

BECOMING JULIET

By Dean Dyer

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SYNOPSIS: Sibley High, a small school in rural Somestate, has a crisis: there isn't enough money to pay for the scripts and royalties for the spring play. Cindy Andrews, the drama teacher, comes up with a desperate plan. The school will perform *Romeo and Juliet*. It's a difficult show for a small high school, but Shakespeare's works are in the public domain, and they already have the complete script in their 9th grade English textbooks. Meanwhile, JJ Baker, a senior girl and drama veteran, hopes to use the spring play rehearsal schedule to finally win the romantic attention of Dylan, a cynical, underachieving rebel. At the same time, Miss Andrews is being romanced by Jack McCoy, a substitute industrial arts teacher.

Everything seems to be going almost too well - - JJ even lands the part of Juliet - - when at the last moment, Joey, the boy playing Romeo, breaks his leg while practicing pole vaulting. The play is canceled and all appears to be lost, unless Mr. McCoy can somehow convince Dylan to break his "golden rule."

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(9 MEN, 18 WOMEN)

CINDY ANDREWS (f) Frustrated drama teacher. (140 lines)
MRS. BATES (f) Elderly high school secretary. (8 lines)
MR. ERVING (m) Elderly high school principal. (24 lines)
JJ BAKER (f) Senior girl, plays Juliet. (78 lines)
KATIE (f) Junior girl, JJ's best friend. (54 lines)
ASHLEY (f) One of a trio of freshman girls. (6 lines)
ASH LEE (f) Another of the trio. (6 lines)
ASHLEIGH (f) Another of the trio. (8 lines)
RANDY (m) Freshman boy. (6 lines)
MADISON ENGERS (f) Pretty, popular "star." (35 lines)
LINDSAY GREENBROOK (f) Snotty, popular girl. (2 lines)
LYNDSEY POMEROY (f) Snotty, popular girl. (3 lines)
JOEY (m) Madison's boyfriend, hot guy. (17 lines)
KYLE (m) Joey's friend, bully. (13 lines)
SHUT UP RONNIE (m) Annoying freshman boy. (27 lines)

- MICHAEL (m) Another freshman boy. (13 lines)
DYLAN ELLIOTT (m) JJ's love interest, troubled boy. (59 lines)
MIRANDA (f) Dark, negative girl, likes Dylan.
(13 lines)
ANNA (f)..... Friend of Miranda. (1 line)
VENUS (f)..... Friend of Miranda. (1 line)
AUTUMN (f)..... Another senior drama geek. (20 lines)
MELODY (f) Senior, new girl. (20 lines)
BRENDA LOOMIS (f)..... Teacher, Andrews' best friend. (44 lines)
JACK MCCOY (m)..... New teacher, Andrews' love interest.
(58 lines)
DANIELLE (f)..... Tomboyish freshman girl. (13 lines)
TONY ALLEN (m) Jack's friend. (13 lines)
MRS. ENGERS (f) Madison's mother. (13 lines)

SETTING

With the exception of three short scenes, the entire play takes place on the high school stage. The three short scenes are all extremely simple: the principal's office, a table in the cafeteria, and a small portion of Miss Andrews' classroom. All can be staged in front of the curtain or in the wings with quick carry-off furniture pieces. The main stage should be in flux, with set pieces in various stages of completion moved around occasionally. In the final two scenes, some final set pieces should be present - - a section of stone wall and perhaps the suggestion of a balcony. The first portion of the final scene should be played in front of the curtain if possible.

ACT ONE

Scene 1: Mr. Engers' office, morning. Set at SL and defined merely by his desk, chair, and a second chair in front of the desk.

Scene 2: High school cafeteria, lunch period. Set at SR, defined by a single table.

Scene 3: The stage, after school. A few set pieces, a crate, props scattered about.

Scene 4: The stage, two days later, now largely emptied for auditions.

Scene 5: The stage, the following Monday, practice begins.

ACT TWO

Scene 1: (Starts with JJ in front of curtain.) The stage, practice continues, set construction in progress, a few pieces scattered about.

Scene 2: The stage, practice continues.

Scene 3: The stage, before practice starts and practice continues

Scene 4: The stage, weeks later, three days before performance. Several completed set pieces visible

Scene 5: Miss Andrews' office, early morning before school starts.

Scene 6: The stage, opening night, minutes before curtain.

Scene 7: Front of curtains, reception line following final performance.

PRODUCTION NOTES

PROPERTIES:

ON STAGE

A few leftover set pieces from previous shows, typical maintenance and construction tools like a stepladder, mop, broom, saw horses, etc. Two 4x8 flats propped horizontally to represent stonewalls, one partially finished for early scenes, and one finished for the final two scenes. For Act One, Scenes 1 and 2, a desk, two chairs, and two cafeteria tables. For Act Two, Scene 5, a small table, chair, and possibly a bookcase or file cabinet.

BROUGHT ON

ACT ONE:

Scene One: A golf club, ball and practice cup; a clipboard.

Scene Two: Lunch pails, cafeteria trays, a textbook (Ronnie), iPods (Miranda and co.)

Scene Three: Tool belt (McCoy)

Scene Four: Textbooks (Students), clipboard or folder, director chair (Andrews), a couple wooden swords (Michael, Ronnie)

Scene Five: Textbooks (Students), clipboard or folder (Andrews), tool belts (McCoy, Allen)

ACT TWO:

Scene One: Textbooks (Students)

Scene Two: Paint can, brush, drop cloth, wooden sword and shields (Dylan); basketball (Kyle); iPods (Miranda and co.)

Scene Three: Textbooks, wooden swords/shields (Students); clipboard or folder (Andrews); tool belt (McCoy)

Scene Four: Swords/shields (Students); clipboard or folder (Andrews)

Scene Five: Clipboard (Bates)

Scene Six: Tool belts, tools (McCoy, Allen)

Scene Seven: Shields, swords (Students); cell phone (Engers)

SOUND:

A clip of the music from the video game *Zelda* is helpful at the end of Act Two, Scene 2, and through the following scene change. No other sound effects required.

CASTING:

Randy, who plays the Friar, has a line in which he says Miss Andrews chose him for the role based on his size (“She needed a tall, serious-looking guy.”) Adjust as necessary to fit the actor. Similarly, Loomis ends Act One, Scene 3, with a reference to McCoy’s eye color. There is no flexibility for gender in speaking roles.

COSTUMES:

Until the final scene, normal student/teacher attire is appropriate, with costume changes made as necessary to reflect passage of time. Joey and Kyle should have varsity jackets, and Lyndsey and Lindsay should be in cheerleading outfits most of the time, Madison less often. Miranda, Venus and Anna are in Goth attire. For the final scene, Dylan and JJ (*Romeo and Juliet*), Randy (*The Friar*), Danielle and Michael (*Mercutio and Benvolio*), Madison (*Lady Capulet*), should be in appropriate costume. The remainder of cast can be partially or fully in costume to reflect various characters from *Romeo and Juliet*. Andrews should be in an evening gown or similarly formal attire for the final two scenes.

TEMPO:

Most of the dialogue should be fairly fast-paced, conversational. The soliloquies delivered by JJ and Dylan should be slower, more contemplative, in contrast.

MISCELLANEOUS:

To the extent possible, this play should be presented in the downstage area. The soliloquies by Dylan and JJ should definitely be delivered right at the front edge of the stage, intimately shared with audience. Some of the other more sensitive scenes are also best played at stage edge; for instance, Madison and JJ's discussion of Mrs. Engers in Act Two, Scene 3.

For the final scene, which is a reception line following the play, the front of curtain area works best if there's enough room for the audience members to pass by the line. If not, curtain can be opened and the cast can be a few steps back to allow passage of the audience members.

The words of Mr. William Shakespeare, borrowed from the actual play of *Romeo and Juliet*, are encased in quotation marks. They are for the most part word-for-word transcriptions, printed in prose format to match the rest of this script, although a couple of lines have been shortened.

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

AT RISE:

Lights up on PRINCIPAL ERVING's office, which is stage left, defined simply by his desk and chair. A second chair is in front of the desk, upstage and turned to face the audience. The cafeteria, defined by two tables, is at stage right, unlighted. ERVING has a golf club and is practicing his putting. He is interrupted by the sudden and explosive entrance of MISS ANDREWS, the drama teacher, and MRS. BATES, his secretary.

ANDREWS: Mr. Erving, I see that you are terribly busy, *(Looks first at golf club and then accusingly at BATES.)* but I need a moment of your time.

BATES: *(Trying to position herself between them.)* I tried to stop her, sir, but she rushed right past me.

ANDREWS: *(Seething.)* Yes, I can be rather uncooperative when I'm really, REALLY, angry.

BATES evaluates the situation, retreats to upstage chair and sits.

ERVING: *(Innocently.)* And whatever could be the cause of such anger, my dear?

ANDREWS: My contract and scripts for the spring play haven't arrived yet, so I called the leasing company. They tell me that they've never received our check, the one that I requested FOUR WEEKS AGO!

ERVING: Ah, yes, the check you requested. Well, you do remember our staff meeting last Tuesday, don't you? The one in which we discussed our budget crisis, and the elimination of all nonessential expenditures?

ANDREWS: Yes, I remember the meeting. But this is not a "nonessential expenditure." This is the spring play, the same spring play that Sibley High puts on every year. Besides, I submitted my request FOUR WEEKS AGO.

BATES: *(Looking at her notebook.)* Actually, you requested it on March 3. That was three weeks and three days ago.

ANDREWS stares at BATES. BATES sinks back into chair. ERVING takes the opportunity to sit behind his desk.

ERVING: Miss Andrews - - Cindy - - let me be honest with you. If we had sent that check, you still wouldn't have your scripts. Instead, the leasing company would have been calling to inform you that your check bounced.

ANDREWS: *(Stepping forward to lean across his desk.)* You've got to be kidding. We're talking about \$450 here. Do you mean to tell me that this district can't scrape up a lousy \$450 bucks?!

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ERVING: I'm afraid that's exactly what I'm telling you. (*Stands and walks around desk, drifting thoughtfully toward center stage.*) I've been in education for over forty years, Cindy, and I've been through some tough financial times, but nothing like this. Sibley has always been a small town, but it's on the verge of becoming a ghost town. Our kindergarten enrollment this year was down almost 25%, and that's after it was already down 12% last year. Our population is falling, and it's also growing older. We need to face the fact that for the immediate future, our district needs to assume that we will continue to have less revenue each year, not more.

ANDREWS: (*Beginning to understand, but still angry.*) But you could at least have let me know. I have auditions scheduled in two days.

ERVING: I'm sorry, Cindy. You're right, I should have told you, but I'm just no good at playing the grim reaper role. I love this district. I became an educator because I love education. You have no idea how many of our programs have been deemed "nonessential." I guess I've just been avoiding reality, hiding out here in my office as much as possible. (*Returns to his desk and sits, fondles golf club.*) On the bright side, my short game has improved considerably.

ANDREWS: Field trips have been gone for three years. Last year, we lost the debate team. When is it going to end, John?

ERVING: I wish I could tell you.

ANDREWS: (*To audience.*) Of course, I'm sure that all the new state-mandated curriculum for the National Achievement Exam doesn't fall under the "nonessential" category.

ERVING: More reality, Cindy.

ANDREWS: (*Walking to center stage as her anger returns, speaking to audience.*) Well, let's think about the term "nonessential." Drama is nonessential. Music is nonessential. Art in general - - we certainly can't score any points on an achievement exam with art. And what about sports teams and other clubs, dances, assemblies? Heck, when you get right down to it, just what *is* essential? Certainly not carpet or brightly painted walls. Even tables and desks aren't *essential*. All we need is to pile all the kids we can into big, empty rooms, have them sit on the floor, and then cram them with facts and figures so they'll score well on the National Achievement Exam. Then some clueless bureaucrats in the Dept. of Education can tell some equally clueless politicians that we're doing a just plain dandy job in our public schools. (*Turning to ERVING.*) There's your *essential* education!

BATES: (*Trying to be helpful.*) Technically, I think the state does require that we have desks.

ANDREWS: AAAAAHHHHHHHHH!

At first, she directs this at BATES, but then turns it to the audience. BATES takes the opportunity to scoot out.

ERVING: (*Crossing to her and patting her shoulder.*) I couldn't have said it better myself, Cindy. Feel any better?

ANDREWS: *(Turning to him, demanding.)* Don't they know that they're dealing with children here? Teenagers are fragile, and the pressures are growing every year. Sex, drugs, violence - - none of those things are addressed in an achievement exam. The arts are a natural, safe place for kids to escape from it all. I have some kids in the drama program who are there because they feel like they don't fit in anywhere else. Aren't their *lives* essential, John?

ERVING: If I could change it, I would, Cindy. Believe me.

BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

AT RISE:

Lights up on the cafeteria, which is set to stage right, simply defined by the Drama Geek table at right and a second table set nearer to center and slightly upstage, which fills with extras during the scene. JJ and KATIE are seated across from each other at the downstage end of the Drama Geek table, talking, while extras occasionally pass by in background.

JJ: This whole thing just stinks so bad. My whole senior year is going right down the toilet.

KATIE: Easy, Jaje. *(This is her way to pronounce JJ's name.)* Three months and you're out of this dump. A college girl, living the good life, out of Sibley and into the real world. I'm the one who's stuck here for another year.

JJ: You just don't get it, Katie. I had two goals coming into this year. Just two, simple little goals. One was to have a date for the prom, and the other was to get a good role in the spring play. Now there isn't even going to be a spring play, and prom is only eight weeks away . . .

KATIE: . . . and if there's no play, there's no opportunity for you to exercise your feminine wiles on Dylan while he's building the set.

JJ: Exactly. We've drifted apart this year - - he's always hanging out with the rebel crowd. We don't have any of the same classes, either. Katie, I know he likes me . . . I just need to have some time to make sure that *he* knows it.

KATIE: I still don't know how you can be so sure he likes you. Okay, so you guys were best friends all through elementary. People change, Jaje. They grow up. Dylan's smart, talented . . . maybe even a little bit cute . . . but he hangs out with nothing but losers, and he's barely going to graduate. You can do better.

JJ: Yeah, every time I go to my locker I have to beat my way through a mob of guys all just begging me to go to the prom with them. Besides, you don't get Dylan. All that dark stuff is just a front. He's so sweet and sensitive underneath.

KATIE: Okay, now you're starting to sound like one of those old fifties rock songs. *(Singing.)* Everybody said he was bad, but I knew he was just sad.

JJ: *(Stands, crosses down left to center.)* You're not helping. Dylan really is sad . . . or at least he's confused, or angry, or . . .

KATIE: . . . or a mildly psychotic jerk?

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JJ: . . . or something. (*Stopping at center.*) But he's also very sweet sometimes. Last year when my grandma died, he made me the nicest card and wrote me a long poem about how important our friendship has been to him. He said I could come to him whenever I felt like I needed to talk. It was so thoughtful.

KATIE: So did you?

JJ: Did I what?

KATIE: Did you talk to Dylan about your grandma?

JJ: No.

KATIE: Why not?

JJ: I don't know - - it just never seemed like the right time.

KATIE: See? Maybe he knew you'd never come talk to him, so the offer was just an empty gesture.

JJ: (*Crossing back to table, emphatically.*) Dylan doesn't make empty gestures.

KATIE: Besides, he owed you. You spent a whole week sitting in the hospital with him after . . .

JJ: (*Cuts her off sharply.*) Don't go there, Katie. You know that subject is off limits.

KATIE: I just hate to see you getting your hopes up again, Jaje.

JJ: (*Sits, puts head on hands.*) Believe me, I'm not getting my hopes up. Without a spring play, my life is hopeless.

Enter the freshmen drama geeks from DR, first ASHLEY, ASH LEE, & ASHLEIGH, giggling characteristically, and then RANDY, RONNIE, and MICHAEL.

ASHLEY: Hey guys, 'sup?

KATIE: It's more like what's down. Haven't you guys heard that they canceled the spring play?

ASH LEE: Golly, that's a bummer. But it's like, what can we do about it?

ASHLEIGH: O-M-G, here comes Joey Pulaski!

RANDY: Y'know, you guys give freshmen everywhere a bad name.

The THREE ASHLEYS gather together and swoon as KYLE, JOEY and MADISON enter SR. KYLE and JOEY split into wing at stage right, where they begin actively pantomiming a replay of a basketball game, while MADISON approaches JJ and KATIE. The ASHLEYS sit in the middle of the table, while RONNIE, RANDY and MICHAEL fill in the upstage end.

MADISON: Hey, guys. (*To JJ and KATIE, ignoring the freshmen.*) Can you believe they canceled the play in our senior year? This is like totally wrong.

JJ: It just doesn't seem real. All year long I was thinking about how it was going to be tough, being up on that stage for the last time, but now we don't even get a last time.

MADISON: We've been drama sisters in every show since sixth grade!

JJ: (*Reminiscing.*) Sixth grade. *Teenage Vampires from Mausoleum Middle School.* What a corny show! (*Stands next to MADISON, morphing into her character.*) "Super Girl, you're our only hope."

MADISON: *(Also in character.)* "Don't worry, Dr. Angela. Thanks to the atomic skateboard you invented, I'll be able to roll right through those vampires and destroy their power source. Mausoleum Middle School will be able to open on Monday!" *(Back to herself, hugging JJ.)* Can you believe how lame that script was? And we thought we were the coolest! Oh, JJ, it just can't end like this!

JJ: That's what I keep trying to tell myself.

MADISON: Maybe if we all get our parents to complain - - my mom has always been pretty good at getting the school board's attention.

KATIE: *(Snotty.)* Well, some people do have more influence than others in Sibley.

MADISON: What's that supposed to mean?

Before the confrontation can build, LINDSAY and LYNDSEY approach from DL and flank MADISON, pushing JJ aside. JJ returns to her seat.

LINDSAY: Come on, Mad. We saved a spot for you and Joey. *(She directs this pointedly at JJ and KATIE, making it clear they're not invited.)*

LYNDSEY: We need to talk about what we're doing after prom.

MADISON: Prom is eight weeks away - - what's the emergency?

LINDSAY: Duh. That's why we need to get our plans straight. We've only got eight weeks!

LYNDSEY: Yeah, that's like no time at all.

MADISON: Okay, okay, just a sec. *(LINDSAY and LYNDSEY don't argue but wait impatiently.)* I'll talk to you later, JJ. Don't give up yet.

JJ: Yeah, talk to you later, Maddy.

MADISON, LYNDSEY and LINDSAY exit DL. JOEY and KYLE remain in the right wing, still reliving the game.

KATIE: I don't know why you like her, Jaje. To Queen Madison, you're nothing but another one of the peasants.

JJ: That isn't true, and you know it, Katie. Maddy can't help it if she's popular. She's always been a good friend.

KATIE: Popular, rich, *and* beautiful - - the triple curse. And she is *not* your friend. She just tolerates you because you make her look good on stage. Besides, everyone likes you, Jaje. You're like the school mascot or something.

MADISON, LYNDSEY and LINDSAY appear back at DL. MADISON leads, looking for JOEY. She stops upstage of the second table as she sees him in the wing.

MADISON: Joey! *(Gestures off L with her head. LYNDSEY and LINDSAY place hands on hips impatiently.)*

JOEY: *(To KYLE.)* Oops, gotta go. *(KYLE pantomimes a cracking whip at JOEY, who turns briefly to drama table as he passes by.)* Hey guys. Tough break about the play.

JJ: Yeah . . . *(Breaks off as JOEY turns and hurries off DL.)* Thanks, Joey.

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ASHLEY, ASH LEE, AND ASHLEIGH: *(In unison.)* TTYL Joey! *(Pause.)* He talked to us!

KYLE approaches table, hovering over RONNIE and MICHAEL and laughing menacingly.

KYLE: Ah, two of my favorite fresh fish. Hop up, boys - - you know the drill!

RONNIE: Aw, come on, Kyle. Give us a break.

KYLE: That's Mr. Kyle, fish. *(Pounds fist in hand.)* Now move.

RONNIE and MICHAEL rise and begin moving reluctantly to downstage center followed closely by KYLE.

MICHAEL: Aw, geez. My mom just bought me new underwear.

RONNIE and MICHAEL turn and face each other, putting their hands in position.

KYLE: Three, two, one!

RONNIE and MICHAEL simultaneously give each other wedgies. Extras at upstage table explode with laughter.

KYLE: Synchronized wedgies! *(Clapping.)* Ladies and gentlemen, we might just have a new Olympic event! Now let's see the fish dance!

JJ: *(Steps up between RONNIE and MICHAEL, directly into KYLE's face.)* That's enough, Kyle. This is the drama geek table. The obnoxious, Neanderthal jerk table is that big rock behind the bus garage, so why don't you drag your knuckles over there and sit with all your friends.

KYLE: Ooooh, bad time of the month, JJ? *(Extras react.)* Or are you just depressed because I haven't asked you to the prom?

JJ: Ask me to the prom? *(Pretending to be flattered at first, then smiles sarcastically.)* Why, is your mom busy that night?

First an alarmed, shocked silence, then both tables erupt in laughter. RONNIE is particularly loud.

KYLE: *(Menacing.)* You're lucky you're a girl, JJ.

JJ: How impressive, Kyle. You know the difference. Yes, I'm a girl. And you're a boy - an annoying, dirty little boy. Now beat it.

MR. ERVING and MR. MCCOY, the new shop teacher, are passing through up stage from UR entrance and pause, taking interest in the confrontation. KYLE backs up slowly. RONNIE starts to laugh again, but a quick glance from KYLE quiets him. He and MICHAEL sit at the upstage end of the table. KYLE glares back at JJ, then turns and exits DL. MR. ERVING and MR. MCCOY continue across and exit.

KATIE: Dang, girlfriend! You really put it to Kyle! Where did that come from?

JJ: *(Returns to seat.)* He had it coming. Look how many years everyone's been putting up with his crap, just because he's big. Besides, I've already had enough bad news for one day.

DYLAN and MIRANDA enter DR, sharing an iPod. They are followed by MIRANDA's friends, ANNA and VENUS, who are also sharing an iPod. MIRANDA, ANNA and VENUS remain apart from the table and don't acknowledge any of the drama geeks.

KATIE: Wow, you just missed all the action. JJ went all gangsta on Kyle Olney.

JJ: It was more of a scolding. *(Frowns at KATIE.)* Just the usual drama at the drama geek table.

DYLAN: Kyle Olney is a pretty rough customer, even for you, JJ.

MIRANDA comes up behind DYLAN and puts her hands on his hips possessively, still ignoring the others.

JJ: Let's just say he picked a bad day to start pushing buttons.

DYLAN: Yeah, pretty tough news about the play. And of course, I'm sure Kyle and his pals don't have to worry about having the *basketball* program cut.

JJ: No, Dylan - - Kyle's a jerk, but we can't start blaming each other. Lots of kids play basketball. Joey Pulaski plays all kinds of sports, and he's a nice guy.

ASHLEY, ASH LEE, AND ASHLEIGH: *(In unison.)* She said JOEY PULASKI!

DYLAN: He could pick better friends.

KATIE: *(Looking at JJ.)* You could say that about a lot of people.

DYLAN: *(Returning her insult.)* Yes, you could.

JJ: Come on, you guys. We *definitely* need to stick together.

MIRANDA: This is boring. *(Pulls DYLAN backwards and gives a head nod toward DL, gesturing to leave, then looks back at VENUS and ANNA.)* C'mon.

DYLAN: Catch ya' later, JJ. At least we'll have some extra chill time for the next couple months.

DYLAN and MIRANDA exit DL, followed by VENUS and ANNA, as AUTUMN and MELODY, a new student, enter DR and approach JJ and KATIE.

AUTUMN: Hey guys, this is Melody. She just started at Sibley today. She's a senior from Morris Central.

KATIE: Wow, you had to move halfway through your senior year? And from Morris Central to a little hick school like Sibley? Don't your parents know that there are laws against child abuse?

MELODY: I'm used to it. My dad has to move a lot with his job. But I was hoping to at least get in a school with a drama program. Autumn told me about the spring play being canceled.

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KATIE: Yeah, that's the fun fact for today. Anyway, I'm Katie, and this is JJ. (*JJ makes a small wave and smiles. ASHLEY, ASH LEE, and ASHLEIGH simultaneously clear their throats and stand.*) And these are the Ashleys.

MELODY: The Ashleys? Like, are they a rock group or what?

ASH LEE: No, silly. We're just all best friends forever, and we have the same name, too, except they're not all spelled the same.

ASHLEIGH: Yeah, it's like totally weird! IDK how it could have happened!

ASHLEY: It's like our parents just knew we were going to be like BFF's!

The ASHLEYS burst into another round of giggles.

RANDY: (*Standing and extending a hand over the table.*) Hi, Melody. I'm Randy. I'm a freshman, too, but I try not to make it quite so obvious. (*Looks at ASHLEYS.*)

MELODY: (*Laughs.*) It's nice to meet you, Randy.

RONNIE and MICHAEL have opened a textbook and are laughing, oblivious to the introductions.

KATIE: (*Pointing.*) And rounding out the drama geek table this morning are two more freshmen, Michael and Shut Up Ronnie.

MELODY: His name is "Shut Up Ronnie"?

AUTUMN, KATIE AND JJ: (*In unison.*) You'll see.

RONNIE: (*Still laughing, rises, brings book over to KATIE.*) Katie, remember when I told you Miss Andrews is crazy? Well, look at the story she just assigned us in English 9.

KATIE: (*Takes book and looks.*) Yes?

RONNIE: (*Points.*) Look - - right there. The author's name. (*AUTUMN moves over and looks with KATIE.*)

KATIE AND AUTUMN: (*In unison.*) Yes?!

RONNIE: (*Crouches beside her and shields his mouth from the ASHLEYS. JJ, AUTUMN and MELODY all lean in to hear.*) The author's name is Alexander DUMBASS! (*He bursts into muted laughter and raises his eyebrows at them conspiratorially.*)

KATIE: It's Dumas, Ronnie. D - - U - - M - - A - - S. Alexander Dumas. He's French.

RONNIE: (*Defeated.*) French? (*Brightens.*) Well, how do you know that Dumas isn't French for dumbass?

AUTUMN: I've had three years of French, Ronnie. Dumas is not French for dumbass.

KATIE: Besides, I know the French word for dumbass. (*RONNIE leans in grinning, interested.*) It's Ronnie. (*She pronounces it with a rolled R and accent on the second syllable so it sounds "French."*)

RONNIE: Really?! Awesome, Dude. Check this out. (*Cups his hands over his mouth and shouts at the extras table.*) Hey, Chad. You know what you are? You're a big, fat RONNIE! (*Both tables burst into laughter, and RONNIE realizes he's been tricked. Turning back to KATIE.*) Hey! You told me . . . that's not fair!

KATIE, AUTUMN, JJ, AND MELODY: (*In unison.*) Shut up, Ronnie.

BLACKOUT. CURTAIN.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

AT RISE:

Curtains open on the stage, which is mostly empty. A few scenery pieces and props from past shows are placed haphazardly, perhaps a broom, bucket, stepladder, etc. A dismayed CINDY ANDREWS sits on a crate down center, brooding, as BRENDA LOOMIS, another teacher, enters UR and crosses to her.

LOOMIS: Figured I'd find you here.

ANDREWS: The stage is empty, and that's pretty much how my life feels these days. *(Looks around the stage.)* You gotta like the metaphor.

LOOMIS: Well, if it's any consolation, I heard that you sent Evelyn Bates home with a migraine.

ANDREWS: Nothing like assaulting an elderly secretary to relieve stress.

LOOMIS: I'm sure she'll recover quickly. She's probably already tossing and turning over the paper and pencils we're wasting with reckless abandon while she's out.

ANDREWS: *(Rising, walking DR.)* It's not her fault, Bren. It's not even the school's fault, or Sibley's fault. Theatre is a dying art. People don't have the time or the patience for live performance anymore, not when they can TIVO anything they want on a 60" HD screen in their own living room, complete with surround sound and those *(Sarcastically.)* wacky deleted scenes. Maybe they're right - - maybe the drama program is nonessential.

LOOMIS: *(Following ANDREWS.)* Now you're scaring me, Cindy. Drama is your *life*. I've heard your pep talks with the kids, all those stories about how you were a drama geek, too. Besides, there are lots of places where theatre is alive and well - - just not out here in the middle of corn country.

ANDREWS: You know, those aren't just pep talks. I really *did* survive on theatre in high school. Acting on a stage in front of an audience is such a rush, Bren. I still get those butterflies when the curtain goes up on opening night, even when I'm just directing. And this year is special - - I took over four years ago, and these seniors were my first freshmen. JJ, Autumn, Madison, Joey, Dylan - - I've spent hours with these kids in rehearsals, shared so many moments. It hurts to have it end like this.

LOOMIS: The economy can't stay down forever, Cindy. It'll pick back up in a year or two, and you'll be able to start the drama program again. At least you still have a job. Just last week you were telling me how much fun it is to start this marking period, teaching *Romeo and Juliet* to your freshmen. You still have that.

ANDREWS: *(Looking off SR over audience, imagining.)* *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare. Those must have been some glorious days. Can you imagine Shakespeare's plays coming to the stage for the first time? All the passion and insight into the human condition, all the romance. Now *that's* theatre.

BECOMING JULIET

LOOMIS: (*Standing.*) And that's the Cindy Andrews I know. Her body and soul completely absorbed as she contemplates the iambic pentameter and rhyme scheme of a Shakespearean soliloquy, lost in the interaction of characters that are larger than life. Why, I can practically see you on stage, spouting Elizabethan expletives and . . .

During this dialogue, ANDREWS has been drifting in a dreamy smile. Now she visibly "returns" with an expression of triumph and breaks in.

ANDREWS: We're going to do it!

LOOMIS: Okay, you lost me, Drewsy. What are we going to do? (*Looking off in same direction as ANDREWS, as if she's trying to see.*)

ANDREWS: Sibley High School is going to perform *Romeo and Juliet*!

LOOMIS: Cindy. HELLOOOO, Cindy! (*ANDREWS continues looking off R, LOOMIS cups her hands around her mouth as if broadcasting.*) This is Mission Control, Cindy. We regret to remind you that the spring play has been canceled due to lack of funding.

ANDREWS: (*Finally "returns," looks at LOOMIS triumphantly.*) Two words.

LOOMIS: Two words . . . ?

ANDREWS: Two words, Bren. Two *beautiful* words. PUBLIC DOMAIN. (*Flourishes her hand as if spelling it out on a theatre marquee.*)

LOOMIS: (*Slowly, distinctly.*) Public domain?

ANDREWS: (*Turns to LOOMIS, grasps her hands in excitement.*) The works of Mr. William Shakespeare happen to be in the *public domain*, which means they can be performed by anyone *without* royalties. And we already have the scripts, Bren! The complete play of *Romeo and Juliet* is in our English 9 textbooks. Sibley High School is going to put on one of the greatest, best-known plays ever written, and it isn't going to cost us a thing!

LOOMIS: Cindy, sit down a minute. (*Pulls ANDREWS back over to crate.*) I don't want to be the prophet of doom here, but we're talking about a Shakespearean tragedy. Accents, rhyming verse, period costumes . . . and most of all, a huge cast. You've got, what, maybe a dozen regular drama kids.

ANDREWS: Fifteen regular drama kids, and three classes full of freshmen that need to pass an exam on *Romeo and Juliet*. I know I can shanghai at least a dozen of them, especially some of the boys. We can do it, Bren. Cut a few scenes, double up some roles. It'll be tough, but I know we can do it!

MR. ERVING enters with MR. MCCOY from UL. MCCOY is looking around the stage, inspecting it, as they approach.

ERVING: Ah, Miss Loomis and Miss Andrews.

ANDREWS: (*Still exhilarated.*) Mr. Erving, I'm so happy to see you. Brenda and I have just come up with a wonderful plan to save the spring play. And the best part is it won't cost the school anything! You see, we're going to . . .

As ANDREWS has been speaking, MCCOY has been wandering toward them. He steps around ERVING and his eyes meet ANDREWS'. The effect is immediate -- she stops in mid sentence and he freezes in mid step as they look into each other's eyes. This mirrors the sudden infatuation that Romeo and Juliet share and should appear overwhelming for both characters -- a real lightning strike.

ERVING: (Pauses, waiting for ANDREWS to finish, then speaks.) Ladies, this is Jack McCoy, our new industrial arts teacher. He just joined the staff as a long-term substitute for Dave Kingsley, who is going to be out for the rest of the year following his surgery. Jack, this is . . .

ERVING and LOOMIS both realize that some sort of connection has occurred between MCCOY and ANDREWS. ERVING looks back and forth between the two. LOOMIS finally breaks the spell by clearing her throat and elbowing ANDREWS. ANDREWS shakes her head and looks away from MCCOY as ERVING continues.

ERVING: . . . Errr, this is Brenda Loomis from the social studies department, and this is Cindy Andrews, from English.

LOOMIS extends her hand and smiles. MCCOY starts to extend his, but he and ANDREWS lock eyes again and the spell is renewed, even as they speak.

LOOMIS: (With sarcasm, as he doesn't acknowledge her.) No, Jack, the pleasure is all mine, really.

ANDREWS: I'm Andy Cindrews . . . um, Sandy Renfrow . . . I mean, Cindy. I'm Cindy Andrews.

MCCOY: (Slowly, as if hypnotized.) Great. That's awesome.

LOOMIS: (Mocking, teenager voice.) You're awesome, Sandy. You wanna hang out at the skate park? Maybe we can listen to my iPod.

ANDREWS: (Finally snapping out of it briefly.) Oh, Mr. Erving. What I started saying was that I intend to put on a spring play -- *Romeo and Juliet* -- and it won't cost us anything because it's in the public domain, which means there are no royalties.

During this dialogue, MCCOY steps back and starts looking over the stage again. However, he continually sneaks sideways glances at ANDREWS, and she does the same, looking around ERVING as she speaks.

ERVING: Yes, I'm familiar with public domain laws. But that's quite a drastic undertaking.

ANDREWS: (Delays, still distracted by MCCOY.) Uhh, yes sir. Drastic. But these are drastic times.

BECOMING JULIET

ERVING: Ah, yes, they certainly are. Hmm. Well, you have my full support. I just hope you're not reaching too far. Now, the reason I came down here was to show Mr. McCoy the stage area - - he had asked about using it occasionally as a larger work space for the shop classes, and, of course, it didn't appear that you would be needing it. Under the circumstances, however, perhaps you two could work something out?

LOOMIS: (*Laughing.*) I couldn't have said it better myself! (*ANDREWS glares at her.*)

MCCOY: Actually, this sounds like a great opportunity. I'm looking for some projects for my students, and if you're doing a play, I'm sure you'll need some construction work. Doesn't *Romeo and Juliet* have a deck or something?

LOOMIS: Of course. You're referring to the famous *deck* scene in which the Montagues and Capulets grill out together. (*Pleased with herself, aside.*) Lord Montague was known all over Verona for his baby back ribs.

ANDREWS: (*Another glare at LOOMIS.*) Yes, we will need a *balcony*, some stone walls, and some basic building facades.

MCCOY: Perfect. We'll work out a schedule later, then. (*Another locking of eyes between MCCOY and ANDREWS.*)

ANDREWS: Yes . . . later.

ERVING: Come along, Jack, and we'll finish up your paperwork.

ERVING tugs MCCOY off UL. The spell is now broken and ANDREWS steps DR and covers her face with her hands in disbelief.

ANDREWS: What was *that*?

LOOMIS: I don't know, *Sandy*, but I'm dying to find out.

ANDREWS: I told him my name was *Sandy*?

LOOMIS: Actually, first you told him it was *Andy*. My guess is you could have told him it was Hillary Clinton and it wouldn't have mattered.

ANDREWS: (*Shakes head back and forth and growls.*) Maybe it was Hillary Clinton. It sure as heck wasn't me. I've never acted like that before. I am so embarrassed. He must think I'm some kind of idiot.

LOOMIS: Well, then the man has a *thang* for idiots. He was every bit as goo-goo-eyed as you were, girlfriend.

ANDREWS: *Goo-goo-eyed?* No, I'm sorry, it just had to be the stress I've gone through today. (*Pacing rapidly back and forth.*) I mean, first, the spring play is canceled, and then I'm suddenly directing *Romeo and Juliet*. Do you realize what a huge responsibility it is to bring a Shakespeare play to the stage? Stress . . . that's all it was.

LOOMIS: Yeah, well, that stress sure has a killer pair of [*blue*] eyes. (*Adjust as necessary to match the actor portraying MCCOY.*)

BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 4

Spot up on JJ at center, front edge of stage. Behind her, frozen, are the ASHLEYS, MIRANDA, KATIE, AUTUMN, JOEY, RONNIE, MICHAEL, MELODY, and extra drama geeks. The freshmen are DL, while the older students (KATIE, JOEY, MIRANDA, AUTUMN, DYLAN, MELODY) are clustered UR. DYLAN, MIRANDA, VENUS and ANNA are UR in the shadows.

JJ: *(To audience.)* This is so unbelievable! Yesterday the play was canceled, and I thought my senior year was going down in flames. Now, we're not only doing a play, we're doing *Romeo and Juliet!* Shakespeare comes to Sibley High -- can you believe it? I've been in love with Shakespeare since I was a freshman. All the beautiful language, the poetry, the passion, the romance -- how could you help but love it?

The best part of all is the soliloquies. *(Becoming Juliet.)* Juliet just steps forward, alone, on a bare stage. First, she sets the scene using only her words and gestures. Then, she looks out at the audience, and pours her heart out. Her deepest desires and her greatest fears, opened up on a bare stage. It's the purest form of acting. *(Sighs, crosses a few steps to R.)*

Of course, that kind of thing can't work in a modern play. *(Turns to audience.)* Audiences today want lavish sets, *(Makes a flourishing gesture.)* dazzling special effects, *(Extends her arms forward and opens and closes her hands like flashing lights.)* and lots of action. *(Shadow boxes.)* But Shakespeare didn't need any of that -- he knew *people.* *(Crosses back to center and sits on stage front.)*

And, of course, I'm not going to be delivering any soliloquies. I'm a decent actress, but I'm not nearly pretty enough to play Juliet. Especially not when Madison Engers is trying out. *(Pauses, thinking this out.)* I mean, I'm not hideously deformed or anything. My parents always tell me I'm pretty . . . well, they have to, they're my parents. *(Stands.)* But sometimes when I look in the mirror, I do think I'm sort of pretty. *(Holds her hair up as if admiring herself.)* Cute, maybe. Not gorgeous like Madison, but definitely . . . cute. Right?

(Pauses, her face twisted in self-doubt, then shakes her head.) Well, there's no sense in worrying about that. *(Crossing L.)* There are lots of other good female roles. Maybe the Nurse or Lady Capulet. I'm a senior now, and I've earned the right to a good part. I won't get stuck playing an extra, or worse, a guy's part. *(Crossing back to center.)* The important thing is that we're doing *Romeo and Juliet*, and the more important thing is that Dylan will be right here for every rehearsal.

Lights up on remainder of stage as spot fades out. JJ hurries back upstage to join other students who are engaged in practicing for auditions. She moves to group of older students at USR, including MADISON, JOEY, AUTUMN, MELODY, KATIE. (DYLAN and MIRANDA are seated on the floor upstage from others, listening to music with ANNA and VENUS.) First attention is on RONNIE, MICHAEL, RANDY, and DANIELLE, who move DL. MICHAEL is holding a wooden sword and another is on the floor near RONNIE.

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MICHAEL: Dude, I don't understand you. Why are you so fired up about being Lord Capulet?

RONNIE: 'Cause I know how to read, Mikey, and Lord Capulet is awesome. He's a pimp!

RANDY: A pimp? My mom made me watch the movie, and I don't remember any pimps.

MICHAEL: Besides, you could be Tybalt or Mercutio. They get in some awesome sword fights. *(Raises his sword over audience.)* "Turn, Benvolio, and look upon thy death!"

DANIELLE: And Mercutio is crazy, dude. Totally whack.

RANDY: I already know who I'm going to be. Miss Andrews said she needed a big, jolly guy *[Adjust as necessary to fit actor.]* to be the Friar, and she was looking right at me when she said it.

MICHAEL: Whoa, dude, the Friar has some like jumbo lines. Look at page 64 - - he talks for like the whole page. *(Shows him book.)*

RONNIE: *(Looking over MICHAEL's shoulder.)* Yeah, and he's a weirdo, too. He's talking about picking flowers.

RANDY: No, he's picking weeds and stuff to make potions. He's kind of like a witch doctor on the side, I think.

RONNIE: A witch doctor. That could be kind of cool.

MICHAEL: *(Picking up wooden sword and challenging RONNIE.)* Tybalt and Mercutio! "Draw, if you be a man!"

DANIELLE: *(Beating RONNIE to the sword and accepting the challenge.)* I get to be Mercutio! "Have at thee, coward!"

MICHAEL: *(Lowering his sword.)* How can you be Mercutio - - he's a dude!

DANIELLE: So? This is acting. Besides, I can hack you to pieces, worm!

They fence sloppily, while RANDY and RONNIE cheer them on. The ASHLEYS and extras also get interested. DANIELLE and MICHAEL's fight carries them all UL, and they exit. Attention turns to the older students at R who gradually move downstage toward center. (Except for MIRANDA, VENUS and ANNA.) JOEY is practicing lines as Romeo, getting help from DYLAN, who has joined the group.

JOEY: *(Reading tentatively and without emotion.)* "Alas that love, whose view is muffled still. Should without eyes see pathways to his will! Where shall we dine? O me! What fray was here? Yet tell me not, for I have heard it all. Here's much to do with hate, but more with love." *(In frustration.)* All right. This stuff doesn't make any sense. Madison, I can't do this. I can only play *regular* guys. I don't get Shakespeare.

DYLAN: Joey, it really isn't that hard - - you'll get it. Romeo just noticed that there's been a big fight - - he sees blood on the ground, stuff tipped over and so on. And he's frustrated because he's in love with a girl who doesn't love him back, so he's saying that everything is backwards in the world. He starts giving examples of contradictions: (*DYLAN does this from memory.*) "Why then, O brawling love, O loving hate, O anything, of nothing first created? O heavy lightness, serious vanity, Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms, Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health, (*In addition to speaking from memory, DYLAN begins actually acting, turning his gaze toward the audience, dropping to his knees.*) Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is! This love feel I, that feel no love in this. Dost thou not laugh?"

The others are silent in amazement at DYLAN's performance, save for JJ and KATIE, who have seen this sort of thing from DYLAN before. JOEY looks intently at his book.

JOEY: (*Rushing to DYLAN's side and pulling him up.*) Dude, you just did that all without even looking! That was intense! You gotta be Romeo, man.

MADISON: (*Miffed at JOEY, steps between them.*) Excuse me. If I'm going to be Juliet, I think it's important that my boyfriend is Romeo. An actress needs proper motivation. (*Pouting.*) Besides, you promised, Joey!

JOEY: But Mad, I could never do it like that. He's awesome!

DYLAN: (*Still in character.*) Fear not, m'lady. This noble knight wouldst die a thousand deaths ere he breaketh his sacred rule.

JOEY: (*Looking up from the book.*) No, dude, that's not in here.

JJ: (*Stepping forward.*) That's not Shakespeare, Joey. It's just Dylan telling you he won't do it.

KATIE: (*Sarcastically.*) It's against his golden rule.

Lights dim, spot opens on center stage. DYLAN steps into it as others fade slowly UR.

DYLAN: Here's some Shakespeare for you: (*Glares back at KATIE, then turns back to audience.*) "He jests at scars that never felt a wound." (*Pauses, remembering.*) Yeah, I'm really good at memorizing things. Call it a gift - - that's what they called it when I was three and could already "read" every book on my little bookshelf. Of course, I wasn't really reading - - I'd just memorized all the words - - but it was a big deal to my parents. My dad just loved to have me show all his friends what a little genius I was.

But his friends weren't enough. He had to show the world. So when I turned four, he entered me in the state spelling bee. I was cleaning up on nine and ten year old kids, and it was a breeze - - my dad just showed me all the words that were going to be in the contest, and I memorized them. Except we must have missed a page somewhere. It was a really easy word - - "vanquish" - - but I'd never seen it before. I was clueless, standing on that stage all alone. I couldn't even get the first letter, because I'd never learned how to spell, really, just how to memorize.

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It humiliated my dad. It wouldn't have been so bad if I'd just switched a couple letters around or something, but instead of his little genius, I looked like a real moron. Not even the first letter?! He tried to pretend it didn't matter, but it wasn't the same after that. And just a year later, he and my mom split up, and he got a new wife and a new family. We still saw each other on weekends at first, but that just kind of faded away.

I know, I'm a whiner, right? All kids think they're responsible when their parents split up, right? And we're just talking about a stupid spelling bee, not some horrible tragedy that you would expect to scar a kid for life. Well, you don't know how important it was to my dad that his kid was exceptional. And I blew it.

So now I've got my art, my music and my *rule*. I stay under the radar, because I'm not going to be a disappointment to anybody . . . especially not me.

Spot fades on DYLAN as lights come back up on stage. DYLAN turns and walks deep up stage past others to start drawing in his notebook, and MIRANDA, who has been sitting in shadows with VENUS and ANNA, moves over near him. MRS. ENGERS enters DR.

ENGERS: *(Looking over cluster of students UC.)* Madison? *(Louder.)* Madison?

MADISON: *(Crosses DR to mother.)* I'm right here, Mom. We have auditions, remember?

ENGERS: Yes, dear, of course I remember. I was hoping you'd be done by now.

MADISON: We just started, Mom. School only got out a few minutes ago.

ENGERS: *(Looking at her watch, impatient.)* Yes, so it did. Well, how long do you expect this will take?

MADISON: I'm not sure. There are a lot of kids trying out. It's a really big cast.

ENGERS: Yes, but don't forget that you also have a preliminary meeting for the Miss Barton County Pageant this evening. After all, we both know that this audition is merely a formality - - you're the natural choice to play Juliet.

MADISON: *(Pulling her further DR, embarrassed.)* Mom, please don't say things like that in front of my friends. There are lots of other girls here who could get the part.

ENGERS: Nonsense, Madison. You don't have to deny your abilities just to make others feel better. Besides, you need time to get yourself together before the pageant meeting. Just look at you. *(Begins fussing with MADISON's hair, scowling at her makeup.)*

MADISON: The meeting isn't until 7:30, Mom. I'll have plenty of time. Now will you please let me get back to practicing?

ENGERS: Fine. But I really must insist that you're done by 5:00 so that we have time to get you ready. Appearance is vitally important, dear, even before the pageant.

MADISON: Okay, Mom, I'll be ready. I have my cell phone. I'll call you as soon as I'm finished.

ENGERS: *(Kisses her cheek.)* All right, dear.

ENGERS exits DR. MADISON returns to group of students practicing UC.

MELODY: I'm glad you're back, Madison. Maybe you can help Joey get this. I was reading Juliet with him on page 25. (*Indicates spot and hands book to MADISON.*)

MADISON: (*Reading well, but without much emotion.*) "I should have been more strange, I must confess, But that thou overheard'st, ere I was ware, My true love passion. Therefore pardon me, And not impure this yielding to light love, which the dark night hath so discovered." Y'know, Joey's right. This stuff is hard to understand. I don't have a clue what Juliet is trying to say here - - she keeps going back and forth like she can't make up her mind.

JOEY: I told you. This is retarded.

KATIE: Yes, Joey. Poor William Shakespeare was hopelessly retarded. You've discovered a secret that's been buried for centuries. Imagine how embarrassed all his billions of fans will be. Thanks so much for sharing your enlightened analysis.

JOEY: Nobody asked you, Katie.

KATIE: Ooh, that's rough. Nobody asked me. Geez, maybe I'm retarded, too. (*Turns and makes a silly face at JOEY. JOEY returns the face, and MADISON scolds him.*)

ANDREWS enters UR behind them carrying her director's chair, and stops, unnoticed, to watch.

JJ: Nobody's retarded . . . (*KATIE turns to her, still making the face.*) Well, at least Shakespeare wasn't. And that's not a nice thing to say anyway. Juliet *can't* make up her mind. She doesn't have any experience with men, and she's afraid that Romeo might take advantage of her, but at the same time she's already madly in love with him and wants him to know it. She feels trapped because he heard her obsessing over him, remember? (*From memory, with great emotion.*) "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." She's only just met Romeo, but already she's willing to give up everything she's ever known for him, and he *heard* her say so. See?

MADISON: Hmm. I guess I've never been like that - - inexperienced with boys. I mean, I've always had a boyfriend, even in kindergarten. Remember me and Timmy Gordon? He was so cute with his Power Rangers lunch box!

JOEY: (*Jealous.*) Hey, I've got a Spiderman t-shirt, and he could kick the Power Rangers' butts.

The freshmen return noisily from the UL exit, with DANIELLE and MICHAEL now pursued by the ASHLEYS, who have somehow taken their swords. ANDREWS uses the distraction to cross to DL and announce her presence.

BECOMING JULIET

ANDREWS: *(Clapping for attention, and then unfolding her chair.)* Okay, ladies and gentlemen. Most of you know how this works, and if you don't, ask one of the regulars. I'm going to start with the male roles, but I'll need some of you ladies to read with them, so everyone please stay in the immediate area. You can practice out in the hallway or in the scene shop. *(Shuffling through papers.)* Joey - - it looks like you're the only one who wants to try for Romeo, *(Raises her voice, looks around, scanning for others hopefully.)* so I guess we'll just consider you in by default. I'd still like you to hang around to read with some of the others, right?

JOEY: *(Resignedly, as MADISON hugs his arm with excitement.)* Sure, Miss Andrews . . . thanks.

ASHLEIGH: Joey Pulaski is Romeo! Catch me! *(Faints into ASH LEE and ASHLEY's arms.)*

During this exchange, RONNIE has been working his way up to ANDREWS, conspicuously. He now hovers over her.

ANDREWS: All right, I guess I'll start with you, Ronnie. You'll be reading Lord Capulet.

RONNIE: Yes! I'll be right back! *(Dashes through SL exit.)*

ANDREWS: . . . and . . . Katie, would you stay and read Lady Capulet, please?'

KATIE: Sure.

As others exit, RONNIE reappears from SL. He's wearing a floppy brimmed hat and sunglasses. KATIE points at him to get ANDREWS' attention.

ANDREWS: Ronnie, what are you doing?

RONNIE: I'm just getting into the part.

ANDREWS: I see . . . *(Exasperated, she obviously doesn't.)* All right, pick it up with Lord Capulet's entrance into the street brawl on page three.

RONNIE: *(Closes his book, snaps his fingers at KATIE, and points at her. He reads this line with a "street" accent, and uses the word "ho" in the modern slang sense.)* "What noise is this. Gimme my long sword, ho!"

KATIE: *(Mimicking RONNIE's street accent and raising the sword to smack him.)* Oh no, you di'n't.

RONNIE: *(Cowering.)* Hey, I was just reading my part!

ANDREWS: *(Buries her head in her hands, then looks up.)* Ronnie, Lord Capulet is not a pimp, and he is not calling his wife a "ho." This play was written in 1599. "Ho" was an interjection, kind of like yelling charge. Lord Capulet is asking for his long sword so he can charge into battle.

RONNIE: "Ho" means "charge"?

ANDREWS: Essentially, yes.

RONNIE: Oh. *(Disappointed, then brightens.)* Is there another part that's a pimp . . . or maybe a gangster?

KATIE: Yeah, Ronnie. Sixteenth century Italy was just crawling with pimps and gangsters.

ANDREWS: Ronnie, Lord Capulet isn't a pimp, but he does have some pretty fun lines when he's mad at Juliet. Look at page 88, lines 154-159. Katie, will you read Juliet there, please?

KATIE: Sure.

RONNIE: Cool! (*Struggling at first, but then getting into it with strong emotion.*) "But fettle your fine joints 'gainst Thursday next to go with Paris to Saint Peter's Church, Or I will drag thee on a hurdle thither. Out, you greensickness carrion! Out you baggage! You tallow-face!"

KATIE: (*Flatly, obviously disliking this, drops to her knees.*) "Good father, I beseech you on my knees, Hear me with patience but to speak a word."

RONNIE: "Hang thee, young baggage! Disobedient wretch! I tell thee what - - get thee to church a' Thursday or never after look me in the face. Speak not, reply not, do not answer me! My fingers itch!" (*To ANDREWS.*) Dude, this is awesome! I totally want to be Lord Capulet! (*Looks at KATIE.*) Wretch!

KATIE: I swear I'm going to kill you.

ANDREWS: All right, that's enough. Ronnie, go out and send in Randy to read the Friar, please, and Joey to read Romeo. Katie, please ask Melody to come and read the Nurse.

RONNIE: Okay. Thanks, Miss Andrews. (*Turns to KATIE.*) Tallow face! (*Runs out UR as she chases him off with sword.*)

BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 5

AT RISE:

As lights come up, auditions are finally ending. AUTUMN, MADISON and MELODY are reading Lady Capulet, Juliet and the Nurse, respectively. ANDREWS is still seated at SL, but she is slouched back, obviously tired, with a mountain of paper wads next to her.

AUTUMN: "Marry, that 'marry' is the very theme I came to talk of. Tell me, daughter Juliet, How stands your disposition to be married?"

MADISON: (*Reading well, but uninspired.*) "It is an honor that I dream not of."

MELODY: "An honor? Were not I thine only nurse, I would say thou hadst sucked wisdom from thy teat."

AUTUMN: "Well, think of marriage now. Younger than you, here in Verona, ladies of esteem. Are made already mothers. By my count, I was your mother much upon these years that you are now a maid. Thus then in brief: the valiant Paris seeks you for his love."

MELODY: "A man, young lady! Lady such a man As all the world. - - Why he's a man of wax."

AUTUMN: "Verona's summer hath not such a flower."

MELODY: "Nay, he's a flower, in faith - - a very flower."

AUTUMN: "What say you? Can you love the gentleman?"

MADISON: "I'll look to like, if looking liking moves."

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ANDREWS: Okay, thank you, ladies. That's enough. You can all leave. Autumn, please send JJ in.

AUTUMN: Would you like anyone to come in and read with her?

ANDREWS: No, just JJ for now. Thanks.

AUTUMN, MADISON and MELODY exit UR. ANDREWS wads up another piece of paper and begins making more notes. Her head is down as JJ enters UR.

JJ: Hi, Miss Andrews. Autumn said you wanted me next?

ANDREWS: *(Looking up briefly.)* Yes, JJ. I think you're the last one left, aren't you?

JJ: I think so. Did you want someone else to come in and read with me?

ANDREWS: *(Jotting notes, then rips the page from her notebook, wads it up and adds it to the others. She puts her head on her fist and stares at JJ, evaluating her, letting her wait for an answer.)* You're a senior, JJ. You've been in every show since I've been here, and you're by far the most dedicated drama student I have.

A long pause ensues, which is clearly uncomfortable for JJ. ANDREWS remains still.

JJ: Ummm, thanks.

ANDREWS: *(Looks at the book, starts to speak, then changes her mind and closes the book.)* JJ, what part do you want?

JJ: Well, I think I'm certainly capable of playing the Nurse or Lady Capulet. I memorize lines well, and like you said, I'm dedicated.

ANDREWS: But what part do you want?

JJ: *(Not understanding, running to ANDREWS and pleading.)* Miss Andrews, please, please, please! I can't play an extra or a guy's part. I know I'm not the greatest actress, but I'm a senior. I've earned a good role.

ANDREWS: *(Opens her book.)* Go to page 36, please.

JJ: *(Flips to the page, looks it over quickly, and then looks up, pleading.)* You want me to read Romeo? Miss Andrews, I can't . . .

ANDREWS: There are two characters speaking on that page, JJ.

JJ: *(Beginning to understand.)* Oh, right. There's . . . Juliet.

ANDREWS: Yes. Please read Juliet, starting at line 151.

JJ: *(Clears her throat, then begins reading very weakly and flatly.)* "Thou knowest the mask of night is on my face, Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek For that which thou hast heard me speak tonight . . ."

ANDREWS: *(More sharply than she intends.)* JJ!

JJ looks up, startled by the severity of her tone. ANDREWS continues, more gently.

ANDREWS: JJ, I want you to read it like you were earlier, when you were helping Madison. I want you to express Juliet's fears, just like you explained them.

JJ: Oh, you saw that. *(ANDREWS just looks at her, as she begins flatly again.)* "Thou knowest the mask of night is on my face, Else would . . ." No, wait. I can do it better.

Lights fade and spot opens on JJ, who now steps into character almost magically. She takes off her glasses, sets the book aside, walks downstage and speaks the lines from memory, with deep emotion.

JJ: "Thou knowest the mask of night is on my face, Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek For that which thou hast heard me speak tonight. Fain would I dwell on form - - fain, fain deny What I have spoke; but farewell compliment. Dost thou love me? I know thou wilt say 'Ay'; And I will take thy word. Yet if thou swear'st, Thou mayst prove false. At lovers' perjuries, They say Jove laughs. O gentle Romeo, If thou dost love, pronounce it faithfully. Or if thou think'st I am too quickly won, I'll frown and be perverse and say thee nay, So thou wilt woo; but else, not for the world. In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond, And therefore thou mayst think my havior light . . ." *(She stops, seeming embarrassed at having been so deep into character, puts her glasses back on, and runs back upstage to pick up her book.)* I'm sorry, that's all that I have memorized. I can go on with the book if . . .

ANDREWS: *(Clearly impressed and pleased.)* No, that's fine JJ. I think we're all done now. You can leave.

JJ: *(Nervously.)* Are you sure you wouldn't like me to read some of the Nurse or Lady Capulet? Or Lady Montague would be good. I don't . . .

ANDREWS: We're done, JJ. You did just fine. I'll have the cast list posted Monday morning. Go enjoy your weekend.

JJ: *(Pausing, wanting to say more, but ANDREWS is looking down at her notes again.)* You too, Miss Andrews. Goodbye.

JJ exits UR. As she does, LOOMIS enters, looking at her watch. They exchange greetings.

LOOMIS: Holy Toledo, 'Drewsy. It's almost 6:30 on a Friday night and you're still in auditions?

ANDREWS: It's a big show, Bren. *(Brightens.)* But I think I have a cast list.

LOOMIS: *(Looking at pile of paper wads.)* Looks like it took a couple of drafts. Wait, let me guess. *(Pantomiming as if she's a mystic, consulting a crystal ball.)* Ah, I see our most popular lovebirds, Joey Pulaski and Madison Engers in the title roles. *(Dropping the act.)* Am I good, or what?

ANDREWS: *(Pleased with herself, rises and begins walking DL.)* You might need to polish up that crystal ball a little bit, Madam Brenda. You're only half-right.

LOOMIS: Half? *(Crosses to ANDREWS.)* What'd you do, Cindy, feed steroids to one of your freshman boys?

ANDREWS: No, Joey is Romeo. *(Crosses R in front of LOOMIS.)* He'll remember most of his lines, deliver them cluelessly, and all the girls in the audience will swoon because he's *(Mimicking.)* "such a hottie." But he won't be romancing Madison. *(Turns to LOOMIS from DR.)* JJ Baker is playing Juliet.

LOOMIS: JJ? Really? You think she can handle it? *(Starts crossing to ANDREWS.)* I mean, she's a great kid, very hard worker, but *Juliet*?

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ANDREWS: She has the passion, Bren. You should have heard her audition . . . well, after I put her under a little pressure. Besides, she looks young for her age, and Juliet is only fourteen. Madison has that seventeen-going-on-twenty-five aura. She's going to be Lady Capulet.

LOOMIS: You might be starting World War Three, Cindy. Mrs. Engers isn't going to be too happy when she finds out her Madison ended up in a supporting role.

ANDREWS: I can handle her. I'm telling you, Brenda, JJ was incredible. (*Paces thoughtfully to L.*) I've always thought she had more talent than she's shown me, but this was something else - - she really understands the role. With JJ playing Juliet, I can actually see this all coming together. (*Looks out over audience, envisioning.*) We are going to pull off the best play Sibley's ever seen. I am in complete control!

MCCOY enters UR with his friend, TONY ALLEN. They're carrying tools, looking over the stage area. ANDREWS is still looking out over audience, enamored by her vision.

MCCOY: Hi, ladies. This is Tony Allen. He's going to help me with some of the more sophisticated work, like framing in the . . . *balcony.* (*Looks at Brenda.*) He also knows a thing or two about sound and light equipment. Anyhow, I thought we could get started tomorrow evening and . . .

ANDREWS turns and their eyes meet, and the spell is revived. MCCOY steps downstage toward her, leaving LOOMIS between them.

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