

BARD III - THE VENICE SANCTION

by
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FADE IN:

EXT. LONDON - THE GLOBE THEATRE - NIGHT

A wooden CRUTCH clunks against the ground -- a BEGGAR, patch over one eye, dressed in layers of ragged clothing staggers drunkenly, towards the outer wall of the theatre.

He sniffs and spits on the ground, one bloodshot and flickering eye trying to focus on the task in hand, swigging from a flask of drink clutched in dirt encrusted fingers.

With a grateful sigh he reaches his destination -- fumbles in his clothing -- balances himself by bracing a hand on the theatre wall -- relieves himself in a grateful steaming rush.

A couple of laughing PLAYERS leave the front of the building passing a sign which reads: THE GLOBE THEATRE.

ACTOR 1 (O.S.)
Well I thought it showed promise.

ACTOR 2 (O.S.)
Who wrote it?

The actor looks at a manuscript.

ACTOR 1
Someone called Shagspeare.

The other actor looks at the manuscript.

ACTOR 2
Could be a K...

They wander off.

EXT. THE THAMES - LONDON BRIDGE - NIGHT

FEET struggle across ground covered in icy SNOW -- large pieces of TIMBER are dragged across the hard surface leaving grooves in the ice.

A light wind whips snow across the scene -- muffling the sound of many MEN who labour at this clandestine operation.

SUPER - 1585

NARRATOR (V.O.)
1585, the age of Elizabeth the first, a time of religious unrest and artistic endeavour. For young William Shakespeare it was a time that would become known as the lost years.

INT. MADAME GONORA'S HOUSE - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Corridors festooned with rich tapestry and oil paintings -- sumptuous glassware and object d'art sit on heavy, decorative furniture. The Narrator's voice drops to a husky whisper so as not to wake the household.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 But to young Will, recently
 invested in the safety of bricks
 and mortar...

FLASH FRAME

A manuscript signed with a flourish "William Shagspeare" and headed "GLOBE THEATRE INVESTMENTS".

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 It was seen as a time of lust.

We are heading down through the corridor now -- approaching a door from behind which the sounds of a passionate encounter become louder -- as a consequence the Narrator raises his voice.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 He was not aware of the impending
 shitstorm headed his way!

MADAME GONORA (O.S.)
 No! No! NO!

WILL (O.S.)
 Me thinks thou does't protest too
 much.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

A four poster bed hung with silks -- dripping candles in silver candelabra illuminating WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE and MADAME GONORA locked together in the throes of lovemaking.

MADAME GONORA
 Yes! Yes! YES!

They collapse in a heap. She turns to him and sighs in pleasure.

MADAME GONORA
 Your quill is truly mightier than
 your word!

Will rolls across the bed and reaches for a pipe, he lights it and coughs.

WILL

And you Madame are the most
sumptuous of ink wells into which
my quill has't dipped.

Madame Gonora laughs. Will looks deep into her eyes and takes
her hand in his -- kissing it.

MADAME GONORA

Would'st that thou had my name.

WILL

A rose by any other name would
smell as sweet...

MADAME GONORA

A rose that would'st feel your
thorn betwixt my petals once more.

She laughs and they wrestle each other onto the pillows.

WILL

I fear you may have drained my love
gourd...but maybe I can entertain
you another way?

MADAME GONORA

You truly have a way with
words...tell me again about your
latest venture.

Will becomes animated.

WILL

I will use the theatre as my
trumpet to the world...an
amphitheater to display my plays to
the people of London.

MADAME GONORA

It is a good plan William, the
risky life of a player, balanced by
the safety of bricks and mortar...

EXT. LONDON - LONDON BRIDGE - THAMES - NIGHT

The heaving edifice of London bridge, it's teetering
structure crammed with houses and shops all precariously
jammed into the span across the Thames.

The surface of the river is frozen and covered with a light
crust of snow. Stretching across its width, fifty or sixty
MEN labour carrying pieces of timber and stone.

EXT. LONDON - SITE OF GLOBE THEATRE - NIGHT

The last few stones and pieces of timber are being manhandled away from the site. Nothing remains except the theatre sign lying on the ground -- it's snatched up and carried off.

WILL (V.O.)

Yes, my Father has played fast and loose with his business ventures and I have learned to trust only what I can touch and see.

Madame Gonora giggles.

MADAME GONORA (V.O.)

Then thou does't best get thyself closer, all the better to touch and see me...

The clunk of a crutch on the ground heralds the appearance of the ragged beggar man as he lurches through the night. He drunkenly weaves his unfocused way towards his favourite spot.

He comes to a halt -- fumbles in his clothes, braces himself against his crutch -- stretches out a steadying hand and... crashes in a heap onto the rubble where the wall had been earlier... Before the theatre was dismantled and carried off!

INT. MADAME GONORA'S HOUSE - MORNING

Will and Madame Gonora lie asleep sprawled on the bed. Madame Gonora is snoring loudly.

EXT. MADAME GONORA'S HOUSE

A small group of HORSEMEN gallop up the driveway of an impressive stately home outside London. At the head of the group is THE DUKE, Madame Gonora's husband. He is accompanied by an armed escort.

INT. MADAME GONORA'S HOUSE - BEDROOM

The SNORT of a HORSE drifts through the partially open window of the bedroom. Will awakes.

WILL

You snore like a horse.

The horse outside gives another snort, followed by a WHINNY. Will sits up with a start.

WILL

Ye Gods, it is a horse!

Madame Gonora wakes up.

MADAME GONORA

What is it?

Will creeps towards the window and peers out -- sees the Duke and his MEN dismounting outside the entrance. He turns back into the room.

WILL

Either the door to door salesmen
are ridiculously rich...or I'm
fucked!

There is the sound of heavy footsteps heading up the stairs

DUKE (O.S.)

Darling, I'm hard!

Madame Gonora leaps out of bed. Rushes round trying to find bits of her clothing.

WILL

I'm fucked!

MADAME GONORA

You must leave, quickly!

Will looks at her.

WILL

Really...I don't think the wild sea
of my conscience will allow me to
slip away like a thief in the
night...

She looks at him.

MADAME GONORA

It's broad daylight, and he's
armed.

WILL

Fair play.

EXT. MADAME GONORA'S HOUSE - SERVANT'S ENTRANCE.

A HORSE munches contentedly on some decorative shrubbery to the left of a first floor window.

MADAME GONORA (O.S.)

Help! Help! I'm being robbed!

The window is flung open and Will plummets through the air -- landing with a wet thud on the ground next to the horse. He picks himself up.

WILL

Shit! Why don't you ever stay where
I put you.

The horse regards him balefully -- whinnies loudly.

WILL
Everyone's a critic.

He brushes himself down -- looks at his hand, then down at what he's landed in.

WILL
Shit!

He vaults onto his horse and gallops off -- the cries of the soldiers and the Duke carrying after him. The Duke comes out of the servants entrance and looks at Wills receding figure.

He looks down at the ground -- picks up a piece of manuscript and reads the name on it.

DUKE
Shagspeare.

His eyes burn with anger as he crumples the manuscript up and throws it to the ground.

EXT. LONDON - SITE OF GLOBE THEATRE - DAY

A light wind blows scraps of manuscript across the rubble strewn ground on the site where the Globe Theatre once stood.

STREET

Will heads towards a cluster of people staring at the rubble.

MAN
He said it would yield a healthy return.

WOMAN
Safe as houses he said.

Will comes to a halt -- looks at where the Globe used to be. The woman turns round and sees him. The crowd begin to shout.

WOMAN
There 'e is!

They begin to run towards him -- they don't look happy. Will turns and runs.

INT. WHITEHALL PALACE, THE GREAT HALL - DAY

QUEEN ELIZABETH bustles down the hall -- trailed by courtesans and members of her court. A bright eyed elder man, has her ear -- FRANCIS WALSINGHAM, spymaster and diplomat, the precursor to our intelligence services today.

ELIZABETH
A Thousand!

WALSINGHAM

Yes your majesty, pistols and muskets awaiting a private army of mercenaries.

ELIZABETH

Why Venice?

WALSINGHAM

The Doje did a swap...

ELIZABETH

What for?

Walsingham colours, whispers in Elizabeth's ear. The Queen stops -- everybody bumps into each other behind -- much fluttering of fans and embarrassed coughing.

ELIZABETH

A woman!

She sets off again.

ELIZABETH

She must be very...talented.

WALSINGHAM

I believe so...but there is a problem.

ELIZABETH

For us, or the Doje.

WALSINGHAM

The women refuses to carry out the trade...

ELIZABETH

Talented and stubborn.

WALSINGHAM

Yes, well...she will bend, of that I'm sure. And when she does a thousand armed men will attack.

ELIZABETH

Can we not prevent this?

WALSINGHAM

We do not know where the arms are hidden, nor when the men will collect them, and from whence they sail.

ELIZABETH

A plot to kill me involving a private army of a thousand armed men sailing from Venice? How could you know nothing of their plans?

WALSINGHAM

All of my agents are known, I fear we have exposed ourselves in our quest to seek out King Philip's plans for the Armada...

Again Elizabeth comes to a halt.

ELIZABETH

Enough!

She shoos the hangers on away.

ELIZABETH

What do you suggest?

Walsingham holds up a manuscript.

WALSINGHAM

We use an unknown, someone who needs to disappear, a man with a talent for disguise, mimicry...in short, a dispensable chameleon.

ELIZABETH

And where might one find such a fabled beast?

Walsingham shows her the manuscript.

ELIZABETH

Shagspeare?

Walsingham peers at the name on the manuscript.

WALSINGHAM

I think that might be a K...

EXT. LONDON STREET - DAY

Will is running down narrow grimy streets -- behind him the cries of the crowd are getting nearer. He bursts out into a wider street -- fumbles in his pocket for some keys.

He sets off towards his residence and turns a corner to see -- a group of mounted soldiers outside his front door -- the Duke is climbing onto his horse. Will ducks into an alleyway. Too late the Duke sees him and wheels his horse around.

A pile of clothes and manuscripts are thrown out of the top window of the house and flutter into the street.

WILL
Great, things can only get better.

WHOOSH! A bucket of sewage drenches him. A MAN looks down.

MAN
Sorry!

Will looks at his sodden clothes, the Duke galloping towards him and the crowd baying for his blood running down the alleyway towards him.

WILL
Me too!

He turns and runs down the only free street.

EXT. OMNIPOTENT VIEWPOINT - ABOVE LONDON

A diffused and floating view of London from above -- the picture shimmers and is imperfect, but what we do see is WILL running for his life -- the Duke's men behind him, and the Globe investors closing in on him.

EXT. SEETHING LANE - SAMETIME

Will races into the crowded street. He comes to a doorway and bursts through it.

INT. STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Will stumbles into a room that covers the entire ground floor of the house. Decorative mirrors cover one wall of the room.

A collection of thirty or forty MEN and WOMEN incongruously dressed in full finery are going through an Elizabethan AEROBICS class. Three MINSTRELS play a frenzied version of a fast moving ballad of the day.

A WOMAN in a too tight green satin outfit is leading them in the moves. Will joins them and is given a withering look by the lady in charge.

WOMAN
If everybody can get back in step,
then we'll start again...and one
and two and twirl...

There's a commotion at the door and two of the Duke's men push through the door. The woman is indignant.

WOMAN
You two out...can't you read!

She points at a sign, "SOFT SHOES ONLY" The MEN look sheepish and start to take off their boots. Will slips out of a side door.

BACK ALLEY

Will comes out into an alleyway behind the house. Looks around frantically. He races down to the end of the alleyway and comes out into the lane he just left but behind the investors -- one of them turns and sees him.

INVESTOR

There he is!

Will turns and runs in the opposite direction down the lane.

On one side of the lane is a large BLACK CARRIAGE with some sort of wooden tower construction on the roof.

Will goes to run past it, but as he draws level the door to the carriage swings open -- knocking him to the ground. HANDS drag him inside.

INT. CARRIAGE - LATER - DAY

Will sits on a seat facing an intense looking MAN, dark eyes and silver hair, this is JOHN DEE, astrologer, Occultist, Alchemist and Secret agent to the queen.

On the floor is a picture, projected from the CAMERA OBSCURA lens set in the tower above the carriage.

In the projected picture the crowd of investors and the Duke and his men converge and meet in the middle of Seething Lane. The carriage is no longer there.

Will rubs his head and stares at the picture.

WILL

What happened, where am I, what is this?

DEE

All in good time, what you need to know is that we saved you from a good kicking.

Will waves his hand in front of the picture causing it to flicker.

WILL

It's magic isn't it...Hellfire, You're a wizard!

DEE

It's a Camera Obscura, based on some drawings by Leonardo De Vinci, I picked them up at a carriage boot sale...

Will shakes his finger at him.

WILL

Get thee thence, this is wizardry,
for sure.

Dee shakes his head -- talks to a dark velvet curtain covering the wall behind Will.

DEE

This isn't going to work, he has
the brains of a lamp wick.

WILL

Easy Greyhair I didn't ask to be
here.

The curtain parts to reveal Walsingham.

WALSINGHAM

That may well be the case, but in
the name of Queen Elizabeth you
will carry out a mission in the
interests of the nations security.

Will stares at him.

WILL

Oh my God it's you isn't
it...Francis Walsingham, my dad
loves your work...The Throckmorton
Plot, that whole Spanish catholic
subsidy shit...outstanding.

Walsingham preens for a moment.

WALSINGHAM

That's very kind of you, of course
I wasn't acting alone...
(pulling himself together)
Look, you need to understand we're
facing a crisis here.

WILL

That's a shame, but anyway, slings
and arrows and shit, I'm going to
have to bail.

WALSINGHAM

Bail? I'm sorry I don't understand.

Dee leans forwards.

DEE

It's what he does, invents words to
amuse his audience.

WALSINGHAM

I'm still confused, how does a hay
bale have any meaning?

DEE

Never mind, we don't have time to waste. He must be trained up and familiarised with his role in the mission.

Will's ears prick up.

WILL

Role? Now you're talking. I'll need time to prepare of course, run throughs, costume fittings...the manuscript will need work, they always make a sows ear of the iambics...

They look at him. Dee smiles.

DEE

They'll be plenty of time for all that...during the voyage.

Will starts.

WILL

Voyage? No No No...I don't do water.

INT. NORTH SEA - ABOARD THE RANCID CRAW - STORMY NIGHT

Will heaves over the side in the teeth of a gale. SPLASH! A wave smashes him in the face knocking him away from the side of the ship. He grabs at a trailing rope.

The rope snaps -- Will is swept down the deck -- heads for the side and is about to be washed over when a strong hand grabs him and yanks him upright. A black face with twinkling eyes and flashing white teeth smiles at him.

RICK

Lucky I'm early for my watch, looked like you was planning to drop in on Davey Jones for tea. My name's Rick.

Will spits a mouthful of seawater out.

WILL

Yo Rick, Better three hours too soon than a minute too late.

Rick helps him down into the ship.

