

## CHAPTER XIV

### TRAGI-COMEDY

WILL had gotten a sweetheart, a true Court lady. Everyone in the Company knew it as they must, though nobody could find out her name, try as they would.

The affair was a complete catastrophe, could be nothing else. Will had a wife down in the country. She did not appear when the players visited Stratford, they were always entertained at his father's house where he stayed, but people had seen him with a cloaked woman on his arm out for silent evening walks. He had always been close as an oyster about his private affairs, and solemn unromantic Cuthbert Burbage knew more than anyone about this new entanglement.

He had come in one morning and found Will shaking his head at his own reflection in the wooden-framed mirror in the tiring-room. Eight o'clock on a London spring morning of sour yellow sunshine is not the hour for a player to inspect his features if he wants a reassuring answer. Will had sighed as he turned from the glass, and sworn softly "I'll never to sea again," but he must have set sail despite that wise decision, for the Company soon began to notice pathetic evidences of the man in love, a state towards which they were always sympathetic. He forgot his meals and bought some new clothes. Truly he looked very well in them. He had always been at home in good company, having some gentle blood in his veins. A real lady was no more

## THE BEST OF HIS FAMILY

than his due. A pity she couldn't have come sooner when he might have taken her lightlier. Kempe, who certainly knew several, said that they were all the same, and if poor Will was expecting a fair deal from one he was living in a Fool's Paradise. They took you up because you were the fashion, like Sackerson the prize brown bear in Paris Garden, whose keeper sometimes let Court ladies with shillings to fling around lead his charge about by the chain (just twice round the pit, more tired them) so that they could say that they had handled Sackerson and the sweet beast had been quite tame.

They took you aboard their galleon, said Kempe, and treated you as if you were a fellow passenger, (he granted them that they knew how to do this,) then when they had spoilt your taste for your natural companions below decks, they cold-shouldered you because they had tired of you. When there was a splash one day they looked down at the struggling white face swallowing sea-water and said to one another: "Ha! One of the crew fallen overboard!"

And the ladies were worse offenders than the gentlemen, said Kempe, for whereas the gentlemen only thumped Sackerson on the back and told him that he was the devil of a performer, ladies always held out hands towards him, and when he had given them a bear's lick, cried out how rude and nasty was the caress of this low fellow.

Cuthbert who as a Burbage and a business manager was afraid lest Will's work should suffer, repeated everything to his father as it unfolded. This was not gossiping; an accident to Will now would be a serious thing for the Theatre. He had asked Will cautiously if it were true that he was forsworn and had put to sea

## TRAGI-COMEDY

again and Will had answered: "Ay, and would fain let down anchor, but I can find no bottom. "God a mercy," said Cuthbert, "that sounds like Hell." "Where'er I abide I am paying my shot," said Will and snecked up.

The Company called her the Dark Lady. "She is not one and twenty, judging by her hands and her throat, and is of competent beauty." She was often to be seen in the Lord's Room at the Theatre, masked of course. "When she chanceth to smile there appeareth a little pit in her chin, the which becometh her right well." On days when she was in the house you could tell without needing to look for her. Will's banged and consternated air in the tire-room, his leashed expectancy for the show to be done betrayed her presence. She came in a coach to his Bishopsgate lodgings, the jay! and friends denied admittance had heard her laughing and laughing. She never took her mask off even in his rooms. Someone had seen her standing at the window wearing a silver dress embroidered with blood-red cornstalks and hunching her bare shoulder at Will, who was chewing his knuckles in the shadow behind her. Someone else was almost sure—hiss! hiss!—that once after dark she had come dressed as a man, a gallant in a long white cloak. Some days Will looked like death, on others he was too much alive, understanding what you were about to say ere you had time to say it, striding about fervent and gustful, humming to himself like a lad. His rooms, which were kept for him by a widow woman so well stricken in years that nobody had ever accused her of being more than housekeeper, now reeked of angel-water scent.

"He is honest as the skin between's brows," grumbled Cuthbert. "He'll take harm."

## THE BEST OF HIS FAMILY

"I thought we spoke of a maid and a married man," said James dryly.

"Pho! pho! one of the Court," said Cuthbert. "You may imagine whether she would not hold it a shame to be still a maid."

The Company who knew the signs of the lover-triumphant believed that Will had not yet got three farthingsworth of entertainment out of her. That would be just like a Court lady, to come to your rooms and mean nothing.

Errand boys were whistling *Who is Silvia?* about the streets of London this spring. When songs from a man's plays are being whistled by boys with trays of pies on their heads, he should know better than to fall in love. Old James listened to the sum of what Cuthbert had to tell and then said grimly: "He shall harness his discontent." It was his experience that some men in this condition did better work than ever in their lives before. He said that a hopeless love affair (what he called barking at the moon) seldom lasted more than five years, but that the Theatre was a constant mistress. Cuthbert, who had seen more of Will, frowned at the thought of him enduring five years at his present pace, and asked whether he might let him off playing. He played small stock parts like old gaffers and minor lords as well as anybody, but he would never make a great actor and indeed seemed to have small ambition that way. "If nobody can play them better let him continue to play them," said James affronted at the thought that anyone should not care to make an actor. "When this fool's fever is over he will thank us for having kept his nose to the grindstone."

Will's tragedy was only one amongst many going on in the Company. On a dark autumn afternoon Gabriel

## TRAGI-COMEDY

Spencer, that ruffinous bully and rare singer, did not turn up. Little Taylor, shaking with cold fright and only pulled together by a timely posset, went on to sing his song. The Theatre was swept for the night and the tire-rooms locked up and still no word came of Gabriel, who was lying on his face in the wet grass of Hoxton Fields while a protesting young north-countryman called Jonson was being marched from the spot with the grip of the Queen's officers on his shoulders. Gabriel himself had killed a man a few years before. That affair was as long as it was broad and nobody grieved when Jonson was released from the Clink a changed man and a convert to the Old Faith. He was a quarrelsome tanling-faced broken-haired youngster who had run away from apprenticeship to a bricklayer and enlisted a soldier in the Low Countries. He had been married to a wife who was virtuous but a shrew, but his mother, who was from north of Carlisle, and a matron of sterner stuff, had refused to be shaken off, and they had religious disputes at the top of their voices even whilst he was in prison. Burbage, who had seen him act, a thing he did most villainously, had refused a play of his, a decision which Will had persuaded the inaccessible manager to reconsider. When Will went to see the prisoner in the Clink bringing this good news, he met the mother, and she replied to his hopes for her son's acquittal by saying calmly that if he was condemned she had obtained a packet of poison, half of which she was going to put in his porridge. No son of hers should die a felon's death. She proposed to swallow the remainder of the dose herself. Jonson seemed quite happy at the idea which he described as "exit in the high Roman fashion."

Burbage put confidence in Will's judgment. He

## THE BEST OF HIS FAMILY

could not himself see that Will's plays differed very greatly from those of other authors, indeed he thought it a pity that characters in them provided with the opportunity for a great rant often said something quite simple just as you or I might have spoken, but the moment you began to read one you could tell that it was another get-penny. There was something hit-the-pin about them—authentic, that was the word. The language of course was a little better than other people's. James found himself stopping as he pottered round the wings sometimes to hear a speech out. Marley had been able to beat the big drum just as well he considered, but then Marley had never consented to introduce a clowning interlude, and oh! the difference between dealing with Marley and dealing with Shakespeare. Will did not put on airs about Latin learning, stamp about saying that he would sooner pitch his play into the Thames than see it so gelded, had never, like some authors one knew, sold the same play to two Companies. Observe, said James, how reasonable was he about that woodland piece (a sure success, people loved heroines disguising themselves as boys). He had come half-way to meet his manager over every cut and alteration, allowed the whole scene of the bad brother's conversion to be deleted, even given up his own idea for a title, although James had nothing better to offer. And when he must have been exasperated he had turned his pains off with a joke. Two days before it was due for showing James sent back the manuscript to the author by a panting call-boy. "Is Master Shakespeare aware that there are two characters in this play called Jaques?" "And five players in Master Burbage's company called Will," scribbled poor Will, returning the nameless play now

## TRAGI-COMEDY

pathetically headed: *As YOU Like It*. At the first showing the audience had stood up in their seats and shouted for an Epilogue. There had been no Epilogue, but by rehearsal the next morning there was one. Will had gone straight home and written it without needing to be asked. He was not fool enough to stand about talking of his poetic soul when the tuppenny gallery was yelling for something he could turn out in ten minutes if he pleased.

His first two plays had been Court comedies about ladies and gentlemen who behaved just like people of worship, the young lords running into debt, kissing and telling, and swearing at their servants, the ladies perfect princesses. Heroines must be chaste, said James. He further explained that there was nothing here for the groundlings to get their teeth into and Will painstakingly put two pairs of twins into his next piece, a true farce. What attraction of the unsuitable had prompted his patron to call for that play to be shown to a learned audience, James had never been able to imagine. Almost anything else that Will had written would have served better.

Lord Southampton, who was studying law in a perfunctory manner at Gray's Inn, had got Will the promise that one of his plays should be shown there on Innocents' Night, a signal honour. James still remembered that whole affair as an actor-manager's nightmare. From the moment that my lord had chosen the roaring farce, despite all persuasions, an evil genius had dogged every arrangement. It had only been one more straw in a peck of troubles when the Queen had sent a command for a piece to be shown to her at Greenwich the same day.

By judicious juggling both things could be managed.

## THE BEST OF HIS FAMILY

The Company had twenty-four hours in which to learn strange parts, an unsatisfactory re-casting was arranged, and Will, who could not be spared from the Court performance, set out heavily for Greenwich. As the show there took place at three o'clock it should be possible for him to get back to Holborn in time to witness at least the tail end of his own comedy which was ordered for after supper.

Burbage and he returned to London by boat after dusk, old James sitting in the bows with his hat pulled down over his eyes and his cloak held across his mouth enveloped in a silence which might mean no more than sleep, Will fidgeting like a hooked fish and uttering the rowers a week's wages if they reached Puddle Wharf before nine. The tide was against them and there was a strong wind blowing. Pull the rowers never so lustily the dark banks moved past at a snail's pace, and the dip-dip of oars seemed endless. When they disembarked the carriage ordered to meet them had not arrived. Will enthroned the manager on a secluded cell-cask and ran off into Blackfriars to get a conveyance. The wind had dropped and some snowflakes were beginning to fall.

It was past ten o'clock when they drew in through the Holborn portal of Gray's Inn entering what should have been an abode of stately peace, but tonight had somehow got caught up in the nightmare. The porter, when they called out: "For my Lord Southampton," said that if they were more of the players' friends he had orders to admit not another such base padding rascal. He had already got into trouble for letting in a host of masked ruffians who were breaking the law in there, jerking his thumb at the lighted windows of the Hall from which came startling

## TRAGI-COMEDY

sounds. James dismounted stiffly and sticking his hand in his vest said: "Master Porter it is Burbage! new come from the Queen's Majesty's presence," and they were let in, Will wishing that his superior had not said that, and left to settle the dispute with the driver of their sorry coach.

They had known when they had visited the hushed and honourable hall earlier in the day to make final arrangements, that a performance here would not be an easy matter. There was no place available for tiring-room, so the players would have to dress in the lord's chambers and walk across the courtyard in a procession carefully timed not to interfere with the removal of supper. The tremendous carved screen with its graceful gallery which they might use as background was unfortunately pierced by the two chief entrance doors also the only communication with the buttery.

Will making after the manager at a limping run saw before he got his breath to ask that something had gone wrong. In the echoing stone entry between the buttery and the hall through which a draught was blowing as down a funnel, the whole Company seemed to be clustered, doing nothing but get in the way of confused and angry sewers carrying out loads of dirty dishes. As he came up a man holding aloft a stuffed peacock brushed against Burbage, sending a rivulet of congealing gravy onto my master's best pot hat. Seizing upon Sinkler, who was disconsolately spitting as he leant against the wall of the archway watching the snowflakes fly past, Will asked were they too late? was it all over? "Why nay," said Sinkler turning a fishy eye upon him. "We've not had leave to open yet. Seemeth as they may not require our services." He added: "We're all cold sober and sober cold out here."

## THE BEST OF HIS FAMILY

"We will go in and find my lord," announced Burbage, and setting his shoulder to one of the massive doors pushed his way into the Hall.

There was no difficulty in finding my lord, although for a moment the wave of hot air and food scents, the roar of voices reverberating in the curved roof-timbers crossing and re-crossing far overhead, and the blaze of candles lighting up panelled walls, shining dresses and faces—some shot by looks of intense disapproval—was overwhelming. My lord had done the natural thing for a young gentleman faced by a difficulty, he had got a little drunk. He was standing on a trestle table which the sewers were begging for leave to take down, with his gown slipping off his shoulders, his dark gold hair tumbled over his white brocaded doublet and his arm linked in that of his dear young friend, Mr. Harry Helms, whom he was proclaiming as Lord of Misrule, Prince of Purpoole, Duke of Holborn, Marquis of St. Giles's, Tottenham, Count Palatine of Bloomsbury and Clerkenwell, and Great Lord of the Cantons of Kentish Town, Paddington and Knights-Bridge.

He looked flagrantly handsome and when he caught sight of the anxious countenances of Will and Burbage looking up at him, he descended with the sad dignity of a conscientious monarch called back from his one hour of relaxation to the cares of a realm.

"Thish," quoth he, laying a heavy hand upon each of them and inclining his inches confidentially, "is a Night of Errors! All has miscarried. By some sorcery. . . ."

He gave up that word, and starting anew wandered into an explanation how this was to have been a special show of Amity for the reception of the Templars, but somehow a whole parcel of base common fellows had

## TRAGI-COMEDY

gained admittance to the sacred precincts. They had worn vizards and by their poor apparel the porter had easily mistaken them for the players that they had declared themselves to be. The guests from the Middle Temple disgusted at their company and finding themselves so crowded that they could obtain neither supper nor seats for the show to follow, had mostly departed though some were still here and inclining to fight. "Never such a disgrace in this Inn," he concluded. "And what to do? Myself I think we are all a whit scratched."

Burbage said: "In God's name, my lord, let the play be summoned." "But," objected my lord, "they are all singing in here and shall cast platters at your players for interruption." "Three blasts of a trumpet thrice repeated, my lord," suggested Burbage, "and—my players have thick skulls."

And that was how it had to be. Will's *Comedy of Errors* made history in Gray's Inn and did him no good. Years after, that dire occasion was still known as the "Night of Errors." Nothing that had happened had been any fault of his, still Burbage kept a superstitious horror of a command performance of one of his plays. They drew increasing crowds to the Theatre, the Curtain and the Rose, but Burbage had never yet offered one of them for the Queen's entertainment. A series of mishaps such as had descended out of a clear sky upon Gray's Inn would have meant the Tower for someone if they had occurred instead at Whitehall or Greenwich.

Will's noble patron was of more use to him when less actively benevolent. As must be expected, directly plays by William Shakespeare began to draw the town, the critics drew their venomous blades, and one of them,

## THE BEST OF HIS FAMILY.

after nosing round the Theatre, wrote an attack upon Will so ill-natured and personal that Burbage himself went off to see its publisher. Mention of Lord Southampton's patronage, together with the lucky accident that the bitter-tongued critic had meantime died, obtained an apology so handsome that no new dramatist could have dreamt of a better advertisement.

Will, with his fractured heart, went on writing better than ever, as old James had intended. His regular output now was three plays a year, and James saw no reason why this gold-mine should ever cease to yield metal. Still Master Burbage had his troubles, one of which was getting desperate.

His arrangement with Henslowe had been shattered by the worst visitation of plague known in England in living memory. All playhouses in London were closed for the whole of one season and half of another, and all Companies had to go on tour. Some players went abroad, others to the provinces; when they began to filter back it was soon plain that death had taken such a toll that the Companies would have to be entirely reorganized. Burbage had got back most of his old favourites, fat Lowin, Kempe, the king of clowns, gaunt Austin Philips and the inimitable Pope. He had got what he had long hoped for, the name of the Lord Chamberlain for his Company, but now he was threatened with having no Theatre. His unendurable landlord refused renewal of the Shoreditch lease, and since he had become a Puritan, added that he was going to have the playhouse plucked down and its timber converted into tenement dwellings. James would have to look about for a new site, and that right speedily.

He must have begun to suspect that he was not much longer for this world, for he said to Will one day that

## TRAGI-COMEDY

he would like the funeral to be very quiet. Will made the necessary reply that such an order would cause great disappointment amongst the Company and indeed throughout London, and James, brightening said well, then let it be as quiet as possible.

They were driving in a caroché again on an August day, down to the district of Blackfriars where James thought he had heard of a possible home for his ill-treated players. The old monastery of Black Friars, like so many of the ecclesiastical houses dissolved by King Henry, was lying neglected and empty. The City was strewn by such relics of former grandeur, but Blackfriars had the advantage that though it was central and in a fashionable neighbourhood it did not fall under the jurisdiction of the Lord Mayor.

The available premises proved to consist of a Parliament Chamber, a Great Hall and a Friars' Dining Parlour. The Parliament Chamber James dismissed with an upward thrust of the palm. Too low in the roof. Over the Hall and Parlour he was jubilant. They could easily be thrown into one, and behold! a theatre almost ready for use, an audience protected from the weather and artificial lighting essential. He had a strong unconventional dislike of playing by daylight. Handing Will an old folding rule he begged him to measure the floor space of both apartments and wandered off by himself muttering something about inspecting the galleries and roof timber. His ungainly form was shortly to be seen moving with professional unconcern upon the leads. So there may have been something in that legend that he had once been apprenticed to the building trade.

Will measured the parlour first. It had a worn stone floor and was known to him of old. It had been Rocho

## THE BEST OF HIS FAMILY

Boretta's school of fence and when last he had called there to meet his patron after a lesson its walls had been covered with noblemen's arms, rapiers, daggers and gloves, and a table with a green cloth of Italian brocade on which were set pens, ink, sand and gilt-edged paper for gentlemen to make their appointments, had stood just inside the door. It measured fifty-two feet by thirty-seven, a goodly size. Clapping the dust off his knees, Will wandered into the Hall, which was already provided with two galleries, having served for a short time as a sort of private theatre for the boy choristers of the Chapel Royal, Windsor and St. Pauls. There had been some difficulty over their leasehold—an ominous sound that—and they had gone elsewhere, but for four years or so they had been serious rivals of the playhouses. Their prices had been nearly double those asked by Burbage, but that had meant that audiences were select. No smell of garlic.

The Great Hall had magnificent long windows like those in a church, filled with glass so old and clouded that its tint was that of the village pond when frozen over. The strong August sunlight rather lit than penetrated them, and not the faintest sounds from the river below or the streets above reminded the visitor that he was in the heart of London on a fine summer's day. Will flapped his rule over the floor-boards (good oak that would soon take a polish) while an aged caretaker watched him in silence. He wanted to get the fellow to speak, so that he could judge how voices carried in here, but Burbage had been absolute that their true errand must not be known. They had come in a plain caroche like private gentlemen. Presently the old fellow opened his lips on his own account, and uttered something unexpected :

## TRAGI-COMEDY

"The Spanish Lady," mumbled he, "stood her trial in here. My dad slipped me in to see 'em at it. (He was a serjeant. We've aye dwelt here.) Kings, cardinals and archbishops set in chairs of cloth of gold with tapestry under their feet. Where you are kneeling now that's where She knelt in front of the King's throne—three score and eight years come next Ascension."

Quarter of an hour later Burbage returned from his exploration to find Will deep in converse with a toothless gaffer. He thought little of it since Will had a genius for striking up odd friendships. He only hoped that his accomplice had kept their secret for he was now determined to secure a lease of these premises. Their hoary stone walls, three feet thick, pleased him right well. He was one of those old gentlemen who are continually inveighing against the staring red-brick houses starting up all over England. As they drove away he asked Will what had been the subject of his confabulation, and Will turning a luminous gaze upon the Manager said had Master Burbage realized that that fair hall was the same, in which the putting away of Queen Katherine by the present Queen's father had been debated? He had got the whole story out of yonder fellow, a lad of eight years at the time. Lend an ear.

The Spanish Lady, the man had said, had spoken very well though her English was unchristian. She had knelt on the juicy rushes in a good crimson gown of three piled velvet sewn all over with tiny white beads, and she had wept and wrung her hands as she recounted to her husband how she had been his true wife these twenty years and eight times carried a child of his, though it had pleased God to call all but one of those out of this world. "I put it to your conscience," said

## THE BEST OF HIS FAMILY

she, free-spoken like a lady of birth, "whethe: I came not to you as a maid." And you could see tht at she had. An honest woman, ancient enough, weighty and nobly contrived as this same stone hall, nothing gamesome mayhap but dead dismal honest. She had looked the princess, none of your Hop-on-my-knee sweethearts like the one that had come after her. She had got to her feet and pointed at Cardinal York who sat watching her with his finger propping his bag cheek, and a fine rating she had given him, casting up at him all that he had done since he wore side-coats, not neglecting to mention in such solemn company his twiggng and wenching. When she had swept out followed by her parchment-faced ladies, the crier had made the leaden roof ring with his summons to her to come back. "Katherine, Queen of England, come again into the court!" But she had said that on this first occasion she must ask her husband's sanction for disobedience.

"A Scarlet sin," that was what she had called my lord cardinal, sitting there in all his yards of stiff carnation silk. As the legate had mounted his trapped mule to ride away, gaffer had overheard a bishop remark that it was warm weather. "Yea, my lord," said Cardinal York, "and if you had been chafed as I have been you would say it was *hot*."

James listened to all this without encouragement, then pronounced heavily: "Princes should not be set on the stage too nigh their lifetime. I have told thee that before."

"It could be called *All is True*," sighed Will, "and would fetch great houses—played in the very hall where the action once took place."

"With our blessed Queen's own mother presented as a Hop-on-my-knee," snorted James. "Will thou have

## TRAGI-COMEDY

us all laid by the heels? Remember the fate of the Swan."

The Swan was a fine new playhouse erected only three years ago on the Bankside, far more modern and better appointed than the Theatre or even the Rose. Its management had been unfortunate enough to produce a satirical piece with characters resembling those in high places very thinly veiled. The poor Swan had been summarily closed, and though permitted to re-open after great entreaties, had never recovered and was said to sit on the marishes a'hanging down her head.

"Even when our present monarch ceases to bear rule over us 'twould be a venture too hazardous," reflected James. "Yet—'*Divorce,*' at the Blackfriars, enacted on the very spot. . . . Hum, hum, I catch thy notion. It might be done. For the nonce bosom up though, and get on with thy Jew of Venice."

Burbage had further business in the City about which he was customarily mysterious, so Will asked that he might be put down as they passed the Bell Inn in Carter Lane. The Oxford carrier, he explained, might be in with news from Stratford.

Pleased to think that his companion's bright face and ardent manner to-day might be attributed to thoughts of home, not some development of that languishing amour, the Manager did as he asked and then drove off to start negotiations with a brazier maker for fire baskets of sea-coal to heat Blackfriars Hall.

Will found that the carrier was in this morning and there was a letter waiting for him. With surprise he found it to be addressed in the hand of Judith Sadler, his old friend who no longer approved him. He opened it and stood to read its few lines in the sunlit courtyard

## THE BEST OF HIS FAMILY

which had late summer flowers trailing down from boxes in its galleries and a magpie chattering in a pendant wicker cage.

Judith wrote to tell him that his only son, her Ham's little namesake was dead. The wench Audrey's child had also been taken, but both his daughters, God be praised, had escaped the fever. . . .

It was breed-fever weather, hot and humid. The spleeny eye of the sun shone into every front-chamber of that Bishopsgate lodging. The market carts coming into the City with dawn were the best things to remind a wakeful Londoner that outside these streets were pastures and green banks. . . .

All the players were sorry when they heard that Will had lost his one male child, and all hastened to express their sympathy according to their means and natures. Nid Field, who was in funds, sent round the book-holder from the Curtain with a copy of a tract which he knew Will desired to see, Sly, who was not, came in person, his long nose redder than ever. He wanted Will to have a great crying out and then feel the better for it. "What man! Never sit staring like a monument. Grief dammed up whispers the heart to break." He explained that he was sorry that he had spent his last tester on sack last night. If he had known how things were to fall out he would have kept his piece and saved himself a headache. He was indeed somewhat sodden still and tears dripped into his little yellow beard as he told that though a bachelor he had known a father's grief—just a seven months' child got on a poor flirt down Cripplegate. . . . It took Will some time to comfort him, and when he had gone there entered Kempe, leading on a string his famous dog Crab whom he had evidently infected with a sense of the situation,

## TRAGI-COMEDY

for the accomplished animal came in with tail drooped and ears held back. Dressed in a dark suit that might easily pass for mourning, Master Kempe was the picture of an elderly gentleman on an errand of condolence. He spoke his lines with a tragic countenance and at the right moment after a parting couplet about Courage, rose and passed out tip-toeing down the stairs and even halfway down the street.

After him came a perfect procession, for by now Sly had got round from house to house telling the news and how Will had not yet shed a tear. Mistress Cuthbert Burbøge came to the door and sent in her last born with a basket of dainties cooked by her own hands. She thought the sight of the lambkin alone might do the trick. The Goughs wanted Will to come to their house and hear a little music. He thanked them heartily but said that he did not think he would abear to hear music a long while, a tribute to their art which they appreciated.

And last came poor Doll from his old Bankside lodging, who had met Sly in the street. He did not recognize her at first, it was long since he had seen her and she was so clean. He would not easily have guessed what consolation she came to offer and she made a ghastly business of it standing flicking the leer of invitation off and on a countenance blotted by unaffected woe. He pressed upon her the basketful sent by Mistress Cuthbert and she went off with it shaking her head. She had troubled to wash herself which was not a thing that happened every week.