

# Excerpt terms and conditions



This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

*Dramatic Publishing*

# Writers' Cramp

(or How Will Shakespeare  
Got Into Show Biz)



Farce by  
Larry Glaister

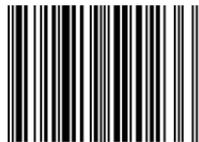
# Writers' Cramp

(or How Will Shakespeare  
Got Into Show Biz)

*Cast: 5m., 2w.* He was born in 1564, but after early adolescence, historians lose track of Will Shakespeare until 1590, more or less. By then he's already married, the father of three and a full-fledged, wildly successful young actor and playwright! Shakespeare's so-called "lost years" have confounded scholars for generations. *Writer's Cramp (or How Will Shakespeare Got Into Show Biz)* gleefully jumps in to fill in the gaps! It's 1585, Will is a 21-year-old dreamer, the father of three and quite jobless. He'd rather cavort with children and fiddle around with phrases than worry about bread on the table and household chores. Small wonder his older and long-suffering wife, Ann, is easily distracted by the amorous attentions of Hamnet, a profligate neighbor with insatiable appetites—and right under Will's nose! But how to consummate the attraction when Will is unemployed and always underfoot? A series of fool's errands to get Will out of the house almost work, but the steamy tryst is spoiled by one intrusion after another: screaming babies, a giddy adolescent girl, a band of strolling players. It's uphill for Ann and Ham. Poverty, lust and gender confusion rock everyone's boat, but, in the end, fortune smiles on the aspiring young poet. As for Ham and as for Ann, what of this folly that they began? When neighbor betrays neighbor and friend, there's only one way the story can end. Always and ever, at the end of the day, when trust is broken, there's hell to pay. But how great the inferno when trust is broken? A farthing, a shilling, a modest token? Or would you prefer more justice this time ... something hideous to befit the crime? Well, yes. Absolutely! *One int. set. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 40 minutes. Code: WH6.*

Cover design: Susan Carle.

ISBN: 978-1-61959-023-6



9 781619 590236 >  
www.dramaticpublishing.com



**Dramatic Publishing**

Your Source for Plays and Musicals Since 1885

311 Washington Street  
Woodstock, IL 60098  
800-448-7469

© The Dramatic Publishing Company

# **Writer's Cramp**

**(or How Will Shakespeare Got Into Show Biz)**

By  
LARRY GLAISTER



**Dramatic Publishing Company**  
Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

\*\*\* NOTICE \*\*\*

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our website: [www.dramaticpublishing.com](http://www.dramaticpublishing.com), or we may be contacted by mail at: THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., 311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play which are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.
---

©MMXV by  
LARRY GLAISTER

Printed in the United States of America  
*All Rights Reserved*  
(WRITER'S CRAMP [OR HOW WILL SHAKESPEARE GOT INTO  
SHOW BIZ])

ISBN: 978-1-61959-023-6

## IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent (50%) the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with  
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., of Woodstock, Illinois.”

In addition, all producers of the play must include the following acknowledgment on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and on all advertising and promotional materials:

“The world premiere of *Writer’s Cramp (or How Will Shakespeare Got Into Show Biz)* was presented in 2009 by The Brevard Little Theatre in Brevard, N.C.”

The world premiere of *Writer's Cramp (or How Will Shakespeare Got Into Show Biz)* was presented by Brevard Little Theatre in Brevard, N.C., in May of 2009.

Cast:

Will Shakespeare.....	Dan Clancy
Anne Hathaway.....	Laura Buckner
Agnes .....	Chelsea Daley
Hamnet.....	Dwight Chiles
Ned.....	Jake Ireland
Frail Young John.....	M. D. Stephen
Old Jack .....	Al Edick

Production Staff:

Director .....	Gene O'Hare
Producer .....	Al Edick
Stage Manager .....	Liz Malzone
Set Design .....	Mark Henry
Set Construction.....	Mark Henry, Oscar Reiner, Raul Gagne
Set Painting.....	Al Edick, Marylou Morrison, Gene O'Hare
Props .....	June Stacy
Lighting Design .....	John Arnett
Sound Design .....	Elizabeth Lemon
Lighting Operator.....	Stephanie Callis
Sound Operator .....	Adam Callis
Costumes.....	Maureen Edick
Assistant Costumes .....	Alberta Peshkin
Makeup .....	Sonia Arnold

# **Writer's Cramp**

## **(or How Will Shakespeare Got Into Show Biz)**

### CHARACTERS

WILL: William Shakespeare, age 21.

ANNE: His wife, aka Anne Hathaway, age 29.

AGNES: A shy, young neighbor girl, age 13.

HAMNET: A rugged, virile neighbor, age 44ish.

NED: A desperate young actor, age 17.

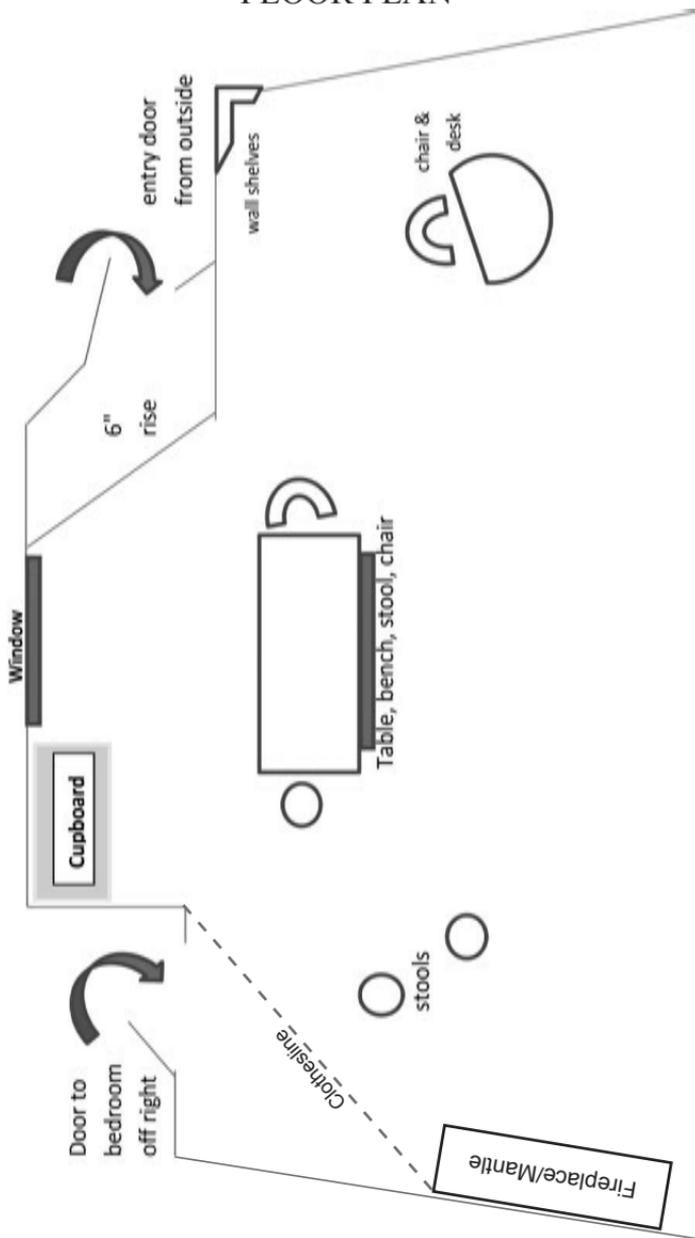
JOHN: Hamnet's nearsighted, fraile and young son, age 20.

OLD JACK: An actor, age 60+.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

For the set, a simple box set is all that's required for this play. It requires a fireplace, a door leading outdoors, a door leading to the bedroom and a good sized window UC, which may be shuttered. The beam mechanism may be situated anywhere on the set that suits the blocking and action concept. A floor plan, list of properties, costume comments and suggestions for creating the beam mechanism can be found in the back of the book.

# FLOOR PLAN



## PROPERTIES

Unstable pole which supports unstable roof beams (see notes on next page)  
Towel hanging on small cross piece on unstable pole  
At least two other falling beams (see notes on next page)  
Fireplace with mantel  
Iron fireplace poker and ash shovel  
Bucket of water with 5-6 dirty diapers in it  
Diapers (3-4, washed, wrung out and piled next to the bucket)  
Clothes line strung between fireplace and wall hook  
Storage cupboard for kitchen stuff (for Ann and Agnes to hide in)  
Table  
Pans (on the table to be put in the cupboard)  
2 table benches, 2 chairs and 2 stools  
9 round loaves of bread on fireplace mantel  
Williams's desk and stool/chair  
Quill pen and ink well  
Writer's notebook or journal (papers)  
Basket of potatoes (under the table)  
Paring knife (in table drawer, on ledge under table or on wall shelf)  
Large dagger-like knife  
Many armloads of firewood (may be fabricated out of painted newspaper or other light weight material)  
Jug of wine (mead) and 2 goblets.  
Fresh bonnet and apron for Ann  
Cloth bag for 6 loaves of bread  
4 Coins (2 for Hamnet/Ann, 2 for William)  
Small bottle of liniment  
Small shelving units on walls in kitchen and desk areas as needed for hand props and set dressing.

## COSTUME NOTTES

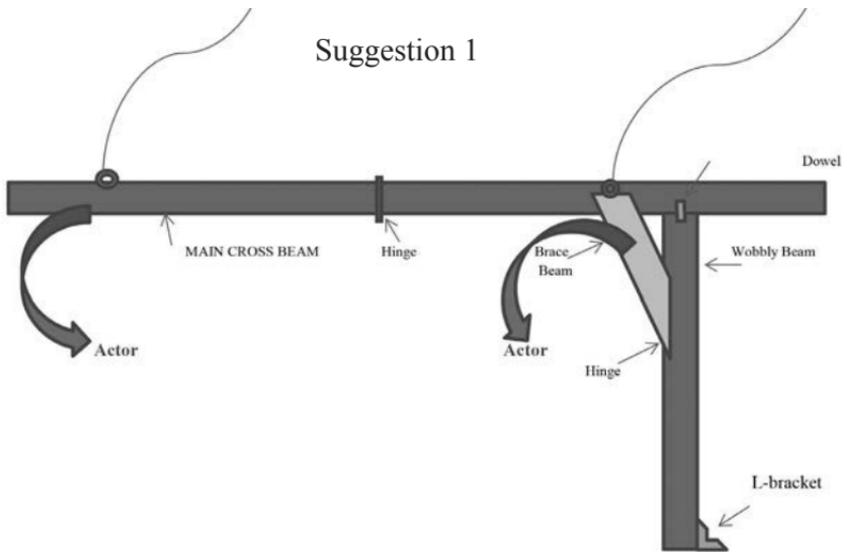
Typical Elizabethan costumes. Anne and Agnes may be in long, cinched waist dresses, possibly with laced bodice. Anne may have a low, square neckline showing some cleavage. Under her dress, she must wear a camisole which does not get removed during the passionate romp with Hamnet. She should wear a long apron and a bonnet, both of these slightly soiled. She should change to a clean, prettier bonnet and apron when Hamnet first arrives. Agnes should change to a prettier dress when she expects to seduce Andrew. The men should all wear doublet type vests over poet's shirts along with knee length narrow pants, with either stockings and low cut boots, or with knee high boots. Ned wears a blond wig, breast padding and traditional Elizabethan dress for the Nettie scene.

## BEAM MECHANISM

Elizabethan residential construction shows a lot of exposed wooden beams, interior and exterior. This is an important look for the play because it ends with TWO falling beams. That's the playwright's preference, though more than one producer has condensed the final scene and ended it with just the final falling beam. Two falling beams is more dynamic.

Some producers may find the construction of the falling beam mechanism a bit challenging. To the playwright's knowledge, no two producers or directors have dealt with the falling beams in exactly the same way. However, the following pages contain two suggested approaches.

## Suggestion 1



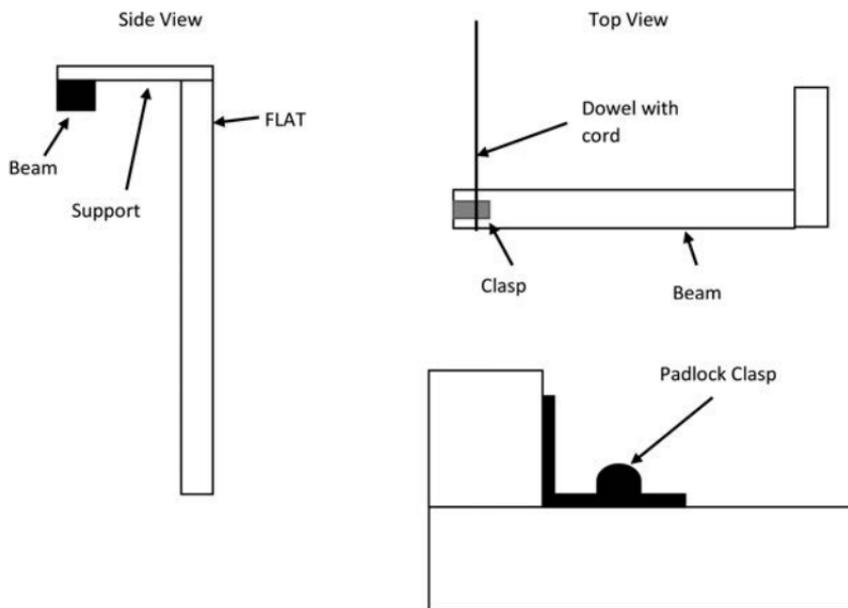
**Wobbly Upright Beam:** The bottom of the Wobbly Beam should be securely, but loosely, attached to the stage floor (L-bracket). To make it wobble, insert a short dowel snugly into a hole in the top of the Wobbly Beam and the other end of the dowel into a larger hole in the bottom side of the Main Cross Beam. The Wobbly Beam never actually falls. Note: the right end of the Main Cross Beam should be securely attached to another sturdy upright beam or to the top of a scenery flat.

The **FIRST BEAM** to fall is the Brace Beam: In the top end of the Brace Beam, screw in a small hook or eyelet. The top end of the Brace Beam should actually extend behind the Main Cross Beam so the hook or eyelet is not visible. From the eyelet, a 100 lb. nylon cord or fishing line should run up and over the set walls to a place backstage where the line may be released or cut when it is time for the Brace Beam to fall. The bottom end of the Brace Beam is attached to the Wobbly Beam only with a hinge so that the top end of the Brace Beam will swing down to strike the actor while the bottom end of the Brace Beam will remain attached to the Wobbly Beam by the hinge.

The **SECOND BEAM** to fall is the Left End of the Main Cross Beam, and this is what should strike the actor in the groin when it falls. The Left End of the Main Cross Beam may or may not appear to be attached to another upright beam or a set wall, or it may clearly not be attached to anything. At some midpoint of the Main Cross Beam, there is a cut and a hinge on the bottom of the cut which will allow the Left End to swing down at the appropriate time and strike the actor once the line that holds the weight of that end of the beam in place has been released. Place the cut and the hinge at a point in the Main Cross Beam that will allow enough length of the falling section to strike the actor in the groin but will also clear the stage floor by 5 or 6 inches when it swings down. Note: For maximum effect, the actor may grab/clutch the beam and hold it in his groin area while he screams in pain as the lights slowly fade out.

**Construction Materials:** The Wobbly Upright Beam should be made of wood, perhaps two 2" x 4" pieces nailed together and painted to look like rough-hewn beams (all of the beams should look as much like rough-hewn wood as possible). The beams that fall (and possibly the entire Main Cross Beam) must be made of light weight material which will not injure the actor when they fall on him, like styrofoam, laminated cardboard, a composite light weight gutter drain pipe. Note: the Left End of the Main Cross Beam may need to be weighted slightly to assist in the swing of the beam.

## Suggestion 2



**Padlock Clasp:** Bend the padlock clasp to a 90 degree angle. Attach clasp to the support beam and the falling beam. Attach the cord to the dowel and insert the dowel into the clasp to hold the beam in place. At the appropriate time, the cord is pulled, releasing the dowel and the beam will fall.

**Construction Materials:** Light weight gutter drain (fill each end with expanding foam insulation to add weight that assists with the swing), a pad lock clasp, a wooden dowel to fit into the clasp, cord (black para-cord works great), 2 beams that will extend from the wall flat to support your beam and one piece of light weight trim or beading to hold the beam in place on the set.

# Writer's Cramp

(or How Will Shakespeare Got Into Show Biz)

## ACT I

### Scene 1

*(October 1585. Interior of Elizabethan cottage. The large room is a combo living room/kitchen area. There is a window, door to the bedroom, and near the cottage entrance door, there is an unstable pole that supports an unstable roof beam. There is a small fireplace on the DR wall, and a clothesline is strung from the UR corner of fireplace to the corner just right of bedroom door.)*

*Lights up, dim. ANNE is stirring ashes in fireplace with an iron poker. OLD JACK enters and moves to DC spot. There is a bucket containing water and dirty diapers on the table along with a pile of three or four washed diapers, wet and wrung out, beside the bucket on the table.)*

OLD JACK. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome! Tonight, here in this humble theatre, here in the 21st century of our lord and savior, we pause to ponder a murky bit of theatrical history. It is true, or possibly true, that on April 23, 1564, one William Shakespeare, an English playwright of some renown, entered this world the beloved son of John and Mary Shakespeare in the gentle town of Stratford-upon-Avon. Historical records do document Shakespeare's youth and early adolescence, but do it *sparingly*. Then, strangely, he disappears from public re-

cords altogether—*no mention of him!*—Until 1590, more or less, when he suddenly re-appears in records as a husband, father and, out of the blue, an established man of the theatre. Yes—an accomplished actor and a brilliant playwright! *How*, historians ask, how did that happen? What inspired him, what drew that man to the Elizabethan stage? And, come to that, how did Anne Hathaway snag young Will, a man eight years her junior after all? Shakespeare's so called "*Lost Years*" have confounded scholars for generations. But now, ladies and gentlemen, *now*, after new and exhaustive research by our playwright, an imaginative academic with admittedly questionable credentials, we have absolutely refutable evidence that it happened—this murky bit of theatrical history—precisely as you will see it unfold upon our stage. And you may trust our account, just as you must trust for the lion's share of all historical knowledge. For what little can you know without trust? Where is any man after all, or his wife, without it? Trust, and trust between them. Between neighbor and neighbor. Between friend and friend. But let trust be broken? Then *trust* must end! But wait, what then, if at the end of the day—the wife, the neighbor, the friend would stay? Trust me when I pause to say—*when trust is broken*—there's *hell* to pay.

*(OLD JACK exits and the spotlight fades. Stage lights up. ANNE crosses to look out cottage door for signs of WILL.)*

ANNE. Evening sets! Ah! That man. *(No sign of WILL. She crosses to the table where she has been washing diapers and continues the task.)* Beggar! What keeps him so?

*(AGNES enters from the bedroom, weeping profusely.)*

ANNE *(cont'd)*. Why, Agnes, what is it? Why do you weep so?

AGNES. Thy babes ... ! Oh ... ! (*She bursts into sobs.*)

ANNE. What? Are they ... ? Oh, saints ... ! (*She starts for the bedroom.*)

AGNES. No, no, Anne, they are well and resting. 'Tis only ... they are so beautiful ... !

ANNE. Heavens, you did give me such a start! Beautiful to a giggly young girl with a head full of boys and babes. Wash these day in and day out and try to think of pretty things!

AGNES. Oh, may I help with them, please?

ANNE. Oh, bless you child, if you could just ... Oh, but no, Agnes. Thy mother must wonder what keeps you so. Surely she has need of thy labor at home.

AGNES. Oh, no, Anne. She has my many sisters to share the household chores. Please, I must help, Anne.

ANNE. Agnes, how could I manage these days without thy kindness. *These last two* are such a chore. And heaven knows I get little enough help from that man of mine.

AGNES. Oh, but he is so ... William is so ...

ANNE. Late! Always! He is never here when I need him most.

AGNES. But he is handsome, Anne. Wonderful handsome, and such tales he spins. Surely he is the very best husband.

ANNE. Useless beauty and silly tales. See you dream of homely men with handsome prospects. If you could just see to the pans before you leave, Agnes ...

(*AGNES bursts into tears again.*)

ANNE (*cont'd*). Oh, but what? Agnes, do stop weeping so!

AGNES. The pans! 'Tis only I would they were mine ... ! A husband, babes, pans of my own ... !

ANNE. Agnes, stop it! You are too young.

AGNES. I am 13, Anne. Fourteen come spring! Yet is there no one for me. When shall I find a man handsome and fine and true?

ANNE. When your time is come, you will find it easy enough to capture a man's attention.

AGNES. When? How, Anne? Oh, please. You must tell me.

ANNE. Any fool is easily enough seduced.

AGNES. Seduced? I may seduce him?

ANNE. Careful lass. That woman's weapon is her woe. For then is she stuck with the critter and all the little creatures that quickly follow.

AGNES. I may seduce him! Oh, but who, Anne? Where is the dashing young man who will take me to wife?

ANNE. Where is the man *after* he takes you to wife? Dashing out! Away! Heaven knows where.

AGNES. Oh! You will not understand. You cannot! You have William.

ANNE. Look around, lass ... Where is this husband you say I have?

AGNES. Why, he is to the classroom, Anne. He tutors while the Master is ill.

ANNE. For a fortnight. Two weeks work in twice as many months, finished now. The Master is well again.

AGNES. Well? Oh, no, my brothers hate the Master. They love William, Anne, all the boys do.

ANNE. And yet he is poor. Poorer still now the Master is well again. See you choose a good provider, Agnes, else you too may peddle loaves through the village to keep the wolf from thy miserable door.

AGNES. First to have a door, Anne. A man. Babes. Pans of my own.

ANNE. Does he think I may peddle bread when doors are barred for the night?

AGNES. Oh, yes, a William of my own.

ANNE (*goes to feel bread loaves*). Cold! Gravestone cold! (*She returns to the diapers.*) Oh, that three so small could make this mountain!

(*WILL enters from the village, whistling merrily.*)

ANNE (*cont'd*). AH! Behold, my husband does appear!

WILL. He does appear, sweet wife, a little late but in good cheer. And young Agnes, sweet gentle lass from yonder hill.

AGNES. Oh! Oh! (*She blushes, a schoolgirl crush.*)

ANNE. William ... !

AGNES. Oh, William! Good evening, sir.

ANNE. Where do you dally until the sun is gone?

WILL. Why, Anne. Do I not instruct these last two weeks?

AGNES. Aye, Anne, he instructs.

ANNE. Speak! Where were you when these stars were lighted?

WILL. "Stars were lighted?" Why, Anne, I might lend thy sweet metaphor to a poem! I must note these words of yours in my journal ... (*He rushes to a desk to scribble down these lines.*)

ANNE. Journal, thy backside! Where were you?

AGNES. Why, in the classroom, Anne.

ANNE. The school day is done hours ago! What boy deserts his chores to play with numbers so far into the dusk of day?

WILL. Only two, alas. But two at least, good wife. But it were not numbers, sweet Anne. It were days ago, great histories did beguile us so.

ANNE. Histories? You did neglect this house for some ancient scroll?

WILL. Truly till sunset we did speak of great kings before our great lady, Elizabeth.

ANNE. Will help them gather eggs no doubt. Or squeeze the heifer's tit.

(*AGNES giggles.*)

WILL. Their squeeze is not impaired for it.

ANNE. Impudent rag! (*She throws a wet diaper at him.*)  
These same do I scrub to make my hands sore and red.  
These! Unseemly soiled by the growth of your untimely seed. And you do conjure ancient courts.

(*AGNES scurries to pick up the wet diaper.*)

WILL. Ah! And how fare our little Shakespeares this eve?

ANNE. How fares thy poor and needy wife? Their shrieks this day are spears unto my ears, and do truly shake this shabby hut.

WILL. *Patience*, gentle wife. Do I not don black robes and preside in learned halls? Our fortune grows! God bless the plague I say.

AGNES. *God bless the plague?* Oh sir!

WILL. A figure of speech, Agnes. We do earnestly pray for the Master and his *eventual* recovery.

ANNE. Then rejoice, husband, thy prayers are answered! Blessing falls upon the Master. His heat falls low and he is well again.

WILL. He rises? Say what?

ANNE. His great robes are hung to lose the wrinkle. I heard it from the fish monger.

WILL. I am come late; my wife does taunt me so!

AGNES. From the *fish monger*, sir. It must be true.

ANNE. The taunt is “poor provider” and mine to bear. The Master is to the classroom come Monday morning.

WILL. Monday? So soon is misfortune upon us once more?

ANNE. See you fix that shaky beam now you are unemployed again! The shutters need repair and the hinges do squeak so.

WILL. But two weeks in the classroom, Anne. On so much gold will we eat awhile.

ANNE. Aye, eat. Pray the queen calls us not to court of yet.

WILL. Oh, Anne, there were truly great courts. Such kings! Henry before Elizabeth. Henry before Elizabeth before Mary before Edward. And Henries before him.

ANNE. Dribble ... kings and queens! That beam is shaky, William! And Elizabeth is a strumpet!

AGNES. Oh, Anne, thy queen!

ANNE. What does she know of pots and pans? Of shaky beams and stone cold bread?

WILL. Savior, save me!

ANNE. Nay save ... Hang! But first these rags! (*She tosses him a couple of wet diapers.*)

WILL. Hang rags? 'Tis unseemly for a man to ...

ANNE. The rags or thy neck!

WILL. The rags, the rags! (*Hangs diapers on rope between the fireplace and the wall.*)

AGNES. I could help. Please, may I hang ... ?

WILL. Aye, Anne, young Agnes could—

ANNE. Young Agnes could go to her own family and lend her hand. Here my unemployed husband may share the household chores.

AGNES. I don't mind—

ANNE. Fare thee well, Agnes, young and kind. Go now.

AGNES. But—

ANNE. Farewell, child!

AGNES. Oh, farewell then ... farewell, sir. Farewell tiny tots and stone cold loaves, squeaky shutters and pots and pans. Good night. Good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow!

*(Harp music. AGNES weeps and exits.)*

WILL. Agnes ... ! *Good night, sweet sorrow ... !*

ANNE. You do neglect this house of hours when my loaves were sold, William! When they must be sold, now you work no more.

WILL. But did you hear, Anne. *Parting is such ... (Goes to his desk.)*

ANNE. Good wives part with gold for new bread oven warm, sir! *(She hurls a loaf at WILL.)* 'Tis thine now! Stale bread and stagnant water for days to come.

WILL. Stale bread?

ANNE. Nine loaves, cold! Icy as the Scottish wind.

WILL. Say you sell them not. We've two weeks gold, Anne. Two weeks ere worry sets upon thy brow.

ANNE. And when the landlord comes rapping for the month gone by?

WILL. Ah!

ANNE *(vigorously scrubbing a diaper)*. Oh, out! Out damned spot!

WILL *(harp music)*. Out ... damned ... spot ... !

ANNE. Would this were my only stain, but I am of husband.

WILL. I hear music there! *(Goes to his desk and begins scribbling again.)*

ANNE. Words again! Or does the tally of thy fortune require great ledgers?

WILL. *Magical! Out! Damned! ... Spot.*

ANNE. With five to feed, we'll not grow fat on thy fortune.

Five are we now with *these last two*.

WILL. Enough, Anne. There is no merriment in so much fret.

ANNE. Dear God, we are five now! A foolish wife and a feckless husband with a three-year-old daughter and now—two new babes!

WILL. Aye, sweet Susannah, and now ...

ANNE. I am in error. Turnip head! We feed not five with our little gold.

WILL. Aye, five.

ANNE. Four!

WILL. What? You would feed me not?

ANNE. Good food for little Susannah—thy nuptial token!—

That she may be safe from this raging disease. And for me, thy wife, that I may be strong to make good milk for these ... *These last two*.

WILL. Ease thy mind, Anne. Soon will some friend have need of my labor.

ANNE. I have need of thy labor too, William, but I do go needy for it. Would you let this house fall down upon us?

WILL. No, Anne, but the landlord must ...

ANNE. The landlord will do precious little save take his rent. I rely upon my husband, sir!

WILL. I know, I know, patch the thatch. Fix the shutters.

ANNE. Come morning, I will have this shaky beam fixed ere the roof falls in upon us! Is that clear, William? *(She empties the wash bucket out the window.)*

WILL. Aye, Anne. 'Tis abundant clear.

ANNE. Potatoes, knave! Bear them up if you would appease thy worthless stomach this night.

WILL. Oh, thank heavens! The little ones, Anne. Are the little 'Speares abed so early this night? (*He gets potatoes from the basket under the table.*)

ANNE. Early to he who has not heard them scream a full day.

WILL. What scream?

ANNE. Susannah is with new tooth ... asleep at last! And *these last two!*

WILL. Anne, we cannot long continue to call these last two "*these last two.*"

ANNE. Aye ... sprinkled on the Sabbath. Two days hence and yet no names. But tell me, sir, how shall a woman think of names when a husband ... ?

WILL. I have given it thought, Anne. Much thought.

ANNE. To names? Wonder we are poor.

WILL. To the girl, already head strong and holding court, I give "Elizabeth" after our great queen. What say you, gentle Anne?

ANNE. Elizabeth again! (*She hurls a potato at WILL.*) I say have them raw!

WILL. Ow!

ANNE. Will you have your daughter grow old and never marry? Elizabeth, indeed!

WILL. But she is so hearty and already makes her wishes known. She "commands," this little one.

ANNE. A spinster for a namesake? Fool! She will wed and well. 'Tis "Judith" I have settled on and that's the end of it. And there's wood to carry before you find your bed.

WILL. Wood? Yes, but, Anne, about the boy, the other of *these last two*. I did have much excitement in the courtly histories this day. What say you to "Henry"? After the last great sovereign of that name. There was a man!

ANNE. Henry? Oh! You think a country wife is ignorant of the ways of that great Henry?

WILL. He was a giant in the land. He was a sovereign.

ANNE. The crown upon the cod piece. Aye, the jewels on that head!

WILL. Oh! Savior ...

ANNE. The most distant village gossips yet of Henry and his women! How he did lay them bare. How he did have his way, then cast them off. And you would give thy son his name?

WILL. King Henry was ...

ANNE. He will not be Henry!

WILL. No. No Henry.

ANNE. Give him thine own name. William! For who can lay a maiden in the grass with greater ease?

WILL. Junior?

ANNE. Sow belly!

WILL. Tempting, but truly, Anne, I do count myself unworthy.

ANNE. Aye, we do add the same figures.

WILL. But Henry is a fine name ...

ANNE. Hold thy tongue, I charge! A paring knife, William, else you will eat these from the ground.

WILL. Paring knife ... paring knife ... What of "Richard"? Now there's a noble name ...

ANNE. What of my foot in thy backside? Enough of these history kings! I will pare thy tongue to have no more.

WILL. No Henry ... No Richard ... (*He puts a rather large knife on the table before her.*) At least one of these last two is named.

ANNE. What? Is this a dagger I see before me, the handle toward my hand?

WILL (*harp music*). *Is this a dagger ...*