

WHAT'S PAST IS PROLOGUE

A one-act comedy by
David J. LeMaster

This script is for evaluation only. It may not be printed, photocopied or distributed digitally under any circumstances. Possession of this file does not grant the right to perform this play or any portion of it, or to use it for classroom study.

www.youthplays.com
info@youthplays.com
426-703-5315

What's Past is Prologue © David J. LeMaster
All rights reserved. ISBN 978-1-62088-617-5.

Caution: This play is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, Canada, the British Commonwealth and all other countries of the copyright union and is subject to royalty for all performances including but not limited to professional, amateur, charity and classroom whether admission is charged or presented free of charge.

Reservation of Rights: This play is the property of the author and all rights for its use are strictly reserved and must be licensed by the author's representative, YouthPLAYS. This prohibition of unauthorized professional and amateur stage presentations extends also to motion pictures, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video and the rights of adaptation or translation into non-English languages.

Performance Licensing and Royalty Payments: Amateur and stock performance rights are administered exclusively by YouthPLAYS. No amateur, stock or educational theatre groups or individuals may perform this play without securing authorization and royalty arrangements in advance from YouthPLAYS. Required royalty fees for performing this play are available online at www.YouthPLAYS.com. Royalty fees are subject to change without notice. Required royalties must be paid each time this play is performed and may not be transferred to any other performance entity. All licensing requests and inquiries should be addressed to YouthPLAYS.

Author Credit: All groups or individuals receiving permission to produce this play must give the author(s) credit in any and all advertisements and publicity relating to the production of this play. The author's billing must appear directly below the title on a separate line with no other accompanying written matter. The name of the author(s) must be at least 50% as large as the title of the play. No person or entity may receive larger or more prominent credit than that which is given to the author(s) and the name of the author(s) may not be abbreviated or otherwise altered from the form in which it appears in this Play.

Publisher Attribution: All programs, advertisements, flyers or other printed material must include the following notice:

Produced by special arrangement with YouthPLAYS (www.youthplays.com).

Prohibition of Unauthorized Copying: Any unauthorized copying of this book or excerpts from this book, whether by photocopying, scanning, video recording or any other means, is strictly prohibited by law. This book may only be copied by licensed productions with the purchase of a photocopy license, or with explicit permission from YouthPLAYS.

Trade Marks, Public Figures & Musical Works: This play may contain references to brand names or public figures. All references are intended only as parody or other legal means of expression. This play may also contain suggestions for the performance of a musical work (either in part or in whole). YouthPLAYS has not obtained performing rights of these works unless explicitly noted. The direction of such works is only a playwright's suggestion, and the play producer should obtain such permissions on their own. The website for the U.S. copyright office is <http://www.copyright.gov>.

COPYRIGHT RULES TO REMEMBER

1. To produce this play, you must receive prior written permission from YouthPLAYS and pay the required royalty.
2. You must pay a royalty each time the play is performed in the presence of audience members outside of the cast and crew. Royalties are due whether or not admission is charged, whether or not the play is presented for profit, for charity or for educational purposes, or whether or not anyone associated with the production is being paid.
3. No changes, including cuts or additions, are permitted to the script without written prior permission from YouthPLAYS.
4. Do not copy this book or any part of it without written permission from YouthPLAYS.
5. Credit to the author and YouthPLAYS is required on all programs and other promotional items associated with this play's performance.

When you pay royalties, you are recognizing the hard work that went into creating the play and making a statement that a play is something of value. We think this is important, and we hope that everyone will do the right thing, thus allowing playwrights to generate income and continue to create wonderful new works for the stage.

Plays are owned by the playwrights who wrote them. Violating a playwright's copyright is a very serious matter and violates both United States and international copyright law. Infringement is punishable by actual damages and attorneys' fees, statutory damages of up to \$150,000 per incident, and even possible criminal sanctions. **Infringement is theft. Don't do it.**

Have a question about copyright? Please contact us by email at info@youthplays.com or by phone at 424-703-5315. When in doubt, please ask.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE, a great playwright who can't find his voice or the ability to write poetry.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, Marlowe's alter ego.

TOMMY KYD, a bartender.

RICHARD BURBAGE, the world's greatest actor.

The ROYAL COURT, part of the Queen's army.

KATE, a serving wench.

The DARK LADY, a muse.

The APOTHECARY, dark and foreboding.

PROLOGUE, a performer. Think Pyramus and Thisbe; *Romeo and Juliet*.

PROFESSOR, used only with the alternate beginning.

NOTES

The text reads as if Marlowe and Shakespeare are played by the same actor. You may choose to do so, or you may choose to cast two separate individuals.

The original production included a dance at the beginning, and a professor character who introduced the piece and accompanied it on the piano. The speech is included here, and the production may occur with or without the character.

Alternate Beginning

(A great PROFESSOR addresses the crowd.)

PROFESSOR: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, I am Distinguished Professor Emeritus with Honors Defrocked Dr. Beverly Bilgepatter Crosby Stills AnOverton, Ph.D., A.B.D., the Fourth, from the University of Fustian. You are about to experience the dramatization of years of my research on Wikipedia, the Internet, and various unnamed sources that point me to the indisputable conclusion dramatized in this performance. Shakespeare was Marlowe, and Marlowe, Shakespeare. My research has convinced me that Shakespeare and Marlowe were the same man, that Marlowe faked his own death and time-traveled across the universe, where he is responsible for Stonehenge, Easter Island, the Egyptian Pyramids, the disappearance of Atlantis, and a series of crop circles in Western Europe and the Central United States, as well as for the disappearance of Jimmy Hoffa and the assassination of President Kennedy. My new book, *The Shakespeare/Marlowe/Roswell/9-11/Mary Magdalene/Curse of the Bambino Conspiracy* will be available in the lobby for 29.95 after the show. Thank you.

The Beginning for the Original Production

(The stage is dark. Enter PROLOGUE.)

(Special on Prologue.)

PROLOGUE: Two men who wrote historical letters
The one you know, the other forgot
Shakespeare's the first, considered the better
But Marlowe once stood at the top of the lot.
Kid Marlowe went to the old university
Studying letters, winning honor galore.
Shakespeare in turn had financial adversity
grammar school class being all he'd afford.

© David J. LeMaster

This is a perusal copy only.

Absolutely no printing, copying/distribution or performance permitted.

But why did the world forget ol' Chris Marlowe?
 How are his writings all gone and forgot?
Faust, Tamberlane, and Edward the Solo
 Not read or performed or remembered a jot.

So lift up thine ears, a story you'll see,
 of Shakespeare and Marlowe, as they came to be.

(In the initial production, an interpretive dance occurred here. The lead DANCER tapped, and two more DANCERS, one with a shirt reading "Shakespeare," and the other with a shirt reading "Marlowe," tried to imitate her. Marlowe was unsuccessful.)

(A tavern. A bartender, KYD, Elizabethan and tough, is on an old-fashioned telephone. Enter MARLOWE as Kyd talks.)

KYD: Boarshead Tavern, you dream it, we write it. This is Tommy K. No, she's not in... There's no set schedule. *(Pause)* You want a what? A muse of fire? Look this isn't that kinda place. Call the bull and bear-baiting guys up town.

(Hangs up and puts phone away. He notices Marlowe and sighs.)

What can I get ya?

MARLOWE: What's the special?

KYD: What's the special?

(Clears throat, and then in deliberately exaggerated rhythm:)

The special is but what the special be
 The special being special, makes it so.
 For if it's good, then special is to me
 A special thing, especially to know.

MARLOWE: You mock me with your iambic pentameter.

KYD: If the shoe fits... Look, how can you call yourself a poet when you can't write blank verse? Give it up, Marlowe. Try a new career. Like...glove making.

MARLOWE: What's this muse of fire business?

KYD: (*Emphatic:*) The muse of fire doesn't work here.

MARLOWE: Then send in Kate.

KYD: Kate's not a muse of anything. She's a serving wench.

MARLOWE: Then send in the muse! If that doesn't fix me, nothing will.

KYD: (*Rolls eyes.*) If you think you gotta be fixed.... (*Picks up phone and tells someone in the back:*) We got a guy at the bar waiting for the muse.

MARLOWE: One does not "wait" for a muse. One searches the world, looks everywhere, and suddenly, out of nowhere, the muse arrives. She is strong, trustworthy, and knowledgeable. She's the face that launched a thousand ships. She's a beauty. She's—

(Enter the DARK LADY.)

Now that's what I call a muse.

DARK LADY: Is there a polemic here waiting for me?

KYD: He's a poet, sweetheart.

DARK LADY: Oh, yeah. Wrong word. Sorry.

MARLOWE: With beauty like that, who needs words?

DARK LADY: Sometimes I get a little confused and use adjuncts to describe words, and I get mixed up with my nuns and voids.

KYD: Nouns and verbs.

DARK LADY: That.

MARLOWE: Who needs words when one has such, such—

DARK LADY: I know. People say it all the time. Indignifiable busty.

MARLOWE: Uh. Indefinable beauty.

DARK LADY: That's what I said. So what's on the pocket for the day?

KYD: Docket, my dear. Docket.

DARK LADY: There's a docket on the pocket today? I'm confused.

KYD: Then you just stay confused, and don't give it a second's thought. This man wants to be inspired.

DARK LADY: Then gaze upon me and find me institutional!

KYD: Inspirational, sweetheart. Inspirational. (*To Marlowe:*) There's your muse. Have at you.

MARLOWE: Yes, I...I...I've got writer's block now.

KYD: Better unblock fast.

DARK LADY: Yeah, just hurry up. I'm about to go on vaccination.

KYD: Vacation. "I'm about to go on vacation."

DARK LADY: Oh, you are too?

KYD: (*To Marlowe:*) Look, but don't talk.

DARK LADY: He can talk. I can precipitate in two motivations at the same time – I'm androgynous.

MARLOWE: Perhaps if you send in Kate –

KYD: Try it, Marlowe. She's inspired countless writers. Dante called her Beatrice. Cervantes, Dulcinea. And today, we'll call her the Dark Lady.

DARK LADY: Just remember, I'm incontinent. I've circumcised the globe.

MARLOWE: I'll not be courting you...

DARK LADY: Why not? Don't poleemics believe in curtly love?

KYD: Courtly love.

DARK LADY: It inspires heroes and villanelles. And villanettes.

KYD: You're much more inspirational with your mouth closed, my dear. Smile.

(She smiles.)

KYD: So, Marlowe. Compose a sonnet for the Dark Lady!

DARK LADY: I'm insatiable.

KYD: You're inspirational, too. Go on, Marlowe. Let's hear what you've got.

MARLOWE: Okay, uh... "Of all the gin joints, in all the towns, in all the world, she walks into mine." Uh... That's all I got.

KYD: You stole that, didn't you?

MARLOWE: Aye.

KYD: Marlowe, my friend, you prodding, knotting fool,
You know not how to speak, nor how to write;
you op' your mouth and bray, like some great mule,
or ass, heehawing in the night.

MARLOWE: How do you do that?

DARK LADY: It's superfluous!

KYD: Yes. I suppose it is.

MARLOWE: But it's essential to being a poet.

KYD: Why should that bother you? A poet you're not.

MARLOWE: But I must be! Poetry is the vein of life, it's the...
It's five counts of unstressed, stressed, right?

KYD: I'm just a bartender —

MARLOWE: But you're also a poet.

KYD: Me? Nah.

MARLOWE: Rumor has it you were arrested as an atheist—

KYD: Shhhhh!

MARLOWE: And a spy—

KYD: Shhhhhhh!

MARLOWE: And once went by the name of Thomas Kyd...

KYD: (*Quickly changes tune:*) The emphasis is on the second syllable.

MARLOWE: Meaning?

KYD: You have an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable.

MARLOWE: Uh... Ok. (*Tries to write in his head.*)

Hey Thom\as Kyd\ a drink\ I crave\ from thee
So pour\ and pour\ and pour\ an ale\ for me.

KYD: Maybe you're just not cut out to be a writer.

MARLOWE: But everyone else can make iambic pentameter—

KYD: Not everyone—

DARK LADY: Mr. Marlowe.

You're smartly, writerly, and oh, so studily.

Someday you'll be a superficial star!

Others just suck, and write real cruddily,

So use me as your muse, but from afar.

KYD: Guess you're right. Everyone can.

DARK LADY: Thank you for letting me percipitate.

KYD: Sure, honey. Just go back to the office and relax.

(She leaves; he turns urgently back.)

Try a real verse. My God, my God, look not so fierce on me.

MARLOWE: My God, my God –

KYD: Hit the second syllable.

MARLOWE: My God, my God –

KYD: You're worse than Burbage when he first started.

MARLOWE: You trained Burbage?

KYD: I trained Bur... Listen fella, Burbage couldn't play Spearchucker Number Three before I got a hold of him. Didn't know an "iamb" from an "I am not." Now. Do it again.

MARLOWE: My God, my God –

KYD: Second syllable!

MARLOWE: My God, my God –

KYD: (*An exclamation of misery:*) My god.

MARLOWE: My g –

KYD: Don't repeat that one, that was just me.

MARLOWE: Oh.

KYD: Look not.

MARLOWE: Where?

KYD: The line.

MARLOWE: Oh.

KYD: Repeat it.

MARLOWE: Look not.

KYD: Place it in the front of the mouth. Look not.

MARLOWE: Look not –

KYD: So fierce upon me.

MARLOWE: Look not so fierce –

KYD: Enunciate.

MARLOWE: Look not so fierce—

KYD: What's your motivation here?

MARLOWE: My what?

KYD: Your reason for saying this! Don't tell me you haven't thought it through?

MARLOWE: I didn't—

KYD: What's your moment before?

MARLOWE: Uh—

KYD: My god, my god.

MARLOWE: My god, my god.

KYD: That was me talking again. One more time. Look not so fierce...

MARLOWE: Look not so fierce.

KYD: Let it roll off the tongue. Look not so fierce upon me.

MARLOWE: Look not so fierce upon me.

KYD: What's with the faux accent?

MARLOWE: I beg your pardon?

KYD: You're making everything round...like a bad British comedy.

MARLOWE: I, uh—

KYD: Are you putting that on?

MARLOWE: No, quite the—

KYD: You sound like a groundling doing Homer.

MARLOWE: I do?

KYD: Forget it. I can't work with you.

MARLOWE: But...but—

KYD: Ay, me. Your words and verses stinketh so
To know you write at all needs give me woe.

MARLOWE: Wow. How do you do that????

(Enter BURBAGE, an actor.)

BURBAGE: Set forth the people in a cheer, I have arrived!!!

MARLOWE: Richard Burbage!

BURBAGE: Marlowe—er, got to be going now. Double-parked.

MARLOWE: Did anyone ever tell you you're the best actor in London?

BURBAGE: *(Softening:)* Well, I have had a write-up or two.

MARLOWE: I'm writing you a role in my new play. Come, let us celebrate!

BURBAGE: Ah, Marlowe, set aside your faulty quill.
Let go of all your books; go till the soil.
You dreadful amateur, you minor swill,
Give up on all the plays o'er which you toil.

MARLOWE: Geez, Louise, I wish I could rhyme like that.

KYD: What do you want to drink?

BURBAGE: Rum. *(Points to Marlowe.)* And a round for that artless, beetleheaded flapdragon.

MARLOWE: Speaking of artless, I've written a part for you in my new play... I mean, I've written you as an artist a part... It's not that you're artless, you're artful...er, artistic, but—

BURBAGE: Pray, leave me. Thou hast given me a great pain in the head.

KYD: He giveth me a pain in lower regions.

MARLOWE: But think of it, Burbage. The curtain rises. It's you. A mad physician. You've sold your soul to the devil for

knowledge, sex, and fame. A demon sits on one shoulder, hissing. An angel sits on the other shoulder, promising. Will God forgive you if you repent? The question is moot, for Falstaff has made up his mind. He won't repent. He'll take eternal punishment for what he's done. He waits for the demons to drag him into hell! A masterpiece, with an unforgettable role written for none other than the great Richard Burbage.

BURBAGE: Did you write it?

MARLOWE: Ay.

BURBAGE: I'll pass.

MARLOWE: But you'll love it!

BURBAGE: I'm out.

MARLOWE: But the critical acclaim—

BURBAGE: Not interested.

MARLOWE: But the play—

KYD: The play's the thing
With which you'll lose the patience of the king.

MARLOWE: What?

KYD: Bugger off.

MARLOWE: But—

BURBAGE: Marlowe, if you'll retreat to yonder room
a place that I can't see,
I'll buy a round so you around won't loom.
Now get you gone; you'll get your drink for free.

MARLOWE: But. But—

BURBAGE: Begone, and leave us now, you louse;
We do not want you in this house.

(Kyd gives him a drink. Marlowe plays wimpy and glum, then walks across stage into an isolated area. As he walks, enter Prologue, who lurks in the shadows.)

PROLOGUE: Christopher Marlowe's a man full of mystery
Made even more so by passage of years.
Look into Marlowe's own fabulous history
And you'll discover his double careers.

Marlowe the poet offended the royals
They thought him an atheist; some called him bi.
His offenses were rank, and the trouble just broils,
But his one saving grace is that he was a spy.

For the Queen on the Queen's Men, who spied back on him,
In return, for the queen, who had numerous spies.
All spying, and spying which was turned back on them,
For the Queen possessed multiple hundreds of eyes.

So Marlowe the playwright, and outcast and spy
Was the world's first James Bond, but was marked down to die.

(Special on Marlowe. He looks around for a moment, then reaches into his bag and pulls out a WWII radio and microphone.)

MARLOWE: Chris Marlowe to the Royal Court. Marlowe to the Royal Court. Come in, Royal Court.

ROYAL COURT: This is the Royal Court. Over.

MARLOWE: Have established spot in tavern and am waiting for Apothecary to make contact. Over.

ROYAL COURT: Well done, Marlowe. Over.

MARLOWE: Standing by for orders, over.

ROYAL COURT: Stand by.

(Noise offstage. Enter KATE, the serving wench.)

MARLOWE: Kate?

KATE: The name's Catherine, Marlowe. You know that.

MARLOWE: Ah, Kate. Bonnie Kate, Kate, Kate of—

KATE: Shut up and order your drink.

MARLOWE: But first a kiss?

KATE: You're an idiot.

MARLOWE: So they tell me.

KATE: I'll bring you your ale.

MARLOWE: Nay, stay a while, Kate, and let me woo you with poetry.

KATE: Catherine.

MARLOWE: Then stay a while, Catherine—

KATE: I don't think so.

MARLOWE: Why not?

KATE: Because I don't.

MARLOWE: Please?

KATE: No.

MARLOWE: Please?

KATE: No.

MARLOWE: Please? (*Pause.*) Please, please, please, please, please?

KATE: (*Pause.*) Ever tried playing hard to get?

MARLOWE: Is that like iambic pentameter?

KATE: Yeah.

MARLOWE: Never learned it.

KATE: I'll get your ale.

(Exits. Marlowe takes out radio.)

MARLOWE: Marlowe to Royal Court. Marlowe to Royal Court. Over.

ROYAL COURT: This is Royal Court. Where the devil have you been?

MARLOWE: Accosted by the serving wench. Couldn't get rid of her. Over.

ROYAL COURT: Orders from Queen are to buy Apothecary's potion and drink it. Over.

MARLOWE: What?

ROYAL COURT: Repeat. Buy Apothecary's potion and drink it.

MARLOWE: But that could kill me!

ROYAL COURT: That's an affirmative.

(Noise offstage.)

MARLOWE: Situation too dangerous for radio contact.

ROYAL COURT: Switch to texting. Over.

MARLOWE: Making switch.

(Marlowe throws radio in bag again and pulls out electronic device. He begins to text. As he texts:)

Drink potion? R U N Sane?

(Noise offstage again. Marlowe quickly pockets phone and tries to look innocent. Enter Kate, with ale. Pause.)

KATE: What did you break?

MARLOWE: Huh?

KATE: That look on your face. You either broke something, or you need to go to the loo. *(Pause.)* It's the first door on your right.

MARLOWE: Ah, me, Kate! You drive me mad with the fires of passion!

KATE: Sorry, loverboy. You're not my type. I like men with either brains or brawn. You gotta have one...

MARLOWE: I writ thee a poem.

KATE: Another one?

MARLOWE: A sonnet. To Kate.

KATE: (*Rolls eyes.*) Let's hear it.

MARLOWE: Oh, Kate. Good Kate. Great Kate, you make me feel—

KATE: The name is Catherine.

MARLOWE: Giddy, like a kitty, pretty kitty, kitty, kitty.

KATE: This is a sonnet?

MARLOWE: Still on the third line, B rhyme. (*Clears throat.*) Uh.

Giddy, like a kitty, pretty kitty,
Kitty, kitty, kitty at his meal—

KATE: You missed a syllable.

MARLOWE: (*Flustered. Under breath, fast:*) Oh, Kate. Good Kate. Great Kate, you make me feel—

Giddy, like a kitty, pretty kitty,
Kitty, kitty, kitty at his meal.

(*Pause.*) Zounds, I did miss a syllable. Drat.

KATE: Here's your ale.

MARLOWE: But the second stanza—

KATE: I've heard enough.

MARLOWE: Oh, Kate—

KATE: Catherine!

MARLOWE: It throws off the rhyme scheme.

KATE: Whatever. Why don't you write for the muse?

MARLOWE: I tried that. Didn't work.

KATE: Tried it? So writing for me is just a science experiment?

MARLOWE: No, it's – It's...well, a little bit, yeah.

KATE: Jerk.

MARLOWE: Oh, Kate, if I could shout your name above
Oh, Kate, dear Kate, I love, I love you so
I'd tell the world about my burning love –
And –

KATE: Sorry, sir. It's time for me to go.

(Exit Kate. Pause.)

MARLOWE: How did she do that? *(Counts syllables:)* And So\ry sir\it's time\for me\to go. Remarkable.

(His electronic device goes off again. Marlowe pulls out radio, starts to speak, then the electronic device goes off a second time. He picks it up and reads message, sighs, and groans.)

MARLOWE: Chris Marlowe requesting audience. Marlowe requesting audience. Over.

ROYAL COURT: Well, if it's an audience to one of your plays, forget it! *(Laughs at his own joke. Pause.)* What?

MARLOWE: The queen put me on a suicide mission, over?

ROYAL COURT: Your point is, over?

MARLOWE: That was a question, over.

ROYAL COURT: And that was an answer, over.

MARLOWE: But I don't want to die.

ROYAL COURT: Oh, don't be a ninny. It's the Existential dilemma, Marlowe. What would you rather be—a living mediocrity, or part of the world's greatest persona?

MARLOWE: What person?

ROYAL COURT: Find out and report back to us. *(Pause.)* If you're still alive. Perhaps you should conjure up your—inner strength. *(Another big laugh at self. Pause.)* That is all.

(Royal Court disappears. Marlowe looks at a text on his phone)

MARLOWE: *(Reading:)* Drink the potion. Though it could mean your death—it's the Queen's orders, Marlowe. For the preservation of poetry.

(He looks up and sighs.)

Aye. Poetry. God Save the Queen.

(Noise from bar area. He puts away the radio and microphone.)

(Enter the APOTHECARY, disguised. Marlowe rises and shouts:)

The Apothecary!

APOTHECARY: Shhh!

MARLOWE: Over here, Lightbourne!

APOTHECARY: *(Tries to be inconspicuous:)* Shhhhh! Don't use my name!

MARLOWE: *(Whispers:)* Over here.

(Apothecary walks discretely to Marlowe.)

APOTHECARY: My dear Marlowe, thou poor and wretched fellow

I've come with balm to soothe thee of thy plight,
Your verse is bunk; your plot a bore, too mellow.
Your works upon the world are but a blight.

MARLOWE: You've got to help me. My new play—

APOTHECARY: McHam?

MARLOWE: Aye. The story of a young prince, waxing philosophical, telling the world of his worries, his woes. (*Apothecary winces.*) What? Is it not good?

APOTHECARY: Good, my lord? It doth suck.

MARLOWE: Ay. You've got to teach me. I've done workshops. Seminars. Self-help tapes. Nothing helps. I need a potion –

APOTHECARY: Shhhh!

MARLOWE: (*Whispers:*) A potion. Words seem not enough. I require guidance. Inspiration. A muse. Even if it comes from the devil himself!

APOTHECARY: Shhhhh!

MARLOWE: Can you unleash my inner demon?

APOTHECARY: A doppelganger demon dost thou request?

Is it a magus wizard you think I be?

I'll stay a while at your behest

But beware – the devil's power resides in me!

MARLOWE: The devil you say?

APOTHECARY: Shhhh!

MARLOWE: I believe in no devil.

APOTHECARY: What you will. Tis much ado.

Perhaps the devil believes not in you.

MARLOWE: Whatever that means. Do you have a potion for me?

(Apothecary reaches into cloak and pulls out vial.)

APOTHECARY: From field o'ergrwn with weed and poison oak

and nightshade deadly in both taste and touch,

I snatched a wretched, bitter flower
 and poured its juice into this cursed vial.
 Then called I, Mephistopheles
 And down he came, his demon skin blood red,
 his horns a' glistenin'; his teeth jet black,
 his cloven hooves, goat-like, trampling the earth
 his crooked claws mishapen, curled about
 the hand with which he tried to snatch my soul,
 For that's the price
 Of fame
 The soul.
 Your soul for your voice.
 Heaven's rewards for earthly fame.

(Thunder. Rumbling in the distance.)

MARLOWE: What happened to all the rhyming?

APOTHECARY: The price of fame's not cheap. Beware, it be
 that you give up your immortality.

(He holds the vial out to Marlowe, who shrugs.)

MARLOWE: You only live once.

(He tries to take vial, but Apothecary stops him.)

APOTHECARY: Wait, good Marlowe, and let me go
 for the cruel demon you unleash from within
 is such a wretched beast
 should I be present at its presence
 it might present my present presence ended.

MARLOWE: Not sure I caught that one—

APOTHECARY: Let me leave before you drink.

MARLOWE: Okay.

APOTHECARY: But first—be you sure you wish to unleash
 this demonic force to overtake your work and threaten the
 world with vile horror?

MARLOWE: Why not?

APOTHECARY: (*Foreboding.*) So be it. (*Pause.*) That will be nineteen ninety-five.

MARLOWE: Zounds, that's pricey.

APOTHECARY: You know what it's like to run an apothecary these days?

MARLOWE: Okay, then. (*Pays.*)

APOTHECARY: (*Gives vial.*) Don't call us, we'll call you. Adieu. Adieu. Adieu. Adieu.

(Exit Apothecary, dramatically. Pause. Marlowe eyes vial.)

MARLOWE: Over the lips and past the gums,
look out stomach, here it comes.

(Marlowe drinks the potion and cries out, then falls behind the table, coughing, choking, sputtering, gagging, gasping. He begins crying out.)

Friends, Romans, Countrymen, I come to bury Caesura Salad, not to praise it. All for your delight we are not hair. Neither a burrow nor a liar be. To thine owned elf be shrew. A house. A house. My kingdom for a house. Now is the dumber type of discontent made outrageous by the Duke of Hazard. Oh, that this too, too sullied fish would bake. To pee, or not to pee. Oh, brave old curl that has such wrinkles in it. But hark, what noise from yonder stereo breaks. Juliet tis the moon. One s'more across the binge, my friends, one s'more. A coward tries a thousand breaths, the brave man eats a bun.

(Pause. Suddenly he leaps back into view, playing profile, with wig, panting, slobbering, horrible.)

(The part of SHAKESPEARE may be played by the same actor as Marlowe, or it may be played by a completely different actor according to the needs of the company. In the initial

performance, separate actors played the two roles, and it afforded a great opportunity for both.)

(In the initial production, a fake mirror was used. The Royal Court is in the mirror, and Shakespeare eventually comes out of it. Marlowe discovers his nemesis just after his transformation scene, and the two play a mirror scene ala the Marx Brothers scene in Duck Soup. When Shakespeare comes out of the mirror, Marlowe is sucked back in, and vice versa.)

SHAKESPEARE: I live. I breathe. I conquer.

(He falls behind table. Marlowe emerges, facing the opposite side.)

(Or, in the case of two actors, Shakespeare is sucked into the mirror, and Marlowe emerges. They battle each other to get out of the mirror for control of the stage.)

MARLOWE: You!? It mustn't be! Who knew my dark side would be—

(Turns to opposite profile.)

SHAKESPEARE: William Shakespeare! I fooled you, Marlowe, you festering simpleton.

(Turns to opposite profile.)

MARLOWE: Must...not...lose...control!

(Turns to opposite profile.)

SHAKESPEARE: Aaaarg! You've let me out of Pandora's box!
I lay dormant within you, a secret, evil twin
basking in words as you went to the university
on a football scholarship.
You learned the King's English but forgot the Queen's,
Forsook the feminine part of your nature
and grew so overcome with piss and vinegar
you had not the time to consider language,
or discover the art

of communication
and the wonder of word!
You lost your power of metaphor and simile
due to lack of use
for you are a great slug, a lummoX, a wildebeest, an ox.
Your poetry be moldy.

(Noise offstage. Enter Kate. Shakespeare eyes her.)

Holy mother of pearl.

KATE: How's your drink?

SHAKESPEARE: 'Tis the taste of heaven!

KATE: Right. It's stale ale.

SHAKESPEARE: 'Tis the milk of Venus.

KATE: Perv. *(Turns to go.)*

SHAKESPEARE: Wait. Stay awhile. What light from yonder window break?

KATE: I beg your pardon?

SHAKESPEARE: 'Tis Juliet—

KATE: Catherine.

SHAKESPEARE: 'Tis Catherine. And she is the sun.

KATE: You poets are all alike. So impeccably dull.

SHAKESPEARE: Eh?

KATE: Woo me with words? Flatter me with song? Blah, blah, blah. You're boring me.

SHAKESPEARE: Thou dost strike me in the heart with thy wicked tongue.

KATE: Whatever.

SHAKESPEARE: My words are a shining light. A window to my soul. A—

KATE: Give me a stinking break. I make a buck ninety-five an hour, plus tips. And people like you keep stiffing me. Cut me some slack here.

SHAKESPEARE: I'll tippeth thee!

KATE: Like last time? Your tip was "Beware the Ides of March."

SHAKESPEARE: Villain! He stole a line from one of my plays!

KATE: What the devil is an Ides?

SHAKESPEARE: That cheapskate Marlowe!

KATE: You're the cheapskate, Marlowe.

SHAKESPEARE: Nay, not I.

KATE: Creep.

(She exits. Shakespeare lunges for her, falls under table and comes up Marlowe.)

MARLOWE: Villain! Leave the girl alone! She belongs to me!

(Enter Kate with ale.)

Kiss me, Kate!

(She throws ale on him and leaves.)

Oh, bugger.

(He convulses and falls under table. Returns as Shakespeare.)

SHAKESPEARE: How did I get wet? *(Pause.)* Must be the work of Marlowe!

You piddling, paddling, pugnacious pomegranate, you promulgate pettiness;

Your writing be like a child learning the alphabet full of errors.

You have the will, but not the wits.

Like an idiot, you tell a tale poorly.

You're like a bird in a basket,
and crazy like a fox
and deaf like a post
and blind like a bat.
Like a Baptist in a brewery
Like a prayer.
Like sands through the hourglass.
Like a virgin
You produce poo,
whilst I process poetry.
So now I'll kill you dead
with my pentameter
and my allusion
and my synecdoche
and my metonymy
and my harmony
and my meter
and my grammatical superpowers.
And once you've died, old Marlowe,
thou rotten bore,
the world shall sing my praises and forget that old Marlowe
once lived at all.

(Enter Kate, with ale and towel.)

KATE: Sorry. Here's a towel to dry off.

SHAKESPEARE: *(Drying:)* Thanks, saucy wench. Now, upon thy cheek I lay this zealous kiss, as seal to the indenture of my love.

(He reaches to kiss her. She slaps him. Throws ale in his face. Pause. She snatches towel out of his hand. Exit Kate).

Verily, I dost love that fair and beauteous lady.

(Snatches quill.)

(Shakespeare convulses and falls. He rises as Marlowe.)

MARLOWE: Lo, thou demon doppelganger! I'll slay thee.

(Enter Kyd and Kate.)

KYD: You make such moves on Kate the serving wench.

KATE: Catherine.

KYD: Her hair be mussed, her bodice all but torn.
And yet, you oaf, you're filled with such a stench
It smelleth like you've died and we should mourn.

So keep your hands and lips unto yourself
Ignore good Cat, and let the lady be.
For if you touch again, the Cat herself,
A touch upon your nose you'll get from me.

I'll punch you straight so hard the bone will break
And make you pug-nosed like the dog you are
And then, a massive belly-shot I'll take
And kick you in the groin till you see stars.

Be this a lie, or have you any doubt;
Just try my hand, and I will throw you out.

(Kyd exits.)

MARLOWE: But my lady!

KATE: Your rag to dry sir.

MARLOWE: Aye, but—

KATE: I'll bring your tab.

MARLOWE: Not yet. Another drink.

KATE: You've had enough.

MARLOWE: Enough to wear, aye, but not to drink. And I
don't wear my ale well. Kiss me, Kate.

KATE: Kiss my assignation, you cheeky bugger.

(Exits.)

MARLOWE: Ah, she loves me! An assignation then. Where shall we meet so I can declare for her my love? Wait—I'm inspired. Inspired. Forget the sonnet, I'll do poetry... Hear the tintinnabulation of the words. Of the words. Of the words, words, words, words! Hear them tinkle, tinkle, tinkle... Perhaps I do need the loo. Kate? K— (*Convulses.*) No! Shakespeare, you blackguard! Keep...away...from Kate!

(Falls. Rises as Shakespeare.)

SHAKESPEARE: Ah ha! Planning a tryst, are you? I'll destroy thy dainty dalliance, you dunderheaded simpleton. You won't get Kate.

(Falls. Rises as Marlowe.)

MARLOWE: The girl is mine! Kate! Kate!

(Enter Kate with ale.)

KATE: Take your ale and be quiet.

MARLOWE: Ah, Kate. Let me woo you again.

KATE: Again? You didn't woo me the first time.

MARLOWE: Oh, woe. Surely you jest.

KATE: Don't call me Sh— I'll leave that one alone. You ready for your bill?

MARLOWE: Bill? Nay, I— aaaaargh!

(Falls to ground. Rises as Shakespeare.)

SHAKESPEARE: Kate? Kate.

You are called plain Kate,

And bonny Kate and sometimes Kate the curst;

But Kate, the prettiest Kate in Christendom

Kate of Kate Hall, my super-dainty Kate,

For dainties are all Kates, and therefore, Kate,

Take this of me, Kate of my consolation.

KATE: Oh, that's lovely...

(Falls. Rises as Marlowe.)

MARLOWE: Blast that poetry! Must impress –

KATE: Please, keep going.

MARLOWE: Uh. Kate. Uh. Katie. Uh. Kitty. Katie, Kitty, Katie, Kitty.

KATE: Not that again!

MARLOWE: Kate. You're cute. Cute Kate. Kate of a thousand...Kates. Er. Katie-bar the door. Kate of Kate's Kate. You're Kate-a-licious. Yeah, Kate-a-licious.

KATE: All right, I'm out –

MARLOWE: Nay – that would be Kate-astrophic. You're – you're magnifiKate! Kateariffic! Katastic. Mary me Kate. MaKate me the hapKatest Kateman in ChristenKate.

(Falls. Rises as Shakespeare.)

KATE: What is wrong with you?

SHAKESPEARE: Nothing, Kate, good Kate. Kiss me, Kate.

KATE: Not on your life!

SHAKESPEARE: Look into my eyes.

KATE: Huh?

SHAKESPEARE: Stare deeper, Kate. Deeper. Dost thou desire poetry?

KATE: Yes!

SHAKESPEARE: Of all the names in Christendom, one rings the ears as fairest, blessed. This name of names Is Catherine; whose praise the angel sings A music to the firmament, it tames.

Your lips drip sweet with nectar of the gods,
and beg me steal a taste each time we meet.

I see your face and calculate the odds
Of kissing, touching, knowing you, my sweet.

But all for naught, away, on pedestal you stand
A monument to untouched, courtly love.
For if I reach across and take your hand
You'll sprout wings and fly to heav'n up above.

For beauteous Catherine, an angel be;
I ask you, angel, hast thou kisses for me?

(Kate tries to kiss him. He moves right by her.)

Marlowe, you are defeated!

(Turns to Kate.)

Kiss me, Kate! We shall be married on Sunday!

KATE: Aye, your poetry has transformed me.

SHAKESPEARE: Be you transfixed?

KATE: Transfigured, aye.

SHAKESPEARE: Then by your translucence, I'll translate the
mundane for you into the language of love!

KATE: Aye, it's transcendental!

*(She tries to kiss him. The Dark Lady enters carrying a stool. She
sits and poses. Shakespeare sees her and jumps away.)*

SHAKESPEARE: Holy Stromboli. Who in bog's great earth is
that?

Want to read the entire script? Order a perusal
copy today!