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POSTCARDS FROM SHAKESPEARE

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT BY
Allison Williams



Postcards from Shakespeare

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Cast

Minimum cast: 4W, 6M + 5 Either.

With no doubling other than specifically called for: 31M, 21W + 18 Either (with 5 soldiers and 5 players/mechanicals).

Add as many soldiers and players as you wish.

William (Shakespeare)
(Queen) Elizabeth
Messenger

Richard III

Richard III

Hamlet

Hamlet
Ghost
Laertes
Horatio
Gertrude
Claudius
Ophelia
Players
1st Player
Player King
Polonius

Antony and Cleopatra

Antony
Brutus
Lucius
Lepidus
Cleopatra
Servant

The Merchant of Venice

Antonio
Shylock
Portia
Bassanio
Nerissa

Measure for Measure

Angelo
Claudio
Girlfriend of Claudio
Isabella

Romeo and Juliet

Romeo
Juliet
Mercutio

Much Ado About Nothing

Beatrice
Benedick

Troilus and Cressida

Troilus
Cressida

The Taming of the Shrew

Katherine
Petruchio

Twelfth Night

Viola

The Tempest

Miranda
Ariel

A Winter's Tale

Antigonus

Pericles

Marina

Two Gentlemen of Verona

Julia
Launce

Othello

Othello
Desdemona

Julius Caesar

Marc Antony
Julius Caesar
Brutus

Macbeth

Macbeth
Birnam Wood (played
by Soldiers)

Cymbeline

Imogen
Pisano

Henry VIII

Henry VIII

Henry IV pts I&2

Lead Soldier
Soldiers

Richard II

Richard II

Timon of Athens

Timon

Coriolanus

Martius

Titus Andronicus

Titus
Lavinia

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Titania
Puck
Helena
Demetrius
Hermia
Lysander
Bottom
Oberon
Mechanicals

Suggested Doubling

Male #1	William
Male #2	Richard III, Claudius, Shylock, Benedick, Petruchio, Pisanio, Martius, Titus Andronicus, Bottom
Male #3	Ghost, Player King, Lepidus, Angelo, Antigonus
Male #4	Laertes, Brutus, Claudio, Romeo, Troilus, Lead Soldier, Demetrius (When Brutus dies, roll under the bench and re-emerge as Lead Soldier)
Male #5	Horatio, Antony, Antonio, Marc Antony, Oberon
Male #6	Polonius, Lucius, Soldier, Othello, Julius Caesar (use a dummy for the dead body of Caesar), Henry VIII, Timon of Athens, Lysander
Woman #1	Elizabeth
Woman #2	Gertrude, Cleopatra, Isabella, Viola, Julia, Helena
Woman #3	Ophelia, Servant, Nerissa, Girlfriend, Juliet, Cressida, Miranda
Woman #4	Ist Player, Portia, Crowd, Beatrice, Katherine, Marina, Desdemona, Imogen, Titania
Either #1	Messenger/Puck
Either #2	Hamlet, Bassanio, Mercutio, Launce
Either #3	Player, Crowd, Ariel
Either #4	Player, Crowd, Macbeth, Mechanical
Either #5	Player, Crowd, Lavinia, Mechanical

Whoever is not otherwise occupied plays a soldier.

Setting

1593. Shakespeare's study, Elizabeth's writing room, the theatre itself.

Note to Actors and Directors

Throughout the play, there are a lot of fast entrances and exits (and if you're doubling, a lot of quick-changes or prop switches). It's important that the play ticks along, so if entrances are a problem, experiment with having actors onstage but frozen before/after their scenes. It's totally OK to have a table with all the props and accessories right there on stage, or have the items hanging on a wall or flat, or a garment rack full of costumes, or things brought in as needed by crew. Do whatever you need to do to make it snappy! If you're doing a festival with a time limit and need to trim, *Measure For Measure* is the easiest to cut. Otherwise, use your best judgment and try to keep running jokes intact.

If you have the ability to light playing areas, make sure the light cues are fast, too. If you've got limited (or no) lights, have William and Elizabeth make their movements slower and smaller, or freeze entirely, when they are not the focus. They can physically take focus when they are "on" again. It will also help to turn their desks slightly toward each other rather than flat front.

When William and Elizabeth are writing, they should not feel literally bound to look down at the page and write. Get the physical sense of "writing a letter" started and then look up and talk more to the audience or slightly in each other's direction.

For props and costumes, it's OK to be anachronistic! Historical accuracy is much less important than helping the audience figure out each character. You could even do this show with cardboard props and simple accessories and have the actors wear t-shirts with character names on them or plain black rehearsal clothes—it would be a great exercise in playing characters strongly!

Set-wise, the desks can be plain tables. Avoid using tablecloths as these are writing desks rather than formal tables. However, you may want a large cloth "rug" underneath Shakespeare's desk to catch the props and papers and make them easy to strike quickly after the show, especially if you are in a festival or competition venue. Put a rug pad underneath to avoid slipping.

One more note on entrances and exits. Each time a new character enters, they should take a quick moment to physically show their character. For example, the Players might enter and strike a quick pose with jazz hands. Juliet might enter and clasp her hands over her heart, then see Romeo. The faster the audience gets a visual sense of who each character is, the more they can focus on the comedy instead of guessing who's who. A fun exercise is to develop a "character zero"—a pose or motion that would be the best statue of this character to show who they are and something about them (think Mr. Burns, "excellent"—that's a character zero.) If you can hit them quickly and cleanly, it will help the audience a lot. They also give the actors positions to hold during freezes.

An open playing space, with a desk on either side. Each desk has an inkwell with a giant feather pen, lots of parchment-colored paper, and a small British flag. Upstage center, a large bench or small platform that will become a throne, a soapbox, a bed, etc.

Lights up on the playing space. An actor in Elizabethan costume—or some facsimile thereof—or plain black “actor” clothes with a ruff or crown and most importantly, a white rose and a number “III” on his chest—strides on from DL and strikes a king-like pose.

RICHARD III: Now is the winter of our irritation!

He pauses and considers what he has just said, then strikes another pose.

Now is the winter of our annoyance?

Another pause, another pose.

Now is the winter we are mildly ticked off!

Made into an unseasonably pleasant summer by this son of York!
Son of York? Huh? Huh?

He gestures to indicate, ‘Son? Like ‘sun?’ Get it?’

Lights up on desk SL, where ELIZABETH is editing a page. There may be a sign on her desk saying “The Quid Stops Here.” Her crown hangs on the back of her chair, or sits casually on her desk. Her most important costume piece is a big ruff.

ELIZABETH: Puns are the lowest form of humor, Willy. You can do better.

Lights up on desk SR, where WILLIAM is reading her edits. His most important costume piece is a square-cornered white collar. He speaks to RICHARD.

WILLIAM: She hates it.

RICHARD III looks lost, gestures to WILLIAM, makes a noise with his mouth closed, indicating, “I need some words.”

WILLIAM writes. RICHARD III speaks continuously and WILLIAM chimes in where indicated.

RICHARD III: Now is the winter of our...discontent!
Made glorious—

WILLIAM: —Yes, that's it!—

RICHARD III: —summer by this sun of York!

RICHARD III pauses in a pose. WILLIAM scribbles.

RICHARD III: To the beach! (*poses grandly*)

WILLIAM: Augh!

WILLIAM scrunches up the paper and chucks it on the floor, sits in despair.

A number of ACTORS, in a wide variety of costumes (that they wear later throughout the play) peek out from the wings or sides of the playing space. If they're already onstage, they can look over their shoulders, or start muttering and whispering while pointing at WILLIAM.

WILLIAM: (*begins to write letter*) Dear Lizzie. I have...I have...

RICHARD: (*helpfully*) Writer's block.

WILLIAM: The words just aren't coming out...it used to be so easy!
Bang out fifty-odd pages, rush it to the theatre, collect the money. Four histories, two comedies and a really long poem in the last four years! But now, I am a block, a stone, a worse than senseless thing. Please, Elizabeth, no-one understands me like you do. What shall I do?

The ACTORS nod—they're sad to agree, but it's true. RICHARD and ACTORS exit or return to their waiting positions.

ELIZABETH: (*writing to WILLIAM*) How dreadful for you! Sometimes I don't know what to say, either! But then I just yell "Chop off his head!" or "I'm not getting married!" and that covers most situations. If I yell it in French I look clever, too.

Couper la tête! Je ne vais pas épouser! (pronounced "COO-pay la TET, ZHE neh vay pah ay-poo-SAY")

I don't think that will work for you, though. You're already married. And you can't chop off people's heads. Well, you can, but you may not. Where would we be if everyone just chopped off someone's head when they felt like it? Spain. And then we'd

all have to take three hours' nap every afternoon, just when the weather's getting nice.

Willy—William—your plays make me—what's that feeling when no-one's attacking you with guns or asking you to marry some repellent little toad from Norway? Happy! They make me happy. Not too many things do that any more.

They say a change is as good as a rest, Willy dear, so let's have a change of scene. See what I did there? "Scene?" I'm sure I could be a writer, too, if I wasn't so busy crushing the Welsh.

MESSENGER, dressed as a delivery person from any era, possibly a UPS driver, enters R and drops a generous purse of ducats on WILLIAM's desk. MESSENGER holds out a clipboard.

MESSENGER: Sign here. Here. Here. And here. (exits R)

ELIZABETH: Enclosed is a purse of ducats. Well, not enclosed, attached. Well, handed to you by the messenger with this letter. You know what I mean. Take a little trip on me, Willy, and see if that gives you some fresh ideas. Don't think of it as giving up—it's like a strategic retreat. Like the Spanish! "Invincible armada" my Aunt Fanny. (she's very pleased with herself)

MESSENGER re-enters and thwacks down a large fish on WILLIAM's desk, then sticks a small Danish flag in it. WILLIAM sniffs the fish and begins writing.

WILLIAM: Something is rotten in the state of Denmark. I've scribbled down some ideas, Lizzie...what do you think?

Enter actors from L with appropriate costumes or accessories as HAMLET (ruff/skull and sword), LAERTES (sword), and HORATIO (collar/book). GHOST (sheet) enters from R. This is tightly cued, with overlapping entrances and exits, but leave some room for acceleration as the play goes on.

GHOST: Boo!

HAMLET: Augg! (jumps into the arms of LAERTES and HORATIO)

GHOST exits R. LAERTES and HORATIO set HAMLET down as GERTRUDE (crown) and CLAUDIUS (crown) enter L. CLAUDIUS strides happily to greet HAMLET.

CLAUDIUS: But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son—

HAMLET: A little more than kin, and less than kind.

GERTRUDE: Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted colour off,
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.
College has made you so angsty. Maybe you should wear
less black. And smile more, you're making your Uncle Dad
uncomfortable.

GERTRUDE and CLAUDIUS go and sit upstage on the bench. They coo at each other and are oblivious to the onstage action until noted.

OPHELIA enters R, wearing a flower crown and singing.

OPHELIA: To-morrow is Saint Valentine's day,
All in the morning betime,
And I a maid at your window,
To be your Valentine.

HAMLET: (to OPHELIA) Trollop!

OPHELIA, shocked, falls down dead, and is dragged off R by LAERTES and HORATIO.

HAMLET: Kidding! I was kidding!

A group of PLAYERS enter L with props/costume pieces.

HAMLET: Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you,
trippingly on the tongue. Nor do not saw the air too much with
your hand thus.

1st PLAYER: One Intro to Drama for Non-Majors and now he's
Stanislavsky?

HAMLET: Who's paying the bill here?

1st PLAYER: Trippingly on the tongue, got it.

LAERTES and HORATIO re-enter from R and take positions on either side of the bench. CLAUDIUS and GERTRUDE rejoin the scene. The PLAYERS pick up props or don accessories identical to Claudius and Gertrude, and strike a pose—Ist PLAYER (as Claudius) embraces a PLAYER (as Gertrude), then turns and stabs the PLAYER KING (representing the previous King, Claudius's brother).

PLAYER KING: (pointing at CLAUDIUS) Murderer!

CLAUDIUS: Give me some light: away!
This is worse than *Cats*. (exits R)

PLAYERS exit L.

GERTRUDE: Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.
Perhaps we should do some family togetherness activities.

HAMLET: How do you feel about Ultimate Fighting?

GERTRUDE: What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me?
Maybe we should cut your Spring Break a little short.

HAMLET: Trollop!

POLONIUS: (*peeks out from behind a curtain or the side of the stage, in the place that CLAUDIUS exited*) What, ho!

HAMLET: How now! A rat? Dead, for a ducat, dead!

HAMLET stabs POLONIUS, who falls fully onto the stage as he dies.

HAMLET: Gotcha!

POLONIUS: O, I am slain!

HAMLET: King Claudius? (*lifts POLONIUS's corpse's head and drops it*)
Wrong dude. Oops!

*GERTRUDE and LAERTES drag POLONIUS off R.
Doorbell rings.*

HORATIO: (*nervous to be alone with HAMLET*) I'll get it! (exits L)

GERTRUDE re-enters R with CLAUDIUS, who holds a goblet, and they sit on the bench upstage as if on thrones. LAERTES charges in from R with sword drawn.

LAERTES: You killed my Dad!

HAMLET: Curiosity killed the cat!

LAERTES: And my sister!

HAMLET: I was kidding!

LAERTES: But my revenge will come!

A stage fight, or merely two stabs, whichever playing time and your combat abilities allow.

LAERTES: Gotcha!

HAMLET: Gotcha!

GERTRUDE: (*taking and raising the goblet*) The queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet. (*drinks*)

CLAUDIUS: Gertrude, do not drink.

GERTRUDE: Urrrgggrr... (*dies*)

CLAUDIUS: Oops!

HAMLET stabs CLAUDIUS, no fight, this is quick.

HAMLET: Gotcha!

*LAERTES, CLAUDIUS, HAMLET, GERTRUDE all die.
HORATIO re-enters L with a pizza box.*

HORATIO: It was pizza and the King of Norway—did I miss anything?

*Momentary freeze. ACTORS get up, dust themselves off, shake hands, with a general air of “not bad!”
Lights out on playing space. MESSENGER enters R, places a souvenir pyramid, the uglier the better, on WILLIAM’s desk, exits R.*

WILLIAM: (*writing*) Egypt very exotic but too many tourists. Line at the Sphinx was hours! There’s a queen here—Cleopatra—
Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety:

ELIZABETH: Oh really?

WILLIAM: But I’m sure she’s as nothing compared to Your Glorious Majesty. God save the Queen!

ANTONY, BRUTUS, LUCIUS and LEPIDUS, all in togas, enter from R.

LEPIDUS: Antony!

ANTONY: Lepidus!

Whose fortunes shall rise higher, Caesar’s or mine?
Lucius! Why are you at war with my wife back in Rome?
Brutus! How come everyone else’s name ends in “-us”?

BRUTUS: Don’t look at me, man.

LUCIUS: Not my issue.

CLEOPATRA sweeps in from L, attended by a SERVANT with a covered tray. She poses regally. ANTONY kisses her hand, LEPIDUS, LUCIUS and BRUTUS bow to her.

The MESSENGER runs through from R, with a toga over the previous uniform, which is still very visible.

MESSENGER: The Romans are coming! The Romans are coming!
(exits L)

CLEOPATRA: Oh, Antony! Save me!
Most worthy sir, I do greatly admire
The absolute soldiership you have by land.

ANTONY: I'll fight at sea.
Can I borrow your navy?

ANTONY, LEPIDUS, BRUTUS exit R. MESSENGER runs back in from L.

MESSENGER: Your Majesty!
Your fleet hath yielded to the foe.
The Romans are victorious. Advise begging for mercy, stat.
(exits R)

CLEOPATRA: (each exclamation with a dramatic pose) O! O! O!
(calling after MESSENGER) Tell Antony I have now slain myself.

MESSENGER runs back in from R with a sword.

MESSENGER: Antony is dead; this is his sword.

CLEOPATRA: Kidding! I was kidding!

SERVANT: (uncovering tray) Coffee, tea, asp?

CLEOPATRA selects the asp and uses it puppet-like to bite herself. She dies and is carried out R by the MESSENGER and the SERVANT.

WILLIAM squares a stack of paper with satisfaction. ELIZABETH looks up from a similar stack of paper.

ELIZABETH: It's a little overdramatic. What if the Queen sends Marc Antony back to his wife, leads the army herself and defeats the Romans? And then all the people love her and cheer her name. You could add a parade.

WILLIAM tosses his paper stack over his shoulder.

WILLIAM: Maybe not.

MESSENGER enters R, places a gondolier's hat on WILLIAM, exits R.

WILLIAM: (*writing*) Venetian canals beautiful, you would love the shopping. 'Twould be delightful to live as a merchant of Venice!

SHYLOCK (with money bag) enters from L, ANTONIO from R. They meet in the playing space.

ANTONIO: (*very used-car salesman*) Heyyyyyyyy, Shylock!

SHYLOCK: (*not having it*) Antonio. Oy vey.

ANTONIO: You know how I've always called you a misbeliever, a cut-throat dog, and a jerk who dominates the political dialogue?

SHYLOCK: Uh-huh.

ANTONIO: How every day in December I stand outside your house and sing Jingle Bells?

SHYLOCK: Uh-huh.

ANTONIO: How I keep inviting you to come over for pork chops and milkshakes on Friday night?

SHYLOCK: Don't remind me.

ANTONIO: (*straight up*) Now I need money.

SHYLOCK: Hath a dog money?

Three thousand ducats for three months. Miss a payment, shmendrik, and I'll repossess a pound of your flesh.

SHYLOCK and ANTONIO shake hands and exit together R.

*PORTIA enters L with a rolling cart with three small caskets, one gold, one silver, and one made of lead.
BASSANIO enters R and contemplates the caskets.*

PORTIA: My father hath devised this lottery,
in these three chests of gold, silver and lead,
whereof who chooses his meaning chooses me.
If you do love me, you will find me out.

BASSANIO: Eeeny, meeny, miney, moe—

PORTIA: (*losing patience*) You know, if a man wanted to marry me, he might find himself *lead* to pick one of these caskets. I'm sure his

natural (say it “led”) leadership would shine through. He certainly wouldn’t be misled.

BASSANIO: Which one should I pick? I’m so confused.

PORTIA pushes the cart in frustration at BASSANIO, who exits R with it. NERISSA enters L wearing an academic robe with a mortarboard hat and carrying another hat, a moustache, and big book titled “VENETIAN LAW FOR DUMMIES.”

NERISSA hands the second hat to PORTIA, who tucks her hair up in it.

PORTIA: Nerissa!

We shall be both accoutered like young men.

No-one will guess I’m a girl if I wear this hat!

NERISSA: (*puts on the moustache*) Look, Portia, I have a moustache!

PORTIA: ¡Hola, Salvador Dali.

PORTIA and NERISSA pore over the law book. SHYLOCK, holding a hacksaw, re-enters with ANTONIO from R.

SHYLOCK: And by our holy Sabbath have I sworn

To have the due and forfeit of my bond.

Don’t worry, your leg is gonna be kosher.

PORTIA: Wait!

The quality of mercy is not strain’d.

I’ve found a loophole! And Shylock, you have to convert.

SHYLOCK: At least there’ll be bacon.

ALL: Mmmmm...bacon...

ACTORS shake hands all round and exit, some giving a thumbs-up to WILLIAM. MESSENGER enters L, brings ELIZABETH a stack of new pages and a piece of strudel. ELIZABETH takes a bite.

ELIZABETH: (*reading*) “Enclosed are my latest efforts, a strudel, and a wiener schnitzel for your enjoyment. Please excuse the sticky letter.”

(*speaking*) Well, the pastry and the schnitzel are splendid. Pages could use a little work. Are you sure Austria was the right choice? The hills are alive with the sound of goatherds.

That doesn't sound like anything you could make a play out of.
Certainly not one of my favorite things.

(reading from a new page) "Measure For Measure..."

ANGELO (cape, gold brooch) enters L and stands on the upstage bench, flanked by SOLDIERS. A crowd enters from all sides and listens, including CLAUDIO and his visibly-pregnant GIRLFRIEND, both standing R.

ANGELO: We have strict statutes and most biting laws.
Which for this nineteen years we have let slip.
No loose morals! No pregnancy without marriage!

ALL turn and look at CLAUDIO and GIRLFRIEND.

CLAUDIO: Oops.

ANGELO: I'll follow close the rigour of the statute,
To make you an example. See that Claudio
be executed by nine tomorrow morning.

SOLDIERS seize CLAUDIO and drag him off R. ALL but ANGELO exit L. ISABELLA, in a nun's wimple or entire habit, pushes through the crowd and enters L. She speaks to ANGELO.

ISABELLA: We cannot weigh our brother with ourself:
Go to your bosom;
Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know
Claudio's young and stupid. He was kidding!

Romantic music swells. ANTONIO steps down from bench.

ANGELO: *(aside)* What, do I love her,
That I desire to hear her speak again?

Romantic music fades.

(to ISABELLA) Which had you rather, that the most just law
Now took your brother's life; or, to redeem him?

ANGELO hints with gestures, "you—me—together," but ISABELLA doesn't understand his gestures. You can skip to ANGELO's exasperation in his next line.

Or, if playing time permits, ANGELO gestures larger, but an elaborate mime or interpretive dance rather than any familiar gestures. ISABELLA doesn't get it.

ANGELO busts out a veil and bouquet and briskly enacts an entire wedding with himself as bride, officiant and groom, maybe even some crying mothers. ISABELLA is still clueless.

ANGELO: *(at the end of his rope)* I'll spare your brother's life if you go out with me!

ISABELLA: Excuse me? *(gestures to her habit, meaning "Yo, I'm a nun!")*
Better it were a brother died at once,
Than that a sister, by redeeming him,
Should die for ever.

ANGELO: That's what makes it so awesome, baby.
Plainly conceive, I love you.
Just give it some thought.

ANGELO gestures "happy times" on one side and "throat cut" or "hanging" on the other, then exits L. ISABELLA sits down upset on the bench. CLAUDIO enters from R.

ISABELLA: And then he asked me to go out with him!

CLAUDIO: You're gonna do it, right?
Sweet sister, let me live:
Death is a fearful thing.

ISABELLA smacks her forehead gesturing "the stupidity of you."

GIRLFRIEND OF CLAUDIO, with bump, bouquet and wedding veil (grab them from ANGELO and reuse) enters L and takes CLAUDIO's hand. ISABELLA makes a quick religious gesture over them. ANGELO re-enters from L.

CLAUDIO: We're married! Gotcha!

ANGELO: Curses, foiled again!

ISABELLA: If I wasn't a nun, I'd punch you!

ANGELO: Give me your hand and say you will be mine.

ALL freeze. ELIZABETH is reading.

ELIZABETH: "End of play." End of play! No. Just no. This play has problems.

ACTORS unfreeze, looking disappointed and muttering among themselves. They exit to whichever side they next enter from.

WILLIAM crumples up a paper and tosses it. MESSENGER enters R, places a long baguette on WILLIAM's desk, and sticks a French flag in it.

ELIZABETH: (*turning a page*) "Love's Labours Lost"...that sounds promising. It certainly applies to a few suitors I know.

WILLIAM: It's a beautiful love story that ends with a surprise death!

ELIZABETH: Maybe someone else should write your endings? Kit Marlowe? Eddie De Vere? You could do everything but the last ten pages.

WILLIAM scrunches up several papers and throws them on the floor. MESSENGER enters with a stack of thick books and sets them on the desk: Game of Thrones, Twilight, Hunger Games, Harry Potter, whatever is currently popular and epically long. WILLIAM grabs one of the books and gestures with it.

WILLIAM: Lizzie, I want to write a multipart epic. They're so popular right now with all the young people. (*gets excited*) What about a miniseries, set in England? History! Pageantry! Surprise deaths!

Acts out the following as a puppet show on his desk with the baguette, the fish and the flags.

See, first, the French Ambassador shows up with a present for Henry the Fifth, but it's tennis balls! And Henry thinks Richard is on his side for the first three plays, but in the fourth one Richard totally backstabs him!

Stabs the fish repeatedly with the French flag. It's not dead enough, so he whacks it a few times with the pyramid, then looks hopefully at ELIZABETH.

ELIZABETH: It's a little difficult to follow. All those numbers. Why don't you go to Italy? Sun—sand—beautiful people!

ELIZABETH snaps her fingers and MESSENGER enters R, dumps another purse of ducats on WILLIAM's desk, makes him sign the clipboard again. MESSENGER pulls out a large salami, thwacks it onto the desk, and plants an Italian flag in it.

WILLIAM: How about a pair of star-crossed lovers from Verona?

ELIZABETH: I could be convinced.

ROMEO (belt with dagger) and JULIET (little 'Juliet' cap with hanging veil) enter and press their palms together.

JULIET: I'm but a maiden.

ROMEO: Not anymore.

ROMEO leads JULIET upstage to the bench and they sit together (ROMEO on R). MESSENGER enters R, dressed in the same uniform with a tabard thrown on top, stands upstage and holds pillows behind their heads, as if they are in bed.

JULIET: Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day

ROMEO: It was the lark, the herald of the morn,
Night's candles are burnt out,
I must be gone.

JULIET: Yon light is not day-light, I know it, oh—
It was the nightingale, and not the lark,
Therefore stay yet; thou need'st not to be gone.

MERCUTIO enters from R and grabs ROMEO's outside hand.

ROMEO: Um, Mercutio? Little busy here?

MERCUTIO: Romeo! Bro! I had this dream! I was riding Space Mountain, but it wasn't at Disney World, it was on a beach, and then this chick with wings showed up and we all went for a carriage ride. (to ROMEO) And you were there... (to JULIET) and Juliet, you were there... (to MESSENGER) and you were there, too, Toto!

MESSENGER: (dourly) Woof.

ROMEO tries to get his hand out of MERCUTIO's. MERCUTIO holds on. ROMEO grabs one of the pillows and whacks MERCUTIO.

MERCUTIO: Ow! (dies)

ROMEO: Oops.

MESSENGER presents poison bottle to ROMEO, who drinks from it.

ROMEO: Thy drugs are quick. (*dies*)

MESSENGER holds poison bottle to JULIET. She pulls dagger from ROMEO's belt and indicates it.

JULIET: I'm good, thanks. (*stabs self*)

O happy dagger!

I should have had a tetanus shot. (*dies*)

ALL help each other up and exit to their next entrance side, taking props.

ELIZABETH: It has potential. What if you put in some songs and set it in the New World? (*snaps her fingers à la West Side Story*)

WILLIAM: You're a hard woman to please.

ELIZABETH: Love's not only for the young.

WILLIAM: How old are you? (*ELIZABETH shoots him a glare*)

Never mind. Mature love, coming right up.

MESSENGER pops back out from R and sticks another Italian flag in the salami on WILLIAM's desk.

BENEDICK (hat) and BEATRICE (flower in her hand) enter from R, already quarreling.

BEATRICE: I wonder that you will still be talking, Signor Benedick: nobody marks you.

BENEDICK: It is certain I am loved of all ladies, only you excepted.

BEATRICE: I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me.

BENEDICK: So some gentleman or other shall escape a scratched face.

BEATRICE: (*referring to BENEDICK's face*) Scratching could not make it worse.

BENEDICK: I would my horse had the speed of your tongue.

BEATRICE: (*to AUDIENCE*) I'll not be fitted with a husband.

BENEDICK: (*to AUDIENCE*) I will live a bachelor.

BENEDICK looks at BEATRICE. BEATRICE looks at BENEDICK. Romantic music swells. BEATRICE tosses her flower to the audience. They run to each other in slow motion, then embrace. BENEDICK sweeps

*BEATRICE up in his arms and they exit together R.
Romantic music fades.*

ELIZABETH: It's a little shallow. Seems like much ado about nothing.

Entering L, TROILUS (played by the same actor as ROMEO, with a toga on top of his Romeo outfit) leads CRESSIDA (played by the same actor as JULIET, also with an added toga) upstage to the bench and they sit together. MESSENGER again holds pillows behind their heads, as if they are in bed.

TROILUS: O Cressida! But that the busy day,
Waked by the lark, hath roused the ribald crows,
And dreaming night will hide our joys no longer,
I would not from thee.

CRESSIDA: Night hath been too brief.

TROILUS: (to WILLIAM) Whoa-whoa-whoa-whoa-wait a minute—
Larks, dawn, "please don't leave me," haven't we heard this
before?

*WILLIAM looks to ELIZABETH. She nods, agreeing
with TROILUS.*

WILLIAM: (to actors) No, no, you're Troilus and Cressida. It's a totally
different story about two teenagers who fall in love and their
families try to keep them apart. This one, they live and everyone
else dies!

ELIZABETH: You can do better.

*WILLIAM crumples and chucks a few pages over his
shoulder.*

*TROILUS and CRESSIDA exit. MESSENGER remains
upstage with pillows.*

*PETRUCHIO (hat) and KATHERINE (different flower
in hand), played by the actors who were BEATRICE
and BENEDICK, enter from R, quarreling.*

KATHERINE: Signor Petruchio,
let him that moved you hither
Remove you hence.

*KATHERINE trips PETRUCHIO, who staggers to the
edge of the stage, then regains his balance and turns
to her.*

PETRUCHIO: Come, come, you wasp; i' faith, you are too angry.

KATHERINE: If I be waspish, best beware my sting.

PETRUCHIO scoops up KATHERINE over his shoulder. She kicks the air and beats his back with her fists but he holds on.

PETRUCHIO: Your father hath consented
That you shall be my wife;

PETRUCHIO sets KATHERINE on the floor and sits on her. She struggles futilely.

And, will you, nill you, I will marry you.
For I am he born to tame you Kate.

KATE stops struggling.

KATHERINE: I'm finding you kind of attractive. Nobody else stands up to me.

PETRUCHIO gets up and helps KATHERINE up.

PETRUCHIO: Why, there's a wench! Come on, and kiss me, Kate.

Romantic music swells, KATHERINE and PETRUCHIO embrace. PETRUCHIO sweeps KATHERINE up in his arms and they exit together L. MESSENGER exits R, embracing the pillows as though they are romantic partners. Romantic music fades.

ELIZABETH: Willy, this is sounding awfully familiar.

WILLIAM: No, no—this is *The Taming of the Shrew*. It's a completely different play about a couple who can't stand each other and then fall in love.

ELIZABETH: And this is a...comedy?

WILLIAM: Yes?

ELIZABETH: Nothing makes me laugh like domestic violence.

WILLIAM: Um—wait—have you heard this one? Two Noble Kinsmen walk into a bar...

ELIZABETH: What happens?

WILLIAM: I don't know, I need a punchline. Augh! (*he crumples and throws a page.*) What's your favorite holiday?

ELIZABETH: Twelfth Night.

VIOLA enters L, wet from swimming and wearing a life-preserver or carrying an oar. MESSENGER, still in tabard, enters R with a sign.

VIOLA: What country, friends is this?

MESSENGER holds up sign, "Welcome to Illyria, Home of Duke Orsino" then flips the sign, which now says "Duke's House" with an arrow.

VIOLA: Conceal me what I am, I'll serve this Duke:
No-one will guess I'm a girl if I wear this hat!

VIOLA whips out and puts on a hat and tucks up her hair, then exits L.

MESSENGER rolls eyes and exits R, taking the sign.

ELIZABETH: How do you spell "derivative," Willy? Are there more letters than "self-plagiarization?"

WILLIAM: No, no, it's a completely different play about a girl disguised as a boy falling in love with a man who doesn't know she's a woman. This one has a shipwreck!

MIRANDA (crown of flowers) enters R. ARIEL (wings or fairy unitard) capers around her.

MIRANDA: Daddy and I had a shipwreck!

MIRANDA leans on WILLIAM and treats him like he's her father, possibly sitting on the desk or leaning on the back of his chair. Throughout the rest of the scene, MIRANDA stays with WILLIAM, pats his shoulder, hands him fresh paper or a new pen, etc.

WILLIAM: (As if he is Prospero, Miranda's father, but also writing it down)
A rotten carcass of a boat, not rigg'd,
Nor tackle, sail, nor mast.
Here in this island we arrived—

ARIEL: All hail, great master! Grave sir, hail!

WILLIAM: Ariel!
Hast thou, spirit,
Perform'd to point the tempest that I bade thee?

MIRANDA stays near WILLIAM. ARIEL begins to carry papers through the air from WILLIAM to ELIZABETH

and back again, wafting them and flapping them like birds.

ANTIGONUS enters L, wearing a life jacket and with a baby in his arms. The baby wears a tiny life jacket.

WILLIAM: I'll tell thee, Miranda, a winter's tale—

ANTIGONUS: Our ship hath touch'd upon
The deserts of Bohemia.

ELIZABETH: Another shipwreck? At this rate there won't be a boat left in Europe!

ANTIGONUS: Anyone want to adopt a baby?

MARINA enters R carrying a buoy. ANTIGONUS moves to ELIZABETH and waits politely behind her.

ELIZABETH: (*turning a page*) "Pericles?"

MARINA: I was born in a boat. That's why Daddy named me Marina!

ELIZABETH: Puns, Willy!

ANTIGONUS: (*to ELIZABETH*) Baby?

ELIZABETH: (*gesturing to herself, "duh"*) Virgin queen?

ANTIGONUS bows and moves upstage from ELIZABETH.

JULIA, carrying a hat, and LAUNCE, carrying two shoes, enter L.

LAUNCE: This shoe is my father: no, this left shoe is my father:
no, no, this left shoe is my mother.
Anyone wanna see a puppet show about a dog?

MIRANDA laughs at the joke, LAUNCE crosses to DR and begins the puppet show, using the monologue in the appendix. He is heard where noted. If needed as the chaos builds, he drops to miming, or raises his voice to fill dead air.

JULIA: Now, with my honour, I may undertake
A journey to my loving Proteus.
No-one will guess I'm a girl if I wear this hat! (*tucks up her hair*)

ANTIGONUS: (*offering JULIA the baby*) Two Gentlemen of Verona and a Baby?

JULIA shakes her head no and goes to watch LAUNCE's puppet show DR.

LAUNCE: I think Crab, my dog, be the sourest-natured dog that lives.

WILLIAM: (*writing*) A moor of Venice!

WILLIAM hands off a page to ARIEL, who flies it to ELIZABETH.

DESDEMONA (nightgown) enters from R, pursued by OTHELLO, carrying a pillow. They pause. ARIEL flies a handkerchief from WILLIAM's desk past OTHELLO.

OTHELLO: I saw the handkerchief.

DESDEMONA: I never did
Offend you in my life; never loved Cassio,
I never gave him token.
I swear I didn't cheat!

OTHELLO: I will kill thee,
And love thee after.

OTHELLO chases DESDEMONA out L, ready to whack her with the pillow. ARIEL grabs the pillow from OTHELLO as he exits and takes it to the upstage bench. MARC ANTONY (toga, same actor who played him in the Cleopatra scene) strides on from L and stands on the upstage bench to orate. ANTIGONUS comes to him.

MARC ANTONY: Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears.

ANTIGONUS: (*to MARC ANTONY*) Baby?

MARC ANTONY dismisses ANTIGONUS with a gesture. ANTIGONUS takes the baby DR to watch LAUNCE's puppet show. MARC ANTONY continues his speech (in appendix) at a low volume while everything else happens around him. He is heard where noted. If needed as the chaos builds, he drops to miming, or raises his voice to fill dead air.

MESSENGER places a page-a-day calendar open to March 15 on WILLIAM's desk. JULIUS CAESAR runs through from R, pursued by BRUTUS with dagger, both in togas.

JULIUS CAESAR: Et tu, Brute! (*pronounced "Brew-tay"*)

JULIUS CAESAR and BRUTUS exit L.

SOLDIERS enter L and cross, carrying branches in front of themselves. MACBETH (crown) enters R, sees the SOLDIERS, screams, and runs back out, the SOLDIERS following. MIRANDA takes a branch from a SOLDIER and adds it to WILLIAM's desk.

For a moment, MARC ANTONY and LAUNCE can be clearly heard.

MARC ANTONY: *(continuing his speech)*

Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral.

He was my friend, faithful and just to me:

MARC ANTONY continues speaking but drops his volume.

LAUNCE: *(continuing his speech)*

Nay, I'll show you the manner of it. This shoe is my father: no, this left shoe is my father:

LAUNCE continues speaking but drops his volume.

IMOGEN (crown) enters L, pursued by PISANIO, in a hat. PISANIO holds a woman's bracelet that he's showing IMOGEN—it's the 'proof' she cheated. They stand downstage of ELIZABETH.

ARIEL brings a sheaf of papers to ELIZABETH.

ELIZABETH: *(taking the sheaf)* "Cymbeline."

IMOGEN: I don't know how Iachimo *(pronounced "YA-kuh-moe")* got my bracelet! I swear I didn't cheat!

PISANIO: Some villain hath done you both this cursed injury. *(takes off his hat and gives it to IMOGEN)* Here, put on this hat and act like a boy! I'll go tell your husband you're dead.

IMOGEN tucks up her hair. PISANIO exits DR. As he does, ARIEL plucks the bracelet from him and gives it to MIRANDA, who admires it and puts it on. IMOGEN has followed PISANIO to the edge of the stage, which puts her near LAUNCE's puppet show DR.

ANTIGONUS: *(to IMOGEN)* You know what would complete your disguise? A baby!

IMOGEN gives him a look, “the stupidity of you” and exits DR.

ELIZABETH: It'll never sell, Will! Nobody wants to see a woman win!

BRUTUS re-enters from L, dragging a dead and bloody JULIUS CAESAR by the leg. He drops the body off at MARC ANTONY's bench.

MARC ANTONY: Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;
And, sure, he is an honourable man.

BRUTUS stabs himself and falls dead on top of JULIUS CAESAR's body. MARC ANTONY drops his volume again for HENRY VIII's line.

HENRY VIII (tabard with “VIII” on it) enters UL and crosses to center.

HENRY VIII: (to AUDIENCE) We all are men,
In our own natures frail, and capable
Of our flesh; few are angels—

ANTIGONUS moves to HENRY VIII to offer the baby.

HENRY VIII: (to ANTIGONUS) Sorry, not if it's a girl.

ELIZABETH: William! Not my dad. (tosses a stack of papers away)

HENRY VIII exits DL. ANTIGONUS walks into the audience and begins offering the baby around.

LAUNCE: This hat is Nan, our maid: I am the dog:

WILLIAM scrunches up a paper and tosses it. SOLDIERS run in from L, waving little Welsh flags. They pause center. LEAD SOLDIER jumps up on bench, jostling MARC ANTONY, who stops speaking for a moment.

LEAD SOLDIER: Who are we?

SOLDIERS: Welshmen!

LEAD SOLDIER: Who do we hate?

SOLDIERS: Everyone!

LEAD SOLDIER: Let's fight!

SOLDIERS exit R, roaring. ARIEL piggybacks on a SOLDIER to the edge of the playing area, grabs that

SOLDIER's Welsh flag and plants it on WILLIAM's desk, stabbing it into the salami already there.

MARC ANTONY has lost his place. Exasperated, he starts again at oration volume.

MARC ANTONY: Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears.

MARC ANTONY drops his volume and keeps speaking, reaching the end of the speech where indicated. RICHARD (same actor, now wearing a "II" on his chest) enters.

RICHARD II: Have I not reason to look pale and dead?
I swear I had twelve thousand Welsh soldiers around here somewhere. (exits)

ELIZABETH: How does he lose a whole army?

WILLIAM: It makes sense in context.

ELIZABETH: I didn't read the whole thing.

WILLIAM: No-one else has either!

WILLIAM crumples paper after paper, in increasing despair. MESSENGER brings ARIEL a basket of paper airplanes made of the writing paper.

TIMON OF ATHENS (toga) enters DR, throwing gold coins (plastic or chocolate) into the audience. He reaches ELIZABETH's desk and offers her a handful.

ELIZABETH: (to TIMON) Who are you?

TIMON: Timon of Athens?
(to AUDIENCE) More welcome are ye to my fortunes
Than my fortunes to me.
You get a coin! And you get a coin! You all get coins!

ELIZABETH: (to WILLIAM) That's just pandering to the audience!

TIMON exits. ARIEL begins to throw paper airplanes.

LAUNCE: Now the dog all this while sheds not a tear nor speaks a word;

ELIZABETH: Give me something grand, Will! Something worth your monarch's time!

Soldier MARTIUS (breastplate or helmet) strides in and speaks directly to WILLIAM.

MARTIUS: So wait—I single-handedly defeat the Volscians of Corioli, (pronounced “VOL-see-ans of Koh-ree-OH-lie”) and the best victory name you can give me is “Coriolanus”? (pronounced “Koh-ree-oh-LAY-nus”)

MARTIUS slaps his forehead, gesturing “the stupidity of you” and exits. WILLIAM crumples another paper.

MARC ANTONY: (hitting the end of his speech, skip/repeat as many lines as needed to make it time out)

My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar,
And I must pause till it come back to me.
(steps down and sits sadly on the bench)

LAVINIA, who has no hands or tongue, enters R and runs through shrieking, waving her bloody stumps, blood dribbling down her chin. TITUS ANDRONICUS, wearing a chef's toque, pursues her with a cleaver in his hand.

TITUS: Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee;
And, with thy shame, thy father's sorrow die!

TITUS ANDRONICUS and LAVINIA exit L.

ELIZABETH: Disgusting! No-one will watch a horror show!

WILLIAM is frantically writing and crumpling.

ANTIGONUS makes it back to the stage, with baby. He takes the baby to MIRANDA, who takes the baby's life jacket, but shakes her head no, she can't take the baby. MIRANDA adds the life jacket to the pile of souvenirs on WILLIAM's desk.

ELIZABETH: This is the last I'm sending you, Willy, so use it well.
Summer is nearly over—write something magical!

MESSENGER enters from R with a purse of ducats and dumps it on WILLIAM's desk. ARIEL pours out the coins all over the desk and over WILLIAM's head. Through the scene, MIRANDA should gently remove any coins sticking to WILLIAM.

TITANIA enters from L, dressed as spooky-wicked fairy as you can manage. If this is a costume-free show, give her some angry eyebrows.

ANTIGONUS: (to TITANIA) You look like a nice lady. Baby?

TITANIA hisses at ANTIGONUS and snatches the baby. She moves to DL, where she rocks the baby. ANTIGONUS goes and hangs out near ELIZABETH, trying to read over her shoulder and generally annoying her.

WILLIAM: That doesn't sound like me! (crumples a paper)

OBERON enters DL and starts trying to get the baby from TITANIA.

OBERON: Why should Titania cross her Oberon?

I do but beg a little changeling boy,

WILLIAM writes and crumples with increasing frenzy. TITANIA refuses to give up the baby and OBERON crosses to WILLIAM's desk to sulk.

WILLIAM: Fairies! I need another fairy! (points to MESSENGER, grabs the clipboard) You'll do.

MIRANDA puts small horns on the MESSENGER, who pushes up sleeves, flexes in a fairylike way, and dives in, thrilled to be part of the action. MESSENGER is now PUCK.

Through the next commentary, HELENA, HERMIA, LYSANDER, DEMETRIUS (all in togas), TITANIA with baby, BOTTOM (wearing ass's head), OBERON (flower crown) and MECHANICALS (each holding a modern or vintage tool) appear and act out the commentary as much as possible. Note that ARIEL also has an action part.

SOLDIERS re-enter from everywhere and form a semi-circle upstage around the playing space, leaving a gap for the bench. They wave their little Welsh flags and act as sports fans. ANTONY, LAUNCE and JULIA join the crowd, LAUNCE using his shoe-puppets to cheer with. CAESAR and BRUTUS come back to life and join the crowd.

ALL OTHER ACTORS not currently on stage, enter and join the sports fan crowd, wearing their previous costume pieces. ARIEL plucks flags from WILLIAM's desk and gives them to ACTORS without flags.

PUCK (MESSENGER) jumps up on WILLIAM's desk and grabs a megaphone or hand-held microphone to be heard above the chaos.

PUCK: Lord, what fools these mortals be!
(like a sports announcer) We're into the second act, things are heating up and Helena's definitely the focus of attention right now.

HELENA runs in from DL, pursued by DEMETRIUS, who is pursued by HERMIA.

DEMETRIUS: *(to HELENA)* O, why rebuke you him that loves you so?

HERMIA: *(to DEMETRIUS)* What's this to my Lysander? Where is he?

LYSANDER enters DR.

LYSANDER: O Helena, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine!

HELENA holds her arms out straight, LYSANDER pushes his chest against her right hand, DEMETRIUS pushes his chest against her left hand, both trying to kiss her.

PUCK: Ouch, Hermia, that's gotta sting! Demetrius and Lysander both pursuing Helena through the woods, it's clear they've been training hard for this scene!

HELENA releases the boys and steps upstage. They collide with each other in an embrace, then recoil in disgust.

HELENA: O spite! O hell! *(exits L)*

DEMETRIUS takes a swing at LYSANDER, who ducks, then exits L pursuing HELENA. DEMETRIUS runs after them both. HERMIA bursts into tears. OBERON enters R and stands next to PUCK.

PUCK: Demetrius aiming for Lysander, he swings and misses! Lysander's heading for the fences! Hermia's turned on the waterworks, a classic strategy, will it work this time? No!

HERMIA exits L. ARIEL goes to TITANIA with flower and squirts her with flower juice in the face. She gasps and splutters. ARIEL grabs the other pillow from offstage.



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