



Act I Scene I

Verona. A public place
Enter **SAMPSON** and **GREGORY**, of the house of Capulet, with swords and bucklers

SAMPSON Gregory, on my word, we'll not carry coals.
GREGORY No, for then we should be colliers.
SAMPSON I mean, an we be in choler, we'll draw.
GREGORY Ay, while you live, draw your neck out of collar.
SAMPSON I strike quickly being moved. 5
GREGORY But thou art not quickly moved to strike.
SAMPSON A dog of the house of Montague moves me.
GREGORY To move is to stir, and to be valiant is to stand. Therefore, if thou art moved thou runn'st away. 10
SAMPSON A dog of that house shall move me to stand. I will take the wall of any man or maid of Montague's.
GREGORY That shows thee a weak slave, for the weakest goes to the wall.
SAMPSON 'Tis true, and therefore women being the weaker vessels are ever thrust to the wall. Therefore I will push Montague's men from the wall, and thrust his maids to the wall. 15
GREGORY The quarrel is between our masters, and us their men. 20
SAMPSON 'Tis all one. I will show myself a tyrant. When I have fought with the men, I will be civil with the maids – I will cut off their heads.
GREGORY The heads of the maids?
SAMPSON Ay, the heads of the maids, or their maidenheads – take it in what sense thou wilt. 25

In a public place in Verona, two Capulet servants, Samson and Gregory, enter holding swords and shields. They discuss how they will fight any servants and attack young women of the Montague house, if they see them.

The two servants speak in **prose** (see p.xx) and make many rude, offensive **puns** (see Glossary p.xxx).

SD **swords and bucklers:** swords and small shields These were acceptable weapons for servants to have.

1 **carry coals:** just take their insults
2 **colliers:** people selling coal
3 **an we be:** if we are
choler anger: This is also a pun on the word 'collier'.
4 **collar:** hangman's noose
5 **I strike ... moved:** I attack quickly when provoked.
8 **stir:** run away
valiant: brave
stand stay/do not run away: This could also be an innuendo/rude pun about his manhood.
12 **take the wall:** get up against the wall (away from the inferior dirt in the gutter)
13–14 **the weakest ... wall the loser of the fight goes to the wall:** This is according to a **proverb** (see Glossary p.xxx).
15–16 **women ... vessels (weaker) bodies/vessels to be filled:** A crude reference to women.

STAGECRAFT: Language
While the wordplay is witty and light-hearted on the surface, the language used is violent and sexual; 'thrust his maids against the wall'.

21–3 **When ... maids:** When I have fought the men, I will move on to the women
26 **maidenheads:** virginity

GREGORY	They must take it in sense that feel it.	
SAMPSON	Me they shall feel while I am able to stand, and 'tis known I am a pretty piece of flesh.	
GREGORY	'Tis well thou art not fish; if thou hadst, thou hadst been poor-john. Draw thy tool, here comes of the house of Montagues.	30
	<i>Enter two other serving-men, ABRAHAM and BALTHASAR</i>	
SAMPSON	My naked weapon is out. Quarrel, I will back thee.	
GREGORY	How, turn thy back and run?	
SAMPSON	Fear me not.	35
GREGORY	No marry, I fear thee!	
SAMPSON	Let us take the law of our sides, let them begin.	
GREGORY	I will frown as I pass by, and let them take it as they list.	
SAMPSON	Nay, as they dare. I will bite my thumb at them, which is disgrace to them if they bear it.	40
ABRAHAM	Do you bite your thumb at us sir?	
SAMPSON	I do bite my thumb sir.	
ABRAHAM	Do you bite your thumb at us sir?	
SAMPSON	[Aside to GREGORY] Is the law of our side if I say 'Ay'.	45
GREGORY	[Aside to SAMPSON] No.	
SAMPSON	No sir, I do not bite my thumb at you sir, but I bite my thumb sir.	
GREGORY	Do you quarrel sir?	50
ABRAHAM	Quarrel sir? No sir.	
SAMPSON	But if you do sir, I am for you. I serve as good a man as you.	
ABRAHAM	No better.	
SAMPSON	Well sir.	55
	<i>Enter BENVOLIO</i>	

They see two servants of the Montague house. They taunt and provoke them.

- 27–32 They ... Montagues:** Sampson and Gregory boast about their sexual activity with the maids of the Montague house, if they were to fight the Montagues.
- 31 poor-john hake:** A cheap fish that was salted and dried.
- tool:** sword Also a **pun** (see Glossary p.xxx) referring to his manhood.,
- 33 Quarrel:** Begin an argument

CONTEXT: Gender

The double-meaning of the words 'tool' and 'weapon' reflect the Elizabethan ideal of masculinity, which was strong and sexually dominant.

- 35 Fear me not:** Don't worry – I won't let you down!
- 36 marry:** A saying that could express mild surprise or add emphasis to a speech, similar to a word like 'indeed'.
- 37 Let ... sides:** We need to be legal
- 38 frown:** This is more than a frown and indicates they are making faces, or sneering at them.
- 39 list:** wish
- 40 bite my thumb:** Considered to be a rude hand gesture in which the tip of the thumb is placed in the mouth then taken out, while clicking the nail against the upper front teeth.

THEME: Conflict

The servants' aggressive taunting shows the feud to be rooted deep within the families.

- 45 Is ... side:** If I shout back, will it place us on the wrong side of the law as well?
- SD BENVOLIO:** This name when translated from Italian means 'well-wisher'. It also sounds similar to the word 'benevolent:' another word for 'peaceful'.

GREGORY

[Aside to SAMPSON] Say 'better'; here comes one of my master's kinsmen.

SAMPSON

Yes, better sir.

ABRAHAM

You lie.

SAMPSON

Draw if you be men. Gregory, remember thy washing blow.

60

[They fight]

BENVOLIO

Part fools.
Put up your swords! You know not what you do.

Enter TYBALT.

TYBALT

What, art thou drawn among these heartless hinds?
Turn thee Benvolio, look upon thy death.

65

BENVOLIO

I do but keep the peace. Put up thy sword,
Or manage it to part these men with me.

TYBALT

What, drawn and talk of peace? I hate the word,
As I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee.
Have at thee, coward!

70

[They fight]

Enter OFFICER and Citizens with clubs and partisans

OFFICER

Clubs, bills and partisans! Strike, beat them down.
Down with the Capulets! Down with the Montagues!

Enter OLD CAPULET, in his gown, and LADY CAPULET

CAPULET

What noise is this? Give me my long sword, ho!

L. CAPULET

A crutch, a crutch! Why call you for a sword?

75

CAPULET

My sword I say! Old Montague is come,
And flourishes his blade in spite of me.

Enter OLD MONTAGUE and LADY MONTAGUE

MONTAGUE

Thou villain Capulet! Hold me not, let me go.

L. MONTAGUE

Thou shalt not stir one foot to seek a foe.

Enter PRINCE ESCALUS, with his train

A fight breaks out, caused by the servants' argument. Benvolio, Romeo's cousin and a Montague, steps in to try and stop the fighting. However, Tybalt, Juliet's cousin and a Capulet, arrives to taunt and challenge Benvolio to a fight. They begin to fight and an officer enters to break it up. Romeo's father, Lord Montague and Juliet's father, Lord Capulet arrive and try to fight each other. Their wives try to prevent this.

57 **kinsmen:** family members

CONTEXT: Gender

Sampson's taunt of 'if you be men' reflects Elizabethan values of male strength and power.

61 **washing blow:** prepare to slash/cut them

CHARACTER: Benvolio

Benvolio is introduced to the audience as a peaceful contrast to the aggression of the servants.

63 Here the language moves from **prose** to **verse**
 Put up: put away/sheathe

64 **heartless hinds A play on words:** *A hart is a male deer and a hind is a female deer. Tybalt uses the **pun** (see Glossary p.xxx) to describe the group as like a female deer without a male to protect them.*

66 **I do but keep:** I am just trying to keep

67 **manage it to part:** use it (the sword) to help me separate them

71 **Clubs ... partisans!:** *Weapons like clubs, spears and axes.*

75 **A crutch:** *Lady Capulet says that her husband would be better with a crutch to help him walk, rather than asking for a weapon to fight.*

77 **in spite of:** to spite me

78-9 **Thou ... foe:** *Lord Montague tells his wife to stop holding him back from the fight, which she refuses. Their lines form a rhyming couplet, changing the language from prose to more formal verse, with the arrival of the authoritative figure of Prince Escalus.*

79 **stir:** move

PRINCE

Rebellious subjects, enemies to peace,
Profaners of this neighbour-stained steel –
Will they not hear? – What ho! You men, you beasts,
That quench the fire of your pernicious rage
With purple fountains issuing from your veins,
On pain of torture, from those bloody hands
Throw your mistempered weapons to the ground,
And hear the sentence of your moved Prince.
Three civil brawls bred of an airy word
By thee old Capulet, and Montague,
Have thrice disturbed the quiet of our streets,
And made Verona’s ancient citizens
Cast by their grave beseeeming ornaments,
To wield old partisans, in hands as old,
Cankered with peace, to part your cankered hate.
If ever you disturb our streets again,
Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace.
For this time all the rest depart away.
You Capulet shall go along with me.
And Montague, come you this afternoon,
To know our further pleasure in this case,
To old Freetown, our common judgement-place.
Once more, on pain of death, all men depart.

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[Exeunt all but MONTAGUE, LADY MONTAGUE, and BENVOLIO]

MONTAGUE

Who set this ancient quarrel new abroach?
Speak nephew, were you by when it began?

BENVOLIO

Here were the servants of your adversary,
And yours, close fighting ere I did approach.
I drew to part them; in the instant came
The fiery Tybalt, with his sword prepared,
Which as he breathed defiance to my ears,
He swung about his head and cut the winds,
Who nothing hurt withal hissed him in scorn.
While we were interchanging thrusts and blows,
Came more and more and fought on part and part,
Till the Prince came, who parted either part.

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Prince Escalus, the Prince of Verona, uses his authority to stop the fight. He instructs the crowd to put down their weapons and warns both Lord Capulet and Lord Montague that if there is any more fighting, those responsible will be executed. Benvolio recounts the events leading up to the fight to his uncle, Lord Montague.

- 81
- Profaners ... steel:** abusers who have used their weapons, which are now stained with the blood of your neighbours
- 83
- pernicious:** destructive
- 85
- On pain of torture:** *Prince Escalus threatens the crowd with torture if they do not stop fighting and listen to him.*
- 86
- mistempered A play on words:** 1) misuse of tempered (prepared/strengthened) weapons 2) weapons that have been used in mistemper (anger)
- 87
- moved:** (Prince Escalus is) furious
- 88
- civil brawls:** fights between citizens
bred ... word: begun with mere words/insults
- 92
- Cast ... ornaments:** cast off/remove their usual accessories/robes/jewellery
- 93
- to wield old ... old:** to pick up and use weapons as old as the hands that hold them
- 94
- Cankered:** rusted/decaying *The weapons have been unused for a long time, due to a period of peace in Verona.*
cankered hate: your corrupting hate (that has ruined the peace once more)
- 96
- Your ... forfeit:** your crimes will be paid for with your lives
- 100
- our further pleasure:** my other commands
- 103
- Who ... abroach?:** Who stirred up this old conflict again?
- 104
- by:** nearby

CHARACTER: Benvolio

Shakespeare uses Benvolio to present the facts about the brawl, further suggesting his role is to be the peacemaker in the play.

- 106
- close fighting:** physically fighting each other
- 107
- drew:** drew my sword
- 111
- nothing hurt withal:** was not hurt by it

L. MONTAGUE O where is Romeo? Saw you him today?
Right glad I am he was not at this fray.

BENVOLIO Madam, an hour before the worshipped sun
Peered forth the golden window of the east,
A troubled mind drive me to walk abroad,
Where underneath the grove of sycamore,
That westward rooteth from this city side,
So early walking did I see your son.
Towards him I made; but he was ware of me,
And stole into the covert of the wood.
I, measuring his affections by my own,
Which then most sought where most might not
be found,
Being one too many by my weary self,
Pursued my humour, not pursuing his,
And gladly shunned who gladly fled from me.

MONTAGUE Many a morning hath he there been seen,
With tears augmenting the fresh morning's dew,
Adding to clouds more clouds with his deep sighs,
But all so soon as the all-cheering sun
Should in the farthest east begin to draw
The shady curtains from Aurora's bed,
Away from light steals home my heavy son,
And private in his chamber pens himself,
Shuts up his windows, locks fair daylight out,
And makes himself an artificial night.
Black and portentous must this humour prove,
Unless good counsel may the cause remove.

BENVOLIO My noble uncle, do you know the cause?

MONTAGUE I neither know it, nor can learn of him.

BENVOLIO Have you importuned him by any means?

MONTAGUE Both by myself and many other friends.
But he, his own affections' counsellor,
Is to himself – I will not say how true –
But to himself so secret and so close,
So far from sounding and discovery,

Lady Montague asks where her son, Romeo, is. Benvolio has seen him and describes how he has seen him wandering around like a typical love-sick young man. Romeo just wants to be left alone. No one seems to know what is the matter with him.

117–18 an hour ... east: an hour before dawn

I17 worshipped sun: The sun is referred to as if it were a god:
personification (See Glossary p.xxx.)

119 **abroad:** out and about

CHARACTER: Romeo

Romeo is first introduced to the audience by Benvolio as a 'troubled mind', and his father talks of his 'tears' and 'clouds', suggesting he is a sensitive and romantic young man.

I23 **made:** walked

was ware of: noticed

124 **covert:** hiding-place

125-6 I, measuring ... found: I recognised that his mood was like mine: we both wanted to be alone

128 Pursued ... his: went along with my own mood by not following him

129 shunned: avoided a person

I3I **augmenting:** adding to

I35 **Aurora's bed:** *Aurora is the goddess of dawn (personification again).*

I36 **heavy:** sad

137 pens himself: shuts himself up

140 **portentous:** ominous, worrying

141 **counsel:** advice

144 importuned him: pressed him to explain

146 his ... counsellor: he will only listen to his own advice about his feelings

147 **true:** honest

148 **so secret ... close:** uncommunicative and private

149 So far ... discovery: a long way from sorting out the depth of his feelings and speaking about it

As is the bud bit with an envious worm, 150
Ere he can spread his sweet leaves to the air,
Or dedicate his beauty to the sun.
Could we but learn from whence his sorrows grow,
We would as willingly give cure as know.

Enter ROMEO

BENVOLIO See where he comes. So please you step aside. 155
I'll know his grievance or be much denied.

MONTAGUE I would thou wert so happy by thy stay,
To hear true shrift. Come, madam, let's away.

[Exeunt MONTAGUE, and LADY MONTAGUE]

BENVOLIO Good morrow cousin.

ROMEO Is the day so young?

BENVOLIO But new struck nine.

ROMEO Ay me, sad hours seem long. 160
Was that my father that went hence so fast?

BENVOLIO It was. What sadness lengthens Romeo's hours?

ROMEO Not having that which having makes them short.

BENVOLIO In love?

ROMEO Out – 165

BENVOLIO Of love?

ROMEO Out of her favour where I am in love.

BENVOLIO Alas that love, so gentle in his view,
Should be so tyrannous and rough in proof!

ROMEO Alas that love, whose view is muffled still, 170
Should without eyes see pathways to his will.
Where shall we dine? O me, what fray was here?
Yet tell me not, for I have heard it all.
Here's much to do with hate, but more with love.
Why then, o brawling love, o loving hate, 175
O any thing of nothing first create!
O heavy lightness, serious vanity,
Mis-shapen chaos of well-seeming forms,
Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health,

Benvolio and Lord and Lady Montague discuss Romeo's sadness. As Romeo enters, Benvolio promises he will find out the cause of his sadness. Romeo explains to Benvolio that he is in love.

150–1 As is ... air: Just like a flower, bitten by a destructive worm, before it can open its petals

154 We ... know: we would like to know the cause of his sadness as much as we want to help him through it

THEME: Family

Montague shows great concern for his son's welfare, presenting the family as a source of love and comfort.

156 be much denied: be denied the chance to know them

158 shrift: confession

160 But new: Just now

163 Not ... short: Not having that thing which makes the hours seem shorter/makes time fly.

THEME: Friendship

Benvolio and Romeo complete each other's lines, showing the strength of their friendship.

168–9 so gentle ... proof!: supposed to be a gentle feeling but when we experience it, it can be rough and cruel

THEME: Love

Love is presented as 'gentle' to look at but 'tyrannous', suggesting it first appears kind but is in reality harsh and controlling.

170 whose view is muffled: who is blinded A reference to Cupid, the god of love, who is always described or painted as blindfolded.

171 to his will: ways to getting his own way

175–9 o brawling ... health: Romeo describes love using a series of **oxymorons** (see Glossary p.xxx) to capture his intense, confused feelings.

176 O any ... create!: just like when God created everything from nothing

	Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is! This love feel I, that feel no love in this. Dost thou not laugh?	180
BENVOLIO	No coz, I rather weep.	
ROMEO	Good heart, at what?	
BENVOLIO	At thy good heart's oppression.	
ROMEO	Why such is love's transgression. Griefs of mine own lie heavy in my breast, Which thou wilt propagate to have it pressed With more of thine. This love that thou hast shown Doth add more grief to too much of mine own. Love is a smoke made with the fume of sighs, Being purged, a fire sparkling in lovers' eyes, Being vexed, a sea nourished with lovers' tears, What is it else? A madness most discreet, A choking gall, and a preserving sweet. Farewell my coz.	185 190
BENVOLIO	Soft, I will go along. And if you leave me so, you do me wrong.	195
ROMEO	Tut I have lost myself; I am not here. This is not Romeo, he's some other where.	
BENVOLIO	Tell me in sadness, who is that you love.	
ROMEO	What, shall I groan and tell thee?	
BENVOLIO	Groan? Why no. But sadly tell me who.	200
ROMEO	Bid a sick man in sadness make his will? A word ill urged to one that is so ill. In sadness cousin, I do love a woman.	
BENVOLIO	I aimed so near, when I supposed you loved.	
ROMEO	A right good mark-man. And she's fair I love.	205
BENVOLIO	A right fair mark, fair coz, is soonest hit.	
ROMEO	Well in that hit you miss. She'll not be hit With Cupid's arrow. She hath Dian's wit, And in strong proof of chastity well-armed,	

Benvolio tries to guess the identity of the girl Romeo is in love with. Romeo tells him that she does not love him in return, which is the cause of his sadness.

183 **oppression:** heavy sadness

184 **such ... transgression:** such are the sins of love

186–7 **Which ... thine:** which you will add to if you are about to express your own sadness.

189 **fume:** vapour

190 **Being purged:** being rid of/removing

191 **Being vexed:** being angered

192 **else:** otherwise

A madness most discreet: A craziness that is also calm and quiet
Romeo continues to describe love with opposites.

discreet: careful/calm

193 **choking gall:** poison/something foul-tasting

preserving sweet: a sweet, lasting taste

194 **coz:** *Short for cousin, this can mean an actual cousin or any family member.*

CHARACTER: Romeo

Romeo appears to recognise that he is easily carried away by his emotions.

201 **Bid ... will?:** Are you asking a severely ill man to create his will?
 205 **mark-man:** someone with a good aim
 206 **right fair mark:** a beautiful target
 207–8 **She'll ... arrow:** She is not in love with me.
 208 **Cupid:** the god of love
Dian's wit: the wisdom of Diana, the goddess of chastity

	From love's weak childish bow she lives uncharmed.	210
	She will not stay the siege of loving terms, Nor bide th' encounter of assailing eyes, Nor ope her lap to saint-seducing gold. O she is rich in beauty, only poor, That when she dies, with beauty dies her store.	215
BENVOLIO	Then she hath sworn that she will still live chaste?	
ROMEO	She hath, and in that sparing makes huge waste; For beauty starved with her severity, Cuts beauty off from all posterity. She is too fair, too wise; wisely too fair, To merit bliss by making me despair. She hath forsworn to love, and in that vow Do I live dead that live to tell it now.	220
BENVOLIO	Be ruled by me, forget to think of her.	
ROMEO	O teach me how I should forget to think.	225
BENVOLIO	By giving liberty unto thine eyes. Examine other beauties.	
ROMEO	'Tis the way To call hers, exquisite, in question more. These happy masks that kiss fair ladies' brows, Being black, puts us in mind they hide the fair. He that is stricken blind cannot forget The precious treasure of his eyesight lost. Show me a mistress that is passing fair, What doth her beauty serve, but as a note Where I may read who passed that passing fair? Farewell, thou canst not teach me to forget.	230 235
BENVOLIO	I'll pay that doctrine, or else die in debt.	

[Exeunt

Benvolio advises Romeo to think about other girls but Romeo says he cannot.

210 **love's ... bow:** Cupid's childish bow and arrow
uncharmed: not affected by Cupid's arrow

211 **stay ... terms:** listen to my expression of love for her

212 **bide ... eyes:** will not let me look at her in a loving way

213 **ope ... gold:** accept my gifts that would tempt any saint

215 **That ... store:** Her beauty will die with her. It will never be reproduced as she has sworn to remain unmarried.

216 **still:** forever

217-19 **She ... posterity:** Cuts off any chance of giving her beauty to her children (by never marrying or reproducing).

220-1 **She ... despair:** She is so beautiful and wise that she will send me to despair (hell) while she goes to heaven.

CONTEXT: Courtly love

Shakespeare's audience might recognise Romeo's hyperbole as fitting into the Elizabethan tradition of courtly love, where a well-bred man would write words of worship for an unattainable woman.

222 forsworn to love: vowed never to love/marry

226–7 By ... beauties: By allowing your eyes the freedom to look at other girls.

227–8 'Tis ... more: Looking at them will make me compare them with her and make her beauty more obvious.

229–30 These ... fair: Like the masks that are worn by beautiful women, which only make us think of their beauty more.

231–2 He ... lost: He that suddenly becomes blind cannot forget all the beauty he saw.

233 passing fair: extremely beautiful

234–5 What ... fair?: What is the good of another girl's beauty? It will only remind me of the girl who is even more beautiful.

237 I'll ... debt: I will teach you to forget, or I will die trying.



I.I The streets of Verona on a hot summer’s day

Plot tracker

- Wordplay develops into public brawling between the Capulets and Montagues, with Benvolio attempting peace and Tybalt increasing the aggression with insults.
- Prince Escalus announces penalties for further public brawling.
- Lord and Lady Montague discuss Romeo’s melancholic mood.
- Romeo arrives and tells Benvolio about his unrequited love for Rosaline.

Character tracker

Benvolio is introduced as gentle and peaceful.
Romeo is introduced as melancholic and solitary.
Tybalt appears to be hot-headed and aggressive.

Theme tracker

Conflict – conflict starts as comic wordplay but quickly descends to violence, and the feud is so deep-rooted that even the servants are involved.
Love – Romeo’s melancholy presents love as a source of inner conflict.

Family – family is presented as a supportive unit here as Lord and Lady Montague express sympathy towards their son, although they need Benvolio’s help to do this, which suggests a rather distant relationship.

Context tracker

Society – rioting and protests about the cost of living was a problem at the time the play was written; the public brawling that starts with the servants, and the authoritarian response to it, reflect concerns about public disorder.

Gender – at the time most families were patriarchal with men dominant over women. Masculinity was allied to aggression and honour. This is demonstrated through the actions and behaviour of Tybalt and Lords Capulet and Montague.

Stagecraft – Elizabethan audiences were often rowdy and loud, leading Shakespeare to include lots of action and comedy to appeal to them.

Key quotations

‘Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?’ shows the conflict between the families to be deep-rooted as even the servants are involved.

‘As I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee’ introduces Tybalt as an aggressive character, and hints at future conflict with the Montague family.

‘O brawling love, O loving hate’ is an oxymoron which shows Romeo’s inner turmoil and also shows love to be a source of conflict.