

THE STORY OF ROMEO AND JULIET

Find out everything that happens in the play by reading our story. You might like to read it with or to someone else!

Chapter 1 – The Capulets and the Montagues

*Two households both alike in dignity
In fair Verona where we lay our scene
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean*

The city streets of Verona are full of menace and dread. Two warring families have been at each other's throats for generations, and the whole city is bristling with fear and hostility. Small groups gather and whisper secretly on street corners. Just look at someone the wrong way and you might find yourself in mortal danger. A violent argument might shatter the city's delicate peace into jagged fragments at any moment.

One of the angry families is the Capulets, and Sampson and Gregory are two of its youngest servants. Muttering furtively at a street corner, they spot two other servants - and members of the city's rival clan, the Montagues.

"Here come two of the house of Montague!" says Gregory.

"I will bite my thumb at them!" responds Sampson excitedly. Imagine the very worst insult you can think of, and multiply it by ten! To bite your thumb at someone in Verona is just like that: the very worst insult you can possibly give, and sure to upset the city's precarious peace.

As the two Montagues pass, Sampson sneakily bites his thumb in their direction and smirks. The Capulets, Abraham and Balthazar, spot the insult immediately and stop dead in their tracks.

"Do you bite your thumb at us sir?" snaps Abraham.

"I do not bite my thumb at you sir. But I bite my thumb sir!" responds Sampson, a slight hint of nervousness creeping into his masculine swagger.

Sampson and Gregory cast a look at each other and instinctively reach for their swords. This is going to get messy, they think. They are quickly matched by Abraham and Balthazar, and in no time the four men are fighting, with bodies darting and diving, and sharp swords glancing, metal against metal.

Suddenly, a fifth young man enters the scene. It is Benvolio, a noble youth of the Montague family. He is angry to see four servants fighting, as he knows that it could reignite real trouble between the Montagues and Capulets. Benvolio is a kind and gentle young man, and the thought of renewed fighting between the families frightens him like nothing else. He knows he must do something to stop things escalating out of control.

“Part, fools! Put up your swords. You know not what you do!” he cries.

Benvolio lifts his sword to warn the four fighting servants. Just as he does so, the fiery young Capulet, Tybalt, appears. He is a noble youth too. But Tybalt is an angry and tempestuous character, with a temper feared the length and breadth of Verona. He loves to fight and, unlike Benvolio, he is secretly delighted to turn a corner and find himself in the midst of a quarrel. But he pretends to be terribly shocked to see Benvolio Montague fighting with mere servants.

“Turn thee, Benvolio,” Tybalt exclaims angrily, “and look upon your death!”

Benvolio tries to explain that he has only just arrived, and that he really wants to keep the peace, but Tybalt will not be calmed. He is enjoying every moment!

“Peace?” yells Tybalt. “I hate the word, as I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee!”

Tybalt draws his sword, which glints and shines in the midday Verona sun. Benvolio has no choice but to defend himself. So, now it is Tybalt and Benvolio fighting, with swords clashing. Now that two young noblemen have joined the servants in the quarrel, there is a real chance that this could turn to full blown war!

The street fight is starting to attract a crowd. Amongst the crowd is the old father of the Capulet family, with his wife Lady Capulet.

“What noise is this?” he demands. He too, reaches for his sword, just as he spots his rival, Old Montague, appear at the frenzied scene with his wife, Lady Montague.

The two old men are keen to fight too. Their bones may be older now, but their hatred for each other feels as young and fresh as it did twenty years ago. As they glare at each other across enemy lines, Lady Montague and Lady Capulet restrain their husbands, just keeping them from joining the skirmish.

The streets are full of people now, baying and shouting in support of their side in the squabble. Some shout, “Capulet, Capulet!” while others shout “Montagues forever!”

With all the noise and hubbub, it’s not surprising that the fuss has attracted the attention of the authorities. Sure enough, it isn’t long before Escalus, Prince of Verona, appears. He is in charge of the city; a

commanding presence - strong, brave and fair. He addresses the fighting company, with a thunderous, authoritative voice.

“You men, you beasts!
Throw your mistempered weapons to the ground!
If ever you disturb our streets again,
Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace!
On pain of death, all men depart!”

The Capulets and Montagues lower their swords, but keep their eyes locked in combat. They reluctantly slink away – the Capulets to one side of town and the Montagues to the other. They mutter and bite their thumbs as they leave the scene, each casting evil eyes at their opponents, as if to say, “Just you wait until next time...”

Only Benvolio is left. What a mess! He only came to town to meet his friend Romeo Montague. How did he get himself into this horrible predicament? He dusts himself off and prepares to head back to the Montague side of town, sure that Romeo has forgotten their planned rendezvous, but just as he turns to go, he sees his good friend heading in his direction.

Meet Romeo Montague. He is a young, handsome noble who send hearts fluttering wherever he goes. He is famous all over Verona for falling in love at the drop of a hat. But today, he looks desperately sad. Benvolio sighs. He can immediately guess why. Putting aside the excitement of the afternoon’s fight, Benvolio asks his friend if there is anything the matter. Sure enough, it turns out that Romeo is moping about because his latest great love, Rosaline, is angry with him for some reason or other. Benvolio is struggling to sympathise – he has seen Romeo fall in love countless times. Rosaline is not the first girl to fall under Romeo’s spell and she certainly won’t be the last that Romeo pledges his love to!

Benvolio tries to cheer up his friend with silly jokes, moving him away from the subject of love and romance, but Romeo will not budge. He is determined to talk about Rosaline – her beautiful eyes, her lovely smile and her long flowing hair.

Benvolio is losing patience. Romeo can be a bit of a bore when it comes to love and slushy stuff! Luckily for Benvolio, their discussion is interrupted by the arrival of an old, doddering servant of the house of Capulet. The old man is carrying a long scroll of paper and is looking very, very confused.

It turns out that old Capulet has a plan. To cheer himself up after all the fighting, he has arranged a party for that very night. His ancient servant has been sent into town with a list of all the guests to invite.

Unfortunately, the silly old servant forgot to mention one little thing: he can’t read! And the very first people that the servant meets are not Capulet guests, but our two Montague friends, Romeo and Benvolio.

“Pray sir,” says the servant to Romeo, “Can you read?”

Romeo glances over the paper and sees that a wonderful assembly of people have been invited to the party and – my goodness! – one of them is his girlfriend Rosaline. He must get to that party to see his Rosaline and make her love him once again, by hell or high water!

But there is a problem. The invitation says that no Montagues can attend the party under any circumstance. Only members of the Capulet household are invited. Romeo’s hopes are dashed, and Benvolio can see that he is going to start moping again. Suddenly, however, a wide grin flashes across Romeo’s face. Of course! The party is to be a masked ball. Simple! If he and Benvolio disguise themselves well enough and wear masks that cover their faces entirely, then nobody will suspect they are from the house of Montague and they can easily sneak into the Capulet house. Soon, Romeo thinks, he will be reunited with the love of his life.

Oh, Rosaline!

Chapter 2 – Forbidden Love!

Old Capulet and Lady Capulet have a young daughter called Juliet. Juliet is counting down the days to her fourteenth birthday. It’s only two weeks away.

Fourteen might seem like a very young age, but in fourteenth century Verona it isn’t too young to be married. The Capulets have already chosen the young man they would like Juliet to marry. He is handsome and rich and his name is Count Paris. Old Capulet has been rather sneaky and made sure that Paris will be at the party that very night. But there is just one problem... Juliet is not sure that she will like him. It doesn’t seem fair to her that her parents get to choose her future husband!

Downstairs in the Capulet house, the guests have begun to gather. Some wear ornate masks that cover their faces entirely. Others, like Juliet, wear elegant, lacy masks that frame their eyes only. The women wear spectacular and sparkly dresses. The men wear doublets and hose, embroidered with fine detail. Servants carry silver trays, balancing delicious appetisers and crystal glasses brimming with light, sparkling wine.

Musicians begin to play violins and pipes, and the dancefloor slowly fills. Soon, couples from all branches of the Capulet family are dancing and laughing merrily. Little do they know that two Montagues – Romeo and Benvolio – have just this moment gate-crashed the party and are in their very midst.

Juliet is dancing with Count Paris. He is absolutely thrilled with his new bride to be. Juliet doesn’t seem so sure. He certainly is

handsome, but she doesn't like his conversation very much: he seems just a little bit boring!

Meanwhile, Romeo is at the other end of the ballroom, scanning the company from top to bottom and from left to right to see if he can find his love Rosaline. But as his eyes search the room, his glance chances upon the beautiful young Juliet, who has just finished dancing with Paris.

It is as if Romeo has been with a sharp arrow straight to the heart. Rosaline? In an instant, Romeo forgets that she ever existed. Why would anyone be interested in Rosaline when this beautiful masked angel exists in the world? Juliet is simply the most stunning girl he has ever seen in his life.

He grabs a servant. "What lady is that? Oh, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!"

Someone overhears Romeo and recognises the voice. Skulking in the corner, it is young, fiery Tybalt, who was so eager to fight with Benvolio during the afternoon's brawl. He rushes to his uncle, Old Capulet.

"Uncle, this is Romeo Montague – our foe. I recognise him by his voice!"

But, despite the posturing and bravado of the morning, Old Capulet is getting tired of all the fighting between the two families. He is growing old, and the long quarrel is wearing him down. He just wants it all to end. He wants everyone to enjoy his party, and for Juliet to fall in love with Paris. Does it really matter if a Montague boy has sneaked into the dance?

"Content thee Tybalt. Leave him alone." he says wearily.

"I'll not endure him!" screams Tybalt.

"You shall!" replies Old Capulet, the anger rising in his voice. "Am I the master here or you!?"

Tybalt slinks back to his corner reluctantly, like a sulky teenager. He will not forget this in a hurry. He has been chastised by the head of his family and Romeo is to blame. Romeo Montague will be his great enemy forever, he thinks. He will find a moment to take his revenge soon enough...

Meanwhile, Juliet has looked up and caught sight of Romeo, who is still gazing at her with longing and tender eyes. First sight is enough. In a moment, both Romeo and Juliet have recognised the same feeling, like a pulse of energy.

Romeo moves towards Juliet and kisses her hand.

"You kiss by the book!" says Juliet. But before they have any time to talk further, Juliet's nurse appears with a message. Juliet's mother is upset

that she is ignoring Count Paris and is talking instead with a complete stranger. This is not the way her daughter should behave!

As Juliet reluctantly makes her way to her mother, casting loving glances at Romeo over her shoulder as she goes, Romeo grabs the nurse and asks, “Who is her mother?”

“Her mother is the lady of the house!” replies Juliet’s nurse. She recognises Romeo instantly and knows that he is a Montague.

“A Capulet!” says Romeo in horror.

Reunited with her nurse, Juliet is desperate to ask her just one question. “Nurse, who is that gentleman?”

“His name is Romeo,” answers her nurse sternly, “The only son of your great enemy!”

A Montague boy at the party, and the son of Old Montague? This is devastating news. “My only love sprung from my only hate!” wails Juliet.

Chapter 3 – Wherefore art thou Romeo?

So there it is. Romeo and Juliet have fallen in love with each other. Romeo now has three enemies. The Capulets, of course. But now he feels that his own family are the enemy too. And his third enemy is time. He must act quickly to secure his relationship with Juliet.

That night, he climbs over the Capulet family’s garden wall to try to find her.

He conceals himself behind a bush when he reaches the Capulet house. From this vantage point he can spy a light radiating from an inside window. Could he be looking at Juliet’s bedroom window?

“But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?” asks Romeo. “It is the east,” he gasps, “and Juliet is the sun!”

Juliet appears at her balcony. As Romeo gazes at her adoringly, she ponders aloud to the moon, not knowing that Romeo Montague is standing directly there beneath her, listening to every single word.

Desperately, she cries out to the night. Why has she has fallen so madly in love with a Montague - her only enemy? This is the worst thing that could possibly have happened to her. Why, of all the names in the world, must her love be called Romeo Montague?

“O, be some other name!” she cries. “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other word would smell as sweet.”

Romeo seizes this as his chance to speak. Emerging suddenly and impulsively from behind his leafy screen, he cries out passionately, “Henceforth, I never will be Romeo!”

Juliet nearly jumps out of her skin. She had thought that she was all alone. Could this really be her Romeo? She pulls herself together and tries to speak in the calmest tones.

“I know thy sound.

Art thou not Romeo, and a Montague?

If any of my kinsmen find thee here, they will murder thee!”

Romeo sighs. He tells Juliet that he would rather his life was ended by the hate of the Capulet clan than live the rest of his life without her love. Being close to her is the most important thing in the whole world!

Suddenly, from just beyond the bedroom door, Juliet hears a sound. It is her nurse, and she knows that if she is found talking to Romeo Montague at her balcony window, she will be in terrible trouble. She turns to Romeo frantically. Does he love her enough to prove himself worthy?

“Dear Romeo. If thy purpose is marriage, then send me word tomorrow!” she calls.

“I will. By the hour of nine!” responds Romeo.

“Good night, good night!” says Juliet, “Parting is such sweet sorrow. That I shall say good night til it be tomorrow...”

And Romeo, full of the flush of true love, knows that he must go to see his great friend, Friar Lawrence, to seek his assistance in planning the secret wedding...

Chapter 4 – Fiery Tybalt Fights!

Romeo is in luck. Friar Lawrence is the one person in all Verona who thinks that a marriage between Romeo and Juliet is a good idea. He thinks that it may put an end to the war between the Montagues and the Capulets.

The friar is friendly with Juliet’s nurse, and, although she seemed to disapprove of the match at first, her friend soon convinces her that the marriage could promote peace between the two old foes. So the friar and Juliet’s nurse plot together to arrange a secret marriage between Romeo and Juliet at Friar Lawrence’s cell.

In the middle of the night and under cover of darkness, Juliet sneaks away from her home with the nurse as her sole companion. They reach the cell and find Friar Lawrence and Romeo waiting there for them. The nurse hovers anxiously at the door, looking about furtively to check nobody has discovered the secret tryst.

Meanwhile, the young couple kneel before the friar and exchange holy vows. They kiss to seal the contract and, as simple as that, Romeo and Juliet, who met just one day earlier, are married. Who'd have thought anyone in Verona would live to see the day a Montague and a Capulet devoted their lives to each other? Will this really be enough to kill the great enmity between their families?

But almost as soon as they are married, it is time for the young lovers to part again. They cannot be seen together – at least not yet. So, after one more lingering kiss, they go home separately: Juliet at the nurse's side and Romeo back to the Montague side of town.

As he walks through the Verona streets, everything feels new, exciting and just a little dangerous for Romeo. I am still a Montague, he thinks, but now I am also a Capulet. Only three other people in the world know my secret! Maybe, thinks Romeo, the friar is right. Perhaps when the Montagues and Capulets find out about this great love, it will be enough to end the hatred and summon in a new and happier time for Verona.

As he rounds a corner, he bumps right into his two great friends: Benvolio, and the witty, fun-loving Mercutio.

Mercutio and Romeo have been friends forever. They enjoy spending time with each other, larking about and practising sword fighting. Mercutio works for Prince Escalus. He has a quicksilver mind and an agile body. In a quarrel with the Capulets, he is often the first Montague to draw swords. Today, he makes Romeo and Benvolio laugh with his stories about Queen Mab, the fairy midwife who rules the land of sleep, and who rides over the noses of men as they sleep in a tiny wagon made from a hazelnut and spiders' legs!

"Enough!" says Romeo, laughing. "Less nonsense Mercutio!"

The laughing stops as the fiery Capulet, Tybalt, suddenly appears in view, his wicked sneer hiding a heart full of fury.

"Gentlemen, good evening. A word with one of you!" says Tybalt angrily.

Mercutio, we have learnt, has a fiery tempter too. "Just a word?" he taunts. "Why not make it a word and a blow?" Mercutio gestures towards the sword hanging at his belt and, with a swagger in his step, glowers defiantly at Tybalt, beckoning him to fight.

"You will find me apt enough to that!" says Tybalt, squaring up to Mercutio and bumping chests with him.

Tybalt's attention has been focused on Mercutio. But now, over Mercutio's shoulder he sees someone else.

"And here is my man Romeo!" sneers Tybalt. He well remembers that Romeo caused him considerable embarrassment at the Capulet party, when Lord Capulet spurned Tybalt and asked him to leave Romeo alone. Tybalt wanted revenge, and now might just be the right time to get it!

Tybalt loses interest in Mercutio. Romeo is a much more interesting opponent. But what can he say to Romeo to antagonise him and start a brawl?

"Romeo." says Tybalt, "I can afford no better term than this: thou art a villain!"

So, Romeo finds himself in a terrible dilemma. Here is Tybalt, abusing and insulting him. Under normal circumstances this would be enough to provoke Romeo to fight. Romeo thinks he has the swordsmanship to beat Tybalt, and would enjoy seeing Tybalt lose. Yet Tybalt is Juliet's cousin. At the forefront of his mind, Romeo remembers that he is now a Capulet as well as a Montague. He must protect and love the members of his wife's family, just as he would protect and love the members of his own. He stammers a little and, with a great struggle, he forces out the words he really doesn't want to speak.

"Tybalt, villain am I none. Therefore farewell. I see thou knows me not..."

Romeo walks away from the fight. He hopes that Tybalt will simply allow him to go on, with no further baiting. But deep in his heart, Romeo knows this isn't Tybalt's style. In fact, Romeo's attempt to leave will probably incense Tybalt even more.

Sure enough, Tybalt spits out an angry laugh.

"You shall not be excused!" he yells, thinking bitterly of the way Old Capulet treated him at the party. "Your words will not excuse the injuries that you have done to me!"

Romeo is desperate. This now seems certain to end in a fight. What can he say to Tybalt to sooth his raging fire? How can he show Tybalt that he cares for him like a brother, now that he is married to Juliet Capulet?

"Tybalt. I love thee better than thou can devise!"

But now it is Mercutio's turn to become angry. What has become of Romeo? Why is he saying that he loves Tybalt? Tybalt is a Capulet, and Romeo has never loved a Capulet before. Mercutio steps forward. He looks at Romeo with disgust in his eyes. Why is his friend suddenly so dishonourable and weak? Romeo's calmness is nothing but cowardice, plain and simple! If Romeo will not fight Tybalt, then Mercutio himself will take up arms against the fiery Capulet.

“Tybalt! I am for you!” roars Mercutio.

Tybalt laughs again. If Mercutio wishes to stand in for Romeo, then that suits him just fine. Romeo Montague can always wait for another time. His day will come.

Tybalt and Mercutio circle each other. A hushed stillness falls and they swipe with their swords. For a while they dance around each other jabbing and slicing the air. The swords nearly strike home a few times as the clash becomes quicker and more urgent. Romeo’s panic grows. He has interests in both camps. He doesn’t want his dear friend Mercutio to be harmed, but Tybalt is his wife’s cousin. What can he do?

In a moment of terror, and as the swords thrust and parry, Romeo steps instinctively between the two fighters. Neither of them must be hurt.

“Hold Tybalt. Hold good Mercutio!” he pleads, as he creates a human shield between the angry young men.

Tybalt laughs scornfully. He will not be stopped. He looks for his chance and sees it! There, through a gap under Romeo’s arm, he stabs swiftly. The thrust finds its mark. Mercutio gasps as the blade strikes, then falls to the ground with a dull, heavy thud. It is a deep wound. As blood spurts from Mercutio’s side, Tybalt hollers in victory, and runs away from the scene with his crowd of howling henchmen.

Romeo loses no time. He bends down to his dear friend. Can he help? Is there anything to be done? With horror, he sees the spreading crimson stain on Mercutio’s shirt. Tears fill his eyes as he realises that Tybalt has delivered a mortal wound. His beloved Mercutio will soon be dead.

“Why the devil did you come between us?” whispers Mercutio, gulping for breath, as if he were drowning.

“I thought all was for the best!” replies Romeo, desperately trying to stem the bleeding from his friend’s side.

Mercutio turns to Benvolio.

“Help me Benvolio, for I shall faint.

Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man.

A plague on both your houses! A plague on both your houses!”

Mercutio slips away, the life and colour draining from his face. Romeo can hardly believe that he will never hear his friend’s jokes again, that he will never listen to his silly quips and enjoy his physical clowning. He can hardly believe that his friend’s final words were a venomous curse on both the Montague and Capulet family names – Romeo’s two family names.

“My very friend hath got this mortal hurt in my behalf...” cries Romeo, cradling the lifeless Mercutio in his arms.

As Benvolio tries to comfort the inconsolable Romeo, he spots a shadow moving in the corner of his eye. It can't be! Tybalt and his gang are returning in triumph to mock and gloat at the death of Mercutio!

“Here comes the furious Tybalt back again!” “Again?” says Romeo, “and Mercutio slain!”

Romeo cannot contain his anger any longer. He may be half Capulet now, but his rage burns furiously when he sees Tybalt smile and sneer. Tybalt must pay. And Romeo will be the one to make sure that Mercutio's death is avenged.

“Thou wretched boy,” yells Tybalt at Romeo, “You shall follow him hence!”

Romeo can take no more. He draws his sword and in an instant he strikes Tybalt to the ground, dead.

“Oh!” wails Romeo realising the horror of what he has done. “I am fortune's fool!” So Romeo has killed Tybalt, but Tybalt has killed Mercutio, the Prince's man.

What will Prince Escalus say? What will his verdict be?

Chapter 5 – Exile to Mantua

“Exile!” yells Prince Escalus. His verdict is the worst blow that Romeo could possibly bear. He must leave Verona and must never return. If he is ever seen in the city again then he will be put to death. Romeo thinks of Juliet and his eyes fill with tears. He has only been married for one day and yet he will never be able to see his wife again. Oh, misery!

Meanwhile, the nurse has heard the news and, with great heaviness of heart, she tells Juliet all that has happened.

Juliet is torn between two griefs: the great sadness that her cousin has been killed and the even greater sadness that her new husband is to be banished. Will she ever see him again?

But the nurse and Friar Lawrence have a plan. Always friends to the two young lovers, they arrange for Romeo and Juliet to spend their wedding night – their first and last night together – as a couple. Romeo must leave Verona the very next day for Mantua, and must never return again.

Juliet's parents, meanwhile, are making other arrangements for their daughter. Of course, they don't know that Juliet is married, and are still pinning their hopes on Count Paris as the perfect match for their

child. Old Capulet speaks with Paris, and promises that he can marry Juliet very soon. Today is Monday, and Capulet promises that the marriage can go ahead as early as Thursday. Paris is keen. He is so keen that he tells Capulet that he wishes that tomorrow was Thursday, so that he did not have to wait three long days before making Juliet his bride.

It is settled then. Juliet will become a bride for the second time. Old Capulet sends his wife to Juliet's bedchamber to give her the news that she will be married to Count Paris.

In the bedchamber, Romeo and Juliet are still talking. Juliet knows that her mother will be up to awake her soon. She thinks she can just see the sun rising in the east. But Romeo doesn't want to leave. He can't bear the idea of losing his love.

"Let's talk. It is not day!" says Romeo

"It is! It is!. Oh, now be gone! More light and light it grows." says Juliet in a panic.

"More light and light – more dark and dark our woes..." says Romeo, with sadness in his voice.

Just then, the nurse bursts in, full of panic. Just as Romeo and Juliet fear, daylight has come and Lady Capulet is approaching Juliet's chamber.

"Farewell, farewell!" says Romeo. "One kiss and I'll descend." "Oh," sighs Juliet, "think that we shall ever meet again?"

"I doubt it not!" says Romeo. One way or another he will make sure that he sees his Juliet again, even if it's the very last thing he does.

The two kiss tenderly, and Romeo jumps out the window and scales his way from the balcony down to the garden below: the garden from which he had wooed Juliet just a few short days before...

So, as Romeo makes his way to exile twenty miles away in Mantua, Juliet now learns what her parents mean to do. And she is not happy at the thought of marrying Count Paris. Not one bit! She confronts her mother, just moments after Romeo has left.

"I pray you, tell my lord and father that I will not marry yet!" Lady Capulet is shocked by her daughter's insolence. "Here comes your father. Tell him so yourself!"

And when Juliet tries to tell her father how she feels, his response is a furious one.

"I tell thee what. Get thee to church on Sunday or never after look me in the face!"

Poor Juliet is inconsolable. How can she go on? Her cousin is killed, her Romeo is banished, and now she is being forced to

marry someone that she does not love. The nurse is the only one left to offer her comfort, and even her words sting!

“I think,” says the nurse, “it is best if you marry with Count Paris. He is a lovely gentleman...”

Juliet’s response is full of bitter sarcasm. “Well, you have comforted me marvellous much!” she snaps. And, as the nurse leaves the woeful Juliet alone, she muses to herself and devises a plan. She will go to Friar Lawrence to seek his remedy. If he can offer no better advice, then she might as well kill herself rather than continue living this foul and horrible life!

Chapter 6 – Friar Lawrence has a plan!

When Juliet rushes in to see Friar Lawrence, she is shocked to find that someone else has beaten her to it. Count Paris is already in the Friar’s cell, excitedly planning all the details of Thursday’s upcoming wedding. Friar Lawrence, meanwhile is taking it all in his stride. It’s certainly unusual to marry somebody twice within a week, he thinks, but who is he to question the great Capulet family?

“Happily met,” says Paris, “My lady and my wife!”

Juliet is taken aback. Why is this silly man here, she thinks, when I have to speak urgently to the Friar about my beloved Romeo?

“That may be sir,” she says petulantly, “When I may be a wife!” “That will be, my love, on Thursday next!”

Juliet needs to engineer some time alone with the Friar and to get rid of this annoying boy Paris. So she pretends that she has come to make her confession to the priest; to ask God’s forgiveness for her sins before her wedding day, so that she is completely ready to marry Count Paris on Thursday.

Paris seems happy with this, taking it as an indication that Juliet is prepared to marry him after all. He kisses his wife to be’s hand (and Juliet tries hard not to shrink from his touch as he does so).

“Adieu my love,” says Paris, and blows Juliet a kiss as he leaves. Now Juliet can let her true feelings show.

“Oh, come weep with me, past hope, past cure, past help!” she moans.

Juliet confesses to the Friar that she is in utter despair. She would rather throw herself from the rooftops or be chained up with wild bears than live without her Romeo.

Friar Lawrence thinks for a moment as he consoles Juliet. He has a solution.

The night before the wedding, he explains that Juliet must drink a special potion that he will make ready for her. The potion has a magical quality: it will make her appear to be dead just long enough for her to be placed in the family tomb.

Meanwhile, Friar Lawrence will write to Romeo in Mantua to send him word that Juliet is sleeping in the tomb and to tell him the approximate time that she will wake from her death-like sleep. Romeo can then be at Juliet's side as she wakes.

Nobody will know that she is still alive, and so Juliet can then escape the Capulets and live with Romeo as his wife in Mantua.

What a wonderful plan! Juliet is beside herself with excitement and cannot wait to put it into action. She takes the small vial of potion that the Friar gives her, and returns home in a much happier mood. So long Paris! So long Capulets! So long Verona! Soon she will be Romeo's wife in Mantua!

When Juliet returns home, she immediately goes to see her father, mother and her nurse. They must not know anything of her plan, so she will have to persuade them all that she has changed her mind and is now keen to marry Paris after all...

"Oh father," she says, "I have learnt to repent my disobedience!"

Her father is frankly astonished that his headstrong daughter has come round to his way of thinking so quickly, but he is nevertheless delighted.

"I beg your pardon father, I beseech you!"

"Send for Count Paris! We shall to the church tomorrow!" says Old Capulet, as he claps his hands together in glee. He is so happy that he has brought the wedding day forward! What an amazing and wonderful development! What an amazing and wonderful young daughter!

Juliet must now ensure that she is left alone to take the medicine that the Friar has given her. She pretends that she must have some time alone to prepare herself. After all, it's not every day that one gets married. If her wedding day is to be tomorrow, then she must say her prayers and get plenty of sleep! She smiles sweetly at her father, kisses her mother and gives her old nurse a big hug. This will be the last time that they see her. From tomorrow morning, they will all think that she is dead.

Left alone, Juliet looks at the bottle of medicine. She gives it a little shake. She holds it up to the light and peers through it. It is green and translucent, and for a while she is mesmerised as she looks at her bedroom through the potion's green lens. But this is just delaying the action she must take. It's scary to think what might happen when she sips the potion. Perhaps it will not work at all. If that is the case, she will have to marry Paris in the

morning. Perhaps it will send her to death instead of a deep sleep. In that case, she will not have to marry Paris, but she will never see her Romeo. Juliet shudders. Be brave! she tells herself. She lifts the potion to her lips and drinks it down in one large gulp.

“Romeo, I come! This do I drink to thee!”

And almost as soon as she gulps the liquid down, she falls to the ground in a heap, seemingly dead.

“Mistress! Mistress Juliet!
Why, you slug a bed! How sound she is asleep!”

The Capulets have been working all night on the wedding preparations and now the nurse has been sent to wake Juliet from her slumber. Nurse cannot understand why the girl is so deep asleep. Surely, she must be excited about her wedding day?

“I must needs wake you Juliet!”

Gripped with fear, the nurse realises the truth. There is no pulse. There is no breath. Juliet is dead!

She screams in horror. “Lady Capulet! Lady Capulet! Alas, alas! Help, help! My lady is dead!”

Lady Capulet comes flying into the room. She sees her child, stone cold and lifeless in her bed. The colour has faded from her cheeks, just as the colour now fades from Lady Capulet’s cheeks. Her beautiful child! Dead!

Old Capulet is in the room now. His stern features crumple into sadness. He places a hand on Juliet’s forehead. It is cold. The spark has gone from her and she is dead. Barely knowing or understanding what he is doing, he moves to his wife’s side and instinctively places his arm around her. They sob uncontrollably.

Today was to be the day that their beautiful daughter was to marry. Now, she is ready to go to church, but never to return again. Today will be her funeral, not her wedding day.

Chapter 7 – The Capulet Tomb

Meanwhile, the Friar is confident that his plan will work perfectly. Juliet is now in a deep sleep. Her parents have been fooled into thinking she is dead, and she can be placed to rest in the Capulet vault, deep in the bowels of the city of Verona.

The Friar has already sent a letter to Romeo, via his trusty friend and messenger Friar John. The letter explains that Juliet is not really dead, but merely sleeping. It explains that the effects of the potion should wear off within a couple of days and tells Romeo to get to the vault as soon as he can to meet his beautiful wife when she wakes.

Whilst all seems to be going to plan, what Friar Lawrence doesn't know is that his messenger has been unable to deliver the letter to Romeo. Guards on the outskirts of Mantua have heard of a recent outbreak of the plague in Verona.

Many people have died from the horrible disease, and when Friar John of Verona appears at the city limits, the guards suspect that this suspicious stranger is carrying an infectious disease. They lock John in a hospital, close to the city walls and forbid him entry to the city of Mantua.

"But I must bear this letter to Mantua!" says John frantically.

"And bring the plague to Mantua?" says one of the guards, shaking his head vigorously.

So, Romeo never learns about Juliet pretending to be dead. Instead, he gets a very different message.

His servant, Balthasar, has ridden out to Mantua. Balthasar has heard news from the Capulet family.

At first, Romeo is thrilled to see such a friendly face.

"News from Verona! Balthasar – how good to see you! How is my Juliet?"

But the rumour that Balthasar has heard will be poison in his friend's ear. On the night after Romeo was banished, the word is that Juliet died of her heartbreak and is now buried deep in the Capulet vault. Balthasar hangs his head in sadness. He can barely bring himself to speak the horrible news. He takes a deep breath.

"O pardon me for bringing these ill news. Juliet's body sleeps in the Capulet monument. And she now with the angels lives."

Romeo is devastated. He falls to the ground, holding his head in his hands. His face crumples with grief and sadness as he lifts up his head and wails to the sky.

"I defy you stars!"

He will travel to the Capulet vault tonight. But before he begins his journey, Romeo has one thing left to do. He seeks out a poor apothecary of Mantua – a chemist who sells drugs and potions – and, although it is against the law, he persuades the apothecary to sell him a vial of poison.

To Romeo, this isn't poison. It is medicine. As he clutches the vial to his chest he wipes away a tear and sobs aloud,

"Come cordial, not poison. Go with me
To Juliet's grave, for there I must use thee."

What is Romeo planning? Where will the story end?

Meanwhile, Friar John has finally been released from the hospital. He realises that he has missed his chance to deliver the letter to Romeo. Instead, he hurries back to Friar Lawrence to tell him the news. Romeo has not received the correct message! Romeo thinks that Juliet is dead!

Friar Lawrence is horrified. But he knows what he must do. He will go to the Capulet monument alone. Juliet will be awake within the next three hours. All is not lost.

As long as Friar Lawrence gets to the grave before Romeo, he can be there for Juliet when she awakes. He can bring her back to his cell and arrange for her and Romeo to meet and smuggle themselves away to Mantua. Things may not have gone exactly to plan, but all may not be lost!

The vault in the graveyard where all the deceased Capulets are laid to rest is a dark and scary place. But today, many people are drawn towards it.

The first is Count Paris. He has the key to the vault. With trembling hands he places the key inside the lock, turns it and allows the heavy iron gate to swing open

Paris takes a garland of flowers from his servant, who carries a flaming torch in his other hand. The flickering flame illuminates stone angels and ornate carvings.

As the flames leap and dance in the darkness of the vault, sinister shadows form and fade on the cold, stone walls.

Paris warily approaches the casket which holds the body of Juliet. Placed high on a raised tomb, Juliet looks as beautiful in death as she looked in life.

Asking his servant to keep watch, Paris gives an instruction to his man to whistle if he hears or sees anything suspicious. Paris will take some time alone with Juliet to pay final respects to the wife he never got to marry.

Paris approaches Juliet. "Sweet flower," he says, "with flowers thy bridal bed I strew."

He lets drop a single tear as he thinks how differently he expected this day to be. This was not the bridal bed that he imagined for his Juliet.

As he sinks his head lower, there is a whistle from the gate. His servant boy has seen or heard something!

It is Romeo, with his servant Balthasar. There is no need for him to use the wrenching iron that he had brought to force the gate. It is already open. Someone must have made it to the tomb before them. Romeo hands a letter to Balthasar. It is addressed to Romeo's father, Old Montague.

"Now go!" he orders Balthasar.

Balthasar dashes off, and Romeo pushes the gate open. He enters the tomb, but he is spotted by Count Paris.

"This is that banished haughty Montague
That murdered my love's cousin.
And here is come to do some villainous shame
To the dead bodies!"

Paris jumps out of the shadows and into the path of Romeo.

"I apprehend thee! Come with me, for thou must die!" he shouts.

"I must die indeed," mutters a distracted Romeo, hardly paying Paris any attention. His thoughts are with Juliet and his plans to join her in death. All he can think of is the vial of poison in his pocket, and how he soon hopes to sleep next to his beloved wife.

But Paris is not prepared to let Romeo go. He stands in his way, barring Romeo's path to the tomb.

This is too much for Romeo. Still paying scant regard to the person barring his way, and simply wanting to get to his Juliet, he draws his sword. He must push past this nuisance.

"Have at thee boy!" he screams in Paris's face.

The two fight in the half light, the flames from the torchlight dancing over their umbered faces. But Romeo is the better swordsman, and after just a few strikes and parries, he drives the blade deep into Paris's chest.

'Oh, I am slain!' says Paris. He sinks to the ground, blood spilling from his wound. Death comes quickly to the young count.

Paris is slumped, face down on the cold, hard ground. Romeo turns over the body to see who he has slain. He is shocked to see that it is someone he recognises.

“Mercutio’s kinsman, noble Count Paris. O give me thy hand”

He drags the body to the foot of the plinth on which Juliet’s body rests, and hoists himself up onto the platform to sit beside his Juliet. Carefully, he takes the vial of poison and, just as Juliet had done two nights earlier with the Friar’s potion, he holds it up to examine it under the light of his lantern. The liquid is thick and viscous, unlike the Friar’s translucent medicine. It shines red, like blood, in the torchlight.

Romeo uncorks the vial and takes a final glance at Juliet.

“Here’s to my love!” he says as he sips from the vial. The liquid burns his lips, and he feels it blister and prickle as it runs down his throat.

“Thy drugs are quick!” sighs Romeo, as he leans down to place his lips on Juliet’s cold mouth.

“Thus, with a kiss, I die!” he says, as the last gasp of breath leaves his body. As he slips into death, he curls up next to Juliet, embracing her lovingly in his final, anguished moments.

Chapter 8 – A Tragic End

Here is Friar Lawrence. He hopes that he is not too late, and has reached the vault before Romeo. Signs of life await the Friar inside the vault: a flickering torch casts long shadows on the rocky walls. There is movement from within.

“Who’s there?” he calls.

Balthasar answers. The servant has returned and has found the body of Romeo.

“A friend!” cries Balthasar, and pointing to the vault he continues, “There lies my master. One that you love!”

“Romeo!” shouts the Friar. Is young Montague dead or sleeping? The Friar feels for a pulse. There is nothing; not even the feeblest beat. Romeo has no breath left. Disconsolate, the Friar bows his head, softly weeping the words of a prayer. As he mutters his hushed words, Lawrence notices another body, lying at the base of the plinth. What terrible new woe is this? Could this be young Count Paris, whom he saw just earlier that day?

As the Friar tries to come to terms with the horrors of the tomb, there is a stirring from young Juliet. For a moment she drifts in and out of consciousness, but finally opens her heavy eyelids. Her world comes back into focus. She becomes dimly aware of her surroundings, and is overjoyed to see the face of the Friar looming over her.

“O Friar! Where is my lord? Where is my Romeo?”

The Friar pauses, and with a heavy heart he speaks.

“O, Lady. Come away. Thy husband in thy bosom there lies dead.”

The Friar runs from the vault, beckoning Juliet to come with him. But Juliet shifts her attention to the man at her side. It is Romeo, lying dead and heavy. Her beautiful husband is gone. Juliet knows what she must do now.

“What’s here? Poison I see has been my Romeo’s timeless end!” She tips up the vial to see if there is any poison left.

She kisses Romeo on the lips, in the hope that some poison is left hanging thereabouts. As she kisses him, she notices that his lips are still warm. Has he only just died? Has she missed her love by mere moments?

A noise from the gate tells Juliet that the watchmen have arrived, perhaps alerted to the horrors of the tomb by Romeo’s servant Balthasar.

In the lantern’s light, Juliet spots Romeo’s dagger, glinting at his side. This, she thinks, will be her escape.

“Oh, happy dagger!” she says as she plunges the weapon deep into her chest. “There rust, and let me die!”

And with that, Juliet falls on her husband’s lifeless body. The two young lovers are reunited in death.

The Prince and watchmen arrive on the scene. Friar Lawrence re-enters and explains what he knows and what he has seen that night. Paris’s page tells of his master’s presence in the tomb and the Prince reads Romeo’s letter to his father.

Escalus calls Old Montague and Old Capulet together. “See what a scourge is laid upon your hate. All are punished!”

Old Montague and Old Capulet embrace. United in grief at the loss of their two dear children, they decide upon a plan. They will create a shining statue in gold commemorating the life and love of Romeo and Juliet. It will stand over fair Verona as a reminder of the power of love and a warning to the warring families that they should fear the consequences of ever resurrecting their battle.

As the Montague and Capulet families leave, now comforting and consoling each other rather than fighting and brawling, Prince Escalus surveys the scene with a heavy heart.

“Never was a story of more woe,” he mutters, “than this of Juliet and her Romeo.”