

S The Death of SHAKESPEARE

*As It Was Accomplisht in 1616
& The Causes Thereof*

A Novel by Jon Benson

PART TWO

William Shakespeare is believed by many to have written the greatest plays the world has ever seen. There is no record of his education, if he had any. His parents, wife, and children may have been illiterate. He left no books. No one reported in any diary or letter that they had met him or talked to him, or even talked *about* him.

He left six signatures, all different. Three were on his last will and testament, which makes no mention of any plays, poems, or books; two were on deeds to real property; the last was on an affidavit he gave in a court case.

The records show a businessman who acquired considerable property during his lifetime, hoarded grain during a famine, and engaged in a number of lawsuits, one over as little as five pounds. He was connected with the theater, but there is nothing that *independently* proves he was the author of the plays attributed to him. Mark Twain, Sigmund Freud, Orson Welles, Sir Lawrence Olivier, Sir Derek Jacobi, Walt Whitman, and many others, including a number of United States Supreme Court justices, have all concluded that William Shakespeare did not write the plays. But if he didn't, who did? And if someone else was the greatest author who ever lived, why was Shakespeare given the credit? *The Death of Shakespeare* explains how this happened, and why the Bard of Avon paid with his life for his part in, to use the words of Henry James, "the biggest and most successful fraud ever practiced on a patient world."



www.doshakespeare.com

S The Death of SHAKESPEARE

*As It Was Accomplisht in 1616
& The Causes Thereof*



A Novel by Jon Benson

PART TWO

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be scanned, uploaded, reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, shared, or transmitted in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the written permission of the publisher. If you would like to use material from this book, other than for review purposes, prior written permission must be obtained by contacting the publisher.


Copyright © 2022 Nedward, LLC

ISBN-13: 978-0-9970899-2-9

Library of Congress Control Number: NRC110174

Published by Nedward, LLC, Annapolis, Maryland
Typeset in Garamond 11

Cover Design by Gerard A. Valerio, with Sherri Ferritto
Maps drawn and hand-lettered by Joan B. Machinchick

The  at the end of each chapter
is the crown in the Earl of Oxford's signature.

The story of how The Earl of Oxford
wrote the poetry and plays attributed to
William Shakespeare
begins in *The Death of Shakespeare – Part One*

Readers interested in further information can purchase
The Reader's Companion to the Death of Shakespeare for comments keyed to
each chapter.

The Death of Shakespeare, Part One and Part Two and *The Reader's
Companion* are also available as E-Books. Both print and E-Book
versions can be purchased at amazon.com. For more information, visit
www.doshakespeare.com.

*To Elizabeth Regina, who took many
secrets with her to the grave.*

*Degree being vizarded,
The unworthiest shows as fairly in the mask.*

Troilus and Cressida, Act I, Scene 3

*Why write I still all one, ever the same,
And keep invention in a noted weed,
That every word doth almost tell my name,
Showing their birth and where they did proceed?*

Sonnet LXXVI

*Far fly thy fame,
Most, most of me beloved, whose silent name
One letter bounds.
Thy unvalu'd worth
Shall mount fair place when Apes are turned forth.*

Scourge of Villainy, John Marston (1598)

To the Gentle Reader

*This Booke, that thou here seest put,
It was for gentle Oxford cut;
Wherein the Author had a strife
With History to show Lord Oxford's life.*

*O, if only those who knew his wit
Had said the plays by him were writ,
There'd be no need to here reclaim
The name purloined by Shakespear's fame.*

*Grave Spenser need not shift more nigh
Our Chaucer, nor Beaumont nearer Spenser lye;
Let them sleep, Westminster lords,
The world now knows the plays are Oxenford's.
Their every word sings he wrote the plays,
And in his Moniment Shakespeare slays.*

*Elizabeth knew of noble lords
Who wrote well but suppressed their words,
Or let them publish in another's name,
Thereby losing deservèd fame.*

*The author here his name must also feign,
Lest he, too, in academia, be slain.
Therefore, Gentle Reader, looke
Not on his name but on his Booke.—J.B.*



The Authorship Question

William Shakespeare is believed by many to have written the greatest plays the world has even seen. There is no record of his education, if he had any. His parents, wife, and children may have been illiterate. He left no books. No one reported in any diary or letter that they had met him or talked about him or even talked *about* him.

He left six signatures, all different. Three were on his last will and testament, which makes no mention of any plays, poems, or books; two were on deeds to real property; the last was found on an affidavit he gave in a court case.

The records show a businessman who acquired considerable property during his lifetime, hoarded grain during a famine, and engaged in a number of lawsuits, one over as little as five pounds. He was connected with the theater, but there is nothing that *independently* proves he was the author of the plays attributed to him.

These missing facts, plus the nature of the plays themselves – thirty-seven of the thirty-eight plays he supposedly wrote were about royalty and nobility with only *The Merry Wives of Windsor* being about commoners – have created the Authorship Question. Many students of the plays have concluded Shakespeare was a front for someone else. The list is long. It includes Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Sigmund Freud, Sir Derek Jacobi, Hugh Trevor-Roper and many others. Visit <https://doubtaboutwill.org/declaration> to learn more.

But if Shakespeare did not write the plays, who did? And if someone else was the greatest writer who ever lived, why was Shakespeare give the credit? *The Death of Shakespeare* explains how this happened, and why the Bard of Avon paid with his life for his part in, to use the words of Henry James, “the biggest and most successful fraud ever practiced on a patient world.”

The story of how the Earl of Oxford wrote the poetry and plays attributed to William Shakespeare begins in Part One of *The Death of Shakespeare*. Readers interested in further information can purchase *The Reader's Companion to the Death of Shakespeare* for comments keyed to each chapter. *The Death of Shakespeare*, Parts One and Two, and *The Reader's Companion* are available in print and E-Book versions at amazon.com. For more information, visit www.doshakespeare.com.

Table Of Contents



Part Two

1594

Author's Note to Part Two

98.	Oxford and the Queen	1
99.	The Boar's Head	7
100.	A Play About Young Love	17
101.	Two Lovers, Still In Love	29
102.	<i>Midsummer Madness</i>	35
103.	The Little Changeling Boy	47
104.	Shackspear and Mumblecrust	61
105.	A Letter from Anne Vavasour	69
106.	<i>Romeo & Juliet</i>	71
107.	The Bastard	75
108.	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	77

1595

109.	<i>The Dream</i> at Greenwich Palace	79
110.	A Visit from a Lady-in-Waiting	85
111.	<i>All's Not Well</i>	89
112.	Touchstone	95
113.	<i>As You Like It</i>	101
114.	Falstaff	103
115.	William	107
116.	Justice	111
117.	<i>The Jew of Venice</i>	113
118.	<i>The Jew of Venice</i> at the Curtain	119

1596

119.	Hedingham	121
120.	Cambridge	125
121.	Filet of Fawn Unborn	135
122.	Two Plays; Two Failures	137
123.	Pursued by a Bear	147
124.	A Visit from Baron Cobham	159
125.	Exit Oldcastle	169
126.	Not Without Mustard	177
127.	The Earl of Derby	181
128.	<i>Richard II</i>	184

129.	<i>Richard II</i> before the Queen	193
130.	Prince Hal and the Boar's Head	195

1597

131.	The Funeral of Lady Cecil	203
132.	The King Knows Him Not	211
133.	<i>Falstaff in Love</i>	217
134.	Johnson is Jonson; Shackspear is Shakespeare	223
135.	<i>Falstaff in Love</i> at Whitehall	229
136.	<i>The Isle of Dogs</i>	233
137.	She's Not Coming With Us	235
138.	An Empty House	243
139.	Lisbeth	249
140.	King's Place	255
141.	In Arthur's Bosom	265
142.	<i>The Return to Parnassus</i>	269
143.	Hedingham, and the Joy of Eating Small Birds	273
144.	John Lyly	277
145.	A Bone in Shackspear's Throat	283
146.	A Murder of Plots	287
147.	Lilah Stanhope	301
148.	Boxes and Trunks	305

1598

149.	A Visit with Lady Susan	311
150.	Bacton and Back	319
151.	A Clash of Wits at The Mermaid	327
152.	Wicked Meaning in a Lawful Deed	331
153.	Timson	339
154.	<i>Cymbeline</i> at the Curtain	343
155.	By A Brand He Shall Be Known	345
156.	<i>Every Man in His Humour</i>	349
157.	Hackney	351
158.	Henry and the Horseshoe	359
159.	Caesar Becomes Brutus	363
160.	The Death of Lord Burghley	365
161.	John Florio and the Earl of Southampton	367
162.	Finley	371
163.	Christmas	377
164.	The Theatre Tiptoes Away	383

1599

165.	“ <i>Far Fly Thy Fame</i> ”	385
166.	<i>Every Man out of His Humour</i>	389
167.	The Burning of the Books	395
168.	Essex Returns	397
169.	At a Frown, They in their Glory Die	399
170.	“ <i>How Rare a Phoenix</i> ”	401
171.	Christmas at the Boar’s Head	405

1600

172.	Penning Plays	409
173.	A Summons from the Queen	411
174.	A Visit from the Countess of Southampton and Her Son	413
175.	By A Mark He Is Known	417
176.	A Portrait of a Pregnant Lady	421
177.	A Visit with the Queen	425
178.	The Duke of Orsino	429
179.	A Surprise Visitor	431
180.	<i>What You Will</i>	435

1601

181.	<i>Twelfth Night</i> before the Queen	437
182.	The City Knows Him Not	439
183.	Malfis	441
184.	The Tryall	445
185.	James Decides Southampton’s Fate	453
186.	“ <i>When Jacks Go Up, Heads Go Down</i> ”	459
187.	“ <i>Like a Jewel Hung in Ghastly Night</i> ”	461
188.	The Worm of Nilus	463
189.	<i>The Phoenix and the Turtle</i>	467
190.	<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>	471
191.	The Devil Himself	477
192.	Helping Mister Wriothesley with a Poem	479
193.	The Ambassador from Morocco	483
194.	Ben Jonson	487
195.	Nedward’s Bowl	493
196.	The Green-Eyed Monster	495

1602

197.	Finley Comes to Stay	497
198.	“ <i>Stand and Unfold Yourself!</i> ”	501

199.	Falstaff and the Earl of Worcester	505
200.	<i>The Tempest</i>	507
201.	An Invitation from the Queen	513
202.	<i>Iago</i>	521

1603

203.	A Gift for James	523
204.	“ <i>The Mortal Moon Her Eclipse Has Endured</i> ”	527
205.	<i>Hamlet</i>	531
206.	The Coronation	537

1604

207.	Ripeness	541
208.	The Rest is Silence	545

—•••—
 Maps of England and London

—•••—
 Floor Plan of Oxford Court, London

—•••—
 Floor Plan of King’s Place, Hackney

—•••—
 Lineage Tables
(At end of text)

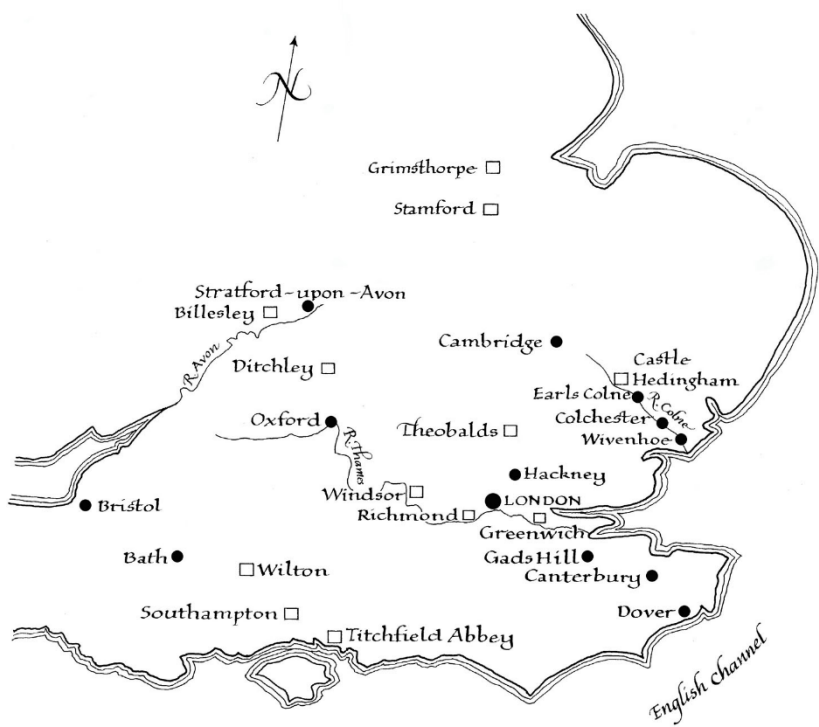
The Earls of Oxford
 William Cecil, Baron Burghley
 The Earls of Southampton
 The Earls of Derby
 Peregrine Bertie, Lord Willoughby de Eresby
 The Earls of Pembroke
 The Lords Hunsdon
 The Sidney Family
 Margaret Douglas, Countess of Lennox

—•••—
 Glossary

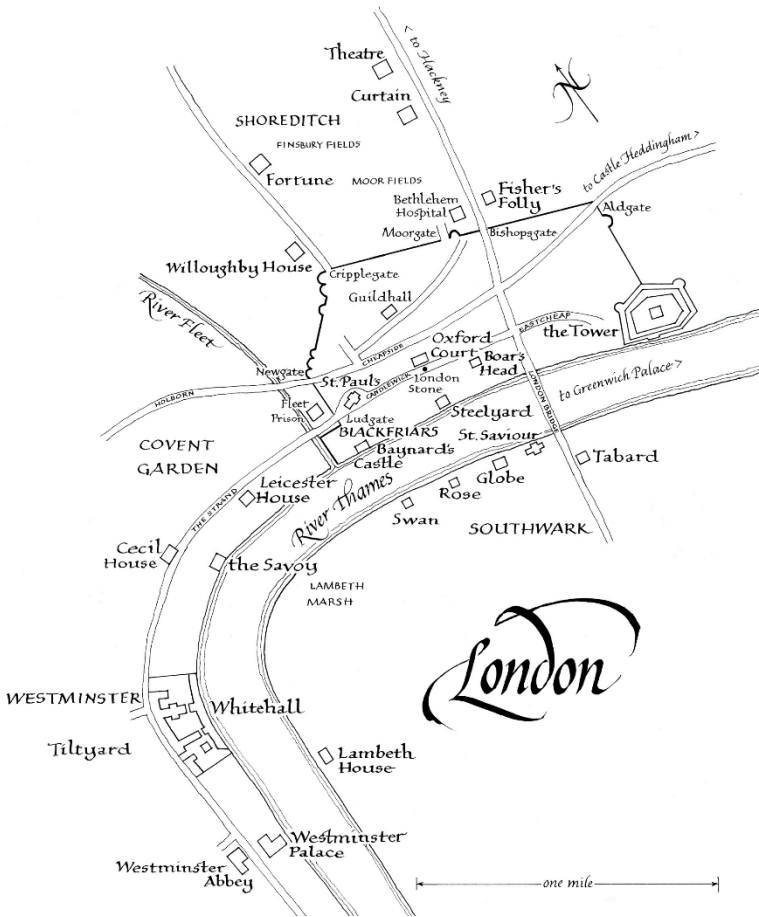
—•••—
 Afterword

—•••—
 Questions for a Stratfordian

—•••—
 More Information

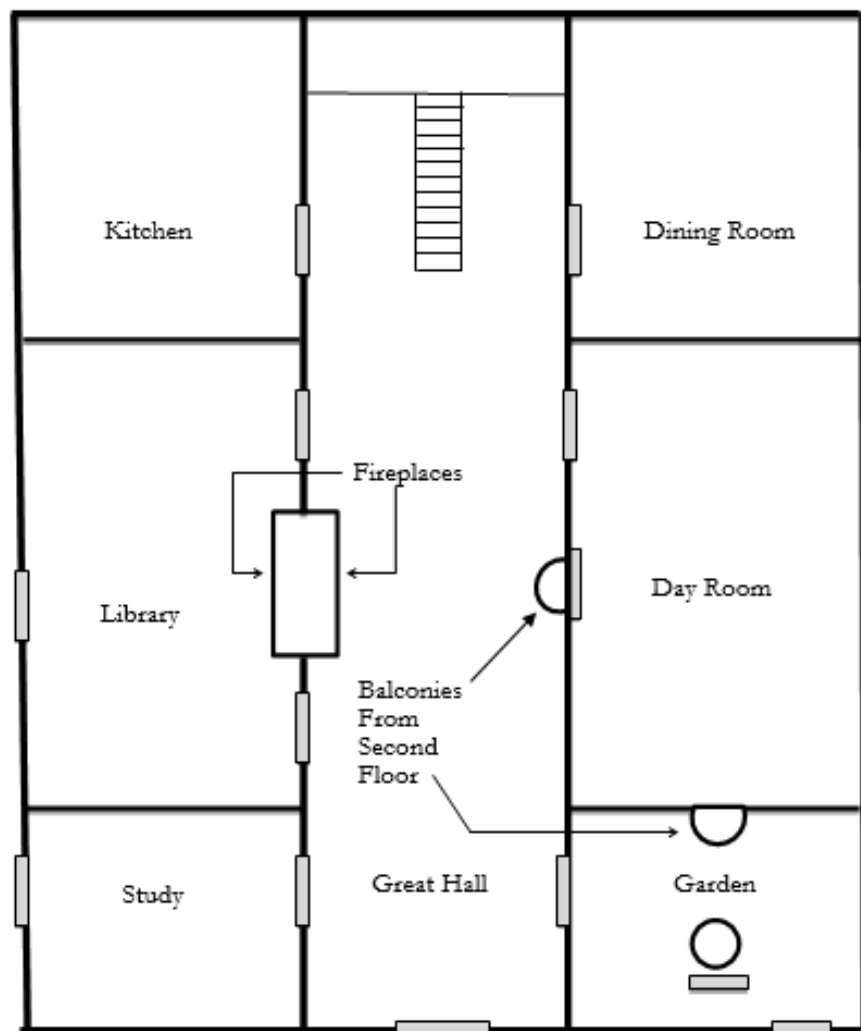


England



Oxford Court

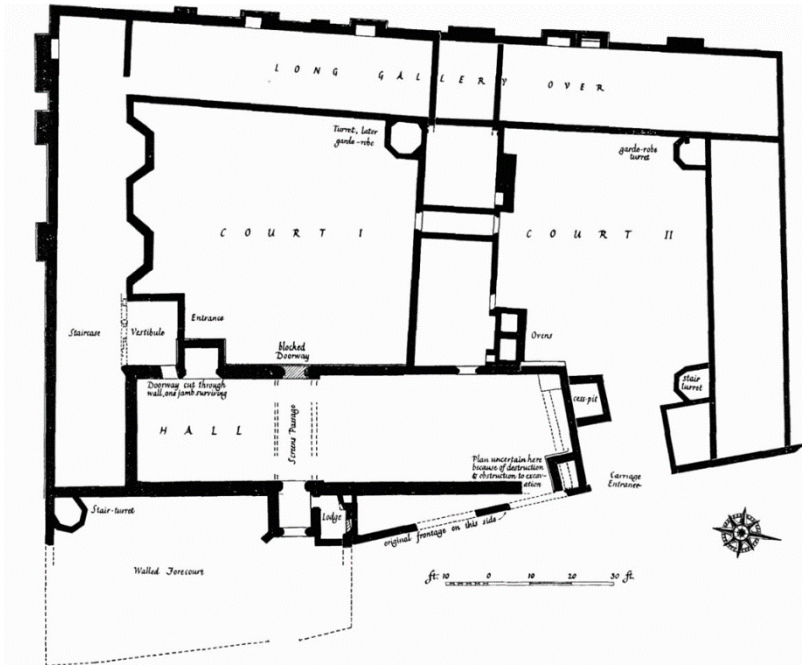
First Floor



Candlewick Street

King's Place, Hackney

First Floor



Dramatis Personae

(Names of historical figures are boldfaced)

Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford (Oxford)

Anne Cecil (Nan), Oxford's first wife, mother of his daughters
Elizabeth (Lisbeth), **Bridget**, and **Susan**

Elizabeth Trentham (Elspeth), Oxford's second wife, mother of his son and heir, **Henry de Vere**, 18th Earl of Oxford.

Anne Vavasour (Anne), lady-in-waiting to Queen Elizabeth, mother of Oxford's bastard son, Edward Vere

William Shakespeare (William Shackspear, Willum)

Anne Hathaway, Shakespeare's wife, mother of his children,
Susanna, **Hamnet**, and **Judith**

Elizabeth Tudor, Queen Elizabeth I of England

Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, putative son of Oxford and Queen Elizabeth

William Cecil, Baron Burghley, Oxford's guardian and father-in-law, and the Queen's most trusted minister

Sir Robert Cecil, Burghley's second son and successor to his father's offices

William Stanley, 6th Earl of Derby, married Lisbeth Vere

Francis Norris, Baron of Rycote, married Bridget Vere

Philip Herbert, Earl of Montgomery, married Susan Vere and was one of the "incomparable pair of brethren" to whom the First Folio was dedicated

Peregrine Bertie, Lord Willoughby de Eresby, twice ambassador to Denmark, who married **Mary Vere**, Oxford's sister

Aemilia Bassano, first published English female poet, the Dark Lady of the sonnets, mistress to **Henry Carey**, 1st Lord Hunsdon

Arthur Golding, Oxford's uncle and translator of Ovid's *Metamorphosis*; brother of **Marjory Golding**, wife of **Earl John**, 16th Earl of Oxford, Oxford's father

Lettice Knollys, dowager Countess of Essex and Leicester, widow of the 1st Earl of Essex and mother of **Robert Dudley**, 2nd Earl of Essex, beheaded in 1601

William Brooke, 10th Baron Cobham, Lord Chamberlain from August 1596 until his death on 6 March 1597; father of **Elizabeth Brooke**, wife of Sir Robert Cecil

Anthony Munday, John Lyly, Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, John Marston, playwrights

Philip Henslowe, manager/impresario of the Rose Theater

James Burbage, manager/impresario of the Theater

Richard Burbage, actor, member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men

Dr. Rodrigo López, physician to the queen, executed for allegedly trying to poison her

Michael Lok, to whom Oxford owed £3,000, induces Oxford to write a play about Jews that becomes *The Merchant of Venice*

Rowland Yorke, servant to Earl John and father of **Rowland Yorke**. Oxford knew the father as Yorick. The son falsely told Oxford that Nan had cheated on him while he was in Italy and, therefore, Lisbeth was not his daughter

Thomas Brincknell, undercook in Cecil House. Oxford, while a ward at Cecil House, stabbed him in the thigh, killing him; Lilah Stanhope, his fiancé/maidservant to Oxford's daughter, Susan

Joan Jockey, love interest of Earl John, whose retainers cut off her face so he would put her away

Marcus Gheeraerts, Dutch artist, who painted the Ditchley Portrait and the Pregnancy Portrait

Sir John Falstaff, knight; Tupp, his page

Peaches Bottomsup, barmaid in the Boar's Head

Robin, Oxford's page

Finley, former classmate of Oxford's at Cambridge, failed playwright, seeking to have plays considered worthy of study

Malfis, Oxford's lawyer

Nigel, Oxford's steward

Timson, Oxford's manservant

Thomas Digby, Oxford's steward at Hedingham Castle

Tobias, Oxford's whiffler

The Death of SHAKESPEARE



Author's Note to Part Two

At the conclusion of Part One, the Earl of Oxford is talking with the dowager Countess of Southampton who has just married Sir Thomas Heneage. They are watching her guests move through a complicated dance when her son, Henry Wriothesley, now 3rd Earl of Southampton, whirls past them. Oxford remarks that it is a pity Henry's father had not lived to see how handsome his son had turned out to be.

"But he *is* here," the Countess says to Oxford.

"Who?"

"His father." She looked out over the dancers.

"His father is dead, my lady. You buried him."

"I buried the 2nd Earl of Southampton, my lord, not Henry's father."

"My lady, you do yourself ill by slandering your former husband on the occasion of your second marriage."

"But truth is truth, is it not, my lord?"

Oxford was beginning to think the Countess may have had too much to drink but then realized she was implying *he* was Henry's father. "My lady, you suggest an honor I must decline."

"Because you and I have never ...?" she said mischievously, letting her voice trail off.

"Yes."

"Your mistake, my lord, is assuming I am Henry's mother."

"Of course, you are."

"I would know, wouldn't I?" The woman Oxford had thought drunk or mad now sounded completely sober. She turned to look at him. "He has your eyes and her hair, your mouth and her nose. His arrogance he gets from both of you."

Oxford looked out at Southampton dancing gracefully across the floor. She waited.

"Then, if you are not his mother, who is?" Oxford asked.

The Countess leaned in and gave his arm a squeeze: "She who just left in the royal barge."



Oxford and the Queen

Oxford's mouth fell open. The Countess was beaming. She waited for Oxford's reaction. Instead, he strode away across the room and ran out onto the pier. The royal barge was barely perceptible in the distance.

"God's blood!" he called out. He ran back down the pier and out into the courtyard on the Strand. He grabbed the reins of a big red being held by a hostler and vaulted into the saddle.

"Hey!" the hostler cried out. He let go when he saw the Earl of Oxford astride the horse. Oxford twisted his head around to glare down at him. The hostler stepped back. Oxford pulled the horse's head around and gave him the same look, startling the beast as much as he had frightened the hostler. He dug his heels in and the stallion bolted through the gates onto the Strand and flew off toward Ludgate.

The Londoners filling the road ahead peeled away like water before a ship under full sail. They were used to being run down by a nobleman in hot pursuit of a lady or a play. The big red flew past Paul's, past London Stone to Bishopsgate where it turned downhill to cross London Bridge at full gallop.

Oxford and the horse sped off the bridge into Southwark, turning left to follow the Thames past Deptford. At Greenwich Palace, Oxford carried on through the gate, scattering the few guards on duty. He brought the horse to a halt in the rear courtyard, leaped off, and ran into the palace. The big red wandered off. A servant ran after him.

No one challenged him. They were all somewhere else the queen was later told when she demanded to know how Oxford had gotten all the way to her private apartments. Elizabeth had just slipped off the gown she had worn to the Countess of Southampton's wedding when Oxford burst into her bedchamber.

"My lord!" Elizabeth cried out. One of the ladies-in-waiting threw a robe over the queen's shoulders.

"Get out!" Oxford said, waving an arm at the other women in the room. Elizabeth could sense something awful had happened but knew Oxford intended her no harm. She gestured and the ladies-in-waiting backed out of the room. Oxford closed the door behind them.

“How dare you!” Elizabeth said, recovering some of her composure. “How dare you come into our presence without permission.”

Oxford came back to the bed and stopped in front of her, hands on hips. “You have lied to me.”

“About what?” she shot back, her own anger at his violation of her private space beginning to match the cholera she saw in his face.

“*Our son!*”

“*Our son?*” Elizabeth repeated. She listened to herself. She laughed. “My lord, you have been too long in the playhouse.”

Oxford stood in front of her, breathing heavily.

“I have been accused of motherhood before,” Elizabeth said, her smile tightening. “Lord Seymour when I was fourteen. Some have claimed I gave birth to *his* son, but a week’s examination failed to prove that claim. Then there was Leicester, and d’Alençon, as well as his minister, Monsieur Simier, my little monkey, and Leicester, of course. And you in there somewhere. *All with access to the royal apartments like I was a hackney in a house of pleasure?*” She was not referring to the horse or the hamlet north of the City.

Oxford was not persuaded. But was she toying with him because she was *not* Southampton’s mother? Or because she *was*. Elizabeth was as fine an actor as any on the London stage. There was more than one reason she and Lord Burghley got along so well, and why the examination into her relationship with Lord Seymour failed to reveal what had actually happened when she was fourteen.

“And who, my lord, is *our son?*”

“Henry Wriothesley.”

She started. “The Earl of Southampton?” She answered her own question. “No. I would know, wouldn’t I?”

Oxford drew in his breath. The Countess had said the same thing to convince Oxford *she* was not Southampton’s mother!

“Piffle. He’s a sweet boy. Long fingers.”

“Like yours, Your Majesty.” She hardened. She was proud of her long fingers and forever showing them to foreign guests. “And his red hair?” Oxford added.

Her amusement disappeared. Her hair had hints of red in it. She had always thought it a sign. She was superstitious about many things, including the gold medallion she always wore around her neck for

good luck. She reached up to touch it. The old woman who had given it to her had said she would reign as long as she wore it around her neck.

“Enough!” she cried out. “Who told you this?”

“Lady Mary.”

Elizabeth’s anger grew. “My lord, you are a bigger fool than I thought you were. She knew you would come running to me. I hate it when that she-wolf finds a way to reach *into my very bedroom and ruin my evening!*”

She turned away. “It was bad enough I had to attend Lady Mary’s wedding and wish her well but my reward is for you to bring me this *canard!*” She looked toward the river, distant in the gathering dusk. “She is laughing at us, my lord. *Both* of us.”

Oxford was studying her, the way a seamstress looks at a dress for an errant thread. Elizabeth saw what he was doing.

“Stop it. I am *not* the mother of the Earl of Southampton. And why, my lord, would you want more sons? You have two already: an heir and a bastard.”

“The bastard gotten here, Your Majesty. And no one knew Anne was pregnant. Not even you, *who knows all!*”

Elizabeth leaned toward him. She did not like being reminded of Anne Vavasour’s pregnancy. Her own lady-in-waiting, gotten with child by the man standing in front of her, the babe delivered in these very rooms, and, yes, *without her knowing anything about it!* She had sent mother, father, and child to the Tower. Elizabeth had been humiliated: how could she be queen if a baby could be conceived and birthed in her own chambers *without her knowing it!* Oxford heard her teeth grind, something he had not heard since they had slept together as lovers.

He dropped another thought into the conversation: “Both sons named Henry, Your Majesty.” She was confused for a moment, then realized he was referring to Henry, his son and heir, the future 18th Earl of Oxford, and Henry Wriothesley.

Elizabeth’s eyes widened. They looked at each other, each imagining the same image: long fingers, red hair, and the word “Henry” floating over both children. Elizabeth was momentarily speechless. The Earl of Oxford was always shocking and surprising her. Most times, it was a healthy tonic to the bureaucratic babbling she had to put up with. Not this time, though.

“You recall the *Book of Prophecies*, don’t you, the one Charles Arundel said I had in my desk?” This startled her. “The one with

paintings in it he said were ‘after the manner of a prophecy and by interpretation resembled a *crowned son to the queen?*’

Elizabeth remembered it well. Oxford was quoting from a written statement Arundel had given while in the Tower. Oxford had named Arundel as part of a plot to replace Elizabeth on the throne. Arundel denied the charges and penned a laundry list of accusations against Oxford, one of which was that Oxford had a *Book of Prophecies* “in his deske.” In it was a painting of a child Oxford claimed was Elizabeth’s son! With a crown on his head!

Arundel told the queen Oxford was lying – he still had the book. The other conspirators agreed. Elizabeth tended to believe them and not Oxford. They were gullible, for sure. They had believed Oxford when he told them he had slept with a mare and seen the ghost of his mother’s second husband coming at him with a whip.

She released them eventually. Arundel fled to France where he died, poisoned by the Spanish. He, at least, was indeed a spy, as Oxford had said he was. But she remained convinced the *Book* existed. Arundel and the others had seen it. Oxford didn’t deny he had such a book in his possession at one point. He said he had given it to Dee who had taken it with him to the continent where he remained.

Not having it vexed her. What did it contain? Genealogical charts and other such nonsense? Something about Southampton? Over the years, she listened to every word Oxford wrote, knowing hidden messages filled his plays. When Pericles said at the Hampton Court performance of *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, “*Who has a book of all that monarchs do, / He’s more secure to keep it shut than shown,*” she knew Oxford was teasing her about *The Book of Prophecies*.

“Did you name him?” Oxford asked, taking her away from thoughts about *The Book*. He was trying to sound blasé.

Elizabeth bristled. “I did not name him. What do you *not* understand? I am *not* his mother. He is *not* my son!”

Oxford nodded, a complacent *we-both-know-you-have-to-say-you’re-not-his-mother* look on his face. She had more to tell him.

“This claim goes no further, Edward.” Her use of his given name underscored the seriousness of her command. “If you tell anyone about this, if you put this in one of your plays or in a poem, I shall have you immediately committed to the Tower again. This time, you won’t be there long. I will forthrightly sign the warrant for your execution, after which your head will appear on London Bridge to

show my people what happens when one of my subjects disobeys me, even one who stands as high in my court as the Earl of Oxford.”

Oxford did not feel threatened. She hadn’t sent him to the Tower for *Venus & Adonis*. If she sent him now, it would only confirm Southampton was their son.

But he was beginning to understand why she couldn’t acknowledge Southampton. She was the virgin queen, wasn’t she? How could she admit she had given birth to a son? Oxford thought he had the answer. He walked back to her.

“You have no heir, Your Majesty. The succession is fraught with danger. England cries out for a proper heir. Our son is royal by virtue of being your son. He can succeed you.”

She glared at him. Oxford went on before she could interrupt him.

“Your own father has shown you the way. He had an illegitimate son, Henry Fitzroy. He could not marry the boy’s mother because he was still married to Catherine. What did he do? He acknowledged the boy as his own and made him the 1st Duke of Richmond *and* Somerset at age six. Had he lived, he would have succeeded your father.”

“And I would never have been born,” she snapped.

“But the step your father took to acknowledge Henry Fitzroy set a precedent that allows you to acknowledge Southampton as your successor. The Act of Succession supports this. Up to 1571, the Act of Succession required that a successor had to be the ‘issue of the queen’s body lawfully begotten.’ In 1571, ‘*lawfully begotten*’ was struck out by Parliament. The Act now reads: ‘except the same be *the natural issue of her Majesty’s body.*’ Henry Wriothesley can succeed you.”

She refused to look at him.

He leaned in. “I asked Camden about the change but he refused to tell me what he knew.” Oxford dropped his voice to imitate the gravelly tones of the noted historian and Clarenceux King of Arms: “*Oh, my. It were incredible the jests made by lewd catchers of words on the occasion of this clause, forasmuch as the lawyers term those children natural which are gotten out of wedlock.*”

Oxford thought his imitation good but Elizabeth’s stony face told him she was not impressed. He decided to tack in another direction.

“Your subjects do not want another War of the Roses after you’re gone. Telling them you have hidden away an heir would bring joy to the land. *The constant virgin who planned for their well-being once she was gone.*”

“But I am the Virgin Queen, and virgins, except for our Lord’s blessed mother, do not have children!”

“They will know it was a clever ruse to protect Henry before he becomes king! Your people will love you for it.”

Elizabeth glared at him. “I am *not* the mother of *any* son, much less the Earl of Southampton.” She leaned toward him. “The moment I acknowledge him, I become Richard II and my reign is over.”

Oxford thought she was protesting too much. Elizabeth read his thoughts.

“You may believe the English people will embrace Henry if they think he is my son but others will surely want him dead. Think of Edward’s sons, murdered in the Tower so that Gloucester could become Richard III. You have shown us the man: ‘*Now is the winter of our discontent,*’ you have him say. You don’t have him say ‘*my discontent.*’ He says ‘*our discontent,*’ showing he already thinks himself king. In real life, someone is *always* having a *winter of discontent*. Words matter, my lord, much more in my world than yours. If you speak of what Lady Mary told you today, you will be signing Henry’s death warrant. It will come when he least expects it, in a dark corner on his way home or in a tavern, upstairs, like Marlowe.” She looked at him closely. “Is that what you want?”

Oxford didn’t say anything.

She continued. “I do this out of love for the Earl of Southampton, my lord, not because I think he is my son. You should do the same. Otherwise, you will be sacrificing the boy on the altar of your pride.”

This brought Oxford up short. But was she putting on a wonderful performance? He couldn’t tell. He nodded and rose. “With your permission.” She waved a hand.

He retraced his steps through the palace. The big red was nowhere to be seen. A warm breeze from the southwest washed over him. He went back through the palace to the side that faced the Thames. As he recrossed the empty hallways, he felt a sense of exhilaration rise within him. He was probably fooling himself but hopeless quests had always excited him. After all, he was the last of the medieval knights. Who better to be the father of the next king? With every step toward the water, he became more convinced Elizabeth was Southampton’s mother *and he was the boy’s father!*

The tide was coming in. A good sign, he thought. He hailed a wherry and stepped aboard. He felt as light as a feather. “Where to go?” he asked himself. “The Boar’s Head; Fat Jack will love this.”



Lineage Tables

(at end of text)

The Earls of Oxford

William Cecil

Baron Burghley

The Earls of Southampton

The Earls of Derby

Peregrine Bertie, Lord Willoughby de Eresby

The Earls of Pembroke

The Lords Hunsdon

The Sidney Family

Margaret Douglas, Countess of Lennox



The Earls of Oxford

John de Vere, 16th Earl of Oxford (d. August 3, 1562)

(m. 1536)

Dorothy Neville (died Aug 3, 1562)

Katherine — m. — Edward, Baron Windsor,
(b. 1538; d. 1600) (b. 1532; d. 1575)¹

(m. 1549)

Margery Golding - m. - Charles Tyrell (1563)
(Margery d. 1568) (Tyrell d. 1570)

Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford Mary - m. - Peregrine Bertie²
(b. April 12, 1550; d. June 24, 1604)

— Anne Cecil
(daughter of Lord Burghley)³
(m. Dec 1571; d. June 5, 1588)

Queen Elizabeth . . .
(affair 1573)

Earl of Southampton
(b. 1573; d. 1624)⁵

Anne Vavasor
(affair 1580-1581)

Edward Vere
(b. March 1581;
d. 1629 without issue)

Elizabeth Trentham —
(m. 1592; d. 1609)

— Elizabeth - m. - Wm Stanley, Earl of Derby ⁴
(b. 7-2-1575)

— Son — (died soon after birth)
(b. 1583)

— Bridget - m. - Francis Norris, Baron of Rycote
(b. 4-6-1584)

— Susan - m. - Philip Herbert, Earl of
(b. 5-26-1586) Montgomery⁶

— Frances — (died soon after birth)
(b. 1587)

Henry de Vere, 18th Earl of Oxford
(b. Feb 24, 1593; d. 1625 without issue)

¹ Edward, Baron Windsor, died, January 24, 1574, in Venice. Oxford's half-sister, Katherine, wife of Edward, Baron Windsor, sued Oxford in 1563 to have their father's marriage to Oxford's mother declared void, which would have 'unearled' Oxford. He was 14 years of age at the time and subject only to the Court of Wards. Katherine's suite was dismissed. She apparently did not refile in the Court of Wards, probably because its head was Sir William Cecil, soon to become Baron Burghley, and Oxford's guardian.

² See, Peregrine Bertie

³ See, The Family of William Cecil, Baron Burghley

⁴ See, The Earls of Derby

⁵ See, The Earls of Southampton

⁶ See, The Earls of Pembroke