

# The libretto in brief

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## Act one

The opera opens with a sung Prologue that Gounod included as an overture and in which the chorus sets the scene for the coming drama. The action then begins with the scene of a masked ball at the Capulets' palace. Amidst the noise and excitement, Juliette is brought in by her father. The young girl is admired by everyone for her beauty. Among the guests are two masked friends, Mercutio and Roméo Montaigu, son of the Capulets' rival family. He appears uneasy and prey to strange premonitions, and he wishes to leave. Mercutio tries to put his mind at rest by assuring him that he has certainly been visited by Mab, the Queen of dreams. Juliette is betrothed to Pâris, a young count, but in secret she tells her nurse Gertrude that she would like to live her youth without having to think of marriage. Upon seeing Juliette, Roméo falls instantly in love with her, not knowing that she is the daughter of Capulet. He approaches her and passionately declares his love for her. The spell is broken by Juliette's cousin, Tybalt, who recognises the voice of the hated Roméo Montaigu. The two lovers thus discover that they belong to two rival families. As Tybalt is about to throw himself on Roméo, Capulet intervenes to stop the quarrel: the ball must continue and Roméo and Mercutio leave.

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## Act two

At night, Roméo enters the Capulets' garden. He expresses all his passion for Juliette, comparing her to the rising sun. She in turn comes out on her balcony and responds to her lover's words. Their passionate dialogue is interrupted by a group of servants from the Capulet household hoping to find Roméo's page and teach him a lesson. The nurse then also intervenes calling Juliette back into the house. Shortly afterwards the lovers' dialogue begins again, and they leave each other with the promise to meet the next day.

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## Act three

The first scene is set in the cell of Frère Laurent, who is touched by the love of the two young people. He hopes that it might serve to bring peace again between the Capulets and the Montaigus, and so, in the presence of Gertrude, he marries Roméo and Juliette.

The second scene takes place near the palace of the Capulets. Stéphan, Roméo's page, sings a provocative song, causing Grégorio, a servant of the Capulets', to challenge him to a duel. Immediately, Mercutio intervenes in defence of Stéphan and Tybalt in defence of Grégorio. Tybalt draws his sword and kills the dear friend of Roméo, who impulsively runs his sword through Tybalt. The Duke of Verona appears and banishes Roméo from the city.

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#### **Act four**

The first scene takes place in Juliette's bedchamber. When the lark begins to sing, Roméo must leave for exile and the lovers' last night together is coming to an end. Once Roméo has gone, Capulet enters the room accompanied by Frère Laurent. Juliette's father announces his firm decision that she should marry Pâris that very day. Frère Laurent tries to calm the girl and gives her a sleeping draught that will cause her to appear as though she were dead and so avoid marrying Pâris.

The second scene is the wedding ceremony. Everything seems to be going as normal, until Pâris is about to place the wedding ring on Juliette's finger. She falls senseless to the ground leaving all those present to mourn her death.

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#### **Act five**

The crypt containing the Capulets' tombs. Frère Laurent's message concerning Juliette's feigned death has not reached Roméo, who, unaware of the truth, enters the crypt, and on seeing his beloved's dead body, takes some poison. Soon afterwards, Juliette awakes, but her joy at the sight of Roméo is short-lived. He is dying and so the girl stabs herself and the two lovers die in an embrace while asking for divine forgiveness.

*(Traduzione di Chris Owen)*