



I WILL NEVER PLAY JULIET
By Paul Smith

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Alice – 69

When I was at school – aged 12 maybe – we performed Romeo & Juliet.

An all-girls school, you might have thought that we all wanted to play Juliet. But no. The clamour for Romeo was extraordinary.

I however, dreamed of playing Juliet. Since I first saw the film version with Leslie Howard and Norma Shearer, I knew I wanted to be an actor and I had to play Juliet.

The teacher disregarded my word-perfect audition and, instead, plumped for Ursula Salisbury. Actually the oldest in the class and, probably, at 13, the correct age.

Ursula was fun but a complete tearaway, always getting into trouble with the police, but she was not built to play Juliet. I always see the ill-fated heroine as delicate and slight. At that age Ursula had a bigger bust than the rest of us girls put together. She always slightly leant forward, the weight of her bosom pulling her down.

Juliet she was not.

I was happy enough to play Nurse, but the roles should have been reversed.

Don't get me wrong, Nurse is a good part. Having played it at only 12, it has remained my go-to role. 14 productions of Romeo and Juliet I have appeared in, each as Nurse. No other roles. Well over 1500 performances.

All the time I have watched, at close quarters, the actresses playing Juliet and wondered if I could manage it any better.

Definitely in some cases, not so in others. But I would certainly give it a run for its money.

Many of the actresses I worked with have been very beautiful, but they couldn't act and as so many of the Romeo's were either narcissists or gay, or both, the chemistry between the leads has often been lacking.

Still, such is life. I continued to pursue my dream and always auditioned for Juliet, and always ended as Nurse. At drama school, in rep and in provincial theatres up and down the country.

'You are no beauty Alice' was often the refrain, 'Nurse suits you well'.