

As You Like It

Act IV, sc. 3

OLIVER

Oli. When last the young Orlando parted from you
He left a promise to return again
Within an hour; and, pacing through the forest,
Chewing the food of sweet and bitter fancy,
Lo, what befell! he threw his eye aside,
And mark what object did present itself:
Under an oak, whose boughs were moss'd with age,
And high top bald with dry antiquity,
A wretched ragged man, o'ergrown with hair,
Lay sleeping on his back: about his neck
A green and gilded snake had wreath'd itself,
Who with her head nimble in threats approach'd
The opening of his mouth; but suddenly,
Seeing Orlando, it unlink'd itself,
And with indented glides did slip away
Into a bush; under which bush's shade
A lioness, with udders all drawn dry,
Lay couching, head on ground, with catlike watch,
When that the sleeping man should stir; for 'tis
The royal disposition of that beast
To prey on nothing that doth seem as dead:

This seen, Orlando did approach the man,
And found it was his brother, his elder brother.

~~Cel. O! I have heard him speak of that same brother;
And he did render him the most unnatural
That liv'd 'mongst men.~~

Oli. And well he might so do,
For well I know he was unnatural.

~~Ros. But, to Orlando: did he leave him there,
Food to the suck'd and hungry lioness?~~

Oli. Twice did he turn his back and purpos'd so;
But kindness, nobler ever than revenge,
And nature, stronger than his just occasion,
Made him give battle to the lioness,
Who quickly fell before him: in which hurtling
From miserable slumber I awak'd.

~~Cel. Are you his brother?~~

~~Ros. Was it you he rescu'd?~~

~~Cel. Was't you that did so oft contrive to kill him?~~

Oli. 'Twas I; but 'tis not I. I do not shame
To tell you what I was, since my conversion
So sweetly tastes, being the thing I am.

~~Ros. But, for the bloody napkin?~~

Oli. By and by.

When from the first to last, betwixt us two,
Tears our recountments had most kindly bath'd,

As how I came into that desert place:
In brief, he led me to the gentle duke,
Who gave me fresh array and entertainment,
Committing me unto my brother's love;
Who led me instantly unto his cave,
There stripp'd himself; and here, upon his arm
The lioness had torn some flesh away,
Which all this while had bled; and now he fainted,
And cried, in fainting, upon Rosalind.
Brief, I recover'd him, bound up his wound;
And, after some small space, being strong at heart,
He sent me hither, stranger as I am,
To tell this story, that you might excuse
His broken promise; and to give this napkin,
Dy'd in his blood, unto the shepherd youth
That he in sport doth call his Rosalind.