

BAD ROMANCE

A LARP OF AMATEUR DRAMATICS AND AFFAIRS



Christian Jensen Romer



Swinton Village





Swinton Village

Key locations

The Village Hall

Centre of gravity for the game - site of the performance, rehearsals, vanishings, and most of the action.

The Primary School

Across the lane from the hall; its assembly room doubles as the dressing area when the cast overflows. During the day it's full of tiny chairs and suspicious children who've heard "the ghosts sing."

The Pond

Overhung by willows and rumoured to have "no bottom." Local legend says Marianne Davenham's reflection still appears there on moonlit nights. Ducks optional, gloom mandatory.

The Petrol Station

The nearest hint of civilisation: forecourt, flickering neon sign, a tired night attendant who's seen too much. Great for clandestine meetings and arguments over cigarette lighters.

The Bus Stop

The social nerve-ending of Swinton - where gossip, outsiders, and "strangers" first arrive. The bench still bears a plaque and faint scorch marks from the 1987 Bonfire Night disaster.

The Red Lion Pub

Half-timbered and half-cursed. Everyone goes there "for one drink" and ends up

oversharing. Lady Evelyn holds court in the snug; Maggie and Tony treat it as an extension of backstage.

Grimacre Wood

Dark, tangled, and full of folklore: phantom footsteps, lantern-lights, a ruined folly where teens dare each other to spend the night, derelict barn and some say rusted Victorian man-traps. Also, pheasants.

The Vicarage

Home to Alan Moreby and filled with boxes of forgotten parish files. The 1972 possession of Gladys Goatley occurred here, but no one in the village speaks of that matter nowadays. Alan is the lay minister as the Bishop of Barchester is distracted by a trollop from the Barseshire Chronicle, or so they say.

St Agatha's Church

A squat Norman building with crooked gravestones and a bell that occasionally tolls on its own. Organ music sometimes drifts out when the church is locked.

The Village Green

Open space between hall, church, and pub - host to fêtes, bonfires, and tragedy. The place Janine was last seen on Bonfire Night.



The Play Within a Play

Excerpts from the Swinton Village Players' premiere production of

William Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*

During the evening, only five key scenes of the play are actually performed. (Normal gameplay continues offstage, and onstage characters will perform in a gazebo representing the stage).

Each is beautifully staged, precisely lit, and free of catastrophe.

(Players should not learn their characters lines. Their characters haven't yet! Also, scripts will be provided on the day. Use those over the actual texts of the play.)

Scene I – The Street Brawl (Act I, Scene I)

The play opens with a spectacular sword fight between the Montagues and Capulets. Steel flashes, tempers rise, and the Prince's decree restores uneasy peace.

Appearing: Tybalt (Arthur Boff), Benvolio (Ari Mala), Romeo (Sarah Clelland) - *understudy: Stage Manager (Alli Mawhinney)*, Mercutio (Amy Mason), Lady Capulet (Michele Minett), The Director (Alison Arnold)

Backstage/Technical Team: Assistant Director (Veronica Melnick) cueing fight choreography; The Owner (Lore Campbell) monitoring safety from the wings.

Scene II – The Masquerade Ball (Act I, Scene V)

Music, masks, and candlelight. Romeo and Juliet meet for the first time in a dazzling dance sequence, as Tybalt seethes nearby and Paris hovers, hopeful.

Appearing: Romeo (Sarah Clelland) -

understudy: Stage Manager (Alli Mawhinney), Juliet (Vicky Sterling) - *understudy: The Director (Alison Arnold)*, Tybalt (Arthur Boff), Lady Capulet (Michele Minett), Paris (Richard Salmon), The Owner (Lore Campbell), The Director (Alison Arnold)

Backstage/Technical Team: Assistant Director (Veronica Melnick) handling lighting cues; The Nurse (Clare Gardner) assisting with costumes and masks.

Scene III – The Balcony (Act II, Scene II)

In the moonlit garden, Juliet appears above while Romeo whispers below. The poetry of youth and passion fills the air - a moment of pure stillness.

Appearing: Juliet (Vicky Sterling) - *understudy: The Director (Alison Arnold)*, Romeo (Sarah Clelland) - *understudy: Stage Manager (Alli Mawhinney)*

Backstage/Technical Team: Assistant Director (Veronica Melnick) on prompt book; Friar Laurence (Dave Wetherall) supervising soundscape; The Owner (Lore Campbell) operating torchlight.

Scene IV – The Duel (Act III, Scene I)

A blistering midday confrontation. Mercutio's wit turns to rage, Tybalt's fury to blood. Romeo's vengeance seals the lovers' fate.

Appearing: Mercutio (Amy Mason), Tybalt (Arthur Boff), Romeo (Sarah Clelland) - *understudy: Stage Manager (Alli Mawhinney)*, Benvolio (Ari Mala), Friar Laurence (Dave Wetherall), The Director (Alison Arnold)

Backstage/Technical Team: Assistant Director (Veronica Melnick) cueing fight sound; Lady Capulet (Michele Minett)



managing props; The Owner (Lore Campbell) on standby for injury cover.

Scene V – The Tomb (Act V, Scene III)

The tragic finale: the star-cross'd lovers die in one another's arms. The music fades, the lights dim, and Verona mourns its children.

Appearing: Romeo (Sarah Clelland) - *understudy: Stage Manager (Alli Mawhinney)*, Juliet (Vicky Sterling) - *understudy: The Director (Alison Arnold)*, Friar Laurence (Dave Wetherall), Paris (Richard Salmon), The Nurse (Clare Gardner), Assistant Director (Veronica Melnick), The Owner (Lore Campbell)

Backstage/Technical Team: Stage Manager (Alli Mawhinney) running cues unless performing; Assistant Director (Veronica Melnick) or The Director (Alison Arnold) as standby prompt; The Owner (Lore Campbell) coordinating curtain call.

Notes for Cast

In this production, both **The Director (Alison Arnold)** and **Lady Capulet (Michelle Minette)** are listed as *understudies* for the leads. In the event of illness, fainting, artistic differences, or divine intervention, either may be required to take the stage.

Casting Hints: Public Background

Tonight is opening night for the Swinton Village Players amateur performance of *Romeo & Juliet*, powered by Arts Council grant money and wild ambition. Three weeks ago the Director, Janine Davenham vanished inexplicably after the village bonfire. This has brought back memories of the strange disappearance of her sister Marianne who was director of the ill-fated last performance of *Romeo & Juliet* in Swinton Village Hall in 1997...

Miriam Davenham – The Director

(Played by Alison Arnold)

Elegant, intense, and certain she knows what "proper theatre" looks like. Miriam is the late Marianne Davenham's older sister - a fact she neither hides nor dwells on, except when she does. She's stepped in to direct after Janine's mysterious disappearance and insists everything is *fine*, though she occasionally forgets which version of *Romeo & Juliet* they're performing. Think RSC discipline meets local-amateur dramatics chaos: a woman holding it together with sheer force of will and a perfectly sharpened HB pencil. Your niece is playing Juliet; your two sisters have now both vanished while working on Romeo and Juliet, and people whisper bad things happen in threes. You could be forgiven for being a trifle paranoid and stressed!

Angel – Arts Council Punk

(Played by Lore Campbell)

Leather-jacketed, Bristol accent, early twenties with a "why am I here" attitude. Sent by the Hippodrome's outreach scheme to bring "community outreach" and "professional attitude" to Swinton Village Players and already regretting it. Smart, sarcastic, perpetually clutching a clipboard or a half-empty coffee. Would



rather be at Glastonbury than refereeing middle-aged drama queens but secretly wants the show to succeed. Think: *young arts administrator dropped into Midsomer Murders*. Works as usher/barperson/source of funding/owner of show.

Chloe Grice – The Assistant Director

(Played by Veronica Melnick)

Bright, ambitious, and permanently over-caffeinated, Chloe Grice was Janine's devoted assistant - and the only person who truly understood her "*bold, cinematic vision*." A lifelong Baz Luhrmann superfan, Chloe had planned a dazzling modern-dress *Romeo & Juliet* full of neon crosses, pop soundtracks, and slow-motion gunfights. When Janine vanished, Chloe assumed she'd be asked to take over. Instead, the committee handed control to Miriam Davenham, who insists on RSC authenticity.

Alex Barrow – The Stage Manager

(Played by Alli Mawhinney)

Efficient, unflappable, and running entirely on black coffee and resentment, Alex Barrow is the one person standing between this production and total collapse. They know where every prop, costume, and body is buried - sometimes literally. A lifelong Swinton local, Alex has seen enough village drama to last several lifetimes and treats crises like stage cues: acknowledge, fix, move on. Everyone agrees that since their release from prison last year after serving six years for the unfortunate Halifax Building Society hold-up, they're "just like the old Alex again"- organized, punctual, and remarkably good with logistics under pressure.

Tommy Moreby – The Lighting Operator

(Played by Tristan Brooks)

Local electrician, lifelong geek, and accidental hero. Tommy Moreby joined the Swinton Village Players because someone told him there'd be free sandwiches and a chance to "test the new dimmer pack." Now he's single-handedly responsible for keeping the entire production illuminated - and, possibly, for keeping the ghosts of 1997 in check. Think: Bruce Willis in *Die Hard* - if John McClane had been issued a headset, a soldering iron, and a PAT-testing certificate instead of a gun. Here only as a favour to Alex...

Lady Evelyn Barrow – Chair of the Village Hall Committee

(Played by Michele Horsey)

Elegant, witty, and far too glamorous for Swinton, Lady Evelyn Barrow insists she's "simply doing her bit for the community"- which happens to involve running the Hall, chairing the Players, and knowing *exactly* where every skeleton in the parish is buried (some of which she dated). Once a minor society darling, she left the London stage under *mysterious circumstances* - a whispered scandal involving a peer, a python, and the closing night of *Noël Coward's Private Lives*. Now she presides over Swinton with gin in hand and an amused smile, mixing genuine charm with the faintest whiff of danger. People underestimate her because of her pearls and perfect diction; they shouldn't.

Rosie Grice – Romeo

(Played by Sarah Clelland)

Dazzling, impulsive, and utterly incapable of doing *anything* halfway, Rosie Grice is the living embodiment of "all in." The Grice-Davenham feud runs through her blood like cheap prosecco, but she wears it with defiant pride. When she loves, she *loves*; when she fights, it's headline news.



Rosie genuinely believes the stage is her destiny - or at least the best available substitute for therapy. She treats *Romeo* as a method role, quoting Shakespeare in Tesco and practising death scenes on the bus. The townsfolk find her exhausting and irresistible in equal measure. Think: Fleabag doing Romeo in a cider advert, pure heart and pure drama - a whirlwind of joy, danger, and lipstick-stained scripts. Her mother is Moira Grice.

Tony Culshaw – Tybalt

(Played by Arthur Boff)

Fierce, dramatic, and gloriously extra, Tony Culshaw approaches *Tybalt* as a personal calling rather than a role. They move through rehearsals like a rock star trapped in a village-hall panto - dangerous, magnetic, and absolutely convinced this production could change British theatre forever. Their moods are legendary, but so is their loyalty - they'd fight to the death for their castmates... preferably in slow motion, under a strobe. Toni travels everywhere with a "*combat emotional support ferret*" called Balthasar, who allegedly "helps with line learning." No one's entirely sure if Balthasar exists or is just part of Tony's method.

Nora Culshaw – The Nurse

(Played by Clare Gardner)

Loud, loyal, and impossible to ignore, Nora Culshaw has been part of the Swinton Village Players since the last century and still calls the props cupboard "*my domain*." To outsiders she's a harmless busybody; to insiders, she's the glue that keeps this shambolic troupe together. Nora has an irreverent sense of humour, a mischievous streak a mile wide,

and an unshakeable belief that the show must go on - even if the ghosts have other plans. Eccentric, brave, and big-hearted. A cross between *Julie Walters in Educating Rita* and *Sigourney Weaver in Ghostbusters*, with a video camera in one hand and a custard cream in the other. Her son Tony is playing Tybalt.

Peter Barrow – Paris

(Played by Richard Salmon)

Smooth, charming, and relentlessly reasonable, Peter Barrow is the man everyone in Swinton calls when something needs "sorting quietly." As Vice-Chair of the Village Hall Committee and heir to the Barrow family's modest local empire (plumbing, roofing, and land ownership), he's built a reputation for being helpful, patient, and disarmingly self-effacing. He brings flowers when things go wrong, mends leaks personally and makes the occasional witty speech about "community spirit." He exemplifies the best in Swinton Village, and is handsome, posh and well liked as well as respected.

Moira Grice – Lady Capulet

(Played by Michele Minett)

Graceful, articulate, and just a little formidable, Moira Grice is the undisputed queen of Swinton society; or at least she would be, if the village had a society worth ruling. Once hailed as "a revelation" for her turn as Juliet in the 1997 *Romeo & Juliet*, Moira has never quite forgiven the world for moving on without her. The night the director, Janine Davenham, vanished, Moira's performance was cut short and her chance at stardom extinguished. Some say she was questioned by police only because she was *too* convincing when she rehearsed Juliet's death scene; she insists it was the worst humiliation of her life. Mention the Davenhams and her smile tightens just a little too



much. The fact her daughter is playing Romeo has done little to make things better.

Sam Moreby – Benvolio

(Played by Ari Mala)

Bright, expressive, and walking a fine line between hope and collapse, Sam Moreby is the village's resident dreamer; and possibly its most tragic soul. They grew up in Swinton, left to "find themselves," and then somehow found themselves right back here, living above the old post office with a collection of dying houseplants and an unfinished screenplay called *Ghostlight*. They're the one person who *feels* the strange energy in the hall: the flicker in the lights, the sudden chill near the trapdoor -- and they are convinced it's trying to tell them something. Sam is slowly unravelling in the most beautiful way imaginable. They quote Shakespeare, Bowie, and Tumblr with equal sincerity; they're impossible not to love and impossible to save. (Think Tilda Swinton in *Orlando*). Alan Moreby is your twin, and the same scandal shaped you.

Maggie Culshaw – Mercutio

(Played by Amy Mason)

A whirlwind in sequins and sarcasm, Maggie Culshaw is the village's answer to a West End diva who never quite made it past junction 12. The youngest of the Culshaw clan, she's inherited the family's wardrobe cupboard, its gossip archive, and absolutely none of its restraint. Maggie lives for the chaos of opening night: the frantic costume swaps, the whispered scandals, the thrill of stealing a scene just by breathing too loudly. She claims she "could have gone professional" if it weren't for the tragic combination of bad luck, worse men, and that pyrotechnics incident in 2012. Now she treats the Swinton Village Players as both therapy and stage - a place to perform her life as the melodrama it deserves to be. She was the driver on the bank robbery in 2018 that put Alex Barrow in prison, but the charges against Alex were dropped.

Juliet Davenham – Juliet

(Played by Vikki Sterling)

Beautiful, brittle, and born into tragedy, Juliet Davenham is the last of the cursed Davenhams - or so the village whispers. Her mother, Marianne, vanished during the 1997 production of *Romeo & Juliet*. Her aunt Janine, who raised her, disappeared three weeks ago on Bonfire Night. Now her surviving aunt Miriam insists "the show must go on," and Juliet finds herself cast in the very role that seems to haunt her bloodline. Juliet doesn't remember much of her mother, but sometimes she swears she catches her scent - lilac and cigarette smoke - in the wings. She dreams in stage directions, hears applause in empty rooms, and can't quite tell if she's becoming her mother or her character. The villagers call her "poor Juliet." They have no idea how dangerous she really is. She's graceful, magnetic, and utterly fearless on stage, but under the poise is a storm: a woman torn between playing the part and rewriting the ending. Maybe this performance is her chance to break the pattern - or maybe it's her turn to vanish.

Alan Moreby - Friar Laurence

Rumpled, magnetic, and dangerously good company, Alan Moreby has a rakish charm. His father was the village vicar during the 1997 production and was widely rumoured to have been involved with the disappearance of Janine Davenham. He tried to follow in his father footsteps, but left theological college after what the diocese still refers to as "the incident in Winchester," and has since reinvented himself as Swinton's unofficial moral adviser, gin connoisseur, and man about town. He is rumoured to have had affairs with half the women in the village, but the truth is unknown; he never kisses and tells. **Sam Moreby** is his twin.