



PUPPET
PLAYS

Edited by
PAUL McPHARLIN
P. M. P.

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GRACE DORCAS RUTHENBURG

I The Wolf at the Door

1 Scene, 2 Characters

Plays 10 Minutes

Suited to Puppets, Marionettes or Shadows



THE WOLF AND THE POET

THE WOLF AT THE DOOR*

A PLAY

by GRACE DORCAS RUTHENBURG

Characters:

A POET

A WOLF

Scene: A Poet's garret. The cross section of a wall is visible. On the left stairs leading up to a landing in front of a door, and the landing. On the right an attic chamber bleakly furnished with a table, on which is a stump of candle, and a large wood-chest which serves also as a chair. A cupboard in the rear corner.

As the curtain rises the POET is seated on the wood-chest, which is drawn up to the table. He is scribbling rapidly.

POET

(*pausing*) Let me see! What rhymes with eye? High—tie—sky—That will do!

Oh, moon thou mistress of the midnight sky

That lights the magic darkness with thine eye . . .

* Note. This play may not be produced by any amateur or professional without written permission from the author, 2215 Bonnycastle Ave., Louisville, Ky.

That's fine! That will do excellently! (He scribbles furiously. The WOLF mounts the stairs. Furry ears are visible, than a powerful nose, chops and whiskers.)

Oh, moon, thou mistress of the midnight sky

That lights the darkness sweetly with thine eye. . .

(The WOLF arrives at the door, whines and scratches. The POET listens.) How often have I asked my landlady not to disturb my efforts . . . (Getting up.) . . . Ah, well, it is chilly here. A stick of wood, since I have been interrupted. (He opens the chest.) . . . What? Not a stick of wood left? (Sitting down again.) . . . Ah, well, rhymes come better when the head is cool. (He writes.) Come — dumb — slum — No, no! That won't do at all! Let me think—(He thinks; begins to write.) . . .

O Mistress of the midnight darkness, come!

Snuff out day's candle with relentless thumb—

(The WOLF yelps.) . . . What was that? There is someone at the door. A collector

4 most likely. (*Loudly.*) . . . Go away! I will have some money tomorrow after I have sold this poem! (*He returns to his pen.*) . . . Now let me think . . . Numb—bun—pomme— Not at all! Not at all! How unpoetic! . . . (*The WOLF howls.*) . . . Mercy! What a persistent collector! . . . (*Getting up and going to the door.*) Tomorrow, I said! Come back tomorrow! (*He goes toward the cupboard.*) . . . Well, well, as long as we're interrupted, I might as well have a drop of wine to resuscitate my inspiration. (*He opens the cupboard.*) . . . What? Not a drop left? . . . A crust then . . . (*He hunts.*) . . . Not a crust of bread! Not one little crust! This is serious . . . (*Going back to the table.*) . . . Well, well! Rhymes come better on an empty stomach! (*He sits down. The WOLF howls.*) . . . Go away, I implore you! I am deep in the throes of creation! (*The WOLF howls.*) . . . Pig of a collector! (*Loudly.*) Go away! (*The WOLF howls.*) Wile—isle—mile—

O Mistress of the sunset's greenish Nile,
Lighting the shoreline with a starlit
smile . . .

(*The WOLF howls.*) Ten thousand curses! The collector will wake up the neighbourhood! I'll have to pretend I'm not here! (*The WOLF howls.*) Here, you! (*He goes to the door.*) . . . My master is not at home, do you hear? Not at home! . . . (*The WOLF whimpers.*) . . . No! He has gone to a banquet with friends! (*The WOLF yelps doubtfully.*) This is his valet speaking! . . . Yes! . . . (*The WOLF whines questioningly.*) . . . And I am very busy at this very moment preparing him a light lunch when he returns . . . (*The WOLF whoops slightly with expectation.*) . . . Only a truffle . . . and a morsel of cress . . . (*The WOLF snuffs at the keyhole.*) . . . What shall I do? He is snuffing at the keyhole! (*Putting his hand over the keyhole quickly.*) . . . You can't smell it because the lid is on, but there is going to be plenty of coffee also . . . Nice thick coffee with lots of sugar . . . (*The WOLF howls enviously.*) . . . If you go away quietly my master will talk to you when he gets back . . . (*The WOLF howls irascibly.*) . . . Be still, do you hear? You will bring the landlady up the stairs! Be still

or my master won't give you a cent when he returns! Not a cent, do you understand? (*The WOLF howls tempestuously. The POET outvoices him.*) . . . Not a sou! Not a kopek! Not a lire! Not a farthing! (*The WOLF becomes quiet. The POET tiptoes back to the table.*) . . . That fixed him . . . (*He sits down again and writes. The WOLF sits on his haunches.*) . . .

O Mistress of the solitary dark

That hears the rabbit whine, the gopher bark—

(*The WOLF whines softly.*) Ten thousand plagues seize that insolent collector! I shall have to throw him down the stairs! (*He goes over and opens the door bravely, sees the WOLF and slams it shut.*) . . . A wolf . . . A wolf! . . . Gracious! Gracious! What shall I do? He will eat me surely. (*He runs to the table, nervously biting his nails.*) . . . I could throw the inkpot at him! . . . No, I need it. The pen! I could poke the pen through the keyhole and frighten him away . . . No . . . No, it might break and what could I use to write my poor verses? (*He goes back and speaks through the keyhole.*)

. . . There, wolf, wolf! Go away, and to-morrow I'll give you a bone. (*The WOLF stops howling and lies down. The POET, after listening a second, creeps back to the table.*) . . . He's gone! What a simple trick! A stupid beast, surely! . . . Weak—sleek—bleak— (*The WOLF yelps.*) . . . What? Again? . . . (*He goes to the door.*) . . . There, there, wolfie! Good wolfie! Lie down and after a while I'll take you for a walk! (*The WOLF lies down again.*) . . . Perhaps now I can get a little peace . . . Peek—creak—sneak—No, no! (*The WOLF raises his head.*) . . . Morn, born, shorn— (*The POET writes.*)

O Moon that shines on oceans most forlorn—

(*The WOLF howls. He jumps up.*) One million red-tailed devils! I must hang him from the banister! (*He throws open the door.*) . . . Scalawag! Thief! Miscreant! (*He starts to seize the WOLF, who bounds into the room.*) . . . Help! Help! (*The WOLF approaches him threateningly.*) Hey, keep off! Keep away! What do you want? Help! (*The WOLF leaps. The POET jumps onto the table.*) . . . Don't eat me! I haven't

6 finished my poem! Here, eat the candle!
(*Offering it to him.*) Nice candle! Nice
nourishing candle! There's more fat on it
than there is on me! (*The WOLF circles
round and round, the POET facing him dizzily.*)
. . . What shall I do? He won't have the
candle . . . I have it! . . . Listen, wolfie!
Keep still and listen! (*The WOLF keeps
still.*) . . . You want to eat me for dinner,
don't you? (*The WOLF wags its tail vio-
lently.*) Of course you do! But you don't
want me raw, do you? (*The WOLF shakes
his head dubiously.*) . . . There! There! Of
course not! You'd like a nice delicious pie
made out of me, wouldn't you? (*The WOLF
nods vigorously.*) . . . Fine! Splendid! Mag-
nificent! (*Confidentially.*) Then you must
build a fire! (*The WOLF grunts reluctantly.*)
. . . Now there's the wood-box! (*The
WOLF backs off.*) You don't want to build
a fire? Think of me with nice gravy! (*The
WOLF starts with gingerly steps toward the
wood-chest and stops, growling.*) . . . And
crisp pie crust! (*The WOLF moves faster and
stops again.*) . . . And dumplings! Only
consider what a savoury dish I shall make
with dumplings! (*The WOLF wags his tail.*)

. . . I can scarcely contain myself for
thinking of the exquisite meal I shall
make! (*The WOLF grunts, bounds forward
and stops in front of the chest.*) . . . Open it!
That's it! (*He balks.*) . . . And potatoes!
Just think! (*He hoists the lid slowly.*) . . .
Finished off with an onion! . . . (*The WOLF
puts his head in, sniffing waterily.*) . . . And
a trifle of suet pudding! (*The WOLF gets his
head and shoulders into the chest.*) . . . And a
sweet! (*The POET jumps down behind him
and shoves him into the chest, slamming down
the lid. He sits on it and begins to write. The
WOLF howls.*) . . . Night—white—spite—
That won't do! Won't do at all! (*The
WOLF continues to howl. The POET pays no
attention.*) . . . Bright—night—tight—
(*The howls weaken.*)

All hail to thee, thou mistress of the
night,
Who with thine orbs so bright
Candles earth's shore—
(*The howls decrease slowly.*)
Mistress of murky air,
Drowned in thy golden hair—
(*The howls fade. He writes madly as the cur-
tain falls.*)

New titles are added to the PUPPET PLAYS from time to time. The current list will be sent if requested from PAUL McPHARLIN, *Editor*, 155 Wimbleton Drive, Birmingham, Michigan.

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