

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Discovering Juliet

by Simon Luckhurst

EXTRACT

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This script is distributed by The Australian Script Centre
77 Salamanca Place Hobart 7004 Tasmania Australia
email admin@ozscript.org
www.ozscript.org
ph +61 3 6223 4675
fax +61 3 6223 4678

DISCOVERING JULIET:

As the lights come up we see Samantha on stage. Possibly she is warming up, stretching and jogging on the spot. When the audience has settled she begins speaking.

I suppose I'm something of an expert on Juliet Montague, nee Capulet these days. You see, I've performed the role five times now. Five completely different productions of *Romeo and Juliet*. I almost know the part backwards. No, seriously. Do you know this speech?

'Tis but thy name that is my enemy.

Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.

What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot,

Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part

Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!

What's in a name? That which we call a rose

By any other name would smell as sweet.

So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called.

Retain that dear perfection which he owes

Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name;

And for thy name, which is no part of thee,

Take all myself.

Beautiful, isn't it? But listen to this:

Myself all take.

Thee of part no is which, name thy for and

Name they doff, Romeo. Title that without.

Owes he which perfection dear that retain

Called Romeo not he were, would Romeo so

Sweet as smell would name other any by

Rose a call we which That? Name a in what's

Name other some be, O. Man a to belonging.

Part other any nor, face nor, arm nor

Foot nor, hand nor is it? Montague what's

Montague a not though thyself art thou

Enemy my is that name thy but 'tis.

Paul is dead. Paul is dead.

OK, I put the last line in myself. Saying that soliloquy backwards doesn't make a lot of sense, but it really freaks out drunk people! I was just fifteen when I played Juliet for the first time. That was back in a place called Lower Hutt, just near Wellington, in New Zealand. Hang on, here are some photos...

She shows some photos to the audience.

My mother's name before she married was Brenda Walters. And my father's was Dean Reynolds. She was interested in netball, boys and cooking. Dad liked fishing, girls and fishing. On the north island of New Zealand in 1971, as in many places around the world still, this combination of qualities was considered an ideal match. I was born in 1973, and they called me Samantha. I guess I was an outgoing kid. It didn't take me long to discover I could always get a few laughs by imitating various members of the family. I suppose that's when I realised I was good at acting. Eventually I went to drama school where the terribly idealistic Myra Bunn had us feeling, really feeling, what it was like to be a rock, or a fence. Or a tree.

Samantha assumes a wide-footed stance.

This was my tree. Gradually we juniors worked our way up through the ranks until we were allowed to play characters with legs. Sheep and cattle usually. Only two years after my fabulous performance as Lead Flamingo in *Alice in Wonderland* I had my first speaking role in the Lower Hutt Academy of Drama and Physical Education. As a North Pole elf I had to utter the immortal words: 'Santa, come quickly, Rudolph's got a cold.' And I might say that even if I wasn't mentioned in the reviews carried by the Lower Hutt Advertiser the next morning, I doubt whether the role of Elf 3 has ever been played with more passion, conviction or studious intent. I knew what the paper *would* have said if they'd bothered to send a real reporter to cover the pageant, and not some middle-aged drunk who fell asleep long before the fake snow began to fall. "A masterpiece of understatement... a more believable elf is not to be found this side of the North Pole... Samantha Reynolds is the new Rachel Clarke..." Rachel Clarke was