

THE SHAKESPEARE PLAYS

Being The Remarkable True Comedy, History
and Tragedy of Shakespeare

A Screenplay by Martin Keady

Copyright 2023

Email: keadym1616@gmail.com

Twitter: @mrtnkeady

Instagram: keadym1616

Website: <http://theshakespeareplays.com/>

BLACK. A caption appears: "PART I (COMEDY) - 1598".

Fade up to:

1. INT/EXT. THEATRE. DAY.

Centre-stage, an OLD MAN with white hair, white beard and an enormous stomach takes a bow and THE AUDIENCE applaud wildly. The OLD MAN then looks at the back of the stage, where another ACTOR is standing, and beckons him forward: THE ACTOR shakes his head, but the OLD MAN keeps beckoning him. Slowly THE ACTOR comes forward and the AUDIENCE applaud him even more wildly than they had applauded the OLD MAN. THE ACTOR, who is about 35, bows and for the first time his thinning hair, beard and ear-ring in his left ear are visible. TWO MEN - one fat and 32, the other thin and 22 - stand at the side of a stage, wearing stage "armour" and holding spears.

FAT MAN:

Good old Will. He's done it again.

THIN MAN (nodding in agreement):

He always does. Rare is the Shakespeare failure. In fact, in all the years we've been together, I can't think of one.

Like everyone else, on stage and off, they continue to applaud THE ACTOR taking a bow - WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

2. INT. BACKSTAGE, THEATRE. DAY.

As ALL THE ACTORS come off-stage, the FAT MAN collects their costumes while the THIN MAN counts the takings from the show.

FAT MAN (to an ACTOR DRESSED AS A LORD):

Costume, please.

ACTOR DRESSED AS A LORD:

Oh, come on, Mister Hemings. Can't I have a drink first?

THE FAT MAN - JOHN HEMINGS - looks at him angrily.

HEMINGS:

No!

ACTOR DRESSED AS A LORD:

Why not?

HEMINGS:

Because like *every other* actor I've ever met, you'll have one drink, then another and then, before you know it, you'll be mewling and puking like an *infant*, and my *beautiful* robes will be *ruined*. So, costume now - please!

ACTOR DRESSED AS A LORD (glumly):

Very well.

The ACTOR starts undressing and looks across at the THIN MAN.

ACTOR DRESSED AS A LORD:

How are the takings, Mister Condell?

CONDELL (while still counting coins):

Excellent! Audiences obviously adore Falstaff.

HEMINGS (smiling):

Just as they loved Romeo and Juliet, loathed Shylock and laughed their heads off at *Bottom*!

The ACTOR laughs, but CONDELL just keeps counting. The "OLD MAN" comes off stage and removes his wig and false beard, then the cushion from under his tunic, to reveal he is actually only about 35, and has a muscular frame and red hair. SHAKESPEARE comes up behind him and slaps him on the back.

SHAKESPEARE:

Richard, you are Falstaff! No-one else can ever play him!

The RED-HAIRED MAN - RICHARD BURBAGE - looks perplexed.

BURBAGE:

I'm not sure whether that's an insult or a compliment.

SHAKESPEARE (smiling):

BOTH!

ALL THE PLAYERS, including BURBAGE himself, laugh.

BURBAGE:

Now, where are the refreshments? I need a *drink!*

He goes to a table laden with wine bottles and picks one up.

MAN (VOICE OFF):

Is that wine?

EVERYONE, including BURBAGE, turns round to see who has spoken: standing by the door is an OLD MAN dressed in black, including black skull-cap, who is looking at THE PLAYERS with contempt. Still clutching the wine bottle, BURBAGE goes towards him.

BURBAGE:

Allen! What are you doing here? You're not allowed backstage.

ALLEN:

It's *my* land that you're standing on, Burbage, and I can go wherever I want on *my* property! (He looks at the bottle in BURBAGE's hand.) Now, I asked you a question - is that wine? (He says it as if it were the word "excrement".) I've told you before - *all* of you - that drinking wine, or any other alcohol, is *forbidden* on these premises.

HEMINGS leans in towards SHAKESPEARE and whispers to him.

HEMINGS:

Damn Puritans! Always spoiling other people's fun!

SHAKESPEARE nods in agreement.

BURBAGE (to ALLEN):

But it's our *first* performance.

ALLEN (smiling):

No, it's your *last* performance. Or at least one of them.

ALL THE ACTORS look at him in amazement.

SHAKESPEARE:

What does that mean?

ALLEN (still smiling):

It means that I am terminating your tenancy with *immediate* effect.

Now ALL THE ACTORS look at him in disbelief.

BURBAGE:

What? You can't do that!

ALLEN (beaming):

I can, and I am.

SHAKESPEARE:

But why?

ALLEN:

For continually flouting the terms of the lease by *drinking* on the premises - (*TO BURBAGE*) - and staging plays that celebrate drunks and sinners, like that *fat oaf* Falstaff!

Both SHAKESPEARE and BURBAGE look offended.

ALLEN:

That's why I'm giving you one month's notice to quit!

ALL THE ACTORS look stunned.

BURBAGE:

A month? But that's barely enough time to remove the seats and stage.

ALLEN (smiling):

Oh, you don't have to worry about *removing* them - I'll be *keeping* them!

THE ACTORS look horrified.

BURBAGE:

You can't do that! The lease says we have permission "to take down any buildings that we might erect".

ALLEN:

Oh, does it?

BURBAGE (firmly):

Yes, it does.

ALLEN:

Well, we can discuss the matter further in court - *if* you can afford a lawyer *and* a long-drawn-out court case!

He laughs and turns back towards the door.

ALLEN:

Goodnight - (*He stops and corrects himself.*) I was about to say "Gentlemen", but of course you're *not* "Gentlemen", are you? (*He looks at them all disdainfully.*) No "player" could ever be a gentleman!

He goes out, laughing, and BURBAGE goes after him.

BURBAGE:

We ought to run him through!

HEMINGS steps between BURBAGE and the door, blocking his path.

HEMINGS:

No, Richard. That way we'll end up in court contesting a *murder* charge rather than the terms of a lease.

BURBAGE (angrily):

No court would convict us!

HEMINGS:

Why? Because society has such a high opinion of players?

He looks at him questioningly, then shakes his head.

HEMINGS:

Of course not. They use us for their "entertainment" and then, when they've had it, they get rid of us. (*He looks round at ALL THE OTHER ACTORS solemnly.*) 'Twas ever thus - 'twill be ever thus!

ALL THE ACTORS look utterly miserable.

3. INT. TAVERN. DAY.

HEMINGS, CONDELL, BURBAGE and SHAKESPEARE sit by a window in a tavern, slowly sipping ale. HEMINGS looks out of the window.

HEMINGS:

It's starting to snow.

BURBAGE (proclaiming, as he is prone to):

Can we stop talking about the blasted weather and concentrate on the matter in hand?

HEMINGS:

Alright. There's no need to shout. You're not on stage!

BURBAGE eyes him, angrily.

SHAKESPEARE:

Stop bickering, you two. *(Pause.)* What are we going to do?

BURBAGE:

What we always do.

SHAKESPEARE:

Which is?

BURBAGE:

Move, of course! *(He laughs.)* That's why we're called *travelling* players!

SHAKESPEARE:

But where to?

HEMINGS:

I have an idea.

SHAKESPEARE, BURBAGE and CONDELL all look at him expectantly.

SHAKESPEARE:

Yes, John?

HEMINGS:

I have a neighbour who recently inherited a plot of land on Bankside.

SHAKESPEARE:

"Bankside"?

HEMINGS:

Yes - beside the river! I'm sure we could lease it from him. *(Grinning.)* It's *perfect!* There's lots of space and he'll charge less rent than Allen does. To be honest, I was going to suggest we move there *before* Allen evicted us. *(He looks round at them all intently.)* Now we have no choice.

BURBAGE:

But the *Rose* is on Bankside. We'd be cutting our *throats* if we moved next door!

HEMINGS:

Not necessarily. Bankside is big enough for *two* theatres, especially if one of them is showing *Shakespeare's* plays.

SHAKESPEARE:

You're too kind, John.

HEMINGS:

I'm not being "kind": it's a fact! No-one draws an audience like you, Will, and Bankside is where all the audiences are.

CONDELL:

Exactly. Because it's where all the bear-pits and brothels are.

They all laugh.

SHAKESPEARE:

Well put, Henry.

BURBAGE (to HEMINGS):

Would your neighbour really lease the land to us?

HEMINGS:

I'm sure he would. He has no use for it himself.

BURBAGE:

And what kind of lease are we talking about?

SHAKESPEARE:

Yes. How long?

HEMINGS (smiling):

Oh, about thirty years.

SHAKESPEARE:

"Thirty years"?

HEMINGS (nodding):

At least! We could stake our whole *future* there! And the best part is that the south bank of the river is outside the city walls, so it's outside the jurisdiction of the City of London. Allen won't be able to touch us!

SHAKESPEARE looks thrilled, but BURBAGE looks troubled.

BURBAGE:

There's a problem.

HEMINGS:

What's that?

BURBAGE:

We have no *stage*, or *seats*! Allen won't let us take them, even though legally they're ours.

For a moment, there is silence around the table.

HEMINGS:

It's *really* starting to snow now.

BURBAGE:

Damn you, John! This is no time to prattle about the weather.

HEMINGS:

Hang on!

SHAKESPEARE:

What, John?

HEMINGS:

I've had another idea!

The OTHERS all look at him questioningly.

4. EXT. STREET OUTSIDE THE THEATRE. DAY.

It is obviously a few days later: the snow has settled and SHAKESPEARE and BURBAGE are standing in several inches of it.

BURBAGE:

Where are they? *I'm freezing!*

SHAKESPEARE:

Don't worry about John and Henry - they're the most trustworthy men I know. They'll be here shortly.

HEMINGS (VOICE OFF, calling out):

HELLO!

SHAKESPEARE and BURBAGE look down the street and see HEMINGS and CONDELL, in fur coats and hats, in a horse-drawn cart being driven by a THIN, GREY-HAIRED MAN, the back of WHICH is full of WORKMEN. The cart stops by the theatre and HEMINGS leaps down.

HEMINGS (to SHAKESPEARE and BURBAGE):

William! Richard! This is the man I told you about -

He indicates the THIN MAN, who climbs down from the cart.

HEMINGS:

Mr Peter Street, the finest theatrical carpenter in London
- the man who built The Rose!

STREET:

Pleased to meet you, Gentlemen, especially you, Mister
Shakespeare: I've heard an awful lot about you.

SHAKESPEARE:

None of it good, I trust.

STREET:

Very little, as befits a player!

SHAKESPEARE laughs.

BURBAGE:

Mister Street, I must ask you something.

STREET:

Go ahead.

BURBAGE:

I know you've built many theatres, including The Rose, but
have you ever taken one down?

STREET (with a shrug):

No, but it's the same process - just in reverse.

BURBAGE considers this, then nods to concede the point.

BURBAGE:

Yes, I suppose it is.

SHAKESPEARE:

I don't doubt, Mr Street, that you can take the theatre apart, but can you do it *quickly*? We only have a few days while Allen is away for Christmas, visiting his relatives.

STREET:

A Puritan Christmas? That'll be *merry*!

THE OTHERS all laugh.

STREET:

We can do it - and *quickly*! (He turns to address his *WORKMEN*.) Come on, boys - let's take her apart!

THE WORKMEN climb down, carrying hammers, chisels and saws, and follow STREET towards the theatre - all except TWO BIG MEN. SHAKESPEARE notices them and nudges HEMINGS.

SHAKESPEARE:

What are *they* doing?

HEMINGS:

Oh, they have *different* tools...

THE TWO BIG MEN begin unloading clubs and axes from the cart.

HEMINGS:

...In case Allen comes back early!

HEMINGS laughs and goes towards the theatre: SHAKESPEARE watches THE TWO MEN start to arm themselves, then quickly follows HIM.

5. INT/EXT. THEATRE. NIGHT.

SHAKESPEARE and CONDELL watch as STREET and some of his WORKMEN start taking up planks from the stage itself.

SHAKESPEARE (admiringly):

They're working fast.

CONDELL:

They ought to be. We're paying *double* their usual rate!

SHAKESPEARE:

"Double"?

CONDELL (with a shrug):

Well, it is Christmas.

SHAKESPEARE groans.

6. EXT. THE STREET OUTSIDE THE THEATRE. NIGHT.

SHAKESPEARE looks in the back of the cart and sees that it is full of planks and benches: HEMINGS, who is sitting in the front of the cart and holding the reins, calls down to him.

HEMINGS:

The first load's ready, Will. We should get going.

SHAKESPEARE (nodding):

Right.

SHAKESPEARE climbs in and sees CONDELL below, waving up at him.

CONDELL:

Godspeed!

The horse starts walking slowly down the street - very slowly.

SHAKESPEARE (to HEMINGS):

We're hardly making any speed, let alone "Godspeed"!

HEMINGS stares at SHAKESPEARE.

HEMINGS:

Stop complaining and enjoy the ride.

SHAKESPEARE looks even more miserable.

7. EXT. RIVERBANK. NIGHT.

SHAKESPEARE tries to huddle up to HEMINGS for warmth, but suddenly HEMINGS sits up straight and pulls hard on the reins.

HEMINGS:

WHOAH!

SHAKESPEARE also sits up with a start as the horse stops.

HEMINGS:

There it is.

SHAKESPEARE:

My God! You were right.

HEMINGS:

Our very own *bridge* across the Thames, direct to Bankside!

THEIR POINT OF VIEW: directly ahead of them is the river Thames - and it is frozen over.

There are A LOT OF PEOPLE on the ice: SOME walking; OTHERS sliding (on sledges or their bottoms); and SOME ice-skating.

SHAKESPEARE:

Are you sure it can take our weight?

HEMINGS:

Of course it can. As you can see, there are *hundreds* of people on it already!

SHAKESPEARE:

"People", yes, but not horses - and certainly not horses pulling carts laden with *timber!*

He looks along the river and in the distance he sees London Bridge, the only actual bridge across the river, which is lined with houses and shops, and full of people on foot and horseback.

SHAKESPEARE:

Why don't we just use the *real* bridge - London Bridge?

HEMINGS (sighing):

I've already told you: it's too far away and too *crowded*, even at night, with all the shops and houses on it, let alone the *traffic*. It would take an age just to get a *single* cartload across. We'd never get everything out of the theatre and across it before Allen comes back from his holiday! (*He looks at the ice.*) This is the only way.

SHAKESPEARE also looks back - nervously - at the ice.

SHAKESPEARE:

Alright. Proceed!

HEMINGS snaps the reins and slowly the horse moves forwards, before stopping right at the edge of the frozen river.

HEMINGS (calling out):

GO ON!

The horse puts one foot forward into the air.

8. EXT. THE FROZEN RIVER THAMES. NIGHT.

The horse carefully puts its foot down on the ice. Then it walks forward and puts down another foot, then another, until finally all four of its feet are on the ice. It walks forward, pulling the cart onto the ice: as it does so, SHAKESPEARE leans out of the cart and looks down at the ice.

SHAKESPEARE:

It's holding! It's taking our weight!

HEMINGS:

What did I tell you? (Beaming.) Like the Good Lord himself, we're walking on water!

SHAKESPEARE laughs and looks around in amazement, seeing *CHILDREN* playing 'tag', a *MAN* walking his dog and a *CROWD* gathered around food stalls, from some of which steam rises.

SHAKESPEARE:

Stay away from the stalls selling hot food!

HEMINGS (nodding):

Don't worry - I will!

HEMINGS takes the reins in one hand and points with the other.

HEMINGS:

There's the Rose!

About 500 yards away on the other bank is The Rose Theatre, its thatched roof towering above the surrounding houses and taverns.

HEMINGS (pointing again):

And there's our new home!

About 500 yards along from The Rose is the only empty plot of land on the riverbank, which is otherwise teeming with PEOPLE. SHAKESPEARE looks at it, then looks back at HEMINGS and smiles.

9. EXT. THE SITE OF THE NEW THEATRE. DAY.

HEMINGS and SHAKESPEARE sit on a pile of timber covered with canvas to stop it getting wet: they are surrounded by about 20 similar piles of timber, each one similarly covered with canvas. They look across the ice and see CONDELL and BURBAGE in the cart: CONDELL driving and BURBAGE shivering beside him. CONDELL drives up onto the bank, then leaps down to tie up the horse to the bench that HEMINGS and SHAKESPEARE are sitting on.

CONDELL (indicating the back of the cart):

That's almost everything.

BURBAGE slowly climbs down and smiles up at them.

BURBAGE:

Only the *walls* are left - and they come down *today!*

THE OTHERS all laugh as HEMINGS looks around the site.

HEMINGS:

It's not much now, but one day it will be the *finest* theatre in London.

BURBAGE (smiling):

Nay, the *world!*

They all laugh.

HEMINGS:

Most importantly, it will be *our* theatre.

BURBAGE:

Exactly. We won't have to answer to Allen or anyone else.

CONDELL:

Except the censor!

BURBAGE:

Well, we always have to answer to the censor.

They all smile, ruefully.

SHAKESPEARE:

How long will it take to build?

HEMINGS:

Oh, about six months.

SHAKESPEARE (looking shocked):

Six months?

HEMINGS:

At most!

SHAKESPEARE:

Why so long? It only took a few *days* to take it down.

HEMINGS (smiling):

Because it will be bigger, better and *grander* than any theatre ever built - as befits *Shakespeare's* theatre!

SHAKESPEARE looks proud, then worried.

SHAKESPEARE:

But what will we *do* for six months? We'll *starve!*

HEMINGS:

It's alright, Will. We've negotiated a temporary lease with The Curtain theatre while construction's going on.

CONDELL:

Everything is arranged. All you have to do is *write!*

HEMINGS:

Yes. More masterpieces, please!

They all laugh, even SHAKESPEARE.

SHAKESPEARE:

You've obviously thought of everything.

HEMINGS:

I try to. In fact, as company manager, it's my job to!

SHAKESPEARE:

I have only one remaining wish.

HEMINGS:

Oh, yes? And what's that?

SHAKESPEARE:

I wish I could see old Allen's face when he returns from his Christmas holiday.

BURBAGE (smiling):

That would be worth seeing!

They all roar with laughter.

10. EXT. THE STREET OUTSIDE THE THEATRE. DAY.

A smiling ALLEN walks towards the theatre, but he suddenly stops smiling and stops walking.

HIS POINT OF VIEW: Where there had been a theatre, there are now only a few nails lying on the ground in the snow. ALLEN looks at them in disbelief: he even screws up his eyes and opens them again, in a double-take. He even looks behind him, as if he has walked past it.

Finally -

ALLEN (screaming):

CONSTABLE!!!!

*Fade to: **BLACK.***

A caption appears: "THE NEW THEATRE WAS CALLED THE GLOBE."

Another caption: "THAT WAS BECAUSE IT WAS SAID TO CONTAIN ALL THE WORLD: PRINCES AND PEASANTS; QUEENS AND WASHERWOMEN..."

Another caption: "...ON AND OFF THE STAGE".

A final caption appears: "PART II (HISTORY) - 1601".

Fade up to:

11. INT. BACKSTAGE OFFICE, THE GLOBE THEATRE. DAY.

SHAKESPEARE, HEMINGS, CONDELL and BURBAGE are all sitting in the backstage office of the new Globe theatre, through the slightly ajar door of which The Globe's thatched roof can be seen: SHAKESPEARE sits at the desk, quill in hand, writing; HEMINGS is checking costumes; CONDELL is also sitting at the desk, counting money; and BURBAGE is pacing up and down, obviously trying to remember his lines.

BURBAGE:

"Sans teeth...sans eyes...sans..."

He hesitates, obviously trying to remember the next word.

HEMINGS:

"Everything."

BURBAGE (remembering):

"Everything"! That's it. Damn it!

He resumes his pacing in silence, or at least he mutters so quietly that it is inaudible. A young BOY - dressed as a sheep, complete with woolly head-dress, ears and tail - runs up to the door.

BOY:

Master Shakespeare, Sir?

SHAKESPEARE (without looking up):

Yes...?

BOY:

There's someone to see you, Sir. Someone important.

SHAKESPEARE:

Who is it?

BOY:

A nobleman, Sir.

SHAKESPEARE finally looks up at him and smiles.

SHAKESPEARE (smiling):

A nobleman in a *playhouse*? Are you sure he doesn't want the *bawdy house* next door?

SHAKESPEARE keeps smiling, but the BOY just looks confused.

BOY:

No, Sir. He says he wants to see you.

SHAKESPEARE:

And which particular "nobleman" is dignifying us with his presence?

BOY:

The Earl of Southampton, Sir.

SHAKESPEARE, HEMINGS, CONDELL and BURBAGE all stop what they are doing and stare at THE BOY for a moment. Then -

HEMINGS (to SHAKESPEARE):

Your so-called "patron"? What does he want?

SHAKESPEARE:

I don't know, but I shall have to find out. *(To the BOY.)*
Tell him I'm coming.

BOY:

Yes, Sir. He's waiting on the stage.

SHAKESPEARE:

"The stage"?

BOY:

Yes, Sir. He said he wanted to take in the view from it.

SHAKESPEARE, HEMINGS, CONDELL and BURBAGE stare at the BOY for a moment, looking confused. Then the BOY runs back out, his woollen "tail" bobbing behind him. SHAKESPEARE puts down his quill and stands up.

HEMINGS (to SHAKESPEARE):

D'you want us to come with you?

SHAKESPEARE:

No. I'd better see him on my own. He always preferred to conduct business on a one-to-one basis.

HEMINGS:

Well, be careful. You know what he's like. (Pause.) He'll demand the world!

SHAKESPEARE sighs heavily.

SHAKESPEARE:

And I shall have to provide it.

SHAKESPEARE walks over to the door and follows the BOY out.

12. INT/EXT. THE STAGE, THE GLOBE THEATRE. DAY.

SHAKESPEARE walks out onto The Globe's stage and sees a YOUNG MAN standing at the front of the stage, looking out: he is handsome, exquisitely dressed and aged about 30, with black curly hair and a neatly trimmed moustache and beard. At the back of the stage, staring at the YOUNG MAN, are a "SHEPHERD" and "SHEEP": in reality, an ACTOR with a shepherd's crook and BOYS dressed as sheep, including the BOY who had summoned Shakespeare.

SHAKESPEARE (to the "SHEPHERD"):

Feed your flock.

The "SHEPHERD" leads off the "SHEEP" and some "BAA" as they go: hearing this, the YOUNG MAN turns round and sees SHAKESPEARE.

YOUNG MAN (smiling):

I always wanted to be a player.

SHAKESPEARE joins him at the front of the stage.

SHAKESPEARE:

That's funny - I always wanted to be a *Gentleman!*

The YOUNG MAN laughs.

YOUNG MAN:

It's a pleasure to see you again, Will.

SHAKESPEARE:

And it's an *honour* to see you again, my Lord.

SHAKESPEARE bows and the YOUNG MAN - THE EARL OF SOUTHAMPTON - looks pleased by this show of obeisance. Then SOUTHAMPTON looks out from the stage again: at the ground (or "Groundlings" area) in front of the stage for the poorest theatregoers; then up at the seats above, which are for the wealthier patrons; and finally up at the thatched roof, forming a "wooden" (or more precisely "straw") 'O', through which the sky is visible.

SOUTHAMPTON:

The Globe is a *magnificent* theatre, Will. It's much bigger - and *grander* - than the one you had in Shoreditch.

He looks back at SHAKESPEARE.

SOUTHAMPTON:

You're obviously doing very well for yourself.

SHAKESPEARE:

I survive, my Lord, which is all one can aspire to in these *mean* times.

SOUTHAMPTON (smiling):

They are "mean" indeed, with the war continuing in Ireland and the *threat* of war in England.

SHAKESPEARE (looking puzzled):

There is no threat of war here, Sir.

SOUTHAMPTON looks at him in surprise.

SOUTHAMPTON:

With an ageing Queen and no heir, what else can there be *but* the threat of war?

SOUTHAMPTON laughs, but SHAKESPEARE looks a little nervous.

SHAKESPEARE:

I heard that you yourself were in Ireland, my Lord.

SOUTHAMPTON (nodding):

That's right. I was there for three years, serving under the Earl of Essex - "the General of our Gracious Empress", as you so memorably christened him in "*Henry the Fifth*".

SHAKESPEARE suddenly looks embarrassed.

SHAKESPEARE:

Unfortunately, my Lord, as he is no longer her "General", I had to *cut* that line.

SOUTHAMPTON looks upset, even offended, before smiling again.

SOUTHAMPTON:

Yes, Essex is being *excised* in all kinds of ways, which is why I wanted to see you, Will.

SHAKESPEARE:

Me, my Lord?

SOUTHAMPTON:

Yes, *you* Will. (*He beams at SHAKESPEARE.*) I want to commission a special production in honour of my Lord Essex.

Now SHAKESPEARE looks very nervous.

SHAKESPEARE:

Of which play, my Lord?

SOUTHAMPTON looks shocked.

SOUTHAMPTON:

Why, "*Richard the Second*", of course? What other play is as relevant to our troubled time?

SHAKESPEARE looks appalled.

SHAKESPEARE:

Perhaps that is why it has been *banned*, my Lord - or at least a certain part of it.

SOUTHAMPTON:

You mean the deposition scene, where Richard hands over his crown?

SHAKESPEARE (nodding):

I do. (*He smiles, thinly.*) The Queen and her advisers, especially Lord Cecil, do not want any depiction of a sovereign *surrendering* their crown, not with the uncertainty surrounding the succession.

SOUTHAMPTON (angrily):

I don't care! I want to commission a production of "*Richard the Second*", complete with deposition scene, for a week today!

SHAKESPEARE looks at him in amazement.

SHAKESPEARE:

That's impossible, my lord. As I just told you, that play, at least in its current form, has been banned by order of the Queen.

SOUTHAMPTON:

I don't care! That's the play I want to see and that's the play you will perform.

SHAKESPEARE takes a deep breath.

SHAKESPEARE:

May I ask why you want to see that play in particular, my Lord? There are many other plays that we could perform in honour of the Earl of Essex.

SOUTHAMPTON (angrily):

No! It must be "*Richard*".

He looks imploringly at SHAKESPEARE.

SOUTHAMPTON:

Don't you see, Will? It is *about* Essex!

SHAKESPEARE (looking confused):

Is it, my Lord?

SOUTHAMPTON:

Of course it is! (*Pause.*) It is the story of a vengeful, despotic ruler who is *corrupted* by their advisers and consequently *robs* the nobles of their titles, just as the Queen has been *corrupted* by Lord Cecil and *robbed* the Earl of Essex of *his* title of vice-regent. (*He sighs, heavily.*) That is why we want to honour the Earl. By staging a performance of "*Richard the Second*" in front of an audience of veterans -

SHAKESPEARE (interrupting, nervously):

"Veterans", my Lord?

SOUTHAMPTON:

Yes, of the Irish war. By staging it in front of an audience of veterans who *served* under Essex, along with *other* followers of the Earl, we will *stir* them all to petition the Queen.

SHAKESPEARE (fearfully):

To do what, my Lord?

SOUTHAMPTON:

To release him from house arrest, restore his title of vice-regent and reinstate him as heir to the throne.

SHAKESPEARE looks astonished.

SHAKESPEARE:

I fear you overestimate the importance of the theatre, my Lord: it can only *represent*, or *recreate*, history, not *alter* it.

SOUTHAMPTON (firmly):

I want you to do this, Will. I *need* you to do it.

SHAKESPEARE (looking pained):

I am not sure I can, my Lord. I am eager to help you, and my Lord Essex, but if I stage "*Richard the Second*", complete with deposition scene, I may find myself stretched out upon the *rack*.

SOUTHAMPTON:

And if you do *not* stage it, you may find yourself stretched out in the *gutter*!

SHAKESPEARE looks stunned.

SHAKESPEARE:

My Lord?

SOUTHAMPTON:

Do you forget the debt you owe me, Will?

SHAKESPEARE looks embarrassed, even ashamed.

SHAKESPEARE:

No, my Lord. (*Pause.*) I could *never* forget.

SOUTHAMPTON:

I am glad to hear it. After all, it is *quite* a debt.

SHAKESPEARE:

I know, my Lord.

SOUTHAMPTON:

Seven years ago, when you were struggling to make a living in plague-ridden playhouses, *I* gave you shelter. *I* gave you a commission then, to write your "*Sonnets*" -

SHAKESPEARE (interrupting):

It was your *family* who commissioned the "Sonnets", my Lord, in *your* honour.

SOUTHAMPTON (angrily):

Don't quibble, Will! Even if my family paid for the "Sonnets", I myself gave you the money to help you build your *theatre*!

He looks around The Globe again, then back at SHAKESPEARE.

SOUTHAMPTON:

The Globe is a fine theatre, Will - the finest in England - and *I* paid for it.

SHAKESPEARE:

Only in part, Sir. I *earned* the rest and the other players invested money too.

SOUTHAMPTON (angrily):

In *full*, Will! (*Pause.*) If I hadn't helped you when you were at your lowest ebb - if I hadn't been your *patron*! - you'd be back in Stratford on Avon now making *gloves* for a living!

SHAKESPEARE looks humbled, even humiliated.

SOUTHAMPTON (lowering his voice):

The money I gave you, Will, was a gift - a *favour* - and now I simply want you to *repay* the favour.

SHAKESPEARE looks frightened.

SHAKESPEARE:

And if I do not, or cannot?

For a moment, SOUTHAMPTON looks surprised.

SOUTHAMPTON:

Then I will have to *demand* repayment of the money I have given you, in full, with interest - *immediately!*

SHAKESPEARE looks mortified.

SHAKESPEARE:

I cannot pay you back that amount, Sir, not immediately and especially if you demand interest. You know I can't.

SOUTHAMPTON:

Then do as I ask, Will. *Please?* For *both* our sakes!

SHAKESPEARE again looks around The Globe, obviously trying to buy himself some time while wondering what to do.

SHAKESPEARE (quietly):

I would have to persuade my business partners.

SOUTHAMPTON:

Your "business partners"?

SHAKESPEARE (nodding):

Yes, the co-owners of The Globe: Mister Hemings and Mister Condell, the company managers; and of course Mister Burbage, our leading man. Then, if I can persuade *them*, I would have to persuade the men - the *players* - themselves.

SOUTHAMPTON smiles, confidently.

SOUTHAMPTON:

I have no doubt you can do it, Will. You could persuade the lamb to lie down with the lion!

SOUTHAMPTON laughs, but SHAKESPEARE looks very grave.

SHAKESPEARE:

We'll need paying. I mean, the men will need paying.

SOUTHAMPTON (nodding):

Of course. That goes without saying. In fact, I will pay *handsomely!*

SHAKESPEARE takes a deep breath.

SHAKESPEARE:

Then I will do my best to arrange it.

SOUTHAMPTON stares at him, seemingly overcome with emotion.

SOUTHAMPTON:

Thank you, Will, thank you. *(Pause.)* I thank you, my noble Lord *Essex* thanks you and in time *England* will thank you!

SHAKESPEARE:

It will be thanks enough, my Lord, if you discharge me - once and for all, in a document to be signed and notarised by a lawyer - of my "debt" to you.

SOUTHAMPTON (nodding):

I will do it. Happily!

Smiling broadly, he looks around The Globe once more.

SOUTHAMPTON:

God, I love the theatre! As you yourself said: "All the world's a stage!"

SHAKESPEARE says nothing, but simply stares out from the stage.

13. INT. BACKSTAGE OFFICE, THE GLOBE THEATRE. DAY.

SHAKESPEARE is sitting back down at his desk and BURBAGE, HEMINGS and CONDELL are all standing in front of him, staring at him in amazement.

BURBAGE:

Did Southampton leave his *mind* in Ireland? We *can't* perform "Richard". If the Queen or any member of the Privy Council, especially Lord Cecil, finds out, we'll be killed. Or worse - sent to the Tower!

SHAKESPEARE:

I know. I told him that. But he didn't care.

He looks at them all in desperation.

SHAKESPEARE:

He *demands* that I do as he asks.

HEMINGS, CONDELL and BURBAGE all look horrified.

CONDELL:

Perhaps we - the rest of the company (*He looks at BURBAGE and HEMINGS*) - could find the money to repay him.

BURBAGE (nodding):

Yes. We could *all* help you to repay him.

HEMINGS nods in agreement, but SHAKESPEARE shakes his head.

SHAKESPEARE:

No. It is typically kind of you all to offer, but no player, or even an entire *company* of players, could find such a large sum at such short notice, let alone the interest that has accrued on it.

BURBAGE:

But *this* - (*He stares at SHAKESPEARE.*) *This* is pulling the dragon's tail! You risk *everything*!

SHAKESPEARE:

I know, but I have no choice. (*Once again, he takes a deep breath.*) I owe him and I have to repay him. And *this* is the only way I can do it.

HEMINGS:

Then I'll do it too.

SHAKESPEARE looks at HEMINGS in surprise.

SHAKESPEARE:

What? *Why*?

HEMINGS:

For one thing, you can't play all the parts yourself.

SHAKESPEARE smiles.

HEMINGS:

For another thing, I don't much fancy having Southampton as a business partner or the company's playwright.

SHAKESPEARE smiles, ruefully.

HEMINGS:

And for a third thing, I owe you.

SHAKESPEARE looks puzzled.

SHAKESPEARE:

You don't owe me anything, John.

HEMINGS:

Yes I do. Without you, Will, I would still be a *part-time* actor and grocer, rather than a *part-owner* of the greatest theatre company in England - nay, the *world!*

He stares at SHAKESPEARE.

HEMINGS:

I owe you *everything*, Will - my career, my fortune, *everything!* (*He looks at BURBAGE and CONDELL.*) We *all* do.

BURBAGE sighs heavily, then nods in agreement.

BURBAGE:

That's right, Will. Without you, I would never have been Richard the Third, or Henry the Fifth, or Falstaff.

CONDELL:

And I would still be a fishmonger, stinking of fish.

SHAKESPEARE laughs.

HEMINGS:

We all owe you, Will, for making us what we are today.

He looks round at BURBAGE and CONDELL.

HEMINGS:

That's why we'll help you to discharge your debt to Southampton, once and for all, so you can finally rid yourself of him.

SHAKESPEARE looks at them all warmly and smiles.

SHAKESPEARE:

Thank you - *all* of you.

HEMINGS:

However, there are a couple of conditions.

SHAKESPEARE:

Such as?

HEMINGS:

The production will only be for Essex's supporters - his "veterans" - and *not* the general public.

SHAKESPEARE:

Good. That will make it easier to keep it quiet.

HEMINGS:

And if any of the Queen's men should appear, we will stop performing *immediately*, or at least *drop* the deposition scene.

SHAKESPEARE:

That makes sense. *(Pause.)* Now we just have to persuade the men.

HEMINGS:

"The men"? We're not going to tell *them*.

SHAKESPEARE:

What? Why not?

HEMINGS:

Because it would only increase the chances of word getting out. No, we'll just tell them that it's a special production for a special audience and that's it.

SHAKESPEARE:

But they know the play is banned.

HEMINGS:

So? We'll just tell them that we've received special dispensation to perform it this one time. They won't know otherwise. *(Pause.)* No, we'll just keep the truth to ourselves and hope we can get away with it.

They all look round at each other nervously.

14. INT. THE WINGS OF THE GLOBE THEATRE. DAY.

SHAKESPEARE and HEMINGS, in make-up and costume as John of Gaunt and The Duke of York, peer out from the wings.

THEIR POINT OF VIEW: The Globe (or at least the Groundlings' area in front of the stage) is filling up with an AUDIENCE that is exclusively male and mostly made up of battle-scarred WAR VETERANS.

HEMINGS:

My God! There's a whole army out there!

SHAKESPEARE:

Literally!

HEMINGS looks shocked, but SHAKESPEARE does not notice as he watches SOUTHAMPTON take his seat above the Groundlings' area: he is flanked by TWO GUARDS and as he sits down he acknowledges SOME AUDIENCE MEMBERS standing directly below him.

SHAKESPEARE:

Southampton has obviously recognised some old friends.

HEMINGS (scornfully):

They're not "friends": they're just men who fought under him and Essex in Ireland. They serve him - just as we do!

SHAKESPEARE looks shocked, but HEMINGS looks away. Then a trumpet sounds to announce the start of the play.

HEMINGS:

We are summoned.

SHAKESPEARE nods, then he, HEMINGS and THE OTHER ACTORS in the first scene, including BURBAGE, go on to a huge round of applause.

15. INT/EXT. STAGE, THE GLOBE THEATRE. DAY.

SHAKESPEARE, as John of Gaunt, sits in a chair, looking sickly and HEMINGS, as The Duke of York, is listening to him carefully.

SHAKESPEARE (as John of Gaunt):

"This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands,
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this *England*."

SHAKESPEARE pauses and sees ALL THE MEMBERS OF THE AUDIENCE staring up at him intently, including A MAN WITH JUST ONE EYE. He is almost thrown by this sight, but manages to continue.

SHAKESPEARE (as John of Gaunt):

"This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings..."

16. INT. THE WINGS OF THE GLOBE THEATRE. DAY.

SHAKESPEARE, HEMINGS and CONDELL watch as BURBAGE (playing King Richard) and AUGUSTINE PHILIPS (fresh-faced, about 30 and playing the rebel, Bolingbroke) confront each other on stage.

SHAKESPEARE (whispering):

This is it - the deposition scene.

HEMINGS (also whispering):

Pray God it's not the last scene we play!

SHAKESPEARE looks at HEMINGS in horror but HEMINGS looks back out at the stage: SHAKESPEARE also looks back at the stage. As he does so, he sees that SOUTHAMPTON is standing up and willing the actors on - indeed, SOUTHAMPTON mouths the lines as the actors speak them - and looks shocked.

17. INT/EXT. THE STAGE, GLOBE THEATRE. DAY.

BURBAGE removes the crown from his head.

BURBAGE (as King Richard):

"I give this heavy weight from off my head."

18. INT. THE WINGS, GLOBE THEATRE. DAY.

HEMINGS whispers in SHAKESPEARE's ear.

HEMINGS:

The Queen won't give up her throne, if that's what they're hoping!

Once again, SHAKESPEARE looks at him in shock.

19. INT/EXT. THE STAGE, THE GLOBE THEATRE. DAY.

BURBAGE (as Richard) lies in a coffin in the centre of the stage, while PHILIPS (as Bolingbroke) weeps over him.

PHILIPS (as Bolingbroke):

"I'll make a voyage to the Holy Land
To wash this blood off from my guilty hand.
March sadly after."

PHILIPS (as Bolingbroke) leads off his LORDS, who carry the coffin containing BURBAGE (as Richard). The stage empties and for a moment is silent: then there is applause and loud cries.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS (together):

God save our Gracious General!

OTHER AUDIENCE MEMBERS (together, even louder):

God save the Earl of Essex!

Finally, a cry is taken up by THE WHOLE AUDIENCE.

AUDIENCE (AS ONE):

GOD SAVE THE KING!

20. INT. THE WINGS OF THE GLOBE THEATRE. DAY.

SHAKESPEARE and ALL THE OTHER ACTORS watch in disbelief from the wings as THE AUDIENCE continue to applaud, cheer and chant.

SHAKESPEARE (to HEMINGS):

Should we take a bow?

HEMINGS (shaking his head):

No. It's not us they're applauding. It's Essex - and he's not here to take a bow.

Finally, the chants and the cheers begin to die down. SHAKESPEARE and THE OTHER ACTORS again peer out from the wings and see SOUTHAMPTON'S GUARDS standing beside the exit and putting coins in the hands of the VETERANS as they leave.

HEMINGS:

It's the first time I've seen an audience being paid, rather than paying, to attend a play.

CONDELL (nodding):

It explains their enthusiasm.

Suddenly SOUTHAMPTON appears, accompanied by SEVERAL OTHER WELL-DRESSED NOBLES, each one grinning as broadly as he is. SOUTHAMPTON heads straight for SHAKESPEARE and shakes his hand.

SOUTHAMPTON:

Thank you, Will. Thank you.

Then he turns to address ALL THE OTHER ACTORS.

SOUTHAMPTON:

Thank you all! You were wonderful - just wonderful!

SOME OF THE YOUNGER ACTORS, like Philips, look flattered but THE OLDER ONES, like BURBAGE and HEMINGS, do not. SOUTHAMPTON turns back to SHAKESPEARE and takes out a letter from his pocket that is wrapped in a bright red ribbon.

SOUTHAMPTON:

And by way of thanks, Will, here is that letter you sought, signed and notarised by a lawyer, discharging you of *all* debts to me.

SHAKESPEARE takes the letter and stares at it for a moment.

SHAKESPEARE:

Thank you, my Lord.

SOUTHAMPTON:

And here - (A *NOBLE* comes forward with a bag bulging with coins) - is the final payment for the rest of you. I think that you will find it *exceeding* generous! But you have earned every penny.

CONDELL takes the bag, but almost drops it as it is so heavy.

SOUTHAMPTON:

Thank you once again, from myself and my Master. It was *marvellous* - all that we had hoped for!

He smiles at THE OTHER NOBLES, before addressing THE ACTORS.

SOUTHAMPTON:

After such an *exhilarating* performance, we are *emboldened!*

He and THE OTHER NOBLES depart as quickly as they had come: as they leave, HEMINGS leans in towards SHAKESPEARE and whispers.

HEMINGS:

"Emboldened" to do *what*?

SHAKESPEARE looks at him nervously.

21. INT. STUDY. DAY (EARLY MORNING).

A TALL, RED-HAIRED MAN dressed all in white stands by the window, looking out at the River Thames: slowly, he turns to reveal that he is wearing a scabbard with a sword in it. He stares at THE MEN who have assembled in his study: SOUTHAMPTON; THE OTHER NOBLES who had been with SOUTHAMPTON at The Globe; and SEVERAL BATTLE-SCARRED VETERANS who had also been at The Globe.

RED-HAIRED MAN (to SOUTHAMPTON):

How was the performance?

SOUTHAMPTON (smiling):

Magnificent, my lord! It rallied the troops wonderfully!

He beams at the RED-HAIRED MAN - THE EARL OF ESSEX.

SOUTHAMPTON:

Having seen a monarch surrender power on stage, they are ready to see one surrender power for real!

THE OTHERS all laugh, even ESSEX.

ESSEX:

They have seen that there is a precedent for what we do.

SOUTHAMPTON (nodding):

Indeed, my Lord.

ESSEX:

Like Bolingbroke, *our* cause is *just*. That is why we will triumph.

SOUTHAMPTON:

Indubitably!

ESSEX:

It would be treason *not* to act. After all, if *I* do not claim the throne, who will? Scotland? *France?!?*

SOUTHAMPTON:

Even Spain! Where the Armada failed, so-called "diplomacy" may prevail.

ESSEX (angrily):

That cannot happen.

SOUTHAMPTON:

No. It cannot.

Suddenly ESSEX looks at them all questioningly.

ESSEX:

Once we leave this room, there is no going back. The Queen will have me hung, drawn and quartered just for evading "house arrest", let alone "*plotting*" against her, as her so-called "advisers", especially *Cecil*, will no doubt describe it. And the same is true for any man who helps me (*Pause.*) If any of you want to leave - to *abandon* me - go now. Otherwise, you must stay the course. (*No-one moves, so ESSEX smiles.*) Good. Then let us claim what is *ours!*

He goes out and is followed by THE OTHERS: as they leave, they step over THE SOLDIERS who had obviously been keeping ESSEX under "house arrest" but who are now tied up on the floor.

22. EXT. ESSEX'S COURTYARD. DAY (EARLY MORNING).

ESSEX stands on the steps of his house and addresses the 300 or so VETERANS of the Irish war who have assembled in the courtyard.

ESSEX:

Men, thank you for your support - your *loyalty!*

THE VETERANS cheer.

ESSEX:

We will march to Whitehall and the whole city will rise as one to support us.

Once again, THE VETERANS cheer.

ESSEX:

Then we shall have the glory - and the *riches* - that the Queen and Lord Cecil denied us!

This elicits the loudest cheer of all and ESSEX strides down the steps towards THE VETERANS, who continue to applaud him.

23. EXT. LUDGATE (LONDON STREET). DAY (EARLY MORNING).

ESSEX, SOUTHAMPTON and THE OTHER NOBLES, who are all on horseback, lead ESSEX'S VETERANS, who are all on foot. There is no-one else about except for a few EARLY RISERS, including a BAKER carrying freshly baked bread, who stop and stare.

SOUTHAMPTON (calling out to them, triumphantly):

Fear not, good fellows. You will soon be *liberated!*

THE BAKER and THE OTHER EARLY RISERS look shocked - and scared.

24. EXT. LUDGATE. DAY.

A NOBLEMAN is riding down Ludgate, but suddenly stops: he can just see at the other end of the street, ESSEX'S MEN (on horseback and on foot) coming towards him. For a moment he looks amazed, but then he wheels his horse round and quickly rides back in the direction he had come from. He rides up to a guard-post, where about FIFTY SOLDIERS are stretching and yawning in the early morning sun.

NOBLEMAN (calling out):

Quick! We must barricade the street.

THE SOLDIERS all look up at him in surprise.

FIRST SOLDIER:

What?

SECOND SOLDIER:

Why, my Lord?

NOBLEMAN:

Because a group of armed men - a *large* group - is coming this way and they look as if they mean to gain entry to the Palace. (Pause.) We *must* not let them pass.

Finally THE SOLDIERS understand and rush inside the guard-post.

NOBLEMAN:

And for God's sake, send to the Palace for reinforcements!

A *THIRD SOLDIER* immediately runs off towards the Palace, which is just visible in the distance.

As *THE OTHER SOLDIERS* begin carrying out chairs and tables from the guard-post, the *NOBLEMAN* looks back down the street.

25. EXT. LUDGATE. DAY.

ESSEX, SOUTHAMPTON and the *OTHER NOBLES* on horseback smile as they slowly trot down the street. Suddenly they stop smiling and stop riding, forcing *THE MEN* on foot behind them to stop walking. *THEIR POINT OF VIEW*: Directly ahead, a barricade has been erected to block off the street and behind it are the *FIFTY SOLDIERS*, spears raised, and the *NOBLEMAN* on his horse.

NOBLEMAN (calling out):

Halt! I am the Sheriff of London. Who goes there?

Nonchalantly, *ESSEX* rides forward.

ESSEX:

'Tis I, Sheriff - the Earl of Essex.

THE NOBLEMAN - *THE SHERIFF* - looks amazed.

SHERIFF:

My Lord Essex?

He looks at the *MEN* massed behind *ESSEX*.

SHERIFF:

What do you mean by this show of force?

ESSEX (smiling):

I have come to reclaim my title of vice-regent.

He extends a hand towards the SHERIFF.

ESSEX:

Join us.

THE SHERIFF looks even more astonished, then shakes his head.

SHERIFF:

I must order you to lay down your arms, my Lord - *at once!*

ESSEX laughs.

ESSEX:

I will surrender neither my *rights* nor my *claim*.

SHERIFF (angrily):

Then, Sir, you are a *traitor!*

ESSEX looks furious.

ESSEX:

Those are the words of *Cecil* and his *parasites!*

He pulls out his sword, looks round and gives the order.

ESSEX:

CHARGE!

ESSEX leads his MEN as they rush towards the barricade: as they approach it, THE SHERIFF looks round at his SOLDIERS.

SHERIFF:

We must hold them at bay.

THE SOLDIERS nod nervously: a few gulp or swallow. Then ESSEX and THE OTHER NOBLES on horseback smash into the barricade, their horses literally rearing up over it. The SHERIFF rides forward, his sword drawn to confront ESSEX. ESSEX and THE SHERIFF's swords crash together as ESSEX'S MEN try to scramble over the barricade: some are about to succeed when there is suddenly a huge roar from behind the barricade. Everyone, including ESSEX and the SHERIFF, stops fighting and turns round to see where the noise is coming from. THEIR POINT OF VIEW: Hurtling towards the barricade are a HUNDRED MEN on horseback, followed by SEVERAL HUNDRED MEN on foot.

SHERIFF (smiling broadly):

Reinforcements! (Pause.) Thank God - and Lord Cecil!

ESSEX'S MEN, or at least those on foot, see the HORSEMEN approaching and immediately turn round and start running away (SEVERAL OF THEM hobbling on crutches, as they are missing legs). ESSEX watches them go, then looks at SOUTHAMPTON in disbelief.

ESSEX:

Where are they going?

THE SHERIFF calls out to *ESSEX* from behind the barricade.

SHERIFF:

Your veterans, my Lord, are obviously *tired* of fighting!

For a moment, ESSEX looks back at THE SHERIFF in horror. Then he quickly wheels his horse round and rides off after his MEN, followed by SOUTHAMPTON and THE OTHER NOBLES on horseback. THE SHERIFF and HIS TROOPS cheer as the "REINFORCEMENTS" on horseback leap over the barricade to follow ESSEX and his MEN.

26. INT. ESSEX'S STUDY. DAY.

ESSEX, SOUTHAMPTON and THE NOBLES are holed up in Essex's study: they have erected their own "barricade", by blocking the door with furniture, but it is about to be broken down. As they watch, the door begins to splinter and split apart.

ESSEX:

There is nothing left but the Roman way.

THE OTHER NOBLES nod grimly, but SOUTHAMPTON looks terrified.

SOUTHAMPTON:

Kill ourselves? But we will go to hell!

ESSEX:

'Tis better than the Tower!

For a moment, SOUTHAMPTON looks appalled, but then the door is finally broken down and a CAPTAIN enters the room.

CAPTAIN (calling out to his SOLDIERS behind):

Disarm them! The Queen will want them alive!

SEVERAL SOLDIERS enter the room and ONE OF THE NOBLES immediately holds his sword with both hands and stabs himself in the stomach. THE OTHER NOBLES hesitate as they watch him die and SEVERAL SOLDIERS wrestle their swords away and force them to the floor. ESSEX and SOUTHAMPTON withdraw towards the window as SEVERAL OTHER SOLDIERS advance towards them with their swords drawn. As they reach the window, ESSEX points his sword at SOUTHAMPTON.

ESSEX:

We must do it, Henry, before it's too late.

SOUTHAMPTON shakes his head.

SOUTHAMPTON:

No, I cannot. I'll throw myself on the mercy of the Queen!

ESSEX stares at him in disbelief.

ESSEX:

TURNCOAT!

ESSEX thrusts his sword at SOUTHAMPTON, who narrowly evades it. He is about to try again when THREE SOLDIERS grab him from behind, wrestle his sword from his grasp and force him to the ground. As ESSEX continues to struggle, even as he lies on the ground, SOUTHAMPTON lowers his sword, kneels down and begins to weep.

27. INT. BACKSTAGE OFFICE, THE GLOBE THEATRE. NIGHT.

The office is illuminated by candle-light as SHAKESPEARE writes, HEMINGS mends a costume and CONDELL counts money. Then, BURBAGE enters, panting for breath, having obviously just run there, and they all look up at him.

SHAKESPEARE:

Richard! What's wrong?

BURBAGE:

Haven't you heard?

SHAKESPEARE:

Heard what?

BURBAGE:

Essex and Southampton have led a rebellion against the Queen.

SHAKESPEARE:

WHAT?!

HEMINGS:

Oh, my God!

BURBAGE:

The rebellion was an utter failure and both men, along with what remains of their "followers", are in the Tower.

CONDELL (softly):

And we shall soon join them.

BURBAGE, HEMINGS and SHAKESPEARE all look at CONDELL in horror.

28. INT/EXT. THE STAGE, GLOBE THEATRE. DAY.

An exhausted-looking SHAKESPEARE, BURBAGE, HEMINGS AND CONDELL (they have obviously not slept) are standing on the stage. THE OTHER ACTORS from "Richard the Second", including AUGUSTINE PHILIPS, are sitting around them looking petrified. SHAKESPEARE addresses them.

SHAKESPEARE:

That's why we've gathered you here, Men. I know we should have told you before, but we were trying to stop word getting out. And we obviously had no idea that Southampton was planning a rebellion: had we known, we would never have accepted the commission. But it's too late now.

He pauses and looks off-stage, as if looking out into the city.

SHAKESPEARE:

The Queen's men will be here soon. By now, they'll have rounded up all of Essex's "sympathisers" and they will surely come for us next, doubtless having been informed of our performance for the rebels. When they do, what do we say?

HEMINGS laughs grimly and SHAKESPEARE stares at him in disbelief.

SHAKESPEARE:

Pray tell, John, what amuses you?

HEMINGS:

You, Will.

SHAKESPEARE:

Me?

HEMINGS:

Yes, you, Will: the great "Shakespeare"! For the first time I can remember, you are lost for words - lost for *lines*!

SHAKESPEARE nods, solemnly.

SHAKESPEARE:

Aye. 'Tis the first time.

HEMINGS:

I say we tell the truth.

SHAKESPEARE:

"The truth"?

HEMINGS:

Aye, that we - the *company* - (*He looks pointedly at SHAKESPEARE as he says this*) - owed Southampton a debt and only sought to discharge it.

CONDELL:

And is that debt above the debt of *loyalty* we owe the Queen? (*CONDELL looks at HEMINGS and slowly shakes his head.*) I think not.

For a moment, there is silence. Then -

CONDELL:

I say we stick to the money.

SHAKESPEARE:

"The money"?

CONDELL:

Aye. We say that we received a special commission, far in excess of what we would normally earn for a single performance, especially of an old play. (*He smiles, mischievously.*) The authorities all think that players are little better than *whores!* Well, let us *act* like *whores* and say that we did it for the money - and no other reason.

HEMINGS looks at CONDELL admiringly.

HEMINGS:

Good idea, Henry. For once, let's *profit* from their *prejudices!*

CONDELL looks flattered.

ACTOR (VOICE OFF):

Why *not* tell the truth, Will?

EVERYONE looks round, and down, at an actor called BRYANT (aged 25), who sits on the floor but looks up at SHAKESPEARE accusingly.

SHAKESPEARE:

What "truth"?

BRYANT (angrily):

That you *loved* Southampton!

SHAKESPEARE (incredulously):

WHAT?!

BRYANT:

I have read some of the "Sonnets" you wrote in his honour.
I know not if it was as a son or as a lover -

SHAKESPEARE and THE OTHERS look even more amazed.

BRYANT:

- But you loved him and that is why you have led us to our
death!

SHAKESPEARE shakes his head defiantly.

SHAKESPEARE:

I do not "love" Southampton. If I ever *did* "love" him, I
do not love him now. Now I *hate* him, for *deceiving* me!

BRYANT (sceptically):

You must have known what he was planning.

SHAKESPEARE (indignantly):

I did not! I knew that he was loyal to Essex - everyone
knew that - but I did *not* know that he was planning to
start a *rebellion* the day after we performed for him! *Had*
I known that, I would *never* have agreed to perform. (*He*
stares down at BRYANT.) He misled me. He used my debt to
him - a debt I *had* to discharge! - to make me do his bidding.

BRYANT scoffs.

BRYANT:

It must have been a considerable debt.

HEMINGS strides across the stage and stands over BRYANT.

HEMINGS:

It was - and we *all* owed it!

BRYANT (firmly):

I owe *no* man.

HEMINGS:

Oh, no? (*He indicates SHAKESPEARE.*) You owe *Will*! Without him, you would still be a tiler, or a carpenter, or whatever *menial* thing you were before you became a *player*, working twice as hard to earn half as much.

CONDELL:

Aye. And without a *whorehouse* next door to spend it in!

THE OTHERS all laugh and BRYANT looks chastened.

HEMINGS (to ALL THE ACTORS):

We *all* owe *Will*: without *his* plays, we would not be players! That is why *his* debt is *our* debt. And that is why we will stick together as a *company* - not just a company of *players*, but a company of *men*!

Suddenly A GROUP OF ARMED SOLDIERS enters the theatre, marches forward and stops in front of the stage. THE ACTORS, who are now all on their feet, stare down at them. The soldiers' CAPTAIN comes to the front, near the stage.

CAPTAIN:

As part of the inquiry into the Earl of Essex's *rebellion*, the Lord Chief Justice orders you to appear before him. (*He looks up at THE ACTORS massed onstage.*) Choose one of your number to speak on your behalf.

ALL THE ACTORS look around at each other as the CAPTAIN turns away and HIS MEN spread out to block the exits.

SHAKESPEARE:

I will do it.

HEMINGS (firmly):

No, Will. You can't.

SHAKESPEARE looks surprised.

SHAKESPEARE:

Why not?

HEMINGS:

Because your long-standing relationship with Southampton will only strengthen the suspicion that we were part of the rebellion.

CONDELL (nodding):

He's right. It's better that you don't mention Southampton at all!

HEMINGS nods in agreement.

HEMINGS:

Someone else should speak for us.

CONDELL:

I suggest Augustine.

EVERYONE looks at PHILIPS, who looks terrified.

PHILIPS:

Me? What? *Why?*

CONDELL (smiling broadly):

Because you are the most *innocent*-looking among us!
(*Pause and even wider smile.*) Indeed, you are the *only*
innocent-looking one among us!

HEMINGS, BURBAGE and SEVERAL OTHERS laugh.

HEMINGS (to PHILIPS):

'Tis true. That is why you always play "the hero"!

PHILIPS:

Bolingbroke is no "hero"! And this is not a *play* - this
is *real*!

CONDELL stares at PHILIPS.

CONDELL:

You are best equipped to play the role of "spokesman",
Augustine.

HEMINGS and BURBAGE (together):

Aye.

PHILIPS still looks frightened, so HEMINGS goes over to him.

HEMINGS:

Don't worry. We'll prepare you.

CONDELL:

Aye. We'll stick to the "money" story.

SHAKESPEARE:

And I will compose a few lines for you to say to the Lord Chief Justice - *(He glances at HEMINGS and CONDELL)* omitting *all* mention of Southampton.

HEMINGS and CONDELL both nod in agreement, then HEMINGS comes over and stands right beside SHAKESPEARE.

HEMINGS (to SHAKESPEARE, quietly):

Compose them *well*. *(Pause.)* You have never written *anything* so important!

SHAKESPEARE suddenly looks very nervous - even scared.

29. INT. COURTROOM. DAY.

A fearful-looking PHILIPS stands before THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE and TWO OTHER JUDGES, all of whom are seated. THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE - a fearsome-looking old man - studies a piece of paper he is holding, then puts it down on the desk.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

This is your statement, Mister Philips? On behalf of *all* your company?

PHILIPS (nodding quickly):

Yes, my Lord.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE (furiously):

Then you are a *liar* as well a traitor!

PHILIPS (shaking his head):

No, my Lord.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

You were part of the conspiracy against Her Majesty, weren't you? *All* of you!

PHILIPS:

No, my Lord. We knew of no conspiracy.

FIRST JUDGE:

Then why perform the play?

SECOND JUDGE:

Yes - especially such an *inflammatory* play?

PHILIPS:

As I said in my statement, my Lord - (*He points at the piece of paper.*) We did it for the money. No other reason.

For a moment, ALL THREE JUDGES look at him accusingly; then, the LORD CHIEF JUSTICE turns and looks round at his colleagues.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

Well, he is a *player*.

FIRST JUDGE:

They are *all* players.

SECOND JUDGE:

And players are little more than *whores*! I can well believe that they would do *anything* for money.

They all laugh and PHILIPS smiles uneasily.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

Alright, Mister Philips. At the moment, there is no other evidence directly linking you and your company to the conspiracy, so for now you are dismissed - *pending* further inquiries.

PHILIPS looks almightily relieved.

PHILIPS:

Thank you, my Lords. Thank you.

He bows, as if on stage. He is about to go out when a MESSENGER enters, carrying a note that he gives to the LORD CHIEF JUSTICE. THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE looks at it, then looks at PHILIPS.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

It is for you, Mister Philips.

PHILIPS turns round, looking absolutely dumbfounded.

PHILIPS:

Me, my Lord?

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE (nodding):

That is what I said.

PHILIPS:

But who is it from?

THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE smiles at PHILIPS.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

The Queen!

For a moment, PHILIPS looks as if he might collapse in shock, but then he steps forward and takes the note.

30. INT/EXT. THE STAGE, GLOBE THEATRE. DAY.

ALL THE ACTORS are on stage, looking at PHILIPS questioningly.

HEMINGS:

Well?

PHILIPS:

We are *not* suspected of being part of the conspiracy.

THE ACTORS all sigh with relief - ONE OR TWO even cheer.

SHAKESPEARE:

You must have been a convincing witness, Augustine.

PHILIPS:

'Twas not me that convinced them, Will. 'Twas your "testimony".

SHAKESPEARE smiles, looking a little pleased with himself.

CONDELL:

So they were persuaded by the "money" story?

PHILIPS:

Aye. As you thought they would be.

CONDELL (smiling):

Good.

CONDELL also looks pleased with himself and HEMINGS laughs.

HEMINGS:

Thank God we players are of such low repute! They would never have believed us otherwise.

Now EVERYONE laughs, except PHILIPS, which SHAKESPEARE notices.

SHAKESPEARE:

What is it, Augustine? Why do you look so anxious?

PHILIPS takes out the note he had received in the courtroom.

PHILIPS:

Because we have received another commission.

SHAKESPEARE:

What? From who?

PHILIPS (solemnly):

The Queen.

SHAKESPEARE and ALL THE OTHER ACTORS look at him in amazement. PHILIPS hands SHAKESPEARE the note and SHAKESPEARE quickly unfurls it as THE OTHERS crowd round, also trying to read it.

HEMINGS:

What is it, Will? What does it say?

SHAKESPEARE:

It says Her Majesty desires that we perform for her.

For a moment, they are all speechless.

HEMINGS:

When?

SHAKESPEARE checks the note again.

SHAKESPEARE:

Tomorrow evening. (Pause.) The night before Essex's execution.

HEMINGS:

WHAT?!

CONDELL (nervously):

Which play?

SHAKESPEARE:

"Richard the Second" - complete with deposition scene.

Once again, for a moment there is total, stunned silence.

HEMINGS:

I don't understand. Having *banned* it, why does the Queen want us to perform *Richard* for her?

SHAKESPEARE:

Because she wants *revenge!*

HEMINGS:

"Revenge"?

SHAKESPEARE:

Aye. We will perform for her, as we performed for the conspirators, and then we will be *killed* - just like the conspirators.

SHAKESPEARE and ALL THE ACTORS look horrified.

31. INT. BACKSTAGE AT COURT. NIGHT.

SHAKESPEARE, HEMINGS and CONDELL, made up and in costume for their roles in "Richard", peer out from the "wings" (in reality, the side of a raised platform serving as a "stage"). THEIR POINT OF VIEW: Sitting in a high-backed chair in the great hall that is being used for the performance is the QUEEN - ELIZABETH I. She is surrounded by OFFICIALS, including a thin, bearded, cruel-looking man.

HEMINGS (quietly):

They're all out there - even Lord Cecil himself!

The cruel-looking man - LORD CECIL - turns and looks directly at them, so they quickly duck back into the wings. Then SHAKESPEARE looks at HEMINGS and CONDELL - and looks terrified.

SHAKESPEARE:

We should have fled!

HEMINGS:

Where to? The Queen has spies all over England - all over Europe! She would find us wherever we went.

CONDELL:

Besides, if we ran away it would only *confirm* their suspicions.

HEMINGS and CONDELL both look at SHAKESPEARE.

HEMINGS:

We must go on.

CONDELL nods and finally SHAKESPEARE nods too. Then they all turn to face THE OTHER PLAYERS, including BURBAGE as Richard and PHILIPS as Bolingbroke, who are all standing behind them: they are also all made up and in costume, and they stare back.

SHAKESPEARE (addressing them all):

Gentlemen, I want to *thank* you - and *apologise* to you.

HEMINGS:

What for, Will? You owe us no apology.

CONDELL:

Nor explanation.

SHAKESPEARE:

I do. Unwittingly, perhaps *carelessly*, I have led us all to this point and if my *fears* are proved correct, then -

HEMINGS (interrupting):

Quiet, Will!

SHAKESPEARE (surprised):

What?

HEMINGS:

For once, you *must* be quiet.

CONDELL:

Aye. Say nothing!

They all laugh, except SHAKESPEARE, who looks confused.

SHAKESPEARE:

Why?

HEMINGS:

For one thing, we are about to go on stage and must concentrate our minds. For another, you owe us nothing - and certainly not an *apology*!

SHAKESPEARE (emphatically):

I do!

HEMINGS (equally emphatically):

No! 'Tis we who owe you - our careers, our *lives*.

CONDELL:

If we lose them now, well, at least we *have* something to lose. Before we had *nothing*!

HEMINGS:

That's right. Without you, Will, we'd all still be tiling walls, or thatching roofs, or selling *fruit* -

CONDELL:

Or *fish*.

HEMINGS:

While *waiting* for a chance to act! Instead, here we are -

He looks out at the great hall briefly before turning back round.

HEMINGS:

- About to perform for the Queen of England herself!
(Pause.) That's something a mere grocer -

CONDELL:

Or *fishmonger!*

HEMINGS:

- Could only *dream* of!

He smiles at SHAKESPEARE and SHAKESPEARE smiles back.

HEMINGS:

Take your positions, Men.

ALL THE ACTORS immediately stand to attention.

HEMINGS:

Tonight's performance is a very special one. It may even
be our *last* performance together.

SOME ACTORS, especially THE YOUNGER ONES, look tearful.

HEMINGS:

So let us make it a memorable one -

SHAKESPEARE (interrupting him):

- One fit for a *Queen!*

EVERYONE laughs, and HEMINGS smiles at SHAKESPEARE.

HEMINGS:

You always have to have the last word, don't you?

SHAKESPEARE laughs.

SHAKESPEARE:

Tonight I do.

A trumpet sounds for the start of the performance and THE ACTORS who are not in the first scene take a step back, leaving those who are - including SHAKESPEARE, HEMINGS and BURBAGE - standing in the wings, looking frightened. Then, as one, they walk onstage.

32. INT. THE "STAGE", COURT. NIGHT.

THE ACTORS stand on the "stage" and look out at the audience and THE COURT, with THE QUEEN at its centre, looks back at them. For a moment, THE ACTORS all seem to be frozen with fear, but then BURBAGE - the consummate professional - begins to speak.

BURBAGE (as King Richard):

"Old John of Gaunt, time-honoured Lancaster,

Hast thou according to thy oath and bond

Brought hither Henry Hereford, thy bold son..."

As BURBAGE continues to speak, SHAKESPEARE stares at THE QUEEN. She is old, perhaps even close to death, with an incredibly wrinkled face, but she is wearing so much make-up - even more than THE ACTORS themselves - that the effect is quite incongruous, like the presence of lipstick on a corpse. He is still staring at her when he becomes aware that THE OTHER ACTORS, including BURBAGE, are staring at him: for a moment he is puzzled, then realises why. Finally, remembering his line, he speaks.

SHAKESPEARE (as John of Gaunt):

"I have, my liege."

HEMINGS looks at him and mouths the word, "Concentrate": SHAKESPEARE nods in acknowledgement and BURBAGE resumes.

BURBAGE:

"Tell me moreover..."

33. INT. "THE STAGE", COURT. NIGHT.

BURBAGE (as Richard) is centre-stage, surrounded by COURTIERS.

BURBAGE (as King Richard):

"For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground,
And tell sad stories of the death of kings -
How some have been deposed, some slain in war,
Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed,
Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping killed - "

34. INT. "THE WINGS", THE COURT. NIGHT.

SHAKESPEARE is continuing to watch the QUEEN, who is staring at BURBAGE: as he says the next line, "All murdered", she nods and mouths the words with him, so they seem to come out of her mouth. SHAKESPEARE is so surprised that he almost falls forward onto the stage in shock, but just manages to steady himself in time.

35. INT. "THE STAGE", THE COURT. NIGHT.

It is the deposition scene and PHILIPS (as Bolingbroke) holds the crown and sceptre that BURBAGE (as Richard) has given him.

BURBAGE (as King Richard):

"What more remains?"

36. INT. "THE WINGS", THE COURT. NIGHT.

HEMINGS whispers in SHAKESPEARE's ear.

HEMINGS:

Indeed! "What more remains" of us, once the play ends?

SHAKESPEARE looks round at him fearfully.

37. INT. "THE STAGE", THE COURT. THE NIGHT.

BURBAGE (as Richard) is in the coffin in the centre of the stage.

PHILIPS (as Bolingbroke):

"I'll make a voyage to the Holy Land

To wash this blood off from my guilty hand.

March sadly after."

PHILIPS (as Bolingbroke) leads off his "LORDS", who carry the coffin containing BURBAGE (as Richard).

38. INT. "THE WINGS", THE COURT. NIGHT.

As soon as BURBAGE is carried into the wings, he leaps out of the coffin and looks at SHAKESPEARE eagerly.

BURBAGE:

Well...?

SHAKESPEARE (confused):

"Well" what?

BURBAGE looks at him in shock, then looks out at THE QUEEN.

BURBAGE:

Did she *like* it?

SHAKESPEARE looks at him in disgust.

SHAKESPEARE:

Honestly, Richard: you and your *vanity!* How could that possibly matter now?

BURBAGE (as if explaining to an idiot):

Because if she *liked* it, she may not *kill* us - *that's* why!

SHAKESPEARE looks unconvinced by this argument and turns round. He sees that THE QUEEN is sitting in her chair, not moving. Her OFFICIALS, including LORD CECIL, are all staring at her, obviously waiting to follow her lead. Then, slowly, as if it was an effort almost beyond her, she lifts her spindly, wrinkled arms and begins to clap. It is quiet, almost tentative, but it is undeniably applause. Seeing - and hearing - this, THE REST OF THE COURT follow suit and begin to applaud, much more loudly.

SHAKESPEARE:

She *liked* it!

BURBAGE:

And because *she* likes it, everyone else has to, as well!

SHAKESPEARE:

Even Lord Cecil.

SHAKESPEARE and BURBAGE laugh.

HEMINGS:

For God's sake, don't keep her waiting! Get back on stage for your bow.

SHAKESPEARE and BURBAGE exchange a final, startled look, then quickly join THE OTHER ACTORS as they go back onstage.

39. INT. "THE STAGE", THE COURT. NIGHT.

ALL THE ACTORS, with SHAKESPEARE and BURBAGE centre-stage, bow deeply as the applause continues and as they do so, they continue to exchange looks of surprise. Suddenly THE QUEEN stops applauding and so - instantaneously - does THE REST OF THE COURT. THE ACTORS, along with THE OFFICIALS, all stare at her: they are all obviously wondering what she will say, or do, next. There is an agonisingly long pause, then she opens her mouth. When she speaks, it is with a quiet, almost inaudible voice: if everyone else were not silent, it would be impossible to hear her.

QUEEN:

Master Shakespeare...

With a skeletal finger, she points at SHAKESPEARE. For a moment, SHAKESPEARE looks stunned, but then - silently urged on by THE OTHER ACTORS - he finds his voice.

SHAKESPEARE:

Yes, your Majesty?

QUEEN:

Come here.

With her skeletal finger, she beckons him forward. SHAKESPEARE looks around nervously at THE OTHER ACTORS, especially HEMINGS, but again they all silently urge him on. He moves forward, slowly, then steps down off the "stage". He walks towards THE QUEEN, until he is right in front of her and then kneels down.

SHAKESPEARE:

Your Majesty.

QUEEN (even more quietly):

Closer.

Looking even more surprised, SHAKESPEARE stands up and moves towards her, until he is literally standing right beside her. Again, she beckons him to come closer. He leans down towards her, his ear by her mouth: when she speaks, he alone hears her.

QUEEN:

Fortunately for you, Master Shakespeare, I am a great admirer of your work.

SHAKESPEARE replies with a whisper as he is so close to her.

SHAKESPEARE:

Thank you, your Majesty. You are too kind.

She looks up at him pointedly.

QUEEN:

I know!

SHAKESPEARE is almost taken aback, then quickly regains his composure and leans in even closer to listen to her.

QUEEN:

I enjoyed the play, but you will never perform it again with the deposition scene while I am alive. Do you understand?

SHAKESPEARE goes to nod, but stops: his head is so close to THE QUEEN's that if he nods he will bump her head with his, so instead he just replies, quietly.

SHAKESPEARE:

Yes, your Majesty. Of course.

QUEEN:

Good. And one final thing...

He leans in even closer, so that he is almost touching her, and she looks up at him again - directly into his eyes.

QUEEN:

I am Richard the Second. Know ye not that?

SHAKESPEARE looks absolutely astonished. Then, slowly, so as to avoid touching her head, he shakes his head.

SHAKESPEARE:

No, your Majesty. I did not know.

She nods, slightly.

QUEEN:

Well, I am. Essex merely *thought* he was Bolingbroke, the rebel who could steal a crown, but I *am* Richard.

She slumps back in her chair and flicks a finger to dismiss SHAKESPEARE. Instantly, he begins withdrawing, bowing as he goes.

SHAKESPEARE:

Thank you, your Majesty. Thank you.

He continues bowing all the way back to the stage. Then he bumps into the stage, before carefully climbing backwards onto it, all the while looking at THE QUEEN and bowing. Once on the stage, and while still bowing, he begins moving slowly toward the wings, followed by ALL THE OTHER ACTORS.

40. INT. "BACKSTAGE", THE COURT. NIGHT.

As they come off stage, HEMINGS, BURBAGE and THE OTHER ACTORS all look at SHAKESPEARE questioningly.

HEMINGS:

What did she say?

SHAKESPEARE stops walking and stares at him.

SHAKESPEARE:

She said she enjoyed the play.

HEMINGS:

Good.

SHAKESPEARE:

But we are *not* to perform it again with the deposition scene while she is alive.

HEMINGS:

That's only to be expected.

SHAKESPEARE:

Then she said, "I am Richard the Second. Know ye not that?"

HEMINGS:

WHAT?!

HE and ALL THE OTHER ACTORS look at SHAKESPEARE questioningly.

HEMINGS:

What did she *mean*?

SHAKESPEARE (shaking his head):

I don't know. And I certainly wasn't going to *ask!* (*He stares at them all.*) Now I suggest that we all "exit" *immediately*, before she changes her mind and has us *killed!*

HEMINGS:

Agreed!

ALL THE PLAYERS quickly begin changing out of their costumes.

41. EXT. PALACE GROUNDS. NIGHT.

SHAKESPEARE, HEMINGS, CONDELL, BURBAGE and ALL THE OTHER PLAYERS leave the Palace through a side door and enter the grounds smiling and laughing - they are obviously delirious with relief.

SHAKESPEARE:

The night air ne'er smelled so sweet!

HEMINGS:

Indeed.

SHAKESPEARE:

Even *I* cannot find words to describe it!

Then, suddenly they all stop laughing and stop walking. THEIR POINT OF VIEW: Straight ahead, a gallows is being erected by several WORKMEN, and ALL THE PLAYERS stare at it.

HEMINGS:

That must be for Essex.

SHAKESPEARE:

Aye. And Southampton.

They all continue to stare at the gallows.

HEMINGS:

But why here? Why not the Tower?

SHAKESPEARE (ruefully):

Obviously, this is another "show" the Queen wants to see for herself.

As they watch, a rope is slung over the top of the gallows. They watch it being tightened, before they walk on silently.

42. EXT. OUTSIDE THE PALACE GATES. NIGHT.

THE PLAYERS, led by SHAKESPEARE and BURBAGE, walk away from the Palace, watched suspiciously by THE GUARDS standing at the gates. For a few moments, they walk in complete silence. Then BURBAGE turns his head and looks at SHAKESPEARE.

BURBAGE:

You know, Will, *this* would be fitting subject matter for a play.

SHAKESPEARE looks at him questioningly.

SHAKESPEARE:

What would?

BURBAGE:

This - this night, this whole story!

SHAKESPEARE stops walking (forcing EVERYONE behind him to stop) and stares at BURBAGE, prompting him to stop walking, too. Then HEMINGS looks at BURBAGE and shakes his head.

HEMINGS:

Not in our lifetime.

CONDELL:

And certainly not in the *Queen's!*

BURBAGE considers this for a moment, then nods in agreement.

BURBAGE:

True, but it *is* a great story. It has *everything*: treason, rebellion and, most importantly, *majesty*!

They all consider this for a moment, then nod in agreement. SHAKESPEARE looks at BURBAGE, then looks back at the Palace.

SHAKESPEARE:

'Tis a plot more fanciful than any I wrote.

For a moment, ALL THE PLAYERS stare at SHAKESPEARE, but then he walks on and they follow, heading away from the Palace.

*Fade to: **BLACK.***

A caption appears: "QUEEN ELIZABETH DIED IN 1603 AND WAS SUCCEEDED BY HER DISTANT COUSIN, KING JAMES THE SIXTH OF SCOTLAND, WHO BECAME KING JAMES THE FIRST OF ENGLAND."

It is replaced by another caption: "KING JAMES WAS SUCH AN ADMIRER OF SHAKESPEARE THAT HE BECAME THE PATRON OF THE COMPANY, FINALLY GIVING THEM A DEGREE OF FINANCIAL SECURITY."

That is replaced by another caption: "OVER THE NEXT TEN YEARS, WHILE HE WAS A MEMBER OF 'THE KING'S MEN', SHAKESPEARE WROTE MANY OF HIS GREATEST PLAYS, INCLUDING THE FOUR GREAT TRAGEDIES - 'HAMLET', 'KING LEAR', 'MACBETH' AND 'OTHELLO' - ALL OF WHICH FEATURE A PLOT AGAINST A MONARCH OR ANOTHER LEADER."

This is replaced by another caption: "PART III (TRAGEDY) - 1616".

This caption fades and a final one appears - "JANUARY" - accompanied by the sound of a quill scraping on paper.

Fade up to:

43. INT. STUDY, SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE, STRATFORD ON AVON. DAY.

SHAKESPEARE, now 51 and almost completely bald, stands in the middle of his study dictating his will to his lawyer, FRANCIS COLLINS, a small, bespectacled man, who is also in his 50s and sitting at a desk.

SHAKESPEARE:

...And finally, I give to my fellows Richard Burbage, John Hemings and Henry Condell twenty-six shillings and eight pence apiece to buy them mourning rings.

COLLINS writes this down, then puts down his quill and looks up.

COLLINS:

May I inquire, Mr Shakespeare, who Mr Hemings and Mr Condell are? I am familiar with the other beneficiaries of your will - including, of course, Mr Burbage, the greatest actor of our age! - but I am not familiar with them.

SHAKESPEARE (smiling):

They are the finest of men: the finest of friends! They were with me from the beginning: they were with me to the end. In fact, when The Globe burned down three years ago, it was John and Henry, along with Richard, who bought my share in the company, allowing me to return to Stratford. Consequently I wish to remember them.

COLLINS (nodding):

Indeed. Rightly so.

COLLINS looks the will over and appears satisfied.

COLLINS:

That is everything. As instructed, I shall retain a copy of the will in our office in Warwick and you can write to me at any point to alter it.

SHAKESPEARE (nodding):

Very good.

COLLINS puts the will in a slim leather bag.

COLLINS:

May I ask another question?

SHAKESPEARE:

Of course.

COLLINS:

Why are you making a will now? *(He peers at SHAKESPEARE.)*
I hope you are not unwell.

SHAKESPEARE (smiling):

No, Mr Collins - I am very well! Very well indeed.

COLLINS:

Then why make a will? *(Pause.)* It is usually only the dying who make one.

SHAKESPEARE (smiling):

My youngest daughter is getting married next month and I want to put everything in place to provide her with a suitable dowry - *and* inheritance.

COLLINS (also smiling):

Ah, I see. In that case, congratulations are in order.

SHAKESPEARE:

Thank you. It promises to be a *joyous* union!

COLLINS:

I trust the groom is a young man of good standing.

SHAKESPEARE (nodding):

Indeed. In fact, he is the son of an old friend.

COLLINS:

Excellent. Then I wish you every felicitation.

SHAKESPEARE:

Thank you.

COLLINS picks up his bag, stands up and goes towards the door.

COLLINS:

Good day, Mister Shakespeare.

SHAKESPEARE:

Good day to *you*, Mister Collins.

SHAKESPEARE watches him go out, then smiles broadly.

SHAKESPEARE (quietly, to himself):

That's *one* thing done.

*Fade to: **BLACK.***

*A caption appears - "**FEBRUARY**" - accompanied by the sound of joyous laughter.*

Fade up to:

44. INT. DINING ROOM, SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE, STRATFORD. DAY.

SHAKESPEARE, wearing his finest, most expensive clothes, is sitting at the head of the dining table for the wedding feast. The bride and groom - JUDITH (a rather plain-looking woman of about 30 who is wearing a beautiful white dress) and THOMAS (a handsome man of about 27) - are sitting on either side of him. His eldest daughter, SUSANNA (who is 32), her husband, JOHN HALL (who is 40 and all in black, including puritanical skull-cap) and their daughter, ELIZABETH (who is nine), sit in the middle of the table, next to HEMINGS and CONDELL (now 58 and 36 respectively), who - like everyone else - are in their finery. At the other end of the table is the Groom's father, RICHARD QUINEY, a handsome man in his early fifties, with his own wife, MRS QUINEY, and Shakespeare's wife, ANNE (a rather plain-looking woman of about 60), sitting on either side of him. HEMINGS and CONDELL look at SHAKESPEARE and begin to chant.

HEMINGS AND CONDELL (together):

SPEECH! SPEECH!

SHAKESPEARE (smiling):

Alright, you rowdy lot - it's coming!

HEMINGS:

It had better be good. After all, you do have a *reputation* to live up to!

Everyone laughs and SHAKESPEARE stands up: he waits for the laughter to subside before starting to speak.

SHAKESPEARE:

I simply want to thank you all for coming today, especially those of you, like John and Henry - *(He smiles at HEMINGS and CONDELL and they smile back)* who have come from afar!

HEMINGS:

It was our pleasure.

CONDELL (nodding):

Indeed.

HEMINGS:

Even if the journey nearly *killed* us!

Everyone laughs, but HEMINGS shakes his head.

HEMINGS:

Three days on the *worst*, most *rutted* roads in England.

CONDELL (to SHAKESPEARE):

It was *too* far for Burbage. He's *too* ill to travel.

SHAKESPEARE (nodding):

I know. He said so in his letter.

HEMINGS looks up at SHAKESPEARE and smiles broadly.

HEMINGS:

No wonder you stayed in London all those years, Will. It would be easier to travel to the *West Indies* than it is to *Warwickshire*!

EVERYONE laughs - except ANNE, who does not look amused. SHAKESPEARE turns to address THE GROOM.

SHAKESPEARE:

I also want to thank Thomas.

THOMAS (looking confused):

Me? What for?

SHAKESPEARE (smiling):

For finally taking Judith off our hands! I thought it would *never* happen.

EVERYONE laughs, except JUDITH, who looks embarrassed.

SHAKESPEARE:

Seriously, Thomas, your father is one of my oldest friends in Stratford and I am *delighted* at the union of our two families.

RICHARD QUINEY (calling out):

We both are!

SHAKESPEARE smiles at RICHARD QUINEY.

SHAKESPEARE:

And finally I want to thank my *own* family: Judith, Susanna and Anne. (*He looks around at each of them in turn.*) They have had *much* to endure over the years, while I was in London.

JUDITH:

You were *working*, Father. We know that - we *always* knew that!

SHAKESPEARE looks at her lovingly.

SHAKESPEARE:

It is kind of you to say so, Judith, but I know that I have missed *much* that has happened in your life. (*He looks at SUSANNA, then ANNE.*) I have missed much that has happened in *all* your lives. (*Suddenly he looks thoughtful, even sad.*) I was away when my children were little; I was away when they grew up; I was even away when my beloved boy Hamnet - Judith's twin - was taken from us by the *plague*. (*He lowers his head.*) God bless his soul.

ANNE begins to cry, gently: for a moment, it looks as if SHAKESPEARE might cry too, but then he continues his speech.

SHAKESPEARE:

But all of that only makes my being here today all the more precious. And so, without further ado, I ask you to raise your glasses to Judith and Thomas - the bride and groom!

The toast is taken up around the table: "THE BRIDE AND GROOM". JUDITH and THOMAS look embarrassed but then kiss, to the sound of applause, cheers and even the banging of fists on the table. SHAKESPEARE sits back down and looks at HEMINGS and CONDELL: they raise their glasses to him, and he raises his to them.

45. INT. THE DINING ROOM, SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

SHAKESPEARE, HEMINGS and CONDELL sit at the dining table, amid the detritus of the wedding feast, smoking clay tobacco pipes.

SHAKESPEARE:

It's been a great day.

HEMINGS (nodding):

Indeed.

SHAKESPEARE:

And not just because I have finally "married off" the last of my daughters.

HEMINGS and CONDELL laugh, but he looks at them very seriously.

SHAKESPEARE:

Today, as I walked Judith to church, I thought of *another* time I had walked down the high street in Stratford with crowds lined up on either side.

HEMINGS and CONDELL both look at him questioningly.

SHAKESPEARE:

It was nearly forty years ago and I was with *my* Father, only that day the crowds were *jeering*, not *cheering*, because my Father, having served on the town council for a *decade* - having been a *magistrate!* - had been stripped of his powers and position.

HEMINGS and CONDELL both look surprised.

SHAKESPEARE:

He had been found guilty of "usury and illegal trading in wool". It was all a *lie*, of course, but he was *paraded* through the town like a *thief!*

Now HEMINGS and CONDELL stare at him in amazement.

HEMINGS:

You never told us this.

SHAKESPEARE:

It's only now I can tell you.

CONDELL:

Why?

SHAKESPEARE:

Because today it was as if that *shame* - that *stain* on the "Shakespeare" family name - was finally expunged.

He stares at HEMINGS and CONDELL.

SHAKESPEARE:

I have dedicated my life to rebuilding my Father's fortune, the fortune that was so cruelly *stolen* from him, but it was only today, when the whole town turned out to watch me lead my daughter to church, that I felt our *reputation* - "the immortal part" of ourselves, as I once wrote - was restored. (*He smiles at them both.*) But that is enough about the past. Now I want to look forward to the *future* and the union of the Shakespeares and the Quineys!

He raises his glass.

SHAKESPEARE:

To the Shakespeares and the Quineys!

HEMINGS and CONDELL raise their glasses, while still looking surprised at what they have just heard.

HEMINGS AND CONDELL (together):

"The Shakespeares and the Quineys!"

They all drain their glasses, drinking deeply.

*Fade to: **BLACK.***

A caption appears - "MARCH" - accompanied by the sound of someone knocking (indeed, hammering) at a door.

Fade up to:

46. INT. DOWNSTAIRS CORRIDOR, SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE. DAY.

SHAKESPEARE, half-asleep, comes downstairs in his nightgown.

SHAKESPEARE (calling out):

Alright! I'm coming! There's no need to wake the dead!

He goes up to the front door and opens it to find JUDITH is in the doorway: her eyes are bloodshot (she's obviously been crying); her hair is tangled (as if she has been tearing at it); and she, too, is in her nightgown, covered by a blanket.

SHAKESPEARE:

Judith! What's wrong? Why are you here?

JUDITH looks up at him - and immediately bursts into tears.

SHAKESPEARE:

Come inside and tell me.

He ushers her inside and closes the door firmly behind her.

SHAKESPEARE:

Now, please tell me what's wrong?

JUDITH:

I'm not sure I can.

SHAKESPEARE (angrily):

Of course you can! That's *why* you came here.

JUDITH looks up at him, then nods her head.

JUDITH:

It's Thomas, Father.

SHAKESPEARE:

"Thomas"? What's wrong with him? *(Pause.)* Is he *ill*?

JUDITH:

No, Father. He's been -

She pauses again, obviously unable to say any more.

SHAKESPEARE (curtly):

Go on - tell me!

JUDITH:

He's been *arrested*!

She starts crying again and SHAKESPEARE looks stunned.

SHAKESPEARE:

"Arrested"? What for?

JUDITH hesitates as she is embarrassed, or even ashamed.

JUDITH:

"Unlawful copulation and abandonment".

SHAKESPEARE looks at her in disbelief.

SHAKESPEARE:

WHAT?!

There is a long pause as he continues to stare at her.

SHAKESPEARE:

Who did he - ? *(He pauses, obviously trying to choose the right word.)* Abandon?

JUDITH:

A woman called Margaret Wheeler.

SHAKESPEARE (blankly):

"Margaret Wheeler"? *(Pause.)* I've never heard of her.

JUDITH:

Neither had I - until the Constables read out her name just now.

SHAKESPEARE is speechless.

JUDITH:

She died in childbirth last week.

SHAKESPEARE almost collapses in shock.

SHAKESPEARE:

WHAT?!

Obviously unable to meet his gaze, JUDITH looks at the floor.

JUDITH:

And the child died too.

SHAKESPEARE puts a hand against the front door for support and stares at JUDITH as she stares at the ground.

SHAKESPEARE:

Where is he?

JUDITH:

At the courthouse - the *church* courthouse.

SHAKESPEARE:

"The *church* courthouse"?

JUDITH (nodding):

Yes. Apparently, because of the nature of the charges against him, he will be tried in an *ecclesiastical* court. (*She comes towards him with a desperate look in her eyes.*) Oh, Father, can you help him?

SHAKESPEARE:

"Help" him? *How?*

JUDITH:

By using your wealth and influence to secure his *release!*

SHAKESPEARE looks shocked.

SHAKESPEARE:

I'm not sure my "wealth and influence", as you put it, extend that far.

JUDITH:

Oh, they do - they do! *(She looks at him almost maniacally.)*
You're the richest and most powerful man in Stratford, Father. If anyone can help Thomas, it's you!

He looks at her in alarm.

JUDITH:

Please help him - if not for his own sake, then for mine!

Once again, she begins to cry.

JUDITH:

I know he didn't do it, Father. *(Pause.)* He'd never do such a thing. *(Pause.)* He's a gentleman!

SHAKESPEARE looks at her questioningly for a moment.

SHAKESPEARE:

I'll see if I can be of any assistance to him.

JUDITH:

Oh, thank you, Father, thank you. *(Pause.)* I knew I could rely on you.

SHAKESPEARE:

You always can, my dear. You always can.

Quickly, he goes upstairs and as he does so he passes ANNE, who is also still in her night-dress, coming downstairs. ANNE looks at him quizzically but he continues up the stairs. Then she looks down and sees JUDITH sitting on the bottom step and weeping, so she hurries downstairs to comfort her.

47. INT. JAIL CELL. DAY.

SHAKESPEARE (now fully dressed) is shown by a JAILER into a tiny cell, where THOMAS, wearing a generic grey prisoner's uniform, is sitting on a filthy bed: in fact, the whole cell is filthy, with excrement smeared on the floor, walls and beds. As the JAILER goes back out into the corridor, locking the cell door behind him, THOMAS rises to greet SHAKESPEARE.

THOMAS:

Thank you for coming.

SHAKESPEARE:

I came as soon as Judith told me.

THOMAS indicates the filthy bed behind SHAKESPEARE.

THOMAS:

Please - have a seat!

SHAKESPEARE looks down at the bed, then shakes his head.

SHAKESPEARE:

No, thank you. I'll stand.

THOMAS remains standing too.

SHAKESPEARE:

I have sent word to my lawyer, Mr Collins, and I am sure he will be here shortly. He will go over *everything* with you: the charges against you; your defence; *everything*. He is an *immensely* capable man and I am sure he can help.

THOMAS (alarmed):

I can't afford a lawyer.

SHAKESPEARE:

Don't worry, Thomas - *I'll* pay. After all, you're a member of the family now.

THOMAS looks simultaneously flattered and embarrassed.

SHAKESPEARE:

However, before Mr Collins arrives, there is something I must ask you.

THOMAS (nodding):

Of course. Anything.

SHAKESPEARE:

Did you do it?

THOMAS sits back down on his bed and stares disconsolately at the ground.

SHAKESPEARE:

I'm not sure you understand the seriousness of the situation you are in, Thomas. I have spoken to the court officials and they told me that the offences you've been charged with are the *most* serious offences that can be tried in a church court. If you are found guilty of them, you could be punished by excommunication -

Now THOMAS looks up at him.

THOMAS (alarmed):

"Excommunication"?

SHAKESPEARE (nodding):

Yes. And flogging!

THOMAS (even more alarmed):

"Flogging"?

SHAKESPEARE (still nodding):

Aye. In public and - if the court deems it appropriate - to within an inch of your life.

THOMAS:

Oh my God!

He looks down again and puts his head in his hands.

SHAKESPEARE:

So, before we go any further, you must tell me the truth. (Pause.) Did you do it?

THOMAS does not reply but continues to stare at the ground.

SHAKESPEARE:

Thomas, if you don't tell me the truth, neither I nor Mister Collins can do *anything* to help you.

Still THOMAS says nothing.

SHAKESPEARE (sympathetically):

I was a young man myself once, so I know the *temptations* that can arise.

THOMAS looks up at him in surprise.

THOMAS:

You do?

SHAKESPEARE (nodding):

Yes, of course. So I ask you again: did you do it? Did you have "carnal relations" with this woman - ?

He takes out a piece of paper from his jacket pocket.

SHAKESPEARE (reading):

"Margaret Wheeler".

THOMAS stares up at him for a moment before finally speaking.

THOMAS:

Yes. I did.

He begins to cry.

SHAKESPEARE:

Given that she died in childbirth, and was apparently near the full term of her pregnancy, it must have happened last summer.

THOMAS (nodding, while still crying):

Yes.

SHAKESPEARE:

When you began courting Judith.

THOMAS begins to sob and his tears fall on the filthy floor.

THOMAS:

Yes.

SHAKESPEARE:

Who was she?

THOMAS:

Just a local girl.

SHAKESPEARE:

"Local"? (*Again, he glances at the piece of paper.*) I don't know the name "Wheeler".

THOMAS:

Well, she's from Arden - the forest.

SHAKESPEARE:

Oh.

THOMAS, his face streaked with tears, looks up at him.

THOMAS:

She was a *WHORE!*

SHAKESPEARE (stunned):

WHAT?!

THOMAS:

She must have been. She used her *wiles* to *lure* me into bed. (*He smiles ruefully.*) I say "bed" - it was actually the forest floor.

He puts his arms out, as if pleading with SHAKESPEARE.

THOMAS:

It only happened once. And I didn't know she was pregnant. I swear it!

For a moment, SHAKESPEARE looks at him questioningly. Then -

SHAKESPEARE:

Alright. I believe you.

THOMAS looks surprised.

THOMAS:

You do?

SHAKESPEARE (nodding):

Yes.

THOMAS smiles.

THOMAS:

Thank you.

As quickly as the smile appeared, it vanishes.

THOMAS:

But what am I going to do? I don't want to be
excommunicated! Or flogged!

*Finally SHAKESPEARE sits down on the filthy bed, while being
careful not to lean back against the even filthier wall.*

SHAKESPEARE:

Just do what Mr Collins tells you to do - and say what he
tells you to say.

THOMAS (nodding):

Right. Of course.

SHAKESPEARE:

And don't worry. I'm sure we can save you from the worst.

THOMAS smiles at him, his eyes full of gratitude.

THOMAS:

Thank you, Will. (Pause.) Thank you, Father!

SHAKESPEARE looks surprised by this, then smiles back at him.

48. INT. SHAKESPEARE'S STUDY. DAY.

SHAKESPEARE is by the window looking out, when there is a knock at the door.

SHAKESPEARE:

Come in.

MR COLLINS enters, carrying his bag, and SHAKESPEARE smiles.

SHAKESPEARE:

Ah, Mr Collins. I'm delighted to see you. Are we all set for court tomorrow?

MR COLLINS:

Yes, I think we can mount a strong defence, especially with you testifying on his behalf.

SHAKESPEARE nods, approvingly.

MR COLLINS:

But there is something I must bring to your attention before the trial.

SHAKESPEARE looks puzzled.

49. INT. COURTROOM. DAY.

THE SHAKESPEARES - WILL, JUDITH, ANNE and JOHN (but obviously not little Elizabeth and her mother, Susanna) - sit next to MR and MRS QUINEY in the public gallery at the back of the court. They are all looking at THOMAS and MR COLLINS, who are sitting together at a desk near the front of the courtroom.

At the side are A MIDDLE-AGED, SHABBY-LOOKING COUPLE: from their bloodshot eyes, it is apparent they are THE WHEELERS, Margaret's parents. SHAKESPEARE stares at them for a moment. Then, THREE "JUDGES" (in reality, PRIESTS) enter, led by an OFFICIAL.

COURT OFFICIAL:

All rise for the court's verdict.

EVERYONE stands as THE PRIESTS sit down at a raised platform: THE OLDEST (AND THEREFORE MOST SENIOR) PRIEST addresses THOMAS.

SENIOR PRIEST:

Thomas Quiney, you are found *guilty* of the charge of having unlawful carnal relations.

THE SHAKESPEARES and QUINEYS look horrified, while THE WHEELERS look absolutely delighted.

SENIOR PRIEST (continuing):

Ordinarily I would impose a severe punishment, one involving *public* penance.

THOMAS bows his head.

SENIOR PRIEST:

However, we have borne in mind your previously *unblemished* reputation, *and* the fact that your father-in-law, Mr Shakespeare, who has been a *true* friend to this town in times of need - such as the recent outbreak of *plague* - testified on your behalf as a character witness.

EVERYONE, including THOMAS, looks round at SHAKESPEARE.

SENIOR PRIEST:

For those reasons, I have *commuted* your sentence to a *fine* of five shillings.

THOMAS, THE SHAKESPEARES and THE QUINEYS (all of them except SHAKESPEARE himself) look amazed, as THE WHEELERS look appalled.

THOMAS:

A fine, your grace?

SENIOR PRIEST:

Yes, which must be paid *immediately!*

MR COLLINS (speaking up):

Your grace, my client's father-in-law, Mr Shakespeare, will pay the fine - *immediately.*

SENIOR PRIEST:

Good. Then the court is dismissed.

He strikes the desk with his gavel and, as quickly as they had arrived, THE PRIESTS leave, followed by THE COURT OFFICIAL.

THOMAS (calling out after them):

Thank you, your graces. Thank you. And God bless you!

THOMAS turns around and is engulfed by FAMILY MEMBERS, both THE SHAKESPEARES and the QUINEYS - all except SHAKESPEARE himself, who hangs back slightly.

THOMAS:

I can't believe I only have to pay a fine - and such a small one! (*He looks at SHAKESPEARE.*) This was *your* doing, wasn't it?

SHAKESPEARE (with a shrug):

Let's just say that in addition to the fine I made a *contribution* towards the court's "running costs".

MR COLLINS, who is putting his papers away in his bag, smiles.

THOMAS:

Thank you.

SHAKESPEARE:

You're welcome.

THOMAS smiles at SHAKESPEARE but SHAKESPEARE does not smile.

THOMAS:

We must celebrate!

SHAKESPEARE:

"Celebrate"? Celebrate what?

THOMAS:

Why, my freedom!

SHAKESPEARE nods, belatedly understanding.

SHAKESPEARE:

Of course. Your freedom.

He glances at MR COLLINS, who is still standing by the desk.

SHAKESPEARE (to THOMAS):

You go ahead. I have to pay your fine and I also have some business to settle with Mr Collins.

THOMAS (nodding):

Of course.

THOMAS looks round at MR COLLINS.

THOMAS:

And thank you too, Mr Collins.

JUDITH (to MR COLLINS):

Yes, thank you.

MR COLLINS:

You are *both* most welcome.

SHAKESPEARE comes forward until he is alongside THOMAS.

SHAKESPEARE:

After you've finished "celebrating", come and see me tomorrow morning.

THOMAS looks surprised.

THOMAS:

What for?

SHAKESPEARE:

We need to discuss the future.

THOMAS nods.

THOMAS:

Of course. I'll come first thing.

THOMAS leads JUDITH and THE REST OF THE SHAKESPEARES and QUINEYS towards the back door. THE WHEELERS, with MRS WHEELER weeping, leave through a side door: SHAKESPEARE watches them go out, then looks at MR COLLINS and shakes his head.

50. INT. SHAKESPEARE'S STUDY. DAY.

SHAKESPEARE is sitting at his desk: he is not reading or writing but simply staring at the door, when there is a knock.

SHAKESPEARE:

Come in.

THOMAS enters, looking dishevelled and sickly (i.e. hungover).

SHAKESPEARE:

Ah, Thomas. Thank you for coming.

THOMAS comes in and slumps in the chair in front of the desk.

SHAKESPEARE:

I trust you had an enjoyable evening.

THOMAS:

Yes. We were at my Father's house. (*Pause and smile.*)
You should have come.

SHAKESPEARE:

As I said yesterday, I had some *business* to attend to with Mr Collins. In fact, that is why I wanted to see you now.

THOMAS:

Oh, yes?

SHAKESPEARE (nodding):

Yes. You see, Mr Collins found out the *truth* about you and Margaret Wheeler.

THOMAS looks surprised.

THOMAS:

I told you the truth.

Slowly, SHAKESPEARE shakes his head.

SHAKESPEARE:

No, you didn't. Mr Collins found out that far from being a "whore", as you described her, Margaret Wheeler was, in fact, the entirely innocent daughter of a woodcutter from Arden. He also found out that, far from *encountering* her only the once, as you said, you *encountered* her several times; that, in fact, you were well known to her and her family; that, in fact, you were as good as *engaged* to her and it was only when she became *pregnant* - a development you *definitely* knew about - that you turned your attention to Judith, a woman with none of Margaret's *innate* natural beauty but an *infinitely* larger dowry.

THOMAS looks as if he might be sick - literally.

THOMAS:

I can explain -

SHAKESPEARE (interrupting):

There's no need to. I know *everything!*

He smiles, ruefully.

SHAKESPEARE:

You should be grateful that the ecclesiastical court and its officials are not as *assiduous* in the gathering of evidence as Mr Collins is. Otherwise, they would have uncovered the truth themselves and I would have been *powerless* to prevent you from being flogged and excommunicated.

THOMAS looks confused.

THOMAS:

Why *did* you prevent me from being flogged and excommunicated? (*He lowers his head.*) It's what I deserve.

SHAKESPEARE (nodding):

It *is* what you deserve, but I couldn't bear the thought of Judith watching her husband - her husband of less than a *month!* - being publicly humiliated! (*Pause.*) Besides, I couldn't bear the thought of watching *another* family member being paraded through the streets.

THOMAS (looking confused):

What?

SHAKESPEARE (abruptly):

No matter. So instead, I have settled on a *private* punishment.

THOMAS (fearfully):

What are you going to do?

SHAKESPEARE:

I know what I would *like* to do. I would *like* to cast you out: to *terminate* your marriage to my daughter and *demand* the repayment of her dowry.

THOMAS looks even more fearful.

SHAKESPEARE:

But I *cannot* do that. You were married in church - in the eyes of *God!* - so, however much I would like to, I cannot "tear you asunder". (*THOMAS looks a little relieved.*) However, I *can* - indeed, I *will* - prevent you from getting your hands on any *more* of my money, or Judith's.

THOMAS (looking appalled):

How?

SHAKESPEARE:

I have altered the terms of my will, to ensure that Judith's inheritance will go to her and her alone; that, in the event of your *abandoning* her as you abandoned Margaret Wheeler, you will not receive a *penny* from my estate; that, in short, you are no longer *legally*, or perhaps I should say *financially*, part of the family.

THOMAS looks horrified.

SHAKESPEARE:

Now, if you will excuse me, there are a number of other people I need to see.

He gets up and goes towards the door: THOMAS watches him go out, then slumps back fully in his seat.

51. INT. HALLWAY, RICHARD QUINEY'S HOUSE. DAY.

There is a loud knocking - indeed, a hammering - at the door. RICHARD QUINEY, who looks even more hungover than Thomas had, goes to answer the door. When he opens it, he sees a furious-looking SHAKESPEARE standing there.

RICHARD QUINEY:

Will? What are you doing here? Come in!

SHAKESPEARE enters and RICHARD QUINEY closes the door behind him.

RICHARD QUINEY:

Please excuse my current state of dishevelment: we were up until late last night celebrating Thomas's release.

SHAKESPEARE:

I know. I've just seen Thomas.

RICHARD QUINEY:

Oh, right.

For a moment, SHAKESPEARE just stares at RICHARD QUINEY, until he obviously starts to feel uneasy.

RICHARD QUINEY:

What is it?

SHAKESPEARE:

You knew, didn't you?

RICHARD QUINEY (confused):

What?

SHAKESPEARE (angrily):

About Thomas's *relationship* with Margaret Wheeler.

RICHARD QUINEY suddenly looks as ashamed as his son had earlier.

RICHARD QUINEY:

I didn't "know" -

SHAKESPEARE (interrupting again):

You *must* have known! He's your son!

RICHARD QUINEY (continuing):

- But I *suspected*.

SHAKESPEARE looks as if he might hit him.

RICHARD QUINEY:

I wanted to say something - I did, truly - but I knew that Thomas was *fond* of your daughter -

SHAKESPEARE:

"Fond"?

SHAKESPEARE looks outraged, but RICHARD keeps going.

RICHARD QUINEY:

So, when they became engaged, I kept quiet. (*He bows his head.*) I didn't know that Margaret was pregnant.

SHAKESPEARE:

But you knew - or at least "suspected" - that Thomas had had *relations* with her?

RICHARD bows his head completely and stares at the ground.

RICHARD QUINEY:

I did.

SHAKESPEARE smiles at him coolly - indeed, cruelly.

SHAKESPEARE:

Thank you. Now I can omit *all* mention of the name "Quiney" from my will.

RICHARD looks horrified, but SHAKESPEARE quickly goes out, slamming the door behind him, so loudly that RICHARD QUINEY winces.

52. INT. THE STUDY, JOHN HALL'S HOUSE. DAY.

A stunned-looking JOHN HALL and SUSANNA sit opposite SHAKESPEARE.

SHAKESPEARE:

So, John, you will be the chief executor of my will.

JOHN HALL (nodding):

Yes. *(Pause.)* Thank you.

SHAKESPEARE:

As such, you must ensure that Judith is not *preyed* on by her so-called "husband" or any other *fortune-hunter* she may have the *misfortune* to encounter in the future.

JOHN HALL (nodding):

Yes. Of course.

SHAKESPEARE stands up.

SHAKESPEARE:

Good. Now I just have to tell Judith herself.

He stands up and is just about to go out when he sees little ELIZABETH standing in the doorway.

ELIZABETH:

Where are you going, Grandfather? *(She looks up at him, smiling angelically.)* Won't you stay and play?

SHAKESPEARE (shaking his head):

No, I'm afraid not, my dear. I would like to - *truly*, I would - but I have some important *business* to attend to.

He goes, leaving ELIZABETH and her PARENTS looking perplexed.

53. EXT. STREET OUTSIDE THOMAS AND JUDITH'S HOUSE. DAY.

SHAKESPEARE knocks on the door and it is opened instantly. JUDITH is standing in the doorway, with reddened eyes.

Without saying a word, she turns around and goes back inside: SHAKESPEARE follows her in and pulls the door shut behind him.

54. INT. HALLWAY, THOMAS AND JUDITH'S HOUSE. DAY.

JUDITH sits down at the bottom of the staircase and SHAKESPEARE comes over and stands in front of her.

SHAKESPEARE:

Where is he?

JUDITH (without looking up):

He's gone to the alehouse.

SHAKESPEARE:

"The alehouse"?

JUDITH (nodding):

Yes. He said he wanted to "get drunk" and "forget" his problems. *(She shakes her head in disgust.)* I wish I could forget *mine*.

SHAKESPEARE:

I assume he told you what I - or rather, Mr Collins - discovered.

JUDITH (nodding):

Yes. He told me *everything*.

SHAKESPEARE sits down beside her and as he does so she immediately throws her arms around him and starts to cry.

JUDITH:

Oh, Father, I've been such a *fool!*

SHAKESPEARE:

No, you haven't. You've been fooled - there's a world of difference.

JUDITH (shaking her head):

No, there isn't. (Pause.) I knew what Thomas was like.

SHAKESPEARE looks at her in amazement.

SHAKESPEARE:

You did?

JUDITH nods her head, even as she continues to cry.

JUDITH:

Yes. I knew about Margaret - well, I knew there was someone like Margaret, even if I didn't know her name - and all the other women before her!

SHAKESPEARE looks even more amazed.

SHAKESPEARE:

There were others?

JUDITH:

Well, there were rumours there were others - many others. But I'd waited so long to get married and I was so desperate to get married - so that I wouldn't die an old maid! - that I ignored them.

She looks at him, the tears pouring from her eyes.

JUDITH:

I thought, "If I don't marry Thomas, I'll never marry".

Finally she slumps against him, weeping uncontrollably.

JUDITH:

Now I wish I had never married.

SHAKESPEARE holds her, but does not look down at her: instead, he looks off, in a daze, into the distance.

55. INT. DOWNSTAIRS HALLWAY, SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

SHAKESPEARE comes in to find ANNE waiting for him. He closes the front door behind him and leans back against it, looking exhausted - and old. ANNE stares at him and he stares back.

SHAKESPEARE:

I assume you know what's happened.

ANNE (nodding):

Yes. Susanna came to see me after you had visited her and John. *(She looks at him accusingly.)* You should have told me first.

SHAKESPEARE looks surprised, then slowly nods his head.

SHAKESPEARE:

You're right. I should have.

ANNE:

Mind you, I'm not surprised you didn't. You never tell me anything: I always have to hear things *second hand!*

SHAKESPEARE looks even more surprised.

SHAKESPEARE:

How was Susanna?

ANNE:

Shocked, as you can imagine. *(Pause.)* We all are.

Suddenly SHAKESPEARE looks angry again.

SHAKESPEARE:

Damn him!

ANNE continues to stare at him as he grows increasingly angry.

SHAKESPEARE:

He has ruined Judith's life - he has ruined *all* our lives!

He stops leaning against the door and stands up straight.

SHAKESPEARE:

I hope he goes to *HELL!*

ANNE:

Hypocrite!

SHAKESPEARE looks at her in surprise.

SHAKESPEARE:

What?

ANNE (firmly):

You heard me - you're a hypocrite.

SHAKESPEARE continues to look surprised.

SHAKESPEARE:

What do you mean?

ANNE:

At least Thomas only slept with *one* other woman. You slept with *dozens!*

SHAKESPEARE looks confused.

ANNE:

And, like most men, he only did it before he got married. You did it after you were married!

Now SHAKESPEARE looks at her in disbelief.

SHAKESPEARE:

What on earth are you talking about?

ANNE:

You *know* what I'm talking about.

SHAKESPEARE:

I don't - truly!

ANNE:

I'm talking about all the *whores* you slept with in London.

SHAKESPEARE shakes his head, wildly.

SHAKESPEARE:

That's not true.

ANNE (angrily):

Don't deny it! I know what happened in London - I always knew! (*She fixes him with a penetrating gaze.*) Whenever you returned from London - on the *few* occasions that you returned from London - you *never* came near me. (*She laughs, ruefully.*) I used to wonder, "How is it that Will - my beloved Will, who before he left Stratford could never keep his hands off me - now refuses to *touch* me?" (*Once again, she looks at him accusingly.*) Then, finally, I realised. He was touching somebody else - *anybody* else, but me.

SHAKESPEARE looks horrified.

ANNE:

So don't condemn *Thomas* to an eternity of damnation, or else you condemn *yourself*!

She turns and walks quickly upstairs. SHAKESPEARE remains standing there for a moment, then slumps back against the front door, as if for support.

Fade to: **BLACK.**

A caption appears - "APRIL" - accompanied by the sound of raucous, drunken laughter.

Fade up to:

56. INT. TAVERN. NIGHT.

A solemn-looking SHAKESPEARE enters a tavern: he looks around at all the HAPPY, DRUNK PEOPLE, then someone calls out to him.

MAN (VOICE OFF):

Will! Will!

SHAKESPEARE looks in the direction the voice had come from and sees, at a table beside a window, a jowly, moustachioed, middle-aged MAN signalling to him to come over.

MAN:

Over here!

SHAKESPEARE walks over to the table and as he does so THE MAN signals to a passing WAITER to bring them two drinks.

SHAKESPEARE:

Hello, Drayton.

THE MAN - MICHAEL DRAYTON - stands up, shakes SHAKESPEARE's hand and indicates an empty chair beside him. They both sit down.

DRAYTON:

I'm glad you could come.

SHAKESPEARE:

*I'm glad to get out of Stratford. (Pause and grimace.)
All the gossip and tittle-tattle was driving me mad!*

DRAYTON (nodding his head):

Yes, I heard about your *predicament*, which is why I invited you.

He smiles at SHAKESPEARE warmly.

DRAYTON:

I thought a little *literary* discussion with a fellow poet might take your mind off things, at least for a few hours.

SHAKESPEARE snorts dismissively.

SHAKESPEARE:

Literature is the *last* thing I want to talk about.

DRAYTON looks surprised.

DRAYTON:

Why do you say that?

SHAKESPEARE:

Because literature - *writing* - is the reason I'm in this "predicament", as you put it.

DRAYTON:

I don't understand.

SHAKESPEARE:

If I hadn't spent so long in London *writing*, I might have realised that sweet Thomas Quiney, who I had known since he was a *boy*, had grown up to become a *liar* and a *blackguard*!

THE WAITER brings two large tankards of ale and sets them down carefully on the table: *SHAKESPEARE* immediately picks one up.

SHAKESPEARE:

So I don't want to talk about "literature". In fact, I don't want to talk at all! (*He looks appreciatively at his tankard.*) I just want to drink!

He duly begins to drink: in fact, he downs his ale "in one". Then he sighs loudly, as DRAYTON continues to stare at him. Suddenly ANOTHER MAN'S voice - a loud, booming voice - is heard.

MAN (VOICE OFF):

DRAYTON!

Both DRAYTON and SHAKESPEARE turn round and look in the direction the voice had come from. On the other side of the tavern, by the doorway, is a large, barrel-chested MAN WITH RED HAIR. He looks at them and smiles, with his hand raised in greeting. In complete contrast, SHAKESPEARE looks horrified to see him.

SHAKESPEARE:

Jonson?

He turns back round and looks at DRAYTON accusingly.

SHAKESPEARE:

What's he doing here?

DRAYTON (with a shrug):

I invited him too.

SHAKESPEARE:

All the way from London?

DRAYTON (with another shrug):

He wrote to me saying that he needed some respite from the *capital* - and from *court* - so I invited him to come and stay with me.

SHAKESPEARE does not look convinced by this explanation. Before he can say anything, however, JONSON has joined them and he greets DRAYTON warmly, shaking his hand.

JONSON:

Michael! It's a *pleasure* to see you.

DRAYTON:

Hello, Ben. Welcome to Warwickshire!

Then JONSON turns to face SHAKESPEARE and puts out his hand.

JONSON (smiling):

And it's a *pleasure* to see you too, Will.

SHAKESPEARE does not take his hand but looks up at him angrily.

SHAKESPEARE:

What are you doing here, Jonson? *(Pause.)* Have you come to gloat?

JONSON looks bewildered.

JONSON:

"Gloat"? About what?

SHAKESPEARE:

My "misfortune".

He continues to look up at JONSON accusingly.

SHAKESPEARE:

I'm sure you've heard about it, even in London. *(Pause.)*
Everyone else has!

Finally JONSON realises what SHAKESPEARE means.

JONSON:

Oh, *that!* *(Quickly, he shakes his head.)* I wouldn't gloat about *that*.

SHAKESPEARE *(bitterly)*:

Why not? Everyone else is.

He adopts different voices as he "recounts" what has been said.

SHAKESPEARE:

"Will Shakespeare's had his come-uppance." "Serves him right, for getting above his station." "He should never have left home and gone to *London! That's* why his family went to *ruin!*"

JONSON stares down at him intently, then slowly shakes his head.

JONSON:

No, Will. I would never "gloat" about another man's misfortune - especially not yours. (*Suddenly he looks at SHAKESPEARE affectionately.*) We may be "rivals" on stage, but we are *friends* off it. And as your friend, I feel only sorrow and pity for you at this difficult time.

SHAKESPEARE looks surprised, even touched, by this declaration: then, instantaneously, he laughs and tries to dismiss it.

SHAKESPEARE:

Then buy your "friend" a drink. (*Pause.*) God knows he needs it!

JONSON and *DRAYTON* both laugh, and *JONSON* signals to the waiter to bring three more tankards of ale. *SHAKESPEARE* looks up at *JONSON* for a moment, then looks away at the wheat-field outside, which is gently billowing in the wind.

57. INT. TAVERN. NIGHT.

THE WAITER is putting chairs on tables and *SHAKESPEARE*, *JONSON* and *DRAYTON* stand, or rather drunkenly sway, by the entrance.

DRAYTON (to SHAKESPEARE):

Where's your horse?

SHAKESPEARE (slurring his words):

I didn't bring a horsh.

DRAYTON looks at him in amazement.

DRAYTON:

But it's *five* miles back to Stratford!

SHAKESPEARE:

So? I'll walk! (*Smile.*) I walked here and I'll walk back.

He takes a step forward, but is so drunk he nearly falls over. DRAYTON helps him to stand upright.

DRAYTON:

Stay with me tonight and walk home in the morning.

JONSON:

Yes. Stay with us, Will. (*He beams at SHAKESPEARE.*) We can continue *drinking* at Drayton's house.

SHAKESPEARE shakes his head.

SHAKESPEARE:

No. I've had enough for one night.

Suddenly he looks up at the millions of twinkling stars above.

SHAKESPEARE:

Besides, it's a bright, starlit night. *(He smiles.)* I shall enjoy a little stroll!

And with that, he begins walking away from the tavern. JONSON and DRAYTON watch him go, then call out.

JONSON:

Goodnight, Will.

DRAYTON:

Take care.

SHAKESPEARE turns round to face the tavern and waves to them.

SHAKESPEARE:

Goodnight, good fellows.

He turns back round to face the road and continues walking.

58. INT. DOWNSTAIRS HALLWAY, SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE. DAY.

There is a loud knocking at the front door. SUSANNA hurries down the stairs, looking anxious. She goes to the door, opens it and her husband, JOHN HALL, is standing there, holding his small leather doctor's bag.

SUSANNA:

Oh, John. Thank God you've come.

DOCTOR HALL:

I was with a patient - I came as soon as I received word. What is it?

SUSANNA:

It's my father. He's sick!

DOCTOR HALL:

"Sick"?

SUSANNA (nodding, furiously):

Yes. Apparently, he went out drinking last night -

DOCTOR HALL (interrupting):

Well, if he will drink the devil's *liquor*, the next morning he will have the devil's *head*!

SUSANNA (shaking her head, furiously):

No, you don't understand. He has a *fever*!

DOCTOR HALL stares at her.

DOCTOR HALL:

A fever?

SUSANNA (nodding):

Yes. Oh John, he's terribly ill.

He turns towards the stairs, when she suddenly grabs his arm.

SUSANNA:

You have to help him.

DOCTOR HALL (firmly):

I will do all I can.

He starts going upstairs and SUSANNA follows behind him.

59. INT. SHAKESPEARE AND ANNE'S BEDROOM. DAY.

SHAKESPEARE is in bed, with his eyes closed; his face is covered with sweat; and his skin is red and blotchy. Beside him, ANNE is squeezing out a grubby, sweat-soaked cloth into a bowl, before applying it again to his forehead. SUSANNA is standing to one side, barely able to watch, while DOCTOR HALL stares down at SHAKESPEARE from the end of the bed. Suddenly the door opens and JUDITH comes in. She stands at the end of the bed and looks down at SHAKESPEARE.

JUDITH:

Father!

She turns to DOCTOR HALL, her brother-in-law.

JUDITH:

He looks awful!

DOCTOR HALL (nodding):

Yes, he does. I'm afraid the fever has taken hold.

JUDITH looks horrified.

JUDITH:

Really?

DOCTOR HALL (nodding):

Yes. If his spirits had been at their normal, *irrepressible* level, he might have been able to resist it, but - well, recent events seem to have *crushed* his spirits.

JUDITH looks even more horrified. Suddenly SHAKESPEARE opens his eyes slightly.

SHAKESPEARE (feebly):

I'm so hot.

ANNE (nodding):

I know.

SHAKESPEARE (equally feebly):

Am I in hell?

ANNE (shaking her head vigorously):

No, of course not. You're not going to hell. You're a good man, Will - a great man!

Slowly, and with obvious effort, SHAKESPEARE shakes his head.

SHAKESPEARE (quietly):

I am not.

He closes his eyes again and ANNE immediately resumes her slow, careful, methodical mopping of his brow. JUDITH and SUSANNA both cry, as DOCTOR HALL looks on helplessly.

60. EXT. STREET OUTSIDE SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE. DAY.

HEMINGS, CONDELL, and DR HALL, all of them in black, lead THE OTHER PALLBEARERS as they carry the coffin out of the house. They are followed by ANNE, SUSANNA, ELIZABETH and JUDITH, who are also all in black. DRAYTON and JONSON follow THE FAMILY, looking embarrassed to be there - even, perhaps, a little guilty. THE PALLBEARERS stop for a moment to adjust the weight of the coffin. Then they walk on towards the church, the steeple of which is just visible in the distance.

61. INT. CHURCH. DAY.

THE PALLBEARERS set the coffin down on two wooden stands in front of the altar. Then, as the PRIEST comes forward towards the coffin, the PALLBEARERS all take a step back and then take their places in the pews. HEMINGS and CONDELL watch the PRIEST stand over the coffin. When they speak, they do so quietly, because they are in church.

HEMINGS:

Apparently, he will be buried directly in front of the altar.

CONDELL:

That's appropriate.

HEMINGS looks confused.

HEMINGS:

How so?

CONDELL:

Well, whatever his protestations to the contrary, Will always enjoyed being the centre of attention.

HEMINGS smiles.

62. INT. DINING ROOM, SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE. DAY.

HEMINGS, CONDELL, DRAYTON, JONSON and SEVERAL OTHER MOURNERS sit at the table: food has been laid out, but nobody is eating. There is total silence, until HEMINGS whispers to CONDELL.

HEMINGS:

I still can't believe it.

CONDELL (equally quietly):

I know. I can't either. Less than two months ago, we were sitting here celebrating his daughter's wedding.

HEMINGS nods solemnly and again there is silence for a moment.

HEMINGS (quietly):

It's not right.

CONDELL (equally quietly):

What isn't?

HEMINGS (quietly):

The cause of *death!* (Pause.) Will survived fire, ice, *plague*, even becoming involved in a plot against the *Queen*, and then - finally! - a *fever* finishes him off.

CONDELL (equally quietly):

I know. 'Tis not a fitting end.

HEMINGS nods and the dining room is quiet once more, apart from the faint sound of crying somewhere else in the house.

*Fade to: **BLACK.***

A caption appears - "MAY" - accompanied by the sound of a piece of paper being unfurled.

Fade up to:

63. INT. BACKSTAGE OFFICE, THE GLOBE THEATRE. DAY.

CONDELL sits at the desk, holding the letter he has opened, and reads it to HEMINGS, who stands in front of him: through the open door, the tiled roof of the rebuilt Globe can just be seen.

CONDELL (reading):

"...And finally, I give to my fellows Richard Burbage, John Hemings and Henry Condell twenty-six shillings and eight pence apiece to buy them mourning rings."

He finishes reading and puts the letter down on the desk. HEMINGS stares at him, then at the letter.

HEMINGS:

"Mourning rings"?

CONDELL nods.

HEMINGS:

That's how he wants us to remember him?

CONDELL (with a shrug):

Apparently.

HEMINGS shakes his head in disbelief and looks away.

*Fade to: **BLACK.***

A caption appears: "EPILOGUE."

Fade up to:

64. INT. BACKSTAGE OFFICE, THE GLOBE THEATRE. DAY.

CONDELL is sitting at the desk while HEMINGS stands over him and stares at the ring on his left little finger, next to his wedding ring, which has a skull or death's head on it.

HEMINGS:

I still can't get used to wearing a mourning ring.

CONDELL, who is counting money at his desk, is wearing an identical ring on his left little finger.

HEMINGS:

I've been wearing it for months now, but it still makes me shudder every time I look at it.

Once again, he looks down at CONDELL, who does not look up.

HEMINGS:

It doesn't even fit! Last week, when I tried to hail a fellow in the street - (He quickly raises his left hand to indicate "hailing a fellow".) It nearly flew off!

Finally CONDELL looks up at him.

HEMINGS:

If I had lost it, I'd have nothing to remember Will by!

CONDELL holds up a piece of paper to show HEMINGS.

CONDELL:

Here is a list of the props we need. (*He pushes a few coins across the desk towards HEMINGS.*) And here is the money to buy them. (*Then he looks up at HEMINGS angrily.*) So would you please stop complaining about *wills* and *rings* - and *Will's rings!* - long enough to do some work? After all, we still have a *theatre* to run!

HEMINGS (equally angrily):

Yes, Henry! Of course, Henry! Forgive me for still being in *mourning*, Henry!

HEMINGS angrily snatches the piece of paper from CONDELL, picks up the coins and goes out.

65. EXT. STREET. DAY.

HEMINGS walks along a typically crowded London street, carrying a leather bag out of which several peacock feathers are poking. Suddenly he stops walking and stares straight ahead. His POINT OF VIEW: Directly ahead of him is St Paul's Cathedral, in front of which there are about A DOZEN BOOKSELLERS, but rather than manning book shops they are manning book stalls. HEMINGS goes towards them and glances at their contents, which range from flimsy paper pamphlets to leather-bound Bibles. Then, suddenly, he stops walking. His POINT OF VIEW: Directly ahead of him is a stall that apparently has only one book for sale: laid out on top are a dozen copies of the same large, leather-bound book. The book is entitled, "THE WORKES OF BENJAMIN JONSON". HEMINGS stares at the stall (and the books) in disbelief for a moment, before finally approaching it. THE BOOKSELLER smiles at him from behind the stall.

BOOKSELLER:

Good day, Sir. How can I help you?

HEMINGS:

I would like to see a copy of Ben Jonson's "Workes", please.

BOOKSELLER (beaming):

Excellent choice, Sir. Allow me to show you one.

THE BOOKSELLER picks up a copy - in fact, it is so heavy that he struggles to lift it.

BOOKSELLER (proudly):

It's only just been published.

HEMINGS:

Really?

BOOKSELLER (nodding):

Oh, yes. And as it says on the *magnificent frontispiece - (He indicates the leather cover, which has been decorated, or more precisely carved, with pictures of classical statues.)* It contains all his plays, from "The Alchemist" to "Volpone".

HEMINGS gently touches the front cover, almost caressing it.

BOOKSELLER:

It is a remarkable book - historic even!

HEMINGS looks up at him in surprise.

HEMINGS:

Really? How so?

BOOKSELLER (beaming):

It is the *first* collection of plays by an *English* playwright.

He leans forward and whispers to HEMINGS conspiratorially.

BOOKSELLER:

Did you know, Sir, that - incredible as it sounds! - there is no law of *ownership*, or *possession*, for playwrights?

HEMINGS (feigning ignorance):

Is that so?

BOOKSELLER (nodding):

It is! That's why most playwrights *never* published their plays, because if they *had*, every other theatrical company in London would simply have bought a copy and put on a production of their own.

HEMINGS:

Really? (*Pause and thin smile.*) How remarkable!

BOOKSELLER:

The only copies of plays that were ever printed were *unauthorised* copies that were printed without the consent of their authors. (*He laughs.*) Apparently, some printers even resorted to *bribing* individual actors to *regurgitate* what they could remember of a play.

HEMINGS shakes his head.

HEMINGS:

I imagine such copies must have been of poor quality.

BOOKSELLER:

They were *terrible!* They always read as if someone had reconstructed the play from *memory* - and in the process, *forgotten* half the lines.

He laughs, but HEMINGS just continues to smile thinly.

BOOKSELLER:

That's why Mister Jonson was so anxious to publish his own plays himself - to preserve them for posterity, in *all* their glory. (*He indicates the book again.*) I think you'll agree that he's done a *fine* job.

HEMINGS (nodding):

He has.

BOOKSELLER:

His collection of plays confirms his reputation as the *pre-eminant* English playwright.

HEMINGS looks at him in amazement.

HEMINGS:

"Pre-eminent"?

BOOKSELLER (nodding):

Indeed.

HEMINGS:

But what about Shakespeare?

BOOKSELLER:

Who?

HEMINGS looks even more amazed.

HEMINGS:

William Shakespeare.

BOOKSELLER:

Oh! *Him!* (*THE BOOKSELLER laughs.*) He hardly ranks alongside Mister Johnson. Granted, he had a certain *populist* touch that allowed him to entertain the *masses*, but he lacked Mister Jonson's *rigorous* classicism.

HEMINGS looks as if he might explode, but restrains himself.

HEMINGS:

Do you have any of his plays?

BOOKSELLER:

Who? *Shakespeare?*

HEMINGS (nodding, patiently):

Yes.

The BOOKSELLER considers this question for a moment.

BOOKSELLER:

I may have *something* but, as I've explained, it almost certainly *won't* be of high quality.

HEMINGS (smiling thinly):

That's alright. I'd still like to see it.

THE BOOKSELLER looks surprised for a moment, then ducks down to rummage in the boxes underneath his stall.

BOOKSELLER (calling out):

Aha! I knew I had something.

HEMINGS:

What is it?

THE BOOKSELLER stands up, clutching something close to his chest, so that it cannot be seen.

BOOKSELLER:

THIS!

He holds it out for HEMINGS to see, but HEMINGS looks horrified.

66. INT. BACKSTAGE OFFICE, THE GLOBE THEATRE. DAY.

CONDELL is still counting money and making a note of it in his ledger when the door opens, quietly. There is a pause, the faint sound of footsteps, then a book - a large, heavy book - is dropped onto his desk, knocking over all of his carefully constructed piles of coins. CONDELL turns round and looks up angrily at HEMINGS, who is standing directly in front of him with his hands behind his back.

CONDELL:

What are you doing?

HEMINGS does not say anything, but simply looks down at the book, directing CONDELL's gaze towards it.

CONDELL (reading):

"The Workes of Benjamin Jonson."

Like HEMINGS before him, he stares at the book in disbelief.

HEMINGS:

Big, isn't it?

CONDELL (nodding):

Enormous!

HEMINGS:

I suppose it *has* to be, to accommodate *all* of Jonson's plays - *and* his massive sense of self-worth!

CONDELL laughs, then looks admiringly at the book again.

HEMINGS:

Apparently, it confirms his reputation as the "pre-eminent English playwright".

CONDELL looks up at HEMINGS in surprise.

CONDELL:

What?

HEMINGS:

That's how he's being described.

CONDELL:

But Will was an *infinitely* better writer.

HEMINGS (nodding):

I know that; we *both* know that; anyone who's ever seen a Jonson play knows that! But will future generations?

CONDELL does not answer, but simply stares at HEMINGS blankly.

HEMINGS:

By contrast with Jonson's "Workes", this is what will remain of Shakespeare.

He takes from behind his back a slim, grubby play-script and lets it fall onto CONDELL's desk: unlike Jonson's book, it lands gently, indeed, it almost floats down. CONDELL stares down at it. His POINT OF VIEW: The thorn front page reads, "The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, by William Shakespeare".

HEMINGS:

At the stall where I bought Jonson's book, that was all they had of Will's work.

The script of "Hamlet" lies forlornly on top of Jonson's "Workes", barely covering half of its front cover.

HEMINGS:

Read it.

CONDELL:

What?

HEMINGS:

I have. In fact, allow me to read it to you, or at least some prize extracts.

He picks up the script and begins reading - quoting - from it.

HEMINGS:

"O, that this too, too sullied flesh should melt."

CONDELL winces and HEMINGS flicks ahead to another page.

HEMINGS:

"The play's the thing,
Wherein we'll catch the King and Queen."

Once again, CONDELL winces and HEMINGS flicks ahead.

HEMINGS:

And best - or rather, worst - of all:
"To be or not to be, aye, there's the *POINT!*"

He closes the script and looks down at CONDELL in disgust.

HEMINGS:

If they can't get *that* right, they won't get *anything* right!

He tosses the script down on the desk and CONDELL stares at it.

HEMINGS (looking distraught):

I can't bear it. After all we went through together - *building* The Globe, *rebuilding* it after it burned down, *surviving* the plot against the Queen - *this* - (*He points - accusingly - at the "script" of "Hamlet".*) - And *trash* like it, is all that will survive of "Shakespeare"!

Suddenly he stares at CONDELL.

HEMINGS:

That's why we have to print the plays ourselves.

CONDELL looks up at him in astonishment.

CONDELL:

WHAT?!

HEMINGS:

Why not? If Jonson can print all of *his* plays, why can't we print all of *Will's*?

CONDELL:

Because we don't even have *copies* of some of Will's plays, especially the *early* ones.

HEMINGS looks horrified.

HEMINGS:

What? *(Pause.)* Why not?

CONDELL:

They must have been destroyed in the fire, or just *lost* over time, most likely when we moved theatres.

HEMINGS looks even more horrified.

CONDELL:

As for the plays we *do* have copies of, most of them are just old prompt-books.

HEMINGS:

So?

CONDELL:

So they've been *scribbled* on and *scribbled* on until they're virtually *illegible*!

HEMINGS:

"Illegible"?

CONDELL (nodding):

Aye. *Will* could decipher them, but we can't.

HEMINGS looks even more distressed.

CONDELL:

While *Will* was still alive, it didn't matter: if we had any problems with a play, we could just *ask* him, even if we had to wait until he visited London. But now - well, we *can't* ask him!

HEMINGS looks at him, pleadingly.

HEMINGS:

I'm sure that, given time, we could "decipher" them and prepare them for publication.

CONDELL looks appalled.

CONDELL:

It would take an *age* - *years*, at least - especially when we've still got a *theatre* to run.

HEMINGS (smiling):

So? What are a few *years* compared with *immortality*?

CONDELL looks at him sceptically.

CONDELL:

Whose immortality? His, or ours?

HEMINGS looks upset, even offended.

HEMINGS:

Why, his of course!

CONDELL doesn't look convinced and instead looks around at the tiny, cramped office. It is, as ever, stuffed full of props and costumes, but now we see (for the first time) that it is also full of scripts. The scripts are scattered around the room: some are stacked on bookshelves; some have been shoved unceremoniously into drawers; and some are piled up on the floor. Seeing all this, CONDELL sighs heavily.

CONDELL:

The truth is that over the years we've probably paid more attention to preserving the company's props and costumes than we have Will's plays. (Pause.) Now the best that we can do is to print those plays that we have fair copies of, which is about half of them.

HEMINGS looks at him in disbelief.

HEMINGS:

"Half"?

CONDELL:

That's still about twenty or so.

HEMINGS shakes his head angrily.

HEMINGS:

It's not enough! Half a Shakespeare is no Shakespeare at all - half a Shakespeare is a Jonson, or a Marlowe! *(Suddenly he stops shaking his head.)* We have to show the whole man, to show what one man is capable of. And in doing so, we'll show what *mankind* is capable of! *(He stares at CONDELL.)* We have to do it.

CONDELL:

Do what?

HEMINGS (smiling):

Print the plays - all the plays, with all the right words.

Once again, CONDELL stares at him in amazement.

CONDELL:

Are you mad? I've just told you: we don't even have *copies* of some of the plays.

HEMINGS:

Then we'll *find* them. They must exist *somewhere*.

CONDELL looks even more amazed.

CONDELL:

And where exactly do you propose looking for them?

HEMINGS (triumphantly):

EVERYWHERE!

67. INT. BEDROOM. DAY.

A LITTLE OLD LADY (who is obviously a landlady) opens the door and leads HEMINGS and CONDELL into a dingy, little room, with only a bed, a desk and a chair for furniture. She steps aside to let HEMINGS and CONDELL look inside.

HEMINGS (VOICE OFF):

"Everywhere he ever lived..."

HEMINGS and CONDELL start looking around (HEMINGS kneels down to look under the bed) while the OLD LADY watches them curiously.

68. EXT. STREET. DAY.

HEMINGS and CONDELL stand outside a derelict theatre.

HEMINGS (VOICE OFF):

"Everywhere he ever worked..."

They walk towards the theatre, stepping through the debris scattered around it.

69. INT. TAVERN. DAY.

HEMINGS and CONDELL stand at the bar in a TAVERN, talking to THE TAVERN-OWNER.

HEMINGS (VOICE OFF):

"And most importantly, everywhere he ever drank..."

THE TAVERN-OWNER directs HEMINGS and CONDELL's attention towards the staircase and they duly look up.

HEMINGS (VOICE OFF):

"And laid his head..."

Their POINT OF VIEW: THE MADAM (suitably attired) who runs the "bawdy house" (or brothel) upstairs smiles down at them.

HEMINGS (VOICE OFF):

"Or any other part of his anatomy."

Slowly, nervously, HEMINGS and CONDELL start walking upstairs.

70. INT/EXT. THE STAGE OF THE GLOBE. DAY.

HEMINGS and CONDELL walk out onto the magnificent new stage of the new Globe theatre.

HEMINGS (VOICE OFF):

"Then, when we've found the missing plays, we'll check all the plays to make sure that nothing has been added or omitted."

CONDELL (VOICE OFF, and sounding alarmed):

"And how do you propose doing *that*?"

HEMINGS and CONDELL reach the front of the stage and look out. Their POINT OF VIEW: The Groundlings' area in front of the stage is full not of Groundlings but ACTORS - about a hundred in total.

HEMINGS (VOICE OFF):

"By gathering together all the actors who ever appeared in a Shakespeare play, or at least those who are still *alive*, and going through their parts with them, line by line, to make sure that they're correct."

The ACTORS are of all ages, from APPRENTICES (some aged about eight) to older VETERANS (some of whom are older than HEMINGS).

71. INT. BACKSTAGE OFFICE OF THE GLOBE. DAY.

SIX MIDDLE-AGED, BESPECTACLED MEN are crowded round the desk, staring at the scripts laid out in front of them.

HEMINGS (VOICE OFF):

"Some of the actors would have been employed as book-holders, or prompters, so we can get them to go through the prompt-books to decipher all the notes and stage directions and scribblings that they added over the years."

THE SIX MEN - the surviving PROMPTERS - study the scripts carefully, either leaning in close to the desk or lifting the scripts up to their faces to see them.

72. INT. BEDROOM. DAY.

HEMINGS and CONDELL are sitting beside a bed.

HEMINGS (VOICE OFF):

"And of course, there is one actor who knows the plays, or at least the title roles, almost as well as Will himself."

HEMINGS and CONDELL's POINT OF VIEW: Lying back in the bed, and looking very sickly (it may well be his deathbed), is BURBAGE. There is a script in front of him and BURBAGE (with great effort) reaches out a hand to touch it: as he does so, his mourning ring (identical to those of HEMINGS and CONDELL) is visible. He points to a line in the script and slowly shakes his head, so CONDELL stands up, leans forward and, with a quill, scratches it out.

HEMINGS (VOICE OFF):

"After all, Burbage always thought that they were *his* plays, not Will's!"

CONDELL (laughing):

"Typical actor!"

73. INT. SHOP. DAY.

CONDELL is sitting at a desk, while HEMINGS leans over him, and BOTH MEN are reading a piece of paper laid out on the desk.

HEMINGS (VOICE OFF):

"Finally, we just have to find someone to write a dedication. (Pause.) And who better than England's greatest *living* playwright?"

HEMINGS and CONDELL both finish reading and look up. Their POINT OF VIEW: Standing next to them, studying them (and their reaction to what they have read), is BEN JONSON.

HEMINGS (smiling):

It's wonderful, Ben.

CONDELL (nodding):

Yes, especially the line, "He was not of an age, but for all time".

JONSON smiles ruefully.

BEN JONSON:

I suspect it's what I'll be best remembered for!

HEMINGS and CONDELL laugh, but JONSON suddenly stops smiling.

BEN JONSON:

I ought to have written a dedication in honour of you two.

HEMINGS and CONDELL look confused.

HEMINGS:

What do you mean?

BEN JONSON:

Well, Will may have *written* the plays, but you're the ones who *found* them, *edited* them and then *prepared* them for publication.

HEMINGS (dismissively):

It wasn't *that* difficult.

CONDELL:

Not once we got started.

JONSON stares at them in disbelief.

JONSON:

Gentlemen, you *amaze* me.

Again, HEMINGS and CONDELL both look surprised.

HEMINGS:

How so?

JONSON:

You make *light* of what you've done, but the truth is that most men wouldn't spend so much *time, money* and *effort* publishing their *own* plays, let alone *someone else's*. (He *scowls*.) I can't imagine that anyone would do it for *me!* (He *stops scowling and looks at them questioningly*.) So why did you do it for Will?

HEMINGS and CONDELL exchange a glance, then smile at JONSON.

HEMINGS:

He did so much for us.

CONDELL:

It was the *least* we could do for him.

JONSON considers this for a moment, then nods in acknowledgement.

A MAN IN AN INK-STAINED APRON approaches HEMINGS and CONDELL.

MAN:

The title-page is ready, gentlemen. Shall I proceed?

HEMINGS AND CONDELL (together):

Please.

HEMINGS and CONDELL follow the MAN IN THE INK-STAINED APRON and for the first time it is apparent that they are in a print shop: all around them (literally all around their heads), the newly printed pages of books and pamphlets are hanging up to dry.

THE MAN IN THE INK-STAINED APRON, who is obviously a *PRINTER*, takes hold of the handle of a printing press with both hands. He presses the handle down, holding it in place for a moment before slowly releasing it. Very carefully (so as not to smudge the ink), he picks up the page he has printed and shows it to *HEMINGS* and *CONDELL*.

Their POINT OF VIEW: It is the title page of the *First Folio*, the first collection of Shakespeare's plays. It is dominated by the famous portrait of Shakespeare that shows his bald head, thinning beard and piercing eyes, which seem to stare out from the page. Above it are the words: "Mr William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories and Tragedies, Published according to the true original copies." Below it are the words: "London. Printed by Isaac Jaggard and Edward Blount, 1623." Seeing this, *HEMINGS* and *CONDELL* both smile broadly.

Fade to: **BLACK**.

The screen remains black for a moment, then a caption appears: **"IT TOOK HEMINGS AND CONDELL SEVEN YEARS TO PRODUCE THE FIRST FOLIO - THE FIRST COMPLETE (OR NEARLY COMPLETE) COLLECTION OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS."**

This caption fades and another appears: **"WITHOUT THE FIRST FOLIO, HALF OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS, INCLUDING CLASSICS SUCH AS "MACBETH", "THE TEMPEST" AND "ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA", WOULD NOT HAVE SURVIVED AT ALL AND THE OTHER HALF WOULD HAVE BEEN AT BEST INCOMPLETE, AT WORST INCOMPREHENSIBLE."**

This caption fades and another appears: **"WITHOUT HEMINGS AND CONDELL, THE MAN WE KNOW AS "SHAKESPEARE" - THE GREATEST WRITER EVER - WOULD NOT EXIST."**

This caption fades and another appears: "IN THEIR PREFACE TO THE FIRST FOLIO, HEMINGS AND CONDELL WROTE THAT THEY HAD ONLY PUBLISHED SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS BECAUSE HE HAD DIED BEFORE HE COULD PUBLISH THEM HIMSELF."

This caption fades and the final caption appears: "THEY ALSO WROTE: "WE HAVE BUT COLLECTED THE PLAYS AND DONE OUR OFFICES TO THE DEAD WITHOUT AMBITION EITHER OF SELF PROFIT OR FAME, ONLY TO KEEP THE MEMORY OF SO WORTHY A FRIEND AND FELLOW ALIVE AS WAS OUR SHAKESPEARE.""

The final caption slowly fades out to:

BLACK.