**The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet**

**Romeo**: Montague’s son. He tells Benvolio of his hopeless love for Rosaline and decides to attend Capulet’s feast in order to see her. At the feast he meets and falls in love with Juliet Capulet, the young daughter of his father’s arch-enemy. He enters the Capulet’s garden at night and overhears Juliet talking to herself about her love for him; they plan to marriage. Romeo arranges a secret wedding with Friar Laurence and takes the nurse into his confidence. He and Juliet are married at Friar Laurence’s cell. He meets Tybalt in the street and is challenged by him. He refuses to fight with him because he is a relative of Juliet and also of Romeo now. Mercutio takes up the challenge and is killed when Romeo’s intervention leaves him open to Tybalt’s thrust. Romeo is furious and kills Tybalt. The Prince rather than put Romeo to death as the law decrees, banishes him from Verona. Friar Laurence advises him to go to Mantua. He bids farewell to Juliet after their wedding night. At Mantua he hears that Juliet is “dead”; he buys a deadly poison and hurries back to Verona to the Capulet’s tomb. He meets Paris there, fights with him and kills him; he drinks the poison and dies beside Juliet just as she recovers from the effects of the drug she has taken. At first Romeo is a bookish lover, ever ready to moan and mope about his love for Rosaline. Juliet even teases him telling him he kisses by the book. Once he falls in love with Juliet the intensity of his passion fills out the previously empty structure.

**Juliet**: daughter of Capulet. She learns that her parents have approved Paris as her husband. She meets the masked Romeo at her father’s feast and falls in love with him. At her window at night she soliloquizes on her feelings for Romeo, who overhears her from the garden below. They decide on immediate marriage. They are married secretly at Friar Laurence’s cell. Juliet learns that Romeo has been banished for killing Tybalt; they spend a first and last night together. She learns that her wedding to Paris has been arranged and is furiously abused by her father when she refuses to go through with it. Friar Laurence promises her a potion that will throw her into a deathlike trance for “two and forty hours”; while Romeo is summoned from Mantua. She drinks the potion and when she awakes she finds Romeo lying dead beside her. She then stabs herself. Juliet is just short of fourteen; we learn that in Verona women younger than her “are made already mother.” She is lively and vivacious, her speech is down to earth and direct, and her declaration of love is straight to the point. The intensity of her love sweeps away these initial intimations of tragedy, and she loses her worldly superiority in her devotion to Romeo.

**Nurse:** Juliet’s nurse. She is garrulous and often talks of Juliet’s infancy. She later acts as a go-between for them and tells Juliet to go to Friar Laurence’s cell. She tells Juliet that Romeo has killed Tybalt and carries messages between the lovers. She advises Juliet to marry Paris. It is she who finds Juliet apparently dead on the morning of the wedding and raises the alarm. She is fickle, liking Paris: “he is a man of wax,” liking Romeo: helping the two to marry and then liking Paris again: “Romeo is a dish clout to him.” This leads Juliet to stop confiding in her and to turn to the Friar for help.

**Tybalt**: nephew to Lady Capulet. He joins in the street brawl between the rival houses and fights with Benvolio. He protests against Romeo’s presence at the Capulet’s feast and picks a quarrel with Capulet when he will not allow him to do Romeo harm. Later he challenges Romeo but Romeo refuses to fight him because he is related to Juliet (and now to Romeo); Mercutio takes up the challenge and is killed. Romeo feels responsible (he would not fight and then stepped between them allowing Tybalt to stab Mercutio) so he kills Tybalt in response. He is fiery and short-tempered and reaches for his rapier at the slightest provocation. Mercutio dislikes his fashionable affections and calls him the “Courageous Captain of Compliments, the Prince of Cats.”

**Paris**: a young nobleman whose betrothal to Juliet has been arranged by her father. She rejects him to marry Romeo but he has no idea. He is killed by Romeo when taking flowers to Juliet’s tomb. Romeo attempts to spare him, but Paris strongly wishes to avenge Juliet’s death.

**Montague**: the father of Romeo and head of the House of Montague. He enters during a fight between the rival houses and is eager to fight old Capulet but is restrained by his wife. He worries about his son’s melancholy state but does not understand it until the end. It is only then, Romeo and Juliet both dead, that he is reconciled to Capulet; he says he will raise a statue “in pure gold” to honor Juliet.

**Lady Montague**: the wife of Montague and mother of Romeo. She stops her aged husband from joining the fight in the street. Later, Montague announces her death due to grief at Romeo’s exile.

**Capulet**: Juliet’s father and head of the House of Capulet. He wants Juliet to marry Paris and is furious when she refuses, feeling that he has made a perfect choice for her. He is reconciled with Montague at the end and promises to build a rich tomb for Romeo.

**Lady Capulet**: wife to Capulet and mother to Juliet. She supports her husband over the proposed marriage and shows no pity for her daughter’s anguish. She strongly hates Romeo and says she will try to have him poisoned.

**Friar Laurence**: a Franciscan Friar who consents to marry Romeo and Juliet in the hope their union will end the feud between the Montagues and Capulets. Romeo hides in his cell when he has been exiled and the Friar helps the young lovers plan a happy return with the announcement of their marriage. When Paris tells Friar Laurence that he must be married to Juliet on Thursday, Laurence tells Juliet he can supply her with a sleeping potion that will make her appear dead for forty-two hours, during which time she will lie in the family tomb. In the meantime he sends word to Romeo for him to return and escape with Juliet, but he does not receive it. He finds Romeo dead in the tomb; when Juliet wakes he tells her to seek refuge in “a sisterhood of nuns.” At the end, in custody, he explains how the failure of his stratagems led to the tragedy. He also explains the parts Montague and Capulet play in the tragedy, a necessary part for them to see the results of their enmity and thus be reconciled.

**Mercutio**: a kinsman of the Prince of Verona and a friend to Romeo. He accompanies Romeo on his way to the Capulet’s feast and Romeo’s love for Rosaline provokes Mercutio’s famous Queen Mab speech. Mercutio and Benvolio meets Romeo in the street later and he teases him again before teasing (insulting) the nurse for his enjoyment. When Romeo is challenged by Tybalt and refuses to fight, Mercutio takes his place and is mortally wounded when Romeo tries to intervene.

**Benvolio:** nephew to Montague and friend to Romeo. He is an innocent cause to the tragedy. His fight with Tybalt leads to street brawls being declared capital offenses. It is he who persuades Romeo to go to the Capulet feast where he falls in love with Juliet. He shows a brief moment of temper following Mercutio’s death but is a peace keeper for most of the play.

**Prince Escalus**: Prince of Verona. He intervenes in the brawl between the Capulets and Montagues and threatens death to the heads of both houses “If ever you disturb our streets again.” He banishes Romeo for killing Tybalt. He investigates the tragedy at the end, declaring that, “Some shall be pardon’d and some punish’d.” He represents order and reason which have been violated.

**Balthasar**: Romeo’s servant who announces Juliet’s supposed death to him. He accompanies Romeo to the Capulet’s tomb where he is ordered to leave. He stays nearby fearing Romeo’s actions and is later caught by the guards and tells them all he knows.

**Friar John**: Friar Laurence gives him a letter to deliver to Romeo in Mantua, informing him that Juliet is alive in the Capulet tomb. The authorities suspect that Friar John has had contact with the plague and prevent him from leaving Verona. By the time he is able to tell Friar Laurence that he has failed to deliver the letter, it is time for Juliet to wake and Romeo already thinks she is dead.