

WHAT HAPPENS IN ACT IV, *ROMEO AND JULIET*

Scene 1

Summary

Paris comes to Friar Laurence's cell and wishes to discuss his impending marriage to Juliet. He feels the wedding should be arranged as soon as possible as Juliet has become unbalanced in grieving over Tybalt. In this way he can put an end to her period of mourning. For different reasons the Friar wishes the marriage to be delayed indefinitely.

Juliet enters and behaves indifferently towards Paris despite the fact that he obviously cares for her. The Friar asks Paris to leave in order to hear Juliet's confession.

Juliet produces a knife saying she will kill herself rather than marry Paris, but the Friar has a plan. He advises Juliet that she must consent to marry Paris then on the night before the wedding she is to take a sleeping draught that the Friar will provide which will make her appear to be dead. The Friar will advise Romeo in Mantua to come and release Juliet from the Capulet tomb. She can then return to Mantua with Romeo free to live with him away from the feuding families. She agrees.

Analysis

Here we now get a full insight into Friar Laurence. He is an intelligent and cunning character portrayed by Shakespeare as a benign and wise father figure. He still hopes to unite the families and enable the two lovers to live happily out of Verona.

We also learn about Paris' true feelings for Juliet and he genuinely cares for her well being. However, he does arrogantly assume that Juliet will submit to the pressures on her to marry him, and the audience still views him as a threat to the play's heroes.

Scene 2

Summary

Juliet returns home and following the Friar's instructions, apologizes to her parents for her disobedience and cheerfully agrees to marry Paris. They are pleased, and advise her that the marriage has been brought forward a day and that they will be married tomorrow.

Analysis

Again, another tool of fate has contrived to obstruct the happiness of Romeo and Juliet, who will be forced to carry out the Friar's plan ahead of schedule.

Scene 3

Summary

Juliet tells her nurse that she wishes to spend the night by herself and repeats the request to Lady Capulet. She wonders if she will die when she takes the potion, or whether she might awake in the

tomb and go mad with fright because Romeo is not there. She then has a vision where she sees Tybalt's ghost searching for Romeo. Begging the ghost to cease, she makes a toast to Romeo and drinks the contents of the vial.

Analysis

Juliet shows that she possesses inner strength and in toasting Romeo and drinking the potion, she is taking on fate face-to-face. She has pondered what the various possibilities may be, but she is determined to keep control over her own destiny, and is willing to face up to the consequences.

Scenes 4 and 5

Summary

The nurse lets out a wail on finding the apparently dead body of Juliet and Lady Capulet and Capulet join her. Suddenly all the wedding preparations come to an end. Paris arrives with the Friar and a group of musicians and he joins in with the mourners. The Friar urges them to make preparations for the funeral.

The musicians are left in limbo with Peter, the Capulet servant, and he asks them to play a happy tune to ease his sorrowful heart. They refuse. Peter then insults the musicians who respond in kind. The musicians decide to wait for the mourners to return so that they might get some lunch.

Analysis

It is at this point that the audience obtains an understanding of how high the hopes were of the Capulets for their daughter Juliet. She was the means through which their family could gain in influence in the city. These hopes have now been dashed. They can also see how legitimate Paris' love for Juliet was. It was clearly a sincere grief he had over the loss of a loved one.



The scene with Peter and the musicians seems to have little relevance, but Shakespeare specifically includes it in order for the audience to view these events through the eyes of the lower classes. It suggests that the common people see the noble houses as shallow. Although the result of the feud is death, and heartbreak, they are meaningless because the deaths result from over-reaction of an over-passionate society. The deaths of the nobility have little effect on the daily lives of the common people. It is clear that the musicians care little about the apparent death of Juliet; they are merely concerned about missing out on a free lunch. Some productions delete this scene with the musicians as they consider that it detracts from the main storyline, but Shakespeare is not just passing comment on the society in

Verona, but on the world as a whole then and perhaps even now. Life and love are precious, and must be treated with respect.

Questions on Act Four

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

1. What advance in the plot have we in Act IV?

Juliet, married to Romeo, and then being forced to marry Paris, goes to consult Friar Laurence. He suggests that she take a drug to make her sleep for 42 hours - that is, during the wedding day and until Romeo can come for her, and he outlines the course of her action. The preparations proceed; Juliet returns from the Friar's and acquiesces in the marriage to Paris. The night before this marriage, Juliet dismisses her mother, ponders long over the potent drug, drinks it and falls into a deep sleep. The preparations hurry on through Wednesday night, but when they try to awaken Juliet on Thursday morning she is "dead", and following the advice of the Friar, she is carried to the tomb of the Capulets

2. This slight action (above) is made to cover a good deal of the text. What does the author add to this action?

A good deal of dialogue between Paris and Juliet, some light conversation between the Capulets and servants making the preparations, and the lightness in the talk of Peter and the musicians at the end of scene. We also have the long conversation between the Friar and Juliet in scene 1 and the Friar's plan (running to thirty lines), Juliet's long soliloquy before she takes the drug (about 40 lines) and the Friar's explanation of the death of Juliet and what they must now do. The setting forth of the character of Capulet by his words and actions takes a fair amount of space and time.

3. How does Juliet reconcile her apparent readiness to marry Paris with her determination to remain true to Romeo?

By equivocation (scene 1 to line 44) and deception (scenes 2 and 3 where she consents to marry Paris and acts the part of preparing for it). In following the Friar's orders - taking the drug - she is determined to remain Romeo's wife.

4. "The Friar's wish to do good is leading him into desperate remedies". Explain.

He married Juliet and Romeo in the hope that he might heal the breach between the two houses; now (because of Romeo's slaying Tybalt) to give Juliet this powerful drug and entomb her. The outcome hangs upon the speed and fidelity of a messenger and a very delicate piece of "timing".

5. Do you find any difference between Romeo and Juliet in their meeting the Friar?

Romeo's meeting is in III - 3. Here we find a man absolutely dejected and hopeless until Laurence finds a way out of the trouble; then he is ecstatic.

Juliet (IV - 21) is much more positive. She wastes no time in lamentation but insists upon a solution, or she will take her life. When the Friar suggests his desperate remedy she seizes it eagerly. "Give me, give me! O tell not me to fear!" Juliet, however, was in a situation where she had to do something at once.

6. "Capulet deserves sympathy in this scene." Discuss

NO: He once said he did not wish Juliet to marry, so why the huge push now? He has been so harsh with her that she dares not tell him the truth. He had threatened to disown her, so his former treatment of her leaves little room for sympathy.

YES: Capulet does not know the situation, Juliet has deceived him, he has great joy in the solution of his trouble, he has an honest desire to relieve Juliet from grief for Tybalt, his good nature, and his beautiful remarks after Juliet's death, all contribute to feelings of pity for this father in mourning.



*"What if it be a poison which the Friar
Subtly hath ministered to have me dead,
Lest in this marriage he should be dishonoured,
Because he married me before to Romeo?
I fear it is. And yet methinks it should not,
For he hath still been tried a holy man ."*