

BENVOLIO enters.

GREGORY

Say "better." Here comes one of my employer's relatives. *They fight.*

BENVOLIO

(pulling out his sword) Break it up, you fools. Put your swords away. You don't know what you're doing.

TYBALT

What? You've pulled out your sword to fight with these worthless servants? Turn around, Benvolio, and look at the man who's going to kill you.

BENVOLIO

I'm only trying to keep the peace. Either put away your sword or use it to help me stop this fight.

TYBALT

What? You take out your sword and then talk about peace? I hate the word peace like I hate hell, all Montagues, and you. Let's go at it, coward!

PRINCE ESCALUS enters with his escort. **PRINCE**

(shouting at the rioters) You rebels! Enemies of the peace! Men who turn their weapons against their own neighbors—They won't listen to me?—You there! You men, you beasts, who satisfy your anger with fountains of each others' blood! I'll have you tortured if you don't put down your swords and listen to your angry prince. *(MONTAGUE, CAPULET, and their followers throw down their weapons)* Three times now riots have broken out in this city, all because of a casual word from you, old Capulet and Montague. Three times the peace has been disturbed in our streets, and Verona's old citizens have had to take off their dress clothes and pick up rusty old spears to part you. If you ever cause a disturbance on our streets again, you'll pay for it with your lives. Everyone else, go away for now. *(to CAPULET)* You, Capulet, come with me. *(to MONTAGUE)* Montague, this afternoon come to old Free-town, the court where I deliver judgments, and I'll tell you what else I want from you. As for the rest of you, I'll say this once more: go away or be put to death.

BENVOLIO

Your servants were fighting your enemy's servants before I got here. I drew my sword to part them. Right then, that hothead Tybalt showed up with his sword ready. He taunted me and waved his sword around, making the air hiss. As we were trading blows, more and more people showed up to join the fight, until the Prince came and broke everyone up.

BENVOLIO

No, cousin, I'm crying.

ROMEO

Good man, why are you crying?

BENVOLIO

I'm crying because of how sad you are.

LADY CAPULET

I'll tell you what's the matter—Nurse, leave us alone for a little while. We must talk privately—Nurse, come back here. I just remembered, you can listen to our secrets. You know how young my daughter is.

NURSE

Yes, I know her age down to the hour.

LADY CAPULET

She's not even fourteen.

NURSE

I'd bet fourteen of my own teeth—but, I'm sorry to say, I only have four teeth—she's not fourteen. How long is it until Lammas tide ?

NURSE

Whether it's even or odd, of all the days in the year, on the night of Lammas Eve, she'll be fourteen. She and Susan—God rest her and all Christian souls—were born on the same day. Well, Susan died and is with God. She was too good for me. But like I said, on the night of Lammas Eve, she will be fourteen. Yes, she will. Indeed, I remember it well. It's been eleven years since the earthquake. She stopped nursing on that very day. I'll never forget it. You and your husband were in Mantua. Boy, do I have some memory! But like I said, the pretty little babe got irritated and started to quarrel with my breast. Then the dovehouse shook with the earthquake. There was no need to tell me to get out of there. That was eleven years ago. By then she could stand up all by herself. No, I swear, by that time she could run and waddle all around. I remember because she had cut her forehead just the day before. My husband—God rest his soul, he was a happy man—picked up the child. "Oh," he said, "Did you fall on your face? You'll [fall backward](#) when you grow smarter. Won't you, Jule." And I swear, the poor pretty thing stopped crying and said, "Yes." Oh, to watch a joke come true! I bet if I live a thousand years, I'll never forget it. "Won't you, Jule," he said. And the pretty fool stopped crying and said, "Yes."

LADY CAPULET

Enough of this. Please be quiet.

NURSE

Yes, madam. But I can't help laughing to think that the baby stopped crying and said, "Yes." I swear, she had a bump on her forehead as big as a rooster's testicle. It was a painful bruise, and she was crying bitterly. "Yes," said my husband, "Did you fall on your face? You'll fall backward when you grow up, won't you, Jule?" And she stopped crying and said, "Yes."

JULIET

Now you stop too, Nurse, please.

NURSE

Peace. I'm done talking. May God choose you to receive his grace. You were the prettiest baby I ever nursed. If I live to see you get married someday, all my wishes will come true.

LADY CAPULET

Well, marriage is exactly what we have to discuss. Tell me, my daughter Juliet, what is your attitude about getting married?

JULIET

It is an honor that I do not dream of.

LADY CAPULET

Well, start thinking about marriage now. The valiant Paris wants you as his bride.

NURSE

What a man, young lady. He's as great a man as any in the whole world. He's as perfect as if he were sculpted from wax.

LADY CAPULET

Summertime in Verona has no flower as fine as him.

NURSE

No, he's a fine flower, truly, a flower.

LADY CAPULET

(to JULIET) What do you say? . Many people think he's handsome, and whoever becomes his bride will be just as admired. You would share all that he possesses, and by having him, you would lose nothing. Can you accept Paris's love?

JULIET

I'll look at him and try to like him, at least if what I see is likable. But I won't let myself fall for him any more than your permission allows.

ROMEO

Give me a torch. I don't want to dance. I feel sad, so let me be the one who carries the light.

MERCUTIO

No, noble Romeo, you've got to dance.

MERCUTIO

If you sink, you're dragging love down. It's not right to drag down something as tender as love.

...Hey, you're being a stick in the mud, as cautious as a policemen on night patrol. If you're a stick in the mud, we'll pull you out of the mud—I mean out of love, if you'll excuse me for being so rude—where you're stuck up to your ears. Come on, we're wasting precious daylight. Let's go!

ROMEO

Is love really tender? I think it's too rough, too rude, too rowdy, and it pricks like a thorn.

MERCUTIO

If love plays rough with you, play rough with love . If you prick love when it pricks you, you'll beat love down. Give me a mask to put my face in. A mask to put over my other mask. What do I care if some curious person sees my flaws? Let this mask, with its black eyebrows, blush for me. *(they put on masks)*

...True. I'm talking about dreams, which are the products of a brain that's doing nothing. Dreams are nothing but silly imagination, as thin as air, and less predictable than the wind, which sometimes blows on the frozen north and then gets angry and blows south.

ROMEO

Enough, enough! Mercutio, be quiet. You're talking nonsense.

ROMEO

(to a SERVINGMAN) Who is the girl on the arm of that lucky knight over there? My eyes were liars, then, because I never saw true beauty before tonight.

TYBALT

I can tell by his voice that this man is a Montague. *(to his PAGE)* Get me my sword, boy.—What, does this peasant dare to come here with his face covered by a mask to sneer at and scorn our celebration? Now, by the honor of our family, I do not consider it a crime to kill him...The combination of forced patience and pure rage is making my body tremble. I'll leave here now, but Romeo's prank, which seems so sweet to him now, will turn bitter to him later.

ROMEO

Who is her mother?

NURSE

Indeed, young man, her mother is the lady of the house. She is a good, wise, and virtuous lady. I nursed her daughter, whom you were just talking to. Let me tell you, the man who marries her will become very wealthy.

JULIET

Come over here, nurse. Who is that gentleman?

NURSE

He is the son and heir of old Tiberio.

JULIET

Who's the one who's going out the door right now?

NURSE

Well, that one, I think, is young Petruchio.

JULIET

Who's the one following over there, the one who wouldn't dance? Go ask. (*the nurse leaves*) If he's married, I think I'll die rather than marry anyone else.

CHORUS

Now Romeo's old feelings of desire are dying, and a new desire is eager to take their place. Romeo groaned for the beautiful Rosaline and said he would die for her, but compared with tender Juliet, Rosaline doesn't seem beautiful now. Now someone loves Romeo, and he's in love again—both of them falling for each others' good looks. But he has to make his speeches of love to a woman who's supposed to be his enemy. And she's been hooked by someone she should fear. Because he's an enemy, Romeo has no chance to see Juliet and say the things a lover normally says. And Juliet's just as much in love as he, but she has even less opportunity to meet her lover. But love gives them power, and time gives them the chance to meet, sweetening the extreme danger with intense pleasure.

JULIET

You can't see my face because it's dark out. Otherwise, you'd see me blushing about the things you've heard me say tonight. I would be happy to keep up good manners and deny the things I said. But forget about good manners. Do you love me? I know you'll say "yes," and I'll believe you. But if you swear you love me, you might turn out to be lying. Oh Romeo, if you really love me, say it truly. Or if you think it's too easy and quick to win my heart, I'll frown and play hard-to-get, as long as that will make you try to win me, but otherwise I wouldn't act that way for anything. In truth, handsome Montague, I like you too much, so you may think my behavior is loose. But trust me, gentleman, I'll prove myself more faithful than girls who act coy and play hard-to-get. I should have been more standoffish, I confess, but you overheard me talking about the love in my heart when I didn't know you were there. So excuse me, and do not assume that because you made me love you so easily my love isn't serious.

Three words, dear Romeo, and then it's good night for real. If your intentions as a lover are truly honorable and you want to marry me, send me word tomorrow. I'll send a messenger to you, and you can pass on a message telling me where and when we'll be married. I'll lay all my fortunes at your feet and follow you, my lord, all over the world.

ROMEO

Good morning, father.

FRIAR LAWRENCE

God bless you. Who greets me so early in the morning? Young man, something's wrong if you're getting out of bed this early. Every old man has worries, and worried men never get any sleep, but young men shouldn't have a care in the world. They should get to bed early and get plenty of sleep. Therefore, the fact that you're awake this early tells me you've been upset with some anxiety. If that's not the case, then this must be the answer: You, Romeo, have not been to bed tonight.

ROMEO

I love rich Capulet's daughter. I love her, and she loves me. I'm begging you: please, agree to marry us today.

FRIAR LAWRENCE

Holy Saint Francis, this is a drastic change! Have you given up so quickly on Rosaline, whom you loved so much? Then young men love with their eyes, not with their hearts. Jesus and Mary, how many tears did you cry for Rosaline? How many salty tear-drops did you waste salting a love you never tasted? The sun hasn't yet melted away the fog you made with all your sighs. The groans you used to make are still ringing in my old ears. There's still a stain on your cheek from an old tear that hasn't been washed off yet. If you were ever yourself, and this sadness was yours, you and your sadness were all for Rosaline. And now you've changed? Then repeat this after me: you can't expect women to be faithful when men are so unreliable.

ROMEO

Please, I beg you, don't scold me. The girl I love now returns my love. The other girl did not love me.

FRIAR LAWRENCE

Oh, she knew very well that you were acting like you were in love without really knowing what love means. But come on, inconsistent young man, come with me. I'll help you with your secret wedding. This marriage may be lucky enough to turn the hatred between your families into pure love.

BENVOLIO

Tybalt, old Capulet's nephew, has sent a letter to Romeo's father's house.

MERCUTIO

Oh, poor Romeo! Is he man enough at this point to face off with Tybalt?

BENVOLIO

Why, what's Tybalt's story?

MERCUTIO

He's tougher than the Prince of Cats . He does everything by the book. He fights like you sing at a recital, paying attention to time, distance, and proportion. He takes the proper breaks: one, two, and the third in your heart. He's the butcher who can hit any silk button. A master of duels. He's a gentleman from the finest school of fencing. He knows how to turn any argument into a swordfight. He knows *passado*—the forward thrust—the *punto reverso*—the backhand thrust—and the *hai*—the thrust that goes straight through...I hate these crazy, affected guys who use foreign phrases and newfangled expressions. I hate their strange manners and their weird accents! I hate it

when they say, “By Jesus, this is a very good blade, a very brave man, a very good whore.” Isn’t this a sad thing, my good man? Why should we put up with these foreign buzzards, these fashionmongers, these guys who say “pardon me,” these guys who care so much about manners that they can’t kick back on a bench without whining? “Oh, my aching bones!”

NURSE

Give me my fan, Peter.

MERCUTIO

Good Peter, give her her fan to hide her face. Her fan is prettier than her face.

NURSE

Please tell me, sir, who was that foulmouthed punk who was so full of crude jokes?

ROMEO

Nurse, he’s a man who likes to hear the sound of his own voice. He says more in one minute than he does in a whole month.

JULIET

I sent the Nurse at nine o'clock. Maybe she can’t find him. That can’t be. Oh, she’s slow! Love’s messengers should be thoughts, which fly ten times faster than sunbeams. They should be strong enough to push shadows over the dark hills. That’s the way doves carry Venus so fast, and that’s why Cupid has wings that let him fly as fast as the wind. Now it’s noon. That’s three hours since nine o'clock, but she hasn’t come back. If she was young and passionate, she’d move as fast as a ball. My words would bounce her to my sweet love, and his words would bounce her back to me. But a lot of old people act like they’re already dead—sluggish, slow, fat, and colorless, like lead.

JULIET

Now, good sweet Nurse—Oh Lord, why do you look so sad? Even if the news is sad, tell me with a smile on your face. If the news is good, you’re ruining the sweet news by playing a trick with a sour face like that.

NURSE

I am tired. Leave me alone for a minute. Oh my, my bones ache so much. I’ve been running all over the place.

JULIET

I wish you had my bones, and I had your news. Come on now, I beg you, speak, good Nurse, speak.

NURSE

Sweet Jesus, you’re in such a hurry! Can’t you wait for a moment? Don’t you see that I’m out of breath?

JULIET

How can you be out of breath when you have enough breath to tell me that you're out of breath? The excuse you make to delay the news is longer than the news itself. Is the news good or bad? Answer that question. Tell me if it's good or bad, and I'll wait for the details. Tell me so I can be satisfied. Is it good or bad?

NURSE

Well, you have made a foolish choice. You don't know how to pick a man. Romeo? No, not him, though his face is more handsome than any man's, and his legs are prettier, and as for his hands and feet and body, they're not much to speak of, and yet they're beyond compare. He's not the most polite man in the world, but, believe me, he's gentle as a lamb. Well, do what you want. Be good. Have you had lunch yet?

JULIET

No, I haven't had lunch. Everything you told me I already knew. What does he say about our marriage? What about that?

NURSE

Lord, what a headache I've got! My head is pounding. It feels like it'll break into twenty pieces. My back aches too—(JULIET *rubs her back*) Ooh, on the other side—ah, my poor aching back! Curse your heart for sending me running all over town. I could get sick and die.

NURSE

Your love says, like an honorable gentleman, who is courteous, kind, handsome, and, I believe, virtuous— where is your mother?

JULIET

Where is my mother? Why, she's inside. Where else would she be? Your answer is so strange! "Your love says, like an honorable gentleman, 'Where is your mother?'"

NURSE

Oh holy Mary, mother of God! Are you this impatient? Come on, you're being ridiculous! Is this the cure for my aching bones? From now on, take care of your messages yourself.

BENVOLIO

I'm begging you, good Mercutio, let's call it a day. It's hot outside, and the Capulets are wandering around. If we bump into them, we'll certainly get into a fight. When it's hot outside, people become angry and hot-blooded.

MERCUTIO

You're like one of those guys who walks into a bar, slams his sword on the table, and then says, "I pray I never have to use you." By the time he orders his second drink, he pulls his sword on the bartender for no reason at all

BENVOLIO

Am I really like one of those guys?

MERCUTIO

Come on, you can be as angry as any guy in Italy when you're in the mood. When someone does the smallest thing to make you angry, you get angry. And when you're in the mood to get angry, you find something to get angry about.

BENVOLIO

And what about that?

MERCUTIO

If there were two men like you, pretty soon there'd be none because the two of you would kill each other. You would fight with a man if he had one more whisker or one less whisker in his beard than you have in your beard. You'll fight with a man who's cracking nuts just because you have hazelnut-colored eyes. Only you would look for a fight like that. Your head is as full of fights as an egg is full of yolk, but your head has been beaten like scrambled eggs from so much fighting. You started a fight with a man who coughed in the street because he woke up a dog that was sleeping in the sun. Didn't you argue it out with your tailor for wearing one of his new suits before the right season? And with another for tying the new shoes he made with old laces? And yet you're the one who wants to teach me about restraint!

BENVOLIO

If I were in the habit of fighting the way you are, my life insurance rates would be sky high.

TYBALT, PETRUCHIO, and CAPULETS enter

BENVOLIO

Oh great, here come the Capulets.

MERCUTIO

Well, well, I don't care.

TYBALT

(to PETRUCCIO and others) Follow me closely, I'll talk to them. *(to the MONTAGUES)* Good afternoon, gentlemen. I'd like to have a word with one of you.

MERCUTIO

You just want one word with one of us? Put it together with something else. Make it a word and a blow.

TYBALT

You'll find me ready enough to do that, sir, if you give me a reason.

MERCUTIO

Can't you find a reason without my giving you one?

BENVOLIO

We're talking here in a public place. Either go someplace private, or talk it over rationally, or else just go away. Out here everybody can see us.

ROMEO enters

BENVOLIO

Oh Romeo, Romeo, brave Mercutio is dead! His brave spirit has floated up to heaven, but it was too early for him to leave life on earth.

PRINCE

Where are the evil men who started this fight?

BENVOLIO

Oh, noble prince, I can tell you everything about the unfortunate circumstances of this deadly fight. Over there Tybalt is lying dead. He killed your relative, brave Mercutio, and then young Romeo killed him.

LADY CAPULET

Tybalt was my nephew! He was my brother's son! Oh Prince, oh nephew, oh husband! Oh, my nephew is dead! Oh Prince, as you are a man of honor, take revenge for this murder by killing someone from the Montague family. Oh cousin, cousin!

PRINCE

Benvolio, who started this fight?

LADY CAPULET

Benvolio is part of the Montague family. His loyalties to the Montagues make him tell lies. He's not telling the truth. There were twenty Montagues fighting in this awful riot, and together those twenty could only kill one man. I demand justice. You, Prince, are the man who can give me justice. Romeo killed Tybalt. Romeo must die.

PRINCE

And for that crime, Romeo is hereby exiled from Verona. I'm involved in your rivalry. Mercutio was my relative, and he lies dead because of your bloody feud. I'll punish you so harshly that you'll regret causing me this loss. I won't listen to your pleas or excuses. You can't get out of trouble by praying or crying, so don't bother. Tell Romeo to leave the city immediately, or else, if he is found, he will be killed. Take away this body, and do what I say. Showing mercy by pardoning killers only causes more murders.

JULIET

What disaster is this? Has Romeo been killed, and is Tybalt dead too? Tybalt was my dearest cousin. Romeo was even dearer to me as my husband. Let the trumpets play the song of doom, because who can be alive if those two are gone?

FRIAR LAWRENCE

Oh, deadly sin! Oh, rude and unthankful boy! You committed a crime that is punishable by death, but our kind Prince took sympathy on you and ignored the law when he substituted banishment for death. This is kind mercy, and you don't realize it. Let me talk to you about your situation.

ROMEO

You can't talk about something that you don't feel. If you were as young as I am, if you were in love with Juliet, if you had just married her an hour ago, if then you murdered Tybalt, if you were lovesick like me, and if you were banished, then you might talk about it. You might also tear your hair out of your head and collapse to the ground the way I do right now. (*ROMEO falls on the ground*) You might kneel down and measure the grave that hasn't yet been dug.

FRIAR LAWRENCE

Hold on, and don't act out of desperation. Are you a man? You look like a man, but your tears make you look like a woman. Your wild actions resemble the irrational fury of a beast. Climb up to her bedroom and comfort her. But get out of there before the night watchmen take their positions. Then you will escape to the city of Mantua, where you'll live until we can make your marriage public and make peace between your families. We'll ask the Prince to pardon you.

NURSE

O Lord, I could stay here all night listening to such good advice. Educated men are so impressive! (*speaking to ROMEO*) My lord, I'll tell my lady you will come.

LADY CAPULET

Well, well, you have a careful father, child. He has arranged a sudden day of joy to end your sadness. A day that you did not expect and that I did not seek out.

JULIET

Madam, tell me quickly, what day is that?

LADY CAPULET

Indeed, my child, at Saint Peter's Church early Thursday morning, the gallant, young, and noble gentleman Count Paris will happily make you a joyful bride.

NURSE

God in heaven bless her! My lord, you're wrong to berate her like that.

CAPULET

And why, wise lady? You shut up, old woman. Go blabber with your gossiping friends.

CAPULET

It makes me mad. Day and night, hour after hour, all the time, at work, at play, alone, in company, my top priority has always been to find her a husband. Now I've provided a husband from a noble family, who is good-looking, young, well-educated. He's full of good qualities.

He's the man of any girl's dreams. But this wretched, whimpering fool, like a whining puppet, she looks at this good fortune and answers, "I won't get married. I can't fall in love. I'm too young. Please, excuse me."

JULIET

Don't tell me that you've heard about this marriage, Friar, unless you can tell me how to prevent it. If you who are so wise can't help, please be kind enough to call my solution wise. (*she shows him a knife*) And I'll solve the problem now with this knife. God joined my heart to Romeo's. You joined our hands. And before I—who was married to Romeo by you—am married to another man, I'll kill myself. You are wise and you have so much experience. Give me some advice about the current situation. Or watch. Caught between these two difficulties, I'll act like a judge with my bloody knife. I will truly and honorably resolve the situation that you can't fix, despite your experience and education. Don't wait long to speak. I want to die if what you say isn't another solution.

FRIAR LAWRENCE

Hold on, daughter, I see some hope. But we must act boldly because the situation is so desperate. If you've made up your mind to kill yourself instead of marrying Count Paris, then you'll probably be willing to try something like death to solve this shameful problem. You can wrestle with death to escape from shame. And if you dare to do it, I'll give you the solution.

JULIET

Oh, you can tell me to jump off the battle posts of any tower, or to walk down the crime-ridden streets of a slum. Or tell me to sit in a field full of poisonous snakes. Chain me up with wild bears. Hide me every night in a morgue full of dead bodies with wet, smelly flesh and skulls without jawbones. Or tell me to climb down into a freshly dug grave, and hide me with a dead man in his tomb. All those ideas make me tremble when I hear them named. But I will do them without fear or dread in order to be a pure wife to my sweet love.

CAPULET

So, my headstrong daughter, where have you been?

JULIET

I went somewhere where I learned that being disobedient to my father is a sin. Holy Father Lawrence instructed me to fall on my knees and beg your forgiveness. (*she kneels down*) Forgive me, I beg you. From now on I'll do whatever you say.

PRINCE

Be quiet and hold back your remarks of outrage, until we can clear up these questions. We want to know how it started and what really happened. And then I'll be the leader of pain, and maybe I'll lead you as far as death. In the meantime, hold on, and be patient. Bring forth the men under suspicion. Tell us what you know about this affair.

FRIAR LAWRENCE

I will be brief because I'm not going to live long enough to tell a boring story. Romeo, who lies there dead, was the husband of that Juliet. And she, who lies there dead, was that Romeo's faithful wife. She threatened to kill herself in my cell if I didn't help her. So I gave her a sleeping potion that I had mixed with my special skills. She woke up, and I asked her to come out of the tomb with me and endure this tragedy with patience. But then a noise sent me running scared from the tomb. She was too desperate to come with me, and it seems that she killed herself. I know all of this. And her Nurse knows about the marriage too. If any part of this tragedy is my fault, let my old life be sacrificed and let me suffer the most severe punishment.

PRINCE

We have always known you to be a holy man. Where's Romeo's man? What does he have to say about this?