

THE SHAKESPEARE PLAYS

Two Screenplays about the Life of
William Shakespeare

by Martin Keady

PART II – THE TRAGEDY OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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BLACK.

A caption appears: "STRATFORD UPON AVON. 1616."

It fades and another caption appears: "JANUARY".

There is the faint sound of a quill scraping on paper.

Fade up to:

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

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, 51 and nearly bald, stands in the middle of his study dictating his will to his lawyer, FRANCIS COLLINS, a small, bespectacled man also in his 50s, who sits at a desk.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

COLLINS writes all this down, then looks up at SHAKESPEARE.

COLLINS:

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

SHAKESPEARE (smiling):

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

COLLINS (nodding):

Indeed. Rightly so.

COLLINS looks the will over and appears satisfied.

COLLINS:

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

SHAKESPEARE (nodding):

Very good.

COLLINS puts the will in a slim leather bag.

COLLINS:

May I ask *another* question?

SHAKESPEARE:

Of course.

COLLINS:

Why are you making a will *now*?

He peers at SHAKESPEARE.

COLLINS:

I hope you are not unwell.

SHAKESPEARE (smiling):

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

COLLINS:

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

SHAKESPEARE (smiling):

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

COLLINS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

COLLINS:

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

SHAKESPEARE (nodding):

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

COLLINS:

Excellent. Then I wish you every felicitation.

SHAKESPEARE:

Thank you.

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

COLLINS:

I am sure you have *plenty* to do before the wedding, Mister Shakespeare, so I will delay you no more. Good day.

SHAKESPEARE:

Good day to *you*, Mister Collins.

SHAKESPEARE watches him go out, then smiles broadly.

SHAKESPEARE (quietly, to himself):

That's one thing done.

Fade to:

BLACK.

A caption appears: "**FEBRUARY**".

The sound of laughter - joyous laughter - can be heard.

Fade up to:

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

SHAKESPEARE, wearing his finest, most expensive clothes, is sitting at the head of the dining table for the wedding feast.

The bride and groom - JUDITH (a rather plain-looking woman of about 30 who is wearing a beautiful white dress) and THOMAS (a handsome man of about 27) - are sitting on either side of him.

His eldest daughter, SUSANNA (who is 33), her husband, JOHN HALL (who is 40 and all in black, including puritanical skull-cap) and their daughter, ELIZABETH (who is eight), sit in the middle of the table, next to JOHN HEMINGS (fat and 60) and HENRY CONDELL (thin and 40), Shakespeare's friends and fellow players, who, like everyone else, are in their finery.

At the other end of the table is the Groom's father, RICHARD QUINEY, a handsome man in his early fifties, with his own wife, MRS QUINEY, and Shakespeare's wife, ANNE (a rather plain-looking woman of about 60), sitting on either side of him.

HEMINGS and CONDELL look at SHAKESPEARE and begin to chant.

HEMINGS AND CONDELL (together):

SPEECH! SPEECH!

SHAKESPEARE (smiling):

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

HEMINGS:

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

I simply want to thank you all for coming today, especially those of you, like John and Henry -

He smiles at HEMINGS and CONDELL and they smile back.

SHAKESPEARE:

Who have come from afar!

HEMINGS:

It was our pleasure!

CONDELL (nodding):

Indeed.

HEMINGS:

Even if the journey nearly *killed* us!

Everyone laughs, but HEMINGS shakes his head.

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL (to SHAKESPEARE):

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

SHAKESPEARE (nodding):

I know. He said so in his letter.

HEMINGS looks up at SHAKESPEARE and smiles broadly.

HEMINGS:

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

EVERYONE laughs - except ANNE, who does not look amused.

SHAKESPEARE turns to address THE GROOM.

SHAKESPEARE:

I also want to thank Thomas.

THOMAS looks confused.

THOMAS:

Me? What for?

SHAKESPEARE (smiling):

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

EVERYONE laughs, except JUDITH, who looks embarrassed.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

RICHARD QUINEY (calling out):

We both are!

SHAKESPEARE smiles at RICHARD QUINEY.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

He looks around at them all.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JUDITH:

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

SHAKESPEARE looks at her lovingly.

SHAKESPEARE:

It is typically kind of you, Judith, to say so, but I know that I have missed *much* that has happened in your life.

He looks at SUSANNA, then ANNE.

SHAKESPEARE:

I have missed much that has happened in *all* your lives.

Suddenly he looks thoughtful, even sad.

SHAKESPEARE:

I was away when my children were little; I was away when they grew up; I was even away when my beloved boy Hamnet - Judith's twin - was taken from us by the plague. (*He lowers his head.*) God bless his soul.

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

The toast is taken up around the table: "THE BRIDE AND GROOM".

JUDITH and THOMAS look embarrassed but then kiss, to the sound of applause, cheers and even the banging of fists on the table.

SHAKESPEARE sits back down and looks at HEMINGS and CONDELL: they raise their glasses to him, and he raises his to them.

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

It's been a great day.

CONDELL (nodding):

Indeed.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS and CONDELL both look at him questioningly.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

HEMINGS and CONDELL both look surprised.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

Now HEMINGS and CONDELL stare at him in amazement.

HEMINGS:

You never told us *this*.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

CONDELL:

How so?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

He stares at HEMINGS and CONDELL.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

He smiles at them both.

SHAKESPEARE:

But that is enough about the past. Now I want to look forward to the future and the union of the Shakespeares and the Quineys!

He raises his glass.

SHAKESPEARE:

To the Shakespeares and the Quineys!

HEMINGS and CONDELL raise theirs, while still looking a little surprised by what they have just heard.

HEMINGS AND CONDELL (together):

"The Shakespeares and the Quineys!"

They all drain their glasses, drinking deeply.

Fade to:

BLACK.

A caption appears: "MARCH".

There is the sound of knocking - indeed, hammering - at a door.

Fade up to:

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

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

SHAKESPEARE (calling out):

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

He goes up to the front door and opens it.

JUDITH is standing in the doorway: her eyes are bloodshot (she has obviously been crying); her hair is tangled (she has obviously not brushed it); and she, too, is still in her nightgown, covered by a blanket.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Come inside and tell me.

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Now, please tell me what's wrong?

JUDITH:

I'm not sure I can.

SHAKESPEARE looks at her angrily.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JUDITH looks up at him, then nods her head.

JUDITH:

It's Thomas, Father.

HAKESPEARE:

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

JUDITH:

No, Father. He's been -

She pauses again, obviously unable to say any more.

SHAKESPEARE (curtly):

Go on - tell me!

JUDITH:

He's been arrested!

She starts crying again and SHAKESPEARE looks stunned.

SHAKESPEARE:

"Arrested"? What for?

JUDITH hesitates as she is embarrassed, or even ashamed.

JUDITH:

"Unlawful copulation and abandonment".

SHAKESPEARE looks at her in disbelief.

SHAKESPEARE:

WHAT?!

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Who did he - ?

He pauses, obviously trying to choose the right word.

SHAKESPEARE:

Abandon?

JUDITH:

A woman called Margaret Wheeler.

SHAKESPEARE (blankly):

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

JUDITH:

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

SHAKESPEARE is speechless.

JUDITH:

She died in childbirth last week.

SHAKESPEARE:

WHAT?!

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

JUDITH:

And the child died too.

SHAKESPEARE looks as if he might collapse: he has to put a hand against the front door for support.

He stares at JUDITH as she stares at the ground.

SHAKESPEARE:

Where is he?

JUDITH:

At the courthouse - the *church* courthouse.

SHAKESPEARE:

"The *church* courthouse"?

JUDITH (nodding):

Yes. Apparently, because of the nature of the charges against him, he will be tried in an ecclesiastical court.

She comes towards him with a desperate look in her eyes.

JUDITH:

Oh, Father, can you help him?

SHAKESPEARE:

"Help" him? *How?*

JUDITH:

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

SHAKESPEARE looks shocked.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JUDITH:

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

He looks at her in alarm.

JUDITH:

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

Once again, she begins to cry.

JUDITH:

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

SHAKESPEARE looks at her questioningly for a moment.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JUDITH:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

You always can, my dear. You always can.

Quickly, he goes upstairs and as he does so he passes ANNE, who is also still in her night-dress, coming downstairs.

ANNE looks at him quizzically but he continues up the stairs.

Then she looks down and sees JUDITH sitting on the bottom step and weeping, so she hurries downstairs to comfort her.

5. INT. JAIL CELL. DAY.

SHAKESPEARE (now fully dressed) is shown by a JAILER into a tiny cell, where THOMAS, wearing a generic grey prisoner's uniform, is sitting on a filthy bed: in fact, the whole cell is filthy, with excrement smeared on the floor, walls and beds.

As the JAILER goes back out into the corridor, locking the cell door behind him, THOMAS rises to greet SHAKESPEARE.

THOMAS:

Thank you for coming.

SHAKESPEARE:

I came as soon as Judith told me.

THOMAS indicates the filthy bed behind SHAKESPEARE.

THOMAS:

Please - have a seat!

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

SHAKESPEARE:

No, thank you. I'll stand.

THOMAS remains standing too.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS looks worried.

THOMAS:

I can't afford a lawyer.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS looks simultaneously flattered and embarrassed.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS (nodding):

Of course. Anything.

SHAKESPEARE:

Did you do it?

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

Now THOMAS looks up at him.

THOMAS (alarmed):

"Excommunication"?

SHAKESPEARE (nodding):

Yes. And flogging!

THOMAS (even more alarmed):

"Flogging"?

SHAKESPEARE (still nodding):

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

THOMAS:

Oh my God!

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

Still THOMAS says nothing.

SHAKESPEARE (sympathetically):

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

THOMAS looks up at him in surprise.

THOMAS:

You do?

SHAKESPEARE (nodding):

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

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

SHAKESPEARE (reading):

"Margaret Wheeler".

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

THOMAS:

Yes. I did.

He begins to cry.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS (nodding, while still crying):

Yes.

SHAKESPEARE:

When you began courting Judith.

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

THOMAS:

Yes.

SHAKESPEARE:

Who was she?

THOMAS:

Just a local girl.

SHAKESPEARE:

"Local"?

Once again, he glances at the piece of paper.

SHAKESPEARE:

I don't know the name "Wheeler".

THOMAS:

Well, she's from Arden - the forest.

SHAKESPEARE:

Oh.

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

THOMAS:

She was a *WHORE!*

SHAKESPEARE (stunned):

WHAT?!

THOMAS:

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

He smiles ruefully.

THOMAS:

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

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

THOMAS:

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

For a moment, SHAKESPEARE looks at him questioningly.

SHAKESPEARE:

Alright. I believe you.

THOMAS looks surprised.

THOMAS:

You do?

SHAKESPEARE (nodding):

Yes.

THOMAS smiles.

THOMAS:

Thank you.

As quickly as the smile appeared, it vanishes.

THOMAS:

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS (nodding):

Right. Of course.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS smiles at him, his eyes full of gratitude.

THOMAS:

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

SHAKESPEARE looks surprised, then smiles back at him.

6. INT. SHAKESPEARE'S STUDY. DAY.

SHAKESPEARE is standing by the window, idly looking out, when there is a gentle knocking at the door.

SHAKESPEARE:

Come in.

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

MR COLLINS:

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

SHAKESPEARE nods, approvingly.

MR COLLINS:

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

SHAKESPEARE looks puzzled.

7. INT. COURTROOM. DAY.

THE SHAKESPEARES - WILL, JUDITH, ANNE and JOHN (but obviously not little Elizabeth and her mother, Susanna) - sit next to MR and MRS QUINEY in the public gallery at the back of the court.

They are all looking at THOMAS and MR COLLINS, who are sitting together at a desk near the front of the courtroom.

At the side of the court are A MIDDLE-AGED, SHABBY-LOOKING COUPLE: from their vacant, bloodshot, almost dead eyes, it is obvious they are THE WHEELERS, the parents of the dead girl, Margaret.

SHAKESPEARE stares at them.

THREE "JUDGES" (in reality, PRIESTS) enter, led by an OFFICIAL.

COURT OFFICIAL:

All rise for the court's verdict.

EVERYONE stands as *THE PRIESTS* sit down at a raised platform.

THE OLDEST (AND THEREFORE MOST SENIOR) PRIEST addresses *THOMAS*.

SENIOR PRIEST:

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

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

SENIOR PRIEST (continuing):

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

THOMAS bows his head.

SENIOR PRIEST:

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

EVERYONE, including THOMAS, looks round at SHAKESPEARE.

FIRST PRIEST:

For that reason, I have *commuted* your sentence to a *fine* of five shillings.

THOMAS, THE SHAKESPEARES and THE QUINEYS (everyone at the back except SHAKESPEARE) look amazed, while THE WHEELERS look appalled.

THOMAS:

A fine, your grace?

FIRST 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*.

FIRST PRIEST:

Good. Then the court is dismissed.

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

THOMAS (calling out after them):

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

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

Even as JUDITH hugs him, THOMAS continues to look amazed.

THOMAS:

I can't believe I only have to pay a fine - and such a *small* one!

He looks at SHAKESPEARE.

THOMAS:

This was *your* doing, wasn't it?

SHAKESPEARE shrugs.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

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

THOMAS:

Thank you.

SHAKESPEARE:

You're welcome.

THOMAS smiles at SHAKESPEARE but SHAKESPEARE does not smile.

THOMAS:

We must celebrate!

SHAKESPEARE:

"Celebrate"? "Celebrate" what?

THOMAS:

Why, my freedom!

SHAKESPEARE nods, belatedly understanding.

SHAKESPEARE:

Of course.

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

SHAKESPEARE (to THOMAS):

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

THOMAS (nodding):

Of course.

THOMAS looks round at MR COLLINS.

THOMAS:

And thank you too, Mr Collins.

JUDITH (to MR COLLINS):

Yes, thank you.

MR COLLINS:

You are *both* most welcome.

SHAKESPEARE comes forward until he is alongside THOMAS.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS looks surprised.

THOMAS:

What for?

SHAKESPEARE:

We need to discuss the future.

THOMAS nods.

THOMAS:

Of course. I'll come first thing.

THOMAS leads JUDITH and THE REST OF THE SHAKESPEARES and QUINEYS towards the back door.

THE WHEELERS, with MRS WHEELER now weeping uncontrollably, leave through a side door.

SHAKESPEARE watches them go out, then looks at MR COLLINS and shakes his head.

8. INT. SHAKESPEARE'S STUDY. DAY.

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Come in.

THOMAS enters, looking sickly: he is obviously hungover.

SHAKESPEARE:

Ah, Thomas. Thank you for coming.

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

SHAKESPEARE:

I trust you had an enjoyable evening.

THOMAS:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS:

Oh, yes?

SHAKESPEARE (nodding):

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

THOMAS looks surprised.

THOMAS:

I told you the truth.

SHAKESPEARE (shaking his head):

No, you didn't. Mr Collins found out that far from being a "whore", as you described her, Margaret Wheeler was, in fact, the 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 in possession of an *infinitely* larger dowry.

THOMAS looks as if he might be sick - literally.

THOMAS:

I can explain -

SHAKESPEARE (interrupting):

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

He smiles, ruefully.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS looks confused.

THOMAS:

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

SHAKESPEARE (nodding):

It *is* what you deserve, but I couldn't bear the thought of Judith watching her husband - her husband of less than a *month!* - being publicly humiliated!

THOMAS nods.

SHAKESPEARE:

Besides, I didn't want to watch *another* member of my family being paraded through the streets.

THOMAS (confused):

What?

SHAKESPEARE (abruptly):

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

THOMAS (fearfully):

What are you going to do?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS looks even more fearful.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS looks a little relieved.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS (looking appalled):

How?

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THOMAS looks horrified.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

He gets up and goes towards the door.

THOMAS watches him go out, then slumps back into his seat.

9. EXT. STREET. DAY.

SHAKESPEARE stands outside a house in Stratford high street: he waits for a moment, then starts hammering on the front door.

The door is answered by RICHARD QUINEY, who, like his son before him, looks hungover.

RICHARD QUINEY:

Will? What are you doing here?

SHAKESPEARE (ignoring his question):

You knew, didn't you?

RICHARD QUINEY (confused):

What?

SHAKESPEARE (angrily):

About Thomas's *relationship* with Margaret Wheeler.

RICHARD QUINEY looks as ashamed as his son had earlier.

RICHARD QUINEY:

I didn't "know" -

SHAKESPEARE (interrupting again):

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

RICHARD QUINEY (continuing):

- But I *suspected*.

SHAKESPEARE looks as if he might hit him.

RICHARD QUINEY:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

"Fond"?

SHAKESPEARE looks outraged, but RICHARD keeps going.

RICHARD QUINEY:

So, when they became engaged, I kept quiet.

He bows his head.

RICHARD QUINEY:

I didn't know that Margaret was pregnant.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

RICHARD bows his head completely and stares at the ground.

RICHARD QUINEY:

I did.

SHAKESPEARE smiles at him coolly - indeed, cruelly.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

RICHARD looks horrified, but SHAKESPEARE quickly walks away.

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JOHN HALL (nodding):

Yes. (Pause.) Thank you.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JOHN HALL (nodding):

Yes. Of course.

SHAKESPEARE stands up.

SHAKESPEARE:

Good. Now I just have to tell Judith herself.

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

ELIZABETH:

Where are you going, Grandfather?

She looks up at him, smiling angelically.

ELIZABETH:

Won't you stay and play?

SHAKESPEARE (shaking his head):

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

He goes, leaving ELIZABETH and her PARENTS looking perplexed.

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

SHAKESPEARE knocks on the door and it is opened instantly.

JUDITH is standing in the doorway, with reddened eyes: without saying a word, she turns around and goes back inside.

SHAKESPEARE follows her in and pulls the door shut behind him.

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Where is he?

JUDITH (without looking up):

He's gone to the alehouse.

SHAKESPEARE:

"The alehouse"?

JUDITH (nodding):

Yes. He said he wanted to "get drunk" and "forget" his problems.

She shakes her head in disgust.

JUDITH:

I wish I could forget *mine*.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JUDITH (nodding):

Yes. He told me *everything*.

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

JUDITH:

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JUDITH (shaking her head):

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

SHAKESPEARE looks at her in amazement.

SHAKESPEARE:

You did?

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

JUDITH:

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

SHAKESPEARE looks even more amazed.

SHAKESPEARE:

There were *others*?

JUDITH:

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

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

JUDITH:

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

Finally she slumps against him, weeping uncontrollably.

JUDITH:

Now I wish I had never married.

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

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

SHAKESPEARE comes in to find ANNE waiting for him.

He closes the front door behind him and leans back against it, looking exhausted - and old.

ANNE stares at him and he stares back at her.

SHAKESPEARE:

I assume you know what's happened.

ANNE (nodding):

Yes. Susanna came to see me after you had visited her and John.

She looks at him accusingly.

ANNE:

You should have told me first.

SHAKESPEARE looks surprised, then slowly nods his head.

SHAKESPEARE:

You're right. I should have.

ANNE:

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

SHAKESPEARE looks even more surprised.

SHAKESPEARE:

How was Susanna?

ANNE:

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

Suddenly SHAKESPEARE looks angry again.

SHAKESPEARE:

Damn him!

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

He stops leaning against the door and stands up straight.

SHAKESPEARE:

I hope he goes to *HELL!*

ANNE:

Hypocrite!

SHAKESPEARE looks at her in surprise.

SHAKESPEARE:

What?

ANNE (firmly):

You heard me - you're a hypocrite.

SHAKESPEARE continues to look surprised.

SHAKESPEARE:

What do you mean?

ANNE:

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

SHAKESPEARE looks confused.

ANNE:

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

Now SHAKESPEARE looks at her in disbelief.

SHAKESPEARE:

What on earth are you talking about?

ANNE:

You *know* what I'm talking about.

SHAKESPEARE:

I don't - truly!

ANNE looks at him contemptuously.

ANNE:

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

SHAKESPEARE shakes his head, wildly.

SHAKESPEARE:

That's not true.

ANNE (angrily):

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

She fixes him with a stare.

ANNE:

Whenever you returned from London - on the *few* occasions that you returned from London - you *never* came near me.

She laughs, ruefully.

ANNE:

I used to wonder, "How is it that Will - my *beloved* Will, who before he left Stratford could never keep away from me - now refuses to *touch* me?"

Once again, she looks at him accusingly.

ANNE:

Then I realised. He was touching somebody else - *anybody* else, but me.

SHAKESPEARE looks horrified.

ANNE:

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

She turns and walks quickly upstairs.

SHAKESPEARE remains standing there for a moment, then slumps back against the front door, as if for support.

Fade to:

BLACK.

A caption appears: "APRIL".

The sound of laughter - raucous, drunken laughter - is heard.

Fade up to:

14. INT. TAVERN. NIGHT.

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

MAN (VOICE OFF):

Will! Will!

SHAKESPEARE looks in the direction the voice had come from.

His POINT OF VIEW:

At a table beside a window, a jowly, moustachioed, middle-aged MAN is signalling to him to come over.

MAN:

Over here!

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Hello, Drayton.

THE MAN - MICHAEL DRAYTON - stands up and smiles, then shakes SHAKESPEARE's hand and indicates an empty chair beside him.

They both sit down.

DRAYTON:

I'm glad you could come.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

DRAYTON (nodding his head):

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

He smiles at SHAKESPEARE warmly.

DRAYTON:

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

SHAKESPEARE snorts dismissively.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

DRAYTON looks surprised.

DRAYTON:

Why do you say that?

SHAKESPEARE:

Because literature - *writing* - is the reason I'm in this "predicament".

DRAYTON:

I don't understand.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

THE WAITER brings over two large tankards of ale and sets them down carefully on the table.

SHAKESPEARE immediately picks one of them up.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

He looks appreciatively at his foaming tankard of ale.

SHAKESPEARE:

I just want to drink!

He duly begins to drink: in fact, he downs his ale in one.

He sighs loudly, as DRAYTON continues to stare at him.

Suddenly a MAN'S voice - a loud, booming voice - is heard.

MAN (VOICE OFF):

Drayton!

Both DRAYTON and SHAKESPEARE turn round and look in the direction the voice had come from.

Their POINT OF VIEW:

On the other side of the tavern, by the doorway, is a large, barrel-chested MAN WITH RED HAIR.

He is looking at them and smiling, his hand raised in greeting.

In complete contrast, SHAKESPEARE looks horrified to see him.

SHAKESPEARE:

Jonson?

He turns round and looks at DRAYTON accusingly.

SHAKESPEARE:

What's *he* doing here?

DRAYTON (with a shrug):

I invited him too.

SHAKESPEARE:

All the way from London?

DRAYTON (with another shrug):

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

SHAKESPEARE does not look convinced by this argument.

Before he can say anything, however, JONSON has joined them.

He greets DRAYTON warmly, shaking his hand.

JONSON:

Michael! It's a pleasure to see you.

DRAYTON:

Hello, Ben. Welcome to Warwickshire!

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

JONSON (smiling):

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

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JONSON looks bewildered.

JONSON:

"Gloat"? About what?

SHAKESPEARE (shaking his head):

My "misfortune".

He continues to look up at JONSON accusingly.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

Finally JONSON realises what SHAKESPEARE means.

JONSON:

Oh, *that!*

Quickly, he shakes his head.

JONSON:

I wouldn't gloat about *that*.

SHAKESPEARE (bitterly):

Why not? Everyone else is.

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

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JONSON stares down at him, intently, and shakes his head.

JONSON:

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

Suddenly he looks at SHAKESPEARE affectionately.

JONSON:

We may be "rivals" on stage, but we are *friends* off it. And as your friend, I feel only sorrow and pity for you at this difficult time.

SHAKESPEARE looks surprised, even touched, by this declaration.

Then he laughs and tries to dismiss it.

SHAKESPEARE:

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

JONSON and DRAYTON both laugh, and JONSON signals to the waiter to bring three more tankards of ale.

SHAKESPEARE looks up at JONSON for a moment, then looks away at the wheat-field outside, which is gently billowing in the wind.

15. INT. TAVERN. NIGHT.

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

DRAYTON (to SHAKESPEARE):

Where's your horse?

SHAKESPEARE (slurring his words):

I didn't bring a horsh.

DRAYTON looks at him in astonishment.

DRAYTON:

But it's five miles back to Stratford!

SHAKESPEARE:

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

He takes a step forward, but is so drunk he nearly falls over.

DRAYTON helps him to stand upright.

DRAYTON:

Stay with me tonight and walk home in the morning.

JONSON:

Yes. Stay with us, Will.

He beams at SHAKESPEARE.

JONSON:

We can continue *drinking* at Drayton's house.

SHAKESPEARE shakes his head.

SHAKESPEARE:

No. I've had enough for one night.

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Besides, it's a bright, starlit night.

He smiles.

SHAKESPEARE:

I shall enjoy a little *stroll!*

And with that, he begins walking away from the tavern.

JONSON and DRAYTON watch him go, then call out.

JONSON:

Goodnight, Will.

DRAYTON:

Take care.

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

SHAKESPEARE:

Goodnight, good fellows.

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

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

There is a loud knocking at the front door.

SUSANNA hurries down the stairs, looking anxious.

She goes to the door, opens it and her husband, JOHN HALL, is standing there, holding his small leather doctor's bag.

SUSANNA:

Oh, John. Thank God you've come.

DOCTOR HALL:

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

SUSANNA:

It's my father. He's sick.

DOCTOR HALL:

"Sick"?

SUSANNA (nodding, furiously):

Yes. Apparently, he went out drinking last night -

DOCTOR HALL (interrupting):

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

SUSANNA (shaking her head, furiously):

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

DOCTOR HALL stares at her.

DOCTOR HALL:

A fever?

SUSANNA (nodding):

Yes.

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

SUSANNA:

Oh, John, you have to help him.

DOCTOR HALL (firmly):

I will do all I can.

He starts going upstairs and SUSANNA follows behind him.

17. INT. SHAKESPEARE'S BEDROOM. DAY.

SHAKESPEARE is in bed, shivering, with his eyes closed; his face is covered with sweat; and his skin is red and blotchy.

Beside him, ANNE is squeezing out a sweat-soaked cloth into a bowl, before applying it again to his forehead.

SUSANNA is standing to one side, barely able to watch, while DOCTOR HALL stares down at SHAKESPEARE from the end of the bed.

Suddenly the door opens and JUDITH comes in.

She stands at the end of the bed and looks down at SHAKESPEARE.

JUDITH:

Father!

She turns to DOCTOR HALL.

JUDITH:

He looks *awful!*

DOCTOR HALL (nodding):

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

JUDITH looks at him in horror.

JUDITH:

Really?

DOCTOR HALL (nodding):

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

JUDITH looks even more horrified.

Suddenly SHAKESPEARE opens his eyes slightly.

SHAKESPEARE (feebly):

I'm so hot.

ANNE (nodding):

I know.

SHAKESPEARE (equally feebly):

Am I in hell?

ANNE (shaking her head vigorously):

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

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

SHAKESPEARE (quietly):

I am not.

He closes his eyes again and ANNE immediately resumes her slow, careful, methodical mopping of his brow.

JUDITH and SUSANNA both start to cry, as DOCTOR HALL looks on helplessly.

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

HEMINGS, CONDELL, and DR HALL, all of them in black, lead THE THREE OTHER PALLBEARERS as they carry the coffin out of the house.

They are followed by ANNE, SUSANNA, ELIZABETH and JUDITH, who are also all in black.

DRAYTON and JONSON follow SHAKESPEARE'S FAMILY, looking embarrassed to be there - even, perhaps, a little guilty.

THE PALLBEARERS stop for a moment to adjust the weight of the coffin between them.

Then they walk on towards the church, the steeple of which is just visible in the distance.

19. INT. CHURCH. DAY.

THE PALLBEARERS set the coffin down in front of the altar.

As the PRIEST comes forward towards the coffin, they all take a step back, and then take their places in the pews.

HEMINGS and CONDELL watch the PRIEST stand over the coffin.

HEMINGS (quietly):

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

CONDELL (equally quietly):

That's appropriate.

HEMINGS looks confused.

HEMINGS (quietly):

How so?

CONDELL (equally quietly):

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

HEMINGS smiles.

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

HEMINGS, CONDELL, DRAYTON, JONSON and THE OTHER MOURNERS sit at the table: food has been laid out, but nobody is eating.

There is total silence, until HEMINGS whispers to CONDELL.

HEMINGS (quietly):

I still can't believe it.

CONDELL (equally quietly):

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

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

HEMINGS (quietly):

It's not right.

CONDELL (equally quietly):

What isn't?

HEMINGS (quietly):

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

CONDELL (equally quietly):

I know. 'Tis not a fitting end.

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

Fade to:

BLACK.

A caption appears: "**MAY**".

There is the sound of a piece of paper being unfurled.

Fade up to:

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

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

CONDELL (reading):

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

He finishes reading and puts the letter down on the desk.

HEMINGS stares at him, then at the letter.

HEMINGS:

"Mourning rings"?

CONDELL nods.

HEMINGS:

That's how he wants us to remember him?

CONDELL shrugs.

CONDELL:

Apparently.

HEMINGS shakes his head in disbelief.

There is a pause, then a caption appears: "LATER THAT YEAR".

Fade up to:

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

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

HEMINGS:

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

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

HEMINGS:

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

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

HEMINGS:

It doesn't even fit! Last week, when I tried to hail a fellow in the street -

He quickly raises his left hand to indicate "hailing a fellow".

HEMINGS:

It nearly flew off!

Finally CONDELL looks up at him.

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL *holds up a piece of paper to show HEMINGS.*

CONDELL:

Here is a list of the props we need.

Then he pushes a few coins towards him.

CONDELL:

And here is the money to buy them.

Then he looks up at HEMINGS angrily.

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

23. EXT. STREET. DAY.

HEMINGS walks along a typically crowded London street, carrying a leather bag out of which several peacock feathers are poking.

Suddenly he stops walking and stares straight ahead.

His POINT OF VIEW:

Directly ahead of him is St Paul's Cathedral, in front of which there are about A DOZEN BOOKSELLERS, but rather than manning book shops they are manning book stalls.

HEMINGS goes towards them and glances at their contents, which range from flimsy paper pamphlets to leather-bound Bibles.

Suddenly he stops walking.

His POINT OF VIEW:

Directly ahead of him is a stall that apparently has only one book for sale: laid out on top are a dozen copies of the same large, leather-bound book.

The book is entitled, "THE WORKES OF BENJAMIN JONSON".

HEMINGS stares at the stall (and the books) in disbelief.

He continues to stare for a moment, before finally approaching the stall.

THE BOOKSELLER smiles at him from behind the stall.

BOOKSELLER:

Good day, Sir. How can I help you?

HEMINGS:

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

BOOKSELLER (beaming):

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

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

BOOKSELLER (proudly):

It's only just been published.

HEMINGS:

Really?

BOOKSELLER (nodding):

Oh, yes. And as it says on the *magnificent* frontispiece -

He indicates the leather cover, which has been decorated, or more precisely carved, with pictures of classical statues.

BOOKSELLER:

It contains *all* his plays, from "The Alchemist" to "Volpone".

HEMINGS gently touches the front cover, almost caressing it.

BOOKSELLER:

It is a remarkable book - historic even!

HEMINGS looks up at him in surprise.

HEMINGS:

Really? How so?

BOOKSELLER (beaming):

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

He leans forward and whispers to HEMINGS conspiratorially.

BOOKSELLER:

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

HEMINGS (feigning ignorance):

Is that so?

BOOKSELLER (nodding):

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

HEMINGS:

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

BOOKSELLER:

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

He laughs.

BOOKSELLER:

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

HEMINGS shakes his head.

HEMINGS:

I imagine such copies must have been of poor quality.

BOOKSELLER:

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

He laughs, but HEMINGS just continues to smile thinly.

BOOKSELLER:

That's why Mister Jonson was so anxious to publish his own plays himself - to preserve them for posterity, in *all* their glory.

He indicates the book again.

BOOKSELLER:

I think you'll agree that he's done a *fine* job.

HEMINGS (nodding):

He has.

BOOKSELLER:

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

HEMINGS looks at him in amazement.

HEMINGS:

"Pre-eminent"?

BOOKSELLER (nodding):

Indeed.

HEMINGS:

But what about Shakespeare?

BOOKSELLER:

Who?

HEMINGS looks even more amazed.

HEMINGS:

William Shakespeare.

BOOKSELLER:

Oh! *Him!*

THE BOOKSELLER laughs.

BOOKSELLER:

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

HEMINGS looks as if he might explode, but manages to restrain himself.

HEMINGS:

Do you have any of his plays?

BOOKSELLER:

Who? *Shakespeare?*

HEMINGS (nodding, patiently):

Yes.

The BOOKSELLER considers this question for a moment.

BOOKSELLER:

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

HEMINGS (smiling thinly):

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

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

BOOKSELLER (calling out):

Aha! I knew I had something.

HEMINGS:

What is it?

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

BOOKSELLER:

THIS!

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

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

CONDELL is still counting money and making a note of it in his ledger when the door opens, quietly.

There is a pause, the faint sound of footsteps, then a book - a large, heavy book - is dropped onto his desk, knocking over all of his carefully constructed piles of coins.

CONDELL looks up angrily at HEMINGS, who is standing directly in front of him with his hands behind his back.

CONDELL:

What are you doing?

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

CONDELL (reading):

"The Workes of Benjamin Jonson."

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

HEMINGS:

Big, isn't it?

CONDELL (nodding):

Enormous!

HEMINGS:

It has to be, to accommodate all of Jonson's plays - and his massive sense of self-worth!

CONDELL laughs, then looks admiringly at the book again.

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL looks up at HEMINGS in surprise.

CONDELL:

What?

HEMINGS:

That's how he's being described.

CONDELL:

But Will was an *infinitely* better writer.

HEMINGS (nodding):

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

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

HEMINGS:

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

He takes out from his pocket a slim, grubby play-script.

*He lets it fall on to CONDELL's desk: unlike Jonson's "*Workes*", it lands gently, indeed, it almost floats down.*

CONDELL looks at it.

His POINT OF VIEW:

The front page - which is torn - reads, "The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, by William Shakespeare".

HEMINGS:

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

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

HEMINGS:

Read it.

CONDELL:

What?

HEMINGS:

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

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

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL winces and HEMINGS flicks ahead to another page.

HEMINGS:

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

Once again, CONDELL winces and HEMINGS flicks ahead.

HEMINGS:

And best - or rather, worst - of all:

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

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

HEMINGS:

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

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

HEMINGS (looking distraught):

I can't bear it. After all we went through together -
building The Globe, *rebuilding* it after it burned down,
surviving the plot against the Queen - *this* -

He points - accusingly - at the "script" of "Hamlet".

HEMINGS:

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

Suddenly he stares at CONDELL.

HEMINGS:

We have to print the plays ourselves.

CONDELL looks up at him in amazement.

CONDELL:

WHAT?!

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL:

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

HEMINGS looks horrified.

HEMINGS:

What? *(Pause.)* Why not?

CONDELL:

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

HEMINGS looks even more horrified.

CONDELL:

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

HEMINGS:

So?

CONDELL:

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

HEMINGS:

"Illegible"?

CONDELL (nodding):

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

HEMINGS looks even more distressed.

CONDELL:

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

HEMINGS looks at him, pleadingly.

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL *looks appalled.*

CONDELL:

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

HEMINGS (smiling):

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

CONDELL *looks at him sceptically.*

CONDELL:

Whose immortality? His, or ours?

HEMINGS *looks upset, even offended.*

HEMINGS:

Why, his of course!

CONDELL *doesn't look convinced.*

He looks around.

His POINT OF VIEW:

The tiny, cramped office is, as ever, stuffed full of props and costumes, but now we see (for the first time) that it is also full of scripts.

The scripts are scattered around the room: some are stacked on bookshelves; some have been shoved unceremoniously into drawers; and others are just piled up on the floor.

CONDELL sighs heavily.

CONDELL:

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

HEMINGS looks at him in disbelief.

HEMINGS:

"Half"?

CONDELL:

That's still about twenty or so.

HEMINGS shakes his head angrily.

HEMINGS:

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

Suddenly he stops shaking his head.

HEMINGS:

We have to show the *whole* man, to show what *one* man is capable of.

He stares at CONDELL.

HEMINGS:

We *have* to do it.

CONDELL:

Do what?

HEMINGS (smiling):

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

Once again, CONDELL stares at him in amazement.

CONDELL:

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

HEMINGS:

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

CONDELL looks even more amazed.

CONDELL:

And where exactly do you propose looking for them?

HEMINGS (triumphantly):

EVERYWHERE!

25. INT. ROOM. DAY.

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

She steps aside to let HEMINGS and CONDELL look inside.

HEMINGS (VOICE OFF):

"Everywhere he ever lived..."

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

26. EXT. STREET. DAY.

HEMINGS and CONDELL stand outside a derelict theatre.

HEMINGS (VOICE OFF):

"Everywhere he ever worked..."

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

27. INT. TAVERN. DAY.

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

HEMINGS (VOICE OFF):

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

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

HEMINGS (VOICE OFF):

"And laid his *head...*"

Their POINT OF VIEW:

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

HEMINGS (VOICE OFF):

"Or any *other* part of his anatomy."

Slowly, almost nervously, HEMINGS and CONDELL start walking upstairs.

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

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

HEMINGS (VOICE OFF):

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

CONDELL (VOICE OFF, and sounding alarmed):

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

HEMINGS and CONDELL reach the front of the stage and look out.

Their POINT OF VIEW:

The Groundlings' area in front of the stage is full not of Groundlings but ACTORS - about a hundred of them in total.

HEMINGS (VOICE OFF):

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

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

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

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

HEMINGS (VOICE OFF):

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

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

30. INT. BEDROOM. DAY.

HEMINGS and CONDELL are sitting beside a bed.

HEMINGS (VOICE OFF):

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

HEMINGS and CONDELL's POINT OF VIEW:

Lying back in the bed, and looking very sickly (it may well be his deathbed), is BURBAGE.

There is a script in front of him and BURBAGE (obviously with great effort) stretches out a hand to touch it: as he does so, his mourning ring - which is identical to those of HEMINGS and CONDELL - is clearly visible.

BURBAGE points to a line in the script and slowly shakes his head, so CONDELL stands up, leans forward and, with a quill, scratches it out.

HEMINGS (VOICE OFF):

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

CONDELL (laughing):

"Typical actor!"

31. INT. SHOP. DAY.

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

HEMINGS (VOICE OFF):

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

HEMINGS and CONDELL both finish reading and look up.

Their POINT OF VIEW:

Standing next to them, studying them (and their reaction to what they have read), is BEN JONSON.

HEMINGS (smiling):

It's wonderful, Ben.

CONDELL (nodding):

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

JONSON smiles ruefully.

BEN JONSON:

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

HEMINGS and CONDELL laugh, but JONSON suddenly stops smiling.

BEN JONSON:

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

HEMINGS and CONDELL look confused.

HEMINGS:

What do you mean?

BEN JONSON:

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

HEMINGS (dismissively):

It wasn't *that* difficult.

CONDELL:

Not once we got started.

JONSON stares at them in disbelief.

JONSON:

Gentlemen, you amaze me.

Again, HEMINGS and CONDELL both look surprised.

HEMINGS:

How so?

JONSON:

You make *light* of what you've done, but the truth is that most men wouldn't spend so much *time, money* and *effort* publishing their own plays, let alone *someone else's*.

He scowls.

JONSON:

I can't imagine that anyone would do it for *me!*

He stops scowling and looks at them questioningly.

JONSON:

So why did you do it for Will?

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

HEMINGS:

He did so much for us.

CONDELL:

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

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

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

MAN:

The title-page is ready. Shall I proceed?

HEMINGS AND CONDELL (together):

Please.

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

THE MAN IN THE INK-STAINED APRON, who is obviously a PRINTER, takes hold of the handle of a printing press with both hands.

He presses the handle down, holding it in place for a moment before slowly releasing it.

Very carefully (so as not to smudge the ink), he picks up the page he has printed and shows it to HEMINGS and CONDELL.

Their POINT OF VIEW:

It is the title page of the First Folio, the first collection of Shakespeare's plays.

It is dominated by the famous portrait of Shakespeare that shows his bald head, thinning beard and piercing eyes, which seem to stare out from the page.

Above it are the words: "Mr William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories and Tragedies, Published according to the true original copies."

Below it are the words: "London. Printed by Isaac Jaggard and Edward Blount, 1623."

HEMINGS and CONDELL both smile broadly.

Fade to:

BLACK.

The screen remains black for a moment, then a caption appears: "IT TOOK HEMINGS AND CONDELL SEVEN YEARS TO PRODUCE THE FIRST FOLIO - THE FIRST COMPLETE (OR NEARLY COMPLETE) COLLECTION OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS."

This caption fades and another appears: "WITHOUT THE FIRST FOLIO, HALF OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS, INCLUDING CLASSICS SUCH AS "MACBETH", "THE TEMPEST" AND "ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA", WOULD NOT HAVE SURVIVED AT ALL AND THE OTHER HALF WOULD HAVE BEEN AT BEST INCOMPLETE, AT WORST INCOMPREHENSIBLE."

This caption fades and another appears: "WITHOUT HEMINGS AND CONDELL, THE MAN WE KNOW AS "SHAKESPEARE" - THE GREATEST WRITER EVER - WOULD NOT EXIST."

This caption fades and another appears: "IN THEIR PREFACE TO THE FIRST FOLIO, HEMINGS AND CONDELL WROTE THAT THEY HAD ONLY PUBLISHED SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS BECAUSE HE HAD DIED BEFORE HE COULD PUBLISH THEM HIMSELF."

This caption fades and the final caption appears: "THEY ALSO WROTE: "WE HAVE BUT COLLECTED THE PLAYS AND DONE OUR OFFICES TO THE DEAD WITHOUT AMBITION EITHER OF SELF PROFIT OR FAME, ONLY TO KEEP THE MEMORY OF SO WORTHY A FRIEND AND FELLOW ALIVE AS WAS OUR SHAKESPEARE.""

The final caption slowly fades out to:

BLACK.