

# **ANNE FEVERSHAM**

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**ANNE FEVERSHAM**

# CHAPTER I

A DISTINGUISHED member of the Lord Chamberlain's company, Mr. William Shakespeare by name, had entered the shop of a tailor in the town of Nottingham. This popular and respected actor and playwright was about thirty-five years of age. Of middle height, he had the compact figure of one in the prime of a vigorous manhood. His hair was worn rather long, but his beard, inclining to red in color, was trim and close. His dress was plainer than is the rule with those who follow his calling. Indeed at a first glance he had less of the look of an actor than of a shrewd, cautious man of affairs who has prospered in trade. Close observation might have amended this estimate. There was a vivid pallor about the face, and the somber eyes, slow-burning and deep-set, were like a smoldering fire. Even when the mobile features were in repose, which was seldom the case, the whole effect of the countenance was vital and arresting.

"That is a very choice coffin-cloth you have there, Master Tidey."

The manner of the actor and playwright was simplicity itself. There was not a suspicion of affectation in it. He passed his fingers over the rich pall that lay on the tailor's knee. Upon the hem of the cloth an armorial device was being stitched by the hand of a master craftsman.

"Yes, it is Master Shakespeare," said the tailor gravely. "Choice enough, choice enough."

“Who is the happy man?”

“A young gentleman who lies in the Castle yonder. He is to have his head cut off a Tuesday by order of the Queen.”

A look of startled interest came into the eyes of the player. “Is that so, Master Tidey? And young, you say, and gentle, too?”

“Aye, young enough. But two or three and twenty—by all accounts a very fair and deliver young man.”

“It seems a pity,” said the player, “a mortal pity, for a man to die by the ax in the heat of his youth. And yet ’tis better to die by the ax than by the string. It is at least a gentleman’s death the Queen is giving him,” he added grimly.

“As you say,” the tailor agreed, “it is at least a gentleman’s death the Queen is giving him, and he’ll have the robe of a gentleman in which to wrap his corpse. Happen, Master Shakespeare, that in like case it is a better consideration than would fall to you and me.”

A light flashed in the somber eyes of the player. “Speak for yourself Master Tidey,” he said, with a slow, deep laugh. “Whenever I get my deliverance, by God’s grace I’ll have the robe of a gentleman to cover me. Unless”—the light in the somber eyes was so intense that they shone almost black—“unless they let the reason out, and then there’s no warrant for any man’s exit. But what of this poor young man? How comes he to this?”

The tailor lowered his voice to a whisper. It was as if he feared to be overheard. "They do say 'a has plotted with the Papishers, who are always contriving against the Queen."

"What's the name of the unlucky youth?"

"His name is Mr. Gervase Heriot."

"Mr. Gervase Heriot! He is a kinsman of my Lord Southampton." A look of keen pity came upon the player's face. "I know the lad well enough. He sat on our stage at The Globe less than two months ago. An open, cheerful youth incapable of plotting against aught save a flask of canaries, if I'm any judge of nature. Poor young man. Master Tidey, this is a very tragic matter."

"Sad enough, Master Shakespeare, sad enough," said the tailor, stitching busily at the coffin-cloth.

The actor passed a delicately shaped hand, the hand of a poet, across his face. "More than once I have marked the lad as he sat in the playhouse," he said. "'A was a proper neat youth. 'A had a subtle tongue and a very flaming eye. 'A was german-cousin to Perseus, him that bestrid the winged horse. And now—with the taste of milk yet on his lips!" The player ceased abruptly, as if overcome by a surge of feeling. For a time he was silent. The tragic end of a youth of bright promise appeared to weigh upon him sorely.

Master Nicholas Tidey, whose skill with the needle and shears had spread far and wide over the midland counties, was, like the player, a Stratford man. In a rather shamefaced way, the tailor was a little inclined to be proud of his fellow-townsmen.

To be sure his calling was hardly that of a Christian. On occasion his speech was apt to be a little disorderly, it even verged upon the fantastical, but Master Tidey was bound to admit that there must be something in the fellow. For one thing, rumor had it that he had recently bought New Place, the largest house in his native town. Such a fact spoke for itself, even if a wise man was inclined to discount the glowing reports of the play-actor's ever-growing success which reached him continually from London. But, even as far back in the world's history as the age of Elizabeth, "Nothing succeeds like success" was a maxim known to the philosophers.

"They do tell me, Master Shakespeare," said the tailor, "that some of these harlotry pieces of yours have been approved by the Queen."

The playwright could not help smiling a little at a certain uneasiness which was apparent in the tone of his friend, in spite of the fact that that honest man tried very hard to conceal it. "If I said they had not, Master Tidey," he answered, with dry modesty, "I might be speaking less than I know. On the other hand, if I said that they had, a needy writer for the stage might be claiming more than becomes the least of her Majesty's servants."

Master Tidey looked a little incredulous. "They do tell me, Master Shakespeare, that you make them out of your own head entirely. Master Burbage, who was here an hour ago to have new points set in his hose, swore it was so, by the beard of the prophet—facetiously, as I think. But I can hardly believe it, Master Shakespeare, not out of your own head, and that's the fact. Why, I mind the time you was a little graceless runnion



that used to play truant from Stratford Free School. Many's the time I've seen you come sliding down Short Hill of a winter's morning in your blue short coat, with your books falling out o' your satchel as you dangled it behind you, and generally twenty minutes late for the muster. You were always a sharp lad, Master Shakespeare, I'm bound to say that although somewhat idly given, but I never thought you'd have had wit enough to make one of these interludes all out of your own head like book-learned men who have been bred at college."

"It seems unlikely enough I grant you," said the player discreetly. "And my pieces, such as they are, don't compare of course with those of some I could mention—there is a young fellow by the name of Ben Jonson, and one of these days you'll be able to contrive a whole garment for the best of us out of his sleeve ruffles. But I sometimes think, Master Tidey, when of an evening I've had a glass o' clear spring water with a carroway-seed in it at the Mermaid Tavern, that if only he had had the singular good fortune to have been bred at Oxford or Cambridge, the world might one day have heard of William Shakespeare—but no matter! It will all be the same a hundred years hence." The player laughed cheerfully. "We shall all be forgotten, and our interludes too, long before then."

"Yes, Master Shakespeare, there can be no doubt about that," said the tailor heartily. "And personally I thank God for it. I don't hold with these masks and gallimaufries and such-like cloaks for wantonness, saving your presence. Still the Queen does, as I understand, and although I am much surprised at *her*, that's a great matter. And that being the case I am bound to admit that for one who left the Stratford Free School at the age

of thirteen with no more book-knowledge in his numskull than Daddy Jenkins could put there with his ferrule, and if, as I say, the Queen approves your interludes, and they are entirely out of your own head, as Master Burbage swears they are by the beard of the prophet—why, I am bound to admit that you bring little or no discredit upon your native parish.”

“You pay me a high compliment, Master Tidey,” said the actor. “And fain would I deserve it. But you will grieve to learn, I am sure, that the Queen has commanded the Lord Chamberlain’s servants to her palace at Richmond on the tenth of July, and moreover she desires a new piece from the pen of the least of them all. It would seem that, for some reason at present obscure, her Grace in her bounty is pleased to approve the nonsensical comedy of “Love’s Labour’s Lost,” which, between ourselves, is by no means the brightest of the performances from the hand of the rustical clown in question.”

In spite of the strictness of his tenets, Master Tidey could not forbear to be impressed. “You are indeed coming to great honors now,” said the tailor, whose worldly wisdom appeared to be in danger of overriding his high principles. “And it is not for me to deny that you have a talent—of a kind that is, Master Shakespeare. But at least, as you are a Stratford man like myself, I am glad to hear that there are those who think well of it. What will you put into your comedy, Master Shakespeare? Love, I presume, and all manner of wantonness?”

“Well, Master Tidey,” said the author, “since you ask the question, you can no more leave love out of a comedy than you can leave an apple out of a dumpling. Besides, it is Gloriana’s desire that I should make her a tale of love, that there should

be youth in it and girlhood and high poesy—that is, if we can rise to poesy in this barren age! And it is Gloriana’s pleasure that it shall be played before her of a summer’s afternoon under the greenwood in Richmond Park.”

“You will be making your fortune one of these days, Master Shakespeare,” said the tailor, upon the verge of awe.

“That is as may be, Master Tidey. At least I would ask nothing better than to quit the stage. A man’s dignity and a player’s calling don’t ride well together. In the meantime must I tease my five wits to devise a play for Gloriana. And it must be made, alas! by the tenth of July.”

“I’d rather you had to do it than had I,” said the tailor, with a sigh of relief, as he took up the needle and shears.

By now the player was subdued to the process of thought, and was twisting his short beard between his thumb and forefinger. The eyes were veiled almost like those of a man in a trance. “I’ve a mind to put Robin Hood in it,” he said. “The bold outlaw of Sherwood and his merry men. Many’s the time they have come from the neighboring greenwood into this famous old town of Nottingham.”

Before, however, the actor could pursue this pleasant idea, there arose a sharp clatter of hoofs on the cobblestones outside the tailor’s door, and a minute afterwards a personage entered the shop who at once turned his thoughts into a new direction.

## CHAPTER II

THE personage was a young woman of some eighteen years, breathing youth and its sorcery in every line. She was tall, well grown, of a beauty that was remarkable. She stepped with a lithe grace, a springing freedom that Atalanta would not have disdained. Her long quilted riding-coat was the last cry of the fashion, and on the left hand she wore a large hawking-gauntlet. But that which at once caught the eye both of the tailor and of the player, and made the charming figure still more memorable, was an audacious pair of leather breeches. These clothed her nether limbs, and below them were a long pair of boots of untanned leather.

Now Master Tidey it was who had built this fine pair of hawking-breeches to the explicit order of the wearer, yet even he could hardly forbear to be scandalized when he marked its effect. As for the player—but he had a larger, a more liberal, a more sophisticated mind. For one thing he had seen the fine ladies of the Court ride out hawking in this guise. To be sure he had heard some very salutary criticism of a style of dress that was creeping into vogue among the highest in the land, but he was not of those who condemned it. Mr. William Shakespeare, unlike his friend Nicholas Tidey, betrayed not the least surprise at this young woman's appearance. Certainly his curiosity was fully aroused, but perhaps that was less on account of the garment itself than because of the look of its wearer.

In point of fact, Mr. William Shakespeare, whose eye was very sure in such matters, was charmed by the spectacle. Swiftly he moved aside, in order that this young gentlewoman might proceed to the tailor's counter. Moreover, as he performed this polite action he removed his hat with a touch of gallantry, as became an acquaintance with courts.

"Good Master Tailor," said the wearer of the garment, with an air so fine as to delight Mr. William Shakespeare still more, "I make you my compliments upon these hawking-breeches you have been so good as to devise for me. They are a little tight around the left knee, otherwise they do excellently well. I make you my compliments upon them, Master Tailor, and have the goodness to devise me a second pair in every particular as the first."

Master Tidey bowed obsequiously. "I attend your pleasure, madam," he said.

The young woman then drew off a glove, and with some little difficulty was able to produce a purse from the recesses of her attire. "What is your charge, friend, for this excellent garment, which gives me such ease in the saddle that from this day I am minded to wear no other style of habiliment."

"Two angels, if it please you, madam."

"Here be four, my friend."

She opened the purse and counted out in gold pieces twice the sum that was asked.

“Good Master Tailor,” she said, “you have right excellent craft and your garment pleases me. And if I must speak the truth, I had never learned until this day what ease and freedom comes of the wearing of galligaskins.”

She used such a grave air, as of one expressing a most serious and private thought, that Mr. William Shakespeare, who all this time had been regarding her covertly, although taking care to appear lost in contemplation of the coffin-cloth the tailor had now discarded, could not forbear from giving forth a dry, stealthy chuckle.

Mistress Anne Feversham half turned for the purpose of visiting such a presumption with an imperious eye. The clear gaze said as plainly as woman could express it: “And who, pray, are you, sir? Whoever you are I’ll thank you to be pretty careful.”

Howbeit, in the matter of looking down this presumptuous individual, young Mistress Anne Feversham, it seemed, had undertaken a task a little beyond her present powers. There was hardly one among the burgesses of the town who could have sustained that gaze. But with this quiet and mild-looking individual, whose coat and sword were so modest, it was a different matter.

The impact of the proud eyes of Mistress Insolence was met with perfect composure. Moreover, there was just a suspicion of laughter. In the opinion of the lady there was no ground for levity. Yet it was almost as if this person, whose dress was so little pretentious as to be hardly that of a gentleman, was daring to say in his heart, “Madam, think not ill of me if I

confess that, far from being abashed by your air, I am rather amused by it.”

That at least was the quick and sensitive feminine interpretation of the subtle face whose owner was hardly entitled to such a look of arch and humorous self-confidence. Mistress Anne Feversham felt a slight wound in her dignity. Who, pray, was this impertinent?

By some means best known to himself, Mr. William Shakespeare appeared to read the thoughts of the lady. At least the sly smile that had crept into those somber but wonderful eyes had deepened to a look of roguery. Mistress Anne grew crimson; the disdainful head went up; she bit her lip; and then realizing that such a display of embarrassment was wholly unworthy of the daughter of the Constable of Nottingham Castle, the pride of youth chastened her so sorely that she turned her back abruptly on the cause of her defeat.

Soon, however, the ever-abiding sense of place and power came to her aid and she was able to command herself sufficiently to address the tailor.

“I see the town is full of play-acting rogues,” she said. “Whence do they come?”

“From London, madam, I believe,” said Master Tidey, without venturing to look in the direction of his friend.

“I am afraid they are a saucy-looking crew. My groom”—perhaps it was well that the voice of Mistress Anne did not reach the ears of the haughty young falconer who was taking charge of her horse at the tailor’s door—“my groom pointed

them out to me as I passed the Moot Hall. As soon as I return to the Castle I will inform my father the Constable, and I will see if they cannot be put in the stocks, which to my mind is where they belong.”

As became the shrewd man he was, Master Nicholas Tidey made no reply. He was content to nod his head gravely, as if he tacitly approved, while at the same time he contrived to keep a tail of an eye upon his distinguished friend. There might or there might not have been a ghost of a smile upon that prim and cautious mouth.

Indeed, very wisely, Master Tidey left it to the play-actor himself to try a fall with such a formidable adversary. And this that daring individual proceeded to do in a manner quite cool and leisurely, and yet with a vastly considered air. In his eye, it was true, there was a suspicion of something far other than gravity. That of course was regrettable; but it was undoubtedly there.

Mr. William Shakespeare’s first act was to remove his hat with its single short cock’s feather, and then he bowed very low indeed, in the manner of one quite well aware of addressing a social superior.

“Cry you mercy, mistress,” he said, “but as one who is himself a poor actor may he ask wherein his guild has had the unhappiness to offend you?”

Mistress Anne Feversham met this effrontery with a disdain that was wonderful. Her chief concern at the moment was to show her great contempt without a descent into downright ill-



breeding. But as soon as she met the somber eyes of this individual, in which a something that was rare and strange was overlaid by a subtle mockery, this natural instinct took wings and fled. In those eyes was something that hardly left her mistress of herself, in spite of her father the Constable, her young blood-horse and her incomparable pair of galligaskins.

“My father the Constable would have all play-actors whipped,” said Mistress Anne Feversham.

But her voice was not as she had intended it to be. Moreover, her father the Constable had yet to deliver himself of such an illiberal sentiment. And this graceless individual seemed to be fully aware that this was the case.

“Whipped, mistress!” His look of grave consternation did not deceive her. “You would whip a poor actor!”

“All who are actors, sir, my father would.”

“Is it conceivable?—the gentlest, the humblest, the most industrious, the most law-abiding of men!”

“My father cares not for that, sir. He says they are masterless rogues.”

“Then by my faith, mistress, that is very froward in your father.”

“He says they are the scum of taverns and alehouses and they corrupt the public mind.”

“Ods my life! how comes so crabbed a sire to have a daughter so fair, so feat, so charming!”

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