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Dramatic Publishing

William Shakespeare's
ROMEO AND JULIET

Freely adapted
by
RUTH PERRY



Dramatic Publishing
Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

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ROMEO AND JULIET

A Play in One Act
For 11 Men, 3 Women
Small Parts and Extras*

CHARACTERS

LORD CAPULET head of the house of Capulet
LADY CAPULET his wife
JULIET his daughter
TYBALT Lady Capulet's nephew
NURSE
SAMPSON] servants to the Capulets
GREGORY]
LORD MONTAGUE head of the house of Montague
LADY MONTAGUE his wife
ROMEO his son
BENVOLIO Lord Montague's nephew
BALTHASAR servant to Romeo
ABRAHAM servant to the Montagues
PRINCE prince of Verona
PARIS a young nobleman
MERCUTIO a friend of Romeo
FRIAR LAURENCE] Franciscan monks
FRIAR JOHN]
OFFICER OF THE WATCH (WATCHMAN)
PEASANT WOMAN
TWO CHILDREN] citizens of Verona
THEIR MOTHER]
TWO GIRLS]

SAMPSON (*continuing a conversation as they enter*). Lord Capulet, our noble master, hath once again forbidden us to brawl.

GREGORY. I shall obey—(*Grins and nudges SAMPSON.*)
—in reason. I'll take no slurs from any Montague!

SAMPSON (*looking offstage L*). Hist! Draw! Here comes one of that cursed house!

(*Enter L ABRAHAM.*)

GREGORY (*edging forward, hand on sword, lusting for a fight*). Art with me?

SAMPSON. Quarrel and I'll back thee, only—make *him* begin it!

GREGORY (*drawing his sword*). I'll frown at him as I pass by.

SAMPSON. I'll bite my thumb at him, which is disgrace if he bear it. (*Brushes against ABRAHAM as he approaches C and bites his thumb sneeringly.*)

ABRAHAM (*surprised*). Do you bite your thumb at me, sir?

GREGORY (*arrogantly*). Do you quarrel, sir?

ABRAHAM (*peaceably*). Quarrel, sir? No, sir.

GREGORY. But if you do, sir, I am for you. I serve a better man than you do—my Lord Capulet!

ABRAHAM (*aroused at last*). I serve Lord Montague!
There is none better!

GREGORY. You lie!

SAMPSON. Draw if ye be men!

(*There is the clash of sword on sword. The combatants are C. The MOTHER OF THE CHILDREN enters DL in*

a rush. She snatches each CHILD by a hand, sparing an angry glance at the quarreling SERVANTS, and the three exit DL. The SERVANTS ignore this incident and continue their fight.)

(Enter BENVOLIO DL and TYBALT DR.)

BENVOLIO *(crossing LC and intervening by placing his drawn sword between the two)*. Part, fools! Put up your swords! Your noble masters have forbidden brawling. *(SAMPSON and GREGORY fall back RC, ABRAHAM withdraws LC.)*

TYBALT *(swaggering up DRC with drawn sword, speaking contemptuously)*. Hast thou drawn sword against these base-born men? Turn thee, Benvolio, look upon thy death!

BENVOLIO *(DRC, reasonably)*. I do but keep the peace. Tybalt, put up thy sword.

TYBALT *(DRC, scornfully)*. What! Drawn, and talk of peace? I hate the word, as I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee. Have at thee, coward!

(BENVOLIO and TYBALT fight. The SERVANTS, overawed, look on. Enter L OFFICER OF THE WATCH.)

OFFICER OF THE WATCH *(roaring it out)*. Citizens, strike! Beat down these bold destroyers of the peace! Down, Capulets! Down, Montagues! *(He is ignored and backs up UC.)*

GREGORY *(shouting)*. Strike, Tybalt! Beat him down!

ABRAHAM. Up, Montague! Up, Benvolio!

(Enter R old CAPULET and LADY CAPULET. They move RC. SAMPSON and GREGORY move DR.)

CAPULET *(rather absurd in his long garment and hair flowing down on his shoulders, feeble but still eager for a fight)*. What noise is this? Give me my long sword. Ho!

LADY CAPULET *(still in her late twenties, speaking tartly)*. Thou need'st a crutch more than a sword, in sooth!

CAPULET. My sword, I say!

(Enter UL old MONTAGUE and LADY MONTAGUE. They move LC. ABRAHAM moves DL.)

CAPULET *(struggling to break free and drawing a short sword)*. Old Montague is come, and flourishes his blade in spite of me!

MONTAGUE. Thou villain, Capulet! *(Starts for him.)*

LADY MONTAGUE *(also much younger than her husband; holding him back by clutching his coattails or with her arms firmly around his waist and bracing herself)*. Thou shalt not stir one foot to seek a foe!

(Enter R the two GIRLS. They give one terrified look at the enraged gentry and scoot L and exit.)

ABRAHAM *(shouting encouragement as BENVOLIO forces TYBALT back a step or two)*. Up! Ho! Finish him, noble Benvolio!

(Enter PEASANT WOMAN UR and PRINCE ESCALUS and his ATTENDANT L at the same moment. Shocked at the scene, neither is aware of the other. The PEASANT

WOMAN, terrified, clutches her basket to her ample bosom and runs, charging directly into PRINCE ESCALUS as he advances C and speaks.)

PRINCE. Rebellious subjects, enemies to peace—(*The PEASANT WOMAN collides with him. ATTENDANT hastily steadies him. PEASANT WOMAN gives one horrified glance at him and falls to her knees, holding up her basket as if offering it to him.*)

PEASANT WOMAN. Spare me, Lord!

PRINCE (*annoyed at the indignity*). Begone! (*Waves her away. She scrambles to her feet and exits L. PRINCE realizes no one has heard his voice in the clamor and raises it a bit.*) Will they not hear? What ho! You men—(*Louder.*)—you beasts! On pain of torture, throw your weapons down! And hear the sentence of your movéd prince! (*Suddenly realizing that it is their PRINCE who speaks, the two LORDS drop their swords. The SERVANTS follow suit. ALL look abashed at the angry PRINCE.*) Three civil brawls, bred of an airy word, by thee, old Capulet and Montague, have *thrice* disturbed the quiet of our streets. If ever you disturb our streets again your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace. (*To his ATTENDANT.*) Record this—my decree. (*ATTENDANT hastily notes it down.*) And now, on pain of death, all men depart. (*Looks sternly at them a moment as if memorizing each face, then turns abruptly and exits L, followed by ATTENDANT. After this dread pronouncement there is a beat of stunned dismay. ALL look at each other uneasily and begin exit. TYBALT, who has been listening with barely repressed fury, lips compressed, snatches his sword from the ground and exits R in a rush.*)

CAPULET (*glancing uneasily after him; to GREGORY*). Attend him. I like not his violent mood. (*GREGORY exits R after TYBALT as does the OFFICER OF THE WATCH.*)

LORD MONTAGUE (*to ABRAHAM who has joined him*). Fellow, be about your tasks. (*ABRAHAM nods and exits L. LADY MONTAGUE murmurs a word to LORD MONTAGUE and they join BENVOLIO DLC. He has picked up his sword and is looking at it ruefully, the would-be peacemaker who gets punished with the belligerents! The three pantomime conversation.*)

CAPULET (*detaining SAMPSON*). This night I hold an old accustomed feast. Go, sirrah, trudge about through fair Verona; find these persons out. (*Gives him list.*) And to them say: "My house and welcome on their pleasure stay." (*To LADY CAPULET, offering his hand.*) Madam—(*They exit R.*)

SAMPSON (*moving RC, turning the paper about, puzzled*). Find out whose names are written here! Am I a clerk this scrawl to read? I must to the learned with all speed! (*Exits R.*)

LADY MONTAGUE. Kinsman, hast thou seen Romeo to-day? Right glad am I he was not at this fray!

BENVOLIO. Madam, an hour before the break of day, out early walking, did I see your son. Towards him I strode, but he was 'ware of me and stole into the covert of the wood.

LORD MONTAGUE (*bored*). Many a morning hath he there been seen.

BENVOLIO. My noble uncle, do you know the cause?

LORD MONTAGUE (*urbanely*). What would you? 'Tis July. Summer rules in state, lovers abound and he who hath no mate, mopeth in solitude.

LADY MONTAGUE. My lord, our Romeo is but seventeen. He is too young by far to brood on love. (*BENVOLIO covers a laugh with a cough.*)

LORD MONTAGUE (*smiling reminiscently*). Is he indeed too young? At his age I'd found willing maids enough—and thought of little else!

LADY MONTAGUE (*primly*). We live in modern days with modern ways and seventeen is deemed too young to marry.

BENVOLIO (*glancing L*). See, here he comes; so, please you, step aside. I'll know his grievance or be much denied.

(*Enter L ROMEO.*)

LORD MONTAGUE. Come, madam, let's away. (*Exits R with LADY MONTAGUE.*)

ROMEO (*joining BENVOLIO LC*). Good morrow, cousin. Dost thou know the hour?

BENVOLIO. 'Tis new struck nine.

ROMEO. Ah me, sad hours seem long. Was that my father that went hence so fast?

BENVOLIO. It was.

ROMEO (*turns L, as if to go*). Farewell, my coz.

BENVOLIO (*detaining him*). Soft, stay awhile, I would have talk with thee. (*They move U and converse in pantomime.*)

(*Enter R CAPULET and COUNT PARIS in conversation. They pause DC.*)

CAPULET (*frowning*). These frequent brawls dishonor my fair name and make me fear the anger of the Prince—all for that ancient grudge 'gainst Montague!

PARIS (*bored but polite*). Of honorable station are you both, and pity 'tis you lived at odds so long. (*Eagerly*.)

But now, my lord, what say you to my suit?

CAPULET. But saying o'er what I have said before: My daughter is too young. (*BENVOLIO and ROMEO have discontinued their conversation and are frankly listening*.)

PARIS. Younger than she are happy mothers made.

CAPULET. And too soon marred are those so early made. (*PARIS makes a gesture of frustration and disappointment and CAPULET puts a friendly hand on his arm, remonstrating*.) 'Tis also well that you choose carefully, lest having chosen rashly you repine, finding some other doth Juliet outshine. (*PARIS shakes his head in impatient denial*.)

ROMEO (*softly repeating the name as if intrigued by it*).
Juliet—

CAPULET. At my poor house, look to behold this night all the admiréd beauties of Verona. So love her most whose merits most shall be: my daughter Juliet or some other she. Come—(*CAPULET and PARIS exit L arm in arm*.)

ROMEO (*coming C with BENVOLIO*). Who was yon caittiff who so humbly begged old Capulet for his daughter's hand?

BENVOLIO. A wealthy lord, Count Paris, favored of our prince. Much favored of the ladies.

ROMEO. So fair a suitor—(*Thoughtfully*.) Yet Capulet put him off—(*Repeats the name musingly*.) Juliet—(*Eagerly*.)
Hast seen this maiden?

BENVOLIO. Nay.

ROMEO. Then let us see Juliet, this star who doth outshine the fairest of Verona.

BENVOLIO. How may that be?

ROMEO. Why—we'll don masks, knock, enter and attend the masquerade.

BENVOLIO (*shocked*). Enter the Capulet halls?

ROMEO. We mean no harm. We'll greet fair Juliet and take our leave.

BENVOLIO (*intrigued*). So be it!

ROMEO (*musingly*). Yet my mind misgives me—some consequence yet hanging in the stars shall bitterly begin his fearful date with this night's revels—(*His mood shifts to lightheartedness.*) But he that hath the steerage of my course, direct my sail! (*Takes BENVOLIO's arm.*) On, Benvolio! (*They exit L, striding away, animated and smiling.*)

(*NURSE enters R. She has a card reading CAPULET'S HOUSE under her arm. She is flurried and can't find it. She searches in both pockets, vainly, then finds it and places it on stand. She speaks to two SERVANTS off-stage.*)

NURSE. Place them here. (*Indicates spot UC.*)

(*SAMPSON and GREGORY enter R with two high-backed armchairs. SAMPSON exits R. GREGORY adjusts position of chair to suit NURSE who is autocratic and taps her foot. SAMPSON enters R with candelabra which he hands NURSE. She puts the candelabra on the bench—now serving as a sideboard. NURSE motions dismissal to the SERVANTS and they exit R. Enter R LADY CAPULET. She sits in the armchair UC.*)