

After the Execution

An excerpt of a short play

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JOAN

M'lady asked. I'll remove myself presently. I do apologize for my tongue. Too much education, too little noble blood.

ISABELLE

No. You amuse me, do stay.

EDITH

(nervous, this could end badly)

Well if your ladyship is amused.

ISABELLE

I haven't had a whiff of intellect since Paris and while I'm rather shocked by the vessel I might as well indulge myself.

EDITH

(snapping)

Indulgences have dangerous ends. Isn't that what this whole bloody affair taught us!

Long silence. It's uncertain whether Isabelle will punish Edith for this remark.

ISABELLE

(Laughing, breaking the tension)

That's the Edith I remember!

Isabelle indicates to her garments.

ISABELLE

Come do your duty.

Edith busies herself with starting to remove Isabelle's overskirt. Joan begins to take off Isabelle's makeup.

ISABELLE

So what did Anne do when Richard did not 'lose interest' for lack of a better word?

JOAN

Anne came back to court and she became queen in all but name. It was good for her family and she was smart enough to know that it was him or nothing. She was no bargaining chip to be sold to Spain, she wasn't of noble enough blood-

ISABELLE

Like you-

JOAN

That is not why I defend her, your ladyship.

ISABELLE

Then why do you?

JOAN

Because someone has to.

Edith snorts in derision.

ISABELLE

Edith might you illuminate us to your perspective.

EDITH

She didn't get anything, nothing, that she didn't want or didn't have coming. She wanted that bloody crown, it was all a plan. She had a witches mind, you see. She could captivate, destroy with her wit - I mean she wormed her tongue so deep into Henry's ear-king Henry, I mean. That she turned poor King Henry against one of his dear faithful Cardinals and the Catholic Church- and I'll bet her witch tricks killed the Cardinal too!

JOAN

If she was a witch then why did she die like a woman?

EDITH

Isabelle bore witness. She can tell you by the way the body fell if there was witchcraft about-

Joan goes to ask but Isabelle cuts her off.

ISABELLE

(putting the pieces together)

So this woman, Anne, refused King Henry. But he did as he's known to do- he was not an abstemious man, in fact quite the contrary when I met him - much like François II, in that respect.

EDITH

Who? M'lady?

ISABELLE

The King of France.

(haunted)

I knew him most intimately.

There's a break in the conversation. The servants return to undressing Isabelle tentatively. They know they touched on something rather too relevant.

ISABELLE

I watched her die today. It was quite an odd homecoming. Tell me was she married to him after he had her? Well— you do know what I mean—

JOAN

Imperfect. No, that was when she birthed a daughter. That's when his love died- at least that's what everyone's said.

EDITH

God brought them a daughter to atone for their sins. Mark my words. He'll have no direct heir.

JOAN

He'll remarry.

EDITH

It won't matter, the sin is too great.

JOAN

I refuse to believe being born a girl is a sin!

ISABELLE

That is almost assuredly a gross misinterpretation.

EDITH

It was, I won't lie about that. But, if I might say, a Lilith cannot make an Eve. Eve was made from man's rib. So she was perfect, but lacking because she was one step further from God. I've always wondered why she had to be made of him, Adam. Not of God himself. Because I feel I have to pray just a little harder than my husband— to make up for the distance, between me and God you see.

JOAN

Is that why you think we can't be kings? We're just too far away?

EDITH

Well all I can say is that all the sins I've known have been born in women. With the exception of m'lady of course.

Isabelle attempts to speak to Edith, but gets cut off.

JOAN

I hope her daughter gets to be King! Just to spite you!

ISABELLE

I thank you for your kindness Edith.

JOAN

Why was Anne unclean, not after she was sullied, but after that defacement, birthed a girl. Why only then? Surely that is not in the stars?!

ISABELLE

Because virginity is a fool's trick. It's costly to maintain and cataclysmic to lose.

Edith is scandalized, and nearly drops the garment she is holding.

JOAN

Do you think Anne wanted to lose hers?

Silence, Isabelle seems to take this question personally, her makeup has been wiped away, and both Joan and Edith are unlacing her corset.

ISABELLE

Well if you're unmarried it's die a virgin or become a witch.

JOAN

Don't you mean birth a daughter?

EDITH

Stop this! I can't bear my ladyship speaking this way of something so, so, so! It's just unbecoming! I can't say I enjoyed my loss, but I have two beautiful daughters to trade for it! And I would make that sacrifice a hundred times over just to see their faces smiling at me as I do every morning.

JOAN

(snidely)

Even though they're further from God.