JESS: Thank you, Daniel, and good evening, friends. [*Hugging the* Complete Works *book too lovingly, he begins professorially, as if lecturing a class of students.*] William Shakespeare: Playwright, poet, actor; Stratford's proudest flower, transplanted from the heart of the English countryside to bask in the warmth of London's literary greenhouse. A man who, despite the ravages of male pattern baldness, planted the potent seed of his poetical genius in the fertile womb of Elizabeth's England. There it took root and spread through the lymphatic system of western civilization, until it became a giant carbuncle of knowledge and understanding on the very organ of our consciousness.

DANIEL: [*At a loss for words.*] Wow.

JESS: And yet, how much do we intellectually flaccid members of the twenty-first century appreciate the plump fruit of Shakespeare's loins?

DANIEL: Yeah—how much?

JESS: Let's find out, shall we? [*To the light booth.*] Bob, may I have the house lights, please?

[*The house lights come up.*]

Now, you are a theater-going crowd, obviously of above-average literary intelligence, and yet—if I may have just a brief show of hands, how many of you have ever seen or read any play by William Shakespeare? Any contact with the Bard whatsoever, just raise your hands . . . [*Almost everyone raises a hand.*]

[JESS *takes two slow steps backward, then rushes to* DANIEL *in a panic.*]

JESS: [*Sotto.*] We're screwed.

DANIEL: Why?

JESS: I think they know more than we do.

DANIEL: But you're an eminent Shakespeare scholar!

JESS: No, I'm *pre*-eminent.

DANIEL: Then be preëminent.

JESS: Right. [*Regaining his confidence,* JESS *comes back downstage. To audience.*] Okay. How many of you have ever seen or read *All's Well That Ends Well*?

[*Perhaps one-third of the audience raises their hands.* JESS *turns to* DANIEL, *and they exchange a thumbs-up.*]

JESS: [*To audience, confidently.*] Well, that seems to be separating the wheat from the chaff rather nicely. Let's see if we have any *super*-eminent Shakespeare scholars in the house. Has anybody ever seen or read *King John*? *King John,* anyone?

[ADAM, *sitting in the audience, raises his hand.*]

You have, really? Have you seen it, or read it?

ADAM: Well . . . I downloaded it.

JESS: Would you mind telling us what it's about?

ADAM: It's . . . about a hunchback?

JESS: Would you stand up, please? [ADAM *rises.*] My friends, *ecce homo.*

ADAM: Whoa, not cool!

JESS: Judging by your obvious lack of fluency in Latin, may I presume that you have not matriculated?

ADAM: Well, not today.

JESS: My friends, look at this sad individual. Abandoned by our educational system, hopped up on empty gigabytes of pirated text. And now, look at the person sitting next to you. Go ahead! Look at them! Do you recognize the same vapid expression? The same pores, clogged with the acne of intellectual immaturity? Or do you perhaps see—*keep looking*!—do you see there a longing, a desperate plea for literary salvation?

ADAM: Can I sit down?

JESS: *No!* [*Getting really worked up.*] You stand there before us as a living symbol of a society whose capacity to comprehend, much less attain, the genius of a William Shakespeare has been systematically stunted by *Star Wars* sequels,

ravaged by *Real Housewives*, and bankrupted by the babbling blather of Big Brothers and Bachelorettes.

[JESS *is now ignoring* ADAM, *who resumes his seat.* JESS *is now in full-on fire-and-brimstone mode.*]

My people, I say to you, toss out your tawdry television to savor the splendors of the sonnet! Exchange the isolation of the iPhone for the idylls of the iamb! Imagine a world where manly men wear pink tights with pride!

DANIEL: Hallelujah!

JESS: A brave new world, where this book [*Raising* The Complete Works *to the heavens.*] is found in every hotel room in the world!

DANIEL: Amen!

JESS: This is my dream, friends, and it begins here, tonight. Join us in taking the first steps down the path to literary salvation . . . by texting SHAKESPEARE IS GOD to 37154. Standard rates apply. Now on with the show, and may the Bard be with you!

[*The house lights fade as* DANIEL *shakes* JESS*'s hand.* JESS *returns the book to* DANIEL *and exits.*]

DANIEL: [*Putting the book back on the bookstand.*] Those of you who own a copy of this book know that no collection is complete without a brief biography of the life of William Shakespeare. Providing this portion of the show will be the third and final member of our company. Please welcome to the stage Mr. Adam Long.

[ADAM *comes to the stage, carrying a smartphone. As he shakes hands with DANIEL, he drops his phone. He scrambles to pick it up and starts swiping madly to find his place on the phone.* DANIEL *retires to his corner.*]

ADAM: [*Greets the audience.*] Hey, y'all. [*Indicating the phone.*] Okay, um . . . [*Still swiping.*] I Googled Shakespeare's life so I could tell you all the stuff he did . . . As you can see, I'm not an audience member. I totally punked you. [*Finds place on phone.*] Okay . . . sorry, new phone. [*Holds up phone for audience to see.*] The new [*Insert name of latest flagship smartphone.*] from T-Mobile, a truly tremendous device—