

WHEREFORE ART THOU ROMEO

A One-Act Comedy Play

by
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SCENE I

SETTING: A stage in a high school auditorium. A small table with two chairs sits SR. There are a number of black wooden boxes (or folding chairs) scattered over the rest of the stage.

AT RISE: A school bell sounds announcing the end of classes for the day. **TIFFANY** enters carrying her director's script which consists of a large three-ring binder and a spiral notebook. **SHE** crosses to the table and chairs and sits. **TIFFANY** begins looking through her notes as **AMANDA** enters. **AMANDA** is carrying her stage manager's script which is in a three-ring binder along with some loose pieces of paper that are the audition readings. **SHE** crosses to **TIFFANY**.

AMANDA: Madam, director.

TIFFANY: Madam, stage manager.

AMANDA: I'm going to be honest Tiffany, I don't know if we will ever get this play cast.

TIFFANY: We have to get it cast. It's our big chance to show everyone in the drama department that we are up to a challenge. All we need is a Romeo. Who would have thought that in a school this size, we couldn't find one guy to play Romeo. I thought we would be swamped with boys auditioning for the part.

AMANDA: Maybe we shouldn't have announced that they would have to wear tights.

TIFFANY: I don't get it. Some boys look good in tights.

AMANDA: Just not the ones who auditioned.

TIFFANY: Well, there is that. Do you think that if we would have stressed the number of sword fights that we would have had more boys audition?

AMANDA: Maybe. But... maybe they just aren't into Shakespeare.

TIFFANY: Then they should have said something at the drama club meeting. At the meeting, everyone agreed that we wanted this year's play to be challenging. And what is more challenging than Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare?

AMANDA: Not much, I'll admit. But, if we can't cast it...

TIFFANY: *(with confidence)* We'll cast it. I am not sure how, but somewhere we will find our Romeo. I won't give up. I know that somewhere in this school, there is the perfect Romeo.

AMANDA: There might be, but he just doesn't want to be in a play by Shakespeare... or wear tights.

TIFFANY: I asked Phoebe to come to auditions and read Juliet opposite potential Romeos.

AMANDA: She may be reading to herself... or to just us. It will be a shame if she doesn't get a chance to play Juliet. She would have been great in the part.

TIFFANY: She'll get to play Juliet! We have to find her a Romeo. Have any of the boys mentioned anything to you about coming to auditions?

AMANDA: *(reluctantly)* Uh... only two.

TIFFANY: Well, who are they?

AMANDA: Do you really want to know?

TIFFANY: Amanda...

AMANDA: Bernard.

TIFFANY: Oh, no.

AMANDA: Oh, yes.

TIFFANY: Bernard? Bernie, the nerd?

AMANDA: That's the one.

TIFFANY: Did you tell him that he couldn't wear his sweater vest and that he would have to wear tights?

AMANDA: As a matter of fact, I did.

TIFFANY: And, what did he say?

AMANDA: (*imitating BERNARD*) My dear Amanda, in the year 1595 at the time that William Shakespeare's play Romeo and Juliet was being performed, many men wore tights or similar garments that fit close to the skin. A man's status among his peers could often be determined by how elaborate the stitching and coloring was on these close fitting garments and his... uh, codpiece. For the sake of historical accuracy, I will gladly surrender my sweater vest and pocket protector and wear tights... that is, should I be cast in the role of Romeo.

TIFFANY: Codpiece? Did he actually mention codpiece?

AMANDA: Would I make that up?

TIFFANY: No, I guess not.

AMANDA: What's more he proceeded to enlighten me with the definition of a codpiece as per Webster's unabridged. (*imitating BERNARD*) codpiece; a flap hanging over the opening in the front of men's breeches. (*as herself*) I assume he was not only right about the history, but also word perfect on the definition. He *is* the smartest kid in the school, ya know.

TIFFANY: I know, and he'd also be the smartest kid in Harvard, Yale and MIT if he went to school there. But, he is not, I repeat *not* a Romeo.

AMANDA: I know that, but he may be our only option.

TIFFANY: Oh, I hope not. Wait, you said two.

AMANDA: Two, what?

TIFFANY: You said there were two boys who told you that they might come to auditions. Who was the other one besides Bernard?

AMANDA: It's not important.

TIFFANY: Of course it is. We need a Romeo and Bernard is *not* him.

AMANDA: You might think differently after I tell you who else said he might show up.

TIFFANY: Amanda...

AMANDA: All right, you asked for it... Kenny.

TIFFANY: (*shouting*) *Kenny!!!?*

AMANDA: I'd say that is pretty much the reaction I expected.

TIFFANY: Kenny is so, so...

AMANDA: Good looking?

TIFFANY: No! So, so...

AMANDA: Obnoxious?

TIFFANY: Amanda, he's an idiot!

AMANDA: Not quite, but he can get on your nerves.

TIFFANY: On your nerves? Amanda, if I only had one nerve left in my body, Kenny would find a way to stand on it. I *cannot* work with Kenny.

AMANDA: Suit yourself, he's *your* brother.

TIFFANY: Don't remind me. I had no choice in the matter. I do have a choice in who plays Romeo however.

AMANDA: So, that leaves us Bernard.

TIFFANY: Unless someone else shows up.

AMANDA: Don't hold your breath.

(*PHOEBE enters and crosses to CS. SHE looks every bit the part of Juliet.*)

PHOEBE: Hi you guys. Has anyone shown up to read for Romeo?

TIFFANY: Not yet. Amanda and I are afraid that Kenny and Bernard might show up.

PHOEBE: Really? Kenny and Bernard? I guess that explains why they were lurking in the hallway outside the auditorium just now.

AMANDA: They're right outside?

PHOEBE: They were... I told them to get lost before they scared away any possible Romeos. You are kidding about them wanting to audition, aren't you?

TIFFANY: Well, Amanda heard that they may...

(KENNY and BERNARD enter.)

KENNY: Hey, Tiff! Bernie and I have been waitin' outside to audition for your play, can we come in now?

TIFFANY: No! Go back out in the hall until we call you in.

KENNY: But, Phoebe is in here.

TIFFANY: Phoebe is Juliet.

BERNARD: How, if I might be so bold, did she acquire that part?

TIFFANY: Talent! Now get back in the hall.

(KENNY starts to exit.)

BERNARD: I object. It seems that some students are getting preferential treatment.

KENNY: Never mind, Bernie. Let's go back out in the hall before my sister throws something at us.

BERNARD: My name is Bernard, not...

(KENNY returns and grabs BERNARD by the arm and starts dragging him offstage.)

KENNY: Sure, whatever... let's go Bernie.

BERNARD: But, but... She throws things?

KENNY: All the time.

(KENNY drags BERNARD offstage.)

PHOEBE: I will *not* play Juliet opposite one of those two.

AMANDA: In all fairness, we have to let them audition.

PHOEBE: I don't see why.

TIFFANY: As much as it hurts me to say it, Amanda is right. We have to let them audition.

PHOEBE: Why?

TIFFANY: The drama club bylaws state that the annual student directed play is open to the entire student body.

That means anyone who is a student in good standing is allowed to audition. Don't worry, even if they audition, it doesn't mean we have to cast them.

PHOEBE: But, what if one of them is actually good?

AMANDA: Then, I guess we have our Romeo.

TIFFANY and PHOEBE: Oh, no!

AMANDA: Let's just wait and see.

TIFFANY: I agree, let's wait and see. *(to PHOEBE)* Go tell them to come back in.

(PHOEBE exits.)

What did I do to deserve this?

AMANDA: We can still hope that someone else shows up.

TIFFANY: They would have been here by now.

(PHOEBE enters followed by BERNARD and KENNY.)

KENNY: *(to TIFFANY)* Okay Sis, so what do we do now? The Kenny-Meister is ready to act.

AMANDA: Oh, my...

TIFFANY: *(to KENNY and BERNARD)* Just find someplace and sit for a minute while we discuss a few things.

KENNY: Fine with me. Let's find a place to crash, Bernie.

BERNARD: Bernard.

KENNY: Yeah, right.

(KENNY and BERNARD each sit on one of the wooden boxes.)

TIFFANY: All right, as you know our play is Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare.

KENNY: What's it about?

AMANDA: It's Romeo and Juliet. It is about Romeo and Juliet.

KENNY: *(not understanding)* Oh...

TIFFANY: Romeo and Juliet is a love story. Probably the best known love story of all time.

KENNY: Never heard of it.

PHOEBE: I don't believe this.

BERNARD: Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare is a tragedy based on an Italian tale that was translated into verse. The basis was The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet by Arthur Brooke written in 1562, thirty years prior to Shakespeare's writing of Romeo and Juliet.

TIFFANY: Thank you, Bernard. I am sure that you are correct.

BERNARD: Of course I am.

AMANDA: *(to herself)* This is not going well.

TIFFANY: As I was saying, our play is Romeo and Juliet and we have cast all of the parts except Romeo. Phoebe will be playing Juliet and she is here to read the Juliet lines at today's audition.

KENNY: So, if this is a love story... then is this Romeo, Juliet's boyfriend?

TIFFANY: Yes, he is.

KENNY: And Phoebe is playing the part of Juliet?

AMANDA: *(impatient)* That is what she said.

KENNY: Do Romeo and Juliet make out?

TIFFANY: Make out?

KENNY: Yeah, you know...

TIFFANY: Yes, I do know... and the answer is that they will share a kiss.

KENNY: A kiss? Then, I'm your man! I'll play Romeo!

PHOEBE: What!? No...

KENNY: *(to PHOEBE)* It's okay, I don't mind kissing you. I'll even come over to your house so we can practice after hours if you'd like.

PHOEBE: Tiffany!

TIFFANY: Kenny!

KENNY: What?

TIFFANY: You have not been cast in the part of Romeo. We need to hold auditions first.

KENNY: What for? There's just me and Bernie here. You can't possibly think Bernie would...

BERNARD: Bernard!

KENNY: *Bernard*, would be a better Romeo.

AMANDA: We have not determined that. In order to be fair we need to hear both of you read.

KENNY: Waste of time, but okay. *(to PHOEBE)* Don't worry this is just a formality. *(to TIFFANY)* So, let's get on with it!

(ERIN enters.)

ERIN: Excuse me, is this where they are holding auditions for Romeo and Juliet?

KENNY: *(to ERIN)* Who are you?

TIFFANY: Kenny! *(to ERIN)* Yes, I'm Tiffany the director and this is Amanda the stage manager.

ERIN: Hi, I'm Erin. I'm new, I just transferred from...

KENNY: *(crossing to ERIN)* I'm Kenny, but you can call me Romeo.

ERIN: Oh, you're playing Romeo?

AMANDA: Kenny, sit down. *(to ERIN)* No, he is not. We haven't cast the part of Romeo yet.

(KENNY sits back down.)

TIFFANY: As a matter of fact it is the only part we haven't cast, so I'm afraid we don't have a part for you.

ERIN: What about Romeo? Can I audition for the part of Romeo?

KENNY: You're a girl. Romeo is a guy's part.

AMANDA: *(to KENNY)* How would you know? A minute ago you hadn't even heard of Romeo and Juliet.

KENNY: I'm a quick learner.

AMANDA: You wish.

TIFFANY: Stop it you two. *(to ERIN)* You want to audition for Romeo?

ERIN: Sure, if it is all right.

TIFFANY: Well, I don't know I...

AMANDA: Why not?

KENNY: Because she is a girl and Romeo is a guy's part.

AMANDA: So what? In Shakespeare's time, men played all of the female roles.

KENNY: You have to be kidding? Shakespeare's Juliet was a guy?

AMANDA: Yes.

KENNY: No way I'd play Romeo with a guy playing Juliet.

AMANDA: Don't worry, you wouldn't have even been considered for the part.

KENNY: How do you know?

AMANDA: Trust me, I know.

KENNY: *(with disgust)* Men playing women's parts?

BERNARD: Amanda is correct. In ancient Rome and Greece and throughout the medieval world it was thought disgraceful for women to appear on stage. For that reason men played all of the characters up until the seventeenth century when the taboo regarding women on stage was broken in Venice, Italy.

TIFFANY: Bernard...

BERNARD: In England, women were banned from the stage until after the English Restoration in 1660.

TIFFANY: Bernard....

BERNARD: Margaret Hughes is credited as the first female professional actress on the English stage.

TIFFANY: *Bernie!*

BERNARD: Bernard.

TIFFANY: Bernard... thank you for the lesson in theater history. I am sure you are correct as always.

BERNARD: Yes, of course I am.

AMANDA: Of course he is.

PHOEBE: I say let her audition.

KENNY: *(to PHOEBE)* You'd rather play opposite a girl than me?

PHOEBE: You don't really want me to answer that.

TIFFANY: *(to PHOEBE)* No, don't answer him.

AMANDA: Come on Tiffany, let Erin audition.

TIFFANY: I suppose it won't hurt. It might be interesting, kind of a role reversal of how things were in Shakespeare's time. Okay Erin, you can audition. Amanda, give everyone a copy of the readings that we will be doing today.

(AMANDA hands out the pages of paper containing the readings to ERIN, KENNY and BERNARD.)

BERNARD: These do not appear to be complete manuscripts.

AMANDA: No Bernard, we cut some dialog from a couple of scenes where Romeo and Juliet appear together and then we...

BERNARD: *(amazed)* You cut Shakespeare?

TIFFANY: I know Bernard, shocking isn't it? High school kids cutting Shakespeare... but, I'm sure Shakespeare will forgive us this one transgression.

KENNY: What about letting a girl audition for the part of Romeo, will Shakespeare forgive you for that?

TIFFANY: Probably. All right if everyone has a copy of the readings we will be doing, we'll get started.

BERNARD: I don't do cold readings. Would it be permissible to ask for a few minutes to prepare?

TIFFANY: Sure, Bernard. Why don't you sit off to one side and we will start with someone else.

BERNARD: Thank you.

(BERNARD moves to a box off to one side to study his script.)

AMANDA: Erin and Kenny do either of you need a minute to study the script?

ERIN: No, I think I can read it cold.

AMANDA: All right. Kenny?

KENNY: Sure, I'm ready. I'll go first. After you see what I can do you won't have to listen to the girl and Bernie. It'll save everyone a lot of time.

PHOEBE: Oh, brother.

TIFFANY: Okay Kenny, you can go first. Our scene is in the orchard outside of Juliet's house.

(PHOEBE stands on top of one of the boxes.)

KENNY: What is she doing up there?

AMANDA: Juliet is on a balcony.

KENNY: Am I on a balcony too? Do I need to get on a box?

AMANDA: *(impatient)* No! You are on the ground outside the house looking up at the balcony where Juliet will appear. This is the famous balcony scene.

KENNY: Okay, sweet. I'm on the ground outside the house. I can do that.

(long pause)

TIFFANY: Kenny...

KENNY: What?

TIFFANY: Start. Romeo has the first line.

KENNY: *(reading slow and poorly)* Oh, uh...

He jests at scars that never felt a wound.

(KENNY mispronounces wound)

AMANDA: Wound!

KENNY: Huh?

AMANDA: Wound, like in an injury. Not wound as in I *wound* the clock.

KENNY: Oh...

He jests at scars that never felt a *wound*.

But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?

It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.

Arise, fair sun and kill the envious moon,

Who is already sick and pale with grief,

That though her maid is far more fair than she.

(KENNY stops reading)

TIFFANY: Now what? Keep reading.

KENNY: What did I just say?

TIFFANY: To make it simple, you just said that Juliet was beautiful.

KENNY: All that, to say she's beautiful?

TIFFANY: That's correct.

KENNY: Why not just say, there's Juliet and man is she hot? Why talk about breaking windows and then the sun coming out and the moon getting sick?

AMANDA: Because Shakespeare doesn't write that way!

(BERNARD crosses CS.)

BERNARD: If I may... Kenneth, Shakespeare's writing is poetry. Romeo and Juliet is written in iambic pentameter. In his play Shakespeare uses metaphors to describe things. That is why he compares Juliet's beauty to that of the fair sun instead of saying something non-poetic like... here comes Juliet, man is she hot.

TIFFANY: Thank you Bernard. You've been a great help.

BERNARD: I know.

(BERNARD returns to the box HE was sitting on.)

TIFFANY: Now, let's continue.

KENNY: Do you want me to start over?

AMANDA: No!

TIFFANY: Just continue.

KENNY: *(reading)*

See how she leans her cheek upon her hand!

Oh, that I were a glove upon that hand,

That I might touch that cheek!

PHOEBE: *(as Juliet)* Ay me!

(pause)

TIFFANY: Kenny, it's your turn.

KENNY: That's all she says? Ay me?

TIFFANY: Yes, now keep going.

KENNY: She speaks: *(breaking character)* but she doesn't say much.

AMANDA: Kenny!

KENNY: O, speak again, bright angel! For thou...

(KENNY stops reading)

TIFFANY: Now, what?

KENNY: Okay, now let me get this straight... bright angel, that's Juliet right?

TIFFANY: That's right.

KENNY: So, she's not the sun anymore?

TIFFANY: What!?

KENNY: Well she was just the sun and now here we are only a few lines later and she's the bright angel. Which is it?

AMANDA: *She's both!*

KENNY: That's gonna make it really tough on the costumer, don't you think?

AMANDA and TIFFANY: *What!?*

KENNY: Think about it... the costumer won't know whether to send Juliet out on the balcony in her sun costume or her angel costume.

AMANDA: *Kenny!*

TIFFANY: (*very angry*) There is no *sun* costume. There is no *angel* costume. Juliet will be wearing her nightgown when she comes out on the balcony.

KENNY: Well, that's going to be confusing.

TIFFANY: Confusing?

KENNY: Sure, there's no way the audience is going to know when Juliet is the sun or when she's the angel if she's standing on the balcony in her nightgown.

AMANDA: Oh, my...

KENNY: It would be like Superman without his cape. Take the cape away and all you have is some nerd in a suit called Clark Kent.

BERNARD: Who did you call a nerd?

KENNY: Sorry, Bernie.

BERNARD: Bernard!

TIFFANY: Kenny, I think we have heard you read enough, don't you Amanda?

AMANDA: More than enough.

KENNY: What? You mean I'm done?

TIFFANY: Yes, you can leave if you want to.

KENNY: Did I get the part of Romeo?

TIFFANY: What? Well, we need to hear the others read before we make any decision.

KENNY: I'll just stay and watch.

TIFFANY: Kenny?

KENNY: Bernie got to watch.

BERNARD: Bernard.

AMANDA: Let him watch.

TIFFANY: Okay, but you'll have to be quiet. Bernard, are you ready?

BERNARD: I believe I am properly prepared.

(BERNARD crosses CS and KENNY crosses and sits on the box where BERNARD was just sitting.)

TIFFANY: Bernard, just continue where Kenny left off.

KENNY: That's where Juliet is the bright angel, Bernard.

AMANDA: Be quiet!

KENNY: Just wanted Bernie to know that Juliet was the angel and not the sun.

BERNARD: Are you ready?

TIFFANY: Yes, start with, oh... start with, She speaks.

(BERNARD begins to read. HE reads the lines correctly but the nasal quality of his voice is unappealing and HE overacts with a lot of hand gestures including the forming of wings with his hands.)

BERNARD: She speaks:

O, speak again, bright angel! For thou art
As glorious to this night, being o'er my head
As is a winged messenger of heaven
Unto the white-upturned wondering eyes
Of mortals that fall back to gaze on him
When he bestrides the lazy-pacing clouds
And sails upon the bosom of the air.

PHOEBE: O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?

Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

BERNARD: (*Aside, very much over acted with one hand going to his ear and another to his mouth.*) Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?

AMANDA: I think I've seen, uh, heard enough. How about you Tiffany?

TIFFANY: Oh yes, definitely. You can sit down Bernard.

BERNARD: Yes, but I didn't get a chance to do the Queen Mab speech.

TIFFANY: That speech isn't Romeo's it's Mercutio's and we already have a Mercutio.

BERNARD: I know, but it will give you an idea of the true scope of my acting ability.

AMANDA: I think we've just seen your scope, Bernard.

BERNARD: But, I memorized the Queen Mab speech just for this audition. And, I practiced Mercutio's death scene. Here, I'll do it for you.

TIFFANY: That is not necessary Bernard.

(*BERNARD proceeds to overact Mercutio's death speech as if HE hadn't heard TIFFANY.*)

BERNARD: I am hurt. (*shouting*) A plague o' both your houses! I am sped. Is he gone, and hath nothing?

AMANDA: Okay, I think we've definitely got Bernard's scope now, don't you Tiffany?

TIFFANY: Yes, that was really something Bernard. Thank you for sharing that with us. I am sure it will make our decision a lot easier.

BERNARD: You're welcome. Did I get the part of Romeo?

TIFFANY: We still have to listen to Erin.

BERNARD: Right. (*to ERIN*) Good luck, I know that is going to be tough to follow.

ERIN: Thank you.

(*ERIN crosses CS and BERNARD sits.*)

Where would you like me to begin?

TIFFANY: Phoebe, why don't you start with Juliet's line, Romeo, doff thy name.

PHOEBE: All right. (*to ERIN*) Are you ready?

ERIN: Yes, I have it right here.

PHOEBE: Okay, here we go.

Romeo, doff thy name,
And for that name which is no part of thee
Take all myself.

(*ERIN begins to read. SHE recites the lines beautifully with the perfect amount of emotion. Together PHOEBE and ERIN make a believable Romeo and Juliet.*)

ERIN: I take thee at thy word:

Call me but love, and I'll be new baptized;
Henceforth I never will be Romeo.

PHOEBE: What man art thou that thus bescreen'd in night
So stumblest on my counsel?

ERIN: By a name

I know not how to tell thee who I am:
My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself,
Because it is an enemy to thee;
Had I it written, I would tear the word.

PHOEBE: My ears have not yet drunk a hundred words
Of that tongue's utterance, yet I know the sound:

Art thou not Romeo and a Montague?

ERIN: Neither, fair saint, if either thee dislike.

KENNY: Stop! Is Juliet a saint now?

TIFFANY: What?

KENNY: He... or she... Erin, just called Juliet a saint twice. One minute Juliet's the sun, the next minute she's the bright angel and now she's a saint. Which is it?

END OF FREE PREVIEW