

LANCE

I am but a fool, look you, and yet I have the wit to think my master is a kind of a knave, but that's all one if he be but one knave. He lives not now that knows me to be in love, yet I am in love, but a team of horse shall not pluck that from me, nor who 'tis I love; and yet 'tis a woman, but what woman I will not tell myself; and yet 'tis a milk-maid; yet 'tis not a maid, for she hath had gossips; yet 'tis a maid, for she is her master's maid and serves for wages. She hath more qualities than a water spaniel, which is much in a bare Christian. He takes out a piece of paper. Here is the catalog of her condition.

(Reads.) Imprimis, She can fetch and carry. Why, a horse can do no more; nay, a horse cannot fetch but only carry; therefore is she better than a jade.

(Reads.) Item, She can milk. Look you, a sweet virtue in a maid with clean hands.

(Enter Speed)

SPEED

How now, Signior Lance? What news with your Mastership?

LANCE

With my master's ship? Why, it is at sea.

SPEED

Well, your old vice still: mistake the word. What news, then, in your paper?

LANCE

The black'st news that ever thou heard'st.

SPEED

Why, man? How black?

LANCE

Why, as black as ink.

SPEED

Let me read them.

LANCE

Fie on thee, jolt-head, thou canst not read.

SPEED

Thou liest. I can. Come, fool, come. Try me in thy paper.

LANCE *(giving him the paper)*

There, and Saint Nicholas be thy speed.

SPEED (*reads*)
Imprimis, She can milk.

LANCE
Ay, that she can.

SPEED
Item, She brews good ale.

LANCE
And thereof comes the proverb:
"Blessing of your heart, you brew good ale."

SPEED
Item, She can sew.

LANCE
That's as much as to say "Can she so?"

SPEED
Item, She can knit.

LANCE
What need a man care for a stock with a wench,
when she can knit him a stock?

SPEED
Item, She can wash and scour.

LANCE
A special virtue, for then she need not be washed and scoured.

SPEED
Item, She can spin.

LANCE
Then may I set the world on wheels, when she can spin for her living.

SPEED
Item, She hath many nameless virtues.

LANCE
That's as much as to say "bastard virtues," that
indeed know not their fathers and therefore have no names.

SPEED
Here follow her vices.

LANCE
Close at the heels of her virtues.

SPEED

Item, She is not to be kissed fasting in respect of her breath.

LANCE

Well, that fault may be mended with a breakfast. Read on.

SPEED

Item, She hath a sweet mouth.

LANCE

That makes amends for her sour breath.

SPEED

Item, She doth talk in her sleep.

LANCE

It's no matter for that, so she sleep not in hertalk.

SPEED

Item, She is slow in words.

LANCE

O villain, that set this down among her vices! To be slow in words is a woman's only virtue. I pray thee, out with 't, and place it for her chief virtue.

SPEED

Item, She is proud.

LANCE

Out with that too; it was Eve's legacy and cannot be ta'en from her.

SPEED

Item, She hath no teeth.

LANCE

I care not for that neither, because I love crusts.

SPEED

Item, She is curst.

LANCE

Well, the best is, she hath no teeth to bite.

SPEED

Item, She will often praise her liquor.

LANCE

If her liquor be good, she shall; if she will not, I will, for good things should be praised.

SPEED

Item, She is too liberal.

LANCE

Of her tongue she cannot, for that's writ down she is slow of;
of her purse she shall not, for that I'll keep shut;
now, of another thing she may, and that cannot I help.
Well, proceed.

SPEED

Item, She hath more hair than wit, and more
faults than hairs, and more wealth than faults.

LANCE

Stop there. I'll have her. More wealth than faults...
That makes the faults gracious. Well,
I'll have her, and if it be a match, nothing is impossible—

SPEED

What then?

LANCE

Why, then will I tell thee that thy master stays for thee at the North Gate.

SPEED

For me?

LANCE

For thee? Ay, who art thou? He hath stayed for a better man than thee.

SPEED

And must I go to him?

LANCE

Thou must run to him, for thou hast stayed so
long that going will scarce serve the turn.

SPEED *(handing him the paper)*

Why didst not tell mesooner? Pox of your love letters!

(He exits)

LANCE

Now will he be swung for reading my letter;
an unmannerly slave, that will thrust himself into
secrets. I'll after, to rejoice in the boy's correction.

(He exits)