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If Shakespeare had lived and worked in the 21st century

Will composed himself at the desk, ripe with ideas for the new play, a tragedy of jealousy and uncontrollable love. It was there, mapped out in his mind's eye, the plot, the characters, the imagery, everything. All he needed was space and time to let it flow.

His mate, Chris Marlowe, had bought him a Windows 10 computer, shortly before being killed in a road rage incident. Half expected, of course. Chris was the most volatile person Will had ever met, a truly flawed artist. Such a thing was bound to happen. So now, Will felt compelled to use the dreaded machine, out of respect for his dead friend.

"It's quicker than a quill, mate," Chris had said, shortly before smashing his Lexus into a 20-ton cross-channel Dutch juggernaut.

Will hoped so. His ideas were flowing faster than he could follow them. He had to see the words on paper before he lost them forever to oblivion.

He switched on.

Windows is updating, he read on the screen. Please do not turn off your computer.

Will waited, watching the one percent change to two percent, to five percent, to ten percent. Won't be long, he told himself. He closed his eyes and focused on the play, vivid and masterful, acting out in his imagination.

Windows is installing updates, he saw. Please wait.

He waited. Great lines, great language, great scenes unfolded before him.

Microsoft Teams has been installed. Configure now?

No. Move on. Let's get started.

Office updates have been downloaded and are ready to install.

'Odds bodkins!' whispered Will. 'Better do it.'

He waited as the computer carried out its hidden rituals, out of sight of human understanding. Will held on to the play, one of his best, and a real money spinner. Such passion, he knew it would work, knew the Chamberlain Production Company would do it proud.

Adobe needs to update. Press to continue.

There was no way to delay the update. Best do it and keep the infernal machine happy.

He'd need about two months to refine the play. It was all there, in his head, as the others had been, but nothing was perfect first time, and if he didn't concentrate and revise the scripts, they could be pretty ordinary, he admitted that to himself.

Okay, let's get start...

Your browser is affected by add-ins that cause it to run slowly. Please check the ones you want to disable.

'Odds bodkins, do I need a browser?' he asked himself. Chris had told him to keep everything updated, to stay safe. 'Safe from what?' Will asked himself, imagining some virtual imitation of the Spanish Armada sailing onto his screen. He did it anyway, only to see an error dialogue box pop into the centre of the screen. Will's head was busy with his characters still, and he could not, at first, make any sense of this peculiar message – something about a missing DLL.

Please contact your administrator.

Will's only administrator was head of the Chamberlain TV Production Company, Richard Burbage. He doubted that Dick Burbage would know much about missing DLLs. Will decided to switch off and switch on again. Chris had told him that that was always a safe bet.

He waited.

The play, he had to admit, was starting to act itself out too fast. The first lines had already drifted. 'Churlish knave,' he whispered angrily at the computer.

Microsoft Teams would...

Will had a wide range of curses to hand. He resented and never used the common blue-air-turning words of the masses. He launched a few original invectives of his own at the screen. It stared back, placid and immovable. He ignored a couple of other messages, closing the dialogue boxes and started Word.

Office cannot find the server. Your work will not be saved. Do you want to continue?

Will read this three times. Why could it not be saved? What was the point of writing anything if it could not be saved? There was a 'Help' box at the top right, but when he clicked it, it listed countless frequently asked questions.

'To ask or not to ask. What's the question?' Will whispered, searching frantically.

Cortana answered.

You are too far from the computer. Please repeat.

Chris had told him that Cortana would be his best friend, but Will found it tediously thick. He hissed, 'Get thee to a nunnery', and closed it.

He navigated to where he could find some real support, possibly in Nubia, but it didn't matter, anyone, anywhere, just to get him started. The script in his mind was getting befuddled by all this magicomputery nonsense.

Will managed to invoke a chat box and somebody with the exotic name of Saitha, wrote, 'Hi Will, hope you are having a great day. I am here to help.'

He tried for an interminable time to explain the situation, but Saitha took far too long to respond. She was evidently helping numerous other people to have similarly great days.

The play had somehow slipped down the priority list. What mattered most was finding out why, after all the updates, the infernal machine would not save his work. There was no point being brilliant, even being a genius as some had called his writing, if it was to disappear into the ether.

Will lost track of time, but when Saitha apologised for the inconvenience the third time, Will closed the chat box. He did not like being rude but enough was enough. He decided to carry on regardless, but as soon as he pressed the first key, the screen dimmed and the words 'Microsoft Word is not responding' appeared at the top.

Will supposed that younger minds than his had ways to deal with this, but he did not. He pushed the computer back, picked up his quill, fetched a piece of parchment and focused – just as his mobile rang, playing 'Alas my love' from Greensleeves over and over again.

It was Anne, his wife, left to keep house in Stratford.

"Will?"

"Yes. This is Will. Hello Anne."

"Am I disturbing you?"

A thousand thoughts raced through Will's mind. He loved his wife, he loved his family, but if truth be told, he loved his work more. It came first, it always had, and it always would. Yet it was falling apart, frustrated by this new, intrusive technology. He felt the play slip from his mind, believed that there was madness in these methods.

"No, my love. I am writing, that's all."

'That's all,' he repeated to himself. 'That's all? Isn't that everything?'

Anne went into a long and involved monologue about domestic life, trying to hide the fact that he was there and she was somewhere else. All wrong, all mistakes.

Will realised, with resignation, that he had wanted to write a tragedy, but this was just a comedy of errors.