ACT ONE

Scene One: THE GLOBE THEATRE, INT./WILL’S HOME, STRATFORD, EXT./WILL’S HOME, LONDON/ON TOUR, OUTSIDE LONDON, EXT.

1. “THE WILL WHO WAS” WILL, LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MEN << Track 1 >>

2. (Lights up on an impressionistic version of The Globe theatre: a multilevel structure, with a canopy on the mainstage, musicians on the balcony, and a top catwalk that can be used as a playing area. Projections appear of different images of William Shakespeare on an array of merchandise. A man, with his back to the audience, takes all the images in, then turns to face the audience. It is WILL SHAKESPEARE.)

WILL

(Sings)

WHO IS THAT MAN?
WHO CAN HE BE?
YOU MIGHT SAY I GIVE A DAMN
FOR HE LOOKS A LOT LIKE ME...

(Speaks)

Of course, I’m better-looking than all of them. And why do they keep leaving out the earring? The fact is I’m everywhere and yet no one has the slightest idea of who I really was. The William Shakespeare you know is a myth, made larger than life by scholars who want me to be so. The truth? Well, I admit, I didn’t exactly leave a
trail of breadcrumbs to help you find me.

(Sings)

YOU MAY THINK THAT YOU KNOW ME
BUT THE DETAILS ARE SCANT
TRY AND FIND THE TRUE STORY
I’VE MADE SURE THAT YOU CAN’T.

DON’T BELIEVE ALL THE BIOS
MOST ARE FALSE OR CONFUSED
THEY INVENT AND SURMISE
AND I AM NOT AMUSED

AM I MY SONNETS? AM I MY PLAYS?
WHO IS THE WILL WHO IS LOST IN THE HAZE
OF HISTORY?
HOW DO YOU FIND THE MAN THAT ONCE WAS ME...?
EVERYONE THINKS THEY KNOW THE TRUTH
BUT NO ONE EVER DOES.

(THE LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MEN, the players of the Globe,
appear on all three levels of the theater, beckoning to WILL. THEY
are dressed in leather and have a brash, swaggering quality.)

LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MEN
GIVE US THE WILL, GIVE US THE WILL,
GIVE US THE WILL WHO WAS.

WILL
I NEVER WANTED TO BE KNOWN
YOU COULD SAY WITHOUT A DOUBT
I HAD SECRETS OF MY OWN
THAT I NEVER WANTED TO COME OUT...
LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MEN
PAST ALL THE LEGENDS, PAST ALL THE LIES,
WILL
PAST ALL OF THOSE WHO WOULD MYTHOLOGIZE
MY HISTORY
AND WHO AGREE I’M NOT THE MAN WHO’S ME...
NOW I WANT YOU TO KNOW THE TRUTH
THOUGH NO ONE EVER DOES --
WHO IS THE WILL, WHO IS THE WILL,
WHO IS THE WILL WHO WAS?

LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MEN
GIVE US THE WILL, GIVE US THE WILL,
GIVE US THE WILL WHO WAS!

WILL
(Speaks)

After four hundred years, I think it’s time
to tell you the truth, before I get too old
to remember it. Come with me as I lift the
curtain on the most obscure man who ever
achieved fame and glory: the Will who was.
Discover what happened to me in the year
1600 that changed my life forever -- and
changed the course of theater too. I will
become an open book – and for the first time
you will find what my most secret chapter
contains!

(Sing)

LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MEN
SOMETHING AMAZING! SOMETHING UNIQUE!

WILL
ONE HIDDEN TRUTH THAT MAKES ALL OF THEM SEEK
THE ANSWER TO
WHO IS THE MUSE THAT THE WORLD NEVER KNEW...
BEFORE IT’S TOO LATE
LET ME SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT.
I’LL FIND THE WILL, I’LL FIND THE WILL,
I’LL FIND THE WILL WHO WAS!

LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MEN
GIVE US THE WILL, GIVE US THE WILL,
GIVE US THE WILL WHO WAS!

WILL
(Speaks)
To assist me are the actors who shared the
Globe with me: my band of brothers, The Lord
Chamberlain’s Men.

(LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MEN gather behind WILL.)
Richard Burbage, my Richard III, my Hamlet,
my Macbeth, my friend.

(BURBAGE steps forward with a flourish and takes an
extravagant bow beside WILL.)
The greatest actor of our time.

BURBAGE
Of all time.

WILL
His modesty is exceeded only by the
fantastic size of his...ego. And meet my
beloved younger brother and fellow actor
Edmund Shakespeare...

(EDMUND steps forward and does a modest bow to the
audience, and then a second bow to WILL.)
And then there are our tragedians, our fool,
and because no real women are allowed to
take the stage, we have young boys perform all the female roles. Here is the boy player who transforms himself into my Kate, my Portia, my Juliet – Master Samuel Gilbourne. Hello Samuel.

SAMUEL

(SAMUEL GILBOURNE, an exceptionally pretty young man of sixteen, makes a coquettish curtsey.)
(His voice is changing, and HE struggles to maintain a higher-pitched voice.)

Hallo. Hallo.

WILL

Yes, well you may soon have to do male parts, my boy.

SAMUEL

I’ve already done many--

WILL

So we’ve heard, Master Gilbourne. So we’ve heard. The groundlings we play to usually stink of garlic and piss but I’m sure that won’t be a problem with this crowd. Shall we begin?

LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MEN

(Sing)

WILL
Before we arrive at the infamous year of 1600, we must present you with some scenes from my life just to set the stage. Places, please!

(On a separate part of the stage, WILL’S wife ANNE and their son, HAMNET, appear.)

WILL
I did not see my family much back in Stratford. My wife Anne, my eldest Susanna, and the twins, my daughter Judith and my son Hamnet. Strange name, I know but I chose it because it means “home.”

(HAMNET runs to him.)

HAMNET

Remember me?

(WILL laughs and hoists HAMNET into his arms.)

WILL

Of course. It hasn’t been that long, my boy.

ANNE

Six months and twelve days, Will.

WILL

But who’s counting? I’m here now.

(Lights down on ANNE and HAMNET.)

But London kept calling me back. There were so many plays to write. It wasn’t as if I didn’t miss my family... but I knew the money I could earn in London would be more
than I could make on Anne’s father’s farm. I did it for them, really...

LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MEN
(Sing)

NO ONE CAN TOP YOU
DON’T LET A LITTLE THING LIKE FAM’LY STOP YOU.

WILL
And sometimes I got lonely.

(A bed slides onstage.)

Could anyone blame me if after a show I sought a bit of fun from the fourteenth row?

(WILL jumps into bed with ROSALIND.)

ROSALIND
I don’t meet a lot of men like you. Do anything you want to do. But promise you’ll write me a sonnet when we’re through. And will you help me meet Richard Burbage, too?

WILL

(Tumbles out of bed.)

But it was never what I was looking for. At my age, I wanted something more. From both women...

(An ARISTOCRATIC YOUNG MAN emerges and caresses WILL’S cheek.)

And men.
LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MEN
(Sing)

NO ONE CAN TOP YOU
DON’T LET A LITTLE THING LIKE ROMANCE STOP YOU.

(LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MAN #1 holds up a sign with the date: “1596.”)

WILL

In the summer of 1596, I was touring the countryside with the Lord Chamberlain’s Men. Whenever the plague broke out in London, we would take our show on the road. When the plague finally subsided, we made our way back to London.

(LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MAN #3 enters as a MESSENGER astride a prop pony, rides up to WILL, and hands him a letter.)

That’s when I learned my eleven-year-old boy, my only son, my little “home,” had succumbed to the pox. He had died a week before. It was too late for me to hold him, or to say goodbye...

(Single light on WILL.)

“Grief fills the room up of my absent child, Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me, Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words, Remembers me of all his gracious parts, Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form.”
(Bright lights up on scene as LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MEN surround WILL.)

LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MEN
NO ONE CAN TOP YOU
DON’T LET A LITTLE THING LIKE SORROW STOP YOU.
GIVE US THE WILL, GIVE US THE WILL,
GIVE US THE WILL WHO WAS!

WILL
I did not take a pause to breathe. I went back to work, writing furiously through all the nights when I could not sleep. Histories, comedies. Especially comedies. Two or three a year. It was easier to hide from the pain by making an audience laugh.

(LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MAN #2 holds up a sign that reads: “1600.”)

LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MEN
(Sing)

JULIUS CAESAR, THE MERRY WIVES
AND THEN A BRAND-NEW CENTURY ARRIVES

WILL
NO ONE CAN TOP ME
WON’T LET LITTLE THINGS LIKE FAM’LY OR ROMANCE OR SORROW STOP ME.
LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MEN
GIVE US THE WILL, GIVE US THE WILL,
GIVE US THE WILL WHO WAS!

WILL
(Speaks)

So, now, we’ve arrived at 1600. Join me as I show you what really happened in that epic year that led me to write, if I may say so myself, the greatest play in all of English literature, Hamlet. A play that broke the rules, that questioned everything, as it searched the soul of one man. A work that contains six hundred words that I had never used in any play before -- an unprecedented, remarkable increase in vocabulary...even for me. Some were words I knew before, others were taught to me by a man who changed my life.

(As WILL sings, words are projected, filling the entire set: “survivor,” “omen,” “inhibition,” “disappointed,” “contumely,” “pious” “summit,” “commencement,” “poem,” “omen,” “clowns,” “jangled,” “heartache,” “unlimited,” etc.)

WILL (cont’d)

SIX HUNDRED WORDS
LIKE STARS EXPLODING WITHIN
SHATTERING THE BOUND’RIES
CAUSING MIRACLES TO BEGIN
A LIGHTNING BOLT MOMENT
LIKE NONE THAT I’VE KNOWN BEFORE
WHAT SEISMIC SHIFT OF HEAVEN
MADE MY IMAGINATION SOAR...?
THE MYS’TRIES OF MY LIFE
WON’T BE HIDDEN ANYMORE!

LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MEN
NO ONE CAN TOP YOU
DON’T LET A LITTLE THING LIKE SCANDAL
STOP YOU!
GIVE US THE WILL...

WILL
THERE WERE RISKS I HAD TO TAKE

LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MEN
WHERE IS THE WILL?

WILL
AND RULES I HAD TO BREAK...

LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MEN
WAITING FOR WILL!

WILL
I WANT YOU TO KNOW THE TRUTH

LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MEN
THOUGH NO ONE EVER DOES.
GIVE US THE WILL

WILL
I’LL FIND THE WILL

LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MEN
(Surround WILL and help him do a rapid costume change.)

GIVE US THE WILL!
WILL

YOU’LL HAVE THE WILL!

(LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MEN part to reveal WILL in new doublet as WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE at thirty-six.)

WILL AND LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S MEN
HERE IS (GIVE US) THE WILL WHO WAS!

(Lights down on scene.)