

THE CRUEL WOMAN: ESTHER GEMSCH

SCRIPT: NADJA ABT, with excerpts from Heinrich von Kleist's "Penthesilea" (1808), Elfriede Jelinek's "Sports Play" (1998) and Lisa Robertson's "Proverbs of a She-Dandy" (2017)

SOUND: FLORIS DEMANDT

VOICE

For now I shall descend into my
breast,
And dig a shaft, and quarry out
the cold
Ore of a feeling that
annihilates.
This ore I purify in fire of
grief
To hardest steel; in poison
then, of bitter,
Burning remorse, I soak it,
through and through;
Now carry it toward Hope's
eternal anvil,
And grind and sharpen it into a
dagger;
And to this dagger now I yield
my breast:
So! Again! So! - Now it is done.

THE CRUEL WOMAN

(knocks three times on
the microphone)

HELLO? HOI? Can you hear me?
Yes?

(knocks on the mic
again, fiddles with
something)

What's this? Hello?

I would like a more comfortable
chair!

(pause)

Please! A little respect...
Where am I anyway? Have I gone
too far? As you're speaking to
me so confidentially, I dress my
voice in ice skates and slide
straight into you. You're
already so worn out. No, your

(MORE)

THE CRUEL WOMAN (CONT'D)

eyes do not deceive you: all
 this that is around me, yes,
 precisely that which is dragging
 itself around half-drugged,
 always hanging back so that you
 believe it's no longer coming -
 that's death. It appears to me
 in the shape of wealth. Here
 however is where I win, by
 taking lives.

This is the cellar, but I am far
 from being a corpse!

A magnificent cellar, a party
 cellar!

The part you didn't expect! Such
 impudence!

Just look at me! I am
 blossoming!

I have a calling and a
 profession here! As a fortune
 teller! You're only looking up,
 but there's more down here!
 Freshly renovated! I have spared
 no expense or effort. The money
 is safely invested. Look me in
 the face!

A mien with lots of dough!
 Wealth is the autonomous
 experience of pleasure! But not
 everyone can have fun, where
 would we end up? My humor is
 ink. Oh, forgive me, I'm
 spitting on your beautiful globe
 as I speak! It's really
 beautiful! Is it homemade? My
 slobber runs in blue streams
 through the lands and makes dry
 places bloom again.

I should have become a poet! I
 worked hard! I strapped my
 breasts to my back and rolled up
 my sleeves. A robbed woman who
 robs. Unwomanly, excuse me,
 unnatural, a stranger to the
 rest of humanity.

(clears throat)

It was a devastating fate
 indeed,
 that brought my women`s state to
 life.

(pause)

But human nature, pressed beyond
 endurance,

(MORE)

THE CRUEL WOMAN (CONT'D)

Rebels and shakes the burden
from its back.

(clears throat again)

So, where was I? Oh yes, the
pleasure of having you visit me.
You could have stayed upstairs,
but just admit it. It's quite
cozy down here too. You don't
need to watch British series to
know that the basement is always
the best place to be.

I've done my best - just look
around. I have nothing to hide.

(indignant)

But not that close! How dare
you? Why don't you give a lady
the distance of a spotlight?
softer again) You know, I'm the
old type. I had my face done
with a lot of dough.

People don't like my teeth, but
I am a practised old horse fly,
which is why I need them, my
teeth I mean, but people too, of
course.

I always need an audience!

That is why it's
incomprehensible why those
gentlemen have me locked up here
in the souterrain. Me, the
fortune teller, the treasurer!
Oops, now I've blabbed...oh well,
never mind...who still wants these
old books?

(afraid)

Oh no! They are coming! I
didn't...I didn't mean to...I
researched and quoted to the
best of my knowledge and belief.
Leave me alone! I have chewed
and digested the pages. (Sound
softens, fades at the end) I...I
have done nothing wrong...this is
mine! Get out of my cellar...

END