



Princess of France.

LOVE'S LABOUR LOST ACT 5. SC. 2.

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THE PRINCESS OF FRANCE.

THIS royal lady, while yet a maiden, was despatched by her bed-ridden father, the King of France, on an important mission to the court of Ferdinand, King of Navarre, to confer with that prince concerning the surrender of Aquitaine—a fair domain then in his possession, but to which France laid claim.

As the august party approached Navarre, the princess learned that his majesty, with sundry of his gentlemen, had recently made a solemn vow to devote the coming three years to pious study—to quantify the flesh by fasting, to speak to no woman, and to forbear the approach of any woman, save in a hall of his royal palace.

At the first news of her approach, she sent a messenger within the gates, to King Ferdinand, craving an interview "on serious business." But the king, already informed of her approach, had taken counsel with his fellow-devotees, and concluding that she must constitute an exception to the rigor of their abstinence, was already on the road, gallantly attended, to bid her highness welcome to Navarre. Much to his mortification he was compelled, for his oath's sake, to deny the princess, and her suite, access to his court; but he agreed terms to be erected at some distance from the

palace, and entertained them with great splendor—he and his favorite gentlemen paying their respects daily to the fair embassy.

The result of these visits to the lively French maids was, as might be anticipated, fatal to the peace of the “matchless Navarre” and his lords; his majesty fell in love with the princess at sight, and his followers were severally fascinated by her highness’s ladies. The merry demoiselles amused themselves to their hearts’ content with the love-making of the amateur ascetics—passing the days in sports, invented for their entertainment by their lovers, and all the graceful coqueties in which the ladies of that nation are expert.

But in the midst of the merry-making came a messenger from France, with the sad intelligence of the king’s death; and at once preparations were made for the princess’s return home. And now Navarre and his lords urged their suits more seriously; but the ladies showed themselves, by their answers, as wise as they were fair and witty: the princess set the example by condemning her royal suitor to a twelvemonth of severe seclusion, to expiate his broken oaths; and her ladies imitated their mistress in the disposition of their lovers, imposing upon each some penance adapted to his peculiar case.

This “French king’s daughter” is drawn after the established model for princesses—“a maid of grace and complete majesty,” beautiful, of imposing presence, and much given to a sententious sort of wit. But under all her ostentation and moral formalities, which seem assumed as necessary addenda to her rank, she is a natural woman in her love of admiration, coquetry, and frolic.

At first, somewhat piqued at being compelled “to attend like humbly-visag’d suitors,” on the king’s high will—herself, a monarch’s daughter, “lodged in a field, like one that came to besiege his court,” rather than to demand a right—the princess receives the royal courtesy with sharp retorts:

King. Fair princess, welcome to the court of Navarre.

Prin. Fair I give you back again; and welcome I have not yet: the roof of this court is too high to be yours; and welcome to the wild fields too base to be mine.

King. You shall be welcome, madam, to my court.

Prin. I will be welcome then; conduct me thither.

King. Hear me, dear lady; I have sworn an oath.

Prin. Our lady help my lord! he’ll be forsworn.

King. Not for the world, fair madam, by my will.

Prin. Why, will shall break it—will, and nothing else.

King. Your ladyship is ignorant what it is.

Prin. Were my lord so, his ignorance were wise,

Where now his knowledge must prove ignorance.

I hear your grace hath sworn out house-keeping:

’Tis deadly sin to keep that oath, my lord—

And sin to break it.

But pardon me—I am too sudden bold;

To teach a teacher ill beseemeth me.

Vouchsafe to read the purpose of my coming,

And suddenly resolve me in my suit.

But all more dignified emotions soon yield to her mischievous enjoyment of the ludicrous plight of these gentlemen-hermits, who fall in love with the first women they meet, after their loud denunciations of the sex. Notwithstanding their hearty response to the protestations of the gallant Navarrese, the princess and her ladies spare no opportunity to heap humiliations upon them: mocking their amorous verses as “huge translations of hypocrisy, vilely compil’d” and “too long by half a mile;” turning their elaborate

entertainments to ridicule; and yet, withal, making themselves more and more fascinating to the infatuated knights. But when the announcement of the death of the King of France puts an end to their mad "revels, dances, masks, and merry hours," the princess, recalled to her stateliness, apologizes for their perhaps indecorous folly, with a dignity truly royal:

I thank you, gracious lords,
For all your fair endeavors, and entreat,
Out of a new-sad soul, that you vouchsafe,
In your rich wisdom, to excuse, or hide,
The liberal opposition of our spirits;
If over boldly we have borne ourselves
In the converse of breath, your gentleness
Was guilty of it.—Farewell, worthy lord!
A heavy heart bears not an humble tongue:
Excuse me so, coming so short of thanks
For my great suit so easily obtain'd.

And her reply to Navarre, that "sole inheritor of all perfections that a man may owe," when in good earnest he proffers his heart, is marked by sound sense, and jealous regard for her honor, as well as by the chivalric spirit of the time, when a lady's love was not to be had for the asking, however her own heart might "own the soft impeachment:"

We have receiv'd your letters, full of love—
Your favors, the ambassadors of love;
And in our maiden council rated them
At courtship, pleasant jest, and courtesy,
As bombast, and as lining to the time:
But more devout than this, in our respects,
Have we not been; and therefore met your loves
In their own fashion, like a merriment.

Dum. Our letters, madam, show'd much more than jest.

Long. So did our looks.

* * * * *

King. Now, at the latest minute of the hour,
Grant us your loves.

Prin. A time, methinks, too short
To make a world-without-end bargain in.
No, no, my lord; your grace is perjur'd much—
Full of dear guiltiness; and therefore this—
If for my love (as there is no such cause)
You will do aught, this shall you do for me:
Your oath I will not trust; but go with speed
To some forlorn and naked hermitage,
Remote from all the pleasures of the world;
There stay, until the twelve celestial signs
Have brought about their annual reckoning;
If this austere insociable life
Change not your offer made in heat of blood—
If frosts, and fasts, hard lodging, and thin weeds,
Nip not the gaudy blossoms of your love,
But that it bear this trial, and last love—
Then, at the expiration of the year,
Come challenge, challenge me by these deserts,
And, by this virgin palm, now kissing thine,
I will be thine; and, till that instant, shut
My woeful self up in a mourning house,
Raining the tears of lamentation
For the remembrance of my father's death.
If this thou do deny, let our hands part—
Neither intitled in the other's heart.

The opening address of the princess is, of course, only a coquetish ruse, not to be thought "too quickly won"—no one is better assured than she of the sincerity of the passion conveyed in those fantastic letters, and the rich gifts which bid fair to "wall about with diamonds" the "girls of France;" and none more happily confident that these "moon-like men" will steadfastly devote their twelvemonth of probation to the consummation of their loves.



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As the august party approached Navarre, the princess learned that his majesty, with sundry of his gentlemen, had recently made a solemn vow to devote the coming three years to painful study—to mortify the flesh by fasting, to speak to no woman, and to forbid the approach of any woman within a mile of the royal palace.

So the lady halted, even where she was, and sent a messenger within the gates, to King Ferdinand, craving an interview “on serious business.” But the king, already informed of her approach, had taken counsel with his fellow-devotees, and, concluding that this must constitute an exception to the rigor of their abstinence, was already on the road, gallantly attended, to bid her highness welcome to Navarre. Much to his mortification he was compelled, for his oath’s sake, to deny the princess, and her suite, access to his court; but he caused tents to be erected at some distance from the