

# The Shakespeares

*By Colleen Shaddox*

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### **DEDICATION**

*For Russell Shaddox and William Shakespeare,  
two men I cannot live without.*

### **STORY OF THE PLAY**

William Shakespeare retired at about age 48. Why did this prolific genius stop writing? How did he get along with his long-neglected wife, Anne, once he gave up the stage? "The Shakespeares" imagines what The Bard's last years were like in Stratford-upon-Avon. The play is full of inside jokes for Shakespeare fans. But even for those unfamiliar with his plays, there are laughs (and a few tears) as we watch this profoundly mismatched couple try to make a go of it. Shakespeare's confidante, daughter Susanna, realizes that her father's creative spirit is being crushed by small town life. So she plots an escape for him, reminiscent of some of the ruses found in Shakespeare's own plays. But things do not go as planned, a guarded secret is revealed, and ultimately a very conventional Anne Shakespeare must decide what she really wants out of this unconventional marriage.

### **PREMIERE PERFORMANCE**

Shakespeare in the Burg, Middleburg VA, April 5, 2014.

### **AWARDS**

Winner of the Shakespeare in the Burg One-Act  
Competition, 2014

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**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(5 m, 3 w, 1 flexible)*

**SHAKESPEARE:** A retired player.

**ANNE:** His wife.

**SUSANNA:** A daughter of Shakespeare.

**JOHN:** Susanna's husband.

**JUDITH:** A daughter of Shakespeare.

**TOM:** Her husband.

**HENRY:** A player.

**EDMUND:** A player.

**SERVANT** (flex): Works for the Shakespeares. Can be doubled.

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**SETTING**

The year is 1616. All action takes place in the living room of Shakespeare's middle-class home. Actors need to be able to enter the room from inside and outside the house, but formal doors are not necessary. The play could easily be produced in a black box.

**PROPS**

Parcel, necklace, fine linen handkerchief, ear trumpet, sewing items, and a locket that can open and shut.

## **The Shakespeares**

### **Scene 1**

*(AT RISE: A SPOTLIGHT reveals SHAKESPEARE.)*

**SHAKESPEARE:** Now my charms are all o'erthrown,  
And what strength I have's mine own,  
Which is most faint: now, 'tis true,  
I must be here confined by you,  
Or sent to Naples. Let me not,  
Since I have my dukedom got  
And pardon'd the deceiver, dwell  
In this bare island by your spell;  
But release me from my bands  
With the help of your good hands:  
Gentle breath of yours my sails  
Must fill, or else my project fails,  
Which was to please. Now I want  
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,  
And my ending is despair,  
Unless I be relieved by prayer,  
Which pierces so that it assaults  
Mercy itself and frees all faults.  
As you from crimes would pardon'd be,  
Let your indulgence set me free.

*(HE bows. LIGHTS come up to reveal a drawing room where ANNE is seated.)*

**ANNE:** —and so I said to her: Thou art quite mistaken, I'm sure, Mistress Barkley. What say you to that, Will? ... Will? ...Will?

**SHAKESPEARE:** Pardon me, my dear. Sometimes in my amazed rapture at the melody of your voice, the matter of your speech escapes me.

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**ANNE:** I told Mistress Barkley that she was quite mistaken because you shall be in church with the family this Sunday.

**SHAKESPEARE:** Did you wager on it?

**ANNE:** Heavens, no!

**SHAKESPEARE:** Good woman.

**ANNE:** William, you are not in London.

**SHAKESPEARE:** I had noted it.

**ANNE:** It does not do in Stratford to conduct oneself like a pagan.

**SHAKESPEARE:** My dear, I was scarce planning to make sacrifices to the gods.

**ANNE:** Except perhaps Bacchus.

*(JUDITH enters.)*

**JUDITH:** Good day to thee, Mother. Father.

**ANNE:** G'day, child. How fares your husband?

**JUDITH:** Well. Tom is at his labors.

**SHAKESPEARE:** And noble labors they are. I thought to visit him after I finish my chat with your dear mother.

**ANNE:** You thought to visit him?

**SHAKESPEARE:** Aye.

**ANNE:** Wherefore?

**SHAKESPEARE:** I'm quite fond of the lad. He hath ever been a good husband to our Judith, hath he not?

**ANNE:** And John hath been a good husband to our Susanna, but you speak not of visiting John.

**SHAKESPEARE:** John is a physician and his work demands privacy.

**ANNE:** And Tom is a vintner, so his work demands company. Yours most especially.

**JUDITH:** Mother, I'm sure Father—

**SHAKESPEARE:** Oh, heartless woman! I thought only to take the lad under my wing, to be a father in truth as I am in law. And thou hast sullied mine intent with suspicions rank. I'll no more of it. *(Exits)*

**ANNE:** How did that man ever earn his bread as an actor?

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**JUDITH:** He holds my Tom but lightly in his affection. He said Thomas Quiney's society is like his wine: providing no joy but enforcing sleep upon all men who partake of it. Susanna laughed at that, Mother.

**ANNE:** She is her father's child.

**JUDITH:** I am not?

**ANNE:** You inherited your father's virtues. Susanna got the greater measure— she inherited his faults.

**JUDITH:** Has Father virtues?

**ANNE:** Aye, there's some good in all men.

**JUDITH:** What be Father's virtues?

**ANNE:** Your father is...

**JUDITH:** He is apt!

**ANNE:** Aye, but apt is not a virtue. Wise is a virtue.

**JUDITH:** But Father is not wise.

**ANNE:** No, never wise. But the creatures of his imagination are many times wise. I ask myself: How is it William can invent people who are chaste, noble, reverent... and yet he is none of these?

**JUDITH:** Perchance someone else wrote Father's plays?

**ANNE:** Your father would require a comrade both diligent in labor and discreet in discourse. There are none such among Master Shakespeare's acquaintances, I assure you, child.

**JUDITH:** Let us not prattle about Father on such a beautiful morning. Will you come to Master Thornby's shop with me? Tom has given me leave to buy new curtains for our closet.

**ANNE:** What a joy it must be to have a kindly husband!

**JUDITH:** Oh, the curtains were my idea. I can easily make Tom think my schemes are his own.

**ANNE:** Judith, you surprise me.

**JUDITH:** Since my own schemes show far more cunning than Tom's, would you not say that it is a kindness on my part to give them over for his claiming?

**ANNE:** Perhaps there is some of your father in you, lady.

*(JUDITH and ANNE exit.)*

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