

SYNOPSIS BY SCENE

ACT I, Scene 1

Two Capulet servants provoke a fight with a servant from the house of Montague. Benvolio, Romeo's cousin, tries to stop the scuffle and asks Tybalt, a nephew of the Capulets, for help. Tybalt, however, antagonizes the situation until it is an all-out brawl. Prince Escalus, ruler of Verona, appears and threatens the life of anyone involved in any future Montague-Capulet fights.

Romeo's parents encounter Benvolio and ask if he has seen Romeo. Benvolio discusses Romeo's melancholy behavior, since the Montague's son has been sick with unrequited love for the fair Rosaline. Romeo appears and asks Benvolio for help, but his cousin advises him, instead, to consider the beauty of other girls. Romeo is resistant to the suggestion and does not want to forget Rosaline.

ACT I, Scene 2

Count Paris, a cousin to the Prince, asks Lord Capulet for Juliet's hand. Capulet is evasive and thinks his daughter too young for marriage. He also feels that Juliet herself must approve of Paris. To arrange a meeting between the two, Capulet invites Paris to a masquerade ball to be held at his home that same night where both young people will meet and appraise each other.

An illiterate servant from the Capulet household is sent to deliver party invitations for the Capulet ball. He cannot read and when he meets Benvolio and Romeo on the street, he asks them to please help him read the guest list. They discover Rosaline's name among the guests. Benvolio encourages Romeo to "crash" the party with him so that Romeo may find another beautiful girl to love. Romeo agrees but only because he expects to see Rosaline.

ACT I, Scene 3

Lady Capulet talks to Juliet of Paris's proposal. Juliet is not interested in marriage but is graciously willing to meet and speak with the young man. Her faithful Nurse, upon hearing that the distinguished Count Paris is the prospective groom, agrees with Juliet's mother and approves the union.

ACT I, Scene 4

Romeo, Benvolio, and Mercutio make their way to the Capulet party wearing masks and costumes. Mercutio is in very high spirits and entertains his friends as he delivers his witty Queen Mab speech which affirms the superficiality of love and other human foolishness. Romeo is not amused. Instead, he feels a grave foreboding as a result of their boldness in attending the party.

SYNOPSIS BY SCENE

ACT I, Scene 5

Lord Capulet, the genial host, welcomes his guests. Romeo sees Juliet and falls hopelessly in love. Asking a servant the name of the young beauty, he is overheard by his cousin Tybalt, who recognizes his voice as an enemy Montague. Tybalt informs Lord Capulet that he is prepared to fight Romeo at that very moment, but Capulet defends Romeo as a "virtuous youth" and restrains Tybalt harshly.

Romeo and Juliet, though still strangers, speak, and each responds to the other with sudden, overwhelming passion. Later, when they part, they learn the devastating news that they are the children of the feuding families.

ACT II, Scene 1

Romeo eludes his friends after the party. He is upset with the implications of this new romance and wants to be alone. Reluctant to leave the grounds, he scales the wall into the Capulet garden. Mercutio and Benvolio continue to look for him while making foul jokes which they hope will provoke him to answer back, but Romeo does not respond.

ACT II, Scene 2

Juliet appears on her balcony and despairs aloud that her newly found love is a Montague. Her passionate declarations are overheard by Romeo who shares all that she feels. He announces his presence and they exchange vows of undying, profound love for each other. Romeo promises to find someone who will unite them in marriage on the following day. Juliet plans to send a messenger the next morning to learn of these wedding arrangements. Their love and their sense of urgency will not allow them to wait.

ACT II, Scene 3

Romeo goes to the cell of his priest, Friar Laurence, to tell him of his love for Juliet and his desire to marry her immediately. The Friar has some misgivings about Romeo's sincerity since Romeo was desperately in love with Rosaline only the day before. The Friar is convinced by Romeo's earnest entreaties, however, and agrees to perform the hasty ceremony in the hope that the marriage will heal the wounds between the two families.



SYNOPSIS BY SCENE

ACT II, Scene 4

Mercurio and Benvolio joke about Tybalt's letter of challenge to Romeo, delivered to the Montague house earlier that day. They encounter Romeo in the street and are pleased that his mood is so changed and lighthearted. Soon after, Juliet's Nurse finds Romeo. He tells her happily of the wedding plans which are to take place in Friar Laurence's cell that afternoon. According to Romeo's plan, Juliet will inform her parents that she is going to confession. In truth, however, the visit to Friar Laurence's will be the occasion of her marriage. Meanwhile, Romeo's servant is to meet the Nurse behind the abbey wall to deliver a rope ladder for Romeo's use later that night. At that time, he will climb to Juliet's balcony when he visits her joyously as her new husband.

ACT II, Scene 5

Juliet waits patiently for her Nurse's return and the confirmation of her wedding plans. Once having arrived, the Nurse perversely prefers to talk about her aches and pains in search of sympathy. Juliet can barely contain her impatience and cajoles and beseeches the old woman to tell her the news which she longs to hear. The Nurse explains the plan and Juliet is ready to join Romeo in the Friar's cell for the wedding ceremony.

ACT II, Scene 6

The wedding arrangements proceed according to the plan. That afternoon in the Friar's cell, Romeo and Juliet are joined in marriage. Friar Laurence speaks to them of the enduring qualities of true love. At the same time he has doubts about the two young lovers marrying in such haste.

ACT III, Scene 1

Benvolio and Mercurio meet on a hot afternoon in the public square. Tybalt appears, still smarting with rage from the Capulet party. He is searching for Romeo with whom he wants to duel. When Romeo enters the scene, Tybalt proceeds to insult him in an attempt to goad him into fighting. However, Romeo exercises self-control, for he realizes Tybalt is Juliet's first cousin and he must not fight him. He attempts to pacify the fiery Tybalt but to no avail. Mercurio is inflamed by this bewildering scene and takes up Romeo's defense. Mercurio draws his sword and engages Tybalt. Romeo intercedes and tries to separate the two, but in so doing makes it possible for Tybalt to wound Mercurio fatally. Romeo, filled with remorse, kills Tybalt and is rushed away by Benvolio who later explains the tragedy to Prince Escalus. The ruler listens and defers the death sentence: Romeo is banished forever to Mantua.



SYNOPSIS BY SCENE

ACT III, Scene 2

As Juliet prepares for her first and only night with Romeo, the Nurse comes with the news that her cousin Tybalt is dead and Romeo has been banished for the crime. Juliet is torn with grief over her cousin's death and her husband's cruel fate. Consoled by the knowledge that Tybalt was determined to kill Romeo, her devotion to her husband prevails. Juliet is disconsolate, but her Nurse knows that Romeo is hiding in Friar Laurence's cell and promises Juliet to bring him back as planned.

ACT III, Scene 3

Friar Laurence tries to comfort a suicidal, hysterical Romeo who is hiding from the authorities in the priest's cell. He informs Romeo that the Prince has set aside the death sentence and has ordered his banishment to Mantua instead. Romeo is inconsolable at the thought of separation from Juliet. The Nurse arrives, bringing a ring from Juliet as a gesture of her love. The old woman assures Romeo of his bride's loyalty and urges that he hurry, for time is short. Friar Laurence, too, encourages him to spend this last remaining evening with his bride and enjoins Romeo to protect his safety and leave for Mantua at dawn. The Friar expresses hope that Romeo will be pardoned in the future and will eventually be able to return home. He assures the young man that he will keep him informed of all news from home.

ACT III, Scene 4

Lord Capulet meets again with Paris to discuss the possibility of the young man's marriage to his daughter. Juliet's grief over her cousin Tybalt seems excessive and is a source of worry to her father. Convinced that he knows what is best for her, he is no longer prepared to wait for her acceptance of Paris who has been most understanding through these sad circumstances. Although there has been no time for a courtship, Lord Capulet makes the impulsive decision that the wedding will take place in three days.

ACT III, Scene 5

Romeo bids Juliet good-bye in a sorrowful parting after their sweet night together. Quickly following his departure, Lady Capulet enters her daughter's room announcing Juliet's forthcoming marriage to Paris on Thursday. Juliet is horrified and disbelieving as she pleads with her parents for a delay. In response, her father is enraged and in a burst of temper threatens to disown her if she refuses to accept his decision. Juliet feels abandoned, for even her faithful Nurse advises her to turn her back on Romeo, her legal husband, and marry Paris, who is a more sensible choice. Disillusioned, she resolves never to reveal her secrets to her Nurse again and decides to seek help from the Friar as her last resort.



SYNOPSIS BY SCENE

ACT IV, Scene 1

Paris is discussing the wedding arrangements with Friar Laurence in the priest's cell when Juliet arrives unexpectedly. Paris leaves and the weeping Juliet pours out her grief and desperation to the priest. He proposes that she falsely consent to marry Paris and then initiate his dangerous plan to prevent the marriage. The Friar gives her a powerful potion to be taken the night before the wedding. The drug will give her the cold and lifeless mask of death for forty-two hours—long enough for the bereaved family to make funeral arrangements and inter her body in the Capulet vault. In the meantime, Friar Laurence will write Romeo about the daring plan so that he can be with her when she awakens in the vault and take her back to Mantua to live with him.

ACT IV, Scene 2

Juliet returns home from Friar Laurence's cell and tells her parents that he has persuaded her to obey her father's wishes. Obediently, she expresses her willingness to marry Paris and submit to her father's judgment. She shows no sign of duplicity as she goes through the motions of participating fully in the wedding preparations. In no way does she betray her unwavering resolution that this wedding will never take place. Overjoyed at his daughter's change of heart, Lord Capulet decides that the nuptials will take place earlier than planned; the young couple will be wed on Wednesday.

ACT IV, Scene 3

Juliet feels a great urgency to say her prayers for the many sins she is about to commit. The Nurse is fully aware that Juliet's marriage to Paris is sinful. When Juliet dismisses her for the night, the Nurse leaves, understanding implicitly that Juliet must ask for forgiveness. What is not revealed to the Nurse is Juliet's guilt over the covert plan she is about to execute. Left alone, Juliet is victimized by her own fears and terrified of the potion. When she contemplates the vault where she will be placed, Juliet is unnerved at the thought of waking alone in that chilling place of death. Overcome with uncertainty, exhausted and at the limits of her sanity, she drinks the potion and falls on her bed unconscious.

ACT IV, Scene 4

The wedding morning has arrived and the entire happy household is bustling in preparation for the joyous event. Lord and Lady Capulet are lighthearted, though sleepless, since they have been up all night directing the activities. The bridegroom, Paris, arrives with the musicians and Lord Capulet sends the Nurse to help Juliet dress in her bridal gown.





SYNOPSIS BY SCENE

ACT IV, Scene 5

The excited Nurse bustles about in Juliet's bedroom with great good cheer. She teases Juliet lovingly and tries to awaken the young bride. When she draws back the bed-curtains, she is shocked to find Juliet in a death-like coma. Hysterical, the Nurse summons the entire household. Responding to her cries, they share her devastating discovery. Grief descends upon the Capulets as they convert all the joyous preparations for the wedding into the mournful rituals of a funeral.

ACT V, Scene 1

Balthasar, Romeo's servant, travels to Mantua with the ghastly news of Juliet's untimely death. Gently, he tells Romeo of her burial in the family tomb. As Romeo listens, tortured with grief, he devises a plan. He buys a powerful poison from a druggist and then sets out for Verona to join his beloved Juliet in the serenity of death.

ACT V, Scene 2

As promised, Friar Laurence sends Friar John with a message for Romeo. In this important letter he outlines his elaborate plan with Juliet and explains the need to prevent Juliet's forced marriage to Paris. Further, he describes the use of the hypnotic potion as a desperate measure to avoid the ceremony. Details of the potion's powerful effect and the time of Juliet's awakening are carefully articulated. The letter emphasizes that Romeo must be present when she opens her eyes in the vault. Unfortunately, Friar John detained by a quarantine in the city, returns two days later and gives the undelivered letter to Friar Laurence, who realizes the plan is ruined. Well aware that Juliet will awaken in three hours all alone in the tomb, Friar Laurence rushes anxiously to the churchyard to be with her.

ACT V, Scene 3

The churchyard is in darkness as Romeo encounters Paris who is mourning at the tomb of Juliet. Paris, outraged at this final blasphemy by the criminal Romeo, threatens to arrest him. In contrast, Romeo begs Paris to leave, but the young count resists his pleas. A fight ensues and a desperate Romeo kills Paris. Romeo then enters the tomb. He sees his beloved Juliet and drinks the deadly poison. Moments later, Friar Laurence arrives as Juliet awakens and discovers her young husband dead. The Friar begs her to come with him to safety, but Juliet steadfastly refuses. He departs quickly, for he hears the watchmen approaching. Juliet, determined to end her life, seizes Romeo's dagger and plunges it into her breast. The city is alerted by the watchmen who assemble all the people implicated in the tragedy. They gather in the vault where they witness the pathetic sight of three young people lying dead. The Prince and both families listen to Friar Laurence as the details of the story are recounted. Montague and Capulet, chastised for the destruction they have wrought, join hands and finally put their pernicious feud to rest.