



Scripts.com

# Shakespeare in Love

By Marc Norman

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. DAY.

SKY. Over which a title "LONDON--SUMMER 1593" appears.  
Title card: In the glory days of the Elizabethan theatre  
two playhouses were fighting it out for writers and  
audiences. North of the city was the Curtain Theatre,  
home to England's most famous actor, Richard Burbage.  
Across the river was the competition, built by Philip  
Henslowe, a business with a cash flow problem...  
...The Rose...

Gradually a building is revealed, The Rose Theatre, three-  
tiered, open to the elements and empty. On the floor,  
roughly printed, a poster--torn, soiled, out of date. It

**says:**

SEPT. 7TH & 8TH AT NOON

MR. EDWARD ALLEYN AND THE ADMIRAL'S MEN AT THE ROSE  
THEATRE, BANKSIDE

THE LAMENTABLE TRAGEDIE OF THE MONEYLENDER REVENG'D  
OVER THIS the screams of a man under torture. The screams  
are coming from the curtained stage.

VOICE (O.S.)

You Mongrel! Why do you howl When it  
is I who am bitten?

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. STAGE. DAY.

The theatre owner, PHILLIP HENSLOWE, is the man  
screaming. HENSLOWE'S boots are on fire. He is pinioned  
in a chair, with his feet stuck out over the hot coals of  
a fire burning in a brazier. He is being held in that  
position by LAMBERT, who is a thug employed by FENNYMAN,  
who is the owner of the VOICE. The fourth man, FREES, is  
FENNYMAN'S bookkeeper.

FENNYMAN

What am I, Mr. Lambert?

LAMBERT

Bitten, Mr. Fennyman.

FENNYMAN

How badly bitten, Mr. Frees?

FREES

Twelve pounds, one shilling and four  
pence, Mr. Fennyman, including  
interest.

HENSLOWE

Aaagh! I can pay you!

FENNYMAN

When?

HENSLOWE

Two weeks, three at the most, Aaaagh!  
For pity's sake.

FENNYMAN

Take his feet out. Where will you get

FREES

(the mathematical genius with  
a notebook)

Sixteen pounds, five shillings and  
nine pence

FENNYMAN

including interest in three weeks?

HENSLOWE

I have a wonderful new play!

FENNYMAN

Put his feet in.

HENSLOWE

It's a comedy.

FENNYMAN

Cut his nose off.

HENSLOWE

A new comedy. By Will Shakespeare!

FENNYMAN

And his ears.

HENSLOWE

And a share. We will be partners, Mr.  
Fennyman!

FENNYMAN

(hesitating)

Partners!

HENSLOWE

It's a crowd-tickler--mistaken  
identities, a shipwreck, a pirate  
king, a bit with a dog, and love  
triumphant.

LAMBERT

I think I've seen it. I didn't like  
it.

HENSLOWE

This time it is by Shakespeare.

FENNYMAN

What's the title?

HENSLOWE

Romeo and Ethel the Pirate's Daughter.

FENNYMAN

Good title.

FENNYMAN snaps his fingers at FREES and LAMBERT. LAMBERT unties HENSLOWE, FREES starts writing a contract.

FENNYMAN (CONT'D)

A play takes time. Find actors... rehearsals...let's say open in three weeks. That's--what--five hundred groundlings at tuppence each, in addition four hundred groundlings tuppence each, in addition four hundred backsides at three pence--a penny extra for a cushion, call it two hundred cushions, say two performance for safety how much is that Mr. Frees?

FREES

Twenty pounds to the penny, Mr. Fennyman.

FENNYMAN

Correct!

HENSLOWE

But I have to pay the actors and the authors.

FENNYMAN

A share of the profits.

HENSLOWE

There's never any

FENNYMAN

Of course not!

HENSLOWE

(impressed)

Mr. Fennyman, I think you may have hit on something.

FENNYMAN slaps a contract down on the table next to an ink-pot and quill.

FENNYMAN

Sign here.

HENSLOWE takes the quill and signs.

FENNYMAN (CONT'D)

Romeo and Ethel The Pirate's Daughter...Almost finished?

HENSLOWE

Without doubt he is completing it at

this very moment.

INT. WILL'S ROOM. DAY

A small cramped space in the eaves of a building. A cluttered shelf containing various objects, wedged between crumpled pieces of paper. Among those we have time to observe: a skull, a mug that says A PRESENT FROM STRATFORD-UPON-AVON.

At infrequent intervals further pieces of crumpled paper are tossed towards the shelf. The man who is throwing them, WILL SHAKESPEARE, is bent over a table, writing studiously with a quill.

Now we see what he is writing: Will is practising his signature, over and over again. "Will Shagsbeard...W Shakspur...William Shasper..." Each time he is dissatisfied, and each time he crumples, and tosses it away.

Suddenly WILL becomes impatient. He jumps up and goes to the loft area in the rafters, where he sleeps, and starts to pull on his boots. At this point the door opens and HENSLOWE walks in. He is out of breath and his feet hurt.

HENSLOWE

Will! Where is my play? Tell me you have it nearly done! Tell me you have it started.

(desperately)

You have begun?

WILL

(struggling with his boots)

Doubt that the stars are fire, doubt that the sun doth move

HENSLOWE

No, no, we haven't the time. Talk prose. Where is my play?

WILL

(tapping his forehead and heading out the door)

It is all locked safe in here

HENSLOWE

God be praised!

(then doubt)

Locked?

WILL

As soon as I have found my muse

EXT. STREET. OUTSIDE WILL'S HOUSE. DAY.

WILL lives in a crowded area of the city. Hawkers are

crying their wares, tract-sellers, delivery boys, and merchants go about their business. HENSLOWE catches up with WILL as he strides purposefully along.

HENSLOWE

(catching up)

Who is she this time?!

WILL

She is always Aphrodite.

HENSLOWE

Aphrodite Baggot who does it behind the Dog and Trumpet?

WILL

Henslowe, you have no soul so how can you understand the emptiness that seeks a soulmate?

HENSLOWE

Well, I am a dead man and buggered to boot. My theatre is close by the plague these twelve weeks, my company is playing the inn-yards of England, while Burbage and the Chamberlain's Men are invited to court and receive ten pounds to play your piece, written for my theatre, by my writer, at my risk when you were green and grateful -

WILL

What piece? Richard Crookback?

HENSLOWE

No--it's comedy they want, Will!  
Comedy! Like Romeo and Ethel?

WILL

Who wrote that?

HENSLOWE

Nobody! You are writing it for me! I gave you three pounds a month since.

WILL

Half what you owed me. I am still due for One Gentleman of Verona.

EXT. ANOTHER STREET. DAY

HENSLOWE'S hardly paused in his appeal.

HENSLOWE

. . . Will! What is money to you and me? I, your patron, you my wordwright!

When the plague lifts Burbage will  
have a new Christopher Marlowe for the  
Curtain and I have nothing for the  
Rose.

WILL stops.

WILL

Mr. Henslowe, will you lend me fifty  
pounds?

HENSLOWE

(staggered)

Fifty pounds? What for?

WILL

Burbage offers me a partnership in the  
Chamberlain's Men. For fifty pounds my  
hired player days are over.

HENSLOWE

Cut out my heart! Throw my liver to  
the dogs!

WILL

(answering for him)

No, then.

WILL turns down a side street.

EXT. MARKETPLACE. DAY.

HENSLOWE and WILL are crossing a crowded marketplace  
where a Puritan preacher, MAKEPEACE, is haranguing anyone  
who will listen.

MAKEPEACE

and the Lord shall smite them! Yea,  
harken to me. The theatres are  
handmaidens of the devil! Under the  
name of the Curtain, the players  
breed lewdness in your wives,  
rebellion in your servants, idleness  
in your apprentices and wickedness in  
your children! And the Rose smells  
thusly rank by any name! I say a  
plague on both their houses!

As he passes WILL gratefully makes a mental note.

EXT. DR. MOTH'S HOUSE. DAY.

WILL turns into a narrow street and walks toward a  
doorway.

HENSLOWE

Where are you going?

WILL

To my weekly confession.

As HENSLOWE arrives the door closes in his face. A sign identifies the place as the premises of Dr. MOTH, apothecary, alchemist, astrologer, seer, interpreter of dreams, and priest of psyche. HENSLOWE looks puzzled.

INT. DR. MOTH'S HOUSE. DAY

A stuffed alligator hangs from the ceiling, pills, potions, amulets and charms, star charts and mystic paraphernalia festoon the place. Testimonials and framed degrees hang on the walls.

WILL lying on a couch, on his back. His eyes are closed  
DR. MOTH sits by the couch, listening to WILL and occasionally making a note on a pad he holds on his knee. What we have here is nothing less than the false dawn of analysis. The session is being timed by an hourglass.

WILL

Words, words, words...once, I had the  
gift...I could make love out of words as  
a potter makes cups out of clay love  
that overthrows empires, love that  
binds two hearts together come  
hellfire and brimstones...for sixpence a  
line, I could cause a riot in a  
nunnery...but now

DR. MOTH

And yet you tell me you lie with  
women?

WILL seems unwilling to respond. DR. MOTH refers to his notes.

DR. MOTH (CONT'D)

Black Sue, Fat Phoebe, Rosaline,  
Burbage's seamstress; Aphrodite, who  
does it behind the Dog and

WILL

(interrupting)

Aye, now and again, but what of it? I  
have lost my gift.

DR. MOTH

I am here to help you. Tell me in your  
own words.

WILL

I have lost my gift.

(not finding this easy)

It's as if my quill is broken. As if



the organ of the imagination has dried up. As if the proud tower of my genius has collapsed.

DR. MOTH

Interesting.

WILL

Nothing comes.

DR. MOTH

Most interesting.

WILL

It is like trying to pick a lock with a wet herring.

DR. MOTH

(shrewdly)

Tell me, are you lately humbled in the act of love?

WILL turns towards him. How did he know that?

DR. MOTH (CONT'D)

How long has it been?

WILL

A goodly length in times past, but lately

DR. MOTH

No, no. You have a wife, children  
The sand runs through the hourglass.

LATER

Not much sand left.

WILL

I was a lad of eighteen. Anne Hathaway was a woman, half as old again.

DR. MOTH

A woman of property?

WILL

(shrugs)

She had a cottage. One day, she was three months gone with child, so

DR. MOTH

And your relations?

WILL

On my mother's side the Ardens

DR. MOTH

No, your marriage bed.

WILL

Four years and a hundred miles away in

Stratford.

A cold bed too, since the twins were born. Banishment was a blessing.

DR. MOTH

So now you are free to love

WILL

yet cannot love nor write it.

DR. MOTH reaches for a glass snake bracelet.

DR. MOTH

Here is a bangle found in Psyche's temple on Olympus cheap at four pence. Write your name on a paper and feed it in the snake.

WILL looks at the snake bangle in wonder.

WILL

Will it restore my gift?

DR. MOTH

The woman who wears the snake will dream of you, and your gift will return. Words will flow like a river. I will see you in a week.

He holds out his hand. WILL drops a sovereign into it, and takes the bracelet.

EXT. DR. MOTH'S HOUSE. DAY.

WILL comes out. HENSLOWE is waiting, standing in a horse trough to ease his feet. WILL walks straight past him, and HENSLOWE follows.

HENSLOWE

Now where? Will?

WILL

To the Palace at Whitehall.

INT. WHITEHALL PALACE. BACKSTAGE. DAY.

WHITEHALL means nothing yet. We are behind closed curtains on a stage busy with preparations for the imminent performance of Two Gentlemen of Verona. This is not a theatre but a banqueting hall, as we will see. RICHARD BURBAGE is to play "PROTEUS." A BOY PLAYER will play "SILVIA," and last minute improvements to his makeup etc. are being applied by BURBAGE'S mistress ROSALINE. "LAUNCE," one of the clowns, is the famous comedian WILL KEMPE. "LAUNCE'S" dog, CRAB is in KEMPE'S charge and is not helping much. There is no set. A helpful placard reading VERONA--AN OPEN PLACE, is ready to hand. MUSICIANS can be heard tuning their instruments. From the other

side of the curtain there is an expectant bubbub. KEMPE leads the dog into the wings and rummages in a box of proops. He finds a skull. He has one foot on the box, his elbow on his knee, he looks at the skull...in other words he reminds us of Hamlet. We see this from the POV of WILL, who is just entering through a door backstage.

WILL

(approaching)

Prithee, Mr. Kempe, break a leg. You too, good Crab.

KEMPE

Crab is nervous. He has never played the Palace. When will you write me a tragedy, Will? I could do it.

WILL

No, they would laugh at Seneca if you played it.

WILL'S attention has been caught by ROSALINE, BURBAGE'S mistress. ROSALINE is big breasted, dark-eyed, dark-haired, sexual.

BURBAGE

(to ROSALINE)

My sleeve wants for a button, Mistress Rosaline, where were my seamstress's eyes?

BURBAGE kisses her mouth and slaps her behind. He comes over to greet WILL.

BURBAGE (CONT'D)

There is no dog in the first scene, Will Kempe, thank you. How goes it Will?

WILL

I am still owed money for this play, Burbage.

BURBAGE

Not from me. I only stole it. When are you coming over to the Chamberlain's Men?

WILL

When I have fifty pounds.

ROSALINE brings over the last elements of BURBAGE'S costume and helps him into them.

BURBAGE

Are you writing?

WILL

(nods somewhat defensively)

A comedy. All but done, a pirate  
comedy, wonderful.

BURBAGE

What is the chief part?

WILL

Romeo. Wit, swordsman, lover.

BURBAGE

The title?

WILL

Romeo

BURBAGE

I will play him. Bring it tomorrow.

WILL

It's for Henslowe. He paid me.

BURBAGE

How much?

WILL

Ten pounds.

BURBAGE

You're a liar.

BURBAGE digs under his costume for his purse, which is on  
a waistband, over his corset.

WILL

I swear it. He wants Romeo for Ned and  
the Admiral's Men.

BURBAGE

Ned is wrong for it.

WILL turns to see HENSLOWE approaching.

BURBAGE (CONT'D)

(to WILL)

Here is two sovereigns--I'll give you  
two more when you show me the pages.

WILL

Done.

HENSLOWE

(arriving)

Burbage, I will see you hanged for a  
pickpocket.

BURBAGE

The Queen has commanded, she loves a  
comedy and the Master of the Revels  
favours us.

HENSLOWE

And what favour does Mr. Tilney  
receive from you?

BURBAGE

Ask him.

The Master of the Revels (TILNEY) comes through the  
curtain officiously.

TILNEY

She comes!

He disappears back through the curtains. The hubbub falls  
silent, rather dramatically, and all the busy PLAYERS  
know what that means: they all crowd to the curtain and  
find places to peep through.

INT. WHITEHALL PALACE. BANQUETING HALL. FRONT OF  
HOUSE/STAGE. DAY.

THE POV OF THE PLAYERS.

The arrival of QUEEN ELIZABETH, aged sixty, coming to  
take her place in the audience at front centre. The hall  
is crowded with lords and ladies, bowing ELIZABETH to her  
seat, which is raised high on a pedestal, affording the  
QUEEN an uninterrupted view of the play, and the audience  
an uninterrupted view of the QUEEN. Trumpets sound.  
Close on a small piece of paper: a quill is writing "W.  
Shakespeare." WILL rolls the paper up carefully and slips  
it into the mouth of the snake bangle.  
The curtain draws back and CONDELL as "VALENTINE" and  
BURBAGE as "PROTEUS" begin the play.

CONDELL AS VALENTINE

"Cease to persuade, my loving Proteus;  
Home-keeping youth have ever homely  
wits..."

INT. WHITEHALL PALACE. BANQUETING HALL. THE  
WINGS/BACKSTAGE. DAY.

With BURBAGES'S presence accounted for on stage, ROSALINE  
curls an arm around WILL'S neck. They kiss hungrily.  
After a moment, WILL pulls back.

ROSALINE

When will you write me a sonnet, Will?

WILL

I have lost my gift.

ROSALINE

You left it in my bed. Come to look  
for it again.

WILL

Are you to be my muse, ROSALINE?

ROSALINE

Burbage has my keeping but you have my heart.

WILL takes the snake bracelet and slips it onto her arm. ROSALINE looks at it, then at WILL. Then they kiss again, but WILL is distracted by the sound of coughing from the auditorium.

WILL

You see? The consumptives plot against me. "Will Shakespeare has a play, let us go and cough through it."

INT. WHITEHALL PALACE. BANQUETING HALL. STAGE. DAY.

"VALENTINE" is on stage with "PROTEUS."

CONDELL AS VALENTINE

"To be in love, where scorn is bought with groans: Coy looks with heart sore sighs; One fading moment's mirth With twenty watchful, weary, tedious nights..."

As the scene continues, WILL appears at the back of the hall and finds himself next to HENSLOWE.

WILL

I feel a scene coming on.

HENSLOWE

Is it about a pirate's daughter?

INT. WHITEHALL PALACE. BACK OF THE BANQUETING HALL/STAGE. DAY.

Laughter. It is later, and KEMPE is now on stage with his dog. The audience is roaring.

HENSLOWE

You see? Comedy.

QUEEN ELIZABETH'S idiosyncratic laugh rises above the others.

QUEEN

Well played, Master Crab, I commend you.

She throws a sweetheart on the stage and the dog wolfs it down. Everyone applauds.

HENSLOWE

Love and a bit with a dog, that's what they like.

Now we meet VIOLA. VIOLA DE LESSEPS is twenty-five and beautiful, and she is laughing with great natural enjoyment. She sits slightly apart from her small family group--her parents, SIR ROBERT DE LESSEPS and LADY

MARGARET DE LESSEPS. Part of the group but seated behind as befits her lower status is VIOLA'S NURSE.

Elsewhere is LORD WESSEX, our villain. WESSEX is in his forties, dark cruel, self-important. He has noticed VIOLA. The nurse notices him.

INT. WHITEHALL PALACE. BANQUETING HALL. FRONT OF HOUSE/STAGE. DAY.

LATER. "VALENTINE" is on stage alone. He is speaking the speech rather more coarsely than the version we hear later.

CONDELL AS VALENTINE

"What light is light if Silvia be not seen?

What joy is joy, if Silvia be not by?

Unless it be to think that she is by

And feed upon the shadow of

perfection..."

Now we see that VIOLA knows the speech by heart, and is silently mouthing it with the actor.

HENSLOWE

There's a lady knows your play by

heart.

But when he turns to WILL he finds that WILL has gone.

INT. WILL'S ROOM. DAY.

WILL comes into his room, goes straight to his table in the window, and arranges pen, ink, and paper. Now he has his ritual: he spins round once in a circle, rubs his hands together and spits on the floor. Then he sits down, picks up his pen, and stares in front of him. PAUSE. Then he begins to write.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. VIOLA'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

The NURSE is undressing her, though VIOLA tries intermittently to push her away. She is still bright with excitement.

VIOLA

Did you like Proteus or Valentine

best? Proteus for speaking, Valentine

for looks.

NURSE

I liked the dog, for laughs.

VIOLA

But Silvia I did not care for much.

His fingers were red from fighting and

he spoke like a schoolboy at lessons.

Stage love will never be true love  
while the law of the land has our  
heroines played by pipsqueak boys in  
petticoats! Oh, when can we see  
another?

NURSE

When the Queen commands it.

VIOLA

But at the playhouse. Nurse?

NURSE

Be still.

Now the NURSE is cleaning VIOLA'S ears, one by one, of course. She has an ear-cleaning implement for this. VIOLA submits.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Playhouses are not for well-born  
ladies.

VIOLA

I am not so well-born.

NURSE

Well-monied is the same as well-born  
and well-married is more so. Lord  
Wessex was looking at you tonight.

VIOLA

All the men at court are without  
poetry. If they look at me they see my  
father's fortune. I will have poetry  
in my life. And adventure. And love.  
Love above all.

NURSE

Like Valentine and Silvia?

VIOLA

No . . . not the artful postures of  
love, but love that over- throws life.  
Unbiddable, ungovernable, like a riot  
in the heart, and nothing to be done,  
come ruin or rapture. Love like there  
has never been in a play.

(beat)

I will have love or I will end my days  
as a . . .

NURSE

As a nurse.

VIOLA



(kissing her)

But I would be Valentine and Silvia too. Good Nurse, God save you and good night. I would stay asleep my whole life if I could dream myself into a company of players.

VIOLA goes over to the window.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. VIOLA'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.  
The NURSE thrusts a twig to her face.

NURSE

Clean your teeth while you dream,  
then.

Automatically, VIOLA takes the twig and begins brushing her teeth, all the while looking downriver towards the Rose. The NURSE attends her with a beaker of water, and a bowl.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Now spit

VIOLA gazes longingly towards the Rose... And, there and then, she makes a plan.

EXT. SQUARE IN FRONT OF THE ROSE THEATRE. DAY.

HENSLOWE is making his way from the theatre to the market place when FENNYMAN and LAMBERT appear at either shoulder and propel him back the way he came. FREES follows behind.

FENNYMAN

This time we take your boots off!

HENSLOWE

What have I done, Mr. Fennyman?

FENNYMAN

The theatres are all closed by the plague!

HENSLOWE

Oh, that.

FENNYMAN

by order of the Master of the Revels!

HENSLOWE

Mr. Fennyman, let me explain about the theatre business.

(they stop)

The natural condition is one of insurmountable obstacles on the road to imminent disaster. Believe me, to be close by the plague is a bagatelle

in the ups and downs of owning a theatre.

FENNYMAN

So what do we do?

HENSLOWE

Nothing. Strangely enough , it all turns out well.

FENNYMAN

How?

HENSLOWE

I don't know. It's a mystery.

LAMBERT

(dumbly)

Should I kill him, Mr. Fennyman?

At this point din is heard in the background. a messenger, ringing a bell, is running though the street.

MESSENGER

The theatres are reopened. By order of the Master of the Revels, the theatres are reopened

FENNYMAN is intrigued.

FREES

Mr. Fennyman! Mr. Tilney has opened the playhouses.

FENNYMAN

Yes I heard.

HENSLOWE plays his temporary advantage modestly, shrugging himself free of LAMBERT'S grip.

HENSLOWE

(to LAMBERT)

If you wouldn't mind

HENSLOWE continues on his way. FENNYMAN watches HENSLOWE, curious.

FENNYMAN

Where is the play?

HENSLOWE

Oh, it's coming, it's coming.

INT. WILL'S ROOM. DAY.

It is. WILL is writing furiously. A burnt-down candle is still alight, although it is day outside the window. He has been writing all night. He has written about ten pages. Pleased with himself and excited, he gathers them up and leaves the room like a man with a mission.

EXT. WILL'S HOUSE. DAY.

Leaving the house, pages in hand, WILL nearly knocks down HENSLOWE who has come to see him.

HENSLOWE

Will! The theatres are  
Before he can finish, WILL brandishes the pages in his hand.

WILL

Romeo and Rosaline. Scene One! God,  
I'm good!

HENSLOWE

Rosaline? You mean Ethel.

WILL has gone.

EXT. BURBAGE'S HOUSE. DAY.

BURBAGE lives in another part of the city. WILL bangs through the door without ceremony.

WILL

(shouting)

Richard!

INT. BURBAGE'S HOUSE. DAY.

WILL enters and calls out.

WILL

Burbage?

INT. BURBAGE'S BEDROOM. DAY.

WILL charges into the bedroom. ROSALINE is in bed. The Master of the Revels is pulling up his breeches. WILL is shattered.

WILL

Mr. Tilney

The unsuccessful snake bracelet glints at him from ROSALINE'S arm.

TILNEY

Like you, I found him not at home!

WILL

So this is the favour you find in the Chamberlain's Men.

ROSALINE

Will!

WILL

(to ROSALINE)

I would have made you immortal.

(turning to go)

Tell Burbage he has lost a new play by Will Shakespeare.

TILNEY

What does Burbage care of that? He is readying the Curtain for Kit Marlowe.

WILL

You have opened the playhouses?

TILNEY

I have, Master Shakespeare.

WILL

But the plague

TILNEY

(sighs)

Yes, I know. But he was always hanging around the house.

A bell can be heard ringing outside.

ROSALINE

(to WILL, leaving)

Will...you're the only one, Will!--in my heart.

EXT. STREET. OUTSIDE BURBAGE'S HOUSE. DAY.

WILL emerges looking distraught. A burning brazier stands by the wall. WILL thrusts the pages into the coals. He watches for a moment as the pages catch fire.

INT. TAVERN. DAY.

WILL walks in to find the place in an uproar of celebration. A handsome young serving man (NOL) is bumping through with a tray of tankards.

NOL

(excitedly)

Mr. Henslowe!

HENSLOWE

Yes, I heard. The theatres are open.

But where is my playwright?

HENSLOWE finds a seat, and takes a tankard off NOL'S tray.

HENSLOWE

Chalk it up, Nol. I'm hungry, too.

NOL

The special today is a pig's foot marinated in juniper-berry vinegar, served with a buckwheat pancake which has been

They are interrupted by WILL who joins them. He looks distracted.

HENSLOWE

Will! Have you finished?

WILL

Yes. Nearly.

(he taps his forehead)

It's all locked safe in here. We need  
Ralph for the Pirate King. Good  
morning, Master Nol. You will have a  
nice little part.

NOL shouts for you, takes off his apron and flings it  
behind the bar. HENSLOWE jumps up and embraces WILL. The  
entire staff and half the customers are now crowding  
around, actors the lot of them. HENSLOWE bangs the table  
to shut them all up.

HENSLOWE

Ned Alleyn and the Admiral's Men are  
out on tour. I need actors. Those here  
who are unknown will have a chance to  
be known.

ACTOR

What about the money, Mr. Henslowe?

HENSLOWE

It won't cost you a penny! Auditions  
in half-an-hour!

The din of excited chatter returns. He sweeps grandly to  
the tavern door...where he meets RALPH BASHFORD, a big,  
burly, middle-aged actor.

HENSLOWE (CONT'D)

Ralph Bashford! I'd have a part for  
you but, alas, I hear you are a  
drunkard's drunkard.

RALPH

Never when I'm working.

INT. TAVERN. DAY.

WILL has remained behind, aghast now at his predicament.  
He goes to the bar.

WILL

Give me to drink mandragora.

BARMAN

Straight up, Will?

VOICE

Give my friend a beaker of your best  
brandy.

WILL turns towards a figure further down the bar. It's  
CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE.

WILL

Kit

MARLOWE

How goes it, Will?

WILL

Wonderful, wonderful.

MARLOWE

Burbage says you have a play.

WILL

I have. And chinks to show for it.

His drink arrives. WILL places a sovereign on the bar.

WILL (CONT'D)

I insist--and a beaker for Mr. Marlowe.

The BARMAN does the business.

WILL (CONT'D)

I hear you have a new play for the  
Curtain.

MARLOWE

Not new--my Doctor Faustus.

WILL

I love your early work. "Was this the  
face that launched a thousand ships  
and burnt the topless towers of  
Ilium?"

MARLOWE

I have a new one nearly done, and  
better. The Massacre at Paris.

WILL

Good title.

MARLOWE

And yours?

WILL

Romeo and Ethel the Pirate's Daughter.

(beat, sighs despondently)

Yes, I know.

MARLOWE

What is the story?

WILL

Well, there's a pirate

(confesses)

In truth, I have not written a word.

MARLOWE

Romeo is...Italian. Always in and out of  
love.

WILL

Yes, that's good. Until he meets

MARLOWE

Ethel.

WILL

Do you think?

MARLOWE

The daughter of his enemy.

WILL

(thoughtfully)

The daughter of his enemy.

MARLOWE

His best friend is killed in a duel by  
Ethel's brother or something. His name  
is Mercutio.

WILL

Mercutio...good name.

NOL hurries back to WILL'S side.

NOL

Will--they're waiting for you!

WILL

I'm coming.

He drains his glass.

WILL (CONT'D)

Good luck with yours, Kit.

MARLOWE

I thought your play was for Burbage.

WILL

This is a different one.

MARLOWE

(trying to work it out)

A different one you haven't written?

WILL makes a helpless gesture and hurries after NOL.

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. GALLERY/STAGE/AUDITORIUM. DAY.

HENSLOWE and WILL are sitting in the gallery, listening  
to a YOUNG ACTOR auditioning.

YOUNG ACTOR

" ..Was this the face that launched a  
thousand ships, And burnt the topless  
towers of Ilium? Sweet Helen, make me  
immortal with a kiss!"

HENSLOWE

Thank you.

HENSLOWE and WILL look a bit deflated. The YOUNG ACTOR  
leaves and is replaced by a SECOND ACTOR.

SECOND ACTOR

I would like to give you something  
from Faustus by Christopher Marlowe.

HENSLOWE

How refreshing.

SECOND ACTOR

"Was this the face that launched a  
thousand ships, And burnt the topless  
towers of Ilium?"

HENSLOWE and WILL let him continue a bit further, but  
exchange despairing looks. A succession of would-be  
actors offer their version of Marlowe's lines, each as  
inappropriate as the other. Among them is a small URCHIN.

URCHIN

"...the topless towers of Ilium? Sweet  
Helen, make me immortal with a--?"

HENSLOWE

(bellows)

Thank you!

The URCHIN leaves, glowering furiously, and is replaced  
by a beanpole of a man (WASBASH). WABASH has a bad  
stutter.

WABASH

"W-w-w-w-was th-th-this th-th-the f-f-  
f-face..."

HENSLOWE

(unexpectedly)

Very good, Mr. Wabash. Excellent.  
Report to the property master.

WILL looks at HENSLOWE in outrage.

HENSLOWE (CONT'D)

(apologetically)

My tailor. Wants to be an actor. I  
have a few debts here and there. Well,  
that seems to be everybody. Did you  
see a Romeo?

WILL

I did not.

HENSLOWE

Well, I to my work, you to yours. When  
can I see pages?

WILL

Tomorrow

HENSLOWE leaves him.



WILL (CONT'D)

(a prayer)

please God.

WILL sits brooding alone for a moment. Then he realizes he is being addressed from the stage. ANOTHER ACTOR.

ACTOR

May I begin, sir?

WILL looks at the stage and sees a handsome young man, with a hat shadowing his eyes.

WILL

Your name?

VIOLA AS THOMAS

Thomas Kent. I would like to do a speech by a writer who commands the heart of every player.

WILL can hardly manage a nod.

VIOLA AS THOMAS (CONT'D)

"What light is light, if Silvia be not seen,  
What joy is joy, if Silvia be not by?  
Unless it be to think that she is by  
And feed upon the shadow of perfection.

It does not take four lines of "VALENTINE'S" speech to confirm for us, if confirmation be needed, that THOMAS is VIOLA. For WILL, amazement at hearing his own words soon gives away to something else. He is captivated. He has found his "ROMEO".

VIOLA AS THOMAS (CONT'D)

"...except I be by Silvia in the night,  
There is no music in the nightingale.  
Unless I look on Silvia in the day,  
There is no day for me to look upon."

WILL interrupts "him."

WILL

Take off your hat.

VIOLA AS THOMAS

My hat?

WILL

Where did you learn how to do that?

VIOLA AS THOMAS

I . . .

WILL

Wait there.

VIOLA AS THOMAS

Are you Mr. Shakespeare?

WILL

Let me see you. Take off your hat.

THOMAS begins to panic. WILL jumps down to ground level.

THOMAS runs offstage, to WILL'S bewilderment. WILL hurries after him. We go with WILL as he crosses the stage, then backstage, then into the

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. RETIRING ROOM. DAY.

RETIRING ROOM which is crowded with actors and HENSLOWE'S lieutenant, property manager, copier, and general factotum who is a new character, PETER.

ACTOR

What are we playing?

NOL

Where are the pages?

WILL enters into the middle of this.

WILL

(shouts)

Where's the boy?

NOBODY knows what he is talking about. WABASH, the stutterer, grabs Will's hand and shakes it excitedly.

WABASH

B-b-b-b-break a l-l-l-leg!

The street door is swinging shut. WILL sees it. He fights his way through the men to get to the door.

EXT. THE ROSE THEATRE. BANKSIDE. DAY.

WILL emerges from the theatre into a street throbbing with nefarious life. Whores, cutpurses, hawkers, urchins, tract-sellers, riffraff of all kinds in an area of stews (lowdown pubs), brothels and slums. It is some time before WILL spots THOMAS, way ahead of him in the crowded street. The chase is taking them to the riverbank.

EXT. THE RIVER. DAY.

When WILL gets to the riverbank he sees that THOMAS is in a smallish boat being rowed upriver and in midstream. The river is quite busy, and among the boats there are a number of waiting "taxis." WILL jumps into the nearest one and shouts at the "Taxi Driver" BOATMAN.

WILL

Follow that boat!

BOATMAN

Right you are, governor!

WILL sits in the stern of the boat and the BOATMAN sits facing him, rowing lustily.

BOATMAN (CONT'D)

I know your face. Are you an actor?

WILL

(oh God, here we go again)

Yes.

BOATMAN

Yes, I've seen you in something. That one about a king.

WILL

Really?

BOATMAN

I had the Christopher Marlowe in my boat once.

EXT. THE RIVER. DAY.

LATER. The BOATMAN is puffing. WILL is looking ahead to where THOMAS'S boat has reached a jetty on the farther shore, a private jetty attached to a rich house on the north bank. WILL sees THOMAS jump out of his boat and run toward the house.

WILL

Do you know that house?

BOATMAN

Sir Robert De Lesseps.

EXT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. DAY.

WILL runs towards the house.

INT. DE LESSEPSES'S HOUSE. DAY.

THOMAS rushes up the back stairs, removing his hat. Her hair tumbles down about her shoulders, so we will call her VIOLA again.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. VIOLA'S BEDROOM. DAY.

Her mother LADY DE LESSEPS, is talking to the NURSE.

LADY DE LESSEPS

Where is she? Our guests are upon us, Lord Wessex too, bargaining for a bride. My husband will have it settled tonight.

Behind her, the door opens revealing VIOLA as THOMAS to the NURSES view, but only for a moment. The door closes again as LADY DE LESSEPS turns.

LADY DE LESSEPS (CONT'D)

Tomorrow he drags me off to the country and it will be three weeks gone before we return from our estates.

A different door communicating to the next room, opens

and VIOLA comes in after a lightning dress change into a robe. She curtseys to her mother.

VIOLA

God save you, mother.

(to NURSE)

Ho water, nurse.

The NURSE looks at her, round-eyed.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. KITCHEN. DAY.

From a cauldron on the stove, hot water is poured into two pails, by the a KITCHEN BOY under the NURSE'S command.

SCULLERY MAID (O.S.)

Thomas Kent, sir? No sir.

WILL (O.S.)

The actor

NURSE

Who asks for him?

WILL has come to the kitchen door with a letter.

WILL

William Shakespeare, actor, poet, and playwright of the Rose.

The NURSE sends the SCULLERY MAID back to work.

NURSE

Master Kent is...my nephew.

WILL

(giving her the letter)

I will wait.

NURSE

Much god may it do you.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. VIOLA'S BATHROOM. EVENING.

VIOLA in her bath, reads WILL'S letter. The NURSE is adding hot water to the tub.

VIOLA

(delighted)

He sees himself in me! Romeo Montague, a young man of Verona.

NURSE

(unimpressed)

Verona again.

VIOLA

(devouring the letter)

A comedy of quarreling families reconciled in the discovery of Romeo to be the very same Capulet cousin

stolen from the cradle and fostered to manhood by his Montague mother that was robbed of her own child by the Pirate King!

EXT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. NIGHT.

WILL waits hopefully. The kitchen door opens and a SERVANT flings a bucket of dirty water in the general direction of the gutter. WILL hops nimbly aside and escapes a soaking.

SERVANT

Be off!

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. VIOLA'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

The NURSE is helping VIOLA into her party dress.

NURSE

Your mother, and your father

VIOLA

(gaily)

From tomorrow, away in the country for three weeks! Is Master Shakespeare not handsome?

NURSE

He looks well enough for a mountebank.

VIOLA

Oh, Nurse! He would give Thomas Kent the life of Viola De Lesseps's dreaming.

NURSE

(firmly)

My lady, this play will end badly. I will tell.

VIOLA

(twice as firmly)

You will not tell. As you love me and as I love you, you will bind my breast and buy me a boy's wig!

EXT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. NIGHT.

WILL spots a gaggle of MUSICIANS approaching, carrying instruments. WILL recognizes them.

WILL

Master Plum! What business here?

MUSICIAN

A five shilling business, Will. We play for the dancing.

The sound of hooves gives hardly any warning as a

GALLOPING HORSEMAN thunders through the MUSICIANS who have to leap out of the way. It is WESSEX arriving at the house, with his usual good manners. Will watches WESSEX skid to a halt and enter the house.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. BANQUETING ROOM. NIGHT.

WILL has got in with the MUSICIANS. Competently enough he strums along with them on the bandstand. Two dozen guests are enough to crowd the space for dancing. WILL glances around, looking for THOMAS KENT. He stops a passing SERVANT, helping himself to a snack off the man's tray.

SERVANT

Musicians don't eat, Sir Robert's orders.

WILL

I seek Master Thomas Kent.

It means nothing to the SERVANT who moves on. ANGLE ON WESSEX and SIR ROBERT.

SIR ROBERT

She is a beauty, my lord, as would take a king to church for a dowry of a nutmeg.

WESSEX

My plantations in Virginia are not mortgaged for a nutmeg. I have an ancient name that will bring you preferment when your grandson is a Wessex. Is she fertile?

SIR ROBERT

She will breed. If she do not, send her back.

WESSEX

Is she obedient?

SIR ROBERT

As any mule in Christendom. But if you are the man to rider her, their are rubies in the saddlebag.

WESSEX

I like her.

ANGLE on WILL--watching the dancing. Then he sees VIOLA in the crowd. He turns to blood.

Love at first sight, no doubt about it. VIOLA has not seen him. She is doing a daughter's duty among her parents' friends. The guests form up to begin a changing-partners dance (the very same one you get in every ROMEO

and JULIET).

WILL

(to Musician)

By all the stars in heaven, who is  
she?

MUSICIAN

Viola de Lesseps. Dream on, Will.

WILL leaves the bandstand and is moving trancelike to  
keep her in view between the dancers and onlookers. VIOLA  
moves through patterns of the dance until...as night  
follows day, she finds WILL opposite her. He has  
insinuated himself into the dance. VIOLA gasps.

VIOLA

Master Shakespeare

WILL reacts, surprised by her reaction. The dance  
separates them. VIOLA finds herself opposite WESSEX.

WESSEX

My lady Viola.

VIOLA

My lord.

WESSEX

I have spoken with your father.

VIOLA

So my lord? I speak with him every  
day.

WESSEX scowls. The dance separates them. VIOLA finds  
herself opposite WILL again. WILL stares at her  
entranced.

VIOLA (CONT'D)

Good sir... ?

WILL has lost his tongue.

VIOLA (CONT'D)

I heard you are a poet.

WILL nods in his trance and she smiles at him.

VIOLA (CONT'D)

But a poet of no words?

WILL tries to speak but the silver tongue won't work. He  
is dumb with adoration. Suddenly WESSEX takes him affably  
by the elbow and leads him into an alcove.

WESSEX

(smiling evilly)

"Poet?"

WILL

(coming round from the

anaesthetic and not noticing  
the danger)

I was a poet till now, but I have seen  
beauty that puts my poems at one with  
the talking ravens at the Tower.

To his surprise he finds a lordly dagger at this throat.

WILL (CONT'D)

(startled)

How do I offend, my lord?

WESSEX

By coveting my property. I cannot shed  
blood in her house but I will cut your  
throat anon. You have a name?

WILL

(gulps)

Christopher Marlowe at your service.

WESSEX shoves him through the nearest door.

VIOLA'S eyes are searching the room for WILL. She finds  
WESSEX smiling at her. She looks away.

EXT. DE LESSEPS' GARDEN/VIOLA'S BALCONY. NIGHT

There is a lighted window on the balcony. VIOLA, dressed  
for bed, and the NURSE pass across the lighted space.  
WILL is in the garden. He sees her. The light in the room  
is extinguished. WILL sighs. Then VIOLA comes out onto  
the balcony in the moonlight. WILL gasps. He watches her.  
VIOLA sighs dreamily.

VIOLA

Romeo, Romeo . . . a young man of  
Verona. A comedy. By William  
Shakespeare.

WILL reckons that's a good enough cue. He comes out of  
hiding, and approaches the balcony.

WILL

(whispers)

My lady!

VIOLA

(gasps)

Who is there?

WILL

Will Shakespeare!

The NURSE calls "Madam!" from inside the room.

VIOLA

Anon, good nurse. Anon.

(to WILL)



Master Shakespeare?!

WILL

The same, alas.

VIOLA

Oh but why "alas?"

WILL

A lowly player.

VIOLA

Alas indeed, for I thought you the highest poet of my esteem and a writer of plays that capture my heart.

WILL

Oh--I am him too!

The NURSE calls again.

VIOLA

(to NURSE)

Anon, anon!

(to WILL)

I will come again.

She goes inside for a moment.

WILL

(to himself)

Oh, I am fortune's fool, I will be punished for this!

VIOLA returns. WILL comes forward again.

WILL (CONT'D)

Oh my lady, my love!

VIOLA

If they find you here they will kill you.

WILL

You can bring them with a word.

VIOLA

Oh, not for the world!

The NURSE calls her again: "Madam!"

VIOLA (CONT'D)

Anon, nurse!

But she goes inside. WILL looks around and sees that there is, as ever a convenient tree. He starts to climb up toward the balcony. When his head is nearly level, a soft figure comes once more onto the balcony. WILL pops his head over the parapet and is face to face with the NURSE. The NURSE gives a yell. WILL falls out of the tree.

EXT. DE LEESEPSES' HOUSE. NIGHT.

Male voice shout to each other inside the house, candle flames appear in different windows, the garden door is flung open, revealing SIR ROBERT with candelabra in one hand and sword in the other. By this time WILL is on top of the garden wall and he drops safely out of sight. He could have written it better.

INT. WILL'S ROOM. DAWN.

WILL is burning the midnight oil--literally and metaphorically. His quill has already covered a dozen sheets. He is inspired.

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. STAGE/AUDITORIUM. DAY.

It is day one. THE COMPANY is on stage. PETER is passing pages around a bunch of actors. JOHN, JAMES, and NOL are looking through their pages.

JOHN

"Draw if you be men!

(to JAMES)

Gregory, remember thy washing blow."

NOL

"Part, fools, put up your swords."

WILL is going around pumping hands and slapping shoulders, flushed with excitement. HENSLOWE is reading his pages, worried. RALPH BASHFORD is next to him.

HENSLOWE

It starts well, and then it's all long-faced about some Rosaline. Where's the comedy, Will. Where's the dog?

(to RALPH)

Do you think it is funny?

RALPH

I was a Pirate King, now I'm a Nurse.  
That's funny

WILL pulls HENSLOWE aside.

WILL

We are at least six men short, and those we have will be overparted, ranters and stutterers who should be sent back to the stews. My Romeo has let me down. I see disaster.

HENSLOWE

We are at least four acts short, Will,  
if you are looking for disaster.

WILL as notices a young scruffy thirteen-year-old actor,

the URCHIN we met before.

WILL

Who are you, master?

URCHIN

I am Ethel, sir, the Pirate's daughter.

WILL

(furiously)

I'll be damned if you are!

And he helps the URCHIN off with a kick. The URCHIN glowers with resentment. HENSLOWE finds himself face to face with FENNYMAN.

FENNYMAN

Is it going well?

HENSLOWE

Very well.

FENNYMAN

But nothing is happening.

HENSLOWE

Yes, but very well.

WILL

(shouts)

Gentlemen! Thank you! You are welcome.

FENNYMAN

Who is that?

HENSLOWE

Nobody. The author.

WILL

We are about to embark on a great voyage.

HENSLOWE

It is customary to make a little speech on the first day. It does no harm and authors like it.

WILL

You want to know what parts you are to receive. All will be settled as we go  
That's as far as he gets before there is a dramatic interruption--the public entrance door is flung open and SIX MEN make a loud entrance, headed by NED ALLEYN, the actor, who is a handsome piratical figure with a big voice and a big sword.

ALLEYN

Huzzah! The Admiral's Men are returned

to the house!

He gets various reactions. HENSLOWE and WILL shout his name joyfully, some of the actors are friends with the new group and behave accordingly, others know they are out of a job. FENNYMAN recovers, or tries to.

FENNYMAN

Who is this?

ALLEYN slaps him aside with his sword.

ALLEYN

(roars)

Silence, you god! I am Hieronimo! I am Tamburlaine! I am Faustus! I am Barrabas, the Jew of Malta--of yes, Master Will, and I am Henry VI. What is the play, and what is my part?

FENNYMAN is impressed.

FENNYMAN

A moment, sir!

ALLEYN

(roars)

Who are you?

FENNYMAN

(bleating)

I am the money!

ALLEYN

Then you may remain so long as you remain silent. Pay attention and you will see how genius creates a legend.

FENNYMAN

(respectfully)

Thank you, sir.

WILL

We are in desperate want of a Mercutio, Ned, a young nobleman of Verona

ALLEYN

And the title of this piece?

WILL

Mercutio

HENSLOWE

Is it?

ALLEYN

I will play him!

Half a dozen of the ADMIRAL'S MEN will be given roles in

our play and we meet them and identify them as WILL enthusiastically shakes hands.

WILL

Mr. Pope! Mr. Phillips! Welcome,  
George Bryan! James Armitage!

(and now greeting SAM GOSSE,  
the female star of the  
Admiral's Men)

Sam! My pretty one! Are you ready to  
fall in love again?

SAM

(hoarsely)

I am, Master Shakespeare.

WILL

(concerned)

But your voice

(he thrust a hand between  
SAM'S legs)

Have they dropped?

SAM

(a girlie voice now)

No, no, a touch of cold only. We  
suspect he is lying but WILL has  
turned away.

WILL

Master Henslowe, you have your actors.

He leaves, passing by the humbled FENNYMAN.

FENNYMAN

I saw his Tamburlaine, you know.  
Wonderful.

WILL

Yes, I saw it.

FENNYMAN

Of course, it was mighty writing.

There is no one like Marlowe

WILL is used to it. He goes.

EXT. RIVERBANK. DAY.

WILL arrives in a hurry at the wharfside, and looks  
vainly in the direction of the DE LESSEPSSES' house: no  
THOMAS.

EXT. THE ROSE THEATRE. STAGE DOOR. DAY.

WILL looks down the alley:--no THOMAS. He turns away. The  
URCHIN, the short-lived Ethel, is sitting in the alley.

WILL

Better fortune, boy.

URCHIN

(shrugs)

I was in a play. They cut my head off  
in Titus Andronicus. When I write  
plays, they will be like Titus.

WILL

(pleased)

You admire it?

The URCHIN nods grimly.

URCHIN

I like it when they cut heads off. And  
the daughter mutilated with knives.

WILL

Oh. What is your name?

URCHIN.

John Webster. Here, kitty, kitty.

Because a stray cat is nearby. The cat show an interest.  
The URCHIN passes a white mouse to the cat and watches  
the result with sober interest.

URCHIN (CONT'D)

Plenty of blood. That is the only  
writing.

WILL backs away, unnerved by the boy.

URCHIN (CONT'D)

Wait, you'll see the cat bites his  
head off.

WILL

I have to get back.

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. STAGE/AUDITORIUM. DAY.

On stage . . . the actors carry their parts.

NOL AS BENVOLIO

"See where he comes. So please you step aside; I'll know  
his grievance or be much denied."

MONTAGUE

"I would thou wert so happy by thy  
stay To hear true shrift. Come, madam,  
let's away."

Onstage "MONTAGUE" and "LADY MONTAGUE" make their exit.  
Offstage, WILL appears next to HENSLOWE.

WILL

Cut round him for now.

HENSLOWE

(not understanding)

What? Who?

WILL

Romeo.

HENSLOWE

The one who came with your letter?

WILL

What?

NOL AS BENVOLIO (O.S.)

"Good morrow, cousin."

VIOLA AS ROMEO (O.S.)

"Is the day so young?"

The voice is THOMAS'S. WILL turns back to the stage and sees him. Today THOMAS has a wig as well as his small mustache.

NOL AS BENVOLIO

"But new struck nine."

VIOLA AS ROMEO

"Ay me, sad hours seem long. Was that my father that went hence so fast?"

NOL AS BENVOLIO

It was. What sadness lengthens Romeo's hours?"

VIOLA AS ROMEO

"Not having that which, having, makes them short."

WILL

Good

NOL AS BENVOLIO

"In love?"

VIOLA AS ROMEO

"Out."

NOL AS BENVOLIO

"Of love?"

VIOLA AS ROMEO

"Out of her favour where I am in love."

WILL

(interrupting)

No, no, no...Don't spend it all at once!

The rehearsal stops.

VIOLA AS THOMAS

Yes, sir.

WILL

Do you understand me?

VIOLA AS THOMAS

No, sir.

WILL

He is speaking about a baggage we never even meet! What will be left in your purse when he meets his Juliet?

HENSLOWE

Juliet? You mean Ethel.

WILL

(rounding on him)

God's teeth, am I to suffer this constant stream of interruption?!

(to THOMAS)

What will you do in Act Two when he meets the love of his life?

VIOLA AS THOMAS

(timidly--looking through his few sheets of paper)

I am very sorry, sir, I have not seen Act Two.

WILL

Of course you have not! I have not written it!

Alone in the auditorium, FENNYMAN looks and listens, fascinated. So this is theatre!

WILL (CONT'D)

Go once more!

NED ALLEYN comes out of the wings, frowning over his manuscript.

ALLEYN

Will...Where is Mercutio?

WILL

(tapping his forehead)

Locked safe in here. I leave the scene in your safe keeping, Ned, I have a sonnet to write.

WILL moves back into the wings where HENSLOWE is looking anxious.

HENSLOWE

A sonnet? You mean a play.

WILL moves on, ignoring him. As he goes, we see that VIOLA is love-struck by him, a riot in the heart.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. STAIRCASE. DAY.

VIOLA still dressed as THOMAS, sonnet in hand, runs up



the stairs to her room. From the other end of the house WESSEX can be heard ranting.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. HALL. NIGHT.

LORD WESSEX is being kept waiting. The NURSE is bearing the brunt of his impatience.

WESSEX

Two hours at prayer!

NURSE

Lady Viola is pious, my lord.

WESSEX

Piety is for Sunday! And two hours at prayer is not piety, it is self-importance!

NURSE

It would be better that you return tomorrow, my lord.

WESSEX

It would be better that you tell her to get off her knees and show some civility to her six-day lord and master.

VIOLA opens the door. She has changed hurriedly--too hurriedly: the effect of her glorious hair falling to her bare shoulders is spoiled by her mustache. Fortunately, the NURSE spots her before WESSEX does and by coming forward to greet her, the NURSE manages to shield Viola from view, communicate the problem, and announce WESSEX'S presence, so that by the time the NURSE has passed by VIOLA and let herself out of the room, the moustache has disappeared.

WESSEX (CONT'D)

My lady VIOLA.

VIOLA

Lord Wessex. You have been waiting.

WESSEX

I am aware of it, but it is beauty's privilege.

VIOLA

You flatter, my lord.

WESSEX

No. I have spoken to the Queen.

(pause)

Her majesty's consent is requisite when a Wessex takes a wife, and once

gained, her consent is her command.

VIOLA

Do you intend to marry, my lord?

WESSEX

Your father should keep you better informed. He has bought me for you. He returns from his estates to see us married two weeks from Saturday.

(pause)

You are allowed to show your pleasure.

VIOLA

I do not love you, my lord.

WESSEX

How your mind hops about! Your father was a shopkeeper, your children will bear arms, and I will recover my fortune. That is the only matter under discussion today. You will like Virginia.

VIOLA

Virginia?!

WESSEX

Why, yes! My fortune lies in my plantations. The tobacco weed. I need four thousand pounds to fit out a ship and put my investments to work--I fancy tobacco has a future. We will not stay there long, three or four years . . .

VIOLA

But why me?

WESSEX

It was your eyes. No, your lips.

He kisses her with more passion than ceremony. VIOLA recoils, and slaps him.

WESSEX (CONT'D)

Will you defy your father and your Queen?

VIOLA

The Queen has consented?

WESSEX

She wants to inspect you. At Greenwich, come Sunday. Be submissive, modest, grateful and brief.

VIOLA

(forced to submit)

I will do my duty, my lord.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. VIOLA'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

She is writing to WILL. His letter-poem is on her table. We can read part of it. "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day..."

Now we see what VIOLA is writing.

**INSERT:**

you, banish me from yours--I am to marry Lord Wessex-- a daughter's duty... "

She sheds a romantic, unhappy tear.

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. STAGE. DAY.

SAM is now "JULIET." The play has evidently reached Act I Scene 5. We are witnessing the meeting of "ROMEO" and "JULIET" in a simplified version of the changing-partners dance we saw at VIOLA'S house. NED ALLEYN is in charge.

ALLEYN

Gentlemen upstage, ladies downstage!

The dance goes wrong. it is THOMAS'S fault.

ALLEYN (CONT'D)

(furious)

Gentlemen upstage! Ladies downstage!

Are you a lady, Mr. Kent?

THOMAS mutters a blushing apology. WILL arrives the bystanders, clutching fresh pages. He gives these to PETER. NED ALLEYN sees him and comes over to start an argument.

WILL

(preempting)

You did not like the speech?

ALLEYN

The speech is excellent.

(he does the first line  
impressively)

"Oh, then I see Queen Mab hath been with you!" Excellent and a good length. But then he disappears for the length of a bible.

WILL points significantly at the pages he has given PETER.

WILL

There you have his duel, a skirmish of words and swords such as I never

wrote, nor anyone. He dies with such  
passion and poetry as your ever heard:

"a plague on both your houses!"

NED nods satisfied and turns back to work. Then he turns  
back.

ALLEYN

He dies?

But the author has escaped.

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. WRITER'S CORNER. DAY.

Up aloft, WILL has a Writer's Corner where he settle down  
to work. We see his private superstition: he spins round  
in a circle, rubs his hands together, and spits on the  
floor. That done, he picks up his pen.

EXT. STREET. NIGHT.

WILL is charging down a narrow alley, and bumps into  
BURBAGE who is emerging from the door of a tavern.

BURBAGE

Will!

WILL is in too much of a hurry to stop. BURBAGE calls  
after him.

BURBAGE (CONT'D)

And where are my pages . . .

WILL hurries on.

EXT. RIVERBANK. DUSK.

VIOLA as THOMAS is being rowed across the river. From  
behind, in the direction of Bankside, "he" hears  
shouting.

WILL

(O.S. shouting)

Did you give her my letter?

VIOLA as THOMAS turns to see WILL some way behind,  
following in another boat. She takes a letter from her  
coat and holds it aloft.

VIOLA AS THOMAS

(calling)

And this for you.

EXT. THE RIVER. VIOLA'S BOAT. NIGHT.

WILL has climbed aboard VIOLA'S boat and is tearing open  
the letter. What he reads causes him great pain. He  
collapses into the stern seat next to VIOLA.

WILL

Oh, Thomas! She has cut my strings! I  
am unmanned, unmended, and unmade,  
like a puppet in a box.

BOATMAN

Writer, is he?

WILL turns on him savagely

WILL

Row your boat.

EXT. THE RIVER. VIOLA'S BOAT. NIGHT.

WILL turns back to VIOLA. They have their conversation intimately, disregarding the lack of intimacy. The BOATMAN is hardly an arm's length away, but they ignore him.

WILL

She tells me to keep away. She is to marry Lord Wessex. What should I do?

VIOLA AS THOMAS

If you love her, you must do what she asks.

WILL

And break her heart and mine?

VIOLA AS THOMAS

It is only ours you can know.

WILL

She loves me, Thomas!

VIOLA AS THOMAS

Does she say so?

WILL

No. And yet she does where the ink has run with tears. Was she weeping when she gave you this?

VIOLA AS THOMAS

I ... Her letter came to me by the nurse.

WILL

Your aunt?

VIOLA AS THOMAS

(catching up)

Yes, my aunt. But perhaps she wept a little. Tell me how you love her, Will.

WILL

Like a sickness and its cure together.

VIOLA AS THOMAS

Yes, like rain and sun, like cold and heat.

(collecting herself)

Is your lady beautiful? Since I came to visit from the country, I have not seen her close. Tell me, is she beautiful?

WILL

Oh, if I could write the beauty of her eyes! I was born to look in them and know myself.

He is looking into VIOLA'S eyes. She holds his look, but WILL belies his words.

VIOLA AS THOMAS

And her lips?

WILL

Oh, Thomas, her lips! The early morning rose would wither on the branch, if it could feel envy!

VIOLA AS THOMAS

And her voice? Like lark song?

WILL

Deeper. Softer. None of your twittering larks! I would banish nightingales from her garden before they interrupt her song.

VIOLA AS THOMAS

She sings too?

WILL

Constantly. Without doubt. And plays the lute, she has a natural ear. And her bosom--did I mention her bosom?

VIOLA AS THOMAS

(glinting)

What of her bosom?

WILL

Oh Thomas, a pair of pippins! As round and rare as golden apples!

VIOLA AS THOMAS

I think the lady is wise to keep your love at a distance. For what lady could live up to it close to, when her eyes and lips and voice may be no more beautiful than mine? Besides, can a lady born to wealth and noble marriage love happily with a Bankside poet and player?

WILL

(fervently)

Yes, by God! Love knows nothing of rank or riverbank! It will spark between a queen and the poor vagabond who plays the king, and their love should be minded by each, for love denied blights the soul we owe to God! So tell my lady, William Shakespeare waits for her in the garden!

VIOLA AS THOMAS

But what of Lord Wessex?

WILL

For one kiss, I would defy a thousand Wessexes!

The boat scrapes on the jetty of the DE LESSEPSSES' house. The bump throws THOMAS into WILL'S arms. He holds her round the shoulders. His words have almost unmasked her. The closeness does the rest. She kisses him on the mouth and jumps out of the boat.

VIOLA

Oh, Will!

She throws a coin to the BOATMAN and runs towards the house.

BOATMAN

Thank you, my lady!

WILL

(stunned)

Lady?

BOATMAN

Viola De Lesseps. Known her since she was this high. Wouldn't deceive a child.

WILL gets out of the boat.

BOATMAN (CONT'D)

(reaching under his seat)

Strangely enough, I'm a bit of a writer myself.

The BOATMAN produces his memoirs in manuscript.

BOATMAN (CONT'D)

It wouldn't take you long to read it, I expect you know all the booksellers

. . .

But WILL has gone.

EXT. DE LESSEPSES' GARDEN. NIGHT.

WILL drops over the wall into the garden and without hesitation starts climbing up to her balcony.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. VIOLA'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

WILL comes in through the window, just as VIOLA enters by the door. They stare at each other across the room.

WILL

Can you love a fool?

VIOLA

Can you love a player?

They run together and fall into a passionate kiss.

WILL

(springs back)

Wait! You are still a maid and perhaps as mistook in me as I was mistook in Thomas Kent.

VIOLA

Answer me only this: are you the author of the plays of William Shakespeare?

WILL

I am.

VIOLA

Then kiss me again for I am not mistook.

They run together and fall into a passionate kiss. VIOLA fumbles with his clothing, he with hers.

VIOLA (CONT'D)

I do not know how to undress a man.

WILL

It is strange to me, too.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. OUTSIDE VIOLA'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

The NURSE has come to listen. She puts her ear against the door. Because she hears muffled voices, she looks startled.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. VIOLA'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

WILL is half-naked. VIOLA is down to her petticoat, and chemise. The petticoat comes away. WILL flings it aside. He takes off her chemise. He is startled to find that she is tightly bandaged round the bosom. WILL finds the loose end and spins her naked.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. OUTSIDE VIOLA'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

The NURSE, drags a chair--a rocker--outside the bedroom door, and takes up her position. She sits down, keeping



guard. Pretty soon there comes the regular creak of VIOLA'S bed. The NURSE fans herself furiously with her little lacy fan. She crosses herself. A CHAMBERMAID comes along the gallery outside the bedroom door. She is dusting her way along. The CHAMBERMAID becomes aware of the regular creaking. She pauses. The NURSE begins to rock in her chair, keeping time with the creaking from within. The CHAMBERMAID stares at the NURSE. The NURSE stares at the CHAMBERMAID.

NURSE

Go to, go to.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. VIOLA'S BEDROOM. NIGHT  
WILL and VIOLA have finished making love, and lie in each other's arms.

VIOLA

I would not have thought it. There is something better than a play.

WILL

There is.

VIOLA

Even your play.

WILL

(frowns)

Oh

VIOLA

And that was only my first try.

WILL

Well perhaps better than my first.

(he kisses her again)

EXT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. DAWN.

Dawn is breaking. The sun lacing the severing clouds with envious streaks.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. OUTSIDE VIOLA'S BEDROOM. DAWN

The NURSE has fallen asleep in her rocking chair.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. VIOLA'S BEDROOM. DAWN.

A rooster crows at some distance. VIOLA and WILL are in bed. She stirs drowsily. VIOLA, coming awake, speaks his name and he kisses her.

VIOLA

Will

Then he starts to get out of bed.

VIOLA (CONT'D)

You would not leave me?

WILL

I must. Look-- how pale the window.

VIOLA

(pulling him down)

Moonlight!

WILL

No, the morning rooster woke me.

VIOLA

It was the owl--come to bed

She is winning. She kisses him and pulls the bedclothes around them.

WILL

(giving in)

Oh, let Henslowe wait.

VIOLA

(pausing, pushing him away)

Mr. Henslowe?

WILL

(persisting)

Let him be damned for his pages!

VIOLA

Oh--no, no!

WILL

(kissing her)

There is time. It is still dark.

VIOLA

It is broad day!

(the rooster crows again)

The rooster tells us so!

WILL

It was the owl. Believe me, love, it was the owl.

He kisses her and starts to make love to her again. VIOLA gives him a shove which pushes him onto the floor. She sits up and pulls on her gown.

VIOLA

You would leave us players without a scene to read today?!

There's a knock at the door.

INT. DE LESSEPSSES' HOUSE. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE VIOLA'S BEDROOM/VIOLA'S BEDROOM. DAWN.

The NURSE is knocking. VIOLA comes to the door.

NURSE

My lady, the house is stirring, it is a new day.

VIOLA looks beautified by the hours that have passed.

VIOLA

It is a new world!

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. STAGE/AUDITORIUM. DAY.

The cut is to the middle of a rehearsal. We are coming up to the moment when "ROMEO" and "JULIET" kiss for the first time (Act I Scene V) NED ALLEYN is in charge but WILL is watching. His life has turned perfect.

VIOLA AS ROMEO

"...Have not saints lips, and holy  
palmers too?"

SAM AS JULIET

"Ay pilgrim, lips that they must use  
in prayer."

VIOLA AS ROMEO

"Oh then, dear saint, let lips do what  
hands to: They pray: grant thou, lest  
faith turn to despair."

WILL is in her eye-line. Her eyes flash an intimate secret look to him.

SAM AS JULIET

"Saints do not move, though grant for  
prayer's sake."

And VIOLA misses her cue as a result.

SAM

(prompting her)

It's you.

ALLEYN

(roars)

Suffering cats!

VIOLA guiltily picks up her line.

VIOLA AS ROMEO

"Then move not, while my prayer's  
effect I take."

In character, VIOLA kisses SAM, demurely, but apparently not demurely enough for WILL, who gives a twitch.

VIOLA AS ROMEO(CONT'D)

"Thus from my lips, by thine, my sin  
is purg'd."

SAM AS JULIET

"Then have my lips the sin that they  
have took."

VIOLA AS ROMEO

"Sin from my lips? Oh trespass sweetly

urg'd. Give me my sin again."

VIOLA kisses SAM again. WILL gives a major twitch, which in fact catapults his body onto the stage. Everybody looks at him in surprise.

WILL

Yes...yes...er...not quite right...it is more  
let me

(as JULIET)

"Then have my lips the sin that they  
have took."

VIOLA AS ROMEO

Sin from my lips? Oh trespass sweetly  
urg'd. Give me my sin again."

VIOLA kisses WILL. They lose themselves for a fraction of a moment. As VIOLA withdraws her lips, WILL'S lips are going for it again.

VIOLA AS ROMEO (CONT'D)

"You kiss by th' book."

ALLEYN

(to Will, sarcastically)

Well! It was lucky you were here! Why  
do not I write the rest of your play  
while you

WILL

(apologising, retreating)

Yes, yes...continue. Now the Nurse.  
Where is Ralph?

RALPH has been ready and waiting.

RALPH AS NURSE

"Madam, your mother craves a word with  
you."

VIOLA AS ROMEO

"What is her mother?"

RALPH AS NURSE

"Marry bachelor, Her mother is the  
lady of the house..."

WILL has retreated to

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. BACKSTAGE. DAY.

He is behind the curtain now.

RALPH AS NURSE (O.S.)

"...And a good lady, and wise and  
virtuous. I nurse her daughter that  
you talk'd withal..."

During RALPH'S lines (which are continuous) WILL stands

in the shadow behind the curtain, alone, agitated.

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. STAGE. DAY.

RALPH AS NURSE

"I tell you, he that can lay hold of her (he makes the money sign) Shall have the chinks."

VIOLA AS ROMEO

"Is she a Capulet" Oh dear account. My  
life is my foe's debt."

NOL, AS "BENVOLIO," at a party, carrying a goblet, tipsy,  
enters the scene.

NOL AS BENVOLIO

(to ROMEO)

"Away, be gone, the sport is at best."

VIOLA, about to make her exit, has her hand holding the  
curtain at the gap.

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. BEHIND THE CURTAIN. DAY.

WILL is kissing her hand.

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. STAGE. DAY.

VIOLA AS ROMEO

"Ay, so I fear; the more is my  
unrest."

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. BEHIND THE CURTAIN. DAY.

VIOLA comes through the curtain. WILL and VIOLA kiss,  
dangerously--they are in a narrow space, hidden from the  
general backstage area.

SAM AS JULIET (O.S.)

"Come hither nurse. What is yond  
gentleman?"

VIOLA

(to Will)

Oh let it be night!

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. STAGE. DAY.

RALPH AS NURSE

"I know not."

SAM AS JULIET

"Go ask his name--If he be married, My  
grave is like to be my wedding bed."

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. BEHIND THE CURTAIN. DAY.

"JULIET'S" line bits WILL between the eyes. WILL pulls  
away.

VIOLA

Oh, do not go

WILL

I must. I must

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. BACKSTAGE. DAY.

As WILL races up the ladder to his writer's corner, the rehearsal can be heard continuing.

RALPH AS NURSE (O.S.)

"His name is Romeo, and a Montague,  
The only son of your great enemy."

ALLEYN (O.S.)

(roaring from the audience)

Terrible!

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. WRITER'S CORNER. DAY.

WILL arrives at the top of the building in his writer's corner. He spins around once in a circle, rubs his hands together and spits on the floor. His manuscript is all over the table.

We take a peak at the lines he has already written.

INSERT MANUSCRIPT: "But soft, what light through yonder window breaks? It is the east and Juliet is the sun."

VIOLA'S VOICE OVER speaks the line.

VIOLA (VO)

"But soft, what light through yonder  
window breaks? It is the east and  
Juliet is the sun!"

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. VIOLA'S BEDROOM. EVENING.

VIOLA

(reading)

"Arise fair sun and kill the envious  
moon Who is already sick and pale with  
grief That thou her maid art far more  
fair than she..."

VIOLA is in bed, reading the lines from the manuscript page. WILL is in bed with her, reading with her.

VIOLA (CONT'D)

Oh, Will!

WILL

Yes, some of it is speakable.

She has to speak through WILL'S kisses, he is nibbling at her neck and shoulders and she has to bat him away with the pages.

VIOLA

(continuing reading)

"It is my lady, O it is my love! O  
that she knew she were!"

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. STAGE. DAY.

VIOLA continues the speech, edge-to-edge, now in

rehearsal, with SAM as "JULIET" sighing on the balcony above her.

VIOLA AS ROMEO

"The brightness of her cheek would  
shame those stars As daylight doth a  
lamp. Her eyes in heaven Would through  
the airy region stream so bright That  
birds would sing and think it were not  
night. See how she leans her cheek  
upon her hand. O that I were a glove  
upon that hand, That I might touch  
that cheek.

SAM AS JULIET

(above)

"Ay me."

VIOLA AS ROMEO

"She speaks.

Oh speak again bright angel..."

We have abandoned real time. The scene continues CROSS  
CUT between the STAGE and VIOLA'S BED.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. VIOLA'S BEDROOM. EVENING.

WILL

(reading through VIOLA'S  
kisses)

"Oh Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou  
Romeo? Deny thy father and refuse thy  
name."

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. STAGE. DAY

SAM AS JULIET

"Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my  
love And I'll no longer be a Capulet."

VIOLA AS ROMEO

(below)

"Shall I hear more or shall I speak at  
this?"

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. VIOLA'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.  
WILL and VIOLA in bed.

WILL

"What man art thou that thus  
bescreen'd in night So stumblest on my  
counsel?"

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. STAGE/AUDITORIUM. NIGHT.

It's become late and the rehearsal is continuing by  
torchlight.

VIOLA AS ROMEO

"...By a name I know not how to tell  
thee who I am: My name, dear saint, is  
hateful to myself Because it is an  
enemy to thee..."

We see that a group of the other actors have drifted "out  
front," drawn by the scene. FENNYMAN is there entranced.

Clearly, this stuff is a cut above the normal.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. VIOLA'S BEDROOM. NIGHT  
WILL, undressed, strides around the room, feeding  
"JULIET'S" lines to VIOLA in bed.

WILL

"The orchard walls are high and hard  
to climb, And the place death,  
considering who thou art, If any of my  
kinsmen find thee here. If they do see  
thee, they will murder thee."

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. STAGE. NIGHT.

VIOLA AS ROMEO

"Alack, there lies more peril in thine  
eye, Than twenty of their swords! Look  
thou but sweet, And I am proof against  
their enmity."

SAM AS JULIET

I would not for the world!

VIOLA AS ROMEO

I have night's cloak to hide me from  
their eyes; And but thou love me, let  
them find me here.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. VIOLA'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.  
WILL and VIOLA are both out of bed, halfway though  
dressing. Still rehearsing.

WILL

"Good night, good night. As sweet  
repose and rest Come to thy heart as  
that within my breast. O wilt thou  
leave me so unsatisfied?"

VIOLA

That's my line!

WILL

Oh, but it is mine too!

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. STAGE. NIGHT.

VIOLA AS ROMEO

"O wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?"



SAM AS JULIET

"What satisfaction can'st thou have tonight?"

VIOLA AS ROMEO

"The exchange of thy love's faithful vow for mine."

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. VIOLA'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.  
WILL and VIOLA are back on the bed, kissing and making love.

WILL

"My bounty is as boundless as the sea,  
My love as deep:

VIOLA AND WILL

(continuing the speech with him)

the more I give to thee The more I have,  
for both are infinite."

Outside the NURSE is knocking on the door and calling.  
INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. STAGE. DAY.

SAM AS JULIET

"I hear some noise within. Dear love,  
adieu."

RALPH, the Nurse, call's "JULIET!" off stage.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. VIOLA'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

VIOLA

(calling to the NURSE who is outside)

Anon, good Nurse

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. OUTSIDE VIOLA'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

The NURSE listens at the door.

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. STAGE. DAY.

SAM AS JULIET

"Anon, good Nurse--Sweet Montague be true."

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. VIOLA'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

WILL

"Stay but a little, I will come again."

VIOLA slaps him playfully for his vulgarity, and then kisses him.

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. STAGE. DAY.

SAM AS JULIET

"Stay but a little, I will come again."

SAM leaves the balcony through the curtain.

VIOLA AS ROMEO

"Oh blessed blessed night."

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. VIOLA'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

It is night. They have just made love. Suddenly it is very still.

VIOLA

(almost to herself)

"I am feared,

Being in night, all this but a dream, Too flattering-sweet to be substantial."

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. BACKSTAGE. DAY.

Onstage, the scene continues. Backstage NED ALLEYN is working his way upstairs. He passes by RALPH (the Nurse) who has a couple of words "of," as it were, in "JULIET'S" chamber.

SAM AS JULIET (O.S.)

"...All my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay, And follow thee my lord throughout the world."

RALPH AS NURSE

"Madam!"

SAM AS JULIET (O.S.)

"I come, anon--But if thou meanest not well, I do beseech thee--"

RALPH AS NURSE

"Madam!"

SAM AS JULIET (O.S.)

By and by I come to cease thy strife and leave me to my grief. A thousand times good night!"

SAM exits (i.e. enters to us) through the curtain.

SAM

(to NED)

I cannot move in this dress! and it makes me look like a pig! I have no neck in this pig dress!

(and then hearing his cue from "ROMEO")

Oh, she's off again! She says she's going and then she doesn't

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. WRITER'S CORNER. DAY.

NED is arriving. WILL is busy writing. PETER is there, holding the pages WILL has completed, and waiting for

WILL to finish his page. PETER is reading his pages. WILL sees NED arrive. He gives his page to PETER.

WILL

(to PETER)

How is it?

PETER

(shrugs)

It's all right.

Typical!, says WILL'S face. Peter departs, leaving the field to NED. WILL braces himself.

WILL

Ned...I know...I know

ALLEYN

It's good.

WILL

Oh

ALLEYN

The title won't do.

WILL

Ah

ALLEYN

Romeo and Juliet--just a suggestion.

WILL

Thank you, Ned.

The whole exchange is in ironic code, between old soldiers. NED nods curtly and turns to descend.

WILL (CONT'D)

You are a gentleman.

ALLEYN

And you are a Warwickshire shit-house.

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. STAGE/AUDITORIUM. DAY.

PETER is just handing the pages HENSLOWE in the auditorium. HENSLOWE has acquired a performing dog. The dog does somersaults tirelessly. As PETER hands over the pages, he shakes his head.

HENSLOWE

(in disbelief)

You mean, no dog of any kind?

FENNYMAN, the born-again theatre groupie shushes HENSLOWE and looks daggers at him.

PETER

(to HENSLOWE)

The Friar married them in secret, then Ned gets into a fight with one of the

Capulets, Romeo tries to stop them, he gets in Ned's way, I mean in Mercutio's way, so Tybalt kills Mercutio and then Romeo kills Tybalt. Then the Prince banishes him from Verona.

HENSLOWE

(much relieved)

That must be when he goes on the voyage and gets shipwrecked on the island of the Pirate King.

FENNYMAN can't hear it. He storms over. Kicks the dog, roars at HENSLOWE .

FENNYMAN

Cease your prattling! Get out!

(to the stage where the action has paused)

A thousand apologies!

SAM AS JULIET

"Good night, good night. Parting is such sweet sorrow That I shall say good night till it be morrow."

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. VIOLA'S BEDROOM. MORNING.

A sunbeam wakes the lovers. Sunday morning. Church bells. VIOLA wakes with a start. Something is bothering her, she can't think what. WILL calms her.

WILL

Sunday...it is Sunday.

He brings her back down to the pillow.

WILL (CONT'D)

I found something in my sleep. The Friar who married them will take up their destinies.

VIOLA

Oh, but it will end well for love?

WILL

In heaven, perhaps. It is not a comedy I am writing now. A broad river divides my lovers--family, duty, fate--as unchangeable as nature.

VIOLA

(sobered)

Yes, this is not life, Will. This is a stolen season.

Suddenly there is a great racket heard from downstairs...a man shouting.

WESSEX (O.S.)

Not ready? Where is she?

NURSE (O.S.)

Be patient, my lord, she is dressing.

WESSEX (O.S.)

Will you ask Her Majesty to be patient?!

VIOLA remembers. She jumps up and gives a cry.

VIOLA

Sunday! Greenwich!

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. OUTSIDE VIOLA'S BEDROOM. MORNING.

The NURSE is barring the stairs to WESSEX.

WESSEX

Now, pay attention, Nursy. The Queen, Gloriana Regina, God's Chosen Vessel, the Radiant One, who shines her light on us, is at Greenwich today, and prepared, during the evening's festivities, to bestow her gracious favour on my choice of wife--and if we're late for lunch, the old boot will not forgive. So you get you to my lady's chamber and produce her with or without her undergarments.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. VIOLA'S BEDROOM. MORNING.

VIOLA has her dress on and is putting on her shoes. WILL, in his underwear is in mid-argument.

WILL

You cannot! Not for the Queen herself!

VIOLA

What will you have me do? Marry you instead?

WILL

(brought up short)

To be the wife of a poor player?--can I wish that for Lady Viola, except in my dreams? And yet I would, if I were free to follow my desire in the harsh light of day.

VIOLA

(tartly)

You follow your desire freely enough  
in the night. So, if that is all, to  
Greenwich I go.

WILL

Then I will go with you.

VIOLA

You cannot, Wessex will kill you

WILL

I know how to fight!

VIOLA

(now fixing her hair)

Stage fighting!

(turn to him)

Oh, Will! As Thomas Kent my heart  
belongs to you but as Viola the river  
divides us, and I will marry Wessex a  
week from Saturday.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. OUTSIDE VIOLA'S BEDROOM  
DOWNSTAIRS HALL. MORNING.

The ranting from WESSEX has continued

WESSEX

(ranting)

By heaven, I will drag her down, by  
the Queen's command

And is cut off short as VIOLA'S door opens at the top of  
the stairs.

VIOLA

Good morning, my lord!

WESSEX

(impressed by her appearance)

Ah! My lady! The tide waits for no  
man, but I swear it would wait for  
you!

VIOLA comes down the stairs. Behind her WILL appears  
gowned and bonneted. He has also assumed a country  
accent.

WILL

Here we come at last, my lord!

WESSEX

(taken aback)

Are you bringing your laundry woman?

WILL

Her chaperone. My lady's country  
cousin.

(arriving with a curtsey)  
My, but you be a handsome gallant,  
just as she said! You may call me Miss  
Wilhelmina!

WESSEX

On a more fortuitous occasion, perhaps

WILL

Oh, my lord, you will not shake me  
off, she never needed me more, I swear  
by your breeches!

EXT. GREENWICH PALACE. NIGHT.

Fireworks explode in the evening sky over Greenwich, a  
royal palace, crowded now with noble guests.

EXT. GREENWICH PALACE. TERRACE. NIGHT.

The way these royal routs work is that guests mill about,  
chatting, bowing and generally behaving gallantly, while  
QUEEN ELIZABETH creates a vortex around her as she passes  
through the throng, occasionally honouring somebody with  
a couple of words, until she arrives thankfully at the  
best chair...where she establishes a headquarters. Her  
current LORD IN WAITING ferries the lucky few forward to  
a brief audience with the QUEEN, each giving way to the  
next. VIOLA and WESSEX are, respectively, dipping and  
bowing as they are greeted by people who know them..Will,  
in close attendance, joins in gratuitously, bowing until  
VIOLA nudges him and reminds him to curtsey instead. The  
QUEEN'S LORD IN WAITING plucks WESSEX'S sleeve.

WESSEX

(to him)

Now?

LORD IN WAITING

Now.

WESSEX

(to Viola)

The Queen asks for you. Answer well.

The LORD IN WAITING ushers VIOLA through the crowd. WILL  
starts to follow. WESSEX takes him by the arm.

WESSEX (CONT'D)

Is there a man?

WILL

A man, my lord?

WESSEX

(impatiently)

There was a man, poet--a theatre poet,

I heard--does he come to the house?

WILL

A theatre poet?

WESSEX

An insolent penny-a-page rogue,  
Marlowe, he said, Christopher  
Marlowe--has he been to the house?

WILL

Marlowe? Oh yes, he is the one, lovely  
waistcoat, shame about the poetry.

WESSEX

(venomously)

That dog!

ANGLE on the QUEEN.

The LORD IN WAITING has presented VIOLA. VIOLA speaks  
from a frozen curtsey.

VIOLA

Your Majesty.

QUEEN

Stand up straight, girl.

VIOLA straightens. The QUEEN examines her.

QUEEN (CONT'D)

I have seen you. You are the one who  
comes to all the plays--at Whitehall,  
at Richmond.

VIOLA

(agreeing)

Your Majesty.

QUEEN

What do you love so much?

VIOLA

Your Majesty

QUEEN

Speak out! I know who I am. Do you  
love stories of kings and queens?  
Feats of arms? Or is it courtly love?

VIOLA

I love theatre. To have stories acted  
for me by a company of fellows is  
indeed

QUEEN

(interrupting)

They are not acted for you, they are  
acted for me.



VIOLA remains silent, in apology.

ANGLE on WILL.

He is watching and listening. He has never seen the QUEEN so close. He is fascinated.

QUEEN (CONT'D)

And--?

VIOLA

And I love poetry above all.

QUEEN

Above Lord Wessex?

She looks over VIOLA'S shoulder and VIOLA realises WESSEX has moved up behind her. WESSEX bows.

QUEEN (CONT'D)

(to WESSEX)

My Lord--when you cannot find your wife you had better look for her at the playhouse.

The COURTIERS titter at her pleasantry.

QUEEN (CONT'D)

But playwrights teach nothing about love, they make it pretty, they make it comical, or they make it lust. They cannot make it true.

VIOLA

(blurts)

Oh, but they can!

She has forgotten herself. The COURTIERS gasp. The QUEEN considers her. WESSEX looks furious. WILL is touched.

VIOLA (CONT'D)

I mean...Your Majesty, they do not, they have not, but I believe there is one who can

WESSEX

Lady Viola is...young in the world. Your Majesty is wise in it.

Nature and truth are the very enemies of playacting. I'll wager my fortune.

QUEEN

I thought you were here because you had none.

Titters again. WESSEX could kill somebody.

QUEEN (CONT'D)

(by way of dismissing him)

Well, no one will take your wager, it

seems.

WILL

Fifty pounds!

Shock and horror. QUEEN ELIZABETH is the only person amused.

QUEEN

Fifty pounds! A very worthy sum on a very worthy question. Can a play show us the very truth and nature of love? I bear witness to the wager, and will be the judge of it as occasion arises.

(which wins a scatter of applause. She gathers her skirts and stands)

I have not seen anything to settle it yet.

(she moves away, everybody bowing and scraping)

So--the fireworks will be soothing after the excitements of Lady Viola's audience.

(and now she is next to WESSEX who is bowing low. Intimately to him)

Have her then, but you are a lordly fool. She has been plucked since I saw her last, and not by you. It takes a woman to know it.

The QUEEN passes by, and as WESSEX comes vertical again, we see his face a mask of furious realisation.

WESSEX

(to himself)

Marlowe!

INT. BURBAGE'S HOUSE. ENTRANCE. DAY.

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE shuts the door behind him. Above him, the ceiling creaks to the rhythm of copulation. He has a sheaf of manuscript pages in his hand. He goes to the stairs.

MARLOWE

Burbage!

The creaking stops.

BURBAGE'S VOICE

Who's there?

INT. BURBAGE'S HOUSE. STAIRS. DAY.

MARLOWE ascends.

MARLOWE

Marlowe.

BURBAGE'S VOICE

Kit!

INT. BURBAGE'S HOUSE. BEDROOM. DAY.

MARLOWE enters, ignoring the situation on the bed where ROSALINE is astride BURBAGE.

MARLOWE

You are playing my Faustus this afternoon. Don't spend yourself in sport.

ROSALINE

(working hard)

This afternoon!--we'll still be here this afternoon.

BURBAGE

What do you want, Kit?

MARLOWE

My Massacre at Paris is complete.

BURBAGE

You have the last act?

MARLOWE

You have the money?

BURBAGE

Tomorrow.

MARLOWE

(leaving)

Then tomorrow you will have the pages.

BURBAGE

Wait!

(to ROSALINE)

Will you desist!

MARLOWE

Twenty pounds on delivery

BURBAGE

What is money to me like us? Besides, if I need a play, I have another waiting, a comedy by Shakespeare.

MARLOWE

Romeo?--he gave it to Henslowe.

BURBAGE

Never!

MARLOWE

Well, I am to Deptford now, I leave my respects, Miss Rosaline.

BURBAGE

I gave Shakespeare two sovereigns for Romeo!

MARLOWE

(leaving)

You did. But Ned Alleyn and the Admiral's Men have the playing of it as the Rose.

BURBAGE

Treachery!

BURBAGE rouses himself violently, throwing ROSALINE off the bed. The glass bracelet is flung from her wrist. It breaks on the floor, releasing a strip of paper. BURBAGE picks it up. What he reads on it does not please him: it is WILL'S signature.

BURBAGE (CONT'D)

Traitor and thief!

EXT. STREETS. DAY.

BURBAGE and a solid wedge of the CHAMBERLAIN'S MEND are cleaving a path through the crowds. Their faces are grim.  
INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. STAGE/AUDITORIUM/UNDER THE STAGE.  
DAY.

We are in Act III Scene I. NED ALLEYN as "MERCUTIO" and NOL as "BENVOLIO", and two "MONTAGUE" sidekicks are in occupation of the stage, when the "CAPULETS" swagger in, four of them headed by JAMES HEMMINGS as "TYBALT."

NOL AS BENVOLIO

"By my head, here comes the Capulets."

ALLEYN AS MERCUTIO

"By my heel, I care not."

JAMES HEMMINGS AS TYBALT

"Follow me close, for I will speak to them. (with bombast to "MERCUTIO")  
Gentlemen, good e'en: a word with one of you."

NED comes out of character.

ALLEYN

Are you going to do it like that? And before the humbled actor can reply NED continues.

ALLEYN (AS MECUTIO)

And but one word with one of us?

Couple it with something, make it a word and a blow.

But suddenly six more men and a dog invade the stage, ready to fight. BURBAGE and the CHAMBERLAIN'S MEN have arrived to avenge BURBAGE'S honour with swords, clubs, and a bucket (containing pig swill).

BURBAGE

Where is that thieving hack who can't keep his pen in his own ink pot!?

WILL has already leapt up onto the stage.

WILL

What is this rabble?!

BURBAGE aims a blow at WILL, who ducks and grabs a stave from the nearest actor, and parries the blow. He swings at BURBAGE, a CHAMBERLAIN'S MAN swings at WILL, THOMAS cries out, someone else slashes the stage hangings bringing down the drapes, and in a moment the ADMIRAL'S MEN and the CHAMBERLAIN'S MEN, using their much rehearsed skills, are brawling with weapons and fist, using everything short of unbuttoned rapiers. CRAB, the dog, is yapping and snapping at any legs he can reach. HENSLOWE, a little slow to catch up on the situation, checks the page in his hand. FENNYMAN, much slower to catch up, watches enthralled.

FENNYMAN

(to HENSLOWE)

Wonderful, wonderful! And a dog!

But now HENSLOWE has worked out that these actors don't belong, nor does the scene. he enters the fray, but his interest is protecting his property. Big burly RALPH is using a couple of unlit torches as weapons; he breaks one of them over an enemy's back and HENSLOWE turns on RALPH

HENSLOWE

Not with my props!

VIOLA is doing well enough, tripping up an enemy with a well-judged stave, and then using it to deflect a blow aimed at WILL

VIOLA

Will! What--?

WILL

A literary feud. Quite normal.

Then he is smashed over the head. He falls off the stage taking VIOLA with him. Under the stage is a space (known as Hell) and WILL shoves VIOLA into this space.

WILL (CONT'D)

Stay hid!

He gets back onto the stage, where the goings on are worthy of the Four Musketeers and Robin Hood combined, with SAM GOSSE, dressed as "JULIET," fighting with the best of them. There is a stack of cushions, stored for the expensive seats, and as the stack is knocked over, NED ALLEYN and others grab cushions to use as shields. Soon cushions are being ripped, and the air is full of flying feathers. The trap door in the stage opens, VIOLA'S head pops up. She looks around and, surrounded by milling legs and floating feathers, a boot catches her sideways and half knocks her wig off. In danger of having her cover blown, she ducks down again, leaving the trap open just nicely for Will to plummet down it.

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. UNDER THE STAGE. DAY.

WILL

I dreamed last night of a shipwreck.

You were cast ashore in a far country.

They embrace and kiss. In a moment they are in a world of their own.

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. UNDER THE STAGE. DAY.

The battle rages. FENNYMAN, alone now in the auditorium, continues to watch entranced. It's the greatest show he's ever seen. HENSLOWE is desperately trying to rescue odd props that have been seconded to the fight. Someone picks up a tree that is to be used in Romeo. HENSLOWE yells.

HENSLOWE

We need that for the balcony scene!

FENNYMAN notices this, and it rings a distant bell. He looks around and realises that some of these faces are unfamiliar. The tree comes crashing down on RALPH'S head. FENNYMAN looks at HENSLOWE.

HENSLOWE (CONT'D)

(in despair)

My poor Rose!

He collapses on to a broken bench. FENNYMAN comes over to him, grabs the script pages from his pocket, and consults them to confirm what he has now begun to suspect: that this scene is not in them.

FENNYMAN

(horrified)

My investment! LAMBERT!!!

LAMBERT has been sleeping peacefully through this, but

wakes to his master's call.

FENNYMAN (CONT'D)

(points at the fray)

VENGEANCE!

HENSLOWE attempts to intervene.

HENSLOWE

I want no more trouble, Mr. Fennyman.  
As I explained to you, the theatre  
business

FENNYMAN

Henslowe, you pound of tripe, in my  
business I would be out of business if  
I had your courage, so don't tell me  
about business

And he delivers a telling blow to a passing CHAMBERLAIN'S  
MAN, who wheels off the stage. LAMBERT meanwhile is  
making short work of the rest of the opposition,  
receiving help with the thorny business of identification  
from SAM. Stray members of the CHAMBERLAIN'S MEN are  
running from the theatre, as BURBAGE, fighting a heroic  
last stand, is tipped backwards by FENNYMAN off the stage  
and into a bucket of swill. A PAUSE. Then NED starts  
applauding. The others, weary from fighting, start  
applauding too, from all levels of the theatre. FENNYMAN  
looks around, starting to beam, as a din of encores and  
bravos engulf him. A star!

INT. BROTHEL. NIGHT.

The victorious army of actors bursts into the brothel,  
FENNYMAN at their head. He owns the brothel. The place is  
already crowded with WHORES and CUSTOMERS. It's a party.

FENNYMAN

(shouts)

A famous victory! Kegs and legs. Open  
and on the house! Oh what happy hour!

(and grabbing a RADDLED

WHORE)

Poxy Pol! You keep yourself to  
yourself I'll not have you infecting  
my investment!

VIOLA AS THOMAS

(looking around guardedly. To

WILL)

Is this a tavern?

WILL

It is also a tavern.

WILL sits her down in THE COMPANY and takes the chair next to her A PRETTY WHORE immediately sits on WILL'S knee and kisses him.

PRETTY WHORE

I remember you! The poet!

VIOLA furiously pulls the PRETTY WHORE off WILL'S lap.

PRETTY WHORE (CONT'D)

One at a time, one at a time!

SECOND WHORE

(to VIOLA)

Oh, he's a pretty one! Tell me your story while I tickle your fancy!

VIOLA AS THOMAS

Oh!--it's--it's--oh, it's a house of ill-repute!

WILL

It is, Thomas, but of good reputation.

Come, there is no harm in a drink.

Glasses are shoved into their hands. Everyone has a glass. Except RALPH

RALPH

(declining the glass)

Never when I'm working!

The PRETTY WHORE has turned her attention to SAM. SAM looks uncomfortable

PRETTY WHORE

Never tried it? Never?

(groping him)

I think you are ready, Sam!

FENNYMAN shouts a toast.

FENNYMAN

(raising his glass)

You are welcome to my best house!

Here's to the Admiral's Men!

Everybody drinks. VIOLA drinks too. She decides too. She decides to enjoy it. She bangs down her glass.

VIOLA AS THOMAS

(shouts)

The Admiral's Men!

WILL toasts with her. He sees that she feels one of THE COMPANY.

EXT. STREET. NIGHT.

A figure is running desperately through the streets. He



comes into the square and runs towards the Rose.

EXT. BROTHEL. NIGHT.

Half THE COMPANY are singing. NOL and a WHORE are tumbling down the stairs together. He is without his trousers. An awful lot of drink has gone down.

SAM

(to the PRETTIEST WHORE)

I...quite liked it.

VIOLA, bright eyed, is banging her glass on the table in time to a song which is being drunkenly delivered by a barbershop quartet of actors.

FENNYMAN reels into VIOLA.

FENNYMAN

Master Kent! You have not dipped your wick?

VIOLA AS THOMAS

(baffled)

My wick?

WILL

(saving her)

Mr. Fennyman, because you love the theatre you must have a part in my play. I am writing an Apothecary, a small but vital role.

FENNYMAN

(embracing WILL)

By heaven, I thank you! I will be your Apothecary!

In his general enthusiasm, he embraces the next man, who is RALPH, stone cold sober.

FENNYMAN (CONT'D)

I am to be in your play.

WHORE

(to RALPH)

And what is this play about?

RALPH

Well, there's this Nurse

FENNYMAN, beside himself, shouts for silence, announcing

FENNYMAN

Mr. Shakespeare has given me the part of the Apothecary!

HENSLOWE

The Apothecary? Will, what is the story? Where is the shipwreck? How

does the comedy end?

WILL

By God, I wish I knew.

HENSLOWE

By God, Will, if you do not, who does?  
Let us have pirates, clowns, and a  
happy ending, or we will send you back  
to Stratford to your wife!

That goes down every well with the entire COMPANY...except for VIOLA and WILL. He looks at her, helplessly, then makes as if to say something. VIOLA ducks away from him and blunders blindly out of the street door, in tears. VIOLA passes PETER who is coming in from the street. WILL, attempting to follow VIOLA, is grabbed round the shoulders by PETER...who, we now see, is in a highly emotional state. WILL tries to fight him off but PETER has the strength of the news he brings.

PETER

(shouts)

Will! Mr. Henslowe! Gentlemen all!

He brings the room to silence.

PETER (CONT'D)

A black day for us all! There is news  
come up river from Deptford. Marlowe  
is dead.

There are general gasps and cries for information.

PETER (CONT'D)

Stabbed! Stabbed to death in a tavern  
at Deptford!

No one is more affected than WILL. This second blow is worse than the first. He stands horror-stricken.

WILL

Oh...what have I done?

ALLEYN

(standing up)

He was the first man among us. A great  
light has gone out.

EXT. BROTHEL. NIGHT.

WILL comes staggering out into the street.

WILL

It was I who killed him! God forgive  
me, God forgive me!

He falls into a stagnant puddle, a deep gutter of water and garbage. He gets up and staggers on.

EXT. CHURCH TOWER. NIGHT.

A church tower looms up in the night sky.

INT. CHURCH. NIGHT.

This is where WILL has come. The church is empty, but for the demented, grieving figure of SHAKESPEARE, kneeling, praying, weeping, banging his head, in his private purgatory, dimly lit by tallow candles, gazed upon by effigies of the dead and images of his Redeemer. He is wet, bedraggled, weeds and leaves in his hair.

EXT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. DAY.

A lovely sunny morning. The church bells are ringing. VIOLA and the NURSE, mounted, approach. VIOLA rides sidesaddle on a beautiful horse, and is followed, rather like Quixote by Sancho, by the NURSE on a less impressive animal.

Riding in the opposite direction, is WESSEX. And what a happy day it is. He sings and hums to himself merrily. Here is a man who has heard wonderful news. He sees VIOLA and greets her merrily.

WESSEX

You look sad, my lady! Let me take you riding.

VIOLA

It is not my riding day, my lord.

WESSEX

Bless me, I thought it was a horse.

VIOLA

I am going to church.

WESSEX

(recomposing his features to solemnity)

I understand of course. It is to be expected.

VIOLA

It is to be expected on a Sunday.

WESSEX

And on a day of mourning. I never met the fellow but once at your house.

VIOLA

(cannot take this in)

Mourning? Who is dead, my lord?

WESSEX

Oh!--dear God, I did not think it would be me to tell you. A great loss to

playwriting, and to dancing.  
VIOLA almost faints. The NURSE steadies her.

VIOLA  
(faintly)  
He is dead?

WESSEX  
(cheerfully solemn)  
Killed last night, in a tavern! Come,  
then, we'll say a prayer for his soul  
VIOLA gives a silent cry. The NURSE is speaking to her in  
distress.

NURSE  
My lady...my lady...now is the time to  
show your breeding.

INT. CHURCH. DAY.

The NURSE is holding VIOLA up as they enter the church.  
VIOLA seems catatonic. The NURSE lowers her onto a seat  
and sits down next to her.

As they sit, the CHOIR enters singing. WESSEX, who is  
sitting in the next pew, looks about him with interest.  
He hasn't been in a church for years. What he sees turns  
him to jelly. He sees WILL SHAKESPEARE.

ANGLE on WILL.

WILL is a spectral, bedraggled figure, backlit by a great  
shaft of light, he would look like a ghost at the best of  
times, and this is the worst. Bleeding from where he has  
banged his head, bedraggled and ravaged by the night, he  
stands in a side chapel staring at WESSEX.

WESSEX gasps and sweats, and sees WILL raise a quivering  
accusatory finger at him. WESSEX cracks. He starts to  
mumble.

WESSEX  
Oh, spare me, dear ghost, spare me for  
the love of Christ!

Now VIOLA sees WILL. She is still paralysed, and seems at  
first unable to take him in. She watches with detachment  
as WESSEX starts to back out of the church, finally  
running in terror.

WESSEX (CONT'D)  
(screaming)

Spare me!

The CHOIR continues to sing, but the scream brings VIOLA  
to her senses and she runs to a side door where WILL is  
leaving.

EXT. CHURCH. DAY.

Outside, VIOLA sees WILL, staggering away from the church. She calls his name.

VIOLA

Will!

He does not answer. She runs after him.

VIOLA (CONT'D)

Oh, my love, I thought you were dead!  
She claps him to her. They told each other for a moment then WILL pulls back.

WILL

It is worse. I have killed a man.

EXT. MEADOW. DAY.

VIOLA'S horse grazes. WILL lies on his back, still sobered and full of guilt. VIOLA sits on the grass among the buttercups and looks down at him.

VIOLA is plaiting a finger-ring from stems of grass. She has not yet revealed her feelings.

WILL

Marlowe's touch was in my Titus  
Andronicus and my Henry VI was a house  
built on his foundations.

VIOLA

You never spoke so well of him.

WILL

He was not dead before. I would  
exchange all my plays to come for all  
of his that will never come.

VIOLA

You lie.

WILL turns to look at her.

VIOLA (CONT'D)

You lie in your meadow as you lied in  
my bed.

WILL

My love is no lie. I have a wife, yes,  
and I cannot marry the daughter of Sir  
Robert de Lesseps. It needed no wife  
come from Stratford to tell you that.  
And yet you let me come to your bed.

VIOLA

Calf love. I loved the writer, and  
gave up the prize for a sonnet.

WILL

I was the more deceived.

VOILA

Yes--you were deceived. For I never  
loved you till now.

WILL

Now?

VIOLA

(declaring herself)

I love you, Will, beyond poetry.

WILL

Oh, my love

(he kisses her)

You ran from me before.

VIOLA

You were not dead before. When I  
thought you dead, I did not care about  
all the plays that will never come,  
only that I would never see your face.  
I saw our end, and it will come.

WILL

You cannot marry Wessex!

VIOLA

If not Wessex the Queen will know the  
cause and there will be no more Will  
Shakespeare.

They kiss again, passionately.

WILL

No...no.

VIOLA

(through his kisses)

But I will go to Wessex as a widow  
from these vows, as solemn as they are  
unsanctified.

And as their desperate kisses turn into lovemaking we cut

**to:**

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. STAGE/AUDITORIUM. DAY.

WILL

(he is mid speech)

For killing Juliet's kinsman Tybalt,  
the one who killed Romeo's friend  
Mercutio, Romeo is banished

He is on the stage of the Rose. The entire COMPANY is  
assembled, HENSLOWE and FENNYMAN included, holding pages

of manuscript, which they are sharing together, examining the separated pages, passing pages to each other, etc.

WILL'S mood is intense and focused.

WILL (CONT'D)

but the Friar who married Romeo and Juliet

ACTOR (EDWARD)

Is that me. Will?

WILL

You, Edward. The Friar who married them gives Juliet a potion to drink. It is a secret potion. It makes her seeming dead. She is placed in the tomb of the Capulets. She will awake to life and love when Romeo comes to her side again.

THE COMPANY murmurs approval.

WILL (CONT'D)

I have not said all. By malign fate, the message goes astray which would tell Romeo of the Friar's plan. He hears only that Juliet is dead. And thus he goes to the Apothecary.

FENNYMAN

That's me.

WILL

And buys a deadly poison. He enters the tomb to say farewell to Juliet who lies there cold as death. He drinks the poison. He dies by her side. And then she wakes and sees him dead.

HENSLOWE is fascinated and appalled.

WILL (CONT'D)

And so Juliet takes his dagger and kills herself.

PAUSE.

WILL is staring at VIOLA

HENSLOWE

Well, that will have them rolling in the aisles.

FENNYMAN

Sad and wonderful! I have a blue velvet cap which will do well, I have seen apothecary with a cap just so.

ALLEYN

(to WILL)

Yes--it will serve. But there's a scene missing between marriage and death.

WILL is still staring at VIOLA. Aware, suddenly, of the others watching, she breaks his gaze and drops her head. WILL looks at NED.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. VIOLA'S BEDROOM. EVENING.

WILL and VIOLA. VIOLA dressed as THOMAS. He has present for her--a neatly written manuscript of his play, on sheets folded to octavo size.

WILL

The play. All written out for you. I had the clerk at Bridewell do it, he has a good fist for lettering.

She wants to accept the present with joy, but something in his mood restrains her.

WILL (CONT'D)

There's a new scene  
He turns the pages and shows her.

VIOLA

Will you read it for me?

WILL

(he knows it)

"Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day> It was the nightingale and not the lark That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear. Nightly she sings on yon pomegranate tree. Believe me, love, it was the nightingale."

VIOLA

(reading)

"It was the lark, the herald of the morn, No nightingale. Look, love, what envious streaks Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east. Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops. I must be gone and live, or stay and die."

The words of the scene become WILL'S and VIOLA'S, their way of saying the farewells they cannot utter.

WILL

"Yon light is not daylight, I know it,



I. It is some meteor that the sun  
exhales To be to thee this night a  
torchbearer..."

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. BACKSTAGE. DAY.

But the scene is continuing with VIOLA dressed as  
"THOMAS." Somewhere behind and up above the stage, in a  
deserted corner among rigging, bits of scenery, etc.,  
they speak the lines and we hardly know ourselves whether  
it is rehearsal or lovemaking. But after a few moments it  
is definitely lovemaking. Their clothes start coming  
away, their words interrupted by kisses.

WILL

"...thou need'st not to be gone."

VIOLA

"I have more care to stay than will to  
go. Come death, and welcome. Juliet  
wills it so. How is't my soul? Let's  
talk. It is not day."

By now, her loosened bosom-bandage has been pulled away  
and WILL passionately embraces her nakedness.

And into this heaving composition comes a little white  
mouse, unseen by them, climbing through a knot hole in  
the planking behind VIOLA'S head.

An adjacent knot hole reveals a human eye and we do not  
need to be told it is JOHN WEBSTER'S.

WEBSTER takes his eye away from the peephole, and frowns,  
thinking it out.

EXT. ALLEWAY. DAY.

TILNEY puts a coin in WEBSTER'S hand.

TILNEY

You will go far, I fear.

TILNEY (CONT'D)

I hope we work together again. Tilney  
walks away.

EXT. THE ROSE THEATRE. DAY.

A man is pacing up and down, in a sort of agony. He is  
muttering. He is glancing at a sheet of paper. He is  
FENNYMAN rehearsing the important role of the Apothecary,  
for which he has a special voice.

FENNYMAN

"Such mortal drugs I have but Mantua's  
law Is death to any he that utters  
them." Then him. Then me.

"Put this in any liquid thing you will And..."--something

He has dried up. He curses--the terror and despair.

FENNYMAN (CONT'D)

"Such mortal drugs I have..." What is  
it? What is it?

He is so wrapped up in all this that he simply does not  
notice when WESSEX rides up to the main entrance  
dismounts and walks inside.

INT. THE ROSE THEATRE. STAGE/AUDITORIUM. DAY.

Onstage, the rehearsal continues. WESSEX strides in.  
Among the audience are HENSLOWE, a few actors...and JOHN  
WEBSTER...who sees WESSEX and jumps up and goes to him.

WEBSTER

My lord!

WESSEX knocks him aside and continues.

WESSEX

(shouts)

Shakespeare!

Everything stops.

WESSEX (CONT'D)

You upstart inky pup! Now I will show  
you your place, which is in hell!

WILL

You are on my ground.

WESSEX

(drawing his sword)

By God, I'll fight the lot of you

WILL draws his sword.

WILL

I am more than enough.

VIOLA reacts. She almost gives herself away. But the  
fight has started.

WESSEX slashes at WILL. WILL knows how to fight. He  
parries and thrusts. WESSEX is surprised. The fight goes  
fast and furious around the stage, until WILL thrusts  
accurately at WESSEX'S chest...and would have killed him  
but for the button on his sword-point.

WESSEX grapples with him, and now it becomes a parody of  
the Hamlet duel; WESSEX'S unbuttoned sword falls to the  
ground, WILL puts his foot on it, tosses WESSEX his own  
safe sword, picks up Wessex's sword and continues the  
fight until he has WESSEX at his mercy.

WILL has fought with a passionate rage that has everybody  
staring at him. Now the look in his eyes is merciless.

WILL (CONT'D)

Absent friends!

(to the assembly)

This is the murderer of Kit Marlowe!

NED ALLEYN comes forward looking worried and dubious.

ALLEYN

Will

WESSEX

I rejoiced at his death because I thought it was yours. That is all I know of Marlowe.

ALLEYN

It's true, Will--it was a tavern brawl...Marlowe attacked, and got his own knife in the eye. A quarrel about the bill

HENSLOWE

The bill! Oh, vanity, vanity!

ALLEYN

Not the billing, the bill!

WILL steps back, and sinks to his knees. His relief could not be greater.

WILL

(to the heavens)

Oh God, I am free of it!

WESSEX gets to his feet. TILNEY enters the auditorium from the public entrance.

WESSEX

Close it!

TILNEY

My Lord Wessex!

WESSEX

(foaming)

Close it! Take it down stone by stone!  
I want it ploughed into the ground,  
and sown with quick lime!

WESSEX storms out past the bewildered TILNEY.

HENSLOWE

Mr. Tilney, what is this?

TILNEY

Sedition and indecency!

HENSLOWE

What?!

WEBSTER

Master of the Revels, sir, over here,

sir.

TILNEY

(to WEBSTER)

Where, boy?

WEBSTER

(points)

I saw her bubbies!

TILNEY

(shocked and gratified)

A woman on the stage? A woman?

WEBSTER

I swear it!

THE COMPANY of actors are dumbstruck. None more than VIOLA.

TILNEY

So, Henslowe! I say this theatre is closed! On the authority of the powers invested in my by the court--I close this theatre!

HENSLOWE

Why so?

TILNEY

(triumphantly)

For lewdness and unshamefacedness! For displaying a female on the public stage!

TILNEY is unstoppable. He jumps on the stage...and seizes SAM GOSSE. Before WEBSTER or anyone can intervene, TILNEY pulls up his skirt, ignoring SAM'S rather guttural yell of protest and pulls down SAM'S drawers.

TILNEY'S face is a study. So is everybody else's. WEBSTER rolls his eyes (oh, these stupid grown-ups!) and deftly throws one of his mice onto "ROMEO'S" hair. VIOLA gives a shrill scream, the startled mouse descends her neck via VIOLA'S ear, and seeks an entry into her collar. By which time VIOLA has gone berserk and torn off her wig. Her hair is pinned up but there is no question her gender. WILL is paralysed. VIOLA gives him a look of terrible despair and apology.

WEBSTER

(pointing at SAM)

Not him.

(pointing at VIOLA)

her.

HENSLOWE

He's a woman!

By now the scene is playing to a crowded theatre, or so it seems.

TILNEY

That's who I meant! This theatre is closed! Notice will be posted!

SAM has picked himself up, and his drawers.

HENSLOWE

(to NED)

Ned, I swear I knew nothing of this!

VIOLA

(hoping to protect WILL)

Nobody knew!

WEBSTER

(pointing at WILL)

He did! I saw him kissing her bubbies!

Everybody looks at WILL, who stares at VIOLA, helpless.

TILNEY

Closed! Closed, mark you, Henslowe!

TILNEY turns on his heel and leaves in triumph. THE COMPANY is still polaxed.

HENSLOWE

(in despair)

It is over.

VIOLA

I am so sorry, Mr. Henslowe. I wanted to be an actor.

(she turns to WILL)

I am sorry, Will.

WILL shakes his head. This cannot be the end. VIOLA walks away, leaving by the public entrance. They all let her go, watching her silently. As she passes WABASH

WABASH

Y-y-y-you w-w-w-were w-w-w-w-wonderful.

VIOLA

Thank you.

As she is leaving, WILL comes to life. He starts off towards her...but his progress is halted by a sock to the jaw from NED ALLEYN. WILL falls down in the dust. FENNYMAN enters, still bent over his sheet of paper, mumbling his precious lines. When he reaches the groundlings yard, he finds to his surprise the whole

COMPANY is standing about in attitudes of despair or worse. FENNYMAN looks around.

FENNYMAN

Everything all right?

EXT. THE ROSE THEATRE. EVENING.

The closure notice is nailed to the door.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. VIOLA'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

VIOLA, in her nightdress, is reading by candlelight. She is reading her private manuscript of Romeo and Juliet...and rereading. Next to her is a tray of covered dishes. the NURSE enters and looks at her sympathetically. She lifts the tray. She realises it is heavy. She puts it down and raises the covers and sees that VIOLA has eaten nothing. She looks at VIOLA'S tears, but there is nothing to be said.

INT. TAVERN. DAY.

They are all there--the ADMIRAL'S MEN, including WILL and HENSLOWE, drowning their sorrows. Everyone is drunk. FENNYMAN is also there, taking the disaster somewhat selfishly.

FENNYMAN

(muttering)

I would have been good...I would have been great.

He hands a flask to RALPH who is in a similar mood.

RALPH

So would I. We both would.

RALPH contemplates the flask, and, since he's not working, takes a swig. A moment later, he keels over, rigid as a pole. The street door crashes open. BURBAGE enters. Behind him enter a solid wedge of the CHAMBERLAIN'S MEN, sober-faced, several with black eyes and bandages round their heads.

FENNYMAN

(shouts)

Lambert!

LAMBERT, FENNYMAN'S henchman and killer, puts down his tankard and comes forward, casually kicking chairs and tables out of his way.

FENNYMAN (CONT'D)

Kill him!

LAMBERT reaches up to the wall over the bar and takes down once of the ceremonial weapons hanging there--a battle-axe.

But BURBAGE has flintlock pistol stuck into his sash. BURBAGE draws and the pistol roars, shooting flame, LAMBERT curses, drops the axe, nurses his wounded hand. BURBAGE puts the pistol back into his sash. NED ALLEYN is half-drunk at a table. He staggers to his feet. He faces BURBAGE.

ALLEYN

Well, Burbage--you never did know when your scene was over.

BURBAGE

That can wait. The Master of the Revels despises us for vagrants, tinkers, and peddlers of bombast. But my father, James Burbage, had the first licence to make a company of players from Her Majesty, and he drew from poets the literature of the age. Their fame will be our fame. So let them all know, we are men of parts. We are a brotherhood, and we will be a profession. Will Shakespeare has a play. I have a theatre. The Curtain is yours.

EXT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. DAY.

A strong wind is blowing through the trees. A BOY with a paste-pot and a bundle of flyers, is having trouble pasting a flyer on the wall of the building. A gust of wind scatters the bundle and sends a couple of dozen flyers flying into the sky. The BOY with the paste-pot runs around, trying to recover those he can. We look at the poster. It says

BY PERMISSION OF

MR. BURBAGE

A

HUGH FENNYMAN PRODUCTION

OF

MR. HENSLOWE'S PRESENTATION

OF

THE ADMIRAL'S MEN IN PERFORMANCE

OF

THE EXCELLENT AND LAMENTABLE TRAGEDY

OF

ROMEO AND JULIET

with Mr. Fennyman as the Apothecary

WILL comes out of the theatre, and passes the poster. He walks on without looking at it. A voice calls after him:

HENSLOWE

Will!

WILL does not turn to look at him.

HENSLOWE (CONT'D)

We'll be needing a Romeo

WILL carries on walking.

EXT. STREETS. DAY.

WILL is pushing through the crowds on his way to the river.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. VIOLA'S BEDROOM. DAY.

The NURSE is helping VIOLA to dress--in a wedding dress. The NURSE is in tears. VIOLA submits to the task impassively.

EXT. THE RIVER. DAY.

WILL is climbing down the ladder to the waiting boats.

INT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. HALL. DAY.

WESSEX, dressed to be a bridegroom is concluding his negotiations with DE LESSEPS, while LADY DE LESSEPS weeps. DE LESSEPS is signing papers. There is a money chest, too.

WESSEX

My ship is moored at Bankside, bound for Virginia on the afternoon tide--please do not weep, Lady De Lesseps, you are gaining a colony.

DE LESSEPS

And you are gaining five thousand pounds, my lord...by these drafts in my hand.

WESSEX

Would you oblige me with fifty or so in gold?--just to settle my accounts at the dockside?

DE LESSEPS sighs and unlocks his money chest. WESSEX places his empty purse on the desk.

WESSEX (CONT'D)

Ah!--Look, she comes!

VIOLA has appeared at the top of the stairs with the NURSE.

VIOLA

Good morning, my lord. I see you are open for business so let's to church.



EXT. DE LESSEPSES' HOUSE. DAY.

WILL is running across the grass towards the house. As he crosses the bridge over the moat, a carriage bears down on him, and he has to flatten himself against the wall of the gatehouse as the carriage passes, taking WESSEX and his bride to church. WILL'S face, as he watches the carriage disappear. Distant bells begin to peal

EXT. CHURCH DOOR. DAY.

The bells announce the completion of the marriage--as WESSEX and the new LADY WESSEX leave the church. VIOLA'S veil is flying in the wind, and beneath it we can just see VIOLA'S unhappy face. The DE LESSEPS FAMILY entourage is applauding. WESSEX beams with satisfaction.

Suddenly the sky and the wind deliver a message--a flyer from the Curtain slaps against WESSEX'S face. He claws at it and tries to throw it away. The wind delivers it to VIOLA'S bosom. She takes it up and reads it. And passes it to the NURSE.

WESSEX descends the steps to where the curtained carriage awaits the bride and groom. He gallantly holds the door for VIOLA to enter. She climbs aboard. WESSEX makes to follow her.

NURSE

My lord!

The NURSE grasps him in a moving embrace, to WESSEX'S discomfort.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Be good to her, my lord!

WESSEX

I will.

He tries to disengage. She won't have it.

NURSE

God bless you!

WESSEX

Thank you. Let go, there's a good nurse.

After a couple of further attempts, WESSEX extricates himself.

WESSEX (CONT'D)

The tide will not wait. Farewell!

WESSEX pulls aside the curtain and gets in.

INT. CARRIAGE. DAY.

It takes a moment for WESSEX to realise he is alone in there. He looks around but VIOLA has fled.

EXT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. DAY.

Hundreds of people are converging on the theatre. Among them is the Puritan MAKEPEACE, vainly exhorting the crowds to run away from sin

MAKEPEACE

Licentiousness is made a show, vice is made a show, vanity and pride likewise made a show! This is the very business of show

But MAKEPEACE is being carried inexorably through the main doors of the theatre.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. BACKSTAGE. DAY.

The ADMIRAL'S MEN are all in costume, and are in a buzz of nervous excitement. ALLEYN, dressed for "MERCUTIO," is giving last minute instructions to PETER. JAMES and JOHN HEMMINGS are arguing about the timing of their entrance. FENNYMAN in his apothecary's cap is agonising over his lines. WABASH is stuttering over his. Alone in his dejection in the midst of all this, is WILL, dressed for "ROMEO."

FENNYMAN approaches him, apothecary's cap in hand.

FENNYMAN

Is this all right?

WILL nods, miserable. SAM has found a private corner. He is gargling into a basin. He looks worried and furtive.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. AUDITORIUM. DAY.

The audience is gathering.

EXT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. DAY.

Word has got around. Even rich people are coming. They arrive by carriage and by palanquin.

Some of them are cloaked and hooded, slumming incognito. A cannon booms from the Curtain. The flag of the ADMIRAL'S MEN flutters above.

EXT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. ENTRANCE. DAY.

LAMBERT and FREES are taking the entrance money.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. AUDITORIUM. DAY.

The auditorium is now packed. Among them, sheepish, is MAKEPEACE.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. BACKSTAGE. DAY.

Everything is ready. NED signals the musicians. Trumpets and drums sound. The house falls silent.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. THE WINGS. DAY.

WABASH seems to be important at the beginning. We have

never been told what part he plays. He is still muttering lines and stuttering them.

WABASH

(mutter)

T-t-t-two h-h-households b-both alike  
in d-d-d-dignity.

WILL listens to him in agony. He finds HENSLOWE next to him.

WILL

(to HENSLOWE)

We are lost.

HENSLOWE

No, it will turn out well.

WILL

How will it?

HENSLOWE

I don't know, it's a mystery.

And off we go. HENSLOWE claps WABASH on the shoulder and sends him through the curtain.

ANGLE on WABASH

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. STAGE. DAY.

The audience waits expectantly. WABASH gathers himself.

WABASH AS THE CHORUS

T-t-t-t-two

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. BACKSTAGE. DAY.

WILL shuts his eyes and prays.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. STAGE/AUDITORIUM. DAY.

WABASH launches himself into a perfect audacious delivery like a star.

WABASH AS THE CHORUS

"...Household both alike in dignity (in  
fair Verona where we lay our scene)  
From ancient grudge break to new  
mutiny, Where civil blood makes civil  
hands unclean. From forth the fatal  
loins of these two foes A pair of star-  
cross'd lovers take their life, Whose  
misadventured piteous overthrows Doth  
with their death bury their parents'  
strife..."

EXT. STREET. DAY.

VIOLA and the NURSE, hurrying toward the Curtain.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. BACKSTAGE. DAY.

HEMMINGS BROTHERS are ready to go on as "SAMPSON" and

"GROCERY," Act I Scene I. They shake hands. Beyond the curtain, the audience applauds the Prologue as WABASH comes through the curtain backstage.

WILL

(to WABASH)

Wonderful!

WABASH

W-w-w-was it g-g-g-good?

The HEMMINGS BROTHERS enter the arena and the play begins.

**POV:**

JOHN HEMMINGS AS SAMPSON

"Gregory, on my word we'll not carry coals."

JAMES HEMMINGS AS GREGORY

"No, for then we should be colliers."

WILL looks as if he would rather be dead. SAM GOSSE approaches WILL, nervously.

SAM

(nervously--in a deep bass  
guttural hoarse voice)

Master Shakespeare

WILL

(absently)

Luck be with you, Sam.

(as the awful truth gets  
through to him)

Sam...?

SAM

(in the same voice)

It is not my fault, Master  
Shakespeare. I could do it yesterday.

WILL

Sam! Do me a speech, do me a line.

SAM

(the effect is horrible)

"Parting is such sweet sorrow..."

HENSLOWE has been overhearing.

HENSLOWE

Another little problem.

WILL

What do we do now?

HENSLOWE

The show must ... you know

WILL

Go on.

HENSLOWE

Juliet does not come on for twenty pages. It will be all right.

WILL

How will it?

HENSLOWE

I don't know. It's a mystery.

And he makes his way towards the front of the house.

EXT. STREET. DAY.

A furious WESSEX is hurrying along the road to the theatre.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. AUDITORIUM/STAGE. DAY.

VIOLA and the NURSE are arriving, and looking for a seat in the gallery. BURBAGE and his MEN are standing at the back, behind the people seated in the gallery. The first scene of the play is continuing

ARMITAGE AS ABRAM

"Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?"

JOHN HEMMINGS AS SAMPSON

"I do bite my thumb, sir."

BURBAGE finds HENSLOWE plucking agitatedly at his sleeve.

HENSLOWE

Can we talk?

They are standing behind the back row of the gallery seats. The spectator in front of them is the NURSE. She turns round and shushes HENSLOWE up.

HENSLOWE (CONT'D)

(whispering to BURBAGE)

We have no Juliet!

BURBAGE

(forgetting to whisper)

No Juliet?!

VIOLA

(turning)

No Juliet?!

HENSLOWE

it will be all right, madam.

VIOLA

What happened to Sam?

HENSLOWE

Who are you?

VIOLA

Thomas Kent!

Their whispers are causing black looks and hushing noises from the neighbours. HENSLOWE pulls VIOLA from her seat, luckily an aisle seat.

HENSLOWE

Do you know it?

VIOLA

(showing the manuscript)

Every word.

HENSLOWE and BURBAGE look at each other. CUT TO:  
INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. STAGE. DAY.

PHILIP AS LADY CAPULET

"Nurse, where is my daughter? Call her forth to me."

RALPH AS NURSE

"Now by my maidenhead at twelve year old, I bade her come. What, lamb. What ladybird."

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. THE WINGS/STAGE. DAY.

SAM who gathers himself, to make his entrance, quietly and horribly practising "How now, who calls?"

RALPH AS NURSE

(on stage)

"God forbid. Where's this girl?"

The author and star, WILL SHAKESPEARE, has his back to the stage, his hands over his ears. He is cowering in dread anticipation.

RALPH AS NURSE (CONT'D)

"What, Juliet!"

As SAM is about to enter HENSLOWE'S hand yanks him by the collar, and VIOLA overtakes him and steps on stage. Enter "JULIET." VIOLA is not wearing the been hidden from us by her cloak.

VIOLA AS JULIET

"How now, who calls?"

RALPH AS NURSE

"Your mother."

VIOLA AS JULIET

"Madam. I am here, what is your will?"

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. AUDITORIUM. DAY.

There is a collective gasp. Nobody has ever seen a BOY PLAYER like this.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. THE WINGS. DAY.

WILL takes his hands from his ears, and turns round in amazement at the sound of VIOLA'S voice.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. AUDITORIUM/STAGE. DAY.

WESSEX has just arrived in the auditorium and jumps as if he has been shot. He seems about to intervene, but looking around at the rapt faces he realises he cannot.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. THE WINGS. DAY.

HENSLOWE and BURBAGE look at each other.

BURBAGE

We will all be put in the clink.

HENSLOWE

(shrugs)

See you in jail.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. BACKSTAGE. DAY.

FENNYMAN, oblivious to the drama, is practising his lines in a fever of nervousness.

FENNYMAN

"Such mortal drugs I have but Mantua's  
Law Is death to any he that utters  
them." Then him. Then me.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. STAGE. DAY.

Swordplay. An amazing performance that holds the audience spellbound. "TYBALT" kills "MERCUTIO."

ALLEYN AS MERCUTIO

(to ROMEO)

"I am hurt.

WILL AS ROMEO

Courage man. The hurt cannot be much.

ALLEYN A MERCUTIO

Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find  
me a grave man."

A roll of thunder. Over the heads of the audience, far above the thatched roof of the theatre, clouds are gathering in the sky. On stage "MERCUTIO" is in 'ROMEO'S' arms, but the tone of the playing is unlike anything we have seen before: without bombast, intense and real. And the audience is quiet and attentive.

ALLEYN AS MERCUTIO (CONT'D)

"...--Why the devil came you between us?

I was hurt under your arms."

EXT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. DAY.

In the semirural view towards the City of London, there can be discerned a gaggle of approaching MEN and three is

something orderly about them. As they come closer, we see that they are a company of PIKE MEN, marching toward the theatre, led by the Master of the Revels, TILNEY. Thunder rolls.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. STAGE. DAY.

Figures are running across the stage, in the panic that follows "TYBALT" death.

ACTOR AS BENVOLIO

"Romeo, away, be gone! The citizens are up and Tybalt slain. Stand not amazed. The prince will doom thee death If thou art taken. Hence, be gone away!"

WILL AS ROMEO

"I am fortune's fool!"

ACTOR AS BENVOLIO

"Why dost thou stay!"

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. BACKSTAGE. DAY.

WILL has just 'killed' "TYBALT." He is still breathless from fighting. he stands face to face with VIOLA.

WILL

I am fortune's fool.

They stare at each other, transfixed.

WILL (CONT'D)

You are married?

PAUSE. She cannot answer.

WILL (CONT'D)

If you be married, my grave is like to be my wedding bed. The implication of her silence fills the air. WILL does not move.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. STAGE. DAY.

We cannot tell whether this is the play or their life. The audience, and the rest of the world, might as well not exist. WILL turn from her and begins to descend from the 'balcony.'

VIOLA AS JULIET

"Art thou gone so?"

WILL stops.

VIOLA AS JULIET (CONT'D)

Love, lord, ay husband, friend, I must hear from thee every day in the hour, For in a minute there are many days. O, by this count I shall be much in



years Ere I again behold my Romeo..."  
WILL as "ROMEO" seems unable to speak. Then he says:

WILL AS ROMEO

"...Farewell..."

All other sounds drain away, and time seems to stop.

VIOLA AS JULIET

"O think'st thou we shall ever meet  
again...? Methinks I see thee, now thou  
art so low, As one dead in the bottom  
of a tomb. Either my eyesight fails,  
or thou lookest pale."

WILL AS ROMEO

"Trust me, love, in my eyes so do you.  
Dry sorrow drinks our blood. Adieu.  
Adieu"

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. STAGE. DAY.

Now the FRIAR is giving "JULIET" his potion.

EDWARD AS FRIAR

"No warmth, no breath shall testify  
thou livest And in this borrow'd  
likeness of shrunk death Thou shall  
continue two and forty hours And then  
awake as from a pleasant sleep..."

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. STAGE. DAY.

It's FENNYMAN'S moment. The "APOTHECARY" and "ROMEO."

WILL AS ROMEO

"Come hither, man. I see that thou art  
poor. Hold, there is forty ducats. Let  
me have A dram of poison--"

FENNYMAN AS APOTHECARY

"Such mortal drugs I have but Mantua's  
law is death to any he that utters  
them!"

FENNYMAN has cut in several lines early, but his  
conviction is astonishing.

FENNYMAN AS APOTHECARY

"My poverty but not my will consents."

WILL AS ROMEO

"I pay thy poverty and not thy will."

EXT. STREET. NEAR THE CURTAIN THEATRE. DAY.

TILNEY, on the march. His hand grips a copy of the  
Curtain flyer.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. STAGE. DAY.

"JULIET" lies "dead." She lies on top of her tomb, "lying

in stage," her best dress, her hair done, her hands in prayer at her breast, her eyes closed. "ROMEO" has found her like this.

WILL AS ROMEO

"Eyes, look your last! Arms, take your last embrace! and lips, Oh you The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss A dateless bargain to engrossing death! Come, bitter conduct; come, unsavory guide! Thou desparate pilot, now at once run on The dashing rocks thy seasick weary bark!"

As WILL embraces her, VIOLA'S eyes flicker open (shielded by WILL from the audience) and the lovers look at each other for a moment as WILL and VIOLA rather than as "ROMEO" and "JULIET." Their eyes are wet with tears.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. AUDITORIUM. DAY.

BURBAGE and ROSALINE are watching.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. AUDITORIUM. DAY.

KEMPE is watching.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. AUDITORIUM. DAY.

We see that in the audience are several of the WHORES we recognise from the brothel. They are weeping openly.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. STAGE. DAY.

WILL is raising the fatal drug in a last toast.

WILL AS ROMEO

"Here's to my love (he drinks) O true Apothecary."

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. THE WINGS. DAY.

FENNYMAN, moved but proud in the wings.

FENNYMAN

(whispers to himself)

I was good. I was great.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. STAGE. DAY.

WILL AS ROMEO

"Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a kiss I die." (and he dies)

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. AUDITORIUM. DAY.

The NURSE is weeping too.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. STAGE. DAY.

"JULIET" wakes up with a start.

VIOLA AS JULIET

"...Where is my lord?

I do remember well where I should be, And there I am.

Where is my Romeo?"

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. AUDITORIUM. DAY.

NURSE

(involuntarily)

Dead!

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. STAGE. DAY.

VIOLA AS JULIET

"What here? A cup clos'd in my true  
love's hand? Poison, I see, hath been  
his timeless end."

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. STAGE. DAY.

"JULIET" takes "ROMEO'S" dagger.

VIOLA AS JULIET

"...O happy dagger

This is thy sheath. There rust, and let me die."

She stabs herself and dies. The "inner curtain" closes  
over the tomb.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. STAGE/AUDITORIUM. DAY.

HIGH ANGLE on audience and stage. "THE PRINCE" played by  
WABASH is having the last word.

THE PRINCE

"For never was a story of more woe  
Than this of Juliet and her Romeo."

The end. There is complete silence. The ACTORS are  
worried. But then the audience goes mad with applause.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. THE INNER CURTAIN/STAGE. DAY.

The inner curtain opens, but WILL and VIOLA, are in a  
play of their own...embracing and kissing passionately,  
making their own farewell. HENSLOWE is too stunned and  
moved to react at first. Then he looks at the audience  
and the penny drops. It's a hit.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. AUDITORIUM/STAGE. DAY.

The audience roars. WILL, VIOLA, and THE COMPANY come  
forward to meet the applause. TILNEY and his MEN burst  
in. TILNEY jumps up onto the stage, where the ADMIRAL'S  
MEN are taking their bows. TILNEY'S "COPS" ring the  
stage, facing inwards.

TILNEY

(shouts triumphantly)

I arrest you in the name of Queen  
Elizabeth!

The AUDIENCE goes quiet. BURBAGE jumps out of the  
audience onto the stage.

BURBAGE

Arrest who, Mr. Tilney?

TILNEY

Everybody! The Admiral's Men, The Chamberlain's Men and everyone of you ne'er-do-wells who stands in contempt of the authority invested in me by her Majesty.

BURBAGE

Contempt? You closed the Rose--I have not opened it.

TILNEY is at a loss but only for a moment.

TILNEY

(he points a "j'accuse" finger at VIOLA)

That woman is a woman!

The entire audience and the actors, recoil and gasp. The NURSE crosses herself.

ALLEYN

What?! A woman?! You mean that goat?! He points at VIOLA, brazening it out without much chance.

TILNEY

I'll see you all in the clink! In the same of her Majesty Queen Elizabeth And an authoritative voice from the audience interrupts him.

VOICE

Mr. Tilney...!

It is QUEEN ELIZABETH herself, descending now, her hood and cloak thrown back. She is an awesome sight. A shaft of sunlight hits her.

QUEEN

Have a care with my name, you will wear it out.

There is a general parting of the waves, soldiers and actors, a general backing off and bowing as QUEEN ELIZABETH takes the limelight.

QUEEN (CONT'D)

The Queen of England does not attend exhibitions of public lewdness so something is out of joint. Come here, Master Kent. Let me look at you.

VIOLA comes forward, and is about to curtsy when she catches the QUEEN'S eye, an arresting eye, which arrests the curtsy and turns it into a sweeping bow.

QUEEN (CONT'D)

Yes, the illusion is remarkable and your error, Mr. Tilney, easily forgiven, but I know something of a woman in a man's profession, yes, by God, I do know about that. That is enough from you, Maser Kent. If only Lord Wessex were here.

VOICE

He is, Ma'am.

The voice belongs to JOHN WEBSTER. He points firmly at a figure in the audience, WESSEX, trying to look inconspicuous.

WESSEX

(weakly)

Your Majesty

QUEEN

There was a wager, I remember...as to whether a play can show the very truth and nature of love. I think you lost it today.

(turning to WEBSTER)

You are an eager boy. Did you like the play?

WEBSTER

I liked it when she stabbed herself, your Majesty.

The QUEEN fixes WILL with a beady eye.

QUEEN

Master Shakespeare. Next time to you come to Greenwich, Come as yourself and we will speak some more. WILL bows deeply. The QUEEN turns to leave. The waves part for her.

INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. MAIN ENTRANCE. DAY.

The QUEEN is bowed out through the doors.

EXT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. DAY.

A gaggle of the QUEEN'S favoured courtiers wait by her carriage. WESSEX is hurrying down the exterior staircase as the QUEEN emerges from the theatre. During the following a general egress from the Auditorium is taking place, including some of the actors crowding to see her off. WESSEX bows out of breath.

WESSEX

Your Majesty!

QUEEN

Why, Lord Wessex! Lost your wife so soon?

WESSEX

Indeed I am a bride short. How is this to end?

VIOLA has come out of the theatre, amongst some of the other players. The QUEEN catches her eye.

QUEEN

As stories must when love's denied--with tears and a journey. Those whom God has joined in marriage, not even I can put asunder.

QUEEN (CONT'D)

(she turns to VIOLA)

Lord Wessex, as I foretold, has lost his wife in the play- house--go make your farewell and send her out. It's time to settle accounts.

(to WESSEX)

How much was the wager?

WESSEX

Fifty shillings.

(the QUEEN gives him a look)

Pounds.

QUEEN

Give it to Master Kent. He will see it rightfully home. WESSEX gives his purse to VIOLA.

QUEEN (CONT'D)

(to VIOLA)

And tell Shakespeare something more cheerful next time for Twelfth Night.

The QUEEN proceeds towards her carriage. There is an enormous puddle between her and her carriage. The QUEEN hesitates for a fraction and then marches through the puddle as cloaks descend upon it.

QUEEN (CONT'D)

Too late, too late.

She splashes her way into her carriage, which departs.  
INT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. STAGE. DAY.

WILL

(heartbroken, testing her

name)

My Lady Wessex?

VIOLA nods, heartbroken too. For a long moment they cannot say anything to each other. The she holds up Wessex's purse.

VIOLA

A hired player no longer. Fifty pounds, Will, for the poet of true love.

WILL

I am done with theatre. The playhouse is for dreamers. Look where the dream has brought us.

VIOLA

It was we ourselves did that. And for my life to come I would not have it otherwise.

WILL

I have hurt you and I am sorry for it.

VIOLA

If my hurt is to be that you will write no more, then I shall be the sorrier.

WILL looks at her.

VIOLA (CONT'D)

The Queen commands a comedy, Will for Twelfth Night.

WILL

(harshly)

A comedy! What will my hero be but the saddest wretch in the kingdom, sick with love?

VIOLA

An excellent beginning

(a beat)

Let him be...a duke. And your heroine?

WILL

(bitterly)

Sold in marriage and half way to America.

VIOLA

(adjusting)

At sea, then--a voyage to a new world?...she lands upon a vast and empty

shore. She is brought to the  
duke...Orsino.

WILL

(despite himself)

Orsino...good name

VIOLA

But fearful of her virtue, she comes  
to him dressed as a boy

WILL

(Catching it)

and thus unable to declare her love

Pause. They look at each other. Suddenly the conversation  
seems to be about them.

VIOLA

But all ends well.

WILL

How does it?

VIOLA

I don't know. It's a mystery

WILL half smiles. Then he's serious. They look deeply at  
each other...and rush into each other's arm.

WILL (CONT'D)

You will never age for me, nor fade,  
nor die.

VIOLA

Nor you for me.

WILL

Good bye, my love, a thousand times  
good bye.

VIOLA

Write me well.

She kisses him with finality. Then turns and runs from  
him. WILL watches as she goes.

INT. WILL'S ROOM. DAY.

A blank page. A hand is writing: TWELFTH NIGHT. We see  
WILL sitting at his table.

WILL (VO)

My story starts at sea...a perilous  
voyage to an unknown land...a shipwreck

EXT. UNDERWATER. DAY.

Two figures plunge into the water

WILL (VO)

the wild waters roar and heave...the  
brave vessel is dashed all to pieces,



and all the helpless souls within her  
drowned

INT. WILL'S ROOM. DAY.

WILL at his table writing

WILL (VO)

all save one ... a lady

EXT. UNDERWATER. DAY.

VIOLA in the water

WILL (VO)

whose soul is greater than the ocean ...  
and her spirit stronger than the sea's  
embrace ... not for her watery end, but  
a new life beginning on a stranger  
shore

EXT. BEACH. DAY.

VIOLA is walking up a vast and empty beach ....

WILL (VO CONTINUED)

It will be a love story ... for she will  
be my heroine for all time

INT. WILL'S ROOM. DAY.

WILL looks up from the table.

WILL (VO CONTINUED)

and her name will be ... Viola.

He looks down at the paper, and writes: "Viola" Then:  
"What country friends is this?"

EXT. BEACH. DAY.

DISSOLVE slowly to VIOLA, walking away up the beach  
towards her brave new world.

THE END