

*The Old Law*

**Act IV, scene i**

*Enter [the] Clown, Butler, Bailiff, Tailor, Cook, Drawer, Wench.*

DRAWER

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

BUTLER

Oh, the summer air's best !

DRAWER

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

BUTLER

De Clare, sirrah.

CLOWN

What! You're all sped already, bullies?

COOK

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

CLOWN

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

COOK

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

CLOWN

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

COOK

Why, drawer!

*Enter Drawer.*

DRAWER

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

COOK

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

DRAWER

*Ad imum*, sir.

CLOWN

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

COOK

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

CLOWN

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

BUTLER

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

CLOWN

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

DRAWER

Yes, sir, here are sweet wire-drawers<sup>1</sup>.

COOK

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

TAILOR

And both govern by the pegs too.

CLOWN

And you have pipes in your consort too?

DRAWER

And sack butts too, sir.

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<sup>1</sup> wire-drawers] Shaw ; wire-drawers in the house Q.

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BUTLER

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

BAILIFF

All wooden heads! There, they meet again!

COOK

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

CLOWN

No dancing with me, we have Siren here.

COOK

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

CLOWN

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

COOK

A match! Five drachmas her name was Hiren.

CLOWN

Siren's name was Siren for five drachmas.

COOK

'Tis done.

TAILOR

Take heed what you do, Gnothos.

CLOWN

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

COOK

That Nell was Helen of Greece too.

CLOWN

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

TAILOR

Why? Did she grow shorter when she came to Troy?

CLOWN

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

BAILIFF

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

CLOWN

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

*Enter Drawer.*

DRAWER

Gentlemen, if you be disposed to be merry, the music is ready to strike up and here's a consort of mad Greeks. I know not whether they be men or women, or between both, they have what-you-call-'em, wizards<sup>2</sup>, on their faces.

COOK

Vizards, goodman lick-spigot.

BUTLER

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

DRAWER

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

*[Enter] old women.*

COOK

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

*[The old women] dance.*

CLOWN

We have Siren here. She['s] dancing with me.

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<sup>2</sup> wizards] Shaw ; vizards Q. |

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

COOK

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

*Exeunt each with his wife; manet GNOTHOS' wife.*

CLOWN

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

AGATHA

What a mermaid!

CLOWN

No, but a maid, horse-face. [AGATHA *unmasks*] Oh, old woman, is it you?

AGATHA

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

CLOWN

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

AGATHA

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

CLOWN

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

AGATHA

Oh, unkind villain!

CLOWN

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

AGATHA

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

CLOWN

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

AGATHA

Impudent villain! Shameless harlot!

CLOWN

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

AGATHA

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

CLOWN

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

AGATHA

No, unkind villain, I'll deceive thee yet! I have a reprieve for five years of life, I am with child.

WENCH

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

CLOWN

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

AGATHA

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

CLOWN

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

AGATHA

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

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CLOWN

Oh, you'd be stoned to death, would you? All old women would die o<sup>3</sup> that fashion with all their hearts, but the law shall overthrow you the other<sup>4</sup> way first.

WENCH

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

CLOWN

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

WENCH

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

CLOWN

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

AGATHA

No, thou art a witch and I'll prove it. I said I was with child, thou knew'st no other but by sorcery. Thou said'st it was a cushion, and so it is! Thou art a witch for it; I'll be sworn to it!

CLOWN

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

*Ex[eunt].*

AGATHA

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

*Exit.*


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<sup>3</sup> o'] Shaw ; a' Q.

<sup>4</sup> the other] Q (the tother).

**[Act IV, scene ii]***Enter* CLEANTHES

CLEANTHES

What's that? Oh, nothing but the whispering wind  
 Breathes through yon churlish hawthorn that grew rude  
 As if it chid the gentle breath that kissed it.  
 I cannot be too circumspect, too careful,  
 For in these woods lies hid all my life's treasure,  
 Which is too much ever to fear to lose,  
 Though it be never lost. And if our watchfulness<sup>5</sup>  
 Ought to be wise and serious against a thief  
 That comes to steal our goods, things all without us,  
 That proves vexation often more than comfort,  
 How mighty ought our providence to be  
 To prevent those, if any such there were,  
 That come to rob our bosom of our joys  
 That only makes poor man delight to live!  
 Pshaw! I'm too fearful. Fie, fie, who can hurt me?  
 But 'tis a general cowardice that shakes  
 The nerves of confidence. He that hides treasure  
 Imagines everyone thinks of that place,  
 When 'tis a thing least minded. Nay, let him change  
 The place continually, where'er it keeps,  
 There will the fear keep still. Yonder's the storehouse

*Enter* HIPPOLITA

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

HIPPOLITA

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

CLEANTHES

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

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<sup>5</sup> CLEANTHES] les vers suivants de cette tirade attribués à HIPPOLITA dans Q.



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HIPPOLITA

His stomach, sir,  
Is better'd wondrously since his concealment.

CLEANTHES

Heaven has a blessed work in't. Come, we're safe here;  
I prithee, call him forth, the air's much wholesomer.

HIPPOLITA

Father!

*Enter* LEONIDES

[LEONIDES]<sup>6</sup>

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

CLEANTHES<sup>7</sup>

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

LEONIDES

Rise, thou art all obedience, love, and goodness.  
I dare say that which thousand fathers cannot,  
And that's my precious comfort, never son  
Was in the way more of celestial rising!

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<sup>6</sup> LEONIDES] attribués à HIPPOLITA dans Q.

<sup>7</sup> CLEANTHES] attribués à LEONIDES dans Q.

Thou art so made of such ascending virtue  
That all the powers of hell cannot sink thee.

*A horn.*

CLEANTHES  
Ha!

LEONIDES  
What was it disturbed my joy?

CLEANTHES [*To LEONIDES*]  
Did you not hear,  
As afar off?

LEONIDES [*To HIPPOLITA*]  
What, my excellent consort?

CLEANTHES [*To HIPPOLITA*]  
Nor you?

HIPPOLITA  
I heard a – *A horn.*

CLEANTHES  
Hark, again!

LEONIDES  
Bless my joy,  
What ails it on a sudden?

CLEANTHES  
Now, since lately.

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

CLEANTHES  
Alas, you do not hear well.

LEONIDES  
What was it, daughter?

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HIPPOLITA

I heard a sound twice. *A horn.*

CLEANTHES

Hark, louder and nearer.

In, for the precious good of virtue, quick, sir!

Louder and nearer yet; at hand, at hand!

A hunting here 'tis strange: I never

Knew game followed in these woods before.

*Enter Duke, SIMONIDES, Courtiers, and executioner.*

HIPPOLITA

Now let 'em come and spare not.

CLEANTHES

Ha! 'tis – is't not the Duke? Look sparingly.

HIPPOLITA

'Tis he, but what of that? Alas, take heed, sir,

Your care will overthrow us.

CLEANTHES

Come, it shall not;

Let's set a pleasant face upon our fears

Though our hearts shake with horror. Ha, ha, ha!

DUKE

Hark!

CLEANTHES

Prithee, proceed.

I'm taken with these light things infinitely

Since the old man's decease. Ha, so they parted, ha, ha, ha!

DUKE

Why, how should I believe this? Look, he's merry

As if he had no such charge. One with that care

Could never be so. Still, he holds his temper,

And 'tis the same, still with no difference,

He brought his father's corpse to the grave with.

He laughed thus then, you know.

FIRST COURTIER

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

SIMONIDES

He tells you right, my lord; his own cousin-german  
Revealed it first to me, a free-tongued woman,  
And very excellent at telling secrets.

DUKE

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

SIMONIDES

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

DUKE

Cleanthes.

CLEANTHES

My loved lord?

DUKE [*Aside*]

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

CLEANTHES

But, finding it  
Grow to a noted imperfection in me,  
For anything too much is vicious,  
I come to these disconsolate walks of purpose,  
Only to dull and take away the edge on't.  
I ever had a greater zeal to sadness;  
A natural proportion, I confess, my lord,  
Before that cheerful accident fell out,  
If I may call a father's funeral cheerful

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Without wrong done to duty or my love.

DUKE

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

CLEANTHES

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

DUKE

So, sir.

CLEANTHES

Which is a kind of grave delight, my lord.

DUKE

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

CLEANTHES

My lord?

SIMONIDES [*To Courtier*]

Now it begins to fadge.

FIRST COURTIER

Peace! Thou art so greedy, Sim.

DUKE

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

I'll have 'em watched on purpose<sup>8</sup>.

FIRST COURTIER

Now, now, his colour ebbs and flows!

SIMONIDES

Mark hers too.

HIPPOLITA

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

CLEANTHES

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

FIRST COURTIER

You've struck 'em dumb, my lord.

SIMONIDES

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

CLEANTHES

He is safe still, is he not?

HIPPOLITA

Oh, you do ill to doubt it.

CLEANTHES

Thou art all goodness.

SIMONIDES

How does your Grace believe?

DUKE

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

---

<sup>8</sup> on purpose] Shaw ; a' purpose Q.

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CLEANTHES  
Ha!

SIMONIDES  
[He] has the lapwing's cunning, I'm afraid, my lord,  
That cries most when she's farthest from the nest.

CLEANTHES  
Oh, we're betrayed!

HIPPOLITA  
Betrayed, sir?

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

*Exeunt Courtiers and SI[MONIDES].*

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

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

CLEANTHES  
Help me, thunder, for my power's lost!  
Angels, shoot plagues and help me!  
Why are these men in health and I so heart-sick?  
Or why should nature have that power in me  
To levy up a thousand bleeding sorrows,  
And not one comfort? Only makes me lie  
Like the poor mockery of an earthquake here,  
Panting with horror, and have not so much force  
In all my vengeance to shake a villain off of me<sup>9</sup>!

*Enter Courtiers, SIMONIDES, [and] LEONIDES.*

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<sup>9</sup> off of me] Q (off a me).

HIPPOLITA

Use him gently and heaven will love you for't.

CLEANTHES

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

LEONIDES

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

DUKE

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

*Exeunt with LEONIDES.*

HIPPOLITA

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

CLEANTHES

Let me rise.

HIPPOLITA

Why do you not then, and follow?

CLEANTHES

I strive for't.  
 Is there no hand of pity that will ease me  
 And take this villain from my heart awhile?



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HIPPOLITA

Alas, he's gone.

CLEANTHES

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

HIPPOLITA

Oh, misery of affliction!

CLEANTHES

They will stay  
Till I can come; they must be so good ever,  
Though they be ne'er so cruel.  
My last leave must be taken, think o' that<sup>10</sup>,  
And this last blessing given. I will not lose  
That for a thousand consorts.

HIPPOLITA

That hope's wretched.

CLEANTHES

The unutterable stings of fortune!  
All griefs are to be borne, save this alone!  
This, like a headlong torrent, overturns the frame of nature;  
For he that gives us life first, as a father,  
Locks all his natural sufferings in our blood<sup>11</sup>;  
The sorrow that he feels, are our heads,  
They are incorporate to us.

HIPPOLITA

Noble sir!

CLEANTHES

Let me behold thee well.

HIPPOLITA

Sir!

---

<sup>10</sup> o' that] Shaw ; a' that Q.

<sup>11</sup> our blood] Shaw ; blood, to Q.

CLEANTHES  
 Thou shouldst be good,  
 Or thou art a dangerous substance to be lodg'd  
 So near the heart of man.

HIPPOLITA  
 What means this, dear sir?

CLEANTHES  
 To thy trust only was this blessed secret  
 Kindly committed. 'Tis destroyed: thou see'st  
 What follows to be thought on't.

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

*Enter* EUGENIA.

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

EUGENIA  
 Ha, ha, ha, cousin!

CLEANTHES  
 How ill dost thou become this time!

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

CLEANTHES  
 Is it come that way?

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EUGENIA

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

CLEANTHES

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

EUGENIA

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

CLEANTHES

Is there not poison yet enough to kill me?

HIPPOLITA

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

CLEANTHES

How!

HIPPOLITA

Aye.

CLEANTHES

The fellow of my heart 'twill speed me then.

HIPPOLITA

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

CLEANTHES

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

EUGENIA

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

*Enter SIMONIDES and Courtiers.*

CLEANTHES

Are you so whorishly provided?

SIMONIDES

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

EUGENIA

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

SIMONIDES

I shall be surer if I keep behind, though.

EUGENIA

Now, servants, show your loves!

SIMONIDES

I'll show my love too, afar off.

EUGENIA

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

SIMONIDES

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

HIPPOLITA

Oh, gentlemen! Cleanthes!

EUGENIA

Fight! Upon him!

HIPPOLITA

Thy thirst of blood proclaims thee now a strumpet.

EUGENIA

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

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*Enter Officers.*

FIRST OFFICER

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

CLEANTHES

I obey fate in all things.

HIPPOLITA

Happy rescue!

SIMONIDES

I would you'd seized upon him a minute sooner; it had saved me a cut finger. I wonder how I came by't for I never put my hand forth, I'm sure. I think my own sword did cut it, if truth were known; maybe the wire in the handle. I have lived these five-and-twenty years and never knew what colour my blood was before. I never durst eat oysters, nor cut peck-loaves.

EUGENIA

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

SIMONIDES

Aye, the wedding finger too. A pox on't!

FIRST COURTIER

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

SIMONIDES

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

*Exeunt.*