

The Eighth

A Short (approximately 10 minutes)

By Gary Davis

© 2022

Gary A. Davis

1337 Forest Glen Dr.

Cuyahoga Falls, OH 44221

artshop@artist-shop.com

330-929-6535

1/29/23 version

10 pages without cover; spoken word count 1,385

SETTING

An empty throne room in the king's castle in England around 1609 or thereabouts. There is a throne, maybe some decorations or trophies on the wall.

SYNOPSIS

'tis a 'bawdy juvenile comedie' in which an English commoner hath been summoned to audience before the King, whether for good or ill he knows not. To say more would be giving it away.

CHARACTERS

BILL in his 50s, a third rate poet who dabbles in theater with varying degrees of success. He's no Kit Marlowe, but who is?

JAMES also in his 50s, two years younger than Bill, and the reigning monarch of both England and Scotland and is therefore both James I and James VI simultaneously. Speaks in a thick Scottish brogue.

ELIZABETH the former reigning monarch of England and therefore the 'late' Queen Elizabeth having died a few years earlier at the age of 80. Yes, that means she's a ghost. Speaks posh.

SCENE OPENS

(Lights come up on an empty castle throne room. Suddenly Bill stumbles into the room and falls to his knees having been tossed in roughly from offstage. He stands and nervously looks around, then looks front, crosses down to the audience and addresses them.)

BILL

Summoned **here** am I, for why I know not.
Could it be that I'm in the fired pot?
How could I know that cast was all women?
I fear 'tis in the Thames I'll be swimmin'!
That women were cast is ruinous indeed.
When brought to my attention, my pantaloons were

(sighs with embarrassment)

peed.

(King James enters the room. Seeing him Bill falls to his knees hiding his face. James can't help but notice this. As he walks past Bill, James turns and bends down to look. He speaks in a thick Scottish brogue.)

JAMES

Ach! A grovel! I do love me a good grovel and that is a fine grovel indeed. But enough.

(gives him a kick)

Up, boy. Can't conduct business with you on yer belly.

(James continues to his throne and sits with one leg draped casually over a chair arm. Bill gets up with plenty of bowing. He looks around expecting others, but sees no one.)

BILL

Oh, uh ...

JAMES

You were expecting perhaps my retinue? All the lords and ladies of the court? Mayhap you expected to perform for the madding crowd?

BILL

The thought had crossed my mind.

JAMES

Ach! You theater pansies are all alike, always craving the center of attention. It's all fleeting. Enjoy it now. After you're gone, no one will remember **your** name, Billy Shakespeare. But a king, that's different. Centuries hence lads at university will be reciting my name in the succession of kings. But my name will stand above all. You know why?

BILL

Because you're such a wise and beloved king?

JAMES

Ach! An apple polishing, boot-licking, lick spittle of a toady you are. I appreciate that in a man. You're right, of course, but I've taken steps to guarantee that position. I'm hard at work for the great Church of England creating an English translation of ... wait for it ... The Bible. The King James Bible will be in every home in all of English speaking Christendom, which is all the Christendom that matters. My name will be remembered for all time! Or until the coming foretold in Revelations, which I am assured is 415 years from this very day.

BILL

Zookers!

JAMES

You've had a good run, you have. But after yer gone yer plays will only be in schoolboy texts and they'll revile and spit upon yer memory for being forced to study you. But you still have today. Even I have to confess to enjoying a few of yer plays. What was that ripping comedy I saw recently? Ah yes, Macbeth!

(there is a crashing sound [could be offstage or something falling off the wall] which shocks Bill, but not James)

BILL

What was that?

JAMES

It needn't concern ya!

BILL

So you liked it? Some told me after you might take offense.

JAMES

Offense? Because it's in Scotland? Nonsense! We may admittedly be a country of curmudgeonly grouchers, but who doesn't enjoy a good jest now and then? Now that Lady Macbeth

(another crash, this time with a short scream; Bill jumps)

she's a saucy wench that one! I mean 'Screw yer courage to the sticky place!' Oooh, the tart! Ha! I'm surprised you weren't shut down for that line!

BILL

That's not ... uh ... of course you're right your majesty.

JAMES

By the by, Billy, you oughtn't be jumping at every little noise. I mean sure, the castle is haunted, but so is every other castle in the land. It's not like this is the tower of London. Now there's a spot to make you wet yer britches! But here it's just the old kings, who are at least a civilized bunch if not occasionally crosspatch fussers.

BILL

So you see ghosts?

JAMES

All the time.

BILL

And they don't frighten you?

JAMES

Ach, no. They do enjoy tormenting members of the household, especially those with very loud and high pitched screams like the serving wenches ... and for some reason my tailor. But I'm one of **them**. And they all know that when my time comes, I may be wandering the halls with 'em. So little sense in crossing someone you may be spending eternity with.

BILL

So you all get along.

JAMES

Ach yes, we even enjoy the occasional game of Parchisi. Well, not ALL of us. There is one monarch that doesn't **want** to get along.

(looks around and whispers)

And a right bitch she is our Lizzie.

ELIZABETH

(offstage with volume and echo added to her voice)

That's her majesty Queen Elizabeth to you, Jimmy!

(she enters, Bill falls to his knees with fright)

BILL

Oh, Crivens!

JAMES

Language, Mr. Shakespeare! There's a lady present!

BILL

Oh, sorry. Um, odds bodkins?

JAMES

Mmmm, 'twill serve. Anyway SHE is the reason for your presence today. The dear lady hath demanded audience with you.

BILL

(trembling)

With me?!

ELIZABETH

Yes **you**, thou milksop scoundrel! You promised to write me a play about daddy!

BILL

Daddy? Oh, King Henry VIII! 'tis true your majesty. I did indeed begin the task. But your passing left me so aggrieved that I could scarce put quill to parchment without tears flowing. I had to lay the project aside.

ELIZABETH

Codswallop and clatfart, you bletherskate! It didn't stop you writing other plays. Although I grudgingly admit your recent comedy a riotous laugh fest indeed! It buggers the mind that men of such position be too clodpated to know they're being pranked by three wily women! Just tell them what they want to hear. Works every time! The goggle eyed ninnyhammers!

JAMES

So much better than that whiny little Hamlet!

ELIZABETH

And also his shortest play, thank God! What was that title again?

JAMES

Macbeth.

(something falls off the wall)

BILL

(again unnerved)

Why does that keep happening?

JAMES

(stepping down from the throne, calling to one of the ghosts)

Now, now Ricky, Mr. Shakespeare doth not appreciate yer shenanigans.

ELIZABETH

That's King Richard III to you, Billy.

BILL

Oh, a pox on me! Will this day never end?

ELIZABETH

He's definitely not a fan.

JAMES

I should say not!

JAMES & ELIZABETH

(together in a loud mocking tone)

A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!

(they laugh)

ELIZABETH

Not quite what one wants for their famous last words! Ha!

(we hear the sound of an unseen Richard III stomping off, door slam)

JAMES

Oooh, isn't he in a bit of a snit!

ELIZABETH

That man is getting on my last nerve!

JAMES

Well, **you've** been getting on all our last nerves, Lizzy.

(as they start arguing Bill hides behind the throne with quill & parchment taking notes)

ELIZABETH

I was Queen of England! I'll not be treated like a lowly scullery maid. You just can't stand having a woman as an equal can you? No, no, I'll say it. You can't stand having a woman as ... a SUPERIOR! I was a better monarch than all of them and better than you'll ever be! I was so great they named the era after me.

JAMES

Oh, yes, the Lizzbian era!

ELIZABETH

(in a low guttural growl)

How dare you! And who are you to talk? Wink, wink. I refused to marry so no **man** would have sway o'er me. But I'll have you know my sweet stud muffin, Wally Raleigh, thoroughly pleased me ... on several occasions! I made you king, Jimmy, you ungrateful little pizzle!

JAMES

Well ... uh ... you killed my mummy!

ELIZABETH

I did you a favor!

JAMES

Admittedly so.

BILL

(to the audience)

Ye Gods! This is comedy gold!

JAMES

(looking around)

Wait, where's Shakespeare? He was here just now!

ELIZABETH

He's hiding behind the throne – with quill and parchment in hand? God's Wounds! He's taking down our words! The bachelor's son intends to put us on the stage!

BILL

(steps out from behind the throne)

No, no, 'tis but ... a grocery list. My dearest Anne hath tasked me with the purchase of some ... uh ...

(hurriedly scribbles the word on his parchment)

cream.

ELIZABETH

'tis known thy dearest Anne doth reside in Stratford – upon – Avon, thirty leagues hence – a two day's journey by coach at best. Any cream would certainly be spoilt upon arrival.

BILL

'twould seem that way ... uh ... but the constant rocking of the coach doth yield ... butter! Which is Anne's intent. She doth complain that churning afflicts her back.

(proud that he just now came up with that)

JAMES

Ooooh, the slippery eel hath a slippery tongue! Nonetheless, we shan't allow you to write our history, Billy Shakespeare.

ELIZABETH

Shan't we?

JAMES

Of course not! Thou hast seen how sharper than a serpent's tooth ... uh ...

(searching for the rest of the quote)

is Shakespeare's quill. Poor Richard III is just one example. Doth we recall the good works of his reign? No! What do we recall of Richard III?

JAMES & ELIZABETH

(together and laughing hysterically)

A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!

JAMES

(still laughing)

An excellent jape mind you,

(quick turn to anger)

but a cruel jape nonetheless! You'll not treat with us thusly.

ELIZABETH

No, he shan't! But alas ... poor Richard wasn't around to write his own story, was he? How could our dear Billy bollix **our** story when he has our ... good ... counsel?

JAMES

(pauses for thought, then erupts)

Huzzah, dear cuz! Gad, egad and gad again!

(crosses to the other side of Bill)

I see it! Through Shakespeare's quill we shall write our own history!

ELIZABETH

To be loved eternally!

ELIZABETH & JAMES

(together on both sides of Bill glaring at him)

Right, William?

BILL

(a sigh of complete and utter defeat)

Most assuredly.

ELIZABETH

Come James, let's plot our story.

JAMES

Stay put, Billy!

(they exit arm in arm)

BILL

(alone on the stage and in a spotlight, Bill steps to the audience and addresses them)

It appears I'm slave to my monarchs' whims.

For if I refuse, they'll hack off my limbs.

Tonight you shall in your beds be tucked.
While here with these monarchs I'm totally ...

I'm sorry, I'm at a loss for a rhyme here. I'm sure one will occur to me eventually. I may have to invent a word. But to continue -

And so my fair friends I bid you adieu.
And on your way out please stop by the loo.
You'll retire to your comfortable sofa.
While I deal here with my anorexia nervosa!
Brew up this new 'coffee!' 'tis another all nighter!

(looking offstage towards the monarchs, then with gritted teeth)

God knows, everyone thinks they're a writer!

(exuent)

The End

Makeup & costuming note – you might consider having Elizabeth dressed in white garments with white makeup on her face and hands ... 'cause she's a ghost.

Interesting historical footnote – “Henry VIII” finally debuted at the Globe Theatre in 1613. At the second or third performance the theater caught fire and was burned to the ground. Make of that what you will.