

Scene Fifteen

(The Rose Theatre. Rehearsals. The COMPANY assemble.)

WILL. Gentlemen. New pages!

[MUSIC NO. 16: "NEW PAGES"]

(WILL hands out new pages.)

NED. Will, hold. Can I have a word?

WILL. You do not like the speech?

NED. The speech is excellent.

NED & WILL. "O, then I see Queen Mab hath been with you."

NED. Excellent and a good length: But then he disappears for the length of a Bible.

WILL. But then you have his duel, a skirmish of words and swords such as I never wrote, nor any man. He dies with such a passion and poetry as you ever read — "A plague on both your houses!"

NED. He dies!?

HENSLOWE. There doesn't appear to be a dog of any kind?

WILL. There was never going to be a dog.

HENSLOWE. I've just bought it from Will Kemp for three sovereigns. And it's eating me out of house and home.

WILL. I will try to work one in.

FENNYMAN. Shut it. I want to hear what happens next. Author, please.

WILL. The Friar marries the lovers in secret, then Ned, playing Mercutio, gets into a fight with one of the Capulets called Tybalt. Romeo—

(WEBSTER volunteers himself.)

—in your dreams — tries to stop them, he gets in Mercutio's way, so Tybalt slays Mercutio and then Romeo slays Tybalt.

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FENNYMAN. Wonderful!

WILL. Then the Prince banishes Romeo from Verona. HENSLOWE. And that's when he goes on the voyage and gets shipwrecked on the island of the Pirate King. Who has a dog!

FENNYMAN. Enough! Cease your prattling. This is not just entertainment. This is art.

HENSLOWE. But I paid Will Kemp three sovereigns for that cruel-hearted cur.

FENNYMAN. Shut it. And then...?

WILL. And then...it all works out in the end.

FENNYMAN. Masterful.

(VIOLA, as KENT, comes in, flustered and late.)

HENSLOWE. Ah, Master Kent. You've kindly decided to join us.

VIOLA/KENT. Sorry, there was a terrible snarl-up under Putney Bridge.

FENNYMAN. Right. Now you're here let's get on with it.

(As the COMPANY take their positions, NED calls WILL over.)

NED. Will...

WILL. I know, I know.

NED. It's good.

WILL. Oh.

NED. But the title. *Romeo and Juliet*. Just a suggestion.

WILL. Thank you, Ned... You are a gentleman.

NED. And you are a Warwickshire shithouse. *(to the COMPANY)* The Capulet ball. The dancing begins.

FENNYMAN. Places, please.

[MUSIC NO. 17: "DANCE REHEARSAL 1"]

(The ACTORS dance as NED gives direction.)