

THE WILD WILDE WEST

A Comedy in Two Acts

by

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(THE WILD WILDE WEST)

CAST OF CHARACTERS (4 women, 6 men)

JIM BRIDGER.....	66, a mountain man
OSCAR WILDE.....	24, Oscar Wilde
HORACE TABOR.....	52, a Silver Baron
AUGUSTA TABOR.....	47, Tabor's wife
BABY DOE.....	24, Tabor's lover
WALTER.....	22, a piano player
FALSTAFF.....	45, a prospector
BEN.....	38, a bartender
REBA.....	30, a "sporting" girl
WILLIE BELLE.....	28, a "sporting" girl

The Setting

Various locations in Leadville, Colorado, including the main stage and a dressing room of the Tabor Opera House, a saloon, an elegant Victorian hotel room, and Tabor's office. The dressing room will need an upstage door.

The Time

Leadville, Colorado 1882.

Playwright's Notes

This play is not meant to be a factual account of the Tabor love triangle, but rather a vehicle to express the playwright's view of the Tabor story in the context of the Western tradition of oral storytelling. Consequently, I have taken considerable liberties with the facts surrounding the Tabor story, compressed time to accommodate art, and blended fact with fiction in this telling of the tale. The playwright wishes as well to acknowledge his liberal use of scenes from a number of Shakespeare's original plays, and to assure the Bard that his words were used with deep appreciation and complete reverence.

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ACT I, SCENE I

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP ON JIM BRIDGER, 66, a famous mountain man and scout. He is dressed in buckskins and is carrying a .50 caliber Hawken rifle and a volume of Shakespeare's collected works. He enters upstage center and moves downstage left where a buffalo skull rests on a podium. Stage right there is a bar, a table and four chairs, and an upright piano. WALTER, 22, is seated on a stool playing a barroom rendition of "O Dem Golden Slippers." There is a sign on the piano that reads: PLEASE DON'T SHOOT THE PIANIST. HE IS DOING HIS BEST. We FOLLOW BRIDGER WITH A SPOTLIGHT as he begins his monologue. Walter stops playing and sits silently at the piano.

BRIDGER

Two things a man needed to settle the West: a dependable rifle, like 'is .50 caliber Hawken here and a volume of the collected works of Mr. William Shakespeare. Course didn't hurt to have a horse either, a bedroll, some grub, a few cookin' utensils, plenty of ammunition, a huntin' knife, traps, a cordial relationship with the injuns, a map—if there was one to be had—and, most important of all, I reckon, a dream to foller.

(He puts the rifle in a stand next to a podium downstage left and rests the volume of Shakespeare on the podium, unopened.)

BRIDGER (continuing)

Bridger's the name, *Jim* Bridger, mountain man, injun fighter, trapper, hero, coward, drunk, explorer, storyteller, liar, and U.S. Army scout—retired, and darn glad of it, and even happier to be alive to tell about it. Made my livin' trappin' beaver in these mountains long time before they was invaded by fortune seekers hopin' ta satisfy a ravenous lust fer gold and silver.

(He begins pacing back and forth.)

BRIDGER (continuing)

Actually, *livin'* ain't exactly what I done in these mountains; jist avoidin' dyin' was more like it. Took a Crow arrow here. (Begins pointing to various points on his body.) Cheyenne arrow here; Arapaho tomahawk here—never had to worry about where to part my hair after that. Anyhow, you got the idea: it weren't no easy means of gittin' by. Even so, them was the days, not the "good ole days", nope not by a long shot; they was hard as granite, but they did provide some fodder fer some fine tales.

Don't know if it's true or not, but Army says I was most likely the first white man to see the Great Salt Lake, west of here over Utah way. Right near where that cussed Brigham Young settled with his band of married maids, if ya know what I'm referrin' to.

(Picks up his rifle, sights down the barrel at Walter, and then goes on.)

BRIDGER (continuing)

Probably, I *was* the first white man ta see the Great Salt Lake—and live ta tell 'bout it. And then they didn't believe me. Army said I must of run into the Pacific Ocean, but I knowed better. I'd never seen no ocean, but I was darn sure ya couldn't ride a horse around one, which is what I done to the lake. Course they didn't believe that either. But that was my fault, havin' been blessed with the gift of storytellin'. And I'll be the first one to admit that if a little embellishment of the facts makes a story more interestin' to the listener, I won't hesitate ta use it.

Why Mister Shakespeare himself did the same thing, and it was from my Bard Bill that all of us storytellers learned ta spin a good yarn whether it be 'bout wrestlin' grizzlies, fightin' injuns, seein' the elephant, or settlin' a matter of the heart.

(Goes back to podium, puts the rifle aside and opens the volume of Shakespeare.)

BRIDGER (continuing)

You was probably wonderin' how I'd get back to Mr. Shakespeare, or how a illiterate mountain man like myself came ta have any kind of appreciation for 'im at all. Cause, I can't read or write a lick, but I speak English real good and I've picked up enough French,

BRIDGER (continuing)

German, and Spanish from other trappers and so called missionaries to get by. I can converse in a half a dozen or more injun languages too I figure. Learnt my Shakespeare by listenin' and seein' it performed in saloons, and opera houses, and 'round campfires under the stars. This volume here I traded a yoke of cattle for, and then I hired me a German kid to read it to me on the trail.

Ain't but a few of us left now; no need for scouts once the West was civilized. I'd think twice 'bout doin' it again, I can tell ya that. Things havta change I reckon; that's as natural as breathin', but that don't mean you havta like it. Same thing happened with the Bard, but I'm gittin' ahead of myself. I got a story to tell ya, a true story more or less, like I said, I ain't one to withhold embellishments if they add little drama to a tale. So, lemme git started.

(He moves downstage center.)

BRIDGER (continuing)

This story begins with a dream, gits sidetracked in a quest fer gold, then silver, and finally turns into a legend, as good stories are prone to do. There's a good measure of lust in this story along with some greed, power, adultery, moral outrage, blind luck, hope, and, of course, love or what was mistook for love. Maybe not? I'll let you be the judge of that. (A beat.) Happened right here in Leadville, Colorado in 1882 when Leadville was a legitimate boomtown on the Western frontier. If ya don't believe me, see fer yerself.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY TO END THE SCENE. WALTER begins PLAYING THE PIANO AND PLAYS THROUGH THE TRANSITION TO THE NEXT SECNE.)

ACT I, SCENE II

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on HORACE TABOR, 52, and ELIZABETH (BABY DOE) McCOURT, a 24-year-old beauty with a full head of curly strawberry blond hair. They are in the suite of a Victorian hotel. BABY DOE is trying on different clothes while HORACE sits idly by reading a newspaper. WALTER is opposite them under a SPOT at the piano and banging out "O Dem Golden Slippers." As he finishes up, the SPOT FADES and BABY DOE turns to HORACE and holds up a lacy gown in front of her.

Horace darling?	BABY DOE
Umm.	TABOR (without looking up)
What do you think of this?	BABY DOE
It's lovely.	TABOR (still without looking)
You didn't even look.	BABY DOE
If you're wearing it, Baby, I don't have to look to know it's lovely.	TABOR
That's awfully sweet of you to say, Haw, but I <i>want</i> you to look.	BABY DOE
	(Looking over the top of the page.)
Well?	BABY DOE (turning around)

TABOR

Well—to tell you the truth, it's a little on the frilly side to suit my taste.

BABY DOE

Frilly side? It's from Paris, Horace, *France!* Frills are all the rage in Paris.

TABOR

You can't depend on France for all you fashions, Baby. Wasn't all that long ago that the guillotine was all the rage in Paris too. It was very fashionable then for a man in my position to lose his head along with all his property.

BABY DOE

Well, I thank for you that history lesson Mr. Tabor; however, I believe you should bear in mind that while the guillotine was used to cut off one thing in France, I am quite capable of cutting off your supply of something altogether different here in Leadville.

TABOR (putting the paper aside)

Actually, I'm taken with all those frills, Baby. On you, they're quite becoming, *quite* becoming.

BABY DOE

Thank you, Sir. The fact is: I obtained this entire ensemble wholly for your benefit.

(She sits down at a dressing table and begins brushing her hair. Horace turns back to his paper.)

BABY DOE

You know, Horace, I've been thinking . . .

TABOR

Have you now?

BABY DOE

Yes, Horace, I have. I just told you.

TABOR

Ummm. (A beat.) Silver's up .25 cents an ounce. That's some good news.

BABY DOE

I *said*, I've been thinking.

TABOR

Well, good for you, Baby. I like a woman who thinks for herself—up to a point anyhow.

BABY DOE (after a moment)

Horace—don't you want to know *what* I was thinking?

TABOR

Well of course I do, Darling, if you *want* me to know. But I gathered from your silence that maybe in this instance, your thoughts, however brilliant, might also be private in nature, and I wanted to respect your privacy.

BABY DOE

Horace, when I have private thoughts, I don't tell you that I've been thinking at all.

TABOR

And that is just how it should be.

BABY DOE

But that is not the case in this instance.

TABOR

Very well, then.

BABY DOE

"Very well then." What does that mean?

TABOR

Whatever you say, Dear.

BABY DOE

You have *no* idea *whatsoever* of what I'm talking about, do you?

TABOR (looks up, guessing)

The price of silver?

BABY DOE

No. That's what *you* were talking about.

TABOR

Paris fashions?

BABY DOE

No! I mentioned them, but that's *not* what I was talking about.

TABOR

Darling, what were you talking about?

BABY DOE

I was talking about what I have been thinking.

TABOR

How could I possibly know anything about what you've been thinking?

BABY DOE

You could make a polite inquiry, Sir!

TABOR

Very well, then, Baby. (A beat.) What *have* you been thinking?

BABY DOE (turning away)

I don't know if I should tell you.

TABOR

Why not?

BABY DOE

Because my thoughts are—private in nature.

TABOR

I tell you my private thoughts.

BABY DOE

That's different. (A beat.) And I'm not thinking *those* kinds of thoughts. My thoughts have to do with art rather than with a man's visceral instincts.

TABOR

That's a shame.

BABY DOE

It most certainly is not!

TABOR

Shame or not, whatever your most private thoughts are, you can share them with me, Baby. I will hold them in the strictest confidence.

BABY DOE

Promise?

TABOR

Cross my heart.

BABY DOE

Your heart is not all that trustworthy from what I've seen Horace.

TABOR

It is to you, Baby Doe. Now tell Daddy what you've been thinking.

(She crosses and sits down on his lap, pushing the newspaper aside.)

BABY DOE

I was thinking of how you could celebrate the third anniversary of the opening of the Tabor Opera House.

TABOR

Were you?

BABY DOE

Yes, I was. That's what I'm trying to tell you, Haw. Must you keep questioning everything I say? It's very aggravating.

TABOR

Forgive me. Now tell me what you have on your mind.

BABY DOE

I was just thinking that for the anniversary you should do something really—*grand!*

TABOR

That is all taken care of, Baby. My agent has booked Mister Oscar Wilde at the opera house during the week of the anniversary. He's English or Irish gentleman or something of that nature if I'm not mistaken. Quite a witty chap I'm told.

BABY DOE

Oh, an English *gentleman!* How grand! Leadville's assortment of miners and drunks and dreamers and schemers will be quite thrilled, I'm sure, beyond measure. And what exactly will Mr. Wilde be doing to entertain Leadville's finest?

TABOR

If I understand it correctly, Mister Wilde will be lecturing on the early Florentines and reading from some eye-talian's autobiography. Fellow that goes by the name of Benvenuto Cellini. Believe he was an artist of some sort.

BABY DOE

Oh, two areas with which his audience will undoubtedly have a *great* familiarity and an unbridled enthusiasm.

TABOR

Baby, the man is professional lecturer. That's what he does. I can't tell him what to talk about!

BABY DOE

Of course you can! You're the richest man in Colorado; you can do anything you want.

TABOR

Baby, a little culture ain't gonna kill Leadville's miners.

BABY DOE

No, but they may very will kill this wild man right on the spot.

TABOR

He's not a wild man, Baby; that's his name: Wilde with an e. Oscar Wilde. He's on a lecture tour to bring some Old World culture to the Wild West.

BABY DOE

Wild without the E in this case.

TABOR

That's right.

BABY DOE

Well, you can rest assured that his audience will be wild all right, and that they will in all likelihood display their disfavor with a bullet if they don't care to hear about the—the early *what?*

TABOR

Florentines.

BABY DOE

Of course—the early Florentines. *I* remember them from my Catholic school days, but believe me Horace, the lives of piety I heard about from the nuns will not enthrall Leadville's miners and gamblers and whores. My God, those people shot a piano player for missing a few notes.

TABOR

But I understand this Benvenuto Cellini was quite the rake.

BABY DOE

Rake or not, this Mister Wilde, Oscar—

TABOR

Oscar Wilde with an E.

BABY

— is likely to come to a no good end.

TABOR

I did consider that possibility. (A beat.) And it would be damned inconvenient to have the blood of an Englishman on my stage, if not my hands.

BABY DOE (thinks, then)

But *not* if it were the blood of the *right* Englishman!

TABOR

And who's blood would that be?

BABY DOE

The blood of none other than that of Mr. William Shakespeare!

TABOR

Shakespeare! Baby, he's been dead a considerable long time.

BABY DOE

I know that. I don't mean *his* blood!

TABOR

Well you said his blood?

BABY DOE

I meant the blood of a character from one of his great plays.

TABOR

Which one?

(She rises to present her idea dramatically.)

BABY DOE

Horace, I was thinking how grand it would be to present a Shakespearean play to commemorate the third anniversary of the opening. And since he's here anyway, to have Mr. Oscar Wilde direct it.

TABOR

You knew who he was all along.

BABY DOE

Of course I knew. And you know how the miners love their Shakespeare.

TABOR

Might near as much as gold, but I don't know that Mr. Wilde would be available to direct a play. I'm sure he has other engagements.

BABY DOE

Well, you could make it worth his while to break his other engagements. (A beat.) And it would be . . .

TABOR

Would be . . . ?

BABY DOE

An opportunity for me to . . . fulfill my dream.

HORACE

What dream is that my love?

BABY DOE

To be immortalized on the stage.

TABOR

Immortalized on the stage? Yes, well—

BABY DOE

It's my dream, Horace. Since I was a little girl. My mother used to tell me: "Lizzie, someday you'll be famous. That's my dream.

TABOR

I thought to be able to call yourself Mrs. Horace Austin Warner Tabor was your dream?

BABY DOE

Horace, a woman can have more than *one* dream.

TABOR

Granted, a woman can have more than one dream. So—can I assume that you already have a play in mind in which you wish to be immortalized on stage?

BABY DOE (as Juliet)

O gentle Romeo,
If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully;
Or if thou think'st I am too quickly won,
I'll frown and be perverse and say thee nay,
So thou wilt woo; but else, not for the world.

TABOR

And doth thee have the play cast as well?

BABY DOE (kneeling beside him)

Oh, Darling, I hardly every ask anything of you. If you just do this one thing for me, I'll be completely . . . fulfilled.

TABOR

This is a very bad time for complete fulfillment. A *very* bad time.

BABY DOE

Not just for you!

TABOR

Darling, things are at a very sensitive point with Augusta. Plus the miners are threatening to strike, and I'm in the middle of Senate campaign.

BABY DOE

Well, I can't do anything about your miners or your Senate campaign, but I know a production of Romeo and Juliet with me as Juliet would force Augusta's hand. With me appearing on the stage of your opera house, she would have no choice but to give in. You could marry me then and stop the newspapers from writing all those awful things about both of us.

TABOR

That won't stop them, Baby. My opponent owns the Rocky Mountain News. Besides, I have no desire to humiliate Augusta. She has done no wrong in all of this to either of us.

(Baby Doe rises and crosses to the other side of the stage.)

BABY DOE

But you have no qualms whatsoever about letting her humiliate me by remaining a "kept woman." Horace, do you know what a *mortal* sin is?

TABOR

I don't believe in that hocus-pocus.

BABY DOE

Well I do! And I put my very soul in jeopardy by staying with you. (A beat.) Horace, it's time for you to take a stand, and the anniversary of the opera house provides you the perfect opportunity to tell the world where your heart is.

TABOR

You know where my heart is, Baby.

BABY DOE

Do I? You lie with me every night here on a bed in this rented room, but I have no idea where your heart is. I have no reason to believe it's not around the corner on Harrison Avenue or in your Denver mansion. (Now poetically) Our brief time upon this earth is but a brief illusion, an actor who struts and frets his hour upon the stage, a tale full of sound and fury, and then is heard no more . . .

TABOR

What?

BABY DOE

Or something like that. (A beat.) Oh, Haw, the time has come for you to show me where your heart is truly—with me, or with that woman who has called herself your wife for 26 years.

TABOR

Baby, I just don't think this is the right time.

BABY DOE

There will never be a *right* time, Horace. Only through a production of Romeo and Juliet on your stage with me as the tragic heroin will Augusta ever be convinced of your undying love for me and set you free.

TABOR

Augusta is a good woman, Baby Doe.

BABY DOE

And am I then a bad one?

TABOR

Not in my eyes!

BABY DOE

But I am in the eyes of the rest of the world—the people of Leadville and Denver, my family, my Church. Everyone in the world *but* you!

TABOR

No! You are the dream of every man. It is through my weakness not yours that brought this scandal about.

BABY DOE

Then it is through the strength of our common bond of love, that you must find the courage to settle this affair once and for all. You cannot remain true to the two of us. You must choose; the time has come.

TABOR (taking her in his arms)

Baby Doe, you are the one love of my life; it is to you who I will remain true to my last day on this earth. And I will do whatever it takes to force Augusta to release her grip on me. We *will* have our happiness together.

BABY DOE

Oh, Horace, I do love you! And just think of me as . . . your *Juliet*!

TABOR (thinks, then)

No, you are my Hero like in "*Much Ado*", not my Juliet.

BABY DOE

Why Hero?

TABOR

Because even though Hero died a death cloaked in a false shame, she was reborn to live and love again.

BABY DOE

Very well then, Horace, I will be your Hero, and you shall be mine. But I still want to *play* Juliet.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY TO END THE SCENE. SPOT COMES UP on WALTER who begins playing "Swanee River" on the barroom piano and CONTINUES PLAYING THROUGH THE TRANSITION TO THE NEXT SCENE.)

ACT I, SCENE III

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP ON OSCAR WILDE, 24, on the stage of the Tabor Opera House. He is finishing a lecture to a collection of local characters and Saloon Girls of whom only a few are visible, including: BEN, WALTER, FALSTAFF, REBA, and WILLIE BELLE. If EXTRAS are available, they can be included as well. WALTER COMPLETES THE SONG DURNG THE TRANSITION and joins the others.

WILDE (closing a book)

So ends the tale of Benvenuto Cellini, as fine a brawler and craftsman of gold as ever lived on this planet or any other for that matter—at least insofar as I have thus far been able to determine. (A beat.) Now it would be my distinct pleasure to entertain any questions . . . you sir?

FALSTAFF

Why didn't ya bring this Cellini fella with ya, Mr. Wilde?

WILDE

Much to his chagrin, I have little doubt, Master Cellini has been dead for a considerable period of time.

BEN

Who shot 'im?

WILDE (thinks, then)

To my knowledge, the perpetrator of Master Cellini's unfortunate, if not premature demise, remains to be identified.

BEN

Who do *you* think done it?

WILDE

Sir, I am not in a position in which even rudimentary speculation would be of the slightest consequence, therefor I must decline to even venture an opinion, and I suggest, to honor

WILDE (continuing)

the memory of this great Florentine, we now allow him to rest in the peace that passeth all understanding. And, the fact is, Master Cellini died of natural causes.

FALSTAFF

Hell, gittin' *shot* in Leadville is 'bout as natural as any other.

WILDE

You needn't trouble yourself to remind me of that fact, Sir. Now, if I might be permitted to venture into a slightly different arena.

REBA

You go right ahead, Mr. Wilde. You got us all right on the edge of our seats.

WILDE

Thank you Miss . . .

REBEA

Reba.

WILDE

Miss Reba.

REBA

Jist Reba, Mr. Wilde. I ain't no *Miss* no more, and ain't nobody misses it less than me, 'cept maybe Willie Belle here. Right, Willie Belle?

WILLIE BELLE

Right. I don't miss Reba, and she doesn't miss me.

WILDE

That being the case, nor shall I miss either of you. (A beat.) Now, permit me to conclude with a few personal observations about this beautiful language with which we are so blessed to be able to communicate our misfortune and missed fortunes one to another.

FALSTAFF

Yeah, we been with ya this far, we'll permit ya to finish up so long as it don't make us miss a hanging or gunfight. Get on with it.

WILDE

It will be my distinct pleasure to do so. I thank you, Sir. As you probably surmise, language is the parent not the child of thought. (A beat.) And English is the legacy of every Englishman—in my case Irishman—and by extension, it can, I think, be argued with some degree of credibility that English is as well perhaps the most *prominent*, if not

WILDE (continuing)

the most important, legacy of the American experience. For it is in the English language that your independence is declared in your Declaration of Independence. The very essence then of your freedom to wander about these mountains in the "pursuit of happiness" is articulated in documents composed entirely in the English language, and it is in the spoken form of this divine vehicle that you relate your stories of valor and cowardice, of passion and pain, of honor and disgrace. So it was with William Shakespeare in Great Britain, and so will it be with all the storytellers that follow. Language, then, is the vehicle on which we humans ride to immortality.

FALSTAFF

Who said that?

REBA

William Shakespeare!

WILDE

Actually, I'm afraid he didn't.

FALSTAFF

Who did?

WILLIE BELLE

He did.

FALSTAFF

Shakespeare?

WILLIE BELLE

No, Mr. Wilde—just now. *He* said it!

FALSTAFF

Why didn't ya say so?

WILLIE BELLE

I didn't have to. He did.

WILDE

Ladies and gentlemen, the important point here is not who said what to whom, but rather that anything was said at all. For it is the English language that empowers our souls, that articulates our vision, that separates us from the flora and fauna, from the fox and firefly. And it is the English language that will carry the small measure of our temporal existence into perpetuity.

FALSTAFF

Where the hell is that?

REBA

Unless I'm mistaken—over towards Utah way.

WILDE

You are—mistaken, Sir, but it is only of minor importance. (A beat.) Because the power of language is so pervasive, what you must remember is that regardless of who says what, you must remain forever vigilant for there are those among us who would use the language not to communicate that what is beautiful and true, but rather to bewilder and confuse, to mislead and deceive.

WILLIE BELLE

Sounds like he's talking about husbands now.

BEN

Or lawyers.

FALSTAFF

Or politicians.

WILDE

And even perhaps Englishmen. Take your pick.

FALSTAFF

I'll take an Englishman every time. Take that Shakespeare fella: now there's a man that could spin a yarn and do it by telling nothin' but the truth 'bout human nature.

WILDE

You've read Shakespeare, Sir?

FALSTAFF

Not myself. Can't read a lick, but *I heard* all the plays. I seen Othello done on the stump of a giant Redwood over in the California Gold Country. Good man—Othello—but that cussed Iago was bad 'un. Sure done Othello and Desdemona wrong with the way he twisted words all around. Damn liar to boot!

WALTER

That the one where his girl goes mad and jumps in the river?

BEN

No! You're thinkin' of Macbeth.

REBA

That ain't right. Lady Macbeth, and incidentally, she weren't no lady, went crazy, but she didn't jump in no river. That was Ophelia in Hamlet.

Ophelia?

BEN

In Hamlet. Ain't that so, Mr. Wilde?

REBA

WILDE

I'm afraid it is as sad as it is true that Ophelia—driven mad by the perceived loss of love—was driven insane, and did, in fact, seek solace in the sleep without dreams.

REBA

Meaning—she done herself in.

WALTER

We know what it means! "To sleep, perchance to dream . . . or somethin'.

REBA

All right, so you know a little Hamlet. Too bad ya don't know that much 'bout piano playin'. (A beat.) Poor Ophelia.

FALSTAFF (breaking)

A beautiful little thing she was too. All came about 'cause of a misunderstandin'.

WILLIE BELLE

One hell of a misunderstanding, I'll grant you that!

FALSTAFF

Hamlet had to let on that he didn't love 'er.

REBA

When he actually did.

FALSTAFF

But she didn't know he *did*, 'cause he told 'er he *didn't*.

WALTER

What kinda of fool tells a woman he don't love 'er when he does?

WILDE

Danish fools. English fools. Perhaps even American fools.

WILLIE BELLE

Fools love is as common as fools gold in this town. I've been told by all kinds of fools that I was loved when I knew it wasn't so. But I didn't go jump in the river over it.

FALSTAFF

That's the difference between you and a tragic Shakespearean heroin.

BEN

That ain't the only difference.

WILLIE BELLE

What other differences are you gentlemen referring to?

FALSTAFF (back pedaling)

You tell 'er Mr. Wilde.

WILDE

Sir, I will only endeavor to articulate the important point here which is this: these characters of whom we speak so fondly, in spite of never having had an actual existence, continue to live on in Master Shakespeare's tales hundreds of years after the Bard's demise. And they will, I have little doubt, continue to live on long after the bones of those present in this gathering have been interred along with what little good we may have accomplished in our brief tenure upon this planet.

REBA

That certainly clears that up.

WILDE

Now, ladies and gentlemen, I must take my leave for I have a pressing engagement with one Horace Austin Warner Tabor, also known so I'm told, as the Silver Baron.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY TO END
THE SCENE.)

ACT I, SCENE IV

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP ON TABOR a few minutes later. He's working at a desk in his opera house office. There is a KNOCK on the door. He answers without looking up.

TABOR

Come in!

(WILDE enters.)

TABOR (pointing, without looking up)

Have a seat, Mr. Wilde, I'll be right with you.

WILDE (taking a seat)

Unless my eyes deceive me Sir, you are already with me. (A beat.) But perhaps things aren't right with you?

TABOR (looking up)

What—?

WILDE (standing and extending his hand)

Oscar Wilde, Sir, at your service.

TABOR

Look Wilde, that so-called witty repartee may work on your Cambridge chums—

WILDE

My God, Sir—*Oxford!*

TABOR

All right, your Oxford chums, but let me assure you, Sir that Horace Austin Warner Tabor is not a man to be trifled with.

WILDE

Very well then, Sir, I shall make it my sacred duty to trifle without him. But I shall continue to trifle nonetheless. For try as I may, I cannot for the life of me seem not to trifle. (A beat.) Again, Sir, allow me to present myself: Oscar Wilde, at your service.

TABOR

Yes, well, my pleasure—

WILDE

That remains to be seen.

TABOR

Yes, well—Horace Austin Warner Tabor. My friends call me Haw.

WILDE (pointedly)

How do you do, Mr. Tabor?

TABOR

Do you want to know the truth?

WILDE

Certainly not! I find the truth to be thoroughly undignified in almost every circumstance. I much prefer to hear a fanciful variation thereof.

TABOR

Then I'll give it to you straight—

WILDE

From the Horace's mouth.

TABOR

What? (A beat.) Oh, I get it—straight from the horse's mouth. I suppose that's better than what comes out the other end.

WILDE

In my somewhat limited experience, Mr. Tabor, I'm sorry to report that it is often difficult, if not impossible, to differentiate between the two.

TABOR

Mr. Wilde—I have *no* idea of what you're talking about.

WILDE

In my youth, Sir, I spent one long insufferable summer serving as an equine agrarian assistant at a local stable.

TABOR

You did *what*?

WILDE

I was a stable boy.

TABOR

So you know something about horses.

WILDE

I know a horse's ass when I see one.

TABOR

Excellent! Now, let's get back to the point.

WILDE

By all means, the point! I assume that's why you've called me here.

TABOR

Yes, that's what I'm trying to tell you, Sir.

WILDE

Well then continue, Sir, without further hesitation. I could not, let me assure you, be any less concerned or more amused.

TABOR

I've got trouble, Mr. Wilde. Right here in Leadville, I've got trouble. It starts with T, which rhymes with a D, which stands for *divorce*.

WILDE

I have a strange feeling that someone else will express a very similar sentiment in the distant future. But then that is there, not here, so do continue for I find the subject of divorce terribly amusing, even more so than pointless conversation.

TABOR

I don't intend to get a divorce so you can be amused, Mr. Wilde.

WILDE

Nor would I expect to you. You intend to get a divorce, no doubt, so that *you* can be amused.

TABOR

Yes—no, no! That's not it at all. Amusement has nothing to do with it.

WILDE

That is a pity, Sir. I am of the opinion that one should seek amusement at every opportunity.

TABOR

Look Wilde, I want a divorce whether it's amusing to anybody or not. It's hanging over me like a—

WILDE (poetically)

Veiled curtain of moral decay.

TABOR

Hell no! (A beat.) To put it in equine terms, it's hangin' over me more like a goddamn load of horse manure.

WILDE

I see, but praise be to the deities, I do not smell.

TABOR

No, you *don't* see! The divorce ain't but half of it. (A beat.) I also got a miner's strike looming, and I'm in the middle of a campaign for a US Senate seat.

WILDE

That would actually make the divorce part of it one-third as opposed to one-half. And you'll probably *need* the horse manure for your campaign.

TABOR

It don't matter! The point is: I'm in trouble. *Big* trouble!

WILDE

My dear man, is *that* what you call trouble?

TABOR

What do you call it?

WILDE

In my book, which is the book I'm referring to in this instance, I classify divorce, strikes—of any kind—and political campaigns as minor inconveniences. This is particularly so in the case of a strike involving miners.

TABOR

Minor inconveniences! What does your book refer to as a *major* problem?

WILDE

Sir, I'm afraid I cannot divulge that information. My book is of a very personal nature—if you know what I mean.

TABOR

I have no idea.

WILDE

And that is just as it should be and will remain until such a time that we would become fast friends.

TABOR

Look Wilde—that time ain't gonna come any time soon.

WILDE

Much to my relief. You can, however, refer to me as Oscar if you desire to do so. I think we have, with all this talk of your personal problems already gained a somewhat intimate familiarity that I should no doubt, capitalize upon.

TABOR

You want me to call you Oscar?

WILDE

That is my name, Sir. Why would you call me anything else?

TABOR

Okay—*Oscar*. Now listen to me. I've got problems here—big problems—the biggest of which is *woman* problems.

WILDE

Ah, *now* you have my undivided attention, Sir, for there is nothing so amusing in this world or any other, that I know of, as a man with a woman's problems.

TABOR

No. No! You don't understand. I don't have a woman's problems. Women *are* the problem!

WILDE

Well then, at the risk of beating the horse analogy to death, I must say that that is a Horace of another color.

TABOR

Did you say Horace of a different color?

WILDE

I'm afraid I did, but, I don't see that it really matters at this point, Mr. Tabor. Do you?

TABOR

No. Of course, you're right on target with that observation—Oscar. What matters is that we deal with the problem at hand.

WILDE

Absolutely! The hand, being quicker than the thigh, invariable leads many an unsuspecting and heretofore respectable man in to the great abyss of—*woman* problems. Does it not?

TABOR

Sir, I doubt that Mr. Shakespeare himself could have expressed any more forthrightly or even half so eloquently.

WILDE

I will be forever in your debt for such a vote of confidence.

TABOR

Mr. Wilde—Oscar, the reason I called you here is to make you a proposition.

WILDE (standing)

Sir! I'll have you know I am a gentleman.

TABOR

Keep your shirt on—

WILDE

A herd of wild Horaces could not persuade me to remove it!

TABOR

I'm talking about a *business* proposition.

WILDE

Are you so naïve, Sir, as to assume that I am not well aware of the fact that the outcome of both kinds of propositions is essentially the same?

TABOR

You're a very difficult man to do business with, Mr. Wilde.

WILDE

Oscar to you!

TABOR

Of course. *Oscar*. You've a very difficult man to do business with Oscar. (A beat. Then offering a cigar from a box on his desk) Would you care for a cigar?

WILDE (taking a cigar)

I might care for it. (A beat.) On the other hand, I might smoke it. Thank you, Sir.

TABOR

My pleasure. (A beat.) There are plenty more where that came from.

WILDE

And just where might that be?

TABOR

Havana. Cuba.

WILDE

I'm well aware of the location of Havana *and* Cuba, Mr. Tabor. I even know the whereabouts of Australia, Asia, Africa and Antarctica—all the "A" continents.

TABOR

Excellent. I'd expect a Cambridge man to know his geography.

WILDE

Oxford, Sir, if you please. And if you make that mistake again you run the risk of putting our budding friendship in serious jeopardy.

TABOR

What do you know about women, Oscar?

WILDE

Only that on some dismal day in the far too near future, I shall—against my better judgement—be compelled to marry one.

TABOR

What else?

WILDE

Absolutely nothing. In so far as I have been able to ascertain thus far in my limited experience, there is nothing that *can* be known about women with any degree of certainty.

TABOR

Surely you jest.

WILDE

Oh, if only it were so, Sir. But, Mr. Tabor, let me assure you that the physical laws of the universe on which every fiber of our scientific knowledge is constructed, have no application whatsoever where women are concerned. They are a mystery unto themselves. I dare say that God himself sees the greatest of his creations as eternally confounding.

TABOR

I don't suppose I should feel quite so inadequate then.

WILDE

I didn't say that, Sir, but in the present company I consider it a privilege to look upon you as a comrade in bewilderment.

TABOR

So you know nothing of women?

WILDE

Much less than that, Sir. I thought I made myself quite clear on that point.

TABOR

Yes, you did. I just—

WILDE

Of course I will be more than willing to accept without hesitation, equivocation or moral evasion *any* applicable knowledge about the gentler sex that you may wish to bestow upon me.

TABOR

You are missing the point, Sir.

WILDE

That, Sir, I'm somewhat ashamed to admit is one of my strong points. Nevertheless, keep me in suspense no longer, lay your proposition before me.

TABOR

Here's the deal: After you complete your lecture series, I want you to remain in Leadville —

WILDE

My God, Sir, why would I want to do that?

TABOR

Hear me out—

WILDE

Say no more. Although I am quite taken with the Leadville's somewhat perverse gaiety and overwhelming sense of doom, I could not possibly remain a day longer than my contract calls for.

TABOR

I need your services rather badly, Mr. Wilde—Oscar, and I could pay you handsomely.

WILDE

Handsomely? Now that is an amusing term. How handsomely?

TABOR

Very handsomely—10,000 now and say another 10,000 upon completion of the project.

WILDE (thinks, then)

I would undoubtedly face a great deal of unpleasantness for not fulfilling my lecture obligations. Legal fees could easily cut deeply into even such a handsome sum as 20,000.

TABOR

Make it 100,000 then—50 now and another 50 upon completion of my project.

WILDE

Your project?

TABOR

To celebrate the third anniversary of opening my opera house here in Leadville, I propose that you direct the production of a play.

WILDE

I haven't the slightest notion of how to direct a play.

TABOR

That doesn't matter.

WILDE

That's an awful lot of money to pay for my very limited experience in the directorial arena. However, it has always been my dream—to *direct*.

TABOR

I don't care a horse's ass about all that. The only thing that matters is that you direct the play. Will you do it?

WILDE

What play?

TABOR

Romeo and Juliet.

WILDE

Kind Sir, my heart is already torn asunder at the thought of it.

TABOR

I don't give a damn about that either! I want an answer and I want the right one.

WILDE

I will have complete artistic control of course.

TABOR

More or less.

WILDE

No exceptions, Sir, to create a thing of beauty, I must insist on *complete* artistic control.

TABOR

All right, whatever the hell you're talking about, you got it. (A beat.) There's jist one thing.

WILDE

One thing?

TABOR

I know this actress—

WILDE

My good man, why don't you just stab me in the art. (A beat.) Sir, I refuse to be comprised where art is concerned.

TABOR

I'm talking 100,000 dollars here Wilde!

WILDE (thinks, then)

Can she act, Sir?

TABOR

Don't matter. She's playing Juliet, and *that*, Sir, is that.

WILDE

I assume you have a pool of professionals from whom I can cast the remaining characters.

TABOR

We got all kinds of professionals here in Leadville.

WILDE

Very well then. Auditions for *all* the roles will be held early Wednesday.

TABOR

How early?

WILDE

Two PM.

TABOR

Not gonna catch any worms at that hour, Mr. Wilde.

WILDE

That, Sir, is precisely the point.

TABOR

Where do you want to hold auditions? I'll make the arrangements.

WILDE

I think the Silver Dollar would be appropriate.

TABOR

That's a saloon.

WILDE

Remove one "O", Sir, and you have a salon, a place of immense popularity for intellectual gatherings on the Continent. Should we have anything less here in Leadville?

TABOR

I'll get you the Silver Dollar.

WILDE

I will be forever in your debt.

TABOR

Somehow I think it's going to go the other way around. (A beat.) Actress goes by the name of Baby Doe; her real name is Lizzie McCourt.

WILDE

That information is of no interest to me whatsoever. (A beat.) You said something about 50,000 now.

TABOR

After casting.

WILDE

What was the name again?

TABOR

Elizabeth McCourt.

WILDE

Sir, you are a Horace trader if ever there was one. I haven't the slightest inclination of whether I can trust you or not.

TABOR

You don't have anyone else to trust, Oscar, so you might just as well trust me.

WILDE

Very well, I will hold you to your word as a Silver Baron. (A beat.) Now I must go to my next engagement—a pedicure at a nearby house of somewhat questionable repute.

TABOR

It's been a pleasure, Mr. Wilde. It isn't every day I get the chance to buy off an esteemed Irish gentleman.

WILDE

Nor is it everyday that an Irish gentleman has the opportunity to give such an esteemed American miner the Royal shaft.

TABOR

What!

WILDE

Never in the course of human endeavor has so much been given to so few to accomplish so little. Good day, Sir.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY to end the scene, with TABOR, somewhat reluctantly, shaking WILDE'S hand. Then as Wilde exits, Tabor scratches his head.)

ACT I, SCENE V

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP IN THE SILVER DOLLAR SALOON a few days later. OSCAR and TABOR are seated in folding chairs opposite the bar where an area has been cleared for auditions. Oscar has a notebook and is dressed flamboyantly in a cape and riding boots. Both he and Tabor are drinking beers from frosty mugs. WALTER is at the piano playing "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny." As Oscar and Tabor sip their beer, WILLIE BELLE enters, script in hand and faces them. MUSIC FADES.

WILDE

Sir, did I misunderstand, or did you not inform me that Leadville had a deep pool of professionals from which to cast my play.

TABOR

These people *are* professionals, Mr. Wilde.

WILDE

Professional *what*?

TABOR

That's putting a rather fine point on it, Sir. This is not London or the Continent; this is the Wild West.

WILDE

Sir, how do you expect me to produce great art with whores and swindlers and gunmen and miners?

TABOR

Look at the play as your canvass, Sir. These—players—are your pallet. How *you* apply them to your canvass is what will determine the beauty of your creation. They are nothing more than tools in the hands of an accomplished artist.

WILDE

Oh, do you really think that?

TABOR

That is what you told me, Sir.

WILDE

Then how could it be anything but true?

TABOR

Indeed, how? My point exactly.

WILDE

Even so, I find it dreadfully annoying, no offense intended Madam, that the tools with which I to work have suffered so much abuse in the hands of far lesser artists than the humble practitioner that sits beside you in this emporium of Western decadence.

TABOR

Deal with it, Sir. Life is not fair!

WILDE (thinks, then)

Then let us not be fair in this arena either, Sir, for fairness invariably sets a poor example for art as well as for life.

TABOR

As you wish, Sir. However, do bear in mind these poor players, untrained though they be, do love their Shakespeare measure for measure as much as any Englishman.

WILDE

Of course, Sir, we cannot deny the common people their love of the Bard.

TABOR

So fair Willie Belle here should have her chance along with everybody else.

WILDE

And she shall. (To Willie Belle.) Madam, would you care to give me a brief summary of your previous acting experience?

WILLIE BELLE

Oh, yes, Sir, I'd like to very much, but I'm afraid it would be woefully brief. Outside of my—profession, I haven't done any acting at all.

WILDE

Outside of your—profession?

TABOR

Willie Belle is what we refer to as a—*sporting* girl, Mr. Wilde.

WILLIE BELLE

But I wasn't always, Sir. (A beat.) I came here to teach school, but . . .

WILDE

There must be quite some but here.

WILLIE BELLE (cupping her breasts)

Yes, that too. (A beat.) Like the miners, I discovered gold in them thar hills—if you know what I mean?

WILDE

I believe I do.

WILLIE BELLE

The teaching profession just doesn't pay like—

WILDE

I understand perfectly, Madam.

WILLIE BELLE

I mean, where I'm concerned no miner ever sank a shaft where—

WILDE

Madam, *please*, that will be quite enough! I see your point.

WILLIE BELLE

Do you, Sir?

WILDE

Perhaps not in the same vivid terms with which you seem so intent upon describing it, but I can assure you, Madam, that my intellectual powers are of sufficient strength to draw the obvious conclusion.

WILLIE BELLE

Which is that I'm acting all the time.

WILDE

All the time, Madam?

WILLIE BELLE

Most all the time.

WILDE

Quite, *most* all the time. Aren't we all? (A beat.) Madam, while I find your career path to be of enormous interest, I have a play to cast. Now, for what role would you like to read?

WILLIE BELLE

Lady Capulet, Sir.

WILDE

Very well, Lady Capulet it shall be. Turn to Act I, Scene III where Lady Capulet speaks of Paris.

WILLIE BELLE (as Lady Capulet)

What say you? can you love the gentleman?
This night you shall behold him at our feast;
Read o'er the volume of young Paris' face,
And find delight writ there with beauty's pen;
Examine every married lineament,
And see how one another lends content
And what obscured in this fair volume lies
Find written in the margent of his eyes.
This precious book of love, this unbound lover,
To beautify him, only lacks a cover:
The fish lives in the sea, and 'tis much pride
For fair without the fair within to hide:
That book in many's eyes doth share the glory,
That in gold clasps locks in the golden story;
So shall you share all that he doth possess,
By having him, making yourself no less.

WILDE (impressed)

Well done, Madam. You obviously have more than a little experience with the Bard.

WILLIE BELLE

Oh yes Sir, I taught Shakespeare before—you know . . .

WILDE

Yes, well we needn't speak of that. (A beat.) In any case, you shall be my Lady Capulet.

WILLIE BELLE

Thank you, Sir. I'm honored to perform before such an esteemed English gentleman.

TABOR

Willie Belle, Mr. Wilde ain't nearly so esteemed *or* as gentlemanly as you might think.

WILDE

Madam, the pleasure was all mine I assure you. However, we need to move on, so you may go. Next!

(WILLIE BELLE smiles provocatively as she exits. BEN enters and without hesitation begins reading for the part of Mercutio from the script.)

BEN

Mercutio, Sir. (Now as Mercutio.)
If love be rough with you, be rough with love;
Prick love for pricking, and you beat love down.
Give me a case to put my visage in:
A visor for a visor! what care I
What curious eye doth quote deformities?
Here are the beetle brows shall blush for me.

WILDE

Well done, Sir. Mercutio you shall be.

BEN

It will be my honor to play for you, Mr. Wilde.

WILDE

Thank you, Sir. (A beat.) You may go.

(BEN exits as FALSTAFF enters. TABOR AND WILDE continue to swill beer.)

WILDE (first to Tabor)

I think I know this man. (To Falstaff) Do I know you, Sir?

FALSTAFF

Yessir. I mean, no sir. We ain't been formally introduced, but I seen ya last week in the theatre lecturin' on that Eye-talian fella—the sculpture.

WILDE

Sculptor.

FALSTAFF

Yeah, that one. Enjoyed it too—ah—immensely.

WILDE

I am immensely gratified for the compliment, Sir. Now tell me about your experience in the theatre.

FALSTAFF

That night?

WILDE

No sir. In general.

FALSTAFF (thinks, then)

Well—had this feller over in Nevada City grab my ass during the second act of Hamlet. Had to put a bullet through his foot to get 'im to let go.

WILDE

Sir, I meant your *acting* experience!

FALSTAFF

Oh—that. (Thinks, then.) Ain't got no actin' experience in the theatre myself, but I have a great admiration and respect for Mr. Shakespeare. I kinda of grewed up with him on the prairie and in these mountains here.

WILDE

Yes, well. (A beat.) Do you have a name, Sir?

FALSTAFF

Falstaff!

WILDE

Falstaff?

FALSTAFF

No sir—Falstaff. It ain't no question; it's a name.

WILDE

Forgive me, Sir. Let me assure you that no offense was intended. I was rather questioning where the name came from.

FALSTAFF

Why it's from Shakespeare, Sir. I figured you knowed that! Jist like the names of many of the mines in these here mountains: Ophelia, Desdemona, and Juliet. Even got a mine named Shakespeare down in the San Juans.

TABOR

Then, of course, we have the Matchless and the Little Pittsburgh right here in Leadville.

WILDE

Quite, the Matchless and the Little Pittsburgh. That's very amusing, Sir. (To Falstaff.) So it was from Shakespeare that you got your name.

FALSTAFF

Yes sir. And that's the part I want to try out for—Falstaff.

WILDE

But, Sir, Falstaff does not appear in *Romeo and Juliet*.

FALSTAFF

Well—I knowed that, Sir, but I thought maybe you could, bein' from over there and a man of letters—write him in I think you call it.

WILDE (appalled)

Write him in?

FALSTAFF

Ain't that what you call it?

WILDE

I am more likely to call it a mortal sin, Sir.

TABOR (to Wilde)

Falstaff don't know a mortal sin from a three-dollar bill.

WILDE

Sir, I believe it is of enormous importance that we maintain the artistic integrity of Mr. Shakespeare's original work. Far be it from this poor player to alter even a single word of the Bard's masterpiece.

FALSTAFF

So you won't do it?

TABOR

It would be like jumping another man's claim, Falstaff.

FALSTAFF

Oh! Why didn't ya jist say so.

WILDE

But, Sir, I am in dire need of a Capulet. Would you care to read for that part?

FALSTAFF

I would be honored.

WILDE (handing him a script)

Very well, then. Turn to Act I, Scene II.

(Falstaff stares at the script dumbfounded.)

FALSTAFF

Oh, I can't read a lick, Sir.

WILDE

Now that might prove to be something of a nuisance since we're going to be dealing with a great many words here.

TABOR

He knows the words.

WILDE

I beg your pardon! What do you mean "he knows the words", Sir?

TABOR

Jist give a listen. (To Falstaff) Show 'im!

FALSTAFF (as Capulet)

But Montague is bound as well as I, In penalty alike; and 'tis not hard, I think, For men so old as we to keep the peace.

FALSTAFF (as Paris)

Of honourable reckoning are you both; And pity 'tis you lived at odds so long. But now, my lord, what say you to my suit?

FALSTAFF (as Capulet)

But saying o'er what I have said before: My child is yet a stranger in the world; She hath not seen the change of fourteen years, Let two more summers wither in their pride, Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride.

FALSTAFF (as Paris)

Younger than she are happy mothers made.

FALSTAFF (as Capulet)

And too soon marr'd are those so early made. The earth hath swallow'd all my hopes but she, She is the hopeful lady of my earth: But woo her, gentle Paris, get her heart, My will to her consent is but a part;

WILDE

My God, Sir, that is extraordinary! Do you know the entire play?

FALSTAFF

I do, Sir. Juliet I could be—as well as her father he.

WILDE (crossing to Falstaff)

Sir, I wish to shake the hand of a true theatre artist.

FALSTAFF

I thank you, Sir, but I ain't really nothin' but a gold digger if the truth be known.

WILDE

So are we all, Sir, some with more luck than others. That is the only difference. Now, tell me truly, how did you acquire such an extraordinary talent.

(BEN refills their mugs with beer.)

FALSTAFF

I was holed up on Mount Elbert winter of '76 with a Irish kid from somewheres back East, Boston I think. Went by the name of O'Malley. He could read *and* write real good—words that is. Weren't much on reading signs was he.

WILDE

I don't understand—signs? What signs?

FALSTAFF

Of nature—tracks, broken twigs, overturned rocks, snow bank 'bout to let go, ashes from a campfire. There are all kinds of signs in these mountains.

WILDE

Am I to surmise then that this inability to read the signs led to O'Malley's premature demise?

FALSTAFF

No, Sir, nothin' like at. O'Malley was et by a mountain lion and her cubs in the Spring. Never saw 'er comin'.

WILDE

Good God, Sir!

FALSTAFF

Don't reckon O'Malley would agree with ya on the "good" part. Anyway, I learnt my Shakespeare before he departed, so his life weren't all for—naught? Is that right?

WILDE

Yes, naught. (A beat.) This is an enormously amusing tale, and to think that O'Malley died because he couldn't read—the signs.

(WILDE takes a huge gulp of beer.)

FALSTAFF

It takes years of living in the mountains, Sir, and the results of making a mistake are a whole lot worse than using the wrong word or not knowin' great art if ya see it.

TABOR

Does he get the part or not?

WILDE

I would be exceeding grateful if Sir Falstaff would accept the role of Capulet.

FALSTAFF

Then you got your man.

WILDE (raising his glass)

Thank you, Sir. You may go. (Falstaff exits.) Next!

(REBA enters in a low cut gown with her breasts almost fully exposed.)

WILDE (drops his mug)

Sweet Jesus, Sir, will you get a load of those tits!

TABOR

Sir, I beg your pardon, there are ladies present!

WILDE

My gracious lady, I beg your pardon for such an immensely tasteless outburst—

REBA

I'm bursting out a little myself, Mr. Wilde; I'm flattered that you took notice.

WILDE

Had I not noticed, Madam, I should be horse whipped. I am not a man to gaze upon the natural beauty manifest in Colorado's peaks without expressing some appreciation for their grandeur. And I must admit that on rare occasions, of which this is a perfect example, I find it a good deal more utilitarian to express myself in the vernacular rather than with the eloquence with which my speech is most often associated.

REBA

I'll take that as a favorable endorsement of my décolleté. But then I have been around long enough to know that beauty often lies in the eye of the beer holder.

(WILDE and TABOR click their mugs and drink to that.)

WILDE

Ah, beautiful and witty too. (A beat.) Let me assure you, Madam that my response to the natural beauty of such worldly orbs was meant to be nothing less than a compliment of the highest regard. Now, if my memory serves me correctly, you are Miss—

REBA

No "Miss."

WILDE

Simply—Reba! And *magnificently* so if I might say.

REBA

That's right, Mr. Wilde. I'm flattered that you remembered.

WILDE

How could I forget— such . . .

TABOR

A pretty face.

WILDE

Yes, quite. A pretty face. (A beat.) Now, what reading will you favor us with this afternoon?

REBA

Juliet—from the balcony scene.

WILDE (doubtfully)

Juliet? Ah, yes, perhaps a more . . . mature Juliet would be , , ,

REBA

From the balcony scene.

TABOR (to Wilde)

You already got a Juliet.

(WILDE ignores him.)

WILDE (to Reba)

Yes, I know it well. (A beat.) Please—begin.

REBA (as Juliet)

O Romeo, Romeo! where the hell are you Romeo? Dump your family name and get a new one, or swear your love to me, and I'll light outta here with you on the next stage.

WILDE

Madam, the script!

REBA (continuing as Juliet)

Tis but thy name, that I can't handle. Thy tight little buns, I'm crazy about. What's Montague anyhow? Ain't nothing but a name. Ain't a hand or foot or face or any other part belonging to man--if ya knows what I mean. . Oh, hell man, change your name. What's in a name? That which we call gold by any other name glitters just as brightly.

WILDE

Madam, this is a sacrilege!

REBA

No sir, it's jist an—*interpretation*—that a audience full of ruffians and hooligans is more likely to make some sense out of.

WILDE

Madam, it was to just such an audience for whom the play was originally written. The common people along with English royalty, which is only a little worse. And upon hearing the words, the common people of the world understood the play perfectly. Let us give the Bard credit for his genius, I beg you.

REBA

Oh, all right. You're the boss.

TABOR

I'm the boss!

WILDE

Madam, I think perhaps that you might be better suited for the role of the Nurse. What do you say, Tabor?

TABOR

Oh yeah, definitely the nurse—especially a wet one.

REBA

Oh, I love the nurse. Shall I do her now?

WILDE

That will not be necessary; however I must have your promise that you will perform the role as it was originally written.

REBA

For you, Sir, I'll do anything.

TABOR (to Wilde)

She means for a price.

WILDE

I'll hold you to your word, and no doubt be immensely gratified for it. You may go.

(REBA exits.)

TABOR

Well done, Sir. You handled her like a pro.

WILDE

Unless I'm mistaken, Sir, she *is* a pro.

TABOR

That she is—just a sweet little whore with a twat of gold.

WILDE

Sir!

TABOR

My apologies, Sir. I thought your Irish wit might benefit from a bit of our ribald Western humor. (A beat.) In any case, Sir, we're almost home.

WILDE

Oh, of course you're right. And once we cast *Romeo* and *Juliet*, we will be—home as you call it. (A beat.) Next!

(BABY DOE enters dressed in a simple white dressing gown. She has on a dark wig that lets hair fall gently over her shoulders. She looks stunningly seductive *and* innocent.)

WILDE (taken aback)

I say!

TABOR

This is the actress I told you about.

WILDE

This is your girl?

TABOR

Yes, Sir, she's my Baby.

Can it be? WILDE

Don't mean maybe. TABOR

You are? WILDE (stares at Baby Doe, then)

Lizzie McCourt, Sir. *Miss Elizabeth McCourt.* BABY DOE

And you wish to read for— WILDE

Juliet, Sir. BABY DOE

Of course, Juliet. (A beat.) Do you have any acting experience, Miss McCourt? WILDE

I'm a woman, Mr. Wilde. I've been acting all my life. BABY DOE

Quite. WILDE (continues staring)

Where shall I begin, Sir? BABY DOE

Wherever you like. WILDE

Like I said, Wilde, she's *my* baby. TABOR

The balcony scene; I'll be your Romeo. WILDE

See here, Wilde! TABOR

(When BABY Doe reads Juliet, she does a terrific job.)

BABY DOE (as Juliet)

O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo? Deny they father and refuse they name:
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love, And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

WILDE (as Romeo, Aside)

Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?

BABY DOE (as Juliet)

'Tis but thy name that is my enemy; Thou art thyself, though not a Montague. What's
Montague? it is nor hand, nor foot, Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part Belonging to a
man. O, be some other name! What's in a name? that which we call a rose By any other
name would smell as sweet; So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd, Retain that dear
perfection which he owes Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name, And for that name
which is no part of thee Take all myself.

WILDE (as Romeo)

I take thee at thy word: Call me but love, and I'll be new baptized; Henceforth I never will
be Romeo.

BABY DOE (as Juliet)

What man art thou that thus bescreen'd in night So stumblest on my counsel?

WILDE (as Romeo)

By a name I know not how to tell thee who I am: My name, dear saint, is hateful to
myself, Because it is an enemy to thee; Had I it written, I would tear the word.

BABY DOE (as Juliet)

My ears have not yet drunk a hundred words Of that tongue's utterance, yet I know the
sound: Art thou not Romeo and a Montague?

WILDE (as Romeo)

Neither, fair saint, if either thee dislike.

BABY DOE (as Juliet)

How camest thou hither, tell me, and wherefore? The orchard walls are high and hard to
climb, And the place death, considering who thou art, If any of my kinsmen find thee
here.

WILDE (as Romeo)

With love's light wings did I o'er-perch these walls; For stony limits cannot hold love out,
And what love can do that dares love attempt; Therefore thy kinsmen are no let to me.

(WILDE rises and begins applauding
vigorously. As he does so, REBA, WILLIE

BELLE, BEN, and FALSTAFF enter
applauding as well. Baby Doe is thrilled. She
takes a gracious bow.)

WILDE

Bravo! Bravo, my lady! Magnificent! Miss McCourt, you shall no doubt set the world
ablaze with your enchanting beauty and enormous talent.

BABY DOE (shyly)

Thank you, Sir.

TABOR (pissed)

Are we done now?

WILDE

I'd like some time alone with this dear lady.

TABOR

So would every other horse's ass in this town!

WILDE

Sir!

BABY DOE

Horace! Where are your manners? (A beat.) My relationship with Mr. Wilde is strictly
professional.

TABOR

You don't have a relationship with Mr. Wilde!

WILDE

But you shall!

TABOR

Look, Wilde, how'd you like to have the barrel of a six gun jammed right up—where the
gold don't glitter?

WILDE

Well, Sir, I've never considered sinking to that level of depravity, but I must admit that I
do find the idea of it more than a little intriguing.

TABOR

You what—

BABY DOE

Horace! Stop this nonsense this instant! Mr. Wilde is a gentleman—

WILDE (aloof)

An *Irish* gentleman at that.

BABY DOE (to Horace, continuing)

—and I will not have you interfering with my work as a theatrical artist. (A beat.) Now, I believe you owe this gentleman your most sincere apology.

TABOR

I own him *what*?

WILDE (aloofly)

An apology, Sir, *and* \$50,000 after I cast the part of Romeo.

TABOR (seething)

Wilde—

WILDE

Oscar!

BABY DOE

Horace! You made me a promise; if you dare go back on it, I will not forget it for a very, very, very long time! Do I make myself clear?

TABOR (first to Baby Doe)

Very clear, my love. (To Wilde, angrily.) Sir—

WILDE (to Baby Doe)

I do not think he means that.

(BABY DOE moves over and hooks her arm in Horace's elbow.)

BABY DOE

Say it like you mean it, Horace.

HORACE (takes a deep breath)

Sir—Oscar . . .

WILDE

That's better.

HORACE

Please accept, Sir, my apology for such an undignified display of my—genuine feelings.

WILDE

Sir, displays of genuine feelings are, regrettably, normally displayed in a most undignified manner, which is precisely why I go to great lengths never to display them. Good manners compel one to be misunderstood and comfortable rather than truly comprehended and most likely highly agitated.

HORACE

Does that mean you accept my apology?

WILDE (extends his hand)

I believe it does, Sir.

HORACE (shakes his hand)

Very well, Sir. I—accept your acceptance, I believe.

BABY DOE

Now that wasn't so bad, was it?

(HORACE starts to gets angry.)

WILDE

Genuine feelings, Sir. Genuine feelings. Don't let them get the best of you.

HORACE (controlled)

No, Dear, it was quite delightful.

WILDE

For me as well, Sir. (A beat.) Now, back to work. Next!

(Nobody enters.)

REBA

Ain't nobody else back there, Mr. Wilde.

WILDE

No Romeo?

BABY DOE

No Romeo?

HORACE (thinks, then)

No Romeo! (A beat.) Ah! *I'll* be your Romeo!

WILDE

Don't be absurd!

(HORACE grabs a script and reads.)

HORACE (as Romeo)

What light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun. Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief,
That thou her maid art far more fair than she:
Be not her maid, since she is envious;
Her vestal livery is but sick and green
And none but fools do wear it; cast it off.
It is my lady, O, it is my love! O, that she knew she were!
She speaks yet she says nothing: what of that?
Her eye discourses; I will answer it. I am too bold, 'tis not to me she speaks:
Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,
Having some business, do entreat her eyes

(As he reads, the others at first try to suppress their laughter, but not for long. As he continues they all begin to roar. Falstaff falls on the floor laughing and kicking.)

WILDE

Sir, pardon our collective ignorance, but from all that is apparent from heaven and earth, we all mistook the Bard's masterpiece to be a tragedy. (A beat.) And you have shown that us that Mr. Shakespeare true intent was purely comic.

HORACE

Is that good—or bad, would you say?

WILDE

Both good and bad are a considerable distance from the point, Sir.

HORACE

And what is the point?

WILDE

I know not, Sir, nor do I want to know. Suffice to say that you have laid claim to virgin Shakespearean territory that no man or descent of man is likely to claim as his own for reasons that need no further explanation.

HORACE

Does that mean I got the part?

BABY DOE
Horace, you *cannot* be my Romeo.

HORACE (under his breath to Baby Doe)
But you told me—

BABY DOE
Nevermind what I told you in *private*. This is the stage, and you just cannot play the role of Romeo on the stage.

HORACE
I think that decision should be left to Mr. Wilde.

BABY DOE
Very well. I agree to abide by his decision. Do you?

(HORACE looks at WILDE and rubs thumb and fingers together to indicate money.)

HORACE
I will so abide. (A beat.) Sir?

WILDE
Sir, may I inquire as to your age?

TABOR
No, Sir, you may not.

BABY DOE
He's 52.

WILDE
My compliments, Sir, you do not look a day over 51. (A beat.) Do you know how old Romeo is in Mr. Shakespeare's masterpiece?

TABOR
What is your point, Sir?

BABY DOE
Answer his question and you'll see the point, Horace.

HORACE (thinks, then)
I don't know, Sir, but I do know that true love is not bound by years.

Fourteen, Sir.

WILDE

Fourteen!

HORACE

As is fair Juliet.

WILDE

I can do 14.

HORACE (thinks, then)

Oh, Horace, for *God's* sake. You most certainly cannot *do* 14!

BABY DOE

I will shave off my moustache. That will take 10 years off.

HORACE

Excellent! We're down to 42, and I have a notion of where to use the hair.

WILDE

Horace, you are not an actor, and I will not appear on stage with you. That is final!

BABY DOE

(WALTER enters with a broom and begins sweeping the floor.)

HORACE

But you have no Romeo!

WALTER

Okay if I start cleaning up in here, Mr. Tabor?

WILDE

Oooh! Who is that young man?

HORACE

He plays the piano here and cleans up. Not much good for anything else.

WILDE

Perhaps not to you. (To Walter.) Young man?

WALTER

Yes sir.

Step over here.

WILDE

(WALTER crosses to them and stands around a little self-consciously as WILDE inspects him, poking here and there and feeling his butt.)

Hey!

WALTER

It's perfectly all right. I'm in the theatre.

WILDE

Oh.

WALTER (not sure)

Do you have a name, Sir?

WILDE

Scott—Walter.

WALTER

Very well, Scott Walter—

WILDE

No sir—Walter Scott.

WALTER

Sir Walter Scott?

WILDE

No! Jist Walter Scott. Nobody never called me sir before until you did jist now.

WILDE

I see. (A beat. Then to Baby Doe.) What do you think?

BABY DOE

Scott Walter is certainly a fine physical specimen.

WALTER

Walter Scott, Miss McCourt.

WILDE

Do you have any acting experience, Sir?

FALSTAFF

Yeah. He acts like he can play the piano!

WALTER

And you go 'round actin' like you got a brain!

FALSTAFF

Why you little—

WALTER

Gentlemen! Please.

WILDE (to Walter)

Can you read?

WALTER

And write!

(WILDE grabs the script and hands it to
WALTER.)

WILDE

Excellent! Read this.

WALTER (looks at script, then as Romeo)

What light through yonder window breaks? It is the east, and Juliet is the sun. Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon, Who is already sick and pale with grief, That thou her maid art far more fair than she: Be not her maid, since she is envious; Her vestal livery is but sick and green And none but fools do wear it; cast it off. It is my lady, O, it is my love! O, that she knew she were! She speaks—

(The kid is not great, but he's good enough.)

WILDE

Enough! You'll do.

WALTER

I'm Romeo?

WILDE

With my help, you shall be.

WALTER (eyes Baby Doe)
I'm Romeo! (A beat.) Does this mean I get to kiss Baby Doe?

HORACE
Not if you want to live in *this* town!

BABY DOE
Horace, will you please just—go?

HORACE
I'm not going anywhere. I *own* this town!

BABY DOE
Well you don't own *me*!

WALTER (feeling his oats)
Or me either!

BABY DOE
Shut up, Walter! (A beat.) Now, Mr. Wilde, does this complete the cast for your production?

WILDE
It does indeed, dear lady.

BABY DOE
Then I suggest that you distribute scripts to those of us that need them, and schedule a rehearsal.

WILDE
You, Miss McCourt, are a lady of not only of immense beauty, but infinite practicality as well. (He begins handing out scripts.) He shall meet here again tomorrow.

WILDE (to Tabor)
So, Sir, the play is cast.

TABOR
It is indeed, Sir, and perhaps the die is cast as well.

WILDE
We shall see.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN to end Act I.)

THE BABE, THE BARD AND THE BARON

by

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ACT II, SCENE I

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP ON JIM BRIDGER two weeks later. He is dressed as before; WALTER is at the piano playing a barroom rendition of "Hear Dem Bells." Bridger considers shooting him, but then decides not to when WALTER points at the sign on the piano. Bridger puts his gun away and walks slowly to the podium where he picks up the buffalo skull, looks at it, and begins his monologue. MUSIC FADES and LIGHTS ON WALTER COME DOWN.

BRIDGER

To be or not to be, that is the question,
Tis nobler to remain true to the dictates of modern convention
Or to follow the heart's true calling (if it be the heart that calls at all)
In matters of love.
Should the vows promised at he the dawn of manhood
Bind a man blessed with the wisdom of years?
Ah, there's the rub.
For is it not the light that burns brightest, the first to grow dim
And cast a dark shadow over love's horizon?
In that darkness, how can mortal man
Help but be drawn to another light?
How unlike love to hide where it cannot be seen,
To conceal itself in a mask of propriety,
When on golden wings love needs to fly in the face of scorn,
If even in the end,
To fall away decrepit and torn.

(Bridger puts the skull down.)

BRIDGER (continuing)

Sleep, my friend, perchance to dream. (A few beats.) Dreams! The West wouldn't of been settled without 'em. Some was realized, but most, I reckon, was otherwise. Even so, that never kept the dreamers from dreamin'.

The players in our tale no less than you or me: Baby Doe to be immortalized on stage. Horace to possess the love of his life. Falstaff, like every other miner in the history of civilization, to strike it rich. Reba and Willie Belle for *anything* other than what they got. And even a practical Yankee like Augusta Tabor dreamt of the day when she'd have her beloved Horace back. Dreamers all! Myself included.

I come to these mountains with a dream to trap more beaver than I knew what to do with, and in the early days if ya knew what you was about, that was about as easily done as it was said. Yessir achieved that one all right. Didn't take long though before the beavers was all but gone; jist like the money I got from trappin' 'em in the first place. So my original dream got replaced by a new one: to find gold or silver or paradise or maybe even myself. Can't say fer sure. All I know is dreams die hard if they die at all. More 'an likely, they just git replaced by different dreams. Ain't no different for the players in the human drama goin' on tonight. Suppose we'll havta drop back in on the Tabor Opera House to find out if any dreams there get realized.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN to END THE SCENE and the PIANO MUSIC BEGINS, with "Hear Dem Bells" and CONTINUES THROUGH THE TRANSITION.)

ACT II, SCENE II

LIGHTS COME UP on REBA, WILLIE BELLE, BEN, BABY DOE and FALSTAFF, who are all assembled around WILDE on the stage of the opera house. They have just completed a rehearsal and are getting feedback. As WILDE BEGINS, the MUSIC FADES and WALTER JOINS THE GROUP. AUGUSTA TABOR, 47, enters from the rear of the theatre and begins walking up the aisle toward the group. She is a stern and dignified New Englander with a serious disposition and a fine business sense. Under her severe exterior, she is really quite sensitive and still deeply in love with her husband of some 26 years. One by one, all except for WILDE see her coming and head for the hills.

WILDE

That wasn't especially intolerable, however, unless we accomplish a great deal before we open, I'm afraid there is a better than even chance that our patrons' displeasure might very well be expressed with a six-gun rather than a with a critique of the performance in the Leadville Dispatch. (A beat.) Baby Doe, I want to work with you and Walter on the final scene tomorrow. And Reba I must *insist* that you adhere to the script. The role of nurse is ribald enough as it stands, and it is certainly not in need of your editorial intrusions. If you cannot control yourself, I'm afraid I'll have to . . .

REBA

Spank me?

WILDE

Certainly not—that's exactly what you *want*. I'll withhold my spankings for the "good" girls who've earned it.

WILLIE BELLE

Have I been a *good* girl Mr. Wilde?

WILDE

Decidedly so! And for that you shall receive nothing less than a sound thrashing.

REBA

Then you have my word, Sir—as a sporting lady—that I shall follow the script word for word and deed for bloody deed.

WILDE

I will be forever in your debt.

WILLIE BELLE

You already *are* in her debt, Mr. Wilde.

WILDE

And I intend to remain so for as long as I enjoy the pleasures of Leadville's mountain environs.

WALTER

Mr. Wilde—I think we have a visitor. A lady.

WILDE (sees Augusta)

So we do. (A beat.) Yes madam?

BABY DOE (rushing off)

Sir, I must take my leave at once.

FALSTAFF (exiting with Walter and Ben)

Me too. Let's go boys.

WILDE (to Augusta)

Madam, you have interrupted my rehearsal.

WILLIE BELLE

I think Reba and I will be running along too, Mr. Wilde. Have fun.

(REBA and WILLIE BELLE exit.)

WILDE

Gone! Utterly gone. The entire cast. What do you have to say for yourself Madam?

AUGUSTA

Perhaps a great deal or perhaps nothing at all. I suppose it depends on whether or not you're a willing listener.

WILDE

I believe listening is a virtuous trait of which I am sorely lacking, however, I will on this occasion allow you to bend my ear—for alas there are no ears left here to bend.

AUGUSTA

I am Augusta Tabor—if that means anything to you.

WILDE

Without wrenching my elementary intuitive notions, I think I can safely surmise that you are the wife of one Horace Austin Warner Tabor, affectionately known as the Silver King here in Leadville. Now, Madam, allow me to introduce myself—

AUGUSTA

I know who you are Mr. Wilde.

WILDE

Nevertheless, a proper introduction is dictated by good manners. (A beat.) Oscar Wilde, Madam, at your service.

AUGUSTA

I hope so.

WILDE

That is, of course, just a figure of speech—manners being far more important than matters. But please do not hesitate to inform me of the purpose of your visit.

AUGUSTA

My purpose—yes. (A beat.) Well, I don't suppose you could have remained in Leadville, particularly in the company you keep, without having heard something about Augusta Tabor—the scorned wife.

WILDE

Indeed, the scorned wife—the good wife. Are they not by definition one in the same?

AUGUSTA

I wouldn't know about that, Sir.

WILDE

Nor would I. (A beat.) Madam, I cannot deny that your name has been mentioned a number of times in polite conversation with my esteemed Leadville colleagues.

AUGUSTA

Esteemed!

WILDE

More or less. Some—admittedly less than more.

AUGUSTA

Well, I don't know what to say, Mr. Wilde.

WILDE

I find myself at something of a loss for words as well. You have taken me by surprise Madam.

AUGUSTA

Please, I prefer to be called Mrs. Tabor.

WILDE

If that is your wish.

AUGUSTA

Oh it is Sir. It *is!* (A beat.) Horace *is* still my husband.

WILDE

I have no reason to believe anything to the contrary—Mrs. Tabor.

AUGUSTA

Is that so?

WILDE

You have my word on it. (A beat.) My dear Mrs. Tabor, matters of conjugal bliss and domestic difficulties are not areas in which I have a wealth of direct experience. Having said that, I can point out, however, that through my poor powers of observation, I would have to conclude that things in the house of Tabor while not idyllic are perhaps not altogether lost and that Horace Austin Warner Tabor remains your husband, even if not an ideal one.

AUGUSTA

Mr. Wilde, there are many paths through the mountains. Why do I have the distinct impression that you would by design choose the most difficult?

WILDE

Because Mrs. Tabor, I do not seek a path based on its degree of difficulty but rather by its possibility for beauty. Such is my nature.

AUGUSTA

Then I pity you, Sir, because your inclination towards beauty may well be your downfall.

WILDE

As it has been for many a man before me, and I will relish the day this mortal being is included in that small number of God's skallywags. (A beat.) Now, Madam, how may I assist you?

AUGUSTA (thinks, then)

Are you a man of your word, Mr. Wilde?

WILDE

A man of my word? (A few beats.) No, Madam, I am not. I am actually a man of my *words*, which, regrettably—as well as conveniently—requires much less of man.

AUGUSTA

I appreciate your frankness, Sir. For if it is true that your word means less than your words, perhaps you can be of some use to me after all.

WILDE (bowing graciously)

How so, Madam?

AUGUSTA

Mrs. Tabor, please.

WILDE

Very well, Mrs. Tabor. Please—go on.

AUGUSTA

Mr. Wilde, I'm sure you must be aware that my husband is—involved in some kind of romantic liaison with this McCourt girl.

WILDE

It has not escaped my attention that he spends a good deal of time in the company of Miss McCourt.

AUGUSTA

That's a very civil way to put it.

WILDE

Civility is what separates man from the lower animals.

AUGUSTA

But not from the *inclinations* of the lower animals.

WILDE

Unfortunately not.

AUGUSTA

Miss McCourt, I'm convinced, is nothing more than a passing fancy upon whom my husband can satisfy these animal inclinations. Horace has in the past had a number of—dalliances—with women cut from a very similar mold.

WILDE

Yes, well—men will be boys I'm very sorry to say.

AUGUSTA

What I'm saying, Sir, is that something is rotten in the State of Colorado because, among other things, Miss McCourt is a divorcee, and a Catholic one on top of that! You must have some appreciation for what that means.

WILDE

Indeed *I* do. However, Mrs. Tabor, I do not think your husband greatly concerns himself either with Miss McCourt's marital status or her religion. He is, I believe, drawn to those baser inclinations of the sub-species.

AUGUSTA

I realize that of course, Sir. (A beat.) Men are *such* fools!

WILDE

Indeed. (A beat.) And a fool and his heart are soon parted.

AUGUSTA

But I am not a fool, Mr. Wilde.

WILDE

It was not my intention to imply anything of the kind.

AUGUSTA

But my heart *is* in great distress over this matter.

WILDE

As it, no doubt, should be.

AUGUSTA

Horace, with no little effort on my part, practically built this town Mr. Wilde, and, in spite of recent events, he is held in high regard not only in Leadville, but in the state as a whole as well. He has great pride, and, as you probably know—political aspirations that stretch well beyond state borders.

WILDE

I've heard it said. I understand he is Lieutenant Governor as we speak.

AUGUSTA

And he wants to be a U.S. Senator. I don't wish to hurt Horace—but he has never before "aired our dirty laundry in public" if you know what I mean.

WILDE

I have more than a vague notion.

AUGUSTA

I mean—with this ridiculous show, he could ruin everything!

WILDE

The show?

AUGUSTA

Romeo and Juliet!

WILDE

Ah. *That* show.

AUGUSTA

I should say so—with Miss McCourt playing the tragic role of Juliet. It is positively—scandalous!

WILDE

And perhaps—humiliating as well?

AUGUSTA

Yes. (A beat.) Making the whole affair so—public! I can't bear it.

WILDE

Mrs. Tabor, from what I have heard of you, I think you had to bear a great deal more when you crossed the frontier and created a life for yourself in these inhospitable mountains. You are, in my view and that of many others, an *extraordinary* woman.

AUGUSTA

You are missing the point, Sir. I had my husband at my side for all the trails and trials that preceded this one. *Nothing* was so difficult that I couldn't be comforted by reaching out and touching him as he lay next to me night after night, year after year. Now I reach out and—

WILDE (taking her hand)

What would you have me do Mrs. Tabor?

AUGUSTA

Cancel this ridiculous show.

WILDE

Madam, that is quite impossible to do at this point.

AUGUSTA

I beg you!

WILDE

It is out of my hands Madam. Your husband has already given me a great deal of money, a goodly sum of which, I am sorry to admit I have spent—in most cases rather unwisely. I therefore am under an obligation as a gentleman.

AUGUSTA

Mr. Wilde, I *know* my husband still loves me; he is just infatuated with this McCourt girl. Given time this affair will end like all the others and my Horace will come home. But not if this production makes my private humiliation into a public scandal. Under such circumstances—I would be forced to act.

WILDE

I know very little of these things Mrs. Tabor, but perhaps the time has come when you *should* take some action.

AUGUSTA

I am Sir! That's what I'm doing here—begging you to stop this show.

WILDE

Madam, I feel for you truly, but it is not in my power to cancel the show. At this point, it could well-nigh go forward without any further direction on my part.

AUGUSTA

Oh God! All is lost.

WILDE (thinks, then)

Perhaps not. (A beat.) I will speak to your husband and tell him that you desire an audience.

AUGUSTA

An audience, Sir, with my husband?

WILDE

It is an English expression, but bear in mind that your husband is, after all, a Silver Baron and used to having things his way, as is the case with English royalty.

AUGUSTA

Horace is a simple stone cutter from the State of Maine, Mr. Wilde. Circumstances made him a "baron", and he can by circumstances be made a stone cutter again. Do you think this McCourt would give him the time of day if he weren't filthy rich?

WILDE

I cannot say. Nonetheless, "Barons" tend to hear only what they choose to hear, and I cannot with any certainty give you any kind of assurance that Mr. Tabor will be willing to listen to what either of us has to say.

AUGUSTA

I see. What you're saying is . . .

(She begins to smile.)

AUGUSTA (continuing)

. . . that we can lead Horace to water, but we can't make him think!

WILDE

Precisely.

AUGUSTA

Why Mr. Wilde, I believe your famous wit is somewhat infectious. *I*, Augusta Tabor, just made a joke. I don't remember doing that before in my entire life.

WILDE

Perhaps a—more jovial approach to life would have some appeal to Mr. Tabor?

AUGUSTA

Life is no joking matter Mr. Wilde.

WILDE

Indeed not! Life is meant to be lived to the dullest!

AUGUSTA

Then you'll tell Mr. Tabor that I must speak with him on this matter.

WILDE

It is the least I can do.

AUGUSTA

I thank you, Sir. I will hold you to your word—and *words*.

(She turns to exit.)

WILDE

Mrs. Tabor?

AUGUSTA

Yes, Mr. Wilde.

WILDE

If—your husband—will not do as you wish, what will you do?

AUGUSTA

In that case, there will be only one person to turn to.

WILDE

And will you have the courage to do it?

AUGUSTA

If I must. (A beat.) Good day, Mr. Wilde.

WILDE

Good day—Dear Lady.

(AUGUSTA turns and starts to exit. LIGHTS
COME DOWN TO END THE SCENE.)

ACT II, SCENE III

SCENE: WALTER IS PLAYING "Dixie" on a DARKENED STAGE. A SHOT RINGS OUT; MUSIC STOPS. A BODY FALLS TO THE FLOOR. LIGHTS COME UP on WILDE and BABY DOE on the stage of the Tabor Opera House. The stage is set as Capulet's tomb in the churchyard. There is one marble slab center stage. There is a SPOT on THE PIANO. The stool is overturned, and the sign asking patrons not to shoot the piano player is on the floor.

WILDE

Miss McCourt, while we wait for Walter's arrival, which I believe is imminent, perhaps I could stand in as your Romeo.

BABY DOE

Mr. Wilde, I think that would be neither appropriate nor wise under the circumstances.

WILDE

What circumstances, Madam?

BABY DOE

I am a single woman, Sir, and since the scene of which you speak requires a certain degree of intimacy, I think it would advisable for me to perform it only in the company of my fellow players or in front of an audience.

WILDE

Madam—are you suggesting that a gentleman such as myself would take advantage of a beautiful young divorcee?

BABY DOE

Oh, nothing of the kind, Sir! However, I *am* suggesting that a gentleman might very well become lost in the reverie of his art and quite unwillingly overstep the bounds of propriety. It is my sacred duty as a woman to protect myself from any such eventuality. You are after all, Mr. Wilde, only a man.

WILDE

Oh Madam let me assure you. I am *much* more, but I cannot deny, Miss McCourt, that if such an eventuality were to present itself to me, I would without hesitation leap into the breach—for the sake of art, of course.

BABY DOE

Just as I suspected. And I therefore—for the sake of art—would be compromised. Which is exactly why I feel compelled to protect my honor as a woman.

WILDE

But Madam, even as we speak, are you not deeply involved in a romantic liaison with a married man—one Horace Austin Warner Tabor?

BABY DOE

I cannot deny it, and it is exactly that trust that I wish to honor.

WILDE (thinks, then)

Then am I to conclude that you do not find me even a little bit attractive?

BABY DOE

Oh *much* less than that, Sir. As a man, I do not find your existence even *significant* much less attractive—for I have given my heart in all earnestness to another. And you well know the importance of being earnest.

WILDE

Perhaps not at this point, but I'm certain I shall. In any case, you mistake my intentions, Madam. I have no interest whatsoever in acquiring your *heart* or that of any other woman. My desires have much more to do with satisfying my animal instincts.

BABY DOE

I know exactly where your interests lie, Sir, and I can assure you that it will not lie with me. The entirety of my physical being is as inaccessible to you, or any other man, as my heart.

WILDE (thinks, then)

My dear Miss McCourt, I must humbly beg your forgiveness for I have made a grave error in judgement about your character. I have made quite the fool of myself.

BABY DOE

Your apology is accepted Sir. You are not the first man to have made himself the fool in my presence, and I should be pleasantly surprised if you are the last.

WILDE

Such beauty as yours is apt to make fools of us all.

BABY DOE

Which is both a blessing and curse that I must learn to live with—lest it will be the death of me.

WILDE

I think not Madam for I am of the opinion that eternal beauty has a life all its own. (A beat.) Ah, someone comes.

(ENTER FALSTAFF and BEN carrying WALTER between them. WALTER has a bandage wrapped around his head and is just a little incoherent.)

WALTER

Sorry to be so late, Mr. Wilde.

FALSTAFF

Weren't the lad's fault, Sir.

BEN

Came straight from the Doc's office we did.

WILDE

Good God, Sir! What kind of calamity led to such a distressing state?

WALTER (proudly)

I was shot, Sir. In the head! There was blood everywhere.

BABY DOE (rushing off)

And still is! I'll get a fresh bandage.

(BABY DOE exits.)

WILDE

He was shot!

BEN

A gunslinger in the Silver Dollar didn't take to this piano playin'.

FALSTAFF

Wanted 'im to play "Dixie."

WALTER

I was playin' "Dixie!"

WILDE

Young man, am I to understand that you were shot for playing "Dixie?"

WALTER

No, sir. I was shot for not playin' it well.

BEN

It's jist a flesh wound—to the head—which bleeds a lot.

WILDE

What about—the sign? Could this imbecile gunslinger not read the sign?

FALSTAFF

I'd be careful 'bout throwin' 'round the term imbecile, Mr. Wilde. The Sundance Kid's still in town. Besides it were a accident; said he was aimin' for the sign.

BEN

But he was drunk and grazed our Romeo.

WILDE

Falstaff, I want you to put up a new sign right now. Put up a sign that says: *Romeo Must Live!* Will you do that for me, Sir?

FALSTAFF

I can't.

WILDE

Why in blazes not? We can't have our leading man shot to death the day before we open.

FALSTAFF

Can't write a lick Sir.

BEN

I'll make the sign.

WILDE

Thank you, Sir. (A beat.) This is utterly inconceivable. My god, if they will shoot a man for not playing the piano to their satisfaction, what . . . will they do to the director of a play they don't favor—shoot him as well?

FALSTAFF (looks to Ben)

Don't reckon they'd do that, Sir.

WILDE

Thank God!

BEN
More likely to hang 'im.

WILDE
Hang him!

BEN
Yes, sir—after a good beatin'.

WILDE
You mean to say Sir, that they would beat me and then hang me?

FALSTAFF
Wouldn't do no good to beat ya afterwards.

WILDE
Sir, while your logic is irrefutable it is a great distance from the point I am attempting to make.

BEN
Which is?

WILDE (thinks, then)
Simply that we need to gather our wits about us and get to work. We have a show to put on, and since I have no intention whatsoever of being the guest of honor at one of your famous Western "necktie parties", we must give them a show that would be worthy of the London stage or even the Globe Theatre itself.

(BABY DOE ENTERS with a fresh bandage.)

BABY DOE
Here, let me see to that.

WALTER
Ah, my Juliet! A simple kiss from you will make a new man of me.

BABY DOE (changing his bandage)
Don't push you luck Romeo. This Juliet knows what's what.

WILDE (To Falstaff and Ben)
Now off with you two. Get that sign up, gather the rest of the cast and then return here. We have a great deal of work to do!

(EXIT FALSTAFF and BEN.)

WILDE

Are you sure you're all right, young man?

WALTER

Don't know fer sure, Mr. Wilde. Ain't never been shot before so I don't know how I should feel. (A beat.) Shot—by the Sundance Kid and lived to tell about it!

BABY DOE

You're a very lucky young man, Walter.

WALTER (dreamily)

To be in your arms fair one, I know.

BABY DOE

To be alive! (A beat.) There—at least the bleeding has stopped. How do you feel?

WALTER

I think just one little kiss would fix me up just fine.

(She gives WILDE a look, and he encourages her to kiss WALTER. She finally relents and gives him a peck on the forehead.)

BABY DOE

Now, are you ready to get to work?

WALTER (touching his forehead)

Now I'm willing to die in peace for fair Juliet has kissed me. (A beat.) If I get shot again, will I get another kiss my love?

BABY DOE

Keep talking such nonsense, Walter, and the next time you get shot the bullet might very well come from me.

WALTER

Ah, sweet Juliet. How can thee deny my love when my wound runs so deep?

BABY DOE

It's just a flesh wound, Walter, and to deny you my love is a distinct pleasure.

WILDE

To work you two! Act V, Scene III. Capulet's tomb in the churchyard. Take your places.

BABY DOE

Where shall we begin?

WILDE

Where we left off yesterday—Romeo mistakes you for dead in Capulet's tomb.

(BABY DOE reclines on the slab.)

WILDE

Romeo . . . begin.

WALTER (as Romeo)

O my love! my wife!
Death, that hath suck'd the honey of thy breath,
Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty:
Thou art not conquer'd; beauty's ensign yet
Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks,
And death's pale flag is not advanced there.
Ah, dear Juliet,
Why art thou yet so fair? shall I believe
That unsubstantial death is amorous,
And that the lean abhorred monster keeps
Thee here in dark to be his paramour?
O, here Will I set up my everlasting rest,
And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
From this world-wearied flesh. Eyes, look your last!
Arms, take your last embrace! and, lips, O you
The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss

(He bends down to kiss Juliet.)

BABY DOE

Hold it right there Buster!

WALTER

Where's it say that?

BABY DOE

I'm saying it!

WALTER

Mr. Wilde, I havta kiss 'er. It's in the script.

BABY DOE

Nobody's kissing me until we open. I thought I made that quite clear!

WALTER

But what if I don't do it right? (To Wilde.) I need to practice Mr. Wilde or I won't know what I'm doin'!

(WILDE pushes BABY DOE aside and lies down on the slab.)

WILDE

You can practice on me.

WALTER

I can *what*?

WILDE

Practice on me.

WALTER

I ain't gonna kiss *you*!

WILDE

And why not may I inquire?

WALTER

You're a man! Ain't cha?

WILDE

I am indeed an Irishman, Sir, and *this*—is the theatre.

WALTER

This may be the Wild West, but it ain't *that* wild!

WILDE

Nevertheless, if you want to rehearse your kiss, I am afraid that I am as good as you are going to get at. And believe me, you could do a whole lot worse.

WALTER

Well, Sir, no offense intended, but I think I'll jist *let on* that I kiss Baby Doe. I can wait 'til we open to actually do it.

BABY DOE

Walter, it's perfectly all right for you to kiss Mr. Wilde. He is a gentleman, and nobody will ever know.

WALTER

I will, and you will, and he will!

(WILDE gets up. BABY DOE lies down.)

WILDE (offended)

Very well, Sir. Just—*let on*—that you kiss Juliet and finish the scene. Begin at: "Will I set up . . ."

WALTER (as Romeo)

Will I set up my everlasting rest,
And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
From this world-wearied flesh. Eyes, look your last!
Arms, take your last embrace! and, lips, O you
The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss

(WALTER leans down to BABY DOE but stops short and fakes it.)

WALTER (continuing as Romeo)

A dateless bargain to engrossing death!
Come, bitter conduct, come, unsavoury guide!
Thou desperate pilot, now at once run on
The dashing rocks thy sea-sick weary bark!
Here's to my love!

(He drinks.)

WALTER (continuing as Romeo)

O true apothecary!
Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a kiss I die.

(WALTER fakes another kiss and dies. After a moment, BABY DOE wakes and plays her Juliet.)

BABY DOE (as Juliet)

I do remember well where I should be,
And there I am. Where is my Romeo?
What's here? A cup, closed in my true love's hand?
Poison, I see hath been his timeless end:
O churl! Drunk all, and left no friendly drop
To help me after? I will kiss thy lips;

Haply some poison yet doth hang on them,
To make die with a restorative.

(Fakes a kiss.)

BABY DOE (continuing as Juliet)

Yea, noise? then I'll be brief. O happy dagger!

(She snatches Romeo's dagger and stabs herself.)

BABY DOE (continuing as Juliet)

This is thy sheath;
there rust, and let me die.

(She falls on Romeo's body, and dies.)

WILDE (after a moment)

Again. And again. And again! We have much to accomplish and so little time. From the top. Romeo . . .

(WALTER and BABY DOE position themselves and begin again from where they started before.)

WALTER (as Romeo)

Will I set up my everlasting rest,
And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars . . .

(LIGHTS COME DOWN TO END THE SCENE.)

ACT II, SCENE IV

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on HORACE working feverishly at his desk in the Opera House office. WALTER is playing "Let Me Call You Sweetheart." After a moment, ANGUSTA enters unannounced and crosses to his desk. WALTER STOPS PLAYING and exits.

Augusta! I didn't hear you knock.

TABOR (looking up)

I didn't.

AUGUSTA

Well—that explains it.

TABOR

Why should your wife have to knock, Horace?

AUGUSTA

Of course, you're right. You shouldn't have to—knock. I simply meant that—

TABOR

Did Mr. Wilde not send me word that you had been so kind as to grant me an audience?

AUGUSTA

That Mr. Wilde is quite the wit—grant you an audience? The very idea.

TABOR

He does seem to get carried away with the formalities.

AUGUSTA

Doesn't he though?

TABOR

Horace, do you mind if I sit down.

AUGUSTA

(HORACE rushes around the desk and gets her a chair.)

HORACE

Oh, please do. Forgive me.

AUGUSTA

I already have.

HORACE (moving back to his desk)

Yes, well. (A beat.) How—have you been Augusta?

AUGUSTA

I'm getting along Horace. Yourself?

HORACE

Busy, as usual. Very busy.

AUGUSTA

Counting your money?

HORACE

Spending it! The more I spend you see, the less time I have to spend counting what's left.

AUGUSTA

Which gives you sufficient time to pursue your—*other* interest.

HORACE

Yes, I . . . suppose so.

AUGUSTA

Perhaps I can help?

HORACE

With?

AUGUSTA

Spending your money. (A beat.) I've located some property in Denver that I think would be a wise investment—something for me to put aside for a—dark day.

HORACE

I'll have my man look into it.

AUGUSTA

I have already looked into it. If it was not a wise investment, I would not even consider it.

How much?

HORACE

Fifteen thousand.

AUGUSTA

Fifteen thousand!

HORACE

AUGUSTA

Horace, that is a fraction of what you spend on many of your other—*investments*. And this was one involves far less *conjecture*—shall we say? (A beat.) Additionally, I think it might be good for our relationship. You haven't done anything nice for me for a very long time.

HORACE (sighs)

All right, Augusta. I'll have a check drawn up in the morning. (A beat.) Now I am very busy, is that all?

AUGUSTA

I don't know.

HORACE

Augusta . . .

AUGUSTA

Is that all, Horace?

HORACE

Yes, it is. That is all.

AUGUSTA

It most certainly is not!

HORACE

Don't be difficult, Augusta.

(AUGUST rises and begins to move about.)

AUGUSTA

Do you hate me, Horace?

HORACE

No, Madam, I do not! I have, in fact, a deep and abiding—respect and admiration for you.

AUGUSTA (thinks, then)

Really? (A beat.) And why is that, Sir?

HORACE

Because you are one tough woman, Augusta—hacking out a life for us on the god-forsaken plains of Kansas and then in these savage mountains. I wouldn't be where I am today if it hadn't been for you.

AUGUSTA

And just where is that, Horace? Where are you today?

HORACE

On top of the heap, old girl. King of the mountain!

AUGUSTA

Evidently with very little recollection of what it took to get there.

HORACE

It took risk, Madam. Risk and capital! Years of hard labor got us nothing but more hard labor. Risk got us . . .

(He makes an expansive gesture with his hands)

HORACE

. . . all this!

AUGUSTA

Us?

HORACE

Augusta, it is not my fault that you cannot abide living in luxury. To me it is no sin to enjoy the fruits of one's labor.

AUGUSTA

But it *is* a sin to pay the men who pluck your fruit from the depths of the earth no more than three dollars a day while you—

HORACE

Madam, my mining interests are mine alone. You know nothing of this business; you are a shopkeeper. You have expressed a desire to wash your hands of the entire enterprise and I intend neither to seek nor to follow your advice on these matters. Now, if that is all, I bid you good day.

AUGUSTA
That is *not* all.

HORACE
I must return to my work.

(HORACE turns back to his business.)

AUGUSTA
When will you return to your home, Horace?

HORACE
I am very busy, Augusta.

AUGUSTA
Of course—with your various enterprises. (A beat.) Is the McCourt girl just another enterprise, Horace, or something more?

HORACE
Dammit woman! Will you stop beating around this infernal bush and just tell me what you want?

AUGUSTA
Sweetheart, I want you to come home!

HORACE
Don't call me that. (A beat.) Augusta—that is no longer where my heart is.

AUGUSTA
Then where is it?

HORACE
Not where it was before.

AUGUSTA
I see.

HORACE
I'm sorry.

AUGUSTA
For what? (A beat.) You have everything you want. What do you have to be sorry for?

HORACE
It was never my intention to cause you pain.

AUGUSTA

Oh, I learned to live with the *pain* a long time ago. But this—public *humiliation* is just too much to bear!

HORACE

I don't know what you're talking about.

AUGUSTA

This show of yours Horace—Romeo and Juliet. With that McCourt girl as your Juliet. What a ridiculous spectacle! Why don't you just hang a banner that says: "I'm a fool."?

HORACE

This production is a business venture, Madam. Miss McCourt is an accomplished actress and Mr. Wilde is an esteemed man of letters whom I have contracted to direct this production of Romeo and Juliet to celebrate the third anniversary of the opening of the opera house that bears the Tabor name.

AUGUSTA

Horace, this production will make fools of us all. I'll be ashamed to show my face in Leadville or Denver, and you should be too.

HORACE

Whatever shame you feel, Augusta, is yours alone.

AUGUSTA

Really Horace? *Mine* alone?

HORACE

Yes, Madam.

AUGUSTA

Horace you have no good reason to humiliate me in this way.

HORACE

I am a businessman, Madam. This is business.

AUGUSTA

I beg you, Sir, spare me this humiliation. Cancel this enterprise.

HORACE

I cannot.

AUGUSTA

I will take action, Sir. You will force my hand.

HORACE

Do what you must, Augusta. I have far too much energy and capital invested in this production to cancel it now. I have given my word.

AUGUSTA

Your word, yes. (A beat. Then going on reflectively.) Do you remember what it was like when we came West so many years ago? How you dropped your young bride in the most desolate expanse of prairie imaginable?

HORACE

I do.

AUGUSTA

And we built something, Horace—you and me, together. We built a house, and a farm, and a business—you and me—out of nothing, in the middle of nowhere. Remember?

HORACE

Augusta, please—

AUGUSTA

And here in these beautiful mountains that have become our home—how many crude miners' camps cut out of a mountainside did we settle in where I was the only woman?

HORACE

It was very difficult for you, I know.

AUGUSTA

Yes, Horace, it was difficult, but it was so much more—it was living! It was life—*our* life, and as hard as it was it was worthwhile because we were *one*—working together, overcoming every adversity and building a life, a good life, a family. (A beat.) And now—apart we have . . . nothing.

HORACE

Augusta, now we have everything!

AUGUSTA

You have everything! Or think you do. I have nothing.

HORACE

Augusta, I have—many accounts to settle.

AUGUSTA

You want me to go?

Please.

HORACE

(AUGUSTA crosses to the door and stops.)

AUGUSTA

Will you be home tonight?

HORACE

No.

AUGUSTA

Are you ever coming home again Horace, ever?

HORACE

Augusta, *this* is my home.

AUGUSTA (thinks, then)

I regret now that I couldn't make you laugh.

HORACE

You regret what?

AUGUSTA

That I can't be gay and beautiful and spontaneous and 24-years-old.

HORACE

I never expected that of you.

AUGUSTA

What did you expect?

HORACE

The same thing you expected of me: unconditional love.

AUGUSTA

And you got that, but it wasn't enough.

HORACE

It was then, but—now things are different.

AUGUSTA

You are different, Horace. Things are no more or no less than what we make of them.

HORACE
Yes, I suppose that's true.

AUGUSTA
However, there is *one* thing you can change for the good of us all.

HORACE
I will not cancel the show, Augusta.

AUGUSTA
Why not?

HORACE
I made a promise.

AUGUSTA
You made one to me too—a long time ago.

HORACE
It's out of my hands.

AUGUSTA
Very well, Horace. We all have to make difficult choices. I understand of course.

HORACE (after a moment)
Then—we're through.

AUGUSTA
Yes, Sweetheart, we're—through.

HORACE (relieved)
Augusta . . . I could use a drink. (A beat.) I don't suppose you'd—no, of course not . . .

(He goes to the bar.)

AUGUSTA
Yes, please. I'll join you. Whiskey!

HORACE (taken aback)
Whiskey?

AUGUSTA
Unless there's something stronger.

(HORACE pours two shots of whiskey from the bottle and takes one to Augusta.)

HORACE

To—the future.

AUGUSTA

Not mine.

HORACE

Then—times gone by.

(They drink. WALTER resumes playing "Let Me Call You Sweetheart." BLACKOUT TO END THE SCENE. MUSIC STOPS.)

ACT II, SCENE V

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on the stage of the Opera House an hour later. TABOR stumbles in carrying a bottle. He is very drunk and disheveled. He crosses the stage to the podium where the volume of Shakespeare's collected works is open. He leafs through the pages, stopping to read here and there.

HORACE

Ah, Mr. Shakespeare! What does the Bard have to say about this—this interlude that we mortals so casually refer to as—life! Something of value no doubt—in a pig's eye. Oh, here, Macbeth! Perfect!

HORACE (reading from Shakespeare)

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

(He stumbles about the stage raving on.)

HORACE (continuing)

Words, words, and more words! What good are they? Did words ever build a bridge? Or dig a mine? Do words build roads or railways? Do they conquer continents? Hell words don't even tell you what you want to know half the time! Work! Capital! *That* is what builds empires? Work not words is the backbone of progress. It takes working capital not art to build a great nation, to pull civilization out of the muck and slime of the primordial swamp, to make a man a *king*.

HORACE (continuing)

The architects of civilization have always been men of means, of power, of money, not words. Men of action—not pretty poets whose only work has been to exercise the mind and push a pen across a sheet of blank paper. Give me men of action, not actors pretending to be great men. Give me barons not bards who have nothing to offer but soliloquies of dark despair.

Art I tell you is nothing more than business by another name. Artists only practice their *art* out of a desire to accumulate wealth; it's no different for a businessman. We just don't consider ourselves corrupted when we succeed. And like the unsuccessful artist, we starve when we don't. When we fail, we are not afraid to call ourselves failures rather than martyrs or purists or worst of all *misunderstood*. The only measure of success in any endeavor is profit. If an enterprise makes money, it is a thing of beauty and a joy for—for as long as it continues to make money. That is the only criteria for good business or good art.

HORACE (breaking)

But *words*! What trivia! What tripe! What—truth? (A few beats.) Augusta—forgive me for I am but a man!

(BLACKOUT TO END THE SCENE.)

ACT II, SCENE VI

SCENE: OPENING NIGHT. LIGHTS
COME UP on BABY DOE in her dressing
room. She is wearing a dressing gown and
applying the final touches to her make-up. The
dark wig she will wear as Juliet is positioned
on a ceramic "head" on her dressing table.
There is a door upstage that leads into a
common hall.

Twenty minutes everyone!

WILDE (off)

(There is a KNOCK.)

Twenty minutes, Miss McCourt.

WILDE (off)

Thank you.

BABY DOE

(As BABY DOE completes her make-up,
there is another KNOCK.)

Yes?

BABY DOE

It's Walter—your Romeo.

WALTER (off)

I know who it is! What do you want?

BABY DOE

I was jist wonderin' 'bout where I kiss ya—

WALTER (off)

On the mouth Walter.

BABY DOE

I mean—*when* I kiss ya.

WALTER (off)

What were you wondering?

BABY DOE

Would ya mind if I did it—the *French* way?

WALTER (off)

If you dare, Walter, I'll bite your tongue off.

BABY DOE

Okay, okay, don't get sore. I was jist wonderin'. No offense intended.

WALTER (off)

None taken—so far, but don't push your luck, Romeo. Now get into character.

(Another KNOCK.)

REBA (off)

Break a leg, Lizzie!

BABY DOE

Thank you, Reba. You too.

(BABY DOE puts on the wig, stands back and looks at herself in the mirror. She is absolutely beautiful. WILDE KNOCKS and sticks his head in the door.)

WILDE

Oh, Madam, you are one of God's own angels—the most beautiful Juliet of our time, art personified in human flesh, like the mountains around us—a masterpiece of God's handiwork.

BABY DOE

Why thank you, Mr. Wilde.

WILDE

How do you feel?

Wouldn't you like to know?
BABY DOE

Don't tempt me, Madam.
WILDE

I feel nervous—but confident. I know what I must do.
BABY DOE

And you will be fine if you just simply—be! Simply let your presence fill the house and your reign in these mountains will be assured for perpetuity.
WILDE

(WILDE EXITS as BABY DOE takes the dress for her first scene from a hanger. There is another KNOCK.)

Yes?
BABY DOE

(ANOTHER KNOCK, LOUDER.)

Come in.
BABY DOE

(AUGUSTA ENTERS. She is dressed in black and is wearing a veil to cover her face. Once inside she removes the veil.)

Mrs. Tabor!
BABY DOE

May I have a word with you, Miss McCourt?
AUGUSTA

Fifteen minutes!
WILDE (off)

This really isn't a good time.
BABY DOE

I don't suppose there ever is a good time for this kind of thing. I'll be brief.
AUGUSTA

BABY DOE
Please—sit.
(AUGUSTA sits down on the edge of a chair.)
AUGUSTA
I don't believe we've ever been formally introduced.
BABY DOE
No, I don't think . . .
AUGUSTA
I am *Mrs.* Augusta Tabor.
BABY DOE
Yes, I know. (A beat.) I'm—Elizabeth McCourt.
AUGUSTA
Not Mrs. Harvey Doe?
BABY DOE
Not anymore.
AUGUSTA
Maybe not according to the State of Colorado, but your Church might view it otherwise.
BABY DOE
That is no concern of yours, Mrs. Tabor. (A beat.) You said you'd be brief. I have a show to put on.
AUGUSTA
I know that. That's why I'm here—this *show*. But before I get to that, may I ask you a simple question?
BABY DOE
If you do so quickly.
AUGUSTA (thinks, then)
Do you love my husband—Miss McCourt?
BABY DOE
Yes—unconditionally.
AUGUSTA
Are you quite certain?

BABY DOE

As certain as I am that the sun will rise above these mountains in the morning.

AUGUSTA

Hmmm. (A beat.) Why?

BABY DOE

Why do I love him?

AUGUSTA

Yes.

BABY DOE

I don't honestly know. He's certainly not the handsomest man in the country—

AUGUSTA

But he *is* one of the wealthiest.

BABY DOE

Of course—the money. That's what everyone thinks. (A beat.) Oh, I enjoy his lavish spending on me; I will not deny it. But that is not *it*. I know now that I would love him without the money and power. (A beat.) It's something else—the way he looked at me when we met. There was something there—like I knew him before, some hint of recognition and a feeling of attachment—that came from . . . somewhere else. A vague sense that we belonged together. You must have some idea of what I'm talking about. (A beat.) Why do you continue to love him—after all this?

AUGUSTA

Because a long time ago—there was something there for me to in that look.

BABY DOE

Mrs. Tabor, may I be perfectly frank with you?

AUGUSTA

If you can be perfectly frank, I would expect nothing less.

BABY DOE

To be honest, I have to admit that I came to Leadville for the specific purpose of—acquiring your husband—not to take him from you because from all reports your marriage was already over. You were in the State of Maine when I met him, and Horace was keeping the company of a good many "sporting" women.

AUGUSTA

You came here to *get* him?

Yes—but I failed.

BABY DOE

I don't see how you can say that!

AUGUSTA

I can say it because—rather than me getting him, he got me.

BABY DOE

I don't see what difference it makes.

AUGUSTA

It isn't something anyone can *see*, but it's something I can feel.

BABY DOE

And just what is it that you *feel*, Miss McCourt?

AUGUSTA

Elation—tempered with regret. Elation that I found my true love, and regret that it had to come at the cost of such pain to you.

BABY DOE

The elation obviously outweighs whatever pain you feel.

AUGUSTA

Yes. (A beat.) Still, it was never my intention to hurt you.

BABY DOE

How did you propose to—*acquire* my husband without doing so?

(There is a KNOCK. WILDE opens the door and sticks his head in.)

WILDE

Ten minutes Miss—Ohmygod! Oh my God! (A beat.) Forgive the intrusion, I'll just leave you two ladies alone to exchange pleasantries.

(WILDE EXITS.)

WILDE (weakly)

Ten minutes!

BABY DOE

Mrs. Tabor, you must have been aware that your marriage was over a long before I came onto the scene.

AUGUSTA

That's not true. Just because I didn't question how Horace—was satisfying his physical needs didn't mean our marriage was over. I must admit that I had grown weary of those kinds of conjugal duties, but I never for an instant stopped loving my husband. I just never considered that—those kinds of women posed any kind of a real threat to my marriage.

BABY DOE

For all your business sense, Mrs. Tabor, you have very little knowledge about affairs of the heart.

AUGUSTA

I didn't think we were talking about the *heart* in this case, Miss McCourt.

BABY DOE

No, I don't suppose we were. But men, you should know, have a hard time making a clear distinction between the two.

AUGUSTA

That being the case, I have no hope of ever competing with a woman of your youth and—physical charms.

BABY DOE

Nonetheless, Horace still has a great deal of respect for you, Mrs. Tabor.

AUGUSTA

Yes—respect. He told me. That's very comforting. (A beat.) But if that is the case, why then is he putting me through the humiliation of having to endure the spectacle of this show?

BABY DOE (thinks, then)

He's doing it for me. This show was my idea.

AUGUSTA

I beg your pardon?

BABY DOE

I'll be frank.

AUGUSTA

Please do.

BABY DOE

Mrs. Tabor—right or wrong—Horace and I wish to be married and to start a life of our own. I want to have a fine home, and I want to bear his children.

AUGUSTA

Oh . . .

BABY DOE

Since you have refused to give Horace a divorce, I saw no alternative but to publicly humiliate you—thinking that such an act would force you to take legal action. So *I* persuaded Horace to produce this show. It was not his doing.

AUGUSTA

Well—I can assure you of this, Miss McCourt: If you go on that stage tonight, it will be the ruin of us all. And I will never agree to a divorce. Never!

BABY DOE (thinks, then)

And if I don't?

AUGUSTA

What?

BABY DOE

If I don't go on—what will you do?

AUGUSTA

Why should I do anything?

BABY DOE

Because I'll be giving up my dream to be on the stage. (A few beats.) Mrs. Tabor . . .

AUGUSTA

If you don't go on . . . I'll let him go.

BABY DOE

Do I have your word?

AUGUSTA

You have my word.

BABY DOE (removing her wig)

Then I won't be needing this.

AUGUSTA
There's just one more thing.

BABY DOE
What?

AUGUSTA
I don't want to see Horace hurt. (A beat.) Promise me—that if you truly love him, you will never leave him, no matter what.

BABY DOE
You have my promise.

AUGUSTA
But that—that if Horace ever wants to come home . . . you will not keep him from doing so. Promise!

BABY DOE
I swear to you that if Horace wants to come back to you, I will let him go.

AUGUSTA
Thank you, Miss McCourt. You're—really quite different from what I expected.

BABY DOE
I can say the same of you. (A beat.) Now you must go. This is going to cause a great calamity.

(AUGUSTA pulls down her veil and EXITS just as HORACE ENTERS. He looks after her.)

HORACE
Was that—that—

BABY DOE
Your wife?

HORACE
Yes?

BABY DOE
Yes, that was Augusta.

HORACE
What in blazes was she doing here?

Sit down, Horace.

BABY DOE

Sit down. Sit down! I don't like the sound of that one bit.

HORACE

Sit!

BABY DOE

(HORACE sits.)

What's going on, Baby?

HORACE

Not me, I'm afraid.

BABY DOE

What?

HORACE (rising)

I'm *not* going on.

BABY DOE

The hell your aren't! They'll burn this place down—listen to 'em out there.

HORACE

(There is NOISE BUILDING IN THE BACKGROUND—CLAPPING, STOMPING, YELLING, ETC.)

I came to an agreement with Augusta.

BABY DOE

You came to an agreement with Augusta?

HORACE

Yes, that's what I just told you. Now calm down.

BABY DOE

Calm down! (A beat.) What—what kind of an agreement?

HORACE

BABY DOE

In exchange for not going on as Juliet, she will grant you a divorce.

HORACE

But—but—you didn't havta do that! We had 'er right where we wanted 'er.

BABY DOE

It wasn't where I wanted her.

HORACE

Yes, it was! This whole thing was *your* idea. It was working.

BABY DOE

I know. But I made a mistake, and I changed my mind.

HORACE

Changed your mind! You can't change your mind!

BABY DOE

I believe that's my prerogative. I don't want to be immortalized on the stage after all. I just want to be your wife.

HORACE

They'll burn this place to the ground.

BABY DOE

Then you can build another—only bigger.

WILDE (off)

Places everyone!

(KNOCK then WILDE ENTERS.)

WILDE

My god! You're not dressed!

HORACE

She's not going on.

WILDE (screams)

Not going on! My god! Lizzie's not going on!

(The OFF STAGE NOISE IS GROWING LOUDER. The rest of CAST APPEARS at

the open door, all in costume and ready to perform.)

Lizzie's not going on?

REBA

No, I made a promise.

BABY DOE

What the hell we gonna do?

FALSTAFF

(WILDE grabs Juliet's wig.)

There is only one thing to do, Sir. Give me that dress, Madam. The show must go on!

WILDE (dramatically)

(WILDE pulls on the wig.)

O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou, Romeo.

WILDE

(WILDE begins to rip off his clothes and change into the dress.)

Does this mean I havta kiss Mr. Wilde?

WALTER

(NOISE BUILDS AND THEN FADES ALONG WITH THE LIGHTS AS BRIDGER ENTERS and walks to the podium, which is LIT BY A SPOT.)

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts . . .

BRIDGER

Jacques—As You Like It, Act II, Scene IV.

Augusta done jist as she promised: She give Horace a divorce, and him and Baby Doe was married in 1883. Baby Doe kept her promise too: She never left Horace—not even after the Silver Crash of '93 an a world of investments gone bad left him penniless and

BRIDGER (continuing)

wheeling slag for three dollars a day in a mine he once owned. Irony, I reckon, you could call it. Or cruelty. Maybe even justice. I ain't no judge of such things as that. Horace died in '99—appendicitis, leaving Baby Doe with nothing but two daughters and no means of support. And it got a lot worse, but jist let me tell ya that there was never another man in Baby Doe's life. Jist hope—hope that silver would come back like Horace told her on his deathbed and she'd be rich again. That's the hope she clung to for 36 years. Augusta died in '95, a rich woman—millionaire in fact—but with a broken heart. Baby Doe died in '35—1935 with her heart in one piece, but her mind wandering off out there somewhere between the high peaks of the mountains she'd come to love.

The story of Baby Doe and Horace and Augusta will continue to be told in these parts because theirs is a story of enduring love. And I figure it's in their story where Baby Doe will find the immortality that she was lookin' for on the stage. For her voice will continue to be heard along with those of Desdemona and Hamlet and Othello and Beatrice and Benedict and Ophelia and all the rest, filling Western skies with the only thing of *real* value to pass through these mountains.

The gold is all gone; silver's pretty much done. Beaver, timber, game all but disappeared. But the real gold remains: our language, our voices, our stories—told with words jist like the tales spun by the Bard on another continent and some 400 years ago. The great oral tradition of storytelling lives on all across the American West, no longer in the voices of pioneers, mountain men, and explorers, but in the voices of ordinary folks in places like Boulder and Ashland, Santa Fe, Austin, Nevada City, and San Diego. Yessir, Shakespeare is alive and well in those and a hundred other places. Listen carefully any summer night and you'll hear the voices of the past echoing in the present and hopefully into the future, entertainin' and enlightin' generations yet to be—or maybe not to be.

(TAPE CUTS FROM SHAKESPEAR'S
PLAYS BEGINS SOFTLY AND BUILDS.)

BRIDGER

That's the thing about story tellin': the stories live on fer a long time after the teller of the tale has turned to dust. I figure that's why they call it art.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN AS HE tucks the
volume of Shakespeare under his arm and
EXITS. TAPE BUILDS, THEN FADES AS
STAGE TURNS DARK. END OF PLAY.)