

WILLM  
SHAKSPER

By  
David Jacklin

*Final May 12, 2018*

*Based on the play "Shakespeare"*

By  
H. F. Rubinstein And Clifford Bax  
*First publication 1921*

*The original of this play is in the public domain.*

*"ALL we know with any degree of certainty concerning Shakespeare is that he was born at Stratford-upon-Avon, married and had children there; went to London, where he commenced as actor, and wrote poems and plays; returned to Stratford, made his will, died, and was buried." George Steevens, 1788*

*"MASTER Shakespeare, your pardon! For all that before this hour I had never set eyes on you, I dare to say that I know you more than well." A Poet (Episode V)*

This adaptation © 2018

David Jacklin

394 Keays Road, R.R. 1

Balderson, Ontario

K0G 1A0

(613) 267-1884

barndoorproductionstheatre@gmail.com

www.barndoorproductions.ca

PERUSAL COPY ONLY

PLEASE CONTACT THE  
AUTHOR FOR RIGHTS

## THE CHARACTERS IN THE DRAMA

PHILIP HENSLOWE, pawnbroker and theatrical adventurer. Aged 42.

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE, the playwright, aged 28.

A POOR MAN.

JOAN HENSLOWE, daughter of Philip Henslowe. A vivacious young woman. (Birth unknown)

EDWARD ALLEYNE, the actor, aged 26.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, actor and playwright, aged 27, 32, 38, 43, 51.

THE DARK LADY of the sonnets, (ROSALINE), a maid-of-honour to Queen Elizabeth I. (20s.)

W. H. (PROTEUS), possibly Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton. Late 20s.

WILL KEMP, clown and singer. 40s.

STAGE-KEEPER, the “door-man” of the Globe Playhouse. 60s or later.

RICHARD BURBAGE, the actor. Aged 33, 37 and 41.

RICHARD ROBINSON, the Queen in "Hamlet." A young actor – 15 or so.

MADAME MONTJOY, an Huguenot refugee, middle-aged.

BEN JONSON, the poet, aged 35.

JUDITH, Shakespeare’s daughter, aged 24 and 31.

THOMAS QUINEY, son of a neighbour of Shakespeare and husband to Judith, aged 27.

FRANCIS COLLINS, a solicitor from Warwick, mid-40s.

ANNE SHAKESPEARE, Will’s wife, aged 59.

A POET – possibly Thomas Middleton (generally accepted as the author of The Puritan). 20.

### POSSIBLE DOUBLING OF CHARACTERS

EPISODE 1	EPISODE 2	EPISODE 3	EPISODE 4	EPISODE 5
HENSLOWE	-----	STAGEKEEPER	OLDER WILL	OLDER WILL
MARLOWE	KEMP	KEMP	JONSON	QUINEY
A POOR MAN	BURBAGE	BURBAGE	BURBAGE	-----
JOAN	-----	ROBINSON	MONTJOY	ANNE
ALLEYNE	W. H.	W. H.	-----	COLLINS
YOUNG WILL	YOUNG WILL	YOUNG WILL	-----	POET
DARK LADY	DARK LADY	DARK LADY	JUDITH	JUDITH

NOTE: This play can be performed by 5 men and 2 women.

The episodes take place in London, 1592, 1596, 1602, 1608 and Stratford, 1616

1592 – theatres close due to plague; S. works on Venus And Adonis; may be working on LLL

1596 - S at the Theatre; LLL performed; KJ, DickII, R&J, MND written; loss of Blackfriars

1602 - At Globe; Hamlet on stage; MWW, MoV, Hank4i

1608 - ToA, Per, Coriol; return to Blackfriars

1616 - no writing; dies April 23

PERUSAL COPY ONLY

PLEASE CONTACT THE  
AUTHOR FOR RIGHTS

**ACT ONE**  
**EPISODE I**

TIME : September, 1592.

SCENE : Philip HENSLOWE'S business room at the Little Rose Estate, Southwark, in the Clink. Second-hand clothes hang here and there. Right, a door leading to the house.

*(In front of this door, a counter, behind which stands Philip HENSLOWE. Before him, Christopher MARLOWE. They are bargaining over a manuscript. Back left, a door into the street. Sounds of hammering are heard without.)*

MARLOWE: Master Henslowe! You jest! Of all the wares in the world, there is none so poorly appraised as a poet's inventions, but even we poets must have silver for wine! And for wenches – not silver, but gold!

*(A POOR MAN enters, carrying a bundle.)*

HENSLOWE: Then you'd best foreswear the wenches.

MARLOWE: When they foreswear me!

HENSLOWE: *(To the POOR MAN.)* What do you bring me, Tom? More of your trash?

POOR MAN: You shall see, Master Henslowe. *(Unpacking his parcel.)*

MARLOWE: Give me but ten crowns and the play is yours.

HENSLOWE: I can do well enough without it. You shall have eight.

MARLOWE: Eight crowns! That's not a penny a page, Barabbas!

HENSLOWE: You see, your *Jew of Malta* was a fine play – this, bah!

POOR MAN: Master Greene's come to a bad end, I hear.

MARLOWE: Greene? Robert Greene? Aye.

HENSLOWE: Yet there was a sweet breast, a man of true wit.

MARLOWE: Aye, now that he'll never come to sell you his "groat's worth of wit" for a beggar's fee. A sad ruin you made of him. Can we sing if we starve?

HENSLOWE: Kit Marlowe, you hear those hammers? That's my new playhouse

a-building, and every hammer costs me a penny. If I were to pay you scribblers to match your vanity, there'd be plays to spare – but no playhouses. A playhouse will outlast you any play you pen.

POOR MAN: Folk say he railed mightily against all his old companions at the end.

MARLOWE: Greene? Starved into piety and repentance! Bah! When the snuffer claps down on me, there shall be no mumbling of prayers.

POOR MAN: They do say that one in this room is a most notorious atheist.

MARLOWE: Let them say what they say! Ten crowns, for the love of learning!

HENSLOWE: Eight crowns, and see you deliver me the fifth act before the week turns. Your signature – come, you agree. (*Produces his day-book.*)

POOR MAN: I wonder at the company you may keep, Master Henslowe.

HENSLOWE: I care little for opinions if they be kept out of plays. *Doctor Faustus*, now, smacked too much of opinions, in my opinions.

MARLOWE: The devil take you! A pen, a pen! (*He signs his name in the book.*)

HENSLOWE: I've a mind not to pay ... (*MARLOWE snatches the book.*) ... until I see the fifth act. I know you, Kit Marlowe. So long as there be shillings in your purse and wench or boy to smile at you, you'll never pen a line.

MARLOWE: Give me the money. By my heart, you shall have the fifth act on Friday.

HENSLOWE: Keep clear of temptations, then. Eight crowns ... (*MARLOWE gathers them up and heads toward the door.*) God speed you, Kit!

MARLOWE: God me no gods. (*He exits.*)

POOR MAN: A'll come to a bad end, but I like his plays. You've bought another?

HENSLOWE: (*Chuckling.*) A rare piece, I'll promise you. (*Reading the title.*) *The Troublesome Raigne and Lamentable Death of King Edward the Second*. Twenty pound, at least, at a penny a bum.

POOR MAN: Ah! (*Displaying his goods.*) What say you to these?

HENSLOWE: These? Trash. Eight crowns.

POOR MAN: Do poor Tom some charity. You paid Marlowe eight for his scribblings.

HENSLOWE: Say nine, then.

POOR MAN: Say ten.

HENSLOWE: Ten crowns is a great sum.

POOR MAN: Not to a gentleman a-building a new playhouse.

HENSLOWE: At what cost? *(Throwing the goods under the counter.)* Here, Tom, here are your ten; but I give 'em rather for your good than for your goods.

POOR MAN: Thank ye, Master Henslowe. Well, keep thy foot out of brothels, thy hand out of plackets, thy pen from lenders' books, and defy the foul fiend.

HENSLOWE: Ha! Poor Tom, you're mad! You and my players will break me. I keep 'em in debt to me – if once they get out of debt, there'll be no holding them.

POOR MAN: Yours is the first company in England! Such spirits! – Ned Alleynes, now.

HENSLOWE: Ay, Ned's well enough.

POOR MAN: He has set his cap at your daughter.

HENSLOWE: Mayhap.

POOR MAN: And there's another hath caught the sweet contagion.

HENSLOWE: Who?

POOR MAN: Why, your jack-of-all-trades, your horse-holder, your poet-player-prompter – young Will Shakespeare.

*(JOAN Henslowe has entered from the back.)*

JOAN: Father, has that same Will Shakespeare come? *(The two men exchange a glance.)* Margaret bade me ask you. Will promised her a new ditty.

POOR MAN: Well, what did I say, Master Henslowe? God by ye, Mistress Joan! *(Exiting.)* Still through the hawthorn blows the cold wind. Tom's a-cold.

HENSLOWE: So Will Shakespeare is bringing a song. I'll ne'er have my daughter trifle with that ardent Arden. Back to the kitchen.

JOAN: But, father ...

HENSLOWE: Out you go!

JOAN: But ... but if the dark lady should return and no one be here ...

HENSLOWE: The dark lady can bide till I come.

JOAN: Margaret thinks that she must be some fine lady from the Court, for there be many that can think on nothing but plays and players ...

HENSLOWE: And not they only. No more of your ditties, your moonshine, your Will-o'-the-wisp. Out you go!

*(He pushes her through the door, right. Exeunt. For a moment the stage is empty, then Edward ALLEYNE enters. WILL Shakespeare enters, unseen by ALLEYNE who coughs to obtain attention. WILL coughs, imitating ALLEYNE.)*

ALLEYNE: *(Starts, turns and confronts him.)* How now, Will? What seek you here?

WILL: Oh, cowslips and gillie flowers. What else?

ALLEYNE: Marry, then get you gone. I seek a more precious commodity.

WILL: Ah! Lady-smocks.

ALLEYNE: No ribaldry with me! Do you understand? Must I speak in capitals?

WILL: A nod's a poor hint to a blind horse, Ned.

ALLEYNE: A blind ass!

WILL: Nay, Neddy, the ass was ne'er called 'Will.'

ALLEYNE: Out upon you! I seek Master Henslowe.

WILL: And I, Mistress Henslowe.

ALLEYNE: Faith, is it so? You were better employed if you conned your part for today's performance. 'Steeth, did you even read it ere rehearsal?

WILL: I never did.



ALLEYNE: Why does Master Henslowe suffer your presence? Do you think that I won my reputation without hard study?

WILL: I never think of it, at all.

ALLEYNE: And when will you deign to learn your part?

WILL: Oh, while you're mouthing the prologue. I can do it readily when I wish.

ALLEYNE: Is there anything you cannot do readily when you wish?

WILL: Marry, I cannot conceive.

ALLEYNE: You preposterous jack! You quill-juggler! Oh, we know how you twist a phrase – that Tyger's heart wrapt in a player's hyde has made you so prideful you think yourself capable of anything.

WILL: *(Chuckling.)* Oh, you've seen departed Master Greene's calumny!

ALLEYNE: I have. The only Shake-scene in a country, are you? Unparalleled!

WILL: No, Alexander was of a like opinion of himself, and Caesar; and, until the barber bobbed his beard, Samson.

ALLEYNE: Then be warned, young Samson, and run from Delilah.

WILL: Delilah? What, Joan? But, Ned, she's a comely lass.

ALLEYNE: Look here, you upstart crow, I purpose marriage with the wench.

WILL: Marriage! Ah, that's a big word. Yet a maid will more delight in a juggling tongue than a strutting stride.

ALLEYNE: What! Would you toy with the lass for your pleasurance?

WILL: Would you marry the lass for your assurance – with her father? You boasted as much yourself.

ALLEYNE: I? Never!

WILL: Last night at the Mermaid! 'Lads,' quoth Ned Alleyne, 'I'll capture the playhouse, if I have to marry the wench withal.'

ALLEYNE: You insolent tenth-rate patcher, you ink-stained wordsmith ... !

*(ALLEYNE flies at WILL when JOAN enters, right.)*

JOAN: Master! Masters! What is amiss between you?

WILL: *(Bowing.)* Little enough, Mistress Henslowe. A petty war contrived by Cupid but, when Venus appears, a truce is drawn.

JOAN: Good morrow, Master Alleyne. What make you here?

ALLEYNE: Mistress Joan, my matter cannot be spoken in front of a – third person.

JOAN: Fie, Master Alleyne, privy matters with me?

WILL: This was my hour of appointment, was it not, Mistress? The new song for Margaret. *(Producing a manuscript.)*

JOAN: *(Taking it.)* I'll take it in to her – *(She looks at him flirtatiously.)* – but when, Master Shakespeare, will you make a song for me?

WILL: When shall I cease to make them? I swear the first is already made.

JOAN: Show it me, Will! Where is it?

WILL: In my mind. I've but lacked leisure to pen it.

ALLEYNE: Then let it remain in its sty! Mistress Joan ...

JOAN: Master Alleyne?

ALLEYNE: Must I unburden my heart before this gaping clown? Show him the door.

WILL: Aye, show me the door – of your affections.

JOAN: If neither will budge, I must even hear both. I cannot think, Master Alleyne, what errand could bring you to me. My father is in the new playhouse.

ALLEYNE: *(Clearing his throat and bracing himself.)* But first I would speak with you.

WILL: A little more fire, Ned, a little more fire! Dig down!

ALLEYNE: Many parts have I played. I have commanded the multitudes of Scythia, led the Grand Turk captive, browbeaten the Devil himself but now for the first time you see me beggared of words, overcome by a beauty to which the light of the sun is a feeble candle at noon.

WILL: Come, your famous crescendo, Ned! *(Crescendo-ing himself.)* There's no maid's heart can withstand it!

ALLEYNE: Some tokens have I brought you, Mistress Joan, but I pray you not to measure my devotion by my offerings ...

WILL: Your left arm higher – higher!

JOAN: Devotion to me, Master Alleyne? The world swims!

WILL: *(Pulls out a manuscript and pretends to prompt.)* Nevertheless ...

ALLEYNE: Nevertheless, I entreat you to accept these jewels not for the sake of their value, though that indeed is not small, but rather ... *(He stalls.)*

WILL: *(As before.)* But rather that you may give them a value beyond price. *(To JOAN.)* How the fellow forgets his part!

ALLEYNE: Enough!

JOAN: Prithee, proceed – dear Master Alleyne. The jewels are worthy of a prince.

ALLEYNE: Would that they were worthy of a goddess! A cruel goddess ...

JOAN: I, cruel?

ALLEYNE: To permit your slave to be tormented by a ridiculous grasshopper! I seek the words that might acquaint you with my condition. Have you not ta'en away my heart, and how then should I have heart to speak?

WILL: *(Applauding.)* Better! Much better!

ALLEYNE: There is little that I can say, but ... *(He runs out of words.)*

WILL: But you know me, Mistress Joan: Ned Alleyne, the prince of actors, who can pour out a passion to a clothespeg! I have little wit of my own, but there's not another in England who can display his leg to greater vantage.

ALLEYNE: He makes a fool of me and you, yet you stand smirking like a milkmaid. I will put my matter before a higher authority. I go to confer with your father.

*(Exit ALLEYNE, right.)*

WILL: Poor Ned! If he could but laugh at himself!

JOAN: Lord, Will! How you mocked him! He called you a grasshopper but 'gadfly' had been apter, so villainously you tormented the good man.

WILL: All's fair in love, they say. Or John Lyly said – but I said it better just now.

JOAN: What do you know of love?

WILL: So much as your eyes have taught me. Ah, Joan, what it is to have Midas eyes – that turn all they behold into love! Whose eyes are those?

JOAN: Ah, Will, what it is to have a Midas tongue that turns every word into gold. Whose tongue is that?

WILL: Ha! I account myself lucky if the words that I write for your father are turned into silver. He will readily set me to gild an old play to the new fashion but will not credit that, out of my own invention, I could devise him a play of far more worth!

JOAN: Plays, plays, plays! I hear nothing else from morn to e'en. Farewell.

WILL: Whither away, my sweeting? Why, Joan, mouse, thou should'st not frown!

JOAN: Speak to me of anything in the world – so it be not plays!

WILL: Nay, Joan, come. You must not look so sour.

JOAN: It is my fashion when I hear of plays! Speak or speak not, it is the same.

WILL: If I speak, Joan, then cannot I hear you speak, and that is to shut me out on the cold side of heaven; for I had rather listen to the cadence of your voice than sit upon Jove's throne and take nectar from the hands of Ganymede.

JOAN: (*Melting.*) Oh, Will, how prettily you talk! And, do you really love me?

WILL: (*Glibly.*) Some day, I will build you a towering song that shall soar up unto the stars and there you shall stand, your beauty the envy of all ages. When your father shall purchase my play – (*Her interest declines*) – I shall be like a galleon unmoored, to gather the wind of admiration and sail at last into the open sea of sunlight and universal fame. My play ...

JOAN: You said you wrote me a sonnet.

WILL: A play – a sonnet – both roses that flower from the mind! If I give you the rose of my fancy, then must you give me the rose of your mouth.

JOAN: If the sonnet be fair, the payment shall be in full.

WILL: *(In reciting the following, he refers here and there to his play manuscript.)*

Touch but my lips with those fair lips of thine, –  
Though mine be not so fair, yet are they red –  
The kiss shall be thine own as well as mine.  
What seest thou in the ground? hold up thy head:  
Look in mine eye-balls, there thy beauty lies;  
Then why not lips on lips, since eyes in eyes?  
Art thou ashamed to kiss? then wink again,  
And I will wink; so shall the day seem night;  
Love keeps his revels where they are but twain;  
Be bold to play, our sport is not in sight:  
These blue-vein'd violets whereon we lean  
Never can blab, nor know not what we mean.

JOAN: *(Melted.)* Oh, Will! I shall kiss thee! *(She puts her arms around his neck and kisses him fiercely.)* And when, when, when shall we marry?

WILL: Ah, that must be thought on at leisure. For the present, let's love!

*(They embrace and kiss as HENSLOWE enters, right.)*

HENSLOWE: Ods my life, what's here? Joan, into the house at once – at once, I say!

JOAN: But, father, the fine gentleman is going to wed me ...

HENSLOWE: He is, is he? You can't have two husbands, baggage! Into the house and leave this *fine gentleman* to me.

WILL: Aye, Joan, be dutiful. Carry the song to Margaret. We'll soon have all trim.

JOAN: I won't marry Ned Alleyne – never, never, never! *(Exit, right.)*

HENSLOWE: Well, sir? Well, sir? Do you fancy my daughter will be bandied about like a tennis ball between the rag-tag-and-bob-tail of my company? I'll make it a matter for the Justices of the Peace.

WILL: To my certain knowledge, they care more for the stealing of venison than for the stealing of a kiss.

HENSLOWE: Aye, I've nosed the stench of your family all the road from Warwickshire. You're an Arden.

WILL: On my mother's side.

HENSLOWE: And a damned Catholic traitor on her side as well.

WILL: That was my second cousin – by marriage – twice removed.

HENSLOWE: And your second cousin, once removed, hanged, drawn and quartered for it. I'll not have my head on a pike on London Bridge for consorting with traitors and Catholics and – *(he whispers)* those who'd threat the Queen!

WILL: God save the Queen.

HENSLOWE: God save us all.

WILL: You are a man, Master Henslowe, as all men allow, who can shrewdly prize merit before it is full-grown. Today, Ned Alleyne stands higher in reputation than I, but the future is mine, Master Henslowe, and, for the plucking of it, I lack nothing but a three-foot ladder. Aid me, cherish me, now, and, I warrant you, I'll bring you the golden apples of the Hesperides.

HENSLOWE: There's no scribbler but swears he's another Kit Marlowe.

WILL: I am scribbler enough to scribble anew the old, unregarded plays you unshelve – and gild your purse afresh with them! My Henrys, all three!

HENSLOWE: Old matter, fresh painted – and look at the trouble! You've offended the Oldcastles, the Cecils! Falstaff, indeed. You bring the stench of the Ardens down the Avon to Cheapside itself. And you still owe me another Henry.

WILL: What, Henry the Sixth, Part Four? Ridiculous.

HENSLOWE: Call it Richard The Third, then. History, that's what the punters want.

WILL: You shall have it! You shall have everything. Do first let me pen you a play that shall be wholly mine. You will see I do not boast –

HENSLOWE: Nay, sir, you have not the skill for it.

WILL: *(Producing his manuscript.)* But here in my hand ...

HENSLOWE: What, will you dangle your precious *Love's Labour's Won* before my eyes?

WILL: Lost!

WILL: Won? Lost? What difference? I have no coin to pour down a sieve!

WILL: But you have never read it!

HENSLOWE: Not a word – and *that* as much as I wish! A tale from the Bible or history: there's money in these; but no man will pay to see a play about young love penned by Will Shakespeare – from Stratford, of all places!

WILL: Master Henslowe, I will make you a proposition after your own heart.

*(Enter, left back, JOAN, timidly.)*

Set your hand, here and now, to a deed whereby you, Master Philip Henslowe, engage to present this play as it shall leave my hand ...

HENSLOWE: And on your side, prithee?

WILL: And on my side, I will content myself with the maid's beauty and will ask not a groat by way of dowry.

HENSLOWE: Do you think me a simpleton? My daughter's coney for an untried play? It's worth more than that! Once for all, I'll have none of your *Labour of Love*!

WILL: *Love's Labour's ... !*

HENSLOWE: It matters not! I'll none it!

WILL: Then, Master Henslowe, I'll none of the slut, your daughter!

JOAN: Will!

HENSLOWE: Ha, child, now you see to what manner of man you have lent your lips!

WILL: Mistress Joan, I entreat your pardon.

JOAN: I will never grant it! Slut, forsooth, I! What, am I to be taken in lieu of crowns? Is my chaste treasure merely the portal to my father's favour? Where now is your tumbling torrent of words? Serpent!

HENSLOWE: Aye, she keeps her sting in the tail of her tongue! Sting him, girl!

JOAN: Have you no sonnets for a maid but when she is deceived?

WILL: Joan, here I stand with a play the like of which the world has never seen,

and your father will not so much as peruse it. I've tried persuasion, I've tried stratagem – and even *that* has failed me. I might have known, the play being aptly entitled – (*Shouted at HENSLOWE.*) – *Love's Labour's LOST!*

HENSLOWE: Infamous! Monstrous! Ned! Ned Alleyne!

(*ALLEYNE enters, right.*)

JOAN: And you've cut your own fingers, Master Sharp-wit. Did you think that I was in earnest? What, wed a Warwickshire clod? Fie, fie! Faith, when I wed, I'll wed bravely. Ned Alleyne's a proper man.

(*ALLEYNE holds her and she rests her head on his chest.*)

WILL: (*Sincerely.*) In good sooth, he is, and I wish you both joy, heartily.

JOAN: Is it Margaret you'd marry? Is that why you made me your she-Mercury?

WILL: I shall marry Meg when the Turk has conquered England and every man may gather wives by the handful, but not before!

HENSLOWE: What? What?

WILL: For the exquisite reason that I am already married. These six years.

HENSLOWE: (*Amazed.*) From before that you settled in London?

WILL: Driven from Stratford, not by Catholic treasons, Master Henslowe, but by a surfeit of marital ... bliss.

JOAN: You monster!

ALLEYNE: Can you never be serious?

WILL: When I hear music. And when I am writing. To that I give my heart.

JOAN: You've no heart to give.

WILL: Who knows? Methinks, 'tis not for mortal woman to have.

JOAN: I pray heaven that you *shall* lose your heart to mortal woman – without mercy, without scruple, without kindness! So ravishing you shall count the sun black if she be not by you, yet cold as a statue. I pray that she may draw you through all the torments of hell till you remember with misery the days



when you looked upon the hearts of good maids as ninepins!

WILL: *(In awe.)* Faith, you curse roundly!

HENSLOWE: And now, sir, the door stands open. Practise your japes, your merriment – your Warwickshires elsewhere! *(As WILL is about to go.)* But, look you, your pages for *Sir Thomas More* – what scratches have you given me? I can read but a word in ten. Better penmanship or my money back. You hear?

*(From within, comes the sound of music upon the virginal. WILL pauses and then involuntarily returns.)*

WILL: 'Tis the new song. I must hear it.

*(He brushes past the astonished HENSLOWE and crosses to the door, right, where he stands listening.)*

HENSLOWE: Are you still here?

WILL: Shh!

A WOMAN'S VOICE: *(Within, singing.)* When daisies pied and violets blue,  
And ladysmocks all silver-white,  
And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue

*(Enter the DARK LADY. HENSLOWE comes to her and catches the mantle which she discards. She listens to the music. WILL sees her and is at once entranced..)*

Do paint the meadows with delight,  
The cuckoo then on every tree  
Mocks married men; for thus sings he,  
Cuckoo; Cuckoo, cuckoo:  
O word of fear,  
Unpleasing to the married ear!

WILL: *(Grips ALLEYNE'S arm.)* Alleyne, who is that world's wonder?

*(Lights down. Virginal music while the scene changes.)*

**END OF SCENE**

**ACT ONE**  
**EPISODE II**

TIME : An August day in 1596.

SCENE : Interior of SHAKESPEARE's lodging in St. Helen's, Bishopsgate. Back left, a latticed window. In front of this, an oak table littered with papers. Back right, a door. A bench, right.

*(WILL is discovered at his table, writing. After a few moments, he leans back in his chair and reads aloud.)*

WILL: For nought so vile that on the earth doth live,  
But to the earth some special good doth give;  
Nor aught so good, but, strain'd from that fair use,  
Revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse ...

*(He writes. A brief interval. Enter Will KEMP.)*

KEMP: What, Will! Gathering cobwebs on a summer's day? Up, lad, up! Sundays were never meant for toil. Foot it, lad! To the fields! ... 'Swounds, 'a's posted to 'lympus on a goose-quill, and I'd as meet holloa to the dead.

WILL: *(Not looking up.)* Prithee forbear, Kemp. Today, I rhyme.

KEMP: Oh! Then rhyme away but, look you, I am no more than the first drop of the summer shower. There be others below who are leagued for your undoing.

WILL: Is it so? Then bid them know I am proof against Will Kemp and the green fields of London and not to be cozened afield by any man.

KEMP: Nor any maid, neither?

WILL: Not by the Queen herself.

KEMP: Plain words were ne'er wasted on plain Will Kemp. Lord! what a tyrant, this passion for pen and paper! *(Exit, calling.)* 'A will not shift him!

WILL: *(Completes the passage.)* Now, these. How do these trip it?  
Within the infant rind of this small flower  
Poison hath residence, and medicine power:  
For this, being smelt, with that part cheers each part,  
Being tasted, slays all senses with the heart.  
*(Thinks.)* What more?  
Full soon the canker death eats up that plant ...

*(Enter THE DARK LADY. She pause and knocks.)*

WILL: *(Without looking.)* Be gone!

DARK LADY : Where the Queen herself might not enter, shall a maid-of-honour dare?

WILL: *(Jumping up.)* Bess!

DARK LADY: *(She steps in.)* I beseech you, give me sanctuary from the babble below.

WILL: You tarry so long with those in the tavern down there?

DARK LADY: I like not to be disdained.

WILL: When the moth disdains the candle!

DARK LADY: Ah, Will, it is quiet here. *(A little imperiously.)* Take my cloak. *(Sitting in the chair which he had vacated.)* They chatter of nothing but Essex's attack on Cadiz. I weary of deeds and sallies and the setting of ships on fire.

WILL: I know.

DARK LADY: *(Freezingly.)* Indeed?

WILL: Do I not know you? Or so much of you as a man may know of this new America. Why hear of brave actions? You would fain be a-doing them.

DARK LADY: *(With intensity.)* Oh, would that I were a man!

WILL: Then would the world have lost her chief glory.

DARK LADY: A truce to compliments, Master Shakespeare. There have been days – and there have been nights – when you had no need for these tongue-toys. What pleasure can a woman derive from hearing a man mumble 'I love you'? Is it not her right to be loved? I account it mine.

WILL: *(Arms around her.)* There is another way – the sweetest of all.

DARK LADY: *(Petulantly, pushing him away.)* Nay, Will, torment me not. I tire of kisses. *(Teasingly.)* Your Proteus is below.

WILL: *(Eagerly.)* He is below?

DARK LADY: Am I so notably ill-favoured that I may wander about the city without a

sword-arm? *(With feigned seriousness.)* Oh, that I had bright hair! You would not despise me. Then, perhaps, you would love me indeed.

WILL: Bess, bait me no longer. Would you have me tell you again that I find more splendour in the night than in the day?

DARK LADY: You are false, Will, false. I have heard you say that the goodwife of Stratford, your dearly-beloved, is flaxen.

WILL: An' she be, it is nothing to me.

DARK LADY: Nothing that my lover is bound to a wife? Tell me about the goodie. Is she taller than I? Is she wittier than I? Has she skill in the charming of men?

WILL: Her colour is fair; for the rest, then, I was a boy. Now, I am a man.

DARK LADY: What equivocation is here! You loved her, Will. Before you had her, you loved her – but a passion that's dead has the sickly smell of dead lilies and we say to ourselves 'That? That was not love!'

WILL: Shall I tell you what pushed me to holy wedlock?

DARK LADY: *(Lightly.)* Why, a surfeit of village life, of push-ha'p'ny at the ale-house, of listening to Goodman Parson's homilies, of dancing morrises on the green.

WILL: I danced no morrises on the green.

DARK LADY: Nay then, in all serious divination. *(Genuinely.)* You got her with child.

WILL: You are too wise to think I did lose my heart but to the merry clouds of spring above her and the green rye below her. She was twenty-six; I, eighteen! Dead lilies – fling them away!

DARK LADY: I wish I were the Queen to command you to attend me, always.

WILL: Is there need to command?

DARK LADY: *(Intentionally cruel.)* Now that you and Burbage have lost the Blackfriars –

WILL: I thank your mother's spite for that loss – and withal an hundred pounds!

DARK LADY: Methinks, a wound beyond bearing.

WILL: 'Tis not so deep as the ocean, but 'tis enough. *(He thinks a moment and*

*then goes to his papers and makes a scribbled note.)*

DARK LADY: Now you've lost the Blackfriars, you'll home to the flaxen goodie.

WILL: We hoped the Blackfriars to be such a theatre as the globe has never seen and your good mother hath ta'en that away. She would take away my head, as well, if she could persuade the Queen, so much doth she hate a Catholic. But this globe London holds too much to pack away to Stratford.

DARK LADY: And the lease on the Theatre vanishes in December. No playing place, Will. What hopes have you then? Build yourself a new globe – across the river, perhaps, where Lady Russell, my mother, cannot follow, for all her Puritan prayers. You were ever ambitious – I'll give you that. Tell me your hopes.

WILL: Not hopes. Purposes. *Imprimis*, to throw forth into the world the sweetest and mirthfullest comedies that ever bubbled from the wit of man.

DABK LADY. No tragedies?

WILL: As long you smile upon me, I shall write no more tragedies.

DARK LADY: *(Touching his papers.)* And this? A comedy?

WILL: Who can tell? But I fear me 'tis a tragedy.

DARK LADY: *(Reading a page.)* The tale of Romeo! I must not put your Muse out of vein. But to these purposes! Acquaint me with the next.

WILL: *(Briskly, lightly.)* Item, a fortune out of these trifles and, there withal, the knighthood which only the blindness of the Three Fates denied me at birth.

DABK LADY. *(Seriously.)* The Queen knows of your Papish faith, Will – but, to be sure, she affects thee in spite of it. It may be. Next?

WILL: Item, your husband shall die of the plague.

DABK LADY: My husband? Got and gone in a breath! God rest his soul!

WILL: Item, at the same instant, my wife shall die of ... an apoplexy.

DABK LADY: And to what end is all this butchery?

WILL: That I may love a bright particular star and that I may wed.

DARK LADY: *(Seriously.)* Nay, Will, you must win the knighthood first.

WILL: Item, my son Hamnet ...

DARK LADY: The hero enters at last! The prologue's o'er! Let the play proceed!

WILL: I say, the boy Hamnet ...

DARK LADY: Whom you dote upon so extremely that for ten years you have never journeyed to see him!

WILL: Whom I love so dearly, Bess, that he has seldom been from my thoughts.

DARK LADY: On, then! Hamnet shall be – what? The greatest of all players!

WILL: A player? Do you count me so poor in pride? I abhor the calling of a player; I curse the trick of fortune that steered me to the stage. If I would win renown, make a breach in the world and carry its treasure by storm, it is that I would set Hamnet among those who command, not serve.

DARK LADY: I marvel, then, that you never take horse for Stratford.

WILL: I will never go back to Stratford, never!

DARK LADY: Item, O wicked and yet adorable Bess, I will never set foot on my village-green unless you torment me from London.

WILL: Let a few years pass, and I'll send for Hamnet ...

DARK LADY: They have passed, and Hamnet is here and Will Shakespeare spares not a thought for Bess, not a thought! And Bess? What becomes of Bess? *(With sudden fury.)* Cease for a little to prate of this tedious Hamnet! *(Very sweetly.)* Have I hurt you, Will? Maybe he is all that you think. I hope it, truly –

WILL: Enough of my hopes! If you had your choice ...?

DARK LADY: *(Sadly.)* Oh, I know well what I would be.

WILL: The Queen of the Amazons? The Pope's daughter! – to sit on his throne, like Lucretia, and receive on your white foot the all too fervent kisses of cardinals? Or, better! The moon herself that poets might adore you!

DARK LADY: Look not so high for the answer. *(Simply and sincerely.)* I'd be a player!

WILL: To strut and rant a little hour upon the stage?

DARK LADY: I am the Queen's lady, at her beck and call, but are there not seven colours in the rainbow? And in my little body, I have a thousand souls – tyrant, slave, enchantress, harlot, and bashful Puritan, too. Were I a player I could make men laugh and weep! Then I'd show the world what it means to love!

WILL: A woman-player! Nay, that were one of our rarer monsters.

DARK LADY: *(Annoyed.)* I could put down any man with my playing.

WILL: *(Laughing.)* But a woman-player! Marry, she'd be out of her part on a hundred provocations. Why, the courtiers seated on the stage would vouchsafe her no peace and drive her, weeping, from the boards!

DARK LADY: *(With repressed anger.)* You doubt my skill? A certain lord whom in these parts we call Proteus has declared that could I present such a woman as only you could write, Will, I should make all London dizzy. *(Ironically.)* But maybe Proteus loves me; and much must be discounted for love.

WILL: And you discount my love?

DARK LADY: Will, you are but dreaming of love.

WILL: *(Taking her in his arms.)* Is it possible to love more?

DARK LADY: *(With passion.)* If you loved me as I you, the flame would devour us both.

WILL: Bess, there are times when I wish that I were in the harbour of old age, never again to be swept and buffeted by the cross-winds of passion.

DARK LADY: And yet, man, you have scarce begun to love. Scarce begun to live.

WILL: If there be more to learn, instruct me.

DARK LADY: I? You must learn in a humbler school, for I have tired of so dull a pupil.

*(She pushes him away. Enter W. H.)*

W. H.: Bess, Bess! Would you give me the slip? Now look you, Will, if you enchant her away, I shall never forgive you in this world – or the next.

WILL: Why, Proteus, sweet friend, you upbraid Ulysses for enchanting Calypso.

DARK LADY: Yes, Will but Ulysses broke *her* spell.

WILL: He desired to break it.

W. H.: A bull's-eye, Will! No one who steps into the circle of my lady's charm would ever wish to get out. Marry, I had rather await the onslaught of the whole Spanish fleet with a single pinnace than endure for five minutes the anger of those eyes. Oh, news, Will, great news! It came to the court this morning. The Spaniard St. Andrew is captured, their fleet burned ...

DARK LADY: Ods life, still chattering of Cadiz? I shall tack and beat my way windward.  
*(She moves to the door.)*

WILL: I entreat you, hull here a little longer!

DARK LADY: And hear yet more of Cadiz? Nay, Proteus, we depart. Will has his wondrous comedy of Romeo to pen. Moreover, a word for your ear.

W. H.: A secret? Then I am with you. And yet I will be sorry that I should lack what the world itself most lacks ...

WILL: What mean you, my lord?

W. H.: Why, a little more of good Will! *(He laughs at his own joke.)*

DARK LADY: Merrily said. But come now!

*(Exit.)*

W. H.: 'I am gone, sir, and anon, sir,  
I'll be with you again.'

*(Exit. WILL closes the door and sighs.)*

WILL: I wonder ...

*(He crosses the room slowly, sits down at the table, takes up his quill, and studies the manuscript before him.)*

And where the worser is predominant,  
Full soon the canker death eats up that plant ...  
*(Thinks.)* Here, Romeo shall enter. I must have light. *(He sets two candles on the table.)* And now where's the tinder? Not here? Fiat lux!



*(He searches vainly for the tinder-box. Enter W. H.)*

W. H.: Woe's me, my friend!

WILL: Why, Proteus, what's amiss?

W. H.: Indeed, as I love you, I hope I'm in error. We had barely gained the parlour when a poor dazed country-woman comes knocking. 'O gentlemen,' says she, 'I am seeking Master Shakespeare, the son of the alderman at Stratford, and folk tell that he lodges hereabout.' She has footed from Warwickshire; and the look of her was a warrant that she told truth.

WILL: *(Sighs.)* 'Tis Anne, my wife.

W. H.: As I feared. Shall I give her direction to some honest tavern?

WILL: She has footed from Stratford, you say? No doubt with news. She is alone, you say? I wonder, did she bring the boy?

*(Exit W. H. WILL goes to the cupboard left of the table and takes out a bottle of ale and a mug and sets them on the bench, then returns to the table, and stands facing the door.)*

*(Enter the DARK LADY disguised by a fair wig, and a hooded cloak of humble material. She is about to run to him, but he checks her with his hand.)*

DARK LADY: *(With a curtsy and a Warwickshire accent.)* God save thee, husband.

WILL: God save you, Anne. Be seated. You must be spent.

DARK LADY: La, Will. I had scarce known thee, boy. What fine clouts! What gentlemanly bearing!

WILL: And you, methinks, have changed out of all reckoning.

DARK LADY: 'Tis years of suffering that have changed me, Will, at thy hands.

WILL: Marry, you thrive on it. Ten years ago, you were not so well-favoured.

DARK LADY: Is it so? Nay, then, thou'lt return wi' me to Stratford?

WILL: Never!

DARK LADY: Husband, thou'rt bold to flout the will of the Lord. "The mighty shall be humbled, and the proud in their strength shall be brought low." Come wi' me back to thine home, and I'll forgive all wrongs.

WILL: What news of Hamnet?

DARK LADY: La, Will, how the boy waxes! A quaint, merry sprite, i' good faith!

WILL: Does he well at the Grammar School?

DARK LADY: Aye, so schoolmaster saith but how should a self-respecting woman judge of scholarship? Master Parson is well pleased with him and, no later than last Tuesday, 'Mistress Shakespeare,' saith he, 'that such a mirror of piety should have blossomed from such a cloud of iniquity,' meaning you, Will.

WILL: And the boy loves the green country about him?

DARK LADY: Wouldst have him gad in the fields and idle away his hours in unrighteous frivollery? If he works not wi' me in our house, he is ever wi' Master Parson. Ah, if the Lord see good, the boy may grow to a notable preacher.

WILL: A preacher, and maybe a whining Puritan! Faugh!

DARK LADY: Will, Will, Heaven save thee, for thy soul is indeed damned and, without repentance, thou'rt no better than chopped wood for the fires everlasting.

WILL: Is it *that* you babble to the boy? Nay, I've a mind to go to Stratford ...

DARK LADY: Will!

WILL: If it be but to show him the Bible of the earth and to teach him to quire with the birds! Yet I cannot come. I am fast in London.

DARK LADY: What should hold thee? Hast friends? May they not visit? Hast forgot my skill wi' tucks and batches and pikelets?

WILL: A lord and a lady of the realm would soon grow weary of Godcakes.

DARK LADY: A lady?

WILL: A maid-of-honour to the Queen.

DARK LADY: Will, hast fallen into sin? Art cozened from grace by this lord, this anti-Christ, and his Scarlet Woman? Did I not warn thee that Babylon

should be thy undoing? 'Twere better for Hamnet that he should never be smirched by the lewdness of a profligate, a fornicator, a bawdy player. Nay, thou shalt never return to Stratford. Nay ...

WILL: To-morrow, Anne, I shall fare to Stratford, and I shall rest in the village for a matter of two weeks. Thereafter, I shall return hither with Hamnet!

DARK LADY: Set but thy foot in our town and, I warrant thee, Master Parson shall turn thee from thy wickedness. To-night, I will share thy lodging – and thy bed.

WILL: That never!

PERUSAL COPY ONLY  
(Enter W. H. with a light.)

W. H.: The fifteen minutes have flown. How fares the poor traveller?

DARK LADY: Famously, famously! Proteus, he will go to Stratford to-morrow.

WILL: Proteus?

DARK LADY: (Removing her disguise but retaining the Warwickshire accent.) Who was it mocked my dream of being a woman-player?

WILL: Bess!

DARK LADY: Who doubted my skill? (Dropping her accent.) And who said he would never go back to Stratford?

WILL: And have I gone back to Stratford? (Laughing heartily.) By my soul, 'twas well done – the blackest of nightmares becomes the blithest of jests!

W. H.: Yet, Will, you have lost me a wager. (To the DARK LADY.) I will bring you the hound tomorrow.

(At this moment, Will KEMP bursts in helter-skelter.)

KEMP: Good even, Will, and to you, my lord, and to you, my lady.

W. H.: Why, Kemp, you come in the nick of time. We owe you something in laughter, and here's a rare jest, fit matter for a penny ballad. Hark you ...

WILL: No more, for the lady's sake.

DARK LADY: For mine? (Adopting the accent.) I care not a rush.

WILL: Yet, I beg you ...

W. H.: Well, as you wish. Master Kemp, what news?

KEMP: Sir – Will – young Morley's the world's tenth marvel!

WILL: He has found an air for the song?

KEMP: The sweetest you ever heard!

DARK LADY: Sing it, sing it!

W. H.: Some of Will's words?

KEMP: Aye, sir, from the play for Twelfth Night. Lord, 'twill take wondrously! But hear! I'll tune me a lute. *(KEMP takes his lute from his back and tunes.)*

DARK LADY: *(To KEMP.)* I would see the music.

*(KEMP hands the music to the DARK LADY who holds it up for him. KEMP finishes tuning, the rest dispose themselves to listen. Enter Richard BURBAGE unceremoniously.)*

BURBAGE: Will, boy!

W. H.: S'lfe, man, can you not see that the company waits for a song?

BURBAGE: Your pardon, my lord. *(To WILL.)* Look you, there was one at the playhouse enquiring for you. He had ridden post from Stratford.

WILL: Enough, Dick.

BURBAGE: And he bade me give you this letter.

W. H.: You come when the jest is over, Burbage.

DARK LADY: Stay! I know nothing of this. You had best read it.

BURBAGE: Here's little matter for laughter, I fear.

WILL: What? Give it me.

*(He takes the letter, reads it, the others remaining silent. He crumples the page and his head droops forward.)*

W. H.: My friend! Ill news? (*WILL passes the paper to him.*) Hamnet – is dead of the plague. Who's Hamnet?

DARK LADY: His son. (*Running to him in tears.*) Will!

W. H.: (*Also going to him.*) What must we do?

WILL: (*Dazed.*) I must to Stratford tonight.

W. H.: I'll help you to put up your chattels, Will.

(*WILL and W. H. gather the necessities for the journey.*)

DARK LADY: (*Seemingly heartless.*) Kemp, the music.

KEMP: (*Shocked.*) What, lady?

DARK LADY: (*Imperiously.*) Sing it.

KEMP: (*Singing.*) Come away, come away, death,  
And in sad cypress let me be laid;  
Fly away, fly away, breath;  
I am slain by a fair cruel maid.

My shroud of white, stuck all with yew,  
O, prepare it!  
My part of death, no one so true  
Did share it.

Not a flower, not a flower sweet,  
On my black coffin let there be strewn;  
Not a friend, not a friend greet  
My poor corpse, where my bones shall be thrown.

A thousand, thousand sighs to save,  
Lay me, O where  
Sad true lover never find my grave,  
To weep there.

(*Toward the close of the song, WILL hurries out with his bundle and exits. Music continues as lights come down.*)

**END OF SCENE**

**ACT ONE**  
**EPISODE III**

TIME : Early winter, 1602.

SCENE : The stage of the Globe Theatre. Properties are scattered here and there, coils of rope, etc. A property throne stands left front. An entrance, back centre; another, front right.

*(Enter, back centre, W. H. and WILL.)*

W. H.: As I love you, not since Rome fell has the world seen such a play!

WILL: *(Darkly.)* As you love me?

W. H.: Aye, 'tis the very summit and outpost of your invention – the finest play ever seen at the Globe. *(He sits on the prop throne. WILL moves about.)* Who will care for *The Spanish Tragedy* now? Who will sit while *Tamburlaine* bellows? And yet, Kit Marlowe, had he lived, would applaud. Not so Master Jonson, I fear me. His is a jealous god, and the rich fare of your *Hamlet* will give our Ben a queasy stomach!

WILL: Should any man, 'twixt heaven and earth, be envious of me?

W. H.: Why, what new quirk has put you into so deep a dump?

WILL: Shall I answer? I did love thee once.

W. H.: *(Uneasily.)* Aye, so I did believe.

WILL: Is she fair?

W. H.: Will?

WILL: Is she fair? Yet, if she be fair, yet is she false; a wanton.

W. H.: Nay, Will, you chide too deeply. What are women but thistledown?

WILL: Once was I happy to snatch at thistledown but the years have I think, have changed the world. Honesty is an old tune today.

W. H.: *(Rising.)* Enough! You are too free!

WILL: Go to, I'll no more on't. It hath made me mad.

W. H.: *(Sitting.)* You play The Ghost, Will. Must you be one, too?

WILL: Aye, I play The Ghost, but Hamlet would be fitter and you, my lord, how excellent well the part of Horatio would fit you!

W. H.: Horatio? I?

WILL: The true friend, the one man trusted by Hamlet. You smile and smile ... at so odd a whimsy.

W. H.: At nothing, indeed, but the outlandish name. No Englishman shall ever be called 'Horatio'! Not an Englishman's name – not a hero's name.

*(Enter, the DARK LADY and the STAGE-KEEPER.)*

STAGE-KEEPER: Lo, madam, milord is upon the stage. *(W. H. and WILL bow.)*

DARK LADY: Ah, Proteus!

STAGE-KEEPER: Was I not a true prophet? I shall make almanacks!

WILL: Peace, fellow. Is Burbage come?

*(The DARK LADY crosses and occupies the throne.)*

STAGE-KEEPER: Master Burbage is now in the tiring-room. I will advise him that you wait.

*(Exit, centre.)*

W. H.: *(Seeing her yawn behind her hand.)* You are weary, Bess.

DARK LADY: In good faith, I have long been weary of much. And how of your *Hamlet*, Will? Do they play it to your liking?

W. H.: Now you may judge for yourself.

DARK LADY: *(She yawns again.)* I am weary indeed, my Proteus. For the last se'n night, I have but slept by the inch. You know how demanding the Queen has become. Truly, I think she has lost in patience what she has gained in years.

W. H.: Sh!

DARK LADY: What! Shall I not open my mind to you? And Will is no tell-tale.

W. H.: You will much admire at his play of *Hamlet*.

DARK LADY: I doubt not I shall and yet I could wish that it might be tedious, for then the bellowing voice of Master Burbage might cradle me to sleep. Plays! I had almost forgot the world of plays. Your globe, Will – you did re-build it!

WILL: And have you forgot the playwright, too?

DARK LADY: Not forgot, Will. Never forgotten. Time flits by us, does it not, Proteus? And you are The Ghost, Will. (*To W. H.*) Did you not tell me so?

W. H.: True. Will is The Ghost.

DARK LADY: I had sooner he were a hero to thrust a rapier through the heart of the villain.

WILL: So? So?

(*Enter, back centre, Richard BURBAGE.*)

BURBAGE: Good-morrow, my lady, my lord. Good morrow, Will. All's ready.

DARK LADY: Master Burbage, I hunger to see this play as a woman with child hungers for pickle. And, doth our Will make a terrifying Ghost?

BURBAGE: Why, madam, if his Ghost at performance be a tenth part as terrifying as his raging lion at rehearsal, our audience must go home quaking to their beds.

DARK LADY: What, is gentle Shakespeare become a tyrant?

BURBAGE: He has toiled overmuch at the midnight lamp, eh, Will?

DARK LADY: In truth, sans chalk, sans powder, he looks the ghost to the life.

WILL: Do I so? And yet in this ghost, there is hot blood.

BURBAGE: Oh, I'll stake my head for the truth o' that. Half the company are in fear of their lives. Dick Robinson now, the lad's for leaving his part altogether.

WILL: You should have had the boy's hand and seal to perform what he undertook.

BURBAGE: Rest easy I have it. By my troth, I believe he will play the Queen to the wonder of all who behold him.



WILL: Aye, and he knows it, the mincing mannikin! Must I velvet my words for his vanity? Pooh, let him keep his womanishness in bounds!

BURBAGE: Men, too, have their feelings, Will.

DARK LADY: Or have they nothing but vanity? *(She yawns delicately again.)*

WILL: *(Relenting.)* Poor Dick – I have used him knavishly and you, Burbage, and all of them. Pah! I speak like an ass, for God knows I shall use you worse.

BURBAGE: Scold at us, roar at us, do what you must – short of burning the playhouse down about our ears – there's not a man here but loves you, Will. *(The STAGE-KEEPER has entered, right.)* Ho, there! Look alive! All's ready for the graveyard?

STAGE-KEEPER: Oh, sir! Would you begin with that?

BURBAGE: Aye, and promptly. Are you losing your wits? What did I tell you yesterday? If we don't start with it, we shall never come to that scene this side Doomsday. Why are Kemp and Armin not here?

STAGE-KEEPER: They are rehearsing without, sir. And oh, sir, that Kemp, sir! When you see him, you'll not keep your countenance ...

BURBAGE: Well, where is the bier? What, man? Ophelia's bier! S' blood! Must I do your work at the tail of my own? Find my lord and lady stools. *(Exit.)*

STAGE-KEEPER: Oh, I will, sir, I will.

*(He hurries to the back and produces stools which he places to the back of the stage, right. They sit on the stools. The STAGE-KEEPER withdraws.)*

DARK LADY: Come, Will, I pray you if it be but for pity of the company, put on a mask of merriment. I am so tired, I lack the strength to counter your gloom.

WILL: I could rock the universe with laughter if it were not that I have bad dreams.

DARK LADY: *(Turning away from him.)* I see you are past all cure.

WILL: It may be so. I think it is.

DARK LADY: Yet, Will, you will find we would be honest friends.

WILL: Would you be honest? You were wiser remain as you are, for, in this world, an honest mind is every villain's ... football. Did not I love you, I could rail at your perfidy, but that's where I stick and there lies the cause of my undoing. I loved you, Proteus. Forty thousand brothers could not, with all their quantity of love, make up my sum. And you stole her away by night.

W. H.: Man, what cause have you for complaint? How have you suffered but in the common hazard that may befall any man? Confront your losses, pay them like a man, and let those who are luckier play on.

DARK LADY: *(Rising.)* If you cannot be merrier, I will take my leave.

W. H.: You are certainly giving us sorry entertainment.

WILL: True, very true. I have done; I have done! I will better this and you shall have entertainment that is worthy of your desserts. Why, look you, here comes Burbage, a figure of fun to grace any country fair, a man who is fretting and fuming because, forsooth, *he cannot find the grave!*

*(Enter BURBAGE, with the STAGE-KEEPER at his heels.)*

BURBAGE: 'Not well,' quotha! 'Not well' three times in a week! The fellow's drunk, and he shall pay twice it. Ten shillings from his wages – note that down!

STAGE-KEEPER: Yet, sir, would you have me prompt?

BURBAGE: Are you stage-keeper or book-holder – which? When you can perform your own office to my satisfaction 'twill be time enough to babble of taking on another's. Well, there's naught else for it. Where's the script?

STAGE-KEEPER: Oh, here, sir.

BURBAGE: To it, now, to it! Bid Kemp and Armin attend.

*(Exit STAGE-KEEPER, back.)*

*(To WILL.)* Kemp carries his clowning to an extreme. There was never a split-rib to match. Why, Armin himself, old hand as he is, can keep his face no longer than the first line of the ditty – but, enough! You shall see.

WILL: *(Springing up.)* Stay! No grave matter! We will have the Closet Scene.

BURBAGE: What, man? The Closet Scene?

WILL: 'For I have heard  
That guilty creatures, sitting at a play ...'

*(Enter KEMP, followed by the STAGE-KEEPER.)*

BURBAGE: But you saw it yesterday, and we had it all pat.

WILL: The Closet Scene, I say! Where's Dick Robinson?

KEMP: Why, peacocking in the new finery for the Queen – pea-henning, I should say. Since ever it came, the boy's been strutting in it.

WILL: *(To the STAGE-KEEPER.)* Fetch him, fetch him. Away with you, prestissimo! *(Exit the STAGE-KEEPER hurriedly.)* Burbage! Your rapier and your sides! I'll teach you how to Hamlet.

BURBAGE: Come, Will, you have laurels enough. You are a great poet, man. In the playing, content yourself with my poor skill.

WILL: Not so! For once, I'll be actor, too.

W. H.: Well, even Homer nodded.

KEMP: True, sir, but he never snored. Yet, are they both honorificabilitudinitatibus. *(W.H. simply stares at KEMP.)*

WILL: Your labours are lost, Will. Dick, your rapier for the Closet Scene.

W. H.: Best humour him, Master Burbage.

BURBAGE: My lord. *(Gives WILL a rapier and his sides.)* Kemp, come you here.

*(BURBAGE takes WILL's stool. KEMP squats at his side.)*

DARK LADY: I pine for the clowning, Will.

WILL: Madam, if that be the tune of your heart, you shall have clowning – anon.

*(Enter, back, the STAGE-KEEPER, followed by Dick ROBINSON, a highly-strung youth attired superbly as The Queen in Hamlet. He carries sides for The Queen.)*

Ah, Dick Robinson! SO! – you are for throwing down your part!

ROBINSON: Marry, sir, you did rage at me so ...

WILL: Perform it well now and I'll be your friend forever. *(Turning to the DARK LADY.)* Mistress Bess, let me present you to The Queen. I would have you well acquainted with one another. I would have you know this Queen, mistress, as intimately as you know your looking-glass.

DARK LADY: Am I so rustical that I do not know Dick Robinson?

WILL: Forget him. I shall hold a mirror up to nature and show you a lady who has been most foully false. *(To the STAGE-KEEPER.)* You are ready?

STAGE-KEEPER: *(Producing the script.)* An' it please you.

*(During the ensuing scene, BURBAGE and KEMP inaudibly confer, making references to passages in a script which KEMP produces. From time to time they give tolerant attention to WILL. WILL consults his sides occasionally.)*

WILL: *(To ROBINSON.)* Now, boy, you should stand here. *(Placing ROBINSON in position.)* And so I come to you – *Hamlet* comes to you. *(To BURBAGE, as he turns to go.)* Mark me, I say, and you, my dark mistress, mark me well. You shall see the very quintessence of *Hamlet*.

*(WILL goes out, right.)*

DARK LADY: There's something in his soul, o'er which his melancholy sits on brood.

W. H.: Yet, I have seen him play a part well.

*(WILL re-enters, in the part of Hamlet.)*

WILL: Now, madam, what's the matter?

STAGE-KEEPER: *(Prompting.)* 'Now, mother, what's the matter?'

WILL: Peace, sirrah! I will say 'madam.' What, a trifling word? *(To ROBINSON.)* To't!

ROBINSON: *Hamlet*, thou hast thy father much offended.

WILL: Madam, you have my father ... *(He flips pages in the sides.)* ... and on and on. Out with all that! *(He finds a new starting place.)* Come, come, and sit you down; you shall not budge;

You go not till I set you up a glass  
Where you may see the inmost part of you.

ROBINSON: *(Catching up.)* Uhm ... What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me?  
Help, help, ho ...!

*(A pause.)*

WILL: *(Throwing up his hands.)* Where is Polonius? Condell! Where's Condell?

BURBAGE: I told him he need not come.

WILL: Can we play the scene without Polonius?

BURBAGE: We knew not we were to do the sc ... ! Kemp or I will do it.

WILL: Sit you down, both. I'll have none of you. Is not Polonius a grave man, a subtle intriguer? You! You, my lord! None better! You shall play Polonius!

W. H.: I, man?

WILL: The last of a thousand favours. I shall ask no more. *(He pulls a page from the STAGE-KEEPER's script.)* 'Tis a matter of but two lines: 'What, ho, help, help, help' and, after, 'O, I am slain.'

W. H.: But, Kemp ...

WILL: *(Dragging W. H. upstage to the curtain at the back.)* He has not the voice. Come, come, would you check the play for want of one to speak a few words and to die? *(He thrusts W. H. behind the arras, back. To ROBINSON.)* Now, madam, cry your 'help.'

ROBINSON: Help, help, ho!

W. H.: *(Behind the arras.)* What, ho, help, help, help!

WILL: *(Rushes to the arras.)* How now! A rat? Dead, for a ducat, dead! *(He plunges the rapier repeatedly through the arras.)*

BURBAGE: Have a care, Will!

WILL: *(Continuing his thrusts.)* Come, sir, your cue: 'O, I am slain!' ... Is there no killing the fellow? *(He draws back the arras. W. H. is not there.)* Vanished! *(Quietly.)* Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell! I took thee for thy

better; take thy fortune. Thou find'st to be too busy is some danger.

*(He laughs a little wildly, then turns to the DARK LADY.)*

How like you the play, madam? You find it tedious?

DARK LADY: *(Yawning.)* A little, by your leave. Shall we soon have the clowning?

WILL: Soon, soon! Yet bear with us to the end.

DARK LADY: Willingly; but the day draws on, and *(Smiling at W.H.)* by dusk I would fain be in bed.

WILL: Fear not. We will give you matter to sleep on. *(Returning to ROBINSON.)*  
Leave wringing of your hands; peace, sit you down,  
And let me wring your heart; for so I shall,  
If it be made of penetrable stuff;  
If damnéd custom have not brass'd it so,  
That it be proof and bulwark against sense.

ROBINSON: What have I done, that thou durst wag thy tongue  
In noise so rude against me?

WILL: *(Half turning to the DARK LADY)* Such an act  
That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,  
Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose  
From the fair forehead of an innocent love,  
And sets a blister there; O, such a deed ... uhm ...

STAGE-KEEPER: 'Makes marriage vows ...'

WILL: Silence! They're not i' the fashion ... O, such a deed  
As from the body of contraction plucks  
The very soul; heaven's face doth glow;  
Yea, this solidity and compound mass,  
With twistful visage, as against the doom,  
Is thought-sick at the act.

ROBINSON: Aye me, what act  
That roars so loud and thunders i' th'index?

WILL: Enough! *(He grabs ROBINSON and pushes him away.)* You mouth it! Oh,  
it offends me to the soul. I had as lief the town strumpet spoke my lines.  
*(He turns to the DARK LADY.)* You, my mistress. Now's the time and

culmination of your desire! Thou'lt be a player!

DARK LADY: I?

WILL: Aye! *(He takes her, a little roughly, and pulls her to where ROBINSON was standing.)* Sirrah, your sides! *(ROBINSON hands them to her. WILL points to a page.)* We begin here! Look here, upon this picture, and on this, the counterfeit presentment of two – friends. *(The STAGE-KEEPER opens his mouth. WILL points at him without looking at him.)* Break not in upon me – I care not for the words!

The counterfeit presentment of two friends  
Whereof was one that loved thee so well,  
So profoundly that, with his love in thy heart,  
*(He leaves the poetic rhythm and extemporizes.)* thou mightst have  
plumbed all mysteries; but him hast thou spurned away to follow  
a painted image, a mockery, a lovely and hollow idolon –  
Whose heart is a nest for the viper-brood of treachery!  
*(He reconnects with the script.)* O shame! where is thy blush?  
But yet proclaim no shame to me  
When the compulsive ardour gives the charge,  
Since frost itself as actively doth burn,  
And reason panders will.

DARK LADY: *(Reading, but reading well.)* O Hamlet, speak no more:  
Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul,  
And there I see such black and grainéd spots  
As will not leave their tinct.

WILL: *(Muttering.)* Is't so indeed? ... Nay, but to live  
In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,  
Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love  
Over the nasty sty ...

DARK LADY: *(Seeming to weep.)* O speak to me no more;  
These words like daggers enter in my ears;  
No more, sweet Hamlet!

WILL: Confess yourself to heaven ...

STAGE-KEEPER: Nay, sir! With all respect, here are whole pages ousted, and The Ghost comes not onto the stage ... !

WILL: *(Furiously.)* Check me not again or I swear you'll play the ghost in earnest!

Away with you! Home to your dinner! I'll have no more of you. Out, out!

*(The STAGE-KEEPER quails and disappears rapidly, right.)*

Confess yourself to heaven;  
Repent what's past, avoid what is to come,  
And do not spread the compost on the weeds,  
To make them ranker.

DARK LADY: *(Catching up, but still intense.)* O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain.

WILL: O throw away the worser part of it.  
Assume a virtue if you have it not.  
Refrain tonight,  
And that shall lend a kind of easiness  
To the next abstinence; the next more easy ...  
One more word, good lady.

DARK LADY: What shall I do?

WILL: Not this, by no means, that I bid you do:  
Let the bloat ... lord ... tempt you again to bed;  
Pinch wanton on your cheek, call you his mouse;  
And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses  
Or paddling in your neck with his damn'd fingers ...

*(The DARK LADY suddenly falls to the floor.)*

Ah, God! I have done too well! *(Going to her.)* How is it with you, lady?

BURBAGE: She but swoons!

DARK LADY: *(Opening her eyes and rising.)* Swoon? Not I, Master Burbage. *(She yawns widely.)* 'Twas my drowsiness o'ercame me.

WILL: What, you slept?

DARK LADY: Your ranting, Will, was so tedious. With Burbage, it had been different. He is a proper actor. I've not slept this se'en-night, Will. I tend the Queen by night; my new husband by day.

WILL: *(Aghast.)* The Queen knows not you've married? Bess! She'll have you in the Tower!



DARK LADY: Mayhap, but I count it worth the pain. And now, cry you mercy, let's have the clowning.

W.H.: *(Re-entering.)* Have I missed my cue? I went but for a cup of sack.

WILL: Kemp, I have failed to entertain the lady. I shall not try again. Do you present your ditty and so make our amends.

*(KEMP squats in front of the arras. BURBAGE, W.H. and the DARK LADY bring their stools forward, backs to the audience. ROBINSON shifts so that he too is looking towards the arras. WILL moves to the corner, front left.)*

KEMP: *(Singing.)* In youth, when I did love, did love,  
Methought it was very sweet,  
To contract, O, the time, for-a my behove,  
O, methought, there-a was nothing-a meet.

*(The company break out in laughter. The DARK LADY claps her hands and turns her head to W. H., who kisses her and they turn, hand-in-hand, cheeks together, to watch KEMP. Enter, right, the STAGE-KEEPER. All laugh and applaud KEMP's foolery. WILL stands, their backs to him.)*

But age-a, with his stealing steps,  
Hath claw'd me in his clutch,  
And hath shipped me intil the land,  
As if I had ne'er been such.

*(The company laughs again.)*

DARK LADY: O, the knave has no mercy! He'll kill me!

KEMP. *(Singing.)* A pick-axe and a spade, a spade,  
For and a shrouding sheet:  
O, a pit of clay for to be made  
For such a guest is meet.

*(The company applauds heartily. WILL tosses the rapier to one side. Lights down.)*

**END OF ACT ONE**

**ACT TWO**  
**EPISODE IV**

TIME: A Spring evening in 1608.

SCENE : The back-parlour in the dwelling of Christopher Montjoy, a Huguenot wig-maker, in Silver Street, Cheapside. Left, an entrance leading into the shop. Right, another leading to a further room.

*(At lights up, the stage is empty. After a moment, a pounding at an outside door, off. After a moment, the pounding is continued. MME. MONTJOY enters from stage right, carrying a wig.)*

MME. MONTJOY: Yes, yes, I come! *(Pounding again.)* Master Burbage! Patience! I come!

*(She goes out the stage left door. After a moment, we hear a door open, off.)*

*(Off.)* Master Jonson!

BEN: *(Off.)* Aye, mistress, and mud and rain and sh— your pardon—to the ears.

*(Enter BEN JONSON, brusquely. He is booted and cloaked and has obviously ridden hard. He is a big man, at least larger than WILL.)*

Where is he?

MME. MONTJOY: Master Jonson!

BEN: Sh, sh, sh!

MME. MONTJOY: I had thought you was Master Burbage – for his wig.

BEN: Ha, ha, ha! Aye, Dick needs a wig, these times. He's not here, is he?

MME. MONTJOY: Master Burbage? But, no, I say – his wig ...

BEN: Damn Burbage! Shakespeare! Is Will here?

MME. MONTJOY: Not here, no. He is, I know not where. Oh, tell me, tell me, what must we do for him? Poor Master Shakespeare!

BEN: Good madam, give me to drink. I've rid hard. *(MME. MONTJOY fills a*

*glass and hands it to BEN.)* Now what's amiss? Your health! *(He drinks.)*

MME. MONTJOY: Master Ben, he is so, so ... what is it? ... *malheureux!*

BEN: Sick. What ails him, then?

MME. MONTJOY: His heart, his head – his spirit.

BEN: That's the word, the very word. His spirit is gone.

MME. MONTJOY: Go to him. Speak him a kind word. I beg! You two have quarrel, but I know you wish him well. Go to him.

BEN: Nay, what say the fishwives of London? It needs two to make a quarrel and I'll cringe to no man. Passion o' me, I'd sooner eat dung. When the fit passes, let him first seek out me!

MME. MONTJOY: Master Jonson, he is desperate. You must help.

BEN: I must?

MME. MONTJOY: You have given him such hurts with your writings, your words.

BEN: Is he a child to squeak at a knock? I say but what I think. They come to me with 'Look you, he scarce ever blots a line,' and I answer 'I would he had blotted a thousand'. Why, marry, so I would! S'death, he fancies that a handful of mother-wit can furnish out his vacuum of scholarship. His Latin! I babbled as much at my mother's apron. His Greek's not sufficient to cover a pin's head. Moreover, he writes too much. What, thirty, forty, fifty plays? I've forgotten half of them! So has he. So has the world.

MME. MONTJOY: But still he loves you, Master Ben.

BEN: Another glass, by your leave. *(She pours another. He drinks.)* Madame Montjoy, when last I came here, though in truth I had better business, you babbled much of Will Shakespeare's gloom. 'Twas nothing to me, mark you, nothing; yet you told of a girl, his daughter, in Stratford, eh? and how he quickened at nothing but the memory of this girl. Well, well?

MME. MONTJOY: His daughter, Judith. His Hamnet was her twin. If he can go to Stratford, but, no! He has no more of energy.

BEN: Answer me to the point! Does he think of the girl still?

MME. MONTJOY: He speaks of her yesterday.

BEN: Ha!

MME. MONTJOY: She is for him like a flower of the country! He speak of her with a tenderness how deep! If he can have seen her, but ... to Stratford and back, 'tis a three days' riding at best.

BEN: The wench is already here!

MME. MONTJOY: Here? *(Realizing.)* You have ridden to Stratford? You have brought her? Oh, Master Ben, I say it – you have the heart of gold! *(She hugs him.)*

BEN: *(Untangling himself.)* Now, now, now, peace to your foreign ways, or I'll be gone.

MME. MONTJOY: Stay! The girl ...?

BEN: Hard by at my lodgment. An arrant country simpleton! I never came on her match. Give me a wench that's half boy. The fluttered fool!

MME. MONTJOY: Fool?

BEN: Aye, fool. Nothing will persuade her but that I mean to despoil her honour.

MME. MONTJOY: You have not tell her that she comes to her father?

BEN: Of course, I have told her! Marry, I rid to Stratford, enquired for Will's house (a fine new place it is, too), and, by grace of the Goddess Fortuna, spoke first with the wench herself at the door: told her of her father's ill state and that she must come post to London, and while she was yet at her 'Oh, sirs' and 'Oh, buts,' clapped her before me on the nag and whipped on. 'A rape, a rape!', she screams. And Lord, what a hue and cry came after! At night, we rested at Oxford with some good friends of mine, and this morning with oh, what a pothor!, on to London. There's the story, but the girl will not credit I'll bring her to Will.

MME. MONTJOY: The poor lamb! How you have terrify her!

BEN: I'll be glad when I hear the poor lamb bleating no longer.

MME. MONTJOY: Bring her quickly, and I shall find Master Will ...

BEN: What? Not a word of it! Do you hear? She'll tell her own tale. If you utter a

syllable, if you nod to Will, Gog's Oons, I'll drop her over my pommel and take her straight-way back to Stratford. No one is to guess I had part in it.

MME. MONTJOY: I say not the word. Do you but bring the maid quickly!

A VOICE: *(Off.)* Mistress Montjoy!

MME. MONTJOY: He is coming!

BEN: Tshaw! Then I go. *(He heads stage right.)* I'll slip out through here.

MME. MONTJOY: That leads but to our private rooms.

A VOICE: *(Off.)* Mistress Montjoy, I say!

MME. MONTJOY: *(Calling.)* Who is it speaks?

A VOICE: *(In full actor's voice.)* It is Othello, it is Richard, it is Caesar – it is Hamlet!

MONTJOY/BEN: *(A beat. To each other.)* Burbage.

*(Madame MONTJOY opens the stage left door and Richard BURBAGE (now six years older) enters.)*

BEN: You left out Volpone.

BURBAGE: I was coming to him, Ben. *(Bowing.)* Master Jonson. Mistress Montjoy.

MME. MONTJOY: By here, Master Burbage, by here. You shall try the wig. *Mon Dieu*, but we have work at her! You shall say, 'Ah! how she is superb!' *(She gives the wig to BURBAGE.)* No? Superb!

BEN: Cunningly made, madame.

BURBAGE: *(Admiring himself in a mirror.)* Yet I would it were somewhat higher. Timon was a person of great import.

MME. MONTJOY: *(Frowning.)* We can perhaps make it more large.

BURBAGE: *(Seeing her frown.)* Nay, now I look closely on it, methinks 'twill serve.

MME. MONTJOY: Ah! Did I not say you shall be pleased?

BURBAGE: Aye, 'twill serve. Mistress Montjoy, I trust that, when you and the good

Mounseer shall see me in the part of Timon, you may be as well pleased with my work as I am with yours.

MME. MONTJOY: You are so kind! And this Timon, he was a grand lord?

BURBAGE: A great man ...

BEN: ... who came to nothing.

MME. MONTJOY: You say it? Ah, all of our Will's grand lords, they come to nothing. The poor Antony! The old king with his daughters ...

BURBAGE: Lear?

MME. MONTJOY: Yes, old Lear! Heigh-ho! Will Shakespeare is melancholic!

BURBAGE: Would God I could cheer him. Though I go to him never so kindly, Ben, he will brush me away with scarce a word. Troth, 'twas much ado I had to learn that he was once more lodging here. And what make you here, Ben?

BEN: *(Shrugs.)* An urging.

MME. MONTJOY: When, it is five years now, he came first, he was often sad, but if my daughter would sing, hey! he would smile. But now! Will, he sigh as though his heart should break. I have never know him so sad.

BURBAGE: You are kind to him. Oh, a pox on that she-devil!

BEN: She-devil? The lady?

MME. MONTJOY: The court-lady?

BURBAGE: His Dark Lady. She and his Proteus are back at court now the old Queen has died. The King has forgiven all – marriage, treason, rebellion, all. A few years behind the walls of Fleet prison give a man time to think.

BEN: Well, Bess is a comely girl – and Harry was a comely boy. No wonder the King affects them. Yet, of a truth, she left her damn'd poison in Will's mind.

MME. MONTJOY: La, sir! But Will Shakespeare, he think no more of women.

BEN: An' he would, he might soon find a medicine – they come to the plays..

MME. MONTJOY: Bah! she is for him dead!

BURBAGE: Ods life! He forget her? After all he suffered?

MME. MONTJOY: Now his trouble is deeper.

BURBAGE: What ails him?

MME. MONTJOY: But who can tell? He hate women, he hate men, he rage against his friends, he cry out against all the world.

BURBAGE: He has lost his Muse.

BEN: *Troilus and Timon*: what are these but the windy wrack of an autumn that follows too early on summer? But two-score years and four, when his power should ride the meridian, it seems that he fails.

BURBAGE: I sorely fear his name is like to be jostled aside by the names of new men: Chapman, Heywood, Webster ... *(To BEN.)* ... and the terrible Big Ben.

BEN: *(Chuckling.)* He *has* spoken vilely of Will. And not Will only.

MME. MONTJOY: *(Looking closely at BEN.)* And yet Will loves him. He loves him still.

BEN: The more fool he. I leave you to your wigs and your Timons. *(Quietly to MME. MONTJOY.)* I shall bring the girl, madame.

BURBAGE: He would fain be your friend, Ben. Will you not stay to speak with him?

BEN: Not I. When he came forth to warm our ears, the Muses still were in their prime. Our Will is not of an age, but for all time.

*(He exits left, followed by MME. MONTJOY.)*

BURBAGE: *(Calls after him.)* How does poetry help? *(He puts the wig on and admires himself in the mirror.)* A beard, methinks – and a monstrous moustache.

MME. MONTJOY: *(Entering.)* He comes! As Master Jonson turn away at Bread Street, Master Shakespeare appear on Milk Street.

BURBAGE: Hark you! Someone has entered the shop.

MME. MONTJOY: I go to see. Pray you, sir, speak with him. *(She goes to the door, left, and opens it.)* Ah, you come, you come *a la bonne heure*. Master Burbage is here in the wig of your Timon.

*(BURBAGE resumes the wig. Enter WILL. His manner is heavy and listless. He greets BURBAGE with the slightest of nods, and sits down on the nearest chair.)*

BURBAGE: What think you, Will? Had it not been better for a little more ostentation?

WILL: More ostentation? Aye. 'Tis what the world loves and should we not pander to the folly and filth of mankind? We, too, are men. Let us frankly admit our shame. To be sure, more ostentation! Let us contrive an unparalleled feast of offal to cast before the swine.

BURBAGE: Be counselled by an old friend and well-wisher, Will ...

WILL: Phrases, phrases! You are but a player and who should feign better than he whose best wish is to flatter groundlings?

BURBAGE: Why, man, is not the world a stage and all the men and women merely players? Who said that?

WILL: I was wrong. 'Tis a brothel and all the men and women mere cut-throats and strumpets.

BURBAGE: How, then, of your new piece? Have you and Wilkins made a cut-throat of Pericles?

WILL: I can make nothing of him. Master Wilkins can make nothing of him – when he exits his brothels long enough to send me fresh pages to rewrite. I have stretched my invention to the last peg. How should I write well of a world that is corruption, lies and lechery; where he that brays loudest achieves the laurels? *(Softly.)* I am spent, Dick.

BURBAGE: It rakes my heart to hear you.

WILL: *(With anger again.)* Doubtless! I was your hen that laid the golden eggs.

BURBAGE: Will, man!

WILL: Well, there's nothing left to get of me and, if you'll be advised by me, you'll waste no more time *on* me.

BURBAGE: Old friend, you'll get no harsh word *from* me. I do but pray God for your speedy recovery. Fare you well and you, too, Mistress Montjoy. 'Tis an excellent wig. Pray send it to the Globe.



*(Exit, left. WILL remains motionless in the chair.)*

WILL: Exit Burbage.

MME. MONTJOY: You have been for a walk in Moorfields with the flowers?

WILL: I was not there.

MME. MONTJOY: Not there? And yet you were not at the Mermaid.

WILL: How know you that? Do you spy on my movements?

MME. MONTJOY: I was in Bread Street, a-visiting Mistress Milton, the scrivener's wife, and as I came home, I thought it no harm to peep at the Mermaid's fine company. Dear Mistress Milton looks to have a baby in December, and will prattle of it so prettily withal. If a boy, they shall name him John, after his father. It gladdens my heart to see it.

WILL: You are glad that men breed sinners? And the Mermaid? Who was there?

MME. MONTJOY: Why, Masters Fletcher and Rowley and Marston and Webster and oh, yes, Master Ford alone in a corner.

WILL: No other?

MME. MONTJOY: Master Jonson was not there.

WILL: What's that to me?

MME. MONTJOY: He have not been there, they tell, for three days past.

WILL: And how do you think he has spent his three days? I will tell you: writing taunts, vile taunts at me!

MME. MONTJOY: I think not. He is hot, I know, but he cools quickly.

WILL: Let me hear of him no more! He climbed to renown on my shoulders. I noted his merit when no man would turn his learning-cumbered pages. He will build a play as he once built walls: brick by brick, to a chart. He would have it that all are fools who bring forth our plays by the rule of nature as things that breathe and move!

MME. MONTJOY: It is that you do not sleep. First you will have a good supper and then, as I hope, sweet music, for Mary shall come anon.

WILL: Music? I had rather set down the discords that jangle about mine ears.

MME. MONT JOY: You should write more of your *Pericles*.

WILL: I have writ ... my will.

MME. MONTJOY: Your testament? Oh, Master Shakespeare! I know what it is you think.

WILL: What?

MME. MONTJOY: I am told that you enter the shop of a chymist.

WILL: What, then? I must sleep. You've told me so. To-night, I think I shall.

*(Exit, right. MME. MONTJOY stands in despair until the outer door is heard to open.)*

MME. MONTJOY: Mary is come! *Merci, le Bon Dieu!* *(She opens the stage left door and looks out.)* Master Ben, I had thought you was my daughter. He is terrible! He mean to kill himself.

BEN: *(Stepping into the room.)* He's come back, then?

MME. MONTJOY: As you leave. He make a testament!

BEN: Tshaw! Let him write his testament. As for killing himself, he'll not do it.

MME. MONTJOY: You have not seen. He sleep never – never! And the poison, he has buy.

BEN: Eh? What?

MME. MONTJOY: Go to him. Speak him a kind word. I beg!

BEN: Not I. I've done all. *(He steps out and returns, pulling JUDITH.)* Here is the wench. What she can do is more than you or I.

JUDITH: *(With a strong country accent.)* I want to go home.

MME. MONTJOY: You must stay. Your father, he is here. *(She points off right.)*

JUDITH: I know what place this is.

MME. MONTJOY: A place of where the gentry may buy pleasures. *(JUDITH gasps.)* Hats and gloves and baubles and wigs, girl *stupid*.

*(JUDITH wails.)*

BEN: I can stand no more. Silence, girl. Just do as madame says.

JUDTH: Madam? *(JUDITH wails again.)*

BEN: Zounds, girl! Madame, I leave her with you and Will with her. I go to be rid of this mud and sweat and sh – your pardon, and your leave. *(He stops at the door.)* 'Sblood, madame, it is the best thing to be done.

*(BEN exits. After a moment, JUDITH wails again.)*

MME. MONTJOY: Oh, *silence!* Come, girl, come to me. *(JUDITH slowly goes to her.)* Now, you go to this corner and you stay silent, yes? You watch and see what happen. You watch and see why the great Master Jonson bring you here. *(JUDITH begins to wail.) Silence!*

*(MME. MONTJOY pushes JUDTH into a corner. Enter WILL, right.)*

WILL: You are still here. That's well. Hark you: I have writ my will, for none of us can lay head to pillow with assurance that he shall wake. I would sleep, sleep at once and for long. Tonight, I shall take no supper, and beg of you that no one shall disturb me. This paper I give to your keeping ...

MME. MONTJOY: I will not touch it. I know! You have purchased death of the chymist.

WILL: And if I had? The devil who set the world a-jogging delays the epilogue too long. The jest begins to stale.

MME. MONTJOY: Best sit here for a little, Master Will – for a half-hour.

WILL: And then another and then another, and so from day to day ... Not I.

MME. MONTJOY: Oh, Will! The paper! Sit you down and read it to me, for there is often much wrangling about a will. Teach me your full intent.

WILL: There'll be no wrangling for the goods that I bequeath! You shall hear. *(Reading.)* The last will and testament of Thersites Modernus, alias Timon of Cheapside, alias William Shakespeare of Stratford-on-Avon, gentleman, though the son of a glover and therefore the fool of Fortune. For the trash, my worldly wealth, I bequeath it to whomsoever can most excel in the fashionable employ of gilding a ladder to office and preferment. For my plays, I desire them a fitter audience than they shall find in a world where

truth is betrayed and beauty strumpeted as certainly as the unblushing sun shall rise. To my fellow writers, I bequeath my reputation, desiring them to smirch and belittle it as they please: to every woman, six lovers for the six days of the week, and a rich and uxorious wittol for Sunday: to every man, the ability to lie, pander and oppress for, by these, he shall climb to honour. And lastly, to the Evil Spirit who devised this world of men, I leave my malediction and therewith, like Job aforetime, I do give my soul, together with my body, most willingly to the worms. I'll seal this, then to my purpose. It is 'adieu, adieu, remember me.'

MME. MONTJOY: Not yet, not yet! Would you leave me nothing?

WILL: You are first here. Forestall the vultures. Take what you will. Snatch at the very coin in Charon's hand!

*(MME. MONTJOY hears voices in the room off left.)*

MME. MONTJOY: The shop. You promise to stay? I would tell you what thing I ask for ...

WILL: Despatch quickly or you may find me a grave man.

*(MME. MOUNTJOY exits, left. WILL stares absently at the floor. JUDITH, frightened, falls to her knees, face hidden.)*

WILL: To sleep; perchance to dream; ay, there's the rub;  
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come ...  
Dick Burbage, I hear you speaking it now! *(JUDITH sobs.)* Who cries so loud? *(JUDITH does not reply. He sees her.)* Well, you are a parcel of the world: you have cause for tears. Who are you, child? *(No answer.)* What would you here? *(No answer. WILL rises and goes over to her, raising her face.)* What! Is it possible? Anne?

JUDITH: *(Looking up.)* Father, father! Then the rough man spoke truth!

*(She rises and embraces him.)*

WILL: Not Anne. Judith? How came you? How was it worked, this wonder?

JUDITH: A dreadful huge fellow, I know not his name, snatched me from home yesterday – aye, it was yesterday – just as I was to go marketing. Here is my money, look! Quotha 'You're father is ill', but how should I believe his story? I thought ... I thought I was in the house of a ... harlot. How should I know? That woman, she is Mistress Mountjoy? Who made honey-cakes for your birthday last year? Oh! I was frightened!

WILL: And the huge fellow, swore he mightily?

JUDITH: Every yard of the way!

WILL: I guessed as much!

JUDITH: And you are sick. I see that.

WILL: Better for seeing you.

JUDITH: Oh, let us better that better. Take me back to Stratford – now, now! The meadows are covered with cowslips, and the oaks begin to leaf. And in the copses, there are primroses and violets. It's a new world, father. Could you not be happy in that brave new world! I have no skill in books and no London ways, but I do love you strangely. Am I too simple to be your companion?

*(WILL, released from strain, breaks down. From an upper room, MME. MONTJOY'S daughter is heard singing.)*

THE VOICE.: Hark! hark! the lark at heaven's gate sings,  
And Phoebus 'gins arise,  
His steeds to water at those springs  
On chaliced flowers that lies;  
And winking Marybuds begin  
To ope their golden eyes:  
With everything that pretty bin,  
My lady sweet, arise.

JUDITH: Take me to Stratford! You will?

WILL: No, Judith. I think I have not the strength. You must take me.

THE VOICE: *(Singing to the end.)*  
Arise, arise,  
My lady sweet, arise.

*(WILL tears into small pieces the Last Will of Thersites Modernus. Lights down.)*

**END OF SCENE**

**ACT TWO**  
**EPISODE V**

TIME : March, 1616.

SCENE : The principal living-room at New Place, Stratford-on-Avon. Centre back, a door leads to a garden. To either side of it a casement window. Left, a door from the rest of the house. Right, a fireplace.

*(WILL sits. He looks grey and broken and speaks without force. To his left, facing the fire, sits Francis COLLINS, his solicitor, middle forties. On the table, papers, an ink-horn, a sandbox and a quill.)*

WILL: Master Collins, importune me no farther,  
For how I firmly am resolved you know; that is,  
Not to bestow upon my youngest daughter  
Any sum until I have assurances  
Firmly laid her husband shall be hers.

COLLINS: Master Shakespeare, speak in prose, I pray. This bequest, sir: three hundred pounds to Judith, provided that "such husband as she shall be married unto" shall settle lands on her to the full sum of the marriage portion.

WILL: What of it, sir?

COLLINS: I' faith, it be – unusual. Oh, 'tis not for me to sway your judgment but, Master Shakespeare, as an old friend, I have found Mistress Judith in tears, and the young man himself as dejected as though his marriage-bells would be robbed of half their music ...

WILL: We will put that question aside.

COLLINS: Of your courtesy! Consider, sir: first, that, in all Stratford, there is no man enjoys a sweeter reputation than Master Thomas Quiney; the second, that he is the son of your old friend; the third ...

WILL: We will put that question aside. No more of it, Master Collins.

COLLINS: Very good, sir, I have done.

WILL: You did not omit my bequest to Judith of the bowl?

COLLINS: It is duly entered. A fine piece of silver-craft!

WILL: Judith was with me when I purchased it ... when I left London.

COLLINS: London! The Court! The playhouse! You have mixed with the bravest company in that great town!

WILL: True enough.

COLLINS: For all I am a plain man of law, yet I think that I could have laughed with the best of you. Marry, you must have heard some rare bouts of wit.

WILL: Long ago ... at the Mermaid, aye, at the Mermaid. ... Kit – who died so young and so foully – and Henslowe – who died these two months since – and Alleyne, still hale, bless him, and Ben himself, great-hearted Ben, a figure in a dream ... a dream of monsters and grinning masks!

COLLINS: But, sir, had it nothing goodly?

WILL: Aye. There were honest spirits: Condell and Dick Burbage and Heminges. I would that they might think on me sometimes when I am gone.

COLLINS: Easy enough, Master Shakespeare. A few shillings out of your residue ...

WILL: I had rather they remembered kind deeds. Nevertheless, the shillings ...

COLLINS: Sufficient to – purchase them rings, eh, sir?

*(He makes a note to that effect.)*

WILL: A man's memory may outlive him half a year – but he must buy rings, first.

*(He laughs. COLLINS looks blankly at him.)*

It matters not. I've done with London. I am firmly resolved to think on it no more. Indeed, I find my memory, even as my sight, begins to wane. I tire quickly. I trust that I have done well with the property.

COLLINS: Sir, you have been generous to a fault. The bulk and balance of your estate to your eldest daughter and her husband. *(Clearing his throat.)* I note that you have made no specific provision for Mistress Shakespeare.

WILL: What of that? Under the law, she'll have one third of all my estate.

COLLINS: Indeed, sir, but perhaps some small specific provision ...

WILL: My second-best bed.

COLLINS: Your second-best bed?

WILL: My second-best bed. She will know why. Mark it down so.

COLLINS: So. *(Making a note.)* Will you sign these provisions?

WILL: Make my mark on those. I will sign the whole.

*(Enter JUDITH and Thomas QUINEY. They go to Will and kneel. ANNE Shakespeare, a sour-faced woman some eight years older than her husband, enters separately.)*

JUDITH: Father!

QUINEY: Father!

ANNE: Will!

WILL: Father me no farthers and will me no Wills.  
I've made my will as thou shalt see – aye, and 'ear it, too.

COLLINS: *(Laughing.)* Eye and ear! Oh, Master Shakepeare, thy London wit!

ANNE: Husband, shall strangers be privy to this?

WILL: Master Collins is no stranger – and all of *this* shall be known to the general weal by the morrow. *(JUDITH begins to cry.)* Leave that. Master Collins, this ungente rogue, this pernicious knave, hath shamed my daughter and himself thrice o'er this past nine month.

COLLINS: E'en so?

WILL: *Tertius:* this mongrel tortoise was too empty-pated to trip him to the bishopric and pay him a shilling for dispensations to wed amid Lent. Whereby, their marriage is void and he and my daughter have honeyed in sin these two month and are now excommunicate from the church.

COLLINS: A five shilling fine, at most. What jack-in-office took note of it, these days?



WILL: *Secundus*: this dissembling finch-egg got himself a bastard on Margaret Wheeler nine-month past – and girl and babe have died but two days ago.

QUINEY: Heaven forgive me.

ANNE: Pray heaven might, for I'll not.

QUINEY: Sir, when this deed had taken place,  
We were as twinn'd lambs that did frisk i' the sun,  
And bleat the one at other: what we 'changed  
Was innocence for innocence; we knew not  
The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dream'd  
That any did.

WILL: And so, by this, we gather you have tripp'd since.  
*Imprimis*, Master Collins, look you, yonder  
Ink-stained cheese pens verses and would  
Turn his hand to scribbling. Peace, Anne! *(To QUINEY.)* Sir,  
I give thee thy liberty, set thee from durance; and,  
In lieu thereof, impose on thee nothing but this:  
Thou'rt excommunicate, therefore  
I'll not communicate with thee. Begone!

*(JUDITH and QUINEY leave.)*

ANNE: *(After they have left.)* Husband, there's a fellow, rid from London, desires words. 'A'll not give his name – says thou'lt be none the wiser.

COLLINS: I will not detain you ...

WILL: Indeed, I trust you will stay for dinner.

COLLINS: *(Glancing at ANNE.)* Were it not that I fear to put you out ...

ANNE: *(Sourly.)* If Master Collins care to stay, we can provide.

COLLINS: I shall be much beholden to you for your hospitality. In the meanwhile, I will not obstruct your visitor. *(He begins to collect his papers.)*

WILL: Perhaps you would care to walk in my garden, sir? The snowdrops are out.

ANNE: What should he do in a garden at this time o' year?

WILL: 'Tis true 'tis newly come spring, but the sun is like April.

COLLINS: Moreover, I carry the happiest recollections of your garden.

ANNE: Send this London man off.

WILL: 'Twere uncourteous to deny him. He's rid far.

ANNE: *(She produces a small cup and gives it to him.)* Then first, thy physic.

WILL: *(Cup in hand.)* Sour stuff, Master Collins, but in time we all come to the doctor. *(He drinks the medicine.)* Aeck! I wonder if my son-in-law is not trying to poison me.

ANNE: Will, thou knowst John an able doctor and loving husband to Susannah.

COLLINS: Well, sir, I shall see you anon.

*(Exit, back centre.)*

ANNE: *(Pausing at door, left.)* Thou'lt relent to Judith, Will, I know thee well. I wonder thou'lt persist when thou'st well nigh broke the chit's heart with thy peevish obduracy.

WILL: We'll not discuss it again, Anne.

ANNE: La! How thou try'st my patience, husband!

*(Exit, left. WILL moves to the window, back right, and looks out. The door, left, is opened and a POET enters.)*

POET: Master Shakespeare!

WILL: *(Turning.)* Hey? Ah, the young man from London.

POET: *(Pause dramatically.)* Sir, shall I doff my shoes, like another Moses?

WILL: Why?

POET: I tread upon holy ground.

WILL: I pray you, leave your shoes to their proper use. May I learn your name?

POET: I am a poet, but, when you left London, I had writ nothing, and my name

would not be known to you.

WILL: At least, you will take a chair?

POET: My thanks. *(They sits by the window but the POET frequently rises and walks about the room.)* I scarce know how to speak to you.

WILL: We both speak English, do we not?

POET: I had meant, sir, that my veneration for you is so profound, I am tongue-tied. How oft I have dreamed of when I meet the mightiest of all poets!

WILL: *(Gently.)* Pardon me. I am an old man now and have no stomach for the libations of language. Be so good as to broach your matter simply.

POET: Let me first persuade you of my – I would fain say ‘adoration’!

WILL: You need persuade me no further.

POET: And then, sir, a word of my qualifications.

WILL: For what office?

POET: I am a scholar of Oxford and thereto a votary of the Muses.

WILL: None of which will buy a pail of stout. Well, sir?

POET: Indeed, I have written a play which ... I tremble to speak it ... is thought to bear a likeness to some of your own. ’Twas entitled *The Puritan, or the Widow of Watling Street*. You have heard of it?

WILL: No. I have small news of London.

POET: Yet I dare to think you’d relish it, so unmercifully does it mock the knaves!

WILL: What knaves?

POET: Why, the Puritans!

WILL: Are they more knavish than you or I?

POET: Master Shakespeare! Puritans! Puritans!

WILL: They have their faults but, I pray you, unfold your purpose.

POET: Then, sir, understand that, ever since the lamentable fire at the Globe Playhouse, I have been oppressed by a powerful and hideous apprehension.

WILL: Then, you were best consult a doctor, not a scribbler.

POET: Do you, sir, realise that your manuscripts, your inestimable manuscripts, might all have perished in that disaster, along with the very Globe itself?

WILL: It was but a fire at a playhouse – the globe was never endangered.

POET: (*WILL remains unmoved.*) But your plays might have perished! Some, it is true, have been uttered by the printer but woefully mangled in form: and others, among them your sublimest achievements, repose in the custody of mere players. Sir, conceive me justly! Burbage, Heminges and the rest, they are all of them, all honourable men, but at any moment, by some rude mischance, the whole of your wit and invention may be lost to the world forever. In good faith, I cannot sleep for the thought.

WILL: There, I have sympathy for you; time was when I could not sleep.

POET: From that same cause, sir?

WILL: From other causes.

POET: Therefore, I know you will not rest until we can put my project into action.

WILL: And yet, I think I shall sleep tonight. What project?

POET: Old age and even death, sir, will often steal upon a man while he is yet relishing in the full flavour of his youth. I pray most fervently that you may continue for many years to enjoy the world ...

WILL: I thank you, but your prayers will prove vain. I have no long lease of life.

POET: I see. And afterwards?

WILL: Heaven, as I hope of heaven.

POET: Marry, sir, I mean your plays. Sir, bequeath them to the world! I come to implore you, in the name of posterity, to memorialize your plays which, in our belief, are likely to prove the greatest of all time. Print them! If you

lack vigour for the enterprise, I would offer my humble service, intruding upon you only in points of doubt, and with no further reward than the gratitude of unborn generations. I warrant you, it would be a labour of love.

WILL: And oft love's labour's lost. I thank you for your zeal, but you urge me in vain.

POET: Oh, sir, your exquisite reason?

WILL: (*Chuckling.*) I have no exquisite reason.

POET: Sir, you confound me!

WILL: First, sir, I have not a page of my own writings. Henslowe has some – or had. Joan and Ned Alleyne will have that portion now. Burbage and Condell have more from the Kings' Men. Others are, I know not where.

POET: They can be found – they *will* be found!

WILL: But more so, I am swayed by something which you could not know until you know me well.

POET: Master Shakespeare, your pardon! For all that before this hour I had never set eyes on you, I dare to say that I know you more than well. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, I know you as you were at the outset of life – careless and wild as an April morn. In *Romeo and Juliet*, I see you as you were as a young man, merriment tempered with pity, freedom constrained by the gyves of love. In *Hamlet*, I find a man who perceives that the world is sick and may not be cured except with tears. In *Timon*, humour becomes passion, loathing, hopelessness for a world where imagination can totter only into madness. At last, in *The Tempest*, I watch you making peace with your fellows, forgiving them their evil, asking forgiveness for yours and looking out on the world with a lantern of wonder in your hand. And through all these pictures – may I not say it, sir? – I know the man.

WILL: And after *The Tempest*?

POET: (*Confused.*) There is nothing after.

WILL: There is something: a desire – a desire which you do not know.

POET: What desire, sir?

WILL: The desire to forget.

POET: To forget?

WILL: Aye, that. I'll break my staff,  
Bury it certain fathoms i'the earth,  
And deeper than did ever plummet sound  
I'll drown my books.

*(Enter JUDITH, left.)*

JUDITH: *(Eagerly.)* Father! Father! *(Sees the POET and draws back.)* Your pardon!

*(She is about to withdraw. The POET rises.)*

WILL: Stay, Judith. *(Introducing her)* My younger daughter, Signor ... Incognito.

POET: The daughter of William Shakespeare! Where shall I find words?

WILL: The simplest were the best, for she is no scholar and can neither read nor write. *(The POET recoils in astonishment.)* All my care I bestowed upon children of another kind – children who in these days bring me no consolation. But returning good for evil, she has been my stay in a time of darkness. *(JUDITH is now sitting on a stool at his feet.)*

POET: *(Responsively.)* Admired Miranda!

WILL: Adored Judith. She loves me a little, for all that I have sinned much.

JUDITH: Father, say not so!

WELL: I shall and have.

JUDITH: Father, I cannot wait – the gentleman will excuse me. I have spoken with Tom. All will be well. He has given way wholly.

WILL: If so, he is wise.

JUDITH: And he has writ you a letter. Oh, say you are glad!

WILL: 'Twere well he writ it. 'Twere better he gave it me.

JUDITH: He did. Here it is. *(She produces it from the bodice of her gown.)* Would you read it now?

POET: *(Bowing.)* I shall withdraw.

WILL: Stay! My sight is no longer clear and as my daughter is 'no scholar', you would do me a service if you yourself would read it.

POET: To do so will be an honour!

*(JUDITH hands him the letter.)*

POET: *(Reading.)* 'Worthy Master Shakespeare,' – he begins well indeed – 'having well considered the matter before us, and inasmuch as my affection for your daughter outruns the capacity of language, I tell you I freely acknowledge my fault on all counts. For my fault with the girl Margaret, I am heartily sorry a summer's day brought such an end to so short a life and can only offer penance thereto, in public or private as you shall say. For my fault of dispensations, this can be repaired and shall be so. For the fault of my pen, I shall write no more verses and bend my wit resolutely to the trade by which I live, and will strive in all ways to be unto your daughter a gentle and loving husband. Moreover, in my life, I never shall set foot in a playhouse.'

*(The letter falls from the YOUNG POET's fingers.)*

WILL: *(To JUDITH.)* I am very glad. And now, my dear, if you go into the garden you will find our good Master Collins. Tell him that we shall join you in a moment. *(As she is about to go out, back.)* Nay, first inform your mother that this gentleman also will share our midday meal. *(Exit JUDITH, left. WILL approaches the POET, who has relapsed into a chair, completely crushed.)* Well, sir, do you have your answer?

POET: Master Shakespeare, I am all amazement. Indeed, you have rent my heart.

WILL: There is that penalty in the possession of a heart. In one way or another, at one time or another, every heart, I think, must be rent.

POET: 'Twere better, then, to have none.

WILL: Not so. A groats' worth of wisdom is worth a heavy price. Long since, not knowing the vanity of ambition, I gave my whole heart to my writings. You, in your generosity, would recall them to me, but, like the hopes and hazards of a fruitless voyage, I wish to remember them no more.

POET: Sir, sir, the sublimest works ever penned by man and you wish to remember them no more!

WILL: For every man, life has a lesson, a buried treasure, which he cannot find except by pain – and endurance.

POET: Do not your works contain a myriad lessons? And will you take no measures to preserve them?

WILL: If they are of value to men, they will not perish.

POET: But have you no pride in them?

WILL: None, I thank God, none! I have learned my lesson and, whiles I yet live, shall think no more on vanity.

POET: Is a life's work no more than that?

WILL: Think it no more. *(Struggling to his feet.)* Come, sir, you shall see my garden. In that, I have some pride, for that is God's work. Ah, Master Collins!

*(He goes out, back, and joins COLLINS, who is visible through the window, left. The POET is about to follow him but, dropping into a chair, buries his face in his hands.)*

JUDITH: *(Enters at door left.)* Young master! Is anything amiss?

POET: *(Looking up, speaking in a broken voice.)* You would not know the song.

JUDITH: What song, sir?

POET: *(Reciting the words softly and upon two or three notes.)*  
Full fathom five thy father lies,  
Of his bones are coral made,  
Those are pearls that were his eyes.  
Nothing of him that doth fade  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange.

*(He rises unsteadily, and passes with JUDITH into the garden. Lights down.)*

**END OF PLAY**