

THE BATTLE OF BROWN AND WHITMORE

By David J LeMaster

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(A bare stage. Two actors (or actresses), BROWN and WHITMORE, approach each other.)

WHITMORE: We meet at last, Brown.

BROWN: Yes, Whitmore. I've heard all about you.

WHITMORE: And I you.

BROWN: Your reputation is impeccable.

WHITMORE: They say you first played Hamlet at twelve.

BROWN: Eleven.

WHITMORE: You've been in over five hundred *Hamlets* worldwide.

BROWN: Indeed.

WHITMORE: They raved in the *Times*.

BROWN: And you, Whitmore, you played Willy Loman at eight.

WHITMORE: I did.

BROWN: The complete works of Aristophanes at twelve.

WHITMORE: Yes.

BROWN: And Leer at thirteen.

WHITMORE: The *Post* called it the greatest Leer ever played by a thirteen year old. They said I found Leer's overriding humor.

BROWN: So you know why I'm here.

WHITMORE: I think so, yes, because they say you're the best in the business.

BROWN: I am.

WHITMORE: But you've never faced me.

BROWN: So it comes to that, does it?

WHITMORE: It's inevitable.

BROWN: There can only be one greatest.

WHITMORE: So this shall settle that.

BROWN: It shall.

WHITMORE: I'll prove my range. I can act every emotion.

BROWN: As can I.

WHITMORE: Oh? Then prove it. **(Pause. They look at each other, considering. Then, a challenge...)** Happiness! **(Both are happy.)** Sadness! **(Both are sad.)** Fear! **(Both are fearful.)** Excitement! **(Both are excited.)** Anger! **(Both are angry.)** Ah! Frustration. **(WHITMORE shows frustration. BROWN does not.)** What? You can act frustration no better than that?

BROWN: No. I was making a statement. I'm really frustrated.

WHITMORE: Oh.

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BROWN: It will take more than a simple contest to determine who is greatest. As I feared, it will actually require a fight.

WHITMORE: Then I'm your man.

BROWN: So it must be that. Very well.

WHITMORE: Your choice of weapons?

BROWN: Tragedy, at five paces.

WHITMORE: Tragedy? Are you sure?

BROWN: I've found your weakness?

WHITMORE: I have no weakness.

BROWN: No? The quiver in your voice suggests you wished for comedy.

WHITMORE: Never. Comedy is your strength!

BROWN: Ah! And I chose tragedy, which confuses you, eh, Whitmore? Doubting the wisdom of your spies?

WHITMORE: No. Tragedy it is.

BROWN: Very well.

WHITMORE: Five paces?

BROWN: Five. Count?

WHITMORE: Of course. **(They stand back to back.)** After five, turn and perform.

BROWN: Right.

WHITMORE: Ready?

BROWN: Ready.

WHITMORE: **(They pace.)** One. Two. Three. Four. Five -

(They whirl and speak at once.)

WHITMORE: O, that this too, too sallied flesh would melt, thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!

BROWN: **(at same time)** If we shadows have offended, think but this and all is mended -

WHITMORE: **(reacting to BROWN)** Aaarrrrg!! You devil! You swore tragedy but you've chosen comedy!

BROWN: My specialty! You're wounded, I see.

WHITMORE: A scratch. A scratch!

BROWN: But 'tis enough. Call on you tomorrow and I shall find you a "grave" man!

WHITMORE: Aaaarg! Not the old play/genre switch!

BROWN: Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow!

WHITMORE: You're hitting me with Leer!

BROWN: You cataracts and hurricanes, spout -

WHITMORE: Please!

BROWN: Had enough?

WHITMORE: No! You're butchering it.

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BROWN: You devil! You cataracts and hurricanes, spout -

(WHITMORE takes up the soliloquy. They're both doing Leer.)

BOTH: Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks! You sulphurous and thought-executing fires! Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts, singe my white head!!!!

(They both collapse, exhausted. Pause.)

WHITMORE: You're a worthy opponent.

BROWN: Indeed.

WHITMORE: I fear but one of us shall walk away still living.

BROWN: Your challenge is well met.

WHITMORE: Then how shall we settle this?

BROWN: By scenes.

WHITMORE: Villain!

BROWN: You are afraid?

WHITMORE: Never.

BROWN: You jest. Your face turns yellow.

WHITMORE: It isn't.

BROWN: Like your belly.

WHITMORE: A yellow belly?

BROWN: Yellow bellied coward.

WHITMORE: You've insulted me for the last time, you dog. You filth.
You mangy cur.

BROWN: Your witticisms are no match for my razor-sharp wit.

WHITMORE: No, they're not your equal.

BROWN: Certainly not.

WHITMORE: For you are but a "half" wit.

BROWN: **(furious)** What? You'll pay for that!

WHITMORE: You mean -

BROWN: The challenge. **(takes out a glove and swipes WHITMORE across the face)** To the death. As you wish!

WHITMORE: The weapon?

BROWN: Scenes.

WHITMORE: Scenes it is!

BROWN: Who goes first?

WHITMORE: A gentleman would yield.

BROWN: I am no gentleman.

WHITMORE: My point.

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