

Excerpt terms and conditions

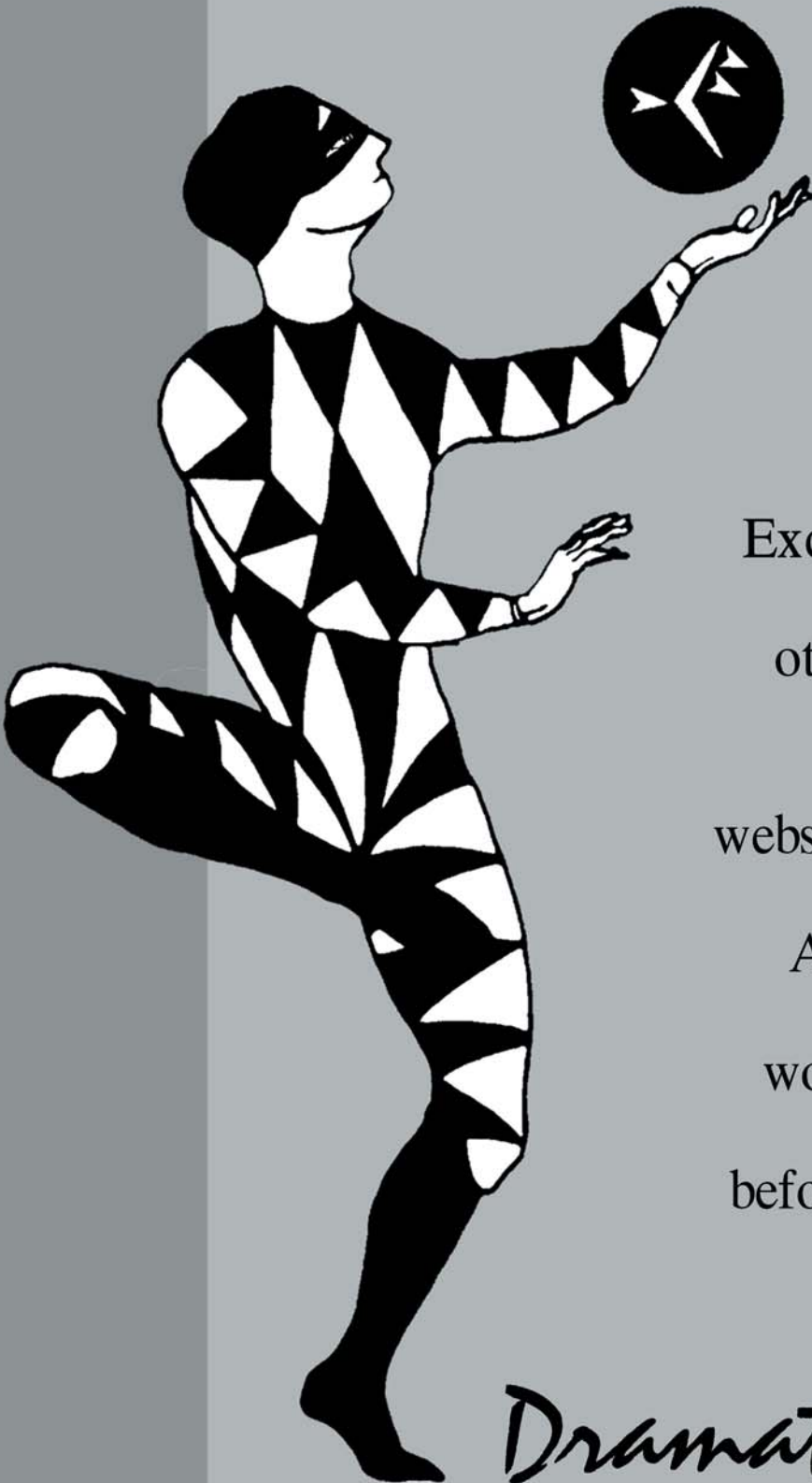
This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

Dramatic Publishing



Dark Lady

A Full Length Drama
by
Karen Sunde



The Dramatic Publishing Company
311 Wasington Street, Woodstock, IL 60098

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty fees are given in our current catalogue and are subject to change without notice. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether it is presented for charity or for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed anytime it is acted before an audience. All inquiries concerning amateur and stock rights should be addressed to: THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, P. O. Box 109, Woodstock, Illinois 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR HIS AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES.

This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work.

DARK LADY

is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including but not limited to the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication, and reading are reserved. On all programs this notice should appear: Produced by special arrangement with THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois.

©MCMLXXXVIII by
KAREN SUNDE

Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(DARK LADY)

Dark Lady

A Play in Two Acts
For Four Men and Three Women

CHARACTERS

EMILIA BASSANOan enchanting musician
WILL SHAKESPEAREa rising playwright
HALthe Earl of Southampton, an elegant young man
DORAan earthy servant
RICHARD BURBAGEa flamboyant actor
HUNSDONthe craggy Lord Chamberlain
LINDYa cocky tavern maid

PLACE: Elizabethan England

Doubles: OLD MAN, WATERMAN, WATCH,
OLD WOMAN, DANCERS, TOWNSPEOPLE

ACT ONE

SETTING: *A bare stage. Drapery, benches, a trap. Sometimes a virginal. AT OPENING: Elizabethan pattern dance - winding, flirtatious, changing partners, ALL masked. Only one couple is sharply lit.*

WILL (*to FIRST WOMAN, dancing*). You move like a whisper.
Perhaps you're a sprite.

FIRST WOMAN. And what if I am?

WILL. I'll snare you.

FIRST WOMAN. Don't blink or I'm gone. (*She twists away, goes to next partner. EMILIA, masked, comes to join WILL.*)

WILL. Your feet barely kiss the ground. I believe you're a sprite.

EMILIA. And you've come to mock us... professional.

WILL. What? What do you...

EMILIA. You dance everyday. (*She twists away. He stands watching her, misses a step. SECOND WOMAN spins into his arms. He picks up step.*)

WILL. Don't dip too low. I'm waiting to gather you.

SECOND WOMAN. You'll gather me. How?

WILL. Closely, my dear. Very tightly.

SECOND WOMAN. You won't know me after.

WILL. No? (*She twists away. FIRST WOMAN is there again.*)

WILL. Golden hair. Blazing cheeks. You won't escape.

FIRST WOMAN. Many have the same. You can't keep track.

WILL. I'll remember. Don't doubt me. (*She leaves. As EMILIA joins him the figure changes.*)

WILL. You've cheated... and have the advantage.

EMILIA. That's natural enough. But I never cheat.

WILL. Will I know you later?

EMILIA. I think not.

WILL. I insist.

EMILIA. I've one short message.

WILL. Your message?

EMILIA. Don't use Italy again. *(She spins to next partner. Circling continues with SECOND WOMAN and FIRST WOMAN, but WILL is not talkative. When EMILIA returns he takes her arm and walks out of the dance with her.)*

WILL. Shall we unmask?

EMILIA. I think not.

WILL *(facing her)*. You know me.

EMILIA. I think not.

WILL. You said that I dance...

EMILIA. Yes. At the end of each play.

WILL. You do know me then. *(She smiles, but says nothing.)* And what of Italy?

EMILIA. You don't know Italy.

WILL. Oh?

EMILIA. Your Italy is a pale painted canvas.

WILL. And yours?

EMILIA. Mine is life. *(She leaves him. He pulls off his mask, begins to follow her, is stopped by HAL who comes up to him.)*

HAL. What do you think?

WILL *(looking after EMILIA)*. Exquisite. Provocative witch, though. You're sure she asked about me? *(EMILIA looks back at him, then exits.)*

HAL. Not that one. Good grief, Will. It's *that* one. The red-hair, in blue. She's giddy to meet you.

WILL. My mistake. Sorry. I forgot which.

HAL. She's been taking your new poem to bed.

WILL. "Adonis"? Then how do you know it's not you she's after?

HAL. Well, me she can't have, can she?

WILL *(sighs)*. Oh, my child. Lead on, I'm for it.

HAL. Bring her into the library then. Marlowe's going to read something. And don't sneak out early. Essex is coming. I'll introduce you.

(HAL and WILL exit. Swirl of exiting party may leave paper, pen, books, bench as bed. There is a lump in bed. Emilia's gown flung in heap. Morning light. DORA enters quietly with bowl of rose water, sets bowl down, may pull drape, straightens gown. EMILIA, the lump, speaks.)

EMILIA. All right, then. What rhymes with "rushes?"

DORA *(starting)*. Oh, my life! Y'give me the frights.

EMILIA. If you're going to be about, you might as well be useful.

DORA. Haven't had your feet down, have y'?

EMILIA. No, I've been good, good, good.

DORA. And well y'might, well y'might be.

EMILIA. And I'm altogether starved waiting for you.

DORA. Here now. Take this and chew it carefully. *(Hands her crust of bread.)*

EMILIA *(takes a bite)*. Ugh... it's dry.

DORA. Better 'at way. Just a bit at a time. *(Watches her.)* 'ats it. How y'feel?

EMILIA. I won't know till my feet are down, will I?

DORA. All right, easy then. *(She helps EMILIA sit up.)*

EMILIA. What a goddamned nuisance. Momma mia!

DORA. Never y'mind, never y'mind.

EMILIA *(standing, feeling pale)*. Well. So far...

DORA. Have a bit more.

EMILIA *(nibbles more crust)*. Never thought I'd be up to something so... silly.

DORA. Works, though. Doesn't it? *(EMILIA walks a bit, testing herself, begins to smile.)*

EMILIA. Yes... Yes, I think so. I think... nothing's coming up. No nausea at all. I really feel... fine. *(Spins around, starts singing in Italian.)*

DORA. Careful now... No blood?

EMILIA *(dashing to papers, studying one)*. Umhmummm. *(Negative.)* And today's three days past the third month. You'd better have a big breakfast waiting. Fresh milk, too. Did you give me a rhyme for rushes?

DORA. Leave that now, and dress. (*Spreads out skirt for her to step into.*)

EMILIA (*absent-mindedly complying*). I just want to get these two lines down. They woke me. Throbbing in my head like a katydid. And it's a treacherous maze, my head. Some of the poor words only come through it in Italian. I'll wear the white sleeves. The English for "desiderio" is "wish." Wish.

DORA. Oop, oop. Have t'be lettin' this out, m'lady. Another month'n you'll burst right through!

EMILIA (*washing with rose water - face, neck, arms, chest*). Ummmm, that smells so good. (*Suddenly.*) I know! I have it. "Dah da, dah da." (*Etc. Beats out iambic line on her fingers.*) Aha! That's good, that's very good, Miss Emilia. Bella, bella, ma carissima. (*Singing.*) That's even good in English, myyyyy lady. (*DORA stands waiting. EMILIA runs to have bodice fastened, sleeves pinned on.*)

DORA (*testing*). My lord should arrive today.

EMILIA. Umhmmm. With news of all his little chickadees.

DORA. Do you... plan t'tell him... about yours?

EMILIA. Of course. Why not? He loves me, doesn't he? He'll be happy if I am. (*Pause.*) Do you miss Lady Hunsdon very much, Dora?

DORA. 'Course not. Not a bit.

EMILIA. Don't be proud, Dora. It doesn't become you.

DORA. If she wants t'think I'm a thief, so much the better for 'er.

EMILIA. Not the children either, not even a bit?

DORA. They's all growed but two, 'n the little uns, well... I think on 'em now'n then.

EMILIA. Of course. Trussing up his paramour is not... quite the same. (*EMILIA stands stiffly, being "prepared" like a mannequin - may pivot very slowly - while her story bubbles up from the insides a mannequin may not have.*) You know, I don't feel so... invaded anymore. At first, remember how raged? No, no. First... I didn't believe it. You knew. You told me. But I couldn't believe it. Wouldn't. Nothing had ever been mine, except me. I had me, and me I could trust. I knew was strong.

I had wit, and my will. What became... what I did with my life... would depend on that. *(Pause.)* So how could this happen? How could something take me, against my will, and twist my life? No. Stop my life, stop it, turn it about completely and say to me... there. Now if you want to go on, go ahead... but it's on new terms. Entirely. *(Pause.)* Rage. Wild frantic rage. My own body had betrayed me. I ran. Raced out of the house, rode into the brittle brush and crusting snow, far. But nowhere could be far enough. Wind smacked my rough cheeks. On the rocky edge of a hill I beat myself numb. But the bit was in place. Like a wild horse caught, I shrieked and thrashed in a narrow cell, without hope. The enemy was inside. *(Pause.)* So I grew still. And in stillness I knew... how little power, how little control, how small my choices really are. What to eat, what to wear. My brothers work every day making music, while I... it was ridiculous to think that my life mattered or... could be worth something to the world. *(Pause.)* So then the invasion proceeded without further violence. Peacefully. And my mind was free to wonder about my invisible, implacable enemy. A force... minute, silent, unseen, yet overwhelming. And growing, swelling, every day more surely becoming... something. Something I will recognize. *(Pause.)* It's so curious, such a quiet... mystery, that now, even when I'm angry, it's amazing... just to wonder about it. *(Pause. EMILIA "comes to life" again.)* We'll be very gay tonight, won't we? It will be a celebration.

(Lights change. EMILIA and DORA exit. RICHARD walking slowly downstage. WILL enters after him, stops to stare at something upstage - imaginary portrait, tapestry, etc. RICHARD, very princely manner, continues without turning. Virginal (or facsimile) with candlestick on it may be placed as they speak.)

WILL. My god.

RICHARD. Will?

WILL *(from upstage, distracted)*. Ummmmh?

RICHARD *(without turning)*. Straighten your cloak.

WILL. What?

RICHARD. It's sliding off your shoulder again.

WILL (*looks at himself*). How did you know?

RICHARD. Come here.

WILL. Just look at this unicorn, Richard. Where do you think...

RICHARD. Come here.

WILL (*finally moving downstage*). It's incredible. The things he has... How would you like to be my Lord Chamberlain, cousin to my Lady Queen?

RICHARD (*straightens Will's cape*). Look as if you didn't notice.

WILL. But I'm getting drunk. I can't help it.

RICHARD. Settle down.

WILL. Look. Look there. Just think what we could do with those draperies.

RICHARD. Assume the role...

WILL. And the gold sconces. My god.

RICHARD. This is all every day to him. Like a stroll down Cheapside after dinner.

WILL. Slap me once and I'll be all right.

RICHARD. Breathe deeply. (*Pause.*) Now.

WILL. What do we say?

RICHARD. It's just business. Like a load of oranges. Think of what we've got to sell.

WILL. Yes. Why he needs us.

RICHARD. Who we are.

WILL. Yes. (*Pause.*) You're sure he saw "Henry Six"?

RICHARD. He sent that dagger to me.

WILL. I thought he didn't come after all.

RICHARD. No. I spotted him right off.

WILL (*teasing*). Counting the gallery?

RICHARD. It was important.

WILL (*pause*). He'll be impressed to meet you.

RICHARD. He won't know your poems, but still...

WILL. He's a tough old soldier. Just remind him of your Talbot. That'll be enough.

RICHARD. Right. (*They draw themselves up, waiting. Pause.*) I think he's an ordinary fellow.

WILL. The great ones always are.

(LORD HUNSDON enters.)

HUNSDON. Ah... Master Talbot. Saints damn it all, it's a glorious honor y'bestow on this old soldier. *(WILL and RICHARD exchange looks.)*

RICHARD. My pleasure, my lord, entirely mine. And again my thanks for the exquisite weapon.

HUNSDON *(eagerly)*. Ha, ha. Has it come into use then?

RICHARD. The very next performance. We had to dull it, of course.

HUNSDON. A'course a'course. Bleedin' slick blade if ever I saw one.

RICHARD. May I present my colleague, the author of "Henry the Sixth" that you admired.

HUNSDON. Ahh, 'n the honor multiplies faster'n conies in a bush. Congratulations, sir. You have captured t'the last point the fighting man's spirit.

WILL. I'm pleased that you...

HUNSDON. And all three. You've written all three a'those "Henry" plays?

WILL. I have, yes. Except for the... *(RICHARD comes down on his forearm to stop him.)*

HUNSDON. Magnificent. Extraordinary. Excuse me, won't y'please? *(He crosses suddenly upstage.)*

RICHARD *(softly)*. It goes well.

WILL *(softly)*. Get to the company.

RICHARD. Pleasantries first. Don't rush.

WILL. I get nervous talking nonsense.

RICHARD. Be calm. It may be life-blood to us, but not to him. If he decides to come along, it's for the glamour. *(HUNSDON returns with EMILIA on his arm.)*

HUNSDON. My dear. It's with a great pleasure I bring y'to these two fellow artists. Master... *(Looking at WILL.)*

RICHARD. Shakespeare.

HUNSDON *(to RICHARD)*. And... Master Talbot.

WILL. Uhh, Burbage, my lord. It's Burbage.

HUNSDON. Aha. (*Laughs.*) A'course, now. I've confused you w'the soldier. Now. Give a creakin' old man space t'clear his head. (*Pointing to RICHARD.*) This... is the actor Burgage, sometime performer a'the soldier Talbot. Is it straight now? (*ALL laugh.*)

RICHARD. Exactly so, my lord. But give me leave to hope I may once more confuse you.

HUNSDON. Confuse me... once more? Ah, oh oh, with another soldier y'mean, with another fine soldier in a play. I hope tha' y'may. Yessir, I hope it. Masters both, this is my darlin' friend, Emilia Bassano, a most accomplished artist herself, a musician.

RICHARD. Ah, of the Bassanos at court?

EMILIA. Yes, sir. My family... my brothers and uncles all play.

HUNSDON. 'n my everlasting gratitude to our late King Henry... who had the blasting good sense t'raid Italy for its flowers.

EMILIA. You speak with a pretty tongue tonight.

HUNSDON. I am inspired, my flower, by the company.

EMILIA. But I think you may have business to speak of. May I sit aside?

HUNSDON. And play, my dear. Grace us, will y'please.

RICHARD. Our business is to lure my lord back to the world of theatre. By all means, play, my lady. You may give our words the pressure of song.

EMILIA. I doubt you'll need me, sir. My lord is easily seduced. (*ALL laugh.*)

HUNSDON. Behave, Emilia.

EMILIA. I'll play. (*She sits at virginal, begins playing softly as conversation continues. WILL watches her.*)

RICHARD. Our business is to woo you, my lord. We are convinced that it is an extraordinary moment for the theatre. Even in spite of the opposition of the Puritans, you yourself witnessed the effect of our "Henry the Sixth."

HUNSDON. Aye, aye. That I did.

RICHARD. It spoke directly to the people.

HUNSDON. Aye. It lit a spark. That rusted old story...

RICHARD. They took fire. That old story of Talbot in France reminded them of Essex now.

HUNSDON. Y'mean... because their hearts were with my Lord Essex in France...

RICHARD. Of course. The theatre gave a... voice... to their precise feeling, even the instant before they knew they felt it, and made of that feeling... a cause for celebration.

HUNSDON. It may be true. They wept. All together - myself as well. 'Twas an amazing thing...

RICHARD. And we actors knew... for the first time, what the great ancient theatre must have been. When every citizen came... to cheer his own glory, to tremble at the sins he feared, to know at last that bravery in truth and a right State will triumph.

HUNSDON. Hear, hear!

RICHARD. Now. (*Pause.*) We've come to you... because we want to be more permanent. We think... the time has come. We want to raise the quality and status of our troupe. We want to become what we will call... a company. As important to the city as its choirs, as solid as a guild. And... to lead us, at our head, we need a great man. Noble, renowned, above all, sensitive. An admired representative of the arts.

HUNSDON (*pause*). Y'stagger me, Master Burbage. Come, sit down. (*Moving upstage.*) Y'may be too young t'know it, but I kept a troupe a'players some years ago... (*WILL stays downstage, watching EMILIA.*)

EMILIA. You don't talk business, Master Shakespeare.

WILL. My way is quieter than Richard's.

EMILIA. You make a team, I think.

WILL. Yes. Yes we do. (*She continues playing. He moves to her. Silence.*)

EMILIA. You are very quiet.

WILL. Excuse me. The music. It's...

EMILIA. You like it?

WILL. It's very moving. It... carries me... somewhere.

EMILIA. Somewhere you'd rather be?

WILL. No. If there is heaven at all, it must be... this.

EMILIA (*laughs lightly*). You tease.

WILL. Not you, I wouldn't.

EMILIA. And I'd do nothing else. We'd have a fine time.

WILL (*looking at her*). You... I know you, don't I?

EMILIA. Do you?

WILL. Yes. Your eyes... Italy! You mocked me. You beat me
round the bush.

EMILIA. Not I.

WILL. Yes. At the May Dance. You knew I was an actor.

EMILIA. I was unkind, I'm afraid.

WILL. Yes. And now that I have you, you'll do penance... by
teaching me Italian.

EMILIA (*laughing*). I will?

WILL (*eagerly*). Tell me about Italy. What is it like there?

EMILIA. How can I? It's too...

WILL. How is it different from here? (*EMILIA stops playing and
laughs long. HUNSDON and RICHARD notice.*)

RICHARD. Will, tear yourself from the lady. Have a drink with
us.

WILL. Too late, my friend. Her music's worked on me. Drink-
ing's superfluous.

HUNSDON. Is she not extraordinary? It's her own composition.

WILL. Is it? Engage her, Richard, immediately. Lord Hunsdon
must share her with the world. (*ALL laugh. RICHARD and
HUNSDON, strolling off.*)

RICHARD (*exiting*). We need someone with the authority to
stand between us and the Puritans. It's likely there'll be tour-
ing, and... (*Etc.*)

WILL (*to EMILIA*). Come. Answer me.

EMILIA (*indicates elaborate candlestick with unlit candle*). Watch
the candle. Don't look at me. Are you watching it?

WILL. Yes.

EMILIA (*quiet, hypnotically*). It's so elegant; the jewels. The
line. The glittering. But cold. Like a portrait of Elizabeth. In
state. But without... this. (*She reaches for a light. The flame*

takes on life between them.) This... is the difference. You're not watching the candle.

WILL. But I am.

EMILIA. You cannot.

WILL. England has jewels, elegance...

EMILIA. But in Italy they're alive... pulsing, warm, breathing, like flesh... the flesh... (*She lights the candle.*) of a Raphael.

WILL. Now may I look?

EMILIA. Now you *must*.

WILL (*still watching candle flame*). Don't try to tell me we've no flesh. England's alive. And seized with adventure. The explorations to...

EMILIA. It's the boldness of barbarism. You may grow rich by your boldness. But unless, with your wealth, a swelling of artistic power comes along, England will never grow great. Where are your painters, your sculptors, musicians, poets, your philosophers? A people who don't cherish those who can express their being in art and in thought are nothing more than barbaric, do not deserve the name of civilization, and will not be remembered. (*Snuffs candle on the word "remembered."*) This... is all I see here. And it's dead. With it you've crept back into the dark age. A candle unlit has no body, no passion, no humanity.

WILL. We do have poets, philosophers...

EMILIA. You have gentlemen who dabble. Which of them has lived by his art? Who is your best?

WILL. Poet? Spenser.

EMILIA (*looks at him quizzically*). Yes. He is. And how is he rewarded? (*Pause. He doesn't answer.*)

EMILIA. Look at our painters. They are no idle gentlemen. (*Excited.*) Ucello, son of a barber; Mantegna, son of a farmer; Botticelli, son of a tanner; Da Vinci, illegitimate son of...

WILL (*smiling*). Has Italy no daughters?

EMILIA. Yes. There is Marietta, daughter of Tintoretto, but he wouldn't let her... (*Her voice has faded.*) I'm sorry. Perhaps your own writing is...

WILL. I've managed to make... some money. My poem...

EMILIA. ...is in its second edition.

WILL. You know that?

EMILIA. Yes. I read. *(Pause.)* I'm afraid I'm a little bitter. My Venice...

WILL. Venice.

EMILIA. ...is not so glorious as she was. Your country...

WILL. ...is rising, yes.

EMILIA. ...is powerful. *(Begins low, will grow fiery.)* She rides out proudly and makes her bid to master the seas. But you must take care for her. If life... each day... does not look for beauty, graciousness, light above all; if it isn't the greatest that man can achieve... what is it?

(HUNSDON and RICHARD are strolling back.)

EMILIA *(goes right on, becoming impassioned)*. Athens ruled the world. Is it power we remember when we think of Athens? Sparta, too, was powerful, bold, and in the end triumphant over Athens. Who thanks her? Who remembers? She made nothing beautiful. She had no true life. Her name is cursed. She bore a people whose highest pride was in war, whose gift to the world was destruction, who had better not have breathed at all!

HUNSDON. Emilia, you don't play.

EMILIA. No. Pardon, my lord. *(She begins to play.)*

WILL. I'm to blame. I asked her about Italy.

HUNSDON. Oho. Careful there. She'll have the spurs off y'in no time, and make a pagan of y'. Or what's worse, a Catholic. *(ALL laugh.)*

WILL. On the contrary, my lord. It may be she's given me my spurs.

RICHARD. I'll have him out of here immediately. A poet's never safe with ladies. A great pleasure, Madame. To our hopeful future, my lord.

HUNSDON. Indeed, sir, indeed.