

John Ford's
The Queen:
A Retelling

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Educate Yourself

Read Like A Wolf Eats

Be Excellent to Each Other

Books Then, Books Now, Books Forever

In this retelling, as in all my retellings, I have tried to make the work of literature accessible to modern readers who may lack some of the knowledge about mythology, religion, and history that the literary work's contemporary audience had.

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According to Charles Lamb, "Ford was of the first order of poets. He sought for sublimity, not by parcels in metaphors or visible images, but directly where she has her full residence in the heart of man; in the actions and sufferings of the greatest minds."

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Female Characters

Queen of Aragon.

Salassa, a widow. Velasco falls in love with her.

Shaparon, her friend. Somewhat of a bawd. Not a “countess,” but more of a “cunt-tess.” Shaparon’s name is reminiscent of “chaperone.” Let it be known that she would make a poor chaperone. (Sadly, the first citation in the *Oxford English Dictionary* for “A person, esp. a married or elderly woman, who, for the sake of propriety, accompanies a young unmarried lady in public, as guide and protector” is 1720. A quarto edition of *The Queen* was published in 1653.)

Male Characters

Alphonso, defeated leader of the defeated rebels. Afterwards King.

Petruchi, a young lord.

Bufo, a captain. Member of the King’s party. Bufo is a comic character.

Pynto, an astrologer. Member of the King’s party.

Muretto, member of the King’s party. Muretto can be described as a flatterer-parasite or as a good man, or possibly as both. His character becomes clearer in the final scene of the final act.

Velasco, the Queen of Aragon’s general.

Lodovico, his friend.

Collumello, counselor to the Queen of Aragon.

Almado, counselor to the Queen of Aragon.

Herophil, the Queen of Aragon’s woman-servant.

Mopas, Velasco’s man-servant. Described by others as a “wise servant” and a “fool” (Act 1, Scene 2), and as a “jester” (Act 2, Scene 1). Self-described as “Velasco’s gentleman usher” (Act 3, Scene 2).

Minor Characters

Hangman, aka executioner.

Messenger.

Groom, aka servant, especially one who takes care of horses.

Officers.

NOTES:

The medieval Kingdom of Aragon is located in northeastern Spain.

Alphonso loves a woman not enough; Velasco loves a woman too much. Alphonso will not allow the Queen (his wife) to act like a woman, and Salassa (the woman Velasco loves) will not allow Velasco to act like a man.

In this culture, a man of higher rank would use words such as “thee,” “thy,” “thine,” and “thou” to refer to a servant. However, two close friends or a husband and wife could properly use “thee,” “thy,” “thine,” and “thou” to refer to each other.

The word “sirrah” is a term usually used to address a man of lower social rank than the speaker. This was socially acceptable, but sometimes the speaker would use the word as an insult when speaking to a man whom he did not usually call “sirrah.”

Tim Seccombe edited John Ford’s *The Queen*, modernized the spelling, and provided useful notes. His excellent edition is available online:

<https://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/iemls/renplays/queencontents.htm#>

Interestingly, John Ford had a Latin motto: *Fide Honor*. This can be translated as “Honor through Faith”). *Fide Honor* is an anagram of “Iohn Forde.”

The full title of John Ford’s play is this: *The Queen, Or the Excellency of Her Sex*.

CHAPTER 1

— 1.1 —

A civil insurrection in the Kingdom of Aragon in northeastern Spain had just been put down. The defeated army's general was Alphonso, and three of his followers were being pardoned: Bufo, Pynto, and Muretto. Bufo was a captain, Pynto was an astrologer, and Muretto was perhaps mostly a flatterer/parasite.

Petruchi, one of the Queen of Aragon's lords, gave them the good news: "All of you are free, and all of you are forgiven."

The three former rebels said, "May God bless her majesty."

"Henceforth, my friends," Petruchi said, "take heed how you so hazard and risk your lives and fortunes on the peevish civil uprising of every discontent; you will not find mercy so rife at all times."

"Gracious sir!" Muretto said, "Your counsel is more like an oracle than a man's advice. For my part I dare speak for one — I will rather be racked asunder than ever again offend so wise a majesty."

The rack was an instrument of torture in which the victim's arms were pulled in one direction and their legs were pulled in the opposite direction. This caused joints to painfully separate.

"That is well," Petruchi said. "Your lives are once more made your own. I must attend the execution of your hot-headed general: Alphonso. Each of you must shift now for yourselves."

Petruchi exited.

"Has he gone?" Bufo said. "Ha, ha, ha! We have the common capony of the clear Heavens once more over our heads, sirs."

Bufo occasionally erred when it came to language. By "capony," he meant canopy." The canopy of the clear Heavens is a clear sky. A capon is something quite different: a castrated cockerel, aka rooster.

"We are at liberty and are out of the hangman's clutches," Muretto said. "Now observe what good language and fair words will do, gentlemen."

"Good language!" Pynto said.

He then said to Muretto, whose occasional use of flattering words offended him, "Oh, let me go back and be hanged rather than live within the rotten infection of thy cankered breath; the poison of a flatterer's tongue is a thousand times more deadly than the twinges of a hangman's rope. Thou birth of an unlucky planet, I abhor thee."

As an astrologer, Pynto believed that planets could exert favorable or unfavorable influences on a person. He was saying that when Muretto was born, the astrological signs were unfavorable.

"Bah! Bah!" Muretto said. "How can you revile your friends like that?"

"Friends?" Pynto said. "Are you my friend?"

He then said to Bufo, who had been a captain in the rebel army, "Captain, come away from that slippery eel, captain."

The "slippery eel" was Muretto.

Pynto continued, "His very cradle was in dirt and mud, his milk was the oil of serpents, his mother was a mangy mermaid, and a male crocodile begat him."

"These criticisms are not necessary, sweet signor Pynto," Muretto said.

"Sweet signor'?" Pynto said. "Sweet cog-foist!"

“Cog” and “foist” both mean “cheat” as a verb and “cheater” as a noun. Some flatterers use flattery to cheat people.

Pynto continued, “Go hang thyself! Thou would jeer the very rags I wear off my back with thy fustian words of ‘sweet,’ ‘precious,’ ‘unmatchable,’ ‘rare,’ ‘wise,’ ‘judicious’ ... bah!”

“Fustian” words are inflated and high-sounding but inappropriate. Pynto was saying that Muretto’s words were flattering and used to manipulate.

He continued, “A pox on thee, sirrah. Sirrah, haven’t thou many a time and often devoured a whole table of mine, garnished with plenty, indeed, with a variety of good wholesome fare, under the pretext of telling news and gossip with a rugged, unpolished compliment?”

“Good fare of thine!” Muretto said.

He had eaten Pynto’s food, but being insulted, he was unwilling to praise it.

“Nay, dear gentlemen,” Bufo said.

He did not want them to argue.

“Good fare of mine?” Pynto said. “Yes, mine, sycophant! I — are you paying attention? — in order to supply thy tatters, pawned a whole study of ephemerides, so rich that they might have set up a corporation of almanac makers.”

“Tatters” are remnants, usually of clothing but also of other things. In this society, “tatter” as a verb meant to speak idly. In order to supply Muretto with tattered clothing, scraps of food, and opportunities to engage in idle talk at the table, Pynto had sold one or more books of ephemerides: an astronomical almanac.

He continued, “And what had I in return but protestations — listen to this, maunderer!”

A maunderer is a professional beggar.

Pynto continued, “You protested that I was, for learning, the soundest; for bounty, the royalest; for discourse, the sententious; for behavior, the absolutest; for all endowments of mind and body, the most accomplished man whom nature ever called her workmanship. But, thou dog, thou scoundrel, my beggary was the fruits of thy flattery.”

Feeding and clothing Muretto had made Pynto poor, according to Pynto.

He said to Muretto, “Stand off, rascal, stand off! Stand away from me!”

“This is excellent, indeed,” Bufo said sarcastically.

“What! What!” Muretto said to Pynto. “I flatter you! Who! Thee? Thee — a poor, lousy, uncloaked impostor! Thee — a deceitful, cozening, cheating, dull, decoying, and decaying fortune-teller!

“Thou pawn books? Thou, patched out of an old shepherds’ calendar that discourses in time of the change of the weather?”

Muretto was saying that any knowledge that Pynto had consisted of passages from an old shepherds’ calendar that listed weather predictions. Such calendars were derided as unreliable.

He continued, “And whose were thy ephemerides — whose were thy astrological tables? Why, Impudence, were thou ever worth *Erra Pater’s Prognostication*?”

This was an almanac with the full title of *A prognostication for ever, made by Erra Pater, a Jew, borne in Iury, Doctor in Astronomie and Physick very profitable to keep the body in health. And also Ptholomeus saith the same.*”

Muretto continued, “Thou learned? In what? And how? By filching, stealing, borrowing, eating, collecting, and counting with as weather-wise idiots as thyself.”

A big part of what was supposed to be Pynto’s astrological knowledge was weather forecasting.

Muretto continued, “Once in twelve months thou were indeed delivered (like a big-bellied wife) of a two-penny almanac at Easter. A hospital boy in a blue coat shall transcribe as much in six hours to serve all the year.”

The hospital was a charitable institution. Any boy there would wear a blue coat and be given a basic education.

Muretto continued, “Thou a table of meat? Yes, you served astronomers’ fare — air. Or at a feast upon high holy days, you served three red sprats in a dish; that was held to be gluttony, though.”

Red sprats are small sea-fish that resemble sardines.

Muretto finished, “I flatter thee? Thou are learned?”

“Rascal!” Pynto shouted. “Cannibal that feeds upon man’s flesh!”

Bufo tried to be a peacemaker: “Nay, please, please, heartily, gentlemen; in good earnest, and as I live, and by this hand now —”

Ignoring Bufo, Muretto said to Pynto, “Right, thou put me in mind what I should call thee. Who was the cause of all the late insurrection for which we were all likely to be hanged, and our brave general, Alphonso, is this day to suffer for? Who but thou! Indeed, the influences of the stars, the conjunction of the planets: the prediction of the celestial bodies were peremptory that, if he — Alphonso — would but attempt a civil commotion, he would — yes, by the Virgin Mary, he would — be immediately crowned the King of Aragon.

“Now, you ’gyptianly man in the moon, your divination has fairly mounted him.”

A “’gyptianly man” is a gypsy, who were popularly supposed to originate in Egypt. A “’gyptianly man in the moon” is an astrologer (“man in the moon”) who tells fortunes, something that both gypsies and astrologers did.

The heads of traitors were often chopped off and mounted on the end of pikes to be displayed as a warning to would-be traitors.

Muretto continued, “Poor gentleman, Alphonso is sure to leave his head in pawn for giving credit to thy prognosticating ignorance.”

“I scorn thee, parasite,” Pynto said.

“You are a stinking, starved-gut star-gazer,” Muretto replied. “Is that flattery or no?”

“By God’s foot!” Bufo said. “What do you mean, signor Pynto, signor Muretto?”

“I will be revenged and watch my time, sirrah,” Pynto said to Muretto.

“Do,” Muretto said.

“It is strange, my masters,” Bufo said, “to be so near the place of execution and prattle so loud. Come, signor Pynto, indeed, please, you shall shake hands.”

“Let me alone,” Pynto said to Bufo. “You are a foolish captain.”

He then said, “Muretto, I will display thee for a —”

“Hang thyself,” Muretto interrupted. “I don’t care for thee! Look!”

He made an obscene gesture.

“Foolish captain?” Bufo said. “Foolish captain! Listen, Pynto, there’s no good meaning in that word.”

“A parrot can echo,” Pynto said. “A parrot can talk to scholars so!”

“You are a proper ‘scholar,’” Muretto said, “stitched up of wastepaper.”

In other words, your conversation consists of unoriginal observations such as the proverbial “A parrot can echo.”

“Sneaks!” Bufo said, angry at both Pynto and Muretto. “If I am a fool, I’ll bang out the wits of some of your noddles, or dry bastinado your sides.”

A noddle is a head.

As a noun, “a bastinado” is a stick or cudgel. As a verb, “to bastinado” means “to beat.”

“To dry bastinado” means “to beat without drawing blood.”

Bufo continued, “You doggrel mangy, scabbed owl-a-glasses, I’ll maul you, so I will.”

“Doggrel” combines the meanings of “dog,” “mongrel,” and possibly “doggerel.”

“Owl-glass” derives from the medieval German jester *Eulenspiegel* (*eulen spiegel* means “owls’ mirror”).

Bufo called Pynto “owl-a-glasses” perhaps because he wore spectacles or perhaps because he used a crystal ball or a prospective mirror. A prospective mirror allowed one to see far-distant events or objects such as those in another city.

“Captain, sweet captain,” Muretto said. “Tell me now, will you put your discretion to coxcombs?”

“Put” can mean “give,” and “discretion” can mean “power granted to an enemy through one’s unconditional surrender.” With those meanings, Muretto was asking “Bufo” if he would surrender unconditionally to fools. (Professional fools — jesters — often wore a coxcomb hat.)

“Put” can also mean “enact” and can also mean “drive a weapon into someone,” and “discretion” can also mean “power to act according to one’s own judgment.”

Bufo understood Muretto to be asking him, “Will you enact whatever judgment you make against coxcombs — fools?”

“Yes, against the proudest coxcombs of them all, if I were to be provoked,” Bufo replied, “Foolish! Flesh and blood cannot endure it.”

Muretto then said to Pynto, “So, goodman sky-walker, you have made a good job of it. You have chafed yourself into a throat-cutting.”

A “walker” is a traveling beggar. Muretto was calling Pynto an astrologer-beggar.

He was also saying that Pynto had succeeded in chafing Captain Bufo and making him angry enough to cut Pynto’s throat — or at least Muretto hoped that Bufo was angry enough to do that.

More likely, however, Muretto knew that Bufo was angry at both Pynto and him and would bluster about it but would not hurt them.

“I will shred you both so small that a very botcher shall thread Spanish needles with every fillet of your itchy flesh,” Bufo said.

A “botcher” is a tailor, but Bufo was also punning on “butcher.”

He continued, “You call me foolish? You whelp’s mules.”

A whelp is a saucy fellow. “Mules” in this context are chilblains.

Bufo continued, “My father was a corn-cutter, and my mother a mussel-woman.”

Both of his parents were skilled users of knives. His father used a knife to cut corns off feet, and his mother used a knife to open mussels. As a military man, Bufo was also a skilled user of knives.

He added, “It is known what I am, and I’ll make you know what I am, if my choler is raised just one inch higher.”

“Well, I see Mars and Saturn were thy planets,” Pynto the astrologer said.

Mars is the Roman god of war; his Greek name is Ares.

Saturn is a Roman god identified with the Greek god Cronus. According to mythology, he castrated his father, Uranus, with a sickle.

Pynto continued, “Thou are a valiant soldier, and there’s no dealing with you.”

He then said, “For the captain’s sake, I will abate my indignation, Muretto. But —”

Bufo interrupted, “Butt in thy face — I’ll have no buts. By God’s bones, any blackguard is more honorably suited than any of us three. Foolish? ‘Foolish’ will never go out of my head while I live.”

Velasco and Lodovico entered the scene. Velasco was the Queen of Aragon’s general, and Lodovico was a gentleman who was his friend.

Muretto said, “May long life, eternal prosperity, the blessing of the Heavens and the honors of the earth crown the glorious merits of the incomparable captain Don Velasco.”

“The chime goes again, captain,” Pynto said to Bufo.

In other words: There Muretto goes again, flattering someone.

“Who are these poor creatures, Lodovico?” Velasco asked his friend, referring to Muretto, Pynto, and Bufo, who were dressed in rags, a result of defeat in war.

“My lord, I know them now,” Lodovico answered. “They are some of the late mutineers whom you, when you took Alphonso prisoner, presented to the rigor of the law, but since that time, they have been by the Queen’s pardon set at liberty.”

“I should know yonder fellow,” Velasco said. “Your name is Bufo, if I am not mistaken.”

“My name is my own name, sir, and Bufo is my name, sir. If any man shall deny it, I dare challenge him in defense of my godfathers who gave me that name, sir — and what say you to that, sir?”

“He is a shallow, unbrained, weak, foolish fellow and so forth; your lordship understands me,” Muretto said to Velasco. “But for our parts, my good lord —”

Velasco interrupted, “Well, gentlemen, I cannot tell you now that any poor endeavors of my own can bring about Alphonso’s peace, yet I have spoken and kneeled and sued for his reprieve. The Queen has heard my request for mercy to Alphonso, but she will not grant it. This is the day, and this is the time and place, where he must render the forfeit of his life unto the law. I can only be sorry. “

Petruchi entered the scene, along with the executioner, who was carrying the axe that would be used to behead Alphonso. Guarded by some officers, Alphonso also entered the scene.

“Alphonso, here is the place, and this is the hour,” Petruchi said. “Judgment has been made against you, and now the sword of law must cut the vein that swelled with such a frenzy of dangerous blood against your Queen and country. Prepare yourself, it is now too late to hope for mercy.”

“Petruchi, what is done I did,” Alphonso said. “My ground for doing it was pity for my country, not malice toward it. I sought to free wracked Aragon from ruin, which a foolish woman’s government must bring.

“Oh, had you and the nobles of this land just a touch of the miseries her weakness must force you of necessity to feel, you would with me have bent your naked swords against this female mistress of the crown, and not have been such children to have fawned upon a girl’s nod.”

Alphonso had rebelled simply because a woman was the head of the government. He hated women.

“You are disturbed in your mind,” Petruchi replied. “She is our lawful sovereign, and we are her subjects.”

“Subjects, Petruchi?” Alphonso said. “You are abjects, and so you live abject, wretched lives. I came here to die, so let’s get on with the execution.”

“Here’s a high Saturnal spirit, captain,” Pynto said to Bufo.

A person with a saturnine character is steady in mood.

“A pox on such spirits,” Bufo said. “When they mount a man to the hangman’s mercy, I do not like such spirits; let me rather be a mooncalf.”

A mooncalf is a person who is unstable. Bufo preferred that people preparing to be executed not be calm and accepting of their fate.

“I come to bid you farewell,” Velasco said to Alphonso, “and in farewell to excuse my very ill fortune; for believe, sir, that I hold my victory over you to be in part a defeat. I won the victory, but at the cost of seeing a good man die. To tell you how incessantly I plied her grace

the Queen for your pardon would be as useless as was my suit. I grieve for your youth. Still, let us part reconciled.”

“With all my heart,” Alphonso replied. “It is my glory that I was defeated by the best man at arms whom knighthood has ever styled a soldier.”

Seeing Bufo, Pynto, and Muretto, he added, “Alas! What souls are those? Now, now, in seeing them I die too late.”

He would have been happier if he had died before seeing his former soldiers dressed in rags.

“Oh, brave general,” Bufo said, “oh, noble general, we are still the rags of the old regiment. The truth is, we were loath to leave thee until thy head and shoulders parted company. But sweet, good, dear general, take courage. What? We are all mortal men, and every one of us must pass this way and die. This is a truth that is as simple to know as that we stand here.”

“Give me thy hand, and farewell,” Alphonso said. “The Queen is merciful in sparing you. I haven’t anything to give thee but my last thanks.”

“Bah to giving,” Bufo said. “Our clothes are paid for, and a day will come that shall requite us all.”

“Are thou and thou there, too?” Alphonso said to Pynto and Muretto.

He said to Pynto, “Well, leave thy art and do not trust the fictions of the stars — they spoke no truth by me.”

Even facing death, Alphonso could pun. The stars had fixions, aka positions, but he believed that they had prophesied a fiction to him: He would become the King of Aragon.

Alphonso then said, “My lord Velasco, that creature there, Muretto, is a man of honest heart; for my sake take him to you and employ him.

“And now I wish soft peace to all.”

“I will burn my books and forswear the liberal sciences, and that is my resolution,” Pynto vowed.

Bufo said to Alphonso, “Go on thy way for you are the arrantest general who ever led a crew of brave skelderers.”

As usual, Bufo had mangled some words. The word “arrant” means “complete” and is used in such phrases as “arrant knave.” Bufo had perhaps intended to say “gallantest.”

The verb “to skelder” means to beg while pretending to be a wounded or discharged soldier. Presumably, Bufo had been referring to brave soldiers.

“Will you make yourself ready, sir?” Petrucci asked Alphonso. “Will you prepare yourself to die?”

“Petrucci, yes,” Alphonso said. “I have a debt to pay; it is nature’s due.”

This society pronounced “debt” much the way it pronounced “death.” All of us owe a debt to nature; it is a debt that can be paid only with our death. Some people say that we owe that debt to God.

Alphonso then said to the executioner, “Fellow, before thou ask my pardon, take it. Be sure and speedy in thy fatal blow.”

A competent executioner would kill quickly. Not all executioners were competent.

“Never fear clean shaving, sir,” the executioner said. “I kill quickly.”

“May I have permission to meditate?” Alphonso asked.

Condemned prisoners were given time to make their peace with God.

“You may,” Petrucci replied.

“Alphonso has a gallant resolution, even in death,” Lodovico said.

Now the Queen of Aragon, her counselors Collumello and Almado, her woman-servant Herophil, and some attendants arrived.

“Stop the execution — it is her highness the Queen’s pleasure!” Collumello ordered. “Alphonso, rise and behold the Queen.”

“Curse the voice of majesty,” Alphonso said. “My thoughts were fixed upon an upper region and had nothing to do with this Earth. Alas, great woman, what newer tyranny, what doom, what torments are borrowed from the conclave of that Hell where legions of worse devils than are in Hell keep their revels — a proud woman’s heart? What plagues are spurred from thence to kill me?”

Pynto thought, *The Moon is now Lady of the Ascendant, and the man will die raving.*

The Moon governs lunacy: *Luna* is Latin for Moon. Because of Alphonso’s words, Pynto believed that Alphonso had become lunatic — insane.

“Bah, Alphonso,” Almado said. “Will you commit another strange commotion with your unruly tongue, and what you cannot perform in act, attempt to do in words? Can a man in your situation be so uncharitable?”

“I beg your pardon,” Alphonso said. “She is the Queen of Aragon, and she wishes with her own eyes, instead of seeing masques and courtly sports, to behold an act of death.

“Queen, welcome Queen, here” — he lifted his head to expose his throat — “quaff my blood like wine and live as a brave she-tyrant.”

“Alas, poor man,” the Queen said.

“‘Poor man!’” Alphonso said. “That is said by one who looks at me and is delighted to destroy me.”

Bufo thought, *He is a good boy, indeed. I swear by this hand of mine that he speaks just as I would do, for all that he is so near being made puddings’ meat.*

“You are sorry for your late desperate rudeness, aren’t you?” the Queen asked. “You are sorry for leading a rebellion, aren’t you?”

“By all my miseries, these taunts are cruelty worse than the executioner’s axe,” Alphonso said. “I am not sorry. Indeed, more — I will not be sorry! Know from me that I hate your sex in general — not you as you are a Queen, but you as you are a woman. If I had the possibility of a term of life that would last forever, and you could grant that to me, yes, and you would grant that to me, yet all of that or more would never reconcile my heart to any woman alive. Are you answered?”

“His spirit flies out in his daring language,” the Queen said.

She then said, “Alphonso, although the law requires the forfeit of thy head, yet I give mercy where I see just cause. If I allow you to live, will you be a new man?”

“Oh!” Alphonso said. “A woman’s tongue is sharper than a steel point.”

He then said sarcastically, “Tender madam, I kiss your royal hand and call you fair.

“Assure this noble, this uncovered presence — me, hatless — that richest virtue is your bosom’s tenant, that you are absolutely great and good, and I’ll flatter all the vices of your sex.”

People who were to be beheaded did not wear hats.

He continued, “I will emphatically avow that men are monsters, and that women are angels.

“I will emphatically avow that women are not light ones, but are completely weighty, nature’s best.

“I will proclaim that lust is a pity, that pride is a handsomeness, that deceit is ripeness of wit, that bold scandalous scolding is a bravery of spirit, that bloody cruelty is masculine justice.

“More — I will maintain that Queens take the first place for rule, that you take the first place of Queens, if you’ll but give me permission to die in peace!

“Please give me permission to die — please, good Queen, do that now.

“What do you think? It is a royal grant. Henceforth may Heaven be the rest you choose, but never come at.”

He was saying that he hoped the Queen would never go to Heaven.

He added, sarcastically, “I give a kind farewell to all!”

Collumello said to the Queen, “Can you endure letting a rebel prate? Off with his head, and let him then dispute.”

“I would have used the privilege of time, had I known that you would do this,” Petruchi said to Alphonso. “I would have had your head cut off much quicker, before the Queen arrived. You must not talk so loudly.”

“My lords, a word,” the Queen said. “What if we pardoned him? I think the nearness of his arrival to the stroke of death will always be a warning to his loyalty. He has come very close to having his head cut off.”

“What!” Almado said. “Pardon him? What does your majesty mean? What can you hope from one so wholly drowned in melancholy and sour discontent that, should he share the crown, he would employ its power on behalf of none except apes and flatterers?”

In this context, “apes” are fools.

“Spare, my lord, such liberal censure,” Velasco said to Almado. “It is better to rein the fury of justice than to spur it on so.”

He then said to the Queen, “Great mistress, I will not plead my services, but I will urge you to consider the glories that you may demand by your mercy in pardoning this man. It will be a most sweetly becoming act that will set you in the chronicles of memory. You will be remembered in historical chronicles as a merciful Queen.”

“Velasco, thou are not braver in arms to conquer with thy valor than with thy courtesy,” the Queen replied.

She then said, “Alphonso, take thy life; that man who took thee prisoner has now become thy spokesman and has persuaded me to spare your life.”

“Bah,” Alphonso said. “Don’t mock calamity so grossly.”

He still preferred to die rather than live under the rule of a woman.

“You are too desperate,” Velasco said. “The Queen has freely pardoned you.”

“And more —” the Queen said.

Using the royal plural, she said to Alphonso, “To purchase the kind opinion of thy sex, ourself will lend our help.”

She then said, “Lords, lend all your hands.”

The Queen and her counselors helped Alphonso move away from the place of execution: the head-chopping block, which was located on a platform to enable more people to have a good view.

“But is the Queen in earnest?” Lodovico asked.

“It becomes her,” Velasco said. “Mercy is God-like.”

“Officers, be gone,” the Queen ordered.

The officers exited.

She said, “Such objects are unfit for a royal presence.”

She then held out her hand to Alphonso and said, “Here, kiss our hand.”

Reluctantly, Alphonso kissed it.

“We dare believe that it was thy height of youth, not hatred of us, that drew thee to those rebellions, and both we pardon,” the Queen said.

She was pardoning both Alphonso’s height of youth and his rebellions. She did not believe that Alphonso hated her.

Muretto asked quietly, "Don't the stars run a wrong bias now, signor Pynto?"

In other words: Aren't the astrological influences running in a different direction now? After all, Alphonso had been a man condemned to die, and now he was a pardoned man. This new "bias" or influence was "wrong" because Pynto had not predicted it. Or seemed not to have predicted it.

"Venus is Lady of the Ascendant, man," Pynto said. "I knew that if once Alphonso would go past the fatal hour, the astrological influence would work another way."

"Very likely," Muretto said. "Your reasons are infallible."

He was sarcastic. Right now, Pynto seemed best able to use astrology to explain events *after* the events had occurred. Predictions were a different matter.

"What can our favors to you demand in return?" the Queen asked Alphonso.

"More true service," he replied, "and more true faith, true love, than I have words to utter."

"Which we accept," the Queen said.

She then said, either to him or to a counselor, "Lead the way. Here ends this strife: When law craves justice, mercy should grant life."

Everyone except Pynto, Bufo, and Muretto exited.

Pynto said, "Go thy ways for a sure, sound-brained piece while thou live."

He was talking about the merciful Queen. A "piece" is a girl or woman. At this time and in this society, "piece" was not derogatory, although it later would be, as in "piece of ass."

Pynto continued, "'Pynto,' say I, 'now, now, now, am I an ass?'"

He had predicted that Alphonso would become the King of Aragon, and he had thought that Alphonso would do so by leading the rebellion against the Queen.

He continued, "Now, my masters, hang yourselves, by God's foot, I'll stand to it — I'll stand by my astrology. That man, whoever he be (better or worse, all's one), who is not star-wise is nature's fool."

"Your astronomer has the Heavens, the whole globe of the Earth, and the vast gulf of the sea itself for his proper kingdom, his fee-simple [permanent lease or full possession], his own inheritance.

"Whoever does not look any higher than the top of a steeple or a maypole is worthy to die in a ditch. But to know the conjunctions of the planets, the influences of the celestial bodies, the harmony of the spheres, frost and snow, hail and tempests, rain and sunshine, indeed, life and death — here's cunning, to be deep in speculation, to be groping the secrets of nature."

"Oh, sir," Muretto said. "There! There! There!"

He applauded sarcastically.

"Let me alone," Pynto said. "I say it myself, I know I am a rare fellow. Why, look, look, we are all made men, or let me be stewed in star-shot."

Star-shot is a translucent and gelatinous substance found on Earth that this society thought to be the remains of a shooting star. Today we identify it as colonies of the cyanobacteria known as Nostoc.

Pynto continued, "Bah, I am confident that we are made men, and we shall all mount up higher, believe it."

"Shall we?" Bufo said. "In that case, I am satisfied."

"Friar Bacon was only a brazen head, in comparison to Pynto," Muretto said.

Many people in this society believed that the English Franciscan philosopher Roger Bacon (c. 1220–92) had used magic to create a head of brass that could speak.

"But why couldn't you have said so much before, goodman Jolthead?" Bufo asked Pynto.

"Goodman" was a polite form of address used between equals.

"Look, captain, there's a time for all things," Muretto said.

“For all this, what will become of us?” Bufo asked. “Is the sign lucky to risk the begging of a castoff suit?”

They were wearing rags, and Bufo wanted to know whether the astrological signs were favorable for begging better clothing.

He continued, “Let me know the answer to that question at once.”

“Your question was wisely brought forward, captain,” Muretto said to Bufo.

“Man’s richest ornament is his nakedness, gentlemen,” Pynto said. “Variety of clothing is the surquedry — the haughty pride — of fools; wise men have their proper solace in the linings of their minds.”

He added, “As for fashions, it is a disease for a horse.”

By “fashions,” he meant “farcy,” which was indeed a disease for a horse.

“Never has richer stuff come from man!” Muretto said.

By “stuff,” he probably meant “bull-stuff,” but he was also punning: “Stuff” means “material,” such as the material for clothing.

“’Zooks,” Bufo said.

“’Zooks” meant “gadzooks,” which in turn meant, “God’s hooks,” which is a reference to the nails of the cross on which Jesus died.

Bufo continued, “It is a scurvy, a pocky, and a naked answer. A plague on all your sentences, while I am likely to starve with hunger and cold.”

“Pocky” means “pox-infected.” Usually, the pox is syphilis or smallpox.

A messenger entered the scene and said, “By your leave, gentlemen, the lord Alphonso has sent you this purse of gold, and he commands you to put yourselves into costly suits of clothing, and come to the court.”

Bufo, Pynto, and Muretto all said, “What! Come to the court?”

The messenger said, “Yes, the court — where you may happily see Alphonso crowned King, for that’s the common report. I was ordered to urge you to be very speedy. Farewell, gentlemen.”

The messenger exited.

“What do you think now, my hearts of gold?” Pynto asked.

He had predicted that Alphonso would become King of Aragon.

“We are hearts of gold indeed now, signor,” Muretto replied.

“Bah, I am a coxcomb, am I?” Pynto said. “Oh, the divinity of —”

“Bawl no more,” Bufo said. “The weather’s cold, and I must have utensicles.”

He meant “utensils,” which refers to objects that serve a useful purpose. Somehow, he had combined that word with “testicles,” which also serve a useful purpose.

He then ordered, “Follow your leader, ho!”

As a former captain, he was their leader.

They exited.

— 1.2 —

Velasco and Lodovico talked together.

“Please don’t try to persuade me,” Velasco said.

“You’ll lose your honor,” Lodovico said.

“I’d rather lose my honor than my faith,” Velasco replied.

Both honor and faith are important. This society regarded Christian faith as necessary for entry into Paradise, and so Velasco regarded faith as more important than honor.

He continued, "Oh, Lodovico, thou art witness with me that I have sworn and pledged my heart and my truth to her deserving memory, whose beauty is through the world unequalled."

Velasco was in love, and Lodovico knew it.

"Hear the wisdom of sword-men!" Lodovico said. "They deal with everything by strength, not policy. What excuse shall be feigned? Let me know that."

Velasco was going to write a love letter to the woman he loved; his excuse for doing so would be that he was love-sick.

"'Excuse'?" Velasco said. "Why, Lodovico, I am sick, and I am sick indeed, sick to the soul. My love-sickness is not feigned."

"For a decayed jousting, or a known coward, this would be tolerable now," Lodovico said. "But let's get down to the business — I have solicited your widow on your behalf."

Velasco was in love with a widow named Salassa.

"Won't she speak with me?" he asked.

"Young widows, and grave old ones, too, by your leave, care not so much for talking — if you come once to them you must do, and do, and do again, again, and again," Lodovico said. "All's too little, you'll find it."

He was punning, bawdily. One meaning of "to do" is "to have sex," and one meaning of "come" is "cum." And one possible meaning of "All's too little" is "Every penis is too little." Another possible meaning is "All the sex is too little."

"Come, friend, you mock my miseries," Velasco said.

"It's a fine laughing matter when the best and most approved and proven soldier of the world should be so heart-sick for love of a placket," Lodovico said.

A placket is an opening in a woman's underskirt. Metaphorically, "placket" can be a woman or a woman's genitals.

He continued, "Well, I have sent your wise servant — for fools are best to be trusted in women's things — to my female cousin Shaperoon, and I have sent your second letter by your wise servant. You shall shortly hear what news. My cousin Shaperoon is excellently traded in these mortal businesses of flesh and blood, and she will hardly come away with two denials."

The widow might once decline to talk with Velasco, but Shaperoon was so persuasive that the widow would not twice decline to talk with Velasco.

"If your cousin should prevail with the widow, Lodovico —" Velasco began.

"What then?" Lodovico interrupted. "Ply your occupation when you come to it — it is a fit season of the year."

"Ply" means "wield," as in "wield a tool." Readers can guess what "tool" and "occupation" Lodovico had in mind.

He continued, "Women are honeymoon if a man could jump with them at the instant, and prick them in the right vein, else this Queen would never have saved a traitor from the head-chopping block and suddenly made him her King and husband."

The words "jump" and "prick" have bawdy meanings. Basically, Lodovico was saying that women like good lovers.

He added, "But no more of that, there's danger in saying such things about royalty. You are sick, you say?"

"I am pierced through with fiery darts much worse than death," Velasco said.

"Why, your only presently available remedy is then, as soon as you can, to quench those fires in the watery channels of accomplishment of the sexual act," Lodovico said.

He looked at a door and said, "Quiet. No more words. Look, and behold a prodigy."

A prodigy is something extraordinary.

Several people entered the room.

Collumello and Almado, counselors of state, entered. Almado was bare headed. Alphonso and the Queen, both of them wearing crowns, entered. Herophil, the Queen of Aragon's woman-servant, entered. Petruchi also entered with some guards.

Alphonso, who was now the King of Aragon, and his wife, the Queen, sat on their thrones.

All present said, "Long live Alphonso, King of Aragon."

"Then we are sovereign?" King Alphonso asked.

He wanted to make sure that he was the King of Aragon and possessed the power of the King of Aragon.

"As free as I by birth, I yield to you, my lord, my crown, my heart, my people, my obedience," the Queen said. "In exchange, what I demand is love."

"You cannot miss love," King Alphonso said.

Two meanings of "miss love" are 1) "fail to get love," or 2) "care about not getting love."

He continued, "There is but one thing that all human power or the malice of the devil could initiate and spur on to work for a breach between you and me."

"One thing?" the Queen asked. "Why, is there one thing then, my lord?"

"Yes, and it is only this — you are still a woman," King Alphonso said.

He was still a misogynist, despite being newly married.

"A woman?" the Queen asked. "Did you say so, sir?"

He replied, "I confess that you have deserved more service, more regard from me, in my particular, than life can thank you for; and that you may conceive my fair acknowledgment, although it is true I might command you to obey me, yet I will make a suit, an earnest request to you."

"It must then be granted," the Queen said.

She believed that Queens must obey Kings and that wives must obey husbands.

"That to redeem awhile some serious thoughts that have made me think ill of your sex, I request that you'll be content that I be a married bachelor for one week. You cannot but conceive."

"Conceive" meant "understand," but it was certainly possible that the Queen would not understand. In addition, for that week in which the King and Queen were to be separated, they would not have sex and the Queen would not conceive a child.

"What's this?" Collumello said, surprised.

"Fine work," Petruchi said.

"Alas, my lord, this needs no public mention," the Queen said.

Some things need not be shared with the public.

"Nay, madam, hear me," King Alphonso said. "I request that our King's court and our Queen's court be kept under separate roofs so that you and I may not for such a short time come together."

"I don't understand you," the Queen said.

"I ask for your patience, madam," King Alphonso said. "You interrupt me. I request that no message pass of commendation, or questioning our healths, our sleeps, our actions, or what else belongs to common courtesy between friend and friend. You must be pleased to grant it; I'll have it so."

"No message of commends?" the Queen asked.

"Commends" are commendations, greetings, compliments.

"Bah, you demur," King Alphonso said. "It argues your distrust of me."

"I am content," the Queen said. "I agree to do what you want: The King should be obeyed. I pray to Heaven that all will be well."

King Alphonso said, "Velasco, thou were the man who did conquer me and did take me prisoner; by doing that, thou were the means to raise me up thus high. I thank thee for it. I thought to honor thee in a defense of the Queen's beauty, but we'll defer it for now. Yet take your Queen by the hand and lead her to the court. We and our lords will follow, and there we'll part. A seven days' absence cannot seem but short."

CHAPTER 2

— 2.1 —

Shaparoon and Mopas talked together.

Shaparoon was a friend to Salassa, the widow with whom Velasco was in love. Mopas was Velasco's man-servant.

"And as I said — nay, please, my friend, be covered — the business has been soundly followed on my part," Shaparoon said. "Yet again, in good sooth, I cannot abide you should stand bare before me to so little purpose."

She wanted Mopas to be covered — to keep his cap on rather than keeping it off to show respect to her.

"Manners is a jewel, madam," Mopas said, "and as for standing bare, I know there is some difference in the putting down of a man's cap and the putting down of his breeches before a reverend gentlewoman."

"You speak very properly," Shaparoon said. "There is a great deal of difference indeed. But to come to the point — oh, what trouble I had to make her to receive the letter and, when she had received it, to open it and then to read it, nay, to read it again and again — that as I am a very woman, a man might have wrung my smock dripping wet with the purse-sweat that came from my body."

"Purse-sweat" is sweat that comes from being fat — so fat that the skin forms folds that resemble the mouth of a purse before the drawstring is drawn.

She continued, "Friend, I took such pains with her — on my conscience, to bear a child at these years of mine would not trouble me half as much as the delivery of that letter did."

"A man-child of my age perhaps, madam, would not trouble you," Mopas said.

"Yet that would be a sore burden for one who is not used to it, I may tell you," Shaparoon said.

One kind of burden is what is carried, aka borne, in the womb: a child. Another kind of burden is that borne by a woman in bed with a man on top of her: That is the type of man-child Mopas would like to be.

She continued, "Oh, these coy girls are such wild cattle to have dealing with."

At this time, "coy" could mean either "shy and reserved," or "pretending to be shy and reserved."

"What ancient madams cannot do one way, let them do another," Mopas said. "She's a rank jade that, being past the breeder, cannot kick up her heels, wince, and cry wee-hee."

A jade is a bad horse, and to "wince" means to "kick restlessly."

According to Mopas, Shaparoon may not be very vigorous in bed, despite being ridden in the past. If true, then she would be a rank jade.

Mopas continued, "Good examples cannot choose from one's elders, but work much to the purpose, being well 'plied and in season."

In other words, the best women in bed don't come from one's elders, but they do "work" in bed and apply themselves well and are also plied well with male "tools." In addition, they are in season. A favorite season is spring, and nubile females are in the spring of their lives.

"In season?" Shaparoon said. "True, that's a chief thing. Yes, I'll assure you, my friend, I am but entering into my eight-and-twentieth year."

"You're somewhat younger than that, I take it," Mopas flattered her. "I warrant you that your mark appears yet to be seen for proof of your age, as plain as when you were only fifteen years old."

A mark is a wearing-down of a horse's teeth that reveals how old the horse is. The mark does not appear in the incisor teeth of a very young horse; it appears only as the teeth wear down. As the horse ages, more of the mark appears. In old horses, the mark disappears because of the wearing away of the crown of the tooth.

Mopas was saying that Shaparoon's mark had not yet disappeared.

"Truly, if it were well searched, I think my mark does appear plainly," Shaparoon said. "Your name is Mopas, you told me?"

"My name is Mopas, and your name is Madam Shaparoon, I was told."

"I am a right madam born, I can assure you," she replied.

"Madam" can be a title for a respectable woman or for an unrespectable woman.

"Your ancestors will say that," Mopas said, "for the Shaparoons have ever taken place of the best French-hoods in the parish — ever since the first addition."

A "Shaparoon" or "chaperon" is a hood. One meaning of "ever" is "always." A French-hood — a kind of headdress — was "worn by women punished for sexual conduct," according to *the Oxford English Dictionary*.

The "addition" may be a title that indicates rank or occupation. If so, the first addition of the Shaparoons is probably "bawd."

"All this, with a great deal of modesty, I must confess," Shaparoon said. "ud's pittikins, stand by, stand aside a little — see where the lady comes."

"ud's pittikins" means "God's pity."

She added, "Do not appear before you are called in any case, but closely observe how I will work her like wax."

Mopas withdrew to a corner where he would not be immediately seen.

Salassa — the widow whom Velasco loved — entered the room. She was reading a letter.

She read the conclusion out loud: "*Your servant in all commands, Velasco.*"

She then said, "So, and I am resolved to put you to the test, servant, for your free fool's heart before I give you the slip, I warrant you."

"Your ladyship has considered the premises at full before this time, I hope," Shaparoon said.

In other words, Shaparoon assumed that Salassa had already read the letter carefully and was prepared to give Velasco an answer to his letter.

"Oh, Shaparoon, you keep a lookout like a true sentinel," Salassa said. "What? I must give a certain answer, mustn't I?"

"Nay, madam, you may choose whether or not to give a certain answer — it is all in your ladyship's discreet consideration. The sum of all the letter is that if you don't show Velasco some favor, he is no long-lived man."

In other words, if you don't return his love, he will not live much longer.

"Very well," Salassa said. "How long have you been a factress for such merchants, Shaparoon?"

The word "factress" means "agent" or "broker." The kind of "broker" she had in mind was "procuress."

"Oh, my religion!" Shaparoon said. "I a factress? I am even well enough served for my good will, and this is my reward? Factress, say you?"

"Come, your intercession shall prevail," Salassa said. "Who is his letter-carrier?"

"I am at your ladyship's service," Mopas said, stepping forward.

"Your lord Velasco sent you?" Salassa asked.

"That is most true, sweet madam."

"What place do you hold about him? What is your main job?"

“I am his drugster, madam,” Mopas answered.

“What, sir?”

“When he is hard-bound with melancholy, I give him a purge — with two or three soluble stools of laughter,” Mopas said.

“Hard-bound” can mean “constipated,” and “soluble” can mean “free from constipation.” “Stool” can mean “privy” or “excrement,” as well as something to sit on.

“Two or three stools” can mean “two or three sessions of making jokes and entertaining Velasco while he sits on a stool.”

“Probably you are his fool or his jester,” Salassa said.

“‘Jester’ if you please, but not ‘fool’, madam; for baubles belong to fools, and they are then fit only for ladies’ secrecies, not for lords’,” Mopas said.

Jesters carried baubles, which were sticks whose end had been carved into a grotesque head. The other kind of “bauble” Mopas was referring to was a kind of stick that would fit inside a lady’s vagina: a dildo.

“But is he indeed sick lately?” Salassa asked.

“Alas, good heart, I suffer for him,” Shaparon said.

Lodovico entered the room.

“By your leave, lady, without ceremony, you know me, and you may guess my errand,” he said to Salassa.

“Yet more trouble?” Salassa said. “Nay, then I shall be hail-shot.”

Hail-shot is small shot. It doesn’t stay together when shot, but scatters, resembling hail.

“I will be brief,” Lodovico said. “By the honors of a good name, you are a dry-skinned widow, and if my haste did not concern the life of the noblest gentleman in Europe — Velasco — I would as much scorn employments of this nature to you, as I do a proud woman of your condition.”

Lodovico did not like Salassa. He was here because Velasco had said that he would die if Salassa did not return his love.

“Yes, indeed,” Mopas said. “Here’s one who will thunder her widowhead into flitters.”

Mopas was playing with language: “Widowhead” is a play on “maidenhead.”

A “dry-skinned” widow could have dry skin on her arms, shoulders, and so on, or she could be dry between her legs and on the inside of part of her body.

He continued, “Stand to it, signor, I am your second. I will support you.”

“Sir, you are uncivil to exclaim against and criticize a lady in her own house,” Salassa said.

“A lady, yet a paraquito, popinjay — that is, a parakeet, a parrot. Your whole worth lies in your gay outside and your tongue that squalls like a storm. A wagtail is a glorious fowl in respect of many of you, although most of you are in nature as very foul as wagtails.”

Wagtails were small birds that got their name from the continual wagging of their tails. According to Lodovico, women such as Salassa also continually wagged their tails.

“Are such men as you the lord Velasco’s agents in his hot affection?” Salassa asked.

“Sweet cousin Lodovico, please now, know that the lady is most virtuously resolved,” Shaparon said. “She is virtuous.”

“Listen, middle-aged countess,” Mopas said. “Do not take another’s tale into your mouth. Let them argue it out.”

Mopas may have pronounced “countess” like “cuntess.” Men have a tail, but it hangs in front, not in back. Also, every man and every woman has a tail end.

Mopas continued, “I have occasion to use you in private, and I can find you work enough myself.”

One meaning of “use” is “have sex with.” Some people do sex work.

He then said, "Let me have a word in your ear."

He and Shaparoon talked quietly together.

Salassa said to Lodovico, "I protest that I meant a more noble answer for Velasco's satisfaction than your railing language shall ever force from me."

Now so angry that he found it hard to finish his sentences, Lodovico replied, "If I were the man who doted on you, I would take a shorter course with you than to come humbly whining to your sweet — a pox on all such ridiculous foppery — I would —"

Still insulted, Salassa interrupted and finished his sentence: "— weep yourself to death, and be chronicled among the regiment of kind, tender-hearted souls?"

"Indeed, truly, I would not," Lodovico said. "What? For a widow? For one who has jumped the old mule's trot so often that the sciatica founders her yet in both her thighs?"

A "mule" is a promiscuous woman, and the old mule's trot is sex. Sciatica is a disease characterized by pain in the hips or thighs. (The Latin word *mulier* means "woman.")

"You abuse me grossly," Salassa complained.

"You are a woman who has been so often drunk with satiety of pleasure that fourteen husbands are but as half a draught to quench her thirst in an afternoon," Lodovico said.

"I will no longer endure you."

"Velasco has fallen for you? For you! You? You who are not noble, not wise, not rich, not fair, and not well-favored! For you?" Lodovico said.

Mopas said to Shaparoon, "You are all these, if you can keep your own counsel and let nobody know, mistress madam."

He may have meant that she was noble, wise, rich, fair, and well-favored, or he may have meant that she was not noble, not wise, not rich, not fair, and not well-favored.

"Indeed, I am so persuaded, and assure yourself nobody shall know," Shaparoon replied.

"Yet, indeed, must you be the only precious piece the lord Velasco must adore, must die for," Lodovico said. "But I vow, if he do miscarry — as I fear he cannot recover —"

"Goodness forbid!" Salassa said. "Alas — is he sick, sir?"

"Excellent dissimulation!" Lodovico said because he didn't believe that Salassa cared about Velasco's health. "Yes, indeed, he is sick, and may an everlasting silence strike you dumb who are the cause of it. But, as I said, if he does go the wrong way, as I love virtue, your ladyship shall be balladed through all Christendom and sung to scurvy tunes, and your picture drawn over every ballad, sucking of rotten eggs among weasels."

Sometimes, ballads were sung about scandalous women. Customers could buy copies of the ballad, the words of which were printed on a sheet of paper that was decorated with a picture.

"Please, give me some credit!" Salassa said. "Is lord Velasco sick? And does anything lie in me to comfort or recover him?"

A bawdy-minded reader might think of her vagina, which lies within her and would comfort Velasco.

"Marry, does there?" Lodovico said.

"Marry" was a mild oath meaning "By the Virgin Mary."

He continued, "Then the more infidel he. And what of all this now?"

"What would you have me do?" Salassa asked.

"I would have you do wonders," Lodovico replied sarcastically. "Either go and visit him, or allow him to visit you — these are mighty favors, aren't they?"

"Why, good sir, I will grant the latter willingly," Salassa said. "He shall be kindly welcome."

"And he will laughed at while he is here, won't he be?" Lodovico said.

“What would you have me say?” Salassa said. “My best entertainment shall be open to him, I will discourse to him freely. If he requires it privately, I will be in all honor what I should be.”

“Certify him so much by letter,” Lodovico said. “Write and tell him that.”

“That cannot stand with my modesty,” Salassa said. “My word and truth shall be my gage. My word and truth is my guarantee of my good faith.”

“Good enough,” Lodovico said. “Do this, and by this hand of mine I’ll ask your pardon for my rudeness, and always afterward heartily honor you.”

They then talked quietly together.

Mopas said to Shaparon, “I shall hear from you when my leisure serves?”

“Most assuredly,” Shaparon replied. “May good destinies speed your journey.”

Mopas said, “May all happiness always ride before you, may your disgraces always ride behind you, and may full pleasure always ride in the midst of you.”

As usual, Mopas was bawdy: “may full pleasure always ride in the midst of you.” A vagina lay in the midst of Shaparon, and a vagina can be ridden, which can cause feelings of fullness and of pleasure.

— 2.2 —

Bufo, who had been a defeated captain and was now wearing fresh and good apparel, ceremonially escorted Herophil, the Queen of Aragon’s woman-servant, into a room.

“My over-kind captain, what do you want to say to me?” Herophil asked.

“Why, mistress, I want to say to you what a man might say, truly, indeed, that is what I would say,” Bufo said.

In this society, a mistress was a sweetheart, as when a man was wooing a woman. The title could also mean 1) a woman who had some power or authority, or 2) a woman with whom a man had a long-standing sexual relationship despite their not being married.

“What would that be, captain?” Herophil asked.

“Even whatsoever you would have me say, truly,” Bufo said.

“If that is all, then please say nothing,” Herophil said.

“Why look, mistress, all that I say, if you listen to it well, is just nothing — as, for example, to tell you that you are beautiful is nothing, for you know it yourself; to say that you were honest would be an indignity to your beauty and, upon the matter, nothing, for honesty in a beautiful woman is as good as nothing.”

An honest woman is a chaste woman. Because Bufo was horny, he did not want beautiful women to be honest.

“That is somewhat strange to be proved,” Herophil said.

“To a good wit, dear mistress, nothing’s impossible,” Bufo replied.

“Surely the court and your new clothes have infected you,” Herophil said. “I wish I were a purse of gold, for your sake, captain, to reward your wit.”

“I wish you were, mistress, so long as you were not counterfeit metal,” Bufo said. “I would soon try you on the too-true touchstone of my affections, indeed, truly.”

Touchstones, which were actual stones (schist or jasper), were used to test the purity of precious metals.

The word “stones” was also a name for testicles, which are things that can be touched.

“Well, witty captain, I must go away in debt for your love, but I will not fail to think about it,” Herophil said. “But now I am in a hurry.”

“If you would just grant me only one poor request before you go, I should soon finish my conversation and depart from you,” Bufo said.

“Name it, captain.”

“Truly, and as I live, it is a very small trifle for your part, all things considered.”

“Can’t you tell me what it is?”

“That would be a fine jest indeed,” Bufo said. “Why, I would desire, entreat, and beseech you.”

“What to do?” Herophil said, meaning, “To do what?”

“There you have it, and I thank you, too.”

He was misinterpreting her answer as, “What? To do?”

One meaning of “to do” is “to have sex.”

“I don’t understand you,” Herophil said.

“Why, to do with you, truly, to do with you.”

“To do what?”

“In plain words, I would commit with you, or as the more learned phrase it, if you would be pleased to consent, I would ravish you,” Bufo said.

One now-obsolete meaning of “commit” is “to sin, especially the sin of adultery.” People speak of “to commit adultery.”

“Bah, bah, captain, you are so uncivil — you made me blush,” Herophil said.

“Do, I say,” Bufo said. “Why, I am glad I have it for you. Soldiers are hot upon service, mistress, and a wise man’s bolt is soon shot, as the proverb says.”

“Do, I say” means both 1) “Do have sex, I say,” and 2) “Do blush, I say.” After sex, many people have a sex flush — orgasm causes much of their skin to turn red.

The word “service” can mean “to have sex.” People speak of a bull servicing a cow.

“A wise man’s bolt is soon shot” is also bawdy.

“Good captain, keep up your bolt until I am at leisure to stand fair for your mark — your target,” Herophil said.

She continued, “If the court stallions all prove to be as rank as you, I will pray for all of them to ride henceforth upon an ass. So, captain, I must leave you.”

This was ambiguous. “Rank” can mean 1) festering and rotten, or 2) strong and vigorous.

“To ride on an ass” can mean 1) to ride a donkey, or 2) to have sex.

Herophil exited.

“Farewell heartily to you, truly,” Bufo said. “Go on thy way for as true a mistress as ever fouled clean napery. This same bastardly court diet, cost, lodging, change of clothes, and ease have addicted me villainously to the itch of concupiscence.”

“Napery” is household linen, including such items as clothing and sheets. Bufo may have been hoping that Herophil’s life included sheets soiled by sex.

King Alphonso entered the room. Pynto and Mureto walked on either side of him.

“They all shall not entreat me,” King Alphonso said.

“Your majesty would be no King, if your own will were not your own law,” Mureto said.

“Always, my lord, observing the domination of the planets as, if Mars and Venus are in conjunction, and their influence is working upon your frailty, then in any case you must not resist the motion of the celestial bodies,” Pynto the astrologer said.

Mars is named after the Roman god of war, and Venus is named after the Roman goddess of sexual passion.

Someone, of course, had to tell King Alphonso what the motion of the celestial bodies was foretelling. Mureto knew who that would be.

“All which, most gracious sovereign,” Muretto said, “this most famous scholar — Pynto — will at a minute foretell.”

“All hail to the King himself, my very good liege, lord, and most gracious benefactor,” Bufo said.

“What need do I have for other counselors than these?” King Alphonso said, referring to Muretto, Pynto, and Bufo.

He added, “Shall I be forced to be a woman’s slave — I, who may live free and hate their fickle sex?”

“Oh, it is a glorious virtue in so magnificent a prince to abstain from the sensual surfeits of fleshly and wanton appetites,” Muretto said.

King Alphonso began, “I find the inclination of such follies —”

He stopped, not wanting to think about such follies, and then he said, “Why, what are women?”

“They are very pleasant, pretty, necessary toys, if it please your majesty,” Bufo said. “I myself could pass the time with them, as occasion might serve, eight-and-forty hours outright, one to one always provided.”

He had already shown that he would like to pass the time with Herophil, preferably one to one in bed.

Pynto said, “Yet of all the seven planets, there are but two women among them, and one of the two is chaste, which is as good as if she were a boy.”

In the astronomy of the day, people believed that the Earth was the center of the universe, and the planets and Sun (which people referred to as a planet) orbited the Earth. According to their belief, this is the order of the planets, moving outward from the Earth: the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn.

The two women are Venus, who was not a virgin, and the Moon, whose goddess — Diana — was a virgin.

“That is not to be questioned,” Muretto said. “The best of women are only troubles and vexations; it is Man who retains all true perfection, and of all men, your majesty most retains all true perfection.”

Almado and Collumello, the Queen’s advisors, entered the scene.

“You are too rude to enter on our privacies without our permission,” King Alphonso said. “Speak your business, lords.”

“We have come from your most virtuous Queen,” Almado said.

“Speak no more,” King Alphonso said.

“A month has almost passed, and yet you slack your love to her,” Collumello said. “What do you mean, sir, by so strangely slighting a wife whose griefs grow now too high for womanhood to suffer?”

King Alphonso had asked to be separated from the Queen for only a week without consummating their marriage but almost a full month had passed without him seeing her.

“Is it your pleasure to admit her to your bosom?” Almado asked.

He was asking if King Alphonso was willing to live with the Queen as man and wife.

“You are too saucy,” King Alphonso said. “Return, and quickly, too, and tell her this — if she intends to keep herself in our favor, let us not see her.”

He did not want to live with the Queen and consummate their marriage.

“Do you really say so, sir?” Collumello said. “You must be speaking this only as a test of some kind.”

King Alphonso, Muretto, Pynto, and Bufo laughed.

Collumello said, “Oh, sir, remember who and what you are, and don’t let the insinuations of these servile creatures who were made men of importance only by you, soothe and traduce your safety to a known and willful danger.”

The word “traduce” means “change.”

Collumello was worried that Muretto, Pynto, and Bufo were manipulating the King and persuading him to reject the Queen who had saved his life, married him, and made him King.

Collumello then added, “Fix in your thoughts the ruin you have escaped, who freed you, and who has raised you to this height of King, and you will then awaken your judgment’s eye.

“The commoners murmur, and the streets are filled with busy whispers — yet in time recall your violence.”

A country needs good leaders who work well together. Certainly, King Alphonso and the Queen were not working well together.

When leaders do not work well together, rebellion can result. For King Alphonso to stop the whispers of the commoners — whispers that could lead to rebellion — he could recall his violence. That is, he could remember that had been a rebel, and he could start treating his Queen as the wife she in fact was.

King Alphonso said sharply, “As I am King, I swear that the tongue forfeits his head that speaks another word! Say one more word, and you die!”

Using the royal plural, he then said, “Muretto, don’t we now talk like a King?”

“You talk like one who has the whole world for his proper monarchy, and it becomes you royally,” Muretto replied.

The Queen, Petruchi, and Herophil entered the room.

“The Queen, and my mistress — Herophil,” Bufo said. “Oh, splendid, we shall have some doings right at hand now, I hope.”

“What does the woman mean by coming here?” King Alphonso said loudly. “Bah! Is this the duty of a good wife? We did not send for you, did we?”

In this society, the duty of a wife was to obey her husband.

“The more I do my duty in that I came unsent for,” the Queen said.

She wanted to be a good wife, and to do that she needed her husband to act like a husband.

“In what way, my gracious lord, have I offended you?” she asked. “In what way have I transgressed against the laws of sacred marriage with the result that I came to be separated in the first spring and April of my joys from you, who are much dearer to me than my life?”

“By all the honor of a spotless bed, show me my fault and I will turn away and be my own swift executioner.”

Her bed was spotless because she had not committed adultery. She was living the life of an honest, chaste woman who was unwilling to have sex with anyone other than her husband. Unfortunately for her, her husband did not want to consummate their marriage.

“I accept your words, and I will tell you your fault,” King Alphonso said. “Know then that you married me against my will, and that’s your fault.”

The Queen made a sound of mourning.

She then said, “Against your will? I dare not contradict what you are pleased to urge. But by the love I bear the King of Aragon — an oath as great as I can swear by — I conceived your words to be true speakers of your heart, and I am sure they were — you swore they were. How should I do anything but believe your words, I who loved so dearly?”

The words were spoken in the marriage ceremony — a religious ceremony in which the husband and wife made vows before God.

“Come, then you are a trifler, for by this I know you don’t love me,” King Alphonso said.

“Is that your fear?” the Queen said. “Why, listen now, lords — I told you that the King had made our division just as a test of faith.

“Kind husband, now I’m bold to call you that, was this your cunning plot to be jealous of me so soon as a test? We women are fine fools to try to examine men’s pretty subtleties.”

“You’ll scarcely find it so,” Muretto said to himself.

In other words, this was not a test of the Queen by King Alphonso — he really did not like her, and he did not like women in general.

But the Queen’s words did make an impact on King Alphonso, who said quietly to himself, “She would persuade me strangely.”

“I beg you, sweetheart,” the Queen said. “Don’t force thyself to look so sadly; truly it accords not with thy love. Your love is well. Was this your week’s respite? Yet, as I am a Queen, I was afraid that you had been in earnest in rejecting me.”

“In earnest?” King Alphonso said. “Go away, monstrous enchantress; by the death I owe to nature, thou appear to me in this matter to be more impudent than impudence. The tide of thy lecherous blood is at the full; and because thy raging pleurisy of lust cannot be sated by our royal warmth, thou are trying all cunning petulant charms to raise a wanton devil up in our chaste breast.”

Pleurisy is a disease of excess. Excess fluid builds up in the body, making it swell hugely. To King Alphonso, the desire for sex was also a disease of excess. Of course, the male desire for sex causes the penis to swell.

He continued, “But we are cannon-proof against the shot of all thy arts.”

“Was it you who spoke that, my lord?” the Queen asked.

Or was he repeating the words of bad counselors?

“Phaëthon is just over the orb of the moon, his horses have gotten loose, and the Heavens begin to grow into a combustion,” the astrologer Pynto said.

“When Phaëthon demanded proof that Helios, the Sun-god, was his father, he made Helios swear an inviolable oath that he would grant Phaëthon a wish. After Helios made the inviolable oath, Phaëthon demanded that he be allowed to drive the Sun-chariot that brought light to earth. Phaëthon could not control the horses, and he nearly destroyed the earth, and Zeus was forced to save the earth by throwing a thunderbolt at Phaëthon and killing him so that Helios could drive the Sun-chariot. I’ll sooner dig a dungeon in a molehill and hide my crown there, so that both fools and children may trample over my royalty, than ever lay it beneath a grotesque woman’s feet,” King Alphonso said to the Queen. “Even if thou could trans-shape thyself into a man, and with it be more excellent than Man can be, yet since thou were a woman once, I would renounce thee.”

“Let the King remember that it is the Queen he speaks to,” Petruchi said.

“Bah!” King Alphonso said. “I know that she would be well contented just to live within my presence; not for love to me, but so that she might with safety of her honor mix with some hot-veined lecher, whose eager lust should feed the rank abscess of desires, and beget a race of bastards, to whose birth I should be thought the dad.”

King Alphonso regarded a vagina as a “rank abscess of desires.” He also thought that the Queen would be unfaithful if she lived with him, which she would want to do so that if she became pregnant other people would think that King Alphonso was the father.

He continued, “But thou, thou woman, before I will be the cloak to thy false play, I’ll couple, aka have sex, with a witch, a hag — for if thou can live chaste, live by thyself like me. Or, if thou would persuade me that thou love me, see me no more, never. From this time forth, I hate thy sex. Of all thy sex, I hate thee worst.”

Actually, he had long hated her sex.

King Alphonso, Bufo, and Pynto exited.

“Madam, dear madam, yet take comfort,” Almado advised the Queen. “Time will work out all for the best.”

“Where must I go?” the Queen asked.

“You are in your own kingdom, it is your birthright, we all are your subjects,” Collumello said. “Not a man of us but to the utmost of his life will right your wrongs against this most unthankful King.”

“Go away,” the Queen said. “You are all traitors to profane his sacred merits with your bitter terms. Why, aren’t I his wife? A wife must bear whatever her lord wants to upbraid her with, and yet it is no injustice.

“What was it he said? That I no more should see him, never, never? There I am quite divorced from all my joys, from all my paradise of life. Not see him? It was too unkind a task. But he commanded, and so I cannot but obey.

“Where’s Herophil?”

“Here, madam,” Herophil said.

“Go hang all my chamber with mourning black,” the Queen ordered. “Seal up my windows: Let no light survey the subtle tapers — candles — that must eye my griefs.

“Get away from me, lords, I will defy you all. You are men, and men — oh! — are all unkind.

“Come hither, Herophil, spread all my robes, my jewels, and my apparel on the floor, and for a crown get me a willow wreath.”

Willows were a symbol of unrequited love.

The Queen continued, “No, no, that’s not my color — buy me a veil ingrained in tawny. Alas, I am forsaken, and no one can pity me.”

Some servants of the time wore tawny coats as part of their livery. The Queen regarded herself as a servant of her husband the King. In addition, the word “tawny” was sometimes used to describe a dark complexion. People in this society regarded dark complexions as ugly.

“By all the faith I owe to you, my sovereign, if you please to order me to do any service for you, I will prove to be most ready and most true,” Petrucci said.

“Why should the King despise me?” the Queen asked. “I never crossed his will, never said ‘nay’ to his ‘yea’ — yet surely I fear he has some ground for his displeasure.”

“None, unless because you saved him and his head from the chopping block,” Herophil said.

“Are thou a prattler, too?” the Queen said. “Silence, Herophil — don’t tempt a desperate woman. Will no man here dare deliver my last commendations to him?”

“If your excellent majesty will please to repose confidence in me, I will not only deliver to him your commendations,” Muretto said, “but I would think myself highly dishonored if he would not return his commendations back to you by letter.”

“Go away, beast, who are made all of baseness,” Petrucci said. “Do not grieve calamity or, as I am a knight, I’ll cut thy tongue out.”

“Sweet signor, I protest —” Muretto said.

Petrucci made a threatening gesture as he came toward Muretto, and Muretto fled.

“Madam, don’t believe him,” Petrucci said. “He is a parasite, although he is one the King dotes on.”

“Then curse you,” the Queen said, “because you did not treat him gently. Had I known it, I would have forestalled it by kneeling before him and I would have sent a handful of my tears to the King.

“Go away, my lords, here is no place to revel in our discomforts and discomfits.”

A discomfit is a defeat in a struggle. The Queen had been defeated in her struggle to be reconciled to her husband.

“Herophil, let’s make haste, so that thou and I may heartily like widows bewail my bridal-mocked virginity.”

The Queen and Herophil exited.

“Let’s follow her, my lords,” Collumello said. “I fear that the King will too late repent these rude divisions.”

They followed the Queen.

— 2.3 —

Velasco, Lodovico, and Mopas entered a room. Velasco had just asked Lodovico whether Salassa had complimented him.

“Compliment?” Lodovico said. “Compliments are for barbers’ shops. Know your own worth. You speak to a frail commodity, and you have bartered away your value completely, my lord.”

Lodovico considered Velasco to be of much more worth than Salassa, and he thought that Velasco was making a bad bargain by wooing her. A commodity is a thing that is for sale.

“She promised free discourse?” Velasco asked.

“She did,” Lodovico said. “Are you answered? Do you like this answer?”

Salassa and Shaparon entered the room.

“Madam, my lord Velasco has come; treat him nobly and kindly or — I say no more,” Shaparon said.

“To a poor widow’s house, my lord is welcome,” Salassa said. “Your lordship honors me in this favor. In what thankful entertainment I can give him, I shall strive to deserve it.”

“Your sweet lordship is most heartily welcome, as I may say,” Shaparon said.

“Instead of a letter, Madam Goodface, on my lord’s behalf, I am bold to salute you,” Mopas said.

His lord was Velasco; Mopas was Velasco’s man-servant.

“Madam Salassa, we do not distrust the liberty you granted, so now that you and my lord are in your own house, we will attend you in the next room,” Lodovico said. “Let’s go, cousin Shaparon; follow, sirrah Mopas.”

“It is a woman’s part to come behind,” Shaparon said.

In other words, women follow behind men.

“But for two men to pass in before one woman, it is too much a conscience on reverend antiquity,” Mopas said.

In other words, two men ought to allow an older woman to go first.

Lodovico, Shaparon, and Mopas went into the next room, leaving Salassa and Velasco alone to speak privately.

“What is your lordship’s pleasure?” Salassa asked.

“To rip up a story of my fate,” Velasco replied. “When the Queen employed me to lead an army against the recent rebels, of whom the now-King was chief leader, then in my return you were pleased to entertain me here in your house.”

“May it do your lordship much good,” Salassa said.

“But then, what conquest did I gain by that conquest, when here my eyes and your commanding beauty made me a prisoner to the truest love that ever warmed a heart?” Velasco said.

“Who might that be?” Salassa asked.

“You, lady, are the deity I adore, have kneeled to in my heart, and have vowed my soul to in such a debt of service that my life is tenant to your pleasure.”

He would give his life to make her happy.

“Bah, my lord,” Salassa said. “To mock me like this is not nobly done.”

“Mock you?” Velasco replied. “Most fair Salassa, if ever truth dwelt in a tongue, my words and thoughts are twins.”

“You wrong your honor in making so mean a choice,” Salassa said. “Can it be thought that that brave man Velasco, sole champion of the world, would look on me? On me, a poor, lone widow? It is impossible.”

“I am poorer in my performance now than ever,” Velasco said. “I am so poor that vows and protestations want fit credit with me to vow the least part of a service that might deserve your favor.”

In other words, he felt that he was not serving her properly, but he would do anything for her and he wanted to vow to serve her properly.

“You are serious?” Salassa asked.

“Lady, I wish that for an immediate trial, against the custom of so sweet a nature, you would be somewhat cruel in commands. You dare not sift the honor of my faith by any strange injunction, which the speed of my glad undertaking would not cheerfully attempt, or perish in the sufferance of it.”

“You promise lordly,” Salassa said.

“You too much distrust the constancy of truth,” Velasco replied.

“It would be ignoble on your part to demand a gift of bounty more than the freedom of a fair allowance — confirmed by modesty and reason’s warrant — might without blushing yield to.”

“Oh, fear not, for my affections aim at chaste contents, not at unruly passions of desire. I claim only the title of your servant. The flight of my ambitions soars no higher than living in your grace. And for encouragement, to quicken my attendance now and then, I want a kind, unravished kiss.”

“That’s just a fee due to a fair deserver. But let’s say that I grant it, and you have it, may I then lay a ‘light’ burden on you?”

“What is possible for me to venture on, by how much more it carries danger in it, by so much more my glory’s in the achievement.”

“I must trust you,” Salassa said.

“By all the virtues of a soldier’s name, I vow and swear that you can lay a light burden on me,” Velasco said.

“Enough, I take that oath, and thus I myself first do confirm your warrant,” Salassa said.

“I feel new life within me,” Velasco said.

“Now be steward for your own store, my lord, and take possession of what you have purchased freely,” Salassa said.

“I do so with a joy as willing as my wishes can arrive at.”

He kissed her.

“So, I may claim your oath now?”

“I await it.”

“Velasco, I do love thee, and I am jealous of thy spirit, which is hourly apt to catch at actions. If I must be mistress of thee and my own will, thou must be subject to my improvements.”

“That is my soul’s delight,” Velasco said.

“You are reputed to be the most outstanding fighting sir alive,” Salassa said. “But what is the good of that to me, if you are not safe?”

She was saying that she was afraid that he would be hurt as he fought. As a military man, Velasco certainly took the risk of being hurt or killed in battle.

“By all —” Velasco began to swear an oath.

Salassa said, “You shall not swear — take heed of perjury.”

She then lay her “light” burden on him: “So much I fear your safety, that I command, for two years’ space, you shall not wear a sword, a dagger, or a stiletto — and you shall not fight in any quarrel, no matter how just the quarrel is.”

This was asking a lot from a military man who valued honor.

“Lady!” Velasco said.

“Hear more yet: If you be baffled, railed at, scorned, mocked, struck, bandied, kicked —”

“Baffle” meant “publicly disgrace a knight, and especially a perjured knight.” “Bandy” meant “strike to and fro, as in tennis.”

“Oh, lady!” Velasco interrupted.

This was asking a lot from a knight who valued honor.

Salassa continued, “— spit on, reviled, challenged, provoked by fools, boys, buffoons, cowards —”

“This is intolerable!” Velasco said.

She was asking him to give up his identity as a soldier and military officer, as a knight, and as a man.

She finished, “— I charge you, by your oath, not to reply in word, deed, or look. And lastly, I conjure you never to reveal the cause for your acting like that to anyone alive by circumstance or by equivocation, nor, until two years have passed, to petition me for love.”

“Why do you play the tyrant like this?” Velasco asked.

“It is common to observe how love has made a coward valiant,” Salassa said. “But that a man as daring as Velasco would, to express his duty to a mistress, kneel to his own disgraces and turn coward belongs to me and to my glories only — I’m empress of this miracle. You have sworn your oath. If you will perjure yourself and lose your soul, you may.

“What will you do, sir?”

“Woman, thou art vain and cruel,” Velasco said.

“Will it please your lordship to taste a cup of wine, or stay and sup, and take a hard bed here?” Salassa said. “Your friends think we have done strange things all this while.

“Come, let us walk like lovers. I am compassionate. I do not love quarrels.”

“Triumph in my ruins,” Velasco said. “There is no act of folly but is common in use and practice to a scornful woman.”

A scornful woman can make a man commit acts of folly.

CHAPTER 3

— 3.1 —

King Alphonso, Almado, Muretto, Bufo, Pynto, and some attendants stood in a room.

King Alphonso said to Almado, one of the Queen's counselors, "You have prevailed even before you came, my lord. Muretto here, this very, very honest man, thoroughly encouraged me now to further give evidence of what a gratitude I love the Queen."

He ordered an attendant, "Give me a bowl of wine."

"Your majesty honors me more in making me the messenger of this most happy concord than addition of greatness can express," Almado replied.

"Addition of greatness" means a title of honor. According to Almado, being asked to deliver this happy message to the Queen honors him more than would being given a title of honor in recognition of his merits.

"I always told you that you would find that his grace the King is inclined to reconcile with the Queen at last," Muretto said.

"The King is the very Jove of benignity, by whose gentle aspect the whole sphere of this court and kingdom are, like the lesser orbs, moved round in the harmony of affability," Pynto the astrologer said.

An attendant brought in wine.

King Alphonso said, "My lord Almado, let's drink a health to your mistress, a hearty health, a deep one."

A health is a drink that follows a salutation and wish for a person's prosperous welfare.

"Upon my knee, my duty gladly answers," Almado said, kneeling to honor the King.

"Give him wine," King Alphonso ordered.

Almado drank.

King Alphonso said, "There's not a man whoever in our court, greater or meaner, but shall pledge this health in honor of our Queen, our virtuous Queen."

Using the royal plural, he said to Almado, "Commend us, and report us as you find us to be."

In other words, say good things about me, the King, and report to the Queen what you see me, the King, doing and saying here.

"Great sir, I shall with joy," Almado replied.

King Alphonso ordered, "Bufo and Pynto, all come in and drink, drink deep, let none not drink, comers or goers, none."

Bufo said, "Away, my hearts."

This was an order for some attendants to leave and have everyone drink a health to the Queen.

"We'll tickle our throats until the welkin blush again, and all the fixed stars dance the old measures," Pynto said.

The welkin is the sky, and the blush referred to is the dawn. The fixed stars are those that do not move in relation to each other, unlike the planets, which wander in the welkin. Perhaps the fixed stars would dance to the music of the spheres.

Muretto said to Almado, "I shall wait upon your lordship and escort you to the stately coach you will take."

Everyone except King Alphonso exited.

He said to himself, "So, so, far-reaching policy, I adore thee, and I will hug thee as my darling."

“Policy” is cunning tricks. As will be seen, the supposed reconciliation with the Queen was policy and not a real reconciliation.

He continued, “Shallow fools don’t dive into the height of regular statist.”

Statists are skilled in politics.

He continued, “Henceforth my stratagems of scorn and hatred shall kill in smiles — I will not strike and frown, but laugh and murder.”

Muretto returned.

“Welcome,” King Alphonso said. “Are we safe? Is our plan proceeding smoothly?”

“The plan is proceeding most free from interruption,” Muretto said. “The lord Velasco has newly entered the court. I have given the watchword that they ply him mightily with alcohol; the conclusion of the drinking bout I know cannot but end in hurly-burly.”

“Hurly-burly” is commotion — in this case, a drunken commotion.

“Good, good, I hate Velasco mortally,” King Alphonso said. “It was he who enslaved me to the hangman’s axe.”

The hangman was an executioner: Sometimes hangmen hanged people and sometimes they beheaded people.

King Alphonso continued, “But now go on — Petrucci is the man, you say, who must stand the champion of her lust.”

King Alphonso was wondering whether Petrucci and the Queen were having an affair. Although he believed that he hated his wife, he did not want to be a cuckold.

“There may be yet virtuous intention even in bad actions and in lewd words,” Muretto said. “I urge no further than likelihoods may inform.”

Bad actions and lewd words can be virtuous; for example, what seem to be bad actions and lewd words may be misinterpreted. Muretto seemed to not want the King to leap to the wrong conclusion.

“Bah, that’s thy nobleness,” King Alphonso said. “But now, Muretto, the eye of lechery speaks loud in silence.”

“Why look, sir, I must confess I observed some odd, amorous glances; some sweet, familiar, courteous, toying smiles; a kind of officious boldness in him, princelike and queenlike allowance of that boldness in him again; sometimes I might warily overhear her whispers,” Muretto said. “But what of all this? There might be no harm meant.”

“Bah, no — the grafting of my forehead, nothing else,” King Alphonso said.

He meant the grafting of horns on his forehead. Cuckolds were said to have invisible horns growing on their forehead.

He continued, “Grafting, grafting, Muretto, a most gentleman-like exercise; a very mystery belongs to it. And now and then they walk thus, arm in arm, twist fingers and hold hands — ha! Wouldn’t they, Muretto?”

A mystery is a skilled art that is regarded as secret by those not in the know. Skilled workmen regarded their occupation as a mystery. To people who do not understand the occupation, it is indeed a mystery.

“It is wondrously fitting that a great Queen should be supported, sir,” Muretto said, “and, for the best lady of them all, to discourse familiarly with her supporter is courtly and surpassingly innocent.”

Muretto was trying to argue that the Queen and Petrucci had done nothing immoral, although he knew that the King wanted to make it appear that the Queen and Petrucci were committing adultery. Opposing the wishes of a King can be dangerous.

Or he was trying to make King Alphonso jealous while at the same time trying to seem innocent of that.

“She and Petruchi did discourse familiarly?” King Alphonso asked.

“And at her passing to her private lodgings, attended only with her lady-in-ordinary, Petruchi alone went in before her,” Muretto said.

A “lady-in-ordinary” is a female member of the Queen’s staff.

“Is it true?” King Alphonso said. “Went in before her! Can you prove that?”

“Your majesty is too quick, too apprehensive of the worst,” Muretto said. “I meant he performed the office of an usher.”

“Guilty, openly and blatantly!” King Alphonso said. “Monstrous woman! Beast! Were these the fruits of her dissembling tears, her whining, and her heart sighs? But, Muretto, I will be swift, Muretto, swift and terrible.”

Muretto thought, *I am such another coxcomb on my side, too.*

The King was acting like a fool, and so was Muretto. Displeasing a King is dangerous, and Muretto was giving the King information that he knew the King wanted, although Muretto knew that the information was misleading and that the Queen was virtuous.

Muretto said to King Alphonso, “Yet indeed, let me persuade you — I anticipate that your wife is virtuous.”

“Virtuous!” King Alphonso said. “The devil she is — it is most impossible. What? Kiss and toy, wink, prate, yet be virtuous?”

“Why not, sir?” Muretto said. “I think now a woman may lie four or five nights together with a man, and yet be chaste. Although that is very hard to accomplish, yet so long as it is possible, such a thing may be.”

“I have it,” King Alphonso said.

He meant that he had the information he needed.

Using the royal plural, he said, “We’ll confer.”

He meant that he would think about the information he had collected.

Seeing some people coming, he said, “Let’s stand aside.”

Velasco, Bufo, and a groom who took care of horses entered the room. The groom carried wine, and both Bufo and the attendant were drunk. Bufo had his arm around Velasco’s shoulders.

“Not drink more?” Bufo said. “By this hand, you shall drink eleven whole healths, if your cap is wool or beaver; and that’s my resolution.”

Beaver was expensive and worn by the wealthy, while even peasants could afford to wear wool.

“By God’s foot,” the groom said, “you shall drink eleven score healths, without dishonor be it spoken to any man’s person out of this place.”

“Please, I can drink no more,” Velasco said. “It is a profession I dare not practice, nay, I will not.”

He knew that alcohol had a bad effect on him: He got drunk easily.

“What!” Bufo said. “Will not? Not drink a toast to her Queenship’s health? Listen to thy stinking and unwholesome words: ‘Will not.’ You will not! You say you will not?”

“I say so,” Velasco said. “Please accept that as my answer.”

“A pox on all flinchers,” the groom said.

A flincher passes the bottle and will not drink.

The groom continued, “If he should say he will not drink, let him choose, like an arrant dry lord as he is.”

“Give me the bowl of wine,” Bufo said. “I must be valiant.”

He said to the groom, “You, sirrah, man-at-arms, here’s a carouse — a drink — to the King, the Queen, and myself.”

“Let’t come,” the groom said, slurring his speech. “I’ll have that drink, truly, sweet, sweet, sweet captain.”

“Wait, give it to the lord first,” Bufo said. “Drink it up, lord, do.”

He grunted, “Ump,” as he slapped Velasco hard on the back.

“Go away, I say,” Velasco said. “I am not in the tune.”

“Tune?” Bufo said. “Tune! By God’s blood, do you take us for fiddlers, scrapers of fiddle strings, rhyme-chanters, by ‘tune’? By this light, I’ll scourge you like a town top.”

A town top was a large top that can be spun by whipping it.

Bufo continued, “Look, you, I am urged —”

He grunted, “Ump,” as he slapped Velasco hard on the shoulder.

He then said, “— and there’s a side blow for you, like a sober thing as you are.”

“Well done, truly, precious captain,” the groom said.

“Do you dare do this to me, knowing who I am?” Velasco said to Bufo.

“Yes, in the way of daring, I dare kick you thus,” Bufo said, kicking him. “Thus, sir, up and down. There’s a jolt on the bum, too. How do you like it?”

Bufo kicked and beat him.

“It is well you use the privilege of the place,” Velasco said. “There was a time the best of all this court dared not have lifted a hand against me then, but I must bear it now.”

Velasco was trying to avoid dishonor by mentioning “the privilege of the place.” It would be a crime to draw a weapon in a place so close to the King.

“Isn’t this strange, Muretto?” King Alphonso asked.

“I can scarcely credit my own eyes,” Muretto said. “The captain — Bufo — follows his instructions perfectly.”

“Not drink?” Bufo said. “Muslim! Infidel!”

The Koran discourages the use of intoxicants.

Bufo continued, “I will flick thy nose with my finger and spit in thy face, mongrel. Brave? A commander? Ha!”

“Oh, woman, woman, woman,” Velasco said. He wanted to defend his honor, but Salassa had forbidden him to, and she had forbidden him to tell anyone why he was not defending his honor.

“That’s a lie, a stark lie,” Bufo said. “It is known that I never was a woman in my life.”

He then said, “I am weary because of my beating of him and can stand no longer. Groom, kick him up and down in my behalf, or by this flesh I’ll beat you, sirrah.”

“Come aloft, jackanapes,” the groom said. “Come aloft, sirrah.”

A jackanapes is an ape or a monkey.

The groom wanted Velasco to “come aloft” into the air each time he was kicked.

The groom continued to kick and beat Velasco.

“Why, surely Velasco dares not fight!” King Alphonso said.

“It must be the case that someone or other has bewitched him,” Muretto said.

Pynto the astrologer, who was drunk, entered the room.

“Avaunt!” he cried.

This word ordered devils and witches to go away.

Pynto continued, “I saw twelve dozen cuckolds in the middle region of the air, galloping on a blackjack, eastward ho.”

People in this culture divided the atmosphere into three regions: 1) low and warm because the Sun warms the ground, 2) middle and cold like the tops of mountains, and 3) high and hot because close to the sphere of fire that some people in this culture believed to exist between the Earth and the Moon.

A blackjack is a tar-covered leather jug of beer.

Pynto continued, "It is certain that every dozen went for a company, and they are now become a corporation."

In Pynto's vision, the cuckolds were joining together and growing in power.

Pynto continued, "Aries and Taurus, the Bull and the Ram, two head signs, shall be henceforth their signs, set up in the grand hall of their politic convocations."

Bulls, rams, and cuckolds all have horns.

Pynto continued, "Whirr, whirr."

This described the alcoholic confusion in his brain.

Pynto continued, "There, there, just under the rainbow ambles Mercury, the thin-bearded thief who stole away the draper's wife while the good man was made drunk at the Stillyard Inn where the cask of wine sat during a light repast of Dutch bread and Rhenish wine, and lay all night in pure Holland cloth in his stocking and shoes."

The "thin-bearded thief" is Mercury, god of thieves and financial gain, who shortly after being born stole Apollo's cattle. He had many affairs with mortals, as well as with goddesses and nymphs.

A draper sells such items as cloth and dry goods.

Usually, people wear two stockings, but a drunk man may wear only one.

Pynto continued, "Bah, don't talk to me, I will maintain against the universities of both the Indies that one alderman's horse is more right worshipful than any six constables, brown-bills and all."

Constables carried a brown-bill, which is a type of halberd (a combination of pike and axe).

Pynto continued, "Now, now, now, my brains burn in sulphur, and thus will I stalk about, and swim through a whole element of dainty, neat, brisk, rich claret, Canary wine, or Malaga sack. Am not I Pynto? Haven't I Hiren here?"

"Hiren" is a woman's name. Possibly, Pynto had named his sword Hiren.

He saw Velasco and asked him, "What are thou? A full moon, or a mooncalf?"

A mooncalf is a misshapen monster.

"No, no," Bufo said. "It is a dry stockfish that must be beaten until it is tender."

Stockfish are dried cod.

"Was there ever a man who was so much a slave as I?" Velasco said to himself.

"Does Saturn wince?" Pynto said.

Saturn's son Jupiter castrated him. Their Greek names are Cronus and Zeus.

"Down with him," Pynto said.

What could go down — and stay down — was Velasco's penis.

"Let Charles' Wain run over his north pole," Pynto said. "It shall be justified, too."

Charles' Wain is the constellation known as the Great Bear, or the Plow. Saturn/Cronus was castrated with a sickle, which is used in harvesting. An erect penis can point upward, and the North Pole is up at the top of maps.

"Now, sir, having taken a little breath, I'll have at you once more, and then I have done," the groom said.

He began to beat Velasco.

Mopas and Lodovico entered the scene.

"Clubs, clubs!" Mopas yelled.

The phrase "Clubs! Clubs!" was a call to the city watch to come and use their clubs to break up a fight in the city streets — or a call to apprentices to grab clubs and come and fight on one or the other side.

Mopas said, "I have been the death of two brewer's horses and two catch-poles myself, and now I am to be tried by two fools and ten knaves."

Catch-poles arrested people for debt; they were warrant officers.

He continued, "Oh, this is monstrously base and horrible. Is my lord past recovery?"

Velasco said, "Stop, I beg of you, fellow, stop. I have no sword, or if I had, I dare not strike in response against you."

"By God's bones," Bufo said, "even if you were an invincible armada, I'd pound you all like brown-paper rags."

Cheap paper was made from unbleached brown rags.

"Let me be struck blind!" Lodovico said. "The shame of fate! Velasco, disgraced, and he doesn't dare to strike back!"

He then said to Bufo and the groom, "Dogs, drunken dogs, I'll whip you to your kennels."

"No, good one, don't do that," Velasco said.

Mopas said as he drew his sword, "Bilbo, come forth and show thy fox's tail."

Good swords were made in Bilboa, Spain, and were called Bilbos. A fox was a type of sword. The fox' tail was the end of the sword.

Mopas added, "Give me liquor and I'll fight like a roarer."

Roaring boys were known for drunken fighting.

"Keep standing, ho!" Pynto the astrologer said. "The almanac says plainly it is no season to be let blood — the sign is mortal. Stop!"

In this society, a person could be let blood. The person could be cut, and blood would be removed from their body. This was supposed to be medically beneficial for certain diseases.

King Alphonso stepped forward and said to Velasco, Lodovico, and Mopas, "Yes, I command. Uncivil ill-bred beasts, how dare you turn our palace into a common market booth? How dare the proudest of you all lift up a hand against the meanest of those creatures whom we do count as ours?"

Bufo was his friend.

King Alphonso continued, "Now, now you spit the ancient rancor of your bitter galls with which you strove to wound us heretofore."

Velasco had led the Queen's forces against the rebels, who had included Alphonso and Bufo. Lodovico was Velasco's friend, and Mopas was Velasco's man-servant.

"We were abused, my lord," Lodovico said.

"Fellow, thou lie," King Alphonso said. "Our royal eyes beheld the pride and malice of thee, Velasco, who in hate to us refused to honor our remembrance, even in just a pledged health."

Velasco had declined to drink a health to the Queen in behalf of her supposed reconciliation with the King.

"Therein I was wronged," Velasco said.

"No," King Alphonso replied. "Therein all thy cunning could not hide the rage of thy malicious heart against us. Yet know that to test thy love for us, we caused this onset. We will justify the height of thy disgraces — what they did was ours. Go away from here, coward, baffled, kicked, despised, and spurned."

"Go hang thyself," Bufo said to Velasco. "A pox on thee."

King Alphonso, Mureto, Pynto, Bufo, and the groom exited.

"Oh, you are ruined," Lodovico said to Velasco. "What devil, hag, or witch has stolen your heart and courage away?"

"I cannot tell you," Velasco answered.

"Not fight!" Lodovico said. "It is enough to shame us all."

Velasco said to himself, "Happy was I who living lived alone. Velasco was a man then, but now he is none."

Velasco and Lodovico exited.

Alone, Mopas said to himself, "Is it true that he is no man now? Then I smell how things stand. I'll lay my life his lady sweetheart has given him the gleek, and he in return has gelded himself and so both lost his courage and his wits together."

"To be given the gleek" means "to have a trick played on you" and "to be mocked."

— 3.2 —

The Queen, Almado, Collumello, Petruchi, and Herophil met in a room.

The Queen said to Almado, "Speak the words again, and, my good lord, be sure you speak the same, the very words — 'our Queen, our virtuous Queen' — weren't those the King's exact words?"

"Exactly so," Almado said, "and the King was also in his carriage — his way of carrying himself — so very kind and so princely, that I must do wrong to gratitude in lacking the ability to express his love."

The Queen said, "I am the happiest she who lives.

"Petruchi, was I mistook or not?"

"Why, my good lords, observe it well — there is a holy league confirmed and ratified between Love and Fate. This sacred matrimonial tie of hearts called 'marriage' has divinity within it.

"Please, Almado, tell me, did the King smile when he praised me?"

"Madam, yes," Almado replied, "and he affably concluded all in this — 'Commend us, and report us as you find us to be.'"

"For love's sake," the Queen said, "let no man prattle of distrust. Whosoever says the King's unkind shall be guilty of treason. I think that I am all air — my soul has wings."

"And we are all overjoyed by this sweet reconciliation," Petruchi said.

The Queen said, "We'll visit him, my lords, in some rich mask of rare device, as thus ... bah, now I think about it, the world yields not variety enough of cost that's worthy of his royal eyes."

Sometimes, members of one court would put on masks and visit another court.

"Why, Herophil?" the Queen said, asking for her.

"Here I am, madam," she replied.

"Now curse me, but I could weep out of anger," the Queen said. "If it were possible to get a chariot cut out of a rock, made all of one whole diamond, drawn all on pavements of pearls and amber by four ivory steeds of perfect crystal — this would be worth presenting to the eyes of the King. Or some bright cloud of sapphires ... bah, you are all so dull — you do not love me!"

"You are transported to strange impossibilities," Collumello said. "Our service shall wait upon your happiness."

"Nay, nay, I know you laugh at me, and well you may," the Queen said. "I say I know not what. I wish it were fitting to ask one question of you."

"Madam, ask anything," all answered.

"You'll swear that I am idle, yet you know that is not my custom," the Queen asked. "Look upon me well. Am I as fair, as beautiful, as Herophil?"

"Yes, madam, or any other creature alive," Petruchi answered.

“You truly make me blush,” the Queen said. “Oh, I wish that the King could see me with your eyes. Or I wish that I were much coarser than I am to all the world so long as I might only seem more beautiful to him. I wouldn’t mind if all the world thought I was ugly as long as the King thought I was beautiful.”

Velasco and Lodovico entered.

The Queen said, “See, here come two more.

“Velasco, thou are welcome.

“Welcome, kind Lodovico.

“You two I know bring fresh supplies of comfort. Do not cloud your news with circumstance — tell me, does the King expect me? Yes, good man, I know he does. Speak briefly, my good lord, and truly.”

“Madam, take all at once — he is the King, and Kings may do their pleasures,” Velasco said.

He meant, Take all — good and bad news — at once.

Although the Queen did not know it yet, the bad news concerned Velasco.

“True, Velasco,” the Queen said, meaning that the King was a King and could do what he wanted to do. “But I have from my heart forgotten remembrance of former passages — the world has changed. Isn’t he justly royal?”

The “former passages” were the words the King had used formerly to reject her.

“I wish he were justly royal,” Lodovico said. “I wish it for your sake, madam, but my wishes and the King’s inclinations are quite opposite.”

“What are you saying, Lodovico?” Petrucci asked.

“This, Petrucci,” Lodovico replied. “Velasco has been disgraced by the King, and he has been abused and baffled by his minions; the King justified the minions’ actions in abusing and baffling Velasco. In a word — King Alphonso is, and will be, the scourge of Aragon.”

“I’ll stop my ears,” the Queen said. “They shall not let in poison — rank, treacherous, searching poison.”

In this society, to “search” a wound meant to “probe” a wound — something that was painful.

“It is impossible,” Almado said.

“Yes, it is impossible,” the Queen said, “but now I see that you are all agreed to curse me in the height of my prosperities. Oh, that at once I could have permission to die and shun the times.”

Muretto entered the room.

“His excellent majesty by me commends to your royal hands this letter, madam,” Muretto said, handing her the letter.

“Why, thus I kiss the letter, and kiss it again. Welcome, whatever it says.”

She read the letter.

“So that you may all conceive, my lords, the King’s hearty zeal to unity and goodness,” Muretto said, “he by me entreats your attendance on the Queen to him.”

He took Petrucci aside and said, “To you, signor Petrucci, he sends this diamond ring from his own finger.”

He gave Petrucci the diamond ring.

“You strike me into wonder,” Petrucci said.

“I would excuse his highness’ violence to you, my lord Velasco,” Muretto said, “but he says that your own indiscretion deserved your late reproof. And further — pardon me for not softening the sum of his injunction — he says that your cowardice is now so vulgarly palpable that it cannot stand with his honor to countenance so degenerating a spirit.”

“I thank him,” Velasco said, “yet, if you remember well, both he and you proved me another man.”

In the civil war, Velasco had proven that he was not a coward. He still was not a coward, although no one could tell by his recent actions.

The Queen said, “This is the sweetest letter that was ever written. Come, we must go to the King.”

Seeing the diamond ring on Petruchi’s finger, she said, “What! That is my ring, the first ring that I ever gave the King. Petruchi, I must have it.”

“It was the King who sent it to me,” Petruchi said. “I intend to give it back to him again.”

“No, I will,” the Queen said, “and in exchange for that ring take this ring of equal value.”

The Queen and Petruchi exchanged rings.

“But the two rings are not of equal value to me,” the Queen said. “This ring comes from my husband, and so it has greater value to me.”

She added, “Let’s waste no time. This day shall crown our peace.”

Everyone except Velasco and Lodovico exited.

“You see, my lord, how the world goes,” Lodovico said to Velasco. “What’s your next course of action?”

“I wish I could leave myself,” Velasco said. “I am unfit for the company of men. Are thou my friend?”

“I cannot tell what I am,” Lodovico said. “Your patient humor indeed persuades me I am nothing. Ladies’ little puppy dogs shortly will break your shins with milksops, and you dare not cry, ‘Come out, cur!’”

A milksop is bread soaked in milk.

He requested, “Tell me truly for our long-established friendship’s sake — hasn’t this madam sweetheart of yours a part in your metamorphosis?”

“You are unkind to even as much as in a thought to wrong her virtue,” Velasco said. “Lodovico, know this: I have resolved never to fight again.”

“It is a very safe resolution,” Lodovico said, “but have you resolved never to be beaten again?”

“That goodly sound of ‘gallant, valiant man’ is but a breath, and dies as soon as uttered,” Velasco said. “I’ll seek my fame henceforward in the praise of sufferance and patience; for rash manhood adds only life to cruelty, yet by cruelty takes life away and leaves upon our souls nothing but guilt; while patience, if it is settled, does even in bondage keep us free.”

Lodovico replied, “That is excellent morality, but my good lord, without more unnecessary detail, tell me its cause. Let me know the ground and cause of your pacifism.”

“The cause is my will, or, if you please, my cowardice,” Velasco said. “Don’t ask for more information; more, I vow, you shall not know.”

Mopas entered the room.

“Oh, damn! Damn! It would be better for me to be the hangman’s deputy than my lord Velasco’s gentleman usher. All the people in the streets as I pass hoot at me and ask me if I am as valiant as my master the coward. They swear their children carry wooden daggers to engage in a fencing contest with him, and there’s no talk but about the arrant coward Velasco.”

“I don’t care,” Velasco said. “Let them talk.”

“You don’t care?” Mopas said. “By these hilts of my sword and dagger, which with the guards and blades, form crosses, I swear that rather than a hundred ducats I would prefer to have just as much spirit as needed to have drawn upon a couple of men in gingerbread, which a huckster’s crook-legged, whoreson ape held up — I would swear the gingerbread men were two braver fellows than you are.”

“Your readiest way would be to get you into a cloister, for there’s no going to court,” Lodovico said.

Velasco had been exiled from court, and because of his pacifism, a cloister would be a good place for him to stay. Mopas, his serving-man, would go with him.

“Yes,” Mopas said, “to have our brains rubbed out with the heel of a small brown loaf of bread.”

In this society, bread was sometimes used to clean paintings.

Velasco said to Lodovico, “As you are my friend, cease to come near me any more.”

Velasco exited.

“Gone so quickly?” Lodovico said. “Mopas, I’ll find out the answer to this mystery, and thou shall be the instrument.”

“Shall I?” Mopas said. “Why, I am agreed. Let me be an instrument. Whether it be a wind or stringed instrument, I’ll sound at one end or the other, I’ll promise you.”

He would either sing or fart.

— 3.3 —

King Alphonso, Pynto, and Bufo talked together.

“Are all things ready as we gave orders?” King Alphonso asked.

“Yes, all is ready, and the face of the Heavens is surpassingly favorable,” Pynto the astrologer answered.

“Bufo, take care, once the watchword is given, to seize Petruchi suddenly,” King Alphonso ordered.

“As long as the devil is not in him,” Bufo said, “I’ll make him fast enough.”

“In the meantime we’ll take our place,” King Alphonso said. “They are at hand. Let some musicians play our choicest music to entertain this Queen with all the seeming, fitting forms of state.”

Some musicians played loudly.

The Queen, Petruchi, Herophil, Collumello, Almado, and Muretto entered the room. Petruchi supported the Queen’s arm.

All said to King Alphonso, “All joy to Aragon’s great King.”

“You strive to act in words, my lords, but we ourself endeavor, rather, how to speak in act,” King Alphonso said. “Now is a time of peace of amity.

“The Queen is present — lady, seat yourself here, as near as if we placed you in our heart, where you are deeply enthroned.”

“As you in mine, so may I ever live in yours, my lord,” the Queen said.

“How so?” King Alphonso said. “You are too charitable now, you who covet only equality in love — a cold love, a frozen love — for I must think that the streams of your affections are dried up, or running from their accustomed channels, they range in lawless paths of secrecy and stealth — which makes us love you more.”

The words “which makes us love you more” are ambiguous. They can mean that King Alphonso loves the Queen more than she loves him, or they can mean that the King loves that the Queen’s love for him is either dried up or is ranging in lawless paths of secrecy and stealth. The “lawless paths of secrecy and stealth” are those paths that lead to adultery. If the Queen has committed adultery, then the King need not stay married to her.

The Queen thought that King Alphonso was jealous and that this jealousy meant that he loved her: “I hope that your words do not dissent from your resolved thoughts” — the King

had recently resolved to be reconciled with her — “for then, if I am not mistaken, you would feel extremity of passion, which indeed is noble jealousy.”

“Are you so plainly spoken?” King Alphonso asked. “I thank you, madam.”

He then said, “Give me your fair hand. What’s this? Oh, my presages! From where did you get this ring?”

“This ring, my lord?” the Queen asked.

“This ring, my lord!” King Alphonso said. “By honor’s reverend crest, it is time for me to wake up.

“Aren’t thou pale, Petruchi?”

“Gracious sir,” Petruchi replied, “this is the ring you sent Muretto to give to me. Because this ring came from you, the Queen insisted on exchanging it for another of her own.”

“True,” King Alphonso said. “Because it came from me. I take it so, and I grant you know the word — ’tis won and lost!”

“Word” meant “maxim.” This was a common maxim or adage that Petruchi would know. But “word” also meant “watchword” — it was the signal for the King’s trap to be sprung.

Some guards entered the room, and they helped Bufo to arrest Petruchi, while Pynto arrested the Queen.

“What do you mean by this, Hellhounds?” Petruchi said. “Slaves, let go of my sword!”

“Shut your jaws,” Bufo said, “and stop your scolding, my small friend. Now is not the time to wrangle or to roar.”

The Queen said to Petruchi, “Stop! Stop!”

She then said to her husband, King Alphonso, “I am content with whatever you are pleased to do.”

“What does your highness mean?” Collumello asked.

Was he talking to the King or to the Queen or to both?

Almado said to King Alphonso, “Don’t wrong majesty with such ignoble rigor.”

This has two meanings: 1) Don’t wrong the Queen with such ignoble rigor, and 2) Don’t wrong your own majesty with such ignoble rigor.

The meanings of “ignoble rigor” include “bad behavior.”

“Oh, my lords, the weight of all this shame falls heaviest here in my afflicted bosom,” King Alphonso said. “Madman-like, I would not credit what my ears had heard from time to time of that adulterous woman. For this have I lived widowed from her bed, was deaf to proofs and to oaths, and always thought that whoredom could not suit herself so trimly on virtue’s outside. But Petruchi there has a loud-speaking conscience, which can proclaim her lust, and my dishonor.”

“Allow me to speak,” Petruchi requested. “Grant me a hearing.”

King Alphonso ordered, “Take him to prison — make him fast on pain of all your lives.”

Bufo said to Petruchi, “Come, sir, there is no playing fast and loose for a ducat now.”

“Fast and loose” was a conman’s game that the sucker could not win unless the conman allowed him to.

Bufo exited with Petruchi under guard.

“But what now about the Queen?” Collumello asked.

King Alphonso said, “She shall be treated as she deserves.”

“Our law requires a clear and open proof, and a judicial trial,” Alphonso said.

“Yes, to subjects it does, but who among you dares to speak justice against your natural sovereign?” King Alphonso said. “Not one.”

“Your majesty has most wisely considered that point,” Pynto said.

“I have stood silent all this while, and I cannot but with astonishment and unutterable grief bear a share of sadness in these disasters,” Muretto said to the Queen. “But, madam, be not altogether dejected on your part — there is more mercy in this sovereign prince than that you should any way distrust.”

“Continue to proceed and question me no more,” the Queen said.

“I will be gentle to you, and the course that I will take shall merit your best thanks,” King Alphonso said. “If in a month a champion shall appear in single opposition to maintain your honor, I will be the man myself in person to vouch for this accusation. One of us shall prevail and end this strife by proving either your innocence or your guilt.”

King Alphonso and the Queen’s champion would fight a single combat to the death. If King Alphonso lived, then the Queen was proven to be guilty of adultery. If the Queen’s champion lived, then the Queen was proven to be innocent of adultery. This was known as trial by combat.

He continued, “But if no champion comes, then you shall lose your head. In the meantime, you shall be treated like a Queen.”

Muretto said, “Now by the life of honor, it is a most princely trial, and it will be worth eternal memory to you.”

Was he talking to the King or to the Queen or to both?

“Where must I then be led?” the Queen asked.

“Nowhere but here in our own palace,” King Alphonso said, “and, as I am King, none worse than I shall be her guardian.”

“Madam, Heaven is the guardian of the just,” Almado said. “You cannot lack a champion.”

“Before I go, may I entreat you to let me speak a word?” the Queen asked the King.

“Oh, yes, you may,” King Alphonso replied.

“Collumello and Almado, listen to me,” the Queen said. “I speak to you and to your fellow peers. Remember that both by oaths and by allegiance you are my subjects.”

Collumello and Almado replied, “Madam, that is true — we are your subjects.”

“Then, as you ever bore respect or truth to me as to your sovereign, I order you never to levy arms against the King, singly or openly, and to never in any way justify my right or wrong in this.

“For, if you do, here I proclaim that you all are traitors to loyalty and to me. For better assurance that you will do this, I want you to swear your oaths anew to me.”

Collumello and Almado replied, “Since you force us, we swear — and may Heaven protect you.”

“Let me be gone,” the Queen said.

“Well, as they please for that,” King Alphonso said. “Muretto, follow us.”

Everyone except Almado and Collumello exited.

“Here is fine work, my lord,” Almado said. “What’s to be done? What can we do?”

“Stand still while this proud tyrant cuts our throats,” Collumello said.

“She’s wronged, and this is nothing but a plot,” Almado said. “Velasco now might bind his country to him by defending the Queen as her champion, but he has grown so cowardly and base that boys and children beat him as they please.”

“I have an idea,” Collumello said. “We, with the other peers, will set out a proclamation, assuring that whatever worthy knight who undertakes, by such a day, to serve as champion for the Queen, shall have a hundred thousand ducats paid, with whatever other honors he shall demand.”

“This must be done hastily or it will come too late,” Almado said.

“It shall be done immediately,” Collumello said. “Here our hope must stand: Kings command subjects; Heaven commands Kings.”

CHAPTER 4

— 4.1 —

Salassa and Shaparoon talked together about Velasco.

“A coward?” Salassa said. “It is impossible. Velasco a coward? The brave man? The wonder of the time? Surely, Shaparoon, it is a complete scandal raised by an enemy.”

“It is most certainly and most apparently true,” Shaparoon said. “Tailors, apprentices, and even bakers and weavers — who are things that drink cannot put courage into, they are such mighty bread-eaters — as I am an honest woman, fling old shoes at him, and he dares not turn back to give an angry word.”

She regarded bread-eaters as weak, perhaps because of milksops and gingerbread men.

“I had been sweetly promoted to such a tame champion,” Salassa said.

Shaparoon had encouraged Salassa to allow Velasco to court her; a marriage to Velasco would promote — gain social advancement for — Salassa.

“Gallants!” Shaparoon said contemptuously. “Curses upon them. It is your tough clown who is your only raiser up of man or woman.”

“A proclamation has been sent out for certain?” Salassa asked.

“Most assuredly,” Shaparoon said.

“The sum proposed is a hundred thousand ducats?” Salassa asked.

“Immediate payment, without waiting,” Shaparoon answered.

“It is a glorious reward,” Salassa said. “Speak low, and observe.”

They stood to the side as Mopas arrived and read out loud a proclamation:

“Whosoever, man or woman, can or will procure any such foresaid defendant against the said day, let them, him, or she repair to the said Lords of the Council and give in such sufficient assurance for such defense, and they or any of them shall receive a hundred thousand ducats in ready cash with what honors may give them, him, or her content or satisfaction.”

He then said, “Oh, that I dared to be that valiant — a hundred thousand ducats! A hundred thousand — how it rumbles in my jaws!”

“Please, let me have a word with you, my friend,” Salassa said.

“Sweet lady, may fair weather always fall upon you,” Mopas replied.

He then said to Shaparoon, “As for you, madam, time was, I recommend to your ancient remembrance, time is past; with my service forwards and backwards when it is time present; resting yours in the whole — Mopas!”

He was attempting to use courtly speech and perhaps courtly flattery.

Shaparoon replied, “That was very courtly and pithy.”

It was neither.

“Please, let me see your paper,” Salassa requested.

“It is your ladyship’s,” Mopas replied, giving the proclamation to her.

“Some proclamation, as I take it,” Shaparoon said.

“Madam reverence, you have taken it in the right cue,” Mopas said.

The word combination “sir-reverence” meant 1) “saving your reverence,” aka “with all due respect,” and 2) “human excrement.”

“I am overjoyed,” Salassa said.

She gave Mopas a tip and said, "Here's gold for thy news, friend. I will make thee the happiest and most welcome messenger to thy lord who ever received thanks from him, without delay. Wait on me for instructions."

"I am at your ladyship's beck," Mopas said. "Beckon to me, and I will come."

— 4.2 —

King Alphonso and Muretto talked together.

"True, true, sir, you are set high upon the stage for action," Muretto said.

He quoted something that King Alphonso had said a moment earlier, "'Oh, the top of my ambition, my heart's idol!'"

Muretto then said, "What a perplexity you are twined into! And justly — so justly that it is hard to judge whether your happiness were greater, in the possession of an unmatched beauty, or your present misery were greater, by forcing that beauty to expose her honor to so apparent a contempt. This is not the least that might have been in time prevented."

"Oh, I am lost, Muretto," King Alphonso said. "My sunken eyes are buried in their hollows; busy thoughts press on like legions of infernal hags to menace my destruction. Yet my judgment still prompts my senses that my Queen is fair."

"Fair!" Muretto said. "Her beauty is the unspeakable workmanship of Heaven's bounty! If all the most skillful painters who ever discerned colors were molded into one to perfect an artist, that artist should still sooner lack the fancy or imagination required for depicting an exquisitely created miniature portrait of her than ever to pattern a counterfeit so exquisitely excellent as the Queen is by nature."

King Alphonso said, "I have surveyed the wonder of her cheeks, compared them with the lilies and the rose, and by my life, Muretto, roses are counterfeit in comparison to her blush, and lilies are pale in comparison with her white; yet, blear-eyed fool that I am, I could not see those rarities before me."

"Every man is blind, my lord, in his own happiness — there's the curse of our mortality," Muretto said. "She was the very tale of the world; her perfections busied all tongues; she was the only wish of Europe's chiefest monarchs — whose full fruition you (and it was your capital sin) most inhumanly abandoned."

"Villain Petrucci, let me forever curse him," King Alphonso said. "Had he not been the man, who else had dared to risk a denial from her scorns?"

"See now, herein you are monstrously discourteous, above excuse," Muretto said. "Why, sir, what has Petrucci done which, from any King to a vassal, all men would not eagerly have pursued? Alas, my lord, his nobleness is eternal by this means: in attempting and (his felicity unmatched) in enjoying the glory of his time — a beauty so conquering, so unparalleled."

"She is superlative," King Alphonso said.

"Divine," Muretto agreed.

"Rich, bright," King Alphonso said.

"Immortal," Muretto agreed.

"Too, too worthy for a man," King Alphonso said.

"The gods might enjoy her," Muretto agreed.

The word "enjoy" can mean "have sex with."

"Nature never framed so sweet a creature," King Alphonso said.

"She is Nature's own self's nature," Muretto agreed. "There is nothing of artifice in her."

"Let me forever curse the frail condition of our deluded faculties, Muretto," King Alphonso said. "Yet being all, as she is all, her best is worst, considering that she is a wanton."

“If you build a palace, arch it with diamonds, roof it with carbuncles, pave it with emeralds, daub it with gold, furnish it with all that cost can lay on, and then seal up the doors, and at best it is but a solitary nest for owls and jackdaws,” Muretto said. “Beauty was not merely created for wonder, but for use. It is you who were in the fault; it is you who persuaded her, urged, compelled, forced her — I know it, and my truth and plainness trumpet it out to you.”

Muretto was saying that by not consummating the marriage and sexually satisfying the Queen, the King had set up the conditions in which she would satisfy her sexual desires by committing adultery.

He added, “Besides, my lord, women are all creatures, not gods and not angels.”

King Alphonso replied, “I must confess that that is true. Yet I swear by my crown that she dies if no one will defend her; I’m resolved — I’ve firmly made up my mind.”

“You have a heroic disposition, and, with your honor, she cannot, must not, live,” Muretto said. “Here’s the point — if she continues to live and you receive her to favor, you will be a noted cuckold, which is a reputation that is dishonorable to all, but to a King fearfully infamous. On the other side, if you prevail and she is put to death, it will be as if you were to deprive the firmament of the sun and yourself of the treasure of the whole earth.”

“Right, right, Muretto, there thou strikes the wound too deeply to be cured, yet I must do it,” King Alphonso said. “I would be delighted to see her now.”

“Please do, sir, and let Petruchi come face-to-face with her,” Muretto said. “Observe them both, but be very mild to both; be violent to neither.”

“Well counseled,” King Alphonso replied. “Call them here, but bring none with them.”

Muretto exited to carry out the King’s order.

Alone, King Alphonso said, “We’ll strive with grief. Heaven! I am plunged at full. Never henceforward shall I slumber out one peaceful hour — my enraged blood turns coward to my honor. I could wish my Queen might live now, even if all I did was look and gaze upon her cheeks, her ravishing cheeks.

“But, oh, to be a cuckold! By God’s death, she dies!”

Petruchi entered at one door, and Muretto and the Queen entered at another door. Petruchi stood separate from Muretto and the Queen.

“My gracious lord,” Muretto said.

“Bring yonder fair sight — the Queen — a chair, and bring that man — Petruchi — a stool,” King Alphonso ordered Muretto.

The higher-ranking person got a chair rather than a stool.

King Alphonso then said to the Queen and Petruchi, “Both of you, sit — we’ll have it so.”

“This is kingly done,” Muretto said, as he brought the chair and stool.

He then whispered to King Alphonso, “In any case, my lord, curb now for a while the violence of your passion and be temperate.”

“Sir, it is my part to kneel, for on your brow I read the sad sentence of a troubled wrath, and that is argument enough to prove my guilt of not being worthy of your favor,” the Queen said.

Petruchi said, “Let me kneel, too, though not for pardon, yet let me kneel in duty to this presence” — he indicated the Queen — “else I stand, as far from falsehood as that presence” — he indicated the King — “is from truth.”

Ignoring Petruchi, Muretto said to the Queen, “Nay, madam, this is not the promise you made on your part. It is the King’s pleasure you should sit.”

In the marriage ceremony, the Queen had promised to obey the King.

“His pleasure is my law,” the Queen replied as she sat down.

“Let him sit, too — the man Petruchi,” King Alphonso said. “Both sit.”

“Sir, you are obeyed,” Petruchi said as he sat down.

“Between my comforts and my shame, I stand in equal distance,” King Alphonso said.

He was standing in between the Queen and Petruchi.

He continued, “This way let me turn to thee, thou woman; let me dull my eyes with surfeit on thy beauty. What are thou, great dazzling splendor? Let me always look and dwell upon this presence.”

Muretto thought, *Now it works.*

The Queen’s beauty was working on the King.

“I am perplexed in my mind,” King Alphonso said. “I am drawn in two different directions. Say? What? Do not ... do not —”

“My lord the King?” Muretto said. “Why are you acting this way, sir?”

“He is in a trance, or else metamorphosed to some pillar of marble: See how fixedly he stands.

“Do you hear, sir? What do you dream about? My lord, this is your Queen, speak to her.”

“May I presume with my irreverent lips to touch your sacred hand?” King Alphonso asked the Queen, his wife.

“I am too wretched to be thought anything but the subject of your mirth,” the Queen said. “You are mocking me.”

“Why, she can speak, Muretto,” King Alphonso said. “Oh, tell me, please, and make me forever, forever fortunate: Are you a mortal creature? Are you indeed molded of flesh and blood like other women? Can you be pitiful? Can you agree to entertain fair parley — fair conversation between opposing parties? Can you love, or grant me permission to love you? Can you? Tell me!”

“You know too well, my lord, that instead of granting something to you, I owe you a duty, and I must sue to you so that I do not displease,” the Queen replied.

The Queen wanted King Alphonso to act like a King — and a man.

“Now I am great,” King Alphonso said. “You are my Queen, and I have wronged a merit more than my service in the humblest lowness can ever recompense. I’ll rather wish to meet whole hosts of dangers and encounter the fabled whips of steel of Hell and the Furies than ever part from those sweet eyes; time shall not sue for a divorce between me and this great miracle of nature.”

He then said, “Muretto?”

“Sovereign sir?” he answered.

“I’ll turn away and mourn my former errors,” King Alphonso said.

He turned to Petruchi and said, “Worse than death! Look where a basilisk with murdering flames of poison strikes me blind. Insatiate tempter, pattern of lust!”

Using the royal plural, he continued, “It is thou alone who have sundered our lawful bride-bed, planted on my crest the horned satyr’s badge, and soiled a beauty as glorious as that beauty sitting yonder on the Queen’s forehead.

“Kill Petruchi, Muretto! Why should he receive the benefit of the law — he who used no law while dishonoring me?”

Petruchi said, “If you were more of a King than royalty can make you —”

He meant that a real King possessed more than just the title and crown of a King. A real King possessed a sense of justice.

He then said, “Though oppressed by your commanding powers, yes, and curbed in bonds most falsely, yet give me a sword and strip me to my shirt, and I will defend the Queen’s

spotless virtue, and I will no more respect in such a noble cause a host of Kings than I would respect a poor, stingless swarm of buzzing flies.”

“Petrucci, in those words thou condemn thy loyalty to me!” the Queen said. “I shall disclaim all my good opinion of thy worth or truth if thou continue to affront my lord.”

“Then I have finished,” Petrucci said. “Here’s misery unspeakable — I must yield and say wrongfully that I am guilty rather than contradict the wrongs I am accused of doing.”

“High impudence!” King Alphonso said. “Even if she were ten times fairer than she is, yet I would be revenged.”

He would get revenge against the Queen for cuckolding him no matter how beautiful she was.

He said to the Queen, “You, sweet, I would —”

He stopped and said, “Again — her glances quite blast me.”

“If you will be an eaglet of the right aerie, you must endure the sun,” Muretto said. “Can you choose anything but to love her?”

This society believed that eagles tested their eaglets to see if they could look directly at the sun; if they could not, they were pushed out of the aerie — the nest.

“No, I swear by the stars,” King Alphonso replied.

He asked the Queen, “Why wouldn’t you be honest and know how I do dote?”

By “honest,” he meant “chaste.”

The Queen, his wife, replied, “May I be so bold to say that I am honest, and not offend you?”

“Yes, yes, say so for Heaven’s love, although you are as foul as sin can blacken your purity,” King Alphonso said. “Yet tell me that you are white and chaste, so that while you live the span of your remaining few days I may rejoice in my deluded follies, lest I die through anguish before I have revenged my injury and so leave you behind me for another — that would be intolerable.”

“Heaven knows I have never abused myself or you,” the Queen said.

“As much swear I, and truly,” Petrucci said.

King Alphonso said to Petrucci, “Thou proud devil, thou have a lying tongue.”

He then said about the Queen and Petrucci, “They consented to the doing of evil.”

He said to them, “Get you hence, seducing horrors! I’ll stop my eyes and ears until you have gone. If you would be more merciful, leave, or leave as if you would find mercy by leaving.”

The Queen and Petrucci exited through different doors.

“Sir, they have gone,” Muretto said.

“And she, too?” King Alphonso said. “Then let me be seen no more. I am pulled in different directions, and both ways I feel my blame — to leave her is death, and to live with her is shame.”

The King exited.

“Fare you well, King,” Muretto said. “This is admirable; I will be chronicled; all my business ripens to my wishes. And if honest intentions thrive so successfully, I will henceforth build upon this assurance: There can hardly be a greater Hell or damnation than in being a villain upon earth.”

Interesting. Whatever Muretto’s intentions were, he thought of them as honest.

Salassa had confessed to Lodovico that she had made Velasco turn coward.

“I am wonder-stricken!” Lodovico said. “And were you, truly, the woman indeed who turned my lord’s heart so handsomely, so cunningly?”

He said sarcastically, “Oh, how I reverence wit.”

He revered wit — intelligence — that was used to do good, but Salassa had used her intelligence to do evil.

Lodovico then said, “Well, lady, you are as pestilent a piece of policy as ever made an ass of love.”

Velasco had allowed himself to be made an ass because he loved Salassa.

“But, Lodovico, I’ll salve all again quickly,” Salassa said.

“Yes, indeed and truly, she has the trick of it,” Shaparon said. “She knows how to do it.”

“You have made an agreement with the lords already, you say?” Lodovico asked.

“I have, and my life is at stake, but I don’t fear that,” Salassa said.

“Bah, you have no need,” Lodovico said. “One smile or kind simper from you does all. I guarantee you that the sight of so much gold as you are to receive has quickened your love infinitely.”

“Why, sir, I was not worthy of my lord’s love before, because I was too poor — but now two hundred thousand ducats is a dower fit for a lord,” Salassa said.

She was exaggerating the size of the one hundred thousand ducats reward.

“By the Virgin Mary, so it is,” Lodovico said, sarcastically. “I applaud your consideration — it was neatly thought on.”

Collumello and Almado entered the scene.

“Have you prevailed yet with Velasco, lady?” Collumello asked. “Time runs on, and you must not dally.”

“My good lords, fear nothing,” Salassa said. “Even if there were only two hours left to prevail with Velasco, I would be ready.”

Velasco, very sad, entered the scene.

Seeing Velasco, Lodovico said, “He himself comes. It is fitting that we stand aside, unseen by him. Ply him soundly, lady.”

“Let us withdraw, then,” Almado said.

They went to a place where they could see and hear but Velasco was unlikely to see them.

Velasco and Salassa seemed to be alone.

“I cannot be alone,” Velasco said to himself. He had not yet seen Salassa. “Continually I am hunted with my confounding thoughts. Too late I find how passions at their best are only sly traitors to ruin honor. That which we call love was by the wisest power above forethought to check our pride. Thus when men are blown up at the highest of conceit, then they fall down even by the peevish follies of their frailties.”

“May the best of my lord Velasco’s wishes always crown him with all true contentment,” Salassa said to him.

“I beg your pardon,” Velasco said.

“I have come to chide you, my lord,” Salassa said. “Can it be possible that any man could ever so sincerely profess such a mightiness of affection as you have done to me, and forget it all so soon and so unkindly?”

“Are you a very true lover, or are you bound for penance to walk to some holy shrine in visitation?” Velasco asked. “I have seen that face.”

Velasco had done — at great cost to his pride and reputation — everything that Salassa had made him vow to do, and now she was criticizing him. She did not seem to be a true lover, and her actions strongly suggested that she had committed sins that required her to walk to and

visit a shrine as an act of penance. She was crying tears now, and he had seen tears on the face of lovers and on the face of penitents.

“Have you so?” Salassa said. “Oh, you are a hot lover. A woman is in fine case to weep out her eyes for so uncertain a friend as your protestations urged me to conceive you. But come, I know what you’ll say before you say it; I know you are angry.”

“Please give me leave to be my own tormentor,” Velasco said.

Salassa said, “Very angry, extremely angry. But, as I respect perfection, it is more than I deserve. Little do you know the misery I have endured, and all about a hasty word of nothing — and I’ll have it prove to be nothing before we part.”

“Her pride has made her lunatic, alas!” Velasco said, using the third person to refer to Salassa but speaking loud enough for her to hear him. “She has quite lost her wits — such losses are the fruits of scorns and mockeries.”

“To witness how endearedly I prefer your merits and love your person — in a word, my lord, I absolve you and set you free from the injunction I bound you in,” Salassa said. “As I desire to thrive, I meant everything to be only a test in jest.”

“These are no words of madness,” Velasco said. “To where tends the extremity of your invention, lady? I’ll swear no more.”

Velasco had learned not to make oaths carelessly. The “no words of madness” were “I’ll swear no more.”

Salassa said, “I was to blame and I was too blameful, but this one fault, I think, is to be pardoned; when I am yours and you are firmly mine, I’ll bear with and endure many faults in you.”

“So, if you are in earnest,” Velasco asked, “what’s the matter?”

“The sum of all is that I know it suits not with the bravery of the lord Velasco’s spirit to allow his Queen and sovereign to stand wrongfully accused of dishonor and die shamefully for a fault she never committed,” Salassa answered.

“Why, that is no fault of mine,” Velasco replied.

His lack of action in not defending the Queen was Salassa’s fault: She had manipulated him into swearing to be a pacifist and not fight — even in a just cause.

“Nor shall it be of mine,” Salassa said. “Go be a famous subject; be a ransom of thy Queen from dangers; be registered thy country’s patron. Fight in defense of the fairest and most innocent princess alive. I with my heart release you. First conquer; that done, enjoy me always as thy wife — Velasco, I am thine.”

“Bah!” Velasco said. “You release me? All their cunning strains of policy that set you now to work to triply ruin me — in life, fame, and soul — are foolish and unable to draw down a greater wrath upon my head.”

Velasco realized that Salassa must have reasons — reasons put into play by others — to act the way she was now acting. That is why he referred to “*their* cunning strains of policy.” He had heard about the one hundred thousand ducats.

The “greater wrath” was the wrath of God, which would be caused by Velasco’s not keeping his vow.

He continued, “Truly, you take a wrong course, lady.”

Velasco no longer trusted Salassa. If she wanted to release him from the oath she had manipulated him to make, it must be because she wanted to ruin him more deeply.

“Very good, sir, it is prettily put off, and wondrously modestly,” Salassa said. “I protest — no man has made me release you from your oath to me so you can defend the Queen — I am doing this only to do service to the state and to do honor to you.”

“No man is making you do this but only yourself?” Velasco asked.

“I swear none else, as I ever had truth in me,” Salassa said.

“Know then from me — you are a wicked woman, and greed, not love for me, has forced you to take advantage of my weakness in once loving you. I could rail, be most uncivil, but take all in short — I don’t know you.”

Using the third person to refer to Velasco but speaking loud enough for him to hear her, Salassa said, “Better and better — the manliness in Velasco will triumph soon, I am sure. Please, good man, put on an act no longer. I say you shall fight — I’ll have it so. I command you to fight, and by this kiss you shall.”

She attempted to kiss him.

“Stop, let me in peace tell you to stop,” Velasco said. “I will from now on be always a stranger to you, forever a stranger. Look, look up, up there” — he pointed to the Heavens — “my oath is recorded in Heaven, and no human power can free me.”

Salassa said, “I grant you, none but I.”

In this society, “to grant” meant “to permit an action.”

Because Salassa believed that Velasco had made an oath to her, she believed she could release him from that oath. Because he believed that he had made an oath to Heaven, he believed she could not release him from that oath.

Velasco replied, “Don’t deceive yourself that I have forgotten your mockery of me. You are lost to me. Let the genius of this place witness that, however you tempt my constancy, I dare not fight.”

This culture believed that places had tutelary — guardian — spirits, which were local gods or other supernatural beings.

“Not dare to fight?” Salassa said. “What, not for me?”

“No, lady,” Velasco said. “I dare not, must not, cannot, will not fight.”

“Oh, me — I am ruined! I am destroyed!” Salassa said.

“What ails you?” Velasco asked.

“Now my life has run its last moments, for I have pawned it, sir, promising to bring you forth as champion for the Queen,” Salassa answered.

“And so would have the promised gold?” Velasco asked.

“Aye, so I would.”

“You have revenged my wrongs upon yourself,” Velasco said. “I cannot help you; indeed, and alas, you know that it lay not in me.”

“Oh, take pity on me,” Salassa said. “Look here, I hold my hands up and bend my knees.”

She knelt and begged and said, “Heaven can require no more.”

“Then kneel to Heaven,” Velasco said. “I am no god; I cannot do you any good.”

“Shall not my tears prevail, hard-hearted man?” Salassa said. “Dissembler, love’s dishonor, bloody butcher of a poor lady — be assured that my ghost shall haunt thy soul when I am dead.”

“Your curse has fallen upon your own head,” Velasco said. “Herein show a noble piety and bear your death with resolution; and for a final answer to you, let me say, lady, I will not fight to gain the world.”

Velasco exited.

“Gone!” Salassa said. “I have found at length my just reward, and henceforth I must prepare to welcome death. Velasco, I begin to love thee now. Now I perceive that thou are a noble man, composed of goodness — what a fool was I? It grieves me more to lose him than to die.”

Almado, Collumello, Lodovico, and Shaparon walked over to Salassa.

“Lady, we have heard all that now has passed,” Collumello said. “You have deceived yourself and us. The time we should have spent in seeking other means of saving the Queen’s life is lost, of which you are the cause.”

“And because there will be no one to champion the Queen, the senate’s strict decree craves execution,” Almado said. “What can you say for yourself?”

“My lords, I can do no more but yield myself to the law,” Salassa said.

She would be executed just like the Queen.

“Oh, that you were ever born!” Shaparoon said. “You have made a sweet handling of it, haven’t you?”

“Here is the right recompense of a vain confidence, mistress,” Lodovico said. “But I will not torture you, since you are so near your end — your death. Lady, say your prayers and die in charity — that’s all the pity I can take on you.”

Lodovico exited.

“Ten times the gold you would have had, lady, cannot now release you,” Collumello said.

“You alone are the woman who ruins your country,” Almado said. “Here’s the price of sin: ill thrift — all lose in seeking to win all.”

Everyone except Shaparoon exited.

She said to herself, “So, go ahead and go thy separate ways. It is an old proverb that lechery and covetousness go together, and it is a true proverb, too. But I’ll shift for myself. If some proper squire or lusty yeoman should have a mind to anything I have about me, he shall soon know what to trust to, for I see the times are very troublesome.”

Pynto entered the scene.

Thinking himself alone, he said, “Now is the prosperous season when the whole round of the planets is coupling together. Let birds and beasts observe Valentine’s Day by mating then. I am a man and all times are with me in season — I am horny everyday and not just on Valentine’s Day. This same court-ease has set my blood on tiptoe — I am madder than a March hare.”

“God’s blessing on your fair face, your handsome hand, your clean foot, sir,” Shaparoon said. “Are you a courtier, sir?”

Pynto thought, *Good stars direct me and give me good fortune.*

He then said out loud, “Sweet woman, I am a courtier — if you have any suit, what is it, what is it? Be short.”

Shaparoon thought, *Lord, what a courteous proper man he is; trust me, he has a most eloquent beard.*

She then said out loud, “Suit, sir? Yes, sir, I am a country gentlewoman by my father and mother’s side. I am one who comes to see fashions and learn news. And how, I ask you, sir, if I may be so bold to ask, do things stand at court, sir, nowadays?”

“That is a very modest, necessary, and discreet question,” Pynto said. “Indeed, mistress country-gentlewoman, things at court stand as they were ever accustomed to stand, some stiff and some slack, everything according to the employment it has.”

He was being bawdy when he referred to some standing stiff and others being slack.

“By the Virgin Mary, the more pity, sir, that they have not all good doing alike,” Shaparoon said. “I think that they should be all and at all times ready *here*.”

She rested her hands in her lap. One of meaning of “doing” is “having sex.”

“You speak by a figure, by your leave, in that,” Pynto replied. “But because you are a stranger, I will a little more amply inform you. Here at our court of Aragon, scholars for the most part are the truest fools because they are always beggarly and proud, and foolish citizens

are the wisest scholars because they never run up charges for greater learning to cast up their reckonings than their hornbook.”

In other words, citizens preferred to cast their own horoscopes using hornbooks that printed elementary tables of astrological and astronomical information. This saved them money that would have otherwise gone to astrologers such as Pynto.

He continued, “Here every old lady is cheaper than a proctor, aka lawyer, and will as finely convey, aka conduct, an open act without any danger of a consistory, aka a court of judgment.”

There is a difference between the proctor and the old lady, other than cost: The proctor would conduct a legal act openly, while the old lady would conduct a sexual act with her legs open.

Pynto continued, “Love and money sweeps all before them, be they cut or long-tail.”

Women have a cut, while men have a long tail.

He then said, “Don’t I deserve a kiss for this discovery, mistress?”

“A kiss?” Shaparoon said. “Oh, my dear chastity, yes, indeed, truly, and I ask you to please yourself.”

They kissed.

“Good wench, by Venus, but are you at all rich?” Pynto asked.

“Rich enough to serve my turn,” Shaparoon answered.

“I see that you are reasonably beautiful,” Pynto said.

“I have always thought myself so,” Shaparoon said.

“Will you take a look at my lodgings?”

“At your pleasure, sir, being under your guard as I am,” Shaparoon answered.

Mopas and Bufo entered the scene.

“Sirrah Mopas, if my mistress — Herophil — will just say the word, thou shall see what an exploit I will do,” Bufo said.

“You’ll undertake it, you say. Though your throat be cut in your own defense, it is only manslaughter — you can never be hanged for it,” Mopas said.

“Nay, I am resolute in that point,” Bufo said. “Here’s my hand, let him shrink that list, I’ll not flinch a hair’s breadth, Mopas.”

Mopas saw Pynto and Shaparoon and said, “What, old huddle and twang so close at it, and the dog days so near?”

In this society, a “huddle” can mean a miserly old person, and Pynto was certainly concerned about money, and a “twang” can mean a penetrating offensive odor. “Huddle and twang” was a non-complimentary way of referring to a person, and Mopas recognized that Pynto and Shaparoon were close to the act of two becoming one.

Mopas said to Shaparoon, “Listen, your lady is going the way of all flesh.”

One way of all flesh is death — Salassa has been condemned to die.

Mopas continued, “And so is that scholar — Pynto — with you, I think, though not in the same cue, isn’t he?”

Another way of all flesh is sex.

“He has promised to tell me my fortune at his chamber, and do me some other good for my lady’s safety,” Shaparoon said.

“I have spoken,” Pynto said. “The planets shall be ruled by me, captain, you know they shall.”

“Let the planets hang themselves in the elements — what do I care?” Bufo said. “I have other matters to trouble my brains.”

“Signor Pynto, take her to you, you who are as true a metaled blade as ever was turned into a dudgeon,” Bufo said.

A dudgeon is the hilt of a dagger. The blade of the dagger is inserted into the hilt. Bufo was referring obliquely to a sexual insertion involving Pynto and Shaparoon.

He took Pynto aside and said, "Listen in your ear."

They talked quietly.

Lodovico and Herophil entered the scene.

Lodovico said, "I don't know how to trust you — you are all so fickle, so inconstant, and unpredictable."

By the second "you," he may have meant "all you women."

"If I fail, let me be noted as a strumpet," Herophil said.

"I see that you treat him — Bufo — kindly still," Lodovico said to Herophil. "See where he is."

He then said to Bufo, "Captain, you are well met. Here's one whose heart you have."

"He knows he has," Herophil said.

"Why, by my loyalty and honor I thank you, indeed," Bufo said. "It is more of your courtesy than my deserving, but I shall endeavor to deserve it."

"I hope so, and I don't doubt it," Herophil said.

"Madam kinswoman Shaparoon," Lodovico said.

"You are welcome, sir," she replied.

"Kinswoman," Pynto said. "Well, then, I smell she is a gentlewoman indeed."

"Yes, and as anciently descended as flesh and blood can derive her," Mopas said.

"I am a made man, and I will have her," Pynto said.

"You'll walk with me, sir?" Herophil asked Bufo.

"Even through fire and water, sweet mistress," he replied.

"Let's everyone get to what concerns us most, for now's the time that all must be saved or lost," Lodovico said.

CHAPTER 5

— 5.1 —

Velasco and Lodovico talked together in front of a scaffold.

“This is not kindly done, nor is it done like a friend,” Velasco said to Lodovico.

“Stay in your chamber then,” Lodovico replied. “What should owls and bats do abroad by daylight? Why, you have become so notoriously ridiculous that a craven is reputed of nobler spirit among birds than Velasco is reputed among men.”

A craven is a cock that will not fight.

“Why, Lodovico, do thou tempt my wrongs?” Velasco said. “Oh, friend, it is not an honor or a reputation that can be a gain to me, though I should dare to fight in this combat.

“Let’s say my fate did crown my arm with conquest of the King. Let’s say that the cause adds glory to the justice of my prevailing sword — what can I win?

“In saving a pair of lives — the lives of the Queen and of Salassa — I lose a soul: my rich soul, Lodovico. Doesn’t yet the heart within thee even thrill? Don’t all thy spirits melt into passions? Doesn’t all thy manhood stagger like mine? Can thou choose other than to confess that this word ‘coward’ is a name of dignity?”

Velasco had made a vow of pacifism to God, and he believed that he would lose his soul if he broke his vow. His soul was much more important than either honor or reputation.

“Faint hearts and strong tongues are the tokens of many a tall, prattling gossip — yet the truth is you have half-convinced me,” Lodovico replied. “But to what end will you be a looker on the tragedy of this she-beast — Salassa? It will but breed your greater vexation.”

“I hope that’s not so,” Velasco replied. “I look for comfort in seeing her die.”

“By the Mass, that may be, too — it cannot but make your melancholy a little merry to see the woodcock’s neck caught in a worse noose than she had set for you,” Lodowick said.

A woodcock is a bird that is known for its stupidity because it is easily caught.

This was not the comfort that Velasco hoped to get.

“That’s but a poor revenge,” Velasco said. “I’d rather weep on her behalf, except that I hope her courage will triumph over death.”

He hoped to see her die bravely and to hear her confess her sins.

“My lord, they are coming,” Lodovico said.

“Let me stand back unseen,” Velasco said. “May good angels guard her.”

Velasco partially covered his face with his clothing.

The executioner walked in front of Salassa, whose hair was loose. Behind Salassa walked Almado, Collumello, and some officers.

“It is a sad welcome to bid you welcome to the stroke of death,” Almado said. “Yet you have come to it, lady.”

Collumello said to Salassa, “And a curse throughout the land will be your general knell for having been the willful overthrow, first of your country’s champion and next of your Queen, your lawful sovereign, who this very day must act a part that you must act before, but the Queen will act her part with less guilt.”

The Queen was also scheduled to be executed on this day.

“Use no long speeches, lady,” Almado said. “The danger of the time calls us away. We cannot listen to your farewells now.”

“I have few words to say,” Salassa said. “My heart is lodged in yonder same upper parliament. Yet now if, before I depart from this life and shall be seen no more, some man of

mercy could but truly speak one word of pardon from the lord Velasco, my peace would be made on earth, and I would fly with wings of speed to Heaven.”

“Bah, here’s not any man of mercy,” Almado said.

“Not any?” Salassa said. “Go on then. Why should I prolong a minute more of life, I who live so late — where I strive most for love but purchase only hate?”

“Bear witness, lords, I wish not to call back my younger days in promise that I would redeem my fault and do Velasco right, but if I could only reverse the doom of time, I would with humblest suit make prayers to Heaven for Velasco’s long flourishing welfare.”

“Conclude, conclude,” Collumello said. “You should have thought about this before; pray now for your own spiritual health, for you have need to pray.”

“Madam Salassa, I am bold to take leave of you before your long journey,” Lodovico said. “All the comfort that I can give you is that the weather is likely to hold very fair, so you need not take much care for either hood or cloak for the matter.”

“Have you come?” Salassa said. “Worthy sir, then I may hope that your noble friend Velasco has sent one gentle sigh to grace my funeral. For virtue’s sake, give me a life in death. Tell me, oh, tell me — if he would just seal my pardon, all is well.”

She wanted Velasco to forgive her.

“Do you say so?” Lodovico said. “Why, then, in a word go merrily up the stairs; my lord Velasco desires that Heaven may as heartily forgive him as he forgives you.”

“Enough,” Salassa said. “I thank his generosity and goodness; on I go —”

She climbed up on the scaffold.

“— to smile on horror. So, so, I’m up, great in my lowness; and to witness further my humbleness, here let me kneel and say my penitence.

“Oh, women, in my fall remember that your beauties, youth, and pride are only gay tempters. Unless you wisely shun the errors of your frailties, let me forever be an example to all fickle dames that folly is no shrine for virtuous names.

“May Heaven pardon all my vanities and free the lord Velasco from the oath he made, whatever becomes of me. Bless, bless, the lord Velasco.”

She then told the executioner, “Strike!”

“Villain, stop!” Velasco yelled at the executioner. “Stop, or thou die, slave!”

“What is the meaning of that countermand?” Almado asked.

“Hey!” Lodovico said. “More news yet; you will not be valiant when it is too late, I trust?”

“Woman, come down,” Velasco said. “Who lends me now a sword?”

He was going to be the Queen’s champion and fight the King. This meant that Salassa had done what she had vowed to do and therefore she would not be executed.

“By the Virgin Mary,” Lodovico said. “I will lend you a sword, sir — I am your first man. Here, here, here, take heed that you do not hurt your fingers, for it will cut like the plague — and what will you do with it?”

“Base woman, take thy life, thy cursed life,” Velasco said to Salassa. “I set thee free, and for it I pawn a soul, my soul, except that I know that Heaven has a greater store of mercy than thou and all thy sex of sin and falsehood.”

Because Heaven is merciful, he would not lose his soul. Dante wrote about vows in his *Paradise*: God accepts good vows, not bad vows. A vow to refrain from protecting the innocent is not a good vow.

Velasco then said, “My lords, I now stand champion for the Queen — does that release Salassa from her sentence of death?”

“Bravest man, it does,” Collumello said. “Lady, you are safe now. Officers, leave. This is a blessed hour!”

The officers left, and Salassa came down from the scaffold.
 “You shall forever bind us as your servants,” Almado said.
 “Aha!” Lodovico said. “Why, then, however things happen, let them fall as they fall. God-a-mercy, my lord, at last.”
 “God-a-mercy” meant “God of mercy” and “thank God.”
 The sounds of people rejoicing were heard.
 Collumello said, “Listen to how the people ring a peal of joy for this good news!”
 He then said to Velasco, “My lord, time steals away — we may not linger now.”
 “You give me life,” Salassa said to Velasco. “Don’t take it, sir, away again. I see upon your troubled eyes such discontent as frightens my trembling heart. Dear sir —”
 “The gold you hazarded your life for is your own,” Velasco said. “You may receive it at your pleasure.”
 “Yes,” Almado said. “It is ready for you, lady.”
 “Gold?” Salassa said. “Let gold and all the other treasures of the earth perish like trash — I value nothing, sir, except your assured love.”
 “My love?” Velasco said. “Vain woman, from this time on I thus turn away from thee. Never look for apish dotage, for a smile, for a how-do-you-do, a fare-you-well, a thought from me. Let snakes live in my bosom and with murderous stings infect the vital warmth that gives life, if ever I remember thee or thine.
 “If I prevail, my services shall crave only one reward, which shall be that if thou ever even come in my sight, the state will please to banish thee from the land — or else I vow that I myself will leave it.”
 “My ill-purchased life!” Salassa said.
 Velasco now spoke in rhymed verse:
 “Ill-purchased life, indeed, whose ransom craves
 “A sadder price than price of bloodshed saves.
 “Go learn, bad woman, what it is, how foul,
 “By gaining of a life, to lose a soul.
 “The price of one soul does exceed as far
 “A life here [on earth] as the sun in light [exceeds] a star.
 “Here, though we live some threescore years or more,
 “Yet we must die at last, and quit [pay] the score [debt]
 “We owe to nature. But the soul, once dying,
 “Dies ever, ever [forever, forever] — no repurifying,
 “No earnest sighs or groans, no intercession,
 “No tears, no penance. No too-late confession
 “Can move the ear of justice, if it doom
 “A soul past cure to an infernal tomb.
 “Make use of this, Salassa.”
 “Think upon that now, and take heed that you look my lord no more in the face,” Lodovico said to Salassa.
 “May goodness protect Velasco!” Salassa said. “Now that my life which so late — so recently and so late in life — I strove to save, has been saved, I hate it.”

A herald led a procession to the place of execution. King Alphonso, completely armed except for a helmet, led the Queen. Muretto, Herophil, and some guards followed them.

“Are you resolved to die?” King Alphonso asked the Queen, his wife.

“When life is irksome, then death is a happiness,” she replied.

“Yes, if the cause of life’s irksomeness does not make it infamous, but when a beauty so very incomparable as yours is blemished with the dishonorable stamp of whoredom, when your black-tainted name — which would have been, had you preserved it nobly, your best chronicle wherein you might have lived — when this is stained, and justly too, then death does but heap affliction on the dying,” King Alphonso said. “Yet you see with what a sympathy of equal grief I mourn your ruin.”

I wish that you could as clearly perceive my innocence, as I can clearly affirm it,” the Queen said.

“Bah!” King Alphonso said. “To justify a sin is worse than to commit it — now you are guilty.”

Muretto said to himself, “What a royal pair of excellent creatures are here both upon the castaway.”

The King and the Queen were about to cast away their marriage.

Muretto said out loud, “It would be a saint-like mercy in you, my lord, to remit the memory of a past error.

“And, madam, if you are guilty of the supposed crime, it would be a saint-like mercy in you to submit yourself to the King. I dare promise you that his love to you is so unfeigned that it will relent in your humility. Please do, good madam, do.”

“But what if I am guiltless?” the Queen asked.

“By any means, for your honor’s sake, do not yield then one jot,” Muretto answered. “Let not the faint fear of death deject you before the royalty of an unbending heart.

“Do you hear this, my lord? It is a case full of doubts and almost impossible to be decided. Look upon the Queen well — as I hope to prosper, she has a most virtuous, a most innocent countenance — never heed it. I know, my lord, your jealousy and your affections wrestle together within you for the mastery. Observe her beauty thoroughly. Now, by all the power of love, it is a pity that she should not be as fair within as without.”

“If it could be proven that she is as fair within as without, I’d give my kingdom to her immediately and live as a slave to her and her perfections,” King Alphonso said.

Almado, Collumello, and some attendants entered the scene.

“Lords, welcome,” King Alphonso said. “See, thus arm-in-arm we pace to the wide theater of blood and shame, my Queen and I. My Queen? Had she been still as she was, mine, we might have lived too happily for either’s comfort. Here on this sweet model, this plot of wonder, this fair face, stands fixed my whole felicity on earth. In witness whereof, behold, my lords, those manly tears of mine that her unkindness and my cruel fate force from their quiet springs. They speak aloud to all this open air, these public eyes, that whether I kill or die in this attempt I shall in both be vanquished.”

“It is strange, my lord,” Almado said, that your love should seem so mighty in your hatred.”

“Muretto, go and guard Petruchi and keep him safely away from here,” King Alphonso said.

Muretto exited.

“We must be stout now and give over whining,” King Alphonso said. “He shall confess strange things, my lords, I promise you.”

King Alphonso may have meant that Petruchi would confess his guilt, perhaps under torture, or that he would lie and assert that he and the Queen were innocent.

He then asked, “Has a champion for the Queen come yet?”

“No one dares to be my champion, I hope,” the Queen said.

“The Queen, you know, has bound us all by oath: We must not undertake to combat you although the cause should prove apparent for her,” Collumello said. “We cannot fight for her even if her innocence were clearly apparent.”

“‘Must not?’ Why then, you are all cowards, you are all base, and you fall off from your duties, but you know that her follies are notorious — none dares stand up as her champion to justify a sin they see so plainly,” King Alphonso said.

“You are too hard a censorer,” Collumello said.

King Alphonso said to the Queen, “Give me your hand. Farewell; thus from my joys I part, I forever part.

“Yet, my good lords, place her on yonder throne, where she may sit just in my eye, so that if my strength should fail, I might fetch double strength from her sweet beauty. I’ll listen to no objections.”

Almado and Collumello escorted the Queen to the throne, where she sat and said, “May Heaven be always the guard to noble actions.”

Collumello said about King Alphonso’s courtesy to a woman whom he had ordered to soon be executed, “Here’s a medley love that kills in courtesy.”

In this society, “medley” meant both a fight or conflict, and a mixture. King Alphonso was fighting a conflict between love and hate in his mind.

“Herald, sound a warning to all defendants,” King Alphonso ordered.

A trumpet sounded.

“What!” King Alphonso said. “No one comes forth to be the Queen’s champion! How do you like this, my lords?”

“Sirrah, sound again.”

The trumpet sounded again.

A different trumpet answered the call for a champion.

A herald entered the scene, sounding the trumpet. After the herald, Velasco came, completely armed except for a helmet. Lodovico and some attendants also entered the scene.

“Velasco?” King Alphonso said. “Ha! Are thou the man? Although thy cowardice has given you a reputation so base that it is an injury to honor to fight with one who has been so baffled and scorned, yet I will bid thee welcome.”

“Nobly spoken,” Velasco said. “Past times can tell you, sir, that I was no coward, and now the justice of a gallant quarrel shall take away my dullness and revive my reputation. Yonder sits a Queen as free from stain of your disgrace as you are foul in urging it.”

“Thou talk courageously,” King Alphonso said. “I love thee for it, and, if thou can make good what thou avouch, I’ll kneel to thee, as to another nature.”

The “another nature” is a higher nature. King Alphonso would kneel before Velasco as he would kneel before God.

“We didn’t come here to combat with words,” Velasco said. “My sword shall thunder the right for which I strike.”

“Traitor to loyalty!” the Queen said to Velasco.

She did not want anyone to fight her husband, King Alphonso. Despite his actions, she loved him and did not want him to be hurt.

The Queen continued, “Rash and unknown fool, what desperate lunacy has led thee on to draw thy treacherous sword against thy King, upon a ground so foolish that thou are just a stranger in the cause thou would defend? By all my royal blood — if thou prevail and kill King Alphonso, thy head shall answer for it.”

If Velasco were to kill King Alphonso, the Queen would have Velasco beheaded.

“Madam, you wrong his truth and your own reputation,” Collumello said.

Velasco’s truth was his faithfulness and loyalty to the Queen, and his being true to his honor as a military man and as a man.

“You violate the liberty of arms,” Almado said to the Queen.

The rules of trial by combat stated that a man such as Velasco could volunteer to be the champion of the Queen.

“Bah, don’t listen to her — it is I who am your man,” King Alphonso said. He was the King and the man whom Velasco would fight.

The Queen said, “Why, foolish, insensible, and false lords, can any drop of blood be drawn from him — my lord, your King — which is not drawn from me?”

“Velasco, by the duty that thou owe me, I order thee to lay aside thy arms.”

“I must not,” Velasco said, “unless this man, whom you call ‘King,’ confesses that he has wronged your honor.”

“Will thou fight, then, when I command the contrary?” the Queen asked.

“I will,” Velasco answered.

“Velasco, listen to me once more,” the Queen said. “Thou were accustomed to be as compassionate as thou were valiant. I will entreat thee, gentle and kind Velasco, a weeping Queen sues to thee — do not fight, Velasco — every blow thou would give the King wounds me. Did you ever love? Velasco, listen to me.”

“She must not be endured,” King Alphonso said.

“Nor can she win me to her side of the argument,” Velasco said. “Blush, my lord, at this.”

“Oh, let me die rather than see my lord affronted like this,” the Queen said.

She fainted.

“Hold up the Queen,” Velasco said. “She has fainted.”

“Madam, dear madam,” Almado said as he tried to revive her.

“Can you see her and not be touched, my lord?” Collumello asked King Alphonso. “Was ever a woman false who loved so truly?”

“It is all dissimulation,” King Alphonso said. “It is all an act.”

“You dishonor her,” Velasco said. “To prove it, I’ll fight both quarrels now.”

He would defend both her loyalty and her truthfulness.

The Queen revived.

A herald arrived, sounding a trumpet. Following him was a completely armed man. Because a helmet covered his face, no one could recognize him.

“Hey!” Lodovico said. “Here comes more work for metal men.”

Metal men were men who made armor from metal.

“Another?” Almado said. “Who would he be?”

“Speak!” King Alphonso ordered. “Who are thou?”

“One who is summoned from the Power above to guard the innocence of that fair Queen,” the unrecognized man in armor said. “Not more against the man who would accuse her than all the world besides.”

He was just as willing to fight everyone in the world, if they were to accuse the Queen, as he was willing to fight King Alphonso.

“Thou are welcome, too,” King Alphonso said.

“You come too late, friend,” Velasco said. “I am the man alone who stands ready to defend that gracious beauty. You may return to where you came.”

“There’s not a man alive who has interest in this quarrel but myself,” the unrecognized man in armor said. “I out of my own knowledge can avouch the truth that the accusation against her is entirely as false as Hell itself.”

“What mortal man is he, so willful in his confidence, who can swear more than he knows?” the Queen asked.

“I swear to be true only what I know to be true,” the unrecognized man in armor said.

“Do thou have a name?” King Alphonso asked.

“Yes,” the unrecognized man in armor said.

He asked Lodovico, “Help me to pull the visor of my helmet down.”

Lodovico pulled down the visor.

The unrecognized man in armor asked, “Do you know me now?”

They did.

“Petrucci!” King Alphonso said. “By the death of manhood, I swear — I am plainly bought and sold!”

He had ordered Muretto to make sure that Petrucci was kept safely out of the way and away from the site of execution.

King Alphonso asked, “Why, where’s Muretto?”

Muretto, carrying a drawn sword, entered the scene.

“Here I am, as ready to stand in defense of that miracle of chaste women as any man in this presence,” Muretto said.

“Has everyone conspired against me?” King Alphonso said. “What, thou, too? Now by my father’s ashes, by my life, I swear that thou art a villain, a gross rancorous villain. Aren’t only thou the person who first made me become jealous concerning the Queen?”

“It is true, I did,” Muretto said.

“Moreover, didn’t thou feed those thoughts with fresh supplies? Didn’t you bring to my attention every circumstantial detail indicating the Queen’s guilt?”

“All this I grant to be true,” Muretto said.

“Do you grant it — you dog, slave, Hellhound?” King Alphonso asked.

“Will you hear me out?” Muretto asked.

“Listen to him, my good lord,” Collumello said. “Let us persuade you to listen to him.”

“What can thou say, impostor?” King Alphonso said to Muretto. “Speak and choke!”

“I have not deserved these words of yours, my lord, and you shall find that to be true,” Muretto said. “It is true, I must confess, that I was the only instrument to incense you to this disturbance of mind because of jealousy and I am proud to say it, and I say it again before this noble presence, that I was myself the only man.”

“Insufferable devil!” King Alphonso said.

“Please, my lord,” Almado said.

“Don’t continue to be astonished, my lords, but lend me your attentions,” Muretto said. “I saw with what violence King Alphonso pursued his resolutions not more in detestation of the Queen in particular than of all her sex in general. So that I may not weary your patience, let me say that I bent all my efforts to devising a way I might do service to my country by reclaiming the distraction of his discontent and making him whole and healthy. And having felt his disposition in every pulse, I found him most addicted to this pestilence of jealousy, with a strong persuasion of which I, from time to time, continually fed him by degrees, until I brought the Queen and the noble Petrucci into the dangers they yet stand in. But in addition — and in this I appeal to your majesty’s own approbation — I seasoned my words with such an intermixing of praises of the Queen’s beauty that I drew the King away from jealousy and toward a serious examination of her perfections.”

“Thus far, I must acknowledge that he speaks the truth,” King Alphonso said.

“At length, having found King Alphonso indeed surely affected, I perceived that nothing but the supposed blemish of her dishonor could work a second divorce between them,”

Muretto said.

“True,” King Alphonso said. “That is truly fate’s own truth.”

“Now, my lords, to clear that imputation, I knew how easy it would be by the apparent certainty itself,” Muretto said. “The Queen was clearly innocent, and so establishing her innocence would be easy. In all of which, if I have erred, it is the error of a loyal service. Only I must forever acknowledge how justly I have deserved a punishment in drawing so virtuous a princess’s honor into public question, and I humbly refer myself to her gracious clemency, and your noble constructions.”

Muretto’s plan had been to make King Alphonso fall in love with the Queen because of her beauty, and then to cement that love by showing that she was chaste despite all the suspicions he had of her. By making King Alphonso love the Queen, Muretto would rid him of his misogyny.

“But can — can this be so?” King Alphonso asked.

“If it is not so, then let me forever be the subject of your rage, in the sufferance of any torture,” Muretto said.

“And is she chaste, Petruchi?” King Alphonso asked.

“She is as chaste by virtue as is the new-born virgin, for anything I know,” Petruchi answered.

“I continually whispered as much in your ears, my lord, and told you that it was impossible such singular endowments by nature should yield to the corruption of so much as of an unworthy thought,” Muretto said to King Alphonso. “Didn’t I tell you so from time to time?”

“Lay by your arms, my lords, and join with me,” King Alphonso said. “Let’s kneel to this — what shall I call her? — woman? No, she’s an angel, glory of creation. All kneel.”

They knelt, and King Alphonso said to the Queen, “Can you forget my wickedness? Your peers, your senators, your bravest men, petition you on my behalf. They want you to forget my wickedness.”

He then said, “Why don’t you speak, my lords? I am, I know, too vile to be forgiven, but she is merciful.”

The kneeling lords began, “Great sovereign lady —”

The Queen interrupted and said to the King, her husband, “Be not so low, my lord, in your own thoughts. You are still, as you were before, the sovereign of my heart, and I must kneel to you.”

She knelt.

“But will you love me?” King Alphonso asked her.

“It is my part to ask that — will you love me?” the Queen replied.

“I am forever, forever yours,” King Alphonso said. “Let this kiss new-marry us.”

They kissed.

“What do you say?” King Alphonso said.

“This kiss does new-marry us,” the Queen said, “and Heaven itself can tell that I never did, nor will, wrong our first loves.”

“Speak no more, let’s rise,” King Alphonso said.

All stood up.

He continued, “Now I am King of two kingdoms as rich as the world affords — the kingdom of thy beauty, and the kingdom of this land.

“But what about Muretto?”

“I account my worthiest thanks his debt. In other words, she owed him her worthiest thanks,” the Queen said.

“And he deserves all honor, all respect,” Almado said.

Collumello hugged Muretto and said, "Thus my embraces can witness how truly I am his friend."

Velasco hugged Muretto and said, "And I am truly his friend, while I have life."

Lodovico said to Muretto, "I am your friend beyond the time I have life. When I am dead, I will appear again, clap thee on the shoulder and cry, "God-a-mercy and thank you, Old Suresby!"

"Old Suresby" was a proverbial name for a person who can be relied on.

"I must ask for pardon from him," Petruchi said. "Always I thought that his plot had been aimed only at his own benefit, but I am sorry for that misunderstanding."

"My lords, what I have been heretofore, I cannot altogether excuse," Muretto said, "but I am sure that my desires were always honest, however my low fortune kept me down — but now I find it is your honest man who is your honest man always, however the world go."

"Muretto, while I live thou shall be near me as thou deserves — and, noble gentlemen, I am in all your debts — henceforth, believe me, I'll strive to be a servant to the state," King Alphonso said.

All said, "Long live and happy, both of you."

"But where are now my brace of new-made courtiers: my scholar and my captain?" King Alphonso said.

He was referring to Pynto and Bufo.

"I plead guilty," Lodovico said. "There is a large story depending upon their exploits, my lord, for both — they thinking in such perilous times that every man must shift for himself — have taken a surpassingly provident course to live without help hereafter.

"The man in the moon, signor Pynto, for the raising of his fortune a planet higher, is by this time married to a kind of loose-bodied widow, called by surname a bawd — one who, if he follow wholesome instructions, will maintain him, there's no question about it.

"The captain, for his part, is somewhat more delicately resolved for as adventurous (though not as frail) a piece of service. For he, in hope to marry this lady attending on the Queen, granted Petruchi his liberty, and by this time he has received a sufficient *quietus est*."

"*Quietus est*" is Latin for "he is requited" — that is, he has received what is due to him.

"Are these my trusty servants?" King Alphonso said. "What a blindness was I led into!"

"If both of your highnesses will in these days of mirth crown the comedy, first let me from the Queen's royal gift be bold to receive Herophil for my wife," Lodovico said. "She and I are resolved of the business already."

They were already engaged.

"With all my heart," the Queen said. "I think that Herophil is well bestowed if she herself consents to the marriage."

"My duty to you, madam, shall ever speak my thankfulness," Herophil said. "In this permission of yours, I reckon that all my services have been rewarded."

"Much comfort to you, friend," Velasco said to Lodovico.

All present said to Lodovico and Herophil, "We wish you all joy and peace."

Lodovico said, "I give my duty to my sovereigns, and to all the rest at once, I give my heartiest, heartiest thanks.

"Now, lady, you are mine. Why so, here's short work to begin with."

They kissed.

He continued, "If in the end we make long work, and beget a race of mad-caps, we shall but do as our fathers and mothers did, and they must be cared for."

Pynto, Bufo, Mopas, and Shaparon arrived on the scene. Mopas was wearing a woman's headdress.

“Stop following me, bawd!” Pynto said to Shaparoon.

He then said, “My lord the King, my Jove, I demand justice, justice!”

“I demand justice for me!” Bufo said. “I was likely to have been married to these black mustachios — he pointed to Mopas — “instead of that lady” — he pointed to Herophil.

“I married to this ugly bawd!” Pynto said about Shaparoon.

Pynto and Bufo shouted, “I demand justice!”

“Go away, you ridiculous fools,” King Alphonso said to Pynto and Bufo. “I banish you forever from my presence.”

He said to Mopas, “Sirrah, to thee I give the order that they be at once stripped and put into such rags as they came to my court in, and so be turned away to go into exile.”

“Do hear me, King!” Pynto said.

“King, hear me, I’m the wiser man!” Bufo said.

“No more, I say,” King Alphonso said.

“Come away, come away, for shame,” Mopas said. “You see what it is to be given to the flesh — the itch of lechery must be cured with the whip of correction. Go, go.”

Bufo, Pynto, Mopas, and Shaparoon exited.

“What else remains but to conclude this day with Hymen’s feasts?” King Alphonso said.

Hymen is the Greek god of marriage.

Salassa, her hair loose, entered the scene, carrying a white rod of penitence in her hand. Some attendants, holding bags of money, were with her.

King Alphonso said to her, “To whom have you come? For what reason have you come? What are your meaning, name, and errand?”

Salassa said to her attendants, “At the King’s feet lay down those sums of gold, the price of guilt, of shame, of horror.”

Her attendants lay the bags of gold at King Alphonso’s feet.

“What new riddle is this?” the Queen asked.

“My gracious lord,” Muretto said.

“I shall inform your highness,” Collumello said.

Muretto whispered to the King, and Collumello whispered to the Queen. They were informing the King and the Queen about Velasco and Salassa’s relationship and breakup.

“Woman of impudence!” Velasco said to Salassa.

Salassa replied, “Your looks proclaim my sentence: ‘banishment.’ But if you think the word ‘banishment’ too hard to utter, just turn away, my lord, and without accent I’ll understand my doom. I’ll take my leave and like a penitent walk many miles away from here to a religious shrine of some chaste sainted nun, and wash my sin off in tears of penance, until my last breath.”

“You have come to new-torment me,” Velasco said.

“I am going, my lord,” Salassa said. “I am going away forever.”

She began to leave.

“Indeed, be merciful,” Lodovico said to Velasco. “The woman will prove to be a wife worth the having, I’ll give my word.”

“Just so,” King Alphonso said. “Stay, lady, I command you, stay.”

“Velasco, here’s occasion proffered now for me to purchase some deserving favor from Woman.

“Honor me by agreeing to my first suit — forgive and love that lady.”

“My good lord?” Velasco said.

“Nay, nay, I must not be denied,” King Alphonso said. “My Queen shall join with me to mediate for her.”

“Yes, I dare undertake to do so,” the Queen said. “She who presents her penance in such sorrow, hearty sorrow, will know how to redeem the time with duty, with love, and with obedience.”

“To redeem the time” means “to make up for past faults with present and future good behavior.”

“Will you listen to me, my lord?” Lodovico said to Velasco. “All the ladies in Aragon, and my wife among the rest, will bait you like so many wild cats if you should triumph over a poor yielding creature who does in such a manner lie down to you of her own accord. Come, I know you love her with all the very veins of your heart.”

Muretto said to Velasco, “There’s more hope of one woman reclaimed, my lord, than of many conceited of their own innocence, which, indeed, they never have but in conceit.”

According to Muretto, many women — but not Salassa — are convinced that they are innocent in reality when they are really innocent only in their own imagination.

“I find it is all in vain to strive against the ordinance of fate,” Velasco said.

He then said to Salassa, “Lady, give me your hand.”

They held hands, and he said, “I must confess I love you, and I hope our faults shall be redeemed in being from now on true votaries to virtue and the faith our mutual vows shall to each other owe.

“Tell me, are you mine? Are you resolved to be mine?”

“Why, that’s well said,” Lodovico said.

“I am yours, if and as you please to have me,” Salassa said.

“Here then ends all memory of any former strife,” Velasco said. “He has enough who has a virtuous wife.”

The others said to Velasco and Salassa, “We wish long joy to both of you.”

King Alphonso said, “The money we return where it is due, and on account of Velasco’s merits, we will double it. Thus a calm is always the most welcome after storms. Now we have passed the worst, and all, I hope, is well at last.”

NOTES

The quotations from *The Queen* come from Tim Seccombe's excellent edition, which is available online:

<https://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/iemls/renplays/queencontents.htm#>

— 2.1 —

In Act 2, Scene 1, Mopas says this to Shaparoon:

Wants somewhat of that too, I take it — I warrant ye your mark appears yet to be seen for proof of your age, as plain as when you were but fifteen.

This information comes from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article of “Horse” in the section titled “Dentition”:

*The incisors of each jaw are placed in close contact, forming a semicircle. The crowns are broad, somewhat awl-shaped, and of nearly equal size. They have all the great peculiarity, not found in the teeth of any other mammal, and only in the Equidae of comparatively recent geological periods, of an involution of the external surface of the tooth [...], by which what should properly be the apex is carried deeply into the interior of the crown, forming a fossa or pit, the bottom of which becomes partially filled up with crusta petrosa or cementum. As the tooth wears, the surface, besides the external enamel layer as in an ordinary simple tooth, shows in addition a second inner ring of the same hard substance surrounding the pit, which of course adds greatly to the efficiency of the tooth as an organ for biting tough, fibrous substances. This pit, generally filled in the living animal with particles of food, is conspicuous from its dark colour, and constitutes the “**mark**” by which the age of the horse is judged, as in consequence of its only extending to a certain depth in the crown it becomes obliterated as the crown wears away, and then the tooth assumes the character of that of an ordinary incisor, consisting only of a core of dentine, surrounded by the external enamel layer. It is not quite so deep in the lower as in the upper teeth.*

[Bold added.]

Source:

The encyclopaedia britannica; a dictionary of arts, sciences, and general literature

by Baynes, Thomas Spencer, 1823-1887

Publication date 1878-89

Topics Encyclopedias and dictionaries

Publisher New York, C. Scribner's sons

Collection cdl; americana

Digitizing sponsor MSN

Contributor University of California Libraries

Language English

Volume 12

<https://archive.org/details/encyclopediabrit12newyrich/page/n8>

— 2.2 —

In Act 2, Scene 2, the Queen says this:

Come hither, Herophil, spread all my robes,

My jewels and apparel on the floor,

And for a crown get me a willow wreath.

No, no, that's not my colour, buy me a veil

Ingrained in tawny.

The entry on “tawny” in *Shakespeare and Visual Culture* by Armelle Sabatier states this:

*This adjective refers to a shade of **brown** dominated by **red** and **yellow** tones that was traditionally worn by servants. According to sumptuary laws, dyers specialized in **blue** were not allowed to produce tawny **colours**. In Elizabethan England, this colour could also describe a dark complexion.*

Source: Armelle Sabatier, *Shakespeare and Visual Culture*. The Arden Shakespeare Dictionaries, 2016. Entry on “tawny.” <<https://tinyurl.com/y6amunz4>>.

— 3.1 —

In Act 3, Scene 1, Bufo says this:

Tune? Tune! 'Sblood, d'ye take us for fiddlers, scrapers, rhyme-canters, by 'tune'? By this light, I'll scourge ye like a town top. Look ye, I am urged — ump — and there's a side blow for ye, like a sober thing as ye are.

In William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, we read this:

his brains turn o' th' toe, like a parish top,

The below is a note on “like a parish-top”:

This is one of the customs now laid aside. A large top was formerly kept in every village, to be whipped in frosty weather, that the peasants may be kept warm by exercise, and out of mischief, while they could not work. The same comparison is brought forward in the Night Walker of Fletcher:

“And dances like a town-top, and reels and hobbles.”

Steevens.

Source: *THE PLAYS AND POEMS OF WILLIAM SHAKSPEARE WITH THE CORRECTIONS AND ILLUSTRATIONS OF VARIOUS COMMENTATORS.*

Volume 11.

BY THE LATE EDMOND MALONE.

London, 1821.

<https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.175280/2015.175280.The-Plays-And-Poems-Of-William-Shakspeare-volxi_djvu.txt>

<<https://tinyurl.com/yxfntqkx>>

— 3.1 —

In Act 3, Scene 1, Pynto says this:

There, there, just under the rainbow ambles Mercury, the thin-bearded thief that stole away the draper's wife while the good man was made drunk at the still-yard, at a bever of Dutch bread and Rhenish wine, and lay all night in pure holland in's stocking and shoes.

This information comes from this source:

The Compendium of Renaissance Drama

© 1989-2016 Brian Jay Corrigan

<<https://cord.ung.edu/topos.html>>.

STILLYARD, or STILLIARD

A hall in Lond. where the merchants of the Hanseatic League had their headquarters. They obtained a settlement in Lond. in 1250, and later were granted certain privileges by the City on condition of their keeping Bishopsgate in repair, and helping to defend it when necessary. The feeling against aliens, however, led to attacks upon them in the reign of Henry VIII, and their monopoly was taken away by Edward VI. In 1597 they were expelled from the country; and the Hall then became a favourite resort for the drinking of Rhenish wines. Neats' tongues and other provocatives of thirst could be obtained there. The S. stood in Upper Thames St. on a site now covered by Cannon St. Station. It was a stone building with 3 arches towards the st. In the Hall were Holbein's paintings of Riches and Poverty.

— 3.1 —

In Act 3, Scene 1, King Alphonso says this:

Uncivil ill-bred beasts,

How dare ye turn our palace to a booth?

I wonder whether John Ford is ironically referencing Jesus' cleansing of the temple:

John 2:13-16 King James Version (KJV)

13 And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

14 And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting:

15 And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables;

16 And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise.

APPENDIX A: ABOUT THE AUTHOR

It was a dark and stormy night. Suddenly a cry rang out, and on a hot summer night in 1954, Josephine, wife of Carl Bruce, gave birth to a boy — me. Unfortunately, this young married couple allowed Reuben Saturday, Josephine's brother, to name their first-born. Reuben, aka "The Joker," decided that Bruce was a nice name, so he decided to name me Bruce Bruce. I have gone by my middle name — David — ever since.

Being named Bruce David Bruce hasn't been all bad. Bank tellers remember me very quickly, so I don't often have to show an ID. It can be fun in charades, also. When I was a counselor as a teenager at Camp Echoing Hills in Warsaw, Ohio, a fellow counselor gave the signs for "sounds like" and "two words," then she pointed to a bruise on her leg twice. Bruise Bruise? Oh yeah, Bruce Bruce is the answer!

Uncle Reuben, by the way, gave me a haircut when I was in kindergarten. He cut my hair short and shaved a small bald spot on the back of my head. My mother wouldn't let me go to school until the bald spot grew out again.

Of all my brothers and sisters (six in all), I am the only transplant to Athens, Ohio. I was born in Newark, Ohio, and have lived all around Southeastern Ohio. However, I moved to Athens to go to Ohio University and have never left.

At Ohio U, I never could make up my mind whether to major in English or Philosophy, so I got a bachelor's degree with a double major in both areas, then I added a Master of Arts degree in English and a Master of Arts degree in Philosophy. Yes, I have my MAMA degree.

Currently, and for a long time to come (I eat fruits and veggies), I am spending my retirement writing books such as *Nadia Comaneci: Perfect 10*, *The Funniest People in Dance*, *Homer's Iliad: A Retelling in Prose*, and *William Shakespeare's Othello: A Retelling in Prose*.

By the way, my sister Brenda Kennedy writes romances such as *A New Beginning* and *Shattered Dreams*.

APPENDIX B: SOME BOOKS BY DAVID BRUCE

Retellings of a Classic Work of Literature

Arden of Faversham: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's The Alchemist: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's The Arraignment, or Poetaster: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's Bartholomew Fair: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's The Case is Altered: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's Catiline's Conspiracy: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's The Devil is an Ass: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's Epicene: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's Every Man in His Humor: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's Every Man Out of His Humor: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's The Fountain of Self-Love, or Cynthia's Revels: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's The Magnetic Lady, or Humors Reconciled: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's The New Inn, or The Light Heart: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's Sejanus' Fall: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's The Staple of News: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's A Tale of a Tub: A Retelling

Ben Jonson's Volpone, or the Fox: A Retelling

Christopher Marlowe's Complete Plays: Retellings

Christopher Marlowe's Dido, Queen of Carthage: A Retelling

Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus: Retellings of the 1604 A-Text and of the 1616 B-Text

Christopher Marlowe's Edward II: A Retelling

Christopher Marlowe's The Massacre at Paris: A Retelling

Christopher Marlowe's The Rich Jew of Malta: A Retelling

Christopher Marlowe's Tamburlaine, Parts 1 and 2: Retellings

Dante's Divine Comedy: A Retelling in Prose

Dante's Inferno: A Retelling in Prose

Dante's Purgatory: A Retelling in Prose

Dante's Paradise: A Retelling in Prose

The Famous Victories of Henry V: A Retelling

From the Iliad to the Odyssey: A Retelling in Prose of Quintus of Smyrna's Posthomerica

George Chapman, Ben Jonson, and John Marston's Eastward Ho! A Retelling
George Peele's The Arraignment of Paris: A Retelling
George Peele's The Battle of Alcazar: A Retelling
George's Peele's David and Bathsheba, and the Tragedy of Absalom: A Retelling
George Peele's Edward I: A Retelling
George Peele's The Old Wives' Tale: A Retelling
George-a-Greene: A Retelling
The History of King Leir: A Retelling
Homer's Iliad: A Retelling in Prose
Homer's Odyssey: A Retelling in Prose
J.W. Gent.'s The Valiant Scot: A Retelling
Jason and the Argonauts: A Retelling in Prose of Apollonius of Rhodes' Argonautica
John Ford: Eight Plays Translated into Modern English
John Ford's The Broken Heart: A Retelling
John Ford's The Fancies, Chaste and Noble: A Retelling
John Ford's The Lady's Trial: A Retelling
John Ford's The Lover's Melancholy: A Retelling
John Ford's Love's Sacrifice: A Retelling
John Ford's Perkin Warbeck: A Retelling
John Ford's The Queen: A Retelling
John Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore: A Retelling
John Lyly's Campaspe: A Retelling
John Lyly's Endymion, The Man in the Moon: A Retelling
John Lyly's Galatea: A Retelling
John Lyly's Love's Metamorphosis: A Retelling
John Lyly's Midas: A Retelling
John Lyly's Mother Bombie: A Retelling
John Lyly's Sappho and Phao: A Retelling
John Lyly's The Woman in the Moon: A Retelling
John Webster's The White Devil: A Retelling
King Edward III: A Retelling
Mankind: A Medieval Morality Play (A Retelling)

Margaret Cavendish's The Unnatural Tragedy: A Retelling

The Merry Devil of Edmonton: A Retelling

The Summoning of Everyman: A Medieval Morality Play (A Retelling)

Robert Greene's Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay: A Retelling

The Taming of a Shrew: A Retelling

Tarlton's Jests: A Retelling

Thomas Middleton's A Chaste Maid in Cheapside: A Retelling

Thomas Middleton's Women Beware Women: A Retelling

Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker's The Roaring Girl: A Retelling

Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's The Changeling: A Retelling

The Trojan War and Its Aftermath: Four Ancient Epic Poems

Virgil's Aeneid: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's 5 Late Romances: Retellings in Prose

William Shakespeare's 10 Histories: Retellings in Prose

William Shakespeare's 11 Tragedies: Retellings in Prose

William Shakespeare's 12 Comedies: Retellings in Prose

William Shakespeare's 38 Plays: Retellings in Prose

William Shakespeare's 1 Henry IV, aka Henry IV, Part 1: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's 2 Henry IV, aka Henry IV, Part 2: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's 1 Henry VI, aka Henry VI, Part 1: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's 2 Henry VI, aka Henry VI, Part 2: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's 3 Henry VI, aka Henry VI, Part 3: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's All's Well that Ends Well: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's As You Like It: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's The Comedy of Errors: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Coriolanus: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Cymbeline: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Hamlet: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Henry V: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Henry VIII: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Julius Caesar: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's King John: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's King Lear: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Love's Labor's Lost: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Macbeth: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Measure for Measure: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's The Merry Wives of Windsor: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Othello: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Pericles, Prince of Tyre: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Richard II: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Richard III: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's The Tempest: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Timon of Athens: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's Twelfth Night: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's The Two Gentlemen of Verona: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's The Two Noble Kinsmen: A Retelling in Prose

William Shakespeare's The Winter's Tale: A Retelling in Prose

