

THE SHAKESPEARE PLAYS

Being The Remarkable True Comedy, History
and Tragedy of Shakespeare

An Audio Play by Martin Keady

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PART I (COMEDY)

SOUND FX: AN ANNOUNCEMENT IS MADE: "Part I (Comedy) - 1598".

SCENE ONE: INT. THE BACKSTAGE DRESSING ROOM OF A THEATRE.

SOUND FX: THE DOOR TO THE DRESSING ROOM IS OPENED AND THE AUDIENCE'S THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE AND CHEERING CAN BE HEARD

HEMINGS:

Good old Will! He's done it again!

CONDELL:

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

SOUND FX: LAUGHTER, BACKSLAPPING AND EXCLAMATIONS AS THE OTHER ACTORS EXIT THE STAGE AND ENTER THE DRESSING-ROOM

HEMINGS:

Costume *off*, please!

ACTOR:

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

HEMINGS:

No!

ACTOR:

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 *off*, please!

ACTOR:

Very well.

SOUND FX: RUSTLING AS THE ACTOR REMOVES HIS COSTUME. THEN THERE IS THE CLINKING OF A LOT OF COINS AS THEY ARE COUNTED.

ACTOR:

How are the takings, Mister Condell?

SOUND FX: CONDELL FINISHES COUNTING "NINETY-NINE, A HUNDRED!", AND NOTES IT, WITH A QUILL SCRAPING ON PARCHMENT

CONDELL:

Excellent! Audiences obviously *adore* Falstaff.

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: BURBAGE AND WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (WHO IS AGED ABOUT 34) ENTER, LAUGHING AND CONGRATULATING EACH OTHER.

BURBAGE:

Well done, Will - another triumph!

SHAKESPEARE:

Well done yourself, Richard. You are Falstaff! Nobody else can ever play him.

BURBAGE:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

BOTH!

SOUND FX: THEY ALL LAUGH, INCLUDING BURBAGE.

BURBAGE:

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

SOUND FX: FOOTSTEPS AS BURBAGE CROSSES THE ROOM, FOLLOWED BY HIS BITING INTO A CORK, PULLING IT OUT WITH HIS TEETH, SPITTING IT TO OUT AND THEN SWIGGING LOUDLY FROM THE BOTTLE

BURBAGE:

Aah! That's better. The actor's *reward*!

SOUND FX: THE DRESSING ROOM DOOR CREAKS OPEN, FOLLOWED BY THE SOUND OF AN OLD MAN'S HORRIBLY WEEDY AND NEEDLING VOICE

OLD MAN:

Is that *wine*?

SOUND FX: BURBAGE'S FOOTSTEPS AGAIN, BUT FASTER THIS TIME,
AS HE RECROSSES THE DRESSING-ROOM TO CONFRONT THE OLD MAN

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! Now, I asked you a question: is that *wine*?

BURBAGE:

So what if it is? Aren't we entitled to a *drink* after a performance?

ALLEN:

No, you're not! I've told you before - *all* of you - that drinking alcohol is *forbidden* on these premises.

BURBAGE:

Damn you Puritans! You're *always* spoiling other people's fun! Can't we even enjoy the *first* performance of a new play?

ALLEN:

"First performance"? Oh, no - it's your *last* performance! Or at least *one* of them.

BURBAGE:

What does *that* mean?

ALLEN:

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

BURBAGE:

What? You can't do that!

ALLEN:

I can, and I am.

BURBAGE:

Why?

ALLEN:

For your *continually* flouting the terms of the lease by *drinking* on the premises, and for staging plays that celebrate *drunks* and *sinners*, like that *fat oaf*, Falstaff! *That's* why I'm giving you one month's notice to quit!

BURBAGE:

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

ALLEN:

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

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:

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!

SOUND FX: HE LAUGHS AND OPENS THE DOOR, SUCH THAT IT CREAKS A LITTLE, BEFORE STOPPING TO ADDRESS THEM ALL AGAIN

ALLEN:

Goodnight - (*Pause.*) I was about to say "Gentlemen", but of course you're *not* "Gentlemen", are you? No "player" could *ever* be a gentleman!

SOUND FX: HE LAUGHS AND EXITS, SHUTTING THE DOOR BEHIND HIM

BURBAGE:

We ought to run him through!

HEMINGS:

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

BURBAGE:

No court would convict us!

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE AS HEMINGS'S QUESTION GOES UNANSWERED.

HEMINGS:

Of course not! They use us for their "entertainment" and then, when they've had it, they get *rid* of us. 'Twas ever thus - 'twill be ever thus!

SOUND: THERE IS COMPLETE SILENCE IN THE DRESSING ROOM

SCENE TWO: INT. TAVERN.

SOUND FX: LAUGHTER AND THE THUMPING TOGETHER OF PEWTER MUGS IN TOASTS AT THE BAR: AT THE PLAYERS' TABLE, WHICH IS BY THE WINDOW, THERE IS ONLY SILENCE, UNTIL HEMINGS SPEAKS UP

HEMINGS:

It's starting to snow.

BURBAGE:

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!

SHAKESPEARE:

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

BURBAGE:

What we *always* do.

SHAKESPEARE:

Which is?

BURBAGE:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

But where to?

HEMINGS:

I have an idea.

SHAKESPEARE:

Yes, John?

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

"Bankside"?

HEMINGS:

Yes - right beside the river! I'm sure we could lease it from him. (*He chuckles.*) It's *perfect!* There's lots of space and he'll charge us less rent than Allen does. To be honest, I was going to suggest we move there *before* Allen evicted us: *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!

SOUND: HEMINGS, BURBAGE AND SHAKESPEARE ALL LAUGH

SHAKESPEARE:

Well put, Henry.

BURBAGE:

Would your neighbour really lease the land to us?

HEMINGS:

I'm sure he would. He's retiring to the country, so he has no use for it himself.

BURBAGE:

And what kind of lease are we talking about?

SHAKESPEARE:

Yes. How long?

HEMINGS:

Oh, about thirty years.

SHAKESPEARE:

"Thirty years"?

HEMINGS:

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!

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 they're *ours*!

SOUND FX: SILENCE, OTHER THAN SIGHS AND THE SIPPING OF ALE

HEMINGS:

It's *really* starting to snow now.

BURBAGE:

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

SOUND FX: SUDDENLY HEMINGS GASPS AND THUMPS THE TABLE

HEMINGS:

Hang on!

SHAKESPEARE:

What, John?

HEMINGS:

I've had *another* idea!

SCENE THREE: EXT. STREET OUTSIDE THE THEATRE.

SOUND FX: THE SLAPPING OF ARMS, THE STAMPING OF FEET AND EVEN THE CHATTERING OF TEETH AS SHAKESPEARE AND BURBAGE WAIT IN THE STREET OUTSIDE THE THEATRE

BURBAGE:

Where is he? *I'm freezing!*

SHAKESPEARE:

Don't worry about John: he's the most trustworthy man I know. He'll be here shortly.

HEMINGS (calling out):

HELLO!

SOUND FX: A HORSE AND A HEAVILY LADEN CART APPROACH THE THEATRE, TO THE ACCOMPANIMENT OF THE HORSE'S HOOVES, THE CREAKING OF THE CART AND THE SCRAPING OF THE WHEELS ON THE ROAD. FINALLY, THE HORSE AND CART COME TO A HALT AND HEMINGS JUMPS DOWN FROM IT, LANDING ON THE GROUND WITH A LOUD THUD.

HEMINGS:

Will, Richard, this is the man I told you about. (*Then, with a truly theatrical flourish.*) Mr Peter Street, the finest theatrical carpenter in London: the man who built *The Rose!*

SOUND FX: PETER STREET, AN OLD MAN WHO WHEEZES AND COUGHS A LITTLE, CLIMBS DOWN FROM THE CART, WHICH CREAKS UNDER HIM

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!

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE, BURBAGE AND HEMINGS ALL LAUGH

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:

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

SOUND: SHAKESPEARE AND HEMINGS LAUGH, THEN BURBAGE

HEMINGS:

I suppose it is.

SHAKESPEARE:

I don't doubt, Mr Street, that you can take the theatre down, 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*!

SOUND FX: THE OTHERS ALL LAUGH

STREET:

Don't worry. We'll work fast! (*He calls up to his WORKMEN on the cart.*) Come on, boys - let's take her apart!

SOUND FX: STREET'S WORKMEN (THERE ARE AT LEAST A DOZEN OF THEM) LAUGH HEARTILY AND CLIMB OR JUMP DOWN FROM THE CART: THEN, THEIR LAUGHTER FADES AS THEY GO INSIDE THE THEATRE.

SHAKESPEARE:

Mister Street...?

STREET:

Yes, Mister Shakespeare?

SHAKESPEARE:

Why were some of your men carrying *clubs* and *swords*? Surely they only need saws and chisels?

HEMINGS:

That's in case Allen returns from his Christmas holiday *early*!

SOUND: HEMINGS LAUGHS, ACCOMPANIED BY STREET, BURBAGE AND EVENTUALLY SHAKESPEARE: THEIR LAUGHTER CONTINUES UNTIL THEY, TOO, GO INSIDE THE THEATRE

SCENE FOUR: EXT. STREET OUTSIDE THE THEATRE.

SOUND FX: BANGING AND SAWING AS STREET'S MEN LITERALLY TAKE THE THEATRE APART. CONDELL AND SHAKESPEARE, WHO ARE IN THE STREET OUTSIDE, HAVE TO SHOUT TO MAKE THEMSELVES HEARD.

SHAKESPEARE:

I must say, Henry: Street's men certainly are working *fast*!

CONDELL:

They ought to be: we're paying *double* their usual rate!

SHAKESPEARE:

"*Double*"?

CONDELL:

Well, it is Christmas.

SOUND FX: A HORSE'S HOOVES AND THE SCRAPING OF WOODEN WHEELS ON THE GROUND AS HEMINGS BRINGS THE HORSE AND CART ROUND.

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Right.

SOUND FX: THE CART CREAKS AS SHAKESPEARE CLIMBS UP ONTO IT.

CONDELL (calling up):

Godspeed!

SOUND: THE HORSE SLOWLY TROTS FORWARD, ACCOMPANIED BY THE GRATING SOUND OF THE WOODEN WHEELS SCRAPING ON THE GROUND

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS:

Stop complaining and enjoy the ride! *Giddy up, boy!*

SOUND: SHAKESPEARE SIGHS HEAVILY, WHICH IS DROWNED OUT BY THE CLIP-CLOP OF THE HOOVES AND THE SCRAPING OF THE WHEELS

SCENE FIVE: EXT. RIVERSIDE.

HEMINGS:

WHOAH, boy!

SOUND FX: THE HORSE STOPS, THE CART STOPS BEHIND IT, AND THE ONLY SOUNDS ARE THE HORSE PANTING FOR BREATH AND OCCASIONALLY SNORTING, AND THE CART CREAKING UNDER ITS LOAD

HEMINGS:

There it is!

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE GASPS IN AMAZEMENT.

SHAKESPEARE:

My God, John: you were right. The river's *completely* frozen over!

SOUND FX: HEMINGS CHUCKLES.

HEMINGS:

And as a result, we have our very own *bridge* across the Thames, direct to Bankside!

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS SHAKESPEARE AND HEMINGS TAKE IN THE VIEW BEFORE THEM, OF A FROZEN RIVER THAMES: THE SILENCE IS ONLY BROKEN BY THE OCCASIONAL PANT OR SNORT BY THE HORSE AND DISTANT SHOUTS OR YELPS BY PEOPLE ALREADY ON THE ICE.

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!* (*Pause.*) Why don't we just use the *real* bridge - London Bridge?

HEMINGS:

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, and we've got *twenty* to get across, at least! We'd *never* get everything out of the theatre and across it before Allen comes back from his holiday! (*Pause.*) *This* is the only way.

SHAKESPEARE:

Alright, then. *Proceed!*

HEMINGS:

That's the spirit! (*Then, far more loudly -*) *Go on, boy!*

SOUND FX: HE SNAPS THE REINS AND THE HORSE MOVES FORWARD, PULLING THE CART BEHIND IT. IT WALKS FORWARDS JUST A FEW STEPS, BEFORE STOPPING AGAIN, SO HEMINGS CALLS OUT AGAIN.

HEMINGS (even more loudly):

GO-AS!

SOUND FX: SILENCE FOR A MOMENT, THEN THE HORSE MOVES FORWARD AGAIN, ONTO THE ICE: THE CLIP-CLOP SOUND STOPS AND IS REPLACED BY THE QUIETER, MUFFLED SOUND OF HOOVES ON ICE.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE LAUGHS JOYFULLY, OR AT LEAST WITH RELIEF. WHEN HE STOPS LAUGHING, THE ONLY SOUNDS THAT CAN BE HEARD ARE THE CRIES AND SHRIEKS OF ALL THE OTHER PEOPLE ON THE ICE - PEOPLE OF ALL AGES, INCLUDING CHILDREN - WHO NOW SURROUND THEM AND SO ARE MUCH LOUDER THAN BEFORE.

SHAKESPEARE:

My God! There are people sledging, and skating...

SOUND FX: THERE IS A LOUD BUMP OR THUD, FOLLOWED BY A YELP OF PAIN, AS SOMEBODY OBVIOUSLY FALLS OVER RIGHT BESIDE THEM

SHAKESPEARE:

Or *trying* to skate! There are even *food stalls*.

HEMINGS:

Of course there are: all these people sledging and skating need feeding, too.

SOUND FX: THE LOUD BUZZ AND FIZZ OF A BRAZIER, ACCOMPANIED BY THE SHOUTS OF THE MAN IN CHARGE OF IT: "CHESTNUTS! COME AND GET YOUR CHESTNUTS! ROASTED CHESTNUTS!"

SHAKESPEARE:

Stay away from the ones selling *hot food*!

HEMINGS:

Don't worry - I will!

SOUND FX: THEY MOVE ACROSS THE ICE, WITH THE HORSE'S HOOVES AND THE WHEELS OF THE CART BARELY AUDIBLE UPON IT, IN CONTRAST TO THE NOISE THEY HAD MADE IN THE STREET. AND SLOWLY THE SOUNDS OF THE OTHER PEOPLE ON THE ICE - SKATING, SLEDGING, AND MAKING, SELLING OR BUYING FOOD - FADE AWAY. THEN, SUDDENLY, HEMINGS SNAPS VIOLENTLY ON THE REINS AGAIN

HEMINGS:

WHOAH, boy!

SOUND FX: THE HORSE COMES TO A HALT AND THERE IS SILENCE, APART FROM THE OCCASIONAL PANT OR SNORT FROM THE HORSE.

HEMINGS:

There it is!

SHAKESPEARE:

What?

HEMINGS:

Our new home!

SHAKESPEARE:

Where?

HEMINGS:

You *must* be able to see it: it's the only *unoccupied* piece of land on Bankside.

SHAKESPEARE (finally seeing it):

Oh, yes!

HEMINGS:

But not for much longer. *GO ON, boy!*

SOUND FX: HE SNAPS THE REINS AGAIN AND ONCE MORE THE HORSE BEGINS WALKING FORWARD ON THE ICE.

SCENE SIX: EXT. BANKSIDE (THE SITE OF THE NEW THEATRE).

SOUND FX: THE HORSE WHINNIES, THEN SOMEONE JUMPS DOWN FROM THE CART, LANDING ON THE MUDDY RIVERBANK WITH A LOUD "PLOP".

CONDELL (calling out):

That's almost everything.

SOUND FX: SOMEONE ELSE - SOMEONE HEAVIER - JUMPS DOWN FROM THE CART AND LANDS ON THE MUD WITH A HEAVIER "SPLASH".

BURBAGE:

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

SOUND FX: CONDELL, BURBAGE, HEMINGS AND SHAKESPEARE ALL LAUGH HEARTILY, IF ALSO A LITTLE WEARILY. FINALLY, THE LAUGHTER STOPS AND THERE IS TOTAL SILENCE, APART FROM THE SQUAWKING OF THE SEAGULLS ON THE RIVER BESIDE THEM.

HEMINGS:

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

BURBAGE (declaiming, loudly):

Nay, the *world!*

SOUND FX: ONCE AGAIN, 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.

SHAKESPEARE:

How long will it take to build?

HEMINGS:

Oh, about six months.

SHAKESPEARE:

"*Six months*"?

HEMINGS:

At most!

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

That's very kind of you to say so, John, but what will we do for six months? We'll *starve*!

HEMINGS:

It's alright, Will. We've already 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!

SOUND FX: THEY ALL LAUGH, EVEN SHAKESPEARE.

SHAKESPEARE (to HEMINGS):

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:

That would be worth seeing!

SOUND FX: THEY ALL ROAR WITH LAUGHTER.

SCENE SEVEN: EXT. THE STREET OUTSIDE THE THEATRE

SOUND FX: ALLEN WHISTLES TUNELESSLY AS HE WALKS ALONG THE ROAD TOWARDS HIS THEATRE - OR SO HE THINKS. THEN, SUDDENLY, THE TUNELESS WHISTLING STOPS.

ALLEN:

What - ?!

SOUND FX: A RAPID SUCCESSION OF FOOTSTEPS AS ALLEN OBVIOUSLY WALKS BACKWARDS AND FORWARDS VERY QUICKLY.

ALLEN:

Where - ?!

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS THE FOOTSTEPS COME TO A HALT AND ALLEN OBVIOUSLY STANDS COMPLETELY STILL. THE SILENCE CONTINUES FOR A FEW MOMENTS, UNTIL FINALLY, IN UTTER DESPERATION, ALLEN CALLS OUT IN HIS FEEBLE, REEDY VOICE -

ALLEN:

CONSTABLE!!!!

PART II (HISTORY)

SOUND FX: AN ANNOUNCEMENT IS MADE: "Part II (History) - 1601".

SCENE EIGHT: INT. OFFICE, THE GLOBE THEATRE

SOUND FX: THE SCRAPING OF A QUILL, AS SHAKESPEARE WRITES; THE RUSTLING OF CLOTH AS HEMINGS CHECKS A COSTUME; THE CLINKING OF COINS, AS CONDELL COUNTS MONEY; AND THE SOUND OF PACING UP AND DOWN, AS BURBAGE TRIES TO LEARN HIS LINES.

BURBAGE:

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

He hesitates, obviously trying to remember the next word.

HEMINGS (calling out):

"Everything."

BURBAGE (remembering):

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

SOUND FX: THERE IS A GENTLE KNOCKING AT THE DOOR AND A BOY (AGED ABOUT EIGHT) ENTERS.

BOY:

Master Shakespeare, Sir?

SHAKESPEARE:

Yes...?

BOY:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Who is it?

BOY:

A nobleman, Sir.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE LAUGHS, BUT THE BOY DOES NOT.

BOY:

What, Sir?

SHAKESPEARE:

It doesn't matter. What did he say?

BOY:

He said he wants to see *you*.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

BOY:

The Earl of Southampton, Sir.

SOUND FX: SILENCE FOR A FEW MOMENTS.

HEMINGS (to SHAKESPEARE):

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

SHAKESPEARE:

I don't know, but I shall have to find out. (*Pause.*) 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.

SOUND FX: THE BOY RUNS BACK TO THE STAGE AND HIS FOOTSTEPS CAN BE HEARD UNTIL THEY FINALLY FADE INTO SILENCE. THEN, SHAKESPEARE SIGHS HEAVILY AND STANDS UP.

HEMINGS:

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:

And I shall have to provide it.

SOUND FX: HE WALKS SLOWLY OVER TO THE DOOR, OPENS IT AND GOES OUT.

SCENE NINE: INT. STAGE, THE GLOBE THEATRE

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE WALKS ONTO THE GLOBE'S STAGE, HIS FOOTSTEPS ECHOING ON THE WOODEN FLOOR AS HE WALKS TO THE FRONT OF THE STAGE.

SOUTHAMPTON (AGED ABOUT 30 AND IMPECCABLY WELL SPOKEN):

I always wanted to be a player.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: SOUTHAMPTON LAUGHS.

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

There is no threat of war here, Sir.

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SOUND FX: SOUTHAMPTON LAUGHS.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

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:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE, FOR A FEW MOMENTS.

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. I want to commission a special production in honour of my noble Lord Essex.

SHAKESPEARE:

Of which play, my Lord?

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

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:

I do. 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!

SOUND FX: SILENCE FOR A MOMENT, AS SHAKESPEARE STARES 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.

SOUND FX: 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:

No! It must be "*Richard*". (Pause.) Don't you see, Will? It is *about* Essex!

SHAKESPEARE:

Is it, my Lord?

SOUTHAMPTON:

Of course it is! 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. (Pause.) 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.

SOUND FX: SILENCE, FOR A FEW MOMENTS.

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 (sounding 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*" with the 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:

My Lord?

SOUTHAMPTON:

Do you forget the debt you owe me, Will?

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!* (Pause.) 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 (furiously):

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!

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS SOUTHAMPTON OBVIOUSLY TRIES TO REGAIN CONTROL OF HIMSELF.

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:

And if I do not, or cannot?

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

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!

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS SHAKESPEARE OBVIOUSLY TRIES TO THINK WHAT TO SAY.

SHAKESPEARE (quietly):

I would have to persuade my business partners.

SOUTHAMPTON:

Your "business partners"?

SHAKESPEARE:

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:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE TAKES A DEEP BREATH.

SHAKESPEARE:

Then I will do my best to arrange it.

SOUTHAMPTON (EXCITEDLY):

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:

I will do it. Happily!

SOUND FX: SOUTHAMPTON LAUGHS.

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS SHAKESPEARE DOES NOT RESPOND.

SCENE TEN: INT. OFFICE, THE GLOBE THEATRE. DAY.

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. (*Pause.*) He *demands* that I do as he asks.

SOUND FX: SILENCE FOR A MOMENT, AS THE OTHERS OBVIOUSLY DIGEST WHAT SHAKESPEARE HAS JUST TOLD THEM.

CONDELL:

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

BURBAGE:

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

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.

SOUND FX: ONCE AGAIN, SHAKESPEARE TAKES A DEEP BREATH.

SHAKESPEARE:

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:

What? *Why?*

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE CHUCKLES.

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE LAUGHS.

HEMINGS:

And for a third thing, I owe you.

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!*

SOUND FX: HE IMITATES BURBAGE'S DEEP, GRUFF VOICE AS HE SAYS THIS AND THE OTHERS ALL LAUGH.

HEMINGS:

I owe you *everything*, Will - my career, my fortune, *everything!* We *all* do.

SOUND FX: BURBAGE SIGHS HEAVILY.

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.

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE LAUGHS.

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS SHAKESPEARE JUST STARES AT THEM ALL FOR A MOMENT.

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.

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS THEY ALL TAKE IN THE ENORMITY OF WHAT THEY HAVE JUST AGREED TO.

SCENE ELEVEN: INT. THE WINGS OF THE GLOBE THEATRE

SOUND FX: THE NOISE OF A SIZEABLE AUDIENCE GATHERING - WITH LAUGHTER, SHOUTING, EVEN THE ODD PROFANITY ("CHRIST'S EYES!", ETC) - AS HEARD IN THE WINGS OF THE GLOBE'S STAGE.

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Literally! *(Pause.)* Here comes Southampton and his guards.

SOUND FX: THE AUDIENCE LOUDLY APPLAUD SOUTHAMPTON'S ARRIVAL

SHAKESPEARE:

Look at him waving to all the *groundlings* down below while he keeps all the *seats* above for himself and his retinue.

SOUND FX: SOME AUDIENCE MEMBERS LAUGH LOUDLY, THEN APPLAUD

SHAKESPEARE:

He's obviously recognised some "old friends".

HEMINGS (scornfully):

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

SOUND FX: A TRUMPET, TO ANNOUNCE THE START OF THE PLAY

HEMINGS:

We are summoned.

SOUND FX: HEMINGS, SHAKESPEARE AND THE OTHER ACTORS IN THE FIRST SCENE WALK ON STAGE AND ARE GREETED WITH LOUD APPLAUSE

SCENE TWELVE: EXT. THE STAGE, THE GLOBE THEATRE

SHAKESPEARE (playing 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*."

SOUND FX: COMPLETE SILENCE, ON AND OFF STAGE, UNTIL IT IS SHATTERED BY A SERIES OF LOUD SHOUTS FROM THE AUDIENCE.

FIRST AUDIENCE MEMBER:

ENGLAND!

SECOND AUDIENCE MEMBER:

NOT ELIZABETH!

THIRD AUDIENCE MEMBER:

THAT'S WHO WE FIGHT FOR!

SOUND FX: THE AUDIENCE APPLAUD THESE CRIES LOUDLY, UNTIL FINALLY THE APPLAUSE DIES AND SHAKESPEARE CAN CONTINUE.

SHAKESPEARE (playing John Of Gaunt):

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

SCENE THIRTEEN: INT. THE WINGS OF THE GLOBE THEATRE

SOUND FX: AUDIENCE APPLAUSE, AS HEARD FROM THE WINGS.

SHAKESPEARE (whispering):

This is it - the deposition scene.

HEMINGS (also whispering):

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

SOUND FX: THE APPLAUSE FADES AND THE ACTORS ON STAGE CAN BE HEARD, CLEARLY AND DISTINCTLY, AS THEY DECLAIM LOUDLY.

BURBAGE (playing King Richard):

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

HEMINGS (whispering to Shakespeare, in the wings):

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

SHAKESPEARE (whispering to Hemings, in the wings):

They can't be hoping for *that* - can they?

HEMINGS (whispering to Shakespeare, in the wings):

Well, if they are, they'll be *severely* disappointed.

SOUND FX: THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE AS BURBAGE REMOVES HIS CROWN.

SCENE FOURTEEN: EXT. THE STAGE OF THE GLOBE THEATRE

SOUND FX: AUGUSTINE PHILIPS (PLAYING BOLINGBROKE, THE REBEL WHO OVERTHROWS RICHARD AND TAKES HIS CROWN), WEEPS LOUDLY.

PHILIPS (playing Bolingbroke):

"I'll make a voyage to the Holy Land

To wash this blood off from my guilty hand.

March sadly after."

SOUND FX: FOOTSTEPS AS PHILIPS EXITS, FOLLOWED BY HIS MEN, WHO SLOWLY CARRY RICHARD'S COFFIN.

ONCE THEY HAVE EXITED, THERE IS TOTAL SILENCE FOR A FEW MOMENTS, WHICH IS FINALLY BROKEN BY A SERIES OF LOUD CRIES OR SHOUTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

SEVERAL AUDIENCE MEMBERS (together):

God save our gracious General!

OTHER AUDIENCE MEMBERS (together, even louder):

God save the Earl of Essex!

SOUND FX: FINALLY, A CRY IS TAKEN UP BY THE WHOLE AUDIENCE

AUDIENCE (shouting, as one):

GOD SAVE THE KING!!!

SOUND FX: THERE IS THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE AND EVEN THE NOISY BANGING OF SWORDS ON SHIELDS BY SOME AUDIENCE MEMBERS.

SCENE FIFTEEN: INT. THE WINGS OF THE GLOBE THEATRE

SOUND FX: THE APPLAUSE AND BANGING AS HEARD IN THE WINGS.

SHAKESPEARE (shouting, to make himself heard):

Should we take a *bow*?

HEMINGS (also shouting, to make himself heard):

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

SOUND FX: THE APPLAUSE AND THE BANGING OF SHIELDS FADE AND ARE REPLACED BY THE LOUD CHATTER OF CONVERSATION AND LAUGHTER AS THE AUDIENCE LEAVE THE THEATRE: WHEN SHAKESPEARE AND HEMINGS SPEAK, THEY NO LONGER HAVE TO SHOUT

SHAKESPEARE:

I don't believe it!

HEMINGS:

What?

SHAKESPEARE:

Southampton's guards are handing out *money* to everyone as they leave.

CONDELL:

It's the first time I've seen an audience being *paid*, rather than *paying*, to attend a play. (*Beat.*) It explains their enthusiasm.

SOUND FX: RAPID FOOTSTEPS, AS SOMEONE CROSSES THE STAGE.

SHAKESPEARE (whispering again):

Quiet! Here comes Southampton!

SOUND FX: THE FOOTSTEPS STOP, AND WHEN SOUTHAMPTON (AGED 30) ADDRESSES THE ACTORS, IT IS WITH ALL THE HAUGHTINESS AND SELF-IMPORTANCE THAT ONLY A TRUE ARISTOCRAT POSSESSES

SOUTHAMPTON:

Thank you, Will! Thank you!

SHAKESPEARE:

You're very welcome, my Lord.

SOUTHAMPTON (to the other actors, with a flourish):

Thank you *all!* You were *wonderful* - just *wonderful!*

THE OTHER ACTORS (as one):

Thank you, my Lord.

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.

SOUND FX: THE LETTER RUSTLES AS SOUTHAMPTON HANDS IT OVER

SHAKESPEARE:

Thank you, my Lord.

SOUTHAMPTON:

And here is the final payment for the rest of you.

SOUND FX: HE CLICKS HIS FINGERS AND HIS GUARD WALKS ACROSS THE STAGE, HIS FOOTSTEPS ECHOING IN THE NOW-EMPTY THEATRE.

SOUTHAMPTON:

I think that you will find it *exceeding* generous! But you have earned every penny.

SOUND FX: THE LOUD CLINKING OF COINS - A LOT OF COINS - IN A BAG, AS THE GUARD HANDS OVER THE ACTORS' FINAL PAYMENT.

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SOUND FX: SOUTHAMPTON'S LAUGHTER RINGS OUT ACROSS THE STAGE

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SOUND FX: FOOTSTEPS AND MORE LAUGHTER, AS SOUTHAMPTON AND HIS GUARD CROSS THE STAGE AGAIN, BEFORE FINALLY EXITING. AFTER THEY EXIT, THERE IS SILENCE FOR A MOMENT, UNTIL -

HEMINGS:

"Emboldened" to do *what?*

SOUND FX: SILENCE AGAIN - NOBODY ANSWERS HIS QUESTION.

SCENE SIXTEEN: INT. THE STUDY IN THE EARL OF ESSEX'S HOUSE

SOUTHAMPTON:

My Lord Essex, the performance was *magnificent!* It rallied the troops *wonderfully*. Having seen a monarch surrender power *on stage*, they are ready to see one surrender power *for real!*

SOUND FX: SOUTHAMPTON LAUGHS HEARTILY, AND WHEN THE EARL OF ESSEX (WHO IS AGED 35) FINALLY SPEAKS, HIS VOICE IS EVEN RICHER, PLUMMIER AND MORE CONDESCENDING THAN SOUTHAMPTON'S.

ESSEX:

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

Indeed, my Lord.

ESSEX:

Like the supposed "rebel", 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:

That cannot happen.

SOUTHAMPTON:

No. It cannot.

SOUND FX: A FOOTSTEP, AS ESSEX MOVES CLOSER TO SOUTHAMPTON, AND THEN HE SPEAKS IN A QUIETER, MORE CONSPIRATORIAL TONE.

ESSEX:

Once we leave this room, Henry, 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. So, if you want to leave me, Henry - to *abandon* me - go now. Otherwise, you must stay the course.

SOUTHAMPTON (instantly):

I will stay the course, my Lord.

SOUND FX: ESSEX LAUGHS, QUIETLY AT FIRST, THEN MORE LOUDLY.

ESSEX:

Good. Then let us claim what is *ours!*

SOUND: THE TWO MEN SLAP EACH OTHER ON THE BACK. THEN THEY WALK OFF TOGETHER, UNTIL THEIR FOOTSTEPS FADE INTO SILENCE

SCENE SEVENTEEN: EXT. ESSEX'S COURTYARD.

SOUND FX: ESSEX SHOUTS AS HE ADDRESSES HIS ASSEMBLED TROOPS

ESSEX:

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

SOUND FX: HIS MEN ALL CHEER.

ESSEX:

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

SOUND FX: HIS MEN CHEER EVEN MORE LOUDLY.

ESSEX:

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

SOUND: FX: THIS ELICITS THE LOUDEST CHEER OF ALL.

SCENE EIGHTEEN: EXT. A LONDON STREET

SOUND FX: THE SOUND OF HORSES' HOOVES, AS SOUTHAMPTON AND ESSEX LEAD THEIR MEN, WHO ARE ALL ON FOOT BEHIND THEM, INTO LONDON. SUDDENLY, THERE IS THE SOUND OF ANOTHER HORSE, WHINNYING LOUDLY AND REARING UP IN FRONT OF THEM.

NOBLEMAN (calling out):

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

SOUND: A SINGLE HORSE'S HOOVES, AS ESSEX RIDES FORWARD.

ESSEX:

'Tis I, Sheriff - the Earl of Essex.

SHERIFF:

My Lord Essex?! What do you mean by this show of force?

ESSEX:

I have come to reclaim my title of vice-regent. *(Pause.)*
Come - join us!

SHERIFF:

What? *Never!* You must lay down your arms, my Lord - *at once!*

ESSEX:

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

SHERIFF:

Then, Sir, you are a *traitor!*

SOUND FX: ESSEX GASPS IN AMAZEMENT AND THERE IS LOUD CHATTER AMONG HIS MEN: "WHAT DID HE SAY?"; "HE CAN'T SAY THAT!": "HE SHOULD *DIE* FOR SAYING THAT!", ETC.

ESSEX:

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

SOUND FX: HE DRAWS HIS SWORD WITH A LOUD SWISH

ESSEX (loudly, as he gives the order to his men behind him):

CHARGE!

SHERIFF (calling out equally loudly to his men behind him):

Hold your ground, men! Do not let them through!

SOUND FX: A SINGLE HORSE'S HOOVES AS ESSEX RIDES FORWARD TO CONFRONT THE SHERIFF: THE SHERIFF DRAWS HIS SWORD, AGAIN WITH A LOUD SWISH, AND THE TWO MEN FIGHT, THEIR SWORDS CLASHING REPEATEDLY. ALL AROUND THEM, THE BATTLE ERUPTS, AS ESSEX'S MEN CLASH WITH THE SHERIFF'S MEN, THEIR SWORDS AND PIKESTAFFS CLASHING AND CLANGING TOGETHER, AND MEN SCREAM OUT IN AGONY AS THEY ARE WOUNDED OR SLAIN. THE FIGHTING CONTINUES FOR A FEW MOMENTS, UNTIL SUDDENLY THERE IS AN ENORMOUS ROAR IN THE DISTANCE AND ALMOST IMMEDIATELY THE FIGHTING STOPS.

ESSEX (calling out, loudly):

Who are they?

SHERIFF (calling out, even more loudly):

Reinforcements! Thank God - *and Lord Cecil!*

SOUND FX: THE ALMOST DEAFENING THUNDER OF HORSES' HOOVES AS THE REINFORCEMENTS, ALL OF THEM ON HORSEBACK, CHARGE TOWARDS ESSEX AND HIS MEN. FOR A MOMENT, ONLY THIS SOUND CAN BE HEARD, BUT THEN THE CRIES GO UP AMONG ESSEX'S MEN.

FIRST MAN (calling out):

RUN!

SECOND MAN (calling out, even more loudly):

THERE'S TOO MANY OF 'EM!

THIRD MAN (calling out, loudest of all):

SAVE YOURSELVES!

SOUND FX: AS THE REINFORCEMENTS ON HORSEBACK DRAW NEAR, SUCH THAT THE THUNDERING OF THEIR HORSES' HOOVES BECOMES EVEN LOUDER, ESSEX'S MEN - ALMOST ALL OF WHOM ARE ON FOOT, APART FROM ESSEX HIMSELF AND SOUTHAMPTON - TURN AND RUN AWAY, MANY OF THEM DROPPING THEIR SWORDS OR PIKESTAFFS AS THEY DO SO, SUCH THAT THEY CLANG AND ECHO IN THE STREET.

ESSEX (crying out):

Where are they going?

SHERIFF (calling out to him):

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

SOUTHAMPTON (calling out):

We must flee, too, my Lord, or we'll be *captured!* Come on!

SOUND FX: THERE IS A MOMENT'S SILENCE, DURING WHICH THE ROAR OF THE REINFORCEMENTS ON HORSEBACK BECOMES EVEN LOUDER. THEN THERE IS THE SOUND OF WHINNYING AND HORSES' HOOVES, AS SOUTHAMPTON AND ESSEX WHEEL THEIR HORSES AROUND AND RIDE OFF IN THE DIRECTION THAT THEIR MEN HAVE FLED IN.

SHERIFF (calling after them):

That's right, you *scoundrels*: run for your lives!

SOUND FX: THE SHERIFF LAUGHS LOUDLY AND HIS LAUGHTER CONTINUES AS THE REINFORCEMENTS ON HORSEBACK THUNDER PAST HIM, RIDING AFTER ESSEX, SOUTHAMPTON AND THEIR MEN AS THEY FLEE.

SCENE NINETEEN: INT. THE STUDY IN THE EARL OF ESSEX'S HOUSE

SOUND FX: ESSEX AND SOUTHAMPTON RUN DOWN A LONG CORRIDOR. SUDDENLY, THEY STOP RUNNING, OPEN A DOOR AND SHUT IT BEHIND THEM. THEY LEAN AGAINST IT FOR A MOMENT, PANTING FOR BREATH.

ESSEX:

Quick! Barricade it!

SOUND FX: ESSEX AND SOUTHAMPTON GRAB WHATEVER FURNITURE THEY CAN FIND - CHAIRS, TABLES, ANYTHING - AND THROW IT AGAINST THE DOOR, TO TRY AND BUILD A MAKESHIFT BARRICADE.

SOUTHAMPTON:

That won't hold them for long, my Lord. Then what do we do?

ESSEX:

There is nothing left but the *Roman* way.

SOUTHAMPTON:

WHAT?! Kill ourselves? But we will go to *hell!*

ESSEX:

'Tis better than going to the *Tower!*

SOUND FX: THERE ARE MANY FOOTSTEPS (THOSE OF ABOUT SIX MEN) AS SOLDIERS RUN DOWN THE CORRIDOR TOWARDS THE STUDY, WHERE ESSEX AND SOUTHAMPTON HAVE BARRICADED THEMSELVES IN. WHEN THEY REACH THE END OF THE CORRIDOR, SEVERAL SOLDIERS THROW THEMSELVES AT THE DOOR AND IT BEGINS TO BREAK AND SPLINTER. THEN, THE MEN'S CAPTAIN CALLS OUT FROM BEHIND THE DOOR.

CAPTAIN:

Remember - don't kill them! The Queen will want them *alive!*

SOUND FX: BEHIND THE DOOR, SEVERAL OF THE SOLDIERS DRAW BACK: THEIR FOOTSTEPS CAN BE HEARD AS THEY SLOWLY WALK BACKWARDS. THEN THEY CHARGE THE DOOR AGAIN, AND THIS TIME THEY SMASH IT DOWN, BREAKING THROUGH THE MAKESHIFT BARRICADE, TO THE LOUD CHEERS OF THEIR COLLEAGUES. THEN THEY BEGIN CLIMBING OVER THE BROKEN CHAIRS AND TABLES, MANY OF WHICH BREAK UNDER THEIR WEIGHT, AND ENTER THE ROOM.

ESSEX (calling out over the melee):

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

SOUND FX: ONCE AGAIN, HE DRAWS HIS SWORD WITH A LOUD SWISH.

ESSEX (calling out):

We must run onto each other's swords!

SOUTHAMPTON (also calling out):

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

ESSEX:

WHAT?! (Pause.) TURNCOAT!

SOUND FX: RAPID FOOTSTEPS, AS ESSEX THRUSTS HIS SWORD AT SOUTHAMPTON, BUT SOUTHAMPTON - CRYING OUT IN FEAR - JUST MANAGES TO EVADE IT. BEFORE ESSEX CAN TRY AGAIN, THE SOLDIERS GRAB HOLD OF THEM BOTH AND LITERALLY WRESTLE THEM TO THE FLOOR: SOUTHAMPTON DOES NOT RESIST; BUT ESSEX RESISTS LOUDLY AND FORCEFULLY: "UNHAND ME, YOU DOGS!", ETC. FINALLY THE CAPTAIN SHOUTS AT, OR ISSUES ORDERS, TO ESSEX.

CAPTAIN (calling out):

Let go of your sword, my Lord! It's over!

SOUND FX: AS ESSEX CONTINUES TO STRUGGLE AND CURSE, SHOUTING "DAMN YOU! DAMN ALL OF YOU!", ETC., SOUTHAMPTON BEGINS TO CRY - INDEED, TO WAIL OR BLUBBER - LIKE A CHILD.

SCENE TWENTY: INT. OFFICE, THE GLOBE THEATRE.

SOUND FX: CONDELL IS, AS ALWAYS, COUNTING CLINKING COINS ("ELEVEN, TWELVE, THIRTEEN", ETC.); HEMINGS IS SEWING, OCCASIONALLY STOPPING TO BITE OFF THREAD, AND SINGING WORDLESSLY AS HE DOES SO ("TRA-LA-LA, TRA-LA-LEE..."); AND SHAKESPEARE IS WRITING, AS SHOWN BY THE RAPID SCRAPING OF HIS QUILL ON PARCHMENT. SUDDENLY, THE DOOR IS THROWN OPEN AND BURBAGE BURSTS IN, OUT OF BREATH AND PANTING LOUDLY.

SHAKESPEARE:

Richard! What's wrong?

BURBAGE (breathlessly):

Haven't you heard?

SHAKESPEARE:

Heard what?

BURBAGE (still gasping for breath):

Essex and Southampton have led a *rebellion* against the Queen!

SHAKESPEARE:

WHAT?!

HEMINGS:

Oh, my God!

SOUND FX: BURBAGE STOPS TALKING AND JUST GASPS FOR BREATH. IT IS A FEW MOMENTS BEFORE HE HAS REGAINED HIS BREATH SUFFICIENTLY TO SPEAK PROPERLY: WHEN HE DOES SO, FOR ONCE HE SPEAKS WITH RELATIVE RESTRAINT, RATHER THAN DECLAIMING.

BURBAGE:

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

CONDELL (quietly):

And we shall soon join them.

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS THEY ALL DIGEST WHAT CONDELL HAS SAID

SCENE TWENTY-ONE: EXT. THE STAGE OF THE GLOBE THEATRE.

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE SHOUTS TO ADDRESS THE ASSEMBLED COMPANY FROM THE STAGE.

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

SOUND FX: HEMINGS LAUGHS, GRIMLY.

SHAKESPEARE:

Pray tell, John, what *amuses* you?

HEMINGS:

You, Will.

SHAKESPEARE:

Me?

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Aye. 'Tis the first time.

HEMINGS:

I say we tell the truth.

SHAKESPEARE:

"The truth"?

HEMINGS:

Aye, that we - the *company* - owed Southampton a debt and merely sought to discharge it.

CONDELL:

And is that debt above the debt of *loyalty* we owe the Queen? I think not! (*Pause.*) 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.

SOUND FX: CONDELL LAUGHS, MISCHIEVOUSLY.

CONDELL:

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:

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

SOUND FX: BRYANT, A YOUNGER ACTOR (AGED ABOUT 25), SPEAKS UP: WHEN HE DOES SO, HIS THIN, YOUNG, RATHER REEDY VOICE IS QUITE DIFFERENT TO THE MATURE VOICES OF THE OLDER ACTORS

BRYANT:

Why *not* tell the truth, Will?

HEMINGS:

What do you mean, Bryant? In fact, what are you even *doing* here?]

BRYANT:

You gathered the whole company and I have as much right to be here as any other member of the company. Now, I say again: why *not* tell the truth, Will?

SHAKESPEARE:

What "truth"?

BRYANT:

That you *loved* Southampton!

SHAKESPEARE:

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:

WHAT?!

BRYANT:

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

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:

You must have known what he was planning.

SHAKESPEARE:

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.

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS SHAKESPEARE PAUSES FOR BREATH.

SHAKESPEARE:

He misled me. He used my debt to him - a debt I *had* to discharge! - to make me do his bidding.

SOUND FX: BRYANT SCOFFS, LOUDLY.

BRYANT:

It must have been a *considerable* debt.

SOUND FX: FAST, HEAVY FOOTSTEPS, AS HEMINGS QUICKLY CROSSES THE STAGE TO CONFRONT BRYANT.

HEMINGS:

It was - and we *all* owed it!

BRYANT:

I owe *no* man.

HEMINGS:

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!

SOUND FX: EVERYONE - EVERYONE EXCEPT BRYANT - LAUGHS.

BRYANT:

I've had enough of this. I'm going!

HEMINGS:

Where?

BRYANT:

For a piss!

CONDELL:

Where? In a *whore's mouth*?!

SOUND FX: AGAIN, EVERYONE - EVERYONE EXCEPT BRYANT - LAUGHS, THEN THERE ARE RAPID FOOTSTEPS AS BRYANT STORMS OFF. AS SOON AS HE HAS GONE, HEMINGS ADDRESSES THE ACTORS, DECLAIMING, AS IF HE WERE PERFORMING AND NOT JUST SPEAKING

HEMINGS:

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*!

SOUND FX: ALL THE OTHER ACTORS AGREE VOLUBLY, SHOUTING: "YES"; "THAT'S RIGHT"; "WE'RE WITH YOU, WILL!" ETC.

SHAKESPEARE:

Gentlemen, once again, I don't know what to say.

SOUND FX: THE THEATRE DOORS ARE FLUNG OPEN, WITH A BANG, FOLLOWED BY THE SOUND OF MARCHING, AS A GROUP OF SOLDIERS ENTER, QUICKLY AND IN UNISON. THEY MARCH INTO THE MIDDLE OF THE THEATRE, AND THEIR CAPTAIN MARCHES UP TO THE STAGE.

CAPTAIN (calling out):

As part of the inquiry into the Earl of Essex's *rebellion*, the Lord Chief Justice orders you to appear before him.

HEMINGS (nervously):

All of us?

CAPTAIN:

Choose *one* of your number to speak on your behalf.

SOUND FX: THE CAPTAIN TURNS ON HIS HEEL AND REJOINS HIS MEN: WHEN THE ACTORS NEXT SPEAK, THEY DO SO FAR MORE QUIETLY

SHAKESPEARE:

I will do it.

HEMINGS:

No, Will. You can't.

SHAKESPEARE:

Why not?

HEMINGS:

Because your longstanding relationship with Southampton will only *strengthen* the suspicion that we were part of the rebellion.

CONDELL:

He's right, Will. It's better that you don't mention Southampton and his patronage *at all!*

HEMINGS:

Someone else should speak for us.

CONDELL:

I suggest Augustine.

SOUND FX: AUGUSTINE PHILIPS, THE ACTOR WHO HAD PLAYED THE REBEL BOLINGBROKE IN THE PERFORMANCE OF *RICHARD II*, GASPS

PHILIPS:

Me? What? *Why?*

CONDELL:

Because you are the most *innocent*-looking among us: in fact, you are the *only* innocent-looking one among us!

SOUND FX: ALL THE OTHER ACTORS LAUGH

HEMINGS:

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

PHILIPS:

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

CONDELL:

You are best equipped of all of us to play the role of "Spokesman", Augustine.

HEMINGS:

Aye.

SOUND FX: HEMINGS'S HEAVY FOOTSTEPS ON THE WOODEN STAGE AS HE WALKS OVER TO PHILIPS AND SLAPS HIM HARD ON THE BACK.

HEMINGS:

Don't worry, Augustine. 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 - omitting *all* mention of Southampton.

CONDELL:

Good.

HEMINGS:

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

SCENE TWENTY-TWO: INT. THE COURT OF THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE.

SOUND FX: THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE, AN ELDERLY JUDGE, READS ALOUD, BUT ONLY FAINTLY AND INDISTINCTLY, AS HE PERUSES THE PLAYERS' STATEMENT, WITH ONLY A FEW WORDS OR PHRASES BEING HEARD CLEARLY: "ONLY FOR THE MONEY"; "WE HAD NO IDEA";

AND "FAITHFUL TO THE QUEEN", ETC. WHEN HE FINISHES READING AND LOOKS UP, HE SPEAKS FAR MORE CLEARLY AND DISTINCTLY.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

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

PHILIPS:

Yes, my Lord.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

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

PHILIPS:

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.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

Then why perform the play - especially such an *inflammatory* play - the day before the rebellion?

PHILIPS:

As it says in my statement, my Lord, we did it for the *money*. No other reason.

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE DIGESTS THIS. THEN HE STARTS TO CHUCKLE, QUIETLY AND GRIMLY.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

Well, you are a *player*, I suppose, and players are little more than *whores*! I can well believe that you would do *anything* for money.

SOUND FX: HE LAUGHS, MIRTHLESSLY, FOR A MOMENT.

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.

SOUND FX: PHILIPS EXHALES LOUDLY WITH RELIEF.

PHILIPS:

Thank you, my Lord. Thank you.

SOUND FX: A DOOR OPENS AND SOMEONE ENTERS THE ROOM AND GOES UP TO THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE BEFORE CONFERRING WITH HIM QUIETLY: THE TWO PEOPLE CAN BOTH BE HEARD MUTTERING, BUT WHAT THEY SAY IS INDISTINCT AND UNCLEAR.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

Very well.

SOUND FX: WHOEVER HAS JUST ARRIVES LEAVES AGAIN JUST AS QUICKLY, SHUTTING THE DOOR BEHIND THEM.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

I have a message for you, Mister Philips.

PHILIPS:

For *me*, my Lord?

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

That is what I said: there's no need to repeat it!

PHILIPS:

No, my Lord. Sorry, my Lord. Who is it from?

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

The Queen!

PHILIPS:

"*THE QUEEN*"?!

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

That is what I said: again, there's no need to repeat it!

SOUND FX: FOOTSTEPS AS PHILIPS COMES FORWARD AND TAKES THE MESSAGE THAT THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE HAS FOR HIM: HE TAKES A STEP BACK, READS IT IN SILENCE AND THEN GASPS IN AMAZEMENT

PHILIPS:

Oh my God!

SOUND FX: ONCE AGAIN THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE LAUGHS CRUELLY.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

I thought you'd be surprised.

SCENE TWENTY-THREE: EXT. THE STAGE OF THE GLOBE THEATRE.

SOUND FX: ALL THE PLAYERS, INCLUDING HEMINGS, CONDELL, SHAKESPEARE AND BURBAGE, ARE ALL ON THE STAGE AGAIN, MILLING AROUND PHILIPS AND ASKING HIM QUESTIONS: "WHAT DID HE SAY?"; "ARE WE DONE FOR?"; "IS THERE ANY HOPE?", ETC.

HEMINGS:

Well, Augustine? What's the upshot?

PHILIPS:

The upshot is that we are *not* suspected of being part of the conspiracy.

SOUND: THE PLAYERS EXHALE OR SIGH IN RELIEF, AND SOME CHEER

SHAKESPEARE:

You must have been a convincing witness, Augustine.

PHILIPS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

I'm pleased to hear it.

CONDELL:

So they were persuaded by the "money" story?

PHILIPS:

Aye. As you thought they would be.

CONDELL:

Good.

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: LOUD LAUGHTER, WHICH EVENTUALLY FADES TO SILENCE

SHAKESPEARE:

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

PHILIPS:

Because we have received *another* commission.

SHAKESPEARE:

What? From who?

PHILIPS:

The Queen.

SOUND FX: SEVERAL PLAYERS GASP IN AMAZEMENT, OR HORROR.

SHAKESPEARE:

WHAT?!

PHILIPS:

It's all in this note.

SOUND FX: A RUSTLE OF PAPER AS HE TAKES OUT THE MESSAGE THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE GAVE HIM AND HANDS IT TO SHAKESPEARE: THE OTHER PLAYERS CROWD ROUND SHAKESPEARE TO READ IT, TOO.

HEMINGS:

What is't, Will? What does it say?

SHAKESPEARE:

It says Her Majesty desires that we perform for her.

HEMINGS:

What?! When?

SHAKESPEARE:

Tomorrow evening. (*Pause.*) The night before Southampton and Essex are executed.

HEMINGS:

WHAT?!

CONDELL:

And what play?

SHAKESPEARE:

"Richard the Second".

HEMINGS:

God's teeth!

SHAKESPEARE:

Complete with deposition scene.

SOUND FX: FOR A MOMENT, THERE IS ONLY 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.

SOUND FX: ONCE AGAIN, THERE IS TOTAL, STUNNED SILENCE.

SCENE TWENTY-FOUR: INT. BACKSTAGE AT COURT

SOUND FX: A HUBBUB AS THE PLAYERS WAIT TO GO ON STAGE, INCLUDING THE FOOTSTEPS OF SERVANTS CARRYING SILVER PLATTERS (AND OCCASIONALLY DROPPING THEM OR CLANGING THEM

AGAINST EACH OTHER); THE TUNING-UP OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS, INCLUDING LUTES AND RECORDERS; AND THE CONVERSATION AND LAUGHTER OF THE "AUDIENCE", WHICH IS THE ENTIRE ROYAL COURT

HEMINGS:

They're all out there, waiting for us - even the Queen herself!

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:

Exactly! We *must* go on.

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE SIGHS HEAVILY - DEEPLY.

SHAKESPEARE:

I suppose we must.

SOUND FX: THE OTHER PLAYERS, INCLUDING BURBAGE AND PHILIPS, ARRIVE, CHATTING AMONGST THEMSELVES OR QUIETLY GOING OVER LINES: "MY LORD!"; "BUSHEY, BAGOT AND GREEN"; AND BURBAGE SAYING: "I WASTED TIME, AND NOW DOTH TIME WASTE ME". THEN SHAKESPEARE ADDRESSES THEM, SPEAKING AS LOUDLY AS HE CAN, WHICH IS NOT VERY LOUDLY, AS THEY ARE SO NEAR THE AUDIENCE.

SHAKESPEARE:

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:

What?

HEMINGS:

For once, you *must* be quiet.

CONDELL:

Aye. Say nothing!

SOUND FX: ALL THE PLAYERS - ALL EXCEPT SHAKESPEARE - LAUGH.

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, you don't! As I've said before, '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*, or *next* to 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:
about to perform for the Queen of England herself! (*Pause.*)
That's something a mere *grocer* -

CONDELL:

Or *fishmonger* -

HEMINGS:

Could only *dream* of!

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE LAUGHS.

HEMINGS:

Take your positions, men.

SOUND FX: THE PLAYERS IMMEDIATELY STAND TO ATTENTION, WHICH
INCLUDES CLEARING THEIR THROATS, COUGHING AND BURBAGE AGAIN
SAYING ALOUD: "AND NOW TIME DOTH WASTE ME".

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: ONE OF THE ACTORS LITERALLY CHOKES BACK TEARS.

HEMINGS:

So let us make it a memorable one -

SHAKESPEARE (interrupting him):

One fit for a *Queen*!

SOUND FX: EVERYONE LAUGHS.

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Tonight I do.

SOUND FX: A TRUMPET TO ANNOUNCE THE START OF THE PERFORMANCE

HEMINGS:

Good luck!

SOUND FX: THE ACTORS IN THE FIRST SCENE WALK OUT ON TO THE STAGE, THEIR FOOTSTEPS ON THE WOODEN FLOOR ECHOING LOUDLY.

SCENE TWENTY-FIVE: INT. THE STAGE AT COURT

SOUND FX: THE ACTORS IN THE FIRST SCENE, INCLUDING SHAKESPEARE, HEMINGS AND BURBAGE, WALK ON TO A SMATTERING OF APPLAUSE, RATHER THAN THE THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE THEY ARE USED TO. THIS THROWS THEM AND THEY STAND SILENTLY FOR A MOMENT, UNTIL BURBAGE, THE CONSUMMATE ACTOR, SPEAKS UP.

BURBAGE (playing King Richard):

"Old John of Gaunt, time-honoured Lancaster,
Hast thou according to thy oath and bond
Brought hither Henry Hereford, thy bold son..."

SCENE TWENTY-SIX: INT. THE STAGE AT COURT

BURBAGE (playing 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 -
All murdered."

SOUND FX: ON STAGE CONDELL GASPS, INVOLUNTARILY.

BURBAGE (under his breath to him):

Henry!

CONDELL (whispering back to him):

Sorry!

BURBAGE (resuming his speech, and declaiming again):

"For within the hollow crown
That rounds the mortal temples of a king
Keeps Death his court..."

SCENE TWENTY-SEVEN: INT. THE STAGE AT COURT.

SOUND FX: IT IS THE END OF THE PLAY AND PHILIPS (AS BOLINGBROKE) IS AGAIN WEeping FOR WHAT HE HAS DONE. FINALLY HE STOPS WEeping AND LOUDLY DECLAIMS THE PLAY'S FINAL LINES

PHILIPS (as Bolingbroke):

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

SOUND FX: FOOTSTEPS, AS PHILIPS LEADS HIS MEN OFF-STAGE: THEY FOLLOW SLOWLY, AS THEY CARRY RICHARD'S COFFIN. ONCE THE ACTORS HAVE EXITED, THERE IS SILENCE ON AND OFF STAGE.

SCENE TWENTY-EIGHT: INT. THE WINGS OF THE STAGE AT COURT.

SOUND FX: THE SILENCE CONTINUES AS THE COFFIN IS CARRIED OFF-STAGE. THEN, AS SOON AS IT IS BACKSTAGE, BURBAGE (WHO IS PLAYING RICHARD) JUMPS OUT AND LANDS WITH A LOUD THUD.

BURBAGE (quietly - at least for him):

Well...?

SHAKESPEARE (even more quietly):

"Well" what?

BURBAGE:

Did she *like* it?

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE SNORTS CONTEMPTUOUSLY.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

BURBAGE:

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

SOUND FX: OFF-STAGE, ONE PERSON CLAPS, SLOWLY AND FAINTLY AT FIRST BUT THEN WITH GROWING SPEED AND VOLUME; THEN OTHERS JOIN IN, ADDING TO IT, UNTIL FINALLY IT IS ALMOST DEAFENING.

SHAKESPEARE:

She *liked* it!

BURBAGE:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Even Lord Cecil.

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE AND BURBAGE BOTH BURST OUT LAUGHING.

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Oh, yes. Right.

BURBAGE:

Of course.

SOUND FX: FOOTSTEPS - LOTS OF THEM, AS THE PLAYERS ALL RUN ON STAGE TO TAKE THEIR BOW AND ACKNOWLEDGE THE AUDIENCE: AS THEY DO SO, THE APPLAUSE GROWS EVEN LOUDER.

SCENE TWENTY-NINE: INT. THE STAGE AT COURT.

SOUND FX: SUDDENLY, THE APPLAUSE STOPS INSTANTLY. THERE IS SILENCE, UNTIL THE QUEEN SPEAKS UP TO BREAK IT, AND WHEN SHE SPEAKS HER VOICE IS SO QUIET THAT UNLESS EVERYONE ELSE WAS SILENT, IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO HEAR HER AT ALL.

QUEEN (softly, indeed almost inaudibly):

Master Shakespeare...

SHAKESPEARE:

Your Majesty.

QUEEN (still softly and almost inaudibly):

Come here.

SOUND FX: THE SOUND OF SHAKESPEARE'S FOOTSTEPS, FIRST ON THE WOODEN STAGE AS HE WALKS FORWARD AND STEPS OFF IT, THEN ON THE STONE FLOOR AS HE APPROACHES THE QUEEN. FINALLY, HE STOPS WALKING AND JUST STANDS QUIETLY BESIDE THE QUEEN.

SHAKESPEARE:

Your Majesty.

QUEEN (even more quietly than before):

Closer. (Pause.) Beside my ear.

SOUND FX: A SINGLE FOOTSTEP, AS SHAKESPEARE STEPS NEARER, AND WHEN SHE NEXT SPEAKS, SHE IS SO QUIET THAT ONLY HE AMONG THE WHOLE ASSEMBLY OF ACTORS AND AUDIENCE HEARS HER.

QUEEN (barely audibly):

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

SHAKESPEARE (whispering back to her):

Thank you, your Majesty. You are too kind.

QUEEN (quietly, but pointedly):

I know!

SOUND FX: SILENCE, BUT FOR THE QUEEN'S LABOURED BREATHING.

QUEEN (again, barely audibly):

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

SHAKESPEARE (whispering back to her):

Yes, your Majesty. Of course.

QUEEN (barely audibly):

Good. And one final thing...

SHAKESPEARE (whispering back to her):

Yes, your Majesty?

QUEEN (barely audibly):

I am Richard the Second. Know ye not that?

SOUND FX: SILENCE, BUT FOR THE QUEEN'S LABOURED BREATHING.

SHAKESPEARE (whispering back to her):

No, your Majesty. I did *not* know.

QUEEN (barely audibly):

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

SOUND FX: SHE SLUMPS BACK IN HER SEAT, WITH A LONG, INDEED ALMOST DYING, SIGH.

QUEEN (a little more loudly):

You may go.

SHAKESPEARE (also a little more loudly):

Thank you, your Majesty. Thank you.

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE'S FOOTSTEPS, FIRST ON THE STONE FLOOR AND THEN ON THE WOODEN STAGE, AS HE WALKS AWAY FROM HER AND FINALLY EXITS.

SCENE THIRTY: INT. THE DRESSING ROOM AT COURT

SOUND FX: THE DOOR OPENS AND THE NOISE INSIDE - OF ALL THE PLAYERS LAUGHING AND JOKING - SUDDENLY STOPS, AS THEY ALL OBVIOUSLY STOP AND STARE AT SHAKESPEARE AS HE ENTERS.

HEMINGS:

What did she say to you?

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:

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

HEMINGS:

WHAT?!

SOUND FX: SILENCE AS THE PLAYERS ALL STARE AT SHAKESPEARE.

HEMINGS:

What did she *mean*?

SHAKESPEARE:

I don't know. And I certainly wasn't going to *ask*!

SOUND: SHAKESPEARE SIGHS, EXHALING IN RELIEF AND EXHAUSTION

SHAKESPEARE:

Now I suggest that we all "exit" *immediately*, before she changes her mind and has us *killed* after all!

HEMINGS:

Agreed!

SOUND FX: THE PLAYERS QUICKLY START CHANGING OUT OF THEIR COSTUMES AND GRAB THEIR PROPS AND MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS, SOME OF WHICH TWANG OR BANG AS THEY GRAB THEM.

SCENE THIRTY-ONE: EXT. THE PALACE GROUNDS.

SOUND FX: A DOOR IS OPENED ONTO THE PALACE GROUNDS AND THE PLAYERS PILE THROUGH IT, LAUGHING AND JOKING. THEY ARE NEARLY DELIRIOUS WITH RELIEF.

SHAKESPEARE (loudly):

The night air ne'er smelled so sweet!

HEMINGS:

Indeed.

SHAKESPEARE:

Even *I* cannot find words to describe it!

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE AND THE OTHER PLAYERS BURST OUT LAUGHING. THEY CONTINUE TO LAUGH FOR A FEW MOMENTS, UNTIL SUDDENLY THEY STOP LAUGHING, ABRUPTLY. THEY ARE ALL SILENT AS A GROUP OF WORKMEN PASS THEM, THEIR FOOTSTEPS ECHOING ON THE STONE PATH, AND THEIR LEADER OR FOREMAN WHISTLING.

LEADER/FOREMAN (cheerily):

Evening.

SHAKESPEARE (cheerlessly):

Good evening.

SOUND: THE WORKMEN'S FOOTSTEPS CONTINUE ON THE PATH FOR A FEW MOMENTS MORE, UNTIL FINALLY THEY FADE INTO SILENCE. THERE IS ANOTHER MOMENT'S SILENCE, UNTIL HEMINGS SPEAKS UP

HEMINGS:

Was that a *gallows* they were carrying?

CONDELL:

Yes. Or at least the component parts.

BURBAGE:

They're obviously building it for Essex.

SHAKESPEARE:

Aye. And Southampton.

SOUND FX: HAMMERING, AS THE WORKMEN BEGIN ASSEMBLING THE GALLOWS.

CONDELL:

But why here? Why not the Tower?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: THE HAMMERING GETS LOUDER.

BURBAGE:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

What would?

BURBAGE:

This - this night, this whole *story*!

SOUND FX: THE HAMMERING IS NOW SO LOUD THAT THE PLAYERS MUST RAISE THEIR VOICES TO MAKE THEMSELVES HEARD OVER IT.

HEMINGS:

Not in *our* lifetime.

CONDELL:

And certainly not in the *Queen's*!

BURBAGE:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS THE HAMMERING FINALLY STOPS.

SHAKESPEARE:

'Tis a plot more fanciful than any I wrote.

SOUND FX: FOOTSTEPS ON THE STONE PATH, AS THE PLAYERS CONTINUE WALKING, UNTIL FINALLY THEIR FOOTSTEPS FADE AWAY INTO SILENCE AS THEY EXIT THE PALACE GROUNDS.

PART III (TRAGEDY)

SOUND FX: AN ANNOUNCEMENT IS MADE: "Part III (Tragedy) - 1598. (PAUSE.) JANUARY."

SCENE THIRTY-TWO: INT. SHAKESPEARE'S STUDY, STRATFORD ON AVON.

SOUND FX: THE SCRAPING OF A QUILL ON PAPER.

SHAKESPEARE (dictating):

...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.

SOUND FX: THE SCRAPING OF THE QUILL ON PAPER CONTINUES FOR A MOMENT, THEN STOPS.

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:

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:

Indeed. Rightly so.

SOUND FX: SILENCE, OR NEAR-SILENCE, FOR A MOMENT, AS COLLINS READS OVER THE WILL, MUTTERING BARELY AUDIBLY.

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:

Very good.

COLLINS:

May I ask *another* question?

SHAKESPEARE:

Of course.

COLLINS:

Why are you making a will *now*? I hope you are not unwell.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

COLLINS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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:

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:

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

COLLINS:

Excellent. Then I wish you every felicitation.

SHAKESPEARE:

Thank you.

SOUND FX: COLLINS PUSHES BACK HIS CHAIR, PICKS UP THE WILL AND PLACES IT IN HIS BAG.

COLLINS:

Good day, Mister Shakespeare.

SHAKESPEARE:

Good day to *you*, Mister Collins.

SOUND FX: COLLINS'S FOOTSTEPS AS HE GOES OVER TO THE DOOR,
OPENS IT, GOES OUT AND CLOSSES IT BEHIND HIM.

SHAKESPEARE:

That's *one* thing done.

SCENE THIRTY-THREE: DINING ROOM, SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE, STRATFORD.

SOUND FX: THE HUB-BUB OF CONVERSATION (INDISTINGUISHABLE
BAR THE ODD PHRASE, SUCH AS "DIDN'T THE BRIDE LOOK
BEAUTIFUL?") AND LAUGHTER AROUND A CROWDED WEDDING TABLE.

SOUND FX: HEMINGS AND CONDELL BEGIN TO BANG ON THE TABLE,
BEFORE STARTING TO CHANT TOGETHER IN TIME-HONOURED FASHION.

HEMINGS AND CONDELL (together):

SPEECH! SPEECH!

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE AND SEVERAL OTHER PEOPLE LAUGH.

SHAKESPEARE:

Alright, you *rowdy* lot - it's coming!

HEMINGS (calling out from the other end of the table):

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

SOUND FX: LAUGHTER AROUND THE TABLE, THEN SHAKESPEARE
STANDS UP, PUSHING HIS CHAIR BACK FROM THE TABLE TO DO SO.

SHAKESPEARE:

I simply want to thank you all for coming today, especially
those of you, like John and Henry, who have come from afar!

HEMINGS:

It was our pleasure.

CONDELL:

Indeed.

HEMINGS:

Even if the journey nearly *killed* us!

SOUND FX: LAUGHTER AROUND THE TABLE.

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

I know. He said so in his letter.

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*!

SOUND FX: LAUGHTER AROUND THE TABLE.

SHAKESPEARE:

I also want to thank Thomas.

THOMAS:

Me? What for?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: LAUGHTER AROUND THE TABLE.

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:

And finally I want to thank my *own* family: Judith, Susanna and Anne. 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:

It is kind of you to say so, Judith, but I know that I have missed *much* that has happened in all your lives. *(Pause.)* 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*. *(Pause.)* God bless his soul.

SOUND FX: ANNE, SHAKESPEARE'S WIFE, BEGINS TO CRY, QUIETLY, WHILE SHAKESPEARE LITERALLY CHOKES BACK HIS TEARS, BEFORE CONTINUING.

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!

SOUND FX: THE TOAST IS TAKEN UP AROUND THE TABLE: "THE BRIDE AND GROOM", AND THEN THERE IS THE SOUND OF APPLAUSE, CHEERS AND EVEN THE BANGING OF THE ODD FIST ON THE TABLE.

SCENE THIRTY-FOUR: DINING ROOM, SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE, STRATFORD.

SOUND FX: THE PUFFING OF CLAY TOBACCO PIPES AS SHAKESPEARE, HEMINGS AND CONDELL SIT AT THE DINING TABLE AFTER THE WEDDING FEAST IS OVER. THEY ARE THE ONLY THREE LEFT AT THE TABLE NOW, AND ARE SITTING CLOSE TO EACH OTHER, NOT AT OPPOSITE ENDS OF THE TABLE, SO WHEN THEY SPEAK THEY DO NOT HAVE TO SHOUT OR CALL OUT TO EACH OTHER AS THEY DID BEFORE.

SHAKESPEARE:

It's been a great day.

HEMINGS:

Indeed.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: HEMINGS AND CONDELL LAUGH FOR A FEW MOMENTS. WHEN THE LAUGHTER DIES AWAY, SHAKESPEARE CONTINUES IN A MUCH MORE SERIOUS - EVEN SOLEMN - TONE.

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:

When was that?

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.

SOUND FX: SILENCE, APART FROM THE SOUND OF HEMINGS AND CONDELL PUFFING ON THEIR PIPES AND THEN EXHALING.

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!*

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.

SOUND FX: SILENCE AGAIN, APART FROM THE ODD PUFF ON THE PIPE AND SUBSEQUENT EXHALATION OF SMOKE.

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.

SOUND FX: SILENCE, APART FROM THE ODD INHALATION OR EXHALATION OF SMOKE. WHEN SHAKESPEARE RESUMES, HE SOUNDS MUCH HAPPIER.

SHAKESPEARE:

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 pauses as he raises his glass.*) To the Shakespeares and the Quineys!

HEMINGS AND CONDELL (together):

"The Shakespeares and the Quineys!"

SOUND FX: THE SOUND OF ALL THEIR GLASSES BEING DRAINED, SLOWLY, UNTIL THERE IS COMPLETE SILENCE AGAIN.

SCENE THIRTY-FIVE: INT. DOWNSTAIRS HALLWAY, SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE.

SOUND FX: THE SOUND OF LOUD KNOCKING - INDEED, HAMMERING - ON THE FRONT DOOR. THEN, EVEN AS IT CONTINUES, THERE IS THE SOUND OF SOMEONE COMING DOWN THE STAIRS.

SHAKESPEARE (calling out from the staircase):

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

SOUND FX: HE GOES UP TO THE FRONT DOOR AND OPENS IT.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: JUDITH BURSTS INTO TEARS. THROUGHOUT THE FOLLOWING CONVERSATION, SHE WILL ALTERNATELY BURST INTO TEARS AND TRY TO CONTROL HER CRYING.

SHAKESPEARE:

Come inside and tell me.

SOUND FX: 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:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE FOR A MOMENT, OTHER THAN JUDITH SNIFFING AND CHOKING BACK TEARS, BEFORE SHE FINALLY SPEAKS AGAIN.

JUDITH:

It's Thomas, Father.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JUDITH:

No, Father. He's been -

SOUND FX: SILENCE, OTHER THAN JUDITH'S SNIFFING AND SNUFFLING, AS SHE IS OBVIOUSLY UNABLE TO SAY ANY MORE.

SHAKESPEARE (curtly):

Go on - tell me!

JUDITH:

He's been *arrested!*

SOUND FX: SHE BURSTS INTO TEARS AGAIN.

SHAKESPEARE:

"Arrested"? What for?

SOUND FX: SILENCE, OTHER THAN THE SOUND OF JUDITH TRYING TO STOP CRYING AND CHOKING BACK HER TEARS, AND BECAUSE SHE IS HESITATING BEFORE SPEAKING, BECAUSE SHE IS EMBARRASSED, OR EVEN ASHAMED. FINALLY, SHE SPEAKS THROUGH HER TEARS.

JUDITH:

"Unlawful copulation and abandonment".

SHAKESPEARE:

WHAT?!

SOUND FX: SILENCE, OTHER THAN JUDITH'S CRYING AND SNIFFLING.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JUDITH:

A woman called Margaret Wheeler.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JUDITH:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS JUDITH SEEMS TO FINALLY CONTROL HER CRYING; THERE IS JUST THE ODD SNIFF NOW.

JUDITH:

She died in childbirth last week.

SHAKESPEARE:

WHAT?!

JUDITH:

And the child died too.

SOUND FX: TOTAL SILENCE (NOT EVEN CRYING OR SNIFFING).

SHAKESPEARE:

Where is he?

JUDITH:

At the courthouse - the *church* courthouse.

SHAKESPEARE:

"The *church* courthouse"?

JUDITH:

Yes. Apparently, because of the nature of the charges against him, he will be tried in an *ecclesiastical* court. (Pause.) Oh, Father, can you help him?

SHAKESPEARE:

"Help" him? *How?*

JUDITH:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JUDITH:

Oh, they do - they do! You're the richest and most powerful man in Stratford, Father. If anyone can help Thomas, it's *you!* Please help him - if not for his own sake, then for *mine!*

SOUND FX: SHE STARTS TO CRY AGAIN AND SPEAKS THROUGH HER TEARS.

JUDITH:

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

SOUND FX: HER CRYING BECOMES EVEN MORE INTENSE.

SHAKESPEARE (softly):

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

JUDITH:

Oh, thank you, Father, thank you. I knew I could rely on you.

SHAKESPEARE:

You always can, my dear. You always can.

SCENE THIRTY-SIX: INT. JAIL CELL.

SOUND FX: THE JANGLING OF KEYS AS THE JAILER SEARCHES FOR THE RIGHT ONE. FINALLY FINDING IT, HE OPENS THE CELL DOOR, WHICH OPENS WITH A CREAK, THEN SHUTS IT AGAIN AS SHAKESPEARE GOES INSIDE. AS HE WALKS AWAY, HIS FOOTSTEPS (AND THE JANGLING OF HIS KEYS) CAN BE HEARD, UNTIL FINALLY THEY FADE OUT TO SILENCE AS HE DISAPPEARS.

THOMAS:

Thank you for coming.

SHAKESPEARE:

I came as soon as Judith told me. 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.

SOUND FX: SILENCE FOR A MOMENT, AS THOMAS OBVIOUSLY DIGESTS THIS.

THOMAS:

Thank you.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS:

Of course. Anything.

SHAKESPEARE:

Did you do it?

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS THOMAS DOES NOT REPLY.

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 -

THOMAS (alarmed):

"Excommunication"?

SHAKESPEARE:

Yes. And flogging!

THOMAS (even more alarmed):

"Flogging"?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS:

Oh my God!

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE AGAIN, AS THOMAS ONCE MORE DOES NOT REPLY IMMEDIATELY.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS THOMAS STILL DOES NOT REPLY.

SHAKESPEARE (sympathetically):

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

THOMAS:

You do?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: THE RUSTLING OF PAPER AS SHAKESPEARE TAKES OUT A NOTE FROM HIS JACKET POCKET.

SHAKESPEARE (reading):

"Margaret Wheeler".

THOMAS:

Yes. I did.

SOUND FX: THOMAS 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 (while still crying):

Yes.

SHAKESPEARE:

When you began courting Judith.

THOMAS:

Yes.

SHAKESPEARE:

Who was she?

THOMAS:

Just a local girl.

SHAKESPEARE:

"Local"? I don't know the name "Wheeler".

THOMAS:

Well, she's from Arden - the forest.

SHAKESPEARE:

Oh.

THOMAS:

She was a *WHORE!*

SHAKESPEARE:

WHAT?!

THOMAS:

She must have been. She used her wiles to lure me into bed.

SOUND FX: THOMAS CHUCKLES, RUEFULLY.

THOMAS:

I say "bed" - it was actually the forest floor.

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS THOMAS STOPS CHUCKLING AND STOPS CRYING.

THOMAS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Alright. I believe you.

THOMAS:

You do?

SHAKESPEARE:

Yes.

THOMAS:

Thank you. *(Pause.)* But what am I going to do? I don't want to be *excommunicated!* Or *flogged!*

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS:

Right. Of course.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS:

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

SOUND FX: THOMAS BEGINS TO CRY AGAIN.

SCENE THIRTY-SEVEN: INT. SHAKESPEARE'S STUDY.

SOUND FX: SILENCE FOR A MOMENT, THEN KNOCKING AT THE DOOR.

SHAKESPEARE:

Come in.

SOUND FX: THE DOOR OPENS, SOMEONE ENTERS AND SHUTS THE DOOR BEHIND THEM.

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

SCENE THIRTY-EIGHT: INT. COURTROOM.

SOUND FX: THE DOOR TO THE COURTROOM OPENS AND A COURT OFFICIAL ENTERS.

COURT OFFICIAL (CALLING OUT):

All rise for the court's verdict.

SOUND FX: THE SOUND OF MULTIPLE CHAIRS BEING PUSHED BACK AND PEOPLE STANDING UP. THEN, THERE IS THE SOUND OF FAINT FOOTSTEPS AS THE "JUDGE" - IN REALITY, A SENIOR PRIEST - ENTERS AND THEN TAKES A SEAT.

SENIOR PRIEST:

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

SOUND FX: THE SOUND OF MULTIPLE GASPS AT THE VERDICT.

SENIOR PRIEST:

Ordinarily I would impose a *severe* punishment, one involving *public* penance. 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. For those reasons, I have *commuted* your sentence to a *fine* of five shillings.

SOUND FX: AGAIN, MULTIPLE GASPS AROUND THE COURTROOM.

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.

SOUND FX: THE "JUDGE"/SENIOR PRIEST STRIKES THE DESK WITH HIS GAVEL. THIS IS FOLLOWED BY THE SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS AS HE AND THE COURT OFFICIAL LEAVE, THE COURT OFFICIAL CLOSING THE DOOR BEHIND THEM.

THOMAS (calling out):

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

SOUND FX: THOMAS SIGHS WITH RELIEF, THEN LAUGHS.

THOMAS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS:

Thank you.

SHAKESPEARE:

You're welcome.

THOMAS:

We must celebrate!

SHAKESPEARE:

"Celebrate"? Celebrate what?

THOMAS:

Why, my freedom!

SHAKESPEARE:

Of course. (*Pause.*) You go ahead. I have to pay your fine and I also have some business to settle with Mr Collins.

THOMAS:

Of course. And thank you too, Mr Collins.

JUDITH:

Yes, thank you, Mr Collins.

MR COLLINS:

You are *both* most welcome.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS:

What for?

SHAKESPEARE:

We need to discuss the future.

THOMAS:

Of course. I'll come first thing.

SOUND FX: THOMAS CRIES OUT WITH JOY, THEN KISSES JUDITH PASSIONATELY, BEFORE EXHALING LOUDLY WITH RELIEF.

SCENE THIRTY-NINE: INT. SHAKESPEARE'S STUDY.

SOUND FX: SILENCE FOR A MOMENT, THEN KNOCKING AT THE DOOR.

SHAKESPEARE:

Come in.

SOUND FX: THOMAS OPENS THE DOOR, COMES IN AND CLOSES IT BEHIND HIM AGAIN.

SHAKESPEARE:

Ah, Thomas. Thank you for coming.

SOUND FX: THE SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS AS THOMAS CROSSES THE ROOM AND THEN LITERALLY SLUMPS DOWN IN A CHAIR WITH AN AUDIBLE GROAN OR MOAN. WHEN HE SPEAKS, HE DOES SO SOFTLY, QUIETLY, AT FIRST, AND WITH SOME DISCOMFORT, AS HE IS OBVIOUSLY HUNGOVER.

SHAKESPEARE:

I trust you had an enjoyable evening.

THOMAS:

Yes. We were at my Father's house. *(Pause.)* 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:

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

THOMAS:

I told you the truth.

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 (feebly - in every sense):

I can explain -

SHAKESPEARE (interrupting):

There's no need to. I know *everything!* *(Pause.)* 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:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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:

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. *(Pause.)* 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". *(Pause.)* However, I *can* - indeed, I *will* - prevent you from getting your hands on any *more* of my money, or Judith's.

THOMAS:

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.

SOUND FX: TOTAL SILENCE - STUNNED SILENCE FROM THOMAS.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE GETS UP FROM HIS DESK, PUSHING BACK HIS CHAIR TO DO SO, CROSSES THE ROOM, OPENS THE DOOR AND GOES OUT, CLOSING THE DOOR BEHIND HIM. FOR A MOMENT, THERE IS ONLY SILENCE, THEN -

THOMAS (softly):

Shit.

SCENE FORTY: INT. HALLWAY, RICHARD QUINEY'S HOUSE.

SOUND FX: THERE IS A LOUD KNOCKING - INDEED, A HAMMERING - ON THE FRONT DOOR. THE THUNDEROUS KNOCKING CONTINUES FOR A FEW MOMENTS UNTIL FINALLY THE DOOR IS OPENED BY RICHARD QUINEY, THOMAS'S FATHER, WHO, WHEN HE SPEAKS, SOUNDS AS HUNGOVER AS THOMAS DID.

RICHARD QUINEY:

Will? What are you doing here? Come in.

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE ENTERS AND RICHARD QUINEY CLOSSES 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.

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS THE TWO MEN JUST STAND THERE FOR A MOMENT.

RICHARD QUINEY:

What is it?

SHAKESPEARE:

You knew, didn't you?

RICHARD QUINEY (confused):

What?

SHAKESPEARE (angrily):

About Thomas's *relationship* with Margaret Wheeler.

SOUND FX: SILENCE FOR A FEW MOMENTS. THEN -

RICHARD QUINEY:

I didn't "know" -

SHAKESPEARE (interrupting again):

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

RICHARD QUINEY (continuing):

- But I *suspected*.

SOUND FX: SILENCE FOR A FEW MOMENTS AS THE TWO MEN OBVIOUSLY JUST STARE AT EACH OTHER.

RICHARD QUINEY:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

"Fond"?

RICHARD QUINEY:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE ONCE MORE, FOR A FEW MOMENTS. THEN -

RICHARD QUINEY:

I did.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE QUICKLY GOES OUT, SLAMMING THE DOOR FIRMLY BEHIND HIM.

RICHARD QUINEY (softly):

Damn.

SCENE FORTY-ONE: INT. THE STUDY OF JOHN HALL AND SUSANNA SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE.

SHAKESPEARE:

So, John, as Susanna's husband and therefore the only other *male* in the family, you will be the chief executor of my will.

JOHN HALL:

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:

Yes. Of course.

SHAKESPEARE:

Good. Now I just have to tell Judith herself.

SOUND FX: THE SOUND OF A CHAIR BEING PUSHED BACK AS SHAKESPEARE STANDS UP. HE IS JUST ABOUT TO GO WHEN ELIZABETH, HIS NINE-YEAR-OLD GRAND-DAUGHTER, SPEAKS UP.

ELIZABETH:

Where are you going, Grandfather? (*Pause.*) Won't you stay and *play*?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE'S FOOTSTEPS AS HE LEAVES, THEN THE OPENING AND SHUTTING OF A DOOR.

SCENE FORTY-TWO: EXT. STREET.

SOUND FX: KNOCKING ON A DOOR - MUCH MORE GENTLE KNOCKING THAN THE HAMMERING BEFORE. THERE IS A PAUSE, THEN THE DOOR IS OPENED.

JUDITH (faintly):

Come in, Father.

SOUND FX: SHE TURNS AND WALKS AWAY AND SHAKESPEARE FOLLOWS HER INSIDE, CLOSING THE DOOR BEHIND HIM.

SCENE FORTY-THREE: INT. HALLWAY, JUDITH'S HOUSE.

SHAKESPEARE:

Where is he?

JUDITH:

He's gone to the alehouse.

SHAKESPEARE:

"The alehouse"?

JUDITH:

Yes. He said he wanted to "get drunk" and "forget" his problems. (*Pause.*) I wish I could forget *mine*.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JUDITH:

Yes. He told me *everything*.

SOUND FX: SHE BURSTS INTO TEARS. ONCE AGAIN, WHEN SHE SPEAKS NOW IT WILL OFTEN BE THROUGH HER TEARS OR CHOKING BACK OF TEARS.

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:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

WHAT?! (*Pause.*) You did?

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:

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.

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS SHE HESITATES BEFORE SPEAKING.

JUDITH:

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

SOUND FX: SHE CRIES UNCONTROLLABLY, THROUGH WHICH SHE CAN BARELY SPEAK.

JUDITH:

Now I wish I had *never* married.

SOUND FX: SHE CONTINUES TO CRY UNCONTROLLABLY, WITH NO SIGN OF LETTING UP - EVER.

SCENE FORTY-FOUR: INT. DOWNSTAIRS HALLWAY, SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE.

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE OPENS THE FRONT DOOR TO HIS HOUSE, ENTERS AND THEN IS SURPRISED TO FIND HIS WIFE, ANNE, WAITING FOR HIM.

SHAKESPEARE:

Anne, what are you doing standing behind the door like that? You nearly frightened me to death.

ANNE:

I was waiting for you to return.

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS THEY OBVIOUSLY JUST STARE AT EACH OTHER.

SHAKESPEARE:

From the look on your face, I can only assume that you know what's happened.

ANNE:

Yes. Susanna came to see me after you had visited her and John. *(Pause.)* You should have told me first.

SOUND FX: SILENCE FOR A MOMENT.

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!*

SOUND FX: SILENCE - A CHILLY SILENCE - FOR A MOMENT.

SHAKESPEARE:

How was Susanna?

ANNE:

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

SHAKESPEARE (angrily):

Damn him!

SOUND FX: FOOTSTEPS, AS SHAKESPEARE OBVIOUSLY BEGINS TO WALK UP AND DOWN THE HALLWAY IN HIS FURY.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: FOOTSTEPS, AS HE OBVIOUSLY WALKS BACK TO THE DOOR, THEN STOPS BESIDE IT.

SHAKESPEARE:

I hope he goes to *HELL!*

ANNE:

Hypocrite!

SOUND FX: SILENCE - STUNNED SILENCE.

SHAKESPEARE:

What?

ANNE:

You heard me - you're a hypocrite.

SHAKESPEARE:

What do you mean?

ANNE:

At least Thomas only slept with *one* other woman. You slept with *dozens!* And, like most men, he only did it *before* he got married. You did it *after* you were married!

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.

SOUND FX: SILENCE, FOR A MOMENT.

SHAKESPEARE:

That's not true.

ANNE:

Don't deny it! I *know* what happened in London - I *always* knew! (*Pause.*) Whenever you returned from London - on the *few* occasions that you returned from London - you *never* came near me.

SOUND FX: SHE LAUGHS, RUEFULLY.

ANNE:

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?" (*Pause.*) Then, finally, I realised. He was touching somebody else - *anybody* else, but me.

SOUND FX: SILENCE - TOTAL, STUNNED SILENCE FROM SHAKESPEARE.

ANNE:

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

SOUND FX: SHE TURNS AND QUICKLY WALKS AWAY, UNTIL HER FOOTSTEPS CAN NO LONGER BE HEARD. THEN SHAKESPEARE SIGHS DEEPLY - PROFOUNDLY - AND SLUMPS BACK, AUDIBLY, AGAINST THE FRONT DOOR (WITH A SLIGHT THUD), AS IF FOR SUPPORT.

SCENE FORTY-FIVE: INT. TAVERN.

SOUND FX: THE BUSY, NOISY, JOLLY HUBBUB OF A TAVERN, WITH PEOPLE CHATTING AND LAUGHING AND GLASSES BEING CLINKED TOGETHER.

MAN (CALLING OUT):

Will! Will! Over here!

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE'S FOOTSTEPS, WHICH CAN JUST BE HEARD ABOVE THE HUBBUB, AS HE SLOWLY CROSSES THE TAVERN.

SHAKESPEARE:

Hello, Drayton.

DRAYTON:

Have a seat.

SOUND FX: THE SCRAPING OF WOODEN CHAIRLEGS ON THE STONE TAVERN FLOOR, AS SHAKESPEARE PULLS OUT A CHAIR AND SITS DOWN BESIDE DRAYTON. WHEN HE SPEAKS, HE DOES SO SLOWLY, PAINFULLY, AS IF - FOR THE FIRST TIME - THE WORDS HAVE TO BE DRAGGED OUT OF HIM.

SHAKESPEARE:

I'm glad you could come.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

DRAYTON:

Yes, I heard about your *predicament*, which is why I invited you. I thought a little *literary* discussion with a fellow poet might take your mind off things, at least for a few hours.

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE SNORTS DISMISSIVELY.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

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*!

SOUND FX: FOOTSTEPS NEARBY AS A WAITER APPROACHES AND THEN PUTS TWO PEWTER TANKARDS DOWN ON THE TABLE. THEN FURTHER FOOTSTEPS AS HE OBVIOUSLY WALKS AWAY AGAIN.

SHAKESPEARE:

So I don't want to talk about "literature". In fact, I don't want to talk at all! I just want to *drink*!

SOUND FX: HE SIGHS HEAVILY, PICKS UP HIS TANKARD AND PROCEEDS TO DOWN ITS CONTENTS IN ONE LOUD, CONTINUOUS GULP, BEFORE PUTTING THE EMPTY TANKARD BACK DOWN ON THE TABLE WITH A THUMP. THERE IS SILENCE FOR A MOMENT, THEN ANOTHER MAN'S VOICE - A LOUD, BOOMING VOICE - IS HEARD, CALLING OUT FROM THE ENTRANCE TO THE TAVERN.

MAN (VOICE OFF):

DRAYTON!

SOUND FX: LOUD FOOTSTEPS AS THE MAN OBVIOUSLY APPROACHES THEM.

SHAKESPEARE (quietly, to DRAYTON):

Jonson? What's *he* doing here?

DRAYTON:

I invited him too.

SHAKESPEARE:

All the way from London?

DRAYTON:

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.

SOUND FX: FURTHER LOUD, HEAVY FOOTSTEPS, WHICH FINALLY STOP AS THE MAN - BEN JONSON - REACHES THEIR TABLE. WHEN HE SPEAKS, IT IS WITH THE SAME LOUD, BOOMING VOICE, EVEN THOUGH HE IS NOW NEARBY RATHER THAN FURTHER AWAY, WHICH IS IN COMPLETE CONTRAST WITH SHAKESPEARE'S SOFT, PAINED WORDS.

JONSON:

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

DRAYTON:

Hello, Ben. Welcome to Warwickshire!

JONSON:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JONSON:

"Gloat"? About what?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JONSON:

Oh, *that!* (*Pause, then more softly -*) I wouldn't gloat about *that*.

SHAKESPEARE (*bitterly*):

Why not? Everyone else is. (*He adopts different voices as he "recounts" what has been said.*) "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!*"

SOUND FX: STUNNED SILENCE FOR A MOMENT, OTHER THAN THE HUBBUB IN THE TAVERN AROUND THEM.

JONSON:

No, Will. I would never "gloat" about another man's *misfortune* - especially not *yours*. (Pause.) 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.

SOUND FX: NOW SHAKESPEARE IS SILENT FOR A MOMENT. THEN, HE LAUGHS - MIRTHLESSLY, JOYLESSLY

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: JONSON LAUGHS, LOUDLY.

SCENE FORTY-SIX: INT. TAVERN.

SOUND FX: IT IS OBVIOUSLY MUCH LATER, INDEED NEAR CLOSING TIME, AS THE TAVERN IS MUCH QUIETER: IN FACT, IT SEEMS THAT ONLY SHAKESPEARE, DRAYTON AND JONSON ARE NOW LEFT IN IT, BECAUSE WHEN THEY SPEAK THEIR VOICES ECHO AROUND IT. AND WHEN THEY SPEAK, THEY SPEAK SLOWLY AND OFTEN SLUR THEIR WORDS.

DRAYTON:

Where's your horse?

SHAKESPEARE:

I didn't bring a horsh.

DRAYTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

So? I'll walk! (He chuckles.) I walked here and I'll walk back.

DRAYTON:

Stay with me tonight and walk home in the morning.

JONSON:

Yes. Stay with us, Will. We can continue *drinking* at Drayton's house.

SHAKESPEARE:

No. I've had enough for one night. *Besides*, I shall enjoy a little *stroll* under the stars.

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE STANDS UP, PUSHING BACK HIS CHAIR (THE LEGS OF WHICH SCRAPE ON THE STONE TAVERN FLOOR) TO DO SO.

JONSON:

Goodnight, Will.

DRAYTON:

Take care.

SHAKESPEARE:

Goodnight, good fellows.

SOUND FX: HE TOTTERS, LITERALLY, TOWARDS THE TAVERN DOOR, ONCE ALMOST CRASHING INTO A TABLE, BEFORE CONTINUING.

SCENE FORTY-SEVEN: INT. DOWNSTAIRS HALLWAY, SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE.

SOUND FX: THERE IS A LOUD KNOCKING AT THE FRONT DOOR, THEN THE SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS AS SOMEONE OBVIOUSLY HURRIES DOWNSTAIRS TO OPEN IT. FINALLY, THEY REACH THE DOOR AND OPEN IT.

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:

Yes. Apparently, he went out drinking last night -

DOCTOR HALL:

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

SUSANNA:

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

DOCTOR HALL:

A fever?

SUSANNA:

Yes. Oh, John, he's terribly ill. You have to help him.

DOCTOR HALL:

I will do all I can.

SOUND FX: THEY BOTH GO UPSTAIRS QUICKLY, THEIR FOOTSTEPS ON THE WOODEN STAIRCASE ECHOING IN THE HALLWAY.

SCENE FORTY-EIGHT: INT. SHAKESPEARE AND ANNE'S BEDROOM.

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE IS IN BED AND HE IS OBVIOUSLY IN GREAT PAIN, AS HE IS MOANING AUDIBLY. SUDDENLY, THE DOOR OPENS AND SOMEONE ENTERS. AS THEY DO, THEY GASP AUDIBLY AT WHAT THEY SEE.

JUDITH:

Father! *(Pause.)* Oh John, he looks *awful*!

DOCTOR HALL *(nodding)*:

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

JUDITH:

Really?

DOCTOR HALL:

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.

SOUND FX: SILENCE FOR A MOMENT, OTHER THAN SHAKESPEARE'S CONTINUED MOANING, AS JUDITH OBVIOUSLY DIGESTS THIS. THEN, SHAKESPEARE FINALLY SPEAKS UP, BUT HE DOES SO FEEBLY AND FAINTLY - INDEED, BARELY AUDIBLY. WHEN ANNE REPLIES TO HIM, SHE DOES SO SOFTLY, QUIETLY, BECAUSE SHE IS SITTING BESIDE THE BED TO TRY AND COMFORT HIM.

SHAKESPEARE:

I'm so hot.

ANNE:

I know, Will. I know.

SHAKESPEARE:

Am I in hell?

ANNE:

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

SOUND FX: TOTAL SILENCE IN THE ROOM, AS EVEN SHAKESPEARE'S MOANING AND GROANING STOPS MOMENTARILY. THEN -

SHAKESPEARE:

I am not.

SOUND FX: JUDITH BURSTS INTO TEARS - UTTERLY UNCONTROLLABLE SOBBING.

SCENE FORTY-NINE: INT. CHURCH.

SOUND FX: FOOTSTEPS ON A HARD STONE FLOOR, ECHOING AROUND A CHURCH, WHICH IS OTHERWISE SILENT, AS SHAKESPEARE'S COFFIN IS CARRIED TO THE ALTAR.

PRIEST (softly, even gently):

Thank you, Gentlemen. You can set him down here.

SOUND FX: THE SOUND OF SIX PALLBEARERS, INCLUDING HEMINGS AND CONDELL, SETTING DOWN THE COFFIN (AND STRAINING SLIGHTLY UNDER ITS WEIGHT) ON TWO WOODEN STANDS IN FRONT OF THE ALTAR. THEN THERE IS THE SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS ON THE STONE FLOOR AGAIN AS THEY WITHDRAW AND SIT DOWN IN THE PEWS

PRIEST (more loudly):

Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today in memory of William Shakespeare, late of this parish...

SOUND FX: AS THE PRIEST CONTINUES, ALTHOUGH HIS WORDS ARE NOW INDISTINCT, HEMINGS AND CONDELL WHISPER TO EACH OTHER.

HEMINGS (quietly):

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

CONDELL (equally quietly):

That's appropriate.

HEMINGS (quietly):

How so?

CONDELL (equally quietly):

Well, he *always* enjoyed being centre-stage.

SOUND FX: HEMINGS LAUGHS, QUIETLY.

SCENE FIFTY: INT. SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE, STRATFORD ON AVON.

SOUND FX: THE QUIET, RESPECTFUL, SHOCKED ATMOSPHERE OF THE WAKE: A WOMAN'S VOICE (PERHAPS THAT OF ONE OF SHAKESPEARE'S DAUGHTERS, SUSANNA AND JUDITH), CAN BE HEARD SAYING POLITELY, "THANK YOU FOR COMING"; DRINKS ARE Poured; AND SOMEWHERE IN THE HOUSE, ANOTHER WOMAN (PERHAPS SHAKESPEARE'S WIFE, ANNE) IS CRYING. WHEN HEMINGS AND CONDELL SPEAK, EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE NO LONGER IN CHURCH THEY CONTINUE TO SPEAK VERY QUIETLY.

HEMINGS:

I still can't believe it.

CONDELL:

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

HEMINGS:

It's not right.

CONDELL:

What isn't?

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

I know. 'Tis not a fitting end.

SOUND FX: THERE IS SILENCE FOR A MOMENT, OTHER THAN THE FAINT BUZZ AND CHATTER OF OTHER PEOPLE'S CONVERSATION IN THE ROOM. THEN THE WOMAN'S CRYING, WHEREVER IT IS COMING FROM IN THE HOUSE, RESUMES. EVENTUALLY, IT BECOMES LOUDER, UNTIL FINALLY IT IS ALMOST DEAFENING.

SCENE FIFTY-ONE: INT. OFFICE OF THE GLOBE THEATRE.

HEMINGS:

I'll never get used to wearing a *mourning* ring!

SOUND FX: THE CLINKING OF COINS AS CONDELL, AS EVER, COUNTS THEM QUIETLY: "THIRTY-SEVEN, THIRTY-EIGHT, THIRTY-NINE..."

HEMINGS:

I've been wearing it for *months* now, but it still makes me *shudder* every time I look at it. And it doesn't even *fit!* Last week, when I tried to hail a fellow in the street, it nearly flew off!

SOUND FX: HE SIGHS, HEAVILY.

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: CONDELL TUTS LOUDLY. THEN THERE IS THE SOUND OF A QUILL SCRAPING ON PAPER AS HE WRITES SOMETHING DOWN.

CONDELL:

Here is a list of the props we need.

SOUND FX: THE LOUD CLINKING OF COINS AS HE COLLECTS THEM.

CONDELL:

And *here* is the money to buy them.

SOUND FX: HIS CHAIR SCRAPES LOUDLY ON THE FLOOR AS HE STANDS

CONDELL:

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!

SOUND FX: HEMINGS GRABS THE PIECE OF PAPER AND THE COINS AND STOMPS OUT, SLAMMING THE DOOR TO THE OFFICE BEHIND HIM

SCENE FIFTY-TWO: EXT. LONDON STREET NEAR ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL

SOUND FX: STREET SOUNDS AS HEMINGS GOES SHOPPING FOR PROPS, BUT IN ADDITION TO THE GENERAL SOUNDS (DOGS BARKING, BEGGARS BEGGING: "ALMS FOR THE POOR", ETC.) ETC.) THERE ARE THE SPECIFIC SOUNDS OF LONDON'S BOOK QUARTER, NEAR ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL, WHERE BOOKSELLERS COMPETE WITH THE CATHEDRAL'S BELLS TO HAWK THEIR WARES: "BIBLES! BIBLES! KING JAMES'S BIBLE"; "UTOPIA - GET IT HERE!"; AND FINALLY, AND LOUDEST OF ALL, "BEN JONSON'S WORKES - ALL HIS PLAYS, EVERY SINGLE ONE OF 'EM, COLLECTED TOGETHER FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME!" THEN, AS THE CATHEDRAL'S BELLS AND THE BOOKSELLERS' VOICES FADE, HEMINGS'S FOOTSTEPS CAN BE HEARD AS HE APPROACHES A 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:

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

SOUND FX: THE BOOKSELLER AUDIBLY STRAINS AS HE LIFTS A COPY OF THE BOOK AND HANDS IT TO HEMINGS.

HEMINGS:

It's heavy!

BOOKSELLER:

You don't have to tell me, Sir. I'm the one who has to cart them about!

SOUND FX: THE BOOKSELLER LAUGHS, THEN HEMINGS OPENS THE BOOK AND TURNS THE PAGES, FLICKING THROUGH THEM QUICKLY.

BOOKSELLER (proudly):

It's only just been published.

HEMINGS:

Really?

BOOKSELLER:

Oh, yes. And as it says on the *magnificent* leather frontispiece, it contains *all* his plays, from "*The Alchemist*" to "*Volpone*".

SOUND FX: HEMINGS FLICKS FURTHER AHEAD IN THE BOOK.

BOOKSELLER:

It is a remarkable book, Sir - *historic* even!

HEMINGS:

Really? How so?

BOOKSELLER:

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

SOUND FX: THE BOOKSELLER LAUGHS.

BOOKSELLER:

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

SOUND FX: HEMINGS CHUCKLES, QUIETLY.

HEMINGS (feigning ignorance):

Is that so?

BOOKSELLER:

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

HEMINGS:

Really? How remarkable!

BOOKSELLER:

The only copies of plays that were ever printed were *unauthorised* copies that were printed without the consent of their authors.

SOUND FX: THE BOOKSELLER LAUGHS AGAIN.

BOOKSELLER:

Apparently, some printers resorted to *bribing* individual actors to *regurgitate* what they could remember of a play.

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.

SOUND FX: THE BOOKSELLER LAUGHS, EVEN MORE HEARTILY.

BOOKSELLER:

That's why Mister Jonson was so anxious to publish his own plays himself: to preserve them for posterity, in *all* their glory. And I think you'll agree that he's done a *fine* job.

HEMINGS:

He has.

BOOKSELLER:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE, APART FROM THE BELLS OF ST PAUL'S.

HEMINGS:

"Pre-eminent"?

BOOKSELLER:

Indeed.

HEMINGS:

But what about Shakespeare?

BOOKSELLER:

Who?

HEMINGS:

William Shakespeare.

BOOKSELLER:

Oh! *Him!*

SOUND FX: THE BOOKSELLER LAUGHS.

BOOKSELLER:

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.

SOUND FX: SILENCE, APART FROM THE BELLS OF ST PAUL'S.

HEMINGS:

Do you have any of his plays?

BOOKSELLER:

Who? *Shakespeare?*

HEMINGS:

Yes.

BOOKSELLER:

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

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: THE BOOKSELLER STARTS RUMMAGING UNDER HIS STALL:
WHEN HE NEXT SPEAKS, HIS VOICE IS MUFFLED, AS HE IS STILL
RUMMAGING IN THE BOXES UNDER THE STALL.

BOOKSELLER:

Aha! I knew I had something.

HEMINGS:

What is it?

SOUND: THE BOOKSELLER STANDS UP, SO HIS VOICE IS DISTINCT.

BOOKSELLER:

THIS!

SOUND FX: HEMINGS GASPS.

HEMINGS:

Oh my God!

SCENE FIFTY-THREE: INT. THE OFFICE OF THE GLOBE.

SOUND FX: CONDELL IS COUNTING QUIETLY, "TWO, THREE, FOUR",
WHEN THE DOOR TO THE OFFICE QUIETLY CREAKS OPEN AND THEN
IS QUIETLY SHUT AGAIN. AS HE CONTINUES TO COUNT ("EIGHT,
NINE, TEN"), MORE FOOTSTEPS CAN JUST ABOUT BE HEARD. THEY
CONTINUE AS SOMEONE QUIETLY CROSSES THE FLOOR TOWARDS HIS
DESK, WHERE HE CONTINUES TO COUNT: "FOURTEEN, FIFTEEN,
SIXTEEN". THEN, FINALLY, THERE IS AN ALMIGHTY CRASH AS
SOMETHING HEAVY IS DROPPED ON THE DESK, SENDING THE PILES
OF COINS FLYING AND LITERALLY MAKING CONDELL JUMP BACKWARDS
AND KNOCK OVER HIS CHAIR.

CONDELL:

OH MY GOD!

SOUND FX: HEMINGS GUFFAWS.

CONDELL:

What on earth are you doing - creeping up behind me like an *assassin*, and then dropping a *bomb* on my desk?

HEMINGS:

It's not a bomb.

CONDELL:

It might as well have been, given the damage it's caused.

HEMINGS:

It's a book.

CONDELL:

A book?

HEMINGS:

Yes.

CONDELL:

Why are you throwing *books* around?

HEMINGS:

Read the front cover - or should I say, "The magnificent leather frontispiece"? - and you'll see why.

CONDELL:

What?

HEMINGS:

Read it.

SOUND FX: CONDELL PICKS UP HIS CHAIR AND SITS BACK DOWN. THEN HE MOVES ASIDE THE SCATTERED COINS, WHICH CLINK TOGETHER AS HE MOVES THEM, AND PICKS UP THE BOOK, STRAINING SLIGHTLY AS HE DOES SO.

CONDELL (reading):

"The Workes of Benjamin Jonson."

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS CONDELL OBVIOUSLY STARES AT THE BOOK.

HEMINGS:

Big, isn't it?

CONDELL:

Enormous!

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: CONDELL LAUGHS.

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

What?

HEMINGS:

That's how he's being described.

CONDELL:

But Will was an *infinitely* better writer.

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: ONCE AGAIN, THERE IS SILENCE.

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

What is it?

HEMINGS:

See for yourself.

SOUND FX: FAINT RUSTLING, AS HE HANDS CONDELL SOME PAPER.

CONDELL (reading aloud):

"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.

SOUND FX: CONDELL STARTS FLICKING THROUGH THE PLAY-SCRIPT.

HEMINGS:

Read it.

CONDELL:

What?

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: SLIGHT RUSTLING AS HEMINGS TAKES BACK THE PLAY, FLICKS TO A PARTICULAR POINT AND BEGINS QUOTING FROM IT.

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

Ouch!

SOUND FX: HEMINGS FLICKS AHEAD AND THEN QUOTES ANOTHER LINE

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

Oh my God!

HEMINGS:

And best - or rather, *worst* - of all...

SOUND FX: HE FLICKS AHEAD AGAIN AND READS OR QUOTES AGAIN

HEMINGS:

"To be or not to be, aye, there's the *POINT!*"

CONDELL:

WHAT?!

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: HEMINGS THROWS DOWN THE SCRIPT ON THE DESK AND WHEN HE NEXT SPEAKS HE SOUNDS DISTRAUGHT.

HEMINGS:

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 *trash*, and *trash* like it, is all that will survive of "Shakespeare"!

SOUND FX: THERE IS TOTAL SILENCE FOR A MOMENT. THEN -

HEMINGS:

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

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:

WHAT? Why not?

CONDELL:

They must have been destroyed in the fire, or just *lost* over time, most likely when we moved theatres. 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 by successive prompters until they're virtually *illegible*!

HEMINGS:

"Illegible"?

CONDELL:

Aye. *Will* could decipher them, but we can't. While he was still alive, it didn't matter: if we had any queries about a play, especially an old one, we could just ask him, even if we had to wait until he visited London or we visited Stratford. But now - well, we *can't* ask him!

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

Are you joking?

HEMINGS:

No! Of course not.

CONDELL:

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

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

Whose immortality? His, or ours?

HEMINGS:

Why, his of course!

SOUND FX: CONDELL SIGHS AGAIN, EVEN MORE 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*. 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:

"Half"?

CONDELL:

That's still about twenty or so.

HEMINGS:

It's not enough! Half a Shakespeare is no Shakespeare at all: half a Shakespeare is a Jonson, or a Marlowe! 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!

SOUND FX: HE THUMPS THE DESK WITH HIS FIST, WHICH KNOCKS EVEN MORE COINS ONTO THE FLOOR.

HEMINGS:

We *have* to do it.

CONDELL:

Do what?

HEMINGS:

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

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:

And where exactly do you propose looking for them?

HEMINGS (triumphantly):

EVERYWHERE!

CONDELL:

"Everywhere"?

SOUND FX: A RAPID SUCCESSION OF FOOTSTEPS, AS HEMINGS STARTS PACING UP AND DOWN, OCCASIONALLY KICKING SOME COINS TO ONE SIDE AS HE DOES SO, WHILE HE ALSO TALKS, GATHERING MORE AND MORE PACE AS HE GOES, BOTH PHYSICALLY AND VERBALLY.

HEMINGS:

Everywhere he ever *lived*; everywhere he ever *worked*; and most importantly, everywhere he ever *drank* and laid his *head* - or any *other* part of his anatomy!

SOUND FX: CONDELL LAUGHS.

HEMINGS:

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:

And how do you propose doing *that*?

HEMINGS:

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. And some of the actors would also 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.

SOUND FX: SUDDENLY HE STOPS PACING UP AND STANDS STILL.

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: HE LAUGHS, LOUDLY - UPROARIOUSLY.

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: CONDELL LAUGHS.

CONDELL:

Typical actor!

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: HEMINGS CHUCKLES.

SCENE FIFTY-FOUR: INT. ROOM.

SOUND FX: HEMINGS AND CONDELL ARE BOTH READING SOMETHING UNDER THEIR BREATH. THEY CONTINUE TO DO SO FOR A FEW MOMENTS AND THEN ARE COMPLETELY SILENT.

HEMINGS:

It's wonderful, Ben.

CONDELL:

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

JONSON:

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

SOUND FX: HEMINGS AND CONDELL BOTH LAUGH.

JONSON:

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

HEMINGS:

What do you mean?

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'd got started.

SOUND FX: SILENCE, APART FROM ONE THING: SOMEWHERE ELSE IN THE ROOM THEY ARE IN, THERE IS A MUFFLED, THUDDING, NOISE.

JONSON:

Gentlemen, you *amaze* me.

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*! (Pause.) So why did you do it for Will?

SOUND FX: HEMINGS AND CONDELL BOTH CHUCKLE.

HEMINGS:

Before we met Will, we were *part-time* actors, struggling to make a living.

CONDELL:

Now, we are *part-owners* of the greatest theatre company in England.

HEMINGS (with a flourish, to imitate Burbage again):

Nay, the *world*!

SOUND FX: JONSON LAUGHS.

HEMINGS:

He did so much for us.

CONDELL:

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

SOUND FX: JONSON SIGHS, HEAVILY.

JONSON:

I suppose so.

SOUND FX: FOOTSTEPS ON A STONE FLOOR AS SOMEONE APPROACHES. WHEN THEY SPEAK, IT IS CLEAR THAT THEY ARE MIDDLE-AGED, OR EVEN ELDERLY, AND, LIKE JONSON, THEY HAVE A MUCH ROUGHER AND COARSER VOICE THAN HEMINGS AND CONDELL, WHO, AS ACTORS, SPEAK MUCH MORE CLEARLY AND DISTINCTLY THAN EITHER OF THEM

MAN:

The title-page is ready, Gentlemen. Would you like to see it?

HEMINGS:

Of course.

CONDELL:

We don't want to leave *anything* to chance - not now.

MAN:

Alright. There you go!

SOUND FX: SILENCE, APART FROM THE MUFFLED, THUDDING NOISE SOMEWHERE ELSE IN THE ROOM.

HEMINGS (reading aloud):

"Mr William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories and Tragedies, Published according to the true original copies."

CONDELL:

There's no need to read it *aloud!*

HEMINGS:

No. Sorry.

SOUND FX: THEY BOTH CONTINUE READING UNDER THEIR BREATH, SO THAT THEIR WORDS ARE FAINT AND INDISTINCT: ALL THAT CAN BE HEARD IS THAT THEY ARE READING, NOT *WHAT* THEY ARE READING

CONDELL:

You forgot the date.

MAN:

Today's date?

CONDELL:

No. Just the year - 1623.

MAN:

Sorry. I'll add it right now.

SOUND FX: THE MAN, WHO IS OBVIOUSLY A PRINTER, PICKS UP THE
PIECE OF PAPER - THE TITLE-PAGE OF THE FIRST EVER COLLECTION
OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS, THE FIRST FOLIO - AND WALKS AWAY,
HIS FOOT-STEPS ECHOING ON THE STONE FLOOR. AS HE DOES SO,
THE THUDDING, MUFFLED, REPETITIVE SOUND THAT WAS HEARD
EARLIER BECOME CLEARER: IT IS THE SOUND OF PRINTING PRESSES
BEING PRESSED, HELD DOWN AND THEN RELEASED, BEFORE THE
WHOLE PROCESS IS REPEATED AGAIN. ONCE THE MAN HAS GONE, AND
THE PRINTING PRESSES HAVE STOPPED FOR A MOMENT, HEMINGS AND
CONDELL BOTH SIGH, HEAVILY, BUT WITH OBVIOUS SATISFACTION.

HEMINGS:

Seven years, from start to finish.

CONDELL:

I know. *(Pause.)* I could hardly *forget!*

HEMINGS:

Still, what are a few years - even *seven* - compared with
immortality?

SOUND FX: CONDELL LAUGHS, QUIETLY.

CONDELL:

Nothing at all, John. *(Pause.)* Nothing at all.

SOUND FX: THEY BOTH LAUGH, QUIETLY AT FIRST, BUT THEN WITH
INCREASING VOLUME AND GUSTO, UNTIL FINALLY THEY ARE
LAUGHING UNCONTROLLABLY. EVENTUALLY, THEY STOP LAUGHING,
AND AS THEY DO SO, THE PRINTING PRESSES CAN BE HEARD AGAIN,
AS THEY ARE ONCE MORE PRESSED DOWN, HELD AND RELEASED.

ON THIS SOUND, FADE OUT TO SILENCE.

- **END** -