

Shakespeare and the Shoemaker

In Elizabethan England, William Shakespeare is a successful writer. But not everyone is a fan of his work. His latest play, *Romeo and Juliet*, has made his enemies angry and it may not make it to the stage. Little does he know that help is at hand from an ordinary shoemaker with an extraordinary talent.

Level 1	A1 > A1+
Level 2	A1+ > A2
Level 3	A2
Level 4	A2 > A2+

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The Black Cab 

Shakespeare and the Shoemaker

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First published - April 2020

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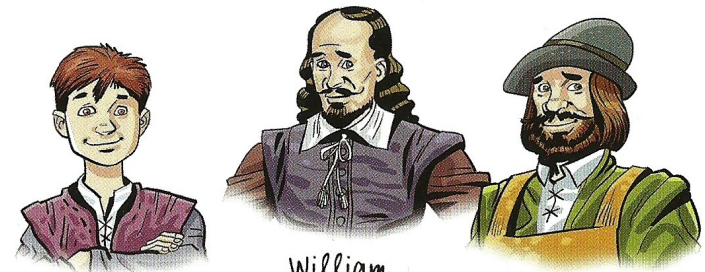
54, rue de Clichy 75009 Paris (France)

Registration of copyright : March 2020

Printed in France by La Centrale de Lens (Lens)

ISBN 979-10-91074-30-8

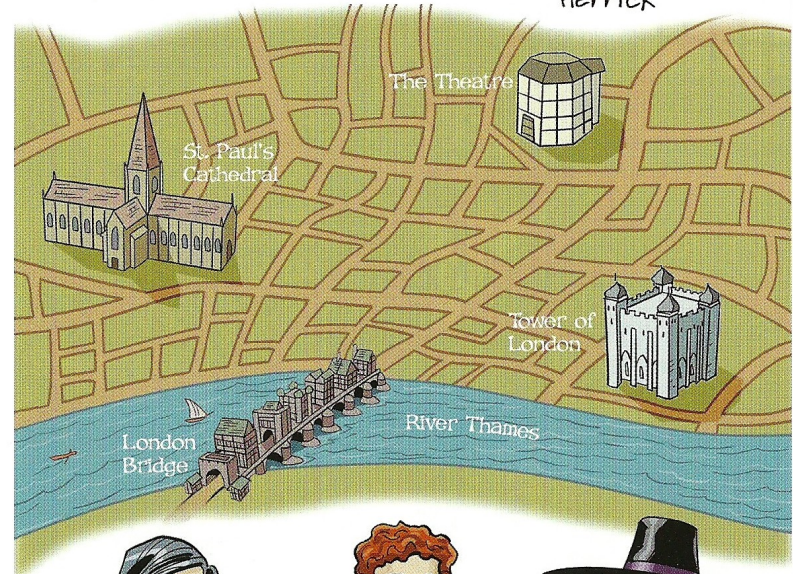
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Edmund

William
Shakespeare

Robert
Herrick



Richard
Greenaway



John
Benson



Dame
Hardcastle

Chapter 1 - London, 1595

Edmund never knew his parents. He grew up in an **orphanage** in London where he learned to read and write. Then, when he was 13, he was **apprenticed** to a shoemaker, Robert Herrick.



Edmund was lucky. Herrick was a kind man. He was a widower and didn't have any children of his own. He treated Edmund like his own son. Edmund was very bright and he had one very exceptional quality: a remarkable memory.

orphanage (n.) a home for children without parents
apprentice (n., v.) an apprentice is a young person who is learning a specific job from an older, experienced person

Master Herrick made excellent shoes but he was very **absent-minded** and disorganised. So he depended on Edmund who always knew, for example, how much each customer had to pay or if Herrick needed to order more **leather**. What's more, Herrick was getting old and couldn't walk very far, so it was Edmund who **ran all the errands**. From all points of view, Edmund was the ideal apprentice.

Edmund enjoyed his work but, in his heart, he knew he didn't want to spend all his life as a shoemaker: he wanted to be an actor. Herrick's shop was only half a mile from The Theatre in Shoreditch, just outside the London wall and, when Edmund had **an afternoon off** – which was not very often – he went to see a play. Herrick didn't pay Edmund very much, but it only cost a penny to stand in the courtyard of the theatre and watch the play. And, when he got back home, he often **entertained** Herrick with scenes from the play, playing all the characters. Herrick was amazed that Edmund could memorise everything but he also realised that Edmund was very talented and that, one day, he was going to leave him and become an actor.



- 6 **absent-minded** (adj.) If you are absent-minded, you often forget things
leather (n.) the skin of an animal used for clothes, shoes or bags

- run errands** to take messages, go shopping, etc
an afternoon off an afternoon when you don't have to work
entertain (v.) to amuse, to give pleasure to

Chapter 2 - A famous customer

It was Monday morning and Edmund was working hard. He didn't hear the shop door open.

"Good morning," said a man's voice.

Edmund looked up. He recognised the man immediately.

"Master Shakespeare!" exclaimed Edmund.

"You know me?" asked the man.

"Oh yes, sir. I mean, I know you because you're in every play at The Theatre and you write some of the plays too."

"Ah, so you come to The Theatre."

"Almost every week, sir. I love it. One day, I'm going to be an actor, just like you. That last play of yours – it was so funny when..."

"Yes, yes, young man. But I'm not here to talk about plays."

"Oh, of course not. Sorry, sir. What can I do for you?"

"Is Master Herrick here? I need a new pair of shoes."

"Yes, sir. He's in the back room. Master Herrick! Customer!" he called.

Herrick was delighted to have such a famous customer. It took about half an hour to measure Shakespeare's feet and to decide on the style and the leather.

"When will they be ready, Master Herrick?"

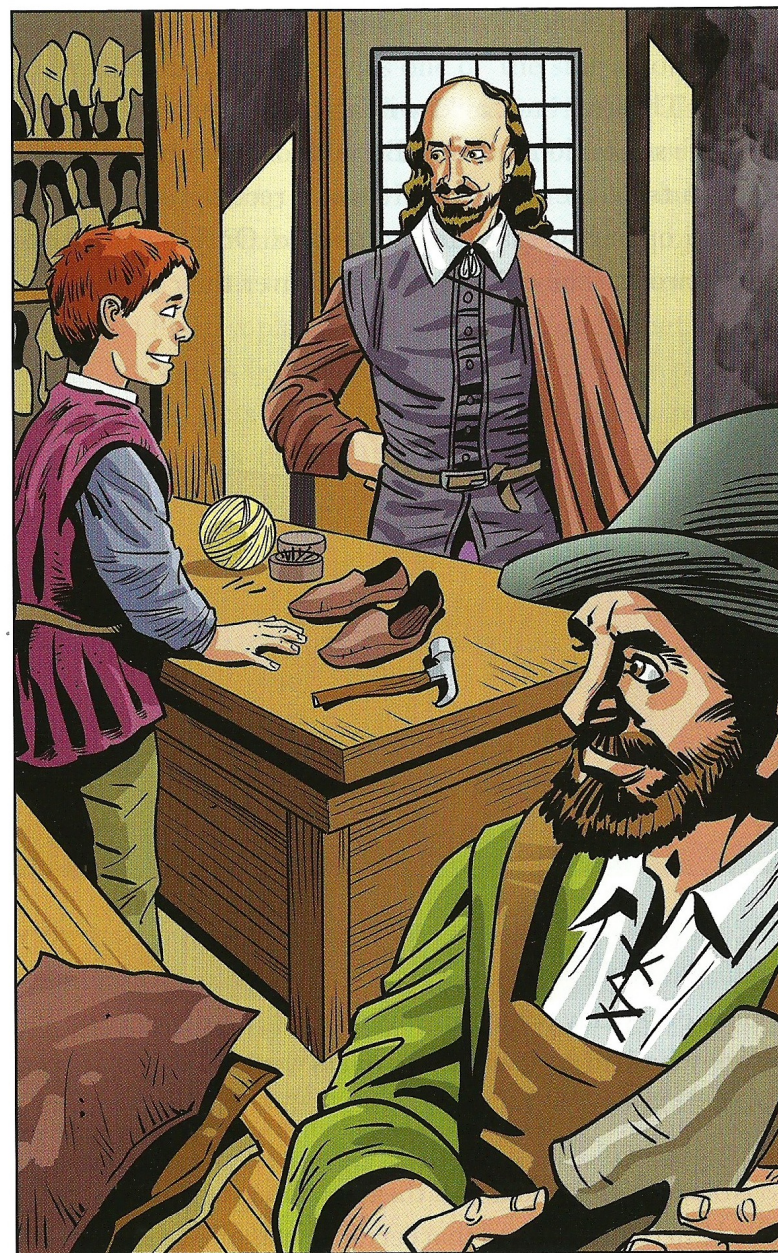
"Will Friday be all right, sir? About midday?"

"Yes, that's perfect. Can you **deliver** them to the theatre?"

"Yes, of course. Edmund will bring them."

"Good." Shakespeare turned to Edmund. "Come in by the **stage door**. It's always open. Don't be late."

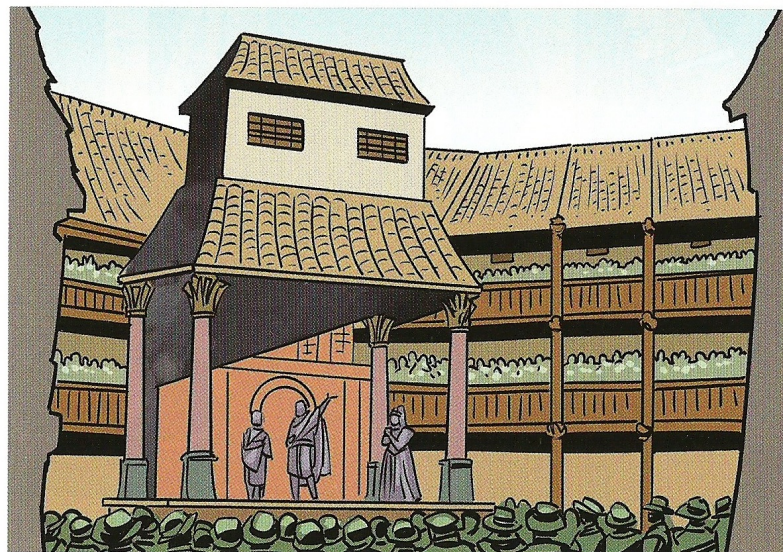
8 **deliver (v.)** If you buy something on the Internet, someone will deliver it to your house.



stage door (n.) The stage is where the actors perform. The back door of a theatre, used by the people who work in the theatre, is the stage door.

Chapter 3 - The Theatre

The Theatre – not a very imaginative name! – was one of the first London theatres. Because of city regulations, it stood outside the city walls. It was a rectangular building with an open courtyard in the middle. Only the audience sitting around the **edges** had a roof over their heads.



Performances took place in the afternoon and were very popular with both rich and poor. There was a different play almost every day, which meant a lot of hard work for the actors who had to learn their **parts** very quickly. Women weren't allowed to be actors, so all the female parts were played by boys.

Not everyone liked the theatre, though. Some people, called Puritans, believed that certain types of entertainment

– like dancing and play-acting – were **ungodly**.

William Shakespeare was one of the star actors of the troupe that performed at The Theatre. He was also their star **playwright** and, at that moment, all the actors in the troupe were waiting impatiently for him to finish his new play. Although Shakespeare liked to keep the subjects of his plays a secret until they were finished, a few people knew that his new play was about Romeo and Juliet. All the actors knew this because they already had their parts for the first four Acts and most of Act V. The only part that was missing was the final scene – when Romeo believes that Juliet is dead and takes poison...



*Romeo and Juliet live in Verona, in Italy. They fall in love but their families are enemies so they can't marry. Juliet has a plan: she will take a drug which gives the appearance of death. Her family will believe she is dead and she will be able to leave Verona secretly and live with Romeo. Unfortunately, Romeo thinks she really is dead. At the end of the play, he comes to the **crypt** where she is lying and drinks a deadly poison. Juliet then wakes up and finds Romeo dead. She then kills herself with a **dagger**.*

- 10 **edge (n.)** the outside limit of something
part (n.) (here) role in a play or a film
ungodly (adj.) against the rules made by God

- playwright (n.)** a person who writes plays
crypt (n.) a room underneath a church where people are buried
dagger (n.) a sort of knife

Chapter 4 - Shakespeare has visitors

In the small room at the theatre where he often worked, which was called the office, Shakespeare put down his pen. The play was finished, at last. He smiled to himself. People thought of him as a writer of comedies, but this play had a tragic ending. It was very sad, but he knew it was good – very good – and he **sighed** with satisfaction. Suddenly, there was a knock at the door.

“Come in!”

It was Edmund with Shakespeare’s new shoes, wrapped in a piece of **cloth**.

“Ah, young Edmund. Let me have a look at the shoes.”

However, before he could open the parcel, they heard loud voices outside.

“I was here first, Benson!” said one man.

“I don’t care, Greenaway. My business is extremely urgent!” said another.

“Sit down, Edmund,” said Shakespeare. “I won’t be long.”

Shakespeare opened the door and went into the corridor outside. Two men were there. One was John Benson, an actor; the other was Richard Greenaway, a young playwright.

“What’s going on here?” asked Shakespeare.

“You are a thief, Shakespeare!” shouted Greenaway. “A common thief!”

“What are you talking about, Greenaway?” asked Shakespeare.

“Your new play – it’s *Romeo and Juliet*, isn’t it?”

“Yes, but...”

“How did you find out?”

“Find out what?”

“That I was writing a play about the same story!”

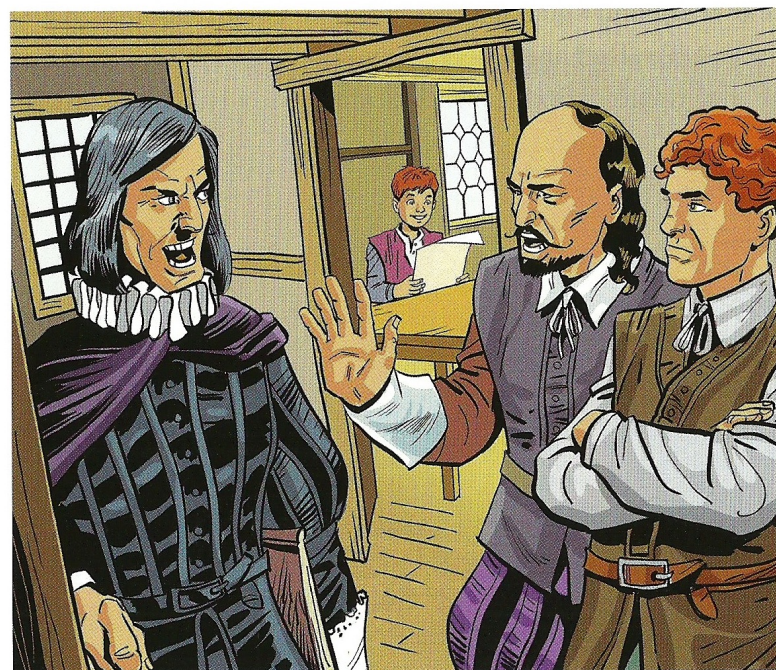
“I’m sorry, Greenaway, I had no idea.”

“No idea? You stole my idea!”

“Calm down, man, and listen. I started writing my play years ago. I read the story in a book. I didn’t take the idea from you!”

“I don’t believe you, Shakespeare. You’ll pay for this!”

Greenaway **stormed out**, leaving Shakespeare alone in the **corridor** with John Benson.



"What can I do for you, John?" asked Shakespeare.

"It's about the part you gave me in your new play, Will. It's only a few lines!"

"I'm sorry, John, but..."

"It's not good enough. Either you give me a bigger part or I leave the troupe," said John, aggressively.

"I can't do that, John. You're a comic actor. You make people laugh. But this new play isn't a comedy."

"But why do we have to do your play? Why can't we do a comedy? I know a good comedy we could do!"

"People like my plays, John. We have to please our audiences. And I think they're really going to like this one."

"Well, I don't! I think it's **rubbish**! I think you should **tear it up** and start again!"

Just like Richard Greenaway, John Benson stormed out of the theatre. Shakespeare walked slowly back into the office.

Chapter 5 - The final visitor

Edmund was reading the last scene from *Romeo and Juliet*. He looked up when Shakespeare came in.

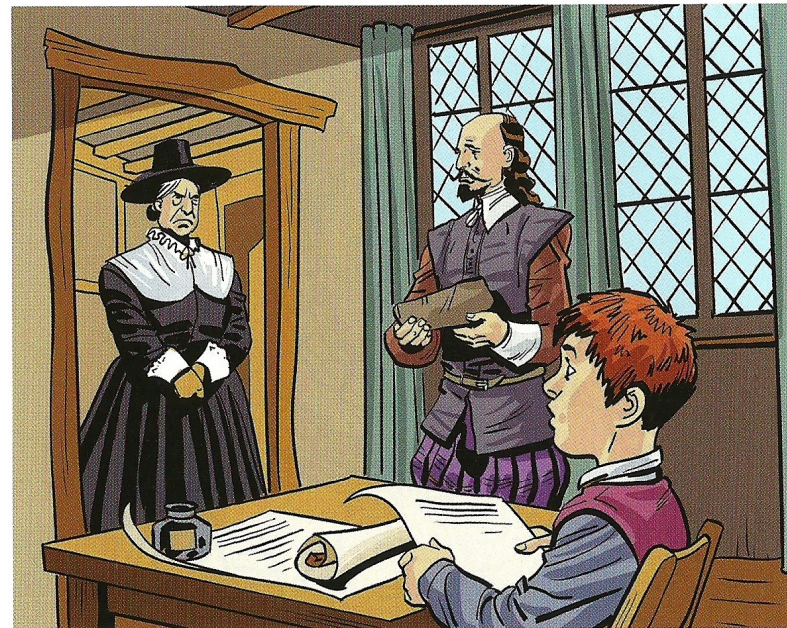
"It's wonderful, sir. The words are beautiful!"

"So you can read, Edmund?"

"Yes, sir. Read and write. But I don't understand everything... why did Romeo take the poison? And why did Juliet...?"

"Come and see the play, and you'll find out, Edmund," said Shakespeare, laughing. "And now let's see the shoes."

But once again, he was interrupted. This time, a woman appeared at the door. She wore a black dress with a white collar and a big black hat. She looked very serious.



"Master Shakespeare, I am..."

"I know who you are, Dame Hardcastle. You stand outside the theatre every day and tell people that my plays are the work of the **devil**. I'm sorry, but you are not welcome here."

"Welcome or not, I am here to **warn** you that, if you don't close this theatre today, I will make sure that you don't put on any more plays."

"And how will you do that?"

"I have friends, Master Shakespeare, important friends. They will stop at nothing to close your theatre."

"Are you **threatening** me, madam?"

"I am just warning you, sir. Do as I ask or you will regret it."



Queen Elizabeth I

- 16 **devil** (n.) an evil force or person, the opposite of God
warn (v.) to inform someone in advance of a possible danger
threaten (n.) to menace, to intimidate

Dame Hardcastle turned and walked away. Shakespeare came back to Edmund.

"Can she really close the theatre, sir?" asked Edmund.

"No, of course not, Edmund. Puritans like her make a lot of noise and have some influential friends, but the Queen **can't stand** them – the Queen loves the theatre, and while she is **on the throne**, I don't think the Puritans will **get their way**. Now! The shoes!"

Shakespeare unwrapped the shoes and cried, "But these aren't mine!"

Edmund looked at them. It was true; the shoes were for another customer.

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry, sir. Master Herrick gave me the wrong parcel!"

"Never mind. Go and get the right shoes and bring them back after the performance."

"Yes, sir. And sir..."

"Yes?"

"I can't wait to see *Romeo and Juliet*!"

- can't stand** (v.) If you can't stand something, you hate it!
get their way to obtain what they want
be on the throne A King or a Queen sits on a throne.

Chapter 6 - The fire

The performance was a great success that afternoon. As the audience left the theatre, the actors changed out of their costumes. Suddenly, one of the actors said, "I can smell smoke."

"I can see smoke!" said another. "It's coming from the office!"

Everyone ran to the office. Shakespeare was the first to get there. Thick white smoke was coming from under the door. He opened it and saw that the room was full of smoke and flames. The desk was on fire.

"Quickly! Water! Get water!"



Twenty minutes later, the fire was out but the desk was completely black. On top of it there was a pile of **ashes**. Shakespeare was in tears.

"The play," he cried. "The last scene of the play. It was here. The only copy."

One of the troupe tried to comfort him. "Don't worry, Will. We all have our parts for the rest of the play and you can easily write the last scene again, can't you?"

"Easily? Easily? It took me months to get all the words exactly right. It'll take days, maybe weeks to do it again. Oh, how did this happen? Is there nothing left at all?"

He searched the ashes. Then a cry came from one of the boy actors:

"Look, Will, under the desk!"

Under the desk there were some tiny pieces of paper, untouched by the fire. Will picked them up.

"Yes, these pieces come from one of the pages I wrote, I'm sure. But they're **useless**. I can't... Wait a minute." Will paused. "Why is the paper in tiny pieces? The paper isn't burned so the fire didn't touch it. There's only one explanation: someone tore the paper up before the fire started and some of the pieces fell on the floor. This fire wasn't an accident."

Chapter 7 - Three suspects

When Edmund arrived at the theatre a few minutes later, he found Shakespeare sitting in the corridor with his head in his hands. All around him, the actors were talking loudly about the fire, but Shakespeare wasn't listening.

"What's happening, sir?" asked Edmund. "Everyone's talking about a fire."

"It's a disaster, Edmund," said Shakespeare. "Someone started a fire in the office and destroyed the final scene of *Romeo and Juliet*. They tore up the pages and then set fire to them. How could anyone do that?"

Edmund thought for a moment.



"Well, sir. When I was here this morning, I saw three people who didn't like your plays, or didn't like *Romeo and Juliet* in particular."

"You mean you think one of them is responsible?"

"It seems probable, sir."

"You know, I think you're right. And the stage door is always open. Anyone can come in during a performance and no one will see them because the actors are on stage."

"What about Master Benson, sir? He was on stage, surely. Perhaps we can eliminate him?"

"He wasn't on stage all the time," said Shakespeare. "No, I think we definitely have three suspects. We must find a **constable** or a **magistrate** and ask them to find out which of the three is **guilty**."

"Yes, sir, call a constable, but call him tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?"

"Yes. I have an idea – but you must **trust** me."

An hour later, three messenger boys delivered letters to the houses of John Benson, Richard Greenaway and Dame Hardcastle. Each letter was the same. It was an invitation:



The suspects were all very pleased: perhaps Master Shakespeare was changing his mind...

Chapter 8 - Constable Godberry

"Why can't you tell me what you're going to do?" Shakespeare asked Edmund next morning at the theatre.

"I want to surprise you, sir," said Edmund.

"Well, I hope you know what you're doing."

"Just play your part, sir, and I'll play mine."

"Come in, all of you," said Shakespeare when the three suspects arrived. "We can't use the office because there was a fire here yesterday, so let's all sit on the stage."

"A fire?" said Greenaway. "Was it serious?"

"Very," said Benson. "Will's last scene of *Romeo and Juliet* was destroyed."

"The fires of **Heaven** will always destroy the devil's work," muttered Dame Hardcastle.

"I'm afraid, Dame Hardcastle, that the fire didn't come from heaven this time. It was started by a human. A person who wanted to **do me harm** or do the theatre harm."

"What are you suggesting, Master Shakespeare?" asked Greenaway.

"I invited you all here this morning because I believe one of you started the fire," declared Shakespeare.

There was an explosion of anger from the three suspects.

"How dare you!" said Dame Hardcastle, getting up from her chair. "I'm not staying to listen to this."

"If you leave, madam," said Shakespeare, "it will look as if you are the guilty person."

"That's ridiculous!"

"No, he's right," said Benson. "All right, Will. How are you going to prove that one of us did it?"

"Not me," said Shakespeare. "There is a constable here who will find out the truth. Come in, Constable Godberry!"



A bearded man dressed as a constable came on to the stage. He was holding several **sheets** of paper in his hand.

"Good morning," he said in a deep voice. "As you know, a fire destroyed some papers in Master Shakespeare's office yesterday. But, before I talk about that, I have some

good news for you, Master Shakespeare. I searched the office again this morning and found several pages of your **manuscript** that survived the fire."

Constable Godberry held up the sheets of paper, **triumphantly**. Shakespeare was open-mouthed.

"But..." he started, but couldn't go on.

"I don't understand," said Benson, "I went into the office after the fire yesterday and there was nothing but ashes on the desk!"

"Yes, Constable, this is **absurd**," said Shakespeare. "Those pages can't be from my manuscript."

"I think I can prove it, sir," said Godberry. He put the first page close to his face and began to read:

'O true apothecary!

Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a kiss I die.'

Shakespeare was **astounded**.

"Those are my words! Yes, that is my manuscript!"

"It can't be," shouted Greenaway, "I tore up all the pages into tiny pieces before..." He stopped suddenly.

"Before what, Master Greenaway?" asked Godberry, looking directly at Greenaway.

Greenaway realised his mistake – but too late.

"I... I... I don't know what to say," he said.

"You can tell it all to my colleague," said Godberry. He raised one hand, clicked his fingers, and another constable walked on to the stage.

"Come with me, sir," said the new constable to Greenaway. He took him by the arm and led him out of the theatre.



Chapter 9 - How did you do it?

John Benson and Dame Hardcastle left. Constable Godberry was silent for a few seconds. Then he removed his beard and his hat. It was, of course, Edmund.

"Well done!" said Shakespeare, laughing. "It was a clever **trap** and Greenaway fell into it. But where did you find my manuscript? There were no copies and I'm sure the fire destroyed it. Let me see it!"

Edmund gave the sheets of paper to Shakespeare.

"This isn't my manuscript!" said Shakespeare. "They're just **blank** sheets of paper! But...you read my words! We all heard you!"



trap (n.) a trick to make someone do something they don't intend to do

blank (adj.) with no writing on

"I wasn't reading the words, Master Shakespeare; I was remembering them. You see, I read your manuscript while you were talking to your visitors this morning, and I memorised it."

"What? I don't believe it!"

"It's true. So you won't have to rewrite the last scene after all. It's all here in my head." Edmund had a big smile on his face.

"You are a remarkable young man, Edmund. And, what's more, you were perfect as Constable Godberry. When can you start?"

"Sorry?"

"I'm offering you a job, Edmund. You want to be an actor, don't you?"



An older Edmund playing Hamlet

WORD LIST

absent-minded (adj.)	If you are absent-minded, you often forget things.
absurd (adj.)	without any meaning
an afternoon off	an afternoon when you don't have to work
apprentice (n., v.)	an apprentice is a young person who is learning a specific job from an older, experienced person
ashes (n.)	what is left of wood, paper or coal after a fire
astounded (adj.)	extremely surprised
be on the throne	A King or a Queen sits on a throne.
blank (adj.)	with no writing on
bright (adj.)	clever, intelligent, quick to learn
can't stand (v.)	If you can't stand something, you hate it!
cloth (n.)	material (cotton, wool, etc.)
constable (n.)	in the 16th century, a sort of policeman
corridor (n.)	a passage between two rooms, for example
crypt (n.)	a room underneath a church where people are buried
dagger (n.)	a sort of knife
deliver (v.)	If you buy something on the Internet, someone will deliver it to your house.
devil (n.)	an evil force or person, the opposite of God
do harm to hurt,	to cause problems for
edge (n.)	the outside limit of something
entertain (v.)	to amuse, to give pleasure to
get their way	to obtain what they want
guilty (adj.)	responsible (for a crime)
Heaven (n.)	Paradise
leather (n.)	the skin of an animal (usually a cow) used for clothes, shoes or bags, for example
magistrate (n.)	a judge
manuscript (n.)	a text that someone wrote by hand
orphanage (n.)	a home for children without parents
part (n.)	(here) role in a play or a film
playwright (n.)	a person who writes plays
Puritan (n.)	The Puritans were a group of English Protestants in the 16th and 17th centuries who wanted to impose strict rules on people's lives.
rubbish (n.)	something with no value, something you throw away
run errands	to take messages, go shopping, etc.
sheet (n.)	A sheet of paper is a large piece of paper – a page.
sigh (v.)	When you sigh, you make a soft sound, like "Aaah".

WORD LIST

stage door (n.)	The stage is where the actors perform. The back door of a theatre, used by the people who work in the theatre, is the stage door.
storm out (v.)	to leave quickly and angrily
suspect (n.)	a person you think is responsible for a crime
tear up (v.)	to pull apart with force
threaten (n.)	to menace, to intimidate
trap (n.)	a trick to make someone do something they don't intend to do
triumphantly (adv.)	in a way that shows victory
trust (v.)	to have confidence in
ungodly (adj.)	against the rules made by God
useless (n.)	If something is useless, it doesn't work or is impossible to use.
warn (v.)	to inform someone in advance of a possible danger
widower (n.)	a man whose wife is dead