

## CECIL/SHAG

**SHAG:** I've come here to apologize. About your father.

**CECIL:** What about my father?

**SHAG:** I'm sorry. For what I wrote about him.

**CECIL:** You parodied him as a meddling old fool. When Hamlet stabbed him behind an arras, he cried, "A rat! A rat!" When he died, people laughed. (*brief pause. Then--*)

**SHAG:** So – you *have* seen my plays.

**CECIL:** There is a ship in the harbor – captured from the Spanish – containing all God's riches in small, easily pilfered quantities – gold bracelets, ivory carvings, spices. Not only do I know what is still in the hold – I know where the stolen items are – down to the last grain of pepper. I could give you the same details on every ship in the harbor – even though I haven't been in their stinking holds – and I can tell you about every one of your plays even though I haven't been in your cesspit of a theater. I am well informed. Now, if you haven't finished the play, what are you doing here?

**SHAG:** I've come to find out about the dirt.

**CECIL:** Dirt? What dirt?

**SHAG:** *Dirt.* Men tunneling under Parliament must have brought out a huge amount of *dirt*. Where did it go?

**CECIL:** In a time of national crisis, nobody's going to care about the dirt.

**SHAG:** Does this play matter to you? Because there will be 700 penny-a-place standees at every performance, *all* of whom make their living *with their hands* and, if there's *anything* they will want to know about, it's *the dirt*. It's the details that sell the story. People tend to trust you on the big things if you get the small ones right – and this play is going to require more trust than usual.

**CECIL:** Why?

**SHAG:** Working people know nothing neat-as-this-piece-of-nonsense can possibly be true. This (*the manuscript*) is a shoddy piece of work.

**CECIL:** *The King* wrote a shoddy piece of work?

**SHAG:** *Whoever* wrote this wrote a shoddy piece of work. Was it you?

**CECIL:** I remind you. When you speak to me you are speaking to the King. Do you understand that?

**SHAG:** I understand more than that. When I am speaking to you, I am speaking to a man who made an English king out of wee James of Scotland. It could not have been easy.

**CECIL:** And if the King walked in now, you would find a way to flatter him too, wouldn't you? Probably at my expense . . . Now, what's the *precise* problem with this?

**SHAG:** There's nothing wrong with *it*. It's what's wrong with me. I'm a *playwright*.

**CECIL:** And?

**SHAG:** (*escalating*) You don't *want* a play. You want a *propaganda* story. I don't do that.

**CECIL:** (*outraged*) Don't do propaganda? *You?* You're the man who gave Richard the Third his *hump*.

**SHAG:** He was a murderer.

**CECIL:** They're *all* murderers! *He* balanced the budget. People have *no idea* how hard that is!