

# **‘Talk’ by Mark Wilson**

## Play synopsis

The play is set in the Criminal Wing at Bethlem Hospital for the Insane in 1854.

**Scene 1**

Emily is an artist who has been incarcerated in Bethlem Hospital for the Insane by her husband. She tells the story of her abandonment and then becomes distressed by the fact that she has been taken away from her children. Ward Sister Grey calls in the orderly, Fowles, to restrain her. Doctor Haydon interjects and insists that no restraints be used. He talks to Emily and she calms down.

**Scene 2**

Doctors Hood and Haydon talk about Emily’s incident. Doctor Hood is concerned that Doctor Haydon’s intentions to talk to the patients will upset his proposal to the commission to reform treatment by creating an artistic environment. Doctor Hood relates a conversation he has had with artist Richard Dadd, who becomes aggressive when Hood does not wish to listen to his concerns about his mental wellbeing.

**Scene 3**

Doctor Haydon and Emily discuss Emily’s poetry and how it expresses her pain at being taken from her children. She tells Haydon that things are done to her in the hospital. In a flashback sequence, Fowles is seen to assault her. She talks about how her experiences enabled her to connect with her inner rage. She starts to lose control because she is not able to have a pen to write her poems with and so she defecates and uses the excretion to write her poems on the walls of her cell.

**Scene 4**

Doctor Hood tells Doctor Haydon that the rise in incidents is concerning the commissioners and that he must stop working with Emily and Dadd in this way. Ward Sister Grey addresses the commissioners and tells them that restraint is not cruel but is a way of calming patients when they cannot control their behaviour.

**Scene 5**

Doctor Haydon visits Richard Dadd as he is painting. Richard becomes distressed when he sees a fly on his canvas and is convinced that it is the devil in disguise. He becomes aggressive as he tries to explain what it means and Fowles restraints him forcibly.

**Scene 6**

Doctor Haydon is very distressed about Richard Dadd’s outburst. He questions whether he did the right thing in having him restrained. Doctor Hood implores him to stop talking to Dadd and Emily and to re-focus on their proposal to create an artistic environment to support patients. He tells Haydon that he wants to host a ball for the patients leaving for the new hospital at Broadmoor.

**Scene 7**

At the ball, Richard and Emily meet for the first time. Emily encourages Richard to talk about the images he has been having and they discover together that they are about his mother’s death when he was a child. He becomes distressed and they share a hug. Ward Sister Grey interprets this as Dadd attacking Emily and she has him restrained by Fowles and taken from the ball room.

**Scene 8**

Doctor Hood is reading Ward Sister Grey’s report. She is very angry and tells Hood that he must be restrained for 10 days. Doctor Haydon gives his account of the ball room incident but becomes aggressive when Grey insists that Dadd attacked Emily. Haydon snaps at Grey and Hood tells him he has gone too far and must stop his ‘experiment’.

**Scene 9**

Doctor Haydon talks to Emily about the ballroom incident. At first, he is angry because he believes that she caused the situation by making Richard talk about his trauma. She explains that Richard needed to talk about his memories and that all stories must be told, however painful. Haydon realises he needs to listen to his patients more.

**Scene 10**

Doctor Haydon tells Doctor Hood that they must change their proposal to include talking with the patients. In a flashback, he tells Hood about meeting with Richard Dadd, who told Haydon about how he killed his father because he thought he was the devil. Hood tells Haydon that he has agreed to send Dadd to Broadmoor because the commissioners are concerned about his violent incidences. He has also agreed to Emily being moved into isolation.

**Scene 11**

Ward Sister Grey talks to Doctor Haydon about how restraint may appear cruel but is actually the best way of calming patients. Haydon is nasty to Grey and tells her that restraint is the opposite of care and they must deal with loss to help the patients talk about their experiences. As they are speaking, Fowles makes Emily dress in a nightdress and attaches a restraint to her ankle.

**Scene 12**

Richard Dadd finds Emily and tells her he is leaving for Broadmoor. Emily appears to have lost her mind in isolation and thinks she is talking to Haydon. She talks about how she feels she is being watched on the ward and that she wants to go home. Dadd thanks her for talking to him and leaves a pen for her to write her poetry with.

**Scene 13**

Dadd is waiting to leave for Broadmoor. Hood tells him goodbye but Dadd dismisses him. Haydon arrives and apologises to Dadd that he could not stop his transfer. Dadd thanks him for talking to him and says goodbye. Emily tells Haydon in a flashback that he must continue to talk to patients.