

Romeo and Juliet

(c.1595)

by William Shakespeare

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PLOT SUMMARY

The Montagues and Capulets, the two most important families of Verona, are bitter enemies.

The Capulet family gives a masked ball to introduce Juliet, who is almost fourteen, to the Count Paris who would like to marry her.

Romeo Montague and his friends Benvolio & Mercutio hear of the party and decide to go in disguise. Romeo hopes he will see his adored Rosaline but instead he meets and falls in love with Juliet.

Juliet's cousin Tybalt recognises the Montagues and they are forced to leave the party just as Romeo and Juliet have each discovered the other's identity. Romeo goes into the Capulet's garden and overhears Juliet confessing that she, too, has fallen in love with him; he talks to Juliet when she appears on her balcony.

They decide to marry secretly: with the help of Friar Lawrence (Juliet's confessor) they are married the next day.

But the same day some of the Montagues and Capulets meet and a fight follows in which Mercutio is killed by Tybalt. Romeo is involved in the fight: he pursues Tybalt in anger, kills him and is banished to Mantua by the Prince of Verona.

Juliet learns of the fighting from her Nurse. With Friar Lawrence's help it is arranged that Romeo will spend the night with Juliet before going to Mantua.

To calm the family's sorrow at Tybalt's death the day for the marriage of Juliet to Count Paris is brought forward. Capulet and his wife are angry that Juliet does not wish to marry Paris, not knowing of her secret contract with Romeo.

Juliet asks Friar Lawrence for advice and he decides to help her. This is his plan: he gives Juliet a potion that will make everyone think she's dead (thanks to this potion, she will appear to be dead for 42 hours) ; Romeo will then come to her tomb and take her away.

However, something goes wrong: the Friar sends a colleague to tell Romeo about this plan, but Romeo doesn't receive the message in time; he hears instead that Juliet is dead.

Romeo decides to kill himself: he buys some poison, returns to Verona and goes to the tomb to see Juliet's body for the last time.

After giving Juliet a final kiss, Romeo takes the poison and dies just as Juliet awakes.

Juliet learns what has happened from Friar Lawrence, but she refuses to leave the tomb: she takes Romeo's knife and stabs herself as the Friar returns with the Prince, the Capulets and Romeo's father. The deaths of their children lead the families to make peace, promising to erect a monument in their memory.