

AUTHOR'S NOTE

EQUIVOCATION is based on an historical event.

It is, in fact, the founding event of modern England. The 5th of November is celebrated with national fireworks and is roughly equivalent to America's 4th of July.

The story has been told for over 400 years and the government's version of the story has become a national myth.

The only thing we know with certainty about the event itself is that it could not possibly have occurred in the way the government claimed.

What follows offers a plausible alternative.

EQUIVOCATION was originally produced by Oregon Shakespeare Festival (Bill Rauch, Artistic Director; Paul Nicholson, Executive Director) in Ashland, Oregon in 2009. It was directed by Bill Rauch; the set was by Christopher Acebo; the costume design was by Deborah M. Dryden; the lighting design was by Christopher Akerlind; the sound design was by Andre Pluess; the stage manager was Randall K. Lum; the assistant stage manager was Mandy Younger; the dramaturg was Lue Douthig; and the verse dramaturg was by Barry Kraft. The cast was as follows:

SHAG Anthony Heald
 RICHARD/FATHER HENRY GARNET Richard Elmore
 SIR ROBERT CECIL/NATE/
 THOMAS PERCY Jonathan Haugen
 SHARPE/THOMAS WINTOUR/KING JAMES I John Tufts
 ARMIN/ROBERT CATESBY/
 SIR EDWARD COKE Gregory Liningron
 JUDITH Christine Albright

EQUIVOCATION was subsequently produced in 2009 at The Geffen Playhouse. It was directed by David Esbjornson; the set was by David Esbjornson; the costume design was by Frances Keaney; the lighting design was by Scott Zielinski; the sound design was by Jon Gottlieb; the dramaturg was Amy Levinson; and the production stage manager was Jill Gold. The cast was as follows:

SHAG Joe Spano
 RICHARD/FATHER HENRY GARNET Harry Groener
 SIR ROBERT CECIL/NATE/
 THOMAS PERCY Connor Trinneer
 SHARPE/THOMAS WINTOUR/
 KING JAMES I Patrick J. Adams
 ARMIN/ROBERT CATESBY/
 SIR EDWARD COKE Brian Henderson
 JUDITH Trojan Bellisario

EQUIVOCATION was originally produced in New York City by Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Executive Producer) on February 10, 2010. It was directed by Garry Hynes; the set and costume design were by Francis O'Connor; the lighting design was by David Weiner; the sound design was by David Van Tieghem and Brandon Wolcott; and the production stage manager was David H. Lurie. The cast was as follows:

SHAG John Pankow
 RICHARD/FEATHER HENRY GARNET ... Michael Countryman
 SIR ROBERT CECIL/NATE/THOMAS PERCY David Pittu
 SHARPE/THOMAS WINTOUR/KING JAMES I David Furr
 ARMIN/ROBERT CATESBY/
 SIR EDWARD COKE Remy Aberjonois
 JUDITH Charlotte Parry

THE CAST

The cast of 6 plays many roles. The core roles are the five members of the Globe acting company and Judith. The acting company is made up of:

SHAG
 RICHARD
 SHARPE
 NATE
 ARMIN

Shag is Shakespeare — called “Shag” after my favorite contemporary spelling of his name, Shakespeare.

JUDITH

Judith — 19 — is Shag’s daughter.

The doubling is detailed throughout the script. Shag and Judith do not double — though, at one point, Shag stands in for a Witch.

Richard doubles as Garnet.
 Nate doubles as Cecil.
 Sharpe triples as Tom Wintour and James I.
 Armin is the utility player and plays many parts including The First Priest, Catesby, Coke, Lady Macbeth, the Porter and others.

The guards and other roles are as specified in the text.

PLACE

The Globe Theater and other locations in London.

TIME

1606.

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SET

The Globe Theater is the basic set. Other places — The Tower, Cecil's office, taverns, etc. — are developed theatrically working from the Globe stage.

I would like to point out that the Globe is not a modern theater. There is nothing black box-y about it. It is an open air place of light. In this world, everything seems well. You have to look behind the scenes to find the darkness.

COSTUMES

I have seen EQUIVOCATION performed both in period and modern dress. It works better in period costume.

EQUIVOCATION

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Military drums bring us into the scene.

A spacious office — mid-meeting — bright morning.

Two men. On the table between them — a manuscript.

Shag — a writer — stands on the power-deficit side of a desk.

Robert Cecil — in spite of a permanently bent body and short stature — sits on the power-surplus side of the desk. And why not? He is the Prime Minister of England.

SHAG. *Why me?*

CECIL. It wasn't that others weren't considered.

SHAG. I can't make the decision.

CECIL. Why not?

SHAG. We're a cooperative venture.

CECIL. Who's in charge?

SHAG. We all share equally in the income and responsibilities of the theater. We're a cooperative venture. (Cecil takes that in. Then —)

CECIL. Who's in charge?

SHAG. (An admission.) Richard.

So much for the illusion of "cooperative venture."

CECIL. This — (*A money bag*) will take care of Richard. You have one week to turn this book into a play.

As Cecil exits, we see he walks with a noticeable limp. He does nothing to hide it and it certainly does not slow him down. When excited, he almost stumps.

SHAG. (*Impossible!*) One?

CECIL. (*Stopping.*) He said/she said. Enter/exit. Drums/trumpets. How long can it take? You have one week to "dialogue" this.

SHAG. We're already working on a new play.

CECIL. About?

SHAG. A king.

CECIL. How does this one die?

SHAG. What makes you think he dies?

CECIL. You've killed more kings than any man alive. Your brain is a graveyard for royalty.

SHAG. This one dies of a broken heart. (*This amuses Cecil.*) Before he dies, he is stripped of everything he owns down to his underwear. (*A threat.*) We are all broken in the end.

CECIL. Two weeks then. No more.

End of discussion. Cecil exits.

SHAG. I don't even know the story.

CECIL. Actually, you do. Everyone does. (*Returns.*) Read. I'll wait.

Shag reads. And goes pale.

SHAG. Who wrote this?

CECIL. The King.

Shag reads on. Closes the manuscript. Places it on desk. Steps back.

SHAG. No.

CECIL. Be careful what you say to me. I speak for the King. And he has absolutely no experience of cooperative ventures.

SHAG. We don't do current events. We do histories. True Histories of the past.

CECIL. Well, this is to be a True History of the present.

SHAG. There are other writers.

CECIL. I am well-informed about your playwrights ... I don't want Fletcher. I don't want Beaumont. I don't want Jonson or Kyd. I don't want any *bullshit* about cooperative ventures. I don't want to be told what you *do* or do *not* do. (*A demand.*) What I want is for you to write this play.

SHAG. (*A demand.*) Why? Why me?

The question must be addressed.

CECIL. This is to be the official version of the event so it must last. Your works will last.

SHAG. (*Touched.*) That is my hope.

CECIL. Oh, yes. Of all the writers now writing, your work will last. I knew that after your play about the Moor. (*Shag is moved. Before he can speak — With admiration.*) You took a very bold position. You told the Moors they are noble victims of a cruel white world. Then you had the Moor disembowel himself for the entertainment of the white audience — and everyone — even the Moors — were pleased. (*Cecil's admiration for Shag borders on awe.*) You did the same thing with the Jews. You told them they have a right to their rage and then you told the Christians they have a right to take the Jews' money, baptize them against their will and somehow everyone went away satisfied. It is an astonishing achievement ... With every new play, you raise the bar in the art of cynical audience manipulation ... You tell bloated kings they are to be pitied because they bear greater burdens than their subjects and then you tell their starving subjects they have the dignity of kings — though, as I gather from this new play — you know kings have none. You do all of this with a straight face and — somehow — everyone believes you. (*With increasing wonder.*) You have discovered what every leader from Jesus to James has sought in vain. You, Master Shakespeare, have discovered how to be all things to all men ... To do this, you have made yourself a pure vessel. You have shat out of yourself any trace of personal belief — any hint of personality — any hope of truth — so that all that is left of you is endless and universal flattery. Since that will never go out of style, I believe your plays will still be being done — (*Lauish guess.*) Fifty years from now. (*A moment. Then —*)

SHAG. So — you've seen my work.
CECIL. No, but I'm well-informed. Come, come — (*The manuscript*) it's a simple *yes-or-no* question.

SHAG. And if I say *no*?
CECIL. You've never said no to anything in your life. I would very much like to see what would happen if you did. (*No response.*)
Mute? Or just out of practice? (*Silence, then* —) Good then. This is your shot — your one shot — at posterity.

The word posterity bites into Shag.

Two weeks.

Cecil, a busy man, skips away.

SHAG. (*A challenge.*) Who do you want to play you?

CECIL. Pardon?

SHAG. Who do you want to play *you*?

CECIL. Me? I am not to be in this play.

SHAG. But certainly you play a leading role.

CECIL. (*Final!*) I am *not* to be in this play (*Then, afterthought* —)

By the way — one thing that is *not* in the manuscript. The King? The King wants witches. There need to be — *witches.*

Young Madman [Sharpe] rushes on wearing only a loin cloth and a torn, filthy, open shirt. Witch-like, he denounces Cecil.

MADMAN [SHARPE]. This is the foul fiend Filbertigibbet — he begins at curfew, and walks till the first cock; take heed of the foul fiend —

Shag and Cecil exit as —

Scene 2

A heath — mid-storm — night.

Sudden thunder, lightning and rain! As the Madman raves, an insane Old Man [Richard] enters wearing an open robe and a Fool [Armin] dressed in rags. They are all in terrible extremity.

Though this will be revealed to be a scene from King Lear, there is nothing performance-like about it. We see men coping with extreme conditions.

All speak rapid, fierce, clipped cadences.

MADMAN [SHARPE]. He squints the eye, and makes the hare-lip; mildews the white wheat, and hurrs the poor creature of earth.

The Madman whirls through space, as does the Fool.

FOOL [ARMIN]. Pillcock sat on Pillcock-hill: Halloo, halloo, loo, loo!

The Old Man pursues the Madman.

OLD MAN [RICHARD]. Have his daughters brought him to this pass? Would'st thou give them all?

FOOL [ARMIN]. Nay, he reserved a blanket, else we had been all shamed.

MADMAN [SHARPE]. (*Tearing off his clothes.*) Who gives anything to poor Tom, whom the foul fiend hath led through fire and through flame. Away! The foul fiend follows me!

A Nobleman [formerly Cecil] joins them.

NOBLEMAN [NATE/CECIL]. Good my Lord, enter here.

OLD MAN [RICHARD]. Wilt break my heart?
 NOBLEMAN. I had rather break mine own.
 OLD MAN [RICHARD]. (*Tearing at his own clothes.*) Is man no more than this? Here's three on's are sophisticated! Thou art the thing itself. Off, off, you lendings! Come unbutton here.
 FOOL [ARMIN]. (*Trying unsuccessfully to dress him.*) Prithee, nuncle, be content — this is a naughty night to swim in.

As the Old Man tears off his clothes down to a loin cloth, all speak wildly — simultaneously

FOOL	MADMAN	OLD MAN	NOBLEMAN
[ARMIN].	[SHARPE].	[RICHARD].	[NATE].
(<i>Singing.</i>)	The foul	Ha! Here's three	I had a son.
He's mad	fiend haunts	on's are sophisti-	I loved him,
that trusts	poor Tom.	icated! Thou art	friend;
in the tame-	Hoppedance	the thing itself.	No father
ness of a	cries in Tom's	Unaccommod-	his son dearer:
wolf, a	belly for two	ated man is no	true to tell
horse's health,	white herring.	more but such	thee, the grief
a boy's love,	Croak not, black	a poor bare,	hath crazed my
or a whore's	angel; I have no	forked animal	wits. What a
oath.	food for thee.	as thou art.	night's this!

The confusion slowly peters out into silence. The storm stops. Lights up.

Scene 3

Globe Theater — rehearsal — King Lear.

Only now do we now reveal that we are in a theatrical situation.

Rehearsal for the original production of King Lear grinds to a halt over tangled cues.

Puzzled silence.

Then —

RICHARD. (*In loin cloth.*) No problem. This is where we always go off track.

Richard [Lear] — father of the troupe — checks his text — as do the others.

Let's go back to first positions and work it out ... King Lear here; Nate, Kent over here; Fool here ...

Richard, Armin [Fool] and Nate [Noble] move to places before they notice that the madman — Sharpe — has not moved. Sharpe, twenty, handsome, gifted, utterly committed to the truth of his art.

Sharpe?

No response. Looks are exchanged among the others. Then —

Look, I know it's a difficult scene. I'm mad; he's half-mad; you're pretending to be mad and he's a fool. It might be the most difficult scene he's ever written. But if we could get through his comedies-don't-have-to-be-funny period, we can get through whatever this is.

Nate — thrives — the most rooted member of the team —

NATE. I think if we just mark through it —

Sharpe is begrimed, stripped to loin cloth and deeply artistically frustrated.

SHARPE. No! It's unplayable. It defies acting. Worse. It defies memory! It can't be learnt!

ARMIN. If we just run lines —

SHARPE. No! We aren't saying things in the right order because it doesn't matter what order we say them in. (*Pulling pages from his loin cloth.*) It doesn't matter if you're seeing devils in the fire before or after I'm picking fleas off myself. Or before or after he sings his fucking idiotic song! Nobody's listening to what anybody is saying!

RICHARD. (*Agreed, but —*) It's how people speak to one another.

SHARPE. No! Sorry. No. This is NOT how people speak to one another. Here's how people speak to one another. *He says let's start again.* I say *no-we-won't*. You say *give-it-another-try*. One thing follows from another. *That's* how people talk. I quit. I'm selling my share and moving on.

RICHARD. What?

Richard goes for Sharpe. Armin steps between.

ARMIN. Don't rise to it, Richard. There isn't an actor in the city can afford to buy it.

SHARPE. Then I'll break it into bits and sell it piecemeal.

RICHARD. (*Going for him.*) Why you little shit —

Nate, who has been reading his sides, speaks —

NATE. (*Obnoxious of previous dialogue.*) You know what the trouble is? (*Looking up.*) It almost doesn't matter what line comes next. Nobody's listening to anybody. (*Then —*) Is that a problem for anybody else?

Sharpe concedes to Richard —

SHARPE. Point taken.

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ARMIN. As long as we're stopped — (*Re: text.*) Am I supposed to be funny?

NATE. As long as we're stopped — (*Re: Richard in rags.*) Does he look like a king to you?

SHARPE. Well, do I look like a NOBLEMAN to anybody? For Christ's sake, I'm running around naked half the time.

ARMIN. Which you usually insist on.

SHARPE. NOT COVERED IN SHIT! He has me COVERED IN SHIT for most of the play! FUCK! This is INSANE!

Shag enters from the house.

SHAG. Not near as insane as what's outside those doors.

The world outside the theater is a world of fear. They look out. And know it.

Well — ? (*Awkward silence. Demanding throughout.*) Come on. What's the problem?

SHARPE. I'm naked, covered in shit, and he wants to know the problem. (*To Richard.*) I'll do it. Just give me a costume.

SHAG. Your skin is your costume.

Shag will always have trouble talking about his own life, but when it comes to theater — he knows exactly where he stands. He speaks with great passion — trying to lead the company into understanding the most extreme play he's ever written — King Lear.

Sharpe, I'm asking something new. I'm asking you to go on stage — *deprived* of character, costume and sanity — to make a living, breathing, flesh and blood person.

SHARPE. Any *WHORE* with her *LEGS* open can *MAKE* a *LIVING* — *BREATHING* — *FLESH AND BLOOD PERSON*. Where's the *ART* in *THAT*? You want me to play a knight, give me a *sword*!

SHAG. (*Angry.*) Armor won't make you noble. A robe won't make him royal. Better jokes won't make him more or less of a fool than he already is. You already contain everything that's noble, foolish, royal. Have the *courage* to be what you already *are*! The thing itself. SHARPE. Which is?

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SHAG. (*Glory!*) Human!
SHARPE. (*What the fuck?*) Human?

Shag speaks his vision into the empty space of the empty theater.

SHAG. I live for the day when an actor can walk onstage, stand stock still and have an audience applaud in sheer wonder that—in spite of plague, politics and the foolishness of this age—this thing has managed to stay alive.

SHARPE. Just stand there? That's what you want us to do? (*Yes.*) OK. Do it then.

Sharpe gets a barrel. Places it center stage. Shag hesitates.

You think that's what acting is? Go ahead then. Show us. Just stand there.

Shag steps up onto the barrel.

Go on. Be human for us.

Shag sustains his exposed humanness as long as he can. It's not long before he starts to feel foolish. Exposed. Embarrassed. The company laughs at his attempt.

Not easy, is it? (*Then —*) You've got NO RESPECT for acting!
SHAG. (*Lashing back.*) I was an actor — and a GOOD one — before you were born. Wasn't I, Richard?

Richard pretends not to have heard.

Richard!

Richard would love to say yes. Can't quite.

SHARPE. (*To Shag.*) I joined this company because of you. Did you know that? I thought you could write me into greatness. NOBODY TOLD ME YOU HAD LOST — YOUR — MIND.

Sharpe leaps at Shag. He is caught by Armin who holds him like a son, cradling him, calming him.

NATE. (*Calm, as always.*) You can solve this, you know. Don't make us human. Make us heroes.
SHARPE. He can't. Look at him. He's over. He hasn't got a hero left in him.

SHAG. Oh, that's what this is about. I'm over? Is that what you think?

All but Sharpe ad lib. Yes. No. Of course not. Don't be silly. Nobody thinks that. Pushed to the wall, Shag uses what he has at hand to re-establish his authority — money. Bravado and defiance.

The King doesn't think so. We have a commission — (*Shag hands the substantial purse to Richard.*) For me — (*At Sharpe.*) and only me — (*To all.*) to write.

Shag, holding the manuscript, lays out the plot for the company and the audience. A hint of wind. Maybe drums. Consummate storyteller.

Winter. A cold November. (*Cast.*) A group of young men! Gentlemen. Religious fanatics of the old faith! Inflamed by an heretic priest — (*Plot.*) They contrive to dig a tunnel under a building. They pack it with gunpowder with the purpose of blowing up the building. And not just any building — Parliament! And not just the building — but with it — his and her sacred majesties, their children and the entire court. RICHARD. (*Stunned.*) The Powder Plot? They want us to — SHAG. (*Yes and —*) A letter arrives. An anonymous letter. The King — guided by Divine Providence — interprets its cryptic message, undoes the plot and thus saves the court, the country and his own royal ass. GOD SAVE THE KING!
ALL. (*Unison and loud.*) AMEN!

Wind and drums end.

RICHARD. (*Awe'd.*) Current events. On stage. It's always been forbidden.

SHAG. Well, current events — with *witches* — are now compulsory! So says Sir Robert Cecil.

SHARPE. (*Over the moon.*) Everybody's going to want to see this. We're going to be rich.

SHAG. (Not so fast.) There is a problem.

SHARPE. No! Don't let him ruin it! *Modern history on the stage?* We'll be rich. Give it to Fletcher to write! Give it to —

Richard throws Sharpe into the audience. From the edge of the stage —

RICHARD. *That man is the finest writer of the age. Not another word against him. (Enraged.)* And if I ever — ever — find you trying to sell your share outside the company, I will break you into bits and sell the pieces for scrap. Is that clear?

SHARPE. You don't scare me. You're a hero onstage, but what are you in life?

RICHARD. A HOMEOWNER ... Like the rest of us.

ARMIN. (Flanking Richard.) A HUSBAND — like the rest of us.

NATE. (Other flank.) A FATHER — like the rest of us.

RICHARD. Now, you landless, unmarried, undefined thing — what are YOU? (To Armin.) Lock up the scripts. (As the company dresses to leave — to Shag.) Now — what's the problem?

SHAG. It can't be done.

RICHARD. I don't need trouble from you either. You'll do what you're assigned. No tyranny here. Not by actors. Not by writers. What we vote, goes. Without that, we are not who we are.

What they are is a group of men who — in spite of fights — care for one another and for what they do. Maybe not Sharpe, but the others care for one another deeply.

All those in favor of his writing the Powder Plot —

ARMIN. (Hand up.) Aye.

RICHARD. (Hand up.) Aye.

SHAG. Nay!

SHARPE. Nay! I think Fletcher should write it.

NATE. (Deciding vote, patting Shag on the back.) Sorry, Will, but you're the man for the job.

SHAG. I can't write this play. But neither can Fletcher. It can't be

written!

RICHARD. Enough! I'll be the judge of what can and can't be done!

People dress to go. As Armin, keeper of the scripts, locks the

Lear scripts in the company strongbox —

ARMIN. Gentlemen, please, no food on the scripts.

Sharpe, dressing, approaches Shag.

SHARPE. I hope you didn't take anything I said personally.

ARMIN. He won't short you on your part. He's incapable of that.

NATE. (Bringing Shag a desk, paper and pen.) Break a pen, Will.

Sharpe exits with Armin and Nate — his big brothers. Richard remains with Shag. Decades of friendship between them, but Richard — businessman — has to get Shag — artist — to write the goddamn play.

RICHARD. He's an idiot.

SHAG. Sharpe? Maybe, but he's right. I'm past it.

As Richard strips naked out of the Lear costume and dresses in his street clothes —

RICHARD. You're certainly past making real people. You were doing that before he was born. Why am I running around in a diaper?

SHAG. I'm trying to write a play that isn't about revenge. It's never been done.

RICHARD. And I know why. Writing a play is revenge. Placing the blame — that's the point of writing in the first place, isn't it? (Then.) He hates you, you know.

SHAG. Sharpe doesn't hate me. He's just frightened — mostly of his own talent.

RICHARD. (Serious matters.) Cecil. Robert Cecil hates you.

SHAG. Yes, I know.

RICHARD. And you know why? (After a nod.) Here's your chance to make it right. (Richard breaks out two beers.)

SHAG. (Resentful.) I don't want to make it right. I want to destroy him. He insulted me. He said my work would last fifty years.

RICHARD. Well, if that's the worst —

SHAG. (More resentful.) He said my brain's a graveyard. He's right there. Do you know how many people I've killed in my plays?

RICHARD. No and you wouldn't either if it weren't for your

daughter. Judith's a good hand at laundry, but shed depress a saint.
SHAG. (*Most resentful.*) He said this commission was my chance — my only chance — at posterity. (*Again, that word!*)
RICHARD. I'll give him this — he knows how to wound. (*A warning-la command!*) Don't let yourself be provoked. London is littered with the bodies of men who let themselves be provoked by Robert Cecil. (*His beer finished.*) Do you want me to stay?
SHAG. Go home. Marjorie will blame me if you're late. (*As Richard goes —*) Richard. (*Richard stops.*) This is dangerous.
RICHARD. (*Oh, please —*) It's a play. (*Then.*) We've been through worse, haven't we?

Richard leaves. Then —

SHAG. No.

Shag chugs his beer. Then — he thinks. Daydreams. Comes up with a first line. He raises his pen. As he brings the pen down towards the paper — A single sheet of paper floats slowly down from the flies. He begins to write. As he does — more papers float down from above. Bells, chiming, a hint of wind. As he continues to write, a storm of papers rains down from above. When the paper storm stops, we are in —

Scene 4

Shag's writing room — several painful twenty-four-hour writing days later — bright day.

A young woman appears out of the storm. For the first time — a female presence in the play.

JUDITH. (*The pages on the ground.*) It's not like you to be this careless with a new play.
SHAG. (*Barely noticing her.*) That's the shit I'm getting out of my head so I can write the new one. (*The new one is on the desk. Judith*

reaches for the fallen pages.) Don't touch. It's mental excrement.

Judith — nineteen — holds a laundry basket full of clean, folded clothes. Shag engrossed in his play, is pissed at Judith's intrusion into his world — though she is there to clean up for him.

JUDITH. How many this time?

SHAG. Dead? Thirteen. Maybe more.

JUDITH. (*A moment, then —*) 50,539.

SHAG. (*Harsh.*) You can't count the war dead. I'm not responsible for the war dead.

JUDITH. (*A moment, then —*) 2,987 ... And they're starting to die in the comedies. (*Then.*) How is it coming?

SHAG. (*Focused on work.*) It can't be done.

JUDITH. Try twins. That usually works.

SHAG. Can't. This is a true story.

JUDITH. Stories aren't true. That's why they're stories.

SHAG. That's why it can't be done. Judith, go — away.

Judith — Shag's daughter — removes his jacket without disturbing his writing. She's smart, sexual but not romantic, in a word, sensible. Shag doesn't much like her.

JUDITH. What's it called?

SHAG. The True History of the Powder Plot by me William Shakespeare for posterity.

JUDITH. Will it pay? (*Affirmative grunt.*) Keep writing. Here — (*Clean clothes.*) Put on these.

SHAG. Do you want me to change or to write?

JUDITH. (*As always, sensible.*) You write better clean. (*Shag takes clothes. Kisses Judith without looking at her. Exiting —*)

SHAG. Don't touch anything.

JUDITH. I won't.

As soon as he's gone, she picks up the fallen papers. Puts them in her laundry basket.

SHAG. (*Offstage.*) How's your mother?

JUDITH. An embarrassment. Like my father.

SHAG. (*Offstage.*) What's she up to these days?

JUDITH. Seducing nineteen-year-olds.

SHAG. (*Offstage.*) She sees it as her civic duty.

Judith sits at her father's desk. Reads.

JUDITH. Still, it's muddying the marriage pool for me. Who's in your bed these days?

SHAG. (*Offstage.*) Just me. But don't tell her that. Leave the pages alone.

JUDITH. (*Lifting the new pages to read them.*) I will. (*Reading them —*) A "true history." How could there be anything true about a play? (*She crosses out "true." Mostly to herself.*) Plays have beginnings and endings. That's two lies right there ... And people listen. When does that ever happen? ... And they care what happens — even if it's not happening to them. (*To the audience.*) How could there be anything true about a play?

Judith surveys the audience. Then speaks to them. Judith doesn't judge things. She simply notices them. Here are some of the things she notices.

I don't like theater. (*She lets that sit. Then —*) And I don't like soliloquies. (*She sits with that. Then —*) So it's odd that I'm the one who has them. (*Judith crosses out a soliloquy.*) Soliloquies. People you've never met telling you things you'd rather not know. Because nobody ever tells anybody anything good in a soliloquy, do they? (*Judith is in no hurry. She's just thinking. With us.*) It's always somebody who just killed his father telling you he's on his way to sleep with his mother. If anybody did that in real life — (*Then —*) But people do it in plays as if it was the most natural — Because — in plays — everybody's got — a secret story. (*Then —*) And he always gives the soliloquies to the wrong people. As if you needed to know one more thing about Hamlet. (*Then —*) He should give them to minor characters — people's daughters, for instance. (*A moment.*) But that wouldn't work, would it? (*A moment.*) According to him, a daughter's job is to love and be silent. So — there'd be nothing to say. Besides — (*A moment at a cost.*) Who would listen?

Judith is silent. Shag reenters — sees all his discarded pages in her laundry basket.

SHAG. (*Bring.*) You're just like your mother. Why must you take up what others throw away?

Shag — wearing the clean clothes Judith brought — gives Judith his dirty laundry. Shag evaluates Judith's text changes — affirmatively — as she puts his dirty laundry in her basket.

JUDITH. Any messages?

SHAG. (*Studying the text.*) Give my love to your sister.

JUDITH. Anyone else?

SHAG. (*Writing.*) How's your brother?

JUDITH. Still dead. (*Silence. Then more silence. Then —*) Ask about me.

SHAG. You're always the same.

JUDITH. Ask.

SHAG. How are you?

JUDITH. The same. (*Shag returns to the pages —*) I wouldn't worry too much over this one.

SHAG. No? Why not?

JUDITH. Posterity's overrated. (*Then — on the way out —*) You should cut the soliloquy at the top.

SHAG. Never! (*Announcing —*) *The Powder Plot — First Draft!*

Scene 5

Enter Conspirator, Father Henry Garnet! And we enter a new, highly theatrical world. The Gunpowder Plot — Shag's first draft — night.

A full-on Shakespeare period play. Props. Costumes. All of it. Let later drafts be more naturalistic. Here we hear the pentameter and are conscious of it.

Enter the Priest in a traditional black robe.

A soliloquy in the Globe.

PRIEST [ARMINI].
We live between two fires: above — the Sun —
God's all-seeing Eye — and yet beneath our feet
Another fire burns. And when God's eye
Doth blink as once a day it must — where should
We seek for warmth but where it might be found?
God's fire burns on, and not above, but deep
Within the ground. Spurn not this double warmth
Like fools who are afraid — for what is hell —
If not like heav'n — a place that God hath made?

Nate — in well-worn armor — enters.

CONSPIRATOR [NATE]. (*Strong, from a distance.*)

How now, Garnet!
You secret, black, and midnight priest!
What is't you do?

PRIEST [ARMINI].

A deed without a name.

FAWKES [RICHARD]. (*Strong, from a distance.*)
Stands our country where it did?

PRIEST [ARMINI].

Alas, poor country, almost afraid to know itself.

CONSPIRATOR [NATE].
Let us seek out some desolate shade and there weep our sad
bosoms empty.

Sharpe in shining armor enters, drawing sword!

CONSPIRATOR [SHARPE]. (*Swashbuckling.*)

Nay! Let us rather hold fast the mortal sword and
Bestride our down-fall'n birthdom.

*Sharpe Zorros with his sword and is, in general, delighted
with himself and his costume. As they come together —*

FAWKES [RICHARD]. (*With seriousness.*)

What mean you, priest?
Why call you good men forth

PRIEST [ARMINI].
Into this dead vast and middle of the night?

Mean? I mean t'break ope the Lord's anointed temple
And steal from thence the life o' the building!

CONSPIRATOR [NATE].
Speak thou plain, priest. Equivocating words

Fall senseless into plain men's ears.
PRIEST [ARMINI]. (*Bottom line.*)

I mean to kill the King!
ALL CONSPIRATORS.

T'h'world's gone mad!
PRIEST [ARMINI].

What if 'twere given us to end the madness —
At once — for all?

CONSPIRATOR [NATE]. (*A strong challenge.*)

Have you forgotten, priest, your Sacred Lord
Was Prince of Peace, both meek and mild, Shepherd

Good and —
PRIEST [ARMINI].

(*Hammering back.*) Have you forgot our Sacred Lord's command
That temple stone should not be left on stone
When once profaned? What then of holy throne

That thrice profaned hath been — by Henry first,
Elizabeth next and now and worst
It is profaned by *James*;
ALL CONSPIRATORS.

Aye!
PRIEST [ARMINI].

Are ye men?
(Sharpe takes over! Tour de force!)
CONSPIRATOR [SHARPE].

What man dare, *I dare!*
Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,
The arnid rhinoceros, or the Hyrcan tiger;
If trembling I inhabit, then protest me
The baby of a girl.

(The other actors look at him a moment. Then get the play back on track —)

FAWKES [RICHARD].
Aye, we are men.

PRIEST [ARMINI].
But are ye such men who — like gods of ancient fire —
Wouldst dig a tunnel underneath the throne
And with most war-like powder blow both King and court
Back to the dark and sooty hell from whence they came?

FAWKES [RICHARD].
How say you then? Will none be saved?
Must all be bereft of breath?

PRIEST [ARMINI].
God's will it is, not ours,
That Adam's sons all owe to God a death.

CONSPIRATOR [SHARPE].
But good with bad and friend with foe?
The worst among the best?

PRIEST [ARMINI].
The good will go to God; I care not for the rest.

CONSPIRATOR [NATE].
But you are *sure* that God will let —

PRIEST [ARMINI].
Aye! Or my name is not Garnet.
CONSPIRATOR [SHARPE].
In the great hand of God stand I!

CONSPIRATOR [NATE].

And I.
FAWKES [RICHARD].
So all.
PRIEST [ARMINI].

Then from this chalice, drink and swear upon
God's blood to speak to none of this —
Lest plot to purge God's throne of stain
Be brought too soon to light.
ALL. Amen.

As the priest makes the sign of the cross in the air, all bless themselves and vanish. Suddenly we are in a dark tunnel beneath Parliament. Guy Fawkes spreads a gunpowder fuse to barrels of powder.

FAWKES [RICHARD].
If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly: that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all —
But hark — voices! *(Lighting the fuse.)*
Then quickly, fire, to your work.

(As the flame moves towards the powder kegs, Fawkes attempts to flee. He is stopped by two royal guards [Nate and Armini] who enter with torches.)
GUARD 1 [NATE]. Halt! Who goes there?
FAWKES [RICHARD].

A man.
GUARD 2 [ARMINI]. What is thy name?
FAWKES [RICHARD].

Thou'lt be afraid to hear it.
GUARD 2. No, though thou call'st thyself a hotter name than any
is in hell.

FAWKES [RICHARD].
My name's *Guy Fawkes!*
GUARD 1. *(Holding high a letter.)* I come with a letter, a patent
of your villainy and do arrest you in the name of the King.

FAWKES [RICHARD].
We are betrayed!
What false friend hath Judas turned?
(As Guard 2 seizes Fawkes —)

GUARD 1. CoF, but what burns here?

The Guard runs to the flame and puts the flame out with the toe of his boot. Toe-ing out the fire easily: Pffffff. Silence. Lights slowly bring us back to —

Scene 6

The Globe stage — bright day

The forward motion of the play stops. The characters become the actors — as lost now as they were passionate a moment before.

After a few lost moments, Shag wanders on. He lets them stay lost. Then —

SHAG. Thoughts?

RICHARD. *(A grudging admission.)* It doesn't work.

SHAG. *(Told you.)* Doesn't and can't.

SHARPE. *Fletcher!* I'm telling you — give it to Fletcher!

SHAG. It amazes me how little brilliant actors know about theater.

SHARPE. But, if you just —

RICHARD, ARMIN, and NATE. *It doesn't work! (As the actors shed their armor —)*

SHARPE. *(At a cost.)* Alright then, *teach me.* What's wrong with it?

SHAG. Well, there's a step.

ARMIN. It's all foreplay and no fucking. *(Sharpe doesn't get it.)*

SHAG. It's a four act build-up to an explosion that *doesn't* happen.

ARMIN. Actually, it's not unlike my marriage.

NATE. You've got four kids.

ARMIN. I'm married ten years. Scripts, gentlemen.

Armin collects scripts. Nate, armor. Judith drifts in, efficiently collects dirty linen from the actors and drifts out without comment or notice. We barely notice her ourselves. She's like that.

RICHARD. Plus the characters are like wood.

SHARPE. Well, *that's* his fault.

SHAG. *(Raising the manuscript.)* Consider the source. Heroes and villains.

SHARPE. *(Unwilling to give up his armor.)* Can't you fix it?

RICHARD. He can make the improbable make perfect sense —

SHAG. It's called history.

ARMIN. — but if nothing happens? It's not drama.

RICHARD. What are we going to do?

SHAG. Well, we could return the money.

RICHARD. No. Really. What are we going to do? *(It's a problem.)*

SHARPE. Wait! ... Wait! *(Best idea ever.)* We change the ending.

(All look at Sharpe.)

NATE. Everyone in London — everyone in the country — knows

what happened. How can you change the ending?

SHARPE. *(The big idea.)* We blow up Parliament.

Sharpe couldn't be more pleased with himself? Then, before Richard can attack Sharpe —

SHAG. No. I want to hear this.

Sharpe pitches his idea with growing commitment.

SHARPE. They want an explosion? We give them one. Dozens of

cannons — all fired at the same time.

RICHARD. How do we do that without blowing up the theater?

SHARPE. *(Improvising.)* We — We fire the cannons *towards the river* ... We *shake* the city to its foundations with the *roar* of can-

nons. The biggest explosion ever this side of war. Onstage we have

a model of Parliament. The cannons roar. Parliament — *explodes!*

Pretty good, huh?

ARMIN. Then?

Sharpe hadn't thought that far. He's lost for a moment, but —

SHARPE. Then — then ... THEN we EXPLAIN — in an

EPILOGUE — that *this* is what *COULD* have happened if the

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plot had worked. We sing a *Te Deum*, do a dance — (He does.) and take our bows.

He dances. Bows. Sharpe is delighted with himself. Then —

RICHARD. Soooo — (Bearing down on Sharpe.) we do a play — for the King — in honor of the King — in the presence of the King — in which we blow up the King — and his wife — and his children.

ARMIN. Then we do our little dance — (Armin, Nate and Shag all do a little dance as —) on the bits and pieces of the dead King — and his wife — and his children.

RICHARD. (Building.) A king whose father was killed in an explosion, a king who was nearly burned to death as a child, a king who is so terrified of smoke and fire that he even hates *TOBACCO!* (Then.) The worst thing — the worst thing — I have ever done in my shoddy life was giving you a full share in this company!

Richard grabs Sharpe's script. Tosses it to Armin. Then —

SHAG. Sharpe?

SHARPE. What!

SHAG. (Gently.) It's an ending — which is more than I have. (Then, to Richard.) I'll go to Cecil. Give me the money. (No response.) Richard. (Shag puts out his hand. Richard takes out the money. Gives it to Shag. Then —)

ARMIN. Come along. First round's on me.

RICHARD. (Re: Sharpe.) If he's coming, I'm not.

SHARPE. (Fine by him.) Go. (As all prepare to go —)

NATE. One thing. (Puzzled.) The men who dug this tunnel under Parliament — they're not like us, right? They're gentlemen? (After a nod/skeptical.) Digging a tunnel? Serious work for gentlemen.

This is the first really serious question raised about the plot. A dangerous thought.

RICHARD. (Sensing the danger.) Enough.

ARMIN. (A more dangerous thought.) And where do "gentlemen"

get that much gunpowder?

RICHARD. (Ending the conversation.) Am I drinking alone?

Armin locks the scripts up and the three senior members of the company leave together. Shag and Sharpe linger — Sharpe struggling to get out of his armor.

SHARPE. (To Shag.) You wrote me a good speech.

SHAG. You're a good actor.

Throughout Shag is focused on preparing to see Cecil, never on Sharpe.

SHARPE. You said — you said I was — brilliant.

SHAG. An actor never forgets a review. I'll trust you on that.

SHARPE. Did you mean it? Am I — brilliant?

SHAG. At your best.

SHARPE. Could I be — great?

SHAG. Anyone who has the looks, energy, needs approval as much as you do and doesn't care about anyone but himself — can be a great actor. A rare combination, but you have it.

SHARPE. You think I'm a fool, don't you? (There's something in Sharpe's tone that gets Shag's attention. Shag hadn't meant to hurt him — but he has. To make amends —)

SHAG. I think we're all fools. And all noble. And all royal. And the terrifying thing is that we get to pick which we will be.

SHARPE. A writer gets to pick. We only get to play. We are at your mercy. Choose well.

As Sharpe leaves, he nearly walks into Judith. Their eyes meet. Shag clears his throat. Sharpe leaves. Judith watches him go. Then —

SHAG. You like him?

JUDITH. Well, he hasn't slept with my mother. It's a start.

She leaves. We are in —

Scene 7

Sir Robert Cecil's office — afternoon.

Shag waits nervously in Cecil's office — which now has in it the King's robe, crown and scepter — displayed — museum-like.

As Shag goes to touch them, Cecil — in a good mood — enters on a run.

CECIL. (*Playful.*) Hands off or your head's off. (*As Shag steps away.*) I keep them here so James's children can't play with them. Don't you start. (*Cecil limps briskly past Shag, removes the manuscript from under Shag's arm.*) See — I told you it wouldn't take long. (*Paging though the text.*) This isn't the play.

SHAG. No. It isn't.

CECIL. Well? Where is it?

SHAG. Barely begun.

CECIL. You're not — What's the word for a person who waits till

the last minute? A —

SHAG. Writer?

CECIL. Procrastinator. From the Latin. Pro — cras. "For tomorrow."

"Tomorrow" is my least favorite word. (*Cecil, a busy man, works at his desk as the conversation goes on.*)

SHAG. I work well under pressure.

CECIL. Is that what you've come here for — pressure?

SHAG. I've come here to apologize. (*At a cost.*) About your father.

(*Dead stop. Then —*)

CECIL. What about my father?

SHAG. I'm sorry. For what I wrote about him.

Cecil sizes Shag up. Then —

CECIL. You parodied him as a meddling old fool. When Hamlet stabbed him behind an arras, he cried, "A rat! A rat!" When he died, people laughed. (*Brief pause. Then —*)

SHAG. So — you *have* seen my plays.

CECIL. There is a ship in the harbor — captured from the Spanish — containing all God's riches in small, easily pilfered quantities — gold bracelets, ivory carvings, spices. Not only do I know what is still in the hold — I know where the stolen items are — down to the last grain of pepper. (*Holding up a paper.*) I could give you the same details on every ship in the harbor — even though I haven't been in their stinking holds — (*Other papers.*) and I can tell you about every one of your plays even though I haven't been in your cesspit of a theater. I am well-informed.

SHAG. When do you sleep?

CECIL. I don't. If, in the future, you wish to make people laugh, I suggest you leave my family alone and write a comedy about your dead son, your foolish father and your endlessly rutting wife. Now, if you haven't finished the play, what are you doing here?

Cecil has succeeded in provoking Shag. Provoked, Shag goes on the offensive. He channels his anger into the details of his work.

SHAG. I've come to find out about the dirt.

CECIL. Dirt? What dirt?

SHAG. *Dirt.* Men tunneling under Parliament must have brought out a huge amount of *dirt*. Where did it go?

CECIL. (*Are you insane?*) In a time of national crisis, nobody's going to care about the dirt.

SHAG. Does this play matter to you? (*Shag has Cecil's attention.*) Because there will be 700 penny-a-place strandeers at every performance, *all* of whom make their living *with their hands* and, if there's *anything* they will want to know about, it's *the dirt*. (*Preempting Cecil.*) And the water. The tunnels by the river. Water would have seeped in. How did they get rid of it? Who ran the pumps? It's a long tunnel. Where did the wood come from to build the supports to hold it up? Was one of them a carpenter? Which? Who knew how to support a mine shaft? It's the details that sell the story. People tend to trust you on the big things if you get the small ones right — and this play is going to require more trust than usual.

CECIL. Why?

SHAG. Working people know nothing neat-as-this-piece-of-non-

sense can possibly be true. This — (*The manuscript.*) is a shoddy piece of work.

CECIL. *The King* wrote a shoddy piece of work?

SHAG. *Whoever* wrote this wrote a shoddy piece of work. Was it you?

CECIL. I remind you. When you speak to me you are speaking to the King. Do you understand that?

SHAG. I understand more than that. When I am speaking to you, I am speaking to the man who made an English king out of wee James of Scotland. It could not have been easy.

CECIL. And if the King walked in now, you would find a way to flatter him too, wouldn't you? Probably at my expense ... Now, what's the *precise* problem with this?

SHAG. There's nothing wrong with it. It's what's wrong with me.

I'm a playwright.

CECIL. And?

SHAG. (*Escalating.*) You don't want a play. You want a propaganda story. I don't do that.

CECIL. (*Outraged.*) Don't do propaganda? You? You're the man who gave Richard the Third his hump.

SHAG. He was a murderer.

CECIL. They're all murderers! He balanced the budget. People have *no idea* how hard that is! (*Outrage building.*) You made the Yorks *hideous* so that the people would love the Tudors and, in return, the Tudors made you *rich*! And now that you have your *land* and the *second largest house in Stratford* — now — NOW you don't do PROPAGANDA?

SHAG. No, I don't do *STORY* ... You were right about that. I am not an *original* writer. I find stories. I "dialogue" them. *Modify*. Sometimes improve, but *I need raw material* and *this* —

CECIL. (*Going back to his work.*) — is a shoddy piece of work!

Fin! Fix it!

SHAG. I can't! It isn't dramatic. Nothing happens.

CECIL. Nothing — ? *A group of thirteen fanatics plot to blow up*

Parliament —

SHAG. And DON'T! Even my actors see the problem! *There is no plot!*

CECIL. (*Rising, enraged.*) It is treason to say so!!!

SHAG. Treason? ... Treason? ... It's — (*What?*) — literary criticism. (*Silence. Then, getting it —*)

CECIL. Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh — no plot.

Cecil, amused, appreciates the difference. Then — a new — more human — start.

Concerning my father —

SHAG. I already apologized, my lord.

CECIL. Concerning my father — you wrote the only honest portrait of my father that exists. Or ever will. It is the father I knew. (*Shag is touched by this. Then —*)

SHAG. It could not have been easy to be the son of such a father.

CECIL. Having a disappointing older brother was some consolation. (*Then, a concession.*) I have never seen your plays, but I have heard them. Here at court. Your words are — (*Almost sexual.*) extraordinary.

SHAG. I've never seen you.

CECIL. You've never looked behind the arras. Your plays — move me. I cannot be seen to be moved. (*Then, open —*) My father failed at one thing. He almost made a single nation out of us.

SHAG. (*Dangerous ground.*) The Act of Religious Uniformity.

CECIL. Yes, since the time of Henry VIII, we have had two religions — Catholic/Protestant — old faith/new — petty theological differences were tearing us apart.

SHAG. People died for those "petty" differences. Your father saw to that.

CECIL. My father was trying to bring about national unity. He didn't understand you can't legislate a soul into a country. For that, you need a *story* — a *moving* story — a story everyone can believe in. William — (*With new intimacy.*) William — you are the one person who can make this work. (*Before Shag can respond —*)

JAMES [SHARPE]. (*Offstage. Heavy Scots accent.*) Beagle!

CECIL. (*Awkward pause, then —*) I must go. (*In a hurry to leave —*)

SHAG. Who's that?

JAMES. (*Offstage.*) Beagle, laddie!

SHAG. The King? The King is looking for his dog?

CECIL. (*Packing papers, rapid fire.*) For the dirt and pumps, the priests — Jesuits — they are the arithmeticians of the religious world and, as the power behind the plot, I'm sure they found ways of working it out.

SHAG. (*Rapid fire.*) Then I need to speak to the priests.

CECIL. As do I, but I haven't been able to find them.

SHAG. I thought you were well-informed.

CECIL. I am, but they have an advantage of me in that I am not in league with the devil.

SHAG. You don't expect me to believe that.

CECIL. Which part? That the priests are in league with the devil or that I'm not? Because I assure you *I'm not* or I would know where the devil they are.

SHAG. (*Leaving.*) Well, send for me when you find them.

CECIL. You know, it's a shame *your* father isn't alive. He knew priests, didn't he? Knew them well. (*Dead stop. More than a hint of threat.*) He entertained Jesuits? Had them in his home? Your home?

Didn't he?

SHAG. Is that what this is about? *My* father?

CECIL. It can be.

SHAG. (*Truth.*) My father was not a spiritual man. He was a leather-worker. It's easy to cheat with leather. It stretches. He liked the priests because they never changed their measure.

CECIL. I will give them this. You can stretch them a full foot taller and they will still give you nothing. (*Then.*) Well, shall we do what neither of our fathers could and restore unity to this nation?

Cecil offers his hand. Shag places the money pouch in the offered hand.

SHAG. What you want is a sermon, not a play. Your world has rules — so does mine. Comedies end in weddings; tragedies in deaths; histories in battles. This — (*The manuscript.*) just ends.

JAMES. (*Offstage.*) Beagle!

CECIL. (*Writing Shag a pass.*) Speak with the remaining conspirators in the Tower. Let us say Thomas Wintour. Perhaps he can provide the details you need.

Scene change to the Tower begins.

SHAG. I don't think they'll be of help.

CECIL. Why not?

SHAG. I read Tom Wintour's confession. He wrote it?

CECIL. Dictated it.

SHAG. But it's his signature?

CECIL. Sworn and witnessed.

SHAG. Odd, he misspelled his own name.

CECIL. He was under some pressure at the time. *You* work well under pressure. How much *pressure* do you need? Enough to make you forget how to spell your name? Because it *can be provided*.

JAMES. (*Offstage.*) Beagle! Beagle, I say! ... BEAGLE!

SHAG. He is calling his dog, isn't he?

CECIL. My master calls: I must go. Get writing. (*Cecil starts out.*)

SHAG. GOD SAVE THE KING! (*Cecil stops. Turns.*) What — no Amen?

CECIL. You — even you — must find *some* things stick in your throat.

Cecil exits. A moment later, so does Shag. The world grows very dark. We see — A prisoner — Tom Wintour [Sharp] — naked — hanging by the wrists like a piece of meat. A scene from any war, any time.

Scene 8

A cell — the Tower of London — dark.

Two men enter Tom Wintour's cell: a Junior [Armin] and a Senior [Richard] Military Interrogator. Junior puts his head against Tom's chest.

SENIOR [RICHARD]. (*A gentleman throughout.*) Breathing?

JUNIOR [ARMIN]. (*Checking.*) Tom? Tom Wintour?

No response. Junior gets a bucket. Throws water on Tom. Tom gasps awake. There is nothing monstrous about our guards. They are gentlemen doing their job. They don't relish or despise it. They just do it — politely and well.

SENIOR [RICHARD]. (*Polite throughout.*) No sleeping. You think they let *me* sleep on the job? Our boss doesn't like sleeping

and if I can't sleep, you sure as hell can't sleep! ... There's a man here to ask you some questions.

The man is Shag who reenters — terrified of where he finds himself. The sooner he can get out, the happier he will be.

TOM [SHARPE]. Please. Kill me.
JUNIOR [ARMINI]. Oh, they'll kill you alright. Repeatedly. First — they'll hang you. And pray that the drop breaks your neck, because if it don't, they'll cut you down and put you on a chopping block — where they'll cut off these — (*Grabs Tom's privates.*) and throw them in a fire.
SENIOR [RICHARD]. Then, they'll make a little hole — right here — (*Tom's belly.*) reach in, grab your intestines and pull them out of you inch by inch and there'll be *no sleeping*. Every time you pass out, they'll wake you up. Then, when you couldn't *possibly* be any more awake, they'll chop your body into four parts and nail them in public places around the city. You know why? (*Then, amused.*) Because we're a civilized society. And that's how you protect a civilized society. (*Senior and Junior take Tom down and hurl him onto the open stage. Then, to Shag —*) See, that's the problem with these people, sir. They've got no sense of humor! No sense of the irony of their situation.

The interrogators leave. Tom lies silent on the floor. Shag, appalled, has no idea what to do. In the distance, we hear a huge gate swinging shut and lock. Shag, terrified of the Tower, facing an inert body, is at a loss. What to do?

SHAG. Thomas? Thomas Wintour? (*No response. Shag gets the bucket of water. Brings it to Tom.*) Thomas Win — (*Tom — nearly insane — whirls away like the madman in Lear.*)
TOM [SHARPE]. NO MORE QUESTIONS! You must be satisfied with the answers I — *I no longer know where my body ends and that machine begins.*

Tom collapses. Has he passed out? Actually died?

SHAG. (*Quietly.*) Tom? (*No response.*) Tom? (*No answer. So Shag takes a risk. Whispered Latin.*) Benedicite.

Tom makes no motion, but the quality of his attention changes. Another risk.

Benedicite.
TOM [SHARPE]. (*Also a risk.*) Benedicite Jesu. (*Shag takes it a step further.*)
SHAG. Benedicite Jesu ... *et Mariae.* (*Tom rises to his knees.*)
TOM [SHARPE]. *Deo gratias* ... Thank God.

Tom grabs, kisses Shag's hand reverently. Shag is touched by the gesture. Then, panicking he pulls his hand away.

SHAG. (*Checking for spies.*) No. I'm not a priest. (*Tom checks for spies. Then —*)
TOM [SHARPE]. No, of course you're not. (*Tom clearly thinks Shag is.*)
SHAG. No — really. (*Shag's denial only convinces Tom more.*)
TOM [SHARPE]. I understand.
SHAG. (*Then, clear.*) No. Really. I am not a priest.
TOM [SHARPE]. (*Equally clear, but wrong.*) No. Really. I understand. (*Tom kisses Shag's hand again.*)
SHAG. (*Letting him.*) Christ, it's an insane world. (*Then — very clear.*) I have nothing to do with religion. (*Then, as proof.*) I'm a writer. (*This also is good news for Tom.*)
TOM [SHARPE]. Writer? Have you ink? Pen? Paper?
SHAG. I have.
TOM [SHARPE]. Then write.

Shag sits. Takes out pen and paper as Tom dictates —

My dearest wife — The hardest work has always fallen to you and now my death leaves you the hardest task of all — to explain a father's death to his children —
SHAG. (*Stopping writing.*) Not that kind of writer. I write plays. For the stage.
TOM [SHARPE]. If you can write plays, surely you can write a letter.
SHAG. I don't have permission to carry letters for you.
TOM [SHARPE]. (*Clearly you can.*) It's to my wife.
SHAG. (*Clearly I can't.*) Even so. (*Silence. Then —*)

TOM [SHARPE]. So you're not —

No, he's not.

Tom falls back into despair. Shag would like to comfort him, but —

Go away.

Shag hesitates. Goes. Thrilled to leave the Tower.

Leave the paper and pen.

SHAG. It's not permitted.

TOM [SHARPE]. Has it come to this? Are you even afraid of blank paper?

Shag, against his better judgment, checking for spies, returns. Places down pen and paper. Starts away as fast as he can. Tom moves to the implements. Tries to pick up the pen, but Tom's arms — after much torture — will not work. When he finally maneuvers his arms into position, his hands will not clasp the pen. It falls with a clatter. Shag stops and watches as Tom, with mounting desperation, tries again to do this simple task. Again. Again. Shag would love to leave. Doesn't. Moved, Shag approaches Tom. He kneels behind him. Shapes Tom's hand around the pen. Holds it. In effect, holds Tom. Feeling Shag's arms around him, Tom begins to weep. Tom rolls into Shag's arms — Tom's head against Shag's chest — needing, relishing Shag's human warmth. Shag hesitates. Then Shag closes his grip and holds Tom tightly to him. Comforts him — like a son. Then —

SHAG. How old are you, Tom?

TOM [SHARPE]. Twenty-four.

Shag rocks him softly. Then — a decision — a dangerous one —

SHAG. I will write your wife whatever you find it in your heart to say — (*Tom sits up, ready to start* —) But first — (*And he means this* —) I need to know what only you know. The true history of the Gunpowder Plot. How did it begin?

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TOM [SHARPE]. (*Bitterly amused.*) *How did it begin?* You know. *Everyone* knows. It began with a lie ... Write this — (*Then, as Shag writes.*) It began when Henry VIII wanted a woman-not-his-wife in his bed, and — as being king wasn't enough to get her there — he declared himself God.

SHAG. (*Did anyone hear that treason?*) Head of Church. He made himself Head of Church. (*Whispered harshly.*) Bel! Careful! TOM [SHARPE]. Keep writing!

As Tom continues, he takes advantage of the bucket of water — drinks and washes.

It began when people like you started calling a serial killer of wives *Head of a Church.* (*With growing outrage.*) It began when men swore Henry's adultery was their religion *not* because they believed it but because *Those-who-didn't-swear* had their lands taken away and given to *Those-who-did.*

Growing stronger, Tom removes his shirt and washes his body.

By their wives they swore, and by their children. They swore by *all that was holy* until what-once-was-holy became nothing-but-words and words, even words themselves had lost their meaning.

SHAG. (*Recognizing the truth.*) And breath became poor and speech unable.

TOM [SHARPE]. You've stopped writing. Trust you to carry a letter to my wife? Never!

SHAG. (*With growing anger.*) You would have blown up a room full of husbands and fathers and sons and brothers and I'm a coward!

TOM [SHARPE]. You say this is a mad world. Tell me you have never been caught in the madness?

SHAG. Not till now.

TOM [SHARPE]. (*Amazed.*) Who protected you?

SHAG. I'm part of a cooperative venture.

TOM [SHARPE]. (*With suspicion.*) Who sent you? *What* are you? (*Grabbing Shag's pass.*) Cecil.

SHAG. I am not his creature.

TOM [SHARPE]. (*Hammering at him.*) If you are not in jail, you live within his lies.

SHAG. You're young. You're like my daughter. You exaggerate.

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TOM [SHARPE]. Do I? When was the last time you shouted a truth that was *shouting out* within you?

SHAG. I am a *writer*, not a town crier.

TOM [SHARPE]. I at least have made *my* cry heard.

SHAG. Really? Who heard you?

TOM [SHARPE]. *THE KING* or I would not be here. Who heard you?

SHAG. *THE KING! I AM HIS PLAYWRIGHT!* (*Shag has revealed more than he wanted to about himself.*)

TOM [SHARPE]. Then there's blood on your hands, Writer. (*As Tom rises and puts on his shirt—*)

SHAG. You think it's easy to write the truth? It's not. Truth defies dramatic formula.

TOM [SHARPE]. Truth must be *lived* and that is a risk you will not take. (*Shag doesn't move. He thinks. Then laughs. Laughs harder. Then—*)

SHAG. (*Moving to leave.*) GUARD!

TOM [SHARPE]. Do you dare laugh at me?

SHAG. (*Done with this.*) He's brilliant. Cecil. Brilliant. He knew you wouldn't talk to me. That's why he wasn't worried about me seeing you. Christ, what a world. Guard! He wanted to show me with you what he could do to a man. He wanted to frighten me with you. Christ, he hates me.

TOM [SHARPE]. Why?

SHAG. Because I can kill kings and he can't. And because I have never sworn the Oath of Uniformity.

TOM [SHARPE]. So, you *are* of the old faith!

SHAG. No, I'm a playwright and uniformity is the death of drama. GUARD!

TOM [SHARPE]. Do I frighten you?

SHAG. You anger me. You played into the hands of the priests and they destroyed you.

TOM [SHARPE]. The priests? What did the priests have to do with it?

SHAG. I don't want to know. JAILER! ... JAILER! ... JAILER! (*No jailer. No nothing.*) Alright. Now I'm frightened.

TOM [SHARPE]. Are you content with Cecil's version of the story?

SHAG. Perfectly ... Except ...

A hint of drum in the background. In spite of himself, a playwright.

One of your friends betrayed you. Which?

TOM [SHARPE]. Impossible. We grew up in each other's houses. We lived in one another's hearts.

SHAG. *Someone* wrote a letter that betrayed you. Who could it have been if *not* one of your friends?

TOM [SHARPE]. (*Impossible.*) My friends were honest.

SHAG. (*The writer.*) Who was there — at the start?

The second play-within-the play begins.

Scene 8 — Part 2

The Tower — continued.

Gunpowder Plot — Tom Winour's version.

TOM [SHARPE]. Robert Catesby.

Catesby — swordsman, horseman, churchman — enters — played by Armin. Dashing, articulate, passionate.

CATESBY [ARMIN]. Friend, how goes the night? Stands our country where it did?

SHAG. And who besides Catesby?

TOM [SHARPE]. Thomas Percy — to whom King James falsely promised toleration.

Percy — young nobleman — played by Nate — second-in-command to Catesby.

PERCY [NATE]. Alas, poor country, almost afraid to know itself! TOM [SHARPE]. And myself. (*Entering the scene.*) It cannot be called our mother, but our grave.

Tom-in-prison is now dressed to match his two noblemen companions. Tom Wintour's version of the origin of the Powder Plot is more naturalistic than the King's version even when using the same words. There is a sense of a spirited — perhaps alcohol-enhanced — discussion in a well-lit private room of a tavern. The men — passionate, athletic and constantly on the move — are at the turning point of their lives.

CATESBY [ARMINI]. What's the newest grief?

PERCY [NATE]. Each new morn new widows howl, new orphans cry, new sorrows strike heaven on the face.

CATESBY [ARMINI]. Must we always TALK and yet do nothing?

Shag takes notes vigorously throughout. Wanting to miss nothing, he moves freely among the conspirators who do not notice him unless so indicated.

TOM [SHARPE]. What man dare, I dare, but God himself has aced. James is king and if he keep his throne as long as did Elizabeth hers, he is the only king I will ever know.

CATESBY [ARMINI]. Unworthy life to serve a king debased!

Armin — who has been playing Catesby — emerges from beneath the role to ask Shag —

ARMINI. Wait a minute, Will, you're not really expecting me to say that, are you?

SHAG. (Writer/director.) GO ON!

Armin becomes Catesby again instantly.

CATESBY [ARMINI]. Before we speak further — an oath.

SHAG. Waitwaitwait! The priest didn't administer the oath?

TOM [SHARPE]. Garnet wasn't there. He was in the next room preparing the sacrament.

Richard appears in background as the priest Garnet. He appears and vanishes quickly and quietly.

CATESBY [ARMINI]. Upon the sacrament we are about to receive, swear never to reveal what I am about to speak.

PERCY [NATE]. I swear.

CATESBY [ARMINI]. Tom?

TOM [SHARPE]. (Reluctant.) Aye — so you speak no treason to the King.

CATESBY [ARMINI]. (A first bold challenge.) Which king? The King of Kings. Or a Scottish king whose ass sits on an English throne? Because you cannot serve two masters, Tom, and, for myself, my allegiance is clear. (Catesby puts his hand out.)

PERCY [NATE]. (Hand on hand.) And mine. (Tom does not join in. Catesby and Percy focus their energy on Tom.)

CATESBY [ARMINI]. Tom, you told me once you saw your father racked for his religion by Cecil's father.

TOM [SHARPE]. (A deeply painful point.) Enough of that.

CATESBY [ARMINI]. (Won't back off.) Was this God's will? For a child to see his father thus?

TOM [SHARPE]. Enough, I say! He stood for his faith. May we do as much.

CATESBY [ARMINI]. (Outraged.) Faith? You think Robert Cecil cares about faith? Religion is the name those in power give their greed. Faith, patriotism — whatever they call it — this is about money, Tom, nothing more. The amassing of wealth. The accumulation of titles. Tom, you know this to be true.

PERCY [NATE]. Tom, if these things are not God's will, then why submit?

TOM [SHARPE]. We wait for God to act.

CATESBY [ARMINI]. And what if God waits for us?

TOM [SHARPE]. And who are we to know God's will?

CATESBY [ARMINI]. (Thrilled with the idea.) What if our will — is — God's will? What if we were to end the madness — at once — for all?

TOM [SHARPE]. (Amused/impossible.) What if God should send a storm to blow away the past — an earthquake to wreck the prisons where they rack our fathers' bones?

CATESBY [ARMINI]. What if we were God's storm? What if we could make the fixed earth quake?

SHAG. (To Tom.) The gunpowder! I have many questions here. Where would you get enough gunpowder to make an earthquake? TOM [SHARPE]. (To Shag.) My question as well.

CATESBY [ARMINI]. (*To Tom.*) I already have it. (*Laughing.*)
From Cecil.

TOM [SHARPE]. Cecil?

SHAG. Cecil?

Cecil appears from beneath Percy to remind Shag —

CECIL. I am not to be in this play.

Armin appears from beneath Catesby.

ARMIN. (*To Shag.*) You can't very well accuse Cecil in a play that he's commissioning, can you?

SHAG. Enough!

Armin and Nate instantly become Catesby and Percy again.

CATESBY [ARMINI]. I went to Cecil. I told him I'm raising a company to join the English regiment on the continent. He has given permission. More — horses, men and powder. He has provided me the tools of his own destruction.

TOM [SHARPE]. What would you do?

CATESBY [ARMINI]. (*The plot.*) There is a room beneath the King's throne in Parliament. We place the powder in the room — SHAG. (*To Tom.*) Room? What room? What about the tunnel? TOM [SHARPE]. (*To Shag.*) Tunnel? What tunnel?

Percy becomes Cecil.

CECIL. (*To Shag, amused.*) Dirt? What dirt?

Cecil becomes Percy again leaving Shag stunned by the apparition.

CATESBY [ARMINI]. (*Immediately.*) We place the powder in the room beneath the throne and — opening of Parliament — we strike a blow that will blow them all to heaven or to hell.

PERCY [NATE]. Would not our souls be damned?

CATESBY [ARMINI]. I posed that question to the priest, to Garnet — Is it lawful to engage in a war knowing innocent lives

will be lost and he said, "Yes, it is permitted if the war is just."

PERCY [NATE]. It may be permitted, but there is no war.

CATESBY [ARMINI]. The King promised toleration, then banned our faith when he needed our land. If a foreign king did that, it would be a war. How say you, Tom?

Tom has been contemplating this proposal seriously and speaks from a dark and powerful place —

TOM [SHARPE]. I saw my father — a man new haled from the rack, limbs weak with long imprisonment. Eyes, like lamps whose wasting oil is spent, shoulders weak, overborne with burdening grief. And arms like wither'd vines that droop sapless to the ground; and feet unable to support his drawn and broken clay. (*Then.*) Oh, there is a war — a war the King wages on his own people. PERCY [NATE]. But to kill a king?

Tom — a young Hal becoming a royal Henry V — brilliantly played.

TOM [SHARPE]. (*With growing conviction.*) If every king before every battle hesitated and said, "But a soldier might die," the world would live in peace. But they don't. They reckon losses. What's one soldier? What's ten? What's hundreds? If the prize be large enough, what's tens of tens of hundreds of thousands? (*Committing deeply.*) Kill a king? ... I say, "What's one?"

The priest reappears, chants —

PRIEST [RICHARD]. *Introito ad altare dei.*

As a sign of their commitment to one another and the plot, they embrace and sing —

CATESBY/PERCY/TOM. Amen.

Scene 9

The stage of the Globe — bright day.

The characters are all still. Then — as they become the actors again —

SHAG. *(To Sharpe, awed by his performance as Tom.)* Well done. *(Then, to the group.)* Well done.

All of them are excited by the forbidden, exciting work they have just done.

Well?

NATE. Well. At least this one has an ending.

SHARPE. How does it end?

NATE. You finish that speech. The King snaps his fingers. Guards come out of the audience, cut off your balls and throw them to the dogs.

ARMIN. In that case — *(Raising his hand.)* I'm in. Anybody else?

Sharpe's hand flashes up.

SHARPE. It's a good part.

NATE. *(Hand up.)* I'm in. Two reasons. One, this has been needing saying —

SHAG. And two?

NATE. There isn't a chance in hell they'll let us say it.

RICHARD. *(In charge.)* Collect the scripts and lock them up — tight.

SHARPE. No.

SHAG. And no, Richard, you've been outvoted.

SHARPE. *(In Richard's face.)* HAI!

RICHARD. *There will be no vote on this.*

SHARPE. *I thought that was who we are!*

RICHARD. Not when it comes to politics.

SHARPE. This is religion.

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RICHARD. *Politics is religion for people who think they're God!* And they are not forgiving people. *(To Shag.)* You went to Cecil to tell him we weren't doing his play. What happened?

SHAG. I spoke with Tom Wintour. He ... *(The company is shocked.)*

RICHARD. Tom Wintour! *You are not to speak with anyone else.*

Do you hear me? Christ, what are we going to do?

SHAG. *(Confident craftsman.)* We present the whole affair — both sides — as a trial.

SHARPE. Trials are good.

SHAG. At the end, the King can get up and dance on his enemies' dead bodies, but both sides get heard. *(Thrilled confidence.)* *I can get it by them, Richard. I'll bet on it.*

Nate and Armin laugh as Shag tosses Richard a money purse.

SHARPE. What? What?

ARMIN. They bet whether he could sneak the dirtiest word in the English language into *Twelfth Night*.

SHARPE. There are no dirty words in *Twelfth Night*. It's our one clean comedy.

NATE. The letter forging scene — when they're talking about the lady's penmanship. What are the letters they discuss?

SHARPE. *(Quoting Twelfth Night.)* Her C — U — and — Ts —

ARMIN. Her c — u — n — ts?

SHARPE. *And thus makes she her great P's ... (Getting it.)* How many times have I heard that and never heard that?

Furious, Richard knocks the props all over the stage.

RICHARD. *This isn't some smut you sneak into a script!*

SHAG. If it's a trial, Richard — if we weigh both sides —

RICHARD. *Are you insane? There are no sides! For Christ's sake, write the play!*

SHAG. Which?

RICHARD. *Cecil's!*

SHAG. *I don't believe it.*

RICHARD. *Neither will anybody else!* People will see it for what it is — *bad melodrama.* It won't play a week and we can go back to the sixty other plays no one objects to.

SHAG. What does that say about them?

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RICHARD. That they're stories — harmless stories — that distract people from the insanity that's going on around us.
SHAG. That's remarkably like what Cecil thinks of our work.
RICHARD. It puts food on our families' table. Is that so bad?
SHAG. Perhaps not for you, Richard. I walked away from my family's table to write plays. Before I'm in my winding sheet, I'd like to leave behind at least one play that was true.
RICHARD. (*Straining to understand.*) You want to do this? (*He does.*) Why?

Instantaneous transformation. There is no pause before Shag says —

Scene 10

Part 2 — The Tower — continued.

SHAG. (*To Tom.*) Make your mark.

Sharpe has become Tom Wintour — sitting on the ground of the cell. Shag holds him tightly and with deep affection. Helps him make his mark on his finished letter. Shag holds him throughout.

Are you frightened?

TOM [SHARPE]. Only of hell. But that was my choice.

SHAG. Not of death?

TOM [SHARPE]. Not now. (*Re: the letter.*) My children will know

there was a reason.

SHAG. How many do you have?

TOM [SHARPE]. Two. (*With pride.*) Sons.

Shag nods. Pockets the letter. Places a fatherly hand on Tom's head.

SHAG. God forgives you.

TOM [SHARPE]. How do you know that?
SHAG. It's my job to forgive.

Shag allows Tom to believe what he will. Tom kisses Shag's hand. Shag kisses Tom's head. Holds him as a son.

Scene 11

The Globe stage — exactly as above — except for Judith whose arrival is taken for granted.

SHAG. (*From the heart.*) If Tom Wintour were your son, Richard — (*Sharpe moves out of Shag's arms as Shag continues —*) wouldn't you want his story told? Would you want his sons to hear only the lies?

RICHARD. He isn't my son. More to the point, he isn't yours. (*Driven, from the core.*) Will, I know you better than anybody in the world. Better than Anne. Better than Judith. I've been you. Your anger, your poetry. Your sins and your grief. I want you to know something. Telling the truth about somebody else's son won't bring back yours. I'm sorry but there it is. You have to let him go. He's dead. (*Then.*) And so is Tom Wintour.

SHAG. He is not.

RICHARD. *As good as.* You don't challenge the Cecils without your head ending up on a pike. You can't speak for him, Will, not without a terrible cost.

JUDITH. Seems to me there's a cost either way. (*To Shag.*) If you had known my brother would die, would you still have had him?

SHAG. (*Harsh.*) We are dealing with serious matters, Judith.

JUDITH. But —

SHAG. (*Brutal.*) Why do you interrupt me! Why are you even here!

The company is taken aback by Shag's harshness. Judith isn't. She challenges him.

JUDITH. But would you? Knowing the worst? Have had him? *(After a nod.)* Then what does it matter what will happen if you write your play?

RICHARD. We could be *hanged!* Is that what you want?

SHARPE. Richard's right. We could be hanged.

JUDITH. Hanged?

Judith has seen death. She knows — after caring for her brother — that there are worse things. She knows more than any man onstage about this. At a cost.

The worst part of dying is the sickness. And the fear. The never-knowing-when. With hanging, you know exactly when. And you can be healthy right till the end. I'm surprised people don't insist on being hanged every day. *(A moment. Then —)*

SHARPE. Your daughter is scary. Lovely, but very, very —

SHAG. *(Needing to make Richard understand.)* Don't you see what he's done? The boy was right. We stop our mouths. We do not shout UNTRUE to what we *know* to be false and if *we* do not, who will? *(Then, a risk.)* Is this about religion, Richard? ... I have never asked this before. Of any of us. Richard, what's your religion?

RICHARD. The SAME as YOURS! *(His arms open to the theater.) THIS! ...* Now, what's so important that you would risk destroying *this?*

SHAG. *(Deepest ambition of a writer.)* I had hoped — I had hoped to write a new soul into this country.

Silence. Then Nate's hand goes up.

NATE. I'm in ... God help me.

ARMIN. Me too.

SHARPE. And me.

SHAG. Richard?

RICHARD. Is this the shit Cecil's been selling you — souls? Leave souls to the priests. What do *we* have to do with souls?

Richard grabs the bodies of his actors.

We're actors. Words made flesh.

SHAG. Just flesh?

RICHARD. *(Driving.)* And blood. We step out on stage and try to show them something enormous, unimaginable for good or ill. And if they catch a sight of themselves in us, we've done our job. We hold the mirror up. Nothing more. *(With disgust.)* Souls!

CECIL. And you must be Richard.

All turn. See Cecil. Nate has become Cecil in our full view. All but Shag bow low to Cecil as, script in hand, he examines the theater. Then —

CECIL. So — this is the great Globe. *(Enjoying being right.)* Cesspit.

SHAG. How long have you been here?

CECIL. *(Re: audience.)* What do you say, Writer? Do you show them their souls —

RICHARD. My lord, I was only —

CECIL. Silence! Do you show them their souls? *(Contemptuous.)* Or what they are?

SHAG. Not *what* they are, but — *that* they are. They forget.

All look into the audience.

CECIL. And soul?

As Shag describes the essence of theater, his actors slowly take over the stage.

SHAG. *(Into the empty theater.)* God's truest name is *I am*. Each time an actor steps out on a stage, his very being proclaims "I am." They — *(The audience.)* with us, for a moment, remember that they ARE. When they see Sharpe here — *(Sharpe — young, handsome, all things possible — faces the audience.)* undefined — royal fool, soldier king, saintly sinner — they know in him their infinite possibility. For a moment, his body becomes their soul. Our bodies *become* their souls made visible. What could they not do if, while in that godlike state, if we were to tell them — the truth?

The company faces the audience. Then —

JUDITH. *(Back to reality.)* You'd have to know it first. Then, if you told it, people would trample one another running for the exits.

CECIL. Clever girl. Is she yours?
SHAG. (To Judith, immediately.) Go!
CECIL. (To all, immediately.) GO!

They bolt. Once again it's —

Scene 12

Cecil and Shag with a manuscript between them.

But the men and the script have changed. What was once a negotiation is now a battle to the death. They will use the whole stage and be in constant motion. Boxers in a ring, circling, attacking, retreating.

CECIL. (The text he brought in.) Now this is a shoddy piece of work.
SHAG. That's an old script. Only company members have the new draft.

CECIL. No, this is it. (Laser focus.) The most interesting aspect is the idea of the composite character. You took Digby's youth, Wintour's rage and Bates' remorse and conflated them into one sympathetic, lovable traitor. William, this is *not* the script I commissioned.

Shag is stunned. Cecil has the script.

SHAG. Where — where did you get that?

CECIL. (Rapid fire throughout.) Now, the problems. You say the King promised religious toleration. Not true and, in fact, treasonous.

SHAG. I will not discuss this until you tell me *where* —

CECIL. You say Catesby came to see me. He did, but the implications are unfair to me. Now, the priests —

SHAG. I will discuss nothing with you, until you tell me *where* you —

CECIL. I bought it.

SHAG. It was not for sale.

CECIL. Everything is for sale.

SHAG. I am NOT!

CECIL. I CAN GO TO ANY PRINTER'S STALL AND BUY 150 OF YOUR MOST EXPLICIT LOVE LETTERS FOR POCKET CHANGE! DON'T TELL ME YOU'RE NOT FOR SALE! William, where's my play?

SHAG. (Furious.) Answer me one question and I'll write it. (A nod, then, flying —) A dozen ill-equipped young men dug a hole — dumping dirt, bringing in lumber, making noise enough to wake the dead? They dug a hole — under Parliament — a hole big enough to store thirty-six barrels of gunpowder?

CECIL. Your question?

SHAG. (Building throughout.) How could a man like you — who — without leaving his office — knows the whereabouts of every grain of pepper in London — (With growing disbelief.) how could such a well-informed man possibly NOT have not known that THOSE MEN were digging THAT HOLE — when the HOLE that they were DIGGING — digging EVERY DAY from MARCH until NOVEMBER — was being dug UNDER the very BUILDING in which YOU HAVE YOUR OFFICE?

Silence. Then —

CECIL. I don't understand theater. (Then.) I have neutralized Europe — set France and Spain at one another's throats to keep them from our door. This is harder.

SHAG. You'll never understand. Theater's a small world, but it's built on affection and trust.

CECIL. And yet — from your little world — I have this.

Cecil holds up the script.

SHAG. So, you have a spy among us.

CECIL. Just the one, do you think? Now — (All business.) What do you require to write this play? Name it — it's yours.

SHAG. (Driving throughout.) Show me the tunnel!

CECIL. (Almost bragging.) I think we both know that would be impossible.

SHAG. Very well. No tunnel. Was there a letter?

CECIL. Of course there was a letter.

SHAG. Forged!

CECIL. If no one knows who wrote it, why would you have to forge it?

SHAG. *I want to see it.*

CECIL. Next you'll be asking me to see the gunpowder.

SHAG. Very well, *show me the —*

CECIL. *It's been dispersed.* It's far too dangerous to have weapons that could cause that much destruction in one place.

SHAG. (*Dawning realization.*) There was no gunpowder in the Gunpowder Plot?

CECIL. There was, but there didn't have to be.

SHAG. There was no *plot* in the Powder Plot ... I am a fool.

CECIL. Don't blame yourself. People might want to know about the dirt in theater. In life, they leave the dirt to me. (*Then, boldly.*) William, will you write this play — YES OR —

SHAG. NO!

CECIL. (*Pleased.*) Very well. (*Then, more pleased.*) GUARDS!

Immediate military drums — powerful, sustained, threatening — under —

SHAG. (*Bold defiance.*) I won't write your lies!

CECIL. (*Brilliant cynicism.*) By the time you're done, they won't be lies. (*Handing Shag files.*) Here are the specifications on the dirt. The water. The wood. Anything else you need will be provided. There will have been a plot when you have written the history of it as real as Richard's hump and I will provide a punishment for deviation from the story so appalling that *no one* will so much as *raise a voice* to question it. William, we can heal this nation of a hundred years of division.

The guards [Richard and Armin] arrive in armor, hands on sheathed swords.

SHAG. You want to found the nation on a lie.

CECIL. You think Rome was founded by twins suckled by wolves?

SHAG. So, we are Rome now?

CECIL. Rome is over, and so is Wittenberg.

SHAG. And when both religions are gone, what will be left?

Cecil is amazed that Shag doesn't know. Drums cease.

CECIL. Why — You. (*With wonder and admiration.*) You will be left. You will be the measure of all things. People will go to your plays as they used to go to church. Reverently. And they will leave exactly as they went in, unchanged but feeling somehow improved. Have you ever looked at one of your audiences? (*Forcing Shag to face his audience —*) You make them happy, but not so happy as to make them reject their unhappiness. You make them angry, but not so angry as to inspire action. You reduce all of reality to spectacle, making action unnecessary, even impossible. You are the perfect civic religion. (*Deep admiration.*) Your work will outlast the Bible — which it resembles — but you've improved on it.

SHAG. How?

CECIL. You've kept the willing suspension of disbelief and gotten rid of the moral demands.

SHAG. You know what the precise problem — is here. You're insane — and *I will NOT write your play.*

Shag starts out. Guards draw swords. Black his exit.

SENIOR [RICHARD]. Sir, you have a letter in your possession I require of you. (*Shag is puzzled.*) A letter from a prisoner.

Shag realizes Tom Wintour's letter is in his pocket. Takes out the letter.

SHAG. (*An appeal to Cecil.*) It's to his wife. Do you know what it is to love your wife?

JUNIOR [ARMIN]. You're asking the wrong man, sir. He worked the day of his wife's funeral.

CECIL. I worked the day she died.

SENIOR [RICHARD]. The letter is from a traitor. It is treason to possess it.

The guards step towards him. Shag fights his desire to hand it over.

SHAG. No. I won't.

As Cecil's command becomes absolute, he approaches ecstasy.

CECIL. *Worri?* Of course you will. You don't wake up one morning and decide to perform an act of moral courage. It takes *practice*. That's why *Faulkes* and *Catesby Wintour* and the others will be remembered and you will be *forgotten*.

SHAG. I will be remembered. You just said my plays would live *forever*:

CECIL. Your plays, yes. But *you?* (*Thrilled by the idea.*) You will be the only major writer whose very *EXISTENCE* will be a matter of debate. (*Then —*) Why should anyone remember you? You have done *NOTHING*. YOU — *ARE — NOTHING*. NOTHING!!!

At a nod from Cecil, the guards bear down on Shag. Then march past Shag to a trapdoor. Open it. Shout into it —

SENIOR [RICHARD]. Thomas Wintour — prepare yourself.

Tom Wintour — shaking, terrified, fighting for his dignity — emerges from the trap.

Scene 13

The execution of Thomas Wintour.

Cecil grabs the letter from Shag's hand as Shag is distracted by Tom's entrance.

Cecil ascends the stairway to the scaffold as Shag petitions urgently from below. Military drums intensify.

SHAG. (*Begging throughout.*) You asked my price. Let him live.

CECIL. He would breed sedition.

SHAG. Not if he gives his word. He is a man of his word.

CECIL. I suppose you should know. You heard his confession. Tell me — where did you get the authority to absolve sins?

SHAG. It's my job as a writer.

CECIL. Well, I spoke with him after. He told me where the priests

are hiding. He feels badly about that. Still, you'll finally be able to talk to the priests.

SHAG. Let him live and I will write the greatest play ever written. It will be a play on which to found a nation.

CECIL. What's it called?

SHAG. *Gymbeline*. All the children of England return home and live as one. It's a war that ends in a wedding.

CECIL. *Comedies* end in weddings; histories in battles; treason in death.

SHAG. *I won't tell your lies.*

JUNIOR [ARMINI]. (*Moving Shag aside.*) Step aside sir, step aside.

CECIL. Of all your lies, do you know which is the worst? You make death beautiful.

Tom is bound and made to step up onto the same barrel Shag stood on in the first company scene —

Romeo and Juliet lying in one another's arms? Do you know what *force* it takes for a dagger to enter a body? Or *how* long it takes to die of poisoning? Have you ever seen an execution close up? No one dies with dignity. No one.

HANGMAN [RICHARD]. Does the prisoner have any last words?

Shag once imagined an actor walking onstage, standing stock still and commanding an audience by the simple fact of being alive. Unaccommodated man, as Lear says. Shaking with emotion, stripped to his loin cloth, defenseless, Tom Wintour becomes in reality what was only imagined in Lear. Naked, distressed, essential humanity. Long silence. Then — almost like waking up — Tom remembers where he is. Then —

TOM [SHARPE]. I wish to recite a poem. To my God. (*Stamps his foot three times.*) *Who's that which knocks? My Lord? O stay, my Lord, I come.*

CECIL. (*Signaling the hangman.*) Enough.

The hangman pushes Tom off the barrel. Tom chokes and struggles.

CECIL. Cut him down.
SHAG. (*Frantic.*) NO! LET HIM DIE.
CECIL. I thought you wanted him to live.
SHAG. Not through this. Let him die!
CECIL. CUT HIM DOWN.

Hangman cuts Tom down. Tom falls to the ground unconscious.

Wake him up.

Junior hurts a bucket of water over Tom. Tom awakens to see Senior approaching him with butcher tools.

Now, Master Writer —

Junior hauls Tom up. Senior puts a knife to his chest and, with the blade, cuts a bloody line down Tom from sternum to navel. Tom howls.

TOM [SHARPE]. Oh, Christ.
CECIL. — will you write the play?
SHAG. (*Horrified.*) YES!
CECIL. *Beg to write the play.*
SHAG. *Please let me write your play.*
CECIL. *And will it have a witch?*
SHAG. NO!
CECIL. No?
SHAG. *It will have three witches!*

Thunder and lightning as witches — powerful male voices — are heard over the speakers —

WITCH 1. (*Voiceover.*)
When shall we three meet again?
In thunder, lightning or in rain?
WITCH 2. (*Voiceover.*)
When the hurly-burly's done,
When the battle's lost and won.
WITCH 3. (*Voiceover.*)
Where the place?

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WITCH 1. (*Voiceover.*)
Upon the heath.
ALL WITCHES. (*Voiceover.*)
There to meet with —

A mighty slice with an ax. Tom's head is cut off. Cecil grabs the head then raises it high.

CECIL. BEHOLD — THE HEAD — OF A TRAITOR!

Tom's eyes flicker to life. Then, into the silence —

TOM'S HEAD. (*Firm whisper.*) Thou liest.

An explosion of thunder. Cecil, stunned, his hands dripping with blood, drops the head. It falls into Shag's arms. Shag, weeping, cradles Tom's head. Huge clap of thunder. Blinding lightning. Blackout.

End of Act One

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ACT TWO

*In the black — we hear powerful male voices perform
Macbeth's witches. There's nothing "wicky" about these voices.
They mean business.*

WITCH 1 [ARMIN].

When shall we three meet again?

In thunder, lightning or in rain?

WITCH 2 [NATE].

When the hurly-burly's done.

When the battle's lost and won.

WITCH 3 [SHARPE].

Where the place?

WITCH 1 [ARMIN].

Upon the heath.

ALL WITCHES.

There to meet with — Garnet!

Great rolling thunder leads into —

Scene 1

The trial of Father Henry Garnet.

Courtroom. Bright day.

*Henry Garnet is arraigned by Edward Coke — the States
Attorney [Armin]. Coke is a well-fed lawyer on his way to the
highest ranks of government.*

*Garnet is the opposite of the dashing priest/conspirator we saw
portrayed earlier in the first draft of the Powder Plot. Recently
captured, newly a prisoner, Garnet is a distracted figure.
There is, however, a steely intelligence under the distraction.
And under that, an understanding heart. Richard plays
Garnet — a lead actor lending star power to a character role.
Cecil observes from a box in court.*

COKE [ARMIN]. *(Over court hubbub.)* Order in the court!
Order! Order! *(As hubbub dies, to Garnet.)* State your name. *(No
response.)* Your name.

*Silence. Garnet — noticing silence — seeing all eyes on him
— realizes he has been asked a question.*

GARNET [RICHARD]. *(Friendly.)* Henry. My name is Henry.
Garnet. Father Henry Garnet.
COKE [ARMIN]. *(Not friendly.)* Mr. Garnet, are you not other-
wise called Whalley? Otherwise Darcy? Otherwise Robert, other-
wise Farmer, otherwise Phillips?
GARNET [RICHARD]. I am.
COKE [ARMIN]. It rather seems to me that *one* name should be
enough for an honest man — though perhaps it does not seem that
way to you, Mr. Garnet — otherwise Whalley — otherwise Darcy
— otherwise Robert-Farmer-Phillips?

Laughter in the court. Coke, knowing this case is the key to his advancement, is pleased.

GARNET [RICHARD]. Yes, I suppose one name should be plenty.

Garnet, puzzling over this, answers the following questions absentely.

COKE [ARMIN]. You are a priest of the old faith?

GARNET [RICHARD]. I am.

COKE [ARMIN]. You are a Jesuit?

GARNET [RICHARD]. I am.

COKE [ARMIN]. Superior of the Jesuits?

GARNET [RICHARD]. For fault of a better, I am.

COKE [ARMIN]. For how long have you been —

GARNET [RICHARD]. I believe Robert Cecil has been trying to find me for — what — twenty years now? We have actually passed in the street.

Murmur in the court, cut short by —

CECIL. Mr. Coke, please instruct the prisoner to limit his responses to answering the questions placed by the State's Attorney.

This chills the air. Garnet nods.

COKE [ARMIN]. Mr. Garnet, you are here charged with capital treason. (*Approaching the audience.*) We shall prove to this court that, on 9 June in the year of our Lord 1605, Mr. Garnet etc. etc. did conspire with Robert Catesby, Thomas Wintour and companions — to ASSASSINATE Our Royal MAJESTY, his FAMILY and the ASSEMBLED PEERS OF THE REALM by placing thirty-six barrels of devilish GUNPOWDER under Parliament with the aim of altering forever the TRUE FAITH on which OUR BELOVED COUNTRY stands! (*To Garnet.*) How say you!

Silence. Garnet again becomes aware all eyes are on him. Then —

GARNET [RICHARD]. I'm sorry. Could you repeat the question?

Laughter from the court at Garnet's expense. Still, he appreciates laughter — to the very end. Then —

I was considering the question of names.

Garnet is the opposite of a lawyer. He is actually interested in Coke's question.

It seems odd to me that I have collected so many. Yet I am not alone in having more than one. Take good Robert Cecil here. He has a collection of his own — does he not?

Cecil is suddenly the focus of all eyes.

He was christened "Robert," but he is now *Sir* Robert. As well as Baron of Essendon. And Viscount Cranborne. And soon —

CECIL. Mr. Attorney, if you please —

GARNET [RICHARD]. I believe, in fact, there isn't a man in this

court with only one name. Does that mean they are not honest men?

COKE [ARMIN]. (*Preempting Cecil.*) Forgive me, Mr. Garnet,

but you see before you plain Edward Coke — attorney — a man

without title.

GARNET [RICHARD]. But you have a powerful title, Mr.

Coke — a single title that accounts for your presence here without

any other.

COKE [ARMIN]. And what is that?

GARNET [RICHARD]. Why — you are Robert Cecil's brother-in-law.

Laughter in the court, which ends as Cecil rises.

CECIL. Mr. Garnet — you have another title which you do not proclaim, do you not, Old Fornicator?

Stunned silence in the court. Then —

GARNET [RICHARD]. (*After pause/focused.*) That title is not mine.

Silence.

COKE [ARMINI]. (*The heart of the matter.*) Mr. Garnet, did you know the plotters of the Powder Treason?

A life and death question. Garnet considers it. Then — carefully —

GARNET [RICHARD]. No.

A major stir in the court.

COKE [ARMINI]. You deny that you knew Robert Careaby?

GARNET [RICHARD]. (*With warmth about all these men.*) I knew Robin well. I thought him the most promising young man in the kingdom. I loved him like a son.

COKE [ARMINI]. Do you deny that you knew Thomas and Robert Wintour?

GARNET [RICHARD]. I knew them — though I knew Tom better than Robert.

COKE [ARMINI]. You knew John and Christopher Wright? GARNET [RICHARD]. Jack. Kit.

COKE [ARMINI]. Guy Fawkes, Thomas Percy, Robert Keyes, Thomas Bares, John Grant, Sir Ambrose Rookwood, Francis Tresham and Sir Everard Digby.

GARNET [RICHARD]. With the exception of Mr. Fawkes, I knew them all. Some since birth.

COKE [ARMINI]. *And yet you just denied knowing them?*

GARNET [RICHARD]. I was asked if I knew plotters of treason. I did not know them — as such.

CECIL. (*Book in hand, taking over.*) Mr. Garnet, did you write a treatise — a learned treatise called — “On Equivocation”? (*To the court.*) A treatise which teaches lying may be justified in certain circumstances?

GARNET [RICHARD]. I wrote such a treatise. It does not teach lying.

COKE [ARMINI]. What does it teach then? (*A thought. Then —*)

GARNET [RICHARD]. How to speak the truth in difficult times.

Allow a moment.

CECIL. And even this is equivocation. The scriptures say, “Let

your speech be “yes, yes” or “no, no.” (*To Coke.*) Let the defendant’s answers be confined to plain English *yes* and to plain English *no!*

The courtroom murmurs approval. Then —

GARNET [RICHARD]. I have answered “yes” to three questions each of which is punishable by death. I am a priest of the old faith, a Jesuit priest and indeed, superior of the Jesuits. What could be more plain than that? Even so — are “yes” and “no” altogether “plain” these days? (*To Coke.*) I wonder, Mr. Coke, to illustrate my point, if I might pose you a yes-or-no question.

COKE [ARMINI]. Let me remind you, Mr. Garnet, we are not on trial; you are.

GARNET [RICHARD]. Was that a yes or a no?

Laughter in the court. For Garnet, this time. Which he notes.

COKE [ARMINI]. Proceed.

As Garnet takes stage, we become aware of two observers of the trial — one Shag, the other unknown [Shapel]. A seasoned teacher; Garnet re-frames the question. He paints a picture —

GARNET [RICHARD]. Let us say, Mr. Coke, that a hostile foreign power has occupied our beloved country. Let us say — Spain. (*Hisses from the court.*) Yes. Precisely. And let us say further that His Majesty has sought safety from these Spanish in a house. Let us say your house, Mr. Coke. As an honest man and friend to the King, you would protect him, would you not?

COKE [ARMINI]. It is my proudest boast as an honest man that I am friend to the King — as indeed are all honest men.

THE COURT. Hear, hear!

GARNET [RICHARD]. Let’s say these invaders arrive at your door and ask you upon your oath — upon your sacred oath — (*Very clear.*) “Is your King within?” (*Then, intrigued.*) What answer would you make — a plain English “yes” or a plain English “no”? Would you protect your King?

COKE [ARMINI]. I would!

GARNET [RICHARD]. (*Inevitable conclusion.*) So — you would lie on your oath and say, “The King is not within”?

COKE [ARMINI]. (*Outraged!*) Lie? I would never lie!
GARNET [RICHARD]. Then you would tell the truth?
COKE [ARMINI]. Certainly!
GARNET [RICHARD]. (*Amazed.*) You would say the King is
withi? And expose His Majesty to mortal danger?
COKE [ARMINI]. Certainly not! I — I —

Coke is trapped and knows it.

GARNET [RICHARD]. Come, come, Mr. Coke, is the King
withi? It's a simple yes-or-no question — is it not? (*Coke begins to
speak. Hesitates. Starts to speak. Hesitates.*) I'll wait.

*Laughter in the court at Coke's expense, shared by Shag and the
observer. Shag, beside himself with delight, speaks to the
unknown observer about Garnet —*

SHAG. (*Amused outrage.*) And that — that — is supposed to be
the source of all evil?
OBSERVER [SHARPE]. (*Heavy Scottish burr.*) No, laddie. Witches.
Witches are the source of all evil.

*Shag realizes he is talking to King James, the Sixth of Scotland
and the First of England.*

SHAG. Majesty!

James is engaging, joyous, carefree and really enjoying the trial.

JAMES [SHARPE]. (*Delighted!*) He's good, isn't he, Writer? Will he
be in our play?

SHAG. Should he be, Majesty?

JAMES [SHARPE]. Oh, he must. He must. He's such fun!

GARNET [RICHARD]. What is your answer, plain Mr. Coke?

JAMES [SHARPE]. Hush.

GARNET [RICHARD]. A plain English "Yes, the King is with-
in" is the honest answer, but were you to give it, I would say that
you are no friend to the King.

COKE [ARMINI]. (*Outraged.*) If Not a friend to the King!

GARNET [RICHARD]. Or were you to be a friend to the King

and lie upon your oath, I would say that you are not an honest man.
COKE [ARMINI]. (*More outraged.*) If I! Not an honest man!
GARNET [RICHARD]. So, Mr. Coke — your King or your
soul? This is the choice you have given me.

*Uproar in the court! Garnet then answers the charges placed
against him in no uncertain terms.*

But to answer to the charges placed against me. In — plain —
English — a conspiracy cannot be proved against me because *I
was never part of one.* Concerning faith — (*Deeper truth, to the
audience.*) It is not only in *what* you believe, but also in *whom.*
(*This moves him. In some way, it actually is him.*) Faith is commu-
nity as much as a creed. And you gentlemen have labored — oh
you have labored *mightily* — day and night and through the night
as well — to destroy our simple sacred belief — *in one another.*
And in destroying that —
COKE, CECIL, and ALL. I beg your pardon! How dare you
imply ...
GARNET [RICHARD]. (*Above the objections.*) In destroying our
common human mutual trust, you have not destroyed a faith. In
destroying that — you honest gentlemen — you have destroyed
faith itself.

PANDEMONIUM in the chamber.

COKE [ARMINI]. TAKE HIM AWAY!

Garnet, Cecil and Coke leave the courtroom.

Scene 2

The empty courtroom — bright day — continuous.

Both James and Shag are delighted with the courtroom events. James, because he loves disputation; Shag, because he sees a way out of his troubles.

JAMES [SHARPE]. (*Joyous and playful.*) What do you think, Writer, of this equivocation? Dangerous, is it not?

SHAG. (*Equally.*) You're a writer, Majesty. Don't you think there must have been a time when there were fewer words?

JAMES [SHARPE]. Well, yes. I imagine words were invented as they were needed.

SHAG. It seems to me that *this man* is trying to find ways to speak of realities for which we do not yet have words.

JAMES [SHARPE]. For example —

SHAG. Well, what is the word for a man with whom you share a country but not a religion?

JAMES [SHARPE]. (*Enthusial.*) Oh, there is a word for that. We have — Oh, what's the word? Damn! It's right on the tip of my —

It's — it's — oh, yes — (*Absolutely lucid.*) Traitor.

Uncomfortable silence, broken by the arrival of Cecil carrying one of James' robes of office. Shag now has an almost physical loathing of Cecil.

SHAG. If you will excuse me, Majesty —

James indicates that Shag is to stay. As Cecil holds the robe for James, James enjoys the rare event of seeing Cecil on the losing side of an argument.

JAMES [SHARPE]. (*High spirits.*) The priest made a monkey out of you, didn't he, Beagle? I call him Beagle. He looks like a beagle, don't he? (*Shag demurs.*) Wouldn't make a good one though.

For hunting, you need a dog who don't tear the meat.
CECIL. (*Bowing.*) It is an honor to serve.

All three men here enjoy this game of verbal tennis.

JAMES [SHARPE]. (*Lightly to Shag.*) He put me on the throne, you know.

CECIL. (*Lightly to James.*) God put you on the throne, Majesty.

JAMES [SHARPE]. No question, but he had help from you. (*To Shag.*) It wasn't that others weren't considered. (*Slipping into the robe.*) He picked me because I have children. Generous, wasn't it?

To work so hard to guarantee that his children will forever be ruled by mine? (*Fully robed.*) We're related, you know. His father killed my mother. It makes us brothers.

CECIL. You are a forgiving man, Majesty.

JAMES [SHARPE]. (*Playful.*) So what do you think, Beagle? If the Spanish arrived at your door and asked if I was there, what would you say?

CECIL. I have made a treaty with the Spanish to make sure that eventuality would never occur. (*Then, to Shag.*) Shouldn't you be away writing His Majesty's play?

SHAG. As His Majesty wants a Jesuit in it, I thought I should see one. I was wondering if I might speak with this one.

JAMES [SHARPE]. CECIL.

Garner? Certainly. Garner? Certainly not.

A problem. Shag takes advantage.

SHAG. Majesty, I had the priest completely, utterly wrong; I should very much like to get him right. For your play, Majesty.

CECIL. Majesty, the priest's a dangerous man. He ensnares souls. (*No response.*) Our writer is suggestible — like a child, Majesty. (*No response.*) If Your Majesty wishes. I will arrange it.

SHAG. I wonder, Majesty, if I might see him *before* he is tortured.

JAMES [SHARPE]. I don't understand. Tortured? (*James is completely puzzled. Then, to Cecil —*) Beagle, isn't torture against English law?

CECIL. (*Rapid fire.*) Torture is completely against our laws, Majesty.

JAMES [SHARPE]. (*Rapid fire.*) So it does not happen.

CECIL. (*Rapid fire.*) We are a country of laws, Majesty.

JAMES [SHARPE]. So there is no torture. *(Then, to Shag.)* Unless you know of any? *(James dares Shag to speak. He doesn't. A challenge.)* Well, do you? *(Shag looks for words.)*

CECIL. He has spells of muteness, Majesty.

JAMES [SHARPE]. Ahhhh. *(Then, leaving.)* Come along, Beagle

... And, yes, of course you can talk to him before they put the screws to him.

CECIL. *(Leaving.)* Tonight.

SHAG. Tomorrow. When he is rested.

CECIL. *(Stopping, annoyed.)* Tomorrow? What did I tell you about that word?

JAMES [SHARPE]. He hates it. He lives only in the present like a good little — *(A sudden thought!)* Oh. Writer, the Beagle told me you read my book. One author to another, what did you think?

(James waits for praise. Shag hesitates. Cecil enjoys this.)

JAMES [SHARPE]. Mute again? How disappointing. *(Offended, James starts off—)*

SHAG. Not mute, Majesty. *(With great respect.)* Speechless.

JAMES [SHARPE]. *(Delighted.)* He's good! Very good! *(James, pleased, starts away, when—)*

SHAG. GOD SAVE THE KING! *(Dead stop. James looks to Cecil.)*

Pause. Nothing. Cecil swallows. Then—)

CECIL. *(Hoarse.)* Amen.

James leaves; Cecil remains. Amused, even pleased that—

You are angry with me.

SHAG. *(A demand.)* What did you do with Tom Wintour's letter?

CECIL. Is that why you're angry? The boy's death? That was as much your fault as mine.

SHAG. I am NOT responsible for the death of that young man!

CECIL. Of course you are.

SHAG. *How! What did I do?*

CECIL. Nothing. You did — nothing. No one ever does. That's the beauty of a public execution. It has a quieting effect on the people.

SHAG. I still feel the boy's blood on my hands.

CECIL. *(Limping to Shag.)* When you are stepped in blood so far as this government is, you learn something.

SHAG. Thou shalt not kill!

CECIL. *(Holding up clean hands.)* It will wash.

SHAG. *(A demand.)* Did you deliver Tom's letter to his —

Cecil takes Tom's letter from his pocket. Tears it in half and half again.

Now I know why you can't sleep.

CECIL. *(Playful, skipping away.)* Losing sleep yourself? Good! More time for writing! I want my play, William!

As Cecil exits, Garnet enters and sits on the floor in—

Scene 3

The Tower — a hospitable cell.

A cell with a fire burning. Warm light. As Garnet is still of use, he is well treated. A Jailer [Armin] enters with Garnet's dinner on a tray. The Jailer is intercepted by Shag — who — bribing the Jailer — takes the dinner tray and Jailer's cap and approaches Garnet. Shag-as-Jailer places Garnet's dinner before him.

SHAG [AS JAILER]. Your supper, sir.

Shag steps back. Garnet kneels, resting on his heels, before the meal. Prays with closed eyes and open hands. Tries to concentrate but can't with the Jailer there. So —

GARNET [RICHARD]. *(Simply throughout.)* Waiting is useless. I don't have anything to give you.

SHAG [AS JAILER]. No problem, sir.

Shag doesn't move. So —

GARNET [RICHARD]. Would you care for some wine? It won't be poisoned. They aren't done with me yet.

SHAG [AS JAILER]. No, thank you, sir.

Garnet returns to prayer. Makes a cross over the food. Almost eats. Then —

GARNET [RICHARD]. Unless you have specific instructions to watch me eat, I'd ask to be left in peace.

SHAG [AS JAILER]. I could carry messages for you, Mr. Garnet. No one need know.

GARNET [RICHARD]. If you are trying to entrap me, I warn you — someday you'll have to answer to your maker.

SHAG [AS JAILER]. I must say I'm getting tired of the moral superiority of the criminal class. Let *me* warn *you*, Mr. Garnet, if you speak of God, I'm to report every word you say to the authorities.

GARNET [RICHARD]. Actually — when I spoke of your maker — I was thinking of your father, Master Shagspeare. (*No response.*) You're a public figure. I have seen you act. And you were no more convincing on stage than you are here. (*Then.*) Now, if you'll excuse me, I must review the day.

Garnet prays. Then, as Shag removes his cap —

SHAG. (*As himself.*) In what?

GARNET [RICHARD]. I beg your pardon?

SHAG. Act badly. In what did you see me act badly?

GARNET [RICHARD]. I forget the title. A good clean comedy. About twins.

Shag knows it's not entirely clean.

I know your teacher from Stratford, Master Shagspeare.

SHAG. Mr. Hunt?

GARNET [RICHARD]. (*Yes.*) Simon came to the continent to join us. He's quite proud of you. He claims to have taught you everything you know.

SHAG. (*No.*) Only everything he knew.

GARNET [RICHARD]. Who can do more? (*Then.*) You must have learned something — the play was wonderful. It made me laugh. Even a tragedy should have *something* in it to make people laugh, don't you think?

SHAG. (*Of course.*) It makes the tragedy bearable.

GARNET [RICHARD]. A great gift. What are you working on now?

SHAG. (*Changing the topic.*) You spoke of my father. You knew him?

GARNET [RICHARD]. (*With warm gratitude.*) He once did me a great kindness ... How did he die?

SHAG. (*Bitter.*) Ruined. After a lifetime of work, he had nothing to leave us. I bought him a house — a mansion — but I think that only humiliated him more. And it was your lot ruined him.

GARNET [RICHARD]. We didn't fine him for his beliefs.

SHAG. No. You gave him the beliefs. I never quite figured out how. He wasn't a spiritual man.

GARNET [RICHARD]. (*Changing the topic.*) A mansion? The playhouses must be full. Good for you.

SHAG. And I have received a commission.

GARNET [RICHARD]. Lucrative? (*Affirmative grunt.*) Is the play funny?

SHAG. Only that I'm writing it.

GARNET [RICHARD]. What's it called?

SHAG. *The True History of the Powder Plot.*

GARNET [RICHARD]. (*Abbbbbb —*) By John Shagspeare's son. (*Yes.*) We are in good hands. (*Then.*) And *that's* why you're here? You've come to me to learn the truth about the Powder Plot?

SHAG. The truth? Fuck the truth. I've come to you to learn how to *equivocate*.

And this is the key. Equivocation is Shag's way out.

Teach me. To equivocate.

GARNET [RICHARD]. (*Annoyed.*) It's not a way to lie, you know — equivocation — it's a way of telling the truth.

SHAG. (*Exactly!*) That's what I want to do. I want to tell the truth. I just don't want to get *caught* at it.

Garnet is reluctant.

Look, here are my choices — lie or die. I don't want to do either. You have written a book — probably a very tedious book — on *how* to tell the *truth* in *difficult* times. Give me a short course in

that and I promise you, I will do the best I can.
GARNET [RICHARD]. (*Considers, then —*) Right. (*Garnet becomes the teacher he was born to be.*) Man comes to the door.
SHAG. (*Dutiful student.*) Man comes to the door.
GARNET [RICHARD]. And he asks you, "Is the King inside?" —
SHAG. He is and I say, "No." How is that *not* a sin? And *on — my — oath —* how is that not a *damnable* sin?
GARNET [RICHARD]. (*The crux of it.*) Ask yourself — *what —* is this man — *really —* asking?
SHAG. (*I've got this one!*) Where's the King?
GARNET [RICHARD]. No.
SHAG. No?
GARNET [RICHARD]. Well, yes. Of course, on the surface, yes. But what does he really *want to know*? *Really?*
SHAG. He really wants to know Where? The King? Is?
GARNET [RICHARD]. (*Nasty teacher.*) Simon was right about you. You're a slow student.
SHAG. (*Nasty schoolboy.*) He was a dull man and you are what they say you are — a clever liar.
GARNET [RICHARD]. (*Bitterly.*) If I wanted to lie, all I would have to do is take the Oath of Uniformity. If I were to lie, what wouldn't they give me? (*Amused.*) They'd make me Archbishop of Canterbury.
SHAG. Why not then? Lie?
GARNET [RICHARD]. Pray God I don't. They'll be after me till the end.
SHAG. No, but really — why not?

Garnet evaluates Shag. Then he does what he does best. He reformulates the abstract question into a personal one.

GARNET [RICHARD]. What would have happened to your father — if he had sworn to what he did *not* believe was true?
SHAG. (*Remembering his father.*) He would have ceased to be himself. (*Then, deeper.*) I can't afford to have that happen to me. (*Deeper still.*) I can't afford to go to hell.
GARNET [RICHARD]. There's always purgatory.
SHAG. (*Immediately resentful.*) They closed it. *Bastards.* I don't miss anything else from the old religion, but how could they take away *purgatory*? Some *hope* for people who won't make heaven on the first try.
GARNET [RICHARD]. (*Amused.*) And you're sure you won't?

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SHAG. Sex before marriage. Sex outside of marriage. Sex everywhere but in marriage.

Garnet gets it. A moment. Then, addressing what he thinks is Shag's concern.

GARNET [RICHARD]. You'll see your father again. God's a father himself. He won't keep you from him.
SHAG. It's not my father. (*Silence, then —*) It's my son. (*A moment, then —*) I lost a son. (*Then, at a cost.*) I lost a son.
GARNET [RICHARD]. (*A respectful moment, then —*) And you loved him.
SHAG. (*With regret.*) From the moment that he died. (*Silence, then —*) I have written 150 love letters to people who don't even remember my name and not one to my son ... I must see him again. If only to say, "Goodbye." "Godspeed." Give him a kiss. (*Then, annoyed with himself.*) Why am I telling you this? I've never told anyone.
GARNET [RICHARD]. I can never tell if people tell me things because I'm a priest or if I'm a priest because people tell me things. (*Taking the goblet of wine from his tray —*) In any case — the seal of confession is the last unbroken seal in this kingdom. (*Offering the cup to Shag.*) Drink this. (*Shag goes to sip. Stops.*)
SHAG. (*Suspicious.*) You were praying over this. Is this wine or the blood of God?

A teachable moment!

GARNET [RICHARD]. What are you asking me? *Really* asking.
SHAG. (*Confrontational.*) I'm asking if this is God's blood.
GARNET. That's not what you're asking.
SHAG. (*More confrontational.*) I am. And this time I know because I'm the one who's asking. I'm asking you if this is God's fucking blood. Is it?

A moment.

GARNET [RICHARD]. You're asking — if there's anything left in you — (*A hand on Shag's heart.*) that can still believe that you hold God's blood in a cup. (*Silence, then, lighter.*) Either way — it

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will warm you. Leave me a sip.

Shag, uncomfortable with the cup, does not drink.

Do you have — other children?

SHAG. Two girls — one, the boy's twin. I can't speak to her. It hurts me even to look at her.

GARNET [RICHARD]. What's she like?

Judith enters — as always — carrying her laundry basket.

The world becomes — for once — about her. Garnet watches Shag as Shag watches Judith. Shag and Judith are aware of one another throughout.

SHAG. Judith? She frightens me. (*Then.*) Her grandfather believed everything. Her father believes little. She believes nothing. Not even that we have souls.

GARNET [RICHARD]. (*Impressed.*) She talks of souls?

SHAG. Not in those words. She calls them our — our secret stories. She doesn't believe we have them. And perhaps we don't any more.

GARNET [RICHARD]. Do you love her — Judith?

SHAG. (*Who knows?*) She does things for me.

GARNET [RICHARD]. Are you close?

SHAG. Yes, I think we're close. (*Then.*) We both know something about the other no one else knows.

GARNET [RICHARD]. What ... if I may ask?

SHAG. We both know — (*Then — to Judith.*) We both know I wish *she* was the one who had died.

Judith doesn't flinch at this. Perhaps she even appreciates the honesty.

What god would have me in heaven? (*Then —*) What devil would have me in hell?

As Judith goes, she stops and picks up the Jailer's hat from where Shag dropped it. She does things for him. As she leaves —

GARNET [RICHARD]. Daughters. They're the core of the problem, aren't they?

SHAG. You think the world is a very simple place.

GARNET [RICHARD]. Isn't it?

SHAG. Not once politics get into it.

GARNET [RICHARD]. What is politics but family writ large? Your own histories show us that.

Shag — disturbed — sits down center, the cup placed before him.

The fate of the nation came down to daughters — Mary and Elizabeth. Two fine, healthy girls. Henry VIII declared Mary a bastard to make way for a son who never arrives. The Pope did the same for Elizabeth. When the girls come to the throne, they kill the men who helped bastardize them. Mary called it Catholicism; Elizabeth, Protestantism. (*Garnet stands behind Shag who remains in his own thoughts.*) I think it would have been simpler, smarter, more pleasurable and finally *easier* — just to have *loved the girls.*

SHAG. You don't have children, do you?

GARNET [RICHARD]. There are compensations. (*Then, a hand on Shag's head.*) I forgive you your sins, William.

SHAG. No. That's too easy.

Though Shag says this, he does not move away from Garnet's hand.

GARNET [RICHARD]. (*Amused.*) You haven't heard your penance yet.

SHAG. (*Laughing.*) I had forgotten penance. For my penance, what — three Ave's?

GARNET [RICHARD]. (*The penance.*) Look to your daughter. (*Then.*) Look to your daughter and you will see your son again.

Shag moves his head. Garnet removes his hand.

SHAG. I don't believe in your hocus pocus.

GARNET [RICHARD]. No? Then why — in this bone-chilling damp cell — have you left a perfectly good, full, warming cup of

wine untouched? (*Garnet takes the cup.*) Is my death — part of your story? (*It is.*) Do I die well? (*No.*) Did the others?

Garnet takes a reverent sip of wine.

SHAG. Fawkes was the luckiest. His neck was broken by the rope. (*Laughing —*) What an age when we think a broken neck a stroke of luck. (*Then, laughter building.*) Keyes. Poor Keyes. And he was only a servant!

GARNET [RICHARD]. What about Keyes?

SHAG. He tried to take the easy way out! He — he didn't wait for the hangman to push him! He jumped! ... He was hoping to break his neck, but — (*Laughing peaks.*) the rope — the rope broke instead! (*Coming down from the laughter.*) So — so — so he was alive ... (*With bitterness.*) For all of it.

GARNET [RICHARD]. Tom Wintour? Alive to the last?

SHAG. Beyond. When his head was off and they cried, "Behold the head of a traitor," the head replied — "Thou liest."

GARNET [RICHARD]. A good man to the end.

SHAG. (*Outraged.*) Good? He left a wife and two sons. The state will take every penny he had and leave them with nothing.

Good???

GARNET [RICHARD]. He left them two true words. May we do as much.

The Interrogators enter.

SENIOR [ARMINI]. Time for you to go, sir.

GARNET [RICHARD]. It begins.

SHAG. (*To Guards.*) NO! NO! NOT YET!

JUNIOR [NATE]. Time, sir.

The Guards take out instruments of torture.

SHAG. I am here with Robert Cecil's permission!

SENIOR [ARMINI]. And we are here at Robert Cecil's command.

As they prepare their instruments, Shag takes Garnet down-stage and asks urgently —

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SHAG. Man comes to the door, asks if the King's inside. Tell me. What's he really asking?

GARNET [RICHARD]. (*Needing to make Shag understand.*) He's asking, "May I kill your guest?" (*Then.*) "Will you open the door for me to kill him?"

He looks to the Interrogators and their tools.

He's asking, "Will you hand over to me one more victim to add to the long slow massacre that is becoming our history." To which an honest man answers —

SHAG. (*Getting it, finally.*) No. (*Then.*) No! (*Thrilled.*) You answer the question that's really being asked.

GARNET [RICHARD]. (*Electric.*) *Equivocation.* Don't answer the question they're asking. If a dishonest man has formed the question, there will be no honest answer. Answer the question *beneath* the question. The *equivalent* question. Answer the question really asked. And answer it *with — your — life.*

As Garnet is put in chains and taken away —

SHAG. (*Desperate.*) I am being asked for a play. (*Shag tries to follow. He is hurled aside.*)

GARNET [RICHARD]. (*From an increasing distance.*) Are you?

Really? Is that what is being asked?

SHAG. I'm a slow student. Help me!

GARNET [RICHARD]. (*Urgent.*) Don't despair. You will see your son again. You will see him — on my word.

SHAG. The word of a man who sent *thirteen young men* to their deaths.

GARNET [RICHARD]. Is that what you are writing in your play?

Shame. I was not involved in the plot and I believe you know that.

SHAG. I don't do plot. I adapt.

GARNET [RICHARD]. I don't and *that's* why Cecil needs my head on a pike.

SHAG. Prove it. Prove you were not involved in the Plot.

With increasing power as the reality of the conversation transforms into a larger event —

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GARNET [RICHARD]. *(With growing size.)* For twenty years, with very few men and no violence, I have kept Robert Cecil and his spies baffled and the old faith alive. In a matter of months, a few stupid young men have played directly into Cecil's hands and, I fear, have destroyed the old faith forever.

SHAG. *(From a distance.)* That's no proof!

GARNET [RICHARD]. *(Unleashing great power.)* Proof then! If I had been a plotter and wanted to blow up Parliament, there wouldn't have been enough of the King left to bury. And that's the truth. You have my word.

Then — after Garnet's vast size, utter silence.

Scene 4

The Globe stage — bright day — continuous.

We become aware that Garnet is now Richard; the Interrogators, Armin and Nate. A moment. Then —

Sharpe runs from the wings to center, thrilled by what he has seen.

SHARPE. *(Holding the text.)* There's never been anything like this. It's dangerous. It's provocative. It's —

SHAG. *(Taking the cup.)* — done. Three drafts in two weeks. I'm exhausted.

Shag chugs the cup.

SHARPE. Richard, you were very good. You —

RICHARD. *(Taking off costumelidgusted.)* I don't do character parts.

SHARPE. *(Great!)* I'll do it. I'll play Garnet.

ARMIN. *(Deeply upset.)* I want nothing to do with this.

NATE. *(Equally.)* Nor I. This is no trial, Will. This is treason.

SHAG. *(Hated with feeling and wine.)* Is it treason to speak our minds?

ARMIN. When have we ever spoken our minds? We've always spoken yours.

SHAG. And done very well by it.

RICHARD. *I asked you not to talk to these people.*

SHARPE. You didn't.

RICHARD. *I DID!*

SHARPE. *You didn't ASK him. You never ASK anybody ANYTHING!*

NATE. *(Restraining hand on Sharpe.)* Enough, Sharpe. Stay out of this.

SHAG. *I had to talk to him, Richard.*

RICHARD. *Why? You didn't talk to Caesar? You didn't talk to Cleopatra!*

SHAG. You didn't see him in council, Richard. He overturned it, Richard; with only the truth, he —

RICHARD. *Stop tossing that word around. Truth's not a game, you know!*

SHAG. *Of course the truth's a game. It's the lies that are deadly serious. I had forgotten that. (Thrilled.)* The priest played a wonderful game with truth in the council. I'd almost forgotten what it's like —

the intoxicating, irresistible freedom-to-laugh that truth alone gives.

SHARPE. That's it. *I'm playing the priest.*

Sharpe puts on the priest's robe and resets the props for the prison scene as Armin and Nate try to strike them.

RICHARD. *(On the attack.)* You know what you're doing? You're doing just what they do. You're taking one side.

SHAG. Well, we've taken the other for all these years.

ARMIN. That's a bit harsh.

SHAG. Is it?

RICHARD. *You celebrated the day we got the King's patronage.*

No one was happier than you. And now, because Cecil hurt your pride, you're willing to sacrifice all this. It's small of you. Very, very small. And that's the truth.

SHAG. Truth then? *(To the empty theater!)* THE TRUE HISTORY

OF THE GUNPOWDER PLOT BY WILLIAM SHAGSPEARE!

(To the company.) The Gunpowder Plot was a terrible thing and if it had succeeded a great many people would have been killed. Now an

unworthy minister and a King who barely speaks the King's English

are USING that plot to ENRICH THEMSELVES AND THEIR

FRIENDS at the COST of YOUNG MEN'S LIVES. And it's only

starting. By the time they are done, a GREAT MANY MORE people will have DIED than the PLOT would have KILLED and FORTUNES will be made from their deaths. That's the truth. (*Calling the question.*) You know it. I know it. *Everybody* knows it. Now — YOU tell me what to write! TELL me what YOU want to say about it? I'm tired of carrying you all. Be your own consciences for once.

RICHARD. (*This is over.*) Collect the scripts and burn them.

ARMIN. Done!

SHAG. No! On my soul, in the name of the religion we share, ON MY HOPES OF HEAVEN, I am doing this play!

RICHARD. Burn them.

ARMIN. (*Grabbing at Shag's script.*) Scripts, Will! Sharpe!

Shag and Sharpe won't give up scripts.

RICHARD. I don't know what he's done to you, but I won't let you destroy yourself and I'll be damned before I let you destroy us.

A fight is about to break out over the scripts —

NATE. My friends and my brothers — sharers of my heart — is one play worth tearing the company apart!

SHAG. (*Harsh, an accusation.*) Are we together as it is?

RICHARD. What are you asking?

SHAG. Would anyone like to speak before I do?

Puzzled silence.

Faith is broken, even among ourselves. Cecil knew every word of our last meeting. One of us is a spy.

NATE. (*Impossible.*) Everyone in the city knows about the commission. He —

SHAG. He had the script!

ARMIN. No, he didn't. Couldn't have. I locked them up and I have the only key.

Armin produces the key — not realizing it suggests his guilt.

Then — whoops! Hands in the air.

It's not me!

NATE. It's not me, but, if there is a spy, I say thank God. Somebody has to put the brakes to this.

Armin, Nate, Richard and Shag all look at Sharpe.

RICHARD. Well?

It takes Sharpe a second to get it. Then —

SHARPE. HeyheyHEY! I'm the one — the ONLY one — who's willing to DO the play.

RICHARD. And why would that be? Maybe you have some assurance that you won't be hanged.

SHARPE. Don't you talk to me. You've been trying to kill this from the start. What better way than to leak a script to Cecil?

RICHARD. You little shit, how dare you? (*Re: Shag.*) I would never do that to him. He's my BEST FRIEND!

SHARPE. WAS! Before he put your house in jeopardy.

Richard coldcocks Sharpe. Sharpe comes back at Richard. The company rushes to pull them apart.

SHAG. Richard, for Christ's sake —

Nate and Armin restrain Sharpe. Shag tries to restrain Richard, but he's too big. Richard hammers Sharpe.

Richard! Richard!

Shag jumps Richard. The fight between Shag and Richard becomes the main event. Shag takes his best shot at Richard. Richard strikes back and long-simmering company tension breaks into a fistfight between Richard and Shag. All join the melee trying to separate Shag and Richard. Judith enters. She calmly throws a bucket of water on the pile of fighting men. Fight stops. Then —

JUDITH. So, it's finally in here.

NATE. What?

JUDITH. What's out there.

A moment. Richard rises from the pile. Shakes the water off.

RICHARD. (*Furious with Shag.*) You want to write a soul into something? This place had a soul before you wrote this play.

SHAG. (*Tending a bloody nose, outraged.*) You insisted that I take this commission, Richard. For the money!

Before the fight can start again —

RICHARD. Well, gentlemen, it's been a good run. (*Richard looks around. Breathes in the theater. Then, a decision.*) Pack your things and be out of here by nightfall.

Richard exits through the house. Stunned silence. It takes a moment for the news to have its effect. Then — group panic sets in.

NATE. Richard? ... Richard!

SHARPE. RICHARD!

ARMIN. (*Desperate.*) Prithee, nuncle, come back! Halloo, halloo, loo, loo! 'Tis a naughty night to swim in. (*A moment — then, with finality —*)

SHAG. He's gone. I know him, he's not coming back.

SHARPE. What are we going to do?

All look to Shag. Who has no answer. Shag, Nate, Armin and Sharpe move about the stage in their own worlds very much as in the Lear scene at the start of the play. They move around Judith — who calmly cleans up the spilled water — uninvolved with the pacing actors around her.

JUDITH. (*Unruffled.*) You'll do what you always do — a play.

Everyone will be pleased. Life will go on.

ARMIN. (*Holding torn scripts.*) *We don't have a play.*

SHAG. (*Focused on Richard throughout.*) Thank God. It's finally over and we can all go home.

SHARPE. (*Calling after —*) Richard!

JUDITH. (*Still working.*) Don't have a play? You've dozens.

NATE. Congratulations, Sharpe. You blew up the theater after all! (*His own world.*) *What am I going to do about my mortgage?*

ARMIN. (*His own world.*) He'll come back for the right part. I know he will.

SHARPE. (*His own world.*) What have I done?

JUDITH. (*Offhand, working.*) Lear's a good part. You could do *King Lear*.

ARMIN. We need an entertainment for wee Jannie of Scotland — not an experimental drama about an insane king running around in his underwear.

SHARPE. I blew up the theater.

SHAG. It's not you. It's Richard!

JUDITH. A play for a Scot? Well. (*A moment.*) You have a Scot-ish play. (*A moment.*) Why not do that one?

ARMIN. We don't have a Scottish —

Everyone stops. Stops dead.

A Scot-ish play? (To Shag.) Will? Did you — by any chance — write a Scot-ish play?

All look to Shag. Everything depends on this answer.

SHAG. (*No.*) I threw it away.

JUDITH. (*Yes.*) I saved it.

SHAG. Why!

JUDITH. Well — (*Then —*) I liked this one.

All: ? Then —

SHARPE. Judith — *liked — a play?*

JUDITH. Not all of it ... I liked the witches.

ARMIN, NATE, SHARPE. (*Electrified.*) *Witches?*

ARMIN. (*Thrilled.*) It has *witches?* Will, it has —

SHAG. (*Dismissing it.*) It's infected. It's hateful. It's *evil*.

ARMIN. *Of course it's evil — it has witches — but does it have a part for Richard?*

JUDITH. A part? It's practically a one-man show.

ARMIN. Where is it?

JUDITH. With the dirty laundry.

SHAG. *Where it belongs.*

ARMIN. Get it.

SHAG. *Leave it.*
ARMIN. (*Grabbing Shag.*) Will, can you work from it?
SHAG. A fourth play? NO! (*Then — maybe.*) It would have to be adapted.

That's a yes!

ARMIN. (*Delighted!*) I'll get it! (*Swinging into action.*) We're going to be alright.
NATE. (*Bottom line.*) Not without Richard, we're not.

A serious problem.

SHARPE. I'll see to Richard.
ARMIN. You? He won't even talk to you.

Sharpe makes a decision. Then, with confidence —

SHARPE. Yes, he will. (*He goes to Judith.*) Judith, thank you.

He kisses her. A serious kiss with a sense of farewell to it. He then runs after Richard — shouting for him.

ARMIN. (*Hoping against hope.*) We're going to be alright. We're going to be alright!

Nate exits with Armin leaving father and daughter alone on stage. When Shag and Judith notice this, they become very still. Uncomfortable, Judith starts to leave.

SHAG. How — how are you, Judith?

She stops. Shag has never asked this on his own. This puzzles Judith.

JUDITH. You know.

SHAG. No. Really. How are you — really?

JUDITH. (*Of course.*) I'm the same.

SHAG. I've never asked you, but — the same as what? What are you the same as?

This is a question she has been prepared to answer for years. But now that it has finally been asked, she hesitates. Then —

JUDITH. My brother ... I'm the same as my brother. (*Then.*) But you've never noticed.

SHAG. (*Dismissive.*) You're very different from him.

JUDITH. (*Yes and —*) And exactly the same.

He looks at her. Sees her. Perhaps for the first time. He almost speaks. Judith waits. But he doesn't speak. Then, to us —

He'd like to speak to me, you know. (*Looks at Shag, then us.*) Tell one of his stories — like he did with my brother. Always the same old drama — the wronged party making somebody pay. (*Truth.*) Never happens in life. (*Then.*) He's never written a play about a happy family. Or a good marriage. Something useful. No playwright ever has. (*Then.*) Sometimes I'm glad he can't speak to me. (*Then, at a cost.*) Sometimes.

She turns back to her father. Shag is confused. He looks at her. Then, at the audience —

SHAG. (*Puzzled.*) Who — (*To Judith.*) Who were you talking to?

JUDITH. (*Puzzled.*) When?

SHAG. Just now. (*Then.*) Yesterday. (*Then.*) Since you were a child.

JUDITH. I didn't speak.

SHAG. But —

JUDITH. (*Firmly.*) I didn't speak.

SHAG. (*Backing off.*) Very well, then. I didn't hear. (*Then, mostly to himself.*) How often have I heard you without hearing you? (*Then, a faint memory.*) Do you remember stories — impossible stories you used to tell yourself as a child? When you thought no one was listening?

JUDITH. (*Yes.*) No.

SHAG. (*I understand.*) Very well. Neither do I. (*How to start?*) I've been thinking. About a new play.

JUDITH. (*Ready to go.*) I don't like plays.

SHAG. (*Don't go.*) A new kind of play. Not the clash of opposites, but their union. Not tearing, joining. Forgiveness, not blame.

JUDITH. (*What's he up to?*) A play that's not about revenge? It can't be done.

SHAG. *(An offering.)* I thought I might try twins. That works. Sometimes. *(Then.)* How are you, Judith?

The infinite possibilities of this moment are interrupted by Nate and Armin. They enter performing full-out Shag's first draft of the Powder Plot —

ARMIN. *(In priest costume.)* We live between two fires — above, the sun, god's all seeing eye and yet beneath our feet another fire burns.

SHAG. NOT — NOW!

NATE. Good news, Will. We have a play.

With great clatter, Nate drops props, costumes — grabbing Shag's attention with —

How now, Garnet! You secret, black, and midnight priest! What is't you do?

Judith leaves with purpose.

ARMIN. *A deed without a name.*

SHAG. NO! We will not do that play. It's false. *(Noticing Judith's absence.)* Judith?

NATE. *(Tossing Armin a prop cup.)* Not anymore.

SHAG. *Judith?*

ARMIN. *(With cup.)*

Then from this chalice, drink and swear upon God's blood to speak to none of this —

Lest plot to purge God's throne of stain ...

Shag grabs Armin and violently takes him to his knees.

SHAG. I said not that play. I won't have any more lies about the priest in this theatre.

NATE. *(Intervening.)* But, Will — it's true. The priest — he confessed.

SHAG. Priest? What priest?

Garnet enters — and we are simultaneously in the Globe and back in the trial of Fr. Henry Garnet.

NATE. Garnet.

SHAG. Garnet?

COKE [ARMIN]. State your name.

GARNET [RICHARD]. Henry. Garnet. Father Henry Garnet.

ARMIN. It's all through the streets, Will. He was behind the plot from the start.

SHAG. *(Impossible.)* He gave me his word he wasn't.

CECIL [NATE]. *(Absolutely possible.)* Well, he lied.

The idea of Garnet lying is impossible. And yet —

COKE [ARMIN]. It rather seems to me that one name should be enough for an honest man.

NATE. Be happy, Will. You don't have to write another word. You got it right the first time.

Shag is paralyzed. Judith enters with a basket full of pages. Sees Shag — lost in his thoughts.

JUDITH. Father?

ARMIN. What's wrong, Will?

SHAG. He — promised me something. Garnet. On his word.

GARNET [RICHARD]. You will see your son again, you will see him — on my word.

SHAG. *(Shaken.)* I believed him. *(Exit Garnet.)*

NATE. *(Making the best of it.)* Well, maybe he told you the truth.

If they tortured him —

SHAG. Either way, he lied to somebody. I didn't think he had a lie in him.

ARMIN. I thought we all had everything in us. I thought that was the point. *(Sharpe arrives on a trot.)*

SHARPE. Richard's coming. He's not happy but — *(Noticing the silence.)* What?

Profound silence. Then —

Profound silence. Then —

NATE. Will, say something.

SHAG. "You will see him again. On my word."

JUDITH. *(Concerned.)* See? Who?

NATE. I don't recognize that. What's it from?

SHAG. (*Putting it together.*) "If I were to lie, what wouldn't they give me?"
ARMIN. (*Tamrunt!*) Nononono! NO! DON'T tell me there's another new play. NO! Will, we have a play. Let's just do it and be done!

Shag sees Judith — and the pages.

SHAG. You're right. We have a play. (*To Judith.*) Is that it? (*Yes.*) Thank you, Judith. Give it me. Give me — (*Taking the basket.*) *The Scottish Play!* It will require some adapting, but it's the one play this faithless world will ever need again. Let's do it and be done! (*Growing dark ecstasy.*) God's BLOOD, let's hold the mirror up. Let's do — (*Thunderous!*) MACBETH!

As pages ruin again from above, huge thunder. As actors collect their new pages —

Judith, go away. I don't want you to see this play. It's too dark.

JUDITH. It's not darker than *Lear*.

SHAG. *Lear?* *Lear's* about compassion.

JUDITH. *Lear's* about an old man who causes the death of his three daughters and, when it's over, everyone feels sorry for him. (*Then.*) It can't be darker than that.

SHAG. Judith!

NATE/ARMIN/SHARPE. Let her stay.

Shag takes over as director!

SHAG. *Enter witches. When shall we three —*

Scene 5

The Globe — Macbeth — rehearsal.

WITCH [ARMIN]. (*As Armin collects pages from the ground.*)
Waitwaitwait — This is NO WAY to treat a SCRIPT! (*Pages assembled roughly.*) Got it!

For the only time in the plays the witches are very Halloween witch-y! Full-tilt, larger than life, witchy witchy witches! Leaping about.

When shall we three meet again?

WITCH [NATE]. (*Marching and topping Armin.*)
In thunders, lightning or in rain?

Silence. All look to Sharpe — who, holding a script page, doesn't pick up his cue.

SHAG. Look, Sharpe, I've had about as much as I can —
SHARPE. (*From the core.*) I told Richard — if he'd come back? — I'd leave the company. (*At a cost.*) I'm selling him back my share. Cheap. (*Anger covering hurt.*) So don't shout at me anymore. You haven't the right.

Shag, Armin and Nate take a moment to understand what Sharpe has done for the company. For the first time, they love him. So —

SHAG. (*To Armin.*) From the top. And do the line EXACTLY as written. (*Armin gets it.*)

WITCH [ARMIN].

When shall we —

WITCHES [ARMIN/NATE/SHAG].

THREE —

WITCH [ARMIN].

— meet again?

WITCH [NATE].

In thunder, lightning or in rain?

Sharpe gets the invitation. Then, with GREAT witchy joy — a bigger witch than the others!

WITCH [SHARPE]. (*Dancing his part.*)

When the hurly-burly's done

When the battle's lost and won.

WITCH [NATE]. (*Joining the dance.*)

Where the place?

WITCH [ARMIN]. (*Dancing.*)

Upon the heath.

There to meet with —

ALL WITCHES and SHAG. (*Joyous hell breaks loose!*)

MAAAACCCEEEETHHHHH!

Richard has entered during the Witches sequence. He is noticed now.

RICHARD. (*Re: Sharpe.*) I want him — gone.

SHAG. No, you don't, Richard, that's not what you really want.

RICHARD. No? What do I want then?

SHAG. You want to be as young as he is. As handsome. As talented.

(*Then.*) Well, you're not. And you're just going to have to forgive him for that.

RICHARD. (*A thought, then.*) Why?

SHAG. All in favor of Sharpe remaining a member of this company?

All but Richard raise their hands — Judith too.

Because he's one of us. You made him one.

Richard doesn't like it, but takes pages. Takes stage.

NATE. As long as we're stopped — I'm playing Banquo? James' ancestor? Me? Not Richard?

SHAG. (*Yes.*) Enter Banquo and Macbeth.

RICHARD [AS MACBETH]. (*On book, but full performance energy.*)

So foul and fair a day I have not seen.

NATE [AS BANQUO]. (*Equally full scale.*)

How far is't called to Forres?

RICHARD. So foul and fair a day — foul AND fair? How can a

day be foul and fair?

SHAG. You didn't want the Powder Plot. You didn't want King

Lear. This is about the King's ancestor Banquo AND it has

WITCHES! Now what the hell MORE do you WANT? ENTER

WITCHES!

The play explodes into huge life!

WITCH [ARMIN]. (*Enormously witchy.*)

Hail.

WITCH [SHARPE]. (*Equally.*)

Hail!

WITCH [ARMIN].

Hail, Macbeth and Banquo.

WITCH [SHARPE].

Banquo and Macbeth, all hail.

Richard walks to the edge of the stage.

RICHARD [AS MACBETH]. (*Fully committed.*)

Two truths are told as prologue to the swelling act of the

imperial theme —

JUDITH. Wait. Father, is this — a soliloquy?

SHAG. Yes. (*To Richard.*) Go on.

RICHARD [AS MACBETH].

Two truths are told —

JUDITH. Wait — what's the bad news?

SHAG. He's going to kill the King. Go on —

RICHARD [AS MACBETH].

Two truths —

JUDITH. I don't believe it.

RICHARD. (*Offended.*) Well, it's only the first time I'm doing it!

JUDITH. No, I don't believe that you would tell everyone in the theater if you were actually going to commit murder.

A puzzled moment. Then —

SHAG. Let's skip the soliloquies.

Armin enters wearing the Lady Macbeth wig. Before he can speak —

RICHARD. Wait a minute. Will, I kill a king? What kind of a hero kills his king?

SHAG. You're not the hero.

ARMIN. That's new. Who is?

SHAG. This play has no heroes.

JUDITH. Finally. A true play.

RICHARD. Well, what's this play's about?

SHAG. *Macbeth? Macbeth* is five acts of *politics* and *pornography*, nothing more. It will run for *centuries!*

RICHARD. How does it end?

SHAG. (*A rush of dark energy*.) Macbeth murders his way to the throne, then murders the opposition until they murder him. (*To Judith*.) How many are killed? Hundreds! (*To all*.) Thousands! Including *both* leads, *two* armies and a few random *children*. IT'S A TRAGEDY? GO — ON!

A moment. The company looks to one another. All are concerned about the darkness of the play.

You don't like it.

RICHARD. (*Not the issue*.) It's a long way from a play that isn't about revenge.

SHAG. What can I tell you? My brain's a graveyard, Richard. You don't want to come in.

RICHARD. (*With compassion*.) Talk to me.

A moment. Then, unfinished business — at a cost —

SHAG. Was it you, Richard? Did you give Cecil the script?

The full group is stunned.

RICHARD. I'm going to pretend I didn't hear that.

SHAG. That's no answer.

RICHARD. (*Deeply offended*.) Well, it's the only one you're going to get.

SHAG. Did you? You'd do anything to keep this cesspit open, wouldn't you? The truth, Richard. Whatever it is, I need the truth from someone just to believe that there still is such a thing.

RICHARD. Get out.

SHAG. No.

RICHARD. GET OUT.

SHAG. *The truth*, Richard.

RICHARD. Truth?

SHAG. Yes.

RICHARD. *I'll tell you the truth, though it isn't easy.*

SHAG. It never is.

RICHARD. (*Absolute truth*.) In spite of what this idiot said, you mean more to me than my house. (*Then*.) I knew that the second I walked out those doors. (*At a cost*.) You mean more to me than myself — though that's not saying much. (*Then, breaking*.) You mean more to me than this. (*He indicates the Globe. Richard can't speak. Nobody else knows what to say. Then —*) And that's the truth. *Now get out of here, do what you need to make yourself right.*

SHAG. I need to see the priest — to tell him to his face that he lied.

RICHARD. Then do it and don't come back till then.

SHAG. The play's not finished.

RICHARD. (*Anger covering great love*.) You'll finish it. You work well under pressure. (*Then, accelerating*.) Our writer is leaving his play in our hands. When he returns, it is my hope to offer him the most *passionate, unquestioning* rendition of his work that we possibly can.

All actors bow with respect to Shag. Shag is moved. Then — he turns front and shouts —

SHAG. I want to speak with Mr. Henry Garnet!

Scene 6

The Tower — night.

The Descent into the Tower begins. Interrogators [Armin/Sharpe] guard the gate. Shag hands Junior — who is very drunk — his pass.

JUNIOR [SHARPE]. Past date pass, sir.

Senior is pissing against the wall —

SENIOR [ARMIN]. Tell him to fuck off.

JUNIOR [SHARPE]. Fuck off.

SHAG. THIS IS THE SIGNATURE OF SIR ROBERT CECIL.

ARE YOU GOING TO TELL HIM TO FUCK OFF?

SENIOR [ARMINI]. *(Finishing his pee.)* Not at the moment, sir. He's sleeping.

SHAG. Sleeping? Robert Cecil? Sleeping? Impossible.

SENIOR [ARMINI]. If he were awake, would we be drunk?

SHAG. ROBERT! ROBERT CECIL!

JUNIOR [SHARPE]. Well, don't wake him!

As the Interrogators disappear, Shag makes a circuit of the stage bringing Shag to —

Scene 7

Cecil's darkened deserted office.

The room is empty. No desk. No chair. But the emblems of state we have seen there earlier — robe, crown, scepter — are tossed about on the floor — as after a drunken party.

SHAG. ROBERT! ROBERT CECIL! ROBERT! *(No response.)*

ROBERT CECIL!

The royal robe — lying on the ground — sits up. Cecil was sleeping under the robe.

CECIL. *(Huge.)* Stop! *(Then.)* You woke me!

SHAG. *(All business.)* I need a pass to see Garnet.

CECIL. I was — *(What's the word?)* Sleeping! ... I was having a dream. No. A nightmare.

Cecil — a frightened child — holds the robe about him, remembering his dream. Driven by terror.

I was in this very room, but not alone. Lurking in the darkness was a murderer. I could hear his breathing. I wanted to run from the murderer but I couldn't. There is no way to run from — *(Painful clarity)* yourself. *(From a breaking heart.)* After all I have done,

there is no creature loves me and if I die, no soul shall pity me. *(Ruthless.)* And why should they? I've never had pity on anyone. *(As he stands.)* But you saw this coming from the start. We are all broken in the end.

As the robe falls open around him, we see Robert Cecil's bent body exposed down to only underpants. We see his misshapen leg and the bunch of his back. We realize with compassion the energy it has taken him to be as physically agile as he has been from the start. We feel for him. Shag is moved. Wearing the royal robe over his nakedness, Cecil takes over the room. With fierce anger.

NONE of them — save Elizabeth — could ADMINISTER a two-hole OUTHOUSE. I killed Elizabeth, you know. She knew I would put James on the throne. It killed her heart. And for what? FOR THIS UNGRATEFUL SCOT?

SHAG. You're becoming unsecret, Robert.

CECIL. *(Borderline delusional.)* I vanquished them all. Essex. Raleigh. Spain. Popes. I SAVED THIS HALL AND ALL ITS INHABITANTS FROM DESTRUCTION AND DAMNATION. If it weren't for ME, all that would be left of THIS ROOM would be SPLINTERED WOOD and CHARRED FLESH.

SHAG. You're starting to believe your own propaganda.

CECIL. You haven't heard? Garnet confessed the Plot. He was behind it *from the start!*

SHAG. *(In denial.)* You tortured him. Tortured people will tell you anything you want to hear.

CECIL. That's why you torture them. Was there ever any question about that? But I'll tell you this — it didn't take much. And when it was done, he did *not* recant.

Cecil reenacts what should have been his greatest moment —

And when I take the news of my greatest triumph to the King — *(James enters with Young Male Friend [Armin]). Cecil approaches the King with his news! Building triumph!* — when I finally get to say, "Majesty, the last recusant priest has confessed. The old faith is destroyed." Do you know what he says to me? He says —

JAMES. *Beagle, can't you see that I'm busy? Shut the door.*
CECIL. And you know what he's busy doing? Buckingham. He's doing Buckingham. Leggy, like Buckingham. And you know what Buckingham says?
YOUNG MALE FRIEND [ARMIN]. That Beagle, doesn't he ever sleep?

As James and Buckingham disappear —

CECIL. *Sleep? I worked the day my wife died!* I — AM — A — FOOL!
SHAG. *(With feeling for Cecil.)* We are all fools. All noble. All royal.
CECIL. Only a fool could think we are all noble. And only *one* is royal. And it's not — *me*. Or mine.

Cecil moves to the crown. Takes it up.

History will be kinder to you than to me.
SHAG. *(Re: crown.)* Robert, put that down.
CECIL. History will remember you as the author of *The True Historie of the Powder Plot*.
SHAG. *(Checking the door.)* If anyone were to come in —
CECIL. I shall be remembered as an allegorical beagle at the feet of bonnie King James.
SHAG. Robert — give me the crown —
CECIL. What do you think, Writer? Do you think you could write a play called —

He crowns himself. For a glorious moment, he is the KING!

King Beagle the First!
SHAG. GIVE ME THE CROWN! *(Shag grabs the crown from Cecil's head. Silence. Then — Shaken.)* I want to see Garnet.
CECIL. Did the priest hold out some metaphysical hope for you?

Garnet crosses between Cecil and Shag to enter his cell.

Well, I'm disappointed too. Some of them held out for days. Some went to their graves without a word. But this man — the soul of the whole thing — *(Amazed.)* there was *nothing* there.

SHAG. I demand to see him!
CECIL. Of course. You think I wish to suppress the truth. On the contrary, it kills me that the true story will never be told. *(As Cecil leaves, he asks — touched.)* Were you worried about me? Just now? Actually worried? *(After a nod.)* Why?
SHAG. You have taught me something. You have taught me there is nothing that will not stretch.

Cecil — pleased with the lesson he has taught — leaves.

LOOK AT ME!

We are instantaneously in —

Scene 8

Garnet's dark, cold cell.

SHAG. *(In motion throughout.)* LOOK AT ME! I've come about the confession.
GARNET [RICHARD]. *(Misunderstanding.)* Ah, yes. You may begin.
SHAG. You should begin; you're the one who's good at confessions. Did you confess? No *equivocating!* Did you confess?
GARNET [RICHARD]. *(With some shame.)* Yes ... I ... I confessed. I —
SHAG. Well, did they put you on the rack? *(After a nod.)* Well, thank God at least for that! For how long? An hour? Half? Ten minutes? *Five?*
GARNET [RICHARD]. Not long.
SHAG. I wrote — *are you listening to me?* — I wrote word for word what you told me. I was willing to risk everything for your story and YOU DIDN'T STAND BEHIND IT FOR — WHAT?
— A QUARTER OF AN HOUR?
GARNET [RICHARD]. I'm sorry I have disappointed you.
SHAG. Disappointed? ... *BETRAYED!*

GARNET [RICHARD]. (*Genuinely puzzled.*) Betrayed? What do you think I confessed?

Coke appears from the shadows.

COKE [ARMINI]. (*As if to the full court.*) *The Powder Plot!*

SHAG. *The Plot.* (*As Coke takes stage —*)

COKE [ARMINI]. *The court is now to witness the last act of that heavy, doleful tragedy which is commonly called the Powder Treason.*

All cast members lurk in the shadows at the edge of the playing area entering and exiting fluidly as needed.

GARNET [RICHARD]. (*With a startled laugh.*) The plot? Who told you I confessed the plot?

SHAG. What did you confess?

COKE [ARMINI]. *He knew!*

GARNET [RICHARD]. (*Minimizing.*) That I was not entirely ignorant of the plot. From confession I knew —

SHAG. You — *knew?*

GARNET [RICHARD]. Robin Catesby —

Coke becomes Catesby. Coke and Catesby will continue to transform into one another instantaneously throughout.

SHAG. *Catesby* came to you and confessed the plot?

GARNET [RICHARD]. Robin wouldn't have dared.

Scene 9

The Plot Revealed.

Garnet and Shag watch as the events described play out before them — THE ACTUAL TRUE HISTORY OF THE POWDER PLOT.

Catesby goes to a Young Priest [Sharpe] — who emerges from the shadows. We see the following enacted —

GARNET [RICHARD]. Robert Catesby went to one of my younger brothers, confessed to *him* — and my brother priest came to me.

The Young Priest moves to Garnet —

SHAG. (*Getting it.*) And he confessed the plot to you?

GARNET [RICHARD]. (*To the Young Priest.*) And Robin said you could tell me this?

YOUNG PRIEST [SHARPE]. He was anxious that I should. (*The Young Priest disappears.*)

SHAG. (*Horried.*) So you knew.

Catesby becomes Coke.

COKE. (*Delighted.*) Oh, yes, he knew!

SHAG. A conspiracy to kill — *YOU KNEW AND YOU DID NOT TELL!*

GARNET [RICHARD]. *TELL WHO? (Shaking with rage.) WHOM DID YOU WANT ME TO TELL? CECIL?* According to you, he *ALREADY KNEW!* Long before me! Simon was right. You are a slow student. They made sure I knew of the plot but knew under the seal of confession, the *only* way I could not tell.

Coke becomes Catesby as Garnet looks at him. With anger.

Robin Catesby made me part of the crime — why I do not know.
SHAG. I do.

Cecil — now back into his court finery — enters. He gives a bag of money to Catesby — making Catesby Cecil's agent in the plot.

CECIL. (*To Shag.*) Everything — is for sale.

Catesby makes his ultimate statement —

CATESBY [ARMINI]. (*To all.*) This is about land. Money. The redistribution of wealth. Nothing more.

SHAG. (*To Garnet.*) Proof: I need —

GARNET [RICHARD]. (*Bitterly.*) Oh, it's a very neat proof. They killed Robin on arrest —

Sharpe becomes the arresting officer with a musket. As Catesby raises his arms in surrender, the arresting officer raises his musket —

Already captured! Utterly needlessly! They shot him.

The officer shoots! Catesby — shocked — looks to Cecil. Dies.

And with him died all evidence of state complicity. The man who shot him was given a king's ransom.

The arresting officer exits with Catesby's money.

The proof is — there is — no — proof.

CECIL. (*Pleased, to Shag.*) Dirt? What dirt?

SHAG. (*To Garnet.*) Better you had gone to your grave with the knowledge.

GARNET [RICHARD]. They were torturing my friends to find out what I knew. I spoke — with Robin's permission — to end the torture. The torture continues. Now — you answer me! (*Harsh demand.*) Who told you I confessed the plot? (*No response.*) Who?

SHAG. (*Avoiding.*) It was all through the streets —

GARNET. *Who made you believe that lie?*

SHAG. (*Deeply embarrassed.*) Cecil.

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GARNET [RICHARD]. (*Shocked.*) Cecil? Robert Cecil?

As the cast applauds and cheers Cecil's triumph, Cecil takes a curtain call. He has learned his theater lessons well.

CECIL. (*Parading his titles.*) Baron of Essendon, Viscount Cranborne, soon to be Earl of Salisbury.

Applause and bravos peak and stop.

GARNET [RICHARD]. And you believed him? With all you know — you believed him? (*Completely puzzled.*) But why?

SHAG. (*Confused, in a rush.*) He moved me. He said —

CECIL. (*A performance for Shag.*) No creature loves me and if I die, no soul shall pity me ...

GARNET [RICHARD]. But ...

SHAG. Waitwaitwait. (*Thunderstruck, working it out.*) No creature loves me and if I die, no soul shall pity me ...

CECIL and SHAG. (*With building shared understanding.*) And why should they? I've never had pity on anyone!

GARNET [RICHARD]. It's understandable. You were moved.

SHAG. OF COURSE I WAS MOVED. IT'S THE END OF RICHARD THE THIRD! I FUCKING WROTE IT.

Cecil takes a triumphant bow to the cheers of the cast!

CECIL. (*Thrilled.*) We need a story, William! One that will last! One everyone can believe in.

TOM WINTOUR [SHARPE]. (*A final accusation.*) If you do not live the truth, you cannot know the truth. Can you not see that?

SHAG. (*Pounding his head.*) I KNOW the truth. I just keep *FORGETTING*.

GARNET [RICHARD]. Now that you know it, will you tell it?

SHAG. (*Cant.*) I've written another play.

GARNET [RICHARD]. (*Despair.*) Then all is lost.

Full cast takes stage as a gavel pounds before sentencing —

COKE. Mr. Garnet — your sentence has been pronounced. (*The sentence.*) Mr. Garnet shall be drawn to the common place of execution —

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JUDITH. — and there to be hanged by the neck —
SHARPE. — cut down alive —
CECIL. — his priny-member cut off, to be burnt before his face —
COKE. — his head to be severed from his body —
COKE/JUDITH/SHARPE/CECIL. — and his body divided into
four parts —
JAMES. (Signing the order.) — to be disposed of as the King should
think fit.

*All but Shag and Garnet depart. We are back in Garnet's cell.
Silence. Then —*

GARNET [RICHARD]. Master Shagspeare — Will — for the
first time, I am afraid.

SHAG. We are all afraid of death.

GARNET [RICHARD]. Not death.

SHAG. What then?

GARNET [RICHARD]. That I shall cease to be myself. I am afraid
that — stepping out on a platform — in front of a crowd — unpro-
rected — exposed, I will not be — sufficient — to the occasion.

SHAG. You're like my actors.

GARNET [RICHARD]. They lose hope?

SHAG. No, actors always have hope. And after they get their first
laugh, they think they are gods.

GARNET [RICHARD]. I — I should like to laugh again —
before I die. Is there anything — funny — in your play?

SHAG. It's the least funny play ever written.

GARNET [RICHARD]. Pity. It's the laughter that makes the
tragedy — (Three loud knocks.)

SHAG. Well — there is one funny bit.

GARNET [RICHARD]. What's it about?

SHAG. (Strangely enough.) Equivocation.

GARNET [RICHARD]. Tell me.

SHAG. (His new play!) A king is killed. The killers have gone to
wash blood off their hands when there's a knocking at the gate.
(Knock, knock, knock.) A porter arrives.

*And with the arrival of the Porter, we enter into the final play
— Macbeth. The Porter lifts tragedy into the bearable.*

PORTER [ARMIN]. (Intense Scottish accent.) Knock, knock,
knock! Who's there, i' the name of Beelzebub? (Amused, to
Garnet.) Faith, here's an equivocator; that could swear in both the
scales against either scale; who committed treason enough for
God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven: o, come in,
equivocator. (Knock, knock, knock.) But this place is too cold for
hell. I'll devil-porter it no further: I had thought to have let in
some of all professions — (Amused to see James joining them in hell.)
— that go the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire.

Scene 10

Macbeth performed — onstage/backstage/audience.

*James — ceremonially robed — enters to watch the play.
James sits dead center and anchors all activity. Macbeth will
be played all around him.*

*Garnet sits on a chair next to him. They are unaware of one
another's presence.*

*Shag throws lines to the Porter who performs for both James
and Garnet.*

SHAG. Was it so late, friend, ere you went to bed that you do lie
so late?

PORTER/ARMIN. Faith, sir, we were carousing till the second
cock. And drink, sir, is a great provoker of three things.

JAMES [SHARPE]. (Scot to Scot.) Aye, and what three things does
drink especially provoke?

PORTER [ARMIN]. (With all the trimmings.) Marry, sir, nose-
painting, sleep and urine. Lechery, sir, it provokes and unpro-
vokes; it provokes the desire but it takes away the performance.
(To James and Garnet.) It makes a man and it mars him. Sets him
on and takes him off. Makes him stand to and not stand to.
Equivocates him in a sleep and giving him the lie, leaves him.

(Then, soliciting applause.) Pray you, remember the porter.

James and Porter exit, James leaving his robe over the back of his chair, making the chair a throne. Garnet remains. His laughter fades to melancholy silence. Shag looks at him with compassion.

SHAG. Do not despair.

GARNET [RICHARD]. What is there left for which to hope?

SHAG. Soon — very soon — you will be seeing my son. (At a cost.) He is a sweet boy. He will make you at home. Give him a kiss for me.

GARNET [RICHARD]. You will see him yourself. (Then.) Look to your daughter. Look to your daughter and you will see your son again. On — my — word.

Shag accepts the truth of Garnet's word. Then —

SHAG. *Benedicite.*

GARNET [RICHARD]. (A hand gently on Shag's head.) *Benedicite.*

As Garnet leaves, actors rush on. Shag is surrounded by the hurly-burly of the first production of Macbeth. We feel the urgency of backstage during an opening night performance.

SHAG. (To Armin, dressing as Lady Macbeth.) How's it going?

ARMIN. (Over the moon.) The King laughed at the Porter.

SHAG. Cecil?

ARMIN. (Under the moon.) Not so much.

Sharpe — pumped — a knight flashing sword and armor — arrives with Nate in costume as Banquo.

NATE. (Thrilled.) Where were you! James almost shat himself with the witches. He's on the edge of his seat!

SHARPE. (Serious actor preparation.) And in the next scene I intend to push him over the edge.

Judith helps with props and costumes throughout. Richard enters costumed as Macbeth. Preparing for his entrance —

RICHARD. You're back?

SHAG. (He is.) How's it going?

RICHARD. James loves it.

SHAG. And Cecil?

Cecil enters. Sits center in the seat formerly used by Garnet — next to James' throne.

RICHARD. (Focused on Cecil.) He never comes to see us. What's he doing here? When I did the speech about insomnia ...

SHAG. (Focused on Cecil.) *Macbeth hath murdered sleep; Macbeth shall sleep no more?*

RICHARD. (Yes.) Cecil stood up like I had called his name. I almost stopped the performance.

SHAG. (Delighted.) He's not used to theater. Here's a new speech. (With serious purpose.) Play it right to him.

SHARPE. (Ready to enter.) Watch this.

Sharpe leaps onstage and makes tour de force changes between Macduff and James.

(As Macduff)

O HORROR! HORROR! HORROR!

(As James.) Laddie, calm yourself.

(As Macduff)

Confusion now hath made his masterpiece!

Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope

The Lord's anointed temple, and stole thence

The life o' the building.

(As James.) What is't you say — the life? Mean you his majesty?

Beagle, I think they killed the King.

(As Macduff)

Approach the chamber, and destroy your sight

With a new Gorgon!

See, and then speak yourselves.

(As James — applauding.) The lad's tremendous. He's brilliant!

Bloody brilliant!

Armin enters as Lady Macbeth —

LADY MACBETH [ARMINI].

Those of his chamber, as it seemed had don't.

Richard walks onstage. His hands are dripping with blood.

MACBETH [RICHARD].

O yet I do repent me of my fury that I did kill them.

Macbeth gestures. Blood flies from his hand and lands on Cecil's hand. Cecil looks at the blood. Does anyone else see it? Shag does.

SHAG. (*Delighted.*) Good.

Cecil takes a handkerchief out of his pocket and tries to wipe off the blood. As the scene plays, Cecil is focused on the blood on his hand.

MACDUFF [SHARPE]. (*Commanding.*)

And when we have our naked frailties hid,
let us meet and question this most bloody piece of work.
In the great hand of God I stand; and thence
against the undivulged preface I fight
of treasonous malice.

MACBETH [RICHARD].

And so do I!

ALL.

So all.

James, loving the play, applauds the exit. Backstage: as Judith helps wash the stage blood off Richard's hands —

SHAG. (*Handing Richard the crown.*) Here — put this on during that new speech. And throw in a little Richard the Third.

RICHARD. (*Amused.*) Right. Good business.

Richard/Macbeth enters. He enters with a Richard III-like limp — which is also a Cecil-like limp. Cecil sees it. Gets it. Looks daggers at Shag.

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MACBETH [RICHARD]. (*To James.*)

The weird sisters prophet-like hail'd Banquo father to a line
of kings while —

(*He holds the crown over his head as Cecil did earlier —*)

Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown,
no son of mine succeeding. If't be so,
for Banquo's issue have I murder'd
and mine eternal soul

given to the common enemy of man,
to make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings!

(*Then Richard crowns himself king — exactly as Cecil did.*)

To be thus is NOTHING.

Cecil — unable to take another moment — rises.

JAMES [SHARPE]. Sit, Beagle. Stay.

Cecil sits.

SHAG. (*Triumphant.*) Good.

LADY MACBETH [ARMINI]. (*Entering.*)

How now, my lord! Why do you keep alone,
Of sorriest fancies your companions making?

What's done is done.

MACBETH [RICHARD].

I will tomorrow to the weird sisters.

Witches! James' witches!

JAMES [SHARPE]. (*Thrilled, to the actors.*) The witches? The
witches are coming?

All actors nod yes. James claps his hands with delight.

MACBETH [RICHARD].

More shall they speak, for I am bent to know
By the worst means, the worst. I am in blood
Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er.

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Richard III-like, he limps off. Cecil is not amused. Backstage:

RICHARD. Cecil is watching this play like a death sentence. What have you done? You haven't cunt-ed me on this, have you?
SHAG. You said we hold the mirror up. Well, that's what we're doing. Shhhhhhhhh —

Onstage: as Cecil inspects his hands for final traces of blood, Lady Macbeth/Armin cleans her hands right alongside him.

LADY MACBETH [ARMIN]. (*Smelling the air around Cecil.*)
Here's the smell of blood still.
Out, damned spot. Out I say.
What? Will these hands ne'er be clean?

Cecil, murderous, approaches Richard —

RICHARD. That's it. I'm ending this.

By the time Cecil gets to Richard, Cecil has become Nate —

NATE. (*To Richard.*) You're on.

Thunder and lightning. Armin/Nate/Shag all become witches. Powerful male-voiced threatening witches. Macbeth [Richard] stands behind James' seat so the witches come directly upstage at James! James is thrilled/scared/delighted!

WITCHES [ARMIN/NATE/SHAG].
Double, double, toil and trouble.
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.

James applauds!

MACBETH [RICHARD].
How now, you secret black and midnight hags.
What is't you do?
WITCH 1 [ARMIN].
A deed without a name.

WITCHES.

Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth!

WITCH 1 [ARMIN].

Be bloody, bold and resolute and laugh to scorn
the power of man for none of woman born
shall harm Macbeth.

JAMES [SHARPE]. (*Triumphant!*) *Then what need he fear any man?*

MACBETH [RICHARD]. (*Exactly — to James and the witches!*)

Then what need I fear any man!

WITCHES.

Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth —

WITCH 1 [ARMIN].

— shall never vanquished be until
Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill
shall come against him.

JAMES [SHARPE]. (*Another discovery!*) *Why that shall never be!*

MACBETH [RICHARD]. (*Right again!*)

That will never be. Yet my heart

Throbs to know one thing. Tell me:

Shall Banquo's issue ever reign in this kingdom?

WITCHES.

Seek to know no more!

MACBETH [RICHARD].

Show! Show!

JAMES [SHARPE]. (*Rising, demanding to know!*) *Tell him! Shall Banquo's issue ever reign in this kingdom? (Thunder and lightning!)*

NATE. Here we go.

WITCHES.

Show!
Show!

With James holding center, the actors approach him with large mirrors — each mirror picking up the King's image and reflecting it to another mirror. An infinite progression of Jameses. James is beside himself with wonder.

MACBETH [RICHARD].
A parade of kings!
Thy crown does sear mine eyeballs.
What, will thy line stretch out to the crack of doom?
And yet another. ENOUGH!

The illusion suddenly vanishes, James stands-applauds-cheers-whistles loudly — that unbearably loud two-finger whistle — until — Armin enters as Seton with a somber announcement —

SETON [ARMIN].

The Queen, my lord, is dead.

James, stunned, sits. Cecil is now again sitting next to him.

MACBETH [RICHARD].

She should have died hereafter.

There would have been a time for such a word.

(Then.) Tomorrow.

JAMES [SHARPE]. Tomorrow, eh?

MACBETH [RICHARD].

And tomorrow.

JAMES [SHARPE]. *(Delighted!)* And tomorrow?

MACBETH [RICHARD].

And tomorrow! *(Cecil is not pleased.)*

JAMES [SHARPE]. Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.

Aye, Beagle, that's a good one! Comic relief!

Shag speaks to Judith.

SHAG. It's a soliloquy. Sorry.

JUDITH. I like this one. It tells the truth. *(Simple and swift.)* Life is a tale told by an idiot. Full of sound and fury signifying nothing.

SHAG. I'm so sorry that you like it.

Build to the final battle. Seton runs on to inform Macbeth —

SETON [ARMIN].

My lord,

As I did stand my watch upon the hill,

I look'd toward Birnam, and anon methought

the wood began to move!

MACBETH [RICHARD]. *(Attacking Seton.)*

Liar and slave!

Seton runs off. Macduff runs on.

MACDUFF [SHARPE]. *(Sword in hand.)*

What is thy name?

MACBETH [RICHARD].

Thou'lt be afraid to hear it.

MACDUFF [SHARPE].

No, though thou call'st thyself a hotter name

Than any is in hell.

MACBETH [RICHARD]. *(A roar.)*

My name's Macbeth.

MACDUFF [SHARPE]. *(A roar.)*

Turn, hell-hound, turn.

MACBETH [RICHARD].

Swords I smile at. Weapons laugh to scorn.

For none of woman born shall harm Macbeth!

MACDUFF [SHARPE].

Despair thy charm

And let the angel whom thou still hast served

Tell thee Macduff was from his mother's womb

Unimely ripp'd.

Instantaneously Macduff becomes James.

JAMES [SHARPE]. *(To Cecil.)* That's poetry for caesarean section.

Instantaneously James becomes Macduff.

MACBETH [RICHARD].

Lay on, Macduff,

And damned be him that first cries hold, enough!

Sword fight/sword fight/sword fight.

ARMIN. *(To Shag.)* Looks like we're going to be alright.

Richard and Sharpe back each other with swords. With a final blow, Sharpe/Macduff kills Richard/Macbeth who falls forward towards the audience — his head over the edge of the stage. This allows Sharpe to walk downstage and take a huge

sword swipe off the edge of the stage as if decapitating Richard. Judith is there with a prop head. Judith hands the prop head to Sharpe — who raises it high.

MACDUFF [SHARPE].

Behold where strands

the usurper's cursed head. The time is free.

Hail, King of Scotland!

ALL. *(To James.) Hail, King of Scotland!*

Macduff becomes James cheering and repeating —

JAMES [SHARPE]. *(Beside himself)* HAIL, KING OF SCOTLAND!
HAIL, KING OF SCOTLAND!!! HAIL, KING OF SCOTLAND!!!

Scene 11

Aftermath of Macbeth — backstage.

Backstage, James gushes over the cast!

JAMES [SHARPE]. You were wonderful. You were wonderful. How do you do it? How do you remember all those lines? I loved it. Where's the lassie? Where's — ?

He finds Armin in Lady Macbeth costume. Ogling Lady Macbeth.

You could almost believe ...

ARMIN. Majesty — this — *(The dress/the breasts.)* — is an illusion.

JAMES [SHARPE]. *(His robe/crown.)* Well, so's this. So is this. Do you know what I liked best, Writer?

SHAG. The mirrors, Majesty?

Actors take mirror positions.

JAMES. The mirrors — the mirrors! The way one image caught

another and it went on and on! But no. That wasn't my favorite — RICHARD. Perhaps his Majesty enjoyed *Double, double, toil and trouble* —

JAMES [SHARPE]. The witches were wonderful! And they tricked him — the poor man. They did! They equivocated him — didn't they, Beagle? *(Then, to Cecil.)* And how did you like your play, Beagle?

Cecil has been in the background watching.

CECIL. If it pleased Your Majesty, I am content.

JAMES [SHARPE]. *(Confidential to the cast.)* He hated it. I sat next to him. You could feel waves of hate rolling off him through the whole thing.

CECIL. I commissioned a play about the Powder Plot, Majesty.

JAMES [SHARPE]. Yes and — wicked creatures — *(Delighted.)* you gave him a play about a man of no conscience, with ambitions above his station, a killer of royalty, careless of his wife, with a spy in every house who dies utterly unpitied. They did a play — *(Then, to Cecil.)* about YOU!

James tosses Cecil Macbeth's severed head. Cecil catches it. Looks at it.

SHAG. *(Absolutely.)* Certainly not, Majesty.

JAMES [SHARPE]. Come, come. I can tell equivocation when I hear it. Foul is fair, indeed!

SHAG. Your favorite part, Majesty?

JAMES [SHARPE]. My favorite part! You remember when Macbeth had just killed the King? And there he is, surrounded by the whole court?

James is surrounded by the actors.

And you can almost smell the blood on him? And everybody knows he did it — you can just tell that everybody knows he did it? And nobody — says — anything?

Nobody says anything.

That was my favorite part.

Silence — then.

Writer, I'm pleased you're on my payroll. You'd be a dangerous man else. Pay them, Beagle. (*Then, to Armin.*) Come along, lassie.

The King leaves, taking Armin — panicked — on his arm. Armin looks to Richard for help. Gets none. Cecil follows, leaving Richard and Shag —

RICHARD. Did you use us, Will? Is that what you did? After accusing me of giving away our scripts — did you use us?

CECIL. (*Returning.*) I never had the script. Blank pages, educated guesses and some spies in the theatrical crowd.

RICHARD. *Who?*

CECIL. None of yours. We approached the young disaffected one —

RICHARD. Sharpe?

CECIL. We offered him the world. Well, the Globe.

RICHARD. And he said no?

CECIL. (*To Richard.*) He said you were his hero.

This humbles Richard. Then —

SHAG. The priest was right. You never wanted to bring the nation together, did you?

CECIL. Why would I? When a country is evenly divided — and plots can be so helpful for that — the slightest touch of a royal finger on the scale changes the balance.

SHAG. (*Awakening to reality.*) *That's* what you were *really* asking from us, wasn't it? *Not* a play. Council, church, conspirators — you divided every group in the country. But not us.

CECIL. Close though. Very close. How *did* you do it? Hold them together?

RICHARD. He doesn't understand, does he? (*Arm around Shag's shoulder.*) This is *theater*, not *politics*. We're a cooperative venture. Didn't you tell him that?

SHAG. All your genius — you could have brought us together. And, instead, you used a tragedy to divide us.

CECIL. All your talent — and the best you could do was call me a name.

RICHARD. If enough people do that, that's the end of you.

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Sharpe runs on.

SHARPE. Richard, can I have an — (*Seeing Cecil.*) Sorry.

RICHARD. (*Seeing Sharpe in a new light.*) How much of an advance?

SHARPE. Twelve pence.

CECIL. Twelve? No one has ever needed *twelve* pence. Ten.

Fifteen. Never twelve.

SHARPE. That's what they're charging to see Garnet's hanging.

RICHARD. Standing or sitting?

SHARPE. Standing.

RICHARD. (*Dumstruck.*) Standing? Twelve?

CECIL. Standing in your theater is —

RICHARD. A penny.

CECIL. It seems my show is outdrawing yours twelve to one.

SHARPE. Yes, but it isn't art, is it, sir?

CECIL. (*Looking at the audience.*) Give it time.

SHARPE. Should I save you a place, Richard? Of course, if you'd rather not go with me —

RICHARD. You were very good.

SHARPE. Brilliant?

Military drums start in the distance.

RICHARD. I'd better go. Professional interest.

Richard claps Sharpe on the back and puts an arm over his shoulder as they leave. As the hanging is prepared in the background —

SHAG. (*Re: Garnet.*) The priest did well. He told the truth in difficult times.

CECIL. *Equivocation.* Yes. We might have to adapt the meaning of that word somewhat.

SHAG. He wasn't involved. Let him live.

CECIL. Why do you care about the priest?

SHAG. It's not for him I am asking. Forgive him for your children's sake. Leave them something better than your father left you. Leave the nation its soul.

CECIL. Oh, I will look after my children.

SHAG. Torturers do not prosper. God will not allow it.

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CECIL. On the contrary, I saw my future in those mirrors as well. And do you know what I saw?

The actual future — as military drums intensify and Cecil ascends the scaffold.

By the time my great-great-great-grandson Robert Cecil is elected prime minister for the third time, the smell of blood will have faded. (*Becoming another Cecil — this one limp-less.*) By 1937, when his grandson — also Robert — wins the Nobel Peace Prize, everyone will have forgotten that the family fortune was purchased with a little torture. (*And another modern Cecil.*) By the 21st century when a conservative Cecil — also Robert — leads the House of Lords, a bit of torture on the resume might even be an asset. (*Over the drums, grandly, as the original Robert Cecil.*) That's what I leave my children. What will you leave yours? (*Then.*) It's not too late. Write the play.

SHAG. I have a greater work to do.

CECIL. Greater than posterity?

JUDITH. (*Entering.*) Father!

SHAG. Posterity's overrated. I have to go.

Garnet enters with hangman. For his hanging, Garnet stands on the same barrel as did Tom Wintour. As did Shag.

CECIL. (*Amused.*) You're taking your daughter to a hanging?

SHAG. She's taking me. She likes them.

CECIL. If her generation shares her taste in entertainment, my father's work will finally be complete. (*Immediately.*) Any last words, Mr. Garnet?

Scene 12

The execution of Henry Garnet.

Garnet is unfocused, not himself —

GARNET [RICHARD]. If I have offended His Majesty, I ask forgiveness with all my heart.

CECIL. (*The big lie, to the crowd.*) Gentlemen, do you hear? He asks the King's forgiveness for the Powder Treason!

GARNET [RICHARD]. No ... I ... I —

CECIL. Come, come, confess. (*To all.*) We have it in *your own handwriting* that you knew of the plot by other means than confession.

GARNET [RICHARD]. (*Struggling for clarity.*) What is under my hand, that I will not deny, but you will never show my hand contrary to what I have spoken.

CECIL. You do but equivocate. After your death we will publish it in your own hand that the world may see your false dealing.

Garnet is at a loss. Shag must do something. He shouts out —

SHAG. *Let him see his confession in his own writing. CONVICT him of his treason. SHOW IT HIM IN HIS OWN WRITING.*

Cecil sees Shag.

CECIL. SILENCE THAT MAN!

But before they can silence him, others in the crowd take up the cry "SHOW IT TO HIM IN HIS OWN HAND!" The shouting becomes overwhelming, forcing Cecil to the embarrassing admission —

The paper. The paper is not here. (*Lame excuse.*) It has been left at home.

People start to laugh. This is dangerous to Cecil, but it restores Garnet to himself.

GARNET [RICHARD]. (*Amused and in command.*) Neither here nor at home have you any such. Now leave me to my prayers.

In possession of himself, Garnet prays. Cecil nods to the hangman — who shoves Garnet out into space. Garnet chokes. Shag cannot bear to see this.

SHAG. Come away, Judith.

Shag attempts to pull Judith away. She resists, watching as Garnet struggles, kicking into empty space.

CECIL. Cut him down!

Judith pulls away from her father.

As Garnet struggles — gasps — chokes —

SHAG. Judith! Come away!

Holding her ground, Judith shouts —

JUDITH. (*To Cecil.*) Let him die. (*He does not respond. So she turns to the crowd —*) Let him die!

The crowd takes up the cry — Let him die! Responding to the crowd, the hangman hesitates. Garnet's feet kick wildly.

CECIL. (*Enraged.*) Cut — him — down!

As the crowd's shouting increases, Shag makes a decision. He walks with purpose towards the gallows. Shag gathers Garnet's kicking legs to him. Shag jerks the legs once hard. Garnet's neck snaps. Stillness. Garnet's lifeless body dangles quietly. Serious silence. In which — Shag turns to his daughter. Holds her face in his hands. Then, looking carefully into Judith's face — he sees his daughter clearly. And something more. He kisses her.

SHAG. (*Tenderly.*) Goodbye.

He kisses again. Then —

Godspeed.

Kisses her one final time. Shag holds Judith tightly. Garnet is lowered, walks away as a new reality takes over. The actors become actors again — removing their costumes. Shag and Judith remain the still center point of the changing picture. Judith, holding her father, addresses the audience.

Scene 13

Judith.

JUDITH. My father — My father wrote little after the Scottish Play.

Judith has a new maturity to her. A new care for her very still father.

He doctored plays till the end, but he only wrote six more on his own.

Judith removes Shag's jacket. He does not resist. Judith bands the jacket to Richard — who kisses it. Holds it to him. The company forms around Judith and Shag.

The last four were very odd plays.

The actors nod in agreement.

They were comedies that ended in wars. Tragedies that ended in marriages. They're awful. Still, better than what he wrote for my brother. Hamlet. Seven soliloquies.

As Judith continues to undress her father, she hands his clothing — including his rings and jewelry — to the actors who accept these keepsakes warmly. Judith continues until Shag lies naked and still on the stage. The actors remove their hats as at a funeral. Sharpe places a simple silver basin next to Judith. Takes her hand for a moment. Then leaves her to her task. With water and a cloth from the basin, Judith washes her father's body. As she does —

I buried him. As I had my brother ... Then my mother ... Then my sister.

As Judith finishes washing Shag's body — Nate places a winding sheet next to Shag's body. Judith nods to Nate gratefully.

They all have the same story — those last four plays.

Armin — keeper of the scripts — puts the final four plays on the ground next to Shag. The story, with warmth and wonder.

A father throws away his daughter. And nothing will ever be right until he gets her back. They're full of impossible coincidences. Miraculous statures. Pirates. Shipwrecks.

Can you believe it? —

Bears. Resurrections.

Actors bow to Shag, move upstage where they watch from a respectful distance.

The last plays are completely unbelievable.

They watch as Judith covers Shag's body — though not his face — with the winding sheet — exactly like tucking a child in to bed.

They were the kind of stories lonely daughters tell themselves on

cold sleepless nights. When they think no one is listening. Audiences loved them ... They cried ... They believed them. Of course, audiences — they'll believe anything.

Then — she gently covers her father's face. Takes the final scripts. Stands with them. Walks away. She stops. Returns. Uncovers her father's face. To him.

And I believed them too. Every word. (... to us.) I never knew I had a story of my own — until he told it.

She kisses him. She holds the final four plays to her.

End of Play

PROPERTY LIST

Manuscript
Money bag
Scripts
Bartel
Strongbox
Beers
Pen
Loose papers
Laundry basket with clothes
Sword
Chalice
Gunpowder fuse and gunpowder
King's robe
Crown
Scepter
Pass from Cecil
Bucket of water
Money purse
Letter from Tom Wintour
Knife
Head of Tom Wintour
Book
Dinner on a tray, including cup of wine
Jailor's cap
Instruments of torture
Chains
Cup
Priest's robes and accoutrement
Key
Bag of money
Musket
Handkerchief
Blood
Head of Macbeth
Silver basin
Washcloth
Winding sheet

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SOUND EFFECTS

Thunder, lightning, and rain
Wind
Drums
Bells
Chimes
Gate shut and lock
Military drums
Gavel
Knocking
Slice with an ax

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