

SCENE 10: After-Show Party Tent

A crowded tent which is lavishly decorated with flowing silks and lots of throw pillows; Playboy club meets hippie love den. A jazzy version of "BUT SOFT WHAT LIGHT" plays. FRANCIS BACON and THOMAS MIDDLETON stand off to the side, smoking pipes. NIGEL and PORTIA enter. They look around in awe.

PORTIA

Oh my...

A scantily clad WAITRESS walks past with a tray of goblets.

WAITRESS

Drinks?

PORTIA

Oh, yes. I'm parched. Thank you.

THEY each take a goblet. PORTIA downs hers quickly – then...

(barely able to speak)

That's not water.

Then – SHE takes another sip. Mmmm, pretty good!

NIGEL

Ohmygod, look over there. It's Thomas Middleton.

PORTIA

<GASP>

And he's talking to Edmund Spenser. And ohmygosh, ohmygosh... look who just walked in!

NIGEL, PORTIA

Francis Bacon!

NIGEL

Wow. It's like – all the greatest poets of London are right here in this room!

PORTIA

Including you.

NIGEL reacts. Then THEY both giggle. PORTIA takes another drink as SHAKESPEARE enters and strikes a pose.

SHAKESPEARE

Is that a young Bottom I see?!

CROWD

(singing)

SHAKESPEARE!

SHAKESPEARE

(polite greetings as HE works the room)

Hi... hi... how are you, thanks for coming... good to see you, yes you can touch me, oooh, I wanna talk to you...

(as the excited guest stands)

Not now.

(arriving at Nigel)

So... Nigel Bottom—playwright, poet and prestigious prodigy.

(to the crowd)

Oooh, that was a lot of alliteration—

(sing-song)

OCCUPATIONAL HA-ZARD!

(playing to crowd, then back to Nigel)

So—Nicky Bottom's little brother. His "secret weapon", all grown up. And who is this delightful damsel, this maiden fair, this feast for the eyes?

NIGEL

Oh, um... This is Portia.

SHAKESPEARE

Portia. Good name.

PORTIA

PORTIA stares stage-struck, mouth quivering, breathing quickening

SHAKESPEARE

That's right. This is happening. Just breathe...

PORTIA

M-m-m-master Shakespeare...

SHE bows and is now so tipsy she collapses to the ground.

SHAKESPEARE

Aw, she's bedazzled. You like that word? I made it up, it's what I do!

(turns to crowd)

Let's drink to that!

CROWD

HUZZAH!!!!

NIGEL helps Portia to her feet. SHE takes another huge gulp. She gets woozy.

PORTIA

I think I need a bit of a lie down.

SHE tries to sit on sofa but falls behind it.

SHAKESPEARE

So! Nigel. What are you and that brother of yours working on? A tragedy? A comedy? A tragic attempt at comedy?

(to the crowd)

See what I did there?

(THEY don't laugh enough)

SEE WHAT I DID??

THEY laugh harder.

NIGEL

Actually, Nick doesn't want me to tell anyone.

SHAKESPEARE

Oh, God, he's so paranoid. Always has been. Even when I was a lowly actor in his sad little troupe, he was so *insecure*. Of course, with you as his partner, he has even more reason to be. I've read your sonnet.

HE puts a hand on Nigel's shoulder, nods like "yeah, that's right, I read it." NIGEL waits for a comment. SHAKESPEARE finds a bit of dust on Nigel's coat, flicks it off. Nigel is in agony, waiting.

It's good. Quite good. I'd love to read more.

(feigning surprise)

Oh— is that your folio?

HE points to Nigel's leather notebook.

NIGEL

What, this? Oh, this is just—a collection of random lines and thoughts...

SHAKESPEARE

Would you like me to give it a looky-loo? What am I saying? Of course you would! I'm Shakespeare!

CROWD

(singing, raising a glass)

SHAKESPEARE!

SHAKESPEARE

(takes Nigel's notebook, reads)

Hmmm. "All the world's a stage" Good line, that.

There's a commotion at the door as SHYLOCK and NICK enter. SHAKESPEARE steps away, flipping through pages.

DOORMAN

Hey, you're not allowed in here...

DOORMAN tries to stop them.

SHYLOCK

It's okay he's my plus one...

NICK

Trust me I have no desire to stay...

(backing into the room)

...I'm just looking for my...

(seeing Nigel)

Brother! There you are! Why the hell are... oh, hello Will.

SHAKESPEARE hides the notebook behind his back.

SHAKESPEARE

Hello, Nick. Been a long time.

NICK

Not long enough. Is that... my brother's *notebook*?

(takes it from him)

Nice try.

NIGEL

He was just offering to look at my ideas.

NICK

Or *his* ideas as they'd soon be known.

CROWD

Ooohhh.

SHAKESPEARE

Do you bite your thumb at me sir?

CROWD laugh and lightly applaud

NICK

Really? Quoting *Romeo and Juliet*? Pathetic.

SHAKESPEARE

By my troth, the tartness of his face doth sour the ripened grape.

CROWD

HA-HA-HA-HA-HA

NICK

Oh yeah? Well, by my troth your grape... is stupid.

NICK instantly winces at what he said, wishing he could take it back.

SHAKESPEARE

Such a clever retort, and you can't write a hit?

CROWD

Oooooooh...

More LAUGHTER at Nick's expense. HE'S fuming.

SHAKESPEARE

No, no, no, no, no, no... we should actually thank this man. He was the one who suggested I take up writing in the first place.

NICK

Because you're a ^{bad} ~~shit~~ actor.

SHAKESPEARE

Oh no I'm not!

NICK

Oh yes you are!

SHAKESPEARE

Oh no I'm not!

NICK

Oh yes you are!

SHAKESPEARE

Take it back.

BROTHER JEREMIAH (O.S.)

OUT OF MY WAY, HEATHEN!

BROTHER JEREMIAH enters with TWO PURITAN FOLLOWERS.

PANICKED WOMAN

PURITANS!!!

PEOPLE scatter. SHAKESPEARE is whisked away by his MEN as JEREMIAH scans the room.

BROTHER JEREMIAH

Where is she?? Where is my daughter?

(SEEING HER, GASP!)

PORTIA!

PORTIA rises from behind the sofa holding a goblet of wine, quite drunk.

PORTIA

Hello, daddy-o.

BROTHER JEREMIAH

You said you were in your room, reading your bible.

PORTIA

(slurred speech)

Ohhh, Bible-bible-bibble-babble

<BLOWING A RASPBERRY>

JEREMIAH is FURIOUS. He turns to Nigel.

BROTHER JEREMIAH

Hear me now, sinner. You dare to cross me and corrupt my daughter!? So help me God, I will smite these Bottoms – and smite them hard.

HE pauses, rethinking what he said. Then turns to Portia.

COME WITH ME!

PORTIA

(giggling as SHE exits)

Smite their bottoms...

HE drags her away. NIGEL goes after them.

NIGEL

Portia!

NICK

(grabbing Nigel)

And you – come with me!

HE grabs Nigel and pulls him across the stage in the opposite direction.

NIGEL

Let me go! I'm not a child!

NICK

Then why are you acting like one?! I told you to stay away from her and now look what's happened – we're on the most wanted list of a deranged Puritan! And Shakespeare nearly got your notebook full of ideas – which, by the way, is the only reason he invited you here.

NIGEL

No!

NICK

You are so naive! You've got to watch your back with this guy. Believe me, I know every trick in his book.

NIGEL

Well, it was all very confusing! And now she's gone and I've lost my inspiration and the love of my life and... I've got to get her back!

(Running off)

PORTIA!

NICK

No! Nigel!! We have a show to write! URGGGGGH.

SHYLOCK, who has been seated this whole time with his back to them, stands.

SHYLOCK

So. Ready to reconsider now...?

#9A – Shakespeare (Incidental)

We hear the guitar riff of "GOD I HATE SHAKESPEARE"

NICK

You know what...

Guitar plays again.

Why the ~~hell~~ not!? Let's do it!

heck

SHYLOCK

Really! Mozeltov! I love it, I love it, I love it! So—tell me—what's our new show about?

NICK

Um, we're still... looking for that great idea.

SHYLOCK

Hmmm... Too bad you can't get a peek into Shakespeare's notebook, huh?

This gives NICK an idea. LIGHTING CHANGE. MORE "GOD I HATE SHAKESPEARE" GUITAR as Nick removes his money pouch, bounces it in his hand as the set transitions to...