EMILIA

Written by

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A NOTE ON THE TEXT

This play was written to be performed by an all female cast of diverse women. It would not be the same play if this is ignored. If being performed in a school where it is impossible to adhere to this then please cast against the ‘usual type’. Be bold.

This play was also written to challenge the notion that a play about a person needs to be a vehicle for one actress. This is very much an ensemble piece hence the three Emilias. It takes place in several time zones at one time. It isn’t an accurate representation of Renaissance England, it isn’t a historical representation. It is a memory, a dream, a feeling of her.

CHARACTERS (grouped in the doubling made in the original production. However if you have a larger group of actresses do share these parts out more. Or if you see better doubling due to specific skills of your actresses do mix them up. This is just a guide.)

This production had new music composed by Luisa Gerstein and the vibe and style is intrinsic to the piece.

EMILIA1
EMILIA2
EMILIA3  - The three Emilias represent the three ages of her.

MARGARET JOHNSON / MARY SIDNEY / HESTER

SUSAN BERTIE THE COUNTESS OF KENT / MARY / BOB

LADY HELENA / LORD HOWARD / EVE

LADY CORDELIA / FLORA

LADY KATHERINE / DESDEMONA (Othello)

LORD THOMAS HOWARD / JUDITH / PRIEST

LORD COLLINS / LADY ANNE / DAVE

LORD ALPHONSO LANIER / EMILIA (Othello)
THE MUSES - Everyone except EMILIA3 is a Muse. They play every other character in the play. The muses are the embodiment of Emilia’s will. It is up to you how you show this.
PROLOGUE

Present Day. EMILIA3 makes her way down through the auditorium and towards the stage. She steps up onto the stage, standing in front of the cloth. She is holding a copy of a book called ‘Sex And Society In Shakespeare’s Age - Simon Forman The Astrologer’ by AL Rowse. She stands for a moment taking in the audience and space. She flicks the book open and begins to read snippets from it.

EMILIA3

“Emilia, daughter of Baptista Bassano and Margaret Johnson...married to a Lanier...paramour to my old Lord Hunsdon that was Lord Chamberlain...maintained in great pomp. She is high-minded...She was very brave in youth...She hath many false conceptions...She hath been favoured much of her Majesty and of many noblemen...She is now very needy, in debt...(and) if I go to Lanier this night or tomorrow, whether she will receive me and whether I shall be welcome to ‘halek’.

EMILIA3 looks up to acknowledge this word. She mouths the word ‘fuck’.

EMILIA3 (CONT’D)

‘...she is or will be a harlot...She was familiar and friendly...but only she would not ‘halek’...

Another look.

EMILIA3 (CONT’D)

“She was a whore and dealt evil with him” Simon Forman, the astrologer, wrote this in 1567.

She stops. She closes the book. She takes a deep breath.

EMILIA3 (CONT’D)

“She was a whore”

She kisses her teeth and throws the book away. Deep breath.

EMILIA3 (CONT’D)

For centuries these are the words they have used to describe me. Not anymore... I am Emilia.

She is joined by EMILIA2 and EMILIA3 on stage.

We are Emilia
They are joined by all the other women.

We are only as powerful as the stories we tell. We have not always been able to tell them. Time to listen!

The music kicks in, the front cloth rises and the women invade the stage. The music slows to become the funeral music and EMILIA1 singing Durme Durme at her father’s funeral.

EMILIA3 (CONT’D)

Here we are where all good stories must start: death.

As EMILIA1 sings MARGARET JOHNSON and PRIEST enter. This is the funeral of Baptista Bassano, EMILIA’s father. The congregation listens to EMILIA1 sing. During, SUSAN BERTIE enters, seen by MARGARET.

EMILIA1

(singing)
Durme, durme, querido hijico
durme sin ansia y dolor
cerra tus chicos ojicos
durme, durme con savor.
Cerra tus lindos ojicos
durme, durme con savor.

MARGARET gestures to EMILIA1 to come with her and the PRIEST.

EMILIA1 (CONT’D)

I’ve written something to honour Papa. Can I read it?

You absolutely cannot!

EMILIA1 ignores her. Over the following MARGARET is very aware that SUSAN BERTIE is watching.

EMILIA1

(reading)
Sweet holy rivers, pure celestial springs
Proceeding from the fountaine of our life;
(MORE)
Swift sugred currents that salvation brings,
Cleare chrystall streames, purging all sinne and strife,
Faire floods, where souls do bathe their snow-white wings,
Before they flie to true eternall life:
Such sweet nectar and ambrosia, food of saints
Which, whoso tasteth, never after faints.

EMILIA1 (CONT’D)

(to MARGARET)
Don’t be angry.

SUSAN BERTIE
Let her do whatever she needs to do. What was it you just recited?

EMILIA1
I wrote it myself.

SUSAN BERTIE
Christ!

MARGARET JOHNSON
I can only apologise Countess.

SUSAN BERTIE
(interrupting)
She shows great promise. Margaret I too lost my husband and I know the great fear that
strikes into our hearts. My offer still stands. I’ll look after her well and her introduction to
court will be assured. The Queen has already requested my presence several times. I’m
well placed to place her well. What do you say?

EMILIA1 runs to MARGARET and hangs off her skirt.

EMILIA1
Mama no!

MARGARET JOHNSON
Your father’s left us with nothing. My dear Countess as you can see she is no delicate
creature to be moulded.

(to Emilia)
Get up!

(to the Countess)
She is wild and boisterous. Her father indulged in her the abandon of her heritage. She
won’t be tamed.
SUSAN BERTIE
I am well accustomed to the challenges of young ladies. I’m sure I can handle her. Shall we discuss the terms?

EMILIA1
No!

She sinks to her knees as MARGARET and SUSAN step away to speak. As EMILIA3 speaks the following we see EMILIA1 come to terms with her leaving. SUSAN BERTIE beckons her to leave with her. She embraces her mother MARGARET and they make the journey to BERTIE’s home. We see MARGARET hiding her sadness from her daughter.

EMILIA3
Like a seed pressed down firmly in the soil, covered and left. Something laid root in me. I did not know it then but I know it now. In my travelling family of musicians I was the latest in a long line of uprooted growth, floating towards somewhere to settle. We came to this island like so many seeking shelter and purpose and we had found it. My father and his brothers were revered in the court for their musicianship. We knew our luck. But we still felt the notion of our otherness. Our differences. We thought we were part of their world but it is an easy fall when you can no longer pay your way. I was only seven, I had to go.
ACT 1 SCENE 1

SUSAN BERTIE
Cheer up Emilia for godsake. You’re one of the lucky ones. You will be afforded the very best of education but most importantly how to present and thrive in court. How to find yourself that coveted prize of a rich and powerful man who will keep you in comfort for all your days. For what else does a young woman want? What else does a young woman need? What else could be as important to you as this?

She sweeps off. EMILIA1 speaks to us.

EMILIA1
My voice. My voice feels too loud in here. I must try to whisper more. Though sometimes I can’t help but scream! Shout! But I mustn’t. I can’t. My breath feels shallower than before. It’s being contained. I’m changing. I’m being changed. Metamorphosis. Eight years. To go from child to woman. I must try to only speak when I’m asked. No screeching. No jumping about. I’m a young lady now. This is what I’ve learnt. You see? I can be tamed. I know now that as I grow I must also shrink. I must not take up too much space. If I am to marry well I need to practice these tricks to hush my whole being so that I am only seen when needed. This I have learnt. This I am to practice. This. Silence. Of being. This. And yet...

The COUNTESS enters loudly.

SUSAN BERTIE
Emilia my girl put down your studies we’ve got guests. If you are to be introduced to court as a young lady, you will need armour. Not just for your body - that’s what the corsets are for- but for you my darling. What is both a woman’s greatest shield and most devastating weapon?

EMILIA1
You mean our...?

She points towards her vagina.

SUSAN BERTIE
No! Dear lord have I taught you nothing? That’s your meal ticket. I’m talking about your protection. LADIES!

EMILIA3 sends the women on.

SUSAN BERTIE (CONT’D)
To survive we protect each other. These young ladies will be your strength. And you will be theirs. Lady Helena.

LADY HELENA
Charmed.
SUSAN BERTIE

Lady Katherine

Charmed.

LADY KATHERINE

And Lady Cordelia

SUSAN BERTIE

Alright?

LADY CORDELIA

Hello.

EMILIA1

SUSAN BERTIE

They are here to learn with you. And over the next few years you’ll become quite the regular fixture in court with these young ladies. I’ll leave you to get acquainted. But prepare yourself for your first lesson together and I will return anon.

She leaves.

LADY HELENA

Oh thank god she’s gone!

LADY CORDELIA

And now she has we can finally...

(she hoiks her skirts up and adjusts her underclothes)

...oh thank the good lord for that; it was going up my bum! Emilia, it’s so nice to finally meet you.

EMILIA1

Have you yet visited court?

LADY HELENA

Heavens no! I’m so nervous! You have natural beauty on your side - It’s not easy for those of us who have to work harder on our outward appearance such as our dear, poor Lady Katherine here.

LADY KATHERINE

You better watch your mouth!
LADY HELENA

(pointing at her bosom)
I’m just saying - you might be needing a little uplift because you’re losing altitude in your old age.

LADY KATHERINE

I’m sixteen!

LADY HELENA

Which makes it all the more urgent.

LADY KATHERINE

You come at me one more time and I swear I’ll...

LADY HELENA

You’ll what? Throw your needle work at me? Read me some latin?

LADY KATHERINE

I’m not the one who should be worried Helena. I’ve never met anyone so ill suited to court - they’ll laugh you out of there. I wouldn’t be surprised if the Countess sent you home before you embarrass her.

LADY CORDELIA

Ladies! Dear lord. This is not becoming of our breeding.

LADY KATHERINE

Speaking of breeding - what’s yours?

EMILIA1

Pardon?

LADY KATHERINE

Where are you from?

EMILIA1

London.

LADY KATHERINE

No. Where. Are. You. From?

EMILIA1

I. Am. From. London.

LADY KATHERINE

But you don’t look like us.

EMILIA1

Is this your first time in London?
LADY KATHERINE
No I’ve been before!

LADY CORDELIA
Don’t lie! She’s born and bred in the shires and she’s as clueless as the sheep her father owns.

LADY KATHERINE
Not true! I’ve travelled.

EMILIA1
Well if you had then you would know that London doesn’t ascribe to just one type of person. It envelopes and welcomes all kinds. My family hark from over the sea...

LADY KATHERINE
I knew it! My father said that we were being inundated with families like yours. Fleeing wars, men migrating for work. Craftsmen are furious. Coming over here to take their work. That’s what they’re saying. You...It’s a real problem, that’s what my father said.

EMILIA1
Bet he’s fun at parties. I cannot speak for other families but as musicians of the court we have been respected and revered for long enough to earn our place here. It is by our virtues that we are judged not our heritage and my family have proved themselves tenfold. I don’t need to answer to you. Or your father and his questionable opinions about human beings rightfully seeking new lives.

LADY KATHERINE
Whatever. But all the virtue in the world will mean nothing if you walk into court as you are now. Do you know how to dance?

EMILIA1
Some.

LADY KATHERINE
Well you need to know them all.

The COUNTESS returns.

SUSAN BERTIE
Ladies!

LADY KATHERINE
You’re lucky - the Countess is the best teacher around.

SUSAN BERTIE
We have the latest dance to learn girls! Chairs! Also we must spruce you and pluck you, tighten and rouge you to within an inch of your pretty little lives.

(MORE)
SUSAN BERTIE (CONT’D)
We have a lot of hard work ahead of us my darlings but by the end of it you’ll be in possession of the best bloody husbands the Court has to offer. Ladies - Are you ready to SLAY?

MUSIC. SUSAN BERTIE teaches the girls a dance that involves important lessons on etiquette.

SUSAN BERTIE (CONT’D)
Rise...and we’re travelling....gliding...innocence...seduction...coy...amused...listening faces...he’s talking....still talking...STILL talking...he’s cracked a joke!....it’s not funny. Practical assesment! Lady Katherine, hanky drop.

She drops a hanky and LADY KATHERINE daintily picks it up.

SUSAN BERTIE (CONT’D)
Steady.... Lovely. Emilia! Book walk.

EMILIA1 puts a book on her head and starts to walk,

SUSAN BERTIE (CONT’D)
Slowly... Good. Lady Cordelia, smile!

LADY CORDELIA gives her best smile.

SUSAN BERTIE (CONT’D)
Perfect! Lady Helena, solo dance.

(she demonstrates)
Step, scissor scissor. Step, scissor scissor. Step, scissor scissor. Step, scissor scissor. And GO!

LADY HELENA attempts this and fails.

SUSAN BERTIE (CONT’D)
(to HELENA)
You’re not ready for court. Go and practice alone. GO!

LADY HELENA exits.

SUSAN BERTIE (CONT’D)
Ladies! Re-form!

They dance.

SUSAN BERTIE (CONT’D)
Ladies, the men are waiting - time to be introduced to court!
Court life. MUSIC. Men arrive. They’re on the prowl. This should be a dance in which the men display their ‘attributes’ - it should be very funny. The girls join others vying for attention. It’s predatory and EMILIA finds it hard to engage - despite being the one getting the most attention. Time passes...
EMILIA1 is busy scribbling in her note book and yet is still the main point of interest for the men (she does not notice them). LADY KATHERINE and LADY CORDELIA can see this and are getting frustrated.

EMILIA1
I’ve written a new sonnet Cordelia. Would you like to hear it?

LADY CORDELIA
No! The last one was most saucy and I felt terribly flustered after hearing it.

LADY KATHERINE
I’ll hear it.

LADY CORDELIA
Katherine! Stop it!

LADY KATHERINE
Why not? The more disreputable she becomes by writing like she’s a man the less men will be interested and the more will be left for us.

LADY CORDELIA
Katherine stop it!

LADY KATHERINE
We need to level the playing field Cordelia; we’re dying out here.

EMILIA1
Calm down Katherine. They don’t want me for marriage. I’m no threat.

LADY CORDELIA
And you’re fine! Lord Howard has been all eyes on you all today.

LADY KATHERINE
Really?

LORD HOWARD appears.

LADY KATHERINE (CONT’D)
He’s coming this way!

LORD HOWARD
My ladies

They all curtsey.
LORD HOWARD (CONT’D)
Lady Katherine I wonder if you would permit me to say how fragrant you are.

LADY KATHERINE
I couldn’t possibly allow such boldness.

But I pray that you will.

LADY KATHERINE
My lord I know not who you think I am but such a forward remark cannot go unpunished.

LORD HOWARD
I fear my sentence will be most lengthy. What do you have in mind?

LADY KATHERINE
Marriage?

LORD HOWARD
Perhaps a dance first?

LADY KATHERINE and LORD HOWARD exit.

LADY CORDELIA
Oh lord will I ever meet someone who will sweep me off my feet like that?

LORD COLLINS arrives. He spots CORDELIA over the following and they make eyes at each other.

EMILIA1
Oh come on don’t you want gentle touch and kind glances and conversation? Don’t you want a man who will see you for how brilliant your mind is and ask you how you wish to live your life instead of telling you how your life will be lived?

LADY CORDELIA
Sorry Emilia I’m not listening, who is that stone cold fox over there?

EMILIA1
(discreetly)
That’s Lord Collins.

EMILIA1 clears the way.

LORD COLLINS
To what do I owe the absolute pleasure?

LADY CORDELIA
Lady Cordelia my Lord. Are you terribly rich and powerful?
LORD COLLINS
Not in the slightest but I’d keep you in dresses and we’d tumble every day.

LADY CORDELIA
Dance with me fool before I change my mind.

He leads her away, she smiles over her shoulder at EMILIA1 as she goes. The dancers return but suddenly EMILIA1 sees her mother MARGARET JOHNSON across the floor from her. She is surprised by this and tries to get to her through the dancers. She can’t reach her and her mother disappears. EMILIA1 drops to her knees.

EMILIA3
Only eight years since my father left me that I was to meet death again. My mother.

1587
The court dances are disbanded.

EMILIA1
Where is home now?

LORD HENRY CAREY approaches her.

My lady Emilia.

EMILIA1
Lord Henry Carey.

LORD CAREY
Would you give me the great pleasure of a dance?

EMILIA1
Would you permit me to decline?

LORD CAREY
That is your choice. Perhaps we could talk instead?

EMILIA1
Only if I can stay my tongue.

LORD CAREY
You would rather I talk without response from you?
EMILIA
Sir I am weary of advances and my tongue would like a rest.

LORD CAREY
Do you have so many advances you feel I am unworthy of an audience?

EMILIA
No sir. I am just weary. It isn’t you. It is all of you. Must we continue these approaches until a match is made? Is it possible that perhaps a woman could choose never to match and instead live her life in pursuit of something greater?

LORD CAREY
What could be greater than love?

EMILIA
Oh come now. How many of these marriages are the product of love? If you do seek love, and I know that I do, then seek it in poetry. Seek it in verse. In words written and spoken. Seek it in the pursuit of beauty. In art. For that, is the only place that will ever hold true love for me.

LORD CAREY
Then how about an old fool who looks not for marriage but for connection.

EMILIA
Oh.

LORD CAREY
I know you Emilia Bassano. I’ve watched you for quite some time. You gently step round the edges of courtly life giving only the minimum of yourself so as to be noticed but not seen. I watch how you suffer the attentions of men your age who find your looks exciting but don’t quite know what to do with you. I feel you don’t yet know what to do with yourself.

EMILIA
You ‘feel’ wrong.

LORD CAREY
Perhaps but if you were clear on how this world works you would maybe know more about where you wish to place yourself in it.

EMILIA
What do you mean?
LORD CAREY
Maybe what you seek is security enough to continue to write and pursue your creative desires whilst also enjoying the careful passions of a man who has been in this game a long time and enjoys many privileges as a result. Those privileges can be shared. I could open some doors for you. I know The Countess of Pembroke well.

EMILIA1
Mary Sidney?

She high fives someone in the front row or box.

LORD CAREY
Yah she is a great patron of the arts. Her property, Wilton House, has been described as ‘Paradise for Poets’ and should you wish I could arrange an introduction.

EMILIA1
Would you do that for me?

LORD CAREY
Well that depends. Will you meet me in my chambers in twenty minutes?

EMILIA1
I don’t know.

LORD CAREY
(passing her a note)
They are not far, which gives you ten minutes to decide. I cannot offer you marriage Mistress Bassano but what I can offer you is worth much, much more.

He leaves. She stands taken aback.

EMILIA1
He’s at least sixty years old! What confidence to approach me. And yet. He doesn’t dismiss my desires like the others. Does he see me? If I do not go to him perhaps I will meet a man of my age to marry and bear children with. Someone I will serve as dutiful wife while he pursues his own wants. That would be the correct path for me. That would be the respectable and safe route. The one I have been trained for. My head sends me this way. But my heart. Oh my heart. Can I ignore it’s beating?

She takes a beat to decide then runs off in the direction LORD CAREY went.

EMILIA3
Suddenly I was no longer a court curiosity. I was currency. A mistress of Lord Henry Carey was afforded an apartment in Somerset House and forty pounds a year, that’s one hundred and twenty thousand to you.
EMILIA3 (CONT'D)
But most importantly to me he provided only the best connections. He indulged in my need for poetry and I was able to mix with others who did too.
ACT 1 SCENE 3

Wilton House. Enter EMILIA1, she marvels at the hundreds of books. MARY SIDNEY enters and watches EMILIA1 until she is noticed.

EMILIA1
My lady, Countess of Pembroke, I am humbled to have been granted an audience. My Lord Carey insisted I stay only a short while so as not to over step my place but I had hoped you would read my work for to have your opinion on it would do me so much pleasure.

MARY SIDNEY
Oh god don’t grovel. I’ve read your work. Henry sent it to me. You write with grace and confidence.

EMILIA1
Thank you!

MARY SIDNEY
You’re not bad. As you probably know, because those bitches in the court keep fake whispering about it, I’m working on some Psalms my late brother did not complete and I hope to publish them when I’m done. Is this something you would also strive for?

EMILIA1
Well of course I can hope but surely the ones who would publish would not permit it.

MARY SIDNEY
The men you mean?

EMILIA1
I do.

MARY SIDNEY
And yet Henry did tell me that you care little for what men think.

EMILIA1
I don’t. I mean. I do. But I’ve never considered it a possibility that my words would ever be good enough to be committed to print.

MARY SIDNEY
That is because you were not brought up as they were with words of encouragement and the blithe acceptance that you would be destined for great things. Do not underestimate what power that has. No matter what obstacles this system holds around us we must always strive to find ways to get whatever it is we so desperately desire. I desire my poems be published. And I will see that they are. You, Emilia Bassano, will one day do the same.
EMILIA

But how?

MARY SIDNEY

Well I don’t know but if you keep writing you’ll conspire of an answer. And in the meantime perhaps you will come and sit with me a while. I want to find out what it is Henry is so enthusiastic about.

LADY MARGARET CLIFFORD has entered in the previous and quickly interrupts.

LADY MARGARET

Now now Mary let’s not prey on a young lady’s naivete.

MARY SIDNEY

Oh god who let you in?

LADY MARGARET

What a pleasure to see you too. I came as soon as I heard you had Mistress Bassano visiting as I had hoped to speak to her about a position but I see you were already attempting to get her into one ahead of me.

MARY SIDNEY

You really are the most dreadful box blocker Margaret. I found her first. She’s much too exotic for you.

LADY MARGARET

How do you feel about that description Emilia? Are you an exotic curiosity?

MARY SIDNEY

(interrupts) Oh come now you know full well I wished only to encourage her pursuit of poetry.

LADY MARGARET

Emilia, my name is Lady Margaret Clifford and I have been admiring you from afar. I come with an offer of employment. My daughter Anne will be ready for a personal tutor soon and I have heard great things about your intellect. Perhaps you would consider joining me in creating another young lady with hopes beyond being considered a mere object of desire.

MARY SIDNEY

Oh Lord how dreary. Emilia darling for heavensake say no. You are destined for greater things than servitude. This is a dead end. Say no.

EMILIA

I am most flattered at the offer. Will you permit me to think on it? I’m suddenly feeling a little conflicted.
LADY MARGARET
You don’t have to answer now. Remember me if you need. Anything.

EMILIA3 speaks to the rest of the company suddenly.

EMILIA3
This moment.

LADY MARGARET
But Emilia beware the ones who appear as ally but play to the same tune as the enemy.

MARY SIDNEY
What was that supposed to mean?

LADY MARGARET starts to walk off.

LADY MARGARET
It means it’s time for me to leave.

MARY SIDNEY
Dear god go already! Guards! Take her away.

LADY MARGARET
You don’t have guards for heavens sake. I’m going. Emilia. The offer is always there.

LADY MARGARET leaves as WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE enters - he isn’t noticed by MARY or EMILIA1 and stays back and watches over the following.

MARY SIDNEY
You will do well to stay well away from her. It’s common knowledge her husband is so bored of her he has a different mistress every week.

EMILIA1
And why should that keep me from Lady Margaret?

MARY SIDNEY
Her reputation is in pieces dear. You must be very careful who you associate with. You’re on a very fine line as it is. You’re not like the other girls, you do know that don’t you? Henry can only protect you so far. Now, I’m bored. Play the game well Emilia and you will succeed. And when I say ‘well’ I mean ‘safely’...for all our sakes.

SHAKESPEARE hovers on the edge waiting for MARY but watching EMILIA1.

MARY SIDNEY (CONT’D)
I have to go, I have another engagement. Do you know Will Shakespeare?
EMILIA1
I don’t.

MARY SIDNEY
Will this is Emilia Bassano but she’s not your type.

Before he can approach EMILIA1 or even speak he has been taken by the hand and lead out. He smiles at EMILIA1 as he goes.

MARY SIDNEY (CONT’D)

(shouting as she leaves.)
Keep writing Emilia! Even if no one wants to read it. Isn’t that right Will?

They’re gone. EMILIA1 is left in their wake.
ACT 1 SCENE 4

EMILIA1 goes to work on her own. MUSIC. She writes and writes. Paper and poems fly around her.

LORD CAREY approaches.

My love, I have twenty minutes.

EMILIA1

Oh!

I have to return to court.

EMILIA1

How romantic.

LORD CAREY

Stop teasing. Nineteen minutes. I’ll lose my window of opportunity.

EMILIA1

Nineteen minutes is generous for your purposes.

LORD CAREY

Watch it.

EMILIA1

Please.

LORD CAREY

What is it?

EMILIA3 halts action

EMILIA3

Safe. Safely. Carefully. Quietly. Calmly. We must abide. We must toe the rope. We mustn’t show our teeth. Be careful. Here it comes.

EMILIA1

My lord I’ve been trying to find words that will not condemn me to a life of poverty. But there is no easy way to give you the plain truth.
LORD CAREY

(smiling)
What wickedness have you performed now?

EMILIA1
My love I carry your child.

LORD CAREY immediately lets go of her. A long pause as she waits breathless for his response.

EMILIA1 (CONT’D)
Please speak.

LORD CAREY
You won’t be left wanting.

EMILIA1
Henry.

LORD CAREY
I’ll arrange everything for you.

EMILIA1
Arrange what?

LORD CAREY
We’ll speak anon.

He strides away. She tries to grab him but he slips her grasp.

EMILIA1
Please!

She is left alone. Except for the other two EMILIAs.

EMILIA1 (CONT’D)
My heart.

She exits. LORD CAREY enters with ALPHONSO LANIER - he is dressed flamboyantly and extravagantly for a court musician. He possesses a descant recorder.

ALPHONSO
I cannot love her. She is my cousin. And besides it is a poor match for me. My father expected better.
LORD CAREY
Your father had little to no expectation for you and this match is above anything you could have ever hoped to have achieved.

ALPHONSO
She is not to my taste.

EMILIA1 re-enters.

LORD CAREY
Your tastes need refinement.

ALPHONSO
She is soiled goods.

LORD CAREY
(furious)
Proud, scornful boy, unworthy of this good gift! Check thy contempt! What you have before you is a flower of such sweetness and beauty. A viper of such strength and cunning. A temptress who will beguile the very clothes off your back. Do not underestimate this jewel.

EMILIA1
Can the jewel speak?

LORD CAREY
Emilia this is the best way.

EMILIA1
It is so far from the best it is back round to the worst. Alphonso? ALPHONSO? What are you doing Henry?

ALPHONSO
Thank you!

EMILIA1
Do you not want me to be happy?

LORD CAREY takes her to one side.

LORD CAREY
This is the perfect solution. He won’t want of you and you have no need to give to him. We can continue our meetings but for colour you will appear virtuous.

EMILIA1
With Alphonso?!
LORD CAREY
I know, I know but think. He won’t care. Look at him.

They both look over at Alphonso who is preening himself in a mirror.

LORD CAREY (CONT’D)
He cares more for himself than for any woman.

EMILIA1
It’s not women I’ll be competing with that’s for sure.

LORD CAREY
You won’t need to compete at all.

EMILIA1
I cannot marry someone I do not love.

You can. And you must.

EMILIA1
And you won’t abandon me?

I won’t.

EMILIA1
What have you offered him?

LORD CAREY
My care. You will be provided for.

EMILIA1
I only do this for you.

LORD CAREY
And I for you. Lanier?

ALPHONSO comes over.

LORD CAREY (CONT’D)
It is agreed.

ALPHONSO
Not by me!
LORD CAREY
Let me be very clear. If you are not obedient then I will throw you from my care and worse you will suffer both my revenge and hate which I will set loose on you in the name of justice. Without any chance of pity. Speak your answer now.

ALPHONSO
Well when you put it like that. How can a man refuse?

LORD CAREY
Good answer. Come. We’ll lay out our terms.

He takes ALPHONSO away without a backward glance at EMILIA1. She stands in shock as EMILIA2 and EMILIA3 speak. Over the following EMILIA1 is dressed in her wedding dress by handmaids.

EMILIA3
Was I a trawl of fish or stack of hay? Was I meat? What else was there for me now? His hook in me digs deeper, burrows further into my flesh so that it can assert it’s ownership over my body. He has covered all inches of me. While he discusses what to do with my future. His seed is busy making home of my now. What were these feelings growing in me? The flutterings of a tiny creature making himself known or was it something else? It was a strange feeling indeed. A growing sense of unease.

EMILIA2
A flickering flame. Heat.

EMILIA3
I felt heat. Of something starting. Something that has lain quiet and still for some time. Held down. Buried. And this unspeakable action by my lord has awakened it somehow. I knew that I would marry that man but no longer for my love.

EMILIA2
I did it for my child.

EMILIA3
For me? I would begin to fan this flame so as to see how bright it would burn.
ACT 1 SCENE 5

Music. The Wedding Of ALPHONSO LANIER and EMILIA BASSANO. A motif that shows the transfer over from LORD CAREY to ALPHONSO. The couple are married. The kiss is an awkward peck. They pull away from each other as soon as it’s done. ALPHONSO goes to his friends. EMILIA immediately bumps into someone. It’s SHAKESPEARE.

EMILIA1

I’m so sorry!

SHAKESPEARE

The fault was mine. My lady...

EMILIA1

Emilia Bassano...sorry; Lanier. It’s Lanier now.

SHAKESPEARE

Congratulations.

EMILIA1

We met once did we not? Lady Mary Sidney’s home.

SHAKESPEARE

Of course! The dark lady I never got the chance to speak with. My name is William Shakespeare. But you can call me Will. If you like, you don’t have to.

A brief moment that they share.

SHAKESPEARE (CONT’D)

Your husband approaches.

He leaves. EMILIA is disappointed and turns to ALPHONSO who approaches merrily.

ALPHONSO

I’m going to go and celebrate our marriage my dear.

EMILIA1

Where?

ALPHONSO

With my friends.

A group of rowdy men cheer and raise glasses.
EMILIA1
I mean tradition does dictate that a man must spend the first night with his wife....but...

ALPHONSO
Oh no no no. Fret not! It’s far more fashionable for the groom to go and toast the beauty of his wife with friends. I’ll return anon and we can complete our...business then.

He leaves.

EMILIA1
I can hardly wait.

He’s gone.

EMILIA1 (CONT’D)
What am I to do now? Go to my Lord Carey? Chase my new husband? I know not. No. I care not. I am done dancing towards them. They will have to dance to me.

She is about to sweep off when she bumps into SHAKESPEARE.

EMILIA1 (CONT’D)
Oh!

SHAKESPEARE
I didn’t mean to startle you my lady. I was simply returning to pay you my many congratulations.

EMILIA1
You already did.

SHAKESPEARE
Sorry?

EMILIA1
Before. You have already congratulated me.

SHAKESPEARE
Well then I do it again. Congratulations.

EMILIA1
That’s a bit weird isn’t it?

SHAKESPEARE
Pardon?
EMILIA1
If you wanted to say something else just say it I cannot be more done with the verbal dances we have to do all the time.

SHAKESPEARE
Oh I see.

EMILIA1
Now what?

SHAKESPEARE
I’m sorry I just/

EMILIA1
I’m going.

SHAKESPEARE
No please! When we met the first time I didn’t have a chance to properly introduce myself but I was taken by your charm.

EMILIA1
You liked my face you mean.

SHAKESPEARE
Yes

EMILIA1
My skin.

SHAKESPEARE
Yes.

EMILIA1
You find me intriguing perhaps? You find me a ‘breath of fresh air’. You find me exciting maybe. You want to give me a try. You want to see whether things are different with me. You want to even perhaps rescue me. Perhaps you want to sweep me off and coddle me. Protect me. Perhaps you want to sympathise with me. Pity me. Be my champion. Encourage me. Step into the heroes shoes and alter my fate. Is that it? Because I’ve heard all of this before. A thousand times from all the men who skulk past and sniff at me like dogs. I don’t care who you are but you will not be able to say or give me anything I have not had before. And besides, I’m married now. You should find someone better suited to your attentions.

She goes to leave.

SHAKESPEARE
You’re so angry. Why? You’re like a trapped wasp.
EMILIA1
Alright. We’re doing this are we?

SHAKESPEARE
Doing what?

EMILIA1
You know what. Fine. Let’s do it. If I am a wasp, best beware my sting.

SHAKESPEARE
If you sting me I’ll pluck it out.

EMILIA1
Ay if you can find it.

SHAKESPEARE
Who doesn’t know where a wasp keeps his sting? It’s in his tail!

EMILIA1
In his tongue.

SHAKESPEARE
Who’s tongue?

EMILIA1
Your tongue if you don’t leave me be.

SHAKESPEARE
Is this...I mean...are we? I don’t know what this is.

EMILIA1
I do know of you, you know. How can I not? I hear you are a poet.

SHAKESPEARE
I am.

EMILIA1
Me too.

SHAKESPEARE
You write?

EMILIA1
I do.

They circle each other. They’re wooing each other.
SHAKESPEARE
How oft, when thou, my music, music play’st,
Upon that blessed wood whose motion sounds
With thy sweet fingers, when thou gently sway’st
The wiry concord that mine ear confounds,
Do I envy those jacks that nimble leap
To kiss the tender inward of thy hand,
Whilst my poor lips, which should that harvest reap
At the wood’s boldness by thee blushing stand!
To be so tickled, they would change their state
And situation with those dancing chips,
O’er whom thy fingers walk with gentle gait,
Making dead wood more blest than living lips.
Since saucy jacks so happy are in this,
Give them thy fingers, me thy lips to kiss.

She seems like she is going to kiss him then turns away at the last moment leaving Shakespeare frustrated. At some point over the following he gives her a rose.

EMILIA1
How I would make him fawn, and beg, and seek,
And wait the season, and observe the time,
And spend his prodigal wits in bootless rhymes,
And shape his service wholly to my hests,
And make him proud to make me proud that jests!
So pertaunt like would I o’ersway his state
That he should be my fool, and I his fate.

She gives the rose to someone in the audience.
Shakespeare reacts angrily. Over the following Emilia1 reacts to his insults.

SHAKESPEARE
My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips’ red:
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.

That’s racist!

EMILIA1

SHAKESPEARE
I have seen roses damask’d, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.

(MORE)
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound:
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare

I carried Henry’s child but it was Will’s heart that I came to cherish.

Come, gentle night, come, loving, black-brow’d night,
Give me my Will, and, when I shall die,
Take him and cut him out in little stars,
And he will make the face of heaven so fine
That all the world will be in love with night,
And pay no worship to the garish sun.

Suddenly EMILIA1 cries out.

Stop!

She grabs her belly and looks up at SHAKESPEARE in fear.

Oh shit. I’ll get help! Midwife!

He runs off.
ACT 1 SCENE 6

1592

The MIDWIFE runs on and EMILIA roar in pain.

MIDWIFE
Here! Now you listen to me. You push when I say. You stop when I say. Anything in between? You do what I say. You understand?

EMILIA1
Yes. But I want to push. Can I push?

MIDWIFE
Hold up!

She looks under EMILIA1’s skirts.

MIDWIFE (CONT’D)
No, no, no , no, YES PUSH!

The birth is a bustling affair with lots of calm reassurances from the MIDWIFE and yelling from EMILIA1. Choral voices. EMILIA1 cradles her new son. ALPHONSO bursts in.

ALPHONSO
I came as soon as I could! Is it safe to view my child?

MIDWIFE
It is.

ALPHONSO
It’s just I’m no good around blood and gore.

MIDWIFE
You just missed that.

ALPHONSO
Small mercies. Do I have a son?

MIDWIFE
I’ll let your wife tell you that.

ALPHONSO approaches.
I’ll call him Henry.

Really?

Let’s make sure we’re never forgotten by him.

Clever woman.

He plays baby Henry a tune on the recorder.

He’s got your eyes. They’re very lovely. And his cheeks are/

You’re allowed to go now.

Oh thank god. Good bye my love. I’m off to fight in a war.

Do whatever you need to do. I am content. Try not to spend all of our money.

That would be good! Oh! And well done for not dying. That would have been a massive drag.

The baby cries and so ALPHONSO exits.

Shush little one. Are you so sad that you have come? This great stage of fools? It won’t be so bad. It won’t be so bad.
ACT 1 SCENE 7

We see a brief moment of SHAKESPEARE and EMILIA1 as lovers which is interrupted by HENRY CAREY before he speaks. Then over the following scene we see various moments occur including SHAKESPEARE watching from a small distance away. EMILIA1 tries to nurse her child but the MIDWIFE is constantly taking him from her. She is also desperately trying to write. She is also torn by her love of SHAKESPEARE and he distracts her from her mothering AND her work. She oscillates between him and LORD CAREY. The two of them demanding her attention one after the other.

LORD CAREY
You do know that rumours are rife about you?

EMILIA1
You don’t believe any of them do you?

Of course I don’t.

EMILIA1
Good. Can you stay?

No. I’m called to court. We are assembling a company of actors - we’re naming it after me; the Lord Chamberlain’s Men! Young Will Shakespeare is making a real name for himself. You wouldn’t want to ruin that for him would you?

She jumps back into the moment with SHAKESPEARE.

EMILIA1
I dare not be the reason your play is late. What have you called it?

I know not.

EMILIA1
Then I shall name it. My Love. Your Labour. Your lost son.

Catchy.

SHAKESPEARE

Love. Labour and Loss.

EMILIA1
SHAKESPEARE
You don’t even know what it’s about yet.

EMILIA1
I can guess. Mistaken identity, notes passed, silly boys and women who could do better?

Well now you mention it.

EMILIA1
Make sure there is resistance from the women. I want there to be one who does not wish to marry. Who is being forced to marry. Let me be able to relate to someone. Someone who has not been given what she deserves.

SHAKESPEARE
Why wait to be given? Why not take?

EMILIA1
You try taking when you are as I am. You try just taking. You can speak as you do because of who you are. What you are. You try stepping in my shoes.

SHAKESPEARE
You have your own talents my love. If you strive you too can achieve the same as I.

She jumps into a moment with LORD CAREY

LORD CAREY
He has talent. Talent doesn’t need distraction.

EMILIA1
What if it is I that is getting distracted?

LORD CAREY
From what?

EMILIA1
My work.

LORD CAREY
Well alright but yours is more of a hobby isn’t it?

EMILIA1
Would you consider something of mine for your men? I could write a play.

LORD CAREY begins laughing hard.

LORD CAREY
Oh you are glorious. I must go. Just be careful. We need him.
He leaves. EMILIA turns back to SHAKESPEARE.

SHAKESPEARE
What did you think he was going to say?

EMILIA1

(furious)
Am I not permitted to have what you have?

SHAKESPEARE
Be careful Emilia. Anger will not serve you well.

EMILIA1
Anger serves me just fine! Anger will fuel me. Anger will turn hope into action. Do not take my anger from me.

SHAKESPEARE
You cannot be angry with me?

EMILIA1
Why not?

SHAKESPEARE
Have I not worked hard? And are you not happy for me?

EMILIA1
How bitter a thing it is to look into happiness through another’s eyes.

SHAKESPEARE
That’s very cruel.

EMILIA1
If you think I’m cruel to speak this truth then you will think me murderous if all my truth were known.

SHAKESPEARE
You’re shaking. What’s wrong you?

EMILIA1
It feels like morning. I’m waking up.

SHAKESPEARE
Your words! This passion! Yes. Love’s, Labour’s, Lost. I can write this. I will write this tonight. And my heart, it will be in tribute to you. Let me distill your anger and love and passion. Let me help your words find a stage. Let me pour you into my work and immortalise your soul.
He grabs her and kisses her then turns to grab his quill and parchment and leaves in a hurry. Over the following EMILIA1 is strapped into a pregnancy bump.

EMILIA1
Is this what it feels like now? Is this it? Have I reached my summit? Should I now rest here and watch the heights that can be reached on other mountains by them? Looking up through the clouds. Searching and straining to watch them triumphantly conquer higher, more beautiful, more bountiful mountains that are not mine to climb? Is this it?

LADY CORDELIA enters

LADY CORDELIA
Emilia! Have you heard the news? Your Lord is dead!

EMILIA1
Alphonso?

LADY CORDELIA
Lord Carey.

EMILIA1
No!

LADY CORDELIA
Last night.

EMILIA1
Can I see him?

LADY CORDELIA
His wife is in attendance.

LADY CORDELIA exits. EMILIA1 is rocked by this news. Everyone has eyes on her. She stands and composes herself.

EMILIA3
There was never any love without pain. My belly was full and round again. Over the crest of a wave I went. Again and again and again.

EMILIA1 howls in labour and gives birth. A repeat of her previous birth but quicker.
ACT 1 SCENE 8

EMILIA1

(to her new baby)
Oh the life you could have had if you had not been born as I. Little eyes stay closed so you
don’t see the fate you are headed towards. Together. We’ll do all this together.

ALPHONSO arrives.

ALPHONSO
Well what immaculate conception could this be? Did I pop back from battle nine months
ago? A son?

EMILIA1
A daughter. Odilya.

ALPHONSO
Well she is of no interest to me. Is Henry prospering?

EMILIA1
He is well. I assume. I get letters from school. I barely see him. You hear about Lord
Carey.

I did.

EMILIA1
I trust you are being careful with our funds.

ALPHONSO
Must you ask? I trust you are being discreet?

EMILIA1
As ever.

ALPHONSO
Clever woman.

SHAKESPEARE has been watching and waits for
ALPHONSO to leave before he approaches with a Moses
basket. EMILIA1 puts the baby in his arms.

SHAKESPEARE
Is she...?
EMILIA1
Yes.

SHAKESPEARE
You know that I cannot...

EMILIA1
I know. Your play? Is it open?

SHAKESPEARE gently returns the baby to EMILIA1

SHAKESPEARE
Yes. Much Ado About Nothing. They love it. In fact. I’m due at the theatre now.

EMILIA1 turns to get her notepad, while she does

SHAKESPEARE leaves.

EMILIA1
I’ve written something new also. In the bleary moments between night feeds. It’s all I can do but I think it might be good. I know you’re busy and probably have plenty of your own work to be doing but will you read it? Tell me what you think.

She turns and sees he’s gone.

EMILIA3
Are you ready?

EMILIA2
Yes.

Over the following EMILIA1 has placed the baby in it’s Moses basket and takes the opportunity to write. EMILIA3 approaches the crib and when it feels right takes the opportunity to lift the baby and cuddle her then finally replace her.

EMILIA3
Some women will say that when they give birth they lose something of themselves to their child. That somehow this tiny parasite that has grown within them has managed to sneak something out of her and will now keep it as their own forever. They see this as the stolen sleep and time. They see this in the changes to their body or the pains they will forever have. They see this in the way their lives before will never now return to them as they will have to pour all their energy into their child so that they can instead be the one that thrives. Not many mothers will begrudge this but some will. I did not begrudge this. But I did feel a loss. Yet it was worth it; I thought that I could bring up a daughter who was perhaps stronger than me. Perhaps would benefit from a changing landscape. (MORE)
Have more chances than I did. And I knew that I would fight for her. So even though I felt the loss I also saw the gain. And for me, Odilya, was hope.

Everyone watches EMILIA1 as she speaks to her daughter. The other EMILIA’s join her.

Hello sweet girl.

Will you wake?

Let’s go out for a walk.

Odilya?

Will you?

EMILIA1 gently shakes her then after another moment she rips at the baby’s clothing.

Odilya?

Wake up.

She holds her baby to her face and tries to feel her breath.

Breath.

Breath for me.

Please. No no no no no.

She is on her knees holding her baby to her. The baby is taken from her. EMILIA2 and EMILIA3 have joined her.

You’ve done so well.
They swap places. EMILIA1 is helped off by EMILIA3 and the ensemble. EMILIA2 is left alone in her grief.
ACT 1 SCENE 9

SHAKESPEARE enters.

I heard. Are you alright?

EMILIA2

No.

What can I do?

EMILIA2

Nothing.

Nothing will come of nothing.

EMILIA2

I cannot heave my heart into my mouth. There are no words for what I am feeling.

I know my love.

EMILIA2

Do you?

You know I do.

EMILIA2

And yet you find them. Again and again. The pain and anguish of your own losses written large upon the stage. Does it help? I think it must. If only my own grief could be dissipated as such. But it can’t. Can it? And it is because of this that grief is not my only pain. It is my whole existence in your shadow. It is women born to a status that dooms us to your ill will. That there be women that do abuse their husbands I am of no doubt but the balance is grossly tipped in your favour. That we must assume that everything we do is to be dismissed. That all talent and interest, all passion and sense is just a quirk of our sex that can be indulged but never validated. That we must instead sit quietly and patiently watch as you enjoy the fruits of your labours. Imagine it so for you. Then see how my own desires languish in the dark. And still your sex think we are less? That we have less, to be able to survive? That somehow perhaps we feel less? Well I would that you use your privileged position in that wooden O of words to let husbands know, their wives have sense like them. They see and smell and have their palates, both for sweet and sour, as husbands have. What is it that they do when they change us for others? Is it sport? I think it is. And does affection breed it? I think it does. Is it frailty, that thus errs?

(MORE)
EMILIA2 (CONT'D)

It is so too. And have not we affections. Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have? Then let them use us well; else let them know, the ills we do, their ills instruct us so. Get out.

SHAKESPEARE

Emilia you are full of grief. Stop.

EMILIA2

Get out!

SHAKESPEARE

I will return when you are at peace.

EMILIA2

I will never be at peace as long as I have no voice!

SHAKESPEARE leaves.

EMILIA2 (CONT'D)

I will not stop. I will not rest until I find words for my Odilya. And for all my daughters I will never know.
ACT 1 SCENE 10

LADY KATHERINE arrives.

EMILIA2
Will you help me? I need money to publish my poetry. I can change things. For us all. I know it.

LADY KATHERINE
Listen to me Emilia; you have lost Lord Carey and your yearly stipend, your husband is an idiot who spends more money than he has, you have no other lovers to pay for you and soon you will be driven to the streets. You are throwing away years of hard work and your father and mother, if they were with you now, would be urging you the same as me. This battle is not yours to fight.

EMILIA2
Then whose is it?

LADY KATHERINE
Not yours. You speak as if you do not live a life of privilege when you do. You are fine. You can still be fine. Don’t throw this away?

EMILIA2
I know I can still be fine and I know my privilege, I am reminded of it every day. Every time I am looked upon with surprised eyes. When I’m lusted over. When I am questioned as to whether I should be in court or did I get lost on my way up from downstairs. I doubt you’ve ever suffered the same.

LADY KATHERINE
It’s hardly a suffering.

EMILIA2
You don’t get to say that unless you’ve experienced it. Have you not heard the way the men in court discuss those coming here to seek a home? To seek work? To seek peace and solace? Have you not noticed how they are no longer interested in what skills people bring but whether they ‘belong’ here or not? Have you not felt a change? These families, coming here, they are like mine. I’m no longer a curiosity. I’m something else now. I can’t sit by and do nothing.

LADY KATHERINE
Find the path you were trained for and rejoin it. Be sensible Emilia.

EMILIA2
‘Sensible’ has never changed anything Katherine.

LADY KATHERINE
Then I must go.
She leaves.
ACT 1 SCENE 11

As EMILIA2 speaks she paces. She walks the stage but eventually joins the groundlings. Stalking everywhere. She has come to the Globe to see SHAKESPEARE’S latest play OTHELLO and the actors prepare themselves on stage.

EMILIA2
I must walk the shore of the river on Bankside. I must breathe in the filth and smoke and smells of the water that brought us here. I must surround myself with the rest of us. I find myself at the Globe. It’s busier here than before. There’s a buzz. A new play is on. I go into the yard amongst people like me, people not like me, people. I go into the yard and for a moment I let myself look at the stage as if expecting to see my own work there. For we are told this. That the art is for escape and we should simply transpose our own image upon it. Use our imaginations. That should be enough shouldn’t it? But there is only so much work our imaginations can do. When the image we see is so far from our truth we cannot see a place for us. Is there no room at all? We do not ask for them to step aside and go without we merely ask them to let us join. Surely there is enough to go around.

Suddenly she sees SHAKESPEARE who walks through the dress circle to the box. He is enjoying his fame.

Will?

SHAKESPEARE
Ay? Autographs at stage door thank you.

EMILIA2
Do you ignore me now?

SHAKESPEARE
Emilia! You were the one who told me to go.

EMILIA2
But now I see you have much to do.

SHAKESPEARE
It’s a busy time. The Globe needs plays. I’m writing more than I ever have. My latest is a triumph. Othello. I play Iago. It is about a Moor. It’s right up your street.

EMILIA2
I’m happy for you.

SHAKESPEARE
Are you?
EMILIA2
I’m happy you’ve found your voice so strongly. Perhaps it is because I am no longer your muse?

SHAKESPEARE

You never were.

EMILIA2

What?

SHAKESPEARE

You were my lover but I had other muses. This is all rather public isn’t it? I’ll come to you. So sorry! Excuse me

He exits to come down. EMILIA2 is made to wait.
SHAKESPEARE arrives on stage.

SHAKESPEARE (CONT’D)

Look, you were my sparring partner. You challenged me of course. But I did not need you for my work.

EMILIA2

And yet you were happy to use my words.

SHAKESPEARE

They aren’t yours. No one owns words spoken. No one owns what they’ve said. What absurdity. After all you can speak with passion and eloquence but when you come to put it onto a page it is a harder craft than you may imagine. I have the talent to recognise phrases or speeches that can be used and I craft them into my scripts to tell the story I wish them to tell. That is where the skill lies. Not in simply speaking. It means nothing until it is on a page.

EMILIA2

Do not assume to teach me my craft. I am not a schoolgirl staring up at you in adoration. You are explaining what I already know. Why is it only men do this? You speak as if I cannot already write.

SHAKESPEARE

You can.

EMILIA2

And yet I should not have recognition for it? Should not publish? Not be commissioned as you?

SHAKESPEARE

No.
EMILIA2

Why not?

SHAKESPEARE

...

EMILIA2

Will? Why can I not do as you do?

SHAKESPEARE

...

EMILIA2

You know why. Say it.

A bell rings.

SHAKESPEARE

Act 4 is beginning I need to go. Good luck Emilia.

EMILIA2

My words! You’ve used my words and stories in so many of your plays and yet only your name is known.

SHAKESPEARE

(angry)

Now you listen to me. Those plays are MY work. I toiled over them. I wrote them. Me. There is a big difference between having an idea to write and being the one who actually does it.

EMILIA2

But I do write!

SHAKESPEARE

I will not be held at fault for the rules of our time.

EMILIA2

And yet you prosper from them.

SHAKESPEARE

What would you have me do? Down tools? Refuse to write unless women are also given the same freedoms?

EMILIA2

Yes!
Well I won’t. And neither would you if you were I.

Some voices call for him from elsewhere.

BOB

Will!

DAVE

We’ve got your beer.

SHAKESPEARE

Just a sparkling water for me...need to protect my voice...!

BOB

It’s starting!

SHAKESPEARE

Good day Emilia. How about you try enjoying the show instead of taking offense at any similarities to your words within it try being flattered. Many other women would die for the chance.

He leaves. BOB and DAVE who he’s joining cheer and laugh at him. By now EMILIA2 is on the floor with the Groundlings. Act 4 Scene 2 of Othello is playing out. The Willow Song is shared between DESDEMONA and EMILIA. Whilst this happens SHAKESPEARE joins his friends in one box and EMILIA2 makes her way up to a box on the opposite side.

DESDEMONA & EMILIA

The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree,
Singing willow willow willow.
With her hand on her bosom and her head upon her knee.
Oh willow willow willow,
Oh willow willow willow, shall be my garland.

DESDEMONA

I have heard it said so. - O these men, these men! Dost thou in conscience think - tell me Emilia.

EMILIA3

She had my name.
EMILIA2
She has my name.

DESDEMONA
That there be women do abuse their husbands in such gross kind?

EMILIA
There be some such, no question.

DESDEMONA
Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the world?

EMILIA
Why, would not you?

DESDEMONA
No by this heavenly light!

EMILIA
Nor I neither by this heavenly light: I might do’t as well in the dark.

EMILIA2
Ha! I like her.

DESDEMONA
Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the world?

EMILIA
The world is a huge thing; tis a great price for a small vice.

DESDEMONA
In troth, I think thou wouldst not.

EMILIA
In troth, I think I should, and undo’ when I had done. Marry, I would not do such a thing for a joint-ring, nor for measures of lawn, nor for gowns, petticoats, nor caps, no any petty exhibition; but for the whole world - why who would not make her husband a cuckold, to make him a monarch? I should venture purgatory for ’t.

EMILIA2
She speaks like I would. She seems like me. He’s even used my name the bastard. Is he laughing at me? For this is not flattery. She speaks sense but they will not see it so. He is laughing at me. He says with this; look what I do that you cannot. And he expects my silence.

DESDEMONA (CONT’D)
Beshrew me, if I would do such a wrong for the whole world.
EMILIA
Why the wrong is but a wrong i’ the world; and having the world for your labour, ’t is a wrong in your own world, and you might quickly make it right.

DESDEMONA
I do not think there is any such woman.

EMILIA
Yes a dozen; and as many to the vantage as would store the world they played for. But I do think, it is their husbands’ faults, if wives do fall.

EMILIA2
Did I not say this to him on the pillow one night? I remember this. I did! I was furious with Alphonso! Oh these are mine! These are mine!

EMILIA
Say, that they slack their duties, and pour our treasures into foreign laps. Or else break out in peevish jealousies, Throwing restraint upon us; or say, they strike us, Or scant our former having in despite: Why we have galls; and, though we have some grace,

A musical note.

EMILIA3
Now!

EMILIA2 runs on stage.

EMILIA2 AND EMILIA
Yet have we some revenge.

The person playing EMILIA stops in shock and looks down towards EMILIA2 who continues the speech while battling her way through the Groundlings and to the stage.

EMILIA2
Let husbands know, their wives have sense like them: they see and smell, And have their palates, both for sweet and sour. As husbands have. What is it that they do, when they change us for others? Is it sport? I think , it is. And doth affection breed it? I think it doth.

DESDEMONA
Guards! There’s a woman on the stage!
EMILIA2 (CONT’D)
Its’ frailty, that thus errs? It is so too. And have not we affections, desires for sport and frailty, as men have? Then let them use us well; else let them know, the ills we do, their ills instruct us so.

By now she is centre stage addressing the crowd. She is furious and powerful. A couple of officials try to grab her and drag her off but she pulls away from them and beats her feet chanting:

EMILIA2 (CONT’D)
The ills we do, their ills instruct us so!

This becomes a chant. Drums. She is watched but not joined. It feels like she is winning but then finally she is over come by people trying to stop her and she is dragged from the stage still shouting.

BOB
Music!

EMILIA2
The ills we do, their ills instruct us so!

BOB
Curtain!

END OF ACT 1.
ACT 2 SCENE 1

Fare thee well old Joe Clark
Fare thee well I’m gone
Fare thee well old Joe Clark
And hello Betsy brown

When I was a little girl
I used to play with boys
But now I am a bigger girl
I only play with ‘toys’

Chorus repeat

When I was a little girl
I used to want a knife
And now I am a bigger girl
I only want a wife

Fare thee well old Joe Clark
Fare thee well I’m gone
Fare thee well old Joe Clark
And hello Betsy brown

EMILIA2
Bankside. Walked the stretch with the filth, the washer women and the hawkers.
Unaccompanied and probably looked lost. No one bothered me. They looked but no one asked me who I was. Why I was here. What I was doing. They have no care for me. Why should they? I looked at the tide line and I found treasure in the filth. It had travelled up the beach and been abandoned there on the ebb. Amongst the clay pipes and food and bones and broken pots I found a seed pod. Not from here. Large. Dark. Why had it washed up here? And what would now become of it? It had been in the water long enough to attract barnacles but now it had reached shore it found a land unforgiving. It was not welcome. It would not grow. Not in this climate. What use was it here? What I should have done was thrown it back to the river and hope it finds it’s way home. Or even perhaps left it to fester on the beach. That’s what I should have done. But I just wanted to hold it. I just needed to hold onto something.

EMILIA3
I was looking at the water for long enough for it to draw me closer. Like the lapping of the waves were pulling me.

EMILIA1
I must have started to wade in. I must have looked like I was trying to swim.
JUDITH

Oi Lady! You lost?

EVE

She mad?

JUDITH

She might be.

EVE

What is she doing?

JUDITH

We’ve got a live one.

EMILIA3

I was sinking. Because the voices got closer and then they, then they, then....

EVE

Jesus christ almighty Jude what is she doing?

JUDITH

Quick! Help me grab her!

A note sounds.

They are joined by EVE, MARY and FLORA and between the five of them, and all shouting at each other and EMILIA2 they grab and carry her out of the river and to safety.

HESTER

Not on my watch lady.

MARY

Is she breathing?

They wait to see if she’s ok and EMILIA2 opens her eyes.

FLORA

Hello missus. Fancied a swim?

EMILIA2

What happened?

HESTER

You got yourself into trouble in the river there.
MARY  
We hoiked you out.

EMILIA2  
The seed pod.

JUDITH  
You ok?

EVE  
Give her some space. What’s your name darlin’?

EMILIA2  
Emilia.

MARY  
You aint from round here are you missus?

EMILIA2  
Bishopsgate.

All the women react with an ‘ooooh’

HESTER  
What was so bad you wanted to throw yourself in there then?

FLORA  
Your husband knocking you about?

JUDITH  
Bankrupted you?

MARY  
Got yourself pregnant?

EMILIA2  
No.

EVE  
Well then what you got to worry about with such lovely clothes?

HESTER  
Filthy though. You don’t want to walk back to Bishopsgate like that.

FLORA  
Come with us and we’ll sort you out.
Oh no I couldn’t possibly.

MARY
Couldn’t possibly’ Hark at her! Why you putting on all them airs and graces?

EVE
Come with us luvvie. We’ll clean you up.

EMILIA2
What are we doing?

JUDITH
We’re having a steam up.

FLORA
Oh you’ll love it. We’ll make you feel brand new.

They arrive at the bath house. Much to EMILIA2’s unease they go about undressing and washing her. They take her corset off and they wash her face. They find her clean clothes - they are simple and no corsetting.

JUDITH
This is all we have. Not as lovely as your dress I’m afraid.

EMILIA2
It’s fine.

JUDITH
We’ll get your under clothes washed up for you and sent on if you have some coin.

EMILIA2
Thank you.

MARY
Your lovely dress just needs drying and brushing off.

EMILIA2
No need.

EVE
Why not?

EMILIA2
I don’t want it.
HESTER
Can we have it?

EMILIA2
Yeh.

The women fall on the clothes and corset and all end up with part of her clothes.

MARY
You sure you don’t want all this?

EMILIA2
Take them as my thanks.

FLORA
It’s no big thing missus. We fish someone out most days. Nice to be able to do it when they’re still breathing.

JUDITH
She looks peaky.

EMILIA2
I’m sorry.

HESTER
What you saying sorry for?

EMILIA2
Everything.

HESTER
What if we told you none of it was your fault?

EMILIA2
What?

HESTER
Whatever you were running from wasn’t your fault.

EMILIA2
I think it was.

HESTER
Nah. It wasn’t.

A pause.
EMILIA2
I don’t know what I’m supposed to do.

EVE
You got any family, friends? Someone you can stay with? Or call on for anything?

LADY MARGARET CLIFFORD and her daughter
LADY ANNE CLIFFORD step into sight. Music kicks in. EMILIA2 collapses in relief and either the
CLIFFORDS or the RIVER WOMEN aid her on her journey
ACT 2 SCENE 2

She travels to the countryside. Music.

EMILIA3
It was like I had been given a single shard of light to follow through a darkened room. The beam led me to them. To the countryside, to the Cliffords.

EMILIA1
How had I let myself forget them before this?

EMILIA3
The warnings of Mary Sidney had blurred them from my view perhaps? And just as waves take you out to sea the waves can bring you back in. I felt a loss so profound I was put to bed for several weeks. I was quite unable to resist the weight of it. I could barely move, let alone write. I could barely speak. I had sunk deeply beneath the surface and nothing but time would heal me. And why did I dream of my father? Every night? He came. And I felt seven years old again. Everything begins with death.

She is approached by LADY ANNE who reads from Ovid’s Metamorphoses.

LADY ANNE
At night the queen, arrayed to celebrate
The rites, went forth with frenzy’s weaponry.
Vines wreathed her head, a light spear lay upon
Her shoulder and a deerskin draped her side.
Wild with her troop of women through the woods
She rushed, a sight of terror, frenzied by
The grief that maddened her, the image of
A real Bacchanal. At last she reached
The lonely hut and, screaming Bacchic cries,
Broke down the door, burst in and seized her sister,
Garbed her in Bacchic gear and hid her face,
Concealed in ivy leaves, and brought the girl
Back, in a daze, inside her palace wall.

LADY ANNE looks up from the book.

LADY ANNE (CONT’D)
Will they kill Tereus? For what he did?

EMILIA2
They will do worse.

LADY ANNE
I like it. I like that they rescue her. Procne takes her band of women and hunts for her.
EMILIA2
And it is thanks to the embroidery Philomela wove that they learn the truth.

LADY ANNE
When you first came here all you had with you was what you had written.

EMILIA2
Yes.

LADY ANNE
Will you let me read it one day?

EMILIA2
I will.

LADY ANNE
You did not speak. It was as if your tongue had been cut out too.

EMILIA2
I was not as wretched as Philomela. Poor woman had been raped and had her tongue cut out with a sword. I can’t pretend to have been treated as badly as that.

LADY ANNE
There is no competition to be had in all this though is there?

EMILIA2
You’re too young to know that.

LADY ANNE
I’ve seen a lot. Are there any women in Greek myths who don’t get raped or brutally mutilated or killed?

EMILIA2
Not many but we’ll hunt them out.

LADY ANNE
I know about Clytemnestra and Medea and they are fearsome but not very nice.

EMILIA2
Go on.

Enter LADY MARGARET

LADY ANNE
Do women who get power have to be cruel as well?
No they don’t.

I want to read stories about that.

Then we will have to write some.

Shall we stop there?

Please say I make a good pupil! Please say you will continue.

You are a very good pupil. But Margaret do you truly want someone like me to teach her?

Someone like you? I would say that a woman who has learnt to think for herself would be the perfect kind of teacher for my daughter.

It’s not the conventional view.

We are not conventional women.

Thank you.

So you’ll do it?

How can I possibly refuse?

Ok enough now Anne. Let’s not exhaust her. Please leave us a while.

LADY ANNE goes to leave then remembers she should curtsy which she does before running off.

Can I ask you something?

Anything.
LADY MARGARET
When you were at court what knew you of my husband George?

EMILIA2
I regret, not much.

LADY MARGARET
You do not have to hide anything from me. I know most of his indiscretions but I am curious what those at court know.

EMILIA2
I’ve not been welcome at court for some time. But I know he had an appetite.

Yes.

LADY MARGARET
And that he was less than discreet.

EMILIA2
And that I am a fool!

No!

LADY MARGARET
People see me like one. He has shamed me and he has broken our marriage vows. He has taken what he wanted and he has forsaken all I have. How could they do this so easily?

EMILIA2
Because it is their right.

LADY MARGARET
By whose laws?

EMILIA2
Their own. Though madam as you know I have done it myself.

LADY MARGARET
But it didn’t end well for you. It won’t so much as touch George. It will be shrugged away. I cannot do anything about it. But you can. Will you write something? For women. To warn us.

EMILIA2
What will I warn them of?

LADY MARGARET
Snakes.
And how do I write about such things? To warn them of their tricks? Even if I had the means to publish women are only permitted by the censor to write of religion.

We will find a way. But for now. Will you start writing? For yourself, as well as me? We need you to. We want you to. Please.

Who am I to do this?

You are my friend.

Then I will.

LADY MARGARET kisses her and leaves.

It was here wasn’t it?

Yes.

Here that I began to think that perhaps I wasn’t quite done yet. It is a wondrous thing when someone instills their confidence in you. Offers you their hand. Believes you can do it and you alone. Sees you not as a risk or a trifle, sees you not to be patronised or dismissed. And I see through my many years now how valuable that is to any kind of creation. And how lucky some have been to have had that from birth. An assumption that ‘you will’, instead of one that says ‘you shouldn’t’. I was lucky in that moment to feel it right then.

Over the following we see what she describes.

I began to write short poems with, at first, subtle warnings and instruction to women on how to approach marriage. I would have Anne and Margaret read them and then they would copy them and pass them quietly to friends. What started small became steadily bigger. One or two copies became ten or twenty. They would be passed amongst us so many times they’d often return in several, tattered pieces. But of course it would only be a matter of time before one of them would fall into the wrong hands. In this instance my dear friend Lady Katherine’s husband Sir Thomas Howard...
ACT 2 SCENE 3

SIR THOMAS HOWARD and LADY KATHERINE arrive. He is furious. LADY MARGARET and LADY ANNE receive them.

LORD HOWARD
Out of my way important man coming through. Dear Countess I apologise for coming here with little warning. I’m afraid I was compelled to come after experiencing something so vile and so terrible that I wanted to be sure you knew who exactly you were harbouring.

LADY MARGARET
Whatever could you mean Sir Thomas??

EMILIA2 enters

LORD HOWARD
This...well I can hardly call her Lady...this female...

LADY MARGARET
Sir Thomas I ask you to explain your manner it is most out of place.

LORD HOWARD
Emilia Lanier is a danger to us all.

LADY MARGARET
Oh heavens! How so?

LORD HOWARD
Not only does she shame both her husband and herself in a most public display of vulgarity on the stage. But are you aware of the fact that she seems to be producing notelets of filth which encourage the most base and disreputable behaviour amongst fine lady folk as yourself?

LADY MARGARET
Are you talking about her poems?

LORD HOWARD
You’ve seen them?

LADY MARGARET
Of course! I’ve helped to reproduce and pass them round.

LORD HOWARD
(incredulous)
Reproduce?!!
LADY MARGARET
To be frank with you Sir Thomas they really aren’t meant for you to read. They’re for a Lady’s eyes only. And they’re not as bad as you seem to be making out. But I suppose while we have you here it would be good to get your opinion. I know Emilia would appreciate the feedback. Did you like them?

LORD HOWARD
Like them? LIKE THEM?! They are the most revolting and insidiously terrifying things I have ever had the displeasure of reading!

LADY MARGARET
Not your cup of tea then.

LORD HOWARD
No! And I am shocked and appalled at your lack of outrage about the matter. Are you not revolted by them too? They speak of Adam being at fault and not Eve.

(reading)
‘But surely Adam can not be excus’d, her fault, though great, yet hee was most too blame’
They call men vipers. They debase the very souls who support and give them permission to live upon gods good earth. Instead of giving thanks for the generous and kind disposition of all men she seems to suggest that men are to be ignored and discarded in favour of a new order in which women are seen as equal. This preposterous notion gives no thought to clear fact that for as long as time immemorial women have never been equal to men and instead must accept the natural order of things. Inferior. Ever more so and subservient to the end! This poetry, if you can call it that, is akin to a call to arms and it is the most dangerous rubbish I’ve ever read. Can you imagine if all women came to believe what she suggests? That women deserve more than they already generously are given? Can you imagine the horror of that? Well I can and I will not stand for this. Which is why I am here and why I say to you Emilia Lanier you will desist your terrible actions and if you do not you will find yourself in a most destitute position. No one at court will entertain you. No patronage will ever come your way. Be mindful of the fact your husband right now is seeking a knighthood for his part in the battles being waged and it would reflect very badly for you both if you did not hush your tongue and stay your pen. Just think on that. Do not forget the growing discomfort at the spread of a certain kind of sorcery that this could be described as. You would not want to be tried as a witch Emilia - I fear your crimes would not go down well. And Lady Margaret I thought better of you. I hope you will reconsider housing such a criminal as this.

LADY MARGARET
Are you quite done?

LORD HOWARD
Why yes!

LADY MARGARET
Good. Lady Katherine do you have anything to say?
LORD HOWARD
No she does not! She is in complete agreement with me.

LADY MARGARET
I asked your good Lady wife.

LORD HOWARD
And she does not need to reply when I have done it for her.

LADY MARGARET
Would you let her speak?

LADY KATHERINE
I am in agreement with my husband.

LORD HOWARD
You see?

LADY KATHERINE
I hope that my friend Emilia will see sense and stop this action of hers as it does tarnish the rest of us so terribly.

EMILIA2
Kate surely you can agree this is all a bit ridiculous. Witch craft?

LADY KATHERINE
You would do well to heed my husband’s advice.

LADY MARGARET
Well it’s hardly advice. It was a threat! A terrible one. How dare you come to my home and threaten my guests so!

EMILIA2
It’s alright Countess.

LADY MARGARET
No it is not. I would ask that they leave now.

LORD HOWARD
I will report back to your husband how foolish his wife has been.

LADY MARGARET
You can tell that bastard what a fool I think he is!
LADY ANNE

(thrilled)
Mother!

LORD HOWARD

I have never heard such crass and terrible language from one that would call herself a Lady!

LADY MARGARET

Oh get out you old turd.

LADY ANNE

Both of you! Out!

LORD HOWARD

Disrespectful!

LORD HOWARD and LADY KATHERINE are sent packing. LADY MARGARET and ANNE are flushed and excited by the encounter. EMILIA2 is quiet.

LADY MARGARET

The cheek of it!

LADY ANNE

Mother you were wonderful!

LADY MARGARET

I rather was wasn’t I? What a horrible man. But we must not be deterred.

EMILIA2

And yet we should be. His threat is a very real one.

LADY MARGARET

Emilia he is scared. They all are.

EMILIA2

Yes.

LADY MARGARET

All that talk of ‘witch craft’ for heavens sake.

LADY MARGARET (CONT’D)

Do not be deterred.
ACT 2 SCENE 4

They disperse. A musical note. Everyone focuses on

EMILIA3

Search for this now and you won’t see it. Look for this in words and it won’t be there. Almost nothing is kept. Nothing is remembered. But in our muscles we feel it. Memories of intention. Memories of need and fury and pain. We hear the echoes bouncing down the passage of time and into our dreams. We read what was recorded and we see what is missing. We see what they did not want us to write down.

Time passes.

EMILIA2 is home with ALPHONSO

Husband.

ALPHONSO

Wife.

EMILIA2

You really fucked it didn’t you?

As did you.

We have nothing?

Well...

No knighthood despite it all?

I’m afraid not.

Then we must get creative.

I don’t want to die a pauper!

You need to find a way to earn more money.
ALPHONSO
What can I do?

EMILIA2
Find a way to return to court and play again.

ALPHONSO
Oh heavens alive are you insane? I haven’t picked up a recorder since my glory days in
Elizabeth’s reign. I wouldn’t know what to do with the damn thing. Let’s be honest I am
exceedingly low on all skills.

EMILIA2
You need to find something.

ALPHONSO
I can’t go back to earning a pittance, it will hardly keep us.

EMILIA2
Well luckily you won’t be the only one earning.

ALPHONSO
How so?

EMILIA2
I’m going to teach.

ALPHONSO
Oh good! Do you have another rich bitch from court needing their idiot children integrated
into society?

EMILIA2
No. I’m going to teach women from over the bridge.

ALPHONSO
South of the river?

EMILIA2
Yes. I understand women aren’t generally on your radar but even you must have noticed a
great many of them have had little to no access to any education ever.

ALPHONSO
How in the hell will you make any money from doing that?

EMILIA2
Whatever they can afford I will ask for.
ALPHONSO
Oh lord you think you’re Jesus. The Mary Magdalen’s of Bankside will lap it up. And how do you think you teaching whores and fish wives their ABC’s is going to help our standing?

EMILIA2
I don’t care.

ALPHONSO
Pardon?

EMILIA2
I don’t care about our standing.

ALPHONSO
Well when we’re languishing in the gutter it will serve you well to ‘not care’ about what people think of you.

EMILIA2
Alphonso I want to change things. You of all people must long for things to change.

ALPHONSO
What is that supposed to mean?

EMILIA2
If things were different wouldn’t you have been happier?

ALPHONSO
I don’t know.

EMILIA2
In many ways we’re very alike.

ALPHONSO
You have not made me unhappy. If anything it’s been rather fun getting news of what you’ve been up to.

EMILIA2
I’ll be careful.

ALPHONSO
Clever woman.

EMILIA2
He leaves.

EMILIA3
So what did I do? I started to teach.
ACT 2 SCENE 5

1610

Music. The River Women burst onto stage, loud and boisterous. MARY, EVE, JUDITH, FLORA and HESTER.

MARY
Emilia! Sorry we’re late. Something happened down at the docks and we had to rubber neck.

JUDITH
Broken down cart...

HESTER
Manure flippin’ everywhere...

EVE
Women screaming about her lost sheep

JUDITH
And some idiot man trying to beat up the statue of the king.

FLORA
Just the usual.

JUDITH
Yeh but I heard that the woman was screaming because she was being dragged off on charges of witchcraft.

FLORA
(shocked)
Witchcraft!

EVE
It’s so hysterical. I wish they’d stop with all that nonsense.

JUDITH
It’s terrifying is what it is.

HESTER
I don’t like the way things are going at all.

MARY
Yeh and if they saw what you do with the devil you’ll be up in flames before you know it!
HESTER
Oi! Please respect my privacy - me and the devil have a very respectable thing going on. Anyway. I’ve brought the coin I owe you from last time Emilia, and what I owe you for today. I’ve had a good week at the Dirty Dick so I’m flush.

EVE
I bet you have you filthy Danish bitch!

HESTER
Serving! I was serving!

MARY
I bet you were you filthy bitch!

The women laugh.

HESTER
Oh fucksake! Tell them Emilia, they won’t be ladies if their minds are in the gutters.

EVE
Shut it Denmark.

EMILIA2
Ok settle down. Have you all had a chance to read what I gave you last time?

EVE
Oh about that. I did read it but my husband found it and used it on the pot.

JUDITH
He wiped his arse with her poem? The dirty bastard!

MARY
That’s pure disrespect that is!

EMILIA2
I’m not a stranger to bad reviews. But we all know those poems aren’t meant for your husbands. What did you think of it before you lost it?

EVE
I liked it.

EMILIA2
Did you?
EVE

Yeh. I did.

(she quotes)
You came not in the world without our paine,
Make that a barre against your crueltie;
Your fault beeing greater, why should you disdaine
Our beeing your equals, free from tyranny?

The women react.

EVE (CONT’D)

Now that is good. Speaks to us all. And do you know what? It inspired me to write my own.

EMILIA2

Really?

EVE

Shall I read it?

EMILIA2

Please.

The other women woop and cheer.

EVE

Alright. Here we go. Be kind.

Where are you going you horrible bastard?
You owe me coin for that trick
Don’t you run from me if you know what’s good for you
I’ll make a tree of you with this stick
I don’t care how much you hit me
My husband does it so much I’m blue
But if you take my coin I’ll kill ya
That’s just what a girls gotta do.

Thank you.

The women applaud and cheer.

EMILIA2

My goodness. You were inspired by my poem to write that?

EVE

Well look, you talk of making sure you have ways of keeping valuable things to yourself. Like jewels and clothes. So your husband can’t spend everything you own.

(MORE)
EVE (CONT 'D)
Which is canny and good advice. Except I aint never had no jewels and the only clothes I own are the ones I’m wearing and aint no one paying me nothing for these old shitty rags so I thought to myself - what’s the equivalent?

MARY
Oooh girl!

HESTER
Equivalent!

EVE
Yeh I went there! New word!

MARY and EVE celebrate.

EVE (CONT’D)
So I was like, what’s the equivalent - and I was like, well for me it’s when I turn tricks and the bastard doesn’t pay me so I got to beat him til he does and then I put the coin somewhere my husband aint gonna find it.

JUDITH
Up her...

EVE
Yeh mate. And then I wrote this.

JUDITH
It’s mint.

EVE
Thank you.

JUDITH
I liked the bit about the tree. That was most describish.

EVE
Thanks babe.

JUDITH
I ain’t written nothing but I read yours and it’s alright you know.

EMILIA2
Thank you.

MARY
Yeh I liked it too. I read it out loud and my mum said I sounded like a posh bitch and I liked that. Ere Miss. Can we ask you something?
Of course.

MARY
We heard a rumour about you. Did you and Will Shakespeare used to...you know?

JUDITH
You can’t just ask her that!

MARY
What?

JUDITH
That’s personal for a lady. She aint like you or I.

EVE
It aint like it’s not common knowledge though.

EMILIA2
What isn’t?

EVE
About you and him.

EMILIA2
Really?

EVE
Yeh! You are her aintcha?

EMILIA2
Who?

HESTER
The one in the sonnets. The ‘dark lady’. It’s got to be you.

EMILIA2
What sonnets?

HESTER
Oh you haven’t seen them yet? They’re being passed round still, Flora don’t you have a copy?

FLORA reluctantly looks for her copy knowing the contents of them.
MARY
How was it? ‘My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun’

JUDITH
‘Coral is far more red than her lips’ red.

MARY
‘If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun’

EVE
‘If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.’

EMILIA2
‘I have seen roses damask’d, red and white, But no such roses see I in her cheeks’

You have read them!

HESTER

EMILIA2
Many years ago.

EVE
See! I told you it was her!

EMILIA2
It could be any number of women. He had so many.

FLORA
Here!

She finds a little book of sonnets and passes them to EMILIA2 who starts flicking through them.

EVE
I mean they’re super passionate. “Thou art the fairest and most precious jewel.” And rather lovely. For the most.

JUDITH
But they get pretty brutal. “For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright, Who art as black as hell, as dark as night.” I mean you clearly broke his heart.

MARY
Maybe she shouldn’t read them.

EMILIA2
How could he?

MARY
Maybe they’re not about you after all?
EMILIA2

How could he do this?

FLORA

They’re probably some other dark lady.

EMILIA2

I remember him writing them. They were for us. Not for the world to see. He published them?

JUDITH

Looks like it.

EMILIA2

Again he takes everything and leaves me nothing. Why can I not be free of him? He takes my name and runs it through the mud for his own gain.

EVE

To be fair he doesn’t name you.

EMILIA2

But you knew it. Did you not? How?

EVE

Literally everyone is talking about it.

EMILIA2

I feel like I’ve lost everything again. Will this be how I am remembered? My name on their lips? Is there anything more violating?

None of the women know what to say.

EMILIA2 (CONT’D)

I’m sorry. Look at me. Self pity for something so trivial.

MARY

It’s not trivial.

EMILIA2

It is. When I know what you all face every day I have nothing to be complaining about.

JUDITH

If he’s hurt you then he’s hurt you and there’s nothing more to say. Come ‘ere darlin’

She pulls her in for a hug.

EMILIA3

Oh those women. What they taught me. When they brought me into their world. The days we had together. The time we spent.
Are you ready now?  

EMILIA1

Just one moment more.

EMILIA3
ACT 2 SCENE 6

ALPHONSO arrives.

ALPHONSO
Even when they had you in make up and skirts you somehow wore your difference with a kind of pride.

EMILIA2
Are you alright?

ALPHONSO
You and I never really fitted in did we?

EMILIA2
Alphonso.

You let me be.

ALPHONSO
And you I. What is this about?

EMILIA2
We were born in the wrong time you know?

EMILIA2
Actually maybe this is the perfect time for us.

ALPHONSO
Clever woman.

He starts walking away.

EMILIA2
(calling out to him, confused)
Hey! Alphonso. Where are you going? Alphonso?

ALPHONSO exits. EMILIA2 watches, confused by his leaving suddenly.

MARY
Emilia love? You been out all day? I’ve got some sad news.

JUDITH
Emilia? You haven’t heard have you? Sorry to have to tell you this.
EVE
Sorry you have to hear from me.

FLORA
I didn’t want you going back there and finding him.

HESTER
It’s your husband love. He’s dead.

MARY
Can we do anything to help you?

HESTER
Is she alright?

EVE
It’s the shock aint it?

FLORA
When my husband died I was ecstatic.

JUDITH
Nice word.

FLORA
Ta. But I guess Emilia liked hers.

Two MEN appear. They are dressed well and obviously have money.

MAN 1
Hello darlins

MAN 2
Got some time for us?

MARY
Not now mate!

JUDITH
Sod off.

MAN 2
(to FLORA)
What about you?

FLORA
You can’t come in here, it’s for women only.
MAN 1

Excuse me?

MAN 2

Nasty little bitches don’t want our money.

MAN 1

If you learnt some manners you could have earned yourselves a decent whack tonight.

EVE

You heard them. We don’t want your money, piss off.

MAN 2

You watch your filthy mouth.

MAN 1

You don’t know who we are - we can have you strung up and thrown in the tower.

MAN 2

We could have you burnt at the goddamn stake.

HESTER

You’re drunk. Go home.

MAN 2

YOU DON’T GET TO TELL US WHAT TO DO.

MAN 1

If we wanted you we could have you.

HESTER

Don’t test us.

MAN 1

Or what?

No response.

MAN 1 (CONT’D)

OR WHAT?

He goes up to EMILIA2

MAN 2

What’s your problem eh? Pretty little Moor. Where you from then eh? You know you’d be a lot prettier if you smiled. Go on darlin’ crack one out for me. Might never happen. What’s wrong with her? Is it that time of the month? Where are you from you miserable cow? Can’t she speak English? Tell her I said she’s a miserable cow.
Something visceral snaps within the EMILIAS and a roar comes out of her before they launch on the men. A big cathartic fight ensues. Music, movement, abstract rather than naturalistic.

She’s insane!

Witchcraft! The devil in her!

This is the devil’s work!

Go! GO!

Now?

NOW!

MAN 1

MAN 2

MAN 1

HESTER

EMILIA1

EMILIA3

The MEN run off and the women envelope EMILIA2 who has collapsed. EMILIA3 launches into the next scene.
ACT 2 SCENE 7

EMILIA3

Men, who forgetting they were borne of women, nourished of women, and that if it were not by the meanes of women, they would be quite extinguished out of the world, and a finall ende of them all, doe like Vipers deface the wombes wherein they were bred, onely to give way and utterance to their want of discretion and goodnesse. Therefore we are not to regard any imputations, that they undeservedly lay upon us, no otherwise than to make use of them to our owne benefits, as spurre to vertue, making us flie all occasions that may colour their unjust speeches to pass currant.

EVE

Who wrote that?

EMILIA3

I did!

LADY KATHERINE enters with LADY ANNE. KATHERINE is badly beaten and her face is bruised and bloody. She stands proudly in front of EMILIA3 holding her composure.

LADY KATHERINE

My dear Emilia. You were hard to find.

EMILIA3

Katherine? Your face! Anne.

LADY KATHERINE

I’m sorry I’ve come in a state of disrepair.

EMILIA3

You don’t need to be so formal with me Kate. What happened?

LADY KATHERINE

My husband.

EMILIA3

Lord Howard did this? Why? He did this because of my words?

LADY KATHERINE

Your beautiful, brilliant words! Those poems have been the most perfect morsels of truth and every new one that came would fill me with such happiness and gratitude that there was someone out there who knew me somehow. And when I found out it was you that was writing them I was so proud. And I wanted to tell you so but I’ve been too stubborn and stupid to do it. And scared. But I am proud. And I’m sorry I ever tried to stop you.
EMILIA 3
You are not stupid Katherine. It is because of her sense and foresight that her husband is as rich as he is. Your skills have benefited him greatly and this is how he repays you? How long has it been going on?

LADY KATHERINE
From the very start. I have been so cruel to you when all you were asking me was for my support. Will you keep showing me that we talk? Will you keep showing them that we can function as they wish us to but behind closed doors like these right now, we talk. I want them to realise this. And I want them to be as scared as I have been my whole life. And I want you to show them that we can do what they do despite their best efforts to stop us. I want to do now what I should have done a long time ago. Let me help you publish your work.

EMILIA 3
Publish? We’ll never get them past the censor.

LADY ANNE
So you change them. Just like we change our very natures for them you can change your words. Course you can! We do it without even thinking it don’t we? We barely even blink. We know from the moment we’re born that we must become shapeshifters and tricksters. That what we wear as our outer skin, our masks, are there to shield what we have kicking and tearing inside us. This world works against us but we’re like some kind of wily upstream swimmers, jumping and diving. We’re born with it. If we’re lucky, like I was, our mothers teach us it. We know what to do. You know exactly what to do; think round it. What can women write? What will get past the censor?

EMILIA 3
Religious texts.

LADY ANNE
Write a religious text but inside it, deep inside what you write, place your messages for us. We who have read your poems will know what you are saying to us. The censor won’t suspect a thing.

EMILIA 3
Clever woman.

LADY ANNE
I had a great teacher.

FLORA
I know a publisher. If the money is right he’ll print anything.

LADY KATHERINE
Leave the money to me and Lady Margaret Clifford - we’ll write to the women of court who loved your words. I’m sure they’ll help. Lead the way my dear.
FLORA
We can talk to him. He owes me.

FLORA and LADY KATHERINE leave together.  
EMILIA3 is half way between the memory and now.

EMILIA3
Teach. Teaching. Words. On a page. This was our chance. This is what we’d been waiting for. We publish my poems. Properly. Officially. As well as that. We realised we could go further. This moment. I remember this. Search for this now and you won’t find it. So many of us were fighting to work, to be chartered, to be recognised. We were part of that. This is what I said - Do you know what I’m thinking? When I take my poems to the men in the scriptorium to copy for our lessons, I give them our money. I give them coin to copy my words. They are making copies, writing letters, contracts, creating pamphlets. With everything I’ve taught you. You can do what they do.

HESTER
A scriptorium?

EMILIA3
We do the copying. We do the writing. We make the money. Anne let’s make what we made before but bigger. More advice, no censors, what we can’t publish in my book of poems we put in a pamphlet to distribute far and wide.

LADY ANNE
It’s dangerous.

EMILIA3
Yes it is dangerous.

She looks around her for agreement.

MARY
Let’s get to work.
ACT 2 SCENE 8

Music. High tempo. Exciting. Fun. Women coming together. Everyone rushes to action. Over the following EMILIA's scriptorium is formed. Pamphlets are made and distributed out to the audience. 'If you want to keep your money don't marry' 'if you marry keep a stash of your own' 'remember if you're widowed you gain rights you never had before'. Sections of Emilia's own poetry.

EMILIA3 directs action. The women help write and distribute the pamphlets. LADY KATHERINE helps to gain patronage from other monied women. Once done HESTER bursts in.

HESTER
The women of the town are loving the pamphlets! We're getting involved. There are protests planned. The women are hopeful their voices will be heard.

JUDITH
We need a run of fifty of this pamphlet ladies, as we ran out too quickly last week. There's still space for a short poem on the final page. Does anyone have anything they wish to contribute.

MARY
Eve does!

EVE
No I don't!

MARY
You do! You said you had finished one last night and you were waiting to see if there would be space.

EVE
Well I aint so sure anymore.

EMILIA3
Read it to us.

EVE
No bleedin' way.

EMILIA3
You won't know if it's any good if you don't let us hear it.

EVE
And I won't know if it's crap if I don't too.
MARY

No one won a war like that.

EVE

We aint at war.

EMILIA3

Oh yes we are. Read it.

EVE

I can't.

EMILIA3

Then I will.

She holds out her hand and EVE reluctantly hands her the poem.

EMILIA3 (CONT’D)

There is volume in my silence
If you stop to listen
Look into my eyes and you will
Hear quite clearly what i'm trying to say
Be careful, I am saying
Be careful
What you have taken is not yours
And one day, loudly, I shall take it back.

The women take it in.

MARY

It doesn't rhyme.

EMILIA3

It's perfect. Put it on the final page. On it's own. It needs a whole page of it's own. What do you think?

EVE

My poem next to yours? It would be an honour.

FLORA

Emilia! Your books are ready!

The muses arrive with the books. Ends with EMILIA3 hugging her newly printed book to her chest. The women disperse. Except EVE who remains watching EMILIA3.
EMILIA3
I found myself marvelling at where I had started and where I was now. From such beginnings as I had come from, the paths I had chosen and the paths I had not. The many moments of change that had shaped me. Forever on a page. Forever on a shelf. Forever to be read by enquiring eyes and minds. If I could only freeze this moment before it happened I would.

She looks at EVE who nods and turns and leaves.

EMILIA3 (CONT’D)

But here it comes.

The building of music and beat. FLORA comes running on.

FLORA
Emilia! Oh god help us. Emilia!

EMILIA3
This is what happens when we speak.

FLORA
Eve. It's Eve. They've got her.

EMILIA3
When we do not cut out our tongues.

FLORA
They found her with the pamphlets. They said it was the devils work.

We see EVE being placed on a pyre. Music. Build. Horror and sadness.

EMILIA3
When we do not stay silent. This is what they do. This is what they did. Our Eve. Our Eve. They took our Eve.

While she speaks we see EVE go up in flames.

EMILIA3 (CONT’D)

And we could not go to her like Procne went to her sister. We could not go with frenzy's weaponry to scream Bacchic cries of anguish and break down the door to seize our sister. We could not go.

A song for EVE. There is the sense that the party is over. Everything she was celebrating has now been forgotten. The reality of their lives, too dark. EMILIA3 is left alone.
ACT 2 SCENE 9

SHAKESPEARE arrives.

You are dead.

EMILIA3

You’ll be dead soon too, old woman.

EMILIA3

Why are you here?

SHAKESPEARE
Well I’m widely regarded as the greatest writer in English Language, a national treasure and the worlds most famous playwright so any theatre I may step into can legitimately be considered ‘My gaff’.

EMILIA3
Not this one and not right now it isn’t.

You had fun?

SHAKESPEARE

EMILIA3
It’s a nice feeling isn’t it? When you see them watching. Knowing your words are sitting within them now. That perhaps you took them on a journey. Perhaps you let them have some time away from themselves to understand you just a little.

SHAKESPEARE
I never wrote for people to understand me. I wrote to understand them.

EMILIA3
You never understood me though did you?

No. Perhaps. A little.

EMILIA3
What did you know of me?

SHAKESPEARE
That you were from a musical family. Italian. Jewish probably but you hid it. And likely of North African Descent. That you were passionate. That you loved to write. That you were more intelligent than many of the people around you would give you credit for. That you were hot. That you were a good mother and grandmother, or at least you wanted to be. That you were
EMILIA3

Stifled. Ignored. Abused.

SHAKESPEARE

That you weren’t the first and you wouldn’t be the last. That you spoke for many who could not speak. That you must have been so brave to have done what you did. That you deserve all of this right now. That perhaps you even knew that one day this would happen for you. That when things started to shift you would emerge. That you would be able to give something hundreds of years after you died. After you were buried by history. I think you probably knew all this. Or at least hoped. That the time would one day be right.

EMILIA3

Yeh.

SHAKESPEARE

Clever woman.

EMILIA3

Yeh I am.

He goes.
She takes a moment to regard us all.

EMILIA3
What can I say to you? Now. What. Can I. I want to tell you about anger. Because it is not just something that passes through like a storm. It is something that forms the core of me. Like the earth has the heat of its origins deep in it’s centre I do too. I have been told that my anger is not to be seen on my outside. That it is not seemly. It doesn’t help. I have been told, even by other women, that it detracts from what I have tried to say. I have been told that it’s distracting people from moving forward as they are too consumed by the guilt I am giving them. And that my hatred of the men whose very ills fuel this anger, detracts from my arguments. But you say we hate men as if we silence them, as if we beat and abuse them, rape them, as if we shame them for their desires, as if we restrict them from any kind of independence and agency. As if we hang them and drown them and stone them and burn them. I am 76 years old and I hold in me a muscle memory of every woman who came before me and I will send more for those that will come after. For Eve. For every Eve. I don’t know if you can feel it. Do you? Do you feel it? Inside of you. You don’t need to be a woman to know what is coming. Because why have our stories been ignored? For so long? Ask yourself why.

A rumble is approaching. Drums.

EMILIA3 (CONT’D)
Listen to us. Listen to every woman who came before you. Listen to every woman with you now. And listen when I say to you to take the fire as your own. That anger that you feel it is yours and you can use it. We want you to. We need you to. Look how far we’ve come already. Don’t stop now. The house that has been built around you is not made of stone. The stakes we have been tied to will not survive if our flames burn bright. And if they try to burn you, may your fire be stronger than theirs so you can burn the whole fucking house down.

Then a song, a celebration, a dance.

END