

ACT 2

SCENE 1

1603. *The Bankside washer women enter. They sing 'Fare Thee Well Old Joe Clark' whilst they work.*

Fare thee well old Joe Clark
Fare thee well I'm gone
Fare thee well old Joe Clark
And bring back 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. 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. 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 must have looked like 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!

EMILIA3: Here's another of those moments. Another of those times.

A note sounds.

They are joined by EVE, MARY and FLORA and between the feet 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?

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.

EMILIA2: Oh no I couldn't possibly.

MARY: Hark at her! 'Couldn't possibly'! 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.

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.

53

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: Give her space. 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 friends? Someone you can stay with? Or call on for anything?

EMILIA2: Yes.

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

52

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: No.

Enter LADY MARGARET

LADY ANNE: Do women who get power have to be cruel as well?

EMILIA2: No they don't.

LADY ANNE: I want to read stories about that.

EMILIA2: Then we will have to write some.

LADY MARGARET: Shall we stop there?

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

EMILIA2: You are a very good pupil. But Margaret do you truly want someone like me to teach her?

LADY MARGARET: 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.

EMILIA2: It's not the conventional view.

LADY MARGARET: We are not conventional women.

EMILIA2: Thank you.

LADY ANNE: So you'll do it?

EMILIA2: How can I possibly refuse?

LADY MARGARET: Ok enough now. Let's not exhaust her, Anne. 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?

EMILIA2: 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.

LADY MARGARET: Yes.

EMILIA2: And that he was less than discreet.

LADY MARGARET: And that I am a fool!

EMILIA2: No!

LADY MARGARET: I am! And 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 he?

EMILIA2: Most easily my Lady. 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. And yet here I am torn in two. 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.

EMILIA2: 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.

LADY MARGARET: 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.

EMILIA2: Who am I to do this?

LADY MARGARET: You are my friend.

EMILIA2: Then I will.

LADY MARGARET kisses her and leaves.

EMILIA3: It was here wasn't it?

EMILIA1: Yes.

EMILIA3: 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.

EMILIA1: 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...

SCENE 3

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

LORD HOWARD: Out of the way, very 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??

EMILIA 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.

EMILIA2: I know.

LADY MARGARET: Do not be deterred.

SCENE 4

They disperse. A musical note. Everyone focuses on EMILIA3

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

EMILIA2: Husband.

ALPHONSO: Wife.

EMILIA2: You really fucked it didn't you?

ALPHONSO: As did you.

EMILIA2: We have nothing?

ALPHONSO: Well...

EMILIA2: No knighthood despite it all?

ALPHONSO: I'm afraid not.

EMILIA2: Then we must get creative.

ALPHONSO: I don't want to die a pauper!

EMILIA2: 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 humanity?

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 no longer 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 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.

He leaves.

EMILIA3: So what did I do? I started to teach.

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.*) She wasn't!

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! You and the devil living it up!

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.

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 disdain
Our beeing your equals, free from tyranny?

The women react.

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 whoop 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. 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: Ooooh girl!

HESTER: Equivalent!

EVE: Yeh I went there! New word!

EMILIA2: Well done for using it correctly.

EVE: Thanks miss. So yeh. 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. Well descriptive.

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?

EMILIA2: 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?

68

HESTER: Oh you haven't seen them yet? They're being passed round still, I'll try and get you them.

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'

HESTER: You have read them!

EMILIA2: Many years ago.

EVE: See! I told you it was her!

EMILIA2: It could be any number of women. I wasn't the only one.

FLORA: Here!

She finds a little book of sonnets and passes them to EMILIA2 who starts sticking 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?

69

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.

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.

EMILIA1: Are you ready now?

EMILIA3: Just wait one moment more.

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.

ALPHONSO: You let me be.

EMILIA2: And you I. What is this about? I need to get on.

ALPHONSO: We were born in the wrong time you know?

EMILIA2: Actually maybe this was the perfect time for us.

ALPHONSO: Clever woman.

He starts walking away.

EMILIA2: (*Calling out to him, confused.*) Hey! We're not done. 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're pissed. Go away.

MAN 1: Charming!

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: We don't want your money, you heard them; 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 DONT GET TO TELL US WHAT TO DO.

72

MAN 1: If we wanted you we could have you.

HESTER: Don't test us.

MAN 1: Or what?

No response.

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.

MAN 1: She's insane!

MAN 2: Witchcraft! The devil in her!

MAN 1: This is the devil's work!

HESTER: Go! GO!

EMILIA1: Now?

EMILIA3: NOW!

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

SCENE 7

EMILIA3: Men, who forgetting they were borne of women, nourished of women, and that if it were not by the means of women, they would be quite extinguished out of the

73

world, and a final end 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 spurres to vertue, making us flee 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 despair.

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.

EMILIA3: 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 them 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.

EMILIA3: 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?

EMILIA3: 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.

EMILIA3: 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.

76

EMILIA3: Yes it is dangerous.

She looks around her for agreement.

MARY: Let's get to work.

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 minded 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: Eve you won't know if it's any good if you don't let us hear it.

77

EVE: And I won't know if it's awful 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.

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. And yet. If I could only freeze this moment before it happened I would.

She looks at EVE who nods and turns and leaves.

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.

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.

SCENE 9

SHAKESPEARE *arrives*.

EMILIA3: You died long ago old man.

SHAKESPEARE: 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 right now it isn't.

SHAKESPEARE: You had fun?

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?

SHAKESPEARE: 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.

SCENE 10

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.

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.

A song, a dance, a celebration.

END

Introduction to the Poems

In August 2017 I had my first cup of coffee with Michelle Terry who had recently been announced as the next artistic director of The Globe. When I arrived it was she that told me all about Emilia Bassano. Told me of a woman forgotten by history who was one of the best cases for being the 'Dark Lady of The Sonnets' and therefore potentially Shakespeare's lover but also a woman who was a talented writer herself, a mother and feminist of the time. Someone who somehow had the wherewithal to publish her poems and therefore is regarded as one of the first English woman to do so. Someone who perhaps knew that if she didn't publish she stood no chance of ever being remembered. When Michelle told me about her I remember a shared astonishment at the fact she was so unknown. But at the same time a recognition of why. A woman whose voice has been ignored for so long? A woman whose talent has been ignored? A woman who probably voiced concerns at her lack of opportunity and was dismissed and therefore had to take matters into her own hands? A woman only remembered as the potential lover and maybe even 'baby mother' of the most famous playwright in history? A woman who juggled writing, love, children and life? A woman. A woman and her story untold. It all felt not only recognisable but relevant.

When I began researching with my wonderful director Nicole Charles we realised how little there was written about her and that what had been written was not necessarily reliable. As with most historical interpretations there isn't much to go on and it entirely depended on who was analysing what there was. Many historians who had written about her had formed an opinion on her based on the writings of Simon Forman who she visited as her astrologer and a kind of counsellor. He recorded their sessions. On the one hand it's a valuable document and if it didn't exist perhaps we would not know anything at all about Emilia. On the other hand we found it very hard to believe every word he