

To the right honourable, the Lord S.

Pardon, sweet flower of matchless poetry,  
And fairest bud the red rose ever bare,  
Although my muse, divorced from deeper care,  
Presents thee with a wanton elegy;  
Ne blame my verse of loose unchastity  
For painting forth the things that hidden are,  
Since all men act what I in speech declare,  
Only induced by variety.  
Complaints and praises every one can write,  
And passion out their pangs in stately rhymes,  
But of love's pleasures none did ever write  
That hath succeeded in these latter times.  
Accept of it, dear Lord, in gentle gree,  
And better lines ere long shall honour thee.

#### THE CHOOSING OF VALENTINES

It was the merry month of February,  
When young men in their jolly roguery  
Rose early in the morn fore break of day  
To seek them valentines so trim and gay,  
With whom they may consort in summer sheen,  
And dance the hay-de-guise on our town green  
As ales at Easter or at Pentecost,  
Perambulate the fields that flourish most,  
And go to some village abordering near  
To taste the cream and cakes, and such good cheer,  
Or see a play of strange morality  
Shown by bachelry of Manningtree,  
Whereto the country franklins flock-meal swarm,  
And John and Joan come marching arm in arm.  
Even on the hallows of that blessed saint  
That doth true lovers with those joys acquaint,  
I went, poor pilgrim, to my lady's shrine  
To see if she would be my valentine,  
But woe, alas, she was not be found [sic?],  
For she was shifted to an upper ground;  
Good Justice Dudgeon-haft and Crab-tree-face,  
With bills and staves had scared her from the place,  
And now she was compelled for sanctuary  
To fly unto an house of venery.  
Thither went I, and boldly made enquire

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If they had hackneys to let out to hire,  
And what they craved by order of their trade  
To let one ride a journey on a jade.  
Therewith out stepped a foggy three-chinned dame  
That used to take young wenches for to tame,  
And asked me if I meant as I professed,  
Or only asked a question but in jest.  
In jest? quoth I. That term it as you will;  
I come for game; therefore give me my Jill.  
Why, sir, quoth she, if that be your demand,  
Come lay me a God's-penny in my hand,  
For in our oratory sickerly  
None enters here to do his nicery  
But he must pay his offertory first,  
And then perhaps we'll ease him of his thirst.  
I, hearing her so earnest for the box,  
Gave her her due, and she the door unlocks.  
In am I entered; Venus be my speed;  
But where's this female that must do this deed?  
By blind meanders and by cranked ways  
She leads me onward (as my author says)  
Until we came within a shady loft  
Where Venus' bouncing vestals skirmish oft,  
And there she set me in a leather chair,  
And brought me forth of pretty trulls a pair,  
To choose of them which might content mine eye,  
But her I sought I could nowhere espy.  
I spake them fair, and wished them well to fare,  
Yet so it is, I must have fresher ware,  
Wherefore, Dame Bawd, as dainty as you be,  
Fetch gentle Mistress Frances forth to me.  
By halidom, quoth she, and God's own mother,  
I well perceive you are a wily brother,  
For if there be a morsel of more price  
You'll smell it out though I be ne'er so nice.  
As you desire, so shall you swive with her,  
But think your purse-strings shall aby it dear,  
For he that will eat quails must lavish crowns,  
And Mistress Frances in her velvet gowns,  
And ruffs and periwigs as fresh as May,  
Cannot be kept with half a crown a day.  
Of price, good hostess, we will not debate,  
Though you assize me at the highest rate;  
Only conduct me to this bonnibel,  
And ten good gobs I will unto thee tell  
Of gold or silver, which shall like thee best,

So much do I her company request.  
Away she went, so sweet a thing is gold  
That (maugre) will invade the strongest hold.  
Hey-ho, she comes that hath my heart in keep,  
Sing lullaby, my cares, and fall asleep;  
Sweeping she comes, as she would brush the ground,  
Her rattling silks my senses do confound.  
Oh, I am ravished! Void the chamber straight,  
For I must needs upon her with my weight.  
My Thomalin, quoth she, and then she smiled.  
Aye, aye, quoth I, so more men are beguiled  
With smiles, with flattering words and feigned cheer,  
When in their deeds their falsehood doth appear.  
As how, my lambkin? blushing she replied,  
Because I in this dancing-school abide?  
If that be it that breeds this discontent,  
We will remove the camp incontinent;  
For shelter only, sweetheart, came I hither,  
And to avoid the troublous stormy weather,  
But now the coast is clear we will be gone,  
Since but thyself true lover have I none.  
With that she sprung full lightly on my lips,  
And fast about the neck me coils and clips,  
She wanton faints, and falls upon her bed,  
And often tosseth to and fro her head;  
She shuts her eyes, and waggles with her tongue.  
Oh, who is able to abstain so long?  
I come, I come; sweet leman, by thy leave;  
Softly my fingers up these curtains heave,  
And make me happy stealing by degrees,  
First bare her legs, then creep up to her knees,  
From thence ascend unto her manly thigh  
(A pox on lingering when I am so nigh);  
Smock, climb apace, that I may see my joys.  
Oh, heaven and paradise are all but toys  
Compared with this sight I now behold,  
Which well might keep a man from being old;  
A pretty rising womb without a wem,  
That shone as bright as any silver stream,  
And bare out like the bending of an hill  
At whose decline a fountain dwelleth still  
That hath his mouth beset with ugly briars  
Resembling much a dusky net of wires.  
A lofty buttock barred with azure veins,  
Whose comely swelling, when my hand distrains,  
Or wanton checketh with a harmless stripe(?),

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It makes the fruits of love eftsoon be ripe,  
And pleasure, plucked too timely from the stem,  
To die ere it hath seen Jerusalem.  
Oh gods, that ever anything so sweet  
So suddenly should fade away and fleet;  
Her arms are spread, and I am all unarmed;  
Like one with Ovid's cursed hemlock charmed,  
So are my limbs unwieldy for the fight,  
That spend their strength in thought of their delight.  
What shall I do to show myself a man?  
It will not be, for aught that beauty can.  
I kiss, I clap, I feel, I view at will,  
Yet dead he lies, not thinking good or ill.  
Unhappy me, quoth she, and will't not stand?  
Come, let me rub and chafe it with my hand;  
Perhaps the silly worm is laboured sore,  
And wearied that it can do no more;  
If it be so (as I am great adread),  
I wish ten thousand times that I were dead.  
Howe'er it is, no means shall want in me  
That may avail to his recovery;  
Which said, she took and rolled it on her thigh,  
And when she looked on't, she would weep and sigh,  
And dandled it, and danced it up and down  
Not ceasing till she raise it from his swoon,  
And then he flew on her as he were wood,  
And on her breach did thack and foin a-good;  
He rubbed and pricked and pierced her to the bones,  
Digging as far as eath he might for stones,  
Now high, now low, now striking short and thick,  
Now diving deep he touched her to the quick,  
Now with a gird he would his course rebate,  
Straight would he take him to a stately gait.  
Play while him list, and thrust he ne'er so hard,  
Poor Patient Grizel lieth at his ward,  
And gives and takes as blithe and free as May,  
And e'ermore meets him in the middle way.  
On him her eyes continually were fixed;  
With her eye-beams his melting looks were mixed,  
Which like the sun that 'twixt two glasses plays,  
From one to th' other casts rebounding rays,  
He, like a star, that to regild his beams,  
Sucks in the influence of Phoebus' streams,  
Embathes the lines of his descending light  
In the bright fountains of her clearest sight;  
She, fair as fairest planet in the sky,

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Her purity to no man doth deny;  
The very chamber that enclouds her shine  
Looks like the palace of that god divine  
Who leads the day about the zodiac,  
And every even descends to th' ocean lake;  
So fierce and fervent is her radiance,  
Such fiery stakes she darts at every glance,  
She might enflame the icy limbs of age,  
And make pale death his surquidry assuage  
To stand and gaze upon her orient lamps  
Where Cupid all his chiefest joys encamps,  
And sits and plays with every atomy  
That in her sunbeams swarm abundantly.  
Thus gazing and thus striving we persevere,  
But what so firm that may continue ever?  
Oh, not so fast, my ravished mistress cries,  
Lest my content, that on thy life relies,  
Be brought too soon from his delightful seat,  
And me unwares of hoped bliss defeat;  
Together let our equal motions stir,  
Together let us live and die, my dear,  
Together let us march unto content,  
And be consumed with one blandishment.  
As she prescribed, so kept we crotchet-time,  
And every stroke in order like a chime  
Whilst she, that had preserved me by her pity  
Unto our music framed a groaning ditty.  
Alas, alas, that love should be a sin,  
Even now my bliss and sorrow doth begin.  
Hold wide thy lap, my love Danae,  
And entertain the golden shower so free  
That trilling falls into thy treasury,  
As April drops not half so pleasant be,  
Nor Nilus' overflow to Egypt plains,  
As this sweet stream that all her joints embains.  
With Oh, and Oh, she itching moves her hips,  
And to and fro full lightly starts and skips,  
She jerks her legs, and sprawleth with her heels;  
No tongue may tell the solace that she feels.  
I faint, I yield, Oh, death, rock me asleep;  
For from us yet thy spirit may not glide  
Until the sinewy channels of our blood  
Withhold the source from this imprisoned flood,  
And then will we (that 'then' will come too soon)  
Dissolved lie as though our days were done.  
The whilst I speak, my soul is fleeting hence,

And life forsakes his fleshly residence.  
Stay, stay, sweet joy, and leave me not forlorn;  
Why shouldst thou fade that art but newly born?  
Stay but an hour; an hour is not so much;  
But half an hour, if that thy haste be such;  
Nay, but a quarter; I will ask no more,  
That thy departure (which torments me sore)  
May be alightened with a little pause,  
And take away this passion's sudden cause.  
He hears me not, hard-hearted as he is;  
He is the son of Time and hates my bliss;  
Time ne'er looks back, the river ne'er return;  
A second spring must help me or I burn.  
No, no, the well is dry that should refresh me;  
The glass is run of all my destiny;  
Nature of winter learneth niggardise,  
Who, as he over-bars the stream with ice,  
That man nor beast may of their pleasance taste,  
So shuts she up her conduit all in haste,  
And will not let her nectar overflow,  
Lest mortal men immortal joys should know.  
Adieu, unconstant love, to thy disport;  
Adieu, false mirth, and melody too short;  
Adieu, faint-hearted instrument of lust,  
That falsely hath betrayed our equal trust;  
Henceforth no more will I implore thine aid,  
Or thee, or men, of cowardice upbraid;  
My little dildo shall supply their kind,  
A knave that moves as light as leaves by wind,  
That bendeth not, nor foldest any deal,  
But stands as stiff as he were made of steel,  
And plays at peacock 'twixt my legs right blithe,  
And doth my tickling swage with many a sigh,  
For by Saint Runnion, he'll refresh me well,  
And never make my tender belly swell.  
Poor Priapus, whose triumph now must fall,  
Except thou thrust this weakling to the wall;  
Behold how he usurps in bed and bower,  
And undermines thy kingdom every hour,  
How sly he creeps betwixt the bark and tree,  
And sucks the sap, whilst sleep detaineth thee;  
He is my mistress' page at every stound,  
And soon will tent a deep-entrenched wound;  
He waits on courtly nymphs that be so coy,  
And bids them scorn the blind alluring boy;  
He gives young girls their gamesome sustenance,

And every gaping mouth his full sufficiency;  
He fortifies disdain with foreign arts,  
And, wanton chaste, deludes all loving hearts;  
If any wight a cruel mistress serves,  
Or in despair, unhappy pines and starves,  
Curse eunuch dildo, senseless counterfeit,  
Who sooth may fill, but never can beget,  
But if revenge, enraged with despair  
That such a dwarf his welfare should impair,  
Would fain this woman's secretary know,  
Let him attend the marks that I shall show.  
He is a youth almost two handfuls high,  
Straight, round and plumb, yet having but one eye  
Wherein the rheum so fervently doth rain  
That Stygian gulf may scarce his tears contain;  
Attired in white velvet or in silk,  
And nourished with hot water or with milk,  
Armed otherwhile in thick congealed glass  
When he more glib to hell below would pass,  
Upon a chariot of five wheels he rides,  
The which an arm-strong driver steadfast guides,  
And often alters pace as ways grow deep  
(For who in paths unknown one gait can keep?);  
Sometimes he smoothly slideth down the hill,  
Anotherwhile the stones his feet do kill;  
In clammy ways he treadeth by and by,  
And plasheth and sprayeth all that be him nigh;  
So fares this jolly rider in his race,  
Plunging and sourcing forward in like case,  
Bedashed, bespirted, and beplodded foul,  
God give thee shame, thou blind mis-shapen owl.  
Fie, fie, for grief; a lady's chamberlain,  
And canst not thou thy tattling tongue refrain?  
I read thee, beardless blab; beware of stripes,  
And be advised what thou vainly pipes;  
Thou wilt be whipped with nettles for this gear,  
If Cicely show but of thy knavery here;  
Saint Denis shield me from such female sprites!  
Regard not, dames, what Cupid's poet writes;  
I penned this story only for myself,  
Who giving suck unto a childish elf,  
And quite discouraged in my nursery,  
Since all my store seems to her penury.  
I am not as was Hercules the stout,  
That to the seventh journey could hold out;  
I want those herbs and roots of Indian soil

That strengthen weary members in their toil;  
Drugs and electuaries of new device  
Do shun my purse, that trembles at the price;  
Sufficeth, all I have I yield her whole,  
Which for a poor man is a princely dole;  
I pay our hostess scot and lot at most,  
And look as lean and lank as any ghost.  
What can be added more to my renown?  
She lieth breathless; I am taken down.  
The waves do swell, the tides climb o'er the banks,  
Judge, gentlemen, if I deserve not thanks.  
And so good night unto you every one,  
For lo, our thread is spun, our play is done.  
*Claudito iam rivo Priape, sat prata biberunt.*

Tho. Nash.

Thus hath my pen presumed to please my friend;  
Oh, might'st thou likewise please Apollo's eye;  
No, honour brooks no such impiety.  
Yet Ovid's wanton muse did not offend;  
He is the fountain whence my streams do flow;  
Forgive me if I speak as I was taught,  
Alike to women, utter all I know,  
As longing to unlade so bad a fraught.  
My mind once purged of such lascivious wit,  
With purified words and hallowed verse  
Thy praises in large volumes shall rehearse,  
That better may thy graver view befit.  
Meanwhile yet rests you smile at what I write,  
Or for attempting, banish me your sight.

Thomas Nash.