



*Juliet*

ROMEO & JULIET, ACT 2, SC. 2.





## JULIET.

JULIET was the only daughter, and heiress, of the Capulets, one of the proudest families of Verona, conspicuous for the deadly enmity existing between them and the equally influential Montagues. When Juliet had arrived at marriageable age, her father gave a grand masque at his palace, to which all the beauty and nobility of Verona were bid—among whom was Rosaline, niece to old Capulet, a fair but disdainful beauty, beloved by young Romeo Montague. To cure him of a hopeless passion, his friend, Benvolio, persuaded him to go to the entertainment, strictly disguised, and there compare his fair Rosaline with the excelling beauties who would be present.

Accordingly, Romeo and Benvolio, masked with studious precaution, for discovery would have been perilous, took part in the gay revel; and the young Montague no sooner beheld the beautiful Juliet than he forgot his Rosaline, and became passionately enamored of the fair Capulet. It was in his recklessly enthusiastic praise of her charms to Benvolio, that he was overheard by Tybalt, a hot-headed young kinsman of the Capulets, and recognized by his voice; Tybalt would have laid violent hands on him at once, but old Capulet interfered. That very night, after the guests had



departed, and the inmates of the Capulet mansion had retired to their chambers, Romeo, spurred on by this new and irresistible passion, climbed the garden wall, and beheld the lady of his love seated on a balcony, indulging in the delicious reveries consequent upon her interview, in the ball-room, with Romeo. Overhearing her rapturous soliloquy, in which she called his name, he replied to it; and they parted only after exchanging vows of everlasting constancy, and a promise to meet at Friar Laurence's cell the next day, for the solemnization of their nuptials. On the morrow, accordingly, Romeo and Juliet were married by the holy Friar, who thought by this union to cancel forever the bitter feud between their houses; but that very day, Tybalt, still intent upon avenging the insolent intrusion of Romeo, met him in the street, provoked a quarrel, fought with him, and was killed.

For this fatal broil, the Prince of Verona banished Romeo, who, after taking a brief farewell of his few hours' bride, betook himself to Mantua. Juliet's tears and lamentations were attributed to her grief for the loss of her cousin Tybalt—the sooner to dissipate which, her father insisted upon marrying her almost immediately to the county Paris, “a gentleman of princely parentage and fair demesnes;” the wedding-day was set, and every preparation made.

Poor Juliet, finding remonstrance unavailing, hastened in her sorrow to the good Friar, who bade her feign obedience to her father's will, and gave her a potent drug which should cause her to appear as if dead—telling her that, while in this state, she should be borne to the burial vault of the Capulets, whence he and Romeo, for whom he would send, would rescue her. Juliet fulfilled his instructions; in the morning, when young Paris came with music to awaken his bride, she was found “dead,” and the joyful festivities were changed into a doleful funeral service.

The Friar then despatched a special messenger to Romeo, with a letter informing him of the true case; but by some accident he was detained, and Romeo received intelligence through another source of his wife's death, which so distracted him with grief that he procured a deadly poison, and repaired forthwith to Juliet's tomb, determined to die on her beloved corse. Having reached the vault of the Capulets, he broke open the gloomy portal, and beheld the still beautiful body of his adored lady; with one kiss he drained the fatal bowl, and breathed his last, just as Juliet awoke, and the Friar, warned of the detention of his envoy, arrived in the hope of preventing the impending disaster.

This fatal catastrophe was productive, however, of one beneficial result: the Capulets and the Montagues were ever after united in bonds of friendship and interest—freely joining to do honor to the memory of those hapless victims to their accursed feud.

---

Of Juliet, Mrs. Jameson says: “Such beautiful things have already been said of her, only to be exceeded in beauty by the subject that inspired them, it is impossible to say any thing better—but it is possible to say something more.” Alas for our task! this latter clause was true only before Mrs. Jameson wrote: not a detail of the subject has been neglected by her sympathetic pen; at the best, we can hope but to repeat her.

The loves of Romeo and Juliet, though physiologically, mentally, and morally, possible only to their traditional birth-place, Italy, have in them that “touch of nature which makes the whole world kin;” and it is to this element that we must attribute the universal popularity of the tragedy which commemorates them. To even the most lymphatic blood, the least susceptible fancy,



there come those few, brief, "perfect days," when Passion, for the first time, asserts its boundless sway over the brain and the pulses—filling the one with ecstatic dreams of a future as blissful as it is infinite, kindling in the other a tormenting yet delicious tumult; and in proportion to the intensity with which we are capable of conceiving these emotions, is our sympathy with this story of two lovers, whose very names may stand for personifications of the passion to which they were beautiful martyrs.

At first it is the ingenuousness, the almost infantine simplicity, of Juliet's character, which endears her to our hearts. Her extreme youth, her rare beauty, which has been perfected in jealous seclusion; her warm affections, repulsed by her austere parents, running to waste on her old nurse,—the only familiar object about which they may twine their eager tendrils; and finally, her love for Romeo, born of a glance, a sigh, a touch—yet, from the moment of its birth, a Titan which shakes to the centre her tender soul: all these constitute a picture, of which the interest and romance are almost too intense.

Yet it is not thus—in the first, happy delirium of her love—that Juliet engages our profoundest sympathy, our liveliest admiration. Not until Fate seems to have executed its most pitiless freaks upon her solitary heart; not until, her husband banished, she loses her sole friend and confidante, by the discovery of her time-serving baseness—the only mother, in familiar affection, she has ever known—and she, for the first time in her young life, asserts her own individuality, invincible through the force of her love, does she command that absorbing interest which would never have been awakened by mere self-abandonment to passion.

To use the words of Hazlitt, Juliet is, indeed, "a pure effusion of Nature"—a woman whose emotions and manifestations are of primeval innocence and vigor—in whom Love is the outward

expression of an instinct as beautiful and holy as it is vehement—who is "Love itself—the passion which is her state of being, and out of which she has no existence." In nothing has Shakspeare proved his wondrous skill more clearly than in this creation of a human being in whom sense asserts itself paramount over reason—indeed, whose only manifestations of intellect are the inspirations of exalted sentiment, a sensuously excited eloquence; and yet who is endowed with such exquisite purity, as distinguished from the false teachings of a conventional modesty, that Eve herself is not more sacred from an imputation of grossness.

It is in this view of her character, and of the idea which Shakspeare expressed through her, that we propose to exceed, by a little, our privileges, to consider a question which properly belongs to the province of legitimate criticism.

A woman and a wife, to whom the hymeneal mysteries are the solemnest of rites, at whose altar she presides with veiled eyes, a jealous priestess, could almost reproach this awful Master, that he has entered the nuptial chamber of Juliet's soul, and exposed its beautiful secrets in words well-nigh too sacred to be pronounced, even to herself; but, since he has done so, she must bow before him as one unto whom, indeed, all hearts were open!

*Jul.* Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,  
Towards Phœbus' mansion! such a waggoner  
As Phaeton would whip you to the west,  
And bring in cloudy night immediately.  
Spread thy close curtain, love-performing Night,  
That run-away's eyes may wink—and Romeo  
Leap to these arms, untalk'd of, and unseen!

\* \* \* \* \*

Come, Night! Come, Romeo! Come, thou day in night!  
For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night  
Whiter than new snow on a raven's back!