

# Romeo and Juliet

## 2.3

*Enter Benvolio and Mercutio*

**MERCUTIO** Where the devil should this Romeo be? Came  
he not home tonight?

**BENVOLIO**  
Not to his father's. I spoke with his man.

**MERCUTIO**  
Why, that same pale hard-hearted wench, that Rosaline,  
Torments him so that he will sure run mad. 5

**BENVOLIO**  
Tybalt, the kinsman to old Capulet,  
Hath sent a letter to his father's house.

**MERCUTIO**  
A challenge, on my life.

**BENVOLIO** Romeo will answer it.

**MERCUTIO** Any man that can write may answer a letter.

**BENVOLIO** Nay, he will answer the letter's master, how he 10  
dares, being dared.

**MERCUTIO** Alas, poor Romeo, he is already dead±±stabbed  
with a white wench's black eye, run through the ear  
with a love song, the very pin of his heart cleft with the  
blind bow-boy's butt-shaft; and is he a man to encounter 15  
Tybalt?

**[BENVOLIO]** Why, what is Tybalt?

**MERCUTIO** More than Prince of Cats. O, he's the courageous  
captain of compliments. He fights as you sing pricksong:  
keeps time, distance, and proportion. He rests his minim 20  
rests: one, two, and the third in your bosom; the very  
butcher of a silk button. A duellist, a duellist; a gentleman  
of the very first house of the first and second cause. Ah,  
the immortal *passado*, the *punto reverso*, the *hai*.

**BENVOLIO** The what? 25

**MERCUTIO** The pox of such antic, lisping, affecting  
phantasims, these new tuners of accent! `By Jesu, a very  
good blade, a very tall man, a very good whore.' Why  
is not this a lamentable thing, grandsire, that we should  
be thus afflicted with these strange flies, these fashion- 30

mongers, these `pardon-me's', who stand so much on the new form that they cannot sit at ease on the old bench? O, their bones, their bones!

*Enter Romeo*

**BENVOLIO** Here comes Romeo, here comes Romeo!

**MERCUTIO** Without his roe, like a dried herring. O flesh, 35  
flesh, how art thou fishified! Now is he for the numbers  
that Petrarch flowed in. Laura to his lady was a kitchen  
wench±±marry, she had a better love to berhyme her±±  
Dido a dowdy, Cleopatra a gypsy, Helen and Hero  
hildings and harlots, Thisbe a grey eye or so, but not to 40  
the purpose. Signor Romeo, *bonjour*. There's a French  
salutation to your French slop. You gave us the  
counterfeit fairly last night.

**ROMEO** Good morrow to you both. What counterfeit did I  
give you? 45

**MERCUTIO** The slip, sir, the slip. Can you not conceive?

**ROMEO** Pardon, good Mercutio. My business was great, and  
in such a case as mine a man may strain courtesy.

**MERCUTIO** That's as much as to say such a case as yours  
constrains a man to bow in the hams. 50

**ROMEO** Meaning to curtsy.

**MERCUTIO** Thou hast most kindly hit it.

**ROMEO** A most courteous exposition.

**MERCUTIO** Nay, I am the very pink of courtesy.

**ROMEO** Pink for flower. 55

**MERCUTIO** Right.

**ROMEO** Why, then is my pump well flowered.

**MERCUTIO** Sure wit, follow me this jest now till thou hast  
worn out thy pump, that when the single sole of it is  
worn, the jest may remain, after the wearing, solely 60  
singular.

**ROMEO** O single-soled jest, solely singular for the singleness!

**MERCUTIO** Come between us, good Benvolio. My wits faints.

**ROMEO** Switch and spurs, switch and spurs, or I'll cry a  
match. 65

**MERCUTIO** Nay, if our wits run the wild-goose chase, I am  
done, for thou hast more of the wild goose in one of thy  
wits than I am sure I have in my whole five. Was I with  
you there for the goose?

**ROMEO** Thou wast never with me for anything when thou 70  
wast not there for the goose.

**MERCUTIO** I will bite thee by the ear for that jest.

**ROMEO** Nay, good goose, bite not.

**MERCUTIO** Thy wit is very bitter sweeting, it is a most sharp  
sauce. 75

**ROMEO** And is it not then well served in to a sweet goose?

**MERCUTIO** O, here's a wit of cheverel, that stretches from  
an inch narrow to an ell broad.

**ROMEO** I stretch it out for that word 'broad', which, added  
to the goose, proves thee far and wide a broad goose. 80

**MERCUTIO** Why, is not this better now than groaning for  
love? Now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo, now  
art thou what thou art by art as well as by nature, for  
this drivelling love is like a great natural that runs lolling  
up and down to hide his bauble in a hole. 85

**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, 90  
for I was come to the whole depth of my tale, and meant  
indeed to occupy the argument no longer.

*Enter the Nurse, and Peter, her man*

**ROMEO** Here's goodly gear.

**[BENVOLIO]** A sail, a sail!

**MERCUTIO** Two, two±±a shirt and a smock. 95

**NURSE** Peter.

**PETER** Anon.

**NURSE** My fan, Peter.

**MERCUTIO** Good Peter, to hide her face, for her fan's the  
fairer face. 100

**NURSE** God ye good morrow, gentlemen.

**MERCUTIO** God ye good e'en, fair gentlewoman.

**NURSE** Is it good e'en?

**MERCUTIO** 'Tis no less, I tell ye: for the bawdy hand of the  
dial is now upon the prick of noon. 105

**NURSE** Out upon you, what a man are you!

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

**NURSE** By my troth, it is well said. `For himself to mar',  
quoth a? Gentlemen, can any of you tell me where I 110  
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 of that name, for fault of a worse.

**NURSE** You say well. 115

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

**NURSE** (to Romeo) If you be he, sir, I desire some confidence  
with you.

**BENVOLIO** She will endite him to some supper. 120

**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.

*[He walks by them and] sings*

An old hare hoar 125

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. 130

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

**ROMEO** I will follow you.

**MERCUTIO** Farewell, ancient lady. Farewell, *[sings]* `lady,  
lady, lady'. 135

*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. 140

**NURSE** An a speak anything against me, I'll take him down  
an a were lustier than he is, and twenty such jacks; an  
if I cannot, I'll find those that shall. Scurvy knave! I am  
none of his flirt-jills, I am none of his skeans-mates. (To  
Peter) And thou must stand by, too, and suffer every 145  
knave to use me at his pleasure.

**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. 150

**NURSE** Now, afore God, I am so vexed that every part about  
me quivers. Scurvy knave! (*To Romeo*) 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 155  
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. 160

**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 165  
mark me.

**NURSE** I will tell her, sir, that you do protest; which as I  
take it is a gentlemanlike offer.

**ROMEO** Bid her devise  
Some means to come to shrift this afternoon, 170  
And there she shall at Friar Laurence' cell  
Be shrived and married. (*Offering money*) Here is for  
thy pains.

**NURSE** No, truly, sir, not a penny.

**ROMEO** Go to, I say, you shall.

**NURSE** [*taking the money*]  
This afternoon, sir. Well, she shall be there. 175

**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,  
Which to the high topgallant of my joy  
Must be my convoy in the secret night. 180  
Farewell. Be trusty, and I'll quit thy pains.  
Farewell. Commend me to thy mistress.

**NURSE**

Now God in heaven bless thee! Hark you, sir.

**ROMEO** What sayst thou, my dear Nurse?

**NURSE**

Is your man secret? Did you ne'er hear say 185  
`Two may keep counsel, putting one away'?

**ROMEO**

I warrant thee my man's as true as steel.

**NURSE**

Well, sir, my mistress is the sweetest lady.  
Lord, Lord, when 'twas a little prating thing±±  
O, there is a nobleman in town, one Paris, 190  
That would fain lay knife aboard; but she, good soul,  
Had as lief see a toad, a very toad,  
As see him. I anger her sometimes,  
And tell her that Paris is the properer man;  
But I'll warrant you, when I say so she looks 195  
As pale as any clout in the versal world.  
Doth not rosemary and Romeo begin  
Both with a letter?

**ROMEO**

Ay, Nurse, what of that? Both with an `R'.

**NURSE** Ah, mocker±±that's the dog's name. `R' is for the±± 200  
no, I know it begins with some other letter, and she  
hath the prettiest sententious of it, of you and rosemary,  
that it would do you good to hear it.

**ROMEO** Commend me to thy lady.

**NURSE** Ay, a thousand times. Peter! 205

**PETER** Anon.

**NURSE** *[giving Peter her fan]* Before, and apace.  
*Exeunt [Peter and Nurse at one door,*  
*Romeo at another door]*