

## CHAPTER XV

### TRAGEDY

WILL's noble patron was back from an expedition to the Azores, a disillusioned hero. He had done heroically, everyone was agreed, but he had got no recognition save the doubtful honour of being knighted by a discredited commander. Lord Essex, who had gone as General by sea and land, had quarrelled with his rear-vice-admiral, Sir Walter Raleigh. People said that he should have cashiered Sir Walter for disobedience. "If he had been my friend," said the General, "I would have done so," a fine sentiment, but not for use in these days. They had missed the Spanish Fleet with its Indian treasure aboard. The Queen was angry with all of them and they with her. The only person she gave any commendation was Sir Walter, her favourite's great enemy.

Sea-dreams had always filled my lord's heart and he had thought himself happy when he had got permission to join the expedition as an adventurer and sent his maiden armour to be scoured for action. The ship to which he was appointed was called *The Garland*. Could anything be more auspicious? He made a fine scene of departure and then had to spoil it by re-appearing in London within a fortnight. The fleet had been obliged to put back into Plymouth after encountering a storm of almost fabulous violence. The ships provided by Her Majesty were deficient in every par-

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ticular, the poor wretches who manned them half starved, verminous and rotted with sickness. Lord Essex, taking his young brother-in-arms with him rode to London to press for better equipment. When my lord charged into Will's Bishopsgate lodgings again six months later he found there the best welcome awaiting him in London.

His golden-haired, still-beautiful lady mother loved him tenderly and had sent him anxious letters—"Yesterday's storms filled my heart with sourest thoughts"—but he was at odds with her as he was with most of his world. She had taken too literally his advice that she was too fair to remain a peevish widow. Once roused from her long seclusion she had entered upon an unbridled career of re-marriages. Her invalid second husband had only lasted three seasons. Her first wedding had been of duty, her second of pity, her third—she dared not tell her mettled supercilious son—was to be one of love. The gentleman she affected was inferior to her in fortune, birth and what was worst, years. She was six and forty. She longed to make her Harry's homecoming a happy one, but every time he visited her she had to ask him to cast his eye over some plaguing papers. Her second husband's will was proving almost as burdensome as that of the late Earl. Sir Thomas Heneage had left her everything he could, more than he should perhaps. A violent gentleman who had married Sir Thomas's only daughter by an earlier wife was going to contest it. Will had never seen my lady yet, but during her son's absence she had sent several times to ask his player friend for news.

It was for Will that her Harry kept his tales of Westward Ho!—of rainbows seen at night, of wakings in the mornings to floods of sunlight and the patter of mules'

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hooves and the drag of bullock carts, of dark Spaniards at work amongst the vines in pale-coloured soil, of cascades of purple and vermeil flowers overhanging a wrinkled cloth of turquoise and hyacinth ocean. The islands had been more beautiful than any dream, and the quarrels amongst his companions worse than any nightmare. Within a fortnight of his return he was back at his old cry of abhorring London. If Lord Essex got a command to Ireland he would like to go with him there.

Meanwhile he talked of asking for the Royal permission to travel in France, visited playhouses every week and nearly got into serious trouble by falling out with a fellow courtier in the Queen's ante-chamber one night.

Sir Walter Raleigh when rudely asked by Mr. Willoughby to stop playing Primero and go to bed had quietly pocketed his winnings and departed, bowing gracefully, but Lord Southampton had followed Mr. Willoughby into the tennis court and there some sort of a rough and tumble had taken place.

Before he had left for the Azores he had got himself into another imbroglio just as daft. That time the Earl of Northumberland had been his adversary. Lord Northumberland had sent a challenge and the young Earl had found himself in the ignominious position of having to ask for a one-handed guello as he had got a swelling in his right elbow from playing over-much tennis.

The Queen had heard of the affair and wrathfully put a stop to it. My lord, who would not lackey her, would never get advancement in her service, and such doings only served to confirm the general opinion that he was of no great parts. As he dined moodily

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alone in his London palace he turned for comfort to a letter written in the over-driven hand of one who has to write too much. "England is not so furnished at this day with fond hopes that those of the better sort should be dejected into forlorn destinies. Men of your haviour and worth receive no glory from their places but rather give honour to the place." My lord shrugged helplessly, tore the letter in two and went off to play Gleek. He was becoming a familiar figure in the gaming-houses and boasted of his winnings there.

The Queen was showing her age, though she would never admit it. Her gust for festivity and travel waxed fiercer. People said that soon there would not be a Great Chamber in England in which she had not feasted nor a bed in which she had not slept. Her temper was becoming maniacal. They whispered that she had broken the finger of one of her ladies-in-waiting the other day. The lady had to say that a chandelier had fallen. Undeniably when Lord Essex had opposed his mistress over a matter of an appointment she had slapped his face in the presence of a large company. The favourite had turned away with his fervent face gone white as death save for those scarlet marks standing out on his cheek. He had laid his hand on his sword hilt and those who had seen the look in his eyes had been startled, but he seemed to be taking a simple revenge. He was openly courting Bess Brydges who had long borne the palm for beauty amongst the maids-in-waiting and long been a maid in waiting for him.

The Queen caught Bess Brydges and Bess Russell leaning over the gallery of the tennis court on a sunny afternoon. Now there was no game going on below, and the only gentleman performing for their admiration was Lord Essex with his shirt open to the waist, idly brick-

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walling a ball to and fro. Bess Brydges had flung down to him her little handkercher with which to wipe his brow. While he did so, laughing amiably, he became aware of parrot cries and sobbings and looking up beheld his beloved being driven from the gallery by blows. The two maids fled to the London house of a friend—Lady Stafford—and dared not return to the Coffer Chamber for three nights. It was not safe to make love in London these days.

James Burbage had prophesied that Will's tragedy would be played out in five years. Four of those five years were run and the old man looked like being right, though he was no longer here to see. He died quietly in his bed on a February morning while his wife was drawing the curtains to show him what manner of a day it was outside. When she turned round from letting in sunlight his spirit had fled. . . . He left the Theatre in Shoreditch to his elder son Cuthbert, the Blackfriars site to his young son Richard, and his troubles to both of them.

Blackfriars was an aristocratic quarter inhabited by dowager countesses and the like. At the thought of a common playhouse arising in their midst they raised a screech and started a petition which they sent round to everyone of note in London. Richard Field, the printer, put his name to it. Perhaps he could not help doing so. When Cuthbert and Richard Burbage heard that the Lord Chamberlain himself had signed the old ladies' document, they knew that the Blackfriars project was doomed. Presently an order of the Privy Council forbade them their theatre. Richard let the building—just made ready for use—to a Welsh scrivener who was master of the Choristers of the Chapel Royal. So the children got their private theatre again and the

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playhouses a rival. The Burbage brothers then did a thing which should have made their sire turn in his coffin. They began negotiations for a site on the Bank-side.

Will's tragi-comedy seemed drawing to its close. From its beginning he had told Cuthbert at intervals that "all was over," "'twas good to be one's own man again," and all that manner of familiar cant—poor soul!

Strange the way that such things could be going on in a Company where players turned up to act every day as if nothing was happening. Three times Will had announced himself quit of the affair, and three times silently taken it up again. You could tell when he was back in his fool's paradise by the look on his face, which grew younger as the faces of the dead do.

He had been looking very ill for six months now, and one day staggered Cuthbert by saying that he was thinking of retiring. Last summer when the company had been in Stratford he had bought a piece of property—in fact the largest house in that town. He had got it cheap because it was in a ruinous and decayed condition. It had been built by a wealthy son of Stratford who had made his money in London and designed to spend his last days in his native place. That gentleman had left things too late and died in harness.

New Place was the name of the Great House, and it stood over against the Gild Chapel in a fair street towards the south end of the town. It had been built in the new style with brick, instead of wattle and plaster, between its timbers, and since a succession of tenants had neglected to spend anything on repairs, money would have to be ladled out before it was fit for habitation. Peter Street, head carpenter, who travelled with the Company to oversee the erection of their temporary

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stages, had shaken his head when Will took him to view it. He said that something in your old black-letter style—by which he meant plaster and timber—would have served Will's turn better.

New Place had a frontage of sixty feet, ten chambers of size with fire-places—its clustering brick chimneys were a pleasure to the eye—and a tangled wilderness of a garden with elms and tumbledown barns at the bottom of it. Its surroundings were peaceful, giving it more the air of a country house than one in a town. Its garden entrance faced the chapel beyond which came the Gild Garden containing an orchard, a bowling green, a herbarium, a fountain and a fine walnut tree with crab-tree seats beneath its shade. From the windows of New Place you could hear the voice of the water-mill in the lane and the cooing of doves. Useless to point out to Will the number of tiles missing from the roof, whole floors unfit to bear the weight of a kitten. He said that he had passed the Great House every morning on his way to school as a lad and always meant to settle there. Members of the Company who had seen him walking towards it on a Sunday evening with that wife of his on his arm and one of the children proudly mincing ahead brandishing the keys of the new purchase, believed he had made some sort of promise to his absurd family and would kill himself fulfilling it.

He had just concluded another piece of business on their behalf which he could not regret, such great pleasure it had given in Henley Street. Twenty years ago in the palmy days of his Bailiwick, John Shakespeare had applied to the Heralds' College for permission to bear a coat of arms, and the Clarenceux King had actually submitted a sketch of the proposed

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coat. Now that Will was an honest fellow, helped by earls, buying houses, going round Stratford and paying up all round, the old gentleman bethought him of his past ambition. The pattern, alas! proved to be one of those things your father had put away so carefully that it could not be found. He was still fussing round the house infuriating his wife and daughter by searching in their glove-and-stockings drawers when Will left for London, promising to do what he could.

He had to make some statements that were conscience-prickers. That legendary ancestor who had served Harry of Richmond on Bosworth Field had to be disinterred. Fortunately Dick Burbage as Richard III was drawing all London at the moment. Had Master Shakespeare's forbear really . . .? Most interesting . . .! The Heralds' Office bowed and smiled. (And after all it was not entirely untrue that one of his kin had served King Henry. An Arden had been a Yeoman of the Chamber to that niggard prince.) Will had to declare that father had lands and tenements of good wealth and substance, to wit five hundred pounds. If only they could see the old gentleman in the chimney corner in Henley Street! Still, Will had made over a hundred pounds himself last year in the Theatre and the two poems dedicated to his patron continued to sell. All the Heralds wanted to know was that the person to whom the grant of arms was made was able to support his dignity.

A fortnight later the draft coat was delivered to Will's lodgings in Bishopsgate at an hour when his patron was with him—in a field of gold, upon a bend sable, a spear of the first, the point upward, headed argent—the crest, a bird standing on a wreath of his colours, with wings displayed, supporting a Spear, armed, headed and steeled silver.



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My lord saw nothing ludicrous in this, only saying that the bird resembled a macaw and reminded him of her Gracious Majesty. Why not demand a silver falcon, such as he bore himself? He could not draw, his handwriting was enormous, with all letters the same size, capitals no taller than the rest. Dipping a pen in Will's ink-pot, however, he made some scratches at the macaw, reducing it to something of a less oriental aspect. His long locks brushed the table, he laughed softly to himself as he wrote the word "Falcon" by the side of his emendation. Next the motto—*Non sans droict!* It pleased him to think that his player friend had gentle blood in his veins.

He said that now Will ought to join the meetings at the Mermaid. Why should Sir Walter Raleigh and Lord Oxford be allowed to stuff them with their friends, none of whom had Will's talent and very few as agreeable a manner? The meetings at the Mermaid Tavern in Bread Street took place on the first Friday in every month while the Court was in London and brought together noblemen, gentlemen from the Inns of Court, Masters of Arts of the Universities, writers of acknowledged merit and other eminent persons interested in the fine arts, to dine, smoke and hold discussion. There was no actual ceremony of election, but the dinner took place in a private room and a newcomer must be introduced. Even at the cost of having to be pleasant to Sir Walter (who to be honest was always pleasant himself), my lord offered to escort Will thither now that he was a gentleman's son beyond question.

Will was not in funds. Before he had left Stratford he had given orders for work to be begun upon the premises at New Place. Almost at once he was given reason to regret his folly, but he would not cancel

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those orders. Cuthbert Burbage had a new scheme in mind connected with the new theatre that was to be erected on the Bankside. Playhouses had hitherto been conducted in the interests of their proprietors rather than the actors. His proposal was to divide the proprietorship of the new building into ten shares, five of which he and his brother would take up. The remaining five he proposed to put out for sale within the Company. Sharers were to get half the gallery takings and ordinary players the other half and all the takings at the doors. Such an arrangement would encourage a troupe to keep together and three at least of the best performers in the Lord Chamberlain's Company had announced their intention of becoming sharers. Will would have liked to buy a share, but a hundred pounds was a sum upon which he could not lay hand at a moment's notice now that he had started work upon New Place.

Early in the New Year his patron talked of going to France, and in February he went off without a farewell visit to Bishopsgate. Will did not know that he was gone until his housekeeper came knocking on his door, interrupting him at his work to tell him that he was asked for. On her heels in marched three persons in blue liveries with the badge of the silver falcon on their arms, the Steward and two tall footmen from Southampton House. Master Steward solemnly unbuckled from his belt a leathern bag out of which he proceeded to pour gold pieces, crowns and angels, upon the manuscript of the chronicle play strewn about Will's desk. He asked Will to count the money—a hundred pounds. He brought no letter, only a message that ere he had left for France last night the Earl had bethought him to send round this gift to enable Master Shakespeare to go

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through with a purchase he believed he had a mind to.

Cuthbert and Richard were not infected by their deceased father's superstition against a court performance of one of Will's plays, any more than they had been infected by his horror of the naughty Bankside. Unlike him too, they looked on their best author as something rarer than a gold mine. Will seemed to write as easily as a bird flies, an act that appears effortless but cannot be imitated by mortal man. Cuthbert, with a touch of awe, felt that he had only to clap his hands, and his faithful bird flew off into the unknown, returning always with a green olive leaf from a promised land. The brothers knew no more whence he got his inspiration than a man knows of what the swallow thinks as he flies south over the sea in search of the sun. They could not discover either. Their bird was a quiet one.

Will had written a play last summer which had been the success of the season and brought him more fame than anything yet. It was a re-cast of a worthless chronicle piece, but the thing that had taken audiences—especially the ladies—was the character of a fat knight, boon companion of madcap Prince Hal. Dick Burbage was Hal and fat Lowin Sir John Oldcastle, as the wicked old knight was called. Why audiences—especially the ladies—should have taken a fancy for this character they could not themselves say. Sir John was everything that they should have disrelished. He was old, gross, dirty, blasphemous and disreputable, a tippler, a glutton and a coward. After the first performance of the play Cuthbert wrote in the margin of his account book the single word "Liked." It was given again and again, and each time went better. Lowin, settled down years ago to respectable mediocrity, threw

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into his rendering the experience of a lifetime. At last he was the most talked-of player in London, just as he had dreamed thirty years ago, only then he had thought that his triumph would come in some part more like your Roineo. "A strange world!" said he puffing his way off the stage amidst applause which shook the gallerics, to which his small shrivelled wife listened with tears in her eyes. He tried to embrace her, but could not because of his false belly. "Sweetheart," said he, "'tis not as we intended, yet—'tis not to be sneezed at." Mistress Lowin felt the same; she was no fool and an excellent helper in the tire-room. Daily she saw to it that Sir John's belly became larger, his legs more thickly padded, his nose redder. He became a caricature of himself, and it seemed only a matter of time till he must burst. Towards the end of the season he had only to roll blinking onto the stage for the prentices in the penny standing room to put away their bags of nuts and the ladies in the Lord's Rooms to let their fans be and cease whispering. They knew that they were going to enjoy this. The tavern scenes while the fat knight uttered his iniquities and Prince Hal lolled half on and half off a table capping them—two finished actors egged on by the knowledge of a perfect understanding with one another and their audience—were a standing feast and people returned to see them every week as regular as going to church. There was a country justice in the piece too, acted by Kempe who was almost as popular, and Sly as a hiccuping maid-servant was a most horrible piece of nature. When a play was commanded for Whitehall on the Queen's return to London, Cuthbert offered his current success as a matter of course, and with dusk on an autumn night the property waggons of the Lord Chamberlain's

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Company rumbled in under Holbein's gate laden with the makings of Will's best get-penny.

They were to play in the Great Chamber which had a gallery passing round two sides of it, one exit leading to the privy closet overlooking the Chapel and the other to the gallery of the Council Chamber. On floor level it opened into the Presence Chamber at one end and the Guard Room at the other. Beyond the Presence Chamber, which was open to all courtiers and those with petitions to present, came sacred ground—the Privy Chamber and the Queen's private apartments, withdrawing rooms and bedchamber. She seldom dined in the Great Hall these days, preferring to have a table carried into the Privy Chamber which was large enough in good faith. Ambassadors of princes got audiences there, councillors got scolded, and her ladies sat and sewed and sang for her dubious entertainment. She had had her portrait painted standing in one of the withdrawing rooms this autumn, and the artist had presented her looking quite old, her face grey and pinched with fatigue and her eyes cast down. In her right hand she held a flowering branch and at her feet lay the sword of state. She stood in cold shadow, but in the middle distance behind her was a view of a sunny loggia and a garden in which younger ladies and gentlemen were conversing.

The Great Chamber to-night was garlanded for the performance, its long windows framed the picture of the changing river in birch and ivy. There were great flower-works from the Royal gardens standing about at the stage end of the hall, and the beautiful wainscoting was hidden by canvas painted rustic to resemble stone. From the rafters hung baskets of foliage fruit and blossoms, bay and rue, pomegranates, oranges, cucum-

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bers, grapes and carrots all smudged with gold paint and stuck with spangles. No need to trouble about your arrangements when you were called to perform at Whitehall. An army of efficient yeomen, grooms, footmen, pages and pantlers had got everything ready before you arrived, and a polite clerk from the Lord Chamberlain's office was waiting to hear what his master's Company would fancy for supper and whether all they saw was to their liking. He was most sorry to have to whisper that they had come upon an unlucky night! (James Burbage would have known it!) A catastrophe had occurred and the Queen was so far out of patience that she had not gone to chapel this evening. She would have counterordered the performance but that the Polish Ambassador was invited. What had happened? Marry, one of the maids of honour, had done it again, the old story, fled from the Coffer Chamber and got her gallant to marry her. "She is despatched with Lord Southampton."

"Here's meat for Will," whispered the Company, struggling into buckram armour in the crowded and overheated tire-room. He said it was an impossible rumour. The Earl had been abroad since February. Whew! Adonis must have taken an over-tender farewell in February then, and done his duty now none too soon. He had been summoned home by Lord Essex who was the lady's cousin, paid a flying visit to London, taken his fairest mistress to wife in the chapel of Essex House and left for Paris again, all in the space of five days. The tale was perfect. The Queen, as usual, was more incensed by the marriage than the dishonour and in her first fury had commanded that the new-coined Countess should be provided with the best and sweetest-appointed chamber in the Fleet wherein to await her

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delivery. The pretty vivid name of the maid that had won so fair a prize so dearly was passed from one lip to another, catching a fresh soil with every repetition—Vernon, a motherless child of Sir John Vernon of Hodnet. Somebody remembered having heard that she was one of the worst of them. Well, she would find meet company at Essex House, my lord's right fair sister with her baby face, black eyes and curling flax-hued hair. Lady Rich had been Sir Philip Sidney's lost love and was now love indeed to Lord Mountjoy, but was still entertained and admired everywhere. Her husband refused to divorce her.

Will was playing the king in his own piece. A very little while before they were due to go across to their stage Lowin came to Cuthbert Burbage to tell him that Will was not yet dressed. He did not appear until Act Three said Cuthbert. Nay, said Lowin, but he was sitting mumpish in a window looking out on the river. All that he had said on hearing that his patron's wife was committed to the Fleet was: "Then I shall not see her." He seemed somewhat o'erparted, whispered Lowin, a look of concern sitting unsuitably on the painted face of fat Sir John. Kempe in the guise of Justice Shallow, joined them to say that all had befallen as he had promised. The nobility took you up, made a sworn brother of you, and then—poof!—when they were about some little matter like taking a wife, forgot that you existed. As like as not Will's young hero would go to the Tower. A great pity all this should have come out to-night, for now Kempe doubted if their friend would be fit to play.

Cuthbert hurried to his brother and found him as gloomy. "He's with me in the fourth act," considered Dick. "I can carry him over, but ere that he has that long utter in the third act, dangerous in any case.

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Who's with him then? Cross and Ostler." He meant a speech on the trials of kingship ending: "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." They had considered cutting it out for this performance. In the play of *Richard II* they had been obliged to omit the deposition scene. The Queen had a nervous horror of the character Will was to play—Bolingbroke the Usurper. She must know too that Southampton was this author's patron. Matters could not have fallen out worse, but it was too late now to re-cast, already the Company had enough to remember. The name of the fat knight, Sir John Oldcastle, which Will had taken direct from the chronicle play, had given offence to Lord Cobham, a descendant of the true Sir John, a Lollard martyr. Only two days ago Will had gone through his play altering the name of his hero to "Falstaff" who figured as a coward in *King Henry VI*, another old piece he was in the act of re-furbishing. He had slipped a line into the Epilogue making assurance doubly sure: "Oldcastle died a martyr, and this is not the man."

The trumpets were calling. The Queen had risen from table. Cuthbert Burbage collected the king's robes and went over to find Will. He was still sitting as Lowin had said, looking out at the river. It was quite dark now, and there was nothing to be seen outside but the windows of the opposite shore casting saw-toothed dagger lights into black waters. Dick gathered his Company and bade it "pluck together a good courage. If you feel squeamish tell yourselves you are playing to a Saturday afternoon crowd at Newington Butts." The theatre at Newington, a ramshackle affair lying beyond Southwark, was the poorest in the country, one to which players only went when there was pestilence in London or their own house was under repair.



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Will did not have to appear until Act Three, but Cuthbert never let him out of his grasp. He led him up to one of the galleries and there in a corner shadowed by a hanging banner they sat to watch.

After the trumpets had sounded came a Prologue spoken by Rumour dressed in a cloak painted all over with tongues—a conceit to please the Queen who had once had her portrait taken in a robe embroidered with eyes and ears. That death's head Philips, who had been allotted the thankless but formidable duties of speaking both Prologue and Epilogue, was one of the old hands, far too experienced to be put out of countenance by anything short of an earthquake. He looked the old actor as he trod confidently down to face his audience and flinging up his arms commanded quietly: "Open your ears!"

Scene One, a long explanatory conversation between minor characters—the Earl of Northumberland was said to be below watching his ancestor—passed off as well as could have been hoped. The audience, broken years ago to the irrelevant confusions and weak characterization of chronicle plays, listened with the look that says: "An excellent entertainment. Would to God that it were done." Once or twice there was an attempt to applaud an unexpected happy turn of phrase.

And then the fat knight rolled on with his page bearing before him his sword and buckler, and the Queen laughed and the play was saved.

Everybody had been longing for an excuse to laugh and when the Queen had done so, suddenly and in spite of herself as it were, there was a descent into mirth that never abated. Sir John had taken the fancy of a Tudor, as of course he would. By the time he was seated cuddling his wench on his knee—little Sly hic-

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cuping most horribly—the first lady in the land had followed the example of all her subjects and lost her heart to him. Fortunately he was very seldom off the stage. There was a dreadful pun on the name that had been changed—Oldcastle—still left in the first act, but it passed unnoticed.

The time came for Will to go down, and without needing a warning he did so. He was supposed to be playing a dying man, and nobody had ever seen him act better. All the same, when the show had ended in a high stew of applause and word came that the Queen would thank the players for her entertainment, Cuthbert saw to it that Will was out of Bolingbroke's robes and in the suit of a private gentleman.

The audience had passed into the presence chamber and had gathered in groups talking and laughing, while trays of spiced wine and sweet cakes were being carried round to the sound of light music. The Queen was conversing with the Ambassador, and the players had to wait for their introduction getting as good a sight of her as ever man would in this world.

She was in her sixty-sixth year, she had had a trying day and the hour was past midnight. Although she was now in particular spirits she produced an immediate impression of fabulous age. Her famous hooked nose and narrow chin had grown perilously near together. When she smiled she showed small irregular teeth gone dark as polished tortoiseshell. She wore false hair and that red, of a hue not a whit less metallic than the small crown set upon it, tilted well back at a fashionable angle. Her bosom was uncovered as English ladies have it until they marry, and her spreading gown was of white silk latticed with many-coloured jewels the size of broad beans. Her sunken cheeks were painted bright

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pink, and there were wrinkles clogged with pearl-powder on her high brow and at the corners of her small black eyes. The borrowed colour, the white gown, the exposed throat gave her at a distance a look of youth which was shockingly belied on a closer view. She was ghastly beyond expectation, and dressed to make herself a laughing-stock, nevertheless nobody ever would laugh except behind her back at this majestic, invincible, eternal woman.

She turned with a jerky elderly movement and became aware of the waiting players. She drew off her glove and gave a hand bearing many rings for Dick Burbage to salute. The sight of a young man so impudently well favoured was always calculated to please her and Dick knew of old how to handle her. His presentation of his fellows passed off without a hitch, she had an appropriate commendation for everyone uttered in a surprisingly mild and agreeable voice, and when she came to the author had, as everyone had expected, something special to say here. Alas! quite useless to pretend that this undoubted princess was a lover of the fine arts. One might have guessed from the fact that she allowed the most indifferent painters to portray her, her only stipulation being that they put no shadows on her white hands. She wanted Will to write another play about Sir John, showing the fat knight in love. She would be at Windsor in three weeks' time and would like it to be shown to her there. With another of her terrible smiles and nods she dismissed the best writer of plays in her kingdom. She had told him that his fat knight had pleased her, and that was the sum of her criticism. Her request showed that she had not the faintest appreciation either of the character Will had meant to create or of the impossibility of her request.

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Impossible was not a word that could be used here though. Cuthbert Burbage was at Will's lodgings early the next morning. He found only his friend's house-keeper, very glad to see him. This woman had always liked the quiet-spoken elder Master Burbage, who was honestly employed in the book trade as well as this sad players' business. Herself she never visited the theatre, deeming it no place for a chaste woman. And now her master was talking of moving to the Bankside! He had gone off this morning to search for rooms there, saying he meant to pay up here and quit before the week was out. After her having been up till midnight only a fortnight ago sweetening these chambers for his return! Whether he wanted her to go with him or not he had not said; even if he did, how was she to find her way home on dark nights to a house in that quarter? "These are gentlemen's lodgings, say I." "And I am a player," says he, wolfish. His breakfast quite untouched and himself looking as if he was going down with the pestilence! "Nay," in a whisper, "'tis not her we wot of this time, I can tell you. She has not been here this three months, not since he returned from the country."

The woman wept upon Cuthbert's bosom before he left (having waited two hours in vain for Will), and a fair picture they presented, poor Cuthbert standing like a ramrod, with his wiry brown hair that always grew bolt upright off his square brows, giving him a look of horror, and his shrewd grey eyes really round with alarm as he thumped gently on her narrow shoulders an aged dame who was screeching like a hen on the edge of the duckpond.