

CAPULET AND MESSENGER

The MESSENGER gives a big sigh and considers going after CAPULET to explain his problem. He thinks better of it. He sneaks off in the opposite direction.

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NICHOLAS AND JOHN

PLAY: The Canterbury Tales
originally by Geoffrey Chaucer
GENRE: Comedy
TIME: 4:30

DESCRIPTION

This scene comes from the Miller's Tale. John, a rich carpenter, enters to see Nicholas, a student, sitting staring into space. Nicholas is interested in John's wife, Allison. In order to separate John from his wife, Nicholas creates an elaborate scheme: He tricks John into thinking another flood is imminent.

ACTING HINTS

Both characters think they are smarter than the other. Both characters think the other is a fool. Both characters are willing to do anything for Allison. How does that affect the way you play the scene?

It's important that Nicholas is, for the most part, sincere. Choose your moments when he reveals to the audience his true motives. Otherwise, it won't make sense that John believes him so wholeheartedly.

NICHOLAS sits on the floor in a daze. JOHN enters.

JOHN: By Saint Thomas, Nicholas, we have not seen you for a day and a night. What is wrong with you? My servant boy says you are just sitting here in your chamber as if you were staring on the new moon. You neither speak, nor move nor eat. *(he gives a big sniff)* Nor bathe. *(he pokes NICHOLAS)* By Saint Thomas he has had some fit. *(He pokes NICHOLAS again. NICHOLAS falls over.)* It is this astronomy you study by Saint Frideswide. There will be no more of that. *(clapping and stamping by NICHOLAS' ear)* What Nicholas! What ho! Look about! You have been bewitched! The stars have bewitched you! *(dancing about, looking generally foolish)* I defend thee from elves and evil spirits! I banish all from my threshold! Bless this house from every wicked thing! *(still dancing about)* Hey ho! Hey ho!

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NICHOLAS: *(with a deep and heavy sigh)* Alas.

JOHN: Nicholas! Speak again boy.

NICHOLAS: Shall all the world be lost again so soon?

JOHN: What are you talking about?

NICHOLAS: *(grabbing hold of JOHN's shirt)* I must speak with you in private. Are we in private? There is a thing that touches us all and I will tell no other man but you.

JOHN: *(looking around)* Steady son, we are truly alone.

NICHOLAS: John. My host. My life and dear. Swear to me that you shall tell no one, NO ONE, what I am about to share with you.

JOHN: I swear.

NICHOLAS: On your life!

JOHN: On my life!

NICHOLAS: For if you tell another soul you will be utterly lost. If you betray me, vengeance will rain down upon you and make you mad.

JOHN: Merciful heaven!

NICHOLAS: Do you understand me, John?

JOHN: I do. I swear. I do not tell tales or secrets. You can ask any man. Say what you will, I will never tell it to anyone, not even to my wife.

NICHOLAS: That is deep swearing indeed. *(He looks around again and brings JOHN downstage. He speaks in a loud whisper.)* I do not lie, John, when I say I have found in my astrology, when I have looked into the bright moon, that on Monday next, at nine o'clock at night... *(He stops and looks around again. JOHN also does*

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this.) On Monday next, at nine o'clock at night there shall fall a rain so wild and fierce it will rival the rains that fell on Noah.

JOHN: No!

NICHOLAS: Yes! In less than an hour the whole world will be wet from this hideous shower. All mankind shall be drowned. All mankind shall lose their lives.

JOHN: No!

NICHOLAS: Yes!

JOHN: Merciful heavens! And my wife? My poor Allison, will she be drowned too?

NICHOLAS: Is she part of all mankind?

JOHN: I fear she is.

NICHOLAS: Then the answer is, yes.

JOHN: No!

NICHOLAS: Now you know why I sit here without a wink of sleep, nor a morsel of food can I eat. *(he sniffs his armpit)* I could bathe, though; you're right about that.

JOHN: Is there no way to save ourselves? There must be something we can do!

NICHOLAS: There is, John. *(He looks around and moves JOHN to the other side of the stage.)* But you must not follow your instincts. You must not act on what your logic tells you to do. If you follow my instructions you will not be sorry. If you follow my advice to the letter and not deviate from it one inch, I will save you and *(he gives a little cough)* Allison and me.

JOHN: *(embracing NICHOLAS in a bear hug)* Bless you, bless you,

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bless you! You are a good man, Nicholas! A good man indeed.
What must we do?

NICHOLAS: First let me go.

JOHN: Oh! Sorry man.

NICHOLAS: Next, go right away into your house and fetch three wooden buckets; one for each of us. See that they are large enough so when the time comes we may float away.

JOHN: Excellent plan!

NICHOLAS: Then, you must gather food and drink enough for one day.

JOHN: One day? Won't we need much more than that?

NICHOLAS: Oh I'm fairly sure the water will drain away quite quickly. Remember! There is no logic here! Remember! No one must know about this. Not your serving boy, nor your maid.

JOHN: No one.

NICHOLAS: Do not ask me why there is such secrecy. Unless you want to make yourself mad, you'll follow me to the letter.

JOHN: I will, I will. Anything to save my dear, sweet, beautiful Allison.

NICHOLAS: When you have the three vats, hang them from the roof as high as you can, so no man will see what we are doing.

JOHN: But wait! Why do we need three boats? Allison and I will be in the same one.

NICHOLAS: NO! No, no, no!

JOHN: Why?

NICHOLAS: You must not. We all must be in *(he gives a little cough)*

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separate boats. That is the most important part of the plan.

JOHN: But...

NICHOLAS: There is a higher power that wants it so and you must not ask any more questions! Remember...

JOHN: Yes, yes, do not use logic. How stupid of me!

NICHOLAS: And one more thing. Once the time has come and we are in our makeshift boats, none of us may speak a word. Not a word, John. Do you understand?

JOHN: Yes. Silence is a virtue, right?

NICHOLAS: Right. You are such a wise man, John. I knew I would be able to count on you. Now go and godspeed.

JOHN: Godspeed to you as well, Nicholas. I thank the heavens that you are in my house this day.

They clasp hands and exit in opposite directions.

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