

# THE HAUNTING OF WILL SHAKESPEARE

By Claudia Haas

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**STORY OF THE PLAY**

Enroute to London, young Will Shakespeare has a fanciful encounter in the woods outside of Stratford. In the space of one night, he finds himself chased by a young maiden, haunted by witches, bedazzled by spirits and enchanted by a group of rag-tag actors. Yearning to be an actor in London, he is in turn stopped by all in his path. The young maiden wishes to deter him from a low, base theatrical life. The witches mean to turn him into a playwright so he can write about their escapades and free them from the woods. Turning to the spirit world, the witches summon ghostly beings to portray characters from the plays Will has yet to write. In turn, these spirits cajole, abuse, amuse and involve Will in their own stories in hopes that he will write about them. Encounter Hamlet, Juliet, Ophelia, Bottom, Kate and Petruchio in a new light and celebrate the Bard's vast body of work that inspires us today.

First place winner in the Columbia Entertainment Company's Jackie White Memorial Play Writing Contest for 2001.

**SETTING:** In the woods surrounding Stratford, England. It is the 1500s.

**SET:** The woods. It is fun to have nooks and crannies that the various spirits can pop out of - but that can be decided according to whatever fits your stage and your budget.

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**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(5 m, 14 w, 1 flex)*

**WITCHES**

**HECATE:** She is head of the witches, confident, learned.

**PADDOCK:** Second of the witches. She wants fame and out of the woods!

**GRAYMALKIN:** Third witch. Sleepy and increasingly irritable as she loses sleep.

**MORTALS FROM STRATFORD**

**WILL:** Young man who yearns with all his heart to live a theatrical life. Likes language.

**HELENA:** Young maiden with a crush on Will. Tall and insecure.

**MORTALS IN A RAGTAG ACTING TROUPE**

**ROSALIND:** An exiled noblewoman. Takes charge, witty.

**CELIA:** Rosalind's cousin and also an exiled noblewoman. Witty in her own right, supportive.

**PHEBE:** In-your-face former shepherdess. Slight in stature.

**SILVIUS:** Naive shepherd, in love with Phebe.

**SPIRITS**

**HAMLET:** Spirit who can't make up his mind, talks to ghosts.

**OLIVIA:** "Grand Lady" spirit. Sometimes a bit too grand.

**OPHELIA:** Sweet spirit, eager to please.

**PETRUCHIO:** Pushy, clown spirit.

**KATE:** Shrewish spirit.

**JULIET:** Loving spirit, searching for Romeo.

**NURSE:** Aging spirit with the aches and pains to show for it.

**BOTTOM:** Windbag spirit.

**FLUTE:** Ingenue spirit.

**STARVELING:** Complaining spirit.

**VIOLA:** Confused spirit.

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### **COSTUMES**

In general, all wear English Renaissance costumes. The Mortals (Will, Helena, Rosalind, Celia, Phebe and Silvius) should not be in grand costumes. They should be simple but colorful. The color can contrast with the costumes of the Spirits. The Spirits should start out with either all black or all gray or all white - a uniform way of establishing their ghostly qualities. As they are assigned parts, they could be given pieces that enhance their character. Or when they come back on as the character they are assigned, they could be in full costume. That would be director's choice. The witches can be fanciful. They should not be Halloween witches - or even the witches from *Macbeth*. (*Macbeth*, after all, has yet to be written.)

### **PROPS**

WILL - Satchel that has a scroll (which he uses to study his audition piece), and various essentials for tacking up poems later (rope, bark).

VIOLA - A grand lady hat and a English boy hat; a moustache.

ROSALIND, CELIA, PHEBE, SILVIUS - Satchels that contain a change of clothing. They need to be in nightdress in their first scene and then in day clothes for the duration of the play.

ROSALIND - Chain necklace, a copy of *Gammer Gurton's Needle*. (optional)

KATE - Rope and gag for Will, a stick.

PADDOCK - A scroll and a quill.

BOTTOM - 3 scripts of *Pyramus and Thisby*.

GRAYMALKIN - A donkey head.

WILL - Scrolls (for the poems and for the playlet).

OLIVIA - A letter, yellow stockings, cross garters.

**SOUND EFFECTS:** Thunder, Elizabethan music.

## **THE HAUNTING OF WILL SHAKESPEARE**

*(AT RISE: RAIN is heard followed by a loud CLAP OF THUNDER. The CLOCK STRIKES midnight. GRAYMALKIN, a witch who needs her sleep is , as expected, asleep. She jumps a bit, startled by the thunder but quickly adjusts and remains sleeping. HECATE, head of the witches, comes center as PADDOCK slinks down the aisle. Paddock may not be head of the witches but she is decidedly a bossy witch and interested in usurping Hecate's place. The witches have decidedly cat-like attributes.)*

HECATE: Who goes there?

PADDOCK: Hecate?

HECATE: She. Paddock, you come most carefully upon the hour.

PADDOCK: It is now struck twelve. Get to bed. Have you had a quiet guard?

HECATE: Not a mouse stirring.

PADDOCK: Another night of boredom in the woods. We must do something to stir things up.

*(Suddenly there is THUNDER and LIGHTNING and GRAYMALKIN stands in the darkness. She slowly comes forward.)*

PADDOCK: Who goes there? Speak! Stay and speak!

HECATE: Why, it's only Graymalkin. Finally awakened.

GRAYMALKIN: I need a nap.

PADDOCK: It is excitement that we need.

GRAYMALKIN: Nay. I only crave sleep.

PADDOCK: These woods are a jail to me. Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow creeps in this petty pace from night to night. We cannot leave. Must I be stuck here forever? I want more. There is life outside these woods – adventure – fame – fortune!

HECATE: By the pricking of my thumbs, someone mortal this way comes!

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PADDOCK: Let us slink by and observe this. Perhaps tonight will be different. Perhaps tonight – we can swipe our claws at adventure.

*(THEY hide as WILL SHAKESPEARE enters doggedly pursued by HELENA. Will has a tendency to speak in an overblown manner. Helena, a local maiden, is attaching herself to Will. She fancies herself in love with him.)*

WILL: *(Desperately.)* I love you not! Therefore, pursue me not! Begone and follow me no more!

HELENA: You draw me to you, you hard-hearted man.

WILL: Do I entice thee? Do I speak thee fair? Rather, I tell you in truth as plain as the sky above us that I cannot love thee!

HELENA: You can skip the “thees” and “thous,” Will. There is nobody here that you need to impress.

HECATE: *(Suddenly popping up.)* Nobody to impress! Why, I am head of the witches!

PADDOCK: *(Dragging HECATE down.)* Shh! It’s not the time to speak one’s mind.

HELENA: Let me accompany you on your journey to London! *(SHE throws herself at HIS feet and holds on to his ankles.)*

WILL: *(Trying to disengage HELENA, HE attempts to walk away, dragging Helena with him.)* Helena, I must tell thee that my affections lie elsewhere. Dost thou understand?

HELENA: Speak normally, Will. You do tend to clutter up a sentence.

WILL: In plainest truth Helena, there is another.

HELENA: I knew it! You love Beatrice! You love Hermia! You love everyone in Stratford except me! *(SHE rises.)*

WILL: Thou knows’t nothing! I have a higher calling!

HELENA: Will you be a priest then?

WILL: Cry “stop” to your tongue, Helena. No priest to be, it’s the stage for me!

HELENA: What?

PADDOCK: What?

HECATE and GRAYMALKIN: Shh!

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