**Shakespeare in Love - Storyline**

**WRITER’S BLOCK**  
Will Shakespeare, an emerging playwright, has writer’s block. He is struggling to complete his new work, *Romeo and Ethel the Pirate’s Daughter*, before the Rose Theatre’s deadline. He needs inspiration and is desperate to rival the success of his friend and fellow playwright, Kit Marlowe. Meanwhile, another acting company steals and performs one of Will’s plays, adding a dog and gaining the attention of Queen Elizabeth I. The Rose’s owner, Philip Henslowe, needs Will’s new production to settle his debts to Hugh Fennyman. Henslowe pressures Will to hold auditions to get the process moving.

**A WOMAN IN DISGUISE**  
Viola de Lesseps is a young gentlewoman from a wealthy family. She longs to be on stage, but only men are allowed to act. She disguises herself as Thomas Kent and auditions for the part of Romeo in Will’s new play.

**A LOVE AFFAIR**  
Mesmerized by Viola/Kent’s audition, Will follows her home. He leaves a letter with her nurse offering Kent the role of Romeo. While at the house, Will sneaks into the de Lesseps’ ball where Viola’s father is arranging her engagement to Lord Wessex, who is titled but has no money. Not recognizing Viola as Thomas Kent, Will becomes infatuated when he dances with her. He later goes to her balcony to profess his love. Viola/Kent attends rehearsals for the play and Will eventually discovers her true identity. They fall in love and begin a secret affair. Viola becomes Will’s muse and he is inspired to write again.

**THE QUEEN’S COURT**  
Wessex brings Viola before the court to seek the Queen’s approval for their engagement. The three of them debate whether a play can capture the true nature of love, and a bet is proposed to settle the matter, with the Queen as judge.

**CLOSED BEFORE OPENING**  
While out for a drink with the cast, Viola/Kent learns that Will has a wife and children. He tries to explain but she rejects his excuses and runs off. Viola reappears as Kent for final rehearsals, but her secret is exposed, and the Rose is shut down for having a woman on stage. With no theatre and a wedding fast approaching, what will become of the production, the actors and the lovers?

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