

Much Ado About Nothing

by William Shakespeare
(abridged by Farrar)

Cast

BENEDICK, A lord and soldier from Padua; companion of Don Pedro

DON PEDRO, Prince of Aragon.

DON JOHN, the half-brother of Don Pedro.

CLAUDIO, of Florence; a count, companion of Don Pedro, friend to Benedick.

LEONATO, governor of Messina; Hero's father.

ANTONIO, brother of Leonato.

BORACHIO, follower of Don John.

CONRADE, follower of Don John.

BEATRICE, niece of Leonato and daughter of Antonio

HERO, daughter of Leonato

MARGARET, waiting-gentlewoman attendant on Hero.

URSULA, waiting-gentlewoman attendant on Hero.

DOGBERRY, the constable in charge of Messina's night watch.

VERGES, the Headborough, Dogberry's partner

FRIAR FRANCIS, a priest.

SEXTON, the judge of the trial of Borachio

FIRST WATCHMAN, a watchmen of Messina

SECOND WATCHMAN, another watchman of Messina

MESSENGER, in service of Leonato

ACT I

SCENE I. Before LEONATO'S house.

Enter LEONATO, HERO, and BEATRICE, with a Messenger

LEONATO

I learn in this letter that Don Peter of Arragon
comes this night to Messina and hath
bestowed much honour on a young Florentine called Claudio.

MESSENGER

He hath borne himself beyond the
promise of his age.

LEONATO

He hath an uncle here in Messina will be very much
glad of it.

BEATRICE

I pray you, is Signior Mountanto returned from the
wars or no?

MESSENGER

I know none of that name, lady.

HERO

My cousin means Signior Benedick of Padua.

MESSENGER

O, he's returned; and as pleasant as ever he was.

LEONATO

Faith, niece, you tax Signior Benedick too much;
but he'll be meet with you, I doubt it not.

MESSENGER

He was a good soldier, lady.

BEATRICE

And a good soldier to a lady: but what is he to a lord?

MESSENGER

A lord to a lord, a man to a man; stuffed with all
honourable virtues.

BEATRICE

It is so, indeed; he is no less than a stuffed man:
but for the stuffing,--well, we are all mortal.

LEONATO

You must not, sir, mistake my niece. There is a kind of merry war betwixt Signior Benedick and her: they never meet but there's a skirmish of wit between them.

BEATRICE

Alas! he gets nothing by that. In our last conflict four of his five wits went halting off, and now is the whole man governed with one. Who is his companion now? He hath every month a new sworn brother.

MESSENGER

He is most in the company of the right noble Claudio.

BEATRICE

O Lord, he will hang upon him like a disease. God help the noble Claudio!

LEONATO

You will never run mad, niece.

BEATRICE

No, not till a hot January.

MESSENGER

Don Pedro is approached.

Enter DON PEDRO, DON JOHN, CONRADE, CLAUDIO, and BENEDICK

DON PEDRO

Good Signior Leonato! I think this is your daughter.

LEONATO

Her mother hath many times told me so.

BENEDICK

Were you in doubt, sir, that you asked her?

LEONATO

Signior Benedick, no; for then were you a child.

BENEDICK

If Signior Leonato be her father, she would not have his head on her shoulders for all Messina, as like him as she is.

BEATRICE

I wonder that you will still be talking, Signior Benedick: nobody marks you.

BENEDICK

What, my dear Lady Disdain! are you yet living?

BEATRICE

Is it possible disdain should die while she hath
such meet food to feed it as Signior Benedick?
Courtesy itself must convert to disdain, if you come
in her presence.

BENEDICK

Then is courtesy a turncoat. But it is certain I
am loved of all ladies, only you excepted: and I
would I could find in my heart that I had not a hard
heart; for, truly, I love none.

BEATRICE

A dear happiness to women. I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man
swear he loves me.

BENEDICK

God keep your ladyship still in that mind! so some
gentleman or other shall 'scape a predestinate
scratched face.

BEATRICE

Scratching could not make it worse, an 'twere such
a face as yours were.

DON PEDRO

Signior Claudio and Signior Benedick, my dear friend Leonato hath
invited you all to stay here at the least a month. I dare swear he is no
hypocrite, but prays from his heart.

LEONATO

If you swear, my lord, you shall not be forsworn.

To DON JOHN

Let me bid you welcome, my lord: being reconciled to
the prince your brother, I owe you all duty.

DON JOHN

I thank you: I am not of many words, but I thank
you.

LEONATO

Please it your grace lead on?

Exeunt all except BENEDICK and CLAUDIO

CLAUDIO

Benedick, didst thou note the daughter of Signior Leonato?

BENEDICK

I noted her not; but I looked on her.

CLAUDIO

Is she not a modest young lady?

BENEDICK

Why, i' faith, methinks she's too low for a high
praise, too brown for a fair praise and too little
for a great praise. I do not like her.

CLAUDIO

In mine eye she is the sweetest lady that ever I
looked on.

BENEDICK

I can see yet without spectacles and I see no such
matter. But I hope you have no intent to turn husband, have you?

CLAUDIO

I would scarce trust myself, though I had sworn the
contrary, if Hero would be my wife.

Re-enter DON PEDRO

DON PEDRO

What secret hath held you here?

BENEDICK

He is in love with Hero, Leonato's short daughter.

DON PEDRO

Amen, if you love her; for the lady is very well worthy.

CLAUDIO

That I love her, I feel.

DON PEDRO

That she is worthy, I know.

BENEDICK

I neither feel how she should be loved nor
know how she should be worthy.

DON PEDRO

Thou wast ever an obstinate heretic.

BENEDICK

That a woman conceived me, I thank her; that she brought me up, I likewise give her most humble thanks: but that I will live a bachelor, all women shall pardon me.

DON PEDRO

I shall see thee, ere I die, look pale with love.

BENEDICK

With anger, with sickness, or with hunger, my lord, not with love.

Exit BENEDICK

CLAUDIO

My liege, your highness now may do me good.

DON PEDRO

I know we shall have revelling to-night:
I will assume thy part in some disguise
And tell fair Hero I am Claudio,
And in her bosom I'll unclasp my heart
Then after to her father will I break;
And the conclusion is, she shall be thine.

Exeunt

SCENE III. A room in Leonato's house.

Enter DON JOHN and CONRADE

CONRADE

My lord, why are you thus out of measure sad?

DON JOHN

There is no measure in the occasion that breeds;
therefore the sadness is without limit.

CONRADE

You have of late stood out against your brother: it is needful
that you frame the season for your own harvest.

DON JOHN

I had rather be a canker in a hedge than a rose in
his grace, and it better fits my blood to be

disdained of all than to fashion a carriage to rob
love from any. Yea, my brother trusts me, but with
a muzzle; therefore I have decreed not to sing in my cage.

CONRADE

Can you make no use of your discontent?

Enter BORACHIO

What news, Borachio?

BORACHIO

I can give you intelligence of an intended marriage.

DON JOHN

Will it serve for any model to build mischief on?

BORACHIO

Marry, it is your brother's right hand.

DON JOHN

Who? the most exquisite Claudio?

BORACHIO

He wishes to marry Hero, the daughter and heir of Leonato.

I heard it agreed upon that the
prince should woo Hero for himself, and having
obtained her, give her to Count Claudio.

DON JOHN

This may prove food to my displeasure. That young start-up hath all the
glory of my overthrow: if I can cross him any way, I
bless myself every way. You are both sure, and will assist me?

CONRADE

To the death, my lord.

Exeunt

ACT II

SCENE I. A hall in LEONATO'S house.

Enter LEONATO, ANTONIO, HERO, BEATRICE, and others

LEONATO

Was not Count John here at supper?

ANTONIO

I saw him not.

HERO

He is of a very melancholy disposition.

BEATRICE

How tartly that gentleman looks! I never can see him but I am heart-burned an hour after.

LEONATO

By my troth, niece, thou wilt never get thee a husband, if thou be so shrewd of thy tongue.

ANTONIO

In faith, she's too curst.

BEATRICE

I pray upon my knees every morning and evening. Lord, I could not endure a husband with a beard on his face: I had rather lie in the woollen.

ANTONIO

You may light on a husband that hath no beard.

BEATRICE

What should I do with him? Dress him in my apparel and make him my waiting-gentlewoman?

ANTONIO

Well, daughter, I hope to see you one day fitted with a husband.

BEATRICE

Not till God make men of some other metal than earth. No, uncle, I'll none.

LEONATO

Daughter, remember what I told you: if the prince do solicit you in that kind, you know your answer.

HERO

The revellers are entering!

All put on their masks

Enter DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, DON JOHN, BORACHIO, MARGARET, URSULA and others, masked

Dance, sing.

DON PEDRO

Lady, will you walk with me in your company?

HERO

I may say so, when I please.

DON PEDRO

And when please you to say so?

HERO

When I like your favour; for God defend the lute should be like the case!

(Drawing her aside)

BORACHIO

Well, I would you did like me.

MARGARET

So would not I, for your own sake; for I have many ill-qualities.

BORACHIO

Which is one?

MARGARET

I say my prayers aloud.

BORACHIO

I love you the better: the hearers may cry, Amen.

MARGARET

God match me with a good dancer!

BORACHIO

Amen.

Exit Margarget and Borachio

URSULA

I know you well enough; you are Signior Antonio.

ANTONIO

At a word, I am not.

URSULA

I know you by the wagging of your head.

ANTONIO

To tell you true, I counterfeit him.

Exit Ursula and Antonio

BEATRICE

Will you not tell me who you are or who told you?

BENEDICK

Not now.

BEATRICE

Well this must have been Signior Benedick that said so.

BENEDICK

What's he?

BEATRICE

I am sure you know him well enough.

BENEDICK

Not I, believe me.

BEATRICE

Did he never make you laugh?

BENEDICK

I pray you, what is he?

BEATRICE

Why, he is the prince's jester: a very dull fool.

BENEDICK

When I know the gentleman, I'll tell him what you say.

BEATRICE

Do, do.

Music

Exeunt all except DON JOHN, BORACHIO, and CLAUDIO

BORACHIO

Claudio remains: I know him by his bearing.

DON JOHN

Are not you Signior Benedick?

CLAUDIO

You know me well; I am he.

DON JOHN

Signior, you are very near my brother in his love:
he is enamoured on Hero; I pray you, dissuade him
from her.

CLAUDIO

How know you he loves her?

DON JOHN

I heard him swear his affection.

BORACHIO

So did I too; and he swore he would marry her to-night.

Exeunt DON JOHN and BORACHIO

CLAUDIO

Thus answer I in the name of Benedick,
But hear these ill news with the ears of Claudio.
'Tis certain so; the prince wooes for himself.
Friendship is constant in all other things
Save in the office and affairs of love.
Farewell, therefore, Hero!

Re-enter BENEDICK

BENEDICK

Count Claudio?
Come, will you go with me?
The prince hath got your Hero.

CLAUDIO

I wish him joy of her.

BENEDICK

But did you think the prince would
have served you thus?

CLAUDIO

I pray you, leave me.

BENEDICK

Ho!

CLAUDIO

If it will not be, I'll leave you.

Exit

BENEDICK

Alas, poor hurt fowl!

But that my Lady Beatrice should know me, and not know me! The prince's fool! Ha? Well, I'll be revenged as I may.

Re-enter DON PEDRO

DON PEDRO

Now, signior, where's the count? did you see him?

Enter CLAUDIO, BEATRICE, HERO, and LEONATO

DON PEDRO

Why, how now, count! wherefore are you sad?

CLAUDIO

Not sad, my lord.

DON PEDRO

How then? sick?

BEATRICE

The count is neither sad, nor sick, nor merry, nor well; but civil count, civil as an orange, and something of that jealous complexion.

DON PEDRO

Here, Claudio, I have wooed in thy name, and fair Hero is won: I have broke with her father, and his good will obtained: name the day of marriage, and God give thee joy!

LEONATO

Count, take of me my daughter, and with her my fortunes: his grace hath made the match, and an grace say Amen to it.

BEATRICE

Speak, count, 'tis your cue.

CLAUDIO

Silence is the perfectest herald of joy: I were but little happy, if I could say how much. Lady, as you are mine, I am yours.

BEATRICE

Speak, cousin; or, if you cannot, stop his mouth with a kiss, and let not him speak neither.

DON PEDRO

In faith, lady, you have a merry heart.

BEATRICE

Good Lord, for alliance! Thus goes every one to the world but I, and I am sunburnt; I may sit in a corner and cry heigh-ho for a husband!

DON PEDRO

Lady Beatrice, I will get you one. Will you have me?

BEATRICE

No, my lord, unless I might have another for working-days: your grace is too costly to wear every day.

LEONATO

Niece, will you look to those things I told you of?

BEATRICE

I cry you mercy, uncle. By your grace's pardon.

Exit

DON PEDRO

By my troth, a pleasant-spirited lady.
But she cannot endure to hear tell of a husband.

LEONATO

O, by no means: she mocks all her wooers out of suit.

DON PEDRO

She were an excellent wife for Benedict.

LEONATO

O Lord, my lord, if they were but a week married, they would talk themselves mad.

DON PEDRO

I will undertake one of
Hercules' labours; which is, to bring Signior
Benedick and the Lady Beatrice into a mountain of
affection the one with the other.

LEONATO

My lord, I am for you.

CLAUDIO

And I, my lord.

DON PEDRO

And you too, gentle Hero?

HERO

I will do any modest office, my lord, to help my
cousin to a good husband.

DON PEDRO

If we can do this,
Cupid is no longer an archer: his glory shall be
ours, for we are the only love-gods.

Exeunt

SCENE II. The same.

Enter DON JOHN and BORACHIO

DON JOHN

It is so; the Count Claudio shall marry the
daughter of Leonato.

BORACHIO

Yea, my lord; but I can cross it.

DON JOHN

How canst thou cross this marriage?

BORACHIO

I think I told your lordship a year since, how much
I am in the favour of Margaret, the waiting
gentlewoman to Hero.
I can, at any unseasonable instant of the night,
appoint her to look out at her lady's chamber window.

DON JOHN

What life is in that, to be the death of this marriage?

BORACHIO

The poison of that lies in you to temper. Go you to the prince your brother and Count Claudio and tell them that you know that Hero loves me. They will scarcely believe this without trial so they will see me at her chamber-window, hear me call Margaret Hero, hear Margaret term me Claudio.

DON JOHN

Be cunning in the working this, and thy fee is a thousand ducats.

Exeunt

SCENE III. LEONATO'S orchard.

Enter BENEDICK

BENEDICK

I do much wonder that one man, seeing how much another man is a fool when he dedicates his behaviors to love, will, after he hath laughed at such shallow follies in others, become the argument of his own scorn by failing in love: and such a man is Claudio. Ha! the prince and Monsieur Love! I will hide me in the arbour.

(Withdraws)

Enter DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, and LEONATO

DON PEDRO

Come hither, Leonato. What was it you told me of to-day, that your niece Beatrice was in love with Signior Benedick?

CLAUDIO

I did never think that lady would have loved any man.

LEONATO

No, nor I neither; but most wonderful that she should so dote on Signior Benedick, whom she hath in all outward behaviors seemed ever to abhor.

DON PEDRO

Why, what effects of passion shows she?

CLAUDIO

Bait the hook well; this fish will bite.

LEONATO

What effects, my lord? You heard my daughter tell you how.

DON PEDRO

I would have I thought her spirit had been invincible against all assaults of affection.

LEONATO

I would have sworn it had, my lord; especially against Benedick.

BENEDICK

I should think this a gull, but that the white-bearded fellow speaks it.

CLAUDIO

He hath ta'en the infection: hold it up.

DON PEDRO

Hath she made her affection known to Benedick?

LEONATO

No; and swears she never will: that's her torment. She wrote him of her love but tore the letter into a thousand halfpence; railed at herself, that she should be so immodest.

CLAUDIO

Then down upon her knees she falls, weeps, sobs, beats her heart, tears her hair, prays, curses; 'O sweet Benedick!

DON PEDRO

It were good that Benedick knew of it by some other, if she will not discover it.

CLAUDIO

To what end? He would make but a sport of it and torment the poor lady worse.

DON PEDRO

An he should, it were an alms to hang him. She's an excellent sweet lady and virtuous.

CLAUDIO

And she is exceeding wise.

DON PEDRO

In every thing but in loving Benedick.

CLAUDIO

Hero thinks surely she will die; for she says she will die, if he love her not, and she will die, ere she make her love known, and she will die, if he woo her, rather than she will bate one breath of her accustomed crossness.

DON PEDRO

Shall we go seek Benedick, and tell him of her love?

CLAUDIO

Never tell him, my lord: let her wear it out with good counsel.

LEONATO

Nay, that's impossible: she may wear her heart out first.

DON PEDRO

I love Benedick well; and I could wish he would modestly examine himself, to see how much he is unworthy so good a lady.

CLAUDIO

If he do not dote on her upon this, I will never trust my expectation.

DON PEDRO

Let there be the same net spread for her; and that must your daughter and her gentlewomen carry.

Exeunt DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, and LEONATO

BENEDICK

[Coming forward] This can be no trick: the conference was sadly borne. They have the truth of this from Hero. They seem to pity the lady: it seems her affections have their full bent. Love me! I did never think to marry. I have railed so long against marriage: but doth not the appetite alter? Here comes Beatrice. By this day! she's a fair lady: I do spy some marks of love in her.

Enter BEATRICE

BEATRICE

Against my will I am sent to bid you come in to dinner.

BENEDICK

Fair Beatrice, I thank you for your pains.

BEATRICE

I took no more pains for those thanks than you take pains to thank me: if it had been painful, I would not have come.

BENEDICK

You take pleasure then in the message?

BEATRICE

Yea, just so much as you may take upon a knife's point and choke a daw withal. You have no stomach, signior: fare you well.

Exit

BENEDICK

Ha! 'Against my will I am sent to bid you come in to dinner;' there's a double meaning in that '

Exit

ACT III

SCENE I. LEONATO'S garden.

Enter HERO, MARGARET, and URSULA

HERO

Good Margaret, run thee to the parlor;
Tell Beatrice I and Ursula
Walk in the orchard and our whole discourse
Is all of her.

MARGARET

I'll make her come.

Exit

HERO

Now, Ursula, when Beatrice doth come,
Our talk must only be of Benedick.
When I do name him, let it be thy part
To praise him more than ever man did merit:
My talk to thee must be how Benedick
Is sick in love with Beatrice.

Enter BEATRICE, behind

Now begin.

URSULA

Are you sure
that Benedick loves Beatrice so entirely?

HERO

So says the prince and my new-trothed lord.
They did entreat me to acquaint her of it;
But I persuaded them, if they loved Benedick,
To wish him wrestle with affection,
And never to let Beatrice know of it.

URSULA

Why did you so?

HERO

Nature never framed a woman's heart
Of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice;
Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes,
Misprising what they look on, and her wit
Values itself so highly that to her
All matter else seems weak: she cannot love.

URSULA

If knew his love, she would make sport at it.

HERO

And who dare tell her so? If I should speak,
She would mock me into air

URSULA

Yet tell her of it: hear what she will say.

HERO

No; rather I will go to Benedick
And counsel him to fight against his passion.

URSULA

She cannot be so much without true judgment--
Having so swift and excellent a wit
As she is prized to have--as to refuse
So rare a gentleman as Signior Benedick.

HERO

Indeed, he hath an excellent good name.

URSULA

We have caught her, madam.

HERO

If it proves so, then loving goes by haps:
Some Cupid kills with arrows, some with traps.

Exeunt HERO and URSULA

BEATRICE

What fire is in mine ears? Can this be true?
Stand I condemn'd for pride and scorn so much?
And, Benedick, love on; I will requite thee,
Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand.

Exit

SCENE II. A room in LEONATO'S house

Enter DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, and LEONATO

CLAUDIO

I hope he be in love.

DON PEDRO

There is no appearance of fancy in him, unless it be a fancy that he hath to strange disguises.

DON PEDRO

For my life, he goes to speak with Leonato about Beatrice.

CLAUDIO

'Tis even so. Hero and Margaret have by this played their parts with Beatrice; and then the two bears will not bite one another when they meet.

Enter DON JOHN

DON JOHN

My lord and brother, God save you!

DON PEDRO

Good den, brother.

DON JOHN

If your leisure served, I would speak with you.

DON PEDRO

In private?

DON JOHN

If it please you: yet Count Claudio may hear; for what I would speak of concerns him.

DON PEDRO

What's the matter?

DON JOHN

Means your lordship to be married to-morrow?

DON PEDRO

You know he does.

DON JOHN

I know not that, when he knows what I know.

CLAUDIO

If there be any impediment, I pray you discover it.

DON PEDRO

Why, what's the matter?

DON JOHN

I came hither to tell you the lady is disloyal.

CLAUDIO
Who, Hero?

DON JOHN
Even she.

CLAUDIO
Disloyal?

DON JOHN
The word is too good to paint out her wickedness
Go but with me to-night, you shall
see her chamber-window entered, even the night
before her wedding-day: if you love her then,
to-morrow wed her; but it would better fit your honour
to change your mind.

CLAUDIO
May this be so?

DON PEDRO
I will not think it.

CLAUDIO
If I see any thing to-night why I should not marry
her to-morrow in the congregation, where I should
wed, there will I shame her.

DON PEDRO
And, as I wooed for thee to obtain her, I will join
with thee to disgrace her.

Mime of seeing "Hero" at the window.

Exeunt

SCENE III. A street.

Enter DOGBERRY and VERGES with the WATCH

DOGBERRY
Are you good men and true?

VERGES
Yea, or else it were pity but they should suffer
salvation, body and soul.

DOGBERRY

Nay, that were a punishment too good for them, if they should have any allegiance in them, being chosen for the prince's watch.

VERGES

Well, give them their charge, neighbour Dogberry.

DOGBERRY

First, who think you the most desertless man to be constable?

VERGES

Hugh Otecake, sir, or George Seacole; for they can write and read.

DOGBERRY

Come hither, neighbour Seacole. To be a well-favoured man is the gift of fortune; but to write and read comes by nature.

SECOND WATCHMAN

Both which, master constable,--

DOGBERRY

You have: I knew it would be your answer. Make no boast of it; and for your writing and reading, let that appear when there is no need of such vanity. You are thought here to be the most senseless and fit man for the constable of the watch; therefore bear you the lantern. This is your charge: you shall comprehend all vagrom men; you are to bid any man stand, in the prince's name.

SECOND WATCHMAN

How if a' will not stand?

DOGBERRY

Why, then, take no note of him, but let him go; and presently call the rest of the watch together and thank God you are rid of a knave.

VERGES

If he will not stand when he is bidden, he is none of the prince's subjects.

DOGBERRY

True, and they are to meddle with none but the prince's subjects. You shall also make no noise in the streets; for, for the watch to babble and to talk is most tolerable and not to be endured.

FIRST WATCHMAN

We will rather sleep than talk: we know what belongs to a watch.

DOGBERRY

Why, you speak like an ancient and most quiet watchman; for I cannot see how sleeping should offend: only, have a care that your bills be not stolen. Well, you are to call at all the ale-houses, and bid those that are drunk get them to bed.

FIRST WATCHMAN

How if they will not?

DOGBERRY

Why, then, let them alone till they are sober: if they make you not then the better answer, you may say they are not the men you took them for.

FIRST WATCHMAN

Well, sir.

DOGBERRY

If you meet a thief, you may suspect him to be no true man; and the less you meddle or make with them, the more is for your honesty.

FIRST WATCHMAN

If we know him to be a thief, shall we not lay hands on him?

DOGBERRY

Truly, by your office, you may; but I think the most peaceable way for you is to let him show himself what he is and steal out of your company.

VERGES

You have been always called a merciful man, partner.

DOGBERRY

Truly, I would not hang a dog by my will, much more a man who hath any honesty in him.

VERGES

If you hear a child cry in the night, you must call to the nurse and bid her still it.

SECOND WATCHMAN

How if the nurse be asleep and will not hear us?

DOGBERRY

Why, then, depart in peace, and let the child wake
her with crying.

VERGES

Very good.

DOGBERRY

Well, masters, good night: an there be
any matter of weight chances, call up me: keep your
fellows' counsels and your own; and good night.
Come, neighbour.

FIRST WATCHMAN

Well, we hear our charge: let us go sit here
upon the church-bench till two, and then all to bed.

DOGBERRY

One word more, honest neighbours. I pray you watch
about Signior Leonato's door; for the wedding being
there to-morrow, there is a great coil to-night.
Adieu: be vigilant, I beseech you.

Exeunt DOGBERRY and VERGES

Enter BORACHIO and CONRADE

BORACHIO

Conrade, I say!

CONRADE

Now forward with thy tale.

BORACHIO

Stand thee close, then, under this pent-house.

SECOND WATCHMAN

[Aside] Some treason, yet stand close.

BORACHIO

Therefore know I have earned of Don John a thousand ducats.

CONRADE

Is it possible that any villany should be so dear?

BORACHIO

Thou shouldst rather ask if it were possible any
villany should be so rich; for when rich villains
have need of poor ones, poor ones may make what

price they will.

CONRADE

I wonder at it.

BORACHIO

Seest thou what a deformed thief
fashion is? how giddily a' turns about all the hot
bloods between fourteen and five-and-thirty?

FIRST WATCHMAN

[Aside] I know that Deformed; a' has been a vile thief.

BORACHIO

Didst thou not hear somebody?

CONRADE

No; 'twas the vane on the house. Why hast thou
shifted out of thy tale into telling me of the fashion?

BORACHIO

Just that fashion is a villain, forever changing appearances.
I have to-night wooed Margaret, the Lady Hero's gentlewoman, by the
name of Hero: she leans me out at her mistress'
chamber-window, bids me a thousand times good
night while the prince, Claudio and my master,
planted and placed and possessed by my master Don
John, saw afar off in the orchard this amiable encounter.

CONRADE

And thought they Margaret was Hero?

BORACHIO

They did.

FIRST WATCHMAN

We charge you, in the prince's name, stand!

SECOND WATCHMAN

Call up the right master constable. We have here
recovered the most dangerous piece of lechery that
ever was known in the commonwealth.

FIRST WATCHMAN

And one Deformed is one of them.

CONRADE

Masters, masters,--

SECOND WATCHMAN

You'll be made bring Deformed forth, I warrant you.

CONRADE

Masters,--

FIRST WATCHMAN

Never speak: we charge you let us obey you to go with us.

CONRADE

Come, we'll obey you.

Exeunt

SCENE IV. HERO's apartment.

Enter HERO, MARGARET, and URSULA

HERO

Good Ursula, wake my cousin Beatrice, and desire her to rise.

URSULA

I will, lady.

Exit

HERO

Good Meg, I'll wear this.

MARGARET

By my troth, 's not so good; and I warrant your cousin will say so.

Enter BEATRICE

HERO

Good morrow, coz.

BEATRICE

Good morrow, sweet Hero.

HERO

Why how now? do you speak in the sick tune?

BEATRICE

I am out of all other tune, methinks.

MARGARET

Oh ho!

BEATRICE

'Tis almost five o'clock, cousin; tis time you were ready. By my troth, I am exceeding ill!

HERO

These gloves the count sent me; they are an excellent perfume.

BEATRICE

I am stuffed, cousin; I cannot smell.

MARGARET

Get you some of this distilled herb Carduus Benedictus, and lay it to your heart: it is the only thing for a qualm.

HERO

There thou prickest her with a thistle.

BEATRICE

Benedictus! why Benedictus? you have some moral in this Benedictus.

MARGARET

Moral! no, by my troth, I have no moral meaning; I meant, plain holy-thistle. You may think perchance that I think you are in love: nay, by'r lady, I am not such a fool to think what I list, nor I list not to think what I can, nor indeed I cannot think, if I would think my heart out of thinking, that you are in love or that you will be in love or that you can be in love. Yet Benedick was such another, and now is he become a man: he swore he would never marry, and yet now, in despite of his heart, he eats his meat without grudging: and how you may be converted I know not, but methinks you look with your eyes as other women do.

BEATRICE

What pace is this that thy tongue keeps?

MARGARET

Not a false gallop.

Re-enter URSULA

URSULA

Madam, withdraw: the prince, the count, Signior

Benedick, Don John, and all the gallants of the town, are come to fetch you to church.

HERO

Help to dress me, good coz, good Meg, good Ursula.

Exeunt

SCENE V. Another room in LEONATO'S house.

Enter ANTONIO, with DOGBERRY and VERGES

ANTONIO

What would you with me, honest neighbour?

DOGBERRY

Marry, sir, I would have some confidence with you that decerns you nearly.

ANTONIO

Brief, I pray you; for you see it is a busy time with me.

DOGBERRY

Marry, this it is, sir.

VERGES

Yes, in truth it is, sir.

ANTONIO

What is it, my good friends?

DOGBERRY

Goodman Verges, sir, speaks a little off the matter: an old man, sir, and his wits are not so blunt as, God help, I would desire they were.

VERGES

Yes, I thank God I am as honest as any man living that is an old man and no honester than I.

DOGBERRY

Comparisons are odorous: palabras, neighbour Verges.

ANTONIO

Neighbours, you are tedious.

DOGBERRY

It pleases your worship to say so, but we are the poor duke's officers; but truly, for mine own part,

I could never be so tedious as a king.

ANTONIO

All thy tediousness on me, ah?

DOGBERRY

Yea, I be but a poor man.

VERGES

And so am I.

ANTONIO

I would fain know what you have to say.

VERGES

Marry, sir, our watch to-night, excepting your worship's presence, ha' ta'en a couple of as arrant knaves as any in Messina.

DOGBERRY

One word, sir: our watch, sir, have indeed comprehended two aspicious persons, and we would have them this morning examined before your worship.

ANTONIO

Take their examination yourself and bring it me: I am now in great haste, as it may appear unto you.

DOGBERRY

It shall be suffigance.

ANTONIO

Fare you well.

Exeunt ANTONIO

DOGBERRY

We are now to examination these men.

VERGES

And we must do it wisely.

DOGBERRY

We will spare for no wit, I warrant you.

Exeunt

ACT IV

SCENE I. A church.

Enter DON PEDRO, DON JOHN, LEONATO, ANTONIO, FRIAR FRANCIS, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, HERO, BEATRICE, and others

LEONATO

Come, Friar Francis, be brief.

FRIAR FRANCIS

You come hither, my lord, to marry this lady.

CLAUDIO

No.

LEONATO

To be married to her: friar, you come to marry her.

FRIAR FRANCIS

Lady, you come hither to be married to this count.

HERO

I do.

FRIAR FRANCIS

If either of you know any inward impediment why you should not be conjoined, charge you, on your souls, to utter it.

CLAUDIO

Know you any, Hero?

HERO

None, my lord.

FRIAR FRANCIS

Know you any, count?

LEONATO

I dare make his answer, none.

CLAUDIO

Stand thee by, friar. Father, by your leave:
Will you give me this maid, your daughter?

LEONATO

As freely, son, as God did give her me.

CLAUDIO

There, Leonato, take her back again:
Give not this rotten orange to your friend;
Behold how she blushes here!
Her blush is guiltiness.

LEONATO

What do you mean, my lord?

HERO

Is my lord well, that he doth speak so wide?

LEONATO

Sweet prince, why speak not you?

DON PEDRO

What should I speak?

I stand dishonour'd.

LEONATO

Are these things spoken, or do I but dream?

DON JOHN

Sir, they are spoken, and these things are true.

BENEDICK

This looks not like a nuptial.

HERO

O, God defend me! how am I beset!

What kind of catechising call you this?

CLAUDIO

To make you answer truly to your name.

HERO

Is it not Hero? Who can blot that name

With any just reproach?

CLAUDIO

Marry, that can Hero;

Hero itself can blot out Hero's virtue.

What man was he talk'd with you yesternight

Out at your window betwixt twelve and one?

HERO

I talk'd with no man at that hour, my lord.

DON PEDRO

Leonato, I am sorry you must hear: upon mine honour,

Myself, my brother and this griev'd count
Did see her, hear her, at that hour last night
Talk with a ruffian at her chamber-window.

CLAUDIO

O Hero, what a Hero hadst thou been,
But fare thee well, most foul, most fair! farewell.

HERO swoons

BEATRICE

Why, how now, cousin! wherefore sink you down?

DON JOHN

Come, let us go. These things, come thus to light,
Smother her spirits up.

Exeunt DON PEDRO, DON JOHN, and CLAUDIO

BENEDICK

How doth the lady?

BEATRICE

Dead, I think. Help, uncle!
Hero! why, Hero! Uncle! Signior Benedick! Friar!

LEONATO

O Fate! take not away thy heavy hand.

FRIAR FRANCIS

Have comfort.

LEONATO

Wherefore!

BEATRICE

O, on my soul, my cousin is belied!

HERO

I was with no one at that hour.

FRIAR FRANCIS

There is some strange misprision in the princes.

BENEDICK

If their wisdoms be misled in this,
The practise of it lives in John the bastard,
Whose spirits toil in frame of villainies.

FRIAR FRANCIS

Pause awhile,
Your daughter here the princes left for dead:
Let her awhile be secretly kept in,
And publish it that she is dead indeed;

LEONATO

What will this do?

FRIAR FRANCIS

When Claudio hears she died upon his words,
The idea of her life shall sweetly creep
Into his study of imagination,
then shall he mourn,
If ever love had interest in his liver,
And wish he had not so accused her,

BENEDICK

Signior Leonato, let the friar advise you.

LEONATO

Being that I flow in grief,
The smallest twine may lead me.

FRIAR FRANCIS

Come, lady, die to live: have patience and endure.

Exeunt all but BENEDICK and BEATRICE

BENEDICK

Lady Beatrice, have you wept all this while?

BEATRICE

Yea, and I will weep a while longer.

BENEDICK

I will not desire that.

BEATRICE

You have no reason; I do it freely.

BENEDICK

Surely I do believe your fair cousin is wronged.

BEATRICE

Ah, how much might the man deserve of me that would right her!

BENEDICK

Is there any way to show such friendship?

BEATRICE

A very even way, but no such friend.

BENEDICK

May a man do it?

BEATRICE

It is a man's office, but not yours.

BENEDICK

I do love nothing in the world so well as you: is not that strange?

BEATRICE

As strange as the thing I know not. It were as possible for me to say I loved nothing so well as you: but believe me not; and yet I lie not; I confess nothing, nor I deny nothing. I am sorry for my cousin.

BENEDICK

By my sword, Beatrice, thou lovest me.

BEATRICE

Do not swear, and eat it.

BENEDICK

I will swear.

BEATRICE

Will you not eat your word?

BENEDICK

With no sauce that can be devised to it. I protest I love thee.

BEATRICE

I love you with so much of my heart that none is left to protest.

BENEDICK

Come, bid me do any thing for thee.

BEATRICE

Kill Claudio.

BENEDICK

Ha! not for the wide world.

BEATRICE

You kill me to deny it. Farewell.

BENEDICK

Tarry, sweet Beatrice.

BEATRICE

I am gone, though I am here: there is no love in you: nay, I pray you, let me go.

BENEDICK

Is Claudio thine enemy?

BEATRICE

He hath slandered, scorned, dishonoured my kinswoman.
O God, that I were a man! I would eat his heart
in the market-place.

BENEDICK

Hear me, Beatrice,--

BEATRICE

Sweet Hero! She is wronged, she is slandered, she is undone.

BENEDICK

Beat--

BEATRICE

O I will die a woman with grieving.

BENEDICK

Think you in your soul the Count Claudio hath wronged Hero?

BEATRICE

Yea, as sure as I have a thought or a soul.

BENEDICK

Enough, I am engaged; I will challenge him.

Exeunt

SCENE II. A prison.

Enter DOGBERRY, VERGES, and Sexton, in gowns; and the Watch, with CONRADE and BORACHIO

DOGBERRY

Is our whole dissembly here?

SEXTON

Which be the malefactors?

DOGBERRY

That am I and my partner.

VERGES

That's certain. We have been exhibitioned.

SEXTON

No! Which are the offenders that are to be examined?

DOGBERRY

What is your name, friend?

BORACHIO

Borachio.

DOGBERRY

Pray, write down, Borachio. Yours?

CONRADE

My name is Conrade.

DOGBERRY

Write down, master gentleman Conrade.
Masters, it is proved already
that you are little better than false knaves. How answer
you for yourselves?

CONRADE

Marry, sir, we say we are none.

DOGBERRY

I say to you, it is thought you are false knaves.

BORACHIO

Sir, I say to you we are none.

DOGBERRY

Have you writ down, that they are none?

SEXTON

Master constable, you go not the way to examine:
you must call forth the watch that are their accusers.

DOGBERRY

Masters, I charge you, in the prince's

name, accuse these men.

FIRST WATCHMAN

This man said, sir, that Don John, the prince's brother, was a villain.

DOGBERRY

Write down Prince John a villain. Why, this is flat perjury, to call a prince's brother villain.

SEXTON

What heard you him say else?

SECOND WATCHMAN

Marry, that he had received a thousand ducats of Don John for accusing the Lady Hero wrongfully.

DOGBERRY

Flat burglary as ever was committed.

SEXTON

What else, fellow?

FIRST WATCHMAN

And that Count Claudio did mean, upon his words, to disgrace Hero before the whole assembly. and not marry her.

DOGBERRY

O villain! thou wilt be condemned into everlasting redemption for this.

SEXTON

And this is more, masters, than you can deny.
All this has come to pass and Hero has died of grief.
Master constable, let these men be bound and taken to Leonato.

Exit

DOGBERRY

Come, bind them.
Thou naughty varlet!

CONRADE

Away! you are an ass, you are an ass.

DOGBERRY

Dost thou not suspect my place? dost thou not suspect my years? O that he were here to write me down an ass! But, masters, remember that I am an

ass; though it be not written down, yet forget not
that I am an ass.

Exeunt

ACT V

SCENE I. Before LEONATO'S house.

Enter LEONATO and ANTONIO

ANTONIO

If you go on thus, you will kill yourself.

LEONATO

I pray thee, cease thy counsel.
Bring me a father that so loved his child,
Whose joy of her is overwhelm'd like mine,
Can counsel and speak comfort this grief
My griefs cry louder than advertisement.

Enter DON PEDRO and CLAUDIO

Hear you. my lords,--

DON PEDRO

We have some haste, Leonato.

LEONATO

Some haste, my lord! well, fare you well, my lord:
Are you so hasty now? well, all is one.

DON PEDRO

Nay, do not quarrel with us, good old man.

ANTONIO

If he could right himself with quarreling,
Some of us would lie low.

CLAUDIO

Who wrongs him?

LEONATO

Marry, thou dost wrong me; thou dissembler,
I speak not like a dotard nor a fool,
Thou hast so wrong'd mine innocent child and me
Thy slander hath gone through and through her heart,
And she lies buried with her ancestors;

CLAUDIO

My villany?

LEONATO

Thine, Claudio; thine, I say.

DON PEDRO

You say not right, old man.

CLAUDIO

Away! I will not have to do with you.

DON PEDRO

My heart is sorry for your daughter's death:
But, on my honour, she was charged with nothing
But what was true and very full of proof.

Exeunt LEONATO and ANTONIO

DON PEDRO

See, see; here comes the man we went to seek.

Enter BENEDICK

BENEDICK

Good day, my lord.
I came to seek you both.

CLAUDIO

We have been up and down to seek thee; for we are
high-proof melancholy and would fain have it beaten
away. Wilt thou use thy wit?

BENEDICK

It is in my scabbard: shall I draw it?

CLAUDIO

I will bid thee draw, as we do the
minstrels; draw, to pleasure us.

DON PEDRO

As I am an honest man, he looks pale. Art thou
sick, or angry? I think he be angry indeed.

BENEDICK

You are a villain; I jest not:
You have killed a sweet
lady, and her death shall fall heavy on you. Let me
hear from you.

CLAUDIO

Well, I will meet you.

BENEDICK

My lord, for your many courtesies I thank

you: your brother the bastard is fled from Messina: you have among
you killed a sweet and innocent lady. For my Lord
Lackbeard there, he and I shall meet: and, till
then, peace be with him.

Exit

DON PEDRO
He is in earnest.

CLAUDIO
In most profound earnest; and, I'll warrant you, for
the love of Beatrice.

DON PEDRO
And hath challenged thee.

CLAUDIO
Most sincerely.

DON PEDRO
But, soft you, let me be. Did he not say, my brother was fled?

Enter DOGBERRY, VERGES, and the Watch, with CONRADE and BORACHIO

DOGBERRY
Come you, sir: if justice cannot tame you, she
shall ne'er weigh more reasons in her balance: nay,
an you be a cursing hypocrite once, you must be looked to.

DON PEDRO
How now? What offence have these men done?

DOGBERRY
Marry, sir, they have committed false report;
moreover, they have spoken untruths; secondarily,
they are slanders; sixth and lastly, they have
belied a lady; thirdly, they have verified unjust
things; and, to conclude, they are lying knaves.

DON PEDRO
First, I ask thee what they have done; thirdly, I
ask thee what's their offence; sixth and lastly, why
they are committed; and, to conclude, what you lay
to their charge.

BORACHIO
Sweet prince, let me go no farther to mine answer:
do you hear me, and let this count kill me. I have

deceived even your very eyes: what your wisdoms could not discover, these shallow fools have brought to light: who in the night overheard me confessing to this man how Don John your brother incensed me to slander the Lady Hero, how you were brought into the orchard and saw me court Margaret in Hero's garments, how you disgraced her, when you should marry her: my villany they have upon record; which I had rather seal with my death than repeat over to my shame. The lady is dead upon mine and my master's false accusation; and, briefly, I desire nothing but the reward of a villain.

DON PEDRO

Runs not this speech like iron through your blood?

CLAUDIO

I have drunk poison whiles he utter'd it.

DON PEDRO

But did my brother set thee on to this?

BORACHIO

Yea, and paid me richly for the practise of it.

CLAUDIO

Sweet Hero!

DOGBERRY

Come, the sexton hath reformed Signior Leonato of the matter: and, masters, do not forget to specify that I am an ass.

Re-enter LEONATO and ANTONIO, with the Sexton

LEONATO

Art thou the slave that with thy breath hast kill'd
Mine innocent child?

BORACHIO

Yea, even I alone.

LEONATO

No, not so, villain; thou beliest thyself:
Here stand a pair of honourable men;
A third is fled, that had a hand in it.
I thank you, princes, for my daughter's death.

CLAUDIO

Choose your revenge upon me.

LEONATO

I cannot bid you bid my daughter live;
To-morrow morning come you to my house,
And since you could not be my son-in-law,
Be yet my nephew: my brother hath a daughter,
Almost the copy of my child that's dead,
And she alone is heir to both of us:
Give her the right you should have given her cousin,
And so dies my revenge.

CLAUDIO

O noble sir,
Your over-kindness doth wring tears from me!

DOGBERRY

Sir, this plaintiff here, the offender, did call
me ass.

LEONATO

There's for thy pains.

DOGBERRY

God save the foundation!

LEONATO

Go, I discharge thee of thy prisoner, and I thank thee.

DOGBERRY

We shall meet again, God prohibit it!

Exeunt

SCENE II. LEONATO'S garden.

Enter BENEDICK followed by BEATRICE

BENEDICK

Sweet Beatrice, wouldst thou come when I called thee?

BEATRICE

Yea, signior, and depart when you bid me.

BENEDICK

O, stay but till then!

BEATRICE

'Then' is spoken; fare you well now: and yet, ere
I go, let me go with that I came; which is, with

knowing what hath passed between you and Claudio.

BENEDICK

Only foul words; and thereupon I will kiss thee.

BEATRICE

Foul words is but foul wind, and foul wind is but foul breath, and foul breath is noisome; therefore I will depart unknissed.

BENEDICK

I must tell thee plainly,
Claudio undergoes my challenge; and either
I must shortly hear from him, or I will subscribe
him a coward.
And, I pray thee now, tell me how doth your cousin?

BEATRICE

Very ill.

BENEDICK

And how do you?

BEATRICE

Very ill too.

BENEDICK

Serve God, love me and mend. There will I leave
you too, for here comes one in haste.

Enter URSULA

URSULA

Madam, you must come to your uncle.
It is proved my Lady Hero hath been
falsely accused, the prince and Claudio mightily
abused; and Don John is the author of all, who is
fed and gone. Will you come presently?

BEATRICE

Will you go hear this news, signior?

BENEDICK

I will live in thy heart, die in thy lap, and be
buried in thy eyes; and moreover I will go with
thee to thy uncle's.

Exeunt

SCENE III. A room in LEONATO'S house.

Enter LEONATO, ANTONIO, BENEDICK, BEATRICE, MARGARET, URSULA, FRIAR FRANCIS, and HERO

FRIAR FRANCIS

Did I not tell you she was innocent?

LEONATO

So are the prince and Claudio, who accused her

ANTONIO

Well, I am glad that all things sort so well.

BENEDICK

And so am I, being else by faith enforced
To call young Claudio to a reckoning for it.

LEONATO

Well, daughter, and you gentle-women all,
Withdraw into a chamber by yourselves,
And when I send for you, come hither mask'd.

Exit HERO

BENEDICK

Friar, I must entreat your pains, I think.

FRIAR FRANCIS

To do what, signior?

BENEDICK

To bind me, or undo me; one of them.
Signior Leonato, truth it is, good signior,
Your niece regards me with an eye of favour.

LEONATO

That eye my daughter lent her: 'tis most true.

BENEDICK

And I do with an eye of love requite her.

ANTONIO

What's your will?

BENEDICK

My will is your good will
May stand with ours, this day to be conjoin'd
In the state of honourable marriage.

Enter DON PEDRO and CLAUDIO, and others

DON PEDRO

Good morrow to this fair assembly.

LEONATO

Good morrow, prince; good morrow, Claudio:
We here attend you. Are you yet determined
To-day to marry with my brother's daughter?

CLAUDIO

Yes.

LEONATO

Call her forth, brother; here's the friar ready.

Enter HERO, masked

ANTONIO

I do give you her.

CLAUDIO

Why, then she's mine. Sweet, let me see your face.

LEONATO

No, that you shall not, till you take her hand
Before this friar and swear to marry her.

CLAUDIO

Give me your hand: before this holy friar,
I am your husband, if you like of me.

HERO

And when I lived, I was your other wife:

(Unmasking)

And when you loved, you were my other husband.

CLAUDIO

Another Hero!

HERO

Nothing certainer:
One Hero died defiled, but I do live.

DON PEDRO

The former Hero! Hero that is dead!

FRIAR FRANCIS

When after that the holy rites are ended,
I'll tell you largely of fair Hero's death:
Meantime let wonder seem familiar,
And to the chapel let us presently.

BENEDICK

Beatrice? Do not you love me?

BEATRICE

Why, no; no more than reason.

BENEDICK

Why, then your uncle and the prince and Claudio
Have been deceived; they swore you did.

BEATRICE

Do not you love me?

BENEDICK

Troth, no; no more than reason.

BEATRICE

Why, then my cousin, Margaret and Ursula
Are much deceived; for they did swear you did.

BENEDICK

They swore that you were almost sick for me.

BEATRICE

They swore that you were well-nigh dead for me.

BENEDICK

'Tis no such matter. Then you do not love me?

BEATRICE

No, truly, but in friendly recompense.

ANTONIO

Come, daughter, I am sure you love the gentleman.

CLAUDIO

And I'll be sworn upon't that he loves her;
For here's a paper written in his hand,
A halting sonnet of his own pure brain,
Fashion'd to Beatrice.

HERO

And here's another
Writ in my cousin's hand, stolen from her pocket,
Containing her affection unto Benedick.

BENEDICK
Here's our own hands against our hearts.

BEATRICE
I would not deny you; but, by this good day, I yield
upon great persuasion; and partly to save your life,
for I was told you were in a consumption.

BENEDICK
Peace!

(Embracing her)

DON PEDRO
How dost thou, Benedick, the married man?

BENEDICK
I'll tell thee what, prince; a college of
wit-crackers cannot flout me out of my humour.
Come, come, we are friends: let's have a dance ere
we are married, that we may lighten our own hearts
and our wives' heels.

Enter MESSENGER

MESSENGER
My lord, your brother John is ta'en in flight,
And brought with armed men back to Messina.

BENEDICK
Think not on him till to-morrow:
I'll devise thee brave punishments for him.
Strike up, pipers.

Dance

Exeunt