

Marlowe The bedroom.

Will As cold as her heart.

Marlowe So you are free to love.

Will Yet not to write, so it seems. Leave me, Kit.

Marlowe I've almost finished my new play for Burbage. More blood and thunder but he pays well for it. I hear he plays your *Two Gentlemen of Verona* for Her Majesty this very afternoon.

Will My play, for the Queen!

Marlowe A summer's day.

Will What?

Marlowe 'A summer's day'. Start with something lovely, temperate and thoroughly trite. Gives you somewhere to go.

*Marlowe leaves. The ensemble reconvene around*

*Will's desk.*

Will *(unconvinced)* A summer's day?!

*He writes reluctantly.*

Shall I compare thee . . . to a . . . summer's day?

Mmm?

Thou art more . . . something something something . . .

## SCENE TWO HANGING OF HENSLOWE

Henslowe Arrtggghh!!

*As Henslowe screams the ensemble scatter, many of them remaining onstage, observing. Henslowe is strung up over hot coals. Lambert holds a rope to move him up and down.*

Fennyman You mongrell! Why do you howl when it is I who am bitren? What am I, Mr Lambert?

Lambert Bitren, Mr Fennyman.

Fennyman How badly, Mr Frees?

Frees Twelve pounds, one shilling and fourpence, Mr Fennyman, plus interest.

Henslowe Aarrggh. I can pay you!

Fennyman When? Mr Henslowe?

Henslowe Two weeks. Three at the most. Aarrggh. For pity's sake.

Fennyman Drop him. Where will you get . . .

Frees Sixteen pounds, five shillings and ninepence . . .

Henslowe I have a wonderful new play!

Fennyman A play?

Henslowe A play, Mr Fennyman.

Fennyman Let him have it.

Henslowe It's a comedy.

Fennyman Cut off his nose.

Henslowe A new comedy.

Fennyman And his ear.

Henslowe By Will Shakespeare.

Fennyman Who?

Henslowe Richard Burbage and his men play his *Two Gentlemen of Verona* today for the Queen at Whitehall.

Fennyman Shakespeare? Never heard of him.

Henslowe I think he has potential. We will be partners, Mr Fennyman.

Fennyman Partners?

Henslowe The play's a crowd-trickler – mistaken identities, a shipwreck, a pirate king, a bit with a dog and love triumphant.

Frees Didn't you see that one, Lambert?

Lambert Yeah, and I didn't like it.

Henslowe But this time it is by Shakespeare.

Fennyman What's it called?

Henslowe *Romeo and Ethel the Pirate's Daughter*.

Fennyman Good title.

*Henslowe is released.*

A play, that 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 backshides at threepence – a penny extra for a cushion, call it two hundred cushions, say two performances for safety. How much is that, Mr Frees?

Frees Twenty pounds to the penny.

Fennyman Correct!

Henslowe But I have to pay the actors and the author.

Fennyman A share of the profits.

6

Henslowe There's never any.

Fennyman Of course not!

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

*From within the watching ensemble Burbage comes.*

Burbage Gentlemen of Verona.

Fennyman Sign here.

Burbage This is your two-minute call.

Henslowe It's blank.

Fennyman I know.

*Fennyman, Frees, Lambert and Henslowe take their leave as the new scene begins.*

### SCENE THREE

### TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA

*We are backstage at Whitehall Palace.*

Burbage Act One, Scene One. Wardrobe Mistress, quickly.

Mistress Quickly Ready, sir!

Burbage Maestro.

Maestro Ready.

Burbage And silence.

Will Burbage!

Burbage Oh God, an author.

Will How dare you perform me here in front of the Queen without my say-so? I am still owed half of the commission.

7

Burbage Not from me. I stole it from Henslowe. If he stole it from you that's his business.

Will Why is there a dog?

Burbage The Queen loves a dog.

Will There's no dog in my *Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

Burbage There is now.

Will I demand to be paid for this, Burbage.

Burbage I told you I will make you a partner, Shakespeare. For fifty pounds. Your hiring days will be over.

Will Where will I go for fifty pounds?

Burbage I hear Anne Hathaway is a woman of property.

Will No, she has a cottage. What would you give me for a comedy all but done?

Burbage What's the part?

Will Romeo. Wit, swordsman, lover.

Burbage And the title?

Will Romeo.

Burbage I shall play him. Here's two sovereigns, and two more when you show me the pages. Now *begone!*

Tilney My masters, are you mad? Her Majesty is waiting!

Burbage We are ready, Mr Tilney.

Tilney Is that the dog?

Burbage Yes.

Tilney But it's a different dog.

Burbage The other was eaten by a bear.

8

Tilney The only reason the Queen asked to see this circus – was the dog.

Actor But Spot can do tricks, sir, look. Spot, jump!

Burbage I assure you he brings the house down at the Curtain.

Tilney It doesn't look funny.

Burbage Nerves. He's never played the Palace.

Tilney If you don't go up this instant I will revoke your charter.

Company One, two, three . . . To silence.

*Music. Curtains open to reveal Queen and Court. Tilney coughs.*

Queen Is this the one with the dog?

Tilney Yes, your Majesty. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, an Italianate romance on the nature of love, with a dog.

Queen Excellent. I very much liked the dog.

Actor

Cease to persuade, my loving Proteus.

Home-keeping youth have ever homely wits.

*Continues in dumbshow.*

Henslowe I thought you'd be here. Where is my play? Shakespeare.

Will All locked safe in here.

Henslowe Locked? I gave you three sovereigns a month ago.

Will Half what you owed me. I am still owed for one *Gentleman of Verona*.

9

Henslowe What is money to you and me? I am without a single new play while Burbage is invited here to Court and receives ten pounds to play your piece written for my theatre at my risk.

Will Mr Henslowe, will you lend me fifty pounds?

Henslowe What for?

Will Burbage offers me a partnership in the Chamberlain's Men.

Henslowe Cut out my heart – feed my liver to the dogs! Will I'll take that as a no, then.

Henslowe I'm a dead man and buggered to boot. I hear Burbage has a brand new Christopher Marlowe for the Curtain and I have nothing for the Rose. When will I get it, Will?

Will As soon as I have found my muse.

Henslowe Who is it this time?

Will It is always Aphrodite.

Henslowe Aphrodite Baggott who does it behind the Dog and Biscuit?

Actor

What light is light if Silvia be not seen?

What joy is joy if Silvia be not by?

*Dog enters and jumps on the actor speaking. Burbage in the wings motions for the other actor to help.*

Unless it be to think that she is by

And feed –

*The dog is causing problems.*

– upon the shadow of perfection.

10

Burbage Sport Sport Out, damn Sport

*He finally removes the dog.*

Henslowe See. Comedy. That's what they want. Love and a bit with a dog.

*The action continues but the lights and sound fade on the stage and the auditorium. We focus on Will's chagrin.*

Will I refuse to watch this shambles.

*Will has had enough – he slopes off. Henslowe is intently watching the audience's reaction to the play.*

Henslowe Where are you going?

Will To hang myself. Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me in a grave pit.

Henslowe Wait. There is a lady who knows your play by heart. Look how she mouths the words.

*Henslowe turns to show Will the appreciative audience member.*

Will – Will . . . ?

*Will has gone. The onstage music that lay under the Two Gentlemen of Verona scene moves into an introduction to Viola's room.*

#### SCENE FOUR VIOLA'S FIRST BEDROOM

*As the scene changes Viola steps out of the tableau of the 'onstage' auditorium and walks downstage, delivering the speech from Two Gentlemen as the new scene sets around her. She plays to various members of the company, who watch appreciatively.*

11

Viola  
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.

SONG – 'O MISTRESS MINE'

*O mistress mine, where are you roaming  
O stay and hear your true love's coming  
That can sing both high and low.*

Viola  
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.

*The watchers applaud.*

Such poetry . . .

*The watchers disappear; reality reasserting itself.*

But how can one care for Silvia while she is – by the  
order of the Lord Chamberlain – played by a pipsqueak  
boy in petticoats!

Nurse I liked the dog.

Viola Stage love will never be real love until we women  
can be on stage ourselves. Yet when can we see another?

Nurse When the Queen commands it.

Viola But at the playhouse.

Nurse 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 better than both. 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 the 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. I will  
have love or I will end my days –

Nurse As a nurse?

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

*Suddenly waiters are on shouting orders to the  
kitchen. The musicians play tavern music.*

Musician Calves' head with oysters and the coxcomb  
tartlet, table nine.

SCENE FIVE  
THE TAVERN

*We find ourselves in a tavern.*

Ralph Ah Mr Henslowe. How goes it, sir?

Henslowe Very well. Very well, Ralph, my good man.  
Some food and drink.

Ralph Well, the special today is a pig's foot marinated in  
juniper berry vinegar served with a buckwheat pancake  
and a burdock salad.

Henslowe I'll have a pie and pint. And have one for  
yourself, Master Ralph.

*As Ralph goes off to fetch the order, Henslowe is pushed on to a table and stretched either side by two henchmen who have arrived with Fennyman.*

Fennyman Next time we take your boots off. Stretch him!

Henslowe Mr Fennyman. What have I done?

Fennyman That is the question. Nothing. (*Turning to the Musicians.*) Shut it! (*To Henslowe.*) Why haven't you started.

Henslowe Oh, it's all taken care of, gentlemen. It all takes time.

Fennyman Where is the manuscript, Mr Henslowe?

Henslowe A manuscript. Let me explain about the theatre business. The natural condition is one of insurmountable obstacles on the road to imminent disaster. One must never expect a manuscript at this stage. That is an impediment to look forward to. But it always works out in the end.

Fennyman How?

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

Fennyman No Pirates, you're a dead man. Come on.

*Fennyman and his men leave. Henslowe knocks back the drink and sits at a table. A waiter arrives.*

Ralph Did I hear you have a play, Mr Henslowe?

*Shakespeare enters and, avoiding Henslowe, makes his way to the bar.*

Henslowe Shakespeare is writing as we speak.

Ralph Is there anything for me?

Henslowe You're a perfect Pirate King, Ralph, but I hear you are a drunken sot.

Ralph Never when I'm working.

Nol A play, Mr Henslowe?

Henslowe And there's a nice little part for you, Master Nol.

Nol Thank you very much.

Ralph What about the money?

Henslowe It won't cost you a penny. We will all share the profits. Auditions this afternoon.

Will Auditions? Where are your usual men?

Henslowe With Ned Alleyn in the provinces. God knows when they will return. We cannot delay. We need bodies, Will.

Will But not these pickled hams.

Henslowe Auditions round the back in five minutes. If you are not there, Will, I will cast it myself. Ralph, bring the pie round.

Nol Mr Henslowe!

*Henslowe leaves with Nol in tow. Will goes to the bar.*

Will Give me to drink mandragora.

Bartman Straight up?

Marlowe Bring my friend a beaker of your best brandy. How goes it, Will?

Will Wonderful, wonderful. Most wonderful.

Marlowe Burbage says you're also writing him a play!

Will I have the chinks to show for it.

*He puts a coin down for the drinks.*

I insist, and a beaker for Mr Marlowe. And how is yours?

Marlowe Just finished. My best since *Faustus*.  
Will I love your early work. This time?  
Marlowe *The Massacre at Paris*. And yours?  
Will *Romeo and Ethel the Pirate's Daughter*. Yes, I know.  
Marlowe What's the story?  
Will Well, there's this pirate . . . In truth I haven't written a word.  
Marlowe Well, Romeo is . . . Italian.  
Will Marvellous.  
Marlowe Always in and out of love.  
Will That's good. Until he meets . . .  
Marlowe Ethel.  
Will Really?  
Suddenly *Marlowe comes up with something*.  
Marlowe Juliet.  
Will Juliet?  
Marlowe The daughter of his enemy.  
Will The daughter of his enemy.  
Marlowe His best friend is killed in a duel by Juliet's brother or something. His name is Mercutio.  
Will Mercutio. Good name.  
Will What happens to Ethel?  
Marlowe (*deliberately preposterous*) Marries a blackamoor and is strangled with a handkerchief.  
Will (*sarcastically*) Inspired. Thank you, Kit.

16

No! Will. Mr Henslowe is about to start the auditions for *Romeo*.  
Marlowe I thought the play was for Burbage?  
Will That's a different one.  
Marlowe A different one you haven't written?  
Will Next!

SCENE SIX  
AUDITIONS

Will Thank you, and now for your modern piece.  
Robin  
Was this the face that launched a thousand ships  
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?  
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.  
Will Thank you. Next!  
Henslowe We have to cast somebody.  
Will Next!  
Adam I would like to give you something from *Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe.  
Will How refreshing.  
Adam  
Was this the face that launched a thousand ships . . .  
Will Next!  
*John Webster comes in. Will takes one look and dismisses him.*  
Next.  
Webster But I haven't started.

17

Will No doubt you will be giving us your Christopher Marlowe?

Webster Yes.

Will 'The topless towers of Ilium'?

Webster *Tamburlaine the Great*.

Will Tamburlaine the Great was a bloodthirsty tyrant. Not a ten-year-old malkin from Cheapside.

Henslowe Maybe he could be Ethel.

Will This is absurd.

Webster (*plays Tamburlaine with vicious gusto*)

Go, villain, cast thee headlong from a rock,  
Or rip thy bowels, and rend out thy heart,  
T'appease my wrath; or else I'll torture thee,  
Searing thy hateful flesh with burning irons . . .

Will Thank you!

Webster

And drops of scalding lead, while all thy joints  
Be rack'd and beat asunder with the wheel.

Will Enough!

Webster I can do Barabas. Or the gory bit from the *Agamemnon*.

Will We've seen enough.

*John Webster goes.*

Henslowe I liked him.

Will Next.

Henslowe Ah, Mr Wabashi!

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

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

Wabash Th-th-th-thank you very m-m-m-much.

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

Will Tomorrow.

Henslowe Tomorrow and . . .

Will Tomorrow.

*Henslowe leaves.*

Viola/Kent May I begin, sir?

Will Your name?

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

Will Yes, I am sure.

*Will sits up.*

Viola/Kent

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  
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 Where did you learn to do that?

Viola/Kent At the playhouse, sir.



Will There is no playhouse in London where my verse is spoke truly.

Viola/Kent Are you Mr Shakespeare?

Will I have not seen you audition before, Mr Kent.

Viola/Kent I am new to London, sir. I am from the country staying at the de Lesseps. In Cheam.

Will Please, sir. Speak some more. Without your hat.

Viola/Kent My hat?

Will Let me see your face.

*Will comes over to Kent.*

Viola/Kent No!

Will Please. Speak it to me again. Let it trip off the tongue.

*Will tries to take Kent's hat.*

Viola/Kent Sirl!

Will It's a love scene. Please take off your hat.

*She continues to evade him.*

Viola/Kent Give me my hat, sir.

*Marlowe comes in and Viola runs straight into him.*

Marlowe Any luck?

*Marlowe likes what he sees. They dance around each other before Viola escapes and leaves*

Who was he?

Will My Romeo. Hands off.

*The scene changes to De Lesseps Hall. Music. Kent/Viola runs on to the waiting Nurse, while around them the ball begins to take shape.*

Nurse My Lady. Where have you been?

Viola I have been to audition for the theatre.

Nurse I'll be in my grave if they find out. Quick indoors, you must get ready for the ball. The guests are already arriving. Special guests too as well you should know.

Your father is waiting to introduce you to Lord Wessex. You'll drive me to madness.

*As Viola and Nurse exit the stage bursts with music and life.*

#### SCENE SEVEN THE BALLROOM

*The stage is strung with nightlights for the alfresco ball. Out of the action emerges a conversation . . .*

Wessex Where is she, Sir Robert? I am starting to wonder if she is a mythical beast of your invention.

Sir Robert de Lesseps She will come, I assure you. She is a beauty, my lord, as would take a king to church for a dowry of 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 de Lesseps She will breed. If she do not, send her back.

Wessex And obedient?

Sir Robert de Lesseps As any mule in Christendom. But if you are the man to ride her, there are rubies in the saddle.

Wessex I like her.

Sir Robert de Lesseps Come, she will be down any moment.

*At the gate to the garden Will appears with Marlowe.*  
Guard Sorry. Can't come in without an invite. This is a proper ball. For civilised people.

Will We are civilised people. I'm an actor and this is Christopher Marlowe, one of Europe's leading writers.

Marlowe Hello.

Guard I don't care if you're Beaumont and Fletcher. You're not getting in without an invite.

Will But I have a letter For Thomas Kent.

*The Nurse, who happens to be near the gate, pushes past.*

Nurse Who asks for Thomas Kent?

Will Will Shakespeare, actor, poet and playwright of the Rose. Master Kent auditioned for me this afternoon.

Nurse Master Kent?

Will You know him?

Nurse Yes. He is my . . . nephew.

Will I have a letter. To offer him the lead part in my play.

Nurse I will see he gets it, sirs. Cadings, let them through.

*They are reluctantly let in.*

PAVANE DANCE – 'WHAT IS LOVE?'

Company

*What is love?*

*Is love hereafter?*

*Present mirth is present laughter.*

*What's to come is still unsure*

*Youth's a stuff will not endure.*

Sir Robert de Lesseps My daughter.

22

Wessex Yes. I think she will do. She will do very nicely.

Will By all the stars in heaven, who is she?

Nurse That's My Lady Viola de Lesseps.

Marlowe Dream on, Will Shakespeare.

Will O she doth teach the torches to burn bright.

Marlowe Forget it!

Will I will speak to her.

Marlowe We will be run out of here.

Will It is a free country, is it not?

Marlowe Have a drink, Will!

*Silence.*

*Sir Robert takes Viola's hand and delivers her to*

*Wessex for the dance. Will stops in horror.*

Sir Robert de Lesseps Viola, My Lord Wessex.

Wessex Enchanted.

*Music continues. Dance changes to cascada.*

*Will is thwarted. A flurry of excitement. Dancers take the stage, obscuring Will. All in time to the music.*

Wessex My Lady Viola.

Viola My Lord.

Wessex I have spoken to your father.

Viola So, My Lord. I speak with him every day.

Wessex I have spoken to your father about your future.

Viola I trust you found it of interest. I rarely know what is going to happen next.

*Wessex and Viola are parted and suddenly she is partnered with Shakespeare.*

23

Nurse (off) Lady Viola.

Viola Anon. (To Will.) I will come again.

*She goes in to deal with the Nurse.*

Marlowe Enough. The trap is laid, she takes the bait.

Will Nonsense. I'm just getting somewhere.

Marlowe 'A lowly player'?! Get out before the whole thing is ruined.

*Viola returns.*

Viola If they find you here they will kill you.

Will And you can bring them with a word.

Viola Not for the world! Yours are the only words mine ears can bear to hear. Speak to me. Inspire me.

Will (*trying rather pathetically to be poetic*) Alas I cannot for I am . . . struck dumb by your beauty.

Viola Come, come. Good poet. These are hackneyed tropes. Extemporise, improvise. Fill me with your words.

Marlowe Leave.

*Viola is waiting, expectantly.*

Will (*to Viola*) Now?

Viola Yes. Translate our base tongue into the golden verse of love.

Will Erm . . . (*Under his breath.*) Pigs!

Viola What was that?

Marlowe Recite something you know.

Will I've gone blank.

Marlowe Anything.

Will Erm . . . erm . . . Help me, Kiri!

Marlowe 'Shall I compare thee . . . ?'

*Relieved by this prompt, he recites with confidence.*

Will

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Thou art more lovely and more temperate.

*He looks to Marlowe for appreciation for the completed line.*

Marlowe It's not Philip Sidney.

Viola Go on.

Will (*to Marlowe*) That's as far as I got.

Marlowe As far as you got?!

Will Help me, Kiri!

Viola More, my love.

*Panic down below, so Marlowe improvises, prompting Will from below the balcony.*

Marlowe

Rough winds do shake . . .

Will

Rough winds do shake . . .

Marlowe

The darling buds of . . . May

Will Isn't that spring?

Marlowe It rhymes with 'day'.

And summer's lease hath . . .

Will

And summer's lease hath . . .

Marlowe  
All too short a date.

Will (*to Marlowe*)  
All too short a date.

Viola Oh, this is beautiful, Will . . . More . . .

Marlowe Dum di dum di dum di . . . got it . . .

But thy eternal summer shall not fade –

Will (*repeating as he goes*)

But thy eternal summer shall not fade

Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest.

Marlowe

Nor shall death . . .

Will Don't mention death . . .

Marlowe Death is good.

Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade.

Will

Nor shall death brag thou wandrest in his shade.

Marlowe

When in eternal lines to time thou growest.

Will (*to Marlowe*) What does that mean?

Marlowe Just say it.

Will

When in eternal lines to time thou growest . . .

Marlowe

So long as men can breathe . . .

Will

So long as men can breathe – (*adding his own bit*)  
or eyes can see . . .

Marlowe Very good . . .

Will (*now inspired*)

So long lives this –

Marlowe That's it.

Will

– and this gives life to thee.

Marlowe Bravo.

Will I have it back, Kit.

Viola Oh, it's beautiful.

Will It's nothing.

Viola Only you could have conceived such a thing.

Will I think it lacks something in the middle.

Viola Not another word. It's perfect.

Nurse (*off*) Madam.

Viola I must go.

Will No. But I am a poor poet. I have not had payment.

Viola Such sublime eloquence is God's own recompense.

Will (*very pleased with himself*) Yet to receive the  
prayers of those two pilgrims thy lips . . .

Marlowe Too far.

Viola I could not sully thy lips gilded with such golden  
words.

Will Lady, you will burnish them to brighter eloquence.  
(*To Marlowe.*) Help me up, Kit.

Will gets on Kit's shoulders.

Viola Good sir, do not use yourself all up.

Will

With love's light wings, did I o'erperch these walls.  
For stony limits cannot hold love out,  
And what love can do, that dares love attempt.  
Therefore thy kinsmen are no stop to me.

Marlowe Very good.

Will Thank you.

*As Will struggles with Marlowe's help to gain a purchase on the balcony, Viola is distracted by a noise within.*

Nurse My Lady!

Viola Oh go away!

Nurse Your father comes.

*Viola goes in. Will pulls himself up.*

Will (to himself) I am fortune's fool, I will be punished for this.

*As Will hauls himself up. The Nurse comes on to the balcony, sees Will.*

*She screams. Drums.*

*Nurse runs inside. Noises within.*

Voices What ho! Lights!

Marlowe Jump!

*Will jumps just in time. Sir Robert appears on the balcony with a candelabra. Alarums.*

Idiot.

*Men run out of the house with flaming lanterns.*

Sam Where did they go?

Peter They went that way.

Sam Which way?

Wessex You that way. You this way. Go!

SCENE NINE  
FIRST REHEARSALS

*Rehearsals, day one.*

Fennyman Is this it?

Henslowe Yes.

Fennyman Is this a rehearsal?

Henslowe Yes.

Fennyman Is it always like this?

Henslowe Yes.

Fennyman Is it going well?

Henslowe Very well.

Fennyman But nothing seems to be happening.

Henslowe Exactly. But it's all happening very well.

Fennyman Who is that?

Henslowe Nobody. The author.

Fennyman If this doesn't work, Henslowe, you are forcemeat.

*Henslowe calls Shakespeare over.*

Henslowe Will, Will! It starts well, but then it gets all long-faced. Where's the comedy, Will? Where's the dog? Do you think it's funny?

Ralph (looking at the new script) I was a Pirate King, now I'm a Nurse. That's funny.

Henslowe We are at least four acts short, Will.

**Will** We are short of any discernible acting talent, those that we have are over-parted ranters and stutters who should be sent back to the stocks. Let's wait for Ned Alleyn. We can't even be sure we have a Romeo. Who are you?

**Webster** I'm Ethel, sir, the pirate's daughter.

**Will** I'm damned if he is!

*He boots Webster up the backside.*

**Henslowe** I think he has potential.

**Will** This is a shambles.

**Henslowe** I think we should get started.

**Will** Gentlemen! Good men all.

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

**Will** Firstly, gentlemen, I want to thank you all for coming here today. I am honoured to be working with such an extraordinary calibre of actor. Today we are about to embark on a mysterious journey, a journey which . . .

**Fennyman** I'll speak the speech.

**Will** I haven't quite finished.

**Fennyman** Shut it! Now you listen to me, you dregs! Actors are ten a penny and I, Hugh Fennyman, hold your nuts in my hand so –

*Noise from offstage. Suddenly a group of men enter headed by Ned Alleyn, the actor – a handsome piratical figure with a big voice and big sword.*

**Ned** Huzzah! I am returned!

**Fennyman** Excuse me, I was speaking the speech.

**Ned** Silence, you dog. I hear there is a play for me.

**Fennyman** Who are you, sir?

**Ned** Who am I? I am Hieronimo! I am Tamburlaine! I am Faustus! I am Barabas the Jew – oh yes, Master Will, and I was Henry the Sixth several times. Who are you, sir?

**Fennyman** I am the money.

**Ned** Then you may remain, as long as you remain silent. Congratulations, sir. Your investment is safe in the hands of Ned Alleyn. What is the play? What is my part?

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

**Ned** *(unimpressed with the location)* Verona, again. And what is the title?

**Will** *Mercutio.*

**Ned** I will play him! Divide the rest betwixt the boys and watch how genius creates a legend.

**Will** Mr Pope! Mr Phillips! Mr Hemmings! Mr Condell! Mr Tooley! Mr Wabash! Mr Noll Sam, my pretty one! Are you ready to fall in love again?

**Sam** I am, Master Shakespeare.

**Will** But your voice . . . have they dropped?

**Sam** No, no, a touch of cold.

**Fennyman** Actually, Master Shakespeare, I saw his Tamburlaine. Wonderful.

**Will** Yes, I saw it.

**Fennyman** Of course, it was mighty writing. There is no one quite like Marlowe.

**Will** No indeed. Master Henslowe, you have your actors. Except Thomas Kent.

*He sees Webster is still there.*

Are you still here, boy?

**Webster** I was in one of your plays before. They cut my head off in *Titus Andronicus*. When I write plays they will be like *Titus*.

**Will** You admire it.

**Webster** No. But I like it when they cut heads off. And the daughter mutilated with knives. Plenty of blood. That's the only writing.

*Ned, now with pages, stops Will.*

**Ned Will** . . . where is Mercutio?

**Will** I am saving my best for him. I leave the scene in your safe-keeping, Ned. Cut round what's his name, Romeo, for now.

**Ned** Who?

**Will** Nobody. Mercutio's friend.

*He turns to find Kent.*

**Master Kent** I almost didn't recognise you.

**Henslowe** Places, please.

**Ned** Gather around, gentlemen.

*Then unexpectedly Burbage arrives.*

**Burbage** Shakespear! You cur. I thought I would find you here. Where's Ethel?

**Will** Who?

**Burbage** The pirate's daughter I paid two sovereigns for. Mr Alleyn.

**Ned** Mr Burbage.

**Burbage** The Prince of the Provinces. Where is my play, Shakespear? I have poster'd half of Shoreditch and I haven't seen a single page.

**Will** They're coming, they're coming.

**Burbage** If you've sold my play to Henslowe I'll slice you nape to chops.

*He stops Ned.*

What play is this, Alleyn?

**Ned** *Mercutio*.

**Henslowe** Out of this theatre, you overripe ham. We are trying to rehearse. Gentlemen. Romeo laments his Ethel.

*Now Kent and Nol (as Benvolio) rehearse, their parts in hand.*

**Will** May I, Mr Alleyn?

*Ned nods.*

**Master Kent** is playing Romeo, and Master Nol is Benvolio. Gentlemen, a scene in Verona.

**Viola/Kent**

Ay me, sad hours seem long.

Was that my father that went hence so fast?

**Nol**

It was. What sadness lengthens Romeo's hours?

**Viola/Kent**

Nor having that which, having, makes them short.

**Henslowe** He's good.

**Nol**

In love?

**Viola/Kent**

Out.

Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade  
When in eternal lines to time thou growest.  
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see  
So long lives this and this gives life to thee.

Oh I am made immortal!

*Music. There is a flurry of movement and sound as the held company break and move to observe the next scene. The Nurse runs on.*

Nurse My Lady. My Lady. My Lady. Where have you been? Lord Wessex demands to come in. He's waiting downstairs. Quickly, you must change.

*Viola runs off to get changed. Wessex paces on the balcony.*

Viola (off, as she changes) How long has he been here?

Nurse All morning.

Viola (off) What did you tell him?

Nurse I told him you were at prayer, My Lady.

Viola (off) For four hours?

Nurse I said you were pious, My Lady.

Viola (off) Why is he here today?

Nurse You know perfectly well, My Lady.

Wessex Nurse, where is the future Lady Wessex?

Nurse You must have patience, sir. My lady is still in the act of contemplation.

Wessex Lengthy orisons for one so young.

Nurse She always was a pious little girl, My Lord. My mistress is the sweetest lady, My Lord and still as pious. Lord, Lord, even when she was a prating child, sir, she

would spend hours on her knees. I used to swear she'd wear them out!

Wessex Oh for heaven's sake, where the devil is she?!

Nurse My Lady, My Lady, Lord Wessex is here.

*Viola returns, immaculately dressed, in the nick of time.*

Wessex My Lady.

Viola Lord Wessex. You have been waiting.

Wessex I am aware of it. It is beauty's privilege. Though four hours' prayer is less piety than self-importance. I have spoken to the Queen. 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. You are allowed to show your pleasure.

Viola But 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 slaps him.*

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 on time.

*Wessex leaves. Viola is bereft. The Nurse sees her distress.*

Viola My summer's lease is all too brief. Bring me pen and ink. I must write to William Shakespeare.

Nurse Yes, My Lady.

*Music. Will rushes on excitedly with pages . . .*

SCENE ELEVEN  
SECOND REHEARSALS

Will Gentlemen. New pages!

*We are in rehearsal again. The actors gather to receive their pages. When Will has distributed them, Ned Alleyn calls Will over.*

Ned Will, hold. Can I have a word?

Will You do not like the speech?

Ned The speech is excellent. '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 But then you have his duel, a skirmish of words and swords such as I never wrote, nor any man. He dies

with such a passion and poetry as you ever read - 'A plague on both your houses!'

Ned He dies?!

Henslowe There doesn't appear to be a dog of any kind?

Will There was never going to be a dog.

Henslowe I've just bought it from Will Kemp for three sovereigns. And it's eating me out of house and home.

Will I will try to work it in.

Fennyman I can't wait to find out what happens next. Author, please.

Will The Friar marries the lovers in secret, then Ned, playing Mercutio, gets into a fight with one of the Capulets called Tybalt. Romeo - (*Sees Webster.*) In your dreams - tries to stop them, he gets in Ned's way, I mean Mercutio's way, so Tybalt slays Mercutio and then Romeo slays Tybalt.

Fennyman Wonderful!

*He didn't really mean to say that but couldn't help himself. He is embarrassed. Will continues.*

Will Then the Prince banishes Romeo from Verona.

Henslowe And that's when he goes on the voyage and gets shipwrecked on the island of the Pirate King. Who has a dog!

Fennyman Enough!

*He breaks into high dudgeon.*

Cease your prattling. This is not just entertainment. This is art.

Henslowe But I paid Will Kemp three sovereigns for that cruel-hearted cur.