

EXT. THE RIVER. VIOLA'S BOAT. NIGHT.

WILL turns back to VIOLA. They have their conversation intimately, disregarding the lack of intimacy. The BOATMAN is hardly an arm's length away, but they ignore him.

WILL

She tells me to keep away. She is to marry Lord Wessex. What should I do?

VIOLA AS THOMAS

If you love her, you must do what she asks.

WILL

And break her heart and mine?

VIOLA AS THOMAS

It is only ours you can know.

WILL

She loves me, Thomas!

VIOLA AS THOMAS

Does she say so?

WILL

No. And yet she does where the ink has run with tears. Was she weeping when she gave you this?

VIOLA AS THOMAS

I ♦ Her letter came to me by the nurse.

WILL

Your aunt?

VIOLA AS THOMAS

(catching up)

Yes, my aunt. But perhaps she wept a little. Tell me how you love her, Will.

WILL

Like a sickness and its cure together.

VIOLA AS THOMAS

Yes, like rain and sun, like cold and heat.

(collecting herself)

Is your lady beautiful? Since I came to visit from the country, I have not seen her close. Tell me, is she beautiful?

WILL

Oh, if I could write the beauty of her eyes! I was born to look in them and know myself.

He is looking into VIOLA'S eyes. She holds his look, but WILL belies his words.

VIOLA AS THOMAS

And her lips?

WILL

Oh, Thomas, her lips! The early morning rose would wither on the branch, if it could feel envy!

VIOLA AS THOMAS

And her voice? Like lark song?

WILL

Deeper. Softer. None of your twittering larks! I would banish nightingales from her garden before they interrupt her song.

VIOLA AS THOMAS

She sings too?

WILL

Constantly. Without doubt. And plays the lute, she has a natural ear. And

her bosom--did I mention her bosom?

VIOLA AS THOMAS

(glinting)

What of her bosom?

WILL

Oh Thomas, a pair of pippins! As round
and rare as golden apples!

VIOLA AS THOMAS

I think the lady is wise to keep your
love at a distance. For what lady
could live up to it close to, when her
eyes and lips and voice may be no more
beautiful than mine? Besides, can a
lady born to wealth and noble marriage
love happily with a Bankside poet and
player?

WILL

(fervently)

Yes, by God! Love knows nothing of
rank or riverbank! It will spark
between a queen and the poor vagabond
who plays the king, and their love
should be minded by each, for love
denied blights the soul we owe to God!
So tell my lady, William Shakespeare
waits for her in the garden!

VIOLA AS THOMAS

But what of Lord Wessex?

WILL

For one kiss, I would defy a thousand
Wessexes!

The boat scrapes on the jetty of the DE LESSEPSES' house.
The bump throws THOMAS into WILL'S arms. He holds her
round the shoulders. His words have almost unmasked her.
The closeness does the rest. She kisses him on the mouth
and jumps out of the boat.

