

Opening Scene - Romeo and Juliet

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The Action

- Sampson and Gregory of the house of Capulet enter.
- They express their hatred of the Montagues and make rude jokes about defeating the men and taking the women as prizes.
- They see two Montague servants approaching and Sampson decides to provoke a fight, telling Gregory 'quarrel, I will back thee.' Sampson bites his thumb at the Montagues which was a great insult at the time.



- Words become deeds and a fight breaks out.
- Benvolio, allied to the house of Montague, enters and immediately tries to break up the fight, crying, 'Part, fools! / Put up your swords; you know not what you do.'
- Tybalt, a Capulet, arrives and draws his sword, challenging Benvolio to fight.
- Benvolio says he is keeping the peace and asks Tybalt to help him but Tybalt will have none of it.

‘What, drawn and
talk of peace! I
hate the word,
As I hate hell, all
Montagues, and
thee:’

Tybalt to Benvolio



- The fighting spreads and soon there is widespread brawling. Citizens with clubs join in and attack the fighters from both sides in an effort to restore peace.
- Montague and Capulet enter and would join in the fray, but are prevented from doing so by their wives. Lady Capulet tells her husband he would be better off with a crutch than a sword and Lady Montague warns her husband not to 'stir a foot to seek a foe'.

- Prince Escalus arrives and orders the fighters to cease. He is tired of this constant fighting and says that any man who fights in public again will be put to death:
- 'If ever you disturb our streets again,
Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace.'

Romeo

- Romeo's mother and father are left alone with Benvolio when the crowd disperses. Both parents express their concern at Romeo's recent, moody behaviour and Benvolio promises to find out what is wrong with him.



- Benvolio meets Romeo and Romeo tells him of his unrequited love for Rosaline. [*'Unrequited love' means Rosaline doesn't love him back.*]
- Romeo is aware of the effects this love has had on him: 'I have lost myself; I am not here; / This is not Romeo, he's some other where.'
- Benvolio advises Romeo to forget Rosaline, but Romeo does not think he can do it: 'O, teach me how I should forget to think.' He says that Benvolio's advice to 'examine other beauties' is pointless and will do no good.
- Benvolio accepts the challenge and the two men part.

The Significance of This Scene

- It is full of action, bound to **capture the audience's attention.**
- **Provides background information** by showing us how all are caught up in the fight between the feuding families, even lowly servants like Sampson, Gregory and the Montague men. The hatred between the Montagues and Capulets is long-standing.
- **Shows us the contrast between the peace-making Benvolio and the 'fiery Tybalt',** both of whom will play important roles later in the play.
- Both the action and the characters **introduce the theme of conflict.**

Introduces tension by letting us know what the Prince will do to anyone who fights in the streets again. This will be important later on in Act 3 Scene 1, when Romeo fights Tybalt. We will remember the Prince's words.



- **Introduces us to Romeo's character**, first through his parents' expressions of concern and Benvolio's confirmation of Romeo's odd behaviour when he says he saw Romeo early that morning, 'but he was ware of me / And stole into a covert of the wood'.
- **Introduces the theme of love, but shows it in a negative way** as it makes Romeo miserable: 'Love is a smoke raised with the fume of sighs'.
- **Ends on an intriguing note**: will Benvolio succeed in teaching Romeo how to forget about Rosaline?