



Love's Labour's Lost

Ferdinand, King of Navarre, opens the play by declaring that his court will be devoted to ascetic study for three years—and, to keep the distractions to a minimum, no women will be allowed within a mile of the court. Berowne, Longaville, and Dumaine agree to devote themselves with the King (although Berowne expresses reservations about the venture and its chances for success). Berowne also points out that the king has forgotten an embassy that very day with the Princess of France. As they set out to meet the princess, the king's fool, Costard, is sent to Don Armado to receive punishment for breaking the king's commands with the country wench, Jacquenetta.

Needless to say, the Princess and her entourage are put off when Ferdinand and his lords deny them entrance into the court. In protest, the embassy camps in front of the court. Boyet makes note of the king's "affection" toward the Princess, and the ladies retreat to their tents to plan how they can get back at Ferdinand and his court. In the meantime, Armado—who is himself in love with Jacquenetta—strikes a deal with Costard to let him off if Costard will deliver a letter to the wench. Before Costard can do so, however, Berowne finds him and asks him to take a letter to Rosaline. This sets up a highly comic series of errors as Costard manages to deliver Jacquenetta's letter to the Princess of France and Rosaline's letter to Jacquenetta.

At this point, King Ferdinand and his lords overhear one another professing their love for their respective ladies and to a man decide that their oaths are better off left for dead while the women are around. When the lords pay a visit to the ladies in disguise, however, the ladies turn the tables on them with disguises of their own. When the men return as themselves, the women continue to bait them with their own words, delighting in the men's confusion. Just when they begin to sort things out and sit down for a pageant, a messenger arrives to inform the Princess that her father has died, and she must leave immediately. The Princess tells Ferdinand that if he spends one year's time cloistered in a remote hermitage—his penance for being an oath-breaker—while she is in mourning, then she will consider his suit of marriage. Each lady-in-waiting exacts a similar promise from the king's lords. Although there will be no weddings forthcoming, the ladies vow to return to Navarre the following year to determine if their love is true.

Dramatis Personae

Ferdinand, King of Navarre
Lords of Navarre: *Berowne, Longaville, Dumaine*
Princess of France
Ladies of France: *Rosaline, Maria, Katherine*
Lords of France: *Boyet and Marcade*
Don Armado, a Spaniard
Moth, page to Armado
Costard, a clown
Jacquenetta, a country wench
Sir Nathaniel, a curate
Holofernes, a schoolmaster
Dull, a constable
Forester
Lords, attendants, etc.