

SHAKESPEARE'S BLOODY DEED

by

Johnrick Hole

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Johnrick Hole  
677 Wiltshire Rd.  
Columbus, OH 43204  
614-588-5253  
[rhole@balletmet.org](mailto:rhole@balletmet.org)

## SHAKESPEARE'S BLOODY DEED

### Characters

Burbage, to be played by a man, a player in the troupe  
(Priest, Macbeth)

Andrews, to be played by a woman, a player in the troupe  
(Juliet, Viola)

The Earl of Southampton, to be played by a woman

Phillips, to be played by a man, a player in the troupe  
(Romeo), doubles as Chamberlain

Thomas, to be played by a woman, a player in the troupe  
(Nurse, Lady Macbeth), doubles as Page

William Shakespeare, to be played by a man

Queen Elizabeth, to be played by a woman

The Earl of Essex, to be played by a man

### The Setting

#### London

A Southwark tavern, the court of Queen Elizabeth, the  
Theatre, the home of the Earl of Southampton

#### The Time

September, 1598

**Act I**

**Scene One**

(A tavern in Southwark. There is a table with three chairs.  
Enter Burbage and Andrews with tankards of ale.)

BURBAGE

Andrews, my good fellow, what are the three needs of man that make life worth living?

ANDREWS

The three needs of man?

BURBAGE

The necessities without which our life on terra firma would prove bleak, indeed.

ANDREWS

Wait, wait- don't tell me- a good meal laid on- a draught of ale downed- a woman of spirit.

BURBAGE

Two of three- not bad.

ANDREWS

Only two of three?

BURBAGE

A hearty meal- yes. A draught of ale- yes.

To enjoy said food and drink- a comforting chair.

(Burbage sits at the table.)

ANDREWS

To Burbage- the man who cares more for the comfort of his ass than the love of a woman.

BURBAGE

Women come and go. My faithful ass is always close behind.

(The Earl of Southampton enters unseen by Andrews.)

ANDREWS

A bigger ass would be hard to find, indeed.

BURBAGE

Respect is due me- I labored like Hercules himself to build this worthy ass.

ANDREWS

If we speak of asses, are you not then like the Earl of Southampton, drinking down your ale, and not a woman's lips?

BURBAGE

Ask him so yourself.

ANDREWS

He stands behind me?

BURBAGE

If not the good Earl Southampton, his shade.

ANDREWS

Good evening Earl, we just spoke of you.

SOUTHAMPTON

When you've known one half the women I've acquainted, will you have the strength to lift that ale to your lips?

BURBAGE

Remember, good Earl- history is a tale now forbidden.

SOUTHAMPTON

The Queen forbids you actors the tales of history to strut upon your stage, but my tales of conquest are whispered in other ears.

ANDREWS

Now there's some twice-told tales.

BURBAGE

Twice-told tales, you say? At least twenty times if they're told at all.

SOUTHAMPTON

Some long tales are ever worth the telling.

BURBAGE

No time now for your fanciful and ribald tales, for off we go to work on a new play.

SOUTHAMPTON

As long as people have ears, I'll have a stage, which is more than I can say for you and your lot. This new play- will you be touring the marketplaces of the far countryside?

ANDREWS

We play The Theatre.

SOUTHAMPTON

And after you lose it?

BURBAGE

Lose the Theatre?

SOUTHAMPTON

To Sir Giles Allen- your honored landlord.

BURBAGE

Allen is a worm.

SOUTHAMPTON

A lowly worm- or for you unfortunates, a towering serpent, soon to devour your stage.

BURBAGE

You would know such a snake, as you tread so low. How will Allen crawl into what is rightly ours?

SOUTHAMPTON

Such sweet entreaties- why should I tell you freely all I know?

BURBAGE

Shall I loosen your tongue?

SOUTHAMPTON

Brave proclamation from one so far advanced in the sunset of his years.

BURBAGE

Tell me what you know and you might live so long.

SOUTHAMPTON

It's nothing to me, and the whole mess will be soon widely known. Let me speak slowly, so you might digest the complicated. Giles Allen- the "lessor" to you and your lot- the "lessees" (and do they come any less than these?)- Giles Allen, who owns the ground beneath your stage- the good man covets the return of his land when your lease expires, and as that's his right, like it or not, you're out.

ANDREWS

Out?

SOUTHAMPTON

Out. Out there. Out in the street. Without your stage to play on.

BURBAGE

We built that stage with our own hands and sweat- he'll take that from us?

SOUTHAMPTON

He who owns the lute, chooses the songs for all. The actor raises a stage and the law so rewards the landlord. The way of the world.

BURBAGE

A dirty deed done, an outrage on us, insult of insults!

SOUTHAMPTON

As outrageous an act as I've ever heard!

BURBAGE

Does Shakespeare know of this bald treachery?

SOUTHAMPTON

The good country Squire, that upstart crowing clown? Has he still his head? I hear the Queen summoned him to her knee.

ANDREWS

The Queen will right this.

BURBAGE

The Queen has always loved our work. To our fair and lovely Queen.

(Burbage raises his tankard and the others follow.)

SOUTHAMPTON

My sources say the Queen is quite angry with Shakespeare. Even angrier than when she thought it was I who made one of her ladies with child.

BURBAGE

The Queen's that angry?

SOUTHAMPTON

Perhaps even more so.

BURBAGE

Oh.

(Burbage lowers his tankard, Andrews follows suit, but Southampton raises his higher.)

SOUTHAMPTON

Is there nothing more pleasing in nature than an angry woman?

### **Scene Two**

(Just outside the Queen's chambers. The Queen's Chamberlain is standing and examining a portfolio. The Page enters and stops when he sees the Chamberlain reading. The Chamberlain finishes the line he's reading and closes the portfolio. He motions the Page forward.)

PAGE

My Lord, Shakespeare's here.

CHAMBERLAIN

Which knave comes here now?

PAGE

William Shakespeare, sir. The playwright.

CHAMBERLAIN

Alas, that Shakespeare.

PAGE

Shall I show him out?



CHAMBERLAIN

Nay, the Queen calls him. Has he an escort?

PAGE

None as I can see.

CHAMBERLAIN

Bring him to me now.

PAGE

Yes, my Lord, at once.

(The Page bows and exits.)

CHAMBERLAIN

Oh, what a troubled age in which we live, when playwrights such as Shakespeare so easily command the Queen's ear.

(Enter Shakespeare.)

SHAKESPEARE

Greetings, Chamberlain.

CHAMBERLAIN

Come in, good Shakespeare. Here's hoping your stay's as brief as your speech.

SHAKESPEARE

Ideally, a speech is as short as deserved by its listener,

CHAMBERLAIN

The shorter your speech the greater your mercy spares me.

SHAKESPEARE

And as all here know, you need all the mercy you may mercifully obtain.

CHAMBERLAIN

As the Queen's summoned you, that pecking order may soon change, as your wish for mercy may increase.

SHAKESPEARE

What do you say, now?

CHAMBERLAIN

It's not by my say, only the Queen knows.

SHAKESPEARE

You know the Queen and all her many needs.

CHAMBERLAIN

Her need for you, no.

SHAKESPEARE

Just company she desires from me, then.

CHAMBERLAIN

The Queen does better than bad company.

SHAKESPEARE

You know not, do you?

CHAMBERLAIN

I know my fair Queen commands you, not pleased with recent unfolding events.

SHAKESPEARE

Certainly not by recent events born from my actions?

CHAMBERLAIN

Do your knees feel well?

SHAKESPEARE

What care you of my-

CHAMBERLAIN

Are they well for long, lowly kneeling? I'll announce you now.

SHAKESPEARE

A small foreshadowing?

CHAMBERLAIN

Just remember you well-

SHAKESPEARE

Yes?

CHAMBERLAIN

The way out of here- well guarded, indeed.

(The Chamberlain exits.)

SHAKESPEARE

The Queen is troubled? I've done nothing untoward, at least not openly.

(Queen Elizabeth enters. Shakespeare goes to her, kneels and kisses her ring.)

ELIZABETH

You may stand now, Master Shakespeare.

SHAKESPEARE

I have your mercy to stand before you?

ELIZABETH

What do you say now?

SHAKESPEARE

I beg your pardon.

ELIZABETH

Get off your knees, man.

(Shakespeare stands.)

SHAKESPEARE

You aren't displeased, then?

ELIZABETH

Displeased, where to begin? South is Spain, a starved dog licking its chops. East is France, waiting to pick the bones. North are those who wish a new master and West is Ireland, the dog that forgets it has a master altogether. There's not a pleasing sight in any direction.

SHAKESPEARE

So tell me, my Queen, do you need a new dog or a new compass?

ELIZABETH

I suppose I called for your quick sharp wit.

SHAKESPEARE

And even at its end, my wit's at your service.

ELIZABETH

What I need from you, I'm not finding on your stage.

SHAKESPEARE

How may I serve you?

ELIZABETH

I yearn for many things- all that life brings us, all to which man aspires, for all our highest dreams in which we revel.

SHAKESPEARE

Then I am your man and my stage is yours.

ELIZABETH

Indeed, for me you are all that and more- but as Queen of all, I fear dangerous stories cross your stage that might those less discerning lead astray.

SHAKESPEARE

Dangerous stories? In my theatre? What passes on our stage is a fleeting thing, it's not the true world, just a reflection of it, and cloudy at best.

ELIZABETH

Who now protests too much, my good and gentle man?

SHAKESPEARE

They pay a few coins. The play takes away for a time the troubles that weigh us all.

ELIZABETH

If only amusement came so from the stage, my crown would rest ever so much lighter.

SHAKESPEARE

What should cross our stage then?

ELIZABETH

You know my thoughts on history and its treachery.

SHAKESPEARE

And since so stated, not one part of our past deeds on this fair island have I placed on stage.

ELIZABETH

Nay, not of our fair island, from our history you wander away.

SHAKESPEARE

As you command me.

ELIZABETH

Or so it would seem.

SHAKESPEARE

The worlds of which now I write are far away, indeed.

ELIZABETH

So far away to see- not so far to feel.

SHAKESPEARE

Nothing on our stage is from our history.

ELIZABETH

All that crosses your stage is commentary.

SHAKESPEARE

Commentary? All?

ELIZABETH

In a far off land, there rules a tyrant, not favored even by his friends, a tyrant so hated that those subjects, who are as well his so called "friends," stab him dead publicly.

SHAKESPEARE

Roman history.

ELIZABETH

Am I not Caesar?

SHAKESPEARE

You're nothing of Caesar.

ELIZABETH

How kindly you say it.

SHAKESPEARE

You surely don't say-

ELIZABETH

Your intent may only be to fill your theatre with all who clutch a coin,  
but I do so resent your doing it at my expense.

SHAKESPEARE

That's not my purpose.

ELIZABETH

Purpose or not, an angry mob's an angry mob, however it becomes so.

SHAKESPEARE

What's your bidding then?

ELIZABETH

Give them great passion, but- not the public kind.

SHAKESPEARE

Give them passion of a more private kind?

ELIZABETH

On your stage, give them passion of the most private kind.

SHAKESPEARE

What you wish to see live on our stage is love, sweet love.

ELIZABETH

Let the people dwell more in the bright house of love and less in the dark  
castle of state.

SHAKESPEARE

Let the players fiddle so the citizens don't smell Rome burning.

ELIZABETH

Let the playwright serve his Queen, keeping then his body and soul, as well as his head, from separation.

SHAKESPEARE

I shall serve my Queen as best I might to thereby keep said parts all together whole.

ELIZABETH

A course of action that's wise for us both. I look forward to the play you so choose.

**SCENE THREE**

(The home of the Earl of Southampton. The Earl is standing with a glass and a bottle. Essex enters.)

SOUTHAMPTON

Is that you, Essex?

ESSEX

That's a fine greeting for a tired and thirsty friend.

SOUTHAMPTON

Have you have run on foot from darkest Ireland?

ESSEX

A heaving sea journey from the coast of Ireland to Bristol and not a decent inn from Bristol to here. I would almost prefer being dragged behind a cart around the walls of London.

SOUTHAMPTON

Why are you home now? Are you not charged with subduing the Irish?



ESSEX

My duty is fulfilled.

SOUTHAMPTON

Strange, I've not heard news of victory in battle.

ESSEX

Listen closely to the sound of peace.

SOUTHAMPTON

You vanquished belligerent Ireland with magic?

ESSEX

If reason be magic.

SOUTHAMPTON

Reason with Ireland? Was that the Queen's command? And can they reason? I hear brute force is their way of "reason."

ESSEX

Reason is a force of wit and illumination- how one influences, without a blow struck.

SOUTHAMPTON

So it was magic. And our fairest Queen? Will your magic illuminate her without a blow as well?

ESSEX

On my way there now.

SOUTHAMPTON

Directly from here?

ESSEX

Is there somewhere else?

SOUTHAMPTON

Even the horses were groomed before they were stalled.

ESSEX

I will enter her chamber, fresh from my efforts-

SOUTHAMPTON

Which as you just said were not strenuous-

ESSEX

Striding in as a man-

SOUTHAMPTON

You smell like a man-

ESSEX

A man of action-

SOUTHAMPTON

She will want action-

ESSEX

Returns from the brink-

SOUTHAMPTON

Of course you've had none-

ESSEX

The brink of danger-

SOUTHAMPTON

A brink not crossed-

ESSEX

To report success.

SOUTHAMPTON

Your success? Really?

ESSEX

Let her drink in fully my manly visage.

SOUTHAMPTON

You're cocksure she won't spit that visage onto the floor?

ESSEX

When I charge in, she'll be swept from the floor.

SOUTHAMPTON

You will dismount your mighty steed before you pierce her chamber?

ESSEX

I will pull her up behind me onto my saddle.

SOUTHAMPTON

She will have your head.

ESSEX

I'll charm her madly.

SOUTHAMPTON

Oh, she'll find you mad, but is madness a defense for what she'll charge you?

ESSEX

What? Defend myself from her acclamation?

SOUTHAMPTON

Acclamation? You?

ESSEX

As good as bestowed.

SOUTHAMPTON

Surely you jest?

ESSEX

Not in the least.

SOUTHAMPTON

When you show your face soiled from your travels with a tale of mesmerizing the Irish rebels, it will be the tower for you, Essex.

ESSEX

How would you stand behind that prognostication?

SOUTHAMPTON

Like any man of means, with my purse.

ESSEX

I'll wager she takes me as I am now.

SOUTHAMPTON

I insist upon a modest wager as I hate to take a friend so easily.

ESSEX

And with my modest winnings I will insist on buying you an ale.

SOUTHAMPTON

Well then, get you to your Queen, I'm thirsty!

**Scene Four**

(The Players rehearse at the Theatre. Andrews, as Juliet, appears above. Enter Phillips as Romeo.)

PHILLIPS/ROMEO

See, how she leans her cheek upon her hand!

O, that I were a glove upon that hand,

That I might touch that cheek!

ANDREWS/JULIET

Ay me!

PHILLIPS/ROMEO

She speaks: O, speak again, bright angel!

ANDREWS/JULIET

O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?

Deny thy father and refuse thy name; or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love, and I'll no longer be a Capulet.

PHILLIPS/ROMEO

Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?

(Phillips breaks character.)

PHILLIPS

This is killing me.

ANDREWS

That's not your next line.

PHILLIPS

Is this enough today? I can't bear another word of this tiresome, worn and threadbare nonsense.

(Shakespeare enters.)

ANDREWS

You might be saddled with a load of skirts.

SHAKESPEARE

What is the trouble?

ANDREWS

How do women wear these things?

PHILLIPS

This is a tired and wretched piece of work.

ANDREWS

The heavy skirts touch the earth- the garment becomes a blazing oven.

SHAKEPEARE

This play is most loved by all those who see it.

PHILLIPS

Perhaps the first time, maybe so the second, the third view's a charm, and some time after, there may be life that remains- but countless are the times we've dragged this old nag onto the stage and beat it senseless.

ANDREWS

Lift the skirts off the earth and heaven only knows what comes crawling up.

SHAKESPEARE

Your constant complaints become tiresome.

(Enter Burbage.)

BURBAGE

Yes, hold your tongue, you might be playing a meddlesome priest.

SHAKESPEARE

Et tu Burbage, my very own Brutus?

BURBAGE

For you, my Caesar, my very own tyrant.

(Sensing trouble, Andrews and Phillips withdraw.)

SHAKESPEARE

Do you challenge me?

BURBAGE

Let us play manly, where the fortunes of many are set by the brave few who fight.

SHAKESPEARE

What is your complaint?

BURBAGE

I play the old priest, what else do I need?

SHAKESPEARE

Perhaps one longs for youth and the role of Romeo.

BURBAGE

All I yearn for is the swing of a blade and a fight that sets my heart racing. Write me a battlefield.

SHAKESPEARE

At your age I would think your heart needs the peace of a field more pastoral. And what of the Montagues and Capulets? Is that not blood enough for your feasting?

BURBAGE

A brawl between two families with a sword fight or two, it makes me sleepy.

SHAKESPEARE

Let your cock crow and awaken you at once. If the Queen's not pleased with this romance of Romeo and Juliet, she may favor our landlord, Giles Allen- and you'll be an actor without a stage.

### **Scene Five**

(Outside the Queen's chambers. The Chamberlain is reviewing an account when the Page enters.)

PAGE

He's arrived, my Lord.

CHAMBERLAIN

Shakespeare is already here.

PAGE

Not Shakespeare, my Lord. The Earl of Essex.

CHAMBERLAIN

The Earl of Essex?

PAGE

He desires an audience with the Queen. He says it's urgent.



CHAMBERLAIN

The Earl of Essex is in Ireland quelling the rebellion.

PAGE

He's at the door now.

CHAMBERLAIN

A most curious thing.

PAGE

He appears quite mad.

CHAMBERLAIN

How do you mean mad?

PAGE

He wishes to approach the Queen on his horse.

CHAMBERLAIN

How's that you say now?

PAGE

When I answered the door he's on his horse. He wanted to ride his horse through the door.

CHAMBERLAIN

That is mad indeed.

PAGE

The guard persuaded him to dismount and leave his horse at the door and the horse waits there now for Essex.

CHAMBERLAIN

Bring him to me now.

PAGE

The horse?

CHAMBERLAIN

No, you fool, the Earl.

PAGE

At once, Chamberlain.

(The Page exits.)

CHAMBERLAIN

A most curious affair's afoot here. The Earl of Essex is back from Ireland, but we've no word of victory- nor even a battle. Does he come crawling back with nothing?

(The Earl of Essex charges in.)

ESSEX

I will see the Queen.

CHAMBERLAIN

Ah, it's so good to see you Lord Essex.

ESSEX

I must see the Queen.

CHAMBERLAIN

And how was Ireland? I've been told it's lovely if the people are a bit brutish.

ESSEX

Take me to the Queen.

CHAMBERLAIN

Does the Queen expect you?

ESSEX

Does she not always?

CHAMBERLAIN

Perhaps, when you're not thought to be in Ireland.

ESSEX

I stand here before you, not in Ireland.

CHAMBERLAIN

You stand before me, yet the Queen commanded you to Ireland, hence my puzzlement.

ESSEX

And now I've returned.

CHAMBERLAIN

With news of victory?

ESSEX

With news of peace.

CHAMBERLAIN

Those tidings usually come together.

ESSEX

Will you announce me? Or should I announce myself?

CHAMBERLAIN

Shall I announce your horse as well?

ESSEX

Away, you insect-

(Essex starts to push past the Chamberlain when the Queen and Shakespeare enter. Essex and the Chamberlain drop to their knees but their presence is not acknowledged by the Queen.)

ELIZABETH

I so look forward to Romeo and Juliet once again on your stage.

SHAKESPEARE

The players are joyful to play it again.

ELIZABETH

A wise choice of plot, full of romantic diversion for all, with swordplay aplenty, yet no crowned head is harmed.

SHAKESPEARE

The players and I discussed that very point.

ELIZABETH

And when her subjects are so satisfied, the Queen is happy.

SHAKESPEARE

I and the Players will be most grateful for your patronage.

ELIZABETH

What ruffian is this?

CHAMBERLAIN

The Earl of Essex calls on you, your grace.

ELIZABETH

This can't be Essex.

CHAMBERLAIN

Beg your pardon, grace?

ELIZABETH

This man is not clean.

ESSEX

It is I, your grace.

ELIZABETH

Who says "this is I?"

ESSEX

Your servant, Earl of Essex.

ELIZABETH

This cannot be as my servant the Earl of Essex- the Earl of Essex would never dare to come before me in such an unkempt state, and furthermore the Earl serves me in Ireland, which is many miles away and across the sea.

ESSEX

It is I, your grace-

ELIZABETH

Who's this imposter?

CHAMBERLAIN

If I may, your grace, I do believe this is the Earl-

ELIZABETH

Arise now, you both.

(Chamberlain and Essex stand.)

CHAMBERLAIN

Your grace, if I may-

ELIZABETH

I don't know which vexes me most- the dirty one or the one who let him in.

CHAMBERLAIN

I tried to tell him-

ESSEX

I can explain all-

ELIZABETH

Silence! Both of you! If only you two were more like Shakespeare. I ask him to do a thing, it is done. Does Shakespeare come crawling back to me, his task unfulfilled and his person unwashed? Would Shakespeare allow such a breach of his sovereign? I think he would not. Now go, dear Shakespeare. Go and prepare your play for all. Leave me to the mess that's been dumped before me. At least I know you do my will and you will be rewarded.

SHAKESPEARE

I will do so now, my beloved Queen.

(Shakespeare bows and backs out, making a broad sweeping satirical gesture of leave taking to the Chamberlain and Essex. He exits.)

CHAMBERLAIN

If I may, your grace-

ELIZABETH

Follow Shakespeare and ensure he has all he needs for his playing of Romeo and Juliet.

CHAMBERLAIN

Yes, your grace, at once.

(The Chamberlain bows and backs out.)

ELIZABETH

Where to begin with you?

ESSEX

If I may, your grace-

ELIZABETH

You may not, good Earl. I have reports of no change in Ireland.

ESSEX

All is at peace there.

ELIZABETH

At peace? I've received none of my rightful tribute. Without my rightful tribute, can there be peace?

ESSEX

Tribute is forthcoming-

ELIZABETH

You were to deliver it to me.

ESSEX

And it will be so delivered by me.

ELIZABETH

Oh? Is it on the horse you wished to ride into my halls?

ESSEX

No, but tribute comes.

ELIZABETH

So all there is here is a promise to make future payment.

ESSEX

And that promise will be fulfilled.

ELIZABETH

Who have you installed to make good that promise?

ESSEX

There's been no such change-

ELIZABETH

No change? So he who has refused to pay my due now promises to pay?  
Is there some date set for this future payment, other than my death?

ESSEX

All will be collected-

ELIZABETH

I sent you to Ireland to set things right and you bring me words, words,  
nothing but words.

ESSEX

There will be more than words-

ELIZABETH

You can wager your head on that true statement. We cannot speak more  
of this with you in this foully fragrant state. Bathe yourself and robe  
yourself in decent garments and I command your presence in my box at  
Master Shakespeare's play.

ESSEX

You command me to Shakespeare's theatre?

ELIZABETH

An evening of theatre may clear your head as it seems clouded. You  
should take a page from Shakespeare. He serves me quite well and his  
company is well disciplined.



**Scene Six**

(On the stage of the Theatre, a rehearsal of Romeo and Juliet. Andrews, costumed as Juliet and Thomas costumed as the Nurse, are sword fighting, and being cheered on by Burbage costumed as the priest and Phillips as Romeo.)

THOMAS

I will teach you a lesson you soon won't forget.

ANDREWS

I see why you play the old woman, as your movements are so well suited.

BURBAGE

Ah, the ringing sounds of clanging steel- the blood rises up.

PHILLIPS

Yes, the lurid sight of two women who lunge and thrust like men at one another.

BURBAGE

A shame they're not truly women.

THOMAS

He fights like a woman.

ANDREWS

Another insult such as that and I won't hold my blows.

THOMAS

Don't favor me with any less than your strongest.

PHILLIPS

Forget old Shakespeare and his tired sentiment- let's fill the stage with bold warrior women.

BURBAGE

For that spectacle, the people will flock to fill our coffers.

(Shakespeare enters.)

SHAKESPEARE

What is the meaning?

(The action stops. Burbage steps forward.)

BURBAGE

We are perfecting a passage that needs work.

SHAKESPEARE

From which play is this?

BURBAGE

Romeo and Juliet.

SHAKESPEARE

Of course, the scene where Juliet kills her nurse.

ANDREWS

Can we add that scene?

THOMAS

It would be better if the Nurse beats Juliet to teach her a lesson.

PHILLIPS

Better yet, they wrestle like two mean old bears.

BURBAGE

That would raise a cheer.

SHAKESPEARE

Everyone's a playwright.

BURBAGE

It would so greatly amuse the groundlings.

SHAKESPEARE

They would be amused if you squatted and relieved yourself on stage, but we're not doing that play either.

BURBAGE

We work to bring life to this old work horse, that's all.

SHAKESPEARE

Our Queen loves this nag- we'll mount her again, with a spring in our step and our hearts so light, to thereby bring her great joy in our playing, and our good Queen, so inspired, may then help us keep our stage. Or do you prefer trouping cross country from guild hall to marketplace to uncovered tavern courtyard?

I thought not.

BURBAGE

She will help us with that scum, Giles Allen?

SHAKESPEARE

If she finds our play pleasing and to her purpose.

BURBAGE

There may be some life left in the old nag.

THOMAS

The Queen?

ANDREWS

Nay, Juliet, you simple idiot.

(Thomas draws his sword.)

THOMAS

Idiot, you say?

PHILLIPS

My wager's certain on sweet Juliet.

BURBAGE

Gentleman, we have work to do to keep these boards under our feet. How will we proceed? Weak from separation or strong together?

PHILLIPS

I say together.

ANDREWS

Together for me.

THOMAS

I'm in as well.

SHAKESPEARE

If we give the Queen a sweet Romeo and Juliet which moves her grace, she may not just save our stage, but shine these old boards with her royal purse. Heartened with such bright hope, let us go to work.

ANDREWS

How shall we do so?

SHAKESPEARE

Do not saw the air too much with your hand. It offends me to the soul to hear a player split the ears of the groundlings.

BURBAGE

Who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise.

SHAKESPEARE

Pray you avoid it.

THOMAS

I hear your statement.

PHILLIPS

I fear Romeo's too passionate a fellow.

SHAKESPEARE

Be not too tame either- you must... let me think...

PHILLIPS

Let my own action be my tutor? Suit the action to the word?

SHAKESPEARE

Just so, and the word to the action.

ANDREWS

Is not the most fair Juliet a modest woman?

(Andrews coyly lifts his costume skirt.)

SHAKESPEARE

Ah, the bounds of modesty, always a tricky balance on the stage...

How to step close but not over... a puzzle indeed...

ANDREWS

So I should not overstep the modesty of nature: for anything so overdone is not the purpose of playing, whose purpose is to hold, as it were, the mirror up to nature.

SHAKESPEARE

On the very tip of my tongue, it was- the mirror of nature's the very thing.

BURBAGE

A mirror for nature?

(Burbage strikes a pose as if admiring himself.)

SHAKESPEARE

To show virtue her own feature, to show a thing as it is- as full of itself as it may be.

BURBAGE

Truth isn't always a virtue for playing comedy.

SHAKESPEARE

Overdone and badly played gets the easy laugh from the stupid and ruins the play for all but them.

BURBAGE

Is that a warning?

SHAKESPEARE

The warning is that one spectator- the Queen- must enjoy this play to her greatest satisfaction, or we are all out on our asses.

BURBAGE

Follow me now, men. We'll call the players.

Tis better to play an old priest today, and by so doing, keep the treacherous Giles Allen away.

**Scene Seven**

(The Queen's chambers. The Queen is standing to read a letter. The Page enters.)

PAGE

You called, your highness?

ELIZABETH

Approach me, young man.

PAGE

How may I serve you?

ELIZABETH

With your honesty.

PAGE

Is there another way?

ELIZABETH

If only there were not another, my life would be so good. The sad truth is that I must weigh every word I hear for falsity.

PAGE

You are the fair Queen. Who would lie to you?

ELIZABETH

That would be most men... other than yourself. Your truthful approach to service commends you to me again.

PAGE

How may I again serve your majesty?

ELIZABETH

In a grave and delicate matter. I have here a most disturbing letter.

PAGE

Does it give bad news?

ELIZABETH

It brings me questions. The letter was brought to me just after the Earl of Essex returned from Ireland and speaks of his deeds there. I know that words are spoken in your presence as if you were not among the speakers. What is said around the Court of the exploits of Essex in Ireland?

PAGE

They say openly there was much feasting.

ELIZABETH

Our men feasted or the Irish feasted?

PAGE

All feasted together.

ELIZABETH

How pleasant that sounds.

PAGE

It seems the Irish aren't as barbarous as some describe them.

ELIZABETH

How refined are they?

PAGE

Quick to share their food- and drink and a bed.

ELIZABETH

A generous people.

PAGE

They tell a good joke and sing a good song.



ELIZABETH

Who would have thought them so entertaining?

PAGE

They excel in sport and great feats of strength.

ELIZABETH

They are the right cloth to make stout soldiers. Perhaps I can have them take up arms against themselves.

PAGE

They are skilled in combat with all weapons.

ELIZABETH

Including, it seems, the greatest weapons of all – their wit and cunning.

PAGE

I heard nothing of their wit or cunning.

ELIZABETH

Which is but added proof it so exists. What of Lord Essex? What think you of the weapons of his mind?

PAGE

They are strong and hard- but sometimes dulled by his vanity.

ELIZABETH

Is he true to me?

PAGE

More true to himself and his wants.

ELIZABETH

This letter comes to me just now from Ireland having left there before the return of Essex here. It states a deeply serious charge that Essex struck a deal with the Irish so that they would quietly await my death and the new terms of their tribute with my successor.

PAGE

If true, that is treason. Who sent that letter?

ELIZABETH

You state my problem. No signature casts doubt on the veracity. Have you heard any words that reek of such a plot?

PAGE

Many foul words issue from Essex, but nothing like that.

ELIZABETH

Go forth then and keep a sharp eye and a keen ear and bring back to me anything of the slightest interest in this regard.

PAGE

It might be best to survey the Earl of Southampton as well.

ELIZABETH

Southampton? What would that low weasel in the hen house have to do with this matter?

PAGE

The Earl of Essex often takes his counsel.

ELIZABETH

I suppose where there's one villain there's likely two – or more.

PAGE

I'll keep watch over both and bring my findings.

ELIZABETH

Godspeed you, good man.

**Scene Eight**

(A tavern in Southwark. Essex is sitting at a table. Enter Southampton, carrying two tankards.)

SOUTHAMPTON

Here is the promised refreshment from my winnings of our wager.

ESSEX

I do need a drink.

SOUTHAMPTON

Is there any drink that tastes as sweet as one that's free?

ESSEX

The drink not paid for with my losses?

SOUTHAMPTON

Now there, it could be far worse. You still have your head.

ESSEX

There was a time when I could sweep in on my horse and no woman's heart was safe, not even the Queen's.

SOUTHAMPTON

Isn't that horse long dead?

ESSEX

Apparently so. I'll miss that horse for its pleasing rides.

SOUTHAMPTON

I wish I could say I take no pleasure in having warned you, but it is so pleasurable.

ESSEX

I'm happy my troubles amuse you.

SOUTHAMPTON

This will all work out in the end I'm sure.

ESSEX

Could you speak to her on my behalf?

SOUTHAMPTON

I'm of no help to you with the Queen, at least not directly. She's still quite angry about the child born to her lady in waiting. She rather finds me the handsome tempting fox in the hen house.

ESSEX

I get the stern warning while Shakespeare of all knaves seems even closer than ever to her heart.

SOUTHAMPTON

Shakespeare, do you say?

ESSEX

He was leaving as I arrived. He and the Queen are thicker than thieves.

SOUTHAMPTON

Shakespeare? You're certain?

ESSEX

How many times have I looked upon that face?

SOUTHAMPTON

The face that launched a thousand quips.

ESSEX

And the Queen bids me to be more like Shakespeare.

SOUTHAMPTON

Forewarned, I'll be sure to keep a closer eye on my purse strings.

ESSEX

And this worst of all- she commands my presence at the theatre.

SOUTHAMPTON

Oh? What's playing now?

ESSEX

Romeo and Juliet.

SOUTHAMPTON

That old thing again?

ESSEX

The abyss yawns wide and ever wider.

SOUTHAMPTON

This all seems very odd as my sources tell me the Queen is quite angry with Shakespeare and that Shakespeare is in danger of losing his playhouse to that old money grubber Giles Allen.

ESSEX

Well, that foul wind seems to have blown over for our friend Shakespeare.

SOUTHAMPTON

It's been said the Queen's unhappy with the tales of history that Shakespeare marches across his lowly stage- tales of history that hold a mirror to the current state of affairs. What changes her countenance?

ESSEX

She seemed most pleased about Romeo and Juliet.

SOUTHAMPTON

The Queen is happy and now Shakespeare plays Romeo and Juliet. Most interesting, indeed.

ESSEX

Isn't the King killed in Romeo and Juliet?

SOUTHAMPTON

Is the King killed? Have you seen Romeo and Juliet?

ESSEX

Yes- many, many times.

SOUTHAMPTON

Have you ever stayed awake until the end?

ESSEX

Plays with battle scenes are more to my taste.

SOUTHAMPTON

My thought is perhaps old Romeo and Juliet could use such a scene.

ESSEX

What, some kind of fight between the Capulets and the Montagues?

SOUTHAMPTON

No, the thing is already full of Italians killing each other, I can't see how that would make a difference to the Queen.

ESSEX

Who cares what she thinks, I will better enjoy the play with more fights.

SOUTHAMPTON

The Queen's happiness depends on her enjoyment of the play, and if she does not enjoy the play, Shakespeare will feel the wrath of the Queen. More wrath for Shakespeare- less wrath for you.

ESSEX

But what if she finds the play pleases her well?

SOUTHAMPTON

Many things can go wrong in the theatre. Let us ensure they do so for brave Romeo and sweet Juliet.

**ACT TWO**

**Scene One**

(The stage of the Theatre and the first night of the latest revival of Romeo and Juliet. Romeo (Phillips) is below and Juliet (Andrews) is on the balcony.)

ANDREWS/JULIET

'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;

Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.

What's Montague? it is not hand, nor foot, nor arm, nor face, nor any other part

Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!

What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet;

So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called.

PHILLIPS/ROMEO

I take thee at thy word:

Call me but love, and I'll be new baptized;

Henceforth I never will be Romeo.

ANDREWS/JULIET

What man art thou that comes so hidden by night, and now stumbles here into my light?

PHILLIPS/ROMEO

By a name I know not how to tell thee who I am: my name, dear saint, is hateful to myself, because it is an enemy to thee.

ANDREWS/JULIET

My ears have not yet drunk a hundred words

Of that tongue's utterance, yet I know the sound:

Art thou not Romeo and a Montague?

PHILLIPS/ROMEO

Neither, fair saint, if either thee dislike.

ANDREWS/JULIET

How camest thou hither, the orchard walls are high and hard to climb.

PHILLIPS/ROMEO

With love's light wings, for stone walls cannot hold love out, Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear-

ANDREWS/JULIET

O, swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon, Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.



THOMAS/NURSE

(From within) Madam!

ANDREWS/JULIET

I come, anon.--But if thou mean'st not well, I do beseech thee—

THOMAS/NURSE

(From within) Madam!

ANDREWS/JULIET

By and by, I come:--to cease thy suit, and leave me to my grief.

A thousand times good night!

(Andrews/Juliet exits above)

PHILLIPS/ROMEO

A thousand times the worse, to want thy light.

Love goes toward love, as schoolboys from their books,

But love from love, toward school with heavy looks.

(Phillips/Romeo starts to exit. Andrews/Juliet reenters above)

ANDREWS/JULIET

Hist! Romeo, hist! O, for a falconer's voice, to lure him back again!

With repetition of my Romeo's name.

PHILLIPS/ROMEO

It is my soul that calls upon my name: how silver-sweet sound lovers' tongues by night, like softest music to attending ears!

ANDREWS/JULIET

Romeo!

PHILLIPS/ROMEO

My dear?

ANDREWS/JULIET

Good night, good night! parting is such sweet sorrow, that I shall say  
good night till it be morrow.

(Andrews/Juliet exits above)

PHILLIPS/ROMEO

Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast!

Would I were sleep and peace, so sweet to rest!

(There is a very loud, long and unmistakable farting  
sound. Juliet enters from above.)

ANDREWS/JULIET

Romeo?

(There is another even louder farting sound.)

PHILLIPS/ROMEO

What wind through yonder window breaks?

(Thomas/Nurse enters on the balcony.)

THOMAS/NURSE

It is Juliet and does she ever reek!

(There is a third and even louder farting sound.)

ANDREWS/JULIET

Romeo, please go Romeo, as farting is such sweet sorrow.

(Pandemonium breaks loose. There is laughter and cheering from the groudlings. Andrews and Thomas come down from the balcony. Burbage comes on stage in costume as the priest and raises his arms to restore order.)

BURBAGE

I must say I'm shocked at such a breach of decorum.

A fart is a fart is a fart- would it smell any sweeter by any other name?

## Scene Two

(The stage of the Theatre. Burbage, Phillips. Andrews and Thomas are seated on a semi-circle of crates. Shakespeare enters.)

SHAKESPEARE

Ah, the ever renowned company of farting clowns. The perpetrators of the cruel villainy of which I spoke against- "overdone and badly played gets the easy laugh from the stupid and ruins the play for all but them"- said just yesterday.

The Queen is surely not pleased with this villainy. Just when we truly need her by our side. Answer me quickly- who among you farted?

BURBAGE

We have discussed this matter at great length-

SHAKESPEARE

Leaving no smell unturned, I pray-

BURBAGE

And while we all thought it was one among us imagine our surprise-

SHAKESPEARE

Will not one of you take this noxious odor as your own? Will that sweet essence, that if one drew breath deep enough might still be sniffed, go unclaimed?

BURBAGE

It was not done by any one among us.

SHAKESPEARE

Perhaps a spirit wind came upon us?

BURBAGE

Not one of us was alone and all observed each other.

SHAKESPEARE

So in effect you are all alibis, one for the other?

BURBAGE

I suppose one could state the issue so.

SHAKESPEARE

How very cozy for you all.

ANDREWS

That is most unjust.

SHAKESPEARE

Unjust? Is that so? I heard it said on stage that it emanated from you.

THOMAS

Not true.

SHAKESPEARE

Andrews has a defense?

THOMAS

I stood directly behind Andrews just when it... it issued forth, and if it had been Andrews, I would have suffered first.

PHILLIIPS

When I heard it I first I thought of Burbage, but there was not smell enough for Burbage, and as I was standing close by him, I knew right then it was not Burbage, as I've stood close to Burbage when he has partook of the vilest things imaginable, and when he does so break wind, Burbage stinks most putridly, therefore it was not he.

BURBAGE

Remind me not to call you as a witness of my character.

SHAKESPEARE

What of the rest of the company?

BURBAGE

All are accounted. Gentleman, leave us to further study this... unfortunate occurrence.

(Phillips, Andrews and Thomas prepare to leave.)

SHAKESPEARE

Make use of your time- if the Queen doesn't have our heads, we'll need another romance ready for her appeasement. Take a close look at Twelfth Night.

PHILLIPS, ANDREWS, and THOMAS

[Loud groan from all]

BURBAGE

Step lively there, gents- recall the wolf we know as landlord, Giles Allen, soon knocks hard upon our door.

(Phillips, Andrews and Thomas exit.)

SHAKESPEARE

We can be sure the Queen's not pleased by this bit of business.

BURBAGE

I think there's treachery afoot.

SHAKESPEARE

Treachery? By who? And for what reason?

BURBAGE

Some scoundrel puts you on the wrong side of the Queen.

SHAKESPEARE

But who would wish the Queen's anger for me? I stand between no man and the Queen.

BURBAGE

Who would gain the most from the Queen's displeasure with our rude spectacle?

SHAKESPEARE

We are but lowly players who scrape and bow across our stage for the amusement of all.

BURBAGE

Have you already forgotten said fox at the door of whom I just now spoke?

SHAKESPEARE

Giles Allen- that fool?

BURBAGE

The fool you speak of will build a stable from the planks we play on-

SHAKESPEARE

By so ruining our play for the Queen- the same Queen we hope will help us pluck our stage from his grasping claws.

BURBAGE

By baiting the mob with a false farting.

SHAKESPEARE

False, you say? It sounded quite natural.

BURBAGE

The sound was quite natural- and yet oddly not as fragrant as one might expect from it's thunderous peal.

SHAKESPEARE

And with the groundlings- just the suggestion of a noxious odor makes it so-

BURBAGE

Not the sweetest smelling crowd in London.

SHAKESPEARE

Yet the sound trumpets true.

BURBAGE

Sounds true- but from stage thunder no lightning strikes, and with stage farting no smell wafts. I speculate some dried bladders of sheep, filled with the air of a blacksmith's bellows, a weight is then dropped against said sheep bladders, and comes forth from there-

SHAKESPEARE

That which might take the bloom from a rose.

BURBAGE

My guess is lowlifes hid in the shadow, and when directed so, made that sound of false farting.

SHAKESPEARE

A clever effect we must use ourselves- for a play more suited than Romeo and Juliet, of course.

BURBAGE

I smell that swine Giles Allen behind these counterfeit farts.

SHAKESPEARE

We need proof before or we make this darkness even darker- who are we as lowly players to accuse such a “gentleman” as he?

BURBAGE

We best keep a sharp lookout for his next bit of rude mischief.

SHAKESPEARE

Yes- let's keep our heads up and our eyes wide. We prove Giles Allen is the rogue herein, and we stalwart Queen's Men deserve to hold our stage and keep.

BURBAGE

I will gather the others and we will scour the taverns for talk of this foul and loathsome deed.

SHAKESPEARE

You think the taverns will bear a fruitful search?

BURBAGE

I have found taverns the likeliest source of such treachery.

SHAKESPEARE

Go with godspeed, as the planks beneath our feet depend on it!



**Scene Three**

(The Queen's chambers. The Queen and the Page are meeting.)

ELIZABETH

I never laughed so.

PAGE

“What wind through yonder window breaks...”

ELIZABETH

Oh, stop, please stop now, I cannot bear it-

PAGE

“It is Juliet, and she certainly reeks”

ELIZABETH

I command you stop at once or I'll apprentice you to Shakespeare...

(The Chamberlain enters. The Queen and the Page are still laughing, but they compose themselves.)

CHAMBERLAIN

The Earl of Essex awaits your command.

ELIZABETH

Bring him to me now.

PAGE

Shall I leave you then?

ELIZABETH

Go, continue to observe as agreed.

PAGE

As you command me.

(The Page exits.)

ELIZABETH

Chamberlain, have we heard from Shakespeare?

CHAMBERLAIN

Not as yet, your grace.

ELIZABETH

Then bring me the errant Earl.

CHAMBERLAIN

At once, your majesty.

(The Chamberlain exits.)

ELIZABETH

Which is the greater comedy- Shakespeare's rude Juliet or Essex in Ireland?

(Essex enters.)

ESSEX

I'm here at your call.

ELIZABETH

That's a most familiar greeting and entrance for your sovereign.

(Essex kneels immediately.)

ESSEX

I live to serve you.

ELIZABETH

I suppose that's better. On your feet then, man.

(Essex stands)

ESSEX

Has your grace recovered?

ELIZABETH

Recovered? From what?

ESSEX

The awful riot at The Theatre.

ELIZABETH

The groundlings were most demonstrative, that's true.

ESSEX

I thought it a demonstration in very poor taste.

ELIZABETH

Truly? In poor taste?

ESSEX

Well, yes... I believe so.

ELIZABETH

But not entirely certain of your judgment.

ESSEX

There seemed to be some not insignificant disturbance of sorts.

ELIZABETH

It was a lively and vocal gathering.

ESSEX

I'm not as learned about theatrics as your majesty.

ELIZABETH

While the action differed from past performances, I found it charming in its life like depiction of events.

ESSEX

So this disorderly display gained your approval?

ELIZABETH

I do not mind the pleasure harmlessly taken by my subjects- it's things taken at my expense that trouble me. For example, your foray in Ireland.

ESSEX

I went at your command.

ELIZABETH

You went at my command but you did not follow my command.

ESSEX

My time in Ireland was only for your service.

ELIZABETH

Reported to me is a meeting between you and the leader of those wild primitives- a meeting at which you suggested that the Irish bide their time peacefully until my demise.

ESSEX

Who could have reported such a meeting and this libelous statement of meaning?

ELIZABETH

With the witness you speak of you would now be in the tower looking forward to the loss of your head.

ESSEX

You have no witness.

ELIZABETH

I have the witness of events unfolding before me and their consequences.

ESSEX

A finding without the foundation of one true evidence.

ELIZABETH

Your lack of progress is so evident and causes me trouble. Those without the means to make trouble are often the better subjects for it. Therefore your concessions are hereby revoked.

ESSEX

Those concessions are the greater part of my earnings.

ELIZABETH

My clerks tell me without them you'll still keep body and soul and your head all together.

ESSEX

Together- but most impoverished then.

ELIZABETH

Impoverishment may provide time to think and consider the ends of failing your sovereign.

ESSEX

But what will I do? How will I then live?

ELIZABETH

Perhaps your friend the Earl of Southampton will cover your loss.

(The Chamberlain enters, followed by Shakespeare.)

ELIZABETH

Escort the Earl out.

CHAMBERLAIN

Yes, your grace, and here is Shakespeare as you commanded.

(Shakespeare goes to the Queen and kneels and kisses her ring.)

ELIZABETH

Now here's a man properly greeting his sovereign.

(Shakespeare stands and bows to Essex.)

SHAKESPEARE

Lord Essex.

ESSEX

Master Shakespeare.

ELIZABETH

I was just telling Essex how greatly I enjoyed Romeo and Juliet.

SHAKESPEARE

You found the play to your satisfaction?

ELIZABETH

It was most amusing and... earthy.

SHAKESPEARE

It was... different than usually played.

ELIZABETH

Much improved is my thought. If things don't change for the better, they eventually wither, is that not true, Lord Essex?

ESSEX

I do see your point.

ELIZABETH

Lord Essex attends the theatre quite infrequently, is that not true, Lord Essex?

ESSEX

The hardship of duty often keeps me away from the theatre.

ELIZABETH

Attendance of more plays would increase your knowledge and appreciation of life.

ESSEX

Of course you are right.

ELIZABETH

As a matter of fact, our good Shakespeare is preparing another performance for our viewing.

ESSEX

I will try my best to attend to it.

ELIZABETH

I command you to it.

ESSEX

You command me again to the theatre?

ELIZABETH

Even in your reduced circumstances there are reasonable entries to the theatre- the groundlings pay less.

ESSEX

I will go, your grace.

ELIZABETH

See that you do so. Now, show the Earl to his horse. Master Shakespeare and I must talk of romance and laughter.

(The Chamberlain leads Essex out.)

SHAKESPEARE

I am at your service as always, my Queen.

ELIZABETH

So you say, but rather than romance you give me riot.

SHAKESPEARE

Your grace was not pleased?

ELIZABETH

I remember my request clearly, and it was not for comedy a whit higher than bear baiting.

SHAKESPEARE

The players are as we speak most diligently reworking Twelfth Night for your pleasure.

ELIZABETH

Take care that the clowns not overpower the gentle sighs of sweet love.

SHAKESPEARE

For you my Queen, the most gentle love will prevail.

ELIZABETH

See that it does so, as my patronage hangs in the balance.



**Scene Four**

(The Southwark tavern. Burbage and Phillips are seated at a table. Andrews enters with three ales.)

PHILLIPS

First Romeo and Juliet and now this?

ANDREWS

Twelfth Night, with even less action than the old dog Romeo and Juliet.

PHILLIPS

There's what, two? Three at most fights in the whole play.

ANDREWS

Our swords are barely unsheathed and it's back to the pursuit of love.

PHILLIPS

And this whole business of Viola disguising herself as a man and then the Lady falling in love with a man who's in fact a woman.

ANDREWS

You find understanding that scenario difficult?

PHILLIPS

Would that happen so in life?

BURBAGE

On the stage anything can happen.

PHILLIPS

It happens on stage, but is it to be believed?

ANDREWS

Do you say I am unconvincing in the role of Viola, the young noblewoman forced by the circumstances of a shipwreck to become a man, and in so presenting herself as a man, attracts the love of a beautiful and noble woman?

PHILLIPS

I'm not speaking of your skills as an actor. Why must all discourse on the theatre be about you and your performance?

BURBAGE

While the two of you bicker over who's the better player, landlord Giles Allen is making plans for our theatre to profit from it for himself.

ANDREWS

Word is- he plans to dismantle it to a stack of wood planks.

PHILLIPS

I hear tell that our stage is to be a stable.

BURBAGE

Yes, my exact point. We must do what we must to keep our theatre. If amusing the Queen with the confusion of men and women is what's so needed, then that is what we must do. Or perhaps the two of you could be employed to clean those stables for Giles Allen.

PHILLIPS

Your point's well taken. What must we do now?

BURBAGE

First, we must find the saboteurs employed by Giles Allen. Those foul sounding winds did not break themselves.

ANDREWS

Who works against us?

BURBAGE

Who delivers us out into the street? The one and same Giles Allen, but we must have proof. What knaves would Giles Allen employ in this knavery?

PHILLIPS

The knaves of London? That would be a considerably long list, indeed.

ANDREWS

London is filled with low life willing to do the dirtiest deed for the lowest price.

(The Players all take a long drink to mull over this puzzle. The Page enters, disguised as a servant, and pretends to sweep so he can eavesdrop on the players.)

ANDREWS

To shorten that list we must divide to conquer.

BURBAGE

We're of the same mind. The two of you go of out of here now- go your separate ways and listen with care for evidence of this treachery.

PHILLIPS

And where will you be?

BURBAGE

Someone has to keep an ear out here- this place is a veritable well of treachery.

ANDREWS

It also has a roof over your head, a soft seat for your ass, and a steady flow of ale.

PHILLIPS

And as this is your habitual place of drink, all know your countenance and will unlikely speak of evil done to you.

BURBAGE

I will return here disguised as a woman to better place myself close to villainy without discovery.

PHILLIPS

Not a pretty thought.

ANDREWS

You- a woman? To what end? To frighten away the honest drinking men?

BURBAGE

I've played my share of those most fair, and to great acclaim.

PHILLIPS

I'd say that ship's long sailed.

ANDREWS

I'd say that ship's long sunk.

BURBAGE

I'd say the two of you will soon be sunk if don't get underway. Now off with you and bring me word at once if you hear any talk of interest.

PHILLIPS

As you bid, dear mistress.

(Phillips and Andrews exit with bows.)

BURBAGE

The burdens of womanhood.

(Burbage exits. The Page steps from the shadow.)

PAGE

Here enter scoundrels, even if they are Earls.

(The Page and steps back into the shadow. Essex enters, Southampton follows, carrying two tankards of ale.)

ESSEX

With this most unfortunate turn of events, I now must insist that you buy me an ale.

(Southampton hands Essex a tankard of ale.)

SOUTHAMPTON

I am steps ahead. This will ease the pain.

ESSEX

My pain is far greater than this ale can ameliorate.

SOUTHAMPTON

There's more will follow. Tell me again what the Queen said exactly.

ESSEX

First, whatever your plan for Shakespeare, it went wholly off course, as her love for that scribbling insect has only increased.

SOUTHAMPTON

But Romeo and Juliet was a shambles. The groundlings rioted and the whole thing collapsed in noisy barbarity.

ESSEX

That noisy barbarity is apparently to the Queen's taste. Shakespeare was leaving as I arrived and she may as well have rubbed my face in that fool's victory.

SOUTHAMPTON

This is one battle- the war won't be won by some country scribe.

ESSEX

Adding insult on top of injury, the Queen commands me to the next play of Shakespeare's.

SOUTHAMPTON

The Queen commands you to Shakespeare's next play?

ESSEX

Yes, much as it pains me.

SOUTHAMPTON

She'll make a man of the theatre out of you yet. Her grace will attend the same performance?

ESSEX

She goes on and on about it.

SOUTHAMPTON

My sources tell me the play is Twelfth Night, which is perfect for our purpose.

ESSEX

What purpose could we have at The Theatre? Raise the standing of Shakespeare with the Queen even higher?

SOUTHAMPTON

Twelfth Night is rife for mischief that will make the flatulence of Juliet seem a gentle flowered breeze. There is a wise fool, a sodden uncle and his a drunken guest, unruly servants- we will make the Queen see Shakespeare as the author of calamity and deserving recipient of all her Queenly ire.

(The Page begins to exit, but Southampton calls out to him)

SOUTHAMPTON

I say there, boy.

PAGE

You summoned me, sire?

SOUTHAMPTON

Be a fine fellow and have the serving woman bring us two ales.

PAGE

My humble pleasure.

(The Page quickly exits.)

SOUTHAMPTON

Be of good cheer, man! We will best old Will.

ESSEX

Shakespeare is the least of our challenges. The Queen has rewarded my service in Ireland by taking all of my concessions and thereby all of my income.

SOUTHAMPTON

What do you say now? She took from you all?

ESSEX

All but my reserve- a quite small amount, that won't keep my goods and land long off the auction block.

SOUTHAMPTON

That is a deathly blow.

ESSEX

I may need your help.

SOUTHAMPTON

By “help” you mean money? You must restore your concessions at once before they’re awarded to some less deserving Earl- leaving you as poor as a peasant’s hut mouse with no where to go but my purse.

ESSEX

How exactly will I accomplish this?

SOUTHAMPTON

To keep your fortune... you must take action.

ESSEX

Do I hear your words?

SOUTHAMPTON

Are your ears still unwashed and filled with Irish soil? That woman has as much as handed you your begging cup.

ESSEX

But she is... the Queen...

SOUTHAMPTON

I suppose you might learn an honest trade- say apprentice with Shakespeare the elder as a glove maker.

ESSEX

Those reduced circumstances would certainly be the lowest level of hell.

SOUTHAMPTON

Perhaps your luck changes and her life be so shortened naturally. You could then follow your own advice to the Irish- keep your head down until the Crown passes and raise it again with the next sovereign, a King more to our liking.



ESSEX

Perchance an accident? Or perhaps the plague? My luck is that spiteful woman outlives me.

SOUTHAMPTON

It must happen before your concessions are awarded to another or you might never retrieve them.

ESSEX

To wait for fortune's smile is not a winning chance. To keep my fortune I'm not left a choice.

SOUTHAMPTON

You must make your own fortune. If you have the heart for it.

(Burbage enters disguised as a serving woman, brings them two ales, and then pretends to clean a nearby table.)

ESSEX

You doubt my courage in this matter?

SOUTHAMPTON

She is a woman. The mother of your troubles, but you are a gentleman.

ESSEX

I'd run her through as soon as look at her.

SOUTHAMPTON

Those are brave words by which your problem with that woman is solved.

ESSEX

Those are true words, by which I will restore that which is mine.

SOUTHAMPTON

Easily spoken until she stands before you.

ESSEX

You doubt my resolve?

(Southampton grabs Burbage and swings him toward Essex.)

SOUTHAMPTON

Pretend this is she!

(Essex pulls his sword and swings on Burbage, but his swing is blocked by Southampton's sword.)

ESSEX

I would send her to heaven this minute.

SOUTHAMPTON

And who would clear away these empty vessels? Take them away, crone.

(Burbage bows and gathers up the empty tankards left by Andrews and Phillips and heads toward the doorway)

BURBAGE

(Aside) Kill the mother of his troubles? Keeping it in his pantaloons in the first place is another solution.

(Burbage exits.)

ESSEX

I'll do what's called for- but how? Where? And when ?

SOUTHAMPTON

At the Theatre.

ESSEX

Not that place again.

SOUTHAMPTON

In Twelfth Night there is a Count Orsino. You will slip backstage and disguise yourself as Count Orsino. As you will be so costumed, no one will notice when, at a place in the play of particular mirth and frivolity—the Count will enter the Queen's box.

(Burbage returns, but keeps to a dark corner,  
unseen by Essex and Southampton.)

ESSEX

I will enter her box as a player?

SOUTHAMPTON

You will enter her box as Count Orsino. A most excellent Count Orsino. I'll make some discreet inquiries as to the cut and color's of The Count's clothing and that of his men.

ESSEX

I will pretend to be a player who plays a Count?

SOUTHAMPTON

Rather you be an Earl who plays without money? Come, we have much to do for your stage debut.

ESSEX

I will play the Count and I will have my Queen!

SOUTHAMPTON

You will have your Queen!

(Essex and Southampton touch glasses, drink, and exit.  
Burbage steps out of the shadow and throws off his  
disguise.)

**BURBAGE**

What a pack of foul and treacherous scum. The role of the Count is mine- how dare he plot to steal my part and then abuse it, and to what purpose? Obtain the Queen's love?

They know not with whom they rudely trifle.

**Scene Five**

(The Theatre, a rehearsal of Twelfth Night. Shakespeare is working with Andrews as Viola and Thomas as Olivia.)

**SHAKESPEARE**

Speak the speech trippingly on the tongue- if you mouth it, I had as leave the town crier spoke my lines. Andrews- you play Viola, a woman who disguises herself as Cesario, a man. As Viola attempts to be manly Cesario, you must be more manly in your posture and gait. You move as a young gentlewoman- remove that grace and be more of a man. Thomas- remember that Olivia is a delicate flower, a gentlewoman most refined, and I'm certain that Olivia, as a gentlewoman, would not scratch her private places in public.

Let us begin again where Viola and Olivia are first left alone by Maria.

**ANDREWS/VIOLA/CESARIO**

I see what you are, you are too proud. My lord and master loves you.

**THOMAS/OLIVIA**

How does he love me?

ANDREWS/VIOLA/CESARIO

With adorations, fertile tears, with groans that thunder love, with sighs of fire.

THOMAS/OLIVIA

Your lord knows my mind; I cannot love him: I believe him virtuous, know him noble, of great estate and stainless youth; and in the shape of nature a gracious person: but yet I cannot love him; he should have known this long ago.

ANDREWS/VIOLA/CESARIO

If I did love you as my master loves you with my master's flame, with my master's suffering, in your denial of his love I would find no sense, I would not understand it.

THOMAS/OLIVIA

Why, what would you do?

ANDREWS/VIOLA/CESARIO

I would build a cabin and live at your gate, write songs of love and sing them loud even in the dead of night, halloo your name to the echoing hills and cry out "Olivia!" until you can do nothing but pity me!

THOMAS/OLIVIA

You might succeed. What is your parentage?

ANDREWS/VIOLA/CESARIO

Above my fortunes, yet my state is well: I am a gentleman.

THOMAS/OLIVIA

Go now to your lord- I cannot love him and let him send his love no more, unless perchance you come to me again to tell me how he takes it. Fare you well: I thank you for your pains: spend this for me.

ANDREWS/VIOLA/CESARIO

I'm no message boy, my lady, keep your purse. My master, not myself, lacks recompense. Let love make his heart of flint that you shall love; and let your fervor, like my master's, be treated with contempt. Farewell, fair cruelty.

SHAKESPEARE

That is so much closer to my purpose.

ANDREWS

Did you observe my walk was more manly?

SHAKESPEARE

You are nothing if not a man's man.

THOMAS

Olivia did not touch herself unladylike, even when the rough cloth of this monstrous garment makes my ass cry "scratch me! Scratch me now!"

SHAKESPEARE

Well spoke and done, all.

(Burbage enters.)

BURBAGE

We must speak at once.

SHAKESPEARE

Lets us rest awhile. To the tavern, men, to refortify!

ANDREWS and THOMAS

[happy grunting noises]

(Andrews and Thomas exit.)

SHAKESPEARE

Have you uncovered the treachery of that cur, Giles Allen?

BURBAGE

Giles Allen is not the only wolf at our door. Essex and Southampton speak of the Queen, and their purpose is evil.

SHAKESPEARE

They mean the Queen harm?

BURBAGE

Worse, they mean me harm.

SHAKESPEARE

What was that you say?

BURBAGE

Southampton will have Essex woo the Queen by taking my part in the role of Count Orsino.

SHAKESPEARE

Essex means to woo the Queen by disguising himself as you?

BURBAGE

As if he could fill my boots, the swine.

SHAKESPEARE

Let it be widely known that this Twelfth Night is set in Egypt and that we'll draw on the costumes of Antony and Cleopatra.

BURBAGE

Egypt? Why Egypt?

SHAKESPEARE

By the false players we'll know a hawk from a handsaw.

BURBAGE

Will Count Orsino be a Pharaoh- and therefore a god?

SHAKESPEARE

Would that part be too small for your stature?

BURBAGE

I have a god in me.

SHAKESPEARE

You'll be neither Pharaoh nor god- unless he be a Scottish Pharaoh.

BURBAGE

Scottish? Who am I?

SHAKESPEARE

Your part's a mousetrap, to catch a wayward Earl for our dear Queen.

BURBAGE

Always the riddle, not a straight answer.

SHAKESPEARE

Your part will be, as always- mountainous. Are you now happy?

### **Scene Six**

(The Queen's Chamber. The Queen is alone. The Page enters, still disguised as a servant of the tavern)

ELIZABETH

And what strange apparition this way comes?

PAGE

Your humble servant, so disguised, to better hear loose talk in ungentle places.



ELIZABETH

What dark matters have you gathered in?

PAGE

Essex and Southampton are villainous knaves.

ELIZABETH

Knowledge held by many far and wide, have you news that truly is?

PAGE

This is treachery of a most unusual kind.

ELIZABETH

Those fools dare not plot against me, their Queen?

PAGE

They do plot, but not against your Majesty.

ELIZABETH

If so, each would have their reasons. So no evidence of disloyalty to me or my crown?

PAGE

They spoke no false word against you.

ELIZABETH

I still hesitate to turn my back on either one of them. Who is then the object of their plot?

PAGE

Shakespeare seems to draw their bad intentions. With my own ears I heard them speak of how they stopped Romeo and Juliet with their fraudulent flatulence.

ELIZABETH

What ill-gotten gain is so harvested from harming Shakespeare?

PAGE

Perhaps they scheme that Shakespeare's loss of your esteem will somehow elevate Essex in your view and restore his fortune.

ELIZABETH

Flattery is often used by Essex, but a more immediate profit motive emanates from those two scheming jackals. Shakespeare and company are in danger of losing the Theatre, and those scoundrels mean to ensure they do, and in some way take the Theatre for some profit of their own.

PAGE

Surely they are not so deluded to think they may find their fortune in the theatre?

ELIZABETH

More likely the land beneath the Theatre is what they covet, yet still I smell a plot to take my rightful throne. Perhaps the answer lies in the waiting drama. Shakespeare has shown me a play in which a Scottish king is killed. In the midst of the romance and laughter of Twelfth Night, the stage for a few scenes will erupt with royal Scottish blood – we will watch Essex while he sees the bloody deed unfurl- and thereby catch the conscience of the Earl.

### **Scene Seven**

(The Theater. Elizabeth is in her box with the Chamberlain. Twelfth Night seems to have morphed into the Scottish play.)

CHAMBERLAIN

This isn't Twelfth Night as I remember it. I thought Twelfth Night was in Illyria, and it seems we're in Scotland.

ELIZABETH

The three witches are a welcome addition. I say more witches and less rehashing of ancient Scottish battles that no one remembers or cares about.

CHAMBERLAIN

The witches I approve, yet I find the direction Shakespeare taking us most troubling. It seems what we have here is a plot against the King of Scotland.

ELIZABETH

Let the Scots tear each other into smaller and smaller pieces.

CHAMBERLAIN

Even so, a crime against one crown is a crime against all crowns.

ELIZABETH

A crime against any other Crown is better than one against the English. Now where is Essex? He'll miss the next scene.

(Burbage/Macbeth enters.)

CHAMBERLAIN

It begins again. Here is Burbage- is he the smooth Count Orsino or some rough uncouth Scot?

BURBAGE/MACBETH

If it were done when it were done, then well it were done quickly: If the assassination is a success; that this blow might be the be-all and end-all here. But in these cases we still have judgment here; this even-handed justice commends the ingredients of our poisoned chalice to our own lips. He's here in double trust; first, as I am his kinsman and his subject, strong against the deed; then as his host, who should against his murderer shut the door, not bear the knife myself.

CHAMBERLAIN

He thinks against moving forward with this crime. There might yet be hope.

(Thomas/Lady MacBeth enters.)

ELIZABETH

This one means trouble.

BURBAGE/MACBETH

How now! What news?

THOMAS/LADY MACBETH

He is almost done: why have you left the chamber?

BURBAGE/MACBETH

Has he asked for me?

THOMAS/LADY MACBETH

Know you not he has?

BURBAGE/MACBETH

We will proceed no further in this business: he has honored me of late; and I have bought golden opinions from all sorts of people, which would be worn now in their newest gloss, not cast aside so soon.

CHAMBERLAIN

He thinks twice of this treachery.

ELIZABETH

Where is Essex now?

CHAMBERLAIN

I don't know, your grace.

ELIZABETH

Fie. This is the part of the play I wanted him to see,

THOMAS/LADY MACBETH

What beast was it then- that made you broach this enterprise to me?  
When you dared to do this deed, you were a man. Nor time nor place did  
then matter, and yet the fitness of time and place now unmakes you and  
you hesitate. I have given suck, and know the tender love for the babe  
that milks me: I would, while it was smiling in my face, have plucked  
my nipple from his boneless gums, and dashed its brains out- had I so  
sworn as you have to do this deed.

ELIZABETH

It vexes me that Essex misses this part entirely.

BURBAGE/MACBETH

If we should fail?

THOMAS/LADY MACBETH

We fail! But screw your courage to the sticking-place, and we'll not fail.  
When Duncan is soundly asleep- I will ply his two chamberlains with  
wine, and while they sleep like swine, so drenched in wine they sleep  
like death- there is nothing you and I cannot perform upon the unguarded  
Duncan. His drunken chamberlains will not recall anything with reason  
when they awaken, and they will bear the guilt.

BURBAGE/MACBETH

You must bear us only men-children- your fearless, undaunted resolve  
should be possessed only by males.

ELIZABETH

As if anything would get done in this world left only to men.

BURBAGE/MACBETH

When we have marked Duncan's sleepy chamberlains with his blood and used their very daggers, will it not be believed that they have done the deed?

CHAMBERLAIN

I resent this plan to blame a foul and bloody deed on the innocent servants.

BURBAGE/MACBETH

I am settled, and bend up each corporal agent to this terrible feat. Away, and mock the time with fairest show: false face must hide what the false heart does know.

(Thomas/Lady MacBeth and Burbage/Macbeth exit.  
Essex enters, dressed as an ancient Egyptian.)

ELIZABETH

At last you arrive, having missed the scenes intended.

ESSEX

I was detained backstage-

CHAMBERLAIN

This is an outrage.

ELIZABETH

What- an outrage that these verminous villains plot to kill their King, who is as well a guest in their home? What kind of animals are they?

CHAMBERLAIN

That's not the outrage. To blame the blameless servants for such an act- by falsely plying them with wine.

ELIZABETH

An end to your complaining, carping and caterwauling!

(Elizabeth reveals a dagger with which she stabs the Chamberlain. The Chamberlain clutches his stomach and falls back into the arms of Essex.)

CHAMBERLAIN

Oh, I am wounded!

ESSEX

You... you ... you killed him!

(Essex pulls back in terror, leaving the Chamberlain teetering. Essex turns and runs, as the Chamberlain issues a red scarf between his fingers, revealing that his “wound” is not and the dagger a prop,)

ELIZABETH

Once again, he misses the best part of the scene. Excellent performance, sir.

CHAMBERLAIN

Perchance I missed my calling. Shall I have the guard collect Essex?

ELIZABETH

No, we've pulled the wings of that fly quite enough for one evening. Bring my coach at once, this theatrical is now completed.

CHAMBERLAIN

At once, your highness.

(The Chamberlain exits. Burbage and Shakespeare rush up, swords drawn.)

ELIZABETH

Men, you are late for your entrances and I for my exit.

(The Queen exits and Essex returns.)

SHAKESPEARE

How now, is that a Pharaoh on stage?

(Essex draws his sword.)

ESSEX

I dressed so in the honor of your play.

BURBAGE

That seems more the costume of Cairo- this play I think is nearer the Highlands.

(Burbage draws his sword.)

SHAKESPEARE

All is known, my lord.

ESSEX

My intention is only to pay my respects to her majesty.

BURBAGE

With what? The point of your limp and feeble weapon?

ESSEX

That's a doubly libelous statement as I've ever heard-

(Essex swings his sword at Burbage who blocks it.)

BURBAGE

One cannot libel an outright falsehood even once-

(Burbage lunges at Essex, who steps aside, and then Essex strikes at Burbage, but Burbage blocks the blow.)



ESSEX

Not bad for an old man past his prime.

BURBAGE

It's sad you won't know the pains of old- or should I say older age-

(Burbage charges and through the following  
their thrusts at each other are blocked.)

ESSEX

Perhaps your playwright will pen a death scene worthy of you.

BURBAGE

I'll put a fine point on your end when I carve my mark on your ass.

(Shakespeare and Burbage advance on Essex when  
Southampton emerges from backstage with his sword  
drawn.)

SOUTHAMPTON

So it appears the Queen's departed from this "entertainment."- and now I see her guards pushing the groundlings out the gate. This appears to be a most unhappy ending for the players, and this is almost a fair fight- if one of you weren't an over the hill actor and the other a playwright.

BURBAGE

Come to me so I may teach the gentility some civility.

(Andrews in costume kilt, and Thomas still in  
costume as Lady MacBeth, enter with their swords  
drawn.)

THOMAS

We're not gentleman, so we needn't pretend to be fair.

SOUTHAMPTON

My personal rule is to never fight a woman- or a man- in a skirt. How have you said it, Will? “Parting is such sweet sorrow?”

(Southampton and Essex quickly exit. Burbage, Thomas and Andrews start after them, but Shakespeare stops them.)

THOMAS

But should we not pursue those scoundrels?

SHAKESPEARE

Our work here is done.

ANDREWS

The Queen seemed quite pleased.

BURBAGE

I wonder how she found my performance?

SHAKESPEARE

I’m sure she found the genius in your brilliant treason.

BURBAGE

Is there a happy ending?

SHAKESPEARE

Have faith, good Burbage. Let’s away now, men!

**Scene Eight**

(The Theatre. Andrews, Phillips and Thomas are dismantling the Queens’s box.)

PHILLIPS

Did he say why we destroy the Queen's box?

ANDREWS

Not destroy, gently remove each piece and keep the pieces all together.

THOMAS

It could be the Queen's so angry she'll never come again to our theatre.

(Shakespeare and Burbage enter.)

ANDREWS

Was the Queen so angered we must remove her seat?

PHILLIPS

For a Queen a tale of regicide and royal mayhem must strike exceedingly near to home.

ANDREWS

We'll have no help from our Queen and our lawful landlord Giles Allen will take what the law allows him.

THOMAS

Alas, we are lost. A pity, as I'd grown fond of these old boards.

ANDREWS

Truly, through many a play we've trod them well.

SHAKESPEARE

Well spoken, my friend, but not to worry. The Queen has granted us our theater and permitted us a new site on the South Bank. Which is why we must fold our tent and move.

BURBAGE

This is not a tent we can fold and move.

SHAKESPEARE

Anything that's raised up can be razed down again.

BURBAGE

Do you say we must take down our beloved Theater, our home?

SHAKESPEARE

I say we take down our Theatre and move our home across the river Thames- where the Queen's bench can once again support that royal bottom in a royal manner. Gather around all of you players, and I'll put my plan before you.

(Thomas, Andrews and Phillips put down their tools and join them. Shakespeare takes cups from his bag, hands one to each and then takes out a bottle and pours all a drink.)

THOMAS

Move across the Thames?

ANDREWS

Taking down the Theater?

SHAKESPEARE

We must work tonight. By morning the Theatre will be disassembled down to her planks and hidden for our future purpose.

PHILLIPS

But what of our landlord?

SHAKESPEARE

Our landlord, Giles Allen, will take repossession of this land and all that was on this land before our time- but by the grace of our Queen, Giles Allen will not reduce our Theatre to a stable.

THOMAS

We're going to steal away by night our own theater?

ANDREWS

How can we steal what is rightfully ours?

PHILLIPS

The Queen makes it so.

SHAKESPEARE

Tonight, by the light of the moon, we'll take down these old boards and stow them away, and come the New Year we'll load them onto boats to cross the river Thames. Once again we'll build a theater- it will rise up anew, that we may once again act the plays for all who've come to see us strut upon this stage.

BURBAGE

Float a theatre across a river. This is the maddest tale yet you've spun.

SHAKESPEARE

On the South Bank astride the Thames we'll build a new theatre for a new age. All the world's a stage and our new stage will mirror the world. From this time forward our stage will be The Globe.

Gentlemen- the Globe.

ALL

The Globe!

BURBAGE

Three cheers for the Globe and three cheers for William Shakespeare!

ALL

Huzzah! Huzzah! Huzzah!

THE END