

**Side 8: Scene Four, Pages 70 to 75 (Emilia Bassano Lanier,
Henry Condell only)**

Four. A Dual Scene.

John knocks on one door...

Henry waits nervously in another room across town, a lovely room, nicer and more extravagant. Instruments are nearby—lots. And books—lots. Waits. Does he hear someone coming?

Then Ben Jonson flings open the door in front of John.

BEN. What the hell are you doing at my door?

JOHN. Ben. It's John. John Heminges.

BEN. I can see that, John Heminges, what the hell are you doing at my door?

JOHN. Well. I'm here for Will. Shakespeare. He needs you.

Ben stares at him.

BEN. You know he'd deck you for saying that. From the grave. Come in.

Then opens the door for John.

And immediately hands him a drink.

Then Emilia Bassano Lanier enters through another door in another room across town. She's a gorgeous woman with dark hair. She enters laughing.

EMILIA. Henry Condell! When she said it was you, I thought my maid had gone syphilitic. How is your wife, your children? Are you well? I heard about Burbage, dear brute. His Antony, I still remember. Do sit, don't stand, wine? I will.

HENRY. Yes, Lady Lanier. And I thank you for seeing me.

EMILIA. Emilia, Emilia. We're friends. We were. In a different life perhaps, but still. Why are you here, Henry?

HENRY. We need your help.

EMILIA. Oh. Who is we?

HENRY. John and I. And Will.

EMILIA. Will?

HENRY. Shakespeare.

EMILIA. (*His name hits her with profound nostalgia.*) Well. Now I'm terribly interested indeed.

Back to John and Ben.

BEN. And what does William Shakespeare require that God does not provide in Heaven, and if he is not in Heaven then tell him to wait until I get to Hell to bother me.

JOHN. We don't want to bother you, Ben, but we do come to ask you something very important.

BEN. Then hurry up and ask.

JOHN. We're in a pickle publishing Will's plays and we wondered—

BEN. Who's publishing? Who'd you get to do it?

JOHN. Well...Jaggard.

BEN. *Jaggard? You let Jaggard have it? After burning my favor owed from the Lord Chamberlain?*

JOHN. I know, we had no choice.

BEN. The only choice I see is to poison his soup.

JOHN. We don't want you to poison anyone, we want you to...preface. The book.

BEN. Preface. The book?

Emilia and Henry...

HENRY. If he were alive he'd never allow us to bother you, but... Well however he broke your heart I hope that the love you showed him once will bare itself again in this hour of need.

EMILIA. *My heart?* Is that what he said? Of course he did. The things men say away from women are never to be trusted.

HENRY. Do I offend you, milady?

EMILIA. Oh no, no. Though it was most certainly *his* heart that broke. He was not the kind of man who could keep a friend after being a certain kind of...friendly.

HENRY. You broke his heart?

EMILIA. Oh yes terribly. All those sonnets don't come from happy endings.

HENRY. I know it didn't end well between you two, but—

EMILIA. (*Quoting by heart Sonnet 147.*)

“For I have sworn thee fair and thought thee bright,
Who art as black as hell, as dark as night.”

Thank you, Will. Thank you so much.

John and Ben again...

JOHN. Your support—kind words from the poet laureate—it would go a long way to legitimize the effort.

BEN. He did lack a certain legitimacy didn't he, the groundling-pleaser. Not every play needs a goddamn clown.

JOHN. Yes, well—

BEN. It was the love stories I couldn't stand. When I go to the theatre I'd like to engage in a thought or two, not suffer the kissing bits without gagging.

JOHN. Well you needn't mention the love stories then—

BEN. And fucking *Pericles*. God. What horseshit.

JOHN. Let's keep that between us, shall we?

Henry and Emilia...

HENRY. You were a kind of a muse to him. He wanted to write you into every play.

EMILIA. He managed to get me in a few I recall.

HENRY. You were the heart of his Beatrice, Rosalind, Lady Macbeth.

EMILIA. Lady M?

HENRY. Ironically the happiest couple he e'er wrote. And even in *Othello* he used your name for Emilia.

EMILIA. Yes well the man failed to realize that most successful courtships don't include naming a character after your true love and then stabbing her to death in the end.

HENRY. He did read your book of poems. He liked it—*loved it*.

EMILIA. Did he?

HENRY. Oh yes, very much. Though I think it made him cringe from...curiosity. The pain in wondering where your lost loves are now.

EMILIA. I did love him. Which was the problem. Love is not a light thing for a poet.

John and Ben...

JOHN. If you could manage only a few lines—they needn't be praise, just remembrance, a somber something, whatever you like.

BEN. Hmm.

JOHN. (*Some reverse psychology.*) Or. Yes. Perhaps we do a greater disservice giving his rival the first word in his life's work—

BEN. I'll do it.

JOHN. No, you're right—

BEN. I'll do it.

JOHN. It's a stupid idea—

BEN. *I said I'll do it.* Something short. Pedestrian. Something *his* audience could understand. Give me a week.

JOHN. Thank you, Ben. Thank you so much.

BEN. (*A sudden soft side.*) Oh. John. I heard about your wife. Terrible thing that. I liked her very much.

JOHN. I know.

BEN. I don't like many people.

JOHN. I know.

Ben pats his back or puts a hand on his shoulder.

Emilia and Henry...

EMILIA. All right Henry, you fanned my flame long enough. How can I help you?

HENRY. We need money to finish publishing Will's collected works.

EMILIA. A collection?

HENRY. Yes, which is quite the task and we've hit a ditch and we didn't want to ask you but...

EMILIA. I suppose...penance for breaking a poet's heart is living with its output. I am happy to help.

HENRY. We thank you, milady.

EMILIA. I do miss him. I hope he knew that. God he was good. And his plays weren't bad either.

HENRY. Oh my word.

EMILIA. Do I make you blush?

HENRY. I was his best friend. You do not tell me anything I have not already heard in reverse.

She smiles at the thought.

Ben and John...

BEN. Wait now. Jaggard's the only one who—Are you publishing this thing in folio? I printed *my collection* in folio *years ago* and—I swear that man aggravates me from the grave.

JOHN. I'll be back in a week.

BEN. Bloody Will Bloody Shakespeare.

JOHN. Thank you, Ben. You're a good man.

BEN. Just leave, I've got beer to do, get out.

JOHN. I think you mean work.

BEN. I know what I mean, *get out*.

JOHN. Thank you, Ben.

Ben slams the door on him and John exits.

Emilia and Henry.

EMILIA. Don't wait until there's an emergency to come back and see me.

HENRY. Milady.

She hands Henry a bag of coin and he bows to her and exits.

She finds that book of sonnets by William Shakespeare...

Reads from Sonnet 130 as we transition...

EMILIA.

"My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;

Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head."

Perhaps touching her hair...she laughs.

Transition from Four...

*The presses in Jaggard's print shop spring to life again—
smacking and clanging as the work is restarted.*

As we transition back to the print shop...

Five.

*Marcus and a compositor are looking at the Droeshout portrait
of Shakespeare.*

MARCUS. I dunno.

COMPOSITOR. Yeah is that... Is that him?

MARCUS. Doesn't quite look like it, does it?

COMPOSITOR. I only met him twice but—

MARCUS. I saw him onstage a dozen times. In costume I'll warrant
but...

COMPOSITOR. That's it! It's the ruff. Not sure about the ruff. Trying
to make him look kingly I suppose.

MARCUS. I think it makes his head look like a ham on a platter.

COMPOSITOR. That's what it is. A touch decapitational.

MARCUS. Floats there, eyeing you like a frog on a rock.

COMPOSITOR. Why do they need a picture of him anyway? Makes
me nervous him looking at me while I'm trying to read.

MARCUS. Those two friends of his commissioned it special.