



## A pair of star-crossed lovers

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### **Chorus:**

Two households, both alike in dignity,  
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,  
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,  
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.  
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes  
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;  
Whose misadventur'd piteous overthrows  
Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.

### *Romeo And Juliet Prologue, 1–8*

In a sonnet no one would claim as Shakespeare's best, the chorus reports a feud between two families "alike in dignity" (of equal social rank), the Montagues and Capulets. Romeo, a Montague, and Juliet, a Capulet, are the "pair of star-cross'd lovers" whose misadventures and deaths will finally put an end to the feud. "Star-cross'd" means "opposed (crossed) by the stars," the arbiters of man's fate. As sophisticated as Renaissance thought was in many ways, the Copernican revolution had yet to have much of an impact. It was still popularly believed that the celestial order directly affected the affairs of the world.

Romeo and Juliet, only the second of Shakespeare's ten tragedies, relies heavily on the rhetoric and devices of the classical tragedies Renaissance dramatists used as models. A prologue delivered by a chorus is one such device; and, as prologues generally did, this one lays out the "argument" (plot and moral) of the play. Suspense was not important to the audiences who came to see Romeo and Juliet—most of them would already have known the story anyway.

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