

'Romeo and Juliet' Text - Act I, Scene iii

Act I, Scene iii. Capulet's house.

Enter Lady Capulet and Nurse

Lady Capulet:

Nurse, where's my daughter? Call her forth to me.

Nurse:

Now, by my maidenhead, at twelve year old,
I bade her come. What, lamb! what, ladybird!
God forbid! Where's this girl? What, Juliet!

Enter Juliet.

Juliet:

How now! who calls?

Nurse:

Your mother.

Juliet:

Madam, I am here. What is your will?

Lady Capulet:

This is the matter:--Nurse, give leave awhile,
We must talk in secret. Nurse, come back again;
I have remember'd me, thou s'hear our counsel.
Thou know'st my daughter's of a pretty age.

Nurse:

Faith, I can tell her age unto an hour.

Lady Capulet:

She's not fourteen.

Nurse:

I'll lay fourteen of my teeth,
And yet, to my teeth be it spoken, I have but four -
She is not fourteen. How long is it now
To Lammas-tide?

Lady Capulet:

A fortnight and odd days.

Nurse:

Even or odd, of all days in the year,
Come Lammas-eve at night shall she be fourteen.
Susan and she - God rest all Christian souls! -
Were of an age: well, Susan is with God;
She was too good for me: but, as I said,
On Lammas-eve at night shall she be fourteen;
That shall she, marry; I remember it well.

Lady Capulet: Nurse, where is my daughter? Call her here.

Nurse:

Now, I called her here. She is such a sweet lamb, such a little ladybird!
Where is she? "Juliet!"

Enter Juliet

Juliet: Hello! Who is calling me?

Nurse: Your Mother calls you.

Juliet: Madam (Mother), I am here.
What do you need?

Lady Capulet: This is what I need.

Nurse you can go for a bit. We need to talk in secret. Nurse, come back again; I have remembered that you need to hear this too. You know my daughter is a of a good age for marriage.

Nurse: Yes, I know her age right down to the hour!

Lady Capulet: She is fourteen.

Nurse: I am willing to bet fourteen of my teeth, even though I only have four. She is not fourteen. How long is it until Lammas-tide (which is a festival on the 1st of August)?

Lady Capulet:

A fortnight and one or two days (about two weeks)

Nurse: No matter how many days exactly. The night before Lammas-tide (August 1st) she will be 14. Susan (who we presume was the Nurse's daughter who died at a young age) and Juliet were both the same age. The night before 1st August Juliet will be 14 and then she might marry.

Answer the questions about the text in the boxes below.

Why do you think Lady Capulet wants the Nurse to stay with them?

How old is Juliet?

Who is Susan and where is she now?

'Tis since the earthquake now eleven years;
 And she was wean'd - I never shall forget it -
 Of all the days of the year, upon that day:
 For I had then laid wormwood to my dug,
 Sitting in the sun under the dove-house wall;
 My lord and you were then at Mantua: -
 Nay, I do bear a brain: - but, as I said,
 When it did taste the wormwood on the nipple
 Of my dug and felt it bitter, pretty fool,
 To see it tetchy and fall out with the dug!
 Shake quoth the dove-house: 'twas no need, I trow,
 To bid me trudge:
 And since that time it is eleven years;
 For then she could stand alone; nay, by the rood,
 She could have run and waddled all about;
 For even the day before, she broke her brow:
 And then my husband - God be with his soul!
 A' was a merry man - took up the child:
 'Yea,' quoth he, 'dost thou fall upon thy face?
 Thou wilt fall backward when thou hast more wit;
 Wilt thou not, Jule?' and, by my holiday,
 The pretty wretch left crying and said 'Ay.'
 To see, now, how a jest shall come about!
 I warrant, an I should live a thousand years,
 I never should forget it: 'Wilt thou not, Jule?' quoth he;
 And, pretty fool, it stinted and said 'Ay.'

Lady Capulet:

Enough of this; I pray thee, hold thy peace.

Nurse:

Yes, madam: yet I cannot choose but laugh,
 To think it should leave crying and say 'Ay.'
 And yet, I warrant, it had upon its brow
 A bump as big as a young cockerel's stone;
 A perilous knock; and it cried bitterly:
 'Yea,' quoth my husband, 'fall'st upon thy face?
 Thou wilt fall backward when thou comest to age;
 Wilt thou not, Jule?' it stinted and said 'Ay.'

Juliet:

And stint thou too, I pray thee, nurse, say I.

Nurse:

Peace, I have done. God mark thee to his grace!
 Thou wast the prettiest babe that e'er I nursed:
 An I might live to see thee married once,
 I have my wish.

Nurse: It's been 11 years since the earthquake and she stopped nursing on that very day. I'll never forget it because I had put wormwood on my chest as I was sitting in the sun under the wall of the dove house. You and your husband were in Mantua (a place), Boy do I have some memory! But like I said when she tasted the bitterworm on the nipple, the pretty little babe got irritated and started to fuss. Then the dovehouse shook with the earth quake. There was no need to tell me to get out of there. That was 11 years ago. By then she could stand up by herself No, I swear, by that time she could run and waddle all around. I remember because she had cut her forehead just the day before. My husband—God rest his soul, he was a happy man—picked up the child. "Oh," he said, "Did you fall on your face? You'll fall backward when you grow smarter. Won't you, Jule." And I swear, the poor pretty thing stopped crying and said, "Yes." Oh, to watch a joke come true! I bet if I live a thousand years, I'll never forget it. "Won't you, Jule," he said. And the pretty fool stopped crying and said, "Yes."

Lady Capulet: Enough of this. Please be quiet.

Nurse: Yes ,madam. But I can't help laughing to think that the baby stopped crying and said, "Yes." I swear, she had a bump on her forehead as big as a rooster's testicle. It was a painful bruise, and she was crying bitterly. "Yes," said my husband, "Did you fall on your face? You'll fall backward when you grow up, won't you, Jule?" And she stopped crying and said, "Yes."

Juliet: Now you stop too Nurse please!

Nurse: Peace. I'm done talking. May God choose you to receive his grace. You were the prettiest baby I ever nursed. If I live to see you get married someday, all my wishes will come true.

What is the Nurse talking about here, and what impression does her speech give us?

What is the rude joke that the Nurse's husband was making?

Look at what Lady Capulet and Juliet say here. What does it tell you about the Nurse?

Lady Capulet:

Marry, that 'marry' is the very theme I came to talk of. Tell me, daughter Juliet, How stands your disposition to be married?

Juliet:

It is an honour that I dream not of.

Nurse:

An honour! were not I thine only nurse, I would say thou hadst suck'd wisdom from thy teat.

Lady Capulet:

Well, think of marriage now; younger than you, Here in Verona, ladies of esteem, Are made already mothers: by my count, I was your mother much upon these years That you are now a maid. Thus then in brief: The valiant Paris seeks you for his love.

Nurse:

A man, young lady! lady, such a man As all the world--why, he's a man of wax.

Lady Capulet:

Verona's summer hath not such a flower.

Nurse:

Nay, he's a flower; in faith, a very flower.

Lady Capulet:

What say you? can you love the gentleman? This night you shall behold him at our feast; Read o'er the volume of young Paris' face, And find delight writ there with beauty's pen; Examine every married lineament, And see how one another lends content And what obscured in this fair volume lies Find written in the margent of his eyes. This precious book of love, this unbound lover, To beautify him, only lacks a cover: The fish lives in the sea, and 'tis much pride For fair without the fair within to hide: That book in many's eyes doth share the glory, That in gold clasps locks in the golden story; So shall you share all that he doth possess, By having him, making yourself no less.

Nurse:

No less! nay, bigger; women grow by men.

Lady Capulet: Well, marriage is exactly what we have to discuss. Tell me, my daughter Juliet, what is your attitude about getting married?

Juliet: It is an honor that I do not dream of.

Nurse: "An honor?" If I weren't your only nurse, I'd say you had sucked wisdom from the breast that fed you.

Lady Capulet: Well, start thinking about marriage now. Here in Verona there are girls younger than you—girls from noble families—who have already become mothers. By my count, I was already your mother at just about your age, while you remain a virgin. Well then, I'll say this quickly: the valiant Paris wants you as his bride.

Nurse: What a man, young lady. He's as great a man as any in the whole world. He's as perfect as if he were sculpted from wax.

Lady Capulet: Summertime in Verona has no flower as fine as him.

Nurse: No, he's a fine flower, truly, a flower.

Lady Capulet: (to JULIET) What do you say? Can you love this gentleman? Tonight you'll see him at our feast. Study Paris's face and find pleasure in his beauty. Examine every line of his features and see how they work together to make him handsome. If you are confused, just look into his eyes. This man is single, and he lacks only a bride to make him perfect and complete. As is right, fish live in the sea, and it's wrong for a beauty like you to hide from a handsome man like him. Many people think he's handsome, and whoever becomes his bride will be just as admired. You would share all that he possesses, and by having him, you would lose nothing.

Nurse: Lose nothing? In fact, you'd get bigger. Men make women bigger by getting them pregnant.

How does Juliet react to Lady Capulet's suggestion of marriage?

What does the Nurse think of Paris?

What is the extended metaphor used by Lady Capulet here?

Why is Lady Capulet using rhyme here?

What is the Nurse's joke here?

Lady Capulet:

Speak briefly, can you like of Paris' love?

Juliet:

I'll look to like, if looking liking move:

But no more deep will I endart mine eye

Than your consent gives strength to make it fly.

Enter Servant.

Servant:

Madam, the guests are come, supper served up, you called, my young lady asked for, the nurse cursed in the pantry, and everything in extremity. I must hence to wait; I beseech you, follow straight.

Lady Capulet:

We follow thee. Juliet, the county stays.

Nurse:

Go, girl, seek happy nights to happy days.

Exeunt

Lady Capulet: *(to JULIET)* Give us a quick answer. Can you accept Paris's love?

Juliet: I'll look at him and try to like him, at least if what I see is likable. But I won't let myself fall for him any more than your permission allows.

Enter servant.

Servant: Madam, the guests are here, dinner is served, people are calling for you, people have asked for Juliet, and in the pantry, people are cursing the Nurse. Everything's out of control. I must go and serve the guests. Please, follow straight after me.

Lady Capulet: We'll follow you.

Juliet, the count is waiting for you.

Nurse: Go, girl, look for a man who'll give you happy nights at the end of happy days.

Exeunt *this indicates that the actors should leave the stage.*