

Susanna and Elders: A Tableau Vivant
of the painting by Artemisia Gentileschi

Susanna, then Susanna becomes the "Young Artemisia"

Elder 1, Elder 1 becomes Agostina Tassi

Elder 2, Elder 2 becomes Cosimo II de' Medici

Scene 2

Susanna and Elders: A Tableau Vivant
of the painting by Artemisia Gentileschi

Susanna is in her garden bathing nude while two elderly men threaten her from the edge of her garden

Susanna: My name is Susanna

I am wife to Joachim

I have sent my handmaids back

To fetch oil and clothes

It is hot and I want to bathe

Here in the garden that my husband

Had made for my pleasure, my pleasure, my pleasure

How I love the low hum of the bees

And the wind's delicate caress

Elder 1:

Susanna don't be scared

We hid here to talk to you Susanna you are so lovely

And you want us to see you or else why would you Walk in the garden each day

(Susanna tries to ignore them and lose herself in the beauty and sanctity of her private garden, surrounded by "humming bees and the winds delicate caress")

Susanna:

My name is Susanna

I am wife to Joachim

I have sent my handmaids back To fetch oil and clothes

Elder 1:

Tell her what will happen if she doesn't give in to our need

Tell her what we will say

Susanna: Leave me be if you please

I am here for the hum of the bees

And the winds delicate caress

Elder 1, 2: Susanna do as we say

We love you; lie with us

Or we will disgrace you

Susanna give us or we will say you're a whore

We'll tell them you'll meant any man

Who asks in the garden

Susanna: I have sent my handmaids back to fetch oil and clothes

If I do this thing,
It is death unto me
If I don't, it is
Death at your hands

(The elder Artemisia enters the "Tableau Vivant" and explains the seven and then tries to comfort Susanna who slowly becomes the "Young Artemisia")

Artemisia: Most painters paint these two as old men
Make them grizzled bald and sagging
But you don't have to be ugly to have a hideous heart

Elder 1: Susanna do as we say
If she doesn't give in to our need

Tell her what we will say

Susanna: Leave me be if you please
I am here for the hum of the bees

And the winds delicate caress

Elders 1 and 2: Susanna do as we say
We love you; lie with us
Or we will bring shame on your name
Susanna give in

We will tell the world you sent your handmaids away and met a
young man here

Lie with us now

Susanna: My name is Susanna
I am wife to Joachim
I have sent my handmaids back
To fetch oil and clothes
It is better for me to refuse you And put myself at your mercy
Than to sin in the sight of the Lord

(The elder Artemisia in the "Tableau Vivant" now showing the creases in her painting to Tomasso)

Artemisia: Do you see how her waist creases like real flesh
On the left as she leans away?
It may sound proud but I got that right.
Though the red cape of the older man
Is what took me longest to paint.
Making those soft folds fall like real cloth,
And red is expensive, too.

Elder 2: Joachim!

Elder 1: Servants!
All you in the house!

Elders 1 and 2: An intruder is in the garden with Susanna!

Elder 2: A young man stronger than we!

Elder 1: He opened the door and ran out!

Elders 1 and 2: But we saw him embracing Susanna Wicked,
wicked Susanna
As the two of us were walking

Susanna came with her maids
She shut the garden doors and sent them out.

Elder 1: Then a young man came out from hiding to lie with her

Elders 1 and 2: in the garden and seeing this crime we cried out.

Susanna: O God, you know all my secrets
You know they have bore false witness And behold, I must die,
even though I never did what they say

It is better for me to refuse you And put myself at your mercy
Than to sin in the sight of the Lord.

Artemisia: Susanna you must stay strong and resist Keep turning
these scoundrels away
For they are bound to be caught in their lies And you will be
proved innocent

Susanna: Oh please let this be so

Artemisia: Susanna think no more about these men

They don't have the power they claim The truth is stronger than
their lies if you hold it fast

Susanna: It is true. It is true

Artemisia: Susanna think no more about these men
Close your ears to their babble
They bear false witness and they will pay for it They made their
own misfortune

Scene 3

Artemisia's studio is now a courtroom.

Susanna, then Susanna becomes the "Young Artemisia"

Elder 1 is now Agostina Tassi

Elder 2 is now Cosimo II de' Medici

Artemisia is now the "inquisitor"

Elder 1 (*Tassi*): My name is Agostino Tassi,

And I am a painter

I was arrested on the Via della Lungara It was around ten p.m.

And I was alone.

Artemisia (*as inquisitor*): What is your place of origin?

Elder 1 (*as Tassi*): I am told I was born in Borgo But now live in Rome.

Artemisia (*as inquisitor*): And are you married?

Tassi: My wife is dead.

Artemisia (*as inquisitor*): When and where and under what circumstances Did she die?

Tassi: Your lordship I cannot say, because I left her behind in Luca when I came to Rome. She stole from me so I let her go to hell.

Elder 2 (*becoming Cosimo*): Listen to me your friend Cosimo.

You left one whore behind

Why would you take on another?

Artemisia (*as inquisitor*): And have you been to the home of Artemisia Gentilleschi?

Tassi: I have been many times.

Orazio took me there to show me some paintings.

Artemisia (*as inquisitor*): And were you there when Orazio was not?

Tassi: Too many times to remember.

Artemisia (*as inquisitor*): And why did you go there when Orazio was not?

Tassi: I went there at his request

To teach his daughter Artemisia About perspective.

Cosimo: You just got rid of your wife with a couple of thugs and a knife Why would you tie yourself down with another just like her?

When you want to be married

You will have better choices than this.

Artemisia (*as inquisitor*): And were Artemisia's brothers there when you spoke with her

Tassi: There was a woman Madam Tuzia. Orazio brought her home.

Artemisia (*as inquisitor*):For what reason?

Susanna re-enters the scene as the "Young Artemisia" and is questioned by the "Older Artemisia"

Susanna: Oh God you know all my secrets
And you know all things before they be
You know Agostino Tassi lies just as he lied to me

Artemisia (*as inquisitor*): Do you know the reason we have brought you here?

Susanna (*as the young Artemisia*): I am here because my father had Tuzia arrested,
For she plotted to betray me and have me disgraced.

Artemisia (*as inquisitor*): And how were you betrayed by this Tuzia?

Susanna (*as the young Artemisia*): She intrigued to have me deflowered by the painter Agostino Tassi.
He was a friend of my father's, and Tuzia said he was kind and well mannered, a gentleman with women she said.
She said I should speak with him alone.
I said it was not proper but she let him into the house Along with that vile man Cosimo

Artemisia (*as inquisitor*): That orderly of the Pope?

Susanna (*as the young Artemisia*): Yes, Cosimo told me I should be nice to him.
Oh God you know all my secrets. And you know all things before they be. You know Agostino Tassi lies just as he lied to me.

Cosimo (*was Elder 2*): You have given it to so many, why not give it to Tassi as well?

Susanna (*as the young Artemisia*): I told them both to leave me alone.

The next day Agostino came back

And Tuzia again let him in.

I wanted to make myself clear so I said (*holding up finger and pointing to ring*) The man who wants me must give me this.

The man who wants me must give me this.

...*Susanna recounts the rape*

After lunch on a rainy day

Agostino came to my house

I was in my studio painting Tuzia's son.

Cosimo: Not so much painting! Not so much painting!

Susanna (*as the young Artemisia*): We were walking around the house

And he kept on passing the bed room

Then pushed me inside and locked the door. He shoved me down on the bed

With his knee between my thighs

And that's where he raped me.

It hurt very much and I screamed

I scratched his face but I couldn't stop him. I called for Tuzia but would not come.

Susanna (*as the young Artemisia*): Tuzia!

Tassi: Don't fight me.

Cosimo: Give in to him.

Artemisia, now remembering as ARTEMISIA: Tuzia!
Help me, Tuzia!

Cosimo: Stay away Tuzia.

Susanna (*as you Artemisia*): I'd like to kill you
For you have dishonored me!

Tassi: Go ahead and kill me then. Here I am.

Susanna (*as you Artemisia*): I threw the knife at him and wounded
his chest. Then he put on his coat to go.
I was crying
and he took my hand.

Tassi: Give me your hand. I promise to marry you As soon as I get
out of the labyrinth I am in.

Susanna (*as you Artemisia*): After that many times he convinced
me many times to yield to him as a wife.
I did not know he was married
For he promised to marry me.
I believed him because when others came To win my hand

Artemisia (*as inquisitor*): Is there more?

Susanna (*as you Artemisia*): He made sure they were all sent
away.

Artemisia (*as inquisitor*): Anything else?

Susanna (*as you Artemisia*): That is all that has happened
Between Agostino Tassi and me.

That is all

That is all that happened between Augustino Tassi and me.

Artemisia (*at canvas and having had enough of her memories for
one day*):

Enough! (*gives brush to Tomasso*) Enough!

Enough!

Enough!

Tomasso: Is the figure complete, madam?

Artemisia: Susanna.

Everyone wants me to paint Susanna. Enough of Susanna today.

Tomasso: Would you like me to work on the sky?

Artemisia: I must rest my eyes.

Tomasso (*taking over*): Good night.

Artemisia: Good night.

Good night (*exits*)