

The Dead Feverfew Flower Effect:

A Modernization of Act II, Scene iii of *Romeo and Juliet*

By Haley Petcher

Lawrence liked to arrive on campus long before students crowded the concourse. He could avoid the talentless strumming of guitars, flyers from campus political organizations, and jeers from the school's rivaling fraternity and sorority. He had to admit to himself that the fraternity and sorority's feud was his main reason for his early arrival. Their constant shouting matches about who will win the annual campus scavenger hunt irritated him. He often wondered if he, as a counselor, should do something to fix the problem, but in the end he always decided that avoiding these monstrosities at all costs was the best possible solution. Without the students, the campus was lifeless and the world felt slow and silent.

Just two years ago, he would have had to take a bus to campus since he was just a student, but now Lawrence walked only a short distance from his car to his office. He kept his hands in his pockets, his eyes examining the cracks in the sidewalk, and his briefcase slung over his shoulder. He rarely had to look up.

Lawrence would walk up three flights of stairs in his building, turn to his left, pass four empty offices of the other college counselors, and enter his office. When he reached his office, Lawrence would place his briefcase beside his desk and walk over to his windowsill where his three pots of feverfew flowers sat. The sun's early morning rays shone through the drooping leaves of the small potted plants, leaving streaks of light on his desk. He watered his limp herbs every morning. Recently he began speaking to them, hoping they would regain their spring.

“Have you not had enough water?” he asked, lifting one of the flowers with his pointer finger and cocking his head to one side and then to the other. “I don’t want to give you too much, you know. ‘Too much of a good thing’ and all of that. But still, you’re drooping, so why not?”

Lawrence began tilting the watering can above his plants when he heard shuffling feet at his door.

“So, do your plants talk back to you?” a voice asked.

Lawrence jumped, letting some water escape from the watering can.

Ro, one of Lawrence’s regular senior visitors, leaned against the doorframe. He was the only likeable brother from the feuding fraternity.

“Maybe I should have knocked.”

Lawrence looked out his window and saw no one on the concourse. He looked at his clock and frowned.

“Isn’t it a bit early, Ro?” He straightened his back, put the watering can down, and walked toward his desk. “You look like you’ve been up all night. Actually, didn’t I see you in those clothes yesterday?”

Ro crossed his arms, furrowed his brow, and tapped his chin with his finger.

“Yes. Yes, that’s likely,” he said, quickly changing to a smile. “But it’s okay. I feel refreshed. Invigorated. Born again!”

“Oh, don’t—“ Lawrence started. He cleared his throat and deepened his voice. “Do *not* tell me you were with Rona.”

“Rona? I’ve forgotten her.” He brushed off his shirt. “Just as I’ve forgotten all feelings for her.”

“Splendid!” Lawrence said. He thought, *Our last session on embracing independence and channeling the art of yoga must have worked. Thank God for Google!*

“Why don’t you sit down?” Lawrence gestured to the chair in front of his desk. Ro jumped into the chair. Lawrence sat down in his swivel chair behind his desk and straightened his back, making himself taller. He inched to the edge of his chair, clasped his hands together, and placed them neatly on his desk.

“So, tell me where you’ve been—how you’ve ended your infatuation with Rona. Let everything out.” Lawrence glanced at his desk and realized that *How to Give Good Advice for Dummies: 5th Edition* was still on his desk. He slowly slid some of his counseling brochures over the book and returned his attention to Ro, who had leaned forward in his chair.

“Last night, Mark, one of my brothers, forced me to join them on a quest—a quest to steal our rival’s prized unicorn plush toy that each president has taken care of since the 1950s. We snuck into their house during their masquerade social. I didn’t want to, but I was following your advice, trying to distract myself. I had to, anyway, since I’m the VP. So, I was walking along, surveying the area. And then I saw this girl—Jules—dressed completely in white. Her mask had lace. She deserved a crown, but she didn’t wear one. Neither of us carried arrows, but we both left with wounds. We need you to heal us—and heal my brothers and her sisters.”

“I have my degree, but I’m not sure I’m following you.”

“I love Jules, and she loves me,” Ro said, patting his hand on his heart. “And you”—he pointed at Lawrence—“need to serve as a witness in our wedding at the courthouse today. No one else I know is the right age outside of my fraternity and her sorority.”

“We talked about your love for Rona yesterday. And the day before yesterday.”

Lawrence frowned.

“She’s only one of the twinkling lights on a string compared to Jules, unable to give light to even half a room. She didn’t love me.” Ro paused, put his elbow on Lawrence’s desk, and rested his head on his hand.

“Jules is brighter than all the twinkling lights strung about a house on Christmas—so bright that she could become the sun, able to give light and warmth to an entire planet and its population. She loves me.”

At least I directed him to the right major, Lawrence thought. He’ll make a decent poet.

“Are you...are you sure ‘Ro’ isn’t short for ‘Romeo’?” Lawrence peered at him, squinting his eyes.

“What? No! It’s short for Roland.” He took his elbow off the desk.

“Right.” Lawrence straightened his back. “I’m noticing inconsistencies in your behavior, Ro. And you’re behaving rashly.” He glanced at his shelves full of books on advice and cleared his throat. “As a wise man once said, ‘Wise and slow. They stumble that run fast.’”

Ro got out of his chair, walked to Lawrence, and knelt on one knee. He raised one hand as if pointing to the future. “True love, Lawrence. An end to an age-old strife! Picture it.”

Lawrence looked from Ro to his counseling diploma on the wall to his window overlooking the concourse. Students had begun to arrive. Some girls stormed past a group of fraternity guys, refusing to turn their heads. One of the guys must have said something rude because one of the girls turned around and tossed her coffee cup at him. Lawrence already heard the jeering. He tried imagining a harmonious campus.

“All right,” he said, turning to Ro. “Let me know when you need me.”

Ro jumped to his feet, punched the air, and hollered his thanks. He rushed out of the room to find Jules.

Lawrence slumped into his chair with a sigh. He looked over to his potted feverfew flowers, still limp, and considered replacing them with some cacti.