When There Can Be No Happy End

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FADE IN.

1. INT. THEATRE NIGHT

It is a FULL HOUSE in a grand theatre. Plush, red carpets cover the floor and marble columns hold the ceiling, glittering with ostentation chandeliers.

ROMEO (V.O.)

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

On audience the school students and their teachers, couples, families, young and old, all dressed as for a special occasion, watch the performance in silence: most are focused on the play, some watch the auditorium through their binoculars, others look around. Their faces are dimly lit by the light coming from the stage.

Five year old MATT sits in the very front row by the stage between his MOTHER and his teenage SISTER. He is dressed in a dark trousers and a white shirt finished off with a big bow tie. His hair is thoroughly gelled to the left. He sits on the very edge of his seat and watches the play with his eyes and mouth wide open.

On a richly and beautifully designed stage, ROMEO climbs up the vines to join JULIET on her balcony and he takes her in his arms.

JULIET

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.

They kiss.

The sister glances at Matt and pulls him back into his seat but he elbows her and goes back to his previous position. The sister puts her hand over her mouth not to laugh out loud.

Later in the play, the audience watch in silence moved, while on stage Romeo walks out of the Capulet's family tomb with dead-looking Juliet in his arms.

ROMEO

Ah, dear Juliet, Why art thou yet so fair? Shell I believe

On audience the mother looks worried at her son. She corrects a strand of hair falls on Matt's forehead and strokes his back. Matt watches oblivious.

ROMEO (CONT'D) (V.O.)

That unsubstantial Death is amorous, And that the lean abhorred monster keeps Thee here in dark to be his paramour?

On stage Romeo puts Juliet on the grass by the tomb, kneels by her, takes his hat off and strokes her face, kisses Juliet's hand and puts it against her body. With tears in his eyes he caresses and embraces her.

ROMEO (CONT'D)

For fear of that I still will stay with thee And never for this place of dim nigh Depart again. Here, here will I remain With worms that are thy chambermaids. O here Will I set up my everlasting rest And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars From this world-wearied flesh. Eyes, look your last. Arms, take your last embrace! And lips, O you The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss A dateless bargain to engrossing Death.

He kisses Juliet, gets up, opens up the flask with poison and raises it.

ROMEO (CONT'D)

Come bitter conduct, come unsavoury guide!

On audience Matt turns to his mum.

MATT

Tell him something mum!

MOTHER

Shhh, shhh...

The mother quietens the boy down while the sister rolls her eyes and shakes her head.

On stage Romeo takes a deep breath and waits for the silence paused with his hand raised up and his lips tightened. He refocuses and brings the flask slowly up to his mouth.

ROMEO

Come bitter conduct, come unsavoury guide, Thou desperate pilot, not at once run on The dashing rocks thy seasick weary bark. Here's to my love!

As he is about to take a sip Matt violently gets up from his seat.

MATT

She's alive Romeo!

Romeo jumps up from this unexpected scream.

The audiences whisper amongst each other while the mother frantically sits the boy down, puts her arm around him and whispers apologies to the audience.

MOTHER

I'm terribly sorry. This is his first time in theatre.

The sister puts one hand on her forehead to separate herself from Matt, rolls her eyes and grimaces.

Romeo frozen in a dramatic pose, with the flask raised waits for the silence: he swallows saliva, bites on his lips, closes and opens his eyes, breathes heavily so that his chest and nostrils move.

When audience is silent again, Romeo puts the cork back into the flask, walks back to Juliet, kneels down by her, puts the hat back on his head, closes his eyes, lowers his head and after a short pause he looks up with a dramatic expression on his face, takes his hat off and puts it by Juliet. He kisses her on her lips, gets up and opens up the flask.

ROMEO
Come bitter conduct, come unsavoury guide,
(MORE)

ROMEO (CONT'D)

Thou desperate pilot, not at once run on The dashing rocks thy seasick weary bark.

He raises the flask, pauses and glances uncertain in Matt's direction. Matt stares without blinking.

ROMEO (CONT'D)

Here's to my love!

MATT

Aaaaa!

Matt frees himself from his mother's embrace. Romeo shoves the cork back into the flask and watches the boy crawl up onto the stage still screaming. The mother, a CHIEF USHER and an ASSISTANT USHER follow the boy stumbling in the darkness but they don't dare to come up onto the stage, only stand by it, self conscious. They dodge and crouch not to block audience's vision.

Romeo paces away to far side of the stage but Matt follows him around.

MATT

Don't drink the poison Romeo! She's alive!

Romeo paces to the other side of the stage and tries to open the flask but the cork is stuck. By the stage the mother and the ushers follow them from the floor level. They cough and gesture to get Matt's attention.

ROMEO

Come bitter conduct, come unsavoury guide!

MATT

She's sleeping! The Friar gave her this potion that makes her look dead but she's sleeping.

ROMEO

Thou desperate pilot, not at once run on

Romeo spits the words out through gritted teeth and struggles with the flask.

As Matt follows Romeo to the edge of the stage, the mother and ushers reach out to grab to boy but he is too far away and they miss.

MATT

The Friar explained everything in a letter, but the letter --

ROMEO

-- The dashing rocks thy seasick weary bark.

Matt throws himself to Romeo's feet and Romeo drags him on the ground.

Finally Romeo wrenches the cork out of the flask but is too exhausted to move or drink so he just stands and breathes heavily and the audience watch the action in silenced terror.

ROMEO (CONT'D)

Here's...to...my...love!

Romeo bends down to catch his breath and sees the boy on the ground, clinched tight to his feet. The boy's body shivers. Worried Romeo touches Matt on his shoulder. Matt looks up at Romeo with his eyes red and wet from crying. Romeo breathes heavily.

ROMEO

O youthful stranger, we have not met before! Art thou unwell?

MATT

She...she's...ju...just slee...sleeping.

ROMEO

Shh...shh,

He comforts the boy.

MATT

Just...don't...drink the...the poison.

The chief usher whispers instructions to the assistant usher who disappears through one of the exits.

ROMEO

Thou be'ist an apparition like none I have ever seen! Why shouldst I trust thee, stranger?

MATT

I'm Matt... Matt Milner, from Remuera... 128 Remuera Road and --

ROMEO

-- Remuera, Remuera... This is a land (MORE)

ROMEO (CONT'D)

unheard of. Thou must have crossed a great many seas to reach our fair Verona.

MATT

It's very close actually! Only ten minutes by car... And I just saw everything! The Friar and Juliet and --

ROMEO

-- Really!?

MATT

Yes!

Romeo scratches his forehead.

In one of the side stage wings, hidden from the view of the audience, an old, serious-looking MAN with white beard and glasses appears alongside the assistant usher.

On stage Matt takes Romeo by the hand.

MATT

Come Romeo, she is breathing, you will see!

On audience in one of the first rows a SMALL GIRL gets up and waves her hand.

SMALL GIRL

I saw it too! Just now!

Her MUM and DAD restrain her from both sides.

Romeo notices the old man in the stage wing shake his finger at Romeo. Romeo shrugs, grimaces and follows Matt towards Juliet, however Juliet holds her breath and as they arrive by her side she is completely still.

Matt is confused and Romeo sees the old man gesture at him to drink the poison. Romeo turns to Matt.

ROMEO

Is't thou finding folly in my grief?
Making merry of mine suffering!?
I shall lose my patience soon so
Get thee gone and let me proceed in my grief!

Romeo pushes the boy away to the sound of awe from the audience. In the stage wing the assistant usher gasps.

MATT

But I swear! She's sleeping! Ask my mum if you don't believe me! Mum, --

ROMEO

-- Have the furies brought madness upon thee, stranger?! Is't thou talking to ghosts?

MATT

Ghosts? My mum, just here, and my sister over there, in the blue top.

Matt points at his mother and sister. The mother smiles and waves her hand intimidated and the sister sinks deeper in her seat with her arms folded.

Romeo exhales and pulls Matt to himself.

ROMEO

As you grow older and the illusion fades
This is when, o when you shalt see
That things are not always as we
would like them to be.
Life is a tragedy scarred with pain and sorrow
Where innocence is lost, sad wisdom
gained for the morrow. Reality is
not simple, fair Matt and often
times comes when
There can be no happy end.

He pauses and looks at Matt hopeful.

ROMEO (CONT'D)

Do you understand?

MATT

Just tickle her!

Romeo stares at Matt in disbelief and tries not to smile.

In the stage wing the assistant usher claps his hands and smiles.

The old man grabs his forehead and gives the assistant usher an angry look.

A murmur grows in the audience.

MATT (CONT'D)

When I tickle my sister in the morning she always wakes up!

In the audience the sister puts her head between her hands.

On stage Romeo circles around and glances at the old man shake his head and threaten Romeo with his fists and throat cutting gestures.

ROMEO

To tickle... or not to tickle...

MATT

Feet are the worst!

Romeo smiles wickedly, grabs Matt by the hand and they walk over to Juliet and kneel by her. The audience await in tension.

In the stage wing the old man notices a big handle with 'CURTAIN' written on it and he runs to it but the assistant usher pulls up a long fabric off the ground and the old man slips and falls backwards.

Romeo begins to tickle Juliet but she does not move. Romeo and Matt frown at each other confused. Romeo tickles and shakes Juliet again.

ROMEO

Wake up Juliet. It's okay.

But to no avail. Romeo gets up. He walks and looks around while in the stage wing the assistant usher ventilates the told man with the fabric.

In the audience people look at each other, whisper and talk.

SMALL GIRL

Maybe kiss her!

TEENAGER ONE

This is not 'Sleeping Beauty'.

TEENAGER TWO

Maybe try mouth to mouth!

Romeo smiles while the teenagers giggle.

A TEACHER

Boys!

Romeo recomposes and the laughter subsides.

AN ADULT

Maybe she really is dead.

Everyone goes silent. Romeo freezes with his eyes wide open.

ANOTHER ADULT (V.O.)

Call an ambulance!

Romeo runs back to Juliet and checks her pulse while Matt removes two feathers from Romeo's hat.

People get up from their seats to see better, some walk down to the edge of the stage.

Matt hands one feather to Romeo. Romeo doesn't understand, but Matt pulls Juliet's dress up revealing her bare feet and smiles.

As they start to tickle Juliet's feet she struggles to keep still and the audience rejoices. Laughter and ovation breaks amongst the audience when Juliet bursts out laughing and screaming.

Romeo drops the feather and embraces Juliet.

Matt jumps off the stage into his mother's arms.

Romeo holds Juliet in his arms and looks her in the eyes.

ROMEO

So you really are alive!

JULIET

More than ever before.

Romeo and Juliet kiss.

In the stage wing the old man regains his consciousness, glances at Romeo and Juliet and faints while the assistant usher brings the red curtain down.

FADE OUT.