

JESS: [*To audience.*] Shakespeare's comedies were greatly influenced by the Roman plays of Plautus and Terence, Ovid's hilarious *Metamorphoses*, as well as the rich Italian tradition of *Commedia dell'Arte*. The Bard was a genius at borrowing and adapting plot devices from these different theatrical traditions.

ADAM: Isn't that called 'plagiarism'?

JESS: Shakespeare did not 'plagiarize,' he 'distilled.' [*Exits.*]

ADAM: Whatever. He's a big cheater.

DANIEL: Hey, it takes a real genius to milk five ideas into sixteen plays.

ADAM: Yeah, but I can never tell them apart. Like what's that one with the shipwreck, the identical twins, and the big wedding at the end?

DANIEL: All of them.

ADAM: See, that sucks.

[*JESS re-enters, and distributes three thin manuscripts.*]

JESS: Well, Shakespeare obviously should have written one exemplary play instead of sixteen sucky ones. Which is why I have taken the liberty of condensing Shakespeare's comedic diarrhea into a single, solid, well-formed lump of hilarity, which I have entitled: *The Comedy of Two Well-Measured Gentlemen Lost in the Merry Wives of Venice on a Midsummer's Twelfth Night in Winter*. Or—

DANIEL [*Reading the cover.*] '*Cymbeline Taming Pericles the Merchant in the Tempest of Love As Much As You Like It For Nothing.*' Or—

ALL: *The Love Boat Goes to Verona!*

[*They read from their manuscripts. NOTE: This may be done reader's theater style, or the scripts may be placed on bookstands, freeing up the actors to use props, masks, puppets, or other devices. But the conceit is that the other two actors are seeing JESS'S script for the first time.*]

JESS: Act One! A Bohemian duke swears an oath of celibacy, turns the rule of the city over to his tyrannical brother, and sets sail for the Golden Age of Greece. While rounding the heel of Italy, the duke's ship is caught in a terrible tempest that casts him up on a desert island along with his daughter, a sweet, innocent, clueless young thing with a sick booty!

A/PRINCESS: O dear father, I am so lonely and pubescent on this island! I am sad, boo-hoo. And frisky, rrarr.

D/DUKE: O precious daughter, watch out for hypersexualized symbols of colonial oppression lurking in caves!

A/PRINCESS: 'Kay, b-bye!

JESS: Meanwhile, the duke's long-lost son, a handsome, dashing, clueless young merchant, is also shipwrecked—coincidentally, on the very same island.

D/MERCHANT: How shall I survive without funds in this strange, foreign land? I know, I must needs find a moneylender. Behold, here cometh a convenient Judeo-Italian stereotype now.

A/JEW: [*Italian accent.*] Whatsammata you, eh? [*Yiddish accent.*] Need a payday loan, *bubbe*?

JESS: The Jew tricks the merchant into putting down his brains as collateral on the loan.

A/JEW: Such a deal!

JESS: Act Two. Fearing ravishment, the clueless young princess disguises herself as a boy and becomes a page to a handsome, dashing, clueless young soldier.

D/SOLDIER: You there, boy!

A/PRINCESS: [*High voice.*] Yes? . . . I mean . . . [*Lowering his voice.*] Yes?

D/SOLDIER: You shall woo Kate for me, for she is shrewish, and I am sick with love and gender dysphoria!

A/PRINCESS: I too feel both phlegmy and confused down there, for while I may not speak it aloud, I do love thee, though I am a boy.

D/SOLDIER: I swingeth not that way, boy. Deliver this letter to Kate the shrew. Go, hence.

A/PRINCESS: Whence?

D/SOLDIER: Hie thee hither from hence to thence!

A/PRINCESS: That doesn't make sense!

D/SOLDIER: Because you're dense.

JESS: The beautiful, clueless young princess arrives in man-drag to woo the shrew.

D/SHREW: It is I, Kate the shrew. I am *so* a woman and you *totes* a man. Come hither!

A/PRINCESS: Whither?

D/SHREW: Hither, from thither. [*Hitting on her.*] If you come inside, I'll show you my zither.

JESS: Act Four. On the Twelfth Night of Midsummer, a puckish sprite leads all the lovers deep into a forest and squeezes the juice of an aphrodisiac flower into their eyes while the queen of the fairies seduces a rude mechanical named Bottom, who coincidentally has the head of an ass.

D/BOTTOM: Yeah, but I have the ass of a man, and I'm hung like a donkey!

JESS: Act Five. In the ensuing omnisexual animalistic orgy, the Princess's man-clothes get ripped off, revealing her sick booty . . . and more! The merchant recognizes his sister.

D/MERCHANT: My nearly-identical twin!

A/PRINCESS: My long-lost and strangely attractive brother!

JESS: The shrew realizes she's bi-curious.

D/SHREW: "O Brave New World!"

JESS: The dashing young soldier decides he actually prefers Bottom.

D/SOLDIER: And thereby hangs a sweet tail!

JESS: The Jew exits, pursued by a bear.

A/JEW: Oy!

JESS: And they all get married and live happily ever after. Now give us your hands if we be friends—

ALL: Because all is well that finally ends!

*[They hand their manuscripts to JESS. JESS dumps the manuscripts offstage and returns.]*