

The Old Law

Thomas Middleton

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The Old Law

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Persons of the Play

EVANDER, Duke of Epire

CREON, father to Simonides

LEONIDES, father to Cleanthes

SIMONIDES }

CLEANTHES } young courtiers

LISANDER, uncle to CLEANTHES

GNOTHOS, the clown

CRATILUS, the executioner

BUTLER }

BAILIFF }

TAILOR }

COOK } Creon's servants

FOOTMAN }

COACHMAN }

PARISH CLERK

[DANCING MASTER]

DRAWER

[Three] COURTIERS

[Two] LAWYERS

[Fiddlers, Officers, Servants]

ANTIGONA, wife to Creon, mother to Simonides

HIPPOLITA, wife to Cleanthes

EUGENIA, wife to Lisander

PARTHENIA, daughter to Lisander

AGATHA, wife to Gnotho[s]

SIREN, a wench

[Old women, wives to Creon's servants]

Scene: Epire

I.i. [A street in Epire]

Enter Simonides and two Lawyers.

SIMONIDES

Is the law firm, sir?

FIRST LAWYER

The law! What more firm, sir,
More powerful, forcible, or more permanent?

SIMONIDES

By my troth, sir,
I partly do believe it. Conceive, sir,
You have indirectly answered my question;
I did not doubt the fundamental grounds
Of law in general for the most solid,
But this particular law that me concerns
Now, at the present, if that be firm and strong,
And powerful, and forcible, and permanent?
I am a young man that has an old father.

SECOND LAWYER

Nothing more strong, sir,
It is secundum statutum principis
Confirmatum cum voce [senatus],
Et voce [republicae], nay, consummatum
Et exemplificatum. Is it not in force
When diverse have already tasted it
And paid their lives for penalty?

SIMONIDES

'Tis true.
My father must be next; this day completes
Full fourscore years upon him.

SECOND LAWYER

He's here then,
Sub poena statuti; hence I can tell him
Truer than all the physicians in the world,
He cannot live out tomorrow. This is
The most certain climacterical year;
'Tis past all danger, for there's no 'scaping it.
What age is your mother, sir?

SIMONIDES

Faith, near her days too;
Wants some two of three score.

FIRST LAWYER

The Old Law

So! She'll drop away
One of these days too. Here's a good age now
For those that have old parents and rich inheritance!

SIMONIDES

And, sir, 'tis profitable for others too:
Are there not fellows that lie bedrid in their offices
That younger men would walk lustily in?
Churchmen that even the second infancy
Hath silenced yet hath spun out their lives so long
That many pregnant and ingenious spirits
Have languished in their hoped reversions,
And died upon the thought? And, by your leave, sir,
By some grave senators that you imagine
Have held them long enough, and such spirits as you,
Were they removed, would leap into their dignities?

FIRST LAWYER

Dic quibus in terris, et eris mihi magnus Apollo.

SIMONIDES

But tell me, faith, your fair opinion:
Is it not a sound and necessary law,
This by the duke enacted?

FIRST LAWYER

Never did Greece,
Our ancient seat of brave philosophers,
'Mongst all her [nomothetae] and lawgivers,
Not when she flourished in her sevenfold sages
Whose living memory can never die,
Produce a law more grave and necessary.

SIMONIDES

I'm of that mind too.

FIRST LAWYER

I will maintain, sir,
Draco's oligarchy, that the government
Of community reduced into few,
Framed a fair state; Solon's [chreokopia],
That cut off poor men's debts to their rich creditors,
Was good and charitable, but not full allowed;
His [seisactheia] did reform that error,
His honourable senate of Areopagitae.
Lycurgus was more loose and gave too free
And licentious reins unto his discipline:
As that a young woman, in her husband's weakness,
Might choose her able friend to propagate,
That so the commonwealth might be supplied
With hope of lusty spirits. Plato did err,

I.i. [A street in Epire]

The Old Law

And so did Aristotle, allowing
Lewd and luxurious limits to their laws.
But now our Epire, our Epire's Evander,
Our noble and wise prince, has hit the law
That all our predecessive students
Have missed, unto their shame.

Enter Cleanthes.

SIMONIDES

Forbear the praise, sir;
'Tis in itself most pleasing. Cleanthes!
Oh lad, here's a spring for young plants to flourish!
The old trees must down [that] kept the sun from us;
We shall rise now, boy.

CLEANTHES

Whither, sir, I pray?
To the bleak air of storms, among those trees
Which we had shelter from?

SIMONIDES

Yes, from our growth,
Our sap, and livelihood, and from our fruit!
What? 'Tis not jubilee with thee yet, I think,
Thou lookst so sad on it. How old's thy father?

CLEANTHES

Jubilee! No, indeed, 'tis a bad year with me.

SIMONIDES

Prithee, how old's thy father? Then, I can tell thee.

CLEANTHES

I know not how to answer you, Simonides.
He's too old, being now exposed
Unto the rigour of a cruel edict,
And yet not old enough by many years,
'Cause I'd not see him go an hour before me.

SIMONIDES

These very passions I speak to my father.
Come, come, here's none but friends here, we may speak
Our insides freely; these are lawyers, man,
And shall be counsellors shortly.

CLEANTHES

They shall be now, sir,
And shall have large fees if they'll undertake
To help a good cause, for it wants assistance;
Bad ones, I know, they can insist upon.

l.i. [A street in Epire]

FIRST LAWYER

Oh, sir, we must undertake of both parts,
But the good we have most good in.

CLEANTHES

Pray you, say,
How do you allow of this strange edict?

FIRST LAWYER

Secundum justitiam, by my faith, sir,
The happiest edict that ever was in Epire.

CLEANTHES

What, to kill innocents, sir? It cannot be;
It is no rule in justice there to punish.

FIRST LAWYER

Oh, sir, you understand a conscience,
But not law.

CLEANTHES

Why, sir, is there so main a difference?

FIRST LAWYER

You'll never be good lawyer if you understand not that.

CLEANTHES

I think then 'tis the best to be a bad one.

FIRST LAWYER

Why, sir, the very letter and the sense
Both do o'erthrow you in this statute,
Which speaks that every man living to
Fourscore years, and women to threescore, shall then
Be cut off as fruitless to the republic,
And law shall finish what nature lingered at.

CLEANTHES

And this suit shall soon be dispatched in law?

FIRST LAWYER

It is so plain it can have no demur,
The church-book overthrows it.

CLEANTHES

And so it does,
The church-book overthrows it if you read it well.

FIRST LAWYER

Still you run from the law into error!

l.i. [A street in Epire]

The Old Law

You say it takes the lives of innocents;
I say no, and so says common reason.
What man lives to fourscore and woman to three
That can die innocent?

CLEANTHES

A fine lawful evasion!
Good sir, rehearse the full statute to me.

SIMONIDES

Fie! That's too tedious; you have already
The full sum in the brief relation.

CLEANTHES

Sir,
'Mongst many words may be found contradictions,
And these men dare sue and wrangle with a statute,
If they can pick a quarrel with some error.

SECOND LAWYER

Listen, sir, I'll gather it as brief as I can for you. [He draws forth the statute and reads it.] "Anno primo Evandri, be it for the care and good of the commonwealth, for diverse necessary reasons that we shall urge, thus peremptorily enacted--"

CLEANTHES

A fair pretence, if the reasons foul it not!

SECOND LAWYER

"That all men living in our dominions of Epire in their decayed nature to the age of fourscore, or women to the age of threescore, shall on the same day be instantly put to death, by those means and instruments that a former proclamation had to this purpose, through our said territories dispersed--"

CLEANTHES

There was no woman in this senate, certain.

SECOND LAWYER

"That these men, being past their bearing arms to aid and defend their country, past their manhood and livelihood to propagate any further issue to their posterity, and, as well, past their counsels (which overgrown gravity is now run into dotage) to assist their country; to whom, in common reason, nothing should be so wearisome as their own lives; as, it may be supposed, is tedious to their successive heirs, whose times are spent in the good of their country, yet, wanting the means to maintain it, are like to grow old before their inheritance born to them come to their necessary use. For the women, for that they were never defence to their country, never by counsel admitted to the assist of government of their country, only necessary to the propagation of posterity, and, now, at the age of threescore, be past that good and all their goodness; it is thought fit, then, a quarter abated from the more worthy member, [they] be put to death as is before recited; provided that, for the just and impartial execution of this our statute, the example shall first begin in and about our court, which ourself will see carefully performed, and not for a full month following extend any further into our dominions. Dated the sixth of the second month at our Palace Royal in Epire."

CLEANTHES

A fine edict, and very fairly gilded!

l.i. [A street in Epire]

The Old Law

And is there no scruple in all these words
To demur the law upon occasion?

SIMONIDES

Pox, 'tis an unnecessary inquisition!
Prithee, set him not about it.

SECOND LAWYER

Troth, none, sir.
It is so evident and plain a case
There is no succour for the defendant.

CLEANTHES

Possible can nothing help in a good case?

FIRST LAWYER

Faith, sir, I do think there may be a hole
Which would protract delay, if not remedy.

CLEANTHES

Why, there's some comfort in that. Good sir, speak it.

FIRST LAWYER

Nay, you must pardon me for that, sir.

SIMONIDES

Prithee, do not;
It may ope a wound to many sons and heirs
That may die after it.

CLEANTHES

Come, sir, I know
How to make you speak. Will this do it? [Gives him money.]

FIRST LAWYER

I will afford you my opinion, sir.

CLEANTHES

Pray you, repeat the literal words, expressly
The time of death.

SIMONIDES

'Tis an unnecessary
Question; prithee, let it alone.

SECOND LAWYER

Hear his opinion; 'twill be fruitless, sir.
[Reading] "That [men] at the age of fourscore and women at threescore shall the same day be put to death."

FIRST LAWYER

Thus I help the man to twenty—one years more.

l.i. [A street in Epire]

CLEANTHES

That were a fair addition.

FIRST LAWYER

Mark it, sir:

We say man is not at age till he
Be one—and—twenty; before, his infancy
And adolescence. [Now], by that addition,
Fourscore he cannot be till a hundred and one.

SIMONIDES

Oh, poor evasion!
He's fourscore years old, sir.

FIRST LAWYER

That helps more, sir.
He begins to be old at fifty; so, at fourscore,
He's but thirty years old. So, believe it, sir,
He may be twenty years in declination,
And so long may a man linger and live by it.

SIMONIDES

The worst hope of safety that e'er I heard!
Give him his fee again, 'tis not worth two dinars.

FIRST LAWYER

There's no law for restitution of fees, sir.

CLEANTHES

No, no, sir, I meant it lost when 'twas given.

Enter Creon and Antigona.

SIMONIDES

[To First Lawyer] No more, good sir,
Here are ears unnecessary for your doctrine.

FIRST LAWYER

I have spoke out my fee and I have done, sir.

SIMONIDES

Oh, my dear father!

CREON

Tush! Meet me not in exclams;
I understand the worst and hope no better.
A fine law! If this hold, white heads will be cheap
And many watchmen's places will be vacant;
Forty of 'em I know my seniors,
That did due deeds of darkness too. Their country

l.i. [A street in Epire]

The Old Law

Has watched 'em a good turn for it and ta'en 'em
Napping now. The fewer hospitals will serve too;
Many may be used for stews and brothels,
And those people will never trouble 'em to fourscore.

ANTIGONA

Can you play and sport with sorrow, sir?

CREON

Sorrow for what, Antigona? For my life?
My sorrow's I have kept it so long well
With bringing it up unto so ill an end.
I might have gently lost it in my cradle,
Before my nerves and ligaments grew strong
To bind it faster to me.

SIMONIDES

For mine own sake
I should have been sorry for that.

CREON

In my youth
I was a soldier, no coward in my age;
I never turned my back upon my foe.
I have felt nature's winter sicknesses,
Yet ever kept a lively sap in me
To greet the cheerful spring of health again.
Dangers on horseback, on foot, by water,
I have 'scaped to this day; and yet this day,
Without all help of casual accidents,
Is only deadly to me 'cause it numbers
Fourscore years to me. Where's the fault now?
I cannot blame time, nature, nor my stars,
Nor aught but tyranny. Even kings themselves
Have sometimes tasted an even fate with me.
He that has been a soldier all his days,
And stood in personal opposition
'Gainst darts and arrows, extremes of heat,
And pinching cold, has treacherously at home
In his secured quiet, by a villain's hand
[Been] basely lost in [his] star's ignorance;
And so must I die by a tyrant's sword.

FIRST LAWYER

Oh, say not so, sir, it is by the law!

CREON

And what's that, sir, but the sword of tyranny
When it is brandished against innocent lives?
I'm now upon my deathbed, sir, and 'tis fit
I should unbosom my free conscience,

l.i. [A street in Epire]

The Old Law

And show the faith I die in. I do believe
'Tis tyranny that takes my life.

SIMONIDES

[Aside] Would it were gone by one means or other.
What a long day will this be ere night!

CREON

Simonides.

Simonides here sit[s], weeping.

Wherefore dost thou weep?

CLEANTHES

[Aside] 'Cause you make no more haste to your end.

SIMONIDES

How can you question nature so unjustly?
I had a grandfather, and then had not you
True filial tears for him?

CLEANTHES

[Aside] Hypocrite!
A disease of drought dry up all pity from him
That can dissemble pity with wet eyes!

CREON

Be good unto your mother, Simonides,
She must be now your care.

ANTIGONA

To what end, sir?
The bell of this sharp edict tolls for me
As it rings out for you. I'll be as ready,
With one hour's stay, to go along with you.

CREON

Thou must not, woman. There are years behind
Before thou canst set forward in this voyage,
And nature sure will now be kind to all.
She has a quarrel in it, a cruel law
Seeks to prevent her, she'll therefore fight in it
And draw out life even to her longest thread.
Thou art scarce fifty-five.

ANTIGONA

So many morrows!
Those five remaining years I'll turn to days,
To hours, or minutes, for thy company.
'Tis fit that you and I, being man and wife,

l.i. [A street in Epire]

The Old Law

Should walk together arm in arm.

SIMONIDES

[Aside] I hope
They'll go together; I would they would, i'faith,
Then would her thirds be saved too.—The day goes away, sir.

CREON

Why, wouldst thou have me gone, Simonides?

SIMONIDES

Oh, my heart! Would you have me gone before you, sir?
You give me such a deadly wound.

CLEANTHES

[Aside] Fine rascal!

SIMONIDES

Blemish my duty so with such a question?
Sir, I would haste me to the duke for mercy:
He that's above the law may mitigate
The rigour of the law. How a good meaning
May be corrupted by misconstruction!

CREON

Thou corrup'st mine; I did not think thou meanest so.

CLEANTHES

[Aside] You were in the more error.

SIMONIDES

The words wounded me.

CLEANTHES

[Aside] 'Twas pity thou died'st not on't.

SIMONIDES

I have been ransacking the helps of law,
Conferring with these learned advocates,
If any scruple, cause, or wrested sense
Could have been found out to preserve your life,
It had been bought, though with your full estate,
Your life's so precious to me. But there is none.

FIRST LAWYER

Sir, we have canvassed it from top to toe,
Turned it upside down, threw her on her side,
Nay, opened and dissected all her entrails,
Yet can find none. There's nothing to be hoped
But the duke's mercy.

SIMONIDES

[Aside] I know the hope of that:
He did not make the law for that purpose.

CREON

Then to his hopeless mercy last I go.
I have so many precedents before me,
I must call it hopeless. Antigona,
See me delivered up unto my deathsman,
And then we'll part; five years hence I'll look for thee.

SIMONIDES

[Aside] I hope she'll not stay so long behind you.

CREON

Do not bait him an hour by grief and sorrow,
Since there's a day prefixed, haste it not.
Suppose me sick, Antigona, dying now,
Any disease thou wilt may be my end,
Or when death's slow to come, say tyrants send.

Exeunt [Creon and Antigona].

SIMONIDES

Cleanthes, if you want money, tomorrow
Use me; I'll trust you while your father's dead.

Exeunt [Simonides and Lawyers].

CLEANTHES

Why, here's a villain
Able to corrupt a thousand by example!
Does the kind root bleed out his livelihood
In parent distribution to his branches,
Adorning them with all his glorious fruits,
Proud that his pride is seen when he's unseen?
And must not gratitude descend again
To comfort his old limbs in fruitless winter?
Improvident, at least partial Nature,
Weak woman in this kind, who in thy last
Teeming still forgets the former, ever making
The burden of thy last throes the dearest
Darling; oh, yet in noble man, reform it,
And make us better than those vegetives
Whose souls die within 'em! Nature, as thou art old,
If love and justice be not dead in thee,
Make some pattern of thy piety
Lest all do turn unnaturally against thee,
And thou be blamed for our oblivions
And brutish reluctations!

Enter Leonides and Hippolita.

Ay, here's the ground
Whereon my filial faculties must build
An edifice of honour or of shame
To all mankind.

HIPPOLITA

[To Leonides] You must avoid it, sir,
If there be any love within yourself.
This is far more than fate of a lost game
That another venture may restore again;
It is your life, which you should not subject
To any cruelty if you can preserve it.

CLEANTHES

Oh dearest woman, thou hast now doubled
A thousand times thy nuptial dowry to me!
Why, she whose love is but derived from me,
Is got before me in my debted duty.

HIPPOLITA

Are you thinking such a resolution, sir?

CLEANTHES

Sweetest Hippolita, what love taught thee
To be so forward in so good a cause?

HIPPOLITA

Mine own pity, sir, did first instruct me,
And then your love and power did both command me.

CLEANTHES

They were all blessed angels to direct thee
And take their counsel. [To Leonides] How do you fare, sir?

LEONIDES

Never better, Cleanthes; I have conceived
Such a new joy within this old bosom
As I did never think would there have entered.

CLEANTHES

Joy call you it! Alas, 'tis sorrow, sir,
The worst of all sorrows, sorrow unto death.

LEONIDES

Death? What's that, Cleanthes? I thought not on it;
I was in contemplation of this woman.
'Tis all thy comfort, son; thou hast in her
A treasure invaluable, keep her safe.
When I die, sure 'twill be a gentle death,

l.i. [A street in Epire]

For I will die with wonder of her virtues,
Nothing else shall dissolve me.

CLEANTHES

'Twere much better, sir,
Could you prevent their malice.

LEONIDES

I'll prevent 'em
And die the way I told thee, in the wonder
Of this good woman. I tell thee there's few men
Have such a child; I must thank thee for her.
That the stronger tie of wedlock should do more
Than nature in her nearest ligaments
Of blood and propagation! I should ne'er
Have begot such a daughter of my own.
A daughter-in-law? Law were above nature
Were there more such children.

CLEANTHES

This admiration
Helps nothing to your safety; think of that, sir.

LEONIDES

Had you heard her, Cleanthes, but labour
In the search of means to save my forfeit live,
And knew the wise and sound preservations
That she found out, you would redouble all
My wonder in your love to her.

CLEANTHES

The thought,
The very thought claims all that from me
And she's now possessed of it. But, good sir,
If you have aught received from her advice,
Let's follow it, or else let's better think
And take the surest course.

LEONIDES

I'll tell thee one:
She counsels me to fly my severe country,
Turn all into treasure, and there build up
My decaying fortunes in a safer soil,
Where Epire's law cannot claim me.

CLEANTHES

And, sir,
I apprehend it as a safest course,
And may be easily accomplished.
Let us be all most expeditious;
Every country where we breathe will be our own

Or better soil. Heaven is the roof of all,
And now, as Epire's situate by this law,
There is 'twixt us and heaven a dark eclipse.

HIPPOLITA

Oh, then avoid it, sir! These sad events
Follow those black predictions.

LEONIDES

I prithee, peace.
I do allow thy love, Hippolita,
But must not follow it as counsel, child;
I must not shame my country for the law.
This country here hath bred me, brought me up,
And shall I now refuse a grave in her?
I'm in my second infancy, and children
Ne'er sleep so sweetly in their nurse's cradle
As in their natural mother's.

HIPPOLITA

Ay, but sir,
She is unnatural; then the stepmother
Is to be preferred before her.

LEONIDES

Tush! She shall
Allow it me despite of her entrails.
Why, do you think how far from judgment 'tis
That I should travel forth to seek a grave
That is already digged for me at home,
Nay, perhaps find it in my way to seek it?
How have I then sought a repentant sorrow?
For your dear loves, how have I banished you
From your country ever? With my base attempt,
How have I beggared you in wasting that
Which only for your sakes I bred together?
Buried my name in Epire, which I built
Upon this frame to live forever in?
What a base coward shall I be to fly
From that enemy which every minute meets me,
And thousand odds he had not long vanquished me
Before this hour of battle! Fly my death?
I will not be so false unto your states,
Nor fainting to the man that's yet in me;
I'll meet him bravely. I cannot, this knowing, fear
That when I am gone hence, I shall be there.
Come, I have days of preparation left.

CLEANTHES

Good sir, hear me;
I have a genius that has prompted me

l.i. [A street in Epire]

The Old Law

And I have almost formed it into words.
'Tis done, pray you observe 'em; I can conceal you
And yet not leave your country.

LEONIDES

Tush, it cannot be
Without a certain peril on us all.

CLEANTHES

Danger must be hazarded rather than accept
A sure destruction. You have a lodge, sir,
So far remote from way of passengers
That seldom any mortal eye does greet with it;
And, yes, so sweetly situate with thickets
Built with such cunning labyrinths within,
As if the provident heavens, forseeing cruelty,
Had bid you frame it to this purpose only.

LEONIDES

Fie, fie, 'tis dangerous, and treason too,
To abuse the law.

HIPPOLITA

'Tis holy care, sir,
Of your dear life, which is your own to keep
But not your own to lose, either in will
Or negligence.

CLEANTHES

Call you it treason, sir?
I had been then a traitor unto you
Had I forgot this. Beseech you, accept of it;
It is secure and a duty to yourself.

LEONIDES

What a coward will you make me!

CLEANTHES

You mistake,
'Tis noble courage! Now you fight with death
And yield not to him till you stoop under him.

LEONIDES

This must needs open to discovery,
And then what torture follows?

CLEANTHES

By what means, sir?
Why, there's but one body in all this counsel
Which cannot betray itself. We two are one,
One soul, one body, one heart, that think all one thought;

l.i. [A street in Epire]

And yet we two are not completely one,
But as [I] have derived myself from you.
Who shall betray us where there is no second?

HIPPOLITA

You must not mistrust my faith, though my sex
Plead weak[ness] and frailty for me.

LEONIDES

Oh, I dare not.
But where's the means that must make answer for me?
I cannot be lost without a full account,
And what must pay that reckoning?

CLEANTHES

Oh, sir, we will
Keep solemn obits for your funeral;
We'll seem to weep and seem to joy withal
That death so gently has prevented you
The law's sharp rigour; and this no mortal ear
Shall participate the knowledge of.

LEONIDES

Ha, ha, ha!
This will be sportive fine demur
If the error be not found.

CLEANTHES

Pray doubt of none.
Your company and best provision
Must be no further furnished than by us,
And, in the interim, your solitude
May converse with heaven, and fairly prepare
[For that] which was too violent and raging
Thrown headlong on you.

LEONIDES

Still there are some doubts
Of the discovery, yet I do allow it.

HIPPOLITA

Will you not mention now the cost and charge
Which will be in your keeping.

LEONIDES

That will be somewhat
Which you might save too.

CLEANTHES

With his will against him,
What foe is more to man than man himself?

The Old Law

Are you resolved, sir?

LEONIDES

I am, Cleanthes.

If by this means I do get a reprieve
And cozen death awhile, when he shall come
Armed in his own power to give the blow,
I'll smile upon him then, and laughing go.

Exeunt.

II.i. [The court]

Enter Duke [Evander], three Courtiers, and executioner [Cratilus].

EVANDER
Executioner!

CRATILUS
My lord.

EVANDER
How did old Diocles take his death?

CRATILUS
As weeping
Brides receive their joys at night, my lord,
With trembling yet with patience.

EVANDER
Why, 'twas well.

FIRST COURTIER
Nay, I knew my father would do well, my lord,
Whene'er he came to die. I'd that opinion of him
Which made me the more willing to part from him.
He was not fit to live in the world, indeed,
Any time these ten years, my lord, but I
Would not say so much.

EVANDER
No! You did not well in it,
For he that's all spent is ripe for death at all hours,
And does but trifle time out.

FIRST COURTIER
Troth, my lord,
I would I had known your mind nine years ago.

EVANDER
Our law is fourscore years because we judge
Dotage complete then, as unfruitfulness
In women at threescore. Marry, if the son
Can within compass bring good solid proofs
Of his own father's weakness and unfitness
To live or sway the living, though he want five
Or ten years of his number, that's not it;
His defect makes him fourscore and 'tis fit
He dies when he deserves, for every act
Is in effect then, when the cause is ripe.

SECOND COURTIER

[Taking the other courtiers aside] An admirable prince! How rarely he talks!
Oh, that we'd known this, lads! What a time did we endure
In two-penny commons, and in boots twice vamped!

FIRST COURTIER

Now we have two pair a week, and yet not thankful;
'Twill be a fine world for them, sirs, that come after us.

SECOND COURTIER

Ay, and they knew it.

[FIRST] COURTIER

Peace! Let them never know it.

THIRD COURTIER

A pox, there be young heirs will soon smell it out.

SECOND COURTIER

'Twill come to 'em by instinct, man. [To Evander] May your grace
Never be old, you stand so well for youth.

EVANDER

Why now, methinks our court looks like a spring;
Sweet, fresh, and fashionable, now the old weeds are gone.

FIRST COURTIER

'Tis as a court should be:
Gloss and good clothes, my lord, no matter for merit;
And herein your law proves a provident act,
When men pass not the palsy of their tongues,
Nor colour in their cheeks.

EVANDER

But women by
That law should live long, for they are ne'er past it.

FIRST COURTIER

It will have heats though, when they see the painting
Go an inch deep in the wrinkle, and take up
A box more than their gossips. But for men, my lord,
That should be the sole bravery of a palace,
To walk with hollow eyes and long white beards,
As if a prince dwelt in a land of goats;
With clothes as if they sat upon their backs on purpose
To arraign a fashion, and condemn it to exile;
Their pockets in their sleeves, as if they laid
Their ear to avarice and heard the devil whisper!
Now ours lie downward, here, close to the flank,
Right spending pockets as a son's should be

The Old Law

That lives in the fashion, where our diseased fathers,
[Wood] with the sciatica and aches,
Brought up your pan'd hose first, which ladies laughed at,
Giving no reverence to the place, lie ruined.
They love a doublet that's three hours a-buttoning,
And fits so close makes a man groan again
And his soul mutter half a day. Yet these are those
That carry sway and worth; pricked up in clothes,
Why should we fear our rising?

EVANDER

You but wrong
Our kindness and your own deserts to doubt on it.
Has not our law made you rich before your time?
Our countenance then can make you honourable.

FIRST COURTIER

We'll spare for no cost, sir, to appear worthy.

EVANDER

Why, you're in the noble way then, for the most
Are but appearers; worth itself, it is lost
And bravery stands for it.

Enter Creon, Antigona, and Simonides.

FIRST COURTIER

Look, look who comes here!
I smell death and another courtier.
Simonides!

SECOND COURTIER

Sim!

SIMONIDES

[Taking the courtiers aside] Push! I'm not for you yet;
Your company's too costly; after the old man's
Dispatched, I shall have time to talk with you.
I shall come into the fashion, ye shall see too,
After a day or two. In the meantime,
I am not for your company.

EVANDER

Old Creon, you have been expected long;
Sure you're above fourscore.

SIMONIDES

Upon my life
Not four-and-twenty hours, my lord; I searched
The church-book yesterday. Does your grace think
I'd let my father wrong the law, my lord?

II.i. [The court]

'Twere pity a' my life then! No, your act
Shall not receive a minute's wrong by him
While I live, sir; and he's so just himself too,
I know he would no[t] offer it. Here he stands.

CREON

'Tis just
I die, indeed, my lord; for I confess
I'm troublesome to life now, and the state
Can hope for nothing worthy from me now,
Either in force or counsel. I've a' late
Employed myself quite from the world, and he
That once begins to serve his maker faithfully
Can never serve a worldly prince well after;
'Tis clean another way.

ANTIGONA

Oh, give not confidence
To all he speaks, my lord, in his own injury!
His preparation only for the next world
Makes him talk widely to his wrong of this.
He is not lost in judgment—

SIMONIDES

[Aside] She spoils all again.

ANTIGONA

Deserving any way for state employment.

SIMONIDES

Mother—

ANTIGONA

His very household laws proscribed at home by him
Are able to conform seven Christian kingdoms,
They are so wise and virtuous.

SIMONIDES

Mother, I say—

ANTIGONA

I know your laws extend not to desert, sir,
But to unnecessary years, and, my lord,
His are not such. Though they show white, they're worthy,
Judicious, able, and religious.

SIMONIDES

I'll help you to a courtier of nineteen, mother.

ANTIGONA

Away, unnatural!

SIMONIDES

Then I am no fool, I'm sure,
For to be natural at such a time
Were a fool's part indeed.

ANTIGONA

Your grace's pity, sir,
And 'tis but fit and just.

CREON

The law, my lord,
And that's the justest way.

SIMONIDES

[Aside] Well said, father, i'faith;
Thou wert juster than my mother still.

EVANDER

Come hither, sir.

SIMONIDES

My lord.

EVANDER

What are those orders?

ANTIGONA

Worth observation, sir,
So please you hear them read.

SIMONIDES

[Takes Evander aside.] The woman speaks she knows not what, my lord.
He make a law, poor man! He bought a table, indeed,
Only to learn to die by it. There's the business now
Wherein there are some precepts for a son too,
How he should learn to live, but I ne'er looked upon it;
For when he's dead I shall live well enough
And keep a better table than that, I trow.

EVANDER

And is that all, sir?

SIMONIDES

All, I vow, my lord,
Save a few running admonitions
Upon cheese-trenchers, as,
"Take heed of whoring, shun it,
'Tis like a cheese too strong of the runnet,"
And such calves' maws of wit and admonition
Good to catch mice with, but not sons and heirs:

They're not so easily caught.

EVANDER

[To Cratilus] Agent for death.

CRATILUS

Your will, my lord?

EVANDER

Take hence that pile of years
Before [he] surfeit with unprofitable age,
And with the rest, from the high promontory,
Cast him into the sea.

CREON

'Tis noble justice!

[Exeunt Creon and Cratilus.]

ANTIGONA

'Tis cursed tyranny!

SIMONIDES

Peace! Take heed, mother,
You have but a short time to be cast down yourself,
And let a young courtier do it, and you be wise
In the meantime.

ANTIGONA

Hence, slave!

[Exit Antigona.]

SIMONIDES

Well, seven-and-fifty,
You've but three years to scold, then comes your payment.

FIRST COURTIER

Simonides.

SIMONIDES

Push, I'm not brave enough to hold you talk yet;
Give a man time, I have a suit a-making.

Recorders [play].

SECOND COURTIER

We love thy form first; brave clothes will come, man.

SIMONIDES

I'll make 'em come else, with a mischief to 'em

II.i. [The court]

As other gallants do that have less left 'em.

Recorders [play again].

EVANDER

Hark, whence those sounds? What's that?

Enter Cleanthes and Hippolita, with a hearse.

FIRST COURTIER

Some funeral

It seems, my lord, and young Cleanthes follows.

EVANDER

Cleanthes!

SECOND COURTIER

'Tis, my lord, and in the place

Of a chief mourner too, but strangely habited.

EVANDER

Yet suitable to his behaviour, mark it;

He comes all the way smiling, do you observe it?

I never saw a corpse so joyfully followed.

Light colours and light cheeks! Who should this be?

'Tis a thing worth resolving.

SIMONIDES

One belike

That doth participate in this our present joy.

EVANDER

Cleanthes!

CLEANTHES

Oh, my lord! [Laughs.]

EVANDER

He laughed outright now!

Was ever such a contrariety seen

In natural courses yet, nay, professed openly?

FIRST COURTIER

I ha' known a widow laugh closely, my lord,

Under her handkercher, when t'other part

Of her old face has wept like rain in sunshine;

But all the face to laugh apparently

Was never seen yet.

SIMONIDES

Yes, mine did once.

II.i. [The court]

CLEANTHES

'Tis of a heavy time, the joyfulest day
That ever son was born to.

EVANDER

How can that be?

CLEANTHES

I joy to make it plain: my father's dead.

EVANDER

Dead!

SECOND COURTIER

Old Leonides?

CLEANTHES

In his last month dead;
He beguiled cruel law the sweetliest
That ever age was blest to.
It grieves me that a tear should fall upon it,
Being a thing so joyful, but his memory
Will work it out, I see. When his poor heart broke,
I did not so much but leaped for joy
So mountingly, I touched the stars, methought.
I would not hear of blacks, I was so light,
But chose a colour orient, like my mind;
For blacks are often such dissembling mourners
There is no credit given to it. It has lost
All reputation by false sons and widows.
Now I would have men know what I resemble,
A truth, indeed; 'tis joy clad like a joy,
Which is more honest than a cunning grief
That's only faced with sables for a show,
But gaudy-hearted. When I saw death come
So ready to deceive you, sir, forgive me,
I could not choose but be entirely merry.
And yet, to see now, of a sudden
Naming but death, I show myself a mortal
That's never constant to one passion long;
I wonder whence that tear came when I smiled
In the production on it. Sorrow's a thief
That can, when joy looks on, steal forth a grief.
But gracious leave, my lord, when I have performed,
My last poor duty to my father's bones,
I shall return your servant.

EVANDER

Well, perform it.
The law is satisfied, they can but die.

The Old Law

And, by his death, Cleanthes, you gain well
A rich and fair revenue.

Flourish. [Exeunt Evander and Courtiers.]

SIMONIDES

I would I had
Even another father, condition he did
The like.

CLEANTHES

[Aside] I have passed it bravely now! How blest was I
To have the [duke in] sight! Now 'tis confirmed
Fast fear of doubts confirmed.—On, on, I say,
He that brought me to man, I bring to clay.

[Exeunt Cleanthes, Hippolita, and funeral procession.]

SIMONIDES

I'm rapt now in a contemplation
Even at the very sight of yonder hearse.
I do but think what a fine thing 'tis now
To live and follow some seven uncles thus,
As many cousin-germans, and such people
That will leave legacies. A pox! I'd see 'em hanged else
E'er I'd follow one of them and they could find the way.
Now I've enough to begin to be horrible covetous.

Enter Butler, Tailor, [Bailiff], Cook, Coachman, and Footman.

BUTLER

We come to know your worship's pleasure, sir;
Having long served your father, how your good will
Stands towards our entertainment.

SIMONIDES

Not a jot, i'faith:
My father wore cheap garments, he might do it;
I shall have all my clothes come home tomorrow.
They will eat up all you, and there were more of you, sirs,
To keep you six at livery, and still munching!

TAILOR

Why, I'm a tailor, you've most need of me, sir.

SIMONIDES

Thou madest my father's clothes, that I confess,
But what son and heir will have his father's tailor
Unless he have a mind to be well laughed at?
Thou hast been so used to wide long-side things, that when
I come to truss, I shall have the waist of my doublet

II.i. [The court]

The Old Law

Lie upon my buttocks. A sweet sight!

BUTLER

I, a butler?

SIMONIDES

There's least need of thee, fellow, I shall ne'er drink at home, I shall be so drunk abroad.

BUTLER

But a cup of small beer will do well next morning, sir.

SIMONIDES

I grant you, but what need I keep so big a knave for a cup of small beer?

COOK

Butler, you have your answer. Marry, sir, a cook I know your mastership cannot be without.

SIMONIDES

The more ass art thou to think so, for what should I do with a mountebank, no drink in my house? The banishing the butler might have been a warning for thee, unless thou meanest to choke me.

COOK

In the meantime you have choked me, methinks.

BAILIFF

These are superfluous vanities, indeed, and so accounted of in these days, sir; but then, your bailiff to receive your rents?

SIMONIDES

I prithee, hold thy tongue, fellow, I shall take a course to spend 'em faster than thou canst reckon 'em. 'Tis not the rents must serve my turn, unless I mean to be laughed at; if a man should be seen out of slash-me, let him ne'er look to be a right gallant. But, sirrah, with whom is your business?

COACHMAN

Your good mastership.

SIMONIDES

You have stood silent all this while, like men
That know their strengths. In these days none of you
Can want employment; you can win me wagers,
Footman, in running races.

FOOTMAN

I dare boast it, sir.

SIMONIDES

And when my bets are all come in and store,
Then, coachman, you can hurry me to my whore.

COACHMAN

I'll firk 'em into foam else.

The Old Law

SIMONIDES

Speaks brave matter!
And I'll firk some too, or shall cost hot water.

[Exeunt Simonides, Coachman, and Footman.]

COOK

Why, here's an age to make a cook a ruffian and scald the devil! Indeed, do strange mad things, make mutton-pasties of dog's flesh, bake snakes for lamprey pies, and cats for conies!

BUTLER

Come, will you be ruled by a butler's advice once? For we must make up our fortunes somewhere now, as the case stands. Let's even, therefore, go seek out widows of nine-and-fifty and we can; that's within a year of their deaths and so we shall be sure to be quickly rid of 'em, for a year's enough of conscience to be troubled with a wife for any man living.

COOK

Oracle butler! Oracle butler! He puts down all the doctors o' the name!

Exeunt omnes.

II.ii. [Lisander's house]

Enter Eugenia and Parthenia.

EUGENIA

Parthenia.

PARTHENIA

Mother.

EUGENIA

[Aside] I shall be troubled
This six months with an old clog! Would the law
Had been cut one year shorter!

PARTHENIA

Did you call, forsooth?

EUGENIA

Yes, you must make some spoonmeat for your father,
And warm three nightcaps for him.

[Exit Parthenia.]

Out upon it!
The mere conceit turns a young woman's stomach.
His slippers must be warmed in August too,
And his gown girt to him in the very dogdays
When every mastiff lolls out his tongue for heat.

II.i. [The court]

The Old Law

Would not this vex a beauty of nineteen now?
Alas! I [should] be tumbling in cold baths now,
Under each armpit a fine bean-flour bag
To screw out whiteness when I list;
And some seven of the properest men in the dukedom
Making a banquet ready in the next room for me,
Where he that gets the first kiss is envied
And stands upon his guard a fortnight after.
This is a life for nineteen! 'Tis but justice
For old men, whose great acts stand in their minds
And nothing in the bodies, do ne'er think
A woman young enough for their desire;
And we young wenches that have mother wits
And love to marry muck first, and man after,
Do never think old men are old enough
That we may soon be rid on 'em. There's our quittance!
I have waited for the happy hour this two year,
And if death be so unkind still to let him live,
All that time I am lost.

Enter Courtiers.

FIRST COURTIER

Young lady!

SECOND COURTIER

Oh sweet precious bud of beauty!
Troth, she smells over all the house, methinks.

FIRST COURTER

The sweetbrier's but a counterfeit to her!
It does exceed you only in the prickle,
But that it shall not long, if you'll be ruled, lady.

EUGENIA

What means this sudden visitation, gentlemen?
So passing well performed too! Who's your milliner?

FIRST COURTIER

Love and thy beauty, widow.

EUGENIA

Widow, sir?

FIRST COURTIER

'Tis sure, and that's as good. In truth, we're suitors,
We come a-wooing, wench; plain dealing's best.

EUGENIA

A-wooing? What, before my husband's dead?

SECOND COURTIER

Let's lose no time. Six months will have an end, you know,
I know it by all the bonds that e'er I made yet.

EUGENIA

That's a sure knowledge, but it holds not here, sir.

FIRST COURTIER

Do not [we] know the craft of you young tumblers?
That [when] you wed an old man, you think upon
Another husband as you are marrying of him?
We, knowing your thought, made bold to see you.

EUGENIA

[Aside] How wondrous right he speaks! 'Twas my thought indeed.

Enter Simonides, Coachman.

SIMONIDES

By your leave, sweet widow, do you lack any gallants?

EUGENIA

[Aside] Widow again! 'Tis a comfort to be called so.

FIRST COURTIER

Who's this? Simonides?

SECOND COURTIER

Brave Sim, i'faith!

SIMONIDES

Coachman.

COACHMAN

Sir.

SIMONIDES

Have an especial care of my new mares.

[Exit Coachman.]

They say, sweet widow, he that loves a horse well
Must needs love a widow well. When dies thy husband?
Is it not July next?

EUGENIA

Oh, you're too hot, sir;
Pray cool yourself and take September with you!

SIMONIDES

September! Oh, I was but two bows wide.

Il.i. [The court]

FIRST COURTIER

Master Simonides!

SIMONIDES

I can entreat you, gallants; I'm in fashion too.

Enter Lisander.

LISANDER

Ha! Whence this herd of folly? What are you?

SIMONIDES

Well-willers to your wife; pray tend your book, sir.
We have nothing to say to you; you may go die
For here be those in place that can supply.

LISANDER

What's thy wild business here?

SIMONIDES

Old man, I'll tell thee,
I come to beg the reversion of thy wife;
I think these gallants be of my mind too.
But thou art but a dead man; therefore,
What should a man do talking with thee? Come,
Widow, stand to your tackling.

LISANDER

Impious bloodhounds!

SIMONIDES

Let the ghost talk, ne'er mind him.

LISANDER

Shames of nature!

SIMONIDES

Alas, poor ghost! Consider what the man is.

LISANDER

Monsters unnatural! You that have been covetous
Of your own fathers' deaths, gape ye for mine now?
Cannot a poor old man that now can reckon
Even all the hours he has to live, live quiet
For such wild beasts as these, that neither hold
A certainty of good within themselves,
But scatter others' comforts that are ripened
For holy uses? Is hot youth so hasty
It will not give an old man leave to die
And leave a widow first, but will make one

The Old Law

The husband looking on? May your destructions
Come all in hasty figures to your souls,
Your wealth depart in haste to overtake
Your honesties, that died when you were infants!
May your male seed be hasty spendthrifts too,
Your daughters hasty sinners and diseased
Ere they be thought at years to welcome misery!
And may you never know what leisure is
But at repentance! I am too uncharitable,
Too foul! I must go cleanse myself with prayers.
These are the plagues of fondness to old men,
We're punished home with what we dote upon.

Exit.

SIMONIDES

So, so!
The ghost is vanished; now, your answer, lady.

EUGENIA

Excuse me, gentleman, 'twere as much impudence
In me to give you a kind answer yet,
As madness to produce a churlish one.
I could say now, come a month hence, sweet gentlemen,
Or two, or three, or when you will, indeed,
But I say no such thing. I set no time,
Nor is it mannerly to deny any.
I'll carry an even hand to all the world.
Let other women make what haste they will;
What's that to me? But I profess unfeignedly,
I'll have my husband dead before I marry.
Ne'er look for other answer at my hands, gentlemen.

SIMONIDES

Would he were hanged, for my part looks for other!

EUGENIA

I'm at a word.

SIMONIDES

And I'm at a blow then;
I'll lay you on the lips and leave you.

[Kisses her.]

FIRST COURTIER

Well struck, Sim!

SIMONIDES

He that dares say he'll mend it, I'll strike him.

FIRST COURTIER

He would betray himself to be a [botcher]
That goes about to mend it.

EUGENIA

Gentlemen,
You know my mind. I bar you not my house;
But if you choose out hours more seasonably,
You may have entertainment.

Enter Parthenia.

SIMONIDES

[To Courtiers] What will she do hereafter,
When sh' is a widow keeps open house already?

Exeunt Simonides and Courtiers.

EUGENIA

How now, girl?

PARTHENIA

Those feathered fools that hither took their flight
Have grieved my father much.

EUGENIA

Speak well of youth, wench,
While thou hast a day to live. 'Tis youth must make thee,
And when youth fails, wise women will make it.
But always take age first to make thee rich;
That was my counsel ever, and then youth
Will make thee sport enough all thy life after.
'Tis time's policy, wench. What is it to bide
A little hardness for a pair of years or so?
A man whose only strength lies in his breath,
Weakness in all parts else, thy bedfellow
A cough of the lungs, or say a [wheezing] matter;
Then shake off chains and dance all thy life after?

PARTHENIA

Everyone to their liking, but I say
An honest man's worth all, be he young or gray.

Enter Hippolita.

Yonder's my cousin.

[Exit Parthenia.]

EUGENIA

[Aside] Art, I must use thee now.

Il.i. [The court]

The Old Law

Dissembling is the best help for a virtue
That ever woman had; it saves their credit often. [Weeps.]

HIPPOLITA

How now, cousin! What, weeping?

EUGENIA

Can you blame me
When the time of my dear love and husband
Now draws on? I study funeral tears
Against the day I must be a sad widow.

HIPPOLITA

In troth, Eugenia, I have cause to weep too;
But when I visit, I come comfortably
And look to be so quited. Yet more sobbing?

EUGENIA

Oh, the greatest part of your affliction's past;
The worst of mine's to come. I have one to die.
Your husband's father is dead and fixed
In his eternal peace, past the sharp tyrannous blow.

HIPPOLITA

You must use patience, coz.

EUGENIA

Tell me of patience.

HIPPOLITA

You have example for it in me and many.

EUGENIA

Yours was a father-in-law, but mine a husband!
Oh, for a woman that could love and live
With an old man; mine is a jewel, cousin,
So quietly he lies by one, so still.

HIPPOLITA

[Aside] Alas! I have a secret lodged within me
Which now will out in pity; I can't hold!

EUGENIA

One that will not disturb me in my sleep
[For] a whole month together, 'less it be
With those diseases age is subject to,
As aches, coughs, and pains, and these, heaven knows,
Against his will too. He's the quietest man,
Especially in bed.

HIPPOLITA

Il.i. [The court]

Be comforted.

EUGENIA

How can I, lady? None knows the terror of
A husband's loss but they that fear to lose him.

HIPPOLITA

[Aside] Fain would I keep it in, but 'twill not be;
She is my kinswoman and I'm pitiful.
I must impart a good, if I know it once,
To them that stand in need on it. I'm like one
Loves not to banquet with a joy alone,
My friends must partake too.—Prithee, cease, cousin.
If your love be so boundless, which is rare
In a young woman in these days, I tell you,
To one so much past service as your husband,
There is a way to beguile law and help you.
My husband found it out first.

EUGENIA

Oh, sweet cousin!

HIPPOLITA

You may conceal him and give out his death
Within the time, order his funeral too.
We had it so for ours, I praise heaven for it,
And he's alive and safe!

EUGENIA

Oh, blessed coz,
How thou revivest me!

HIPPOLITA

We daily see
The good old man and feed him twice a day.
Methinks it is the sweetest joy to cherish him,
That ever life yet showed me.

EUGENIA

So should I think
A dainty thing to nurse an old man well.

HIPPOLITA

And then we have his prayers and daily blessing,
And we two live so lovingly upon it,
His son and I, and so contently,
You cannot think unless you tasted on it.

EUGENIA

No, I warrant you. Oh, loving cousin,
What a great sorrow hast thou eased me of!

The Old Law

A thousand thanks go with thee.

HIPPOLITA

I have a suit to you:

I must not have you weep when I am gone.

EUGENIA

No, if I do, ne'er trust me.

Exit [Hippolita].

Easy fool!

Thou hast put thyself into my power forever;

Take heed of angering of me. I conceal!

I feign a funeral! I keep my husband!

'Las, I have been thinking any time these two years,

I have kept him too long already.

I'll go count o'er my suitors, that's my business,

And prick the man down. I ha' six months to do it,

But could dispatch him in one, were I put to it.

Exit.

III.i. [A church]

Enter [Gnothos] the clown and [Parish] Clerk.

GNOTHOS

You have searched o'er the parish chronicle, sir?

CLERK

Yes, sir, I have found out the true age and date of the party you wot on.

GNOTHOS

Pray you be covered, sir.

CLERK

When you have showed me the way, sir.

GNOTHOS

Oh, sir, remember yourself; you are a clerk.

CLERK

A small clerk, sir.

GNOTHOS

Likely to be the wiser man, sir, for your greatest clerks are not always so, as 'tis reported.

CLERK

You are a great man in the parish, sir.

GNOTHOS

I understand myself so much the better, sir, for all the best in the parish pay duties to the clerk, and I would owe you none, sir.

CLERK

Since you'll have it so, I'll be the first to hide my head. [Puts on his hat.]

GNOTHOS

Mine is a capcase. Now, to our business in your hand: good luck, I hope; I long to be resolved.

CLERK

Look you, sir, this is that cannot deceive you; this is the dial that goes ever true. You may say ipse dixit upon this witness, and 'tis good in law too.

GNOTHOS

Pray you, let's hear what it speaks.

CLERK

Mark, sir: [reading] "Agatha, the daughter of Pollux"—this is your wife's name and the name of her father—"born"—

The Old Law

GNOTHOS

Whose daughter say you?

CLERK

The daughter of Pollux.

GNOTHOS

I take it his name was Bollux.

CLERK

P-O-L-L-U-X the orthography, I assure you, sir; the word is corrupted else.

GNOTHOS

Well, on, sir, of Pollux; now come on Castor.

CLERK

"Born in an[no] 1540," and now 'tis '99. By this infallible record, sir, let me see, she is now just fifty-nine and wants but one.

GNOTHOS

I am sorry she wants so much.

CLERK

Why, sir? Alas, 'tis nothing, 'tis but so many months, so many weeks, so many--

GNOTHOS

Do not deduct it to days; 'twill be the more tedious, and to measure it by hour-glasses were intolerable.

CLERK

Do not think on it, sir. Half the time goes away in sleep; 'tis half the year in nights.

GNOTHOS

Oh, you mistake me, neighbour, I am loath to leave the good old woman. If she were gone now it would not grieve me, for what is a year, alas, but a lingering torment? And were it not better she were out of her pain? It must needs be a grief to us both.

CLERK

I would I knew how to ease you, neighbour.

GNOTHOS

You speak kindly, truly, and if you say but Amen to it, which is a word that I know you are perfect in, it might be done. Clerks are the most indifferent honest men, for to the marriage of your enemy, or the burial of your friend, the curses or the blessings to you are all one; you say Amen to all.

CLERK

With a better will to the one than the other, neighbour, but I shall be glad to say Amen to anything might do you a pleasure.

GNOTHOS

There is, first, something above your duty. [Gives him money.] Now I would have you set forward the clock a little, to help the old woman out of her pain.

The Old Law

CLERK

I will speak to the sexton for that, but the day will go ne'er the faster for that.

GNOTHOS

Oh, neighbour, you do not conceit me; not the jack of the clock-house, the hand of the dial, I mean. Come, I know you, being a great clerk, cannot choose but have the art to cast a figure.

CLERK

Never indeed, neighbour; I never had the judgment to cast a figure.

GNOTHOS

I'll show you on the backside of your book. Look you, what figure's this?

CLERK

Four with a cipher; that's forty.

GNOTHOS

So, forty; what's this now?

CLERK

The cipher is turned into 9 by adding the tail, which makes forty-nine.

GNOTHOS

Very well understood. What is it now?

CLERK

The 4 is turned into 3; 'tis now thirty-nine.

GNOTHOS

Very well understood, and can you do this again?

CLERK

Oh, easily, sir.

GNOTHOS

A wager of that! Let me see the place of my wife's age again.

CLERK

Look you, sir, 'tis here: 1540.

GNOTHOS

Forty drachmas you do not turn that forty into thirty-nine.

CLERK

A match with you!

GNOTHOS

Done! And you shall keep stakes yourself; there they are. [Gives him money.]

CLERK

III.i. [A church]

The Old Law

A firm match! But, stay, sir, now I consider it, I shall add a year to your wife's age. Let me see: [Scirophorion] the 17, and now 'tis [Hecatombaion] the 11. If I alter this, your wife will have but a month to live by the law.

GNOTHOS

That's all one, sir; either do it or pay me my wager.

CLERK

Will you lose your wife before you lose your wager?

GNOTHOS

A man may get two wives before half so much money by 'em. Will you do't?

CLERK

I hope you will conceal me, for 'tis flat corruption.

GNOTHOS

Nay, sir, I would have you keep counsel, for I lose my money by it, and should be laughed at for my labour if it should be known.

CLERK

[Writing in the chronicle] Well, sir, there! 'Tis done, as perfect 39 as can be found in black and white. But, mum, sir, there's danger in this figure casting.

GNOTHOS

Ay, sir, I know that better men than you have been thrown over the bar for as little. The best is, you can be but thrown out of the belfry.

Enter the Cook, the Tailor, Bailiff, and Butler.

CLERK

Look close; here comes company. Asses have ears as well as pitchers.

COOK

Oh, Gnothos, how is it? Here's a trick of discarded cards of us; we were ranked with coats as long as our old master lived.

GNOTHOS

And is this then the end of serving-men?

COOK

Yes, faith, this is the end of serving-men. A wise man were better serve one God than all the men in the world.

GNOTHOS

'Twas well spoke of a cook. And are all fallen into fasting days and ember weeks, that cooks are out of use?

TAILOR

And all tailors will be cut into lists and shreds. If this world hold, we shall grow both out of request.

BUTLER

And why not butlers as well as tailors? If they can go naked, let 'em neither eat nor drink.

The Old Law

CLERK

That's strange, methinks, a lord should turn away his tailor of all men. And how dost thou, tailor?

TAILOR

I do so—so. But, indeed, all our wants are long of this publican, my lord's bailiff, for had he been rent—gatherer still, our places had held together still that are now seam—rent, nay, cracked in the whole piece.

BAILIFF

Sir, if my lord had not sold his lands that claim his rents, I should still have been the rent—gatherer.

COOK

The truth is, except the coachman and the footman, all serving—men are out of request.

GNOTHOS

Nay, say not so, for you were never in more request than now, for requesting is but a kind of begging; for when you say, "I beseech your worship's charity," 'tis all one if you say I request it, and in that kind of requesting, I am sure serving—men were never in more request.

COOK

Troth, he say true. Well, let that pass, we are upon a better adventure. I see, Gnothos, you have been before us; we came to deal with this merchant for some commodities.

CLERK

With me, sir? Anything that I can.

BUTLER

Nay, we have looked out our wives already. Marry, to you we come to know the prices, that is, to know their ages; for so much reverence we bear to age, that the more aged they shall be the more dear to us.

TAILOR

The truth is, every man has laid by his widow; so they be lame enough, blind enough, and old [enough], 'tis good enough.

CLERK

I keep the town stock. If you can but name 'em, I can tell their ages today.

ALL

We can tell their fortunes to an hour then.

CLERK

Only you must pay for turning of the leaves.

[They give the Clerk money; he consults the chronicle and writes the names of old widows on a separate paper.]

COOK

Oh, bountifully! Come, mine first!

BUTLER

The butler before the cook, while you live; there's few that eat before they drink in a morning.

TAILOR

III.i. [A church]

The Old Law

Nay, then the tailor puts in his needle of priority, for men do clothe themselves before they either drink or eat.

BAILIFF

I will strive for no place. The longer ere I marry my wife, the older she will be, and nearer her end and my ends.

CLERK

I will serve you all, gentlemen, if you will have patience.

GNOTHOS

I commend you modesty, sir; you are a bailiff whose place is to come behind other men, as it were, in the bum of all the rest.

BAILIFF

So, sir, and you were about this business too, seeking out for a widow?

GNOTHOS

Alack! No, sir, I am a married man and have those cares upon me that you would fain run into.

BAILIFF

What, an old rich wife? Any man in this age desires such a care.

GNOTHOS

Troth, sir, I'll put a venture with you, if you will. I have a lusty old quean to my wife, sound of wind and limb, yet I'll give out to take three for one at the marriage of my second wife.

BAILIFF

Ay, sir, but how near is she to the law?

GNOTHOS

Take that at hazard, sir; there must be time, you know, to get a new. Unsight, unseen, I take three to one.

BAILIFF

Two to one I'll give, if she have but two teeth in her head.

GNOTHOS

A match! There's five drachmas for ten at my next wife.

BAILIFF

A match!

[The Clerk finishes writing and hands them the paper.]

COOK

I shall be fitted bravely: fifty-eight and upwards; 'tis but a year and a half, and I may chance make friends and beg a year of the duke.

BUTLER

Hey, boys, I am made Sir Butler! My wife that shall be wants but two months of her time. It shall be one ere I marry her, and then the next will be a honeymoon.

TAILOR

III.i. [A church]

The Old Law

I outstrip you all! I shall have but six weeks of Lent if I get my widow, and then comes eating—tide, plump and gorgeous.

GNOTHOS

This tailor will be a man if ever there were any!

BAILIFF

Now comes my turn, I hope, goodman finis, you that are still at the end of all with a "so be it." Well now, sirs, do you venture there as I have done, and I'll venture here after you. Good luck, I beseech thee!

CLERK

Amen, sir.

BAILIFF

That deserves a fee already. [Gives him money.] There 'tis. Please me and have a better.

CLERK

Amen, sir.

COOK

How, two for one at your next wife? Is the old one living?

GNOTHOS

You have a fair match; I offer you no foul one. If death make not haste to call her, she'll make none to go to him.

BUTLER

I know her; she's a lusty woman. I'll take the venture.

GNOTHOS

There's five drachmas for ten at my next wife.

BUTLER

A bargain.

COOK

Nay, then we'll be all merchants; give me.

TAILOR

And me.

BUTLER

What, has the bailiff sped?

BAILIFF

I am content, but none of you shall know my happiness.

CLERK

As well as any of you all, believe it, sir.

BAILIFF

Oh, clerk, you are to speak last always.

III.i. [A church]

The Old Law

CLERK

I'll remember it hereafter, sir. You have done with me, gentlemen?

Enter [Gnothos's] wife, [Agatha].

ALL

For this time, honest register.

CLERK

Fare you well then; if you do, I'll cry Amen to it.

Exit.

COOK

Look you, sir, is not this your wife?

GNOTHOS

My first wife, sir.

BUTLER

Nay, then we have made a good match on it. If she have no forward disease, the woman may live this dozen years by her age.

TAILOR

I'm afraid she's broken-winded; she holds silence so long.

COOK

We'll now leave our venture to the event. I must a-woeing.

BUTLER

I'll but buy me a new dagger and overtake you.

BAILIFF

So we must all, for he that goes a-woeing to a widow without a weapon will never get her.

Exeunt [Cook, Butler, Tailor, Bailiff].

GNOTHOS

Oh, wife, wife!

AGATHA

What ail[s] you, man, you speak so passionately?

GNOTHOS

'Tis for thy sake, sweet wife. Who would think so lusty an old woman, with reasonable good teeth, and her tongue in as perfect use as ever it was, should be so near her time? But the fates will have it so.

AGATHA

What's the matter, man? You do amaze me.

III.i. [A church]

The Old Law

GNOTHOS

Thou art not sick neither, I warrant thee.

AGATHA

Not that I know of, sure.

GNOTHOS

What pity 'tis, a woman should be so near her end and yet not sick.

AGATHA

Near her end, man! Tush, I can guess at that:
I have years good yet of life in the remainder.
I want two yet, at least, of the full number;
Then the law, I know, craves impotent and useless
And not the able women.

GNOTHOS

Ay, alas! I see thou hast been repairing time as well as thou couldst; the old wrinkles are well filled up, but the vermilion is seen too thick, too thick, and I read what's written in thy forehead. It agrees with the church-book.

AGATHA

Have you sought my age, man? And, I prithee, how is it?

GNOTHOS

I shall but discomfort thee.

AGATHA

Not at all, man; when there's no remedy, I will go, though unwillingly.

GNOTHOS

1539. Just; it agrees with the book: you have but a year to prepare yourself.

AGATHA

Out, alas! I hope there's more than so. But do you not think a reprieve might be gotten for half a score? And 'twere but five year, I would not care; an able woman, methinks, were to be pitied.

GNOTHOS

Ay, to be pitied, but not helped, no hope of that; for, indeed, women have so blemished their own reputations now-a-days, that it is thought the law will meet them at fifty very shortly.

AGATHA

Marry, the heavens forbid!

GNOTHOS

There's so many of you that, when you are old, become witches: some profess physic and kill good subjects faster than a burning fever; and then schoolmistresses of the sweet sin, which commonly we call bawds, innumerable of that sort; for these and such causes 'tis thought they shall not live above fifty.

AGATHA

Ay, man, but this hurts not the good old women.

The Old Law

GNOTHOS

Ay, faith, you are so like one another that a man cannot distinguish 'em now. Were I an old woman, I would desire to go before my time, and offer myself willingly two or three years before. Oh, those are brave women and worthy to be commended of all men in the world, that when their husbands die, they run to be burnt to death with 'em. There's honour and credit; give me half a dozen such wives!

AGATHA

Ay, if her husband were dead before, 'twere a reasonable request. If you were dead, I could be content to be so.

GNOTHOS

Fie, that's not likely, for thou hadst two husband before me.

AGATHA

Thou wouldst not have me die, wouldst thou, husband?

GNOTHOS

No, I do not speak to that purpose, but I say what credit it were for me and thee if thou wouldst, then thou shouldst never be suspected for a witch, a physician, a bawd, or any of those things, and then how daintily should I mourn for thee, how bravely should I see thee buried. When, alas, if he goes before, it cannot choose but be a great grief to him to think he has not seen his wife well buried. There be such virtuous women in the world, but too few, too few, who desire to die seven years before their time with all their hearts.

AGATHA

I have not the heart to be of that mind. But, indeed, husband, I think you would have me gone.

GNOTHOS

No, alas! I speak but for your good and your credit, for when a woman may died quickly, why should she go to law for her death? Alack! I need not wish thee gone for thou hast but a short time to stay with me; you do not know how near 'tis. It must out, you have but a month to live by the law.

AGATHA

Out, alas!

GNOTHOS

Nay, scarce so much.

AGATHA

Oh, oh, oh, my heart! [Swoons.]

GNOTHOS

Ay, so, if thou wouldst go away quietly, 'twere sweetly done and like a kind wife. Lie but a little longer and the bell shall toll for thee.

AGATHA

Oh, my heart, but a month to live!

GNOTHOS

Alas, why wouldst thou come back again for a month? [Aside] I'll throw her down again.—Oh, woman, 'tis not three weeks; I think a fortnight is the most.

AGATHA

III.i. [A church]

The Old Law

Nay, then, I am gone already. [Swoons.]

GNOTHOS

I would make haste to the sexton now, but I'm afraid the tolling of the bell will wake her again. If she be so wise as to go now— She stirs again; there's two lives of the nine gone.

AGATHA

Oh, wouldst not thou help to recover me, husband?

GNOTHOS

Alas, I could not find in my heart to hold thee by thy nose, or box thy cheeks; it goes against my conscience.

AGATHA

I will not be thus frightened to my death,
I'll search the church record a fortnight;
'Tis too little conscience, I cannot be so near.
Oh time, if thou beest kind, lend me but a year.

Exit.

GNOTHOS

What a spite's this, that a man cannot persuade his wife to die in any time with her good will! I have another bespoke already. Though a piece of old beef will serve to breakfast, yet a man would be glad of a chicken to supper. The clerk, I hope, understands no Hebrew and cannot write backward what he hath writ forward already, and then I am well enough.

'Tis but a month at most; if that were gone
My venture comes in with her two for one.
'Tis use enough, a conscience for a [broker],
If he had a conscience.

[Exit.]

III.ii. [Lisander's house]

Enter Eugenia at one door, Simonides, Courtiers, at the other.

EUGENIA

Gentlemen courtiers.

FIRST COURTIER

All your servants
Vowed, lady.

EUGENIA

Oh, I shall kill myself
With infinite laughter! Will nobody take my part?

SIMONIDES

And it be a laughing business,
Put it to me; I'm one of the best in Europe.
My father died last too; I have the most cause.

III.i. [A church]

EUGENIA

You have picked out such a time, sweet gentlemen,
To make your spleen a banquet.

SIMONIDES

Oh, the jest!
Lady, I have a jaw stands ready for it;
I'll gape half way and meet it.

EUGENIA

My old husband,
That cannot say his prayers out for jealousy
And madness, at your coming first to woo me--

SIMONIDES

Well said!

FIRST COURTIER

Go on!

SECOND COURIER

On, on!

EUGENIA

Takes counsel
With the secrets of all art to make himself
Youthful again.

SIMONIDES

How? Youthful! Ha, ha, ha!

EUGENIA

A man of forty-five he would feign seem
To be, or scarce so much, if he might have
His will indeed.

SIMONIDES

Ay, but his white hairs,
They'll betray his hoariness.

EUGENIA

Why, there
You are wide: he's not the man you take him for;
[Nor] will you know him when you see him again,
There will be five to one laid upon that.

FIRST COURIER

How!

EUGENIA

Nay, you did well to laugh faintly there.

III.i. [A church]

I promise you, I think he'll outlive me now
And deceive law and all.

SIMONIDES

Marry, gout forbid!

EUGENIA

You little think he was at fencing school
At four o'clock this morning.

SIMONIDES

How, at fencing school!

EUGENIA

Else give no trust to woman.

SIMONIDES

By this light
I do not like him, then; he's like to live
Longer than I, for he may kill me first, now.

EUGENIA

His dancer now came in, as I met you.

FIRST COURTIER

His dancer too!

EUGENIA

They observe turns and hours with him;
The great French rider will be here at ten
With his curvetting horse.

SECOND COURIER

These notwithstanding,
His hair and wrinkles will betray his age.

EUGENIA

I'm sure his head and beard, as he has ordered it,
Looks not past fifty now. He'll bring it to forty
Within these four days, for nine times an hour at least
He takes a black lead comb and kembs it over.
Three-quarters of his beard is under fifty;
There's but a little tuft of fourscore left
All of one side which will be black by Monday.

Enter Lisander.

And to approve my truth, see where he comes!
Laugh softly, gentlemen, and look upon him.

[They hide.]

III.i. [A church]

SIMONIDES

Now, by this hand, he's almost black in the mouth indeed!

FIRST COURTIER

He should die shortly, then.

SIMONIDES

Marry, methinks he dies too fast already,
For he was all white but a week ago.

FIRST COURIER

Oh, this same coney—white takes an excellent black
Too soon. A mischief on it!

SECOND COURTIER

He will [beguile] us all
If that little tuft northward turn black too.

EUGENIA

Nay, sir, I wonder 'tis so long a—turning.

SIMONIDES

Maybe some fairy's child, held forth at midnight,
Has pissed upon that side.

FIRST COURTIER

Is this the beard?

LISANDER

[Looking in a mirror, to himself] Ah, sirrah! My young boys, I shall be for you.
This little mangy tuft takes up more time
Than all the beard beside! Come you a—wooing
And I alive and lusty? You shall find
An alteration, jack—boys; I have a spirit yet—
And I could match my hair to it, there's the fault—
And can do offices of youth yet lightly.
At least I will do, though it pain me a little.
Shall not a man for a little foolish age
Enjoy his wife to himself? Must young court tits
Play tomboys' tricks with her and he live, ha?
I have blood that will not bear it, yet, I confess
I should be at my prayers. But where's the dancer there?

Enter Dancing Master.

DANCING MASTER

Here, sir.

LISANDER

Come, come, come, one trick a day

III.i. [A church]

The Old Law

And I shall soon recover all again.

EUGENIA

'Slight, and you laugh too loud, we are all discovered, gentlemen.

SIMONIDES

And I have a scurvy, ginny laugh a' mine own
Will spoil all, I'm afraid.

EUGENIA

Marry, take heed, sir.

SIMONIDES

Nay, and I should be hanged, I can't leave it.
Pup! There 'tis! [Bursts out laughing.]

EUGENIA

Peace! Oh, peace!

LISANDER

Come, I am ready, sir.
I hear the church-book's lost where I was born too,
And that shall set me back one-and-twenty years;
There is no little comfort left in that.
And, my three court codlings, that look parboiled,
As if they came from Cupid's scalding house—

SIMONIDES

He means me specially, I hold my life.

DANCING MASTER

What trick will your old worship learn this morning, sir?

LISANDER

Marry, a trick! If thou couldst teach a man
To keep his wife to himself, I'd fain learn that.

DANCING MASTER

That's a hard trick for an old man especially;
The horse-trick comes the nearest.

LISANDER

Thou sayest true, i'faith;
They must be horsed indeed, else there's no keeping on 'em,
And horseplay at fourscore is not so ready.

DANCING MASTER

Look you, here's your worship's horse-trick, sir. [Leaps.]

LISANDER

Nay, say not so, 'tis none of mine; I fall

III.i. [A church]

Down horse and man if I but offer at it.

DANCING MASTER

My life for yours, sir.

LISANDER

Sayest thou me so? [Leaps.]

DANCING MASTER

Well offered, by my viol, sir.

LISANDER

A pox of this horse-trick! It has played the jade with me
And given me a wrench in the back.

DANCING MASTER

Now, here's your inturn, and your trick above ground.

LISANDER

Prithee, no more, unless thou hast a mind
To lay me underground. One of these tricks
Is enough in a morning.

DANCING MASTER

For your galliard, sir,
You are complete enough, ay, and may challenge
The proudest coxcomb of 'em all, I'll stand to it.

LISANDER

Faith, and I've other weapons for the rest too.
I have prepared for 'em, if e'er I take
My Gregories here again.

SIMONIDES

Oh, I shall burst,
I can hold out no longer. [Laughs aloud.]

EUGENIA

He spoils all.

[They come forward.]

LISANDER

The devil and his grinners! Are you come?
Bring forth the weapons, we shall find you play!
All feats of youth too, jack-boys, feats of youth,
And these weapons: drinking, fencing, dancing,
Your own roadways, you glisterpipes! I'm old, you say?
Yes, parlous old, kids, and you mark me well:
This beard cannot get children, you lank suck-eggs,
Unless such weasels come from court to help us out!

III.i. [A church]

The Old Law

We will get our own brats, you lecherous dog—bolts!

Enter [servants] with [foils, wine and] glasses.

Well said, down with 'em; now we shall see your spirits.
What, dwindle you already?

SECOND COURTIER

I have no quality.

SIMONIDES

Nor I, unless drinking may be reckoned for one.

FIRST COURTIER

Why, Sim, it shall.

LISANDER

Come, dare you choose your weapon now?

FIRST COURTIER

I? Dancing, sir, and you will be so hasty.

LISANDER

We're for you, sir.

SECOND COURTIER

Fencing, I.

LISANDER

We'll answer you too.

SIMONIDES

I'm for drinking, your wet weapon there.

LISANDER

That wet one has cost many a princox life,
And I will send it through you with a powder.

SIMONIDES

Let come with a pox, I care not so it be drink.
I hope my guts will hold, and that's even all
A gentleman can look for of such trillibubs.

LISANDER

[To the First Courtier] Play the first weapon; come, strike, strike I say!
Yes, yes, you shall be first; I'll observe court rules.
Always the worst goes foremost, so 'twill prove, I hope.

[Music. The First Courtier dances a galliard: "La Mignarde".]

So, sir, you've spit your poison; now come I.

III.i. [A church]

The Old Law

[Aside] Now forty years go backward and assist me;
Fall from me half my age but for three minutes
That I may feel no crick! I will put fair for it
Although I hazard twenty sciaticas.

[Music. Lisander dances a galliard.]

So, I have hit you!

FIRST COURTIER

You've done well, i'faith, sir.

LISANDER

If you confess it well, 'tis excellent,
And I have hit you soundly. I am warm now;
The second weapon instantly!

SECOND COURTIER

What, so quick, sir?
Will you not allow yourself a breathing time?

LISANDER

I've breath enough at all times, Lucifer's muskcod,
To give your perfumed worship three vennis!
A sound old man puts his thrust better home
Than a spiced young man.

[They fence, and Lisander scores the first hit.]

There, ay!

SECOND COURIER

Then have at you, fourscore!

LISANDER

You lie: twenty, I hope, and you shall find it.

SIMONIDES

I'm glad I missed this weapon. I had an eye
Popped out ere this time, or my two butter-teeth
Thrust down my throat instead of a flapdragon.

[Lisander scores another hit.]

LISANDER

There's two, pentweezle!

DANCING MASTER

Excellently touched, sir!

SECOND COURTIER

III.i. [A church]

The Old Law

Had ever man such luck? Speak your opinion, gentlemen.

SIMONIDES

Methinks your luck's good that your eyes are in still;
Mine would have dropped out like a pig's half-roasted.

[Lisander scores another hit.]

LISANDER

There wants a third, and there 'tis again!

SECOND COURTIER

The devil has steeled him!

EUGENIA

What a strong fiend is jealousy!

LISANDER

You're dispatched, bear-whelp!

SIMONIDES

Now comes my weapon in.

LISANDER

Here, toadstool, here!
'Tis you and I must play these three wet vennis.

SIMONIDES

Vennis in Venice glasses! Let 'em come;
They'll bruise no flesh, I'm sure, nor break no bones.

FIRST COURTIER

Yet you may drink your eyes out, sir.

SIMONIDES

Ay, but that's nothing: then they go voluntarily;
I do not love to have 'em thrust out
Whether they will or no.

LISANDER

Here's your first weapon, duck's meat!

[Drinks, then hands Simonides a full glass.]

SIMONIDES

How? A Dutch what-you-call-'em
'Stead of a German faulchion? A shrewd weapon,
And, of all things, hard to be taken down.
Yet, down it must. [Drinks.] I have a nose goes into it;
I shall drink double, I think.

FIRST COURTIER

The sooner off, Sim.

LISANDER

I'll pay you speedily [] with a trick
I learned once amongst drunkards. Here's half-pike.

[Drinks again.]

SIMONIDES

Half-pike comes well after Dutch what-you-call-'em;
They'd never be asunder by their good will.

FIRST COURTIER

Well pulled of an old fellow!

LISANDER

Oh, but you fellows pull better at a rope.

[Hands Simonides another glass.]

FIRST COURTIER

There's a hair, Sim, in that glass.

SIMONIDES

And it be as long as a halter, down it goes:
No hair shall cross me. [Drinks.]

LISANDER

I['ll] make you stink worse than your polecats do.
Here's longsword, your last weapon.

[Drinks, then offers Simonides another glass.]

SIMONIDES

No more weapons.

FIRST COURTIER

Why! How now, Sim? Bear up; thou shamest us all else.

SIMONIDES

Light, I shall shame you worse and I stay longer.
I ha' got the scotomy in my head already.
The whimsy, you all turn around! Do not you dance, gallants?

SECOND COURTIER

Pish, what's all this? Why, Sim, look: the last venny!

SIMONIDES

No more vennies go down here, for these two are coming up again.

SECOND COURTIER

Out! The disgrace of drinkers!

SIMONIDES

Yes, 'twill out. Do you smell nothing yet?

FIRST COURTIER

Smell?

SIMONIDES

Farewell quickly, then; it will do if I stay.

Exit.

FIRST COURIER

A foil go with thee!

LISANDER

What! Shall we put down youth at her own virtues?
Beat folly in her own ground? Wondrous much!
Why may not we be held as full sufficient
To love our own wives then, get our own children,
And live in free peace till we be dissolved?
For such spring butterflies that are gaudy-winged,
But no more substance than those shamble-flies
Which butchers' boys snap between sleep and waking,
Come but to crush you once; you are all but maggots
For all your beamy outsides!

Enter Cleanthes.

EUGENIA

[To Courtiers] Here's Cleanthes;
He comes to chide. Let him alone a little;
Our cause will be revenged. Look, look, his face
Is set for stormy weather. Do but mark
How the clouds gather in it; 'twill pour down straight.

CLEANTHES

[To Lisander] Methinks I partly know you, that's my grief.
Could you not all be lost? That had been handsome;
But to be known at all, 'tis more than shameful!
Why, was not your name wont to be Lisander?

LISANDER

'Tis so still, coz.

CLEANTHES

Judgment, defer thy coming,
Else this man's miserable!

EUGENIA

I told you there would be
A shower anon.

SECOND COURTIER

We'll in and hide our noddles.

Exeunt Courtiers and Eugenia.

CLEANTHES

What devil brought this colour to your mind,
Which since [my] childhood I ne'er saw you wear?
You were ever of an innocent gloss
Since I was ripe for knowledge; and would you lose it
And change the livery of saints and angels
For this mixed monstrousness? To force a ground
That has been so long hallowed like a temple,
To bring forth fruits of earth now, and turn black
To the wild cries of lust and the complexion
Of sin in act, lost and long since repented?
Would you begin a work ne'er yet attempted,
To pull time backward? See what your wife will do!
Are your wits perfect?

LISANDER

My wits?

CLEANTHES

I like it ten times worse; for it had been safer
Now to be mad, and more excusable!
I hear you dance again, and do strange follies.

LISANDER

I must confess I have been put to some, coz.

CLEANTHES

And yet you are not mad? Pray, say not so;
Give me that comfort of you that you are mad,
That I may think you are at worst. For, if
You are not mad, I then must guess you have
The first of some disease was never heard of,
Which may be worse than madness, and more fearful,
You'd weep to see yourself else, and your care
To pray would quickly turn you white again.
I had a father, had he lived his month out,
But to ha' seen this most prodigious folly,
There needed not the law to have cut him off;
The sight of this had proved his executioner,
And broke his heart. He would have held it equal
Done to a sanctuary! For what is age
But the holy place of life, chapel of ease

III.i. [A church]

The Old Law

For all men's wearied miseries? And to rob
That of her ornament, it is accursed,
As from a priest to steal a holy vestment;
Ay, and convert it to a sinful covering.

Exit Lisander.

I see it has done him good; blessing go with it,
Such as may make him pure again.

Enter Eugenia.

EUGENIA

'Twas bravely touched, i'faith, sir.

CLEANTHES

Oh, you're welcome.

EUGENIA

Exceedingly well handled.

CLEANTHES

'Tis to you I come;
He fell but in my way.

EUGENIA

You marked his beard, cousin?

CLEANTHES

Mark me.

EUGENIA

Did you ever see a hair so changed?

CLEANTHES

[Aside] I must be forced to wake her loudly too;
The devil has rocked her so fast asleep.—
Strumpet!

EUGENIA

Do you call, sir?

CLEANTHES

Whore!

EUGENIA

How do you, sir?

CLEANTHES

Be I ne'er so well
I must be sick of thee! Thou art a disease

III.i. [A church]

That stickest to the heart, as all such women are.

EUGENIA

What ails our kindred?

CLEANTHES

Bless me, she sleeps still!
What a dead modesty is in this woman!
Will never blush again? Look on thy work
But with a Christian eye, 'twould turn thy heart
Into a shower of blood to be the cause
Of that old man's destruction. Think upon it!
Ruin eternally! For through thy loose follies
Heaven has found him a faint servant lately.
His goodness has gone backward and engendered
With his old sins again; h'as lost his prayers,
And all the tears that were companions with 'em;
And, like a blindfold man, giddy and blinded,
Thinking he goes right on still, swerves but one foot
And turns to the same place where he set out.
So he, that took his farewell of the world
And cast the joys behind him out of sight,
Summed up his hours, made even with time and men,
Is now in heart arrived at youth again,
All by thy wildness. Thy too hasty lust
Has driven him to this strong apostacy.
Immodesty like thine was never equalled!
I've heard of women, shall I call 'em so,
Have welcomed suitors ere the corpse were cold,
But thou, thy husband living: thou art too bold!

EUGENIA

Well, have you done now, sir?

CLEANTHES

Look, look, she smiles yet!

EUGENIA

All this is nothing to a mind resolved;
Ask any woman that, she'll tell you so much.
You have only shown a pretty saucy wit
Which I shall not forget, nor to requite it
You shall hear from me shortly.

CLEANTHES

Shameless woman!
I take my counsel from thee, 'tis too honest,
And leave thee wholly to thy stronger master.
Bless the sex of thee from thee; that's my prayer.
Were all like thee, so impudently common,
No man would be found to wed a woman.

Exit.

EUGENIA

I'll fit you gloriously!
He that attempts to take away my pleasure,
I'll take away his joy, and I can, sure.
His concealed father pays for it! I'll even tell
Him that I mean to make my husband next,
And he shall tell the duke.

Enter Simonides.

Mass! Here he comes.

SIMONIDES

H'as had a bout with me too.

EUGENIA

What? No! Since, sir?

SIMONIDES

A flirt, a little flirt; he called me strange names,
But I ne'er minded him.

EUGENIA

You shall quit him, sir,
When he as little minds you.

SIMONIDES

I like that well.
I love to be revenged when no one thinks of me;
There's little danger that way.

EUGENIA

This is it then:
He you shall strike; your stroke shall be profound,
And yet your foe not guess who gave the wound.

SIMONIDES

A' my troth, I love to give such wounds.

Exeunt.

IV.i. [Before a tavern]

Enter [Gnothos the] Clown, Butler, Bailiff, Tailor, Cook, Drawer, [and Siren the] Wench.

DRAWER

Welcome, gentlemen, will you not draw near? Will you drink at door, gentlemen?

BUTLER

Oh, the summer air's best.

DRAWER

What wine will [it] please you drink, gentlemen?

BUTLER

De Clare, sirrah.

[Exit Drawer.]

GNOTHOS

What! You're all sped already, bullies?

COOK

My widow's a' the spit and half ready, lad. A turn or two more, and I have done with her.

GNOTHOS

Then, cook, I hope you have basted her before this time.

COOK

And stuck her with rosemary too, to sweeten her; she was tainted ere she came to my hands. What an old piece of flesh of fifty–nine, eleven months and upwards! She must needs be flyblown.

GNOTHOS

Put her off, put her off, though you lose by her; the weather's hot.

COOK

Why, drawer!

Enter Drawer.

DRAWER

By and by! Here, gentlemen, here's the quintessence of Greece; the sages never drunk better grape.

COOK

Sir, the mad Greeks of this age can taste their Palermo as well as the sage Greeks did before 'em. Fill, lick–spigot!

DRAWER

Ad imum, sir.

GNOTHOS

The Old Law

My friends, I must doubly invite you all, the fifth of the next month, to the funeral of my first wife and to the marriage of my second. My two to one, this is she!

COOK

I hope some of us will be ready for the funeral of our wives by that time to go with thee; but shall they be both of a day?

GNOTHOS

Oh, best of all, sir! Where sorrow and joy meet together, one will help away with another the better. Besides, there will be charges saved too; the same rosemary that serves for the funeral will serve for the wedding.

BUTLER

How long do you make account to be a widower, sir?

GNOTHOS

Some half an hour; long enough for a conscience! Come, come, let's have some agility: is there no music in the house?

DRAWER

Yes, sir, here are sweet wire-drawers in the house.

COOK

Oh, that makes them and you seldom part; you are wine-drawers and they wire-drawers.

TAILOR

And both govern by the pegs too.

GNOTHOS

And you have pipes in your consort too?

DRAWER

And sack butts too, sir.

BUTLER

But the heads of your instruments differ; yours are hogsheds, their[s] cittern and gitternheads.

BAILIFF

All wooden heads. There, they meet again!

COOK

Bid 'em strike up, we'll have a dance. Gnothos, come, thou shall [foot] it too.

[Exit Drawer.]

GNOTHOS

No dancing with me; we have Siren here.

COOK

Siren! 'Twas Hiren, the fair Greek, man!

GNOTHOS

IV.i. [Before a tavern]

The Old Law

Five drachmas of that! I say Siren, the fair Greek, and so are all fair Greeks.

COOK

A match! Five drachmas her name was Hiren.

GNOTHOS

Siren's name was Siren for five drachmas.

COOK

'Tis done.

TAILOR

Take heed what you do, Gnothos.

GNOTHOS

Do not I know our own countrywomen? Siren and Nell of Greece, two of the fairest Greeks that ever were.

COOK

That Nell was Helen of Greece too.

GNOTHOS

As long as she tarried with her husband, she was Ellen; but after she came to Troy, she was Nell of Troy, or Bonny Nell, whether you will or no.

TAILOR

Why? Did she grow shor[t]er when she came to Troy?

GNOTHOS

She grew longer, if you mark the story. When she grew to be an ell, she was deeper than any yard of Troy could reach by a quarter. There was Cressid was Troy weight, and Nell was haberdepoise; she held more by four ounces than Cressida.

BAILIFF

They say she caused many wounds to be given in Troy.

GNOTHOS

True, she was wounded there herself and cured again by plaster of Paris, and ever since that has been used to stop holes with.

Enter Drawer.

DRAWER

Gentlemen, if you be disposed to be merry, the music is ready to strike up and here's a consort of mad Greeks. I know not whether they be men or women, or between both: they have what-you-call-'em, [wizards], on their faces.

COOK

Vizards, goodman lick-spigot.

BUTLER

If they be wise women, they may be wizards too.

The Old Law

DRAWER

They desire to enter amongst any merry company of gentlemen goodfellows for a strain or two.

COOK

We'll strain ourselves with 'em. Say let 'em come now, for the honour of Epire!

[Enter Agatha and the others' wives, masked.]

GNOTHOS

She [is] dancing with me: we have Siren here.

The dance of old women masked; then [they] offer to take the men [out]. They agree all but Gnothos; he sits with his wench, after [the dance] they whisper.

COOK

Ay, so kind! Then everyone his wench to his several room. Gnothos, we are all provided now, as you are.

Exeunt each with his wife; manet [Gnothos, Siren, and Agatha,] Gnothos's wife.

GNOTHOS

I shall have two, it seems. Away! I have Siren here already.

AGATHA

[Unmasks.] What a mermaid!

GNOTHOS

No, but a maid, horse-face! Oh, old woman, is it you?

AGATHA

Yes, 'tis I! All the rest have gulled themselves and taken their own wives; and shall know that they have done more than they can well answer. But, I pray you, husband, what are you doing?

GNOTHOS

Faith, thus should I do if thou were dead, old Ag, and thou has not long to live, I'm sure. We have Siren here.

AGATHA

Art thou so shameless whilst I am living, to keep one under my nose?

GNOTHOS

No, Ag, I do prize her far above thy nose. If thou wouldst lay me both thine eyes in my hand to boot, I'll not leave her. Art not ashamed to be seen in a tavern, and hast scarce a fortnight to live? Oh, old woman, what art thou! Must thou find no time to think of thy end?

AGATHA

Oh, unkind villain!

GNOTHOS

[To Siren] And then, sweetheart, thou shalt have two new gowns, and the best of this old, old woman's shall make thee raiments for the working days.

The Old Law

AGATHA

Oh, rascal! Dost thou quarter my clothes already too?

GNOTHOS

Her ruffs will serve thee for nothing but to wash dishes, for thou shalt have nine of the new fashion.

AGATHA

Impudent villain! Shameless harlot!

GNOTHOS

You may hear she never wore any but rails all her lifetime.

AGATHA

Let me come, I'll tear the strumpet from him!

GNOTHOS

Dar'st thou call my wife strumpet, thou preter-pluperfect tense of a woman? I'll make thee do penance in the sheet thou shalt be buried in. Abuse my choice, my two to one!

AGATHA

[Aside] No, unkind villain, I'll deceive thee yet!—I have a reprieve for five years of life: I am with child!

SIREN

Cud, so, Gnothos; I'll not tarry so long! Five years! I may bury two husbands by that time.

GNOTHOS

Alas, give the poor woman leave to talk. She with child? Ay, with a puppy! As long as I have thee by me, she shall not be with child, I warrant thee.

AGATHA

The law and thou and all shall find I am with child.

GNOTHOS

I'll take my corporal oath I begat it not, and then thou diest for adultery.

AGATHA

No matter, that will ask some time in the proof.

GNOTHOS

Oh, you'd be stoned to death, would you? All old women would die a' that fashion with all their hearts, but the law shall overthrow you the t'other way first.

SIREN

Indeed, if it be so, I will not linger so long, Gnothos.

GNOTHOS

Away, away, some botcher has got it; 'tis but a cushion, I warrant thee. The old woman is loath to depart; she never sung other tune in her life.

SIREN

We will not have our noses bored with a cushion if it be so.

The Old Law

GNOTHOS

Go, go thy ways, thou old almanac at the twenty–eighth day of December, even almost out of date! Down on thy knees and make thee ready. Sell some of thy clothes to buy thee a death's head and put upon thy middle finger; your least considering bawd doe[s] so much; be not thou worse, though thou art an old woman as she is. I am cloyed with old stockfish; here's a young perch is sweeter meat by half. Prithee, die before thy day if thou canst, that thou mayst not be counted a witch.

AGATHA

No, thou art a witch and I'll prove it. I said I was with child; thou knew'st no other but by sorcery. Thou saidst it was a cushion, and so it is! [Drops the cushion from beneath her gown.] Thou art a witch for it; I'll be sworn to it!

GNOTHOS

Ha, ha, ha; I told thee 'twas a cushion! Go get thy sheet ready; we'll see thee buried as we go to the church to be married.

Ex[eunt Gnothos and Siren].

AGATHA

Nay, I'll follow thee and show myself a wife. I'll plague thee as long as I live with thee, and I'll bury some money before I die that my ghost may haunt thee afterward!

Exit.

IV.ii. [Outside Leonides' lodge in the woods]

Enter Cleanthes.

CLEANTHES

What's that? Oh, nothing but the whispering wind
Breathes through yon churlish hawthorn that grew rude
As if it chid the gentle breath that kissed it.
I cannot be too circumspect, too careful,
For in these woods lies hid all my life's treasure,
Which is too much ever to fear to lose,
Though it be never lost. And if our watchfulness
Ought to be wise and serious against a thief
That comes to steal our goods, things all without us,
That proves vexation often more than comfort,
How mighty ought our providence to be
To prevent those, if any such there were,
That come to rob our bosom of our joys
That only makes poor man delight to live!
Pshaw! I'm too fearful. Fie, fie, who can hurt me?
But 'tis a general cowardice that shakes
The nerves of confidence. He that hides treasure
Imagines everyone thinks of that place,
When 'tis a thing least minded. Nay, let him change
The place continually, where'er it keeps,
There will the fear keep still.

Enter Hippolita.

IV.i. [Before a tavern]

Yonder's the storehouse
Of all my comfort now; and see, it sends forth
A dear one to me. Precious chief of women,
How does the good old soul? Has he fed well?

HIPPOLITA

Beshrew me, sir, he made the heartiest meal today,
Much good may it do his health!

CLEANTHES

A blessing on thee,
Both for thy news and wish.

HIPPOLITA

His stomach, sir,
Is bettered wondrously since his concealment.

CLEANTHES

Heaven has a blessed work in it. Come, we're safe here;
I prithee, call him forth, the air's much wholesomer.

HIPPOLITA

Father!

Enter Leonides.

[LEONIDES]

How sweetly sounds the voice of a good woman!
It is so seldom heard, that when it speaks
It ravishes all senses. [To Cleanthes] Lists of honour!
I've a joy weeps to see you; 'tis so full,
So fairly fruitful.

CLEANTHES

[Kneels.] I hope to see you often and return
Loaden with blessings still to pour on some.
I find 'em all in my contented peace,
And lose not one in thousands. They're dispersed
So gloriously, I know not which are brighter!
I find 'em as angels are found, by legions:
First in the love and honesty of a wife,
Which is the first and chiefest of all temporal blessings;
Next in yourself, which is the hope and joy
Of all my actions, my affairs, my wishes;
And lastly, which crowns all, I find my soul
Crowned with the peace of 'em, the eternal riches,
Man's only portion for his heavenly marriage.

LEONIDES

Rise, thou art all obedience, love, and goodness.

I dare say that which thousand fathers cannot,
And that's my precious comfort: never son
Was in the way more of celestial rising!
Thou art so made of such ascending virtue
That all the powers of hell cannot sink thee.

A horn.

CLEANTHES

Ha!

LEONIDES

What was it disturbed my joy?

CLEANTHES

Did you not hear,
As afar off?

LEONIDES

What, my excellent consort?

HIPPOLITA

I heard a--

A horn.

CLEANTHES

Hark, again!

LEONIDES

Bless my joy,
What ails it on a sudden?

CLEANTHES

Now, since lately.

LEONIDES

'Tis nothing but a symptom of thy care, man.

CLEANTHES

Alas, you do not hear well.

LEONIDES

What was it, daughter?

HIPPOLITA

I heard a sound twice.

A horn.

CLEANTHES

IV.i. [Before a tavern]

The Old Law

Hark, louder and nearer.
In, for the precious good of virtue, quick, sir!

[Exit Leonides.]

Louder and nearer yet; at hand, at hand!
A hunting here 'tis strange: I never knew
Game followed in these woods before.

HIPPOLITA

Now let 'em come and spare not.

Enter Duke [Evander], Simonides, Courtiers, and [Cratilus the] executioner.

CLEANTHES

Ha, 'tis— Is it not the duke? Look sparingly.

HIPPOLITA

'Tis he, but what of that? Alas, take heed, sir,
Your care will overthrow us.

CLEANTHES

Come, it shall not;
Let's set a pleasant face upon our fears
Though our hearts shake with horror. Ha, ha, ha!

EVANDER

Hark!

CLEANTHES

Prithee, proceed.
[Loudly] I'm taken with these light things infinitely
Since the old man's decease. Ha, so they parted, ha, ha, ha!

EVANDER

Why, how should I believe this? Look, he's merry
As if he had no such charge. One with that care
Could never be so. Still, he holds his temper,
And 'tis the same, still with no difference,
He brought his father's corpse to the grave with.
He laughed thus then, you know.

FIRST COURTIER

Ay, he may laugh, my lord:
That shows but how he glories in his cunning,
And, perhaps, done more to advance his wit
Than to express affection to his father;
That only he has overreached the law.

SIMONIDES

He tells you right, my lord; his own cousin—german

IV.i. [Before a tavern]

Revealed it first to me, a free-tongued woman,
And very excellent at telling secrets.

EVANDER

If a contempt can be so neatly carried,
It gives me cause of wonder.

SIMONIDES

Troth, my lord,
'Twill prove a delicate cozening, I believe.
I'd have no scrivener offer to come near it.

EVANDER

Cleanthes.

CLEANTHES

My loved lord!

EVANDER

[Aside] Not moved a whit,
Constant to [lightness] still.—'Tis strange to meet you
Upon a ground so unfrequented, sir.
This does not sit your passion; you're for mirth
Or I mistake you much.

CLEANTHES

But, finding it
Grow to a noted imperfection in me,
For anything too much is vicious,
I come to these disconsolate walks of purpose,
Only to dull and take away the edge on it.
I ever had a greater zeal to sadness;
A natural proportion, I confess, my lord,
Before that cheerful accident fell out,
If I may call a father's funeral cheerful
Without wrong done to duty or my love.

EVANDER

It seems, then, you take pleasure in these walks, sir?

CLEANTHES

Contemplative content, I do, my lord;
They bring into my mind oft meditations
So sweetly precious, that in the parting
I find a shower of grace upon my cheeks
They take their leave so feelingly.

EVANDER

So, sir.

CLEANTHES

Which is a kind of grave delight, my lord.

EVANDER

And I've small cause, Cleanthes, to afford you
The least delight that has a name.

CLEANTHES

My lord?

SIMONIDES

Now it begins to fadge.

FIRST COURTIER

Peace! Thou art so greedy, Sim.

EVANDER

In your excess of joy, you have expressed
Your rancour and contempt against my law.
Your smiles deserve fining; you've professed
Derision openly, even to my face,
Which might be death, a little more incensed.
You do not come for any freedom here,
But for a project of your own.
But all that's known to be contentful to thee
Shall in the use prove deadly. Your life's mine
If ever thy presumption do but lead thee
Into these walks again, ay, or that woman.
[To Courtiers] I'll have 'em watched a' purpose.

[Cleanthes and Hippolita step aside.]

FIRST COURTIER

Now, now, his colour ebbs and flows!

SIMONIDES

Mark hers too.

HIPPOLITA

Oh, who shall bring food to the poor old man now?
Speak somewhat good, sir, or we're lost forever.

CLEANTHES

Oh, you did wondrous ill to call me again;
There are not words to help us. If I entreat,
'Tis found; that will betray us worse than silence.
Prithee, let heaven alone and let's say nothing.

FIRST COURTIER

You've struck 'em dumb, my lord.

SIMONIDES

IV.i. [Before a tavern]

Look how guilt looks!
I would not have that fear upon my flesh
To save ten fathers.

CLEANTHES

He is safe still, is he not?

HIPPOLITA

Oh, you do ill to doubt it.

CLEANTHES

Thou art all goodness.

SIMONIDES

How does your grace believe?

EVANDER

'Tis too apparent.

Search, make a speedy search, for the imposture
Cannot be far off by the fear it sends.

CLEANTHES

Ha!

SIMONIDES

H'as the lapwing's cunning, I'm afraid, my lord,
That cries most when she's farthest from the nest.

CLEANTHES

Oh, we're betrayed!

HIPPOLITA

Betrayed, sir?

SIMONIDES

See, my lord,
It comes out more and more still.

Exeunt Courtiers and Simonides.

CLEANTHES

Bloody thief!
Come from that place; 'tis sacred, homicide,
'Tis not for thy adulterate hands to touch it!

HIPPOLITA

Oh miserable virtue, what distress
Art thou in at this minute?

CLEANTHES

Help me, thunder,

IV.i. [Before a tavern]

The Old Law

For my power's lost! Angels, shoot plagues and help me!
Why are these men in health and I so heart-sick?
Or why should nature have that power in me
To levy up a thousand bleeding sorrows,
And not one comfort? Only makes me lie
Like the poor mockery of an earthquake here,
Panting with horror, and have not so much force
In all my vengeance to shake a villain a' me!

Enter Courtiers, Simonides, Leonides.

HIPPOLITA

Use him gently and heaven will love you for it.

CLEANTHES

Father, oh father, now I see thee full
In thy affection! Thou'rt a man of sorrow,
But reverently becom'st it, that's my comfort.
Extremity was never better graced
Than with that look of thine. Oh, let me look still
For I shall lose it; all my joy and strength
Is e'en eclips'd together. [Kneels before Evander.] I transgressed
Your law, my lord; let me receive the sting on't.
Be once just, sir, and let the offender die;
He's innocent in all, and I am guilty.

LEONIDES

Your grace knows when affection only speaks;
Truth is not always there. His love would draw
An undeserved misery on his youth,
And wrong a peace resolved, on both parts sinful.
'Tis I am guilty of my own concealment
And, like a worldly coward, injured heaven
With fear to go to it. Now I see my fault
And am prepared with joy to suffer for it.

EVANDER

Go, give him quick dispatch, let him see his death;
And your presumption, sir, shall come to judgment.

Exeunt [Evander, Simonides, Courtiers and Cratylus] with Leonides.

HIPPOLITA

He's going! Oh, he's gone, sir!

CLEANTHES

Let me rise.

HIPPOLITA

Why do you not then, and follow?

CLEANTHES

I strive for it.
Is there no hand of pity that will ease me
And take this villain from my heart awhile?

HIPPOLITA

Alas, he's gone.

CLEANTHES

A worse supplies his place then,
A weight more ponderous. I cannot follow.

HIPPOLITA

Oh, misery of affliction!

CLEANTHES

They will stay
Till I can come; they must be so good ever,
Though they be ne'er so cruel.
My last leave must be taken, think a' that,
And this last blessing give. I will not lose
That for a thousand consorts.

HIPPOLITA

That hope's wretched.

CLEANTHES

The unutterable stings of fortune!
All griefs are to be borne, save this alone!
This, like a headlong torrent, overturns
The frame of nature;
For he that gives us life first, as a father,
Locks all his natural sufferings in our blood;
The sorrow that he feels, are our heads,
They are incorporate to us.

HIPPOLITA

Noble sir!

CLEANTHES

Let me behold [thee] well.

HIPPOLITA

Sir!

CLEANTHES

Thou shouldst be good,
Or thou art a dangerous substance to be lodged
So near the heart of man.

HIPPOLITA

IV.i. [Before a tavern]

What means this, dear sir?

CLEANTHES

To thy trust only was this blessed secret
Kindly committed. 'Tis destroyed: thou seest
What follows to be thought on it.

HIPPOLITA

Miserable!
Why, here's the unhappiness of woman still,
That having forfeited in old times their trust,
Now makes their faiths suspected that are just!

Enter Eugenia.

CLEANTHES

What shall I say to all my sorrows then,
That look for satisfaction?

EUGENIA

Ha, ha, ha, cousin!

CLEANTHES

How ill dost thou become this time!

EUGENIA

Ha, ha, ha,
Why, that's but your opinion: a young wench
Becomes the time at all times.
Now, coz, we're even! And you be remembered
You left a strumpet and a whore at home with me,
And such fine field-bed words which could not cost you
Less than a father.

CLEANTHES

Is it come that way?

EUGENIA

Had you an uncle he should go the same way too.

CLEANTHES

Oh, eternity!
What monster is this fiend in labour with?

EUGENIA

An ass-colt with two heads, that's she and you!
I will not lose so glorious a revenge
Not to be understood in it. I betray him,
And now we're even, you'd best keep you so.

CLEANTHES

IV.i. [Before a tavern]

Is there not poison yet enough to kill me?

HIPPOLITA

Oh, sir, forgive me, it was I betrayed him.

CLEANTHES

How!

HIPPOLITA

Ay.

CLEANTHES

The fellow of my heart 'twill speed me then.

HIPPOLITA

Her tears that never wept, and mine own pity
Even cozened me together and stole from me
This secret, which fierce death should not have purchased.

CLEANTHES

Nay, then we're at an end; all we are false ones
And ought to suffer: I was false to wisdom
In trusting woman, thou were false to faith
In uttering of the secret, and thou false
To goodness in deceiving such a pity.
We are all tainted some way, but thou worst;
And for thy infectious spots ought to die first.

[Draws his sword.]

EUGENIA

Pray turn your weapon, sir, upon your mistress;
I come not so ill-friended. Rescue, servants!

Enter Simonides and Courtiers.

CLEANTHES

Are you so whorishly provided?

SIMONIDES

Yes, sir,
She has more weapons at command than one.

EUGENIA

Put forward, man; thou art most sure to have me.

SIMONIDES

I shall be surer if I keep behind, though.

EUGENIA

Now, servants, show your loves!

IV.i. [Before a tavern]

SIMONIDES

I'll show my love too, afar off.

EUGENIA

I love to be so courted! Woo me, there!

SIMONIDES

I love to keep good weapons though ne'er fought;
I'm sharper set within than I am without.

HIPPOLITA

Oh, gentlemen! Cleanthes!

EUGENIA

Fight! Upon him!

HIPPOLITA

Thy thirst of blood proclaims thee now a strumpet.

EUGENIA

'Tis dainty, next to procreation fitting;
I'd either be destroying men or getting.

Enter Officers.

FIRST OFFICER

Forbear, on your allegiance, gentlemen!
He's the duke's prisoner, and we seize upon him
To answer this contempt against the law.

CLEANTHES

I obey fate in all things.

HIPPOLITA

Happy rescue!

SIMONIDES

I would you'd seized upon him a minute sooner; it had saved me a cut finger. I wonder how I came by it, for I never put my hand forth, I'm sure. I think my own sword did cut it, if truth were known; maybe the wire in the handle. I have lived these five-and-twenty years and never knew what colour my blood was before. I never durst eat oysters, nor cut peck-loaves.

EUGENIA

You have shown your spirits, gentlemen, but you have cut your finger.

SIMONIDES

Ay, the wedding finger too. A pox on it!

FIRST COURTIER

You'll prove a bawdy bachelor, Sim, to have a cut upon your finger before you are married.

The Old Law

SIMONIDES

I'll never draw sword again to have such a jest put upon me.

[Exeunt.]

V.i. [The court]

Sword and Mace carried before them, enter Simonides and the Courtiers.

SIMONIDES

Be ready with your prisoner; we'll sit instantly
And rise before 'leven, or when we please.
Shall we not follow, judges?

FIRST COURTIER

'Tis committed
All to our power, censure, and pleasure, now
The duke hath made us chief lords of this session;
And we may speak by fits, or sleep by turns.

SIMONIDES

Leave that to us, but, whatsoe'er we do,
The prisoner shall be sure to be condemned.
Sleeping or waking, we are resolved on that
Before we set upon him?

SECOND COURTIER

Make you question
If not? Cleanthes? And [our] enemy!
Nay, a concealer of his father too,
A vile example in these days of youth.

SIMONIDES

If they were given to follow such examples,
But sure I think they are not; howsoe'er,
'Twas wickedly attempted, that's my judgment,
And it shall pass while I am in power to sit.
Never by prince were such young judges made;
But now the cause requires it, if you mark it.
He must make young or none, for all the old ones,
[Their fathers], he hath sent a-fishing, and my
Father's one. I humbly thank his highness.

Enter Eugenia.

FIRST COURTIER

[Widow]!

EUGENIA

You almost hit my name no[w], gentlemen;
You come so wondrous near it, I admire you
For your judgment.

SIMONIDES

My wife that must be, she!

EUGENIA

My husband goes upon his last hour now.

FIRST COURTIER

On his last legs, I'm sure.

EUGENIA

September the seventeenth,
I will not bate an hour on it; and tomorrow
His latest hour's expired.

SECOND COURTIER

Bring him to judgment;
The jury's panelled and the verdict given
[Ere] he appears, we have ta'en course for that.

SIMONIDES

And officers to attach the gray young man,
The youth of fourscore. Be of comfort, lady;
We shall no longer bosom January,
For that I will take order and provide
For you a lusty April.

EUGENIA

The month that ought, indeed,
To go before May.

FIRST COURTIER

Do as we have said;
Take a strong guard and bring him into court.
Lady Eugenia, see this charge performed
That, having his life forfeited by the law,
He may relieve his soul.

EUGENIA

Willingly!
From shaven chins never came better justice
Than these new-touched by reason.

[Exit Eugenia.]

SIMONIDES

What you do
Do suddenly, we charge you, for we purpose
To make but a short sessions.

Enter Hippolita.

Ah, new business!

V.i. [The court]

FIRST COURTIER

The fair Hippolita! Now, what's your suit?

HIPPOLITA

Alas, I know not how to style you yet;
To call you judges doth not suit your years,
Nor heads and [beards] show more antiquity.
Yet sway yourselves with equity and truth
And I'll proclaim you [reverend] and repeat,
"Once in my lifetime I have seen grave heads
Placed upon young men's shoulders."

SECOND COURTIER

Hark, she flouts us,
And thinks to make us monstrous.

HIPPOLITA

Prove not so,
For yet, methinks, you bear the shapes of men,
Though nothing more than [mercy beautifies]
To make you appear angels. But if [you] crimson
Your name and power with blood and cruelty,
Suppress fair virtue and enlarge of old vice,
Both against heaven and nature draw your sword,
Make either will or humour turn the soul
Of your created greatness, and in that
Oppose all goodness, I must tell you there
You're more than monstrous. In the very act,
You change yourself to devils.

FIRST COURTIER

She's a witch!
Hark, she begins to conjure!

SIMONIDES

Time, you see,
Is short; much business now on foot. Shall I
Give her her answer?

SECOND COURTIER

None upon the bench
More learnedly can do it.

SIMONIDES

Hem, hem, hem! Then list:
I wonder at thine impudence, young huswife,
That thou dar'st plead for such a base offender.
Conceal a father past his time to die!
What son and heir would have done this but he?

FIRST COURTIER

I vow not I.

HIPPOLITA

Because we are parricides!
And how can comfort be derived from such
That pity not their fathers?

SECOND COURTIER

You are fresh and fair, practise young women's ends;
When husbands are distressed, provide them friends.

SIMONIDES

I'll set him forward, fee thee. Without fee?
Some wives would pay for such a courtesy!

HIPPOLITA

Times of amazement, [where doth] goodness dwell?
I sought for charity, but knock at hell!

Exit. Enter Eugenia, with Lisander prisoner, [and] a guard.

SIMONIDES

Eugenia, come! Command a second guard
To bring Cleanthes in. We'll not sit long,
My stomach strives to dinner.

EUGENIA

Now, servants, may a lady be so bold
To call your power so low?

SIMONIDES

A mistress may;
She can make all things low, then in that language
There can be no offense.

EUGENIA

The time's now come
Of manumissions; take him into bonds,
And I am then at freedom.

SECOND COURTIER

This the man!
He hath left of late to feed on snakes,
His beard's turned white again.

FIRST COURTIER

Is it possible these gouty legs danced lately,
And shattered in a galliard?

EUGENIA

V.i. [The court]

Jealousy
And fear of death can work strange prodigies.

SECOND COURTIER

The nimble fencer this, that made me tear
And traverse 'bout the chamber?

SIMONIDES

Ay, and gave me
Those elbow healths, the hangman take him for it!
They had almost fetched my heart out. The Dutch venny
I swallowed pretty well, but the half-pike
Had almost [pepper'd] me. But had I took,
Being swollen, I had cast my lungs out.

A [flourish]. Enter the Duke [Evander].

SECOND COURTIER

Peace, the duke!

EVANDER

Nay, [take] your seats. Who's that?

SIMONIDES

May it please your highness, 'tis old Lisander.

EVANDER

And brought in by his wife! A worthy precedent
Of one that no way would offend the law,
And should not pass away without remark.
[To Lisander] You had been looked for long.

LISANDER

But never fit
To die till now, my lord; my sins and I
Have been but newly parted. Much ado
I had to get them leave me, or be taught
That difficult lesson, how to learn to die.
I never thought there had been such an act,
And 'tis the only discipline we are born for.
All studies as are, are but as circular lines
And death the centre where they must all meet.
I now can look upon thee, erring woman,
And not be vexed with jealousy; on young men,
And no way envy their delicious health,
Pleasure and strength, all which were once mine own,
And mine must be their's one day.

EVANDER

You have tamed him.

SIMONIDES

And know how to dispose him. That, my liege,
Hath been before determined. [To Lisander] You confess
Yourself of full age?

LISANDER

Yes, and prepared to inherit—

[EUGENIA]

Your place above!

SIMONIDES

Of which the hangman's strength
Shall put him in possession.

[LISANDER]

'Tis still
To take me willing and in mind to die,
And such are, when the earth grows weary of them,
Most fit for heaven.

SIMONIDES

The court shall make his mittimus
And send him thither presently. In the meantime—

EVANDER

Guard! Away to death with him!

[Exit Lisander, led off by guard. Enter a guard with Cleanthes, Hippolita weeping after him.]

SIMONIDES

So! See, another person brought to the bar!

FIRST COURTIER

The arch malefactor!

SECOND COURTIER

The grand offender! The most refractory
To all good order! 'Tis Cleanthes, he—

SIMONIDES

That would have sons grave fathers ere their fathers
Be sent unto their graves.

EVANDER

There will be expectation
In your severe proceedings against him,
His act being so capital?

SIMONIDES

Fearful and bloody!

V.i. [The court]

The Old Law

Therefore we charge these women leave the court
Lest they should [swoon] to hear it.

EUGENIA

Ay, in expectation
Of a most happy freedom!

Exit.

HIPPOLITA

Ay, with the apprehension
Of a most sad and desolate widowhood!

Exit.

FIRST COURTIER

We bring him to the bar.

SECOND COURTIER

Hold up your hand, sir.

CLEANTHES

More reverence to the place than to the persons!
To the one I offer up a [spreading] palm
Of duty and obedience showed [th]us to heaven,
Imploring justice which was never wanting
Upon that bench whilst their own fathers sat.
But unto you, my hand's contracted, thus,
As threatening vengeance against murderers;
For they that kill in thought, shed innocent blood!
With pardon to your highness, too much passion
Made me forget your presence and the place;
I now am called to.

EVANDER

All [our] majesty
And power we have to pardon or condemn,
Is now conferred on them.

SIMONIDES

And these we'll use
Little to thine advantage.

CLEANTHES

I expect it.
And as to these, I look no mercy from [them]
And much less mean to entreat it. I thus now
Submit me [to] the emblems of your power, I mean
The sword and bench. But, my most reverend judges,
Ere you proceed to sentence, for I know
You have given me lost, will you resolve me one thing?

V.i. [The court]

FIRST COURTIER

So it be briefly questioned.

SECOND COURTIER

Show your honour,
Day spends itself apace.

CLEANTHES

My lords, it shall
Resolve me then. Where are your filial tears,
Your mourning habits, and sad hearts become,
That should attend your fathers' funeral?
Though the stric[t] law, which I will not accuse
Because a subject, snatched away their lives,
It doth not bar [you] to lament their deaths;
Or, if you cannot spare one sad suspire,
It doth not bid you laugh them to their graves,
Lay subtle trains to antedate their years,
To be the sooner seized of their estates.
Oh time of age! Where's that Aeneas now,
Who, letting all his jewels to the flames,
Forgetting country, kindred, treasure, friends,
Fortunes, and all things save the name of son,
Which you so much forget? Go like Aeneas,
Who took his bedrid father on his back,
And with the sacred load, to him no burden,
Hewed out his way through blood, through fire, through
Even all the armed streets of bright-burning Troy,
Only to save a father.

SIMONIDES

We have no leisure now
To hear lessons read from Virgil; we are passed school
And all this time thy judges.

SECOND COURTIER

'Tis fit
That we proceed to sentence.

FIRST COURTIER

You are the mouth,
And now 'tis fit to open.

SIMONIDES

Justice, indeed,
Should ever be close-eared and open-mouthed,
That is, to hear him little and speak much.
Lo, then, Cleanthes, there's none can be
A good son and a bad subject, for if princes,
Becalled the people's fathers, then the subjects

Are all his sons, and he that flouts the prince
Doth disobey his father. There ye are gone.

FIRST COURTIER

And not to be recovered.

SIMONIDES

And again--

SECOND COURTIER

If he be gone once, call him not again.

SIMONIDES

I say again, this act of thine expresses
A double obedience. As our princes
Are fathers, so they are our sovereigns too,
And he that doth rebel against sovereignty
Doth commit treason in the height of degree.
And now thou art quite gone.

FIRST COURTIER

Our brother in commission
Hath spoke his mind both learnedly and neatly,
And I can add but little, howsoever
It shall send him packing.
He that begins a fault that wants example,
Ought to be made example for the fault.

CLEANTHES

A fault! No longer can I hold myself
To hear vice upheld and virtue thrown down.
A fault! Judge, then, I desire, where it lieth,
In those that are my judges or in me.
Heaven stand on my side! Pity love and duty!

SIMONIDES

Where are they, sir? Who sees them but yourself?

CLEANTHES

Not you, and I am sure; you never had
The gracious eyes to see them. You think you arraign me,
But I hope to sentence you at the bar.

SECOND COURTIER

That would show brave!

CLEANTHES

This were the judgment seat.
We [k]now the heaviest crimes that ever made up
Unnaturalness in humanity,
You are found foul and guilty by the jury

The Old Law

Made of your fathers' curses which have brought
Vengeance impending on you, and I now
Am forced to pronounce judgment of my judges.
The common laws of reason and of nature
Condemn you ipso facto! You are parricides,
And if you marry will beget the [like],
Who, when grown to full maturity,
Will hurry you, their fathers, to your graves.
Like traitors, you take counsel from the living;
Of upright judgment, you would rob the bench;
Experience and discretion snatch away
From the earth's face; turn all into disorder,
Imprison virtue, and enfranchise vice;
And put the sword of justice into the hands
Of boys and madmen.

SIMONIDES

Well, well, have you done, sir?

CLEANTHES

I have spoke my thoughts.

SIMONIDES

Then I'll begin
And end.

EVANDER

'Tis time I now begin,
Where your commission ends. Cleanthes,
You come from the bar. Because I know
You're severally disposed, I here invite you
To an object will, no doubt, work in you
Contrary effects. Music!

Music [sounds], and the old men [Lisander, Leonides, Creon] appear.

CLEANTHES

Pray heaven
I dream not! Sure he moves, talks comfortably
As joy can wish a man. If he be changed
Far above from me, he is not ill-treated.
His face doth promise fullness of content
And glory hath a part in it.

LEONIDES

Oh, my son!

EVANDER

You that can claim acquaintance with these lads,
Talk freely.

The Old Law

SIMONIDES

I can see none there that's worth
One hand to you from me.

EVANDER

These are thy judges, and by their grave law
I find thee clear, but these delinquents guilty.
You must change places, for 'tis so decreed
Such just preeminence hath thy goodness gained;
Thou art the judge now, they the men arraigned.

[Cleanthes, Lisander, Leonides and Creon change places with Simonides and the Courtiers.]

FIRST COURTIER

Here's fine dancing, gentlemen!

SECOND COURTIER

Is thy father amongst them?

[SIMONIDES]

Oh, a pox! I saw him the first thing I looked on. Alive again! 'Slight, I believe now a father hath as many lives as a mother.

[CLEANTHES]

'Tis full as blessed as 'tis wonderful!
Oh, bring me back to the same law again,
I'm fouler than all these! Seize on me,
Officers, and bring me to new sentence.

[EVANDER]

What's all this?

CLEANTHES

A fault not to be pardoned!
Unnaturalness is but sun's shadow to it.

SIMONIDES

I am glad of that; I hope the case may alter and I turn judge again.

EVANDER

Name your offense.

CLEANTHES

That I should be so vile
As once to think you cruel.

EVANDER

Is that all?
'Twas pardoned ere confessed. [To the old men] You that have sons,
If they be worthy, here [may] challenge [them].

The Old Law

[CREON]

I should have one amongst them, had he had grace
To have retained that name.

SIMONIDES

I pray you, father.

[CREON]

That name I know hath been long since forgot.

SIMONIDES

[Aside] I find but small comfort in remembering it now.

EVANDER

Cleanthes, take your place with these grave father[s]
And read what in that table is inscribed.

[He hands him a paper, and points to Simonides and the Courtiers.]

Now set these at the bar, and read, Cleanthes,
To the dread and terror of disobedience and unnatural blood.

CLEANTHES

[Reading] "It is decreed by the grave and learned council of Epire, that no son and heir shall be held capable of his inheritance at the age of one-and-twenty unless he be at that time as [mature] in obedience, manners, and goodness."

SIMONIDES

Sure I shall never be at full age then, though I live to an hundred years, and that's nearer by twenty than the last statute allowed.

FIRST COURTIER

A terrible act!

[CLEANTHES]

"Moreover is enacted that all sons aforesaid, whom either this law, or their own grace, shall reduce into the true method of duty, virtue, and affection, relate their trial and approbation from Cleanthes, the son of Leonides—" From me, my lord?

EVANDER

From none but you as fullest. Proceed, sir.

CLEANTHES

"Whom for his manifest virtues, we make such judge and censure of youth, and the absolute reference of life and manners."

SIMONIDES

This is a brave world! When a man should be selling land, he must be learning manners. It is not, my masters?

Enter Eugenia.

The Old Law

EUGENIA

What's here to do? My suitors at the bar?
The old [band] shines again; oh miserable!

She swoons.

EVANDER

Read the law over to her, 'twill awake her.
'Tis one deserves small pity.

CLEANTHES

"Lastly, it is ordained that all such wives now whatsoever that shall design the[ir] husbands' death to be soon rid of them and entertain suitors in their husbands' lifetime--"

SIMONIDES

You had best read that a little louder, for if anything, that will bring her to herself again, and find her tongue.

CLEANTHES

"Shall not presume, on the penalty of our heavy displeasure, to marry within ten years after."

EUGENIA

That law's too long by nine years and a half;
I'll take my death upon it, so shall most women.

CLEANTHES

"And those incontinent women so offending, to be judge[d] and censured by Hippolita, wife to Cleanthes."

EUGENIA

Of all the rest, I'll not be judge[d] by her.

Enter Hippolita.

CLEANTHES

Ah, here she comes. Let me prevent thy joys,
Prevent them but in part and hide the rest,
Thou hast not strength enough to bear them else.

HIPPOLITA

Leonides!

She faints.

CLEANTHES

I feared it all this while.
I knew 'twas past thy power, Hippolita.
What contrariety is in women's blood?
One faints for spleen and anger, she for grace.

EVANDER

Of sons and wives, we see the worst and best;
M[a]y future ages yield Hippolitas

V.i. [The court]

The Old Law

Many, but few like thee, Eugenia.
Let no Simonides henceforth have a fame,
But all blest sons live in Cleanthes' name.

Music.

Ha, what strange kind of melody was that?
Yet give it entrance, whatsoever it be.
This day is all devout to liberty.

Enter [Gnothos the] Clown and [Siren the] Wench, the rest [Cook, Butler, Bailiff, Tailor] with the old women and [Agatha] the Clown's wife [accompanied by fiddlers]; music, and a bridecake to the wedding.

GNOTHOS

Fiddlers, crowd on, crowd on; let no man lay a block in your way. Crowd on, I say!

EVANDER

Stay the crowd awhile, let's know the reason of this jollity.

CLEANTHES

Sirrah, do you know where you are?

GNOTHOS

Yes, sir, I am here, now here, and now here again, sir.

LISANDER

Your hat's too high-crowned: the duke in presence.

GNOTHOS

The duke? As he is my sovereign, I do give him two crowns for it, and that's equal change all the world over. As I am lord of the day, being my marriage day the second, I do advance bonnet. Crowd on afore!

LEONIDES

Good sir, a few words if you'll vouchsafe 'em, or will you be forced?

GNOTHOS

Forced? I would the duke himself would say so!

EVANDER

I think he dares, sir, and does. If you stay not, you shall be forced.

GNOTHOS

I think so, my lord, and good reason too. Shall not I stay when your grace says I shall? I were unworthy to be a bridegroom in any part of your highness' dominions then. Will it please you to taste of the wedlock courtesy?

EVANDER

Oh, by no means, sir. You shall not deface so fair an ornament for me.

GNOTHOS

If your grace be pleased to be caked, say so.

The Old Law

EVANDER

And which might be your fair bride, sir?

GNOTHOS

This is my two-for-one that must be uxor uxoris, the remedy doloris, and the very syceum amoris.

EVANDER

And hast thou any else?

GNOTHOS

I have an older, my lord, for other uses.

CLEANTHES

My lord,

I do observe a strange decorum here.

These that do lead this day of jollity,

Do march with music and most mirthful cheeks;

Those that do follow, sad and woefully,

Nearer the 'haviour of a funeral

Than a wedding.

EVANDER

'Tis true; pray expound that, sir.

GNOTHOS

As the destiny of the day falls out, my lord, one goes out to wedding, another goes to hanging. And your grace, in the due consideration, shalt find 'em much alike; the one hath the ring upon her finger, the other a halter about her neck. "I take thee, Beatrice," says the bridegroom. "I take thee, Agatha," says the hangman. And both say together, "To have and to hold till death do part us."

EVANDER

This is not yet plain enough to my understanding.

GNOTHOS

If further your grace examine it, you shall find I show myself a dutiful subject and obedient to the law. Myself, with these my good friends and your good subjects, our old wives whose days are ripe and their lives forfeit to the law: only myself, more forward than the rest, am already provided of my second choice.

EVANDER

Oh, take heed, sir; you'll run yourself into danger if the law finds you with two wives at once. There's a shrewd praemunire.

GNOTHOS

I have taken leave of the old, my lord; I have nothing to say to her: she's going to sea. Your grace knows whither better than I do. She has a strong wind with her; it stands full in her poop. When you please, let her disemboque.

COOK

And the rest of her neighbours with her, whom we present to the satisfaction of your highness' law.

GNOTHOS

And so we take our leaves and leave them to your highness. Crowd on!

The Old Law

EVANDER

Stay, stay, you are too forward. Will you marry and your wife yet living?

GNOTHOS

Alas, she'll be dead before we can get to church, if your grace would set her in the way. I would dispatch her; I have a venture on it which would return me, if your highness would make a little more haste, two for one.

EVANDER

Come, my lords, we must sit again. Here's
A case craves a most serious censure.

COOK

Now they shall be dispatched out of the way.

GNOTHOS

I would they were gone [at] once. The time goes away.

EVANDER

Which is the wife unto the forward bridegroom?

AGATHA

I am, and it please your grace.

EVANDER

Trust me, a lusty woman,
Able-bodied, and well-blooded cheeks.

GNOTHOS

Oh, she paints, my lord. She was a chambermaid once and learned it of her lady.

EVANDER

Sure, I think she cannot be so old.

AGATHA

Truly, I think so too, and please your grace.

GNOTHOS

Two to one with your grace of that: she's threescore by the book.

LEONIDES

Peace, sirrah, you're too loud!

COOK

[Aside to Gnothos] Take heed, Gnothos, if you move the duke's patience; 'tis an edge tool: but a work and a blow, he cuts off your head.

GNOTHOS

[Aside to Cook] Cut off my head? Away, ignorant! He knows it costs more in the hair; he does not use to cut off many such heads as mine. I will talk to him too. If he cut off my head, I'll give him my ears. I say my wife is at full age for the law. The clerk shall take his oath and the church-book shall be sworn too.

EVANDER

My lords, I leave this censure to you.

LEONIDES

Then, first, this fellow does deserve punishment
For offering up a lusty, able woman
Which may do service to the commonwealth,
Where the law craves one impotent and useless.

CREON

Therefore, to be severely punished
For thus attempting a second marriage
His wife yet living.

LISANDER

Nay, to have it trebled,
That even the day and instant when he should mourn
As a kind husband to her funeral,
He leads a triumph to the scorn of it,
Which unseasonable joy ought to be punished
With all severity.

BUTLER

The fiddlers will be in a foul case too, by and by.

LEONIDES

Nay, further, it seems he has a venture
Of two for one at his second marriage,
Which cannot be but a conspiracy
Against the former.

GNOTHOS

[Aside] A mess of wise old men!

LISANDER

Sirrah, what can you answer to all these?

GNOTHOS

Ye are good old men and talk as age will give you leave. I would speak with the youthful duke himself; he and I may speak of things that shall be thirty of forty years after you are dead and rotten. Alas, you are here today and gone to sea tomorrow.

EVANDER

In truth, sir, then I must be plain with you.
The law that should take away your old wife
From you, the which I do perceive was your
Desire, is void and frustrate, so for the rest.
There has been since another parliament
Has cut it off.

The Old Law

GNOTHOS

I see your grace is disposed to be pleasant.

EVANDER

Yes, you might perceive that;
I had not else thus dallied with your follies.

GNOTHOS

I'll talk further with your grace when I come back from church. In the meantime, you know what to do with the old women.

EVANDER

Stay, sir, unless in the meantime you mean
I cause a gibbet to be set up in your way,
And hang you at your return.

AGATHA

Oh, gracious prince!

EVANDER

Your old wives cannot die today by any
Law of mine. For aught I can say to 'em
They may, by a new edict, bury you.
And then, perhaps, you pay a new fine too.

GNOTHOS

This is fine, indeed!

AGATHA

Oh, gracious prince, may he live a hundred years more!

COOK

Your venture is not like to come in today, Gnothos.

GNOTHOS

Give me the principal back.

COOK

Nay, by my troth, we'll venture still, and I'm sure we have as ill a venture of it as you, for we have taken old wives of purpose, where that we had thought to have put away at this market, and now we cannot utter a pennyworth.

EVANDER

Well, sirrah, you were best to discharge
Your new charge, and take your old one to you.

GNOTHOS

Oh music! No music, but prove most doleful trumpets!
Oh bride! No bride, but thou mayest prove a strumpet!
Oh venture! No venture, I have for one now none!
Oh wife! Thy life is sav'd when I hoped it had been gone!
Case up your fruitless strings; no penny, no wedding!

The Old Law

Case up thy maidenhead; no priest, no bedding!
Avaunt my venture; it can ne'er be restored
Till Ag, my old wife, be thrown overboard!
Then, come again, old Ag, since it must be so;
Let bride and venture with woeful music go!

COOK

What for the bridecake, Gnothos?

GNOTHOS

Let it be mouldy, now 'tis out of season;
Let it grow out of date, current and reason!
Let it be chipped and chopped, and given to chickens;
No more is got by that than William Dickens
Got by his wooden dishes!
Put up your plums as fiddlers put up pipes;
The wedding dashed, the bridegroom weeps and wipes!
Fiddlers, farewell, and now, without perhaps,
Put up your fiddles as you put up scraps!

LISANDER

This passion has given some satisfaction yet,
My lord, I think you'll pardon him now with all
The rest, so they live honestly with the wives
They have.

EVANDER

Oh, most freely! Free pardon to all!

COOK

Ay, we have deserved our pardons if we can live honestly with such reverend wives that have no motion in 'em but their tongues.

AGATHA

Heaven bless your grace, you're a just prince.

GNOTHOS

All hopes dashed, the clerk's duties lost,
Venture gone, my second wife divorced,
And which is worse, the old one come back again!
Such voyages are made now—a—days.
I will weep two salt of [my] nose, besides these two fountains of fresh water. Your grace had been more kind to your young subjects. Heaven bless and mend your laws that they do not gull your poor country men [in this] fashion. But I am not the first by forty that has been undone by the law; 'tis but a folly to stand upon terms. I take my leave of your grace, as well as mine eyes will give me leave. I would they had been asleep in their beds when they opened 'em to see this day! Come, Ag, come, Ag.

[Exeunt Gnothos, Agatha, and the fiddlers.]

CREON

Were not you all my servants?

V.i. [The court]

The Old Law

COOK

During your life, as we thought, sir, but our young master turned us away.

CREON

[To Simonides] How headlong, villain, wert thou in thy ruin!

SIMONIDES

I followed the fashion, sir, as other young men did. If you [were] as we thought you had been, we should ne'er have come for this, I warrant you. We did not feed, after the old fashion, on beef and mutton and such like.

CREON

[To servants] Well, what damage or charge you have run yourselves into by marriage, I cannot help, nor deliver you from your wives: them you must keep. Yourselves shall again retain to me.

ALL

We thank your lordship for your love, and must thank ourselves for our bad bargains.

[Exeunt the servants and the old wives.]

EVANDER

Cleanthes, you delay the power of law
To be inflicted on these misgoverned men
That filial duty have so far transgressed.

CLEANTHES

My lord, I see a satisfaction
Meeting the sentence, even preventing it,
Beating my words back in their utterance.
See, sir, there's salt sorrow bringing forth fresh
And new duties, as the sea propagates.

[Simonides and the Courtiers kneel.]

The elephants have found their joints too. Why,
Here's humility able to bind up
The punishing hands of the severest masters,
Much more the gentle fathers'.

SIMONIDES

I had ne'er thought to have been brought so low as my knees again, but, since there's no remedy— Fathers, reverend fathers, as you ever hope to have good sons and heirs, a handful of pity! We confess we have deserved more than we are willing to receive at your hands, though sons can never deserve too much of their fathers, as shall appear afterwards.

CREON

And what way can you decline your feeding now?
You cannot retire to beefs and muttons, sure.

SIMONIDES

Alas, sir, you see a good pattern for that! Now we have laid by our high and lusty meats and are down to our mary

bones already.

CREON

Well, sir, rise to virtues! [They rise.] We'll [bind] you now;
You that were too weak yourselves to govern,
By others shall be governed.

LISANDER

Cleanthes,
I meet your justice with reconciliation.
If there be tears of faith in woman's breast,
I have received a myriad which confirms me
To find a happy renovation.

CLEANTHES

[To Leonides] Here's virtue's throne,
Which I'll embellish with my dearest jewels
Of love and faith, peace and affection!
This is the altar of my sacrifice,
Where daily my devoted knees shall bend.
Age-honoured shrine! Time still so love you
That I so long may have you in mine eye,
Until my memory lose your beginning.
For you, great prince, long may your fame survive,
Your justice and your wisdom never die!
Crown of your crown, the blessing of your land,
Which you reach to her from your regent's hand.

LEONIDES

Oh, Cleanthes, had you with us tasted
The entertainment of our retirement,
Feared and exclaimed on in your ignorance,
You might have sooner died upon the wonder
Than any rage or passion for our loss.
A place at hand we were all strangers in;
So sphered about with music, such delights,
Viands, and attendance, and, once a day
So cheered with a royal visitant,
That oftentimes waking, our unsteady fantasies
Would question whether we yet lived or no,
Or had possession of that paradise
Where angels be the guard.

EVANDER

Enough, Leonides,
You go beyond the praise. We have our end,
And all is ended well. We have now seen
The flowers and weeds that grew about our court.

SIMONIDES

[Aside] If these be weeds, I'm afraid I shall wear none so good again as long as my father lives.

V.i. [The court]

The Old Law

EVANDER

Only this gentleman we did abuse
With our own bosom; we seemed a tyrant,
And he our instrument. Look, 'tis Cratilus,
The man that you supposed had now been travelled,
Which we gave leave to learn to speak
And bring us foreign languages to Greece.
All's joyed, I see. Let music be the crown
And set it high: the good needs fear no law;
It is his safety, and the bad man's awe.

[Exeunt omnes.]