**This lecture gives a plot overview of William Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet**

**Romeo and Juliet Summary**

**ACT 1**

The play opens in Verona, a city in Italy. Two prominent families, the Capulets and the Montagues, have been involved in a long-standing feud. One day, some servants and members of the two families fight in the street. Prince Escalus, the ruler of Verona, states that anymore fighting will be seen as civil disobedience—the penalty for which is death. Romeo’s parents are worried about him because he has been quite depressed lately. They ask their nephew Benvolio to find out the cause of Romeo’s dark moods. Benvolio soon discovers that Romeo has been brooding over Rosaline, a young girl who does not return his love.

His cousin, Benvolio, advises him to stop thinking about Rosaline and consider other young women. Just then, an illiterate servant of the Capulets approaches. He asks for their help in reading a guest list. In this way, Romeo and Benvolio find out that a masked ball will be given that night at the Capulet house. Rosaline is listed as one of the invited guests. Benvolio sees this as a good chance for Romeo to compare Rosaline to other beautiful girls. Before the party, Lord Capulet talks to Paris about Paris’s wish to marry Juliet. Capulet is not willing to allow this because Juliet, his only child, is not yet 14. Yet even so, he invites Paris to come to the party and speak to Juliet himself. Capulet tells Paris that if Juliet is willing to marry him, Capulet will give his consent. At the party, Romeo and Juliet meet by chance and fall in love at first sight. Later, they discover that they are members of the rival families.

Act II

That night, after the party, Romeo climbs the wall into the Capulet orchard. Juliet comes out on her balcony. Each declares love for the other, and they make plans to marry. The next day, Romeo goes to see Friar Lawrence to make arrangements for the wedding. The friar performs the ceremony, hoping that the marriage will bring peace between the two families.

### Act III

Tybalt, a Capulet who had recognized Romeo at the party, insults Romeo on the street. Romeo’s friend Mercutio defends Romeo by fighting Tybalt in a duel. Now related to Tybalt, Romeo tries to stop the fight—but he is unsuccessful. In the duel, Tybalt kills Mercutio. Enraged, Romeo then fights Tybalt, killing him. For this, Prince Escalus banishes Romeo from Verona.

Romeo and Juliet spend one night together before he leaves. They pray for a quick pardon so he can soon return. The grief-stricken Juliet spends much time weeping. Her father, thinking she is grieving for her cousin Tybalt, arranges for her marriage to Paris, in hopes the marriage will cheer her up. When she objects, her parents become angry, telling her that she must obey them and marry Paris. Even Juliet’s nurse agrees with them, saying that Paris is a better match than the banished Romeo.

### Act IV

Juliet visits Friar Lawrence and begs for help. Friar Lawrence explains his plan for Juliet to avoid marrying Paris. He gives her a potion that will make her appear to be dead for 42 hours. She will be put in the family tomb where the friar and Romeo will meet her when she wakes up, so she can leave Verona with Romeo. That night, Juliet drinks the potion and falls into a deep sleep. The next morning, the nurse finds her, and everyone thinks she is dead. The joyful wedding plans are changed into funeral plans.

### Act V

Romeo’s servant brings him word of Juliet’s death. The friar’s message— that she is not really dead—fails to reach Romeo. Romeo decides to join Juliet in death. He buys some poison before leaving for Verona. At the Capulet tomb, Romeo finds Paris and kills him when he will not leave.

Romeo then kisses Juliet, drinks the poison, and dies. The friar arrives just as Juliet is waking up. He tries to get her to leave the tomb, but she won’t go. Fearful of being discovered, the friar leaves. Juliet then kills herself with Romeo’s dagger. When the families discover the tragic truth, they agree to end their tragic feud.