

AMARANTH

A Farcical Tragedy

Written by Asa Leininger

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Dramatis Personae:

JACK – A man of 26, occasionally humourous, well-mannered, and slightly traditional.

ELLIE – A woman of 23, intelligent, witty, a bit snarky, and currently enraptured by Shakespeare.

SERVER – A poet with parents from the Windrush generation. A truly extroverted artist.

BOSS – Heard from offstage.

MARCIE – Ellie's mum. 50s. Very upper class. Sickeningly so.

TONY – Marcie's boy-toy. Young. Muscled. Working class.

Author's Note:

This play is to be performed in both traditional and non-traditional spaces. For example, if one reads Peter Brook's *The Empty Space*, they will understand that theatre may be exciting in spaces as small as attics. Take that into account when staging this play. If you do not have a theatre to which the people may come, then take the theatre to the people. This is not to say that *Amaranth* must solely be staged in attics. It may be staged anywhere. But what should be clear through the reading of this work, it should be intimate and accessible, wherever staged.

SCENE 1: COFFEE

(JACK sits at a coffee table in a sparsely populated London cafe. He checks his watch and taps his fingers on the table. He sits in silence for a moment, turns to the door, thinking he had heard it open, and then slouches back down into his chair, realising it did not. He checks his watch again. The sound of the door opening again resonates through the room and he looks up to see ELLIE enter.)

JACK. Ellie?

ELLIE. Mmm? Oh, hiya. Sorry I'm a bit late. There was this... With the tube... And... I'm sorry.

JACK. No worries at all. I'm—

ELLIE. You're Jack, right?

JACK. —Jack. Yeah.

ELLIE. Sorry.

JACK. Nah, nothing to be—

ELLIE. —I swear I didn't mean to interrupt—

JACK. — sorry about.

ELLIE. Oh God, I've done it again.

JACK. *(Joking.)* How dare you.

ELLIE. God, look at me, I'm a mess—

JACK. Hardly—

ELLIE. —I sound like the fucking interrupting cow from that knock-knock joke.

JACK. What? The one where it goes: Knock, knock...

ELLIE. Who's there?

JACK. Interrupting cow.

ELLIE. Interrupting co—

JACK. Moo! There. Now, I think – and correct me if I'm wrong – but we're even.

ELLIE. Fair enough, then.

JACK. So you're the illustrious Ellie?

ELLIE. That's me.

JACK. Well, it's a genuine pleasure to meet you Ellie. *(JACK, after abandoning an all-too-formal handshake attempt, does an awkward little half bow.)*

ELLIE. Likewise. *(Ellie reciprocates by doing a small curtsy. A short pause.)* Well, anyway—

JACK. Shall we sit?

ELLIE. Yeah. I think—

JACK. Because I think—God. So sorry.

ELLIE. No worri—

JACK. Now I'm the one who's—

ELLIE. Well now you're just doing it on purpose.

JACK. Maybe a bit.

ELLIE. Cheeky.

JACK. You know, that's exactly what they called me in primary school.

ELLIE. Is it now?

JACK. Cross the ticker. Cheeky Jack. Though, come to think of it, that particular term of affection may have been less inspired by my acute wit and more inspired by the fact that

whenever I would eat a good sausage roll, I would literally stuff my mouth so full that I look a bit more like a chipmunk than a person. You know, with the cheeks and all. Cheeky. *(Beat.)*

ELLIE. You don't quite look like the type to go to primary school.

JACK. Oh?

ELLIE. Oh god, did you?

JACK. Well—

ELLIE. Oh god!

JACK. No, no—

ELLIE. How terribly rude of me!

JACK. No, no worries—

ELLIE. I really shouldn't have assumed—

JACK. No, you're actually right. I didn't go to primary school at all.

ELLIE. You didn't?

JACK. No, I went to St. Paul's.

ELLIE. Oh, thank fuck. I knew it!

JACK. I suppose I should have been more precise with my wording.

ELLIE. No you're fine! Honestly, *I* should have—

JACK. No, no, no! I should have been more specific with my choice of words. Let me try again. Whilst studying at St. Paul's—

ELLIE. Oh?

JACK. When I was at the primary level—

ELLIE. Mmmhmm.

JACK. My friends...

ELLIE. Your friends—

JACK. Used to call me...

ELLIE. What did they call you?

JACK. "Cheeky."

ELLIE. Did they?

JACK. I know.

ELLIE. How interesting!

JACK. I know!

ELLIE. And thanks for that bit of information about St. Paul's.

JACK. Oh, anytime.

ELLIE. I never would have guessed you went to Public school unless you'd said!

JACK. I know, I just radiate the "working man," don't I?

ELLIE. Blue collar, all the way.

JACK. Is it the tweed?

ELLIE. I didn't want to make you feel insecure.

JACK. No, no! I'm confident in my financial status, honest though it may be.

ELLIE. Well, that's good. I quite admire confidence.

JACK. Do you?

ELLIE. Certainly.

JACK. Well, that's good to know.

ELLIE. Is it?

JACK. Certainly. But, in all honesty, sitting?

ELLIE. Sitting?

JACK. Sitting.

ELLIE. Sitting.

JACK. (*Gesturing to the table at which he was previously sat.*) This alright?

ELLIE. Yeah, I think that'll do.

JACK. Oh I see. A bit particular, are we?

ELLIE. It's not the best I've seen, is it?

JACK. This seat fit for royalty? (*They both sit.*)

ELLIE. But I suppose it's not the worst either.

JACK. That's a relief.

ELLIE. No, I've made up my mind. This'll do for now.

JACK. Well, I'm glad you're willing to stoop to my level.

ELLIE. My pleasure. (*Looking at the table.*) Are there no menus?

JACK. No, you actually have to go up and order.

ELLIE. Seriously?

JACK. Dead.

ELLIE. Well, then, back up we get— (*ELLIE begins to rise.*)

JACK. I'm joking, I'm joking. They've an electric menu—somewhere here. (*JACK searches the tabletop, moves the napkins, and finds what he is looking for*) Ah! Yes, here we are. (*He gestures at a tab on the table with a menu via QR code.*)

ELLIE. Ah. Right. Thanks much. (*Ellie scans the QR code.*)

JACK. What're you thinking about getting?

ELLIE. I dunno. Maybe a cappuccino with a pain-au-chocolat?

JACK. Sounds delightful. One cappuccino and a pain-au-chocolat coming right up—

ELLIE. Oh god, you don't have to.

JACK. Oh come on now. I'd like to.

ELLIE. Really, it's just a coffee and pastry—

JACK. I know. Which is precisely why I don't mind.

ELLIE. Right. Fine.

JACK. Thank you.

ELLIE. No, thank *you*.

JACK. Anytime.

ELLIE. What're you getting?

JACK. No clue. I spent about 2 minutes looking at the menu, couldn't decide, and started having an existential crisis.

ELLIE. Ah yes. We love a good one of those.

JACK. Oh I never start my week without one. I say up in the morning on Monday, brush the teeth, and question existence. What? You don't start your Mondays with a good old-fashioned philosophical dilemma?

ELLIE. You are quite cheeky; d'you know that?

JACK. Guilty as charged.

ELLIE. I wonder if there's some sort of penalty for that.

JACK. What? For being abundantly cheeky?

ELLIE. There's got to be, hasn't there?

JACK. If there is, I must say, they've done a poor job enforcing it.

ELLIE. I bet it's something like five years—

JACK. Five years—

ELLIE. Oi! I haven't finished yet. You don't know what it's five years of so don't fret just yet.

JACK. I certainly hope it's not what I think it is.

ELLIE. No. No one's gonna nick you for being too cheeky—

JACK. That's a relief. I really don't think I could go back to the clink—

ELLIE. Just make you do a bit of community service is all.

JACK. Oh?

ELLIE. Yes, I think that seems appropriate.

JACK. And what kind of community service are we talking?

ELLIE. Not picking up rubbish.

JACK. Oh that's good.

ELLIE. Good?

JACK. Yeah, I have weak lungs.

ELLIE. Weak lungs?

JACK. Yes, well, see, it's actually a terribly sad story...

ELLIE. Is it?

JACK. Yes, very depressing.

ELLIE. Oh no!

JACK. Hardly the kind of conversation fit for pain-au-chocolat in a café on Tuesday.

ELLIE. I understand.

JACK. And anyway, I don't wanna bore you with the details—

ELLIE. Very considerate—

JACK. Of my troubled childhood.

ELLIE. I never would have guessed it was troubled.

JACK. Never?

ELLIE. Never. You just look in such good health.

JACK. Why thank you.

ELLIE. And, anyway, what do you take me for? Someone who makes assumptions about people? Someone who just jumps to conclusions all willy-nilly?

JACK. I would never.

ELLIE. Never?

JACK. Never-ever.

ELLIE. Good. Now, as I was saying—

JACK. Ahh yes, the sentencing.

ELLIE. I think the appropriate community service activity for your offence would be... Does your nan bake?

JACK. Naturally.

ELLIE. Perfect. Spending one afternoon every weekend baking with your nan.

JACK. I have always wanted to learn how to make a really smashing Victoria Sponge.

ELLIE. Your nan makes a good one?

JACK. The best.

ELLIE. That's debatable.

JACK. Are you challenging me?

ELLIE. Maybe.

JACK. Careful. I've debated lots of people.

ELLIE. Oh? Lots?

JACK. Loads.

ELLIE. Loads?

JACK. Loads.

ELLIE. Whereat?

JACK. Wouldn't you like to know?

ELLIE. I would.

JACK. Well, if you must know—

ELLIE. Oh, see, now you've said it like that, I've lost all interest.

JACK. Ah. That's fair. My sincerest apologies. I did say that in quite the condescending manner, didn't I?

ELLIE. Just a bit.

JACK. Let me try again?

ELLIE. Alright.

JACK. Would you like to know where I have debated? – and please feel no pressure at all to respond in the affirmative should you not wish to.

ELLIE. Yes. I think I would.

JACK. Well then, if you must know—

ELLIE. You bastard—

JACK. I frequently participated in debates at the Oxford Union during Uni.

ELLIE. No.

JACK. Yes.

ELLIE. Oh that is not good.

JACK. How so?

ELLIE. You went to Oxford?

JACK. Yeah?

ELLIE. Oof. That might be a deal-breaker for me.

JACK. Oh don't tell me you're a Cambridge girl.

ELLIE. Don't insult me like that.

JACK. Insult—Well now I am thoroughly confused.

ELLIE. I also went to Oxford.

JACK. Ahhhh, yes. Makes sense now. The—yeah. That makes sense.

ELLIE. What college were you?

JACK. Take a guess.

ELLIE. Pembroke?

JACK. Now *I* feel insulted.

ELLIE. Interesting. Queen's?

JACK. No.

ELLIE. Balliol?

JACK. Absolutely not.

ELLIE. What then?

JACK. Oriel. Obviously.

ELLIE. I'm not gonna lie, that does make so much sense.

JACK. Why, thank you.

ELLIE. I never said it was a compliment.

JACK. Doesn't matter. I'm taking it as one.

ELLIE. Alright, and what was your course?

JACK. Guess.

ELLIE. Do I have to?
JACK. Through with the guessing?
ELLIE. Can I be?
JACK. For you I'll make a concession.
ELLIE. Aww thanks. I feel quite special now.
JACK. You should. I don't let just anyone get out of guessing my course.
ELLIE. Noted.
JACK. Classics.
ELLIE. That also makes so much sense.
JACK. Oh?
ELLIE. Yeah.
JACK. Does it show?
ELLIE. A bit.
JACK. The tweed again.
ELLIE. Yeah.
JACK. Damn.
ELLIE. Sorry.
JACK. And what was your course-slash-college?
ELLIE. Wouldn't you like to know?
JACK. Ahh, well played.
ELLIE. Thank you.
JACK. *I am going to guess.*
ELLIE. Okay.
JACK. Do you know why?
ELLIE. Do enlighten me.
JACK. Because. Guessing... Is fun.
ELLIE. Is it—
JACK. And I like it.
ELLIE. What? No!
JACK. I know, I know. But alas, it's true.
ELLIE. I never would have guessed.
JACK. Now you're just breaking my heart.
ELLIE. I know. (*Beat. Looks. Heartbeat.*)
JACK. You know what I think?
ELLIE. What?
JACK. I think your course was something smart. Something science-y.
ELLIE. In a way you'd be correct.
JACK. In a way? Okay. Promising start.
ELLIE. Don't get ahead of yourself now.
JACK. I think you were... Geology.
ELLIE. Geology?
JACK. Geology.
ELLIE. You think I like to study rocks?
JACK. Yes. Though, I'm growing less confident about it by the second.
ELLIE. Not even remotely close.
JACK. Not even a little bit?

ELLIE. 'Fraid not.

JACK. Alright, go on then.

ELLIE. Only one guess? I thought you liked guessing.

JACK. Damn you, you're right. I ought to hold myself to a higher standard.

ELLIE. Not too high though. Lest you become an—

JACK & ELLIE. Icarus.

JACK. Interesting.

ELLIE. Interesting?

JACK. You're not Classics, are you?

ELLIE. No.

JACK. Well now you have me properly stumped.

ELLIE. Would you like the answer?

JACK. Yes.

ELLIE. European History and English.

JACK. Fuck off.

ELLIE. It's true.

JACK. Which college?

ELLIE. Guess.

JACK. You're having fun with this.

ELLIE. Very much.

JACK. Too much.

ELLIE. You can never have too much fun.

JACK. Can you not?

ELLIE. I don't think so.

JACK. No?

ELLIE. Not at all. It's like being too cheeky, isn't it? The worst that could happen is that you have to do some community service with your nan baking scones for cream tea.

JACK. Cream tea?

ELLIE. Sure.

JACK. Well if the excess of enjoyment leads to cream tea then...

ELLIE. Sign you up?

JACK. Sign me up.

ELLIE. Done.

JACK. Thanks very much.

ELLIE. Very welcome. But, to our previous point, which college was I?

JACK. Ah yes. You weren't at Merton, were you?

ELLIE. How did you know?

JACK. Wait, you were actually at Merton?

ELLIE. Yes.

JACK. No.

ELLIE. Seriously.

JACK. I don't know if I believe you right now.

ELLIE. Oh. No. I am actually being genuine now.

JACK. Ah. Lucky guess!

ELLIE. Impressive.

JACK. Nah. Just lucky.

ELLIE. Wait so how come we never saw each other on campus?
JACK. Dunno. When did you graduate?
ELLIE. After Spring-term.
JACK. Ah.
ELLIE. You?
JACK. Couple years ago now.
ELLIE. Ah. That makes more sense.
JACK. Yeah.
ELLIE. What've you been doing since then?
JACK. Ah not much. Just working.
ELLIE. What kind of work?
JACK. Super important things. I wish I could divulge.
ELLIE. Oh? It's classified, then?
JACK. Extremely.
ELLIE. I should have known.
JACK. Yes, I'm sorry you're just finding out.
ELLIE. No worries. I understand how these things work.
JACK. You do?
ELLIE. You're not the only one with redacted files.
JACK. Oooh. Mysterious. I like it.
ELLIE. But no, in all honesty what have you been doing with a Classics certification for two years?
JACK. Erm, well, I got a job at Christie's.
ELLIE. You're joking.
JACK. No, it's true.
ELLIE. At *the* Christie's?
JACK. Yeah, I'm working as a conservator there. Well, in a way I am. I worked my way up to an assistant position to one of the conservators there. So I, uh, do the documentation for new pieces and, erm, paintings and...
ELLIE. Help conserve them?
JACK. Yeah, that sort of thing.
ELLIE. So a conservator.
JACK. Not yet.
ELLIE. But the conservator couldn't do the job without you?
JACK. Well, it'd be quite a bit slower.
ELLIE. So you help in the process though? Of conserving the pieces?
JACK. Yeah. In the process.
ELLIE. So you're a conservator.
JACK. Yeah, I guess.
ELLIE. Well that's fantastic! I hope. Is it?
JACK. Yeah, it is.
ELLIE. That's great, then.
JACK. Yeah, it's really good actually. It's nice to – erm – be surrounded by good art, you know?
ELLIE. Oh absolutely.
JACK. And they actually have quite a few pieces from antiquity.

ELLIE. Do they?

JACK. They do!

ELLIE. Do tell.

JACK. Well, erm, just the other day a brass helmet from—I think it was the Antonine Period—came in. It's Roman. Very good condition. So I was just—I was going out of my mind with excitement, you know, as you do—

ELLIE. As you do—

JACK. But then we also have some, you know, some DaVinci, some Mundi, some renaissance pieces that hearken back to antiquity as well.

ELLIE. Very well looked after, I'm sure.

JACK. Well, that was actually why I applied there in the first place – because they have—because they are so well-funded, that they're, their equipment is just...

ELLIE. Second to none?

JACK. Second to none. Exactly.

ELLIE. Well, it sounds like it's a perfect match then.

JACK. Yeah, I'd say so.

ELLIE. D'you think you'll stay there?

JACK. For a couple years, probably.

ELLIE. Oh?

JACK. Well, I'd love to eventually look into master's courses and, erm, you know, I'd love to teach... eventually.

ELLIE. You do give off a sort of professorial air.

JACK. Do I? Is it the—it's the tweed isn't it?

ELLIE. How did you know?

JACK. Lucky guess.

ELLIE. Where at?

JACK. Do I want to teach?

ELLIE. Yeah.

JACK. Cambridge.

ELLIE. Isn't that a bit treasonous?

JACK. What? They've got the better rowing team anyway, don't they?

ELLIE. No, that's—I'll give you that.

JACK. No, I would like to teach at Oxford, though.

ELLIE. Merton?

JACK. I think so. And what about you?

ELLIE. Me?

JACK. Yeah, what d'you do?

ELLIE. I've got an internship at the British Library—

JACK. Well that sounds absolutely perfect.

ELLIE. Yeah, it's alright.

JACK. I mean, you've got both the History and the English there at the British Library. You, know, what more could you want?

ELLIE. I suppose that's true. But what I'd really like to do—I do a bit of writing on the side...

JACK. You do writing?

ELLIE. Yeah. I'd love to do it full time. Some time.

JACK. What kind of writing?

ELLIE. Right now? I've been working on a book of poetry.

JACK. Fantastic.

ELLIE. Yeah, it's... It's coming along.

JACK. Can I hear some of it? Your book?

ELLIE. For a fiver.

JACK. I don't have notes on me.

ELLIE. I accept electronic as well.

JACK. Deal.

ELLIE. Perfect.

JACK. Alright, let's hear it then—Sorry, is payment after acceptable?

ELLIE. Are you good for your word?

JACK. Always.

ELLIE. Okay. Let me find one. (*ELLIE searches on her cell for one of her poems.*) Erm... This should do.

JACK. Okay.

ELLIE. I should preface: the entire book is inspired by Shakespearean literature – I think more people ought to appreciate it—

JACK. As do I.

ELLIE. Thank you! He's the single greatest English-language author to have ever lived or written and—

JACK. No, no, I agree. He absolutely is.

ELLIE. It's just, you know—

JACK. No, I know. People.

ELLIE. People. Thank you. People have no appreciation for his genius.

JACK. It's a travesty, really.

ELLIE. Yes. I don't understand it! Finally—finally! Someone gets it! Anyway, this one in particular – right now it's my favourite – is about Brutus after he murders Julius Caesar.

JACK. Incredible. Dark, but sounds incredible.

ELLIE. Yeah, sorry, it's just... It's fun actually: I like to tell people that I got my degree in *Julius Caesar* – you know, the play – because my concentration in History was the Roman Republic during antiquity and my unofficial concentration in English was—

JACK. Shakespeare?

ELLIE. Exactly.

JACK. D'you know something?

ELLIE. What?

JACK. I think you may just be the coolest person I have ever met.

ELLIE. Oh?

JACK. It's true.

ELLIE. Well thank you.

JACK. I mean, I am biased because I also studied antiquity—

ELLIE. But if you acknowledge your biases—

JACK. Then everything's fine.

ELLIE. Exactly. Thank you.

JACK. Very welcome.

ELLIE. But you should wait to declare me the coolest person you've ever met—

JACK. Should I?

ELLIE. Yes, because you haven't even heard the poem yet.

JACK. I'm sure it'll be fantastic—

ELLIE. It might be utter shit—

JACK. Oh, I doubt that—

ELLIE. And I might turn out to be severely un-cool...

JACK. Well I suppose there is the possibility—

ELLIE. Oi! You could at least have some faith in me!

JACK. Well-played. I'll tell you what—

ELLIE. What?

JACK. I'll save my judgments 'til after you read it. How about that?

ELLIE. Probably for the best.

JACK. Right, well let's hear it then.

ELLIE. Okay...

“It was not pity, nor the good of Rome,
That drove your heart to stir up rageful acts.
Nor 'twas it fears that humoured Cassius so
And then inspired a cowardly attack.
Though noble you appear to common eyes,
And cloak your deeds within necessity
Your adder's tongue betrays your jealous mind
Disclosing envious propensity:
You speak of joy, as he is fortunate
And yet you spurn your lover for his crown!
So fortune's even, just apportionment
Determine love's extent – love's fortune-bound.
Your actions, did your jealousy foretell:
Your love lies bleeding, though you *love* him well.”

JACK. (*Beat.*) May I just say...

ELLIE. You may.

JACK. That was really very good.

ELLIE. Why thank you.

JACK. Like, Shakespeare good.

ELLIE. I dunno about that—

JACK. No, honestly! It was really good. The pentameter—it was in pentameter, right?

ELLIE. Yeah.

JACK. Thought so. It was spot-on. And you pulled from Brutus' lines, yes?

ELLIE. You noticed?

JACK. Brilliant, that. What is it? The joy and fortune bit – you took that from the public address after the murder?

ELLIE. Yes! Wait—hold on. What—

JACK. That was maybe my favourite bit.

ELLIE. I am so impressed that you know that.

JACK. Like I say: I specialise in antiquity.

ELLIE. So you do. I—sorry. I'm just, I'm actually so chuffed that someone understands my references.

JACK. They're very well done. A brilliant poetic homage to Shakespeare's Brutus.

ELLIE. Thank you.

JACK. So—may I ask what inspired this poem?

ELLIE. You may.

JACK. Right, so what inspired this poem?

ELLIE. I'm so glad you asked. I've actually—I've always found Brutus to be a severely frustrating character.

JACK. Oh?

ELLIE. Well it's like I say—It's like the poem says: He talks about love, right?

JACK. Sure.

ELLIE. He throws the word around in almost every one of his speeches. But I don't think—you know, if I'm gonna be completely honest—I don't think he has a clue as to what it actually is. Or rather, I think he's incapable of loving.

JACK. Do you?

ELLIE. I do.

JACK. And why's that?

ELLIE. Because he's jealous.

JACK. Do explain.

ELLIE. Everything he does, he does out of jealousy.

JACK. Sure.

ELLIE. I mean, he gives these other reasons for it, but really that's what's driving him.

JACK. Right.

ELLIE. Just look at—just take, for example, the line that you were talking about—

JACK. With joy and fortune?

ELLIE. Right. *You speak of joy as he is fortunate.* But we see over and over again in the play that Brutus says one thing and means another.

JACK. And you think that what he's really filled with when he sees a *fortunate* Caesar, as you say, is not joy, but jealousy?

ELLIE. Precisely.

JACK. Fair enough. That's actually exactly what I was getting from the poem—

ELLIE. That's a relief.

JACK. —So well done. But how does that tie into your previous assertion?

ELLIE. About Brutus being incapable of love?

JACK. Yes.

ELLIE. Because I think that jealousy and love are fundamentally incompatible.

JACK. Interesting.

ELLIE. You disagree?

JACK. I'm curious to hear your reasoning.

ELLIE. Well love hopes for the best for the other, yes? Even when it means that the other is, you know, more fortunate than I.

JACK. Sure.

ELLIE. And jealousy longs for what the other has.

JACK. Point well made.

ELLIE. So either love sort of dissolves jealous desires, or jealousy overwhelms love.

JACK. But they can't coexist.

ELLIE. Right.

JACK. Okay. But, and just for a moment I'm going to play the devil's advocate—but what if Brutus still loved Caesar even during – and after – the assassination?

ELLIE. Right, but I've just told you why I don't think that's possible—

JACK. You have. You absolutely have. But, and hear me out, what if... it is?

ELLIE. And you said you were good at debating?

JACK. Because I think it might be. I have some experience with this play—

ELLIE. Oh do you, now?

JACK. I do. And I think that Brutus, though he destroys Caesar—

ELLIE. Oh?

JACK. —doesn't actually do it out of jealousy. I think – and hear me out – that Brutus, though it sounds as if he is lying half the time, is rather driven by a desire for honesty. And he thinks that Caesar is fundamentally dishonest about his motivation. But, and here's the real fun bit, I think he never ceases to love him.

ELLIE. Is this some desperate and absurd attempt to rope me into a debate, Mr. Oxford Union? *(Enter SERVER with cappuccino, pain-au-chocolat, and an almond croissant.)*

JACK. I think you can handle it, Ms. poet.

SERVER. Hiya, we doing alright? I've got a Cappuccino? *(ELLIE sets down her phone.)*

ELLIE. Ah, yes. Here, thanks.

SERVER. Almond croissant?

JACK. That'd be me.

ELLIE. Ooh.

JACK. Can never go wrong with almond.

SERVER. Pain-au-chocolat?

ELLIE. Yes.

SERVER. Anything else?

JACK. I'm alright. *(To ELLIE.)* You alright?

ELLIE. I think we're good for now, thank you.

SERVER. Of course. *(Server goes to turn away but is stayed by something.)* Did I hear right? That you're a poet, Ms.?

ELLIE. Oh, I—

JACK. She is. A very good one too.

ELLIE. Well I don't know about—

JACK. What? It's true.

SERVER. What kind of poetry?

ELLIE. Do you write poetry as well?

SERVER. Yeah, you know. All sorts of stuff. Free-verse, slam, lyrical – you name it, I write it.

ELLIE. That is awesome!

JACK. Really fantastic.

SERVER. You?

ELLIE. Well, right now I'm working on a book of sonnets—

JACK. Very good.

SERVER. I love sonnets.

ELLIE. Do you?

SERVER. Yeah. Have you submitted to any of the poetry competitions?

ELLIE. What? Like—

SERVER. You know, the Stanza, the Enfield, Poetry by Heart, ooh! The National Poetry Contest?

ELLIE. Not yet, I'm afraid.

SERVER. You should, you know. The National—they give out the best prizes.

JACK. Do they?

ELLIE. You've submitted to the National?

SERVER. Oh yeah. Won two-thousand quid a couple years ago, didn't I?

ELLIE. You were a finalist??

SERVER. Second place, yeah.

JACK. Oh, how fun!

ELLIE. That's incredible. Second place?

SERVER. Yeah.

ELLIE. That really is incredible!

SERVER. Nah, I just write as I speak and speak as I feel, don't I? But you said you were working on a—

JACK. A book of sonnets.

ELLIE. Right.

SERVER. That's it. Sonnets. Brilliant. What are they on?

ELLIE. The sonnets? Oh. They're-erm-they're on Shakespeare's plays.

SERVER. Oh, Willy Shakes?

ELLIE. You know Shakespeare?

SERVER. 'Course I do. *Romeo and Juliet* and whatnot. Had to learn all about 'em for A-levels.

ELLIE. So you know *Julius Caesar*?

SERVER. The salad?

ELLIE. Erm—

JACK. The Roman—

SERVER. I'm playing, I'm playing, bruv. No, he's the guy that got stabbed to death, right?

ELLIE. Yeah.

SERVER. Yeah, I've heard of 'im.

ELLIE. Do you know the play though?

SERVER. There's a play?

ELLIE. Yeah. The Shakespeare play? *Julius Caesar*?

SERVER. Can't say I'm familiar with it, no.

ELLIE. Oh.

SERVER. But you've written sonnets on it?

ELLIE. Yeah, I've sort of adapted it for a modern third-party audience as a book of sonnets.

SERVER. Have you?

ELLIE. So as to examine it from, you know, a more current, lyrical viewpoint.

SERVER. Very nice. Very important with adaptation.

ELLIE. And I've used a lot of the lines from the actual play as inspiration.

JACK. But don't worry if you don't pick up on all of it—

SERVER. That is brilliant—

ELLIE. It was really a way, you know, a way to share this... you know, to share Shakespeare with new audiences.

JACK. But again, now worries if you don't—

SERVER. Go on, then! Let's hear some.

ELLIE. You're sure?

SERVER. Absolutely.

ELLIE. Alright then. Erm. Where—ah yes. Here.

“It was not pity, nor the good of Rome,
That drove your heart to stir up rageful acts.
Nor 'twas it fears that humoured Cassius so
And then inspired a cowardly attack.
Though noble you appear to common eyes,
And cloak your deeds within necessity
Your adder's tongue betrays your jealous mind
Disclosing envious propensity:
You speak of joy, as he is fortunate
And yet you spurn your lover for his crown!
So fortune's even, just apportionment
Determine love's extent – love's fortune-bound.
Your actions, did your jealousy foretell:
Your love lies bleeding, though you *love* him well.”

SERVER. (*Beat.*) It sounds very nice.

ELLIE. Yeah?

SERVER. Yeah. I like those rhymes. Don't hear those sorts of words on smash night too often, eh?

ELLIE. Thank you.

SERVER. Yeah, that shit's good man, I tell you what. But I don't really understand it.

ELLIE. Oh.

SERVER. I mean, I know it's about someone who's jealous right?

ELLIE. Yeah.

JACK. Brutus.

SERVER. Brutus! Right. ...which one's he again?

ELLIE. He's the one that betrays Caesar.

SERVER. Right. Wait, don't they all betray Caesar?

ELLIE. I mean—

JACK. Technically—

SERVER. But no, you know; anyway: I'm sure it makes more sense in the context of your book.

ELLIE. Yeah.

SERVER. Or when you know the source material, like you do.

ELLIE. Yeah.

SERVER. But yeah— (*A crash is heard from offstage.*)

BOSS. (*Offstage.*) Ah shite!

SERVER. That'd be the boss. (*To BOSS.*) Coming boss-man! Don't you fret! (*To ELLIE.*) Keep it up, yeah? Some good shit there.

ELLIE. Thanks.

JACK. Thank you. (*SERVER turns and begins to exit.*)

SERVER. Oh, and, if you need anything, I'm over there. (*SERVER exits.*)

ELLIE. Thanks.

JACK. Some people just don't understand.

ELLIE. Yeah.

JACK. (*Beat.*) Oh! You know, there was something else about the poem that I found really interesting as well... What was it... What was the last line again? Something stuck out to me there.

ELLIE. Erm, “Your love lies bleeding, though you love him well.”

JACK. Yes, that’s the one! Brilliant line.

ELLIE. Thanks.

JACK. And did you know that you make a reference to a specific species of plant there?

ELLIE. I do?

JACK. You do.

ELLIE. What plant?

JACK. Pendant amaranth.

ELLIE. Pendant amaranth?

JACK. Yes, it’s this velvet-coloured flower that hangs down a bit like a tassel.

ELLIE. Oh, very nice.

JACK. Yeah.

ELLIE. But how do I reference it in the line, exactly?

JACK. Oh! Right. Yes. Pendant amaranth is also known as “love lies bleeding.”

ELLIE. Oh!

JACK. Very cool stuff.

ELLIE. Thank you. Love lies bleeding—

JACK. —*Though you love him well.*

ELLIE. Well, you learn something new every day, don’t you? And how is it you know about this flower? Are you a gardener too?

JACK. I prefer the label: plant father.

ELLIE. Plant father?

JACK. Yeah. You know, I’ve actually got one at my place. Gift from nan.

ELLIE. So you take in lots of plant-children, then?

JACK. I take it you’re not a horticulturalist?

ELLIE. Not especially. Though I do like the green ones.

JACK. The green ones? The green plants?

ELLIE. Yeah, you know, the green ones.

JACK. Oh, yes, I think I know which ones you’re talking about.

ELLIE. Yeah, the ones with the—

JACK. Leaves?

ELLIE. Exactly.

JACK. What are the odds! I like those ones too!

ELLIE. Well there we go! Common ground.

JACK. Good for planting.

ELLIE. Is it?

JACK. I’ve heard so.

ELLIE. I’ll take your word for it. Take it you’re not the animal type then?

JACK. Not especially. Though, I could be swayed.

ELLIE. Well that’s a relief.

JACK. You have a pet?

ELLIE. No. But I’d like one.

JACK. Cat or dog?
ELLIE. Ferret.
JACK. Ferret?
ELLIE. Yeah, a ferret.
JACK. Like one of the long...
ELLIE. That's the one.
JACK. ...Are you sure?
ELLIE. What, you don't like ferrets?
JACK. No, it's just that...
ELLIE. Jack.
JACK. Yes?
ELLIE. I'm joking.
JACK. Ah, thank fuck.
ELLIE. Bit worried there?
JACK. I was a bit, yeah.
ELLIE. I wouldn't mind a dog, though.
JACK. I could do a dog.
ELLIE. Well that's good to hear. I've wanted one ever since I was little, but my mum never let me get one.
JACK. No?
ELLIE. No.
JACK. Why?
ELLIE. Bit of a bitch, isn't she?
JACK. That's... She... she sounds like fun.
ELLIE. Yeah, so much fun. *(Beat.)*
JACK. D'you know what?
ELLIE. What?
JACK. I have suddenly been overcome with a strange desire for fresh air.
ELLIE. Have you?
JACK. That I have. I mean, it's such a lovely day. Be a shame to waste it inside a café wouldn't it?
ELLIE. That's a very fair point.
JACK. D'you fancy a stroll through Clapham Common?
ELLIE. I think I could be amenable to that.
JACK. Shall we then?
ELLIE. We shall. *(They rise.)* Wait. The cheque.
JACK. Ah yes. No worries. I've got it.
ELLIE. You sure?
JACK. Positive.
ELLIE. I really don't mind—
JACK. No, no, no, no. This is on me. *(JACK pulls out a banknote.)*
ELLIE. Alright. But only if you let me pay the next time.
JACK. The next time?
ELLIE. The next time.
JACK. I could be amenable to that. *(Motions to the server. SERVER enters.)*
SERVER. Yes?

JACK. Hi, yes. Could we get takeaway containers please?

SERVER. Yeah, you got it. Just give me one second.

JACK. 'S alright. (*SERVER exits.*)

ELLIE. You know, I do quite like the Common this time of year.

JACK. Do you?

ELLIE. I do. And... You never know. Might see a flower and find some inspiration for my next work.

JACK. That you might! (*Enter SERVER.*)

SERVER. Here are those takeaway containers for ya.

JACK. Thanks very much.

SERVER. 'S alright.

JACK. And here you are. (*JACK hands the SERVER the banknote while ELLIE puts the things in takeaway containers.*)

SERVER. Ah, thanks. I'll be back with the change.

JACK. No worries.

SERVER. You sure?

JACK. Yeah.

SERVER. Okay. Thanks.

JACK. 'S alright. (*Exit SERVER.*) Right—

ELLIE. I thought you said you didn't have bank notes.

JACK. Did I?

ELLIE. You did.

JACK. Huh. When did I say that?

ELLIE. When I said it'd cost you a fiver for a poem.

JACK. Oh right! Yeah. I lied. Sorry about that.

ELLIE. Bit of a red flag, isn't it?

JACK. Well, I thought that it was mostly in fun—

ELLIE. But I figure I might be able to forgive it—

JACK. Would you?

ELLIE. Why not? I did too.

JACK. Lied?

ELLIE. I don't accept electronic payment.

JACK. Ah. I suppose you'll be wanting your bank note, then?

ELLIE. Well, I've delivered on my end. It's your turn now.

JACK. Fair enough. (*JACK pulls out a fiver and hands it to ELLIE.*)

ELLIE. Thank you.

JACK. By the time I've heard all your sonnets I shall be a destitute beggar.

ELLIE. Oh, will you now?

JACK. No. But I'll feel like one. Metaphorically speaking.

ELLIE. Mmm. Well, then perhaps I could take you in.

JACK. Care for me in my time of need?

ELLIE. It's the charitable thing to do, isn't it?

JACK. Very.

ELLIE. Well, then, it's settled.

JACK. Perfect.

ELLIE. By the way, are you ready?

JACK. I guess I am. Thank you. *(They gather their things.)*

ELLIE. Absolutely.

JACK. Right. Off we go then. *(They start to exit.)* You're sure you're not Shakespeare reincarnated?

ELLIE. Hmmmm. About ninety-five per-cent. *(SERVER enters and begins to wipe down the table.)*

JACK. So you're saying there's a possibility.

ELLIE. Only five per-cent. *(Lights dim as JACK and ELLIE exit. Scene change.)*