



SCENE 4 *A street.*

Several hours after his meeting with Friar Laurence, Romeo meets Benvolio and Mercutio in the street. He is excited and happy; his mood is key to the comic nature of this scene, which includes much talk of swordplay and many suggestive jokes. Mercutio makes fun of Tybalt and teases Romeo. The Nurse comes to carry a message from Romeo to Juliet. Romeo tells her that Juliet should meet him at Friar Laurence's cell for their secret marriage ceremony.

[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,
5 that Rosaline,
Torments him so that he will sure run mad.

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

Mercutio. A challenge, on my life.

10 **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
dares, being dared.

Mercutio. Alas, poor Romeo, he is already dead!
15 stabbed with a white wench's black eye; shot 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 Tybalt?

Benvolio. Why, what is Tybalt?

20 **Mercutio.** More than Prince of Cats, I can tell you. O,
he's the courageous captain of compliments. He
fights as you sing pricksong—keeps time, distance,
and proportion; rests me his minim rest, one, two,
and the third in your bosom! the very butcher of a
25 silk button, a duelist, a duelist! a gentleman of the
very first house, of the first and second cause. Ah,
the immortal passado! the punto reverso! the hay!

Benvolio. The what?

30 **Mercutio.** The pox of such antic, lispings, affecting
fantasticoes—these new tuners of accent! "By Jesu, a
very good blade! a very tall man! a very good

3 man: servant.

7-13 **Tybalt . . . dared:** The hot-headed Tybalt has sent a letter to Romeo, challenging him to a duel. He is obviously still angry about Romeo's crashing the Capulet party. Benvolio says that Romeo will do more than answer the letter; he will accept Tybalt's challenge and fight him.

17 **blind bow-boy's butt-shaft:** Cupid's dull practice arrows; Mercutio suggests that Romeo fell in love with very little work on Cupid's part.

20-27 **More than . . . hay:** Mercutio mocks Tybalt's name. Prince of Cats refers to a cat in a fable named "Tybalt" that was known for its slyness. Then Mercutio makes fun of Tybalt's fancy new method of dueling, comparing it to precision singing (**pricksong**). **Passado, punto, reverso,** and **hay** were terms used in the new dueling style.

29-37 **The pox . . . their bones:** As in his previous speech, Mercutio makes fun of people who, like Tybalt, try to impress everyone with their knowledge of the latest fashions in dueling.



whore!" Why, is not this a lamentable thing,
 grandsire, that we should be thus afflicted with these
 strange flies, these fashion-mongers, these
 35 perdonami'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, no longer moody.]

Benvolio. Here comes Romeo! here comes Romeo!

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

50 **Romeo.** Good morrow to you both. What counterfeit
 did I give you?

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.

55 **Mercutio.** That's as much as to say, such a case as yours
 constrains a man to bow in the hams.

Romeo. Meaning, to curtsy.

Mercutio. Thou hast most kindly hit it.

Romeo. A most courteous exposition.

60 **Mercutio.** Nay, I am the very pink of courtesy.

Romeo. Pink for flower.

Mercutio. Right.

Romeo. Why, then is my pump well-flowered.

65 **Mercutio.** Well said! 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 singular.

Romeo. Oh, single-soled jest, solely singular for the
 singleness!

39-45 without his roe: he is only part of himself. Mercutio makes fun of Romeo's name and his lovesickness.
numbers: verses. Mercutio mentions Petrarch, who wrote sonnets to his love, Laura. He then makes insulting comments about famous lovers of the past.

46-51 bon jour: (French) good day. Here's a greeting to match your fancy French trousers (**slop**). You did a good job of getting away from us last night. (A piece of counterfeit money was called a **slip**.)

51-97 In these lines, Romeo and Mercutio have a battle of wits. They keep trying to top each other with funnier comments and cleverer puns.

63 pump: shoe; **well-flowered:** shoes were "pinked," or punched out in flowerlike designs.

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70 **Mercutio.** Come between us, good Benvolio! My wits faint.

Romeo. Switch and spurs, switch and spurs! or I'll cry a match.

75 **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 wast not there for the goose.

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

Romeo. Nay, good goose, bite not!

Mercutio. Thy wit is a very bitter sweeting; it is a most sharp sauce.

85 **Romeo.** And is it not, then, well served in to a sweet goose?

Mercutio. O, here's a wit of cheveril, that stretches from an inch narrow to an ell broad!

90 **Romeo.** I stretch it out for that word "broad," which, added to the goose, proves thee far and wide a broad goose.

95 **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 driveling love is like a great natural that runs lolling up and down to hide his bauble in a hole.

Benvolio. Stop there, stop there!

100 **Mercutio.** Thou desirest me to stop in my tale against the hair.

Benvolio. Thou wouldst else have made thy tale large.

105 **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 the argument no longer.

[Enter Nurse and Peter, her servant. He is carrying a large fan.]

Romeo. Here's goodly gear!

Mercutio. A sail, a sail!

72-73 **Switch . . . match:** Keep going, or I'll claim victory.

77 **Was . . . goose?:** Have I proved that you are a foolish person (**goose**)?

86 **cheveril:** kid skin, which is flexible. Mercutio means that a little wit stretches a long way.

95-97 **great natural:** an idiot like a jester or clown who carries a fool's stick (**bauble**). Mercutio is happy that Romeo is his old playful self again.

106-107 **Goodly gear:** something fine to joke about. A sail indicates that the Nurse in all her petticoats looks like a huge ship coming toward them.

RSJ

Benvolio. Two, two! a shirt and a smock.

Nurse. Peter!

Peter. Anon.

Nurse. My fan, Peter.

Mercutio. Good Peter, to hide her face; for her fan's
the fairer of the two.

Nurse. God ye good morrow, gentlemen.

Mercutio. God ye good-den, fair gentlewoman.

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.

Nurse. Out upon you! What a man are you!

Romeo. One, gentlewoman, that God hath made
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
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.

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.

Benvolio. She will endite 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.

[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."

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

110 Anon: Right away.

111 Fans were usually carried only by fine ladies. The Nurse is trying to pretend that she is more than a servant.

132–134 confidence: The Nurse means conference; she uses big words without understanding their meaning. Benvolio makes fun of this by using *endite* instead of *invite*.

135–145 Mercutio calls the Nurse a **bawd**, or woman who runs a house of prostitution. His song uses the insulting puns **hare**, a rabbit or a prostitute, and **hoar**, old.



dinner thither.

Romeo. I will follow you.

Mercutio. Farewell, ancient lady. Farewell, [*sings*] lady,
lady, lady.

[*Exeunt* Mercutio and Benvolio.]

150 **Nurse.** Marry, farewell! I pray you, sir, what saucy
merchant was this that was so full of his ropery?

151 **ropery:** roguery, or jokes.

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.

155 **Nurse.** An 'a speak anything against me, I'll take him
down, an '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 skainsmates. [*Turning to Peter.*] And thou must
160 stand by too, and suffer every knave to use me at his
pleasure?

158-161 The Nurse is angry that
Mercutio treated her like one of his loose
women (**flirt-gills**) or his gangsterlike
friends (**skainsmates**). She then
complains that Peter did not come to her
defense.

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
165 occasion in a good quarrel, and the law on my side.

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 bade me
enquire you out. What she bid me say, I will keep
170 to myself; but first let me tell ye, if ye should lead her
into a fool's paradise, as they say, it were a very gross
kind of behavior, 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
175 any gentlewoman, and very weak dealing.

169-175 The Nurse warns Romeo that
he'd better mean what he said about
marrying Juliet. She holds back her own
news to make sure that Romeo's love is
genuine.

Romeo. Nurse, commend me to thy lady and mistress.
I protest unto thee—

176 **commend me:** give my respectful
greetings.

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

180 **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 gentlemanlike offer.

Romeo. Bid her devise

NSJ

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

Nurse. No, truly, sir; not a penny.

Romeo. Go to! I say you shall.

190 Nurse. This afternoon, sir? Well, she shall be there.

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

195 Must be my convoy in the secret night.

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?

200 Nurse. Is your man secret? Did you ne'er hear say,

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

205 nobleman in town, one Paris, 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 as pale as

210 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—

No; I know it begins with some other letter;

215 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. [*Exit* Romeo.] Peter!

Peter. Anon.

220 Nurse. Peter, take my fan, and go before, and apace.

[*Exeunt.*]

184–187 Romeo tells the Nurse to have Juliet come to Friar Laurence's cell this afternoon using the excuse that she is going to confession (**shrift**). There she will receive forgiveness for her sins (**be shrived**) and be married.

193–194 **tackled stair**: a rope ladder. **topgallant**: highest point.

196–201 **quit thy pains**: reward you. The Nurse asks Romeo if his servant can be trusted and quotes the saying that two can keep a secret, but not three.

203–207 The Nurse, as is her way, begins to babble on and on. She mentions Paris' proposal but says Juliet would rather look at a toad than at Paris.

210–216 **clout . . . world**: old cloth in the entire world. **Doth not . . . hear it**: The Nurse tries to recall a clever saying that Juliet made up about Romeo and rosemary, the herb for remembrance, but she cannot remember it. She is sure that the two words couldn't begin with R because this letter sounds like a snarling dog. The Nurse mistakenly says **sententious** when she means sentences.

220 **apace**: quickly.