

"Shakespeare in a Stone"

A prompt to page post by Julie Mariouw



AMHERST WRITERS & ARTISTS AND JULIE MARIOUW
FEB 24, 2026



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The following piece was written in an online AWA workshop using this quote from Shakespeare: “And this our life, exempt from public haunt, finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything.” —“As You Like It”, William Shakespeare.

I asked writers to cluster a word from this quote, using the method described by [Gabriele Rico](#), in her book “[Writing the Natural Way](#)” (a form of brainstorming, also called mind mapping or word association). Then we wrote silently together for 45 minutes.

We read our work aloud to each other to receive feedback using the AWA method. It is always fascinating for me to hear what people come up with in response to the very same quote.

The following is what I wrote in response to the quote.

“Shakespeare in a Stone”

William Shakespeare visits my land. Honestly, he really does. He likes to hang out with the Grandparent Trees. I saw him for the first time a few years ago, right after I moved to this property. I didn't have much experience with the land at that point, and I certainly wasn't looking for a famous author to show up. But there was something about this land that was so magical, I knew I should be ready for anything.

The day Shakespeare showed up, it was Indian Summer, an early November day. I saw a wisp of purple out near Finch Field. At first, I thought I imagined it, but then I saw purple again near the Old Oak Forest. It was a man wearing a purple coat. He had on a white, high-collared shirt, black pants and boots, and his hair was shoulder-length, brown and beginning to thin. His eyes were grayish-brown with long lashes, and his cheeks were rosy.

Suddenly, the trees in the forest all leaned toward us, and Shakespeare said, “Remember that line—finds tongues in trees? Well, I didn't make that up. Trees actually do have tongues and they gave me that line. They also gave me the entire play—As You Like It.”

I knew right away that this was William Shakespeare, even though it seemed impossible that he was here. I stayed behind a tree for a moment to watch him. First, he went to Grandfather Tree to show him respect. He bowed. Then he went to Grandmother Tree and sat down beside her. He was such a flirt. Grandmother Tree blushed like crazy.

Shakespeare and Grandmother Tree talked for a long time, and I wondered if Grandfather Tree might feel jealous. But Grandfather Tree handled it well, and Shakespeare and Grandmother Tree made magic together.

I really wanted to talk to Shakespeare. I had idolized him all my life. So finally, I got up my courage and walked over. I bowed to him. He looked at me in surprise, but not really too much surprise, as I was the reason he had come. He reached for

my hand, held it in his, then invited me to join the conversation. I sat next to him—next to William Shakespeare, OMG! I had so many questions.

Finally, Shakespeare said, “I see you’ve been writing quite a bit in the past few years, little one.”

I wasn’t sure why he called me “little one”, as I’m in my sixties and not a child. But I went along with it.

“Yes, I have,” I said, “Much of it is due to you. You were a lifeline to me as a child, when I had nothing else to hold onto. I was drowning in my family, and I reached for your plays to help connect me to the human race. I cannot believe how you captured humanity on paper. It was a miracle. You saved my life.”

Now it was Shakespeare’s turn to blush, if only for a moment. Then he turned to the trees. “Tell her,” he said, “how you gave me those words.”

Suddenly, the trees in the forest all leaned toward us, and Shakespeare said, “Remember that line—*finds tongues in trees*? Well, I didn’t make that up. Trees actually do have tongues, and they gave me that line. They also gave me the entire play—*As You Like It*.”

At that point, I was almost crying. “I knew it, I just knew it,” I said, “I thought the trees had given you those words, but I was afraid to say that to anyone at the time.”

Shakespeare nodded, then placed his palm on the grandmother tree. She sighed.

“I also saw the piece you wrote about pages fluttering down from birches to make a book. Nice work,” Shakespeare said.

I sank into the comfort of the dirt, but Shakespeare waved me on, “Go explore, little one. You deserve it. You’ve been working hard for a long, long time.”

So I went exploring in the woods, and this is what happened:

Crows dart in and out of the forest, like children playing. Crows own this forest, they just allow me to visit. A spider weaves its web, connecting a fallen tree with a leaf—a leaf with a rock—a rock with a stick in the dirt. So clever, so delicate in such a dangerous world.

I walk over the hill and down to the marsh, where ferns pop up through rocks. Downed tree limbs create thick black soil, and everything grows with a vengeance.

Then I see it—sermons in stones—just as Shakespeare said it would be. Milky white pages unfurl like velvet, spreading a carpet before me. I step onto the carpet and Holy Words flood my body. I feel light as a feather, yet grounded too. Shakespeare chuckles, “I designed it this way...”

Yes, yes. I always knew that when I read your plays. I felt your words in my body. I knew they would save me someday, and here they are, doing just that.

Rich words pour out of the sermons in the stones—dark, moody, cold, grounded. The stones are fractured by the beauty of what they carry.

Shakespeare’s eyes shine as he leans back against a tree. He has done good work for the day.

Julie Mariouw is a published author, certified Amherst Writers & Artists workshop facilitator, AWA Affiliate, and creator of Wellspring Writing Workshops, LLC. Julie combines the power of metaphor, the senses, the body, and nature together with writing, to create healing and increased creativity. Julie’s work has been published in Story Sanctum, Wilderness House Literary Review, Teach.Write.A Literary Journal, Recovering the Self, The Huron River Review, The Brick Magazine, Crazy Wisdom Journal, Natural Awakenings Magazine, and Verdad Magazine.

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