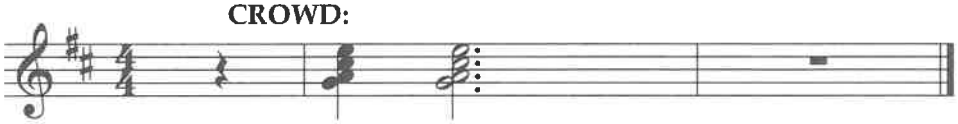
SHAKESPEARE IN COURT 1

'Shakespeare' Tempo

CROWD:



Shake - speare!

Start

SHAKESPEARE
Hi... hi... how are you? If it please the court...

MASTER OF THE JUSTICE
Oh, the court is very pleased...
(clapping)
Continue.

SHAKESPEARE
Words without thoughts never to heaven go...

MASTER OF THE JUSTICE
(to CLERK)
I love how he puts words in the wrong order.

SHAKESPEARE
And the quality of mercy is not strained. It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven. But! – if a merciful ending is not – with these characters and thee at thy bench – then, shall I see fair justice done.

MASTER OF THE JUSTICE
Are you saying you might write a play about this? With me as a character? Well, I wouldn't want to look the fool.

SHAKESPEARE
And you shan't, Lord Falstaff – not if you spare their lives and see these mischief makers banish-ed. Send them off of this royal throne of kings, this sceptered isle – this England.

(The GALLERY, CLERK, GUARDS, and JUDGE... even NOSTRADAMUS, all applaud. SHAKESPEARE bows.)

MASTER OF THE JUSTICE
(tearing up)
That is so much more elegant than beheading, I agree. Defendants, I sentence you to be banish-ed. Transported on the first ship for the New World. And take your so-called 'Musicals' with you!

End

(NICK looks to the egg.)
NICK: Frailty, thy name is egg.

(NICK)
How like thee I am. For I am – what I am, and what I am doth be an illusion.

Start

HORATIO
You beckoned, my lord.

NICK
Where is Macavity?

HORATIO
At the Jellicle Ball. He would not come. Alas, my lord, what vexes thee?

NICK
I dreamed a dream, Horatio. An impossible dream. There were wheels upon yon dream. And raindrops upon Rosencrantz and whiskers on his kitten.

HORATIO
What be the meaning of it?

NICK
We've got trouble.

HORATIO
Trouble?

NICK
Trouble, I say!

(NIGEL re-enters.)

(NICK)

Where is Macavity!?

NIGEL

Macavity's not there!

(ROBIN (the QUEEN) enters. All bow.)

FOOTMAN

My Queen.

ROBIN

(as QUEEN)
Oh, what a ball. I could have danced all night! Gentle prince, thine absence 'twas worrisome for the king and I.

End

(ROBIN points to SHAKESPEARE, who is dressed as the KING, wearing a crown.)

NICK

He wears the crown that should don my head. GOD I HOPE I GET IT!

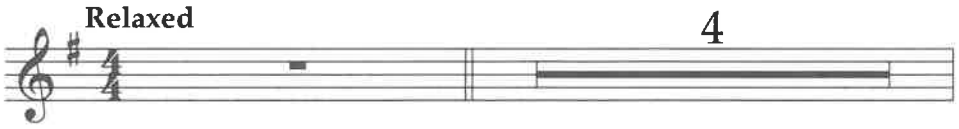
SHAKESPEARE

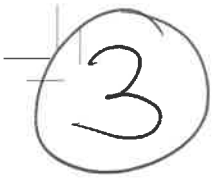
(as Toby)
Fair guests – *wilkommen, bienvenue,* welcome. The wedding breakfast is served!

(#32 – MAKE AN OMELETTE begins.)

MAKE AN OMELETTE

(SHAKESPEARE (KING) sits with ROBIN (QUEEN), surrounded by the court. MEMBERS of court stand about. NICK notices a bowl of eggs on the table.)
NICK: My father newly dead and the funeral boiled eggs now coldly furnish forth the marriage table.





NIGEL

It's probably terrible.

NICK

Let me see!

(reading)

"Let me talk of graves, of worms, of epitaphs..."

(NICK gets the notebook and reads as NIGEL nervously looks on.)

NIGEL

Oh, it's bad, isn't it? I don't even know why you let me write with you.

NICK

Start

Nigel, it's good! I'm starting to believe this is gonna be the Bottom Brothers' first hit.

(LORD CLAPHAM, their patron, enters. He's a lesser lord and extravagantly overdresses to compensate.)

LORD CLAPHAM

Pity we have to shut it down!

NICK

Lord Clapham. What do you mean – shut it down?

LORD CLAPHAM

Guess whose next production is going to be *The Tragedy of Richard the 2nd*??

(LORD CLAPHAM opens a poster that says, 'THE TRAGEDIE OF RICHARD II by William Shakespeare.' TROUPE gasps!)

NIGEL

Shakespeare??

PETER QUINCE

Why is he doing *Richard the 2nd*?? He just did *Richard the 3rd*! Who goes backwards?!

NIGEL

He breaks convention. That's why he's so great.

NICK

Well, he can't do *Richard the 2nd* because we're doing *Richard the 2nd*!

LORD CLAPHAM

Not anymore. And as your patron I paid for an original play, so no more money – unless I hear a new idea – on the morrow!

TOM SNOUT
I think that means 'tomorrow.'

NICK
Lord Clapham, please...

LORD CLAPHAM
Write something original – like the Bard!

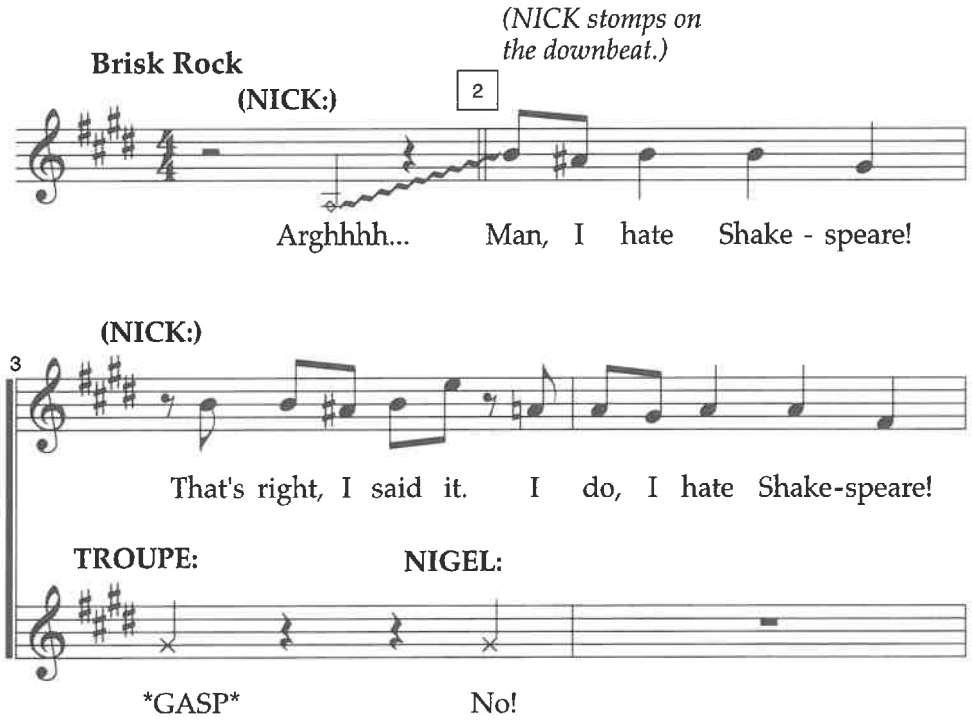
(LORD CLAPHAM exits.)

End

NICK
The "bard." Why is he the Bard? He's uh bard. Just like I'm a bard, you're a bard. HE'S JUST ONE OF THE BARDS!

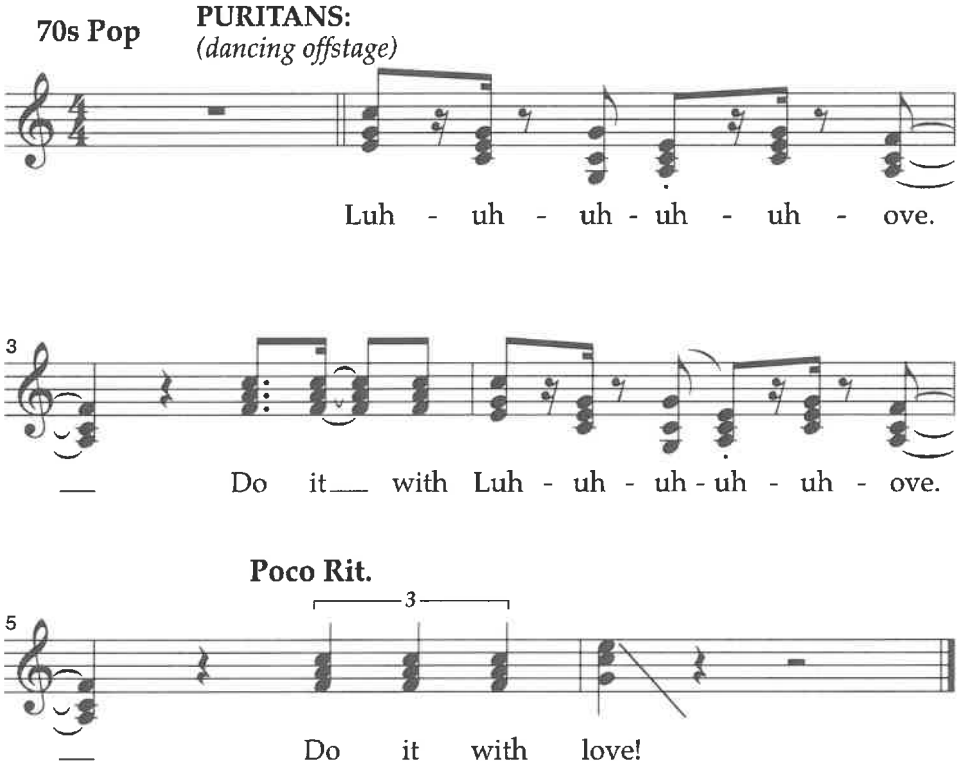
(#4 – MAN, I HATE SHAKESPEARE begins.)

MAN, I HATE SHAKESPEARE



(#27 – WE SEE THE LIGHT (PLAYOFF) begins.)

WE SEE THE LIGHT (PLAYOFF)



(NIGEL and PORTIA are left onstage.)

NIGEL

You really think that could happen?

PORTIA

Yes. Once my father sees your heart is true, he will love you as much as I do.

(BROTHER JEREMIAH enters with a couple of PURITANS.)

Start

BROTHER JEREMIAH

You dare defy me, daughter of Eve?!?

PORTIA

Please, Father...

BROTHER JEREMIAH
You bid me grant you leave so you could pray forgiveness in church, and instead you slither off here?

PORTIA
(to NIGEL)
Read it. Read your poem.

(NIGEL steps forward to read.)

NIGEL
"If love is a sic..."

BROTHER JEREMIAH
SILENCE!

NIGEL
Okay.

BROTHER JEREMIAH
You will tempt my daughter no more. She will be locked in the church tower, and there she will stay until her exile to our brethren in Scotland.

PORTIA
NO!... ~~End~~

(The PURITANS drag her away.)

NIGEL
Portia!

PORTIA
Write what you feel, Nigel.

NIGEL
I will! I promise!

PORTIA
I love you!

NIGEL
And I l—

(BROTHER JEREMIAH stops him.) End

BROTHER JEREMIAH
I am warning you, boy! Leave her be – or you will pay... dearly.

(BROTHER JEREMIAH leaves. NIGEL is left alone, panicking.)

NICK

Ah. I see.

NIGEL

I think it's delicious.

BEA

Aw, thanks Nige. There would've been meat, but the landlord came by demanding the rent – took our last shilling right out of my hand. Then I was gonna surprise you with some mutton – but sheep are fast.

NICK

Start Wait, wh— you chased a SHEEP? Alright, that's it.

(He pushes away from the table and heads for a wooden lockbox on the mantle.)

BEA

What are you doing?

NICK

I'm just...

(He grabs the money box. She quickly takes it away.)

BEA

No! We've been through this, we do not touch the money box!

(She puts it back.)

NICK

Come on, Bea... we shouldn't have to live like this. You deserve better.

BEA

And so do you – we all do, and that's what we're saving for. A simple cottage in the country, for all of us. You, me, a couple of kids... a room for Nigel and maybe his wife one day?...

NIGEL

(embarrassed)
Oh, stop it.

BEA

That's why I was thinking – I should get a job.

NICK

What? No, if you get a job, that will just make me feel like a failure. None of the other writers' wives have jobs.

BEA

Well, they should. This is the nineties! We've got a woman on the throne, and by the year 1600, women will be completely equal to men. Ooh! I just thought of the perfect job for me. I could be in your play!

NICK

What? You can't act.

(BEA cries.)

Oh. I'm sorry.

BEA

(quickly stops crying)

Gotcha. See, I can act.

NICK

You know it's illegal to put women onstage.

NIGEL

And anyway, our play's been cancelled.

BEA

What?

NICK

Not cancelled, Nige. I mean, yes, we are no longer doing *Richard the 2nd* but only because we've come up with... a better idea!

BEA

Oooh, what is it?

NICK

Well, we've had the idea that – we need an idea.

BEA

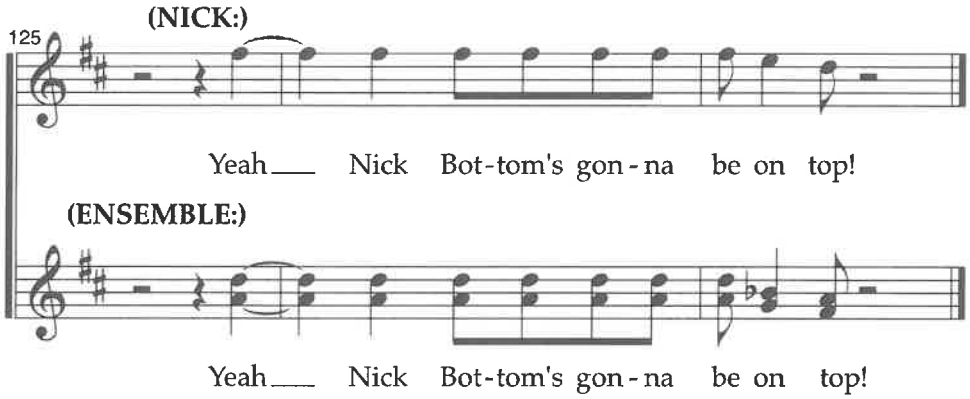
Then let me help you! I'll go out and earn some money and that'll take the pressure off you guys.

End

NICK

Bea, listen...

(#6 – RIGHT HAND MAN begins.)



(Transition to... #22 – TO SHAKESPEARE'S STUDY begins.)

SCENE 10: SHAKESPEARE'S STUDY

(SHAKESPEARE sits at his desk, trying to write...)

SHAKESPEARE

(saying what he's writing...)
"Shall I compare thee to... a horse?" No. A really nice building? No! It has to be wonderful and poetic, something everyone loves. Oh, I know! "Shall I compare thee – to me?" Ha-ha-ha-ha. No, that's terrible.

(crumpling paper)
Uggh! It's hard to be the Bard!

(pacing)
I know writing made me famous – but being famous is just so much more fun!

(His VALET enters.)

VALET

Sir.

SHAKESPEARE

What!? What do you want!? Why are you here?!

(SHAKESPEARE turns; next to his VALET is the EYEPATCH MAN.)

VALET

You asked for information on what Nicholas Bottom is writing. Our spy is here with news.

SHAKESPEARE
Oh. So I did. Speak, man. What news?

(EYEPATCH MAN extends a hand. SHAKESPEARE puts a shilling in it.)

EYEPATCH MAN
I saw Nick Bottom, I did. He paid a soothsayer to foresee what Shakespeare's greatest play would be.

SHAKESPEARE
That sneaky little thief! Why doesn't he get his own idea!?

VALET
Because... writing is hard?

SHAKESPEARE
Oh. Right. It is, isn't it? **End**

(SHAKESPEARE grabs a coat, hat, and fake beard.)
Well, nice try, Nick Bottom. But I think Shakespeare needs to find out what Shakespeare's biggest hit will be.

(#23 – HARD TO BE THE BARD (PLAYOFF) begins. SHAKESPEARE exits.)

SCENE 11: THE THEATRE

(NICK is alone with NOSTRADAMUS, furiously sifting through his various sheets of parchment.)

NICK
Okay, so just to make sure I've got this all straight, we've got a prince... eating a danish... and he's visited by the ghost of his dead father?

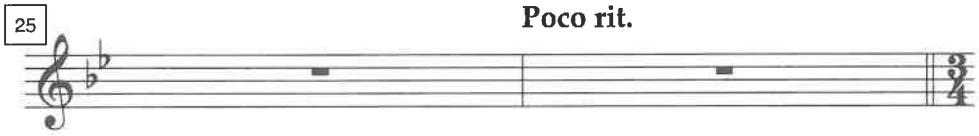
NOSTRADAMUS
Not a ghost. The phantom! He's the former king who was murdered by the prince's uncle... and the uncle's name is... Scar.

NICK
Scar.

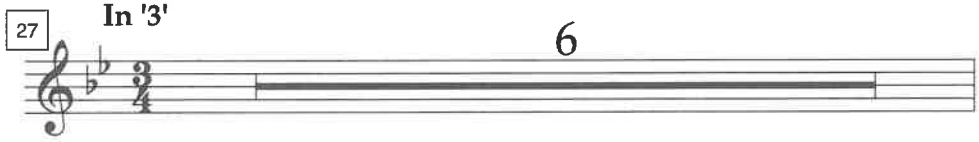
(writing that down)
And he murdered the king. And the prince is in love, but she goes mad you say?

NOSTRADAMUS
Yes! And – how do you solve a problem like Ophelia?

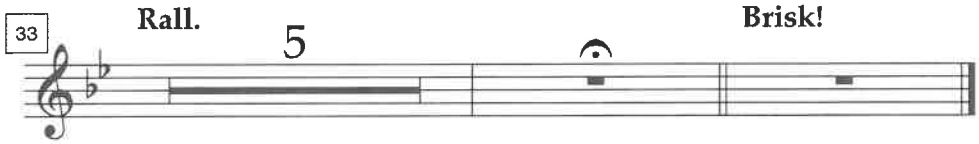
(SCENE 4: SOOTHSAYER ALLEY. There's a row of run-down storefronts manned by various PSYCHICS, FORTUNE TELLERS, ASTROLOGERS, etc.)



ASTROLOGER: Tarot cards! Palm readings!
NICK: Hey. I'm looking for a soothsayer.



ASTROLOGER: *(pointing to a hut)* Norbert the Knowing. Supposed to be the best.
(NICK goes to the hut. There's a note on the board.)
NICK: "Out of business due to unforeseen circumstances." So not the *very* best.



(A person on the street spins around. This is NOSTRADAMUS.)

Start

NOSTRADAMUS

Did I hear a need for future seeing? If seeing is what you need, then I can help you. If help is what you need, then I can see you. If neither is what you need, then I can foresee you leaving very shortly.

NICK

Who are you?

NOSTRADAMUS

I – am Nostradamus.

NICK

Not THE Nostradamus.

NOSTRADAMUS

No. I'm his niece – Nancy.

NICK

Nancy Nostradamus?

NOSTRADAMUS

(raising her hand as if giving an oath)
Yes! But I share the same gifts as my esteemed uncle. And for half a crown, I'll share those gifts with you.
(NICK pays NOSTRADAMUS.)
Excellent! Now – what is it you would like the future to tell?

NICK

I want you to look into the future and tell me... what will the next big thing in theater be?

NOSTRADAMUS

Right. Stand back. Give me some space.

(She shakes out and warms up like an athlete before an event, then hacks and clears her sinuses, then squints hard and puts her fingers to her temples – then gets the shivers.)

(NOSTRADAMUS)

Oh. Oh my. Wow. Ooooh, in the future, the theaters are very niiiice. Cushy red seats, ushers, people opening candies wrapped in magical clear paper that's annoyingly noisy...

NICK

How about what's on the stage?

NOSTRADAMUS

Getting to that... Whoa! What spectacle! I have seen the future! The biggest, most fantastic thing in theater will be...
(painting it in the air)
MUSICALS.

NICK

What?

NOSTRADAMUS

Musicals.

NICK

What the heck are "musicals"?

End

NOSTRADAMUS

(squinting into the distance)
It appears to be a play where the dialogue stops and the plot is conveyed through song.

NICK

Through song?

NIGEL, PORTIA

Francis Bacon!

NIGEL

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

PORTIA

Including you.

(NIGEL reacts. Then they both giggle. SHAKESPEARE re-enters.)

SHAKESPEARE

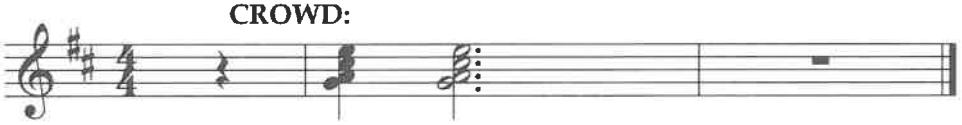
Is that a young Nigel Bottom I see?!

(#17 – SHAKESPEARE'S AFTER PARTY 1 begins.)

SHAKESPEARE'S AFTER PARTY 1

'Shakespeare' Tempo

CROWD:



Shake - speare!

SHAKESPEARE

Hi... hi... how are you, thanks for coming... good to see you. etcetera.

(arriving at NIGEL)

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

(to ATTENDANT)

Oooh, that was a lot of alliteration—

(singing it)

OCCUPATIONAL HA-ZARD!

(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 gasps and starts to breathe quickly.)

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

PORTIA

M-m-m-master Shakespeare...

(PORTIA faints.)

SHAKESPEARE

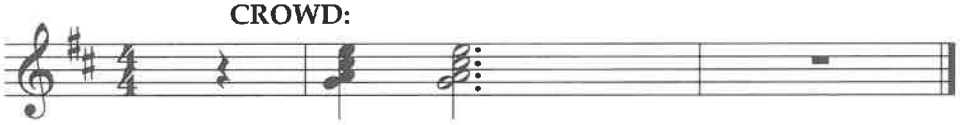
See that? She's bedazzled. Do you like that word? I just made it up – it's what I do!

(#18 – SHAKESPEARE'S AFTER PARTY 2 begins.)

SHAKESPEARE'S AFTER PARTY 2

'Shakespeare' Tempo

CROWD:



Shake - speare!

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?

(Everyone laughs and applauds.)

NIGEL

Actually, Nick doesn't want me to tell anyone what we're writing.

SHAKESPEARE

Ugh! He's so paranoid. 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.

NICK

Nigel, please. I need you, now more than ever. I've got to go find us a new backer and that means you need to come up with a new idea.

(NICK exits in a huff.)

NIGEL

Yes, you can. Yes, you can.
(He sits, tries to write.)
Uggggh, no you can't.
(He stands to leave and is stopped by A WOMAN IN A CLOAK (PORTIA).)
Oh. Good day, mistress.

PORTIA

"Good days were those when lit with love, till dusk of death did herald th'eternal night."

NIGEL

Hey – I wrote that.

(The WOMAN IN A CLOAK turns and lowers her hood, revealing herself to be PORTIA.)

PORTIA

Yes, I know.
(holding up a page)
I accidentally took this after our first encounter. Your sonnet. It's – perfection.

NIGEL

Really? You thought it was... good?

PORTIA

It... spoke to my soul.
(PORTIA turns away – embarrassed.)
Forgive me. Poetry is forbidden in my house, especially poems of earthly love.
(melodramatically; to the heavens)
OH, IS THERE NO PITY IN THE CLOUDS THAT SEES INTO THE BOTTOM OF MY GRIEF?!

NIGEL

Romeo and Juliet, act 3, scene 5.

PORTIA

You've seen it?

NIGEL

Six times. And you?

PORTIA
Eight! If my father knew, he would disown me.

NIGEL
My brother, too.

PORTIA
I adore Shakespeare.

NIGEL
Me, too! I've got a *Comedy of Errors,* first edition.

PORTIA
I've got "Sonnet Number 1." Signed!

NIGEL
Wow!

PORTIA
I know! Heh-heh...

NIGEL
Heh-heh... that's awesome...

(They giggle together – a pause.)

PORTIA
I think you're his equal – if not better.

NIGEL
What??? No way.

PORTIA
Oh yes. Your sonnet has Shakespearean sophistication mixed with the complexity of Daniel Webster and the sensitivity of Samuel Daniel.

(#14 – I LOVE THE WAY begins.)

PETER QUINCE
Nick, do we still have a job!?

TROUPE
Yeah, what are we gonna do!/Where will you find a patron?/ What show are we doing now!/I'm hungry! *(etc.)*

NICK
It's ok...
(They quiet.)
I'll take care of it. Come back tomorrow and we'll have a new idea.

(#5 – MAN, I HATE SHAKESPEARE (PLAYOFF) begins. They exit, muttering nervously.)

SCENE 3: NICK AND BEA'S HOUSE

(NICK)
New idea... new idea... we need a new idea.

NIGEL
I still say we should write our life story – how you, at age 14, carried me, your sickly little brother, on your back all the way from Cornwall.

NICK
No. We gotta think bigger! The world is changing – you know, some people are saying the world's actually round not flat!
(They look at each other for a moment and then burst out laughing.)
I know, it's ridiculous. But big new ideas are all the rage – and that's what we need. Something new.

(SHYLOCK enters.)

SHYLOCK
Nicholas Bottom.

NICK
Shylock! What are you doing at my house?

SHYLOCK
Your debt is due.

(BEA enters and crosses to the fire. NICK pulls SHYLOCK off to the side so NIGEL and BEA can't hear the discussion.)

NICK

Shhhh... I've, uh... hit a little setback with the play. But – if you give me another week – I'll name a character after you.

SHYLOCK

Too late. Shakespeare already promised that. I can see it now.
(painting the name in the air)
"Shylock. A really nice guy." Hey! Here's a better idea. Cut me in as an investor in your play and I'll cancel your debt.

NICK

You're not a patron, you're a moneylender!

SHYLOCK

I know, cause that's the only job the queen will let me do!
(then)
And I hate it. I-hate-it, I-hate-it, I-hate-it! But what I love – is the theater. I love the sights, the smells, the roar of the crowd, the smell of the fruits as it hits the actors! I LOVE IT, I TELL YA!
(shaking NICK)
I-love-it I-love-it I-love-it!!

NICK

Wow, I had no idea. But I can't, it's illegal. If I let you invest, we'd both be hanged in front of an angry mob.

SHYLOCK

At least you'd finally have an audience. Take the weekend. Mull it over. Because on Monday, your interest doubles. **End**

(SHYLOCK exits. NIGEL is now at the table eating from a bowl. BEA is at the cast iron kettle over the fire. NICK crosses to them.)

NICK

Hello, darling. How was your day?

BEA

Interesting. I went to the stocks and watched the mob throw cabbages at the criminals.

NICK

Why? You hate all that stuff.

BEA

I know, it was awful.
(handing him a bowl)
Boiled cabbage?