

Side 11: Scene Eight, Pages 86 to 89 (Anne Hathaway, Henry Condell, John Hemings, Susannah Shakespeare)

Transition from Seven...

Our crier is back as we leave London...

CRIER. Three plays this week at the Globe Theatre! One lamentable tragedy of *King Lear*; one excellent history of *King John*; and the enchanting comedy *Much Ado About Nothing*. 3 o'clock in the afternoon, a penny for the pit! One penny for a play today!

The crier walks on through the crowd.

Eight.

In the main room of Anne Hathaway Shakespeare's house—New Place—in Stratford-upon-Avon. It's a lovely cottage, clean and cozy with books around the room.

John and Henry stand in nice clothes with the book wrapped in a cloth and in a large sack. They wait. Nervous. Anxious. Wistful. This was his house. This was where he died.

Susannah Shakespeare enters helping her mother, Anne, to a chair near the men. Anne is frail and unwell. Tired but with a light in her eye.

ANNE. Gentlemen, good day. My daughter tells me I am to present a good appearance for friends of William's in my house.

HENRY. No need to trouble yourself, Milady Shakespeare.

JOHN. But friends of your husband's indeed, God rest his soul.

ANNE. I hope he does rest in Heaven, he never did on earth.

HENRY. We know that indeed, milady. It's Henry Condell and John Hemings come from London.

ANNE. Of course, I remember you. He spoke of you often in his last years here. And you were at the funeral, I recall.

JOHN. We were, yes ma'am. Of course we were.

ANNE. And you are here again. Tell us why, and please excuse my condition. I am not so well nor so young as you two.

JOHN. Oh I am not your junior by many months, milady.

ANNE. Then my eyes are failing me worse than I thought.

HENRY. You look well enough from mine.

SUSANNAH. What do you want?

ANNE. What brings you all the way to Stratford, good sirs?

HENRY. We wanted you to see...to be the first to see...his work.

ANNE. Whose work?

JOHN. Will's. We gathered his plays and printed them.

ANNE. Printed? All of them?

JOHN. Yes.

HENRY. Well.

JOHN. Henry.

HENRY. I hope you didn't like *Pericles*.

JOHN. *(To Henry.) We'll put it in a later book, all right?*

(To Anne.) Your husband's words meant the world to us. And we wanted you to see them first.

HENRY. To see that the life you let him live was lived a thousand times over in the souls he gave us with his pen.

She's trying to decide if she buys this.

ANNE. That's it there?

HENRY. Yes milady.

They retrieve the Folio from the sack, unwrap it carefully on a table, and offer it to her.

She hesitates.

ANNE. Susannah.

Susannah hurries to her side.

Anne prepares for this with a deep breath...

then opens the large book's cover.

The first thing she sees is his picture—

both the women catch their breath at the sight.

Anne is steady though; Susannah might tear up at this point

already.

*Anne nods her approval of the picture,
touching it softly before turning the page.*

She turns a few pages then leans in to look at something...

Ben Jonson wrote that? About Will?

HENRY. Yes milady.

JOHN. And with minimal coercion.

ANNE. Those boys. They didn't know brotherhood if it wasn't a battle.

SUSANNAH. And fatherhood if it wasn't at a distance.

ANNE. *Susannah.*

JOHN. My dear, he only spoke of you with great gentleness in my presence. His pride was kept safe at home in Stratford, he said.

SUSANNAH. I think he had enough to say without mentioning us.

ANNE. All right, girl, enough.

HENRY. Oh no, my dear, no. If you read it you'll see he wrote...so often of daughters. Heroines, great loves, great loss. Daughters all.

Susannah hears this. Pause.

JOHN. We can leave you ladies, if you wish.

ANNE. Why would you? Where would you like to start?

HENRY. Start...?

ANNE. To read them.

JOHN. To *you*, milady?

ANNE. Well they're plays are they not? Which are usually *performed*. And I find myself with two fine actors in my presence. Don't I?

HENRY. That you do, milady.

Will John let himself be an actor?

JOHN. Yes. I suppose you do.

ANNE. Very good then. Use Susannah for the lady parts.

SUSANNAH. *Mother.*

ANNE. No one's going to arrest you for it here.
Where shall we start?

At the beginning I suppose. Which is...?

JOHN. *The Tempest.*

ANNE. Hm. Doesn't that sound exciting. Go on then.

Henry, John, and a reluctant Susannah gather around the book.

As soon as John opens the cover...

The world around and ahead of them explodes into the sound of centuries of forthcoming speeches—"To be or not to be"s, "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow"s and "Romeo O Romeo"s—a beautiful cacophony of actors' voices performing Shakespeare tempests and time warps around us—the speeches swirl—different accents, different languages—all the world's a stage and it's funneled into Anne Hathaway's living room at this moment.

Then the sound of the future fades away in a flash that drops us back in that little house in that little town... where John, Henry, Anne, and Susannah have spent the day in his plays. We find them now in the quiet darkness, listening as...

JOHN. Exeunt.

He closes the book.

The moment the cover hits the top page—Blackout.

End of Play

Or...