



Romeo & Juliet

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Prologue

As a prologue to the play, like in ancient Greek plays, a chorus comes out. Their opening speech serves as an introduction to the play, giving the audience a brief background story and an idea of the play to come. The Prologue itself creates the first sense of Fate in the play, by telling the audience of these star-crossed lovers who will end conflict with their death. The audience then watches the play with the expectation of what the Prologue has told them.

Summary: Act 1

Scene 1

Enter two servants of Capulet, who talk to one another in a friendly jovial manner, they casually mock the house of Montague, their master's rival. Seeing two servants of the Montagues enter, they consult with one another about the best way of provoking a fight without actually initiating violence. Samson bites his tongue at the Montagues – a very insulting gesture. A verbal conflict quickly escalates into a physical fight. Benvolio, a kinsmen of Montague, enters and tries to quell the fighting, drawing his sword so they would drop theirs. Tybalt, kinsmen of Capulet, enters and sees the servants of both houses, as well Benvolio, with drawn weapons.

Benvolio tries to explain that he was merely keeping the peace, while Tybalt replies that he hates the word [peace] as much as he hates Montagues, and the brawl quickly escalates further. The heads of both houses, Lord Capulet and Lord Montague enter, followed quickly by Prince Escalus, who quickly commands the fighting to cease. The Prince, proclaiming that the fighting and brawling between the two families has gone on for far too long; “Three civil broils, bred of an airy word, / By thee, Old Capulet, and Montague, / Have thrice disturbed the quiet of our streets,” (A1.S1.L74-6) and he declares a death sentence on anyone who disturbs the peace again; “on pain of death” (A1.S1.L88).

The Prince exits, followed by the Capulets and the brawlers, Lord and Lady Montague and Benvolio remain. Benvolio describes to his uncle what had happened and how the brawl had begun. Lady Montague asks whether or not he has seen his cousin, her son, Romeo; “O, where is Romeo? Saw you him today? / Right glad am I he was not at this fray” (A1.S1.L101-2). Benvolio replies to her worried questions, informing her that he saw Romeo pacing underneath the grove of sycamores outside the city that morning. Since he had seemed troubled, he had not gone to speak him. Lord Montague confesses that they too think Romeo is troubled and that he has been suffering from melancholia. They had tried to discover the cause for his troubles, but to no avail. Benvolio, seeing Romeo approaching, promises to find out the reason for his distress and the Montagues depart.

Benvolio approaches his cousin cheerfully, contrasting starkly with Romeo's sadness. Romeo tells Benvolio of his love for Rosaline and how it is unrequited, for she has sworn a life of chastity. Benvolio counsels his cousin to forget her by “giving liberty unto thine eyes: / Examine other beauties” (A1.S1.L217-8). They exit, Romeo assuring his cousin that he cannot forget his love, while Benvolio resolves to help him do so; “I'll pay that doctrine, or else die in debt” (A1.S1.L229).

Scene 2

In another area of the city, Capulet walks with young Paris, a noble kinsman of the Prince who is a suitor for Capulet's daughter, Juliet. Capulet is overjoyed that Paris wishes to marry his daughter, but states that, at only fourteen, she is much too young to be a bride. He asks Paris to wait two more years, assuring Paris that he is the favoured suitor. To keep Paris sweet and allow him to begin wooing, he invites him to his annual masquerade ball he is holding that night. Capulet dispatches his manservant to invite a list of people to the masquerade. The servant, alone after the two men leave, laments that he cannot read and will not be able to accomplish his task.

Romeo and Benvolio enter, still arguing amongst themselves, and spot the servant lamenting his fate. The servant asks Romeo to read the list to him and as he does so, he notices Rosaline's name is one of those on the list. Overjoyed, the servant prepares to depart, but not before inviting Romeo and Benvolio to the ball, if they not be of the house of Montague. Benvolio sees an opportunity; the feast will be the perfect opportunity for Romeo to compare Rosaline to the other beauties of Verona. Romeo agrees to go, but only because Rosaline will be there.

Scene 3

In Capulet's house, prior to the feast, Lady Capulet calls to the Nurse for help in finding her daughter. Juliet, hearing them call her, enters and the Nurse is dismissed so that Lady Capulet may speak to her daughter alone. Immediately she changes her mind and asks the Nurse to remain so she may add her counsel. Before Lady Capulet can speak again the Nurse goes into a long speech about Juliet as a child, while Lady Capulet tries, unsuccessfully, to interrupt her and Juliet eventually embarrassed, forces the Nurse to stop.

Lady Capulet, seizing an opportunity of silence, asks her daughter her thoughts on getting married. Juliet replies that she has no thoughts to give, as she has not considered marriage yet. Her mother replies that she was around Juliet's age when she gave birth to her, implying that marriage and children should not be far from her mind. Excitedly she continues, saying "the valiant Paris seeks [her] for his love" (A1.S3.L55). Dutifully, Juliet replies that "I'll look to like, if looking liking move: / But no more deep will I endart mine eye / Than your consent gives strength to make it fly" (A1.S3.L78-80). She will go to the feast and look upon Paris but no more, and at that moment a serving man enters and announces the beginning of the masquerade.

Scene 4

Romeo, Benvolio and their friend Mercutio, all in masquerade, have gathered, along with other mask-wearing guests, on their way to the Capulets' feast. Romeo, still melancholy, wonders how they will get into the ball since they are of the house of Montague. When Benvolio deals with that concerned, Romeo states loudly that he will not dance at the feast. Mercutio begins to gently mock his best friend. He transforms all of Romeo's statements about love into obvious sexual metaphors. Romeo, refusing to be drawn into this banter, explains that he learned, in a dream that going to the masquerade was a bad idea. Mercutio responds to this with a long speech about Queen Mab of the fairies, who visits people in their sleep. Beginning whimsically, the speech begins to spiral into bitter strains of thought, and Mercutio seems entranced by his words. Romeo, worried, steps in and calms his best friend. Mercutio admits that he has been talking of nothing and notes that dreams are but "the children of an idle brain" (A1.S4.L101), implying that Romeo's dream of bad things to come was nothing.

Benvolio comes over to them and refocuses the friends, getting their attention and stating that they will arrive at the feast too late. Romeo voices his own concerns, that he perceives "Some consequence yet hanging in the stars" (A1.S4.L111) he feels that the actions of tonight will set into motion the action of Fate, resulting in "untimely death" (A1.S4.L115). Romeo decides to put himself in the hands of "he who hath the steerage of my course" (A1.S4.L116), and his spirits are lifted when he lets Fate take over.

Scene 5

In the grand hall of the Capulet's home the masquerade is full swing. Servants bustle about and Capulet makes his rounds amongst his guests, making sure all is well, joking with them and encouraging them to dance.

From across the ballroom Romeo sees Juliet and asks a nearby serving man who she is. The servant does not know and Romeo, transfixed, goes to find out, Rosaline vanishing from his mind; "Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight, / For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night" (A1.S5.L51-2).

Moving through the crowd he is spotted by Tybalt, who quickly commands a servant for his rapier. Capulet, overhearing this, reprimands Tybalt for being so quick to violence after what the Prince commanded. He states that Romeo is well regarded in Verona and that he would not for the life of him have the youth harmed at his ball. Protesting, Tybalt tries to persuade his uncle but Capulet, quick to anger, scolds his nephew until he agrees to keep the peace. As Capulet moves on, Tybalt vows that "[he] will withdraw, but this intrusion shall / Now seeming sweet convert to bitter gall" (A1.S5.L93).

On the other side of the party Romeo has approached Juliet and tentatively touched her hand. He tries to persuade her to kiss him, and she consents, remaining still as he kisses her. The two, flirting over sin, kiss again and just as their second kiss ends the Nurse arrive, telling Juliet that her mother wants to speak to her and takes her away. Romeo, following, asks the Nurse who is Juliet's mother and she replies that the lady of the house, Lady Capulet, is her mother. Devastated Romeo stares after his love

while the crowd around him begins to disperse and Benvolio once again comes to drag him away.

Juliet, just as curious about Romeo but not wanting to raise suspicion, asks the Nurse to find out the names of a series of men. The Nurse then informs her that his name is Romeo, and that he is a Montague. Overcome with anguish that her “only love sprung from [her] only hate! / Too early seen unknown, and known too late! / Prodigious birth of love it is to me, / that I must love a loathed enemy” (A1.S5.L143-6) she follows the Nurse from the hall.
