

WEBSTER. Arrest who?

TILNEY. Everybody! Burbage's Men, Henslowe's Men, the whole of English Theatre – every one of you ne'er-do-wells who stands in contempt of the authority invested in me by Her Majesty.

BURBAGE. Contempt? You closed the Rose. What charge do you lay against the Curtain?

TILNEY. That woman is a woman!

NED. A woman?!

TILNEY. Yes. So in the name of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth...

QUEEN. (*offstage*) Have a care with my name, you'll wear it out. (*enters*) Oh, you are sick of self-love, Lord Chamberlain. The Queen of England does not attend exhibitions of public lewdness, so something is out of joint. Come here, Master Kent. Let me look at you.

(*VIOLA comes forward and is about to curtsy, but stops and turns it into a sweeping bow.*)

Yes, the illusion is remarkable and your error, Tilney, easily forgiven. But I know something of a woman in a man's profession. Yes, by God, I do know about that. That is enough from you, Master Kent. If only Lord Wessex were here.

WEBSTER. He is, Ma'am. (*gets WESSEX from the trap*) Here he is. It's cold down there, isn't it, mate?

WESSEX. Unhand me, you stockfish. (*to QUEEN*) Your Majesty.

QUEEN. There was a wager, I remember...as to whether a play can show us the very truth and nature of love. I think you lost your wager today. (*to WEBSTER*) You are an eager boy. Did you like this play?

WEBSTER. I liked it when she stabbed herself.

QUEEN. And your name, young man?

WEBSTER. John Webster, Your Majesty.

QUEEN. You will go far.

WEBSTER. Cor...fanks!

QUEEN. (*fixes WILL with a beady eye*) Master Shakespeare. Next time you come to Greenwich, come as yourself and we will speak some more.

WESSEX. Your Majesty! How is this to end?

QUEEN. As stories must when love's denied – with tears and a journey. Those whom God has joined in marriage, not even I can put asunder. Master Kent – Lord Wessex, as I foretold, has lost his wife at the playhouse. Go make your farewell and send her out. It's time to settle accounts. How much was the wager?

WESSEX. Fifty shillings... (*off the QUEEN's look*) Pounds.

QUEEN. Give it to Master Kent. He will see it rightfully home.

(*WESSEX gives the purse to VIOLA, who turns and hands the money to WILL.*)

VIOLA. I believe this is rightfully yours, Master Shakespeare. I wish you a long and glorious career.

QUEEN. Master Shakespeare, something more cheerful next time...for Twelfth Night perhaps. Tragedy is all very well, sir, but remember, we very much like a dog.

[*MUSIC NO. 43: "VIVAT QEI EXIT"*]

(*The QUEEN exits, followed by WESSEX.*)

TILNEY. I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!