

KIT MARLOWE, PRIVATE EYE

by Christina Hamlett and Jamie Dare

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KIT MARLOWE, PRIVATE EYE

A One Act Comedy

by Christina Hamlett and Jamie Dare

SYNOPSIS: Here's a tale you can't refuse. The story of Will Shakespeare's muse. What starts out as a slow week at Kit Marlowe's P.I. agency quickly brings a succession of royals, rogues, peeved parents, and damsels in distress seeking his assistance to remedy perceived wrongs. Among them we find Lady MacBeth, Othello, Lady Capulet, King Lear, a conniving Iago and two comely lasses in the form of Ophelia and Portia. Meanwhile, at home, Kit must contend with a woefully lazy roommate named Will, an unemployed actor who believes he could write his own material if only he could come up with some fresh plots. Once Kit starts sharing his day, however, the otherwise indifferent Will suddenly perks up and starts taking notes, a strategy which will lead to the overnight success of one and the untimely death of the other.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 females, 5 males)

KIT MARLOWE (m).....A private investigator in Elizabethan times. *(80 lines)*

WILL (m).....Kit's roommate, an actor and aspiring writer. *(69 lines)*

LADY MACBETH (f).....A power-hungry client. *(29 lines)*

OTHELLO (m)A fiercely jealous Moor. *(18 lines)*

IAGO (m).....A snarky sneak. *(18 lines)*

PORTIA (f).....A beautiful young woman with golden hair, disguised as a man. *(4 lines)*

LADY CAPULET (f).....Mother of a starry-eyed teen. *(18 lines)*

KING LEAR (m)A monarch with a dilemma. *(13 lines)*

OPHELIA (f)A girl with a crazy beau back home. *(23 lines)*

DURATION: 35 minutes.

TIME: 1586.

SETTING: London.

SET

The stage is divided into three distinct playing spaces which are individually illuminated when action is transpiring in them: Office, Alley, and Garret Flat.

OFFICE: The office of Kit Marlowe. Center stage and the largest of the three spaces. It is minimalist in nature, largely because young Marlowe hasn't exactly been bringing in that much business lately. At its center is a large desk topped with parchment letters, ledgers, and a quill pen in an inkwell. There is a desk chair behind it as well as a chair for visitors. Just upstage of the desk is a coat-tree with a trench coat and fedora.

Upstage is a large window that looks out on a dark and dodgy English street. Stage left of the window is a door with a frosted glass panel which, backwards, reads KIT MARLOWE, PRIVATE EYE. There is a freestanding doorway stage left.

ALLEY: The stage left playing space is a dark, narrow alley with a single street lamp. Debris and a few rubber rats round out its scuzzy look.

GARRET FLAT: Stage right is the garret flat which Kit shares with his roommate, Will. If this were modern times, it would probably be littered with Chinese takeout containers, soda cans, and unwashed socks. Kit has tried to keep it tidy but he's cursed with an unemployed friend who has all day to messy it up again.

There is a door downstage right and a freestanding doorway upstage which leads to another room. A table and two ladder back chairs comprise their dining space. It is topped with several unwashed plates and pewter mugs. The chairs are currently being used for articles of clothing that someone hasn't had time or inclination to put away.

COSTUMES

KIT: Elizabethan attire with a modern fedora and trench coat.

WILL: Elizabethan attire. Rumpled shirt and saggy pants.

LADY MACBETH: Elizabethan attire.

OTHELLO: Elizabethan attire.

IAGO: Elizabethan attire.

PORTIA: Pants, shirt, and hat. (Disguised as a man.)

LADY CAPULET: Elizabethan attire.

KING LEAR: Elizabethan attire and crown.

OPHELIA: Elizabethan attire.

LIGHTING

The economy of this production rests in the fact that it is a single set with three distinct staging areas. A scene is only “lit” when something is going on; the rest of the stage is in darkness.

SOUND EFFECTS

- ☐ oven timer ding
- ☐ ominous thunder
- ☐ knock on door
- ☐ three bells

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

For the first read-through, it is recommended that actors read the lines straight and not attempt to rhyme them. This is for the purpose of understanding what is being conveyed in the dialogue. Once rehearsals get underway, this can very much take on the qualities of an old-fashioned melodrama. Facial expressions and gestures are exaggerated just as they would be on a vaudeville stage.

It can also make for an interesting debate topic for your actors as to the true authorship of Shakespeare's prolific works. To this day, scholars continue to argue whether contemporaries such as Christopher Marlowe, Francis Bacon, and Edward de Vere may have participated in the wordsmithing. The ominous ending of this play also speaks to the real-life murder of Marlowe in 1593. Was it simply a tavern brawl which ended badly, a hit piece orchestrated by Queen Elizabeth I, or did Marlowe fake his own demise and continue writing, using as his front-man a guy named William Shakespeare?

PROPS

- ☐ inkwell
- ☐ parchments
- ☐ several manuscripts
- ☐ quills
- ☐ letters
- ☐ ledgers
- ☐ reticules
- ☐ coins
- ☐ debris
- ☐ rubber rats
- ☐ handkerchief
- ☐ bachelor pad clutter
- ☐ *Ye Olde Pizza* box
- ☐ unwashed plates
- ☐ pewter tankards
- ☐ small scroll
- ☐ big bag of chips
- ☐ paddle ball game
- ☐ pewter pitcher
- ☐ two oven mitts
- ☐ bag of coins
- ☐ pocket notebook
- ☐ burlap sack
- ☐ skull
- ☐ vase with flowers
- ☐ theatre poster (e.g., 16th century *Playbill* with Will's face)
- ☐ five daggers
- ☐ drinks
- ☐ two takeout bags
- ☐ plate
- ☐ coat tree

AT START: *The stage is dark and we hear the melancholy strains of "film noir" music. As lightning flashes outside the window, we see the silhouette of KIT MARLOWE seated behind the desk but have yet to realize he is dressed in Elizabethan clothing and looks a bit like Shakespeare. A second figure, LADY MACBETH, stands in the shadows just downstage of the entry door. Note: KIT'S opening speech can be done live or prerecorded as a voiceover.*

KIT: They say you know trouble when it walks in the door. A last-resort looker we've all seen before. A woman whose bankroll is deep in the red? A husband or boyfriend she'd sooner wish dead? I've heard every story. I've dried every sob. Been shot at and stabbed at—all comes with the job. I coulda closed shop. I coulda stayed still. Nevertheless, it's a gig I can bill. My rent's in arrears and my roommate's a flake. Turnin' down business? A choice I can't make.

The lights come up to reveal KIT and LADY MACBETH. Though elegantly dressed, LADY MACBETH wears an unbecoming expression of severity.

LADY MACBETH: *(Loudly, with impatience.)* I'm looking for Marlowe. Is he about?

KIT stands to greet LADY MACBETH with a bow.

KIT: Foursquare in person. You don't have to shout. My friends call me Kit.

LADY MACBETH looks KIT up and down as if he were pond scum.

LADY MACBETH: We've not even met.

KIT: True enough, yes. I'd not quickly forget. Might I inquire with my next breath... to whom am I speaking?

LADY MACBETH: Lady MacBeth. *(Beat.)* You seem awfully young.

KIT: I am. Twenty-two.

LADY MACBETH: I thought you'd be older.

KIT: Most people do. It doesn't, however, diminish my skill. I *earn* every tuppence I put on my bill. (*Indicates door.*) But if you'd rather not bend my ear—

LADY MACBETH: (*Firmly grabs his arm.*) I need your assistance. That's why I'm here.

KIT: You've got quite a grip.

LADY MACBETH: (*With an evil smile.*) I don't like to lose.

KIT manages to shake himself free and offers LADY MACBETH a chair.

KIT: Then why don't you start by giving me clues? (*Dips the quill pen in the inkwell and prepares to take notes.*) Philandering spouse? A dream that's dashed? Business rivals? Stocks that crashed? A house foreclosed? A theft of riches? Greedy heirs or—

LADY MACBETH: (*Bluntly.*) No. It's witches.

KIT: Witches?

LADY MACBETH: Yes.

KIT: The sort with hats and brooms and cats?

LADY MACBETH: Is there any other kind? They bid my husband pay them mind.

KIT: And for what purpose, may I ask?

LADY MACBETH: It seems there lurks a murky task.

KIT: (*Candidly.*) Witches really aren't my thing.

LADY MACBETH: They say my husband's to be king.

KIT: And this, I gather, isn't keen?

LADY MACBETH: Of course it is! I'd then be queen.

KIT: Forgive me if I'm seeming lost—

LADY MACBETH: The current monarch must be tossed.

KIT: By "tossed" you're saying—

LADY MACBETH: Gone for good. (*Indifferent shrug.*) So said the witches in the wood. They also spoke of legged shrubs and blood that can't come out with scrubs.

KIT: I feel I must protest a bit. You see that witches—

LADY MACBETH: Silly Kit. I need your help.

KIT: (*Under his breath.*) Much more than that. Pish, this woman's such a brat.

LADY MACBETH: (*Teasing him.*) I'll make you Duke or Count or Lord.

KIT: (*Fold arms, shakes head.*) My services you can't afford.

LADY MACBETH opens her reticule and sprinkles a goodly number of coins on his desk.

KIT: Although perhaps I spoke too soon.

LADY MACBETH rises to leave. KIT rises as well.

LADY MACBETH: (*Shakes KIT'S hand.*) I'll call again next week. At noon.

LADY MACBETH turns on her heel and exits upstage.

KIT: She lays it on a bit too thick. Oh, how I loathe of politic! Strange, is not, her weird obsession, bordering on dark confession? Time will tell, the sayings say. One can but hope she'll go away.

KIT puts on his fedora and casts a wary glance at the upstage door as the lights go down. An eerie light comes up in the stage left alley scene. An impatient OTHELLO is pacing, waiting for IAGO. IAGO, emerges from upstage, clutching a lady's handkerchief. He dangles it in front of OTHELLO'S face.

IAGO: Othello, my lord. Bad tidings I bear. Your wife left her hankie... in another man's lair.

OTHELLO: Be gone, Iago! My wife would not cheat. Desdemona is true. She's kind and she's sweet.

IAGO: Then why was this kerchief in Cassio's house? (*Slyly.*) Perhaps she left more. Like a skirt or a blouse.

OTHELLO: Are you quite mad? Why tell me this now?

IAGO: It's for your own good, sir. Don't have a cow.

OTHELLO tries to compose himself.

OTHELLO: I cannot endure this. I might hit the roof. But first I need more. Like ocular proof.

IAGO closes his eyes, clutching the handkerchief. Concentrating.

IAGO: I've had a clear vision. It's just as we feared. Cassio used this. To clean off his beard.

OTHELLO'S pacing intensifies.

OTHELLO: Trust not in visions. They may not be pure. I seek something better. I must know for sure.

IAGO sighs, exasperated.

IAGO: Kit Marlowe can help you. Interesting guy. He's savvy and crooked. For you, he will spy.

OTHELLO: I know my wife's honest! But... what if she's not?

IAGO: Find out for certain. Give Marlowe a shot.

IAGO whips out an Elizabethan-style business card (a small scroll) and points to the print on the bottom.

IAGO: Behold, his address. Sounds fake, but it's real. Mention my name. He'll cut you a deal.

OTHELLO: I don't wish to do this.

IAGO: It's all for the best.

OTHELLO: I'm a prince and a soldier. Why am I stressed?

OTHELLO takes the scroll and tries to stuff it into his pocket as the lights go down stage left. The lights up come up stage right, where a barefoot WILL (in rumpled shirt and saggy pants) is focused on beating his prior score at paddle ball. KIT enters from stage right wearing his fedora and trench coat. He's less than pleased.

KIT: William!

WILL: (Without looking away from his game.) It's Will, please.

KIT: Fine. As you like it. Supper's not ready.

WILL: What am I, psychic?

KIT removes his coat and hat and searches for a place to set them. Annoyed to be ignored by his roomie, he strides over and grabs the ball.

WILL: See here, that's wicked. You've broken my score!

KIT: Left to my druthers, I'd break much more.

WILL: Bad day of sleuthing? You seem in a mood.

KIT: Just feeling peckish and wanting some food.

WILL: For what do you hunger? Steak? Kidney pie?

KIT: Both would be lovely. *(Dismayed at the mess.)* Our place, 'tis a sty.

WILL: Methinks it looks "lived in."

KIT: By what? Wild boars? The sink overfloweth. So do the drawers.

During the following, KIT tries in vain to tidy up.

WILL: Regrets, but I can't clean. My mind's in a haze. The Globe has not cast me in any new plays.

KIT: O whimper! O whine! Then write your own stuff.

WILL avails himself of the only empty chair and puts his feet on the table, the picture of laziness.

WILL: I have no ideas. 'Tis all dreck and fluff.

KIT: Then seek out the want ads. Try List of Craig.

WILL: The jobs all pay nothing. They're weird and they're vague.

KIT finds a big bag of chips amidst the clutter. During the following, he struggles with the bag but it will not open.

KIT: Perhaps this shall cheer you. A tale from my work. I have a new client. Maniacal jerk.

WILL: Odd you should say that. Wherefore and why?

KIT: She wants to be queen. First someone must die.

WILL: *(Intrigued.)* Who is that someone?

KIT: Only the king.

WILL: She's going to *kill* him?

KIT: Don't know. That's the thing.

WILL grabs the chip bag and tries to open it. Again, no luck.

KIT: I'll meet her again and her plans will unfold. She's already paid me. With coins made of gold.

WILL gives up on the chips. He chucks them over his shoulder.

WILL: You can buy supper! Chicken and rice.

What a mooch. KIT shakes his head.

KIT: Just this one time. You're lucky I'm nice.

KIT exits, presumably to get take-out.

WILL: How now, inspiration! Oh, glorious day! Kit's life and his work... make a marvelous play!

WILL picks up the quill pen and writes intently as the lights go down stage right. The lights come up in the stage left alley. We think at first that we're looking at the back of a man facing upstage. The moment "he" turns and speaks, however, we discover it's the beautiful PORTIA.

PORTIA: Oh what fools my suitors be and much too dumb to even see that underneath this cute disguise it's really me and worldly wise. How else could I escape the fate, of being told who I could date! Father said he'd run my life—(Sarcastically with finger quotes.) Little Portia, someone's wife. When he died, I thought—(Whips off hat to reveal a tumble of long blond hair.)—"I'm free!" And yet it wasn't meant to be. Beyond the grave, he pulls the strings that seek to clip my youthful wings. Why can't women use their voices and demand important choices? Methinks I need some sage direction lest I blow covert deception. (Snaps fingers, inspired.) A private eye might know some tricks to remedy my current fix. I'll seek one out. It can't be tough. And then I'll call my parent's bluff!

Resolved, PORTIA pulls on her hat and turns to exit upstage as the alley lights go down. The lights come up on the office, center stage, where KIT is at work. A tentative LADY CAPULET enters from upstage.

LADY CAPULET: Excuse me?

KIT: Yes?

LADY CAPULET: May I intrude? I've no appointment, which is rude.

KIT: Not at all. *(Indicates she should sit.)* The morning's slow. Lately, 'tis the status quo.

LADY CAPULET: Are you the sleuth who speaks in rhyme?

KIT: Almost always, all the time.

LADY CAPULET: I am Lady Capulet.

KIT: A name I shall not soon forget. Tell me why the furrowed brow.

LADY CAPULET: A romance that I must stop... *now.* My daughter is a pretty lass. Not too bright but full of sass. She was once our pride and joy...

KIT: But now?

LADY CAPULET: She's gone and met... a boy!

KIT: *(Perplexed.)* What has this to do with me?

LADY CAPULET: She's far too young, sir, can't you see? His people are the Montagues. *(Shakes head in disgust.)* It makes me want to blow a fuse! Even worse—and to my knowledge—he has never been to college. We fear that she shall run away.

KIT: My role in this?

LADY CAPULET: To make her stay. Follow them and make report. You, sir, are our last resort!

KIT: *(Shakes his head.)* That sort of thing is not my style.

LADY CAPULET dangles a reticule under his nose.

LADY CAPULET: I guarantee it's worth your while. *(Sprinkles coins on the desk.)* Our Juliet deserves the best. Consider this your latest quest.

Before KIT can protest, LADY CAPULET exits upstage. A stealthy IAGO enters from the doorway stage left and startles KIT.

KIT: Heavens but you gave me shock! Don't you ever think to knock?
(*Points to upstage door.*) And why not come in through *that* door?

IAGO: (*Shrug.*) Never bothered you before.

KIT: Look, I'm busy. Make it snappy.

IAGO: Last referral? Not that happy.

KIT: *Not* to learn his wife is true?

IAGO: Which she isn't.

KIT: So says you. Why such rush to tear asunder? Are you jealous?
Makes me wonder.

IAGO: (*Offended.*) Just because my eyes are green doesn't make me
plot and scheme.

KIT: A hobby's what you need forsooth. One that doesn't twist the
truth—or stoke the fires of scandal.

IAGO: Truth? Ha ha. You make me laugh. The truth you cannot
handle!

*IAGO dramatically exits stage left as the lights go down. The lights
come up stage right, where WILL writes at the table. The room now
boasts several neat stacks of manuscript pages.*

WILL: Another play is almost done. Who knew that writing could be
fun?! (*Picks up a manuscript and reads a passage.*) "Lord, what
fools these mortals are." (*Wincing.*) Hurts my ears. And sounds
bizarre. (*Tries again.*) "Lord, what fools these mortals *be*."
(*Pleased.*) I rather like this repartee. (*Jots this down, then picks up
another manuscript.*) I need a word that rhymes with *June*. Maybe
moon or dune or loon. (*Glancing offstage, startled.*) Is Kit outside?
It's but high noon. I thought he'd not be home so soon.

*WILL quickly hides his manuscripts in a Ye Olde Pizza box and closes
the lid just as KIT enters. WILL immediately takes his coat and hands
him a large tankard. Wary, KIT sniffs it.*

KIT: Ale for me? My lucky day.

WILL: Mead and flagons seemed cliché.

WILL pulls out the opposite chair and gestures for KIT to sit.

WILL: Your clients, are they doing well?

KIT: They're all so strange, I cannot tell. Iago scares me half to death. Jealousy with every breath. Portia leaves me more at peace. Her sunny locks like golden fleece.

WILL: A lady fair?

KIT: An heiress, too.

WILL: (*Eagerly.*) Has she a swain?

KIT: What's this to you?

WILL: (*Shrug.*) Just curious.

KIT: She wears disguise—to blend in with the manly guys. And thwart a plot her father schemed. (*Shakes his head.*) Beyond the grave, I'm sure he's steamed.

WILL: And what of Lady Capulet?

KIT: A weaker mom I have not met. She likes to wield that little purse. Her daughter's closer to the Nurse.

WILL: How's Hermia? And—(*Trying to remember name, then snaps his fingers as it comes to him.*) Lysander?

KIT: Charming pair who doth philander. Demetrius she's set to wed. She said no, and then they fled.

KIT finishes his drink but WILL tops it off so he'll stay put.

WILL: Star-crossed lovers are your brand.

KIT: Most distressing, and unplanned. I'd rather solve a mystery.

WILL: It pays the bills, though. Let it be.

SFX: Ding! (Oven timer.) KIT sniffs the air like a coyote tracking its prey.

KIT: Do I detect a rack of lamb? (*Another sniff.*) With courgettes and side of ham?

WILL: Parsnips, too. And corn, no cob.

KIT tries to stand, but WILL shoves him back into the chair.

WILL: Let's eat and talk. About your job.

WILL puts on two oven mitts and exits upstage. KIT reaches to remove the pizza box and notices the papers inside.

KIT: All this writing in one day? The slug-a-bed hath gone away! (*Silent cheer.*) At last he found a path to choose. One day I'd like to meet his muse!

KIT raises his tankard, thanking the heavens, as the lights go down stage right. The lights come up center stage. KING LEAR, an older gentleman wearing a crown, paces the office. He glances impatiently at the door.

KING LEAR: Where is Marlowe? Why is he late? I'm getting so old. 'Tis hazard to wait. My subjects are vultures. They cheer my demise. Even my family can't wait for goodbyes. I'm not a mean ruler or negligent dad. Compared to the others, I'm better than bad. Yet who can I trust with the wealth I've amassed? I'm stymied by choices and have to act fast.

KIT enters from upstage, ready to tackle the day. He sees KING LEAR and jumps a mile.

KIT: (*Startled, bowing.*) Your majesty!

KING LEAR: King Lear's the name. "Your Highness" works. They're both the same.

KIT: Prithee, why the drop-in call?

KING LEAR: Parenting. It's not a ball.

KING LEAR takes a seat at KIT'S desk.

KIT: A fact to which I cannot speak.

KING LEAR: Trust me, 'tis a task that's bleak. You give kids everything they need, yet all it does is foster greed.

KIT: For sure they *all* can't be corrupt?

KING LEAR: (*Warning him.*) I'm the king! Don't interrupt! I have a realm I must divide and errors I cannot abide. I understand you are a sleuth?

KIT: That's correct.

KING LEAR: Then find the truth.

KIT: The truth about...?

KING LEAR: My daughters three. And which is *the* most true to me.

KIT: It would seem an easy task—to gather them and simply ask?

KING LEAR: You miss the point. This calls for stealth if I'm to wisely leave my wealth. Find out which one loves me most!

WILL enters from upstage. He holds up two take-out bags.

WILL: Who here's hungry? I made French toast!

Mortified, KIT rushes upstage.

KIT: (*Sotto, hissing.*) What art thou doing? I'm meeting a client!

WILL: I dropped by to say "hi." Don't be so defiant.

KIT: We'll socialize later, but please not at work.

WILL: I'll wait here in silence. You know I don't lurk.

KIT: (*Warns him.*) Not one peep. Not even a breath.

WILL points to KING LEAR, who's now sleeping at the desk.

WILL: Ay, but it looks like you bored him to death.

KIT approaches and nudges him awake. WILL, meanwhile, withdraws a pocket notebook and a quill with which to surreptitiously scribble notes.

KING LEAR: (*Snapping to.*) Clearly I'm aging! I need to step down. Tell me which daughter inherits my crown.

KIT: How shall I do this? Some sort of test?

KING LEAR: My fortune shall go to... who loves me best. Regan is crafty. Goneril, too. Cordelia's pleasant. Not sure what to do.

KIT: Sir, might I offer a piece of advice? Playeth not favorites. 'Tis not very nice.

WILL inches forward, taking notes.

KIT: Resentment will build...

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