

Out Of Her Mouth: Synopsis

‘Out of Her Mouth’ tells 3 stories.

The story of Susanne

Susanne tells us the story of how, years ago, as a teenager, she once stripped off to wash in a stream on a hot summer’s day, not realising that two much older men were spying on her. She warns us that sexual urges don’t diminish with age, and tells us how the men propositioned and harassed her. When she turns them down, they threaten her: give in or we will say we saw you with a lover, and you will be executed for adultery (sex outside marriage).

Young Susanne refuses to submit to them despite the risks. She is arrested and put on trial. However, during the trial it is revealed that the men are lying, and she is acquitted. Looking back, her older self is struck by her bravery.

The story of Rachel

Rachel tells us the story of her wedding day. The young man she loves, Jacob, has worked on her father’s farm for seven years, in return for her hand in marriage. When the day finally comes for them to be married, he is impatient and full of love. However, the morning after the wedding he has a terrible realisation: he has been tricked into marrying Rachel’s sister Leah. Jacob confronts Laban, the girls’ father, who has planned the deception, but the older man is unrepentant. He offers Jacob the chance to marry Rachel as well and have two wives, in return for more farm work. After Jacob accepts Laban’s offer, Rachel tries to make the best of the situation.

The story of Judith

Judith, a respectable widow, tells us her story. Her city has been besieged by an invading army and is on the brink of collapse. The military commander Holofernes holds a party to celebrate and, wanting to sleep with her, invites Judith to come. Despite the situation, he tries to charm and impress her. She plays along, making sure he has plenty to drink. When they go to bed, he passes out. Left alone with him, Judith hesitates, but takes his sword and finds the resolve and the strength to decapitate Holofernes in his sleep. Shocked by her own actions, she comes round quickly enough to flee, carrying the severed head with her. She holds up Holofernes’ head on the city walls, and seeing what she’s done, her fellow citizens celebrate the power of ordinary people.

Out Of Her Mouth: Full Text

[The following is spoken through a microphone]

SUSANNE

On stage there is a group of musicians. A woman sits at a harpsichord, just left of centre stage. It is black, its lid propped open showing the pale wood inside. To its right, on a raised platform sits a cellist, and next to her another woman plays a theorbo, a lute with a long neck. In front of them sits the violinist, the only man. They are all wearing casual black clothes.

Above them, a horizontal metal pole holds rolls of blue paper, the kind used to clean up in hospitals and restaurants. These words are being projected onto the paper. Theatre lights are visible around the stage. The light is pale lavender and cool yellow light. The space is artificial but functional. The band communicate with each other through looks and nods, the performers set their props, the blue roll wafts slightly as people move past it. Throughout the show, many things will happen at once.

Rachel is a young white woman in her 20s. She is slight, with cropped dark hair and is wearing a brown waterproof gilet, over a long white dress, dirty around the hem, and pink, sparkly wellies. She is carrying watermelons, and planting them carefully along the front of the stage. She gives one to the violinist.

Judith, a white woman is in her 40s with shoulder-length blond hair, is wearing an ivory slip and has bare feet. She stands at a table, to the right, sharpening a large kitchen knife.

Now, I'm on stage. I'm Susanne. I'm a tall white woman in my early 40s with cropped, silver grey hair. I'm wearing khaki cargo shorts and black hiking boots and a white T Shirt that reads "Keep your laws off my body" in red. I'm carrying a rucksack, and I'm taking a notebook from it.

[She reads]

"Article 1. All appropriate measures shall be taken to abolish existing laws, customs, regulations and practices which are discriminatory against women, and to establish adequate legal protection for equal rights of men and women."

Susanne

Once upon a time, in the summer,
A teenage girl, Susanne, took a bath in a stream.
She cooled off getting clean in the fresh, flowing water.
Unaware two old men watched her bathe from the
bushes.

All you sexy young people
With your burning desires
Would not believe that growing older
Does little to put out the fires.

All you tender young folk
Would recoil in disgust,
If you could see how ageing bodies
Are brimming with ardour and lust.

If you're consumed by passion
In the peak of youth's prime
Foolish, you'll feel its pangs
Until the day you die.

All you sexy young people
With your burning desires
Would not believe that growing older
Does little to put out the fires.

All you tender young folk
Would recoil in disgust,
If you could see how ageing bodies
Are brimming with ardour and lust.

The appeal of Susanne provokes some manly courage,
And her admirers step forth to reveal themselves:
Mixing sweet words with a threat,
To make her scared
And make her nice.

“We'd like to get to know you,
Give us a little smile!
Won't you make us both happy,
By staying for a while?

Come on, why not be friendly?

Give us a little hug!
Let's get better acquainted,
Who knows it might be fun!

You ought to be more cheerful
With such a pretty face
You must drive all the boys wild
And lead them such a chase.

But it's not playing fairly
To lead a man astray,
Don't you know we have feelings,
That won't be pushed away?

Give in, you know you want it.
You planned for us to look,
Now if you won't deliver,
That's cheating in our book.

Relax and treat us nicely,
And no one's getting hurt.
You're just getting what's coming,
You nasty little flirt."

They said they'd accuse her of meeting a
lover - At the time the sentence was death!
To brush away her strong resistance,
This was the clever trap which they set for Susanne.
Wicked men! Is this how you want to get your pleasure?
Susanne! What a mess!
What are you going to do?
Will you be punished for their lies?
Will you surrender to their lust to escape from death?
What sort of choice is that?

"No! No!" answers the girl without pausing
"You may threaten me all you like
But, if I have to die
Then at least I can
Choose the way I die – unafraid.
But, but, if I have to die
Then at least I can
Choose the way I die – unashamed."

What a reckless move I just made
Arrested and taken away
What a reckless move I just made
To face my accusers in court.
Thank God their lies come undone in the trial!

Easy to be brave when you're young,
You can't understand what's at stake!
What a risk I took!
What a risk I took with my life!
A terrible thing to endure
To face my accusers in court
Thank God their lies came undone in the trial!

No, no,
May any man watching this
Know he won't get a minute's peace
If he abuse the power he wields.

What a fearless girl I was then,
I hope I'd still be half as brave.
No child, no child should be made to be brave,
I hope, I hope I'd still be half as brave.

[The following text is spoken through a microphone]

JUDITH

Susanne is sitting hunched on a chair centre stage, exhausted. I am standing on the highest part of the platform holding a knife loosely by my side. Me, Judith. Earlier I cut up some watermelon for us to eat, and Rachel is busy cleaning up the mess where we dropped the slices.

Now, Susanne is sitting at the table with her back to you, making party decorations from the blue paper. And Rachel is pulling the end of another paper roll as she moves to the front of the stage. It unfurls behind her like a bridal train.

I am holding the mic for Rachel.

RACHEL

[She reads] "Article 2. Discrimination against women, denying or limiting as it does their equality of rights with men, is fundamentally unjust and constitutes an offence against human dignity."

Rachel

Let me tell you the story of Rachel and her love,
And the day of their wedding.
Young Jacob feels blessed as he wakes in the morning
And the day quickly runs to meet the sacred night.

Seven years he has worked for Rachel's father Laban,
Laboured hard every day on his farm for her hand.
Now that his wait is nearly done,
With a song, Jacob helps the minutes pass.

"Come dearest wish of all my life,
Come be my wife,
Let us entwine our lives together.
Come sweetest thought of all my days,
Love me always,
Please let me stay with you forever.
Come and kiss away all the pain
Of the time we have spent apart!

What a pleasure to feel the sting
Of the love that has pierced my heart!
Come and kiss away all the pain
Of the time we have spent apart!
For it's love that has pierced my heart.

As I sweated in summer heat
Worked in winter cold and in rain
For as long as I thought of you,
Weary hours felt light to bear.
For as long as I dreamt of you,
Heavy loads felt light to bear.

"Come dearest wish of all my life,
Come be my wife,
Let us entwine our lives together.
Come sweetest thought of all my days,
Love me always,
Please let me stay with you forever.
Come and kiss away all the pain
Of the time we have spent apart!

What a pleasure to feel the sting
Of the love that has pierced my heart!

Come and kiss away all the pain
Of the time we have spent apart!
For it's love that has pierced my heart."

But what use is his song to miserable Rachel?
At the altar the bride, nervous beneath her veil,
Is really Rachel's sister, her only sister Leah!
Locked inside, Rachel can't stop the lie.

All night unaware of the switch,
In the first light of dawn Jacob sees his mistake.
And he runs to confront his new father in law,
Swindler, and bully of his daughters.

"Get up! Get up! What have you done, you monster?
Playing games with our lives, for what?
Is this what you want, Leah crying?
Are you pleased with yourself, for breaking Rachel's heart?"

You have enjoyed a life of comfort
Wealth you owe to my hard work:
How can you face me now and tell me,
'Thanks for your sweat and tears, this is how you're repaid'?

My God! My God! What have you done, you monster?
Playing games with our lives, for what?
Is this what you want, Leah crying?
Are you pleased with yourself, for breaking Rachel's heart?"

But Laban stands his ground, says he's a careful father,
How he knows what's best for both his little girls.
How it's only right, as Leah is the eldest,
That she become a woman first.

"Don't get yourself worked up for nothing,
No need just yet to give up hope.
Don't get yourself upset for nothing,
No need just yet to get depressed.
With a little more work,
You can earn what you crave
Take for a second wife
The younger girl you want.
With a little more work,
You can buy what you need:
Two women to yourself,
Two women keeping house

And bearing children.
Take for a second wife
The younger girl you want.”

[Pause. It goes unspoken that Jacob ultimately accepts this deal.]

Rarely in life are wishes granted
Mostly we don't get what we want
And if we obtain what we covet
It isn't what we hoped it was.

It isn't what I hoped it was.

Yet despite the disappointments
We still look for happiness
And love, and love,
Undefeated by sorrow,
Finding joy as best we can.

We love, we love,
Undefeated by sorrow,
Finding joy as best we can.

Rarely in life are wishes granted
Mostly we don't get what we want
And if we obtain what we covet
It isn't what we hoped it was.

It isn't what I hoped it was.

[The following text is spoken through a microphone:]

RACHEL

Two twisted streamers of blue paper roll are crossed above my head, like party decorations. I am sitting, waiting at the front of the stage wearing my wedding dress and veil. To my left, Judith is sitting very still, frozen even. She now has an elegant shawl with yellow and green flowers.

Susanne brings the table into the centre between us and lays it on its side.

There are still 3 watermelons on the front of the stage, and there is a baseball bat on the floor in front of the harpsichord.

I'm giving the mic to Ju- ...

[off mic] Judith as taken the mic.

JUDITH

[She reads]

"Article 3. All appropriate measures shall be taken to educate public opinion and to direct national aspirations towards the eradication of prejudice and the abolition of customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women."

Judith

[Overture]

One month after the siege of her city began,
With the food and water all gone,
Holofernes, the general surrounding the town
Invites Judith to come to his camp for a party.
For her he feels a pressing hunger,
And tonight, with his charm, plans to win her over.

“The sweetest of victories
Is all I pursue,
Forgetful of glory
When I’m around you.

I battle in vain
Against your allure,
Bind me in chains
I’m totally yours.

The sweetest of victories
Is all I pursue,
Forgetful of glory
When I’m around you.”

Hurry someone, make him shut up! Judith!
Come make him silent with a smouldering look.

More wine! Another bottle!
Put down your burdens and dance.
Drink up! Another bottle!
Why not? Another bottle!
And whisky and cocktails and shots,
Shrug off all your cares and relax.

Look at him how he stares, beguiled by her laughter,
Inhales her smell, her neck, her long hair.
But all in vain his anticipation builds:
No sooner have they reached the bed
Than, quite drunk, he’s closing his eyes.

[Instrumental music: sleep]

It is time.
In the hush
And the stillness
Of night,
You hold this burly man in the palm of your hand.
Take his sword, it is sharp and it's heavy,
If you cut off his head, you'll set your city free.

She wishes it was done; but thinks of just running,
Her arm, raised to strike, in the air freezes still,
Her feet stay rooted to the ground,
In her ears, the blood rushes round.
Oh God give her the strength to do what she must do.
Oh God give me the strength to do what I must do.

[Judith beheads Holofernes]

She strikes the fatal blow -
The rush of elation!
A frantic exaltation!
Everything will be well.

She sliced his neck in two!
She sliced his neck in two!
The rush of elation!
A frantic exaltation!
Everything will be well.

This soldier gently sleeping -
He won't hear the alarm,
There's no bugle will rouse him
From the arms of the dead.

She strikes the fatal blow -
The rush of elation!
A frantic exaltation!
Everything will be well.

She sliced his neck in two!
She sliced his neck in two!
The rush of elation!
A frantic exaltation!
Everything will be well.

Now run, now run - escape!
Run Judith and escape,
Bring news to the people at home;
Climb up, climb up and from the height of the walls raise his head,
A sign, sure and true, of the triumph to come.

Sing and dance and be glad
Of the power we have,
Oh, oh! The fortunes of kings
Are like clay in our hands.

Sing and dance and be glad,
Take the chance to be free,
No, no, no master or lord
In your mind or your body!

And the smallest of us,
Can change things for the better.
And the weakest of us,
And the poorest of us,
Can change life for the better.

Sing and dance and be glad
Of the power we have,
Oh, oh! The fortunes of kings
Are like clay in our hands.

Sing and dance and be glad,
Take the chance to be free,
No, no, no master or lord
In your mind or your body!

[End of the show. Captions scroll by saying...]

Article 1

All appropriate measures shall be taken to abolish existing laws, customs, regulations and practices which are discriminatory against women, and to establish adequate legal protection for equal rights of men and women.

Article 2

Discrimination against women, denying or limiting as it does their equality of rights with men, is fundamentally unjust and constitutes an offence against human dignity.

Article 3

All appropriate measures shall be taken to educate public opinion and to direct national aspirations towards the eradication of prejudice and the abolition of customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women.

UN Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (1967)