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THE PATTERN OF PAINFUL ADVENTURES

Stephen Wakelam

steviewakelam@hotmail.com | 07957 122812 | www.stephenwakelam.net

CHARACTERS:

William Shakespeare.

Jack Robinson.

Susanna Shakespeare.

John Marston

Edmund Shakespeare/Bookkeeper.

George Wilkins / Richard Burbage.

Robert Johnson / William Ostler

The play is set in 1607/8. It sticks to the facts as we know them - which leaves a few gaps to fill. We don't know the mother of Shakespeare's younger brother Edmund's base-borne child, but we do know that Edmund died and was buried inside the church we now call Southwark Cathedral while the Thames was frozen over and at the same time Shakespeare's King's Men were performing before the King at Whitehall.

We do know - from examples of his signature - that it is at least possible Shakespeare had what we call RSI - their scribes' palsy. We know he had a tenant called John Robinson, whose brother was a Catholic priest and whose father sheltered Catholic priests at a time of persecution. It was probably the same John Robinson who witnessed Shakespeare's will in Stratford, just before the playwright's death. We know that Shakespeare's favourite daughter, Susanna, gave birth to a baby girl in March of 1608, at about the time the strange play 'Pericles' got its first - triumphant - outing at the Globe. Shakespeare's probable co-author of this surprising hit was a brothel keeper - on Turnmill Lane, where a pub still stands. And, finally - though it's where this play began - there are few stranger contrasts in stage history than

between the great man's fellow playwright, John Marston's feverishly active decade of playmaking, and the obscurity of his quarter of a century as a parish priest. Marston left the stage abruptly in 1607, and his friend and admirer, Shakespeare, would no doubt have been interested why.

ACT ONE.

1. Accounts Office.

We are backstage at the Globe.

It's 1607, a May Saturday afternoon.

Sound of the audience and/or the play itself - 'Antony and Cleopatra' through the wooden walls.

There's a table with playbooks, papers and an accounts book. A chair, a stool. A costume from some 'antique' play hanging - but the settings are Jacobean-lite. As with the language of the play we are half in half out of the modern world.

JACK ROBINSON, 30, dressed in Roman costume - he's currently playing the Messenger - seated at the table. He trims a pen with a knife, then talks to us.

JACK: I'd been a boy actor, known him since I was, oh, about twelve. His was the first play I was in, the adult companies. Harry the Sixth. We're in Ipswich on tour, I'd cut my hand with a dagger - over-enthusiastic - on stage. Not serious but it's mentioned to him. He'd barely got going as a playwright. The name almost meant nothing. He's dressing in the tiring room and somebody says, 'This is Will. You know who he is, don't you? He wrote your best lines.' I didn't. I'm only just managing. And he says, 'What kind of plays do you like?' And I said, anything with a ghost in it.

Sixteen/seventeen years later I'm working for him in a different capacity. He'd had difficulties with his hand - which we'll come to. His eyesight was as before. Outward health good - thank God for it - but look at his signature the older he got. (*demonstrates*) R.S.I. We called it scrivener's palsy.

The sound of someone coming up the stairs.

Oh - a word about language. 'Hamlet' - Elsinore, misty Norse legend. How does the Prince speak? Or Henry the Fifth, Fourth, Sixth? They all sound like Tudors. So: 'Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts.'

JOHN MARSTON enters. He's also 30, though maybe looks a little older than Robinson. He's dressed mainly in black, elegant.

JACK: John Marston?

MARSTON: Yes.

JACK: John Robinson. You were expecting to see Will?

MARSTON: Yes.

JACK: He's on stage, or rather will be when he's mugged up his lines. We've had a sudden problem. One of the hired men's hurt his back, can scarcely stand up straight. We've had to re-jig. So he's filling in.

There's some amusement about this.

MARSTON: What as?

JACK: A pirate. Menas, pirate king. He gets to wear a bigger earring. He'll be finished in a hour and won't stay till the end so if you want to wait or come in, if you can..? Have you seen it?

MARSTON: Last week. I think it's magnificent.

JACK: Tell him that. He doesn't think the audience likes it.

MARSTON: Why not?

JACK: He thinks the language is a problem.

MARSTON: Well, it is. But that's what I like about it.

JACK: I should tell him that then.

MARSTON: *(overlapping)* It gleams.

JACK: I suppose it does. *(picks a pamphlet off the desk)* He said would you have a look at this? 'The Pattern of Painful Adventures.'
(reads) Laurence Twine. Was this what you were meeting about?

MARSTON: *(takes pamphlet)* I'm not sure. *(Considers whether he recognises the author)* Twine.. *(turns pages)*.

JACK: He says there's a play there that you might be interested in doing. A version of a play we once did.

MARSTON: You're - ?

JACK: Robinson. People call me Jack. I was an actor - I think before your time. Still am from time to time.

MARSTON: Boy actor?

JACK: Yes.

MARSTON: But you've not been around.

JACK: No, only just started back.

MARSTON: Acting?

JACK: At the moment, scrivener. I've been helping him write mainly.

MARSTON: *(smile)* Helping Will write?

JACK: That's what I like to say. He's had some problems. Stiffness in his hand. It might be gout. It's giving him pain. He writes too much. *(about to go)* Oh, I liked 'The Malcontent' -

MARSTON: Thanks.

JACK: - and 'The Dutch Courtesan.' Do you want to come in?

MARSTON: No, no. Even for the pleasure of seeing him act. Tell him I'll see him at The Three Cranes. It's where we usually meet.

Door open.

We can hear 'Antony' more clearly.

JACK: The Three Cranes?

MARSTON: Yes. You're on later?

JACK: Yes, not yet.

Marston goes ahead of Jack.

Jack makes as if to follow him, turns to us -

JACK: *(V/O)* Marston. John. Satirist. Playwright. A great reputation among his contemporaries. Energetic. Idiosyncratic. Near forgotten now. Not short of a bob or two and didn't have to write for the popular stage. *(With a look at us)* The stinkards, we used to call them.

2. Tavern terrace.

It's a couple of hours later.

Marston and Will exit from the tavern - some background noise - to talk more quietly outside.

Seagulls at a distance. We are near water. Occasional sounds from the (working) river. Some wind in nearby rigging, perhaps.

They have pewter tankards. Sit at a wooden table.

WILL is early forties, waist beginning to thicken, in doublet of silk or velvet. No ruff.

WILL: They imagine I remember what I wrote. I don't, sadly. Two pirates. I couldn't even remember where we were or what the business was. Striding across the stage.

MARSTON: You got through?

WILL: More or less as written. I cued the end of one scene a bit early. I couldn't think what else I should be saying but nobody else was helping me and so I did a bit more striding about and strutting. Made up a line or two until Will Sly arrived on stage - to see what was happening, I suppose, and move us on.

MARSTON: Were they good lines?

WILL: I've got one or two that see me through. I could do whole speeches but they'd hold things up. The temptation is to swing the action elsewhere. Instead of 'Will you aboard, sir?' you say, 'To Rome!' and leave them to sort it out. *(Marston is laughing)* You've been to see it?

MARSTON: Yes. As soon as I got back to London. You don't think it works?

WILL: Is that what you think?

MARSTON: No. I like it a great deal. I like the language. I like the language a great deal.

A moment.

WILL: That's what I most enjoyed, you see. But perhaps it was a kind of exercise. Perhaps I did it for its own sake. Did it move you?

MARSTON: The play? (*considers*) No. They're beyond us. They're great babies, really - that's what you're showing us - worked up.

WILL: That's good. 'Great babies'. But there's no struggle. I couldn't invent.

MARSTON: You invite us to judge, to balance.

WILL: I think it's too big.

MARSTON: Love and empire.

WILL: There's nothing to get hold of.

MARSTON: It's fast, it's fluid, there are sea battles. What more do people want?

Will laughs.

MARSTON: The boy - what's he called, Ostler? - is wonderful.

WILL: And Burbage gets off half an hour before the end. He likes that. Well, I wrote it for them.

Church bells begin, at a distance - a City church somewhere - after a time reducing to a single tolling.

WILL: (*after a moment*) So what are you working on at the moment?

MARSTON: I'm not.

WILL: Where've you been?

MARSTON: Kent.

WILL: Doing what?

MARSTON: Dodging the affliction. Reading. Walks. Clear air.

WILL: What, no plays?

MARSTON: One. It's no good. The best thing about it is its title.

WILL: What's it called?

MARSTON: 'The Insatiate Countess'.

WILL: That's a very good title.

MARSTON: I like titles.

WILL: What is it? Wealth, sex, violence?

MARSTON: Disordered, in the extreme.

WILL: Music?

MARSTON: Oh, vile and out of tune - when I get round to specifying it. (*Will is in some discomfort*) What's the matter with your hand?

WILL: I'm getting stabbing pains when I pick up the pen. The wrist, fingers, the joints. Look. I disguise it, or try to. The shakes. It's not drink. It's not temporary either. If I desist -

MARSTON: Writing?

WILL: Yes. It improves a little. I've got somebody to help me, or, well, take some of the - Robinson, you met him.

MARSTON: Can you hold a pen?

WILL: I think with it, that's the problem. I can speak speeches, remember them for a time, but getting a run at something without this pain is tricky.

MARSTON: What's next? Do you know?

WILL: I'm working on something with Tommy Middleton. Or not working.

MARSTON: Middleton?

WILL: You've seen his new play?

MARSTON: No. What's it like?

WILL: There's a bit of you in it - 'The Malcontent'. A bit of me. Opens with a skull scene. He's very proud of that. Best skull scene, he says. Burbage likes it. Good part. Somebody said how good he is in it. 'Never been better,' he said. Better than Brutus, Hamlet, the Moor, Lear...? Must be the writing.

MARSTON: Is that why you're collaborating?

WILL: Only we're not - much. He's a difficult man to get hold of.

MARSTON: Why are you collaborating with him?

WILL: Because I'm struggling.

MARSTON: The hand?

WILL: We need plays, John. I've got to do at least one play for next season.

MARSTON: What's the play?

WILL: Timon. Do you know the tale? Left Athens. Only he's a very busy man is Mr. Middleton. And I don't think he likes working with me.

MARSTON: He'll be scared. Frit.

WILL: Scared?

MARSTON: Who mapped it out?

WILL: We sat down together.

MARSTON: Whose idea was it?

WILL: Mine.

MARSTON: You're wanting other people to write plays that you can't write at the moment.

WILL: No.

MARSTON: Is that what this is about? (*the pamphlet*) 'The Pattern of Painful Adventures.' Why do you think it might make a play?

WILL: It was a play.

MARSTON: Who by?

WILL: Nobody can remember. Hemings thinks it was Robert Greene but isn't sure. It wasn't one of ours. And it's lost. But then saw this, remembered it - the old story, newly printed. Gower did it as well.

MARSTON: Yes. It's not a play.

WILL: It was a play.

MARSTON: Meandering.

WILL: A king's wanderings. Ships, heroism. Disaster..
Incest? Decadence? Spectacle. Music. You don't like?

MARSTON: It's all - too long ago and far away for me. (*hands it back*) I have to follow my own line - even if it leads to perdition. But thanks.

WILL: What have you been reading?

MARSTON: Philosophy.

WILL: Maybe you need to get away from your books, John, and back into the theatre.

MARSTON: 'God bless him,' my father said, 'and give him true knowledge of himself and forego his delight in plays.'

WILL: So don't say the delight's gone. Or not completely. What happened to the old satiric Mr. Marston?

MARSTON: He's still there.

The church bell has reduced to a single tolling.

MARSTON: (*con't*) Something happened to me. It's difficult to explain. When I went down into Kent, it was January, there was snow. I had to put up at an inn. You were glad to get somewhere for the night. It was clean, comfortable. But there's no chance of travel the following morning. Still dense. I had a fire lit, settled in. I'm at the casement, on the window seat. There's nobody stirring much, it's all very quiet. And it seemed to me that someone was there with me. I mean a sense of presence. It was as real as if someone had touched my arm or spoken to me. I don't mean a ghost. This was ... wide and more benign. Everything fitted, came together. It was like music, a sudden harmony. I could see beyond the room. The world was a thing of beauty and I was caught up in it. I was both inside and outside my body. No feeling of ... Marston, and yet it was me, but as if I had escaped myself, the misery and corruption of my own soul. The feeling was of such joy and certainty that this was the way the world is. God? Heaven? Here.. and now. And I was a part of it. And then my own self came back. Like my head escaping the waves, surfacing. For a moment I was relieved that this was the familiar me, the room, the fire. And ever since then I've wanted it back. This glimpse of perfection. Of love. I feel it's something I have to respond to. I've been reading philosophy, theology. Trying to change my ways. It was like nothing I've ever known before. Too good for imagining.

WILL: How long did the experience last? The vision?

MARSTON: It's hard to say. Several minutes but probably not five or ten. You lose yourself in writing from time to time. It was beyond that.

WILL: 'Beyond imagining?'

MARSTON: Yes.

WILL: Like a dream?

MARSTON: It felt like reality itself and that this was the dream. A greater reality.

WILL: More real than - ?

MARSTON: This. A door opening in my mind. I have no other experience with which to compare it.

WILL: And you feel you have to change?

MARSTON: It was like a gift.

WILL: From God?

MARSTON: I think it's what people call The Kingdom.

WILL: Glory.

MARSTON: But with no tambourines or trumpets or organ pipes.

WILL: Can you write about it?

MARSTON: No.

WILL: Come and work for us, John.

MARSTON: I might write something that offends the King. Offend the Scots, get clapp'd in jail.

WILL: That needn't be a problem.

MARSTON: You start out wanting to cut a dash, make a mark. Impertinent, troublesome. 'Look at me'. The you ask yourself what it is you're supposed to be doing. I don't think it's playwriting.

Sounds of a city street. Bells, sellers' cries, carts rumbling.

3. Will's Chambers.

A week later.

Two first floor rooms, of which we are looking at the larger. An empty fireplace, table, couple of chairs, box of books.

Jack Robinson is in day clothes with one of the volumes, a copy of Painter, maybe, 'Palace of Pleasure.'

JACK: *(to us)* He didn't invent - or not much. He rearranged. Old tales. Why invent? Mouldy old tales. He liked the extremities of experience, he told me. 'Why are we here?' Old tales are the best for that. *(replaces book)* He knew what he wanted for the company, what actors there were, who could do what. What played well. Who were the coming writers. The journeymen - (apprentices)

He is interrupted by the sound of someone, whistling, coming up stairs and along a corridor - who then stumbles heavily outside the room.

WILKINS: *(off, overlapping)* Jesus God...Why is it so - dark? .. Hello??

Jack opens the door. GEORGE WILKINS, mid thirties, dressed mainly in blue, cuts a dash.

WILKINS: Who are you?

JACK: I could ask the same of you. *(aside)* George Wilkins. Parish of St. Sepulchre, victualler, playwright. And sex on two legs. Well, one..

Wilkins has entered the room, limping. He glances at Robinson, who seems to be talking to himself, and Jack gets back into the scene.

WILKINS: This is Will's chambers?

WILKINS is a Londoner, and sounds it, though not unintelligent. Jack opens a pair of shutters of a little window on the corridor just outside the door.

JACK: Yes. You're Wilkins.

WILKINS: You've heard of me.

JACK: I've seen a play of yours. You were due yesterday. You're bleeding.

WILKINS: So who are you?

JACK: Robinson. People call me Jack. I work for him. What's the matter with your leg?

WILKINS: I've been attacked by a dog. *(pain)* Ah!

JACK: Just now?

WILKINS: Moorgate. The devil got his teeth in me.

JACK: The devil?

WILKINS: The dog. And I was as likely to have broken my neck coming up those stairs. Are you his man or.. ?

JACK: I'm an actor, most of the time. That wound needs cleaning. It's a mess.

Jack goes to fetch a basin of water.

WILKINS: The damn thing wasn't a stray. It had a master. He said, 'It's because you're wearing blue.'

JACK: The doublet.

WILKINS: As if it were my fault for wearing blue. The thing was baring its teeth, savage. I couldn't get past it.

JACK: Nice doublet.

WILKINS: Too expensive. A mistake.

JACK: Oh, I don't know.

WILKINS: It's not paid for yet.

Wilkins takes the pamphlet of 'Pattern' out of his doublet.

JACK: It might help if you got your stockings off. Then I can be Mary Magdalen.

Wilkins takes off his hose - there's a certain amount of hitching. Jack waits, watches, admires.

JACK: What did you do?

WILKINS: I went for it to kick its teeth out. Then it went for me.

JACK: Did it have a master?

WILKINS: There were two of them. Cut purses. I've seen them before. While you're tangled with the dog one comes to help you, dust you down, robs you of your purse. The dog backs off as he's trained to and then they're gone.

JACK: Did they get anything?

WILKINS: No. And then I fall up your stairs. God.

Jack, on his knees, attaches the kerchief.

JACK: There we are.

WILKINS: Thank you.

JACK: When you bleed, you bleed. It looks all right.

Sound of someone approaching. Then Will in from outside, in well dressed day wear. His gloves, which he will take off, are exquisite.

WILL: George. *(then)* What's happened to you?

WILKINS: Cutpurses with a dog. Which bit me. And then I fell up your stairs.

WILL: You got here.

WILKINS: Yes.

WILL: It was supposed to be yesterday, George. I'd given you up.

WILKINS: I know. I'm sorry. I had some trouble the night before.

WILL: Trouble?

WILKINS: Apprentices. Causing trouble at the place. One of the women got attacked. I had to go to the Magistrate.

WILL: *(active throughout)* Have you thought of a quiet life in the country, George? George has a tavern, Jack -

JACK: I think I know.

WILL: - Turnmill Street.

WILKINS: I'll stand you a drink.

JACK: (*quick*) Drink and a meal.

WILL: And a woman, George. Give him a woman. A woman would do him good.

WILKINS: We're getting some new in.

WILL: You should write a play, George. An innkeeper endures a chapter of accidents, more or less comic. A man who attracts.. maybe, this misfortune. Enters in foul mood, his knee is hurting and some woman - make her a whore, to whom he's attached - is giving him trouble. Then we see the fresh disaster fall, whatever it is. But the disaster turns profitable, as they all do, given time. Call it that: 'A Profitable Disaster.' You know how to turn a plot to comedy, George.

WILKINS: I like it all but the title. Do you want me to write that as well?

WILL: One at a time, George.

WILKINS: Is that how you write?

WILL: No. So what did you make of 'The Pattern of Painful Adventures' ?

WILKINS: I found it interesting. I've read it twice. I think there's some problems.

WILL: As with any story. What do you like about it?

WILKINS: You can't tell whether it's a comedy or a tragedy.

WILL: That's what I like about it. What problems do you see?

WILKINS: He has to age quite a bit. A lot happens, one thing after another.

WILL: It's a journey. He travels round the Mediterranean, George. You can manage a play that dodges around. Go on.

WILKINS: He's looking for a wife, finds one, loses her, or seems to. I wondered if that's why you gave it me.

WILL: I think that's the most interesting part about it.

Robinson, at the table, copying, looks across, interested.

WILL: (*con't*) There's a brothel scene - now there's a train of thought. It's not made much of, but you could do something with it.

WILKINS: The incest is unusual.

WILL: Whatever takes your fancy.

Wilkins smiles.

But lust gets its due, George. All avenues of pleasure closed off - sadly. Spectacle. Music. Diversions. And I was thinking of a chorus. You'll need something to move it on.

WILKINS: It's like a fairy tale - with incest and brothels.

WILL: Do you want to do it?

WILKINS: Do you?

WILL: I wouldn't have wasted your time otherwise, George. You were first choice.

Robinson glances at Will. And perhaps at us.

WILL: (*con't*) Would you write it with somebody else? John Day?

WILKINS: No.

WILL: Have you fallen out?

WILKINS: No. I'd like to do it on my own. I don't like the title though. 'Pattern of Painful Adventures.'

WILL: Call it 'A Shipwreck.'

JACK: What you will.

WILL: Thanks. Have you two met before?

JACK: No.

WILL: One of the best boy actors around, George, when I was getting going.

JACK: Was.

WILL: In 'Hieronimo.'

JACK: (*catchphrase*) 'Go by, go by.'

WILL: Give us your Lavinia, Jack.

JACK: (*lying*) Can't remember it.

WILKINS: Were you Rosalind?

WILL: No, that was Alexander Cooke, played her on stage. Got a daughter of his own now.

WILKINS: And - ?

WILL: There was something of my daughter, Susanna, about her. The character.

JACK: Has she ever seen it?

WILL: On tour. Coventry Guildhall.

JACK: Did she know it was her?

WILL: No, or not then. There was plenty of me as well.

WILKINS: You? Rosalind?

WILL: Never been in love when you were younger, George? That's the skill of it.

WILKINS: The skill..

WILL: Bits and pieces of yourself. Write of then but think of now. Like this, (*pamphlet*) both here and now - and long ago. Old tales worked up. (*hands it over*) I've talked to John Hemings about money, but we thought you might do it with somebody else.

WILKINS: No.

WILL: Well, if you've got the balls up. Eight pounds on completion.

WILKINS: You said there was an old play.

WILL: Lost.

WILKINS: Lost?

WILL: Not that anybody can put their hands on. And we don't want to ask around too much. And nor you. But there's a version by Gower - I'll get hold of it for you.

WILKINS: Gower.

WILL: The poet. John Gower.

WILKINS: I know. Where?

WILL: It's called 'Confessio Amantis.'

WILKINS: English?

WILL: Yes. The story's there. Same story. You'd have this and the Gower.

WILKINS: I'd banked on there being an old play.

WILL: I should think it creaks. You'd be better to start fresh without it. You've got the Gower and you've got this. You put your own stamp on it. Do you want to do something else?

WILKINS: No. I think ten pounds without the old play as a help.

WILL: I got five pounds for 'Hamlet,' George.

WILKINS: Yes, but you'd got the old play to help you along.

Laughter.

And you've told me that before, your five pound play.

WILL: And it will always be true. And I'm sorry to say we can't go beyond eight pounds. Bring us an outline, with two or three scenes fair written. Two pounds down, then.. three pounds on completion of the first half and three pounds payment on delivery of the last scene perfected. Write it down, Jack, will you? (*wooden desk calendar*) The finished play by .. August, August the first.

Some hand movement has hurt him. He lets his arm hang loose.

JACK: A note for Hemings?

WILL: Yes. Two months.

WILKINS: What's the matter with your hand?

WILL: I'm getting stabbing pains when I pick anything up. It's difficult. It's not temporary. Little jerks. If I desist it improves a little. How busy are you?

WILKINS: Enough. When would it open?

WILL: That depends where we are. If we're here in London say late September, October.

WILKINS: Is Burbage interested? It's a good part.

WILL: He's not seen it yet and there's something he wants me to do.

WILKINS: What's that?

WILL: Another Roman play. He's in battling mode. And there's only so many Burbage will do. So don't bank on him. He'll decide. You've got a lot of characters. It's not just the king, don't go just for him. Go for the cast. Three or four women. You may need to think about doubling. I think you can give it some feeling, some umph. The princess at the beginning -

WILKINS: Her father's screwing her.

WILL: It's bad dream stuff.

JACK: What story's this?

WILL: Appolonius. And he's on the run almost from the word go. It's a strange story. If you can give it life we've got something. Bring us a few scenes first. Two pounds' worth.

WILKINS: Will you be around? In London?

WILL: The next few weeks? No. Why?

WILKINS: Your daughter - Susanna, is it? - is getting married.

WILL: Yes. And that's about as expensive as putting on a play.

WILKINS: A doctor?

WILL: Very useful, a doctor. I think he thinks plays a prelude to whoring. Though he's never quite said that quite to me.

WILKINS: A man of some experience?

WILL: I don't think so.

Wilkins makes a move.

WILKINS: I saw your brother, Edmund.

WILL: Yes. *(then)* What's he got to say?

WILKINS: He's not going with you to the wedding.

WILL: No. When did you see Edmund?

WILKINS: Yesterday?

WILL: How was he?

WILKINS: Well, without asking, he told me all that he was.

WILL: Drinking?

WILKINS: Yes.

WILL: Drunk?

WILKINS: Cheerful.

WILL: Did you say you were seeing me?

WILKINS: Yes.

WILL: Does he speak unkindly of me?

WILKINS: No. Only that you didn't want to see him.

WILL: Do you see him regularly?

WILKINS: He calls in.

WILL: Is he still living with the woman?

WILKINS: Yes.

WILL: Is the child his?

WILKINS: Probably.

WILL: Does she have the malady?

WILKINS: I don't know.

WILL: Has she ever worked for you, George?

WILKINS: No.

WILL: Is he living with her now?

WILKINS: Yes.

WILL: Does she spend his money?

WILKINS: I don't think he's got much, has he?

WILL: If he were a slave to beauty I could understand it but she's not beautiful. And was once a whore, however she describes herself these days. 'Sells her desires'. The problem I've got, George, is this. It's that my daughter is marrying a man with a house not far from London. Acton town. And my brother is having a child with this woman. Who he wants to continue to live with.

WILKINS: She's got something about her.

WILL: Then employ her, George. *(gets up)* We have a mother in Stratford. She's near seventy. She has lost almost all her faculties. But she understands enough. And adores him. Her youngest. Though he communicates infrequently. Let me know if there's a falling out or any division between them.

WILKINS: The woman? Rose.

WILL: Whatever she calls herself. And I'll talk to Hemings. *(leaves with him)* Will you call in at The Globe?

WILKINS: Yes.

WILL: He's expecting you. Come and see me in about three weeks. I'll be back by then. And don't fall on the stairs, George.

Wilkins exits.

Will accompanies him into the vestibule, then comes back in, shuts the door.

WILL: Imagine what it's like to run women, to satisfy your lusts when you want, how you want.

JACK: George?

WILL: Yes. How you must despise yourself.

JACK: Well, you can't fuck all day.

WILL: That's true.

JACK: Is he married?

WILL: George? Was. A son. They've cleared off. Why? Do you like him?

JACK: I'm not sure I formed an opinion.

WILL: That's not what I mean.

JACK: What happened to the wife?

WILL: I think he liked hitting her too much. Nice girl. I liked her. I knew his father. He was a poet, dead now. And now his son's keen on the game.

JACK: Playwriting?

WILL: Yes. Knows what people like. Playwright and brothel owner - there are worse combinations. His wife thought she was running a tavern but he wanted to get women in, boost the business.

JACK: Did it?

WILL: Yes. *(on the move before getting on)* He's always on his best behaviour with me.

JACK: Do you go there?

WILL: She used to make pastries, apple pastries - they were worth having.

JACK: Just the pastries?

WILL: Have you done much of that?

JACK: No.

WILL: And he's a Catholic, Jack. Another reason for you to like him. So where did we get to?

It's a letter.

JACK: You've all kinds of business to deal with. You'll be there a week before the wedding. You can bring sugar, nuts and that necklet of little pearls -

WILL: Borrowed necklet.

JACK: Yes. And that Edmund's not coming. Can't.

WILL: He's working.

JACK: Is he?

WILL: No.

JACK: Is that what you want me to write?

WILL: Yes. It's called lying, Jack.

JACK: Have you met this woman of Edmund's?

WILL: I may have had her.

4. New Place: Stratford.

*A back room used as a study. A door leads outside to an orchard.
A few stray sounds from the street at the front of the house.
Early June morning, a week or two later.*

SUSANNA talks to us, fond memories. She's mid twenties, dressed plainly, with a touch of the Midlands about her accent.

SUSAN: Sometimes, when I was growing up, we had actors staying with us at the house, on tour. And they said to me, 'You know the parts your father likes to play?' 'Parts where he can get off quickly, sit the rest of the play out. Or just calls in on stage from time to time.' The first play of his I saw I didn't recognise him - as an actor. And then I did: he was playing a man so much older than himself. A forest. Arden - his mother's name. Somebody carried him on stage. And once I went to Oxford - 'Hamlet' - a ghost in armour. Hollow voiced. He scared me. 'It's only a play,' he'd say - an illusion. Plays set in distant lands and long ago, but things in them that were of us, of his family here and now, of Warwickshire and home. We knew that.

*During this Will enters from outside, sits at his desk. He has his arm in a loose kind of sling.
He writes, using his other hand, with a pencil.
Susanna turns into the scene.*

SUSAN: Are you writing?

WILL: A letter. Trying to.

SUSAN: Can you write with your other hand?

WILL: I can make a good beginning.

SUSAN: Why write at all?

WILL: I know, sweetheart.

SUSAN: Is the letter urgent?

WILL: No.

SUSAN: I can finish it, if you wish. *(she picks it up)* Who's it to?

WILL: Hemings. Who has sent his congratulations to you. Read it. *(a smile)* He commiserates with me about the expense of a wedding.

SUSAN: (*reading*) How many daughters does he have?

WILL: Six. Young Ostler - our young star's seeing one of them. Hemings is waiting for him - dreading when he puts the question.

SUSAN: Is he not suitable?

WILL: Very suitable but Hemings is very tight.

SUSAN: (*puts down the letter*) He says he hopes for another play of yours. And soon.

WILL: It's why he's a better business manager than an actor.

SUSAN: But he knows of your difficulties?

WILL: Yes.

SUSAN: Then why does he ask?

WILL: It will be a sorry day when he doesn't.

SUSAN: Don't they have enough plays of yours?

WILL: People want new plays.

SUSAN: There are other playwrights.

WILL: Young knuckles hammering on the door. A new generation.. Some of them more than a set of knuckle bones... One or two might get in. One day people might not want my plays, or the plays I want to write. Or tire of them. And one day perhaps my flame will lack oil. It happens. I've lasted longer than anyone.

SUSAN: You don't have to write plays.

WILL: No. But while I have life and talent left.

SUSAN: Why do you say that?

WILL: I'm working with a man called Middleton. Or supposed to be. We have something we're working on. My idea - or a subject we agreed on. We mapped it out and he went away for a time and came back with some brilliant scenes, sharper than I could write.

SUSAN: What do you mean?

WILL: Glitters, hard, cold. Detached - do you understand? I think he can do almost anything, except make you feel about these figures. There's a distaste for the world.. but a world well observed. He's very assured, fast footed. Can write almost anything. Reminds me of the way I was. A lot younger than me.

SUSAN: Leaner?

WILL: Hungrier. He's got more variety than me.

SUSAN: Better than you?

WILL: If I had to pick a successor it would be him. But he's in demand, would be a catch for us. Writes of now, a kind of comedy I can't write, or don't like to, very popular. London life, the City: innkeepers, clever servants, foolish fathers. I think he thinks my kind of writing old fashioned. I write of the past. Your toga drama, he calls it. (*some amusement*) I have to watch these little upstarts.

SUSAN: What's he like?

WILL: Full of his talent. Married. Happy in that. It helps him. Marriages do, or can. A child. He has to keep working.

SUSAN: He lives in London?

WILL: Yes. Close to the theatres - you have to.

SUSAN: You don't, or not any more.

WILL: Since I stopped acting. But people know me. (*laughs*) They want the plays more than my acting. But when you're younger - as a playwright - you need to be there. And now I don't always need to be there. So long as they think I'm working.

SUSAN: You'd miss London.

WILL: If I was here all the time I would miss it the more. It's the way of things. It is a kind of restless infirmity. But I like coming home.

SUSAN: Just as I'm leaving.

WILL: I will come and stay with you. Read my plays to your children.

SUSAN: Don't talk like an old man yet. I would like to see a play or two of yours at Court before you retire.

WILL: This winter, why not? They want eleven (*indicates the letter*).

SUSAN: Of yours?

WILL: Three or four will be mine. It depends what the King wants. New plays as well as old.

SUSAN: Oh, an old play will do me.

WILL: (*laughs*) The first Christmas of the King's reign, we'd been out of London, he knew little of us. And we of him. And we did 'The Moor - the Moor of Venice.' We were away from London, the plague, and opened it on tour, not many parts - young Ostler was new to the company. He takes the part of a waiting woman. She's called Emilia. There wasn't much of her to begin with except she's there at the death of her mistress, Desdemona, who's murdered by her husband, the Moor. And Ostler, this boy, tears into the murderer, the Moor, starts big and gets bigger. He's fifteen.

SUSAN: Big?

WILL: In performance. And sustains this note. And Burbage says to me, afterwards, 'He's good, the boy.' Well, he was more than good but we don't let him know that. But I say to him, 'I've written you some more. The play needs slowing a little.' And he questions that. This boy is bright. And I say, there's too much plot - you can have too much plot. It's relentless.' A hundred lines are inserted, mainly him, which he learns - fast - building this waiting woman's part.

SUSAN: Emilia?

WILL: This boy can command a stage. Can silence an audience. There's a scene before the end - a new scene. No one has seen it before. Desdemona sings a song, it's just her and Ostler - Emilia. And we put some music in, hidden instruments. And Desdemona keeps breaking off, hears noises. She's waiting for her death that will happen when her husband comes. And Emilia talks of men, what they do to women. A speech I put in ..two days previously. Two women, these two boys, talking. And no one made a sound at court that night. People knew - we were holding it back - what was coming. People wept.. A play unfolding. As if the crime the Moor is about to commit is inevitable.. 'It is the cause. It is the cause, my soul.' This foolish man. Characters creating their own fate. 'Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars.' You should have seen Burbage, those boys, that company... (*upset*) I wanted to be nothing but what I was, that night, the playwright.

SUSAN: Were you in it?

WILL: Early. First scenes. Then off. (*Susanna laughs*) The way I like it. Playwright's prerogative.

SUSAN: What did you play?

WILL: Brabantio, the father of Desemona. He doesn't want her married.

SUSAN: Oh.

WILL: (*laugh*) And he was right, of course. It kills him.

SUSAN: You like my husband.

WILL: I think he's a good man.

SUSAN: Good enough for me.

WILL: Nobody's good enough for you.

SUSAN: You didn't think that when I was younger.

WILL: It's what people become. I'll miss our quiet times.

SUSAN: No reason why they should end.

WILL: Your husband will want you by him.

SUSAN: It's not as if you're here week in, week out.

WILL: What if I was?

SUSAN: You won't be.

WILL: Do you love him?

SUSAN: Yes.

WILL: Do you desire him?

SUSAN: No. But he desires me. How long will that last?

WILL: Love survives that.

SUSAN: Does it?

WILL: Yes. He's a reliable man. You will be happy.

SUSAN: *(leaving)* What plays is Edmund performing?

WILL: Not very good plays, sadly. But he's occupied again. Which is good. That's the main thing.

The next scene is already breaking in - noise and activity.

A lute, perhaps, but tuning up. Then, 'Hark, hark, the lark,' (Johnson/Shakespeare), part of a short soundscape of a summer morning at the Globe Theatre: carpenters banging; Burbage rehearsing a fight scene, and Will, unseen nearby, with a musician, Johnson.

5. Accounts Office. Globe Theatre.

Jack comes in.

*He's followed, after a moment, by Wilkins, who's a bit nervous.
It's late June.*

JACK: Hello, George. Are you - ?

WILKINS: There's a lot happening this morning. Is Will - ?

JACK: He's seeing a musician, George. He won't be long. He's read what you've written and wants to talk to you about it.

*It's warm weather: doors are sometimes left open.
So occasional backstage sounds.*

WILKINS: When he writes a play who reads it?

JACK: It goes to the company straight away.

WILKINS: What if they don't like it?

JACK: People comment. There are improvements, cuts. He's been doing it longer than most of them.

WILKINS: I saw you yesterday, the play.

JACK: It's a bit ramshackle but plays well.

*He's interrupted by the sound of a song, male falsetto voice -
Johnson's - through the wooden partition, nearby.
It's a thrilling, rising opening: 'Hark, hark, the lark' - a
demonstration which then stops.*

WILKINS: Who's the songbird?

JACK: Robert Johnson. He's writing some songs for us.

The song starts again.

JACK: When do you write?

WILKINS: When?

JACK: Yes.

WILKINS: Late night, that's the best time.

JACK: Nights?

WILKINS: Late. That's when I get going. And only time I can.

JACK: You have to be around?

WILKINS: Yes, when we're busy - and we are. (*then*) We've got some new women. Two Italians, they say they're sisters. I don't know about that but they know what they're doing. Don't have much of the language.

JACK: He speaks Italian.

WILKINS: Does he? But he doesn't come.

JACK: Did he once?

WILKINS: Yes, but he's cautious. You should come.

JACK: I once dressed as a woman, a foreigner. I think I did it mainly French.

WILKINS: What?

JACK: A dinner, when I was a young actor. To see if I could get away with being a woman. Not just on stage.

WILKINS: What did you do that for?

JACK: I was egged on. Group of actors, see if anybody would notice.

WILKINS: Did they?

JACK: No, I got some offers.

WILKINS: Come and work for us then.

JACK: It's a long time ago. I was told to laugh and talk bawdy. We were at the Temple, lawyers. I sat next to some old fellow, a judge, who held my hand under the table then put it on his prick. I did what he wanted and everyone went away happy.

WILKINS: Did he pay you?

JACK: No.

WILKINS: You should have asked for payment. Did you like playing women?

JACK: I did then.

WILKINS: How old were you?

JACK: Fifteen. Sixteen. They were the best parts. Otherwise it's pages or messengers, servants. I was good. The best part I ever did for Will - one of his plays, 'Titus'.

WILKINS: I've seen it.

JACK: I had my tongue cut out, my hands chopped off and had to write down the name of the murderer with a stick in my mouth. Giving a judge what he wanted was a doddle after that.

WILKINS: Maybe he knew you weren't a girl.

JACK: I've wondered that.

*Will in with Wilkins' draft: a couple of what are big pages.
He doesn't wear the sling.*

WILL: George. Well, we're underway. One of the problems is you're dramatising everything or trying to and it won't always work.

WILKINS: What do you mean?

WILL: It's not that kind of play. It can't be that realistic. The characters need to convince, that's all. Things happen to them and then they change. We're not inside them or looking over their shoulder. We've no time. You need to start later with the story. It takes a long time to get going. The incest's interesting but - less. We need to register it and then move onto consequences.

WILKINS: Consequences.

WILL: Get him out of that court. He's looking for a wife. Princess. Thinks he's found what he's looking for, except she's being bedded by her father. He realises that and starts running. There's danger. Get in and then get out. Don't linger. Go on. The first half of the play it's disorder, it's chaos. But you're going to bring it round. There's a long way to go. A shipwreck deprives him of his wife. The daughter's lost. Years pass. It's a problem. But you're going to change direction and you're taking too long at the start. And you're moralising. Don't moralise. Things happen. Let them happen.

WILKINS: *(blows out)* Doesn't sound as if it's very good to me.

WILL: It's not easy. You've got to learn how to compress and expand. Where to embellish, where not. The play starts and it's near evil. There's a journey, a long journey and we have to find our way back into harbour. That's the story. And we need to be clear where we are. Nobody - hardly anybody - knows where Antioch, Tyre and Tarsus are, but we need to know we're there. Go back over it. Who are we? Where are we? Why? Let people say who they are and what they're up to.

WILKINS: You want it re-writing.

WILL: Yes. You've got time. The plague numbers are rising.

WILKINS: (*it affects his business too*) First fucking sign of hot weather.

WILL: We may well be closed the rest of the summer and we've only just got going.

WILKINS: Only I could do with the money, though.

WILL: Well, you've got to write it yet. And in this business, George, you can't walk without stumbling.

WILKINS: What, you?

WILL: I've no idea what direction to take at the moment. I've no idea. Maybe I'm in for an unsuccessful season, because I'm trading water - or that's what it feels like. If you want to be a playwright, get used - now, everyday - to days when you don't understand anything and disappointed days. You have to be prepared for this and accept it. But follow your own way - no way else. Fanatically. Stubbornly. Or stick to the day job, George. We may well be out on tour, George, so any movement with this is not going to be as soon as, perhaps, you'd like. But get the first half ready and get it to us.

WILKINS: Where will you be?

ROBERT JOHNSON enters, musician, 23.

ROBERT: I'm sorry, Will, I wanted to have a word with Jack.

WILL: We've finished. George Wilkins, who's writing something for us. Robert Johnson, musician, also writing for us.

WILKINS: The songbird.

JOHNSON: I have my good days.

WILL: You're not the only one. I don't need you, Jack.

Jack gets up.

JACK: Good.

WILL: 'Good' he says. Tomorrow. And my friend here, George - young Jack with the italic hand - had a voice, when he was a boy, would shatter an audience. And knew it.

JACK: It lasted about three weeks.

WILL: *(overlapping)* And then when it cracked he would scare an audience with it.

JACK: I was corrupted by then.

WILL: And never happier.

JACK: Lewd and dissolute players.

WILL: This is what you got up to on the tour, is it?

JACK: Influence of the plays. Incest and murder. What do you expect?

WILL: Ignore him. Daily traffic of the stage. Are you on this afternoon?

JACK: Yes.

WILL: Don't over-act.

Jack goes with Johnson. Door closes.

WILL: The songbird, as you call him, is brilliant.

WILKINS: Good voice.

WILL: More than that. He can write a song in character. Not just a pretty tune tagged on - he wants to marry words and notes. That's what I like to hear. His family are musicians. It's in the blood.

WILKINS: Do you think this is any good what I've written?

WILL: I think you need to have another go. There's time. You still want to do it?

WILKINS: Yes.

WILL: Have it ready for when and if the sickness lifts.

WILKINS: I feel I've wasted my time.

WILL: It's different - it's tricky. A strange journey and a happy ending. Not sunshine and not all shadow. What matters to Gower is that the good fare well in the end, you know, and the wicked are punished. Well.. the Twine's more about the ups and downs of fortune. Arbitrary. Put your own twist on it. You can do it. So how's business, George?

WILKINS: Brisk. We've got a couple of new ones you might like. Italians.

WILL: Oh, I've given up on Italians, George.

WILKINS: Practice your language? .

WILL: (*interrupted*) So that's (what you think I like, is it?)

JOHNSON: (*head round the door*) There's somebody waiting for you, Will.

WILL: Who?

JOHNSON: Your brother.

WILL: Tell him I'll be - a minute.

JOHNSON: Yes.

Door closes.

WILL: Did he come along with you?

WILKINS: No. His child's sick.

WILL: I heard he's not likely to live.

WILKINS: No.

Wilkins gets up.

WILKINS: Will you be leaving town?

WILL: Probably, but things need to be sorted. What about you?

WILKINS: No. Call in before you go.

WILL: (*non-committal*) I'll let you know where I am. Stratford, probably, if they give me time off.

Wilkins goes.

A moment's interchange outside between Wilkins and Edmund. Edmund in. He's 27, sober, but dressed in poor condition.

WILL: Edmund.

ED: Are you - ?

WILL: No. Sit down.

ED: I didn't know you were seeing George.

WILL: No, well.. I've heard about the child. Not from him. If you want any expense to help.. any necessary expense, if that's what you want. (*then*) Are you working?

ED: No.

WILL: I can help with that. Who's with the child?

ED: His mother.

WILL: Do you have any other help?

ED: Her sister.

WILL: Does the child need a doctor?

ED: No. There's nothing to be done. A priest eventually. There's some problems with his breathing, some constriction, the lungs. You can hear him straining. It's hard.

WILL: He's been christened?

ED: Yes.

WILL: What name?

ED: My name. We call him 'Mun.'

WILL: How long?

ED: I don't know. Sometimes he seems alive. But the eyes aren't opened. Or only briefly. We think he hears. (*a moment*) I sing to him. He likes it. It seems to comfort him.

WILL: It would be worse if his life were longer. Likely to be longer.
What do you sing?

ED: Some of yours.

WILL: Heaven help him. Take some money.

ED: I will need help with the burial. Will you come?

WILL: Would it do any good? I may not be in London.

ED: The theatres are closing?

WILL: Next week, if the numbers keep rising.

ED: You'll go to Stratford.

WILL: At some point. The fact of your child and this.. woman ..
must be kept secret.

ED: But I stay with her.

WILL: You may change your mind.

ED: I won't.

WILL: She has a hold over you.

ED: I love her.

WILL: Of all the women you have chosen one who could be bought.

ED: She remembers you. She remembers you very well. How you
touched her cheek. Admired her dress, the colours. You were a
gentleman, she said. You talked of your daughter -

WILL: No.

ED: Your favourite. Your best object. Maybe you were drunk.

WILL: She liked actors. She liked the theatre.

ED: Why don't you call her by her name?

WILL: She has designs on you -

They talk over one another, old disputes.

ED: You sound /like my mother.

WILL: Any actor.

ED: She didn't want you / married.

WILL: She did her trade at the theatre.

ED: Well, you'd know.

WILL: You lose physical desire. You lose lustiness - though it rises up to torture you. I do without desire. I loathe adultery, though have committed it often enough. I quench my senses. I disuse my body from pleasure.

ED: Not when you were younger. You had a mistress at court. Does Stratford know of that?

WILL: I don't know.

ED: They know you what you are. And you tell me what to do.

WILL: Are you going to parade this woman in front of your mother?

ED: She bores and vexes you.

WILL: Sadly. Yes.

ED: Then don't use her against me.

WILL: She is your mother too. You dishonour her. You intend to parade this woman in front of her? In front of Susanna..?

ED: No.

WILL: Good.

ED: Susanna knows the way we live.

WILL: Not from me.

ED: This husband of hers is a doctor. A Puritan. Are you afraid of him?

WILL: It's a different world. Things we don't talk about. I can't plead innocency of life. I'm a player. We say you have a woman in London. We go so far as that. If you want help from me you leave it at that.

ED: Is that a condition of the money?

WILL: There's a job going. Some of Worcester's Men are going out on tour. To Germany.

ED: Germany?

WILL: Yes. Small company - eight or nine. They are preparing now. You were mentioned. If you talked to them, they'd have you.

ED: Why?

WILL: I can make it worth their while.

ED: No.

WILL: What are you doing? You prefer drink and debt? You have some ability as an actor. What else are you fit for? To be a serving man? Work your way. To sit in the corner of some tavern, some dive? To drink and fornicate? Work your way back with us. We'll be playing ten or a dozen plays at court this Christmas. We'll need people who know them.

ED: I won't work for you again.

WILL: You're working for the company. The company decide. There is no dislike of you. There is no malice in you - people like working with you - you were unreliable, foolish. You have a tender heart.

He's upset.

WILL: (*con't*) Give me patience. I can't play the father with you. But this life will destroy you. Is she working?

ED: Yes.

WILL: Not as a whore.

ED: No.

WILL: What as?

ED: Seamstress like her sister.

WILL: I have a duty to my mother. And so do you. She blames me for your ever coming to London. They don't know what we know. They don't live as we do. They don't know the pleasures we've known. But you have no restraint.

ED: I stay with her.

WILL: Rose. I will do what I can to help you. I grow repressive, I know.

ED: Who do you love?

WILL: What do you mean?

ED: Not your wife.

WILL: Not in that way. I don't love in that way. I try as best I can to be my own grave. I never want to love again. Who you choose to bed is not my business. The way you're living now ..

ED: She tolerates my drinking.

WILL: You need work. Occupation. I'm empty, I'm worn, I'm peevish, but not mistaken in this.

ED: You're a difficult man to hate.

WILL: I will stay in London as long as I can. The child will have a proper burial. But it will remain a secret to Stratford, for now. You will think about Germany.

End of Act One.

ACT TWO.

6. New Place: Stratford.

Back room.

It's late September. Door closed to outside. Here and elsewhere in this scene the sense of a large house with other activities.

Jack and Susanna, both standing. Jack refers to his written sheets.

JACK: He's a soldier.

SUSAN: He likes soldiers.

JACK: And I suppose passionate. Which leads him to disaster. But not like Antony. It's a passion, well.. passions, of a very different nature. And their general characters even more so. One throws away an Empire for a woman he doesn't even trust, this one's dour, married - happily married - but violent tempered. He's like a boy. There's a strong mother.

SUSAN: How old is he?

JACK: As old as Richard Burbage, I suppose. He'll play him.

SUSAN: What's he called?

JACK: Caius Marcius. Later Coriolanus.

SUSAN: I would like to see it, finally.

JACK: When you come to London?

SUSAN: He says if they're not at the Globe I may be able to see a play at Court. What's it like?

JACK: At Court? Well, it's easier indoors in many ways, pays well - lifeline really when the theatres are closed. But I prefer the Globe, the atmosphere. You can smell the audience. Garlic and beer. *(laughter)* Cold in winter. You've seen plays on tour?

SUSAN: I saw you.

JACK: Did you?

SUSAN: In 'King Lear.' With Edmund.

JACK: Ah, yes.

SUSAN: In Coventry. I didn't like it.

JACK: The play?

SUSAN: I found it upsetting.

JACK: It's a painful play.

SUSAN: I couldn't stay to the end. I didn't tell him that.
I had to leave.

WILL: Cordelia's death?

SUSAN: Yes. Edmund said she didn't die, not in the old play.

JACK: No, I don't think she did.

SUSAN: Why did he alter it?

JACK: Have you asked him? I think it's always what makes the best
play. It's headlong.

SUSAN: Yes.. headlong. He said something about that.

JACK: After the first scene. Just unravels.

SUSAN: I thought Edmund was good in it.

JACK: Yes - Edmund as his namesake.

SUSAN: A villain.

JACK: The most obvious one. (*cautious*) There were a lot of them
in that play. It was that kind of play.

SUSAN: Why did he leave the company?

JACK: Edmund? I don't know.

SUSAN: What did he say to you?

JACK: I think he wanted to strike out on his own more.

SUSAN: With other companies?

JACK: Yes.

SUSAN: But he didn't work for some time.

JACK: That happens to all of us. He's in Germany now. They like English plays, English actors, heaven knows why.

SUSAN: Have you been there?

JACK: No, but I've been to the Low Countries.

SUSAN: Do you like touring?

JACK: Sometimes.

SUSAN: Do you miss it?

JACK: Now? No. I like working with him. You look after me well.

SUSAN: Will you go back to acting?

JACK: When we're back in London, I can do both.

SUSAN: Was there a falling out between my father and Edmund?

JACK: I think it's difficult being the brother of somebody like your father in a company like that.

SUSAN: I would have thought it was an advantage.

JACK: I had to get away from my family at one time.

SUSAN: I see.

JACK: My father didn't like me acting.

SUSAN: Why not?

JACK: *(smile)* Not a respectable profession.

SUSAN: You defied him?

JACK: Eventually. I respected him a great deal. But sometimes, well..

Someone approaching.

SUSAN: It's gammon tonight.

JACK: Gammon? Ah.

Will in.

WILL: Jack.

SUSAN: Jack was telling me about the new play.

JACK: *(a wink)* And how we all leave plays before the end. Wish them shorter.

WILL: I don't know how long this is going to be.

JACK: Don't you ever talk to your daughter about what you're doing?

SUSAN: I'd come in on him sometimes. If it was going well he might read me out something.

WILL: You'd got better things to do.

SUSAN: When are you going to write another comedy?

WILL: I think I've written plenty. I'm giving people fights at the moment. Hand to hand combat, battle scenes, alarms. It's why Burbage wants this one.

JACK: *(on the move)* He just says to Burbage, this is what we want here. He handles all that.

WILL: Front stage. Please the stinkards. Lot of noise. No words. Bit of blood.

SUSAN: I don't want to see those plays!

WILL: It's only pig's blood.

SUSAN: I'll hide my eyes.

JACK: Do you want me this morning?

WILL: Later. Half an hour.

Jack goes.

SUSAN: Are you near the end?

WILL: Beyond half way. In the middle - there's always a lot of middle - but it's set firm. Things need working out that's all.

There's a table book on the desk and a copy of his own used North's Plutarch, which he picks up.

SUSAN: I think you like having someone by you when you're working.

WILL: I like him.

SUSAN: Does he make suggestions?

WILL: If I ask he does. A word or phrase. He's an actor, he knows what works.

SUSAN: Don't you?

WILL: People say my language is getting complicated. They can't follow things. I'm keeping this one mainly straightforward. Well, when I can. I can use a lot of this - Plutarch's Lives - without too much alteration.

SUSAN: It's about a son and his mother.

WILL: *(smile)* Yes.

SUSAN: Will I see it?

WILL: It depends when we can back to London. We won't open it on tour. If we can get a few weeks at the Globe before we go to court, then we might. But we have another Roman play, 'Antony.' The King's not seen that. I think this will wait is for the Spring.

SUSAN: There's something you should know. About next year. I'm going to have a child. I don't think there's any doubting it. It will be March next year. You are going to be a grandfather.

Between scenes, the sound of travelling players: trumpets and drums on the back of a cart followed by a more formal - regal - sennet.

7: Whitehall.

Large chamber. A high window, perhaps.

It's four months later, late December, ringingly cold.

There's a fire: everyone will move to it.

Jack is there, in winter gear.

There's the BOOKEEPER, THOMAS VINCENT, well wrapped up at a table with some fresh play sheets which Jack has just delivered.

He sorts them into order, takes no notice of Jack.

JACK: *(to us)* "Give us a bit of 'Hieronimo', Jack," he'd say. It was an old play, a favourite. It was to limber him up. And he'd begin pacing, sometimes with a book in his hand. There was a pattern to his reading. When he hit upon a theme - the theme was the thing: 'what's this thing about?' - he'd open what he could get hold of that was relevant, looking for what you'd best call local colour, circumstantial detail - what he needed, no more - significant phrases. The language of 'Coriolanus' was not the language of 'Antony and Cleopatra.' 'Coriolanus' would wait till the Spring. It was 'Antony' was the new play for court, that Christmas.

Richard Burbage enters. He's early forties, and like everyone in this scene dressed against the extreme cold.

BURBAGE: My nose is dropping off.

JACK: *(to us)* Burbage in the lead.

WILL: *(enters, bright rehearsal manner)* Richard. Morning, Mr. Vincent.

But Burbage seems puzzled by Jack's aside.

JACK: *(to Burbage)* I stand in the gaps to convey the stages of our story.

This seems to content the actor, Burbage - and the scene continues.

JACK: Good morning.

BURBAGE: Morning, Jack. Push over. *(laughter)* Come on, let's see that fire.

Some argy bargy. Jack moves.

WILL: There was a body floating in the Thames, just downstream.

BURBAGE: Where?

WILL: Opposite here, Whitehall steps.

Burbage rubs his hands.

BURBAGE: When?

WILL: Yesterday afternoon. Did you not see it?

BURBAGE: I've not stepped outside in two days.

WILL: Frozen in the ice. How are you?

BURBAGE: Not quite that cold. Is there much - some changes, you said?

WILL: Yes.

BURBAGE: Can we have a look?

Jack goes to the desk.

BURBAGE: When we were doing 'The Moor' somebody said that negroes who drown turn white in the water.

JACK: Richard.

Hands him a sheet.

BURBAGE: Thanks. Is this a new scene?

WILL: Changes. .

BURBAGE: *(not ever so pleased)* Ah, yes. More lines. Or less?

WILL: About the same, I think.

BURBAGE: We've got a suggestion for some cuts.

WILL: Good.

BURBAGE: Young Mr. Ostler taking my lines mainly.

But he sounds quite cheerful about it.

WILL: Where is he?

BURBAGE: He wasn't well last night. Were you in?

WILL: No, I went to Acton. My daughter's there. It took me a time.

BURBAGE: How is she?

WILL: Mistress of her own house, soon to be mother.

Burbage laughs.

WILL: What are you laughing at?

BURBAGE: You.

WILL: What?

BURBAGE: Being pushed to the side of things. Is she coming in to see us?

WILL: Not in this weather, her condition. She's disappointed.

BURBAGE: That's a shame. Ah, Mr Ostler.

OSTLER, nineteen, approaches.

OSTLER: *(a bit hoarse)* Richard. Will.

BURBAGE: How are you?

OSTLER: A lot better.

BURBAGE: Are you?

WILL: What was the matter?

OSTLER: Throat. But my stomach's still a bit dicky.

BURBAGE: Cold meat, bread and cheese for you from now on.

OSTLER: Can't I have cake?

BURBAGE: No, you've been enjoying yourself far too much. It's sin. And as in the best plays you pay for sin. You've been in enough.

OSTLER: You talk about cake, he talks about sin.

BURBAGE: Continue with your work.

OSTLER: What this? *(new sheet from Robinson)*

JACK: Will.

OSTLER: Jack. Oh, God, no.

WILL: New lines. Not many.

OSTLER: Where? Where is this?

WILL: Antony's back in Egypt. It's after the messenger, Thidias.
Young Jack here.

OSTLER: You've not written these, have you?

JACK: I only write what he says.

But these are routine moans.

OSTLER: We've got some changes round there.

BURBAGE: I was just saying.

WILL: Have a look at these first.

OSTLER: I've been listening to the music. It's good.

WILL: New costumes for you as well.

OSTLER: We don't need words, then.

BURBAGE: *(reading, talking at the same time)* There's a reception
for the Venetian Ambassador, just before. They'll be in. Super
subtle fucking Venetians, won't understand much of it anyway.

OSTLER: We'll have to speak slowly then. And you can speak more
loudly. *(then)* Even more loudly.

BURBAGE: Was I spitting last night?

Laughter.

OSTLER: Charmian can wipe it off me.

BURBAGE: I'll keep away from your disease.

A moment.

Both read, seated.

BURBAGE: One thing I've noticed about this play is that...there's a lot of talk about the Queen's power - your power - over Antony but we never see it.

WILL: What would you have him do?

BURBAGE: (*concedes*) He can't keep away, I suppose.

OSTLER: I could tie you up naked. Inspect your battle scars.

BURBAGE: The King might like that.

WILL: Are you going to save your voice for the play?

OSTLER: Of course.

WILL: What's good for throats?

JACK: Hot water and honey?

OSTLER: Oh, yes.

WILL: Could you get some?

JACK: I'll see.

BURBAGE: Me, too.

Jack goes.

BURBAGE: I've discovered the secret of this play.

A moment.

Guilt free sexual bliss. Antony. How old is he?

WILL: Forty three.

BURBAGE: How old are you?

WILL: Forty three.

Laughter.

BURBAGE: Enchanted by a courtesan.

WILL: Have you only just noticed?

BURBAGE: I've been reading my Plutarch.

WILL: Very useful man, Plutarch.

BURBAGE: I was looking at the next one.

OSTLER: (*looking up*) Another Roman play?

WILL: Yes. Concentrate on this one.

BURBAGE: You're generally quite untidy. This new one's quite formal.

OSTLER: What's it called?

BURBAGE: 'Coriolanus.'

WILL: Do you like the title?

BURBAGE: Yes. I like the play. (*to Ostler*) Big woman's part. If you get through this one. If you don't annoy me. If we don't get anybody better. You're playing my mother.

OSTLER: If I don't go elsewhere. How old?

BURBAGE: (*cutting across*) What's happened to 'Timon'?

WILL: It's not gone away.

BURBAGE: It's just not got written.

WILL: Some of it's written. But it's a bit one note. No cheer.

BURBAGE: Stick a fool in.

WILL: There was one. Not very funny and got killed off. That's Middleton for you.

BURBAGE: He can be very hard on his characters, Mr. Middleton. Likes carnage.

WILL: (*gratuitous*) And no common sense or incompetence. Everything's repulsive.

BURBAGE: (*authoritative*) Yes, well, he writes parody. Satire.

WILL: It pins people against a wall.

BURBAGE: I think tragedy fixes them too.

WILL: Not always.

BURBAGE: You know what I remember? When we first started working together. Romeo. Those musicians at the end. They've come for a wedding. Only the bride is dead, which leaves them at a loss. It's not what the musicians have come for. And they manage to laugh a little, packing their instruments and decide to stay on for the funeral dinner. It's quite a moment in the middle of this - tragedy. You're very good at that, and I think we need a little more of it.

WILL: Well, thank you.

BURBAGE: Any love interest in 'Timon'? Anything like that? Bit of nookie?

WILL: No. He's a misanthrope, ends up alone. A few good speeches.

BURBAGE: Prosperity doesn't await him?

WILL: No.

BURBAGE: Dark. No variety at all?

WILL: We're working on it.

BURBAGE: What happened to those plays you used to write? A Duke is in love with a Countess who's in love with the Duke's serving man -

OSTLER: Who's a girl.

BURBAGE: Where was it set?

WILL: Illyria.

BURBAGE: That's it. Sunshine. Nuptials - no carnage. There was a Fool in that one - melancholic but some jokes. How long did it take you to write?

WILL: Two weeks.

OSTLER: Did it?

WILL: This one didn't take me that long.

BURBAGE: You used to be quite serious young man who wrote comedies.

WILL: We're getting older, Richard.

BURBAGE: Less sex, more regret. 'Our infancy..' what is it?

WILL: I don't know.

BURBAGE: 'Our infancy is but a dream..' is it yours?

WILL: No.

BURBAGE: 'Our youth but a madness, our manhood (*remembers*) a combat.' That's true. 'Our age a - '

WILL: (*does remember*) Sickness. 'Our life a misery.'

BURBAGE: 'Our death a horror.' There you are, you see.

OSTLER: Nothing more to be said, then, is there?

WILL: Shall we have a look at this?

Some movement to get the rehearsal started.

BURBAGE: Yes.

Jack in.

He signals for Will to move to one side but Will wants to get going.

JACK: There's somebody outside. She wants you, Will.

WILL: Me? Who is it?

BURBAGE: So is this scene - ? It's the one we were talking about before - ?

OSTLER: Yes.

WILL: Can you deal with it, Jack?

BURBAGE: You're very fond of that word 'brows', you know.

OSTLER: (*background*) What's 'a terrene moon'?

JACK: (*stops Will*) I'm sorry, Will, I think you need to - it's Rose.

WILL: Rose.

JACK: Edmund's -

WILL: Rose. Here?

Will goes.

BURBAGE: Rose?

JACK: His brother's dead.

BURBAGE: Edmund?

Music: William Byrd 'Christus Resurgens,' perhaps.

8. Acton house: small sitting room.

Susanna, dressed darkly, is visibly pregnant.

SUSAN: *(to us)* 'In the eyes of the foolish they seem to have died. Their departure was thought to be an affliction. Their going from us to be a destruction. But they are at peace.' So the book says.

It was a frost, the worst in memory, people, I was told, crossing the Thames on foot, coals and fires on the ice. Edmund had written, when he had heard of my condition, from Germany and desired that we would meet in London. I hadn't known that he was back. And there was some discussion whether to tell me of his death.

*Will is there. He wears travelling clothes.
She sits. He continues to stand.*

SUSAN: Who was with him?

WILL: He had a woman. She looked after him.

SUSAN: Did she not tell you he was ill?

WILL: He'd been sickly for a week since returning from abroad. We were at Court. It seemed like some kind of aguish fever. He said he had had them before -

SUSAN: He had.

WILL: It was more than that. There was a rash over parts of his body. A pleurisy. He had let himself...he was not robust. The end was rapid.

SUSAN: Who was this woman? His mistress?

A moment.

WILL: Yes.

SUSAN: She came to Court to tell you.

WILL: Yes.

SUSAN: Do you know her?

WILL: I met her once.. or twice.

SUSAN: What kind of woman is she?

WILL: A serving woman. No, a seamstress.

SUSAN: She was with him when he died.

WILL: Yes.

SUSAN: I would like to meet her.

WILL: No.

SUSAN: But she cared for him.

WILL: She would be uncomfortable with you.

SUSAN: There would be no need to be.

WILL: She had his child around the time you married. The child died. I never wanted you to know. It was agreed that you wouldn't.

SUSAN: Because they were unmarried?

WILL: She had been a whore...she was a whore. It was how they met.

SUSAN: And had his child?

WILL: Yes.

SUSAN: How long did the child live?

WILL: Three weeks.

SUSAN: Is that why he didn't come to the wedding?

WILL: Yes. I told him not to.

SUSAN: You told him not to.

WILL: Yes.

SUSAN: Because he was working?

WILL: He was not working then. He was incapable of working then. He was drinking. She tolerated his drinking. Perhaps she helped. Then the child came, died, and I got him a job. He went abroad. I wanted to get him away from her. I didn't succeed.

SUSAN: The last time I saw him was in Stratford. He stood with his hands on the back of a chair in the parlour by the fire. March, the end of Lent, and he was going back to London. He told me a great deal, we were open with one another.

A moment.

Was it a boy or a girl?

WILL: A boy.

SUSAN: Was it named?

WILL: Edmund. Mun.

SUSAN: Did you see the child?

WILL: No. I paid for his coffin.

SUSAN: Why did you not see the child?

WILL: I refused to visit the woman. She was not fit for him.

SUSAN: Why did he not give her up?

WILL: He said he loved her.

SUSAN: And then he went to Germany. He wrote to me. He said nothing about this - because you told him not to.

WILL: I wanted nobody to know - not at Stratford. Not his mother. Nor you.

SUSAN: I would have preferred to have seen him, than this. I would have preferred to have known.

WILL: He had no command over himself. His life was disordered. He frequented most types of tavern. Dives. It was what he liked. And sponging. He was in debt. He neglected his work. If he were a youth of any extraordinary parts I would have had better hope.

SUSAN: You employed him.

WILL: It was his ruin. I was his ruin. *(then)* What he wanted and saw he took.

SUSAN: Women would wait after the theatre for him. He told me that. A woman came to the door once in Stratford. Asking for him. Finely dressed. It would not be her?

WILL: No.

SUSAN: Will she be at the burial?

WILL: I can't say.

SUSAN: You mean you will ask her not to be.

WILL: That depends on you.

SUSAN: Me? What does she look like? Is she gaudy? Haggard? She is not trash if he loved her.

WILL: It was a wish to defy me.

SUSAN: You told him how to live his life.

WILL: He liked wenching and whores./ Debauchery.

SUSAN: (*clashing*) But you had women.

A moment.

He told me. A woman at Court. He told me - as well as whores. You have not shared my mother's bed for years. You thought you had the infection.

WILL: Who told you that?

SUSAN: My mother.

WILL: When?

SUSAN: I didn't want to know but she told me.

WILL: I was younger. The place teems with whores. I was a player.

SUSAN: So was he. Who was the woman at Court?

WILL: Why do you want to know?

SUSAN: There were poems.

WILL: Why do you want to know this?

SUSAN: You wrote about her. People knew these poems.

WILL: He told you that.

SUSAN: I saw some of them. He showed me. They were to a woman not your wife. People knew - here in London.

WILL: Some people knew.

SUSAN: People at Court. You used her name in that play. It's what you do. Emilia.

WILL: If you know these things why do you ask me? I needed an Italian name. She was half Italian.

SUSAN: Married to a musician.

WILL: Yes.

SUSAN: Did he know, her husband?

WILL: She had a child by another man.. a nobleman at Court. She was married off to this musician, who agreed to take on the child. This is the way things are done in these Courts. (*then*) Her husband dealt hardly with her. She began to take who she wanted. When did Edmund tell you this?

SUSAN: A few years ago.

WILL: Why did you not ask me about it then?

SUSAN: He said the affair was over.

WILL: Does your mother know?

SUSAN: No. Or not from me. Would you like me to tell her? She never asks you about your life here, not a word. You don't have the infection?

WILL: No. But since that fear I began to lead a more orderly life. I kept a middle way, cautious for a time, between vowing and slackness - but I wanted no one after her. It was empty compensation, an empty form of pleasure, if that's what it can be called. And now I put most priests to shame.

SUSAN: You should never have married.

WILL: We had you. I have never regretted that. And my life is tied to your mother's and will be while her life lasts.

SUSAN: How drab we must have seemed to you.

WILL: No. But no one would have satisfied my longings. And your mother would not have fitted here in London.

SUSAN: Edmund was wild for the life you had.

WILL: He had no calling. I came home. I provided for you. I provided for you well. You have gained some honour by me.

Silence.

SUSAN: Will she be provided for? Edmund's mistress?

WILL: I don't -

SUSAN: He loved her. She was not married.

WILL: No.

SUSAN: He loved her openly. What would he want you to do? Or would you prefer me to? Clothes and money.

WILL: If you want it.

SUSAN: I do.

Sound of forenoon bell, a large (cathedral) church.

The intonements of a funeral service.

Then a wind howling.

9. Will's Chambers.

*Two days later. Winter evening.
A fire burning.*

MARSTON: *(on stairs)* Hello?

Jack comes out of the other room with some of Will's clothes which he brings to warm by the fire.

JACK: *(opens door)* Hello?

It's been snowing, Marston's shoulders and headgear are covered.

MARSTON: It's John Marston - or a part of him. We've met.

JACK: Yes. Come in.

MARSTON: You're, I've forgotten -

JACK: Robinson.

MARSTON: Is he in - ?

JACK: No. But he may not be long.

MARSTON: I've only just got back. Only just heard. So I missed the funeral.

JACK: It went well... well.

MARSTON: In all this cold. There's a street fair on the ice. Market stalls. You're looking after him?

JACK: In a way.

MARSTON: Living here?

JACK: I live nearby. I have some copying to do.

MARSTON: Is he at Court?

JACK: Not tonight. He's gone to - pay a visit. I expect him soon.

MARSTON: The last time I saw Edmund, to talk to, he was in a play of mine. Did you know him?

JACK: Yes.

MARSTON: You were at the funeral.

JACK: The whole Company were there, though he no longer worked for them.

MARSTON: Because of Will?

JACK: And people liked him. It was hard not to, though he proved unreliable. And was working his way back. Can I get you something? There's wine, some sack?

MARSTON: I'll wait.

JACK: I once saw him vault on stage. Edmund. I mean from off the stage, onto it. A fight.

MARSTON: He was a good swordsman. But never personated anybody. Was always himself.

JACK: He was buried as if he was the leader of the Company, a leading player.

MARSTON: Wasn't he like a son to Will?

JACK: If troublesome. *(realises)* Yes, a son.

MARSTON: How many years between them?

JACK: Sixteen .

Will arriving. Also thickly dressed and near frozen.

WILL: John..

Marston and Will embrace. Will's clothes get in the way.

MARSTON: I've been away.

WILL: It's good of you to come. What have we got, Jack?

ROBINSON: Some sack. Some Rhenish.

MARSTON: If you want me to stay?

WILL: Yes. There's some mutton. Cheese?

MARSTON: No.

WILL: There were some children pissing in the street. To see if the piss would freeze.

JACK: Did it?

WILL: On the ground it did. I think they were hoping for something more memorable. And then they started sliding on it. Tippling over. We buried him in the chancel, John. I wanted him inside. They asked me if I wanted to be buried with him.

JACK: (*sets table*) Right away?

WILL: No. Or anybody else buried with him. Because it depends how deep they dig.

JACK: What did you say?

WILL: You take a decision. That he lies on his own. Or with strangers. There is quite a crowd down there. They disturbed the other corpses that are not quite rotten to make room for him. You can't dig down without hitting bones. There was a woman. He had a woman.

MARSTON: Yes.

WILL: I've just seen her. We've talked about what she wants to keep of his. There wasn't much. Some gloves my father made. He'd already sold his best lace. There was a cloak, a blue cloak. And what he stood up in. He had some poems of mine - sonnets - she gave back to me. She doesn't read. They are about love, she said. Yes, I said - or a form of it. She asked me why they were called sonnets and I said it means little songs in Italian.

MARSTON: Yes.

WILL: She got me to read one to her. And then she gave me a hare's foot for my health and my continued success. I think he loved her. We had not been friends lately because of it. Other men's failings I tolerate. Not his. And not my own. You acted with him, what did you think?

JACK: Me? Why do you ask that?

WILL: It's a simple question. What did you think of him?

JACK: As an actor?

WILL: As a man.

JACK: He was well favoured, had a fine (person) -

WILL: (*sharp*) Beyond that.

JACK: I think it was his misfortune to be born your brother.
But as that was neither his fault or yours.. I think he should have
stayed away from the stage.

A moment.

JACK: (*adds*) He was good company.

WILL: And never so happy as on the back of a touring cart
impressing the locals.

JACK: Trumpets and drums on a cart.

A moment.

There is some ox tongue and some bread. I'm going to leave you.

WILL: Do you have to? You can stay here.

JACK: I am expecting someone, if he turns up in this weather. I will
see you tomorrow. Oh, Wilkins left the play.

WILL: Wilkins?

JACK: Not as fair written as he would wish, he says. And there may
not be an ending.

Puts the play on the table

WILL: I thought he'd died as well. The promised delivery was
months ago.

JACK: He had some problems his license, his place has been shut
down. He's been in Yarmouth.

WILL: Yarmouth?

JACK: Avoiding, I don't know, someone or arrest. It was a long
tale.

WILL: Kicking some woman was what I heard.

JACK: And his Italian women left him. 'Wenchless', he says.

WILL: A chapter of accidents.

JACK: He says the brothel scene is good.

WILL: Well, that's as well. But his promises are better than his writing.

MARSTON: A brothel scene?

WILL: Well, as he runs one. But it gets in the way of writing.

JACK: (*who has dressed for outdoors*) I can come back if you want tonight.

WILL: No, tomorrow.

Jack goes.

MARSTON: He looks after you.

WILL: I enjoy his company. He's clever, well read, silent when he needs to be.

MARSTON: And frank with you.

A plate is offered.

They eat, drink.

WILL: He's not in awe of me. I've known him since he was a kid, . boy actor. His father wanted him to be a priest.

MARSTON: From being an actor?

WILL: He was 17, his voice had gone, was persuaded I think against his best interests to go abroad. A Catholic.

MARSTON: A seminary?

WILL: Left, obeyed his father. But he says - Jack - he was the kind who wanted to eat meat pies on fast days. Came back to London, worked in the printing trade, then came back to us. Likes base plays. Dissolute players. (*then*) At one time, he says, when he was most persuaded, he would have died for his faith. You have to admire that.

MARSTON: Do you?

WILL: I'm attracted to the faith. Believing's the problem. Are you living in eternity, John?

MARSTON: No.

WILL: Has the experience gone?

MARSTON: No, but the feeling lasted for some months.

WILL: What was it?

MARSTON: Something beyond myself.

WILL: What do you understand by it?

MARSTON: I don't know for sure. Like a letter. Only like a child you don't understand the words.

WILL: Have you thought that this God who seems a friend could turn into your enemy in an instant?

MARSTON: You mean was I deceived? I wonder how I could be.

WILL: Could you have conjured it up like a play?

MARSTON: No, it was something I experienced rather than did.

WILL: You're certain.

MARSTON: But you're not.

WILL: I think there are many improbable things, vouched for by trustworthy people. It would be a serious presumption to condemn what we don't understand.

MARSTON: You ask yourself was I deceived and I don't know how I could be.

WILL: A delusion?

MARSTON: No. It was beyond anything I've ever known. Of love. Like shout of joy. Divine harmony. Eternity in an instant. A kind of knowledge. A glimpse of something. And then it disappeared, dropped away, but the feeling remained for months. It's that I think I trust - no doubting it...comfort, that you are watched over.

WILL: You think we are forgiven?

MARSTON: Yes.

WILL: I mean will we all get a glimpse? You see, I don't think we can be despised as much as we deserve. Why are we forgiven?

MARSTON: We forgive children. Do you forgive your characters?

WILL: Most.

MARSTON: You were why I wanted to be a playwright.

WILL: You sound as if it's in the past.

MARSTON: Perhaps it is.

WILL: Are you writing?

MARSTON: No.

WILL: You write good plays, John.

MARSTON: My own work is so displeasing to me that every time I look at it it annoys me. Yours was the first play - first professional play I ever saw. I had to fight to get in.

WILL: Where?

MARSTON: Oxford. 'By Heaven, methinks it were an easy step/To pluck bright honour from the pale faced moon.'

WILL: Fine lines.

He weeps.

MARSTON: You have lost a brother.

WILL: I may have lost a daughter. *(recovers)* Her love.

MARSTON: Why?

WILL: I kept them apart.

MARSTON: He was leading a disordered life.

WILL: She knows about that. And mine. My daughter. My daughter.

MARSTON: There is mercy, there is Grace, there is forgiveness.

WILL: You're sounding like a priest, John.

MARSTON: And you are sounding like somebody who needs one.

Silence.

WILL: What are you going to do?

MARSTON: Me?

WILL: If you're not writing plays?

MARSTON: What's required of me, when I know what that is.

WILL: There is a requirement with this glimpse of something?

MARSTON: I feel so.

WILL: I liked you as a sceptic, John. All opinion.

MARSTON: Yes, but something happened.

WILL: You bumped into God in Kent.

MARSTON: I suppose you have to meet him somewhere.

WILL: Why the suffering?

MARSTON: You write tragedies. There is a redemption even there.
The burden of the mind eased.

WILL: Redemption?

MARSTON: It's not all chaos. Perhaps the suffering is necessary. A
precondition of happiness.

WILL: You have had a most rare vision.

MARSTON: *(smile)* You have written one or two.

WILL: Come and work for us, John. Come and write for the
stinkards You could write of visions and prophecies. This world
elsewhere.

MARSTON: *(gets up)* If I find a way. I always have an idea in my
mind, a certain confused picture that shows me, as in a dream, a
better form than I'm used to. But I can't grasp it or develop it. It's
beyond me. Your writing not only satisfies me to the full but
astounds me and strikes me with wonder.

WILL: Follow your natural way.

MARSTON: Finding it's the problem. Are you still working with Middleton?

WILL: No. Though neither of us has admitted it.

MARSTON: 'Timon'.

WILL: It's always in earnest. No variety. I could do it but my heart's not in it. And he's working on something else.

MARSTON: And you?

WILL: Another Roman play. A hero who's something of a monster, self-willed, unbending, had his own way for too long. I don't think anybody will like it.

Music.

10. Will's chambers.

The following morning. The fire has burnt low.

Jack is at the table, reading Wilkins play. Some warm wine or beer bubbling quietly on the embers.

Will half dressed, comes in from the bed chamber.

WILL: Jack.

JACK: I thought I'd leave you sleeping.

WILL: It took me a long time to.. I was reading.

Will moves between the two rooms.

JACK: It's a better morning.

Jack feeds the fire.

WILL: Who were you with last night?

JACK: You make it sound -

WILL: Was it a musician?

JACK: Yes. How did you know?

WILL: Suspected.

Both are laughing.

Mr. Johnson.

JACK: Yes.

WILL: Very talented man, Mr. Johnson.

JACK: I think he thinks the same of you.

WILL: Is it love?

JACK: What's love?

WILL: You should be a playwright.

Will is now in the room.

WILL: (*con't*) When did that start?

JACK: Last year.

WILL: I thought you liked them older.

JACK: I like what I can get. He talks of you. Which may be why he's seeing me.

WILL: He's ambitious.

JACK: He wants to work with you more than anything.

WILL: There'd be plenty for him in this one.

JACK: Wilkins' play. I've been reading it. Or bits and pieces. What do you think?

WILL: He's revised the first half. The rest are scenes, some better written than other, some badly written. It's heavy handed. There's no poetry and little charm.

JACK: Is it actable?

WILL: Just about. There's a progression of scenes. It starts and then it finishes. It's that kind of play. Episodic. He's obsessed by guilt and misery.

JACK: Wilkins?

WILL: Yes, he's a Catholic, Jack. Still shows. There's one good line in it.

JACK: Go on.

WILL: (*reads*) 'Faith, she would serve after a long voyage at sea.' Client in a brothel casting his first eye on the heroine.

JACK: How does she find her way into a brothel?

WILL: Chapter of accidents. A shipwreck deprives the hero, Appolonius, of his wife. The daughter's lost. Years pass. The girl fetches up in a brothel. Then Providence blows him into a harbour. Where his daughter waits for him. It's glorious illusion.

Will gets up.

JACK: It's a miracle play.

WILL: Yes. Marston had a formula for plays: 'Poison the father, marry the son. Butcher the mother.' Or some variety of that. It's not that.

Robinson is feeding the fire.

I think he's going to be a priest.

ROBINSON: Marston?

WILL: Yes. He's had a kind of waking dream which he says was reality itself. He used to write these clever plays but now talks of peace and seems quite troubled.

ROBINSON: I knew a few priests like that. Would you like a drink? It's warm.

WILL: Yes. A vision of perfection. Thinks we will be saved. I knew your friend Johnson's kinswoman.

JACK: Yes.

WILL: Emilia. I've never wanted anything more than her. I would have given up all I had for her.

JACK: Would it have lasted?

WILL: I didn't care. That's the tragedy of it. Does Robert see her still?

JACK: He's mentioned her.

WILL: And me?

JACK: It's been talked of, yes.

WILL: I have an ideal of fidelity, of constancy. Write of it as a saving grace. But worship corruption. I would have broke my bed vows a hundred times to get her. She talked of men's inconstancy. But we were both false from the start, both married to others. Impossible to imagine a tranquil future with her. Do these things matter?

JACK: To you.

WILL: My daughter knew about her, even her name. Has known for years. Edmund had told her.

Will drinks.

JACK: Do you know what a saint is?

WILL: Tell me.

JACK: Someone we don't know well enough.

Will manages a laugh.

JACK: I've never had any great illuminations. God never seemed so far away as when I was in the company of priests. I preferred plays finally.

WILL: Ungodly players. Illusions.

JACK: They're not about nothing.

WILL: There's something in this one.

JACK: Appolonius?

WILL: Young King, then old King. Wanders. Suffers. Finds a kind of harbour. (*sits, looking through*) Though you think, staying in Yarmouth lately, he might have made more of the sea. There's a shipwreck.

JACK: You like shipwrecks.

WILL: Very convenient for the playwright. They blank out our previous existence. And endurance of perils seeming to ease the burden of the mind. Then he's redeemed.

JACK: How?

WILL: By his daughter. Her goodness. Only Wilkins doesn't understand that. That that's what it leads to, that's what it's about. This is the Wilkins' way into a scene. (*reads*) 'So this is Antioch then and this is the Court and here comes Prince Appolonius who I must kill.'

JACK: Clear.

WILL: We're going to have to alter the names. I don't like the names. He's in danger all the way through. Periculum. Pyrocles? Pericles. The pattern of all patience. Have you got your pen?

Jack crosses the room.

WILL: What redeems you, Jack? Love?

JACK: Work.

WILL: Acting?

JACK: Yes. Let me warm my hands first.

WILL: You're a good fellow.

JACK: *(at the fire)* You know what redeems you?

WILL: What?

JACK: This.

WILL: You think? I don't think words save you.

JACK: You think we are put here to be punished? Who condemns you? What separates us from the love of Christ? Ourselves. Your plays will last.

Jack comes to sit.

I don't mean rewards or titles or flattery.

WILL: I don't think this one will. But we might make something of it. Is there enough space for alterations?

Will passes a sheet across.

JACK: Yes.

WILL: Give us a bit of 'Hieronimo,' Jack.

JACK: 'O, eyes, no eyes, but fountains filled with tears.'

WILL: More. Hieronimo's mad again!

JACK: 'O life, no life, but lively form of death.
O world, no world, but mass of public wrongs.' Where from?

WILL: The shipwreck. *(demonstrates)* So. *(gets up. Then leans over by Robinson, reads)* '...action may conveniently the rest convey.. In your imagination hold.' That's fine. Then .. *(begins)* Make it: Enter Pericles, on shipboard.'

Walks, paces. Then dictates, acting -

'The god of this great vast, rebuke these surges..'

The speech (Pericles on shipboard, Act 3 Scene 1) continues, then fades among sounds of the sea and shipwreck.

A song, half heard, looped, somewhere among the effects as the scene shifts.

Perhaps we see the Mediterranean in antique map - ships, islands, monsters.

Sounds of the sea subside.

11. Globe Theatre: inner stage.

We're out of Winter interiors and into the open air. Spring. Music - woodwind - enhances the rough magic of the scene. Perhaps the acting is a little heightened by today's tastes. Burbage is the aged King, woken from dear death; Ostler as his daughter.

OSTLER: My name is Marina.

BURBAGE: O, I am mocked,
And thou by some incensed god sent hither
To make the world to laugh at me.

OSTLER: Patience, good sir,
Or here I'll cease.

BURBAGE: Nay, I'll be patient.
Thou little knowest how thou dost startle me
To call thyself Marina.

OSTLER: The name
Was given me by one that had some power,
My father, and a king.

BURBAGE: How, a king's daughter?
And called Marina?

OSTLER: You said you would believe me,
But not to be a troubler of your peace,
I will end here.

BURBAGE: But are you flesh and blood?
Motion as well? Speak on. Where were you born?
And wherefore called Marina?

WILL: When I was a baby, my mother took me out of Stratford when the sickness was in every house. I've heard her tell the tale often enough it's as if I remember it myself.

SUSAN: It would be odd if you did.

WILL: I do remember waking up next to her. Somewhere. Not the familiar bedroom.

SUSAN: It would be later.

WILL: You think if she'd not been so.. determined. Whole households died. She takes me into the country.

SUSAN: (*overlapping*) Don't talk about that. You were writing?

WILL: When?

SUSAN: I saw you, in the orchard.

WILL: A song. A few lines. Something that came in my head. I can manage a few lines. Pencil. I was mainly asleep. I was dreaming about raspberries.

SUSAN: Raspberries?

WILL: I know. Wrong season.

SUSAN: I don't remember my dreams.

WILL: I try to.

SUSAN: Is it a song for a play?

WILL: I should think so. The music worked well in the last play. A gifted - very gifted - friend of Robinson's. I think the music was better than the play. Not for the first time.

SUSAN: I thought it was a success.

WILL: People loved it, flocked to it. It doesn't mean it was very good. There was no coherent pattern to it - I've not written anything like it. I didn't know how to do it, still don't. No climax or single crisis, just this series of adventures. Battered by events, loses hope but endures.

SUSAN: I thought it was a comedy.

WILL: It wasn't a comedy or a tragedy. But Providence smiles on the hero of the play. He's rescued finally. His sufferings are brought to an end. Finds illumination. Comfort.

SUSAN: How?

WILL: With his daughter. A family re-united.

SUSAN: You wrote the play with somebody.

WILL: Yes, so it's only half mine. We needed something.

SUSAN: The better half. Which half?

WILL: You'll see it later this year, I hope.

SUSAN: Which half?

WILL: The second. Love, loss, restoration, a shipwreck. There's a child, sent out in a boat.

SUSAN: Like Moses.

WILL: Yes. It reminds me of those old Mystery plays of my childhood. Saints' plays. They've gone out.

SUSAN: When grandfather stood you between his legs?

WILL: That was when the players came to town. And then I went off with them.

SUSAN: You were away for a long time when I was a girl.

WILL: I should have stayed.

SUSAN: And done what?

WILL: Oh.. a country lawyer. I could have done that. An orchard. Lives next to where he works. Or near. An orchard for an hour at midday.

SUSAN: (*looking out*) Does it not rain in this town? (*then*) But what would you have dreamed?

End.

