

Scene Ten

(Gate outside De Lesseps Hall. WILL appears with MARLOWE and is confronted by CATLING, the guard.)

CATLING. Sorry. You can't come in without an invite. This is a proper ball. For civilised people.

WILL. We are civilised people. I'm an actor and this is Christopher Marlowe, one of Europe's leading writers.

MARLOWE. Hello, young man.

CATLING. I don't care if you're bloody Beaumont and Fletcher, mates. You're not getting in without an invite.

WILL. But I have a letter. For Thomas Kent.

(NURSE appears.)

NURSE. Who asks for Thomas Kent?

WILL. Will Shakespeare – actor, poet, and playwright of the Rose. Master Kent auditioned for me this afternoon.

NURSE. Master Kent?

WILL. You know him?

NURSE. Yes. He is my...nephew.

WILL. I have a letter. To offer him the lead part in my play.

NURSE. I will see that he gets it, sirs. Catling, let them through.

SIDE #13

Scene Eleven

(Inside De Lesseps Hall.)

[MUSIC NO. 10: "PAVANE. WHAT IS LOVE?"]

(The COMPANY dances.)

MUSICIANS. (sing)

~~WHAT IS LOVE? 'TIS NOT HEREAFTER,~~

~~PRESENT MIRTH HATH PRESENT LAUGHTER;~~

~~WHAT'S TO COME IS STILL UNSURE:~~

~~YOUTH'S A STUFF WILL NOT ENDURE.~~

(Singing repeats quietly underneath the following conversations between DE LESSEPS and WESSEX, and WILL, MARLOWE, and NURSE. Enter VIOLA.)

DE LESSEPS. My daughter.

WESSEX. Yes. I think she will do. She will do very nicely.

WILL. By all the stars in heaven, who is she?

NURSE. That's My Lady – Viola de Lesseps.

MARLOWE. Vain fantasy, Will Shakespeare.

WILL.

O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright.

MARLOWE.

So quick bright things come to confusion.

WILL. I will speak to her.

MARLOWE. We will be run out of here.

DE LESSEPS. Viola, My Lord Wessex.

WESSEX. Enchanted.

[MUSIC NO. 11: "MISS GIBSON'S ROUND"]

(WESSEX and VIOLA dance.)

WESSEX. My Lady Viola.

VIOLA. My Lord.

WESSEX. I have spoken to your father.

VIOLA. So, My Lord. I speak with him every day.

WESSEX. I have spoken to your father about your future.

VIOLA. I trust you found it of interest. I rarely know what is going to happen next.

(As the dance turns, VIOLA realizes that WILL is dancing next to her as WESSEX moves on.)

Good sir!

WILL. My Lady.

VIOLA. Are you not the poet William Shakespeare?

WILL. I am not, My Lady.

VIOLA. But sir, I have seen you at the playhouse.

WILL. I am a poet no longer. As I have seen a beauty that would prove all my poetry prose.

VIOLA. What brings you to my house?

WILL. I came to seek one who would make my words as fluent as the river. Now I find one who makes me dumb.

(VIOLA turns to WESSEX.)

WESSEX. I need a dowry, your family seeks a title. It seems our fortunes are well met.

VIOLA. You think only of "a fortune," My Lord. Fate pays no heed to worldly commerce.

WESSEX. You mistake the times; finance and futures are inextricably linked.

(VIOLA turns to WILL.)

WILL. This is a dream.

VIOLA.

Dreams are the children of an idle brain, begot of nothing but vain fantasy which is as thin of substance as the air.

WILL. Did you really just say that?

VIOLA. Indeed I truly hope, sir, this is no dream.

WILL. If we are awake let me dream you such words that will make you immortal.

VIOLA. Good sir. None can be immortal. I only dream of being alive.

WILL. Then I will be your poet.

(WESSEX turns to WILL.)

WESSEX. Poet? Nay, you are a knave, sir.

WILL. How do I offend, My Lord?

WESSEX. By coveting my property. I cannot shed blood in her house but I will cut your throat anon. You have a name, sirrah?

WILL. Christopher Marlowe, at your service.

(WESSEX turns to VIOLA.)

VIOLA. You smile, sir. I am glad you are happy.

WESSEX. I am perfectly happy, now.