

Romeo: literature's greatest lover... or literature's greatest player? He's the young son of the affluent Montague family who lusts after the unavailable, but oh-so gorgeous Rosaline—right up until he sets eyes on Juliet Capulet, only daughter of his family's arch enemies, and falls in love at first sight.

As the beautiful and only daughter of the Capulets, Juliet is slated to marry Verona's hottest non-Montague bachelor until she takes her fate into her own hands. This is a girl who knows what she wants, and gets it—even if it means death.

Rosaline is the gorgeous and aloof woman Romeo crushes on until he meets the love of his life, Juliet. But, um, don't get excited, because we never see her, she has no speaking part, and she isn't even listed in the dramatis personae (the cast list).

Mercutio is Romeo's sword-fight loving BFF, and you probably won't be surprised to find out that his name sounds a lot like the word "mercurial," i.e. "volatile," i.e. "touchy." He never backs down from a duel and, although he's neither a Montague nor a Capulet, he gets involved in the long-standing family feud on the side of the Montagues.

Benvolio, whose name literally means "good will," is a classic nice guy: stuck playing the straight man to Mercutio and the non-romantic-idiot to Romeo, constantly telling everyone else to chill and stop fighting and "keep the peace" (1.1.61), and being asked to spy on his friends.

You don't have to look far for Tybalt's motivation: testosterone. He's not deep, but he sure is handy with a sword. Mercutio, who hates Tybalt, gives him the "caty" nickname the "Prince of Cats," and it totally fits. While Romeo can sometimes remind you of a bouncy and overeager puppy, Tybalt tends to stalk around proudly attacking anyone who strokes his fur wrong.

Even a tragedy needs some comic relief, and who better than Juliet's bawdy, lower-class nurse? It's comic gold: she's a lower-class woman, so that's already funny; and she's a nurse, which means all she can talk about are bodies—bodies having babies, bodies nursing babies...

A mentor to both Romeo and Juliet, Friar Laurence constantly advises them to act with more caution and moderation, even though he doesn't wait too long before agreeing to marry off these two crazy kids. I

Lord Capulet (a.k.a. Capulet) is Juliet's daddy. At first, he seems like a pretty good dad. When Paris comes sniffing around for thirteen-year-old Juliet's hand in marriage, Capulet puts him off, citing Juliet's young age and even suggesting that he'd like his daughter to marry for "love" (1.2.2-3). But Lord Capulet doesn't play the good father for long. Paris eventually wears him down, but Lord Capulet isn't too happy when Juliet refuses to marry him.

Like many other mothers of teens, Lady Capulet has her hands full with Juliet. Sure, Lady Capulet does make an effort to reach out to her daughter now that she's of an age to be married. But it's obvious that Juliet's closest bond is with the Nurse; Lady Capulet never even comes close to challenging that. As a result, Lady Capulet doesn't come across as a particularly great mom.

All you have to do to see why Paris (the guy who wears down Juliet's dad until he agrees to let him marry Juliet) is such a good foil for Romeo—and why Juliet chose Romeo over him—is to contrast what Paris and Romeo each say outside Juliet's grave.

The Prince of Verona wants peace, but he can't restrain the violence between the Montagues and the Capulets. If the Prince can't do anything about the feud, it means that the law (which the Prince embodies) is powerless against the passions of hate and of love.