

THE UNKNOWN ACTOR

by

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Based On True Events

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FADE IN:

EXT. GLOBE THEATER - DAY

THE UNKNOWN ACTOR (19), a handsome young man, excited that he's about to make his mark in the world, terrified that he can't pull it off, raises the Globe's flag.

Superset on the screen: London 1601

INT. GLOBE THEATER, BACKSTAGE - DAY

The Actor enters the Globe and heads for the Tiring House. Around him people rush about as they sweep up, bring in costumes, carry musical instruments, secure sandbags, and tie up ropes and pulleys.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (37) dressed as the Ghost, walks towards the Tiring House from the opposite direction. RICHARD BURBAGE (33) dressed as King Claudius and JOHN HEMINGE (38) dressed as Queen Gertrude approach him. Shakespeare smiles.

SHAKESPEARE

What say the receipts this
afternoon Master Burbage?

BURBAGE

They tell a tale of riches Master
Shakespeare.

HEMINGE

There cannot possibly be another
playhouse as full as the Globe
Theater!

INT. TIRING HOUSE - DAY

The Actor, dressed as Hamlet, sits before a mirror nervously doing his own make-up. His hands shake. Shakespeare enters.

SHAKESPEARE

The curtain approaches. You'd best
be quick.

THE ACTOR

A minute more. How does the crowd?

SHAKESPEARE

Opening night and we shall fill the
house. Are you sure you're ready?

EXT. GLOBE THEATER - DAY

There is a huge line to get in. In the distance a large royal company approaches headed by SIR WALTER RALEIGH (49) and the Royal Guard. At it's center, carried on a litter lays QUEEN ELIZABETH (67), surrounded by many lords and attendants.

RALEIGH

Your Majesty, the Globe is just ahead.

ELIZABETH

Your men make excellent time, Sir Walter.

INT. GLOBE THEATER - DAY

Raleigh and his men empty the center section of seats opposite the stage.

ROBERT CECIL (34), Secretary to the Queen, dressed in black, jaded, vulnerably bitter, limps; GEORGE CARY (54), Lord Chamberlain to the Queen's Household, restrainedly English; and WILLIAM BROOKE (74), the 5th Baron of Cobham, a scheming, fatiguing complainer, wait for Elizabeth around her seat.

She arrives and everybody bows. She looks around curiously.

CHAMBERLAIN

Welcome to the Globe Theater, my Queen.

ELIZABETH

Thank you, my Lord Chamberlain.

COBHAM

The King of Spain and the Pope shall chorus their outrage.

ELIZABETH

The Pope has ordered my execution, Lord Cobham, what care I his outrage?

(to the Chamberlain)

I shall say one thing, frankly your Theater disappoints me, Lord Chamberlain.

CHAMBERLAIN

Whatever for, my Queen?

ELIZABETH

It does not at all appear the house
of ill repute of which Lord Cobham
complains.

CECIL

They are on their best behavior,
your Majesty.

Elizabeth takes her seat in the center of the Theater.

ELIZABETH

We shall see what their best gets
them.

INT. TIRING HOUSE - DAY

Burbage and Heminge rush in on Shakespeare and the Actor.

BURBAGE

William, she's here!

SHAKESPEARE

Anne?

HEMINGE

She has come to the Globe and is
sitting in the audience!

THE ACTOR

Who is she?

BURBAGE

The Queen, Will! Elizabeth the
First.

SHAKESPEARE

Good God! She has come to see
Hamlet.

THE ACTOR

But why come here?

BURBAGE

Forgiven once, but perhaps not
twice.

SHAKESPEARE

She'll recognize the references to
Essex, Southampton, and James.

THE ACTOR

Are we then... to truly die?

SHAKESPEARE

That is the question, isn't it?
You must give the performance of
your life.

HEMINGE

What are we to do?

SHAKESPEARE

Tell everybody. Every detail from
start to finish is to be checked
and rechecked. Costumes, music,
cues; our performance shall be
without flaw.

BURBAGE

That cannot save us.

SHAKESPEARE

The Queen has come to see if we
perform a play or treasons. A
perfect play is all that can.

BURBAGE

Then I shall take the lead.

SHAKESPEARE

What?

THE ACTOR

Forgive me Master Burbage, but
Hamlet is my role.

SHAKESPEARE

It is he the Queen has come to see.

BURBAGE

He is a boy! In his first major
role.

SHAKESPEARE

Second!

THE ACTOR

Third!

SHAKESPEARE

The Chamberlain's Men have
rehearsed with only him as Hamlet.
For you to take the lead now would
cast the entire production askew!

INT. GLOBE THEATER - DAY

Elizabeth taps her fingers. She turns to the Chamberlain.

ELIZABETH
 Hadn't they best be getting
 started?

CECIL
 Perhaps you've made them nervous,
 your Majesty.

ELIZABETH
 Of course I have.

COBHAM
 Or perhaps they seek to polish, in
 light of your presence, your
 Highness.

ELIZABETH
 If they present anything other than
 Hamlet, as entered in the Station's
 Register, this time I shall skewer
 their heads on pikes.

CECIL
 I am certain they shan't, your
 Highness.

ELIZABETH
 I shall have no more reworked plays
 from Master Shakespeare!

CHAMBERLAIN
 Your Majesty, perhaps I should
 attend to this delay.

ELIZABETH
 You have my leave, Lord
 Chamberlain.

He stands, bows, and exits.

INT. TIRING HOUSE - DAY

Shakespeare, Burbage, Heminge, and the Actor argue. The Lord
 Chamberlain hurriedly enters, unnoticed.

SHAKESPEARE
 With him we may succeed, this
 change would, for certain, doom us
 all!

CHAMBERLAIN
 Gentlemen.

They all turn to him, fall silent, and bow.

BURBAGE

My good Lord Chamberlain, how may we be of service?

CHAMBERLAIN

Get this bloody play started.

BURBAGE

At once, my lord.

CHAMBERLAIN

Exactly as you've been rehearsing it these last few weeks.

BURBAGE

With but one minor change, Lord Chamberlain.

CHAMBERLAIN

Change?

BURBAGE

I shall take the role of Hamlet.

CHAMBERLAIN

No.

BURBAGE

My lord?

CHAMBERLAIN

There shall be no changes! Who rehearsed as Hamlet?

Shakespeare looks at the Actor.

THE ACTOR

I have, your Grace.

The Chamberlain grabs the Actor.

CHAMBERLAIN

Then it shall be he who goes out as Hamlet today!

BURBAGE

Yes, my lord.

CHAMBERLAIN

Every scene shall be done exactly the same.

Not one note of the chorus nor a single line of text shall vary from what was entered into the Station's Register. Is that clear?

SHAKESPEARE

Yes, Lord Chamberlain. We live only to serve.

Shakespeare and the others bow. The Chamberlain leaves.

BURBAGE

The traitor's death is a horrible way to die.

HEMINGE

Do not fail us.

THE ACTOR

I shall not, Master Burbage.

SHAKESPEARE

Come gentlemen. We have a play to perform.

Heminge runs out the door.

HEMINGE

I shall tell everybody!

Shakespeare steps between Burbage and the Actor and leads them out.

SHAKESPEARE

We shall perform it as we always have. Professionally.

INT. GLOBE THEATER BACKSTAGE - DAY

The Actor stands alone behind the darkened curtains. He pulls the center curtains open a crack and peers out.

The Queen sits between Cobham and Cecil, surrounded by guards who carry swords and halberds. She looks suddenly towards the curtains and the Actor jumps back into the shadows.

THE ACTOR

How did I get here?

MUSIC begins. Startled, the Actor looks to the curtains. They open to the blinding white light of the midday sun.

FLASHBACK - EXT. COUNTRY FAIR - NIGHT

A few dozen country folk watch a Passion Play by torch light performed on a Pageant Wagon stage.

Superset on the screen: Wolfamcote England, 1599

The Actor (17) stands on the stage dressed as Everyman. At his foot and at the feet of every actor on the stage sits a placard bearing the name of their character.

Across from him in a black robe with a skull face mask stands another actor dressed as DEATH. Around them are five other trade guild actors and one young actress dressed as GOOD WORKS, KNOWLEDGE, STRENGTH, WIT, WORLDLY GOODS, and BEAUTY.

DEATH

"It is time."

THE ACTOR

"Such a long journey. Must I go alone?"

DEATH

"You may have but one true friend."

They all step away from the Actor except Good Works, who takes his hand. They pause and face the audience. The audience claps. Politely. They bow.

INT. PAGEANT WAGON - NIGHT

The other actors change into their homespun clothes, set aside their costumes and leave. The Actor stops and caresses the rich fabric of the Everyman costume next to the poor worn homespun pants and shirt he wears.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Farmers work in their fields. One of them is the Actor. He guides a plow pulled by two oxen.

His little sister AUDREY (5) walks over to him and the oxen with a skin of water. The Actor stops the oxen and takes the bag from her.

THE ACTOR

Welcome and a blessing, my little princess.

He drinks thirstily. She picks up the reins.

AUDREY

Giddy up.

THE ACTOR
Would you like to start the oxen?

AUDREY
Yes, please.

He puts a hand on the wooden handles and she starts the oxen.
He guides them from behind as they pull her along.

THE ACTOR
Such a little girl to tame two such
wild beasts.

AUDREY
I'm doing it.

GERALD (O.S.)
Armed men!

In the distance, a large group of armed MEN head towards
their farm. A few are on horseback.

The Actor drops the water bottle, picks Audrey up and runs
towards the house.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

GERALD (42) and PATRICIA (38) gather the rest of their
children into the house.

The Actor arrives with Audrey and he hands her to their
mother, Patricia.

GERALD
They've come for men to take to the
war in Ireland.

PATRICIA
You cannot let them take you.

Two riders, SIR GELLI MEYRICK (32), rough, roguish, and SIR
HENRY CUFFE (45), distinguished, learned, ride up.

MEYRICK
You there.

Gerald removes his hat and bows his head.

GERALD
Aye, sir.

MEYRICK
Your house's been taxed. You must
come into the service of England.

PATRICIA
You take him, sir, you'll kill us
all.

MEYRICK
He don't go, you'll all die anyway.

GERALD
Do na' threaten my family.

Gerald picks up a shovel near the door. Meyrick looks at Cuffe.

MEYRICK
The flint of 'im.

Meyrick draws his pistol and aims it at Gerald.

MEYRICK
You'd be dead already were I not
charged wit' taking you.

Gerald eyes Meyrick and tightens his grip on the shovel.

CUFFE
Gelli, we would do better to take
the lad. Leave the old man.

GERALD
I'll not lose my firstborn.

PATRICIA
We have other children.

MEYRICK
I've no time. Decide.

Meyrick COCKS the trigger. Gerald looks at Patricia, his other children, and then at the Actor. He loosens his grip on the shovel.

GERALD
All right.

THE ACTOR
Da, no! You promised me leave for
London.

Gerald BACKHANDS the Actor and knocks him down.

GERALD
I didna' raise you t'back talk.

MEYRICK
Can you ride, boy?

PATRICIA
We've only the one horse.

CUFFE
Men in the cavalry live longer.

GERALD
He's got a horse.
(to the Actor)
Fetch it.

INT. BARN - DAY

The Actor saddles his horse and pack within the stable in the darkened barn. He looks out towards the house where his family and the riders await.

He stops, reaches a decision and leads the horse out towards the back door of the barn.

Just inside the back door waits Audrey, close to tears.

AUDREY
You leaving me?

He kneels down and hugs her hard.

THE ACTOR
Little princess, I cannot die in
Ireland, never having seen London.

She pushes off to face him.

AUDREY
What's in London?

THE ACTOR
The chance to make a name for
myself, to become an actor and
perform upon a stage.

AUDREY
Take me with you.

THE ACTOR
'Tis too dangerous.

AUDREY
'Tis dang'rous here.

THE ACTOR

I've no money, and little food.

She starts to cry.

AUDREY

You can't leave me. Who else would
read to me or teach me French?

The Actor cries too. He stands up and whispers.

THE ACTOR

Not a word.

He lifts her and puts her on the horse in front of the
saddle.

She puts her hands over her mouth to stifle her own stillborn
cry of joy.

He mounts behind her and starts the horse out the back door
of the barn.

EXT. BARN BACK DOOR - DAY

The Actor and Audrey emerge. Before him waits Meyrick on
horseback with two other armed riders.

MEYRICK

If it's little girls you fancy,
they'll be plenty in Ireland.