

Romeo & Juliet: Part II

A One-Act Play

By

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Characters:

Romeo – male, 30s

Juliet – female, 30s, pregnant

Friar – male, 50s+, a drunk

Setting: A hovel.

Time: Fifteen plus years after the tomb.

Synopsis: What would've happened if Romeo and Juliet had lived?

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SETTING: A hovel.

AT RISE: A small dining room with a medieval wood table and bench. A fireplace where the cooking is done. A haggard and pregnant JULIET is preparing the evening meal. Enter an aged and senile FRIAR LAWRENCE on his way to the Montague's house.

FRIAR

I approach the cottage of Montague where two lovers, both alike in spoiled want, live in a low-class neighborhood of Verona where we lay our scene. The story you think you know did not end there in the tomb. Juliet's happy dagger did miss its mark, and the poison, which young Romeo drank, was from an apothecary of questionable nature. So the two lived to love. However, from a hot spark come cooler coals.

JULIET

(calling offstage)

Romeo! Romeo! Where art thou Romeo! Get your arse in here!

FRIAR

Aaah. The fair Juliet.

(She snorts.)

But soft. She is not so. Time has not been kind.

(exits)

JULIET

(sigh)

Aye me.

ROMEO

(entering)

What Juliet?

JULIET

What? What do you think? Am I not slaving here? Do you not see that I am with child? Your child?

ROMEO

What? No 'good eve' for your true love Romeo.

JULIET

Ha! Fetch me the plates from the shelf.

ROMEO

The babes are abed?

JULIET

Aye they are. Fed, washed, and safely tucked in by their mother. Fat cow that she is.

(He hands her two plates.)

I need another.

ROMEO

Who is the third party at my table. I pray 'tis not your father.

JULIET

Why not my father?

ROMEO

Know you not how he needles me?

JULIET

I call it guiding.

ROMEO

Goadng. He does not respect my work.

JULIET

What work is that?

ROMEO

I am a poet.

JULIET

A fop. You dream of poetry. The proof is in the sheaf.

ROMEO

(sarcastic)

You are the flower of cordiality. Prithee put my mind at ease, dear wife.

JULIET

Relax. My father is safe within the walls of his own courtyard. Though I should invite him to supper to spite you. No, rest easy, Love. It is Friar Lawrence who comes.

ROMEO

Aah. The good friar. I should lock up the wine then. Last time he drank himself into a river.

JULIET

Where have you been today? Did you speak to the silversmith as Papa suggested?

ROMEO

I did begin my journey there, but was captured by a glorious column of trees all aglow with white blossoms. Their petals fell to the ground as snow. It reminded me of our wedding, Mo Cheri. I settled in to watch the scene for but a moment, and my eyes closed as if under a spell.

JULIET

You tarried.

ROMEO

I was bewitched.

JULIET

You slept all day!

ROMEO

I was lost.

JULIET

You sloth! You snail! Sicilian slug! You are as slow as an old woman walking up a steep hill. All the world moves 'round her while she inches upward. Papa was right about you.

ROMEO

Popinjay.

JULIET

Clog.

ROMEO

Argh. Your voice is as thunder. I am no slug. And your father knows nothing of it.

JULIET

No work. No trade. No money. A dozen. A dozen—soon to be 13—mouths to feed in this hovel. What shall I feed them? Dirt and grubs? Shall I dress the children of Romeo Montague in sackcloths? Where shall we live when you dream away our means? Romeo. Romeo. Your name brings laughter to the people in the town. Do you not hear what they say when we walk Verona's streets. "Look there," they say, "There go poor Romeo's urchins and his varicose wife. Make way for the monkey Montagues!"

ROMEO

There was a time when we cared not a whit about the words of others. We ignored their stares and whispers. Remember?

JULIET

I can only remember what I see before me. I'll endure it no longer, my husband.

ROMEO

What can you do to manage the beasts of the town?

JULIET

Money.

ROMEO

Money?

JULIET

I aim to tame the town with money.

ROMEO

Where comes this money?

JULIET

I shall work.

ROMEO

What?

JULIET

Are you deaf?

ROMEO

I am dumb. What shall be your trade?

JULIET

I shall bake bread and sell it in the square.

ROMEO

My wife, a common peddler?

JULIET

Better to be industrious than feeble-minded. I'll not dwell in the kitchen while my husband wanders as a feckless fly.

ROMEO

Feckless?!

JULIET

I go to fetch water.

ROMEO

Let me help.

JULIET

No. Rest. It is your best occupation.

(FRIAR enters.)

FRIAR

Good eve good Montagues.

ROMEO

Friar! What a pleasant end to a perfect day.

FRIAR

I am blessed to have such faithful constituents.

JULIET

(kissing him on the cheek)

Good eve Father.

FRIAR

Where are you going?

JULIET

To fill this bucket.

FRIAR

An arduous task for a little mother. Let me help.

JULIET

No, thank you, sir. Converse with my husband while I do my duty.

(exits)

ROMEO

She walks like a duck. For nigh on fourteen years she has been in this state. I only see her true self for a few short weeks a year. Don't think me cruel. I love my twelve daughters. They are my little lambs.

FRIAR

Where are the little monkeys?

ROMEO

Abed. But soft. Even a low whisper can wake the sleeping thunder. Once done, the house will quake and rumble.

FRIAR

Then we shall keep our merriment below a rustle. Any wine about?

ROMEO

It went out with the March wind I'm afraid.

FRIAR

Cursed wind. 'Tis your good fortune I brought my own supply.

(Takes out a wine bottle. JULIET enters hefting a full water bucket. ROMEO rises to help.)

JULIET

Don't get up, my love. I wouldn't want the weight of my load to bow your back. I carried it up the hill. I can carry it to the pot. Sit.

FRIAR

I ne'er saw such a woman. The sun is setting on her pregnancy and still she slaves over the fire. Be of glad heart, Romeo, your wife is not a whiner like that Rosaline woman.

ROMEO

Rosaline?

JULIET

Yes, Rosaline. Has time made you forget?

FRIAR

That thin thing who married the widowed merchant Paddywick. They live in a villa overlooking the town. If she were a stock horse like your Juliet, she might have borne a child by now, but she'll none of it. Makes for a quarrelsome time in the bedroom I dare say.

ROMEO

And what would a man of the cloth know of married matters I wonder.

FRIAR

Only what I see, good sir. And what I hear in confession.

JULIET

Father! Confession is sacred. What do you say to the town about my dear husband and me?

FRIAR

Only that you are still in love. And prolific.

(laughs)

Glasses, madam.

(She hands the men each a glass.)

JULIET

I go to check on my sleeping babes. Stoke the fire Romeo.

(exits)

ROMEO

Stoke the fire. Feed the cow. Muck out the chicken house. In such a case as mine, a man may strain courtesy.

FRIAR

Why so contentious? 'Tis a small thing your love asks of you.

ROMEO

Love, Father, is an elusive word.

FRIAR

Only to those who do not know how to give it, my son.

ROMEO

Have you loved father?

FRIAR

I love my fellow man.

ROMEO

You love to drink with your fellow man.

FRIAR

Rightly so. But in sober words, as a man of the cloth, it is my duty to love man, to hear his cries and send them to God.

ROMEO

Have you not loved of the flesh?

FRIAR

You mean rutted like a horny pig in a patch of sows? I have thought of love. And women. They are my daughters as you are my son. I am too old for much else.

ROMEO

When I first spied Juliet in her father's house so many years ago, she stood under the torch light like an angel. The world was a blur around her. Mercutio, God rest his soul, was speaking to me, but I heard only the blood coursing through my veins, up from my loins to my ears. I approached her. Our hands touched. We were holy pilgrims, she said. But I knew I was not holy as I took my trespass on her lips.

FRIAR

There was fire in you then.

ROMEO

You speak in the past.

FRIAR

Methinks you live in the past.

ROMEO

What is wrong with remembrance?

FRIAR

Nothing, so long as the present is not forgotten.

ROMEO

And the future?

FRIAR

Tomorrow, tomorrow, and tomorrow. I only know the sun will rise. The rest is left to God's discretion.

ROMEO

Wherefore did my wife invite you here tonight?

FRIAR

Do you not know?

ROMEO

She is a woman. I am not always privy to her thoughts.

FRIAR

She says you do not listen.

ROMEO

Insolence! I must tame her tongue.

FRIAR

Romeo. Romeo. Do not carry coals against your wife. Drink. Take leave of your worries.

ROMEO

Father. Your voice is a saintly poultice. What did my wife say to you?

FRIAR

She says you wander aimlessly from day to day.

ROMEO

I do not wander.

FRIAR

Romeo, I know you are a dreamer. I have seen you tramping through the woods, throwing rocks into the Adige River, or lying in the sun in the middle of the square. When I see that unkempt head of yours, I send a little prayer to heaven. I ask myself what humor is present in his mind or if his mind is present at all. Your wife does not see your travels, but she knows.

ROMEO

So?

FRIAR

So? You must find out what ails her.

ROMEO

This is absurd!

FRIAR

Take care. I believe she is right to smell trouble.

ROMEO

We can manage. If we are so ill-matched, wherefore did you help us in the first place?

FRIAR

How could I deny two people whom I baptised as babes, who in this dark time had made each other's light? How could God? I had my doubts about what would happen, but not about your love for each other. It was the strength of love that brought the houses of Montague and Capulet together. But I fear it is a house of cards.

ROMEO

You are a drunk and frustrated old man. What do you know of it?
(exits)

FRIAR

Romeo.

(He takes a swig then follows. JULIET enters.)

JULIET

Good, they are gone. I pray Friar Lawrence can draw my husband into this present time. Sometimes methinks his mind remains entombed. Aye me. My back bears the weight of a hundred horses galloping up and down upon it.

(talking to her stomach)

I am ready for you. Your bed is made with wool blankets. A dozen sisters await you. How nice a present it would be to have you to wake up to. If you do not. I shall have to cut you out.

(Contraction)

Oh!

(relaxes. She takes a shiny urn off of a shelf.)

Oh, Nurse, how I wish you were here in person.

(looks at her reflection)

Oh. I am aged. How tired I look. Where is that maiden of yesteryear? She is in the faces of my little ones. Kind, sweet, Nurse. My problem now is not my physical state. It is a matter of the heart. It is my Romeo. I fear he no longer loves me. He thinks me fat and old and a crank. Now I know why Mama and Papa maintain separate quarters. And this, dear Nurse, I cannot bear. He speaks in his sleep. I have not told him thus, for things said in sleep are not meant for the light of day, though they eventually have a way of finding illumination. The other night he called out a name ... Rosaline. I cannot discount this utterance. She was his unrequited love. What or why he thinks of her I know not, but my mind is wrought with torturous wondering. I'm afraid my obsession has turned me into a shrew. If you were here, you could tell me not to worry. That I am his only true love. That I am the one he comes home to each day after his meanderings. Here is the rub. I, too, dream of another time. 'Tis hard to remember our humble beginnings. When to be apart was like moving the tide back with a spoon. I cannot help but wonder what life would have been like had I married Paris. Mother reminds me of it each time I see her. Perhaps if I would not have chosen Romeo, I would not have fallen out of my father's favor. And perhaps I would have a big house overlooking Verona such as the thin, fair Rosaline. 'Tis no good to think of these things. Thank you, Nurse. Even in death, you comfort me.

(FRIAR enters.)

FRIAR

Who are you talking to, my child?

JULIET

I'm just making supplications, Father. Where is my husband?

FRIAR

He broods by the well.

JULIET

He broods everywhere. By the well, in the olive grove, in church. Yes, Father, even there. Wherefore I know not.

FRIAR

How long has it been thus?

JULIET

A season. Methinks it is me.

FRIAR

Oh, no, sweet Juliet. Husbands who are out of work are often melancholy. There are ways to revitalize a man.

JULIET

I know. The evidence is before me
(points to her stomach)

And there, lying in their beds. I have always been free with him. 'Tis he who is not free with me.

FRIAR

He says you have been difficult.

JULIET

Difficult?

FRIAR

Shrewish.

JULIET

He has filled your head with dung.

FRIAR

What?

JULIET

'Tis pure horse shit.

FRIAR

Juliet!

JULIET

Excuse me Father, but you have only been listening with half an instrument. You men know nothing of a woman's heart or reason.

FRIAR

My dear, with women I have learned that there often is no reason.

JULIET

If my Nurse were here, she would tie those troublemaker lips to the nearest flagpole and run you up it.

FRIAR

That is no way for a lady to speak to her pastor. Is the student greater than the teacher?

JULIET

I'm through with being polite. Where in the scripture does it say I have to stand on my feet all day, struggle to feed 12 children and a shiftless husband.

FRIAR

Come come. Don't be a Martha. Be like Mary who sat at the feet of the Lord.

JULIET

Well, when Jesus was done speaking, what do you suppose he said?

FRIAR

That's not ...

JULIET

"Hey, Martha, you got anything to eat?!"

(ROMEO enters.)

Well if it isn't the prodigal husband. I suppose you want me to slay the fatted calf now.

ROMEO

Juliet, please.

JULIET

Don't speak. Just sit.

(She serves them.)

Here is your supper.

FRIAR

Mmm. Smells delicious my dear. Needs a dash of seasoning.

(Takes some ashes out of the urn and sprinkles them on his food.)

Mmm. Good. Flavoring, Romeo?

JULIET

(seeing what he has done and grabbing the urn)
Nooooooooo.

FRIAR

What is the molestation?

ROMEO

It is the Nurse.

FRIAR

Where?

ROMEO

There. In the urn.

(FRIAR retches.)

JULIET

My Nurse. My poor nurse. What has the friar done to you. Stolen a piece of what is left of your body. Pure in life. Defiled in death. A man of God should know better than to do such a thing.

ROMEO

See how she talks to it. The Nurse has been dead five years. And she still clings to the old bag. How am I to compete with that?

FRIAR

(still retching)
Water.

(ROMEO points him toward the water bucket. FRIAR runs to the bucket and continues retching.)

ROMEO

(to JULIET)
She is dead you know. She's been dead. These are but her earthly remains. Her soul is in Heaven—I hope.

JULIET

I hold her near.

ROMEO

You hold a metal vase with nothing but dust inside. Give it me.

JULIET

No.

ROMEO

Come now. Let her go.

JULIET

I will not. She took care of me and I promised I would take care of her.

ROMEO

There is no life in that space.

JULIET

She lives in my heart.

ROMEO

Then let her live in your heart, not in your house. Not on the shelf in your kitchen.

(They fight over the urn.)

JULIET

You churlish crayfish. Your hands are hooks. Let me take my leave!

(The urn flies out of her hands and spills ashes everywhere.)

Nooooo. Treachery! O spite! O hell! Villain of the earth. The very being of my confidante and counselor spread about like dust.

(picks out a piece of bone and holds it up)

I'm so sorry, Nurse. My heart breaks that I could not keep my promise to you.

(To ROMEO)

See what you have done.

ROMEO

Me?

JULIET

Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless miscreant.

(A child cries softly.)

Now you have wakened the children.

(contraction)

Oh!

ROMEO

What is it?

JULIET

Oh the pain!

Romeo! What have you done?
FRIAR

Not I. The babe inside.
ROMEO

Fie!
FRIAR

Nurse. Call the nurse.
JULIET

What? The nurse again?
FRIAR

I must summon the midwife.
ROMEO

Sweet Jesus!
JULIET

The lady is waning.
FRIAR

Help me!
JULIET

Romeo, help me lift her to the table.
FRIAR

(They lift JULIET up on the table and she leans back on her elbows facing away from the audience.)

Ooooooh.
JULIET

I go to fetch the nurse.
ROMEO

Don't leave me!
JULIET

I must.
ROMEO

FRIAR

I shall go.

JULIET

There is no time!

FRIAR and ROMEO

No time?

(JULIET shakes her head. More children cry.)

ROMEO

What shall we do?

FRIAR

You mean with 12 children you know not how to bring a child into this world?

ROMEO

I tend to the fire.

JULIET

It's true. He is ineffectual.

(beat)

FRIAR

Not a problem.

(He produces an instruction book.)

JULIET

Since when have you ever delivered a baby?

FRIAR

Never. But I've read the treatises.

JULIET

Ooooooh!

FRIAR

Her cries are strong. That's good. She is vital.

ROMEO

Dear God.

FRIAR

Romeo. Check to make sure the door is unbolted.

ROMEO

What for?

FRIAR

It says here. Go, go, go.

(While ROMEO checks the lock, FRIAR checks the hearth and thumbs through the book.)

Boil water. Yes. Ok. What else?

ROMEO

Now what?

FRIAR

Let the cow out of the barn.

ROMEO

What?

FRIAR

Make haste.

(A child calls offstage amidst the crying: Mommy?)

JULIET

(grabbing ROMEO)

Don't leave. Ooooh!

ROMEO

Forget the cow.

JULIET

Romeo. Don't let the fire go out.

ROMEO

Yes, Dear. What's next, Father?

FRIAR

A cloth.

(While ROMEO grabs a cloth, FRIAR says a prayer over Juliet: Thou art my refuge, from tribulation. Thou shalt keep me. With shouts of gladness, thou shalt surround me.)

Tu es refugium meum, a tribulatione conservabis me; exsultationibus salutis circumdabit me.

Amen.

(ROMEO throws the cloth over JULIET, covering her completely.)

Butter.

ROMEO

(under his breath as he searches: Butter. Butter. Butter. Butter.)

Here. What is its purpose?

FRIAR

It is a lubricant. To ease the child's pathway.

(starts to go under the sheet)

ROMEO

(pulling him back)

Oh no you don't.

FRIAR

This is no time for jealousy.

JULIET

(throwing the cloth off of her head)

Romeo, the necklace.

FRIAR

What necklace?

ROMEO

'Tis one I made when our first child was born. For luck.

FRIAR

We need all the help we can get.

ROMEO

Where is it?

JULIET

On the mantle.

(A child calls more insistently: Mommy?)

FRIAR

Pepper.

(ROMEO places the necklace around her neck and kisses her on the cheek. FRIAR takes down the cloth enough to throw pepper in her face then replaces the cloth. JULIET sneezes.)

ROMEO

What are you doing?

JULIET

Achoo.

FRIAR

The pepper propels the baby.

JULIET

Achoo.

ROMEO

Are you certain?

FRIAR

It says here.

ROMEO

I don't remember the midwife doing this.

JULIET

Achoo.

ROMEO

Wherefore is nothing happening?

FRIAR

I must consult the text.

JULIET

(contraction)
Romeo! It hurts.

ROMEO

I am here.

JULIET

I cannot see you.

ROMEO

You may feel me.

(He takes her hand out from under the cloth.)

I remember the first touch of our hands. We were but pilgrims then.

JULIET

Oh, Romeo.

(He kisses her forehead through the cloth. JULIET sneezes. FRIAR begins banging pots and pans together in JULIET's face, scaring both she and ROMEO.)

ROMEO

Are you mad?

FRIAR

We must scare the bugger out.

JULIET

(big contraction)

Oh dear God!

(She bears down.)

ROMEO

It worked!

FRIAR

(takes his position at her legs and places his hands under the cloth)

Quickly now. Shake her as a plum tree.

(ROMEO shakes her.)

JULIET

(bearing down)

Ooohaaargh!

(relaxes)

FRIAR

Good one, Juliet.

(ROMEO jumps on the table behind JULIET and rubs her shoulders roughly as if preparing an athlete for the big game.)

JULIET

I can push no longer.

ROMEO

What is this foolish talk. You shall endure.

(A child's very demanding cry: Mommy!)

JULIET

Nurse. Where is my nurse. Achoo.

ROMEO

Why the absent nurse? Why not Romeo?

JULIET

You? You who sleeps by day and hogs my bed at night.

ROMEO

I only sleep because I fear you do not need me. You clean. You take care of the children. You earn money at market. What good am I? I am only a monkey Montague.

JULIET

But you are my monkey.
(contraction)

FRIAR

Once more with feeling.

JULIET

Aaargh.

(Her whole body goes limp. The sound of crying children softens.)

FRIAR

Ah. Ha.

(He takes the newborn out from under the cloth and wraps it in a blanket.)

ROMEO

Juliet?

(He shakes her gently.)

Juliet? My love, she does not answer.

(He tears the cloth from her face and kisses her.)

Juliet!

JULIET

(opening her eyes)
Romeo.

ROMEO

Yes, my love.

JULIET

You let the fire go out.

FRIAR

'Tis a boy.

(He hands ROMEO the baby.)

ROMEO

Finally!

FRIAR

Thirteen must be your lucky number.

JULIET

My son. What shall we call him?

ROMEO

Lawrence. To esteem the man who brought him into the world.

JULIET

(disapproving)
Lawrence?

FRIAR

Marion is my middle name.

JULIET

That's nice.

ROMEO

Very well, then. Marion Montague.

FRIAR

I am honored.

(Offstage child's voice: Mommy? Daddy?)

ROMEO

I shall check the children.

FRIAR

You stay. I will go.

(He exits. ROMEO hands JULIET the baby.)

JULIET

He has your eyes.

ROMEO

And your curled lip.

JULIET

What do you mean curled?

ROMEO

'Tis that face you make.

JULIET

What face?

ROMEO

See. There it is.

JULIET

I will bite you by the ear for that jest.

ROMEO

'Tis truth I speak.

(They continue to argue in the background as the FRIAR enters.)

JULIET

You speak to goad me.

ROMEO

I call it guiding.

JULIET

Foul knave.

ROMEO

Wench.

JULIET

You upset the child.

ROMEO

(to the baby)

Do not worry. She will not eat you.

(Juliet gently rocks the baby, calming him. After the FRIAR says: "grace," ROMEO kisses JULIET on the forehead. They happily talk to the child.)

FRIAR

And so our tale is done. The true fate of those star-crossed lovers long after the spark of passion ignited, youthful desire has waned, and in its place a fairer grace. Woe and joy. Woven together are simply life.

JULIET

Oh, Romeo.

(They kiss. Fadeout.)