

Romeo vs Juliet

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Two football teams, both alike in hostility. Two football teams - one from St Montague's High, the other from the nearby Capulet Academy. Year after long year, these teams have played each other - ill feeling building up between them with each bad tackle or sending off. Bad blood and old bruises.

Each new player to the team is schooled in this dark history of the rivalry, each disputed foul and bitter loss relived and reimagined until these fresh-faced boys and girls are wild-eyed and snarling, straining at the leash to be allowed onto the field of battle, as filled with fury as though they themselves had played at every match.

The two teams have, thus far, avoided one another in the league, until, as chance would have it, they realise that they will meet in this year's cup final. The news of this coming match is greeted on both sides with glee and great excitement. Revenge in every heart. Revenge!

The day arrives and the match is held - on neutral ground - each team arriving by school minibus, the names of Capulet and Montague upon their sides. Once parked, players and supporters all pour off, jabbing fingers and hurling insults at their enemies, until calmed by teachers, who, nevertheless, mirror the hostility of their students by frowning sternly at opposing teachers. No friendship shown on either side.

The team supporters yell out all along opposing touchlines, their voices loud and shrill. The clouds above them grey and darkening. The handshake between the captains is brief and grudging and when the whistle blows, the two teams clatter into one another like opposing armies, boy and girl alike, crunching tackle after crunching tackle, team colours quickly camouflaged by mud.

The referee struggles to keep both teams from forgetting all about footballing and descending into random brawling. Yellow card after yellow card, but still the tackles rattle on with grunt and roar. The referee blows his whistle and calls captain and coach from either team to tell them in no uncertain terms that though he has no wish to, he will not hesitate to send players off should things continue in their present state.

Captain looks to coach and coach to captain. Heads are nodded in agreement but their hearts are too far fired-up to listen to their nodding heads. And when the game restarts, a boy called Romeo breaks free and scores. One - nil! The Montagues are in the lead!

The half time whistle can not come too soon and both teams leave the field, limping and licking their wounds, muttering dark threats to the opposition - who respond in kind until their teachers shepherd them away to sit, drink water and talk tactics for the second half.

Romeo - the best player of the Montagues - goes off to change his boots, the lucky ones he has been wearing having finally split. As he emerges from the changing rooms he comes quickly to a halt, bedazzled and bewitched by the beauty of a girl sitting just outside, in jeans and hooded coat, texting on her phone. She turns to look at him with big brown eyes. She feels this strange attraction too.

It seems to Romeo that she must be one of the rowdy crowd of opposing supporters - whose songs and taunts his ears have been assaulted by. Her clear allegiance to the Capulets should be enough to see him to walk on by, but he can not - he can do nothing but sit down, entranced, and bashfully ask this Capulet her name. To which she with equal bashfulness replies: 'Juliet'.

And she in turn asks his. 'Romeo' is his response.

'Like Romeo Beckham?' she asks, her voice perhaps, thinks Romeo, the loveliest that he has ever heard.

He nods his head. 'Yes,' he says. 'That's right.'



They have no more to say, but smile one to the other, then away, then back again with blushes. They are fixed there, eye to sparkling eye - hypnotised - unconscious of all else but the face they each now gaze upon.

Then comes the call from their coaches and they are in that moment released from their trance and come alive - Romeo to jog away to hear last plans and tactics for the remainder of the game, Juliet to disappear into the nearby changing-room.

Romeo does his very best to listen to the team talk but is, in truth, almost entirely distracted by thoughts of this Juliet he has so recently encountered.

And as if in answer to these thoughts, Romeo now sees the self-same Juliet run out onto the pitch to warm up before the second half. The girl he had mistaken for a supporter is revealed to be the Capulet striker - playing keepy-uppy in the centre circle.

The referee calls the players to attention and reminds them once again to play fairly and though everyone shows their agreement, nothing in the mood of either team has changed.

The whistle blows and the Montagues kick off, but Romeo is immediately dispossessed by none other than the new girl, Juliet. He tries to win it back, but Juliet appears to have the ball attached to her football boots and Romeo eventually stands staring in admiration of her skills - despite her being on the other team.

So mesmerised is Romeo, in fact, that Juliet dribbles round and past him like he was a tree, rooted to the muddy earth and by the time he registers the cries of his bewildered team mates, Juliet has dribbled round the goalie too and slotted ball to bottom corner of a gaping goal. She spins away to celebrate and her team mates' shouts and cheers are echoed by the Capulet supporters in the crowd.

This Juliet that Romeo had met outside the changing rooms is more and more revealed to be the best player of the Capulets - and probably the best upon the pitch. She is, for sure, the best player that Romeo himself has ever played against. The Montagues look on with worried frowns. Their one goal lead is now a one-all draw.

Only Romeo is, in skill, her football match - and his team mates call on him to take the ball and score another goal. 'Come on! Come on! For Montague!'

But Juliet is magical, remarkable - un-markable. She makes all other players seem as though they move in slow-, slow-motion and she at super speed. The Montagues growl in their frustration and try their best to bring her down, but she evades them all to score again, chipping the floundering goalie as he dives in desperation. Two-one to Capulet!

Romeo's team mates are not best pleased at his lack of spark or zest and shout and jeer at him and call him names too rude to mention here. The coach too yells enthusiastically and goes a little purple in the face. But try as he might, Romeo cannot take the ball from Juliet and shakes his head in wonder as she goes by him once again.

Now the Capulets, seeing that he's beaten, join in the mocking of poor Romeo. But Romeo, for his part, is too impressed by Juliet to feel upset or angry - too admiring of her skill, her grace. One Capulet gives Romeo a hefty nudge, which sends him sprawling in the mud. But even this does not in any part arouse his anger. Getting to his feet, he wipes the mud from off his face and smiles and sighs at Juliet as she jogs by.

His team mates are enraged on his behalf and Romeo's best friend takes hold of the offending Capulet and gives him in turn, a mighty shove, which sends the player, nose-first, onto the trampled ground.

The Capulets now howl in horror, when they see their team-mate struck and surge forward as one to the referee, who, left with little choice, produces a card - red to match the throbbing nose of the Capulet - and shows it to Romeo's best friend, insisting, that without delay, he must leave, at once, the field of play.

The Capulet boy gets to his feet. He wipes his sore nose upon his sleeve and smiles. It was worth it to see a Montague sent off. He tells them so and laughs and laughs. The red-carded Montague sees red again and throws himself at the jeering Capulet. Romeo snaps into life and grabs his angry friend to hold him back. But while Romeo has him tightly held, the Capulet steps up and shoves them both to earth.

The referee blows his whistle as all-out war threatens to engulf the sparring players and shows a red card to the Capulet, evening up the teams once more, as their respective coaches are forced to come onto the field and pull their red-faced, red-carded players from the pitch to the tune of shouts and threats - and lock them out of harm's way in their team buses.

Romeo is full of guilt for having caused the sending off of his best friend and this guilt is even more keenly felt when he hears the disapproving cries of his team mates and the crowd. He stands, dumbfounded, on the pitch, not knowing what to do or say.

Juliet now sees the sadness in poor Romeo's face - and feels responsible, knowing it has been her silky skills and clutch of goals that has, in part, been the cause of love-struck Romeo's misfortune. And she cares more about that than any stupid game. She there and then decides to make amends.

The referee blows his whistle to restart the game - and as soon as it sounds, Juliet lets out a cry that startles all about her, grabbing at her leg and waving to her coach - her face a pitiful contortion - a picture of her pain.

The Montagues pitilessly cheer as Juliet limps away with Romeo looking on, his guilt-clouded face made all the sadder by her untimely departure. But as she passes by, fair Juliet turns her face towards him, unseen by all but Romeo, and winks to let him know that her supposed injury is nothing but a ruse to make things better with his team-mates.

Romeo is astounded that Juliet would make this sacrifice for him and her action only serves to make him like her more. The game begins once more but Romeo has lost all interest in the game or the result - or anything in the entire world apart from Juliet - and after a few minutes he too cries out, reaching for his leg and calls to the coach to tell him he cannot continue. A substitute is sent on in his stead and Romeo limps off to that same bench beside the changing room where he had first laid eyes on Juliet.

There she is, attended by a school nurse, who searches leg for signs of muscle tear or fracture - while Juliet smiles secretly at limping Romeo who, mirroring her secret smiles, sits down beside her. The nurse moves on to Romeo but finding no sign of injury in either player, moves off with muttering and much shaking of her head.

Romeo looks at Juliet and Juliet at Romeo. Birds tweet in the trees above. The air is filled with twittering and love. They try out each other's names again and find they taste as sweet - and having had each other names upon their lips decide that they might put those same lips to another use and leaning forward, face to face, they kiss.

At this same moment, both muddied, bloodied teams stride forward at the game's end, their studded boots skidding to a screeching halt as they, dumbfounded and wide-eyed, behold their team-mates locked in this embrace of love. Ewwwww. They all agree, each one alike, that they had none of them in all their lives, seen anything so vile and sickening - and thus united in disgust, they vow to put aside their warring ways and walk on, agreeing that there never was a story of more woe, than this - of Juliet and her Romeo.