

EAT CROW

A Mortality Farce

By Lindsay Hayward

EAT CROW

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EAT CROW

for Leo – “There was a star danced, and under that were you born.”

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EAT CROW was ordinally produced as **Crow Eats Death** at the Addison Theatre Centre's Stone Cottage Theatre in Addison, Texas by IMPRINT Theatreworks. The production was directed by Lisa Cotie, and featured the following cast:

BURBAGE... Joe Borunda

LIAM... Charlton Gavitt

POPE... Sherry Etzel

KIT... Raven Pinkston

ALEX... Miles Shickman

WILL... Chet Monday

DEATH... Drake Caprio

CAST

BURBAGE. Non-gender specific, plays Richard Burbage, 27.

LIAM. Non-gender specific, plays William Kempe, 40.

POPE. Non-gender specific, plays Thomas Pope, 37.

KIT. Non-gender specific, plays Christopher Beeston, 17.

ALEX. Non-gender specific, plays Alexander Cooke, 17.

WILL. Non-gender specific, plays William Shakespeare, 28.

DEATH. Immortal, to be played by ALL.

All other roles are to be played by named members of the company as stated in the script. DEATH should be portrayed by a company member not onstage during the scene's action. While the characters are based on actual persons with traditional pronouns, any bias based on historical record is highly discouraged.

TIME & PLACE

1593, Annus Horribilis.

Cripplegate, London.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS

ALL CAPS marks volume, italics to emphasize, a double back slash (//) indicates overlapping dialogue.

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The following concerns all music referenced in the script. "No Scrubs" was written by Kevin "She'kspere" Briggs, Kandi Burruss, Tameka "Tiny" Cottle, Lisa Lopes. Produced by She'kspere and released by LaFace Arista Records in 1999. Published Under License from EMI Music Publishing © All Rights on behalf of HITCO MUSIC and SHAK'EM DOWN MUSIC, INC. Administered by WINDSWEPT PACIFIC SONGS All Rights Reserved. Rights obtained for LYRICS ONLY through EMI Music Publishing. Authorized for use by playwright. The author suggests the license contact ASACP or BMI to ascertain the rights holder to acquire permission for performance of this song. "One, Twice, Thrice, I Julia Tried" was written by Henry Purcell (1659-1695). Music and lyrics are public domain.

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SCENE 1

June 1593. A city street, London. A chorus of hammers. One short figure waits next to a marquee. His high-end plague doctor costume plus mask visible. Deep in the shadows of the space, another plague doctor lingers. DEATH, in raggedy hems, stands frozen in statue. A street performer bent double against a long staff. A spotlight blinks on. After a few false starts, BURBAGE finds his light. He remembers the marquee, fetches it. The sign reads: "BEAT THE HEAT WITH MARLOWE'S JEW! PERFORMED BY THE (almost) FAMOUS RICHARD BURBAGE!" Burbage begins his prologue. The mask renders all dialogue unintelligible.

BURBAGE. *(LIAM and POPE enter, poorly disguised as QUEEN'S MEN.)*

Albeit the world think I am dead.

Birds of the air will tell of murders' past.

I am asham'd to hear such fooleries.

Let me be envied and not pitied! But whither am I bound?

I crave but this, -- *(Pope nails a "CLOSED DUE TO PLAQUE" sign on the marquee. Burbage pulls down his mask. A formable nose is now visible.)*

WHAT IN HELL ARE YOU DOING?

LIAM. Putting you out of your misery.

BURBAGE. This is art.

LIAM. This is illegal.

BURBAGE. Says who?

POPE. *(Softy.)* We do.

BURBAGE. SAYS WHO?

POPE. *(In a stage whisper.)* We do. Remember? We're Queen's men in this bit.

BURBAGE. PROJECT.

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POPE. YOU SAID FOR US TO BE QUEEN'S MEN IN THIS BIT//

BURBAGE. Not that part.

POPE. RIGHT. *Oh!* Right.

BURBAGE. And....

POPE. And.... *line.*

BURBAGE. This is a performance. You can't call line. It's against the rules.

POPE. Sorry, sorry! (*Taps his head.*) All apples plus oranges up there//

LIAM. I'm a lychee fella myself.

BURBAGE. (*Burbage sighs. Pinches the bridge of his nose.*) Let's start again. I say, 'Says who?' Then, you say. 'We do, as the Queen's men.'
(*Pope nods.*) Whenever you're ready.

POPE. We do... (*He dries. Again.*)

BURBAGE. We do-do... what? (*Pope and Liam break into winded giggles.*)

POPE. Doo-doo! He said doo-doo //

LIAM. Scatological humor at its finest//

BURBAGE. Just keep going. On what authority?

LIAM. (*Composes himself.*) By notice of her royal majesty, Our pearly Queen Elizabeth. In this year of our Lord, fifteen ninety-three. As of the midsummer eve, all theatrical performance, visual feats via the spectacular, and any attempt to pleasure oneself in public is strictly prohibited.

BURBAGE. Why?

POPE. 'Cause if ya go at it too much, you'll go blind. All hairy palms.

BURBAGE. Not that! About the theatre. (*Liam taps the board.*) Am I to be censured by poor dental hygiene? (*The pair check the marquee. Liam hits Pope with the hammer.*)

LIAM. Told you it was supposed to be a 'G'.

BURBAGE. Wait. You mean the plague?

POPE. Can't have folks buzzing together when we're dropping like flies. 'Specially in this heat.

LIAM. London's on lockdown. No one going in, no one going out.

POPE. No one's goin' nowhere.

BURBAGE. Precisely. I've got a captive audience. Look! (*The fools bray again.*)

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What's so funny? Folks need entertainment these days. They're desperate for an escape.

LIAM. Looks like most of 'em have already.

BURBAGE. Eh, it's a matinee. But they're here. Stuffed like sausages into slightly too small seating. Slacked in jawed as the sweet release of death-- except that guy. Who's already asleep? Zounds! We've just started//

POPE. Not a soul, mate. Not a soul.

LIAM. Playin' to an empty street//

POPE. There's a dead dog in yonder ditch//

LIAM. Or closest London comes to empty anyway.

BURBAGE. Come off! I'm doing the latest Marlowe. Very modern writer. *Edgy.* Took that knife to the eye. 'Course it also took his life, so kind of puts a damper on any new material.

LIAM. Folks today! What's wrong with a good bear bait? Watching an animal torn asunder, limb by bloody limb. Now that's entertainment the whole family can enjoy.

POPE. My mama always did love a good cock fight. Broke her heart when they started usin' birds instead.

BURBAGE. By Beelzebub's beard! I'm an artisan.

LIAM. All artists suffer.

BURBAGE. I am allergic to suffering. I break out all over in pain.

LIAM. Play on, player. Always next season.

POPE. If you live that long.

LIAM. If any of us do. (*Guffawing, Pope and Liam exit.*)

BURBAGE. (*Impulsively kicks the marquee. Yelps.*) Told you I was agony-intolerant. (*To the audience.*) I know. Broke the rules before. (*Thinks.*) There are laws which govern us all. Whether be heaven or these heathen boards. As a player, I gotta pretend we're all alone out. Unless it's a soliloquy, ya know. But I know you're gonna get something worth remembering or my name isn't Richard Burbage. (*Thinks.*) Which it isn't. Obviously. Listen to me. We all know I'm miscast in this role. Just? Suspense your disbelief, ok? 'Cause as far as you know? I am him. Know what I mean? You do know what I mean? Right? *Oof.* This off-the-cuff stuff is brutal. No wonder they erected that fourth wall. Gotta keep the talent in somehow. Else how would you know? (*Burbage spots Death*

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upstage.) See! Why is legitimate art always marginalized, yet no matter where you go there's always a bloody busker? What are you supposed to be? The Grim Reaper? That's your act? Standing? Most of us master that talent as a toddler, mate. (Death points the staff at him.) Very spooky. If we weren't already in the age of death. Stalks us all here. This latest virus alone has sent fifteen thousand city souls to their heavenly reward, and it's not even high summer yet. London's a cesspool of disease stirred by inconsistent social distancing. So, expect it'd take a bit more than Death's cheap cosplay to scare me. (Death revels a tiny Punch puppet.) A PUPPET? THOSE THINGS ARE CREEPY! (The puppet waves to him. Burbage exits as if pursued by bear. End of Scene.)

SCENE 2

One month later. Exterior of the Burbage Family Workshop, Cripplegate. The gentle patter of hammers as a clock chimes early morning. Lights up on a joiner's side yard. Coffins litter the space. One behemoth model straddles center stage. A single candle, and small water bowl rest on top. Two teens kneel on either side. KIT's bangs flop forward as he flips playing cards on the lid. ALEX's carefully contoured face stares at the bowl. He cradles a small blade near his face.

KIT. Pure dog's bollocks.

ALEX. Shut your hole.

KIT. Funny. Said the same thing to your mam last night. *(Alex flies at the other boy as the cards scatter. He holds the blade against Kit's throat.)* Oi Alex! Those are precious!

ALEX. Say it.

KIT. Yea.

ALEX. SAY IT.

KIT. Fine. Your eyebrows are//

ALEX. Yea?

KIT. Fierce.

ALEX. Obviously. *(With a flick of his wrist, Alex's blade is revealed. A pair of tweezers.)*

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KIT. Hair removal by candle flame and gutter water? You're such a peacock, Alex.

ALEX. While you, Kit? Embody the tail end of such a word.

KIT. *(He retrieves the cards to expertly shuffle the well-thumbed deck. References a card.)* Clock this.

ALEX. You've got to be one of the only kids in Cripplegate with a full set of pornographic playing cards.

KIT. I'm one of only kids in Cripplegate. Full stop.

ALEX. Why else do we hang out?

KIT. Figured as apprentices we don't have much choice.

ALEX. *(Glances at the card.)* Bollocks. No one's that flexible.

KIT. Got it wrong way round.

ALEX. *(He flips the card around. Grimaces.)* Ew. Somehow that's worse. *(WILL trails in. All prominent forehead and dusty black attire, he tucks ink-stained hands behind him. The teens ignore his arrival.)*

WILL. Morning. Was in the neighborhood. And saw you two//

KIT. Stranger danger.

ALEX. Creeper.

WILL. No. A mistake! I meant, as in...as in...

ALEX. Have a way with words, don't ya?

WILL. Usually? I'm very//

KIT. Boring. Come on, Alex. Let's go next door. Before the rest get up. *(Kit pockets his cards. Blow out the light.)*

ALEX. Ew. Why would I set foot in that brothel?

KIT. Mingin' Judy's got new greasepaint. A passable lip stain's the word.

ALEX. Always lead with the cosmetics, Kit. *(He stands, scoops up his bowl.)* And I'll be the judge of that.

KIT. Always are.

ALEX. Better than sticky fingers//

KIT. Says you. Seen my new choker?

ALEX. Black velvet. With the metal ankh?

KIT. Yea.

ALEX. What ho? Never.

KIT. Come off, Alex. *(To Will.)* Ta, sunshine.

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ALEX. When did gothic stage a comeback? (*In a huff of contempt, the boys exit.*)

WILL. I'm Will from Stratford. I write! Stuff. I write stuff?? For futtock's sake. (*A knock sounds from the large coffin. Will jumps.*) Indeed. (*Silence, save for the creak of a large medieval sign. It reads "BURBAGE FAMILY BUILDERS: BUILT FOR THE AGES? BUILT BURB-AGES. EST 1559". Will debates opening the box. Decides not. Relents. Slowly begins to lift the lid. An inhuman moan escapes. Will slams the top down in horror as Burbage enters from the interior. He wears a workman's apron. In a panic, Will hops atop the box.*) Burbage?

BURBAGE. Who's asking?

WILL. I've pressing need for a.... um? (*The coffin lid rattles; Will presses down using his full weight. Another groan is heard. Will clears his throat over the sound.*)

BURBAGE. Was that a dry cough?

WILL. (*Preoccupied by the coffin.*) No.

BURBAGE. (*Inhales for the following sales pitch. He's oddly good at it.*) Starts with a dry cough, they say. Leading to fever. Delirium. Excessive bleeding from a variety of orifices, some of the more intimate nature. Best not to mention the puss. Til' next thing ya know. *YOU'RE IN THE MARKET FOR ONE OF THESE PUPPIES!* Note your interest in our Model Royale. Fitted for a king! Henry the Eighth to be precise. Our family has been putting the fine arts in your final destination since 1559.

WILL. No art in a coffin.

BURBAGE. Pardon?

WILL. Pray, what's creative in following instructions? Two plus two equals a box. Whoop, there it is. Want a gold star?

BURBAGE. And you do what? Exactly.

WILL. I write stuff.

BURBAGE. Stuff?

WILL. My histories created quite a stir.

BURBAGE. A mock bird then?

WILL. (*A nerve struck; Will stands.*) Bit more than that.

BURBAGE. As is most things.

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WILL. For some. Perhaps.

BURBAGE. I'll leave you to browse.

WILL. (*Burbage crosses the large coffin.*) There's a ... body in that one? Several days gone. Going by smell. Rot's starting to knock in this heat. (*Impulsively Burbage kicks off the lid. Both players yelp. Burbage in pain, Will in terror. A large arm appears from the coffin's depths.*)

LIAM. AAAAAIIIIIIIII Have lost my HOSE!

BURBAGE. Try the brothel. Next door.

LIAM. Not harlots, man. My garments. I have misplaced//

BURBAGE. Stop sleeping one off in the merchandise, Liam//

LIAM. Certain I had 'em at the start of the evening. Only now? Morning after the night before? Poof!

BURBAGE. Ruins the interior, ya know. Mourners expect that new coffin smell//

LIAM. My deepest regrets, dear boy. Only libations called out on the summer breeze.

BURBAGE. More like three sheets to the wind//

LIAM. Speaking of, I've a tiniest tempest towards my temperate zone.

BURBAGE. Ye gads. Seen Pope anywhere?

LIAM. (*A full moon rises from the coffin. BURBAGE throws his apron over LIAM's bare posterior for modesty's sake.*) Suppose chap's same place as my lower attire. All in all, a bit of a blur.

BURBAGE. All in all, a typical Monday. (*A missed cue.*) I SAID, all in all, a typical Monday. (*Burbage massages his nose. Looks to the other players, they shrug. Tries again.*) Monday, I said. A TYPICAL MONDAY!

POPE. (*FROM OFF*) That's me!

BURBAGE. Ya think!

POPE. (*He enters, carrying damp hose plus two steaming mugs of ale.*) Sorry! Sorry. I'm late.

BURBAGE. Missed your cue. Again.

POPE. I know. I know. Had to sort these out down at the river. (*Pope drops the clothes in Liam's coffin. Places one mug by the side of the coffin. Liam dips down into its' wooden depths to dress.*)

LIAM. Careful, man. They're sopping wet!

POPE. Funny! That washerwoman said the exact same thing.

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BURBAGE. Pope, why must you enable him?

POPE. Liam's very persuasive. Articulate even. *(A loud burp erupts from the coffin.)* A true poet. Who dragged in the crow?

WILL. Name's Will. In a bit of a bugbear here. I thought Burbage had a troupe of actors.

BURBAGE. You're looking at 'em. What's left, anyway. Tom Pope. Liam Kempe, lying in state. And in top billing? Me as myself, Burbage.

WILL. You're it?

POPE. Most spilt as soon as the plague lists were nailed to the gates.

LIAM. What about Kyle?

POPE. May he rest in peace.

LIAM. And Kevin?

BURBAGE. Slipped our mortal coil.

LIAM. Chad??

POPE. Dead as a doornail.

LIAM. Oh yes, I recall now. Lovely funeral.

BURBAGE. We dump him at the plague pit. Then vomited into a ditch.

POPE. It's what he would have wanted.

LIAM. *(With a grunt, Liam rises again. Fully clothed this time.)* My deepest condolences. No harm done.

WILL. Pardon?

LIAM. Figured the coffin yours. Why else such morose attire? Unless you're one of those//

BURBAGE. Mind all P's'n'Q's.

LIAM. My dear boy, I never hold any incantation except that of chivalry. Only figured the gentleman to be... What's the word? Puts-the-No-Fun-in-Fundamental? Putrid? Puerile?

BURBAGE. Puritan. You have to call them Puritans now. We've been over this.

LIAM. So many labels presently.

WILL. I'm a writer. Histories mainly. And poems. Sonnets really.

POPE. Liam! Hear that? You 'n Blackbird are one 'n the same.

LIAM. Pope, I possess but a minuscular talent. Mainly in the medium of lewd limericks.

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POPE. Total doggerel! Guarantee to bring a tear to your eye 'n a stir to your loins.

BURBAGE. Liam! Pope! Shake off your spuddle. Take a coffin down to the corner shop. Their sign swears they buy anything. Let's hold 'em to it. *(The fools collect a coffin and their cups. Burbage fishes out a copper. Drops it into Pope's mug.)* And pick up something to break the fast while out. Solids only.

LIAM. You know us.

BURBAGE. That I do. *(The fools exit.)*

WILL. Thanks.

BURBAGE. Don't flatter yourself. Just can't stand Liam's poetry. Only last week, he rhymed 'knee-knocked whore' with 'cockney-ed sore'.

WILL. *Oof.* Is this really an acting company?

BURBAGE. Either that, or purgatory.

WILLIAM. How? All say James Burbage runs the best theatre troupe in England.

BURBAGE. *James?* James is my father. I'm Dick. *(Will stifles a laugh.)* Something funny?

WILL. Only a mistake of identity. You are but players, right?

BURBAGE. In the present economic climate, we've diversified our first folio. Hard to make living amidst Black Death.

WILL. Hence the coffin jobs.

BURBAGE. Family side hustle. However, while a Burbage toils artlessly for trade. I trade toil for art as a Dick. *(Thinks.)* That? Sounded so better in my head. Besides, there're more pressing concerns, Blackbird. We're down to our last copper from the Marlowe play. Which means unless we start collecting outstanding payment from the recently deceased. It's done.

WILL. What's done?

BURBAGE. My livelihood. Will to live. Take your pick.

WILL. Perhaps I could help. My plays are//

BURBAGE. Useless without a stage.

WILL. Try zoom?

BURBAGE. Where to?

WILL. A patron?

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BURBAGE. Who's in arts management here? Don't tell me how to fundraise. *(Will pulls parchment from his doublet.)* Our theatre does not accept submissions at present.

WILL. Your theatre is literally a fund-less funeral home.

BURBAGE. Yea. There are standards. Where's your cover letter?

WILL. Huh//

BURBAGE. Statement of purpose?

WILL. Fame 'n fortune. Though order's unimportant.

BURBAGE. Doesn't quite align with our mission statement.

WILL. Just read it for futtock's sake! It's traditional.

BURBAGE. Punters do love traditional. Means they're not bothered by any pesky new ideas. Funny? *(Will presses the papers on Burbage. He reads the title page.)* *Comedy of Errors?*

WILL. Laugh-a-minute.

BURBAGE. I'll be sure to time it. Give us seven to fourteen working days. *(Will does not move.)* You can go now. *(Will starts an exit.)* Oi, Blackbird. Where you from?

WILL. Wrong question.

BURBAGE. Pardon?

WILL. Ask how far I'll go. *(Will exits. With nary a glance, Burbage tosses the papers into an empty coffin before exiting into the interior. End of Scene.)*

SCENE 3

Two weeks later to date. Exterior of the Burbage family workshop, Cripplegate. Hammers rap a warning. Death appears. It pulls out the Punch puppet now with a Judy from deep within its robes. The puppets mime a show. One pretentious display where Punch is beaten by Judy. Death provides an oddly muted chorus for all action. At its climax, Punch is brutally murdered by Judy. The entire thing is cringle-inducingly senseless. Will watches from audience. A glittery pedant now added to his ensemble.

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WILL. I just don't get modern theatre. It's all so weird. (*Death and the puppets bow their heads.*) Was that... That was the end? Do we clap now? No? I never know. (*Punch's head flies up. The puppet beckons to Will.*) Not audience participation. No one likes audience participation. Ever. Any takers? (*Looks around.*) Aren't you a sorrier sight than Job's knees. Fine, the things I do to humor the lot of you. (*Will moves to the playing space.*) Now what? (*Punch points to Will's pocket.*) Should have guessed money would be involved. (*Will pulls out a twee coin purse. Punch giggles.*) Come off. It holds a mistaken sentimentality. And all my coppers (*Will produces a coin. Punch shakes his wooden head. Will spreads his arms wide.*) Then what do you want? (*Without warning, the Judy puppet springs to life. It grabs Will's coin purse.*) OI! YOU THIEVING PUPPET! (*Just as quickly, Punch nabs the other copper. The scam complete, DEATH rushes off.*) Did you catch that? Death CHEATED me! Me! Hold up you yeasty miscreant! (*Will starts to exit as Liam, Pope, Kit, and Alex appear from the opposite side. The older fools intoxicated while the younger pair are shabbily disguised as WHORES for this bit. Kit supports a tipsy Pope. Liam carries a quietly comatose Alex. All but Alex sing "No Scrubs" in various keys.*)

ALL BUT WILL & ALEX. No! I don't want no scrub.

A scrub is a guy who can't get no love from me!

WILL. What's all this then?

LIAM. You heard the lady.

WILL. Wait. Those two identify as female?

POPE. For this bit at least.

KIT. (*Sings.*) Noooo. Scrruuubs.

LIAM. Afraid the lass has spoken. We shall brook no scrubs. Even you, Blackbird.

POPE. Blackbird? Still amongst the living?

LIAM. Make's a change.

WILL. What pray tell is a scrub?

LIAM. Does it matter?

WILL. Kinda the point.

KIT. Your point?

WILL. Wrong question. Their point.

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LIAM. Whose point?

WILL. Words.

POPE. Why is everything all the sudden pointy?

WILL. Words have definition. Meaning. Why else have 'em? So, a scrub is what?

KIT. Some guy.

WILL. Who?

KIT. Thinks he's fly.

POPE. Like a bird?

KIT. As in fine.

LIAM. (*Knowingly.*) Also known as a buster.

WILL. No! Not another noun. We need an action. To describe. Does what?

KIT. Or who?

WILL. Always one. Yes! Always 'claiming what he wants. And just sits on his//

LIAM. Broke arse!

WILL. Crude. But effective. What else? A scrub's checking on me. But his game is?

KIT. Super weak.

WILL. So, you know that he cannot reproach me.

KIT. Cause I'm all about class.

WILL. While he's all about trash. Can't get with his//

LIAM. DEADBEAT ARSE!

WILL. Again, with the buttocks?

LIAM. They formed the cornerstone to all doggerel, my boy. So?

KIT. (*Pointedly to Will.*) No. Wouldn't want to meet you nowhere.

WILL. (*Pointedly to Kit.*) No. Don't want none of your time. (*Starts to sing.*) And no. I don't want no scrub. A scrub is a guy who can't get no love from me.

ALL BUT ALEX. (*Singing.*) Hanging out the passenger side of his best friend's ride. Tryin' to holler at me.

WILL. A scrub's some bum-bailey! No. Better. He's a DICK! Yes! Need to write this down. (*Will digs paper, plus quill from his doublet. Pulls out a chain with a large pendant. He dips the quill in the repurposed bubble necklace. Scrawls down the lyrics.*)

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POPE. Whatcha doing?

WILL. Building my vocabulary.

KIT. But it's not your word.

WILL. Is now.

KIT. Aren't you the magpie.

WILL. At your service.

KIT. Try your own. *(Will writes. The rest grow bored. Liam drapes a still-unresponsive Alex across a coffin while Kit dumps Pope on the ground. The fool snores softly. Hitching up his gown, Kit extracts his cards for dirty solitaire.)*

WILL. Speaking of dicks, where's Burbage?

LIAM. Devil himself knows. Probably gone, like my memory. Poof!

WILL. Perhaps if you didn't drink quite so much.

LIAM. District possibility. But I'd hate to risk it.

WILL. Risk what?

LIAM. Remembering. No good comes from that.

WILL. Puttock. You need to remember. To matter.

LIAM. Why? I recollect earworms most days. They don't matter.

WILL. Earworms?

LIAM. That wiggle of melody wormed deep into one's antebellum.

WILL. Oh. When a tune gets stuck in your head? Neat. How would you spell that?

LIAM. Spell what?

WILL. Earworm.

LIAM. Haven't the foggiest, dear boy. You brought it up. *(Will grins. He sounds out the word to write it down.)*

WILL. E-A-R-W-O-R-M. *Eh.* Let's add 'E' at the end. For posterity's sake. Noted.

LIAM. Blackbird. No memory has ever been made by a nose pressed against parchment.

WILL. Incorrect statement. There must be a record. How else do you tell the tale?

LIAM. Depends. Do you wish to retell or rewrite?

WILL. Not following.

LIAM. *(As he crosses over to a coffin.)* Take Burbage.

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WILL. No thank you.

LIAM. On this in-celestial plain, you'll find no greater player. Even amongst a family containing their multitudes. Yet ever since my salad days, Dick performs for an audience of one. *His father.* Yet James is as rigid as the boards he builds. That man fixtured'n'fitted all London theatrics.

WILL. Classic. Daddy issues. Then why'd he gift a theatre to his son?

LIAM. He didn't. James shuttered it. Saw no point in non-profit 'especially in a plague year. Such is a son's lack of business acne to drive the father's distraction. Pray tell. Once, James sent the lad to summer a season in the low countries. Dick went off, halfcocked per usual. Devised a grand European tour of new works.

WILL. Why? Punters love traditional.

LIAM. Precisely. I did some two-step with a schnauzer. No matter, no money in it. No one watched, not one remembered. Then halfway through the tour, we were forced to eat the dog. A blessing in disguise.

WILL. How?

LIAM. *(Lowering himself into the coffin.)* He added nothing to the act. And I never much cared for how his dog eyes judged me for not being house-broken.

WILL. Is there a point in this tale?

LIAM. Yea. Now? Burbage recalls only triumph recounting that tour. Recollects none of the disappointment. Or hound's gristle. Now after so much time has passed, who can expect to know what truly occurred?

WILL. *(Liam sinks from sight. Will scoots over to the coffin.)* What do you think Burbage expected? Fame, fortune? To be remembered by all ages?

LIAM. *(His head reappears.)* When?

WILL. When you toured the low countries.

LIAM. I toured the low countries? Unlikely. They eat dog there. *(Liam disappears. Unsatisfied, Will cast his gaze out. It falls to the teens. Stuffing all papers away, Will straightens his pendant. Kit notes the action.)*

KIT. Biatch please.

WILL. But I'm bedazzled!

KIT. I should//

WILL. Look to your lady. Yet to see her draw breathe.

EAT CROW

KIT. *(As he places a palm to Alex's neck.)* She's dead. *(The mood shifts to somber. The fools resurrected themselves. Will starts the sign of cross. Decides not. Brushes imaginary lint off his brooch instead. Kit gathers Alex up for a big dramatic moment.)* Out, out. O, briefest of candles. Woe to the nimblest of shadows. A mere dancer in the dark. One total eclipse of this heart. Every rose has its thorn. Yet we don't need another hero for everything I do? I do it for you. More than words, near or far. Where're you are. Mine heart will go on. WHY? YE GODS! WHY? NO! *(The boy shakes Alex in grief. The movement dislodges a tiny slivery object from his gown. The velvet ankh necklace clatters to floor.)* Is that my choker? Oi! Did you pinch my new choker? Thieving' moppet! I nicked that from Minglin' Judy fair and square. *(Kit shakes the corpse again. In real anger.)* Don't you dare steal what I've rightfully stolen! What ho! Answer me.

ALEX. *(Through theatrical rigor mortis.)* Can't. Dead.

KIT. ANSWER ME!

ALEX. *Shhh.* The dead don't speak.

KIT. Nuts to that. I'm gonna to kill you!

ALEX. So scared. *(He makes a gasping sound.)* No wait. Just my death rattle.

(With eyes still closed, the teen beautifully swoons away from Kit onto Pope. The fool buckles immediately under his weight, collapsing into Liam. Kit lunges at the boy. Chaos ensues over the following dialogue, while Burbage enters from the interior.)

POPE. MY BODKINS//

LIAM. MY ARSE//

BURBAGE. MY GODS//

WILL. MY SCRUB! *(He sings.)* Still live at home with your daddy. Oh yes son, I'm talking to//

BURBAGE. You, again. What, in the nine circles of hell, is a scrub?

WILL. *(Inhales for the following freestyle rap. He's oddly good at it.)*

If you never spatially expand your horizon/
That leaves ya all lower class, never rising/
'Cause to satisfy with something spectacular/
Don't be surprised when I shake up the vernacular/
Whether scrub, physician or clinician/

EAT CROW

Can't detect an acquisition without an expedition/
Fore we all travel that road to perdition/
Now so if you really want to know/
How to keep moving from plain status to quo/
Stop behaving worse than some common ho/
Else you'll stay stuck, tuck in Thames muck/
As history marches straight past/
Yer sorry arse, gonna grab that cash/
Gotta charting the flow/
Blowing up a celestial sensation from the un---(*Catching Burbage's
expression, he dries.*) ...No?

BURBAGE. What was said about ad-libs//

WILL. You said//

BURBAGE. I said//

WILL. You promised we'd workshop it. And where are we?

BURBAGE. The globe? London. (*Will shake his head.*) Cripplegate?

WILL. Better. (*Gestures broadly.*)

BURBAGE. ... my workshop?

LIAM. Your workshop//

POPE. Your workshop// (*The fools dissolve into giggles.*)

BURBAGE. (*He roughly rubs the bridge of his nose. To the darkness.*)
Witness my dealings. These are the jokes, folks. (*Pope joins him to stare
out into the abyss. Opens his mouth.*) A lone word. Merely one. I dare you.
(*Pope decides not. Withdraws.*) Return your ladies, gentle sirs. Sure their
hour's almost up.

LIAM. But//

BURBAGE. No buts, Liam. Especially yours. (*Liam and Kit exit. Pope
attempts to drag a still-dead Alex in the same direction with increasingly
difficulty. Burbage exhales.*)

BURBAGE. No rush. We can wait.

WILL. Such a thing is dedication.

BURBAGE. There's such a thing as *milking a bit*.

WILL. I meant the lady.

BURBAGE. More drama than queen, says me.

WILL. Not your preference then?

EAT CROW

BURBAGE. (*Snorts. No.*) Care to say the same? (*Will is again preoccupied by the pretend lint on his brooch. Liam reappears. He scoops up Alex single-handed.*)

POPE. I see, I see. Gotta bend at the ol' knees.

BURBAGE. Take yer exit. By Lucifer's lip- ring you've earned it. (*The fools exit with Alex. A beat.*)

WILL. Any feedback?

BURBAGE. On...

WILL. The script//

BURBAGE. *Oh.* The script// (*Another silence.*)

WILL. You did read it?

BURBAGE. When in arts management//

WILL. You didn't read it//

BURBAGE. Many, many items pass through my hands. My head, mine heart//

WILL. Didn't even *look* at it//

BURBAGE. Never. I though it...

WILL. What? Funny, clever?

BURBAGE. Convolutud.

WILL. No call for contrition. You wanted a comedy.

BURBAGE. Blackbird. Times are rough. Theatricals need an edge. Like Marlowe.

WILL. Who's dead.

BURBAGE. Who is no longer available. Shame, 'cause he was modern.

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