

PRETTY SHREWD

Inspired by William Shakespeare's
The Taming of the Shrew

by Clive Duncan

 vet_schooltours

www.schooltours.at

© Vienna's English Theatre Schooltours
(Vienna's English Theatre Gastspiel GmbH)
Neudeggergasse 14/17
A-1080 Wien

Coverbild KI generiert

Author's Note

Pretty Shrewd is based on William Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (an early comedy written around 1592). The main storyline, which I've used, is that of Petruchio (Pete) who sets out to *tame* Katherine (Kate) who is a *shrew* (dictionary definition: *a bad tempered or aggressively assertive woman*). Like all "romantic comedies", they start out disliking each other but end up falling in love. In *Pretty Shrewd* I have reversed the roles of Kate and Pete. Whilst *The Taming of the Shrew* is still an amusing play, the idea of a man *taming* a woman makes for uncomfortable watching in the present day (*taming* is what we do to animals and often involves cruelty), but a woman challenging a man, especially one with fixed male values like Pete, opens up possibilities. I have made Pete a stereotypical male and it is important to say that not all men think in the same way that he does, but the aim is that in challenging these entrenched values, you may think about your own views of what it is to be male or female.

Why is this important? In the liberal democratic society that is Western Europe, there is still inequality between men and women. There is a recognised gender pay gap – in many professions women earn less than men for doing the same job. Women are under-represented in board rooms, politics and science, whilst music, sport and the arts are dominated by men. Women are still clearly 2nd class and change is slow. The rise of the *#metoo* movement at the start of the decade grew out of the abuse women were subjected to in Hollywood and beyond, and whilst it gives a welcome platform for women to call out sexual abuse in the workplace, it doesn't stop it from continuing. In the UK I've noticed, over the past few years, the word *misogynist* (dictionary definition: *a person who dislikes, despises or is strongly prejudiced against women*) has come into regular use. It's not a new word, but its frequent use is. Behaviour such as wolf-whistling, criticising a female's appearance before performance, low expectations of females in a prominent position, expecting people to conform to gender-typical roles (i.e. *women do the housework*) can all be called misogynistic. Naming such behaviour this way is good because, apart from calling it out, it allows for reflection on the part of the offender and, hopefully, it leads to education. Attitudes towards gender are deep-rooted and introduced to us the moment we leave our mothers' wombs and pop into a pink, blue or gender-neutral coloured baby-grow. Our views are formed very early on by the environment around us which we, when we are older, either a) accept after consideration and live comfortably in our skins, b) reject and find values which suit us better, or c) accept without consideration, and struggle to justify those views. This last is Pete; his values are not his own and he can only feel "right" if they are shared by others, therefore he'll impose them on others. Luckily for Pete, he is challenged and made to think about what he really values and so, is able to change his position. Which means

we can have the happy ending a *romcom* demands. But when attitudes go unchallenged, they become normalised and injustices are allowed to continue.

A few years ago, I spent a happy summer face-painting in an English country park. This isn't a scientific study but most females between the age of 4 and 12 chose to be butterflies, unicorns, pink rabbits, pussycats or have flowers painted on them. Males of the same age group chose lions, tigers, wolves, snakes and T-Rexes. This is good, if this is what the children wanted to be; they were expressing inner feelings in an outwardly colourful way. What concerned me was the girls who asked to be tigers, cheetahs and wolves were persuaded to be butterflies or fairies by their guardians. The boys who wanted butterflies or flowers were told by their guardians that those were for girls and they should choose wolves or snakes instead. I wondered what made their guardians so fearful – it was only face-paint, after all, and easily washed off. But strong messages, which would last longer than the face-paint, were being sent to these children: girls aren't tigers, boys aren't butterflies. A woman asked me, "Are you the face-painter?" I replied that I was. "But you're a man!" she cried. "Face-painters are women!" I told her that my grizzled appearance was just an example of my brilliant face-painting skills and that really, underneath it all, I was a black and white penguin. She wasn't convinced, but she did allow me to face-paint her daughter – as a pink and purple butterfly. If gender politics is present in something as innocent as face-painting, is it any wonder that progress is so very slow in achieving male/female equality?

So, choose a face-paint. What would you like to be? A wolf? Pink rabbit? Tiger? Is that who you think you are? Or, what you'd like to be? Or – what others think you should be.....?

Clive Duncan

Characters in the Play:

Kate

Bianca - Kate's best friend and in love with Luke

Pete - Bianca's brother

Luke - Pete's best friend and in love with Bianca

Worksheet available online
www.schooltours.at

PRETTY SHREWD¹

by Clive Duncan

Scene 1 - Pete's Café

At the back of the acting area is a small counter² with cups and plates. In front of the counter is a café table with chairs. A tall stool³ is next to the counter. There are chalk boards behind the counter with "Today's Specials" written on them. To one side is a coat stand. At the back is a large poster reading – One night only! Pete and Luke - stunning singing duo at Battersea⁴ Folk Club.

Bianca is behind the counter drying cups. Pete, with his guitar, and Luke sit at the table, they sing "The House of the Rising Sun". During the song Kate comes into the café and sits on the stool at the counter. Bianca serves her with a coffee.

Pete stops singing before the end of the song.

PETE: Too slow! Pick it⁵ up – (he clicks his fingers to the beat)...

LUKE: Ok, ok...

PETE: "Mother, tell your children, not to do what I have done..."

LUKE: I was singing that.

PETE: No, you were singing (very slowly) –*Mo-ther-tell-your-children-not-to-do-as-I-have-done*

BIANCA: Chill out, Pete – it's just a song.

PETE: Er, no! – This is the semi-final of the Folk Fest Competition.

LUKE: So, chill out, it's just a competition.

PETE: With a recording contract for the winners, plus £10,000. And a lot of free advertising. This is the rest of our lives and you're telling me to chill out...

LUKE: I was joking. Bianca said – chill out it's only a song, so I said...

PETE: Luke – when you have to explain a joke, it's not that funny.

KATE: You were playing a little fast, Pete.

There is a moment as Pete and Luke register⁶ what Kate has said.

PETE: I'm sorry?

Luke motions⁷ to Kate to stay out of it...

KATE: It's a soulful lament, full of regret. The way you were playing it sounds as if he's angry with his mother.

¹ fairly clever

² a table or area used for serving food/drink

³ backless chair

⁴ area in South London

⁵ i.e. the rhythm

⁶ realize, understand

⁷ gestures

PETE: Is this a social visit, Kate, or will you be paying for that coffee?

BIANCA: Pete!

KATE: Only trying to help.

PETE: Do I look like⁸ I need help?

KATE/LUKE/BIANCA: Yes.

PETE: What I need is people to keep this (*points to his nose*) out of⁹ my business, and this (*points to his mouth*) shut – especially Miss Smartarse¹⁰, there (*points to Kate*).

BIANCA: Don't be so rude¹¹!

PETE: Is she a paying customer?

Kate points to the card reader, which Bianca holds up and Kate taps her mobile phone on it...

KATE: I am now.

PETE: (*pretending to be friendly*) I'm sorry but the café is now closed. (*He pours her coffee into a paper cup*). Perhaps you'd like this as a takeaway.

BIANCA: Come on through, Kate. We'll go upstairs to my room.

Kate goes behind the bar.

PETE: Hey! You're supposed to be minding¹² the café.

BIANCA: You just closed it. See you later.

Bianca and Kate go.

LUKE: Why do you give Kate a hard time?

PETE: Kate is a friend of my sister's – she's no friend of mine.

LUKE: Yeah, but you've got to admit – she's a bit of all right¹³...

PETE: A bit of all right?

LUKE: You know – good looking, clever, funny...

PETE: And doesn't she know it? I wish Bianca wouldn't hang around with her – she's a bad influence.

LUKE: If you had your way, you'd lock Bianca in a cupboard.

PETE: I'm her brother – it's my job to protect her.

LUKE: She's young, she needs a bit of space¹⁴.

PETE: She's seventeen, she's studying for her exams – what space does she need?

LUKE: What does any seventeen-year-old need – fun, friends ...boyfriends...

PETE: Over my dead body¹⁵! Whilst she lives under my roof there will be no boys.

⁸ Does it seem that...

⁹ idiom – not to interfere in

¹⁰ 'clever pants'

¹¹ cheeky, impertinent

¹² taking care of, looking after

¹³ (colloq. for) attractive, sexy

¹⁴ freedom

¹⁵ Not if I can stop it

LUKE: So, it's good that she spends time with Kate – it keeps her occupied.

PETE: Can we rehearse, please? The next stage of the competition is tonight and it's important...

LUKE: Recording contract, £10,000, and a lot of free advertising – I know.

PETE: It's more than that; do you think I want to run a café for the rest of my life?

LUKE: I thought you liked running the café...

PETE: Grumpy¹⁶ customers, working all hours, doing the books¹⁷ when we're closed, the cleaning, preparing food for the next day – and then there's the fridge...

LUKE: The fridge?

PETE: Always breaking down.

LUKE: Get a new one.

PETE: Money...

LUKE: So that's why you want to win the competition - ten thousand pounds - get a new fridge.

PETE: No! I want the recording contract. Wouldn't it be great if we could earn a living singing and playing? Making albums, playing concerts, playing on TV shows. That's why we've got to win tonight, so we can get to the final, and then – who knows...

LUKE: How long have we been playing together?

PETE: Four years.

LUKE: In all that time, have I ever let you down?

PETE: Er...

LUKE: ...often?

PETE: How many times is often?

LUKE: What I mean is – you can trust me.

PETE: (*uncertain*) Yeah – I know.

LUKE: So, let's rehearse! You think it should be faster? Count me in...

PETE: 1 – 2 – 3 – 4...

Bianca runs in.

BIANCA: Pete! The refrigerator! All the ice cream is melting!

PETE: We have got to win that competition!

Pete hurries off. Bianca waits till he's gone and then rushes to Luke. They kiss.

BIANCA: I've missed you.

LUKE: I've missed you, too. (*Gently putting her down*) But we should be a little bit careful.

BIANCA: You don't love me anymore!

LUKE: Of course I do! It's just that Pete is in the other room.

Bianca throws her arms around Luke.

¹⁶ annoyed, in a bad mood, difficult

¹⁷ preparing the accounts

BIANCA: We should tell him.

Luke breaks away.

LUKE: You're mad!

BIANCA: You *don't* love me.

LUKE: You know what Pete's like.

BIANCA: His sister, his best friend – together. What could make him happier?

LUKE: A new fridge! Listen, if you'd just had the conversation I've had, you'd understand. "No boyfriends for Bianca whilst she's living under my roof".

BIANCA: This is 2026!

LUKE: Not in Pete's Café - we're back in the 'sixties' - the fifteen sixties!

BIANCA: I don't like being secretive¹⁸ about it, sneaking off¹⁹ to a pub or the cinema so we can be together. I want to be open – and if Pete doesn't like it... well, what can he do?

Luke hugs her from behind.

LUKE: Ok, we'll tell him. But not today. We'll tell him once this singing competition is over – win or lose.

Pete returns, screwdriver in hand...

PETE: The fuse²⁰ is blown...

Luke picks Bianca up and squeezes her.

LUKE: Heimlich manoeuvre²¹!

Bianca plays along and starts to cough. Luke puts her down and slaps her on the back.

BIANCA: Something stuck. A sweet. Went down the wrong way!

PETE: Be careful – one disaster a day is enough for me. We've got some fuses, somewhere.

Pete puts the screwdriver on the countertop and disappears beneath it. Bianca takes the opportunity to kiss Luke. He tries to fight her off. Pete jumps up again...

PETE: Got one! Er...

BIANCA: Thanks so much – you saved my life.

LUKE: Ha! It was nothing – I'd have done the same for ... for Pete!

PETE: Do you know anything about fuses? This is the third one I've changed this week.

Bianca is blowing kisses to Luke from behind Pete's back.

LUKE: It's for safety, when the fuse blows, the kisses are too strong...

PETE: Kisses?

¹⁸ private, hidden

¹⁹ going quietly and secretly

²⁰ Sicherung

²¹ a first-aid procedure for someone who is choking on something they have eaten. It involves grabbing the person from behind and putting sudden strong pressure on their stomach.

LUKE: Current! Electrical current²² – the flow is too great, ‘cos something in the fridge isn’t right, so it ... stop it! – Stops it ... from working by blowing the fuse.

PETE: You don’t know anything about fuses.

LUKE: Not much, no.

Pete sees Bianca.

PETE: What are you doing?

She changes the action to fanning²³ herself.

BIANCA: Whew! Hot – all that coughing.

PETE: I hope this lasts longer than the last fuse did.

Pete goes. Bianca and Luke collapse in each other’s arms with laughter.

BIANCA: Heimlich? Quick thinking.

LUKE: Have you got a death wish? If he catches us...

Pete is back.

PETE: Forgot the screwdriver...

Bianca pushes Luke into a waltz.

BIANCA: And right together, left together, right together...

PETE: What are you doing?

BIANCA: The waltz!

LUKE: The tango!

PETE: I mean why are you fooling about? There’s a big puddle²⁴ under the fridge, Bianca – get a mop²⁵ and bucket. Luke – you could help too...

BIANCA: On my way!

LUKE: I’ll tune the guitar...

Pete picks up the screwdriver and goes.

BIANCA: This is why we have to tell him.

LUKE: After the competition.

They kiss again. This kiss grows. Pete returns. He stops and watches them. After a moment...

PETE: You must think I am so stupid.

Bianca and Luke spring apart.

BIANCA: It’s not what you think...

LUKE: I can explain...

PETE: I don’t want to know. How long have you ... has this ...?

LUKE: Three months.

PETE: Behind my back? You’ve betrayed me²⁶!

LUKE: We fell in love, Pete, we didn’t plan it.

PETE: With my baby sister.

²² flow

²³ (with her hand)

²⁴ pool of water

²⁵ (used for cleaning floors with water)

²⁶ broken my trust

BIANCA: I'm seventeen!

LUKE: We were going to tell you – we were waiting for the right moment.

PETE: *(to Bianca)* And you don't mind, what people will say?

BIANCA: People?

Kate appears behind the counter.

PETE: The neighbours, the customers ... the café's Instagram comments will be full of filthy innuendo or brainless gossip.

BIANCA: You're being ridiculous. Nobody's going to do that! Luke's your best friend – if he's good enough for you, he's good enough for me. Who cares about what anyone else thinks?

PETE: I do! I don't want my sister splattered all over social media – everyone suggesting that you've thrown yourself at the first person who's come along.

BIANCA: Again – ridiculous!

PETE: You can do so much better than Luke!

LUKE: Thanks!

KATE: When you bought your guitar, Pete, didn't you try out a few?

PETE: Try out a few? This is my sister we're talking about.

KATE: I was talking about Luke.

LUKE: Thanks!

PETE: And what has it got to do with you?

KATE: No more than it has to do with you. Bianca's nearly eighteen; she should be allowed to make her own mistakes in life, not have someone do it for her.

LUKE: Thanks.

PETE: I can't believe you could do this to me – either of you. Luke – my best friend. My sister! Well, best friend no more. Out! I never want to see you again. Don't come back – you are barred from²⁷ this café!

Pete picks up Luke's jacket and thrusts²⁸ it at him.

LUKE: What about the competition, the recording contract, the new fridge...?

PETE: I could never sing with someone who could stab me²⁹ in the back.

Traitor³⁰! Out!

Luke storms off.

PETE: *(to Bianca)* As for you...

BIANCA: Go to my room?

PETE: I've got a fridge to fix – then we'll talk.

KATE: Who needs a fridge when you're around?

Pete goes. Bianca collapses at the table and cries.

KATE: Your brother, Bianca, is a male chauvinist pig³¹!

²⁷ not allowed in

²⁸ pushes it violently

²⁹ kill me with a knife

³⁰ a betrayer, someone who breaks trust

³¹ a man who is a prejudiced bastard

BIANCA: What am I going to do? I'll never see Luke again.

KATE: Oh, I'm sure he'll be back.

Luke returns.

LUKE: Right! Where is he?

KATE: Told you.

LUKE: We'll sort this out – man to man!

BIANCA: No! You'll get hurt.

LUKE: Oh thanks.

KATE: Fighting won't help.

LUKE: It'll make me feel better. What do you suggest?

KATE: We've got to persuade Pete to³² change his mind.

BIANCA: Oh, simple! Can a leopard change its spots³³?

KATE: Pete's a pussycat³⁴ – not a leopard.

LUKE: You don't know him – once he's made his mind up about something...

BIANCA: And he has to be right. About everything. All the time.

LUKE: Even when he's wrong.

KATE: Poor thing – some men are like that. Never mind, I'll soon sort him out.

BIANCA: Ha! You think you can get round Pete?

KATE: In four easy stages.

BIANCA: Oh? And they are?

KATE: Ok – step one: confuse him. To soften him up.

LUKE: Confuse Pete? How?

KATE: Tease him, infuriate him³⁵, frighten him, shock him. And then, step two: surprise him.

BIANCA: What do you plan to do?

KATE: If I told you, it wouldn't be a surprise. Next, step three: I'll make him feel calm and relaxed, that everything is all right, that he's on top of the world...

LUKE: Nice... And step four?

Kate claps her hands.

KATE: Squash³⁶ him flat!

BIANCA: That sounds a bit harsh³⁷.

KATE: Do you want to be able to see Luke again? Ten pounds says I can do it.

LUKE: You're on! It'll be worth ten pounds to get Bianca back and if it doesn't work, I'm ten quid up³⁸.

BIANCA: Thanks!

³² convince Pete of the need

³³ Can he change his basic nature?

³⁴ someone who is soft and easy to deal with

³⁵ make him extremely angry

³⁶ crush

³⁷ hard, brutal

³⁸ (colloq.) pounds (Sterling); I will have made £10.

KATE: But you have to do what I tell you. Luke, go before Pete finds you here, it'll just make him worse. *(She pushes him out of the café.)* Don't come back until we tell you to.

Luke pushes past Kate to give Bianca a farewell kiss. Kate prises them apart³⁹. Luke goes.

KATE: Go! Bianca, stay in your room, pretend you're unwell. I need time alone with Pete.

BIANCA: I'm supposed to be minding the café.

KATE: That's why I'm here.

Bianca goes. Kate tidies up the café and then sees Pete's guitar. She picks it up and strums⁴⁰ a few chords. She plays and sings "Katy Cruel". Through the song, Pete comes in to listen. When Kate "notices" Pete she stops.

KATE: Was I disturbing you⁴¹?

PETE: I was looking for Bianca.

KATE: In her room. Although it might be best to leave her alone for a while – she's upset. I hope you don't mind me playing your guitar...

PETE: She should be upset – going out with Luke behind my back.

KATE: Better someone you know and trust than a total stranger.

PETE: That's not the point. Bianca and Luke did not tell me about ... it ... because they knew it was wrong. If it's wrong, they shouldn't have been doing it.

KATE: A man of principle...

PETE: It's important to have values⁴².

KATE: I agree; so long as you're honest and live by your principles...

PETE: I am – I do.

KATE: ...but are values worth it if they cost too much?

PETE: What do you mean?

KATE: You've lost your best friend, your sister and your chance in the Folk Fest competition. Expensive!

PETE: If you're not prepared to pay the price – your values are worthless...

KATE: We might be able to save something out of this...

PETE: Don't ask me to change my mind about Bianca and Luke.

KATE: I meant the competition...

PETE: But I can't go by myself. I've entered the competition as a duo, the judges would never accept it.

KATE: So, you need a new partner.

PETE: The competition is tonight – is someone going to walk into the café who likes folk music and can sing?

KATE: Someone already has. *(She strums a chord.)* Ta daa!

³⁹ uses force to separate them

⁴⁰ moves her hand up and down across the strings

⁴¹ breaking your concentration

⁴² moral qualities