

THE SHAKESPEARE PLAYS

*Being For The First Time The Remarkable True
Comedy, History and Tragedy of Shakespeare*

A Play by Martin Keady



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THE SHAKESPEARE PLAYS has many characters but has been written for just six actors: five male; and one female. So, there will be multi-roling, as follows:

FIRST ACTOR: to play John Hemings (32 at start). And First Soldier; and Senior Priest/Judge.

SECOND ACTOR: to play Henry Condell (22 at start). AND Actor playing a Lord; Sheriff; and Court Official.

THIRD ACTOR: solely to play William Shakespeare (34 at start).

FOURTH ACTOR: to play Richard Burbage (31 at start). AND Actor playing a Lord; the Earl of Essex; the Lord Chief Justice; Collins, Shakespeare's lawyer; Richard Quiney, Shakespeare's old friend and Thomas Quiney's father; Pallbearer; and Ben Jonson.

FIFTH ACTOR: to play multiple small roles: Actor dressed as a Lord; Allen; Peter Street; Augustine Philips; the Earl of Southampton; Bryant; Army Captain; The Queen (Elizabeth I); Masked Man; Thomas Quiney; Anne Shakespeare; Michael Drayton; and Printer.

ACTRESS: to play several small roles: Actor playing a Shepherd; Actor playing a Lord; Second Soldier; Judith Shakespeare; Waitress; and Pallbearer.

NOTES ON STAGING

Ideally, the time and date of each part of **THE SHAKESPEARE PLAYS** (e.g. "Part I (THE EXTRAORDINARY TRUE COMEDY OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE): 1598") will be announced or otherwise communicated to the audience. Also, in Part I, a horse is required on stage. This can be represented in any way: imaginatively; by puppets; by a "pantomime horse" (with two actors inside, front and back) - whatever works. And in Part II, during the performance of *Richard the Second*, the action at The Globe theatre switches between the wings (or side of the stage) and the stage itself. Throughout this action, the wings (or side of the stage) and the stage can be lit alternately, to indicate where the action is taking place, or any other suitable means of highlighting the wings (or side of the stage) and the stage alternately can be used. Again, whatever works.

PROLOGUE - SHAKESPEARE'S BEDROOM, STRATFORD ON AVON, 1616

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (aged about 50) lies in bed with his eyes closed and his face covered in sweat.

His daughter JUDITH (aged about 30) and his wife ANNE (aged about 60) enter: JUDITH goes to the end of the bed to look down at him.

JUDITH:

Father!

She turns round to look at her mother.

JUDITH:

He looks awful.

ANNE:

I know. I'm afraid the fever has already taken hold.

JUDITH looks frightened.

JUDITH:

Really?

ANNE:

Yes. If his spirits had been at their normal, *irrepressible* level, he might have been able to resist it, but - well, everything that's happened recently seems to have *crushed* his spirits.

JUDITH looks appalled, as SHAKESPEARE opens his eyes slightly.

SHAKESPEARE (weakly - feebly):

I'm so hot.

ANNE:

I know, Will. I know.

She goes over to the bedside table, takes a cloth from the bowl of water on the table and starts mopping his brow.

As she mops his brow, there is silence for a moment.

SHAKESPEARE (even more weakly):

Am I in hell?

ANNE (shaking her head):

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

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

SHAKESPEARE (quietly, indeed almost inaudibly):

I am not.

Then, with obvious pain, he closes his eyes again.

ANNE resumes her slow, methodical mopping of his brow.

JUDITH lowers her head and starts to cry.

Slowly, the lights come down.

**PART I: THE EXTRAORDINARY TRUE COMEDY OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE -
1598. ACT I, SCENE I (THEATRE DRESSING ROOM) .**

APPLAUSE off-stage as JOHN HEMINGS and HENRY CONDELL, wearing helmets after playing Soldiers on stage, wait in the dressing-room: HEMINGS to collect costumes from ACTORS as they come off-stage; CONDELL to count money and record it in a ledger.

HEMINGS (shaking his head in amazement):

How does he do it? I mean - *how?* Every time - every time!

CONDELL:

There's no point asking *how* Will does it: I doubt he knows himself. Just be grateful *that* he does it.

HEMINGS:

Oh, I am. I am.

ANOTHER ACTOR, DRESSED AS A LORD, enters the dressing room, but HEMINGS puts out an arm to stop him going any further.

HEMINGS:

Costume, please!

ACTOR DRESSED AS A LORD:

Oh, come on, Mister Hemings.

He indicates a table opposite that is laden with wine bottles.

ACTOR DRESSED AS A LORD:

Can't I have a *drink* first?

HEMINGS:

No!

ACTOR DRESSED AS A LORD:

Why not?

HEMINGS:

Because, like every 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 DRESSED AS A LORD:

Oh, very well.

He starts removing his costume.

ACTOR DRESSED AS A LORD:

How are the takings, Mister Condell?

CONDELL:

Excellent! Audiences obviously adore Falstaff.

HEMINGS:

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

The ACTOR DRESSED AS A LORD removes his costume and exits. RICHARD BURBAGE, who's been playing FALSTAFF, enters: as he does so, he removes the white wig he has been wearing over his red hair and the cushion that has served as his "stomach". He is followed in by SHAKESPEARE (aged about 34), who starts removing his own costume.

BURBAGE:

Well done, Will - another triumph!

SHAKESPEARE:

Well done yourself, Richard. You are Falstaff! No-one else can ever play him!

BURBAGE:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

BOTH!

BURBAGE laughs as he & SHAKESPEARE hand HEMINGS their costumes.

BURBAGE:

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

He goes over to the table, picks up a bottle and pulls the cork out with his teeth. He spits the cork aside and swigs. HEMINGS, CONDELL and SHAKESPEARE watch as it seems he will drink the bottle in one, so they do not notice an OLD MAN dressed in black (including a black puritanical skull-cap) enter behind them.

BURBAGE:

Aah! That's better.

OLD MAN:

Is that wine?

ALL THE ACTORS immediately turn round to look at THE OLD MAN.

BURBAGE:

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

ALLEN:

It's my land 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 staging plays that celebrate *drunks* and *sinner*s, like that fat oaf, Falstaff! (*Pause.*) 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:

WHAT?! 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!

He laughs and goes to leave, before stopping.

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.

He exits, laughing, and BURBAGE goes to follow him.

BURBAGE:

We ought to run him through!

HEMINGS steps in front of BURBAGE to stop him following ALLEN.

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?

He looks at BURBAGE questioningly, then shakes his head.

HEMINGS:

Of course not. Like *whores*, 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.

ALL THE ACTORS look desolate.

SCENE II (THE MAIN BAR OF A TAVERN)

HEMINGS, CONDELL, BURBAGE and SHAKESPEARE sit at a table in a tavern, sipping ale from tankards: HEMINGS looks off-stage.

HEMINGS:

It's starting to snow.

BURBAGE (proclaiming, as he is prone to):

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

HEMINGS:

Alright. There's no need to *shout*: you're not on stage!

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. 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!

THE OTHERS laugh.

BURBAGE (to HEMINGS):

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. Once we're there, 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 legally they're ours.

For a moment, there is silence around the table and HEMINGS looks out of the window again.

HEMINGS:

It's really starting to snow now.

BURBAGE:

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

HEMINGS:

Hang on!

SHAKESPEARE:

What, John?

HEMINGS:

I've had another idea.

THE OTHERS all look at him questioningly.

SCENE III (THE STREET OUTSIDE THE THEATRE)

SHAKESPEARE and BURBAGE stand outside the theatre, jumping up and down, and rubbing their hands together, to try to keep warm.

BURBAGE:

Where are they? I'm freezing!

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS (calling out, from off-stage):

HELLO!

HEMINGS and CONDELL enter with an OLD MAN, all three of them wearing fur coats, fur hats and gloves.

HEMINGS:

William, Richard, this is the man I told you about: Mr Peter Street, the finest theatrical carpenter in London - the man who built The Rose!

STREET:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

None of it good, I presume.

STREET:

Very little, as befits a player.

SHAKESPEARE laughs.

BURBAGE:

Mister Street, I must ask you something.

STREET:

Go ahead.

BURBAGE:

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

STREET:

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

THE OTHERS all laugh, including BURBAGE.

BURBAGE:

I suppose it is.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

STREET:

A Puritan Christmas? That'll be merry!

THE ACTORS laugh.

STREET:

I can do it - and quickly! (*He looks behind him at the theatre.*) Take me inside and I'll calculate how many men I'll need.

HEMINGS:

However many you need, we'll pay for them!

They all go inside the theatre, exiting.

SCENE IV (THE STREET OUTSIDE THE THEATRE)

The sound of banging, hammering and sawing is heard off-stage. It continues as CONDELL and SHAKESPEARE enter, and when they speak, they must shout to make themselves heard above the din.

SHAKESPEARE:

Street's men are certainly working fast!

CONDELL:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

"Double"?

CONDELL:

Well, it is Christmas!

HEMINGS enters, sitting on a cart, full of timber, that is being pulled by a horse.

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Right.

SHAKESPEARE climbs up alongside HEMINGS.

CONDELL (calling up to them):

Godspeed!

The horse starts walking away slowly - very slowly.

SHAKESPEARE (to HEMINGS):

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

HEMINGS:

Stop complaining and enjoy the ride.

SHAKESPEARE looks even more miserable. HEMINGS whips the horse forward and it moves forward, slowly - even more slowly than before - until finally it exits. CONDELL watches them go, then shakes his head (in amusement or disbelief) and also exits.

SCENE V (THE RIVERBANK)

The horse and cart, with HEMINGS and SHAKESPEARE still sitting on it, re-enter, moving as slowly as before, if not more so. SHAKESPEARE tries to huddle up to HEMINGS (and his fur coat) for warmth, but suddenly HEMINGS sits up and pulls hard on the reins.

HEMINGS:

WHOAH!

SHAKESPEARE also sits up with a start as the horse stops, and HEMINGS points directly in front of him.

HEMINGS:

There it is!

SHAKESPEARE:

My God! You were right, John: the whole river's frozen over!

HEMINGS:

It's our very own bridge across the Thames, direct to Bankside.

He smiles, while SHAKESPEARE takes in the scene before him.

SHAKESPEARE:

There are so many people on the ice.

Suddenly, he looks quickly from side to side, as he obviously watches someone, or more than one person, move in front of him.

SHAKESPEARE:

They're walking...or sledging...or skating! *(He looks round at HEMINGS, nervously.)* Are you sure the ice can take our weight?

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

"People", yes. But not *horses* - and certainly not horses pulling carts laden with *timber*! *(He looks away, looking further along the river.)* Why don't we just use the *real* bridge: *London Bridge*?

HEMINGS:

I've already told you: because it's the *only* bridge across the river, it's always crowded, even at night. It would take an *age* just to get a single cartload across it, let alone the whole theatre. We'd never get everything out and across the river before Allen returns from his holiday. *(He again looks directly in front of him.)* This is the *only* way.

SHAKESPEARE also looks directly ahead - nervously.

SHAKESPEARE:

Alright. Proceed.

HEMINGS snaps the reins and slowly the horse moves forward a few feet, before stopping, right at the edge of the ice.

HEMINGS (calling out):

GO ON!

The horse puts one foot forward into the air, then carefully puts it down on the ice. Then it walks forward and puts down another foot, then another, until finally all four of its feet are on the ice. Finally, it walks forward, pulling the cart. As it does so, SHAKESPEARE leans out of the cart and looks down.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE laughs, sits up and again looks around him in amazement, taking in all the other people already on the ice.

SHAKESPEARE:

My God! There are even food stalls.

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE sits bolt upright.

SHAKESPEARE:

Stay away from the stalls selling hot food!

HEMINGS:

Don't worry: I will!

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

HEMINGS:

There's the Rose! (He looks further along, until he finds what he is looking for and points again.) And there's our new home!

SHAKESPEARE looks at what he is pointing - the site for the new theatre - then looks back at HEMINGS and smiles. HEMINGS smiles back. Then he snaps the reins to move the horse forward again.

HEMINGS:

GO ON!

The horse, cart, HEMINGS and SHAKESPEARE move further forward - out onto the ice - until finally they exit.

SCENE VI (THE OPPOSITE RIVERBANK: THE SITE OF THE NEW THEATRE)

Slowly, the horse, cart, HEMINGS and SHAKESPEARE re-enter: they reach the middle of the stage, then HEMINGS snaps the reins.

HEMINGS:

WHOAH!

The horse stops immediately. HEMINGS and SHAKESPEARE jump down from the cart and look all around them: indeed, they both complete a full 360 degrees rotation, taking everything in.

HEMINGS:

So here we are - our new home.

SHAKESPEARE looks distinctly unimpressed.

HEMINGS:

I know it's not much now, but one day it will be the finest theatre in London. Or as Burbage would say: *(He imitates Burbage declaiming, loudly and gruffly.)* "Nay, the world"!

SHAKESPEARE *laughs*.

HEMINGS:

Most importantly, it will be *our* theatre. We won't have to answer to Allen or anyone else.

SHAKESPEARE:

Except the censor.

HEMINGS:

Well, we always have to answer to the censor.

SHAKESPEARE:

How long will it take to build the new theatre?

HEMINGS:

Oh, about six months.

SHAKESPEARE:

"Six months!?!"

HEMINGS:

At most.

SHAKESPEARE:

Why so long? It only took a few days to take the old one down.

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

It'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. I've already negotiated a temporary lease with The Swan while construction of our theatre is going on. Everything is arranged. All *you* have to do is *write*. So, more masterpieces, please!

SHAKESPEARE laughs.

SHAKESPEARE:

You've obviously thought of everything.

HEMINGS:

I try to; in fact, as company manager, it's my *job* to!

SHAKESPEARE:

I have only one remaining wish.

HEMINGS:

Oh, yes? And what's that?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS:

That would be worth seeing!

They both laugh as the lights come down.

SCENE VII (THE STREET OUTSIDE THE THEATRE)

A smiling ALLEN enters an empty stage, walking towards his theatre - or so he thinks. Suddenly, he stops smiling and stops walking. He looks around: he screws up his eyes and opens them again. Then he literally does a double-take. He looks behind him, as if he has somehow walked past the theatre. Finally, he kneels down, squints at the ground and picks up a single nail or wooden rivet. He stands up again and holds it aloft.

ALLEN (screaming):

CONSTABLE!!!!

The lights come down instantly.

PART II: THE REMARKABLE TRUE HISTORY OF SHAKESPEARE - 1601. ACT I, SCENE I (BACKSTAGE OFFICE, GLOBE)

SHAKESPEARE, HEMINGS, CONDELL and BURBAGE are in the backstage office of the new Globe theatre: SHAKESPEARE sits at a desk, quill in hand, writing; HEMINGS inspects costumes; CONDELL also sits at the desk, counting money; and BURBAGE paces up and down.

BURBAGE:

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

He hesitates, as he obviously tries to remember the next word.

HEMINGS (without looking round):

"Everything."

BURBAGE:

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

He resumes pacing in silence, or at least mutters so quietly that it is inaudible. As he does so, A SHEPHERD (or rather an Actor playing a Shepherd, complete with Crook) enters.

SHEPHERD:

Master Shakespeare, Sir?

SHAKESPEARE (without looking up):

Yes...?

SHEPHERD:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Who is it?

SHEPHERD:

A nobleman, Sir.

SHAKESPEARE finally looks up at him.

SHAKESPEARE (smiling):

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

The SHEPHERD laughs, then shakes his head.

SHEPHERD:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SHEPHERD:

The Earl of Southampton, Sir.

HEMINGS, CONDELL and BURBAGE all stop what they are doing.

HEMINGS (to SHAKESPEARE):

Your old patron? What does he want?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SHEPHERD:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

"On the stage"?

SHEPHERD:

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

The SHEPHERD exits.

HEMINGS (to SHAKESPEARE):

D'you want us to come with you?

SHAKESPEARE:

No, I'd better go alone. He's *my* cross to bear, not yours.

HEMINGS:

Well, be careful. You know what he's like: he'll demand the world!

SHAKESPEARE:

He always does. And as always, I shall have to provide it.

He gets up from his desk and exits.

SCENE II (THE STAGE, THE GLOBE THEATRE)

SHAKESPEARE walks onto the stage and sees SOUTHAMPTON (handsome, finely dressed and 30) standing at the front of it, looking out.

SOUTHAMPTON (noticing Shakespeare and smiling at him):

I always wanted to be a player.

SHAKESPEARE joins him at the front of the stage.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUTHAMPTON laughs.

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SHAKESPEARE bows and SOUTHAMPTON looks pleased by this show of obeisance, before looking out from the stage again.

SOUTHAMPTON:

The Globe is a *magnificent* theatre, Will. It's much bigger - and *grander* - than the one you had in Shoreditch. (*He looks back at SHAKESPEARE.*) 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 looks puzzled.

SHAKESPEARE:

There is no threat of war here, my Lord.

SOUTHAMPTON looks surprised.

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SOUTHAMPTON laughs, but SHAKESPEARE just looks nervous.

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*.

Suddenly, SHAKESPEARE looks embarrassed.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

For a moment, SOUTHAMPTON looks upset - even offended.

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.

Now SHAKESPEARE looks very nervous.

SHAKESPEARE:

Of which play, my Lord?

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE looks appalled.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

You mean the scene where Richard hands over his crown?

SHAKESPEARE:

Yes: the deposition scene. The Queen and her advisers, especially Lord Cecil, do not want any depiction of a sovereign *surrendering* their crown, not with all the uncertainty surrounding the succession.

SOUTHAMPTON (angrily):

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

SHAKESPEARE stares at him in disbelief.

SHAKESPEARE:

That's impossible, my lord. As I just explained, 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.

Obviously trying to keep calm, SHAKESPEARE takes a deep breath (or similar) before proceeding.

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*.

He stares at SHAKESPEARE.

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Is it, my Lord?

SOUTHAMPTON:

Of course it is! It's 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 her officials, especially 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 *Richard* in front of an audience of veterans -

SHAKESPEARE (interrupting, in alarm):

"Veterans", my Lord?

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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.

For a moment, SHAKESPEARE looks dumbfounded.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

My Lord?

SOUTHAMPTON:

Do you forget the debt you owe me, Will?

SHAKESPEARE looks embarrassed - even ashamed.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

I know, my Lord.

SOUTHAMPTON:

Ten years ago, when you were struggling to make a living in plague-ridden playhouses, I gave you shelter. Later, I commissioned your *Sonnets* -

SHAKESPEARE *(interrupting)*:

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

Don't *quibble*, Will! Later still, I gave you money to help you build your theatre.

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE looks humbled, even humiliated: SOUTHAMPTON, obviously trying to be conciliatory, lowers his voice.

SOUTHAMPTON:

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?

For a moment, SOUTHAMPTON looks surprised.

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE looks mortified.

SHAKESPEARE:

I cannot pay you back such a sum, Sir, not "immediately" and especially if you demand "interest", not even if I sold my share in The Globe. You know I can't.

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE again looks out from the stage, obviously trying to buy himself some time while considering what to do.

SHAKESPEARE:

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!

SOUTHAMPTON laughs, but SHAKESPEARE just looks very grave.

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!

SHAKESPEARE takes a long, deep breath before replying.

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! *(Beaming, he looks around The Globe again.)* God, I love the theatre! As you yourself said, Will: "All the world's a stage!"

SHAKESPEARE says nothing, but just continues staring out from the stage.

SCENE III (BACKSTAGE OFFICE, THE GLOBE THEATRE)

SHAKESPEARE is sitting back down at his desk and BURBAGE, HEMINGS and CONDELL stand in front of him, staring down at him.

BURBAGE:

Did Southampton leave his *mind* behind in Ireland? We can't perform *Richard the Second* - not with the deposition scene! 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.

HEMINGS, CONDELL and BURBAGE all look horrified.

CONDELL:

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

BURBAGE:

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

HEMINGS nods in agreement, but SHAKESPEARE shakes his head.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

BURBAGE:

But *this* - *(Pause.)* This is pulling the dragon's tail! You risk *everything!*

SHAKESPEARE:

I know, but I have no choice. *(Pause.)* I owe him and I have to repay him. And this is the only way I can do it without losing *everything* I've worked for, including my share in The Globe.

HEMINGS:

Then I'll do it too.

SHAKESPEARE:

What? *Why?*

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE smiles.

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE smiles, ruefully.

HEMINGS:

And for a third thing, *I owe you.*

SHAKESPEARE looks puzzled.

SHAKESPEARE:

You don't owe me anything, John.

HEMINGS:

Yes, I do. Without you, Will, I would still be a *part-time* actor and grocer, struggling to make a living. Instead, I am a *part-owner* of the greatest theatre in England - (*imitating BURBAGE*) "Nay, the world!"

SHAKESPEARE smiles and HEMINGS stares at him.

HEMINGS:

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

BURBAGE:

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

CONDELL:

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

SHAKESPEARE laughs.

HEMINGS:

We *all* owe you, Will, for making us what we are today. *That's* why we'll help you discharge your debt to Southampton, once and for all, so you're *finally* free of him.

SHAKESPEARE looks around at them all warmly and smiles.

SHAKESPEARE:

Thank you - *all* of you.

HEMINGS:

However, there are a couple of conditions.

SHAKESPEARE:

Such as?

HEMINGS:

The production will only be for Essex's supporters, including 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"? (*Pause.*) 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, or at least part of it, 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.*) We'll keep the truth to ourselves and *pray* we get away with it.

They all look round at each other nervously.

ACT II, SCENE I (THE WINGS OF THE GLOBE THEATRE)

SHAKESPEARE and HEMINGS, in costume as John of Gaunt and The Duke of York respectively, peer out from the wings of The Globe.

HEMINGS:

My God! It looks like there's a whole army out there.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

A loud burst of applause is heard (off-stage).

SHAKESPEARE:

Look at him waving to all the groundlings down below while he keeps all the seats up above for himself and his retinue. *(Even more applause, off-stage.)* He's obviously recognised some "old friends" in the audience.

HEMINGS:

They're not "old friends": they fought under him in Ireland. They serve him - just as we do. *(A trumpet sounds to announce the start of the performance.)* Come: we are summoned.

HEMINGS and SHAKESPEARE walk on stage to the sound of applause.

SCENE II (THE STAGE OF THE GLOBE THEATRE)

SHAKESPEARE, as John of Gaunt, sits in a chair, looking old and sickly, and HEMINGS, as The Duke of York, stands beside him.

SHAKESPEARE (as John of Gaunt):

"This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,

This fortress built by nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands,
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this *England*."

There is a pause, then a series of shouts (off-stage).

FIRST MAN (VOICE OFF):

ENGLAND!

SECOND MAN (VOICE OFF):

NOT ELIZABETH!

THIRD MAN (VOICE OFF):

THAT'S WHO WE SERVE!

SHAKESPEARE & HEMINGS look startled, before SHAKESPEARE resumes.

SHAKESPEARE (as John of Gaunt):

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

SCENE III (THE WINGS AND STAGE OF THE GLOBE THEATRE)

SHAKESPEARE and HEMINGS are again at the side of the stage, watching the action taking place on stage: when they speak to each other, they do so quietly, so as not to be heard on stage.

SHAKESPEARE:

This is it - the deposition scene.

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE looks at him, but HEMINGS turns to look at the action on stage, so SHAKESPEARE does, too.

As they watch, BURBAGE (as King Richard, complete with crown) and AUGUSTINE PHILIPS (as the rebel, Bolingbroke) walk onto the stage at The Globe from different sides. They approach each other slowly, until finally they meet centre-stage. They stare at each other for a moment, then BURBAGE removes the crown.

BURBAGE (as King Richard):

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

At the side of the stage, HEMINGS whispers to SHAKESPEARE.

HEMINGS:

The Queen won't surrender her throne, if that's what they want.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS:

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

They both look back at the action on stage: PHILIPS (playing Bolingbroke) now weeps over a coffin in the middle of the stage.

PHILIPS (as Bolingbroke):

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

PHILIPS (as Bolingbroke) leads off TWO LORDS, who carry the coffin. The stage empties and there is silence for a moment, then loud applause, followed by a series of even louder cries.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS (off-stage):

GOD SAVE OUR GRACIOUS GENERAL!

OTHER AUDIENCE MEMBERS (also off-stage and even louder):

GOD SAVE THE EARL OF ESSEX!

AUDIENCE (as one, almost deafeningly, off-stage):

GOD SAVE THE KING!

SHAKESPEARE, still at the side of the stage, looks alarmed. He and HEMINGS are joined by CONDELL and BURBAGE, and they all look confused as THE AUDIENCE continue cheering (VOICES OFF).

SHAKESPEARE:

Should we take a bow?

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

I don't believe it!

HEMINGS:

What?

SHAKESPEARE (pointing off-stage):

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.

HEMINGS:

It explains their enthusiasm.

SHAKESPEARE (looking off to the side of the stage):

Quiet! Here comes Southampton.

SOUTHAMPTON enters and walks across the stage towards the ACTORS: as he reaches them, they all bow deeply.

SHAKESPEARE:

My Lord!

SOUTHAMPTON heads straight for SHAKESPEARE and shakes his hand.

SOUTHAMPTON:

Thank you, Will. Thank you.

SHAKESPEARE:

You're very welcome, my Lord.

SOUTHAMPTON:

Thank you all! You were wonderful - just wonderful!

THE ACTORS all bow again, then SOUTHAMPTON takes out a letter from his pocket that is wrapped in a bright red ribbon.

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Thank you, my Lord.

SOUTHAMPTON:

And here - *(He produces a bulging bag of coins.)* - Is the payment for the rest of you. I think you will find it exceedingly generous. But you have earned every penny.

CONDELL comes forward to take the bag, but it is so heavy that he almost drops it, before he takes hold of it and retreats.

SOUTHAMPTON:

Thank you once again, from myself and my Master. It was *marvellous*: all we had hoped for! *(Pause.)* After such an exhilarating performance, we are *emboldened*!

Still smiling, SOUTHAMPTON exits, and THE ACTORS bow once again. They wait for a moment, still bowing, to make sure he has gone, before rising. Then HEMINGS turns to face SHAKESPEARE.

HEMINGS:

"Emboldened" to do what?

THE OTHER ACTORS, including SHAKESPEARE, look at him, fearfully.

ACT III, SCENE I (THE EARL OF ESSEX'S STUDY)

SOUTHAMPTON stares at an expectant-looking ARISTOCRAT, who is even more exquisitely attired than he is.

ARISTOCRAT (to SOUTHAMPTON):

How was the performance?

SOUTHAMPTON:

Magnificent, my lord: it rallied the troops wonderfully. Having seen a monarch surrender power on stage, they are ready to see one surrender power for real!

THE ARISTOCRAT - THE EARL OF ESSEX - laughs.

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.

ESSEX looks at SOUTHAMPTON questioningly.

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 Lord Cecil, will doubtless 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 does not move.*) Good. Then let us address the men.

He exits, followed by SOUTHAMPTON.

SCENE II (ESSEX'S COURTYARD)

ESSEX and SOUTHAMPTON re-enter and there is a huge cheer (off-stage): ESSEX puts up a hand and the cheering stops immediately.

ESSEX:

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

There is another huge cheer from his Veterans (off-stage).

ESSEX:

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

Once again, the Veterans cheer (off-stage).

ESSEX:

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

This elicits the loudest cheer of all (off-stage): ESSEX and SOUTHAMPTON look at each other, smile triumphantly and exit.

SCENE III (LONDON STREET)

ESSEX and SOUTHAMPTON enter from one side of the stage as a NOBLEMAN enters from the other side; seeing ESSEX and SOUTHAMPTON, the NOBLEMAN immediately draws his sword.

NOBLEMAN:

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

ESSEX:

'Tis I, Sheriff - the Earl of Essex.

SHERIFF:

My Lord Essex? *(He looks behind ESSEX, looking off-stage at Essex's Veterans.)* What do you mean by this show of force?

ESSEX:

I have come to reclaim my title of vice-regent. *(He extends a hand towards the SHERIFF and smiles.)* Come - join us.

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

SHERIFF:

Never! I must order you to 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!

ESSEX:

Those are the words of Cecil and his parasites! (He draws his sword and looks round to give the order to his men.) CHARGE!

The SHERIFF turns and calls out in the other direction.

SHERIFF:

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

ESSEX marches forward to confront THE SHERIFF and the two men fight, their swords clashing loudly.

They continue to fight for a few moments.

Then, suddenly, there is a huge roar (off-stage), from behind THE SHERIFF.

Both he and ESSEX stop fighting and look round in the direction the roar had come from.

ESSEX:

Who are they?

SHERIFF:

Reinforcements! Thank God - and Lord Cecil!

The roar (off-stage) grows as the Reinforcements for the Sheriff obviously approach.

SOUTHAMPTON looks behind him (off-stage, in the other direction that the SHERIFF had looked) at his and Essex's Men.

Suddenly, he looks startled.

SOUTHAMPTON:

My Lord!

ESSEX:

What is it?

SOUTHAMPTON:

It's the men, my Lord.

ESSEX:

What about them?

SOUTHAMPTON:

They're running away!

ESSEX:

WHAT?!

As ESSEX looks off-stage, the sound of his Men running away, and in the process discarding their weapons with a succession of loud clangs and bangs, is heard.

ESSEX:

Where are they going?

SHERIFF:

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SOUTHAMPTON takes him by the arm and starts leading him off.

SHERIFF (calling after them):

That's it, you *scoundrels*! Run for your lives!

SCENE IV (THE EARL OF ESSEX'S STUDY)

ESSEX and SOUTHAMPTON re-enter, panting for breath, having obviously run upstairs to Essex's study.

Quickly, they assemble a makeshift barricade by piling up a chair and furniture against the door.

They stand back, to see if the barricade will hold, but TWO SOLDIERS enter and start battering away at it.

Seeing it is about to be broken down, ESSEX turns to SOUTHAMPTON.

ESSEX:

There is nothing left but the Roman way.

SOUTHAMPTON:

Kill ourselves? But we will go to hell!

ESSEX:

'Tis better than the Tower.

Finally the "barricade" is broken down and TWO SOLDIERS enter.

FIRST SOLDIER:

Disarm them. The Queen will want them alive.

THE SECOND SOLDIER nods, draws his sword and advances towards SOUTHAMPTON and ESSEX, who back away until they are at the edge of the stage. ESSEX turns to SOUTHAMPTON and draws his sword.

ESSEX:

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

ESSEX stares at him in disbelief.

ESSEX:

TURNCOAT!

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

SCENE V (THE BACKSTAGE OFFICE OF THE GLOBE THEATRE)

SHAKESPEARE is seated, quill in hand, HEMINGS stands to mend a costume and CONDELL is also seated, counting money, when BURBAGE enters, panting for breath, having obviously just run there.

SHAKESPEARE:

Richard! What's wrong?

BURBAGE:

Haven't you heard?

SHAKESPEARE:

Heard what?

BURBAGE:

Essex and Southampton have led a rebellion against the Queen.

SHAKESPEARE:

WHAT?!

HEMINGS:

Oh, my God!

BURBAGE:

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

CONDELL:

And we shall soon join them.

They all look horrified.

ACT IV. SCENE ONE (THE STAGE OF THE GLOBE THEATRE)

SHAKESPEARE, BURBAGE, HEMINGS and CONDELL stand, while BRYANT, a younger actor, sits on the stage. SHAKESPEARE addresses the AUDIENCE as if they were also Players.

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 his commission. But it's too late now.

He looks offstage, as if looking out into the city.

SHAKESPEARE:

The Queen's men will be here soon. By now, they'll have rounded up all of Essex's sympathisers and they will surely come for us next, doubtless having been informed of our "performance" for the rebels. And that's it! I don't know what else to say.

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:

Yes, that we, the entire *company* (*he addresses this to the AUDIENCE*) owed Southampton a debt and merely sought to discharge it.

CONDELL:

And is that debt above the debt of loyalty we owe the Queen? (*He looks at HEMINGS questioningly.*) I think not. (*Pause.*) I say we stick to the money.

SHAKESPEARE:

"The money"?

CONDELL:

Yes! 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, which we did. The authorities - indeed, all of society - believe 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, SHAKESPEARE and BURBAGE all stare at him.

HEMINGS:

That's a good idea, Henry. For once, we might just *profit* from their prejudice.

BRYANT:

Why not tell the truth, Will?

EVERYONE looks around and down at BRYANT, who is still sitting on the floor but is now looking up at SHAKESPEARE accusingly.

HEMINGS:

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

BRYANT:

You assembled the whole company (*he indicates the OTHER ACTORS and THE AUDIENCE*) 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 (*incredulously*):

What?!

BRYANT:

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

SHAKESPEARE (even more incredulously):

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

BRYANT:

It must have been a considerable debt.

HEMINGS walks over to BRYANT and stands over him.

HEMINGS:

It was - and we *all* owed it!

BRYANT:

I owe *no* man.

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

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

THE OTHERS laugh: BRYANT looks chastened and gets to his feet.

BRYANT:

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

HEMINGS:

Where?

BRYANT:

For a piss!

CONDELL:

Where? In a whore's mouth?!

Again, they all laugh at BRYANT as he exits: they watch him go, then HEMINGS addresses THE PLAYERS (AND AUDIENCE).

HEMINGS:

Men, we *all* owe Will, because 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!

ALL THE OTHERS (except SHAKESPEARE):

AYE!

SHAKESPEARE looks around at them all and the AUDIENCE.

SHAKESPEARE:

Gentlemen, once again, I don't know what to say. *(Pause.)* Except "thank you".

Suddenly, an ARMY CAPTAIN enters The Globe and marches up to the stage to confront the assembled ACTORS.

CAPTAIN:

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

ALL THE ACTORS look down at him in horror.

HEMINGS:

All of us?

The CAPTAIN looks up at the ACTORS on stage & then looks out at the AUDIENCE, taking in the large number of assembled "Players".

CAPTAIN:

Choose one of your number to speak on your behalf and choose him quickly! I shall wait for him at the gate.

THE CAPTAIN exits and THE ACTORS all look round at each other.

SHAKESPEARE:

I will do it.

HEMINGS:

No, Will. You can't.

SHAKESPEARE:

Why not?

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

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

HEMINGS:

Someone else should speak for us.

CONDELL:

I suggest Augustine.

He points to AUGUSTINE, who is standing at the back of the PLAYERS/AUDIENCE.

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!

THE OTHERS - except for PHILIPS himself - all 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 to play the role of "spokesman", Augustine.

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 (to SHAKESPEARE):

Compose them *well*: you have never written *anything* so important.

SHAKESPEARE looks alarmed.

SCENE II (COURTROOM)

A fearful-looking PHILIPS stands before THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE, who is bewigged, seated and studying a piece of paper he is holding. Finally, having read it, he puts it down on the desk.

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

THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE looks at him accusingly for a moment, then slowly starts to smile.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

Well, you are a *player*, I suppose, and players are little more than *whores*, so I can well believe that you'd do *anything* - even entertaining *rebels*! - for money.

He pauses for a moment, obviously weighing things up.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

Alright, Mister Philips: given the nature of your "profession" and the lack of evidence *directly* linking your company to the conspiracy, for now you are dismissed - *pending* further inquiries.

PHILIPS:

Thank you, my Lord. Thank you.

PHILIPS bows, as if he were on stage; he turns to go but a MESSENGER enters with a note he gives to the LORD CHIEF JUSTICE. THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE reads it, smiles and looks up at PHILIPS.

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.

PHILIPS steps forward, takes the note and quickly reads it.

PHILIPS:

Oh my God!

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE (smiling broadly):

I thought you might be surprised.

SCENE III (THE STAGE OF THE GLOBE THEATRE)

HEMINGS, CONDELL, SHAKESPEARE and BURBAGE are all standing on the stage at The Globe and looking at PHILIPS questioningly.

HEMINGS:

Well, Augustine? What's the upshot?

PHILIPS:

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

THE OTHER ACTORS sigh audibly or even cheer with relief.

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.

PHILIPS:

And the money story.

CONDELL:

They were persuaded by it?

PHILIPS:

Aye. As you thought they would be.

CONDELL:

Good.

HEMINGS suddenly bursts out laughing.

SHAKESPEARE:

What's so funny, John?

HEMINGS:

Well, I was just thinking: "Thank God we players are of such *low* repute!"

SHAKESPEARE:

"*Low* repute"?

HEMINGS:

Absolutely! Otherwise, they would *never* have believed us!

EVERYONE laughs, except PHILIPS, which SHAKESPEARE notices.

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.

SHAKESPEARE:

WHAT?!

PHILIPS:

It's all in this note.

He gives SHAKESPEARE the message he received in the courtroom.

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

It says Her Majesty desires that we perform for her, at the palace.

HEMINGS:

WHAT?! When?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS:

Oh my God!

CONDELL:

Which play?

SHAKESPEARE:

Richard the Second.

CONDELL:

WHAT?!

SHAKESPEARE:

Complete with deposition scene.

For a moment, there is total 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, just as we performed for the rebels, and then we will be *killed* - just like the rebels.

ALL THE OTHER PLAYERS stare at him in horror.

ACT V. SCENE I (BACKSTAGE/"DRESSING ROOM" AT THE PALACE)

SHAKESPEARE, HEMINGS and CONDELL, in costume for Richard the Second, wait backstage and peer out at their audience.

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

We should have fled.

HEMINGS:

Where to? Cecil has spies all over England - all over *Europe*! He would find us wherever we went.

CONDELL:

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

HEMINGS:

Exactly! We must go on.

SHAKESPEARE sighs, deeply.

SHAKESPEARE:

I suppose we must.

BURBAGE & PHILIPS enter, also in costume: SHAKESPEARE addresses them & the AUDIENCE, who again represent ALL THE OTHER PLAYERS.

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.

They all laugh, except SHAKESPEARE, who looks confused.

SHAKESPEARE:

Why?

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

I do!

HEMINGS:

No, you don't! As I've said before, 'tis we who owe *you*: our careers, our fortunes, *everything*! (Pause) Without you, 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 herself. That's something a mere grocer-

CONDELL:

Or fishmonger.

HEMINGS:

Could only dream of!

SHAKESPEARE smiles.

HEMINGS:

Take your positions, men.

THE ACTORS stand to attention and HEMINGS addresses them and the AUDIENCE.

HEMINGS:

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

PHILIPS looks as if he might cry: he has to choke back tears.

HEMINGS:

So let us make it a memorable one -

SHAKESPEARE (interrupting):

One fit for a Queen!

EVERYONE laughs and HEMINGS smiles at SHAKESPEARE.

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE laughs.

SHAKESPEARE:

Tonight I do. (Pause.) Just in case.

A trumpet sounds to announce the start of the performance.

HEMINGS (to all the players):

Good luck, men.

Then, as one, they all exit, to walk on stage.

SCENE II (THE "STAGE" AT COURT)

THE ACTORS walk onto the "stage" and stare out at their audience (i.e. the actual AUDIENCE).

For a moment, they seem to be frozen with fear, then BURBAGE - always the consummate professional - speaks.

BURBAGE (as King Richard):

"Old John of Gaunt, time-honoured Lancaster,

Hast thou according to thy oath and bond]

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

As BURBAGE speaks, SHAKESPEARE stares at the audience and is still staring at them when he slowly becomes aware that THE OTHER ACTORS, including BURBAGE, are all staring at him: for a moment he is puzzled, then realises why and remembers his line.

SHAKESPEARE (as John of Gaunt):

"I have, my liege."

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

BURBAGE:

"Tell me moreover..."

SCENE III (THE "STAGE" AT COURT)

BURBAGE (as Richard) is centre-stage with CONDELL, who is playing a Courtier.

BURBAGE (as King Richard):

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

On hearing the words "All murdered", CONDELL gasps audibly, then BURBAGE shoots him a look and he quickly composes himself again.

SCENE IV (THE "STAGE" AT COURT)

BURBAGE (as Richard) is lying in the coffin in the centre of the stage, surrounded by PHILIPS (as Bolingbroke) and TWO LORDS.

PHILIPS (as Bolingbroke):

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

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

SCENE V (BACKSTAGE/"DRESSING ROOM" AT COURT)

SHAKESPEARE waits backstage: the coffin is carried off stage and BURBAGE leaps out of it, stands up and stares at SHAKESPEARE.

BURBAGE (to SHAKESPEARE):

Well...?

SHAKESPEARE:

"Well" what?

BURBAGE looks at him in disbelief.

BURBAGE:

Did she like it?

SHAKESPEARE looks back at BURBAGE, again in disbelief.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

NOW BURBAGE looks at SHAKESPEARE in disbelief.

BURBAGE:

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

Suddenly, off-stage, the sound of clapping - by just one person - is heard: faintly at first, but then with growing volume. Other hands join in, until finally it becomes almost deafening.

SHAKESPEARE:

She liked it!

BURBAGE:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Even Lord Cecil!

SHAKESPEARE and BURBAGE laugh.

HEMINGS:

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

ALL THE ACTORS immediately exit, rushing back on stage.

SCENE VI (THE "STAGE" AT COURT)

HEMINGS, CONDELL, BURBAGE and SHAKESPEARE enter and stand centre-stage, bowing as the applause continues, and as they bow they continue to exchange looks of surprise. Suddenly the applause stops. Then, breathing heavily (as it obviously requires enormous effort for her to move, such is her great age and infirmity), THE QUEEN - ELIZABETH I - enters, climbing up on stage. ALL THE ACTORS, including SHAKESPEARE, bow before her.

QUEEN:

Master Shakespeare...

Still bowing, SHAKESPEARE strains his neck to look up at her.

SHAKESPEARE:

Yes, your Majesty?

QUEEN:

Come here.

He stands up and walks over until he is beside her: THE OTHER ACTORS watch him, but THE QUEEN looks at them all dismissively.

QUEEN:

The rest of you may go.

Immediately THE OTHER ACTORS exit, some of them still bowing as they go: THE QUEEN watches them leave, then looks at SHAKESPEARE.

QUEEN:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Thank you, your Majesty. You are too kind.

QUEEN:

I know!

For a moment, SHAKESPEARE is taken aback; then he bows again.

QUEEN:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Yes, your Majesty. Of course, your Majesty.

QUEEN:

Good. And one final thing...*(She stares at him.)* I am Richard the Second. Know ye not that?

SHAKESPEARE looks stunned.

SHAKESPEARE:

No, your Majesty. I did not know that.

QUEEN:

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

And with that, she exits, again breathing heavily as she goes.

SHAKESPEARE (calling after her):

Thank you, your Majesty! Thank you!

He exits as quickly as he can, following the OTHERS off-stage, still bowing as he walks backwards, until finally he exits.

SCENE VII (BACKSTAGE/"DRESSING ROOM" AT COURT)

SHAKESPEARE enters & THE OTHER ACTORS look at him questioningly.

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?!

HEMINGS and THE OTHER ACTORS all stare at SHAKESPEARE.

HEMINGS:

What did she mean?

SHAKESPEARE:

I don't know. And I certainly wasn't going to ask! *(He sighs, in exhaustion and relief.)* Now I suggest we all exit immediately, before she changes her mind and has us killed after all.

HEMINGS:

Agreed!

THE ACTORS hastily gather up their props & costumes, then exit.

SCENE VIII (THE PALACE GROUNDS)

Still in their costumes, SHAKESPEARE, HEMINGS, CONDELL and BURBAGE enter the palace grounds smiling and laughing.

SHAKESPEARE:

The night air ne'er smelled so sweet.

HEMINGS:

Indeed.

SHAKESPEARE:

Even I cannot find words to describe it!

They all laugh. Suddenly, however, they stop laughing and stop walking as a MASKED MAN enters, carrying a coil of rope over his shoulder. He is obviously a HANGMAN and for a moment he stops walking and looks at THE ACTORS, before walking past them and exiting.

BURBAGE:

He must be preparing the gallows for Essex.

SHAKESPEARE:

Aye. And Southampton.

HEMINGS:

But why here? Why not the Tower?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

There is silence for a moment.

BURBAGE:

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

SHAKESPEARE looks confused.

SHAKESPEARE:

What would?

BURBAGE:

This - this night, this whole story.

SHAKESPEARE, HEMINGS and CONDELL all stare at him.

HEMINGS:

Not in our lifetime.

CONDELL:

And certainly not in the Queen's!

BURBAGE considers this for a moment before nodding in agreement.

BURBAGE:

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

SHAKESPEARE considers this for a moment.

SHAKESPEARE:

'Tis a plot more fanciful than any I wrote.

BURBAGE, HEMINGS and CONDELL all stare at SHAKESPEARE for a moment. Then SHAKESPEARE walks on silently and they all follow him, exiting. Slowly the lights come down.

And if there is an interval, it comes here.

PART III - THE MOST LAMENTABLE TRAGEDY OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE:
1616. ACT I, SCENE I (SHAKESPEARE'S STUDY, STRATFORD ON AVON)

SHAKESPEARE, now 51 and almost totally bald, stands in his study dictating to his lawyer, FRANCIS COLLINS, a small, bespectacled man also in his 50s, who is sitting at a desk, quill in hand.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

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

COLLINS:

May I inquire, Mr Shakespeare, who Mr Hemings and Mr Condell are? I am familiar with the other beneficiaries of your will - including, of course, Mr Burbage, the greatest actor of our age.

SHAKESPEARE:

Alas, he is too old, and ill, to act much now.

COLLINS:

However, I am not familiar with Mr Hemings and Mr Condell.

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. (*COLLINS looks the will over and appears satisfied.*) Now I just need you to sign it and date it.

SHAKESPEARE comes over to the desk, takes the quill from COLLINS and signs and dates the will: he goes to hand the quill back to COLLINS, but COLLINS obviously notices that something is awry.

COLLINS (pointing at the will):

It is January 1616, Mr Shakespeare, not '15.

SHAKESPEARE stares down at the will and realises his mistake.

SHAKESPEARE:

Forgive me, Mr Collins. The change of year always catches me out.

COLLINS:

You're not alone in that regard.

SHAKESPEARE corrects the date and hands the quill back to COLLINS: COLLINS checks the will and finally seems satisfied.

COLLINS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Very good.

COLLINS puts the will in a slim leather bag.

COLLINS:

May I ask another question?

SHAKESPEARE:

Of course.

COLLINS:

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

SHAKESPEARE (smiling):

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:

Judith, 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.

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

COLLINS:

Good day, Mister Shakespeare.

SHAKESPEARE:

Good day to you, Mister Collins. (*SHAKESPEARE watches him go out, then smiles.*) That's one thing done.

ACT II. SCENE I (THE DINING ROOM, SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE)

SHAKESPEARE, wearing his finest, most expensive clothes, is sitting at the head of the dining table for the wedding feast. The bride and groom - JUDITH (a rather plain-looking woman of 30 who wears a beautiful white dress) and THOMAS (a handsome man of about 27) - sit either side of him. Next to them are HEMINGS and CONDELL (now nearly 60 & 40 respectively), who, like everyone else, are in their finery. Beside HEMINGS is the Groom's father, RICHARD QUINEY, a handsome man who, like Shakespeare himself, is in his early 50s. HEMINGS & CONDELL bang the table and chant.

HEMINGS AND CONDELL (together):

SPEECH! SPEECH!

SHAKESPEARE (smiling):

Alright, you rowdy lot - it's coming!

HEMINGS:

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

Everyone laughs and SHAKESPEARE stands up: he waits for the laughter to stop before speaking. When he speaks, he projects beyond the table to THE AUDIENCE, as if they too were guests.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS:

It was our pleasure.

CONDELL:

Indeed.

HEMINGS:

Even if the journey nearly killed us!

Everyone laughs, but HEMINGS shakes his head.

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL (to SHAKESPEARE):

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

SHAKESPEARE (nodding):

I know. He said so in his letter.

HEMINGS looks up at SHAKESPEARE and smiles.

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*!

Laughter, and when it stops, SHAKESPEARE turns to THE GROOM.

SHAKESPEARE:

I also want to thank Thomas.

THOMAS (looking confused):

Me? What for?

SHAKESPEARE (smiling):

For finally taking Judith off our hands. I thought it would *never* happen! (*ALL laugh except JUDITH, who looks embarrassed.*) Seriously, Thomas, your father is one of my oldest friends in Stratford and I am delighted at the union of our two families.

RICHARD QUINEY (calling out):

We both are!

SHAKESPEARE smiles at RICHARD QUINEY.

SHAKESPEARE:

And finally I want to thank my own family: Judith - (*He indicates JUDITH, sitting next to him.*) Susanna and Anne, who are both so far away at the end of the table that I can hardly see them!

He feigns peering into the distance and EVERYONE laughs.

HEMINGS (calling out):

That'll teach you to have such a big house!

Once again, EVERYONE laughs.

SHAKESPEARE:

They have had *much* to endure over the years, while I was in London.

JUDITH:

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

SHAKESPEARE looks at her lovingly.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

EVERYONE else lowers their head, too.

EVERYONE (TOGETHER, but quietly):

God bless his soul.

For a moment, SHAKESPEARE looks as if he might cry, but then resumes.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

The toast is taken up around the table: "THE BRIDE AND GROOM". JUDITH and THOMAS look embarrassed but then kiss, to the sound of applause, cheers and even the banging of fists on the table.

SCENE II (THE DINING ROOM, SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE)

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

SHAKESPEARE:

It's been a great day.

HEMINGS:

I'll say! The whole town turned out for you.

CONDELL:

Burbage will be sorry he missed it.

SHAKESPEARE:

And we missed him! Nevertheless, it was a great day and not just because I have finally "married off" the last of my daughters!

HEMINGS and CONDELL smile, but SHAKESPEARE suddenly looks very serious - even grave.

SHAKESPEARE:

Today, as I walked Judith to church, I thought of another occasion when I walked down the high street in Stratford with crowds lined up on either side. *(Pause.)* 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 the Mayor, even - had been stripped of his powers and position. *(Pause.)* 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!

For a moment, HEMINGS and CONDELL just stare at him in amazement.

HEMINGS:

You never told us this.

SHAKESPEARE:

It's only now that I can tell you.

CONDELL:

How so?

SHAKESPEARE:

Because today it was as if that *shame* - that *stain* on the "Shakespeare" family name - was finally expunged. (*Pause.*) I have dedicated my life to rebuilding my Father's fortune, the fortune that was so cruelly stolen from him, but it was only today, when the whole town turned out to watch me lead my daughter to church, that I felt our *reputation* - "the immortal part" of ourselves, as I once wrote - was restored.

He smiles at HEMINGS and CONDELL.

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 raises his glass.*) "The Shakespeares and the Quineys!"

HEMINGS & CONDELL raise their glasses, still looking surprised.

HEMINGS AND CONDELL (together):

"The Shakespeares and the Quineys!"

They all drain their glasses.

ACT III. SCENE I (HALLWAY, SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE, STRATFORD)

There is a loud knocking - indeed, hammering - at the front door and SHAKESPEARE enters in his nightgown.

SHAKESPEARE (calling out):

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

He goes to the door and opens it to find JUDITH in the doorway. She looks distraught, with her hair tangled (as if she has been tearing at it), & she is in her nightgown, covered by a blanket.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JUDITH looks at him - and immediately bursts into tears.

SHAKESPEARE:

Come inside and tell me.

He ushers her inside and closes the door behind her.

SHAKESPEARE:

Now, tell me what's wrong.

JUDITH:

I'm not sure I can.

SHAKESPEARE:

Of course you can: that's why you came here.

JUDITH looks at him, then nods.

JUDITH:

It's Thomas, Father.

SHAKESPEARE:

"Thomas"? What's wrong with him? Is he ill?

JUDITH:

No, Father. He's been -

She pauses again, obviously unable to say any more.

SHAKESPEARE:

Go on - tell me!

JUDITH:

He's been *arrested*.

She starts crying again and SHAKESPEARE looks shocked.

SHAKESPEARE:

"Arrested"? What for?

JUDITH hesitates, as she is obviously embarrassed, or even ashamed.

JUDITH:

"Unlawful copulation and abandonment".

Now SHAKESPEARE looks at her in disbelief.

SHAKESPEARE:

WHAT?!

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Who did he - *(He tries to find the right word)* abandon?

JUDITH:

A woman called Margaret Wheeler.

SHAKESPEARE:

"Margaret Wheeler"? I've never heard of her.

JUDITH:

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

SHAKESPEARE continues to stare at her.

JUDITH:

She died in childbirth last week.

SHAKESPEARE:

WHAT?!

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

JUDITH:

And the child died too.

SHAKESPEARE looks stunned and for a moment there is silence.

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. Oh, Father, can you help him?

SHAKESPEARE:

"Help" him? *How?*

JUDITH:

By using your wealth and influence to secure his release.

SHAKESPEARE looks shocked.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JUDITH:

Oh, they do: they do! You're the richest and most powerful man in Stratford, Father. If anyone can help Thomas, it's you.

SHAKESPEARE looks sceptical.

JUDITH:

Please help him: if not for his own sake, then for mine. (Again, she begins to cry.) I know he didn't do it, Father. He'd never do such a thing. (Pause, while still crying.) He's a gentleman!

For a moment, SHAKESPEARE continues to look uncertain.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JUDITH:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

You always can, my dear. You always can.

He takes her in his arms and she immediately starts to cry again.

SCENE II (JAIL CELL)

SHAKESPEARE (now dressed) enters a jail cell & the door is locked behind him. THOMAS QUINEY, who wears a generic grey prisoner's uniform, stands up from the grubby bed he has been sitting on.

THOMAS:

Thank you for coming.

SHAKESPEARE:

I came as soon as Judith told me.

THOMAS indicates the bed behind him.

THOMAS:

Please - have a seat.

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

SHAKESPEARE:

No, thank you. I'll stand.

THOMAS remains standing, too.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS looks alarmed.

THOMAS:

I can't afford a lawyer.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS looks simultaneously flattered and embarrassed.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS:

Of course. Anything.

SHAKESPEARE:

Did you do it?

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS looks terrified.

THOMAS:

"Excommunication"?

SHAKESPEARE:

Yes. And flogging.

THOMAS looks even more terrified.

THOMAS:

"Flogging"?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS:

Oh my God!

He looks down at the floor and puts his head in his hands.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

Still THOMAS says nothing.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS looks up at him in surprise.

THOMAS:

You do?

SHAKESPEARE:

Yes, of course. So I ask you again: did you do it? Did you have "carnal relations" with this woman - ? *(He takes out a piece of paper and reads from it.)* "Margaret Wheeler".

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

THOMAS:

Yes. I did.

He begins to cry.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS (nodding, while still crying):

Yes.

SHAKESPEARE:

When you began courting Judith.

THOMAS starts to sob.

THOMAS:

Yes.

SHAKESPEARE:

Who was she?

THOMAS:

Just a local girl.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS:

Well, she's from Arden - the forest.

SHAKESPEARE:

Oh. (*Pause.*) Right.

THOMAS looks back up at him.

THOMAS:

She was a *WHORE!*

SHAKESPEARE:

WHAT?!

THOMAS:

She must have been. She used her *wiles* to lure me into bed. (*He smiles ruefully.*) I say "bed": it was actually the forest floor. (*He extends his arms, as if pleading with SHAKESPEARE.*) It only happened *once*. And I didn't know she was *pregnant*. I swear it!

For a moment, SHAKESPEARE looks at him questioningly.

SHAKESPEARE:

Alright, Thomas. I believe you.

THOMAS looks surprised.

THOMAS:

You do?

SHAKESPEARE:

Yes, of course.

THOMAS smiles.

THOMAS:

Thank you.

As quickly as the smile appeared, however, it vanishes.

THOMAS:

But what am I going to do? I don't want to be excommunicated, or flogged.

Finally SHAKESPEARE sits down on the bed beside him.

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, Thomas. I'm sure we can save you from the worst.

THOMAS smiles at him.

THOMAS:

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

And with that, he leans against SHAKESPEARE, hugging him: SHAKESPEARE looks surprised, then slowly puts an arm around him.

SCENE III (SHAKESPEARE'S STUDY)

There is a knock at the door.

SHAKESPEARE:

Come in.

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

MR COLLINS:

Yes, I think we can mount a strong defence, especially with you testifying for Thomas. But there is something that I must bring to your attention *before* the trial.

SHAKESPEARE looks puzzled.

SCENE IV (COURTROOM)

SHAKESPEARE AND JUDITH sit at the back of the courtroom: THOMAS AND MR COLLINS at the front. THOMAS turns & looks back at JUDITH AND SHAKESPEARE but turns round again as a COURT OFFICIAL enters.

COURT OFFICIAL:

All rise for the court's verdict.

Everyone stands as a SENIOR "JUDGE" (in reality, a Senior Priest) enters and sits at the raised platform at the front. He surveys the courtroom and all those in it before speaking.

SENIOR PRIEST:

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

THOMAS and JUDITH look devastated, but MR COLLINS and SHAKESPEARE's calm expressions do not change.

SENIOR PRIEST (continuing):

Ordinarily I would impose a severe punishment, one involving public penance, and possibly even *excommunication*.

THOMAS bows his head.

SENIOR PRIEST:

However, we have borne in mind your previously unblemished reputation. We have also borne in mind 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.

THOMAS looks back at SHAKESPEARE, before quickly turning back round again to face the front.

SENIOR PRIEST:

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

THOMAS and JUDITH look amazed; SHAKESPEARE & MR COLLINS less so.

THOMAS:

A fine, your grace?

SENIOR PRIEST:

Yes, which must be paid *immediately*.

MR COLLINS (speaking up):

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

SENIOR PRIEST:

Good. Then the court is dismissed.

He strikes the desk with his gavel, gets up and he and the COURT OFFICIAL exit: as they go out, THOMAS calls after them.

THOMAS:

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

THOMAS turns around, JUDITH immediately runs into his arms, and they embrace and kiss passionately: SHAKESPEARE and MR COLLINS both look embarrassed, until finally they stop kissing.

THOMAS:

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

SHAKESPEARE shrugs.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

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

THOMAS (to SHAKESPEARE):

Thank you.

SHAKESPEARE:

You're welcome.

THOMAS smiles at SHAKESPEARE, but SHAKESPEARE does not smile back.

THOMAS:

We must celebrate.

SHAKESPEARE looks surprised.

SHAKESPEARE:

"Celebrate"? Celebrate what?

THOMAS:

Why, my freedom, of course.

SHAKESPEARE nods, belatedly understanding.

SHAKESPEARE:

Of course. Your freedom.

He glances at MR COLLINS, who is still standing by the desk, then looks back at THOMAS.

SHAKESPEARE (to THOMAS):

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

THOMAS:

As you wish. *(Beat.)* And thank you too, Mr Collins.

JUDITH (to MR COLLINS):

Yes, thank you.

MR COLLINS:

You are *both* most welcome.

Finally SHAKESPEARE comes forward until he stands beside THOMAS.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS looks surprised.

THOMAS:

What for?

SHAKESPEARE:

We need to discuss the future.

THOMAS nods.

THOMAS:

Of course. I'll come first thing.

THOMAS and JUDITH exit, arm in arm: SHAKESPEARE and MR COLLINS watch them go, then turn and stare at each other.

SCENE V (SHAKESPEARE'S STUDY)

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Come in.

THOMAS enters, looking tired and sickly, i.e. hungover.

SHAKESPEARE:

Ah, Thomas. Thank you for coming.

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

SHAKESPEARE:

I trust you had an enjoyable evening.

THOMAS:

Yes. We were at my Father's house. You should have come.

SHAKESPEARE:

As I told you 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 looks surprised.

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 looks as if he might be sick - literally.

THOMAS:

I can explain -

SHAKESPEARE (interrupting):

There's no need to: I know *everything*. (*He smiles, ruefully.*) You should be grateful that the ecclesiastical court and its officials are not as *assiduous* in the gathering of evidence as Mr Collins is. Otherwise, they would have uncovered the truth themselves and I would have been powerless to prevent you from being flogged and excommunicated.

THOMAS looks confused.

THOMAS:

Why *did* you prevent me from being flogged and excommunicated? (*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. Besides, I couldn't bear the thought of watching *another* family member being paraded like a thief through the streets of Stratford.

THOMAS (looking confused):

What?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS looks fearful.

THOMAS:

What are you going to do?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS looks even more fearful.

SHAKESPEARE:

But I *cannot* do that. You were married in church - in the eyes of God - so, however much I would like to, I cannot "tear you asunder".

THOMAS looks a little relieved.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS looks appalled.

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.

THOMAS looks horrified.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

He gets up and goes to the door: THOMAS watches him go out, then totally slumps back in his seat, looking sicker than ever.

SCENE VI (HALLWAY, RICHARD QUINEY'S HOUSE)

There is a loud knocking at the door. RICHARD QUINEY, Thomas's father - who, like his son, looks hungover - enters and goes to the door, opening it to find an angry-looking SHAKESPEARE.

RICHARD QUINEY:

Will! What are you doing here? Come in.

SHAKESPEARE enters and RICHARD QUINEY shuts the door behind him.

RICHARD QUINEY:

Please excuse my state of dishevelment: we were up until *late*, celebrating Thomas's release.

SHAKESPEARE:

I know. I've just seen Thomas.

RICHARD QUINEY:

Oh, right.

SHAKESPEARE stares at him.

RICHARD QUINEY:

What is it?

SHAKESPEARE:

You *knew*, didn't you?

RICHARD QUINEY:

What?

SHAKESPEARE:

About Thomas's *relationship* with Margaret Wheeler.

RICHARD QUINEY:

Oh...

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

RICHARD QUINEY:

I didn't "know" -

SHAKESPEARE (interrupting):

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

RICHARD QUINEY (continuing):

But I *suspected*.

SHAKESPEARE looks furious.

RICHARD QUINEY:

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

SHAKESPEARE (interrupting):

"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?

RICHARD bows his head and stares at the ground.

RICHARD QUINEY:

I did.

SHAKESPEARE smiles at him coolly - indeed, cruelly.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

RICHARD QUINEY looks horrified, but SHAKESPEARE quickly exits: when he is gone, QUINEY looks even more bilious than before.

SCENE VII (JUDITH'S HOUSE, STRATFORD ON AVON)

There is a knocking at the door and a distraught-looking JUDITH opens it, to find SHAKESPEARE standing there. She turns round and goes into the house and he follows her, closing the door behind him. There are two chairs and they sit down on them.

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*.

Finally, she starts to cry.

JUDITH:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

No, you haven't: you've been *fooled!* There's a world of difference.

JUDITH (shaking her head):

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

SHAKESPEARE stares at her in amazement.

SHAKESPEARE:

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 looks even more amazed.

SHAKESPEARE:

There were others?

JUDITH:

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

She looks up at him, looking as if she will start crying again.

JUDITH:

I thought, "If I *don't* marry Thomas, I'll never marry". (*Finally, she slumps against him, weeping.*) Now I wish I'd never married.

SHAKESPEARE holds her but stares off into the distance.

SCENE VIII (HALLWAY, SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE)

SHAKESPEARE enters. As he does so, his wife, ANNE, a woman of 60, also enters and takes him by surprise.

SHAKESPEARE:

Anne!

ANNE:

Why didn't you tell me about Thomas?

SHAKESPEARE looks shocked.

SHAKESPEARE:

You've heard? How?

ANNE:

After you left this morning, Thomas started *screaming* and *cursing* at the top of his voice and when I went into your study to find out what was going on, he told me *everything*.

SHAKESPEARE:

"Everything"?

ANNE:

Yes, *everything*! How you'd found out the truth about him, how you'd cut him out of your will and how he now *hated* all of us, especially you, and wished he'd never married Judith.

She stares at SHAKESPEARE, penetratingly.

ANNE:

You should have told me first.

SHAKESPEARE looks surprised, then slowly nods his head.

SHAKESPEARE:

You're right. I should have.

ANNE:

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

SHAKESPEARE looks more surprised & for a moment there is silence.

SHAKESPEARE:

Damn him!

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

SHAKESPEARE:

He has ruined Judith's life: he has ruined *all* our lives!
(Pause.) I hope he goes to *HELL*!

ANNE:

Hypocrite!

SHAKESPEARE looks shocked.

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*!

SHAKESPEARE looks confused.

ANNE:

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

Now SHAKESPEARE looks at her in disbelief.

SHAKESPEARE:

What are you talking about?

ANNE:

You *know* what I'm talking about.

SHAKESPEARE:

I don't - truly!

ANNE:

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

SHAKESPEARE shakes his head.

SHAKESPEARE:

That's not true.

ANNE:

Don't deny it! I *know* what happened in London - I *always* knew!

She fixes him with an even more penetrating stare.

ANNE:

Whenever you returned from London - on the *few* occasions that you returned from London - you *never* came near me. (*She laughs, ruefully.*) I used to wonder, "How is it that Will - my *beloved* Will, who before he left Stratford could never keep his hands off me - now refuses to *touch* me?" (*She looks at him accusingly.*) Then, finally, I realised: he was touching somebody else - *anybody* else, but me.

SHAKESPEARE looks horrified.

ANNE:

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

She exits.

SHAKESPEARE remains standing there as the lights come down.

ACT IV. SCENE I (TAVERN)

A solemn-looking SHAKESPEARE enters a tavern: as he does so, a jowly, moustachioed, middle-aged MAN sat at a table calls out.

MAN:

Will! Over here!

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Hello, Drayton.

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

DRAYTON:

I'm glad you could come.

SHAKESPEARE:

I'm glad to get out of Stratford. (Pause and grimace.) All the gossip and tittle-tattle over the last few weeks has been driving me mad!

DRAYTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE snorts dismissively.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

DRAYTON:

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 *rake*!

THE WAITRESS brings two large tankards of ale and sets them down on the table before exiting. Instantly SHAKESPEARE picks one up.

SHAKESPEARE:

So I don't want to talk about "literature"; in fact, I don't want to "talk" at all. (*Pause.*) I just want to *drink*.

He downs his ale "in one", then sighs, as DRAYTON stares at him.

A TALL, RED-HAIRED, BARREL-CHESTED MAN enters the tavern.

MAN (calling out):

DRAYTON!

Both DRAYTON and SHAKESPEARE turn round to look at him. He smiles, with his hand raised in greeting. In total contrast, SHAKESPEARE looks horrified to see him and stares at DRAYTON.

SHAKESPEARE:

Jonson? What's he doing here?

DRAYTON (with a shrug):

I invited him too.

SHAKESPEARE:

All the way from London?

DRAYTON:

He wrote to me saying he needed some respite from the city, so I invited him to come and stay with me.

SHAKESPEARE does not look convinced by this, but before he can say anything JONSON has joined them and he greets DRAYTON warmly.

JONSON:

Michael! It's a pleasure to see you.

DRAYTON:

Hello, Ben. Welcome to Warwickshire!

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

JONSON:

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JONSON looks confused.

JONSON:

"Gloat"? About what?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

Finally JONSON realises what SHAKESPEARE means.

JONSON:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Why not? Everyone else is. *(He expertly adopts a succession of 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!"

JONSON looks at him intently, then slowly shakes his head.

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.

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JONSON and DRAYTON laugh.

The WAITRESS enters: JONSON signals to her to bring three tankards of ale and she exits to get them.

SCENE II (TAVERN)

It is closing time (the WAITRESS enters, puts some chairs on tables and exits) and SHAKESPEARE, JONSON and DRAYTON look drunk. With considerable effort, DRAYTON turns to SHAKESPEARE.

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

He goes to stand up, but is so drunk that he nearly falls over: both DRAYTON and JONSON put out their arms to hold him upright.

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.

Slowly, SHAKESPEARE shakes his head.

SHAKESPEARE:

No. I've had enough for one night.

He looks over at the door.

SHAKESPEARE:

Besides, it's a dry night. I shall enjoy a little *stroll*!

He stands up again and starts walking towards the door.

JONSON (calling after him):

Goodnight, Will.

DRAYTON:

Take care.

SHAKESPEARE turns round to face them and waves.

SHAKESPEARE:

Goodnight, good fellows.

Slowly & drunkenly, he almost walks into a table before exiting.

SCENE III (HALLWAY, SHAKESPEARE'S HOUSE)

There is a loud knocking at the front door; ANNE enters, goes to the door and opens it hurriedly to find JUDITH standing there.

ANNE:

Oh, Judith. Thank God you've come!

JUDITH:

I came as soon as I received word that you wanted to see me.
What is it?

ANNE:

It's your father. He's sick!

JUDITH:

"Sick"?

ANNE:

Yes. Apparently, he went out drinking last night -

JUDITH (interrupting):

Well, if he will insist on *drinking* so much, the next morning he *will* feel sick.

ANNE:

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

JUDITH looks alarmed.

JUDITH:

"A fever"?

ANNE:

Yes. Oh Judith, he's terribly ill. I've sent for John, but I fear even a doctor can't help him.

JUDITH:

Let me see him.

They both exit, hurriedly.

SCENE IV (SHAKESPEARE'S BEDROOM)

SHAKESPEARE lies in bed with his eyes closed and his face covered in sweat.

JUDITH and ANNE enter, and JUDITH goes to the end of the bed to look down at him.

JUDITH:

Father!

She turns round to look at her mother.

JUDITH:

He looks awful.

ANNE:

I know. I'm afraid the fever has already taken hold.

JUDITH looks frightened.

JUDITH:

Really?

ANNE:

Yes. If his spirits had been at their normal, *irrepressible* level, he might have been able to resist it, but - well, everything that's happened recently seems to have *crushed* his spirits.

JUDITH looks appalled, as SHAKESPEARE opens his eyes slightly.

SHAKESPEARE (weakly - feebly):

I'm so hot.

ANNE:

I know, Will. I know.

She goes over to the bedside table, takes a cloth from the bowl of water on the table and starts mopping his brow.

As she mops his brow, there is silence for a moment.

SHAKESPEARE (even more weakly):

Am I in hell?

ANNE (shaking her head):

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

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

SHAKESPEARE (quietly, indeed almost inaudibly):

I am not.

Then, with obvious pain, he closes his eyes again.

ANNE resumes her slow, methodical mopping of his brow.

JUDITH lowers her head and starts to cry.

ACT V, SCENE I (HOLY TRINITY CHURCH IN STRATFORD)

HEMINGS and CONDELL enter, leading TWO OTHER PALLBEARERS as they all carry a coffin into the church and set it down on two wooden stands. They all check the coffin is secure, then step away from it. HEMINGS and CONDELL go and kneel down (stage right) while the TWO OTHER PALLBEARERS go to the back of the church and exit. When HEMINGS and CONDELL finally speak, they do so very quietly, as they are in church.

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

That's appropriate.

HEMINGS:

How so?

CONDELL:

Well, he always enjoyed being centre-stage.

HEMINGS smiles.

There is silence again for a moment.

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 nods and again there is silence for a moment.

HEMINGS:

It's not right.

CONDELL:

What isn't?

HEMINGS:

The cause of death! *(Pause.)* Will survived a *multiplicity* of calamities - 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.

They bow their heads and slowly the lights come down.

EPILOGUE - BACKSTAGE OFFICE, REBUILT GLOBE THEATRE

*HEMINGS and CONDELL are in the office of the rebuilt Globe:
CONDELL sits, holding a letter, while HEMINGS stands over him.*

CONDELL (reading aloud):

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

He puts the letter down on the desk & HEMINGS looks down at it.

HEMINGS:

"Mourning rings"? (Pause.) *That's* how he wants us to remember him?

CONDELL:

Apparently.

HEMINGS shakes his head in disbelief.

Slowly, the lights come down.

CODA
(or HEMINGS AND CONDELL)

SCENE ONE. BACKSTAGE OFFICE, THE REBUILT GLOBE THEATRE, LONDON.

CONDELL sits at the desk, counting money as always, while HEMINGS stands beside him and stares at the ring on his left little finger, next to his wedding ring, which has a skull or death's head on it.

HEMINGS:

I still can't get used to wearing a mourning ring. (Pause.) I've been wearing it for months now, but it still makes me shudder every time I look at it. (Pause.) It doesn't even fit! Last week, when I tried to hail a fellow in the street - (He raises his left hand to indicate "hailing a fellow") it nearly flew off! (Pause.) If I had lost it, I'd have nothing to remember Will by!

CONDELL (angrily):

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

HEMINGS (equally angrily):

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

HEMINGS snatches up the piece of paper and the coins, and exits.

SCENE TWO. LONDON STREET

HEMINGS enters, carrying a leather bag out of which a single peacock feather is poking. Ahead of him there is a bookstall, attended to by a BOOKSELLER. HEMINGS glances at the stall as he walks past it. Then, suddenly, he stops, turns round and stares at the stall, which only seems to have copies of one large, leather-bound book on top of it. He walks towards the stall and stands directly in front of it.

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. (*Pause.*) It's only just been published.

HEMINGS:

Really?

BOOKSELLER:

Oh, yes. And as it says on the magnificent frontispiece - (*Pause, as he indicates the carved leather cover*) it contains all his plays, from *The Alchemist* to *Volpone*. (*Pause.*) Consequently, it is a remarkable book - historic even.

HEMINGS:

How so?

BOOKSELLER:

Because it is the first collection of plays by an English playwright. (*Pause, as he leans forward to speak to HEMINGS more intimately.*) Did you know, Sir, that - incredible as it sounds! - there is no effective law of ownership, or possession, for playwrights?

HEMINGS (smiling):

Is that so?

BOOKSELLER:

It is. That's why most playwrights never published their plays, because if they did, every other theatrical company in London would simply have bought 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.

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. Which is exactly what did happen! *(He laughs.)* That's why Mister Jonson was so anxious to publish his plays himself: to preserve them for posterity, in all their glory. *(Pause & smile.)* 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.

HEMINGS:

"Pre-eminent"?

BOOKSELLER:

Indeed.

HEMINGS:

But what about Shakespeare?

BOOKSELLER:

Who?

HEMINGS:

William Shakespeare.

BOOKSELLER:

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

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

HEMINGS:

Do you have any of *his* plays?

BOOKSELLER:

Who? *Shakespeare?*

HEMINGS:

Yes.

BOOKSELLER:

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.

THE BOOKSELLER ducks down under his stall.

BOOKSELLER:

Aha! I thought I had something.

HEMINGS:

What is it?

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

BOOKSELLER:

THIS!

Looking pleased with himself, THE BOOKSELLER proudly holds out a grubby, torn play-script that HEMINGS looks at in horror.

HEMINGS:

Oh my God!

SCENE THREE: BACKSTAGE OFFICE, REBUILT GLOBE THEATRE, LONDON.

CONDELL is still counting money when the door is opened, quietly. HEMINGS enters as quietly as he can, holding a copy of Jonson's Workes, and then tip-toes over to the desk, so as not to alert CONDELL to his presence. Once he reaches the desk, he stands over CONDELL (who continues to stare down at the money he is counting) and lifts the heavy, leather-bound book aloft. HEMINGS waits for a moment, then lets the book fall with a CRASH, startling CONDELL, who almost falls off his chair in shock.

CONDELL:

OH MY GOD!

HEMINGS laughs.

CONDELL (to HEMINGS):

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 *looks down at the book.*

CONDELL (reading aloud):

"The Workes of Benjamin Jonson."

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

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!

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?

CONDELL does not answer, but simply stares at HEMINGS.

HEMINGS:

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

HEMINGS takes from a pocket the slim, torn, grubby play-script the Bookseller had shown him, holds it up with both hands and then lets it fall gently (it almost floats down, as it is so light) on to CONDELL's desk.

CONDELL (reading):

"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. (Pause.) Read it.

CONDELL:

What?

HEMINGS:

I have. In fact, allow me to read it to you, or at least some prize extracts. (Pause, as he picks up the script, flicks through it and begins reading - quoting - from it.) "O, that this too, too sullied flesh should melt."

CONDELL winces and HEMINGS flicks ahead to another page.

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL winces again and HEMINGS flicks ahead again.

HEMINGS:

And best - or rather, worst - of all:

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

He closes the script and looks at CONDELL in disgust.

HEMINGS:

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

He tosses the script down on the desk.

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* - (*Pause, as he points at the script*) - And *trash* like it, is all that will survive of "Shakespeare"! (*Pause.*) 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 simply lost over time, most likely when we moved theatres. As for the plays we do have copies of, a lot of them are just old prompt-books.

HEMINGS:

So?

CONDELL:

So they've been scribbled on and scribbled on by successive book-holders or prompters until they're virtually illegible!

HEMINGS:

"Illegible"?

CONDELL:

Aye. Will could decipher them, but we can't, at least not easily. While he was still alive, it didn't matter: if we ever had any problems with a play, especially an old one, we could just ask him, even if we had to wait until he visited London. But now - well, we *can't* ask him.

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

Are you joking?

HEMINGS:

No! Of course not.

CONDELL:

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

CONDELL sighs, deeply.

CONDELL:

The truth is that over the years we've probably paid more attention to preserving the company's *props* and *costumes* than we have Will's *plays*. (*Pause.*) We left it to Will himself to look after them, but he was always more interested in preserving his *poems* than his plays. (*Pause.*) Now the best that we can do is to print those plays 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, at best! (*Pause.*) We have to show the *whole* man, to show what *one* man is capable of. (*He thumps the desk, scattering coins.*) 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:

EVERYWHERE!

CONDELL:

"EVERYWHERE"?

HEMINGS suddenly starts pacing up and down the floor excitedly, gathering speed and even kicking coins aside as he gathers ideas.

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!

HEMINGS laughs at his "joke", but CONDELL does not.

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 over the last twenty years, 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 try and elucidate all the notes and stage directions and *scribblings* that have been added over the years.

HEMINGS suddenly stops pacing up and down and stares at CONDELL.

HEMINGS:

And of course, there is one actor who knows the plays, or at least the title roles, almost as well as Will himself. (*He pauses and smiles.*) After all, Burbage always thought that they were really *his* plays, not Will's!

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?

CONDELL looks at him quizzically.

SCENE FOUR. A SHOP.

CONDELL sits at a desk (one that is not laden with coins) and HEMINGS stands over him, so they can both read a page laid out on the desk. BEN JONSON stands to one side & watches them both. Finally, HEMINGS and CONDELL finish reading & look up at JONSON.

HEMINGS:

It's wonderful, Ben.

CONDELL:

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

JONSON smiles ruefully.

JONSON:

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

HEMINGS and CONDELL laugh, but JONSON just stares at them.

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 published them. *(Pause.)* Thank God you did, because otherwise half Will's plays would have been lost and the other half would have been at best *incomplete* and at worst *incomprehensible*. *(Pause.)* Without you, we would have lost *Macbeth*, *The Tempest*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and a dozen other *classics*. *(Pause.)* That is why, gentlemen, I would happily write another dedication in your honour.

*For a moment, HEMINGS and CONDELL look flattered, even touched.
Then -*

HEMINGS:

It wasn't *that* difficult.

CONDELL:

Not once we'd got started.

JONSON stares at them in disbelief.

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* preserving their own plays, let alone someone else's! (*Pause and grimace.*) I can't imagine that anyone would do it for *me*. (*Pause.*) So why did you do it for Will?

HEMINGS and CONDELL exchange a glance, then look back at JOHNSON.

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 in Europe.

HEMINGS (imitating Burbage):

Nay, the *world*!

JONSON laughs.

HEMINGS:

He did so much for us.

CONDELL:

It was the least we could do for him.

JONSON nods in acknowledgement.

A PRINTER in an ink-stained apron enters, carefully carrying a pristine printed page.

PRINTER (to HEMINGS AND CONDELL):

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!

THE PRINTER puts the piece of paper down on the desk and both HEMINGS and CONDELL begin reading it.

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.

They both continue reading, then CONDELL looks up at THE PRINTER.

CONDELL:

You forgot the date.

PRINTER:

Today's date?

CONDELL:

No. Just the year - 1623.

PRINTER:

Oh. Sorry. I'll add it right now.

THE PRINTER carefully picks up the title page and exits with it.

When he has gone, HEMINGS looks at CONDELL.

HEMINGS:

From start to finish, a mere seven years.

CONDELL smiles, ruefully.

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL looks at him questioningly.

CONDELL:

"Immortality"? *(Pause.)* What are you talking about? *We're* not immortal and never will be!

HEMINGS smiles at CONDELL.

HEMINGS:

I'm under no illusion, Henry. No-one will remember *us*; I know that. But now - hopefully - they'll remember *Will*. And that's all the *immortality* I want, or need.

CONDELL smiles back at HEMINGS.

Slowly, the lights come down.

- **END** -