

11 VARIATIONS ON FRIAR JOHN'S FAILURE

by Yuri Baranovsky

Characters

FRIAR JOHN

TOM SAWYER

Scene

In *Romeo and Juliet*, Friar John is charged to deliver a letter to Romeo telling him of Juliet's false demise. The Friar is supposedly waylaid by a break out of plague—but what is the real reason? In this variation, instead of plague, Friar John bumps into a young boy named Tom Sawyer, who offers him what sounds like a very fair trade...

(FRIAR JOHN enters, walking swiftly from stage right, and off, to stage left. A teenager sits near a fence, and paints it quietly on the opposite side of the stage. FRIAR JOHN slowly backs up, and looks at TOM SAWYER with curiosity.)

FRIAR JOHN. Good day, sire. What doest thou 'pon this road?

TOM SAWYER. Ain't it obvious, mister?

FRIAR JOHN. Nay, nay, 't isn't.

(TOM ignores him, continues painting.)

FRIAR JOHN. I shall say it again, sire, for thou didst hear me not. Nay, I do not understand thine activity.

TOM SAWYER. I'm whitewashin' this 'ere fence, mister.

FRIAR JOHN. Whitewashing? Thou dost speak of things which I have yet to hear, art thou mad or simply dumb?

TOM SAWYER. You ain't from 'round here, are ye?

FRIAR JOHN. I hail from Verona.

TOM SAWYER. Long way away from home then.

FRIAR JOHN. Aye. The duties of a Friar do often take him places that only God has seen!

TOM SAWYER. And the people livin' in those places.

FRIAR JOHN. Pardon?

TOM SAWYER. God, and the people livin' in those places.

(There is a pause; they stare at each other.)

FRIAR JOHN. Right.

(There is more silence. TOM shrugs, and begins to paint the fence again. FRIAR JOHN watches him curiously.)

FRIAR JOHN. An interesting activity, that. *(Pause.)* One I have yet to attempt in mine busy life, busied as I am with chores, blessings...baptizing stuff. *(Pause.)* I wonder if such a skill is taught in Verona, or if thou didst acquire it in thy short youth, and didst develop such a knack that thou dost do so for a living.

TOM SAWYER. *(Looks up at him:)* Are you still talkin'? Why, I ain't even notice ye, so involved am I in th'fence. Th'fence is fun. I love this fence. If I was older, an' my aunt let me, I'd marry it.

FRIAR JOHN. The fence?

TOM SAWYER. Yeah.

FRIAR JOHN. Yes...well... I would be on my way, then. I shall deliver this letter thusly and return to my duties—I can see thou'rt the busy lad, working as you are. Adieu. *(Begins to walk off.)*

TOM SAWYER. Work? Whattaya call work?

FRIAR JOHN. Why, good sir, do not you, with thy well-worn practitioner's hand know the likes of work? *(Points at the fence:)* That, sir, is work!

TOM SAWYER. Well, maybe it is. And maybe it ain't. You'll never know though, 'cause you ain't ever gonna do it. *(Suddenly very excited:)* Oh!

FRIAR JOHN. What!

TOM SAWYER. Didja see that?!

FRIAR JOHN. Nay, what?!

TOM SAWYER. Aw. Nevermind. Ya gotta be paintin' t'see it. It was real neat though.

FRIAR JOHN. *(Looks at him skeptically:)* Surely, sir, you do not speak of liking such a task! Verily, 'tis one of little diversity, and indeed, a matter of much tedium.

TOM SAWYER. Liking it? How many days does a boy jus' get to white-wash a fence? Normally, you'd say, what, three? four days? But you'd be wrong. It's one. Just one.

FRIAR JOHN. *(Watches TOM silently.)* Good sir, what would it take thee to allow me feel of such a fence, and indeed, perhaps spend a bit doing thine own task?

TOM SAWYER. Mm. I dunno if I can let ye do that. M'aunt's particular 'bout her fence. 'Specially 'bout the people who do it. See, I got a practiced

hand, and one outta a thousand others can do it the way she wants it t'be done. And frankly, we don't often trust weird speakin' folks from...Veroner?

FRIAR JOHN. Dear sir, how thou dost tease me with thy cruel words. It is as if thou didst unleash thy very blade 'pon my heart, and struck me thus—an old man Friar—'pon my dignity. Surely, you would allow me to prove that I am capable of such a task as you yourself perform forthwith!

TOM SAWYER. Mm. It'll cost ye...

FRIAR JOHN. This robe? I'd gladly—

TOM SAWYER. Nah. Nah.

FRIAR JOHN. My shoes, here, here—

TOM SAWYER. Nah! No shoes.

FRIAR JOHN. *(Sighs.)* My hair then, aye. 'Twill be but a moment. *(Takes out a knife and puts it against hair.)*

TOM SAWYER. Nah! Nah. I just want th'letter.

FRIAR JOHN. Oh, sir, I cannot—

TOM SAWYER. Then no deal.

FRIAR JOHN. How unfairly the fates do rule this land! Come, sir. Another offer?

TOM SAWYER. Letter, or you ain't got a deal.

FRIAR JOHN. Alack, alack, I am undone! Here, sire. Take it. Take it. Take it!

(FRIAR JOHN hands TOM the letter, TOM hands FRIAR JOHN the paintbrush.)

TOM SAWYER. Top o' the morn t'ye then. *(Exits.)*

(FRIAR JOHN kneels next to fence, begins painting. A moment passes—to audience.)

FRIAR JOHN. This isn't so fun. *(Pauses, in thought.)* Methinks a piece of particularly horrid tomfoolery hath befallen me. I've been made a tomfool!

(Sighs, and continues working.)

Woe is me.

DOWN CAME THE RAIN

by Burgess Clark

Characters

MICHAEL, 18. Softly rugged. Medium build. A young man of simple good looks, he is very tolerant—yet can be rather cruel at times. Despite all the turmoil he loves Brucie deeply.

BRUCIE, 14. Michael's brother. Small; frail. Considered mentally “slow” since birth. He depends on Michael for everything, holding simple love and admiration for him.

Scene

Michael and Brucie are in the midst of a brotherly camping trip. Brucie's endless series of questions, especially regarding their dead mother, is beginning to tip Michael's patience to the breaking point.

(A remote campsite in full. It is early evening. A tent dominates the upper portion of the stage. A small circle of stones representing a fire ring is in the lower section. Otherwise, requirements are few. Several camping articles are scattered around the site, such as a cooler, a spread-out sleeping bag, and so on. Small pieces of trash give a general feeling of carelessness about the space.)

(The stage is empty as the lights slowly rise. A bird calls in the far-off distance. Crickets and other general nature noises prevail.)

(The two sit for a moment.)

BRUCIE. What did Mama look like?

MICHAEL. I told you. I don't remember.

BRUCIE. You don't remember anything about her?

MICHAEL. I didn't say that.

BRUCIE. You do remember something about her?

(MICHAEL shrugs.)

Tell me, Mickey. What do you remember?

MICHAEL. *(Rising.)* Naw...

BRUCIE. Please?