

~ POETRY FOR KIDS ~

William Shakespeare



EDITED BY
MARGUERITE TASSI, PhD

ILLUSTRATED BY
MERCÈ LÓPEZ

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MoonDance



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This book is dedicated to my wonderful children, Francesca and James. —M.T.

To Roberto and Frida —M.L.

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Introduction

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE WAS AN ENGLISH PLAYWRIGHT, ACTOR, AND POET who lived during the reigns of two monarchs, Queen Elizabeth I and King James I. Widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language, he has gained fame across the globe for his brilliance as a dramatist.

For all of his fame and fortune, William's beginnings were humble. He was born in April 1564 in Stratford, a small town on the River Avon one hundred miles from London. He was the oldest surviving child of John Shakespeare, a successful glove maker, and Mary Arden. William attended the King's New School in Stratford, taking classes six days a week, primarily in Latin grammar and literature, until about the age of fifteen. At age eighteen, William married a local girl, Anne Hathaway. They had three children: Susanna and twins named Judith and Hamnet. Sadly, Hamnet lived only to the age of eleven. By all appearances, William's life was relatively quiet until his mid-twenties when he left Stratford to try his fortune in the big city.

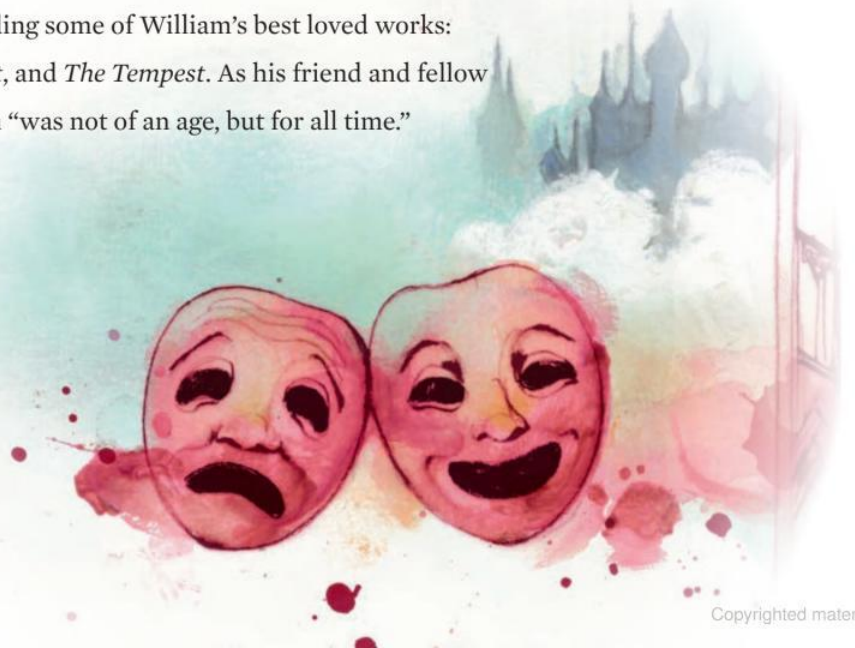
In the late 1580s, the London-area theatres were on the rise, teeming with excitement and life. William made his way to London to work in this vibrant artistic world, where a new show played every afternoon in gorgeously painted wooden playhouses. William got his start as an actor, but it did not take long for him to realize that his greatest talent lay in playwriting. He joined an acting company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men, later known as the King's Men (when James I became their patron). William became the company's resident dramatist at the Theatre, the first professionally built playhouse in London. The Lord Chamberlain's Men were a travelling company as well, which meant that William's plays were performed at inns, royal courts, universities, and in other English towns.

William first won fame with his history plays in the early 1590s, which brought the thrilling stories of England's kings to the stage. He then gained further popularity with comedies

like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and tragedies, such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*. His soaring poetry, lifelike characters, and dramatic innovations made William the most popular playwright of his time. He also earned a reputation as a poet, writing a number of long poems and 154 sonnets.

William is best known for his association with the Globe Theatre. When the Lord Chamberlain's Men lost their lease to the land under the Theatre, they took a risk that changed the course of history. In the dead of night, the men met at the Theatre, and despite the wintry cold, they worked to dismantle the entire building. Then they carried the timber across the frozen River Thames to another site, where the playhouse was rebuilt and named the Globe. Although it was demolished eventually in 1644, a new Globe playhouse was built many years later and opened in 1997.

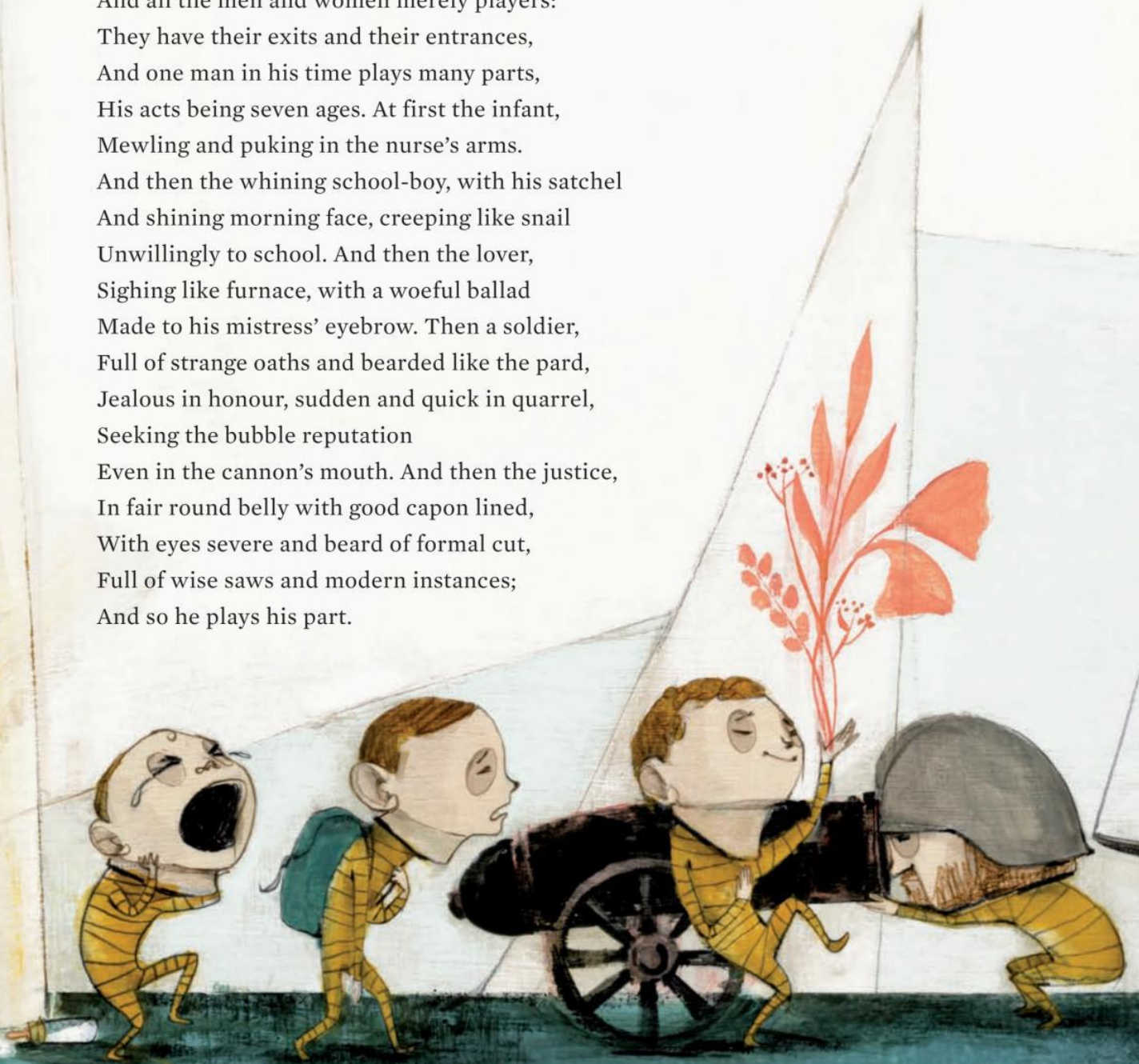
William died a wealthy man in Stratford in April 1616 at the age of fifty-two. Seven years later, his friends from the King's Men, John Heminge and Henry Condell, did something that would change literary and theatrical history profoundly. They collected all of William's handwritten scripts and brought them to a printer. In 1623, the collected plays of Shakespeare, called the First Folio, appeared in print. Among the thirty-six plays were eighteen that would have been lost had they not appeared in the Folio, including some of William's best loved works: *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, *As You Like It*, and *The Tempest*. As his friend and fellow dramatist Ben Jonson wrote, William "was not of an age, but for all time."



All the World's a Stage

FROM *As You Like It*, ACT 2, SCENE 7

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.
And then the whining school-boy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lined,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so he plays his part.



The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

Mewling—whimpering

Like furnace—like a furnace emitting smoke

Bearded like the pard—having whiskers like a leopard

Jealous in honour—carefully guarding his honour

Bubble reputation—fleeting glory

Capon—cock fattened for eating; often presented to judges as a bribe

Saws—sayings

Modern instances—commonplace illustrations or proofs against universal beliefs

Pantaloon—ridiculous old merchant from Italian comedy

Hose—leggings

A world—far

Shank—leg

Mere oblivion—complete forgetfulness

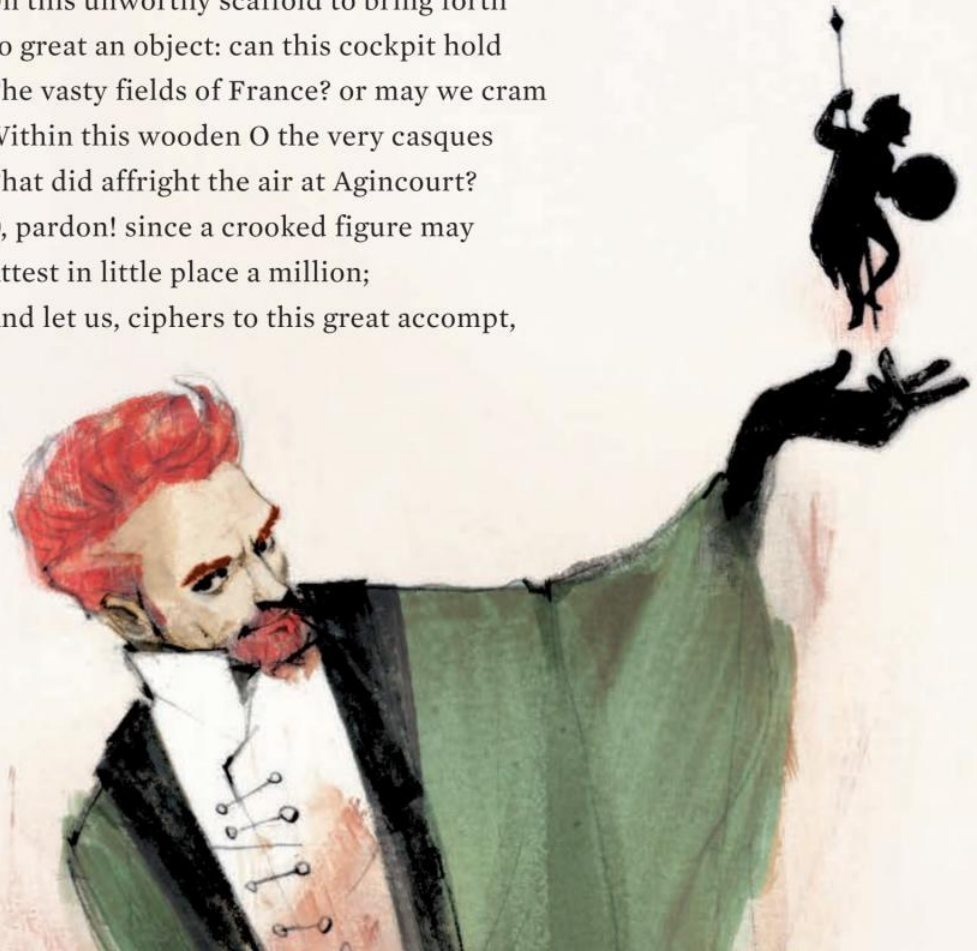
Sans—without



O, for a Muse of Fire

FROM *Henry V*, ACT 1, PROLOGUE

O, for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention,
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!
Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,
Assume the port of Mars; and at his heels,
Leash'd in like hounds, should famine, sword and fire
Crouch for employment. But pardon, and gentles all,
The flat unraised spirits that have dared
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
So great an object: can this cockpit hold
The vasty fields of France? or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt?
O, pardon! since a crooked figure may
Attest in little place a million;
And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,



On your imaginary forces work.
Suppose within the girdle of these walls
Are now confined two mighty monarchies,
Whose high upreared and abutting fronts
The perilous Narrow Ocean parts asunder:
Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts;
Into a thousand parts divide one man,
And make imaginary puissance;
Think when we talk of horses, that you see them
Printing their proud hoofs i' th' receiving earth;
For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
Carry them here and there; jumping o'er times,
Turning the accomplishment of many years
Into an hour-glass: for the which supply,
Admit me Chorus to this history;
Who Prologue-like your humble patience pray,
Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play.

Muse—source of inspiration
Invention—imagination
Swelling—increasing in magnificence
Port—appearance
Scaffold—stage's platform
Wooden O—a circular amphitheatre
Very casque—actual helmets
Agincourt—a village in Northern France
where Henry V won his greatest victory
Crooked figure—zero
Attest—stand for
Narrow Ocean—the English Channel
Ciphers—zeroes
Parts—actors' roles
Puissance—armies

