

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

A line-by-line translation

Act 1, Scene 1

Shakespeare

Enter BERTRAM, the COUNTESS of Rousillon, HELENA, and LAFEU, all in black

COUNTESS

In delivering my son from me, I bury a second husband.

BERTRAM

And I in going, madam, weep o'er my father's death anew: but I must attend his majesty's command, to whom I am now in ward, evermore in subjection.

LAFEU

- 5 You shall find of the king a husband, madam; you, sir, a father: he that so generally is at all times good must of necessity hold his virtue to you; whose worthiness would stir it up where it wanted rather than lack it where there is such abundance.

COUNTESS

- 10 What hope is there of his majesty's amendment?

LAFEU

He hath abandoned his physicians, madam; under whose practises he hath persecuted time with hope, and finds no other advantage in the process but only the losing of hope by time.

COUNTESS

- 15 This young gentlewoman had a father, --O, that 'had!' how sad a passage 'tis! --whose skill was almost as great as his honesty; had it stretched so far, would have made nature immortal, and death should have play for lack of work. Would, for the king's sake, he were living! I think it would be the death of the king's disease.
- 20

LAFEU

How called you the man you speak of, madam?

COUNTESS

He was famous, sir, in his profession, and it was his great right to be so: Gerard de Narbon.

LAFEU

- 25 He was excellent indeed, madam: the king very lately spoke of him admiringly and mourningly: he was skilful enough to have lived still, if knowledge could be set up against mortality.

BERTRAM

What is it, my good lord, the king languishes of?

LAFEU

- 30 A fistula, my lord.

Shakescleare Translation

BERTRAM, the COUNTESS of Roussillon¹, HELENA, and LAFEU enter, all wearing black.

¹ Rousillon was an old province of France that was separated from Spain by the Pyrenees mountains.

COUNTESS

In saying goodbye to my son, it's like I'm losing another husband.

BERTRAM

And for me, in leaving, mother, I mourn my father's death all over again, but I must serve at the king's command, since I am now his subject and eternally in servitude to him.

LAFEU

The king will be like a husband to you, madam, and like a father to you, sir. If he's so good to all his subjects, you can be sure he'll be good to you. Your family has been so important to him that you'd bring out the generosity in him even if he was miserable—since he is generous, there's no way he won't share that kindness with you.

COUNTESS

How likely is it that his majesty will recover?

LAFEU

He's given up on his doctors, madam. He's wasted a lot of time and hope following their orders, and all he's getting out of it is gradually losing hope over time.

COUNTESS

[Gesturing to HELENA] This young woman had a father—oh, that word "had!" What a sad word it is!—and his skill was only outshined by his goodness. If he'd had the chance, he could have made men immortal. Death would have been out of business. If only he were living now, for the king's sake! I think he would cure the king's illness.

LAFEU

What was the name of this man you speak of, madam?

COUNTESS

He was famous in his line of work, sir, and he absolutely deserved that fame: Gerard de Narbon.

LAFEU

He was excellent indeed, madam. The king only recently was talking admiringly and sadly about him. Narbon had enough skill to keep himself alive, if only you could fight mortality with brilliance.

BERTRAM

What exactly is the king's sickness, my good lord?

LAFEU

A fistula², my lord.

² A fistula is a type of ulcer.

BERTRAM

I heard not of it before.

LAFEU

I would it were not notorious. Was this gentlewoman the daughter of Gerard de Narbon?

COUNTESS

35 His sole child, my lord, and bequeathed to my overlooking. I have those hopes of her good that her education promises; her dispositions she inherits, which makes fair gifts fairer; for where an unclean mind carries virtuous qualities, there commendations go with pity; they are virtues and traitors too; in her they are the better for their
40 simpleness; she derives her honesty and achieves her goodness.

LAFEU

Your commendations, madam, get from her tears.

COUNTESS

45 'Tis the best brine a maiden can season her praise in. The remembrance of her father never approaches her heart but the tyranny of her sorrows takes all livelihood from her cheek. No more of this, Helena; go to, no more; lest it be rather thought you affect a sorrow than have it.

HELENA

50 I do affect a sorrow indeed, but I have it too.

LAFEU

Moderate lamentation is the right of the dead, excessive grief the enemy to the living.

COUNTESS

If the living be enemy to the grief, the excess makes it soon mortal.

BERTRAM

55 Madam, I desire your holy wishes.

LAFEU

How understand we that?

COUNTESS

60 Be thou blest, Bertram, and succeed thy father In manners, as in shape! thy blood and virtue Contend for empire in thee, and thy goodness Share with thy birthright! Love all, trust a few, Do wrong to none: be able for thine enemy Rather in power than use, and keep thy friend Under thy own life's key: be cheque'd for silence, But never tax'd for speech. What heaven more will,
65 That thee may furnish and my prayers pluck down, Fall on thy head! Farewell, my lord; 'Tis an unseason'd courtier; good my lord, Advise him.

LAFEU

70 He cannot want the best That shall attend his love.

COUNTESS

Heaven bless him! Farewell, Bertram.

Exit

BERTRAM

I haven't heard of that before.

LAFEU

Don't let the word get out. So this woman was the daughter of Gerard de Narbon?

COUNTESS

His only child, my lord, and left to my care. I have high hopes that she'll live up to the education she's received. She got her lovely personality from her father—that makes good-looking women even better-looking. If a sinful mind accompanies a woman with many skills, those skills are praiseworthy but also regrettable—they're virtues but also traitors. In Helena, though, these virtues are stronger because she is so pure. She gets her honesty from her father and earns her goodness herself.

LAFEU

I can see the proof of your praises in her tears, madam.

COUNTESS

It's the best salt water a maiden can wash her praises in. As soon as she remembers her father, the cruelty of her sorrow takes all the joy out of her cheeks. No more of this, Helena. Come on, no more. You don't want people to think that you're performing sorrow rather than genuinely feeling it.

HELENA

I do perform my sorrow, but I genuinely feel it too.

LAFEU

Moderate mourning is what we owe to the dead, but excessive grief is an enemy to the living.

COUNTESS

If the living is an enemy to grief, too much grief will kill the mourners.

BERTRAM

Madam, I desire your blessing.

LAFEU

What should we make of that?

COUNTESS

Be blessed, Bertram, and follow your father in behavior as well as in looks! Your blood and your manners are fighting for power inside of you, so let your goodness take the side of your noble blood! Be good to all, trust a few, don't wrong anyone. Win over your enemies by holding power, not by abusing it, and value your friends as much as you value your own life. Be scolded for being silent but don't talk so much that you make yourself a nuisance. Otherwise, I hope you'll be blessed with whatever heaven wants to supply you with, to make you better and to answer my prayers! Farewell, my lord.

[To LAFEU] He's an untrained nobleman. Advise him, my lord.

LAFEU

He'll have only the best advice from me.

COUNTESS

Heaven bless him! Farewell, Bertram.

The COUNTESS exits.

BERTRAM

[To HELENA] The best wishes that can be forged in your thoughts be servants to you! Be comfortable to my mother, your mistress, and make much of her.

LAFEU

Farewell, pretty lady: you must hold the credit of your father.

Exeunt BERTRAM and LAFEU

HELENA

O, were that all! I think not on my father;
 80 And these great tears grace his remembrance more
 Than those I shed for him. What was he like?
 I have forgot him: my imagination
 Carries no favour in't but Bertram's.
 I am undone: there is no living, none,
 85 If Bertram be away. 'Twere all one
 That I should love a bright particular star
 And think to wed it, he is so above me:
 In his bright radiance and collateral light
 Must I be comforted, not in his sphere.
 90 The ambition in my love thus plagues itself:
 The hind that would be mated by the lion
 Must die for love. 'Twas pretty, though plague,
 To see him every hour; to sit and draw
 His arched brows, his hawking eye, his curls,
 95 In our heart's table; heart too capable
 Of every line and trick of his sweet favour:
 But now he's gone, and my idolatrous fancy
 Must sanctify his reliques. Who comes here?

Enter PAROLLES

HELENA

[Aside] One that goes with him: I love him for his
 100 sake;
 And yet I know him a notorious liar,
 Think him a great way fool, solely a coward;
 Yet these fixed evils sit so fit in him,
 That they take place, when virtue's steely bones
 105 Look bleak i' the cold wind: withal, full oft we see
 Cold wisdom waiting on superfluous folly.

PAROLLES

Save you, fair queen!

HELENA

And you, monarch!

PAROLLES

No.

HELENA

110 And no.

PAROLLES

Are you meditating on virginity?

HELENA

Ay. You have some stain of soldier in you: let me ask you a question. Man is enemy to virginity; how may we barricado it against him?

PAROLLES

115 Keep him out.

HELENA

But he assails; and our virginity, though valiant, in the defence yet is weak: unfold to us some warlike resistance.

BERTRAM

[To HELENA] I wish the best for you that you can imagine! Take care of my mother, your mistress, and keep her well.

LAFEU

Farewell, pretty lady: you must maintain the reputation of your father.

BERTRAM and LAFEU exit.

HELENA

Oh, if only that were all! I don't think of my father. And these over-the-top tears honor his memory more than the tears I genuinely shed for him. What was he like? I have forgot him. My imagination thinks not of any face but Bertram's. I am ruined. There's no point in being alive, none, if Bertram is away. What terrible luck that I should love a bright star and want to marry it. He is so high above me. I must be comforted by the bright radiance he gives off and the light emanating from him, for I can't be close to him. Loving someone so far above my station will be fatal to my love. The deer that wants to mate with the lion must die in the process. It was lovely, though torturous, to see him every hour, to sit and draw his arched eyebrows, his hawklike eye, his curls, on the drawing-table of my heart. My heart knows too well every line and feature of his sweet face. But now he's gone, and my idol-worshipping love must cling to the things he's left behind. Who comes here?

PAROLLES enters.

HELENA

[To herself] Here's one that accompanies him. I love this man for Bertram's sake, but, at the same time, I know that he's a notorious liar, pretty much a fool, completely a coward. These evils are so engrained in him that they stay firm even when virtue's own firmness wavers in the cold wind. Moreover, extreme foolishness often becomes more powerful than sturdy wisdom.

PAROLLES

God be with you, beautiful queen!

HELENA

And you, monarch!

PAROLLES

No.

HELENA

And no.

PAROLLES

Are you thinking about virginity?


HELENA


Yes. You have some hint of soldier about you: let me ask you a question. Man is the enemy of virginity: how can we barricade it up against him?

PAROLLES

Keep him out.

HELENA

But he attacks, and our virginity, though brave, is weak in defense. Share with us  some warrior tips for resistance.

 Helena plays along with Parolles here when he called her "fair queen," using the royal we.

PAROLLES

120 There is none: man, sitting down before you, will
undermine you and blow you up.

HELENA

Bless our poor virginity from underminers and
blowers up! Is there no military policy, how
virgins might blow up men?

PAROLLES

125 Virginity being blown down, man will quicklier be
blown up: marry, in blowing him down again, with
the breach yourselves made, you lose your city. It
is not politic in the commonwealth of nature to
preserve virginity. Loss of virginity is rational
130 increase and there was never virgin got till
virginity was first lost. That you were made of is
metal to make virgins. Virginity by being once lost
may be ten times found; by being ever kept, it is
ever lost: 'tis too cold a companion; away with 't!

HELENA

135 I will stand for 't a little, though therefore I die a
virgin.

PAROLLES

There's little can be said in 't; 'tis against the
rule of nature. To speak on the part of virginity,
is to accuse your mothers; which is most infallible
disobedience. He that hangs himself is a virgin:
140 virginity murders itself and should be buried in
highways out of all sanctified limit, as a desperate
offendress against nature. Virginity breeds mites,
much like a cheese; consumes itself to the very
paring, and so dies with feeding his own stomach.
145 Besides, virginity is peevish, proud, idle, made of
self-love, which is the most inhibited sin in the
canon. Keep it not; you cannot choose but lose
by't: out with 't! within ten year it will make
itself ten, which is a goodly increase; and the
150 principal itself not much the worse: away with 't!

HELENA

How might one do, sir, to lose it to her own liking?

PAROLLES

Let me see: marry, ill, to like him that ne'er it
likes. 'Tis a commodity will lose the gloss with
lying; the longer kept, the less worth: off with 't
155 while 'tis vendible; answer the time of request.
Virginity, like an old courtier, wears her cap out
of fashion: richly suited, but unsuitable: just
like the brooch and the tooth-pick, which wear not
now. Your date is better in your pie and your
160 porridge than in your cheek; and your virginity,
your old virginity, is like one of our French
withered pears, it looks ill, it eats drily; marry,
'tis a withered pear; it was formerly better;
marry, yet 'tis a withered pear: will you anything with
165 it?

HELENA

Not my virginity yet—
There shall your master have a thousand loves,
A mother and a mistress and a friend,
A phoenix, captain and an enemy,
170 A guide, a goddess, and a sovereign,
A counsellor, a traitress, and a dear;
His humble ambition, proud humility,
His jarring concord, and his discord dulcet,
His faith, his sweet disaster; with a world
175 Of pretty, fond, adoptious christendoms,

PAROLLES

There's no resistance. Man, sitting down in front of you, will
conquer you and blow you up ⁴.

HELENA

Bless our poor virginity and keep it safe from conquerers
and blower-uppers! Is there no military policy on how
virgins could blow up men?

PAROLLES

When virginity gets blown down, men will quickly be blown
up ⁴. Indeed, in blowing him down again, your fortified
city's already been lost by the fracture that you yourselves
have made. It's not right under nature's laws to preserve
your virginity. Loss of virginity leads to a population
increase and no virgins have ever been born until their
mothers lost their virginity first. The stuff you were made of
is material used to make more virgins. Once you've lost
your virginity, you can make ten more virgins. By keeping
your virginity forever, no more virgins will be made. It's too
cold a companion—get rid of it!

HELENA

I will stick with it a little bit longer even if it means I die a
virgin.

PAROLLES

There's no argument in favor of it. It's against the laws of
nature. To speak out in favor of virginity is to accuse your
mothers of behaving badly which is unacceptable
disobedience. A virgin is like a man who hangs himself,
because virginity should kill itself and should therefore, like
a suicide victim, be buried far outside holy ground ⁵ as
something that has committed a crime against nature.
Virginity breeds mites like a cheese does, and, just like a
cheese, grows moldy, rots, and dies, like it's eating itself.
Besides, virginity is silly, proud, lazy, made of self-love,
which is the most forbidden sin in the Bible. Don't keep
your virginity; no matter what you'll lose out this way. Get
rid of it! Within ten years, it will bring you ten babies, which
is a good increase, and the original body itself ⁷ won't be
much the worse for wear. Away with it!

HELENA

How might somebody lose it as she pleases, sir?

PAROLLES

Let me see. Well, unfortunately, you'll have to like a man
you've never liked before. It's merchandise that will lose its
shine if it doesn't get used. The longer you keep it, the less
it's worth. Get rid of it while you can still sell it. You'd better
act worth the clock's still ticking. Virginity, like an old
nobleman, wears a cap that's out of fashion: it looks nice,
but it doesn't fit, just like the brooch or the tooth-pick ⁸,
which are completely out of fashion these days. You'd do
better to cook your date ⁹ in your pie or porridge than in
your cheek, and your virginity, your old virginity, is like one
of our withered French pears. It looks ill, it tastes dry.
Indeed, it is a withered pear. It used to be better, but it's still
a withered pear: will you do anything with it?

HELENA

I'm not giving it up just yet. At court, your master will have a
thousand relationships. ¹⁰ A mother and a mistress and a
friend, a phoenix, a captain, and an enemy, a guide, a
goddess, and a sovereign, a counsellor, a traitress, and a
dear loved one. His humble ambition, his proud humility,
his jarring harmony, and his dissonant sweetness, his faith,
his sweet misfortune, and lots of pretty, silly nicknames
that blind Cupid might have given at a christening. Now
shall he—I know not what he shall. God protect him! The

⁴ Parolles uses "blow you up" with the double meaning of explode and impregnate.

⁵ Parolles' language is loaded with military and sexual double meanings.

⁶ By "sanctified limits," Parolles means any place that is blessed under the Church, as opposed to secular ground.

⁷ Shakespeare's "goodly yield" and "principal" plays on financial investments, suggesting that by getting rid of her virginity, and having children, Helena can multiply her value.

⁸ A tooth-pick was seen as a sign of a well-traveled person of high standing. They may have been worn in a hat to symbolize a person's social superiority.

⁹ There is a pun here on "date" as both age and a type of fruit. Dates were often used for sweetening in food such as porridge.

¹⁰ The following passage doesn't make all that much sense, both because a) editors think some lines may have been lost after "Not my virginity yet" and b) it seems like Helena is trying to change the subject by parodying love poetry of the period (and she loses track of her train of thought by the end of the speech).

That blinking Cupid gossips. Now shall he--
I know not what he shall. God send him well!
The court's a learning place, and he is one--

PAROLLES

What one, i' faith?

HELENA

180 That I wish well. 'Tis pity--

PAROLLES

What's pity?

HELENA

That wishing well had not a body in't,
Which might be felt; that we, the poorer born,
Whose baser stars do shut us up in wishes,
185 Might with effects of them follow our friends,
And show what we alone must think, which never
Return us thanks.

Enter Page

PAGE

Monsieur Parolles, my lord calls for you.

Exit

PAROLLES

190 Little Helen, farewell; if I can remember thee, I
will think of thee at court.

HELENA

Monsieur Parolles, you were born under a charitable
star.

PAROLLES

Under Mars, I.

HELENA

195 I especially think, under Mars.

PAROLLES

Why under Mars?

HELENA

The wars have so kept you under that you must needs
be born under Mars.

PAROLLES

When he was predominant.

HELENA

200 When he was retrograde, I think, rather.

PAROLLES

Why think you so?

HELENA

You go so much backward when you fight.

PAROLLES

That's for advantage.

court's a good place to get an education, and he's
someone—

PAROLLES

Someone what, pray tell?

HELENA

Someone who I wish all the best. It's a pity—

PAROLLES

What's a pity?

HELENA

That wishing someone well is just a thought and not
something physical that could be felt. If only we, the poorer
folk, whose more unlucky fates leave us just with our
wishes, could go along with our friends, and show the love
that we must keep to ourselves and that never earns us any
gratitude.

A PAGE enters.

PAGE

Monsieur Parolles, my lord is calling for you.

The PAGE exits.

PAROLLES

Little Helena, farewell. If I can remember you, I'll think of
you at court.

HELENA

Monsieur Parolles, you were born under a generous star.

PAROLLES

I was born under Mars, the god of war.

HELENA

I especially think you were born under Mars.

PAROLLES

Why under Mars?

HELENA

You've been so subservient to the wars that you must have
been born under Mars.

PAROLLES

When the star was ascending.

HELENA

When he was descending 🗨️, I think, actually.

🗨️ Helena and Parolles are using
astrological terms here. Parolles
claims he was born when Mars was in
the ascendant (rising). Helena
counters that the planets were
actually moving backwards when he
was born.

PAROLLES

Why do you think so?

HELENA

You tend to flee backwards when you fight.

PAROLLES

That's to gain advantage.

HELENA

205 So is running away, when fear proposes the safety;
but the composition that your valour and fear makes
in you is a virtue of a good wing, and I like the wear
well.

PAROLLES

I am so full of businesses, I cannot answer thee
acutely. I will return perfect courtier; in the
210 which, my instruction shall serve to naturalize
thee, so thou wilt be capable of a courtier's
counsel and understand what advice shall thrust upon
thee; else thou diest in thine unthankfulness, and
thine ignorance makes thee away: farewell. When
215 thou hast leisure, say thy prayers; when thou hast
none, remember thy friends; get thee a good husband,
and use him as he uses thee; so, farewell.

Exit


HELENA

Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,
Which we ascribe to heaven: the fated sky
220 Gives us free scope, only doth backward pull
Our slow designs when we ourselves are dull.
What power is it which mounts my love so high,
That makes me see, and cannot feed mine eye?
The mightiest space in fortune nature brings
225 To join like likes and kiss like native things.
Impossible be strange attempts to those
That weigh their pains in sense and do suppose
What hath been cannot be: who ever strove
To show her merit, that did miss her love?
230 The king's disease--my project may deceive me,
But my intents are fix'd and will not leave me.

Exit

HELENA

So is running away, when fear leads you to flee to safety.
But the mixture of bravery and fear has helped you develop
an impressively swift flight and [it suits you well](#).

 Helena's "I like the wear well" suggests that Parolles' "good wing" may both refer to his tendency to flee battle as if flying away and some extravagant attire he wears on his shoulder.

PAROLLES

I am so busy, I cannot answer you fully. I will come back the
perfect nobleman, and, when I've done so, I will teach you
what I've learned so that you can keep up with a
nobleman's advice and understand the guidance given to
you. Otherwise, you'll die in your ungratefulness and your
ignorance will kill you: farewell. When you have free time,
say your prayers. When you don't have time, just remember
your friends. Get a good husband for yourself and use him
as he uses you. So, farewell.

PAROLLES exits.

HELENA

Often, we find the solution in ourselves, even though we say
they came from heaven. For all we say that heavens control
our fates, we have free will—that talk of fate only slows us
down when we ourselves are lazy in getting what we want.
What power is it that makes me love someone so high up,
that makes me see his wondrousness but doesn't give me
the ability to gain his love? Even people who are on
opposite ends of the social spectrum can be brought
together by nature and their mutual attraction, and they
can kiss like they were born equals. Of course, unusually
difficult attempts will seem impossible to people who think
rationally and rigidly about their limitations and suppose
that they can't do things that others have managed to do
before them. Who's ever failed to win her love when she
successfully showed her merit? The king's disease—I might
be misguided in this plan, but my intentions are firm and I'll
stick to them.

HELENA exits.

Act 1, Scene 2

Shakespeare

Flourish of cornets. Enter the KING of France, with letters, and divers Attendants

KING

The Florentines and Senoys are by the ears;
Have fought with equal fortune and continue
A braving war.

FIRST LORD

So 'tis reported, sir.


KING


5 Nay, 'tis most credible; we here received it
A certainty, vouch'd from our cousin Austria,
With caution that the Florentine will move us
For speedy aid; wherein our dearest friend
Prejudicates the business and would seem
10 To have us make denial.

Shakescleare Translation

A trumpet fanfare plays. The KING of France enters, carrying letters, and followed by many attendants.

KING


The Florentines and the [Sienese](#)  are fighting each other.
They've each had equal success and the war goes on.


 The "Sienese," or "Senoy's" were those from the Republic of Sienna, a town in Italy. They were at war with the state of Florence until they were eventually defeated in 1559.

FIRST LORD

That's what's been reported, sir.

KING

No, it's definitely true. We received confirmation from it
from our friend the King of Austria, with a warning that the
Duke of Florence will be asking us for immediate assistance.
Our dearest friend , the King of Austria, doesn't support
that request and urges us to deny it.

 There appears to be no logical reason as to why the King would refer to the King of Austria as their "dearest friend."

FIRST LORD

His love and wisdom,
Approved so to your majesty, may plead
For amplest credence.

KING

15 He hath arm'd our answer,
And Florence is denied before he comes:
Yet, for our gentlemen that mean to see
The Tuscan service, freely have they leave
To stand on either part.

SECOND LORD

20 It well may serve
A nursery to our gentry, who are sick
For breathing and exploit.

KING

What's he comes here?

Enter BERTRAM, LAFEU, and PAROLLES

FIRST LORD

25 It is the Count Rousillon, my good lord,
Young Bertram.

KING

Youth, thou bear'st thy father's face;
Frank nature, rather curious than in haste,
Hath well composed thee. Thy father's moral parts
Mayst thou inherit too! Welcome to Paris.

BERTRAM

30 My thanks and duty are your majesty's.

KING

I would I had that corporal soundness now,
As when thy father and myself in friendship
First tried our soldiership! He did look far
Into the service of the time and was
35 Discipled of the bravest: he lasted long;
But on us both did haggish age steal on
And wore us out of act. It much repairs me
To talk of your good father. In his youth
He had the wit which I can well observe
40 To-day in our young lords; but they may jest
Till their own scorn return to them unnoted
Ere they can hide their levity in honour;
So like a courtier, contempt nor bitterness
Were in his pride or sharpness; if they were,
45 His equal had awaked them, and his honour,
Clock to itself, knew the true minute when
Exception bid him speak, and at this time
His tongue obey'd his hand: who were below him
He used as creatures of another place
50 And bow'd his eminent top to their low ranks,
Making them proud of his humility,
In their poor praise he humbled. Such a man
Might be a copy to these younger times;
Which, follow'd well, would demonstrate them now
55 But goes backward.

BERTRAM

His good remembrance, sir,
Lies richer in your thoughts than on his tomb;
So in approval lives not his epitaph
As in your royal speech.

KING

60 Would I were with him! He would always say--
Methinks I hear him now; his plausible words
He scatter'd not in ears, but grafted them,
To grow there and to bear, --'Let me not live,'--

FIRST LORD

If your majesty thinks so highly of his love and wisdom, that
should serve as sufficient guidance.

KING

He's convinced me of my answer. Before he even arrives,
I've decided the Duke of Florence will be denied. Yet, if any
of our gentlemen are planning to go fight in this war in
Tuscany, they're welcome to fight for either side.

SECOND LORD

That should be good news for our soldiers, who are dying to
actually get to fight.

KING

Who's he who's just come here?

BERTRAM, LAFEU, and PAROLLES enter.

FIRST LORD

It is the Count Rousillon, my good lord, young Bertram.

KING

Young man, you have your father's face. Nature being
generous, and meticulous rather than hasty, has made you
handsome. I hope you have your father's morality too!
Welcome to Paris.

BERTRAM

I give my thanks and pledge my service to your majesty.

KING

I wish I was as physically healthy now as when my
friend—your father—and I first became soldiers! He wanted
to rise up in the military service then and had a reputation
for being one of the bravest. He stuck around a long time.
But horrid age stole up on both of us and wore us out. It
makes me feel much better to talk of your good father. In
his youth, he had the same wit which I now see today in our
young lords. But these young folks today can joke until
people start ignoring them before they'd ever swap their
quick-wittedness for honorable deeds. Like a real
nobleman, your father had neither contempt nor bitterness
in his pride, nor sharpness. If he did ever speak sharply, it
was to an equal, and his honor, which he always
maintained, knew exactly when it was appropriate for him
to speak out, only if he could back up his words with action.
He'd treat men who were below him like they were better
than they were and bowed down, despite his greatness, to
those low soldiers. That would put them in awe of his
humility and he'd humble himself to praise them, even low
as they were. Such a man should be a role model to these
young folks. If they followed his example, but young people
now are going backwards in their manners.

BERTRAM

Your thoughts honor his memory, sir, more richly than the
words on his tomb do. His legacy lives on not in his epitaph³
but in your royal speech.

³ An "epitaph" is a phrase written in
memory of a person who has died,
usually as an inscription on a
tombstone.

KING

If only I were with him! He would always say—I think I hear
him now; his pleasing words he wouldn't tell many people
but planted them carefully to grow and bear fruit—"Let me
not live,"—that's how his good melancholy speeches would

This his good melancholy oft began,
 65 On the catastrophe and heel of pastime,
 When it was out, --'Let me not live,' quoth he,
 'After my flame lacks oil, to be the snuff
 Of younger spirits, whose apprehensive senses
 All but new things disdain; whose judgments are
 70 Mere fathers of their garments; whose constancies
 Expire before their fashions.' This he wish'd;
 I after him do after him wish too,
 Since I nor wax nor honey can bring home,
 I quickly were dissolved from my hive,
 75 To give some labourers room.

SECOND LORD

You are loved, sir:
 They that least lend it you shall lack you first.

KING

I fill a place, I know't. How long is't, count,
 Since the physician at your father's died?
 80 He was much famed.

BERTRAM

Some six months since, my lord.

KING

If he were living, I would try him yet.
 Lend me an arm; the rest have worn me out
 With several applications; nature and sickness
 85 Debate it at their leisure. Welcome, count;
 My son's no dearer.

BERTRAM

Thank your majesty.

Exeunt. Flourish

often begin, when a fun event of leisure had come to an end, -- "Let me not live," he'd say, "after my spirit has lost its fire, to stick around stifling younger folks, whose quick sense hate anything that is not new. All their thinking only leads to getting new clothes. Their loyalties fade out before their new fashions do." This is what he wished, and, now, I wish the same thing too. Since I can no longer bring the wax or honey home, I'd quickly be tossed out of my hive, so the laboring bees have room to take over.

SECOND LORD

You are loved, sir. Those that least show their love will miss you most.

KING

I hold an important place, I know it. How long is it, count, since the physician at your father's died? He was very famous.

BERTRAM

Six months ago, my lord.

KING

If he were living, I'd still try him. Give me a hand. The rest of the doctors have worn me out with their many cures. Nature and sickness are fighting over me. Welcome, count. You are as dear to me as my own son.

BERTRAM

I thank your majesty.

All exit. A trumpet fanfare plays.

Act 1, Scene 3

Shakespeare

Enter COUNTESS, Steward, and Clown

COUNTESS

I will now hear; what say you of this gentlewoman?

STEWARD

Madam, the care I have had to even your content, I wish might be found in the calendar of my past endeavours; for then we wound our modesty and make
 5 foul the clearness of our deservings, when of ourselves we publish them.

COUNTESS

What does this knave here? Get you gone, sirrah: the complaints I have heard of you I do not all believe: 'tis my slowness that I do not; for I know
 10 you lack not folly to commit them, and have ability enough to make such knaveries yours.

CLOWN

'Tis not unknown to you, madam, I am a poor fellow.

COUNTESS

Well, sir.

Shakescleare Translation

The COUNTESS, her steward, and a Clown enter.

COUNTESS

I will hear you now. What do you say of this gentlewoman?

STEWARD

Madam, I hope you'll recognize in my past behavior how much care I've taken to make you happy. It would be harmful to my modesty and would muddy my clear honor if I were to announce my past deeds myself.

COUNTESS

What is this rogue doing here?

[To the CLOWN] Get out of here, slave. I don't believe all the complaints I've heard of you. It's my own fault that I don't believe them because I know you're foolish enough to do these things, and you have the ability to misbehave in these ways.

CLOWN

It's not unknown to you, madam, that I am a poor fellow.

COUNTESS

Well, sir.

CLOWN

15 No, madam, 'tis not so well that I am poor, though many of the rich are damned: but, if I may have your ladyship's good will to go to the world, Isbel the woman and I will do as we may.

COUNTESS

Wilt thou needs be a beggar?

CLOWN

I do beg your good will in this case.

COUNTESS

20 In what case?

CLOWN

In Isbel's case and mine own. Service is no heritage: and I think I shall never have the blessing of God till I have issue o' my body; for they say barnes are blessings.

COUNTESS

25 Tell me thy reason why thou wilt marry.

CLOWN

My poor body, madam, requires it: I am driven on by the flesh; and he must needs go that the devil drives.

COUNTESS

Is this all your worship's reason?

CLOWN

30 Faith, madam, I have other holy reasons such as they are.

COUNTESS

May the world know them?

CLOWN

35 I have been, madam, a wicked creature, as you and all flesh and blood are; and, indeed, I do marry that I may repent.

COUNTESS

Thy marriage, sooner than thy wickedness.

CLOWN

I am out o' friends, madam; and I hope to have friends for my wife's sake.

COUNTESS

Such friends are thine enemies, knave.

CLOWN

40 You're shallow, madam, in great friends; for the knaves come to do that for me which I am aware of. He that ears my land spares my team and gives me leave to in the crop; if I be his cuckold, he's my drudge: he that comforts my wife is the cherisher of my flesh and blood; he that cherishes my flesh and blood loves my flesh and blood; he that loves my flesh and blood is my friend: ergo, he that kisses my wife is my friend. If men could be contented to be what they are, there were no fear in marriage; for young Charbon the Puritan and old Poysam the Papist, howsome'er their hearts are severed in religion, their heads are both one; they may jowl horns together, like any deer i' the herd.

CLOWN

No, madam, it's not so well that I am poor, although many rich people are damned. But, if I have your ladyship's good permission to go out into the world, Isbel the servant girl and I will do what we can.

COUNTESS

Will you need to be a beggar?

CLOWN

I do beg for your good will in this case?

COUNTESS

In what case?

CLOWN

In the case of Isbel and myself. Being servants doesn't build up much of an inheritance, and I don't think I'll ever have God's blessing until I've had children, for they say kids are blessings.

COUNTESS

Tell me why you want to marry.

CLOWN

My poor body, madam, requires it. I am driven on by the desires of the flesh and I must respond to the devil's commands.

COUNTESS

Is this your only reason?

CLOWN

Actually, madam, I have other nicer reasons as it so happens.

COUNTESS

May the world know what they are?

CLOWN

I have been, madam, a wicked creature, just as you and anyone of flesh and blood have been. Indeed, I want to get married so that I can repent.

COUNTESS

You'll repent your marriage before you repent your wickedness.





CLOWN


I have no friends, madam, and I hope to have friends for my wife's sake.


COUNTESS


Such friends are your enemies, fool.


CLOWN

You're not too knowledgable, madam, about great friends. The rogues come to do things for me that I'm tired of doing for myself. He that takes care of my land and spares my animals from having to do the work leaves me time to focus on the harvest.  If he ends up sleeping with my wife , he's my slave: he that comforts my wife cherishes my flesh and blood; he that cherishes my flesh and blood loves my flesh and blood; he that loves my flesh and blood is my friend. Therefore, he that kisses my wife is my friend. If men could be happy to be what they are, they wouldn't be afraid to get married. Young Charbon the Puritan and old Poysam the Papist , even though they have different religions, have the same head. They can knock their horns  together like any deers in the herd.

 Shakespeare's language here clearly involves extensive sexual wordplay.

 A "cuckold" was a man whose wife cheated on him with another man.

 "Chair bonne" means "good meat" in French and "poisson" means "fish."

 Cuckolds were often depicted as having horns.

COUNTESS

Wilt thou ever be a foul-mouthed and calumnious knave?

CLOWN

- 55 A prophet I, madam; and I speak the truth the next way:
For I the ballad will repeat,
Which men full true shall find;
Your marriage comes by destiny,
60 Your cuckoo sings by kind.

COUNTESS

Get you gone, sir; I'll talk with you more anon.

STEWARD

May it please you, madam, that he bid Helen come to you: of her I am to speak.

COUNTESS

- 65 Sirrah, tell my gentlewoman I would speak with her; Helen, I mean.

CLOWN

- Was this fair face the cause, quoth she,
Why the Grecians sacked Troy?
Fond done, done fond,
Was this King Priam's joy?
70 With that she sighed as she stood,
With that she sighed as she stood,
And gave this sentence then;
Among nine bad if one be good,
Among nine bad if one be good,
75 There's yet one good in ten.

COUNTESS

What, one good in ten? you corrupt the song, sirrah.

CLOWN

- One good woman in ten, madam; which is a purifying o' the song: would God would serve the world so all the year! We'd find no fault with the tithe-woman,
80 if I were the parson. One in ten, quoth a'! An we might have a good woman born but one every blazing star, or at an earthquake, 'twould mend the lottery well: a man may draw his heart out, ere a' pluck one.

COUNTESS

- 85 You'll be gone, sir knave, and do as I command you.

CLOWN

- That man should be at woman's command, and yet no hurt done! Though honesty be no puritan, yet it will do no hurt; it will wear the surplice of humility over the black gown of a big heart. I am
90 going, forsooth: the business is for Helen to come hither.

Exit

COUNTESS

Well, now.

STEWARD

I know, madam, you love your gentlewoman entirely.

COUNTESS

- 95 Faith, I do: her father bequeathed her to me; and she herself, without other advantage, may lawfully make title to as much love as she finds: there is

COUNTESS

Will you always be a foul-mouthed and lying knave?

CLOWN

I'll be a prophet, madam, and I speak the truth this way:

[Singing] For I will repeat the song that honest men will find to be true. Your marriage is fate, your cuckoo sings its natural song. ⁵

⁵ The cuckoo's song was associated with being a cuckold, a man whose wife was unfaithful to him.

COUNTESS

Leave, sir. I'll talk with you more later.

STEWARD

If it's alright with you, madam, he should tell Helena to come to you. Its about her I need to discuss.

COUNTESS

Sir, tell my gentlewoman I want to speak with her. Helena, I mean.

CLOWN

[Singing] Was this fair face the cause, she asked,
Of why the Greeks destroyed Troy ⁶?
Foolishly done, lovingly done,
Was this the joy of King Priam ⁷?
With that she sighed while she stood,
With that she sighed while she stood,
And then gave this sentence:
If there is one good among nine bad,
If there is one good among nine bad,
There's still one good in ten.

⁶ The Trojan War between the Greeks and the Trojans allegedly began when the beautiful Helen of Troy was kidnapped by the Greek Paris.

⁷ King Priam was the King of Troy during the Trojan War.

COUNTESS

What, one good in ten? You ruined the song, sir. ⁸

⁸ The suggestion is that the original song said that only one of ten sons was bad—in the Trojan War, Priam's only bad son would have been Paris.

CLOWN

One good woman in ten, madam, which purifies the song. If only God would serve the world as I've served the song all year! We'd find nothing bad about the one woman in ten if I were the parson ⁹. One in ten, I sing! If we might have a good woman born once every comet or during an earthquake, it would help our chances: a man can tear his heart out before he finds a good woman.

⁹ A parson was a member of the clergy, typically a priest or vicar.

COUNTESS

Get out of here, rogue, and do as I command you.

CLOWN

Can you imagine, woman should command man and no harm is done by it! Although my honest character doesn't follow strict morals, it won't do any harm. I will, like a secret Puritan, wear my Anglican robes over my black gown that shows my true colors. I am going now: my task is to summon Helena here.

The Clown exits.

COUNTESS

Well, now.

STEWARD

I know, madam, you love your gentlewoman completely.

COUNTESS

Well, yes, I do. Her father left her in my care, and she herself, regardless of any other qualities, deserves as much love as she can find, wherever she can find it. She is owed more

more owing her than is paid; and more shall be paid
her than she'll demand.

STEWARD

100 Madam, I was very late more near her than I think
she wished me: alone she was, and did communicate
to herself her own words to her own ears; she
thought, I dare vow for her, they touched not any
stranger sense. Her matter was, she loved your son:
105 Fortune, she said, was no goddess, that had put
such difference betwixt their two estates; Love no
god, that would not extend his might, only where
qualities were level; Dian no queen of virgins, that
would suffer her poor knight surprised, without
110 rescue in the first assault or ransom afterward.
This she delivered in the most bitter touch of
sorrow that e'er I heard virgin exclaim in: which I
held my duty speedily to acquaint you withal;
sithence, in the loss that may happen, it concerns
you something to know it.

COUNTESS

115 You have discharged this honestly; keep it to
yourself: many likelihoods informed me of this
before, which hung so tottering in the balance that
I could neither believe nor misdoubt. Pray you,
leave me: stall this in your bosom; and I thank you
120 for your honest care: I will speak with you further
anon.

Exit Steward

Enter HELENA

COUNTESS

Even so it was with me when I was young:
If ever we are nature's, these are ours; this thorn
Doth to our rose of youth rightly belong;
125 Our blood to us, this to our blood is born;
It is the show and seal of nature's truth,
Where love's strong passion is impress'd in youth:
By our remembrances of days foregone,
Such were our faults, or then we thought them none.
130 Her eye is sick on't: I observe her now.

HELENA

What is your pleasure, madam?

COUNTESS

You know, Helen,
I am a mother to you.

HELENA

Mine honourable mistress.

COUNTESS

135 Nay, a mother:
Why not a mother? When I said 'a mother,'
Methought you saw a serpent: what's in 'mother,'
That you start at it? I say, I am your mother;
And put you in the catalogue of those
140 That were enwombed mine: 'tis often seen
Adoption strives with nature and choice breeds
A native slip to us from foreign seeds:
You ne'er oppress'd me with a mother's groan,
Yet I express to you a mother's care:
145 God's mercy, maiden! does it curd thy blood
To say I am thy mother? What's the matter,
That this distemper'd messenger of wet,
The many-colour'd Iris, rounds thine eye?
Why? that you are my daughter?

HELENA

150 That I am not.

than she's been paid, and she'll be paid more than she'd
ever demand.

STEWARD

Madam, I recently was nearer to her than I think she wanted
me to be. She was alone, and spoke her words for her own
ears only. She thought, I'd assume on her behalf, that no
one else could hear. Her subject was that she loved your
son. Fortune, she said, was no goddess, that had put such a
difference between their stations. Love was no god that
would not bless the union of two people of different social
levels. Diana is no queen of virgins that would allow her
poor servant to be so captured by love without any way to
be rescued from the passion or to earn her love later. She
delivered this in the most bitter tone of sorrow that I've ever
heard a virgin give. I thought it was my duty to share this
information with you quickly. Since, in the grief that might
follow, it's important for you to know about it.

¹⁰ In Roman mythology, Diana was known as the virgin goddess of childbirth and women.

COUNTESS

You've done your duty honestly. Keep it to yourself. Many
moments made me suspect this before, but it was so
uncertain that I could neither believe it nor doubt it. Please,
leave me. Keep this in your heart and I thank you for your
honest service. I will speak with you further later.

The Steward exits.

HELENA enters.

COUNTESS

[To herself] It was just like this for me when I was young. If
we belong to nature, these things happen: this thorn of love
accompanies our rose of youth. Our blood gives into these
passions. When love's strong passion emerges in youth,
that's how we know that nature's doing its job. In our
memories of days long gone, these were our faults, but
then we didn't think of them as faults. Her face looks ill with
love: I watch her now.

HELENA

Why did you summon me, madam?

COUNTESS

You know, Helena, I am a mother to you.

HELENA

My honorable mistress.

COUNTESS

No, a mother. Why not a mother? When I said "a mother," I
thought you saw a snake. What's in "mother" that so
startles you? I say, I am your mother, and I put you in the list
of my children that came out of my womb. It's often the
case that adopted children feel as close to us as natural
children and the family that we choose feel as familiar to us
even though they came from another family tree. You never
put me through labor pains, but I still tell you I have a
mother's love for you. By god, lady! Does it boil your blood
to hear me say I am your mother? What's the matter, that
Iris, the rainbow-goddess messenger of the rain clouds,
brings tears to your eye? Why? Because you are my
daughter?

HELENA

Because I am not your daughter.

COUNTESS

I say, I am your mother.

HELENA

Pardon, madam;

The Count Rousillon cannot be my brother:

I am from humble, he from honour'd name;

155 No note upon my parents, his all noble:

My master, my dear lord he is; and I

His servant live, and will his vassal die:

He must not be my brother.

COUNTESS

Nor I your mother?

HELENA

160 You are my mother, madam; would you were,--

So that my lord your son were not my brother,--

Indeed my mother! or were you both our mothers,

I care no more for than I do for heaven,

So I were not his sister. Can't no other,

165 But, I your daughter, he must be my brother?

COUNTESS

Yes, Helen, you might be my daughter-in-law:

God shield you mean it not! daughter and mother

So strive upon your pulse. What, pale again?

My fear hath catch'd your fondness: now I see

170 The mystery of your loneliness, and find

Your salt tears' head: now to all sense 'tis gross

You love my son; invention is ashamed,

Against the proclamation of thy passion,

To say thou dost not: therefore tell me true;

175 But tell me then, 'tis so; for, look thy cheeks

Confess it, th' one to th' other; and thine eyes

See it so grossly shown in thy behaviors

That in their kind they speak it: only sin

And hellish obstinacy tie thy tongue,

180 That truth should be suspected. Speak, is't so?

If it be so, you have wound a goodly clew;

If it be not, forswear't: howe'er, I charge thee,

As heaven shall work in me for thine avail,

Tell me truly.

HELENA

185 Good madam, pardon me!

COUNTESS

Do you love my son?

HELENA

Your pardon, noble mistress!

COUNTESS

Love you my son?

HELENA

Do not you love him, madam?

COUNTESS

190 Go not about; my love hath in't a bond,

Whereof the world takes note: come, come, disclose

The state of your affection; for your passions

Have to the full appeach'd.

COUNTESS

I say, I am your mother.

HELENA

I'm sorry, madam. The Count Rousillon cannot be my

brother. I come from humble origins, he from an honorable

family. My parents are nobodies, his are nobles. He's my

master, my dear lord. And I live as his servant and will die as

his subject. He must not be my brother.

COUNTESS

And I must not be your mother?

HELENA

You are my mother, madam. I wish you were—if only my

lord your son were not then my brother—indeed, my

mother! Even if you were both our mothers, I'd rather die,

as long as I'm not his sister. Is there no way for me to be

your daughter without him being my brother?

COUNTESS

Yes, Helena, you might be my daughter-in-law. God save

you from meaning it! "Daughter" and "mother" make your

pulse quicken. What, why have you turned pale again? My

fear has found out your fondness: now I have solved the

mystery of your loneliness, and I see where your tears come

from. Now it's completely clear to me that you love my son.

It would be shameful to deny it, given how clearly your

looks proclaim your passions. Therefore, tell me the truth,

and tell me it's true. Your cheeks are confessing it in their

blushes, one to the other, and your eyes are so obviously

demonstrating it in their behavior that they're practically

speaking it. Only sinful and damned stubbornness keeps

you from speaking along with your frustration that the truth

should be suspected. Speak, is it true? If it is, you've made a

good tangle of things. If not, swear it. But, I command you,

as heaven will help me fight for you, tell me the truth.

HELENA

Good madam, forgive me!

COUNTESS

Do you love my son?

HELENA

I beg your pardon, noble mistress!

COUNTESS

Do you love my son?

HELENA

Don't you love him, madam?

COUNTESS

Don't mess around with me. My love for you is strong

enough that everyone recognizes it. Come, come, tell me

what your affections are, for your passions have already

given you away.

HELENA

Then, I confess,

- 195 Here on my knee, before high heaven and you,
That before you, and next unto high heaven,
I love your son.
My friends were poor, but honest; so's my love:
Be not offended; for it hurts not him
- 200 That he is loved of me: I follow him not
By any token of presumptuous suit;
Nor would I have him till I do deserve him;
Yet never know how that desert should be.
I know I love in vain, strive against hope;
- 205 Yet in this captious and intenable sieve
I still pour in the waters of my love
And lack not to lose still: thus, Indian-like,
Religious in mine error, I adore
The sun, that looks upon his worshipper,
- 210 But knows of him no more. My dearest madam,
Let not your hate encounter with my love
For loving where you do: but if yourself,
Whose aged honour cites a virtuous youth,
Did ever in so true a flame of liking
- 215 Wish chastely and love dearly, that your Dian
Was both herself and love: O, then, give pity
To her, whose state is such that cannot choose
But lend and give where she is sure to lose;
That seeks not to find that her search implies,
- 220 But riddle-like lives sweetly where she dies!

COUNTESS

Had you not lately an intent,--speak truly,--
To go to Paris?

HELENA

Madam, I had.

COUNTESS

Wherefore? tell true.

HELENA

- 225 I will tell truth; by grace itself I swear.
You know my father left me some prescriptions
Of rare and proved effects, such as his reading
And manifest experience had collected
For general sovereignty; and that he will'd me
- 230 In heedfull'st reservation to bestow them,
As notes whose faculties inclusive were
More than they were in note: amongst the rest,
There is a remedy, approved, set down,
To cure the desperate languishings whereof
- 235 The king is render'd lost.

COUNTESS

This was your motive
For Paris, was it? speak.


HELENA


- My lord your son made me to think of this;
Else Paris and the medicine and the king
- 240 Had from the conversation of my thoughts
Haply been absent then.

COUNTESS

- But think you, Helen,
If you should tender your supposed aid,
He would receive it? he and his physicians
- 245 Are of a mind; he, that they cannot help him,
They, that they cannot help: how shall they credit
A poor unlearned virgin, when the schools,
Embowell'd of their doctrine, have left off
The danger to itself?

HELENA

Then, I confess, here on my knee, before heaven and you,
first to you, and then to heaven, I love your son. My friends
were poor but honest and my love is too. Don't be offended,
for it doesn't hurt him to be loved by me. I don't follow him
claiming anything of him and I wouldn't want to be with
him until I'm worthy of him. I don't know how I'd ever be
worthy of him. I know I love him in vain, I have no hope. It's
like I pour the waters of my love into a strainer trying to
catch them, but they always evade me. So, like an Indian,
worshipping the wrong religion , I adore the sun, that
looks down on his worshipper but doesn't even know the
one who worships him exists. My dearest madam, don't
hate me for loving the son that you love. If you
yourself—whose honor in old age suggests you were a
virtuous young woman, ever loved chastely and
passionately like me, so that Diana, goddess of chastity,
and Venus, goddess of love, merged into one—oh, then,
give pity to a girl whose condition means that she cannot
choose but to give her love to someone who can never
return it. She is a girl who won't seek to pursue her love but
will keep her secret sweetly until death!

 To be "religious in mine error" likely means that she is doing something wrong, like an Indian who worships the wrong religion (not Christianity).

COUNTESS

Did you not recently have a plan—speak honestly—to go to
Paris?

HELENA

Madam, I did.

COUNTESS

Why? Tell the truth.

HELENA

I will tell the truth; I swear to God. You know that my father
left me some medicines with rare and tested powers that he
collected for general usefulness based on his reading and
impressive experience. He meant to leave them to me for
safe-keeping and to use since I understood that their
powers were beyond the reputation that they carry. Among
those medicines, there is a remedy, that's been tested and
studied, that will cure the terrible sickness that is thought
to be a death sentence for the king.

COUNTESS

That was your reason to go to Paris, was it? Speak.

HELENA

My lord your son gave me this idea. Otherwise Paris and the
medicine and the king would never have crossed my mind.

COUNTESS

But do you think, Helena, if you should offer this supposed
help to the king that he would accept it? He and his
physicians all think the same thing: he thinks they can't
help him and they think that he can't be helped. Why would
they trust a poor, uneducated virgin, when the leading
doctors, having put all of their learning to practice, have left
the sickness to take its natural course?

HELENA

250 There's something in't,
More than my father's skill, which was the greatest
Of his profession, that his good receipt
Shall for my legacy be sanctified
By the luckiest stars in heaven: and, would your honour
255 But give me leave to try success, I'd venture
The well-lost life of mine on his grace's cure
By such a day and hour.

COUNTESS

Dost thou believe't?

HELENA

Ay, madam, knowingly.

COUNTESS

260 Why, Helen, thou shalt have my leave and love,
Means and attendants and my loving greetings
To those of mine in court: I'll stay at home
And pray God's blessing into thy attempt:
Be gone to-morrow; and be sure of this,
265 What I can help thee to thou shalt not miss.

Exeunt

HELENA

My hope is that, beyond just my father's skill, which was the greatest of his profession, that his good reputation will be blessed by all the stars in heaven and will bring me good fortune. And, if your ladyship would only give me the chance to attempt success, I'd wager my life on his grace being cured down to the very day and hour.

COUNTESS

Do you really believe it?

HELENA

Yes, madam, completely.

COUNTESS

Why, Helena, you will have my permission and love, everything you need to travel and servants to wait on you and my loving greetings to my friends at court. I'll stay at home and pray for God's blessing in your attempt. Leave tomorrow, and be sure of this: anything that I can help you with, you shall have.

They exit.

Act 2, Scene 1

Shakespeare

Flourish of cornets. Enter the KING, attended with divers young Lords taking leave for the Florentine war; BERTRAM, and PAROLLES

KING

Farewell, young lords; these warlike principles
Do not throw from you: and you, my lords, farewell:
Share the advice betwixt you; if both gain all,
The gift doth stretch itself as 'tis received,
5 And is enough for both.

FIRST LORD

'Tis our hope, sir,
After well enter'd soldiers, to return
And find your grace in health.

KING

No, no, it cannot be; and yet my heart
10 Will not confess he owes the malady
That doth my life besiege. Farewell, young lords;
Whether I live or die, be you the sons
Of worthy Frenchmen: let higher Italy,--
Those bated that inherit but the fall
15 Of the last monarchy,--see that you come
Not to woo honour, but to wed it; when
The bravest questant shrinks, find what you seek,
That fame may cry you loud: I say, farewell.

SECOND LORD

Health, at your bidding, serve your majesty!

KING

20 Those girls of Italy, take heed of them:
They say, our French lack language to deny,
If they demand: beware of being captives,
Before you serve.


Shakescleare Translation

A trumpet fanfare plays. The KING enters, attended by many young lords who are leaving for the Florentine war, as well as BERTRAM and PAROLLES.

KING

Farewell, young lords. Don't forget your warlike principles.

[To a different group of lords] And you, my lords, farewell: share the advice between you. If you both gain all the knowledge, the gift of the advice will spread and will be sufficient.

 It is possible that different groups of lords may be going to fight for each side of the war.

FIRST LORD

It's our hope sir, after we've fought well, to return and find your grace in good health.

KING

No, no, it cannot be. And yet my heart will not admit that I am sick and dying. Farewell, young lords. Whether I live or die, act like the sons of worthy Frenchmen. Let strong Italy—those lesser people that inherit only the fallen Roman Empire—see that you haven't come just to court honor like a lover but to marry it. When the bravest man of them flees, push onwards, and fame will remember you well for it. I say, farewell.

SECOND LORD

Health, upon your command, serve your majesty!

KING

Take heed of those girls from Italy. They say that Frenchmen don't have the language to deny what they demand. Beware of falling captive to them before you serve your captains.

BOTH

Our hearts receive your warnings.

KING

25 Farewell. Come hither to me.

Exit, attended

FIRST LORD

O, my sweet lord, that you will stay behind us!

PAROLLES

'Tis not his fault, the spark.

SECOND LORD

O, 'tis brave wars!

PAROLLES

30 Most admirable: I have seen those wars.

BERTRAM

I am commanded here, and kept a coil with
'Too young' and 'the next year' and 'tis too early.'

PAROLLES

An thy mind stand to't, boy, steal away bravely.

BERTRAM

35 I shall stay here the forehorse to a smock,
Creaking my shoes on the plain masonry,
Till honour be bought up and no sword worn
But one to dance with! By heaven, I'll steal away.

FIRST LORD

There's honour in the theft.

PAROLLES

Commit it, count.

SECOND LORD

40 I am your accessory; and so, farewell.

BERTRAM

I grow to you, and our parting is a tortured body.

FIRST LORD

Farewell, captain.

SECOND LORD

Sweet Monsieur Parolles!

PAROLLES

45 Noble heroes, my sword and yours are kin. Good
sparks and lustrous, a word, good metals: you shall
find in the regiment of the Spinii one Captain
Spurio, with his cicatrice, an emblem of war, here
on his sinister cheek; it was this very sword
entrenched it: say to him, I live; and observe his
50 reports for me.

FIRST LORD

We shall, noble captain.

Exeunt Lords

PAROLLES

Mars dote on you for his novices! what will ye do?

BOTH

We hear your warnings.

KING

Farewell. Come along with me.

The KING exits, attended by his followers.

FIRST LORD

[To BERTRAM] Oh, my dear lord, what a shame that you
must stay behind!

PAROLLES

It's not his fault, the little bugger.

SECOND LORD

Oh, these are exciting wars!

PAROLLES

Most admirable: I have seen the wars.


BERTRAM

I am commanded to remain here, and am told I am "Too
young" and "the next year" and "it's too early."

PAROLLES

If you're fixed on fighting, boy, steal away to the wars
bravely.

BERTRAM

Otherwise, I'd stay here to dance with women, creaking my
shoes on the flat stone, until there was honor left to buy. I'd
wear no sword except one to dance with . By heaven, I'll
steal away.

FIRST LORD

There's honor in stealing if you're stealing away to fight.

PAROLLES

Commit to doing this, count.

SECOND LORD

I am your accomplice in this, and so, farewell.

BERTRAM

I've enjoyed our growing friendship, and our parting is
torturous.


FIRST LORD

Farewell, captain.

SECOND LORD

Sweet Monsieur Parolles!

PAROLLES

Noble heroes, my sword and yours are family. Good young
buggers and shiny, in a word, good young metals: you shall
find in the regiment of the Spinii a man named Captain
Spurio , with his scar, received in war, here on his evil
cheek. It was this very sword that gave him the wound. Tell
him that I live and observe how he reacts for me.


FIRST LORD


We shall, noble captain.

The lords exit.

PAROLLES

May Mars look down on you, his young warriors! What will
you do, Bertram?

 Elizabethan dancers would wear
lighter swords that were not meant for
fighting.

 Ironically, "Spurio" means "false"
in Italian, indicative of Parolles'
elaborate stories and lies.

BERTRAM

Stay: the king.

55

Re-enter KING. BERTRAM and PAROLLES retire

PAROLLES

[To BERTRAM] Use a more spacious ceremony to the noble lords; you have restrained yourself within the list of too cold an adieu: be more expressive to them: for they wear themselves in the cap of the time, there do muster true gait, eat, speak, and move under the influence of the most received star; and though the devil lead the measure, such are to be followed: after them, and take a more dilated farewell.

60

BERTRAM

65 And I will do so.

PAROLLES

Worthy fellows; and like to prove most sinewy sword-men.

Exeunt BERTRAM and PAROLLES

Enter LAFEU

LAFEU

[Kneeling] Pardon, my lord, for me and for my tidings.

KING

70 I'll fee thee to stand up.

LAFEU

Then here's a man stands, that has brought his pardon. I would you had kneel'd, my lord, to ask me mercy, And that at my bidding you could so stand up.

KING

75 I would I had; so I had broke thy pate, And ask'd thee mercy for't.

LAFEU

Good faith, across: but, my good lord 'tis thus; Will you be cured of your infirmity?

KING

No.

LAFEU

O, will you eat no grapes, my royal fox?
80 Yes, but you will my noble grapes, an if
My royal fox could reach them: I have seen a medicine
That's able to breathe life into a stone,
Quicken a rock, and make you dance canary
With spritely fire and motion; whose simple touch,
85 Is powerful to arise King Pepin, nay,
To give great Charlemain a pen in's hand,
And write to her a love-line.

KING

What 'her' is this?

LAFEU

Why, Doctor She: my lord, there's one arrived,
90 If you will see her: now, by my faith and honour,
If seriously I may convey my thoughts
In this my light deliverance, I have spoke
With one that, in her sex, her years, profession,
Wisdom and constancy, hath amazed me more
95 Than I dare blame my weakness: will you see her
For that is her demand, and know her business?

BERTRAM

Hold on: the king comes.

The KING re-enters. BERTRAM and PAROLLES move aside.

PAROLLES

[To BERTRAM] Speak with more warmth to the noble lords. You've held back and just said a cold farewell. Be more expressive to them: they behave in the new fashion, and they walk, eat, speak, and move following the most successful, popular trends. Even though the devil may be behind these fashions, you want an in with them. Follow after them, and have a more extended farewell.

BERTRAM

And I will do so.

PAROLLES

They're worthy fellows, and they'll probably prove to be talented sword-men.

BERTRAM and PAROLLES exit.

LAFEU enters.

LAFEU

[Kneeling] Give pardon, my lord, to me and my news.

KING

I'll ask you to stand up.

LAFEU

Then a man stands here before you having received his pardon. I wish you had kneeled, my lord, to ask me for mercy, and that you'd have waited for my permission to stand up too.

KING

I wish I had. Then I'd have broken your head and asked you mercy for that.

LAFEU

That's well said. But, my good lord, I have to ask you, will you be cured of your disease?

KING

No.

LAFEU

Oh, do you not like to eat grapes, my royal fox ⁴? Yes, but you will eat the noble grapes that I bring, if my royal fox can reach them. I've been shown a medicine that can breathe life into a stone, bring a rock to life, and make you dance the canary ⁵ with spritely energy and vigor. The simple touch of this medicine is powerful enough to resurrect King Pepin, no, to resurrect great Charlemagne, put a pen in his hand, and have him write to her a love letter.

KING

What "her" do you speak of?

LAFEU

Why, Doctor She: my lord, there's a lady who's arrived if you will now see her. Now, by my faith and honor, if I can seriously share my thoughts beyond this silly speech, I have spoken with a woman that, in her gender, her age, profession, wisdom, and loyalty, has amazed me more than I can blame on my weakness for her beauty. Will you see her and know what she has to say? That is her demand. Once you've done that, you can laugh at me all you want.

⁴ Lafeu references a fable of Aesop's in which a fox pretends he does not want to eat grapes after he has tried and failed to reach them.

⁵ The canary was a Renaissance dance that was popular throughout Europe when Shakespeare was writing. It was often a dance used for wooing.

That done, laugh well at me.

KING

Now, good Lafeu,
Bring in the admiration; that we with thee
100 May spend our wonder too, or take off thine
By wondering how thou took'st it.

LAFEU

Nay, I'll fit you,
And not be all day neither.

Exit

KING

105 Thus he his special nothing ever prologues.

Re-enter LAFEU, with HELENA

LAFEU

Nay, come your ways.

KING

This haste hath wings indeed.

LAFEU

Nay, come your ways:
110 This is his majesty; say your mind to him:
A traitor you do look like; but such traitors
His majesty seldom fears: I am Cressid's uncle,
That dare leave two together; fare you well.

Exit

KING

Now, fair one, does your business follow us?

HELENA

115 Ay, my good lord.
Gerard de Narbon was my father;
In what he did profess, well found.

KING

I knew him.

HELENA

The rather will I spare my praises towards him:
120 Knowing him is enough. On's bed of death
Many receipts he gave me: chiefly one.
Which, as the dearest issue of his practise,
And of his old experience the oily darling,
He bade me store up, as a triple eye,
125 Safer than mine own two, more dear; I have so;
And hearing your high majesty is touch'd
With that malignant cause wherein the honour
Of my dear father's gift stands chief in power,
I come to tender it and my appliance
130 With all bound humbleness.

KING

We thank you, maiden;
But may not be so credulous of cure,
When our most learned doctors leave us and
The congregated college have concluded
135 That labouring art can never ransom nature
From her inaidible estate; I say we must not
So stain our judgment, or corrupt our hope,
To prostitute our past-cure malady
To empirics, or to dissever so
140 Our great self and our credit, to esteem
A senseless help when help past sense we deem.

KING

Now, good Lafeu, bring in this admirable woman. Along
with you, I'll wonder at her too, or, at the very least, I'll
wonder why you found her so wonderful.

LAFEU

No, I'll get her for you, and I won't take all day either.

LAFEU exits.

KING

He always introduces his topic with this special nonsense.

LAFEU re-enters with HELENA.


LAFEU


No, come along.

KING

You've done this quickly indeed.

LAFEU

No, come along. This is his majesty, say what you will to
him. You look like a traitor, but his majesty is seldom afraid
of traitors who look like this. I'm like Cressida's uncle ,
daring to leave a man and a woman together. Farewell.

 Pandarus, depicted in Shakespeare's "Troilus and Cressida," brings together his niece Cressida and the soldier Troilus, leaving them alone for the night.

LAFEU exits.

KING

Now, beautiful one, does your business here have to do
with me?

HELENA

Yes, my good lord. Gerard de Carbon was my father. He was
well-renowned in his profession.

KING

I knew him.

HELENA

Then I won't waste breath praising him. If you know him,
that's enough. On his deathbed, he gave me many
medicines, but one in particular. That one, as the most
special product of all his work, and his favorite of all his
practice, he commanded me to store up, and to watch it as
if I had three eyes, more safely than I could with these two,
more dearly. I have done so. Now, since I've heard your
majesty is infected with this terrible disease that my dear
father's medicine was made to cure, I come to offer it to
you, along with my medical care, with all appropriate
humility.

KING

Thank you for that, girl. But I don't believe so quickly in this
cure when the most educated doctors in the land have
given up and their gathered colleagues have concluded that
no medicine will ever defeat nature in this helpless
condition. I wouldn't want to cast aside my judgement, or
overreach my hope, to offer up my incurable sickness to
quacks, or to so divide my great self and my reputation, to
pursue an impossible cure when I've been called beyond
help.

HELENA

My duty then shall pay me for my pains:
I will no more enforce mine office on you.
Humbly entreating from your royal thoughts
145 A modest one, to bear me back again.

KING

I cannot give thee less, to be call'd grateful:
Thou thought'st to help me; and such thanks I give
As one near death to those that wish him live:
But what at full I know, thou know'st no part,
150 I knowing all my peril, thou no art.

HELENA

What I can do can do no hurt to try,
Since you set up your rest 'gainst remedy.
He that of greatest works is finisher
Oft does them by the weakest minister:
155 So holy writ in babes hath judgment shown,
When judges have been babes; great floods have flown
From simple sources, and great seas have dried
When miracles have by the greatest been denied.
Oft expectation fails and most oft there
160 Where most it promises, and oft it hits
Where hope is coldest and despair most fits.

KING

I must not hear thee; fare thee well, kind maid;
Thy pains not used must by thyself be paid:
Proffers not took reap thanks for their reward.

HELENA

Inspired merit so by breath is barr'd:
It is not so with Him that all things knows
As 'tis with us that square our guess by shows;
But most it is presumption in us when
The help of heaven we count the act of men.
170 Dear sir, to my endeavours give consent;
Of heaven, not me, make an experiment.
I am not an impostor that proclaim
Myself against the level of mine aim;
But know I think and think I know most sure
175 My art is not past power nor you past cure.

KING

Are thou so confident? within what space
Hopedst thou my cure?

HELENA

The great'st grace lending grace
Ere twice the horses of the sun shall bring
180 Their fiery torcher his diurnal ring,
Ere twice in murk and occidental damp
Moist Hesperus hath quench'd his sleepy lamp,
Or four and twenty times the pilot's glass
Hath told the thievish minutes how they pass,
185 What is infirm from your sound parts shall fly,
Health shall live free and sickness freely die.

KING

Upon thy certainty and confidence
What darest thou venture?

HELENA

Tax of impudence,
190 A strumpet's boldness, a divulged shame
Traduced by odious ballads: my maiden's name
Sear'd otherwise; nay, worse--if worse--extended
With vilest torture let my life be ended.

KING

Methinks in thee some blessed spirit doth speak
195 His powerful sound within an organ weak:

HELENA

Having done my duty in making you this offer will be
enough payment for coming here. I won't try harder to
convince you to try this. I just humbly ask your highness
kindly to send me back home again.

KING

I cannot offer less than to say that I'm grateful. You thought
of helping me, and I give you the thanks of a man near
death who's grateful to those who wish him to live. But
the extent of what I know, you know only a little bit. I know
all of my suffering, you don't know anything about
medicinal art.

HELENA

What I can offer can hardly hurt to try since you're
convinced you're beyond curing. God often does great
deeds through the weakest of humans. We have seen this
when the youth have shown holy judgement, when judges
have been youths. Great floods have come from small
sources, and great seas ⁷ have dried up when the most
powerful have said miracles were impossible. Often, our
expectation fails exactly where we think success most likely
to happen, and often we get what we prayed for where
hope seems weakest and it seems to make the most sense
to despair.

KING

I must not listen to you further. Farewell, kind maid. You'll
have to make up the difference for your efforts coming here:
offers not accepted can earn only thanks as a reward.

HELENA

I'm not saying that my mortal words can guarantee power
over divine will. God knows all and has powers beyond us
humans who can only guess based on what we see. But it's
presumptuous of us to call events the act of men when they
actually are controlled from heaven. Dear sir, consent to my
attempts. Test heaven, not me. I'm not an impostor who
claims to be able to do things greater than I can. But just
know that I believe and I think I can be sure that the art that
I know is powerful and you can still be cured.

KING

Are you so confident? How long do you think it will take for
this cure to work?

HELENA

If God lends his power, before the sun's horses ⁸ can twice
bring that sun to nighttime, before the evening star
Hesperus ⁹ can twice turn off his sleepy lamp. When the
hourglass has counted the fleeting minutes twenty-four
times, the sickness in your healthy bones will flee, and
health shall live free and sickness will die.

KING

How much are you willing to wager on your certainty and
confidence?

HELENA

An accusation of arrogance, the boldness of a whore, an
infamous shame carried out in horrid ballads: my maiden's
name defamed this way and that. No, worse—if this is
worse—let my life be ended with vilest torture.

KING

I think some blessed spirit speaks in you, his powerful sound
playing from a weak organ. And even though common

⁷ This is probably a reference to the Biblical drying of the Red Sea that allowed the Israelites to escape from Egypt.

⁸ Helios, the Greek god, was the personification of the sun; he drove a chariot drawn by horses across the sky every day.

⁹ "Hesperus" refers to the planet of Venus in the evening, which was personified in Greek mythology.

And what impossibility would slay
 In common sense, sense saves another way.
 Thy life is dear; for all that life can rate
 200 Worth name of life in thee hath estimate,
 Youth, beauty, wisdom, courage, all
 That happiness and prime can happy call:
 Thou this to hazard needs must intimate
 Skill infinite or monstrous desperate.
 205 Sweet practiser, thy physic I will try,
 That ministers thine own death if I die.

HELENA

If I break time, or flinch in property
 Of what I spoke, unpitied let me die,
 And well deserved: not helping, death's my fee;
 But, if I help, what do you promise me?

KING

210 Make thy demand.

HELENA

But will you make it even?

KING

Ay, by my sceptre and my hopes of heaven.

HELENA

Then shalt thou give me with thy kingly hand
 What husband in thy power I will command:
 215 Exempted be from me the arrogance
 To choose from forth the royal blood of France,
 My low and humble name to propagate
 With any branch or image of thy state;
 But such a one, thy vassal, whom I know
 220 Is free for me to ask, thee to bestow.

KING

Here is my hand ; the premises observed,
 Thy will by my performance shall be served:
 So make the choice of thy own time, for I,
 Thy resolved patient, on thee still rely.
 225 More should I question thee, and more I must,
 Though more to know could not be more to trust,
 From whence thou camest, how tended on: but rest
 Unquestion'd welcome and undoubted blest.
 Give me some help here, ho! If thou proceed
 230 As high as word, my deed shall match thy meed.

Flourish. Exeunt

sense says this should be impossible, my senses tell me differently. Your life is valuable. All worth that can be bestowed on a person finds itself in you: youth, beauty, wisdom, courage, everything that one hopes for in the prime of their life to be happy. If you're willing to risk all of this, then that must mean you have either infinite skill or horrible desperation. Sweet doctor, I'll try your medicine. It will be the prescription of your own death if I die.

HELENA

If your cure doesn't meet this deadline, or if I don't do exactly what I've said, then let me die without pity, and it will be well deserved. If I don't help, death's the cost. But, if I help, what do you promise me?

KING

Make your demand.

HELENA

But will you do whatever I ask?

KING

Yes, by my scepter and my hopes to go to heaven.

HELENA

Then you will give me with your kingly hand whatever husband I choose. You'll give me the right to choose from among all the royal blood of France so that I can spread my low and humble name to any branch or family of your kingdom. I know someone who falls into that category, your subject, and it would be acceptable for me to ask for his hand and for you to bestow it.

KING

Here is my hand. If what you promise comes to pass, I will do exactly what you ask. So tell me when you're ready to choose, for I, your new patient, rely entirely on you. I should question you more, and I will question you more, although I wouldn't trust you any more no matter how much I knew about where you came from or how you got here. But leave those questions aside and be welcome and undoubtedly blessed. Give me some help here, hey! If you follow through with what you claim, my deeds for you will match your gift to me.

A trumpet fanfare plays. They exit.

Act 2, Scene 2

Shakespeare

Enter COUNTESS and Clown

COUNTESS

Come on, sir; I shall now put you to the height of your breeding.

CLOWN

I will show myself highly fed and lowly taught: I know my business is but to the court.

COUNTESS

5 To the court! why, what place make you special, when you put off that with such contempt? But to the court!

Shakescleare Translation

The COUNTESS and the Clown enter.

COUNTESS

Come on, sir. I will now make you demonstrate the extent of your breeding.

CLOWN

I will show myself to be well fed but poorly educated. I know I will be only sent to the court.

COUNTESS

To the court! Why, what place do you think of as special if you can talk of the court in such a contemptuous tone? Only sent to the court!

CLOWN

10 Truly, madam, if God have lent a man any manners, he may easily put it off at court: he that cannot make a leg, put off's cap, kiss his hand and say nothing, has neither leg, hands, lip, nor cap; and indeed such a fellow, to say precisely, were not for the court; but for me, I have an answer will serve all men.

COUNTESS

15 Marry, that's a bountiful answer that fits all questions.

CLOWN

It is like a barber's chair that fits all buttocks, the pin-buttock, the quatch-buttock, the brawn buttock, or any buttock.

COUNTESS

20 Will your answer serve fit to all questions?

CLOWN

25 As fit as ten groats is for the hand of an attorney, as your French crown for your taffeta punk, as Tib's rush for Tom's forefinger, as a pancake for Shrove Tuesday, a morris for May-day, as the nail to his hole, the cuckold to his horn, as a scolding quean to a wrangling knave, as the nun's lip to the friar's mouth, nay, as the pudding to his skin.

COUNTESS

Have you, I say, an answer of such fitness for all questions?

CLOWN

30 From below your duke to beneath your constable, it will fit any question.

COUNTESS

It must be an answer of most monstrous size that must fit all demands.

CLOWN

35 But a trifle neither, in good faith, if the learned should speak truth of it: here it is, and all that belongs to't. Ask me if I am a courtier: it shall do you no harm to learn.

COUNTESS

40 To be young again, if we could: I will be a fool in question, hoping to be the wiser by your answer. I pray you, sir, are you a courtier?

CLOWN

O Lord, sir! There's a simple putting off. More, more, a hundred of them.

COUNTESS

Sir, I am a poor friend of yours, that loves you.

CLOWN

O Lord, sir! Thick, thick, spare not me.

COUNTESS

45 I think, sir, you can eat none of this homely meat.

CLOWN

O Lord, sir! Nay, put me to't, I warrant you.

CLOWN

Truly, madam, if God has bestowed a man with any manners, he can discard them all at court. If a man can't bow, doff his cap, kiss his hand and say nothing, or has neither leg, hands, lip, nor cap, then such a fellow, to say precisely, is not made for court. For me, though, I have an answer that will respond to all men.

COUNTESS

Well, that's quite an answer that can respond to all questions.

CLOWN

It's like a barber's chair that fits all types of buttocks: the narrow buttock, the fat buttock, the brawny buttock, or any buttock.

COUNTESS

Will you answer be fit to respond to all questions?

CLOWN

It will be as fit as four pence is fit for the hand of an attorney, as fit as a French crown is fit for the hand of a scantily clad prostitute, or as fit as a lady's ring is fit for a man's finger ¹, or as fit as a pancake on Shrove Tuesday or a morris dance on May-day or as a nail to a hole or as a cuckold to his horn or as a scolding woman to a wayward rogue. Or as fit as the nun's lip to the friar's mouth, no, sorry, that should be as fit as the sausage ² to the sausage skin.

COUNTESS

Have you, I say, an answer that can respond to all questions?

CLOWN

From a duke to a constable, it will be good for any question.

COUNTESS

It must be an answer of a gigantic size that would fit any question.

CLOWN

But a little one, actually, to speak the truth: here it is and everything attached to it. Ask me if I am a nobleman: it won't hurt you to learn.

COUNTESS

Oh, to be young again, if we could. I will play the fool in asking you a question, hoping to become wiser from your answer. Please, sir, are you a nobleman?

CLOWN

"Oh Lord, sir!" That's a phrase used to evade answering the question. More, more questions, ask a hundred of them.

COUNTESS

Sir, I am a poor friend of yours, that cares for you.

CLOWN

"Oh Lord, sir!" More, more, don't spare me with your questions.

COUNTESS

I think, sir, you can't eat more of this plain meat.

CLOWN

"Oh Lord, sir!" No, ask me more of these, I beg you.

¹ "Tib" and "Tom" were common names for a man and woman, and a "rush" was a ring used as a token of love.

² The correct expression was apparently "as fit as a pudding for a friar's mouth"—the clown deliberately confuses the expression.

COUNTESS

You were lately whipped, sir, as I think.

CLOWN

O Lord, sir! spare not me.

COUNTESS

50 Do you cry, 'O Lord, sir!' at your whipping, and 'spare not me?' Indeed your 'O Lord, sir!' is very sequent to your whipping: you would answer very well to a whipping, if you were but bound to't.

CLOWN

I ne'er had worse luck in my life in my 'O Lord, sir!' I see things may serve long, but not serve ever.

COUNTESS

55 I play the noble housewife with the time
To entertain't so merrily with a fool.

CLOWN

O Lord, sir! why, there't serves well again.

COUNTESS

60 An end, sir; to your business. Give Helen this,
And urge her to a present answer back:
Commend me to my kinsmen and my son:
This is not much.

CLOWN

Not much commendation to them.

COUNTESS

Not much employment for you: you understand me?

CLOWN

Most fruitfully: I am there before my legs.

COUNTESS

65 Haste you again.

Exeunt severally

COUNTESS

You were recently whipped, sir, I think.

CLOWN

"Oh Lord, sir!" Don't spare me.

COUNTESS

Do you cry, "Oh Lord, sir?" about your whipping, and "Don't spare me?" Indeed, your "Oh Lord, sir!" is an appropriate thing to cry out during a whipping. You would answer very well during a whipping if you were only sentenced to such a punishment.

CLOWN

I never had worse luck in my life in my "Oh Lord, sir!" than the threat of whipping. I see some phrases may serve me for a while but not serve me forever.

COUNTESS

I act like a noble household manager entertaining the time with a fool like this.

CLOWN

"Oh Lord, sir!" Why, there, now, the phrase is serving me well again.

COUNTESS

Let's wrap this up, sir. To your task. Give Helena this, and tell her to send me back an answer quickly. Send my best wishes to my family and my son. That's not very much.

CLOWN

Not much best wishes to them.

COUNTESS

Not much of a task for you: you understand me?

CLOWN

Most heartily. I am there ahead of my legs.

COUNTESS

Go quickly again.

They exit in different directions.

Act 2, Scene 3

Shakespeare

Enter BERTRAM, LAFEU, and PAROLLES

LAFEU

They say miracles are past; and we have our philosophical persons, to make modern and familiar, things supernatural and causeless. Hence is it that we make trifles of terrors, ensconcing ourselves
5 into seeming knowledge, when we should submit ourselves to an unknown fear.

PAROLLES

Why, 'tis the rarest argument of wonder that hath shot out in our latter times.

BERTRAM

And so 'tis.

Shakescleare Translation

BERTRAM, LAFEU, and PAROLLES enter.

LAFEU

They say miracles no longer exist, and we have our scientists and philosophers to explain in modern and familiar terms the things that seem supernatural and without cause. So these days we think of terrors as just little trifles, wrapping ourselves in knowledge, when we should be filled with fear of the unknown.

PAROLLES

Why, it's the strangest story of wonder that has come to pass in modern times.

BERTRAM

And so it is.

LAFEU
10 To be relinquish'd of the artists,--

PAROLLES
So I say.

LAFEU
Both of Galen and Paracelsus.

PAROLLES
So I say.

LAFEU
Of all the learned and authentic fellows,--

PAROLLES
15 Right; so I say.

LAFEU
That gave him out incurable,--

PAROLLES
Why, there 'tis; so say I too.

LAFEU
Not to be helped,--

PAROLLES
Right; as 'twere, a man assured of a--

LAFEU
20 Uncertain life, and sure death.

PAROLLES
Just, you say well; so would I have said.

LAFEU
I may truly say, it is a novelty to the world.

PAROLLES
It is, indeed: if you will have it in showing, you shall read it in--what do you call there?

LAFEU
25 A showing of a heavenly effect in an earthly actor.

PAROLLES
That's it; I would have said the very same.

LAFEU
Why, your dolphin is not lustier: 'fore me, I speak in respect--

PAROLLES
30 Nay, 'tis strange, 'tis very strange, that is the brief and the tedious of it; and he's of a most facinerious spirit that will not acknowledge it to be the--

LAFEU
Very hand of heaven.

PAROLLES
Ay, so I say.

LAFEU
35 In a most weak--and debile minister, great power, great transcendence: which should, indeed, give us a further

LAFEU
To be given up on by the physicians--

PAROLLES
That's what I've been saying.

LAFEU
Both the schools of ancient and more recent medicine.

PAROLLES
That's what I've been saying.

LAFEU
Of all the learned and famous doctors--

PAROLLES
Right. That's what I've been saying.

LAFEU
That said he was incurable--

PAROLLES
Why, there it is. I've been saying that too.

LAFEU
Not to be helped--


PAROLLES
Right. As it were, he was a man assured of a--

LAFEU
An uncertain life and definite death.


PAROLLES
Exactly so. You speak well. I would have said the same.

LAFEU
I may truly say, this is a new thing in the world.

PAROLLES
It is, indeed. We'll hear it narrated, we'll read it in--what do you call it there?

LAFEU
[Reading] "A showing of a heavenly effect in an earthly man." 

PAROLLES
That's it. I would have said it exactly the same.


LAFEU
Why, no dolphin  is more sprightly than the king now. Of course, I speak in respect--


PAROLLES
No, it's strange, it's very strange, that is the long and the short of it. And only someone wicked could fail to acknowledge it to be the--

LAFEU
Very hand of heaven.

PAROLLES
Yes, so I say.

LAFEU
In a most weak--and feeble person, great power, great heavenly transcendence. That power should give us

 The story of the king's recovery has already been published.

 Lafeu puns on "Dauphin," the title for the heir to the French throne which was pronounced the same as "dolphin."

use to be made than alone the recovery of the king, as to be—generally thankful.

PAROLLES

40 I would have said it; you say well. Here comes the king.

Enter KING, HELENA, and Attendants. LAFEU and PAROLLES retire

LAFEU

Lustig, as the Dutchman says: I'll like a maid the better, whilst I have a tooth in my head: why, he's able to lead her a coranto.

PAROLLES

45 Mort du vinaigre! is not this Helen?

LAFEU

'Fore God, I think so.

KING

Go, call before me all the lords in court.
Sit, my preserver, by thy patient's side;
And with this healthful hand, whose banish'd sense
50 Thou hast repeal'd, a second time receive
The confirmation of my promised gift,
Which but attends thy naming.

Enter three or four Lords

KING

Fair maid, send forth thine eye: this youthful parcel
Of noble bachelors stand at my bestowing,
55 O'er whom both sovereign power and father's voice
I have to use: thy frank election make;
Thou hast power to choose, and they none to forsake.

HELENA

To each of you one fair and virtuous mistress
Fall, when Love please! marry, to each, but one!

LAFEU

60 I'd give bay Curtal and his furniture,
My mouth no more were broken than these boys',
And writ as little beard.

KING

Peruse them well:
Not one of those but had a noble father.

HELENA

65 Gentlemen,
Heaven hath through me restored the king to health.

ALL

We understand it, and thank heaven for you.

HELENA

I am a simple maid, and therein wealthiest,
That I protest I simply am a maid.
70 Please it your majesty, I have done already:
The blushes in my cheeks thus whisper me,
'We blush that thou shouldst choose; but, be refused,
Let the white death sit on thy cheek for ever;
We'll ne'er come there again.'

comfort, even bound the king's recovery so that we can be—generally thankful.

PAROLLES

I would have said it just like that. You say it well. Here comes the king.

The KING, HELENA, and Attendants enter. LAFEU and PAROLLES move aside.

LAFEU

"Lustig," or frolicsome, as the Dutch say: I'll still like maids as long as I have teeth in my head. Why, the king's strong enough to lead her in a dance.

PAROLLES

A ridiculous oath ! Isn't that Helena?

LAFEU

By God, I think it is.

KING

Go, call all the lords in the court before me. Sit, my savior, by your patient's side, and with this healthy hand, whose death sentence you've revoked, hear me confirm a second time the gift I've promised you. I only wait for you to name it.

Three or four Lords enter.

KING

Fair maid, look around the room. This youthful group of noble bachelors stand ready to be given away by me. I have both the king's power and the voice of a father over them. Choose who you want. You have the power to choose and they have no power to refuse.

HELENA

I hope all of you will find a fair and virtuous mistress when Love pleases to bestow her upon you! Yes, just one to each of you!

LAFEU

I'd give my horse Curtal and all his accoutrements if my mouth were as young as these boys' are, and covered with as little beard as they have.

KING

Look over them well. All of them had a noble father.

HELENA


Gentlemen, through me, heaven has restored the king to health.

ALL

We understand that, and we thank heaven for you.

HELENA

I am a simple maid and I am most valuable in my simple maidenhood. So please your majesty, I have finished already. The blushes in my cheeks whisper this to me: "We blush that you should have the power to choose, but if you are refused, let the white paleness of death sit on your cheek forever. We'll never come to your cheek again."

 "Mort du vinaigre" literally translates to "death of vinegar" but was used as an expression meaning a ridiculous oath.

KING

75 Make choice; and, see,
Who shuns thy love shuns all his love in me.

HELENA

Now, Dian, from thy altar do I fly,
And to imperial Love, that god most high,
Do my sighs stream. Sir, will you hear my suit?

FIRST LORD

80 And grant it.

HELENA

Thanks, sir; all the rest is mute.

LAFEU

I had rather be in this choice than throw ames-ace
for my life.

HELENA

85 The honour, sir, that flames in your fair eyes,
Before I speak, too threateningly replies:
Love make your fortunes twenty times above
Her that so wishes and her humble love!

SECOND LORD

No better, if you please.

HELENA

90 My wish receive,
Which great Love grant! and so, I take my leave.

LAFEU

Do all they deny her? An they were sons of mine,
I'd have them whipped; or I would send them to the
Turk, to make eunuchs of.

HELENA

95 Be not afraid that I your hand should take;
I'll never do you wrong for your own sake:
Blessing upon your vows! and in your bed
Find fairer fortune, if you ever wed!

LAFEU

100 These boys are boys of ice, they'll none have her:
sure, they are bastards to the English; the French
ne'er got 'em.

HELENA

You are too young, too happy, and too good,
To make yourself a son out of my blood.

FOURTH LORD

Fair one, I think not so.

LAFEU

105 There's one grape yet; I am sure thy father drunk
wine: but if thou be'st not an ass, I am a youth
of fourteen; I have known thee already.

HELENA

[To BERTRAM] I dare not say I take you; but I give
Me and my service, ever whilst I live,
Into your guiding power. This is the man.

KING

Make your choice. You'll see that he who rejects your love
rejects all my love for him too.

HELENA

Now, chaste Diana, I fly from your altar, and turn with my
sighs to powerful Love, that most mighty of gods.

[To FIRST LORD] Sir, will you hear my wishes?

FIRST LORD

And grant them.

HELENA

Thanks, sir. I have nothing else to say.

LAFEU

I would want to be one of her choices here even if it meant I
would lose at dice ⁴ for the rest of my life.

⁴ An "ames-ace" was the lowest throw at dice, the double ace. It came to mean bad luck or misfortune.

HELENA

[To SECOND LORD] Before I speak, the honor, sir, that I see
in your fair eyes, seems to reply threateningly: I hope that
love will make your fortunes twenty times greater than my
own humble love can offer!

SECOND LORD

No better, if you please.

HELENA

Well, receive my wish, anyway, which I hope Love will grant
you! And so, I take my leave of you.

LAFEU

Do they all deny her? If they were sons of mine, I'd have
them whipped, or else I'd send them Turkey to be made
into eunuchs ⁵.

⁵ There was a common misconception during this time period that all Turks, or Muslims, were eunuchs; male servants who have been castrated.

HELENA

[To another Lord] Don't be afraid that I should take your
hand. I'll never wrong you in that way. May your marriage
vows be blessed and may you find fairer fortune than me in
your bed if you ever get married!

LAFEU

These boys are made of ice. None of them will have her.
They must be English bastards. They can't have French
parentage.

HELENA

[To the FOURTH LORD] You are too young, too happy, and
too good, to father a son from my blood.

FOURTH LORD

Fair one, I don't think that.

LAFEU

There's one man left yet. I am sure your father drank wine,
but if you're not an ass, then I'm a youth of fourteen. I know
you to be an ass already.

HELENA

[To BERTRAM] I dare not say that I take you. But I give
myself and my service, as long as I live, into your guiding
power.

[To the KING] This is the man.

KING

110 Why, then, young Bertram, take her; she's thy wife.

BERTRAM

My wife, my liege! I shall beseech your highness,
In such a business give me leave to use
The help of mine own eyes.

KING

Know'st thou not, Bertram,
115 What she has done for me?

BERTRAM

Yes, my good lord;
But never hope to know why I should marry her.

KING

Thou know'st she has raised me from my sickly bed.

BERTRAM

But follows it, my lord, to bring me down
120 Must answer for your raising? I know her well:
She had her breeding at my father's charge.
A poor physician's daughter my wife! Disdain
Rather corrupt me ever!

KING

'Tis only title thou disdain'st in her, the which
125 I can build up. Strange is it that our bloods,
Of colour, weight, and heat, pour'd all together,
Would quite confound distinction, yet stand off
In differences so mighty. If she be
All that is virtuous, save what thou dislikest,
130 A poor physician's daughter, thou dislikest
Of virtue for the name: but do not so:
From lowest place when virtuous things proceed,
The place is dignified by the doer's deed:
Where great additions swell's, and virtue none,
135 It is a dropsied honour. Good alone
Is good without a name. Vileness is so:
The property by what it is should go,
Not by the title. She is young, wise, fair;
In these to nature she's immediate heir,
140 And these breed honour: that is honour's scorn,
Which challenges itself as honour's born
And is not like the sire: honours thrive,
When rather from our acts we them derive
Than our foregoers: the mere word's a slave
145 Debauched on every tomb, on every grave
A lying trophy, and as oft is dumb
Where dust and damn'd oblivion is the tomb
Of honour'd bones indeed. What should be said?
If thou canst like this creature as a maid,
150 I can create the rest: virtue and she
Is her own dower; honour and wealth from me.

BERTRAM

I cannot love her, nor will strive to do't.

KING

Thou wrong'st thyself, if thou shouldst strive to
choose.

HELENA

155 That you are well restored, my lord, I'm glad:
Let the rest go.

KING

My honour's at the stake; which to defeat,
I must produce my power. Here, take her hand,
Proud scornful boy, unworthy this good gift;
160 That dost in vile misprision shackle up
My love and her desert; that canst not dream,

KING

Why, then, young Bertram, take her, she's your wife.

BERTRAM

My wife, my lord! I will plead with your highness that in
such a business I can use my own eyes to make my choice.

KING

Don't you know what she's done for me, Bertram?

BERTRAM

Yes, my good lord, but I don't have a clue why I should
marry her.

KING

You know that she has raised me from my sickbed.

BERTRAM

But does it make sense, my lord, that I must be brought
down because you've been raised up? I know her well. She
was brought up in my father's court. A poor physician's
daughter as my wife! I'd rather be hated forever!

KING

It's only her title that you hate in her, and that I can
improve. How strange it is that our blood, its color and
weight and heat, when you pour all our blood together, all
looks the same but we still put so much stock in social
differences. If she is totally virtuous, and you only dislike
her because she's a poor physician's daughter, you dislike
someone virtuous only because she lacks a title. Don't do
that. When low-born people do virtuous things, their status
is raised up by their virtuous deed. When a high-born
person has no virtue, it's a swollen, fake honor. Goodness is
goodness with or without a title. Vileness is the same. It's
the deeds that matter, not the title. She is young, wise, and
beautiful. She's the legitimate heir of nature in all of that
and those qualities make her honorable. Honor mocks
people who claim to be honorable by birth but don't
behave like it. Honors matter most when they come from
our acts, not from our ancestors. The mere word "honor" is
a slave we carve into every tomb, a memorial on every
grave. In every case, it's a silent legacy because dust and
eternal nothingness are all that's inside a tomb of so-called
"honored" bones. What else can be said? If you can like this
creature just as she is, I can provide the rest. She herself
and her virtue is what she brings. I can supply honor and
wealth.

BERTRAM

I cannot love her and I won't try to.

KING

You wrong yourself if you should try to get out of this.

HELENA

I'm just glad you're recovered, my lord. Let the rest go.

KING

My honour's at risk. To eliminate that risk, I must wield my
power. Here, take her hand, you proud, scornful boy, you're
unworthy of this good gift. In your vile hate you throw away
my love and her worthiness. You can't imagine how, when I
add my weight to hers on the scale how little you will be

We, poisoning us in her defective scale,
Shall weigh thee to the beam; that wilt not know,
It is in us to plant thine honour where

165 We please to have it grow. Cheque thy contempt:
Obey our will, which travails in thy good:
Believe not thy disdain, but presently
Do thine own fortunes that obedient right
Which both thy duty owes and our power claims;
170 Or I will throw thee from my care for ever
Into the staggers and the careless lapse
Of youth and ignorance; both my revenge and hate
Loosing upon thee, in the name of justice,
Without all terms of pity. Speak; thine answer.

BERTRAM

175 Pardon, my gracious lord; for I submit
My fancy to your eyes: when I consider
What great creation and what dole of honour
Flies where you bid it, I find that she, which late
Was in my nobler thoughts most base, is now
180 The praised of the king; who, so ennobled,
Is as 'twere born so.

KING

Take her by the hand,
And tell her she is thine: to whom I promise
A counterpoise, if not to thy estate
185 A balance more replete.

BERTRAM

I take her hand.

KING

Good fortune and the favour of the king
Smile upon this contract; whose ceremony
Shall seem expedient on the now-born brief,
190 And be perform'd to-night: the solemn feast
Shall more attend upon the coming space,
Expecting absent friends. As thou lovest her,
Thy love's to me religious; else, does err.

Exeunt all but LAFEU and PAROLLES

LAFEU

[Advancing] Do you hear, monsieur? a word with you.

PAROLLES

195 Your pleasure, sir?

LAFEU

Your lord and master did well to make his
recantation.

PAROLLES

Recantation! My lord! my master!

LAFEU

Ay; is it not a language I speak?

PAROLLES

200 A most harsh one, and not to be understood without
bloody succeeding. My master!

LAFEU

Are you companion to the Count Rousillon?

PAROLLES

To any count, to all counts, to what is man.

LAFEU

205 To what is count's man: count's master is of
another style.

valued. You pretend not to know that it's in my power to
decide how much honor you have. Stop your contempt.
Obey my will which is all for your own good. Don't listen to
your hate, but just do yourself the obedient favor of doing
what duty and my power commands of you. If not, I'll throw
you out of my protection forever into the confusion and
careless idiocy of your youth and ignorance. I'll apply both
my hate and revenge upon you, in the name of justice, with
no pity. Speak. Give me your answer.

BERTRAM

Pardon me, my gracious lord. I will give in and allow you to
choose for me. When I think about what greatness you
create and how much honor you bestow wherever you
want, I realize that she, who I used to think of as low-class,
is now praised by the king. Being made so noble by you, it's
as if she were born noble.

KING

Take her by the hand, and tell her that she is yours. I
promise her a compensation that may not equal your estate
but will make you equals nonetheless.

BERTRAM

I take her hand.

KING

Good fortune and a king's favor will smile upon this union.
The ceremony will happen quickly and will be performed
tonight. The celebratory feast will come later since there are
friends who will be absent. As long as you love her, your
love is holy to me. If you don't love her, I view your love for
me with anger.

All exit but LAFEU and PAROLLES.

LAFEU

[Coming forward] Did you hear that, monsieur? I'd like to
have a word with you.

PAROLLES

What do you want, sir?

LAFEU

Your lord and master made the right choice to take back
what he'd said.

PAROLLES

Take it back! My lord! My master!

LAFEU

Yes. Do you not understand the words I'm saying?

PAROLLES

They're harsh ones, and they're not to be understood
without a bloody fight. My master!

LAFEU

Are you companion to the Count Rousillon?

PAROLLES

To any counts, to all counts, to all mankind.

LAFEU

You're a count's servant. A count's master is another thing
altogether.

PAROLLES

You are too old, sir; let it satisfy you, you are too old.

LAFEU

I must tell thee, sirrah, I write man; to which title age cannot bring thee.

PAROLLES

210 What I dare too well do, I dare not do.

LAFEU

I did think thee, for two ordinaries, to be a pretty wise fellow; thou didst make tolerable vent of thy travel; it might pass: yet the scarfs and the bannerets about thee did manifoldly dissuade me from believing thee a vessel of too great a burthen. I have now found thee; when I lose thee again, I care not: yet art thou good for nothing but taking up; and that thou't scarce worth.

PAROLLES

Hadst thou not the privilege of antiquity upon thee,--

LAFEU

220 Do not plunge thyself too far in anger, lest thou hasten thy trial; which if--Lord have mercy on thee for a hen! So, my good window of lattice, fare thee well: thy casement I need not open, for I look through thee. Give me thy hand.

PAROLLES

225 My lord, you give me most egregious indignity.

LAFEU

Ay, with all my heart; and thou art worthy of it.

PAROLLES

I have not, my lord, deserved it.

LAFEU

Yes, good faith, every dram of it; and I will not bate thee a scruple.

PAROLLES

230 Well, I shall be wiser.

LAFEU

Even as soon as thou canst, for thou hast to pull at a smack o' the contrary. If ever thou be'st bound in thy scarf and beaten, thou shalt find what it is to be proud of thy bondage. I have a desire to hold my acquaintance with thee, or rather my knowledge, that I may say in the default, he is a man I know.

PAROLLES

My lord, you do me most insupportable vexation.

LAFEU

I would it were hell-pains for thy sake, and my poor doing eternal: for doing I am past: as I will by thee, in what motion age will give me leave.

Exit

PAROLLES

Well, thou hast a son shall take this disgrace off me; scurvy, old, filthy, scurvy lord! Well, I must be patient; there is no fettering of authority.

245 I'll beat him, by my life, if I can meet him with

PAROLLES

You are too old, sir. Be happy with that, you are too old.

LAFEU

I must tell you, sir, I call myself a man. Your young age can't bring you that title.

PAROLLES

I'd love to fight you, but I dare not.

LAFEU

For about two meals, I thought you were a pretty wise fellow. You spoke well about your travels. It might be the case, but the scarfs and the doodads you wore completely convinced me that you couldn't be a man of much substance. I have now found you out. If I lose you, I won't care. You're good for nothing but being attacked and you're hardly worth that much.

PAROLLES

If you didn't have the privilege of being ancient--

LAFEU

Don't go too far in anger or you might speed up the time of your trial; which if--Lord have mercy on you, chicken! So, my good see-through window, farewell: I don't need to open you up because I can see through you. Give me your hand.

PAROLLES

My lord, you do me most remarkably wrong.

LAFEU

Yes, with all my heart, and you are worthy of it.

PAROLLES

I have not, my lord, deserved it.

LAFEU

Yes, good faith, every piece of it, and I won't give you back a hair.

PAROLLES

Well, I will be wiser.

LAFEU

Do that as soon as you can, for you'll have to be the total opposite of what you are now. If you ever find yourself tied up in your scarf and beaten, you'll find out what it means to be proud of your bondage. I would love to keep up my acquaintance with you, or rather my knowledge of you, so that I can say when you get tied up and beaten, he is a man I know.

PAROLLES

My lord, you irritate me enormously.

LAFEU

I wish you felt pains from hell for your sake, and my poor attempts to irritate you forever. For doing this, I'm done, and I'll now pass by you with whatever speed my great age will allow me.

LAFEU exits.

PAROLLES

Well, you have a son who will pay for this disgraceful talk. Worthless, old, filthy, worthless lord! Well, I must be patient. There is no violence I can take against authority. I'll beat him, on my life, if I can run into him in a convenient

any convenience, an he were double and double a lord. I'll have no more pity of his age than I would of --I'll beat him, an if I could but meet him again.

Re-enter LAFEU

LAFEU

250 Sirrah, your lord and master's married; there's news for you: you have a new mistress.

PAROLLES

I most unfeignedly beseech your lordship to make some reservation of your wrongs: he is my good lord: whom I serve above is my master.

LAFEU

255 Who? God?

PAROLLES

Ay, sir.

LAFEU

260 The devil it is that's thy master. Why dost thou garter up thy arms o' this fashion? dost make hose of sleeves? do other servants so? Thou wert best set thy lower part where thy nose stands. By mine honour, if I were but two hours younger, I'd beat thee: methinks, thou art a general offence, and every man should beat thee: I think thou wast created for men to breathe themselves upon thee.

PAROLLES

265 This is hard and undeserved measure, my lord.

LAFEU

270 Go to, sir; you were beaten in Italy for picking a kernel out of a pomegranate; you are a vagabond and no true traveller: you are more saucy with lords and honourable personages than the commission of your birth and virtue gives you heraldry. You are not worth another word, else I'd call you knave. I leave you.

Exit

PAROLLES

275 Good, very good; it is so then: good, very good; let it be concealed awhile.

Re-enter BERTRAM

BERTRAM

Undone, and forfeited to cares for ever!

PAROLLES

What's the matter, sweet-heart?

BERTRAM

Although before the solemn priest I have sworn, I will not bed her.

PAROLLES

280 What, what, sweet-heart?

BERTRAM

O my Parolles, they have married me! I'll to the Tuscan wars, and never bed her.

PAROLLES

France is a dog-hole, and it no more merits The tread of a man's foot: to the wars!

way, if he were twice and twice again as great a lord. I won't have any more sympathy for his age than I would have—I'll beat him if only I could just meet him again.

LAFEU re-enters.

LAFEU

Sir, your lord and master is married. There's news for you. You have a new mistress.

PAROLLES

I most seriously beg your lordship to plead pardon for your wrongs. He is my good lord. Only he that I serve above is my master.


LAFEU


Who? God?

PAROLLES

Yes, sir.

LAFEU


The devil is your master. Why do you dress up your arms in this fashion ? Do you make pantaloons of sleeves? Do other servants do so? You'd do best to put your leg where your nose is. I swear, if I were only two hours younger, I'd beat you. I think you are an offense to everyone and every man should beat you. I think you were created for men to practice their beating on you.


 Parolles seems to have tied scarves around his sleeves as if they were garters.

PAROLLES

This is harsh and undeserved talk, my lord.

LAFEU

Oh, come on, sir, you were beaten in Italy just for picking a seed out of a pomegranate . You are a vagabond and not a true traveller. You are more rude to lords and honorable people than the quality of your birth and your manners should allow you to be. You are not worth another word. Otherwise, I'd call you a rogue. I leave you now.

 Lafeu's example suggests that Parolles was beaten in Italy for every little thing.

LAFEU exits.

PAROLLES

Good, very good. It is so then. Good, very good. Let my knowledge of this be kept secret for a while.

BERTRAM re-enters.

BERTRAM

Undone, and sacrificed to woes forever!

PAROLLES

What's the matter, sweet heart?

BERTRAM

Although I've sworn to love in front of the solemn priest, I will not sleep with her.

PAROLLES

What, what, sweet heart?

BERTRAM

Oh, my Parolles, they have forced me to marry! I'll flee to the Tuscan wars and never sleep with her.

PAROLLES

France is a hellhole and it no longer deserves a man's foot walking on it. To the wars!

BERTRAM

285 There's letters from my mother: what the import is,
I know not yet.

PAROLLES

Ay, that would be known. To the wars, my boy, to the wars!
He wears his honour in a box unseen,
290 That hugs his kicky-wicky here at home,
Spending his manly marrow in her arms,
Which should sustain the bound and high curvet
Of Mars's fiery steed. To other regions
France is a stable; we that dwell in't jades;
295 Therefore, to the war!

BERTRAM

It shall be so: I'll send her to my house,
Acquaint my mother with my hate to her,
And wherefore I am fled; write to the king
That which I durst not speak; his present gift
300 Shall furnish me to those Italian fields,
Where noble fellows strike: war is no strife
To the dark house and the detested wife.

PAROLLES

Will this capriccio hold in thee? art sure?

BERTRAM

Go with me to my chamber, and advise me.
305 I'll send her straight away: to-morrow
I'll to the wars, she to her single sorrow.

PAROLLES

Why, these balls bound; there's noise in it. 'Tis hard:
A young man married is a man that's marr'd:
Therefore away, and leave her bravely; go:
310 The king has done you wrong: but, hush, 'tis so.

Exeunt

BERTRAM

There are letters from my mother. What they say, I don't yet know.

PAROLLES

Yes, that should be known. To the wars, my boys, to the wars! A man keep his honor hidden away, when he stays at home with his darling spending his manly energy in her arms, when he should be riding and leaping on Mars's fiery horse in war. In the eyes of other nations, France is like a stable and the people who dwell in it are horses. Therefore, to the war!

BERTRAM

We will go. I'll send her to my house, let my mother know how much I hate my wife and why I'm fleeing. I'll write to the king these words I don't dare speak. His recent gift to me will fund my escape to those Italian fields where noble fellows fight. War is nothing compared to the awful home and the detested wife.

PAROLLES

Will you stick to this commitment? Are you sure?

BERTRAM

Go with me to my chamber and advise me. I'll send her away immediately. Tomorrow, I'll go to war and she'll go live a single life in sorrow.

PAROLLES

Why, these tennis balls are bouncing now, you can hear it. It's hard indeed: a young man who's married is a man that is damaged goods. Therefore, get away and leave her hastily. Go. The king has wronged you, but don't say that aloud.

They exit.

Act 2, Scene 4

Shakespeare

Enter HELENA and Clown

HELENA

My mother greets me kindly; is she well?

CLOWN

She is not well; but yet she has her health: she's very merry; but yet she is not well: but thanks be given, she's very well and wants nothing i', the
5 world; but yet she is not well.

HELENA

If she be very well, what does she ail, that she's not very well?

CLOWN

Truly, she's very well indeed, but for two things.

HELENA

What two things?

Shakesclare Translation

HELENA and the Clown enter.

HELENA

My mother greets me kindly. Is she well?

CLOWN

She is not well 🗨️, but she still has her health. She's very cheerful. But yet she is not well. But, thankfully, she's very well and doesn't need anything in the world. But still she's not well.

HELENA

If she is so well, what pains her, that she's still not very well?

CLOWN

Truly, she's very well indeed, except for two things.

HELENA

What two things?

🗨️ The clown is probably playing on two different meanings of "well", as in healthy and also in a theological sense.

CLOWN

10 One, that she's not in heaven, whither God send her quickly! the other that she's in earth, from whence God send her quickly!

Enter PAROLLES

PAROLLES

Bless you, my fortunate lady!

HELENA

15 I hope, sir, I have your good will to have mine own good fortunes.

PAROLLES

You had my prayers to lead them on; and to keep them on, have them still. O, my knave, how does my old lady?

CLOWN

20 So that you had her wrinkles and I her money, I would she did as you say.

PAROLLES

Why, I say nothing.

CLOWN

Marry, you are the wiser man; for many a man's tongue shakes out his master's undoing: to say nothing, to do nothing, to know nothing, and to have nothing, is to be a great part of your title; which is within a very little of nothing.

PAROLLES

Away! thou'rt a knave.

CLOWN

30 You should have said, sir, before a knave thou'rt a knave; that's, before me thou'rt a knave: this had been truth, sir.

PAROLLES

Go to, thou art a witty fool; I have found thee.

CLOWN

Did you find me in yourself, sir? or were you taught to find me? The search, sir, was profitable; and much fool may you find in you, even to the world's pleasure and the increase of laughter.

PAROLLES

A good knave, i' faith, and well fed. Madam, my lord will go away to-night; A very serious business calls on him. The great prerogative and rite of love, Which, as your due, time claims, he does acknowledge; But puts it off to a compell'd restraint; Whose want, and whose delay, is strew'd with sweets, Which they distil now in the curbed time, To make the coming hour o'erflow with joy
45 And pleasure drown the brim.

HELENA

What's his will else?

PAROLLES

That you will take your instant leave o' the king And make this haste as your own good proceeding, Strengthen'd with what apology you think
50 May make it probable need.

CLOWN

One, that she's not in heaven, where God will send her quickly! The other, that she's on the earth, from where God will send her quickly!

PAROLLES enters.

PAROLLES

God bless you, my fortunate lady!

HELENA

I hope, sir, I have your blessing to celebrate my own good fortune.

PAROLLES

I prayed for you to pursue your good fortune. And so you can keep them, have them still. Oh, my rogue, how is my old lady doing?

CLOWN

If you could have her wrinkles and I could have her money, I wish she would do as you say.

PAROLLES

But I have said nothing.

CLOWN

Ah, you are the wiser man. Many a man's tongue causes his master's downfall. To say nothing, to do nothing, to know nothing, and to have nothing, is going to be a big part of your position, which is pretty close to nothing itself.

PAROLLES

Get away! You're a rogue.

CLOWN

You should have said, sir, in front of a rascal that you are a rascal. That is, in front of me, you are a rascal. This would have been a true statement, sir.

PAROLLES

Get out, you're a witty fool. [I've found you out.](#)

CLOWN

Did you find me in yourself, sir? Or were you taught to find me? The search was successful, sir. And you may find a big fool inside yourself, even one who can please the world and make many people laugh.

PAROLLES


You're a good rascal, I swear, and well fed. Madam, my lord will go away tonight. A very serious business summons him. He acknowledges the great needs and ceremonies of love, which you're entitled to, but he has no choice but to put them off. The absence of those love ceremonies, and their delay, will make them all the sweeter, now that they're distilled in the meantime, so that when you finally consummate your love, that hour will overflow with joy and pleasure will run over the brim.

HELENA

What else does he want me to do?

PAROLLES

That you will immediately leave the king and tell him that your urgency is your own idea. Use whatever excuse you think makes your story sound stronger and more probable.

 Parolles means "I have seen through you," and the clown takes up his "I have found thee" with his own wordplay.

HELENA

What more commands he?

PAROLLES

That, having this obtain'd, you presently
Attend his further pleasure.

HELENA

In every thing I wait upon his will.

PAROLLES

55 I shall report it so.

HELENA

I pray you.

Exit PAROLLES

HELENA

Come, sirrah.

Exeunt

HELENA

What else does he command?

PAROLLES

That, once you've done this, you wait to hear more from
him.

HELENA

In everything, I serve him.

PAROLLES

I shall report that to him.

HELENA

I pray you do so.

PAROLLES exits.

HELENA

[To the CLOWN] Come, sir.

They exit.

Act 2, Scene 5

Shakespeare

Enter LAFEU and BERTRAM

LAFEU

But I hope your lordship thinks not him a soldier.

BERTRAM

Yes, my lord, and of very valiant approval.

LAFEU

You have it from his own deliverance.

BERTRAM

And by other warranted testimony.

LAFEU

5 Then my dial goes not true: I took this lark for a
bunting.

BERTRAM

I do assure you, my lord, he is very great in
knowledge and accordingly valiant.

LAFEU

10 I have then sinned against his experience and
transgressed against his valour; and my state that
way is dangerous, since I cannot yet find in my
heart to repent. Here he comes: I pray you, make
us friends; I will pursue the amity.

Enter PAROLLES

PAROLLES

[To BERTRAM] These things shall be done, sir.

LAFEU

15 Pray you, sir, who's his tailor?

Shakesclore Translation

LAFEU and BERTRAM enter.

LAFEU

But I hope your lordship doesn't think that he's a soldier.

BERTRAM

Yes, my lord, and with very brave proof of it.

LAFEU

You've heard that from him.

BERTRAM

And by other believable testimony.

LAFEU

Then my estimation of him was wrong. I took him to be a
fraud.

BERTRAM

I do assure you, my lord, he has a lot of knowledge and is
very brave.

LAFEU


Well, then I've been unfair to his experience and misjudged
his bravery. Yet I might be in danger of damnation since I
can't yet find it in my heart to repent. Here he comes. I hope
that you'll make us friends. I'll pursue our reconciliation.


PAROLLES enters.

PAROLLES

[To BERTRAM] These things will be done, sir.

LAFEU

[To PAROLLES] Pray you, sir, who's his tailor ?

 It's possible that Lafeu is pretending Parolles is a servant who has just been to the tailor, and his use of "sir" is likely ironic.

PAROLLES

Sir?

LAFEU

O, I know him well, I, sir; he, sir, 's a good workman, a very good tailor.

BERTRAM

[Aside to PAROLLES] Is she gone to the king?

PAROLLES

20 She is.

BERTRAM

Will she away to-night?

PAROLLES

As you'll have her.

BERTRAM

I have writ my letters, casketed my treasure,
Given order for our horses; and to-night,
25 When I should take possession of the bride,
End ere I do begin.

LAFEU

A good traveller is something at the latter end of a dinner; but one that lies three thirds and uses a known truth to pass a thousand nothings with, should
30 be once heard and thrice beaten. God save you, captain.

BERTRAM

Is there any unkindness between my lord and you, monsieur?

PAROLLES

I know not how I have deserved to run into my lord's displeasure.

LAFEU

35 You have made shift to run into 't, boots and spurs and all, like him that leaped into the custard; and out of it you'll run again, rather than suffer question for your residence.

BERTRAM

It may be you have mistaken him, my lord.

LAFEU

40 And shall do so ever, though I took him at 's prayers. Fare you well, my lord; and believe this of me, there can be no kernel in this light nut; the soul of this man is his clothes. Trust him not in matter of heavy consequence; I have kept of them
45 tame, and know their natures. Farewell, monsieur: I have spoken better of you than you have or will to deserve at my hand; but we must do good against evil.

Exit

PAROLLES

An idle lord. I swear.

BERTRAM

I think so.

PAROLLES

Sir?

LAFEU

Oh, I know him well, yes, sir. He, sir, he's a good workman, a very good tailor.

BERTRAM

[So only PAROLLES can hear] Has she gone to the king?

PAROLLES

She has.

BERTRAM

Will she leave court tonight?

PAROLLES

As you bid her.

BERTRAM

I have written my letters, packed up my treasure, called for our horses, and tonight, when I should be consummating my marriage, I'll end that act before it begins.

LAFEU

[To himself] A man who's well travelled is a nice thing to have at the end of a dinner to tell stories, but a man who lies three out of three times and tells one truth to convince you of a thousand lies should be heard once and then beaten three times.

[So only PAROLLES can hear] God protect you, captain.


BERTRAM


Is there a feud between you and this lord, monsieur?

PAROLLES

I don't know what I've done to earn his displeasure.

LAFEU

You have managed to run directly into my displeasure, boots and spurs and all, like a jester who jumped into the custard , and you'll flee again rather than stick around to defend yourself.

 The sight of a jester leaping into a large custard (a type of dessert) was a common feature of the Lord Mayor's show in London.

BERTRAM

It might be that you're mistaken about him, my lord.

LAFEU

And I'll continue to be mistaken about him forever, then, even if I stumbled upon him praying. Farewell, my lord. Believe this from me. There can be no kernel at the core of this lightweight nut. This man's soul is in his clothes. Don't trust him with important matters. I have kept tame animals and I know to beware of them. Farewell, monsieur. I have spoken better of you than you have or ever will deserve from me, but we must try to do good even in the presence of evil.

LAFEU exits.

PAROLLES

He's a foolish lord, I swear.

BERTRAM

I think so.

PAROLLES

50 Why, do you not know him?

BERTRAM

Yes, I do know him well, and common speech
Gives him a worthy pass. Here comes my clog.

Enter HELENA

HELENA

I have, sir, as I was commanded from you,
55 Spoke with the king and have procured his leave
For present parting; only he desires
Some private speech with you.

BERTRAM

I shall obey his will.
You must not marvel, Helen, at my course,
60 Which holds not colour with the time, nor does
The ministration and required office
On my particular. Prepared I was not
For such a business; therefore am I found
So much unsettled: this drives me to entreat you
65 That presently you take our way for home;
And rather muse than ask why I entreat you,
For my respects are better than they seem
And my appointments have in them a need
Greater than shows itself at the first view
70 To you that know them not. This to my mother:

Giving a letter

BERTRAM

'Twill be two days ere I shall see you, so
I leave you to your wisdom.

HELENA

Sir, I can nothing say,
75 But that I am your most obedient servant.

BERTRAM

Come, come, no more of that.

HELENA

And ever shall
With true observance seek to eke out that
Wherein toward me my homely stars have fail'd
80 To equal my great fortune.

BERTRAM

Let that go:
My haste is very great: farewell; hie home.

HELENA

Pray, sir, your pardon.

BERTRAM

Well, what would you say?

HELENA

I am not worthy of the wealth I owe,
85 Nor dare I say 'tis mine, and yet it is;
But, like a timorous thief, most fain would steal
What law does vouch mine own.

BERTRAM

What would you have?

PAROLLES

Why, do you not know him?

BERTRAM

Yes, I do know him well, and most people say he's very
worthy. Here comes my clog.

HELENA enters.

HELENA

Sir, as you commanded me to do, I have spoken with the
king and have gotten permission to leave immediately. He
just wants to speak to you in private.

BERTRAM

I will obey his request. You mustn't be confused, Helena, at
my behavior, which isn't normal for such a marriage day. I
know I'm not doing the things expected of me as a
husband. I wasn't prepared for such an event and it's
unsettled me. This makes me ask you to go home ahead of
me. You can think for yourself, rather than ask, why I
request this of you. My reasons are better than they seem.
These actions are more necessary than they seem at first
sight because you don't know my reasons. Bring this to my
mother.

He gives her a letter.

BERTRAM

It will be two days before I will see you, so I'll leave you to
your thoughts.

HELENA

Sir, I can't say anything except that I am your most obedient
servant.

BERTRAM

Come, come, no more of that.

HELENA

And I shall forever with truth and honesty aim to be worthy
of this great fortune which my plain upbringing did not
deserve.

BERTRAM

Forget that. I'm in a big hurry. Farewell. Go home.

HELENA

Please, sir, your pardon.

BERTRAM


Well, what would you say?

HELENA

I am unworthy of the wealth I've received and I don't dare
say it belongs to me, and yet it is. But, like a shy thief, I
would still like to steal what the law says is mine.

BERTRAM

What is it that you want?

 A "clog" is a weight tied to an animal to restrict its movement; Bertram is implying that Helena weighs and slows him down.

HELENA

90 Something; and scarce so much: nothing, indeed.
I would not tell you what I would, my lord:
Faith yes;
Strangers and foes do sunder, and not kiss.

BERTRAM

I pray you, stay not, but in haste to horse.

HELENA

95 I shall not break your bidding, good my lord.

BERTRAM

Where are my other men, monsieur? Farewell.

Exit HELENA

BERTRAM

Go thou toward home; where I will never come
Whilst I can shake my sword or hear the drum.
100 Away, and for our flight.

PAROLLES

Bravely, coragio!

Exeunt

HELENA

Something. And hardly that much. Nothing, indeed. I can't tell you what I want, my lord. Well, yes. Only strangers and foes part ways without a kiss.

BERTRAM

I plead with you, don't stay here, but hurry to your horse.

HELENA

I won't fail to do what you command, my good lord.

BERTRAM

Where are my other men, monsieur? Farewell.

HELENA exits.

BERTRAM

Yes, go towards home where I will never come while I can still use my sword or hear the drums of war. Let's get away, and prepare to flee.

PAROLLES

Bravely, courage!

They exit.

Act 3, Scene 1

Shakespeare

Flourish. Enter the DUKE of Florence attended; the two Frenchmen, with a troop of soldiers.

DUKE

So that from point to point now have you heard
The fundamental reasons of this war,
Whose great decision hath much blood let forth
And more thirsts after.

FIRST LORD

5 Holy seems the quarrel
Upon your grace's part; black and fearful
On the opposer.

DUKE

Therefore we marvel much our cousin France
Would in so just a business shut his bosom
10 Against our borrowing prayers.

SECOND LORD

Good my lord,
The reasons of our state I cannot yield,
But like a common and an outward man,
That the great figure of a council frames
15 By self-unable motion : therefore dare not
Say what I think of it, since I have found
Myself in my incertain grounds to fail
As often as I guess'd.

DUKE

Be it his pleasure.

FIRST LORD

20 But I am sure the younger of our nature,
That surfeit on their ease, will day by day
Come here for physic.

Shakescleare Translation

A trumpet call. The DUKE of Florence enters, with attendants, along with two French Lords and a troop of soldiers.

DUKE

So now you've heard point by point the basic reasons for this war. The weighty decision to go to war has already caused so many deaths and more are still to come.

FIRST LORD

It seems like God is on your side in this fight, your grace. Things are looking pretty dire and frightening for your enemy.

DUKE

That's why we're astonished that the King of France would refuse to help us when we have such a just cause and pray for support.

SECOND LORD

My good lord, I can't explain why our king does what he does. I can only say, as a common observer, that great men tend to act in ways I'm incapable of explaining. Don't ask me what I think about it then, since I tend to be so uncertain about such things that I'm usually wrong whenever I guess.

DUKE

Well, he'll do as he pleases.

FIRST LORD

But I'm sure that our younger countrymen, that are sick of easy leisure, will come here to recover themselves more and more every day.

DUKE

Welcome shall they be;
And all the honours that can fly from us
25 Shall on them settle. You know your places well;
When better fall, for your avails they fell:
To-morrow to the field.

Flourish. Exeunt

DUKE

They'll be welcome here. All the honors that I can bestow,
I'll bestow upon them. You know where you're supposed to
be. When better positions open up, you'll be the first to
know. Tomorrow, the battlefield!

A trumpet call. All exit.

Act 3, Scene 2

Shakespeare

Enter COUNTESS and Clown

COUNTESS

It hath happened all as I would have had it, save
that he comes not along with her.

CLOWN

By my troth, I take my young lord to be a very
melancholy man.

COUNTESS

5 By what observance, I pray you?

CLOWN

Why, he will look upon his boot and sing; mend the
ruff and sing; ask questions and sing; pick his
teeth and sing. I know a man that had this trick of
melancholy sold a goodly manor for a song.

COUNTESS

10 Let me see what he writes, and when he means to come.

Opening a letter

CLOWN

I have no mind to Isbel since I was at court: our
old lings and our Isbels o' the country are nothing
like your old ling and your Isbels o' the court:
15 the brains of my Cupid's knocked out, and I begin to
love, as an old man loves money, with no stomach.

COUNTESS

What have we here?

CLOWN

E'en that you have there.

Exit

COUNTESS

20 *[Reads]* I have sent you a daughter-in-law: she hath
recovered the king, and undone me. I have wedded
her, not bedded her; and sworn to make the 'not'
eternal. You shall hear I am run away: know it
before the report come. If there be breadth enough
25 in the world, I will hold a long distance. My duty
to you. Your unfortunate son,
BERTRAM.
This is not well, rash and unbridled boy.
To fly the favours of so good a king;
30 To pluck his indignation on thy head
By the misprising of a maid too virtuous
For the contempt of empire.

Re-enter Clown

Shakesclear Translation

The COUNTESS and the Clown enter.

COUNTESS

It's all happened just as I wanted it to, except that he
doesn't come along with her.

CLOWN

Truthfully, I think my young lord is a very melancholy man.

COUNTESS

Based on what, may I ask?

CLOWN


Why, he tends to look at his boot and sing, mend his ruff
and sing, ask questions and sing, pick his teeth and sing. I
know a man that had this melancholic trait and sold a vast
manor in exchange for a song.


COUNTESS

Let me see what he writes and when he means to come
home.

She opens a letter.

CLOWN

I haven't been very interested in Isbel since I was at court.
Our old fish  and our Isbels in the country are nothing
compared to your old fish and your Isbels at the court. The
brains of my heart's been knocked out, and I've started to
love her, as an old man loves his money, with no appetite.

 "Old lings" means salted cod and
is also slang for the male genitalia.

COUNTESS

What have we here?

CLOWN

Whatever it is that you have there.

The Clown exits.

COUNTESS

[Reading] "I have sent you a daughter-in-law. She has
healed the king and ruined me. I have married her but not
slept with her, and I've sworn to make that 'not' last forever.
You shall hear that I've run away. I want you to know it
before you hear the report. As long as there are more miles
in the world, I will stay far away. I pledge my duty to you.
Your unfortunate son, Bertram."

This is not good, hasty and wild boy. To lose the favor of
such a good king, to bring down his anger on you by
discarding a maid too virtuous for even an emperor to
despise.

The Clown re-enters.

CLOWN

O madam, yonder is heavy news within between two soldiers and my young lady!

COUNTESS

35 What is the matter?

CLOWN

Nay, there is some comfort in the news, some comfort; your son will not be killed so soon as I thought he would.

COUNTESS

Why should he be killed?

CLOWN

40 So say I, madam, if he run away, as I hear he does: the danger is in standing to't; that's the loss of men, though it be the getting of children. Here they come will tell you more: for my part, I only hear your son was run away.

Exit

Enter HELENA, and two Gentlemen

FIRST GENTLEMAN

45 Save you, good madam.

HELENA

Madam, my lord is gone, for ever gone.

SECOND GENTLEMAN

Do not say so.

COUNTESS

Think upon patience. Pray you, gentlemen, I have felt so many quirks of joy and grief,
50 That the first face of neither, on the start,
Can woman me unto't: where is my son, I pray you?

SECOND GENTLEMAN

Madam, he's gone to serve the duke of Florence: We met him thitherward; for thence we came,
And, after some dispatch in hand at court,
55 Thither we bend again.

HELENA

Look on his letter, madam; here's my passport.

Reads

HELENA

When thou canst get the ring upon my finger which never shall come off, and show me a child begotten
60 of thy body that I am father to, then call me husband: but in such a 'then' I write a 'never!' This is a dreadful sentence.

COUNTESS

Brought you this letter, gentlemen?

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Ay, madam;
65 And for the contents' sake are sorry for our pain.

COUNTESS

I prithee, lady, have a better cheer;
If thou engrossest all the griefs are thine,
Thou robb'st me of a moiety: he was my son;
But I do wash his name out of my blood,
70

CLOWN

Oh madam, over there comes heavy news shared between two soldiers and the young lady!

COUNTESS

What's the matter?


CLOWN

No, there is some comfort in the news, some comfort. Your son won't be killed as soon as I expected he would.

COUNTESS

Why should he be killed?

CLOWN

Well, that's what I say, madam, if he runs away as I hear he does. The danger is in standing erect and fighting. That's how men die, although standing erect  can also lead to fathering children. They're coming now and they'll tell you more. For my part, I only heard your son had run away.

The Clown exits.

HELENA enters with two Gentlemen.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

I hope you're well, good madam.

HELENA

Madam, my lord is gone, forever gone.

SECOND GENTLEMAN

Don't say so.


COUNTESS

Be patient. Please, gentlemen, I have been pushed back and forth between joy and grief in such fits and starts, that I can barely take in the sudden announcement of either one of them and react like a woman. Where is my son, pray tell?

SECOND GENTLEMAN

Madam, he's gone to serve the Duke of Florence. We met him on his way there. From there we came, and, now that we've taken care of some necessary things at court, we go back there again.

HELENA

Look at his letter, madam. Here's my dismissal .

She reads.

HELENA

"When you can get the ring off my finger which will never come off, and when you can show me a child born from your body that I am the father to, then you can call me husband. But I write a 'never' on top of this 'then.'" This is a terrible sentence.

COUNTESS


You brought this letter, gentlemen?


FIRST GENTLEMAN

Yes, madam. And we're very sorry to have done so given the contents.

COUNTESS

I plead with you, lady, cheer up. If you claim that the only griefs are yours, you steal a right from me too. He was my son, but I wash his name out of my blood, and you are my only child. He's gone to Florence?

 The Clown is making an obvious pun on standing "erect", standing straight, and an erect penis.

 By "passport," Helena means a license to wander from home.

And thou art all my child. Towards Florence is he?

SECOND GENTLEMAN

Ay, madam.

COUNTESS

And to be a soldier?

SECOND GENTLEMAN

Such is his noble purpose; and believe 't,
The duke will lay upon him all the honour
75 That good convenience claims.

COUNTESS

Return you thither?

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Ay, madam, with the swiftest wing of speed.

HELENA

[Reads] Till I have no wife I have nothing in France.
'Tis bitter.

COUNTESS

80 Find you that there?

HELENA

Ay, madam.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

'Tis but the boldness of his hand, haply, which his
heart was not consenting to.

COUNTESS

Nothing in France, until he have no wife!
85 There's nothing here that is too good for him
But only she; and she deserves a lord
That twenty such rude boys might tend upon
And call her hourly mistress. Who was with him?

FIRST GENTLEMAN

A servant only, and a gentleman
90 Which I have sometime known.

COUNTESS

Parolles, was it not?

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Ay, my good lady, he.

COUNTESS

A very tainted fellow, and full of wickedness.
My son corrupts a well-derived nature
95 With his inducement.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Indeed, good lady,
The fellow has a deal of that too much,
Which holds him much to have.

COUNTESS

You're welcome, gentlemen.
100 I will entreat you, when you see my son,
To tell him that his sword can never win
The honour that he loses: more I'll entreat you
Written to bear along.

SECOND GENTLEMAN

We serve you, madam,
105 In that and all your worthiest affairs.

SECOND GENTLEMAN

Yes, madam.

COUNTESS

And to become a soldier?

SECOND GENTLEMAN

That's his noble purpose, and you can believe that the duke
will bestow him with all the honors that the moment makes
suitable.

COUNTESS

You're returning there?

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Yes, madam, as fast as we can.

HELENA

[Reading] "Until I have no wife, I have nothing in France."
It's bitter.

COUNTESS

Was that written in the letter?

HELENA

Yes, madam.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

It's but the rashness of his hand, maybe, and his heart
doesn't go along with it.

COUNTESS

Nothing in France until he has no wife! There's nothing in
France that is too good for him except her. She deserves a
lord that would have more than twenty servant boys
waiting upon her and calling her "mistress" every hour.
Who was with him?

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Just a servant, and a gentleman who I've met a few times.

COUNTESS

Parolles, wasn't it?

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Yes, my good lady, it was him.

COUNTESS

A very foul fellow, and full of wickedness. My son corrupts
his formerly moral nature by spending time with Parolles.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Indeed, good lady. The fellow has a very persuasive power
that leads men to corrupt themselves.

COUNTESS

You're welcome, gentlemen. I will ask you that, when you
see my son, to tell him that his sword can never earn him
the honor that he's given up. I'll also ask you to bring along
a letter.

SECOND GENTLEMAN

We serve you, madam, in that and all your affairs where we
can be of service.

COUNTESS

Not so, but as we change our courtesies.
Will you draw near!

Exeunt COUNTESS and Gentlemen

HELENA

'Till I have no wife, I have nothing in France.'
110 Nothing in France, until he has no wife!
Thou shalt have none, Rousillon, none in France;
Then hast thou all again. Poor lord! is't I
That chase thee from thy country and expose
Those tender limbs of thine to the event
115 Of the none-sparing war? and is it I
That drive thee from the sportive court, where thou
Wast shot at with fair eyes, to be the mark
Of smoky muskets? O you leaden messengers,
That ride upon the violent speed of fire,
120 Fly with false aim; move the still-peering air,
That sings with piercing; do not touch my lord.
Whoever shoots at him, I set him there;
Whoever charges on his forward breast,
I am the caitiff that do hold him to't;
125 And, though I kill him not, I am the cause
His death was so effected: better 'twere
I met the ravin lion when he roar'd
With sharp constraint of hunger; better 'twere
That all the miseries which nature owes
130 Were mine at once. No, come thou home, Rousillon,
Whence honour but of danger wins a scar,
As oft it loses all: I will be gone;
My being here it is that holds thee hence:
Shall I stay here to do't? no, no, although
135 The air of paradise did fan the house
And angels officed all: I will be gone,
That pitiful rumour may report my flight,
To console thine ear. Come, night; end, day!
For with the dark, poor thief, I'll steal away.

Exit

COUNTESS

Not really, only in exchanging courtesies. Will you come
along with me?

The COUNTESS and the gentlemen exit.

HELENA

"Until I have no wife, I have nothing in France." Nothing in
France until he has no wife! You will have no wife, Rousillon
again. Poor lord! Is it I that makes you flee from your
country and expose your tender limbs to the violence of
this destructive war? And is it I that drives you out of the
leisurely court, where you were only shot at by the eyes of
fair ladies, now to be the target of smoky muskets? Oh, you
bullets, that violently speed from weapons, miss your
targets. Move the torn air that sings from being pierced by
bullets again and again. Do not touch my lord. Whoever
shoots at him, it's my fault that he's there. Whoever charges
towards him, I am the wretch that keeps him on the
battlefield. And even though I won't be the one to kill him,
I'll be the reason for his death. I'd rather meet a ravenous
lion when he was roaring with violent hunger. I'd rather all
the miseries that nature can deliver were rained down on
me all at once. No, come home, Rousillon, where danger
only leaves the honorable men with scars, and never takes
their lives. I will be gone. My staying here is what keeps you
in the war. Shall I stay here to let you die? No, no, not even if
the air from paradise filled the house and angels flocked
into it. I will be gone so that a rumour can spread that I have
fled and that will reach your ear. Come, night. End, day!
With the dark, that poor thief of daylight, I'll steal away.

She exits.

4 Helena refers to Bertram by his title in this speech, perhaps to emphasize her distance from him, and his natural ties to France.

5 Helena believes that she has stolen the title of Bertram's wife.

Act 3, Scene 3

Shakespeare

Flourish. Enter the DUKE of Florence, BERTRAM, PAROLLES, Soldiers, Drum, and Trumpets

DUKE

The general of our horse thou art; and we,
Great in our hope, lay our best love and credence
Upon thy promising fortune.

BERTRAM

Sir, it is
5 A charge too heavy for my strength, but yet
We'll strive to bear it for your worthy sake
To the extreme edge of hazard.

DUKE

Then go thou forth;
And fortune play upon thy prosperous helm,
10 As thy auspicious mistress!

BERTRAM

This very day,
Great Mars, I put myself into thy file:
Make me but like my thoughts, and I shall prove
A lover of thy drum, hater of love.

Shakescleare Translation

A trumpet sounds. The DUKE of Florence, BERTRAM, PAROLLES, soldiers, drummers, and trumpet players enter.

DUKE

You're now commander of the cavalry. We're putting all our hope, love, and belief in your great potential.

1 "Great in our hope" conjures images of pregnancy, a theme and motif that will carry throughout the rest of the play.

BERTRAM

Sir, that's too weighty an honor for my little worth, but still
I'll try to bear it for your sake, even to the death.

DUKE

Then go forth, Bertram. May good fortune be on your side,
following your helmet, like a devoted mistress!

BERTRAM

This very day, great Mars, god of war, I declare myself one of
your soldiers. Make me as warlike as my thoughts, and I'll
prove to be a lover of the drums of battle and a hater of
gentle love.

Exeunt

All exit.

Act 3, Scene 4

Shakespeare

*Enter COUNTESS and Steward***COUNTESS**

Alas! and would you take the letter of her?
Might you not know she would do as she has done,
By sending me a letter? Read it again.

STEWARD*[Reads]*

- 5 I am Saint Jaques' pilgrim, thither gone:
Ambitious love hath so in me offended,
That barefoot plod I the cold ground upon,
With sainted vow my faults to have amended.
Write, write, that from the bloody course of war
10 My dearest master, your dear son, may hie:
Bless him at home in peace, whilst I from far
His name with zealous fervor sanctify:
His taken labours bid him me forgive;
I, his spiteful Juno, sent him forth
15 From courtly friends, with camping foes to live,
Where death and danger dogs the heels of worth:
He is too good and fair for death and me:
Whom I myself embrace, to set him free.

COUNTESS

- Ah, what sharp stings are in her mildest words!
20 Rinaldo, you did never lack advice so much,
As letting her pass so: had I spoke with her,
I could have well diverted her intents,
Which thus she hath prevented.

STEWARD

- Pardon me, madam:
25 If I had given you this at over-night,
She might have been o'erta'en; and yet she writes,
Pursuit would be but vain.

COUNTESS

- What angel shall
Bless this unworthy husband? he cannot thrive,
30 Unless her prayers, whom heaven delights to hear
And loves to grant, relieve him from the wrath
Of greatest justice. Write, write, Rinaldo,
To this unworthy husband of his wife;
Let every word weigh heavy of her worth
35 That he does weigh too light: my greatest grief.
Though little he do feel it, set down sharply.
Dispatch the most convenient messenger:
When haply he shall hear that she is gone,
He will return; and hope I may that she,
40 Hearing so much, will speed her foot again,
Led hither by pure love. Which of them both
Is dearest to me, I have no skill in sense
To make distinction. Provide this messenger.
My heart is heavy and mine age is weak.
45 Grief would have tears, and sorrow bids me speak.



Exeunt


Shakescleare Translation


*The COUNTESS and her Steward enter.***COUNTESS**

Oh no! And you took the letter from her? Didn't you figure out what she was going to do when she gave you a letter to send to me? Read it again.

STEWARD

[Reading] "I am a pilgrim of Saint Jaques, gone on a pilgrimage . My love for a man above my station has caused so much pain that I will walk the cold ground barefoot and try to make amends for my faults with prayers to the saints. Write, write to my dearest husband, your dear son, so that he can leave the war as soon as possible. He can come home to live in peace with your blessing while I wander far away to pray and honor his name. Ask him to forgive me for forcing him to go to war. It's because of me, his wicked Juno , that he left his friends at court, taking up camp closer to his enemies, where great men are pursued by death and danger. He is too good and just for me and for death. Now I embrace death myself in order to set him free."

 Note that Helena has written this letter as a perfect sonnet (the form used for love poetry).

 Helena imagines herself as the Roman goddess Juno (the Greeks' Hera) commanding Hercules to complete his twelve labors.

COUNTESS

Oh, how sharply even her mildest words sting me! Rinaldo, you've never made such an awful mistake as letting her leave like this. If I had spoken with her, I could have changed her mind, but she's prevented me from interfering this way.

STEWARD

I'm sorry, madam. If I had given this to you in the middle of the night, she might have been overtaken. At the same time, she writes that pursuing her would be in vain.

COUNTESS

What angel will bless this unworthy husband of hers? He cannot expect salvation, unless her prayers, which God will delight to hear and surely will grant, save him from damnation. Write, write, Rinaldo, to Helena's unworthy husband. In every word, make it clear how much she's worth and how little he values her. That's my greatest sorrow. He won't care much, but write it down harshly. Then get the fastest messenger. When he hears that she's gone, he'll happily come back. I really do hope that when she hears he's come home, she'll run back to him, spurred on by her pure love. I really couldn't say which of Helena and Bertram is dearest to me. Go get this messenger. My heart is heavy and I'm feeling my age. Such grief demands my tears, and this sorrow compels me to speak my mind.

They exit.

Act 3, Scene 5

Shakespeare

Enter an old Widow of Florence, DIANA, VIOLENTA, and MARIANA, with other Citizens

WIDOW

Nay, come; for if they do approach the city, we shall lose all the sight.

DIANA

They say the French count has done most honourable service.

WIDOW

- 5 It is reported that he has taken their greatest commander; and that with his own hand he slew the duke's brother.

Tucket

WIDOW

- 10 We have lost our labour; they are gone a contrary way: hark! you may know by their trumpets.

MARIANA

- 15 Come, let's return again, and suffice ourselves with the report of it. Well, Diana, take heed of this French earl: the honour of a maid is her name; and no legacy is so rich as honesty.

WIDOW

I have told my neighbour how you have been solicited by a gentleman his companion.

MARIANA

- 20 I know that knave; hang him! one Parolles: a filthy officer he is in those suggestions for the young earl. Beware of them, Diana; their promises, enticements, oaths, tokens, and all these engines of lust, are not the things they go under: many a maid hath been seduced by them; and the misery is, example, that so terrible shows in the wreck of maidenhood, cannot for all that dissuade succession, but that they are limed with the twigs that threaten them. I hope I need not to advise you further; but I hope your own grace will keep you where you are, though there were no further danger known but the modesty which is so lost.
- 25
- 30

DIANA

You shall not need to fear me.

WIDOW


I hope so.


Enter HELENA, disguised like a Pilgrim

WIDOW

- 35 Look, here comes a pilgrim: I know she will lie at my house; thither they send one another: I'll question her. God save you, pilgrim! whither are you bound?

Shakescleare Translation

An old Widow of Florence, her daughter DIANA, VIOLENTA , and MARIANA enter, with other citizens.

 *Violenta famously never speaks and no one refers to her, so her presence in the stage directions could well be an authorial or editorial oversight left in from an early draft.*

WIDOW

No, come, because if they do come towards the city, we won't be able to see them.

DIANA

They say the French count has served very honorably.

WIDOW

It's been reported that he has captured their greatest commander and that he slew the duke's brother himself.

A trumpet flourish plays.

WIDOW

We've missed our chance. They've gone a different way. Listen! You can hear where they are from their trumpets.

MARIANA

Come, let's return again, and be satisfied just hearing a report of it. Well, Diana, beware this French earl. A virgin's honor is like her name and no legacy is as rich as honesty.

WIDOW

[To DIANA] I told my neighbor how you've been propositioned by the gentleman who's the earl's companion.

MARIANA

I know that scoundrel. Hang him! His name's Parolles. What a filthy officer to urge the young earl to behave so immorally. Beware of them, Diana. Their promises, gifts, oaths, tokens, and all these things driven by lust, are not what they seem. Many an innocent young lady has been seduced by them. What's terrible about it is that, as horrible as these stories of lost chastity might be, they can't dissuade other women from falling prey in the same way because so many women give into seductive men as easily as birds fall into traps. I hope I won't need to give you further advice but that your own grace will keep you pure even if the worst that could happen is that you'd lose your modest reputation.

DIANA

You don't need to worry about me being fooled.

WIDOW

I hope not.

HELENA enters, disguised like a pilgrim.

WIDOW

Look, here comes a pilgrim. I'm sure she'll want to sleep at my house. They are always sending each other here. I'll question her. God save you, pilgrim! Where are you heading?

HELENA

To Saint Jaques le Grand.

40 Where do the palmers lodge, I do beseech you?

WIDOW

At the Saint Francis here beside the port.

HELENA

Is this the way?

WIDOW

Ay, marry, is't.

A march afar

WIDOW

45 Hark you! they come this way.
If you will tarry, holy pilgrim,
But till the troops come by,
I will conduct you where you shall be lodged;
The rather, for I think I know your hostess
50 As ample as myself.

HELENA

Is it yourself?

WIDOW

If you shall please so, pilgrim.

HELENA

I thank you, and will stay upon your leisure.

WIDOW

You came, I think, from France?

HELENA

55 I did so.

WIDOW

Here you shall see a countryman of yours
That has done worthy service.

HELENA

His name, I pray you.

DIANA

The Count Rousillon: know you such a one?

HELENA

60 But by the ear, that hears most nobly of him:
His face I know not.

DIANA

Whatsome'er he is,
He's bravely taken here. He stole from France,
As 'tis reported, for the king had married him
65 Against his liking: think you it is so?

HELENA

Ay, surely, mere the truth: I know his lady.

DIANA

There is a gentleman that serves the count
Reports but coarsely of her.

HELENA

What's his name?

DIANA

70 Monsieur Parolles.

HELENA

To Saint Jaques le Grand. Where do the pilgrims stay, could you tell me, please?

WIDOW

At the inn with the sign of Saint Francis here near the port.

HELENA

Is this the way?

WIDOW

Yes, it certainly is.

A military march is heard in the distance.

WIDOW

Listen up! They're coming this way. If you will wait around, holy pilgrim, just until the troops have walked by, I'll bring you to where you'll stay. I'm suited for this job since I think I know your hostess there as well as I know myself.

HELENA

Is it yourself?

WIDOW

If that's all right with you, pilgrim.

HELENA

I thank you, and I'll wait until it's a good time for you.

WIDOW

You came, I think, from France?

HELENA

I did.

WIDOW

Here you're about to see a countryman of yours that has served worthily.

HELENA

His name, tell me.

DIANA

The Count Rousillon. Do you know him?

HELENA

Just by word-of-mouth. One hears noble things about him. I don't know what he looks like.

DIANA

Whatever else he is, he's been a brave soldier. He fled from France, as it's reported, because the king had made him marry a bride he didn't like. Do you think that's true?

HELENA

Yes, surely, it's absolutely the truth. I know his wife.

DIANA

There is a gentleman who serves the count who only reports rude things about her.

HELENA

What's his name?

DIANA

Mister Parolles.

HELENA

O, I believe with him,
In argument of praise, or to the worth
Of the great count himself, she is too mean
To have her name repeated: all her deserving
75 Is a reserved honesty, and that
I have not heard examined.

DIANA

Alas, poor lady!
'Tis a hard bondage to become the wife
Of a detesting lord.

WIDOW

80 I warrant, good creature, wheresoe'er she is,
Her heart weighs sadly: this young maid might do her
A shrewd turn, if she pleased.

HELENA

How do you mean?
May be the amorous count solicits her
85 In the unlawful purpose.

WIDOW

He does indeed;
And brokes with all that can in such a suit
Corrupt the tender honour of a maid:
But she is arm'd for him and keeps her guard
90 In honestest defence.

MARIANA

The gods forbid else!

WIDOW

So, now they come:

Drum and Colours

Enter BERTRAM, PAROLLES, and the whole army

WIDOW

That is Antonio, the duke's eldest son;
95 That, Escalus.

HELENA

Which is the Frenchman?

DIANA

He;
That with the plume: 'tis a most gallant fellow.
100 I would he loved his wife: if he were honest
He were much goodlier: is't not a handsome gentleman?

HELENA

I like him well.

DIANA

'Tis pity he is not honest: yond's that same knave
That leads him to these places: were I his lady,
105 I would Poison that vile rascal.

HELENA

Which is he?

DIANA

That jack-an-apes with scarfs: why is he melancholy?

HELENA

Perchance he's hurt i' the battle.

HELENA

Oh, I agree with him, in terms of praise, or in terms of the worth of the great count himself, she is too lowly to have her name repeated. All that she has of value is her honesty, and I don't know if even that has been examined.

DIANA

Alas, poor lady! It's a hard bondage to become the wife of a lord who detests you.

WIDOW

I assume, good creature, wherever she may be, her heart is heavy. This young maid here might do her a great wrong if she wanted to.

HELENA

What do you mean? Maybe the loving count is trying to seduce her?

WIDOW

He is indeed. And he comes with full force on this mission to corrupt the tender honor of a virgin. But she is prepared for him and keeps her guard up in honest defense.

MARIANA

The gods forbid she do otherwise!

WIDOW

So, now they come.

A drum is heard and flags are flown.

BERTRAM, PAROLLES, and the whole army enter.

WIDOW

That is Antonio, the duke's eldest son. That one's Escalus.

HELENA

Which one is the Frenchman?

DIANA

Him. That one with the plume. He's a very well-dressed fellow. I wish he loved his wife. If he were more honest, he would be much more appealing; but still, is he not a handsome man?

HELENA

I like his looks.

DIANA

It's a pity he's not honest. There's the same rogue that takes him to these places. If I were his wife, I would poison that vile rascal.

HELENA

Which one's he?

DIANA

That silly looking man in the scarves. Why is he melancholy?

HELENA

Maybe he got hurt in the battle.

PAROLLES

Lose our drum! well.

MARIANA

110 He's shrewdly vexed at something: look, he has spied us.

WIDOW

Marry, hang you!

MARIANA

And your courtesy, for a ring-carrier!

Exeunt BERTRAM, PAROLLES, and army

WIDOW

115 The troop is past. Come, pilgrim, I will bring you
Where you shall host: of enjoin'd penitents
There's four or five, to great Saint Jaques bound,
Already at my house.

HELENA

I humbly thank you:


120 Please it this matron and this gentle maid
To eat with us to-night, the charge and thanking
Shall be for me; and, to requite you further,
I will bestow some precepts of this virgin
Worthy the note.

BOTH

125 We'll take your offer kindly.

Exeunt

PAROLLES

Lose our drum ! Well.

MARIANA

He's clearly upset about something. Look, he's seen us.

WIDOW

Well, hang him!

MARIANA

And his manners , the dirty deceiver!

BERTRAM, PAROLLES, and the army exit.

WIDOW

The troop's gone past. Come, pilgrim, I'll bring you to where you will stay. There's already four or five pilgrims bound for Saint Jaques staying at my house.


HELENA


I thank you humbly. I hope this woman and this gentle maid will eat with us tonight. I'll gladly pay for the meal, and, to pay you further, I'll share some advice with this virgin that will be worth hearing.

BOTH

We'll take your offer gratefully.

All exit.

 To lose drums in battle was a serious matter, for they were decorated with the colors of the regiment. However, it is likely Parolles is here referring to a metaphorical drum, as Bertram had previously sworn to follow the drum to the "exclusion of love" (Act 3, Scene 3).

 "Courtesy" could also have meant "curtsy"; Bertram bowed or saluted them as he walked past.

Act 3, Scene 6

Shakespeare

Enter BERTRAM and the two French Lords

SECOND LORD

Nay, good my lord, put him to't; let him have his way.

FIRST LORD

If your lordship find him not a hilding, hold me no more in your respect.

SECOND LORD

5 On my life, my lord, a bubble.

BERTRAM

Do you think I am so far deceived in him?

SECOND LORD

10 Believe it, my lord, in mine own direct knowledge, without any malice, but to speak of him as my kinsman, he's a most notable coward, an infinite and endless liar, an hourly promise-breaker, the owner of no one good quality worthy your lordship's entertainment.

Shakescleare Translation

BERTRAM enters with two French lords.

SECOND LORD

No, my good lord, put him to the test. Let him be examined.

FIRST LORD

If your lordship doesn't find him to be a worthless nothing, don't respect me any longer.

SECOND LORD

On my life, my lord, he'll prove to be nothing but a bubble.

BERTRAM

You really think I'm so completely deceived by him?

SECOND LORD

Believe it, my lord, based on my own personal knowledge, without any ill will, but to speak of him as I would speak of a family member: he's a real coward, an infinite and endless liar, he breaks promises every hour, and he doesn't have one good quality worthy of following your lordship.

FIRST LORD

15 It were fit you knew him; lest, reposing too far in his virtue, which he hath not, he might at some great and trusty business in a main danger fail you.

BERTRAM

I would I knew in what particular action to try him.

FIRST LORD

None better than to let him fetch off his drum, which you hear him so confidently undertake to do.

SECOND LORD

20 I, with a troop of Florentines, will suddenly surprise him; such I will have, whom I am sure he knows not from the enemy: we will bind and hoodwink him so, that he shall suppose no other but that he is carried into the leaguer of the adversaries, when we bring him to our own tents. Be but your lordship
25 present at his examination: if he do not, for the promise of his life and in the highest compulsion of base fear, offer to betray you and deliver all the intelligence in his power against you, and that with the divine forfeit of his soul upon oath, never
30 trust my judgment in any thing.

FIRST LORD

O, for the love of laughter, let him fetch his drum; he says he has a stratagem for't: when your lordship sees the bottom of his success in't, and to what metal this counterfeit lump of ore will be melted, if you give him not John Drum's
35 entertainment, your inclining cannot be removed. Here he comes.

Enter PAROLLES

SECOND LORD

40 *[Aside to BERTRAM]* O, for the love of laughter, hinder not the honour of his design: let him fetch off his drum in any hand.

BERTRAM

How now, monsieur! this drum sticks sorely in your disposition.

FIRST LORD

A pox on't, let it go; 'tis but a drum.

PAROLLES

45 'But a drum!' is't 'but a drum'? A drum so lost! There was excellent command,—to charge in with our horse upon our own wings, and to rend our own soldiers!

FIRST LORD

50 That was not to be blamed in the command of the service: it was a disaster of war that Caesar himself could not have prevented, if he had been there to command.

BERTRAM

Well, we cannot greatly condemn our success: some dishonour we had in the loss of that drum; but it is not to be recovered.

PAROLLES

It might have been recovered.

BERTRAM

55 It might; but it is not now.

FIRST LORD

It would be best that you know him as he is. Otherwise, if you're too trusting of his virtue, which he doesn't have, he might fail you at some great and important moment.

BERTRAM

I wish I could think of a particular way to test him.


FIRST LORD


There's no better way than to let him fetch back his lost drum which we've all heard him so confidently say he'll do.

SECOND LORD

Along with a troop of Florentines, I'll suddenly ambush him. I'll bring the men I have that he won't be able to tell apart from the enemy. We'll bind him and blindfold him so that he'll think he's been brought into enemy territory, when we're really bringing him into our own tents. Your lordship will be present at his examination. If he doesn't, in order to save his life and out of extraordinary fear, offer to betray you and inform against you with all the intelligence he can share, after swearing that everything he says is true, don't trust my judgement in anything ever again.

FIRST LORD

Oh, since we love to laugh, let him try to fetch his drum back. He says he has a plan to do it. When your lordship sees his failure in trying to get it back, and how this fake lump of ore melts down when the truth comes out, if you don't kick him out , it will only be because of a tremendous bias in his favor. Here he comes.

 To "give him John Drum's entertainment" was an expression meaning "to throw him out."

PAROLLES enters.

SECOND LORD

[So only BERTRAM can hear] Oh, since we love to laugh, don't try to stop his ludicrous plans. Let him try to fetch the drum how ever he sees fit.

BERTRAM

How now, monsieur! This situation with the drum is making you moody.


FIRST LORD


Just move on, get over it, it's only a drum.

PAROLLES

"Only a drum!" Is it "only a drum?" A drum lost in this way! What an excellent command—to charge right into battle with the cavalry coming in on either side, and to divide our own soldiers!

FIRST LORD

That's not the fault of the commander of the service. It was a war disaster that not even Caesar  could have prevented if he had ben there to command.

 The Lord is referring to Julius Caesar, the Roman Emperor.

BERTRAM

Well, we cannot be too upset about our success. We had a little bit of dishonor in losing that drum, but there's no way it can be stolen back.

PAROLLES

It might have been stolen back.

BERTRAM

It might have, but there's no way now.

PAROLLES

It is to be recovered: but that the merit of service is seldom attributed to the true and exact performer, I would have that drum or another, or 'hic jacet.'

BERTRAM

60 Why, if you have a stomach, to't, monsieur: if you think your mystery in stratagem can bring this instrument of honour again into his native quarter, be magnanimous in the enterprise and go on; I will grace the attempt for a worthy exploit: if you
65 speed well in it, the duke shall both speak of it, and extend to you what further becomes his greatness, even to the utmost syllable of your worthiness.

PAROLLES

By the hand of a soldier, I will undertake it.

BERTRAM

70 But you must not now slumber in it.

PAROLLES

I'll about it this evening: and I will presently pen down my dilemmas, encourage myself in my certainty, put myself into my mortal preparation; and by midnight look to hear further from me.

BERTRAM

75 May I be bold to acquaint his grace you are gone about it?

PAROLLES

I know not what the success will be, my lord; but the attempt I vow.

BERTRAM

80 I know thou'rt valiant; and, to the possibility of thy soldiership, will subscribe for thee. Farewell.

PAROLLES

I love not many words.

Exit

SECOND LORD

No more than a fish loves water. Is not this a strange fellow, my lord, that so confidently seems
85 to undertake this business, which he knows is not to be done; damns himself to do and dares better be damned than to do't?

FIRST LORD

You do not know him, my lord, as we do: certain it is that he will steal himself into a man's favour and
90 for a week escape a great deal of discoveries; but when you find him out, you have him ever after.


BERTRAM


Why, do you think he will make no deed at all of this that so seriously he does address himself unto?

SECOND LORD

95 None in the world; but return with an invention and clap upon you two or three probable lies: but we have almost embossed him; you shall see his fall to-night; for indeed he is not for your lordship's respect.

PAROLLES

It is to be taken back. If it weren't that tasks are almost never assigned to the person most capable of carrying them out, I would have that drum back or another one, or I'd die trying .

 "Hic jacet" translates to "here lies," a phrase often used on tombstones to begin an epitaph, so Parolles is implying he would die if he failed.

BERTRAM

Well, if you have the bravery for it, monsieur. If you think your mysterious strategy can bring this honorable instrument back again to its troops, be generous in the attempt and go on. I will report the attempt as a worthy one. If you succeed in it, the duke shall not only speak of it but also grant you with whatever else his greatness thinks you deserve, every last drop that you are worthy of.

PAROLLES

By the hand of a soldier, I will do this.

BERTRAM

But now you must sleep on it.

PAROLLES

I'll do it this evening. And I will now write down my concerns, encourage myself in my sure success, arm myself and prepare for death. By midnight, look to hear more from me.

BERTRAM

Can I be so bold to tell his grace that you are going to attempt this?

PAROLLES

I don't know if I'll be successful, my lord, but I vow that I will attempt it.

BERTRAM

I know you are valiant, and I'll support you when I speak of your soldierly ability. Farewell.

PAROLLES

I do not love speaking at length.

PAROLLES exits.

SECOND LORD

Sure, no more than a fish loves water. Isn't this a strange fellow, my lord, that so confidently claims to take on this task, which he knows he won't actually do? He condemns himself to do it when he'd rather be damned than actually attempt to carry it out?

FIRST LORD

You don't know him, my lord, as we do. It's certain that he'll convince some man to cover for him and no one will discover the truth for a week. But once you've found him out, you'll have him disgraced forever after.

BERTRAM

Why, do you think he will really make no attempt at all to do this thing he so seriously vows to do?

SECOND LORD

No attempt in the world. He'll return instead with some story and tell you two or three probable lies. But we've almost caught him. You'll see his downfall tonight, for indeed he is not worthy of your lord's respect.

FIRST LORD

100 We'll make you some sport with the fox ere we case
him. He was first smoked by the old lord Lafeu:
when his disguise and he is parted, tell me what a
sprat you shall find him; which you shall see this
very night.

SECOND LORD

I must go look my twigs: he shall be caught.

BERTRAM

105 Your brother he shall go along with me.

SECOND LORD

As't please your lordship: I'll leave you.

Exit

BERTRAM

Now will I lead you to the house, and show you
The lass I spoke of.

FIRST LORD

110 But you say she's honest.

BERTRAM

That's all the fault: I spoke with her but once
And found her wondrous cold; but I sent to her,
By this same coxcomb that we have i' the wind,
Tokens and letters which she did re-send;
115 And this is all I have done. She's a fair creature:
Will you go see her?

FIRST LORD


With all my heart, my lord.


Exeunt

FIRST LORD

We'll have you watch some sport with the fox before we
reveal him. He was first caught in the act of lying by the old
lord Lafeu. When he's finally parted from his disguise, tell
me what a fool you take him for. You'll see it this very night.

SECOND LORD

I must go prepare the trap . He'll be caught.

 Twigs were often smeared with
"birdlime" (a sticky substance) in
order to catch and trap birds.

BERTRAM

Your brother shall go along with me.

SECOND LORD

As your lordship requests. I'll leave you.

SECOND LORD exits.

BERTRAM

Now I'll lead you to the house and show you the lady I was
telling you about.

FIRST LORD

But you say she's honest.

BERTRAM

That's the whole problem. I spoke with her once and found
her incredibly cold. But I sent to her, via this same fool that
we're about to play a trick on, some tokens and letters
which she sent back. This is all I've done. She's a pretty
creature. Will you go see her?

FIRST LORD

With all my heart, my lord.

All exit.

Act 3, Scene 7

Shakespeare

Enter HELENA and Widow

HELENA

If you misdoubt me that I am not she,
I know not how I shall assure you further,
But I shall lose the grounds I work upon.

WIDOW

5 Though my estate be fallen, I was well born,
Nothing acquainted with these businesses;
And would not put my reputation now
In any staining act.

HELENA

Nor would I wish you.
First, give me trust, the count he is my husband,
10 And what to your sworn counsel I have spoken
Is so from word to word; and then you cannot,
By the good aid that I of you shall borrow,
Err in bestowing it.

WIDOW

I should believe you:
15 For you have show'd me that which well approves
You're great in fortune.

Shakescleare Translation

HELENA and the Widow enter.

HELENA

If you doubt that I'm she, I don't know how else I'll prove it
to you further without ruining my whole plan.

WIDOW

Although I've fallen in society, I was well born, nothing to do
with these seedy businesses. I wouldn't put my reputation
at risk now by committing any scandalous act.

HELENA

Nor would I wish you to do so. First, trust me, the count is
my husband, and what I've spoken to your sworn secrecy is
true to the very word. You cannot do wrong by offering to
help me.

WIDOW

I'm led to believe you for you've shown me things that
convincingly demonstrate that you have a great fortune.

HELENA

Take this purse of gold,
 And let me buy your friendly help thus far,
 Which I will over-pay and pay again
 20 When I have found it. The count he woos your daughter,
 Lays down his wanton siege before her beauty,
 Resolved to carry her: let her in fine consent,
 As we'll direct her how 'tis best to bear it.
 Now his important blood will nought deny
 25 That she'll demand: a ring the county wears,
 That downward hath succeeded in his house
 From son to son, some four or five descents
 Since the first father wore it: this ring he holds
 In most rich choice; yet in his idle fire,
 30 To buy his will, it would not seem too dear,
 Howe'er repented after.

WIDOW

Now I see
 The bottom of your purpose.

HELENA

You see it lawful, then: it is no more,
 35 But that your daughter, ere she seems as won,
 Desires this ring; appoints him an encounter;
 In fine, delivers me to fill the time,
 Herself most chastely absent: after this,
 To marry her, I'll add three thousand crowns
 40 To what is passed already.

WIDOW

I have yielded:
 Instruct my daughter how she shall persevere,
 That time and place with this deceit so lawful
 May prove coherent. Every night he comes
 45 With musics of all sorts and songs composed
 To her unworthiness: it nothing steads us
 To chide him from our eaves; for he persists
 As if his life lay on't.

HELENA

Why then to-night
 50 Let us assay our plot; which, if it speed,
 Is wicked meaning in a lawful deed
 And lawful meaning in a lawful act,
 Where both not sin, and yet a sinful fact:
 But let's about it.

Exeunt

HELENA

Take this purse of gold, and let me pay for your help so far,
 which I'll over-pay and pay over again once your help is
 complete. The count woos your daughter, attempts to
 capture her beauty. He is resolved to conquer her. Let her
 consent, as we'll tell her exactly how it's best to word it.
 Now his lustful blood will never deny what she demands: a
 ring the count wears, that has been passed down in his
 house from son to son, some four or five generations since
 the first ancestor wore it. This ring he holds very dearly, but
 in his idle passion, to buy what he wants from her, it would
 not seem too priceless, however much he regrets it after.

WIDOW

Now I see the endgame of your plan.

HELENA

You see that it's lawful then. It's nothing more but that your
 daughter, before she agrees to be won by him, requests this
 ring. Then she schedules an encounter with him. In short,
 she brings me instead to fill the bed, and she's entirely
 absent and chaste. After this, as a dowry, I'll add three
 thousand crowns to what I've already given you.

WIDOW

I'm sold. Instruct my daughter on how she will do this so
 that the time and place for this lawful trick will all be
 successful. Every night he comes with all sorts of music and
 songs composed to her unworthy self 🗨️. It doesn't do
 anything for us to tell him to get away from our house as he
 persists as if his life hangs in the balance.

HELENA

Why then, tonight, we'll lay our plot. If it goes well, it's
 wicked intention but lawful action for Bertram and lawful
 intention and lawful action for me. Therefore, neither of us
 will sin, and yet he'll think it to be a sinful act. But let's get
 to it.

They exit.

🗨️ *It is not clear exactly what makes Diana "unworthy"; it could be because she has allowed herself to be publicly scandalized by Bertram's serenading, or simply because her low-born status is not fit for all his attention.*

Act 4, Scene 1

Shakespeare

Enter Second French Lord, with five or six other Soldiers in ambush

SECOND LORD

He can come no other way but by this hedge-corner.
 When you sally upon him, speak what terrible
 language you will: though you understand it not
 yourselves, no matter; for we must not seem to
 5 understand him, unless some one among us whom we
 must produce for an interpreter.

FIRST SOLDIER

Good captain, let me be the interpreter.

SECOND LORD

Art not acquainted with him? knows he not thy voice?

Shakescleare Translation

The Second French Lord enters with five or six other soldiers waiting to ambush PAROLLES.

SECOND LORD

There's no other way that he can come except by these
 bushes. When you ambush him, speak whatever terrible
 language you can. If you don't even understand the
 language you're speaking, it doesn't matter. We must not
 seem to be able to understand him except for one among us
 whom we put forward as our interpreter.

FIRST SOLDIER

Good captain, let me be the interpreter.

SECOND LORD

Don't you know him? Doesn't he know your voice?

FIRST SOLDIER

No, sir, I warrant you.

SECOND LORD

10 But what linsey-woolsey hast thou to speak to us again?

FIRST SOLDIER

E'en such as you speak to me.

SECOND LORD

He must think us some band of strangers i' the
adversary's entertainment. Now he hath a smack of
all neighbouring languages; therefore we must every
15 one be a man of his own fancy, not to know what we
speak one to another; so we seem to know, is to
know straight our purpose: choughs' language,
gabble enough, and good enough. As for you,
interpreter, you must seem very politic. But couch,
20 ho! here he comes, to beguile two hours in a sleep,
and then to return and swear the lies he forges.

Enter PAROLLES

PAROLLES

Ten o'clock: within these three hours 'twill be
time enough to go home. What shall I say I have
done? It must be a very plausible invention that
25 carries it: they begin to smoke me; and disgraces
have of late knocked too often at my door. I find
my tongue is too foolhardy; but my heart hath the
fear of Mars before it and of his creatures, not
daring the reports of my tongue.

SECOND LORD

30 This is the first truth that e'er thine own tongue
was guilty of.

PAROLLES

What the devil should move me to undertake the
recovery of this drum, being not ignorant of the
impossibility, and knowing I had no such purpose? I
35 must give myself some hurts, and say I got them in
exploit: yet slight ones will not carry it; they
will say, 'Came you off with so little?' and great
ones I dare not give. Wherefore, what's the
instance? Tongue, I must put you into a
40 butter-woman's mouth and buy myself another of
Bajazeth's mule, if you prattle me into these perils.

SECOND LORD

Is it possible he should know what he is, and be
that he is?

PAROLLES

45 I would the cutting of my garments would serve the
turn, or the breaking of my Spanish sword.

SECOND LORD

We cannot afford you so.

PAROLLES

Or the baring of my beard; and to say it was in
stratagem.

SECOND LORD

'Twould not do.

PAROLLES


50 Or to drown my clothes, and say I was stripped.

FIRST SOLDIER

No, sir, I promise you.

SECOND LORD

But what nonsense language  do you have to speak back
to us?

 Shakespeare's original "linsey-woolsey" refers to a fabric woven of linen and wool; the phrase here basically just means wisps of nonsense.

FIRST SOLDIER

Whatever nonsense language you speak to me.

SECOND LORD

He must be convinced that we're some group of strangers
connected to our enemy. He knows a little bit of the
neighboring language. Therefore we all must each speak
whatever random language we know and not know what
we're saying to each other. As long as we pretend to
understand each other, our purpose will be served. Chatter
like a crow, gabble like a goose, and that's good enough. As
for you, interpreter, you must seem very wise. But hold,
hey! Here he comes, to sleep for two hours and then to
return and swear to the lies he makes up.

PAROLLES enters.


PAROLLES


Ten o'clock. Within three hours I'll have stayed away long
enough to go home. What shall I say I have done? It must be
a very plausible story that I tell. They're beginning to
suspect me, and I've lately had too many disgraces. I find
that my tongue says whatever it wants, but my heart is
afraid of Mars, the god of war, and all his soldiers,
regardless of the stories my tongue tells.

SECOND LORD

[To himself] This is the first truth that your tongue has ever
been guilty of.

PAROLLES

What the devil would make me attempt to get back this
drum since I know it's impossible and I have no reason to
go after it? I must inflict some wounds on myself and say I
got them in the attempt. Minor wounds won't be
convincing; they would say, "You escaped with just a little
scratch?" and I don't dare to give myself serious wounds.
Why, what's the evidence? Tongue, I must put you into the
mouth of a dairy-woman and buy myself another one of
Bajazeth's mules , if you keep talking me into these
dangerous situations.

 Editors are unsure what this refers to, but Bajazeth is the name of a Turkish emperor in "Tamburlaine," a play by one of Shakespeare's great contemporaries, Christopher Marlowe.

SECOND LORD

[To himself] Is it possible he should know what he's like and
still behave the way that he does?

PAROLLES

I'm thinking maybe cutting my garments would do the
trick, or breaking my Spanish sword.

SECOND LORD

[To himself] The army can't afford that.

PAROLLES

Or cutting off my beard and saying I lost it in a fight.

SECOND LORD

[To himself] That wouldn't do.

PAROLLES

Or to drown my clothes and say they were stripped off me.

SECOND LORD

Hardly serve.

PAROLLES

Though I swore I leaped from the window of the citadel.

SECOND LORD

How deep?

PAROLLES

Thirty fathom.

SECOND LORD

55 Three great oaths would scarce make that be believed.

PAROLLES

I would I had any drum of the enemy's: I would swear I recovered it.

SECOND LORD

You shall hear one anon.

PAROLLES

A drum now of the enemy's,—

60

Alarum within

SECOND LORD

Throca movousus, cargo, cargo, cargo.

ALL

Cargo, cargo, cargo, villiando par corbo, cargo.

PAROLLES

O, ransom, ransom! do not hide mine eyes.

They seize and blindfold him

FIRST SOLDIER

65 Boskos thromuldo boskos.

PAROLLES

I know you are the Muskos' regiment:
And I shall lose my life for want of language;
If there be here German, or Dane, low Dutch,
Italian, or French, let him speak to me; I'll
70 Discover that which shall undo the Florentine.

FIRST SOLDIER

Boskos vauvado: I understand thee, and can speak thy tongue. Kerely bonto, sir, betake thee to thy faith, for seventeen poniards are at thy bosom.

PAROLLES

O!

FIRST SOLDIER

75 O, pray, pray, pray! Manka revania dulce.

SECOND LORD

Oscorbidulchos volivorco.

FIRST SOLDIER

The general is content to spare thee yet;
And, hoodwink'd as thou art, will lead thee on
To gather from thee: haply thou mayst inform
80 Something to save thy life.

SECOND LORD

[To himself] That would hardly serve.

PAROLLES

And I'd swear that I leapt from the window of the fortress.

SECOND LORD

[To himself] How deep?

PAROLLES

Thirty fathoms.

SECOND LORD

[To himself] Even if you swore three great oaths, that would hardly be believable.

PAROLLES

I wish I had any drum belonging to the enemy. I would swear I had stolen it back.

SECOND LORD


[To himself] You'll hear one soon.


PAROLLES

A drum now of the enemy's—

A military signal is heard from offstage, including drums.

SECOND LORD

Throca movousus, cargo, cargo, cargo. 

 These words are nonsense, a made up language to confuse Parolles.

ALL

Cargo, cargo, cargo, villiando par corbo, cargo.

PAROLLES

Oh, I'll pay ransom, I'll pay ransom! Don't cover my eyes!

They seize and blindfold him.

FIRST SOLDIER

Boskos thromuldo boskos.

PAROLLES

I know you are the Muscovite regiment. And I shall lose my life since I don't speak the language. If anyone here is German or Danish, Dutch, Italian, or French, let him speak to me. I'll reveal a secret that will destroy the Florentine.

FIRST SOLDIER

Boskos vauvado. I understand you and I can speak your language. Kerely bonto, sir, you'd better pay for seventeen swords are pointed at your chest.

PAROLLES

Oh!

FIRST SOLDIER

Oh, pray, pray, pray! Manka revania dulce.

SECOND LORD

Oscorbidulchos volivorco.

FIRST SOLDIER

The general is still content to spare you. And, blindfolded as you are, will lead you on to get information from you. Maybe you can share information that will save your life.

PAROLLES

O, let me live!
And all the secrets of our camp I'll show,
Their force, their purposes; nay, I'll speak that
Which you will wonder at.

FIRST SOLDIER

85 But wilt thou faithfully?

PAROLLES

If I do not, damn me.

FIRST SOLDIER

Acordo linta.
Come on; thou art granted space.

Exit, with PAROLLES guarded. A short alarm within

SECOND LORD

90 Go, tell the Count Rousillon, and my brother,
We have caught the woodcock, and will keep him muffled
Till we do hear from them.

SECOND SOLDIER

Captain, I will.

SECOND LORD

A' will betray us all unto ourselves:
95 Inform on that.

SECOND SOLDIER

So I will, sir.

SECOND LORD

Till then I'll keep him dark and safely lock'd.

Exeunt

PAROLLES

Oh, let me live! And I'll reveal all the secrets of our army.
How many men there are, what our plans are. No, I'll speak
things that you will wonder at.

FIRST SOLDIER

But will you do so honestly?

PAROLLES

If I don't, damn me.

FIRST SOLDIER

Acordo linta. Come on. You are granted an audience.

The first soldier exits with PAROLLES guarded. A short military signal plays from offstage.

SECOND LORD

Go, tell the Count Rousillon, and my brother, we have
caught the fool, and will keep him tied up until we hear
from them.

SECOND SOLDIER

Captain, I will.

SECOND LORD

He will betray us all to ourselves. Let them know that.

SECOND SOLDIER

So I will, sir.

SECOND LORD

Till then I'll keep him blindfolded and securely imprisoned.

All exit.

Act 4, Scene 2

Shakespeare

Enter BERTRAM and DIANA

BERTRAM

They told me that your name was Fontibell.

DIANA

No, my good lord, Diana.


BERTRAM

Titled goddess;
And worth it, with addition! But, fair soul,
5 In your fine frame hath love no quality?
If quick fire of youth light not your mind,
You are no maiden, but a monument:
When you are dead, you should be such a one
As you are now, for you are cold and stem;
10 And now you should be as your mother was
When your sweet self was got.

Shakescleare Translation

BERTRAM and DIANA enter.

BERTRAM


They told me that your name was [Fontibell](#) .

DIANA

No, my good lord, it's Diana.

BERTRAM

You have a goddess' name. And you're worth it, and then
some! But, fair soul, in your beautiful body, haven't you got
any interest in love? If your youthful passions don't ignite
your mind, you're not a maiden but a statue: when you're
dead, you'd be just as you are now, for you are cold and
stern. You should be like your mother was when your sweet
self was conceived.

 *The reference here is unclear. Some editors have thought it may refer to a fountain with a statue of Diana, but there is no evidence that there was such a fountain with the name "Fontibell."*

DIANA

She then was honest.

BERTRAM

So should you be.

DIANA

No:

15 My mother did but duty; such, my lord,
As you owe to your wife.

BERTRAM

No more o' that;

I prithee, do not strive against my vows:
I was compell'd to her; but I love thee

20 By love's own sweet constraint, and will for ever
Do thee all rights of service.

DIANA

Ay, so you serve us

Till we serve you; but when you have our roses,

You barely leave our thorns to prick ourselves

25 And mock us with our bareness.

BERTRAM

How have I sworn!

DIANA

'Tis not the many oaths that makes the truth,

But the plain single vow that is vow'd true.

What is not holy, that we swear not by,

30 But take the High'st to witness: then, pray you, tell
me,

If I should swear by God's great attributes,

I loved you dearly, would you believe my oaths,

When I did love you ill? This has no holding,

35 To swear by him whom I protest to love,
That I will work against him: therefore your oaths
Are words and poor conditions, but unseal'd,
At least in my opinion.

BERTRAM

Change it, change it;

40 Be not so holy-cruel: love is holy;

And my integrity ne'er knew the crafts

That you do charge men with. Stand no more off,

But give thyself unto my sick desires,

Who then recover: say thou art mine, and ever

45 My love as it begins shall so persevere.

DIANA

I see that men make ropes in such a snare

That we'll forsake ourselves. Give me that ring.

BERTRAM

I'll lend it thee, my dear; but have no power

To give it from me.

DIANA

50 Will you not, my lord?

BERTRAM

It is an honour 'longing to our house,

Bequeathed down from many ancestors;

Which were the greatest obloquy i' the world

In me to lose.

DIANA

55 Mine honour's such a ring:


My chastity's the jewel of our house,

Bequeathed down from many ancestors;

Which were the greatest obloquy i' the world

DIANA

She was honest then .

 Diana means that her mother was married when Diana was conceived.

BERTRAM

You would honest too.

DIANA

No. My mother only did her duty. The same duty, my lord,
that you owe your wife.

BERTRAM

No more of that. Please, don't fight me on the things I've
sworn to you. I was forced to marry her, but I love you by
love's own sweet force, and I'll forever serve you.

DIANA

Yes, you'll serve us until we've served you. But when you've
taken the rose of our virginity, you barely leave us even with
the thorns to prick ourselves, and you mock us for having
nothing of value left.

BERTRAM

Think of how much I've sworn to you!

DIANA

Swearing many oaths doesn't make you faithful. I'd rather
you swear one plain single vow that you really mean. We
don't swear by what's not holy, but we swear by what's
most holy. Then, please, tell me, if I should swear to God
that I loved you dearly, would you believe my vows when I
didn't really love you faithfully at all? What would be the
value of swearing by God, who I claim to love, that I will do
this evil thing against him? Therefore, your oaths are just
words and flimsy promises, non-binding, at least in my
opinion.

BERTRAM

Change your opinion, change it. Don't be so cruel in your
holiness. Love is holy, and I have way too much integrity to
ever be as crafty as you claim men are. Stop being
standoffish and give yourself to my yearning desire that you
can heal. Say you're mine and my love will last forever as
strong as it begins.

DIANA

It seems like men make ropes into such a snare that we'll
give ourselves up. Give me that ring.

BERTRAM

I'll lend it to you, my dear, but I don't have the option of
giving it away.

DIANA

Will you not, my lord?

BERTRAM

It's a token belonging to my house, passed down from
many ancestors. It would be the greatest disgrace in the
world for me to lose it.

DIANA

My virginity's just such a ring. My chastity's the jewel of our
house, passed down from many ancestors. It would be the
greatest disgrace in the world for me to lose it. So, your own

In me to lose: thus your own proper wisdom
60 Brings in the champion Honour on my part,
Against your vain assault.

BERTRAM

Here, take my ring:
My house, mine honour, yea, my life, be thine,
And I'll be bid by thee.

DIANA

65 When midnight comes, knock at my chamber-window:
I'll order take my mother shall not hear.
Now will I charge you in the band of truth,
When you have conquer'd my yet maiden bed,
Remain there but an hour, nor speak to me:
70 My reasons are most strong; and you shall know them
When back again this ring shall be deliver'd:
And on your finger in the night I'll put
Another ring, that what in time proceeds
May token to the future our past deeds.
75 Adieu, till then; then, fail not. You have won
A wife of me, though there my hope be done .

BERTRAM

A heaven on earth I have won by wooing thee.

Exit

DIANA

For which live long to thank both heaven and me!
80 You may so in the end.
My mother told me just how he would woo,
As if she sat in 's heart; she says all men
Have the like oaths : he had sworn to marry me
When his wife's dead; therefore I'll lie with him
85 When I am buried. Since Frenchmen are so braid,
Marry that will, I live and die a maid:
Only in this disguise I think't no sin
To cozen him that would unjustly win.

Exit

logic makes honor the champion on my part against your
hopeless attempts to win me.

BERTRAM

Here, take my ring. My house, my honor, yes, my life, is
yours, and I'll be instructed by you.

DIANA


When midnight comes, knock at my chamber window. I'll
make sure my mother won't hear. Now I'll give you
instructions and you need to be true to them. When you've
conquered my still virgin bed, stay there only an hour and
don't speak to me. I have very strong reasons, and you'll
know them when I deliver this ring back again. And in the
middle of the night, I'll put another ring on your finger
which will be a sign in the future of our past
deeds. Farewell, till then. Then, don't fail in this. You have
won a wife of me though this will ruin me.


BERTRAM

I've won a heaven on earth by wooing you.

BERTRAM exits.

DIANA

And I hope you'll live to thank heaven and me for that! You
may do so in the end. My mother told me exactly how he
would woo, as if she'd seen into his heart. She says all men
make the same oaths. He had sworn to marry me when his
wife was dead. Therefore, I'll lie with him when I'm buried.
Since Frenchmen are so deceitful , marry if you like, but
I'll live and die a virgin. In this context, I don't think it's a sin
to trick a man who would win a woman so unjustly.

 This is the only recorded use of
"braid" as an adjective, but most
editors assume it means "deceitful."

She exits.

Act 4, Scene 3

Shakespeare

Enter the two French Lords and some two or three Soldiers

FIRST LORD

You have not given him his mother's letter?

SECOND LORD

I have delivered it an hour since: there is
something in't that stings his nature; for on the
reading it he changed almost into another man.

FIRST LORD

5 He has much worthy blame laid upon him for shaking
off so good a wife and so sweet a lady.

SECOND LORD

Especially he hath incurred the everlasting
displeasure of the king, who had even tuned his
bounty to sing happiness to him. I will tell you a
10 thing, but you shall let it dwell darkly with you.

FIRST LORD

When you have spoken it, 'tis dead, and I am the
grave of it.

Shakesclore Translation

The two French lords and a few soldiers enter.

FIRST LORD

You haven't given him his mother's letter?

SECOND LORD

I delivered it an hour ago. There is something in it that
upsets him. Upon reading it, he almost changed into a
different man.

FIRST LORD

He deserves all the blame placed on him for getting rid of
such a good wife and sweet lady.

SECOND LORD

Especially since he's earned the everlasting displeasure of
the king, who had gone all out in his generosity to, and
happiness for, him. I will tell you something, but you can't
tell anyone.

FIRST LORD

When you've spoken it, it's dead, and it's buried in me.

SECOND LORD

15 He hath perverted a young gentlewoman here in Florence, of a most chaste renown; and this night he fleshes his will in the spoil of her honour: he hath given her his monumental ring, and thinks himself made in the unchaste composition.

FIRST LORD

Now, God delay our rebellion! as we are ourselves, what things are we!

SECOND LORD

20 Merely our own traitors. And as in the common course of all treasons, we still see them reveal themselves, till they attain to their abhorred ends, so he that in this action contrives against his own nobility, in his proper stream o'erflows himself.

FIRST LORD

25 Is it not meant damnable in us, to be trumpeters of our unlawful intents? We shall not then have his company to-night?

SECOND LORD

Not till after midnight; for he is dieted to his hour.

FIRST LORD

30 That approaches apace; I would gladly have him see his company anatomized, that he might take a measure of his own judgments, wherein so curiously he had set this counterfeit.

SECOND LORD

We will not meddle with him till he come; for his presence must be the whip of the other.

FIRST LORD

35 In the mean time, what hear you of these wars?

SECOND LORD

I hear there is an overture of peace.

FIRST LORD

Nay, I assure you, a peace concluded.

SECOND LORD

What will Count Rousillon do then? will he travel higher, or return again into France?

FIRST LORD

40 I perceive, by this demand, you are not altogether of his council.

SECOND LORD

Let it be forbid, sir; so should I be a great deal of his act.


FIRST LORD


45 Sir, his wife some two months since fled from his house: her pretence is a pilgrimage to Saint Jaques le Grand; which holy undertaking with most austere sanctimony she accomplished; and, there residing the tenderness of her nature became as a prey to her grief; in fine, made a groan of her last breath, and now she sings in heaven.

SECOND LORD

How is this justified?

SECOND LORD

He has seduced a young gentlewoman here in Florence, who has a very chaste reputation. This night he'll take her chastity . He's given her his ancestral ring, and he thinks he's definitely going to be successful in going through with it tonight.

 To "flesh a hound with the spoil" in the original text meant to give some flesh of the animal being hunted to the hunting dog. Here, it means Bertram's lust will be rewarded by Diana, or who he thinks is Diana.

FIRST LORD

Now, God protect us from our fleshly desires! Without God's help, what things we turn out to be!

SECOND LORD

Just traitors to ourselves. And, as with most acts of treason, we always see the perpetrators reveal their true natures, until they achieve their horrific goals. In acting against his own proper noble behavior, he'll ruin himself and give himself away by talking about it.

FIRST LORD

Isn't it supposed to be sinful to go around proclaiming our immoral desires? We won't have his company tonight then?

SECOND LORD

Not till after midnight. He only gets one hour.

FIRST LORD

That's coming soon. I would gladly have him see his companion under interrogation so he could make his own judgements since he's had so much faith in this liar.

SECOND LORD

We won't bother with Parolles till Bertram comes. We'll start working on him when Bertram shows up.

FIRST LORD

In the meantime, what have you heard of these wars?

SECOND LORD

I've heard there's been a start to peace talks.

FIRST LORD

No, I assure you, peace has been made.

SECOND LORD

What will Count Rousillon do then? Will he travel onwards, or go back to France?

FIRST LORD

I gather, by this question, that you're not a close confidant of his.

SECOND LORD

God forbid, sir. If I were, I'd be accountable for his actions.

FIRST LORD

Sir, his wife fled two months ago from his house. She said she was going on a pilgrimage to Saint Jaques le Grand and she completed that holy task with impressive piety. And, while she was there, her grief overcame the tenderness in her nature. In short, her last breath became a groan, and now she sings in heaven.

SECOND LORD

What proof is there?

FIRST LORD

The stronger part of it by her own letters, which makes her story true, even to the point of her death: her death itself, which could not be her office to say is come, was faithfully confirmed by the rector of the place.

SECOND LORD

Hath the count all this intelligence?

FIRST LORD

Ay, and the particular confirmations, point from point, so to the full arming of the verity.

SECOND LORD

I am heartily sorry that he'll be glad of this.

FIRST LORD

How mightily sometimes we make us comforts of our losses!

SECOND LORD

And how mightily some other times we drown our gain in tears! The great dignity that his valour hath here acquired for him shall at home be encountered with a shame as ample.

FIRST LORD

The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together: our virtues would be proud, if our faults whipped them not; and our crimes would despair, if they were not cherished by our virtues.

Enter a Messenger

FIRST LORD

How now! where's your master?

SERVANT

He met the duke in the street, sir, of whom he hath taken a solemn leave: his lordship will next morning for France. The duke hath offered him letters of commendations to the king.

SECOND LORD

They shall be no more than needful there, if they were more than they can commend.

FIRST LORD

They cannot be too sweet for the king's tartness. Here's his lordship now.

Enter BERTRAM

FIRST LORD

How now, my lord! is't not after midnight?

BERTRAM

I have to-night dispatched sixteen businesses, a month's length a-piece, by an abstract of success: I have congeed with the duke, done my adieu with his nearest; buried a wife, mourned for her; writ to my lady mother I am returning; entertained my convoy; and between these main parcels of dispatch effected many nicer needs; the last was the greatest, but that I have not ended yet.

SECOND LORD

If the business be of any difficulty, and this morning your departure hence, it requires haste of your lordship.

FIRST LORD

Most of the proof is in her own letters, which shows her story to be true right up to her death. Her death itself, which she couldn't herself have announced, was faithfully confirmed by the rector where she was staying.

SECOND LORD

Does the count have this information?

FIRST LORD

Yes, and the specific confirmations, point by point, so all the evidence showing it to be true.

SECOND LORD

I am very sorry that this news will have made him glad.

FIRST LORD

Sometimes we mightily make comforts out of our losses!

SECOND LORD

And some other times we mightily drown the positives in tears! All the great respect that his bravery has earned him here will be matched by an equal shame at home.

FIRST LORD

The web of our life is like tangled yarn, good and bad together. Our virtues would become too proud if our faults didn't attack them, and our crimes would fall into despair if they weren't embraced by your virtues.

A Messenger enters.

FIRST LORD

What's going on? Where's your master?

SERVANT

He met the duke in the street, sir, and he's said farewell to him. His lordship will leave tomorrow morning for France. The duke has offered him letters of praise addressed to the king.

SECOND LORD

Those will definitely be necessary even if they're full of more praise than he deserves.

FIRST LORD

They can't be sweet enough for the king's displeasure. Here's his lordship now.

BERTRAM enters.

FIRST LORD


How's it going, my lord? Isn't it after midnight?

BERTRAM

Tonight I've taken care of sixteen different things, a month's worth of tasks, with total success: I've taken leave of the duke, said goodbye to his nearest and dearest. I've buried a wife and mourned for her. I've written to my mother that I'm returning home. I've entertained my followers. And between these main things I had to get done, I've met many more pleasurable needs. The last was the most significant, but I haven't ended that yet.

SECOND LORD

If this business is at all difficult, and you're leaving this morning, your lordship had better hurry up.

 Shakespeare personifies virtues and vices here as having emotions (proud, despair) and taking action (whipping, cherishing).

BERTRAM

95 I mean, the business is not ended, as fearing to hear of it hereafter. But shall we have this dialogue between the fool and the soldier? Come, bring forth this counterfeit module, he has deceived me, like a double-meaning prophesier.

SECOND LORD

100 Bring him forth: has sat i' the stocks all night, poor gallant knave.

BERTRAM

No matter: his heels have deserved it, in usurping his spurs so long. How does he carry himself?

SECOND LORD

I have told your lordship already, the stocks carry him. But to answer you as you would be understood; he weeps like a wench that had shed her milk: he hath confessed himself to Morgan, whom he supposes to be a friar, from the time of his remembrance to this very instant disaster of his setting i' the stocks: and what think you he hath confessed?

BERTRAM

Nothing of me, has a'?

SECOND LORD

His confession is taken, and it shall be read to his face: if your lordship be in't, as I believe you are, you must have the patience to hear it.

Enter PAROLLES guarded, and First Soldier

BERTRAM

A plague upon him! muffled! he can say nothing of me: hush, hush!

FIRST LORD

Hoodman comes! Portotartarosa

FIRST SOLDIER

He calls for the tortures: what will you say without 'em?

PAROLLES

I will confess what I know without constraint: if ye pinch me like a pasty, I can say no more.

FIRST SOLDIER

Bosko chimurcho.

FIRST LORD

Boblibindo chicurmurco.

FIRST SOLDIER

125 You are a merciful general. Our general bids you answer to what I shall ask you out of a note.

PAROLLES

And truly, as I hope to live.

FIRST SOLDIER

[Reads] "First demand of him how many horse the duke is strong." What say you to that?

PAROLLES

130 Five or six thousand; but very weak and unserviceable: the troops are all scattered, and the commanders very poor rogues, upon my reputation

BERTRAM


I mean, the business is not ended, as in I'm afraid word will get out later. But shall we hear this dialogue between the fool and the soldier? Come, bring for this lying rogue, he has deceived me, like a fortune-teller who speaks in double meanings.

SECOND LORD

Bring him forth. He has sat in the stocks all night, poor foppish rogue.

BERTRAM

No matter: his heels have deserved the discomfort for pretending to be brave for so long. How does he behave himself?

 To "win one's spurs" is to demonstrate that one has a high level of skill in some area. Bertram puns on heels/spurs, suggesting that Parolles has faked his skill and bravery.

SECOND LORD

I've told your lordship already, he behaves like a coward. But to answer you more specifically, he weeps like a young woman that had spilled her milk. He has given confession to Morgan, who he believes to be a friar, from as far back as he can remember to the very instant he was placed in the stocks. And what do you think he has confessed?

BERTRAM

Nothing of me, has he?

SECOND LORD

His confession is taken, and it will be read to his face. If your lordship is in it, as I believe you are, you must have the patience to listen to it.

PAROLLES enters, guarded, with the First Soldier.

BERTRAM

A plague on him! I wish his mouth were covered! He can say nothing about me: hush, hush!

FIRST LORD

The blindfolded man comes! Portotartarosa.

FIRST SOLDIER

He calls for the tortures to begin. What will you say without their help?

PAROLLES

I will confess what I know without constraint. If you pinch me until I'm a pie, I'd have nothing more to add.

FIRST SOLDIER

Bosko chimurcho.

FIRST LORD

Boblibindo chicurmurco.

FIRST SOLDIER

You are a merciful general. Our general commands you answer to what I shall ask you from this piece of paper.

PAROLLES

And I'll answer truly, as truly as I hope to live.

FIRST SOLDIER

[Reading] "First, ask him how many horses are in the duke's army." What do you say to that?

PAROLLES

Five or six thousand, but they're very weak and unready for battle. The troops are all scattered, and the commanders

and credit and as I hope to live.

FIRST SOLDIER

Shall I set down your answer so?

PAROLLES

135 Do: I'll take the sacrament on't, how and which way you will.

BERTRAM

All's one to him. What a past-saving slave is this!

FIRST LORD

140 You're deceived, my lord: this is Monsieur Parolles, the gallant militarist,—that was his own phrase,—that had the whole theoretic of war in the knot of his scarf, and the practise in the chape of his dagger.

SECOND LORD

145 I will never trust a man again for keeping his sword clean. Nor believe he can have every thing in him by wearing his apparel neatly.

FIRST SOLDIER

Well, that's set down.

PAROLLES

Five or six thousand horse, I said,—I will say true,—or thereabouts, set down, for I'll speak truth.

FIRST LORD

He's very near the truth in this.

BERTRAM

150 But I con him no thanks for't, in the nature he delivers it.

PAROLLES

Poor rogues, I pray you, say.

FIRST SOLDIER

Well, that's set down.

PAROLLES

155 I humbly thank you, sir: a truth's a truth, the rogues are marvellous poor.

FIRST SOLDIER

[Reads] "Demand of him, of what strength they are a-foot." What say you to that?

PAROLLES

160 By my troth, sir, if I were to live this present hour, I will tell true. Let me see: Spurio, a hundred and fifty; Sebastian, so many; Corambus, so many; Jaques, so many; Guiltian, Cosmo, Lodowick, and Gratii, two hundred and fifty each; mine own company, Chitopher, Vaumond, Bentii, two hundred and fifty each: so that the muster-file, rotten and
165 sound, upon my life, amounts not to fifteen thousand poll; half of the which dare not shake snow from off their cassocks, lest they shake themselves to pieces.

BERTRAM

What shall be done to him?

are weak scoundrels. I swear upon my reputation and credit and my life.

FIRST SOLDIER

Should I write that down as your answer?

PAROLLES

Do so. I'll take the sacrament on that, however and whichever way you want me to ⁴.

BERTRAM

[So only the Lords can hear] It's all the same to him. This slave is beyond saving!

FIRST LORD

[So only BERTRAM can hear] You're deceived, my lord. This is Monsieur Parolles, the "gallant militarist"—that was his own phrase—that knew the whole theory of war like the knot in his scarf ⁵, and had the strategies of war in the sheath of his dagger.

SECOND LORD

[So only BERTRAM can hear] I will never trust a man again for keeping his sword clean. Nor will I believe he can be a great man just because he wears his uniform neatly.

FIRST SOLDIER

[To PAROLLES] Well, that's written down.

PAROLLES

Five or six thousand horses, I said—I will tell the truth—or thereabouts. Write it down, for I'll say the truth.

FIRST LORD

[So only BERTRAM can hear] He is very near the truth in this.

BERTRAM

[So only the Lords can hear] But I'll give him no thanks for it, given the situation in which he delivers it.

PAROLLES

Poor scoundrels, please, say something.

FIRST SOLDIER

Well, that's written down.

PAROLLES

I humbly thank you, sir. A truth is a truth. The rogues are incredibly weak.

FIRST SOLDIER

[Reading] "Demand of him how strong they are on foot." What do you say to that?

PAROLLES

I swear, sir, if I were to die this hour, I would tell the truth. Let me see: Spurio ⁶ has a hundred and fifty. Sebastian, the same number. Corambus, the same number. Jaques, the same number. Guiltian, Cosmo, Lodowick, and Gratii, two hundred and fifty each. My own company, Chitopher, Vaumond, Bentii, two hundred and fifteen each. So the whole army, useless or in good shape, upon my life, comes up not even to fifteen thousand people, half of which wouldn't even dare to shake snow off their boots, they're so afraid they'd shake themselves to pieces.

BERTRAM

[So only the Lords can hear] What shall be done to him?

⁴ Parolles may be referring to the different ways the sacrament may be given (bread only or bread and wine), or whether he should receive it sitting or kneeling.

⁵ The knot in the scarf was tied by the lady who was giving a man her favor.

⁶ There is no clear logic in these random choice of names. The names may have been invented by Shakespeare simply to indicate an international group of soldiers.

FIRST LORD

170 Nothing, but let him have thanks. Demand of him my condition, and what credit I have with the duke.

FIRST SOLDIER

Well, that's set down.

[Reads]

'You shall demand of him, whether one Captain Dumain be i' the camp, a Frenchman; what his reputation is with the duke; what his valour, honesty, and expertness in wars; or whether he thinks it were not possible, with well-weighing sums of gold, to corrupt him to revolt.' What say you to this? what do you know of it?

PAROLLES

I beseech you, let me answer to the particular of the inter'gatories: demand them singly.

FIRST SOLDIER

Do you know this Captain Dumain?

PAROLLES

175 I know him: a' was a botcher's 'prentice in Paris, from whence he was whipped for getting the shrieve's fool with child, --a dumb innocent, that could not say him nay.

BERTRAM

180 Nay, by your leave, hold your hands; though I know his brains are forfeit to the next tile that falls.

FIRST SOLDIER

Well, is this captain in the duke of Florence's camp?

PAROLLES

Upon my knowledge, he is, and lousy.

FIRST LORD

Nay look not so upon me; we shall hear of your lordship anon.

FIRST SOLDIER

185 What is his reputation with the duke?

PAROLLES

The duke knows him for no other but a poor officer of mine; and writ to me this other day to turn him out o' the band: I think I have his letter in my pocket.

FIRST SOLDIER

190 Marry, we'll search.

PAROLLES

In good sadness, I do not know; either it is there, or it is upon a file with the duke's other letters in my tent.

FIRST SOLDIER

Here 'tis; here's a paper: shall I read it to you?

PAROLLES

195 I do not know if it be it or no.

BERTRAM

Our interpreter does it well.

FIRST LORD


[So only BERTRAM can hear] Nothing, just thank him.

[To the FIRST SOLDIER] Demand from him what he thinks of my qualities and what the Duke thinks of me.

FIRST SOLDIER

Well, that's written down.

[Reading] "You shall demand from him whether one Captain Dumain is in the camp, a Frenchman. What his reputation is with the duke, his bravery, honesty, and expertise in wars, and whether the prisoner thinks it would not be possible, with high sums of gold, to corrupt the captain to revolt." What do you say to this? What do you know of it?

 Shakespeare may be referencing the character of Dumain from his play "Love's Labor's Lost."

PAROLLES

I plead with you, let me answer to each particular question. Ask them one at a time.

FIRST SOLDIER

Do you know this Captian Dumain?

PAROLLES

I know him. He was a tailor's apprentice in Paris and he was whipped out of the city for getting a girl pregnant—an innocent mute girl that could not say no to him.

BERTRAM

No, hold on, resist fighting him, even though I know you'll smash his brains out at the nearest opportunity.

FIRST SOLDIER

Well, is this captain in the Duke of Florence's camp?

PAROLLES

As far as I know he is, and he's lousy.

FIRST LORD

[So only BERTRAM can hear] Don't look at me like that. We'll hear about your lordship soon enough.

FIRST SOLDIER

What's his reputation with the Duke?

PAROLLES

The Duke knows him to be a poor officer in my charge. He wrote me the other day to throw him out of the army. I think I have his letter in my pocket.

FIRST SOLDIER

Okay, we'll search.

PAROLLES

Sad to say, I'm not sure. Either it is there or maybe it is in a file with the duke's other letters in my tent.

FIRST SOLDIER

Here it is. Here's a paper. Should I read it to you?

PAROLLES

I don't know if that's it or not.

BERTRAM

Our interpreter's good at this.

FIRST LORD

Excellently.

FIRST SOLDIER

[Reads] "Dian, the count's a fool, and full of gold,"--

PAROLLES

200 That is not the duke's letter, sir; that is an advertisement to a proper maid in Florence, one Diana, to take heed of the allurement of one Count Rousillon, a foolish idle boy, but for all that very ruttish: I pray you, sir, put it up again.

FIRST SOLDIER

205 Nay, I'll read it first, by your favour.

PAROLLES

My meaning in't, I protest, was very honest in the behalf of the maid; for I knew the young count to be a dangerous and lascivious boy, who is a whale to virginity and devours up all the fry it finds.

BERTRAM

210 Damnable both-sides rogue!

FIRST SOLDIER

[Reads] "When he swears oaths, bid him drop gold, and take it;

After he scores, he never pays the score:

Half won is match well made; match, and well make it;

215 He ne'er pays after-debts, take it before;

And say a soldier, Dian, told thee this,

Men are to mell with, boys are not to kiss:

For count of this, the count's a fool, I know it,

Who pays before, but not when he does owe it.

220 Thine, as he vowed to thee in thine ear,

PAROLLES.'

BERTRAM

He shall be whipped through the army with this rhyme in's forehead.

SECOND LORD

225 This is your devoted friend, sir, the manifold linguist and the armpotent soldier.

BERTRAM

I could endure any thing before but a cat, and now he's a cat to me.

FIRST SOLDIER

I perceive, sir, by the general's looks, we shall be fain to hang you.

PAROLLES

230 My life, sir, in any case: not that I am afraid to die; but that, my offences being many, I would repent out the remainder of nature: let me live, sir, in a dungeon, i' the stocks, or any where, so I may live.

FIRST SOLDIER

235 We'll see what may be done, so you confess freely; therefore, once more to this Captain Dumain: you have answered to his reputation with the duke and to his valour: what is his honesty?

PAROLLES

240 He will steal, sir, an egg out of a cloister: for rapes and ravishments he parallels Nessus: he professes not keeping of oaths; in breaking 'em he

FIRST LORD

He's excellent.

FIRST SOLDIER

[Reading] "Diana, the count's a fool, and only very rich,"--

PAROLLES

That's not the duke's letter, sir. That's a message to a very admirable lady in Florence, one Diana, to watch out for the seduction of the Count Rousillon, a foolish, lazy boy but, despite that, also very lecherous. I beg you, sir, put the letter back again.

FIRST SOLDIER

No, I'll read it first, if you don't mind.

PAROLLES

My meaning in it, if I can explain, was very honest on behalf of the maid. Because I knew the young count was a dangerous and lustful boy, who is like a whale that feeds on virginity and devours up all the virgins it can find.

BERTRAM

[To himself] Damned two-timing rogue!

FIRST SOLDIER

[Reading] "When he makes vows to you, tell him to give you gold and then take it. After he gets what he wants, he never pays what he owes. You've already done half the work if you can make a good deal with him. Make a match of it, and take what you can get first. He never pays afterwards, take it before. And say that a soldier told you this, Diana. You can mess around with men, but don't kiss boys. To wrap things up, the count's a fool, I know that to be true. He pays to get what he wants but not if he owes it after he's gotten what he's after. Yours, just like vowed to be yours in your ear, Parolles."

BERTRAM

[So only the Lords can hear] He'll be whipped throughout the army with this rhyme stuck in his forehead.

SECOND LORD

[So only BERTRAM can hear] This is supposedly your devoted friend, sir, who speaks so many languages and is such a brave soldier.

BERTRAM

[So only the Lords can hear] I used to be able to tolerate anything except a cat and now this man is like a cat to me.

FIRST SOLDIER

I see, sir, based on the general's expression, we'll have to hang you.


PAROLLES


Give me my life, sir, at least. It's not that I'm afraid to die. It's just that since I've committed so many sins, I'd rather live out the rest of my life being repentant. Let me live, sir, in a dungeon or in the stocks or anywhere just so I may live.

FIRST SOLDIER

We'll see what may done as long as you confess truthfully. Therefore, let's go back to this Captain Dumain. You've talked about his reputation with the duke and about his bravery. What about his honesty?

PAROLLES

He will steal an egg out of a church, sir. In terms of raping and ravishing, he's as bad as Nessus . He doesn't ever keep his oaths. He's stronger than Hercules when it comes

 Nessus was a centaur (half-man, half-horse creature) from Greek

is stronger than Hercules: he will lie, sir, with such volubility, that you would think truth were a fool: drunkenness is his best virtue, for he will
 245 be swine-drunk; and in his sleep he does little harm, save to his bed-clothes about him; but they know his conditions and lay him in straw. I have but little more to say, sir, of his honesty: he has every thing that an honest man should not have; what
 250 an honest man should have, he has nothing.

FIRST LORD

I begin to love him for this.

BERTRAM

For this description of thine honesty? A pox upon him for me, he's more and more a cat.

FIRST SOLDIER

What say you to his expertness in war?

PAROLLES

255 Faith, sir, he has led the drum before the English tragedians; to belie him, I will not, and more of his soldiership I know not; except, in that country he had the honour to be the officer at a place there called Mile-end, to instruct for the doubling of
 260 files: I would do the man what honour I can, but of this I am not certain.

FIRST LORD

He hath out-villained villany so far, that the rarity redeems him.

BERTRAM

A pox on him, he's a cat still.

FIRST SOLDIER

265 His qualities being at this poor price, I need not to ask you if gold will corrupt him to revolt.

PAROLLES

270 Sir, for a quart d'ecu he will sell the fee-simple of his salvation, the inheritance of it; and cut the entail from all remainders, and a perpetual succession for it perpetually.

FIRST SOLDIER

What's his brother, the other Captain Dumain?

SECOND LORD

Why does he ask him of me?

FIRST SOLDIER

What's he?

PAROLLES

275 E'en a crow o' the same nest; not altogether so great as the first in goodness, but greater a great deal in evil: he excels his brother for a coward, yet his brother is reputed one of the best that is: in a retreat he outruns any lackey; marry, in coming on he has the cramp.

FIRST SOLDIER

280 If your life be saved, will you undertake to betray the Florentine?

to breaking his oaths. Sir, his lies are so versatile that you'd think truth was just a fool. Drunkenness is his best virtue for he tends to get blackout drunk, and in his sleep he doesn't do any harm (except to his bedsheets). His servants know his behaviors, though, and they lay him down to sleep in straw. I don't have much more to say about his honesty, sir. He has every quality that an honest man should not have and no qualities that an honest man should.

FIRST LORD

[So only BERTRAM can hear] I'm starting to find this endearing.

BERTRAM

[So only the FIRST LORD can hear] Because of this description of your honesty? A curse on him, I say. He's more and more like a cat.

FIRST SOLDIER

What do you have to say about his expertise in war?

PAROLLES

Well, sir, he's just an actor when it comes to being in the war. I won't tell lies about him and I don't know very much about him as a soldier. Except that I do know that in that country he had the honor to be the officer in charge at a place called Mile-end⁹ and his job was to instruct during the doubling of files¹⁰ drill. I would say whatever honorable things about him I could, but I don't know very much.

FIRST LORD

[So only BERTRAM can hear] He's out-villained villainy so far, but this nice gesture is redeeming.

BERTRAM

[So only the FIRST LORD can hear] Curse him, he's still a cat.

FIRST SOLDIER

Given that you've rated his qualities so poorly, I don't need to waste time asking you if he could be bribed with gold to revolt.

PAROLLES

Sir, for just a silver coin, he'd sell all his chances at being saved and his heirs' chances too. He'd cast off his salvation and his descendants' salvation forever.

FIRST SOLDIER

What's his brother like, the other Captain Dumain?

SECOND LORD

[To himself] Why does he ask him about me?

FIRST SOLDIER

What's he like?

PAROLLES

He's a crow from the same nest. He's not really as great as the first brother in terms of goodness, but he's a great deal greater in terms of evil. He's much more of a coward than his brother even though his brother is known as one of the biggest cowards there is. In running away, he outruns any man. Yes, and when the troop is advancing, he gets a cramp.

FIRST SOLDIER

In order to save your life, will you be willing to betray the Florentine?

mythology killed by Hercules. Nessus was only known for one attempted rape, that of Hercules' wife, but centaurs are a common symbol for lust.

⁹ Mile-end was the exercise ground for the London citizen militia, which was a force not generally respected.

¹⁰ The "doubling of files" was a simple military drill.

PAROLLES

Ay, and the captain of his horse, Count Rousillon.

FIRST SOLDIER

I'll whisper with the general, and know his pleasure.

PAROLLES

285 *[Aside]* I'll no more drumming; a plague of all drums! Only to seem to deserve well, and to beguile the supposition of that lascivious young boy the count, have I run into this danger. Yet who would have suspected an ambush where I was taken?

FIRST SOLDIER

290 There is no remedy, sir, but you must die: the general says, you that have so traitorously discovered the secrets of your army and made such pestiferous reports of men very nobly held, can serve the world for no honest use; therefore you must die. Come, headsman, off with his head.

PAROLLES

295 O Lord, sir, let me live, or let me see my death!

FIRST LORD

That shall you, and take your leave of all your friends.

Unblinding him

FIRST LORD

300 So, look about you: know you any here?

BERTRAM

Good morrow, noble captain.

SECOND LORD

God bless you, Captain Parolles.

FIRST LORD

God save you, noble captain.

SECOND LORD

305 Captain, what greeting will you to my Lord Lafeu? I am for France.

FIRST LORD

Good captain, will you give me a copy of the sonnet you writ to Diana in behalf of the Count Rousillon? an I were not a very coward, I'd compel it of you: but fare you well.

Exeunt BERTRAM and Lords

FIRST SOLDIER

310 You are undone, captain, all but your scarf; that has a knot on't yet

PAROLLES

Who cannot be crushed with a plot?

FIRST SOLDIER

315 If you could find out a country where but women were that had received so much shame, you might begin an impudent nation. Fare ye well, sir; I am for France too: we shall speak of you there.

Exit with Soldiers

PAROLLES

Yet am I thankful: if my heart were great, 'Twould burst at this. Captain I'll be no more;

PAROLLES

Yes, and the captain of his horse, Count Rousillon.

FIRST SOLDIER

I'll whisper with the general and find out what he wants.

PAROLLES

[To himself] I won't drum anymore. Curse all drums! I've only run into this danger because I wanted to seem courageous, and because I wanted to win over that lustful young boy, the count. But who would have suspected there would be an ambush in the play where I was?

FIRST SOLDIER

There's no way out, sir, but you'll have to die. The general says that someone who has been such a traitor in sharing the secrets of his army and made such lying reports of men who are known to be noble can never serve the world for any honest purpose. Therefore you must die. Come, executioner, off with his head.

PAROLLES

Oh Lord, sir, let me live, or let me at least see my death!

FIRST LORD

Yes, you will do that, and say farewell to all your friends.

He removes the blindfold.

FIRST LORD

So, look around you. Do you know anyone here?

BERTRAM

Good morning, noble captain.

SECOND LORD

God bless you, Captain Parolles.

FIRST LORD

God protect you, noble captain.

SECOND LORD

Captain, what greeting will you send to Lord Lafeu? I'm going to France.

FIRST LORD

Good captain, will you give me a copy of the sonnet that you wrote to Diana on behalf of the Count Rousillon? If I weren't a total coward, I'd demand it of you. But farewell.

BERTRAM and the lords exit.

FIRST SOLDIER

You are ruined, captain, all but your scarf. That still has a knot in it.

PAROLLES

Who cannot be crushed by a plot against them?

FIRST SOLDIER

If you could discover a country where only women were and all of them had been as shamed as you've been, maybe you could father a shameless nation. Farewell, sir. I'm heading for France too. We shall speak of you there.

The Soldiers exit.

PAROLLES

Yet I'm thankful. If my heart were big, it would burst at this. I won't be a captain anymore. But I'll eat and drink and I'll

But I will eat and drink, and sleep as soft
 320 As captain shall: simply the thing I am
 Shall make me live. Who knows himself a braggart,
 Let him fear this, for it will come to pass
 that every braggart shall be found an ass.
 Rust, sword; cool, blushes! and, Parolles, live
 325 Safest in shame! being fool'd, by foolery thrive!
 There's place and means for every man alive.
 I'll after them.

Exit

sleep as softly as a captain does. Simply being what I am
 will keep me alive. If any man knows himself to be a
 braggart, let him be afraid of what's happened to me. It is
 sure to happen that every braggart shall be revealed to be
 an ass. My sword will rust and my blushes will fade and
 Parolles will live most safely in his shame! By being fooled,
 my foolery will help me survive! Every man can find a place
 and a way to live. I'll go after them.

PAROLLES exits.

Act 4, Scene 4

Shakespeare

Enter HELENA, Widow, and DIANA

HELENA

That you may well perceive I have not wrong'd you,
 One of the greatest in the Christian world
 Shall be my surety; 'fore whose throne 'tis needful,
 Ere I can perfect mine intents, to kneel:
 5 Time was, I did him a desired office,
 Dear almost as his life; which gratitude
 Through flinty Tartar's bosom would peep forth,
 And answer, thanks: I duly am inform'd
 His grace is at Marseilles; to which place
 10 We have convenient convoy. You must know
 I am supposed dead: the army breaking,
 My husband hies him home; where, heaven aiding,
 And by the leave of my good lord the king,
 We'll be before our welcome.

WIDOW

15 Gentle madam,
 You never had a servant to whose trust
 Your business was more welcome.

HELENA

Nor you, mistress,
 Ever a friend whose thoughts more truly labour
 20 To recompense your love: doubt not but heaven
 Hath brought me up to be your daughter's dower,
 As it hath fated her to be my motive
 And helper to a husband. But, O strange men!
 That can such sweet use make of what they hate,
 25 When saucy trusting of the cozen'd thoughts
 Defiles the pitchy night: so lust doth play
 With what it loathes for that which is away.
 But more of this hereafter. You, Diana,
 Under my poor instructions yet must suffer
 30 Something in my behalf.

DIANA

Let death and honesty
 Go with your impositions, I am yours
 Upon your will to suffer.

HELENA


Yet, I pray you:
 35 But with the word the time will bring on summer,
 When briers shall have leaves as well as thorns,
 And be as sweet as sharp. We must away;
 Our wagon is prepared, and time revives us:
 All's well that ends well; still the fine's the crown;
 40 Whate'er the course, the end is the renown.

Exeunt

Shakescleare Translation

HELENA, DIANA, and the Widow enter.

HELENA

So you can be totally sure I haven't wronged you, one of the
 greatest men in the Christian world will speak for me.
 Before his throne, I will need to kneel before I can make
 everything clear. There was once a time I did a great service
 to him almost as dear as his life. Even if he was a violent
 Tartar , the gratitude for that deed would still overwhelm
 him and answer with thanks. I've been told that his grace is
 in Marseilles, and we have convenient means to get there.
 You must know that I am assumed dead. The army breaking
 up, my husband's hurrying home, where, with heaven's
 help, and with the king's support, we'll be there ahead of
 him.

WIDOW

Gentle madam, you never had a servant who trusted you
 more in whatever you say.

HELENA

And you, mistress, have never had a friend who more
 desires to pay you back for your love. I'm confident that
 heaven has put me here to pay your daughter's dowry just
 as heaven has put her here to be my instrument and helper
 to win my husband. But, oh strange men! They can make
 such sweet use of the women they hate, even when they
 are giving into such lustful thoughts that defile the dark
 night. In that way, his lust has played with the thing it
 loathes instead of that thing which is absent. But more of
 this later. You, Diana, under my poor instructions still must
 suffer something on my behalf.


DIANA

Even if I had to give up death and chastity on your orders,
 I'll follow you in whatever you need me to undergo.

HELENA

Not quite yet. But when it comes time for me to give the
 word, summer will arrive, and the roses will have leaves as
 well as thorns and be as sweet as they are sharp. We must
 get away. Our wagon is ready, and time is ticking. All's well
 that end's well. The conclusion is the crowning moment.
 Whatever the means, the end is what will be remembered.

They exit.

 Tartars were members of various
 tribes, including the Turks and
 Mongols. They were descendants of
 Tartary, used to designate a large part
 of Central and Northern Asia.

Act 4, Scene 5

Shakespeare

*Enter COUNTESS, LAFEU, and Clown***LAFEU**

No, no, no, your son was misled with a snipt-taffeta fellow there, whose villanous saffron would have made all the unbaked and doughy youth of a nation in his colour: your daughter-in-law had been alive at this hour, and your son here at home, more advanced by the king than by that red-tailed humble-bee I speak of.

COUNTESS

I would I had not known him; it was the death of the most virtuous gentlewoman that ever nature had praise for creating. If she had partaken of my flesh, and cost me the dearest groans of a mother, I could not have owed her a more rooted love.

LAFEU

'Twas a good lady, 'twas a good lady: we may pick a thousand salads ere we light on such another herb.

CLOWN

Indeed, sir, she was the sweet marjoram of the salad, or rather, the herb of grace.

LAFEU

They are not herbs, you knave; they are nose-herbs.

CLOWN

I am no great Nebuchadnezzar, sir; I have not much skill in grass.

LAFEU

Whether dost thou profess thyself, a knave or a fool?

CLOWN

A fool, sir, at a woman's service, and a knave at a man's.

LAFEU

Your distinction?

CLOWN

I would cozen the man of his wife and do his service.

LAFEU

So you were a knave at his service, indeed.

CLOWN

And I would give his wife my bauble, sir, to do her service.

LAFEU

I will subscribe for thee, thou art both knave and fool.

Shakescleare Translation

*The COUNTESS, LAFEU, and the Clown enter.***LAFEU**

No, no, no, your son was misled by a fellow with his silk slashed there, who would have, in his villainy, made all the young and impressionable youth of a nation believe him and wear his same orange color. Your daughter-in-law could have been alive right now, and your son here at home, with greater honors from the king than from that red-tailed bumble-bee I speak of.

COUNTESS

I wish I had never known him. This caused the death of the most virtuous lady that nature ever created. If she had been my own daughter, and made me groan in labor, I could not have loved her more deeply.

LAFEU

She was a good lady, she was a good lady. We can sift through a thousand salads before we find another herb like her.

CLOWN

Indeed, sir, she was like the sweet marjoram in the salad, or, if you prefer, the herb of grace, rue.

LAFEU

Those aren't herbs, you dummy. Those are just plants that smell nice.

CLOWN

I'm no great Nebuchadnezzar, sir. I don't know very much about grass.

LAFEU

Which do you claim yourself to be, a rogue or a fool?

CLOWN

A fool, sir, when I serve a woman, and a rogue when I serve a man.

LAFEU

What's the difference?

CLOWN

I would steal the man's wife and do his service with her.

LAFEU


Then you'd definitely be a rogue if that was the service you did him.


CLOWN


And I would give his wife my rod, sir, to do her service.


LAFEU

I'll say it's true, you are both a rogue and a fool.

 "Snipt-taffeta" meant the material was cut to allow another material to show through; this beckons to Parolles' flashy costume as well as his flakiness.

 Nebuchadnezzar is a Biblical king who went mad and ate grass.

 It was the "service" or duty of a man to sleep with his wife, so the clown puns on the two meanings of the word.

 The clown obviously refers to the male genitalia here, but a "bauble" was literally the rod that a professional fool or court jester would carry.

CLOWN

30 At your service.

LAFEU

No, no, no.

CLOWN

Why, sir, if I cannot serve you, I can serve as great a prince as you are.

LAFEU

Who's that? a Frenchman?

CLOWN

35 Faith, sir, a' has an English name; but his fisnomy is more hotter in France than there.

LAFEU

What prince is that?

CLOWN

The black prince, sir; alias, the prince of darkness; alias, the devil.

LAFEU

40 Hold thee, there's my purse: I give thee not this to suggest thee from thy master thou talkest of; serve him still.

CLOWN

I am a woodland fellow, sir, that always loved a great fire; and the master I speak of ever keeps a good fire. But, sure, he is the prince of the world; let his nobility remain in's court. I am for the house with the narrow gate, which I take to be too little for pomp to enter: some that humble themselves may; but the many will be too chill and tender, and they'll be for the flowery way that leads to the broad gate and the great fire.

LAFEU

Go thy ways, I begin to be aweary of thee; and I tell thee so before, because I would not fall out with thee. Go thy ways: let my horses be well looked to, without any tricks.

CLOWN

If I put any tricks upon 'em, sir, they shall be jades' tricks; which are their own right by the law of nature.

Exit

LAFEU

60 A shrewd knave and an unhappy.

COUNTESS

So he is. My lord that's gone made himself much sport out of him: by his authority he remains here, which he thinks is a patent for his sauciness; and, indeed, he has no pace, but runs where he will.

LAFEU

65 I like him well; 'tis not amiss. And I was about to tell you, since I heard of the good lady's death and that my lord your son was upon his return home, I moved the king my master to speak in the behalf of my daughter; which, in the minority of them both, his majesty, out of a self-gracious remembrance, did first propose: his highness hath promised me to do

CLOWN

At your service.

LAFEU

No, no, no.

CLOWN

But, sir, if I cannot serve you, I can serve a man who's as great a prince as you are.

LAFEU

Who's that? A Frenchman?

CLOWN

Indeed, sir, he has an English name, but his face is hotter in France than in England.

LAFEU

What prince is that?

CLOWN

The black prince, sir. Also known as the prince of darkness. Also known as the devil.

LAFEU

Stop there, there's my purse. I don't give this to you to tempt you away from the master that you talk of. Serve him still.

CLOWN

I'm a woodland fellow, sir, and I've always loved a great fire. The master I speak of always keeps a good fire burning. But, of course, he is the devil. Let his nobility stay firmly inside his kingdom. I am headed for the house with the narrow gate which I understand to be too little for many people to enter. Some who are very humble may enter but most people will be too fainthearted and self-interested. They'll end up following the flowery path that leads to the broad gate and the great fire of hell.

LAFEU

Go away now. I'm going to get tired of thee, and I want to tell you that now because I don't want to quarrel with you. Go away now. Let my horses be well looked to, and don't play any tricks on them.

CLOWN

If I play any tricks on them, sir, they would be jades' tricks, which they deserve given their names.

He exits.

LAFEU

A clever rogue and an unhappy one.

COUNTESS

So he is. My late husband had a lot of fun with him. By my husband's order he stays here, which he thinks means he has free reign to be saucy. Indeed, he has no self-control but runs about wherever he wants.

LAFEU

I like him a lot. There's nothing wrong with that. And I was about to tell you, since I heard of the good lady's death that my lord your son was on his way home, I convinced the king, my master, to speak on behalf of my daughter. When Bertram and my daughter were minors, his majesty, out of a very gracious kindness to remember us, proposed that first. His highness has promised me to do it. There's no better

⁵ The Clown could be referring to the the pox, which was commonly known as the "French disease."

⁶ "The prince of the world" was a Biblical phrase for the devil.

⁷ Heaven is depicted as having a narrow gate—only the selected few can enter.

⁸ Lafeu puns on the expression "jades' tricks" which are particularly harsh tricks or pranks, and tricks played on horses—or jades. A "jade" could also be a derogatory word for an ill-tempered woman.

it: and, to stop up the displeasure he hath conceived against your son, there is no fitter matter. How does your ladyship like it?

COUNTESS

75 With very much content, my lord; and I wish it happily effected.

LAFEU

His highness comes post from Marseilles, of as able body as when he numbered thirty: he will be here to-morrow, or I am deceived by him that in such intelligence hath seldom failed.

COUNTESS

It rejoices me, that I hope I shall see him ere I die. I have letters that my son will be here to-night: I shall beseech your lordship to remain with me till they meet together.

LAFEU

85 Madam, I was thinking with what manners I might safely be admitted.

COUNTESS

You need but plead your honourable privilege.

LAFEU

Lady, of that I have made a bold charter; but I thank my God it holds yet.

90

Re-enter Clown

CLOWN

O madam, yonder's my lord your son with a patch of velvet on's face: whether there be a scar under't or no, the velvet knows; but 'tis a goodly patch of velvet: his left cheek is a cheek of two pile and a half, but his right cheek is worn bare.

95

LAFEU

A scar nobly got, or a noble scar, is a good livery of honour; so belike is that.

CLOWN

But it is your carbonadoed face.

LAFEU

Let us go see your son, I pray you: I long to talk with the young noble soldier.

100

CLOWN

Faith there's a dozen of 'em, with delicate fine hats and most courteous feathers, which bow the head and nod at every man.

Exeunt

way to end this displeasure that the king has developed against your son. How does your ladyship like this?

COUNTESS

It makes me very content, my lord, and I hope it will come to pass happily.

LAFEU

His highness comes directly from Marseilles. He's in as good physical shape as when he was thirty. He'll be here tomorrow unless I'm deceived by a reporter who has rarely failed me in his information.

COUNTESS

It makes me happy to hope that I will see the king before I die. I have letters that say my son will be here tonight. I'll request that your lordship will stay with me until the king and Bertram are together.

LAFEU

Madam, I was wondering what I'd need to say to be admitted to that meeting.

COUNTESS

You only have to remind the kingdom of the privilege that your honor deserves.

LAFEU

My lady, I've been as bold as I would dare in saying that, but I thank God it hasn't failed me yet.

The Clown re-enters.

CLOWN

Oh, madam, my lord your son is nearby wearing a [velvet patch](#) ⁹ on his face. Whether there's a scar under it or not, the velvet knows the truth, but it's a good-looking patch of velvet. His left cheek is wearing velvet of two pile and a half [quality](#) ¹⁰, but his right cheek has nothing on it.

⁹ Velvet patches were used to cover scars and incisions made to remove sores from syphilis.

¹⁰ The best and thickest velvet was three pile so two pile and a half would be quite thick.

LAFEU

A scar he received nobly, or a noble scar, is a good sign of honor. This probably is too.

CLOWN

But it is your slashed face.

LAFEU

Let's go see your son, I beg you. I'm longing to talk with the young noble soldier.

CLOWN

Wow, there's a dozen of them, with delicate, fine hats and fancy feathers, which weigh down their heads and look like they're nodding at every man.

All exit.

Act 5, Scene 1

Shakespeare

Enter HELENA, Widow, and DIANA, with two Attendants

Shakescleare Translation

HELENA, WIDOW, and DIANA enter, along with two Attendants.

HELENA

But this exceeding posting day and night
Must wear your spirits low; we cannot help it:
But since you have made the days and nights as one,
To wear your gentle limbs in my affairs,
5 Be bold you do so grow in my requital
As nothing can unroot you. In happy time;

Enter a Gentleman

HELENA

This man may help me to his majesty's ear,
If he would spend his power. God save you, sir.

GENTLEMAN

10 And you.

HELENA

Sir, I have seen you in the court of France.

GENTLEMAN

I have been sometimes there.

HELENA

I do presume, sir, that you are not fallen
From the report that goes upon your goodness;
15 An therefore, goaded with most sharp occasions,
Which lay nice manners by, I put you to
The use of your own virtues, for the which
I shall continue thankful.

GENTLEMAN

What's your will?

HELENA

20 That it will please you
To give this poor petition to the king,
And aid me with that store of power you have
To come into his presence.

GENTLEMAN

The king's not here.

HELENA

25 Not here, sir!

GENTLEMAN

Not, indeed:
He hence removed last night and with more haste
Than is his use.

WIDOW

Lord, how we lose our pains!

HELENA

30 All's well that ends well yet,
Though time seem so adverse and means unfit.
I do beseech you, whither is he gone?

GENTLEMAN

Marry, as I take it, to Rousillon;
Whither I am going.

HELENA

35 I do beseech you, sir,
Since you are like to see the king before me,
Commend the paper to his gracious hand,
Which I presume shall render you no blame
But rather make you thank your pains for it.
40 I will come after you with what good speed
Our means will make us means.

HELENA

But walking constantly day and night must be tiring you
out. We can't help it. Since we've been treating the days
and nights like they're all the same, and you've been
wearing out your gentle bodies just for my sake, rest
assured that I am more and more in your debt and nothing
will ever undo that. Oh, good timing!

A gentleman enters.

HELENA

This man might help me to reach the king if he's willing to
lend a hand. God bless you, sir.

GENTLEMAN

And you.

HELENA

Sir, I have seen you at the French court.

GENTLEMAN

I have been there sometimes.

HELENA

I assume, sir, that you're still maintaining your good
reputation. If that's true, since I'm in a difficult situation
that forces me to forget my manners, I'll ask you to act in
your typical virtuous way, for which I'd be forever grateful.

GENTLEMAN

How can I help?

HELENA

If you could please give this little letter to the king, and help
me with whatever power you have to visit him in person.

GENTLEMAN

The king's not here.

HELENA

Not here, sir?

GENTLEMAN

Indeed not. He just left last night and more quickly than he
usually does.

WIDOW

Lord, we've been exhausting ourselves for nothing!

HELENA

All's well that ends well still, even though our timing and
methods seem to fail us.

[To the Gentleman] I beg you, where's the king gone?

GENTLEMAN

Well, as far as I know, to Roussillon. I'm going there too.

HELENA

I beg you, sir, since you'll probably see the king before I do,
bring this paper to his kind hand. I'm pretty sure that doing
so won't get you in trouble but will make you glad you did
it. I'll come after you as fast as we're able.

GENTLEMAN

This I'll do for you.

HELENA

And you shall find yourself to be well thank'd,
Whate'er falls more. We must to horse again.

45 Go, go, provide.

Exeunt

GENTLEMAN

I'll do this for you.

HELENA

And you'll find yourself to be well thanked, whatever else
happens. We must ride our horses again.

[To the Attendant] Go, go, get the horses.

All exit.

Act 5, Scene 2

Shakespeare

Enter Clown, and PAROLLES, following

PAROLLES

Good Monsieur Lavatch, give my Lord Lafeu this
letter: I have ere now, sir, been better known to
you, when I have held familiarity with fresher
clothes; but I am now, sir, muddied in fortune's
mood, and smell somewhat strong of her strong
displeasure.

CLOWN

Truly, fortune's displeasure is but sluttish, if it
smell so strongly as thou speakest of: I will
henceforth eat no fish of fortune's buttering.
Prithee, allow the wind.

PAROLLES

Nay, you need not to stop your nose, sir; I spake
but by a metaphor.

CLOWN

Indeed, sir, if your metaphor stink, I will stop my
nose; or against any man's metaphor. Prithee, get
thee further.

PAROLLES

Pray you, sir, deliver me this paper.

CLOWN

Foh! prithee, stand away: a paper from fortune's
close-stool to give to a nobleman! Look, here he
comes himself.

Enter LAFEU

CLOWN

Here is a purr of fortune's, sir, or of fortune's
cat,—but not a musk-cat,—that has fallen into the
unclean fishpond of her displeasure, and, as he
says, is muddied withal: pray you, sir, use the
carp as you may; for he looks like a poor, decayed,
ingenious, foolish, rascally knave. I do pity his
distress in my similes of comfort and leave him to
your lordship.

Exit

PAROLLES

My lord, I am a man whom fortune hath cruelly
scratched.

LAFEU

And what would you have me to do? 'Tis too late to
pare her nails now. Wherein have you played the

Shakesclore Translation

The clown enters with PAROLLES following behind him.

PAROLLES

Good Monsieur Lavatach, give my lord Lafeu this letter. You
knew me before, sir, when I wore fresher clothes. Now, sir, I
have been muddied by fortune turning against me, and so I
smell somewhat like fortune's fool.

CLOWN

Well, fortune in a bad mood must be quite dirty if it smells
as strongly as you do. I will never again eat any fish that
fortune has buttered. Let's air you out.

PAROLLES

No, you don't need to hold your nose sir. I was just using a
metaphor.

CLOWN

Well, sir, since your metaphor stinks, I will hold my nose. I'd
hold my nose at any man's metaphor. Please, stand further
away from me.

PAROLLES

I hope, sir, that you'll deliver this note.

CLOWN

Pffh! Stand further away. A note from fortune's chamber pot
to give to a nobleman! Look, here he comes himself.

LAFEU enters.

CLOWN

Sir, here is fortune's rogue 🐱, a plaything of fortune's
cat—but not a sweet-smelling cat,—who has fallen into the
dirty fishpond of fortune's displeasure. And, as he says, is
muddied from the fall. I ask you, sir, use this fish 🐟 as you
want. He looks like a poor, decayed, clever, foolish, rascally
rogue. In my own state of something like comfort, I do take
pity on how distressed he is, and I leave him with your
lordship.

The Clown exits.

PAROLLES

My lord, I am a man who has been cruelly scratched by
fortune.

LAFEU

And what would have me do about that? It's too late to trim
Fortune's nails now. What have you done to Fortune to

🐱 A "purr" was an early modern
card game's name for the "knave"
card. The clown's use of "purr" leads
to the stream of cat references in this
speech.

🐟 A carp is a type of fish commonly
found in manure ponds, as well as a
term for someone who talks a lot.

35 knave with fortune, that she should scratch you, who
of herself is a good lady and would not have knaves
thrive long under her? There's a quart d'ecu for
you: let the justices make you and fortune friends:
I am for other business.

PAROLLES

I beseech your honour to hear me one single word.

LAFEU

40 You beg a single penny more: come, you shall ha't;
save your word.

PAROLLES

My name, my good lord, is Parolles.

LAFEU

You beg more than 'word,' then. Cox my passion!
give me your hand. How does your drum?

PAROLLES

O my good lord, you were the first that found me!

LAFEU

45 Was I, in sooth? and I was the first that lost thee.

PAROLLES

It lies in you, my lord, to bring me in some grace,
for you did bring me out.

LAFEU

50 Out upon thee, knave! dost thou put upon me at once
both the office of God and the devil? One brings
thee in grace and the other brings thee out.

Trumpets sound

LAFEU

55 The king's coming; I know by his trumpets. Sirrah,
inquire further after me; I had talk of you last
night: though you are a fool and a knave, you shall
eat; go to, follow.

PAROLLES

I praise God for you.

Exeunt

make her scratch you? Fortune's a good lady and she
wouldn't allow rogues to have good fortune for very long.
Here's a silver coin for you. I hope you and fortune can
become friends. I have other things to deal with.

PAROLLES

I beg your honor to listen to one single word from me.

LAFEU


You beg just a single penny more from me. Come, then, you
shall have it. Don't bother with your single word.

PAROLLES

My name is Parolles, my good lord.

LAFEU

You beg more than just one "word" then. By God! Give
me your hand. How is your drum?

 "Paroles" means "words" in French so Parolles' name includes more than one word.

PAROLLES

Oh, my good lord, you were the first man that found me
out!

LAFEU


Was I, really? And I was the first man that lost you too.

PAROLLES

You're the only man, my lord, who can see that I find favor
with the court since you brought me out of favor when you
saw through me.

LAFEU

How dare you, you rascal! Do you claim that I do the work
of both God and the devil at the same time? One is bringing
you into favor and the other one's bringing you out of it.

 Shakespeare's use of "grace" to mean "favor" explains Lafeu connecting the conversation to God and the devil.

A trumpet fanfare plays.

LAFEU

The king's coming. This is his fanfare. Sir, ask for me later. I
heard people talking about you last night. Even though
you're a fool and a rogue, I'll make sure you eat. Go along,
follow.

PAROLLES

I praise God for you.

They exit.

Act 5, Scene 3

Shakespeare

Flourish. Enter KING, COUNTESS, LAFEU, the two French Lords, with Attendants

KING

We lost a jewel of her; and our esteem
Was made much poorer by it: but your son,
As mad in folly, lack'd the sense to know
Her estimation home.

Shakesclare Translation

A trumpet fanfare plays. The KING, COUNTESS, LAFEU, the two French Lords, and attendants enter.

KING

In losing her, we lost a jewel, and I'm worth much less from
losing her. But your son, as if he was mad, didn't have the
sense to know how worthy she was.

COUNTESS

5 'Tis past, my liege;
And I beseech your majesty to make it
Natural rebellion, done i' the blaze of youth;
When oil and fire, too strong for reason's force,
O'erbears it and burns on.

KING

10 My honour'd lady,
I have forgiven and forgotten all;
Though my revenges were high bent upon him,
And watch'd the time to shoot.

LAFEU

This I must say,
15 But first I beg my pardon, the young lord
Did to his majesty, his mother and his lady
Offence of mighty note; but to himself
The greatest wrong of all. He lost a wife
Whose beauty did astonish the survey
20 Of richest eyes, whose words all ears took captive,
Whose dear perfection hearts that scorn'd to serve
Humbly call'd mistress.

KING

Praising what is lost
Makes the remembrance dear. Well, call him hither;
25 We are reconciled, and the first view shall kill
All repetition: let him not ask our pardon;
The nature of his great offence is dead,
And deeper than oblivion we do bury
The incensing relics of it: let him approach,
30 A stranger, no offender; and inform him
So 'tis our will he should.

GENTLEMAN

I shall, my liege.

Exit

KING

What says he to your daughter? have you spoke?

LAFEU

35 All that he is hath reference to your highness.

KING

Then shall we have a match. I have letters sent me
That set him high in fame.

Enter BERTRAM

LAFEU

He looks well on't.

KING

40 I am not a day of season,
For thou mayst see a sunshine and a hail
In me at once: but to the brightest beams
Distracted clouds give way; so stand thou forth;
The time is fair again.

BERTRAM

45 My high-repented blames,
Dear sovereign, pardon to me.

KING

All is whole;
Not one word more of the consumed time.
Let's take the instant by the forward top;
50 For we are old, and on our quick'st decrees
The inaudible and noiseless foot of Time

COUNTESS

It's over, my lord. I beg your majesty to think of it as natural,
youthful rebellion, like when oil and fire refuse to listen to
reason, and burn in spite of what they're told.

KING

My honored lady, I have forgiven and forgotten everything,
though I was ready to revenge her death on him and was
just waiting for the right time.

LAFEU

I have to say this, but first I beg pardon. The young lord
mightily affronted his king, his mother, and his wife, but he
did the greatest wrong of all to himself. He lost a wife whose
beauty astonished all the richest eyes in the land, whose
words took all ears as their captives, and whose perfection
made previously scornful men humbly serve her.

KING

When we praise what we've lost, it makes remembering
even more dear to us. Well, call him in. We're friends again,
and once we're reunited, we won't need to repeat this first
reunion. Don't let him ask for my forgiveness. The woman
he wronged is dead, and now I bury the memory of his
offenses deeper than you can imagine. Let him approach as
a stranger, not as an enemy. Inform him it's my will that he
should do so.

GENTLEMAN

I will, my lord.

The gentleman exits.

KING

What does he say to your daughter? Have you spoken with
him?

LAFEU

All that he has said has focused on your highness.

KING

Then we shall have a match made. I've had letters sent to
me that put him among the most famous.

BERTRAM enters.

LAFEU

He looks well considering.


KING


My moods aren't like just one season. You might see
sunshine and hail in me at the same time. Clouds
eventually part and give way to bright sunbeams, though.
So come forward, the sun is shining on you again.

BERTRAM

Dear king, pardon me for my wrongs that I greatly repent.

KING

You're fully pardoned. Don't speak one word more about
the time that's passed. Let's seize the day. I'm old, and the
silent  foot of Father Time appears before I can get
anything done. You remember this lord's daughter?

 The King's "inaudible and noiseless" is an example of the literary device called hendiadys, the use of two synonyms connected by an "and"

Steals ere we can effect them . You remember
The daughter of this lord?

BERTRAM

Admiringly, my liege, at first
55 I stuck my choice upon her, ere my heart
Durst make too bold a herald of my tongue
Where the impression of mine eye infixing,
Contempt his scornful perspective did lend me,
Which warp'd the line of every other favour;
60 Scorn'd a fair colour, or express'd it stolen;
Extended or contracted all proportions
To a most hideous object: thence it came
That she whom all men praised and whom myself,
Since I have lost, have loved, was in mine eye
65 The dust that did offend it.

KING

Well excused:
That thou didst love her, strikes some scores away
From the great compt: but love that comes too late,
Like a remorseful pardon slowly carried,
70 To the great sender turns a sour offence,
Crying, 'That's good that's gone.' Our rash faults
Make trivial price of serious things we have,
Not knowing them until we know their grave:
Oft our displeasures, to ourselves unjust,
75 Destroy our friends and after weep their dust
Our own love waking cries to see what's done,
While shame full late sleeps out the afternoon.
Be this sweet Helen's knell, and now forget her.
Send forth your amorous token for fair Maudlin:
80 The main consents are had; and here we'll stay
To see our widower's second marriage-day.

COUNTESS

Which better than the first, O dear heaven, bless!
Or, ere they meet, in me, O nature, cesse!

LAFEU

Come on, my son, in whom my house's name
85 Must be digested, give a favour from you
To sparkle in the spirits of my daughter,
That she may quickly come.

BERTRAM gives a ring

LAFEU

By my old beard,
And every hair that's on't, Helen, that's dead,
90 Was a sweet creature: such a ring as this,
The last that e'er I took her at court,
I saw upon her finger.

BERTRAM

Hers it was not.

KING

Now, pray you, let me see it; for mine eye,
95 While I was speaking, oft was fasten'd to't.
This ring was mine; and, when I gave it Helen,
I bade her, if her fortunes ever stood
Necessitated to help, that by this token
I would relieve her. Had you that craft, to reave
100 her
Of what should stead her most?

BERTRAM

My gracious sovereign,
Howe'er it pleases you to take it so,
The ring was never hers.

to convey the same idea. You can see the same thing in Hamlet's "book and volume of my brain."

BERTRAM

I admired her, my lord, and I originally wanted to marry her. Before I could express my love for her, I started to scorn the faces of all other women. I'd say that fair faces were ugly or just looked nice because of makeup. I thought of all other women's forms except this lord's daughter as hideous. That's why, when my wife, praised by all men and loved by me myself since I lost her, looked to me like dust in my eye.

KING

That's a good excuse. Knowing that you did love her frees you from some of your debt. But love that comes too late, like a pardon delivered too late to the gallows, is an offense to God. What good does it do to cry, "What's gone was good!" Our unthinking faults make us undervalue the worthy things we have. Doesn't it always seem to go that you don't know what you've got till it's gone? Often our scornfulness is unjust to ourselves. It destroys our friends and then, after we've mourned them, our love for them finally surfaces and makes us cry when we realize what we've done. We don't feel shame until it's too late. Memorialize sweet Helena and now forget her. Send your tokens of love to fair Maudlin, Lafeu's daughter. Consent has been given for the union and so here today we'll see this widower's second marriage.

COUNTESS

Which I hope will go better than the first, oh dear heaven, bless! If not, I hope I die before they meet!

LAFEU

Come on, my son-in-law-to-be, you'll soon take hold of my estate. Give a present to ignite my daughter's love so she will quickly come to you.

BERTRAM gives a ring to LAFEU.

LAFEU

By my old beard and every hair in it, the late Helena was a sweet creature. The last time I saw her at court, I saw a ring just like this on her finger.

BERTRAM

It wasn't hers.

KING

Hold on, let me see it. While I was speaking just now, I couldn't stop staring at it. This ring was mine. When I gave it to Helena, I instructed her that if she ever needed my help, to send me the ring and I would help her. Have you been so crafty as to steal the thing from her that would have been her greatest help?

BERTRAM

My gracious king, whatever you think you know, the ring was never hers.

COUNTESS

105 Son, on my life,
I have seen her wear it; and she reckon'd it
At her life's rate.

LAFEU

I am sure I saw her wear it.

BERTRAM

You are deceived, my lord; she never saw it:
110 In Florence was it from a casement thrown me,
Wrapp'd in a paper, which contain'd the name
Of her that threw it: noble she was, and thought
I stood engaged: but when I had subscribed
To mine own fortune and inform'd her fully
115 I could not answer in that course of honour
As she had made the overture, she ceased
In heavy satisfaction and would never
Receive the ring again.

KING

Plutus himself,
120 That knows the tinct and multiplying medicine,
Hath not in nature's mystery more science
Than I have in this ring: 'twas mine, 'twas Helen's,
Whoever gave it you. Then, if you know
That you are well acquainted with yourself,
125 Confess 'twas hers, and by what rough enforcement
You got it from her: she call'd the saints to surety
That she would never put it from her finger,
Unless she gave it to yourself in bed,
Where you have never come, or sent it us
130 Upon her great disaster.

BERTRAM

She never saw it.

KING

Thou speak'st it falsely, as I love mine honour;
And makest conjectural fears to come into me
Which I would fain shut out. If it should prove
135 That thou art so inhuman,—'twill not prove so;—
And yet I know not: thou didst hate her deadly,
And she is dead; which nothing, but to close
Her eyes myself, could win me to believe,
More than to see this ring. Take him away.

Guards seize BERTRAM

KING

140 My fore-past proofs, howe'er the matter fall,
Shall tax my fears of little vanity,
Having vainly fear'd too little. Away with him!
We'll sift this matter further.

BERTRAM

If you shall prove
145 This ring was ever hers, you shall as easy
Prove that I husbanded her bed in Florence,
Where yet she never was.

Exit, guarded

KING

I am wrapp'd in dismal thinkings.

Enter a Gentleman

GENTLEMAN

150 Gracious sovereign,
Whether I have been to blame or no, I know not:
Here's a petition from a Florentine,
Who hath for four or five removes come short

COUNTESS

Son, on my life, I've seen her wear it. She priced it as highly
as her life.

LAFEU

I am sure I saw her wear it.

BERTRAM

You are wrong, my lord. She never saw it. It was thrown to
me out of a window in Florence. It was wrapped in a paper
with the name of the lady who threw it written on it. She
was noble and thought we were engaged, but when I had
explained the situation and told her that I couldn't marry
her, since she had brought that up, she refused to
interact with me and wouldn't take back the ring.

KING

Plutus himself, the god of riches who knows how to turn
metals into gold, doesn't know more about the science of
nature than I know about this ring. It was mine and it was
Helena's, regardless of who gave it to you. Then, if you
know what's required of you, confess that it was hers, and
how you took it from her by force. She swore to the saints
that she would never take it off her finger unless she gave it
to you in bed, where you've never been with her, or unless
she sent it to me if there was some great catastrophe.

BERTRAM

She never saw it.

KING

That's a lie, by my honor. You're making me fear terrible
things which I wish I'd never thought of. If it is proven that
you could be so inhuman—it won't prove to be so—and yet
I can't be sure. You hated her and now she's dead. Nothing
could make me believe that she's dead more than seeing
this ring unless I had been present at her deathbed myself.
Take him away.

The guards seize BERTRAM.

KING

Given the evidence I already have, whatever the truth turns
out to be, I won't be thought to have overreacted, given
that I already trusted you too much. Away with him! We'll
investigate this matter further.

BERTRAM

If you can prove that the ring was ever hers, you can prove
as easily that I slept with her in bed in Florence, where she's
never been.

He exits, guarded.

KING

I am overwhelmed by terrible thoughts.

A Gentleman enters.

GENTLEMAN

Gracious king, I don't know if this is a bad time. Here's a
petition from a Florentine who's followed you but has
arrived too late four or five times to give it to you herself. I
took on the task, persuaded by the fair words and

To tender it herself. I undertook it,
 155 Vanquish'd thereto by the fair grace and speech
 Of the poor suppliant, who by this I know
 Is here attending: her business looks in her
 With an importing visage; and she told me,
 In a sweet verbal brief, it did concern
 160 Your highness with herself.

KING

[Reads] Upon his many protestations to marry me
 when his wife was dead, I blush to say it, he won
 me. Now is the Count Rousillon a widower: his vows
 are forfeited to me, and my honour's paid to him. He
 165 stole from Florence, taking no leave, and I follow
 him to his country for justice: grant it me, O
 king! in you it best lies; otherwise a seducer
 flourishes, and a poor maid is undone.
 DIANA CAPILET.

LAFEU

170 I will buy me a son-in-law in a fair, and toll for
 this: I'll none of him.

KING

The heavens have thought well on thee Lafeu,
 To bring forth this discovery. Seek these suitors:
 Go speedily and bring again the count.
 175 I am afraid the life of Helen, lady,
 Was foully snatch'd.

COUNTESS

Now, justice on the doers!

Re-enter BERTRAM, guarded

KING

I wonder, sir, sith wives are monsters to you,
 180 And that you fly them as you swear them lordship,
 Yet you desire to marry.

Enter Widow and DIANA

KING

What woman's that?

DIANA

185 I am, my lord, a wretched Florentine,
 Derived from the ancient Capilet:
 My suit, as I do understand, you know,
 And therefore know how far I may be pitied.

WIDOW

I am her mother, sir, whose age and honour
 190 Both suffer under this complaint we bring,
 And both shall cease, without your remedy.

KING

Come hither, count; do you know these women?

BERTRAM

My lord, I neither can nor will deny
 But that I know them: do they charge me further?

DIANA

195 Why do you look so strange upon your wife?

BERTRAM

She's none of mine, my lord.

DIANA

If you shall marry,
 You give away this hand, and that is mine;
 You give away heaven's vows, and those are mine;
 200

behaviors of the poor woman, who is waiting outside. She
 looks like she means business. She told me in person that it
 has something to do with your highness and herself.

KING

[Reading] "After he told me many times that he would
 marry me when his wife was dead, I blush to say that I gave
 myself to him. Now the Count Rousillon is a widower. He
 broke his vows to me and I've already given my honor away
 to him. He fled from Florence without saying goodbye, and
 I've followed him to his country for justice. Grant me justice,
 oh king! You're the only one who can. Otherwise, a seducer
 will live happily and a poor maid will be ruined. Diana
 Capilet."

LAFEU

I will buy myself a son-in-law at a fair and sell this one. I
 don't want anything to do with him.

KING

The heavens have been kind to you, Lafeu, to reveal this
 information. Find these people who want to speak to me.
 Go quickly and bring the count back in. Lady, I am afraid
 that Helena was the victim of foul play.

COUNTESS

Now, may the perpetrators be brought to justice!

BERTRAM re-enters, guarded.

KING

I'm surprised, sir, since wives are like monsters to you and
 you flee from them as soon as you make your vows to them,
 that you would want to marry again.

The Widow and DIANA enter.

KING

What woman is that?

DIANA

I am, my lord, a wretched Florentine of the ancient Capilet
 family. You know why I'm here, I've been told, and therefore
 you know how much I deserve to be pitied.

WIDOW

I am her mother, sir. I'm too old for this shock and my honor
 has taken a hit because of this. I'll lose both my life and
 honor if you don't help us.

KING

Come here, count. Do you know these women?

BERTRAM

My lord, I can't and won't deny that I know them. Do you
 they accuse me of anything else?

DIANA

Why do you look upon your wife like you're a stranger?

BERTRAM

She's not my wife, my lord.

DIANA

If you marry someone, you'll give away your hand that
 belongs to me. You'll give away heaven's vows and those
 belong to me. You'll give yourself away and you are known

You give away myself, which is known mine;
For I by vow am so embodied yours,
That she which marries you must marry me,
Either both or none.

LAFEU

205 Your reputation comes too short for my daughter; you
are no husband for her.

BERTRAM

My lord, this is a fond and desperate creature,
Whom sometime I have laugh'd with: let your highness
Lay a more noble thought upon mine honour
Than for to think that I would sink it here.

KING

210 Sir, for my thoughts, you have them ill to friend
Till your deeds gain them: fairer prove your honour
Than in my thought it lies.

DIANA

215 Good my lord,
Ask him upon his oath, if he does think
He had not my virginity.

KING

What say'st thou to her?

BERTRAM

She's impudent, my lord,
And was a common gamester to the camp.

DIANA

220 He does me wrong, my lord; if I were so,
He might have bought me at a common price:
Do not believe him. O, behold this ring,
Whose high respect and rich validity
Did lack a parallel; yet for all that
He gave it to a commoner o' the camp,
225 If I be one.

COUNTESS

230 He blushes, and 'tis it:
Of six preceding ancestors, that gem,
Confer'd by testament to the sequent issue,
Hath it been owed and worn. This is his wife;
That ring's a thousand proofs.

KING

Methought you said
You saw one here in court could witness it.

DIANA

I did, my lord, but loath am to produce
So bad an instrument: his name's Parolles.

LAFEU

235 I saw the man to-day, if man he be.

KING

Find him, and bring him hither.

Exit an Attendant

BERTRAM

240 What of him?
He's quoted for a most perfidious slave,
With all the spots o' the world tax'd and debosh'd;
Whose nature sickens but to speak a truth.
Am I or that or this for what he'll utter,
That will speak any thing?

to belong to me. For, by your vow, I am part of your body. A woman who marries you must also then marry me. It's both of us or neither of us.

LAFEU

Your reputation is much too bad to marry my daughter. You won't be marrying her.

BERTRAM

My lord, this is a foolish and desperate creature who I laughed with occasionally. I hope your highness would more nobly trust that I've been honorable than to think that I'd give my honor away to this woman.

KING

Sir, don't look for my thoughts to be friendly to you until your actions have earned it. Prove yourself to be more honorable than I think you are.

DIANA

My good lord, ask him to swear that he didn't take my virginity.

KING

What do you say to her?

BERTRAM

She's shameless, my lord, and was a common whore for the soldiers.

DIANA

He wrongs me, my lord. If I were what he says, he might have bought my love cheaply. Don't believe him. Oh, look at this ring, that has no equal in respect and richness. For all that value, you think he gave it to a common army whore, if that's what you think I am?

COUNTESS

He blushes and that seals the deal. For six generations, that gem, required by the wills and testaments to be passed down to the next heir, has been worn by our family. This is his wife. That ring gives the proof a thousand times.

KING

I thought you said you saw someone in the court who could be a witness.

DIANA

I did, my lord, but I hate to produce such a bad man. His name's Parolles.

LAFEU

I saw the man today, if he is a man.

KING

Find him, and bring him here.

An Attendant exits.

BERTRAM

You'll believe Parolles? He's known to be a lying rascal as disgraced and horrible as the worst blemishes in human history. It would make him ill to tell the truth just once. Are you going to make up your mind about me based on what he says when he'll say anything?

KING

She hath that ring of yours.

BERTRAM

245 I think she has: certain it is I liked her,
And boarded her i' the wanton way of youth:
She knew her distance and did angle for me,
Madding my eagerness with her restraint,
As all impediments in fancy's course
250 Are motives of more fancy; and, in fine,
Her infinite cunning, with her modern grace,
Subdued me to her rate: she got the ring;
And I had that which any inferior might
At market-price have bought.

DIANA

255 I must be patient:
You, that have turn'd off a first so noble wife,
May justly diet me. I pray you yet;
Since you lack virtue, I will lose a husband;
Send for your ring, I will return it home,
260 And give me mine again.

BERTRAM

I have it not.

KING

What ring was yours, I pray you?

DIANA

Sir, much like
The same upon your finger.

KING

265 Know you this ring? this ring was his of late.

DIANA

And this was it I gave him, being abed.

KING

The story then goes false, you threw it him
Out of a casement.

DIANA

I have spoke the truth.
270

Enter PAROLLES

BERTRAM

My lord, I do confess the ring was hers.

KING

You boggle shrewdly, every feather starts you.
Is this the man you speak of?

DIANA

Ay, my lord.

KING

275 Tell me, sirrah, but tell me true, I charge you,
Not fearing the displeasure of your master,
Which on your just proceeding I'll keep off,
By him and by this woman here what know you?

PAROLLES

280 So please your majesty, my master hath been an
honourable gentleman: tricks he hath had in him,
which gentlemen have.

KING

Come, come, to the purpose: did he love this woman?

KING

She has your ring.

BERTRAM

I think he does. It's true that I liked her, and I made
advances towards her like youths always do. She knew how
far apart we were socially and tried to win me, making me
more eager by playing hard-to-get, as all obstacles to desire
tend to make the desire greater. In short, her endless
cunning, with her common charm, made me give her what
she wanted: she got the ring. And I had something from her
that any lower-class man could buy from her more cheaply.

DIANA

I must be patient. If you've gotten rid of your first noble wife
so easily, you'll obviously try to get rid of me too. I plead
with you still. Since you have no virtue at all, I will lose a
husband. Call for your ring, I'll put it back on and get out of
here.

BERTRAM

I don't have it.

KING

What ring belonged to you, can I ask?

DIANA

Sir, a ring very similar to the one on your finger.

KING

You know this ring? This ring belonged to him recently.

DIANA

And this was the ring I gave him when we were in bed.

KING

This story must be false. You threw it to him out of a
window.

DIANA

I have spoken the truth.

PAROLLES enters.

BERTRAM

My lord, I confess that the ring was hers.

KING

You tell lies manically, every change in the story startles
you. Is this the man you mean?

DIANA

Yes, my lord.

KING

Tell me, sir, but tell me the truth, I command you. Don't be
afraid of making your master mad. I'll deal with that if you
answer honestly. What do you know about him and this
woman here?

PAROLLES

If it please your majesty, my master has been an honorable
gentleman. He's only done things that gentlemen do.

KING

Come, come, answer my question: did he love this woman?

PAROLLES

Faith, sir, he did love her; but how?

KING

How, I pray you?

PAROLLES

285 He did love her, sir, as a gentleman loves a woman.

KING

How is that?

PAROLLES

He loved her, sir, and loved her not.

KING

As thou art a knave, and no knave. What an equivocal companion is this!

PAROLLES

290 I am a poor man, and at your majesty's command.

LAFEU

He's a good drum, my lord, but a naughty orator.

DIANA

Do you know he promised me marriage?

PAROLLES

Faith, I know more than I'll speak.

KING

But wilt thou not speak all thou knowest?

PAROLLES

295 Yes, so please your majesty. I did go between them, as I said; but more than that, he loved her: for indeed he was mad for her, and talked of Satan and of Limbo and of Furies and I know not what: yet I was in that credit with them at that time that I
300 knew of their going to bed, and of other motions, as promising her marriage, and things which would derive me ill will to speak of; therefore I will not speak what I know.

KING

305 Thou hast spoken all already, unless thou canst say they are married: but thou art too fine in thy evidence; therefore stand aside.
This ring, you say, was yours?

DIANA

Ay, my good lord.

KING

Where did you buy it? or who gave it you?

DIANA

310 It was not given me, nor I did not buy it.

KING

Who lent it you?

DIANA

It was not lent me neither.

KING

Where did you find it, then?

PAROLLES

Well, sir, he did love her. But how did he love her?

KING

How, will you tell us?

PAROLLES

Sir, he loved her as a gentleman loves a woman.

KING

How is that?

PAROLLES

Sir, he loved her and loved her not.

KING

Just like you're a rogue and not a rogue. What a rambling companion this man is!

PAROLLES

I am a poor man, and at your majesty's command.

LAFEU

He beats the drum, well, my lord, but he speaks naughtily.

DIANA

Do you know he promised me marriage?

PAROLLES

Well, I know more than I'll say.

KING

You won't say all you know?

PAROLLES

Yes, if it please your majesty. I did go between them as I said. Beyond that, he loved her. He was crazy for her and he talked in his passion about Satan and Limbo and the Furies and I don't know what else. I was still friends with them when I knew that they had gone to bed together, and that other things had happened, like him promising her marriage, and things which would make you angry to hear from me. Therefore I won't say what I know.

KING

You've said everything I need to know already unless you can say that they are married. But you are clear enough in your evidence. Therefore, stand aside.

[To DIANA] This ring was yours, you say?

DIANA

Yes, my good lord.

KING

Where did you buy it? Or who gave it to you?

DIANA

It was not given to me and I did not buy it.

KING

Who lent it to you?

DIANA

It wasn't lent to me either.

KING

Where did you find it, then?

DIANA

I found it not.

KING

315 If it were yours by none of all these ways,
How could you give it him?

DIANA

I never gave it him.

LAFEU

This woman's an easy glove, my lord; she goes off and on at pleasure.

KING

320 This ring was mine; I gave it his first wife.

DIANA

It might be yours or hers, for aught I know.

KING

Take her away; I do not like her now;
To prison with her: and away with him.
Unless thou tell'st me where thou hadst this ring,

325 Thou diest within this hour.

DIANA

I'll never tell you.

KING

Take her away.

DIANA

I'll put in bail, my liege.

KING

I think thee now some common customer.

DIANA

330 By Jove, if ever I knew man, 'twas you.

KING

Wherefore hast thou accused him all this while?

DIANA

Because he's guilty, and he is not guilty:
He knows I am no maid, and he'll swear to't;
I'll swear I am a maid, and he knows not.

335 Great king, I am no strumpet, by my life;
I am either maid, or else this old man's wife.

KING

She does abuse our ears: to prison with her.

DIANA

Good mother, fetch my bail. Stay, royal sir:

*Exit Widow***DIANA**

340 The jeweller that owes the ring is sent for,
And he shall surety me. But for this lord,
Who hath abused me, as he knows himself,
Though yet he never harm'd me, here I quit him:
He knows himself my bed he hath defiled;
345 And at that time he got his wife with child:
Dead though she be, she feels her young one kick:
So there's my riddle: one that's dead is quick:
And now behold the meaning.

*Re-enter Widow, with HELENA***DIANA**

I didn't find it.

KING

If you didn't get it any of these ways, how did you have it to give it to him?

DIANA

I never gave it to him.

LAFEU

This woman's like a loose glove, my lord. She slips off and on, going back and forth, without warning.

KING

This ring belonged to me. I gave it to his first wife.

DIANA

It could be yours or it could be hers for all that I know.

KING

Take her away. I don't like her anymore. Take her to prison and away with him. Unless you tell me where you got this ring, you'll die within the hour.

DIANA

I'll never tell you.

KING

Take her away.

DIANA

I'll post my bail, my lord.

KING

Now I think you probably are a whore.

DIANA

By God, if I've ever slept with a man, it was you.

KING

Why have you accused him of sleeping with you all this time then?

DIANA

Because he's guilty and he's not guilty. He knows I'm not a virgin and he'll swear to it. I swear I am a virgin and he doesn't know it. Great king, I'm no loose woman, by my life. I am either a virgin, or else this old man's wife.

KING

She just talks nonsense to us. To prison with her.

DIANA

Good mother, get my bail. Hold one moment, royal sir.

*The Widow exits.***DIANA**

The jeweler that the ring came from is coming, and he will pay my bail. As for this lord, who has abused me, as he's said himself, although he's never yet harmed me, this is the last I'll say of him: He knows he's defiled my bed, and when he did so, he got his wife pregnant. Even though she's dead, she feels her child kick inside her. So there's my riddle: someone who's dead is pregnant. And now you'll see what I mean.

The WIDOW re-enters with HELENA.

KING

Is there no exorcist

350 Beguiles the truer office of mine eyes?
Is't real that I see?

HELENA

No, my good lord;
'Tis but the shadow of a wife you see,
The name and not the thing.

BERTRAM

355 Both, both. O, pardon!

HELENA

O my good lord, when I was like this maid,
I found you wondrous kind. There is your ring;
And, look you, here's your letter; this it says:
'When from my finger you can get this ring
360 And are by me with child,' etc. This is done:
Will you be mine, now you are doubly won?

BERTRAM

If she, my liege, can make me know this clearly,
I'll love her dearly, ever, ever dearly.

HELENA

If it appear not plain and prove untrue,
365 Deadly divorce step between me and you!
O my dear mother, do I see you living?

LAFEU

Mine eyes smell onions; I shall weep anon:

LAFEU

Good Tom Drum, lend me a handkercher: so,
370 I thank thee: wait on me home, I'll make sport with
thee:
Let thy courtesies alone, they are scurvy ones.

KING

Let us from point to point this story know,
375 To make the even truth in pleasure flow.

[To DIANA]

If thou be'st yet a fresh uncropped flower,
Choose thou thy husband, and I'll pay thy dower;
For I can guess that by thy honest aid
Thou keep'st a wife herself, thyself a maid.
Of that and all the progress, more or less,
Resolvedly more leisure shall express:
All yet seems well; and if it end so meet,
The bitter past, more welcome is the sweet.

Flourish

KING

The king's a beggar, now the play is done:
All is well ended, if this suit be won,
That you express content; which we will pay,
With strife to please you, day exceeding day:
380 Ours be your patience then, and yours our parts;
Your gentle hands lend us, and take our hearts.

Exeunt

KING

Is there no sorcerer who has bewitched me to see what my
eyes present to me? Is what I see real?

HELENA

No, my good lord. It's only the shadow of a wife you see
before you. The name of wife but not the thing itself.

BERTRAM

Both, both. Oh, forgive me!

HELENA

Oh, my good lord, when I pretended to be this maid, I found
you incredibly kind. There's your ring. And, look at this,
here's your letter. Here's what it says: "When you can get
this ring from my finger and are pregnant by me, etc." This
is done. Will you be mine, now that I've fulfilled both
conditions?

BERTRAM

[To the KING] My lord, if she can explain this to me clearly,
I'll love her dearly, ever, ever dearly.

HELENA

If it's not clear and it proves untrue, then we'll instantly be
separated by divorce!

[To the COUNTESS] Oh, my dear mother, do I see you alive?

LAFEU

My eyes smell onions. ² I'm going to weep.

² Lafeu famously and amusingly mixes his senses here.

LAFEU

[To PAROLLES] Good Tom Drum ³, lend me a
handkerchief. There, I thank you. Come visit me at home
and we'll have a fun time. Forget your manners—your
manners are worthless anyway.

³ Likely a reference to the Tom or Jack Drum character in the short play from a few years earlier, "Jack Drum's Entertainment."

KING

Tell us the story from beginning to end so that we can enjoy
the whole tale.

[To DIANA] If you're still a virgin, choose your own husband
and I'll pay your dowry. Based on your honest assistance in
helping a wife to preserve her marriage bed, I'd guess
you've also kept yourself a virginal maiden. We can talk
about that, and everything else, big and small, when we
have more leisure to do so. All seems to be well now. If it
ends well, too, it will be all the sweeter for having left the
bitter past behind us.

A trumpet fanfare plays.

KING

[To the audience] The king now turns into a beggar since
the play is over. All will indeed end well if you tell us you're
happy with our performance. We'll do whatever we can to
please you day after day. Now we'll patiently listen while
you perform for us: give us your hands in applause and
we'll love you for it.

All exit.

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