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A Most Lamentable and Excruciating Romeo and Juliet

FARCE. “For never was a story of more woe...” A student production of *Romeo and Juliet* opens in just two days and the drama group is desperately trying to complete rehearsals. Friar Lawrence recites his lines as if he is a chicken suffering from brain-freeze. Juliet is constantly trying to upstage Romeo and insists that her death scene be obnoxiously long. Two friends, who always speak in unison, play the part of the Nurse, complete with matching modern nurse uniforms and stethoscopes. Then on opening night, the stage manager has to fill in as Romeo when the lead actor is hospitalized. Juliet freezes in place onstage with her mouth agape and has to be replaced by Freddy, wearing a dress and wig. Then throw in some tap dancing, a freestyle dance, and a cardboard moon on a stick that droops from boredom. As the show spirals into chaos, it goes down as the most hilarious and unexpected production of something that *almost* resembles Shakespeare’s classic!

Performance Time: Approximately 75-90 minutes.

Characters

(3 M, 7 F)

DIANE: Student director who plays Capulet and the Prince; female.

J.J.: Stage manager and Romeo stand-in; female.

HIRAM: Afraid he isn't a good actor and is afraid of falling off the stage; plays Friar Lawrence and recites his lines as if he is a chicken with brain-freeze; male.

TROY: Tries to "help" Hiram think like a true actor; plays Mercutio; male.

CHRISTINA: Plays Chorus, Nurse, and Lady Capulet; female.

CRISTINA: Plays Chorus, Nurse, and Lady Capulet; female.

BOBBY: Plays Tybalt; female.

CORI: Plays Juliet; female.

FREDDY: Plays Page and a surprise Juliet; male.

CHERYL: Plays Benvolio; female.

Costumes

It should look as if each cast member decided what period and style to play their character and created the costume on their own.

Setting

A high school rehearsal room/performance space.

Set

Rehearsal room/performance space. There are cardboard bushes, a balcony, and a moon on a stick.

Synopsis of Scenes

ACT I: Rehearsal, two days prior to opening.

Intermission, opt.

ACT II

Scene 1: Backstage, opening night.

Scene 2: Performance of *Romeo and Juliet*, abridged.

Props

2 Swords	2 Stethoscopes
Vial of "poison"	Stuffed chicken
Scripts	Romeo costume, for JJ
Headphones	Cardboard moon on a stick
Plastic knife	Messy wig, for Freddy as Juliet
MP3 player	Dress, for Freddy as Juliet
Watch, for JJ	Lantern
Leather outfit, for Bobby	Large Band-Aid for Cheryl's head
Modern nurse uniform, for Christina	Oversized letter
Modern nurse uniform, for Cristina	

Sound Effects

Weird music

Music for Queen Mab speech

Raucous music

Music for beginning of Act II

Music for the performance

Bang

Sound of Freddy "falling" and landing on other cast members

**“For never was a story
of more woe
than this
of Juliet and her Romeo.”**

ACT I

(AT RISE: A high school rehearsal room/performance space. The cast of "Romeo and Juliet" is practicing bits, talking, and making a lot of commotion. JJ enters.)

JJ: (To cast.) Okay, everybody. Places for the death scene!
New version!

(All exit except Diane, Christina, Cristina, and Freddy. Weird music is heard. Troy as Mercutio and Bobby as Tybalt enter, moving awkwardly to the music with their swords flailing around as they pretend to fight. It is obvious they do not like the music.)

DIANE: To the music! (Mercutio and Tybalt stab each other on a music cue and then twirl to a quick death. Cori as Juliet enters, making a grand entrance with great flourishes. At DCS, Juliet drinks the "poison" and dies gracefully, taking a very long time to do it. JJ as Romeo enters, carrying a prompt book. She walks about the grave area.) To the music, JJ. (Romeo makes little attempt to follow the music.) The music, JJ.

(JJ closely follows the prompt book. Romeo reacts emotionlessly to the dead Mercutio, fake spits at Tybalt, and then stops by Juliet's body and sort of mourns. Romeo pretends to kiss Juliet's hand. Romeo takes out a bottle and drinks it. Romeo lies down as if dying. Romeo crosses her legs and holds her folder against her chest, waiting. Hiram as the Friar enters followed by Cheryl as Benvolio. Hiram's movements as the Friar are obviously memorized. The Friar walks to Juliet, who suddenly awakens. Friar and Benvolio scream. Benvolio runs off but the Friar remains, having forgotten his next move. Benvolio surreptitiously returns and tries to pull the Friar offstage. Juliet sees Romeo's body and starts to overact her sorrow, suffering grandiosely. She picks up a dagger and starts to "stab" herself. She keeps "stabbing" herself. She moves to a better position. She "stabs" herself. She repositions herself and "stabs." This

continues. Friar enters and kneels where he thinks Juliet's dead body should be. Juliet still isn't dead.)

HIRAM: *(As Friar.)* "She's dead. Oh, Juliet's dead!"

(Juliet "stabs" herself. Juliet scootches close to Romeo and continues to "stab" herself. Troy, Bobby, and JJ sit up, having seen this happen before too many times. Bobby puts on headphones. JJ, disgusted, grabs the knife and "stabs" Juliet.)

DIANE: *(To Cast.)* Stop. *(Shouts.)* Stop! What are you doing, JJ? What was the purpose of that?

JJ: *(Indicating Juliet.)* She wasn't dying. She wasn't dying!

CORI: Well, I never —

BOBBY: That's the problem, Cori.

(Offended, Cori goes to the side and practices overacting. Christina and Cristina follow her.)

DIANE: *(To JJ.)* You're Romeo, for Pete's sake.

JJ: I'm not supposed to be, Diane.

DIANE: That's not the point, JJ. Romeo doesn't kill Juliet.

JJ: Cori keeps stabbing herself but not dying, so I killed her.

(Freddy bounds onstage, seizing the moment.)

FREDDY: I could do it! I could play Juliet! I could! Watch!

(Freddy takes the knife from JJ and makes a show of "killing" himself.)

DIANE: Okay, everyone.

FREDDY: Hold on, Diane.

HIRAM: *(To Diane.)* Was there something wrong with the way I was acting?

JJ: *(To Diane.)* If Cori's not going to kill herself, somebody has to.

TROY: *(To Diane.)* Uh, what time is rehearsal over?

HIRAM: *(To Diane.)* I can do much better than I did, really...

DIANE: *(Shouts.)* Will everyone be quiet, please!

(Silence.)

FREDDY: *(“Stabbing” himself.)* Ahhhh! Uh! Ah! *(“Dies” in front of everyone.)*

TROY: Oh, that was excellent, Freddy. *(Applause.)* Dork.

DIANE: Now, look, what is the problem here? What is the problem?

CORI: I was dying. Obviously, my acting abilities are not appreciated here, so—

DIANE: No, no, no, no. Your acting is just... *(Thinks.)* ...great.

CHRISTINA/CRISTINA: *(To Cori.)* You're really good. You're really good. You're really good.

DIANE: Christina, Cristina!

CHRISTINA/CRISTINA: What?

DIANE: Why don't you...? *(Thinks.)* The chorus isn't needed for a little while, so why don't you go off, rehearse, and make your acting better. *(To Cori.)* Your acting is...is just, just lovely, Cori. You know, I mean, I couldn't ask...the whole cast just couldn't ask for anything more. It's just great.

CORI: Yes?

DIANE: But...

CORI: But?

DIANE: Why don't you try and shorten your death.

CORI: The death scene...it has to be long. The audience, they need to experience Juliet's pain.

JJ: They can do that with one swift blow to the gut.

(Diane tries to push JJ away while still talking to Cori.)

CORI: *(To Diane.)* I don't know if I could do that...

DIANE: I'm the director, trust me. Look, why don't we try this again and take it from—

CORI: This won't be easy.

DIANE: I understand that, but I'm sure you're perfectly capable.

JJ: *(To Cori.)* Why don't you try doing the pain thing offstage?

DIANE: *(To Cast.)* All right, take it from the top!

JJ: Okay, everyone onstage for Juliet's death!

TROY: Again?

CORI: I'll do it.

(Everyone gets into place. Hiram exits. JJ takes the knife from Freddy and gives it to Cori. Cori as Juliet repeats the obnoxiously long death.)

TROY: *(To Cori, stage whisper.)* Die.

DIANE: Shhhh.

TROY/JJ: *(To Cori, stage whisper.)* Die.

DIANE: Shhhh.

TROY/JJ/FREDDY: *(To Cori, stage whisper.)* Die.

DIANE: *(Louder.)* Shhhhhh!

ALL: *(To Cori.)* Die!

TROY: *(To Cori.)* Would you die already?!

DIANE: Cut! That is not the part, Troy. What do you think you are doing?

(Hiram enters.)

HIRAM: Was I that bad?

TROY: *(To Hiram.)* Yes. Look, Diane, this obviously isn't working out, so let's take a break, okay?

(Hiram sinks to the floor, crying. Cheryl enters and tries to console Hiram.)

FREDDY: *(To Diane.)* If Troy can't handle his character, I could do it.

TROY: Hey, you, you, short person, you. What do you think—?

FREDDY: I can do Mercutio better than you.

(Diane puts her head on JJ's shoulder.)

TROY: Oh, you're just the actor now, aren't you, Freddy?

FREDDY: I'll show you, Troy. Here, give me the sword.

TROY: Let's just see you do it, Mr. Freddy Benedict Cumberbatch, sir. *(Freddy grabs Troy's sword and performs Mercutio's death badly. JJ stands Diane back up and pushes her toward Troy and Freddy.)* You know, I appreciate good acting but I just don't appreciate you.

(Freddy quickly stands to face Troy.)

DIANE: *(Shouts.)* I am the director here!

TROY/FREDDY: *(Shouts.)* So?!

DIANE: So...why don't we all take a 10-minute break?

TROY: Thank you! *(Immediately rushes backstage.)*

JJ: *(To Diane.)* Meeting.

DIANE: A meeting for the 10-minute break. Meeting, yes. All right, everybody. Meeting!

JJ: *(Shouts a bit too loud.)* Let's go, everyone. Meeting onstage!

(All gather onstage.)

DIANE: Now, I realize, with Miss Needle gone, it's really difficult right now—

FREDDY: Where is she?

JJ: She ran out of here screaming a week ago.

TROY: She ran out 'cause Hiram, here, messed up his lines.

CHERYL: He did not mess up his lines. Hiram's perfect.

DIANE: *(Shouts.)* He did not mess up!

CHERYL: See, Troy!

DIANE: She left because she was having her baby. (*Hears something.*) Now...what the...is that noise? (*Bobby is sitting upstage listening to an MP3 player. Diane approaches Bobby and pulls one of the headphones away from Bobby's ear.*) Hello, Bobby! We are having a cast meeting. Why don't you turn that down and join us. (*Bobby begrudgingly turns down the music. To cast.*) Now, because the performance is only two days away –

BOBBY: What?

DIANE: Now, because the performance is only two days away –

BOBBY: Two days is Friday.

DIANE: Yeah, Bobby, that's right.

HIRAM: (*Panicking.*) You're kidding me, right?!

DIANE: No, Hiram, it's Friday.

BOBBY: There's a concert in town on Friday.

DIANE: Well, there just happens to be our performance on Friday, Bobby.

(*Christina and Cristina raise their hands.*)

DIANE: Yes, Cristina, Christina?

CHRISTINA/CRISTINA: What about Juliet?

DIANE: Juliet, I mean Cori, is concentrating.

(*All adlib "There's a concert," "Cori's concentrating," etc.*)

CHRISTINAS: Can we watch Cori?

DIANE: Good. Why don't you just sit there quietly and –

BOBBY: Look, Diane, there's a concert, so there's no way. I mean, I got front row seats. I spent \$250 bucks for my tickets.

DIANE: I can assure you, Bobby, that the school has sunk much more into this.

TROY: Yeah, \$255 bucks! Come on, Diane...

HIRAM: *(To Diane.)* Let me ask you this...

FREDDY: *(To Diane.)* I can play Bobby's part. Let me. *(Starts reciting Tybalt lines.)*

HIRAM: *(To Diane.)* This coming up particular Friday? I mean, like, this week Friday?!

JJ: *(Over the melee, shouts.)* Only 30 minutes left of rehearsal!

DIANE: *(Shouts.)* Guys, guys, guys! Let's have a little organization here!

CORI: *(Insulted.)* I am *not* a guy.

(Everyone quiets down. Troy falls asleep.)

DIANE: *(To Cast.)* Okay, because the production is only two days away, and everyone will be here to play the parts in the production whether their grandmother got run over by a car or they have a concert to go to... *(Pointedly.)* ...Bobby, we should try to pull everything together. Now. I know you're all concerned about the teacher, so, um, why don't we try to make this production as good as possible so that she will see it and be very happy. *(Scattered applause.)* All right. Ten minutes till dance rehearsal. *(Cast starts to wander off.)* Oh, wait a second. I meant to ask...has anyone seen George?

CHRISTINA/CRISTINA: George? Who's George?

DIANE: George...the guy who plays Romeo. Where's Romeo?

BOBBY: *(Sarcastically.)* "O, Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou, Romeo?"

(Everyone joins in. Christina and Cristina think it's funny. Cori overacts warming up. Hiram goes to Diane and asks her if he should act like that. Freddy starts reading lines at Diane.)

DIANE: *(Shouts.)* Ten minute break!

JJ: *(Shouts.)* Okay, everyone! Ten minutes till dance rehearsal!

(Everyone exits quickly except for Hiram, who hangs behind and begins practicing his lines.)

HIRAM: *(To himself.)* Friday. Two days. What am I going to do? My lines, Hiram. I have to learn my lines. *(Strikes a pose. As Friar.)* "I'll be brief, Romeo there dead was husband to that Juliet." *(To himself.)* No, no that's not it. *(As Friar.)* "I'll be brief, Romeo there dead was..." No, no, Hiram, that still isn't. *(Thinks.)* I need a body! *(Crosses to Troy, who is still asleep. As Friar, kneeling.)* "I'll be brief Romeo there dead—" *(To himself.)* No, no. *(As Friar.)* "I'll be brief Romeo there dead was husband to that Juliet dead. Oh, dead."

(Troy awakens, startled. Hiram jumps back.)

TROY: Geez, Hiram, what are you doing? You're spitting all over me.

HIRAM: I'm sorry, uh, Troy, I figured that, uh, you were sleeping, and uh, uh, you know, I figured, you know... *(Pause.)* ...you know...

TROY: Where is everybody?

HIRAM: They've been, uh, out on a break.

TROY: A break?

HIRAM: Yeah, a break.

TROY: I can't believe it. I've wanted a break all day. Why didn't anyone wake me? *(Starts to exit.)* What are you still doing out here?

HIRAM: I'm practicing my lines for this coming Friday.

TROY: Give it up, Hiram. You don't need practice.

HIRAM: Ah, thanks, Troy. Um...you know, Troy, I mean, you're a really good actor, you know, a two-thumbs-up actor—

TROY: *(Feigning humility.)* Nah, I'm not that good.

HIRAM: No, I've seen you in "The Taming of the Shrew."
You were really good. You don't have this trouble, you know.

TROY: *(Smiling.)* Yeah, I know. I was good in that one, wasn't I?

HIRAM: Yeah, you're really good at this stuff. I, I, I need— you know, and you're really good—some help on this one line. *(Points to the script.)*

TROY: Um, I think you were saying that line just fine. How about we go to another line? *(Scans script.)* Ah, here we go. This is a good one. I like this one myself. Read that first line.

HIRAM: Oh, okay, you're really good at this stuff, and, you know—

TROY: Just read it.

HIRAM: Okay. Um, do I, like, do... *(Waves hands.)* ...the motions and stuff?

TROY: Just read it.

HIRAM: Okay. *(Rapid, monotone.)*

"Take thou this vial, being then in bed,
And this distilling liquor drink thou off."

TROY: Right. 'Kay, what does that mean?

HIRAM: Uh, this, uh, is, uh, is...um, a vial, and he's, uh, gonna drink, um, it up. Off.

TROY: And it's the olden days, so he's drinking...?

(Pause. Hiram just stares blankly.)

HIRAM: What?

TROY: Hiram, Hiram, Hiram. It's gotta be river water, right? Cold river water...ice-cold, freezing river water. They didn't have sinks and stuff.

HIRAM: Huh? I would not a thought of that.

TROY: This is how you get to be a real actor, Hiram. Think creatively!

HIRAM: Yeah, yeah. I'll think.

TROY: So when you drink something ice, ice-cold...?
HIRAM: You freeze your brain?
TROY: Ah-ha! Thinking, man! Thinking! And then...and then you...?
HIRAM: I "eeee."
TROY: You...what?
HIRAM: (*High-pitched.*) Eeeee!
TROY: (*Laughs.*) Yeah, that. Do that when you're saying the line.
HIRAM: Really?
TROY: Actor, Hiram. Actor.
HIRAM: Okay. (*As Friar.*)
 "Take thou this vial, and being then in bed,
 And this distilling liquor drink thou off."
 (*High-pitched.*) Eeeeeee!" Is that good?
TROY: That was more than good.
HIRAM: I mean, really good?
TROY: Outstanding.
HIRAM: (*Extends his hand to shake.*) Oh, thank you.
TROY: Don't touch.
HIRAM: Wow. It was good.
TROY: But it's missing something.
HIRAM: Oh, uh, yeah, of course. What?
TROY: If your brain freezes ice-cold-like, what's gonna happen to you, huh? What? What? What?
HIRAM: (*Thinking.*) Um, um, um, um...I'll shiver!
TROY: Yes! You're thinking almost like an actor!
HIRAM: I'm an actor!
TROY: Almost.
HIRAM: I'm an almost actor.
TROY: Okay, then. "Eeeee" it up, baby, and shiver. Shiver and "eeee." Be the brain freeze, Hiram! Be that brain freeze!
HIRAM: Yeah, okay. I, I, I think I can do that. Okay.
 (*Shivering dramatically. As Friar.*)
 "Take thou this eeeeeeee vial, and being in bed,

And this distilling eeeeeeee liquor and drink thou eeeeeeee off." Good? Good? Good?

TROY: Ah, no. Still something missing.

HIRAM: Missing? What? What's missing?

TROY: You gotta help me here, Hiram. You gotta think like a true actor.

HIRAM: I can do that! I can! (*Thinks.*) What should I think?

TROY: I got it!

HIRAM: What?! What?!

TROY: To thaw your brain, you're going to do ridiculous, foolish, strange things.

HIRAM: Right. Right. I can do that! I do ridiculous things!

TROY: (*Gets an idea.*) I know! I know, man! "Eeee," shiver, fall over, and spin around to ward off that evil freeze gripping your brain!

HIRAM: You know, that's, uh, that's, uh, a really good idea. I mean, I could probably incorporate that into my line...make it more believable.

TROY: Try it, Hiram. Now, get into the part!

HIRAM: Okay, Troy. (*Shivering dramatically. As Friar.*)

"Take thou this eeeeeeee vial, being then in bed,
And this distilling eeeeeeee liquor drink thou eeeeeeee off."
(*Falls on the floor, grips his head, and starts to spin.*)

"When presently through all thy veins eeeeeeee shall run
A cold and drowsy humor eeeeeeee—"

TROY: Spin, Hiram, spin! Ah, forget it. Forget it. It was stupid of me even to think I could help you.

(*Troy starts to exit. Hiram jumps up and chases after him.*)

HIRAM: No, wait, Troy! I can make it more believable...incorporate more things into my line.

TROY: Do you really want to make this work?

HIRAM: Yes. Yes, I do! You know, I mean, you're a really good—

TROY: What's your favorite animal, Hiram?

HIRAM: A chicken.

TROY: (*Whipping Hiram into an evangelistic frenzy.*) A chicken. Perfect! A chicken ain't afraid of brain freeze! A chicken shouts to the world! A chicken attacks without a second thought! Be a chicken, Hiram... "bawk"! "Eeee," shiver, fall down, spin around, and "bawk." I want to see you "bawk," Hiram!

(*Troy grabs Hiram.*)

HIRAM: (*In Troy's face, shouts.*) I can do that, Troy! I can do that!

TROY: (*In Hiram's face, shouts.*) I know you can do it! You're an actor!

HIRAM: (*Shouts.*) I'm an actor! I am an actor!

[END OF FREEVIEW]