

# Beautiful Stories From Shakespeare

2

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# C O N T E N T S

## Volume I

Preface

A Brief Life of Shakespeare

- 1 Hamlet
- 2 A Midsummer Night's Dream
- 3 King Lear
- 4 The Taming of the Shrew
- 5 The Tempest
- 6 Cymbeline
- 7 As You Like It
- 8 The Comedy of Errors

Quotations From Shakespeare

# CONTENTS

## Volume 2

	Preface	4
	A Brief Life of Shakespeare	7
<b>1</b>	Romeo and Juliet	11
<b>2</b>	The Merchant of Venice	31
<b>3</b>	Macbeth	47
<b>4</b>	Twelfth Night	67
<b>5</b>	Othello	83
<b>6</b>	The Winter's Tale	105
<b>7</b>	Much Ado About Nothing	121
<b>8</b>	Measure for Measure	145
	Quotations From Shakespeare	164

# Preface

The writings of Shakespeare have been justly termed “the richest, the purest, the fairest, that genius uninspired ever penned.” Shakespeare instructed by delighting. His plays alone (leaving mere science out of the question), contain more actual wisdom than the whole body of English learning.

He is the teacher of all good—pity, generosity, true courage, love. His bright wit is cut out “into little stars.” His solid masses of knowledge are meted out in morsels and proverbs, and thus distributed, there is scarcely a corner of the English-speaking world to-day which he does not illuminate, or a cottage which he does not enrich.

His bounty is like the sea, which, though often unacknowledged, is everywhere felt. As his friend, Ben Jonson, wrote of him, “He was not of an age but for all time.” He ever kept the highroad of human life whereon all travel. He did not pick out by-paths of feeling and sentiment.

In his creations we have no moral highwaymen, sentimental thieves, interesting villains, and amiable, elegant adventuresses—no delicate entanglements of situation, in which the grossest images are presented to the mind disguised under the superficial attraction of style and sentiment.

He flattered no bad passion, disguised no vice in the garb of virtue, trifled with no just and generous principle. While causing us to laugh at folly, and shudder at crime, he still preserves our love for our fellow-beings, and our reverence for ourselves.

Shakespeare was familiar with all beautiful forms and images, with all that is sweet or majestic in the simple aspects of nature, of that indestructible love of flowers and fragrance, and dews, and clear waters—and soft airs and sounds, and bright skies and woodland solitudes, and moon-light bowers, which are the material elements of poetry,—and with that fine sense of their indefinable relation to mental emotion, which is its essence and vivifying soul—and which, in the midst of his most busy and tragical scenes, falls like gleams of sunshine on rocks and ruins—contrasting with all that is rugged or repulsive, and reminding us of the existence of purer and brighter elements.

These things considered, what wonder is it that the works of Shakespeare, next to the Bible, are the most highly esteemed of all the classics of English literature. “So extensively have the characters of Shakespeare been drawn upon by artists, poets, and writers of fiction,” says an American author,—“So interwoven are these characters in the great body of English literature, that to be ignorant of the plot of these dramas is often a cause of embarrassment.” But Shakespeare wrote for grown-up people, for men and women, and in words that little folks cannot understand.

Hence this volume. To reproduce the entertaining stories contained in the plays of Shakespeare, in a form so simple that young people can understand and enjoy them, was the object had in view by the author of these Beautiful Stories from Shakespeare.

E.T.R.



William Shakespeare  
(1564-1616)

*It may be said of Shakespeare, that from his works may be collected a system of civil and economical prudence. He has been imitated by all succeeding writers; and it may be doubted whether from all his successors more maxims of theoretical knowledge, or more rules of practical prudence can be collected than he alone has given to his country.*

*—Dr. Samuel Johnson*



Samuel Johnson  
(1709-1784)



Shakespeare's birthplace in Stratford

## A BRIEF LIFE OF SHAKESPEARE

In the register of baptisms of the parish church of Stratford-upon-Avon, a market town in Warwickshire, England, appears, under date of April 26, 1564, the entry of the baptism of William, the son of John Shakespeare. The entry is in Latin—"Gulielmus filius Johannis Shakespeare."

The date of William Shakespeare's birth has usually been taken as three days before his baptism, but there is certainly no evidence of this fact. The family name was variously spelled, the dramatist himself not always spelling it in the same way. While in the baptismal record the name is spelled "Shakespeare," in several authentic autographs of the dramatist it reads "Shaksper," and in the first edition of his works it is printed "Shakespeare."



Halliwell tells us, that there are not less than thirty-four ways in which the various members of the Shakespeare family wrote the name.

Shakespeare's father, while an alderman at Stratford, appears to have been unable to write his name, but as at that time nine men out of ten were content to make their mark for a signature, the fact is not specially to his discredit.

The traditions and other sources of information about the occupation of Shakespeare's father differ. He is described as a butcher, a wool-stapler, and a glover, and it is not impossible that he may have been all of these simultaneously or at different times, or that if he could not properly be called any one of them, the nature of his occupation was such as to make it easy to understand how the various traditions sprang up.

He was a landed proprietor and cultivator of his own land even before his marriage, and he received with his wife, who was Mary Arden, daughter of a country gentleman, the estate of Asbies, 56 acres in extent.

William was the third child. The two older than he were daughters, and both probably died in infancy. After him was born three sons and a daughter. For ten or twelve years at least, after Shakespeare's birth his father continued to be in easy circumstances. In the year 1568 he was the high bailiff or chief magistrate of Stratford, and for many years afterwards he held the position of alderman as he had done for three years before.

To the completion of his tenth year, therefore, it is natural to suppose that William Shakespeare would get the best education that Stratford could afford. The free



school of the town was open to all boys and like all the grammar-schools of that time, was under the direction of men who, as graduates of the universities, were qualified to diffuse that sound scholarship which was once the boast of England.

There is no record of Shakespeare's having been at this school, but there can be no rational doubt that he was educated there. His father could not have procured for him a better education anywhere. To those who have studied Shakespeare's works without being influenced by the old traditional theory that he had received a very narrow education, they abound with evidences that he must have been solidly grounded in the learning, properly so called, was taught in the grammar schools.

Nor was Stratford shut out from the general world, as many country towns are. It was a great highway, and dealers with every variety of merchandise resorted to its markets. The eyes of the poet dramatist must always have been open for observation. But nothing is known positively of Shakespeare from his birth to his marriage to Anne Hathaway in 1582, and from that date nothing but the birth of three children until we find him an actor in London about 1589.

How long acting continued to be Shakespeare's sole profession we have no means of knowing, but it is in the highest degree probable that very soon after arriving in London he began that work of adaptation by which he is known to have begun his literary career.

To improve and alter older plays not up to the standard that was required at the time was a common practice even among the best dramatists of the day, and

Shakespeare's abilities would speedily mark him out as eminently fitted for this kind of work. When the alterations in plays originally composed by other writers became very extensive, the work of adaptation would become in reality a work of creation. And this is exactly what we have examples of in a few of Shakespeare's early works, which are known to have been founded on older plays.

It is unnecessary here to extol the published works of the world's greatest dramatist. Criticism has been exhausted upon them, and the finest minds of England, Germany, and America have devoted their powers to an elucidation of their worth.

Shakespeare died at Stratford on the 23rd of April, 1616. Shakespeare's fellow-actors, fellow-dramatists, and those who knew him in other ways, agree in expressing not only admiration of his genius, but their respect and love for the man. Ben Jonson said, "I love the man, and do honor his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any. He was indeed honest, and of an open and free nature."

He was buried on the second day after his death, on the north side of the chancel of Stratford church. Over

his grave there is a flat stone with this inscription, said to have been written by himself:

*Good friend for Jesus sake forbear  
To digg the dust enclosed heare:  
Blest be ye man yt spares these  
stones,  
And curst be he yt moves my bones.*



Shakespeare's funerary monument

1

Romeo  
and  
Juliet

Once upon a time there lived in Verona two great families named Montagu and Capulet. They were both rich, and I suppose they were as sensible<sup>1</sup>, in most things, as other rich people. But in one thing they were extremely silly. There was an old, old quarrel between the two families, and instead of making it up like reasonable folks, they made a sort of pet<sup>2</sup> of their quarrel, and would not let it die out<sup>3</sup>.



So that a Montagu wouldn't speak to a Capulet if he met one in the street—nor a Capulet to a Montagu—or if they did speak, it was to say rude and unpleasant things, which often ended in a fight.

And their relations and servants were just as foolish, so that street fights and duels<sup>4</sup> and uncomfortablenesses of that kind were always growing out of the Montagu-and-Capulet quarrel.

Now Lord Capulet, the head of that family, gave a party—a grand<sup>5</sup> supper and a dance—and he was so hospitable<sup>6</sup> that he said anyone might come to it except (of course) the Montagues.

But there was a young Montagu named Romeo, who very much wanted to be there, because Rosaline, the lady he loved, had been asked.

This lady had never been at all kind to him, and he had no reason to love her; but the fact was that he wanted to love somebody, and as he hadn't seen the right lady, he was obliged to love the wrong one. So to the Capulet's grand party he came, with his friends Mercutio and Benvolio.



- 1 sensible ['sensɪbəl] (a.) having sound reason and judgment
- 2 pet [pet] (n.) a fit of sulkiness
- 3 die out: to become less common and finally stop existing
- 4 duel ['du:əl] (n.) a fight with weapons between two people, used in the past to settle a quarrel
- 5 grand [grænd] (a.) splendid in style and appearance
- 6 hospitable ['hɑ:spɪtəbəl] (a.) friendly, welcoming, and generous to guests or strangers

Old Capulet welcomed him and his two friends very kindly—and young Romeo moved about among the crowd of courtly<sup>7</sup> folk dressed in their velvets<sup>8</sup> and satins<sup>9</sup>, the men with jeweled<sup>10</sup> sword hilts<sup>11</sup> and collars, and the ladies with brilliant gems on breast and arms, and stones of price set in their bright girdles<sup>12</sup>.



The ladies with brilliant gems on breast and arms, and stones of price set in their bright girdles

Romeo was in his best too, and though he wore a black mask over his eyes and nose, everyone could see by his mouth and his hair, and the way he held his head, that he was twelve times handsomer than anyone else in the room.

Presently amid the dancers he saw a lady so beautiful and so lovable that from that moment he never again gave one thought to that Rosaline whom he had thought he loved.

7 courtly ['kɔ:rtli] (a.) polite, graceful and formal in behaviour

8 velvet ['velvɪt] (n.) fabric with soft lustrous pile

And he looked at this other fair lady, as she moved in the dance in her satin and pearls, and all the world seemed vain and worthless to him compared with her.

And he was saying this, or something like it, when Tybalt, Lady Capulet's nephew, hearing his voice, knew him to be Romeo.

Tybalt, being very angry, went at once to his uncle, and told him how a Montagu had come uninvited to the feast; but old Capulet was too fine a gentleman to be discourteous<sup>13</sup> to any man under his own roof, and he bade Tybalt be quiet. But this young man only waited for a chance to quarrel with Romeo.



- 9 satin ['sætɪn] (n.) a type of cloth that is very smooth and shiny  
 10 jeweled ['dʒu:əld] (a.) decorated with jewels  
 11 hilt [hɪlt] (n.) the handle of a sword or knife, where the blade is attached  
 12 girdle ['gɜ:rdl] (n.) a long strip of cloth worn tied around the waist  
 13 discourteous [dɪs'kɜ:rtiəs] (a.) behavior or an action that is bad-mannered or impolite





In the meantime Romeo made his way to the fair lady, and told her in sweet words that he loved her, and kissed her. Just then her mother sent for<sup>14</sup> her, and then Romeo found out that the lady on whom he had set his heart's hopes was Juliet, the daughter of Lord Capulet, his sworn foe. So he went away, sorrowing indeed, but loving her none the less.

Then Juliet said to her nurse, “Who is that gentleman that would not dance?”

“His name is Romeo, and a Montagu, the only son of your great enemy,” answered the nurse.

Then Juliet went to her room, and looked out of her window, over the beautiful green-grey garden, where the moon was shining. And Romeo was hidden in that garden among the trees—because he could not bear to go right away without trying to see her again.

So she—not knowing him to be there—spoke her secret thought aloud, and told the quiet garden how she loved Romeo.



And Romeo heard and was glad beyond measure. Hidden below, he looked up and saw her fair face in the moonlight, framed in the blossoming creepers<sup>15</sup> that grew round her window, and as he looked and listened, he felt as though he had been carried away in a dream, and set down by some magician in that beautiful and enchanted garden.

“Ah—why are you called Romeo?” said Juliet. “Since I love you, what does it matter what you are called?”

“Call me but love, and I’ll be new baptized<sup>16</sup>—henceforth I never will be Romeo,” he cried, stepping into the full white moonlight from the shade of the cypresses<sup>17</sup> and oleanders<sup>18</sup> that had hidden him.

She was frightened at first, but when she saw that it was Romeo himself, and no stranger, she too was glad, and, he standing in the garden below and she leaning from the window, they spoke long together, each one trying to find the sweetest words in the world, to make that pleasant talk that lovers use.

14 sent for: order, request, or command to come

15 creeper [ˈkriːpər] (n.) a plant that grows along the ground, or up walls or trees

16 baptize [ˈbæptɪz] (v.) to perform the ceremony of baptism on someone

17 cypress [ˈaɪprɪs] (n.) a tree with dark green leaves and hard wood, which does not lose its leaves in winter

18 oleander [ˌoʊliˈændər] (n.) an evergreen Mediterranean tree or bush with strong leaves and white, red or pink flowers



And the tale of all they said, and the sweet music their voices made together, is all set down in a golden book, where you may read it for yourselves some day. And the time passed so quickly, as it does for folk who love each other and are together, that when the time came to part, it seemed as though they had met but that moment—and indeed they hardly knew how to part.

“I will send to you tomorrow,” said Juliet.

And so at last, with lingering<sup>19</sup> and longing, they said good-bye. Juliet went into her room, and a dark curtain hid her bright window. Romeo went away through the still and dewy<sup>20</sup> garden like a man in a dream.



They tried to find the sweetest words in the world, to make that pleasant talk that lovers use.

<sup>19</sup> lingering [ˈlɪŋgəɪŋ] (n.) to delay leaving somewhere because of reluctance to go

<sup>20</sup> dewy [ˈduːɪ] (a.) wet with drops of dew





The next morning, very early, Romeo went to Friar<sup>21</sup> Laurence, a priest, and, telling him all the story, begged him to marry him to Juliet without delay. And this, after some talk, the priest consented<sup>22</sup> to do.

So when Juliet sent her old nurse to Romeo that day to know what he purposed to do, the old woman took back a message that all was well, and all things ready for the marriage of Juliet and Romeo on the next morning.



Juliet and her nurse

The young lovers were afraid to ask their parents' consent to their marriage, as young people should do, because of this foolish old quarrel between the Capulets and the Montagues.

And Friar Laurence was willing to help the young lovers secretly, because he thought that when they were once married their parents might soon be told, and that the match might put a happy end to the old quarrel.

<sup>21</sup> friar [ˈfraɪər] (n.) a man belonging to one of several Roman Catholic religious groups, whose members often promise to stay poor

<sup>22</sup> consent [kənˈsent] (v.) to give formal permission for something to happen

So the next morning early, Romeo and Juliet were married at Friar Laurence's cell, and parted with tears and kisses. And Romeo promised to come into the garden that evening, and the nurse got ready a rope-ladder to let down from the window, so that Romeo could climb up and talk to his dear wife quietly and alone.

But that very day a dreadful thing happened.

Tybalt, the young man who had been so vexed<sup>23</sup> at Romeo's going to the Capulet's feast, met him and his two friends, Mercutio and Benvolio, in the street, called Romeo a villain<sup>24</sup>, and asked him to fight.

Romeo had no wish to fight with Juliet's cousin, but Mercutio drew his sword, and he and Tybalt fought. And Mercutio was killed.

When Romeo saw that this friend was dead, he forgot everything except anger at the man who had killed him, and he and Tybalt fought till Tybalt fell dead.



Romeo and Juliet were married at Friar Laurence's cell.

<sup>23</sup> vexed [vɛkst] (a.) provoked to slight annoyance or anxiety

<sup>24</sup> villain ['vɪləɪn] (n.) a bad person who harms other people or breaks the law

So, on the very day of his wedding, Romeo killed his dear Juliet's cousin, and was sentenced to be banished<sup>25</sup>.

Poor Juliet and her young husband met that night indeed; he climbed the rope-ladder among the flowers, and found her window, but their meeting was a sad one, and they parted with bitter tears and hearts heavy, because they could not know when they should meet again.

Now Juliet's father, who, of course, had no idea that she was married, wished her to wed a gentleman named Paris, and was so angry when she refused, that she hurried away to ask Friar Laurence what she should do.



Poor Juliet and her young husband met that night.

<sup>25</sup> banish [ˈbæɪnɪʃ] (v.) to send someone away, especially from their country, and forbid them to come back





He advised her to pretend to consent, and then he said, “I will give you a draught<sup>26</sup> that will make you seem to be dead for two days, and then when they take you to church it will be to bury you, and not to marry you. They will put you in the vault<sup>27</sup> thinking you are dead, and before you wake up Romeo and I will be there to take care of you. Will you do this, or are you afraid?”

“I will do it; talk not to me of fear!” said Juliet.

And she went home and told her father she would marry Paris. If she had spoken out and told her father the truth . . . well, then this would have been a different story.

Lord Capulet was very much pleased to get his own way, and set about inviting his friends and getting the wedding feast ready. Everyone stayed up all night, for there was a great deal to do, and very little time to do it in.



“Will you do this, or are you afraid?”

<sup>26</sup> draught [dræft] (n.) the amount of air, liquid, or smoke taken in in a single breath or swallow

<sup>27</sup> vault [vɔ:lt] (n.) a room where people from the same family are buried, often under the floor of a church





“I will do it; talk not to me of fear!” said Juliet.

Lord Capulet was anxious to get Juliet married because he saw she was very unhappy. Of course she was really fretting<sup>28</sup> about her husband Romeo, but her father thought she was grieving for the death of her cousin Tybalt, and he thought marriage would give her something else to think about.

Early in the morning the nurse came to call Juliet, and to dress her for her wedding; but she would not wake, and at last the nurse cried out suddenly—

“Alas<sup>29</sup>! alas! help! help! my lady’s dead! Oh, well-a-day that ever I was born!”

Lady Capulet came running in, and then Lord Capulet, and Lord Paris, the bridegroom. There lay Juliet cold and white and lifeless, and all their weeping could not wake her. So it was a burying that day instead of a marrying.

Meantime Friar Laurence had sent a messenger to Mantua with a letter to Romeo telling him of all these things; and all would have been well, only the messenger was delayed, and could not go.

But ill news travels fast. Romeo’s servant who knew the secret of the marriage, but not of Juliet’s pretended death, heard of her funeral, and hurried to Mantua to tell Romeo how his young wife was dead and lying in the grave.

<sup>28</sup> fret [fret] (v.) to be anxious or worried

<sup>29</sup> alas [ə'la:s] (int.) used to express sadness, shame, or fear

“Is it so?” cried Romeo, heart-broken. “Then I will lie by Juliet’s side tonight.”

And he bought himself a poison, and went straight back to Verona. He hastened to the tomb where Juliet was lying. It was not a grave, but a vault.

He broke open the door, and was just going down the stone steps that led to the vault where all the dead Capulets lay, when he heard a voice behind him calling on him to stop. It was the Count Paris, who was to have married Juliet that very day.

“How dare you come here and disturb the dead bodies of the Capulets, you vile Montagu?” cried Paris.

Poor Romeo, half mad with sorrow, yet tried to answer gently.

“You were told,” said Paris, “that if you returned to Verona you must die.”

“I must indeed,” said Romeo. “I came here for nothing else. Good, gentle youth—leave me! Oh, go—before I do you any harm! I love you better than myself—go—leave me here—“

Then Paris said, “I defy<sup>30</sup> you, and I arrest you as a felon<sup>31</sup>,” and Romeo, in his anger and despair, drew his sword.

30 defy [di'fai] (v.) to act or be against, a person, decision, law, situation, etc

31 felon ['felən] (n.) someone who is guilty of a serious crime

They fought, and Paris was killed. As Romeo's sword pierced him, Paris cried—

“Oh, I am slain<sup>32</sup>! If thou<sup>33</sup> be merciful<sup>34</sup>, open the tomb, and lay me with Juliet!”

And Romeo said, “In faith I will.”

And he carried the dead man into the tomb and laid him by the dear Juliet's side.

Then he kneeled by Juliet and spoke to her, and held her in his arms, and kissed her cold lips, believing that she was dead, while all the while she was coming nearer and nearer to the time of her awakening. Then he drank the poison, and died beside his sweetheart and wife.



Romeo kneeled by Juliet and spoke to her.

32 slain [sleɪn] past participle of slay

33 thou [ðəʊ] (pron.) nominative singular of the personal pronoun of the second person; you

34 merciful [ˈmɜːrsɪfəl] (a.) showing mercy or compassion to somebody

Now came Friar Laurence when it was too late, and saw all that had happened—and then poor Juliet woke out of her sleep to find her husband and her friend both dead beside her.

The noise of the fight had brought other folks to the place too, and Friar Laurence, hearing them, ran away, and Juliet was left alone.

She saw the cup that had held the poison, and knew how all had happened, and since no poison was left for her, she drew her Romeo's dagger<sup>35</sup> and thrust it through her heart—and so, falling with her head on her Romeo's breast, she died.

And here ends the story of these faithful and most unhappy lovers.



35 dagger ['dægəɹ] (n.) a short pointed knife used as a weapon





Falling with her head on her Romeo's breast, she died.

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And when the old folks knew from Friar Laurence of all that had befallen<sup>36</sup>, they sorrowed exceedingly, and now, seeing all the mischief<sup>37</sup> their wicked quarrel had wrought<sup>38</sup>, they repented them of it, and over the bodies of their dead children they clasped<sup>39</sup> hands at last, in friendship and forgiveness.

36 befall [bi'fɑ:l] (v.) to happen, or happen to somebody, especially through the unexpected workings of chance or fate

37 mischief ['mɪstʃɪf] (n.) to deliberately cause quarrels or unfriendly feelings between people

38 wrought [rɔ:t] (v.) past tense & past participle of work

39 clasp [klæsp] (v.) to hold someone or something tightly, closing your fingers or arms around them