

A Tale from Love

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I WATCH them from afar and can't help myself. What I do is so small, a pebble in the ocean. I make eyes lock and thoughts spin, nothing more.

But the ripples, oh, the ripples.

Sometimes they silently fade out to still waters. I hate this. I want waves. I want hearts broken and families torn apart. I want empires crumbled and worlds destroyed, all for love, all from the pebbles I drop.

Today, I move through Verona and set to work.

Here, a chambermaid gazes too long at her master.

There, a monk begs the Lord to free him from his sinful thoughts.

Here, two widows find comfort in each other's arms.

There, I see two Capulet cousins, Juliet and Rosaline, beautiful and blooming. I make Juliet catch the eye of a count, and Rosaline a boy from a rival family. The men swoon, the women reject, and I chuckle as the men crumble.

I should move on, I know, yet I linger. The rejected son, Romeo, has caught my attention. His heart is beautiful, a masterpiece when broken. He hasn't accepted the rejection. I follow him as he finds his way to the Capulet's Ball. Entering enemy territory for unrequited love? Truly, a masterpiece.

The tension in the boy's heart excites me as he scans the crowd for his beloved Rosaline. I wait for her cries of rejection, his identity revealed, the coming storm. I can feel the waves already.

Then I see Juliet, the other cousin, and it all spins in my mind at once. I can see the jealousy, the torn emotions, duty, family, honour, ruined all because of these two crossed stars.

My waves, so many waves.

I drop a pebble. Their eyes lock.

Romeo and Juliet. This should be fun.

I feel their love burst instantly. It's a supernova, bright and enveloping. The gravity in their hearts pull them in and, in an instant, a new world is made. Their world. They are cosmic, infinite. I've never seen this happen so fast. I can only marvel at the potential of what I have ignited.

Soon, Romeo's family name is discovered. I laugh as he barely leaves the ball with his life. My joy only escalates later when he sneaks away to Juliet's balcony. They vow their love and, to my surprise, decide to wed. One night, a few hours, that's all they needed. I have made waves before, but never a perfect storm.

Daybreak comes and I move through Verona once more.

Here, a man locks fingers with his daughter-in-law.

There, a woman falls for a man half her age.

It's entertaining, but it's not last night. As the day drags on, I struggle with my curiosity. Romeo and Juliet are a flame and I'm fast becoming their moth.

Two nights pass. I soon find that I needn't seek out the lovers. The waves they've made are washing over Verona with gossip and hushed whispers. I hear every word. The family's feud has shed blood. Romeo has slain Juliet's cousin in a duel gone wrong and has now been banished by order of the prince. Juliet herself is to be wed to the count tomorrow, though rumours dictated her agreement was made under threats of disownment.

I pause every time I catch a line of their story. At first, these whispers fill me with glee. Then surprisingly the glee begins to dispel, disbelief taking its place. I can turn my mind to nowhere else but them. All throughout Verona, I can feel their ripples, their waves; though instead of entertained, I feel as though I am drowning.

The news of Juliet's death runs through Verona like flames through Rome. The details are muddied, but I know the truth. This isn't the first time one of my pebbles led to a suicide. In the past this has made me overjoyed, yet somehow this time it is different. Instead of the final touch to a masterpiece, this feels like a pallet knife through the canvas.

I find myself drifting solemnly through Verona to Juliet's crypt. To no surprise, Romeo is already here, alone and by her side. His beautiful heart is in ashes. He's nothing but dust in the air, barely a shadow.

The sight of him leaves me heavy with shame. What misery has been wrought in the wake of my fun?

No. I could not help this. This is who I am. This is all I am.

I could not help this.

I could not help this.

I watch, waiting for Romeo to make his peace and flee Verona so I might

leave with a shred of hope for him. Instead, he kisses Juliet then lifts the poison to his lips.

If I had a voice to shout with, I would use it now, though even then it would be too late. My damage is done, and I turn to leave.

Suddenly, Juliet stirs. I freeze as she awakens.

I watch as Juliet sees Romeo. I feel her heart shatter, then burst. Their supernova turns to a black hole. I am pulled in, joining her in a whirlwind of despair. I see it now. This had been her plan. Poor Juliet had tried so desperately to claim her own fate, though her instructions of escape must never have reached Romeo. Now this...

...this is not what they deserved.

I cannot bear to see Juliet's tears. I turn and leave the crypt just as she lifts Romeo's dagger to her breast. Quickly, I escape to the streets of Verona. It feels silent around me and as cold as death. I see men and women, matches ready for disaster, but the taste of temptation leaves bitterness in my heart.

I leave the city, taking only my sins and my lesson learned. In this moment, I make an oath. I swear to myself that never, *never again* will I create a tale of more woe than that of Juliet and her poor, poor Romeo.