

OMELETTE OF ELSINORE

By Jerold London

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OMELETTE OF ELSINORE



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TO. THE. ONLIE. BEGETTER. OF.
THESE. INSVING. SONNETS.
M^r. W. H. ALL. HAPPINESSE.
AND. THAT. ETERNITIE.
PROMISED.

BY.

OVR. EVER-LIVING. POET.

WISHETH.

THE. WELL-WISHING.

ADVENTVRER. IN.

SETTING.

FORTH.

T. T.

OMELETTE OF ELSINORE

TIME AND PLACE

2024.

Crossland University, Grahamstead, Surrey, England.

CHARACTERS

TIMOTHY (“Ted”) WILLIAMS, American playwright in his late 30s. Stanford University Playwright-in-Residence.

AURORA (“Sunny”) LEIGH, employee of the Crossland University Drama Department in her early 30s.

CAMERON LEIGH, British playwright. Married to Aurora. Head of the Crossland University Drama Department. 40s.

WILLOW NELSON, acting student in the Crossland University Drama Department in her early 20s.

ALASTAIR ROCKWELL (“Major”), British actor in his 60s.

HENRY HARRIS (“Bucket”), British actor in his 40s.

DUNCAN SANDS (“Sandy”), British actor in his early 20s.

GHOST OF OPHELIA, dressed and veiled in white. Unseen and unheard by the other characters.

... in the dialogue indicates either a thoughtful break or an interruption.

SCENE 1

WILLIAMS is walking by himself when he happens to see AURORA (also by herself) picking grass in a small garden outside a Crossland University lecture hall, and putting it in tissue paper.

He approaches her.

WILLIAMS

[*indicating*] For your pet rabbit?

AURORA

Eyeing WILLIAMS.

My cat....
Grass helps her digestion.
This grass does. A bit of it.
At her age.

WILLIAMS

Often?

AURORA

I beg your pardon.

WILLIAMS

Is picking grass here for your cat something you do often?

AURORA

When I feel she needs it.

WILLIAMS

[*beat*] I apologize.
I'm new here.
This is my first day on campus.

AURORA

Well, welcome to Crossland then.
I really must be getting back.

Turns to leave.

WILLIAMS

Maybe you can help me.

AURORA
Turns back toward WILLIAMS.

Help you?

WILLIAMS
Are there any places to get a good meal nearby?

AURORA
There's Monkey's.

WILLIAMS
Monkey's?

AURORA
Monkey's Sore Thumb.
A pub with good pub food.
As pub food goes, you know....
Just across the road from campus.

WILLIAMS
Want to have dinner there with me this evening?

AURORA
[*indignantly*] I happen to be married, Sir! We eat together, thank you.

WILLIAMS
I mean, afterwards.
Fix his dinner, then join me.
Or bring him along.
I don't mind.

AURORA
Who *are* you?

WILLIAMS
I'm an American.

AURORA
Tell me something I don't already know.

WILLIAMS
The name is Williams.
Timothy Williams.
But everyone, of course, calls me "Ted."

AURORA

Is that spost to mean something to me?

WILLIAMS

Ted Williams?

You don't know who Ted Williams was?

AURORA

You?

WILLIAMS

He was a baseball batting legend.

I carry his name, so to speak, but I'm nothing like him.

AURORA

Why are you here? To play cricket?

WILLIAMS

I'm a playwright.

AURORA shows surprise.

WILLIAMS

I write plays.

AURORA

I know what a playwright is.

WILLIAMS

Are you one, too?

AURORA

I happen to be employed in the Drama Department. Here at Crossland.

WILLIAMS

With Cameron Leigh?

You work with Cameron Leigh?

AURORA

[*beat*] I'm married to Cameron Leigh.

WILLIAMS

O! my God!... O! my God!...

[*beat*] Tell me something.

AURORA

What?

WILLIAMS

If I did a pirouette, en pointe, could we start this conversation over?
From the beginning?

AURORA

I must get back to work.

WILLIAMS

I've made a total ass of myself, haven't I?

AURORA

Arse.

WILLIAMS

[*slowly*] Arse.

AURORA

Au revoir, Mr. American Baseball.

**AURORA turns and walks into the hall,
carrying her tissue with the grass she
picked.**

WILLIAMS watches her.

WILLIAMS

[*to himself*] Quelle omelette au fromage!

SCENE 2

WILLIAMS, alone, is sitting at a long table in a rehearsal room in the Crossland University Drama Department hall of Scene 1.

The door to the room opens and CAMERON enters.

WILLIAMS stands.

CAMERON

Mr. Williams?

WILLIAMS

WILLIAMS shows some surprise.

Call me Ted, please. I prefer that.

CAMERON

Very well.

I am Cameron Leigh.

We have corresponded....

[*without warmth*] It is a pleasure to meet you.

They shake hands, formally, then sit. A copy of Shakespeare's works rests on the table by Cameron's right hand.

WILLIAMS

A pleasure to meet you, as well.

CAMERON

You seem surprised.

WILLIAMS

I ... I didn't Google you....

You're more attractive than I thought.

CAMERON

You though I was a man.

Pause.

WILLIAMS

I made a wrong assumption.

CAMERON

Well, we'll go from there....
You'll find I'm a particularly frank, plain spoken woman.
Blunt.
Harsh, some say.
But I am what I am.
Here when I'm here; there when I'm there.
That's the sum of it.

WILLIAMS

I have no problem with that.

CAMERON

Those trivialities.
Your flight from California.
Is your room acceptable?
Did you have a pleasant evening?
Those I leave to my assistant to ask.
I'm a busy person, and particularly busy at the moment.

WILLIAMS

I understand.
Business is business.

CAMERON

Yes. Business is business.
And to set the stage straight:
Our two universities, their respective Drama Departments that is, have agreed to collaborate in creating an original script out of Shakespeare's Hamlet, rough-hew it as we most certainly will.
Is that correct?

WILLIAMS

To expand the presence of Ophelia, whom we feel

CAMERON

It's a pathetic waste of time, as I am sure you know.

WILLIAMS

I sincerely hope not.

CAMERON

Tom Stoppard successfully filed claim on that piece of property fifty-five years ago. There's nothing left for us to unearth.

WILLIAMS

If I may respectfully disagree, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were two inconsequential characters inserted in Shakespeare's play for the mere purpose of moving Hamlet from point A to point B.

They have no pith. No character. No legs of their own, as such.

Less engaging even than the two grave-diggers.

Ophelia, on the other hand, is central to the very meaning of ...

CAMERON

Hardly!

Ophelia was ...

WILLIAMS

A character with agency.

CAMERON

Agency? Ophelia was a weak sister.

A dutiful daughter to a dotard.

A fool for love.

And a hopeless suicide.

WILLIAMS

Well, that's a relief!

I had concerns I might find you not so open-minded toward our project.

CAMERON

I loathe the project; but I respect my job.

Does that about sum it up for you?

WILLIAMS

Where do we begin?

The door to the room opens, and then slams shut, apparently on its own.

CAMERON pays no attention to it.

CAMERON

Begin by telling me where you imagine this moldy creature of ours will start.

WILLIAMS

Pause, while staring at the door.

I picture Ophelia in two different forms. Two different bodies.
The conventional Hamlet character – Polonius’s daughter.
And a ghost.
She’s clad in period dress as the former.
And in modern-day attire as the latter.... Like a university student.

CAMERON

[*beat*] I’m listening.

WILLIAMS

When she’s a ghost, no other character can see her.
Not even Hamlet, who’s otherwise good at seeing the paranormal.
She has total poetic freedom of the stage.
To get right up into actors’ faces.
To mimic their lines.
To speak directly to the audience, if she wants to.

CAMERON

To get naked?

WILLIAMS

If she wants to.

CAMERON

And what’s her purpose in all that?

WILLIAMS

To tell the world a dark secret.

CAMERON

Which is?

WILLIAMS

How she was murdered.

CAMERON

What??!

WILLIAMS

That Hamlet treated her so brutishly, it as much as poisoned her will to live.
In addition to acting crazy half the time.

CAMERON

Oh.
I thought for a moment *you* were going crazy.
I know you're American.

WILLIAMS

Her ghost explains it better:
From the time she was ten or eleven, Ophelia had had a crush on the older Prince.
They virtually lived on the same premises.
He was the glass of fashion.
The mould of form.
The noblest of minds.
The rose of the castle.
Who could compare to him?
What young woman could resist the chance to win his heart?
And she fell for him, with all the trappings of teenage love.
She fell in love with the Prince, Juliet-like, thinking he felt the same, because of the words he sent her.

CAMERON

That vile poem?

WILLIAMS

Young girls and puppy dogs believe the words of a man.

CAMERON

Tell me about it.

Once again the door opens and slams shut.

WILLIAMS

What's with that door?

CAMERON ignores the door AND Williams's question.

CAMERON

But what's the *point*?
Just to dilute attention from the real cause of her collapse?
Which, as every Shakespeare scholar knows, was Hamlet's stabbing Polonius to death through the drapes.

WILLIAMS

Her heart had cracked before her father's death.
It cracked when she gave her love to Hamlet, and he denied loving her.
"I did love you once," he tells her.
"Indeed, my lord. You made me believe so," she replies.
"You should not have believed me.... I loved you not," he retorts.
"I was the more deceived," she answers.

There's no more telling a passage in this jumbled play. No more base deceit and mendacity by any character than this, even if it takes Ophelia time to digest it.

CAMERON

So *that's* your attitude. A Hamlet-hater.

WILLIAMS

Truly, yes.
I hate much of what Hamlet does.
Not everything.
Hell, he kills Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern, and virtually causes Ophelia's demise. What's to love about him?
But I accept as real Hamlet's surprise and confusion at Ophelia's death.
It shows how far he allowed himself to drift from reality.
Neither he, nor his Creator, had any explanation, other than suicide.

**The door opens and AURORA enters,
leaving the door open.**

AURORA

[to CAMERON] Did you call me?

CAMERON

[to AURORA] Not unless you read my mind....
Aurora, this is Mr. Williams.
From the States.
Come to work on the collaboration project I mentioned.

[to WILLIAMS] Mr. Williams, Ted, as I think you prefer, this is my assistant, Aurora.
We call her Sunny.
S.U.N.N.Y.

**WILLIAMS stands and offers his hand to
AURORA, who dutifully shakes it.**

Neither one of them gives any hint that they have already met.

CAMERON stands.

CAMERON

I've heard enough for now.

[to AURORA] You two:

Work out details for a work schedule with the actors.

And let me know.

CAMERON leaves, shutting the door behind her.

Pause, as WILLIAMS and AURORA look at each other.

Then, almost simultaneously, they begin laughing.

WILLIAMS

[to *himself*] Quelle omelette au fromage!

SCENE 3

WILLIAMS, ROCKWELL, HARRIS, SANDS and NELSON are sitting, silently, at the long table in the rehearsal room. In front of WILLIAMS is a stack of scripts. On a chair, a collection of cloaks and crowns.

The door to the room opens and AURORA enters, and sits.

AURORA

Hello, everybody. I'm Aurora Leigh, Cameron's assistant. Most of you know me already. Until Cam gets here, she's asked me to start things moving by having you introduce yourselves to one another. Please, Mr. Williams ...

WILLIAMS

Smiling.

Ted.

AURORA

Yes. Ted. As our guest from America, would you please begin? And then, around the table.

WILLIAMS

To begin with: let me say it's an honor being here in at Crossland. Actually, it's an aspiration of mine come true. And Monkey's Sore Thumb! Whoa! What a great pub Grahamstead has. If I could only make a copy to take back with me to California.

But down to business. I'm Ted Williams, from America. I am Playwright-in-Residence and lecturer at Stanford University in Palo Alto. My goal here is our Drama Department's goal, which is to flesh out a deeper meaning to Ophelia's presence in Shakespeare's Hamlet. And to do that we envision our working together to create a new play, within the framework of Shakespeare's existing play, that gives her greater voice. I have my thoughts. And I am certain you will have yours. Let's share them. Let's explore them. Openly and frankly. And from them my hope is that we produce something novel and stage-worthy.

HARRIS

Have you heard, Mr. Williams ...

WILLIAMS

Puts a hand up, palm out.

“Ted,” please.

HARRIS

All right, if we must....

Have you heard, *Ted*, of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead?

WILLIAMS

Yes, of course, Mr.

HARRIS

Harris. Henry Harris.

WILLIAMS

Of course, Henry, I know Tom Stoppard’s piece. Very well, actually.

HARRIS

If we’re bound to use familiar names ... Ted, mine’s “Bucket”; and there’s no use asking why.

I was “Bucket” before I could walk straight; and “Bucket” I’ve remained.

Some of my uncles claim it was my Dad’s doing, one night, when he’d had too much gin, and said my head looked like a bucket.

The rest of my family profess otherwise.

They say it’s more something I must have done with a bucket, as a toddler.

WILLIAMS

Well, Henry, “Bucket” it is.

HARRIS

Let that be.

The point of my bringing up Stoppard’s play was simply to ask:

Why do it again?

It was the alpha and omega of squeezing a new child out of the belly of the Bard’s masterpiece.

Or has that notion not yet crossed the pond?

WILLIAMS

You’d be surprised what’s crossed the pond, Bucket.

Even old London Bridge, to Arizona, to make way for your present one.

SANDS

London Bridge is falling down, my fair lady.

WILLIAMS

That's my cue, young man, to send the introduction line your way....

SANDS

Oops!

WILLIAMS

Go ahead.

Mr. Shaw, is it?

SANDS

It's not my turn....

Well, anyway, I guess I'm the youngest here.

Next to Willow, that is.

Way too young to be a Bernard Shaw.

Who's probably dead by now. Right?

Anyway, my name's Duncan Sands.

One guess allowed for my nickname.

And ... uh ... I'm not sure why I was chosen for this project.

All this talent here.

But, anyway, here I am.

With one credit to tell:

I was in a production of *The Play That Goes Wrong*, at the Bloomsbury last year.

That's it.

Not including a few parts I had in school at Guildhall.

So, anyway,

Points to NELSON, sitting next to him.

I guess it's your turn.

NELSON

Willow Nelson.

No nickname, thank you. Unlike Sandy, and the rest of you. Just "Willow."

I'm a student here, in the Drama Department.

Theatre's always been the dream in my life.

And music, too.

I've performed publically in a few places.

Schubert's *Ave Maria*, for example.

Which the Head of our Music Department said was sung by me with almost a sixth sense.

Pause.

HARRIS

Back to me?

WILLIAMS

It looks like it, Bucket.

HARRIS

Well, you know me already.

Henry “Bucket” Harris, no less.

And no more.

I was born and raised in the West Midlands.

Warwick, to be exact.

And I spent many a day and night in Stratford, long before joining the Royal Shakespeare Company.

I trained at LAMDA; joined the RSC twenty years ago; and there I am today.

By “today” I mean the here and now.

The actual *today* I’m here in Grahamstead, as you can plainly see.

And as for pubs, you haven’t seen a pub yet, Ted, may I say? until you’ve dined and drank at The One Elm in Stratford.

Or The Coach House, for that matter.

Or The Fleece Inn.

Stratford has it all over Monkey’s, in my opinion.

Whatever that’s worth.

I’m a Shakespearean actor through and through.

If you need a Falstaff, or a Nick Bottom, or King Lear’s fool, or a Malvolio, or a Timon of Athens even, look me up. I’m the man for it.

WILLIAMS

What about Polonius?

HARRIS

That’s one I’ve not played.

But, now that you mention it, I suppose I could.

“Do you see yonder cloud that’s almost in shape of a camel?

[*in Polonius voice*] By the mass, and ‘tis like a camel indeed.

Methinks it is like a weasel.

[*in Polonius voice*] It is backed like a weasel.

Or like a whale?

[*in Polonius voice*] Very like a whale.”

WILLIAMS

Very good.

HARRIS

I know my Shakespeare.

WILLIAMS

[*beat, then to ROCKWELL*] Well, sir, you're at the end.
Last; but I'm sure not least.

ROCKWELL

Alastair Rockwell; and I know my Shakespeare, too.
But in a different way.

WILLIAMS

Hamlet?

ROCKWELL

When I was younger.

WILLIAMS

Lear?

ROCKWELL

A far more satisfying role.

WILLIAMS

Macbeth?

ROCKWELL

Macbeth is as close as you come to the perfect play.

WILLIAMS

And your nickname?

ROCKWELL

Friends call me "Major," if you need to know.

WILLIAMS

Well, Major, we're all friends here. And we all respect service, at whatever front.
So ... let me ask you: What do you make of Macbeth's being childless, yet his wife,
Lady Macbeth telling him:
"I have given suck, and know how tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me."

ROCKWELL

All perfections have their flaws.

WILLIAMS

Precisely.

And ... consider this: The flaw is not in Lady Macbeth.
It's in the playwright.

ROCKWELL

What are you saying?

WILLIAMS

Is the audience to believe that Lady Macbeth imagined the whole thing?
Was beginning to lose touch with reality from the get-go? and her husband knew
she was? Or that the two of them invented a child between them who never
existed?

ROCKWELL

No. Of course not.

WILLIAMS

Then what?

ROCKWELL

The real Lady Macbeth, in Scotland, had been married before, and had a child.
Shakespeare knew that, and simply slipped it into her speech without ever
following up.

WILLIAMS

I'll buy the possibility of that ... if you'll buy the possibility of my thesis.

ROCKWELL

Which is what?

WILLIAMS

That Shakespeare intentionally included the reference to a babe whom Lady
Macbeth had given suck to, and then who totally disappears from the story, to
give a hidden clue no ordinary person would ever consider: That a certain well
known lady in London had had a babe in arms whom she gave away, never again
to be a part of her family story.

ROCKWELL

Why would Shakespeare do anything as bizarre as that?

WILLIAMS

My God! That's one of the mysteries I believe we're here to solve.
Fair is foul, and foul is fair.
Hover through the fog, in a different play.

ROCKWELL

You think Shakespeare's works were coded?

WILLIAMS

I think Shakespeare wrote what he wrote *intentionally*.
If something appears to be a slip of the pen, my first reaction is to ask:
What's the secret behind it?
Not, why did the Bard goof up here?

ROCKWELL

I was in cryptography.

WILLIAMS

You were?

ROCKWELL

In the British Army. Royal Corps of Signals. Back in the eighties.

WILLIAMS

And from there ... how did you come to theatre?

ROCKWELL

After my service I enrolled at Central, in Swiss Cottage, and was lucky enough to
be cast in Hamlet with the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford.
Fortinbras. My first part. Ever.

WILLIAMS

From one army to another, so to speak.

**CAMERON enters the room, closes the
door behind her, and sits.**

Silence.

CAMERON

Go on. Go on.

AURORA

[*beat*] I believe introductions are complete, Cameron.

CAMERON

[to AURORA] So, what's next?

AURORA

[to WILLIAMS] What's next?

WILLIAMS

[to CAMERON] If you allow me, I propose an experiment.

CAMERON

I shouldn't have expected anything less.

WILLIAMS stands and fetches from the chair the cloaks and crowns there, which he places on the table by the scripts.

WILLIAMS

A reading. In period dress. The best I could assemble this early.

It's a place to start.

When the King and Hamlet and the others are first together. You'll recognize it.

King Claudius and the rest have just entered a room of state in the palace, accompanied by an appropriate trumpet march.

I have copies of the script here.

Hands a copy, a cloak, and a crown to ROCKWELL.

Major, you are King Claudius.

Hands a copy and a cloak to HARRIS.

Bucket, you are Polonius. Your day has come.

Hands a copy and a cloak to SANDS.

Sandy ... Prince Hamlet.

Puts on a cloak.

I'll read the short bit Laertes has. And ...

Hands a copy, a cloak, and a crown to CAMERON.

Cameron, will you please read Queen Gertrude?

CAMERON

If you don't mind, I'll let Aurora take the part.

WILLIAMS

[to CAMERON] All right.

Takes the copy, cloak and crown from CAMERON and hands them to AURORA.

[to AURORA] Aurora, you're Queen Gertrude.

[to NELSON] And Willow, you're a ghost. You don't need a costume or a script.

NELSON

I'm the ghost of Hamlet's father?

WILLIAMS

No. The Ghost of Ophelia. She's something new.
You're not to be regarded by the others. Only the audience sees you.
If they can.
And I want you to be crazy. Get into their faces. Make faces.
You can even mimic a line or two, if you wish. Do whatever possesses you.
Just be as annoying, in an unscripted, impromptu way, as possible.
Okay? Can you do that?

NELSON

Stands.

[*to the others*] You heard him: I am not to be regarded.
And if I have offended, think but this, and all is mended:
That we have but slumbered here, when this American did appear.

WILLIAMS

Right... Well, let's begin. Put on your costumes, and find comfortable places.
[*to ROCKELL*] Major, you have entered, with Queen Gertrude, Hamlet,
Polonius, and Laertes.... Begin.

ROCKWELL

[*to WILLIAMS*] Now, Laertes, what's the news with you?
You told us of some suit.

WILLIAMS

My dread lord, your leave and favour to return to France;
From whence though willingly I came to Denmark,
To show my duty in your coronation,
Yet now, I must confess, that duty done,
My thoughts and wishes bend again toward France,
And bow them to your gracious leave and pardon.

ROCKWELL

Have you your father's leave? [*then to HARRIS*] What says Polonius?

HARRIS

He hath, my lord, wrung from me my slow leave

**As HARRIS reads his lines, NELSON
circles round and round, staring at him.**

HARRIS

By laboursome petition; and, at last,
Upon his will I sealed my hard consent.
I do beseech you, give him leave to go.

ROCKWELL

Take thy fair hour, Laertes; time be thine,
And thy best graces spend it at thy will!

**NELSON does a cartwheel as WILLIAMS
sits down.**

ROCKWELL

But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son,
How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

SANDS

Not so, my lord; I am too much in the sun.

AURORA

Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted colour off.
Do not forever with thy veiled lids
Seek for thy noble father in the dust:
Thou knowest 'tis common, all that live must die,
Passing through nature to eternity.

SANDS

Ay, madam, it is common.

AURORA

If it be, why seems it so particular with thee?

SANDS

Seems, madam! nay, it is; I know not seems.

**NELSON comes up to SANDS, looks at
him closely, and then begins kissing his
face.**

SANDS

'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye.
But I have that within which passeth show.

ROCKWELL

'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet,
To give these mourning duties to your father:
But, you must know, your father lost a father;
That father lost, lost his; but to persevere
Is of impious stubbornness; 'tis unmanly grief.

**NELSON sticks her tongue out at
ROCKWELL, and holds her hands up to
the side of her head – thumbs in her
ears, wiggling her fingers at him.**

ROCKWELL

It shows a will most incorrect to heaven.
You are the most immediate to our throne;
Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.

AURORA

Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet:
I pray thee, stay with us; go not to Wittenberg.

SANDS

I shall in all my best obey you, madam.

NELSON

No! No! Don't stay.
Get back to Wittenberg. Enjoy yourself. And save us all a boatload of grief!

ROCKWELL

Why, 'tis a loving and a fair reply. — Madam, come;
This gentle and unforced accord of Hamlet
Sits smiling to my heart. In grace whereof,
No jocund health that Denmark drinks today,
But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell. Come away.

**Everyone sits down except for SANDS
and NELSON.**

SANDS

O, that this too, too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
O God! How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!

SANDS

That it should come to this!
But two months dead!—nay, not so much, not two:
So excellent a king; that was, to this,
Hyperion to a satyr: so loving to my mother,
That he might not betwixt the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!
Must I remember? why, she would hang on him,
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on: And yet, within a month,—
Let me not think on it—Frailty, thy name is Woman!—

NELSON

Got that, Hamlet? Frailty, thy name is Woman.
You'll remember; I promise you.

SANDS

But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue!

SANDS and NELSON sit.

WILLIAMS

Wonderful! Wonderful!

[*to himself*] Quelle omelette au fromage!

SCENE 4

The next day.

**All again enter and sit at the long table
as before.**

ROCKWELL

Your Ghost of Ophelia is a gross monstrosity.

WILLIAMS

And a Good Morning to you, too, Major.... It was an experiment.

HARRIS

Until yesterday I never imagined that ghosts could reek.

WILLIAMS

Woodsmoke....

Some ghosts smell of woodsmoke, I've been told.

HARRIS

More of pig manure, this one, I would say.

CAMERON

As I feared.

ROCKWELL

We're turning Hamlet into a farce.

WILLIAMS

Any constructive suggestions?

Pause.

NELSON

Maybe I got carried away, and overdid it.

WILLIAMS

Not in the least, Willow.

You played your part exactly how I had in mind.

If there's fault in this it's all mine, not yours.

HARRIS

Now what?

The door to the room opens, and then slams shut by itself.

WILLIAMS

What is it? With that door?

CAMERON

Drafts.

WILLIAMS

[*beat*] Let's skip ahead to some of Ophelia's key scenes, without her ghost.

WILLIAMS hands scripts to ROCKWELL, HARRIS, SANDS, AURORA and NELSON.

NELSON immediately studies her script, page by page.

WILLIAMS

No need to stand up. We'll read sitting in our chairs, this time. Sandy again is Hamlet. Bucket, Polonius. Major, the King, as always. Aurora, Queen Gertrude. Willow, Ophelia now ... not her ghost. And I'll read Laertes.

Polonius, at home, has just instructed his servant Reynaldo to deliver some money to Laertes in France; but first to spy out what Laertes has been doing there; and, if necessary to gain the confidence of those he's asking, Reynaldo may forge lies about Laertes to ferret out the truth, but none *too serious*.... Talk about odor, Shakespeare's Denmark stinks of mendacity.

ROCKWELL

Polonius ... and Claudius, of course.

SANDS

Hamlet, as well.

NELSON

But not the ghost.
Ghosts will speak no lies.

The door to the room opens; the GHOST OF OPHELIA enters with a bag; and the door slams shut. No one notices the GHOST.

WILLIAMS

Reynaldo leaves on his errand, and Ophelia rushes in to her father.

Points to HARRIS.

HARRIS

[*beat*] How now, Ophelia, what's the matter?

NELSON

Delivering her lines from pure memory throughout the Scene.

Alas, my lord, I have been so affrighted!

HARRIS

With what, in the name of Heaven?

NELSON

My lord, as I was sewing in my chamber,
Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced,
No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,
Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle,
Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
And with a look so piteous in purport,
He comes before me.

HARRIS

Mad for thy love?

NELSON

My lord, I do not know, but truly I do fear it.

HARRIS

What said he?

NELSON

He took me by the wrist and held me hard.
Then goes he to the length of all his arm,
And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow,
He falls to such perusal of my face
As he would draw it. Long stayed he so.
At last, a little shaking of mine arm,
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
He raised a sigh so piteous and profound
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk and end his being.

**The GHOST OF OPHELIA puts the bag
over her head.**

NELSON

That done, he lets me go,
And, with his head over his shoulder turned,
He seemed to find his way without his eyes,
For out of doors he went without their help
And to the last bended their light on me.

HARRIS

Come, go with me. I will go seek the King.

WILLIAMS

Raises a hand, for the reading to stop.

[*beat*] Well, what do you think?

AURORA

What are we supposed to think? It's Shakespeare.
But, Willow, how did you do that?
You spoke all your lines from memory. Have you played Ophelia before?

NELSON

No, never. But it's nothing. Just a thing I have.

WILLIAMS

It's positively remarkable. Hardly "nothing."
I've never seen a photographic memory like yours....
Maybe it's called an eidetic memory nowadays, I don't know.
But back to Ophelia: Polonius engages Hamlet in a private conversation about
her.

Points to SANDS.

SANDS

[*to HARRIS*] Have you a daughter?

HARRIS

I have, my lord.

SANDS

Let her not walk in the sun:
Conception is a blessing; but not as your daughter may conceive.
Friend, look to it.

The GHOST OF OPHELIA takes the bag off her head and gives SANDS a wicked stare.

WILLIAMS

Why would Hamlet want to impugn Ophelia's reputation?
Was it jealousy?

NELSON

Because he's a nasty git....
Not you, Sandy.

AURORA

Because, maybe, he was betrayed by a woman before.

WILLIAMS

Or thought he was.

ROCKWELL

It's his mother. He sees her behavior, and slut-shames Ophelia in her place.

WILLIAMS

There, Major, I think you have something.

CAMERON

Hamlet's a misogynist.

NELSON

Hamlet's a nasty, sullen git who suspects all women's chastity.

HARRIS

Suspecting a woman's chastity was a common theme back in the day.

ROCKWELL

Then *and* now.

NELSON

If I were chaste, and did nothing to suggest otherwise, what am I supposed to do?

WILLIAMS

Sleep with Hamlet, I suppose, and let him prove your chastity by breaking it.

AURORA

How sinister is that kind of circular male reasoning?

WILLIAMS

So there you have it. The world of women before MeToo.

ROCKWELL

At least it's better than Desdemona.

CAMERON

Not much better.

WILLIAMS

Let's go on....

Sometime after his chat with Hamlet, Polonius sends Ophelia herself to speak with Hamlet, in a place where the old man can eavesdrop on their conversation.

WILLIAMS points to SANDS. NELSON delivers all of her lines from memory.

SANDS

The fair Ophelia. – Nymph, in thy orisons be all my sins remembered.

NELSON

Good my lord.

How does your honour for this many a day?

SANDS

I humbly thank you: well, well, well.

NELSON

My lord, I have remembrances of yours

That I have longed long to re-deliver.

I pray you, now receive them.

SANDS

No, not I.

I never gave you aught.

NELSON

My honoured lord, you know right well you did;

And, with them, words of so sweet breath composed

As made the things more rich: their perfume lost.

Take these again; for to the noble mind

Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.

There, my lord.

SANDS

Ha, ha! Are you honest?

NELSON

My lord?

SANDS

Are you fair?

NELSON

What means your lordship?

SANDS

That if you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty.

NELSON

Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with honesty?

SANDS

Ay, truly; for the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness: this was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof. I did love you once.

NELSON

Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

SANDS

You should not have believed me; for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it: I loved you not.

NELSON

[beat, then slowly] I was the more deceived.

SANDS

Get thee to a nunnery.

WILLIAMS

Puts up a hand for them to stop.

Well done, you two. Now tell me, why has Hamlet seduced Ophelia into believing he loves her, only to reject her like this? It's brutal.

SANDS

[beat] He foresees the future? And repents the past?

WILLIAMS

Possibly.

NELSON

To save her life. Although she might go blind in there.

CAMERON

Like I said before: He's a misogynist.

WILLIAMS

Not just women. Hamlet seems to dislike half the people he knows in Denmark....
But let's proceed.

His players put on the play for the King and the court.

The Murder of Gonzago. A twin to the poisoning of Hamlet's father.

And, as Hamlet prophesied, the play was the thing that caught the conscience of King Claudius; and, at the same time, seemed to exonerate Gertrude from knowing about the poisoning.

The Queen retires to her chambers, and Polonius hides himself there behind some drapes, to spy on Hamlet's and his mother's private conversation to come.

We all know what happened.

Hamlet and his mother have words. She cries out. Polonius cries out.

And Hamlet spears him with his sword through the drapes, sight unseen.

The scene ends with Hamlet telling his mother to "assume a virtue" and not sleep with Claudius anymore. Then Hamlet drags the old man's body out.

SANDS

Assume a "virtue" is like what? Assume a headache?

NELSON

No, Sandy, you clownster! It means what it says. In the Biblical sense.

Not have sex with him....

But, Ted, when Ophelia is told about Polonius, is that when she loses her mind?

WILLIAMS

I believe Shakespeare is implying as much. But ...

NELSON

Too quickly, you think?

WILLIAMS

There are only two acts left; and Shakespeare has to get Hamlet sent to England, and back; Laertes returned from France; and seven surviving characters, including Hamlet and Ophelia, killed off. How much time is left for bereavement?

NELSON

No much time for Hamlet to grieve Ophelia.

AURORA

That aside, are you suspecting Shakespeare had another reason for her insanity?

WILLIAMS

Absolutely.

But I've reached a roadblock here.

Help me examine what's left of Ophelia's mind.

Willow, will you and Aurora please get us started?

Gertrude is in a room in the castle, and Ophelia enters.

Claudius will join them later.

**NELSON leaves her seat and moves
freely about the room, approaching the
others, as appropriate to the lines.**

NELSON

Where is the beauteous majesty of Denmark?

AURORA

How now, Ophelia!

NELSON

How should I your true love know

From another one?

By his cockle hat and staff,

And his sandal shoon.

AURORA

Alas, sweet lady, what imports this song?

NELSON

Say you?

Nay, pray you, mark.

He is dead and gone, lady,

He is dead and gone;

At his head a grass-green turf,

At his heels a stone.

AURORA

Nay, but, Ophelia, –

NELSON

Pray you, mark.
White his shroud as the mountain snow,
Larded with sweet flowers,
Which bewept to the grave did go
With true-love showers.

WILLIAMS

Claudius has entered the room and heard Ophelia.

ROCKWELL

How do you, pretty lady?

NELSON

[*eye-to-eye*] Well. God yield you! They say the owl was a baker's daughter. Lord,
we know what we are, but know not what we may be. God be at your table!

ROCKWELL

Conceit upon her father.

NELSON

Pray you, let's have no words of this; but when they ask you what it means, say
you this: Tomorrow is Saint Valentine's day, All in the morning betime,
And I a maid at your window,
To be your Valentine.
Then up he rose, and donned his clothes,
And dugged the chamber-door;
Let in the maid, that out a maid
Never departed more.

ROCKWELL

Pretty Ophelia!

NELSON

Indeed, la, without an oath, I'll make an end on it:
By Gis and by Saint Charity,
Alack, and fie for shame!
Young men will do it, if they come to it;
By cock, they are to blame.
Quoth she, before you tumbled me,
You promised me to wed.
So would I have done, by yonder sun,
An thou hadst not come to my bed.

ROCKWELL

How long hath she been thus?

NELSON

I hope all will be well. We must be patient: but I cannot choose but weep, to think they should lay him in the cold ground.

My brother shall know of it: and so I thank you for your good counsel.

Come, my coach!

Good night, ladies; good night, sweet ladies; good night, good night.

Walks to the back of the room.

WILLIAMS

Ophelia exits, having dropped veiled implications of her and Hamlet's doing the naughty....

By the way, very well done, Willow. Very well done. Your memory is impeccable. Anyway, what do all of you make of that scene so far?

AURORA

It's Shakespeare, Man.

CAMERON gives AURORA a harsh look.

HARRIS

It's not making much sense, is it?

Why would Hamlet have chastised Ophelia for yielding to him?

"Get thee to a nunnery" and all that. When he promised her he loved her?

And why did he warn Polonius to keep Ophelia away from Claudius?...

Unless Hamlet was indeed a bit mad himself....

Or mad with jealousy.

WILLIAMS

To me there's no doubt that during the few months after Hamlet's return from Wittenberg he was not his former self.

Moody, to be sure. But not vindictive before.

Possibly that helps explain why he could have taken advantage of Ophelia.

And why he accuses himself of offenses so rank that his mother should never have born him.

And why, from his first soliloquy, he is already longing for death, even *before* encountering the ghost, who merely gives all the more reason for Hamlet's feelings of impotence and guilt.

Hamlet, pure and simple, is overwhelmed with guilt. And inertia.

And if that explains his paralysis of action, it'll have to be enough.

WILLIAMS

Anyway, back to Act Four.

Claudius and Gertrude are together in the same room when Laertes, returning in anger from France, barges his way in, demanding to know what's happened to his father.

At first he seems to blame Claudius.

But Gertrude puts her arms around the boy; and she and Claudius are able to calm him down, and convince him that the king had nothing to do with his father's death.

At that moment Ophelia reenters the room.

NELSON walks back to the table.

NELSON

They bore him barefaced on the bier;
Hey no nonny, nonny, hey nonny;
And on his grave rained many a tear, –
Fare you well, my dove!

WILLIAMS

[*reading from script*] Hadst thou thy wits, and didst persuade revenge,
It could not move thus.

NELSON

You must sing,
Down a-down,
An you call him a-down-a.

O, how the wheel becomes it!
It is the false steward, that stole his master's daughter.

WILLIAMS

[*reading from script*] This nothing's more than matter.

NELSON

Hands out imaginary sprigs and flowers.

There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray, love, remember: and there is pansies, that's for thoughts.

WILLIAMS

[*reading from script*] A document in madness, thoughts and remembrance fitted.

NELSON

There's fennel for you, and columbines; there's rue for you; and here's some for me: we may call it herb-grace o' Sundays; O, you must wear your rue with a difference. There's a daisy; I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died: they say he made a good end, –
For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy.

WILLIAMS

[*reading from script*] Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself,
She turns to favour and to prettiness.

NELSON

And will he not come again?
And will he not come again?
No, no, he is dead:
Go to thy death-bed:
He never will come again.

His beard was as white as snow,
All flaxen was his poll:
He is gone, he is gone,
And we cast away moan:
God have mercy on his soul!

And of all Christian souls, I pray God – God be with ye.

WILLIAMS

It's over. Those are Ophelia's last lines in the play.

Pause, as NELSON sits back in her seat.

NELSON

Sad.

WILLIAMS

Do you think she's mad, Willow?

NELSON

[*pause*] I'm afraid I'm too young to know.
But, she *is bleeding* two griefs in one.

WILLIAMS

Maybe three.

HARRIS

What third?

WILLIAMS

Most of the plants and flowers Ophelia mentions were long known as medications to induce a miscarriage.

Particularly rosemary ... fennel ... rue ... pansies ... and violets.

AURORA

Ophelia imagined she might be pregnant?!

Or that she was drugged?

WILLIAMS

Things would add to a more reasonable sum, if she thought she were pregnant.

HARRIS

Pregnant, out of wedlock, with no protection left.

Hamlet's advice to get to a nunnery is beginning to make more sense.

NELSON

Why wouldn't Prince Hamlet just marry me?...

Er. I mean Ophelia.

WILLIAMS

It's a play.

And the playwright could have had a dozen different reasons why not.

But the obvious one is:

Hamlet marries Ophelia, and no mass killings in Act Five.

Yet, at the time his head was wrapped up in revenging his father's murder.

Maybe afterwards.

If there had been an afterwards for the two of them.

We have one final look at this unfortunate girl.

When Queen Gertrude recounts her tragic drowning at the very end of Act Four.

WILLIAMS points at Aurora.

AURORA

[reads from script] One woe doth tread upon another's heel,

So fast they follow: Your sister's drowned, Laertes.

WILLIAMS

[reads from script] Drowned! O, where?

AURORA

[*reads from script*] There is a willow grows aslant a brook,
That shows his hoary leaves in the glassy stream;
There, with fantastic garlands did she make
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them.
There, on the pendant boughs her coronet weeds
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke;
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,
And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up,
Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds,
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and endued
Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.... She drowned.

WILLIAMS

Not to belabor the matter, but there is one last wrinkle to consider:
When Hamlet returns from his fateful pirate voyage, watches the funeral
procession, realizes Ophelia is dead, leaps into the grave hole, and then comes
out:

Points at SANDS.

SANDS

[*reads from script*] I loved Ophelia; forty thousand brothers
Could not, with all their quantity of love, make up my sum.

WILLIAMS

That's enough for today. See you here tomorrow.
And you have your assignments.

**All, save WILLIAMS and the GHOST OF
OPHELIA pick up their things and exit.**

WILLIAMS

Quelle omelette au fromage!

SCENE 5

The next day.

All again enter and sit at the long table as before.

NELSON and SANDS enter carrying various notes and papers with them.

WILLIAMS

Good morning everyone.

Well, I can see everybody's eager to get down to it.

So ... Willow, and Sandy, tell us what you've learned.

SANDS

First of all, as I suppose everybody knows, Hamlet is generally considered Shakespeare's most powerful and influential work.

Many date it between 1599 and 1601.

But that's tentative, anyway, because there's no hard proof when any of his plays were actually written.

Some were probably put down years before their performance or publication.

All's Well That Ends Well, Coriolanus, and Timon of Athens, for example anyway, never appeared at all, until published in the First Folio in 1623, long after Shakespeare's death.

And some scholars suspect that Hamlet itself was started, written and revised in pieces over ten to fifteen years before its first performance.... uh

NELSON

[*beat*] That may explain, like we talked about, Sandy, why the play goes off in so many weird directions. Not just Hamlet's emotional roller coaster.

Starting with an immature, even maladjusted university student in Act One, brooding over his mother's remarriage following his father's death,

philosophizing about suicide, to an impulsive, vengeful, misanthrope, ready and able to bring on manslaughter, to a friendly combatant asking Laertes' forgiveness in Act Five, to his dying words, beseeching Horatio to clear his name. Not to mention his many awful mood swings toward Ophelia.

Added up, they're enough to show that this story is not one off the shelf.

No. This play's unique.

And it's primarily unique, we believe, because so many of its characters are based on the personalities and traits of a certain family living in London whom Shakespeare must have known.

CAMERON

Where are you getting that from, Young Lady?

NELSON

Actually, from a number of different places.

Picking up one of the papers in front of her on the table.

George French, back in 1869, in his book on Shakespeare, wrote that Polonius, Laertes, and Ophelia are ...

[reading] “are supposed to stand for Queen Elizabeth’s celebrated Lord High Treasurer Sir William Cecil, Lord Burghley, his second son Robert Cecil and his daughter Anne Cecil.”

About the famous precepts which Lord Burghley gave his son Robert for his travels abroad George French says:

Looks for another page, and then reads:

“in some of these the identity of language with that of Polonius is so close that Shakspeare could not have hit upon it unless he had been acquainted with Burghley’s parental advice to Robert Cecil.”

Unsuccessfully looks for another note:

One of Lord Burghley’s sons, but I don’t remember which, went to Elsinore and wrote for his father a personal account of his experiences there, which was not made public till years after Shakespeare’s death. In it he mentions meeting a true life Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, being in great halls divided up by drapes, and witnessing cannons being fired at each round of the King’s drinks...

Plus, there was Lord Burghley’s known habit for rambling on and on, in ponderous style, taking about things the way Polonius does.

SANDS

And in one place I read that a member of the Burghley household had been on a ship that was hijacked by pirates, who left him half naked on the coast of England. Just the same way Hamlet’s ship was hijacked by pirates on the way to England, and he was left half naked on the coast of Denmark.

NELSON

Too many coincidences to be a coincidence.

WILLIAMS

And what does that add up to?

NELSON

That Hamlet, the play, was a mixed bag:

A blend of the story of the Burghley family combined with a murder and revenge mystery.

The door to the room opens; the GHOST OF OPHELIA enters; and the door slams shut. No one notices the GHOST.

WILLIAMS

Anybody else, any comments?

AURORA

Why?...

I don't understand why Shakespeare, if he even knew anything about the private lives of nobility, which he probably didn't at all....

Why he would risk everything to publish a play like Hamlet.

Playwrights could get in trouble back then, couldn't they? for writing things that put the nobility in a bad light?

WILLIAMS

You bet your ... [*catching himself*] ast pound they could.

Christopher Marlowe got a dagger in his eye.

And Ben Jonson was tortured in prison for a play *he* wrote.

AURORA

Then why?

WILLIAMS

I can't tell you that. All I can say is:

How could someone make all that up out of thin air?

CAMERON

Someone like Shakespeare could, because Shakespeare had one of the greatest dramatic imaginations of all time.

WILLIAMS

Granted.

But that didn't give him intimate knowledge of what was going on in Court, or behind the closed doors of Lords and Ladies.

You don't create things like that, as you might a poem, or a piano sonata.

CAMERON

You and I are never going to agree.

And I don't at all like what you're putting Sands and Nelson up to.

WILLIAMS

[*beat*] Bucket.... Did you find anything?

HARRIS

Something from Hamlet.

WILLIAMS

Go ahead.

HARRIS

Here, Sandy, come stand by me.

They stand together, facing each other.

[reads] Yet here, Laertes? Aboard, aboard, for shame.
The wind sits in the shoulder of your sail,
And you are stayed for. There, my blessing with you.
And these few precepts in thy memory
Look thou character. Give thy thoughts no tongue,
Nor any unproportioned thought his act.
Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar.
Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of steel;
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment
Of each new-hatched, unfledged comrade. Beware
Of entrance to a quarrel; but being in,
Bear it that the opposed may beware of thee.
Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice:
Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgement.
Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
But not expressed in fancy; rich, not gaudy:
For the apparel oft proclaims the man;
And they in France of the best rank and station
Are most select and generous chief in that.
Neither a borrower nor a lender be:
For loan oft loses both itself and friend;
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
This above all: to thine own self be true;
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.
Farewell: my blessing season this in thee.

WILLIAMS

Polonius, of course. His famous precepts speech.

HARRIS

Indeed.... And above all: to thine own self be true.

HARRIS and SANDS retake their seats.

WILLIAMS

Major? Anything for the good of the cause?

ROCKWELL

Not from Hamlet....

But you didn't say you wanted it to be.

WILLIAMS

You're right.

I certainly did not limit choices to Hamlet.

ROCKWELL

Stands.

[*reads*] Behold, I have a weapon.

A better never did itself sustain

Upon a soldier's thigh: I have seen the day

That with this little arm and this good sword

I have made my way through more impediments

Than twenty times your stop. But, O vain boast!

Who can control his fate? 'Tis not so now.

Be not afraid, though you do see me weaponed.

Here is my journey's end, here is my butt,

And very sea-mark of my utmost sail.

Do you go back dismayed? 'Tis a lost fear.

Man but a rush against Othello's breast,

And he retires. Where should Othello go?

Now, how dost thou look now? O ill-starred wench,

Pale as thy smock, when we shall meet at compt,

This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven,

And fiends will snatch at it. Cold, cold, my girl!

Even like thy chastity.

O cursed, cursed slave! Whip me, ye devils,

From the possession of this heavenly sight!

Blow me about in winds, roast me in sulphur!

Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!

O Desdemona! Dead, Desdemona! dead! Oh! Oh!

WILLIAMS

[*beat*] Othello.

After smothering his wife. Who was guiltless.

HARRIS

Not Hamlet.
But Ophelia's cousin in it.

WILLIAMS

How many plays did Shakespeare write, with remorse in them for wrongfully suspecting a woman of infidelity?

SANDS

Hamlet and Othello, obviously.

NELSON

The Winter's Tale.

ROCKWELL

Cymbeline.

AURORA

Much Ado About Nothing.

CAMERON

You keep beating this bush, Mister America, and something unpleasant is going to fly out in your face.
I don't like or agree with what you're doing at all.

WILLIAMS

That's it for today, everybody.
Thanks for all the good work.
But enough's enough.
Have a pleasant weekend.
See you on Monday.

**All, save WILLIAMS and the GHOST OF
OPHELIA exit.**

WILLIAMS

Quelle omelette au fromage!

SCENE 6

That evening.

SANDS and NELSON have just finished dinner at Monkey's.

Their empty plates, with knives and forks on them, are on the table.

NELSON, initially, is sitting alone.

SANDS comes back with two fresh drinks, one for each of them.

NELSON

Thank you....
You didn't need to do that.

SANDS

My pleasure.

They each take a drink.

SANDS

Can I be honest with you, Willow?

NELSON

I should hope so.

SANDS

Hamlet is a complete mishmash to me.

NELSON

Maybe it's not just to you. What bothers you the most?

SANDS

The most? How people in theatre all rave, how great it is; and it's not great to me.

NELSON

The Emperor's New Clothes.

SANDS

What?

NELSON

The Emperor's New Clothes is one of Hans Christian Andersen's folktales. It's about a king who spends a fortune on the newest fashion in clothes. One day two con men get into the castle, pretending to be weavers with magical cloth that can be seen only by intelligent people. They persuade him to buy a new royal gown out of this magical material. And along the way the king's most trusted advisors vow that they see what's being sewn, when, of course, they can't. So the king pretends as well that he can see the gown, so as not to appear stupid. On the big day the king wears his new gown in public. The townsfolk uncomfortably pretend, each one, to see the clothes until

SANDS

Until what?

NELSON

I can't believe you've never heard this.

SANDS

Well, I haven't.
Tell me.

NELSON

A child finally blurts out, "The king is naked."
Then everyone knows.
Except for the king, who continues walking along proudly ... in the buff.

SANDS

Clever.

NELSON

Simple. So simple a child can see it.

SANDS

See what? That even kings can be naked anyway?

NELSON

That a person should believe what they honestly believe, even if it means they have to believe it all alone.

SANDS

That would be scary.

NELSON

Like looking at that fakey, egghead engraving of what was supposed to be Shakespeare in the First Folio. It looks like a mask over his head. Scary. But when I showed it to my little brother, he just laughed at it. However ...

SANDS

[*beat*] However, what?

NELSON

If people you respect say they see something different, keep an open mind. That's all.

The GHOST OF OPHELIA enters and sits at the table next to them, unnoticed.

NELSON and SANDS each take a drink, and a pause.

NELSON

Do you feel something in here?

SANDS

Like what?

NELSON

I don't know. I just noticed it. Like a draft or something in Monkey's. Or like a rainbow. Oh, never mind. It's just crazy me.

[*beat*] Let me ask you something else.

SANDS

Okay.

NELSON

Do you think Ted Williams is attractive?

SANDS

The American?

NELSON

Yes.
The American playwright.
We see every weekday.

SANDS

Attractive to whom? To you?

NELSON

Well, I think he's attractive. Some.
And I suspect something about him, too.

SANDS

What?

NELSON

That he's interested in Aurora Leigh.

SANDS

To Sunny? Isn't she married?

NELSON

Sort of.

SANDS

What does that mean?

NELSON

She's married to Cameron Leigh.

SANDS

O my God! I didn't know that.

NELSON

Leigh? And Leigh?

SANDS

That doesn't mean they're married.
They could be sisters, for all I know anyway.

NELSON

Well they're married.

SANDS

So it's kind of a double entendre.
Married. Both female.
With a man sticking his nose in, under the tent.
And an American to boot....
So, what makes you think he's interested in her anyway?

NELSON

Don't you see how he looks at her?

SANDS

No.

NELSON

Well, he does.

SANDS

He looks at all of us.

NELSON

Not the same way he looks at Sunny.

They drink quietly for a while.

SANDS

I like him.

NELSON

I do, too. But why do you like him?

SANDS

Because I think he thinks the same about Hamlet.

NELSON

You're probably right.

He certainly seems critical of the way women are treated in Elsinore.

SANDS

You think he's a feminist?

NELSON

Do you really want to know what I think about him?

SANDS

Of course I do.

NELSON

I think he's been hurt. By a woman.

Maybe because he hurt her.

And he's angry, what he did.

But also angry with her.

SANDS

What makes you think that?

NELSON

I don't know. I just know.

SANDS

Like you knew Ophelia's lines by heart, just by looking at them once?
Like that?

NELSON

I've had things in my head I can't explain.
Ever since I was a child

SANDS

What do you mean?

NELSON

I seem to know things....
Like, when I was seven, and in school.
I'd plan out for the next week everything I would wear.
One time I told my parents I was wearing black the next Thursday and Friday.
They said, "No, you're not. You don't wear black to school."
But I did....
Because my uncle died unexpectedly the next week; and I wore black.
And they asked me how I knew; but I just didn't know.

SANDS

You can see the future?

NELSON

Not exactly the future.
Just things I work out that maybe haven't happened yet.

SANDS

For example.

NELSON

Smoking.
You know those virtual reality headset devices?

SANDS

Yes.

NELSON

Someday people will be able to use them to smoke, without actually having to smoke.

SANDS

What an amazing gift.

NELSON

Not always.

When I was in school the other kids used to tease me, and make fun of it.

They called me "Willow the Witch."

Until I stopped talking about it, and pretended it all went away.

But there was something else.

SANDS

What?

NELSON

I used to have to put everything in order.

Everything. In its proper place.

Symmetrically.

It drove my parents and brother crazy.

I'd walk into a room, and start rearranging anything that had been moved.

To get things perfectly where they were before.

Or I'd go crazy.

SANDS

Are you still that way?

NELSON

No. And I'll tell you why.

My parents had a friend whose right hand was clenched tight.

In a ball.

They told me he had grasped an electric wire once, and it did that to his muscles.

I was afraid of him because of that.

But he was a fine person.

And I knew it.

And I said to myself: This has to stop. Here.

So I closed the eyes of my fear and walked right up to him.

Held out my right hand, and shook his paralyzed hand.

He seemed surprised at first, but understood what I was doing.

He was a kind man. To the core. And I never had to make things perfect again.

SANDS

You are amazing.... Was his hand healed?

NELSON

No!!

SANDS

Tell me then

NELSON

[beat] Tell you what?

SANDS

You think a lot, don't you?...

I mean, you let your imagination run loose in the woods, don't you?

NELSON

If that means that I'm a material girl in a rain forest, I guess you're right.

SANDS

You're a poet.

NELSON

I am what I am.

Wanting to be an actor. A Shakespearean actor.

And understand Shakespeare. The man behind the veil of his plays and poetry.

But there's a problem.

SANDS

Which is ...?

NELSON

Cameron Leigh and Williams are both noted Shakespeareans, and she's peeved with him.

SANDS

You can tell?

NELSON

How she looks at him? How she talks to him?

Isn't it obvious?

SANDS

You think she knows?

NELSON

About his liking her wife? I doubt it.
With her, it's all Shakespeare.
She almost seems to worship the man.

SANDS

I don't see why that's a problem.
Williams likes Shakespeare, too.
Or else he wouldn't be here.

NELSON

There's something.
Cameron Leigh suspects something.
And I don't know what it is yet.
But it's about Shakespeare.

SANDS

Willow!
Shakespeare's dead.
Whatever he was or did, it's done anyway.

NELSON

There's a ghost hidden in Shakespeare.
Like there was in Hamlet.

SANDS

There's no more a ghost in Shakespeare than there's a ghost in this room.

NELSON laughs.

SANDS

Willow? Do you see anything about me other people don't see?

NELSON

[*pause*] Yes.
[*beat*] You like men.

SANDS

It's not that I don't like women.
But is it that obvious?

NELSON

Not at all.

SANDS

How could you tell?

NELSON

I told you.

There are things in my mind my mind knows and I don't know how.
It just does.

SANDS

I like women a lot.

It's just that men are more ...

How can I say this and not offend you?

Because I certainly don't want to do that.

NELSON

Just say it. It won't offend me. I promise.

SANDS

It's that men are more complete.

WILLIAMS enters, reading a book and carrying a mug of beer.

Almost absent-mindedly, he sets his beer down and sits at the table where the GHOST OF OPHELIA is sitting across from him, not noticing her and likewise not at first noticing SANDS or NELSON.

Pause, as WILLIAMS reads.

NELSON

Mr. Williams?

WILLIAMS

Looks up, somewhat startled.

Oh, Willow. Hello. And Sandy....

And remember ... I'm called Ted.

NELSON

Ted ...?

WILLIAMS

Yes?

NELSON

Is there a ghost in Shakespeare?

WILLIAMS

Looks somewhat confused.

Shakespeare?...

I'm sorry: To me that name means three quite different things.

So, I'm going to assume you don't mean number three:

The plays themselves, generally attributed to a William Shakespeare.

Because we both know that we both know that there's a ghost in Hamlet, and a ghost in Macbeth.

So, I guess you mean

NELSON

[*beat*] I mean in Shakespeare himself. The person.

WILLIAMS

Is there a ghost in Shakespeare himself?...

Not that I know of myself; but it's an interesting way of putting it.

Because there's definitely a shadow over him.

NELSON

I knew it! I knew it!... What *is* the shadow?

WILLIAMS

In Stratford-upon-Avon there once was a man named William Shaxspere.

He left no letters, no books, no manuscripts, no writings of any sort except for a will and six scrawled signatures, no two of which spelled his name the same way, *or* spelled it "Shakespeare."

His parents were both illiterate, as were his children.

So how could a complete commoner, growing up in an illiterate household, in what was then an obscure country town, who never went to university, never travelled abroad, whose children couldn't write, who left no compositions at his death, except for a will giving his second best bed to his wife? How could such a man possibly have produced what Shakespeare wrote?...

Sure, anyone can be born with genius; but not just anyone could get away telling the Earl of Southampton to get married, as Shakespeare does in his Sonnets. And, if in any place outside Denmark or Scotland there's a ghost, it's in those sonnets.

NELSON

I'm sorry. Are you suggesting that Shakespeare is not the person we all know was Shakespeare?

WILLIAMS

Eighty percent of the literate world knows Shaxspere of Stratford was William Shakespeare, the great Bard.
Buildings in Stratford stand as monuments to that knowledge.
Millions of pounds a year attest to the fact.
And Cameron Leigh knows it.
What more do you want?

NELSON

I knew it! I just knew it!
That's why Cameron Leigh is peeved.

SANDS

Shhh! [*subtly indicating WILLIAMS*]

NELSON

Oh!

In silence NELSON and SANDS continue sitting at their table and drinking, while WILLIAMS goes on reading and drinking his beer.

After a minute or so they stand.

NELSON

Have a nice weekend, Ted.

WILLIAMS looks up.

WILLIAMS

You as well, Willow
And you, too, Sandy.

SANDS

See you Monday, Sir.

NELSON and SANDS exit.

WILLIAMS

[*to himself*] Quelle omelette au fromage!

SCENE 7

WILLIAMS and the GHOST OF OPHELIA are still at the table they were occupying at the end of Scene 6.

WILLIAMS is still drinking a beer and reading as AURORA enters.

They see each other.

WILLIAMS stands and AURORA comes over to his table.

WILLIAMS

Out this evening?
On your own?

AURORA

Cameron's in Manchester. On business.

WILLIAMS

For the weekend?

AURORA

Yes.

WILLIAMS

Well, have a seat [*indicating*] and join me.

AURORA

That seat's taken.

WILLIAMS

By whom?

AURORA

By Norman.
He's a regular at Monkey's. Every Friday night.
I thought you knew this place.

WILLIAMS

I do. I guess I never noticed.
When does he come in?

AURORA

Any moment now.

WILLIAMS moves his book and drink to the adjacent table (where NELSON and SANDS were sitting in Scene 6).

WILLIAMS

Here. Have a seat with me here.

AURORA

Do you think that's wise?

WILLIAMS

The Turtle's loyal breast
To eternity doth rest
Leaving no posterity.

AURORA

What's that from?

WILLIAMS

Shakespeare.

AURORA

Shakespeare?
I don't recognize it.

WILLIAMS

His Phoenix and the Turtle.

AURORA

Never read it.

WILLIAMS

You will....
But Hell yes, have a seat.
It's as wise as anything else we can do in this crazy world.

AURORA sits as the GHOST OF OPHELIA watches them.

WILLIAMS

What a pleasant surprise, for a Friday night in Grahamstead!

AURORA

She's pretty mad at you, you know.

WILLIAMS

I took a chance, coming here,
It was a dream I had, that somebody in England would listen to me.
And I guess it didn't pan out.

AURORA

We sort of trusted you.

WILLIAMS

Old habits die hard.

AURORA

I spose that's true. Even if Shakespeare didn't say it.

WILLIAMS

Tell me. What do you think? Am I wrong?

AURORA

About which, in particular? Shakespeare? Or how you look at me?

WILLIAMS

Both.

AURORA

You're upsetting Cameron. How can that be right?

WILLIAMS

By how I feel about you?

AURORA

You're out of bounds, and you know it...
But no. She doesn't seem to notice.

WILLIAMS

I can't ...

AURORA

I doubt you even know yourself.

WILLIAMS

How I feel?

AURORA

How you *think* you feel.

WILLIAMS

I'm not crazy, if that's what you're saying.

AURORA

See a doctor.

WILLIAMS

Is Norm a doctor?

AURORA

Who?

WILLIAMS

Your friend Norm.

Pointing where the GHOST OF OPHELIA is sitting.

AURORA

Oh, Norman.

He a regular here.

I've seen him lots of times with his pint of beer.

But I don't know what he does.

Should I?...

Probably a chartered accountant.

WILLIAMS

Not a heart doctor?

AURORA

Definitely not a heart doctor ... I wouldn't think.

WILLIAMS

[*pause, gazing at AURORA*] Let me get you something to eat.

Pause.

Then AURORA fetches a £20 note and hands it to WILLIAMS.

AURORA

A veggie burger and a jacket potato, vegetarian.... They know.

WILLIAMS leaves the table, and a minute later returns with a gin and Coke.

WILLIAMS

Your food will be ready in a bit.

WILLIAMS hands AURORA the drink.

AURORA

Where did *this* come from?

WILLIAMS

The barman told me.... Gin and Coke.

AURORA

You definitely need a doctor.

WILLIAMS

Because you're married?

AURORA

Because I'm gay.

WILLIAMS

I never thought I'd feel this way again.

AURORA

Did you hear me?
I'm gay.

WILLIAMS

There's no working this out, is there?
I'm crazy about you; and you're gay....
Maybe I'm just plain crazy.

AURORA

Maybe you are, Ted. Or just lonely.

WILLIAMS

Lonely?

AURORA

Do you want to talk about it?

WILLIAMS

[*pause*] You tell me you're gay.
I have my own opinion about that.
You tell me I'm lonely.
It makes me dizzy to think how right you are.
But how do you see it when no one else does?
I'm as alone as a raven without a home, save for Poe and Shakespeare.
But I hide it.
Pretty well, I thought.
Two loves I have, of comfort and despair.
Which like two spirits do suggest me still.
I brood. And I've made one of my comforts, Shakespeare, my life's work.
Because that's the way I want it.
Because, in his true state, the royal William Shakespeare, I think, was as sad and lonely as I have been.
I want to find the trueness of that, beyond the hype and superstition around the Bard.
He claimed there is no woman's sides that can bear the beating of so strong a passion a man can have.
How would he know? I wouldn't. Except I do.
I believe I do.
Because I've never met a woman who's disabused me of Shakespeare's claim.
But then, I've never met anyone like you.

AURORA

Who did this to you?

WILLIAMS

I don't know. A person?
[*beat*] She was my fiancée.
The problem was, I had no one to talk to about it.
No friend I could trust to listen how she'd dug her claws into me, and left the ulcers to weep.

AURORA

And what?...
You're trusting me?

WILLIAMS

I was a fool. Or blind. Or both. Obsessively trapped in the trauma of it.
A man my age has no business nursing the wounds of infidelity as long as I have, and turn them into an endless memory.

AURORA

Then why have you?

WILLIAMS

Maybe because I believed I killed her.

AURORA

You what?! You murdered her?

WILLIAMS

Not actually, of course. In my imagination and in my nightmares.
How Shakespeare killed the brutes in his life by killing Claudius and Polonius,
first in his mind, then on stage. To get revenge.
Not a healthy way to meet another woman, is it?

AURORA

What in the world did she do to you?

WILLIAMS takes a drink.

WILLIAMS

What do you do when everywhere men laugh at you behind your back?
Professors, tennis partners, students. Everybody knows, but you, the cheat she is.

AURORA

What *did* you do?

WILLIAMS

I took her picture and made a hundred copies, smeared "Slut" in red across each
one, and hung them out to dry.
Then I wrote Revelations of Jericho, and moved to the West Coast.

AURORA

How did you find out? ... about her?

WILLIAMS

Red handed; bare assed; and a book she kept I finally saw. Chapter and verse.
But if I could now, I'd undo it all, and just let her leave in peace. Like

AURORA

[*beat*] Like?

WILLIAMS

Like Shakespeare does in The Tempest.

AURORA

I think you're a bit too tight with Shakespeare.

WILLIAMS

Shakespeare allowed some woman to dominate his thoughts for years, didn't he?
And I am no less naïve.

AURORA

And how do I fit in to your naïveté?

WILLIAMS

The moment I saw you, picking grass the way you were, I heard a voice inside
saying, here's what you should jump for.
A woman picking grass for her cat, She's the miracle I've been awaiting.
And God forgive me, I didn't know that voice before you.

AURORA

A lot to think about.

WILLIAMS

[*beat*] Do you dance?

AURORA

I haven't for donkey's years.

WILLIAMS

Let's go dancing tonight.... To celebrate.

AURORA

Celebrate what?

WILLIAMS

My insanity.

AURORA

You *are mental*, you know.

WILLIAMS

When I look at you
I guess I mean, when I look at Cameron, I know in my heart the truth.
She is gay.
But when I look at you, Sunny, my gut tells me something quite different.

They pause for a few moments to drink.

AURORA

What do you see?

WILLIAMS

Two people who should have the chance to spend time together.
More time together
To discover life together; because I feel so strongly that our lives are meant to
take that chance.
Hearts remote, yet not asunder:
Distance, but no space between.

AURORA

Stop telling me how you feel.
When you look at me, what do you see?
Honestly see. As a writer.

WILLIAMS

Pauses to peruse Aurora's face, as though to draw it.

The grace of a swan, stately and elegant.
[beat] The beauty and poise of an Arabian night.
[beat] The probing eyes of an inquisitive cat.
[beat] The bearing of a Gustav Klimt.
[beat] The joy of a hummingbird in flight.
[beat] The smile of O! Danny Boy.
[beat] The laugh of a child.
[beat] The voice of a Helen Mirren
[beat] And the soul of a middle sibling.

Pause.

AURORA

Like Hell I'm a middle child!... I have to go.

AURORA abruptly stands and walks out.

WILLIAMS, stunned, remains sitting.

Pause.

WILLIAMS

Quelle omelette au fromage!

SCENE 8

Monday.

All enter to the long table in the rehearsal room, and sit.

Pause.

CAMERON

So, Mr. Williams ... Ted, as you will.
What's the plan for today?

WILLIAMS

Maybe it's your turn.

CAMERON

To do what?

WILLIAMS

Tell me what you think of me.

CAMERON

What does that matter?
We're all professional here; and we know how to behave professionally.

WILLIAMS

Then ... where do you think out project is going?

CAMERON

To pot.

WILLIAMS

Is there anything you can suggest?

CAMERON

Oh, I have two things I could suggest.

WILLIAMS

What's the first?

CAMERON

Go home, and forget the whole thing.

WILLIAMS

That doesn't leave much room for your second suggestion, does it?

CAMERON

If we're going to try to salvage something from this, I have a suggestion for you.

WILLIAMS

Okay. Tell me.

CAMERON

You should put that high intellect of yours to better use working *with* Shakespeare, not *against* him.

WILLIAMS

Give me
Could you give us an example?

CAMERON

Ophelia's death.

WILLIAMS

Yes.... We've talked about it.

CAMERON

Do you believe it?

WILLIAMS

I believe Shakespeare wrote it.

CAMERON

But Gertrude's description? Does it ring true to you?

WILLIAMS

Pauses, in thought.

Now that you bring it up, no, of course it doesn't.

CAMERON

A creature's natural reflexes rebel automatically against choking, no matter what sort of trash bin the rest of its mind is in. And to get out of the cold of water. Not just lie there, singing.

WILLIAMS

Just floating there, singing, not making a splash.
And no one to lend a hand.

CAMERON

Picture it.

WILLIAMS

Which leads us where? Do you think?

CAMERON

I suspect Queen Gertrude lied.

WILLIAMS

What do you think made her do that?

CAMERON

What do *you* think?

WILLIAMS

I think you think Gertrude was protecting Ophelia, from being accused of suicide, or something else.

CAMERON

You drown yourself in the ocean, or a lake, or the straits between Denmark and Sweden. Not in a stream.
And with stones in your pockets, or a boulder tied around your waist.

WILLIAMS

Wasn't there some drowning in a stream near Stratford in Shakespeare's time, I read about somewhere?

CAMERON

A two-year-old girl named Jane Shaxspere, in a pond near Upton Warren. Possibly a cousin of Shakespeare's. She was picking wild flowers and fell in.

WILLIAMS

If Gertrude could lie that eloquently about Ophelia, she could lie about discovering the truth, that Claudius was behind Hamlet's father's murder.

CAMERON

The bedroom scene has always been suspicious to me.
Gertrude seems far more nonplussed by her son's seeing an apparition than by his telling her that her new husband killed her former one.

WILLIAMS

She must have suspected something. Maybe Claudius confessed in his sleep. Or asked her if anyone thought he'd killed his brother.

AURORA

Gertrude was a liar?

WILLIAMS

That's one thing we can agree upon. And an adulteress. And maybe more.

NELSON

Ophelia slit her wrists, and died in a bath tub; and someone carried her body to the willow brook? Is that it?

CAMERON

Possibly not so dramatic as all that.

WILLIAMS

The willow brook was the very coinage of Shakespeare's brain.

NELSON

I think, if Ophelia were pregnant out of wedlock, and all, it's easier to accept her decision to commit suicide.

Much more of an action person than Hamlet.

But if that's true, did Gertrude also commit suicide?

When she grabbed the poison cup meant for Hamlet, and drank it?

CAMERON

Now *that's* what we should be talking about.... And developing a story around.

AURORA

Then all is mended?

CAMERON

Ophelia was the captive pigeon of her father; and her death broke Queen Gertrude's heart. Added to the Queen's *own guilt* in the matter, it might help to explain the ending. Why the storyline proceeds in such a Romeo and Juliet trajectory.

AURORA

Lies, guilt, and adultery, to win the hearts of men.

Is that what Hamlet is all about, underneath?

NELSON

If it is, then it's senseless.

WILLIAMS

That's all of half of what I wanted us to say.

NELSON

What's the other half?

WILLIAMS

Just why Shakespeare wanted to show something rotten in the state of Denmark.

SANDS

To excite the audience.

ROCKWELL

To get even with a pompous ass who was Danish, or who bragged too much about Denmark.

HARRIS

To show how Danes are even crazier than mad dogs and Englishmen.

AURORA

Why do you think, Ted?

WILLIAMS

Because Shakespeare wanted to show something rotten in the state of England. And he used Denmark as a surrogate.

The door to the room opens; the GHOST OF OPHELIA enters; and the door slams shut. No one notices the GHOST.

CAMERON

I hesitate to say it, but we may have found common ground between us, Ted. If Ophelia's and Gertrude's voices have been silenced, your ghost of Ophelia might be a way to feminize the meaning of the play. You do have a feminine side, you know.

WILLIAMS

I think we can work along these lines.

AURORA

Wonderful!

CAMERON gives AURORA an even harsher look than before.

WILLIAMS

I suggest we go off, and digest what we've learned today.

CAMERON

Let's all write, or borrow, some lines for the Ghost; throw them against the wall;
and see if any stick.

WILLIAMS

Fine by me.
Until tomorrow.
And good luck!
Making things that stick.

**All, save WILLIAMS and the GHOST OF
OPHELIA exit – AURORA last.**

WILLIAMS

Quelle omelette au fromage!

SCENE 9

Tuesday.

All enter to the long table in the rehearsal room, and sit.

WILLIAMS

Good to see you all.

CAMERON

You, as well.

The door to the room opens; the GHOST OF OPHELIA enters; and the door slams shut. No one notices the GHOST.

WILLIAMS

Well, tell me what we've got.
Sandy, you first.

SANDS

Stands with a paper in his hand.

[*reads*] When I yet bore a childlike voice and guise,
I loved a prince with heart that proved untrue.
He wooed my virtue with mendacious eyes,
And then from every vow he made, withdrew.

He steered me sudden toward a cloistered place,
To fast away my life in cold and prayer;
To yield our son, and never see his face;
And rue the day I once was young and fair.

To be or not to be, mine's not to live
For falling for a vow I ought not trust.
A woman has so little left to give,
Once maidenhood between her legs is lost.

And so beneath the moon and withered sky
I haunt deceit till once again I die.

That's our own.
This second bit is from Hamlet ... sort of:

SANDS

[reads] O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
Is it not monstrous that that player there,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from its working all his visage paled,
Tears in his eyes, distraction in his looks,
A broken voice, a howl, and all for nothing!
When I have far more motive for offense?
When I, an undertrodden female, peak,
a frightened child, unpregnant of my cause,
And say but naught against dishonor shown
Toward me and all my sex by royal blood?
Am I a coward? Who does this to a maid?
O bloody, bawdy villain of a man!
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!

WILLIAMS

“Bloody, bawdy villain of a man!
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!”
My God, *there is anger*.
Real anger.
Well done.

CAMERON

The outrage of women over the ages against male chauvinism.

WILLIAMS

Well done. Sandy.

SANDS

Willow worked on it with me anyway.

SANDS sits.

WILLIAMS

Well done, you, too, Willow.
Anything to add?

**NELSON stands, but with nothing in her
hand to read.**

NELSON

Just one bit:

What man with heart and honest faith at risk
Rejects his only daughter for his gain?
Do even maids in poverty have less
Of freedom than the say in life we have?
Damn! If I had another chance to live,
I swear to Jesus I'd not waste a breath
But name the ways that men restrain our lives,
Our liberty, our happiness, our choice.
Just hide and watch the Hell that I would raise.

NELSON sits.

CAMERON

Willow ... top marks for that.

WILLIAMS

Bucket, the stage is yours.

HARRIS

Stands with a paper in his hand.

[reads] I barely hear myself.... Can you? I doubt
You can. I'm dead as you perceive. And ghosts
Command no living soul to mark their words.
Except for one, who dogs Prince Hamlet's ear,
But no one else that hears it on this earth.

Puts the paper down.

But for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack
Falstaff, and therefore more valiant, being, as he is, old Jack Falstaff, banish not
him thy Harry's company, banish not him thy Harry's company. Banish plump
Jack, and banish all the world!

HARRIS sits.

HARRIS

From his seat.

And yet, I would I were a weaver.
I could sing psalms. And you would listen.

WILLIAMS

Well spoken, Bucket.
Well spoken Sir Jack as well!

[to ROCKWELL] And yours, Major?

ROCKWELL

Stands with a paper in his hand.

[reads] No boat. Nor cart. Nor horse. Nor gentleman
Makes way for me. My tender years are gone.
A storm is moving in, to Elsinore.
I am the storm. From room to room my tears
Will wash away my father's blood and mine.
Hark now! the empty celebration; blasts
Of cannon roaring; plots of death; and more.
If Fate could only teach before it strikes....

Puts the paper down.

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

ROCKWELL sits.

Long pause.

**The door to the room opens; the GHOST
OF OPHELIA exits; and the door slams
shut.**

WILLIAMS

That pretty well sums it up, doesn't it, Major?
They came to the same conclusion, but from miles apart....
Hamlet and Macbeth.

NELSON

From the same spirit. The same hand. The same pen.
But why?

WILLIAMS

But why?
That's our question to our ghost of Ophelia.
Why?

Pause.

AURORA

Either Shakespeare was bipolar, or somewhere near the end of his writing he
must have suffered a hard landing.
Must have hit rock bottom.
Hamlet.
Macbeth.
Othello.
Lear.

NELSON

That's my job, isn't it?

WILLIAMS

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.

NELSON

In me thou seest the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
In me thou seest the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
Consumed with that which it was nourished by.
This thou perceivest, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

Another pause.

AURORA

That's my favorite sonnet of his....

We're asking an awful lot of poor, young Ophelia's ghost.

ROCKWELL

And of Shakespeare.

WILLIAMS

[*beat*] I have faith in both of them....

This whole day has been full of new things to think about.

Hats off to everyone.

Thank you.

All of you.

It's been our best day.

Now, let's take some space, and come back tomorrow.

Take the time to ponder what Shakespeare would have wanted of us.

All save WILLIAMS exit.

WILLIAMS

Quelle omelette au fromage!

SCENE 10

That evening.

CAMERON and AURORA have finished dinner at Monkey's and are drinking.

CAMERON

Did you enjoy your veggie burger and jacket potato?

AURORA

As always.

CAMERON

Let's talk business, now, for a few minutes.
Okay, Sunny?

AURORA

Of course.

CAMERON

What do you think about the Ophelia project?

AURORA

I thought the presentations today were surprisingly good. All of them....
Why? What did you think?

CAMERON

I think I'm losing the battle to American liberal thinking. That's what I think.
And it's beginning to tear at the seams of Shakespeare's traditional English life.

AURORA

Oh?

CAMERON

What Shakespeare wrote stands on its own.
We don't need to know anything about the man. Just that.
But we do.
We know where he lived.
We know his wife and children.
And we know what he looked like.

AURORA

That monstrous engraving in the First Folio that looks like a mask? That thing?

CAMERON

Not you, too?

AURORA

I prefer to think of Shakespeare as the man Ophelia describes: “The glass of fashion and the mold of form.” Not some creepy-looking egghead.

CAMERON

As a courtier?

AURORA

It fits my imagination better with the way he writes; but I don’t know. He was a great writer; and had a great pain.

CAMERON

They’re trying to steal Shakespeare, you know. Make him into a member of the House of Lords or something.

AURORA

It’s what he wrote. I completely agree with you. And if he wrote ninety percent about the lives of gentlemen, and ladies, and royalty, well, that’s what he wrote. And The Phoenix and the Turtle. And it doesn’t make him less a writer if he came from nobility, does it?

CAMERON

It’s the principle of the thing.

AURORA

That speech from Troilus and Cressida you like so much

CAMERON

“The heavens themselves, the planets, and this center, Observe degree, priority, and place”? That one?

AURORA

Yes, that one.

CAMERON

What about it?

AURORA

It’s where Shakespeare says that when class or order is shaken, when social degree is taken away, when the ultimate power of the queen, or king, is questioned, the whole unity of society wanders into disarray.

CAMERON

Ulysses says.

AURORA

Ulysses was an Englishman, at heart; and Hamlet says about the same thing:

The age is grown so loose that the toe of a peasant comes close to galling the heel of a courtier and no one seems to care ... or something like that.

CAMERON

Are you starting to buy into that nonsense that Shakespeare was an elitist?

AURORA

If Shakespeare meant what he wrote, and really believed in the divine right of kings, and that noblemen were superior to commoners, what else am I spost to believe?

CAMERON

He was writing dialogue for his characters.
Not an ethics paper.

AURORA

Not always.

CAMERON

Who's side are you on, anyway?

AURORA

Freedom's. And Monty Python's. Freddie Mercury's. And Two Soups.

CAMERON

I mean in our project.

AURORA

I'm on your side. I'm always on your side.

CAMERON

Good....

That American

I mean, for a moment I thought he and I were coming together on the same page.
And then ... Poof!!

They spend a few moments drinking.

AURORA

Is being against Ted being on your side?

CAMERON

My side is Shakespeare's side.

AURORA

Maybe I don't understand.

We're having all this because of Shakespeare?

CAMERON

Sunny, sometimes you confound me.

England's greatest product of all time has been English.

And the greatest product of English has been Shakespeare.

AURORA

They have Shakespeare in America, too.

CAMERON

Not that you'd recognize.

AURORA

He's been dead over three hundred ninety-nine years.

CAMERON

And how much of the English language has changed?

AURORA

I know. I know.

He virtually wrote the first dictionary.

And the Bible, probably, too.

CAMERON

The Bible?

You mean for King James?

I never thought of that.

AURORA

Some of it.

CAMERON

Some of it?

Like what, for example?

AURORA

The 23rd Psalm....
The Lord is my shepherd?....
And the Beatitudes.
And Psalm 46.

CAMERON

Psalm 46?... I don't think I know that one.

AURORA

You don't need to.
Only the forty-sixth word from the beginning, and the forty-sixth word from the end.

CAMERON

What are *they*, pray tell?

AURORA

Shake.
And spear.

CAMERON

Why should I have known that?

AURORA

Shakespeare was sneaky.
He loved clever riddles, codes, and secret messages.

CAMERON

What are you talking about?

AURORA

Like the gold, silver, and lead caskets in Merchant of Venice.
And the three witches in Macbeth.
And the coded message Maria inserts in the counterfeit letter she and the others drop for Malvolio to find and be fooled by, in Twelfth Night.

CAMERON

The fustian riddle?
"M. O. A. I. doth sway my life?"

AURORA

That very one.

CAMERON

It's not solvable.

It was intentionally not solvable, to trick and mislead Malvolio.

They spend a few more moments drinking.

AURORA

Cam?

CAMERON

Yes?

AURORA

Twelfth Night is a comedy, right?

CAMERON

Of course.

AURORA

Do you think what they did to Malvolio was funny?

CAMERON

Actually, no.

AURORA

Malvolio lost his pride.

He became a laughingstock. An outcast.

CAMERON

I know.

And at the end he swears to be revenged on the whole pack of people involved in his mortification.

Pause.

AURORA

Cam?

CAMERON

Yes?

AURORA

Does Malvolio remind you at all of Timon of Athens?

CAMERON

Never thought about it. Why?

AURORA

They both swear revenge against society.

CAMERON

In a way, yes. What of it?

AURORA

Just wondering.

CAMERON

Wondering what, Sunny?

AURORA

Wondering if Shakespeare ever wanted revenge on society.

CAMERON

That's ridiculous.

Pause.

AURORA

Cam?

CAMERON

Yes?

AURORA

Would you like to start a family?

CAMERON

What?!

AURORA

For us to have a baby to raise....

For me to have a living copy to leave the world.

They go on drinking.

SCENE 11

Wednesday.

All enter to the long table in the rehearsal room, and sit.

WILLIAMS

Good morning, everybody.

SANDS

Good morning, Mr. Williams ... er, Ted.

WILLIAMS

Any new questions today?... Anybody?

Pause.

WILLIAMS

Oh surely there must be some questions.

Pause.

ROCKWELL

Are you married?

WILLIAMS

No, Major, never have been. My work has been my wife.

ROCKWELL

That's what I thought.

WILLIAMS

Anything else?

AURORA

Yesterday evening Cam and I were talking about puzzles Shakespeare left in his plays.

WILLIAMS

Yes?

AURORA

Like Maria's coded message in the letter dropped for Malvolio to find.

WILLIAMS

Yes. The fustian riddle.
“M. O. A. I. doth sway my life.”

AURORA

That one.

CAMERON

It's not solvable.
It was intentionally not solvable, to trick and mislead Malvolio.

AURORA

We don't believe it can be solved. It's somewhat like a Buddhist riddle.
The beauty, or moral, is in the thinking about it.
Not the actual solving of it.
Like: How can you just sit there and meditate ... or write plays, for that matter ...
when there's so much hunger and misery in the world?
That kind of riddle.... What do you think?

WILLIAMS

Personally, I believe Shakespeare intended every one of his puzzles to be solved.

SANDS

How do you mean that, anyway?

WILLIAMS

Take his Sonnet 81, for example.
He tells his friend that the poems he writes him shall make his friend's name as
immortal in history as a monument, while his own name, once he is dead, will be
forgotten. How can that reasonably be, when he conceals his friend's name, and
publishes what he did under the name of “William Shakespeare”?
If there's one name that won't be forgotten in English, it's William Shakespeare.

SANDS

I get it: Every time somebody reads about his friend, they will automatically be
thinking: This is Shakespeare's friend, won't they?

WILLIAMS

Or take his Sonnet 29.
He claims he's alone. An outcast.
Cursing his fate.
When Shakespeare was far from being anything like an outcast in Stratford-
upon-Avon, enjoying wealth and status, a large house and a new coat of arms.

HARRIS

Yes. How do we answer that?

WILLIAMS

And most of all, the puzzle of Hamlet.

ROCKWELL

As we are learning.

NELSON

I've solved it.

CAMERON

What?

NELSON

I think I've solved the fustian riddle in Twelfth Night.

CAMERON

What are you talking about? It's unsolvable. On purpose.

NELSON

It's from the Bible.

CAMERON

No, Willow.

It's not from the Bible.

NELSON

"I am that I am."

What God told Moses to call him.

CAMERON

That's got nothing to do with Twelfth Night.

Or with "M. O. A. I. doth sway my life."

NELSON

Think about it:

The only words those letters spell is "I am."

CAMERON

I am? I am ... what?

I am ... O?

What's "O"? Ophelia?

NELSON

O is what would “sway” Malvolio’s life....
If he took the bait, and believed that Olivia loved him.

CAMERON

I don’t get it. O is what?

NELSON

O is a noose.
A hangman’s noose.

CAMERON

That’s daft.

NELSON

O is a circle.
A noose is a circle.
O is a noose.

CAMERON

But Malvolio wasn’t hanged.

NELSON

He was as good as hanged....
Locked in a small, dark room and treated as though he’d lost his mind.

CAMERON

But not *hanged*.

NELSON

Not literally hanged. Translated: I am hanged equals

SANDS

I am fucked!

NELSON

Thank you, Sandy.

CAMERON

That’s what you think Maria’s riddle meant?

NELSON

It’s what happened.

CAMERON

You're mental.

NELSON

"Many a good hanging prevents a bad marriage," the Fool says in Twelfth Night.

CAMERON

On that I agree: Hanging villains does protect innocent girls from bad marriages.

AURORA

I think it means something a little more off-color than that.

CAMERON

[*beat*] Ugh! Is that the kind of thing you're finding funny these days, Sunny?

WILLIAMS

[*to NELSON*] You should take that imagination of yours, Young Lady, and solve the riddle of Ophelia's ghost.

ROCKWELL

All right, Willow:

What is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?

NELSON

From Hamlet?

ROCKWELL

[*beat of surprise*] Yes ... from Hamlet.

NELSON

A grave-maker.

ROCKWELL

I can't believe your mind, Lass.

HARRIS

Pr'ythee, nuncle, tell me whether a madman be a gentleman or a yeoman?

NELSON

[*beat*] Lear's Fool?

HARRIS

[*beat*] Of course.

NELSON

A yeoman that has a gentleman for his son.

HARRIS

Holy God!!

CAMERON opens the copy of Shakespeare's works resting on the table in front of her, searches for a few moments, and then:

CAMERON

[reads] I am no viper, yet I feed
On mother's flesh which did me breed.
I sought a husband, in which labour
I found that kindness in a father.
He's father, son, and husband mild;
I mother, wife, and yet his child.
How they may be, and yet in two,
As you will live, resolve it you.

NELSON

I'm sorry Ms. Leigh, but I don't know Cymbeline, Coriolanus, Two Gentlemen of Verona, or Pericles.

CAMERON

Then take a guess.

NELSON

It's not a proper riddle, is it? The person speaking is making a confession.
Like Lot's daughter, she's willingly had sex with her father to conceive a child.
And like Oedipus, her father had sex with his mother to conceive her.

ROCKWELL

Williams, have you ever witnessed a mind phenomenon like this?

WILLIAMS

[beat] Never.... Or maybe once. In a personal sense....
Strange how some nights you can't forget ... like ghosts ... of a life you thought
you once had.
I wanted to kill someone. Literally. Or myself.
And then Hamlet's words came like a blinding flash out of nowhere, that one may
smile, and smile, and be a villain.

Pause.

NELSON

Go on.

WILLIAMS

Life's a riddle, isn't it? That you can't rightly solve.

NELSON

Yes, it is.

WILLIAMS

This is really not the time or place for this story.
I'm sorry.

NELSON

Go on, Ted.

WILLIAMS

Go on?...

Well, okay. If you will. Since I've started it.

I don't know why you reminded me of that night, Willow. I truly don't.

Unless it's Shakespeare.... Or the viper Cameron spoke of.

I wasn't supposed ... wasn't spost to come home for another day.

And the night was as dark as any I can remember.

A clear sky, and a bright, full moon, being visited by Jupiter.

Space in a dark night can unlock a mind in a cage.

My car gave out a couple of miles from my fiancée's, and I hoofed it.

Her phone was off.

I tried to call.

More than once.

Even seeing his car in the driveway.

When I went in (I had a key) they were upstairs together....

He'd been my closest friend ... all smiles and laughter.

Pause.

NELSON

I thought so.

AURORA

And ...?

NELSON

Were you afraid?

WILLIAMS

Afraid? Well, yes. I was.

AURORA

Like Hamlet?

WILLIAMS

No.... More like Lear.

Hamlet's fear was of something else. Of actually having to kill somebody.

NELSON

Yes.

WILLIAMS

I was afraid of being a failure.

Afraid of having no friends.

Afraid forever of losing faith in love. Losing Romeo and Juliet. Losing my sanity.

NELSON

I understand.

WILLIAMS

But I contained it.

NELSON

And kept it in.

WILLIAMS

[abruptly] That's enough of this....

Shakespeare has obviously left us with more than plays and poetry. Some of us.

And that's the point.

He left us with the disappointments of his life. And doing that leaves us with a place to go when everything else seems falling apart in ours.

Plus, he left us with a view of history he knew we could never get anywhere else.

Because it was forbidden history.

Buried by the region clouds that could bury history in those days.

And he did it intentionally, at risk to himself. Why?

NELSON

It meant more to him than the risk.

WILLIAMS

Shakespeare was a man, only if we can see him as a man more than a genius.
And he suffered as much as most of the rest of us.
Probably for a long time.
Because genius in a man suffers.

SANDS

You're not talking about our grandfather's Shakespeare, are you?

Pause.

WILLIAMS

Let's get back on track:
We now have a taste of Shakespeare's fondness for riddles, puzzles, codes, and secrets.
What I want *all* of you to do is to ponder this, and relate it to Ophelia.
Dig around.
See what else you can find.
That's your assignment for tomorrow.
And forget my sordid story.
That, too.

All save WILLIAMS exit.

WILLIAMS

Quelle omelette au fromage!

SCENE 12

Thursday.

All enter to the long table in the rehearsal room, and sit.

WILLIAMS

Hello, everybody.
Good to see all of you back....

NELSON

You knew, didn't you?
You knew all along.

WILLIAMS

Knowing you, Willow, as I do, I think I can safely answer that in the affirmative.
But would you please share with everybody what you're accusing me of.

NELSON

Ophelia is Anne Cecil, Lord Burghley's daughter.
Who married the man on the ship Sandy told us about, captured by pirates.

CAMERON

[*to WILLIAMS*] There's no escaping our fate, is there?

WILLIAMS

[*to CAMERON*] We'll talk.
[*to NELSON*] Willow, tell us what you've learned.

NELSON

Anne Cecil got married when she was fifteen.
We can say, about Ophelia's age.
We know it was roughly Juliet's age.
She and her husband separated when Anne was nineteen, over his false belief
that she had cheated on him, and that their daughter, Elizabeth, was fathered by
another man.

AURORA

Is that true?

NELSON

All true, from what I've read.

WILLIAMS

[*beat*] Anything else?

NELSON

It was when her husband was in Paris, about to return to London, that a certain person came to him with the false story he believed, that Anne had been unfaithful.

Right after that he sailed in the ship captured by pirates, who left him stripped, nearly naked but alive, on the coast of England.

He and Anne were separated five years before reconciling.

Because it took him that long to learn of the treachery of the man who lied to him.

Who went on to betray British troops to the Spanish.

A man the Spaniards called Sant-Iago.

AURORA

O! my God!

Iago!

WILLIAMS

Coincidences just won't stop, will they?

NELSON

After their separation ended they went on to have four more children, two of whom died in infancy.

The three surviving children were all daughters.

Elizabeth, the oldest, who grew up to marry William Stanley, 6th Earl of Derby.

Bridget, the middle one, who grew up to marry Francis Norris, 1st Earl of Berkshire.

And Susan, the youngest, who grew up to marry Philip Herbert, 4th Earl of Pembroke.

CAMERON

[*resignedly*] Nothing further, I trust.

NELSON

Anne died at age 31 at the Queen's court in Greenwich, of unknown causes.

She is buried in Westminster Abbey in a tomb on which rests her effigy.

Her father ... Lord Burghley ... Polonius ... was so stricken with grief at her death that he was unable to perform his duties in Privy Council.

CAMERON

Willow?...

Where is this going?

NELSON

I don't know.
It's so disturbing to me, I don't know.
Like people have been hiding the truth all over the place.
You included, Ted.
But why?...
Why?

ROCKWELL

Ted ... I remember your story, of course.
Of being betrayed by the woman you were engaged to.
But, if you were married, to someone else I mean, and someone told you she'd
been unfaithful, would you walk out on her?

WILLIAMS

Unfaithful with another man?

ROCKWELL

With another man.
Just one.
That's what you were told; and you hadn't caught her red handed.

WILLIAMS

No. Not if I loved her.
I'd owe my wife a fair chance to defend herself. To explain.
Not like Othello did.

ROCKWELL

Well, that's exactly what I did. I gave her the benefit of the doubt.
And it was the best thing I could have done, because I found out the truth, finally.
About the Iago, lying in my life.
And never talked to the douchebag again.
Because liars lie just to lie. Their brains are just twisted that way.
And we are the fools, for listening to them.

NELSON

I'm not lying.

ROCKWELL

I believe you, Willow. And if what you say is true, then the First Folio of
Shakespeare's plays was dedicated to Anne's daughter Susan's husband.
And I never knew that.
And that is disturbing to *me*.

CAMERON

What does all this have to do with Ophelia?

ROCKWELL

If Ophelia is Anne Cecil's alter ego, and if Anne's daughter had all of Shakespeare's plays, even the ones which had never been published, then Ophelia must have known Shakespeare's secrets.

AURORA

I'm confused.

Wouldn't Shakespeare himself have had copies of all his plays with him when he died?

WILLIAMS

Sadly, no.

Shakespeare left no plays, no poems, no writings of any sort, except for a will, which gave his second best bed to his wife.

AURORA

Then how did Anne Cecil's daughter get ahold of them?

HARRIS

[*beat*] I found something I can't explain either.

I don't know if it means anything to this.

Other than to add further confusion to the whole caboodle.

AURORA

What?

HARRIS

Shakespeare wrote one of my very favorite plays.

The Merry Wives of Windsor.

In it, you may recall, there's a subplot concerning Slender, and his unsuccessful attempt to negotiate a marriage to Anne Page, who actually wound up marrying Fenton.

Slender was having serious financial problems, which the marriage would alleviate.

His cause was forwarded on his behalf by his uncle, Robert Shallow.

Fenton, on the other hand, was an orphan, and had to press his suit on his own.

Specific money matters are discussed in the play. Very specific ones.

Slender's annual income, the jointure to be made to Anne, and the expected inheritances of each....

Personal and confidential financial information.

CAMERON

I've asked this before: What does all that have to do with Ophelia?

HARRIS

Believe it or not, in nearly every detail the play matches the real life story involving Philip Sidney, who was seeking the hand of Anne Cecil, aided by his uncle, Robert Dudley.

Numbers (that weren't known publicly till long after Shakespeare's death) match up far too well for it to be a coincidence.

Shakespeare knew the back facts of Anne Cecil's marriage, and inserted them, the money, and the players, into his farce.

AURORA

How could Shakespeare possibly have gotten away with writing and publishing such personal information about key figures in Queen Elizabeth's court?

And how did he get it in the first place?

NELSON

We need to ask Anne.

AURORA

I want to ask Ted instead.

WILLIAMS

Merry Wives is a comedy.
Othello is a guilt tragedy.
Hamlet is a guilt tragedy.
The Winter's Tale is atonement.

**The cellphone in Williams' pocket
sounds to announce a text message
received.**

WILLIAMS takes it out to read the text.

WILLIAMS

With your permission, let's hold these thoughts.
And Sunny's questions.
I'm afraid something's come up I have to attend to.
Sorry.
See all of you all tomorrow.

All save WILLIAMS and AURORA exit.

WILLIAMS commences a text on his phone, not noticing that AURORA is still in the room.

WILLIAMS

What a cheesy omelette we do make of things!

AURORA exits.

SCENE 13

Friday.

All enter to the long table in the rehearsal room, and sit.

CAMERON

Before we begin, Mr. Williams, I want to make myself perfectly clear. This project of ours is restricted to seeing whether we can produce a separate play about Ophelia, building upon the part she plays in and behind the scenes in Hamlet. It is NOT Let me repeat that: It is NOT a sounding board for arguments pro and con as to the authorship of the Shakespeare canon. Is that understood?

WILLIAMS

They are one in the two.

CAMERON

You stand warned.

WILLIAMS

[*to everyone*] In Hamlet, Queen Gertrude is privately instructed by Polonius (not too long before he becomes a “dead for a ducat” corpse in the drapes): “Tell him ... (Hamlet, that is) ... his pranks have been too broad to bear with; and that your grace hath screened and stood between much heat and him.” In the same way *Queen Elizabeth* screened and stood between much heat and *Shakespeare*. Because she knew not protecting Shakespeare might mean the revelation of some dark secret of her own. It’s the only sane explanation. Other writers of the day suffered when they spoke too freely. Why not Shakespeare?... Because he was protected by Queen Elizabeth.

AURORA

Hamlet knew about the dark secret of King Claudius. We think Queen Gertrude may have suspected. What about Ophelia? There’s that line in the play, just before Ophelia’s mad scene, that she knew something, or might say something, that could strew dangerous thoughts in the minds of the public. Did she need protection?

WILLIAMS

I don't know.

NELSON

I believe you do.

WILLIAMS

About Ophelia, or Shakespeare?

NELSON

About both.

WILLIAMS

I don't *know*.

What I think is that Shakespeare had sources all the way to the Queen's chambers.

CAMERON

That's ridiculous.

WILLIAMS

To you, maybe.

Because you picture William Shakespeare as a commoner from Stratford-upon-Avon. I don't.

CAMERON

Why would any intelligent reader picture Shakespeare as anyone else?

WILLIAMS

Because the Shakespeare of the plays and sonnets must have been a man who had a personal relationship with Queen Elizabeth, who had intimate knowledge of court life, and who was well versed in science, medicine, mathematics, music, astronomy, philosophy, and the law.

Not some commoner from Stratford-upon-Avon whose family was mostly illiterate.

CAMERON

That's it! It's finished.

I warned you, Mr. Williams.

This session is over.

We can meet on Monday to decide where to go from here.

But you, Mr. Williams ... go back home.

You are no longer welcome. Good-bye.

NELSON

No! No!

NELSON stands on her chair and puts one foot upon the table.

SANDS follows her, doing the same.

CAMERON stands, and leaves the room.

WILLIAMS

I was afraid this would happen. But I owed it to the man who's saved my life.

NELSON

We don't want you to leave, Ted.

WILLIAMS

Sit down, and let me tell you something.

NELSON and SANDS reluctantly sit back down in their chairs while WILLIAMS stands and gathers his things.

WILLIAMS

I love Shakespeare, and what he's done.
Time spent with him, for me, is better spent than in the Bible.
Because he, an aristocrat, suffered in a common man way.
And reveals his pain and disappointments to the world.

Listen to me. This may be the last time I'll ever talk to you.
Keep the faith. Shakespeare's world is a world we all can share, like pelicans.
The warts of man, his own included.
The halting. The urges. The crimes.
The inability to take action in the face of necessity.
The joy of love and freedom, and its ultimate disillusion.
The witches. The disorder. The anguish, and the punishment.
Some like to believe it all came out of thin air from the imagination of a great and rustic mind.
I say it came from the writer's personal life experiences, through the genius of his English brain and the wounds he suffered in life.
And I say, though Cameron may disagree, that to find the man beneath the words is to know the soul beneath the soil....
[beat] Goodbye, and good luck to all of you.

WILLIAMS exits.

A stunned pause.

AURORA

Quelle omelette au fromage!

SCENE 14

That evening.

WILLIAMS and AURORA have just finished dinner at Monkey's.

They take a few sips of their drinks without speaking.

AURORA

Was it worth it?

WILLIAMS

I'd stake my career on it.

AURORA

O the pride of being right!
Mr. America!

WILLIAMS

There's nothing wrong in being right, in my neck of the woods..
Or being American.

AURORA

Knowing you're right and getting it right are two different things.
Or don't they teach that, "in your neck of the woods"?

WILLIAMS

What's the difference?

AURORA

The difference is, knowing you're right is a put-off to people who are as intelligent as you think you are.
It's about proving yourself.
While getting it right is about keeping your eye on the prize, and helping others reach the right conclusion.

WILLIAMS

I dropped the ball, didn't I?

AURORA

You took your eye off it, Mr. Baseball Legend.

WILLIAMS

I did.

I took personal pride in solving the mystery of who Shakespeare was, while most people, I guess, don't give a fig for who he was. Just what he wrote. To them, the plays are the thing, like Hamlet says.

AURORA

If you want to know:

Pride concerns itself with *who* is right.

Humility concerns itself in helping people get to *what* is right.

WILLIAMS

But Shakespeare was prideful.

AURORA

I don't care. Don't you understand that?

The plays are what matters.

Especially after four hundred years of enchanting people.

Not who wrote them.

WILLIAMS

You're talking about my taking my eye off of us, aren't you? Leaving you.

AURORA

All those words of yours.... Words, words, words.

WILLIAMS

This doesn't have to be the end.

I can come back.

Find a position over here.

Or you could come to California with me.

AURORA

Until your next episode?

WILLIAMS

But Shakespeare *was* Anne Cecil's husband. He had the education and everything to prove it. And the run of Burghley's library, one of the best in Europe.

AURORA

I don't care.

Education doesn't make the man.

WILLIAMS

Oh! for Heaven's sake, Sunny!

Anne's husband was a champion horseman, jousting, and swordsman.

He was a trained falconer.

He composed music.

He earned degrees from Cambridge and Oxford, and studied law at Gray's Inn.

After finishing there, he served in a military campaign in Scotland, got married, and then embarked on a grand tour of France and Italy, where he spent time in Paris, Venice, Genoa, Florence, Verona, and Palermo.

All of those places, the people, and the law are on stage in Shakespeare's plays.

AURORA

And what was the dark secret he knew about Queen Elizabeth, may I ask?

WILLIAMS

[*beat*] Do you know Shakespeare's Sonnet number 33?

AURORA

Not by that name.

WILLIAMS

I know it by heart:

Full many a glorious morning have I seen
Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign eye,
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy;
Anon permit the basest clouds to ride
With ugly rack on his celestial face,
And from the forlorn world his visage hide,
Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace:
Even so my sun one early morn did shine
With all triumphant splendor on my brow;
But out! alack! he was but one hour mine,
The region cloud hath masked him from me now.

AURORA

Which means, what?

WILLIAMS

Sun, S-U-N, is a pun with son, S-O-N; and I believe what Shakespeare is telling us is that it was *his own son* who was born one morning; and after only an hour, the boy was whisked away.

AURORA

Why?
And by whom?

WILLIAMS

By Elizabeth ... regina, the queen, the region cloud of the poem.

AURORA

Why would she do that to Shakespeare?... Or to the boy's mother?

WILLIAMS

Because Elizabeth *was* the boy's mother. And if so, he might be king, someday.

AURORA

How on God's green earth could Shakespeare ever have fathered a queen's child?
And how could they keep it a secret?

WILLIAMS

Elizabeth had a secluded place called Havering, where she could go for long periods of time, and not be visited. The Court wouldn't dare bother her, on pain of death. One serving woman reportedly did lose her life, for talking too much.

AURORA

And the child?

WILLIAMS

Sent to an Earl and his wife, to be raised as their son.

AURORA

Under what name?

WILLIAMS

Henry Wriothesley.
Ever hear of him?

AURORA

Never. And I don't want to. I'm fed up with the whole thing.
Talk about something else, or I'm leaving.

WILLIAMS

[*beat*] Would you please come to California with me?

AURORA

I can't. You know I can't.

WILLIAMS

I love you, Sunny.

AURORA

That and my twenty pounds gets me a decent dinner and drink here at Monkey's.

WILLIAMS

Did you hear what I said? I love you.
I love you; and I love the way our minds meet.

AURORA

Okay. Let's get serious about this.
I don't know why, being who I am, but I love your telling me how you love me.
Because, in a way, I believe it. But it's not workable.
Love between us, you know. It's not workable.
And you know why.

WILLIAMS

Sunny ... if it weren't workable, my heart wouldn't be telling me how much it is.

**A moment looking at each other, and
time for sips of their drinks.**

AURORA

How do you know anything about loving a gay woman?

WILLIAMS

I don't. But you're not gay. Not captive-in-love gay.
I can feel it.

AURORA

I don't believe it. I don't trust it.
You're wanting to change my whole life around, based on a couple of weeks of a
wild goose chase.

WILLIAMS

A snipe hunt

AURORA

Is that what you call it in America?

WILLIAMS

Yeah.

AURORA

And, besides, what if I don't want to leave Cam?

WILLIAMS

Do you?

AURORA

Not really.

We're settled in, to a steady relationship.

No bumps.

No heartaches.

No stress.

WILLIAMS

No meaning.

AURORA

What do you mean, no meaning?

WILLIAMS

I misspoke. I'm sorry.

We're all part of the meaning. I know that.

Shakespeare is part of the meaning.

Passion is part of the meaning.

Finding meaning is part of the meaning.

And finding the right person to talk to and to share life with is part of the meaning.

Pause.

AURORA

I'll tell you what....

WILLIAMS

What?

AURORA

Don't ask me again.

You go back to America. We can email. Once a week. *No phone calls.*

And in three months I'll give you my answer.

WILLIAMS

Three months?

AURORA

[*beat*] All right. Two months then. But no less.

WILLIAMS stands, goes to AURORA, kisses her on the lips, and sits back down.

WILLIAMS

It's a deal.

They drink on in silence for a moment.

Then AURORA stands, and WILLIAMS stands.

AURORA extends her right hand to WILLIAMS, who looks at it a moment, and then kisses it.

AURORA

Well, goodbye, then.

AURORA exits.

WILLIAMS watches her exit, and then sits back down.

WILLIAMS

Quelle omelette au fromage!

SCENE 15

The following Monday.

All save WILLIAMS enter to the long table in the rehearsal room, and sit.

ROCKWELL has brought papers with him.

CAMERON

To start off with ... I've been thinking this weekend.

ROCKWELL

So have I.

Holds his papers up in his hand.

NELSON

And so have I.

CAMERON

About what, Willow?

NELSON

About playing the part of Ophelia's ghost again....
I can do it now!

CAMERON

What makes you think there will be an Ophelia's ghost?

NELSON

We're here because we're here, because we're here, because we're here.
And because we love Shakespeare.
And we see something special in Ophelia that only her ghost can tell us about.

SANDS

I see something special in Ophelia.

CAMERON

What? What, Sandy, do you see in Ophelia?

SANDS

I see she was once real.

CAMERON

Ophelia was never real. Her ghost was never real.
They're just imaginary.

NELSON

No; I'm not.

**The door to the room opens; the GHOST
OF OPHELIA enters; and the door slams
shut. No one notices the GHOST.**

CAMERON

You're not imaginary, Willow, but Ophelia and her ghost are.

NELSON

If I were imaginary, you could only see me with your imagination.
And even that would be real.

CAMERON

Well, if you're not imaginary, tell me how you feel.

NELSON

I feel dead.

CAMERON

Of course you do.

NELSON

And I want to know how I died. And then tell the world.

CAMERON

What difference can it make?
Knowing won't bring you back, or telling it.

NELSON

So you say.

HARRIS

A ghost in search of a play.

CAMERON

This is crazy.
Debating with the ghost of a theater piece.
And not even one that matters much.

ROCKWELL

Even more crazy to be losing the debate.

CAMERON

[*to NELSON*] All right, young lady.
Answer me this.

NELSON

With pleasure.

CAMERON

What is the square root of 36 times 4?

NELSON

[*without hesitation*] Twelve.

ROCKWELL

What is the square root of 36 ... times 4?

NELSON

[*without hesitation*] Twenty-four.

HARRIS

What are you on?
The answers can't be different.

ROCKWELL

They are when I hesitate between 36 and 4.

HARRIS

What??

CAMERON

Don't ask.

HARRIS

We're not getting anywhere with this.

CAMERON

What do you suggest, Henry?

ROCKWELL

I know what to suggest.

ROCKWELL stands and shows NELSON the top paper from the ones he is holding.

ROCKWELL

[to NELSON] What hidden name do you find encrypted in this array of letters?

NELSON studies the diagram intently for a minute. Her face shows the depth of her concentration.

ROCKWELL

Never mind. There's no possible way you can solve it.
I should never have asked you.
What came over me?
It wasn't fair.
I'm sorry.

NELSON

Henry.

ROCKWELL

[*astounded*] What? What did you say?

NELSON

Give me another minute.

A minute's silence.

NELSON

Henry ... Wriiothesley ... I think you'd say.
W. R. I. O. T. H. E. S. L. E. Y.

ROCKWELL

[*astounded*] *Good God!!! This is impossible!!!*

ROCLWELL snatches the paper back from NELSON, studies it for a few moments, and then sits, burying his head in his hands.

CAMERON

What is it, Alastair? What's the matter with you?

ROCKWELL

Lifting his head.

There's something paranormal in this room.
And ...

Pointing.

It came through that fucking door.

CAMERON

Alastair. Get a hold of yourself.
What's come over you?

ROCKWELL

I almost got divorced!

CAMERON

Divorced?
You, Alastair? At your age?

ROCKWELL

Last Friday I started working on Shakespeare's Dedication.
To his Sonnets, you know.

AURORA

You mean the puzzle no one has solved for four hundred years?

ROCKWELL

That one.

Pointing to the papers he is holding.

This one. And Meg said,
"Alastair, if you start on one of your enigmas again, I'm divorcing you."

**ROCKWELL stands and distributes
around the room copies of the pages he
has been holding – keeping a copy for
himself and one he does not give to
NELSON.**

ROCKWELL

Nelson got it right.

The Dedication reads: "To the only begetter of these insuing sonnets, Mr. W. H.,
all happiness and that eternity promised by our ever-living poet wisheth the well-
wishing adventurer in setting forth. Gamma. Gamma."

AURORA

Which makes virtually zero sense.

It never has.

Besides, I thought the initials at the end were T. T. not Gamma Gamma, you said.

ROCKWELL

Indeed, it makes little sense because it's obviously a cypher. Cypher's rarely do. Until you break the coded message.

Which, in this case, gives the name of the Fair Youth of the Sonnets.

But no. The initials are clearly not "T's" but the Greek letter Gamma. Just look.

The third letter of the Greek alphabet.

Gamma Gamma. Three, three.

They are part of the code ... 33.

HARRIS

You're losing it, Major. And you're losing me along with it.

ROCKWELL

I'll keep it simple.

Although there's nothing simple in what Nelson just did before our eyes.

The first step in decoding a cypher like this is to arrange its letters into a block.

This one starts with a 12 by 12 array, since Shakespeare used 144 letters.

I've been breaking codes like this for donkey's years. Well before I met Meg.

And the first page, the 12 by 12 starting point, is what I gave Nelson.

It doesn't reveal a thing.

So you go on to 13 by 11; then 14 by 10; 15 by 9 and a half; and so on. Until ...

At 15 by 9 and a half you can see, on the fifth page: "Henry" clearly appears.

Nelson did that in her head! In less than two minutes!! Extraordinary!!

I have never met a person with visual spatial memory that finely developed.

She must have a brain like one of those blindfold chess masters we've all been reading about. Even beyond that.

Dear God! This girl, if it's her brain that did this, may have one of the most brilliant brains the world has ever produced!

Because you have to get to 18 by 8 to find the name Wriothesley.

See? On the last page: W. R. I. O. T. H. E. S. L. E. Y.

Henry Wriothesley, just as it was formally written in Shakespeare's time.

And who could possibly do that in their head?... Other than a computer.

CAMERON

This is all much ado about nothing. Don't get so carried away, Alastair.

Shakespeare already dedicated two of his poems to Wriothesley.

Every Shakespeare scholar knows that. There's nothing new here.

ROCKWELL

Shakespeare didn't dedicate anything to Wriothesley after Wriothesley was convicted of treason and sentenced to death.
Not openly, at least.

CAMERON

Oh. I'd forgotten that.

AURORA

Why would Shakespeare do that?
I mean, take the risk that a code-breaker as good as you might figure it out back then?

ROCKWELL

Because he wanted to record for history the reason why Wriothesley risked his neck marching on the Queen's quarters the way he and Essex did.
To leave a monument of the truth, for the Fair Youth's name.

HARRIS

I don't get it. Why would Shakespeare have any reason to do that?

ROCKWELL

Wriothesley suffered from a delusion that if he could persuade the Queen to admit the truth, he, Henry Wriothesley, might factor, personally, into the equation of the Queen's succession.

HARRIS

Wriothesley?? To become Henry the Ninth of England??

ROCKWELL

Apparently there was knowledge abroad, or call it dogged rumor, that Queen Elizabeth was not the virgin she pretended to be.
And somehow Shakespeare gambled on putting it down, disguised, of course, in his Sonnet 33.

HARRIS

Sonnet 33? What's in that?

AURORA

"Full many a glorious morning have I seen
Flatter the mountaintops with sovereign eye,
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy"

SANDS

“Anon permit the basest clouds to ride
With ugly rack on his celestial face,
And from the forlorn world his visage hide,
Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace:
Even so my sun one early morn did shine
With all triumphant splendor on my brow;
But out! alack! he was but one hour mine,
The region cloud hath masked him from me now....”

[beat] We had to memorize it.

HARRIS

But what does it mean? Other than a weather forecast?

AURORA

The sonnet is saying that one morning Shakespeare’s son was born, and within the hour the boy was whisked away from him.

CAMERON

How do you know that?

AURORA

Whisked away into the noble Wriothesley family.

CAMERON

Williams told you, didn’t he?

ROCKWELL

Whisked away by the region cloud....

NELSON

By the regent of England. Queen Elizabeth. And Lord Burghley, I suppose.

CAMERON

Why? Pray tell.

ROCKWELL

Because Queen Elizabeth was the mother of the boy ... who gave suck to him and knew how tender it is to love the babe that milked her.

CAMERON

This is so completely preposterous it’s laughable. *All* of you are laughable. How could the Queen of England have a child and keep it a secret?

AURORA

Queen Elizabeth had a secluded place called Havering, where she could go for long periods of time, and not be visited.
The Court wouldn't dare bother her, on pain of death.
One servant reportedly did lose her life, for talking too much.

CAMERON

Sunny ... I banished Williams.
Do I need to banish you, as well?

NELSON

Let's say it's not all true.
Though why else would Henry Wriothesley have risked being charged with treason and die?
But, anyway, let's say it's not all true.
It still makes for good theatre.
Others are there to sort out the bits.

ROCKWELL

I couldn't completely agree more.
We've got something here.

NELSON

I didn't drown myself for grief.
I died for what I knew.

CAMERON

We need to come to our senses.
Cryptograms don't rule the world.
And they don't make theatre....
We need a breath of fresh air.
To think things through.
Because, the whole thing is preposterous.
And *that* makes theatre.
Come back here tomorrow.

CAMERON stands and leaves the room.

Then everyone else save AURORA and NELSON leaves the room.

AURORA

Quelle omelette au fromage!

SCENE 16

Tuesday.

All save WILLIAMS enter to the long table in the rehearsal room, and sit.

CAMERON

I'm a plain-spoken woman, as you know.
Not all that well liked for it.
But when I make a mistake, I own up to it.

I feel I made a mistake concerning Mr. Williams.
Not about the body of Shakespeare.
Williams is terribly misguided on that subject, and terribly arrogant about it.
And he's American, to boot.
Yet, it appears he actually has a workable idea:
Ophelia's back and side stories are interesting ones to tell.
And, Alastair, if that must involve your cryptograms, so be it.
They can be projected on the stage for Ophelia to solve and the audience to marvel. As you all did.

As for Shakespeare, outside of Hamlet, I have this to say:
He was an oddball. A genius, but odd.
Maybe as odd a man as Malvolio.
And perhaps crazed enough to fall in love with the Queen.
He certainly spent enough time and energy in his plays talking about what he imagined her life was like ... going so far as to call her yon sovereign cruelty in Twelfth Night.
And other things we don't need to discuss.
Picking up on rumors, undoubtedly, when he could.
And somehow cozying up to the Burghley family, probably through the acting company that Anne Cecil's husband had.
He likely never got near the Queen.
Sent messages to her, maybe. And poetry. Which would have been flatly rebuffed.
And, yes, he was damned lucky to keep his head intact.
Be that as it may, we ought to be able to create something new, where Shakespeare falls in love with Queen Elizabeth, and Ophelia, or her talking ghost, narrates the story.
And I think support for that can be had by way of Shakespeare's obscure poem: The Phoenix and the Turtle.
It can be part of Ophelia's mad scene where the birds fly in.

CAMERON takes the copy of Shakespeare's works which is resting on the table by her chair, and opens to a marked place.

CAMERON

First, let me explain, to you, Sandy, that the word "turtle" actually means turtledove. A lovebird.

And the phoenix is a symbol Queen Elizabeth assumed for herself, representing chastity. It's in one of her portraits.

SANDS

Okay.

CAMERON

From The Phoenix and the Turtle:
[reads] Let the bird of loudest lay,
On the sole Arabian tree,
Herald sad and trumpet be,
To whose sound chaste wings obey....

Here the anthem doth commence:
Love and constancy is dead;
Phoenix and the turtle fled
In a mutual flame from hence.

So they loved, as love in twain
Had the essence but in one;
Two distincts, division none:
Number there in love was slain.

Hearts remote, yet not asunder;
Distance and no space was seen
'Twixt the turtle and his queen;
But in them it were a wonder....

Death is now the phoenix' nest;
And the turtle's loyal breast
To eternity doth rest.

Leaving no posterity:
'Twas not their infirmity,
It was married chastity.

CAMERON

Closes the book.

We can work from that:

A saddened, delusional poet ... the greatest who ever lived ... and his Queen whose hand he could never reach.

Returning heartbroken to Stratford, with his play Hamlet to tell the story, through the eyes of our Ophelia.

What do you think?

NELSON

O! my God!!

O! my God!!

AURORA

What, Willow?

NELSON

He's coming back!

CAMERON

It's the only sensible thing we can do:

Sunny ... contact Mr. Williams.

You can explain my apologies anyway you want.

Tell him I want him back. We're going to finish the Ophelia project.

NELSON and SANDS jump to their feet, step up on their chairs, and climb onto the table to do a little dance of joy, hugging each other.

The door to the room opens; the GHOST OF OPHELIA enters; and the door slams shut. No one notices the GHOST.

The light dims.

SANDS steps down from the table.

Going behind a scrim (as NELSON remains standing on the table), ROCKWELL (as Claudius), AURORA (as Queen Gertrude), HARRIS (as Laertes), and SANDS (as Hamlet) don cloaks and

**crowns, and mime the final, death scene
of Hamlet, lit behind the scrim.**

CAMERON remains sitting.

NELSON

[*to the audience*] Sing a song of sixpence,
A pocket full of rye,
Four and twenty blackbirds
Baked in a pie.

When the pie was opened
The birds began to sing –
Wasn't that a dainty dish
To set before the king?

[*beat*] And thou, treble-dated crow,
That thy sable gender make
With the breath thou give and take,
'Mongst the mourners shalt thou go.

[*beat*] See? The players make a grief and mourning world through the power of
their acting.

[*beat*] I loved a nightingale,
Of a man.
O, what a noble mind!
The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword.
The expectancy and rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion and the mold of form,
The observed of all observers,
The unmatched form and feature of youth.
I fell in love with a Prince.

[*beat*] A magnificent Prince, who, after the death of his grandmother.
His father's mother.
For his mother's mother died long before, you see.
Murdered by her husband.
The Prince's grandfather.
Gertrude's mother, who dominated her daughter's life by her death.
Her only daughter, her only child, who avenged her father's murder of her
mother by luring men romantically, stripping them of their pride, and then
ditching them.

NELSON

[beat] A magnificent Prince I say, who, after the death of his grandmother, rode to Elsinore with seven score horse and one – all in black.

I watched him, and the hundred and forty others with him.

What young woman could not fall in love with a prince like that?

I was six.

[beat] A magnificent of all Princes.

I watched him when I was eleven conduct a spectacular battle, staged at the castle, between two armies he created for the show.

First I saw a fort, commanded by Horatio, made of slender timber covered with canvas. Inside of which were divers actors serving as soldiers.

Against it stood a second fort of like strength, commanded by Hamlet himself, with a lusty band of gentlemen.

In the field between the two were placed battering rams and mortar pieces brought from London.

The Prince and his soldiers gave numerous assaults, with fireworks in the air to serve as fire and brimstone for the mock battle.

All of it, flashes and flames, sound and fury, were of great excitement to those who witnessed with the Queen.

[beat] But the joy of pomp and theatre faded from my Prince's eyes.

He turned sullen, angry, and morose.

His love of life hardened into hatred.

Fain would I sing, he told me, but fury makes me fret,

And rage hath sworn to seek revenge of wrong:

Oh let us sit upon the ground

And tell sad stories of the death of kings:

How some have been deposed, some slain in war.

Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed,

Some poisoned by their wives or would-be king.

[beat] My fair prince trusted me, and told me too much. Much too much.

You live to trust a person you can trust.

You live to be or not to be. And die in another's deceit.

Always a woman's question. Sometimes a woman's choice:

Life can be miserable, Aye! But is escape from it not yet worse for beings that can feel? Can a dream of who to be choose not to be? Not to wrestle with ... O my

God! O the mind, in life or death, has mountains. Cliffs of fall.

[beat] I was poisoned because I knew too much; my lips could not be trusted.

Nightshade in the daylight; deathly fatal, given time.

NELSON

I was delusional from the venom in my blood.
I barely knew where I was.
Or heard what I said.
After a while I barely could keep my balance.
A willow branch I held broke from my weight, and I was wet.
Too weak and wet to stand.
My muscle strength had left me, and I drowned.
With Nightshade in my blood.
Poisoned in the daylight.
I died.

[*beat*] Too many eggs have been broken.
The man I'm in love with, is in love with another.

[*beat*] Four and twenty blackbirds
Baked in a pie.
When the pie was opened
Ashes, ashes, we all fall down.

**The mime concludes, with all the actors
in it on the ground behind the scrim.**

**The door to the room opens; the GHOST
OF OPHELIA exits; and the door slams
shut.**

NELSON steps down from the table.

The light dims to darkness.

END

Postscript

TO.THE.ONLIE.BEGETTER.OF.
THESE.INSVING.SONNETS.
M^r.W.H.ALL.HAPPINESSE.
AND.THAT.ETERNITIE.
PROMISED.

BY.

OVR.EVER-LIVING.POET.

WISHETH.

THE.WELL-WISHING.

ADVENTVRER.IN.

SETTING.

FORTH.

T. T.

T O T H E O N L I E B E G E T
T E R O F T H E S E I N S V I
N G S O N N E T S M ^r W H A L
L H A P P I N E S S E A N D T
H A T E T E R N I T I E P R O
M I S E D B Y O V R E V E R L
I V I N G P O E T W I S H E T
H T H E W E L L W I S H I N G
A D V E N T V R E R I N S E T
T I N G F O R T H

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T O T H E O N L I E B E G E T T E R
O F T H E S E I N S V I N G S O N N
E T S M ^r W H A L L H A P P I N E S
S E A N D T H A T E T E R N I T I E
P R O M I S E D B Y O V R E V E R L
I V I N G P O E T W I S H E T H T H
E W E L L W I S H I N G A D V E N T
V R E R I N S E T T I N G F O R T H

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Γ Γ

The well-wishing Adventurer in setting forth.

King James assumed the throne after Queen Elizabeth died in 1603 without designating her successor.

In June, a year later, the man whom Ted Williams believes actually wrote the works of William Shakespeare disappeared. It was attested in legal documents that he died, June 24th, 1604. But there are no credible records how he died, or where, or even if he did die. No funeral. No will. No elegies or epitaphs. No tomb or corpse. No mention of his death in any correspondence anywhere, despite the fact that the death of a notable was always a major topic of conversation in letters at that time.

Williams believes that man retreated to an island where he spent the last year to eighteen months of his life writing *The Tempest* and getting all his other plays properly edited.

And the island?

Bleak and stormy, yellow sands, and a rock-hard shore.

Frost in the fall upon the sharp north wind.

On the east coast of England.

It's depicted as being in two parts, surrounded by foul mud-flats, with brackish water, but a freshwater well.

It adds up to *one* place Williams can find.

In Essex, 20 miles from Hedingham Castle.

Mersea Island.