## THE SHAKESPEARES By Colleen Shaddox

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AUDITION- 3 m, 1 flex

In this scene, Shakespeare's two friends visit him.

**EDMUND:** You amaze me, Will, or should I say Master Shakespeare? You look every inch the prosperous householder, counting his shillings and kicking the cat.

**HENRY:** Your good lady had every expectation that you would to church with her. Have thy own pew, Master Will? With thy name in gilded letters?

**EDMUND:** And a nice joint of mutton waiting for Sunday dinner.

**HENRY:** God save the King!

EDMUND: And all good Christians!

SHAKESPEARE: You do wrong me with your jests. I-

(Enter SERVANT.)

**SERVANT:** Master Shakespeare, will ye be wanting cakes or pudding after the joint today? Cook has left ye both, sir.

**SHAKESPEARE:** Pudding. And lay two more places for dinner.

(SERVANT exits.)

- **SHAKESPEARE:** (*Cont'd.*) You'll eat your fill of mutton, I warrant. There's nothing noble in hunger.
- **HENRY:** Master Will speaks truth. I've been hungry often, but never was nobler for it.

**EDMUND:** You may be the greatest glutton in Christendom for all I care, Will, and be no worse a man for it. My quarrel with you is that you abandoned the theater.

**SHAKESPEARE:** There's more to that tale than you know.

- **EDMUND:** If I had your art, I should lock myself away and write day and night. I should not waste the least part of so great a treasure. But you, at the height of your powers, you decided to be—
- **SHAKESPEARE:** I decided nothing. Matters were decided in my stead. And lecture me not of what you would do with my art. You have not my art and cannot know. You cannot know.

EDMUND: Know what?

SHAKESPEARE: Leave me.

- **HENRY:** Master Will, forgive us. We offend where we meant to come in friendship.
- **SHAKESPEARE:** I know nothing of friendship only duty. Be a husband, a father, an author, a player. I once tried to be a man and disaster ensued.

HENRY: Disaster?

**SHAKESPEARE:** Before your time, lad. It's all very ancient now. And I am a churlish old man to treat you so after your journey. Forgive me.

**EDMUND:** No, Will, I ask your forgiveness. My words often o'ertake my judgment.

**SHAKESPEARE:** We are reconciled, Ned. Now let us sit and talk of the great world.

**HENRY:** That's why we've come, Master Will. We're going out into the great world.

**EDMUND:** 'Tis true, Will. We sail in three months' time for the West Indies.

SHAKESPEARE: To live among kindred savages?

**EDMUND:** Quite. But we'll be having our joints of mutton too. **HENRY:** And sugar. It grows like grass there.

**EDMUND:** And a fine theater.

SHAKESPEARE: Ah, now you have me.

EDMUND: Lord Oliver Berwick—

EDMUND and HENRY: May God give him long life.

**EDMUND:** —a younger son, but nevertheless possessed of a mighty fortune, wishes to establish a plantation in the New World, far from the influence of his rather overbearing elder brother. Lord Berwick—

EDMUND and HENRY: May God give him long life.

- **EDMUND:** —loves the idea of having an ocean between himself and his family. But he's not so keen to be separated from London's theaters. So he's paying actors to come with him a private troupe.
- **SHAKESPEARE:** You'll spend the rest of your days acting out old plays in a drawing room.
- **HENRY:** It's to be a large drawing room, and wages large enough to make me blush.
- **SHAKESPEARE:** Make you blush, Henry? Well, that is something.
- **EDMUND:** And they need not be old plays if we bring a writer with us.
- **HENRY:** They say the sand on the beaches is soft as a babe's skin. And the water is like a jewel.

**SHAKESPEARE:** Bravely put, Hal. Here is thy writer, Edmund. Henry, Bard of Bermuda.

**HENRY:** I'm no William Shakespeare. **SHAKESPEARE:** Be grateful.

(Enter THOMAS.)

**SHAKESPEARE:** (*Cont'd.*) Ah, my honored son, Thomas Quiney, husband to my daughter, Judith. Thomas, here are my fellow players, Edmund Johnson and Henry Gordon.

THOMAS: Ah, you're players then.

**SHAKESPEARE:** As I have said, Tom.

**THOMAS:** I like a play, but not so much as the bear baiting comes a'fore.

**HENRY:** 'Tis difficult to compete with such entertainments.

**THOMAS:** Tell me, sir. As a player, do ye ever get to meet the bears?

**HENRY:** No, Master Quiney, I do not wish to reach above my station.

**EDMUND:** The Lord Mayor, it is said, once fed a player to a bear.

THOMAS: No!

EDMUND: So say many.

THOMAS: And the actor, I suppose, was killed?

**HENRY:** As was the bear.

THOMAS: How so?

**HENRY:** The man was so full of spleen that he did poison the beast.

**THOMAS:** 'Tis a sad story. I do hate to see any creature suffer.

**EDMUND:** Even a player?

**THOMAS:** I spoke of the bear, but indeed the player's death is also most unfortunate.

**SHAKESPEARE:** Wherefore dost thou delight us with thy company, son Quiney?

THOMAS: Eh?

SHAKESPEARE: What do you require, lad?

THOMAS: Ah, yes.

(Pause.)

SHAKESPEARE: Tom?

**THOMAS:** My Judith bade me come and see to my father and his guests.

SHAKESPEARE: See to us?

THOMAS: Aye.

**SHAKESPEARE:** What said she, Tom? Come lad, we are all of one heart here.

**THOMAS:** She said I should see that the players not drink the last drop in the house. Forgive, she means no harm. She is a woman of great scruple.

SHAKESPEARE: What a generous girl is my Judith!

THOMAS: Eh?

**SHAKESPEARE:** 'Tis clear as water. She bade thee bring us more drink so that we should never reach the last drop. Sweet girl, so swift in her duty to her father.

EDMUND: Commendable.

**HENRY:** A worthy woman. Thou art to be congratulated, Master Quiney.

THOMAS: Am I?

**SHAKESPEARE:** My dear girl would send us thy finest brandy.

THOMAS: Judith would?

SHAKESPEARE: Is she not her mother's daughter?

THOMAS: Precisely.

SHAKESPEARE: Forgive me for delaying your errand. But I do so love your company, Tom! Now off you go. Borrow the pony cart, 'twill make the journey swifter, son. THOMAS: Thankee, Father.

SHAKESPEARE: 'Tis a trifle, dear boy.

(Exit THOMAS.)

**EDMUND:** Ah, the hours you must while away in happy discourse with that youth.

**HENRY:** Sir, you must to the West Indies with us! Think on it. Our patron is a man of most exquisite taste. We shall be free to sing our best tune, like the birds of the air.

**EDMUND:** 'Tis never winter, Will, and ripe fruit hangs from the trees for the picking. 'Tis like a return to the Garden.

SHAKESPEARE: Alas, I am not fit for paradise.

HENRY: As fit as any man.

**SHAKESPEARE:** Demands upon me keep me in Stratford.

EDMUND: Berwick will make good your debts.

**SHAKESPEARE:** No, he cannot. Let's no more of this, lads. Come with me to the kitchen, there's ale for ye.

(THEY exit.)

From: The Shakespeares - By Colleen Shaddox Published by: Eldridge Publishing Co. http://www.histage.com/playdetails.asp?PID=2675