

## Scene Thirteen

*(The Rose Theatre. Rehearsals – day one.)*

FENNYMAN. Is this it?

HENSLOWE. Yes.

FENNYMAN. Is this a rehearsal?

HENSLOWE. Yes.

FENNYMAN. Is it always like this?

HENSLOWE. Yes.

FENNYMAN. Is it going well?

HENSLOWE. Very well.

FENNYMAN. But nothing seems to be happening.

HENSLOWE. Exactly. But it's all happening very well.

*(WILL comes on and hands RALPH his "part.")*

FENNYMAN. Who's that?

HENSLOWE. Nobody. The author.

FENNYMAN. If this doesn't work, Henslowe, you are forcemeat.

HENSLOWE. Will, Will! It starts well, but then it gets all long-faced. Where's the comedy, Will? Where's the dog? Do you think it's funny?

RALPH. I was a Pirate King, now I'm a Nurse. That's funny.

HENSLOWE. We are at least four acts short, Will.

WILL. We are short of any discernible acting talent – those that we have are over-parted ranters and stutterers who should be sent back to the stocks. Let's wait for Ned Alleyn. We can't even be sure we have a Romeo.

*(WEBSTER comes on.)*

Who are you?

WEBSTER. I'm Ethel, sir, the pirate's daughter.

WILL. *(to HENSLOWE)* I'm damned if he is!

HENSLOWE. I think he has potential.

WILL. This is a shambles.

HENSLOWE. I think we should get started.

WILL. Gentlemen! Good men all.

HENSLOWE. *(to FENNYMAN)* It is customary to make a little speech on the first day. It does no harm and the authors like it.

WILL. Firstly, gentlemen, I want to thank you all for coming here today. I am honoured to be working with such an extraordinary calibre of actor. Today we are about to embark upon a mysterious journey, a journey which—

FENNYMAN. I'll speak the speech.

WILL. I haven't quite finished.

FENNYMAN. Shut it! Now you listen to me, you dregs! Actors are ten a penny and I, Hugh Fennyman, hold your nuts in my hand so—

*(Noise from offstage. Suddenly, a group of ACTORS enter, headed by NED ALLEYN – a handsome, piratical figure with a big voice.)*

NED. Huzzah! I am returned!

FENNYMAN. Excuse me, I was speaking the speech.

NED. Silence, you dog. I hear there is a play for me.

FENNYMAN. Who are you, sir?

NED. Who am I? I am Hieronimo! I am Tamburlaine! I am Faustus! I am Barabas the Jew – oh yes, Master Will, and I was Henry the Sixth – several times. *(to FENNYMAN)* Who are you, sir?

FENNYMAN. I am the money.

NED. Then you may remain, as long as you remain silent. Congratulations, sir. Your investment is safe in the hands of...

ACTORS. Ned Alleyn!

NED. What is the play? What is my part?

WILL. We are in desperate want of a Mercutio, Ned, a young nobleman of Verona.

NED. Verona, again. And what is the title?

WILL. *Mercutio*.

NED. I will play him! Divide the rest betwixt the boys and watch how genius creates a legend.

WILL. (*handing out parts*) Master Pope! Master Phillips! Master Hemmings! Master Condell! Master Tooley! Master Wabash! Master Noll! Sam, my pretty one! Are you ready to fall in love again?

SAM. I am, Master Shakespeare.

WILL. But your voice...have they dropped?

SAM. No, no, a touch of cold.

FENNYMAN. Actually, Master Shakespeare, I saw his Tamburlaine. Wonderful.

WILL. Oh, yes...

FENNYMAN. Of course, it was mighty writing. There is no one quite like Marlowe.

WILL. No indeed. Mister Henslowe, you have your actors. Except for Thomas Kent. (*to WEBSTER*) Are you still here, boy?

WEBSTER. I was in one of your plays before. They cut my head off in *Titus Andronicus*. When I write plays they will be like *Titus*.

WILL. You liked it?

WEBSTER. No. But I like it when they cut heads off. And the daughter mutilated with knives. Plenty of blood. That's the only writing.

NED. Will...where is Mercutio?

WILL. I am saving my best for him. I leave the scene in your safe-keeping, Ned. Cut round – what's his name – Romeo, for now.

NED. Who?

WILL. Nobody. Mercutio's friend. (*turns to find KENT*)

Master Kent! I almost didn't recognise you.

HENSLOWE. Places, please.

NED. Gather around, gentlemen.

(*Enter BURBAGE.*)

BURBAGE. Shakespeare!

HENSLOWE. Oh God!

BURBAGE. You cur. I thought I'd find you here. Where's Ethel?

WILL. Who?

BURBAGE. The pirate's daughter I paid two sovereigns for... (*sees NED*) Mister Alleyn.

NED. Mister Burbage.

BURBAGE. The Prince of the Provinces.

NED. The Scourge of the Suburbs.

BURBAGE. Where is my play, Shakespeare? I have posterred half of Shoreditch and I haven't seen a single page.

WILL. They're coming, they're coming.

BURBAGE. If you've sold my play to Henslowe I will slice you nape to chops. What play is this, Alleyn?

NED. *Mercutio.*

HENSLOWE. Out of this theatre, you over-ripe ham. We are trying to rehearse.

BURBAGE. My play, Shakespeare, or I will do such things – I know not what they are – but they shall be the terrors of all Shoreditch.

(*Exit BURBAGE.*)

NED. ...they shall be the terrors of all Shoreditch...

HENSLOWE. Gentlemen. Romeo laments his Ethel.

WILL. May I, Mister Alleyn?