

Act 1, Scene 1

The Tower of London. A ribbon hangs across the stage.

Queen Elizabeth enters with mighty golden shears.

Queen: Citizens of Londowntown. I, your beloved Queen Elizabeth the First, Sovereign of England, Scotland, France for some reason, and that wee growth affectionately known as Wales - hereby proclaim the Tower of London... *open!*

She snippeth. Applause.

Queen: This great fortress hath alate been built by the late great builder, Lord Horton Fortressbuilder. Here, inside its thick stony walls, the royal jewels shall rest snugly forevermore. And thus kick we off a week's worth of royal birthday festivities, culminating in the premiere of a new family-friendly, musical-comedy: *Titus Andronicus*, by our own Master William Shakespeare! Come on up, William: say hello to the people.

Will: *(Joining her onstage, wittily)* Hello to the people.

Queen: Ha ha, so literal. Now I've asked Master Shakespeare, Londontown's preeminent author, to honour us tonight by inventing a new word. William?

Will nods, takes out a piece of parchment, and clears his throat.

Will: "Bedroom."

Queen: Huzzah! How like you muggles that?

The crowd goes berserk."Words! Words! Words!"

Queen: Thank you, Master Shakespeare. And as always, special thank you to our royal sponsor, Virgin Queen Mobile. We shall see you all at the theatre! Adieu!

Applause. The Queen and Will exit.

Torchlight. Enter Troy, a guard, carrying a halberd. He stops and whistles.

Troy: Zounds, them royal jewels sure is sumfin'. No trading goats or children for them, nosiree... Ah but whatchoo gabbing on for, Troy? Ain't nuffin you can do to get at those, locked away inside Lord Fortressbuilder's patented fortress. May as well be on the Sun, which orbits our planet...

A doorbell rings elaborately. Troy angles his halberd.

Troy: Stand and unfold yourself!

Delivery-Lad: *(Off)* Horse delivery for Troy.

Troy: Did you say *horse*?

Delivery-Lad: Ay? Horseback ribs, extra taters, turnip milkshake...

Troy: O riiight. God, I'm so high, I am!

He opens the door to accept the package. It's huge.

Troy: And here's for thee.

He tips him an egg.

Delivery-Lad: *(Exiting)* Bless thee, Master Troy!

Troy: Nuffin' like a horse delivery to sharpen the senses. In you come, horsey. Come in to Troy.

Ravenstartler bursts from the bag, a burlap sack over his head, straw sticking out from his hat. Birds caw in the distance.

Ravenstartler: 'Tis I, Ravenstartler!

Troy: One of Londontown's cadre of villains? Zounds! Thou shalt never get the royal jewels! I need this job.

He prepares to fight, but Ravenstartler blows some powder in his face. Troy freaks out.

Troy: Waaugh— Hobgoblins! Fairies a-pinching! Zounds, they're all over me!
Lord-a-mercy on your poor Troy!

Ravenstartler: And now to steal the jewel: the perfect crime to kick-start my spree!

The Knight of the Bat (Will Shakespeare) emerges from the shadows behind him, clad in black armour. A little, pointy goatee sticks out of his cowl.

Will: Not if I *start-kicking* you first.

He does.

Ravenstartler: Well, if 't isn't... *the Knight of the Bat!*

Will: When wast thou released from Bedlam?

Ravenstartler: 'Tis so overcrowded, no one noticed an old bag of straw being tossed out with the soiled bed linens...

Will: (*Darkly*) Gross.

Ravenstartler: The race hath begun, Sir Bat, but once I possess the crown jewels, Londontown's greatest weapon shall be mine, and all the world shall know the name RAVE—

Bat knees him in the stones. A visual punch caption is seen: "ZOUNDS!" Ravenstartler is out.

Will: Worry about those crown jewels instead.

Troy continues to hyperventilate.

Troy: Witches! Changelings! Other monsters!

Will: Alas, Ravenstartler's doused him with spooky powder. Luckily I know the cure...

He slaps Troy repeatedly in the face.

Troy: Commitment— O sir, me wits is restored! Bless thy medical knowledge— Lord above, 'tis thee... *the Knight of the Bat!*

Will: 'Tis I. Now must I away. Next time... pack a lunch, sirrah.

He pulls out his grappling hook.

Troy: Wait, I never thanked thee—

Will: I know. And 'tis very rude.

Troy looks down, ashamed. Bat scampers off. Troy looks back and realizes he's alone. He gasps.

Troy: He's gone!

Scene 2

A busy London street. Ragamuffins hawk newsparchment.

Ragamuffin: Exeunt, exeunt, read all about it! Freeman Fighter Foils Fancy Filching! Baddie Back in Bedlam! Alliteration: Always Amusing!

Two Londoners walk by with a Bat-pamphlet.

Londoner 1: He's so mysterious! Who could he be?

Londoner 2: I heard it's a Dutchman, what with all the flying.

Londoner 1: Nay, if you ask me, he's an extraterrestrial...

A rooftop. Judge Gourd-on-Thames puffs his pipe whilst angling a curious lantern in the air. Finally, he chuckles.

Judge: 'Twas afeard thou wouldn't'st come...

Will: (*Appearing*) Judge Gourd-On-Thames... Didst thou get my package?

Judge: You mean Ravenstartler? Ay, that waste of burlap is back under lock and key, covered top to tail in leeches.

Will: Good. Best let science restore his creepy brains. But there's one thing that perturbs me yet...

Judge: What might that be, Sir Bat?

Will: Ravenstartler said that a race hath begun to acquire a weapon that could destroy Londontown.

Judge: Yea, they always say shite like that...

Will: But 'twas something different about it this time. Something... *foreshadowy*?

Judge: Then do you some digging then into what this weapon might be. Meanwhile shall I go to the Bedlam Asylum, there to ensure all are present and accounted for amongst our gallery of *knaves*.

Will: Thanks. Just don't forget about... *thou knoweth whom*.

Judge Gourdon-Thames gets all nervous and squirrely.

Judge: Ah yes... O I'm sure he's still chained up in that foul dungeon... so far removed from the light of God that not even She can hear that twisted, wicked giggling...

As he speaks, the lights slowly fade to black...

... and slowly brighten to reveal a catacomb. A maid, Harriet Quince, carries a candle and a platter. She stops outside a vault, her eyes full of fear and wonder. She speaks in a very thick, Cockney accent.

Harriet: Sir? 'Tis I, Harriet Quince. I've brought thee thy favourite... Crusts! *(Silence)* Wouldst thou tell me another jest, sir? I've only now stopped laughing since you told me that one last week. About the chicken what sought to cross the road... and died!

She bursts out laughing and then suddenly catches herself.

Harriet: Apologies, sir. I understand if you don't feel like japery. *(Silence)* I placed that order for you: should pull into port tomorrow! *(Silence)* O I can't stand knowing you're sad... which is why I've added a special ingredient to thy rations...

Slowly, a white, skeletal hand reaches out and drags the plate of crusts into the dark.

Harriet: Perchance 'twill bring that lovely smile back... *Master J.*

She makes a gesture of romantic longing and then scurries back whence she came.

From the darkness, a chuckling grows louder and louder.

Scene 3

Daybreak. A bedchamber. A rooster crows.

The Knight of the Bat swings into his room and doffs his cowl. He looks at the mask the way one might ponder a skull, and he sighs dramatically. From the depths of his depression, a child - Hamnet - speaks:

Hamnet: Come, Father, I just love the opera!

Will: *(Fighting tears)* No...

Hamnet: This way, 'tis a shortcut!

Will: Stop—

A figure (Richard Burbage) appears in the shadows behind him.

Hamnet: *(Fearfully)* Who're you?

Sound of a blade slicing through the air.

Hamnet: Nooo—

Burbage: Will?

Will cartwheels across the stage. Quick as lightning, he has a dagger against Burbage's neck.

Will: I KILL YOU— *(Realizes)* O... Good morrow, Burbage! What's up?

Burbage: Master Shakespeare?

Will: Sorry, old boy, I was just... um... sleep-stabbing!

Burbage: Ah, yes, well, just wanted to tell you that rehearsal started... um, recently...

Will: Rehearsals? For what?

Burbage: *Titus Andronicus?*

Will: Ah yes... I shall be down presently.

Burbage: I'll make you some coffee.

He looks back at Will, still shivering and traumatized, knife drawn.

Burbage: Decaf, methinks...

He exits. Will takes off his armour to reveal a body covered in scars and bruises.

Alfreda Halfpenny, his nurse, enters.

Alfreda: O lord, lookit your poor, battered bod. Did you get maced again?

Will: No no, 'twas just your standard longsword.

Alfreda: Something the matter? *(Silence)* Come now, 'tis I, thy trusted nurse: Alfreda Halfpenny. Did not I raise thee as me own, nourishing thee with these merry milkers? Did not I support thy quest for vengeance, forging thy pointy-eared armour from discarded chamber pots?

Will: True, thou hast— Wait, what?

Alfreda: O yes, collected them meself from every hospital and Mexican restaurant in town. Most so soiled they couldn't be salvaged... or so they thought!

Alfreda winks cunningly. Will pales. She picks up Will's chamberpot.

Alfreda: Speaking of which, well done, sir! May I?

Will: I, uh, I mean sure...

Alfreda: 'Tis my job, after all, much like yours is obliterating the ne'er-do-wells of Londontown. I may just be a simple stool-maid—

Will: Please stop.

Alfreda: — but I reckon this city needs someone what's not afraid to get their little hands dirty...

(As she speaks, her arms disappear deeper and deeper into the chamberpot.)

Alfreda: ... to purge the city of the filth what's clogging it. Understand me, Sir?

Will: All too well...

Alfreda: *(The task completed)* There we go. Should flow as freely as the River Thames. Actually, may I keep this?

Will: Uhhhhhhh...

Alfreda: Ever see a turd in a bottle? Breathtaking. Well, that's enough folksy wisdom from old Alfreda Halfpenny. Just know that though the fight is hard, it means it's worth doing. And your boy would want you to fight for him, since he can't.

Will: Thank you, Alfreda.

Alfreda: Because he's dead.

Will: Yes.

Alfreda: *Dead. (Beat)* Still, maybe things wouldn't feel quite so bleak if you didn't insist on dealing out the whoopings all by your lonesome...

Will: I work alone.

Alfreda: *(Simultaneously, gruffly)* I work alone.

Alfreda: Yeah yeah yeah. Well innt that a fresh new take on the character. Just remember, Master Shakespeare: life's always better when you open it to others... Otherwise you're nothing more than, why, a turd in a bottle.

She winks warmly.

Will: Jesus Christ.

She exits with the chamber-pot. A huge clatter.

Alfreda: *(Off)* O nooo, what a mess!

Will shudders, disgustedly. A squeaking, above. He looks up. A bat has got stuck in the corner of his roof. He extends a finger. The bat lands on it. He strokes it and wipes a tear from his eye.