

# ROMEO AND JULIET

## ACT I

After the prologue, the curtain rises on a dazzling ball in the palace of the Capulets. They are celebrating Juliet's birthday. Her father, Count Capulet, has promised her to Count Paris. Everyone admires the young girl's beauty, and her father bids the guests to enjoy themselves. Two masked members of the rival Montague clan—Romeo and Mercutio—have slipped incognito into the ball. Romeo has dark forebodings, but his friend jokes teasingly that Mab the queen of dreams must have paid him a visit during the night. Suddenly Romeo sees Juliet at a distance and is immediately smitten with love for her. Juliet confesses to her nurse, Gertrude, that she would like to enjoy her youth before getting married. Seeing that Gertrude has been called away, Romeo approaches Juliet and declares his love for her, which arouses tender emotions in response. The arrival of Tybalt, Juliet's cousin, brutally shatters the enchantment. Romeo realizes that his beloved is the daughter of his enemy Capulet, while Tybalt recognizes the voice of the hated Romeo. The lovers are horrified to discover that they belong to two families separated by an ancient and hate-filled feud. The rules of hospitality forbid Tybalt from venting his anger there and then, and Capulet orders the festivities to proceed.

## ACT II

Night has fallen. Romeo is alone and enters Juliet's garden. He sees her at her window and compares her beauty to that of the rising sun. Juliet steps out onto her balcony and the two lovers pledge their love for each other. But their idyll is interrupted by the arrival of a group of servants, led by Gregorio, searching for some Montagues suspected of slipping into the ball. Gertrude sends them away and then calls Juliet in, scolding her for not being in bed. The lovers reluctantly take leave of each other, promising to meet again the next day.

## ACT III

**SCENE 1** At sunrise Romeo and Juliet go to Friar Lawrence's laboratory. Deeply moved by the force of their love and seeing the opportunity to reconcile the two houses, he agrees to marry them in secret. Gertrude, who has arrived in the meantime, shares their joy.

**SCENE 2** Romeo's page, Stephano, comes looking for his master. He mockingly compares the Capulets' palace to a vulture's nest where Juliet, a turtle dove, is living in bad company. The reaction is swift: Gregorio challenges him to a duel. Mercutio rushes in to help Stephano. Then Tybalt rushes into the affray. Romeo runs in to calm everyone down and refuses to fight against Tybalt who is now his cousin by marriage. But Mercutio is mortally wounded and Romeo immediately avenges his death by killing Tybalt. The Duke of Verona arrives and after pronouncing harsh words against both families he banishes Romeo from Verona.

## ACT IV

Romeo has joined Juliet for one last night. She forgives him for killing Tybalt. The song of the lark announces the dawn, the moment of their heart-rending farewells before Romeo's departure. Capulet enters, accompanied by Friar Lawrence who has to prepare Juliet for her imminent marriage to Paris. Alone with Juliet, who wants to die, Friar Lawrence gives her a potion that will cause her to appear to be dead, and plans for Romeo to meet her inside the tomb when she awakens. The friar leaves and Juliet summons the courage to drink the potion.

## ACT V

Believing that Juliet is dead, Romeo takes one final look at her and then drinks poison. Juliet slowly wakes from her deep sleep. Their joy at being reunited is shortlived. Romeo weakens. Juliet sees the empty vial and realizes what has happened. She stabs herself. The lovers die in each other's arms, imploring God's forgiveness.

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**First performance:** Paris, Théâtre Lyrique, April 27, 1867

**First performance in the United States:** New York, Academy of Music, November 15, 1867

**First San Francisco Opera performance:** October 4, 1923. San Francisco Opera has performed *Roméo et Juliette* in 7 previous seasons; for complete information, visit [archive.sfopera.com](http://archive.sfopera.com)

**Orchestra:** 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones and 1 bass trombone, 1 tuba, 1 timpani, 3 percussion, 1 harp, 1 organ, 40 strings (12 first violins, 9 second violins, 7 violas, 7 cellos, 5 basses); **64 total**

**Personnel:** 14 principals, 60 chorus, 8 dancers, 14 supernumeraries; **96 total**

—INTERMISSION—