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Dramatic Publishing

ROMEO AND JULIET
or
**The Old “You-Know-I-
Really-Love-You-But-My-
Father-Really-Hates-You” Blues**

Adapted from Shakespeare’s play
by
NANCY LINEHAN CHARLES



Dramatic Publishing
Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(ROMEO AND JULIET or The Old "You-Know-I-Really-Love-You-But-My-Father-Really-Hates-You" Blues)

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ROMEO AND JULIET
or
**The Old “You-Know-I-Really-Love-
You-But-My-Father-Really-Hates-You” Blues**

A Play in One Act
For 4 Males, 4 Females, 21 either gender

CHARACTERS

FEMALES

Juliet
Nurse
Lady Capulet
Lady Montague

MALES

Romeo
Paris
Mr. Capulet
Mr. Montague

EITHER GENDER

Three Storytellers (Jessie, Nicky, Loren)
Friar Lawrence
Prince Escalus
Benvolio
Tybalt
Mercutio
Abram
Gregory

Sampson
Balthasar/Servant/Voice
Newsperson
Cameraperson
Two Assistants
Fighters (at least 6, but as many as you like—includes
Abram, Gregory, Sampson)
Townspeople (go for it)

It is important to understand that a great number of the characters can be played either by girls or boys. Shakespearean names should not be changed; girls will be playing males as males.

Costumes for this show ought to be expressed basically in two colors: Red (Juliet's family, the Capulets) and Blue (Romeo's family, the Montagues).

ROMEO AND JULIET
or
**The Old “You-Know-I-Really-Love-
You-But-My-Father-Really-Hates-You” Blues**

AT RISE: Bare stage. Two groups of teenagers or pre-teens (the FIGHTERS) start walking aggressively toward each other. They should be on opposite sides of the room, if possible, one group dressed in red, the other in blue. They shout insults across the audience at one another.

BLUE 1
Hey, you.

RED 1
Who you talkin' to?

BLUE 1
You. I'm talkin' to you.

RED 2
You yellin' at my man here?

BLUE 2
Yeah. That's what he's sayin'.

(This stuff can get as mindless as you like. You can ad lib forever. Finally, JESSIE, a storyteller, steps out from R. Her character name should actually be the name of the person who's cast—male or female. She speaks to the audience.)

JESSIE

Don't anybody panic. This isn't a real fight.

(NICKY [storyteller 2] steps out from L.)

NICKY

No. This is like...ya know...a virtual fight.

(LOREN [storyteller 3] steps out from R.)

LOREN

Trust me...if this were real, you'd see tons of grownups all over these guys.

JESSIE

No, but see...this is how Bill Shakespeare starts off a story about true love.

NICKY

Just to let ya know that hate's gonna do its best to rain on the parade.

This is how he says it.

(A roving NEWSPERSON with trench coat and microphone walks with purpose to center stage. There's a CAMERAMAN with her. TWO ASSISTANTS fix her hair.)

She looks directly into camera. She speaks with appropriate gravity.)

NEWSPERSON

Two households, both alike in dignity
(In fair Verona, where we lay our scene),
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny...
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean...

(The FIGHTERS get up to the stage and begin circling each other. The NEWSPERSON dons a pith helmet and moves with caution through the gang of FIGHTERS. She holds the mike up to a BLUE FIGHTER.)

NEWSPERSON

Can you tell our audience why you're angry?

(The FIGHTER questioned shrugs his shoulders ["I dunno"]. NEWSPERSON approaches a RED FIGHTER.)

NEWSPERSON

And you, sir. What is your reason for engaging in this street brawl?

RED FIGHTER *(with a Brooklyn accent)*

Hey, lady. We do what we're told. Our families tell us to hate, we hate. No questions. *(He grabs the mike from her, looks at the camera and says:)* Details at eleven.

(All FIGHTERS laugh at his joke, then immediately go back to snarling at one another.)

JESSIE

OK. Just hold it a sec. Rewind the tape. Wha'd you just say?

(If the FIGHTERS can, they make movements as though they're going backwards. So does the NEWSPERSON. If someone can make a rewind sound, that's even better.)

RED FIGHTER

Our families tell us to hate, we hate.

(All freeze.)

JESSIE *(to the audience)*

Ever hear anything sillier? Somebody's mad at somebody...

NICKY

Tells Uncle Morty to hate that person...

LOREN

And pretty soon, the whole clan is involved...

JESSIE

...and it goes on for years. Till, honestly, no one even remembers who stepped on whose toe first.

NICKY

The big guy, Billy Shakespeare, was so good at this. My science teacher would say he knew how to dissect the underbelly.

LOREN

Yeah. Like runaway ambition in Macbeth, or jealousy in Othello.

JESSIE

In this case, the two fighting families are Romeo's family—the Montagues...

(All three MONTAGUES [dressed in blue] step from backstage and bow.)

NICKY

And Juliet's family—the Capulets.

(All three CAPULETS [dressed in red] step from backstage and bow.)

NICKY

Yeah...thanks for the curtsy, guys. But ya might try being polite to your enemy.
Just look what happens when hate runs riot. Go on, guys.
Do your worst.

(GREGORY to SAMPSON, [red fighters—Capulets], indicating the blue gang members [Montagues].)

GREGORY

...The house of MONTAGUE!!!!

SAMPSON

Quarrel. I will back thee.

GREGORY

I will frown as I pass by, and let them take it as they list.

SAMPSON (*suddenly inspired*)

I will bite my thumb at them, which is disgrace to them if they bear it.

JESSIE (*to audience*)

Oh, brother! He's saying biting your thumb at someone is the same as insulting them.

NICKY

Well...some things never change. Even today, people get upset over some stupid sign. Aren't people silly????

JESSIE

And by the way. Don't anybody get crazy over there being girl fighters. In this production, it's kinda cross-gender.

LOREN

I mean, in Shakespeare's day, men played ALL the parts. Women weren't allowed.

JESSIE

So it's payback time. Girls are playin' some guy parts. Chill.

(SAMPSON bites his thumb in the direction of the MONTAGUE GANG.)

ABRAM (blue) (*deeply offended*)

Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?

SAMPSON (red)
I do bite my thumb, sir.

ABRAM
Do you bite your thumb AT US, sir?

SAMPSON (*aside to GREGORY*)
Is the law of our side if I say “Ay”?

NICKY
Fighting is exhausting, isn't it? 'Cause, of course, nobody wants to get into trouble over it.

GREGORY
No.

SAMPSON (*to the MONTAGUES*)
No, sir. I do not bite my thumb at you, sir, but I bite my thumb, sir.

(They confer with their own gang members as to what to do. They form two huddles. They whisper loudly. Periodically one head pops up to look at the other gang. Finally...)

GREGORY (red)
Do you quarrel, sir?

ABRAM (blue)
Quarrel, sir? No, sir.

SAMPSON (red)
Draw if you be men.

(They draw knives. BENVOLIO enters, dressed in blue.)

BENVOLIO
Part, fools!

JESSIE
This is Benvolio...Romeo's cousin.

BENVOLIO *(drawing his sword)*
Put up your swords. You know not what you do.

(TYBALT enters, dressed in red, drawing HIS sword.)

TYBALT
Turn thee, Benvolio.

LOREN
This is Tybalt, Juliet's cousin. They call him the King of
Cats. Cool name, huh?

TYBALT
Look upon thy death.

BENVOLIO
I do but keep the peace. Put up thy sword,
Or manage it to part these men with me.

TYBALT

What, drawn and talk of peace? I hate the word
As I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee.

(They fight. The NEWSPERSON stands center and finishes her newscast.)

NEWSPERSON

From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life.
(She turns to the CAMERAPERSON.)
How's my hair?

CAMERAPERSON

Perfect.

NEWSPERSON

That's a wrap. LUNCH!!!

(The NEWS TEAM runs off, as the FIGHTERS brawl. People come from everywhere shouting "Down With the Montagues; Down With the Capulets!!")

NICKY *(like a scolding parent)*

Oh great!!! Now the whole town's awake.

(MR. MONTAGUE and MR. CAPULET run in with their wives. Each family wears its color. The men are both old and have huge, outdated swords. They try to fight each other but weary of it very fast.)

JESSIE

So here we have Mr. Montague and Mr. Capulet...the guys who started the whole fight, YEARS ago, who are WAAAAY too old to be doing this sort of thing.

(From the back of the theatre, someone shouts.)

VOICE

Prince Escalus!!!!

(Everybody screeches to a halt, looks to the back of the house, and gasps.)

LOREN

Here's the big cheese in this town—a PRINCE already—and he's HAD it with this brawling. All rise, please. Bow your heads as the Prince comes by. Ladies? A slight curtsy would not be out of the question.

(She demonstrates the curtsy. The audience gets to its feet. If they don't, the STORYTELLERS need to force them by prodding. PRINCE ESCALUS comes from the back of the house to the stage. All the FIGHTERS stop and go down on one knee when they see him coming.)

PRINCE ESCALUS

Rebellious subjects, enemies to peace.

Three civil brawls

Have thrice disturbed the quiet of our streets...

If EVER you disturb our streets again,

Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace.

Once more, on pain of death, all men depart.

(Everyone starts to skulk away to offstage. The PRINCE goes back up the aisle.)

LOREN

He can do it too. He's the ruler and what he says, goes. Ya know, here we get to vote on stuff. Not in Verona!

(The MONTAGUES and BENVOLIO have remained behind.)

MONTAGUE *(to BENVOLIO)*

Who set this ancient quarrel?

LADY MONTAGUE *(to BENVOLIO)*

O, where is Romeo? Saw you him today?
Right glad I am he was not at this fray.

(ROMEO is seen, upstage, wearing blue, walking sadly.)

BENVOLIO

See where he comes. So please you, step aside.
I know his grievance.

MONTAGUE

Come, Madam, let's away.

(The MONTAGUES exit.)

BENVOLIO

Good morrow, cousin.

(He goes into conference with ROMEO.)

JESSIE

OK, see, Romeo has been moping around a lot lately and his cousin wants to know what's the deal? Turns out... well, I know this play is called *Romeo and Juliet*, but he hasn't met her yet and at the moment, he's head over heels in love with someone named Rosaline.

LOREN

Teenagers. My sister is just like that. Emotions are all over the place. Can anyone relate?

BENVOLIO

Tell me in sadness, who is that you love?

ROMEO

She hath forsworn to love.

NICKY

I guess Rosaline won't be his girlfriend.

BENVOLIO

Be ruled by me. Forget to think of her.

ROMEO (*desperately*)

O, teach me how I should forget to think.

BENVOLIO

By giving liberty unto thine eyes.

Examine other beauties.

ROMEO

Farewell. Thou canst not teach me to forget.

(ROMEO races out with BENVOLIO in pursuit. MR. CAPULET comes on with COUNTY PARIS.)

NICKY

The plot thickens. Here comes Juliet's father, with a guy who wants to marry Juliet. Boy!! They married 'em off early back then. How old is Juliet?

(JULIET walks onto the stage. She curtsies to the audience.)

JESSIE

How old would you say? Fourteen? Fifteen? *(The audience yells out ages.)* If ya said thirteen, you'd be right.

PARIS

Now, my lord, what say you to my suit?

CAPULET

My child hath not seen the change of fourteen years.

LOREN

See?

CAPULET

Let two more summers wither in their pride
Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride.

JESSIE

Oh, yeah. Let her marry at the ripe old age of fifteen. But back then, ya know, girls didn't go to college or work at Starbucks or anything.

LOREN

We've come a long way, baby.

PARIS

Younger than she are happy mothers made.

NICKY

Today we'd call that "children having children." But remember, this is olden times.

CAPULET

Woo her, gentle Paris, get her heart.
This night I hold an old accustomed feast
Whereto I have invited many a guest
Such as I love; and you among the store,
One more, most welcome, makes my number more.
(To a SERVANT.) Go, sir, find those persons
Whose names are written here.

(He hands the SERVANT a long scroll. CAPULET leaves, talking to PARIS. The SERVANT goes through the audience, softly calling out names: Di Niro, Sinatra, Nostradamus, Romano, Linguini, Chicken Cacciatori, etc. [If there are actors in the play or in the community with Italian surnames, it would be fun to put their last names into this list].)

NICKY

So, it's party time at the Capulets!! Romeo better get a move on or Paris is gonna win the prize.

(Enter ROMEO and BENVOLIO. CAPULET's SERVANT approaches them with his party list.)

SERVANT

I pray you, sir, can you read?

ROMEO *(winking at BENVOLIO)*

Ay, if I know the letters and the language.

(ROMEO grabs the list and begins to read to himself. BENVOLIO looks over ROMEO's shoulder.)

ROMEO

A fair assembly. Whither should they come?

SERVANT

My master's...the great, rich Capulet, and, if you be not of the house of Montague, I pray come and crush a cup of wine.

(The SERVANT grabs his list and exits.)

BENVOLIO

At this same ancient feast of Capulet's
Supps the fair Rosaline whom thou so loves...

JESSIE

Uh-oh. They're gonna crash the party.

BENVOLIO

Compare her face with some that I shall show,
And I will make thee think thy swan a crow.

ROMEO

One fairer than my love? The all-seeing sun
Ne'er saw her match since first the world began.

BENVOLIO

Tut...

JESSIE

Tut. I like that word, tut. Kinda like...NOT!!!

BENVOLIO

Tut, you saw her fair, none else being by.

ROMEO

I'll go along.

(They exit.)

NICKY

So...Romeo and his Montague pals are going in disguise to
a party at the Capulets.

JESSIE

Sounds like trouble to me. Not to mention Juliet's parents
are fattening her up for the kill.

NICKY

Gussyng her up to meet Paris: the guy THEY want her to
marry.

JESSIE

AT THIRTEEN. REMEMBER???

NICKY

Yup. Paris will be at the party at her father's invitation. Things are movin' fast. Come on, Romeo.

LOREN

Just so you know, the girl had very little to say about it.

NICKY

Yeah. If she didn't totally, like, throw up when she met him, and he had a lot of money and land and stuff...

JESSIE

...well, it was sort of a done deal.