

The Montagues and Capulets

Or

The Taming of the Lion

A Comedy of the Commons by Gavin Miller

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Dramatis Personae

Mid 21st Century

Juliet II	The heir to the throne of Austria and Italy.
Female Reporter 1	Media reporter for a streaming media service.
Female Reporter 2	Media reporter for a streaming media service.
Male Reporter 1	Media reporter for a streaming media service.
Male Reporter 2	Media reporter for a streaming media service.

Early 20th Century

Alexandra	The Empress of Austrian Empire including Northern Italy.
Friedrich	The Kaiser of Germany.
Francis	The King of France.
Nicholas	The Tsar of Russia.
Stefano	The King of Roman Italy.

Late 15th Century

Romeo	Heir to the Montagues.
The Messenger	A messenger for Romeo.
Rosaline	A beautiful and wealthy lady.
Jedediah	Treasurer of the Capulets, and brother of Balthazar.
Balthazar	Treasurer of the Montagues, and brother of Jedediah.
Lord Montague	Father of Romeo.
Mercutio	Cousin of the Prince of Verona.
Juliet	Heir to the Capulets.
Tybalt	Cousin of Juliet, and a Capulet.
Nurse	Juliet's nurse.

Chamberlain	Servant of the Prince of Verona.
The Prince	The Prince of Verona.
Maria	A cook and poet.
Katherine	A jealous lady.
Friar Lawrence	A Franciscan friar and confessor of Romeo.
Lady Montague	Wife of Lord Montague and mother of Romeo.
Dromio	A prince of Naples, and long-lost brother of Romeo.
The Emissary	Representative of the Duke of Milan.
The Venetian Ambassador	Representative of the Doge of Venice.

The Introduction.

(Princess Juliet II enters the palace theater surrounded by reporters. She is taking them on a tour of the royal palace in Verona in 2054.)

Juliet II: And it was here, a hundred and forty years ago, that Empress Alexandra greeted her guests for the first time, at the Congress of Verona. There was something theatrical about my great, great grandmother, so this is a fitting place to tell her history.

Female Reporter 1: Our younger viewers may not be familiar with the Congress of Verona. Can you say what it was, and why they should think it important?

Juliet II: A good question. In the early twentieth century, there were a series of anarchist attacks – bombings of key buildings and public spaces. These added to a growing sense of anger and despair. When the mood was at its darkest, an assassination triggered talk of war. Fearing the worst, my ancestor called on all the royal families of Europe to come together, to head off the growing crisis...

(Juliet II and the reporters step to one side and fade from view.)

The Prologue.

(Empress Alexandra stands on stage in early 20th-Century aristocratic clothing. She is speaking to Kaiser Friedrich of Germany, King Stefano of Roman Italy, King Francis of the Normans, Tsar Nicholas of Russia, and other similar dignitaries, attending the peace conference. She recites her introduction accompanied by a magic lantern show illustrating the points she is making.)

Alexandra:

Europe stands upon the brink of bloody war and civil strife.
New powers arise as ancient empires totter to their graves,
While borders meander, made perilous on both sides,
From dormant enmities burned awake,
By murderous acts, and incendiary lies.

Lurking suspicions and our mutual dread
Consume our treasure and our hard-won skill,
As Promethean mills spew plumes of acrid breath,
Forging fire-belching ships that can rain meteors of death
To ignite cowering cities into a living hell.

Our children may come to shudder in despair,
As new wonders fill the air with bird-like grace,
But carry on their wings, whirling swords of power,
And cloaked in their bellies,
The eagle's taloned iron embrace.

War is the fox
And we may be the hares.

Too long, our wonted ways of thought
Have crept as snails,
Cowering in their shells,
A canopy of pearl, that murmurs with
The ocean's soothing waves,
A lullaby that we may sleep.
But change bursts in,
Like the raven's daggered beak,
A sudden, pounding harbinger of death.

Time is the wolf,
And we may be the sheep.

We must change or die.

The shadow of our petty bickering dances large
Upon the wall of history,
Cast ominous by sharpened armies
And surging powers of the sea.

The world is ours to lose.

If the bones be true,
Our long-lost forbears cowered in caves,

Ragged, hungry and afraid.
Then one nurtured fire,
To drive away the monstrous beasts of night.
A first step, to enlightenment and ourselves.

Will we let their efforts go in vain?
Will we watch our long-built cities turn to ash,
And see young men devoured
By bullet, blade and creeping silent gas?

Or will a new amity arise from meeting in this holy place,
Where honesty and grace outflank deceit?
I brought you here in friendship, to Verona,
My family's ancient seat,
In the hope that we might seek,
For laurels, far nobler than a victor's bloody crown –
The fruitful cornucopia of a just and lasting peace.

And so, it is for us to choose,
For each of you tonight,
Whether we make of life a tragedy,
Swept along by fate to our inevitable doom,
Dragging with us many more besides,
Or if, despite the end, we cast off our gloom,
And make of it, a comedy,

Buoyed by music and by laughter,
And sail the swirling random tides,
With nothing for our compass,
But our mutual love.

Love, there, I have said the word.
Verona's patron saint of love,
My ancient ancestor,
Whose trials and triumph
Framed the very fabric of our state,
Will be your other host tonight,
Brought alive by the gentle magic of this stage.

Her council will be good, and her conclusions wise.
And even a happy ending may be supplied, for her and us,
For though you have heard much of her demise,
There is a real story that you do not know,
The true tale of Juliet, and her Romeo.

Act 1, Scene 1. Outside the city walls of Verona at midnight.

(Balthazar paces a while, in medieval clothes, clutching a dim lantern, until his brother approaches from the other direction.)

Balthazar: Halt! Who goes there?

Jedediah: Your brother, and your mortal enemy.

Balthazar: That you are my brother, I doubt not. And that we are mortal, I regret, since perforce, one must stand at the other's grave, unless, by chance, we end our days as we began, in the same hour. And as for enemies, despite our masters' enmity, surely not, unless it is as rivals for our mother's love, who overflows with that...

Jedediah: As she does with everything.

Balthazar: Welcome back, brother.

Jedediah: Bah.

Balthazar: What news of Venice?

Jedediah: Shylock is dead.

Balthazar: Oh, worthy man, how so? And such a doting father.

Jedediah: Or 'tis as if he were, his daughter married to a gentile, and all his goods are confiscate.

Balthazar: How came it so?

Jedediah: Shylock, being an honest man, and thrifty, had heaped up a little fortune. This he to Antonio loaned, who hazards all on ships of trade, sure to bring a profit to the gentleman. For such a perilous venture, Shylock feared that said Antonio might wink at his debts, if the ships were lost. So, to spur the aging man to fiscal recollection, he included a clause, to wit, were the debt to be unmet, Shylock could take a pound of flesh from the gentleman's hide.

Balthazar: A very sharp proviso. How fared the ships?

Jedediah: Not well. Shylock, thinking other worthy men of Venice would never allow such recompense, while they had cash to serve, pressed home his point, not for himself, but so that bankers, such as ourselves, should not be held in light regard when Christian gentlemen default in the face of calamity.

Balthazar: How did the venture end?

Jedediah: All the ships were seeming lost, and then, in court, the law held sway to Shylock - though Antonio's friends wailed for mercy, though not a jot was offered in recompense. Shylock, his blood distempered by his daughter's new-found love, one Lorenzo, a gentile gentleman, pushed home his suit. Antonio, true to his word, was ready to surrender to the blade, when a young clerk, comely to look at

and quick of tongue, arrived, carrying most learned and heavy books. This clerk declared that Shylock could remove the flesh, as was his right, but were he to spill a single drop of blood, it would amount to murder in the eyes of Venice, and he himself would hang and all his goods be confiscate.

Balthazar: No!

Jedediah: And then, when Shylock renounced his claim, the court held him bound for his attempt on Antonio's life. Half his goods were taken by the Doge, and the rest, passed over to his daughter Jessica, who has now become a Christian wife.

Balthazar: Daughters in love may be the ruin of us all.

Jedediah: So it is, brother.

Balthazar: What fickle friends these Christians are. When, through our guidance they venture much and prosper, they call us sage, and sorcerer, hanging on our every syllable, and saying that we conjure money from the very air, but when they fail, through their own policies, they call us rogue and usurer, and spread poisoned lies about our practices. The law conspires against us, and all our goods are confiscate.

Jedediah: But there is more. The boyish clerk, who like a ministering angel had flown to old Antonio's aid, was soon revealed as Portia – a most silver-tongued and learned *lady*.

Balthazar: I am amazed.

Jedediah: I have always said that a man's learning coupled to a woman's wit might conquer half the world.

(A pause.)

Balthazar: I fear for the future.

Jedediah: As do I. Though he would have me flogged to say it, Lord Capulet had diverse loans, at good interest, out to Shylock, all of which are now dissolved. My master's house teeters on the brink of ruin.

Balthazar: As does mine.

Jedediah: How is't possible? Lord Montague is a wealthy gentleman, and his estates well managed, though his men a querulous rabble, forever attacking my master's servants.

Balthazar: They take as much as they give in that regard.

Jedediah: No matter.

Balthazar: My master is a bold man, and one led to Christian zeal by his wife's devotions. Hearing that the King of Portugal intended one last crusade to free the Holy Land, he loaned him a considerable mound of silver, winning the praise of men of God, and the promise of plunder were the Holy City to be taken. But on the way, they tarried near Carthage, where Dido lost her life to faithless Aeneas. Promised

boldly by a prodigal son, they thought to aid a father's overthrow, in return for that son's succor in pressing on to Jerusalem.

Jedediah: A foolish bargain, by any measure.

Balthazar: Just so. Meeting on the field of battle, far inland from the safe harbor of the foreign fleet, the father and son reconciled, and turned, together, on the Portuguese, who were slain, king and nobles all, their armor taken, and their treasure lost. All royal debts are cancelled, and it is rumored that Portugal may soon fall prey to the greedy eyes of Spain.

Jedediah: I fear our masters' ruin will be quickly followed by our deaths.

Balthazar (drawing his sword): As do I. Take out your sword, brother.

Jedediah: How can I have given such offense?

Balthazar (under his breath): I fear we are watched by my master's men. If we do not meet in anger, we may be murdered for our conspiracy.

Balthazar (shouting out loud so that he may be heard): Do you bite your thumb, sir?

Balthazar (under his breath): Bite your thumb.

(Jedediah bites his thumb.)

Balthazar (under his breath): Now say "I bite my thumb, sir".

Jedediah (trying to talk with his thumb in his mouth): I bith my thmb ssh.

Balthazar (under his breath): Without the thumb.

Jedediah (out loud this time): I bite my thumb, sir!

Balthazar (out loud): Do you bite your thumb at me, sir?

Jedediah (under his breath): You asked me to do it so.

Balthazar (under his breath): Just say you bite your thumb. It is against the law if you say more.

Jedediah (out loud): I do bite my thumb, sir!

Balthazar (out loud): Look to your sword. I work for as good a man as you.

Jedediah (getting into the spirit of the thing, out loud): What, no better?

Balthazar: Let our blades decide. (They start to fight in earnest but continue their discussion in a stage whisper.)

Jedediah: So we are both ruined – our masters and ourselves.

Balthazar: And when this news reaches Verona with the dawn, we will be pilloried or worse, if there is no resolution of this entanglement.

Jedediah: What resolution can there be tonight or any night? We are both destroyed!

Balthazar: Our two houses, great each in resolve and enterprise, are blocked at every turn by bloody conflict, sprung from ancient hate. But these flailing trees, that threaten to topple in the coming tempest, might hold strong if leaning each on each, like arches in the great cathedral.

Jedediah: Speak plainly brother, for I am nearly out of breath.

Balthazar: Juliet must marry Romeo.

Jedediah: God's teeth. This midnight fencing carries your fancy to delirium.

Balthazar: No lesser course than this can bind the warring clans into a family.

Jedediah: But young Romeo is a love-soaked fool.

Balthazar: It is said that Romeo is a comely youth, but his affections so meander this way and that, that they overspill their banks into stagnant salty pools of adulation. And so, he may swiftly come to love the lady.

Jedediah: Juliet is a paragon of wit and beauty, and so imbued with good sense that, though her mother is honest, she belies her parentage.

Balthazar: I think you love the lady for yourself.

Jedediah: As an uncle, Balthazar, as an uncle.

Balthazar: Then now, since we are brothers, I am an uncle, too! "Our niece" will do her duty, as will the boy, if commanded – but I wrestle with how to launch this loving enterprise.

Jedediah: Lady Capulet seeks advice from me on trifles of her wardrobe. I can let slip a love note, near her chamber, embellished with a single R, praising Juliet's eyes. There are many such, to nameless beauties, scattered in the forest. My lady's soft deliberation may do the rest.

Balthazar: And I can counsel my lord, that poverty is more keen a foe than Capulet.

Jedediah: We are agreed.

Balthazar (breathless): And I am spent. (Out loud) I am done with thee, be gone!

Jedediah: (Out loud) And I with thee. Long live the Prince and Lord Capulet! (They exit in opposite directions.)

Act 1, Scene 2. Romeo's Bedchamber.

(Half the stage is Romeo's study, the other half is Rosaline's bedchamber. Romeo sits writing at a desk, and then reads over what he has written. Rosaline stares at herself in a mirror, adjusting her hair.)

Romeo: There, a perfect vessel for my perfect love, and as the book said, "A few words of rhyme may melt the lady's heart more surely than a flower-drenched meadow."

(He places the letter into an envelope.)

Romeo: To R from R. The mystery alone should pique her fancy, and the happy capital of both our names can be my brave ambassador to pay her court.

(He hands the envelope to a servant, to take to Rosaline, along with a single rose. Romeo picks up his Book on Love, and proceeds to read.)

"Once the gift is sent, our poor lover must suffer the anguish of amorous delay. Minutes hang heavy, and hours drag into days, as the fair lady decides his fate...."

(Rosaline receives the letter)

The Messenger (handing Rosaline the rose and the letter): Madam, for you.

Rosaline (taking the letter): From R to R, how curious. Is it that I write a letter to myself, or does another R admire me, thinking himself so above the common folk that he need not stoop to trouble his quill with a lower class of characters? (She sniffs the envelope.) No dainty hint of flowers or of musk, so not a lady's missive then, also, no whiff of sack or rum. It is a letter, from a very sober gentleman, for the paper is good, though the writing a trifle boyish, and it is, mercifully, not over-streaked with tears.

(Opening the envelope and taking out the letter.)

To my darling Rosaline,

(Aside) Well that's one R explained. The second R, a certain "Romeo of Verona". As for the rest, a poem. (She sighs, as if disappointed.)

(Romeo speaks the words as Rosaline reads.)

The river of my love so swiftly flows,
Its dizzy slope
And gentle roar,
Implore me to succumb to hope,
And send to you this rose.

Do not curse me,
Who should be so bold,
Or to a growing friendship,
Now turn cold.

It is your beauty
That prompts me so,
To sing your praises,
Even as I hazard "No!"

Your snow-white cheeks
Might warm and calm
The heart that beats,
Of one who seeks.

Your elfin waist,
Would make
The hourglass
Slow its pace.

And your slender wrists
Should make
The willow weep
That longs for trysts.

Oh, how I love your hair!
And yet I fear
That you might anger,
If I pause to stare.

Your coal-black eyes
Might quake
The mountains deep,
If they despise.

And your sweet lips' sneer
Could cause their
Cherried snare
To disappear.

And so,
Since I despair,
Help me understand
Your ice and fire.

Take pity on desire,
And hold my hand,
No longer just a friend,
And give this dazzled man
A happy end.

Rosaline: I remember the gentleman now. He is a Montague, handsome, by some reports, and not a fool. But he cherishes in his heart a high regard for ladies which is only eclipsed by the reverence in which he holds himself.

(Referring to the letter.) For my own part, I am unmoved by this petty thing, but in feeding his hopes, I may defend the weaker of my sex. And since, in this duel of love, he has chosen the pointed tip of poetry, I must reply in kind, but in a way ambiguous, running hot and cold, like an English summer day, which is sure to drive him mad, if he can grasp it.

(Rosaline starts writing furiously.)

Romeo (still reading from his book): Once Cupid's arrow has struck, you must prepare for a battle of wits, in which the lady protests much, but in her heart has already surrendered the precious castle to her conqueror. Doting eyes, and by chance a gentle brushing of her hand, may make the lady swoon. Be sure to catch and comfort her, with modest gentleness. It is only seemly that a true caress should await a later rendezvous.

Arrange for the second tryst to be at night, far from prying eyes. A bold advance may lead to bliss, or if you must withdraw, do so with tears of love. By the third encounter, you should...

(Romeo falls to silent reading.)

Romeo: This book is very bold. Even I blush at its effrontery.

(The Messenger arrives and hands Romeo the same envelope.)

Romeo: Alas, the same letter returned. All my hopes are vanquished.

The Messenger: The lady thought it expedient, given the cost of paper, to employ the happy chance of your two names, and let thrift and amorous good wishes fly by the same messenger. Indeed, her tip, as well, was most economical.

Romeo: I understand you not.

The Messenger (gesturing first from Romeo to Rosaline, then from Rosaline to Romeo): Not from R to R, but from R to R.

Romeo: Oh blessed lady. She captures my airy bird of love and returns it with new wings.

The Messenger: Same wings, different message.

Romeo: As you say. (He opens the envelope.) The lady has a bold and vivid hand, and has returned a verse to me. What bliss!

(Romeo reads silently as Rosaline speaks the words.)

Thank you for the rose,
But let me be.

That gentle roaring in your heart,
That you describe,
And that to love
That you ascribe,
Stirs not in me.

And your chattering words
Are less a lover's plea,
Than the nattering thoughts
Of a lust so loud,
It cannot see.

You say my cheeks are white,
Like driven snow,
And yet you long to know
Their warmth
Against your skin,
If only I will heed your plaintive song,
And glow with rosy praise's blush,
To hear your lover's gush.
But you are wrong.
I won't give in.

You say my waist and wrists are slim,
But they,
Like that flower's slender stem,
Are ringed with barbs,
To cut the hands of foolish men,
Who dare to venture near,
Leaving wiser, bloodied,
And in tears.

You say that I despise,
And fear my coal-black looks could kill,
But if my lethal, carbon eyes,
Should let fall shiny drops of diamond dew,
Do not thrill with sudden hope's surprise.
The longing in my grief
Is not for you.

And if I hide my lips so sweet,
As you protest,
Beneath a frown or sneer,
They are not for you to seek,
Young man.

A bee must pass the test,
Walking their moist velveteen,

Unbitten,

Then flying back to tell the queen.
As in my dream,
She will come to praise my ruby red,
And with a kiss,
Lie down in petalled flowery bed,
To find her bliss.

Romeo: Hmm. My lady's genius is most rare. I must read again.

"Thank you for the rose,
But let me be..."

She thanks me for the rose. Oh excellent beginning to my quest.

That gentle roaring in your heart,
That you describe,
And that to love
That you ascribe,
Stirs not in me.

Then she talks of love and lust, but denies it in herself. Ah lady, that is ancient dissembling. Did not the Egyptian Queen recoil from Caesar, though she had herself carried to his chamber, wrapped only in tapestry?

And your chattering words
Are less a lover's plea,
Than the nattering thoughts
Of a lust so loud,
It cannot see.

"Chattering." She compares me to the song of birds and speaks true that love is blind. Oh, sweet lady.

You say my cheeks are white,
Like driven snow,
And yet you long to know
Their warmth
Against your skin,
If only I will heed your plaintive song,
And glow with rosy praise's blush,
To hear your lover's gush.
But you are wrong.
I won't give in.

She talks much of her milky skin, and rosy blushing, again, she whispers yes, while crying no.

The longing in my grief is not for you.

Either she longs not for me, which is hard to fathom, I am much beloved by ladies of the court, or I grieve her not, which is a pretty way to say, she loves me!

And if I hide my lips so sweet,
As you protest,
Beneath a frown or sneer,
They are not for you to seek,
Young man.

Her lips are not for me to seek. Why, I have already found them, that is clear.

A bee must pass the test,
Walking their moist velveteen,
Unbitten,

There is much puzzlement in this. (A moment's pause for thinking.) Unless she means that I must BE Romeo to win her love.

And last of all -

Then flying back to tell the queen.
As in my dream,
She will come to praise my ruby red,
And with a kiss,
Lie down in petalled flowery bed,
To find her bliss.

Why, at last, it is plain. Courtesy is the Queen of Love, so if I come to her laden with gentle praise and dotting looks, she will guide me to her bedchamber. It will be strewn with petals from my loving rose, and she will surrender to my heart's desire.

The Messenger slightly shaking his head: Will that be all, Sir?

Romeo: Yes, for now. But do not stray far, I must write another letter.

Rosaline (stamping her foot): Oh!
(She storms off the stage in a huff.)

Act 1, Scene 3. Friar Lawrence's Cell.

(Friar Lawrence sits reading, while sipping a small draft of an intoxicating liquor)

(A knock at the door.)

Juliet: Good friar? Are you home?

Friar Lawrence (opening the door): Always for my flock, child. How may I oblige?

Juliet (entering): I would a word.

Friar Lawrence: Are you troubled? I see wrinkles on your brow.

Juliet: Perplexed, merely. I have portentous news, from my father.

Friar Lawrence: Be seated and gather your thoughts, for you are surely out of breath. Are you ill?

Juliet: A little running brought the color to my cheeks. It will pass.

Friar Lawrence: When you are ready, then.

Juliet: My father proclaimed, before the sun had risen from his lazy bed, that I am to be married.

Friar Lawrence: Heaven be praised.

Juliet: If heaven had a hand in it.

Friar Lawrence: Heaven governs all.

Juliet: But men would meddle in heaven's wake.

Friar Lawrence: True, but it wanders from the point. To whom?

Juliet: Am I betrothed? To a man.

Friar Lawrence: Yes, child, I guessed as much. To whom will you be wed?

Juliet: To Romeo, a Montague, and my mortal enemy, until yesterday.

Friar Lawrence: But no more. The Lord is merciful. I know the youth. Whence came this newfound amity between your houses?

Juliet: Some affair of business, that I know not of. It is my father's will.

Friar Lawrence: And God's will, too.

Juliet: God's will is apt to mirror that of men, with women chastised only to obey.

Friar Lawrence: That may be so, but not for us to question.

Juliet: It is His will, that I have my own, besides, to reason and to choose the better path, guided by my conscience.

Friar Lawrence: Take care it is your conscience and not your pride that drives you so. Recall you not, the serpent in the garden?

Juliet: You speak of Eve. My sister sinned, and yet it taints us all? Show me the man who parries all temptation, and I will blush for Eve.

Friar Lawrence: Take care, Juliet. Original Sin is not to be absolved.

Juliet: Is unoriginal sin so much simpler to forgive? For surely men excel at that, if at nothing else.

Friar Lawrence: What harpy put this rebellion in your heart?

Juliet: One as fit to hold a harp as you, when the last day comes.

Friar Lawrence: You are wise beyond your years, which is a fault in one so young, but one that time may mend. There is still much for you to learn.

Juliet: I am eager to hear of it.

Friar Lawrence: Conquer the world, with all your disputation, it even yet may cut you to the quick.

Juliet: With quickness, I will dodge its thrusts, and counterstrike with sharp retorts.

Friar Lawrence: Indeed, you are too quick for me. With such barbs to harm your foes, you have little need of counsel. Be gone and leave me to my prayers.

Juliet (softening): Good friar, kind friar, you have held me since before I wore a name, and water sprinkled, gave it me. Your noble face has been my Northern Star, for all these years. And now I come, in all humility, to ask your blessing of this match.

Friar Lawrence: My child, you have it, even before you asked.

Juliet: But I am troubled, yet. The swift embrace of foes trips many saints.

Friar Lawrence: Your nuptials will soon be a time of joy and merriment.

Juliet: I have foreboding dread of such merry haste.

Friar Lawrence: What ails you still in this?

Juliet: Will the match be sound?

Friar Lawrence: It is your father's choice, and he loves thee, despite his gruff and bluster.

Juliet: I would know my husband, from first seeing, through cautious liking, to sanctioned loving. Veiled vows pave paths to clear regret.

Friar Lawrence: Human hearts are but as wood. A little rubbing and they may burst to flame.

Juliet: But if such "rubbing" is found odious? I fear a despairing heart trapped in a loveless cage. Surely, first liking augurs well for happy loving.

Friar Lawrence: Alas, not always so. But I know the youth. Perhaps my words will salve your worried wounds. What would you know?

Juliet: Is Romeo kind?

Friar Lawrence: As kind as peace-filled feathered doves, if his blood's not up.

Juliet: And is he fair?

Friar Lawrence: You have no fears in that. A youth of peerless looks as makes the ladies swoon.

Juliet (her curiosity piqued): Which ladies?

Friar Lawrence: Those he looks not on, being a righteous and a proper gentleman.

Juliet: And is he wise?

Friar Lawrence: Alas no, not wise. For with a poet's gaze he sees the world, touched to the core by each new circumstance, and with an angel's voice, gives words to help hearts fly. Poets are but children in men's shoes, seeing all with saucered eyes, and moved to manufacture spells to charm us.

Juliet: A foolish poet, then.

Friar Lawrence: Wisdom may come to him in time, like snowdrop flecks into his raven hair. But you must be his chart and compass, as his love fills your nights with uncounted wonders.

Juliet: I think the stars may be enough for that. Is he at least a sober gentleman?

Friar Lawrence (hesitating): A sober youth ... as any in Verona, in these wild times.

Juliet: And what of books....

Romeo (outside, up all night from drinking): Rosaline!

Juliet: What noise is that?

Friar Lawrence: Some addled sinner, up all night from reveling.

Romeo (louder): Rosaline!

Friar Lawrence: Come child, you must look into your heart and pray to find your path.

(Friar Lawrence places Juliet's hands together in prayer, and then puts his hands over her ears.)

Friar Lawrence (loudly, so that Romeo may hear): Lady Juliet, you must take your prayers to know God's grace in this holy match.

Juliet: Speak not so loud, good Friar, for your palms may muffle less than you suppose.

Romeo (knocking on the door to be let in): Rosaline!

Juliet: I hear a pounding.

Friar Lawrence: It is your heart that speaks its hopes.

(Louder)

Lady Juliet, you know that Romeo is thine.

Romeo: Not Juliet, but Rosaline!

Romeo (wandering off):

Not Juliet, Rosaline!

Juliet: I hear my name.

Friar Lawrence: 'Tis but a drunken reveler who knows not what he says.

Juliet (removing the Friar's hands from her ears): Dear Friar, I am satisfied.

Friar Lawrence: What makes it so?

Juliet: From your kind words, and noisy happenstance, I leave far wiser than I came.

Friar Lawrence: And so, you aim to do your Father's will?

Juliet: As he would have me mine.

(She curtsies and leaves.)

Act 1, Scene 4. The Capulet banqueting hall.

(Food and music are on hand for the formal proposal of Romeo to Juliet. There are numerous courtiers in elegant medieval cloths.)

Lord Montague:

You are welcome all. Tonight, my son, the handsome Romeo will plight his troth to the lovely Juliet.

(The Courtiers clap.)

But first, as is his right, my lord Mercutio speaks, for himself and for his cous. the Prince.

Mercutio (standing):

Montague and Capulet,
With this love you seek the peace,
I, my prince and all Verona hope you cease
Those arguments that last 'til dawn,
That have disturbed our sleep for far too long.

But ponder this,
When your fine men have met
Upon the midnight hour,
Even just their swords have
Made the night to shower
With meteors bright.
Think what other, heavenly light
Might softly glow
When you two meet as lovers
Not as foes.

(The Courtiers clap politely.)

But one last word,
From my cousin strong and clear,
He sends apologies that some new cares
Of state mean he comes not here.

In his own words,

(Unrolling a parchment and reading from it)

Love must ever be a guest,
Ushered in with open arms,
Love's door cannot admit duress,
Or entertain false charms
Conjured by an easy word.
A lover's pleas must sound absurd

Unless they strike a stirring chord,
In the lover's lady's breast.

And so, dear Romeo,
Give this love your best,
And if you pass the test,
Warm days of sunshine will be
Yours and hers.

But if proud puffs of artifice
Should cloud the countenance
Of one so young and fair,
You should admit defeat,
And leave the courtly square,
Long ere your quest so bold,
Should end with forcèd frosty kiss,
And in a bed grown cold.

Lord Montague:

I will ponder much on what the Prince has said.
Just as my son now must play his part,
Singing high praise to Juliet, that they might wed.
To woo, and banish doubts, and win her heart.

Romeo (aside to the audience):

There sits Juliet, feted in this gaudy room,
Though I must speak of love,
I fear my everlasting doom.

She is shy and paler in her gilded throne.
And looks not as lusty in her heart,
As older ladies I have known.

I'd wager, were I to deftly climb
To her chamber window
In the dead of night,
She'd cry out
With agitated fright,
And call her nurse,
Fleeing my advance,
And fearing worse.

Lord Montague:

Come now sir, as you delay us all.

Romeo: Only, because with haste, I fear to tumble and might fall.

(The audience claps again.)

Romeo (aside)

And so it is, I take a heavy breath,
And bound by duty,
Like a clinging death,
Summon up this verse.

Romeo (to the gathered room): Can it be day, and Juliet is the sun?

(The courtiers groan and look at each other. Lord Montague silences them with a gesture to give his son another chance.)

Lord Montague (to Romeo): Perhaps celestial rhetoric has been too overdone.

Romeo (nods):

The nightingale sings false,
Thinking his merry work is done,
And whispering fountains weep with joy
That icy night has run.

(The courtiers start to nod in appreciation.)

And see how the fires grow dim,
When chided how to glow
By those fair cheeks.
The wistful moon now seeks
A softer hill on which to rest her gentle head,
Knowing that Endymion,
Despite his vows of love,
Has feasted on a greater light instead.

And Juliet's brilliant, conjuring eyes,
Could, with a smile, when open wide,
Make my spirits swell, with hope and pride,
And cause them to rise up, with airy gusts,
Even to the gilded gates of heaven,
Or with a frown, cause all to tumble down
In darkest deep despair, until they fell
Into the dismal fiery pits of hell.

(A few courtiers briefly clap.)

Juliet (still sitting on the throne):

Can my shy looks do even this?

Then what disasters might a kiss
Bring to poor Romeo's heart?"

Romeo:

Were you to grant such bliss,
And I could play my part,
Naught could go amiss.
When shall we start?

(The young lady courtiers laugh into their hands, and the men applaud his wit.)

Juliet (standing from the throne):

These pretty songs of praise you say so well,
Are they quite mine?
For I heard, when at shrift,
In Friar Lawrence's cell,
You claimed you loved the lady Rosaline.

(Romeo, putting his hand on his dagger, casts a glare at Friar Lawrence.)

And those words you speak,
Like lines writ in a play,
Perhaps you whispered even these to her,
Just yesterday.

Romeo: Not for three weeks!

(The courtiers gasp in horror.)

Juliet:

And what's more, withal,
My loyal cousin Tybalt,
Who stands there proud and tall,
Avows you are apt to lose
Your temper in a brawl.

And so, I must abhor your lover's plea,
A man so charming and so changeable,
Is like to be the death of me.

(Lady Montague and Lady Capulet exchange a knowing look, and begin to usher out their doubt-filled guests. The house is filled with uproar as the parents fume, and the Montague and Capulet relatives glare at each other with daggers drawn.)

The Nurse: Kind ladies and kind gentlemen, sweet Juliet is just fifteen. Time, the great leveler, can conjure love from harsh disdain as well as lay us in our graves. Perhaps this suit too quickly urged, should not be swiftly won.

(The courtiers gather round her throne.)

Courtier 1: Heavens above.

Courtier 2: Such insults made by one so young!

Courtier 3: She's deaf to love.

Courtier 4: Perhaps the girl should be a nun.

(With daggers drawn, some of the Montague family start to move nearer towards the throne. Lady Capulet gestures to her husband to intervene, but he folds his arms in refusal. Then, as the danger looms, Tybalt, draws his sword and comes to Juliet's aid.)

Tybalt (shouting to the gathered strong):

I say this now with sword and tongue,
That I would rather die, and murder too,
Before my tender cousin Juliet,
Should be deflowered by the likes of Montague.

(The Montague clan approaches, and a sword fight begins.)

(Juliet stands high up on her throne, taking two pistols from the belt of one of her cousins, she shoots one in the air)

Juliet: Enough!

(The fighting stops.)

Kinsmen, put up your swords and part.
When I marry, it will be with my heart,
Not this false and hasty scene,
In which my parents' scheming crime,
Forces me to act a part.

If you ever hoped for love,
Or have your sweetheart by your side,
Return your swords into their gloves,
And let me be not forced to be a bride.

(The female guests are moved by this speech, and go and grab their husbands or lovers, and force them to depart.)

(Lord Capulet approaches Juliet. She looks to him for comfort but finds only rage.)

Lord Capulet: Be gone by dawn. You have defied my will, and I'll have no truck with you, (to the Nurse) and you too madam!

Romeo (who has been skulking in the shadows, as an aside):

Did you not remark how the lady's eyes,
Flashed with fire, even as she despised my paltry lies?
If her anger, which so quickened my desire,
Can bring on passions of such a height,
How might my kisses move her to a matching fire,
And furnish me, with heavenly delight?

Oh I am fortune's fool to spurn the thing from which I run,
Love come too late is torture, if this evil plot
Can never be undone.

(Romeo emerges from the shadows)

Romeo: Sweet lady, words cannot express...

Juliet (looking up in horror as Tybalt draws his sword again): Just go!

Romeo bows: As you and I deserve.

(Romeo leaves.)

(Juliet gives Tybalt a kiss on the cheek, and everyone leaves, except the Nurse and Juliet, who slumps down on the steps in front of her throne. Fade to black.)

Act 1, Scene 5. The Palace Grand Ballroom, Verona in 1914.

(The heads of state sit around a table with maps and documents before them.)

Kaiser Friedrich: I demand reparations from Russia! Their assassins have killed the Duke of Holstein, and Denmark is aroused to arms, again. This flagrant act will lead to war unless quickly recompensed.

King Francis: Who are Germans to talk of recompense? My own cousin was blasted to pieces when on a state visit to Berlin. Where was the outrage then?

Kaiser Friedrich: Anarchist assassins answer to no king, but we have proof that Nicholas knew of the plot and did nothing!

Nicholas: That is a lie!

Empress Alexandra: We have all lost ones dear to us, Nicholas an uncle and a son, Friedrich a valued duke, Francis a cousin, and I, I lost my own sister, one whom I placed higher in my heart than all the world of men, shot by a murderous bullet on my coronation day.

The anarchists come to each of us, and offer, for love of king or God or country, to rid us of a troublesome neighbor, or to take revenge for past wrongs.

I know that each of you have turned a blind eye to them, granting safe passage and even money for weapons to vex your enemies. And so now, bullets, daggers and poison haunt our darkest corridors, and innocent crowds are slain by vicious conflagrations. This must stop today! Our men who darkly sanctioned these ungodly acts must be cast out and punished, and we must pledge to find a new way to resolve our differences.

The anarchists do not love us, or God, or their own people. They hope to set us at each other's throats, to make us lust for vengeance, and to start a war that will drive a stake through the heart of our beloved countries.

King Stefano of Italy: I too have lost many kinsmen. The sweet taste of vengeance does indeed turn to ashes, but so too does my house if my neighbor burns it to the ground. Roman Italy is small, but we will defend ourselves to the death!

Kaiser Friedrich: As will Germany.

Nicholas: As will Russia.

Francis: As will Normandy.

Empress Alexandra: As will my empire. Let's, then, discuss how to dissuade each other from such an attack.

King Stefano: But how?

Act 1, Scene 6. Juliet's room.

The Nurse (singing and Juliet lies with her head on the nurse's lap):

Though the winds be strong
And the feelings fraught,
As lovers court and pine.
A girl must find her own way home,
Using all the sense that she's been taught,
To a house of her own design.
To a house of her own design.

The troubles of this world,
Will yield to thought,
And heal in time,
But a girl must find her own way home,
Using all the sense that she's been taught,
To a house of her own design,
To a house of her own design.

Juliet (sitting up): I will be a woman soon. Perhaps a better match will quench my father's rage, when policy is wedded to a higher cause, and coupled with desire.

The Nurse: The County Paris is a handsome man. You should grab him while you can, before tonight's vile crowd slanders you abroad.

Juliet: No more young men! They know not what they do, and when they claim they love, young girls should hit them with a shoe.

(They laugh together.)

The Nurse: Who then?

Juliet: Sparkle-eyed Paris hankers for fortune more than he seeks to win my heart. With wooing looks and gentle words, he seeks the dowry in my father's love. But now he's seen a hawk made from a dove, I think his latest thought is how to flee.

(The Nurse nods.)

Juliet: I vow that if I marry, it will be to the one gentle man in all of Mad Verona, who can talk some sense. Why settle for a paupered count, when you can love a prince?

(They embrace.)

(Fade to Black)

Act 1, Scene 7. The Court of Verona.

(The Prince of Verona sits on his throne, hearing petitions from his subjects. The Chamberlain enters.)

Chamberlain: A young lady seeks an audience with your highness.

The Prince: What is her name?

Chamberlain: Juliet, and a Capulet.

The Prince: I hear from Mercutio that the lady is cast out by her family, for rejecting their rival's son. Though she was much maligned, the fault was with Romeo, not herself. Let the lady enter.

Chamberlain (announcing): Juliet Capulet of Verona.

(Juliet enters)

Juliet: Forgive my intrusion, your highness.

The Prince: How may I aid you in your current plight?

Juliet: I wish to be allowed to enter your service.

The Prince: Indeed, to what purpose?

Juliet: So that you may see my finer qualities and marry me.

The Prince: Indeed, and how old are you child?

Juliet: I am no child, for to be one speaks a lack of care, as parents and fond relatives provide a shelter from the stormy world. I have touched this Earth for just fifteen years, but I have a good heart, an honest disposition, and some have called me beautiful. I looked far and wide to find a noble man who is strong and kind and wise, and all roads led me home to my beloved Verona and its peerless Prince. What think you of my suit?

The Prince: You are very young, and might be better served by school books than an ancient husband.

Juliet: Though I have much to learn, I do know Latin, French and Greek. And all the theorems of Euclid, though I find his axioms arbitrary and questionable, ill-suited to calculations on the curvaceous orb on which we spin. I know how to measure a man's body from Vitruvius, and how to gauge his character from Socrates, and his immortal soul from Saint Augustine. I am well versed in dressing field wounds, and know the symptoms and the antidotes of even the rarest poisons. I have also studied the principles of alchemy and the zodiacal constellations, and I can use a bow to shoot an apple from a tree at one hundred paces. So what is it that you would have me study?

The Prince: What do you know of love?

Juliet: I know that love must ever be a guest, ushered in with open arms, and that my suit must seem absurd unless it kindles some desire in you.

The Prince (smiling): To use my own words to woo, is that quite fair?

Juliet: Was it fair of you? For in your words I saw a spark of what a thoughtful prince might do, out of kindness to a stranger, which only made me ponder how such a one might be, when moved by thoughts of love. I burn with a desire to improve myself and the fate of those less fortunate. If fairly wed to your wisdom and your power, we might build a glittering empire to bring light to the whole world.

The Prince: You are very young.

Juliet: It might be unseemly for a maid of fifteen to marry a prince of thirty. And so I propose that I stay in your service until I am fully sixteen. If by then you have not surrendered your love, I will raise my siege, quit the city gates, and leave you to your fate.

The Prince: And of what service can you be 'til then?

Juliet: Any that my modesty allows and that your business requires.

The Prince (thinking for a moment while looking at his chess set): Do you, perhaps, play chess?

Juliet: I have studied it much, but am yet to find a worthy adversary.

The Prince: In that, at least, you may have met your match.

Juliet: Then I may stay?

The Prince (smiling): Only if you play to win.

Act 1, Scene 8. The Palace Library, Verona in 1914.

(Tsar Nicholas sits in an armchair, nervously waiting, trying to read a newspaper. Empress Alexandra enters, and Nicholas rises to greet her.)

Nicholas: You came.

Alexandra: Your note was most specific.

Nicholas: I needed to be alone with you.

Alexandra: Needed or wanted? They are quite different.

Nicholas: Both, of course. We haven't had a moment together, since the conference began.

Alexandra: I have many guests. All are important to me.

Nicholas: Of course.

Alexandra: But if there is something you need to say to me privately, I understand.

Nicholas: I have found an answer to all our troubles.

Alexandra: How magnificent, and unlikely.

Nicholas: You should marry my brother.

Alexandra: Your brother? How would that solve anything?

Nicholas: You hope for peace through diplomacy. It is noble, but doomed to war. With marriage, our alliance would command my army and your ingenious machines - Europe would be at our feet. We could enforce a peace.

Alexandra: So, it is to be a love match, then.

Nicholas: We are leaders first and lovers second.

Alexandra: And I hear that your brother, with his frills and finery, prefers the company of men.

Nicholas: He will do his duty, as I command him.

Alexandra: I'm not sure I relish being any man's duty. And I still think he would refuse me, and if he did not, I would refuse him.

Nicholas: Then I will annul my own marriage and marry you myself.

Alexandra: I'm sure the Tsarina would thank you much for that. Are you two so unhappy, then?

Nicholas: She is a good wife, and a kind mother, but you, Alexandra, are a great woman. Who else could gather such feuding royalty on the brink of war? Your beauty and wisdom are beyond compare.

Alexandra: Is it my nose, my knowledge or my navy that makes me so irresistible?

Nicholas: All Europe admires your wit and charm.

Alexandra: Spare me the compliments, Nicholas, you were never very good at them. Your army is large, and your nation vast, I admit. But your weapons are far from new, and your roads and railways are hideously backward. If war came, all your troops would need to pass through a few critical junctions. These could be easily disrupted by aerial bombs and naval artillery. By the time you recovered, your army would be locked into a stagnant battle of attrition. Within a year or perhaps two, you would come to fear your own people. They have not yet forgiven your blunders in the East.

Nicholas: So you reject my offer?

Alexandra: We are leaders, not lovers, as you say, and I will consider your proposition in that light.

Nicholas: You *will* consider it, then?

Alexandra: On Friday, at noon, in this very place, I will give you my answer.

Nicholas (kissing her hands): I live in hope, until then.

Alexandra: Each moment is filled with possibilities. That should give hope to us all.

Act 1, Scene 9. Romeo's bed chamber filling the whole stage.

Romeo (sits writing):

Friar Lawrence, I am in despair. My foolish pride held a mist before my eyes, not seeing, until too late, the virtues and the charms of the lady Juliet. Teach me how to make amends, and bring this penitent, who has abandoned verse, and all pretense, to a happy end.

(There is a knock at the door.)

(Romeo approaches the door but does not open it.)

Romeo: Who is it?

Maria (with a strong country accent): Maria, your true love.

(Romeo struggles to remember who she is.)

Romeo: Madam, I am not sure I know...

Maria (with some anger): The woman with the pies.

(Recollection crosses Romeo's face.)

Romeo: Ah yes.

Maria: I have come for your love, as once you said I should.

Romeo: My dear lady, I'm sorry, but my heart has quite forgotten you.

Maria (bursting open the door. She is obviously very pregnant): Well, my belly hasn't forgotten you.

Romeo: Holy mother of God.

Maria: Well, I'm not that, but in a few weeks, a mother I'll be.

Romeo: And the child?

Maria (slaps Romeo hard across the cheek): Is yours. Don't let your heart forget that!

Romeo: But after only one night!

Maria: Four times was plenty, from what I remember, one night or not.

Romeo: I remember some splendid pies, and a little brandy, but...

Maria: Glad to see me then?

Romeo: Well yes, but the news weighs heavy on me.

Maria: It weighs heavier on me.

Romeo: I am not a rich man.

Maria: Your father is Lord Montague.

Romeo: Who has cut me off. His hopes for me are all in disarray.

Maria: In regards a lady?

Romeo: In a way, yes.

Maria: Well you have a lady now. This will do nicely.

Romeo: What will?

Maria: Staying here with you until our child is born, and then you can find a finer place than this.

Romeo: I can't. My landlord would never allow... I mean...

Maria: Let me deal with him.

(There is a second knock at the door.)

Romeo: My dear Maria, I will afford you every comfort, in your condition, but now you must be quiet as the grave.

(He takes her by the hand, at first she is pleased, but then she sees that he is leading her towards a closet.)

Romeo: For just so long as my visitor stays, no more. (He hurries her in and closes the closet door behind her.)

Romeo (at the front door): Who goes there?

Katherine: Your one true love, Katherine.

Romeo: Katherine? I'm sorry, (through the door), I don't quite...

Katherine: Your Kate. Your winsome Kate, your darling Kate, your Kate with the lovely eyes, your Kate with the ostrich feather bed.

Romeo (recollection dawns, along with a smile): Ah Kate, of course, what brings you to this place?

Katherine: Hearing of your broken engagement, I came to comfort you.

(Romeo opens the door, to see a more elegant lady, obviously pregnant, but less far along than Maria.)

Romeo: And you are with child. Did you find a new love so soon?

Katherine: I did not.

Romeo (with dread): Then the child?

Katherine: Is yours. I know we parted harshly, but I am ready to be reconciled. I forgive your many foibles, and your wandering eye, if you will give a steady hand, and marry me.

Romeo: Marry you!

Katherine: It was your parting wish.

Romeo: It was, but...

Katherine: But what?

Romeo: My ears still ring with the chorus of curses you poured forth as I departed. Sluggard, rascal, dog's breath, coward, lecher, philanderer. And all because I wished a lady good morning and she smiled back a thank you.

Katherine: She slipped you a note!

Romeo: I did not slip a note to her.

Katherine: Well now you are a father, you must reign in your passions!

Romeo: My passions have already fled.

Katherine (looking around the room.): This may do, while I am with child, then you must find a richer source of gold, and we can move to grander lodgings.

Romeo: I am a poet. Speak not to me of gold.

Katherine: How much silver, then, does poetry afford?

Romeo: Not a unicorn's breath of dust.

Katherine: Well that will not suffice. My mother needs a larger room than this.

Romeo: Your mother!

(There is another knock at the door.)

Katherine: That might be her now, dear lady.

Romeo: But if it is not, I wish to keep this love a gentle whisper, until the world is ready for our great discovery.

(Romeo opens a trunk and gestures for Katherine to get inside it. She points at the closet.)

Katherine: Surely, I see a more congenial abode.

Romeo: It is fully occupied.

Katherine: In truth?

(Romeo nods vigorously.)

Katherine: Very well, but if it is my mother knocking at your door, you must make clear the reason why I am sequestered in this tiny prison.

(Katherine climbs inside the trunk and Romeo gently closes the lid.)

Romeo (going to the front door.): Who knocks so gently in the dead of night?

Rosaline: It is I, the lady Rosaline.

Romeo: Rosaline! Perhaps another time, it is passing late.

Rosaline: Your welcome was not always quite so cold. Hearing of your broken marriage plans...

Romeo (opens the door slowly): Come in.

(Rosaline enters and gives Romeo a peck on the cheek.)

Rosaline: To your poet's inner sanctum! Did you write immortal lines today?

Romeo: There were many interruptions. Are you with child?

Rosaline (surprised): How did you surmise?

Romeo: It is just that sort of day.

Rosaline: After that troubled loving night, I know I banished you from my bed, but just that once seems to have surpassed my expectations.

Romeo: As it did mine.

Rosaline: Well, you've long lamented that. But it is what it is, I thought that I might stay with you, to silence wagging tongues, and then make this house anew. You would be free to love as you wish, and so would I, if that pleases you.

Romeo: But not with you.

Rosaline: Quite so. Swimming upstream can be so exhausting.

(There is a loud insistent knock at the door.)

Romeo (jumping out of his skin): Mother of Katherine!

Rosaline: Is that some new oath?

Romeo (barely pulling himself together): Dear, honest Rosaline. This new joy comes tangled with astonishment. In short, I am amazed. I know not who knocks at the gate, but for fear of gossip, and for your sake, please stand behind this heavy drapery.

Rosaline: Oh, very well. But wouldn't that closet be more agreeable?

Romeo: No.

Rosaline: Or this chest?

(Romeo shakes his head vigorously and leads her behind the tapestry, throwing a cushion over her protruding shoes.)

Romeo: Who goes there?

Friar Lawrence: Friar Lawrence. Surely you know me from my honest knock.

Romeo (opening the door): It has been a day filled with wonders.

Friar Lawrence: Not another lady?

Romeo (whispering): Three.

Friar Lawrence: My vow of chastity brings me some discomfort but much peace.

Romeo (whispering): And each here secreted silent in my room.

Romeo (whispering even quieter): And everyone, soon to be the mother of my child.

Friar Lawrence (puzzled): The same child?

Romeo (shaking his head): One each.

Friar Lawrence: Holy Saint Francis.

Romeo: And all intent to marry Romeo.

Friar Lawrence: Do I know the ladies?

Romeo: Maria, Kate and Rosaline.

Friar Lawrence: Have I not warned? Have I not pleaded? Have I not chastised?

(Romeo nods penitently.)

Friar Lawrence: And which lady is it that you love, and say not all?

Romeo: The lady Juliet, that is soon to be married to the Prince.

Friar Lawrence: The very one you spurned so vilely in front of all her kith and kin.

Romeo: I am proud of none of it.

Friar Lawrence: In ancient times, when Alexander came to the Gordian knot, he took out his sword and hacked it in twain. He went on to capture much of Asia. Instead, you have tied it around your neck in pretty bows, and all these ladies now will conquer you.

Romeo: Is there no escape, no penitence to absolve me of my sins, no holy vow of chastity?

Friar Lawrence: Methinks it is a trifle late for that.

Romeo: Then Juliet is lost.

Friar Lawrence: And Romeo.

Romeo: Then death itself must be my release.

Friar Lawrence (having an idea): Romeo must die. But Dromio might live.

Romeo: Dromio, Dromio? What manner of creature is a Dromio?

Friar Lawrence: A beast to carry your burden, if you will play the story well.

Romeo: I will.

Friar Lawrence: In a dark corner of Verona's walls, is the sunken grotto of an old apothecary. His wizened frame carries dark secrets from a bygone time. Ask of him, for three pieces of gold, an ancient potion, that once taken, dissembles death, slowing pulse and graying skin, and carrying poor sinners, even to the gates of hell.

This very night, you must take a draft, and leave a note, despairing of your sins. In the morning, all is found, and your seeming death will carry you to the icy tomb in which your ancestors await your company.

At your destruction, these three ladies, will all cry out in grief, forgiving your transgressions, as saintly memory clouds the many slights and hurts that you have done them.

Each will return to their own family, distraught, but unclasped by Romeo's dead hand, and free to marry otherwise, as do the honestly bereaved.

Then, I will send a fellow friar, to Mantua, whence another potion may be had to undo the cursèd first affliction. With him returned, I come to your tomb, on the fourth day, and you will be reborn, not as Romeo, but as Dromio.

Romeo: But who is Dromio?

Friar Lawrence: Dromio, is your twin brother, lost off the coast of Naples in a shipwreck, when just six months old. Once feared drowned, but by this miracle now he lives.

Romeo: I knew none of this.

Friar Lawrence: You still have much to learn, my son.

But Dromio will be honest, where you were sly, kind, where you were cruel, loyal where you were fickle, strong where you were weak, vigorous where you were idle, and no longer a burden on your family.

Romeo: Enough! Dromio sounds like a perfectly worthy friar, but never one to win a lady's heart.

Friar Lawrence: Dromio may comfort the ladies for their loss, and help raise their children, as any doting uncle might, whilst also being free to love the Lady Juliet.

Romeo: There is still the Prince.

Friar Lawrence: That is yours to mend. Three miracles should be enough for one day's work. Now tell me, do you like my plan?

Romeo: Like it? Your stratagem is riven with paths to hasty death. What if the potion brings an end to life, not just its semblance? What if the tomb, too tightly sealed, drowns out my meager breath? What if there is no other potion to undo the first? Or the second Friar goes not, or going, does not return? What if the Mantuan potion comes too late, and merely adds a dribble to my lips, or waking, I remember not who I am, nor why I live? And what if I portray an imperfect Dromio? This dark deception will anger more than Cupid's overflowing cup. And worst of all, what if Juliet fails to love me? All will be despair.

Friar Lawrence: Then come and live with me, as a hermit in the woods. I will use taut ropes to gird your loins – and bound them fast with vows of chastity.

Romeo (wincing): For love, I will hazard death. To find Juliet, I must lose myself.

Friar Lawrence: There's my good son. Come now, for we must prepare many things.

Romeo (pointing to the three hiding places): But what of them?

Friar Lawrence: Tread softly and be gentle with the door.

(Romeo and Friar Lawrence leave. After a few moments of silence, all three women come out from their hiding spot and see each other, pregnant as they are.)

Maria, Katherine and Rosaline together: Oh!

Act 1 Scene 10. The Montague House.

(Lord and Lady Montague sit on chairs with Maria, Katherine and Rosaline standing before them, obviously pregnant. Maria and Katherine are weeping, and Friar Lawrence stands in the background.)

Maria (crying hysterically): Oh, woe, woe, unutterable woe!

Lord Montague: What ails you, madam?

Maria (after more weeping): Romeo is dead.

(Maria and Katherine cry some more.)

Katherine: And buried in a tomb!

(More crying from them both.)

Lord Montague: I am aware of my son's condition, but not what it has to do with you.

(Maria and Katherine burst into tears even more loudly.)

Maria: I am with child.

Katherine: As am I.

Lord Montague: So are many.

Lady Montague: And who is the father?

Maria: Romeo, your son.

Lord Montague: And you, madam, who or what are you?

Maria: I am Maria, and an honest innkeeper.

Lady Montague: But Romeo..., with you?

Lord Montague: Perhaps the hunger in his belly silenced the alarum from his eyes.

Maria: Hey, I didn't come here to be insulted!

Lord Montague: Then why did you burden our door with so much wailing? To plunder a lord's dead heir?

Maria: To have what's right, for me and my child.

Lord Montague (to Katherine): And you, mistress, who are you?

Katherine: I am Kate, your son's true love.

Lady Montague: He spoke of a Katherine, once - a very shrew who cast him out from jealousy.

Katherine: I am the very same, though slanderous remarks belie the tenderness of our affections. We were reconciled and set to wed before this calamity.

Lord Montague: And now you seek our shelter and our gold?

Katherine: As it should be, for one so close to your beloved son.

Lord Montague: The candle of my love for him was snuffed out by his prodigal debasement.

Lady Montague (to Rosaline): And you, dear lady, whose breeding is clear from your high bearing and unwept cheeks, what brings you here?

Rosaline: I am the lady Rosaline.

Lady Montague: Ah yes, I have heard him speak of you, or was it Juliet? You were the rock on which the shipwreck of his love was smashed.

Rosaline: We had our exits and our entrances, and I am with-child too.

Lord Montague: Many may claim, but few may prove such obligations.

Friar Lawrence: My lord, good Christian. Your son and I were close, as all you know, and he divulged, far from the confessional, that all three ladies were with him, and changed by him, and he was much amazed.

Lady Montague: As am I.

Lord Montague: Romeo was lazy, disobedient and woeful in his choice of friends – and as for lovers, well! Defying me, he rebuffed a Capulet, who could have secured all our fortunes. I cut him off, so that he should stomach a poet's feast: his empty promises - for coin he would have none of me. Seeing what easy women he has misguided, I grant that same inheritance to them. Begone!

(Maria and Katherine start to cry loudly again.)

Lady Montague: Come now, husband. Were we not misled by him, just as these ladies erred, to love his dark curls and winning ways? I am a mother, and have more pity in my heart than you, and will share what little comfort I can spare from our time of woe.

Rosaline: I need no charity. I am a lady and seek no succor from the likes of you. (To Lord Montague) By your churlish pride, you have lost a son, and three grandchildren. Think on that, in your dotage, and be worm-bored with regret.

Lady Montague: He spoke in haste. Let not an angry moment bring a lifetime of discontent.

Maria (looking to the door, sees Romeo arrive in the guise of Dromio.): Aaahh! Romeo walks abroad. His ghost is come to drive us to our graves.

Lord Montague: Your muddled mind must turn from grief to life. Romeo is dead and will not return.

Maria (pointing): There.

All (cry out in surprise, except for Friar Lawrence.): Aaaahh!

Romeo (as Dromio): Be not alarmed. I am no spirit, but a weary traveler.

Katherine: He is the very glass of Romeo 's past, but paler and more beautiful.

Rosaline: And carries himself with nobler bearing, a gravity more suiting a soldier than a poet.

Maria: And thin, and shaking, like a wind-swept leaf. Do we have bread and wine for this poor wanderer?

Lady Montague: Stranger, answer this. How came you here, and what divine reflection gives you semblance to poor Romeo, who lies entombed not four days since?

Romeo: My lady, or might I call you mother, I am your child, but am no Romeo. An accident at sea, when I was but a babe, cast me ashore in Naples. A kind fisherman took me in, and raised me as his own. I was content, until these two days past - a fast ship brought news of Romeo's loss. He was a stranger to me, then. But my father, weeping tears of guilt, told me of my discovery, and how once brought ashore, he found a necklace with the name of Dromio about my neck, and knew me as a Montague. With twins, he thought there one to spare, to comfort his old age, but hearing of my brother's death, he told me all, and sent me here to be your other son, as is my birthright.

Lady Montague: And the necklace?

Romeo: Alas, dear lady, lost to time.

Lady Montague: The mirror-match does quite o'erthrow my eyes -as babes you 'peared not near so much alike.

Romeo: May I call you mother?

Lady Montague: You may do *that*, at least, with easy conscience.

Romeo: And these ladies?

Lord Montague: Were much enamored of your brother. Perhaps they can stir the like in you, and some restitution might arise from this imbroglio.

(Romeo kisses Maria's hand, who is then reluctant to let his go.)

Maria: Your hands are soft, and your eyes like silent pools of anguish. How might such a face move the heart of one who loved your brother!

(Romeo disengages, to kiss Katherine's hand.)

Katherine: And your voice weighs heavy with your grief and loss, and calls for tender nurturing.

(Romeo withdraws his hand and turns to Rosaline.)

Rosaline: And you do not prattle on. No poet then, but a sober fisherman. Who knows what you might catch in your enchanted net in fair Verona?

Lord Montague: Come now, many a tear have I shed for my drowned son. Perhaps an honest life has honed a better man than was your brother.

Romeo: Father!

(They embrace. Romeo starts to shed tears.)

Romeo: I am overwhelmed. This week was filled with wonders.

Lady Montague: We hold a service at your brother's new-hewn tomb, on Friday next. Stay if you will, and say a goodly word for him.

Romeo: As you command.

Lord Montague: Come, dear wife, let us drink and dine with our new son, and grieve the other's loss, and let these ladies share our supper and our hearth.

Lady Montague: As my lord wishes.

Act 1, Scene 11. Romeo's chambers. (Romeo sits reading. There is a knock at the door.)

Romeo (opening the door): What ails you, madam? 'Tis very late.

Rosaline: My restless wanderings drove me to your door. May I not see you then, for we are truly strangers?

Romeo: For the love I bear my brother, come in.

Rosaline: 'Tis passing strange to find you here, your brother's very echo in his cave.

Romeo: The room was shunned by those who fear a death, and draws me closer to my long-lost twin. I feel his presence, though we never met.

Rosaline: Except as babes.

Romeo: As you say. May I offer you replenishment?

Rosaline: Only by drinking from your eyes.

Romeo: Or warmth?

Rosaline: A fond embrace might melt the chill around my heart.

Romeo: Do you forget my brother?

Rosaline: Remember, rather, with every moment that I see your face. And yet, better. Your earnest manner moves my inner fire more deeply than his constant nattering. Your eyes more steadfast, your arms are stronger, and I would have you catch me, if I fell. (She falls into his arms.)

Romeo: Are you quite well? Perhaps your condition...

Rosaline: My condition was from an ardent misfire, where nature's urging raced ahead of preparation. But now, all might be mended, with a second deeper kindling. Do you not feel a stirring in your blood, as our bodies blend like intertwining flames?

(She rubs herself against him.)

Romeo (though tempted as he smells her hair, he finally pushes her away): It is too hot for me. I share my brother's brow and hair and eyes, but not his boldness. This has been a troubled time beyond compare, and I would not err by giving way to so sudden an enticement. You are beautiful, like a goddess from the woods, but I am a simple man, and must catch my breath before I pledge my heart.

Rosaline: Your heart can wait. It is your bed that brings me by tonight. Love may come with the dawn.

Romeo: And regret, and scolding self-reproach.

Rosaline: Then I must go?

Romeo: As my brother would have wished.

Rosaline: Be careful, Dromio. There will come cold nights when you will think on passions that you might have had, and I will be the queen of your remembrance.

Romeo: Let me give my answer, in all good time, after the service at my brother's tomb. I will decide, for my happiness and for yours.

Rosaline: Until then, good night.

Romeo: May I guide you in the dark?

Rosaline: I know my way, like a charcoal cat, and in my present humor, a pouncing robber might come to rue our meeting by the clawed daggers in my hands.

Romeo: Take care, then.

Rosaline: Good night.

(She exits.)

Romeo (sitting down to write):

Friar Lawrence,

My spirits weigh heavy with deceit. I hoped to be reborn, free to love sweet Juliet, but find myself in chains of expectation. Rosaline was here tonight, and threw her love at me, like I was a second glove to be put on, she having lost the first. And as our bodies touched, an old passion stirred against my will, dreaming as I do of Juliet. Holy Father, pray for me, that I may be kept from temptations of the flesh, for though my mind is sanctified at Juliet's holy altar, my body wanders, in its night-unguarded state, towards sweet recollections.

(There is a knock at the door. Romeo opens it. Katherine runs weeping straight into Romeo's arms, and buries her grieving face into his chest.)

Romeo: What troubles you, at such an hour?

Katherine: Your brother's loss has tossed me all at sea. What safe harbor beckons in such a storm of tears, but thee?

Romeo: I am not my brother.

Katherine: No man is, but you may wear his shoes, and fill his coat, and eat his meat, and hold me in tender consolation.

Romeo: Romeo was not so worthy of your love, to have cast you off.

Katherine (crying again): It was my fault, not his – my petty jealousies and harsh reproofs. I should have shown the sunshine in my heart when he approached, not my fear of night at his departing.

Romeo: So you truly loved him, then?

Katherine: With all my heart.

Romeo: He was a fool to cast away such love. It comes but rarely.

Katherine: But you are no fool.

Romeo (stepping back): I have some sense, that hard work and my travels have earned me.

Katherine: And steady and perceptive eyes.

Romeo: Perhaps you see my brother and not me in that.

Katherine: Far from it. Romeo's eyes, would dart this way and that, as if seeking an escape from consequence. But you, you study my face, and hair and hands, as if I am the only Eve to your only Adam. And as you do, this well of love still in my heart, seeks to overflow and carry you to blissful paradise.

(She puts her arms around him and kisses him.)

Romeo: This is very quick.

Katherine: But not for me. Months of lonely pondering on Romeo's loss have let me grasp a second chance, one surely heaven-sent.

(She kisses him again.)

Romeo: I still am not my brother, and though you are one worthy of love, my heart is much distressed with grieving for his loss. Surely, grand passions may wait for great rewards, and high regard may outlive days of self-reflection. I take your current tears as tributaries of my brother's love, which when they join and flow across your heart as one, will be a cooling balm to your desolation.

If, after the service at his tomb, you still would woo his shadow in myself, then I will give you thoughtful answer, but for now, good night, sweet Katherine.

Katherine: I will dream away the time, 'til then.

Romeo: And think upon my words, not just my likeness.

Katherine: I will.

(She leaves.)

(Romeo sits to write again.)

Friar Lawrence,

I am besieged, even as I write. A fevered Katherine pounds my door with tender yearnings. Was I a monster, then, to bring these women so much hope and misery? Please guide me at my next confession and...

(There is another knocking at his door.)

Maria: So pale, and all alone?

Romeo: I am, though the night was far from quiet.

Maria: Such grief deserves fine food and better company.

Romeo: Alas, I have little to offer...

Maria (opening her basket): Trouble not, I come prepared.

(She lifts out two pies, and a bottle of brandy.)

Romeo: I cannot eat, my grief devours my hunger for earthly pleasures.

Maria: I also grieve, but beef and onions oft would still your brother's tears.

(She waves one of the pies under Romeo's nose.)

Romeo: Perhaps a morsel, then, to please a lady.

(Maria bows in an exaggerated way, playing up to the compliment. She hands Romeo a pie and a spoon, and he sits and begins to eat.)

Maria: And a tipple, perhaps, to wash it down?

(She takes out two glasses, and fills them both. Romeo drinks and coughs. It is very strong liquor.)

Maria: To Romeo, as handsome a man as will ever walk the Earth.

(They drain the glasses and refill them.)

Romeo: And as noble a spirit as may fill a chest with pride.

(They drain the glasses again.)

Maria: You know, I wonder.

Romeo (getting a little drunk.): Wonder what, good woman?

Maria: If a twin may kiss with tender lips, just like his brother.

Romeo: A kiss must surely come from love.

Maria: A kiss must surely come from lips. The love may follow.

Romeo: You think to comfort me, in my grief.

Maria: I think for you to comfort me in mine.

(Maria sits on Romeo's lap, and kisses him.)

Romeo: Madam!

(Maria puts another spoonful of pie into Romeo's mouth.)

Maria: Hush now, and stop your chattering. (She kisses him again.)

Romeo: I am not my brother, you forget yourself.

Maria: Am I not to your liking?

Romeo: I love another.

Maria: Tush.

(She puts another spoonful of the pie in Romeo's mouth.)

Maria: Do you prefer a stuck-up, scarecrow of a lady, who knows more about embroidery than how to give you pleasure? Or you would you have a well-upholstered woman, full-quipped to furnish all a man's appetites?

Romeo (taking the spoon from his mouth): My dear Maria, I am aware of your *ample* charms, but both our hearts are heavy, and this forward leap too bold. Much may break on leaping with this suddenness.

Maria: My heart is pounding, as I feel is yours, but I hear no breaking. Would you like more pie?

Romeo: I am fully satisfied. I have travelled far and must to bed, alone.

Maria (pulling his head to her breast and strokes his hair): Rest then, upon my bosom and sleep contented like a little babe.

Romeo (pulling back): My chaste pillow should be my only friend tonight. I thank you for your kindness, but you must leave me be.

Maria (standing up): So early! Your brother was more quickly won, but no matter, what's worth having is worth the wait, they say.

Romeo: I will give no word tonight, but past the service at my brother's tomb...

Maria: Yes, yes. I won't stay where I'm not wanted. But this sweet pie, I leave for breakfast. The light of day, and cherries ripe might warm your heart towards the caring cook.

Romeo: As you say. Be safe, good Maria.

Maria:

The sweetness of your parting kiss,
A trembling in my throat,
The sullen moon will be my lonely guide,
And loving thoughts of you, my warming cloak.

Romeo: What do you quote? I do not know it.

Maria (bowing): One of my own.

Romeo (surprised): You, a poet?

Maria: Does it surprise you?

Romeo: Well, yes. I hope I don't offend.

Maria: It fills the time, between the pies.

Romeo: You have a gift.

Maria: Your brother was a poet too.

(She steals one more kiss.)

Maria: But not so sweet a kisser.
Good night, dear Dromio.

Romeo: Good night.

(Maria exits. Romeo looks sad and guilty.)

Act 1, Scene 12. The Montague Family tomb.

(Friar Lawrence addresses the mourners who include Romeo, Maria, Katherine and Rosaline, along with the Prince and Juliet.)

Friar Lawrence: Time is the great mystery. It levels castles, and heals wounded hearts. A happy year remembered, rushes by like a summer's day, but a moment of grief drags us into an eternal winter of despair. And so we walk, with leaden-footed steps through this living world, unbelieving that the dead are truly gone.

In this place, we come to think of Romeo, a poet-son of Montague, gentle man, filled with eloquence and grace, and though he loved too much, let no man say that he loved not well. If he had known of this miracle brother, rescued from the clinging naiads of the sea, how would he have clasped that hand, as if to drag him from those waters once again into his family.

Master Dromio, though much moved with tears, has asked to speak upon this woeful day.

Romeo (as Dromio): Dear brother, whatever your sins, the harshest judge was you unto yourself. Three women wooed, and each with child. Heaven should wink at such love overflowed, as a torrent floods its mirroring pool, and cleaves new streams, through harsh mountains and timbered forests, even to the very sea. Oh, that I had known you in life, as I learn now of you in your death. What burdens could we not have shared? What peak too high might we not have climbed as one? I am no poet, with words like yours to sing orisons to the new-born day, and yet your conjured moments ever will be young, as I grow stooped and dull, as creeping time burns raven locks to silver ash, and youthful strength to feeble stumbling.

(Maria, Katherine and Rosaline burst into tears.)

Friar Lawrence: Let each speak, who once did love him.

Maria (stepping forward): I was his first. Romeo, a lusty lad, came to my inn for comfort from the storm. I fed him well, and loved him better, and now I am with child. I am not ashamed. His brief sojourn on this ravenous Earth encompassed love. Not all can say as much. He had a well-sprung arm, and a goodly thigh, and such a head as would melt the heart of chastity herself. Only his wandering eye was his undoing, and I forgive, as I must never forget the father of my child.

Katherine (stepping forward): I was Romeo's first *true* love. We met and wooed in my father's garden, and I hoped to be betrothed to such a worthy gentleman, surrendering my heart and my good name too soon, before his formal vows were exchanged for mine. His hands were soft as silken flowers, and his tongue could charm a crow to sing like Philomel.

At first he loved me well, but then so many other ladies caught his eye, that I grew jealous, and like a royal fool, I cast him out, not knowing I was begotten with his child. I tried to mend the war between us, and win his heart anew. By then he was ensnared by another lady's charms, and spurned me. I do not ask for justice from the dead, but judge me not so harshly, who still lives. I love him even now, though his sweet and conquered body lies sealed in that stony prison.

Rosaline (stepping forward): Romeo loved me well, in his own way, with emissaries of poesy wrapped in guile. I think that only I was his true match, sparring word for word, and loving blow for loving blow. He was a wild one, not knowing his own faults, and drawn like a pounding moth to beauty's flame. I brought him bliss, but would have crushed his heart, if he had lived. Judge me not unkind. He begged and pleaded, like one doomed to die, before I succumbed to his fevered embrace. It ended with a sad farewell, as if he broke the glass in which he looked, and saw not the reflection of his own passion. That he is my coming child's father, I will not deny. I will speak vaguely to her of our love, and count it best that she respects him.

Friar Lawrence: Are there others who would speak before we place the seal upon the door?

Lady Montague: I will speak. He was my son. A handsome and a foolish boy, with gifts beyond compare of looks and eloquence, wasted on a sinful life. Any of these three women might have made a dotting wife, except perhaps the last.

(Rosaline bows sarcastically).

Lady Montague: He threw away the sacred blessing of life, from petulance. And yet, to see his empty vessel, with all blood drained away, has cracked my heart, never to be repaired.

Dromio (who had arrived quietly as the other's spoke): Speak you now of Romeo, a Montague?

Romeo: And who are you, Sir?

Dromio: One who loved him better than he knew.

Romeo: How so, you are a stranger here?

Dromio: I am Dromio of Naples. My father, the King, hearing of this tragic death, confessed a tale that brought wonder to my ears. Though I was long raised a prince, his child, he brought forth a golden chain, once found around my neck, when new dragged from the sea as just a babe. His wife, the queen, was barren, and learning that my family was drowned, they took pity on my screeching face, and raised me as their own. But hearing of my brother's death, and how, when shipwrecked off the Naples coast, Romeo had lost a brother, the king felt for my northern kin, and sent me forth to comfort their new loss with long-unhoped discovery. And who sir, are you?

Romeo: I am Romeo, and a Montague, new conjured from that grave by your arrival.

Dromio: Then the news is false, and my brother lives?

Romeo: Your brother is caught in a sharp stratagem, and I will answer for it.

Lady Capulet: Can it be true? For this wicked world has played the fool with me. Do you have proof, Sir, of this happy tale?

Dromio: Here is that very chain, with Dromio Montague graven into this curvaceous emblem. It is too dainty to wear around my swollen neck, so in this satchel I hold it fast, the one link to my history.

Lady Capulet (embraces and kisses him): You are my son, and in your eyes and golden hair I see the sunny child who brought delight to a mother's heart.

Maria (approaching Dromio): I have oft said, that I love Romeo's brother more than I love the father of my child. (She kisses him on the mouth before he can react, then steps away.)

Katherine: And so have I. (She also kisses Dromio, who staggers amazed.)

Rosaline: And so have I. (She also kisses Dromio.)

Lady Montague (turning to Romeo): It is a foolish mother who does not know her own son! (She slaps him.)

(Maria turns to Romeo and slaps him, as does Katherine, as does Rosaline.)

Dromio: These women of Verona greet very warmly.

Romeo: Yes, brother, my cheek is still glowing from it.

The Prince (standing on a wall to draw attention): Dromio Montague, you are welcome to Verona, but you must prepare yourself for your brother's reckoning. Each of these three women have loved and lost him, each now with child, and each deserving to be cherished, as a mother should.

Romeo, you have deceived these ladies, all Verona and me. Many shed tears for your seeming loss, and were I in a darker humor, I would cast you in chains for this dissembling. But these children need a father, and I am moved to be benevolent. I understand Lord Montague has cast you off, for your impudence. Perhaps this seeming death has touched his tender feelings. I will intercede with him, and have your fortunes quite restored, if you will name the lady you will take to wife, and treat the others well. Which will it be, Maria, Katherine or the lady Rosaline?

Romeo: My heart is lost to a lady, final and irrevocable, though come too late. It will be my ruin.

The Prince: Come now, you need only speak the lady's name, and it is done. Did not Paris choose from Hera, Athena and Aphrodite? Can you do no less? Blissful love with Helen was his reward.

Romeo: Then I choose Juliet.

The Prince (to Juliet): What say you to his suit?

Juliet: This fair-faced youth has sung-false, more than once, his love for me. He hopes to skip away from duty's bonds, and taint the kindness of my loving prince.

The Prince: Impudent boy, she is betrothed to me. Will you cast these ladies off?

Romeo: My heart is set, even unto my own doom.

The Prince: When all good fortune and your Prince's love rest on another choice?

Romeo: Great Prince, if love was ours to tame, I would make it so, but wild horses in our hearts decide our fate, dragging all before, with bruised elbows and wind-swept hair. If Juliet is lost to me, then I will live alone, bemoaning my outcast state, content to sing her praises in songs of poetry.

The Prince: You are a selfish and a foolish man. If you will not take my aid, then hear this. In poverty you will stay, and far from Verona's heart. If after sunset you are found within the city walls, that hour will mean your death. Romeo is banished.

(The Prince and Juliet exit.)

Rosaline: I am done with men. They take up much space and furnish meager comfort. They grab, and belch, and mope, and know little of bringing joy to ones they claim to love. When the Heavenly Creator shaped the world, did he not start with fish and frogs, apes and Adam, fashioning each rudely from clay, learning from one to perfect the next? Fish glide like gods, but gape, with gormless vacancy. Frogs are cursed with bumps and blemishes frightening to look upon and deadly to touch, while Adam He marred with scratching beard and graceless limbs lashed to a torso made hideous by ill-favored protuberances.

But at the end of all His cosmic laboring was Eve, sinuous and seductive, with such lovely lines as charm the eye whether slender or plump, young or in her prime, blessed with the power to nurture life, and gilded with an angel's voice. And yet, ancient *men* wrote it was Eve who sinned, caressed and goaded by a loathsome snake wrapped around her naked flesh.

If the mother of us all had truly bitten the apple, would she not have seen the world for what it is, and cast Adam out of Paradise, keeping it alone, for herself and all her sisters?

What peace is there for women in this man-stuffed world? We must make our own Paradise, cut off from fear and lust-filled men. I will found an order of clear-hearted women, and guide the world from a sainted tower of purity. Farewell mankind, I tarried long as one who should have fled.

(She exits.)

Dromio: Come brother, there is hope and new life in this. My father would welcome a second son, a second prince of Naples, where new loves might wipe away the old.

Romeo: Dear brother, for though you are my newfound blood, and kith and kin, I cannot leave my love so far away. Juliet is my life, and even if I can do no more than catch a glint of light, as she opens the casement of her bedroom window, I must remain.

Dromio: If you stay, you die.

Romeo: Friar Lawrence has a cell beyond the city walls, a hermit's holy place, ripe for contemplation. Time and my devotion might soften even my angered Prince, and let a desperate love feed on a crumb of hope.

Dromio: Then I shall return to Naples, where my father grows old, and craves my comfort.

Katherine (approaching Dromio): Take me with you.

Dromio: Madam?

Katherine: For Romeo is dead to me, or it is as if he were. You are not so handsome nor as quick of tongue as your strange brother, but I could like you well enough.

Dromio (to Romeo): These women of Verona have a strange way of wooing.

Katherine: But saying you are no Romeo, is like saying the sun outshines the moon. One is too hot and burns my eyes, the other, with cooling gentleness might become a beacon for my aching heart, and win my everlasting love.

Dromio: As I rode from Naples, I promised God that were my brother to have left a family, I would take it in, and care for all with due devotion. I find a bounty of such need. But if you would talk of love, that is too grave a thing for hurried reckoning. We should walk apart, and slowly as we may, parlay as friends, before Cupid scorches with his flaming tips, and leaves us shorn of judgment. I would be happy in my marriage bed and think the galloping of human hearts a worse augurer of future bliss than earnest thought, and long acquaintance.

Katherine: If you prove one-tenth as wise as you are handsome, I will become your shadow and follow you throughout the world.

Dromio: Goodbye brother. I love you well enough, though I judge you lost to madness.

Romeo: Farewell. Commend me to your King.

(Katherine and Dromio leave hand in hand, and Friar Lawrence takes Romeo away.)

End of Act 1.

Act 2, Scene 1. Juliet's bedchamber, the night before the wedding.

(Juliet sits as the Nurse combs her hair. There is a knocking at the door.)

Lady Capulet: Juliet?

Juliet: Ah, my mother.

The Nurse: Come to wish you well, I'm sure.

(Lady Capulet enters.)

Lady Capulet: Now, Juliet, I have come to see you all prepared for tomorrow's nuptials.

Juliet: Thank you, Mother. All is well.

Lady Capulet: And you have what you need of comfort and of wisdom.

Juliet: A strange inquiry, but yes. I am well furnished with clothes and trinkets, and must soon look to my new husband for guidance and a soft resting place to lay my head.

Lady Capulet: Soft resting, yes. That is why I came. This is passing awkward.

Juliet: Have I displeased you, or father in this match?

Lady Capulet: Far from it. The Prince is munificent in his embrace. It is just that he is, or soon will be a husband.

Juliet: I am glad of it.

Lady Capulet: And on your wedding night he...

Juliet: Yes.

Lady Capulet: He may create a certain consternation with his approaches.

Juliet: Consternation?

Lady Capulet: You may be surprised, and even somewhat put out. What may happen is mercifully brief, and with solemn repetition, you may even take some pleasure in it.

Juliet: Do you speak of the viola, Madam, or my wedding night?

Lady Capulet: The Prince is a man, and must be satisfied.

Juliet: I am assured that the Prince is a perfect gentleman.

Lady Capulet: Even princes have their imperfections, as do we all.

Juliet (exchanging slightly amused glances with the Nurse): Do you wish me to welcome these “consternations”, or repel them? Surely a chaste embrace is all that can be expected of a dutiful wife.

Lady Capulet: Rather more than that.

Juliet: But Mother, I know not that of which you speak.

Lady Capulet (flustered): Surely your nurse has explained what is to be expected of you on your wedding night.

Juliet: She is a plain and simple woman, and knows little of such secrets.

Lady Capulet: Well, then, just remember this. What cannot be enjoyed, must be endured. Goodnight, Juliet. Sleep well tonight, and arise tomorrow a bride.

Juliet: Goodnight, dear lady.

(Lady Capulet leaves.)

The Nurse (slapping her playfully): Plain and simple, am I? I’ll have you know that I’ve been cherished in my time by just as good a one as you, and brought forth tears of love and joy as would fill a walnut shell of remembrance.

Juliet: I am much moved to hear it. Why did you not marry?

The Nurse: The gentleman was otherwise engaged, but he liked me well enough, and I had my reasons too.

Juliet: How so?

The Nurse: My father, a carpenter, was a passable fellow, when sober, but when he drank, the very devil. What he built by day, he would smash by night. We were all afeared of him, and hid in dark corners, less frightened of the rats than of that man’s rage.

I vowed, that when I grew, I would never again steer my ship of comfort by such an inconstant star as a man’s devotion. And yet, I longed for a child, and when she came, poor Judith was my Sun and Moon, but taken from me, before her first winter’s thaw. So I became your nurse.

Juliet: I am truly sorry for it, but in losing your own child, I gained a mother – kinder, wiser and stronger, than that vaunted lady, who totters on high-cobbled shoes, and shudders at my father’s gruff commands.

The Nurse: When men speak their minds, they think themselves both bold and true. But if women contradict, the men rail and fume, and dub us old nag or shrew, and by harsh words, and threat of violent consequence, seek to tame us. But it is the lion, not the mouse, that takes the chair and whip to mute its savagery. And so it is with men.

The Prince is a goodly gentleman, but master him, before he muzzles you.

Juliet: I am doomed then, for I know not how to please a man, nor tame him.

The Nurse: I am not a learned woman, such as yourself, but I did read once, of a Lady Lysistrata, of ancient times. Tiring of war, she moved all the women of Athens to deny their men, until the bloody strife was parlayed to a gentle peace. Though their husbands wailed with despair at such a loss, and walked all crooked, and with stifled *expectations*, as they say, the peace was won, and bliss restored.

Juliet: But how to tame, and not to lose?

The Nurse: There, there, chuck. Love at first is wondrous, and you are well prepared with all the news that will afford you joyful nights and blissful days. You are a wicked thing, to tease your mother so. You know full well, what it takes to please a man, and how his swelling may lead to yours.

Juliet: You did explain, once, how the prince... may change... to my copious blushing, but you mentioned not my own *distention*.

The Nurse: Of your belly, Madam, your belly, when you are with child. Oh, to think a year since, we wallowed in despair, as that young scamp spouted vile verses, and shamed you in front of all your kin.

Juliet: The verses were not quite so vile, although his fond wishes were a sham. With time I see, that he was dragged against his will, no more content than I to be in such a match. And in the end, I did detect he was abashed to have abused me so, though my anger would not let me show it. And now he is banished.

The Nurse: Good riddance, and that's the end of him. And you resolved, that very night, to win the Prince's hand. At first he laughed at one so young, but with brave words, and wit beyond your years, you charmed and then ensnared him.

Juliet: Not ensnared, but fairly won. He was kind, and wise, and taught me much about the world.

The Nurse: But do you love him?

Juliet: Fond enough to wed.

The Nurse: But in love enough to be content?

Juliet: There will be solace in it, but sad at losing you.

The Nurse: Well, there's a cure for that. Remember all I told you, and in a year, a new child may need an idle nurse, and I will love it like my own.

Juliet: As you did me.

The Nurse: As you deserve.

Juliet: And you.

The Nurse: Now to your prayers, and straight to rest. For after this, your bed is not your own. Oh, lucky lady.

Juliet: Good night.

(Juliet kisses the nurse goodnight. The nurse exits.)

Juliet (kneeling by her bed in prayer):

One day, my end will come,
Unbidden and unsought,
When all my glimpses of this little world,
Will settle on a single thought.
If I must die, with sadness in my heart,
Let it not be for the life I chose to live,
But that there was but one life left to give.

Juliet (opening her eyes in and as an aside): The ancients saw destiny as a fate-spun thread, leading us, like Theseus, through the tangled labyrinth of a sinuous world. But in my heart, I know, that each moment hangs heavy with budding consequence. What if life is not a single note, but a constant branching theme, with many lives lived in unison, like chords of music, serenading the heavenly spheres? Then each choice, each fateful moment is lived both ways, with every outcome splitting to another strand – our chosen paths embroidered in a tangle of infinities. How then to choose? Some Juliets stumble to this blissful night, while others disguise themselves as men, and voyage to distant lands, or found new dynasties. Yet others die a mewling child, bewept and buried in a few short months.

And one foolish Juliet might even marry Romeo. There, now, Romeo, his name is spoken, even on my wedding's eve.

Ah me! If I, between ourselves, was true to my own nature, I would tarry with that dotting poet, then marry the steadfast prince. For never, before Romeo, was such a sickly poison, carried in so sweet a cup. His mournful face and gentle looks belied a conjurer's heart. Fickle at best, a changeable foolish boy forever seeking glimpses of his self-love reflected in another's eye.

And then the Prince, bold and noble, a soldier's bearing, his body strong, and coupled with sharp intellect, which softened by my kindness might lead to greatness. But in having one, I must lose the other, whereas Romeo, knowing not how to choose, had all three. And now they all have him. Oh, foolish pilgrim, to worship at every altar, is to lose your way. And yet I might have loved him, for all his faults – though finding much to fix, there was more to like. But I will not be fourth, however charming the gentleman, living forever thence, in fear of the number five.

Now, I must put doubts to bed, and wake with blissful certainty. My new husband awaits, and with him, a new world.

(Juliet climbs into bed.)

Romeo (calling from below): Juliet, oh Juliet!

Juliet: Go to - such foolish pondering, and now his nightingale voice flutters in my addled brain.

Romeo: Oh Juliet, say it is not too late. The moon shines down with full and smiling face, guiding me to this casement, and to you.

Juliet (sitting up ruefully): That sounds like my Romeo.

(Juliet moves to the tall shutters that open to her balcony.)

Romeo: Oh Juliet, do I dream, or are you yet awake?

Juliet: Foolish man, what brings you hither? It must mean death, banished as thou art. And the prince, on his wedding's eve, will not be merciful to a wooer of his bride. Be gone, before the guards return.

Romeo: I see them now. To live, and by my love, I am forced to climb.

Juliet: Away with you! The prince will think me feckless if you are discovered here.

Romeo (arriving on the balcony): My cat-like grace will fool their muffled ears, and the cloak of night may be my inky canopy.

Juliet: But what of the Moon? Be gone sir, you are not welcome.

Romeo: I hazard much to be here.

Juliet: Hazard less. I love thee not. And if I think you come to mar my reputation with the prince, I will cry rape and bloody murder, and you will die for it.

Romeo: Sweet lady, be calm. Not out of vengeance, but from devotion I come to seek your company. I wronged you, just before my heart was opened to your loveliness, and kindness, and your noble spirit. With what fiery brilliance you chided me, and with what fearless words you calmed your kinsmen. I was in awe, but all too late.

Juliet: It is even later now. The clock strikes twelve, and I am to be wed.

Romeo: On the morrow, you *may* wed. But if in your heart there is the merest portion of a smidgen of a doubt, then leave with me, instead.

Juliet: With *you*, sir?

Romeo: I know I am beneath you, in looks, in grace, in learning, and in strength of character. But being a paragon, if you will only marry higher than yourself, there is so little choice, and less joy than you deserve.

Juliet: You forget the prince.

Romeo: He is above you in station, yes, but is he in wit and tender eloquence?

I will cherish and protect you, and we will share such bliss and gentle kisses, as have not graced the world since Helen and Paris stole away to Trojan shores.

Juliet: I read it ended far from well - for the lady, and for Troy.

Romeo: You do not love me then?

Juliet: I cannot, *will* not love you. It is too late. I have given my word unto the prince, who lifted me up from the dark well of fear and dread in which *you* left me.

Romeo: But the love that stirs inside my heart will burn for all eternity.

Juliet: That is beyond my aid. The cure you seek would be my undoing.

Romeo: How then to live, for poor Romeo?

Juliet: Write poetry and song. You have the gift. Distill your burning passion into an immortal work, so that simple women in times to come may grieve for lovelorn Romeo.

Romeo: Even when love is lost?

Juliet: That is the truest measure of a steadfast heart.

Romeo: I have my penance, may we not seal it with a kiss?

Juliet: Be gone before I call the guard. With such a fickle heart, I doubt your quill will spill a single stanza, before your eyes shed tears for yet another lady.

Romeo: You understand me not, but I will withdraw.

Juliet: Fall not as you climb.

Romeo (newly heartened): You care, in some regard, at least.

Juliet: A body would be hard to answer to the prince.

Romeo: I have some rope, from Friar Lawrence. It hangs more loving than its former use.

Juliet: Go safely then. Though I cannot love you now, I do not wish you dead.

Romeo: Farewell, sweet Princess Juliet. Though you think me sly and feckless, I will amaze you.

Juliet: Not in this way again.

Romeo: Good night. May heaven bring you every happiness. (He leaves.)

Juliet: Oh Romeo, Romeo, though I longed to be soft-wrapped in your enfolding arms, I have passed the test, and now with easy conscience may embrace the prince.

Act 2, Scene 2. The Royal Court of Verona.

(The Prince and Juliet sit on two thrones. In front of them stand Lord Montague and Lord Capulet. Balthazar and Jedediah stand at the back, held back but observing.)

The Prince: Lord Montague and Lord Capulet, for too long, the rancor of your men has set Verona into bloody brawling. Our quiet industry and tranquil thoughts are quite overthrown by this unruly mob that threatens peace, long life, and me. And though I am now your kinsman, through marriage to this peerless lady, I will not wink at your offenses, but demand a reckoning from both your houses.

Lord Capulet: My daughter surely speaks my part more eloquently than I, and touches your benevolence.

The Prince: Indeed, she has, remembering sorely the sham marriage that you would have thrust upon her.

Lord Capulet: In the name of peace.

Juliet: Forced by your imminent ruin.

Lord Montague: Your highness, I commanded my son to woo the lady, thinking that true love would follow good intension, but alas the young are headstrong, and that foolish boy sees with his heart and not his eyes.

The Prince: Enough. Through that marriage, you hoped your two houses would be joined in blood. Well, there is another way. You, Old Montague and you, Old Capulet, must kneel and face your foe. With this knife, you must cut your palms and each grip each, until blood flows between your veins. Hence forth, when peeping in a glass, you will see Montague mixed with Capulet and Capulet mixed with Montague. Then must you think as brothers, holding back the angry throng, and drive a new accord. And if, from this day forth, either steps but one jot from the law, in wish or deed, it will mean both your deaths.

Lord Capulet: As you and my daughter command.

Lord Montague: As my prince deserves.

(They kneel and cut their palms and shake.)

Lord Capulet: A little cut, made for a greater peace.

Lord Montague: A little hurt, granting a greater ease. Give me your hand.

(They shake, and then embrace.)

The Prince: It is done. Now Lords Montague and Capulet, arise and meet my treasurer, for some distress of late has come to your affairs. You two remain as pillars of our state, and may be buttressed by your Prince with healing gold.

(Both fall to their knees.)

Lord Montague: Every happiness to your highness and your bride.

Lord Capulet: To my daughter, I give every blessing, and to my prince, great thanks.

(The exit.)

The Prince: Bring forth Balthazar and Jedediah.

(They are brought forward.)

Juliet: Balthazar, do you speak many tongues?

Balthazar: A smattering of this and that, your highness.

Juliet: Come now, dissembling is not welcome here. By all reports, you converse in Latin, Hebrew and Greek, Russian and Spanish, Portuguese and Arabic. You have even mastered that barbaric chimera of French and Saxon that the English use for a tongue.

Balthazar: You know me better than I know myself.

Juliet: And do you play chess?

Balthazar: No, your highness.

Juliet: If not with ivory, then with men, perhaps?

Balthazar: Surely not, your highness. I am a lowly treasurer.

Juliet: And Jedediah, are you quite the puppeteer, tugging at string and wood, to make it dance with joy, or with sagging lines, conjuring a vanquished lover's overthrow?

Jedediah: I know no such art, your highness.

Juliet: And yet, one midnight, when only cats and mischief walk abroad, you met, under the gaze of the Prince's watchman, like two love birds, hatching an agile plot, to have me wedded to a moonstruck Montague.

Balthazar: How could we accomplish such a thing?

(She unrolls a scroll.)

Juliet: By casting a note near my mother's chamber, and wooing Lady Montague to persuade her husband of a match that was against my will, and dragging fickle Romeo to our mutual doom.

Balthazar: We meant no harm, your highness, merely an alliance that would mend both families' woes.

Juliet: Indeed. Now that this amorous conspiracy has been exposed, and the pawn is now a princess, how do you expect to be punished for your effrontery?

Balthazar: Given the high regard in which my brother Jedediah holds your highness, I am sure the punishment will be in just measure to the crime.

Juliet: Well said, but you must judge that for yourself. You, Balthazar, will be exiled to walk the Earth to the end of your days, whilst Jedediah will be locked in a room with all the troubles of the world.

But first, you must make your peace as your masters have done.

Jedediah: Must our hands be cut?

The Prince: Surely not, for you are already brothers. No blood, and few tears will be spilt by you this day.

The Prince (turning to Juliet): Come now, my pretty lioness, stop toying with your prey, and let them know what fate awaits them.

Juliet: As a wedding gift, the Prince has granted me fortune enough to found a university, open to all faiths. I command that you, Balthazar, will be my ambassador, traveling the courts of Europe, gathering scholars and translators. You must seek out new scrolls, treasured by the Moors from the words of ancient Greece, that are filled with ethics and artifice, tragedy and wit. These might make Verona the crucible of a new world. And you, Jedediah, will be my counselor, guiding my affairs, as an uncle would, avoiding worldly treachery and spending our little fortune wisely. I wish to make of our city a painted jewel, revered in times to come, by lovers and scholars alike. Do you accept my terms?

Balthazar: This punishment is my heart's delight. I will pour knowledge into Verona, until it overflows with wisdom.

Jedediah: And I shall guide you, as best I can, if that contents you, as my own niece.

Juliet: Both please me well.

The Prince: Now embrace, and say your farewells. This enterprise must start without delay.

(Balthazar and Jedediah embrace)

Jedediah: Safe travels, brother. I know not when we shall meet again.

Balthazar: Nor I.

Act 2 Scene 3. Narration.

Empress Alexandra (as narrator):

Within a year, the nurse's words came true.
Princess Isabella, was born and grew,
Pretty, gentle, sweet and kind.
Dancing in her crystal shoes,
The courtiers gasped "She's so refined".
But more than this they knew, by far,
Blessed with such a brilliant mind,
As made the heavens weep new stars.

Her mother had taught how constellations
Each contain a story fair,
As she wove a diadem,
Into her daughter's raven hair.
She studied rather more than prayed,
And asked that for her sixteenth year,
A new invention should be made,
A telescope to make the skies more clear.

Night after night she peered.
Eyes reddened by the cold night air.
"That's no way to find a prince,"
Her father sneered,
But Isabelle was not convinced,
As seeking through the glass she stared.

One night she cried in shrill delight,
Which gave her doting nurse a fright,
"What is it, now, my little mite?"
"I see a light! I see a light!"

Isabelle, the astronomer princess,
Praised by lord and courtly poet,
Was quite a dazzling success,
With her new-discovered comet,
Emblazoned on her wedding dress.

(Empress Alexandra goes to leave, but King Francis enters.)

Francis: May I have a word?

Alexandra: Is there no better time?

Francis: For what I would say, there is no better setting. What I feel, no poet can express. And as for consequence, the fate of the world teeters on the brink of hope and despair.

Alexandra: Now will suffice, as you request.

Francis: Alexandra?

Alexandra: Yes.

Francis: Do you remember how we played as children? Always laughing and hugging - even playing at a kiss.

Alexandra: I remember how you pulled my hair, and called me names, and chased the servants round the garden with a wooden blade.

Francis: But always with love.

Alexandra (smiling): Always in fun at least.

Francis: But now I find you troubled. The worry of this coming war is too great a burden for one alone to carry.

Alexandra: It is my duty.

Francis: But it may crush you and your empire too, if left unaided. Nicholas has summoned his army. Within a month they will spill over their borders and ravage Austria and pillage Paris, and burn your cherished Verona to the ground.

Alexandra: I am stronger than you think, than all you men think.

Francis: Surely love would lighten the burden of your affairs.

Alexandra: As your affairs lighten your head from the burden of state. I hear your mistresses lead you a merry dance.

Francis: I hoped to speak of love, to one so charming, but we are no longer children. What I am offering is an alliance – our combined navies could rule the world, and carry Europe with us.

Alexandra: Your navy is obsolete – slow destroyers and great lumbering battleships. They would make easy targets for my new fleet of submarines. Once your navy was sunk, your colonies in Canada would declare their independence, and all England would rise up against their Norman masters, and ally themselves with the Welsh and Scots.

Francis: Surely not, after so many centuries. The English embrace us now, and Scottish food, it is disgusting – boiled entrails and fire water...

Alexandra: My grandmother once said that Scottish cooking had done more to deter a Norman invasion than three legions of pikemen.

Francis: But how could the English be so stupid?

Alexandra: The English are a proud and stubborn people, who think themselves just as fit to rule the waves as the Normans.

Francis: So, you reject my proposal?

Alexandra: On the contrary, I will consider it carefully, and answer you this Friday, at noon, in the library.

Francis (kissing her hand): I would make you the happiest of women.

Alexandra: Perhaps.

Francis: And I would be the luckiest of men.

Alexandra: We will see.

Act 2, Scene 4. The Court of Verona.

(The Prince sits upon his throne, with Juliet on a smaller throne at his side. They are playing chess.)

Juliet: Checkmate.

The Prince: Again. How can it be?

Juliet: You forget that I was taught by a philosopher prince.

The Prince: And I was counseled by a mighty king, but it aids me not.

Juliet: Was it he who taught you to mope over lost battles?

The Prince: I fought valiantly, you must admit.

Juliet: And too gallantly.

The Prince: How so? Surely, I did not let you win.

Juliet: Not knowingly, perhaps. You were too in love with your queen, sacrificing many pieces to keep her safe.

The Prince: If my fault is that I love my queen too much, then I plead guilty to such a failing - both in chess and in the world.

Juliet: Prettily said, but I shall show no mercy, in the game at least. Shall we start another?

The Prince: I will battle heartily this time, and let my ungrateful queen be carried off by any errant knight that passes by.

Juliet: Are we talking only of chess?

The Prince (kissing her hand): Of course.

(Mercutio enters in great haste.)

Mercutio: My prince, news both sudden and terrible. The Duke of Milan and his son, with ten thousand men, have crossed onto our lands, and lay ancient claim to your throne.

The Prince: How many days until they reach the city walls?

Mercutio: Not more than two.

The Prince: Summon my cavalry. We ride at dawn.

Mercutio (bowing): They are many to our few.

The Prince: Then we must fight the harder. Make haste.

(Mercutio runs off to gather the Prince's forces.)

Juliet: What means this gross intrusion?

The Prince: Milan has always looked with envy at our prosperous state. With Isabella now abroad, the duke fears a deep alliance that will drive him from his cherished lands, and thinks to strike before our strength is hardened by his northern foe. I must ride out to meet him, though my palace guard has not returned from Isabella's journey.

Juliet: Dear husband, do not go. Even with his quaking heart, his numbers might outfight your bravery. Rather let us bolster the city walls. We have supplies enough to last a season, and perhaps my daughter can furnish aid to our predicament.

The Prince: The Emperor is dying, and the Crown Prince is weak – mired in scandal and besotted with his mistresses. Though Vienna is great indeed, the wife of a second son has little sway at court. We must see to our own salvation, though it may be steeped in blood.

Juliet: And what of the Veneto?

The Prince: The Doge is old and cautious. He will fear that soldiers lodged here would better serve defending Venice.

Juliet: Then stay, my love. My scholars may work with your engineers to make such devices as will ensure our victory. Roman ballistas armed with Greek fire might turn the tide of war.

The Prince: There is too little time. Our supplies are few, and our subjects many. Gaunt famine would consume our people before the first snows had fallen, and by the Spring, our city would collapse, cut down by hunger, desperation and despair. I must ride out if I am to defend the Empire of Light that you so longed to make.

Juliet: It was to be an empire of thought, not land.

The Prince: It is hard to have one without the other. And after all, I must prove that I deserve the lovely wife that all the world admires.

Juliet: You have nothing you must prove to me, bar living to show the dotting looks of a proud and tender grandfather.

The Prince: Stop up your tears. This may yet end well. A single blow from me may turn their hostile strength into confused abandonment. The Duke's son is no lion. He fears single combat. With his father gone, he might sue for peace.

Juliet: I wish I had never come to you, if it means your death.

The Prince: If you had never come to me, I would have sought you out. You are beyond compare, and if I must die, it will be with pride, knowing that you loved me.

Juliet: Take me with you. I can shoot an arrow such as might stop an emperor's heart.

The Prince: You must stay here. If I am lost, the city would be consumed with grief to lose you too.

Juliet: Take care, my love.

The Prince: I will, but if I do not return, frame your grief into a furnace of anger, and make them think Verona a fiery hell before they enter it.

Juliet (kissing him goodbye): I will.

Act 2, Scene 5. The Court of Verona.

(Juliet sits anxiously on the smaller throne. Jedediah stands close by.)

Juliet: What news?

Jedediah: None yet, your highness.

Juliet: I hear footsteps.

(Mercutio rushes in.)

Juliet: Your face is racked with grief. How fares my lord?

Mercutio: Alas, dear lady, he is slain.

Juliet: What, not wounded? I have a gathering of doctors as might heal the wounds of Saint Sebastian.

Mercutio: Dead, your highness.

Juliet (taking a moment): My poor love. How came it so?

Mercutio: With all haste we rode to engage Milan before he could engulf our countrymen. But seeing the fearful numbers of his men, the Prince paused, and quoted you, praising your wisdom and saying that we must withdraw to the outer walls, and hazard a long siege rather than be slain. Our cavalry turned as one at their prince's command, when hot-headed Tybalt declared us cowards, and charged off, unaided and unasked, to attack the Duke, or die in the attempt.

Seeing his brave action, and not wanting your kinsman to perish without aid, the Prince and half his cavalry charged straight into the throng. The Duke's men were shattered by surprise and driven back with brandished lances. At last, as if by unseen will, the lines opened, and the cowering noble was revealed vulnerable and aghast. Our cavalry drew closer when a row of pikemen placed themselves between the Duke and our onslaught. But by fearless horsemanship and weight of numbers we broke through until all collapsed in general confusion. The Prince dismounted and wielding his sword, charged at the Duke, slaying many knights to reach him. They both fought bravely. The Prince began to tire, but with stronger blows, beat down the weaker Duke, until it ended with a final thrust. We sounded our trumpets to withdraw, but then the Duke's son, who had cowered at the back, far from the fray, ordered his archers to unleash their waves of death onto us and his own men, too, killing as many of each, and striking down the Prince, with iron-tipped arrows piercing his armor at the neck. The Prince and half our men lay dead, and I, the last member of his household, gave the order to return, so that your army might stand buttressed against the Duke's attack.

Juliet: Is the battle lost or no?

Mercutio: We have strength enough to man the walls, but not to lift the siege, if they come on as before.

Juliet: Very well. Go to, and make preparations. Tell my scholars that today, they are my soldiers too.

Mercutio: Your highness, I will.

Jedediah: An emissary from the young duke awaits an audience.

Juliet (still shaking): May I have a moment.

Jedediah: I will walk with grave solemnity.

(Juliet calms her nerves, and sits on the larger throne.)

(The Emissary enters.)

Juliet: What is your business here?

The Emissary: I come to offer you a peace that will save your subjects much suffering. My master, the Duke of Milan, lays claim to Verona's ancient seat through long-acknowledged ancestry. He now pursues his claim, but seeing the great love the people bear you, he offers you his hand in marriage, so that this unhappy day might end in a new alliance. Gentle lady, the weight of new leadership must weigh heavily upon you, and surely a marriage alliance would lift that burden from your slender shoulders.

Juliet: Send my condolences to your young master. He must be much cast down by his great loss, losing his father as I have lost a husband.

The Emissary: Madam, I will.

Juliet: I am still a princess, and should be addressed as such.

The Emissary: Quite so, your highness.

Juliet: May I think a moment before giving you my answer?

The Emissary: Of course.

Juliet: May we talk while I decide?

The Emissary: As you wish.

Juliet: Your new young master, did he inherit this stratagem along with his dukedom? This plan speaks of his father rather than of himself. It sits poorly on one so young. I may be too old to bear him an heir. Perhaps, once his soldiers have occupied Verona, and cemented his claim, I would be removed.

The Emissary: Surely not. Your highness is still in the blush of youth, and your wisdom and beauty are known throughout Europe.

Juliet: Jedediah, what do you think of this offer of a marriage peace?

Jedediah (walking over to Juliet): I think before the gentleman is answered, you should read this missive from Balthazar.

(Juliet reads a small piece of parchment that was wrapped inside a tiny cylinder.)

Juliet: How fair your pigeons?

Jedediah: My pigeons your highness?

Juliet: Yes, are they well?

Jedediah: Alas, one died bringing you this letter.

Juliet (with tears in her eyes): Then you must make of it a statue, cast in solid gold, and placed in the palace courtyard, to act as a reminder to all my courtiers.

Jedediah: Yes, your highness.

Juliet: Come now, I have your answer.

The Emissary: I am glad to hear it.

Juliet: You may not be. Tell your young duke, that if he encamps below the castle walls, we have diverse means to rain poison, pestilence and hell-fire onto his men, such that by the Spring, not one in five shall be left standing. And add this. I would rather die at my own hand, than be forced to marry the man who killed my prince and beloved husband.

The Emissary (bowing and starting to leave): If that is all.

Juliet (becoming angry): That is all? I say that I may die at my own hand, and you say that that is all. Shall we talk of *your* death and see if *that* is all? I am no "gentle lady". Must I have you thrown screaming from the battlements to prove that to your new master?

The Emissary: My earnest assurance should prove sufficient to persuade him. I meant no offence.

Juliet: Very well, you may go.

(The Emissary turns to leave.)

Juliet: There is one more thing.

(The Emissary turns back.)

Juliet: Tell your master that I received news today from Vienna. The Emperor is dead, and the Crown Prince has abdicated, so that he may marry a commoner. That means that my daughter, Princess Isabella, is now the Empress. Verona belongs to her, and Vienna belongs to us. Even now Balthazar is using Austrian gold to buy Venetian galleys to intercept your supplies by sea. And Florentine mercenaries are being hired to attack your wagon trains and to drive back reinforcements. Even the king

of Naples has sent word of his support. Your master and his men are cut off, and beyond hope of rescue. Tell him, that if he does not leave Veronese lands by sunset tomorrow night, then the combined armies of Naples, Florence, Verona and Vienna will descend upon Milan, and at my order, they will level it to the ground.

The Emissary (clearly shaken): And if my master sues for peace?

Juliet: He must withdraw, and renounce all claims to Verona and its surrounding lands. To compensate for this murderous assault, Milan must grant free passage to my merchants, free of interference and taxes in perpetuity.

The Emissary: And the other conditions?

Juliet: The Duke must add a man of my choosing to his high council, so that we may never again be surprised by such an attack.

The Emissary: Surely that is not all.

Juliet: True. There is a painter whom I would like sent to my court.

The Emissary: A painter? Why does your highness bother yourself with such trivialities?

Juliet: He is also known for certain artful machines that his teeming brain has conjured forth from the dark shadows of our listless age. Your old master wasted his energies on masked balls and court spectacles. Tell the man from Vinci that a court awaits that is better suited to his talents.

The Emissary: Your highness, I will. If that is...the full list of your requirements...

Juliet: One more.

The Emissary (sighing): Yes, your highness.

Juliet: Tell your master that this is a request, not a demand. Say that it is my fancy that *you* be sent back as my ambassador.

The Emissary: Me your highness?

Juliet: Yes. Though we are implacable in war, if you return in peace, you will find the palace filled with music, poetry and laughter. You may even come to find love here. The women of Verona are quite remarkable.

The Emissary (bowing): So I have observed, your highness. If I might beg your leave...

Juliet: As you wish.

(The Emissary leaves.)

Juliet (to Jedediah): Draw up a written treaty lest the young duke forget his promises.

Jedediah: I will. (He leaves.)

(Juliet walks over to the chessboard and lays the opposing king gently on its side.)

Juliet: Rest gently from your cares, my prince. Verona is safe as you commanded. (She collapses crying onto the larger throne.) You taught me all, but knowing how to grieve.

Act 2 Scene 6: The Palace Library, Verona in 1914.

Kaiser Friedrich enters, followed by Empress Alexandra.

Friedrich: It is imperative that I talk to you.

Alexandra: If you insist.

Friedrich: This congress is well-intentioned, but will lead to war.

Alexandra: How so?

Friedrich: Francis and Nicholas are already in a secret alliance. They are wooing King Stefano, and meddling in the Balkans. The Norman fleet has moved from Trieste, under the cover of night, to prepare a blockade of my Atlantic ports. With Italy on their side, they are itching for an excuse to attack, and then Germany and Austria will be crushed in a vice of avarice.

Alexandra: My scholars report nothing of such an alliance, although it does seem plausible.

Friedrich: It is iron-clad and unavoidable.

Alexandra: How so?

Friedrich: It is what I would do.

Alexandra: Perhaps they lack your clarity of vision.

Friedrich: They have their spies, as do I.

Alexandra: And so you offer an alliance with my empire, perhaps bolstered by a proposal of marriage?

Friedrich: Just think. With your science and our industry, we could build a new world, freed from the yoke of the Norman navy, no longer cowed by the Russian army.

Alexandra: And this new world would have colonies for Germany.

Friedrich: As is our right. We must sit at the table of empire, or burn down the house in which it sits.

Alexandra: It is no secret that you long for your place in the sun, and yet, within a generation, the colonies you seek will become a political and economic liability – not to mention the human suffering you will cause. And once gained, they may be drowned in an upswelling of insurrection. Look at Canada, ripe for rebellion, and the southern states have already pulled away from Spain.

Friedrich: I think only of your safety. All admire your talents, but crave to split your empire.

Alexandra: And so, you offer marriage.

Friedrich: To make Austria-Germany indivisible and impregnable. My eldest son would be a sterling match for a woman such as you. His strength would bring order to your free-thinking, ramshackle empire.

Alexandra: We are a federation too, and my people value their freedoms. Wilhelm is very young.

Friedrich: He is as wise as I command, and knows his sacrifice would be for the good of his people.

Alexandra: Would it be such a sacrifice for him, marrying me? How tempting.

Friedrich: I am a soldier, not a poet. I am clumsy. He should woo you, with his own words.

Alexandra: Once it is all decided.

Friedrich: Just so.

Alexandra: I am tired. This week of squabbling has drained me of the usual delight at such an offer. Let me consider it for a day. I see merit in your arguments, but must think on behalf of all my people. You may have my answer on Friday at noon, in the palace library. Perhaps the surrounding books will imbue the moment with some of their solemnity.

Friedrich kisses her hand, stiffly: I hope this is the beginning of a magnificent alliance.

Alexandra: Are we not already friends?

Friedrich: Of course.

Alexandra: Then await my answer. It will be given thoughtfully.

Act 2, Scene 7. The Court of Verona.

(There is a single throne on stage with Juliet sitting as the Venetian Ambassador stands before her. Jedediah stands at Juliet's side.)

The Venetian Ambassador: All Venice mourns the loss of so great a prince, but each masked reveler is heartened by your victory.

Princess Juliet: All Verona thanks you for your aid and sympathy. Though commerce guided our mutual interests 'til now, I hope that a stronger alliance might bring us closer still.

The Venetian Ambassador: We delight in your victory, but also fear that having so dazzling a neighbor may dim our own star in the eyes of the world.

Princess Juliet: Speak plainly, for the hour is getting late, and my head throbs from much weeping.

The Venetian Ambassador: Venice is mighty on the sea, but by land, must take refuge in swamps and shrewd defenses to avoid an army's onslaught. Though Verona is a worthy friend, perhaps the influence of Vienna will drive you to thoughts of conquest.

Princess Juliet: I wish for no subjects, but those who come willingly. I worry that it is not Vienna that is too strong, but Venice that will become too weak.

The Venetian Ambassador: How so?

Princess Juliet: The ancient paths of trade, that fill your palaces with spice, and drape your churches in luminous gold, are in decay. Our beloved sea that names the very center of the world may soon become a pond, circumvented by the galleons of the West as they plow the Atlantic to new continents and round the Cape in search of other avenues of trade. My scholars have observed the high-masted caravels of Iberia, their great sheets puffed with wind. Their thunderous cannonades may level towns or drive your oar-stuffed galleys from the sea. Those vessels built to conquer oceans may also come to tyrannize the land.

The Venetian Ambassador: Surely the splendor of Venice will never fade.

Princess Juliet: So thought loquacious Greece and mighty Rome, but the Doge may still prevent it. Let us build new ships together, greater than the western or northern states can dream, to explore to the very corners of the Earth. They will bring back treasures of the East, not waylaid by silken banditry, but honestly bought and sold at fair prices. Beyond trade, such ships may even stumble on undreamt-of Edens, untarnished by our history – perhaps the world can start anew.

The Venetian Ambassador: This is much to think upon. I will return with careful answer, at which time I hope to find your highness much restored.

Princess Juliet: Though my loss can never be repaired, I would not make Verona a sepulcher. I trust that you will find us more as once we were. Send my greetings to the Doge.

The Venetian Ambassador: I will. (He exits.)

Princess Juliet: Are there more subjects with their condolences?

Jedediah: A few, your highness, but none of great consequence. Surely, I may say that you are weary.

Juliet: The Prince would not have wearied until everyone was heard. I will not have less said of me.

Jedediah: The next is Lord Montague.

Juliet: Jedediah, you are growing old, and forget. Lord Montague is dead.

Jedediah: The young lord Montague.

Juliet: Romeo? I thought him still exiled in the woods.

Jedediah: Under our laws, an act of banishment must be renewed with each change of prince. Perhaps he comes to plead his case.

Juliet: How does he seem?

Jedediah: Like a man, your highness.

Juliet: I fancied as much. Is he well?

Jedediah: As well as might be expected of any not involved in the fighting.

Juliet: I would like to see Lord Montague alone.

Jedediah: Is that wise, your highness?

Juliet: Wise? No, not wise, palpably not wise, but it is necessary.

Jedediah: It is of course for you to say, but I shall wait outside, in case I am needed.

Juliet: You have always served me well, Jedediah, and it will not be forgotten.

Jedediah: Thank you, your highness.

(Jedediah leaves, and returns with Romeo, dressed in modest courtier's clothes.)

Jedediah: Lord Montague.

(Romeo bows and Jedediah leaves.)

Romeo: Forgive my intrusion.

Juliet: This time, at least, it is with my permission.

Romeo: I have been foolish in the past, I freely admit. Not loving you when we were betrothed, then loving you when you were lost to me, even in the face of prince's gift that would have restored my fortunes. And, at the last, coming to you the night before your wedding, when it would have been better to stay away.

Juliet: And now you take another misstep by declaring your love again, when the Prince is barely in his grave.

Romeo: I did not come for that.

Juliet: No? For what then?

Romeo: To offer my condolences, for a great man. And then, since you are now my prince, to ask you permission to leave your lands.

Juliet: Leave?

Romeo: My estates have not prospered. I hope to seek my fortune in Rome.

Juliet: But you are now Lord Montague.

Romeo: My father had debts.

Juliet: As did mine, mainly to the Prince, which coming as my inheritance, I find I owe the money to myself. Such debts are easy to forgive.

Romeo: I have no such means to heal my prosperity, and so must hazard my luck abroad.

Juliet: How will you live?

Romeo: I have learned to be frugal in the forest, and against my expectations, my poems have touched the hearts of some, even in Verona.

Juliet: Beyond the war, it is hard to hear of anything else. Your Dark Lady sonnets have my ladies-in-waiting fainting into the arms of the first gallant who can remember a rhyming couplet. Your Three Furies has all the young men of Verona swearing improbable vows of chastity. I think you conspire to have the children of Verona fathered by foreigners.

Romeo: I meant no offense.

Juliet: And none was taken. I am a reader too.

(Romeo bows.)

Juliet: How are your children and their mothers?

Romeo: They are well, at last report. Maria married, and she and her husband have a well-liked tavern not five miles from Verona.

Juliet: I hear she has become exceeding fat.

Romeo: But her pies are still magnificent. Our daughter, Sarah, used to bring us succor in the woods, at the end of Lent, each year.

Juliet: Used to?

Romeo: When she turned sixteen, she took a great liking to hats and eloped with a milliner to Florence. Her mother is in despair.

Juliet: It is hard to lose a child, even to marriage.

Romeo: Your daughter Isabella.

Juliet: Is Empress of Austria, surely that news has reached even your hermitage.

Romeo: It did. You must be proud and glad of it.

Juliet: And worried. Assassination lurks in the shadows of the great.

Romeo: Even the greatly loved.

Juliet: Even more so. We see Katherine's daughter Elizabeth, on royal visits, from the King of Naples. Perhaps, next time...

Romeo: I should like that, one day. How fares my brother?

Juliet: A little stiff, but much loved by his people. What news of Rosaline's child, Heloise?

Romeo: Rosaline was true to her word. Forsaking men, she became the founding abbess of the holy order of Saint Ursula. Our daughter is a novitiate, and I am forbidden to see her, but she is renowned as a great scholar. I hope, one day, that one of my books might make its way into her library, so that she may see that there was once love in her father's heart.

Juliet: Rather too much, from what I remember.

Romeo: I have paid royally for that.

Juliet: And enriched the world regally with three daughters, and your writing.

Romeo: Mine has been a very poor form of kingship.

Juliet: What is this talk of Rome? What siren-call has Rome that drowns out the elfish charms of Verona?

Romeo: A merchant of books, who likes my work.

Juliet: They say the ghost of Gutenberg howls with rage at stationer's promises. And all Verona loves you.

Romeo: All but my bankers... and you.

Juliet: Your bankers answer to me. I can stay their demands a while. I would even move them to forgive your debts, if...

Romeo: If...

Juliet: If you would stay with me for a year of mourning. Your company would lighten the heavy load of my grief with airy puffs of poetry. If you need a means to live, all the palace would be yours, and I could grant a small allowance for a position at court.

Romeo: What you would have is a pet lion.

Juliet (frustrated): What I would have is a great friend, and perhaps, in time, something more.

Romeo: Will you ever marry?

Juliet: If I do, it will be to a regent, not a prince. I have a knack for governing, and I am reluctant to relinquish it.

Romeo: My fortune calls to me from Rome.

Juliet: Your future calls from Verona, and yet your wounded pride will not let you hear it.

Romeo: I beg your leave.

Juliet: I will grant it, but before you depart, you must answer one question that has troubled me since last we spoke.

Romeo: If I know how.

(Juliet stands and walks over to Romeo and kisses him on the lips, but does not let him go.)

Juliet: Hmm.

Romeo: Eighteen years too late.

Juliet: Or one too early. Your lips are softer than I would have thought after so many hard winters in the forest.

Romeo: When I was first exiled, I would think of you every day and kiss a different flower.

Juliet: For eighteen years?

Romeo: For one month at least.

Juliet: And then, alas, I was forgotten.

Romeo: I was injudicious in my choice of blossom and my lips swelled up so as I could hardly speak.

Juliet (laughing): There is a moral in that, I think.

Romeo: And your question?

Juliet: If you did stay, do you think your love for me could survive the corrosive rain of our daily acquaintance?

Romeo: Like a copper-clad cupola, I would shelter you from the rain, and make other men green with the verdigris of envy.

Juliet: An old aunt of mine once said, that husbands have their uses, but they grow less useful with age. But she added that poets seem to improve with it.

Romeo: Then I must content myself with being a poet.

Juliet: Not too content, I hope.

Romeo: No.

(They kiss again.)

Act 2, Scene 8 The Palace Library, Verona in 1914.

(Tsar Nicholas enters and checks his pocket watch and the clock. It is nearly noon. King Francis enters, and is surprised to see Nicholas there.)

Francis: Perhaps there is some mistake. I have the library reserved today.

Nicholas: As do I. Alexandra was...

Francis: As she was with me...

(The door opens, and in marches Kaiser Friedrich.)

Friedrich: Gentlemen, be gone. The library is mine, by prior arrangement.

Francis: With Alexandra?

Friedrich: The matter is quite delicate, so if you would kindly leave.

Nicholas: For us, too.

Friedrich: A matter of life and death.

Francis: Is that not why we are all here this week? But perhaps the delicate matter is the lady's hand?

Friedrich coughing: Just so.

Francis: For me, too.

Nicholas: Also, for myself.

Friedrich: But aren't you both already...

Nicholas: For my brother.

Friedrich: For my son.

Nicholas, Francis and Friedrich together: This is intolerable!

(Alexandra enters.)

Alexandra: I see you are all here. Have you spoken of your plans with one another?

Nicholas: We have.

Alexandra: And what did you conclude?

Francis: You must marry one of us, to avoid war. Austria tips the balance, and with it, each may rule from a position of strength.

Alexandra: And Nicholas?

Nicholas: Francis is right. You must surrender, so that we may be at peace.

Alexandra (in anger): Did you learn nothing from my play? I am the richest and most powerful woman in the world. My navy is unmatched, and my aircraft twenty years ahead of your wood-and-canvas contraptions. Mine can carry heavy loads for hundreds of miles, while yours can barely cross the Channel with a single man.

My people love me, and my empire is a center of science, learning and high culture. I own grand palaces and vast estates. And yet to me, these would be worthless baubles, if it meant that I was not free to choose whom and how I love - not to dance to the dictates of a rabble of men.

Francis: But surely you must marry one of us.

Alexandra: Surely I must NOT. I may be friends and allies with each, but I can only marry one, and drive the rest away. That is a recipe for war!

Friedrich: War will come without such an alliance.

Alexandra: You think yourselves so strong that each might conquer all, with just my help. But do you even ask if I need you? My navy is unmatched, and my scholars have developed such devices that even were you to unite and attack as one, my empire would withstand the blow, and vanquish any armies that might be arrayed against it.

Nicholas: Impossible.

Alexandra: Nicholas, you are a good man, but you are, at heart, a farmer, judging your strength by the breadth of land and those who work it. Francis, your empire dangles by a thread of commerce that is easily destroyed. And Friedrich, you think yourself so modern, and so fit for war, but your uniformity is your great undoing. By freeing the imagination of my people, I have become stronger than all your crisp parades and iron cavalry.

Friedrich: But how?

Alexandra: Please raise the screen.

(A cinema screen is raised up on a stand. The blinds are also drawn, and the room becomes darker.)

Alexandra: I am going to treat you to a demonstration of the new projecting kinetoscope. If properly prepared, it allows the faithful reproduction of past events. You all know of the recent meteor strike in the Sahara, that turned night into day, and melted sand into glass. Well, that was no meteor, but a test of our latest weapon. It brings a dreadful devastation that levels mountains as it would your armies.

(Nicholas, Friedrich and Francis are aghast.)

Friedrich: What fairytale is this?

Alexandra: Begin the projection.

(A movie shows the empty desert transformed by a nuclear explosion and the resulting mushroom cloud, along with rampant destruction.)

Alexandra: And now you are thinking, if this is true, why do I not attack, and conquer all of Europe for myself.

Francis: Not just Europe, but the whole world.

Alexandra (looking at Nicholas): Though some have called me great, I would not be another Alexander, building an empire baptized in blood, only to have it collapse into civil ruin at my death.

You each asked for my hand in marriage. Instead, I will grant you a greater gift - peace. You must learn to respect current borders, for whoever attacks the other, will feel the full force of my anger. Even if you steal our secrets, and build such weapons, too, it will gain you little, since any war would destroy both sides completely. So, you see, with these new devices, there can be no profitable war, and we must resolve to live in peace.

Francis: A Pax Alexandra.

Alexandra: If you insist.

Nicholas: I heard hints of this from my ambassadors, but thought it impossible.

Francis: As had I.

Friedrich: And I.

Alexandra: Let us stand in a circle, then, and give a solemn oath to peace.

Francis: Surely with the other heads of state as well.

Alexandra: Just so. (She opens the door and lets in the other kings who also kneel.)

Let us each give our solemn oath, that from this day forth, an attack on one, is an attack on all, and we will maintain the peace, as one family.

All together: I so swear.

Alexandra: As do I. And now, since we have abandoned war, we must drain the pool of discontent on which the anarchists thrive.

Nicholas: But how?

Alexandra: We must abdicate some of our sovereign powers, and grant them to a parliament.

(The gathered leaders all look up in sudden horror at Alexandra and take a loud gasp of breath.)

Act 2 Scene 9. The Palace Theater, Verona in 2054.

(Princess Juliet II stands surrounded by reporters in mid-21st-Century clothes.)

Female Reporter 1: Why was some of the simulation in verse?

Juliet II: I was surprised by that at first, an emergent property of the language model. It was trained on the archives which included literature of the period.

Female Reporter 2: Can you explain how a history simulation works? It seems impossible.

Juliet II: When human level AI was reached a decade ago, the networks of Verona University came alive with speculation about whether larger groups of people might be modeled, perhaps the whole of history. But today, even with the bountiful computation available, modeling nine billion people is quite impractical. But there are special moments when the winds of macroeconomics and the tides of geopolitics wash up a few individuals onto an island of space and time, rather like a play, in which personality is important, and a simulation *is* possible. Naturally this came to be known as Theatrical AI, and we have refined it to the point where we can answer some important questions.

Female Reporter 2: Such as?

Juliet II: Such as whether the leaders of the past would have made the same mistakes had they understood the consequences of their actions – and more importantly, will we? Starting with behavior that is known, we can evolve a thought emulator that allows for reliable predictions under similar circumstances. We can rerun history to see what was likely, and what was avoidable.

Female Reporter 2: And?

Juliet II: So much suffering was unnecessary.

Female Reporter 1: But what do these systems show about the future?

Juliet II: That is why I invited you here. The science is not exact, and the predictions are not fate, but in our simulations so far, there are two divergent futures, both likely, and despite our best efforts, too close to call.

Female Reporter 1: Why two?

Juliet II: The world has many problems – a polluted atmosphere, a changed climate and eroded topsoil that are exacerbating other emerging shortages. We have an ocean swept of fish, and choked with floating plastic. Medicines are failing through overuse, and old scourges return, when people don't vaccinate their children. There is a collapse of courtesy and compromise in politics, leading to intransigence, deadlock, street violence and even civil war. We already have more failed or failing states than at any time since the collapse of the Roman Empire.

Female Reporter 2: But surely it will be alright, with all our technology?

Juliet II: Left unchecked these forces will intensify local disputes, leading to wildfires of territorial conflict and mass migrations. Efficient agriculture will fail, bringing famine, epidemics and bloody conflict on a continental scale. The hardships will first affect the poorer nations, but in time, the rising tide of chaos will engulf even the spiked and gilded citadels in which the mighty think themselves safe. Some simulations show the population crashing to less than a billion people, plunged into a new Dark Age, from which it will be almost impossible to emerge. It is not a world I am comfortable to describe, nor one in which I would want my children to live.

Female Reporter 1: But surely there is something you can do, that we can do?

Juliet II: You are correct. That grim future is not inevitable. On a different path, a growing sense of peace and prosperity leads to a community of nations in which people choose to have smaller families, and the population has a soft landing, down to seven billion from nine, over half a century. And an economy emerges that is more or less in equilibrium with its environment, and is sustainable for centuries to come.

Female Reporter 2: You describe one image of heaven, the other of a living hell, what will make the difference?

Juliet II: In a word, love. Love for each other and the world.

Male Reporter 1: Love?

Juliet II: Not just sentimental love, but systematic love. A few of our problems will yield to pure science. My marine research institute has been collaborating with Oceanic Pharmaceuticals, and today we are pleased to announce the discovery of three new antibiotics. They are derived from coral organisms, and target pathways against which it will be hard for bacteria to develop resistance. My foundation has taken a majority stake in Oceanic, and we will be placing the use of these antibiotics into the public domain.

Male Reporter 1: Surely it will take more than that.

Juliet II: Other problems don't have a simple technical fix, but may yield to new knowledge and novel incentives. To address the problems of ocean pollution, I am launching Project Helen, in which a thousand autonomous ships will ply the oceans, making maps of particulates and helping to plan restoration. The University of Verona has developed a novel organic fiber which, when dragged through water, binds to fine plastic particles, leaving the fish unscathed. We are working with several other foundations to pay fisherman, forced ashore by declining quotas, to trawl the oceans for plastic. This will be sequestered in disused mines, to contain the carbon.

Female Reporter 1: Will that be enough to make the difference?

Juliet II: Sadly, no, but it is a start and we hope to set a good example for other projects.

Female Reporter 2: Then what would?

Juliet II: Not the sort of brinkmanship at which Empress Alexandra was so adept. So many of this century's problems share a common pattern, from pollution to the debasement of politics. In economics it has a technical name, called the Tragedy of the Commons. Any free resource that may be exploited for personal gain will be plundered to the point of exhaustion. That is why pollution chokes our air, our medicines are failing, our politics are toxic, and we stand on the edge of the abyss. Put in the abstract words of science, it sounds harmless enough, and even morally neutral, but there is a plainer way to say it. It is selfishness to the point of hurting everyone else.

Male Reporter 1: Isn't that just human nature?

Juliet II: My ancestor once gave a speech about whether life is a tragedy or a comedy. Well today, I am challenging the world to think about whether there might not be a Comedy of the Commons, in which our shared best interests can triumph over selfishness. In a world polarizing to oblivion, we need not a plague of demagogues, but a new understanding of our interdependence. The answer is not one brilliant invention, but communities brought together to turn vicious circles into virtuous cycles. The more we nurture our shared interests, the more we can flourish and invest in them.

And so tomorrow is the first day of the Comedy of the Commons Symposium, in which I am bringing together scientists, economists, religious leaders and secular humanists to begin to explore solutions to our deepest problems.

Female Reporter 1: Isn't that for politicians to do?

Juliet II: There will be a role for policy and governments in all this, of course, but even enlightened leaders can only move so far ahead of the people they govern. To address our problems deeply will require a marriage – a marriage of art and science, of religious and secular moral philosophy – ultimately people must change, adopting new concepts of virtue and sin to augment or replace the old. In a time when a single book, a single image can change the sensibility of a generation, we will need poets and writers, artists and journalists to embrace these new ideas as well.

Male Reporter 1: You talked about love. Does that mean you are dating anyone at the moment?

(The other reporters look at him with horror and roll their eyes at him.)

Juliet II: Good-looking young men such as yourself would have more chance with me, if they asked less vacuous questions.

(Male Reporter 1 looks pleased.)

Male Reporter 1: I can live with that.

Male Reporter 2: You plan to give away the fruits of medical science to the world. If you do that, how can you finance research for the next discovery?

Juliet II: Now that is an interesting question, and I am very glad that *you* asked it.

(Male Reporter 2 casts a satisfied grin at Male Reporter 1.)

(Fade to black.)

Act 2, Scene 10. The Court of Verona.

(Friar Lawrence stands in front of Romeo and Juliet, and they are surrounded by courtiers, to have a wedding service.)

Friar Lawrence: Is all prepared?

Romeo nods: Proceed, good Friar, we have waited long for this day.

Friar Lawrence (raising his voice to the crowd): Your Royal Highness, Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, citizens of Verona, we are gathered here today to marry our beloved Princess Juliet to Lord Montague – a match sprung from friendship and deep love. For many years I and all the world heard the praises of the deserving lady from my troubled ward. It is my honor to be asked to perform this union, as much a fulfillment of a lifelong quest for me, as it is for Romeo. But before we begin, it is my legal and spiritual duty to ask if any here present knows of any impediment to my marrying this man to this woman. They should speak now, or forever hold their peace.

(A friar dressed in the same cloth as Friar Lawrence walks up to him and places a scroll in his hand which unfurls all the way to the floor.)

Romeo (turning to Juliet): I know I have my faults, but so many?

Friar Lawrence (reading through the scroll): Not *your* faults, my son, but *mine*.

Juliet: How so?

Friar Lawrence: The Abbess of Saint Ursula, hearing of this marriage, wrote to the abbot of my order outlining why I am unfit to be a friar.

Item, to have guided a foolish boy to dissemble his own death rather than cherish the mothers of his children.

Item, to have helped said boy to secure fatal and forbidden drugs to aid such a plan.

Item, to have certified such a mischievous death, so that many grieved and suffered at such a terrible lie.

Item, to have solicited yet more forbidden juices to undo the first near fatal potion.

Item, to have performed a holy rite of burial of one he knew to be still living.

Item, to have violated the grave of many resting souls to retrieve said breathing corpse, and then to have sheltered that very fugitive in his holy refuge, rather than force him to face the punishment for his crimes.

For all these sins, I am cast out of my order, and am no longer a friar.

Romeo: I am amazed, and sad, old friend. I fear you suffered all for love of me.

Juliet: There was malice in what the abbess did. I sense a meanness of spirit in such an action. What was her name, before taking holy orders?

Romeo (wincing): The lady Rosaline.

Juliet (looking at Romeo reproachfully): Ah yes, a daring adversary. She strikes sharply, and when she can do most harm. Rosaline is a holy mother and must be granted her prerogatives. She *is* an abbess, after all, but I am a princess, and rule more broadly than her little kingdom. This trifle will not disrupt our day. Mercutio, run after that peripatetic friar and urge him to marry us. What seemed like doom will only cause delay.

(Mercutio leaving): What if he will not come?

Friar Lawrence: Tell him that his brother Lawrence may seek him out and tighten his knots to remind him of his holy vows of charity.

(Mercutio nods and leaves. The nurse pushes her way to the front.)

Nurse (to Friar Lawrence): Since you may no longer marry them, you can marry me.

Friar Lawrence: Madam?

Nurse: Since they have defrocked you, you may unfrock me?

Friar Lawrence: I still struggle with your drift?

Nurse: Marry me! For you have a good heart and a fine face, and though you have no sense, I have enough for two. And I'll warrant that you have all those other parts of a man as may bring a woman bliss if properly handled.

(The crowd laughs.)

Friar Lawrence: Holy Saint Francis. (A pause.) But I am a man of God.

Nurse: Any man who takes such trouble to chain up his desires is running too hard from what he craves. Your order has cast you out, and I will take you in. They have driven you away, I will pull you close.

Juliet: But I thought you would never...

Nurse: You have forgiven Romeo, and I have come to see, that not all men are my father. With tenderness, and good cheer, we can soften the cold world for each other, and I have a warmer bed than any he has known.

(Turning to the Friar)

So what do you say?

(She goes down on one knee.)

Marry me, yes or no?

Friar Lawrence:

Madam, I will. (He raises her to her feet and kisses her.)

(The gathered congregation claps.)

Mercutio returns: The friar agrees, but begs a moment to gather his thoughts.

Romeo: Juliet, I love you dearly, but what if marriage dims our passions into contentment, and silences poetry with dull conversing - and perhaps there even comes the day when we forget to kiss.

Juliet: I will be in my dotage before I forego kissing my Romeo. And you will grace a pretty dungeon I have specially prepared, if ever your eyes should wander too far from my slender cheek.

Romeo: What tyrants women are when once they win our hearts.

Juliet: What lion cubs men become, when finally we tame them with our love.

(She musses Romeo's hair, then Romeo and Juliet turn to each other, and smiling, kiss each other.)

The Epilogue.

(Empress Alexandra enters as the Narrator)

Empress Alexandra:

And so Romeo and Juliet were wed,
And Romeo, with reverent grace
Wrote loving sonnets to his peerless wife
And an epic saga of Verona's fallen prince.

And what of Juliet?

She gathered scholars to her court,
And all with ancient manuscripts were taught,
To waken knowledge from a thousand years of sleep.
Sly Venice and querulous Florence could not help but peep
With envious eyes at the thoughts of Greece reborn so wise,
And Juliet's famous, lovely eyes,
Inspired poets and painters to surprise,
Even themselves.

As her hair of chestnut turned to grey,
The people loved her not less, but more.
Since she built the first great hospital,
For the orphaned, sick and poor.

And what of Juliet's early house?

An English poet was near one day,

To visit two young gentlemen
About a lovers' fray,
And catching sight of that fine railing up so high,
He fancied it the stage-set for a play.

But had he looked more carefully above the door,
He would have spied
A withered iron plaque inscribed,
"Montague and Capulet,
Counselors at Law,
By high command of Princess Juliet.
Established 1494."