

Love Gothic

By Joe Standerline for Bluecoat Shine

The Capulet orchard was drenched in moonlight. A balmy breeze was playing across Juliet's arms and face as she prepared for bed. The celebration had been raucous, the wine flowed freely and, had it not been for the intruder, this would have been the best Capulet party in recent times. The intruder was Romeo. Romeo Montague. The Montague and the Capulet's had been at war for years. They hated each other, the reason for this eluded Juliet. All she saw was a personable man, probably the most attractive she'd ever met. Charming and exciting in equal measure. As her nurse brushed her silky, long hair, Juliet tried hard not to entertain the wild and forbidden thoughts that were racing through her head. Perhaps nothing would happen. Perhaps in a day or two she would have forgotten all about him. Perhaps nothing. She was resolute; Romeo was the one and she was to use all her new found powers to captivate him completely. He didn't know it but Romeo Montague had been chosen.

"You're restless tonight", The nurse had known Juliet since she was a baby. She could read her like a book. "Will you tell me or am I to guess?" Juliet managed a smile. She made an excuse about feeling tired from too much dancing. "Of course, too much dancing". Nurse had an uncanny ability to say one thing and mean another. She kissed Juliet lightly on the forehead and left her chamber.

Romeo, Romeo, Romeo. A thousands fantasies filled her thoughts. They belonged together, she could feel it. She would make a million sacrifices; do whatever was necessary to ensure they would be together, today, the next day and forever. Love would conquer everything. The stupidity of their families would fade to insignificant memory and from there the memory would eventually scatter and never be spoken of again. Juliet was young and strong. She had the power to change the world. She had the power to make this man hers. All hers. She could still feel his lips against hers as though still at the party, a rush of adrenalin shot through her as she imagined him there with her.

Sounds of thuggery broke Juliet's indulgent muse. Men were staggering along the lane beyond the boundary wall. "Romeo, that she were, O, that she were an open et caetera, thou a poperin pear!
Romeo, good night: I'll to my truckle-bed"

"He jests at scars that never felt a wound"

Juliet's heart leapt. This was Romeo's voice. Romeo was in the orchard. She had drawn him to her, just as nurse had promised; given him no choice but to follow his passion and risk everything to be with her. Juliet had iniquitous charm, beyond her wit and beauty, a ruthless gift. A newfound power to captivate. He was here, bones, flesh and blood.

Romeo hit the earth with a thud. He wasn't hurt, at least if he was, he didn't feel it. He leapt to his feet and gazed into the open doors above him. Soft light flickered inside and played against the balcony railings. They looked soft, like licorice. Since laying eyes on this amazing girl, Romeo's world had changed. Everything was altered; sweeter, kinder.

And there she was. Lighting up the night with her exquisite brilliance. In every way, Romeo loved her. They stared at each other. Neither dared speak for fear of losing the moment, this timeless, swirling, wonder that engulfed them. Juliet's heart pounded. She had never known excitement like it. Romeo was breathless. His life had already taken a new course. It was already done and nothing he could do would stop it. He was alive, prickling with joy. "See, how she leans her cheek upon her hand! O, that I were a glove upon that hand, that I might touch that cheek!"

Romeo would remember this night forever. The night they met and fell in love. No one and nothing could ever take this away. But they weren't alone. They had been joined in the orchard by another. Not human. Far from human. It had tight, furry skin wrapped around cold, thin bones. It stood, tall like a man, had eyes that peered out onto the world with a yearning hatred. This had no name. To give it a name would make it all the more real and terrifying. It swept closer to Romeo across the dusty earth until it stood only inches away from him. Even in the heat of this summer night, smoky breath billowed from its mean, cracked lips. Romeo was oblivious. Only two things existed in his new and amazing world; Juliet, and, the hypnotic passion he felt for her. Juliet broke the silence. "My ears have not yet drunk a hundred words of that tongue's utterance, yet I know the sound: Art thou not Romeo and a Montague?"

"Neither, fair saint, if either thee dislike"

She appeared to hover above the balcony floor, her tiny feet hardly visible beneath her softly billowing night dress.

Long and bony fingers caressed Romeo's shoulder. Taken aback, he made to turn but such was the strength of this abominable creature, he was rendered motionless. Romeo looked up at Juliet in terror. What wicked evil had befallen him? Juliet stared back at him, tears trickling down her face. Her mouth opened. A leathery creak sounded in Romeo's ear. Fangs appeared from brown, rotting gums. They punctured his flesh. Romeo's body began to convulse. The beast held him tight. Stinging fingertips spread to an all-consuming agony. This was pain like no other; vicious, exhilarating. Romeo could feel his life draining away. The creature groaned and rasped, tightening its vice-like grip. Juliet looked on. There was pity in her expression but no surprise. As the last of the light bled away from his eyes, Romeo fixed his gaze upon her. He was done. His lifeless body slumped to the earth. Juliet floated on the still night air, over to where he lay.

"You did well"

“Is he dead?”

“In a manner of speaking. What is left is yours”

With that, the beast was gone. Only a sickly stench remained. Romeo’s body began to twitch. His skin whiter than moonlight. Nurse appeared on the balcony, smiling down at them. Romeo was no longer a Montagu. He was a part of their family now. He and Juliet would be together for eternity.

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