

~~natural that runs lolling up and down to hide his bauble in a hole.~~ 75
~~BENVOLIO Stop there, stop there.~~
~~MERCUTIO Thou desirest me to stop in my tale against the hair.~~
~~BENVOLIO Thou wouldst else have made thy tale large.~~
~~MERCUTIO O thou art deceived; I would have made it short, for I was~~
~~come to the whole depth of my tale, and meant indeed to occupy~~ 80
~~the argument no longer.~~
 ROMEO Here's goodly gear! **START**

Enter NURSE and her man [PETER].

A sail, a sail!

MERCUTIO Two, two: a shirt and a smock.

NURSE Peter!

85

PETER Anon.

NURSE My fan, Peter.

MERCUTIO Good Peter, to hide her face, for her fan's the fairer face.

NURSE God ye good morrow, gentlemen.

MERCUTIO God ye good den, fair gentlewoman.

90

NURSE Is it good den?

MERCUTIO 'Tis no less, I tell ye, for the bawdy hand of the dial is now upon the prick of noon.

75 hide| Q2-4, Q1; hid F 75 bauble| F4; bable Q2-4, F, Q1 77 stop in| Q2-4, F; stopp Q1 78 tale large.| Q2-4, F; tale too long? Q1 79 for| Q2-4, Q1; or F 82 SD| Q2-4, Q1; follows 81, F 83 A sail, a sail| Q2-4, F; Mer: A saile, a saile, a saile Q1, *Capell* 84 SH MERCUTIO| Q2-4, F; Ben: Q1, *Capell* 85-8 Peter!... Peter.| Q2-4, F; Peter, pree thee giue me my fan. / Mer: Pree thee doo good Peter, Q1, *Collier* 86 Anon.| Q2-4, F; Anon? *Theobald*; Anon! *Craig* 88 Good| Q2-4, F; Do good *Pope* (from Q1; see 85-8 above) 88 face.| Q2-4; face? F; face: Q1 88 fairer face.| Q2-3; fairer face, Q4; fairer face? F; fairer of the two. Q1, *Pope* 92 ye| Q2; you Q3-4, F, Q1

75 natural idiot, fool.

75 lolling sticking out his tongue (with probable reference to 'bauble' (75)).

75 bauble (1) fool's short stick decorated with a fool's head and sometimes with a bladder for striking offenders; (2) penis.

75 hole With quibble on vagina.

77-82 The wit in these lines, sparked by 'bauble in a hole' (75), turns on a series of bawdy puns: 'stop in' (77) = (1) cease, (2) stuff in; 'tale' (77) = (1) story, (2) penis; 'against the hair' (77) = (1) against the grain (my desire), (2) with reference to pubic hair (punning further on Benvolio's 'Stop there' (76), i.e. 'th'hair'); 'large' (78) = (1) long, (2) tumescent (compare play on 'longer' in 81 and 'short' (79) = detumescent); 'come...tale' (80) = (1) reached the end of my story, (2) achieved orgasm (with pun on 'whole' (80) = hole); 'occupy' (80) = (1) continue in, (2) have intercourse with (compare 2*H4* 2.4.148-50);

'gear' = (1) rubbish, nonsense, (2) the organs of generation.

82 goodly gear Some eds. take 'goodly gear' to mean 'large clotheshorse' and to refer to the approaching Nurse (following F in placing her entry after 81), but this ignores the bawdy pun in 'gear' (see preceding note), which links perfectly with Mercutio's wit-play.

83-4 Q1's assignment of these lines to Mercutio and Benvolio respectively presumably reflects stage practice and may be correct.

84 shirt...smock man...woman.

90 good den good even (used loosely for any time after noon). Mercutio thus corrects the Nurse's 'good morrow' = good morning.

92-3 bawdy...noon 'hand of the dial' (1) the hand(s) on the clock face; (2) a woman's hand ('dial' = vagina; compare 'O', 2.1.37, 3.3.90); 'prick of noon' = (1) the point on the dial marking twelve o'clock (compare 'noontide prick', 3*H6*

NURSE Out upon you, what a man are you?

ROMEO One, gentlewoman, that God hath made, himself to mar. 95

NURSE By my troth, it is well said: 'for himself to mar', quoth'a?

Gentlemen, can any of you tell me where I may find the young Romeo?

ROMEO I can tell you, but young Romeo will be older when you have found him than he was when you sought him: I am the youngest 100 of that name, for fault of a worse.

NURSE You say well.

MERCUTIO Yea, is the worst well? Very well took, i'faith, wisely, wisely.

NURSE If you be he, sir, I desire some confidence with you. 105

BENVOLIO She will indite him to some supper.

MERCUTIO A bawd, a bawd, a bawd! So ho!

ROMEO What hast thou found?

MERCUTIO No hare, sir, unless a hare, sir, in a lenten pie, that is something stale and hoar ere it be spent. 110

95 One, gentlewoman] F4; One gentlewoman Q2-4, F; A Gentleman Nurse Q1 95 himself] Q2-4, F; for himselfe Q1, Collier 96 well said:] Q1; well said, Q2-4; said, F 97 the young] Q2-4, F; yong Q1, Pope 103 well?] Q5, Q1; wel, Q2-4, F 106 indite] Theobald; endite Q2-4, F; inuite Q1; envite F2 106 some supper] Q2-4, F; supper Q1, Capell 108 What] Q2-4, F; Why what Q1; What, NS (conj. Carr) 110 spent] Q2-4, F; eaten Q1 110 SD] Q1; not in Q2-4, F

1.4.34); (2) *penis erectus* (with further play on 'strike'). Partridge (p. 36) considers this passage 'one of the three or four most scintillating of all Shakespeare's sexual witticisms'.

94 what a man what kind of a man.

95 made...mar Compare 1.2.12-13.

96 troth faith (variant of 'truth').

96 quoth'a literally, 'said he', but here as often a sarcastic interjection meaning 'indeed', used following the repetition of something just said by another.

101 for...worse for lack of a worse (bearer of that name). The usual phrase is 'for fault of a better', but Shakespeare is setting up Mercutio's jest in 103.

103 is...well? i.e. is it well to be the worst of all those named Romeo? The Nurse's meaningless 'well' (102) gives Mercutio an opportunity to play on Romeo's 'worse' (101).

103 took understood, interpreted. The Nurse, of course, had 'understood' nothing.

105 confidence Usually taken as a malapropism for 'conference', used twice elsewhere by Shakespeare (*Wiv.* 1.4.160; *Ado* 3.5.2); Kittredge, however, questions the blunder (so too in *Wiv.*) and defines as 'private conversation'. Probably accented on second syllable.

106 indite Benvolio means 'invite' (the reading of Q1), but is presumably represented as mimicking the Nurse's supposed malapropism. Compare 2*H4* 2.1.28.

107 bawd (1) procurer, go-between; (2) hare (in North-Midland dialect). See 109.

107 So ho! Hunter's cry on sighting his quarry. Compare Peele, *Edward I* (1593; MSR, 1009): 'Saw haw, maister, I have found, I have found'; see following note.

108 What...found i.e. What game animal have you started? Compare the implications of Cupid as a 'hare-finder' in *Ado* 1.1.184.

109-10 hare...lenten pie...hoar The Nurse is no hare, or if she is, she is as mouldy ('hoar') and stale ('stale' as a noun = whore) as an old hare (= 'whore') in a lenten pie. Technically, a lenten pie should contain no meat, the implication being that no fresh meat was properly available in Lent (compare 113, 'Is very good meat in Lent', where 'meat' = whore, with the meaning that even an old mouldy whore ('hare') is better than none in a time of prohibition). Dowden cites William Rowley (?), *A Match at Midnight* (ed. S. B. Young, 5.2.143), in which a 'Hare Pye' is the figurative equivalent for a bawd.

110 spent used up.

[*He walks by them and sings.*]

An old hare hoar,
 And an old hare hoar,
 Is very good meat in Lent;
 But a hare that is hoar
 Is too much for a score,
 When it hoars ere it be spent.

115

Romeo, will you come to your father's? We'll to dinner thither.

ROMEO I will follow you.

MERCUTIO Farewell, ancient lady, farewell, lady, [*Singing.*] 'lady, lady'.

120

Exeunt [Mercutio and Benvolio]

NURSE I pray you, sir, what saucy merchant was this that was so full of his ropery?

ROMEO A gentleman, Nurse, that loves to hear himself talk, and will speak more in a minute than he will stand to in a month.

NURSE And 'a speak any thing against me, I'll take him down, and 'a were lustier than he is, and twenty such Jacks; and if I cannot, I'll find those that shall. Scurvy knave, I am none of his flirt-gills, I am none of his skains-mates. [*She turns to Peter, her man.*] And thou must stand by too and suffer every knave to use me at his pleasure!

125

PETER I saw no man use you at his pleasure; if I had, my weapon should quickly have been out. I warrant you, I dare draw as soon as another man, if I see occasion in a good quarrel, and the law on my side.

130

111-16] *As Capell; two lines, ending lent / ... spent Q2-4, F; four lines, ending hore / ... Lent / ... score / ... spent Q1 119 SD Singing] This edn (after Hosley, from conj. Farmer, following farewell 119); no SD, Q2-4, F, Q1 120 SD Exeunt ... Benvolio] F (Exit. Mercutio, Benvolio.); Exeunt. Q2-4; Exeunt Benvolio, Mercutio. Q1 121 I pray] Q2-4, F; Marry farewell. Pray Q1; Marry, farewell! - I pray Malone 122 ropery] Q2-4, F; roperipe Q1 125 And 'a speak] Q2-4, F; If hee stand to Q1 127 flirt-gills] F, Q1; flirt gills Q2-3; Gil-flurts Q4 128 skains-mates] F4; skaines mates Q2-4, F, Q1 128 SD] Q1; not in Q2-4, F 130-2 my... side.] Q2-4, F; I would soone haue drawn: you know my toole is as soone out as anothers if I see time and place. Q1*

115 too...score not worth marking up on the reckoning ('score').

116 hoars (1) turns mouldy; (2) whores.

117 dinner In Elizabethan times dinner was eaten about midday.

119-20 'lady, lady' Mercutio ironically applies a refrain-tag to the Nurse from a ballad, 'The Constancy of Susanna' (*Roxburghe Ballads*, 1, 190): 'There dwelt a man in Babylon, / of reputation great by fame; / He tooke to wife a faire woman, / Susanna she was call'd by name; / A woman faire and vertuous: / Lady, Lady, / Why should wee not of her learne thus / to live godly?' Compare *TN* 2.3.78-9.

121 merchant fellow.

122 ropery knavery. Compare Q1 'roperipe' = ready for the hangman.

125 take him down humble him (with the usual bawdy pun looking back to 'stand to' in 124).

126 Jacks ill-mannered fellows, knaves.

127 flirt-gills loose women (from 'Gill', a girl's name). Earliest citation in *OED*.

128 skains-mates Unexplained, but perhaps = cut-throat companions (from 'skene' = a long dagger, originally associated with the Irish kerns). As Kittredge shows, female desperadoes ('roaring girls') were armed with knives.

129 use...pleasure treat me as he pleased (picked up by Peter in 130 with a bawdy twist on 'use' and 'pleasure' and the inevitable play on 'weapon' in 130). Compare 1.1.28-9.

NURSE Now afore God, I am so vexed that every part about me quivers.
 Scurvy knave! Pray you, sir, a word: and as I told you, my young
 lady bid me enquire you out; what she bid me say, I will keep to
 myself. But first let me tell ye, if ye should lead her in a fool's
 paradise, as they say, it were a very gross kind of behaviour, as they
 say; for the gentlewoman is young; and therefore, if you should deal
 double with her, truly it were an ill thing to be offered to any
 gentlewoman, and very weak dealing.

ROMEO Nurse, commend me to thy lady and mistress. I protest unto
 thee –

NURSE Good heart, and i'faith I will tell her as much. Lord, Lord, she
 will be a joyful woman.

ROMEO What wilt thou tell her, Nurse? thou dost not mark me.

NURSE I will tell her, sir, that you do protest, which, as I take it, is a
 gentleman-like offer.

ROMEO Bid her devise

Some means to come to shrift this afternoon,
 And there she shall at Friar Lawrence' cell
 Be shrived and married. Here is for thy pains.

NURSE No truly, sir, not a penny.

ROMEO Go to, I say you shall.

NURSE This afternoon, sir? Well, she shall be there. **END**

~~ROMEO And stay, good Nurse, behind the abbey wall:
 Within this hour my man shall be with thee,
 And bring thee cords made like a tackled stair,~~

133 quivers.] Q1 (quiuer:); quiuers, Q2-4, F 135 bid...bid] Q2-4, F; bad...bad Q1, *Capell* 136 in] Q2-4, F; into
 Q1, *Theobald* 140 weak] Q2-4, F, Q1; wicked *Collier MS.*; wicke [= wicked] *conj. Fleay* 141 SH ROMEO] Q2-4, Q1;
 Nur. F 141-2 I...thee -] F2 (*reading* 1, protest onto); I protest vnto thee. Q2-4, F; tell her I protest. Q1, *Daniel*
 145 dost] F3; dooest Q2; doest Q3-4, F (*Nurse...me. not in Q1*) 145 me.] Q5; me? Q2-4, F 148-51 Bid...married.]
 Q2-4, F; Bid her get leave to morrow morning / To come to shrift to Frier *Laurence* cell: Q1 (*transferring the rest of*
 151-4 after 159) 148-9] *As Delius*; one line, Q2-3, F; as prose, Q4; as verse, ending shrift / ...afternoon *Capell*
 151 shrived] F (*shriu'd*); shriued Q2-4 154 This...there.] Q2-4, F; Weil, to morrow morning she shall not faile. Q1
 154 sir?] F; sir, Q2-4 155 stay] Q2-4; stay thou F, Q1 155 Nurse.] F4; Nurse Q2-4, F, Q1; Nurse; *White*
 155 wall:] *Pope*; wall, Q2-4, F, Q1; wall *White* 157 thee] Q2-4, F; the Q1, F2

136-7 lead...paradise i.e. seduce her.

140 weak dealing (?) behaviour lacking in
 moral fibre. Perhaps the Nurse means to say
 'wicked' (Singer, after Collier). Cowden Clarke
 defends 'weak': 'the Nurse intends to use a most
 forcible expression, and blunders upon a much
 feebler one'.

141 commend me convey my best wishes.

141 protest solemnly undertake or vow (the
 sense which the Nurse jumps at in her comment
 about a 'gentleman-like offer' (147), though
 Romeo may only be using it as an asseveration
 meaning 'declare' (*OED* sv v 1c)).

145 mark me pay attention to what I am saying.

149 shrived confession.

151 shrived given absolution after confession.
 Compare Brooke (633-4): 'On Saterdag quod he,
 if Juliet come to shrift, / She shalbe shrived and
 married' (Romeus talking to the Nurse).

151 Here...pains In Brooke (667) Romeus
 gives the Nurse 'vi. crownes of gold' and she makes
 not even a token resistance as in Shakespeare (152).
 'pains' = trouble.

157 tackled stair rope ladder; in Brooke (813),
 'corden ladder'.