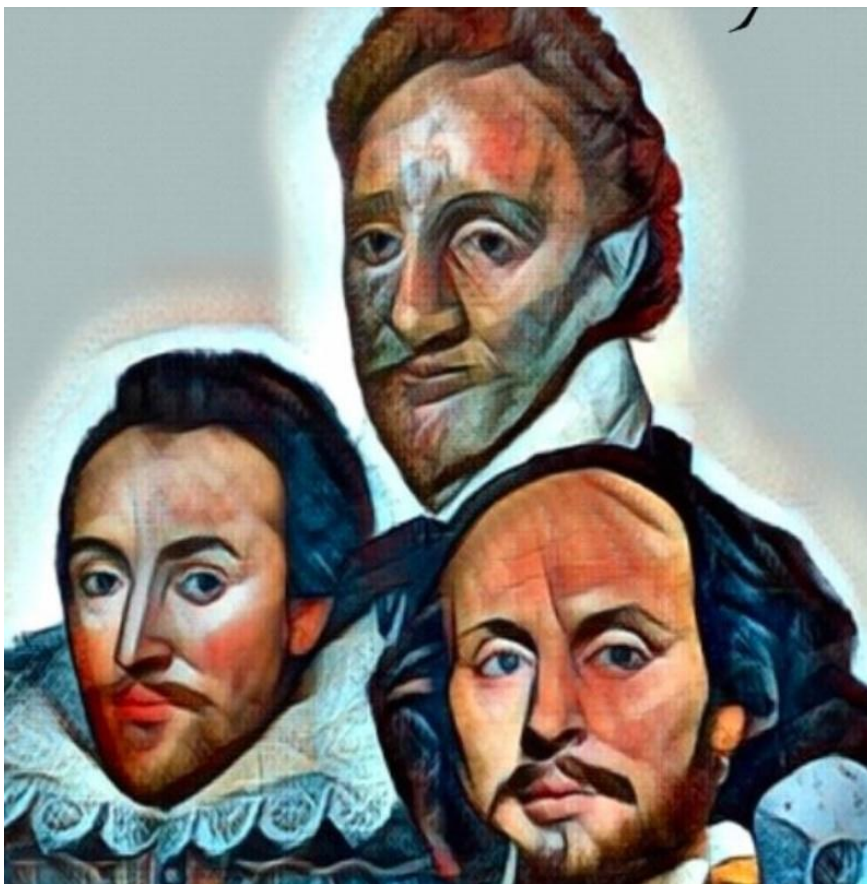


THE SHAKESPEARE PLAYS

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

An Audio Play by Martin Keady



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PROLOGUE: INT. SHAKESPEARE AND ANNE'S BEDROOM, STRATFORD ON AVON

AN ANNOUNCEMENT IS MADE: "PROLOGUE - 1616".

SOUND FX: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (AGED ABOUT 50) IS IN BED & IN PAIN, AS HE MOANS. THE DOOR OPENS, SOMEONE ENTERS & THEN GASPS AT WHAT THEY SEE.

JUDITH:

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

DOCTOR HALL:

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

JUDITH:

Really?

DOCTOR HALL:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE, OTHER THAN SHAKESPEARE'S MOANING. FINALLY, HE SPEAKS BUT ONLY FEEBLY & FAINTLY: INDEED, BARELY AUDIBLY. WHEN HIS WIFE ANNE REPLIES TO HIM, SHE SPEAKS VERY QUIETLY, AS SHE IS SITTING RIGHT BESIDE HIM.

SHAKESPEARE:

I'm so hot.

ANNE:

I know, Will. I know.

SHAKESPEARE:

Am I in hell?

ANNE:

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

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

SHAKESPEARE (very softly - very quietly):

I am not.

SOUND FX: JUDITH BURSTS INTO TEARS: UNCONTROLLABLE SOBBING.

PART I (COMEDY)

AN ANNOUNCEMENT IS MADE: "PART I (COMEDY) - 1598".

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

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

HEMINGS:

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.

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

HEMINGS:

Costume *off*, please!

ACTOR:

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

HEMINGS:

No!

ACTOR:

Why not?

HEMINGS:

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

ACTOR:

Very well.

SOUND FX: RUSTLING OF CLOTHES AS ACTOR REMOVES HIS COSTUME.

ACTOR:

How are the takings, Mister Condell?

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

CONDELL:

Excellent! Audiences obviously *adore* Falstaff.

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: BURBAGE & SHAKESPEARE (AGED 34) ENTER, LAUGHING

BURBAGE:

Well done, Will - another triumph!

SHAKESPEARE:

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

BURBAGE:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

BOTH!

SOUND FX: THEY ALL LAUGH, INCLUDING BURBAGE.

BURBAGE:

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

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

BURBAGE:

Aah! That's better.

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

OLD MAN:

Is that wine?

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

BURBAGE:

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

ALLEN:

It's my land that you're standing on, Burbage, and I can go wherever I want on my property! Now, I asked you a question: is that wine?

BURBAGE:

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

ALLEN:

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

BURBAGE:

Damn you Puritans: you're always spoiling other people's fun! Can't we 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 *sinners*, like that *fat oaf*, Falstaff! *That's* why I'm giving you one month's notice to quit!

BURBAGE:

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

ALLEN:

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

BURBAGE:

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

ALLEN:

Oh, does it?

BURBAGE:

Yes, it does!

ALLEN:

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

SOUND FX: HE LAUGHS AND OPENS THE DOOR, WHICH CREAKS OPEN.

ALLEN:

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

SOUND FX: HE EXITS, LAUGHING.

BURBAGE:

We ought to run him through!

HEMINGS:

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

BURBAGE:

No court would convict us!

HEMINGS:

Why? Because society has such a high opinion of *players*? *(Pause.)* 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!

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS ALL THE ACTORS OBVIOUSLY DIGEST THIS.

SCENE TWO: INT. TAVERN.

SOUND FX: LAUGHTER & TOASTS AT THE BAR: AT THE PLAYERS' TABLE, BY THE WINDOW, THERE IS SILENCE UNTIL HEMINGS SPEAKS

HEMINGS:

It's starting to snow.

BURBAGE:

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

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

BURBAGE:

What we *always* do.

SHAKESPEARE:

Which is?

BURBAGE:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

But where to?

HEMINGS:

I have an idea.

SHAKESPEARE:

Yes, John?

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

"Bankside"?

HEMINGS:

Yes, right beside the river! I'm sure we could lease it from him. It's *perfect*! There's lots of space and he'll charge us less rent than Allen does. I was going to suggest we move *before* Allen evicted us. Now we have no choice.

BURBAGE:

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

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

You're too kind, John.

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

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

SOUND FX: HEMINGS, BURBAGE AND SHAKESPEARE ALL LAUGH.

BURBAGE:

Would your neighbour really lease the land to us?

HEMINGS:

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

BURBAGE:

And what kind of lease are we talking about?

SHAKESPEARE:

Yes. How long?

HEMINGS:

Oh, about thirty years.

SHAKESPEARE:

"Thirty years"?

HEMINGS:

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

BURBAGE:

There's a problem.

HEMINGS:

What's that?

BURBAGE:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE AGAIN, APART FROM DISTANT LAUGHTER AT BAR

HEMINGS:

It's *really* starting to snow now.

BURBAGE:

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

SOUND FX: SUDDENLY HEMINGS GASPS AND THUMPS THE TABLE.

HEMINGS:

Hang on!

SHAKESPEARE:

What, John?

HEMINGS:

I've had *another* idea!

SCENE THREE: EXT. STREET OUTSIDE THE THEATRE.

SOUND FX: SLAPPING OF ARMS, STAMPING OF FEET & CHATTERING OF TEETH AS SHAKESPEARE AND BURBAGE WAIT IN THE COLD.

BURBAGE:

Where is he? *I'm freezing!*

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS (calling out):

HELLO!

SOUND FX: A HORSE AND A HEAVILY LADEN CART APPROACH THE THEATRE, TO THE ACCOMPANIMENT OF THE HORSE'S HOOVES, THE CREAKING OF THE CART AND THE SCRAPING OF THE WHEELS ON THE ROAD. FINALLY, THE HORSE & CART STOP & HEMINGS JUMPS DOWN.

HEMINGS:

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

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

STREET:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

None of it good, I presume.

STREET:

Very little, as befits a player!

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE, BURBAGE AND HEMINGS ALL LAUGH

BURBAGE:

Mister Street, I must ask you something.

STREET:

Go ahead.

BURBAGE:

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

STREET:

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

SOUND: SHAKESPEARE AND HEMINGS LAUGH, THEN BURBAGE

HEMINGS:

I suppose it is.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

STREET:

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

SOUND FX: THE OTHERS ALL LAUGH

STREET:

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

SOUND FX: STREET'S WORKMEN (AT LEAST A DOZEN) LAUGH AND CLIMB OR JUMP DOWN FROM THE CART, THEN ENTER THE THEATRE.

SHAKESPEARE:

Mister Street...?

STREET:

Yes, Mister Shakespeare?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND: HEMINGS LAUGHS AS HE GOES INSIDE THE THEATRE.

SCENE FOUR: EXT. STREET OUTSIDE THE THEATRE.

SOUND FX: BANGING AND SAWING BY STREET'S MEN INSIDE THE THEATRE. OUTSIDE, CONDELL & SHAKESPEARE HAVE TO SHOUT.

SHAKESPEARE:

Street's men certainly are working *fast*!

CONDELL:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

"*Double*"?

CONDELL:

Well, it is Christmas.

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

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Right.

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

CONDELL (calling up):

Godspeed!

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS:

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

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

SCENE FIVE: EXT. RIVERSIDE.

HEMINGS:

WHOAH, boy!

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

HEMINGS:

There it is!

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE GASPS IN AMAZEMENT.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: HEMINGS CHUCKLES.

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS SHAKESPEARE AND HEMINGS TAKE IN THE VIEW: THE SILENCE IS ONLY BROKEN BY THE OCCASIONAL PANT OR SNORT BY THE HORSE AND DISTANT SHOUTS OR YELPS FROM THE ICE

SHAKESPEARE:

Are you sure it can take our weight?

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

"People", yes, but not *horses* - and certainly not horses pulling carts laden with *timber*! (*Pause.*) Why don't we just use the *real* bridge - London Bridge?

HEMINGS:

I've already told you: 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. (*Pause.*) This is the *only* way.

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE TAKES A DEEP BREATH.

SHAKESPEARE:

Alright, then. *Proceed*!

HEMINGS:

That's the spirit! (Then, far more loudly -) GO ON, BOY!

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

HEMINGS (even more loudly):

GO-AS!

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE LAUGHS. WHEN HE STOPS LAUGHING, THE ONLY SOUNDS ARE THE CRIES & SHRIEKS OF THE OTHER PEOPLE - PEOPLE OF ALL AGES, FROM THE OLD TO CHILDREN - ON THE ICE.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Or trying to skate! There are even food stalls.

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: THE LOUD FIZZ AND BUZZ OF A BRAZIER, ACCOMPANIED BY THE CRIES OF ITS OWNER: "CHESTNUTS! ROASTED CHESTNUTS!".

SHAKESPEARE:

Stay away from the ones selling hot food!

HEMINGS:

Don't worry - I will!

SOUND FX: THEY MOVE ACROSS THE ICE, WITH THE HORSE'S HOOVES
AND THE WHEELS OF THE CART BARELY AUDIBLE UPON IT. SLOWLY,
OTHER SOUNDS FADE AWAY. SUDDENLY, HEMINGS SNAPS THE REINS.

HEMINGS:

WHOAH, boy!

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

HEMINGS:

There it is!

SHAKESPEARE:

What?

HEMINGS:

Our new home!

SHAKESPEARE:

Where?

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Oh, yes!

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: HE SNAPS THE REINS AND THE HORSE WALKS FORWARDS.

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

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

CONDELL (calling out):

That's almost everything.

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

BURBAGE:

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

SOUND FX: CONDELL, BURBAGE, HEMINGS AND SHAKESPEARE ALL LAUGH. FINALLY, THE LAUGHTER STOPS AND THERE IS TOTAL SILENCE, APART FROM THE SQUAWKING OF SEAGULLS ON THE RIVER.

HEMINGS:

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

BURBAGE (declaiming, loudly):

Nay, the *world*!

SOUND FX: ONCE AGAIN, THEY ALL LAUGH.

HEMINGS:

Most importantly, it will be *our* theatre.

BURBAGE:

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

CONDELL:

Except the censor!

BURBAGE:

Well, we always have to answer to the censor.

SHAKESPEARE:

How long will it take to build?

HEMINGS:

Oh, about six months.

SHAKESPEARE:

"*Six months*"?

HEMINGS:

At most!

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

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

HEMINGS:

Yes. More masterpieces, please!

SOUND FX: THEY ALL LAUGH, EVEN SHAKESPEARE.

SHAKESPEARE (to HEMINGS):

You've obviously thought of everything.

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

I have only one remaining wish.

HEMINGS:

Oh, yes? And what's that?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

BURBAGE:

That would be worth seeing!

SOUND FX: THEY ALL ROAR WITH LAUGHTER.

SCENE SEVEN: EXT. THE STREET OUTSIDE THE THEATRE

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

ALLEN:

What - ?!

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

ALLEN:

Where - ?!

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS THE FOOTSTEPS COME TO A HALT AND ALLEN OBVIOUSLY STANDS COMPLETELY STILL. SILENCE AGAIN, THEN IN DESPERATION HE CALLS OUT IN HIS OLD, REEDY VOICE.

ALLEN:

CONSTABLE!!!!

PART II (HISTORY)

AN ANNOUNCEMENT - "PART II (HISTORY) - 1601".

SCENE EIGHT: INT. OFFICE, THE GLOBE THEATRE

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

BURBAGE:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS HEMINGS TRIES TO REMEMBER A WORD.

HEMINGS (calling out):

"Everything."

BURBAGE:

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

SOUND FX: GENTLE KNOCKING AND A BOY (ABOUT EIGHT) ENTERS

BOY:

Master Shakespeare, Sir?

SHAKESPEARE:

Yes...?

BOY:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Who is it?

BOY:

A nobleman, Sir.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

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

BOY:

What, Sir?

SHAKESPEARE:

It doesn't matter. What did he say?

BOY:

He said he wants to see *you*.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

BOY:

The Earl of Southampton, Sir.

SOUND FX: SILENCE, FOR A FEW MOMENTS.

HEMINGS (to SHAKESPEARE):

Your old patron? What does he want?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

BOY:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

"On the stage"?

BOY:

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

SOUND FX: THE BOY RUNS BACK TO THE STAGE. THEN, SHAKESPEARE SIGHS HEAVILY AND STANDS UP.

HEMINGS:

D'you want us to come with you?

SHAKESPEARE:

No. I'd better see him on my own. He'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.

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

SCENE NINE: INT. STAGE, THE GLOBE THEATRE

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE WALKS ONTO THE GLOBE'S STAGE, HIS FOOTSTEPS ECHOING A LITTLE AS HE WALKS TO THE FRONT OF IT.

SOUTHAMPTON (AGED ABOUT 30 AND EXTREMELY WELL SPOKEN):

I always wanted to be a player.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: SOUTHAMPTON LAUGHS.

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

The Globe is a *magnificent* theatre, Will. It's much bigger - and *grander* - than the one you had in Shoreditch. (*Pause.*) You're obviously doing very well for yourself.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

There is no threat of war here, Sir.

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SOUND FX: SOUTHAMPTON LAUGHS.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: An EXTREMELY AWKWARD SILENCE, FOR A MOMENT.

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Me, my Lord?

SOUTHAMPTON:

Yes, *you* Will. I want to commission a special production in honour of my noble Lord Essex.

SHAKESPEARE:

Of which play, my Lord?

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

You mean the 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 around the succession.

SOUTHAMPTON (angrily):

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS SHAKESPEARE OBVIOUSLY TAKES THIS IN.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE TAKES A DEEP BREATH.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Is it, my Lord?

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE (interrupting, nervously):

"Veterans", my Lord?

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE (fearfully):

To do what, my Lord?

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SOUND FX: AGAIN SILENCE, AS SHAKESPEARE DIGESTS THIS.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUTHAMPTON (firmly):

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

SHAKESPEARE (sounding pained):

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

My Lord?

SOUTHAMPTON:

Do you forget the debt you owe me, Will?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

I know, my Lord.

SOUTHAMPTON:

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 (angrily):

Don't quibble, Will! Later still, I gave you the money to help you build your *theatre*! (*Pause.*) The Globe is a fine theatre, Will - the finest in England - and *I* paid for it.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUTHAMPTON (furiously):

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE.

SOUTHAMPTON (lowering his voice, to try and be conciliatory):

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

SHAKESPEARE:

And if I do not, or cannot?

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

I cannot pay you back 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!

SOUND FX: SILENCE AS SHAKESPEARE TRIES TO THINK WHAT TO SAY

SHAKESPEARE (quietly):

I would have to persuade my business partners.

SOUTHAMPTON:

Your "business partners"?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE TAKES A LONG, DEEP BREATH.

SHAKESPEARE:

Then I will do my best to arrange it.

SOUTHAMPTON (excitedly):

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

I will do it. Happily!

SOUND FX: SOUTHAMPTON LAUGHS LOUDLY, BRAYINGLY, AND THE SOUND ECHOES AROUND THE GLOBE.

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS SHAKESPEARE DOES NOT RESPOND.

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

BURBAGE:

Did Southampton leave his *mind* 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.

CONDELL:

Perhaps we - the rest of the company - could find the money to repay him.

BURBAGE:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

BURBAGE:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

I know, but I have no choice.

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

SHAKESPEARE:

I owe him and I have to repay him. And this is the only way I can do it 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!

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE CHUCKLES.

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE LAUGHS.

HEMINGS:

And for a third thing, I owe you.

SHAKESPEARE:

You don't owe me anything, John.

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: THEY ALL LAUGH AT HIS IMITATION OF BURBAGE.

HEMINGS:

I owe you *everything*, Will - my career, my fortune,
everything! 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!

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE LAUGHS.

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS SHAKESPEARE OBVIOUSLY TAKES THIS IN.

SHAKESPEARE:

Thank you - *all* of you.

HEMINGS:

However, there are a couple of conditions.

SHAKESPEARE:

Such as?

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

That makes sense. Now we just have to persuade the men.

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

What? Why not?

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

But they know the play, 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.

SCENE ELEVEN: INT. THE WINGS OF THE GLOBE THEATRE

SOUND FX: AN AUDIENCE GATHERS WITH LAUGHTER, SHOUTING AND THE ODD PROFANITY, AS HEARD IN THE WINGS OR SIDE OF STAGE.

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: THE AUDIENCE LOUDLY APPLAUD SOUTHAMPTON'S ARRIVAL

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: SOME AUDIENCE MEMBERS LAUGH LOUDLY, THEN APPLAUD

SHAKESPEARE:

He's obviously recognised some "old friends".

HEMINGS (scornfully):

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

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

HEMINGS:

Come: we are summoned.

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

SCENE TWELVE: EXT. THE STAGE, THE GLOBE THEATRE

SHAKESPEARE (playing John of Gaunt):

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

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

FIRST AUDIENCE MEMBER:

ENGLAND!

SECOND AUDIENCE MEMBER:

NOT ELIZABETH!

THIRD AUDIENCE MEMBER:

THAT'S WHO WE SERVE!

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

SHAKESPEARE (playing John Of Gaunt):

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

SCENE THIRTEEN: INT. THE WINGS OF THE GLOBE THEATRE

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

SHAKESPEARE (whispering, so as not to be heard on stage):

This is it - the deposition scene.

HEMINGS (also whispering):

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

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

BURBAGE (playing King Richard):

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

HEMINGS (whispering to Shakespeare, in the wings):

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

SHAKESPEARE (whispering to Hemings, in the wings):

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

HEMINGS (whispering to Shakespeare, in the wings):

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

SOUND FX: THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE AS BURBAGE REMOVES HIS CROWN.

SCENE FOURTEEN: EXT. THE STAGE OF THE GLOBE THEATRE

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

PHILIPS (playing Bolingbroke):

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

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

SOUND FX: THERE IS TOTAL SILENCE FOR A MOMENT, WHICH IS
FINALLY BROKEN BY A SERIES OF LOUD SHOUTS FROM THE AUDIENCE.

SEVERAL AUDIENCE MEMBERS (together):

God save our gracious General!

OTHER AUDIENCE MEMBERS (together, even louder):

God save the Earl of Essex!

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

AUDIENCE (shouting, as one):

GOD SAVE THE KING!!!

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

SCENE FIFTEEN: INT. THE WINGS OF THE GLOBE THEATRE

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

SHAKESPEARE (shouting, to make himself heard):

Should we take a *bow*?

HEMINGS (also shouting, to make himself heard):

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

I don't believe it!

HEMINGS:

What?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

CONDELL:

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

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

SHAKESPEARE (whispering again):

Quiet! Here comes Southampton!

SOUND FX: THE FOOTSTEPS STOP AS SOUTHAMPTON REACHES THEM.

SOUTHAMPTON:

Thank you, Will! Thank you!

SHAKESPEARE:

You're very welcome, my Lord.

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

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

THE OTHER ACTORS (as one):

Thank you, my Lord.

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SOUND FX: THE LETTER RUSTLES AS SOUTHAMPTON HANDS IT OVER

SHAKESPEARE:

Thank you, my Lord.

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

SOUND FX: FOOTSTEPS AND LAUGHTER AS SOUTHAMPTON AND HIS GUARD EXIT. THERE IS SILENCE FOR A MOMENT, UNTIL -

HEMINGS:

"Emboldened" to do *what*?

SOUND FX: SILENCE AGAIN - NOBODY ANSWERS HIS QUESTION.

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

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

ESSEX:

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

Indeed, my Lord.

ESSEX:

Like the supposed "rebel", Bolingbroke, *our* cause is *just*.
That is why we will triumph.

SOUTHAMPTON:

Indubitably!

ESSEX:

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

ESSEX:

That cannot happen.

SOUTHAMPTON:

No. It cannot.

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

ESSEX:

Once we leave this room, Henry, there is no going back.
The Queen will have me hung, drawn and quartered just for
evading "house arrest", let alone "*plotting*" against her,
as her so-called "advisers", especially *Cecil*, will no
doubt describe it. And the same is true for any man who
helps me. So, if you want to leave me, Henry - to *abandon*
me - go now. Otherwise, you must stay the course.

SOUTHAMPTON (instantly):

I will stay the course, my Lord.

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

ESSEX:

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

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

SCENE SEVENTEEN: EXT. ESSEX'S COURTYARD.

SOUND FX: ESSEX SHOUTS AS HE ADDRESSES HIS ASSEMBLED TROOPS

ESSEX:

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

SOUND FX: HIS MEN ALL CHEER.

ESSEX:

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

SOUND FX: HIS MEN CHEER EVEN MORE LOUDLY.

ESSEX:

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

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

SCENE EIGHTEEN: EXT. A LONDON STREET

SOUND FX: THE SOUND OF HORSES' HOOVES, AS SOUTHAMPTON &
ESSEX LEAD THEIR MEN, WHO ARE ON FOOT BEHIND THEM. SUDDENLY,
ANOTHER HORSE WHINNIES LOUDLY & REARS UP IN FRONT OF THEM.

NOBLEMAN (calling out):

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

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

ESSEX:

'Tis I, Sheriff - the Earl of Essex.

SHERIFF:

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

ESSEX:

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

SHERIFF:

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

ESSEX:

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

SHERIFF:

Then, Sir, you are a *traitor!*

SOUND FX: ESSEX GASPS AUDIBLY & LOUD CHATTER AMONG THE MEN:
"WHAT?"; "HE CAN'T SAY THAT!": "HE SHOULD *DIE* FOR THAT!"

ESSEX:

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

SOUND FX: HE DRAWS HIS SWORD WITH A LOUD SWISH

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

CHARGE!

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

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

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

ESSEX (calling out, loudly):

Who are they?

SHERIFF (calling out, even more loudly):

Reinforcements! Thank God - and Lord Cecil!

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

FIRST MAN (calling out):

RUN!

SECOND MAN (calling out, even more loudly):

THERE'S TOO MANY OF 'EM!

THIRD MAN (calling out, loudest of all):

SAVE YOURSELVES!

SOUND FX: AS THE REINFORCEMENTS ON HORSEBACK APPROACH, ESSEX'S MEN - ALMOST ALL OF WHOM ARE ON FOOT - TURN AND RUN AWAY, MANY OF THEM DROPPING THEIR SWORDS OR PIKESTAFFS AS THEY DO SO, SUCH THAT THEY CLANG AND ECHO IN THE STREET.

ESSEX (crying out):

Where are they going?

SHERIFF (calling out to him):

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

SOUTHAMPTON (calling out):

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

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

SHERIFF (calling after them):

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

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

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

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

ESSEX:

Quick! Barricade it!

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

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

ESSEX:

There is nothing left but the *Roman* way.

SOUTHAMPTON:

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

ESSEX:

'Tis better than going to the *Tower!*

SOUND FX: THE MANY FOOTSTEPS OF MANY MEN AS SOLDIERS RUN DOWN THE CORRIDOR TOWARDS THE STUDY. REACHING THE STUDY, SOME THROW THEMSELVES AT THE DOOR & IT BEGINS TO BREAK.

CAPTAIN (calling out from behind the door):

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

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

ESSEX (calling out over the melee):

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

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

ESSEX (calling out):

We must run onto each other's swords!

SOUTHAMPTON (also calling out):

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

ESSEX:

WHAT?! (Pause.) TURNCOAT!

SOUND FX: RAPID FOOTSTEPS, AS ESSEX THRUSTS HIS SWORD AT SOUTHAMPTON, BUT SOUTHAMPTON, CRYING OUT IN FEAR, MANAGES TO EVADE IT. BEFORE ESSEX CAN TRY AGAIN, THE SOLDIERS GRAB HOLD OF THEM BOTH & WRESTLE THEM TO THE FLOOR: SOUTHAMPTON DOES NOT RESIST; BUT ESSEX RESISTS LOUDLY AND FORCEFULLY.

CAPTAIN (calling out):

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

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

SCENE TWENTY: INT. OFFICE, THE GLOBE THEATRE.

SOUND FX: AS ALWAYS, CONDELL COUNTS CLINKING COINS ("TWELVE, THIRTEEN", ETC.); HEMINGS SEWS, OCCASIONALLY BITING OFF THREAD AND SINGING WORDLESSLY; AND SHAKESPEARE IS WRITING, SCRAPING HIS QUILL ON PARCHMENT. SUDDENLY, THE DOOR IS THROWN OPEN AND BURBAGE ENTERS, PANTING.

SHAKESPEARE:

Richard! What's wrong?

BURBAGE (breathlessly):

Haven't you heard?

SHAKESPEARE:

Heard what?

BURBAGE (still gasping for breath):

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

SHAKESPEARE:

WHAT?!

HEMINGS:

Oh, my God!

SOUND FX: BURBAGE STOPS TALKING & GASPS FOR BREATH. WHEN HE SPEAKS, HE SPEAKS WITH RESTRAINT, RATHER THAN DECLAIMING

BURBAGE:

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

CONDELL (quietly):

And we shall soon join them.

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

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

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE SHOUTS TO ADDRESS ASSEMBLED 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 the commission. But it's too late now. (*Pause.*) The Queen's men will be here soon. By now, they'll have rounded up all of Essex's sympathisers and they'll surely come for us next, doubtless having been informed of our "performance" for the rebels. And that's it! I don't know what else to say.

SOUND FX: HEMINGS LAUGHS, GRIMLY.

SHAKESPEARE:

Pray tell, John, what *amuses* you?

HEMINGS:

You, Will.

SHAKESPEARE:

Me?

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Aye. 'Tis the first time.

HEMINGS:

I say we tell the truth.

SHAKESPEARE:

"The truth"?

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

"The money"?

CONDELL:

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.

SOUND FX: CONDELL LAUGHS, MISCHIEVOUSLY.

CONDELL:

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:

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

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

BRYANT:

Why *not* tell the truth, Will?

HEMINGS:

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

BRYANT:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

What "truth"?

BRYANT:

That you *loved* Southampton!

SHAKESPEARE:

WHAT?!

BRYANT:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

WHAT?!

BRYANT:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

BRYANT:

You must have known what he was planning.

SHAKESPEARE:

I did not! I knew that he was loyal to Essex - *everyone* knew that - but I did *not* know that he was planning to start a *rebellion* the day after we performed for him! *Had* I known that, I would *never* have agreed to perform.

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS SHAKESPEARE PAUSES FOR BREATH.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: BRYANT SCOFFS, AUDIBLY.

BRYANT:

It must have been a *considerable* debt.

SOUND FX: FOOTSTEPS AS HEMINGS CROSSES STAGE TOWARDS BRYANT

HEMINGS:

It was - and we *all* owed it!

BRYANT:

I owe *no* man.

HEMINGS:

You owe *Will*! Without him, you would still be a tiler, or a carpenter, or whatever *menial* thing you were before you became a *player*, working twice as hard to earn half as much

CONDELL:

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

SOUND FX: EVERYONE - EVERYONE EXCEPT BRYANT - LAUGHS.

HEMINGS (declaiming, to the entire company):

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

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

CAPTAIN (calling out):

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

HEMINGS (nervously):

All of us?

CAPTAIN:

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

SOUND FX: THE CAPTAIN WALKS BACK TOWARDS HIS MEN & WHEN THE
ACTORS NEXT SPEAK, THEY DO SO FAR MORE QUIETLY THAN BEFORE,
SO AS NOT TO BE HEARD BY THE CAPTAIN AND HIS SOLDIERS.

SHAKESPEARE:

I will do it.

HEMINGS:

No, Will. You can't.

SHAKESPEARE:

Why not?

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

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

HEMINGS:

Someone else should speak for us.

CONDELL:

I suggest Augustine.

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

PHILIPS:

Me? What? *Why?*

CONDELL:

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

SOUND FX: ALL THE OTHER ACTORS LAUGH

HEMINGS:

'Tis true Augustine: that's why you always play the hero.

PHILIPS:

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

CONDELL:

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

HEMINGS:

Aye.

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

HEMINGS:

Don't worry, Augustine. We'll *prepare* you.

CONDELL:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

And I will compose a few lines for you to say to the Lord Chief Justice - omitting *all* mention of Southampton.

CONDELL:

Good.

HEMINGS:

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

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

SOUND FX: THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE, AN ELDERLY JUDGE, READS ALOUD, BUT ONLY FAINTLY AND INDISTINCTLY, AS HE PERUSES THE PLAYERS' STATEMENT, WITH ONLY A FEW WORDS OR PHRASES BEING HEARD CLEARLY: "ONLY FOR THE MONEY"; "WE HAD NO IDEA"; AND "FAITHFUL TO THE QUEEN", ETC. WHEN HE FINISHES READING AND LOOKS UP, HE SPEAKS FAR MORE CLEARLY AND DISTINCTLY.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

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

PHILIPS:

Yes, my Lord.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

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

PHILIPS:

No, my Lord.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

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

PHILIPS:

No, my Lord. We knew of no conspiracy.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

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

PHILIPS:

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

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

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

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

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

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.

SOUND FX: PHILIPS EXHALES LOUDLY WITH RELIEF.

PHILIPS:

Thank you, my Lord. Thank you.

SOUND FX: A DOOR OPENS AND SOMEONE ENTERS THE ROOM AND GOES UP TO THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE BEFORE CONFERRING WITH HIM QUIETLY: ONLY THEIR INDISTINCT MUTTERING CAN BE HEARD.

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

Very well.

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

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

I have a message for you, Mister Philips.

PHILIPS:

For *me*, my Lord?

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

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

PHILIPS:

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

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

The Queen!

PHILIPS:

"*THE QUEEN*"?!

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

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

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

PHILIPS:

Oh my God!

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

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE:

I thought you'd be surprised.

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

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

HEMINGS:

Well, Augustine? What's the upshot?

PHILIPS:

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

You must have been a convincing witness, Augustine.

PHILIPS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

I'm pleased to hear it.

PHILIPS:

And the money story.

CONDELL:

They were persuaded by it?

PHILIPS:

Aye. As you thought they would be.

CONDELL:

Good.

SOUND FX: 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!

SOUND FX: LOUD LAUGHTER, WHICH EVENTUALLY FADES TO SILENCE

SHAKESPEARE:

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

PHILIPS:

Because we have received *another* commission.

SHAKESPEARE:

What? From who?

PHILIPS:

The Queen.

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

SHAKESPEARE:

WHAT?!

PHILIPS:

It's all in this note.

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

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS:

What?! When?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS:

WHAT?!

CONDELL:

Which play?

SHAKESPEARE:

Richard the Second.

HEMINGS:

WHAT!?!

SHAKESPEARE:

Complete with deposition scene.

SOUND FX: FOR A MOMENT, THERE IS ONLY STUNNED SILENCE.

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Because she wants *revenge*!

HEMINGS:

"Revenge"?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

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

SCENE TWENTY-FOUR: INT. BACKSTAGE AT COURT

SOUND FX: A HUBBUB AS THE PLAYERS WAIT TO GO ON STAGE, INCLUDING: THE RAPID FOOTSTEPS OF SERVANTS CARRYING SILVER PLATTERS (AND OCCASIONALLY DROPPING THEM); THE TUNING-UP OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS, INCLUDING LUTES AND RECORDERS; AND THE CONVERSATION AND LAUGHTER OF THE "AUDIENCE" - THE COURT

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

We should have fled!

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

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

HEMINGS:

Exactly! We *must* go on.

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE SIGHS HEAVILY AND DEEPLY.

SHAKESPEARE:

I suppose we must.

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS:

What for, Will? You owe us no apology.

CONDELL:

Nor explanation.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS (interrupting):

Quiet, Will!

SHAKESPEARE:

What?

HEMINGS:

For once, you *must* be quiet.

CONDELL:

Aye. Say nothing!

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Why?

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE (emphatically):

I do!

HEMINGS (equally emphatically):

No, you don't! As I told you 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! (*Pause.*) That's something a mere *grocer* -

CONDELL:

Or *fishmonger* -

HEMINGS:

Could only *dream* of!

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE LAUGHS.

HEMINGS:

Take your positions, men.

SOUND FX: SOME PLAYERS CLEAR THEIR THROATS; SOME COUGH; AND BURBAGE SAYS AUDIBLY: "AND NOW TIME DOTHS WASTE ME".

HEMINGS:

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

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

HEMINGS:

So let us make it a memorable one -

SHAKESPEARE (interrupting him):

One fit for a *Queen*!

SOUND FX: EVERYONE LAUGHS.

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

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

HEMINGS:

Good luck!

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

SCENE TWENTY-FIVE: INT. THE STAGE AT COURT

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

BURBAGE (playing King Richard):

"Old John of Gaunt, time-honoured Lancaster,

Hast thou according to thy oath and bond

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

SCENE TWENTY-SIX: INT. THE STAGE AT COURT

BURBAGE (playing King Richard):

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

SOUND FX: ON STAGE CONDELL GASPS, INVOLUNTARILY.

BURBAGE (under his breath to him):

Henry!

CONDELL (whispering back to him):

Sorry!

BURBAGE (resuming his speech, and declaiming again):

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

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

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

PHILIPS (as Bolingbroke):

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

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

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

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

BURBAGE (quietly - at least for him):

Well...?

SHAKESPEARE (even more quietly):

"Well" what?

BURBAGE:

Did she *like* it?

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE SNORTS, CONTEMPTUOUSLY.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

BURBAGE:

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

She *liked* it!

BURBAGE:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Even Lord Cecil!

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE AND BURBAGE BOTH BURST OUT LAUGHING.

HEMINGS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Oh, yes. Right.

BURBAGE:

Of course.

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

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

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

QUEEN (softly, indeed almost inaudibly):

Master Shakespeare...

SHAKESPEARE:

Your Majesty.

QUEEN (still softly and almost inaudibly):

Come here.

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Your Majesty.

QUEEN (even more quietly than before):

Closer. (Pause.) Beside my ear.

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

QUEEN (barely audibly):

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

SHAKESPEARE (whispering back to her):

Thank you, your Majesty. You are too kind.

QUEEN (quietly, but pointedly):

I know!

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

QUEEN (again, barely audibly):

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

SHAKESPEARE (whispering back to her):

Yes, your Majesty. Of course.

QUEEN (barely audibly):

Good. And one final thing...

SHAKESPEARE (whispering back to her):

Yes, your Majesty?

QUEEN (barely audibly):

I am Richard the Second. Know ye not that?

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

SHAKESPEARE (whispering back to her):

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

QUEEN (barely audibly):

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

SOUND FX: SHE SLUMPS BACK WITH A LONG, ALMOST DYING, SIGH.

QUEEN (a little more loudly):

You may go.

SHAKESPEARE (also a little more loudly):

Thank you, your Majesty. Thank you.

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

SCENE THIRTY: INT. THE DRESSING ROOM AT COURT

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

HEMINGS:

What did she say to you?

SHAKESPEARE:

She said she enjoyed the play.

HEMINGS:

Good.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS:

That's only to be expected.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS:

WHAT?!

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS THEY OBVIOUSLY STARE AT SHAKESPEARE

HEMINGS:

What did she *mean*?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE SIGHS, EXHALING IN RELIEF.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS:

Agreed!

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

SCENE THIRTY-ONE: EXT. THE PALACE GROUNDS.

SOUND FX: A DOOR IS OPENED ONTO THE PALACE GROUNDS AND THE PLAYERS PILE THROUGH IT, LAUGHING AND JOKING.

SHAKESPEARE (loudly):

The night air ne'er smelled so sweet!

HEMINGS:

Indeed.

SHAKESPEARE:

Even I cannot find words to describe it!

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE AND THE PLAYERS BURST OUT LAUGHING. SUDDENLY THEY STOP LAUGHING - ABRUPTLY. THEY REMAIN SILENT AS A GROUP OF WORKMEN PASS THEM, THEIR FOOTSTEPS ECHOING ON THE STONE PATH, AND THEIR LEADER OR FOREMAN WHISTLING.

LEADER/FOREMAN (cheerily):

Evening.

SHAKESPEARE (cheerlessly):

Good evening.

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

HEMINGS:

Was that a *gallows* they were carrying?

CONDELL:

Yes. Or at least the component parts.

BURBAGE:

They're obviously building it for Essex.

SHAKESPEARE:

Aye. And Southampton.

SOUND FX: HAMMERING, AS THE WORKMEN ASSEMBLE THE GALLOWS.

CONDELL:

But why here? Why not the Tower?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: THE HAMMERING GETS LOUDER.

BURBAGE:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

What would?

BURBAGE:

This - this night, this whole story!

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

HEMINGS:

Not in *our* lifetime.

CONDELL:

And certainly not in the *Queen's*!

BURBAGE:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS THE HAMMERING FINALLY STOPS.

SHAKESPEARE:

'Tis a plot more fanciful than any I wrote.

SOUND FX: FOOTSTEPS AS THE PLAYERS CONTINUE WALKING.

PART III (TRAGEDY)

AN ANNOUNCEMENT: "PART III (TRAGEDY) - 1616. JANUARY."

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

SOUND FX: THE SCRAPING OF A QUILL ON PAPER.

SHAKESPEARE (dictating):

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

SOUND FX: THE SCRAPING OF THE QUILL CONTINUES, THEN STOPS.

COLLINS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

COLLINS:

Indeed. Rightly so.

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

COLLINS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Very good.

COLLINS:

May I ask *another* question?

SHAKESPEARE:

Of course.

COLLINS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

COLLINS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

COLLINS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

COLLINS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

COLLINS:

Excellent. Then I wish you every felicitation.

SHAKESPEARE:

Thank you.

SOUND FX: COLLINS PUSHES BACK HIS CHAIR AND STANDS UP.

COLLINS:

Good day, Mister Shakespeare.

SHAKESPEARE:

Good day to *you*, Mister Collins.

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

SHAKESPEARE:

That's *one* thing done.

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

SOUND FX: THE HUB-BUB OF CONVERSATION (INDISTINCT BAR "DIDN'T THE BRIDE LOOK BEAUTIFUL?") AND LAUGHTER AROUND A CROWDED WEDDING TABLE. HEMINGS AND CONDELL BEGIN TO CHANT.

HEMINGS AND CONDELL (together):

SPEECH! SPEECH!

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE AND SEVERAL OTHER PEOPLE LAUGH.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

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

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS:

It was our pleasure.

CONDELL:

Indeed.

HEMINGS:

Even if the journey nearly *killed* us!

SOUND FX: LAUGHTER AROUND THE TABLE.

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

I know. He said so in his letter.

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: LAUGHTER AROUND THE TABLE.

SHAKESPEARE:

I also want to thank Thomas.

THOMAS:

Me? What for?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: LAUGHTER AROUND THE TABLE.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

RICHARD QUINEY (calling out):

We both are!

SHAKESPEARE:

And finally I want to thank my *own* family: Judith, Susanna and Anne. They have had *much* to endure over the years, while I was in London.

JUDITH:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

It is kind of you to say so, Judith, but I know that I have missed *much* that has happened in all your lives. *(Pause.)* I was away when my children were little; I was away when they grew up; I was even away when my beloved boy Hamnet – Judith's twin – was taken from us by the *plague*. *(Pause.)* God bless his soul.

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

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

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

SOUND FX: THE PUFFING OF CLAY TOBACCO PIPES AS SHAKESPEARE, HEMINGS AND CONDELL SIT AT THE DINING TABLE AFTER THE WEDDING FEAST IS OVER. THEY ARE THE ONLY THREE LEFT NOW, AND ARE NEAR EACH OTHER, SO THEY NO LONGER HAVE TO SHOUT.

SHAKESPEARE:

It's been a great day.

HEMINGS:

Indeed.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: HEMINGS AND CONDELL LAUGH. WHEN THE LAUGHTER DIES AWAY, SHAKESPEARE CONTINUES IN A SERIOUS, EVEN SOLEMN, TONE

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS:

When was that?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE APART FROM PUFFING ON PIPES AND EXHALING.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: THERE IS SILENCE FOR A MOMENT, AS HEMINGS AND CONDELL OBVIOUSLY TAKE ALL THIS IN.

HEMINGS:

You never told us this.

SHAKESPEARE:

It's only now that I *can* tell you.

CONDELL:

Why?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE, APART FROM THE ODD PUFF OR EXHALATION.

SHAKESPEARE:

I have dedicated my life to rebuilding my Father's fortune, the fortune that was so cruelly *stolen* from him, but it was only today, when the whole town turned out to watch me lead my daughter to church, that I felt our *reputation* - "the immortal part" of ourselves, as I once wrote - was restored.

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

SHAKESPEARE:

But that is enough about the past. Now I want to look forward to the *future* and the union of the Shakespeares and the Quineys! (*Pause*) "To the Shakespeares and the Quineys!"

HEMINGS AND CONDELL (together):

"The Shakespeares and the Quineys!"

SOUND FX: GLASSES BEING CLINKED, THEN DRAINED.

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

SOUND FX: KNOCKING, INDEED HAMMERING, ON THE FRONT DOOR AND THEN THE SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS, AS SOMEONE COMES DOWN STAIRS.

SHAKESPEARE (calling out from the staircase):

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: JUDITH BURSTS INTO TEARS; THROUGHOUT WHAT FOLLOWS
SHE WILL ALTERNATIVELY CRY OR TRY TO CONTROL HER CRYING.

SHAKESPEARE:

Come inside and tell me.

SOUND FX: HE USHERS HER IN AND SHUTS THE DOOR BEHIND HER.

SHAKESPEARE:

Now, please tell me what's wrong?

JUDITH:

I'm not sure I can.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: JUDITH SNIFFING, OR CHOKING BACK TEARS.

JUDITH:

It's Thomas, Father.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JUDITH:

No, Father. He's been -

SOUND FX: SILENCE, OTHER THAN SNIFFING AND SNUFFLING.

SHAKESPEARE:

Go on - tell me!

JUDITH:

He's been *arrested*!

SOUND FX: SHE BURSTS INTO TEARS AGAIN.

SHAKESPEARE:

"Arrested"? What for?

SOUND FX: JUDITH TRYING TO STOP CRYING & CHOKING BACK TEARS.

JUDITH:

"Unlawful copulation and abandonment".

SHAKESPEARE:

WHAT?!

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JUDITH:

A woman called Margaret Wheeler.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JUDITH:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS JUDITH FINALLY CONTROLS HER CRYING.

JUDITH:

She died in childbirth last week.

SHAKESPEARE:

WHAT?!

JUDITH:

And the child died too.

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Where is he?

JUDITH:

At the courthouse - the *church* courthouse.

SHAKESPEARE:

"The *church* courthouse"?

JUDITH:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

"Help" him? *How?*

JUDITH:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JUDITH:

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

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

JUDITH:

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

SOUND FX: HER CRYING BECOMES EVEN MORE INTENSE.

SHAKESPEARE (softly):

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

JUDITH:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

You always can, my dear. You always can.

SCENE THIRTY-SIX: INT. JAIL CELL.

SOUND FX: KEYS Jangling AS Jailer searches for right one. Finding it, he opens the cell door, which opens with a metallic creak, then shuts it again as Shakespeare goes in.

AS THE JAILER LEAVES, HIS FOOTSTEPS (AND KEYS) CAN STILL
BE HEARD UNTIL FINALLY THEY FADE TO SILENCE.

THOMAS:

Thank you for coming.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS (alarmed):

I can't afford a *lawyer*.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS THOMAS OBVIOUSLY DIGESTS THIS.

THOMAS:

Thank you.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS:

Of course. Anything.

SHAKESPEARE:

Did you do it?

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS THOMAS DOES NOT REPLY.

SHAKESPEARE:

I'm not sure you understand the seriousness of the situation you are in, Thomas. I have spoken to the court officials and they told me that the offences you've been charged with are the *most* serious offences that can be

tried in a church court. If you are found guilty of them, you could be punished by excommunication -

THOMAS (alarmed):

"Excommunication"?

SHAKESPEARE:

Yes. And flogging!

THOMAS (even more alarmed):

"Flogging"?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS:

Oh my God!

SHAKESPEARE:

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

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

SHAKESPEARE (sympathetically):

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

THOMAS:

You do?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: RUSTLING OF PAPER AS SHAKESPEARE TAKES OUT A NOTE

SHAKESPEARE (reading):

"Margaret Wheeler".

THOMAS:

Yes. I did.

SOUND FX: THOMAS BEGINS TO CRY.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS (while still crying):

Yes.

SHAKESPEARE:

When you began courting Judith.

THOMAS:

Yes.

SHAKESPEARE:

Who was she?

THOMAS:

Just a local girl.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS:

Well, she's from Arden - the forest.

SHAKESPEARE:

Oh.

THOMAS:

She was a *WHORE*!

SHAKESPEARE:

WHAT?!

THOMAS:

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

SOUND FX: THOMAS CHUCKLES, RUEFULLY.

THOMAS:

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

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

THOMAS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Alright. I believe you.

THOMAS:

You do?

SHAKESPEARE:

Yes.

THOMAS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS:

Right. Of course.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS SHAKESPEARE OBVIOUSLY CONSIDERS THIS
LAST WORD.

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Come in.

SOUND FX: DOOR OPENS, A MAN ENTERS & SHUTS DOOR BEHIND THEM

SHAKESPEARE:

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

MR COLLINS:

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

SCENE THIRTY-EIGHT: INT. COURTROOM.

COURT OFFICIAL (CALLING OUT):

All rise for the court's verdict.

SOUND FX: THE SOUND OF CHAIRS BEING PUSHED BACK & PEOPLE
STANDING AS THE "JUDGE" (SENIOR PRIEST) ENTERS & SITS DOWN

SENIOR PRIEST:

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

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

SENIOR PRIEST:

Ordinarily I would impose a severe punishment, one involving *public* penance. However, we have borne in mind your previously *unblemished* reputation, *and* the fact that your father-in-law, Mr Shakespeare, who has been a *true* friend to this town in times of need - such as the recent

outbreak of *plague* - testified on your behalf as a character witness. For those reasons, I have *commuted* your sentence to a *fine* of five shillings.

SOUND FX: AGAIN, MULTIPLE GASPS AROUND THE COURTROOM.

THOMAS:

A fine, your grace?

SENIOR PRIEST:

Yes, which must be paid *immediately*!

MR COLLINS (speaking up):

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

SENIOR PRIEST:

Good. Then the court is dismissed.

SOUND FX: SENIOR PRIEST HITS DESK WITH HIS GAVEL, FOLLOWED BY THE SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS AS HE & THE OFFICIAL GO OUT AGAIN

THOMAS (calling out):

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

SOUND FX: THOMAS SIGHS WITH RELIEF, THEN LAUGHS.

THOMAS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS:

Thank you.

SHAKESPEARE:

You're welcome.

THOMAS:

We must celebrate!

SHAKESPEARE:

"Celebrate"? Celebrate what?

THOMAS:

Why, my freedom!

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS:

Of course. And thank you too, Mr Collins.

JUDITH:

Yes, thank you, Mr Collins.

MR COLLINS:

You are *both* most welcome.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS:

What for?

SHAKESPEARE:

We need to discuss the future.

THOMAS:

Of course. I'll come first thing.

SOUND FX: THOMAS KISSES JUDITH, BEFORE EXHALING WITH RELIEF

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Come in.

SOUND FX: THOMAS OPENS THE DOOR, COMES IN & CLOSSES IT AGAIN

SHAKESPEARE:

Ah, Thomas. Thank you for coming.

SOUND FX: FOOTSTEPS AS THOMAS CROSSES THE ROOM AND SLUMPS
IN A CHAIR WITH AN AUDIBLE GROAN, AS HE IS VERY HUNGOVER.

SHAKESPEARE:

I trust you had an enjoyable evening.

THOMAS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS:

Oh, yes?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS:

I told you the truth.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS (feebly - in every sense):

I can explain -

SHAKESPEARE (interrupting):

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

THOMAS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS:

What?

SHAKESPEARE (abruptly):

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

THOMAS (fearfully):

What are you going to do?

SHAKESPEARE:

I know what I would *like* to do. I would *like* to cast you out: to *terminate* your marriage to my daughter and *demand* the repayment of her dowry. (Pause.) But I *cannot* do that. You were married in church - in the eyes of *God!* - so, however much I would like to, I cannot "tear you asunder". (Pause.) However, I *can* - indeed, I *will* - prevent you from getting your hands on any *more* of my money, or Judith's.

THOMAS:

How?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: TOTAL SILENCE - STUNNED SILENCE FROM THOMAS.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE GETS UP & LEAVES. A MOMENT LATER -

THOMAS (softly):

Shit!

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

SOUND FX: HAMMERING ON THE FRONT DOOR FOR A FEW MOMENTS UNTIL THE DOOR IS OPENED BY RICHARD QUINEY, THOMAS'S FATHER, WHO, WHEN HE SPEAKS, SOUNDS AS HUNGOVER AS THOMAS.

RICHARD QUINEY:

Will? What are you doing here? Come in.

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE ENTERS AND QUINEY CLOSES THE DOOR.

RICHARD QUINEY:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

I know. I've just seen Thomas.

RICHARD QUINEY:

Oh, right.

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS THEY JUST STAND THERE FOR A MOMENT.

RICHARD QUINEY:

What is it?

SHAKESPEARE:

You knew, didn't you?

RICHARD QUINEY (confused):

What?

SHAKESPEARE (angrily):

About Thomas's *relationship* with Margaret Wheeler.

SOUND FX: SILENCE FOR A FEW MOMENTS.

RICHARD QUINEY:

I didn't "know" -

SHAKESPEARE (interrupting again):

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

RICHARD QUINEY (continuing):

- But I *suspected*.

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

RICHARD QUINEY:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

"Fond"?

RICHARD QUINEY:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

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

RICHARD QUINEY:

I did.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE LEAVES, SLAMMING THE DOOR BEHIND HIM.

RICHARD QUINEY (softly):

Damn!

SCENE FORTY-ONE: INT. STUDY OF JOHN HALL & SUSANNA SHAKESPEARE

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JOHN HALL:

Yes. (Pause.) Thank you.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JOHN HALL:

Yes. Of course.

SHAKESPEARE:

Good. Now I just have to tell Judith herself.

SOUND FX: CHAIR PUSHED BACK AS SHAKESPEARE GETS UP, WHEN ELIZABETH, HIS NINE-YEAR-OLD GRAND-DAUGHTER, SPEAKS UP.

ELIZABETH:

Where are you going, Grandfather? Won't you stay and *play*?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE'S FOOTSTEPS AS HE LEAVES.

SCENE FORTY-TWO: EXT. STREET.

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

JUDITH (faintly):

Come in, Father.

SOUND FX: SHE GOES INSIDE & SHAKESPEARE FOLLOWS HER.

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Where is he?

JUDITH:

He's gone to the alehouse.

SHAKESPEARE:

"The alehouse"?

JUDITH:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JUDITH:

Yes. He told me *everything*.

SOUND FX: SHE BURSTS INTO TEARS AGAIN.

JUDITH:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JUDITH:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

WHAT?! You did?

JUDITH:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

There were *others*?

JUDITH:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS SHE HESITATES BEFORE SPEAKING.

JUDITH:

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

SOUND FX: SHE CRIES UNCONTROLLABLY AND CAN BARELY SPEAK.

JUDITH:

Now I wish I'd *never* married.

SOUND FX: SHE CRIES UNCONTROLLABLY.

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

ANNE:

I was waiting for you to return.

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Judging by the look on your face, I assume you know what's happened.

ANNE:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

You're right. I should have.

ANNE:

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

How was Susanna?

ANNE:

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

SHAKESPEARE (angrily):

Damn him!

SOUND FX: FOOTSTEPS, AS SHAKESPEARE BEGINS TO PACE AROUND.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: FOOTSTEPS, AS HE WALKS TO THE DOOR, THEN STOPS.

SHAKESPEARE:

I hope he goes to *HELL*!

ANNE:

Hypocrite!

SOUND FX: SILENCE - STUNNED SILENCE.

SHAKESPEARE:

What?

ANNE:

You heard me - you're a hypocrite.

SHAKESPEARE:

What do you mean?

ANNE:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

What on earth are you talking about?

ANNE:

You *know* what I'm talking about.

SHAKESPEARE:

I don't - truly!

ANNE:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE FOR A MOMENT.

SHAKESPEARE:

That's not true.

ANNE:

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

SOUND FX: SHE LAUGHS, RUEFULLY.

ANNE:

I used to wonder, "How is it that Will - my *beloved* Will, who before he left Stratford could never keep his hands off me - now refuses to *touch* me?" Then, finally, I realised. He was touching somebody else - *anybody* else, in fact, but me.

SOUND FX: TOTAL, STUNNED SILENCE FROM SHAKESPEARE.

ANNE:

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

SOUND FX: SHE WALKS AWAY, UNTIL HER FOOTSTEPS CAN NO LONGER BE HEARD. SHAKESPEARE SIGHS HEAVILY & SLUMPS AGAINST DOOR.

SCENE FORTY-FIVE: INT. TAVERN.

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

MAN (CALLING OUT):

Will! Will! Over here!

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE'S FOOTSTEPS JUST HEARD UNDER HUBBUB.

SHAKESPEARE:

Hello, Drayton.

DRAYTON:

Have a seat.

SOUND FX: SCRAPING OF WOODEN CHAIRLEGS ON THE STONE FLOOR, AS SHAKESPEARE PULLS OUT A CHAIR AND SITS DOWN.

SHAKESPEARE:

I'm glad you could come.

SHAKESPEARE:

I'm glad to get out of Stratford. 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. I thought a little *literary* discussion with a fellow poet might take your mind off it, if only for an evening.

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE SNORTS DISMISSIVELY.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

DRAYTON:

Why do you say that?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

DRAYTON:

I don't understand.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: SIGHS, PICKS UP TANKARD & DOWNS ITS CONTENTS IN ONE LOUD, CONTINUOUS GULP, BEFORE THUMPING THE TANKARD BACK DOWN ON THE TABLE. THEN, SUDDENLY, A LOUD, BOOMING MAN'S VOICE IS HEARD FROM TAVERN ENTRANCE.

MAN (VOICE OFF):

DRAYTON!

SOUND FX: LOUD FOOTSTEPS AS THE MAN APPROACHES THEM.

SHAKESPEARE (quietly, to DRAYTON):

Jonson? What's *he* doing here?

DRAYTON:

I invited him too.

SHAKESPEARE:

All the way from London?

DRAYTON:

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

SOUND FX: LOUD, HEAVY FOOTSTEPS, WHICH STOP AS BEN JONSON REACHES THEIR TABLE, BUT THE LOUD, BOOMING VOICE CONTINUES.

JONSON:

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

DRAYTON:

Hello, Ben. Welcome to Warwickshire!

JONSON:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

What are you doing here, Jonson? Have you come to *gloat*?

JONSON:

"Gloat"? About what?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JONSON:

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

SHAKESPEARE (bitterly):

Why not? Everyone else is. (*He expertly adopts different voices as he "recounts" what has been said.*) "Will Shakespeare's had his come-uppance." "Serves him right, for getting above himself." "He should never have gone to London! *That's* what ruined him and his family."

SOUND FX: SILENCE, OTHER THAN THE HUBBUB IN THE TAVERN.

JONSON:

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

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE IS SILENT, THEN LAUGHS, JOYLESSLY.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: JONSON LAUGHS, LOUDLY.

SCENE FORTY-SIX: INT. TAVERN.

SOUND FX: IT'S CLOSING TIME, SO THE TAVERN IS QUIETER: ONLY SHAKESPEARE, DRAYTON & JONSON ARE LEFT & THEY ARE ALL DRUNK.

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

DRAYTON:

Stay with me tonight and walk home in the morning.

JONSON:

Yes. Stay with us. We can continue *drinking* at Drayton's!

SHAKESPEARE:

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

SOUND FX: HE STANDS & SCRAPES CHAIR ON THE STONE FLOOR.

JONSON:

Goodnight, Will.

DRAYTON:

Take care.

SHAKESPEARE:

Goodnight, good fellows.

SOUND FX: HE BANGS INTO A TABLE AS HE GOES OUT, LAUGHING.

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

SOUND FX: KNOCKING, THEN RAPID FOOTSTEPS TO OPEN FRONT DOOR

SUSANNA:

Oh, John. Thank God you've come.

DOCTOR HALL:

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

SUSANNA:

It's my father. He's sick!

DOCTOR HALL:

"Sick"?

SUSANNA:

Yes. Apparently, he went out drinking last night -

DOCTOR HALL:

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

SUSANNA:

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

DOCTOR HALL:

A fever?

SUSANNA:

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

DOCTOR HALL:

I will do all I can.

SOUND FX: QUICKLY, THEY BOTH HURRY UPSTAIRS.

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

SOUND FX: SHAKESPEARE IS IN BED & IN PAIN, AS HE MOANS. THE DOOR OPENS, SOMEONE ENTERS & THEN GASPS AT WHAT THEY SEE.

JUDITH:

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

DOCTOR HALL:

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

JUDITH:

Really?

DOCTOR HALL:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE, OTHER THAN SHAKESPEARE'S MOANING. FINALLY, HE SPEAKS BUT ONLY FEEBLY & FAINTLY: INDEED, BARELY AUDIBLY. WHEN ANNE REPLIES TO HIM, SHE SPEAKS VERY SOFTLY & VERY QUIETLY, AS SHE IS SITTING RIGHT BESIDE HIM.

SHAKESPEARE:

I'm so hot.

ANNE:

I know, Will. I know.

SHAKESPEARE:

Am I in hell?

ANNE:

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

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

SHAKESPEARE (quietly, indeed barely audibly):

I am not.

SOUND FX: JUDITH BURSTS INTO TEARS: UNCONTROLLABLE SOBBING.

SCENE FORTY-NINE: INT. CHURCH.

SOUND FX: FOOTSTEPS ON STONE ECHOING AROUND A CHURCH, WHICH IS OTHERWISE SILENT, AS SHAKESPEARE'S COFFIN IS CARRIED IN.

PRIEST (softly, even gently):

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

SOUND FX: THE SOUND OF PALLBEARERS, INCLUDING HEMINGS & CONDELL, SETTING DOWN A COFFIN (& STRAINING UNDER ITS WEIGHT) ON STANDS IN FRONT OF THE ALTAR. THEN FOOTSTEPS ON THE STONE FLOOR AS THE PALLBEARERS GO TO SIT IN THE PEWS.

PRIEST (more loudly):

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

SOUND FX: THE PRIEST CONTINUES, BUT HIS WORDS ARE NOW INDISTINCT; INSTEAD, WE HEAR HEMINGS AND CONDELL WHISPERING

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

That's appropriate.

HEMINGS:

How so?

CONDELL:

Well, he always enjoyed being centre-stage.

SOUND FX: HEMINGS LAUGHS, QUIETLY.

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

SOUND FX: WOMAN SAYS, "THANKS FOR COMING"; DRINKS ARE
POURED; ANOTHER WOMAN CRIES. AND EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE NO
LONGER IN CHURCH, HEMINGS & CONDELL CONTINUE TO WHISPER.

HEMINGS:

I still can't believe it.

CONDELL:

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

HEMINGS:

It's not right.

CONDELL:

What isn't?

HEMINGS:

The cause of *death*! Will survived 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.

SOUND FX: THE WOMAN'S CRYING, WHEREVER IT IS COMING FROM,
RESUMES, BECOMING LOUDER AND LOUDER UNTIL IT IS ALMOST
DEAFENING.

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

SOUND FX: THE RUSTLING OF PAPER AS A LETTER IS OPENED, OR UNFURLED.

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."

SOUND FX: SILENCE FOR A MOMENT, AS HEMINGS OBVIOUSLY TAKES THIS IN.

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

Apparently.

SOUND FX: HEMINGS SIGHS DEEPLY.

EPILOGUE

SOUND FX: ANNOUNCEMENT - "EPILOGUE".

SCENE FIFTY-TWO: INT. OFFICE OF THE REBUILT GLOBE THEATRE.

HEMINGS:

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

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

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: HE SIGHS, HEAVILY.

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: CONDELL TUTS, FOLLOWED BY SOUND OF QUILL SCRAPING

CONDELL:

Here is a list of the props we need.

SOUND FX: LOUD CLINKING OF COINS AS HE PUTS SOME TOGETHER.

CONDELL:

And here is the money to buy them.

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

CONDELL:

So would you please stop complaining about wills and rings - and Will's rings! - long enough to do some work? After all, we still have a theatre to run!

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: HEMINGS GRABS PAPER & COINS & LEAVES, SLAMMING THE DOOR LOUDLY BEHIND HIM.

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

SOUND FX: STREET SOUNDS: DOGS BARKING; BEGGARS BEGGING: "ALMS FOR THE POOR", ETC. ALSO SPECIFIC SOUNDS OF LONDON'S BOOK QUARTER, NEAR ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL, WHERE BOOKSELLERS COMPETE WITH THE CATHEDRAL'S BELLS TO HAWK THEIR WARES: "BIBLES! BIBLES!"; "UTOPIA"; AND "BEN JONSON'S WORKES".

BOOKSELLER:

Good day, Sir. How can I help you?

HEMINGS:

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

BOOKSELLER:

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

SOUND FX: BOOKSELLER STRAINS AS HE LIFTS A COPY FOR HEMINGS.

HEMINGS:

It's heavy!

BOOKSELLER:

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

SOUND FX: HEMINGS OPENS BOOK & STARTS FLICKING THROUGH IT.

BOOKSELLER (proudly):

It's only just been published.

HEMINGS:

Really?

BOOKSELLER:

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

SOUND FX: HEMINGS FLICKS AHEAD, FINGERS DANCING OVER PAGES

BOOKSELLER:

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

HEMINGS:

Really? How so?

BOOKSELLER:

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

SOUND FX: THE BOOKSELLER LAUGHS.

BOOKSELLER:

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

HEMINGS:

Is that so?

BOOKSELLER:

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

HEMINGS:

Really? How remarkable!

BOOKSELLER:

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

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 happened!

SOUND FX: THE BOOKSELLER LAUGHS, EVEN MORE HEARTILY.

BOOKSELLER:

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

HEMINGS:

He has.

BOOKSELLER:

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

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

HEMINGS:

"Pre-eminent"?

BOOKSELLER:

Indeed.

HEMINGS:

But what about Shakespeare?

BOOKSELLER:

Who?

HEMINGS:

William Shakespeare.

BOOKSELLER:

Oh! *Him!*

SOUND FX: THE BOOKSELLER LAUGHS.

BOOKSELLER:

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

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

HEMINGS:

Do you have any of his plays?

BOOKSELLER:

Who? *Shakespeare?*

HEMINGS:

Yes.

BOOKSELLER:

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

HEMINGS:

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

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

BOOKSELLER:

Aha! I thought I had something.

HEMINGS:

What is it?

SOUND FX: BOOKSELLER STANDS, SO HIS VOICE IS DISTINCT AGAIN

BOOKSELLER:

THIS!

SOUND FX: HEMINGS GASPS.

HEMINGS:

Oh my God!

SCENE FIFTY-FOUR: INT. THE OFFICE OF THE REBUILT GLOBE.

SOUND FX: CONDELL COUNTS COINS QUIETLY, "TWO, THREE, FOUR", WITH THE COINS CLINKING TOGETHER. THE DOOR TO THE OFFICE CREAKS OPEN QUIETLY & THEN IS SHUT AGAIN. AS CONDELL CONTINUES TO COUNT ("EIGHT, NINE, TEN"), FOOTSTEPS CAN JUST BE HEARD AS SOMEONE CROSSES THE FLOOR TOWARDS HIM. FINALLY, AS HE TO COUNT: "FOURTEEN, FIFTEEN, SIXTEEN", THERE IS A VERY LOUD, INDEED ALMOST DEAFENING CRASH AS SOMETHING IS DROPPED ON THE DESK, SCATTERING ALL HIS COINS ON THE FLOOR.

CONDELL:

OH MY GOD!

SOUND FX: HEMINGS GUFFAWS.

CONDELL:

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

HEMINGS:

It's not a bomb.

CONDELL:

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

HEMINGS:

It's a book.

CONDELL:

A book?

HEMINGS:

Yes.

CONDELL:

Why are you throwing *books* around?

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

What?

HEMINGS:

Read it.

SOUND FX: CONDELL MOVES CLINKING COINS AS HE PICKS UP BOOK.

CONDELL (reading aloud):

"The Workes of Benjamin Jonson."

HEMINGS:

Big, isn't it?

CONDELL:

Enormous!

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: CONDELL LAUGHS.

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

What?

HEMINGS:

That's how he's being described.

CONDELL:

But Will was an *infinitely* better writer.

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: FOR A MOMENT, THERE IS ONLY SILENCE.

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

What is it?

HEMINGS:

See for yourself.

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

CONDELL (reading aloud):

"The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, by William Shakespeare".

HEMINGS:

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

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

HEMINGS:

Read it.

CONDELL:

What?

HEMINGS:

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

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

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

Ouch!

SOUND FX: HEMINGS FLICKS AHEAD AND THEN QUOTES ANOTHER LINE

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

Oh my God!

HEMINGS:

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

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

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

WHAT?!

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: HE THROWS THE SCRIPT DOWN ON THE DESK, FURTHER SCATTERING A FEW COINS.

HEMINGS:

I can't bear it! After all we went through together - *building* The Globe, *rebuilding* it after it burned down, *surviving* the plot against the Queen - this *trash*, and *trash* like it, is all that will survive of "Shakespeare"!

SOUND FX: TOTAL SILENCE FOR A MOMENT. THEN -

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

WHAT?

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

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

HEMINGS:

WHAT? Why not?

CONDELL:

They must have been destroyed in the fire, or 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 prompters until they're virtually *illegible*!

HEMINGS:

"Illegible"?

CONDELL:

Aye. *Will* could decipher them, but we can't. While he was still alive, it didn't matter: if we 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 or we visited Stratford. 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.

SOUND FX: CONDELL SIGHS HEAVILY.

CONDELL:

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

HEMINGS:

"Half"?

CONDELL:

That's still about twenty or so.

HEMINGS:

It's not enough! Half a Shakespeare is no Shakespeare at all: half a Shakespeare is a Jonson, or a Marlowe! We have to show the *whole* man, to show what *one* man is capable of.

SOUND FX: HE THUMPS THE DESK, SCATTERING MORE COINS.

HEMINGS:

We *have* to do it.

CONDELL:

Do what?

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

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

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

And where exactly do you propose looking for them?

HEMINGS (triumphantly):

EVERYWHERE!

CONDELL:

"EVERYWHERE"?

SOUND FX: 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!

SOUND FX: CONDELL LAUGHS AT HIS OWN "JOKE".

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

And how do you propose doing *that*?

HEMINGS:

By gathering together *all* the actors who ever appeared in a Shakespeare play, or at least those who are still *alive*, and going through their parts with them, line by line, to make sure that they're correct. And some of the actors would also have been employed as *book-holders*, or *prompters*, so we can get them to go through the prompt-books to elucidate all the *notes* and *stage directions* and *scribblings* that have been added over the years.

SOUND FX: SILENCE AS HE STOPS PACING AND STANDS STILL.

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: HE LAUGHS, LOUDLY.

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: CONDELL LAUGHS.

CONDELL:

Typical actor!

HEMINGS:

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

SOUND FX: HEMINGS CHUCKLES.

SCENE FIFTY-FIVE: INT. ROOM.

SOUND FX: HEMINGS AND CONDELL BOTH READ SOMETHING UNDER THEIR BREATH, DOING SO FOR A FEW MOMENTS, & THEN ARE SILENT.

HEMINGS:

It's wonderful, Ben.

CONDELL:

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

JONSON:

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

SOUND FX: HEMINGS AND CONDELL BOTH LAUGH.

JONSON:

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

HEMINGS:

What do you mean?

JONSON:

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

SOUND FX: SILENCE, AS HEMINGS AND CONDELL ARE OBVIOUSLY FLATTERED, EVEN TOUCHED, BY JONSON'S COMPLIMENT.

HEMINGS:

It wasn't *that* difficult.

CONDELL:

Not once we'd got started.

SOUND FX: SILENCE, APART FROM A DISTANT MUFFLED THUDDING.

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.) I can't imagine that anyone would do it for *me*. (Pause.) So why did you do it for Will?

SOUND FX: HEMINGS AND CONDELL BOTH CHUCKLE.

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

Now, we are part-owners of the greatest theatre in Europe.

HEMINGS (imitating Burbage):

Nay, the *world*!

SOUND FX: JONSON LAUGHS.

HEMINGS:

He did so much for us.

CONDELL:

It was the least we could do for him.

SOUND FX: SILENCE FOR A MOMENT, AS JONSON CONSIDERS THEIR ANSWER TO HIS QUESTION. THEN THERE ARE FOOTSTEPS ON STONE AS SOMEONE APPROACHES. WHEN THEY SPEAK, THEIR VOICE IS EVEN ROUGHER & COARSER THAN JONSON'S.

MAN:

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

HEMINGS:

Of course.

CONDELL:

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

MAN:

Alright. There you go!

SOUND FX: SILENCE APART FROM THE MUFFLED THUDDING IN THE BACKGROUND.

HEMINGS (reading aloud):

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

CONDELL:

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

HEMINGS:

No. Sorry.

SOUND FX: THEY BOTH READ UNDER THEIR BREATH.

CONDELL:

You forgot the date.

MAN:

Today's date?

CONDELL:

No. Just the year - 1623.

MAN:

Sorry. I'll add it right now.

SOUND FX: THE MAN, WHO IS OBVIOUSLY A PRINTER, PICKS UP THE PIECE OF PAPER - THE TITLE-PAGE OF THE FIRST COLLECTION OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS, THE FIRST FOLIO - AND WALKS AWAY, HIS FOOT-STEPS AGAIN ECHOING ON THE STONE FLOOR. AS HE DOES SO, THE MUFFLED THUDDING SOUND BECOMES CLEARER: IT IS THE SOUND OF PRINTING PRESSES BEING PRESSED, HELD DOWN AND THEN RELEASED, BEFORE THE PROCESS IS REPEATED. FINALLY, THE FOOTSTEPS STOP, THE PRINTING PRESSES STOP AND THERE IS COMPLETE SILENCE.

HEMINGS:

From start to finish, a *mere* seven years.

SOUND FX: CONDELL LAUGHS.

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

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

SOUND FX: HEMINGS SIGHS, DEEPLY.

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.

SOUND FX: THERE IS SILENCE FOR A MOMENT. THEN THE PRINTING PRESSES START UP AGAIN: THEY ARE PRESSED DOWN, HELD DOWN FOR A MOMENT AND THEN RELEASED, BEFORE THE PROCESS IS REPEATED. ON THIS SOUND, FADE OUT TO COMPLETE SILENCE.

- END -