Lovereading.co.uk

The Shakespeare Secret

J. L. Carrell

Published by Sphere

Please note that this extract is taken from an uncorrected proof

All text is copyright of the author

This opening extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

SPHERE

First published in the United States in 2007 by Dutton,
a member of Penguin Group (USA) inc.
First published in Great Britain in 2008 by Sphere

Copyright © Jennifer Lee Carrell 2007

The moral right of the author has been asserted.

All characters and events in this publication, other than those clearly in the public domain, are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

All rights reserved.
No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-0-7515-4035-2

Papers used by Sphere are natural recyclable products made from wood grown in sustainable forests and certified in accordance with the rules of the Forest Stewardship Council.

Typeset in Horley Old Style by M Rules
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc
Paper supplied by Hellefoss AS, Norway

Sphere
An imprint of
Little, Brown Book Group
100 Victoria Embankment
London EC4Y 0DY

An Hachette Livre UK Company

www.littlebrown.co.uk

‘The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones . . .’

—*William Shakespeare*

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Katharine Stanley ('Kate'), director of *Hamlet* at Shakespeare's Globe

Rosalind Howard ('Roz'), Professor of Shakespeare, Harvard University, and Kate's mentor

Sir Henry Lee, British actor appearing as the ghost of Hamlet's father in Kate's production

Cyril Manningham, Artistic Director of Shakespeare's Globe, London

Francis Sinclair, Detective Chief Inspector of the London Metropolitan Police

Jason Pierce, Australian actor, starring in Kate's production of *Hamlet* at the Globe

Talbot, concierge at Claridge's, London

Barnes, Sir Henry Lee's butler

Benjamin Pearl, British security expert

Matthew Morris, Professor of Shakespeare, Harvard University

Maxine Tom, Librarian of the Preston Archive and Professor of Shakespeare, Southern Utah University; friend of Kate's from graduate school

Athenaide Preston, American billionaire, Shakespeare enthusiast, and owner of Shakespeare, New Mexico

Graciela, Athenaide's housekeeper

Dr Nicholas Sanderson, Librarian, the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC

Verger, Westminster Abbey

Marjorie Quigley, Head Guide, Wilton House, Wiltshire
Monsignor Michael Armstrong, Rector of the Royal College of St Alban, Valladolid
Memo Jiménez, Arizona rancher
Nola Jiménez, his wife

PROLOGUE

June 29, 1613

From the river, it looked as if two suns were setting over London.

One was sinking in the west, streaming ribbons of glory in pink and melon and gold. It was the second sun, though, that had conjured an unruly flotilla of boats and barges, skiffs and wherries, onto the dark surface of the Thames: across from the broken tower of St Paul's, a sullen orange sphere looked to have missed the horizon altogether and rammed itself into the southern bank. Hunkering down amid the taverns and brothels of Southwark, it spiked vicious blades of flame at the night.

It wasn't, of course, another sun, though men who fancied themselves poets sent that conceit rippling from boat to boat. It was – or had been – a building. The most famous of London's famed theatres – the hollow wooden O, round seat of the city's dreams, the great Globe itself – was burning. And all of London had turned out on the water to watch.

The Earl of Suffolk included. 'Upon Sodom and Gomorrah, the Lord rained down fire from heaven,' purred the Earl, gazing south from the floating palace of his private barge. In his office of Lord Chamberlain of England, Suffolk ran the King's court. Such a disaster befalling the King's Men – His Majesty's own beloved company of actors who not

only played at the Globe when they weren't playing at court, but who owned the place – might have been expected to disturb him. To scuff, at the very least, the sheen of his pleasure. But the two men sitting with him beneath the silken awning gave no sign of surprise as they sipped wine, contemplating the catastrophe.

Their silence left Suffolk unsatisfied. 'Gorgeous, isn't it?' he prompted.

'Gaudy,' snapped his white-haired uncle, the Earl of Northampton, still lean and elegant in his mid-seventies.

The youngest of the three, Suffolk's son and heir, Theophilus, Lord Howard de Walden, leaned forwards with the intensity of a young lion eyeing prey. 'Our revenge will burn even brighter in the morning, when Mr Shakespeare and company learn the truth.'

Northampton fixed his great-nephew with hooded eyes. 'Mr Shakespeare and his company, as you put it, will learn nothing of the kind.'

For a heartbeat, Theo sat frozen in his great-uncle's stare. Then he rose and hurled his goblet forwards into the bottom of the barge, splattering servants' saffron-yellow liveries with dark leopard spots of wine. 'They have mocked my sister on the public stage,' he cried. 'No amount of conniving by old men shall deprive my honour of satisfaction.'

'My lord nephew,' said Northampton over his shoulder to Suffolk. 'With remarkable consistency, your offspring exhibit an unfortunate strain of rashness. I do not know whence it comes. It is not a Howard trait.'

His attention flicked back to Theo, whose right hand was closing and opening convulsively over the hilt of his sword. 'Gloating over one's enemies is a simpleton's revenge,' said the old Earl. 'Any peasant can achieve it.' At his nod, a servant offered another goblet to Theo, who took it with poor grace.

'Far more enthralling,' continued Northampton, 'to commiserate with your foe and force him to offer you thanks – even as he suspects you, but cannot say why.'

As he spoke, a small skiff drew up alongside the barge. A man slid over the rail and glided towards Northampton, shunning the light like a wayward shadow slinking home to its body. 'Anything worth doing at all, as Seyton here will tell you,' continued Northampton, 'is worth doing exquisitely. Who does it is of little consequence. Who knows who did it is of no consequence at all.' Seyton knelt before the old Earl, who put a hand on his shoulder. 'My lord of Suffolk and my sulking great-nephew are as curious as I am to hear your report.'

The man cleared his throat softly. His voice, like the rest of his clothing and even his eyes, was of an indeterminate hue between grey and black. 'It began, my lord, when the players' gunner took sick unexpected this morning. His substitute seems to have loaded the cannon with loose wadding. One might even suspect it had been soaked in pitch.' His mouth curved in what might have been a sly smile.

'Go on,' said Northampton with a wave.

'The play this afternoon was a relatively new one, called *All Is True*. About King Henry the Eighth.'

'Great Harry,' murmured Suffolk, trailing one hand in the water. 'The old Queen's father. Dangerous territory.'

'In more ways than one, my lord,' answered Seyton. 'The play calls for a masque and parade, including a cannon salute. The gun duly fired, but the audience was so taken with the flummery onstage that no one noticed sparks landing on the roof. By the time someone smelled smoke, the roof thatch was ringed with fire, and there was nothing to do but flee.'

'Casualties?'

'Two injured.' His eyes flickered towards Theo. 'A man called Shelton.'

Theo started. 'How?' he stammered. 'Hurt how?'

'Burned. Not badly. But spectacularly. From my perch – a fine one, if I may say so – I saw him take control of the scene, organising the retreat from the building. Just when it seemed everyone had got out, a young girl appeared at an upper window. A pretty thing, with wild dark hair and mad eyes. A witch child, if ever I saw one.

'Before anyone could stop him, Mr Shelton ran back inside. Minutes passed, and the crowd began to weep, when he leapt through a curtain of fire with the girl in his arms, his backside aflame. One of the Southwark queens tossed a barrel of ale at him, and he disappeared again, this time in a cloud of steam. It turned out that his breeches had caught fire, but he was, miraculously, little more than scorched.'

'Where is he?' cried Theo. 'Why have you not brought him back with you?'

'I hardly know the man, my lord,' demurred Seyton. 'And besides, he's the hero of the hour. I could not disentangle him from the crowd with any sort of discretion.'

With a glance of distaste at his great-nephew, Northampton leaned forwards. 'The child?'

'Unconscious,' said Seyton.

'Pity,' said the old Earl. 'But children can prove surprisingly strong.' Something wordless passed between the Earl and his servant. 'Perhaps she'll survive.'

'Perhaps,' said Seyton.

Northampton sat back. 'And the gunner?'

Once again, Seyton's mouth curved in the ghost of a smile. 'Nowhere to be found.'

Nothing visibly altered in Northampton's face; all the same, he radiated dark satisfaction.

'It's the Globe that matters,' fretted Suffolk.

Seyton sighed. 'A total loss, my Lord. The building is

engulfed, the tiring-house behind it, with the company's store of gowns and cloaks, foil jewels, wooden swords and shields . . . all gone. John Heminges stood in the street, blubbering for his sweet palace of a playhouse, his accounts, and most of all, his playbooks. The King's Men, my lords, are without a home.'

Across the water, a great roar shot skywards. What was left of the building imploded, collapsing into a pile of ash and glimmering embers. A sudden hot gust eddied across the water, swirling with a black snowfall of soot.

Theo howled in triumph. Beside him, his father ran a fastidious hand over his hair and beard. 'Mr Shakespeare will never again so much as jest at the name of Howard.'

'Not in my lifetime, or in yours,' said Northampton. Silhouetted by the fire, heavy eyelids drooping over inscrutable eyes, his nose sharpened by age, he looked the very essence of a demonic god carved from dark marble. 'But never is an infinite long time.'

ACT I

1

June 29, 2004

We are all haunted. Not by unexplained rappings or spectral auras, much less headless horsemen and weeping queens – real ghosts pace the battlements of memory, endlessly whispering, *Remember me*. I began to learn this sitting alone at sunset on a hill high above London. At my feet, Hampstead Heath spilled into the silver-grey sea of the city below. On my knees glimmered a small box wrapped in gold tissue and ribbon. In the last rays of daylight, a pattern of vines and leaves, or maybe moons and stars, swam beneath the surface of the paper.

I cupped the box in both palms and held it up. 'What's this?' I'd asked earlier that day, my voice carving through the shadows of the lower gallery at the Globe Theatre, where I was directing *Hamlet*. 'An apology? A bribe?'

Rosalind Howard, flamboyantly eccentric Harvard Professor of Shakespeare – part Amazon, part earth mother, part gypsy queen – had leaned forwards intently. 'An adventure. Also, as it happens, a secret.'

I'd slipped my fingers under the ribbon, but Roz reached out and stopped me, her green eyes searching my face. She was fiftyish, with dark hair cut so short as to be boyish; long, shimmering earrings dangled from her ears. In one hand, she held a wide-brimmed white hat set with peonies in lush crimson

silk – an outrageous affair that seemed to have been plucked from the glamour days of Audrey Hepburn and Grace Kelly. 'If you open it, you must follow where it leads.'

Once, she'd been both my mentor and my idol, and then almost a second mother. While she played the matriarch, I'd played the dutiful disciple – until I'd decided to leave academics for the theatre three years before. Our relationship had frayed and soured even before I left, but my departure had shorn it asunder. Roz made it clear that she regarded my flight from the ivory tower as a betrayal. *Escape* was how I thought of it; *absconded* was the term I'd heard that she favoured. But that remained hearsay. In all that time, I'd heard no word of either regret or reconciliation from her, until she'd shown up at the theatre without warning that afternoon demanding an audience. Grudgingly, I'd cut a fifteen-minute break from rehearsal. Fifteen minutes more, I told myself, than the woman had any right to expect.

'You've been reading too many fairy tales,' I'd answered aloud, sliding the box back across the table. 'Unless it leads straight back into rehearsal, I can't accept.'

'Quicksilver Kate,' she'd said with a rueful smile. 'Can't or won't?'

I remained stubbornly mute.

Roz sighed. 'Open or closed, I want you to have it.'

'No.'

She cocked her head, watching me. 'I've found something, sweetheart. Something big.'

'So have I.'

Her gaze swept around the theatre, its plain oak galleries stacked three storeys high, curving around the jutting platform of the stage so extravagantly set into gilt and marble backing at the opposite end of the courtyard. 'Quite a coup, of course, to direct *Hamlet* at the Globe. Especially for a young

American – and a woman to boot. Snobbiest crowd on the planet, the British theatre. Can't think of anyone I'd rather see shake up their insular little world.' Her eyes slid back towards me, flickering briefly over the gift perched between us. 'But this is bigger.'

I stared at her in disbelief. Was she really asking me to shake the dust of the Globe from my feet and follow her, based on nothing more than a few teasing hints and the faint gravitational pull of a small gold-wrapped box?

'What is it?' I asked.

She shook her head. '*'Tis in my memory lock'd, and you yourself shall keep the key of it.*'

Ophelia, I'd groaned to myself. *From her, I'd have expected Hamlet, the lead role, and centre stage every time.* 'Can you stop speaking in riddles for two minutes strung together?'

She motioned towards the door with a small jerk of her head. 'Come with me.'

'I'm in the middle of rehearsal.'

'Trust me,' she said, leaning forwards. 'You won't want to miss being in on this.'

Rage flared through me; I rose so quickly I knocked several books off the table.

The coy teasing drained from her eyes. 'I need help, Kate.'

'Ask someone else.'

'*Your* help.'

Mine? I frowned. Roz had any number of friends in the theatre; she would not need to come to me for questions about Shakespeare on the stage. The only other subject she cared about and that I knew better than she did stretched between us like a minefield: my dissertation. I had written on occult Shakespeare. The old meaning of the word *occult*, I always hastened to add. Not so much darkly magical, as hidden, obscured, secret. In particular, I'd studied the many strange

quests, mostly from the nineteenth century, to find secret wisdom encoded in the works of the Bard. Roz had found the topic as quirky and fascinating as I did – or so she had claimed in public. In private, I'd been told, she had torpedoed it, dismissing it as beneath true scholarship. *And now she wanted my help?*

'Why?' I asked. 'What have you found?'

She shook her head. 'Not here,' she said, her voice dipping into a low, urgent hush. 'When will you finish?'

'About eight.'

She leaned closer. 'Then meet me at nine, at the top of Parliament Hill.'

It would be dusk by then, in one of the loneliest spots in London. Not the safest time to be out on the Heath, but one of the most beautiful. As I hesitated, something that might have been fear flickered across Roz's face. '*Please*.'

When I made no answer, she stretched out her hand, and for a moment, I thought she'd snatch back the box, but instead she reached up to touch my hair with one finger. 'Same red hair and black Boleyn eyes,' she murmured. 'You know you look especially royal when angry?'

It was an old tease – that in certain moods, I looked like the Queen. Not the present Elizabeth, but the first one. Shakespeare's Queen. It wasn't just my auburn hair and dark eyes that did it, either, but the slight hook in my nose, and fair skin that freckled in the sun. Once or twice, I'd glimpsed it in the mirror myself – but I'd never liked the comparison or its implications. My parents had died when I was fifteen, and I'd gone to live with a great-aunt. Since then, I'd spent much of my life in the company of autocratic older women, and I'd always sworn I would not end up like them. So I liked to think I had little in common with that ruthless Tudor queen, save intelligence, maybe, and a delight with Shakespeare.

'Fine,' I heard myself say. 'Parliament Hill at nine.'

A little awkwardly, Roz lowered her hand. I think she couldn't quite believe I'd given in so easily. Neither could I. But my anger was sputtering out.

The intercom crackled. 'Ladies and gents,' boomed the voice of my stage manager, 'places in five minutes.'

Actors began flocking into the bright glare of the courtyard. Roz smiled and stood. 'You must go back to work, and I must simply go.' In a rush of nostalgia, I glimpsed a ghost of the old wit and spark between us. 'Keep it safe, Katie,' she'd added with one last nod at the box. Then she'd walked away.

Which was how I came to be sitting on a bench up on Parliament Hill at the end of the day, doing what I'd once sworn I'd never do again: waiting for Roz.

I stretched and considered the world spread out in the distance. Despite the two fanged towers of Canary Wharf to the east and another set midtown, from this height London looked a gentle place, centred on the dome of St Paul's Cathedral like a vast downy nest harbouring one luminous egg. In the last hour, a steady trickle of people had passed by on the path below. Not one of them had turned up towards me, though, marching through the grass with anything like Roz's arrogant step. Where was she?

And what could she be hoping for? No one in their right mind could imagine that I'd give up directing *Hamlet* at the Globe. Not yet thirty, American, and trained first and foremost as a scholar, I figured I was pretty much the toxic negative of whatever the gods of British theatre might imagine as ideal clay for fashioning a director. The offer to take on *Hamlet* – the finest jewel in the British theatrical crown – had seemed a miraculous windfall. So much so, that I'd saved the voice mail from the Globe's artistic director, spelling it out. I still played his manic, staccato voice back every morning, just

to make sure. In that state of mind, I didn't much care if the box in my lap held a map of Atlantis or the key to the Ark of the Covenant. Surely even Roz at her most self-involved would not expect me to exchange my title of 'Master of Play' for whatever mystery, large or small, she'd handed into my keeping.

The show opened in three weeks. Ten days after that would come the worst part of life in the theatre. As director, I'd have to stop hovering, tear myself from the camaraderie of cast and crew, and slink out, leaving the show to the actors. Unless I'd lined up something else to do.

The box sparkled on my knee.

Yes, but not yet, I could tell Roz. *I'll open your infernal gift when I'm finished with Hamlet*. If, that is, she bothered to show up for any answer at all.

At the bottom of the hill, lights kindled as night crept through the city in a dark tide. The afternoon had been hot, but the night air was growing cool, and I was glad I'd brought along a jacket. I was putting it on when I heard a twig snap behind me, somewhere up the hill; even as I heard it, the prickle of watching eyes washed down my back. I stood and whirled, but darkness had already settled thickly into the grove fringing the hilltop. Nothing moved but what might be wind in the trees. I took a step forwards. 'Roz?'

No one answered.

I turned back, scanning the scene below. No one was there, but gradually I became aware of movement I had not noticed before. Far below, behind St Paul's, a pale column of smoke was spiralling lazily into the sky. My breath caught in my throat. Behind St Paul's, on the south bank of the River Thames, sat the newly rebuilt Globe with its walls of white plaster criss-crossed with oak timbers, its roof prickly with flammable thatch. So flammable, in fact, that it had been the

first thatched roof allowed in London since the Great Fire of 1666 had burned itself out almost three and a half centuries ago, leaving the city a charred and smoking ruin.

Surely the distance was deceptive. The smoke might be rising five miles to the south of the Globe, or a mile to the east.

The column thickened, billowing grey and then black. A gust of wind took it up, fanning it out; at its heart winked an ominous flicker of red. Shoving Roz's gift into the pocket of my jacket, I strode downhill. By the time I reached the path, I was running.