

The libretto in brief

Act I

Scene One

Gallery in Capellio's palace in Verona, in the 13th century.

The Guelphs, followers of Capellio Capulet, have gathered fearing that the proud Ghibellines, supporters of the Montagues, may be preparing to attack them, protected by the friendship of Ezzelino and led by that same Romeo who, as Capellio bitterly recalls, slew his son and now dares to dispatch envoys to the Guelphs to make deceitful overtures of peace. While Laurence, a friend of the family, advises them to receive the Montagues' messenger, Capellio urges the Guelphs to reject their false proposal of peace, and he offers the hand of his daughter Juliet to Tybalt, who has sworn to challenge Romeo to a duel to avenge the death of the young Capulet.

He wishes the wedding to be celebrated that same evening, but Laurence tries to dissuade him: Juliet is sick and in deep distress, and could be led to the altar only against her will. Tybalt, whilst proclaiming his great love for Juliet, refuses to marry her, not wishing to make her suffer; but Capellio convinces him of Juliet's affection to the man who will vindicate her slain brother.

Meanwhile the Montagues' embassy enter, led by Romeo under false identity. The proposal of peace, a thousand times signed and a thousand times infringed by the Montagues, is to be rejected, says Capellio. It is up to the Capulets to see that it is respected, replies the young man; may the Montagues live together in peace at Verona with the Capulets and Juliet be the bride of Romeo. Capellio disdainfully refuses this proposal, declaring scornfully that Tybalt shall marry Juliet, while the Capulets will wage a merciless war against their hated enemies. And upon the Capulet family, concludes Romeo, will fall the curse of so much bloodshed.

Scene Two

A room in Juliet's apartments.

Mournfully contemplating her wedding dress, Juliet thinks sadly about Romeo, whose return from exile she has so many times invoked. She is comforted by Laurence, who confides to her that the young man is in Verona and is about to see her again, having been introduced by him into the palace through a secret passageway. The two lovers embrace passionately, then Romeo, confessing his weariness of such a tormented life and of his unbearable separation from Juliet, proposes to his beloved that they flee together. Juliet refuses in the name of duty and obedience to her father and Romeo ardently endeavours to convince her to follow him, but to no avail. The distant echo of nuptial music, and Juliet's entreaties not to defy death by daring to confront her father's wrath unarmed, persuade him to leave the Capulets' palace.

Scene Three

Hall in the Capulets' palace, a wide staircase and illuminated gallery.

Ladies and gentlemen are celebrating the imminent nuptials of Juliet with Tybalt. Romeo, disguised as a Guelph, tells Laurence that a thousand armed Ghibellines are preparing to descend upon their adversaries, thus interrupting the wedding ceremony. His friend tries in vain to dissuade him. At that very moment a great tumult and clashing of swords is heard, with guests fleeing in all directions as Romeo runs to join his own side, followed by Laurence.

Juliet descends alone from the gallery, inwardly happy to be yet free, but concerned over the fate of Romeo. The latter joins her immediately afterwards, trying to drag her away, but she is still reluctant to abandon her father's house. At this moment Tybalt and Capellio burst in, accompanied by armed Guelphs. In a heated confrontation, Tybalt asks the reason for such despicable behaviour from a man whom he still believes to be the envoy of the Montagues. Romeo is about to disclose his real identity, but Juliet, in despair, implores him not to do so. Invoking their leader Romeo, the armed Ghibellines rush in. Fierce fighting ensues.

Act II

Scene One

Apartment in Capellio's palace

The clangour of weapons gradually dies away. Juliet is restless as she asks Laurence for news of the clash. Romeo is safe and can hope for help from Ezzelino, replies Laurence. She, however, is in grave danger: she will be taken to the castle of Tybalt and obliged to go through with the abhorred marriage unless she will put her trust in him. He hands her a strong potion which will enable her to simulate death, so that she will be borne to the family vaults, where she will awake, after a long sleep, to find herself in the arms of Romeo. After a moment of anguish, Juliet drinks the potion as her father, deaf to her sorrowful plea for forgiveness, enters and sternly enjoins her to retire to her rooms to make ready for her wedding.

Scene Two

A solitary place not far from Capellio's palace.

Romeo frets about the lack of news from his friend Laurence, who has not yet appeared, when he meets Tybalt, who recognizes and challenges him. The two men are about to fight, when lugubrious music is heard in the distance. Presently a funeral procession enters and makes its way along the gallery. Upon hearing the name of Juliet unanimously bewailed, Romeo and Tybalt put down their arms and mourn the death of the girl they both so dearly loved.

Scene Three

The Capulet family vaults.

The vaults are closed, but after repeated blows from outside, a door swings open and Romeo enters with a retinue of armed men. They open Juliet's tomb, which is still adorned with flowers, and in tears, Romeo speaks to his beloved, who appears to be serenely sleeping. His men endeavour without success to restrain him, but he orders them to leave him alone; he then poisons himself. At that moment Juliet stirs, pronouncing Romeo's name. Upon seeing the young man at the foot of her tomb, she thinks that he is beside her because he has been forewarned, in accordance with their agreement, by Laurence. But when, in a heartrending dialogue, the two unhappy lovers learn the ghastly truth, they clasp one another in a last desperate embrace. Romeo dies and Juliet falls lifeless upon his body. Romeo's supporters re-enter precipitously, pursued by the Capulets in arms. Faced with the tragic scene, Capellio feels all the guilt fall upon himself for the dismal consequences of his implacable hatred.

(Traduzione di Rodney Stringer)