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ROMEO & JULIET

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&
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Romeo & Juliet

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WHERE

Verona, a small city in the north of Italy.



WHEN

The events in the play take place sometime between about 1300 and 1400 (600 – 700 years ago).

This is the 'Renaissance' period.

The play itself was written in about 1595.

WHO

The Montague family

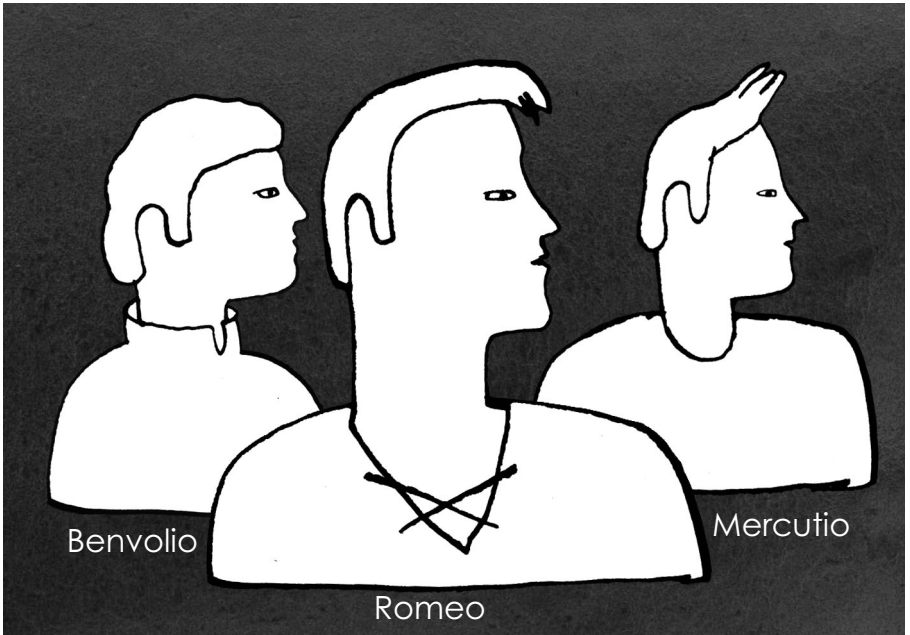
Benvolio – a Montague nobleman.

He is serious and sensitive

Romeo – cousin to Benvolio.

A romantic soul

Mercutio – friend of Romeo, friend of the Montague family. Brash, bold and witty



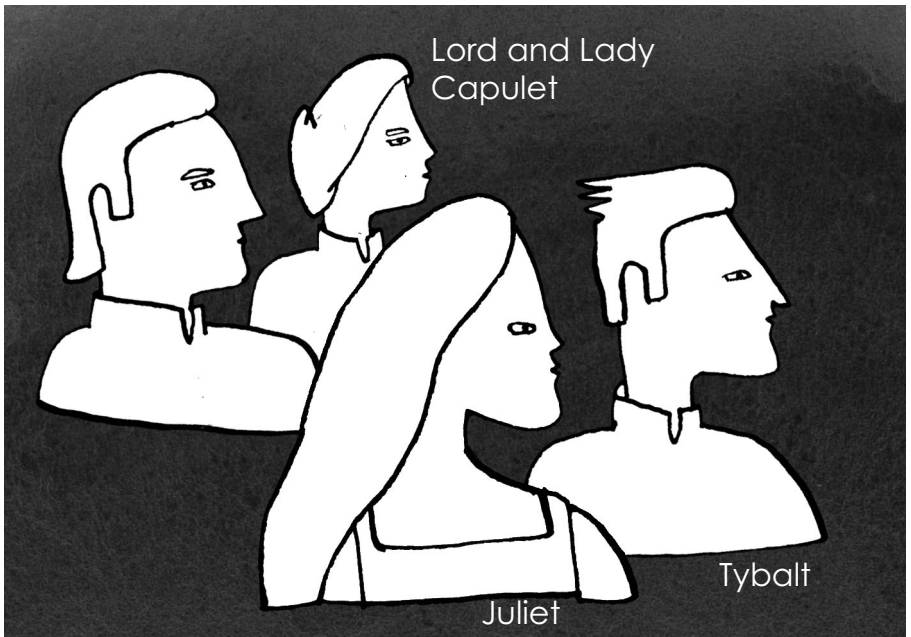
The Capulet Family

Lord Capulet – head of the Capulet family.
Strict

Lady Capulet – his wife

Juliet – their daughter.
She is nearly fourteen

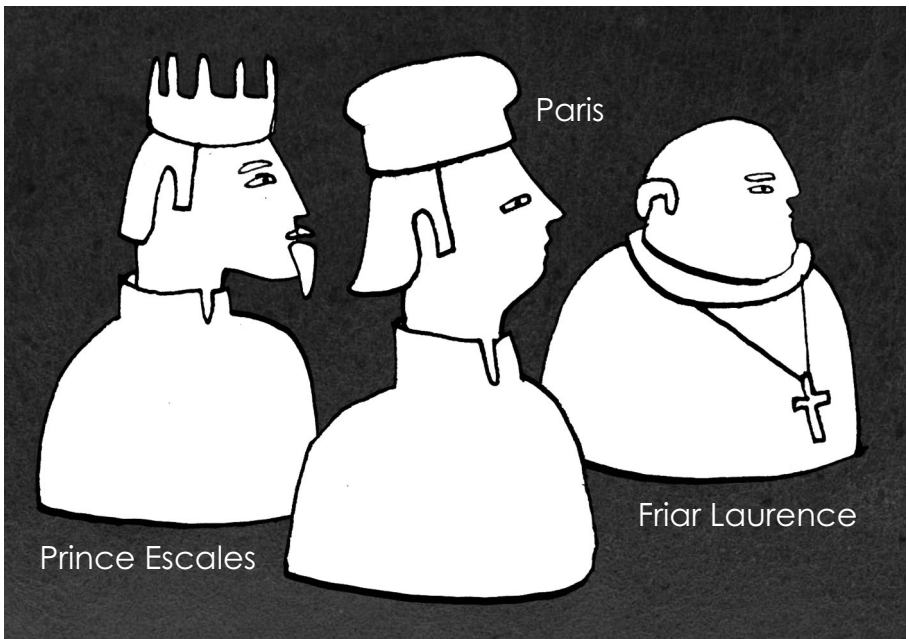
Tybalt – a Capulet nobleman. Juliet's
cousin. He is good with a sword, proud and
fashionable. Keen to protect the Capulet
name



Prince Escalus – Prince of Verona

Paris – a nobleman, friend of Prince Escalus and friend of the Capulets

Friar Laurence – a clever and devout man.
He is full of good intentions



Friar John – Friar Laurence’s messenger

Balthasar – Romeo’s servant

The Nurse – Juliet’s nurse

Sampson – a Capulet servant

Peter – a Capulet servant

HELPFUL NOTE

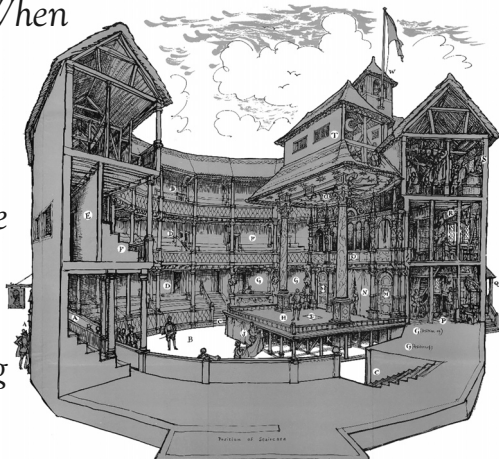


All the spoken words in this book that are in italics, *‘like this’*, are actual words taken from Shakespeare’s play. They are spoken by one of the actors in the play.



The Globe Theatre. Above is a reconstruction of the original Globe Theatre, which is in London. Below is a cross-section of the original theatre, which was built in 1599.

Shakespeare's plays were performed at this theatre. When you read this book, just imagine standing in the crowd, in front of this stage, watching the play.



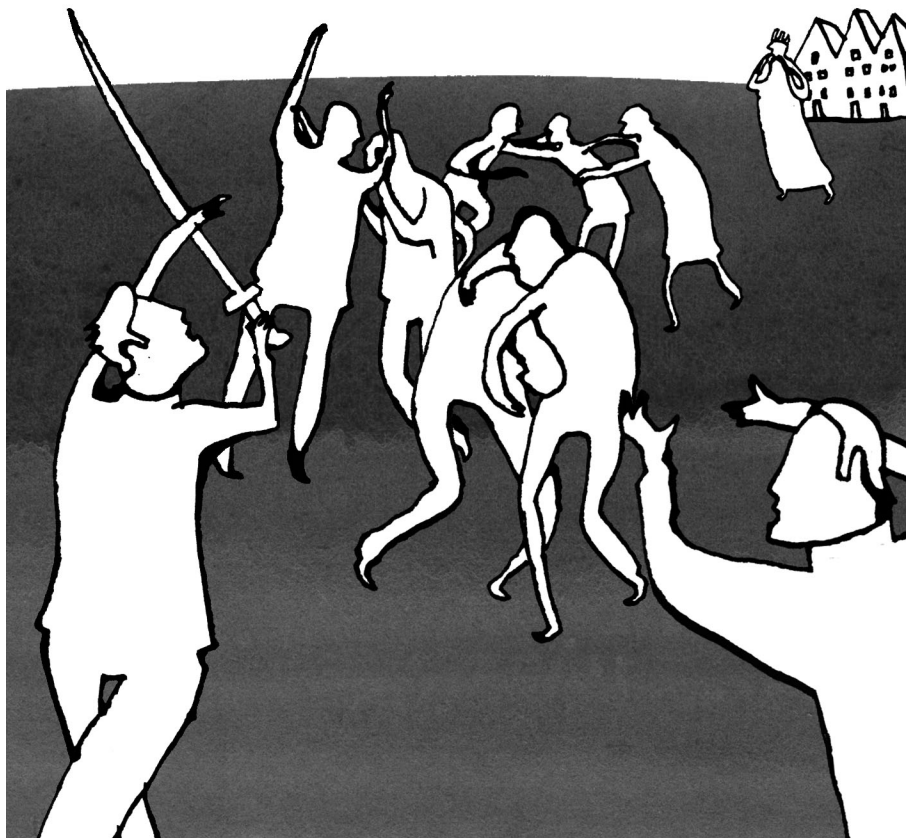


Sampson, a servant of the Capulet family, is trying to start a street fight with some servants of the Montague family. (To put it nicely, the Capulets and the Montagues do not get on!)

Samson bites his thumb at the Montagues, which in Italy is a way of showing contempt for someone. It's a big insult – and it starts a fight!

Benvolio, a Montague nobleman and an all-round nice guy, tries to part the brawling servants. He's doing his best to keep the peace.

Then, unluckily, **Tybalt Capulet** comes



swaggering down the street and immediately draws his expensive sword.

Tybalt likes nothing better than a sword fight. He practises all the time. And he hates the Montagues with a dark, black rage.

Very quickly there are servants and noblemen brawling everywhere – even old

Lord Capulet and Lord Montague. The street is full of shouting men and blood is flowing.

Prince Escalus of Verona stands watching the messy fight. This is *his* town – and yet he can't control it! This is the third time this has happened. The prince is livid! He has to stop it.

'Listen up, you lot! Stop this now!' he shouts.

Then he tells them straight: if this happens again, there will be executions:

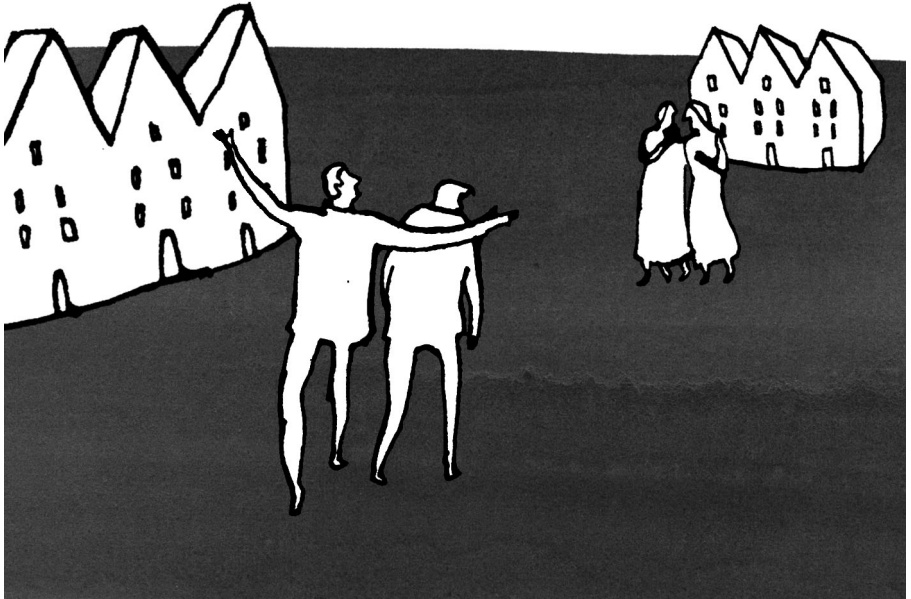
'Once more, on pain of death, all men depart.'

Later that day, in another part of Verona, **Romeo Montague** is out walking.

He is feeling depressed and hasn't been able to sleep. He is in love with a girl named Rosaline, but she's told him she doesn't want him. In fact, she isn't planning on going with any boys at all. So that all seems pretty final.

Romeo strolls along the street with his cousin Benvolio, chatting and looking sadly at the mess left from the street fight earlier.

Benvolio suggests a simple solution to Romeo's problem: there are plenty of girls around – just pick another one!



'Examine other beauties,' he says to Romeo. But Romeo says he could never love another. He will love Rosaline forever ...

Meanwhile, at the Capulets' house, another nobleman, **Count Paris** (friend of Prince Escalus), has decided which girl he wants to marry. It is thirteen-year-old **Juliet**, daughter of **Lord Capulet**.

So Paris asks Lord Capulet if he can marry her. Lord Capulet isn't keen – Juliet is his only child, she isn't even fourteen and (in those days) marriage usually meant babies straight away. And Lord Capulet thinks Juliet is still too young for all that.

So Lord Capulet tells Paris that he should wait two years – until Juliet is at least fifteen.

But he does invite Paris to a ball (read: big party!) that he is holding. (Parties make everything better!)

Lord Capulet then sends a servant out with invitations to all the nobility of Verona (except for the horrid Montagues, of course, who obviously aren't invited).

Bad luck, though! The servant who is sent out with the party invitations can't read.

But it turns out OK (kind of) – the servant meets Romeo and Benvolio by chance in the street. Romeo is still whining to Benvolio about Rosaline.

The two men help the servant out and read the invitations for him.

Then Benvolio has a great idea: he and Romeo could gate-crash the Capulet ball! (Don't forget – Romeo and Benvolio are Montagues.) Romeo could meet some beautiful girls at the party, to help him get over this Rosaline.

Juliet's mother, **Lady Capulet**, is talking to Juliet about Count Paris' offer of marriage.

'The valiant Paris seeks you for his love,'
she says.

Juliet agrees that she'll at least have a look at this Paris guy at the party.

After Benvolio's brainwave, the Montague family decide that they are *all* going to go to Lord Capulet's ball, invitation or no invitation.

(Luckily it's going to be a masked ball, so they should be able to attend without being recognised.)

Romeo still thinks going is a really bad idea. He tells them they'll have to drag him there.

Mercutio, a Montague family friend and, frankly, a bit of a lad, urges them on.

'So Romeo had a bad dream,' says Mercutio. 'Well,' he says, 'so did I.'

He had dreamed of Queen Mab, Queen of the Fairies, who causes dreams – often with tragic results for the dreamer. She even causes maids to become pregnant.

They have to tell Mercutio (always reckless and loud) to be quiet.

'Peace, peace, Mercutio, peace!

Thou talk'st of nothing,' says Romeo.

nobody else is meant to hear, is called a **soliloquy**.)

In this play Shakespeare uses many **metaphors** and **similes** to paint vivid pictures in our minds.

- ★ When Romeo first sees Juliet at the window, he uses the metaphor of light:
*‘But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon.’*

It is as if Juliet is a source of warmth and light to him.

Shakespeare also uses different kinds of language for different characters in the play.

Juliet’s nurse is quite rough and bawdy, and she uses quite crude language. When she returns to Juliet after getting details of the wedding arrangements, she complains

about her aching bones, but then points out that Juliet will be busy that night (with Romeo):

'You shall bear the burden soon at night.'

Friar Laurence, on the other hand, is more philosophical, less in touch with such earthy matters. His language seems to be full of words of wisdom. For example, after Romeo and Juliet are married, he says:

'These violent delights have violent ends.'

The way Shakespeare chooses the language that different characters use helps us understand their personalities.