BEAU JEST — PLAY SYNOPSIS

A romantic comedy in two acts by James Sherman. Prepared for actors considering an audition.

Playwright	James Sherman
Genre	Romantic comedy / farce
Premiere	Victory Gardens Theater, Chicago (1989); later Off-Broadway
Setting	Sarah Goldman's apartment in Chicago
Cast	Six actors (four men, two women)
Structure	Two acts; single interior set

The Premise

Sarah Goldman is a bright, warm Jewish kindergarten teacher in Chicago. She is in love with Chris Kringle, a successful, good-natured advertising executive who is not Jewish. Her parents, Abe and Miriam, want nothing more than to see her settle down with a nice Jewish man. Unable to face their disappointment, Sarah invents a Jewish boyfriend: a surgeon named David Steinberg.

When her parents insist on meeting David, Sarah hires a man from an escort service to play the part. The man who arrives, Bob Schroeder, is a struggling actor, and he is not Jewish either.

Act One

Bob throws himself into the role, improvising a Jewish background largely from memory of a stage production he once appeared in. To Sarah's astonishment, he is a hit. Abe and Miriam adore "David," and Sarah's brother Joel, a psychologist, finds him intriguing. Each success forces Sarah to book Bob again, and the lie grows. Meanwhile Chris, kept in the dark about the family dinners, grows puzzled by Sarah's evasions.

Act Two

The deception reaches its comic peak when the family gathers for a Passover seder and "David" is expected to lead it. Bob must bluff his way through a ritual he barely knows, while Sarah struggles to keep the story intact. Over the course of the masquerade, Sarah and Bob discover a genuine attraction, and Sarah has to confront what she actually wants rather than what will please everyone else. The truth eventually comes out, and the play resolves with the family's affection intact and Sarah choosing love on her own terms.

Themes and Tone

- Family expectations versus personal happiness
- Identity, cultural heritage, and assimilation

- The comedy of deception and performance (an actor playing a man playing a role)
- Warmth over cynicism: the humor is affectionate, never mean-spirited

Notes for Auditioning Actors

- The play is an ensemble piece built on timing and escalating farce; listening and reacting matter as much as lines.
- Characters must stay grounded and sincere; the comedy works because everyone wants something real.
- Expect physical comedy, rapid exchanges, and a seder scene that requires confident handling of ritual business.

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