

Romeo and Juliet Summary

The play is set in Verona, Italy, where a feud has broken out between the families of the Montagues and the Capulets. The servants of both houses open the play with a brawling scene that eventually draws in the noblemen of the families and the city officials, including Prince Escalus.

Romeo is lamenting the fact that he is in love with a woman named Rosaline, who has vowed to remain chaste for the rest of her life. He and his friend Benvolio happen to stumble across a servant of the Capulet's in the street. The servant, Peter, is trying to read a list of names of people invited to a masked party at the Capulet house that evening. Romeo helps him read the list and receives an invitation to the party.

Romeo arrives at the party in costume and falls in love with Juliet the minute he sees her. However, he is recognized by Tybalt, Juliet's cousin, who wants to kill him on the spot. Capulet intervenes and tells Tybalt that he will not disturb the party for any amount of money. Romeo manages to approach Juliet and tell her that he loves her. She and he share a sonnet and finish it with a kiss.

Juliet's Nurse tells Romeo who Juliet really is, and he is upset when he finds out he loves the daughter of Capulet. Juliet likewise finds out who Romeo is, and laments the fact that she is in love with her enemy.

Soon thereafter Romeo climbs the garden wall leading to Juliet's garden. Juliet emerges on her balcony and speaks her private thoughts out loud, imagining herself alone. She wishes Romeo could shed his name and marry her. At this, Romeo appears and tells her that he loves her. She warns him to be true in his love to her and makes him swear by his own self that he truly loves her.

Juliet then is called inside but manages to return twice to call Romeo back to her. They agree that Juliet will send her Nurse to meet him at nine o'clock the next day, at which point Romeo will set a place for them to be married.

The Nurse carries out her duty, and tells Juliet to meet Romeo at the chapel where Friar Laurence lives and works. Juliet goes to find Romeo, and together they are married by the Friar.

Benvolio and Mercutio, a good friend of the Montagues, are waiting on the street when Tybalt arrives. Tybalt demands to know where Romeo is so that he can challenge him to duel, to avenge Romeo's sneaking into the party. Mercutio is eloquently vague, but Romeo happens to arrive in the

middle of the verbal bantering. Tybalt challenges him, but Romeo passively resists fighting, at which point Mercutio jumps in and draws his sword on Tybalt. Romeo tries to block the two men, but Tybalt cuts Mercutio and runs away, only to return after he hears Mercutio has died. Romeo fights with Tybalt and kills him. When Prince Escalus arrives at the murder scene he chooses to banish Romeo from Verona forever.

The Nurse goes to tell Juliet the sad news about what has happened to Tybalt and Romeo. Juliet is heart-broken, but soon recovers when she realizes that Romeo would have been killed if he had not fought Tybalt. She sends the Nurse to find Romeo and give him her ring. Romeo comes that night and sleeps with Juliet. The next morning, he is forced to leave at dusk when Juliet's mother arrives. Romeo goes to Mantua where he waits for someone to send news about Juliet or about his banishment.

During the night Capulet decides that Juliet should marry a young man named Paris. He and Lady Capulet go to tell Juliet that she should marry Paris, but when she refuses to obey Capulet becomes infuriated and orders her to comply with his orders. He then leaves and is soon followed by Lady Capulet and the Nurse, whom Juliet throws out of the room, saying, "ancient damnation" (3.5.235).

Juliet then goes to Friar Laurence, who gives her a potion that will make her seem dead for at least two days. She takes the potion and drinks it that night. The next morning, the day Juliet is supposed to marry Paris, her Nurse finds her "dead" in bed. The whole house decries her suicide, and Friar Laurence makes them hurry to put her into the family vault.

Romeo's servant arrives in Mantua and tells his master that Juliet is dead and buried. Romeo hurries back to Verona. Friar Laurence discovers too late from Friar John that his message to Romeo has failed to be delivered. He rushes to get to Juliet's grave before Romeo does.

Romeo arrives at the Capulet vault and finds it guarded by Paris, who is there to mourn the loss of his betrothed. Paris challenges Romeo to a duel and is quickly killed. Romeo then carries Paris into the grave and sets his body down. Seeing Juliet dead within the tomb, Romeo drinks some poison he has purchased and dies kissing her.

Friar Laurence arrives just as Juliet wakes up within the bloody vault. He tries to get her to come out, but when she sees Romeo dead beside her, Juliet takes his dagger and kills herself with it. The rest of the town starts to arrive, including Capulet and Montague. Friar Laurence tells them the whole story. The two family patriarchies agree to become friends by erecting golden statues of the other's child.