

# Romeo Montague: Innocent or Guilty?

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## Abstract

The script of the play *Romeo Montague: Innocent or Guilty?* was written collaboratively by the workshop participants. It consists of different scenes, each developed at different stages of the workshop, both in the theatre or in the “blue room” inside the prison.

Prologue – 2018. After the party. *Rage* by Davide Novello.

Scene 1 – The Courtroom. 1 December 2018.

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## Prologue. 2018. After the Party – *Rage* by Davide Novello

(Winner of the 2018 edition of the writing competition “Scrivere per il teatro”)

*Two rival fan groups scream and threaten each other. One group is dressed in red (the Montagues), the other, in blue (the Capulets). They sit on two sides of a platform in the middle of the stage. The screams are in sync with Mirko Preatoni’s claps. When the noise subsides, the play starts. The setting: a boys’ changing room in a high school. At the centre there’s a bench with two gym bags, some clothes and a printed hoodie. Stage left, the sound of running water in the showers.*

*Characters:*

*Benvolio, 17*

*Mercutio, 17*

*Tybalt, 15*

*Benvolio enters.*

*Benvolio:* It’s just us.

*The water stops. Mercutio enters.*

*Mercutio:* What was that?

*Benvolio (turns):* The others left.

*As they speak, they dry themselves, dress and put their dirty clothes in their bags.*

*Mercutio:* It’s the least they could do. Today, they sucked.

*Benvolio:* ‘Cmon man, they didn’t suck... we just weren’t at our best.

*Mercutio:* Bullshit. I was at my best. And you were good, too. I say they were shit.

*Benvolio:* Thanks, man.

*Mercutio:* And I even think I know why.

*Benvolio (puzzled):* Why they were shit?

*Mercutio:* Yeah, they train a lot, but never actually play.

*Benvolio looks at him deadpan.*

*Mercutio:* Think about it. Were any of our team mates at Rose’s party on Saturday?

*Benvolio:* No, but what does that have to do with what you’re saying?

*Mercutio (raising his fist to the air):* They stayed at home to train, I'm telling ya.

*Benvolio laughs.*

*Benvolio:* ... and you never lose, do you?

*Mercutio:* That's right, my dear Ben, that's just right. I never train, and yet I always win. (*He takes the printed hoodie*) Is this yours?

*Benvolio shakes his head. Mercutio drops the hoodie to the floor.*

*Benvolio:* I lost you at Rose's. You disappeared soon after we got there.

*Mercutio:* No, I didn't. I was around.

*Benvolio:* What do you mean?

*Mercutio:* I never left; I was around.

*Benvolio looks at him, puzzled.*

*Mercutio (sighs):* Must I always spell everything out for you? Where were we on Saturday, again?

*Benvolio:* At Rose's.

*Mercutio:* And do you remember when you last saw her sister?

*Benvolio:* No idea. She insisted on eating the cake and opening her presents, and then she disappeared.

*Mercutio:* And do you remember how much time went by before we had the cake?

*Benvolio:* Couldn't tell you for sure, maybe an hour? Wait, are you saying...

*Mercutio:* That while Rose was busy unwrapping her presents and filling her mouth up with cake, I was upstairs unwrapping and filling her sister up.

*Benvolio (laughs):* You're joking, right? There were at least forty people in that house!

*Mercutio:* They were all focused on Rose, the ugly pig. It must have been hard for her. So, she got something harder instead.

*Benvolio:* What was it like? What did you do to her?

*Mercutio:* It was her. She dragged me into her room, without a word, and pushed me onto her bed. You can imagine what happened next.

*Benvolio:* Yes, but what was it like?

*Mercutio:* It was okay, nothing special. No better than the other girls I've been with. But she was hungry, I'm telling you.

*Benvolio:* Was it the first time?

*Mercutio:* With her? Of course.

*Benvolio:* I mean, was it her first time?

*Mercutio:* How would I know? Knowing her, I doubt it. If it really was her first time, I'm sorry for those she'll go with next.

*Benvolio:* Right.

*Mercutio:* How about you?

*Benvolio:* What about me?

*Mercutio:* Nada?

*Benvolio (avoiding Mercutio's gaze):* Nope, nada.

*Mercutio:* Wasn't the second-year gal there, the one who always hovers around you at the party? The one who always stares at you at break time.

*Benvolio:* Yes, she was. She was there too, on Saturday.

*Mercutio:* What's wrong with you, mate?

*Benvolio:* It's just that... I told you, I want my first time to be special.

*Mercutio:* I can't stand you when you talk like a fag. You're at a party, there's booze, and a gal who wants to fuck you. And what do you do? Nothing.

*Benvolio:* 'Cmon man. You know I don't like her like that.

*Mercutio:* What do you mean, "like that"? And what does this have to do with you liking her? You have to fuck her, not marry her.

*Benvolio:* You don't understand. (he hesitates) I'm not... I'm not sure I could do something with a girl... if I don't have feelings for her.

*Mercutio steps closer to Benvolio, smiling.*

*Mercutio (mocking him):* My little, coward Benvolio. Trust me, when you have a naked girl in front of you, you feel things all over your body. Especially in one part.

*Mercutio pats him on the shoulder. Benvolio smiles.*

*Mercutio:* You are not proving my point, though. How were you able to play so well today?

*Benvolio (hesitates):* Well, I wasn't laid, that's true, but did you hear me say nothing happened?

*Mercutio:* Ah! You're just afraid of dipping it in, then. Who were you with? That second-year gal?

*Benvolio:* Name the sin, not the sinner.

*Mercutio:* Oh, she was a sinner, alright. (He reaches for Benvolio's thighs) I know who else sinned here.

*Benvolio pulls back his legs, embarrassed. Then, he laughs*

*Mercutio:* ‘Cmon, man! You always want me to tell you everything, but if I ask you to spill some tea, you hold back like a damn virgin. Was it an oral test? Did you do it to her, or did she do it to you?

*Benvolio remains silent. Mercutio looks at him.*

*Mercutio:* I don’t think you actually...

*Benvolio:* Let’s just say it was wet and went on for a while.

*Mercutio makes an obscene gesture. Benvolio nods.*

*Mercutio:* That’s my man! Well done, Ben! What was it like? Did you manage to hold back, or did you come super-fast like when you’re alone?

*Benvolio (laughs):* You’re such a dick.

*Mercutio (laughs):* Yes, and...? Who did you have this wet interaction with?

*Benvolio keeps quiet. Mercutio sits on the bench, avoiding eye contact.*

*Mercutio (continues):* I know you, man: I bet you couldn’t keep your hands to yourself. Who was it?

*Tybalt comes in. Mercutio gets in his way to stop him. Benvolio and Tybalt look at each other.*

*Mercutio:* The fuck are you doing here? This is the men’s locker, the girls’ one is down the other corridor.

*Tybalt looks down and tries to go past him. Benvolio stares at him.*

*Tybalt:* Please, let me through.

*Mercutio:* Wait, you can’t go into that one, either. I’d notice, if you were a girl. Where do you get changed when you come to the gym, ah?

*Tybalt tries to push past him, but Mercutio stands in his way.*

*Tybalt:* Leave me alone.

*Mercutio:* Do you happen to know if the school has a fags’ locker? I think this one got lost. You got lost, princess? Isn’t this what your classmates call you, Cat Princess? Or maybe you came to have a look at us boys getting changed? (*he moves closer to Tybalt*) Did you come looking for some cocks to shove up your ass, Princess? (*he puts a hand between his legs*) You like this, don’t you? This is what you wanted.

*Tybalt:* I just need to get my hoodie. (*he pushes Mercutio aside*) Let me through.

*Mercutio:* What the fuck do you think you’re doing?

*Mercutio knocks Tybalt to the ground and threatens him from above. Benvolio stands up and walks over to them.*

*Benvolio:* ‘Cmon, man, that’s enough. Somebody might see us.

*Mercutio:* Let them watch. They have eyes.

*Benvolio:* Mercutio, please.

*Mercutio (keeps looking at Tybalt):* What? Are you jealous?

*Benvolio freezes. Tybalt stands up.*

*Mercutio:* Ben, take the hoodie. The Cat needs to wipe his dirty face.

*Mercutio spits in Tybalt's face. Tybalt holds his head high and refuses to wipe his face.*

*Benvolio takes the hoodie and wraps it around his arm. Then, he moves closer to Tybalt, keeping his eye on him.*

*Mercutio:* What are you waiting for? Are you scared you are gonna become a fag too, if you touch him?

*Benvolio punches Tybalt in the stomach with his wrapped hand.*

*Mercutio:* 'Cmon, Benvolio, that's no way to treat a Princess. You should show respect (*he kicks Tybalt*), deference (*another kick*) and devotion (*a third one*).

*Tybalt lies on the ground, not saying a word.*

*Mercutio:* Now, subject, treat your majesty as is befitting. Make her meow.

*Benvolio gets closer to Tybalt. Tybalt keeps looking Benvolio in the eye. Benvolio maintains eye contact and starts kicking him. Then, he drops to the floor and punches him all over his body and head. Mercutio gets changed and throws his clothes in his bag.*

*Mercutio:* That's enough, Ben.

*Benvolio keeps hitting Tybalt*

*Mercutio:* You'll kill him.

*Benvolio doesn't stop. Mercutio grabs him from behind and tries to pull him away.*

*Mercutio:* I said, that's enough! Fuck.

*Benvolio sits on a bench. Mercutio turns to look at Tybalt and picks up the hoodie from the floor.*

*Mercutio (tosses the hoodie at Tybalt):* I told you, you need to wipe your face. (*to Benvolio*) Have you cooled off?

*Mercutio squats down and looks at Tybalt for a few seconds*

*Mercutio:* You are not gonna say a single word about this. Is that clear?

*Mercutio stares at him. Then, he acts like he is about to punch him in the face, but he stops just before hitting him. Tybalt doesn't flinch.*

*Mercutio:* Fuck, I hate you fags.

*Mercutio gets back on his feet, and beckons Benvolio to get out. They both exit. Tybalt gets up and wipes off his clothes. Benvolio comes in.*

*Benvolio:* Tyb... Tyb, I... I don't know what...

*Tybalt:* You're gonna know soon enough, when he starts treating you like that.

*Benvolio takes a step back.*

*Benvolio:* But... you said that-

*Tybalt:* I won't do it. I won't even say what happened here today. I'm not a coward like you.

*Tybalt picks up his hoodie.*

*Tybalt:* But hitting me like that doesn't make him more of a man. And it doesn't change the fact that you sucked me off on Saturday.

*Benvolio freezes. Tybalt exits.*

## Scene 1. The Courtroom. 1 December 2018.

*Milan's Juvenile Court. The Judge comes in with three honorary judges. One of them also serves as a secretary.*

*Judge:* Good evening. The Juvenile Court is now in session. To assist me in court today are associate judge Denise Manna, and honorary judges Letizia Ceriani and Lorena Siqueira Leuzzi. We are gathered here for the trial of Romeo Montague. Is the defendant in the courtroom? The Judge opens proceedings.

*Prosecutor:* Romeo Montague, born in Verona on 1 April 2002, is charged with the murder of Tybalt Capulet, and is punishable by articles 61 n. I and 575 of the penal code. The defendant, aged 16, is a Montague, the family, feuding with the Capulets. He committed the crime that happened in Piazza delle Erbe, Verona, when two rival gangs clashed: in one gang, Romeo Montague, Mercutio and Benvolio; in the other, the plaintiff and other members of the Capulet family. According to reports, Mercutio assaulted Tybalt Capulet in a fit of anger after being verbally abused by him. He was killed in the fight. The defendant, who arrived at the scene soon after the incident, at first tried to reason with Tybalt Capulet, but being taunted by him, intentionally, and I repeat, intentionally, pulled a knife out

and stabbed the victim. Aggravated by the futile reasons that moved his actions. He was arrested in Verona, on 1 November 2018.

## Scene 2. The Hearings

*In the courtroom. The Judge gives the defendant an opportunity to speak.*

*Judge (to Romeo):* Hello, Romeo. Is it okay if I use your first name? I don't want to be rude. I'm simply trying to make this easier for you. I want you to be comfortable. Before we start, I want to remind you that you have the right not to answer. Our system does not force anybody to plead guilty. If you decide to remain silent, we'll simply go on with the proceedings. Remember that if at any time during your statement you mention someone who is not here today, you will turn into a witness. What does that mean? It means that, as long as you are the defendant, you can say whatever you want in self-defence, even lie to us, although I would not recommend it. However, if you hold someone else accountable for what happened, then you'll become a witness, and you'll have to tell the truth, because you are talking about someone else, and they must be given the chance to defend themselves. So, are you going to answer our questions? Did you hear what the Prosecutor said, and do you know what the charges against you are? Now you can tell us your version of the story.

*Romeo:* Mercutio and Tybalt were fighting. A punch in the face, one in the back, and one in his side. I tried to stop Tybalt. I got in the way and stood between the pair of them. I thought I was doing the right thing. I'm sure I did whatever I could to stop them. Tybalt looked at me. I can still see the sweat on his forehead. His mouth, wide open. He looks like an animal. I can tell he's seething with rage. He pulls out a knife. I dodge the first thrust. Fuck. The knife goes right by me and hits Mercutio who drops to the floor. Mercutio is laughing. He says: "Ay, ay, a scratch, a scratch." Then, he's crying. He's bleeding. He's losing so much blood. He screams: "A plague o' both your houses!" Mercutio was a friend. A pal. A brother. Then came the rage. Tybalt legs it. He gets away without a scratch. Rage. That's all I remember. No, Mercutio! Don't touch my brother. You can

stomp me, kill me if you want. But don't lay a finger on Mercutio! My heart's racing in my chest. I hear someone screaming: "Stop it! Stop it! Let him go, you're gonna kill him!" Then, all went quiet. Everything's all right. I'm alive. Nothing to worry about. Tybalt is there, on the floor. He's not moving.

I stand still. I don't scream, or cry. It doesn't feel real.

I didn't mean to do it.

*Judge:* The Judge now gives the floor to the defence attorney, who verifies the facts and collects the evidence to make his case.

*Defence Attorney:* Your honour, we are not here to prove our client's innocence, nor are we here to deny his involvement. The Prosecutor has already confirmed Romeo Montague's guilt and provided evidence of his role in the events mentioned. I repeat: we are not claiming he did not commit the crime, nor do we want him to be acquitted. We are asking for him to be put on probation, and to defer the decision in accordance with art. 28 of the Judicial Decree n. 448 of 1988. It's undeniable, Romeo Montague murdered Tybalt Capulet, and we recognise his crime. Yet, a more objective look will reveal the complexity of this situation. First of all, when it comes to the criminal offence Romeo Montague is guilty of, we must separate our client's responsibility from the objective circumstances that prevented him from handling the situation properly. Among the circumstances that lead to a "necessary action," we have to take into consideration the family and social background of the accused. These inevitably influenced the young Romeo. It is not our place to relate yet again the feud between Romeo's family, the Montagues, and the Capulets that for years has stained our city walls with blood. It is not our place to remind you of all the many raids, pillaging, damages and injuries suffered by both families during this civil war that clearly shows no sign of stopping. Can we really dismiss these circumstances? Are we really going to blame it all on Romeo, a teenage boy? Or are we going to consider the other factors, which contributed to the murder?

### Scene 3. The Psychological Report

*The Judge calls two experts to the stand to present their psychological reports, one is appointed by the defendant, the other by the court.*

*Expert Witness:* Romeo Montague is sixteen years old. He is an only child and belongs to a prominent, wealthy family, the Montagues. After a long assessment, we have gauged the moral and normative influence this ongoing feud with the Capulets has had on him, from a very young age. From the day he was born, he was assigned some difficult tasks, since he had no brothers or sisters, he could share the responsibility with. As a result, this dispute was passed on to him almost genetically, even if he wants nothing to do with it. A personality test revealed the boy's behaviour is quiet and meditative. He is sometimes impulsive, probably because he is young. He was kind and sincere when answering our questions, and he collaborated from the outset. When we started asking him more sensitive questions (especially when we brought up his love life), he became upset and showed a more irrational, passionate side to his personality. However, this is perfectly normal for a boy his age. Romeo's personality is still developing, and growing up in such a fraught environment caused his personality to split. He is experiencing cognitive dissonance, caused by the clash between his ideal self, made up of all the rules and norms he is supposed to follow, and his real self, which is totally detached from his family's values and beliefs. This makes him struggle a lot, as he wants to change not only himself, but also the entire city of Verona. This inner struggle became more evident when he killed Tybalt. The boy didn't strike first, but attacked Tybalt only after Tybalt had murdered Mercutio. This wasn't a gang fight, but an impulsive act of self-defence triggered by his rage. Moreover, the boy shows signs of guilt for what he did and wishes to make amends in every possible way. His violent reaction was triggered by circumstantial factors that have nothing to do with his personality. He is known in Verona as a decent person, and has even made a name of his own, unblemished by his family ties. He was ready to give up his name and his whole being for the girl he loved, thus showing exceptional maturity. He is unstable, but as said, this comes as no surprise, considering his young age. We are sure Tybalt's murder wasn't premeditated. Premeditation, in fact, requires cold, manipulative behaviour, which our tests and observations have not detected.

*Defence Attorney:* If our client is convicted, the motive is clear: the murder of Mercutio Montague. This drove him to act in a fit of rage that temporarily and irreparably compromised his cognitive abilities. Therefore, as our client acted in a state of anger provoked by the unlawful conduct of others, namely the offended party, the Capulets, we request the consideration of mitigating circumstances pursuant to Article 62(2) of the Penal Code. Romeo was a young man who did possess the capacity to understand, albeit impaired by the criminal environment extensively discussed here. However, he lacked the capacity to check his impulses. Romeo did not intend to kill Tybalt, nor did he wish to cause his death. He was so blinded by rage, so deeply wounded and shaken by the death of his friend Mercutio, that he acted impulsively—a victim of a society far too accustomed to taking justice into its own hands. Romeo did not just act as himself, but as a reflection of the environment in which he was born and raised, as a victim of the very society that drove him to commit this act.

*Prosecutor:* Objection, your Honour. Both social services and the defence attorney affirm Romeo grew up in an environment which is unfit for a sixteen-year-old boy, and that the pattern of violence in his family influenced his course of action. It was said that the social environment he grew up in cannot be disregarded, as it left the boy psychologically and physically scarred. Now, allow me to share some thoughts. How is it possible that a young boy who grew up in such a dysfunctional environment and, as a result, developed impulsive, violent behaviour could be so kind to a person that was trying to kill his best friend? As mentioned, the boy's personality is still developing, and the environment he is part of hasn't allowed him to become a balanced, stable person. How is it possible, then, that such a fragile, violent and impulsive sixteen-year-old could hesitate to INTENTIONALLY kill his rival in a moment like that? How could he stop to think and control his emotions when faced by his enemy? Wasn't it normal for him to attack Tybalt Capulet, as his family had taught him? The psychological report confirms my theory.

*Party-Appointed Expert:* Romeo Montague, sixteen-years-old, is the boss of the Montague clan. At first glance, he looks like a polite, good-looking boy. It's hard to believe how such a young person could be given so much

power. And yet, this does not worry him. On the contrary, it makes him feel proud and satisfied. We have conducted a psychological assessment to match the results the defence provided. However, we've noticed that he took a long time to answer our questions, probably to deceive us. Moreover, his answers were really polarised. He labelled things as right or wrong, nothing in between. This reveals a lack of critical judgement. He was very cooperative, but also smug and complacent when answering our questions, and he didn't show any sign of fear for what his punishment might be. It's well known in Verona that Romeo's friends are deviant and violent. They have been hassling the citizens there for a very long time. Mercutio, his best friend, was violent and aggressive, and displayed disturbing homosexual tendencies. His other friend, Benvolio, is defiant and dissolute. The group are well known for their parties and drug use, including alcohol and hashish. Let's not forget, the night Tybalt was murdered, they were all under the influence of drugs. After hearing his family and friends, we learnt that Romeo had slept with many girls, showing his lack of commitment to the opposite sex. Rosalind, the boy's ex-girlfriend, said one moment he seemed deeply in love, and the next he broke up with her, after seducing her both romantically and physically. From the evidence we've collected, we discovered that during the fight between Mercutio and Tybalt, Romeo got in the way as an act of bravado. He actually deflected Tybalt's blow, thus causing Mercutio's death. After that, he used his friend's death as a pretext to kill Tybalt and then ran off. Our psychological report, then, reveals Romeo's lack of empathy, his cold, cynical personality. He is smart and knows how to adjust his behaviour according to the person he is interacting with. This allows him to manipulate a situation as he pleases. He often picks unnecessary fights. So, it comes as no surprise that he ended up killing someone. His family heritage has played a pivotal role in his life. Hence, we think he will not hesitate to defend his honour again, even if this means killing another human being. He is a dangerous person who shouldn't be allowed to roam free.

#### Scene 4. Logbook. *Silence* by Emilia Piz

*Emilia:* When we were let in, the first thing I noticed was the silence.

The air was quite dense.

As we went further into the prison, the space seemed to be shrinking, and the silence started to throb.

Long, colourful corridors with tiny windows.

One thing I remember perfectly: the moment we heard the boys' voices as they came up. It was comforting to hear them laughing and swearing.

I can't recall what happened in chronological order. I just remember some fragments, images, sensations that pop into my head.

The tattoos on their arms.

The hidden glances.

The way they backed each other up.

The way they flex their muscles to compare them to their mates.

The way they shyly start reading the script: "What the fuck is this!"...  
"Bro, it's sword, not blade."

The look on a boy's face. He doesn't speak Italian but tries his best to understand what is going on and tells us: "Bye mum, Albania, via Padòva."

"Is there someone who can speak Albanian to him?"

"My cellmate. They talk sometimes."

And I think: "I hope they get along, or else it will be a hassle. Imagine being able to speak with just one person, who is a dick."

Lisa asks me to tease H., and he closes his eyes and keeps his mouth shut to keep calm.

I think: "I've got the feeling this won't end well."

When Lisa hugs them, drags them around and holds them, their bodies change.

They get softer. They get freer, less confined, more human.

Before they go away, they shake our hands and kiss us on the cheek. You can tell it is important for them.

"I feel like I'm watching First Dates."

They laugh.

I hear them laughing and swearing, as they go away.

Silence.

## Scene 5. The Cell

*Romeo is in his cell. In the cell there are the signs we painted during our masterclass with Peter McCaughey.*

*Romeo:* Romeo... wherefore am I Romeo? Why me? But, in the end... What's a name? What's Montague? It isn't a hand, or foot, or arm, or face. Maybe it's just a dream. It can't be true.

What did I do? What the hell did I do?

I couldn't leave Mercutio in the shit. Yes, he'd have done the same for me.

But now, I'm just like them. A murderer. Just like the people I hate. Just like my family.

Cursed be our families, and cursed be the blood, running through my veins.

Capulets, Montagues, they are all the same shit.

What will Juliet think of me? I'm so sorry, Tybalt, my brother. But for fuck's sake, not Mercutio. Not him. What did I do? My hands are shaking, covered in his blood.

I didn't mean to. I swear, Tybalt. I didn't mean to kill you. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, everyone.

I thought I was different, but maybe I'm not.

I can still smell his blood on me. I never thought it would have such a sweet scent.

And your eyes, as they were leaving this life. They still haunt me. It's my punishment.

Cursed be the blade that killed you, and the one that hit Mercutio.

What's going to happen, now? Will they put me to death? No more deaths. No more.

Is it not enough? Maybe they'll understand why I did it. The shrinks seemed understanding.

Juliet. The love of my life, where are you? I wish you were here. I'm scared. I'm so scared.

Help me. I'm just a boy. I'm just a boy and I'm going nuts.

Or maybe I was already nuts. Or maybe the entire city has gone crazy, we all have.

This cell is so small.

I'm scared.

## Scene 6. Do You Bite Your Thumb at Us, Sir?

*This scene is taken from Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet (1.1) and it includes the Prince's entrance and speech.*

## Scene 7. Acting, Running, Stepping Outside the Box

*Two students who took part in the workshop, Michela Segato and Debora Frascini, compete in a frantic dance fight, a mix of classical ballet and modern dance, to the tune of Run Boy Run by Woodkid.*

Run boy run! This world is not made for you  
 Run boy run! They're trying to catch you  
 Run boy run! Running is a victory  
 Run boy run! Beauty lays behind the hills  
 Run boy run! The sun will be guiding you  
 Run boy run! They're dying to stop you  
 Run boy run! This race is a prophecy  
 Run boy run! Break out of society  
 Tomorrow is another day  
 And you won't have to hide away  
 You'll be a man, boy!  
 But for now, it's time to run, it's time to run!  
 Run boy run! This ride is a journey to  
 Run boy run! The secret inside of you  
 Run boy run! This race is a prophecy  
 Run boy run! And disappear in the...  
 Tomorrow is another day  
 And you won't have to hide away  
 You'll be a man, boy!  
 But now. It's time to run, it's time to run!  
 Tomorrow is another day

## Scene 8. The Witnesses

*The entrance and identification procedure are repeated every time somebody is called to the stand.*

*The Judge:* The Court will hear all the evidence presented by the parties. Counsel, you may call the first witness to the stand.

*Benvolio enters.*

Please, you may sit. Good evening, Benvolio. We will now identify you. You will be heard as a witness in this trial and must tell the whole truth. Remember that perjury is a felony punishable by law. Please, answer the questions the Prosecutor is going to ask you.

*Prosecutor:* Benvolio, where were you on 1 November 2018, when the Montagues and the Capulets clashed on the streets of Verona? Who were you with? Who took part in the fight and what caused it? I urge you to provide detailed information, leaving nothing out.

*We play the video of Benvolio's statement. It was recorded in the "blue room," inside the prison. Benvolio is played by W.*

*Benvolio:* Get off me!

I said, let me go!

I saw nothing.

Can I smoke?

I was drunk.

We were at Juliet's party.

We shouldn't have been there, I know. It was a mess.

I swear to God, if you don't get your hands off me.

Leave me alone!

Who was I with? Some friends.

Mercutio, Romeo ... and some others.

I'm not going to snitch on 'em. I never have, so I'm not starting now.

Are we done? If I don't have a fag, I'm going to lose it.

We were all drunk and high. We went out. We wanted a burger.

Tybalt started teasing Mercutio.

How? He was staring at him.  
Mercutio was stoned. He was restless. When he acts like that, it's impossible to stop him.  
It got out of hand.  
You must get off me, I'm serious.  
*(He raises his voice)*  
Let me go... I didn't do anything... fuck.  
Mercutio went nuts.  
Romeo got in the way.  
He tried to stop 'em.  
It was a mistake... fuck.  
Can I go, now?  
*(He calms down, and speaks to himself)*  
Tybalt killed Mercutio. He pounced on Romeo.  
Romeo fought back. Tybalt died.  
He had it coming.  
Can I have a fag, now?

*We play the video of Balthasar's statement. It was recorded in the "blue room," inside the prison. Balthasar is played by F.*

*Balthasar:* We went clubbing.  
It was someone's birthday.  
I was with Romeo and Mercutio.  
We were going back home, it was 4.30 am.  
That's when the fight started.  
Next to a food truck.  
The fuck do I know?  
Hey! Stop recording me.  
At some point, a bloke showed up.  
He was a show off.  
He called us names, and Mercutio punched him.  
Tybalt punched him back.  
Mercutio hits his head on the ground and dies.  
Romeo stands between the two and pulls a knife out of his pocket.  
He stabs Tybalt a couple of times.

And Tybalt dies.  
Romeo didn't know what to do.  
So, a dude got killed.  
That's about it.

*We play the video of K's statement. It was recorded in the "blue room," inside the prison. K. is played by K. He only speaks Albanian. Giorgia, a cultural mediator, translates his lines.*

*Giorgia:* I'm Giorgia, a cultural mediator, and I'm here today to translate K.'s statement.

*K.:* Në rregull. Ishte e martë, binte shi dhe nga Puka morra një autobus që më la në Milano, saktësisht në rrugën Padova.

*Giorgia:* All right. It was Tuesday, and it was pouring outside. I caught a bus that would take me from Puka to Milan, and I got off in via Padova.

*K.:* Në rregull. Vendosa të shkoja në një supermarket për të marrë një kaçavidë.

*Giorgia:* Okay. I went to a store to buy a screwdriver.

*K.:* Kisha në mendje një nga marifetet e mia, por kur dola nga supermarketi e gjeta veten në mes të një përleshjeje midis dy të rinjve. Nga frika se mund të arrinte policia, vendosa të iki.

*Giorgia:* I was planning one of my stunts, but when I left the store I saw some dudes fighting. I was afraid the police would come, so I ran off.

*K.:* Fatkeqësisht nuk ua pashë fytyrat dy të rinjve, ndaj nuk di t'ju them më shumë.

*Giorgia:* Unfortunately, I didn't get a look at their faces. That's all.

*We play the video of Tybalt's statement. It was recorded in the "blue room," inside the prison. Tybalt is played by Y.*

*Tybalt:* I was at a friend's place, and we hung out there till 6 am, then I had to go home.

We drank a lot and listened to music.

Walking home, I smoked a joint.

But when I got to the square, I saw some Montagues.

They were talking trash about us.

I swaggered up to them.

Mercutio started riling me and calling me names.

Romeo tries to separate us and says something I don't understand.

He tells me something along the lines of "I love you and care about you."

But I hit him and push him over.

Mercutio jumps at me and hits me in the face.

We start fighting and Romeo

Tries to stop us

But as I hit Romeo to push him out of the way

I knock Mercutio down.

I spit at him and leave.

*We play the video of Mercutio's statement. It was recorded in the "blue room," inside the prison. Mercutio is played by G., who performs the Queen Mab speech.*

## Scene 9. Breaking News

*Our correspondent from Verona, Beatrice Cionti, speaks on video.*

*Beatrice:* Good evening. I am speaking from Milan's Juvenile Court, where at this very moment Romeo Montague is being tried for the murder of Tybalt Capulet, also known as Prince of the Cats. It's not the first time this criminal offender has come before the court. His clan are notorious for their violence, deviant behaviour and drug use. It appears that on the night of the murder, the suspect was high on drugs. The trial is still underway,

but we all hope justice will be done, and that this dangerous killer will be granted a life sentence. That's all for now, back to you, Paul.

## Scene 10. *Angel and Devil*, a Rap Song by Kristian Sefgjini

*Judge (to Romeo):* Tell us about your family. How's your relationship with your parents?

*Silence*

What would you like to do with your life? What do you want to be? What are your hobbies?

*Silence*

Have you heard of probation? Has anyone told you what it is?

*Silence*

Probation is a programme you could benefit from, if you are willing to give it a try. You will be supported by experts. But you must make a real effort, if you really want to change, and leave your old self behind. You must show us that you are more than the crime you have committed, and that you can still be a productive human being who follows his dreams and obeys the law. Are you willing to try this new experience? You will have to leave home and stay in a community where some decent people will help you get through it.

*Silence*

Do you have anything you want to say?

*Romeo starts rapping Angel and Devil by Kristian Sefgjini. Romeo is played by the author.*

*Romeo:* Talking about life and my family keeps me alive

I left them behind to live on the streets

Sorry mum, just another bad choice.

I was scared, I was hungry, and I met some lying rats

But I am what I am, charmed by the devil – charmed by the devil.

I live my life just as I like. You don't have a say. God will be my judge.

He already spoke and I paid for what I did, I know that I was wrong.

I grew up on the streets, far from my mum, far from my home  
 I thought I could help, but I only broke her heart  
 At first, I was in heaven, but that money looked like poison  
 I got a few smiles, only for a while, but I felt like my heart was withering  
 inside

This life took my smile, drops of blood on my face  
 When I look in the mirror, I see my crappy self  
 As I look at these bars, I can't catch my breath  
 I lie on my bed, trying to get some sleep  
 The dreams I dream, they make me lose my mind  
 Thinking I'm outside, while I'm still caged inside  
 Tears are in my eyes, I want to disappear  
 In a dark and distant place, a deep dark void  
 My ghosts, they keep screaming  
 I spent all my days looking at the clock, and sometimes I thought I  
 wouldn't get back.

I've wondered in the dark, trying to give my life a purpose  
 The devil speaks, the angel looks and weeps at the evil in my heart.  
 I've wondered in the dark, trying to give my life a purpose  
 The devil speaks, the angel looks and weeps at the evil in my heart.  
 Running from a world on fire, looking for a light in the darkness  
 I must try; I must fight with all my strength I must rise up  
 All the scars on my body that those devils left on me when I died  
 I've buried this devil, I go with the light, never looking back, I keep my  
 head up

I thank the Lord, I have a chance, I can start anew  
 I live my life with a quiet heart, I don't want to suffer thinking of that  
 poison

I know I saw an angel, and I've kept smiling ever since  
 Being free, living free, that's all I ever wanted.  
 Money isn't everything, I saw that in a dream  
 Money can't buy all the love that now I need.  
 As I smoke and think of all the mistakes that changed my life  
 I keep my head up and look in the mirror, and I see the man I became  
 And I know I've wasted time. I've wasted so much time.  
 Angel and devil, that's how I was born...

## Scene 11. Logbook. *For Them, For Us* by Alessandra Romeo

*Alessandra:* I've been thinking about it all week. I've been thinking about this day, my last Tuesday visiting the prison. And I've been thinking of all the people I've met along the way, and all the moments I hold in my heart. This Tuesday was magical: W. was all dressed up, he had cut his hair and was wearing glasses, which made him look smart. F. is complaining about his hair, he says he didn't style it properly, and he is ashamed. Yes, F. is a lamb, asking for love, who hides behind some huge tattoos to look tougher. What happened on Tuesday was special. G. was really looking forward to starting to act, he was ecstatic; K., who doesn't speak a word of Italian, let his smile talk; another boy sings a song he wrote: "All I want from you, mum, is a prayer. I know dad isn't proud of me" – that's how it ends. It's really moving. I tell him, and he says no one has ever told him that. Fuck, I think, they are really good! They are all so good, and I get angry – angry because I know they didn't have the same opportunities as me; they didn't have someone who believed in them or motivated them. The last goodbye. They hug us like they are saying goodbye to all their hopes. The air grows quite heavy, full of things to say, tears to shed, moments to spend together, and laughs to share. For them, for us.

## Scene 12. The sentence

*After a short discussion, the judges return to the courtroom.*

*Judge:* After hearing social services, who have illustrated the feasibility of the programme to be implemented in the probationary period, the court rules as follows.

*The Judge reads the Court Order:* The probationary period means the judge will defer his decision for a period that, in the case of a serious crime like this one, will be three years. If everything goes smoothly, the charges will be dismissed, and the trial will not resume. On the contrary, if this test is not passed, the trial will resume, and the boy will probably be sentenced to prison.

We all agreed on a three-year probationary period, which means that during this time the defendant, Romeo Montague, will attend a rehabilitation programme which has been drawn up by social services and approved by the judge. There's an intensive theatre workshop in this programme, and a lot of Shakespeare!

Romeo, it will be tough, but you must try.

We believe in you. It's never too late to change.

We have also scheduled some mid-term reviews. These will be one-to-one interviews with the honorary judge every three months to check on your progress during the probationary period.

Thank you, everyone.

## Epilogue. At the Very Bottom

by *Dimitri Patrizi*

*Nick Bottom (played by Kristian Sefgijni):* My name, governor? Yes, that's it, gov. That's right. But friends call me Nick. Nick Bottom. You know, Nick Bottom, like Shakespeare's character. Never been to the theatre? No? Why? You can go, so you should, gov. You have a serious job that pays well, and a uniform: you should go, seriously! It'll do you good, gov. It can change you... Bottom, yes, Bottom: it means "the lowest part of something" in English. You don't speak English, gov? Guv, you must study English: if you know English, you can go anywhere! You could climb up the ladder and end up working for Interpol, rather than staying here, squashing cockroaches. With all due respect, gov! I bet you don't know Nick Bottom's story. Of course, you don't, you never go to the theatre. Sure, I've been to the theatre. Once. Nope, just once. I couldn't go back. I wanted to... but I had other things to do. Know the story, as I see it, gov? This is how it goes, listen carefully, I'm talking. You can't go on like this, gov, you're a real shit. It's the story of a fucking nobody. Sorry for that word, but it is what it is. He was someone who stayed at the very bottom. "Bottom," got it? At the bottom of the list, down at the bottom, where no one could see him. Someone who

lived at the very bottom and then started to go up. What? You want to know how it goes? Alright, this is Bottom's story.

That time at the theatre, a bloke told us the story – they were actors, and they were working, and one of them had to tell us things – this is what I heard.

Nick Bottom is an ordinary bloke, just like many of us. He is somebody who works whenever he can, and when he can't he finds something else. He is a weaver. Someone who makes cloth and clothes, I guess. Now, clothes are made in Chinese factories – so we can say goodbye to our jobs. You need to find your own way, pal. I'm a bricklayer. One of Bottom's friends was a bricklayer. Peter. Yes, he was unemployed, too. They can't find work, so they say: let's try acting. You know, there's this rich bloke, guv. He is someone important, guv, a lot more than you. No offence. He is the big boss, the one who lays down the law and forks out. This rich bloke is getting married. There's going to be a party. So, he wants some music and someone who can tell a few jokes. He's got money, guv, he can afford to laugh. And so, Bottom and his friend, Peter, go: we can make him laugh. "Get your head out of your ass, Peter, we're not good actors!" "Sure, but he pays well, and we could set ourselves up for life. We've had enough of living like this..." Yeah, so they give it a go. You do what you can, right? I did. But I had no luck. So, I ended up at the very bottom too, got it, guv? Down, at the very bottom, where you get splattered in mud, and nobody sees you. And you cry for help, fuck, pull me out, would you please help me get out of here? Nope, no luck this time, guv. Nobody gives a shit, you know. 'Cos you're at the bottom, fuck. Nick Bottom. Sank to the bottom. Got it, guv?

That night, when I got to the theatre, the bloke who knows everything was telling the story like this. I got in because... because it was better than staying outside, where nobody could see me. Got it? You know how things are at the theatre, right? You get in and the lights go down. Sure, like the cinema, but we are real people. While you're in the dark. And I needed to be in the dark, you know? At the bottom, in the dark. It was my place.

Then, Bottom and his friend Peter – you can tell they're friends and have been through a lot together, and Peter knows him really well – they say, "Let's try acting," and Peter tells Bottom "You'll have to be the hero of the story!" "What hero?" says Bottom. "What good am I, when my dad used to make clothes, and now the Chinese do it instead?" Something like

that, right? Okay, he doesn't mention the Chinese, guy, you're right. But Peter insists: "You know, the hero gets the girl..." "Girls only like wealthy men, pal!" "That's not always the case, Bottom. If you change your mind, and start believing, you'll get a girl too!" I don't know. We'll see. So, they decide to start acting, right? You know, when you're still you, but pretend to be someone else, and if you really believe it, you can be a hero or get a girl. And suddenly, you leave this dark, claustrophobic space, all smelly and dank, you forget the stains on the walls and the renovations that everyone says will start soon but never do because there's never enough money. No: you go: "Now, we're in the woods..." and trees are growing, with branches and leaves, and a nice breeze is blowing, taking away that stench. Can you smell how clear the air is, guv... come on, at least pretend! I know you can only smell the toilet from here, because the door doesn't close proper, but you've got to believe, because we're in a theatre... and here the tiles stay put and don't crack. Look at the grass, so fresh and soft that it makes me want to lie down right here and have sex with my girl... Do you have a girl, guv? Got it, sorry, none of my business.

Well, this is how magic works in a theatre. And Bottom is happy, you know. He likes it. He can see he's changing – Peter, his friend, was right. He's always been right. And so, something strange happens to him – maybe he's fallen asleep and now he's dreaming. Maybe not. Who knows? He is in the woods, and when he turns round, he sees... gorgeous! A girl so gorgeous the world has never seen before – a girl who looks at him, sees him. Yes, him, who nobody has even noticed before, because no one has ever looked at him and seen him and... she grabs his hand! She takes Bottom's hand, can you believe it, guv? Bottom can hardly believe what is happening: "You're holding my hand? Nobody has ever held my hand. They've always left me there, in the dirt, because who cares about Nick..." ... but she didn't... no, she didn't look the other way! She saw me, fuck. She saw me. Those eyes of hers looked for me and found me. That patch of blue sky, because that's what it was, guv, a patch of blue sky like in the songs, it came looking for me, in the dark... and... "It could be a whole different story, you know, Nick?" A different story, where I can hold her hand and run away, free, or fly up in the sky, up there. Fuck, guv, it would be a whole lot different from being here at the bottom. No, now you're a hero – and you fly, fly, fly away. You fly over this shitty city, over those motherfuckers who don't want to see

you, over the job you can't find – and even over the Chinese. Yes, even over those guys who see you up there with your girlfriend, happy, while they are down there, surrounded by grey concrete and you fly in the blue sky of her eyes... got it, guv?

That was magic, and she was a fairy... or maybe a dream. Or... who knows? All I know is that Nick was happy. I've never been this happy.

Alive. With her.

What then? I don't know, guv.

Then, you came along and took me away.

And they say you can trust the theatre...

Well, you got it, right? My name is Nick Bottom.

I still haven't hit the bottom, but... if you help me, I can get back up, pal.









## Logbook

And before we know it, the show is on. We all have the same red marks on our faces and wear the same black dresses that make us look identical and recognisable. The audience is looking at you, but you don't even notice, because all that matters is your friends next to you and those on stage giving their best performance ever. The first scene is so well-designed and exciting that I am completely captivated, as if I were seeing it for the first time. Everything goes smoothly.

Who would have thought? I never thought I'd be so emotional. It is so full. Full of everything. In the blink of an eye, we're already at the end. We all stand together as the audience bursts into applause. And in that moment, we are like a family. That's what we've become in such a short time. I have to say goodbye to the people who made me laugh and helped me open up, who have been with me all the way. Some of them I'll probably see at the uni, others I won't.

Kristian and A., with whom I've become closer than ever today, have left a permanent mark on my heart tonight.

I will remember this experience forever.

Beppe and Lisa taught us so much without us even realising it. They've put themselves in our shoes, been very patient and made their voices heard.

Our teachers showed us a playful and more human side of their character. The distance you have to keep from them at uni was somehow closed, and that was a breath of fresh air.

And with these last hugs, I'm taking with me the excitement of the night and the love I feel for all the people I've worked with. We all came in as separate individuals, but we leave as a group, as parts of a whole.

Mara Isotta, 1 December



