

WHAT HAPPENS IN ACT II, *ROMEO AND JULIET*

Prologue

Romeo's desire for Rosaline is dead and his love for Juliet has begun. The two have a deep mutual love, each caught by the good looks of the other. Alas! He must approach a man supposed to be his foe (Capulet) and she must disobey her parents at great risk. He has no access to his beloved in the usual way, and she is at an even greater disadvantage. But love can conquer all and can soften hardships with its sweetness.

ACT II Scene 1

Romeo is in a lane by the wall of Capulet's house. He decides that he must see Juliet again and climbs the wall surrounding the Capulet orchard in order that he may obtain a glimpse of Juliet once more. Benvolio and Mercutio call out for their friend, but they are unable to find him.

ACT II Scene 2

Summary

Romeo is standing in Capulet's orchard (garden). Juliet suddenly appears at the window above where Romeo is standing. She is unaware that Romeo is in the garden and she asks why Romeo must be a Montague. She says that if he would refuse his name she would give herself to him, or if he would simply swear he loved her she would refuse her Capulet name.



Romeo responds, surprising Juliet who thought she was alone. She is amazed that he has found her, and concludes that it must be their love that has brought them back together again.

Juliet is concerned for Romeo's safety, but he says that their love will protect them. Juliet admits that she feels strongly for Romeo.

The nurse interrupts by calling for Juliet who goes inside for a moment. Juliet reappears and Romeo tells her that his love for her is true and that he intends to marry her. The nurse calls again and Juliet withdraws. She then reappears in order to set a time when her messenger can call on him and they agree 9.00 o'clock next day. Juliet finally retires and Romeo departs, seeking a Friar to aid them in their cause.

Analysis

This is often called the balcony scene, but Shakespeare never indicates in his stage directions that there is a balcony; just that she appears above Romeo. This scene contains one of the most famous speeches in the literary world commencing 'But soft, what light through yonder window breaks? Is it the east, and Juliet is the sun . . . O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?'

This Act is the happiest of the tragedy and Shakespeare indulges in exploring the positive facets of young love. He uses beautiful poetry in order to describe the deep love that the young lovers have for each other. Juliet is torn between her desire to be with Romeo, and the need to be cautious. Romeo imagines that Juliet is the sun rising from the east to banish the night. Juliet has removed the sadness in his life and has transformed night into day.

The speech also contains another famous quote, 'What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other word would smell as sweet'. Here Juliet comes to terms with the fact that it is only Romeo's name that is her enemy and not the man himself, and that they should both give up their names for the sake of the love they have for one another, which is pure. Their names have no relevance in the orchard, their love is triumphant, but unfortunately, this is not the case in the outside society of Verona.

One should also note that the most important scenes in Romeo and Juliet take place either at night or very early in the morning. The whole story takes place in just five days, and Shakespeare makes full use of the limited time available. The transition between day and night is a recurring theme throughout the play.

Act II Scene 3

Summary

This scene takes place in Friar Laurence's cell. He is proficient in the art of using herbs etc., having knowledge of the properties of the plants that he collects.

Romeo enters, advising the Friar of his new love for Juliet, and his intention to marry her. The Friar is amazed at Romeo's sudden change in affection from Rosaline to Juliet. He suggests that Romeo is fickle, but Romeo is insistent that his love is true and tells the Friar that Juliet returns his love. The Friar eventually agrees to marry the couple, and he expresses the hope that this might end the feud between the families.

Analysis

The Friar comments on the frailties of youth, being amazed at Romeo's change of allegiance from Rosaline to Juliet. Romeo's response is that Rosaline did not return his love, in contrast to Juliet who fully reciprocates. The Friar makes the comment of how good may be perverted to evil and evil may be purified by good. He puts his theories to use by agreeing to marry Romeo and Juliet. He hopes that the good of their love will reverse the evil between the two noble houses.

ACT II Scene 4

Summary

In a street in Verona, Benvolio and Mercutio enter. We have a scene much in contrast to the previous scene, for Mercutio is filled with fun and gaiety. They appear to be seeking Romeo, and complain that Rosaline is driving him mad. Little do they know his new affliction. We learn that Tybalt is already on the war-path.

Romeo enters and explains why he had slipped away from them into Capulet's garden (scene 2.). He and Mercutio again resort to puns and plays upon words; in fact it is a little surprising to see him so apparently care-free.

Now we have a change. The nurse enters with an assistant, Peter, and Romeo has an opportunity to make connections with her regarding Juliet. Mercutio's humour in the presence of the nurse is not so pleasant. He treats her as being on a much lower scale, calls her a skirt, and says her face is uglier than her fan. Of course, he outrages her.

Mercutio and Benvolio depart to dine at the home of the Montagues and Romeo says he will follow. Nurse is very angry at the insults thrown upon her by Mercutio and upbraids Peter for not challenging Mercutio to a fight.

Informed by Romeo of his intended marriage to Juliet, the nurse adjures him to be very sincere with Juliet, to remember that she is a gentle lady. Romeo comes directly to the point: "tell Juliet to come to Friar Laurence's cell this afternoon as if to confession and we shall be married. And my man will bring to you a rope-ladder which you will carry to Juliet's window for me to use tonight." The nurse, evidently convinced that Romeo is sincere now becomes garrulous, and gabbily refers to Paris as a rival suitor, but a suitor detested by Juliet. And Juliet is "the sweetest lady".

Analysis

We are given a picture of Romeo as a lover and Tybalt as a duellist, the use of puns and play on words, the nurse and Mercutio's attitude towards her, contrast between this scene and the previous two, suspense regarding Juliet's going to the Friar's and Romeo's use of the ladder.

Mercutio is as we have known him: bright, light-hearted, fun-loving, an incurable punster, a good cartoonist (description of Romeo and Tybalt), contemptuous of pretence. With the nurse he is not at all gallant; he is on the other hand, scornful and even cruel, but there was in those days a wide difference in class or social standing which only a few rare spirits rose above.

Romeo is again in love but in a brighter style - his melancholy has gone. He is now witty in talk, and he shows himself practical, quick and resolute in act; in fact, perhaps too impetuous.

The nurse, following the style of previous scenes, is commonplace, gabby, repetitious, a chatterer. But she has self-esteem enough to resent Mercutio's making fun of her. She has some dignity.

ACT II Scene 5

Summary

We return to the Capulet orchard where Juliet awaits the return of her nurse. Juliet is anxious for news of Romeo, but the nurse claims to be too tired and out of breath to give her any news. Eventually the nurse says that Romeo is waiting at Friar Laurence's cell to marry her. The nurse departs to find a ladder.

Analysis

We see here the excitement that the two lovers have. They are full of anticipation for the wedding. The excitement is fuelled by the danger of the plans.

Shakespeare uses a cleverly constructed comic scene involving the nurse's reluctance to provide Juliet with news. However, the nurse's joke at delaying the news will be sadly mirrored later on in a future scene, where the delay in relaying news has dire consequences.

ACT II Scene 6

Summary

Romeo anxiously awaits the arrival of Juliet at Friar Laurence's cell. He boldly states that he does not care what misfortune might come as it will pale in comparison to the joy he feels right now. The



Friar warns Romeo not be so intense as violent delights often lead to violent ends.

Juliet eventually arrives and they are married.

Analysis

Shakespeare cleverly generates an electric atmosphere of euphoric love.

The Friar warns against Romeo's intensity and this is Shakespeare's way of reminding the audience that they are watching a tragedy and that Romeo and Juliet will die. The Friar's words demonstrate that it is the power of fate that will overcome the power of love.

At this stage, we have seen that most of the characters are driven by uncontrollable passions. If Romeo and Juliet were modest lovers, then the effect on the audience would not be great, but their love has to be passionate so that it seems plausible that they would give up their families and friends just so that they can be together.

Questions on Act Two

(answer them mentally, and compare your answers with the prepared responses)

1. What has Act II added to the action of Act I?

In Act I the lovers had met and fallen in love; also Tybalt had been aroused. In Act II the lovers have their long dialogue in the orchard which ends in their plan to marry; we have met the Friar who will marry them in the hope of ending the feud between the families; we have seen the nurse serve as a go-between and make arrangements. We are all ready for the marriage but have been reminded that Tybalt is in love with his sword and his use of it.

2. What is added to character in Act II?

Romeo is a new man, no longer a moon-struck mortal. His love is sincere; he is gracious and courteous, quick and resolute in action, a brilliant young nobleman of Verona in deep and honourable love.

Juliet has advanced from girlhood to womanhood. She knows her love and trusts it and feels that she must follow the leading of her heart. She has been candid, not immodest, can speak in dignified and gracious language. And yet she fears some "consequence hanging in the stars".

Mercutio is more keen, more clever, more full of fun and humour, but more hostile to Tybalt.

Tybalt is still a provoker of strife, in love "with his own sword and his swordsmanship, a dainty and fastidious poseur (see Mercutio's descriptions)

The nurse is assuming new dimensions, not all admirable. She seems to lack sympathy for Juliet; if she is humourous her humour is ill-timed; she may not be a true friend of Juliet. Besides, why does Mercutio treat her with little dignity? Is the fault partly his, partly hers?

Friar Laurence is deep and steady; so far the one voice of weight and wisdom and moderation. His profession is to heal by herb and spiritual advice and good will. To the young he is understanding, gracious and helpful. He sees the way to peace but will he achieve it? He should have conferred with the Capulets and the Montagues before the marriage.

3. "All seems ripe for happiness now". From what quarter do you suspect trouble and why?

From Tybalt. He was mortally offended the evening of the feast (I, 5-60) and Mercutio has reminded us of his own love for strife and death.

4. In what scenes have we had Romeo and Juliet and what is the content of the scenes?

In II, 2 the orchard scene and in II, 6 the Friar's cell, a scene which immediately preceded the marriage. In the former the author cleverly reveals the mutual love of the two without having them meet; then has them advance to the arrangements for marriage. In the second he shows them brought together before the Friar who is to marry them.

5. *This act has a pleasant variety in its scenes. Illustrate.*

1. It has the very pictorial and romantic orchard scene with Romeo and Juliet telling of their love in a lovely setting.
2. It has the street scene featuring Mercutio first with Benvolio, then with the nurse.
3. It has the cell scene giving the rich personality of the Friar and the actual meeting of the two lovers.

6. *What has Friar Laurence added to the play?*

He has added weight of character; wisdom of age, counsels of moderation, at least one sympathetic, understanding character, a good liaison means, a man of charitable will.

7. *Do you think it is wise for the Friar's to secretly marrying the lovers?*

8. *Which is the more practical, Romeo or Juliet?*



*"Come, come with me and we will make short work,
For, by your leaves, you shall not stay alone
Till Holy Church incorporate two in one."*