

The Old Law

Act II, scene i

Enter [the] Duke, three Courtiers, and [the] executioner.

DUKE
Executioner!

EXECUTIONER
My lord.

DUKE
How did old Diocles take his death?

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

DUKE
Why, 'twas well.

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

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

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

DUKE
Our law is fourscore years because we judge
Dotage complete then, as unfruitfulness
In women at threescore. Marry, if the son
Can within compass bring good solid proofs
Of his own father's weakness and unfitness

To live or sway the living, though he want five
 Or ten years of his number, that's not it;
 His defect makes him fourscore and 'tis fit
 He dies when he deserves, for every act
 Is in effect then, when the cause is ripe.

SECOND COURTIER

An admirable prince! How rarely he talks!
 Oh, that we'd known this, lads! What a time did we endure
 In two-penny commons, and in boots twice vamp'd!

FIRST COURTIER

Now we have two pairs¹ a week, and yet not thankful;
 'Twill be a fine world for them, sirs, that come after us.

SECOND COURTIER

Ay, and they knew it.

FIRST COURTIER

Peace! Let them never know't.

THIRD COURTIER

A pox, there be young heirs will soon smell't out.

SECOND COURTIER

'Twill come to 'em by instinct, man. May your Grace
 Never be old, you stand so well for youth.

DUKE

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

FIRST COURTIER

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

DUKE

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

¹ two pairs] Q (two paire).

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FIRST COURTIER

It will have heats though, when they see the painting
 Go an inch deep in the wrinkle, and take up
 A box more than their gossips. But for men, my lord,
 That should be the sole bravery of a palace,
 To walk with hollow eyes and long white beards,
 As if a prince dwelt in a land of goats;
 With clothes as if they sat upon their backs on purpose
 To arraign a fashion, and condemn it to exile;
 Their pockets in their sleeves, as if they laid
 Their ear to avarice and heard the devil whisper!
 Now ours lie downward, here, close to the flank,
 Right spending pockets, as a son's should be
 That lives in the fashion, where our diseased fathers,
 Would with the sciatica and aches,
 Brought up your pan'd hose first, which ladies laughed at,
 Giving no reverence to the place, lie ruined.
 They love a doublet that's three hours a-buttoning,
 And fits so close makes a man groan again
 And his soul mutter half a day. Yet these are those
 That carry sway and worth; pricked up in clothes,
 Why should we fear our rising?

DUKE

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

FIRST COURTIER

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

DUKE

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

Enter CREON, ANTIGONA, *and* SIMONIDES.

FIRST COURTIER

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

SECOND COURTIER

Sim!

SIMONIDES

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

DUKE

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

SIMONIDES

Upon my life
Not four-and-twenty hours, my lord; I searched
The church-book yesterday. Does your Grace think
I'd let my father wrong the law, my lord?
'Twere pity o' my life then! No, your act
Shall not receive a minute's wrong by him
While I live, sir; and he's so just himself too,
I know he would not offer it². Here he stands.

CREON

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

ANTIGONA

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

² he would not offer it] Shaw ; he would no offer it Q.

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SIMONIDES [*Aside*]
She spoils all again.

ANTIGONA
Deserving any way for state employment.

SIMONIDES
Mother!

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

SIMONIDES
Mother, I say!

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

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

ANTIGONA
Away, unnatural!

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

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

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

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

DUKE
 Come hither, sir.

SIMONIDES
 My lord.

DUKE
 What are those orders?

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

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

DUKE
 And is that all, sir?

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

DUKE
 Agent for death.

EXECUTIONER
 Your will, my lord?

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DUKE

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

CREON

'Tis noble justice!

ANTIGONA

'Tis cursed tyranny!

SIMONIDES

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

ANTIGONA

Hence, slave!

SIMONIDES

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

FIRST COURTIER

Simonides.

SIMONIDES

Push, I'm not brave enough to hold your talk³ yet;
 Give a man time, I have a suit a-making.

Recorders.

SECOND COURTIER

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

SIMONIDES

I'll make 'em come else, with a mischief to 'em
 As other gallants do that have less left 'em.

Recorders.

³ your talk] Q (you talk).

DUKE

Hark, whence those sounds? What's that?

Recorders. Enter CLEANTHES and HIPPOLITA, with a hearse.

FIRST COURTIER

Some funeral

It seems, my lord, and young Cleanthes follows.

DUKE

Cleanthes!

SECOND COURTIER

'Tis, my lord, and in the place

Of a chief mourner too, but strangely habited.

DUKE

Yet suitable to his behaviour, mark it;

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

I never saw a corpse so joyfully followed.

Light colours and light cheeks! Who should this be?

'Tis a thing worth resolving.

SIMONIDES

One belike that doth participate

In this our present joy.

DUKE

Cleanthes!

CLEANTHES

Oh, my lord!

DUKE

He laughed outright now!

Was ever such a contrariety seen

In natural courses yet, nay, professed openly?

FIRST COURTIER

I ha[ve] known a widow laugh closely, my lord,

Under her handkercher, when t'other part

Of her old face has wept like rain in sunshine;

But all the face to laugh apparently

Was never seen yet.

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SIMONIDES

Yes, mine did once.

CLEANTHES

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

DUKE

How can that be?

CLEANTHES

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

DUKE

Dead!

SECOND COURTIER

Old Leonides?

CLEANTHES

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

I wonder whence that tear came when I smiled
 In the production on't. Sorrow's a thief
 That can, when joy looks on, steal forth a grief.
 But gracious leave, my lord, when I have performed,
 My last poor duty to my father's bones,
 I shall return your servant.

DUKE

Well, perform it.
 The law is satisfied, they can but die.
 And, by his death, Cleanthes, you gain well
 A rich and fair revenue.

Flourish.

SIMONIDES

I would I had even another father, condition he did the like.

CLEANTHES [*Aside*]

I have passed it bravely now! How blest was I
 To have the Duke in sight⁴! Now 'tis confirmed
 Fast fear of doubts confirmed. On, on, I say,
 He that brought me to man, I bring to clay.

SIMONIDES

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

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

BUTLER

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

⁴ the Duke in sight] Shaw ; the dim sight Q.

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SIMONIDES

Not a jot, i'faith:

My father wore cheap garments, he might do it; I shall have all my clothes come home tomorrow. They will eat up all you, and there were more of you, sirs, to keep you six at livery, and still munching!

TAILOR

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

SIMONIDES

Thou madest my father's clothes, that I confess,
But what son and heir will have his father's tailor
Unless he have a mind to be well laughed at?

Thou hast been so used to wide long-side things, that when I come to truss, I shall have the waist of my doublet lie upon my buttocks. A sweet sight!

BUTLER

I, a butler?

SIMONIDES

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

BUTLER

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

SIMONIDES

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

COOK

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

SIMONIDES

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

COOK

In the meantime you have choked me, methinks.

BAILIFF

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

SIMONIDES

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

COACHMAN

Your good mastership.

SIMONIDES

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

FOOTMAN

I dare boast it, sir.

SIMONIDES

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

COACHMAN

I'll firk 'em into foam else.

SIMONIDES

[He] speaks brave matter!
And I'll firk some too, or't shall cost hot water.

COOK

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

BUTLER

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

COOK

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

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[Act II, scene ii]

Enter EUGENIA and PARTHENIA.

EUGENIA
Parthenia.

PARTHENIA
Mother.

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

PARTHENIA
Did you call, forsooth?

EUGENIA
Yes, you must make some spoonmeat for your father,
And warm three nightcaps for him. Out upon't!
The mere conceit turns a young woman's stomach.
His slippers must be warmed in August too,
And his gown girt to him in the very dogdays
When every mastiff lolls out his tongue for heat.
Would not this vex a beauty of nineteen now?
Alas! I shall be tumbling in cold baths now,
Under each armpit a fine bean-flour bag
To screw out whiteness when I list;
And some seven of the properest men in the dukedom
Making a banquet ready in the next room for me,
Where he that gets the first kiss is envied
And stands upon his guard a fortnight after.
This is a life for nineteen! But 'tis justice
For old men, whose great acts stand in their minds
And nothing in the bodies, do ne'er think
A woman young enough for their desire;
And we young wenches that have mother wits
And love to marry muck first, and man after,
Do never think old men are old enough
That we may soon be rid on 'em. There's our quittance!

I have waited for⁵ the happy hour this two year,
 And if death be so unkind still to let him live,
 All that time I am lost.

Enter courtiers.

FIRST COURTIER
 Young lady!

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

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

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

FIRST COURTIER
 Love and thy beauty, widow.

EUGENIA
 Widow, sir?

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

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

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

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

⁵ waited for] Shaw ; wasted for Q.

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FIRST COURTIER

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

Enter SIMONIDES [and] coachman.

EUGENIA [*Aside*]

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

SIMONIDES

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

EUGENIA [*Aside*]

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

FIRST COURTIER

Who's this? Simonides?

SECOND COURTIER

Brave Sim, i' faith!

SIMONIDES

Coachman.

COACHMAN

Sir?

SIMONIDES

Have an especial care of my new mares.

They say, sweet widow, he that loves a horse well

Must needs love a widow well. When dies thy husband?

Is it not July next?

EUGENIA

Oh, you're too hot, sir;

Pray cool yourself and take September with you!

SIMONIDES

September! Oh, I was but two bows wide.

FIRST COURTIER

Master Simonides!

SIMONIDES

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

Enter LISANDER.

LISANDER

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

SIMONIDES

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

LISANDER

What's thy wild business here?

SIMONIDES

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

LISANDER

Impious bloodhounds!

SIMONIDES

Let the ghost talk, ne'er mind him.

LISANDER

Shames of nature!

SIMONIDES

Alas, poor ghost! Consider what the man is.

LISANDER

Monsters unnatural! You that have been covetous
Of your own fathers' deaths, gape ye for mine now?
Cannot a poor old man that now can reckon
Even all the hours he has to live, live quiet
For such wild beasts as these, that neither hold
A certainty of good within themselves,
But scatter others' comforts that are ripened

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For holy uses? Is hot youth so hasty
 It will not give an old man leave to die
 And leave a widow first, but will make one
 The husband looking on? May your destructions
 Come all in hasty figures to your souls,
 Your wealth depart in haste to overtake
 Your honesties, that died when you were infants!
 May your male seed be hasty spendthrifts too,
 Your daughters hasty sinners and diseases'd
 Ere they be thought at years to welcome misery!
 And may you never know what leisure is
 But at repentance! I am too uncharitable,
 Too foul! I must go cleanse myself with prayers.
 These are the plagues of fondness to old men,
 We're punished home with what we dote upon.

Exit.

SIMONIDES

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

EUGENIA

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

SIMONIDES

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

EUGENIA

I'm at a word.

SIMONIDES

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

FIRST COURTIER

Well struck, Sim!

SIMONIDES

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

FIRST COURTIER

He would betray himself to be a botcher⁶
That goes about to mend it.

EUGENIA

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

Enter PARTHENIA.

SIMONIDES

What will she do hereafter, when sh' is a widow
Keeps open house already?

Exeunt.

EUGENIA

How now, girl?

PARTHENIA

Those feather'd fools that hither took their flight
Have griev'd my father much.

EUGENIA

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

⁶ a botcher] Shaw ; a brother Q.

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A cough of the lungs, or say a wheezing matter⁷;
Then shake off chains and dance all thy life after?

PARTHENIA

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

Enter HIPPOLITA.

Yonder's my cousin.

EUGENIA [*Aside*]

Art, I must use thee now.
Dissembling is the best help for a virtue
That ever woman had; it saves their credit often.

HIPPOLITA

How now, cousin!
What, weeping?

EUGENIA

Can you blame me when the time
Of my dear love and husband now draws on?
I study funeral tears against the day
I must be a sad widow.

HIPPOLITA

In troth, Eugenia, I have cause to weep too;
But when I visit, I come comfortably
And look to be so quitted⁸. Yet more sobbing?

EUGENIA

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

HIPPOLITA

You must use patience, coz.

⁷ a wheezing matter] Shaw ; a wheening matter Q.

⁸ quitted] Q (quited).

EUGENIA

Tell me of patience.

HIPPOLITA

You have example for't in me and many.

EUGENIA

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

HIPPOLITA [*Aside*]

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

EUGENIA

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

HIPPOLITA

Be comforted.

EUGENIA

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

HIPPOLITA [*Aside*]

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

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EUGENIA

Oh, sweet cousin!

HIPPOLITA

You may conceal him and give out his death
 Within the time, order his funeral too.

We had it so for ours, I praise heaven for't,
 And he's alive and safe!

EUGENIA

Oh, blessed coz,

How thou reviv'st me!

HIPPOLITA

We daily see

The good old man and feed him twice a day.

Methinks it is the sweetest joy to cherish him,

That ever life yet showed me.

EUGENIA

So should I think

A dainty thing to nurse an old man well.

HIPPOLITA

And then we have his prayers and daily blessing,

And we two live so lovingly upon't,

His son and I, and so contentedly,

You cannot think unless you tasted on't.

EUGENIA

No, I warrant you. Oh, loving cousin,

What a great sorrow hast thou eased me of!

A thousand thanks go with thee.

HIPPOLITA

I have a suit to you, I must not have you weep when I am gone.

Exit.

EUGENIA

No, if I do, ne'er trust me. Easy fool!

Thou hast put thyself into my power forever;

Take heed of angering of me. I conceal!

I feign a funeral! I keep my husband!
'Las, I have been thinking any time these two years,
I have kept him too long already.
I'll go count o'er my suitors, that's my business,
And prick the man down. I ha' six months to do it,
But could dispatch him in one, were I put to it.

Exit.