

**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, ooh, 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)*

Ooh, 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!