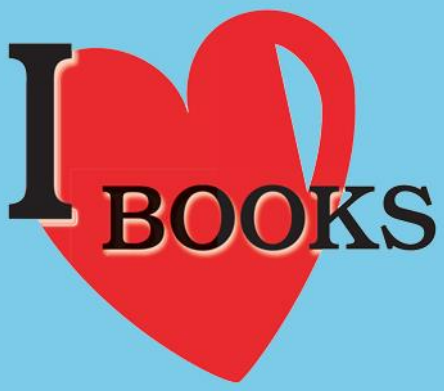


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Written by

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Illustrated by

Tom Morgan-Jones

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THE Cast

TOBY CUFFE . . . . . an orphan boy

JACK FILCHER . . . . . a young thief

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE . . . . . a writer of plays

MOLL CUT-PURSE . . . . . a trainer of young thieves

JOHN HEMINGES
HENRY CONDELL
AUGUSTINE PHILLIPS
RICHARD BURBAGE
ROBERT ARMIN
} . . . play-house people and actors from The Globe

NED ALLEYN . . . . . an owner of a rival play-house

SIR EDMUND TILNEY . . . . . Master of the Revels to King James

KING JAMES . . . . . a monarch

SARAH . . . . . a girl who Toby meets

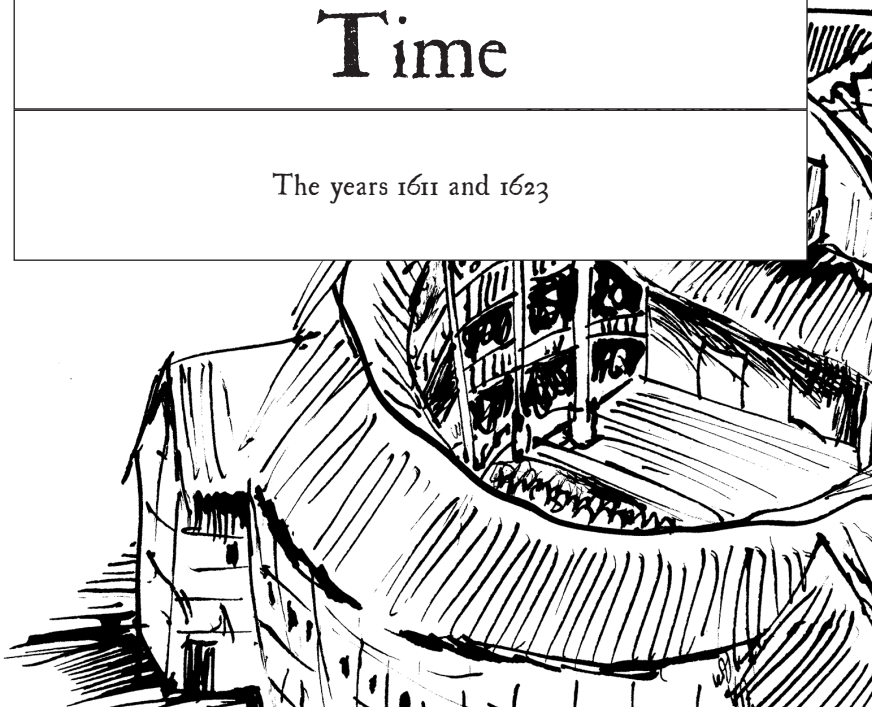
A TAVERN KEEPER, VARIOUS ROUGH BOYS, GENTLEMEN, PLAY-HOUSE AUDIENCES, OTHER RESIDENTS OF LONDON

THE Place

London

THE Time

The years 1611 and 1623



ACT I: The Story

SCENE ONE Queen of the Pick-Pockets 1

SCENE TWO A Visit to the Play-House 14

SCENE THREE Not Good for Business. 29

SCENE FOUR Under Pressure all the Time. 43

SCENE FIVE A Jack of Many Trades 57

SCENE SIX Let Slip the Dogs of War 71

SCENE SEVEN A Tale Told by an Idiot 86

SCENE EIGHT I'll Drown My Book 100

Epilogue. 115

ACT II: Funne Activities for Boyes & Girls

SCENE ONE The Busy Streets of London 124

SCENE TWO All the World's a Stage 128

SCENE THREE The Show Must Go On!. 132

SCENE FOUR Barbs with the Bard 136

ACT I

The Story



SCENE ONE

Queen of the Pick-Pockets

The inn stood on the corner of a narrow street just off Cheapside, the great road that led from St Paul's and into the heart of London. The sign over the door said The Devil's Tavern. This was the place Toby was looking for. He took a deep breath and went inside.

Beyond the door was a large, dark room full of people drinking and shouting and laughing raucously. Toby had been in taverns



before, so he knew what they were like, but this one seemed especially rough. He looked around at the people sitting at the tables, and the few who were standing, but none of them seemed to be the person Toby was after. He went up to the bar. The tavern keeper had a shiny bald head, a purple nose and a sagging

belly that arrived quite some time before the rest of him. He peered down at Toby.

"Begging your leave, sir," Toby said. "Where can I find ... you-know-who?"

"Another lamb for the slaughter, eh?" the tavern keeper snorted. "She's in the back room with her band of rogues." He nodded to a door in the corner.



Toby thanked him, opened the door he had indicated, and went into an even darker room. It was lit by a couple of smoky lanterns and Toby had to peer through the thick air to see who else was there. There were a dozen or so tough-looking boys leaning against the walls, but none took any notice of Toby, so he stood beside them. A small, skinny boy was standing alone in the middle of the room, and in front of him a figure sat on a big chair like a throne. Deep shadow covered the figure's face – then suddenly a powerful voice came out of the darkness.

"*Books?* What am I supposed to do with a few blasted *books*, you dolt?"

"Sorry, Moll!" the boy squeaked, clearly

terrified. “I just don’t know what I was thinking, really I don’t. I saw ’em lying there and I grabbed ’em and ran!”

The person sitting in the chair stood up into the light, and Toby saw it was a woman. She was tall and broad-shouldered and she wore a man’s leather jerkin over a woman’s raggedy gown. She had a tangle of black hair like the nest of an incredibly messy bird, and a face that looked as if it could turn you to stone. So this was Moll Cut-Purse, the Queen of London’s thieves and pick-pockets.

“Don’t do it again,” Moll snarled at the boy. She grabbed a book from a table beside her chair and flicked through it. Then she threw it down again. “When I send you out to

do some thieving it's gold and silver I want, or at least something I can sell. Why, I'll wager the printers themselves couldn't even sell this lot. Not that we know what any of them are about, do we? Seeing as … *NONE OF US CAN READ!*"

She shouted the last few words, and the boy winced as if she had struck him. The rest of Moll's boys laughed and jeered and called him nasty names. Toby had heard a lot of swearing on the streets of London, but some of their curses were new to him.

"Er … perhaps I could help?" he said, stepping forward. "I can read."

"Is that right?" Moll said, glaring at him. "And who might you be?"