

NIGHT AND SILENCE

A Play in Two Acts

By

Bret Jones

NIGHT AND SILENCE

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Cast of Characters

Dr. Lon Brown

In his early 40s. A theatre Professor at Longville University. He's dogmatic about Shakespeare's place in the world as a playwright. He values his debates with Dr. Ackroyd as witty, intellectual combat.

Dr. Marc Ackroyd

In his mid-50s. An English professor at Longville University. He's made a career as a scholar of Shakespeare. He values Shakespeare as a poet and a source of his re-nown. He, too, looks forward to his visits with Dr. Brown.

TIME

Evening. The present.

PLACE

Dr. Ackroyd's house.

ACT ONE

The living room and study of Dr. Ackroyd. There is a front door, a foyer area complete with a small closet, a door that leads to a small kitchen, and an opening to a hallway that leads to the rest of the house. The room also has a small fireplace (fire going) with a few small couches nearby. There is an area used as a small study complete with an oversized desk with a laptop computer, chair, and bookcases. Near one of the bookcases is a small glassed-in case, under which is a book. The room also has a bar fully stocked with liquor.

At rise - It is evening. DR. MARC ACKROYD enters. He is eating off a plate of hors d'oeuvres. He stops at the bar and opens a bottle of wine. He lets it breathe. He exits back into the kitchen. There is the sound of a vehicle outside. The headlights are seen through the window. Marc re-enters with a plate of fruit (unsliced) and a knife. He looks out the window.

MARC. Ah, yes. Early even. A first at that. *(Sound of the vehicle being shut off. He puts the plate with the fruit on the coffee table and begins slicing the fruit. He nibbles at an apple slice as he prepares the rest.)* Ta-ra-boom-di-ay. Ta-ra-boom-di-ay. *(Footsteps outside.)* Ta-ra-BOOM-di-ay! *(On the "BOOM" Marc slices an apple in half with extra vigor. A knock at the door. Marc plops another slice of apple into his mouth.)*

LON. *(Outside)* Hello in there!

MARC. Hello out there! *(He goes to the door. Before he gets there, LON BROWN enters. He is somewhat disheveled. He shuts the door behind him.)* Come in.

LON. I did.

MARC. I noticed. *(Lon takes his jacket off.)*

LON. What's the big rush?

MARC. You're early. *(Lon hands his jacket to Marc and walks over to the fireplace to get warm.)*

LON. Your note made it sound like the death of some monarch was imminent.

MARC. And yet you finished rehearsal first. *(Marc puts the jacket away in the foyer closet.)*

LON. Well, priorities, you know. It's freezing out there.

MARC. It's February. What do you expect?

LON. An explanation.

MARC. How about a piece of fruit? *(He waves toward the plate on the coffee table.)*

LON. How about something with fuel in it?

MARC. Regular or unleaded?

LON. With the lead.

MARC. It's breathing. *(Lon walks over the bar.)*

LON. How 'bout a G-and-T?

MARC. I'll pass. Let me get the fruit dip. *(Marc exits into the kitchen while Lon makes his gin and tonic.)*

LON. You'd be proud of the students.

MARC. *(Offstage)* Surely you jest.

LON. They know their lines. *(Marc re-enters.)*

MARC. The first sign of the Apocalypse. *(He offers the dip to Lon.)*

LON. Let me finish this first and then I'll dig in.

MARC. I've got some knick-knackey things by your elbow. *(Lon notices them for the first time. Marc takes the dip to the coffee table.)*

LON. Oh. *(He nibbles at one and then devours it. He gobbles down two more.)*

MARC. So how are the kids doing with Marlowe?

LON. Like I said: they know the lines.

MARC. Which sounds like a miracle.

LON. You don't know my kids. Saying they know their lines is like saying they discovered the New World. At this point, knowing their lines is a big thing.

MARC. But not Marlowe.

LON. You mean do they understand--?

MARC. --yes.

LON. We're not there yet. Give a couple of days.

MARC. Don't you open any day now? What's interfering

LON. The kid playing Faust--Zach Yoder--has the hots for the girl playing Helena. I think we may have love on the set.

MARC. Ah, yes, fornicating and the stage seem to go hand in hand, don't they? (*Lon ignores him.*)

LON. Good gin.

MARC. It should be. No remark for my last...remark?

LON. You're goading. I've known you too long to know when you're just playing around.

MARC. Is this production going to be worth my time?

LON. They're college students, Marc. (*Marc eats an apple slice and warms himself by the fire.*)

MARC. Who are going to do what after college?

LON. Go into the real world.

MARC. The real world of acting?

LON. Maybe.

MARC. Ah, yes. (*Lon walks to the fireplace.*)

LON. Scoot. (*Marc walks over to his desk.*)

MARC. So no more vacuous looks concerning the text?

LON. Like I said Faust and Helena have it for each other.

MARC. And there lies my answer.

LON. You'll be there. We haven't done Marlowe's Faustus since... forever. In fact, probably never at this school.

MARC. And let that be a lesson to you. The last time you did something classical it was vapid as getting your tires rotated.

LON. The dean loved it.

MARC. Yes, true. But let me remind you, dearest Lon, that the dean also forced you to put on *Oklahoma* for the umpteenth time to draw in bigger numbers.

LON. I'd erased that from my mind, thank you very much.

MARC. *Avec plaisir.*

LON. Tasteless jerk.

MARC. *Moi?*

LON. No. The dean.

MARC. *Oui.*

LON. Very much oui. A history professor promoted to dean of the fine arts? And then he tells me to put on Oklahoma? Oklahoma, Marc. That's like being sent to ninth circle of hell.

MARC. I've seen worse.

LON. Yes, but does history go back that far? (*Marc frowns. Lon toasts him.*) Ha-ha.

MARC. I have a duck in the oven. And you always go with the obvious joke. (*He walks to the kitchen opening.*)

LON. I thought you just had to have me over here for something you just couldn't wait to talk about.

MARC. Show you.

LON. All right. Show me, then.

MARC. Well, we can be civilized about it. (*Marc exits.*)

LON. You English profs. I always feel like I'm either in some endless chapter from Ulysses or swimming in a useless mystery from some Agatha Christie novel.

MARC. (*Offstage*) Bite your tongue. (*Lon finishes his drink.*)

LON. What, the Christie comment?

MARC. (*Offstage*) No! I'm rather fond of Hercule Poirot. (*Marc enters with a mock Belgian accent*) You know the little gray cells at work all zee time. (*Lon walks back to the bar. He eats more of the hors d'oeuvres.*)

LON. Cute. You do that for your Brit Lit class?

MARC. (*Keeping the accent*) But of course. (*Marc gets an hors d'oeuvre.*)

LON. (*Referring to the hors d'oeuvres*) These are good.

MARC. They should be. They're goose liver pate.

LON. I wish I hadn't known that. (*He mixes another gin and tonic. Lon holds up the gin bottle. Marc shakes his head "no."*)

LON. You sure?

MARC. I'm waiting for the wine.

LON. And what else? Remember, I'm the drama professor, we're known for our dramatic timing. You're just the English prof.

MARC. Shakespearean scholar. Get it right.

LON. And a hack at that. (*Marc walks to the fireplace.*)

MARC. I do hope you're joking. Papers in Venice, Berlin, London...

LON. Yes, yes. Preach on.

MARC. I will. Five books...one in the making...which makes six for those of you who can't add. *(Lon turns to look at him.)*

LON. Really? Since when? I thought you said the ink was dried up from that old pen. You were ready to pass, and I quote: "the quill to someone else."

MARC. I am.

LON. Shakespeare again?

MARC. You say it with such enthusiasm. Yes, Shakespeare again.

LON. How magnanimous of you.

MARC. Ooh, and look at you using your thesaurus again. I can't decide whether it grates on my very last nerve or impresses me.

LON. Should I run through my vocabulary?

MARC. Certainly. I have the next five minutes. *(Lon sips from his drink.)*

LON. Marc, please. I didn't come all the way out here to practice a little bit of verbal swordplay. We can do this at work. Over lunch. And it's your turn to buy.

MARC. I may not be around much longer to buy said lunch. *(Lon walks to him.)*

LON. What? Another offer? I know you'd been looking.

MARC. Better than that...I think. I hope, anyway.

LON. Want to share?

MARC. Not the right moment. The wine... *(Marc walks over the wine. He sniffs the cork.)*

LON. Ah, yes, all the amenities must be perfect.

MARC. But of course.

LON. Tell.

MARC. A moment. *(Marc pours a bit of wine in a fluted glass. He sips it. It's good. He holds up the bottle, offering it to Lon.)*

LON. I'll stick to my G-n-T.

MARC. Philistine.

LON. I've been called worse. And usually by my students.

MARC. Not the way I meant it. *(Marc pours himself a glass of wine.)*

LON. Marc, really. I didn't come out here for our regular fencing matches. Like I said: you made it sound like the death of kings.

MARC. Victory, actually.

LON. Oookay.

MARC. Let me at least relish the moment. My dearest Dr. Brown--and I do use your title loosely--I've been planning this evening for quite some time. *(Marc waits for a response. He gets none.)* Nothing to say? To add? To joke about?

LON. It's your party. I figure you got it planned out and I'm just another prop in the show.

MARC. Not a prop, Lon. A character--one of the main parts. A lead. You're not used to that, are you? And to make it even better, you don't have lines to memorize.

LON. Good. After tonight's rehearsal I couldn't stand to go through another script.

MARC. Ha, naturally. All right. Let me pose something to you.

LON. Pose away.

MARC. Thank you, I will. There are few things in this life--material things--that are worth much. Would you agree with that assessment?

LON. I would.

MARC. Such as?

LON. My Born to Run album on vinyl.

MARC. Ah, primitive.

LON. You haven't heard it until you've heard it on a record player. It has more than just rhythm and power--it has texture.

MARC. I was wrong to call you a Philistine.

LON. What am I now?

MARC. A Visigoth. Those who raped and pillaged Rome.

LON. I know them.

MARC. I'm sure you do. Personally. *(Lon finishes his drink.)*

LON. Didn't you say you had a duck cooking?

MARC. All right, all right. I'm digging in the spurs a bit too much.

LON. A bit?

MARC. Not of personal value, but something bigger. Go there.

LON. A Gutenberg Bible. How about that? The Latin Vulgate trans-

lation of God's Word.

MARC. Very good. A book, even. How do drama professors know of such things?

LON. Marc.

MARC. Yes, yes. Would you own one?

LON. A Gutenberg Bible? No.

MARC. And why not?

LON. Not practical.

MARC. What? You can go to the local bookstore and buy a cheaper copy? Is that it?

LON. I don't read Latin. *(Marc walks over to him.)*

MARC. But not for its value alone?

LON. I would have to keep it under lock and key. *(Lon gestures to Marc's glass case.)*

MARC. Yes. True enough. But you have one. You immediately sell it at an auction house. You profit enormously. You produce that play of yours that no one is looking at presently. *(Lon walks back to the bar. He nibbles on the hors d'oeuvres. Marc gets a slice of apple and dips it in the bowl on the coffee table.)*

LON. I know you and your linear thinking. This is supposed to be going somewhere. Just tell me where you want to go and let's eat. I'm really tired from rehearsal and I'm not interested in your pontificating without going somewhere.

MARC. Again with the thesaurus.

LON. Give it a rest.

MARC. As I told you, I have planned this for a long time.

LON. Good. That's great, Marc. Oh, sorry. *Dr. Ackroyd.* I feel like I'm supposed to address you as if you were teaching one of your valuable deconstructionist classes on the Bard.

MARC. Let's not be bitter.

LON. You may know your lines here, Marc, but I don't. You asked me here, remember?

MARC. And I appreciate it very much. *(He drops the "act" he's been putting on of teasing Lon.)* Really, Lon. You have no idea. But we have much to do tonight and I have little patience sometimes.

LON. Another of your games in logic or philosophy?

MARC. Either one will do right now. You see: there is the death of a king very imminent.

LON. Who?

MARC. Me. *(Lon stares at him as he eats another hors d'oeuvre.)*

LON. Marlowe could do better. You're bored. That's it. You want your twenty years of unsupervised and uncontrolled search for pleasure. Is that it? I'm producing this play right now. Wait and watch it in a couple of weeks. And pay particular attention to the end: the demons drag ole Faustus to Hell. This is after they rip his body to shreds.

MARC. This is the truth.

LON. Pull the other one.

MARC. What is that one thing out there--besides your copy of the Boss--that would excite you? Torment you. Cause you to re-evaluate everything that you'd ever done in your life?

LON. These are just words.

MARC. Yes. All hypothetical.

LON. Including the deathbed confession?

MARC. Not that. No. I wish. I even prayed about it. You'd be proud of me. Me, suddenly talking to the Almighty.

LON. You are playing Faust here, aren't you? Let's eat the duck. *(He walks to the kitchen.)*

MARC. Lon! *(Lon freezes.)*

LON. You think of some cruel things to do to get things rolling. You know that? Your practical jokes, your moronic e-mails, your cross-bred classes that only three students take or understand. But death? I mean, really? Really, Marc? *(Marc points to his desk.)*

MARC. On top of the desk by my laptop.

LON. I can print you off a doctor's note on my own computer, Marc. Come on here.

MARC. Would you just look at the bloody thing!?! Please! I'm not asking you to open the door of the Trojan Horse or anything that dramatic!

LON. Oh, with you, there's always a door. *(They stare at each other.)*
Fine. *(He looks at the piece of paper on the desk. He reads it without*

being moved.)

MARC. And?

LON. The prostate. How original.

MARC. I'm sure God in all His glory thought so to when he made them for us. Aren't the males of the species blessed.

LON. Treatable?

MARC. Indeed. But for how long?

LON. I don't know. Print another sheet and let me know. *(Marc throws his wine glass into the fireplace.)*

MARC. Do you really think I'm joking?! Do you honestly believe that I would have you out here to have some lark at my own expense! Have you finally cracked? I go to the doctor a month ago. He does...what he has to do...to my body to check it over. Thoroughly. Get that? Thoroughly.

LON. I got it. Vividly.

MARC. He dug around like a magician stuffing a handkerchief in his fist. And if that violation weren't enough he drew blood, took a urine sample, and a nice collection from my stool. *(He looks at Lon.)*

No comment? *(Lon merely looks at him.)*

LON. None. Proceed. You're doing great. My students could learn something from you.

MARC. Harsh. But, never mind. More tests...and yet still more.

LON. They do that at your age.

MARC. Buck up, pal o' mine, you're day is coming.

LON. And then?

MARC. And then ten days later--ten being some magical number--he calls and asks that I come in. He gives me the long face. And you'd appreciate his bedside manner. What an actor he was. Is. Gave me the countdown to curtain. I asked for it in writing, knowing you--and everyone else that knows me--wouldn't believe it.

LON. So the sixty-four dollar question is: how long?

MARC. Months, a year. Something along those lines.

LON. Two G-n-Ts and I don't feel a buzz. *(He walks back to the bar.)*

MARC. Nothing profound to add to that? Just: "two G-n-Ts and I don't feel a buzz?" Your bedside manner stinks, too.

LON. I need lines for the script, Marc. I was never any good at improv.

MARC. You and that wicked tongue of yours...

LON. Well, what do you want me to say? I don't have the text in front of me. You, who live so cavalier and above all the rest of us--us groundlings--while you lord up there from behind the lectern...just what is you'd like to hear?

MARC. Something original.

LON. Sorry. All I've got is trite and empty.

MARC. Figures.

LON. What are you supposed to say at a moment like this? You tell me.

MARC. You're the drama expert. I thought you'd have the right speech, the right turn of phrase..."Friends, Romans, countrymen..."

LON. Oh, please. You're not Caesar and I certainly haven't come out here to bury you.

MARC. One never knows. Does one?

LON. Why don't we eat before we get completely maudlin and boring?

MARC. So, tell me.

LON. Tell you what? I just told you I didn't have anything to say to you--

MARC. --not that. The item of worth.

LON. Right now?

MARC. So what would it be?

LON. Something of great value. And not my Boss album?

MARC. Precisely.

LON. I don't really know. I go out to Ebay every once in a while and drool over--

MARC. I'm not talking about Ebay. Don't insult me any more than you already have. The Gutenberg?

LON. I already told you: not practical. How many thieves would want to get their grubby hands on it? I wouldn't want the responsibility. And what about it being a part of the world's treasures?

MARC. Please. Riddle me something else.

LON. What's wrong with that?

MARC. Everything. We're in academia.

LON. Don't remind me. The dean does that enough as it is.

MARC. In academia we produce. "Publish or perish." You have your quaint articles, your occasional play that's produced in Timbuktu, and shows you're asked to direct here and there. A wonderful portfolio that's you've aggregated to present to the tenure committee so they can cluck their tongues and revile and pass on so you can go out and bury yourself even deeper into the muck and hypocrisy of the profession. It's a wonder they don't ask you to be your own janitor. I know the process. I nearly killed myself with it. I committed myself to its rigors and demands. I sharpened my blade on the stone of the Bard. Shakespeare. *(He walks over to the case and stares at its contents.)*

LON. And you made your career. You're one of the best, as you like to remind all of us--your students, the faculty, the staff...I've even heard colleagues compare you to other scholars of the Bard: Dryden, Bradley, Hazlitt.

MARC. Yes, and everyone of them rapists. Burrowing into every nook and cranny of the man's work as if it really mattered to someone...to anyone.

LON. You have your circle.

MARC. Circle usually means a small number of people. *(A ding is heard offstage left.)*

LON. I think that's your duck. The oven rang. *(Marc pauses over the glass case.)* Marc?

MARC. Of course. Excuse me. *(Marc exits into the kitchen. Lon walks over the glass case.)*

LON. You know, even though it's the Fourth Edition of the Folio, I still think it's quite something. *(He realizes it's a weak attempt to cheer Marc up.)*

MARC. *(Offstage)* What do you mean: "even though?"

LON. Never mind.

MARC. *(Offstage)* What's that?

LON. *(Louder)* I said never mind. *(Marc re-enters.)*

MARC. The duck is still lame. *(Lon doesn't respond.)* Do I need to explain that one to you?

LON. I got it. Lame duck. Very droll.

MARC. The Fourth Edition cost me a pretty penny.

LON. It cost your uncle a pretty penny.

MARC. My mother, actually. But it's all the same. Ninety thousand at auction.

LON. Is this that item?

MARC. The one that I was talking about?

LON. Yes.

MARC. For me? The question was put to you, not me.

LON. I don't know. One of these. *(He gestures to the case.)*

MARC. Why shoot so low?

LON. All right. A First Folio.

MARC. Shakespeare's First Folio? Well, now I think you're getting to something closer. Something that has more meaning. But would you really?

LON. Want one? Desire one? Sure. But again, just like the Gutenberg, it would have to be under lock and key. One got stolen not too long ago.

MARC. And yet one sold last year for nearly four million.

LON. Four million's enough for me.

MARC. What about something without price?

LON. Priceless? Sticking to the world of academia?

MARC. Oui.

LON. There isn't anything. Not in my field, anyway.

MARC. Oh, contraire. Has the gin gone to your head?

LON. Marc, this is going nowhere.

MARC. But we're merely philosophizing over drinks before dinner.

LON. Your cancer.

MARC. I like the pronoun before it. As if I owned it or something. That would look nice in someone's essay in Comp One class. *(He walks over to the book shelf.)*

LON. Why don't we just talk about it?

MARC. I asked you just five minutes ago to comment. You couldn't.

LON. I've changed my mind.

MARC. Why?

LON. I was rude earlier. You caught me off guard. I'm sorry.

MARC. I'm not interested in discussing it.

LON. Talking about it--between the two of us--is better than some

monologue that I could concoct. Let's talk about it.

MARC. To do what? What could you possibly solve by sitting around talking about it?

LON. They say it's good to do that.

MARC. They who? You should know that in research it is imbecilic to refer to your source material as "they." Remind me: how did you get your Ph.D?

LON. I'm trying to give you some kind of comfort! Can't you just take it for what it's worth?

MARC. Do you want me to tell you what it's worth? *(They stare at each other. Marc retrieves a wooden case off the bookshelf.)*

LON. It's what people do for each other.

MARC. Well, as you so often remind me, Lon, I'm not a people. So forget it. Come, look at this. *(He clears off the coffee table and sets up the box on it. Lon walks over and watches.)*

MARC. Open.

LON. What's in it?

MARC. Part of the reason you're here tonight. *(Lon opens the box. He steps back from it.)*

LON. What is this? *(Marc pulls out each item one at a time.)*

MARC. One: a bottle of poison. Very powerful from what "they" tell me. But in my research the "they" are known chemists in their chosen profession. Two: a dagger. Very Medieval, I know, forgive me. It's how my mind works. Three: a flint lock pistol. Loaded, naturally, and ready to fire.

LON. More props.

MARC. No, I assure you. All practical, working objects of death and destruction. Very affective and proven fatal to anyone on the receiving end of such devices.

LON. The purpose?

MARC. We're not there yet.

LON. What are they for, Marc?

MARC. The death of a king. Just like I said on the phone. You want a glass of wine?

LON. I think I do, yeah. *(Marc goes to the bar and pours him one. He*

gives it to Lon. Marc gets another glass and fills it for himself. Silence passes between them.)

MARC. You've had time to think about it. What would your item be?
Lon walks over to the fireplace.

LON. I'm suddenly very cold. Give me a minute to thaw out.

MARC. I don't mean to lecture--

LON. --since when?

MARC. Ouch. But, it shouldn't take a man of your knowledge, of your imagination to come up with something that holds great value. Something on a large scale. Something to give you glory and honor. Something to give you prestige. Respect. Tenure.

LON. Tenure?

MARC. And the footing to never have to direct an Oklahoma again. To tell the dean where to stick the surrey with the fringe on top. *(Lon drinks his wine.)*

LON. Your Fourth Edition isn't worth it. No matter how much I admire it and appreciate the fact that you have one.

MARC. Forget the Fourth Edition! We aren't talking about the quest of some conniving servant here. We are discussing the throne room of kings!

LON. I don't think I can play this right now with you.

MARC. Play what with me? This isn't a game. The time for that is long past. We've moved onto other things now.

LON. Why?

MARC. Death. That's why. Humor me.

LON. That's our entire relationship. Humoring you. You don't like that restaurant. Okay, we go to another. You don't want to hang out with the other theatre faculty. All right. We don't. We discuss what you want to talk about. You drive the friendship.

MARC. And for very good reasons.

LON. Which are?

MARC. If they aren't clear by now, then they'll never be.

LON. Your cancer, the gun--

MARC. Flint lock.

LON. Whatever. The poison, the knife--

MARC. Dagger!

LON. Okay! Have you completely lost it?

MARC. Lost what?

LON. That's it. The diagnosis has left you unhinged. They say--doctors say, medical doctors--that that's the first sign for some folks who've been labeled as terminal.

MARC. I haven't been labeled anything and I certainly haven't gone insane. I'm here to prove to you a few things. A parting gift. A last impression. Call it what you will.

LON. I'm not playing. I think I've said that once already.

MARC. You don't get a choice in the matter. Remember: I run the show. You said so yourself.

LON. I'm not listening to you.

MARC. Yes, you are. All great things: works of art, literature, government, science, etcetera--all of them--are created at some great price.

LON. Oh really? And how do you figure that?

MARC. By my years of study of such things. Take your play that your directing now. Marlowe's *The Tragical Life and Death of Dr. Faustus*. Pretentious title about a pretentious man who wanted knowledge.

LON. He was bored. Just like you are, apparently.

MARC. He gives up his soul to the devil for twenty years of great power. And as you so eloquently pointed out: he fries for it in the end.

LON. Not before he's ripped to pieces by Mephistopheles.

MARC. Also, pointed out by you so eloquently. And take Caesar. Brutus and the coconspirators had to make a blood sacrifice to save the republic. They stabbed the man until his blood flowed down the steps of the great steps of Rome.

LON. Plays, Marc. Make-believe.

MARC. Need I remind you that Julius Caesar--(was real?)

LON. Yes, all right. All right.

MARC. How many people die before a new cure can be found? How many innocents died in World War Two? How many millions? Our faith and our hope and our security are built on a mountain of bones.

LON. You're just lecturing again. What class would this fit into?

MARC. Life.

LON. Ha! *(He finishes his wine.)* I need another.

MARC. I think maybe you've had enough.

LON. Forget you. *(He walks to the bar.)*

MARC. No, really. You'll want to stay lucid, but clear-headed. Trust me.

LON. Oh, the great Houdini is about to tell his great secret.

MARC. It's more than just a secret, Lon. It's more than just slight of hand. It's a way for me to go out on the tail of a star.

LON. Stop waxing poetical and just tell me whatever it is you've called me out here for!

MARC. I've called you out here for more than just a revelation. So much more than just that.

LON. You really are him, you know? I should've cast you in the part. You're perfect.

MARC. Who?

LON. Faust. You sit there on your throne and you regale the rest of us with your--

MARC. --yes, yes. Blah, blah, blah-bliddy-blah, Lon. You've said that already. Try another tactic.

LON. Why do I submit myself to your lunacy? Can you answer me that? Can you? I play your friend because no one else will. I let you run all over half the time just to placate your insatiable ego. Your ravenous id that goes around seeking whom it may devour. And now you've found the perfect excuse for all of it.

MARC. Excuse?

LON. Yes. You'll let this diagnosis propel you to even greater heights above the rest of us mere mortals.

MARC. I may not be around that long to fly so high.

LON. You have months.

MARC. Not if you kill me first. *(They face each other. A long pause. Marc calmly eats another apple slice from the coffee table. Lon puts his glass on the bar. He walks into the foyer area, gets his jacket from the closet, and opens the front door.)*

LON. Good night, Marc.

MARC. *Love's Labour's Wonne.* *(Lon stares at him.)*

LON. Liar.

MARC. Think what you will.

LON. Don't worry. *(Lon storms out. Marc walks to the bar and stares out the window. Lon's car starts up. The headlights come on and are seen through the window.)*

MARC. Hmmmm. Interesting. *(The headlights go out. The engine dies.)* Well, well, well. *(Marc runs to the case of weapons and grabs the poison. He goes back to the bottle of wine and pours it in. He finishes as the doorbell rings.)* Who is it? *(Lon enters through the front door.)*

LON. Uh...?

MARC. I thought you were gone. *(Lon shuts the door behind him and takes his jacket off.)*

LON. I didn't get any of that duck. I'm hungry and it's too far to drive back without getting some kind of explanation to all of this. *(Lon puts his jacket back in the front closet.)*

MARC. You heard me. Your hearing isn't failing you. *(Lon goes to the bar. He holds up the bottle of wine.)*

LON. Refill?

MARC. No, none for me. Not right now. You go ahead. *(Lon is about to pour a glass when he changes his mind.)*

LON. I'm on the verge of a buzz, anyway. *(He puts the wine back.)*

MARC. It's good wine.

LON. And you've got some story to tell.

MARC. Don't play the hurt paramour, Lon, it just isn't you. I told you. I'm dying. I want to know what really holds worth to you. The bargaining chip on the table is a copy of *Love's Labour's Wonne*.

LON. Whose version?

MARC. There's only one.

LON. There've been lots of playwrights arrogant enough to write a sequel.

MARC. As I said: there's only one. Only one worth talking about.

LON. This is stupid! I'm tired of the run-around!

MARC. Then quit running around! What would you do for a glimpse at the missing play? Would you fight for it? Would you die for it? Would you kill for it?

LON. Why do you do this? Can you answer me that?

MARC. What have I done now?

LON. You know exactly what you're doing.

MARC. Do tell.

LON. You're playing again. You do it with your students who are brave enough to take your classes. You do it at the Shakespeare conferences you attend. You present papers that are condescending to everyone in the room. I've seen you. I've been there and watched the verbal massacre.

MARC. They're all hacks and fools in disguise! They know nothing of Shakespearean scholarship!

LON. Why? Because you say they don't?

MARC. Precisely.

LON. You're arrogant.

MARC. Is it wrong to know that you're good at something? Is it? Tell me that. Are you a good theatre director? (*A pause.*)

LON. Yes.

MARC. Ah! You're arrogant!

LON. There's a difference between knowing you're good at something and rubbing your colleagues faces in it, Marc!

MARC. I never!

LON. You excel at it! You're a circus every time you and your Shakespeare snobs get together.

MARC. And you're not in that circle.

LON. I don't want to be in that circle! You're side-barring here. The play!

MARC. The play. Ah, yes, *Love's Labour's Wonne*. The missing play of Shakespeare's that dolts across the world thought was another name for Shrew.

LON. I know the story.

MARC. Do you? Shakespearean scholars didn't for generations. Not until references were cross-checked did anyone get wise. The original sequel. Can you imagine what Shakespeare wrote in it? Do you think that love was actually...dare I say it? Won?

LON. It's all hypothetical. Why bother? And why bother me about it?

MARC. Pay attention. I'm only going to tell you one final time and then you're on your own. I'm dying.

LON. You've said that already. And then you pull out a knife, a bottle full of poison, and a pistol.

MARC. What would you imagine would happen if I leaked this out to the world?

LON. The mythical play that doesn't exist?

MARC. The real thing. What would Shakespeare fans do?

LON. Laugh at you.

MARC. I doubt it.

LON. Call you a liar.

MARC. They'd be wrong.

LON. You'd be asked to produce the proof.

MARC. Which I would oblige.

LON. Then it would be scrutinized...thoroughly. First, the documents' experts would take a look at the paper and then the ink to determine the date. And then Shakespearean scholars would read the play and cross-reference it with the other plays to see if the language, the iambic pentameter, and everything else matched up.

MARC. Is that all?

LON. I'm sure the providence would be in question after that...if not before.

MARC. And what Shakespearean scholars would be called in?

LON. Certainly not you.

MARC. And why not?

LON. You'd be the one claiming he'd found it. Just that revelation alone would be suspect.

MARC. I did find it.

LON. Then show me or shut up about it! *(A pause.)*

MARC. I'll go check that duck. *(Lon steps in front of him.)* What? A show of force so soon?

LON. I'm going to walk out that door.

MARC. P-lease.

LON. And when I do, it will be for the last time. I appreciate the stress you're going through with your news and all, but this is too much, even

for you.

MARC. I like that word: "appreciate." You can do nothing of the kind. May I pass, please? *(Lon steps out of the way. Marc exits into the kitchen. Lon follows as far as the bar. He pours himself a glass of wine.)*

LON. You like pushing me, don't you?

MARC. *(Offstage)* I'm not pushing you. You're following willingly.

LON. And why would I do something as stupid as that? *(Marc re-enters. He sees that Lon has poured himself a glass of wine.)*

MARC. Because in your heart of hearts, dear boy, you hope I'm telling the truth.

LON. You're not, though. I'm just...intrigued. That's all.

MARC. If I had my glass, I'd toast you. *(He gestures to the glass of wine.)*

LON. Quit distracting me. *(Lon puts the glass down and walks to the fireplace. Marc follows.)*

MARC. Who would be the first theatre to produce the play?

LON. Whoever wanted to. It would be public domain.

MARC. Not necessarily. There are ways to copyright the holding for publishing rights...and possibly even production rights.

LON. It's all hypothetical.

MARC. What would you do to be the first one to produce it?

LON. This is a stupid game. What do you hope to achieve here?

MARC. I told you before you so dramatically exited and then re-entered.

LON. Your death.

MARC. That's what I said. But we'll get back to that. Answer my question.

LON. All right, all right. To humor you. If it were authentic, I could write my own ticket. I would put it on at the university-- *(Marc breaks out in laughter.)*

MARC. Oh, that's rich! That's wonderful!

LON. What? Why are you laughing?

MARC. One of the lost treasures of the literary world and you're going to put it on at the school where the dean is a blockhead, the rest of the theatre faculty out of their depth, and the student body dying to get out

of rehearsal early so they can go get drunk and get laid! You're an idiot!

LON. Quit doing that!

MARC. Doing what, Lon?

LON. Goading me!

MARC. Or, what? *(A pause.)* Or, you'll do what? Leave? We're beyond that. You try to leave again and I'll cripple you. *(Another pause.)*

LON. That sounds like a threat.

MARC. You've got good hearing.

LON. The university would have no choice but to grant me tenure and the promotion to associate professor...full professor!

MARC. Ah, I see. That would be your only goal for producing such a lost classic.

LON. It's not been proven that it's a classic.

MARC. You're beginning to believe me. You're slipping.

LON. I'm playing along.

MARC. You're getting better at it. Good. So, you would produce it in this one-horse town for an audience of ne'er-do-wells who have nothing better to do during your shows but text their friends, answer their cell phones, or play footsie with the person next to them? That's your great ambition? Can't you try a little harder?

LON. The fire's getting cold.

MARC. If it's cold, put more wood on it. *(Lon does so.)*

LON. It would take something like the first production of *Love's Labour's Wonne* to get me that promotion and tenure.

MARC. Tell them what they can do with it.

LON. You don't have a wife and family to support. *(A pause.)* Sorry.

MARC. Why?

LON. I don't know. It just didn't seem to be called for.

MARC. What do I care?

LON. It's a battleground up there at the school everyday. You know that.

MARC. I passed that a long time ago. I mark the cadence now and all the young profs jump. It's amusing...for a while, anyway.

LON. My chair won't take me seriously.

MARC. He's a dolt--simple explanation. He's like the dean. He was put

into a position of power without understanding what he's leading. So why would you grace their stage with so important a find?

LON. To show them.

MARC. Petty of you.

LON. And what would you do with it?

MARC. I wasn't finished hearing your answer.

LON. I am. Tell me. *(Marc goes to the bar and gets the glass of wine that Lon poured. He pours himself a shot of bourbon.)*

MARC. My canvas wouldn't be so small.

LON. Of course not. You have a bigger stage to play on.

MARC. You know what's the worst thing about going to all those conferences you ranted about earlier? The same faces you see every time. Our circle is a small one. I mean, really. How many times can you hear another paper on the transmogrification of feminism in Shakespeare's comedies before you gag on your own vomit? Or, the pentameter modifications that he used to create the Alexandrine and feminine foot? Or, the pastoral allusions, or the transgender questions the he uses, or etcetera, etcetera, ad nauseam, etcetera. We talk to hear our own intelligence.

LON. I thought you'd love kind of folks.

MARC. But they aren't!

LON. What?

MARC. Intelligent!

LON. But you are?

MARC. By more than just a long shot, brother. I'm so sick of hearing the unintelligible comments that don't amount to anything! The after parties and the drinks that lead to the same debauchery your students indulge in--and these are scholars! "What happens at the conference, stays at the conference!" I kid you not, the last one I went to four of the professors--two from NYU, one from Oxford, the other from who knows where--hosted an orgy in their hotel room. It's a bottomless pit of vulgarity not seen since Ghengis Khan went roaming the earth with this Golden Horde. *(He remembers the drinks. He takes them over to Lon.)*

LON. Then why go?

MARC. For that one time, that one moment--that golden moment--when

someone will say something worth while. When some genius will mount the podium and leave us all awestruck.

LON. And you intend to be him--hypothetically. (*Marc toasts Lon. Lon follows. They drink.*)

LON. And so you'd do what? Present it to your colleagues? Wouldn't that be a touch--how would you put it?--droll?

MARC. If I brought this and laid it their feet, and they'd verified its authenticity, I would be heralded as a genius.

LON. You've done that already. And not by your own admission. You're known.

MARC. But not like this.

LON. So you'd take the play and present it at a conference? Am I missing something here? What's the difference between me putting it on here at the school and you presenting it for an audience of eight? Marc is about to answer. No, let me finish! I've listened to you pontificate. Now it's your turn to listen. Do you really think your highbrowed buddies would really care in the long run? You'd brought them to their knees with your intelligence. So what? You pride yourself on that every time you meet. They'd congratulate you and then secretly hate you. Or, openly despise you. And what would it gain you? A trip to all the talk shows? And them asking you inane questions about: "is it any good?" "Who'll make a movie of it, do you think?" "Brad Pitt?" You'd subject yourself and Shakespeare's work to the pop culture masses? Is that what you'd really do?

MARC. Nice.

LON. What?

MARC. You're getting better at this.

LON. So?

MARC. You're right.

LON. Wait a minute. Whoa, back up!

MARC. What now?

LON. I'm what?

MARC. Right. Relish it. It doesn't happen often.

LON. So you'd use this hypothetical play to go out in a blaze of glory?
(*A pause.*)

MARC. Wouldn't you? If you were me, I mean? Wouldn't you like to have one last moment in the sun before you had to push up the daisies?

LON. I don't know. I suppose so.

MARC. You'll get your chance.

LON. What's that supposed to mean?

MARC. *(Covering)* We all do, don't we? It's whether we take it or not.

LON. Me, for tenure and promotions. You, for one last moment.

MARC. Of course, mine is the more noble pursuit of the two. *(Lon takes his glass back to the bar. He walks back to the coffee table and eats a slice of apple.)*

LON. *(Walking)* Shakespeare was meant to be performed. He wrote for actors, not scholars.

MARC. I've heard that argument before.

LON. The majority of his audiences couldn't read or write.

MARC. Another one I've heard echoed from your blabbing lips.

LON. The editors raped him.

MARC. Well, not him actually.

LON. His work. Same thing. Can we eat now?

MARC. What for? Aren't you stimulated by our discussion?

LON. That's not the word I would use, no. I didn't come out here for this.

MARC. So would you hide it away then? The thieves in the temple are waiting for their moment. Would you let them have it? Do you think the dean and your chair would even remember the production a year from now?

LON. They wouldn't remember it the next month. Even after the promotion and tenure. They'd say it was a good job, but I really ought to publish an article or two on it in some obscure journal subscribed to by the publisher and his five friends.

MARC. Why not Broadway?

LON. Well, why not? Since we're playing the "what if" game. Sure. Pick a theatre. Any one of them would come groveling to me just for the opportunity to put lights on it. No matter how good or bad it is.

MARC. It's actually pretty good. *(A pause.)*

LON. All right. Okay. I've humored you enough. Let's eat, or I'm going

home to microwave leftovers.

MARC. It is, Lon. It should've been in the First Folio.

LON. Quit it, will you?! I went along with you! I ran along your pathway of logic just to appease your over-inflated ego! Now let it go!

MARC. The denouement. You want a satisfactory conclusion? I've got one for you. *(He gestures to the glass case.)*

LON. I've seen it. It's a nice Fourth Folio. I wouldn't mind having it myself. *(He catches himself.)* Is that what this is about? You want to leave me your Folio?

MARC. Ha! Think again, cretin. I'll be buried with it first! Come over here.

LON. I can see it just fine from here.

MARC. Get over here, Lon. I'm only going to tell you once. *(Marc unlocks the case and opens the lid. He gets a pair of white gloves from off his desk. Lon walks over to him.)*

LON. You're going to tell me that your copy of the Folio just happens to have the missing play. I love it. *(Marc puts the gloves on.)*

MARC. No. Nothing so--what did you say I would use earlier?

LON. Droll.

MARC. Yes, droll. Nothing like that. Take a look. *(Marc gets the book and sets it on top of the case.)*

LON. It's a nice Folio. You've heard me say it before. *(Marc opens the book. A small booklet is stuffed between its pages.)*

MARC. You see it?

LON. Have you torn pages out it? Are you completely demented?

MARC. Pull it out of the book and see for yourself. *(Lon does so. He stares at it.)*

LON. A quarto.

MARC. Correct. A single copy printed of the play.

LON. *(Reads the cover)* "Love's Labour's Wonne."*(He stares at Marc.)* Boy, you've gone to great lengths here. This took a lot of work.

MARC. It did, but not in the way you think. It took me years to track down that single copy. *(Lon begins to open the pages of the quarto.)*

LON. You didn't even print this off of a printer. This is good craftsmanship, I'll give you that. *(Marc takes off his gloves.)*

MARC. You're handling a manuscript four hundred years old! Put these on! *(Lon laughs.)* Put them on!

LON. Sure, sure. *(He puts the gloves on and handles the play. He turns the pages.)* Beautiful. *(He's beginning to question his first assessment.)* Where did you get this?

MARC. Ah, ah, ah. You're beginning to have a little faith. Wouldn't want that, now would we? *(Lon thumbs through another page.)*

LON. Marc, where did you get this?

MARC. It's real. It's very real. You're holding my last will and testament to a lost and uncaring world.

LON. This can't be. It just can't.

MARC. We know it existed. We have the evidence. And when I say "we," I am referring to the scholars of the man's work.

LON. But it's never been found.

MARC. That doesn't mean it wasn't out there. It was. You're holding it. Now put it down. *(Lon doesn't. He continues thumbing through the pages.)*

LON. You're telling me it's now surfacing for the time since this was printed?

MARC. Yes. And now that you've seen it, you have to-- *(Lon lets go of the manuscript and doubles over. He goes down to one knee.)*

LON. Agh! I think I'm going to throw up. What was in the wine?

MARC. The poison. *(Lon looks up at him from the floor.)*

LON. Very funny.

MARC. Look for yourself. *(Marc gestures to the case where the bottle of poison is. Lon looks and sees that the bottle is now empty. Lon is hit with another cramp.)*

LON. I'm going to throw up!

MARC. No, my friend, you're going to die.

LON. Marc-- *(He reaches up from the floor.)*

MARC. You don't think that I would discover this just so you would have your untalented group of wanna-be thespians put this on, do you?

LON. What was I going--to--?

MARC. I've shown you. You had the chance to believe me. You had the chance to get it from me. You didn't. And now it's too late to show me

just how much worth it holds for you.

LON. I'm going to be sick-- *(He struggles to his feet and exits into the kitchen.)*

MARC. No, you're going to be dead. *(He calmly puts the quarto back in the Folio and closes the lid on it.)*

LON. *(Offstage)* Marc!! *(Marc smiles as lights fade out.)*

END OF ACT ONE

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