*(Ben Jonson trundles onstage. Man is he drunk. Also. Has he been crying?)*

BEN. I cannot take it. I cannot and will not. I cannot do it, men.

ALICE. What's wrong with you, Ben? Are you well?

BEN. Do grown men weep in public if they be well?

ALICE. I'll get you a drink.

BEN. I have been drunk for three days straight

ALICE. No drink then.

BEN. -and without drink I will not last a fourth.

ALICE. Coming right up. Pity's sake, tell us what ills you, Ben.

BEN. William. Bloody. Shakespeare.

*(He starts to cry again, can't help it, trying to stop.)*

God help me, here I go again. I started your lines-some tepid praise, some "good man, good words hey nonny nonny: Then I said, let me read a play or two to remind myself. I set out at midnight, drag Crane from bed, "show me Shakespeare”

*(Cries again, can't help it.)*

And I read everything.

*(Hates that he liked it so much.)*

That man. Hamlet. Lear, Romeo and What's-Her-Name.

ALICE. You read them all. And at once?

BEN. I’d only ever heard the plays, seen them, never. . .been alone

with them. And there I was. And there they were, these pinnacles of

story, these peaks of heart, and I hate heart! God help me. I started drinking and haven't stopped since.

ALICE. Oh dear. But I need to ask if you penned the lines yet? We just need those few lines to say you knew him.

BEN. Of course I knew him. I was with him the day before he ... he

died. I was there and I could've ...

ALICE. No one can help the passing of time nor friends. That's why this is so urgent.

BEN. YesYesYes “he lives on in art'' I wrote your damn lines. Take

them and let me drink and bemoan times cruel reaping in the corner.

(To Alice.) Unless of course you’d like to…?

ALICE. Not even a little.

*(She reads)* "To draw no envy (Shakespeare) on thy name.

Am I thus ample to thy Booke, and Fame;

While I confesse thy writings to be such,

As neither Man, nor Muse, can praise too much;"

ALICE. Oh that's really-

BEN. It's good. I know. Keep on.

ALICE.

“I, therefore will begin. Soul of the Age!

The applause! Delight! The wonder of our stage!”

BEN. No no no, you’re doing it wrong.

“ Shine forth, thou Starre of Poets, and with rage,

Or influence, chide, or cheere the drooping Stage;

Which, since thy flight fro’ hence, hath mourn’d like night,

And despaires day, but for thy Volume’s light.”

*(They are thunderstruck.)*

You’re welcome. I’m going to be sick.

*(Ben exits.)*

ALICE. Did you hear that? Brilliant

BEN. (*From* *offstage*.) Bloody brilliant.