The Shakespearean Actor

John Grey

Johnston, RI
THE SHAKESPEAREAN ACTOR

He’s on stage, every night, playing grief, be it Hamlet’s for his father, Macbeth at his vainglory or Othello’s hard look at his own reasonless rage.

But he puts so much into Shakespearean misery that his personal anguish is treated almost casually backstage, a sip from a bottle as the makeup goes on, two as it comes off. A fractured marriage can’t compete with the treacherous minxes of the printed page. And what’s a friend’s broken promise to duplicitous whispers in the ear, a murderous stepfather. His family aggravate him but their ghosts don’t appear on parapets. And the news is never encouraging.

But it sure beats the cackling bile of witches. He even considered suicide once. Trouble was, he could never come up with a soliloquy to rival, “To be or not to be.”

One day, when he’s much older, and his wife has left him, and children seldom call, he’ll be ready to play Lear. Seven nights a week, a breakdown for the ages. He’ll have no strength left for his own tragedy.

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