

ACT 2:

Act 2, prologue–scene 1

Summary: Act 2, prologue

The Chorus delivers another short sonnet describing the new love between Romeo and Juliet: the hatred between the lovers' families makes it difficult for them to find the time or place to meet and let their passion grow; but the prospect of their love gives each of them the power and determination to elude the obstacles placed in their path.

Summary: Act 2, scene 1

Having left the feast, Romeo decides that he cannot go home. He must instead try to find Juliet. He climbs a wall bordering the Capulet property and leaps down into the Capulet orchard. Benvolio and Mercutio enter, calling out for Romeo. They are sure he is nearby, but Romeo does not answer. Exasperated and amused, Mercutio mocks Romeo's feelings for Rosaline in an obscene speech. Mercutio and Benvolio exit under the assumption that Romeo does not want to be found. In the orchard, Romeo hears Mercutio's teasing. He says to himself, "He jests at scars that never felt a wound" (2.1.43).

Juliet suddenly appears at a window above the spot where Romeo is standing. Romeo compares her to the morning sun, far more beautiful than the moon it banishes. He nearly speaks to her, but thinks better of it. Juliet, musing to herself and unaware that Romeo is in her garden, asks why Romeo must be Romeo—a Montague, and therefore an enemy to her family. She says that if he would refuse his Montague name, she would give herself to him; or if he would simply swear that he loved her, she would refuse her Capulet name. Romeo responds to her plea, surprising Juliet, since she thought she was alone. She wonders how he found her and he tells her that love led him to her. Juliet worries that Romeo will be murdered if he is found in the garden, but Romeo refuses to budge, claiming that Juliet's love would make him immune to his enemies. Juliet admits she feels as strongly about Romeo as he professes he loves her, but she worries that perhaps Romeo will prove inconstant or false, or will think Juliet too easily won. Romeo begins to swear to her, but she stops him, concerned that everything is happening too quickly. He reassures her, and the two confess their love again. The Nurse calls for Juliet, and Juliet goes inside for a moment. When she reappears, she tells Romeo that she will send someone to him the next day to see if his love is honorable and if he intends to wed her. The Nurse calls again, and again Juliet withdraws. She appears at the window once more to set a time when her emissary should call on him: they settle on nine in the morning. They exult in their love for another moment before saying good night. Juliet goes back inside her chamber, and Romeo departs in search of a monk to aid him in his cause.

Summary: Act 2, scene 2

In the early morning, Friar Lawrence enters, holding a basket. He fills the basket with various weeds, herbs, and flowers. While musing on the beneficence of the Earth, he demonstrates a deep knowledge of the properties of the plants he collects. Romeo enters and Friar Lawrence intuits that Romeo has not slept the night before. The friar fears that Romeo may have slept in sin with Rosaline. Romeo assures him that did not happen, and describes his new love for

Juliet, his intent to marry her, and his desire that the friar consent to marry them that very day. Friar Lawrence is shocked at this sudden shift from Rosaline to Juliet. He comments on the fickleness of young love, Romeo's in particular. Romeo defends himself, noting that Juliet returns his love while Rosaline did not. In response, the friar comments that Rosaline could see that Romeo's love for her "did read by rote, that could not spell." Remaining skeptical at Romeo's sudden change of heart, Friar Lawrence nonetheless agrees to marry the couple. He expresses the hope that the marriage of Romeo and Juliet might end the feud ravaging the Montagues and Capulets.

Summary: Act 2, scene 3

Later that morning, just before nine, Mercutio and Benvolio wonder what happened to Romeo the previous night. Benvolio has learned from a Montague servant that Romeo did not return home; Mercutio spouts some unkind words about Rosaline. Benvolio also relates that Tybalt has sent a letter to Romeo challenging him to a duel. Mercutio responds that Romeo is already dead, struck by Cupid's arrow; he wonders aloud whether Romeo is man enough to defeat Tybalt. When Benvolio comes to Romeo's defense, Mercutio launches into an extended description of Tybalt. He describes Tybalt as a master swordsman, perfectly proper and composed in style. According to Mercutio, however, Tybalt is also a vain, affected "fashionmonger" (2.3.29). Mercutio disdains all that Tybalt stands for.

Romeo arrives. Mercutio immediately begins to ridicule him, claiming that Romeo has been made weak by love. As a way of mocking what he believes is Romeo's overwrought love for Rosaline, Mercutio takes the part of Romeo and compares Rosaline to all the most famous beauties of antiquity, finding Rosaline far superior. Then Mercutio accuses Romeo of abandoning his friends the previous night. Romeo does not deny the charge, but claims his need was great, and so the offense is forgivable. From this proceeds intricate, witty, and wildly sexual verbal jousting.

The Nurse enters, trailed by the servant, Peter. The Nurse asks if any of the three young men know Romeo, and Romeo identifies himself. Mercutio teases the Nurse, insinuating that she is a harlot, thus infuriating her. Benvolio and Mercutio take their leave to have dinner at Montague's house, and Romeo says he will follow shortly. The Nurse warns Romeo that he had better not attempt to "deal double" with Juliet, and Romeo assures her he is not. He asks the Nurse to tell Juliet to find some way to attend confession at Friar Lawrence's cell that afternoon; there they will be married. The Nurse agrees to deliver the message. The Nurse also agrees to set up a cloth ladder so that Romeo might ascend to Juliet's room on their wedding night.

Summary: Act 2, scene 4

In the Capulet orchard, Juliet impatiently waits for her nurse, whom she sent to meet Romeo three hours earlier. At last the Nurse returns, and Juliet anxiously presses her for news. The Nurse claims to be too tired, sore, and out of breath to tell Juliet what has happened. Juliet grows frantic, and eventually the Nurse gives in and tells her that Romeo is waiting at Friar Lawrence's cell to marry her. The Nurse departs to wait in the alley for Romeo's servant, who is

to bring a ladder for Romeo to use to climb up to Juliet's chamber that night to consummate their marriage.

Summary: Act 2, scene 5

Romeo and Friar Lawrence wait for Juliet to arrive at the cell. An ecstatic Romeo brashly states that he does not care what misfortune might come, as it will pale in comparison to the joy he feels right now. Friar Lawrence counsels Romeo to love moderately and not with too much intensity, saying, "these violent delights have violent ends" (2.5.9). Juliet enters and Romeo asks her to speak poetically of her love. Juliet responds that those who can so easily describe their "worth" are beggars, her love is far too great to be so easily described. The lovers exit with Friar Lawrence and are wed.