

CHARACTERS

Casting should be diverse. Shakespeare is for everyone.

HENRY CONDELL—40; feisty, hopeful friend and actor in the King's Men.

JOHN HEMINGES—50; reasonable friend and financial manager of the King's Men; owner of the Globe Tap House; a good man, a gentleman, if serious.

RICHARD BURBAGE—50s; seasoned lion of the stage, famous across England, loud and proud.

(Henry, John, and Richard wear identical mourning rings for Will.)

ALICE HEMINGES—35, John's daughter and alewife, knows everyone and hangs with the boys.

BOY HAMLET—Young actor.

BARMAN—Ruffian.

BARMAN 2—Drunk.

BEN JONSON—Poet laureate of England, friend/rival of Shakespeare. Amazing drunk. A bear of a man. Surprisingly weepy.

ELIZABETH CONDELL—Henry's wife, savvy and fun.

REBECCA HEMINGES—John's wife, a good wife. Strong, busy with their grocery business, a woman who has weathered much but loves her husband and sons and God.

ED KNIGHT—"Stage manager" for the King's Men, self-serious and particular.

RALPH CRANE—Humble scrivener of the King's Men. Quick, sure, quiet.

WILLIAM JAGGARD—Successful if shady publisher of books, plays, and playbills. He is confident in his ability to get what he wants. Very experienced, very connected, willing to do whatever it takes to get the job done. An ass.

ISAAC JAGGARD—William's son, will inherit the business. Sensitive, an artist at heart.

MARCUS—20, printer's apprentice at the Jaggard print shop, nosy but honest.

COMPOSITOR—Works for Jaggard, young.

EMILIA BASSANO LANIER—50, fiery Italian feminist and poet, independent woman, lover of life (and of Shakespeare).

ANNE HATHAWAY SHAKESPEARE—60, Shakespeare's now ailing wife. Strong-willed, a classy lady, a survivor.

SUSANNAH SHAKESPEARE—30, good girl and daughter of Shakespeare.

CRIER—Newsboy.

BERNARDO, FRANCISCO—Actors playing those roles.

SIR EDWARD DERING—60, book and theatre lover.

HORATIO

FRUIT SELLER

MARCELLUS

Doubling for 10 Actors

- 1—Henry Condell
- 2—John Heminges
- 3—Richard Burbage / William Jaggard / Horatio
- 4—Elizabeth Condell / Emilia Bassano Lanier / Fruit Seller / Marcellus
- 5—Rebecca Heminges / Anne Hathaway Shakespeare
- 6—Ralph Crane / Barman / Compositor / Francisco
- 7—Alice Heminges / Susannah Shakespeare
- 8—Ed Knight / Isaac Jaggard
- 9—Marcus / Boy Hamlet / Crier / Bernardo
- 10—Ben Jonson / Barman 2 / Sir Edward Dering

SETTING

1619–1623.

London and Stratford-upon-Avon, England.

LOCATIONS

John Heminges' Tap House at the Globe, John's home, Henry's home, the office and stage at the Globe, Jaggard's print shop, Emilia Bassano Lanier's house, Ben Jonson's house, Anne Shakespeare's house in Stratford.

NOTE ON PRESSES

Full moveable Elizabethan printing presses needn't be seen. It's their sound, the ink, and the multitude of paper that interest this play.

THE BOOK OF WILL

ACT ONE

One.

1619. London, England.

The sound of millions of...pages flipping and smacking and rustling.

Or is it applause we hear?

Out of the darkness emerges one man, a young, scrawny actor playing Prince Hamlet...poorly.

He performs from the “bad quarto” version of Hamlet...

BOY HAMLET.

To be, or not to be... Aye there's the point,
To Die, to sleep, is that all? Aye all:
No, to sleep, to dream, aye marry there it goes,
For in that dream of death, when we awake,
And borne before an everlasting Judge,
From whence no passenger ever returned—

Which smacks right into...

Two.

The Globe Tap House—the comfortable haunt of our heroes and their friends.

John Heminges, Henry Condell, and Richard Burbage sit at their favorite table, drink their favorite beer—of which they've had several so far—and ridicule that poor actor. Burbage is mad as hell, the others laugh at and with him, and Alice Heminges keeps the beer coming. They are drunk, hilarious compatriots.

BURBAGE. *What in the un-muzzled dog-breath was that?* That wasn't *Hamlet*, that fobbing hackery, that was a defilement, I have been defiled.

ALICE. All right, Burbage.

BURBAGE. *I have been defiled.*

JOHN. It was awful, Alice.

HENRY. So very awful. I was not enough prepared for that level of mediocrity.

JOHN. And I was not enough drunk.

ALICE. I told you not to go; I said it'd make you mad.

JOHN. I heard they sold out both days.

HENRY.	BURBAGE.	ALICE.
What?!	What?!	No!

JOHN. *That's* what makes me mad.

BURBAGE. Just because that little froth can hold a skull he thinks he can play *Hamlet*? My soul is written into that part and I'll play The Prince till I die, and after that? They better use *my* skull for Yorick so I can spend eternity silently judging all else.

ALICE. You could've left before he boiled over.

HENRY. We did, right after Ophelia giggled his way through Act Three.

ALICE. Giggled.

HENRY.	BURBAGE.	JOHN.
Giggled.	Giggled.	Giggled.

BURBAGE. *Those pillagers of wit and charlatans of heart.*

ALICE. That's what I hate most, the thievery of it. They just steal the words.

JOHN. I wish they stole the words. They just steal the title and Will's name and make up the rest.

HENRY. Of all the piracies of Will's work this one was the worst.

ALICE. Worse than the *Two Gentlemen of Antwerp*?

JOHN.	HENRY.	BURBAGE.
<i>The worst.</i>	<i>The worst.</i>	<i>The worst.</i>

BURBAGE. Now? I'm going to have to kill that kid. First I'm going to kill the hack that pirated our play, then I'm going to kill the pimple that played my part, and just for shits and giggles I'm killing Ophelia too.

ALICE. Hasn't that girl been through enough?

BURBAGE. *It was blasphemy and they must be punished.*

JOHN. We shall spare you the description of Gertrude.

HENRY. The lady doth protest *so very much*, methinks. Did they not read the part where he says, "Do not saw the air too much with your hand"? Act Two.

JOHN.	BURBAGE.
Act Three.	Act Three.

HENRY. Act Three. And here the simpering thing is— (*Makes a sawing-of-air gesture.*) extricating the logs of an unseen forest.

JOHN. And yet the people pay. For rubbish!

HENRY. If I'd known that I wouldn't have worked so hard all this time.

ALICE. They pay because it says Shakespeare.

BURBAGE. That's not Shakespeare, that's shit wrapped in roses.

ALICE. I mean if they're going to steal the scripts why don't they at least steal them *correctly*?

HENRY. Because they send those damn boys, who have neither patience nor understanding, to copy the shows while we perform them.

BURBAGE. *I'll kill the boys too.*

ALICE. That's it I'm cutting you off.

BURBAGE. You do and the king'll hear of it.

ALICE. It's not the king I'm worried about, Burbage, it's your wife. Winny will have my hide if I send you back to her like this.

BURBAGE. My Winnifred, Henry's Liz, your mother, they saw us play these parts with our hearts on fire. They saw the first *Hamlet* that e'er was, they know what's lost with this pirating, what cold wind blows when mice attempt to play lions. You do too. You remember your father onstage, I know you do.

ALICE. Strutting and fretting. Yes I do.

JOHN. All right, Burbage.

HENRY. A lion indeed. That you were, John.

JOHN. That was a long time ago.

ALICE. I wish you'd play again, Dad. I really do.

JOHN. Oh stop it, all of you.

BURBAGE. We lost one of our best when you quit.

JOHN. I didn't quit. We needed a manager more than a Polonius. Now we play the palace monthly. That took more than Burbage's fame, it took fiscal sanity and you're welcome.

ALICE. We just mean you were good.

HENRY. Very good.

BURBAGE. Pretty good.

Teasing laughter—John bats it away.

ALICE. Well no matter how the mice skitter, it's *you* that play to packed houses, you the king's favorite, you who roar. You are *all* lions of the boards to this day and no hack Hamlet will change that.

HENRY. No. 'Tis we ourselves will do it. We are not young.

BURBAGE. Aye. Performances end. So do actors.

HENRY. Theatre is lived, not kept. It sleeps when we do.

JOHN. Well said, Condi. Now shut up, you're making me feel old.

BURBAGE. You are old.

HENRY. We all are.

ALICE. All right you triplets of gloom. You're none of you King Lear yet.

A joyful thought.

BURBAGE.
Lear!

HENRY.
Titus!

ALICE. I might have rattled some pots backstage for that.

JOHN. You did indeed my dear.

HENRY. And your Prospero.

BURBAGE.

“Blow wind! come, wrack!

At least we’ll die with harness on our back.”

JOHN.

HENRY.

ALICE.

That’s from *Macbeth*. That’s from *Macbeth*. That’s from *Macbeth*.

BURBAGE. (*Covering.*) I know it’s from *Macbeth*, I played *Macbeth* and I’ll play it again right now. *Who wants to be a witch?*

Alice volunteers!

HENRY. You know my favorite was always *Pericles*.

Pause.

JOHN. *Pericles?*

ALICE. Which one was *Pericles*?

HENRY. With the king and the daughter and the riddle that he figures out and then leaves on a boat and—there’s a storm in it, I thought you’d like it.

BURBAGE. Is there a wizard?

HENRY. Never mind.

JOHN. I thought Wilkins wrote that.

HENRY. *I said never mind.*

The Boy Hamlet enters with two barmen.

The bar cheers for him. He takes a grandiose, undeserved bow.

Burbage is about to sock this little shit—

BURBAGE. Goddamn, son-of-a—

ALICE. He’s a kid, Burbage. He probably wants an autograph.

Boy Hamlet waves and winks at Burbage from across the room.

BURBAGE. I’m sorry did he just wink at me?

Burbage rises but Henry stops him from charging the kid.

HENRY.

JOHN.

HeyHeyHey

Richard, not here.

ALICE. Sit, Burbage. Please.

BURBAGE. I will attempt. To stay seated.

ALICE. Thank you. More ale.

BURBAGE. Gentlemen. We have lived through the age of the poet and landed in the age of the hack.

ALICE. Then thank God Burbage knows all the plays by heart.

BURBAGE. That's the only way you get to tell everyone else what to do.

JOHN. At least someone knows them. I can tell you the stories, but I can't remember the lines.

HENRY. I can barely remember the lines of the ones I'm in now.

JOHN. Fading in the flesh. This is what it feels to be the last of a group of men. Will's gone, the original King's Men *gone*, save us. It's not the same now is it?

BURBAGE. I'll admit it. I wept like a lady when Sam passed.

ALICE. A fitting tribute, actually.

HENRY. His Juliet was soft as moonlight.

BURBAGE. After he played Cleopatra I kissed him. Offstage. Couldn't help it.

HENRY. Me too!

ALICE. The man made a good woman.

JOHN. And Will Sly, remember. And Augustine.

HENRY. And Armin, and Crosse.

ALICE. I remember.

HENRY. Exactly. Now it's those who remember, and those who don't. We few, we happy few, we band of—

BURBAGE. That's my line, don't steal my line.

ALICE. And what of Marlowe?

HENRY.	JOHN.	BURBAGE.
Marlowe!	Marlowe!	Marlowe!

JOHN. What a genius.

HENRY. What a rogue.

BURBAGE. What an idiot getting himself killed like that so young.

JOHN. Well. We must not weep for those past. They lived well that lived onstage.

BURBAGE. A life of ages and pages.

Pause. Henry looks at his ring.

HENRY. I miss him. Three years gone and I miss Will every day.

JOHN. Aye. He'd know what to say to shut up all our bleating.

BURBAGE. To Will.

Who bequeathed us three these rings to remind us that good friends
are behind all good stories. And good stories make for good lives.

JOHN.

HENRY.

ALICE.

To Will

Hear, hear.

That I like

A lovely moment...

*That is soon destroyed when Boy Hamlet stands on a table
as the gathered crowd cheers and starts clapping for the boy
to do a speech.*

CROWD.

BOY HAMLET.

Speech! Speech! Speech!

Yes, yes. Thank you, yes!

BURBAGE. *(Making a fist with his ringed hand.)* Or perhaps Will just
meant us to leave a mark.

ALICE. Oh dear.

HENRY.

JOHN.

ALICE.

Burbage, let's not.

What's the point,
Burbage.

Dammit, Richard,
behave.

BOY HAMLET. "Alas poor Yorick—"

Burbage rises on the table—cuts the boy off.

He is a lion of a man and throws his ire at the Boy Hamlet.

BURBAGE. YOU. BOY. *Speak not that speech, I pray you.*

Mine ears repel the broken lines you claim as Shakespeare.

BOY HAMLET. I claim it not, Master Burbage. I only play the part
as written.

BURBAGE. IT WAS NOT WRITTEN FOR YOU.

Those lines are not Shakespeare's and not yours. And Hamlet does
not flinch at death, nay he leans into it, he examines, he defies, he
does not, as you did today, fall to his knees and whine about it.

The crowd laughs at this.

You deserve the crown more than you deserve that play.

BOY HAMLET. You misunderstand me, Master Burbage. I defer to you, sir. I hope in my old age I will be as well seasoned.

BURBAGE. I'M NOT A GODDAMNED SOUP, YOU ARTLESS MINNOW.

ALICE. Time to go, young man.

HENRY. This is the house of the King's Men, and we have seen enough of you today.

BARMAN. You know I just saw you play Polonius last week, Condell. Had a good cheer when they poked you to death.

BARMAN 2. Finally shut him up.

HENRY. Oh, you think you're being funny?

BARMAN 2. Oh, not as f-f-funny as it was watching Johnny all those years ago.

BARMAN. I do miss the crackling of old St-St-Stuttering Heminges.

HENRY.

ALICE.

That is *not* this good man's name.

Hey now, none of that in here.

JOHN. Leave it, Henry.

BARMAN. No wonder they moved him to m-m-management.

HENRY. OUT OF HERE OR A BROKEN JAW FOR BOTH.

JOHN. (*Getting upset, which triggers his stutter.*) Just l-l-leave it, I said, leave it.

The barmen explode into laughter and mock John's stutter.

Alice smacks her hand on the table, shutting them up.

ALICE. *This is Master John Heminges' Tap House next to the Globe Theatre on the boards of which he made real men, gentlemen, kings, and queens laugh with wit and wisdom and the soul of the ages, while you were trying to think of a comeback to the cheap whore who wouldn't have you. So unless you want to feel even more like the desperate asses you are, you'll learn from these gentlemen players, steal better, and go drink by your own playhouse, not ours.*

The bar cheers for her.

JOHN. (*To Alice.*) Never tell your brothers but you are my favorite.

Burbage quiets them.

BURBAGE. Wait, wait, wait, Ali my dear, I'm sorry but these men are not going to leave until they bear witness.

ALICE. To what? Burbage. Don't. Whatever you're about to do.

BURBAGE. To do? No. NoNoNo.

Burbage jumps full force into Hamlet—speedy delivery, deft, quick, confident, leaving them all in the dust.

To be, or not to be, that is the question:

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,

Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,

And by opposing end them: to die, to sleep

No more—

Switching to Macbeth—Henry, John, and Alice clap.

“Sleep no more!

Macbeth does murder sleep,” the innocent sleep,

Switching to Richard III in a instant.

Let not our babbling dreams affright our souls

Conscience is but a word that cowards use—

Then Caesar.

Cowards die many times before their deaths;

The valiant never taste of death but once.

Then Henry V.

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more!

Or close the wall up with our English dead—

Then Richard II.

this England,

This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,

Fear'd by their breed and famous by their birth,

Then Lear.

When we are born, we cry that we are come

To this great stage of fools.

Last, to Midsummer—delivered directly to the barmen.

Lord...what fools these mortals be.

And Burbage is done.

The bar bursts into applause and cheers for Burbage, who goes to the barmen.

Now. If you taint my good friend's name with another one of your specious displays, the King's Men will put down the props and pick up the real swords.

Boy Hamlet and the barmen get the hell out of there and fast.

As the applause rolls on, Burbage nods good night to Alice, raises his ring to John and Henry, who raise theirs back to him, downs his drink, smiles and...

Exit, Burbage.

And he does.

Transition from Two...

The sounds and bustle of the streets of London, 1619. The crier walks through town...as a few posters for plays are nailed or hung by workers.

CRIER. Three plays this week at the Globe Theatre! One lamentable tragedy of *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*; one excellent farce of *Volpone*; and the enchanting comedy *Twelfth Night*. 3 o'clock in the afternoon, a penny for the pit! One penny for a play today!

The crier walks on through the crowd.

Three.

John is in his Tap House surrounded by papers or log books, trying to make those managerial decisions managers do...

When Henry runs in, breathless.

HENRY. John.

JOHN. Henry, good morning. I was thinking, if we move the Turner piece later in the month—what?

HENRY. John. It's—I—I don't know—I *don't know*—

JOHN. What is it?

HENRY. I—I'm so sorry, I don't even know how to utter it—

JOHN. What happened, Henry? What's wrong?

HENRY. Last night he was—he was right there.

JOHN. Henry.

HENRY. He's dead, John. He's gone. In his sleep last night. This morning? Gone.

JOHN. Henry. Who?

Pause.

HENRY. Exit, Burbage.

A shocked, impossible pause that blends into...

Four.

John, Henry, Alice, Rebecca Heminges, Elizabeth Condell, Ben Jonson, Ralph Crane, Ed Knight, and any others lay roses at the lip of the stage for Burbage. Even young Boy Hamlet is there and might be the most inconsolable of them all.

Elizabeth breaks from Henry and joins Rebecca and Alice.

ELIZABETH. How's John, Becky?

REBECCA. John's a wreck. Your husband?

ELIZABETH. Henry's in a fog since we heard. Good friends mean bad days when the time comes.

REBECCA. How is he gone? How could he be? Not Burbage. He had more life in him than twenty men.

ALICE. I keep thinking he'll just walk back into the Tap House. Surprise us all.

ELIZABETH. I think that would be a plot twist he'd like.

REBECCA. A life with actors and I still fool myself that it's all entrances and no exits.

ALICE. Well. You can't have the comedies without the tragedies.

REBECCA. I find I *need* more comedies the older I get.

ALICE. You've always loved the comedies Mum.

REBECCA. Yes but it's the *needing* that surprises me in times like these. Laughter must be death's greatest defiance I think.

ELIZABETH. You and your daughter are the heart of this entire outfit, you know.

REBECCA. I think we share the pulse of it, Liz.

ALICE. It's hard to be strong through it all.

ELIZABETH. That's why they need us to do it.

REBECCA. Clean up and carry on. So they can.

ELIZABETH. I think we can stop cleaning for a day. Come round tomorrow, we'll find somewhere sunny to walk.

REBECCA. I could stop for an hour I suppose.

ELIZABETH. Join me and your mum tomorrow, Ali? Take your mind off it all?

ALICE. Would that I could. The theatre needs ale and apples and I clean up and carry on.

John finds Rebecca, he's nervous.

JOHN. Becky, I think Henry should speak, n-not me.

REBECCA. What's this? No, John, you must.

JOHN. Henry can do it just fine, and I—I c-can't.

REBECCA. John, *you're* head of the King's Men now. You're the one they want to hear from and no one will mind if— (*She doesn't say "if you stutter."*) your heart gets the best of your speech.

JOHN. I will mind.

(Calling to Henry.) Henry.

REBECCA. John.

JOHN. I will mind.

John squeezes her hand and leaves her to offer Henry his piece of paper. Henry listens to John, nods, takes the paper. Meanwhile...

ALICE. What's wrong with Dad?

REBECCA. You know him. If he can't do it perfectly he'll not do it at all.

ALICE. Ah yes. His best and worst quality.

Clearing his throat and moving to the front, Henry reads the speech John wrote...

HENRY. Gathered friends. In our mourning we honor the great man Richard Burbage. A man who lived so many lives on stages across this country that all of England pauses in their pain today. We who knew him well...will never know another of his kindness, his caliber, and his art. And now, the poet laureate of England, Master Ben Jonson, has requested a chance to speak.

Ben Jonson rises.

ALICE. That's nice of him. He usually doesn't ask permission.

REBECCA. Hush, Ali.

BEN. My compatriots. Burbage was a giant of these boards. The speech he lifted from page to air was honeyed and wise. Silence did not suit him. So I know that Heaven is full of laughter and speech tonight. Do not rest in peace, good friend. Rest in sound and fury.

Ben is done, nods of approval.

I have penned a eulogy that I shall be humbled to recite anon.

ALICE. That *wasn't* the eulogy?

REBECCA. *Would you hush.*

ELIZABETH. *Shh.*

Ben reveals a scroll and unrolls it...all of it. It's long.

Clears his throat to begin and—

Blackout.

Five.

The Globe Tap House that night. John, Henry, Alice, Ben, Elizabeth, and Rebecca drink to their friend.

JOHN. How? How how how is another one of us gone?

HENRY. Good night, sweet prince.

ELIZABETH. He wasn't that sweet. He'd be the first to admit it.

ALICE. True.

HENRY. Good night, proud, loud, and rowdy prince.

REBECCA. That's more like it.

ALICE. Certainly the Burbage I knew.

HENRY. (*A sudden toast.*) To good men, and good players.

JOHN. With good wives. Such good wives.

BEN. *Alewives*. They're the ones you can count on. (*To Alice.*) I'm looking at you.

ALICE. Please don't.

BEN. Can't help it.

ALICE. Please try.

ELIZABETH. I thought you didn't believe in love, Ben, your plays don't.

BEN. There is rational love and there is heedless passion, and only one of those is worth enshrining in literature.

ALICE. And only one of those is worth watching onstage, which is exactly why Will outdid you.

BEN. Out-*what*? He never outdid me in all my life, that untrained populist.

ALICE. *A poet of the heart always beats a scholar*. No highborn Latin rationalism can grip like a story of passion, of men and women alight with revenge or love or loss. You wrote for professors, he wrote for people. And for good or ill the latter rule the world I live in.

HENRY. I'll drink to that and so would Burbage.

BEN. Marry me.

ALICE. Aren't you already married?

BEN. Probably.

ALICE. To be so smart, Ben, you are so ridiculous.

BEN. You know it's only because I secretly love you that you get to talk to me that way.

REBECCA. Move away from my daughter, Ben. I like your plays but not your reputation.

BEN. I did not kill that man and if I did it was a long time ago. I'm going to bed.

JOHN. Leaving us so soon, Ben?

BEN. Yes I am because life is short and shitty and your daughter won't give me any more beer, and when friends and art are lost, what's left for men to seek but God and hops.

HENRY. Only one of those is supposed to answer prayers.

BEN. Oh shut up, Henry.

ELIZABETH. Do you need help home, Ben?

BEN. I just walked to Scotland and back, I can walk up the street.

ELIZABETH. Why'd you walk to Scotland, Ben?

BEN. *Because I'm a man and I felt like it and I did it and Will and Burbage and every good man is dying before our eyes and I'm tired and good night.*

Ben exits.

ALICE. Always a pleasure, that one.

Ben comes back in—

JOHN. What now, Ben?

BEN. *(To Alice.)* Did I tell you that I love you?

ALICE. You did.

BEN. Secretly?

ALICE. You did.

BEN. All right then.

Ben grabs whomever's beer is closest to him and finishes it as he really exits.

ELIZABETH. I'll retire as well, Henry. Sans pageant. Good night all and God bless.

HENRY. WaitWaitWait my dear. I just...I must say how lost and low I would be without you.

ELIZABETH. I know my love. Don't stay up too late. *(To Alice.)* Funerals always make them so sweet.

REBECCA. Wait, Liz, I'm off as well. The morning is nigh and I can neither spoil the children nor the produce. *(To Alice.)* See your father

finds a bed at some point. *(To the room.)* Good night and God rest his soul.

JOHN. Good night, my dear.

As the wives start to exit:

ELIZABETH. Becky, I found a book of poems at the stalls last week by a woman poet no less.

REBECCA. A woman?

ELIZABETH. I know. Do you remember Lady Lanier?

REBECCA. Lady Lanier...

ALICE. Bassano you mean? Emilia Bassano?

REBECCA. The Lord Chamberlain's mistress, ages ago.

ALICE. Will's mistress, I thought.

ELIZABETH. Not in the end she wasn't.

REBECCA. Oh yes, I remember all the trouble she caused for Will.

ALICE. You mean the *sonnets* she caused for Will.

ELIZABETH. "The Dark Lady," he called her.

REBECCA. Always thought that was a bit dramatic.

ELIZABETH. Yes well now she's written something of her own and it's quite good. We'll read them tomorrow and lift this fog of sorrow for a bit.

ALICE. Take a break from drama for poetry.

ELIZABETH. We are wives of actors, dear.

REBECCA. There are no breaks from either.

JOHN. What was that darling?

REBECCA. NothingILoveYouGoodNight.

Elizabeth and Rebecca exit together.

JOHN.	HENRY.	ALICE.
Good night.	Good night, dear.	Good night, Mum.

HENRY. I don't know how men do it without good women.

JOHN. Do what?

HENRY. Exactly.

JOHN. All right. One more and then to bed. *(Lifting a glass.)* To Burbage.

HENRY. To Burbage.

ALICE. To Burbage. And the stories and souls he kept alive in his head.

Pause. They realize what she just said. Oh god.

JOHN. Blessed word, she's right.

ALICE. What?

JOHN. The speeches. I didn't think of that. God's light, who knows the speeches now?

HENRY. God in Heaven, you're right. No one knew the plays like he did.

ALICE. I thought Taylor was learning the leads?

JOHN. He is, but that's just the plays we're running now, we have those scripts. I'm talking about the plays we did ten years ago, twenty years. Burbage knew all of them.

HENRY. He did. What now? He's gone, so are the plays, *what now?*

ALICE. Wait wait, you must have Will's old scripts, don't you?

HENRY. Do we?

ALICE. I don't know.

JOHN. Of course we do. Ed's got to have all the old promptbooks, actors' sides, he'll know.

HENRY. He has to know. Those words are our lives' work, Burbage's life's, Will's life. If we don't find them, they die with us.

JOHN. We'll find the plays, Henry.

ALICE. What's past is prologue. Isn't that right? Will's words.

HENRY. Unless...the prologue is prologue.

Pregnant pause.

ALICE. What does that mean?

JOHN. Hasten the point, Henry. Too late and too drunk for riddles.

HENRY. (*The start of an idea.*) What if we...gather them. Collect them all.

JOHN. Isn't that what we just said we're doing?

HENRY. Collect them not in a drawer somewhere but in a...a book.

ALICE. A book?

JOHN. Of Will's plays?

HENRY. Something simple, just to have them all together, so we know they're safe. Have Crane pen them on fine paper. A collection of Will's work, for *us*.

JOHN. It would be nice to see them all again.

HENRY. Wouldn't it? I don't think Will would mind.

ALICE. I think he'd love it.

JOHN. Aye. He would.

HENRY. (*Another idea.*) And. If we're going to collect them all in a book anyway we could just...publish them.

JOHN. Now we're publishers?

ALICE. Publish all the plays.

HENRY. Yes, and not in some cheap quarto like those pirated versions, *our* version, the real plays by William Shakespeare set down as they were done by us. But for everyone.

ALICE. I don't know, I think that's rather brilliant.

JOHN. Aye but rather futile. Henry, it's scores of plays. The book would be as big as a log. And we don't have the rights to half of them anyway.

HENRY. Yes we do. The King's Men have the rights to *all* Will's plays. He wrote for *us*.

JOHN. For *performance* not printing. The rights to print the plays go to whoever prints it first, hence the artless quartos with Will's name.

HENRY. Exactly! We can't let that be what's remembered. We publish the right plays rightly. We must.

JOHN. Even if we could get the rights we don't have the money to do this.

HENRY. We can find the money.

JOHN. You mean *I* can find the money.

HENRY. Exactly what I meant.

JOHN. Henry.

HENRY. John. Publish or vanish. That's the choice I see.

Beat.

JOHN. It's a lovely thought but...who would even buy such a volume *if* we managed to do this?

ALICE. They bought Ben's plays. A folio collection of them.

HENRY. Yes! We could publish Will's in folio too!

ALICE. Yes!

JOHN. No! Folio?! That's—come on—I love Will's work but it's not a Bible.

And quartos cost a penny, a folio imprint could be a pound or more. Who could pay a year's wages for a *book*? of *plays*? No. In heart I am with you, but...desire is not a plan.

HENRY. Well it's the start of one! You always do this, you always say "no" before you even consider it.

JOHN. You haven't thought this through. What would stop troupes from performing the damn things and giving the King's Men a run?

ALICE. Because they'd be terrible.

JOHN. So were we once. Upstart crows the lot of us.

HENRY. All right. What if other troupes would perform them. Even better than we would. But wouldn't that be grand? That would be a new kind of success, John. For the real plays to go on without us. On and on and on.

ALICE. They would be...deathless.

Pause.

JOHN. When you turn my daughter against me I have very little choice.

HENRY. Does that mean you'll do it? For Will. For we poor players and our tales full of sound and fury—

ALICE. Signifying everything.

JOHN. Let me think it through in the daylight.

Henry hugs John.

I didn't say yes.

HENRY. But you will. We'll go to Ed first thing tomorrow. You have a golden heart, friend.

JOHN. And it tends to weigh me down.

But Alice hugs her dad too. Which he likes.

Transition to...

Six.

John and Henry loom over poor Ed Knight in the Globe Theatre's back offices. Ed has his hands and desk and room full of papers and scrolls. Ralph Crane is in the corner furiously copying scripts with ink-stained hands. Ed is an ass to Crane, Crane just takes it. No one listens to Crane.

ED. All the plays?

HENRY. Ay. Everything by Will property of the King's Men. We'll take everything you have.

ED. All right.

I don't.

(To Crane.) Crane. Switch to the other. It's been moved up.

CRANE. Yessir.

HENRY. You don't...what?

ED. I don't have them.

(To Crane.) Crane.

CRANE. Here, sir, yessir.

JOHN. You hold the promptbooks, Ed, you have to have them.

ED. Yes well I have the ones on our boards right now. I don't have them *all*.

HENRY. What does that mean, he wrote dozens of plays for us.

ED. Yes—

HENRY. *Four* dozen if you count collaborations.

JOHN. *Five* if you count rewrites.

HENRY. *Six* if you add up all the clowns. That man could fit a clown in anything.

ED. *All of this I know.*

HENRY. *Then where are the scripts?*

ED. Marry. We had them. But you might recall that rather off-putting fire a few years back. Poof. Will stopped writing right before the blaze. Back to Stratford he goes, the cannon effect in *Henry VIII*, to which

you might also recall my stern objection, sets the whole theatre alight and everything in it. What am I to do?

JOHN. We lost everything?

HENRY. The first drafts in his own hand? The originals?

ED. We almost lost you, Henry, yes we lost Will's manuscripts, the promptbooks, we had a library of actor sides but, as I said, poof. I told Will, I said "no cannons" I said it to his face a hundred times.

HENRY. Bloody poof and we're sunk from the start.

JOHN. Well which plays *do* you have, Ed?

ED. *The Winter's Tale, Hamlet, Othello, and Henry IV Part Two.*

CRANE. And *Twelfth Night*.

ED. And *Twelfth Night*. Thank you, Crane. How's that copying coming?

HENRY. That's it? That's all we have? Five?

ED. Might be a few more in some of the prop boxes.

CRANE. I actually think we might—

ED. (*Not even hearing Crane.*) I don't know and I don't have time.

CRANE. I mean there's a chance I could—

HENRY. (*Not even hearing Crane.*) You're supposed to manage the stage, Ed!

ED. *And you were supposed to manage the cannon.*

JOHN. All right. Perhaps we can admit that this project is too much for us.

HENRY. No! John? You're siding with Ed? We hate Ed.

ED. Excuse me?

JOHN. (*To Ed.*) No we don't, Ed. We *need* Ed.

ED. Thank you very much.

JOHN. (*To Henry.*) What we don't need is an impossible project when we're trying to run a theatre company.

HENRY. It's not impossible!

CRANE. Improbable, yes, but not impossible. (*Immediately realizes his place.*) Sorry.

HENRY. Just because the scripts aren't here doesn't mean they're not somewhere. What about Burbage? He must've kept his sides.

ED. Probably slept with them round him like cats.

JOHN. But even Burbage wouldn't have the whole plays he'd just have his character's lines—

HENRY. Why the hell did we start doing it that way, anyway? Every actor gets only his lines? It's a mess. I blame Ed.

ED. *It wasn't me.*

JOHN. It was Will. Make it harder for other companies to steal it if no one had the whole play.

HENRY. Well now we can't steal our *own* plays *from* ourselves *for* ourselves.

CRANE. But if we can find *most* of the sides we could piece the shows back together using our memory and the quartos to fill in the rest.

HENRY. Yes!

ED. *Crane.*

JOHN. NO.

CRANE. Sorry.

JOHN. The quartos?

You saw that boy's Hamlet, most of the quartos are trash. And frankly our memory is worse.

HENRY. Which is why this is so important. That *Hamlet* is what's left if we don't do this and do it well.

John admits that he hates that idea...

Crane's right. We scour the city. If there are sides in corners and cupboards across London, we'll find them. What about Will's wife, surely there's something back in Stratford.

CRANE. He left all his papers here before he retired, but I can write her.

ED. No you won't. You've got two tragedies and a farce to ready before Friday. And the Will I knew would much prefer the show go on. Speaking of which, you're going on for Burbage in an hour, Henry.

HENRY. We must all "give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak whispers the o'erfraught heart and bids it break."

ED. *Macbeth*, isn't it? Nice. Except it's *Henry IV* today. But have Crane pen that bit before you go and we lose it too. Beg your pardon, friends.

Ed gathers some scrolls, glares at Henry, and leaves them.

JOHN. I don't want to lose the plays either, of course I don't, but if we don't have the scripts I don't know what's to be done? We've got to be reasonable about this—

HENRY. No we don't! Listen to yourself! Was it reasonable to start a theatre troupe in the first place? Was it reasonable to hire a no-name poet who wouldn't write a play the same way twice? Was it reasonable to build the Globe the first time much less to tear it down, carry it across the Thames in the middle of the night log by log, and build it again just to avoid rent? No! There is no reason in losing those plays, there is only erosion. And erosion you can stop. If you act fast. Now. I have to go on in one of the few full scripts of Will's we have left. After that I'm going to Saint Paul's to buy every pirated play by William Shakespeare I can find so that I can get to work. Join me or don't, but I'm doing this.

Henry starts to exit.

CRANE. Master Condell, I'd be honored to help you.

HENRY. Thank you, Crane. Thank you very much.

JOHN. *Henry.*

You go onstage, I'll go to Saint Paul's, but don't say "thank you" because I'm doing this to prove you wrong.

Henry smiles. Crane does too. Right before he exits he sneaks in a—

HENRY. Thank you.

And off they go in two different directions into...

Transition from Six...

The streets of London. The crier walks through town...more posters for plays are hung.

CRIER. Three plays this week at the Globe Theatre! One lamentable tragedy of *Othello*, the *Moore of Venice*; the excellent histories of *Henry IV*; and the enchanting comedy *Every Man in His Humor*. 3 o'clock

in the afternoon, a penny for the pit! One penny for a play today!
The crier walks on through the crowd.

Seven.

The Globe Tap House. The following day—on a large table lie a smattering of scrolls, quartos, and papers. John, Henry (perhaps half in/half out of costume), and Alice survey the loot.

JOHN. After a day at the bookstalls with the dregs of the publishing trade I am sick with ink.

HENRY. But what did you find? What plays?

ALICE. Not even half of them. It's a start, yes, but—

JOHN. Half his work is missing and the other half is this poor and pirated rubbish.

HENRY. Do you see *Pericles*?

JOHN. *Pericles* again?

ALICE. Would you leave that play alone.

HENRY. I happen to like that one. I like it a lot.

ALICE. The point is, where's *Macbeth*? Where's *Antony and Cleopatra*? There's no quarto for those plays and we don't have the originals. They're gone.

JOHN. No *Tempest* either.

ALICE. Or *As You Like It*? Come on, that's the best one.

HENRY. That's why we're doing this. Not just for Will or Burbage. For Orlando and Prospero and Banquo—

ALICE. Yes, and Lady Macbeth, Rosalind, Viola. They're why I came to the theatre at all. His women, they spoke, they loved, they... got to be evil. But Dad's right, it's not worth doing if you don't find them all.

JOHN. And I don't see how we can. We don't have money, or rights, or half the damn plays. What and how are we going print anyway?

Rebecca comes in with a basket of scrolls.

REBECCA. John! Look what I found. Look here.

ALICE. What did you find, Mum?

JOHN. What's there, darling?

REBECCA. I was raminating about your project and I thought—the basket in the chest in the closet!—and sure enough I found some of your sides John—Falstaff!—I'll admit to mostly keeping the funny ones.

ALICE. *You threw some out?*

REBECCA. Well I didn't know we'd need them fifteen years later, and a house full of paper and children is quite the fire hazard thank you very much.

JOHN. Thank you for this, Becky.

HENRY. Yes! *(To John.)* See? *(To Rebecca.)* Thank you for keeping what you did. Thank you.

ALICE. *(Under her breath.)* Threw out Shakespeare.

REBECCA. All right, you. It's not Oxford.

Elizabeth comes in too, with more scrolls.

ELIZABTH. Henry Henry Henry! I found some of your parts at home—Mercutio and Horatio—Becky was right, check near the privy. Oh! And Burbage's widow found his Hamlet and Othello, and his mistress gave me Richard!

HENRY. This is excellent, my love, thank you.

ALICE. Thank you, Liz!

ELIZABETH. The mistress said she might also have his Antony and Lear somewhere too. I'm going back tomorrow.

HENRY. Well thank God for mistresses.

Elizabeth smacks Henry.

And happily married husbands—

ELIZABETH. Uh-huh.

HENRY. Deeply happy—truly deep.

REBECCA. I found Polonius and Oberon too.

ELIZABETH. And somehow I've got Sam's Titania.

ALICE. There starts a pairing.

HENRY. All right then.

REBECCA. But who had Puck? You can't do that one without Puck.

JOHN. I think it was Kemp that played him? Or... Who was it, Condi?

HENRY. I subbed in once, but—

ELIZABETH. (*Reciting Puck, her favorite.*)

“If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended,
That you have but slumber'd here
While these visions did appear.”

HENRY. Look at that.

REBECCA. Well played there, Liz.

ELIZABETH. Thank you. I always liked it when it rhymed.

HENRY. You don't know the rest of it do you?

ELIZABETH. Probably a bit more. And I memorized most of Beatrice.

REBECCA. Oh me too. She was my favorite. “Is it possible disdain
should die while she hath such meet food to feed it as Signior
Benedick?”

*They cheer her! Crane runs in with a large bag in his hand.
He's more than a bit awkward.*

CRANE. Masters. Good evening. I—well—you must forgive me but—

HENRY. Speak, Crane. What is it?

CRANE. Now I know it was mostly wrong of me, but I swear I didn't
mean any harm, I just—

HENRY. WhatWhatWhat is it, man?

Will he reveal or flee...

CRANE. All the Shakespeare I could find.

He dumps the contents on the table—papers spill out.

Please don't sack me. Master Knight didn't know I kept them. I wasn't
supposed to, but I made copies of my favorites. Just for private reading
and study.

ALICE. *Cymbeline, Antony, Lear, Caesar—*

HENRY. Oh my God, Crane, I could kiss you.

CRANE. Thank you, let's not.

REBECCA. *Tempest, Two Gents, King John.*

CRANE. I had a lot of favorites.

HENRY. Blessed Heaven you did! John, do you see this!

ELIZABETH. *Merry Wives, Measure for Measure, Taming of the Shrew—*

ALICE. *As You Like It!* As much as you can drink, Master Crane!
On the house!

JOHN. No it's not.

ALICE. *On the house.*

CRANE. That's very kind but I just want to keep the job.

HENRY. You will. And you just earned another.

JOHN. What other?

HENRY. Editor of the Collected Plays of William Shakespeare. You've seen more of Will's hand than anyone alive, I'd wager.

JOHN. Henry, wait now, we haven't agreed to all this yet.

HENRY. But we have the plays, John! *Full* scripts, not part-by-part, not shite quartos. We have the actual plays now.

JOHN. *Some* of them. And not all the rights and not the funding and not the—the time and the knowledge, and—We don't know what we're doing, and even if we did it would *still* be mostly insane to try.

Pause.

REBECCA. He'll do it.

JOHN. *Becky.*

REBECCA. John. You'll do this like you do everything else.

JOHN. And how is that?

ALICE. *How is that?*

REBECCA. With a sometimes charming but always robust blend of reason, fortitude, and guile.

I love you. Get to work.

Rebecca kisses John and goes.

JOHN. And now you leave me?

REBECCA. I said get to work. We've all got to.

She smiles and exits as John watches her go, heart full for her.

ELIZABETH. *(To Henry.)* I hope you look at me like that when I leave a room.

HENRY. Usually.

She smacks him.

Always.

JOHN. All right, Condi. Let's give this damn thing a try.

ALICE. HENRY. CRANE.

Yes, Dad! Yes! Heart of gold, I always said. Isn't this exciting.

They cheer just as a very angry Ben Jonson enters with a book.

BEN. CONDELL.

HENRY. What, ho, Ben. Join us!

ELIZABETH. Master Jonson, we're toasting!

JOHN. Welcome, Ben. A pint for the poet?

ALICE. Pint?

JOHN. True. Better just put a stool under the tap for him.

BEN. *What in high shit do you think you're doing?*

This changes the mood.

HENRY. Well. Presently we celebrate John finally coming to his senses and Master Crane and his marvelous deception.

CRANE. Private study, I said.

BEN. Deception indeed. You publish Will's work without my knowledge? *Without my knowledge?*

JOHN. Publish it? No.

HENRY. Yes we are. Now we are!

JOHN. But we haven't even started.

BEN. And yet I hold in my hand ten so-called plays by William Shakespeare.

A new collection on which I was neither consulted nor alerted so I will repeat, *what in high shit is this?*

Ben walks right over to their table and drops it with a SMACK.

JOHN. What the devil?

CRANE. Ten plays?

ELIZABETH. A collection of Shakespeare.

HENRY. Who printed this?

CRANE. It says William Jaggard.

JOHN. *Jaggard?*

ALICE. The one who does the playbills?

HENRY. The one who's been making money off of Will's name for decades, printing false work and calling it his.

BEN. So you did not approve this then?

JOHN. Of course we did not.

HENRY. With Jaggard printing? Not till the core of the earth has rotted out would I work with that liar.

JOHN. He was one of the few men Will disliked.

HENRY.	ALICE.	ELIZABETH.
<i>Hated.</i>	<i>Hated.</i>	<i>Hated.</i>

BEN. I know that, John, that's why I came here to throttle you.

ALICE. Sometimes you were on the list as well, Ben.

BEN. Oh, now, Will's and mine was a friendly rivalry. Poet against poet. Battle of wits not fists.

ALICE. Unless you drank, which you always do. And I cleaned up your broken bottles after your "friendly rivalries."

BEN. I take no heed from a barmaid.

HENRY. I thought he loved her?

BEN.	ALICE.	ELIZABETH.
He does.	He does.	He does.

CRANE. Um. The book? The table lists *Lear*, *Merchant*, *Merry Wives*, *Pericles* but also—

HENRY. *They printed Pericles?*

JOHN. Calm down, man.

CRANE. But also plays I know aren't his. *A Yorkshire Tragedy?*

ALICE. *A Yorkshire* what?

CRANE. *Exactly.*

HENRY. The man already published crap *sonnets* under Will's name, crap *quartos* under Will's name, and now this. I will not stand for it.

JOHN. And who would buy *our* book with that one out first.

CRANE. I'm fairly sure Jaggard doesn't have the rights to half of these plays anyway. He just prints what he likes no matter who owns them.

This stops them.

BEN. Oh really?

JOHN. He does, does he?

CRANE. I heard he's reprinting old quartos and calling them first editions so he can sell more books. That man survives through forgiveness, not permission.

BEN. Not anymore he doesn't.

HENRY. What's this now?

BEN. John knows what we have to do to crush the man and his lies.

JOHN. Aye. Our very good friend, The Lord Chamberlain, needs to know there's a peddler of theft and malfeasance at the Jaggard Print House.

BEN. And that Ben Jonson doesn't like it.

Ben, John, and Henry hurry out with the book running through...

Transition from Seven...

The streets of London. Rebecca walks by, selling and singing her groceries...

REBECCA. Apples! Pears! Figs and nuts!

The freshest

Apples! Pears! Figs and nuts!

She walks on through the crowd.

Eight. A Dual Scene.

Henry bounds into his house, thrilled, and meets Elizabeth.

HENRY. Light has triumphed over darkness! Good over evil! And all here shall know that chicanery hath been vanquished on this day!

ELIZABETH. My goodness, Henry, what play is that?

HENRY. No play, my glorious wife, *today* life is better than drama!

ELIZABETH. (*Sarcasm.*) No.

HENRY. Yes! Ben went to the Lord Chamberlain to flatten the Old Jaggard for printing Will's work without the rights and they stopped the presses *today*!

ELIZABETH. Stopped them today?

HENRY. They are stopped! And Ben tells us that Jaggard played the fool: "Oh sire, I did not know the rights were in question." Horse shit—

ELIZABETH. *Henry.*

HENRY. He knew exactly what he was doing, do not be fooled.

ELIZABETH. I'm not fooled and you're not sleeping in my bed with that language.

HENRY. I love you my darling but you cannot stop glee from arising as it will.

ELIZABETH. Please inform your glee that it needs to behave like a gentleman.

HENRY. The gentlemen won today! We are free to print our book the way it should be printed.

ELIZABETH. Will's book.

HENRY. What?

ELIZABETH. It's *Will's* book, isn't it?

HENRY. With him gone, and a legacy on the line? We are Will.

John and Rebecca at home.

John is exhausted, sinks into a chair.

Rebecca brings him something warm to drink.

JOHN. What a day, my dear, a day that ends a week that ends a month of this tiresome business.

REBECCA. What's this shadow about? I thought you and Ben sorted it all out?

JOHN. We did. He's not very pleasant company but he is profoundly effective at getting what he wants. So. The Jaggard book is stopped, but...

REBECCA. What? Is this not good news?

JOHN. Yes, but I don't know if I can weather the constant storms to get this book done, and it looks like the waves won't stop coming, it's one thing after another, and I don't know if I can do it.

REBECCA. Of course you can, if anyone can, you can. Your sails are stronger than anyone's.

JOHN. I don't need encouragement right now, I need support.

REBECCA. Support you quitting?

JOHN. I'm not quitting!

REBECCA. It sounds like you're quitting. But this book is a good idea and a good deed.

JOHN. Well it's also impossible.

REBECCA. It's not, it's...*nearly* impossible.

JOHN. *Nearly*, yes, thank you, and every day it gets more so. And I fear after all the work and the time away from you and the children and the theatre and the church, after all that time we will have nothing to show for it, I will have nothing to show for it.

REBECCA. John—

JOHN. Failing them is worse than losing them.

REBECCA. Well you can't help losing friends, but you can and must try to honor them.

JOHN. I am not young.

REBECCA. You're also not dead.

JOHN. But everyone who should be doing this work instead of me already is.

Back to Henry and Elizabeth.

HENRY. Now that we *can* do this, we must! If we do not, who will?

ELIZABETH. Oh please, darling, I'm not dissuading you, I think the book is a fine idea and a brilliant tribute. But you need to watch the money. We want to be *investing* in this book, not donating.

HENRY. We'll work out the deal when we have the partners. Right now we drink!

ELIZABETH. You need to think of it now. And I will not have you do all this work for nothing.

HENRY. It's not *nothing*, it's pride, it's love, it's not about profit.

ELIZABETH. Henry. There no such thing as a business that's non-profit. Now before you sign any papers let me read them, I want a return and a percentage of the earnings.

HENRY. I love it when you talk business.

ELIZABETH. I know you do.

HENRY. I get swept away with the heart of a thing.

ELIZABETH. I know you do.

HENRY. And now I need to kiss my beautiful wife.

ELIZABETH. Nothing in your way that I see.

He chases her off.

Back to John and Rebecca.

REBECCA. All right. Yes. This is mostly absurd and rather improbable, and you're not even publishers.

JOHN. Exactly.

REBECCA. And the project is enormous and costly and it is all on your head because this theatre has come to depend on you for its very life.

JOHN. Yes. Yes.

REBECCA. But not its art.

This stops John.

You gave up the stage, the stage you loved, the stage that made you and made you alive, to make the King's Men great, and they are, *you* are. That's why you have to do this. That book is...it's *you*. Those

plays are you at your best. You gave up what you loved once, I won't let you do it again.

JOHN. I've already put my life into this theatre, I don't know if I can put the rest into a book.

REBECCA. A theatre is an empty thing. A theatre you fill up. With words.

Alice enters.

ALICE. Dad. We need to talk about this.

JOHN. Ali, not now.

ALICE. Dad, this book is—

JOHN. I know what it is, and I know what it's not. Half the country can't read, the other half can't pay, the paper alone is worth the whole theatre, and I'm not bankrupting the King's Men for this.

ALICE. There's a way.

REBECCA. There must be.

JOHN. *There's not, I'm telling you there's not.*

I'm sorry. I'm tired, Becky.

REBECCA. So am I. I'm tired too, I'm tired after *my* long days, and I know my lines aren't grand ones, "apples, pears, figs, and nuts," but I say them every day, on cue, with no applause. Because not everyone doing good work gets applause. And not everyone gets the chance at a legacy.

JOHN. Is a legacy worth a life?

REBECCA. You're damn right it is.

ALICE. Dad, I can help more if that would—

JOHN. I've tried, I've tried, I've given it too much already and I'm done.

REBECCA. *Dammit John that book is mine too.* Those plays are mine and Ali's and your sons', and I should tell you to abandon this thing just so I can have you at home, so your children can have you, you know the little people who sleep here at night.

JOHN. Becky, please—

REBECCA. I should tell you to drop this whole thing because that would make *my* life better and probably yours. But those plays are not yours and not Will's and not Burbage's, no, they're ours and if

they are lost to time, I'm sorry my love, but that will be on your head.
So you *will* do it. Yes you will.

JOHN. *All right*, women, all right.

Beat.

ALICE. Why don't you come to the playhouse tomorrow, Mum?
I'll take care of things here, come see a play, have some fun.

Rebecca stops. Tentatively she asks...

REBECCA. What's on? A comedy?

ALICE. Actually it is, and Henry's in it. He's not bad.

REBECCA. (*Thinks.*) Maybe next week. (*To John.*) Would it were
you, I'd go. I'd always go see you.

*She smiles at her daughter, and husband. Breathes, and heads
to bed. John and Alice share a look as we... Transition.*

Nine.

John, Alice, Henry in the Globe Tap House...

HENRY. Wait a minute, wait, not one printer on Fleet Street is willing?

JOHN. I went to everyone. They all say they can't print such a large
project. I even said we had the money.

ALICE. Do we?

JOHN. Of course not.

ALICE. Well it has to be folio or else we can't fit all the plays.

HENRY. So John is finally on board to print and now we have no
printers.

ALICE. Something's rotten in that.

JOHN. Tarry now. I tried today and I'll try tomorrow. Where there's
a will...

*William Jaggard enters the Tap House with a cane and guided
by his son, Isaac.*

JAGGARD. Good day gentlemen. Do I find any of the King's Men
present here?

JOHN. You do, sir, but the theatre's entrance is around the corner and I'm afraid the show's not till 3.

JAGGARD. Thank you lass, but I'm not here for a show. My sight is as useless as a hat on a fish.

ISAAC. I believe we find Masters Condell and Heminges, do we not?

JOHN. You do, sir. And my daughter, Alice.

ISAAC. Milady.

Isaac bows to her grandly, she doesn't usually get that kind of deference.

ALICE. (*Awkwardly—she thinks he's cute and totally loses her composure.*) Oh. Welcome...good...sir.

JOHN. (*Defensive of Alice.*) And who are you, sirs?

JAGGARD. We hope to engage you men in a conversation about the plays of William Shakespeare of which we hear rumor you are arranging for print.

HENRY. Yes sir, that we are. How do you come to know this?

JAGGARD. I know everything on Fleet Street. I know the cost of paper in Normandy, I know which whores have crabs (most of them), and I know that you are asking every printer in town about some grand project but not me.

ISAAC. We are printers, sirs.

JOHN. You are?

JAGGARD. This is my son, Isaac, who manages the presses I have, large ones too, folio imprint, and the like.

ALICE. "Folio"?

JOHN. Well we are glad to make your acquaintance. Please sit.

ALICE. A drink for you, sir? Or your son?

ISAAC. Thank you, milady.

Alice gives him a drink.

JAGGARD. You say you have a great many of the man's plays? How many?

HENRY. We have eighteen or so all together. None of them ever printed before. We have his *Caesar*, *Macbeth*—

ALICE. *As You Like It.*

JAGGARD. Well. With my eighteen we could print the lot then, couldn't we?

HENRY. Your...eighteen?

JAGGARD. That's right. My eighteen plays by William Shakespeare *have* been printed. By me. So though you managed to shut down my last attempt to publish your friend, I stand here willing to forgive that slight and forge ahead with a complete collection.

HENRY. No. No—

JAGGARD. William Jaggard, at your service.

HENRY. *OH FOR GOD'S SAKE.*

ALICE. Henry.

HENRY. GET OUT, YOU DOG.

JOHN. *Henry.*

HENRY. He comes here to forgive *us?! To forgive us?*

ISAAC. No, please, I can explain—

JAGGARD. You stopped my presses, you cost me coin. I could sue you for damages—

HENRY. You stole those plays, which you had no right to print nor call Will's!

JAGGARD. Poets don't have rights, not to their names and not to their work. It's business, friends, no harm in it.

JOHN. There is harm in deceit, there is always harm in that.

ISAAC. Yes, and we only want to make it right—

JAGGARD. What we want to make is a deal, a partnership between us to create a volume of plays by—

HENRY. NO. Again and again NO.

JAGGARD. If you want to do this, you cannot do it without me.

HENRY. We can and will. We don't need your filthy business.

JAGGARD. What about the plays to which you have no rights?

ALICE. You said poets don't have rights.

JAGGARD. Well printers *do*. And lawyers. And investors, and those are the ones you really don't want to fuck with.

JOHN. We'll get the rights from honest men who want the first and only *authorized* version of Shakespeare—as in the actual author.

JAGGARD. And how much of that work is there without your friend's *Hamlet*? Dear old Smethwick owns it and *Romeo and Juliet*, gave me the rights to both. What about *Much Ado*? That's Aspley's title, already on board. The *Richards*, the *Henrys*, crowd favorites all and all mine, and who will buy your collection without them? I wouldn't.

ISAAC. *Father, please.*

JAGGARD. Let me be frank:

I know you don't have the funds to do this. I do.

I know you don't have the means to print. I do.

You don't have the rights to all the plays, but I have already brought together a syndicate of owners to invest in this folio's production.

Suddenly you have money, rights, texts, presses, and nothing in your way but...an old blind man asking to be friends. So. Is there a deal to be made, gentlemen?

Pause.

HENRY. Have you ever seen a play of his? Ever?

JAGGARD. Aye. *Pericles* I believe. Didn't really move me.

That makes Henry furious.

HENRY. You son of a—

ISAAC. Father, we should go.

ALICE. Yes, I think you'd better leave, Master Jaggard.

JOHN. We'll consider your proposal.

ISAAC. Thank you, sirs.

HENRY. NO WE WILL NOT.

JAGGARD. You should. Until tomorrow. When I start printing *HALF The Collected Works of William Shakespeare*. Good day.

(To Isaac.) Isaac.

William and Isaac Jaggard leave.

ALICE. Well. We have just confirmed that *that* man is a leech.

HENRY. A scheming, dog-hearted liar with terrible taste.

JOHN. Also with...funding. Presses. Experience.

HENRY. No, John. We cannot consider it, not for a moment.

JOHN. Perhaps we should.

HENRY. *John.*

JOHN. Henry, you cannot keep grudges in business.

HENRY. This is not that kind of business! This is our heart on those pages.

JOHN. And letting it lie fallow is the insult. Wasn't that your point when we started this?

HENRY. Don't you quote me at me. This is ridiculous. Will hated that man *for a reason*. He has no scruples, we know for a fact that he doesn't respect contract, why on earth would we think he would respect us, or the work, or—*no*—Alice, help me. Your father has lost his mind.

ALICE. I think Jaggard's a depreciating evil sort of fellow.

HENRY. *Thank you.*

ALICE. Who does make a good point. If the option is to take the risk on him or do nothing... I'd take it.

HENRY. *Ali.*

ALICE. I would. It's worth it to see the work completed.

Isaac Jaggard reenters calmly.

ISAAC. Gentlemen, if I may.

HENRY. *You.* Tell your father he's a—a—what did I say?

ALICE. Scheming, dog-hearted liar.

HENRY. Scheming, dog-hearted liar. You tell him that to his face.

ISAAC. Oh, I have. Not often, but at least twice in my life. He's a bit of a bastard but he's damn good at selling books.

HENRY. *Stealing* them!

JOHN. What do you want, son?

ISAAC. I want you to know that I have seen every play that William Shakespeare ever wrote for the King's Men which means I saw you both countless times. And bought a few dozen apples from you over the years, Mistress Heminges. I love the plays and I loved you in them. My father is a bit of a dog but I'm not. And despite his swagger, I run the shop now. And I want to publish these plays as they should be published. Cleanly. Rightly.

ALICE. (*Fancies Isaac more than a bit.*) Handsomely.

ISAAC. (*Fancies her too.*) Yes. A book that will last. If that is what you wish for as well, please consider this partnership.

HENRY. I don't trust your father and I don't trust you.

ISAAC. Well it will be my pleasure to earn that from you.

JOHN. That sounds reasonable to me.

HENRY. *I like not fair terms and a villain's mind.*

ISAAC. *Merchant of Venice*. Bassanio if I recall correctly.

JOHN. I think he's right about that.

ALICE. Aye.

HENRY. *I don't care*, John. They could ruin our plays, run away with them, who knows what!

ISAAC. I promise you, Master Condell. An unrivaled book of unrivaled plays, that's what I want. If you do too...join us tomorrow. At the Half-Eagle-and-Key in Barbican at 3. You can meet the other owners, see the presses, hear the plans. If we can all agree...we'll start right away.

Beat.

JOHN. Not a word could be altered in any way. If we work with you, not one word changes without our approval.

ISAAC. Yes of course. You knew him best.

HENRY. And Ralph Crane is the editor.

ISAAC. We have experienced editors in-house—

HENRY. *Ralph Crane edits the plays with us*. He copied Will's hand all his life, he knows what's right.

ISAAC. All right. Yes. Crane will edit along with the both of you. I can see to that.

JOHN. And you only print what we know to be authored by Will Shakespeare.

HENRY. None of this *Yorkshire Tragedy* crap. Anything we don't approve is out.

ISAAC. I promise you, on my life.

ALICE. Good.

JOHN. Good.

A beat. Henry's not on board yet. Isaac sees this.

ISAAC. I'll leave you to consider this. I do so hope you will join us, nay, *complete* us in this task. Until, I hope, tomorrow. And please ignore my father. He's blind, he'll have no clue what we actually print anyway. Good day, gentlemen. Miss.

Isaac leaves.

The three look at each other.

JOHN. The answer to our prayers perhaps.

HENRY. Does the devil answer prayers?

ALICE. Apparently he does. Though his son seems...genuine enough to me.

HENRY. Aye, *seems*. Don't come to me shocked when the devil's son is exactly the devil's like.

JOHN. Henry, this might be—nay, it surely is—our best chance to do this. Publish or vanish, wasn't it? We are near certain of the latter if we refuse this. What say you, friend?

What will they do...?

Transition as...

Ten. A Triple Scene.

One—The crier walks through town...

CRIER. Masters and Mistresses! The King's Men present the tragical history of *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*! Starting now at the Globe Theatre! Starting now!

Alice runs through town, frantic, shocked...and into Elizabeth Condell.

ELIZABETH. Alice, dear. Are you all right?

ALICE. I need to find my father, where's my father?

ELIZABETH. He's with Henry at a meeting. Will you sit, you look upset—

ALICE. *Of course, the meeting. I have to go—*

ELIZABETH. *Alice?*

ALICE. *I have to go.*

ELIZABETH. *Ali, who's hurt?*

Alice runs off—runs past.

*Two—Bernardo and Francisco as the Globe's performance
of Hamlet starts.*

BERNARDO.

Who's there?

FRANCISCO.

Nay, answer me: stand, and unfold yourself.

BERNARDO.

Long live the king!

FRANCISCO.

Bernardo?

BERNARDO.

He.

FRANCISCO.

You come most carefully upon your hour.

Three—John and Henry stand in a circle of men...

*Jaggard, Isaac, Blount, Smethwick, Aspley, Pavier. The
Shakespeare Syndicate.*

Hands are shaken, a deal is made.

JAGGARD. Upon this hour, gentlemen, we begin a great thing
together. Literature is set and opportunity is met.

The play again...

BERNARDO.

If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus,

The rivals of my watch, bid them make haste.

FRANCISCO.

I think I hear them. Stand, ho! Who's there?

HORATIO.

Friends to this ground

MARCELLUS.

And liegemen to the Dane.

The Syndicate again—

ISAAC. Friends and partners, we must be both in this, and we will make a great thing between us all.

JAGGARD. And a great return on our investment.

ISAAC. My father is blunt but honest. Farewell.

The play again...

MARCELLUS.

O, farewell, honest soldier:

Who hath relieved you?

FRANCISCO.

Bernardo hath my place.

Give you good night.

The Syndicate again—

ISAAC. Good night, gentlemen, and may I again say that I will not fail you in this.

JOHN. Good night, son, and thank you.

ISAAC. Thank you for your trust in me.

HENRY. We have less trust in you than we have hope.

JOHN. And where hope springs, faith must appear.

The play—

MARCELLUS.

What, has this thing appeared again tonight?

The Syndicate—

ISAAC. Faith is better than nothing.

Isaac leaves them as...

The play again...

BERNARDO.

I have seen nothing.

MARCELLUS.

Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy,
And will not let belief take hold of him.

The street with John and Henry...

HENRY. I will not believe a one of them until I see it, John. Until I see that book in my hand.

JOHN. The boy is on our side, Henry.

HENRY. I still don't know. Is this the right thing? I do not know.

JOHN. Yes it is. Although it's also the *only* thing. So we must make it right and keep it right.

HENRY. Then that's what we'll do. Starting tomorrow.

JOHN. And tomorrow.

HENRY. And tomorrow.

Alice runs on breathlessly, catching John with her tone and urgency—

ALICE. DAD. Dad...

*She can't manage to speak the words of what brought her...
The future hangs in the air for a moment before—
Blackout.*

End of Act One

ACT TWO

One.

John's home.

John is at Rebecca's bedside. He watches her.

REBECCA. Good night, John. Go to bed.

JOHN. What, my dear? Are you all right? What do you need?

REBECCA. I need you to sleep. That's what people mean when they say "good night." You don't have to stay next to me every moment.

JOHN. I'm not leaving you.

REBECCA. John.

JOHN. I'm not.

REBECCA. I'm fine.

JOHN. You're not, and I'm not, so here I stay.

REBECCA. Then neither of us will sleep. I can't rest when I know you're sitting right there worrying about me. Don't you have a book to worry you?

JOHN. Don't think about that. I'm right here and I'm staying here until you can stand up and walk about and start giving me orders again.

REBECCA. I can give you orders from bed, thank you. The book, John.

JOHN. I don't care about the book. I'm not bothering with it. Not now.

REBECCA. Yes you are.

JOHN. Not now.

REBECCA. Yes now. Your sons might have never seen you onstage but I did. And I've never seen you happier. Or more full of life. Or handsomer. I know Will's words made you, John. Return the favor.

Pause.

JOHN. Handsomer?

REBECCA. Always had a weakness for men in makeup.

JOHN. Well you married a player and ended up with a manager.

REBECCA. I know whom I married. In your heart you're a player still. The heart's what matters.

Pause.

JOHN. When I thought you were gone my heart stopped. No play has sent me to my knees and then up again and through the streets running as last night. Nothing is worth more than you.

REBECCA. Then listen to me. When the world grew dark, where did you turn? When our sweet Mary died.

JOHN. Yes.

REBECCA. And then young John. Then our Lizzie.

JOHN. God bless them. I never knew how people went on after loss like that, but somehow they do. We did.

REBECCA. Every day is someone's worst. At least ours we had together.

JOHN. You bore it all so much better than I did.

REBECCA. No I didn't. We all bear it as we can. Most people would go to church, but you went...to the Globe.

JOHN. No I didn't.

REBECCA. I know you went there. Alone and at night. Why? What did you do there? Meet Will?

JOHN. No.

REBECCA. Henry?

JOHN. No. I would...just speak. It seems childish but I...would stand on the boards. And speak. The whole theatre dark but for a candle to my side. I would recite speeches. *Hamlet* and *Lear*. Some *King John*, anything that would...direct the rage, the pain, the endless pain of it. Plays held more solace than priests, they always did in that respect. You're supposed to be quiet in church. That I could not do, not when God asked me to hold that much in my heart, I could not do that.

REBECCA. You needed words.

JOHN. Yes I did. They were alive for me.

REBECCA. Yes they are.

JOHN. Yes.

REBECCA. The book, John.

JOHN. The book.

*As the room melts into the darkness of a dream,
Rebecca stands and walks away.*

REBECCA. When the world gets too dark.

JOHN. Too dark to bear.

REBECCA. The words, John. There's light in them.

JOHN. Yes. Light.

REBECCA. There's life in them.

JOHN. Yes. Life.

REBECCA. Good night, John.

JOHN. *(Now quoting Hamlet.)* Good night,

REBECCA. Good night,

JOHN. Sweet prince.

REBECCA. Dear John.

JOHN. And may flights of angels

REBECCA. sing thee to thy—

Then Rebecca is gone. She was never there.

JOHN. Rest.

*John, so alone, looks out to us as the scene reveals its true location.
The Globe Theatre at night, John standing midstage alone but
for a candle.*

He wears all black. Mourning.

He twists a sprig of rosemary in his fingers.

HENRY. John.

Henry walks on, carefully carrying a lantern...

John. It's midnight, you shouldn't be here.

JOHN. What?

HENRY. I said you shouldn't be here. Come with me. Come home.

JOHN. There is no home without her. There is no *where* to go.

HENRY. I know it feels that way. I know it does. But you can come with me.

JOHN. Why?

HENRY. Because this is the hardest thing you'll ever go through and I won't have you go through it alone. Elizabeth insists you come and eat with us. Come and eat.

JOHN. I have never thought food as useless as I do now.

Pause.

HENRY. Then we'll both starve.

Onstage.

In the dark.

Henry sits down next to John on the empty stage.

Pause.

When my first boy died, only months old, I couldn't imagine a loving God that would have any part in such a thing. And I told Him so in my prayers, silent because I know I'd be the one in the ground if anyone heard what I thought of God and His taking and taking and taking. Then I realized the great weight of every grieving father's prayers that must hit God every night, and must sound so much like my own. Sons who lost fathers, husbands without wives, mothers—oh God the mothers. All that grief on God's ear constantly.

Then I felt bad for God.

Which made me laugh.

Which made me feel alive again. Funny how that worked out didn't it.

JOHN. That's a good story. Why do we bother?

HENRY. With what?

JOHN. With stories. Dramas. Especially the dramas. Isn't that ridiculous? Grown men dressing up as kings and, even more ridiculously, *queens*. And the people come to see it. And they laugh. But they also weep. They weep with us. Why do they do it?

HENRY. Because stories are real in their own way.

JOHN. No. Real life keeps going on and on, and the villains aren't caught and the endings aren't right, and it's rough seas and dark days and we sit here in this *barn* playing fictions for willing dreamers. We tell it over and over and over again. And I sit through it and it's false and it's hot air and I need it. When I have nothing left to say I need it. When I hurt so much I can't breathe, when I've got a horse for a heart

and it won't stop running and pounding and running me down, I need it...

HENRY. John—

JOHN. Am I godless? I look to fairies and false kings instead of holy people. Does that a heathen make?

HENRY. No. Of course not, no.

JOHN. I cannot breathe without her, I cannot breathe at home or in the street or in the yard where she now lies, I cannot breathe in this world but here. Here I am come. And I am lulled into meaning. And that is greatest fiction of all. *Meaning anything. (Then with great ferocity.) And God and His angels mock us every ending we play but the tragic ones, for if they aren't tragedies yet, they will soon enough be.*

Beat.

Story's a forged life. Life's a tempest of loss. Why do we bother with any of it?

HENRY. To feel again.

JOHN. I feel enough.

HENRY. I said to feel *again*. That's the miracle of it. The fairies aren't real but the feeling is. And it comes to us here, player and groundling alike, again and again *here*. Your favorite story just ended? Come back tomorrow, we'll play it again. Don't like the story you're in? A different one starts in an hour. Come here, come again, feel here, feel again.

History walks here, love is lived here, loss is met and wept for and understood and survived here and not the first time but *every* time. We play love's first look and life's last here every day. And you will see yourself in it, or your fear, or your future before the play's end. And you will test your heart against trouble and joy, and every time you'll feel a flicker or a fountain of feeling that reminds you that, yes, you are yet living. And that is more than God gives you in his ample silence. And then it ends. And we players stand up. And we look at the gathered crowd. And we bow. Because the story was told well enough, and it's time for another.

They look at each other.

They look at us right now...or the vacant seats in the Globe Theatre.

And John thinks of Rebecca and out softly comes...Romeo

and Juliet, Act 2, Scene 2.

JOHN. "It is my lady, O, it is my love, O that she knew she were..."
And John weeps. Henry lets him, perhaps holds him, perhaps weeps too.

HENRY. Mourn her, honor her, but do not join her yet.
John breathes, nods.

JOHN. She spoke to me. About the book. She insists

HENRY. Well. She was always wiser than you were.
A careful smile between them.
Alice emerges from the dark, in mourning too. Sick with sorrow.

JOHN. Ali. What are you doing here, what brings you?

ALICE. I don't know. I couldn't think of anywhere else to be...
John runs to her, grabbing her in a desperate, huge hug.
They hug and hug and hug.
Blackout.

Transition from One...

A fruit seller walks through town...

FRUIT SELLER. Apples! Pears! Figs and nuts! All the freshest apples, pears, figs, and nuts!
The fruit seller walks off.

Two.

The Globe Tap House.

Henry, Elizabeth, Ralph Crane, and Isaac Jaggard gathered around piles of pages.

This group is editing the damn thing.

CRANE. Again, anything that is not the closest to Will's mind and hand we do not include. If it is suspect, we don't include it. If it is written in too much collaboration, we do not include it.

ISAAC. So, we lose *Two Noble Kinsmen*?

HENRY. With Fletcher? Yes.

ISAAC. And *Cardenio*?

CRANE. Not a chance.

ISAAC. Well what about *Love's Labour's Won*?

CRANE. It's lost.

ISAAC. I know that, but we HAVE *Love's Labour's Lost*, where's *Love's Labour's Won*?

CRANE. I'm saying it's lost.

ISAAC. I know, but he also wrote *Won*.

CRANE. *Which is lost.*

ISAAC. There are *two* plays, man!

CRANE. (*Losing it.*) And one of them is gone—we can't find it—*Won* is lost—all we have is *Lost* because we lost *Won*, *all right*?

ISAAC. All right.

HENRY. *All right.* We're all here for the same reason.

CRANE. And it is of utmost importance to me. He was a great man, Will, and a great friend to me and I feel it's my duty to care for his legacy like it were my own, and I do not see *any* humor in editing.

John has entered with Alice. Graciously he offers a joke to the room.

JOHN. I don't either, Crane, I've always said there's nothing to laugh

about in the theatre.

HENRY. John, come in. Come, sit.

JOHN. Hello friends. Carry on.

CRANE. Sir, welcome back.

ELIZABETH. Darling John. Ali, how are you?

ALICE. I take each day as it comes, but here we are.

JOHN. And ready to work. If you are.

ISAAC. Indeed we are, sir. *(To Alice.)* And I am so sorry for you.

ALICE. Thank you. Being here feels right. Mum loved this effort like she loved the plays themselves. Well. Like she loved—

ELIZABETH.

JOHN.

ALICE.

The comedies.

The comedies.

The comedies.

A moment to laugh as Rebecca would have.

JOHN. Shall we?

HENRY. We shall. We start editing the *unpublished* plays, of which we've got five copies from Master Crane in his fine hand.

ISAAC. *(Revealing a stack of neatly copied plays.)* Yes sir. *Two Gents, Merry Wives, Measure for Measure, Winter's Tale, The Tempest.*

CRANE. Also I can vouch for these copies of *Caesar, As You Like It, Macbeth, and Cymbeline.*

HENRY. We all know these nine are true and good as we have watched and performed them ourselves.

JOHN. Good. Next.

CRANE. Next are the foul papers.

Crane reveals a pile of messy scrolls of foul papers. Alice leaps at them.

ALICE. First drafts?!

CRANE. These escaped the fire under my arm.

HENRY. And thank God they did. Will's papers plus our memory can give us a fair version of these.

CRANE. *Comedy of Errors, Taming of the Shrew, All's Well, Antony, Coriolanus, Timon, and Henry VIII.* That's sixteen.

HENRY. *Henry VI* we have Will's own manuscript.

Crane reveals a single, perfect manuscript.

ELIZABETH. The man gets a say at last.

Crane brings up the heavier promptbook for King John.

CRANE. For *King John* we have a promptbook, and that makes eighteen. The rest of the folio will come from the *published* plays that we have in quarto, good and bad.

And finally Crane reveals a stack of printed quartos.

HENRY. Do not trust the quartos as most of them are not sanctioned by Will or the King's Men.

ELIZABETH. The best quarto we have is *Much Ado*.

CRANE. It's nearly perfect. Won't take time at all to set it.

ELIZABETH. *Romeo and Juliet* and *Love's Labour's* are mostly intact.

ALICE. *Midsummer's* not bad, but use the second quarto not the first. Not that anyone likes *Midsummer* anyway.

ISAAC. Oh I do. I love a love story.

Alice likes the sound of this—John doesn't.

CRANE. Now for *Merchant* we'll use the first quarto not the second, and I think the latest quarto of *Richard II* is the best if we use the promptbook for the abdication scene.

HENRY.

JOHN.

Agreed.

Agreed.

CRANE. Good. Now. *Hamlet*.

ISAAC. *Hamlet's* first quarto is a mess, but the second's not bad.

ELIZABETH. And we have promptbooks and sides for *Hamlet*.

ALICE. We all know that one so well, we'll be fine on it.

HENRY. But *Lear* needs work.

Henry accidentally spills his drink on Lear—prompting outrage.

ELIZABETH.

ISAAC.

ALICE.

HENRY.

Henry!

Oh God.

Careful!

Sorry! Sorry.

CRANE. Now it needs *lots* of work.

HENRY. I said I'm sorry.

ISAAC. *Titus* needs work too, *Othello* is good, *Troilus* is done from Walley's copy, just some minor fixes.

CRANE. It's the other *Henrys* that are going to take time. I'll fix it but some idiot added heaps of low speech throughout.

JOHN. You focus on those, Crane. Condi and I will start going through the plays in the order we've laid them out for publishing. Comedies first.

HENRY. Remember, we aim to be careful and correct, not quick.

ISAAC. Perhaps a touch quick. As soon as you finalize the plays my men will set the type, start printing, and we...will have our book. In a year or so.

HENRY. All right, let's not take a decade. I'd certainly like to live to see the damn thing done. Are we agreed?

ELIZABETH.	ISAAC.	ALICE.	CRANE.
Yes indeed.	That we are.	Aye.	We are.

Satisfaction.

HENRY. Wait. Did we mention *Pericles*? Where's *Pericles*?

CRANE. It's...out.

HENRY. WHAT.

ELIZABETH. Henry

HENRY. WHAT?

CRANE. Its origins are dubious, Master Condell. I'm sorry, it's out.

HENRY. John!

CRANE. *You heard me.*

JOHN. Henry. Look. We'll have Crane pen a special copy of the play just for you, all right?

CRANE. We'll have Crane do *what*?

JOHN. (*To Crane, "please go with me on this."*) All right?

CRANE. Fine.

HENRY. (*Grudgingly.*) *All right.* But use the good ink. There's a future in that one.

ELIZABETH. Everyone please. We are all of us here grateful for all of us here. (*Talking about Becky.*) And for all those not, we do this for them.

ALICE. Aye.

JOHN. That we do. Fourteen comedies. Ten histories. Eleven tragedies.
And thank you.

Satisfaction and energy. As we transition...

Transition from Two...

*John, Henry, Elizabeth, Crane, Isaac, and Alice work to edit
the plays.*

*It's a group effort, ink and pages fly from hand to hand,
scrolls and quartos and memories are consulted.*

*As finally...
stacks of finished pages pile up.*

As we move to...

Three.

*Jaggard's print shop. An inky place with two presses, raw leather
for binding, and huge sheets of blank paper stacked everywhere.
The printed pages are hanging like sails. It's a forest of paper.*

*The presses spring into action—men inking plates, laying
paper, strong-arming the press, removing the pages, hanging
the pages on lines.*

Then the presses stop.

*John and Henry walk in, marveling at the hanging pages.
Henry walks up to a hanging page and reads it.*

JOHN. Look at that.

HENRY. There it is. There it is, John.

JOHN. *Romeo and Juliet.*

HENRY. *"Enter Sampson and Gregory, with Swords and Bucklers, of
the House of Capulet."*

JOHN. Just look at it. Beautiful. Clean and clear and... (*Looking*

closer.) Why is the word “go” spelled differently page to page?

HENRY. Is it? I’ll talk to them. (*Reading the pages—acting it out.*)

“Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?”

JOHN. “I do bite my thumb, sir.”

HENRY. “Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?”

*Marcus hurries in. He is the head compositor and he looks it—
inky as the presses, rough and young and a bit...unpolished.*

MARCUS. *Do not touch the pages. No one touches my pages.*

HENRY. We were just looking, friend.

MARCUS. *Looking leads to touching. No touching.*

JOHN. They’re *our* pages, young man.

MARCUS. Your pages?

HENRY. Yes, *this is our book*. Ours.

MARCUS. ‘Cause I thought you were dead.

HENRY. No. We’re not him.

JOHN. We’re not William Shakespeare.

MARCUS. Yeah ‘cause he’s dead.

HENRY. *We are well aware. We’re his friends. We’re the ones who
started the entire effort.*

MARCUS. AllRightAllRight. No need to yell about it. If you were
Master Shakespeare I’d have a thing or two to tell you.

JOHN. Really.

MARCUS. The end of—what’s that one—*Lear*? Yeah. Coulda worked
on that one.

HENRY. Excuse me?

MARCUS. Just saying. Little dark, don’t you think?

JOHN. It’s a tragedy.

MARCUS. He coulda added a dance or something.

HENRY. And what is your exact function in this outfit?

William and Isaac Jaggard enter.

JAGGARD. This is Marcus. Head compositor and general annoyance
to all.

MARCUS. AllRightAllRight.

ISAAC. He's actually quite good at his job.

HENRY. Then he can fix the spelling. It's different every page.

MARCUS. Everyone's a critic.

JAGGARD. *Would you desist.*

MARCUS. AllRightAllRight.

ISAAC. Now we wouldn't have bothered you if it wasn't urgent.

JOHN. What's urgent? What's wrong?

HENRY. What did you do now?

JAGGARD. No good to run around it. The project's off.

ISAAC. The project's *on hold*.

HENRY. What?

JOHN. On hold?

HENRY. What does that mean?

JAGGARD. It's too expensive to publish it as is.

HENRY. You set the budget, Jaggard.

JAGGARD. And you insisted on the fine paper, you insisted on *folio*, you insisted on the extra editors.

JOHN. Crane is the most knowledgeable one of us all about this.

JAGGARD. And he's another mouth to feed. I'm sorry.

HENRY. No you're not, you're cheap.

ISAAC. We'll give you back your money.

JAGGARD. No we won't.

JOHN. We don't want money, we want a book.

ISAAC. As do I.

JAGGARD. Boys, at this point the paper is worth more blank than it's worth in verse.

HENRY. So you're stopping mid-run?

ISAAC. Just pausing. If we can get more money we can start again.

JOHN. Isaac, come on. I'm looking at half of *Romeo and Juliet* just hanging here.

HENRY. I knew we should have never let this man near us.

ISAAC. Gentlemen please. We just need a little bit more money. More interest in the publication wouldn't hurt either.

JOHN. If we can find the money, can we start printing immediately?

ISAAC. Yes.

JAGGARD. Well we'll have to see—

ISAAC. Yes. We will. We'll invest more ourselves.

JAGGARD. Like hell we will.

HENRY. We'll find the money. Will would hate it, but I know who to go to.

JOHN. Not Ben.

HENRY. Not Ben. Actually Ben's a great idea.

ISAAC. Ben Jonson?

JOHN. Ben spent all his money on beer and bail.

HENRY. Yes but he's got clout. He's the poet laureate. If he'd come out in support of this book, the book by his rival, people would start talking.

JAGGARD. That usually helps them start buying.

HENRY. He owes Will. He'll do this. You talk to Ben. Get him to write something, a few lines.

JOHN. Why do I have to talk to Ben? Where are you going?

HENRY. To the Dark Lady.

MARCUS. Ooh, "The Dark Lady"? Is that a play? I'd see that one.

They all glare at Marcus.

AllRightAllRight.

Transition.

Four. A Dual Scene.

John knocks on one door...

Henry waits nervously in another room across town, a lovely room, nicer and more extravagant. Instruments are nearby—lots. And books—lots. Waits. Does he hear someone coming?

Then Ben Jonson flings open the door in front of John.

BEN. What the hell are you doing at my door?

JOHN. Ben. It's John. John Heminges.

BEN. I can see that, John Heminges, what the hell are you doing at my door?

JOHN. Well. I'm here for Will. Shakespeare. He needs you.

Ben stares at him.

BEN. You know he'd deck you for saying that. From the grave. Come in.

Then opens the door for John.

And immediately hands him a drink.

Then Emilia Bassano Lanier enters through another door in another room across town. She's a gorgeous woman with dark hair. She enters laughing.

EMILIA. Henry Condell! When she said it was you, I thought my maid had gone syphilitic. How is your wife, your children? Are you well? I heard about Burbage, dear brute. His Antony, I still remember. Do sit, don't stand, wine? I will.

HENRY. Yes, Lady Lanier. And I thank you for seeing me.

EMILIA. Emilia, Emilia. We're friends. We were. In a different life perhaps, but still. Why are you here, Henry?

HENRY. We need your help.

EMILIA. Oh. Who is we?

HENRY. John and I. And Will.

EMILIA. Will?

HENRY. Shakespeare.

EMILIA. (*His name hits her with profound nostalgia.*) Well. Now I'm terribly interested indeed.

Back to John and Ben.

BEN. And what does William Shakespeare require that God does not provide in Heaven, and if he is not in Heaven then tell him to wait until I get to Hell to bother me.

JOHN. We don't want to bother you, Ben, but we do come to ask you something very important.

BEN. Then hurry up and ask.

JOHN. We're in a pickle publishing Will's plays and we wondered—

BEN. Who's publishing? Who'd you get to do it?

JOHN. Well...Jaggard.

BEN. *Jaggard? You let Jaggard have it? After burning my favor owed from the Lord Chamberlain?*

JOHN. I know, we had no choice.

BEN. The only choice I see is to poison his soup.

JOHN. We don't want you to poison anyone, we want you to...preface. The book.

BEN. Preface. The book?

Emilia and Henry...

HENRY. If he were alive he'd never allow us to bother you, but... Well however he broke your heart I hope that the love you showed him once will bare itself again in this hour of need.

EMILIA. *My heart?* Is that what he said? Of course he did. The things men say away from women are never to be trusted.

HENRY. Do I offend you, milady?

EMILIA. Oh no, no. Though it was most certainly *his* heart that broke. He was not the kind of man who could keep a friend after being a certain kind of...friendly.

HENRY. You broke his heart?

EMILIA. Oh yes terribly. All those sonnets don't come from happy endings.

HENRY. I know it didn't end well between you two, but—

EMILIA. (*Quoting by heart Sonnet 147.*)

“For I have sworn thee fair and thought thee bright,
Who art as black as hell, as dark as night.”

Thank you, Will. Thank you so much.

John and Ben again...

JOHN. Your support—kind words from the poet laureate—it would go a long way to legitimize the effort.

BEN. He did lack a certain legitimacy didn't he, the groundling-pleaser. Not every play needs a goddamn clown.

JOHN. Yes, well—

BEN. It was the love stories I couldn't stand. When I go to the theatre I'd like to engage in a thought or two, not suffer the kissing bits without gagging.

JOHN. Well you needn't mention the love stories then—

BEN. And fucking *Pericles*. God. What horseshit.

JOHN. Let's keep that between us, shall we?

Henry and Emilia...

HENRY. You were a kind of a muse to him. He wanted to write you into every play.

EMILIA. He managed to get me in a few I recall.

HENRY. You were the heart of his Beatrice, Rosalind, Lady Macbeth.

EMILIA. Lady M?

HENRY. Ironically the happiest couple he ever wrote. And even in *Othello* he used your name for Emilia.

EMILIA. Yes well the man failed to realize that most successful courtships don't include naming a character after your true love and then stabbing her to death in the end.

HENRY. He did read your book of poems. He liked it—*loved it*.

EMILIA. Did he?

HENRY. Oh yes, very much. Though I think it made him cringe from...curiosity. The pain in wondering where your lost loves are now.

EMILIA. I did love him. Which was the problem. Love is not a light thing for a poet.

John and Ben...

JOHN. If you could manage only a few lines—they needn't be praise, just remembrance, a somber something, whatever you like.

BEN. Hmm.

JOHN. (*Some reverse psychology.*) Or. Yes. Perhaps we do a greater disservice giving his rival the first word in his life's work—

BEN. I'll do it.

JOHN. No, you're right—

BEN. I'll do it.

JOHN. It's a stupid idea—

BEN. *I said I'll do it.* Something short. Pedestrian. Something *his* audience could understand. Give me a week.

JOHN. Thank you, Ben. Thank you so much.

BEN. (*A sudden soft side.*) Oh. John. I heard about your wife. Terrible thing that. I liked her very much.

JOHN. I know.

BEN. I don't like many people.

JOHN. I know.

Ben pats his back or puts a hand on his shoulder.

Emilia and Henry...

EMILIA. All right Henry, you fanned my flame long enough. How can I help you?

HENRY. We need money to finish publishing Will's collected works.

EMILIA. A collection?

HENRY. Yes, which is quite the task and we've hit a ditch and we didn't want to ask you but...

EMILIA. I suppose...penance for breaking a poet's heart is living with its output. I am happy to help.

HENRY. We thank you, milady.

EMILIA. I do miss him. I hope he knew that. God he was good. And his plays weren't bad either.

HENRY. Oh my word.

EMILIA. Do I make you blush?

HENRY. I was his best friend. You do not tell me anything I have not already heard in reverse.

She smiles at the thought.

Ben and John...

BEN. Wait now. Jaggard's the only one who—Are you publishing this thing in folio? I printed *my collection* in folio *years ago* and—I swear that man aggravates me from the grave.

JOHN. I'll be back in a week.

BEN. Bloody Will Bloody Shakespeare.

JOHN. Thank you, Ben. You're a good man.

BEN. Just leave, I've got beer to do, get out.

JOHN. I think you mean work.

BEN. I know what I mean, *get out*.

JOHN. Thank you, Ben.

Ben slams the door on him and John exits.

Emilia and Henry.

EMILIA. Don't wait until there's an emergency to come back and see me.

HENRY. Milady.

She hands Henry a bag of coin and he bows to her and exits.

She finds that book of sonnets by William Shakespeare...

Reads from Sonnet 130 as we transition...

EMILIA.

"My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;

Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head."

Perhaps touching her hair...she laughs.

Transition from Four...

*The presses in Jaggard's print shop spring to life again—
smacking and clanging as the work is restarted.*

As we transition back to the print shop...

Five.

*Marcus and a compositor are looking at the Droeshout portrait
of Shakespeare.*

MARCUS. I dunno.

COMPOSITOR. Yeah is that... Is that him?

MARCUS. Doesn't quite look like it, does it?

COMPOSITOR. I only met him twice but—

MARCUS. I saw him onstage a dozen times. In costume I'll warrant
but...

COMPOSITOR. That's it! It's the ruff. Not sure about the ruff. Trying
to make him look kingly I suppose.

MARCUS. I think it makes his head look like a ham on a platter.

COMPOSITOR. That's what it is. A touch decapitational.

MARCUS. Floats there, eyeing you like a frog on a rock.

COMPOSITOR. Why do they need a picture of him anyway? Makes
me nervous him looking at me while I'm trying to read.

MARCUS. Those two friends of his commissioned it special.

COMPOSITOR. Well I never heard of a book with a picture of the author in it. Seems to be beside the point.

MARCUS. Though they won't admit it, I find writers tend to like being noticed.

COMPOSITOR. Even the dead ones?

MARCUS. Especially them.

Jaggard and Isaac enter in a hurry.

JAGGARD. *Goddammit, blasted, shite.*

ISAAC. *Stop the presses. Stop them all.*

MARCUS. What's wrong now?

JAGGARD. *Goddamn, horsey, fucker.*

ISAAC. *I said stop working.*

MARCUS. AllRightAllRight.

ISAAC. How much have you done of *Romeo and Juliet*?

MARCUS. Most all of it.

COMPOSITOR. But you told us to finish the histories before going back to the lovey ones.

MARCUS. We're still ending with *Cymbeline* though, right?

ISAAC. Yes that's not at issue.

MARCUS. I do love that bit with the eagle. Now *that's* how you end a play.

ISAAC. *Marcus.* Have you printed *Troilus*? The order was *Romeo and Juliet* and then *Troilus*. Have you started *Troilus*?

MARCUS. Only a bit of it. The last page of *Romeo* and the first three of *Troilus* share a sheet.

ISAAC. Now they don't.

JAGGARD. *Fuckers.*

MARCUS. Well we've already printed ten of 'em.

ISAAC. Cross them out.

MARCUS. Cross them—?

ISAAC. *Troilus* is pulled. Cross it out on the ones already printed, we can't waste the paper.

JAGGARD. This is not my fault. Walley is a shite man.

ISAAC. You told me you had all the rights for all the plays!

JAGGARD. You never have *all* the rights. You *get* the rights. That's the fun of it.

ISAAC. You start printing things you don't own. This is why everyone in this business hates you.

JAGGARD. This is why everyone in this business knows who I am. I'll fix this.

ISAAC. You can't. Walley said no. In fact he said "No, you lowly rat, never in ten hells would I give it to you."

JAGGARD. Just caught him on a bad day.

ISAAC. You were trying to play him and it failed. This time, the one time we're working on something I care about, you are caught in your deceptions. Now we have *The Collected Works of William Shakespeare Except for That One Play We Lost Because the Publisher Is a Cad*.

JAGGARD. *I said I will fix this*. Walley has friends.

ISAAC. Have you ever wondered what that must be like?

JAGGARD. He has friends who owe me. Let me fix this the way I know how.

ISAAC. We are not putting anything but Shakespeare in this. Do not for a moment think—

JAGGARD. I'm not.

ISAAC. *Do not for a moment think of shoving some crap sonnets by some crap hacks in this book*.

JAGGARD. I've published more books than you've ever seen in your life. There's always something that goes wrong, just let me handle it.

ISAAC. That's why we're in this mess!

JAGGARD. *Trust me*. The rest of the work is set and printed?

MARCUS. All but the Greeky ones.

JAGGARD. Good. Get John and Henry to write something for the front.

ISAAC. What for the front?

JAGGARD. Some introduction. "We knew him, we loved him," whatever. Make it sound like love not profit.

ISAAC. That's what it always has been.

JAGGARD. Then they should have no problem penning it in a hurry. Actually do have them put something in there about buying it. "Buy the book you're reading, don't just read it," something. Then set the title page, roll the engraving, and there you have it. Fourteen comedies, ten histories, and somewhere between ten and eleven tragedies by the great playwright, published according to the True Original Copies, Printed 1623 by...Isaac Jaggard.

ISAAC. ...What?

JAGGARD. This is *your* book, son. The world should know it.

A lovely moment that Marcus destroys.

MARCUS. What about *Timon of Athens*?

Pause.

ISAAC. What?

MARCUS. We could put *Timon of Athens* instead of *Troilus*. I like *Troilus* better but both have their problems and—you know—*Timon* is kinda Greeky too.

Pause.

JAGGARD. I can get *Troilus* back.

ISAAC. (*To Marcus.*) Switch the plates to *Timon of Athens*, reset the contents page, and prep the picture.

MARCUS. About the picture.

COMPOSITOR. We'd suggest a bit more shading on the ruff.

MARCUS. Make him look less like dinner.

ISAAC. Like what?

Isaac looks at the image.

Oh God. Tell him to fix it.

MARCUS. Yessir.

ISAAC. Not you, you've got to work.

MARCUS. Yessir.

JAGGARD. Isaac, wait.

ISAAC. I'll do it.

JAGGARD. Son.

ISAAC. I have this under control now. And when this shop is mine...
I will not run it like you.

Isaac leaves. Jaggard is left.

COMPOSITOR. Do you need some help, sir? Point you in the right direction?

JAGGARD. Somehow...I always know the right direction.

Jaggard shoves the compositor on his way out and walks off.

Six.

At the Globe Tap House.

Alice is reading John and Henry's dedication.

They watch her...

HENRY. What. Alice. Is it bad? I knew it. *I knew it.*

JOHN. Let her read it, Henry.

HENRY. She's been reading it for ten minutes. What's wrong with it?

ALICE. Nothing's wrong with it, I'm reading it carefully.

JOHN. She's reading it carefully.

HENRY. I didn't think we'd have to write something. That's kind of the point of all this. I *speake* the speech.

JOHN. And I pay for it. And neither of us should be let near a quill.

ALICE. "It had bene a thing, we confesse, worthie to have bene wished, that the Author himselfe had liv'd to have set forth, and overseen his owne writings; But since it hath bin ordain'd otherwise, and he by death departed from that right, we pray you do not envie his Friends, the office of their care, and paine, to have collected and publish'd them."

It's good.

HENRY. Is it really?

JOHN. Honestly, Ali. We need your honest eyes on this.

ALICE. The beginning is a bit...pecuniary. "Buy it first. That doth best commend a Booke."

JOHN. Well, if it doesn't sell—

HENRY. Jaggard insisted we put it in.

ALICE. The best bit is at the end. "Who, as he was a happie imitator of Nature, was a most gentle expresser of it. His mind and hand went together." It's very good. Will would have loved it. Mum too.

Ben Jonson trundles onstage. Man is he drunk.

Also. Has he been crying?

BEN. I cannot take it. I cannot and will not. I cannot do it, men.

ALICE. What's wrong with you, Ben?

HENRY. Are you well man?

BEN. Do grown men weep in public if they be well?

ALICE. We'll get you a drink.

BEN. I have been drunk for three days straight—

ALICE. No drink then.

BEN. —and without drink I will not last a fourth.

ALICE. Coming right up.

HENRY. Pity's sake, tell us what ills you, Ben.

BEN. William. Bloody. Shakespeare.

He starts to cry again, can't help it, trying to stop.

God help me, here I go again.

JOHN. Ben—sit—what on earth—?

BEN. I started your lines—some tepid praise, some "good man, good words, hey nonny nonny." Then I said, let me read a play or two to remind myself. I set out at midnight, drag Crane from bed, "show me Shakespeare!"

Cries again, can't help it.

And I read everything.

Hates that he liked it so much.

That man. *Hamlet, Lear, Romeo and What's-Her-Name.*

ALICE. You read them all.

HENRY. And at once?

JOHN. That'd be too much for anyone.

BEN. I'd only ever *heard* the plays, *seen* them, never...*been alone with them*. And there I was. And there they were, these pinnacles of story, these peaks of heart, and I *hate* heart! The way he grows in the writing too. As a man himself. But even young the wisdom he put down. How did he know those things so young? How could he? God help me. I started drinking and haven't stopped since.

JOHN. Oh dear.

ALICE. Perhaps some food instead of ale.

HENRY. I know the feeling you're in, Ben. I do and I respect it. But I need to ask if you penned the lines yet?

BEN. What.

HENRY. The printing's almost done and we just need those few lines to say you knew him.

BEN. *Of course I knew him. I was with him the day before he...he died.*

I was there and I could've...

JOHN. Ben, no. It's not your fault.

BEN. What if it was, I could have stopped him.

JOHN. You couldn't have.

ALICE. It was a fever. What's to be done?

BEN. He was drinking *with me*, he was out *with me*. We gorged ourselves, we fought, we drank, we drank more. I could've sent him home, I didn't. Out from the Stratford pub hot and drunk and he steps outside and falls asleep in the snow. I find him half an hour later and he's...the fever was already in him. I could've...

JOHN. No, Ben. Release yourself from that.

BEN. I miss him. I miss the fight, I miss the work. I miss the world. The one we had and loved is gone.

JOHN. No one can help the passing of time nor friends.

HENRY. That's why this is so urgent.

BEN. YesYesYes "he lives on in art" I wrote your damn lines. Take them and let me drink and bemoan time's cruel reaping in the corner. (*To Alice.*) Unless of course you'd like to—?

ALICE. Not even a little.

Ben moves on, shoves pages in Henry's hands.

Henry looks at the first page...

JOHN. Thank you, Ben. Thank you, again and...

(And the second page.) Again.

(And the third page.) And again.

BEN. I tried to be brief. I couldn't.

Henry reads...

HENRY.

"To draw no envy (Shakespeare) on thy name,
Am I thus ample to thy Booke, and Fame;
While I confesse thy writings to be such,
As neither Man, nor Muse, can praise too much."

JOHN. That's...

ALICE. Oh that's really—

BEN. It's good. I know. Keep on.

ALICE.

"I, therefore will begin. Soul of the Age!
The applause! delight! the wonder of our Stage!"

Isaac enters crestfallen, exhausted, lumbering.

BEN. No no no, you're doing it wrong.

"Shine forth, thou Starre of Poets, and with rage,
Or influence, chide, or cheere the drooping Stage;
Which, since thy flight fro' hence, hath mourn'd like night,
And despaire day, but for thy Volume's light."

They are thunderstruck.

You're welcome. I'm going to be sick.

Ben exits.

HENRY. Isaac. Did you hear that? Brilliant.

BEN. *(From offstage.)* Bloody brilliant.

ISAAC. It was. Perfect. It'll be perfect.

HENRY. If we get it to your men today how soon can we see the book?

ISAAC. Soon.

HENRY. How soon?

ISAAC. The front matter's all that's left. The first few copies will have *Timon* instead of *Troilus*—

ALICE. What? Why?

ISAAC. Long story. The end of which is, thankfully, happy. My father convinced Walley to let us publish *Troilus* after all. All we have to do is dedicate the book to the Earls of Pembroke and Montgomery.

HENRY. Dedicate it to whom?

JOHN. Who are they?

ISAAC. Now, they're our dearest and most constant patrons.

HENRY. Like hell they are.

ISAAC. That's what my father bought for Walley to drop his quarrel.

JOHN. We're not writing a dedication to men who had nothing to do with this.

ISAAC. Which is why he wrote one for you. "To the most noble and incomparable pair of brethren." And it'll work. And we'll have our collection.

JOHN. What your father would not do to ensure his own profit.

ISAAC. Yes. Ironically a career of pirating Master Shakespeare's plays is going to pay to publish them as they should be.

HENRY. That man would have to die to not get what he wants.

ISAAC. In this case he did both.

JOHN. What's this?

ISAAC. Last night. In his sleep. As soundly as a monk.

ALICE. Oh Isaac, no.

JOHN. What do you mean?

ISAAC. His favorite writer, his biggest project. And he didn't live to see it in print. I'm not sure if it makes me sad or serves him right. Or both.

HENRY. Isaac. I am sorry.

ALICE. I'm so sorry.

ISAAC. Thank you. Let's finish it, shall we? Let's finish it.

Blackout.

Seven.

A collection of short scenelets—time is moving fast—the presses are always running now—we're getting close. (Basically, however you'd like to build the book, do it now.)

One—

At the print shop—Marcus, Isaac, and other printers work in a busy rush. Some pages are hung, some taken down, some folded and sewn at the seam. John, Henry, and Crane supervise, correct, survey, and try to stay out of the way.

Two—

Henry shows Elizabeth and Alice the churning presses. Isaac joins them with the new engraving of Shakespeare. They all agree it looks better. Isaac and Alice are quite fond of one another. Alice tosses Isaac an apple. Marcus runs by with sheets now folded. Marcus takes one look at Alice and falls in love...and also on the floor.

Three—

As the book is coming together we see less hung pages and more folded and bound page sets. Marcus and Isaac keep the pages in order. Ben Jonson comes by—walks in, starts crying. Alice comforts him, which makes him quite happy.

Then the presses stop. Silence. Focus shifts to...

The book. It is done.

The First Folio is handsome and large in its leather cover.

*It sits on a table with everyone around it, looking,
unable to speak.*

John goes to it. Touches it very gently.

JOHN. Well done, son. Well done.

ISAAC. This is the presentation copy only. We'll do another printing to insert *Troilus and Cressida* so this isn't the final version but...I thought you'd want to see it.

Henry goes to it. Overwhelmed. John might start to open it... then stop.

Silence as they...just look.

JOHN. Anne. Anne should see it.

HENRY. We could take it to her.

MARCUS. This copy should go to the register actually.

HENRY. We'll bring it back.

JOHN. (*Talking about Rebecca too...*) Yes. I want her to...know. What we did. What all this was for.

Isaac nods. John picks up the copy like a child—careful and watchful.

He and Henry exit with it, leaving a room of exhausted but excited men.

A man enters—a customer. Sir Edward Dering.

DERING. Excuse me.

ISAAC. Yes? Yessir. How can I help you?

DERING. You don't have any Ben Jonson, do you?

ISAAC. Ah. No. Apologies, Your Lordship. Down the street they do.

DERING. Right then. Actually I just came from a play across town by um...Master Shakespeare. Splendid. Do you have any of his plays?

ISAAC. We have an entire collection. In folio. Such a handsome volume. Our best work.

DERING. Good. I'd like two.

Pause. No one moves.

Of the Shakespeare collection. One covered in fine leather and one simply bound for home performances.

Pause. No one moves.

Please?

Isaac and Crane hug the man out of nowhere.

Transition from Seven...

Our crier is back as we leave London...

CRIER. Three plays this week at the Globe Theatre! One lamentable tragedy of *King Lear*; one excellent history of *King John*; and the enchanting comedy *Much Ado About Nothing*. 3 o'clock in the afternoon, a penny for the pit! One penny for a play today!

The crier walks on through the crowd.

Eight.

In the main room of Anne Hathaway Shakespeare's house—New Place—in Stratford-upon-Avon. It's a lovely cottage, clean and cozy with books around the room.

John and Henry stand in nice clothes with the book wrapped in a cloth and in a large sack. They wait. Nervous. Anxious. Wistful. This was his house. This was where he died.

Susannah Shakespeare enters helping her mother, Anne, to a chair near the men. Anne is frail and unwell. Tired but with a light in her eye.

ANNE. Gentlemen, good day. My daughter tells me I am to present a good appearance for friends of William's in my house.

HENRY. No need to trouble yourself, Milady Shakespeare.

JOHN. But friends of your husband's indeed, God rest his soul.

ANNE. I hope he does rest in Heaven, he never did on earth.

HENRY. We know that indeed, milady. It's Henry Condell and John Heminges come from London.

ANNE. Of course, I remember you. He spoke of you often in his last years here. And you were at the funeral, I recall.

JOHN. We were, yes ma'am. Of course we were.

ANNE. And you are here again. Tell us why, and please excuse my condition. I am not so well nor so young as you two.

JOHN. Oh I am not your junior by many months, milady.

ANNE. Then my eyes are failing me worse than I thought.

HENRY. You look well enough from mine.

SUSANNAH. What do you want?

ANNE. What brings you all the way to Stratford, good sirs?

HENRY. We wanted you to see...to be the first to see...his work.

ANNE. Whose work?

JOHN. Will's. We gathered his plays and printed them.

ANNE. Printed? All of them?

JOHN. Yes.

HENRY. Well.

JOHN. Henry.

HENRY. I hope you didn't like *Pericles*.

JOHN. *(To Henry.) We'll put it in a later book, all right?*

(To Anne.) Your husband's words meant the world to us. And we wanted you to see them first.

HENRY. To see that the life you let him live was lived a thousand times over in the souls he gave us with his pen.

She's trying to decide if she buys this.

ANNE. That's it there?

HENRY. Yes milady.

They retrieve the Folio from the sack, unwrap it carefully on a table, and offer it to her.

She hesitates.

ANNE. Susannah.

Susannah hurries to her side.

Anne prepares for this with a deep breath...

then opens the large book's cover.

The first thing she sees is his picture—

both the women catch their breath at the sight.

Anne is steady though; Susannah might tear up at this point