

ROMEO & JULIET DIE IN THE END

By Christopher E. Engler

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ISBN: 978-1-61588-522-0

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SYNOPSIS: When a narrator struggles with the opening prologue of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the Bard himself enters the picture to teach the narrator just exactly how his legendary story should be told. Not to be outdone, this modern narrator adds the 21st century context (and comedy) needed so that our audience can understand the Bard's eternal genius. Every plot beat remains intact in this trivia-filled family-friendly hour-long one-act version of *Romeo and Juliet*. Part authentic Shakespearean text/part Ren-fair ridicule, this adaptation is the perfect entry into the Bard's world for students and audiences alike. With cheeky, ironic what-ifs to serious tonal shifts, this play flips and turns, taking the crowd on a wild ride from hilarious start to tragic finish.

DURATION: 60 minutes.

TIME & SETTING: A Medieval town.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(14-22 either; extras)

- THE NARRATOR (m/f).....An amateur actor trying their best to bring the Bard's words to life. Because they guide the audience through several tonal shifts during the play, this role takes a lot of metacognition. They also should have no troubles with ego because they first appear to be a "bad" actor. *(55 lines)*
- THE BARD (m/f).....Full of swagger, the Bard commands the stage with poise and charisma because they are in fact Shakespeare himself! Because he "directs" on the fly, lots of metacognition is needed for this role. *(62 lines)*
- ROMEO* (m/f).....Cute, lovesick, and a little dopey. Comedic timing, emotional range, and athleticism are needed. *(112 lines)*

- JULIET (m/f) Pretty, headstrong, and defiant. There is some comedic irony in her role later in the script. She must have emotional range. *(82 lines)*
- BENVOLIO* (m/f) Romeo's best friend and cousin, this person prefers to make peace but will draw swords if needed. Athleticism is needed. *(51 lines)*
- LORD CAPULET (m/f) Juliet's dad. Must be able to feign affability and show "real" anger and heartbreak. *(56 lines)*
- PARIS* (m/f) The Prince's kind but somewhat geeky cousin. He's the nice guy who finishes dead last... literally. This actor can't be afraid to be thought of as undesirable even though they are kind. *(27 lines)*
- MERCUTIO* (m/f) Another cousin of the Prince. A full range is needed for this dynamic, intense character who can glide from dirty jokes to anger to overt violence all within moments. *(51 lines)*
- THE FRIAR (m/f) Old and sage-like with their kind advice. *(22 lines)*
- TYBALT* (m/f) Unironic without a whiff of comedy; a bit one-dimensional. Lots of athleticism is needed for the fight scenes. *(16 lines)*
- THE NURSE (m/f) Bawdy, loud, and funny, she also looks out for the well-being of Juliet. She must also show genuine concern when things get rough. *(43 lines)*
- THE PRINCE (m/f) Regal and commanding, the Prince rules the city. *(16 lines)*
- LADY CAPULET (m/f) Juliet's mom. No comedy but sincere. *(27 lines)*
- LORD MONTAGUE (m/f) Romeo's dad. Must show anger and sincerity. *(3 lines)*
- THE APOTHECARY (m/f) A ratty, rough peddler of cheap goods. *(3 lines)*

LADY MONTAGUE (m/f).....Romeo's mom. No comedy but sincere.
(3 lines)

THE CAPTAIN (m/f)The head of the citywatch, this person
leads the Prince's army. (8 lines)

SAMPSON* (m/f).....A hired hand from the house of Capulet.
(1 line)

GREGORY* (m/f)A hired hand from the house of Capulet.
(1 line)

ABRAM* (m/f).....A hired hand from the house of
Montague. (Non-Speaking.)

THE CITIZEN (m/f)A functional walk-on who fears violence
in the street. (1 line)

THE MESSENGER (m/f).....A functional walk-on role. (2 lines)

* Characters who will need fight choreography

CASTING NOTE: Productions have the right to gender-bend any role as they see fit.

OPTIONAL DOUBLING

- MERCUTIO can be double-casted as The APOTHECARY
- TYBALT can be double-casted as THE APOTHECARY
- THE APOTHECARY can be double-casted with MERCUTIO, SAMPSON, GREGORY, ABRAM, CITIZEN, MESSENGER, or NARRATOR
- LADY MONTAGUE can be double-casted as THE NARRATOR
- THE CAPTAIN can be double-casted with THE BARD
- SAMPSON can be double-casted with THE NURSE, THE MESSENGER, or THE FRIAR
- GREGORY can be double-casted with THE NURSE, THE MESSENGER, or THE FRIAR
- ABRAM can be double-casted with THE NURSE, THE MESSENGER, or THE FRIAR
- THE CITIZEN be double-casted with THE FRIAR or THE NARRATOR

- THE MESSENGER can be double-casted with SAMPSON, GREGORY, ABRAM, or THE NARRATOR

PRODUCTION NOTES

SCRIPT CHANGES: Because a lot of comedy is contemporary and much of this play is tongue-in-cheek, productions have the right to update lines to drive home the joke.

SCRIPT FORMAT NOTE: some scenes feature sub-scenes. Because not every actor is needed for the entirety of a scene, divisions have been made to make rehearsal scheduling easier.

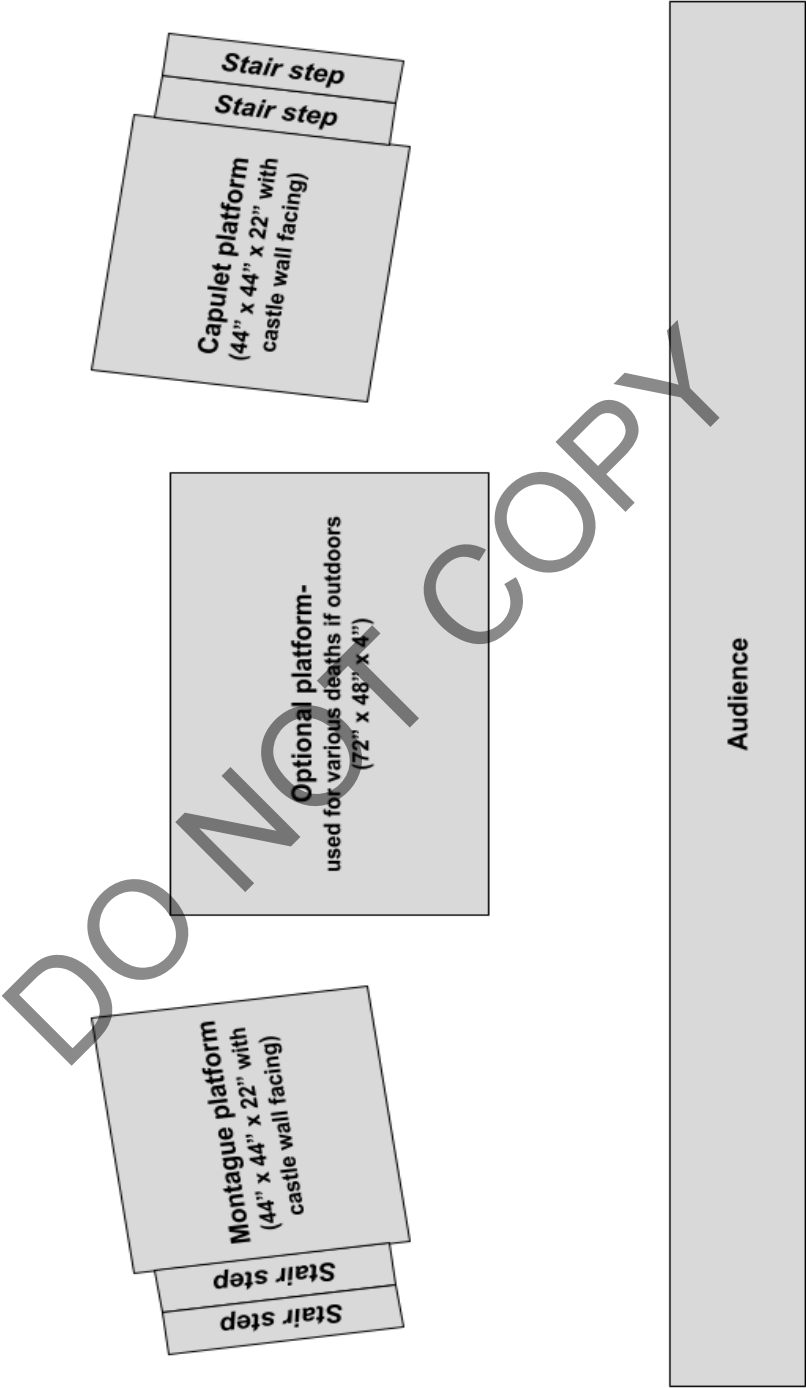
GENDER NOTE: Inclusion and equity is important, so please know that the playwright has given you the full right to explore gender as you see fit. In the original production, several roles were gender neutral or genderbent. Do what is best for your troupe.

MUSIC: This play contains suggestions for using musical works (either in part or whole). Heuer Publishing LLC has not obtained performing rights for these works. The direction of such works is only a playwright's suggestion, and the play producer should obtain such permissions on their own through ASCAP, BMI, or the U.S. copyright office.

SET/STAGE DIRECTIONS

The set is symmetrical, comprised of two castle-like rampart platforms equal in size and height (the Capulet's upstage left and the Montague's upstage right). An optional middle platform could sit slightly upstage center, acting as both a literal middle-ground when appropriate and as a way to add a little height to the actors during key death scenes. Please ensure plenty of downstage space for swordfighting.

Measurements below are from the original performance but serve only as suggestions. Please take into account your own stage's space and directorial vision when designing your set. As long as the "two households [are] both alike" visually, it will work. The Capulet rampart will double as the balcony later.



AUTHOR'S NOTE

The following script was written as an introduction to Shakespeare and his language. This breezy staging jumps from ironic and cheeky to desperately romantic to dead serious... all within the timeframe of one hour. This contrast may seem jarring but works quite well in reality. The biggest difficulty may be the stage-fighting, but that can be remedied through simplified choreography.

Although scenes are given numbers, there should NOT be any breaks in the action. The set is fixed with two castle-esque platforms on opposite sides of the stage; these platforms can be as big as you wish, but only two characters share a platform at any given time. Other than this, the stage is empty. Light cues and other stage directions are mere suggestions.

PROPS

- ☐ various Medieval weaponry
- ☐ party invitations
- ☐ masquerade masks
- ☐ torch
- ☐ party goblets
- ☐ drink tray
- ☐ flowery plant
- ☐ Tybalt's letter
- ☐ whetstone (painted sponge)
- ☐ gloves for Tybalt
- ☐ potion bottles
- ☐ flowers
- ☐ Romeo's letter
- ☐ Romeo's dagger
- ☐ Juliet's dagger

PREMIERE PRODUCTION

ROMEO AND JULIET DIE IN THE END premiered in October of 2021 at Harlem High School in Machesney Park, IL during the school's first outdoor Shakespeare festival. Nearly 40 students learned sword fighting and fight choreography starting in July in preparation for this event. The festival brought in over 500 people over two days, reviving the school's theater program after a long year of Covid lockdown restrictions. Student Directed by Payton Rogers, with the following cast and crew:

NARRATORZoe Juliano
 ROMEO.....Angelo Galindo
 BENVOLIO.....Alia Moran
 MERCUTIOSeven Schoenherr
 THE FRIAR.....Thaddeus Skarr
 LORD MONTAGUE.....Calissa Chappell
 LADY MONTAGUELucy Axe
 ABRAM.....Kylee Boyle
 THE PRINCEPayton Rogers
 THE BARD/CAPTAIN.....Olivia Frieden
 JULIETKlaudia Ahmer
 TYBALTTrenton Hammond
 PARIS.....Star Wheeler
 NURSE.....Gabby Willson
 LORD CAPULETTyler Myers
 LADY CAPULET.....Cierra Wichman
 SAMPSONGiancarlo Cardenas
 GREGORYGabby Williams
 MESSENGER/CITIZEN/FIGHTERChloe Doner
 APOTHECARY/SERVANT/FIGHTERDaniel Rouleau
 EXTRA FIGHTERS/DANCERSCamille Pearse & Serena Borum

STUDENT DIRECTOR: Payton Rogers

STAGE MANAGER: Elizabeth Taylor

CREW: Kali Hicks, Nathan Kyriazopoulos, Izzy Smith, Olivia Wells

PROLOGUE

AT START: *A lone NARRATOR enters, a bit nervous. The narrator looks to the crowd, gulps, and begins an overly-dramatic speech, earnestly but poorly overemphasizing iambic pentameter.*

NARRATOR: Two HOUSE-holds BOTH a-LIKE in DIG-ni-TEE... In FAIR Ve-RO-na WHERE we LAY our SCENE... From AN-cient GRUDGE break TO new MU-ti-NEE...

A line or two into the narrator's speech, a Medieval BARD sneaks in behind the NARRATOR and watches curiously. As the NARRATOR continues the speech, the BARD also looks out to the audience with a questioning eye.

NARRATOR: Where CI-vil BLOOD makes CI-vil HANDS unCLEAN. From FORTH the FA-tal LOINS of THESE two FOES a PAIR of STAR-crossed LOV-ers TAKE... THEIR... LIVES...

The NARRATOR'S pantomimed actions grow bigger and bigger until the NARRATOR "takes their life" on stage by lying down and dramatically faking a death. The BARD gives a look to the audience, awkwardly leads a clap that ironically says, "Get a load of this guy."

BARD: *(To the audience.)* Do we clap for this? Is that what we're doing now? *(Turns to the NARRATOR.)* What are you doing? *(Beat, then louder.)* Hey, narrator guy, what are you doing?!

NARRATOR: *(Peeking an eye.)* I'm dead. Don't kill the moment.

The BARD shakes his head in disappointment. Then...

BARD: Get up.

NARRATOR: What?

BARD: Get up! If you're going to do this show, you're going to do it right.

NARRATOR: *(Steps up, breaking character.)* But I am doing it right. This is not just any show. This is... *(Reverent.)* Shakespeare! Ever hear of him?

BARD: (*Sneaks a suspicious look to the audience, then.*) I'm familiar with his work, yes.

NARRATOR: Then you know his plays are (*Back into parody Shakespeare.*) over dramatic, filled with long, over-ee-NUNC-i-a-ted speeches about the deepest meanings of life and love.

BARD: Like I said, I'm familiar, but you're still doing it wrong.

NARRATOR: (*Offended.*) Wha-What!?

BARD: Your diction beats the brain. We speak clearly not (*Imitating.*) be-CAUSE he WRITES it SO... (*Returns to normal.*) but because people out there need to hear you... And you don't need to act out every word. Let your emotions give the weight to the scene.

NARRATOR: Okay... But what about all the iambic pentameter and the poetic life lessons they made me analyze in school?

BARD: Shakespeare is a genius to be sure, but the play's the thing. The story always comes first. Waxing on about war, life, revenge, and ambition is all a labor lost if you don't keep the story moving.

NARRATOR: Wait! How is it you know all of this stuff? You act like you knew the guy or something.

BARD: Know him? I am him.

NARRATOR: No...

BARD: Try me.

NARRATOR: Where were you born?

BARD: (*Laughs at the simple question.*) Stratford-on-Avon.

NARRATOR: (*Now quickfire back and forth.*) When?

BARD: April 1564.

NARRATOR: First play?

BARD: Henry the sixth: part one.

NARRATOR: Wife's name?

BARD: Anne Hathaway.

NARRATOR: Wait, really?

BARD: (*Shrugging.*) ... yeah...

NARRATOR: That's weird... (*The BARD shrugs; beat.*) How many sonnets did you write?

BARD: Hundreds.

NARRATOR: Can you be more specific?

BARD: I never counted!

NARRATOR: (*Catching him.*) Ha! Every Shakespeare fan knows Shakespeare only wrote 154 sonnets.

BARD: 154... that you've found.

NARRATOR: (*Skeptical.*) All right. If you are who you say you are, then show us how it's done, (*A little shade.*) Bill.

BARD: All right (*A little arrogant to the audience.*) That was the plan.

NARRATOR: What's that supposed to mean?

BARD: Well, no one wants to sit through two hours of (*Over acting and pantomiming.*) "To BE or NOT to BE!"

NARRATOR: (*A bit hurt.*) I'm trying my best.

BARD: And for that, I applaud the effort, but step aside.

NARRATOR: Or what?

BARD: Or I shall be much denied.

NARRATOR: Ooo, that was good.

BARD: (*Shrugs.*) I have a gift.

SCENE 1

The lights dramatically change as the cast enters: MONTAGUES from SR; CAPULETS from SL. The BARD takes the high spot on the SR platform as something like a Medieval version of "Gangster's Paradise" begins.

BARD: (*To the audience.*) Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ear! Now is the time for tales, and we invite you to gather near. Shall we begin again?

The BARD snaps his fingers. The cast then instantly strikes a dramatic pose: a Renaissance-style tableaux freeze of angry CAPULETS and MONTAGUES on opposite sides of the stage. The MONTAGUES are stage right, and the CAPULETS are stage left. The BARD hops down from the platform and walks through the stage-wide freeze of characters.

BARD: *(Epic but natural for the charismatic bard.)* Two households both alike in dignity in fair Verona where we lay our scene. *(LORD CAPULET SL and LORD MONTAGUE SR step forward, giving one another the stink eye from across the stage.)* From ancient grudge break to new mutiny where civil blood makes civil hand unclean. *(ROMEO and JULIET lovingly meet center stage palm-to-palm.)* From forth the fatal loins of these two foes... A pair of star-crossed lovers take their lives. *(Their admiration turns to fear.)* This is now the two hours traffic of our stage! *(The BARD separates ROMEO and JULIET.)* Strike drum!

Lights change, breaking the cast from their freeze. Most of the cast exit except for BENVOLIO, SAMPSON, GREGORY, ABRAM, TYBALT, and EXTRA FIGHTERS.

SAMPSON: *(Challenging.)* Draw, if you be men, Capulet dogs!

SAMPSON, GREGORY, ABRAM, and others swashbuckle. TYBALT chuckles at the amateurs. BENVOLIO separates the fighters before anyone gets hurt, and the fight comes to a standstill.

BENVOLIO: *(Stepping in with sword drawn.)* Part fools! You know not what you do.

GREGORY: Look, it's another Montague man. We know who he serves.

BENVOLIO: Yes, I am a Montague, but we all serve a higher Lord who desires peace in these streets, so I suggest we all put our weapons down before the Prince has our heads.

The two sides retreat for a moment, but then TYBALT steps center, calmly challenging BENVOLIO who also has retreated SR.

TYBALT: *(To SAMPSON.)* What are thou drawn among these heartless hinds? *(Calling.)* Turn thee, Benvolio... *(Draws sword.)* and look upon thy death.

BENVOLIO: I do but keep the peace.

TYBALT: Peace? I hate the word as I hate hell... and all Montague... and thee!

TYBALT lunges with his sword, starting another fight. A passing CITIZEN enters as ABRAM kills SAMPSON; SAMPSON falls at his feet.

CITIZEN: Oh my... *(Yells while running offstage, concerned.)* Call the city watch! Tell the Prince. Peace has been broken! Peace has been broken!

More fighting. Everyone ends up dead except for TYBALT and BENVOLIO. They face off but before they strike, SFX: trumpets blast. BENVOLIO and TYBALT drop their weapons as everyone retreats to their sides, posturing an innocent look. The whole cast sans ROMEO and JULIET enter.

LORD CAPULET: It's Montague come to spite my clan!

LORD MONTAGUE: There's that wretch! Fetch me my sword!

CAPTAIN: Rebellious subjects, enemies to peace, Three civil brawls, bred of an airy word by thee, Capulet, and thee, Montague, have thrice disturbed the quiet of our streets due to your canker'd hate.

SFX: trumpets blast a second times.

VARIOUS CITIZENS: *(Improvised.)* It's the Prince. The Prince has come!

The PRINCE enters and takes center glaring judgmentally at all sides. Note: the timing between the actor of the improvised chaos and the PRINCE in this scene is the key to understanding the moment.

CAPTAIN: Hear ye! Hear ye! The sentence of your moved Prince.

PRINCE: *(After weighing the scene, he ignites.)* Can nothing quench the fire of your pernicious rage?

CAPULETS and MONTAGUES: *(Improvising chaos.)* He started it. The thing is---

CAPTAIN: Silence!

PRINCE: *(To everyone.)* If anyone disturbs the peace of these Verona streets again, their lives shall pay the forfeit...

More improvised chaos. The PRINCE motions to the CAPTAIN who draws his sword. The crowd quiets down.

PRINCE: *(To the patriarchs.)* Do I make myself clear?

LORD CAPULET and LORD MONTAGUE: *(Improvising.)* Yes, yes, my Lord. Sorry, my Lord.

PRINCE: Good. Now on pain of death, depart! All of you, depart!

CAPTAIN: *(Clearing the crowd.)* You heard the man, depart! Everyone depart! 'Tis nothing more to see.

The cast exits, leaving the NARRATOR and the BARD alone, except for the "dead" bodies.

SCENE 2

NARRATOR: Wow, that was fun... *(Points to the dead bodies.)* except for these guys I guess.

BARD: Like I said: keep the story moving. Too much dialogue? Time to twist the plot. Too many depressing moments? Time for jokes! Is the audience falling asleep? *(Eyes the audience.)* Time to kill someone... *(Realizing the implication, then corrects himself.)* on stage of course. *(To the audience member.)* It's theater. No one really dies.

The "dead" bodies pick themselves up and exit.

NARRATOR: Speaking of death; that's another thing I noticed. You begin the play telling everyone that Romeo and Juliet... *(Motions death by slitting his throat.)*

BARD: Yeah, so.

NARRATOR: You give away the ending of the play!

BARD: Why wouldn't I?

NARRATOR: Uhhh... spoiler. Wait, do you even know what a spoiler is?

BARD: I added over 1700 words to the English language. I think I can figure out what “spoiler” means. And no, it doesn’t ruin the play because this story is not about the ending. (*Rethinks.*) Well, it is, but it’s not. The audience needs to watch knowing how the story ends. Otherwise, they won’t appreciate it.

NARRATOR: Kinda ruins it for me.

BARD: (*Annoyed.*) Just let me do my job.

NARRATOR: But it’s my job. I’m the narrator.

BARD: There, there now. All the world’s a stage, and we all must play our parts.

NARRATOR: But my part is literally “The narrator.” It says it in the program and everything.

BARD: Settle down, my friend. There are no small parts, just... crushed egos. Now where were we? Oh yes. (*The BARD crosses SR while addressing the audience.*) We had this deadly display of swashbuckling and threats from the Prince, but we haven’t even met our main characters. (*Finds ROMEO standing SR, sad and alone.*) This is Romeo. He wasn’t at this fight because he was out all night brooding over a girl he loves.

ROMEO: (*Doesn’t notice the NARRATOR.*) In sadness, I do love a woman.

BARD: (*To audience.*) Look at that puppy dog face. (*Beat, turns to NARRATOR.*) And do you have any idea who he’s in love with?

NARRATOR: (*Perturbed.*) Yeah, I do. I’ve read the script. In fact, I have it memorized.

BARD: Then don’t **spoil** it for us! (*Turns to the audience and gives a “get a load of guy” look. Beat. Then encouraging a reply from a patron.*) How about you? Do you have any idea who he loves?

If audience replies “Juliet.”

BARD: Of course you’d think that. It’s right there in the program, isn’t it?

If audience replies “Rosaline.”

BARD: Talk about spoilers. (*Pointing.*) Look here, I think we found the only person who actually paid attention in English class. (*Gentle ribbing.*) Teacher’s pet! You’re right though.

BARD: You think Romeo has to love Juliet; it's the title of the play... but you'd be wrong. Romeo is actually madly in love with a girl named Rosaline, but she doesn't love him back.

ROMEO: (*Sadly adding.*) She'll not be hit with Cupid's arrow.

BARD: (*Turns to NARRATOR.*) And it's driving him mad. So his cousin Benvolio enters—

BENVOLIO tries to enter, but the NARRATOR holds him back.

NARRATOR: (*Interrupting, to the BARD.*) You gonna do my job all night, or what?

BARD: My apologies. Proceed.

NARRATOR: (*With grandeur.*) Thank you. Enter Benvolio, Romeo's cousin.

BENVOLIO finishes his entrance.

BENVOLIO: (*To the NARRATOR.*) You done? (*The NARRATOR nods; BENVOLIO turns to ROMEO.*) Good cousin, forget to think of Rosaline.

ROMEO: O, teach me how I should forget to think.

BENVOLIO: By examining other beauties... tonight. (*Offers an invitation.*)

ROMEO: Are you inviting me to a party?

BENVOLIO: Not just any party. Thee party. Tonight we're gonna party like it's 1399. (*Gets his pre-game dance on.*) Raise the roof... if our stage had one! Woot woo!

ROMEO: (*Reads the invite.*) Woe is me. This is a Capulet party. They are enemies to my father. We'll be denied entry... or worse.

BENVOLIO: No one will know who we are because... (*Flips the invite to the other side, ROMEO reads.*) It's a masquerade ball.... And rumor has it, Rosaline will be there.

ROMEO: My Rosaline?

BENVOLIO: (*Shrugs.*) You never know.

BENVOLIO motions ROMEO to follow, so he does. They exit SR.

SCENE 3

Attention moves to PARIS who is already standing SL; he is looking at his own invitation with splendor. LORD CAPULET enters SL and begins a long cross with their destination SR.

LORD CAPULET: There you are, Paris. Follow me. Are you joining us for this evening's festivities?

PARIS: Oh yes, lord. I'm very much looking forward to seeing your family again.

LORD CAPULET: *(Eyeing him, clarifying.)* You're very much looking forward to seeing **my daughter** again.

PARIS: Why yes, my lord, and what do you say to my suit?

LORD CAPULET: *(Trying to explain.)* Look, Paris, I like you—

PARIS: Thank you, sir.

LORD CAPULET: You are a good man.

PARIS: *(Adding.)* With wealth.

LORD CAPULET: Yes...

PARIS: *(Adding more.)* And favor with the Prince.

LORD CAPULET: Yes, he being your cousin does not hurt your suit, but my Juliet is young.

PARIS: *(Trying to convince.)* I would make a fine husband... And your heirs would be mine... *(Hinting.)* Royalty?

LORD CAPULET: Truth be told, Paris, I like this match, but I want Juliet to say yes to this, too. She is my only child, so woo her gently. Take time tonight to win her heart. My will to her consent is but a part.

PARIS: Yes, Lord.

PARIS and LORD CAPULET exit SR.

SCENE 4

JULIET stands lonely looking out from the SL Capulet platform. Did she watch the exchange between Paris and her father? Maybe. LADY CAPULET enters SL below the platform with the NURSE.

NURSE: *(Calling.)* Juliet. Juliet!

JULIET: Who calls?

NURSE: Your mother.

LADY CAPULET: Come down here, child.

As JULIET descends to join them, LADY CAPULET turns to the NURSE.

LADY CAPULET: Nurse, thou knowest my daughter's of a pretty age.

NURSE: *(Admiring JULIET.)* Oh yes, thou wast the prettiest babe I ever nursed. It is my most sincere wish to see you merry in marriage.

JULIET: Marriage?

LADY CAPULET: Aye, how stands your disposition to be married?

JULIET: It is an honor... *(A bit headstrong.)* that I dare not dream of.

LADY CAPULET: Not dream of marriage?

NURSE: Not dreaming of marriage? *(To the audience.)* This girl is a smart one, ain't she?

LADY CAPULET sends the NURSE a look of disapproval.

LADY CAPULET: *(To JULIET.)* Younger than you are mothers made, and your father has already made a match. *(A surprised fear comes to JULIET'S face.)* The valiant Paris seeks you for his bride.

NURSE: *(Excited.)* Paris? The cousin of the Prince Paris?

LADY CAPULET: Yes, the very same.

NURSE: *(A bit desirous.)* Oh, dear. How lucky you are! That man... *(Twitterpated, she makes the hour-glass figure motion.)* That man is a man of wax.

JULIET: *(Blushing with bemused embarrassment.)* We are speaking of marriage, my sweet Nurse... not of something... improper.

NURSE: Do you not know where babies come from?

LADY CAPULET: *(Stepping in.)* Quiet! What say you, Juliet? Can you learn to love the gentleman?

JULIET: I'm not even sure I like him.

NURSE: Not like him? What's not to like? Money, looks, a big house, money.

LADY CAPULET: (*Throwing her look of disapproval at JULIET.*) Don't like him?

JULIET: (*Explaining.*) There's nothing to dislike, but... I... I want...

LADY CAPULET: (*Suddenly strict.*) What? What is it you want, Juliet? He is kind, gentle—

NURSE: (*Adding.*) And wealthy...

LADY CAPULET: Yes, he is kind, gentle, wealthy—

NURSE: (*Adding more.*) And handsome! (*Dreamily enamored.*) Can't forget the handsome. (*Laugh beat.*)

LADY CAPULET: Yes, he is a kind, gentle, wealthy, handsome man who happens to also be related to the Prince.

JULIET: (*Snippy.*) He's not the only person who's related to the Prince.... and besides, father said I have to consent.

LADY CAPULET: (*Sharply.*) Your consent is dependent on your prudence. If one leaves, so does the other. Do I make myself clear? (*JULIET nods with disappointment; LADY CAPULET steps up to exit.*) So get yourself ready. Your father is throwing a party, and Paris will be joining us. (*Exits SL.*)

JULIET: (*To the NURSE.*) What's the point in having a choice if the only choice I can make is the one already made by my father?

NURSE: (*Coming behind her, consoling.*) Worry not, child. You will not marry tomorrow. (*JULIET agrees with the sentiment but is still a little saddened. The NURSE puts her arm around her and shows the possibilities in the stars.*) So go! Seek happy nights to happy days!

JULIET perks up a smile as they exit SR.

SCENE 5

ROMEO, BENVOLIO, and MERCUTIO enter from SR dressed in masquerade. BENVOLIO holds a torch, leading the way to their goal stage left, which they should reach by the scene's end. The NARRATOR and the BARD join them as if they were a part of the scene.

ROMEO: *(Stops and motions to turn back.)* Sorry guys, I am not for this ambling.

BENVOLIO: But we're going to a party.

ROMEO: Yes, a *Capulet* party. Tis no wit to go.

MERCUTIO: Relax, Romeo. Thou art with me, are you not? *(Shows off an emblem on his jacket.)*

ROMEO: *(Retorting.)* Your cousin, the Prince, advised us on this very day not to—

MERCUTIO: Hush, Romeo. You are all my guests, and no one refuses a royal seal.

BENVOLIO: Besides, it's a masquerade party. No one will even know it's us.

ROMEO: Fine, but I'm not going to dance. *(Holds out his hand.)* Give me the torch. Being but heavy, I will carry the light.

MERCUTIO prevents BENVOLIO from handing over the torch.

MERCUTIO: Nay gentle Romeo, we must have you dance.

MERCUTIO anachronistically dances, trying to encourage ROMEO. ALL others laugh.

ROMEO: No, I have a soul of lead so stakes me to the ground I cannot move.

MERCUTIO: *(Aside to the guys.)* Somebody's heartbroken. *(Beat.)* Give me my mask!

The BARD presents MERCUTIO with his masquerade mask.

ROMEO: And give me the torch. I'll be the candleholder and look on.

BENVOLIO hands over the lamp; MERCUTIO looks at both of them with disappointment.

MERCUTIO: *(A little annoyed.)* On the constable's own word. *(Takes the lamp and hands it back to BENVOLIO. ROMEO tries to take it back; MERCUTIO then speaks to ROMEO.)* Your words stickest up to my ears!

ROMEO: I know we mean no harm by going to this mask, (*Cautious.*)
but tis no wit to go.

MERCUTIO: And why not, may one ask?

ROMEO: (*Hesitant.*) Because... I had a dream...

MERCUTIO: (*Shrugging.*) A dream? (*ROMEO nods.*) What was it
about? Let me guess: you dreamt of your lover, Rosaline? (*They
laugh, then.*) Well, I had a dream, too.

ROMEO: What was your dream about?

MERCUTIO: (*Accusatory.*) I dreamt that dreamers often lie.

ROMEO: (*One-upping.*) Yes, in their beds while they sleep. (*Serious.*)
But they also dream of things to come.

MERCUTIO: (*A little surprised.*) A dream of prophecy? Then I see
Queen Mab hath been with you.

BENVOLIO: Who's Queen Mab?

MERCUTIO: Who's Queen Mab? She is the fairy's midwife, and she
comes in shape no bigger than an agate stone. Drawn by a little
team of pixies, she flies over men's noses as they sleep, making
them dream dreams sometimes true. And in this state she gallops
night by night through lover's brains, and they dream of....?
(*Teasingly asks BENVOLIO who shrugs.*) Love! Stay with me,
Benvolio. Or she flies over lawyers fingers, who dream of...?
(*Asking the NARRATOR.*)

NARRATOR: Fees?

They all laugh.

MERCUTIO: Right! Or she flies over ladies whose lips dream of...?
(*Points to a ROMEO.*)

ROMEO: Kisses?

MERCUTIO: Yes! Or she tickles the priest's nose who then dreams
of...? (*Asking the BARD.*)

BARD: A rich parishioner?

They all laugh.

MERCUTIO: Ooo, that's good. (*Turning dramatically serious.*) Or she flies over a soldier's neck, and dream he of (*Pantomiming swashbuckling and cutting his friend's throat.*) cutting foreign throats... of breaches and Spanish blades, (*Getting a little lost in the pretend battle, MERCUTIO crosses to SL.*) of health five fathoms deep and then anon. Drums in his ear! At which he starts and wakes And being thus frightened swears a prayer or two and sleeps again! (*Scared and shouting.*) This is she—!

ROMEO: Peace, peace, Mercutio, peace! Thou talkest of nothing.

MERCUTIO: (*A little lost.*) But I speak of dreams?

ROMEO: Which are nothing but the children of an idle brain.

MERCUTIO: (*Returning.*) Really? If that be so, then tell me. You dreamt a dream last night. And what did it mean again? Oh right: nothing.

ROMEO realizes he's been played.

BENVOLIO: C'mon, or we shall come too late!

MERCUTIO takes the lantern from ROMEO'S hand and leaves him behind. The troupe—sans ROMEO, the BARD, and the NARRATOR—exits SL.

ROMEO: (*To himself but directed at the audience.*) I don't know. My mind misgives some fearful consequence yet hanging in the stars...

BENVOLIO: (*From offstage.*) C'mon, Romeo!

ROMEO: But what's life without risk?

Although hesitant, ROMEO exits SL.

SCENE 6

The BARD and the NARRATOR take center and play the next few lines as the CAPULETS and their guests enter, take their places, and freeze. LORD and LADY CAPULET stand atop their platform SL. Downstage, JULIET and PARIS and other young couples are paired ready for a dance. The older folks stand along the sidelines ready for a toast.

BARD: I have a bad feeling about all of this... and I wrote it.

NARRATOR: No, no, no. This is the best part! *(To the audience; caught up in the excitement, walking through the freeze.)* Romeo and his friends are going to crash this Capulet party *(Finds JULIET and PARIS center.)* ...a party meant for Juliet and Paris *(Points to TYBALT who stands below the SR platform, acting like paid security.)* ...and Tybalt's here, and you know how he is: all *(Mocking the frozen and grumpy TYBALT.)* "I hate all Montagues! Rawr, rawr, rawr." All these passions and anger and hormones about to explode. It's all so... so... *(Can't find the word.)*

BARD: Shakespearean?

NARRATOR: Yeah!

BARD: *(Proud of himself, beat.)* Strike, drum!

The scene suddenly comes alive. MERCUTIO and two mystery guests in masks—ROMEO and BENVOLIO—enter from SL.

LORD CAPULET: *(From the platform SL.)* Welcome! Welcome all to our hall on this most happy night... where we dine and dance with friends and *(Eyeing PARIS specifically.)* family alike.

LORD CAPULET motions to the new guests. TYBALT steps slightly DSR, eyeing the new guests with caution.

LORD CAPULET: *(Encouraging.)* Come, gentlemen. Come in. Don't be shy.

MERCUTIO crosses to PARIS and JULIET.

MERCUTIO: *(Removing his mask.)* Cousin, it is good to see you.

PARIS: Likewise, good man! *(To JULIET, also without a mask.)* Juliet, meet my kinsman Mercutio.

JULIET: Tis an honor, sir.

MERCUTIO: So this the girl you've been telling me about?

PARIS: *(Proud.)* One and the same.

JULIET: *(To PARIS.)* You've been speaking of me?

PARIS: *(Kind.)* Yes, often.

MERCUTIO: But only in the most wonderful of terms, my dear.

LORD CAPULET: (*Aside to LADY CAPULET, with pride.*) Two of the Prince's kinsman under my roof... and both in need of a wife. Too bad we only have one daughter.

LADY CAPULET: (*Nods in agreement then presents herself to her guests.*) Lords and Ladies, gather round. Let's make merriment this fine night with a dance. Lord Paris, 'Tis not polite to leave a lady without a partner.

PARIS: (*Getting the hint.*) Oh, yes. (*To JULIET.*) May I?

JULIET obligingly smiles, and the two get into their dance positions along with the rest of the dancers.

LORD CAPULET: (*Aside to LADY CAPULET.*) With a little luck, we might have more of the Prince's kinsmen under this roof soon.

MUSIC and dancing begin, something like "Kiss from a Rose." The older characters watch on with sentiment. PARIS is enamored with JULIET who is polite but not exactly reciprocating the sentiments. The masked ROMEO wallflowers near the SR platform as TYBALT watches the whole scene from further SR.

ROMEO: (*To himself, watching.*) What lady's that which doth enrich the hand of yonder knight? O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright.

ROMEO removes his mask to see JULIET more clearly. TYBALT spots ROMEO, makes a hard SL cross to the Montague platform, and motions for his uncle LORD CAPULET to step down from the platform.

ROMEO: Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight! For I never saw true beauty till this night.

As the dance continues, JULIET spots ROMEO gazing from afar; although she dances proficiently with PARIS, her attention is obviously now on ROMEO.

TYBALT: (*To LORD CAPULET, pointing.*) Uncle, that is a Montague, our foe, a villain, that is hither come in spite to scorn at our solemnity this night.

LORD CAPULET: Young Romeo, is it? (*Spot him, then weighs.*)

Concerned, LORD CAPULET descends the stairs and walks TYBALT DSL for a private conversation.

LORD CAPULET: Content thee, gentle coz. Leave him alone. All of Verona brags of him to be a virtuous and well-governed youth, so content thee, coz. Take no note of him.

TYBALT: I'll not endure him!

LORD CAPULET: What say you, boy?

TYBALT: Uncle 'tis a shame—

LORD CAPULET: You are a saucy boy, telling me in my house who shall and shall not be endured! Am I the master here or are you?!

TYBALT: But uncle!

LORD CAPULET: (*Grabs him by the collar, pulling him further SL, threatening.*) You will not make a mutiny among my guests, not tonight. (*Points him offstage SL.*) Now go! Go!

TYBALT: I will withdraw, but this intrusion shall, now seeming sweet, convert to bitterest gall.

LORD CAPULET: Go! (*To a servant.*) Good man, a drink please!

MUSIC ends. Everyone claps. LORD CAPULET turns to the crowd as if nothing happened. PARIS kisses JULIET'S hand; she smiles awkwardly.

PARIS: Shall I get some refreshment, my dear?

JULIET: Yes please. Thank you.

PARIS crosses SL, sees the servant with the drink tray but then gets roped into a conversation with LORD CAPULET.

LORD CAPULET: Good Paris, my man. Has the prince ever told you about the great and noble house of the Montagues?

PARIS: No, my lord.

LORD CAPULET: No? Well, it goes back generations. You see...

Their conversation goes into pantomime DSL. This clears a way for ROMEO who steps forward shyly. JULIET notices ROMEO and childishly looks away. She pretends to not notice his approach. ROMEO steps up behind her and takes her hand. Lights dim behind them as the outside world slows. Both look around the room trying to act nonchalant as they talk.

ROMEO: *(Gently lifting her hand with his, intertwining their finger, showing her their bond.)* If I profane with my unworthing hand this holy shrine, the gentle sin is this: two blushing pilgrims, ready stand to smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

Just before (or after) their lips touch, JULIET snaps out of ROMEO'S trance and looks around the room.

JULIET: Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much, which mannerly devotion shows in this. *(Switching their hands to a much more appropriate palm-to-palm holy palmers' kiss position.)* For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch, and palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

ROMEO: Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?

JULIET: *(Laughs at his suggestion.)* Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

ROMEO: O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do! *(Entwines their fingers.)* They pray; grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

JULIET: *(ROMEO moves in to kiss her, but she places their hands in between their lips as if to tell him "Slow down".)* Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.

ROMEO: *(Bringing their hands down.)* Then move not while my prayer's effect I take.

Just before their lips touch, the NURSE steps behind the couple and clears her throat. Caught, the couple return to their pre-kiss poses as the world outside returns. From above on the SL platform, LADY CAPULET glares down at JULIET.

NURSE: Madam, your mother craves a word with you.

JULIET spots her mom's glare. Now guilt-ridden, she curtsies to ROMEO and crosses SL.

ROMEO: Who is that?

NURSE: Her name is Juliet, and that is her mother, the lady of the house.

ROMEO: She's a Capulet? My life is now in my foe's debt.

JULIET'S eyes meet the angry LADY CAPULET who points offstage SL as if to say, "Go to your room." JULIET exits SL. LADY CAPULET composes herself, then speaks loudly from up high,

LADY CAPULET: *(To LORD CAPULET, breaking the mood of the room.)* My lord, it is time to retire.

LORD CAPULET: But it's so early.

LADY CAPULET: *(Urgent.)* Now, my lord.

LADY CAPULET hints with her eyes and head that there is a problem with JULIET.

LORD CAPULET: Oh, yes, yes. Why then... *(To the crowd.)* Attention everyone, attention! I thank you all for coming; I thank you all. But this is: good night! *(Improvised "what?" and "awe man" from the cast.)* It waxes late, and I'll to my rest. Good night...

LORD CAPULET tries to exit SL but notices no one is moving. The crowd doesn't move.

LORD CAPULET: You heard me. Go away. Bye, bye.

The people groan in disappointment as they exit. LORD and LADY CAPULET follow behind them. But JULIET returns, ascends the Capulet platform, and gazes down at ROMEO who stares up at her. The nurse stands below.

JULIET: *(To the NURSE.)* Who is that there, the one who would not dance?

NURSE: *(Makes sure no one else can hear.)* His name is Romeo, and a Montague. The only son of your great enemy.

JULIET: *(Realizing.)* Oh no, my only love sprung from my only hate.

The NURSE exits SL as JULIET waives to ROMEO. He smiles.

NURSE: Juliet!

JULIET: Coming!

JULIET exits SL.

SCENE 7

BENVOLIO, MERCUTIO, and ROMEO linger as ROMEO gazes up at the stage left platform where JULIET was.

BENVOLIO: *(Calling.)* Romeo! Cousin, let us retire. *(A lost ROMEO looks back to BENVOLIO who senses something is wrong.)* Romeo?

MERCUTIO: I got this. *(Walks up to him and waves his hand in front of ROMEO'S face. His gaze cannot be broken.)* He stirreth not. He moveth not.

BENVOLIO: *(Shaking ROMEO.)* Romeo!!

ROMEO: *(Turns to MERCUTIO and BENVOLIO, a bit spacey.)* Can I go forward when my heart is here? *(Then returns his gaze to the platform.)*

MERCUTIO: *(To BENVOLIO.)* I told you he was a lover...

BENVOLIO: *(Chiming in.)* And a madman... *(To ROMEO.)* Rosaline is not there, cousin. *(Gazing up but not seeing.)* What is he looking at?

MERCUTIO: Nothing. His love for Rosaline has killed all good sense.

MERCUTIO tries again to waive his hand in front of ROMEO with little success. BENVOLIO then comically shakes ROMEO.

BENVOLIO: Romeo!

Nothing works.

MERCUTIO: I think the ape is dead. (*After a moment.*) Fine, we out.
(*Starts to exit SR.*)

BENVOLIO: We can't just leave him here.

MERCUTIO: He's a big boy. He knows his way home.

BENVOLIO reluctantly follows MERCUTIO as they exit SR.

MERCUTIO: (*Calling back to ROMEO.*) Later, madman!

SCENE 8

Lights dim to a romantic tone as JULIET returns to the SL Capulet platform.

ROMEO: But soft! What light through yonder window breaks? (*Angles for a better view.*) It is the East, and Juliet is the sun.

Unaware of ROMEO below, she leans and sighs in worry.

JULIET: (*Sighs.*) Ay me!

ROMEO: (*To the audience.*) She speaks! (*Back to himself, quietly.*)
O speak again, bright angel, for thou art as glorious to night as a winged messenger of heaven.

JULIET: (*To herself.*) O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?
Were thy some other name, we could be one.

ROMEO: Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this? (*Moves in to hear more.*)

JULIET: (*Still unaware of ROMEO below.*) What's in a name? A rose by any other name would smell just as sweet. So would Romeo, too... were he not called Montague. (*Beat.*) So Romeo, give up thy name... (*Aching.*) and take me instead.

ROMEO: (*Too excited, allows himself to be seen.*) I take thee at thy word. Henceforth, I will never be Romeo...

JULIET: (*Surprised.*) Romeo! What are you doing here?

ROMEO: (*Flirty.*) I heard you talking about me.

JULIET: (*Blushing.*) Stop. You're making me blush.

ROMEO: I like it when you blush.

JULIET: (*After a giggly beat.*) What is this?

ROMEO: (*Shrugs.*) Love?

JULIET: (*Shakes her head.*) No, it is too quick, too rash, too like the lightning...

ROMEO: (*With charm.*) Too hot?

JULIET: (*Clarifying.*) Too dangerous. That is why you must go, Romeo. Then return tomorrow and ask for me... like a gentleman does.

ROMEO: (*A little off-guard.*) You mean like in marriage?

JULIET: And why not? Like feels a lot like love in the night, but I have my honor to consider.

ROMEO: (*Defending.*) I'd never dishonor you.

JULIET: So take me for a lifetime, or not at all. What shall it be?

ROMEO: (*After a moment.*) I'll speak to the friar and send for you tomorrow.

JULIET: Then I shall be yours... and follow you throughout the world.

Optional: ROMEO climbs approaches the platform; JULIET bends to kiss him. He then descends.

ROMEO backs away towards SR but the two continue to gaze at one another.

JULIET: Good night, good night! A thousand times good night.

ROMEO: A thousand times to want thy light!

JULIET: Parting is such sweet sorrow that I shall say goodnight till it be morrow.

Light fades SL on JULIET so she can exit. ROMEO pauses to take the moment in, like a deep breath of solace. He then opens his eyes and realizes.

ROMEO: Is it dawn already? Time to find me a priest to make Juliet my bride.

SCENE 9

ROMEO crosses to SR. Lights come up SR revealing FRIAR LAWRENCE who is examining a flower. SFX: Holy Chant Music can be heard softly in the distance.

FRIAR: *(To himself.)* Every plant on earth some special use doth give. Some bring death while others a chance to live. Within this infant rind of this weak flower exist both poison and medicinal power. *(Hypothesizing.)* Man is no different: within us all lies *(Weighing.)* grace and rude will. Which will guide us in the end? Whichever we feed. Let's hope vile death does not eat up this plant.

ROMEO: *(Entering.)* Good morrow, father!

FRIAR: *(Not looking back.)* What early tongue so sweet saluteth me? *(He turns and finds ROMEO, welcoming him.)* Romeo, it's not like you to see me at such an early hour. Or here I hit it right: our Romeo hath not been to bed tonight.

ROMEO: Yes, the sweeter was my rest.

FRIAR: *(Shocked.)* Was't thou with Rosaline? God pardon sin! *(Crosses himself.)*

ROMEO: Please father, no! My love for Rosaline never was. I love another now.

FRIAR: *(Rolling his eyes.)* Another? Truly young man loves not with his heart, but with his eyes.

ROMEO: This is different. *(Recalling.)* We met...

FRIAR: *(To audience.)* I don't like where this is going.

ROMEO: We wooed...

FRIAR: *(To audience.)* Uh oh...

ROMEO: And we exchanged vows.

FRIAR: There it is. *(Back to ROMEO.)* Romeo, let me speak plainly. One does not simply fall in and out of love. This is a young man's passion; nothing more. It will pass.

ROMEO: No father, my heart is set... on the fair daughter of Capulet.

FRIAR: *(Shock.)* Holy Saint Francis! What change is here?

ROMEO: And we wish for you to marry us... today.

FRIAR: *(Concerned thinking.)* You are a fool.

ROMEO: I don't know. Juliet Montague has a ring to it, don't you think? (*The FRIAR sees an opportunity as ROMEO continues to ramble.*) Or I could take her name, if it wasn't the 14th century.

FRIAR: (*Stopping him.*) On the other hand, your wandering heart could be a grace I had not seen.... (*Thinking.*) This love you harbor for your fair Juliet... could end the feud between Montague and Capulet.

ROMEO: Then let's do it!

ROMEO tries to give the FRIAR a high-five. Confused, the FRIAR shakes ROMEO'S hand instead. They exit SR.

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