

Bard Beyond Belief

a 10 Minute Play

by Tony Pelham

An Elvis-impersonator and a Shakespeare buff can't agree in which themed-retirement community they ultimately wish to settle. In the midst of a comical sales presentation, life suddenly begins to imitate art, causing each partner to reevaluate their priorities

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Cast of Characters

Constance: 30s or older. Sales manager for "A Little Slice of Avon" Shakespeare retirement community. Wears Elizabethan garb.

Art: 60s or older. Retired Elvis impersonator, husband of Rose. Art sports Elvis-style hair and sideburns, and wears Elvis-style clothing.

Rose: 60s or older. Retired actress, wife of Art. Well dressed and sophisticated.

Place

Sales Office of a Retirement Community.

Bard Beyond Belief

Setting:

A small room with a table and two chairs. A small stand on off to the side displays a beverage can.

At Rise:

ART and ROSE are seated at a table. CONSTANCE enters the room. She's in full salesman mode, cheerful and optimistic.

CONSTANCE:

Good greetings. My lord. My lady. I be Constance, your host.

It would make my heart exceedingly merry to hear that you have been pleased with your stay here at "A Little Slice of Avon," our land's only Shakespeare-themed retirement community, where, as we are wont to say, "one never gets bored with the Bard."

ROSE:

Yes, Constance, we've had a wonderful time.

ART:

Wonderful is not the word for it. If there was a dagger around here, I might be tempted to use it... on myself.

CONSTANCE reads from his clipboard

CONSTANCE:

My writings inform me of your participation in our all-inclusive plan. Everything is thus covered, including, as we are wont to say, all room and Bard.

ART:

The only things that should be "barred" here are your "Bard" puns.

CONSTANCE chuckles politely.

CONSTANCE:

Currently, I see that you resideth in "The Scottish Place." Tis a most excellent venue.

ART:

Tell me, does everyone here speak Shakespeare-talk, all the time?

CONSTANCE:

It's one's own choosing, but most take great delight in speaking the language of the times. "Bards of a feather flock together," you know.

(MORE)

CONSTANCE: (CONT'D)

And, if you need to get up to speed quickly, we do offer complimentary classes in "Elizabethan English as a Second Language."

You will find that the variety of activities here is overwhelming. You know what we are wont to say...

ART joins in, speaking in bored monotone

ART AND CONSTANCE:

"One never gets bored with the Bard."

ART:

Say, by any chance, are you a carpenter?

CONSTANCE:

No...

ART:

Then tell me... why do *bards* suddenly appear, every time you are near?

(beat)

Hey, I'll grant you that Shakespeare was a great guy and all that, and I do admit that I occasionally like to watch the thezbians perform.

ART rhymes "thespians" with "lesbians"

ROSE:

How many times do I have to tell you? It's pronounced thespian, not thez-bian.

ART:

Hey, I got nothing against thezbians. They are what they are. You know what the man said - "To each his own."

ROSE:

What he said was, "To thine own self be true." And that was not just some *man*, that was *Shakespeare!*

ART:

Yeah, but like I was saying, we've decided to retire to Graceland Village. Our week here was just to prove to my wife how much better it will be for us to retire and live around Elvis and his people. No slam against Billy Shakes, but Elvis - he's the king.

ROSE:

Arthur, you're such an oaf! I haven't decided to retire to Graceland! If you're going to play that game, you may just be moving there by yourself. Arrivederci, Elvis!

And, by the way - William Shakespeare is the greatest playwright of all time!

(MORE)

ROSE: (CONT'D)

No one who has ever lived can even begin to compare to his legacy.

CONSTANCE:

So thou pondereth our fine sister community of Graceland Village? It be most infrequent that we entertain couples who are interested in both retirement communities.

ART:

I get it, Const. The artsy snobs all live here, and the blue collar folks, well, we go slummin' in Graceland.

You know, I grew up "in the ghet-to."

ROSE:

You grew up in the suburbs, Art. I love it here. After seeing this place, there's no power on Earth that would make me want to move to Graceland to live with those... Elviruses.

ART:

And I hate it here! How many times can you eat "Hamlet and eggs" for breakfast in "Ye Olde Elizabethan Diner?" Talk about cheesy!

And this place isn't even quiet! There's still construction work going on everywhere.

CONSTANCE:

I'm happy to inform you that construction on our authentic Globe Theater reproduction is nearly two-thirds complete. Surely thou knoweth that it taketh time to faithfully recreate the Shakespearean stage! As they say... Romeo wasn't built in a day!

ART:

Speaking of stages...

(As Elvis in Love me
Tender)

You know, someone said, "the world's a stage, and each must play a part"

ROSE:

That wasn't just "someone," that was Shakespeare! Elvis was trying to quote Shakespeare, and not doing a very good job of it, I might add.

ART:

Elvis didn't write that song, he just made it famous. And by the way, Elvis did know how to do Shakespeare.

CONSTANCE:

Pray tell? That is surely news to mine ears!

ROSE:
Please don't get him going!

ART stands up and goes into full-blown, over-the-top Elvis impersonation, mixing Shakespeare's verse with Elvis-like commentary.

ART:
"All the world's a... stage," don't you see?

ROSE:
Too late.

ART:
"And all the men... and women... they're simply..." like...
"actors." "They have their exits... and their entrances... And
one man... in this time... he plays many parts" - By the way,
did I tell you I had parts in thirty-three movies?

ROSE:
Enough, Arthur! We surrender. We bow before the king.

ART, as Elvis.

ART:
Thank you. Thank you very much.

CONSTANCE:
Thou hast rendered me speechless.

ROSE:
You're not the first.

ART:
You know, if you'd like, I can also sing you some Macbeth, as
Elvis.

CONSTANCE:
Oh, hell no!

I mean, prithee, let me doth ponder thy request for a goodst
while.

ART holds his stomach.

ART:
Say, Constance, all of a sudden, I'm not feeling so hot. My
stomach, - it's all shook up. I may need to go use the
bathroom back at our hotel.

CONSTANCE points to the bathroom offstage.

CONSTANCE:

No need for thou to leave the building. Thy privy be right there, across the hall. Availeth thyself freely.

ART heads offstage.

ROSE:

Art's got his pelvis all in a twist over this place. Anyway, Constance, I'm just not sure whether to lease a place first for a year, or to purchase one now while the interest rates are low.

CONSTANCE:

Ah, to buy or not to buy, that is the question. I wondereth, by any chance, if thou hast partaken of some of our other amenities here in "A Little Slice of Avon?" Hast thou availed thyself of our wondrous massage parlor - "Aye, there's the rub?"

And as a pet owner, thou surely art awareth of our remarkable dog-walking service - "Out damned Spot."

Art groans from bathroom

ROSE:

Art, are you all right? Art? Art?

A loud thud is heard. Rose rushes offstage, and a moment later screams. She comes back in hurriedly.

He's dead. Art's died sitting on the toilet! Just like Elvis!

ROSE goes back offstage.

CONSTANCE:

Oh dear! The wheel has come full circle. Life imitates Art! Or be that death?

CONSTANCE takes off his hat, lowers his head for a moment, and speaks

From the little I didst know of him, it seems likely Art wouldst have been pleased that he bade sweet farewell to this life in a fashion so similar to that of his beloved mentor.

CONSTANCE puts his hat on again and speaks loudly to ROSE, who is still offstage

Pray pardon me, my lady, but couldst thou tell me - dost this recent tragic turn of events perchance mean thou wouldst not be buying today?

ROSE re-enters

ROSE:

It's all my fault. I killed him! He just wanted to live in Graceland Village with all the other Elvii. But I wouldn't let him. The stress of it all, the pressure I put on him to live here, it killed him.

CONSTANCE:

Thou may knowest it not, but we do have a wonderous singles community here at "A Little Slice of Avon."

ROSE:

(to ART)

Art, oh Art. What I wouldn't give now to be able to be with you in Graceland. I would have had lunch with you every day at the "Ain't Nothing but a Hot Dog" diner.

Oh Art, it would be enough for me just to be with you again and to be your love. O think'st thou we shall ever meet again? Only when I, too, am shuffled off this mortal coil.

ROSE looks around the room and spots a can of "Double Hemlock" on a display stand. She rushes over and inspects the can.

The Double Hemlock!

ROSE holds the can up, dramatically.
Here's to my love!

CONSTANCE:

No, please don't!

ROSE chugs from the can, then looks at CONSTANCE

ROSE:

Thy drugs are quick.

ROSE collapses dramatically to the ground

CONSTANCE:

Good heavens. Methinks I be now in a troubled place.

CONSTANCE looks to the heavens
Oh Bard, help me. What shall I do?

A loud groan is heard from the bathroom. CONSTANCE rushes over and looks offstage.

Great Caesar's ghost! You're alive...

Toilet flushing is heard.
...although thou dost look a bit flushed.

Methought thou had "left the stage."

ART comes out of the bathroom but does not yet see ROSE.

ART:

That was a doozy. I guess I just passed out. It must have been that deep-fried peanut butter, banana, and bacon sandwich I had for lunch. What a gut bomb. It just went off in there.

Wait - I remember something - I dreamt my lady came and found me dead!

(beat)

Then I saw him, Constance. I saw him.

CONSTANCE:

Him who?

ART:

The king, in my dream. He spoke to me.

CONSTANCE:

Dare I ask? What sayest he?

ART:

He spoke to me about Rose! He said:

ART quietly imitates Elvis, half talking, half singing

Love her tender

Love her dear

Tell her she is yours

Tell her you'll be hers through all the years

Till the end of time

(as himself)

If I do that, he said, happiness will follow me...

(as Elvis)

Everywhere you go.

(as himself)

I think Elvis was telling me that I need to be here with Rose, that if I make her happy, I'll find happiness, just by being with her.

CONSTANCE:

Thy muse doth speak true words of wisdom.

ART:

By the way, where is Rose?

ART looks around and sees ROSE on the floor

CONSTANCE:

She believeth thou wast dead. She thought thou had died like Elvis, and twas her fault.

(MORE)

CONSTANCE: (CONT'D)
She didst partake of the double hemlock!

ART kneels down next to ROSE and takes her hand

ART:
The double hemlock! Rose, oh Rose! This is all my fault. I killed you. You just wanted to live here with the other thezbians, and I fought you.

ART takes her limp hand

Rose, take my hand. Take my whole life, too. Rose, come back to me. Anyplace will be paradise when I'm with you.

ART picks up the can of double hemlock

What is this stuff? Is it poison?

CONSTANCE goes out of character as she enthusiastically promotes the product.

CONSTANCE:
Heavens, no! Double Hemlock is our own brand of premium malt beverage. An Elizabethan "Four Loko," you might say.

CONSTANCE goes back into character.

Tis true, it be strong drink, but it shalt render no permanent harm to the fair lady.

ART and CONSTANCE look down at Rose.

ART:
She looks like an angel.

ROSE awakens slowly, but does not open her eyes.

ROSE:
Wouldst this be heaven?

CONSTANCE:
She talks like an angel.

Still with eyes closed.

ROSE:
"Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices That, if I then had waked after long sleep, Will make me sleep again."

ART:
She's delirious!

CONSTANCE:

Nay sir. The lady be not delirious. Merely... Shakesperious!

ROSE:

Dost I hear voices? Do they bidst me welcome, or adieu? If it were truly my beloved Art, then this wouldst surely be heaven.

Art? Wherefore-art thou... Art?

CONSTANCE whispers to ART

CONSTANCE:

We shall have to play along, so as not to shock her. Speak thee to her now in the Bard's tongue.

ART clears throat and speaks broken Elizabethan English, haltingly, at first

ART:

It be-eth me, you hear, dear Rose, because I do-eth remain alive, as do-eth you... do-eth too.

Neither of us is dead. Twas merely a sleep, a chance for each of us, it looketh like, to dream.

Rose opens her eyes and sees Art. She reaches out to him.

ROSE:

Truly, thou art!

ART:

Truly, I Art.

ROSE and ART embrace

CONSTANCE:

Methinks I'm going to cry.

ROSE:

In my slumber, I dreamt of a man. The man wouldst not call my name. He kept calling me Milady... Milady.

ART:

Oh my Rose, by any other name, you are just as sweet.

ROSE:

And the man said to me:

"Milady, yours is not the time to exit the stage, for thou hast many more days to giveth and receiveth thy love."

ART:

Oh, if for love, thy heart doth yearneth, I'll be thy hunk of love, that burneth.

ROSE:

Oh, Art, I see it's all true now, what the man in my dream proclaimed - just before I awakened:

"Thy bounty is as boundless as the sea, Thy love as deep; the more thou giveth, The more thou shall have, for both are infinite."

CONSTANCE:

That was no *man*...

ART, ROSE, AND CONSTANCE:

That was Shakespeare!

CURTAIN