

THE STRATFORD WIFE

Written by

Sarah E. Sinclair

EXT. THE THEATRE - 1592 - DAY

TITLE: **London. 1592.**

Show day. Elizabethan England. Londoners from every social station funnel eagerly toward the entrance of the most popular theatre bankside, known simply as The Theatre.

CRYER

Behold the Tragedy of King Richard
III! Treacherous plots, pitiful
murder, tyrannical usurpation!

A WOMAN IN A DARK CLOAK weaves through the crowd. She alone seems immune to the excitement. She stops at the entrance and the crowd flows around her like a river around a boulder.

This is ANNE, 36, more striking than beautiful. She radiates intimidating intelligence, confidence...and irritation.

CRYER (CONT'D)

A most deceitful life and deserved
death! Told by a scribe without
equal. A legend in his own time...

ANNE

(muttering)

A philandering fuckwit...

She glares at the PLAYBILL for RICHARD III, honing in on a single name in elaborate script...

CRYER

William Shakespeare.

THEATRE PATRON

It's starting!

An eager theatre patron bumps her and we see a flash of a red satchel beneath her cloak before Anne allows herself to be carried forward by the crowd into the theatre.

INT. THE THEATRE - TWO HOURS LATER

At the back of the audience, Anne's view is mostly blocked by a pillar, but she isn't watching the show. She studies the crowd's reactions. The rapt faces. The gasps. The jeers.

Onstage, the ACTOR playing the hunchback king is swaying and slurring his way through a speech. Drunk off his ass.

ACTOR PLAYING RICHARD
*I must be married to my daughter's
 brother, or else my kingdom stands
 on brittle glass...*

Anne's mouth twists in irritation as he flubs the line.

INT. THE THEATRE - THE FINAL ACT

Drunk Richard parries the sword of A TALL, CHARISMATIC ACTOR, but the actor spins with a flourish and stabs him.

CHARISMATIC ACTOR
 Ha!

The crowd roars with bloodthirsty glee as Richard gasps and stumbles, falling to the ground, dead. Anne studies the vengeful delight of a woman near her, who chucks a piece of rotten fruit at the "corpse."

A horn sounds. The charismatic actor now stands onstage with an entourage, one of whom is an ACTOR HOLDING A CROWN.

CHARISMATIC ACTOR (CONT'D)
*God and your arms be praised,
 victorious friends! The day is
 ours; the bloody dog is dead.*

His gaze sweeps the audience, including them in the victory--

Anne ducks hastily behind the pillar before he can spot her.

ACTOR WITH CROWN
*Courageous Richmond, well has thou
 acquit thee.*

Anne peeks out from behind the pillar. The charismatic actor doesn't seem to have seen her, consumed with his performance. The other actor places the crown on his head. Anne watches as the audience hangs on every word.

CHARISMATIC ACTOR
*Let them not live to taste this
 land's increase that would with
 treason wound this fair land's
 peace! Now civil wounds are
 stopped. Peace lives again: that
 she may long live here, God say
 Amen!*

The crowd erupts into shouts of "Amen!" Deafening applause.

Anne watches, unmoved, silently dissecting it all.

Onstage, the actors break character and take their bows. The actor playing Richard is gleefully booed, the others cheered.

Shouts of "Shakespeare!" begin to ripple through the crowd-- and Anne's expression darkens.

The charismatic actor laughs, raising a hand with false modesty as he steps forward to receive the adoration, still wearing the crown. The audience chants his name.

This is WILL SHAKESPEARE. 28 years old. Handsome. Charming. And smugly aware of both traits as he basks in his glory.

Disgusted, Anne turns away, her cloak swirling.

Will is busy receiving accolades, but the ACTOR who crowned him notices the movement and tracks Anne's progress as she slips through the crowd toward the exit.

INT. BACKSTAGE AT THE THEATRE - EVENING

Anne lets herself in through a rear door, moving with the confidence of one familiar with the Theatre.

The actors are milling backstage. Will is nowhere in sight. A young actor in a soldier's uniform tries to stop Anne.

SOLDIER

You can't be here--

The actor who crowned Will steps in, sweeping an overly-dramatic bow at Anne's feet. This is KEMP, 32, the jester, his face is round and kind, his eyes glinting with humor.

KEMP

My lady Shakespeare.

ANNE

(grudgingly charmed)

Kemp.

KEMP

I saw you in the audience. Did you enjoy the show, m'lady?

ANNE

I never do.

(beat)

Where is he?

KEMP

He's already left. Though I'm sure if he knew you were here...

ANNE

He would've left all the faster.
Good night, Kemp.

KEMP

My lady.

He offers another exaggerated bow. She doesn't notice, already moving toward the door.

As she exits, she passes the actor who played Richard, dead drunk and snoring on the floor. Her irritation mounts--and Kemp watches her. Missing nothing.

EXT. SHOREDITCH STREET - NIGHT

Will and his PRETTY YOUNG MISTRESS stumble down the street, giddy as teenagers--which she is. He spins her against a door, kissing her as he fumbles with the latch.

INT. WILL'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

The mistress--Mariah--erupts into giggles as she and WILL stumble through the door into his bachelor apartment. It's heavy with shadows. Will pins Mariah to the wall, kissing the skin at the edge of her bodice.

MARIAH

(worshipfully)

How do you write women so good? You see into my soul, you do.

Will is tempted to stop unlacing her bodice by the one force more seductive to him than lust: PRAISE. He runs a thumb across her cheek, his face all false humility.

WILL

That's just how the muse speaks to me.

MARIAH

Can I be your muse?

WILL

Mariah, my love, you already are.

He bends to kiss her, but a voice speaks from the shadows--

ANNE (O.C.)

And here I thought I was your muse.

WILL
 (spinning toward her)
 Bloody hell!

ANNE
 Hello, Will.

Anne steps into the light. Recognition and something more complicated flash across Will's face.

WILL
 Anne. You're in London.

ANNE
 So I am.

MARIAH
 (to Will)
 Is this your housekeeper?

ANNE
 No, pet. I'm his wife.
 (to Will)
 We need to talk.

WILL
 Do we?

His composure back in place, Will moves deeper into the apartment, lighting lamps.

MARIAH
 You're married?

ANNE
 Three children too. Didn't he tell you?

Will crouches to light the fire.

WILL
 Speaking of the children, aren't you supposed to be in Stratford with them? Isn't that what mothers do? Tend to their young?

ANNE
 Whilst fathers, what? Pretend to be kings on London stages? Of course you gave yourself the crown.

WILL
 (straightening)
 It's my play. Why shouldn't I be
 the rightful king?

Mariah is still several steps behind.

MARIAH
 You've three children?

ANNE
 That we know of.
 (to Will)
 Get rid of your pet.

WILL
 I don't think I will.

ANNE
 You don't want me to speak freely
 in front of her.

WILL
 Don't I? Go ahead.

Will meets her eyes, calling her bluff. Anne tries to win the battle of wills, but she buckles, looking away.

WILL (CONT'D)
 Nothing to say, love?

ANNE
 I'm not your love.

WILL
 (contemplatively)
 No. I suppose not.
 (beat)
 Get out, Mariah.

MARIAH
 What?

He pours himself a drink, lazily in control, now that he's proven his dominance over Anne.

WILL
 I need to speak to my wife
 about...why are you here?

ANNE
*I must be married to my daughter's
 brother?*

WILL

Must you?

ANNE

The speech. In Act Four. It does lose some of its impact when our Richard is too drunk to know the difference between saying he's plotting to wed his niece versus plotting to marry his own son.

WILL

Well, he is corrupt. There are no lengths to which he won't go.

ANNE

Will.

Lingering, Mariah watches avidly. Will takes a casual drink.

WILL

The audience hates him. That's what you want, isn't it?

ANNE

He's butchering it. I know you don't respect me, but I thought you respected the work.

WILL

Of course I do. It's my work.

He meets her eyes, a hard threat in his, all charm gone.

WILL (CONT'D)

Isn't it.

Anne doesn't look away this time.

We hear a rhythmic tapping. It's her gloved fingers, agitatedly rapping on the red satchel. The sound grows louder as she refuses to yield until it becomes--

--A QUILL rhythmically striking the edge of an inkpot.

--The quill slashes through *Belike some noble gentleman...*

--Ink-stained hands crumple a piece of parchment.

--The quill taps against the inkpot again. Faster.

--Chair legs scrape hard across hardwood. A swish of skirts.

--Crumpled parchment flies into the fire. The parchment catches, curling as the lines of prose burn.

EXT. HATHAWAY MANOR - DAWN

Misty dawn at a sizeable manor house. A rooster crows.

TITLE: Stratford-Upon-Avon. Ten years earlier.

INT. ANNE HATHAWAY'S BEDROOM - DAWN

Slumped over a writing desk, Anne (now 26) snores softly. The eye of a hurricane of parchment, she rumbled in yesterday's clothes, her hair wild and loose. There's no sign of the contained, controlled woman we saw with Will.

ANNE'S STEPMOTHER (O.S.)
(calling, distant)
Anne? Anne!

Anne JERKS awake. One hand smacks the INKPOT, spilling ink everywhere.

ANNE
Bollocks.

Anne snatches the nearby parchment to safety before scrambling to right the pot, dark ink covering her hands as she frantically clears the desk.

ANNE (CONT'D)
Bugger bugger bugger.

ANNE'S STEPMOTHER (O.S.)
(closer now)
Anne?

Anne shoots an anxious look toward the door, a new urgency to her movements. We hear FOOTSTEPS growing closer.

ANNE
One moment!

Using a pair of DOVE GREY GLOVES, she sops up the last of the ink and hurriedly hides the piles of parchment beneath an embroidery hoop.

The door opens.

Anne spins to face it, swirling her skirt to hide her ink-stained desk and hands, and smiles brightly for the new arrival--her STEPMOTHER, barely ten years older than Anne, but distinctly maternal, with a soft voice and a perfectly composed demeanor in contrast to Anne's disheveled state.

ANNE'S STEPMOTHER

Oh good, you've already risen.

ANNE

Good morning, stepmother.

ANNE'S STEPMOTHER

Bartholomew needs you to go into town to fetch some more ink. The steward tried to complete the ledgers but all his ink is missing.

ANNE

(smiling innocently)
Of course, stepmother.

Her stepmother eyes Anne's messy hair.

ANNE'S STEPMOTHER

(encouraging)
Maybe you should tidy that up. You might see that Sadler lad.

ANNE

(suppressing irritation)
Of course, Stepmother.

Anne's stepmother nods and exits, satisfied Anne will obey.

As the door closes, Anne slumps with relief. Until her gaze lands on the DOVE GREY GLOVES, now destroyed by ink stains.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Bugger.

EXT. HATHAWAY MANOR - MORNING

In front of the house, Anne's spoiled 12-year-old brother BARTHOLOMEW is being fussed over by her stepmother.

Anne, now in a fresh dress, hair half-heartedly styled, bursts out of the side door of the manor and across the side yard, startling the chickens.

It's a gorgeous spring day. Anne hops a fence and cuts across a field, bounding with more enthusiasm than grace.

She spots a figure in the distance, walking along the road.

ANNE
(shouting)
Judith!

Anne breaks into a run, hitching up her skirts.

EXT. THE ROAD TO STRATFORD - CONTINUOUS

JUDITH, 22, kind and quietly composed, with a basket on her arm, pauses when she sees Anne running pell-mell toward her.

JUDITH
People will think you're wild if
they see you running like that.

ANNE
I am wild. I've just never done
anything as wild as I am.

Anne is out of breath, but smiling and free. She falls into step beside Judith, heading toward town.

JUDITH
I'm afraid for you doing something
as wild as you are.

ANNE
At this rate, I'll never get the
chance. My beloved stepmother is
hinting at marriage again.

JUDITH
You love your stepmother.

ANNE
I know.

She leaps up to walk along a low stone wall.

ANNE (CONT'D)
Which is all the more vexing. I
don't even have a proper villain to
rail against. Though I do wish she
would stop using Bartholomew as a
shield. *She* doesn't want me to go
to town, *Bartholomew* needs me to
go. Since only my twelve-year-old
brother is allowed to want things,
because he has a cock.

Judith flushes, embarrassed, but she's heard this before.

ANNE (CONT'D)

I should have a male child so I can make people do things in his name.

JUDITH

You might need a husband for that.

ANNE

Ugh. I need a husband for everything. You want to leave Stratford? Unmarried ladies don't travel! You want to have your own home? Unmarried ladies don't own property! You want to think for yourself? Unmarried ladies don't have ideas!

They're nearing the edge of town and Anne jumps down from the wall, linking arms with her friend.

JUDITH

At least you've an inheritance.

ANNE

Which I don't get until I marry. We live in a time of queens! When a woman can rule all of England, but I must be subject to a husband--or my twelve-year-old brother.

Anne faux-smiles demurely at a town matron across the street.

JUDITH

You'll have to marry eventually.

ANNE

Must I? And who will marry me?

She waves a hand, encompassing the town.

ANNE (CONT'D)

You are a paragon of womanly virtue no man deserves. Whereas I terrify them. Because no man knows what to do with a woman who won't instantly bow to his superior intellect. Anne, the curst! *Intolerable shrewd and forward beyond all measure.*

Music plays from the heart of town. Anne instantly perks up.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Are those traveling players?

She pulls Judith forward, eager.

EXT. STRATFORD-UPON-AVON - TOWN SQUARE - DAY

A cart bedecked with colorful ribbons has folded out into a stage and drawn a crowd in the market square. Musicians lure townspeople closer as players pantomime the upcoming drama. The HEAD PLAYER'S voice booms across the square.

HEAD PLAYER

Valiant knights! True love and
tragedy! Come behold all the truth
of humanity in a single play!

Anne, rapt, pulls Judith closer. A young baker--HAMNET SADLER, 20s--watches from the doorway of his shop. He catches Judith's eye, nodding to her, and she blushes, flustered.

WILL--only 18 here, all arrogance and potential--has also been lured toward the spectacle from the glover's shop. Neither he nor Anne can tear their eyes away from the stage.

HEAD PLAYER (CONT'D)

Sir Clyomon, Knight of the Golden
Shield, son to the King of Denmark--

One player steps forward wielding a golden shield.

HEAD PLAYER (CONT'D)

--and Clamydes the White Knight,
Son to the King of Swabia--

Another player, in white armor--

HEAD PLAYER (CONT'D)

--venture to the Forest of Marvels
encountering beautiful Neronis--

A female player emerges from behind the curtain. She's modestly dressed, but the crowd gasps, scandalized--and immediately begins to jeer.

Disapproving, Hamnet Sadler turns and goes into his bakery. Seeing this, Judith tries to pull Anne away.

JUDITH

Anne...come...it isn't decent...

Anne lets Judith coax her away, but she's still watching. The head player has lost control of the crowd, but he powers on.

HEAD PLAYER
 --daughter of Patranius, late king
 of the Isle of Strange Marshes--

A MAN in the crowd grabs his crotch lewdly.

MAN IN THE AUDIENCE
 (loudly)
 I'll show her my strange marshes.

Anne frowns at him. YOUNG WILL also glares at him for the interruption--and his gaze locks with Anne's for a moment.

HEAD PLAYER
 Journey to Macedonia and Norway--

JOHN SHAKESPEARE (O.S.)
 Will! Back to work.

Will's father, JOHN, 50s stern, has emerged from his glove shop. Will reluctantly obeys--the crowd is dispersing anyway, except for those taunting the female player.

HEAD PLAYER
 Bravery and adventure!

Anne and Judith are well away from the stage now.

ANNE
 They don't even hear him. All they
 see are tits.

JUDITH
 (shushing)
 Anne! It's indecent!

ANNE
 Yes, I know, we mustn't watch lest
 our purity be tarnished by the very
 sight of a loose woman on stage.

Judith glances nervously toward the bakery.

ANNE (CONT'D)
 Don't worry. I'm sure Hamnet Sadler
 noticed you virtuously averting
 your eyes.

JUDITH
 I simply need a loaf of bread.

ANNE
 Of course. Bread. You should get
 that. I'm in need of new gloves.

Anne shows Judith the ink-stained gloves.

JUDITH

What did you do to them?

ANNE

What if I told you I was writing a play?

JUDITH

Don't even jest.

ANNE

I wouldn't be on the stage. I'd be anonymous.

JUDITH

You'd brag. And get caught. And they wouldn't forgive you for making them look foolish.

ANNE

Nonsense. I'm protected by the very implausibility of a woman possessing a brain.

Will appears in the doorway of the glove shop, watching the players pack their cart--and distracting Anne.

JUDITH

People will think you're keen on Will. Ruining your gloves to see him.

ANNE

There are worse things for them to think.

Leaving Judith, she crosses the square toward Will. He eyes her appreciatively as she approaches.

WILL

Mistress Hathaway.

ANNE

Will.

She brushes against him as she enters the shop.

INT. SHAKESPEARE GLOVERS - DAY

Will tugs Anne's gloves off one fingertip at a time, the movements slow and intimate. They're alone in the dim shop.

WILL
You've ruined them.

ANNE
Clumsy of me.

WILL
I should make you a black pair.

ANNE
Oh?

Will gently strokes her bare, ink-stained fingers.

WILL
The trick with gloves is the fit.
It's all about that perfect...
snug...fit.

He caresses her hand, fully focused on his seduction routine--and oblivious to the fact that she isn't taken in by it.

She's enjoying it, undeniably--equal parts aroused and amused--but also analyzing everything he's doing.

ANNE
What's your perfect fit, Master Shakespeare?

WILL
I don't fit here. My dreams are too big. I'm meant for more.

ANNE
Oh?

She turns her hand, teasing his fingers.

WILL
Could you see me as a player?
Standing onstage in London with
everyone shouting my name.

She eyes him, trying to discern if this is part of his routine or if he means it. He's kissing her hand now, working his way up her arm. His lips brush her inner elbow and her breath catches softly.

ANNE
(confessing)
I love plays. Whole worlds of words.

WILL
 (still kissing his way up)
 I'd heard your father let you read.

ANNE
 Did you also hear I don't inherit
 until I marry?

WILL
 (against her throat)
 Who's talking about marriage?

Anne tips her head to allow better access to her neck. He's quite good at this...

A woman walks past the front window with a crying child--and Anne reluctantly works up the will to push Will away.

ANNE
 Just the gloves, Will.

WILL
 As you wish, my lady.

He bows, all show and flourish.

INT. ANNE HATHAWAY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Anne's quill flies across the page, words flowing quickly.

ANNE'S STEPMOTHER (O.S.)
 Anne?

ANNE
 Damnation.
 (calling)
 Coming, Stepmother!

Anne quickly hides her work and rushes from the room.

INT. HATHAWAY MANOR - PARLOR - DAY

Anne's stepmother frowns, puzzled, at a large package.

ANNE'S STEPMOTHER
 How many gloves did you order?

ANNE
 Just the one pair.

Anne unwraps the package--revealing a dozen pairs of soft, luxurious gloves, all of them black except one pair of dove grey. Tucked among the gloves is a single red rose.

She smiles slightly, in spite of herself.

ANNE'S STEPMOTHER
Black gloves?

Anne hurriedly closes the package, hiding the rose from view.

ANNE
It's nothing. A laugh.

INT. ANNE HATHAWAY'S BEDROOM - DAY

At her desk, Anne taps the rose against her lips, smiling, and reaches for fresh parchment. She writes:

ANNE (V.O.)
*Master Shakespeare, you shall have
to do better than a rose.*

Reveling in the flirtation, she seals the note. She starts to rise, but the rose catches her eye and she pauses.

ANNE
*The canker blooms have full as deep
a dye...*

She scrambles for a bit of paper, excited. Invigorated.

ANNE (CONT'D)
*Hang on such thorns, and play as
wantonly...*

EXT. HATHAWAY MANOR - GARDEN - DAY

Anne, wearing the black gloves, snatches a note from Judith and eagerly reads it.

JUDITH
Why is Hamnet passing me notes to
you from Will Shakespeare?

ANNE
(still reading)
Are you not happy for an excuse to
see more of your Hamnet?
(indicating the letter)
He's not much of a writer, is he?

JUDITH

What are you playing at, Anne?

ANNE

Nothing! He's harmless. And obvious. I can handle Will Shakespeare.

INT. HATHAWAY MANOR - PARLOR - DAY

Anne's stepmother frets over a small parcel as Anne enters.

ANNE'S STEPMOTHER

Another package from the glover...

Eager, Anne rushes to open it. It isn't gloves this time.

ANNE'S STEPMOTHER (CONT'D)

A book? The glover gave you a book?

ANNE

(whispering reverently)
The Complete History of Henry VI.

She pets the book, biting her lip like it's an aphrodisiac.

INT. SHAKESPEARE GLOVERS - THE BACK ROOM - NIGHT

Will is kissing Anne, his hands everywhere, gloves scattering as he boosts her onto a worktable.

ANNE

(breathless)
How did you know?

WILL

(distracted by her bodice)
What?

ANNE

The book. How did you know I love the histories? The gore. The absolutely stupidity of men.

WILL

It was the first one I saw.

Anne can't be disappointed--he gave her a book. And really, the man is very good at this. His hands work beneath her skirts again and her head falls back.

ANNE
 (breathless)
Will.

INT. ANNE HATHAWAY'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Anne, disheveled, bursts into her room and rushes to her desk, desperate to get the words down before she forgets a single detail. The quill can't move fast enough.

INTERCUT: Anne writing and Anne with Will in the back room at the glover.

--Will's fingers trail down her throat and over her breast.

--Anne trails the feather of the quill along her neck and against her cleavage.

ANNE (V.O.)
*Graze on my lips and if those hills
 be dry stray lower where the
 pleasant fountains lie...*

--Will slides down her body, bunching up her skirts.

--Anne arches on the worktable, gasping, coming.

--The quill scratches rapidly across the paper.

ANNE (V.O.)
The spear's point can enter...

--Will thrusts into her and Anne gasps, claspng his arms.

ANNE (V.O.)
*Call it not love, for Love is to
 Heaven fled since sweating Lust on
 earth usurped his name...*

--Will and Anne strain together, sweaty and flushed.

--The quill scratches faster.

--Will and Anne climax and collapse, breathing hard.

--At her desk, Anne leans back in her chair, head back, breathless and flushed at the memory. She wets her lips, smugly satisfied.

END INTERCUT.

INT. SHAKESPEARE GLOVERS - THE BACK ROOM - NIGHT

Anne and Will lay tangled together on a makeshift bed of their own clothing, naked and post-coital.

WILL
You weren't a virgin.

ANNE
And you were?

WILL
No, but...

ANNE
But you're a man. And men decide what is right and virtuous.

WILL
(indulgent)
Would you rather women decide?

She twists to confront him.

ANNE
Why not? Why can't a woman do everything a man does?

WILL
Because they can't.

ANNE
Why? Why did my father teach me to read? Why give me the tools to think and never let me use them?

WILL
I expect because you badgered him until he had no choice.

Anne is vaguely mollified by this sign that Will knows her.

ANNE
I did. But it still isn't fair. Why can I not go to Italy and Greece like a man?

WILL
The world isn't fair.

ANNE

But it could be! People say the world isn't fair as if there's nothing we can do to change it, but if they would just listen--

WILL

To a woman?

ANNE

To the *words*. Words, ideas can change minds. No one has to know who wrote them. Words are monuments, sculptures of thought living for centuries in our wake. Look at Seneca and Aristotle.

WILL

Both men.

ANNE

No. They aren't men anymore. They're just ideas now. Words that shape us a thousand years after they're gone.

WILL

(gentle)

They won't listen, love. Not to you.

ANNE

Yes, they will. I just have to be better than anyone has ever been.

He reaches for her, rolling her beneath him.

WILL

You already are.

INT. HATHAWAY MANOR - PARLOR - DAY

Anne's stepmother opens the latest package from the glover suspiciously. A *TRAVELER'S GUIDE TO GREECE AND ITALY*.

Anne enters, but her stepmother doesn't hand over the book.

ANNE'S STEPMOTHER

Are you having a love affair with the glover's eldest boy?

ANNE

Of course not.

Anne reaches for the book, and her stepmother reluctantly relinquishes it.

ANNE'S STEPMOTHER
You can do much better than Will Shakespeare.

ANNE
(dismissively)
I know.

INT. ANNE HATHAWAY'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Anne escapes into her room, shutting the door and leaning against it. She hugs the book and smiles secretively.

EXT. HIGH STREET - STRATFORD-UPON-AVON - DAY

Judith and Anne survey the wares at an outdoor market.

ANNE
I've decided to marry Will Shakespeare.

Judith stops in surprise, forcing Anne to turn back for her.

JUDITH
Does he know that?

ANNE
He will.

Aware of curious glances, Judith starts walking again.

JUDITH
Don't you worry he only wants you for your inheritance?

ANNE
That's convenient. I only want him for my inheritance too.

JUDITH
Anne.

Seeing her friend's concern, Anne sobers somewhat.

ANNE
He's fun. I like him. And he sees me. In a way no one else in this town does. Except you, darling, and they won't let me marry you.

JUDITH
Are you pregnant?

ANNE
God, no. I'm in no hurry to have children, and neither is Will.

JUDITH
He flirts with everyone. They say he's been chasing Anne Whateley.

ANNE
And?

JUDITH
And that doesn't worry you?

ANNE
I'm more worried about being controlled. He doesn't want to rule me. He has dreams of his own. Dreams which will take us away from Stratford and all its narrow ideas.

JUDITH
I hope you know what you're doing.

ANNE
I always know what I'm doing.

INT. HOLY TRINITY CHAPEL NAVE - DAY

Anne waits in the chapel nave, dressed in her finest--and holding a bouquet to conceal a pregnancy.

Across the church, Will is in a huddle with several other men, and Judith. He speaks urgently, pleading with his hands.

Judith breaks away from the group, hurrying across the church to where Anne is waiting.

ANNE
What's wrong?

JUDITH
There's a problem with the license.

ANNE
Will got the special license. It's all arranged.

JUDITH
It has the wrong name.

ANNE
 It...what?
 (realization landing)
 Whose name?

JUDITH
 Anne Whateley.

Anne goes still, resignation slowly setting in. She's pregnant--and she knew what she was getting with Will.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
 Anne. You can still--

ANNE
 It's fine. Will can talk his way
 into anything. He'll fix it.

JUDITH
 I'm sorry.

ANNE
 Why? Judith. I don't love him.

It's a lie. But one that she needs right now.

Across the church, Will suddenly beams, clapping the priest on the shoulder. He hurries to Anne, grinning broadly.

WILL
 Are you ready to become Mistress
 Shakespeare, my love?

She smiles, as if nothing could make her happier.

INT. HENLEY STREET HOUSE - WILL'S CHAMBERS - NIGHT

Will carries Anne over the threshold of a simple bedroom in his parents' house. It's dark and cramped, definitely a step down from Anne's previous chambers. He kicks the door closed.

Will kisses her, grandiosely playing the role of the husband, and carries her to the bed, but before he can set her on it, Anne stops him with a hand on his face.

ANNE
 Promise me you'll be faithful.

WILL
 (blithely)
 Of course. You're my wife.

ANNE

Only me, Will. Swear it. Promise me now. No other women.

He meets her eyes, exuding sincerity.

WILL

I promise.

She knows he's lying. But he's a good actor. And she wants to believe him. She kisses him with a passion fueled by desperation--and all the faith she wishes she had in him.

INT. WILL'S APARTMENT - LONDON - 1592

Back in Will's London apartments, he closes the door behind Mariah as Anne pours herself a drink.

ANNE

Whatever happened to Emilia? Of all your mistresses, she was my favorite.

WILL

I know. You ruined her for me.
(indicating the satchel)
Is that the new play?

ANNE

The idea that one of the great wits of our time is taken with that insipid toddler--

WILL

I'm not fucking her for her brains.

ANNE

You'll blow our cover.

She hands him the satchel.

WILL

One of the great wits, are we?
(removing a manuscript)
"Love's Labour's Won?"

ANNE

The people love a sequel.

He flips it open, skimming.

WILL

I promised Burbage a tragedy.

ANNE
When did you do that?

WILL
(lifting the manuscript)
This will need work.

Anne tries to snatch it from his hands.

ANNE
Don't you dare. You ruined Two
Gentlemen of Verona, changing my
ending.

WILL
You had my character eaten by
wolves.

ANNE
(sweetly)
That's just the way the muse spoke
to me.

WILL
It needed a happy ending.

ANNE
I was very happy to see you eaten
by wolves.

WILL
It was childish. As is your temper
tantrum about it. Everything
changes on its way to the stage.
That's how it's done.

ANNE
Then I should be the one to change
it! You didn't even know what you
were breaking. The poetic justice!
Men may not face consequences for
their asinine behavior in life, but
they should in art!

WILL
You should be thanking me. Without
me there is no Two Gentlemen.
Wriothsley likes me far more than
he likes my pretty words.

ANNE
They aren't your words! It isn't
you they're cheering. You owe me,
Will.

WILL

I think you mean I own you.

He holds up Love's Labour's Won.

WILL (CONT'D)

Is this the only copy?

He tosses it cavalierly into the fire.

ANNE

No!

Anne lunges for the play, but Will grabs her, hauling her away from the fire and shoving her roughly back. She watches her work burn, and turns burning eyes on Will.

ANNE (CONT'D)

I detest you.

WILL

And I you, my love. Now write me a tragedy.

Love's Labour's Won crackles in the flames.

INT. HENLEY STREET HOUSE - WILL'S CHAMBERS - 1582 - NIGHT

A manuscript flies into the fire: *Taming of the Shrew*.

ANNE

I hate it.

WILL

Anne!

Young Will dives into the fire to save the play, yanking it from the flames and stamping out the singed edges on the rug. Anne barely notices, pacing, agitated--and heavily pregnant.

ANNE

It's awful. Why did I think I could write? It'll never be good enough.

WILL

Come now. It's brilliant. You just need actors. A play isn't a play until it's read aloud.

ANNE

And where will we find actors?

Will strikes a dramatic pose.

ANNE (CONT'D)
Are you playing all the parts?

WILL
Of course not.

He picks up the singed play, shuffling to the scene he wants.
He puffs himself up, becoming Petruchio.

WILL (CONT'D)
*Come, come, you wasp, i'faith you
are too angry.*

Anne smiles in spite of herself, and reluctantly plays along.

ANNE
*If I be waspish, best beware my
sting.*

WILL
(circling her)
My remedy is then, to pluck it out.

ANNE
(getting into it now)
*Ay, if the fool could find it where
it lies.*

WILL
*Who knows not where a wasp doth
wear his sting? In his tail.*

He lunges for her, grabbing her ass with both hands.

ANNE
In his tongue.

She snaps at him playfully.

WILL
Whose tongue?

He kisses her.

ANNE
(breathless)
*Yours, if you talk of tales, and so
farewell.*

WILL
*What, with my tongue in your tail?
Nay, come again.*

He kisses her more deeply, dropping the pages.

They fall onto the bed together, but even mid-foreplay, Anne has to ask...

ANNE

Do you really like it? It's good?

WILL

(against her skin)

It's brilliant. You're brilliant.

She moans, melting at the praise, and kissing him passionately.

INT. HENLEY STREET HOUSE - WILL'S CHAMBERS - LATER

Anne and Will curl together, post-coital and relaxed.

WILL

Do you worry about running out of ideas?

ANNE

I worry more about having time to write them all. I just wish I knew if they were any good. If I could show someone--

WILL

So do it. Anonymously.

ANNE

I wouldn't know where to begin.

WILL

London. Where all great artists go.

ANNE

We just go to London? With a baby?

WILL

Why not? We've your inheritance. I could go first. Once I find work acting I'll send for you. You write the plays. I'll star in them.

ANNE

They won't perform a woman's plays.

WILL

Hence the magic of anonymity. Until we find a powerful patron to protect us. Then we reveal you.

(MORE)

WILL (CONT'D)

But it can't be "The Taming of the Shrew"--it's too provocative. One of your histories.

ANNE

You're mad.

WILL

(kissing her wrist)
You love my madness.

ANNE

I do.

INT. HENLEY STREET - WILL'S CHAMBERS - DAY

Anne writes "THE FIRST PART OF KING HENRY VI" on the title page of a manuscript. A BABY, not quite a year old, sleeps in a cradle beside the small writing desk.

She pauses--and adds "by Anne Shakespeare" with a flourish, staring at the words. Will enters, dressed to go out.

WILL

Are you ready?

A NURSE enters behind him and Anne hastily slaps her bare hand over the still-drying ink of her name.

ANNE

Nearly.

The nurse lifts the sleeping baby, crooning to her softly, and holds her so Anne can kiss her forehead.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Goodnight, precious Susanna.

WILL

I don't know why you keep her in here with you.

ANNE

I like having her close.

The nurse exits and Anne lifts her hand, ink streaks on her palm. Her name is smudged, barely legible, but still there.

Will looks over her shoulder and tsks, gently scolding.

WILL

Anne.

He takes the title sheet, carrying it to the fire and dipping the corner into the flame.

WILL (CONT'D)
It's too risky, love. Even here.

ANNE
I know.

Will tosses the burning paper into the fire.

WILL
Ready?

Anne stands and conceals her ink-stained hands in a pair of black gloves.

INT. STRATFORD-UPON-AVON - A PARTY - NIGHT

Anne sits with Judith at one side of the party while Will holds court across the room, making everyone laugh.

JUDITH
He's going to London without you?

ANNE
Only until he finds work as an actor. Then he'll send for us.

JUDITH
But using your inheritance...I thought you wanted your own house. To get away from your in-laws.

ANNE
I won't be living with the Shakespeares much longer. Just until I join Will in London. A month. Maybe two.

Judith is skeptical, but before she can press Anne they're distracted by Will--now standing on a chair, quoting grandly.

WILL
*Hung be the heavens with black,
yield day to night! Comets,
importing change of times and
states, brandish your crystal
tresses in the sky, and with them
scourge the bad revolting stars
that have consented unto Henry's
death!*

(MORE)

WILL (CONT'D)
*King Henry the Fifth, too famous to
 live long! England ne'er lost a
 king of so much worth.*

Will ends dramatically and the men around him roar with praise, shouting for more. Will is in heaven.

He looks across the room, catching Anne's eye. They loved her words. Her smile widens as the calls for more grow louder.

INT. HENLEY STREET - WILL'S CHAMBERS - NIGHT

Will and Anne fall into the bedroom, kissing passionately, tearing at one another's clothes. High on the moment.

WILL
 God, that feeling. They couldn't
 get enough.

ANNE
 How did you remember it perfectly?

WILL
 Lines are easy. I've always been
 able to remember them.

ANNE
 (breathless)
 Will. This is going to work. We can
 really do it.

They tumble onto the bed.

WILL
 You'll be the queen of London.

ANNE
 Careful. England has a queen.

WILL
 You are *my* queen.

He moves beneath her skirts and she gasps, her hands fisting the coverlet.

EXT. HENLEY STREET HOUSE - DAWN

Anne kisses Will goodbye, Susanna on her hip. He mounts a horse and she waves him off, watching long after he is gone.

ANNE (V.O.)
*When in disgrace with Fortune and
 men's eyes, I all alone bewEEP my
 outcast state...*

INT. HENLEY STREET - WILL'S CHAMBERS - AFTERNOON

Anne writes as Susanna plays nearby. Suddenly she lurches out of her chair and rushes to throw up in the chamber pot.

ANNE (V.O.)
*And trouble deaf heaven with my
 bootless cries...*

EXT. LONDON STREET - DAY

We see Will in London, knocking on theatre doors. Pleading with older men, who turn him away--again and again.

ANNE (V.O.)
*And look upon my self and curse my
 fate, wishing me like to one more
 rich in hope...*

Another day, another theatre. Will sees a young, richly-dressed man approach the theatre: HENRY WRIOTHSLEY, EARL OF SOUTHAMPTON. Even younger than Will, Wriothsley looks naïve and rich--the perfect patron.

ANNE (V.O.)
*Featured like him, like him with
 friends possessed...*

Will approaches WRIOTHSLEY, laying on the charm. We can't hear what is said, but it's clearly working. The earl laughs.

ANNE (V.O.)
*Desiring this man's art, and that
 man's scope...*

INT. HENLEY STREET - WILL'S CHAMBERS - DAY

Anne scratches out a line of prose in frustration--visibly pregnant again--and visibly exhausted. Susanna hangs from her skirts and she shoos the toddler away.

ANNE (V.O.)
*With what I most enjoy contented
 least, yet in these thoughts my
 self almost despising...*

EXT. HENLEY STREET HOUSE - DAY

Anne--heavily pregnant--hurries to meet a messenger, deflating when the letter isn't from Will.

ANNE (V.O.)
*Haply I think on thee, and then my
 state...*

INT. WRIOTHSLEY'S ESTATE - NIGHT

A party--bordering on an orgy--swirls around Will as he charms Wriothsley, selling as hard as he knows how. Beside Wriothsley, a young, dark-eyed ITALIAN COURTESAN watches with interest. Wriothsley laughs and claps Will on the shoulder.

Elation fills Will, quickly hidden behind a cultured façade.

ANNE (V.O.)
*Like to the lark at break of day
 arising from sullen earth, sings
 hymns at heaven's gate.*

A lady catches Will's eye, smiling coyly, and he smiles back.

INT. HENLEY STREET - WILL'S CHAMBERS - DAY

Anne coos to a pair of babies, lying side-by-side in a cradle. Nearby, little Susanna plays with a discarded pair of black gloves. The desk is neat--no work in progress.

ANNE (V.O.)
*For thy sweet love remembered such
 wealth brings, that then I scorn to
 change my state with kings.*

The nurse enters, carrying a letter. Anne takes it, opening it eagerly. As she reads, her face lights. She leaps up, laughing with delight, and sweeps up Susanna, spinning her around and around.

EXT. HENLEY STREET HOUSE - DAY

Judith races toward the house, one hand bracing her pregnant belly and a note clutched in the other.

INT. HENLEY STREET - WILL'S CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS

Anne is packing--a tornado of euphoric energy--as Judith Sadler appears in the doorway.

JUDITH

What's happened? Your note said to come immediately--is it Will? The children?

ANNE

No, he's well! We're all well! I have to go to London! Wriothsley--the Earl of Southampton--wants to fund my play! Henry VI! Will was right about the histories.

Judith drops onto a chair in front of the fire, stunned.

JUDITH

Anne. You can't-- They can't stage your play. You'll be arrested.

ANNE

It's anonymous!

JUDITH

If anyone suspects--

ANNE

We've a patron now. A powerful one. And Will knows what he's doing. We won't reveal me as the author until the time is right.

JUDITH

The time--Anne. Listen to yourself.

Anne shoves clothing into a satchel.

ANNE

You always worry too much.

JUDITH

Better than not at all. You're going to get hurt.

ANNE

Judith. What would hurt me most is staying in Stratford forever and never trying. Being the perfect, biddable wife. I can't. I simply can't. I have so much to say and, if there's ever a chance someone might hear me, I have to try.

JUDITH

But London. It'll be so much worse--

ANNE

Trust me. We've a plan.

JUDITH

And the children? The twins are so young to travel.

ANNE

They'll stay here for now, with their nurse. My uncle has business in town--he'll take me. But could you--you'll look in on them, won't you? You and Hamnet? We did name the twins after you, after all.

JUDITH

Of course, but Anne--

ANNE

I couldn't go if I didn't know you'd look after them. If I'm not back right away.

Judith meets her eyes. Anne can't admit anything could go wrong--but she isn't just asking about the next few weeks.

JUDITH

(a vow)

Always.

Anne beams, instantly brightening.

ANNE

I'm going to be the queen of London!

EXT. STRATFORD-UPON-AVON - DAY

Judith and Anne hug fiercely before Anne climbs onto the cart with her UNCLE--a man we saw at her wedding.

The cart lurches forward. Anne tips her face up to the sun, radiating hope as she leaves Stratford for the first time.

EXT. THE THEATRE - DAY

Anne still glows with hope as she arrives in London. Travelworn, but drinking it all in.

Her uncle pulls up in front of The Theatre, and Anne leaps down before the cart stops, racing toward the entrance.

INT. THE THEATRE - DAY

Anne spins, looking everywhere. Actors mill around, chatting, swinging prop swords, but Will is nowhere in sight.

A young Kemp sits leaning against the steps up to the stage, reading Henry VI--wholly engrossed in it.

ANNE
(to Kemp)
Have you seen Will Shakespeare?

Kemp doesn't look up, flipping to the next page.

ANNE (CONT'D)
Will Shakespeare.

Kemp points without looking up, and Anne hurries toward the backstage area.

ANOTHER ACTOR
Hey! You can't go back there!

ANNE
It's all right! I'm his wife.

Kemp looks up at that--and sees her disappear backstage.

INT. THE THEATRE - BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Anne charges through the maze of props and costumes. She hears Will's voice--indistinct--and followed by a throaty feminine chuckle, but she's too focused on her goal to register the sound. She turns a corner--

Will sits on a prop throne, with a golden crown lopsided on his head--and the Italian courtesan draped across his lap. Her skirts are rucked up, his hand on her thigh.

Anne bumps into a prop table--and Will looks up, locking eyes with her. Surprise flashes across his face, but no shame.

WILL
(softly)
Anne.

Anne whirls, moving rapidly back the way she came.

WILL (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Anne!

The maze of backstage closes around her and she can't find her way to an exit--just more props, more illusions.

WILL (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Anne, wait, love...

There. A door. She rushes toward it, but Will's hand closes on her upper arm, spinning her to face him.

WILL (CONT'D)
Let me explain. That wasn't what you thought.

She can't look at him. She knows she shouldn't be surprised, but she still feels so stupid--so she focuses on the work.

ANNE
I'm only here for the play.

He frowns, gently patronizing.

WILL
Anne. Love. Bankside is no place for a woman. It's all brothels and bear baiting--

ANNE
And plays. *My* play, Will. I belong here! I know we said I wouldn't reveal myself until it opened--

WILL
I told them I wrote it.

Anne goes still.

ANNE
What?

WILL
I told Southampton it's mine. Don't you see this is better? If we reveal you, all we'll be is a scandal. We'll be stopped, possibly jailed, the play will never be performed again, but if it's a triumph--which it will be, Anne, it's so good--we could keep going.

ANNE
But we agreed...queen of London...

WILL
You will be! As my wife. No one needs to know who's writing them.

ANNE
 (quietly horrified)
 How long have you been planning
 this?

She tries to pull away, but he doesn't release her.

WILL
 Anne. You don't know what it's like
 here. It's an unforgiving town.
 Actors like me are a dime a dozen,
 but I have contacts now. People
like me--and they always need
plays. Don't you see this is
perfect? You can be heard--not just
*as a novelty, but truly *listened to--**

ANNE
 (wrenching away)
 Because they'll think I'm you.

WILL
 If there was another way, I would
 have found it. You know I would've.
 Isn't this what you wanted?

Anne stares at him, reeling, unsure what to think.

KEMP (O.S.)
 Shakespeare?

WILL
 (to Anne)
 I'm needed onstage. And you need to
 go back to Stratford. The children
 need you. And we can't risk anyone
 suspecting. Wriothsley wants to put
 up *Taming* next. You'll see. They're
 going to love you.

ANNE
 No. They're going to love you.

WILL
 (smiling, cocky)
 Us. This is all for us. You'll see.

He kisses her cheek, and hurries toward the stage.

EMILIA (O.S.)
 He's not entirely wrong.

Anne turns sharply to find Will's dark-eyed Italian mistress watching her. EMILIA BASSANO (early 20s) is elegant, poised, and expensively dressed. Out of Will's league.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

Emilia Bassano. Poet. Patron of the arts. I trust I have the pleasure of addressing the true wit.

ANNE

I trust you're fucking my husband.

EMILIA

True. I've lived at court too long to have childish ideas about love. Do you think I was the first?

ANNE

What do you want?

EMILIA

What do *you* want?

Irritated, Anne begins to walk away.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

You wanted him to reveal you? What did you think would happen? That you would write one play and all of society would change for you?

ANNE

I had to try.

EMILIA

You think no one is trying? The Countess of Pembroke may be the greatest writer alive today, but her works are only read in private salons. Closet dramas.

ANNE

So you just give up?

EMILIA

No. You get smarter. Half the plays in London are anonymous. Why do you think that is?

ANNE

Because no one is brave enough to come forward.

EMILIA

Because they are erased as soon as they do. You can't win at their game.

There is a shout from the stage and Anne looks toward the sound. Toward her dream.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

Perhaps if you were the most celebrated playwright in the world they wouldn't be able to erase you. But no woman can become that playwright. And neither can an anonymous writer. You need a name.
(nodding toward the stage)
So...use his.

Anne meets her eyes--not wanting to listen, but is she right?

She hears Will laugh. A new resolve enters her eyes.

ANNE

What's in a name?

Emilia smiles.

EXT. THE THEATRE - DAY

The cart carrying her lurches, but Anne sits straight and tall as Will waves her off. She watches him, determination and a challenge in her eyes.

ANNE

(softly, to herself)
*The devil shall have his bargain,
for he was never yet a breaker of
proverbs.*

EXT. WILL'S APARTMENT - LONDON - 1592 - NIGHT

Anne erupts from Will's London apartment. She's carrying the now-empty red satchel as she stalks down the street, angrily oblivious to her surroundings.

ANNE

(muttering to herself)
Bastard. I'll give him a bloody tragedy. Put it in a pie so he can fucking eat it.

A pedestrian clips her shoulder and she spins, combative, only to find herself facing a sign--TRAGEDY AND COMEDY FACES etched into the placard for a pub.

Anne releases a bitter laugh.

INT. PLAYERS' PUB - NIGHT

A rowdy pub crowded with ACTORS and PLAYWRIGHTS--many of whom are members of Will's company, all drunk and singing.

Anne makes her way to the bar. KEMP--the comic actor who bowed to her backstage--spots her and perks up.

KEMP

The woman who doesn't enjoy
Shakespeare!

Anne smiles at Kemp--it's impossible not to--but another man steps between them, beaming like God's gift to humanity.

MARLOWE

A woman after my own heart!

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE--28, handsome--is the reigning king of the London playwrights, fully aware of his own brilliance, but with a sarcastic edge. He bows over Anne's hand.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)

Christopher Marlowe, at your
service.

ANNE

I know who you are, Mister Marlowe.
One of the great University Wits.

MARLOWE

Oh please, I insist all beautiful
women call me Kit. And you--

ANNE

Are married.

KEMP

To Shakespeare.

Marlowe doesn't miss a beat.

MARLOWE

My condolences then, dear lady.
What a tragedy for one so lovely to
find herself shackled to such an
unimaginative hack.

ANNE
Unimaginative?

MARLOWE
Never had an idea he didn't steal from a greater mind. He stands on the shoulders of giants else no one would remark on him at all.

ANNE
And do you not do the same? Is not every play an echo of tales that have lived since the Greeks?

She's enjoying this--sparring with another playwright, even if all he sees is a skirt he's trying to get beneath.

MARLOWE
Yes, my dear, but there's an artistry to it. Much more than can be comprehended by an idiot parroting back whatever he's read.

ANNE
I suppose they're all just tales told by idiots, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

MARLOWE
Only for some of us. Should you ever wish to graduate to a *real* artist...

He lifts her hand to his mouth again.

ANNE
No. Thank you. One idiot is quite enough for me.

MARLOWE
(unoffended)
As you like it.

He bows, moving on in search of more adoring attention.

MARLOWE (CONT'D)
Emilia! Come kiss me and breathe life into my lips!

Anne turns sharply toward the woman he was calling--but it isn't the same Emilia. Disappointed, she watches him go.

KEMP

Don't mind Kit. People tell him he's a genius and he has the misfortune of believing them.

ANNE

How tragic.

KEMP

It is, for a man of his talent. The second we believe we're great, we stop trying to be. Don't you think?

He's watching her closely--too closely. It would be unnerving, but this is Kemp. Always easy and smiling.

KEMP (CONT'D)

Ale?

He gestures to the barkeep, and she joins him at the bar.

ANNE

If it's fatal to believe our own genius, I suppose I shouldn't say you were a brilliant Lord Stanley.

KEMP

Oh no, by all means, I'm an actor. Different breed entirely. Without flattery we starve.

The drinks arrive and he toasts her.

KEMP (CONT'D)

Food, ale and compliments. The three essential nutrients for an actor. But then you know. You're married to Will.

(beat)

He's the best actor of us all.

Anne studies him over her ale.

ANNE

Most people think of him as a playwright.

KEMP

Only those who've never met him, I expect. He never struck me as a writer.

The tone is light, but he's watching her much too closely--and it suddenly feels foolish to stay.

ANNE
 (setting down her ale)
 I should get back.

KEMP
 To Will?

ANNE
 To Stratford--to the inn where I'm
 staying and then Stratford.

KEMP
 I'll walk you. Tisn't safe.

She opens her mouth to protest, but he meets her eyes and even though he sees too much, she finds herself nodding.

EXT. LONDON STREET - NIGHT

Anne and Kemp walk through the dark London streets.

KEMP
 A tale told by an idiot full
 of...what was it? Fury?

ANNE
 I don't recall.

KEMP
 You've quite a way with words.

ANNE
 I was quoting Will. I transcribe
 for him. Sometimes I find myself
 speaking in his voice.

KEMP
 Ah. That must be it.

He offers his arm to help her over a rough patch in the road.

KEMP (CONT'D)
 I almost thought you were trying to
 tell him something. Marlowe.

ANNE
 I don't know what you mean.

KEMP
 I always wondered where Will got
 the plays. He's a good actor, but
 half the time I'm not sure he even
 understands the lines he's saying.

He stops in front of the Theatre, looking up at it, at the playbill for Richard III.

KEMP (CONT'D)
It's you, isn't it?

After he speaks, he looks at her, unwavering. Anne shakes her head, pretending not to understand, but Kemp isn't convinced.

KEMP (CONT'D)
It's so obvious once you see it.
Funny how no one questions how many brilliant women there are posing as men in your husband's plays.

ANNE
It's a common trope in the theatre.

KEMP
All those women being used by men.
Saving men. Being smarter and braver than man's world deserves.
The arrogance of men mucking it up--
and they believe a man wrote them.

ANNE
He's very clever.

KEMP
(skeptically)
Will?

ANNE
(harder)
He's very clever. Though I suppose I have to think that. I'm his wife.

Kemp meets her eyes.

KEMP
(soft, but firm)
I think you're a great deal more than that.

He tucks a lock of her hair back, holding her gaze. There's something tempting about him--and the idea that he truly sees her. But it's too dangerous to reveal the truth.

ANNE
(pulling away)
It's late.

KEMP
 So it is.
 (bows dramatically)
 Goodnight, my lady Shakespeare.

ANNE
 (soft)
 Goodnight, Kemp.

She heads toward the door of a nearby inn.

INT. ANNE'S ROOM AT THE INN - NIGHT

Anne enters the room and moves directly to the window.

In the street below, Kemp whistles as he wanders slowly down the street. He glances back over his shoulder.

Anne ducks out of view and leans against the wall. Breathless, but knowing she shouldn't be. Kemp can never know the truth. But she likes that he suspects.

EXT. STRATFORD-UPON-AVON - DAY

Anne, wearing her signature black gloves and carrying a slim book, walks through market day with her children, SUSANNA (9), HAMNET (7), and LITTLE JUDITH (7).

She greets Judith Sadler, who is pregnant, carrying a baby and herding four other children. Their children merge and play as Anne gives Judith's stomach a sympathetic look.

ANNE
 Again?

JUDITH
 We are nothing if not prolific.
 Soon I'll have as many children as
 you have plays.

ANNE
 Here. Give her to me.

Anne takes the baby, cooing, as they move away from the crowds. The children swarm ahead, playing.

JUDITH
 Are you sure you don't want
 another?

ANNE

Who has the energy? That's the main benefit of an absentee husband. Fewer babies. Besides, I'm a terrible mother.

JUDITH

Anne.

ANNE

I am. They'd be half-feral if not for their nurse. The girls can't even read. My in-laws discourage it. "An education never did their mother any favors." And I'm not even with them enough to counteract the Shakespeare propaganda. Always writing.

They're alone now, save the children who are ignoring them.

JUDITH

You could stop. You said that actor suspects. Will burnt your last play. Why not just quit?

ANNE

I can't. And William Kemp won't tell anyone. I think he simply wanted me to know that he knew.

JUDITH

For blackmail?

ANNE

No, goodness. That isn't Kemp. More my Will's style.

Judith studies her, concern all over her face.

JUDITH

He really burnt it?

ANNE

Just to prove he could. You know how he is. He regretted it, I'm sure.

(holding up the book)

He sent me a whole stack of books-- though with Will I'm never sure whether that's an apology or a hint that I ought to write about Pyramus & Thisbe next.

JUDITH
What will you do?

ANNE
Probably write about Pyramus and
Thisbe next. If I can stomach the
idea of star-crossed lovers.

She watches Hamnet fencing one of Judith's sons with a stick.

ANNE (CONT'D)
I should get back. The Shakespeares
will wonder where we've been.
(to the children)
Hamnet! Susanna, Judith! Come on.

HAMNET
I'm in a duel!

ANNE
And duels are vitally important, my
prince of Stratford, but alas we
must depart.

JUDITH
I'll see you soon.

Anne hands back the baby and herds her children away.

EXT. HENLEY STREET HOUSE - DUSK

Anne is approaching the Shakespeare house with her children
when she spots KEMP leaning against a wall, watching her.

KEMP
Mistress Shakespeare.

ANNE
Master Kemp.
(to the children)
Go on inside. I'll be a moment.

Susanna eyes them suspiciously as the children head inside.

ANNE (CONT'D)
(to Kemp)
What are you doing here? Don't you
have a show?

KEMP
There was a riot bankside. They
closed all the theatres.

ANNE

So you came to Stratford?

KEMP

I couldn't stop thinking about you.
I know I'm right.

ANNE

How very manly of you.

He smiles.

KEMP

He isn't quick like you. He's good.
Rehearsed. He sells it. But those
little twists of phrase...

She meets his gaze, dead-eyed.

ANNE

I don't know what you mean.

KEMP

Come to the Forest of Arden with
me. You and your children.

ANNE

(startled out of stoicism)
What?

KEMP

I've a cottage there. Space for all
of us. You can write. Who knows how
long the theatres will be closed?

ANNE

I'm married. To a colleague of
yours, in case you've forgotten.
This is the house of my in-laws.

KEMP

You won't convince me you're afraid
of scandal, but bring as many
chaperones as you like. I merely
think you'd enjoy it. It's
beautiful.

She can't figure out his angle, but she's tempted in spite of
herself. Though not tempted enough.

ANNE

I'm sorry you came all this way.

KEMP
Was worth it. I saw you.

The line is smooth, but there's a lingering sincerity to it.

He takes her gloved hand, bowing to kiss it. Before releasing her hand, his thumb strokes the spot he just kissed.

KEMP (CONT'D)
Til we meet again.

Anne holds her hand, watching him walk away. An idea forms...

ANNE (V.O.)
*If I profane with my unworthy
hand...*

INT. HENLEY STREET - DOWNSTAIRS - EVENING

The children look up as Anne races past, rushing upstairs.

ANNE
(to herself)
*O that I were a glove upon that
hand...*

INT. HENLEY STREET - WILL'S CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS

Anne bursts into the room, impatient to get the words down before she loses them, rushing to the writing desk.

She doesn't see WILL.

He leans unsteadily against the bedpost, a bottle in one hand, a crumpled pamphlet in the other, disheveled and visibly drunk. He watches her, growing angrier as she writes.

WILL
(sarcastic)
The genius at work.

Anne jolts and streaks ink on the page, standing in alarm.

ANNE
Will! You're here.

WILL
Is this not my home? Is this not my
loving wife?

Anne glances automatically toward the window, trying to gauge if he could have seen her with Kemp below.

ANNE

I heard the theatres were
shuttered.

WILL

Good news travels quickly. Did you
see this too?

He flings the pamphlet at her. She catches it awkwardly,
smoothing it.

ANNE

Richard Greene?

WILL

One of the great University Wits.
Mocking me because the 'upstart
crow' had the temerity to
impersonate his betters. To play at
being Marlowe and Nash.

ANNE

(reading)

He's threatened by your popularity.

WILL

He's sneering at me!

ANNE

Why do you care what Richard Greene
thinks?

WILL

Because they care! London cares! I
know you can't understand it, here
in your safe little world, but this
matters. You need to be better.
Better than all of them.

ANNE

What do you think I'm trying to do?

WILL

They don't care about my
performance. They only care about
your bloody words.

(pausing to drink)

When'll the next play be ready? You
haven't sent me anything in months.

ANNE

You burnt the last one.

WILL
 (too loud, volatile)
 And I apologized!

ANNE
 Did you?

WILL
 What do you want from me? It's
 never good enough for you.

ANNE
I'm the demanding one?

WILL
 You're the genius, aren't you? So
 much better than me.

He waves at her desk and Anne frowns, realization dawning.

ANNE
 This is about that sonnet, isn't
 it? The one you tried to pass off
 as mine.

WILL
 How could they know?

Will stalks to the window.

WILL (CONT'D)
 Why would Greene target that sonnet
 and the ending of *Two Gentlemen*--

ANNE
 (smiling)
 All the things you wrote.

WILL
 What's so different about what you
 do? What's so clever? So perfect?

ANNE
 (laughter in her voice)
 You aren't angry at me. You're
 angry because you aren't me. And
 you never will be.

WILL
 I perform for KINGS!

ANNE
 Because of me! You only exist
 because of me.

Will moves fast, lunging for her throat.

He has her pinned against the wall by the neck before Anne can so much as gasp. She pries at his hand at her throat, struggling to breathe--fear in her eyes, but also a strange, angry calm.

ANNE (CONT'D)
(gasping)
Will...

WILL
Am I funny?

She doesn't have the breath to respond.

WILL (CONT'D)
I could kill you right now and no one would care. I'm a god. And you're just my property. Understand?

ANNE
(hoarse)
If you kill me, you won't be a god anymore.

He releases her with a shove and she hits the wall, but stays upright, watching him warily. He scrubs a hand down his face, stalking the room, agitated.

WILL
Why would you make me do that? I don't want to hurt you. Why must you--

He sees the pamphlet on the floor, kicks it into the fire.

WILL (CONT'D)
We need another play. I'll speak to Burbage. We'll be ready when the theatres reopen.

He won't look at her.

WILL (CONT'D)
I love you.

He doesn't wait for her to respond.

When the door slams behind him, Anne sinks to the floor, holding her throat. She held it together in front of him, but now she breathes fast, angry/frightened tears releasing.

She looks toward her desk, at the papers that were knocked to the floor when he grabbed her. She swipes them away.

But as her breathing slows, she looks again at the papers.

Anne stands. Moving shakily to her desk. She touches her throat, dips her quill in ink, and begins to write...

ANNE (V.O.)
*Beware, my lord, of jealousy. A
 monster begot upon itself.*

INT. HENLEY STREET - WILL'S CHAMBERS - DAY

Anne works feverishly at her desk, piles of papers stacked around her. A ruff around her neck conceals her bruises.

Judith Sadler knocks as she enters. Anne doesn't look up.

JUDITH
 When was the last time you left
 this room?

ANNE
 I'm working.

JUDITH
 (holding up a letter)
 This arrived for you.

That gets Anne's attention.

ANNE
 Is it from Will?

JUDITH
 It doesn't say.

Anne abandons her desk to take the letter, curious. She breaks the seal and skims quickly.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
 What is it?

ANNE
 It's from William Kemp.

JUDITH
 The actor?

ANNE

There's plague in London. The theatres will remain closed until at least December.

JUDITH

Is Will all right?

ANNE

He wants me to go to the Forest of Arden.

JUDITH

Will?

ANNE

Kemp.

JUDITH

You can't go.

Anne touches her neck, the bruises half-hidden by the ruff.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

Anne. You can't.

EXT. KEMP'S COTTAGE - DAY

The "cottage" is actually a small manor, tucked into nature, private and welcoming. Kemp emerges as Anne, her children and their nurse pull up in a cart. The children immediately leap down and chase the hunting dogs, trailed by their nurse.

Kemp lifts a hand to help Anne down from the cart.

ANNE

A little country cottage?

KEMP

I didn't say little.

He still has her hand.

KEMP (CONT'D)

I'm glad you decided to come.

ANNE

I did it to spite my husband, who will likely eject you from the company when he learns we're here, so perhaps don't be too glad.

KEMP
 (undeterred)
 There are other companies. Though I shall miss speaking the words of my favorite playwright.

Anne glances toward her children, but they're out of earshot.

KEMP (CONT'D)
 They don't know? What do they think you're writing?

ANNE
 I transcribe for him. Children are terrible at keeping secrets.

Kemp pauses--this is the first time she's almost admitted it.

KEMP
 They've no idea who you are.

ANNE
 What child ever knows their mother?

KEMP
 Would you like to see your rooms?

INT. KEMP'S COTTAGE - ANNE'S ROOM - DAY

Anne's room at the cottage is beautiful--spacious and light, featuring a window nook with a large desk tucked into it.

KEMP
 I had them bring up the desk from my study. My man thought I was mad, but I want you to be at home here.

ANNE
 It's beautiful. Where do you sleep?

KEMP
 Other side of the house. Far from temptation.

ANNE
 Do I tempt you?

KEMP
 Always.

His voice is sincere--but he's a good actor. And she's wary.

ANNE
Are you married, Will Kemp?

KEMP
No.

ANNE
Good.

He looks at her sharply, unsure what she means.

KEMP
And your marriage?

ANNE
I'm sure you've met my husband's
many mistresses.

KEMP
Am I revenge then?

ANNE
Not for the mistresses.

He hesitates.

KEMP
I would never betray you. You have
my word.

ANNE
Only a fool speaks in never.

KEMP
Then let me be your fool.

ANNE
(smiling)
I do like you, Will Kemp. I'm not
sure I trust you, but you do amuse.

KEMP
(taking her hand)
I shall endeavor to earn your
trust.

She pulls her hand away.

ANNE
I should check on the children.

EXT. FOREST OF ARDEN - DAY

The children roam the forest with their nurse as Anne and Kemp lag behind. Hamnet and Little Judith are fencing with sticks and she bests him, crowing her victory.

KEMP

Your daughter is merciless.

ANNE

Though she be but little, she is fierce.

KEMP

Like her mother.

Anne eyes him, wary of compliments.

KEMP (CONT'D)

What you said in London...you truly don't enjoy your plays?

ANNE

I can't. I only see the things I would change. Mistakes I can't take back.

He helps her over a fallen tree.

KEMP

Why did you marry him?

ANNE

Mm. That wasn't a mistake. I needed him. And I suppose I was naïve. I thought I could control him. I didn't realize the power he'd have. But I can still write.

The children are out of sight now.

KEMP

It must be intolerable. Seeing him praised for your plays.

ANNE

It was my choice. And it had to be someone. No one can ever see me for who I truly am.

KEMP

(meaningful)

I see you.

ANNE
 (smiling, indulgent)
 You're quite the romantic, aren't
 you, Will Kemp?

KEMP
 And you aren't.

ANNE
 No. No, I've never been swept away
 by love. Never the fool for it--
 which perhaps makes me the greatest
 fool of all.

KEMP
 You could be a fool with me.

She smiles, but there's a sadness to it, because she knows
 herself--and she knows she won't be love's fool.

He extends a hand to her.

KEMP (CONT'D)
 Anything is possible in the forest.

ANNE
 Is it?

When she accepts his hand, he turns her so she's facing a
 copse where the sunlight streaks through the trees, painting
 everything golden and magical. Her back is to his front.

KEMP
 Magic...fairies...love...we aren't
 responsible for what happens in the
 forest.

ANNE
 (smiling)
 You're an ass.

He is very close, but not touching her. Tension builds.

KEMP
 I thought I was your fool. But I'll
 play any role you write for me.

ANNE
 Then I'll write you as an ass.

A childish shriek interrupts them, followed by more shouting
 from the children. Anne pulls away. The moment dissipates.

KEMP

Come. They must've found the pond.

INT. KEMP'S COTTAGE - ANNE'S ROOM - DAY

Anne writes at the gorgeous desk, sunlight streaming through the open windows. At a childish shriek, she looks up. Through the window, she sees Kemp, playing with her children. She smiles fondly.

Kemp glances up, and Anne hastily turns back to her work.

ANNE (V.O.)

*As an unperfect actor on the stage,
who with his fear is put beside his
part, or some fierce thing replete
with too much rage, whose
strength's abundance weakens his
own heart...*

INT. KEMP'S COTTAGE - PARLOR - NIGHT

Anne sits across the room from Kemp, stealing glances at him as she writes.

ANNE (V.O.)

*So I for fear of trust, forget to
say, the perfect ceremony of love's
rite, and in my own love's strength
seem to decay.*

When he looks at her, she feigns absorption in her work.

EXT. FOREST OF ARDEN - DAY

Anne is playing with her children, dubbing them "Peasebottom" and "Mustardseed" and "Cobweb"--until Kemp crashes into the clearing, roaring, and they scatter, shrieking with laughter.

ANNE (V.O.)

*O'ercharged with burden of mine own
love's might: o let my looks be
then the eloquence...*

EXT. FOREST OF ARDEN - THE POND - DAY

Kemp sprawls beside a picnic, whittling a wooden donkey. The children splash in the water nearby, and Anne watches him.

ANNE (V.O.)
*And dumb presages of my speaking
 breast, who plead for love, and
 look for recompense, more than that
 tongue that more hath more
 expressed.*

INT. KEMP'S COTTAGE - PARLOR - NIGHT

Kemp is reading her manuscript, Anne watching him--and when he looks up, she doesn't look away. The gaze holds, building.

ANNE (V.O.)
*O learn to read what silent love
 hath writ, to hear with eyes
 belongs to love's fine wit.*

KEMP
 You've given yourself away.

ANNE
 (flustered)
 What?

He holds up the pages.

KEMP
 You made me a right ass. Much more
 literally than I'd anticipated. But
 the queen of the fairies falls in
 love with me.

ANNE
 Only because she's been tricked.

KEMP
 By her husband, the fairy king, who
 steals from her.

ANNE
 Too pointed, you think?

KEMP
 Do you often write him into your
 plays? And yourself?

ANNE
 Some times more than others.
 Betimes the plays are how I speak
 to the world. At times they're how
 I speak to him.

She looks toward the fire with a wry smile.

ANNE (CONT'D)

I used to rail at him in sonnets. I was so angry as I wrote that love *is an ever-fixed mark*, trying to punish him with poems of fidelity--and he published them.

KEMP

"Why didst thou promise me such a beauteous day..."

ANNE

You know them.

KEMP

You weren't subtle.

ANNE

I wasn't trying to be. I made him Proteus in *Two Gentlemen*, the faithless snake--and he rewrote my ending so instead of Proteus being eaten by wolves, Julia forgives him. Like magic.

KEMP

Julia who impersonates a man to get what she wants.

ANNE

I'm not the first to use the trope. I borrowed most of the plot from the Seven Books of Diana--as Marlowe was quick to point out. It was a good shield. For what I needed to say.

KEMP

So Julia isn't you?

ANNE

Of course she is. I'd just been forcefully shown how little power I had because of my sex. She let me give voice to that frustration.

KEMP

And *Taming of the Shrew*? Did he change that ending as well?

ANNE

He didn't have to.

Anne stands up, bitter, agitated. She paces to the fire.

ANNE (CONT'D)

I wasn't good enough or I didn't-- something got lost. Petruchio doesn't *win*, he doesn't tame her. She learns her own power. Her ability to manipulate him, to use his ego against him--but no one sees it. It's a satire! An exaggeration of what they want marriage to be, but she's winking at the audience the entire time! Look at this fool. Look how he thinks he owns me.

KEMP

Men will never see that.

ANNE

I didn't write it for them! We've so little power--we have to take what we can. We've only enough freedom to know we'll never truly be free. I can write about Italy, but I can never leave Stratford.

He joins her at the fire.

KEMP

You aren't in Stratford now. You could stay here. With me.

ANNE

Will...

KEMP

(taking her hand)
Come live with me and be my love...

ANNE

Are you trying to woo me with Marlowe's words?

KEMP

I didn't know which of yours were written about him.

She smiles with genuine regret.

ANNE

I can't. You're sweet. But I've already stayed too long.

KEMP

Why? You don't have to be afraid. I have connections too. In many ways I'm more powerful than he is. I can get you free of him. You wouldn't need to write anymore.

ANNE

(gently)

I will always need to write. I'm not afraid of him. I'm more frightened of losing myself.

KEMP

But Will--

ANNE

Is just a man. Even if likes to think himself a god.

KEMP

I hate thinking of you with him.

ANNE

Our marriage is more complicated than it looks. We're one person now. For better or worse.

KEMP

You don't have to--

ANNE

I'm not yours either, Will Kemp.

KEMP

I know.

He drops her hand, starting to pull away, and she stops him with a hand on his chest.

ANNE

And this...isn't happening.

She kisses him.

ANNE (CONT'D)

(whispering)

This never happened. Understand?

He deepens the kiss, folding her in his arms.

INT. KEMP'S COTTAGE - ANNE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Kemp stirs, waking in Anne's bed, naked. Anne, in a shift, writes at her desk by candlelight, her hair loose.

KEMP

Anne?

ANNE

Did I wake you?

She takes the top page and the candle, carrying them to the bed. He's groggy, but she's brimming with excitement.

ANNE (CONT'D)

I wrote you a sonnet. So you never have to wonder which words are about him. This one's yours.

Kemp sits up, coming more fully awake.

KEMP

May I?

She hands it over, and he reads as she looks on nervously.

ANNE

It's nothing.

KEMP

It's everything. Did you mean this?

ANNE

And if I did?

Kemp kisses her, sweeping her onto his lap. She smiles against his lips, fumbling to set the candle aside.

EXT. KEMP'S COTTAGE - DAY

It's a glorious day and Anne glows with happiness, her gait loose and easy as she walks from the edge of the wood toward the house--when a cart pulls up, bearing JUDITH SADLER.

ANNE

(shouting)

Judith!

Anne picks up her skirts and races to embrace her friend--as carefree as before she married Will.

INT. KEMP'S COTTAGE - PARLOR - DAY

Judith sits skimming one of Anne's manuscripts as Anne buzzes around the room, too energized to sit still.

ANNE

I can't write fast enough. The ideas come so quickly here.

JUDITH

Anne.

ANNE

The children like it too. The forest is so magical, Judith, you're going to love it.

JUDITH

Anne. What is this?

ANNE

Venus and Adonis. It's an epic poem. A rebellion against chastity. Will wanted poems to sell while the theatres are closed.

Judith sets aside the manuscript, worry etched on her face.

JUDITH

What are you doing?

ANNE

It's just a holiday. He's a friend of Will's.

JUDITH

It's been months.

ANNE

And? Will isn't even home. He's off touring the countryside with the troupe. God forbid he go two seconds without an adoring crowd.

JUDITH

And this Kemp isn't touring?

ANNE

He likes it here. You should give it a chance--

JUDITH

People are starting to talk.

ANNE
 (irritated)
 People always talk.

JUDITH
 Anne. You can't court scandal. Not
 with your secrets. You must come
 home. You know I'm right.

She does. But she doesn't want to leave.

ANNE
 Just a little longer. I'm *happy*,
 Judith. And Will doesn't care as
 long as I'm writing.

JUDITH
 If people talk, his ego will care.
 He won't let you cuckold him.

ANNE
 I'm not! I'm just writing. And the
 things I'm writing, Judith! The
 words flow right through me--and if
 I go back, if I'm back in that
 house, living with the
 Shakespeares, suffocating--I was
 bitter and angry and almost lost
 myself in that house. I can't go
 back.

JUDITH
 This isn't your life.

ANNE
 No, it's a dream. A midsummer's
 dream. But I'm not ready to wake
 up. I have to stay. Just until I
 finish the play.

Judith rises and goes to her.

JUDITH
 Do you remember walking into town
 together when we were girls? Your
 father had gotten you a translation
 of Greek myths and you would tell
 me stories of goddesses and oracles
 on our way to market.

ANNE
 I remember.

JUDITH

I don't recall most of them, but there's one I've never forgotten. Icarus. Flying too close to the sun with wings of wax and plummeting back to earth.

(taking Anne's hand)

You were always Icarus. Never scared. Always pushing a little higher. And I'm down below, watching, waiting for you to fall.

ANNE

If I fall...at least I flew.

JUDITH

I'm never going to convince you to be careful, am I? Not even for me.

ANNE

For you is the only reason I would.

A childish shriek outside the window. Anne looks toward it.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Or for them. But I'm not so very high yet. My wings are strong.

JUDITH

I hope you're right.

EXT. KEMP'S COTTAGE - AFTERNOON

Anne waves Judith off. Her children run alongside the cart for a while. Kemp waits in the doorway, behind Anne.

KEMP

I shouldn't keep you here.

ANNE

I'm not a prisoner. But I do need take the children back. Hamnet must return to school.

KEMP

Will you return?

ANNE

For another dream in the forest? I hope so.

EXT. HENLEY STREET HOUSE - DUSK

The cart carrying Anne, her children and their nurse pulls up in front of the Shakespeare residence. Will's parents greet the children, who run to them, chattering excitedly.

Anne holds back, drawing in on herself as she takes hold of her satchel and trudges toward the house.

INT. HENLEY STREET - WILL'S CHAMBERS - DUSK

The room is all shadows. Anne drops her satchel and places a tiny carved donkey on the desk. She sinks down onto the chair with a sigh.

INT. HENLEY STREET - WILL'S CHAMBERS - NIGHT

The fire crackles. Anne writes a title page by candlelight--*A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Two identical copies sit side by side. She ties one into a package, addressing it to Will.

EXT. HENLEY STREET - GARDEN - DAY

Anne sits in the garden on a grey day, listless as her children play nearby--until the nurse appears, carrying a letter. Anne perks up, hurriedly opening it.

EXT. KEMP'S COTTAGE - DAY

Anne arrives at Kemp's cottage, leaping into his arms.

INT. KEMP'S COTTAGE - ANNE'S ROOM - DAY

Anne bursts into the bedroom, brandishing the letter, as Kemp follows with her bag.

ANNE

I can't stay long. He hates the ending. I forbade him from changing anything without me, so now he's demanding *I* change it.

KEMP

Is that why you're here? Because of Will?

ANNE

Darling Bottom, don't be hurt. I needed an excuse to run away and he gave me one. I didn't show anyone the letter. I simply said he needed me. And since he's off God knows where performing this week, no one can say I'm not with him.

KEMP

Except Will. What if he goes home looking for you?

ANNE

He won't. He'd miss his adoring public too much.

KEMP

So you only returned to fix Midsummer?

ANNE

It doesn't need fixing.

Kemp hesitates.

ANNE (CONT'D)

What?

KEMP

He wants Helena to end up with Demetrius, doesn't he? And Titania with Oberon?

ANNE

Not you, too! He also wants a ridiculous epilogue tacked onto the end, *apologizing* to our powerful patrons for any resemblance they might see to themselves.

KEMP

Even before the plague, the mood in town was shifting. Nash and Jonson were jailed. It's growing more dangerous to challenge the order of things--even on stage.

ANNE

Isn't that what we do? What theatre does?

KEMP

You're not the one sticking your neck out.

ANNE

(bitterly)

No. I'm not.

KEMP

Anne. I only meant--

ANNE

That he's right and I'm wrong. I thought you'd be on my side.

KEMP

I am. Always.

(pause)

But I do see his point. Audiences want things tidy. A happy ending for all. You know that.

ANNE

How is it happy for Helena to marry a man who threw her over for another woman and only came back because of magic? How is it happy for Titania to submit to the man who drugged her and stole from her? They deserve better.

KEMP

You put a king and a queen in a comedy. They must reconcile. You made Helena sick with love for Demetrius. Being with him is the only thing that satisfies the promise of your first act.

ANNE

Her satisfaction is the realization that he never deserved her love.

KEMP

It's a comedy.

ANNE

And a woman alone is inherently tragic? I am so sick of men telling me what to do!

KEMP

Your anger at Will is affecting your work.

ANNE

I shouldn't have come here.

KEMP

People want to believe in hope and happiness. They want to believe in love and your anger keeps pushing them away!

He isn't talking about the plays anymore.

ANNE

I don't know what you want from me.

KEMP

Even the greatest playwrights must learn to compromise. I'm only asking that you consider it.

ANNE

I have been fighting my entire life to be heard and now you want me to speak with another's voice. You all want the words, but you won't let them be *mine*.

KEMP

You're Shakespeare. No one has your voice. But the audiences will *hear* you more if they love you. And they will *love* you if you make them feel—
—not just anger. But passion and hope and love and longing and sorrow. They'll forgive you anything, if you make them feel. If they love you.

She turns away from the raw emotion on his face, focusing on the desk instead.

ANNE

I'm sorry I can't be what you want.

KEMP

You already are. You're more than the words to me, Anne.

She doesn't turn back. Doesn't acknowledge his words. Finally, Kemp sighs.

KEMP (CONT'D)

I'll leave you.

Anne rests her fingertips on top of the fresh parchment on the desk. The neatly lined up quills and pots of ink. He prepared it for her. Her haven.

The door thumps shut and she looks toward it. Kemp is gone.

She doesn't want to change the play. Giving any ground feels like admitting defeat. But she sits and reaches for a quill.

INT. KEMP'S COTTAGE - PARLOR - NIGHT

Kemp is reading a book by candlelight when Anne enters, holding a few pages. She hesitates, not coming close.

ANNE

I wrote Demetrius a pretty speech-- his love for anyone but Helena was a sickness and he's healthy now. Perhaps she rejects him later. Perhaps Oberon gives Titania back the changeling after the epilogue.

Kemp rises.

KEMP

You even wrote an epilogue?

She tosses the papers at him and he fumbles, only managing to catch one.

ANNE

It's nonsense. A fluffy little apology.

KEMP

(reading)
If we shadows have offended... This is beautiful.

He bends to collect the other pages, reading.

ANNE

I know I'm not always...
(hesitating)
I did love him, you see. And I hate him in equal measure. My work has been tangled up in Will for the last decade, but I didn't write this for him.

KEMP

The people are going to love it.

ANNE

I know. Which vexes me no end. I'm writing a tragedy next. Everyone dies. There are consequences for stupidity.

Kemp smiles at her bloodthirsty grumpiness.

KEMP

I love you.

ANNE

Don't.

KEMP

I'm not a poet. I'm a fool. A jester. So I cannot dress it up in pretty words, but I do love you.

ANNE

Titania can love Bottom, but in the end she goes back to the king.

KEMP

I don't care.

She lets him pull her close, but before he kisses her...

ANNE

(whispering)
You will.

INT. KEMP'S COTTAGE/HENLEY STREET - DAY/NIGHT

We see Anne writing the great plays...

--Anne at her desk in Kemp's cottage with sunlight streaming it the windows, her hands covered in ink.

--Anne and Kemp debating one of her manuscripts by candlelight in the parlor, laughing and arguing. Kissing.

--Anne and Will fighting as she throws a manuscript at him at Henley Street: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

--More manuscripts land on top of it: *Romeo & Juliet*.
Othello. *The Comedy of Errors*. *The Merchant of Venice*.

--Kemp receives a message at the entrance to his cottage. He reads it, sobering.

INT. KEMP'S COTTAGE - ANNE'S ROOM - DAY

Anne stares out the window, lost in thought, tapping her quill against the ink well rhythmically.

Kemp appears in the doorway.

KEMP

Anne.
(no reaction; louder)
Anne.

ANNE

(distracted)
I keep thinking of this character for you. Drunk, corrupt, but so wickedly *alive*. Falstaff. All the vices we wish we could let ourselves have in one man.

KEMP

The theatres are reopening.

The tapping stops abruptly.

ANNE

When do you leave?

KEMP

Soon. Burbage is securing the Theatre. We'll finally be able to perform your new plays.

ANNE

(unenthusiastic)
Good. The plague is over and theatre is back.

KEMP

We'll still see one another.

ANNE

Of course.

KEMP

You can come to London. Or we can meet here.

She smiles, sadly. Kemp goes on, but his words are distorted-- and lost in a rising wave of sound.

The roar of laughter from a crowd.

INT. THE THEATRE - DAY

Kemp is on stage, holding a donkey's head and receiving a standing ovation. Will watches from the wings, frowning-- until the crowd starts shouting his name.

He steps out on stage, one hand dramatically over his heart as he bows. The audience roars.

He glances over, mid-bow, meeting Kemp's eyes as they chant his name.

Sudden silence.

EXT. A STREAM IN STRATFORD - AUGUST 1596 - DAY

We hear the soft sound of birdsong and children's laughter. Anne, now 40, and Judith walk along a stream, watching the twins (11) and a small army of Judith's children splashing in the water several yards away.

Judith, pregnant again, sinks wearily down onto a boulder. She's aged sharply in the last few years.

JUDITH

How was London? Hamnet tells me
Romeo & Juliet is a triumph.

ANNE

(irritable)
They're calling it a love story. A
romance for the ages.

JUDITH

They're calling you the greatest
playwright of our generation.

ANNE

They still don't *hear* me. His image
distorts my words. I write a
tragedy about feuds poisoning our
lines, about the danger of hate,
and all anyone hears is "It is the
east and Juliet is the sun."

JUDITH

You made it too romantic.

ANNE

That's how they should know it was
written by a woman. Though idiotic
suicide for love is very manly. A
poetic virtue.

(MORE)

ANNE (CONT'D)
 Children making gestures at
 devotion rather than living with
 their choices.

JUDITH
 I take it you couldn't see your
 other Will in London.
 (off Anne's sharp look)
 You're never this cross when you've
 seen him.

ANNE
 It isn't about him. It's about the
 work. Though the foolish
 romanticism is certainly his fault.

JUDITH
 And everyone loves it. Can't you
 enjoy your success? Other theatres
 are struggling to stay open and
 you're turning people away.

ANNE
 (irritably)
 Yes, of course, I'm happy.

When Judith chuckles at her tone, Anne makes a face.

ANNE (CONT'D)
 I thought if I was just famous
 enough I could come forward. But
 now there's so much more to lose.
 If anyone would even believe me.
 Will would deny it. And it wouldn't
 just be my reputation in ruins--
 Hamnet, the girls...Judith loves
 being Shakespeare's daughter.

She looks out at the children, chattering in the cold stream.

ANNE (CONT'D)
 But I still want more. I always
 want more.

Hamnet falls into the stream with a splash, emerging
 sputtering and coughing.

ANNE (CONT'D)
 I should get them home.
 (shouting)
 Hamnet! Judith! Time to go.

JUDITH

Some day you'll have to learn how
to be happy.

ANNE

Perhaps. But not today, I think.

The children approach, Hamnet coughing harshly. Anne steers him away from the river.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Come, my prince of Stratford. Lets
get you warmed up.

He continues to cough.

INT. WILL'S APARTMENT - LONDON - NIGHT

An orgy is in progress, Will cavorting with several beautiful young men and women, clearly enjoying his fame.

At a knock on the door, Will extracts himself his adoring fans. He accepts a message, breaking the seal.

As he reads, he goes pale. Grief washes over him and he braces against the wall to stay upright.

INT. THE THEATRE - DAY

Kemp enters the Theatre, joining the assembled company.

BURBAGE

Late, Kemp.

KEMP

I'm not the last. Shakespeare isn't
here.

BURBAGE

He isn't coming. His son just died.

Kemp freezes, stricken and unable to control his reaction, but the other players don't notice.

BURBAGE (CONT'D)

Now that Master Kemp has joined us,
we'll start from Act Two.

EXT. HOLY TRINITY CHURCHYARD - STRATFORD - DAY

Beneath dark clouds, Anne stands stoically graveside, a hand on each of her daughters' shoulders. Across the grave, Will gazes past her blindly, utterly destroyed by loss.

The children's nurse falls to her knees, sobbing brokenly. Anne watches, dry-eyed. Another mourner helps the nurse away.

EXT. HOLY TRINITY CHURCHYARD - LATER

The mourners drift away from the grave, Will with an arm around each of his daughters. Anne doesn't move.

Judith Sadler approaches, still heavily pregnant. She links arms with Anne's, standing vigil with her. Finally...

ANNE

I haven't cried. Will was very heroically tragic and poor Lydia hasn't stopped crying for days--but then she was always more mother to him than I was. I shouldn't have let him swim.

JUDITH

You couldn't have known.

ANNE

How do you bear it? I've only lost one child, but you've lost four--and so young. How does each one not carve a piece out of you?

JUDITH

It does.

ANNE

(whispering)
I'm so sorry.

EXT. HENLEY STREET HOUSE - DAY

Still dressed for the burial, Judith and Anne approach the house. Will emerges, carrying a bag toward his horse. Anne drops Judith's arm, moving toward her husband.

ANNE

You're leaving?

WILL

I need to get back to London. The play's the thing.

ANNE

Will...please. Can't you at least stay for a day? The girls...

She reaches for him. He shrugs her off.

WILL

I have to go.

Will mounts. It begins to rain, but Anne doesn't move. Their daughters exit the house, confused.

SUSANNA

Father?

Judith Sadler tries to usher the girls back toward the house, but Susanna resists.

JUDITH

Susanna, Judith, come.

SUSANNA

What's happening? Why is he leaving?

Will turns his horse and rides away.

SUSANNA (CONT'D)

(to her mother)

What did you do?

Anne doesn't respond, watching Will go. Judith manages to herd the Shakespeare girls back into the house, leaving Anne standing alone in the rain.

INT. HENLEY STREET - WILL'S CHAMBERS - NIGHT

Rain pouring outside. Anne shivers in front of the fire, dazed. Her dress drips, forming a puddle.

A sob slips out.

Suddenly, she crumples, buckling under the weight of her loss. The tears have arrived.

INT. HENLEY STREET HOUSE ENTRY - DAY

Judith Sadler opens the door, ushering Kemp out of the rain. He sheds his wet coat, worry on his face.

JUDITH

The family's at church. You should have an hour.

KEMP

How is she?

JUDITH

She's barely left her room in weeks. She won't talk--even to me.

INT. HENLEY STREET - WILL'S CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS

Kemp opens the door into a mess. Anne is slumped over her desk, fast asleep. He goes to her, easing the quill from her hand. It catches on a paper and he absently glances at it.

Goes still. Kemp reads--his expression darkening.

ANNE

(stirring)

Bottom?

KEMP

(tight, restrained)

What is this? *To be or not to be?*

ANNE

(groggy)

What are you doing here?

KEMP

You weren't answering my letters. Is this supposed to be a play? *In that sleep of death?*

ANNE

Don't.

She reaches for the paper. He holds it away.

ANNE (CONT'D)

It's just words. The only kind I seem to be able to write.

KEMP

This isn't you.

ANNE
Isn't it?

KEMP
Anne--

ANNE
They're only words, Will. Just the thing I put above everything else.

KEMP
It wasn't your fault.

ANNE
Wasn't it? I wasn't a proper mother to him. And now I'm trapped in this house where they teach my daughters to hate me. Will just left me here-- alone--after he died in my *arms*--

Her voice breaks and Kemp pulls her close.

KEMP
(firm)
It wasn't your fault. I should've come sooner. Come to Arden--

ANNE
No. I can't.

KEMP
Bring the girls. Leave him.

ANNE
(pulling away, reluctant)
He'll never let that happen. You have to go.

He's still holding the wrinkled soliloquy.

KEMP
I can't leave you here.

ANNE
They're just words, Bottom.

They both know she's lying.

KEMP
I love you.

ANNE
Don't.

KEMP
You're my life.

She reaches out, gently touching his face.

ANNE
Such a romantic fool.

He presses his hand over hers.

KEMP
Then write me a fool.

ANNE
I'm not sure I remember how. It's
all different now.

He draws her back into his arms and she finally let herself
be comforted. His chin rests on her head.

ANNE (CONT'D)
Tell me again about Elsinore.

KEMP
Denmark? Why?

ANNE
I need to remember there's a world
outside this house. Tell me.

KEMP
(softly)
There's a narrow platform on the
battlements for the night watch...

As he speaks, resolve forms on Kemp's face.

INT. THE THEATRE - DAY

Kemp and Shakespeare speak heatedly at the edge of the stage.

EXT. HENLEY STREET HOUSE - DAY

Anne, still grief-worn and wan, accepts a letter from a
messenger. She opens it, reading as she heads inside.

INT. HENLEY STREET - DOWNSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Judith Sadler is sitting with her needlework as Anne enters,
baffled by the letter in her hands.

JUDITH
All's well?

ANNE
My husband has bought a house.

JUDITH
In London?

ANNE
Here. New Place. He bought New
Place.

JUDITH
The manor outside town?

ANNE
(puzzled)
He says it's time we stopped living
with his parents.

JUDITH
Isn't that good?

ANNE
I'd feel better if I knew what he
wants from it.

EXT. NEW PLACE - DAY

The new manor is massive, and in disrepair. Anne and Judith Sadler eye the overgrown brambles.

ANNE
Well. It's the biggest place in
town. I'll give him that.

JUDITH
Second biggest. Come. I'm dying to
see inside.

Judith links arms with Anne and urges her toward the house.

INT. NEW PLACE - DAY

Inside, New Place is dusty and ramshackle--but it's easily double the size of the Henley Street House. And it's hers.

ANNE
It'll need work.

JUDITH
Will can afford it.

Anne runs a finger along a tilted mantle, collecting dust.

ANNE
I wish I knew why. Do you suppose
some critic wrote about him not
supporting us properly?

JUDITH
Does it matter why he's doing it?

ANNE
It will when he calls in whatever
debt he thinks I now owe him.

JUDITH
Maybe he wants you to be happy.

ANNE
(laughing lightly)
I love you, Judith. You are far too
good.

INT./EXT. NEW PLACE - DAY

Over the spring & summer, we see New Place transform--the
gardens tidying and flourishing. The interior under
construction, then dust clearing as new furnishings arrive.

Anne oversees it all, beginning to look more alive herself.

A desk is placed in the bright new study, at the windows, and
Anne looks out of them, watching her daughters in the garden.
Wistfully, she touches an unused quill.

EXT. NEW PLACE - LATE FALL - DAY

Kemp rides up to the fully renovated house. Anne is in the
garden as he approaches, though nothing is blooming.

He kisses her hand--it's bare and not covered in ink stains.

KEMP
You haven't been writing?

ANNE
Listen to this man. All he wants
are the words.

KEMP

I want your happiness. You're only happy when you're writing.

ANNE

I have been. A bit. A tragedy. In Denmark.

KEMP

You look well.

ANNE

(lightly)
Do I?

She links their arms, guiding him deeper into the garden.

KEMP

The house is lovely. You like it?

ANNE

The man who sold it to Will was poisoned by his own son just two months later. Who needs London theatre--we've patricide and feuds enough in Stratford.

Kemp doesn't know how to respond. He's awkward with her now.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Did Will send you to badger me for the next play?

KEMP

He doesn't know I'm here.
(off her skeptical look)
It's been over a year.

ANNE

I gave him more than he could perform for years.

Kemp hesitates before admitting...

KEMP

He's run through them. He wants something new. We're building the new theatre and we're all invested--

ANNE

What new theatre?

KEMP

Burbage couldn't renew the lease on the land. The building is ours so we're moving it to the South Bank. Will wants to call it the Globe. Didn't he tell you?

ANNE

We don't speak anymore. Loss divides us. But you two seem quite close. Invested.

KEMP

I'm too popular for him to get rid of. And he'd have to admit he knows about us, which he'll never do. But I didn't invest for him. I wanted a stake in the company that performs your plays.

ANNE

So you can be my taskmaster as well?

KEMP

So I can be close to you.

ANNE

As close as the South Bank.

KEMP

You could come to London. I've asked you enough times.

ANNE

Perhaps when the girls are grown I'll run away with you to Italy.

KEMP

(irritated)
You don't mean that.

ANNE

No. But it's a lovely dream.
(beat)
You'll get your play.

KEMP

That isn't why I--

ANNE

No. Of course.

KEMP

Anne.

ANNE

We should go inside. It's getting cold.

She takes his arm.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Perhaps I'll write you a comedy. A bit of silliness where the women are clever, the men fools, and no one dies. Much ado about nothing.

INT. NEW PLACE - ANNE'S STUDY - NIGHT

Anne is at her desk in her beautiful new study--warm fire, lush furnishings. The large desk is arranged in front of the windows, like her room at Kemp's cottage.

She gathers up a thick stack of parchment, title page on top: ***The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke***. She ties twine around the manuscript. Slides it into the bottom drawer, closing it.

She takes a fresh piece of parchment and dips her quill in ink, beginning to write:

Act One. Messina, Italy.

INT. NEW PLACE - ANNE'S STUDY - NIGHT

Kemp reads the play, standing at the fire. Anne approaches.

ANNE

Do you like Dogberry?

KEMP

He's a proper fool. Can I never be the hero? The lover?

ANNE

I've started one about shipwrecks and mistaken identities--perhaps I'll make that fool a lover. Or at least let him think he is.

She laughs as he lunges for her, mock growling.

KEMP

I missed your laugh.

There is still sadness in her eyes, but she smiles.

ANNE

How can I resist my fool?

INT. THE GLOBE THEATRE/ANNE'S STUDY - 1597-1599

--In the Globe, Anne hands Will *Much Ado About Nothing*, glancing past him to meet Kemp's eyes. Will's jaw tightens.

--A playbill is nailed up: *Much Ado About Nothing*. Then another, and another: *Henry IV: Part One*. *Henry IV: Part Two*. *As You Like It*. *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

--Anne writing at her desk, smiling to herself.

--Anne handing off another play to Will: *Twelfth Night*.

--Kemp performing Malvolio, keeping the audience laughing. Will watching from the wings, eyes narrowed.

--At rehearsal, Will listens to Burbage speak, but watches Anne smiling with Kemp at the edge of the stage.

--Anne, in her study, opens the bottom drawer and takes out the manuscript for Hamlet. She traces the twine and puts it into the red satchel. Finally ready to let it go.

EXT. THE GLOBE THEATRE - DAY

Eager crowds flood toward the Globe. Anne moves among them in her dark cloak, carrying the red satchel.

INT. THE GLOBE THEATRE - DAY

Anne watches from the back. Onstage, Kemp is performing, keeping the audience laughing. He spots Anne in the crowd, meeting her eyes and winking.

In the wings, Will watches, his expression black.

INT. BACKSTAGE AT THE GLOBE - AFTER THE SHOW

Anne moves among the props and players, many of whom smile at her. Kemp spots her and bows with an elaborate flourish.

KEMP

Mistress Hathaway.

ANNE
Master Kemp.

They aren't alone, but awareness sparks between them.

KEMP
Do you stay in London long?

ANNE
Only for the night. I've come to
see Will.

She places her hand on the satchel. Kemp nods.

KEMP
We shall have to make tonight worth
the journey.

She blushes, spotting Will at the edge of the Tiring House.

ANNE
(nodding goodbye)
Master Kemp.

INT. THE GLOBE TIRING HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Anne finds Will in the dressing area, half out of his
costume.

WILL
Well, if it isn't one of most
"passionate writers" to e'er
"bemoan the perplexities of love."

She glances around--they're alone, but that was careless. She
closes the door, shutting the rest of the company out.

ANNE
You can't still be vexed by Francis
Meres. He was praising you.

WILL
Was he?

ANNE
I didn't come here to fight.

WILL
But we're so good at it.

Anne extracts the twine-tied manuscript from the red satchel.
She sets it on the vanity in front of him.

Will reads the title. Goes deathly still.

WILL (CONT'D)
What is this?

ANNE
A play.

WILL
(staring at the title)
"Hamlet." Why would you name it
that?

ANNE
It's a tragedy. I've toyed with it
for three years. I can't tell if
it's any good. It's too raw--

WILL
(hard, interrupting)
You made him a prince.

ANNE
I used to call him that. And you
crown yourself king on the stage at
every opportunity. It seemed apt.

He finally looks up at her--angry eyes glittering.

WILL
Why would you do this? You're
punishing me. Is that it?

ANNE
(tired of this)
God, Will. It isn't about you. It's
never about you.

WILL
Of course it is. You've be writing
to impress me since the day we met.

ANNE
Is that supposed to be a joke?

He stands suddenly, confronting her.

WILL
You think you would be here without
me? Your precious plays would be
rubbish if I didn't challenge you.

ANNE
Belittle me...Fight with me...

WILL
 (raising his voice)
 I made you better. You did your
 best work when I pushed you and you
 know it.

She tips her chin up, challenging him--and exposing her neck.

ANNE
 Like Othello? Will you hide Hamlet
 in the same hole where you hid the
 Moor? Never to be performed?

WILL
 It isn't good enough.

ANNE
 Liar. You know it's good. You just
 can't stand to see yourself as you
 truly are. Petty and jealous and
 small.

He raises his hand and she flinches. Victory flashes--he
 doesn't even need to hit her, only to know he can scare her.

WILL
 I'm not the one eaten by envy. You
 can never be me. But I'm the one
 you fight to prove yourself to with
 each manuscript.

ANNE
 It isn't for you! If it's for
 anyone--

She breaks off, snapping her mouth shut.

WILL
 Who? Your lover?

Anne freezes. He's never admitted he knew before. This feels
 much more dangerous. He smiles, darkly satisfied by her fear.

WILL (CONT'D)
 I let you have your affair. Let you
 think I didn't know. Who was I to
 begrudge you a little fun? Though I
 can't say I see the appeal.

Anger at his words burns away her caution.

ANNE

A little fun? I *needed* him. He was the only thing that pulled me back into the world when Hamnet died.

WILL

Don't speak of him.

ANNE

Of my son? Or the man who loves me in a way you can't even comprehend?

WILL

I loved you--

ANNE

You left me alone! When our son was dying, I was alone. Our daughters were grieving, and you rode off and left me to deal with all of it. You leave me alone to do everything-- renovate your house and write your bloody plays. You're never there!

WILL

That's what you wanted! You never wanted a husband. You only wanted your inheritance and you couldn't get it without me. Then you wanted your precious plays and you couldn't write them without me. I was a means to an end. I still am. But I loved that boy. I love our children.

ANNE

It's only me you hate?

WILL

I don't know what this is. This thing I feel for you. I'm not sure there's ever been a word. But yes. Hatred comes close.

She glares at him, fire in her eyes.

ANNE

Enjoy the play. It's the last one you'll ever get.

She throws open the door, intending to storm out, but Will is right on her heels.

INT. BACKSTAGE AT THE GLOBE - CONTINUOUS

Kemp is on his way up the stairs, worry on his face. He stops when Anne flings open the door of the Tiring Room, but moves quickly to intercept when Will appears behind her.

WILL
You don't get to say when we're done!

Will grabs her arm, yanking her so she trips on the steps.

KEMP
(bellowing)
Will! That's enough.

All the remaining players are watching.

WILL
This doesn't concern you, Kemp.

KEMP
Let her go.

ANNE
Kemp. Just go. I'm fine.

They are at a standoff. Kemp won't leave while Anne is threatened and Will won't back down until Kemp does.

ANNE (CONT'D)
Go!

Kemp meets her eyes. He slowly backs down the stairs, until he's amid the other players, who watch it all, uneasy.

BURBAGE
Will...

WILL
(to Anne)
Get out of here.

Will releases Anne, shoving her down the stairs. Kemp lunges forward to catch her, along with two other players.

Will slams back into the Tiring Room. Kemp starts up the stairs after him, but Anne grabs his arm, stopping him.

ANNE
Don't. Let's go.

KEMP
Anne...

ANNE

Now, Kemp.

She pulls him past the other players toward the outer door.

INT. KEMP'S APARTMENTS - LONDON - NIGHT

Kemp paces as Anne stands eerily calm at the fire.

KEMP

You have to leave him.

ANNE

It will blow over. It always does.

KEMP

I can't watch him hurt you.

ANNE

He's all ego. I know better than to push him.

KEMP

I can get you free.

ANNE

No. He'll read the play, I'll apologize, and it will all go back to the way it was.

KEMP

Maybe it shouldn't. Maybe we shouldn't let it.

ANNE

Bottom. Please. Just be here. That's all I need.

He stops pacing, taking her in his arms, but over her shoulder we see resolve forming on his face.

INT. KEMP'S APARTMENTS - LONDON - MORNING

At dawn, Anne sits up in bed, alone, and scans the room.

ANNE

Kemp?

No response. On the bedside, she finds a note.

Agitated, Anne throws back the covers and hurries to dress.

EXT. THE GLOBE THEATRE - DAY

Kemp stalks toward the theatre, taut resolve in every step.

INT. THE GLOBE THEATRE - DAY

Will is standing by the stage with several other actors when Kemp enters. Kemp crosses the theatre, his fury building. He says something we can't hear and Will straightens, his own posture growing aggressive.

EXT. LONDON STREETS - DAY

Anne rushes down the street, trying to run, but slowed by heavy traffic.

INT. THE GLOBE THEATRE - CONTINUOUS

Kemp shoves Will's shoulder.

Will throws a punch, which Kemp dodges, tackling him around the body.

Both fall to the ground, wrestling, as the other actors close around them, unsure whether to intervene.

EXT. LONDON STREETS - CONTINUOUS

Anne dodges down an empty alley, away from the crowds--and breaks into a run.

INT. THE GLOBE THEATRE - CONTINUOUS

Will and Kemp--both bruised and bloody--are hauled apart by the company. Kemp is still shouting. Will yells something back that makes everyone freeze.

EXT. THE GLOBE THEATRE - CONTINUOUS

Anne, panting, finally catches sight of the theatre ahead.

Relieved, sweaty, she pushes through the doors.

INT. THE GLOBE THEATRE - DAY

Anne charges into the Globe, ready to intervene, but stumbles to a stop.

Only Will is there.

Seated on the edge of the stage. Sporting a black eye and waiting for her. Unnervingly calm.

ANNE
Where's Kemp?

WILL
Don't worry. He's alive. I only
fired him.

ANNE
You can't. He's a stakeholder.

WILL
I think you'll find I can do
anything I want to the man who was
fucking my wife.

She starts past him, toward backstage.

ANNE
You're mad. Where is he?

WILL
When did you tell him?

ANNE
What?

He steps into her path, his rage cold.

WILL
I never told anyone. The truth was
ours. Fucking him I can understand,
but you told him.

ANNE
You're actually trying to convince
me this isn't about your precious
company learning that someone else
fucked your wife? Your *property*?
Made a fool of you--

WILL
(booming)
YOU TOLD HIM!

ANNE
He figured it out! I didn't have to
tell him. He knew before he even
met me that you hadn't written
them.

(MORE)

ANNE (CONT'D)

I guess you aren't such a great liar after all. Oh, forgive me, actor. That's the word you prefer, isn't it? He's an actor too. But he's never used me.

WILL

You think he doesn't use you? How many parts have you written for him--
-Falstaff, Bottom, Malvolio--

ANNE

At least he doesn't steal my words. He sees me. He *admires* me!

WILL

The same way we admire dancing bears. Look at this trick someone taught her to do.

ANNE

He would give me credit!

WILL

No! He would only take it for himself. Why do you think he came here today? If you wanted to run off together, run away! He came for the plays.

ANNE

He asks me to leave you every day.

WILL

Then go.

ANNE

You don't mean that.

WILL

No? I'm a reasonable man. I'll give you a choice. Kemp goes. He'll never again play with the Lord Chamberlain's men. That doesn't change. But you can go with him. I won't say a word. I'll even let you write to the girls, now and then.

Anne watches him, wary, waiting for the catch.

WILL (CONT'D)

But if you ever write another play--
if I hear of so much as an
anonymous poem that sounds like you--
I'll destroy you both. I'll expose
you--being very penitent for my
part in it, of course. But we both
know it won't be me they punish.

She stares at him, burning with hatred.

ANNE

Or?

WILL

Or you stay with me. With the
Globe. We go on--and you never see
him again.

ANNE

You wouldn't really let me leave.

WILL

You have my word. If that's what
you want. The plays have been dreck
lately anyway. Perhaps you're done.

The script for Hamlet sits open on the stage. He kicks it.

WILL (CONT'D)

No one wants this morose rubbish.
You want to be free of me. Go on.

She stares at her husband, her mind working frantically.

ANNE

You would let me leave. No more
plays.

WILL

(indicated Hamlet)

What's this? Nineteen? It's a good
legacy.

ANNE

It's my legacy.

WILL

Is it, love? In a thousand years,
people will remember my name. And
you'll just be someone's wife.
They'll never know you existed.

ANNE

You'll be dust. They'll *only* know me.

WILL

Sophocles's wife? Chaucer's wife?

ANNE

The words. Fools like you may think you understand them, but the words are there for people like me to find. And you will never understand that. No one will remember you as a man. They will only remember the plays. And I am the plays. They will remember *me*.

WILL

Will they?

(beat)

Choose.

INT. KEMP'S APARTMENTS - LONDON - DAY

Kemp is washing the blood from his face in a basin when Anne enters, her face inscrutable. Relief flashes across his.

KEMP

Thank God. I was worried you'd gone to see him.

ANNE

I did.

He moves to fold her in his arms.

KEMP

Are you well? The man is mad. I went to speak to him this morning--

ANNE

I know.

She pulls away. He frowns, studying her face.

KEMP

What's wrong? What's happened?

ANNE

Why did you go? I told you to leave it and you--what? Decided to resolve it between men?

KEMP

I wanted to help. Like with New Place.

Anne goes still.

ANNE

What are you talking about?

KEMP

After Hamnet died. You needed to get out of that house. He would've left you there. It was killing you. I thought--

ANNE

How long have you been going behind my back?

KEMP

Anne. I only wanted to help you--

ANNE

You don't even see what you did, do you?

KEMP

I was trying to free you!

ANNE

You don't get to decide what makes me free! Don't you see? My entire life men have been deciding for me, arranging for me. You think you're so much better than him but you're actually worse--because at least he gave me a choice. He didn't pretend to listen and then do whatever the hell he pleased simply because he was a man and he could.

KEMP

Anne, I didn't--

ANNE

You made yourself rich, didn't you? Smart of you, to own a share.

KEMP

I'm not using you! I don't care about the bloody plays! You could stop writing tomorrow and I would still love you.

ANNE

But that's the thing. I can't stop.
It would be like cutting out my
heart.

(beat)

And he knew that.

KEMP

Love. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have--

ANNE

He gave me a choice. You or my
work.

Kemp freezes. He knows instantly what she would choose.

KEMP

(whispering)

No.

ANNE

You had to keep pushing. We could
have gone on like this. Weren't you
happy?

KEMP

I would have given up everything
for you.

ANNE

I know.

But she can't say the same.

KEMP

I can't even be surprised. You love
being him more than you ever loved
me.

She scoffs.

ANNE

You want me to choose you. But it
isn't you or him, it's you or *me*.
Women are supposed to give
ourselves up for men. Our bodies,
our very souls belong to you. But I
won't martyr myself like a
character in one of my plays.

KEMP

Did you ever truly love me?

ANNE

Is it easier for you if I say yes
or no?

His expression hardens.

KEMP

Don't say anything. Just go.

Anne goes to the door, but pauses, looking back.

ANNE

Farewell, Bottom.

He won't look at her.

INT. THE HALLWAY OUTSIDE KEMP'S APARTMENTS - DAY

Anne only makes it a few steps before she stops with a soft
sob, bracing herself against the wall.

ANNE (V.O.)

*So now I have confessed that he is
thine, and I my self am mortgaged
to thy will...*

INT. NEW PLACE - ANNE'S STUDY - NIGHT

Anne sits at her desk, writing a new play: *Julius Caesar*.

ANNE (V.O.)

*My self I'll forfeit, so that other
mine, thou wilt restore to be my
comfort still...*

INT. THE GLOBE THEATRE - DAY

Will glowers, watching Burbage rehearsing, holding a skull.

ANNE (V.O.)

*But thou wilt not, nor he will not
be free, for thou art covetous, and
he is kind...*

INT. KEMP'S APARTMENTS - LONDON - DAY

Packing up his apartment, Kemp picks up a sonnet--the one she
wrote for him. He looks at it...and sets it on the table,
turning his back on it as he leaves.

ANNE (V.O.)
*He learned but surety-like to write
 for me, under that bond that him as
 fast doth bind.*

INT. NEW PLACE - ANNE'S STUDY - DAY

Anne hands Will a new play. *Julius Caesar.*

ANNE (V.O.)
*The statute of thy beauty thou wilt
 take, thou usurer that put'st forth
 all to use...*

Another play. *Troilus and Cressida.*

ANNE (V.O.)
*And sue a friend, came debtor for
 my sake, so him I lose through my
 unkind abuse.*

Will looks at the latest play. *Macbeth.*

WILL
 So many plays about betrayal, my
 love. Is it he who betrayed you, or
 you who betrayed him?

Anne doesn't respond, turning away.

WILL (CONT'D)
 He's well, I think. Last I heard he
 was touring Italy.

Anne looks out the window at her daughters, now teens.

ANNE (V.O.)
*Him have I lost, thou hast both him
 and me, he pays the whole, and yet
 I am not free.*

EXT. NEW PLACE - LATE FALL - 1603 - DAY

Title: **Four years later.**

Anne, now 47, and Judith Sadler walk in the gardens, bundled up for the cold--Anne dressed all in black.

JUDITH
 (lightly)
 Don't you think you've mourned her
 long enough?

ANNE

She was our queen.

JUDITH

You never even saw her.

ANNE

No, but I wrote for her. And now the age of queens is over. Perhaps I'm mourning that, as much as her.

A rider appears, cantering toward the house.

JUDITH

Is that Will?

ANNE

He's probably come to finalize the land purchase for Susanna's dowry. Will I see you tomorrow?

JUDITH

Mm. Good luck with your errant husband.

ANNE

Not so errant anymore. I think we're getting old.

Judith smiles and waves. Anne heads toward the house.

INT. NEW PLACE - PARLOR - DAY

Will stalks through the house, searching for Anne.

WILL

Anne!

ANNE

You bellowed, my love?

Will stills when he sees her, uncharacteristically hesitant. Working himself up to something.

WILL

I know you won't believe me, but I am sorry. Truly.

ANNE

(sobering)
What's happened?

WILL

Will Kemp has died. In Southwark.

Anne barely reacts, shaking her head.

ANNE

No. He was in Italy.

WILL

He'd come back. I'm sorry.

Anne shakes her head, uncomprehending. And unemotional.

WILL (CONT'D)

Wasn't he your great love?

That gets her attention. Her gaze snaps to his.

ANNE

(angrily)

Do you want to know if I loved him more than I loved you? I was happier with him. But he could never hurt me as much as you--so perhaps I do love you more. Does that please you?

WILL

You're very cold. Not even a tear?

ANNE

I was never the romantic. That was him. You love to claim you pushed me to my best plays? So did he. Perhaps I needed you both.

She swallows and falls silent, staring at the mantle.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Is that all?

WILL

I shall never understand you.

ANNE

No. I don't suspect you shall.

He turns and leaves, irritated and confused.

After he's gone, a sob slips out. Then another. Anne grips the mantle under her knuckles turn white, hanging on to stay upright, broken in a way she will never let Will see.

INT. THE GLOBE THEATRE - JUNE 1613 - DAY

Title: **Ten years later.**

The company is performing Henry VIII. Will, now 49, lights a fuse on a cannon. There's something different about him. He's old for his age, disoriented. The cannon booms.

The show goes on, but Will is staring upward. Finally the other actors look up--

The thatch roof is ablaze. Panic sets in as the crowds notice the fire and shove toward the exits.

INT. NEW PLACE - THE PARLOR - DAY

Anne, now 57 and sharper than ever, and Judith Sadler, looking wan and tired, stand in the doorway, watching Will as he writes frantically.

ANNE

It was an accident. A bit of wadding caught. At least that's what Burbage is telling everyone.

JUDITH

No one was hurt. They'll rebuild.

ANNE

(watching Will)

Something's wrong. He quoted Romeo & Juliet to me when he arrived, flawlessly--*these violent delights have violent ends*--but then he called me Emilia, a mistress he hasn't seen in twenty years.

JUDITH

I'm sure he was only rattled by the fire.

ANNE

I hope so. All this time, our scheme only worked because Will could call up my words as if they were his own. If his mind is going...

JUDITH

You don't know that.

ANNE

No, but if it's true...He'll have to live here. He truly thought I was Emilia. Just for a moment, but it was there in his eyes. What if he should think someone else is me?

Will calls out suddenly.

WILL

Anne! More parchment! I must write to Marlowe and Nash. Bastards they may be, they'll help us rebuild.

Judith gasps softly. Anne stares at his back, reality sinking in. Sadness welling.

ANNE

(gently)

Marlowe died two decades ago, Will.

He continues to write, ignoring her.

JUDITH SHAKESPEARE (O.S.)

Mother?

Anne turns to see her daughter Judith, now 28, watching nearby, anxious.

ANNE

It's all right, Judith. All's well.

Anne smiles reassuringly and steps into the room with Will and Judith Sadler, closing the door--and shutting us out.

EXT. HOLY TRINITY CHURCHYARD - DAY - FALL 1616

It's a beautiful fall day in the graveyard. Anne, 60, dressed in mourning, sets a posy of flowers on Hamnet's grave, then moves farther from the church, carrying another posy.

She reaches another grave and gently brushes leaves from the top, tidying it before kneeling and setting down the flowers.

ANNE

I'm sorry I haven't been to see you lately.

She touches the name on the gravestone: **JUDITH SADLER**

ANNE (CONT'D)

Quite the furor since Will... A bunch of London playwrights want to move his remains to Westminster Abbey. They wrote poems about shuffling Spencer and Chaucer aside to make room.

Anne plucks at a blade of grass.

ANNE (CONT'D)

I suppose I should be flattered. But no one will care where my bones end up. Will was the last person who knew the truth.

A child's shout draws her attention toward town. She looks over and sees her daughter Judith, pregnant and pleading with her husband, THOMAS QUINEY. Even from a distance, his expression is arrogant and dismissive.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Judith wants to christen the baby Shakespeare, if she can convince awful Quiney. He's so like Will sometimes. All the worst parts. I should've taken your advice and told the girls years ago. Not sure they'd even believe me now. I've failed them in so many ways.

Judith's husband stalks off and she hurries after him.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Quiney's still mad about the will. I couldn't believe Will actually cut him out. Bastard did something right. In the end. Though Susanna keeps asking about my share. She thinks I was slighted. I nearly told her that he'd asked me what I wanted and I said, "My words are my legacy. All I need is somewhere to lay my head." So he left me a bed.
(laughing softly)
He could be so literal.

She goes quiet. Children shriek with laughter in the distance.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Your children are well. We miss you. Me most of all. I keep burying pieces of myself.

(MORE)

ANNE (CONT'D)

You were my goodness. Hamnet my hope. Kemp my heart. And Will my fire. Who am I without you?

BEN JONSON (O.S.)

Mistress Shakespeare?

Anne turns, coming awkwardly to her feet. A man with sharp eyes and a neatly groomed beard stands several feet away. BEN JONSON, 44, exudes an air of culture and intellect.

BEN JONSON (CONT'D)

I'm sorry to disturb. I stopped by your house and they said I might find you here. I'm Ben Jonson.

ANNE

Yes, of course. It's an honor.

BEN JONSON

The honor is mine.

He bows, then looks past her toward the grave.

BEN JONSON (CONT'D)

Is this where Will...?

ANNE

No. He's inside the church. I can show you if you like...

BEN JONSON

I've actually come to see you.
(uncomfortable)
You might know I took Will out drinking. Just before his death.

Understanding sympathy dawns on her face.

ANNE

Master Jonson. My husband may have relished telling everyone he was in perfect health, but he was already quite ill. You need feel no guilt that you hastened his departure. If anything, be gratified you brightened his final days.

BEN JONSON

That isn't why I've come, madam. You see, I've been tasked with writing his epitaph. And now...

A vicar comes out into the churchyard. Jonson glances over at him and offers Anne his arm.

BEN JONSON (CONT'D)

Would you do me the honor of taking
a stroll with me?

ANNE

I don't know how I can help, but I
am at your service.

She takes his arm. Ben guides her away from the vicar and toward the Avon river.

EXT. THE AVON RIVER - DAY

A swan glides by on the water. Ben Jonson is working himself up to something.

BEN JONSON

I've known Will for decades. Or I
thought I knew him. But that night
he said something that made me
question everything.

ANNE

He wasn't well. One day he'd think
Romeo was real. Another that his
plays were all written by Marlowe.

BEN JONSON

He didn't say Marlowe.

Anne arches a brow playfully.

ANNE

Who was it this time? The queen?

Jonson isn't buying her act. His sharp eyes study her.

BEN JONSON

At first I thought he was talking
about his muse. *She* was still
writing. He'd spoken of her before--
when he was too drunk for sense.
How he had to fight her to get the
plays. But that night he called her
by name.

ANNE

Master Jonson. I'm afraid I'm quite
lost.

BEN JONSON

That night when I helped him home,
I saw you. Writing in the window.

He stops, turning to face her.

BEN JONSON (CONT'D)

I've had a complicated relationship
with your husband. The words made
me seethe with jealousy, and the
man infuriated me. It was always so
easy for him. Because it wasn't
him, was it?

ANNE

I don't know what you mean.

BEN JONSON

I'm to write his epitaph. To put
his legacy into verse. And I now
believe everything I know of him to
be a lie. What would you have me
say, Mistress Shakespeare? Do I
reveal what I believe to be true?

She meets his eyes, calm.

ANNE

Would anyone believe you?

He sucks in a breath, startled by the almost-confirmation.

ANNE (CONT'D)

And worse, what if they did?

BEN JONSON

I'm not afraid of controversy.

Anne turns to watch the swan on the river.

ANNE

A troupe of traveling players came
to town when I was young--that
wasn't uncommon, but this troupe
had a female player. The scandal!

BEN JONSON

I would protect you. All of us
would.

Anne shakes her head.

ANNE

You don't understand. As soon as they saw her--these upstanding men of my town--they couldn't hear the words anymore. They couldn't see the play. All they could see was a loose woman. All the poetry. The romance. They were deaf to it. Because a woman had dared step on stage.

She turns back to Jonson.

ANNE (CONT'D)

If you reveal what you think you know, it will change how the world sees the plays. Men will always think only men could've created the great works. If it is known I wrote them, they will cease to be great.

BEN JONSON

You would give him credit?

ANNE

Will is just a name now. What's in a name? I used to think I could force the world to change. But now...I will live in Portia and Beatrice and Rosalind. Women a hundred years from now will be able to see their strength on stage-- that will be my legacy. If anyone remembers any of us at all.

BEN JONSON

They will remember you.

ANNE

The wife of a great man?

BEN JONSON

The soul of an age.

ANNE

I only wanted to be heard.
(smiling)
Perhaps I needed a world that would never listen. They *listen* to men. And it made me so angry. Which made me good. They become complacent with the first whiff of success. High on their own importance. But I was forever fighting to be seen.

BEN JONSON
And were you?

ANNE
Perhaps none of us truly are.

BEN JONSON
I have to know. Do you still write?

She removes one black glove, revealing the ink-stains on her fingertips.

BEN JONSON (CONT'D)
You could release them as written
before his death. No one would
know.

ANNE
It isn't the same without Will. But
perhaps you could write to me. It's
a comfort to know someone in the
world who knows who I am.

BEN JONSON
The world could know. Say the word.

ANNE
No. Though I may tell my daughters.
I would like them to know me.

BEN JONSON
I am your servant. If you change
your mind.
(bowing over her hand)
Sweet swan of Avon.

Anne smiles softly.

INT. NEW PLACE - ANNE'S STUDY - NIGHT

Anne takes out a fresh sheet of paper and begins to write.

ANNE (V.O.)
*Dearest Susanna, beloved Judith,
perhaps there is something craven
in telling you this way...*

We see Anne (7 years later), seeming asleep in her study.
Susanna comes in. Anne does not rouse.

ANNE (V.O.)

*But written words have been my
soul's delight, so now I offer them
to you. I wish you to know who your
mother was, if only in death.*

INT. HOLY TRINITY CHURCH - DAY

Anne's daughters and their families stand over a pair of crypts, dressed in black. We see a plaque being placed on Anne's crypt, and the plaque next to hers--Will's.

ANNE (V.O.)

*I spent my life building monuments
of words, etching them into the
consciousness of man. It was my
passion and my obsession.*

INT. NEW PLACE - ANNE'S STUDY - DAY

Judith's husband, Quiney, riffles through Anne's desk. In the red satchel, he finds the letter to her daughters and a new play. He rips open the letter, greedy and eager.

ANNE (V.O.)

*Your father was a great actor. We
were jealous of one another. We
needed one another. And the plan
was his...*

As Quiney reads, anger and disbelief fill his face. He looks at the play, now with disgust--and drops it into the fire.

JUDITH SHAKESPEARE

(from the doorway)

What are you doing?

QUINEY

Protecting your legacy.

He flicks the letter into the flames and ushers her out.

Close on the fire, we see the letter crackle and burn, framing the final words:

I wrote them all. I am Shakespeare.

Until even they are consumed by the fire.