

ALL YOUR GRACES by Steve McMahon

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Steve McMahon is an award-winning Scottish actor and writer based in New York. He is a graduate of the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, where he is a 2015/16 Company member. His plays have been produced off-off-Broadway and in Scotland.

DAVID – a young man in love

ALICE – a young woman not in love

ALL YOUR GRACES follows two young people fighting to love and be loved.

DAVID and **ALICE**. He reads from a tatty piece of paper.

DAVID

*Who will believe my verse in time to come,
If it were filled with your most high deserts?
Though yet heaven knows it is but as a tomb
Which hides your life, and shows not half your parts.
If I could write the beauty of your eyes,
And in fresh numbers number all your graces,
The age to come would say 'This poet lies;
Such heavenly touches ne'er touched earthly faces.'
So should my papers, yellowed with their age,
Be scorned, like old men of less truth than tongue,
And your true rights be termed a poet's rage
And stretched metre of an antique song:
But were some child of yours alive that time,
You should live twice, in it, and in my rhyme.*

ALICE

Was that Shakespeare?

DAVID

Uh, yes. Yes it was.

ALICE

Okay.

DAVID

Did you like it?

ALICE

I'm not going to have sex with you.

DAVID

I wasn't -

ALICE

You were.

DAVID

No, I -

ALICE

You were!

DAVID
What?

ALICE
Huh?

DAVID
Were what?

ALICE
Trying to – to -

DAVID
Trying to what?

ALICE
Seduce – You were trying to seduce me! Into – into having sex with you!

DAVID
Well...

ALICE
There, you admit it!

DAVID
I mean, of course I'd like to –

ALICE
Ha!

DAVID
But – but – I'm not trying to -

ALICE
What are you -

DAVID
If you'd just -

ALICE
Well?

DAVID
Let me -

ALICE
Go on!

DAVID
Finish, then -

ALICE
What's the deal with the Shakespeare?

DAVID
I – I -

ALICE
What do you want?

DAVID
I want to have babies with you!

ALICE
O-kay...

DAVID
Is that a yes?

ALICE
No! What the fuck's wrong with you?

DAVID
Well, there's no need to -

ALICE
Oh, fuck off.

DAVID
Swear. Right.

ALICE
Explain yourself. Come on.

DAVID
Right. Well. I – I wanted to, um, express how, how I felt about you and I'm not so good at, um, words.

ALICE
Clearly.

DAVID

Right, yes. So I, um, used Shakespeare to – to –

ALICE

Yeah, what was that?

DAVID

Sonnet 17. It's about, well, it's actually about a man. A *beautiful* man –

ALICE

You kidding me?

DAVID

No, no. That doesn't really - it's universal, you know. Shakespeare sees this man's beauty and, and he wants the world to know. He wants others to see what he sees, because such beauty deserves to be shared. He urged the young man to have a child, so that his beauty will not be lost, so that it can be passed down for future generations to admire, cause Shakespeare's words can only do so much and memory will distort, like a game of Chinese Whispers. Ideas will vanish or wear away, as will you, so leave a trace in your child's face, and, in some way, you will live on. Which is nice, it is something that I believe to be true, and nice, and I don't want to see you fade. You deserve to be seen. Your beauty deserves to be seen.

ALICE

No. Sorry.

DAVID

Um, what? Sorry. Uh, what?

ALICE

I don't buy that.

DAVID

You don't –

ALICE

No. Sorry. It's – Well, firstly, tell me what you were hoping to achieve. With this – this –

DAVID

This what?

ALICE

I guess I'm not so good at words either.

DAVID

No.

ALICE

Don't agree with me! It's not helping you. Tell me what you hoped to achieve by reciting poetry to me.

DAVID

I – I hoped... I hoped you might hear those words and hear me telling them to you and that you would like the words and like me.

Beat. He gestures as if to ask 'shall I go on?'. She nods.

And if you liked the words, and me, that you might want to, um, be with me, and then you might like me more and more until the point where like turns to love and then, you know, um, *babies*. I mean, obviously there are more, um, steps along the way and it's not, *life's* not, that simple, though I wish it was sometimes, don't you? Yes, and um, that's not really the point. The point is – the point is that I want to be with you.

Beat.

Um, that's it. So... What do you think?

ALICE

I think you've got it all wrong.

DAVID

Oh.

ALICE

Well not all wrong.

DAVID

Oh.

ALICE

But wrong enough.

DAVID

Oh.

ALICE

Stop saying 'oh'.

DAVID

Oh...

She looks at him.

...kay. Okay...

ALICE

Yep, so, as I said, you got it wrong. You got me wrong. You think fourteen lines of

Shakespeare could capture all of me?

DAVID

He's the greatest writer who ever –

ALICE

Yeah, yeah. He's good, but –

DAVID

Good? Good?!

ALICE

But you take a poem about superficial beauty, and tell me I'm beautiful to look at – thanks, by the way – but that just doesn't cut it. You really think that's enough to, what, win my heart?

DAVID

Um... No?

ALICE

Correct. Ten points. You say 'um' a lot.

DAVID

Yeah.

ALICE

It's annoying.

He stays silent, trying hard not to say 'um'.

Moving on. Quick-fire round. You can only answer 'yes' or 'no'. 'Um' means game over.

He goes to speak.

Don't speak. Question One. Answer with your gut. That's what my mother always said.

DAVID

My mother –

ALICE

Don't speak. Question One. Would you still have talked to me if I wasn't physically attractive to you?

DAVID

Yes.

ALICE

Do you believe there is something deeper that drew you to me?

DAVID

Yes.

ALICE

Would you go away if I asked you to stop talking to me?

Beat.

DAVID

No.

ALICE

Okay. Okay. Bonus round.

DAVID

This isn't a game to me.

ALICE

No?

DAVID

No.

ALICE

Then what is it?

DAVID

This might just be a matter of life and death.

ALICE

Are you dying?

DAVID

No. Well, eventually. But now right now.

ALICE

So what's the rush?

DAVID

I don't know what it is, but there's something about you that, just, *compels* me.

ALICE

Compels you to recite poetry?

DAVID

Yeah.

ALICE

Out of interest, if we can just pause for a sec here, did you already know that poem?

DAVID

Um, no, I learned it. For you.

She is touched. A little. More than she wants to admit.

ALICE

Um... Oh look, there I go with the 'ums'! So, when exactly did you learn it? If we've just met? And never seen each other before?

DAVID

I have seen you before.

ALICE

Wait, have you been stalking me?

HE

No, no! I haven't seen you here.

ALICE

Then where have you seen me? Have you been following me?

DAVID

No, listen. It's hard to explain.

ALICE

You're not good at words, I get it...

DAVID

Hey! Will you listen to me?

ALICE

It bites!

Beat.

Sorry...

DAVID

I have to say this. I have to try to find the words to be able to say this. I'm not stalking you. I'm not following you. I know of you but I don't know you. But I feel I know something of you. I feel like I've known you before. In a memory. Or a sort of dream.

ALICE

Oh, I see, I'm being stalked in a dream world!

DAVID

No, please. Please. Ever feel like there was someone you were supposed to know?

ALICE

What do you mean?

DAVID

I don't know. It's like there's been someone - someone important – missing from my life.

ALICE

So you're saying I'm this *missing person*? The missing puzzle piece?

DAVID

Maybe. Yes. I think so.

ALICE

'I think so' isn't going to be enough.

DAVID

Yes. Definitely. Absolutely. I'll say whatever you want to hear.

ALICE

It's not about what I -

DAVID

What you *need* then -

ALICE

It's not that either! It's... just... a lot to take in.

Beat.

DAVID

Yeah...

ALICE

I just need some time to think, take it all in.

DAVID

Okay.

ALICE

Okay.

DAVID

So...you're not saying no?

ALICE

No.

DAVID

Wait, does that mean -

ALICE

Means not yet.

DAVID

Okay.

ALICE

Okay.

Long pause.

DAVID

Should I go or -

ALICE

(A little too quickly.)

No!

DAVID

(Smiles a little.)

Okay. Should I stay?

ALICE

(Not wanting to give much away.)

Yeah. Yeah, if you want.

DAVID

Okay.

ALICE

I mean, I don't mind -

DAVID

Okay.

ALICE

Either way...

DAVID

Okay, okay. So, do you want to think about it now?

ALICE

What?

DAVID

My, um, proposal?

ALICE

Proposal?!

DAVID

I mean, my... suggestion?

ALICE

Suggestion?!

DAVID

Can you stop just repeating everything I say?
It's quite intimidating.

ALICE

Sorry, it's just, distracting, the words. All the words.

DAVID

Tell me about it.

Beat.

Tell me about it...

ALICE

Yeah, I heard you.

DAVID

No, I mean, tell me about it.

ALICE

About... words?

DAVID

Yeah. Tell me. I hate them, tell me why you hate them too.

ALICE

Hate?

DAVID

Well maybe not *hate*. That's the wrong...

ALICE

...word?

DAVID

(Laughs.)

Yeah. I don't *hate* words, I just hate having to speak them. Tell me what it is about words. Whatever it is...

ALICE

Well...

Long silence.

DAVID

You alright?

ALICE

Yeah, fine. I just realized I... don't know your name.

DAVID

Oh.

ALICE

Yeah. Sorry -

DAVID

No -

ALICE

About that...

DAVID

It's -

ALICE

No, it's -

DAVID

Okay.

ALICE

Not. Okay. I'm sorry.

DAVID

Don't -

ALICE

Do you know mine?

DAVID

(A little too quickly.)

Alice.

ALICE

Yes. That's me.

DAVID

I like it. Alice.

ALICE

Thank you. Um, what's yours?

DAVID

Francois.

ALICE

Really?!

DAVID

No.

ALICE

Then -

DAVID

Sorry.

ALICE

Why?

HE

I don't know. I just realized I could say anything. So I did.

ALICE

Right.

DAVID

Not funny, was it?

ALICE
Nope.

DAVID
Sorry.

ALICE
Uh-huh.

DAVID
Well... It's David.

ALICE
That's... fine. It's fine.

DAVID
Fine?

ALICE
It's -

DAVID
You don't like it?

ALICE
Good. It's good.

DAVID
Thanks.

ALICE
Nothing wrong with it.

DAVID
Okay...

ALICE
I don't know why you changed it.

DAVID
Me neither, actually.

ALICE
If you haven't worked it out by now, perhaps you should just be honest from now on.

DAVID

Got it, thanks.

ALICE

If I may just take stock for a moment, may I point out that this is all a bit ridiculous?

DAVID

In what way?

ALICE

We don't even know each other!

DAVID

That's why we're getting to know each other.

ALICE

It feels like we might have skipped a few steps, no?

DAVID

Look, I know you. I know who you are.

ALICE

No, you don't! We've never met. You don't know me and I don't know you and that's the way it is.

DAVID

I knew your name, didn't I? I've known of you for a long time.

ALICE

So you *were* stalking me?

DAVID

Everyone knows you! Everyone knows who you are. Around here, you... are famous. You are a legend. You are a myth. You are beyond celebrity. You are Angelina Jolie and Cleopatra and Beyoncé and Helen of Troy and Madonna and... all the other Madonnas. You are Lady, uh...

ALICE

Gaga?

DAVID

Gaga – and Marilyn Monroe -

ALICE

Yeah I get it -

DAVID
And Juliet -

ALICE
Got it -

DAVID
And... Medusa -

ALICE
Medusa?!

DAVID
And -

ALICE
What's your point?!

Beat.

DAVID
People know you. People like you. People adore you, in fact. You're popular. That's how I know you.

ALICE
That means nothing. That doesn't mean a thing.

DAVID
But I saw more of you in that dream. I saw who you might be, or who you could be.

ALICE
But ultimately, you *don't* know me. You might like to think you do, but you don't. And I don't see why you should.

Beat.

DAVID
You know what? I don't know why I'm bothering. I don't know why I'm making the effort.

ALICE
Wasn't that the point?

DAVID
What?

ALICE

That you don't know why. That something 'compels' you.

Silence. That hurt him.

DAVID

Well, it appears I've made a mistake.

He waits for her to speak. She doesn't.

I guess I'll be going then.

He makes to leave.

ALICE

You guess?

DAVID

Do you want me to stay?

ALICE

I guess...

DAVID

You guess?

She laughs nervously.

ALICE

Stay.

Beat.

DAVID

Okay.

ALICE

You will?

DAVID

I will.

ALICE

Good.

Silence.

DAVID

Are you going to tell me why I should stay?

ALICE

Does there have to be a reason?

DAVID

No. Well, actually, yes. You keep on making me explain my feelings. It's your turn.

ALICE

I think you should stay.

DAVID

Because?

ALICE

I don't know, you just should.

DAVID

What if I say that's not good enough?

ALICE

What if I say fuck off and don't push your luck?

DAVID

Noted.

ALICE

Look, I'm sorry, okay? It's just a lot to take in.

DAVID

Yeah. You said.

ALICE

Please, don't be mad.

DAVID

I'm not... mad.

ALICE

Please don't be disappointed then.

DAVID

Are you giving me a reason to be disappointed?

ALICE

I don't think so.

DAVID

Come on...

ALICE

I don't *want* to disappoint you.

DAVID

Then don't.

ALICE

What do you want me to say?

DAVID

Say yes.

ALICE

Yes to what?

DAVID

Yes to me. To us.

ALICE

Look. David. There is no 'us'.

DAVID

Then say yes to the maybe us. Say yes to the possibility of us.

ALICE

Is there a possibility of us?

DAVID

You tell me.

ALICE

David! I don't know you. You may know who I am, but you don't really know me. You don't know 'how' I am. How can you expect me to just -

DAVID

Take a chance? Take it. I can't say any more than that I have a feeling. And I've never felt anything so strongly. In my life. In my whole life I've never felt so much, so fully, so focused. I don't know how to express how I feel, but that doesn't mean that what I feel isn't eloquent. What I feel is loud and it is mine. It has a voice, even if I don't.

Beat.

Look, all I know is that I have to be with you. I don't fully understand why but I'm willing

to take a chance and for once in my life say 'fuck it' and fight for something that I believe in. And I've tried. I've made the effort even though it scared me to do it and even if I fail it's been worth it.

Beat.

You are worth it. I will fight for the possibility of us, Alice. Because I can believe in the possibility of us but I can't believe in the *absence* of us.

A long, long silence.

ALICE

Then stay. Stay and... we'll see. Stay and we'll find out if the possibility of us is worth fighting for.

DAVID

Okay.

ALICE

Okay.

END