Moon-Crossed

a play in play with All's Well That Ends Well

by
Kendra Preston Leonard
Playwright’s Note

*Moon-Crossed* was originally written as an entry for the American Shakespeare Center’s “Shakespeare’s New Contemporaries” competition. Each year, the ASC selects five of Shakespeare’s plays; playwrights then choose one to use as an inspiration or basis for their new work, responding to, parodying, or otherwise engaging with the work. For the 2019 competition, one of the plays was the “problem play” *All’s Well That Ends Well*. Ostensibly a comedy, *All’s Well* has long been considered problematic: it includes nonsensical, “fairy-tale” logic; a forced marriage; a bed-trick, in which Bertram is fooled into sleeping with Helena without his consent; and a strangely abrupt ending in which Bertram’s loathing of Helena suddenly becomes love.

As I thought about ideas for addressing the play, it occurred to me that I could employ several tropes from both the early modern period and the present. Why does Bertram hate Helena so? Clearly, she’s a monster. In making her a real monster, I was able to take into consideration early modern beliefs about women’s monstrosity and men’s fears of women as unnatural, enigmatic, and devious. It also allowed me to consider the ways in which women’s power and influence is used in early modern drama: Helena, Madame Capilet, and Diana must all resort to some levels of cunning to survive, as were many women during the period, and are frank about the roles their wealth, bodies, and minds play in that use of power. Finally, by making Helena a real monster, I could bring humor into an otherwise mostly humorless play. The recent popularity of works like *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* and *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter* made it clear to me that there was plenty of room for werewolves in Shakespeare, and noble werewolves at that.

*Moon-Crossed* also let me play with lines and ideas from *All’s Well That Ends Well*, other Shakespeare plays, and medieval and early modern writings. Many lines come directly from *All’s Well That Ends Well*; other text comes from or is in reference to *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the King James Bible; and Marie de France’s “Bisclavret.” Other influences and references come from Charles Perrault’s fairy tales; the concept of “ghost characters,” who appear in lists of roles but have no spoken lines; the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Firefly*; Billie Holiday; Warren Zevon; Shakira; and Charles Addams.

In keeping with the ASC’s practices of universal lighting and minimal staging, *Moon-Crossed* needs no costumes or lighting equipment and only a few props.

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Kendra Preston Leonard
10 September 2019
Casting Note: I am committed to diversity on the stage. Thus all roles can be played by actors of all genders, races, ages, body types, and status in regard to disability. That said, the play relies on certain gender presentations in response to those used in All's Well That Ends Well, particularly the central issue of the woman—Helena—as monstrous, and so I have listed genders for the characters to correspond with that. Ages likewise provide a guideline, not a fixed need.

List of Characters
COUNTESS DE ROUSILLON, a noblewoman (female, 45-70)
BERTRAM, her son and Count de Rousillon (male, 20-30)
LAVATCH, a clown in the de Rousillon household (male, female, or non-binary, 20-85)
GARNIER, a person in service to the de Rousillon household (male, female, or non-binary, 35-45)
HELENA DE NARBON, a young woman protected by the COUNTESS (female, 20-30)
PAROLLES, a follower of BERTRAM (male, 20-40)
VIOLENTA, a ghost (female, 20-40)
KING OF FRANCE (male, 40-60)
A LORD, attendant to the KING (male, female, or nonbinary, 30-65)
DUKE OF FLORENCE (male or female (as Duchess), 45-65)
MADAME CAPILET, a widow of Florence (female, 45-70)
DIANA, her daughter (female, 20-30)

List of Scenes
Act 2. Scene 1. Rousillon. The COUNT’s palace.
Act 3. Scene 2. Florence. The home of MADAME CAPILET.
Act 4. Scene 2. The DUKE’s palace.
Act 5. Scene 1. A room in the COUNT’s palace.
Act 5. Scene 2. A room in the COUNT’s palace.
Act 5. Scene 4. In the foyer of the COUNT’s palace.
Epilogue
Act 1.
Scene 1. Rousillon. The COUNT’s palace.

Enter the COUNTESS and BERTRAM. It is clear that they have been arguing and continue to do so.

BERTRAM
–I do not care what you think or desire, I will not marry her!

COUNTESS
You need a wife, now that you are become the Count of this place. Helena loves you and would serve you well; she is well-read, speaks prettily, is gentle and kind, knows of the healing arts from her father-doctor—

BERTRAM
The healing arts? Her father? Did you know him, madam?

COUNTESS
Indeed I did, he cured Garnier of the fever and his lady wife midwifed you from my body!

BERTRAM
We are both lucky to be alive, then! And all the better reason for me to leave to attend the King. You, madam, you should leave as well. Take that clown Lavatch and your women and go abroad or someplace you are safe and Helena cannot find you.

COUNTESS
Cannot find me? But she is my ward! I do not understand your animosity towards Helena, Bertram. Perhaps you do not like her; I know you think she is too poor and not noble enough for you, although neither is an impediment to a good match. Fine. But why abandon her? How could I possibly leave her here? That would negate all of my compassion in taking her in. Why should I do that, and even if I did, what would I say to explain it?

BERTRAM
Anything you like! Or tell people the truth: that Helena is the child of a monster,
that she is a monster herself.

COUNTESS

A monster? She is no monster, Bertram.
She is the same as any lady in this town.
You would be in her place, fostered by another,
if your father had died earlier and
I followed so hard on his heels as did
her mother and father.

BERTRAM

And I thank God that you did not.
But it is not the same at all.
I am a normal, human being.
Helena is—something else. As was her mother.

COUNTESS

I knew them, Bertram, I knew her parents.
This idea of yours is mad. Why are
you saying such things? Has Helena
s slighted you in some way? Refused an advance
too harshly made? Tell me what makes you say
these things about people I knew, and their
only child, whom I am sworn to protect.

BERTRAM

You do not seem to have known them at all!
Do you know why they are dead, why Helena
has come into this house?

COUNTESS

You know why as well as I do!
Her mother died of a wretched illness
her father for all his learning could not
cure, and he fell into a terrible
melancholy. He became ill from his sorrow
and wasted away. There were no relatives
for Helena to go to, and so
having known her parents and as part of
my moral duty, I offered to protect
their child and become her guardian.
You were there, you’ve seen the documents.

BERTRAM

An illness he could not cure? Oh, that’s the truth,
her illness was one none could cure, for she
was an unnatural creature. But that’s not
how she died. She was hunted down; they tracked her,
like an animal, because she was one. She was shot, out in the forest, shot and stabbed and her heart removed and burnt, and her body brought home and placed in bed and it was given out to all the world that she died of illness. It fooled almost everyone, but I know the truth.

COUNTESS

Bertram, how can you slander her so, and in such gruesome detail? You are overwrought—with grief for your father, with concern for your duties. Calm yourself, my son, and think with a rational mind. The town midwife—the respectable wife of the respectable doctor—was not some sort of creature from an ancient map.

BERTRAM

I am not irrational, and I tell you, monsters are no fantasy of my—or anyone else’s—mind. And that is no gentle and kind girl that you have brought here: her mother’s blood is all too rich in her. She is as monstrous as the Monsters of Ravenna or Bologna, but worse in that she looks like any other woman and lives among us.

COUNTESS (incredulous)

I do not know how you can believe any of this. What is your proof?

BERTRAM

Oh, proof! I have proof. Have you not noted how she secludes herself away some days each month? And how she dismisses her waiting-women then? How dark her room and how heavy the curtains?

COUNTESS

You are enough of this world to know that some women engage in such seclusion, and why. It is nothing but that she is pained more than others and wishes privacy then. No woman is a monster for having a woman’s courses.

BERTRAM
No, no, this is not like other women. She is hiding something beyond her natural women’s custom. Her door is always locked tight but her windows are always open during that time, even in the coldest winter, and I have seen signs of animals leading to and from her window into the forest.

COUNTESS
And so you think she is...what? A hunter?
You see the natural marks where snow falls from the roof.

BERTRAM
The maid tells me her hands are sometimes calloused and rough, as if she walks on them, and yet other times smooth, all corresponding with a lunar schedule; says that her feet bear ulcers from running on the ground without shoes, but these too heal quickly without medicine; reports her laundry is bloody, yes, but it is the blood and fur of animals, of butchering, of eating—

COUNTESS
This is wild and wretched!

BERTRAM (ignoring her)
She sucks marrow from the bones of deer and boar, daintily, yes, but with vigor; when she smiles, her teeth are long and sharp; when she speaks, her voice is low and monstrous. Have you not seen the shadows on her cheeks, where she cuts away hair? How her brows met together above her nose, although now she appears to pluck them apart?

COUNTESS
Is this why you shun her? Women, as men, grow hair, Bertram, some on their faces. But I have never noticed Helena thus.

BERTRAM (continuing, insistent)
Do you not pay attention? She is always thirsty and often drinks cow’s milk; she wears those spectacles because when she is in her human form her vision is weak and her eyes unnatural; when you take her hand, again, look! Her third finger is longer than the middle one.
COUNTESS (loudly)
I will hear no more of this. Your mind is
poisoned by your father’s death, by loss,
by morbid fancy. Helena is no monster.
She is like a child to me; I would you
loved her even half as well. Take your leave,
as you wish, but I will stay; when you return,
perhaps this fantastical idea
will have been cleansed from your mind.

Enter PAROLLES, knocking as he enters. BERTRAM, startled by the knocks, comes out of his intense state.

PAROLLES
My lord, my lady. My lord, you sent for me?

BERTRAM
A good half hour ago. What news?

PAROLLES
It is urgent: the king’s health still fails
and now he has sent his physicians away.
We are ready to travel. I have checked
the calendar; we are safe to ride all day
and through the night, as the moon wanes until we
will reach Paris. I have made arrangements
for fresh horses along the way.

COUNTESS
What has the moon to do with your travel?
The road is old and clear; the servants can
carry lights, if you are in such a hurry
that you must travel overnight.

PAROLLES
We travel with utmost haste to the King,
madam, having stayed here to see your lord
with all due respects buried, and there is
a wild beast in your woods. Come, sir.

Exit BERTRAM and PAROLLES.

COUNTESS
A wild beast! The moon! What is this lunacy—
which it truly is!—that affects them?
Bertram’s ravings were of a madman, and
Parolles seems to believe the same reports.
Where are they getting these ideas?
Enter HELENA and GARNIER.

COUNTESS
My dear Helena, now you leave me too,
and so all my chicks leave the nest at once.
Now that I am resigned to your journey,
Helena, I find myself interested
in every detail. Are you prepared for
your trip? Have you all that you need and want?
Garnier, is she properly outfitted?

HELENA
I am, good lady. I have gathered
my father’s supplies and books, and the good
Garnier has assisted me in providing me
with fresh herbs and provisions from his own gardens.
I am sorry to take your leave, but if
I can save the king, or even ease his pain,
it is my duty to do so.

COUNTESS
Of course it is. My thanks, Garnier.
Farewell, Helena.
I will look for you with news of the King,
restored and well.

Exit HELENA.

COUNTESS
Before you go, Garnier — Bertram and his
foolish follower spoke of danger in
the woods and on the road. Parolles I know
to be a liar and flatterer, but
my son’s sudden belief in things irrational
is new to me.

GARNIER
There are always stories, madam, and the
townspeople do seem to seize fast upon
grisly legends. Only recently some
have decided to transform the doctor’s
wife into a secret monster, of which
I assume your son speaks.

COUNTESS
I suspect it is no more than Bertram
feeling slighted by my recent attention to Helena; and that fear that many men have of intelligent, clever women. The idea that women are monsters is as old as time, I fear, and unfortunate births like those of Ravenna spur on disgust rather than pity.

GARNIER

Still, fantastical rumors may conceal truthful worries. I once heard reports of a man who feigned madness to escape the wrath of his father’s illegitimate son, living in hovels and seemingly in league with demons.

COUNTESS

Will you investigate this for me, then? If I am to rule while Bertram is away, I must know what is being said and done. Superstitious fears are always dangerous. I give you leave to ask any questions of any person. Report to me what you find. But first, come and dine with me.

*They exit.*

**Act 1.**

**Scene 2. Paris. A room in the KING’s palace.**

*Enter Helena, carrying satchels. She empties them onto a table, revealing bottles of liquids and powders, a couple of old books, and a case of implements. She takes out a knife and a spoon from the case and is beginning to mix things together with the spoon, consulting a book.*

**VIOLENTA enters. A ghost, she can only be seen by Helena.**

**VIOLENTA**

Mistress, a man comes this way. He skulks and hopes not to be seen, and he smells like fear and hatred.

**HELENA**

Thank you, sweet spirit. I wish I could lift the bond that keeps you in this place, but I cannot wish I had never made your acquaintance.

**VIOLENTA**

So few know my presence; it is a relief
to talk with anyone, and with you a delight.

HELENA

It is my relief to talk with one not afraid of me, nor for whom I must feign being other than myself. Of every being in this place, you perhaps know best the belief: *Omnes angeli, boni et Mali, ex virtute naturali habent potestatem transmutandi corpora nostra.*

VIOLENTA (slowly at first, working out the translation) “All angels, both good and evil, have the ability to transmute our bodies.” [she laughs and gestures to herself]

And so they do, although I cannot claim I was so changed. I have never seen an angel.

HELENA

Nor I, yet here we are!

VIOLENTA

Shh! He approaches.

*Enter PAROLLES.*

PAROLLES (trying to be light and funny) Little Helen, who seeks my master’s heart.

HELENA

Little Parolles, who seeks his money. I am busy, Parolles, serving my monarch, so unless you bring word from your master, I must ask that you not distract me.

PAROLLES

Did I not surprise you, finding you here all by yourself? Little Helen, my master does not even know yet that you are here, much less making potions for the King. Do you hope to sway him through the heroism of healing the dying royal? Shhhh— I will not tell your secrets. Or perhaps you are here to work magic on my master and the King both?

HELENA

I am a doctor’s daughter and I am here to restore the King’s health. I have no nefarious plans and no plans at all
that I would share with you. Pray, leave me to work.

PAROLLES (pawing through her things)

No fancy silver knife?

HELENA

Silver tarnishes, as well you know.

PAROLLES

Ah, an arrow remover. Ugh, what’s this?

HELENA

A tom cat’s tail. Said to be good for styes.
I am busy, Parolles, please deliver
whatever message you have and go.

PAROLLES

No monkshood? No hellebore? Rosemary,
anise, catnip. Are you a cat doctor
or a human one? What’s catnip for, save to
relieve a cat of his melancholy?
What is this ugly sprout, to cause
indigestion or nightmares?

HELENA

Catnip helps sufferers of poor lungs to breathe.
And that is yarrow, to treat the bites of
mad dogs. Are you one? Should I dose myself?
or do I need the arms of strong men to
remove you from my workplace? Here, take a
leaf of mint before you go, to sweeten
your breath before you speak again to my
beloved.

VIOLENTA puts her hands against Parolles's cheeks.

PAROLLES (startled)

What witchcraft is this? My face suddenly
feels like ice.

HELENA

There is a draft, Parolles, and this room helps
keep the medicines cool. What is it you want?
Are you in need of physicking? Come to
the point of your visit.

PAROLLES (with sudden intensity)

You are an unnatural thing. Why are you here?
What are you doing? What are you? I will be
HELENA

I seek only to help the King. All this is my father's, he who once treated your own family.

PAROLLES

Why do this? What would you gain?

HELENA

Is not the health of the King enough? Or do you not want him to recover, for some nefarious plot of your own?

PAROLLES

I will tell the King about you—that you cannot be trusted, that you are no woman, but a monster!

_Exit PAROLLES_; _VIOLENTA looks after him to watch him go._

VIOLENTA

He’s gone.

_HELENA picks up the knife._

HELENA

No doubt to tell Bertram and the King wild tales of floating alembics and flowers dancing in the air. Well, better that than anything else, I suppose.

VIOLENTA

Oh mistress, you will marry him, I am sure. The King will make it so, when you heal him, and your Count will come to know your power and grace and love you as well.

HELENA

If only ghosts were prophets! I hope Bertram will understand, as he wishes I were more noble. Once he knows my lineage, surely he will find new respect for me. Now guard the door for me. I will call you back in.
HELENA pushes up a sleeve and cuts her arm. She forces a small bit of blood into a vial, then cleans up and bandages her arm and pulls her sleeve back down. She stoppers the vial and shakes it and puts it on the table. She cleans the knife and puts it in the case, and closes the case.

HELENA

Done now. Thank you for your help.

VIOLENTA

The King will be as good as new, won’t he, mistress? A bit of what’s in your blood should add years to his life, children to his years, and strength to them all. Call on me anytime; I am always here.

HELENA, carrying the vial, and VIOLENTA exit.

Act 1.

The KING is in bed.
Enter LORD.

KING

What now? I have only just taken the medicine de Narbon’s daughter brought me.

LORD

A man seeks an audience, sir, about that very medicine.

KING

What man? If he wishes medicine of his own, he may go find Mistress de Narbon himself. She is a kind and generous sort, and will surely make for him a cure for his ailment.

LORD

He is emphatic, sir, and says he must speak with you.

Enter PAROLLES.

PAROLLES

Your majesty, please give me leave. This elixir you have taken, it is foul, it will bring you death—
KING
Who is this? Why do you disturb my recovery?

LORD
He is called Parolles, sir, a hanger-on to the Count de Rousillon.

PAROLLES
Sir, forgive my impudence, but I must tell you: who you call the Mistress de Narbon is a dangerous, unnatural creature!

KING
What nonsense speak you? She has worked to heal me—

Enter VIOLENTA. She goes to PAROLLES and begins to dance around him in a circle, moving the air. He looks about, a bit wildly, then refocuses on the KING.

KING
—and whom I will honor as I pledged. Look, I am increasingly well!

The KING gets up out of bed.

PAROLLES
Please, hear me. (He tries to regroup) She is of an unusual extraction—

KING
We know her parentage, and in addition, I do not care if they were conversos or Moors or Hindus.

PAROLLES (sensing something unseen around him)
It is not that, sir, but—do you not feel the cold air, sir? She has magicked you, she is a danger to your entire court—

Behind the KING and the LORD and facing PAROLLES, VIOLENTA lifts up the KING’s sheets and waves them about.

PAROLLES (frightened)
Look! Look! Behind you! She has conjured an unnatural spirit even here in your chambers.

VIOLENTA drops the sheet and begins circling PAROLLES again, touching him lightly around his face and arms. PAROLLES turns this way and that, panic growing in him. The KING and LORD look behind them and, seeing nothing, give each other knowing looks.
PAROLLES
Here, there, here—it is sorcery! The cold, these feelings of ice on my face—!

LORD
This is absurd. My lord, I am sorry. I will remove this man. He must have a fever, an ague. He should not be near you.

KING
Take him away, and keep a watch on him til this fever-dream has passed from him. And call Mistress de Narbon and return yourself to me.

*The LORD takes PAROLLES’S arm and marches him out. VIOLENTA follows them. The KING sits on the bed.*

*Enter the LORD and HELENA.*

HELENA—yes, he is most unpleasant and odd.

LORD
He will not disturb you again, sir. How fares your majesty? I have brought to you the healer, as you requested.

KING
But look! *(rising)* I am entirely well, made complete again by the good doctor de Narbon and what he left to his daughter in thought and material. Your cure has worked where so many others failed, and I must question you to satisfy my curiosity. I feel as though a young stag has entered my body and that my mind is refreshed as if a fog has been burnt away. How did you treat me?

HELENA
Only what my father’s herbals and notes directed me: a tincture to help the blood increase and wounds to knit. It is what I would give any soldier injured in the field, or, if you will not take offense, any woman who has given birth.
KING
Offense? None at all. I have seen women, even my own wife, grievously hurt in the battle to bring new soldiers to the world. But come now, each ingredient, please, that we might all know and that my lords might be satisfied that you have not secretly poisoned me.

HELENA
I would no more poison you, sir, than myself, as your health is tied to my life. There are cloves, and mugwort, and saffron, and Achillea, this last being a very noble healing herb; and wine and marrow….

KING
Is that all? Eh? There must be more, or a method! I had sent my own physicians away and here you come with simples and wine and the bones of a deer?

HELENA
And an ingredient my father labeled only as “iron of the woods,” which I believe is a mushroom, one in very short supply. Upon my return home, I will seek out more of it to send to you, your majesty.

KING
I would be glad of it, and offer you generous remembrances beyond our first agreement.

LORD
Most amazing! But what was the agreement you made?

KING
Why, she very bravely bet her own life against mine. I told her: “Thy physic I will try, that ministers thine own death if I die.”

HELENA
This you did swear, and I agreed. I seek no more than what our agreement stated. But is there something else you require, having brought me here?
KING

My lord, go prepare the court. I will come in good time to make plain the reward for Mistress de Narbon’s good work.

Exit LORD.

KING

Now, let me speak most freely. I am a soldier and I have fought in battle, and I have tasted the iron of blood. Do not argue: there was blood in that elixir.

HELENA

Your majesty, I do not know—

KING

Stop, Helena. I have filled my court with intelligent and learned men, and I am well educated myself. And a potion such as you gave me is a very particular one. The truth, please. I pledge not to harm you unless you show yourself a threat to me.

HELENA

Sir, I am no threat, this I promise. But it is true that I am descended, in my mother’s line, from Bisclavret. [a little panicky] Please remember, sire, how my ancestor did serve his king. Blood of that line is a powerful healer, but this we do not often share for fear of being slaughtered for it. Indeed, the blood must be taken while we are still living, and then only a small amount every seven days, else it does not work.

KING

I do remember this; the legend says he was a loyal and noble man. I did not know his line persisted, or that it had fallen from nobility. Do not be afraid; I will honor my promises to you and tell no one, as you have managed to keep this secret for so long. Your blood has made me strong! [pauses]
I trust it will not cause transformation?

HELENA

No, my lord; the remainder of the tincture prevents it. My father created it; he tested it himself many times.

KING

Such bravery in a single family.
Was he never afraid of your mother?

HELENA

He revered my mother through whose veins the strength runs, never fearing or reviling her as others might have done. He knew her lineage before they were wed and their union was a happy one, despite the poverty of her family, one of many branches that have lost the use of a title.

KING

A kind soul!
Many men would have looked upon such a woman and seen only monstrosity.
Come then, we will reward you.

Exit the KING and HELENA.

Act 2.
Scene 1. Rousillon. The COUNT’s palace.

Enter the COUNTESS and LAVATCH, who carries a lute or similar stringed instrument.

COUNTESS

And where have you been, sly fool? Off in the village with the innkeeper’s girls?

LAVATCH

You flatter me, madam, as he has six and there is but one of me, and they do say I am a butt indeed, so I never get anywhere with them but am always on the bottom.

COUNTESS

Silly fool. What good news or bad news?
Alone here, I relish both and will take
what I can get.

LAVATCH

Oh, there’s plenty to be had. Shall you have
a joke or a song or a very bawdy
story about a monk and—

COUNTESS

A song, Lavatch, would be lovely. I think
I’ve heard all of your jokes and the monk story besides;
you should endeavor to find new material.

LAVATCH

I will, madam, go bawdy hunting at
your command this very evening. Now, in
the town there is speculation that would
fill a broadside with ballads….

(begins to play Warren Zevon’s ‘Werewolves of London’; singing)
I saw a dark shape with some big teeth in the woods
walking like it’s hunting in the dark
It was looking for some prey of the peasant child type
gonna make a good meal of the Perrault twins….

GARNIER enters; Lavatch stops.

COUNTESS

My lord, welcome. Have you news of the rumors in the village?

GARNIER

I do, madam, and they are odd indeed.

COUNTESS

I believe Lavatch was just alluding to some of them. Come, tell us.

GARNIER

I have spoken with neighbors of the doctor
and his family, and farmers and hunters.
It is true that Madame de Narbon seemed
a bit odd: neighbors say she kept quite
irregular hours, although that could be
explained by her midwifery, but she
also traveled, it seems, about once a
month. She would go away for several days
and the doctor only ever said she
was attending patients.

COUNTESS
That is a lot of “seems” and not a lot of anything very odd, Garnier.

GARNIER
No, perhaps not. But old Madame Cardot, the falconer's widow, said she saw Madame de Narbon twice coming from the woods wearing clothes smeared with blood, and wet, as if she had tried to bathe in a stream. Once she was accompanied by her daughter, your ward, who also bore spots on her dress where something had stained it.

COUNTESS
She was a midwife; I am sure her daughter sometimes assisted her. Still none of this is very odd.

GARNIER
Hear me out: there is more. Madame Cardot recalled that these were not times when a birth occurred in the town or at any of the farms, that both followed upon the full moon, and her son oft noted the absence of small game in the woods for many years now.

LAVATCH (speaking)
Oh, he’s a terrible shot, that one. He’s covering for his inability to hit a deer in full daylight. In fact, I’d wager he couldn’t hit a cabbage at twenty paces.

GARNIER
Perhaps. But both the old woman and her son have observed strange creatures in the woods at the same time the midwife was “away.” And it is not just they who associated the late Madame de Narbon with woodland animals at the full moon. Others who have reason to be in the woods—your own huntsman, Ollier, and the fur-trapper Philidor—spoke of strange beasts sometime in the forest. They are not always there, but three or four days beginning with the full moon.

COUNTESS
This seems a tale from legend or for children, but that Ollier should speak of it….
LAVATCH (singing)
Full moon, you do make me a fool—

GARNIER
A sedgerer working by the forest’s edge tells a similar story, having seen two oddly moving creatures at last hunter’s moon. He supposed them injured wolves, or large dogs, and reported it to Ollier, but the huntsman could not find or track them. The sedgerer’s apprentice, Old Tremblay’s boy, claims he saw a furred animal and a smaller one bed down in the doctor’s own garden, there on the Chemin de la Mute, but he has also claimed to see fairies dancing in the Val des Fées.

LAVATCH (speaking)
There is a reason it’s called the Valley of Fairies, esteemed sir. But to the point: what you are trying to say, sir, is that either Madame Cardot, the young Count, and several whom you interviewed, are lunatics, or the kind and gentle Helena’s mother was— and Helena herself is—

COUNTESS and GARNIER
—a loup-garou.

LAVATCH
[makes howling noise until COUNTESS looks at him to silence him]

GARNIER
Yes. It sounds outlandish, I know. I sound addled with drink or the sun or some other madness, but this is what I have learned. And it is true that Helena bears marks of the wolf—her maid has mentioned calluses and wounds on her hands and feet that appear after the full moon and heal rapidly, beyond normal healing, or even that of a doctor. The maid also says that Helena keeps a sharp razor hidden among her effects, which the maid believes Helena uses to remove hair much as a man might.
COUNTESS
This is a grave matter indeed—perhaps
a poor choice of words—but I will hear none
of your feeble jokes, Lavatch. Quickly, paper
and pen. I must write at once with warnings—

Exit COUNTESS, LAVATCH, and GARNIER.

Act 2.

Enter BERTRAM and PAROLLES.

PAROLLES (as they enter)
The king has done you wrong: but, hush, ’tis so.

BERTRAM
Well, you have witnessed my declaration:
ever will I bed her, nor shall ever
she wear my ring on her loathsome claws. Go
and seek the Florentine spy, Parolles, so
that we may plot with him to travel
unseen and untracked to Florence.

PAROLLES
Will not your newly-wedded Helena
track us easily? Is her own nose not
knowing, given her woodland episodes?

BERTRAM
I do not think so, not as she is now.
What says the calendar?

PAROLLES
I check it now daily, sir; the moon is
just waxing gibbous, and we should well make
Florence before any danger comes from
your bride.

BERTRAM
Call her not—nor ever— my bride!
She is a foul beast and I repent
I did not leave my mother’s house secretly,
that she may not have followed us here.

PAROLLES
The good lord Lafeu, who knows your family well,
seeks on your behalf to have her sent back
to Rousillon; he will escort her there
even as we head in the opposite direction.
I passed him now in the hall, and have this
(pulls out a note)
received from him.

BERTRAM
What says he, then? What are his exact plans?

PAROLLES (reading)
“...I thought not to have seen you again,
but your lady wife—the lady whom I
am to accompany—
now says she will stay on here for a week
er we may depart. She is coy and will not
give me a full reason why, but to remain
in the company of some ladies she
has here befriended. After, I will fulfill
our agreement and return with her to
the Countess Dowager, where she will await
whatever arrangements you make for her.”

BERTRAM
Excellent news, for which I give thanks.
We may now travel without fear of her
following in any form. Parolles, you
told him to take pains to keep himself
safe in the transporting of her, did you not?

PAROLLES
Allow me, sir, to read on, and you will
learn the answer to that very question,
of which, sir, how dare you ask it of your
loyal Parolles? But yes, I did tell him thus:
What rumors of her being you may have
heard I can confirm as true almost as well
as I deem myself a man of the Count;
while I have not seen her in her state of
monstrosity, doubt not that it is a
dangerous one and that which chills the blood
er e it make it run.

BERTRAM
Did he believe you? Will he be well-protected?

PAROLLES (reading)
“Of her monstrous self I have heard, my lord,
but never in such confirming terms than
from your man Parolles. I will at once go
ask the King for a heavy guard on the basis
that she is not only now a sight for
brigands who would ransom her for your purse
but also a healer of such renown
that she might be spirited away by
those in desperation for a doctor
of some kind and take her into the hill-country.”

BERTRAM
A clever man, that Lafeu. God bless him.
Now, Parolles, seek out that Florentine, and
let us make plans. I would be on the road
with the sun.

Act 2.

Enter HELENA and VIOLENTA.

VIOLENTA
Mistress, were that I still had a heart that
could beat and stop, I would rend it for you.
You are unfairly treated by the Count,
for no reason one can ascertain.

HELENA
I must find some way of making this marriage
be one in truth. How I can love a man
who does not love me in return, I do
not understand, but yet my heart pleads
against my very own wits and I find
myself feeling as though I were hollow
when I think of how he speaks against me.
And yet I know I should now swallow this
humiliation—here, cool my flaming
face with your glacial hands—and depart from him
never to look upon him again, for
my psyche is so bruised as it may never heal.

VIOLENTA
The Countess wrote to you with love for you
as her daughter; can she not assist?
Can you not love another? The court is
full of intelligent and capable men.

HELENA
Perhaps one day, but one so far off in
the future no calendar can yet know
its name. I have given him no reason
for his scorn for me: I have been mild and
sweet and gentle. He knows nothing of my
sometimes-other self, nor would he ever
need to know. But now we are wed, and I
must make this marriage function.

VIOLENTA

His man, though, the one that came to interrupt
your work for the King—he’s the gossiping type.
Would he have poisoned the young Count’s mind against you,
with scandalous tales that question your
virtue or worth?

HELENA

Oh, Parolles is that type indeed.
He slithers and slips around Bertram
as if my beloved were Medusa,
and he unable to part from her snakes.
He could well have—(she stops short) Oh, Violenta.

VIOLENTA

What is it?

HELENA

Do you remember?
Before you helped to rid me of him,
Parolles asked of my work. He asked about
silver, and he asked about yarrow.
Could he suspect? As you have seen,
I cannot wear silver or even touch it
for more than the briefest of moments ere
it begins its burning of my skin.
And monkshood and hellebore—the former
is also called wolfsbane and said to protect
against my type. The latter is a poison
that will burn the skin of any person,
but sprinkled on or rubbed against mine,
it would leave burns the like of which only
the hottest fires create. Oh, Violenta,
what if he suspects? What if he knows?
What if Bertram removes himself from me
because he fears me?

VIOLENTA

Then you must show him that there is no reason
to fear. But how can that be done? The King
knows of your traits. What of others of your line, or other lines from Bisclavret?

HELENA

The king, while knowing, would never admit his knowledge lest the belief cause a panic among his men or even through the nation. We survive because we are so few: not in numbers great enough to threaten the crown, but enough to serve as healers or hunters or spies by those who keep the secret of our existence safe.

VIOLENTA

Give me but a moment, mistress, to put my ear to the court’s movements. Perhaps we can find a way.

Exit VIOLENTA.

HELENA

Oh, that I could bleed away this troublesome lineage, and all that makes me feared; that my hands grew not long and tipped with claws as sharp as arrowheads; that I were still of my courageous mother and gracious father but lacking in the power of transformation, such is my burden to bear. And bear it I do, a wolf-skin that can never be removed, or is it a human-skin that I must endure? In truth I often do not know, for my human part in the company of humans does make me wish to be in the company of wolves; yet in my wolf-skin I miss that which is human in my life: good company and music and books. What I gain in wolf’s power—eyesight and brawn and hearing and freedom—I do lose as a woman. And as a woman I surpass the wolf in wit and learning and grace—ah! if only I had a bit more of that, it would be a nice blessing. Perhaps Bertram will never love me and I should flee to the nearest wood and there remain always and resolve to never take on human skin again; but oh I do love him and admire him despite his callous words; perhaps love is not part
of his repertoire as yet, but is waiting
to be learned or composed within him.
I must hope and name this latter my hope,
and try once more to gain his respect;
or else to the woods I shall truly go.

*Enter VIOLENTA, gleefully.*

HELENA

Sweet ghost, what news?

VIOLENTA

You may be amazed, as the King will be,
for the Count and his companion this very
minute meet with a spy of Florence.
They propose to proffer themselves to the
Duke there in aid to his current war.

HELENA

Another journey. (*Begins counting on her fingers*) To Rousillon, then,
when the objurate moon has come and gone.
May the Countess help guide me in my quest:
to win Bertram’s love and bear him a child.

VIOLENTA

My good friend, do not despair. There is more
news to be had that will both delight and
surprise you, for the spy himself is one
of your unique kind.

HELENA

Of my kind? He is—no! Do you mean, truly,
that he is of the Bisclavret bloodline?
How is’t possible? Bertram and Parolles
swear themselves to a duchy served by a
man just like me?

VIOLENTA

Yes! I can ascertain the presence of those
not entirely of the human world,
fairies and ghosts and *les vampires*, and of
those like you as well, mistress. Mayhap he
is an angel in disguise, sent to the Count
to show him the way to your wedded bliss.

HELENA

Angels, in faith! Tell me, what else?
VIOLENTA

The Florentine proposes the Count and Parolles accompany him immediately to Florence to join the Duke's service there. (pause) What is the moon tonight?

HELENA

Waxing gibbous. They have enough time to reach Florence before the spy must concern himself with concealment or a reason for his absence. I cannot get to Rousillon in that time, but must go there first and thence to Italy. How might we delay them?

VIOLENTA

The King ordered Parolles to be watched for fever, but the Count has had him released. Parolles is very susceptible to me; I could make him mad, for a short while. And I could speak with the spy: perhaps he, knowing of your plight, will postpone their leave.

HELENA

Anything to keep them here; I must speak with the Countess and arrive in Florence if even by a single day ahead of them. Oh, blessed ghost, you have been transformed not just by an angel, but most like into one! You have given me hope.

Act 2.
Scene 4. Rousillon. The COUNT’s palace.

Enter the COUNTESS, HELENA, and GARNIER.

GARNIER

Madam, I am amazed by what you say. The Count did warn me about this kind lady, defining her to me as monstrous. But I have escorted her here from where Lafeu left off from her care by the woods, having neither seen nor heard any such, and you welcome her as your own.

COUNTESS

That I do, my good sir, as she is nearer to me now than was my son who has
badly abused her. My dear Helena, have you the letter I sent?

HELENA

I do, madam. I keep it with me, as I do the letter your son gave me before quitting the court.

COUNTESS

Give it to the lord here; let him read it. He will then even more understand my son’s fears and see my confidence in you.

HELENA hands the letter to GARNIER, who reads it silently.

GARNIER (looking up at the COUNTESS and HELENA)

I am astonished, my lady, and my lady. True, this is why the Count fears your presence, and why he has fled the King’s court to the Duke of Florence, where his plan is that war shall engage him so entirely that he can forget about who and what you are. But clearly you are no threat: you have healed the King, and received his love and his ring as a token of his admiration for you, even full knowing your heritage; you spent the full of the moon at court too. And we have come here, with nothing but peace and pleasantness on the way. What I have said or believed in the past, I render up as false and narrow-minded. It is my wish that you will both forgive me, and allow me to be of further use as you require.

COUNTESS

My good Garnier, we will forge Helena’s demise at her own hand, and you shall to Florence with this news for my son and his attendants, who will spread it widely. For myself, I will act it true and my emotions will to her death testify. Helena herself shall also to Florence, where with my old friend, the widow Capilet, who despite her status still holds the ear of the Duke, from past service done for him, and secrets long kept for him, discover a method for educating my wayward, benighted, and spineless son.
Act 3.
Scene 1. Florence. The DUKE’s court.

Enter DUKE, BERTRAM, and PAROLLES.

DUKE
My thanks, friends, for your support in this my endeavor. But for the loss of a drum you have acquitted yourselves well, not being soldiers or men of war and untested. I am sure you look now to the fair city rather than the fields of battle for your entertainment. I myself am prepared for a brief respite while the moon becomes full-sailed and my best troops avail themselves of the powers it brings.

BERTRAM
My lord, do your men not fear the time of the full moon? For in France we mark it carefully as a time when even battles cease lest the beasts whom the moon does transform come forth from forests dark to ravage and sup on them all, from luggage boys to highest rank.

DUKE
Fear? Why, never, for my forces imbibe the moon’s strength and, as all of the ancient line, yet still retain their loyalty to me and mine. Was it not in France that the great Bisclavret did once serve his lord so? Is his lineage fallen there? For here in Florence and in the other great cities and states we do honor and, yea, cultivate those in whose bodies the wondrous rich blood of transformation flows.

PAROLLES
Sir, you jest with us, perhaps knowing of the woman whom we avoid even to the point of dishonor, the woman who was appointed my master’s wife but who is one of these monstrous ones. Your humor is flat, sir: such persons should be evidenced before the law and rightly put to death, or at the very least sent into distant exile, for the safety of all.
BERTRAM

Sure it is my incomplete marriage and
never-bride to which the Duke now refers.
Is’t not so, sir? I admit, though perhaps
it unman me, that I am frightened of
she who is my wife and will not countenance
being near her, much less make our marriage
one in truth. Gods! To think of a child born
of such a union, a child that might—would!—
continue in its mother’s monstrous and
four-footed path. I suppose it is funny,
my lord, but you have not, I wager, known
the devastation such beasts cause under
your vaunted full moon, and so I do beg you,
sir, to leave off with the jokes at my expense.

DUKE

Of your personal and household matters
I know nothing, but impress upon you
that I do not laugh at your expense, but
do pity your sad ignorance and fear.
The very man who brought you to me is
of the Bisclavret line. I suppose he
told you nothing of this, if he knew of
your fears, but he is one of my very
best, and his family has served mine for
six generations. You say your fear
cannot be overcome, but I will teach
you well ere you depart my service.
In two nights you shall go with my soldiers
and witness their power but also their control,
for while their skins may be wolfish and their
mouths unable to speak, their minds are sharp
and they know my enemies from my friends.

Exit DUKE.

BERTRAM

How can this be? He is a learned man,
an honest and truthful fellow, and he
keeps at his command a faction of these loup-garoux,
without concern, without trepidation?
Is he among them, one of their strange ranks?
What is his motivation in this act?
Faith, he does not appear to encourage
indiscriminate slaughter of his foes
or of his own people, and even claims
to support their continuance, as if
he were a breeder of such rare wolf-kin.

PAROLLES

These are dark doings by the Duke; if his plans are wicked, we must divine more knowledge to take to higher authorities. Let's with his infernal band to collect such; he claims our safety is guaranteed.

Exit BERTRAM and PAROLLES.

Act 3.
Scene 2. Florence. The home of MADAME CAPILET.

DIANA, and HELENA sit at a table. HELENA plays with a ring on her finger.

HELENA

Your night passed quietly, well-named Diana?

DIANA

It did, here in my mother's house. And yours, I hope, was pleasant enough and will soon show signs of productivity?

HELENA

It was, and it will! But now the hour grows late and I must either steal away to the fields and woods or else risk discovery in your home during my transformation.

DIANA

I wish I could accompany you there, in woman-skin or wolf, to see that weird conversion myself and run freely through the wild. If one chose between a woman's natural custom and the transformation loup-garou, I would have the latter.

HELENA

There are some advantages, but far more problems. It is fortunate indeed that my guardian knew your mother, and that both of you sympathize with my twin plights. For you to have tricked my husband to bed, and then let me take your place in the sheer beauty of the utter darkness, is a boon I can only repay through lifelong friendship and aid. I own you everything.
Enter MADAME CAPILET.

MADAME CAPILET

I know the hour runs late, and Helena
must find the safety of the wood, but I
bring news that may well change the course of your
lunar wanderings these few days. In the town,
among the soldiers and their companions,
it is given out that the Duke, learning
of the young Count’s aversion to the loup-garou,
has instructed that the Count and his man
Parolles will patrol with his garrison
of such men to begin tomorrow night
and to last a full three days, until they
to their human forms return with waning moon.

HELENA

This news is most welcome, madam, and even
as I rush to conceal myself, I will
think on how I may best use it to my
advantage and pray that if nothing else
it does convince my noble husband that
the Bisclavret heritage I bear is
no tarnish on me or my heirs but an
approved and sterling trait prized by greater
men than he. I must away but will soon
return—adieu!

Act 3.
Scene 3. In the woods near Florence.

Enter BERTRAM and PAROLLES.

BERTRAM

—if you survive this night you
will away tomorrow in any regard.
You will complete what affairs you have here
and return to Rousillon. I will stay
and see myself—Shh! what is that strange noise?

PAROLLES

It is the Duke’s loup-garou men; they did
say they would make the noise of an owl ere
they changed their natural bodies for monstrous
ones, so as to alert us to their presence
and prepare to see them wolf-skinned.

BERTRAM
And look! The moon just now rises over the fields.

PAROLLES
Look! Look! They are much changed! That one—with the vast silvered ears and tail—beckons us with its head to follow! It waits upon us.

BERTRAM
I am near transfixed. The Duke did say that they are touched by angels, but I had sworn those seraphs to be devils. But now, I see the grace of wolf and man in one. He beckons us again, more emphatically. Let us follow, Parolles; we must watch them up close and know if they are of heaven or if they are of hell.

Exit BERTRAM and PAROLLES.

Act 3.
Scene 4. The DUKE’s court.

Enter DUKE, followed by PAROLLES.

DUKE
Where is your master? Why do you nip at my heels like a pup? You have been chastened and ridiculed; I thought never to see your face again, much less to speak to you.

PAROLLES
It is my master’s exact location about which I nip, noble sir! We did, as you commanded, spend these last two days in the field with your most extraordinary troops, but on that final night, they did turn on me and chase me, separate me from my master, and cause me to flee into a tree, whereupon they ringed the trunk til it was almost morning, whereupon they fled, my master no where to be found, and it is thus I come to you with grave fear for him.

DUKE
I have heard of nothing untoward, though full reports are yet to come. You should be home-ward bound as your master said he would tell you. No doubt he has made comrades in the
course of my plan and has dismissed all thought of you from his cares. Obey him and go.

PAROLLES

My lord, I wish not to risk your wrath but what if, as in their hunting of me, your men did also my master harry, and bring his life to an untimely end?

DUKE

If the Count de Rousillon was dead, I would know it, and in knowing it, I would address it, and in addressing it, I would tell you. But what I tell you is that you are being preposterous, should now follow your good master’s orders, as you esteem him so, and go.

Exit PAROLLES.

DUKE

A tiresome and dull man, that one. Would he to the far reaches of the world to spare us all his prattle and supposition. He has departed, friend, as you decreed.

Enter BERTRAM.

BERTRAM

I am aghast now that ever I kept company with the man. My lord, you have done me a great honor, and your men have honored me, with your blessing, a greater honor still. I will abide here a while, to get my bearings and to practice with them, as they have so offered, and lend my aid to this war, in whatever form you require of me in order to succeed.

DUKE

Will you stay with us for the duration, then? Have you no ties that await you in France?

BERTRAM

I have only recently, my lord, received word that my wife, though not my wife, has died, and I though I now regret sadly my scorn of her and having never known
her, I find myself at liberty to marry again. Having seen the women of your fair city, sir, I thought to make a bride of one of them and remain here until such a time as my lady mother cannot manage my holdings in France. I am well away from her.

DUKE

Might I suggest, sir, that if your intention is marriage, you seek out the daughters of some certain families of the city I can recommend to you: those knowledgeable about this court and my special captains? I can arrange for introductions to such women, all young, all honest, all wise. And may I congratulate you on your recent excellent decisions regarding your presence here; would that I were younger and could undertake what you have chosen.

BERTRAM

My status as a young man without heirs, unloved by my mother and newly free from my forced marriage—as well as the thought of what I did not understand about my wife and her ilk—is what gave me the fortitude to take what risk there was.

DUKE

Let us to my secretary; with him we shall find you a match to fit you well.

Exit DUKE and BERTRAM.


Enter the COUNTESS, HELENA, GARNIER, and LAVATCH, who carries a stringed instrument.

LAVATCH (singing and playing)

To welcome you home, fair wolfgirl—

COUNTESS

Lavatch!

LAVATCH (singing and playing)

To welcome you home, fair wolf-lady,
I sing of the moon to you. I sing of
your hair, whether tis coarse or fine, and, er,
I sing of your eyes, more animal than mine—

GARNIER

How do you tolerate this?

COUNTESS

I normally give him more time to prepare,
but Helena’s arrival was unknown to me.

HELENA

Sing on, fool—sing as much as you like!
But I am sorry my letters did not
reach you. I have a most odd story to tell,
and hope that in the telling of it you
will understand my actions and forgive
me the disingenuous things that I
have done. In the end, this news I bear—
all I bear—is good and I believe
will be welcomed, especially by you, madam.

COUNTESS

I will hear your whole story, Helena,
but first, tell me what I so devoutly
want to know. I see a ring on your finger,
but I cannot tell if my petulant
son’s other condition has been met.

HELENA

Madam, it has, and I carry the proof
wherever I go.

COUNTESS

Fate has smiled upon you, my dear daughter.

GARNIER

I give you my congratulations, but
must also ask: where now is the Count? What
does he know of what has occurred?

HELENA

Your questions are important ones, Garnier.
My husband knows not that I am alive,
much less that I have met his demands and
am now his wife in name and deed. But some
of what I now report to you touches
on this very issue of my being,
and his fear and distrust of me. The Duke keeps a retinue of loup-garou men, who serve as his special forces in the conflict over which he currently presides. Having necessity to hide myself, I did see them take Bertram on patrol with them, at the Duke’s command. I could not follow closely nor for long, but enough to see my husband fall into a kind of ease with them. He was to tour with them for some days and nights, and to witness their transformations. My hope now is that when he returns home, his new-found respect for them will he transfer to me, and to our child.

GARNIER
Wars might end, if all armies were so made.

COUNTESS
Wars shall never end, and you know that well. But let us celebrate: Helena is home, I will have a grandchild, and Lavatch has learnt new music, new dances, and jokes.

LAVATCH (playing and trying to come up with a song) Baby...baby... lady...maybe...baby... I can find out no rhyme for “baby” except for “lady.” Wait, I have just the song! (begins singing and playing any baby-related song the performer wants)

Exit COUNTESS, HELENA, GARNIER, and LAVATCH.

Act 4.
Scene 2. The DUKE’s palace.

Enter DUKE and BERTRAM.

DUKE
This lady, while not of the nobility, is from a family I have trust entirely. Her father was dear to me and capable; her mother holds the secrets of my court tightly to her breast.

Enter MADAME CAPILET and DIANA.

DUKE
Dear Madam, my thanks for your attendance
at court today. I summoned you and your daughter especially to meet with this man, newly the Count de Rousillon. I can myself vouch for him, as he has been a true and worthy captain in my cause, and has—it is for this reason that I have asked you to this private meeting—taken the steps necessary to join with my special guard, and has survived, nay, embraced the change.

BERTRAM
My lord, if your first entreaty to me to witness the prowess of your loup-garoux I thought I jest, I know that this must be.

DUKE
No, in good faith I would have you meet this fine lady.

BERTRAM
She is no lady, nor is she fine, nor honest.

MADAME CAPILET
Do you know my daughter, sir, that you would slander her so?

BERTRAM
Know her? Oh yes indeed, for she was in my bed, just a few nights hence.

MADAME CAPILET
You are a liar, sir, and I will have satisfaction.

DIANA
All of you, please. There is an explanation to this, though I am loathe to give it in full. Maman, this is the husband of Helena, so recently gone home to Rousillon. Sir, you may have wooed me with a sweet tongue and a fine hand for poetry, but your eyesight was still poor when you came to me—or rather, your wife. Women jest that men are so inept and impatient as to think all cats black in the night, but your good wife, sir, did take my place ‘twixt the sheets, and so I do remain honest.

DUKE
Is this a trap you have sprung on the Count?

MADAME CAPILET
I did not recognize you, sir, having only seen you from afar. My good lord, it was a trap of sorts, though I begin to suspect the situation has changed since its making. Helena de Narbon came to me with a letter from her new-wed husband, in which he swore that theirs was no marriage at all until she wore his ring and he had bedded her, which he also swore never to do. The Countess Dowager—the Count’s mother—and I are friends, and she knew I could be trusted to help Helena and shelter her safely here. She and my daughter, clever girls both, played on the Count’s perfidy and lust until it was true that Helena had met his demands in total: ring and bed.

BERTRAM

Helena is dead! Whoever she was, this woman has fooled you. My mother did love Helena well, yes, but to consent to a plan such as this—never!

MADAME CAPILET

Read this letter, from your mother to me. I believe it follows that the one she sent to you that claimed Helena’s early death.

DUKE

I like this not. There is perfidy in the actions of both women here as well. What would you have done, my friend, to right this?

BERTRAM

If my wife is alive, I must to her. For while I did revile her ere I knew the truth about her—now our—kind, I now regard her in a different frame entirely. And if, by chance, she carries our child—

DIANA

That she does, sir. But she quit the city before your transformation was known to us.

BERTRAM

She must despise me.

MADAME CAPILET

It is likely that she thinks you dead.
BERTRAM

What?

MADAME CAPILET

Your man, that Parolles, went to every inn
or tavern a soldier or captain might
have ever seen, proclaiming you had been
killed, and that the Duke and his men were to blame.

What?

DUKE

MADAME CAPILET

He is a known liar, sirs, and proved a
coward and traitor, so few believed him,
and he is now departed the city
for Rousillon and you, good sir, are proof
of your own life, as you have now been seen
abroad on the Duke’s business in the town.

DIANA

Will Parolles, arrived in Rousillon, then
tell Helena her husband is murdered
by the ducal werewolf troops of Florence?

DUKE

Go, sir. May angels speed your travel home.

Exit BERTRAM.

Madame, Diana, I have not the words
or even the faintest of ideas
of what I should say to you, other than
that I still regard you as friends to my
court and myself, with no harm done. If he
is reunited with his wife in joy,
so be it, and all’s well that ends well.
Let us go drink deep to that conclusion!

Exit DUKE, MADAME CAPILET, DIANA.

Act 4.

Scene 3. Rousillon. Outside the COUNT’s gates.

Enter LAVATCH and GARNIER. LAVATCH is carrying his stringed instrument.

LAVATCH (playing and singing “She Wolf”)
“There’s a she wolf in disguise, coming out…”

(speaking) "Tis no good; a bourée, yes, for the Count--

GARNIER

Your songs, Lavatch, would better suit the inn than my lady’s house. And I do not think the Count will need a suite of newly writ dances mimicking his lately changèd form.

Enter PAROLLES

LAVATCH (singing)

[Note: this can be performed to the tune for “The Hero of Canton/The Ballad of Jayne,” from the television show Firefly, but fits other tunes equally well, or can be sung to a newly composed melody for the performance.]

Parolles! the man of all talk!

He swore to the Count and he broke all his oaths said he would to war but to do so was loath. Our scorn for him here you’ll soon comprehend: he’s Parolles the coward, he’s nobody’s friend—

PAROLLES

You, Garnier, take me to the Countess. My news must reach her without delay.

GARNIER

What news, knave, could you have, else that of the shame you brought the Count in far-off Florence?

PAROLLES

That is my business and none of yours.

GARNIER

Near all the Countess’s business is mine: what have you to say?

PAROLLES

It concerns the young Count and so must be delivered to her ears before all else.

GARNIER

How fortunate for you; she comes this way.
Enter COUNTESS.

GARNIER

Madam, this insolent speck of dust would address you with so-called urgent news.

COUNTESS

Sir, come you here with message from my son?

PAROLLES

Most kind lady, it is not from your son I bring news, but about him. I know not how to explain, but to make short my trial in reporting: your son, my lady, is dead. He has at the hands of Florence’s unnatural wolf troops been vilely murdered.

The COUNTESS sways.

LAVATCH

Look to the lady.

The COUNTESS faints. EXIT COUNTESS, carried by GARNIER, and followed by PAROLLES and LAVATCH.

Act 5.
Scene 1. A room in the COUNT’s palace.

Enter COUNTESS, HELENA, GARNIER, and PAROLLES.

COUNTESS

I scarce believe this news, which comes to me when happiness was just at hand, with a fruitful ending for our long travails.

HELENA

Nor I, for what I know, my dear mother, was that my lord did run alongside the loup-garoux, taken as a friend into their company, with due respect and care.

PAROLLES

How do you come by such information? For I alone was with him when the Duke sent us with his monsters, I am sure.

HELENA
May your tongue be cloven; we are no monsters.
It was with my own two eyes—eyes that then
did have the wolf’s precise vision—that I
did see my noble husband accepted
and safely borne among the lycanthropic
protectors of that city.

**COUNTESS**

She is of the same lineage, Parolles,
as those men who do bravely serve Florence,
and I will hear not one word against her,
for she is a kind and gentle lady,
and her inheritance one of noble
service, devotion, courage, and honor.

**PAROLLES**

A conspiracy against my master,
then, that has caused his death—oh gods, smite them.

**GARNIER**

No conspiracy here resides, sir, and
yet as I hesitate to doubt your kind,
my lady, I too mourn at this unwelcome
news. But if, in faith, this man does speak truth,
we must this tragedy accept, resigned.

**HELENA**

Did the Duke bid you come? I do not know
why he would send this base fellow to us.
Did you see his body? What arrangements
are made for its return to Rousillon?

**PAROLLES**

I witnessed the Count’s death at the claws of the—

**COUNTESS**

You will answer with a civil tongue, or
yours will be made cloven indeed.
Give us your full report; spare no detail
for my woman’s stomach, nor for that of her
you call, incorrectly and with slander,
a monster, for we deserve to hear all.

**PAROLLES**

My lady, my master and I were bid
accompany the Duke’s special troops on
a mission about the city walls, so
as to demonstrate to us their supposed
loyalty and human reason. To the forest they did lead us and then, having warned us aforethought, did transform themselves from men to beasts. One in particular stayed close by us, to lead us, and we stayed with it for the first night and following day. But on the second night a group of the wolves undertook to separate us, and hunted me til I fled up a tree. They circled beneath me as their fellows likewise hounded away my master to murder him, as I am sure they would have me but for my fleetness in climbing, and only when morning had been upon me for some time was I able to retreat to the city. The Duke denied my tale, and lacking in all compassion did send me here. Through Paris I came, to give word to King and court and now you find me abject.

COUNTESS

Fool! Worthless man! Why did you not seek out your master or his body? No, I know why—you are a coward, Parolles, and perchance a thief and a killer yourself.

Enter LAVATCH, with stringed instrument.

LAVATCH

[plays a flourish]

Madam, my lady, good sir, bad sir, the most high of royalnesses, the most royal of highnesses, the King approaches.

COUNTESS

To receive his majesty, all go now—save Parolles. Garnier, ensure this man is put out of this place, not to come again. I do fear his report now confirmed, else why the King to Rousillon but to us offer obsequies and share our grief.

Exit COUNTESS, HELENA, LAVATCH, PAROLLES, and GARNIER.

Act 5.
Scene 2. A room in the COUNT's palace.

Enter COUNTESS.
COUNTESS
Where is Helena? She must be here to greet the King.

HELENA (offstage)
I will be there anon, madam.

Enter the KING of FRANCE.

KING
My honored lady, let me bear your grief.
Your man Parolles has told me of your son’s demise at the hands of Florence’s wolves.
I am wrapp’d in dismal thinkings, and ere I go, we shall sing the praises of your son and daughter, gone, as praising what is lost makes the remembrance dear to us all.

COUNTESS
My liege, my son’s wife lives, and here abides.
She comes here now to greet you.

Enter HELENA.

HELENA
Your majesty honors this house. It was, my lord, given out that I was dead, but so that the Rousillon and Bisclavret lines might live. But being moon-crossed lovers my husband died before he knew I yet lived, and ere I could give him full welcome in his transformèd state or tell him of our child to be, who will be born loup-garou.

COUNTESS
We had held hope, my lord, that my son’s death was incorrectly reported, for the source for us was a perfidious knave, but now that you are here, we must ourselves in cloaks of inky black be gowned, and so prepare the funeral rites and customs.

HELENA
Where are our graces? Your majesty, let us break your fast and allow you rest.

Exit the KING, the COUNTESS, and HELENA.
Act 5.
Scene 3. Rousillon. Outside the COUNT’s gates.

Enter LAVATCH, with his stringed instrument.

LAVATCH (singing, sadly)
“Blue moon, you saw me standing alone….”

Enter BERTRAM.

LAVATCH (speaking)
Ah, what ghost is this? What spirit of the beyond? Go, go I pray, to whence you came, oh solemn ghost, oh most like the young Count. Oh ghost, do not take me to hell, sir ghost, for I am an honest fool and must the young Countess and less-young Countess this night attend to play songs and dirges and sad lamentations for the young count, whom you, spirit, do so resemble, is dead. Dead.
The young Count. Oh ghost, are you the young Count come to wail at the machinations of fate, you who were so lately accepting of the young Countess’s self as a boon and not a curse? Do you come to repent for your ugly treatment of her ere you depart this world forever? Oh sad ghost—

BERTRAM
Fool, I am no ghost. I come not to harrow you with fear nor make portentous march to hell—young Countess, did you say? My Helena lives?

LAVATCH
Indeed, my spectral Count, sir, she is within, with your much-grieved mother and with them the King come to pay respects—

BERTRAM
I am no ghost, Lavatch; why call me this? Take me to them ere I do make a ghost of you.

Exit BERTRAM and LAVATCH.

Act 5.
Scene 4. In the foyer of the COUNT’s palace.
Enter BERTRAM and LAVATCH.

BERTRAM

Your majesty? Madam?

LAVATCH

Be not shy, sir: I will announce your homecoming.

[plays a flourish]

What ho and hi! Hi! Hi! The young count, Bertram, as arrived! [pause] Hello?

BERTRAM

Confirm, Lavatch, my wife lives? Helena is not dead?

LAVATCH

She is very much alive, good sir, you could say more alive with life than any man can be. And she has pined for you.

Enter the KING, COUNTESS, and HELENA.

BERTRAM


HELENA

Husband.

COUNTESS

How can this be? Only now we have heard of your death, Bertram, by the Florentine loup-garou—

BERTRAM

Who brought you such falsehood? No, madam, I am not dead. I am—

KING

You are alive, as we can see. But ’twas your own man, Parolles, who did spread the news of your death to all and sundry. What did he witness, if not your violent murder?

BERTRAM

Parolles? Nature sickens him but to speak a truth. Am I that or this for what he’ll utter, That will speak any thing? Truly he lied when he claimed you dead, my dear Helena. As for what he thought he saw: He saw not
my end, but my beginning. Helena,
I am transformed in all ways; no longer
do I abjure you or revile your kind,
for in Florence I came to be wooed and yes,
won by the Duke and his special forces
and having delighted in their cunning
and ability, I have myself now
become loup-garou.

HELENA
I forgive your harsh words and callous mind,
my husband, and having got your ring and
you mine, and I am by you with child, I
ask: Will you be mine, now you are doubly won?

BERTRAM
I will love you ever dearly, as man
or wolf so please the moon.

COUNTESS
A dance, good fool, where we had planned to howl.

HELENA
Oh, we shall howl indeed, although in love
and not in mourning. Strike a tune, Lavatch!

LAVATCH
A song for wolves and a song for men,
as Rousillon’s halls are merry again.
[howling] A-oooooo!

Exit COUNTESS, BERTRAM, HELENA, and LAVATCH.

Epilogue

KING
This play’s now over, for me and for you,
our pastiche about French loup-garoux,
and if you were pleased by our werewolves’ tale,
applaud so we know when we say adieu,
and return to this place, again and soon,
to rehear this play on love and the moon.

Exit KING.