

New Place and Time
by Richard Macaulay

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(organised by NDFA)

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and Time**

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a play in one act
by Richard Macaulay

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CHARACTERS

BARTHOLOMEW GREEN an aged actor
THOMAS KEMP another
ANN BARKER a journalist
NICK COOPER a photographer
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
ANNE SHAKESPEARE his wife

THE SCENE IS A GARDEN TERRACE, WITH THE FACADE OF AN OLD MANOR HOUSE BEHIND IT. SOME CLIPPED HEDGEROW, SPRING FLOWERS IN TUBS, AND RIGHT OF CENTRE AN ANCIENT WOODEN TABLE AND TWO CHAIRS. THE DOOR IN THE HOUSE FRONT STANDS AJAR.

IN THE MORE CENTRAL CHAIR SLOUCHES A FAT OLD MAN, BALDISH, WITH A RIM OF WHITE BEARD, DRESSED IN DISREPUTABLE DUN COLOUR ELIZABETHAN COSTUME AND BOOTS, ASLEEP NOW AND SNORING. THERE IS A LARGE PEWTER JUG AND TANKARD ON THE TABLE BESIDE HIM.

AWAY LEFT STANDS A THINNER, TIDIER VERSION OF THE SAME, SOBERLY DRESSED IN DARK CLOAK AND GOWN, LEANING ON A LONG STAFF AND SURVEYING HIS COMPANION WITH DISTASTE.

ALL THIS IN THE GOLDEN LIGHT OF A LATE AFTERNOON SUN THAT FADES TOWARDS EVENING AS THE ACTION PROCEEDS.

THE FAT SLOUCH IS BARTHOLOMEW GREEN, THE STAFF BEARER THOMAS KEMP.

THERE IS A PAUSE FOR THE SNORES TO IMPOSE THEMSELVES. THEN:

KEMP: Can you not at least sleep in a decent silence?

GREEN: (AN INDECIPHERABLE GRUNT THAT MIGHT BE...) Buggrrorff!

KEMP: Only you're frightening my thrush in the mulberry tree.

GREEN: Buggrrushes!

KEMP: And I find birdsong more soothing to the sprit than the gross thunder of your company.

GREEN: (STIRRING) Stand further off then, priss mouth, for I must tell you I have a great fart brewing.

KEMP: God save us! (BUT DOES SO, NEVERTHELESS)

- GREEN: (OPENING HIS EYES AND LIFTING HIMSELF ONTO ONE NETHER CHEEK) As save us he may, sir, seeing we have such a quantity of black sins between us would make a rapture in heaven for the redemption. (THEN A RANT TO DROWN ALL LESSER WINDSTORMS) Blow winds and crack your cheeks rage blow you cataracts and hurricanoes! (AND RELAX) Relief... Deo Gratias! (SQUINTS AT THE SUN) How much longer do we have to wait here?
- KEMP: Till the gates close.
- GREEN: (PEERING DISPIRITEDLY INTO HIS TANKARD, THEN THE JUG) If we don't die of thirst before that blessed hour.
- KEMP: The queen's gone.
- GREEN: I heard the obsequious babble of her going.
- KEMP: But her subjects linger, and must be entertained.
- GREEN: (ANOTHER RANT) Then let them be entertained by others beyond the gates! Are there no trinket sellers, no fire eaters, no tuppenny harlots left in all Christendom? No jugglers, no dancing bears, no cutpurse girls with bright promise in their eyes?
- KEMP: (UNMOVED) None. And even if there were...
- GREEN: (THE BOMBAST DYING) I know, I know. Not for us. Nothing for us now but the poor limp flesh of memory.
- KEMP: So we survive on such crumbs of employment as these.
- GREEN: But oh, to be fifty years young again!
- KEMP: And travel the same penitential road a second time? Thank you, but no.
- GREEN: Need it have been the same road?
- KEMP: Same ingredients make the same stew, no matter how you stir the pot.
- GREEN: (ANOTHER RANT) Then blast you, Thomas Kemp! And blast your stew of a prating arithmegorical mind! Where's the hope of salvation and mercy? Are there no pardons? Dost think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale? (AGAIN THE BOMBAST DIES) And yet... Gods mercy... I dare say you're right. One thin slice of talent we had, and never a golden dollop of fortune to butter it. End up the same sad relics we are now. (HIS MOBILE

PHONE STARTS RINGING. HE SEARCHES FOR IT, GRUMBLING, IN THE RECESSES OF HIS COSTUME, FINALLY PULLS IT OUT OF HIS BOOT) Bartholomew Green here. Who calls to rattle his bones? (PAUSE. CHANGE TO A FLATTER TONE) Oh. It's you.

KEMP: (MOVING CLOSER) Who?

GREEN: (PHONE TO HIS CHEST) The matrimonial hag. (BACK TO HIS EAR. LISTENS) No, I can't write it down, I'm in costume! (PAUSE) Fish fingers, spinach, tomato ketchup, new potatoes' (TO HIS CHEST AGAIN) Dear God, I should have throttled her when I had the chance!

KEMP: That chance being?

GREEN: Before she grew a thicker neck than mine! (EAR AGAIN) What? No I can't! Not till the gates close... Well then we'll just have to starve as well as die of thirst! What...? Yes! Who do you think? Kemp! Tom Kemp! Old Detestable.

KEMP: A mutual regard...

GREEN: No he can't! We're both on duty till the gates close and the mob is sent home to Hell and high tea! (CHEST) What can I say to get rid of her?

KEMP: (POINTS OUT FRONT) Tell her we have a small parcel of mob approaching us.

GREEN: (EAR) Hullo? Did you hear that? I have to go. Guide books and dripping cornettos. Talk later. (THRUSTS THE PHONE BACK IN HIS BOOT AND HAULS HIMSELF TO HIS FEET) Why did I ever marry?

KEMP: She was pregnant as I recall. And her father had given us a contract for the season. Comedy of Errors was it? Or Much Ado About Nothing? Something apt. (MOVING UP TO THE DOOR) Your turn. I did the last one.

GREEN: Swine!

KEMP: So cast your pearls before them. (AND IS GONE)

(GREEN MOVES DOWN RIGHT, BRACING HIMSELF TO WELCOME THE VISITORS. AS HE SPEAKS, SO HE IS MOVED SLOWLY ACROSS THE STAGE, DRAWN INEXORABLY BY THEIR REFUSAL TO STOP AND LISTEN TO HIM)

About the playwright

Richard Macaulay (1929-2005) enjoyed a life-long passion for, and knowledge of, both history and drama, which is evident in his plays. Based in Somerset, he took great pleasure in sharing this enthusiasm with many talented friends in various theatre companies and in numerous productions. He was delighted by the national recognition his award winning plays received.

New Place and Time

The play supposes a fold or overlap in time between a spring afternoon in our present world and Will Shakespeare's last days in his garden at New Place. Bartholomew Green and Thomas Kemp are two aged actors, earning a pittance as fringe performers in a Shakespeare birthday festival. They are joined by Ann Barker, a journalist with ambitions, and her photographer fiancé Nick Cooper. Their present day concerns are interwoven with those of a past age, when Ben Jonson and Michael Drayton arrive from London to visit an ailing Shakespeare, cared for by Anne his wife. Thus we have a playwright at the end of his journey, his work done but questions still unanswered, and a young woman at the beginning of hers, with her own doubts, looking for guidance. Green and Kemp find themselves acting as links between the two worlds, and as voices of resolution in both. Their afternoon is a gentle comedy of frustrations, puzzlement within time's overlap, and finally a decision at their own journey's end.

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