

Romeo & Juliet Act 4 Summary

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SCENE i

In his cell, Friar Lawrence speaks with Paris about the latter's impending marriage to Juliet. Paris says that Juliet's grief about Tybalt's death has made her unbalanced, and that Capulet, in his wisdom, has determined they should marry soon so that Juliet can stop crying and put an end to her period of mourning. The friar remarks to himself that he wishes he were unaware of the reason that Paris's marriage to Juliet should be delayed.

Juliet enters, and Paris speaks to her lovingly, if somewhat arrogantly. Juliet responds indifferently, showing neither affection nor dislike. She remarks that she has not married him yet. On the pretense that he must hear Juliet's confession, Friar Lawrence ushers Paris away, though not before Paris kisses Juliet once. After Paris leaves, Juliet asks Friar Lawrence for help, brandishing a knife and saying that she will kill herself rather than marry Paris. The friar proposes a plan: Juliet must consent to marry Paris; then, on the night before the wedding, she must drink a sleeping potion that will make her appear to be dead; she will be laid to rest in the Capulet tomb, and the friar will send word to Romeo in Mantua to help him retrieve her when she wakes up. She will then return to Mantua with Romeo, and be free to live with him away from their parents' hatred. Juliet consents to the plan wholeheartedly. Friar Lawrence gives her the sleeping potion.

SCENE ii

Juliet returns home, where she finds Capulet and Lady Capulet preparing for the wedding. She surprises her parents by repenting her disobedience and cheerfully agreeing to marry Paris. Capulet is so pleased that he insists on moving the marriage up a day, to Wednesday—tomorrow. Juliet heads to her chambers to, ostensibly, prepare for her wedding. Capulet heads off to tell Paris the news.

SCENE iii

In her bedchamber, Juliet asks the Nurse to let her spend the night by herself, and repeats the request to Lady Capulet when she arrives. Alone, clutching the vial given to her by Friar Lawrence, she wonders what will happen when she drinks it. If the friar is untrustworthy and seeks merely to hide his role in her marriage to Romeo, she might die; or, if Romeo is late for some reason, she might awaken in the tomb and go mad with fear. She has a vision in which she sees Tybalt's ghost searching for Romeo. She begs Tybalt's ghost to quit its search for Romeo, and toasting to Romeo, drinks the contents of the vial.

SCENE iv-v

Early the next morning, the Capulet house is aflutter with preparations for the wedding. Capulet sends the Nurse to go wake Juliet. She finds Juliet dead and begins to wail, soon joined by both Lady Capulet and Capulet. Paris arrives with Friar Lawrence and a group of musicians for the wedding. When he learns what has happened, Paris joins in the lamentations. The friar reminds them all that Juliet has gone to a better place, and urges them to make ready for her funeral. Sorrowfully, they comply, and exit.

Left behind, the musicians begin to pack up, their task cut short. Peter, the Capulet servant, enters and asks the musicians to play a happy tune to ease his sorrowful heart. The musicians refuse, arguing that to play such music would be inappropriate. Angered, Peter insults the musicians, who respond in kind. After singing a final insult at the musicians, Peter leaves. The musicians decide to wait for the mourners to return so that they might get to eat the lunch that will be served.