

**SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE**

by

Marc Norman

&

Tom Stoppard

**FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY**

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 On the floor, roughly printed, a poster -- torn, soiled, out of date.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

(continuing)

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

(continuing)

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 bugged to  
boot.  
(more)

HENSLOWE (cont' d)

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

(continuing)

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 a 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  
(continuing)  
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  
(continuing)  
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**  
(continuing; 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

(continuing)

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 overthrows 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 LESSEPSSES' 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

(continuing)

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 through 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  
(continuing)  
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 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

(continuing)

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  
(continuing)  
I insist -- and a beaker for Mr.  
Marlowe.

The BARMAN does the business.

WILL  
(continuing)  
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**  
(continuing)  
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

(continuing;  
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

(continuing; 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

(continuing)

"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

(continuing)

"... 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  
(continuing)  
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 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

(continuing)

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)  
Hot 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

(continuing)

Good sir...?

WILL has lost his tongue.

VIOLA  
(continuing)  
I heard you are a poet.

WILL nods in his trance and she smiles at him.

VIOLA  
(continuing)  
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 his throat.

WILL  
(continuing; 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  
(continuing)  
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  
(continuing)  
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 LEESEPSSES' 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!

(more)

WILL (cont'd)  
(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 LESSEPSES' 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  
Plenty of blood. That is the only  
writing.

WILL backs away, unnerved by the boy.

URCHIN  
(continuing)  
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  
(continuing)  
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  
(continuing)  
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

(continuing)

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: "Master Will, poet dearest to my heart, I beseech 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  
(continuing; 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 you 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

(continuing)

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!

(more)

WILL (cont' d)  
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 LESSEPSES' 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  
(continuing; reaching  
under his seat)  
Strangely enough, I'm a bit of a  
writer myself.

The BOATMAN produces his memoirs in manuscript.

BOATMAN  
(continuing)  
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 I 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  
(continuing)  
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

(continuing)

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 LESSEPSES' 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

(continuing)

"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  
(continuing)  
"You kiss by the 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.  
(more)

RALPH AS NURSE (cont' d)  
(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  
(continuing)  
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..."

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,  
adi eu."

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  
(continuing)  
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 MDRNING.

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  
(continuing)  
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.

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 curtsy 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  
(continuing)

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

(continuing)

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

(continuing)

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

(continuing; 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

(continuing)

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

(continuing)

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

(continuing; 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.

(more)

QUEEN (cont'd)  
(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  
(continuing)  
Traitor and thief!

EXT. STREETS. DAY.

BURBAGE and a solid wedge of the CHAMBERLAIN'S MEN 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 MERCUTIO)  
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

(continuing)

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

(continuing; 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

(horried)

My investment! LAMBERT!!!

LAMBERT has been sleeping peacefully through this, but wakes to his master's call.

FENNYMAN  
(continuing; 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  
(continuing)  
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 to. 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  
(continuing)  
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

(continuing)

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

(continuing)

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  
greet 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

(continuing;  
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

(continuing)

Oh, my love, I thought you were dead!

She claps him to her. They hold 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

(continuing)

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.

VIOLA

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, HENSLÖWE 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  
(continuing)  
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

(continuing)

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

(continuing)

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  
(continuing)  
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.

"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.

WEBSTER

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.

FENNYMAN  
(continuing)  
"Put this in any liquid thing you will  
And..."

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

FENNYMAN  
(continuing)  
"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.

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  
(shouts)  
Shakespeare!

Everything stops.

WESSEX  
(continuing)  
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  
(continuing)  
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  
(continuing)  
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.  
(more)

## BURBAGE (cont' d)

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

(continuing)

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 LESSEPSSES' 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 LESSEPSSES' 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

(continuing)

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 LESSEPSSES' 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

(continuing)

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

(continuing)

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: from THE WINGS:

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

(continuing;  
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  
(continuing)  
"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 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

"...Why the devil came you between us?  
I was hurt under your arms."

EXT. THE CURTAIN THEATRE. DAY.

In the semi-rural 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

(continuing)

You are married?

PAUSE. She cannot answer.

WILL

(continuing)

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

(continuing)

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

(continuing)

"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  
desperate 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 "ROME0's" dagger.

VIOLA AS JULIET

"...0 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

(continuing)

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

(continuing)

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, Master 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  
(continuing; she turns to VIOLA)  
Lord Wessex, as I foretold, has lost his wife in the playhouse -- 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  
(continuing; 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  
(continuing)  
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  
(continuing)  
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  
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