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Tales from Shakespeare

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In the beautiful old Italian city of Verona, Lord Capulet was planning a grand banquet. All the noble families in the city were invited, except the Montague family. The Capulets and Montagues were sworn enemies. They had been feuding for as long as anyone could remember, and their quarrel ran so deep that even their servants fought. If a member of the Capulet household passed a member of the Montague household on the street, the peaceful city would suddenly erupt in violence. The Prince of Verona was no longer prepared to tolerate this situation. He had decreed that the next Capulet or Montague to disturb the peace would pay with his life.

Lord Capulet had invited all the fairest ladies of Verona to the banquet, including his own niece, Rosaline. She had many suitors, but unknown to Lord Capulet, the most passionate of all was a young nobleman named Romeo, son of his enemy, Lord Montague! Romeo was a romantic young man. His infatuation with Rosaline caused him much heartache, for Rosaline was a faithful Montague and scorned Romeo.

Day and night, Romeo was either wandering the streets of Verona looking for Rosaline, or boring his friends, Benvolio and Mercutio, with tales of her great beauty. So when they heard that she would be at Lord Capulet's party they persuaded Romeo to go with them, disguised behind a mask. They hoped to show him that there were many ladies in Verona who were even fairer than Rosaline. "Compare her face with some that I shall show, and I will make thee think thy swan a crow," said Benvolio.

Old Lord Capulet was in a jovial mood the evening of his party. "Welcome gentlemen! Ladies that have their toes unplugged with corns will walk about with you. Come musicians, play!" he said.

He encouraged all the young folk to enjoy the dancing, including his daughter, Juliet, who soon took to the floor with a dashing knight. She was so merry and so very pretty that even the love-struck Romeo noticed her. Indeed, not realizing that she was Lord Capulet's daughter, Romeo suddenly found that his heart no longer belonged to Rosaline, but to Juliet! "O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright! Did my heart love till now?" he breathed.

Romeo did not keep his feelings to himself, but, as if in a dream, stood declaiming his new love to all about him. Unfortunately, Lord Capulet's fiery nephew, Tybalt, recognized his voice. "This, by his voice, should be a Montague," he angrily cried. "To strike him dead I hold it not a sin!"

Tybalt called for his sword and had it not been for Lord Capulet, who forbade fighting at his ball, the evening would certainly have ended in bloodshed. Lord Capulet insisted that Tybalt should make Romeo welcome. Tybalt unwillingly sheathed his sword, but he swore he would take revenge on Romeo at some other time.

Romeo was quite unaware of this passing danger. He waited until Juliet stopped dancing and then began to woo her. Juliet was entranced by Romeo and even allowed him to steal a kiss. Their few minutes together seemed to them like hours.

When Juliet was called away by her mother, Romeo realized she was a Capulet, but he didn't care. And when Juliet's nurse told her that Romeo was a Montague, her heart was too full of love to take notice of a family feud. "My only love sprung from my only hate!" she cried.

As the party ended, Romeo and his friends set off to make merry elsewhere, but Benvolio and Mercutio soon found themselves walking along the road on their own.





Then he woke Titania. She was mortified that Oberon had found her with a snoring ass in her arms! "My Oberon, what visions have I seen! Methought I was enamour'd of an ass," she cried. To cover her confusion she promised to give the changeling boy to Oberon. Oberon was satisfied at last! He called for music and danced happily away with Titania, leaving Puck to turn Bottom back to his usual self.

The day was nearly dawning and Duke Theseus was leading his hounds on an early morning hunt, with his love Hippolyta and Hermia's father, Egeus. When they came across the runaway lovers, Egeus was still eager to force Hermia to marry Demetrius! "I beg the law!" he demanded of Duke Theseus.

Luckily for Hermia, this was Duke Theseus's wedding day. When he saw the young people so in love and paired off so happily, he overruled Egeus. He bade the whole party return with him to Athens and resolved that all three couples would wed that very day: he and Hippolyta, Hermia and Lysander, and Helena and Demetrius. Everyone was delighted, except Egeus, who grumbled all the way home!

After the wedding ceremonies, the motley troupe of actors – including Bottom,



who had his old head back – were called to put on their play. They put their all into every part! "Roar!" went the lion and "shine" went the moon, so that the audience cried, "Well roared, Lion" and "Well shone, Moon." The play earned them much money and applause!



As the players departed, the Duke called for music and everyone celebrated the end of an eventful day with a dance. Even Egeus smiled and seemed quite pleased that his daughter was neither dead nor banished, but dancing in the arms of Lysander, the man she truly loved.

"The iron tongue of midnight hath told twelve," yawned the Duke, as the music faded. "Lovers to bed; 'tis almost fairy time."

And so the whole company, at last restored to happy harmony, retired to bed.

For a moment the hall was left in quiet darkness. Then came the fairy King and Queen, attended by Puck and a whole train of fairies, elves and goblins, and they banished the darkness with fairy light. They had come to bless the palace of Duke Theseus and all who slept there – a perfect end to the story, or maybe to a midsummer night's dream in an enchanted wood...

