

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S SCENE

The waiter placed two tankards of sack before them.

“To your very good health, sir,” Robert said, lifting his pewter mug.

“And to yours, good sir,” Phillip replied, taking a hearty swig of amber liquid.

Robert craned his neck, searching the candlelit tavern.

“And where is our esteemed friend, Christopher?” he asked. “Was he not privy to our our rendezvous?”

“I did foretell him of it,” Philip said, “I’m quite astonished by his unpunctuality. T’isn’t like him.”

“No, forsooth,” Robert said.

“How now!” Christopher exclaimed, joining their table and silently motioning to the waiter for another tankard.

“Good Christopher,” Phillip said, “do explain your tardiness.”

“My hearty apologies,” he replied, taking his seat, “but I found myself waylaid in the street by that crashing bore, Billy.”

“Zounds!” Robert exclaimed, “thou didst not tell him you were hither bound, I hope?”

“Of course not. Dost thou think me sodden-witted?”

“Forsooth, I was truly afeard,” Phillip said, wiping his brow theatrically.

“I truly cans’t abide that pretentious ass,” Robert said.

“So pretentious,” Phillip agreed.

“And to think that he fancies himself a *playwright*,” Christopher said. “Romeo and — what is it again?”

“Juliet,” Robert said through his tankard.

“Rubbish,” Christoper said. “Idle-headed dross.”

“And those *sonnets*,” Phillip said. “Okay, we get it. You’re gay.”

“I’ll alert the press,” Robert smirked.

““To be or not to be, that is the question,”” Christopher quoted. “No, the *question* is, how can you suck so hard?”

“Parting is such sweet sorrow? Not if *you’re* the one leaving, because, news flash: you *suck*,” said Robert.

”Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more,”” said Phillip.

They lay silent for a moment.

“That one’s pretty good, actually,” Robert said.

“Oh *shit*,” Christopher exclaimed, lowering his voice to a whisper. “*He’s here.*”

Billy suddenly materialized at their table like an apparition. “How now, good sirs! Are we all met? Good Christopher. When we passed in the lane, not a quarter hour ago, you claimed an appointment at the dentist’s.”

“Yes, yes...” Christopher faltered, “I was indeed headed thither, but apparently he’s come down with a touch of plague.”

“Thus pour the stars down *plagues* for perjury,” Billy said, as Phillip and Christopher exchanged a look of confusion. “May I?”

“Uh... of course,” Robert said, motioning to an empty seat.

“Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides, I suppose,” said Billy.

“Excuse me?” Christopher said.

“I’m just saying that the tongues of men are full of deceits; what could possibly be more manifest than falsehood and treachery?”

“Look. I had a dentist’s appointment. A crown lengthening, in fact.”

“A *crown*, you say? Thou shouldst come like a fury, *crown’d* with snakes! Ah villain, thou will betray me, and get a thousand *crowns* of the King by

carrying my head to him, but I'll make thee eat like an ostrich, and swallow my sword like a great pin, ere thou and I part! ”

Christopher looked to the others at the table. “Seriously, Does anybody have any idea what he’s talking about?”

“Pretty sure he’s pissed off about something,” Phillip said.

Billy rose to his feet, indignant. “Farewell, and be proud of thy victory. Tell Kent from me, she hath lost her best man —“

“Who the hell is Kent?”

“— and exhort all the world to be cowards, for I, that never fear’d any, am vanquished by famine, not by valor.”

They watched him as he stomped off, back into the high street.

Christopher turned to the others. “So, is he saying he’s hungry, or what?”

“Seriously,” Robert said, “Can’t understand a goddam word.”

“Me neither.”

“Thinks he’s so great,” Christopher said.

“Well, said Phillip, “Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon them.”

“So true,” said Christopher. “Who said that?”

Philip let out a sigh.

“Billy.”