

"O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?"

Romeo & Juliet

Act 2 Scene 2

Juliet Capulet has just met Romeo Montague for the first time at the Capulet ball and, as we all know, has fallen head over heels in love with him. We also know that the Montagues and Capulets are deadly enemies. What Juliet is unaware of is that Romeo has crept into the Capulets' garden and is listening to her.

Juliet:

O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?

Commentary

Juliet is standing on her famous balcony lamenting the fact that her lover is also her deadly enemy: "Why oh why did you have to be Romeo, the Montague?"

Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

She hopes Romeo will deny his family name or swear his love to her and she will deny her family name.

'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.

After all it's only the name that is her enemy: Romeo is a person first and a name second.

What's Montague? it is nor hand, nor foot,
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man.

A name is just a label; it's not a physical part of a person.

O, be some other name!
What's in a name? that which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title.

She says that the essence of Romeo would be the same whatever he were called just like a rose would be the same flower even if we gave it a different name.

Romeo, doff thy name,
And for that name which is no part of thee
Take all myself.

She urges Romeo to reject his name which isn't a real part of his true self and take her for his own instead.