

Act One

SCENE 1 A public square in Verona.

As the scene opens, two young Capulet servants swagger across the stage, joking and bragging. When they happen to meet servants from the rival house of Montague, a quarrel begins that grows into an ugly street fight. Finally the ruler of Verona, Prince Escalus, appears. He is angry about the violence in his city and warns that the next offenders will receive the death penalty. The crowd fades away, and the stage is set for the entrance of Romeo, heir of the Montague family. Romeo, infatuated and miserable, can talk of nothing but his love for Rosaline and her cruelty in refusing to love him back.

[Enter Sampson and Gregory, servants of the house of Capulet, armed with swords and bucklers (shields).]

Sampson. Gregory, on my word, we'll not carry coals.

1–2 we'll not carry coals: we won't stand to be insulted. **Colliers**, those involved in the dirty work of hauling coal, were often the butt of jokes.

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.

3–4 in choler: angry; **collar:** a hangman's noose.

5 Sampson. I strike quickly, being moved.

Gregory. But thou art not quickly moved to strike.

Sampson. A dog of that house of Montague moves me.

Gregory. To move is to stir, and to be valiant is to stand.

Therefore, if thou art moved, thou runnest 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.

11 take the wall: walk nearest to the wall. People of higher rank had the privilege of walking closer to the wall, to avoid any water or garbage in the street. *What claim is Sampson making about himself and anyone from the rival house of Montague?*

Gregory. That shows thee a weak slave, for the weakest goes to the wall.

14–24 Sampson's tough talk includes boasts about his ability to overpower women.

Sampson. 'Tis true; and therefore women, being the weaker vessels, are ever thrust to the wall. Therefore push I will Montague's men from the wall and thrust his maids to the wall.

Gregory. The quarrel is between our masters and us their men.

Sampson. 'Tis all one. I will show myself a tyrant. When I have fought with the men, I will be cruel 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.

Gregory. They must take it in sense that feel it.

Romeo and Juliet in the Anželika Cholina Dance Theatre's 2003 production



25 **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 two of the house
of Montagues.

[Enter Abram and Balthasar, servants to the Montagues.]

30 **Sampson.** My naked weapon is out. Quarrel! I will back thee.

Gregory. How? turn thy back and run?

Sampson. Fear me not.

Gregory. No, marry. I fear thee!

Sampson. Let us take the law of our sides; let them begin.

35 **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.

Abram. Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?

Sampson. I do bite my thumb, sir.

40 **Abram.** Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?

Sampson [aside to Gregory]. Is the law of our side if I say ay?

Gregory [aside to Sampson]. No.

Sampson. No, sir, I do not bite my thumb at you, sir; but I bite
my thumb, sir. **A**

45 **Gregory.** Do you quarrel, sir?

Abram. Quarrel, sir? No, sir.

Sampson. But if you do, sir, I am for you. I serve as good a man
as you.

Abram. No better.

50 **Sampson.** Well, sir.

[Enter Benvolio, nephew of Montague and first cousin of Romeo.]

Gregory [aside to Sampson]. Say “better.” Here comes one of my
master's kinsmen.

Sampson. Yes, better, sir.

Abram. You lie.

55 **Sampson.** Draw, if you be men. Gregory, remember thy
swashing blow. **B**

[They fight.]

Benvolio. Part, fools! [beats down their swords]
Put up your swords. You know not what you do.

28 **poor-John:** a salted fish, considered
fit only for poor people to eat.

33 **marry:** a short form of “by the Virgin
Mary” and so a mild exclamation.

34–44 **Gregory** and **Sampson** decide to
pick a fight by insulting the Montague
servants with a rude gesture (bite
my thumb).

COMMON CORE L5a

A SARCASM

Sarcasm is an ironic remark often
used to convey an insult. In this
instance, Sampson is being sarcastic
by telling Abram and Balthasar he
is not quarreling, or starting a fight,
when he is clearly doing just that.
Does including sarcasm in this scene
make the dialogue more realistic?
Explain.

51–52 **Gregory** notices that Tybalt,
a Capulet, is arriving. *Why do you think
Gregory and Sampson behave more
aggressively as soon as they realize that
Tybalt is approaching?*

B ASIDE

Contrast what the servants say
openly in lines 35–56 with what they
say in **asides**, or whispers to each
other. What does this contrast reveal
about Sampson and Gregory?

[Enter Tybalt, hot-headed nephew of Lady Capulet and first cousin of Juliet.]

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

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.
65 Have at thee, coward!

[They fight.]

[Enter several of both houses, who join the fray; then enter
Citizens and Peace Officers, with clubs.]

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

[Enter old Capulet and Lady Capulet.]

Capulet. What noise is this? Give me my long sword, ho!
Lady Capulet. A crutch, a crutch! Why call you for a sword?
70 **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.
Lady Montague. Thou shalt not stir one foot to seek a foe.

[Enter Prince Escalus, with attendants. At first no one hears him.]

Prince. Rebellious subjects, enemies to peace,
75 Profaners of this neighbor-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
80 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
85 And made Verona's ancient citizens
Cast by their grave beseeming ornaments
To wield old partisans, in hands as old,
Cankered with peace, to part your cankered hate.
If ever you disturb our streets again,
90 Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace.

59–65 Tybalt does not understand that Benvolio is trying to stop the fight. He challenges Benvolio.

69 **heartless hinds:** cowardly servants.

63 **drawn:** with your sword out.

65 **Have at thee:** Defend yourself.

66 **bills, and partisans:** spears.

69 **A crutch . . . sword:** You need a crutch more than a sword.

74–81 The prince is furious about the street fighting caused by the feud. He orders the men to drop their weapons and pay attention.

77 **pernicious:** destructive.

82–90 **Three . . . peace:** The prince holds Capulet and Montague responsible for three recent street fights, each probably started by an offhand remark or insult (airy word). He warns that they will be put to death if any more fights occur.

For this time all the rest depart away.
You, Capulet, shall go along with me;
And, Montague, come you this afternoon,
To know our farther pleasure in this case,
95 To old Freetown, our common judgment place.
Once more, on pain of death, all men depart.

[*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
100 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,
105 Who, nothing hurt withal, hissed him in scorn. C
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.

Lady Montague. O, where is Romeo? Saw you him today?
110 Right glad I am he was not at this fray.

Benvolio. Madam, an hour before the worshiped sun
Peered forth the golden window of the East,
A troubled mind drove me to walk abroad,
Where, underneath the grove of sycamore
115 That westward rooteth from the city's 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,
120 Which then most sought where most might not be found,
Being one too many by my weary self—
Pursued my humor, not pursuing his,
And gladly shunned who gladly fled from me.

Montague. Many a morning hath he there been seen,
125 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,
130 Away from light steals home my heavy son
And private in his chamber pens himself,
Shuts up his windows, locks fair daylight out,

exeunt: the plural form of exit, indicating that more than one person is leaving the stage.

97 Who ... abroach: Who reopened this old argument?

99 adversary: enemy.

100 ere: before.

C CHARACTER

According to Benvolio, what kind of person is Tybalt? **Predict** how Tybalt might act if he runs into Benvolio—or any other Montague—again.

107 on part and part: some on one side, some on the other.

Stop here

110 fray: fight.

113 drove: drove.

115 rooteth: grows.

117–123 made: moved; **covert:** covering. Romeo saw Benvolio coming and hid in the woods. Since Benvolio himself was seeking solitude, he decided to respect Romeo's privacy and did not go after him. *What does this action tell you about Benvolio?*

124–135 Romeo has been seen wandering through the woods at night, crying. At dawn he returns home and locks himself in his darkened room. Montague feels that this behavior is a bad sign and that his son needs guidance.

129 Aurora's bed: Aurora was the goddess of the dawn.