

Kunst über alle Künste, ein Bös Weib Gut zu Machen (An Art beyond All Arts, to Make a Bad Wife Good)

A Sample Scene

The following sample scene reflects work-in-progress towards our edition and may well be revised before publication.

1.[1]

Enter THEOBALD, CATHARINA, SEBASTIAN, ALFONS, *and* VEIT.

THEOBALD To speak frankly with my lord, it is to no avail that you continue your suit with me: I am wholly decided not to publish my younger daughter's dower before the elder's is out. Should any of you be inclined towards the latter, she shall not be denied you, for I know of your good lineage as well as your honourable character and wealth.

SEBASTIAN My good Sir Theobald, may I give you great thanks for such an offer. You know well, however, that my waning forces would be somewhat too weak to endure her untamed nature. Sir Alfons is younger and stronger, she will not be unsuitable for him.

ALFONS Please, sir, mind your own business. I am not your ward, and am no longer a minor.

CATHARINA Father, I am amazed at your gross negligence, that you offer me to these fools with such disdain.

VEIT (*aside*) What the merchant cannot sell has need of such a bargain.

ALFONS As for us, the maid is mistaken: we are not such fools as to take pains over her, and, truly, I would think twice before buying such stuff as a wife. Though the colour may be good, the worth is but small.

CATHARINA My high-ranked lord has no reason to bolt from one who is not in the least eager to follow him. Truly, I have no

great mind to be bound with you. But were it so, my greatest care would be to comb your bristles with a three-legged stool, to ruffle your puny beard with the fire tongs, to dye your face scarlet with a pan, and to display you to everyone as the fool you are.

VEIT Now she's armed, now it'll rain cuffs! Strike him, strike him!

ALFONS Her maidenly modesty will be above such trouble. I will ever include her in the litany. May the good Lord protect us from such evil.

SEBASTIAN Amen.

CATHARINA You grey-bearded ass, you'd prefer to stay at home with your poor servants; you are more common than a cur. You're a lame old nag, you do naught but neigh. A fine Sir Sebastian, indeed! Touching her with his little yard. Why, you may believe the maids gaze greedily at you, but you will have to run after them. My sister will certainly leave it open for you, you know where.

SEBASTIAN Your sister has better virtues making her more lovely than you. Sir Theobald would be wise to bring her out sooner, since he is acquiring ill fame through your lack of virtue.

CATHARINA Your wisdom sits nowhere but in your ass-grey hair. You have not yet been made judge between me and my sister, that silly child. Even if she were not brought out into the open for your pleasure, I would still wish her burnt by the sun, ruffled by the wind, or stung by a fly when she's exposed under the open sky. My father knows better how to watch over her.

THEOBALD Unnatural child, would to God you had one single vein in you alike to hers. She is not in the habit of running around the alleys like you, but practises all things virtuous for women.

CATHARINA (*aside*) That lazy wench will pay for such hatefulness towards me when I find her alone.

THEOBALD [*to Alfons and Sebastian*] I have a mind to offer her some delight and have her instructed in poetry and music.

CATHARINA This is needed above all else, so that she can please men, for she lacks certain courtly qualities.

ALFONS I would gladly be of use for such instruction.

THEOBALD I fear the gentleman would ask too much for his wages.

SEBASTIAN And I would say nay to that too!

CATHARINA O, how the fools quarrel about what isn't theirs, and above all not worth the trouble.

THEOBALD Gentlemen, make peace. Meanwhile I shall take my leave. At your service, gentlemen.

Exit.

SEBASTIAN We remain ever obedient to your lordship.

VEIT I'll listen awhile, she's got more in her yet!

SEBASTIAN Will it not please the maid to follow her father?

CATHARINA This old ape-face is surely called to be the tutor. [*to Sebastian*] You are much concerned about what is not your business; go about your own, so please you, you old wandering vagabond, and let me go about mine. Unless you want to have a good mouthful of what I let drop behind. Pull in your snout, mouse-beard, or else it is going to rain muck, I warn you.

SEBASTIAN I had rather have to do with evil spirits than with such a one.

CATHARINA Were I a spirit, I'd torment you.

ALFONS The holy cross is good for that, and he who gets her will have no need to make it himself. She'll bring it to him soon enough.

CATHARINA You're much too dishonourable an ass to bear such a cross, and may the devil protect you for it.

ALFONS I'd rather call upon God.

CATHARINA I'll waste no more time with this fantastico.

SEBASTIAN And we will not force you to stay with us.

CATHARINA Hold your peace, old man, or I'll pluck off your beard.

ALFONS The maid should not give way to anger.

CATHARINA You saucy milksop, pull in your pipe, or I'll give you some food for your snout.

Exit.

VEIT I wager the gentlemen have enough for the time being, and that will keep them busy.

ALFONS Let us break off at once. Sir Sebastian, were you so inclined, I would impart toward you some of the proceedings, for I know that you are a lover of whatever concerns the ladies.

SEBASTIAN Keep what you have, sir, and have my part for free.

ALFONS Thanks, sir. I know well that you are sometimes a little short-winded. [*Hands Sebastian spices.*] Therefore make yourself a poultice for the chest from these spices. – But what do you think, Veit, about the civility of your maid?

VEIT She uses a certain manner in her conversation that I do not understand, and which is perchance familiar only to gentlemen. I am at your disposition if you seek to insinuate with her, or to leave something with her. I am more than willing if it be lawful.

SEBASTIAN Truly, that lady can go to the gallows and the hangman can insinuate with her.

ALFONS I ask you nothing but to write my name in the book of exemptions. But if you are willing to do something, appeal to her mild-mannered sister. Your reward will be good.

VEIT Ha ha! There's a cat in the birds' nest! Will she be easier to deal with? I'd rather lodge by her than with the dean, however holy he may be.

SEBASTIAN Ho, that morsel would be somewhat too good for you.

VEIT Let it be as delicious as can be, neither you nor I will be allowed to try our teeth on it. But I shall go my ways. Good bye, gentlemen.

ALFONS Commend me to my lady.

SEBASTIAN Commend me first, I am next in line.

VEIT That shall be my work. I will remember one thing, and forget the other. I'll seek money for my pains. Nothing is free.

[*Exit.*]

SEBASTIAN I am so glad the monster's gone. I am amazed that such a fine house has such an evil owner, but even more by the difference between the sisters, for their humours are so contrary. What one possesses in virtue the other lacks in equal measure, and what one lacks in vice, the other possesses. And the more one makes herself hated through her disobedience, the more the other makes herself beloved through her fair and commendable behaviour. I am upset that we must dispense with modest Sabina because of this savage animal, this raging Catharina. I wish she were out of my sight altogether.

ALFONS Not so fast, here is good counsel on how to open the way to our lady: we need to find a man for the elder sister.

SEBASTIAN A man? A devil!

ALFONS I say a man.

SEBASTIAN And I say a devil. What man would cast himself into hell in good faith, and only for the sake of riches?

ALFONS I think Sir Sebastian still does not know that nowadays *ratio status* governs marriage as it does every other thing that follows the humour of the people. If you and I care not about the money because someone happens to be peevish and unworthy, so some look for gold who need to cover their costs. Well, God gives where it falls.

SEBASTIAN I don't object to anyone taking her as long as he be not among my friends. I'd wed her as readily for her money as I'd stand on the pillory every morning, whipped bloody with rods. And while I do not usually waste money, I would

be generous with any man who agrees to be joined with her in order to release the younger.

ALFONS Time will tell. I know there will come a hungry brother who'll do the work for us, so let him come, we'll have liberal hands.

[Exeunt.]

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