



TWO SWORDSMEN OF VERONA

Fictional History, circa 1300

THE LOVERS HAD DIED JUST three years earlier. At the time it was thought that the tragic deaths of Romeo and Juliet would help end the feud that had plagued the noble houses for so many decades, and for a while, this proved to be the case. Escalus, princely emissary of the Doge, was so moved by their deaths that he ordered a truce and a yearlong period of contrition and penance.

The sorrowful families joined forces to mourn. Lord Montague built an impressive funereal monument so that the young husband and wife, once divided by clan hatred, might now be united, awaiting the resurrection. But this loving tribute to his son was the very wedge that began to destroy the fragile peace.

Lady Capulet was young and seemingly docile. The second wife of Lord Capulet, she had been devoted to her daughter and in some part blamed herself for Juliet's death. To inter a deceased couple in the vault of the husband's family was an incontestable right. No one could oppose it. But seeing her sole daughter taken from her own family tomb and buried among the despised Montagues was more than Lady Capulet's nature could bear. And so, almost from the day of the funeral that was meant to end their strife, the seeds of discord were sown once again.

The feud recommenced with all the subtlety of Machiavelli. Genial smiles turned begrudging, then became frowns.

Greetings on the street went unreturned. Social snubs and whispered insults escalated at a snail's pace, unnoticed by the prince until the situation had once again gone beyond his poor powers to correct.

The roiling tempers came to a boil on a hot afternoon in June when Lords Capulet and Montague met in a public square. No others were present, so it was impossible to determine exactly how the fight began. But rapiers were drawn, and by the time citizens and courtiers came within sight, Lord Capulet lay wounded on the cobblestones, his hand clutched to the thick leather jerkin popularly worn at the time.

"My sword barely touched him," Lord Montague claimed to the onlookers who were already murmuring and starting to take sides.

"A palpable hit," protested Capulet and clutched his chest in agony.

Within minutes, Prince Escalus arrived in the square, his face dark with anger. If the offenders had been any less than the patriarchs of their houses, he would have banished them on the spot. But such a decree on two such men would only fuel the flames between the clans.

"Bring Lord Capulet to the Castelvechio," he ordered. "He will stay as my guest until this fever of hatred is broken. Lady Capulet." He saw that the stricken man's wife had already arrived on the scene. "Call a surgeon for your husband and come with us."

"No surgeon," Lord Capulet insisted. "Lady Capulet can attend to me herself."

The prince regarded the young noblewoman. "I am well trained in the healing of wounds," she explained modestly. "Life among the Montagues has rendered the Capulet women finer surgeons, and more trusted, than any others in Verona."

The prince granted them their whim. Lady Capulet sent a servant running for bandages and ointments and a nightshirt, then gently supervised the loading of her husband onto a litter. She followed at a pace behind during the short walk to the prince's castle.

The royal household opened its doors for the injured lord. Candles were lit, a room was opened and aired, and Lady Capulet set about easing her husband into bed. She called for a pan of water, then dismissed the servants and set about dressing the wound herself.

That night, as the clock in the tower struck ten, Prince Escalus and his kinsman, Count Anselmo, paid a visit to Lord Capulet's bedside. The middle-aged nobleman lay pale and listless. "He'll live," Lady Capulet whispered comfortingly.

"For no reason, he assaulted me," rasped the injured man. "And he will try again. You must banish Montague."

The prince said nothing, but Count Anselmo bristled. The count's elder brother, Paris, had been killed on the same night as the lovers' suicide, murdered by Romeo, just feet away from the Capulet crypt. Anselmo blamed both families for his beloved brother's death. The renewing of the feud only served to anger him more. "How many more must die?" he demanded. "When will this madness end?"

"When we're all dead in our graves," hissed Capulet.

"Enough," said Prince Escalus. "You will be safe here until your body and temper are healed. Latch the doors and windows," he called to a servant. "Place a guard in the hallway. There will be no more killing."

The prince and count left the sickroom, followed shortly by Lady Capulet. An hour later, just as the clock in the tower struck eleven and a soft rain began to fall over Verona, Lady Capulet returned to the room. The guard in the hall unlocked the door and ushered her inside. It took only a minute to satisfy her concerns. "He's asleep," she reported to the guard, then walked down the hall to the chambers the prince had provided for her own use.

The tower clock struck the half-hour, 11:30. The shower had passed and the moon peered out from behind the clouds. Bertram, a captain in the guard, had just come off duty. He was walking by the west wing of the castle, carrying a full flagon of wine to the barracks, when he tripped over a sizable object. The flagon was tossed and his precious wine seeped

into the wet ground. Bertram cursed. And then, by the moonlight, he saw the object: a middle-aged man dressed in a thick leather jerkin and pantaloons. The man lay face up, a rapier in his right hand. Bertram quickly recognized him as Lord Capulet. And he was dead.

Bertram didn't move the body. Instead, he knelt and gingerly unhooked the jerkin. He had heard of the disturbance to the civil peace today—all of Verona had heard—and his first thought was to examine the wound delivered earlier by Lord Montague. The bandage wrapped around the torso was soaked with blood. With gentle fingers, Bertram eased away the cloth and looked at the wound. It was rapier thin and deep. "How did he even live so long?" the guard marveled.

"What have you there, soldier?"

Bertram started and turned and found himself staring up at Prince Escalus and Count Anselmo. He leaped to attention. "Your grace, it's Lord Capulet. Dead from the Montague's wound."

"What was Capulet doing?... " Prince Escalus inspected the body and the rapier, then turned to see the loosely closed window in the west wing. "That was his sickroom. Why was the man out of doors, fully clothed, and with a sword?"

Count Anselmo was on his knees, his gloves off, feeling for any trace of life. "It's clear to me," he said, looking up, his face flushed with anger. "Not content with your decree of peace, Capulet rose from his sickbed and spirited himself out the window. He was on his way to deal with Montague when his wound tore open."

"He's not long dead," Bertram ventured. "Lady Capulet saw him in his chamber at eleven by the clock-tower bell, half an hour before I came to this spot and found him."

"Is it murder then?" asked Anselmo. "To die from a wound inflicted in a fight would place the fault with Lord Montague."

The prince shrugged. "Perhaps. And yet Capulet's own recklessness was as much the cause as Montague's rapier."

"Your grace," Bertram stammered. "If I may have your permission to examine the situation, I might shed some light on this."

Prince Escalus trusted his captain and had commented more than once that the young officer was bright, well beyond his station. "Very well," he assented. "You may examine what you like and question whom you will."

And with that, the prince turned and left the scene, followed by his kinsman Anselmo.

(1) Who was planning a murder? (2) Who was responsible for Lord Capulet's death? (3) What clue points to the guilty party?

**If you've already solved this mystery, check the Solution on p. 142.
To discover additional clues, turn to Gathering Evidence on p. 119.**

HISTORICAL NOTES ON SHAKESPEARE'S ROMEO & JULIET

AS WAS THE case with many of Shakespeare's plays, *Romeo & Juliet* was adapted from earlier works of fiction: a moralistic poem based on an Italian novel based on a short story that was based on another novel set in Verona and featuring Romeo and Giulietta. The original plot, of a sleeping potion drunk by the heroine to avoid a bad marriage, can be traced back to a Greek story of the third century A.D.

The actual period of Shakespeare's play, a world of feuding clans and princely emissaries, is probably around 1300, when Verona was governed by the Doges of Venice.

Nowadays, the city of Verona has fostered a Romeo and Juliet circuit, featuring a walking tour of the couple's crypt, Romeo's house, and also Juliet's. This last structure, a museum to the fictional heroine, dates back to the correct period and had been home to the Cappello family, a close-enough approximation of Capulet. The Juliet bedroom even features a picturesque balcony facing a courtyard. What many tourists don't realize is that this famous balcony was built only recently, to make the house better conform to the Shakespeare play.