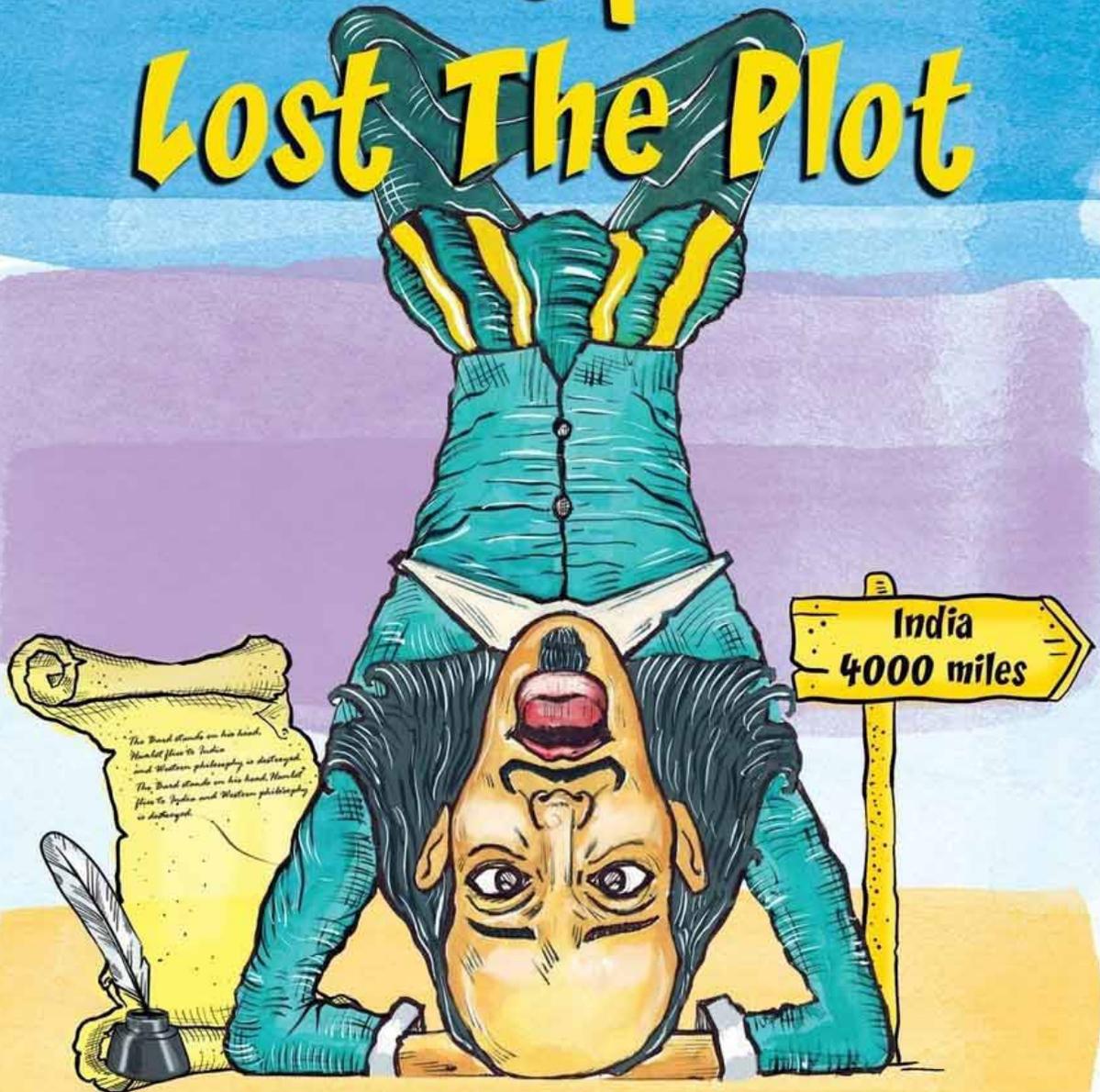


Subhuti Anand

When Shakespeare Lost The Plot



The Bard stands on his head, Hamlet flies to India and Western philosophy is destroyed.

WHEN SHAKESPEARE LOST THE PLOT

A comedy in which the West's most famous playwright gets into trouble
because of his wife's love for Eastern philosophy.

By Anand Subhuti

Enter Prologue with scroll.

Prologue:

The mark of greatness, as we know,
Is left for history to bestow.
And who of us, now sitting here,
Will be remembered through the years?
Whose name to others will be shown,
In golden letter, carved in stone?
William Shakespeare, there's a name,
Four hundred years of global fame.
His plays show man in good, in badness,
Our vanity, our pride, our madness.
The rise and fall of kings and queens,
Blind ambition, broken dreams.
Shakespeare's mighty pen described it,
What unkind critic will deny it?
But this I say, no hesitation,
Will never knew of meditation.
His busy mind was full of chatter,

He didn't think that silence mattered.
His characters did everything
But close their eyes and look within.
So come with me, let me invite you
With this small drama to excite you,
And meet Will Shakespeare and his wife
And give them both a different life.
And what we poor players lack in skill
Let your imagination now fulfill.

Queen Elizabeth walks swiftly onto the stage, followed by an attendant. Prologue becomes her second attendant. She is holding a manuscript in her hand and she is angry. William Shakespeare follows her.

Elizabeth: I will not have this play performed in my court, not while there is a single breath left in my body. No, no, no, Master Shakespeare!

Shakespeare (*protesting*): But your Majesty, it is a worthy play....

Elizabeth (*waving the papers at him*): I commanded a tragedy, Master Shakespeare.

Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy, your Majesty.

Elizabeth (*shaking her head*): Ha! Do you take me for a fool?

Shakespeare: No indeed, your Majesty.

Elizabeth: It is a love story, Master Shakespeare, and what is more, it is an indecent love story! Will you have me sit on my throne, in front of the entire court, and watch while a young girl, barely 13 years old, shares her bed with her lover?

Shakespeare: But they were married, your Majesty.

Elizabeth: A hasty, secret wedding, performed against all wise counsel. It cannot excuse the scandal you will have us watch.

Shakespeare: But they both die in the end, your Majesty.

Elizabeth: Too late, Master Shakespeare, much too late! The romance has already happened. I will have none of it (*she rips up the manuscript and throws it on the floor*).

Shakespeare (*horrified*): My play!

He tries to gather the pieces, but the Queen stops him.

Elizabeth: Leave it there, I command you! And write me another play, to be performed in court within the week, or risk my deep displeasure. Do I make myself clear Master Shakespeare?

Shakespeare: Indeed, your Majesty, very clear.

Elizabeth: So be it. One week, Master Shakespeare. Not a day longer.

Haughtily, she starts to walk away.

Shakespeare (*to the audience*): My God, what a bitch!

Elizabeth stops, turns slowly in a menacing way towards Shakespeare.

Elizabeth: What did you say, Master Shakespeare?

Shakespeare (*realizing the Queen was still within earshot*):

Er... I said... That I am rich...

Your patronage prevents me... from falling in a ditch.

Queen Elizabeth gives him a scornful look and begins to leave the stage, with her attendants. As she leaves, two players belonging to the same theatre company as Shakespeare come running onstage, the girl being chased by the boy, and laughing. When they see the Queen they immediately stop and give a deep solemn bow.

Players (*bowing*): Your Majesty.

The Queen exits. Shakespeare waits until she has gone, then starts to pick up the pieces of his torn manuscript.

First Player (*approaching Shakespeare and mocking him*): How now, what grave misfortune have we here?

Second Player: Her Majesty was not too pleased, I fear!

First player: Why Will, what ails you man? Why this distress?

Second Player: Have you been fighting with our Royal Mistress?

Shakespeare: Leave me alone, good fellows, I entreat you.
I lack the time and humour now to meet you.

First player picks up two of pieces of paper and hands one to her companion. They tease Will by playing the roles of Romeo and Juliet.

First Player (*playing Juliet*):

Oh Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?

Second Player (*playing Romeo*):

But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?

It is the East and Juliet is the sun!

First Player (*surrendering*):

Take me, Romeo, for I am yours!

Second Player (*running towards her*): My love! My angel!

They collapse in giggles of laughter.

Shakespeare (*irritated*): Stop it, both of you! Leave me in peace. For I must write a tragedy, within a week.

First Player: What story will you tell? Hast thou begun?

Shakespeare: Alas, I know not. Inspiration have I none.

The two players look at each other and nod agreement.

Second Player: Will, we can help you...

First Player: ...if you so desire.

Shakespeare: How now? What mischief do you two conspire?

First Player: Last month, in Denmark, we played before the king...

Second Player: In his great castle did we dance and sing...

First Player: A mighty feast was held, with many plays...

Second Player: Heroic tales and legends from the grave...

First Player: One story was admired above them all...

Second Player: The greatest tragedy, wherein a king did fall...

First Player: The king's own brother did most treacherously take his life...

Second Player: And then he forced the Queen to be his wife!

Shakespeare: So far so good... and then?

First Player: Then her poor son, Hamlet, tortured by this stealth...

Second Player: Knows not whether to kill the new king, or himself...

First Player: And so he struggles on, quite desperately

Second Player: Not knowing whether to be, or not to be....

Shakespeare (*intrigued by the story*): It is a worthy tale. What happens next?

The two players look at each other and scratch their heads and look puzzled.

First Player: Er... we forget! It matters not, Will, draw upon thy skill...

Second Player: And let your clever mind write what you will.

First Player: Just make it up, you shall invent the rest,

Second Player: After all, it is what you do best!

First Player: As long as they all die when the play ends...

Second Player: The Queen will love you...

First Player (*rubbing fingers to indicate money*): ...and make sweet amends!

Shakespeare: It shall be done. I'll write this 'Hamlet' now.

For I must save my precious neck somehow!

Henceforth, Will Shakespeare's plays shall ever be,

Remembered for their gloom and tragedy!

All gather together for the opening song. Queen Elizabeth comes onstage with her attendants and stands separately, looking proud and aloof, and she does not sing.

Another drama for you to see,

Another ending in misery,

It's oh-so tragic, it has to be

It's for her Royal Majesty.

Another drama to make you sad,

Another story that's going bad

If you enjoy it

You must be mad!

It's for her Royal Majesty.

Heroes, zeroes, kings and villains

Kill each other with precision.

Cleopatra's destiny

Dying with Mark Anthony,

Juliet as we all know

Killed herself for Romeo,

Star-crossed lovers, heartbreak endings

Tragedy and gloom descending

Is there more that we can't see?

Is this all that's meant to be?

Another drama for you to see,

Another ending in misery,

It's oh-so tragic, it has to be

It's for her Royal Majesty.

Another drama to make you sad,

Another story that's going bad

If you enjoy it

You must be mad!

It's for her Royal Majesty... we're going crazy!...

It's for her Royal Majesty.

*Actors depart, leaving Will Shakespeare sitting alone, writing with a quill pen
(Attendants remain standing at the back).*

WS: "To be or not to be, that is the question" ... Yes... that is *the* question... (*writing*)...

Enter Shakespeare's wife (SW). She has a crochet circle in her hand. She looks at her husband, recognizing that he is completely preoccupied.

WS: "...Whether 'tis nobler in the mind..."

SW: Will dear.... Will.... WILL!!! Fetch another basket of firewood, there's a good fellow.

WS: Er... what?

SW: Wood, dear, the fire's going out and there's a winter chill in the air today.

WS: "To suffer... the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune..." (*writing*) yes, I like that!

SW (*wearily*): Writing again, I see.

WS (*not looking up*): Hmm...

SW: Not another tragedy I hope.

WS (*frostily*): Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, happens to be very fond of tragedies.

SW: That's because she's old and sick and dying.

WS (*shocked, indignant and scared*): Hush, woman, hold your tongue! Such things may not be said without immediate arrest and punishment.

SW (*shrugs*): Everyone's saying it except you. The gossip is all over London that the Queen will die before the year is out.

WS: Alas, I fear it. And what will happen to our poor company of players then?

SW comes over to him, smiling and seductive.

SW: Will, sweetheart, write me a nice comedy... something to make me smile and laugh... like you used to in the old days... to please me?

WS: Dearest, I will... but not now. (*stands up*) This new play, Hamlet, is going to be my greatest triumph. The great tragedy of the young Prince of Denmark, torn between action and inaction, decision and indecision, life and death... (*dramatically with a flourish*)... "To be, or not to be, that is the question!"

SW remains unimpressed. She picks up the bucket and hands it to him.

SW: Firewood or no firewood? *That* is the question. Now get along with you or we'll both die of cold tonight.

WS (*taking the bucket*): Oh very well... But wait! I see how it must continue... (*sits down and writes furiously*) "To sleep, perchance to dream – ay, there's the rub: For in that sleep of death what dreams may come..."

SW: I give up. Give me the bucket (*picks it up*). (*to the audience*). Equal rights for women is going to come a little too late for me. (*smiling deviously at WS*) But I have my ways. Buy me a new dress, Will, and I'll forgive you everything."

WS (*not looking up*): Yes dear.

SW (*pleased at herself for persuading him*): Ha! (*to the audience*) You see? It's better to *be*. How can you wear a new dress if you choose *not to be*!

SW exits with her basket. An actor come onstage carrying a human skull and approaches WS. He has come to audition for the role of Hamlet (H).

H (*coming close to WS, he accidentally almost thrusts the skull in his face*): Excuse me, Will.

WS (*looks up, sees the skull and is frightened*): Aaaargh! For God's sake, man, what do you think you're doing?

H (*hides the skull clumsily behind his back*): Sorry, Will. I've come for the audition.

WS: What?

H: The part. I've come to play Hamlet.

WS: But why the skull?

H: Well, you said it's a tragedy, so I brought along my grandfather to add a little atmosphere.

WS: Oh, very well (*takes skull to inspect*). After all, if I fail to please the Queen, this is what I will look like in a week! (*gives him a script to read*): Let's put him down... stand here, face the audience and read this.

Hamlet strikes a very theatrical pose.

H: To be, or not to be, that is... such a stupid question...! (*laughs*)

WS: What do you mean, man?

H: Nobody asks questions like this, Will.

WS: I don't believe this! You and your colleague gave me that line yourselves, from the play in Denmark!

H (*shrugs*): I guess it sounds better in Danish.

WS (*annoyed*): Just read the script.

H: ...Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them.

WS: That's better.

Enter SW, looking sceptically at Hamlet.

SW: So... let me get this straight. This handsome-looking young man is called Hamlet.

WS: Right.

SW: Hamlet's father was the King of Denmark, but he was killed by a rival. The rival becomes the new King of Denmark and marries Hamlet's mother.

WS: Right.

SW: Hamlet wants to kill the new king, to revenge his father, but instead spends a long time wondering whether to be or not to be, which makes everything very complicated. And how does it all end...?

WS: In tragedy, of course.

SW: Hamlet dies...?

WS: Yes.

SW: Hamlet's mother dies?

WS: Yes.

SW: The new king dies?

WS: Yes.

SW: The king's prime minister dies?

WS: Yes.

SW: The king's prime minister's son dies?

WS: Yes.

Enter Ophelia, looking dreamy and sad.

SW: And who might this young lady be?

WS: This is Ophelia, the Prime Minister's daughter. She's in love with Hamlet.

SW: Ah, something to be happy about, at last!

WS: Not exactly. You see, the murder of his father has driven Hamlet almost mad, so he rejects Ophelia. Watch and see!

H (*to Ophelia*): I did love you once.

O (*sad yet still hopeful*): Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

H: You should not have believed me. I loved you not.

O (*hurt and crushed*): Alas, I was the more deceived.

H: Get thee to a nunnery: why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?

O: O, help him, you sweet heavens! I fear that my true love is going mad!

H: Get thee to a nunnery, go: farewell. Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool; for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery, go, and quickly too. Farewell.

O: O heavenly powers, restore his troubled mind to peace and sanity!

Ophelia sinks down in despair. SW looks at the scene and moves slowly towards the couple.

SW: So Hamlet told her he loved her, and now he doesn't... and now what will she do?

WS: Er... she will throw herself in a lake.

SW: And drown herself and die?

WS: Yes, in her grief and her despair.

SW (*slowly*): Will...

WS: Hmm...?

SW: Don't you think you're overdoing it, just a little bit? All this doom and gloom...?

WS: The Queen will love it.

SW: Yes, well, the Queen is 67 years old and still a virgin. (*goes to Ophelia*) But what about all the young women who will watch your play? "Breeder of sinners"? "Get thee to a nunnery"? What kind of example are you giving them?

WS (*wearily*): You don't understand, woman.

SW: Oh but I rather think I do... (*to Ophelia*) Come here, sweetheart.

Ophelia looks surprised.

O: Who me?

SW: Yes, dear (*takes her by the hand and leads her to one side*). Now listen, you're much too young to go drowning yourself in a lake.

O (*looking at Hamlet*): But... but I love him!

SW: There are plenty more idiots where that one came from, I assure you. What you need is a role model...

O: What is a role model?

SW: Oh, I forgot, that phrase doesn't come into fashion for another 300 years. Well, someone to look up to... someone to give you hope... someone to show you a new vision of life...

O: Like who?

SW: Well, how about Lady Raga?

Attendants bring forward Lady Raga props.

O: Who's Lady Raga?

SW: I can't explain. You need to experience it. Bring on the curtain! Let's have a little music.

WS (*alarmed*): Hey, what's going on? This isn't in my script!

Music plays. Attendants bring on a curtain to screen off Ophelia. She changes into her Lady Raga outfit while the music-intro is playing. Ophelia bursts out from behind the curtain and sings the blues song "Raga and her Baba:"

Raga and her Baba, we don't get along,

Raga and her Baba, this man he done me wrong.
Broke my heart in pieces and threw it on the floor,
Still I come back crying, begging him for more....
It's a crying shame.... oooh yes it is... it's a crying shame...

Raga and her Baba, the man I love to hate,
Raga and her Baba, a passion that can't wait.
Broke my heart in pieces and threw it on the fire,
Still I come back crying, burning with desire...
It's a crying shame... oooh yes it is... it's a crying shame....

Song runs for approx. 1:45 min, then SW stops the music with a wave of her hand.

SW (to Ophelia): Stop! You've got the right idea, sweetheart, but you're still focusing on Hamlet. Take all the energy back and give it to yourself. You are free to be you.

Ophelia: Free to be me?

Music begins: Lady Raga sings fast pop song "Free to be Me." Throws off wig. There's a wild dance routine by Ophelia, with Shakespeare's wife and the two Attendants doing a support routine behind her.

I'm free to be me, yeah, free to be me,
Free to be me, yeah, free to be me...

Free to say "No!" and free to say "Yes!"

Free turn on, say goodbye to the rest

Free to get high and dance all night long

Grab any guy and this is my song.

Free to say "Hi, I'm single and free,"

Free to say "You! You're coming with me!"

Free to say "Guy, are you looking at me?"

Free to say "Yeah, now, you're coming with me!"

I'm free to be me, yeah, free to be me,
Free to be me, yeah, free to be me...

At the end, Ophelia and SW dance offstage, leaving Hamlet alone with WS.

WS (Hamlet): What are you smiling at?

H (*looking after Ophelia*): She's kinda cute, isn't she?

WS (*slowly and deliberately*): Young man, I am a genius in the use of English language and the word 'cute' does not appear in any of my plays. Ophelia is a tragic figure who is doomed to drown in a lake. Now, the big question is: how should YOU die?

H (*nervously*): Do I have to, Will?

WS: Of course, man. How can Hamlet be a tragedy if you don't die? (*calling out*) Where are the instruments of death?

An attendant brings a tray with a wine cup, a bottle of poison, an old flintlock pistol and two swords.

WS (*picking up the wine cup and bottle of poison*): Now, suppose the new king pours a glass of wine, sprinkles poison in it, then offers it to you to drink?

Hamlet reluctantly accepts the glass, then deliberately drops it.

H: Oops! Sorry, I dropped it.

WS (*handing him the pistol*): Or, perhaps, in your despair, you put a pistol to your head and pull the trigger...

Hamlet does so and pulls the trigger but there is just a 'click' and nothing happens.

H: Will, you forgot to load it!

WS: I have it! Hamlet must die in a sword fight. Come on man, take one of these and defend yourself.

H: (*to audience*): My god, do I really have to fight? Maybe I can scare him with my Clint Eastwood impersonation. (*to WS*) "Will, you've got to ask yourself one question: 'Do I feel lucky?' Well, do ya, punk?"

WS: You can't threaten me. I'm a Master Swordsman.

H: (*still imitating Clint Eastwood*): "Go ahead, make my day!"

WS: Where are you getting these cheap Hollywood lines from? Fight, man, fight!

H: (*to audience*) When all else fails... Arnold Schwarzenegger. (*to WS*) "Hasta la vista baby!"

Hamlet charges at WS, taking him by surprise. They fight. Shakespeare is losing and falls on the floor.

WS: Wait! Wait! I forgot. There must be treachery involved. (*to the attendant with the tray*) Give me that bottle of poison! (*drips it on his blade*) Your enemy has put poison on the tip of his sword. One small cut and all is lost. (*to Hamlet*) Look over there! (*points behind him*).

Hamlet looks behind, Shakespeare makes a quick jab and cuts Hamlet's leg. Hamlet gasps and performs a long, overly-dramatic death, collapsing in a heap on the stage.

WS: That's much better!

Enter Queen Elizabeth.

E: Where is our playwright, Master Shakespeare?

WS (*kneeling immediately*): Here, your Majesty... your humble servant awaits your bidding.

E: We are interested in the progress of your a new play.

WS (*still kneeling*): Yes, your Majesty, it's coming along nicely.

E: What is this drama to be called?

WS: Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, your Majesty.

E: Indeed? We are curious as to how you intend this play to end... in *tragedy*, we trust?

WS: Oh yes, indeed, madam. (*Pointing to Hamlet's dead body*) All the main characters die.

E: Excellent. Our people must be continuously reminded that life is filled with melancholy, suffering and death.

Elizabeth exits. WS nudges Hamlet's body with his foot.

WS: Arise, O Corpse!

H (*looking up, surprised*): But I'm dead!

WS: No, no. That was just a temporary death to keep Her Majesty the Queen off my back (*helps him up*). Don't worry, you will die permanently later in the play.

H (*sarcastically*): Gee, thanks Will!

Hamlet limps offstage. Will goes back to his chair and starts writing. Enter Mrs Shakespeare. She walks to the front of the stage and addresses the audience directly.

SW (*to audience*): You seem like an intelligent group of people, so let me ask you a question. Don't you think it's odd that in the whole history of Western culture nobody knew anything about meditation?

WS (*standing up and joining his wife*): All those European geniuses...

SW: French Impressionist painters...

WS: Russian novelists...

SW: Italian sculptors....

WS: German composers...

Brief silence, as Will coughs and waits to be acknowledged.

SW: Oh yes, and not forgetting the English playwrights...

WS: Thank you, dear.

SW: And not one of them ever sat down, closed his eyes and meditated.

WS: They knew everything about the human ego...

SW: But they didn't know anything about dropping the ego.

WS: They knew how to be Somebody.

SW: But they had no idea how to be Nobody.

SW: Don't you think it's kind of odd?

Don't you think it's kind of strange?

WS: Such a funny situation

No one's heard of meditation.

SW: If you say the world is maya

WS: You will just be called a liar.
SW: If you point towards Nirvana
WS: They will say you've gone bananas.
SW If you tell them not to think
WS: They will send you to a shrink.
SW: If you ask them to be still
WS: They will offer you a pill.
SW: If you talk of inner vision
WS: They will think of television.
SW: If you sit silently alone
WS: Don't switch off your mobile phone.
SW: If you want to clear your head
WS: You can Google it instead.
SW: If you want true happiness
WS: Just send an SMS.
SW: If you want to raise your spirit
WS: Any shopping mall will do it.
SW: You can find out who you are
WS: At your local pub or bar.
SW: That's the story of the West,
WS: There's no time to stop and rest,
SW: Just to be...
WS: And let the rest...
SW: Disappear...
SW & WS:in emptiness...

WS and SW close their eyes for a moment, in silent meditation. Then they turn to face each other and give a Namaste. Mrs Shakespeare leaves the stage.

WS (*watching her go*): My wife's in love with Eastern philosophy. Oh, it's interesting, I grant you, but what can you do with it? It's not going to pay the rent is it? It's not going to get me out of trouble with the queen. So, it's back to work for me...

He sits down and starts writing. Ophelia enters. Her 'Lady Raga' mood has disappeared and she is again hesitant and insecure.

O: Excuse me, Master Shakespeare.

WS (*irritated at being disturbed*): Yes, what is it now?

O (*hesitantly*): I... I want to change my character.

WS (*astonished*): You... what?

O (*gathering courage*): I want to change my character.

WS (*dismissively*): No, no. That's not going to happen. The play is almost finished.

O (*kneels down by his chair and comes close with an appealing look*): Please, sir! It's not much to ask, is it? I just want to live my own life. And you are such a clever genius, you can make anything possible.

WS (*noticing for the first time that she's beautiful*): Hmm. You are a pretty little thing, aren't you? Listen, tomorrow my wife goes out of town to take care of her sick mother. Why don't you come to my house and we'll... talk about it... together... hmm?

O (*getting up and addressing the audience*): My god... this horny old goat is trying to seduce me! I've heard of the Hollywood casting couch... I've heard of the Bollywood casting couch... but I've never heard of an Elizabethan casting couch! Oh well, I guess it's always been the same. (*making herself look nice, as if she's giving in to his desire*) Right then...

O goes over to him seductively.

O: Oh Master Shakespeare
You're such a handsome man
And if you agree to help me
I'll give you what I can
(*She is all over him, caressing his face, etc*)
Would you like to taste my cherry?
It's so tender, it's so sweet!
Would you like to squeeze my plums
While I'm lying at your feet?
Shall I feed you some papaya
While we're lying on your bed?
Or would my lover rather have
A twisted nose instead?

(*Ophelia gives a hard yank to Will's nose*)

WS: Ow! You hurt me, you little bitch!

O: Well, you asked for it! You dirty old man!

WS: You will regret this young lady. You will die before this play is done. Your fate is sealed!

WS sits down with his play. Ophelia collapses weeping. Enter Mrs Shakespeare, who comforts her with the following song (based on Charlene's song, "I've Never Been To Me" but with new lyrics).

Hey lady, young lady, weeping at your life
You want to be a princess and you want to be a wife
I can see you long to be

His sweet beloved one

And I hope that you have your dreams come true

Now your life has just begun.
I've searched and roamed many miles from home
Looking for that special one,
Enjoyed a fling with a foreign king
And we made love in the sun
I met Will and I love him still
And yet I want to be free

I've been around the world

But I'd rather be with me

Hey lady, dear lady, you will have your day

From my heart I want to tell you

That everything's okay.

I can see your destiny
Reflected in your eyes
You won't be apart and your open heart
Can see through all the lies

It's strange but true, and I'm telling you

That nothing ever lasts.

The future will be present

And the present will be past.

Now the hardest thing is to look within

And find the real me

I've been around the world

But I'd rather be with me.

Mrs Shakespeare holds Ophelia's hand and they go off together. Hamlet wanders on, sees the skull next to Will's chair, picks it up and looks at it.

H (*limping onstage*): Ow, that fake swordfight wasn't quite as 'fake' as I hoped. (*sees skull and picks it up*). But, on the other hand, it could have been worse! (*strikes a pose, holding up skull*) Alas, poor Yorick. You lost your head over a woman, didn't you? Well, that's not going to happen to me!

Hamlet tosses the rubber skull carelessly over his shoulder.

Nobody: Hi, how's it going?

Hamlet: Well, to be honest, I could use a few laughs. Who are you? What's your name?

N: Nobody.

H: Nobody? C'mon, you must be *somebody*.

N: Everybody tells me that: you *must* be *somebody*. But *anybody* can be somebody. And everybody *wants* to be somebody. Nobody wants to be *nobody*. Except me.

H: Can you say that again, slowly please?

N: Everybody says that, as well. *Nobody* understands.

H: But you *are* Nobody, so *you* must understand.

N: Anybody *could* understand, and I keep thinking one day somebody *will* understand. But believe me, nobody has any idea what Nobody is talking about.

H: Well, nobody's perfect.

N: Thank you, I agree!

H: No, that's not what I mean!

N: No worries. Nobody cares.

H: Okay, Mister Nobody, where are you from?

N: I'm from the Land of Not To Be.

H: I should have guessed.

N: Not to be, you see,

Is the only way to be.

Though you may disagree

Just listen carefully:

The more you think you've got,

The more you have to drop.

But, the more you find you're not

The more you've really got.

H: That's nonsense, don't you see?

Or would nobody agree?

N: Nonsense it may be,

But would you agree

To check it out with me?

H: Well, okay... maybe.

N: Watch closely... you will see.

Enter Queen Elizabeth with attendants. It is time for the daily business in her court. First Attendant unrolls a scroll with a list of supplications from her people.

First Attendant: Your Majesty, the people of London have no bread to eat.

E: Let them eat cake.

First Attendant: Your Majesty, the people of York say your taxes are too high.

E: Let them work harder.

First Attendant: Your Majesty, the people of Lancaster wish you a happy birthday.

E (*slight smile*): Indeed? How touching. Let them make a statue of me, in gratitude.

The Royal group freezes, standing motionless.

N: Tell me, who is she?

H: Of course, 'tis Her Majesty

N (*reaching up towards her crown*): And if I remove her attire?

H (*alarmed*): Oh, I wouldn't do that, sire!

Nobody, not in the least worried, takes off her crown. The Queen reacts with a little gasp, as the crown is removed, but is still in trance. Nobody gives the crown to one of her Attendants.

E: Ah!

N: Who is this woman now, before whom you love to bow?

H: Well, no matter what it seems, she will still say she's the queen.

N: Without a crown with golden teeth?

H: Why certainly, 'tis her belief.

N: This belief, she wears it like a mask.

So this gives me another task (*takes the mask off her face, gives it to Attendant*).

H (*to the audience*): This Nobody is quite insane,
She'll cut his head and eat his brains!

E (*bigger reaction but still in trance*): Oh!

N: Your queen is stripped of power and glory
Who is she now in your Tudor story?

H: Why, looking simple, sad and sorry

This woman is just... ordinary.

E (*still in trance, dazed and amazed*): Who am I?

Slowly the Queen leaves the stage, downcast and sad. Attendants stand again at the back of the stage.

N: (*walking towards Hamlet*): Now, Hamlet, think what I have said,
Take off *your* mask and lose *your* head.

H (*confused*): I have no mask! It's not on me.

N (*laughs*): Oh yes, you have. You just can't see!

H: You've gone quite mad, I'll say good day!
And this Nobody can go his way.

N: Wait, spare a moment, let me ask,
This noble fellow with no mask,
This gloomy guy so filled with sadness
Who thinks that I am touched by madness.
Can you smile and sing and dance
If I give you half a chance?

H: Of course I can, if I so choose.
I've really nothing left to lose.

N: Then why be miserable and glum

When you can dance under the sun?

H: It isn't me who feels this way.

It's this bloody Bard who writes this play!

N: Come then, let's show this anti-fun guy

How they move it down in Mumbai!

Music begins and Nobody leads Hamlet into a popular Bollywood dance routine. Nobody does it easily. Hamlet does his best to follow but soon gives up.

H: Stop! Stop! Enough! It's plain to see,

This Bollywood is not for me.

N: You're giving up because you're foreign?

Oh Hamlet, this is really boring!

H: But I *can* dance, please have no fear,

Hi! My name's Psy... I'm from Korea!

Dressing classy, dancing cheesy

Gangnam Style is really easy!

Music for Psy's Gangnam Style is played. Mrs Shakespeare and Ophelia come onstage and join in. Hamlet drags Will off his seat to dance. Everyone joins in and dances like crazy. As the music ends, Mrs Shakespeare and Ophelia exit. Will comes center stage.

WS: My god, what in the name of Her Majesty is happening to my play? I will be thrown into the Tower of London and left to rot forever!

WS returns to his seat. Nobody and Hamlet are left on stage.

H: Okay Mr. Nobody, I'm beginning to see things differently. But there's one thing I don't understand. What would I gain from becoming a Not To Be?

N: Well, let's see... you wouldn't be the Prince of Denmark any more... so you wouldn't be obsessed with trying to avenge your father's death... so you wouldn't spend all your time thinking "to be or not to be"... *and* you wouldn't tell your beautiful girlfriend to get lost.

H: Really?

N: Really.

H: How do I do it?

N: Ah, that can be a *little* challenging. Come with me.

They exit. Ophelia enters with SW.

O: Oh Mrs. Shakespeare, it was wonderful being Lady Raga. But I don't want to imitate anybody else. I want to be me.

SW: Really?

O: Really.

SW: Really... really?

O: Yes really. I just want to be myself.

SW: Well, that can be a *little* challenging. Come with me.

Enter Queen Elizabeth, with crown and mask.

E (to WS): Master Shakespeare, we are not pleased with the way this play is progressing.

WS: A thousand apologies Your Majesty.

E: We have not seen enough suffering and death to call it a tragedy.

WS (*thinking fast*): Fear not, Your Majesty. I am... er... I am planning a surprise. The play will seem to be heading in the direction of happiness, but, at the very end, I shall kill them all!

E: Very well. See that it is done, (*menacing*) or I promise you, thine head shall be impaled on a stake before the Tower of London.

WS: Oh no! I mean... oh yes, Your Majesty.

The Queen exits. Shakespeare goes to his chair. Attendants bring two chairs to the front centre of the stage. Nobody brings Hamlet to sit in one. SW brings Ophelia to sit in the other. Nobody stands behind Hamlet's chair. SW stands behind Ophelia's chair.

N: Not To Be requires an empty mind.

SW: A clear and quiet head.

N: We will represent your thoughts.

SW: When a thought enters your head, we will speak it for you.

N: In this way, you will become aware of your own thoughts.

SW: And most important, you will become aware of the silence *behind* your thoughts.

N: In that silence you will discover the Land of Not To Be.

SW: Close your eyes. Let us begin.

N and SW crouch down behind Hamlet and Ophelia. Each time a thought comes, they will stand erect and speak it.

N (*standing up*): This is easy... oh no, that's a thought! (*ducks down*)

SW (*standing up*): I just want to be myself... is this a thought?

N (*standing up and looking at SW*): Of course it is! (*ducks down*)

SW: But it's such a nice thought!

N: (*standing up again*): Nice thoughts... nasty thoughts... they all have to go! (*ducks down*).

SW (*shrugs*): Oh well... bye bye nice thought (*ducks down*).

N (*standing up*): I'm hungry! (*ducks down*).

SW (*standing up*): I'm thirsty (*ducks down*).

N (*standing up*): I'm restless (*ducks down*).

SW (*standing up*): I'm sad (*ducks down*).

N (*standing up*): To be or not to be?... oh, not again! (*ducks down*).

SW (*standing up*): I wonder if Hamlet still loves me? (*ducks down*).

N (*standing up*): I wonder what Ophelia looks like in the shower? (*as himself*) Now that's an interesting thought...

SW (*standing up, amused but firm*): Hey, keep your mind on the job, Mr. Not To Be!

N (*laughing*): Well, it's the first time he's actually expressed interest in her.

SW (*comes behind Hamlet and holds his head gently with her hands*): Isn't the male mind wonderful? If it's not drowning women in lakes, it's gazing at them under the shower...

N: Wait... listen! Listen!

SW (*puzzled*): What do you hear?

N (*in wonder*): Nothing!

SW (*looking down at Hamlet and Ophelia*): Oh my god, they've done it. They've stopped thinking!

At the same moment, N and SW put a finger to their lips, then turn towards each other.

N & SW (*simultaneously*): Sssshhhhh!

They both stand with eyes closed, their hands in a mudra – buddha-like. But SW isn't very good at it and occasionally takes a quick peek at Nobody to see if he still has his eyes closed. Then she goes back to trying to meditate.

SW (*opening her eyes*): I wonder if I left my cooking pot on my stove.

N (*opening his eyes and rolling them upwards, while making an Italian gesture with his hands*): Oy vey! Now you're thinking!

SW (*rebuffing him*): Well, now you're thinking about me thinking. (*glances at Ophelia*)

N: Wait! She's going to say something.

Ophelia opens her eyes and looks lovingly at Hamlet and takes his hand. He opens his eyes and looks at her.

O: Hamlet, beloved, you still love me, don't you?

H: Yes, I do.

O: I knew it!

H: Shall we dance?

O: I'd love to!

They smile lovingly at each other.

Nobody and Mrs Shakespeare take away the chairs. Hamlet and Ophelia dance to "There is a Country Far Away."

There is a country
Far away,
There is a land
Far away and lost.
There is a feeling
There is a healing
There is a country
A country of the heart.

Can this beauty that's there
Something so rare
Touch your heart, touch your heart, touch your heart?
Can this love in the air
Something so rare
Ever let us part?

Mrs Shakespeare runs over and drags Will onto the dance floor. He is reluctant, but gives in and dances with his wife. Then all four dance together.

There is a secret in my soul
There is a deep mystery of love
There is a first time
There is a last time
There is a deep mystery of love

Can this beauty that's there
Something so rare
Touch your heart, touch your heart, touch your heart?
Can this love in the air...

WS breaks away from the other dancers and signals for the music to stop.

WS: Stop! Stop! All this romantic nonsense... it just won't do!

He shakes his head in frustration and goes back to his seat.

Hamlet (to SW): What happens now?

SW: Well, if you take my advice you'll both get out of Denmark as quickly as possible. It's such a miserable country. Why don't you go to India for the winter?

Ophelia: India! That sounds like a wonderful idea!

Hamlet: My god, but from Elizabethan England it will us take six months just to get there!

SW: No, no. I happen to know that Jet Airways is offering special flights from sixteenth century London. Look, *(removes tickets from her dress)* here are the tickets. Now run along both of you.

Will: Wait! Hold everything!

SW: Uh-oh.

Will *(walks forward a short way, then stops)*: May I have a word with you... dear?

SW *(to Hamlet and Ophelia)*: Just a minute. *(goes over to WS)*. Yes, dear?

WS: Listen, beloved. I know you have good intentions and you want these young people to be happy, but if they don't die, I will. The Queen has threatened me with execution if this play does not end in tragedy.

SW: Ooooh, that nasty woman! But wait... I know... *(pulls more tickets out of her dress)* We'll all fly to India... right now, before she finds out.

WS: What? You want me to give up being the greatest playwright in England... just like that?

SW: Oh, I forgot. You haven't learned how Not To Be, have you?

WS (*indignant*): No, indeed. Nor will I ever do so. My name is going to be remembered for centuries and centuries.

SW (*takes him by the hand*): Will, love, come here (*takes him over to Hamlet and Ophelia*) Look at these beautiful young people. They've just discovered the joy of living. Do you want to take it away from them?

WS (*hesitating*): Well... er...

Queen Elizabeth enters with crown and mask. Two Attendants follow her, carrying swords.

E: Off with their heads!

WS (*bowing*): Your Majesty.

E: Why are these young people not yet dying or dead?

WS: Soon, soon, Your Majesty. I'm just about to kill them.

E: Do it now. I command it! Off with their heads!

WS: Yes, Your Majesty. I'm sorry, both of you. A thousand pardons, but it is your destiny to die in my play.

Enter Nobody, disguised as Death, with black hood and skull face.

N (*hollow voice*): Your time has come, Your Majesty.

E (*shrieks in fright*): Eeeek! Oh god! Who are you, pray?

N: I am the Angel of Death. And it is your time to die!

E (*clutches her heart*): Ah, it is true! (*staggers forward a little*). My heart is giving out! (*theatrically brushes her forehead with her hand*) It is my time! (*sinks to her knees*) Farewell, cruel world! Farewell! I die! I die! I die!

Elizabeth staggers off, supported by her Attendants. Nobody takes off his death mask.

N: That was pretty good acting, eh Will?

WS: Well, obviously the queen thought so. She died of fright. Who are you?

N: I'll tell you later. But first, we must find a way to end this play properly.

SW, Ophelia, Hamlet (*together*): A *happy* ending!

WS (*stubbornly*): No. I refuse to write a happy ending.

N: But why?

WS: It's so ordinary, so predictable. Look at this sophisticated audience. You can't expect them to take me seriously as a playwright if I write a happy ending.

SW (*folding her arms*): Well, we refuse to take part in a tragic ending.

H and O (*also folding their arms*): Right!

N: I know. How about a thriller?

SW: A thrilling ending, yes!

WS: But I've never ever written a thriller.

N: It's easy. Listen, Will... (*he whispers in WS's ear*).

WS (*smiling*): Okay. I'll try it. Take your places everyone!

Lights down. Music starts from Michael Jackson's "Thriller." WS dances like Michael Jackson and lip-synchs the words, while the rest are dancing as zombies.

WS (*lip-synching*): "It's close to midnight and something evil's lurking in the dark..."

The song continues for a couple of minutes, including two choruses of "It's Just a Thriller, Thriller Night..." Then, suddenly, the music is interrupted by a Royal fanfare of trumpets. Queen Elizabeth comes on to the stage, followed by Attendants. Everyone kneels down and is worried.

E: One moment. Please don't be afraid

Of being hurt by this old maid.

If I may choose twixt life and death
I'd really rather keep my breath.
So let me join you in your gladness
And say goodbye to royal sadness.

SW (*taking Elizabeth warmly by the arm*):

Your Majesty, I'm glad to see
That, deep inside, you're just like me!

WS (*to N*): So tell me, Master Nobody
Where is this Land of Not To Be?

N: Well, if you look beyond your mind
You'll find it's been there all the time.
But meditation is more fun
If to India you come!

E: India! Oh yes, that's hip!
If my old bones can make the trip.
I think I'll go to Dharamshala
And hang out with the Dalai Lama.

Attendants (*still wanting to please her*):

Oh yes, Your Majesty, it's true
Can we come along with you?

E (*to her Attendants*): I think it's time for you to see

You really don't belong to me.

Nobody (*to Attendants*):

Find a path that suits *you* best,
And give this 'royal' thing a rest!

Mrs Shakespeare: Yoga is what I love best.

And so I'll go to Rishikesh.
Sitting by the Ganges stream
Enjoying yoga – that's my dream!
I'll practice my asanas daily
Standing on my head... well, maybe.

Attendants:

Oh yes we're good at yoga, too,
Perhaps we'll come along with you.

Mrs Shakespeare: Find a method of your own
Don't just follow... stand alone.

Hamlet (*to Ophelia*):

I'm sure we'll get enlightened sooner
If we meditate in Pune.

Ophelia (*worried*):

But isn't that the 'free love' ashram?
Will I lose my love, my passion?

Attendants:

Don't worry, dear, we'll come with you
And sing and dance the whole night through!

Hamlet (*taking Ophelia's hand and taking her away from the Attendants*):

That won't be necessary, good fellows.
We can celebrate by ourselves.
We'll go to Pune as a pair
A challenge will await us there.

Ophelia (*no longer afraid, but courageous*):

Let's see if we can both be free
And true lovers still shall be.

Will:

All my life I've been a playwright
Finding words to make you say right.
So maybe I should shut up now
And silently meditate somehow.
I'll find a monastery in Ladakh
And take the pressure off my back.

1st Attendant:

Let's join the Bard in silence deep

2nd Attendant:

If it doesn't put us both asleep.

Nobody (*to Attendants*):

Now stop this nonsense, both of you
Find something specially meant for you!

1st Attendant:

Okay, we'll walk the Himalayan hills
From end to end in search of thrills.

2nd Attendant:

We'll trek from Kathamanadu to Kulu
And touch the feet of every guru.

Nobody:

Now I can say goodbye in style,
Let me vanish for a while.
Nobody was never here,
It's time for me to disappear.
If you wish, you can find me
In the Land of Not To Be.

Will:

Meet we all, here, in one year
There'll be so much for us to hear.
I'll write a new play, make amends,
Called Shakespeare the Meditator And His Friends.

Closing Song. This song is a repeat of the opening number "It's for her Royal Majesty" but the lyrics are entirely different, the tune is faster and the mood is now upbeat and happy.

Another drama for you to see,
Another story ends happily
In meditation, in ecstasy,
In the Land of Not to Be.
Another drama to make you smile,
Another story performed in style
We'll see you later, in a while,
In the Land of Not to Be.

Heroes, zeroes, kings and villains
Greet each other with precision.
Cleopatra's destiny
Schmoozing with Mark Anthony,
Juliet as we all know
Fooled around with Romeo,
Let your heart be open wide
Close your eyes and go inside.
There is more for you and me
In the Land of Not to Be.

Another drama for you to see,
Another story ends happily
In meditation, in ecstasy,
In the Land of Not to Be.
Another drama to make you smile,
Another story performed in style

We'll see you later, in a while,
In the Land of Not to Be.... you gotta be there!...
In the Land of Not to Be.

The End