

# **Much Ado About Nothing**

**By William Shakespeare**

**ACT I**

**SCENE I. Before LEONATA'S house.**

**Enter LEONATA, HERO, and BEATRICE, with a Messenger**

LEONATA

I learn in this letter that Don Pedro of Arragon  
comes this night to Messina.

MESSENGER

He is very near by this: he was not three leagues off  
when I left him.

LEONATA

I find here that Don Pedro hath  
bestowed much honour on a young Florentine called Claudio.

MESSENGER

Much deserved on his part and equally remembered by  
Don Pedro: he hath borne himself beyond the  
promise of his age, doing, in the figure of a lamb,  
the feats of a lion: I have already delivered him letters, and there  
appears much joy in him;

BEATRICE

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

MESSENGER

I know none of that name, lady: there was none such  
in the army of any sort.

LEONATA

What is he that you ask for, niece?

HERO

My cousin means Signior Benedick of Padua.

MESSENGER

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

BEATRICE

I pray you, how many hath he  
killed and eaten in these wars? But how many hath  
he killed? for indeed I promised to eat all of his killing.

LEONATA

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

MESSENGER

He hath done good service, lady, in these wars.  
And a good soldier too, 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.

LEONATA

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:

MESSENGER

I see, lady, the gentleman is not in your books.

BEATRICE

No; an he were, I would burn my study. But, I pray  
you, who is his companion? Is there no young  
squarer now that will make a voyage with him to the devil?

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! if he have caught the Benedick,  
it will cost him a thousand pound ere a' be cured.

MESSENGER

I will hold friends with you, lady.  
Don Pedro is approached.

**Enter DON PEDRO, DON JOHN, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, and BALTHASAR**

DON PEDRO

Good Signiora Leonata, you are come to meet your  
trouble: the fashion of the world is to avoid  
cost, and you encounter it.

LEONATA

Never came trouble to my house in the likeness of  
your grace: for trouble being gone, comfort should  
remain; but when you depart from me, sorrow abides  
and happiness takes his leave.

DON PEDRO

You embrace your charge too willingly. I think this  
is your daughter.

LEONATA

Yes, your grace. And this, my niece, Beatrice.

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: they would else have  
been troubled with a pernicious suitor. 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.

BENEDICK

Well, you are a rare parrot-teacher.

BEATRICE

A bird of my tongue is better than a beast of yours.

BENEDICK

I would my horse had the speed of your tongue, and so good a continuer. But keep your way, i' God's name; I have done.

BEATRICE

You always end with a jade's trick: I know you of old.

DON PEDRO

That is the sum of all, Leonata. Signior Claudio and Signior Benedick, my dear friend Leonata hath invited you all. I tell her we shall stay here at the least a month; and she heartily prays some occasion may detain us longer.

LEONATA

**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.

LEONATA

Please it your grace lead on?

DON PEDRO

Your hand, Leonata; we will go together.

**Exeunt all except BENEDICK and CLAUDIO**

CLAUDIO

Benedick, didst thou note the daughter of Signiora Leonata?

BENEDICK

I noted her not; but I looked on her.

CLAUDIO

Is she not a modest young lady?

BENEDICK

Do you question me, as an honest man should do, for my simple true judgment; or would you have me speak after my custom, as being a professed tyrant to their sex?

CLAUDIO

No; I pray thee speak in sober judgment.

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: only this commendation I can afford her, that were she other than she is, she were unhandsome; and being no other but as she is, I do not like her.

CLAUDIO

Thou thinkest I am in sport: I pray thee tell me truly how thou likest her.

BENEDICK

Would you buy her, that you inquire after her?

CLAUDIO

Can the world buy such a jewel?

BENEDICK

Yea, and a case to put it into. But speak you this with a sad brow? or do you play the flouting Jack, Come, in what key shall a man take you, to go in the song?

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: there's her cousin, an she were not possessed with a fury, exceeds her as much in beauty as the first of May doth the last of December. 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.

BENEDICK

Is't come to this? Shall I never see a bachelor of three-score again? Go to, i' faith; an thou wilt needs thrust thy neck into a yoke. Look Don Pedro is returned to seek you.

**Re-enter DON PEDRO**

DON PEDRO

What secret hath held you here, that you followed not to Leonata's?

BENEDICK

I would your grace would constrain me to tell.

DON PEDRO

I charge thee on thy allegiance.

BENEDICK

You hear, Count Claudio: **(Claudio allows him to speak)** He is in love. With who? now that is your grace's part. Mark how short his answer is;--With Hero, Leonata's short daughter.

CLAUDIO

If my passion change not shortly, God forbid it should be otherwise.

DON PEDRO

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

CLAUDIO

You speak this to trick me, my lord.

DON PEDRO

By my troth, I speak my thought.

CLAUDIO

And, in faith, my lord, I spoke mine.  
That I love her, I feel.

DON PEDRO

That she is worthy, I know.

BENEDICK

That I neither feel how she should be loved nor  
know how she should be worthy, is the opinion that  
fire cannot melt out of me: I will die in it at the stake.

DON PEDRO (to **Benedick**)

Thou wast ever an obstinate heretic in the despite  
of beauty.

CLAUDIO

And never could maintain his part but in the force  
of his will.

BENEDICK

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

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:

DON PEDRO

Well, if ever thou dost fall from this faith, thou  
wilt prove a notable argument.

BENEDICK

If I do, hang me in a bottle like a cat and shoot  
at me; and he that hits me, let him be clapped on  
the shoulder, and called Adam.

DON PEDRO

'In time the savage bull doth bear the yoke.'

BENEDICK

The savage bull may; but if ever the sensible

Benedick bear it, pluck off the bull's horns and set them in my forehead: and let me be vilely painted, and in such great letters as they write:  
'Here you may see Benedick the married man.'

DON PEDRO

Well, you temporize with the hours. In the meantime, good Signior Benedick, repair to Leonata's: commend me to her and tell her I will not fail her at supper; for indeed she hath made great preparation.

BENEDICK

I have almost matter enough in me for such an embassy; and so I leave you.

**Exit**

CLAUDIO

My liege, your highness now may do me good.  
Hath Leonata any son, my lord?

DON PEDRO

No child but Hero; she's her only heir.  
Dost thou affect her, Claudio?

CLAUDIO

O, my lord,  
When we went onward on this ended action,  
I look'd upon her with a soldier's eye,  
That liked, But now I am return'd and war-thoughts  
Have left their places vacant, in their rooms  
Come thronging soft and delicate desires,  
All prompting me how fair young Hero is,  
Saying, I liked her ere I went to wars.

DON PEDRO

If thou dost love fair Hero, cherish it,  
And I will break with her and with her mother,  
And thou shalt have her.

CLAUDIO

How sweetly you do minister to love,  
But lest my liking might too sudden seem,  
I would have salved it with a longer treatise.

DON PEDRO

I will fit thee with the remedy.  
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  
And take her hearing prisoner with the force  
of my amorous tale:  
Then after to her mother will I break;  
And the conclusion is, she shall be thine.  
In practise let us put it presently.

**Exeunt**

**SCENE II. A room in LEONATA's house.  
Enter LEONATA and ANTONIO, meeting**

LEONATA

How now, brother! Where is my cousin, your son?  
hath he provided this music?

ANTONIO

He is very busy about it. But, sister, I can tell  
you strange news that you yet dreamt not of.

LEONATA

Are they good?

ANTONIO

The prince and Count Claudio, walking in an alley in mine  
orchard, were thus much overheard by a man of mine:  
the prince discovered to Claudio that he loved my  
niece your daughter and meant to acknowledge it  
this night in a dance: and if he found her  
accordant, he meant to take the present time by the  
top and instantly break with you of it.

LEONATA

Hath the fellow any wit that told you this?

ANTONIO

A good sharp fellow: I will send for him; and  
question him yourself.

LEONATA

No, no; we will hold it as a dream till it appear

itself: but I will acquaint my daughter withal,  
that she may be the better prepared for an answer,  
if peradventure this be true. Go you and tell her of it.

**Exeunt**

**SCENE III. The same.**  
**Enter DON JOHN and CONSTANZA**

CONSTANZA

What the good-year, 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.

CONSTANZA

You should hear reason.

DON JOHN

I cannot hide  
what I am: I must be sad when I have cause and smile  
at no man's jests.

CONSTANZA

You have of  
late stood out against your brother, and he hath  
ta'en you newly into his grace; where it is  
impossible you should take true root but by the  
fair weather that you make yourself: 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: I am trusted with  
a muzzle and enfranchised with a clog; therefore I  
have decreed not to sing in my cage. If I had my  
mouth, I would bite; if I had my liberty, I would do  
my liking: in the meantime let me be that I am and  
seek not to alter me. Who comes here?

**Enter BORACHIA**

What news, Borachia?

BORACHIA

I came yonder from a great supper: the prince your brother is royally entertained by Leonata: and I can give you intelligence of an intended marriage.

DON JOHN

Will it serve for any model to build mischief on? What is he for a fool that betroths himself to unquietness?

BORACHIA

Marry, it is your brother's right hand.

DON JOHN

Who? the most exquisite Claudio?

BORACHIA

Even he.

DON JOHN

A proper squire! And who, and who? which way looks he?

BORACHIA

Marry, on Hero, the daughter and heir of Leonata.

DON JOHN

A very forward March-chick! How came you to this?

BORACHIA

Hand in hand in sad conference comes by me the prince and Claudio, I hid me behind the tapestry; and there heard it agreed upon that the prince should woo Hero for himself, and having obtained her, give her to Count Claudio.

DON JOHN

Come, come, let us thither: 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?

CONSTANZA

To the death, my lord.

DON JOHN

Shall we go prove what's to be done?

BORACHIA

We'll wait upon your lordship.

**Exeunt**

**ACT II**

**SCENE I. A hall in LEONATA'S house.**

**Enter LEONATA, ANTONIO, HERO, BEATRICE, and others**

LEONATA

Was not Count John here at supper?

ANTONIO

I saw him not.

BEATRICE

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

HERO

He is of a very melancholy disposition.

BEATRICE

He were an excellent man that were made just in the midway between him and Benedick:  
With a good leg and a good foot, Madam, and money enough in his purse, such a man would win any woman in the world, if a' could get her good-will.

LEONATA

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.

LEONATA

So, by being too curst, God will send you no husband.

BEATRICE

Just, if he send me no husband; for the which blessing I am at him upon my knees every morning and evening.

ANTONIO

**[To HERO]** Well, niece, I trust you will be ruled

by your mother.

BEATRICE

Yes, faith; it is my cousin's duty to make curtsy and say 'Mother, as it please you.' But yet for all that, cousin, let him be a handsome fellow, or else make another curtsy and say 'Mother, as it please me.'

LEONATA

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

BEATRICE

Not till God make men of some other metal than Earth, I'll none.

LEONATA (to Hero)

Daughter, remember what I told you: if the prince do solicit you in that kind, you know your answer. The revellers are entering, brother: make good room.

**All put on their masks**

**Enter DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, BALTHASAR, DON JOHN, BORACHIA, MARGARET, URSULA and others, masked**

DON PEDRO (to Hero)

Lady, will you walk about with your friend?

HERO

So you walk softly and look sweetly and say nothing, I am yours for the walk; and especially when I walk away.

DON PEDRO

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!

DON PEDRO

Speak low, if you speak love.

**Drawing her aside**

BALTHASAR

Well, I would you did like me.

MARGARET

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

BALTHASAR

Which is one?

MARGARET

I say my prayers aloud.

BALTHASAR

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

MARGARET

God match me with a good dancer!

BALTHASAR

Amen.

MARGARET

And God keep him out of my sight when the dance is  
done! Answer, clerk.

BALTHASAR

No more words: the clerk is answered. **(They dance)**

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.

URSULA

You could never do him so ill-well, unless you were the very man. Here's his dry hand up and down: you are he, you are he.

ANTONIO

At a word, I am not.

URSULA

Come, come, do you think I do not know you by your excellent wit? can virtue hide itself? Go to, you are he: graces will appear, and there's an end. **(They dance)**

BEATRICE

Will you not tell me who told you so?

BENEDICK

No, you shall pardon me.

BEATRICE

Nor will you not tell me who you are?

BENEDICK

Not now.

BEATRICE

That I was disdainful, and that I had my good wit out of the 'Hundred Merry Tales:'--well this was 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;  
only his gift is in devising impossible slanders:  
none but libertines delight in him; and the  
commendation is not in his wit, but in his villany;  
for he both pleases men and angers them, and then  
they laugh at him and beat him. I am sure he is in  
the fleet: I would he had danced me.

BENEDICK

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

BEATRICE

Do, do.

**Music**

We must follow the leaders.

BENEDICK

In every good thing.

BEATRICE

Nay, if they lead to any ill, I will leave them at  
the next turning.

**Dance. Then exeunt all except DON JOHN, BORACHIA, and CLAUDIO**

DON JOHN

Sure my brother is amorous on Hero and hath  
withdrawn her mother to break with her about it.  
The ladies follow her and but one masquer remains.

BORACHIA

And that is Claudio: I know him by his bearing.

DON JOHN (to Claudio)

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: she is no equal for his birth.

CLAUDIO

How know you he loves her?

DON JOHN

I heard him swear his affection.

BORACHIA

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

DON JOHN **(to Borachia)**

Come, let us to the banquet.

**Exeunt DON JOHN and BORACHIA**

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:  
Therefore, all hearts in love use their own tongues;  
Let every eye negotiate for itself  
And trust no agent; for beauty is a witch  
Against whose charms faith melteth into blood.  
This is an accident of hourly proof,  
Which I mistrusted not. Farewell, therefore, Hero!

**Re-enter BENEDICK**

BENEDICK

Count Claudio?

CLAUDIO

Yea, the same.

BENEDICK

Come, will you go with me?

CLAUDIO

Whither?

BENEDICK

Even to the next willow, about your own business,  
county. What fashion will you wear the garland of?  
about your neck, or under your arm? You must wear  
it one way, for the prince hath got your Hero.

CLAUDIO

I wish him joy of her.

BENEDICK

Did you think the prince would have served you thus?

CLAUDIO

I pray you, leave me.

BENEDICK

Ho! now you strike like the blind man: 'twas the boy that stole your meat, and you'll beat the post.

CLAUDIO

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

**Exit**

BENEDICK

Alas, poor hurt fowl! now will he creep into sedges. But that my Lady Beatrice should know me, and not know me! The prince's fool! Ha? It may be I go under that title because I am merry. Yea, but so I am apt to do myself wrong; I am not so reputed: it is the base, though bitter, disposition of Beatrice that puts the world into her person and so gives me out. Well, I'll be revenged as I may.

**Re-enter DON PEDRO**

DON PEDRO

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

BENEDICK

I found him here as melancholy as a lodge in a warren: I told him, and I think I told him true, that your grace had got the good will of this young lady; and I offered him my company to a willow-tree, either to make him a garland, as being forsaken, or to bind him up a rod, as being worthy to be whipped.

DON PEDRO

To be whipped! What's his fault?

BENEDICK

The flat transgression of a schoolboy, who, being

overjoyed with finding a birds' nest, shows it his companion, and he steals it.

DON PEDRO  
(confused)

BENEDICK

Yet it had not been amiss the rod had been made,  
and the garland too; for the garland he might have  
worn himself, and the rod he might have bestowed on  
you, who, as I take it, have stolen his birds' nest.

DON PEDRO

I will but teach them to sing, and restore them to  
the owner.

BENEDICK

If their singing answer your saying, by my faith,  
you say honestly.

DON PEDRO

The Lady Beatrice hath a quarrel to you: the  
gentleman that danced with her told her she is much  
wronged by you.

BENEDICK

O, she misused me past the endurance of a block!  
She told me, not thinking I had been  
myself, that I was the prince's jester, that I was  
duller than a great thaw; huddling jest upon jest  
with such impossible conveyance upon me that I stood  
like a man at a mark, with a whole army shooting at  
me. She speaks poniards, and every word stabs:  
if her breath were as terrible as her terminations,  
there were no living near her; she would infect to  
the north star. I would not marry her:  
she would have made Hercules have  
turned spit, yea, and have cleft his club to make  
the fire too. Come, talk not of her.

DON PEDRO

Look, here she comes.

**Enter CLAUDIO, BEATRICE, HERO, and LEONATA**

BENEDICK

Will your grace command me any service to the world's end? I will go on the slightest errand now that you can devise to send me on; rather than hold three words' conference with this harpy. You have no employment for me?

DON PEDRO

None, but to desire your good company.

BENEDICK

O God, sir, here's a dish I love not: I cannot endure my Lady Tongue.

**Exit**

DON PEDRO

Come, lady, come; you have lost the heart of Signior Benedick.

BEATRICE

Indeed, my lord, he lent it me awhile; and I gave him use for it, a double heart for his single one.

DON PEDRO

You have put him down, lady, you have put him down.

BEATRICE

So I would not he should do me, my lord, lest I should prove the mother of fools. I have brought Count Claudio, whom you sent me to seek.

DON PEDRO

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

CLAUDIO

Not sad, my lord.

DON PEDRO

How then? sick?

CLAUDIO

Neither, my lord.

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

I' faith, lady, I think your blazon to be true; though, I'll be sworn, if he be so, his conceit is false. Here, Claudio, I have wooed in thy name, and fair Hero is won: I have broke with her mother, and her good will obtained: name the day of marriage, and God give thee joy!

LEONATA

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: I give away myself for you and dote upon the exchange.

BEATRICE **(to Hero)**

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

DON PEDRO **(to Beatrice)**

In faith, lady, you have a merry heart.

BEATRICE

Yea, my lord; I thank it, poor fool, it keeps on the windy side of care. My cousin tells him in his ear that he is in her heart.

CLAUDIO

And so she doth, cousin.

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.

BEATRICE

I would rather have one of your father's getting.  
Hath your grace ne'er a brother like you? Your  
father got excellent husbands, if a maid could come by them.

DON PEDRO

Will you have me, lady?

BEATRICE

No, my lord, unless I might have another for  
working-days: your grace is too costly to wear  
every day. But, I beseech your grace, pardon me: I  
was born to speak all mirth and no matter.

DON PEDRO

Your silence most offends me, and to be merry best  
becomes you.

BEATRICE **(in the manner of a toast)**

Cousins, God give you joy!

LEONATA

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

BEATRICE

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

**Exit**

DON PEDRO

By my troth, a pleasant-spirited lady.

LEONATA

There's little of the melancholy element in her, my  
lord: she is never sad but when she sleeps, and  
not ever sad then; for I have heard my daughter say,  
she hath often dreamed of unhappiness and waked  
herself with laughing.

DON PEDRO

She cannot endure to hear tell of a husband.

LEONATA

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

DON PEDRO

She were an excellent wife for Benedict.

LEONATA

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

DON PEDRO

County Claudio, when mean you to go to church?

CLAUDIO

To-morrow, my lord: time goes on crutches till love  
have all his rites.

LEONATA

Not till Monday, my dear son, which is hence a just  
seven-night; and a time too brief, too, to have all  
things answer my mind.

DON PEDRO

Come, you shake the head at so long a breathing:  
but, I warrant thee, Claudio, the time shall not go  
dully by us. I will in the interim 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: if  
you three will but minister such assistance as I  
shall give you direction.

LEONATA

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

And Benedick is not the unhopefullest husband that I know. Thus far can I praise him; he is of a noble strain, of approved valour and confirmed honesty. I will teach you how to humour your cousin, that she shall fall in love with Benedick; and I, with your two helps, will so practise on Benedick that, in despite of his quick wit and his queasy stomach, he shall fall in love with Beatrice. Go in with me, and I will tell you my drift.

**Exeunt**

**SCENE II. The same.**

**Enter DON JOHN and BORACHIA**

DON JOHN

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

BORACHIA

Yea, my lord; but I can cross it.

DON JOHN

Any bar, any cross, any impediment will be medicinable to me: I am sick in displeasure to him. How canst thou cross this marriage?

BORACHIA

Not honestly, my lord; but so covertly that no dishonesty shall appear in me.

DON JOHN

Show me briefly how.

BORACHIA

I think I told your lordship a year since, the debt owed me by Margaret, the waiting gentlewoman to Hero.

DON JOHN

I remember.

BORACHIA

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?

BORACHIA

Go you to the prince your brother; spare not to tell him that he hath wronged his honour in marrying the renowned Claudio--whose estimation do you mightily hold up--to a contaminated stale, such a one as Hero.

DON JOHN

What proof shall I make of that?

BORACHIA

Proof enough to misuse the prince, to vex Claudio, to undo Hero and kill Leonata. Look you for any other issue?

DON JOHN

Only to despise them, I will endeavour any thing.

BORACHIA

Go, then; find me a meet hour to draw Don Pedro and the Count Claudio alone: tell them that you know that Hero loves the servant Panthino; intend a kind of zeal both to the prince and Claudio.

They will scarcely believe this without trial: offer them instances; which shall bear no less likelihood than to see the servant at her chamber-window, hear him call Margaret Hero, hear Margaret term him Claudio; and bring them to see this the very night before the intended wedding,--for in the meantime I will so fashion the matter that Hero shall be absent,--and there shall appear such seeming truth of Hero's disloyalty that jealousy shall be called assurance and all the preparation overthrown.

DON JOHN

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

BORACHIA

Be you constant in the accusation, and my cunning shall not shame me.

DON JOHN

I will presently go learn their day of marriage.

**Exeunt**

**SCENE III. LEONATA'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. I have known when there was no music with him but the drum and the fife; and now had he rather hear the tabour and the pipe: I have known when he would have walked ten mile a-foot to see a good armour; and now will he lie ten nights awake, carving the fashion of a new doublet.

May I be so converted? I think not: One woman is fair, yet I am well; another is wise, yet I am well; another virtuous, yet I am well; but till all graces be in one woman, one woman shall not come in my grace. Rich she shall be, that's certain; wise, or I'll none; virtuous, or I'll never cheapen her; fair, or I'll never look on her; mild, or come not near me; noble, or not I for an angel; of good discourse, an excellent musician, and her hair shall be of what colour it please God. Ha! the prince and Monsieur Love! I will hide me in the arbour.

**Withdraws**

**Enter DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, and LEONATA**  
**Music off stage**

DON PEDRO

Come, shall we hear this music?

CLAUDIO

Yea, my good lord. How still the evening is,  
As hush'd on purpose to grace harmony!

DON PEDRO (*aside to Claudio*)

See you where Benedick hath hid himself?

CLAUDIO

O, very well, my lord: the music ended,  
We'll fit the kid-fox with a pennyworth.

**Enter BALTHASAR with Music**

DON PEDRO

Come, Balthasar, we'll hear that song again.

BALTHASAR

O, good my lord, tax not so bad a voice  
To slander music any more than once.

DON PEDRO

I pray thee, sing, and let me woo no more.

BALTHASAR

Because you talk of wooing, I will sing;  
Since many a wooer doth commence his suit  
To her he thinks not worthy, yet he woos,  
Yet will he swear he loves.

DON PEDRO

Now, pray thee, come;  
Or, if thou wilt hold longer argument,  
Do it in notes.

BALTHASAR

Note this before my notes;  
There's not a note of mine that's worth the noting.

DON PEDRO

Why, these are very crotchets that he speaks;  
Note, notes, forsooth, and nothing.  
Air

**BENEDICK (from his hiding place)**

Now, divine air! now is his soul ravished! Is it  
not strange that sheeps' guts should hale souls out  
of men's bodies?

**(Balthasar sings)**

BALTHASAR

Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more,  
Men were deceivers ever,  
One foot in sea and one on shore,  
To one thing constant never:  
Then sigh not so, but let them go,  
And be you blithe and bonny,  
Converting all your sounds of woe  
Into Hey nonny, nonny.

Sing no more ditties, sing no moe,  
Of dumps so dull and heavy;  
The fraud of men was ever so,  
Since summer first was leafy:  
Then sigh not so, & c.

DON PEDRO

By my troth, a good song.

BALTHASAR

And an ill singer, my lord.

DON PEDRO

Ha, no, no, faith; thou singest well enough for a shift.  
I pray thee, get us some excellent music;  
for to-morrow night we would have it  
at the Lady Hero's chamber-window.

BALTHASAR

The best I can, my lord.

DON PEDRO

Do so: farewell.

**Exit BALTHASAR. The game is on.**

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

CLAUDIO

**(aside)** O, ay: stalk on. stalk on; the fowl sits. **(to Don Pedro)** I did  
never think that lady would have loved any man.

LEONATA

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.

BENEDICK

Is't possible? Sits the wind in that corner?

LEONATA

By my troth, my lord, I cannot tell what to think  
of it but that she loves him with an enraged  
affection: it is past the infinite of thought.

DON PEDRO

May be she doth but counterfeit.

CLAUDIO

Faith, like enough.

LEONATA

O God, counterfeit! There was never counterfeit of passion came so near the life of passion as she discovers it.

DON PEDRO

Why, what effects of passion shows she?

CLAUDIO (**secretly watching Benedick throughout this scene**)

(**aside**) Bait the hook well; this fish will bite.

LEONATA

What effects, my lord? She will sit you, you heard my daughter tell you how.

CLAUDIO

She did, indeed.

DON PEDRO

How, how, pray you? You amaze me: I would have I thought her spirit had been invincible against all assaults of affection.

LEONATA

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

BENEDICK

I should think this a gull, but that the Lady of the house speaks it: knavery cannot, sure, hide himself in such reverence.

CLAUDIO

(**aside**) He hath ta'en the infection: hold it up.

DON PEDRO

Hath she made her affection known to Benedick?

LEONATA

No; and swears she never will: that's her torment.

CLAUDIO

'Tis true, indeed; so your daughter says: 'Shall I,' says she, 'that have so oft encountered him with scorn, write to him that I love him?'

LEONATA

This says she now when she is beginning to write to him; for she'll be up twenty times a night, and there will she sit in her smock till she have writ a sheet of paper: my daughter tells us all.

CLAUDIO

Now you talk of a sheet of paper, I remember a pretty jest your daughter told us of.

LEONATA

O, when she had writ it and was reading it over, she found Benedick and Beatrice between the sheet?

CLAUDIO

That.

LEONATA

O, she tore the letter into a thousand halfpence; railed at herself, that she should be so immodest to write to one that she knew would flout her.

CLAUDIO

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

LEONATA

She doth indeed; my daughter says so: and the ecstasy hath so much overborne her that my daughter is sometime afeared she will do a desperate outrage to herself: it is very true.

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, out of all suspicion, she is virtuous.

CLAUDIO

And she is exceeding wise.

DON PEDRO

In every thing but in loving Benedick.

LEONATA

O, my lord, I am sorry for her, as I have just cause, being her aunt and her guardian.

DON PEDRO

I would she had bestowed this dotage on me: I would have daffed all other respects and made her half myself. I pray you, tell Benedick of it, and hear what a' will say.

LEONATA

Were it good, think you?

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

She doth well: if she should make tender of her love, 'tis very possible he'll scorn it; for the man, as you know all, hath a contemptible spirit.

CLAUDIO (**mocking an argument**)

He is a very proper man.

DON PEDRO

He hath indeed a good outward happiness.

CLAUDIO

Before God! and, in my mind, very wise.

DON PEDRO

He doth indeed show some sparks that are like wit.

CLAUDIO

And I take him to be valiant.

DON PEDRO

And so will he do; for the man doth fear God,  
howsoever it seems not in him by some large jests  
he will make. Well I am sorry for your niece. 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.

LEONATA

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

DON PEDRO

Well, we will hear further of it by your daughter:  
let it cool the while. I love Benedick well; and I  
could wish he would modestly examine himself, to see  
how much he is unworthy so good a lady.

LEONATA

My lord, will you walk? dinner is ready.

CLAUDIO (**aside to present company**)

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. The  
sport will be, when they hold one an opinion of  
another's dotage, and no such matter: that's the  
scene that I would see.

Let us send her to call him in to dinner.

**Exeunt DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, and LEONATA**

BENEDICK

**[Coming forward]** This can be no trick: the  
conference was sadly borne. They have the truth of  
this from Hero. Love me!

why, it must be requited. They say I will bear myself proudly,  
if I perceive  
the love come from her; they say too that she will  
rather die than give any sign of affection  
They say the lady is fair; 'tis a  
truth, I can bear them witness; and virtuous; 'tis  
so, I cannot reprove it; and wise, but for loving  
me; by my troth, it is no addition to her wit, nor  
no great argument of her folly, for I will be  
horribly in love with her. I may chance have some  
odd quirks and remnants of wit broken on me,  
because I have railed so long against marriage.  
No, the world must be peopled. When I said I would  
die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I  
were married. 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 'I took  
no more pains for those thanks than you took pains  
to thank me.' that's as much as to say, Any pains

that I take for you is as easy as thanks. If I do not take pity of her, I am a villain.

**Exit**

**ACT III**  
**SCENE I. LEONATA'S garden.**  
**Enter HERO, MARGARET, and URSULA**

HERO

Good Margaret, run thee to the parlor;  
There shalt thou find my cousin Beatrice.  
Whisper her ear and tell her, I and Ursula  
Walk in the orchard and our whole discourse  
Is all of her; say that thou overheard'st us;  
And bid her steal into the covered arbour,  
there will she hide her,  
To listen our purpose. This is thy office;  
Bear thee well in it and leave us alone.

MARGARET

I'll make her come, I warrant you, presently.

**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;  
For look where Beatrice, like a rodent, runs  
Close by the ground, to hear our conference.

URSULA

Fear you not my part of the dialogue.

HERO

Then go we near her, that her ear lose nothing  
Of the false sweet bait that we lay for it.  
**Approaching the arbour – the game is on.**  
No, truly, Ursula, she is too disdainful;  
I know her spirits are as coy and wild  
As haggerds of the rock.

URSULA

But are you sure  
That Benedick loves Beatrice so entirely?

HERO

So says the prince and my new-trothed lord.

URSULA

And did they bid you tell her of it, madam?

HERO

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? Doth not the gentleman  
Deserve as full as fortunate a bed  
As ever Beatrice shall couch upon?

HERO

O god of love! I know he doth deserve  
As much as may be yielded to a man:  
But Nature never framed a woman's heart  
Of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice;  
Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes,  
and her wit  
Values itself so highly that to her  
All matter else seems weak: she cannot love,  
She is so self-endear'd.

URSULA

Sure, I think so;  
And therefore certainly it were not good  
She knew his love, lest she make sport at it.

HERO

Why, you speak truth. I never yet saw man,  
How wise, how noble, young, how rarely featured,  
But she would spell him backward.  
So turns she every man the wrong side out  
And never gives to truth and virtue that  
Which simpleness and merit purchaseth.

But who dare tell her so? If I should speak,  
She would mock me into air; O, she would laugh me  
Out of myself, press me to death with wit.  
Therefore let Benedick, like cover'd fire,  
Consume away in sighs, waste inwardly:  
It were a better death than die with mocks.

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.  
And, truly, I'll devise some honest slanders  
To stain my cousin with: one doth not know  
How much an ill word may empoison liking.

URSULA

O, do not do your cousin such a wrong.  
She cannot be so much without true judgment--  
as to refuse so rare a gentleman as Signior Benedick.

HERO

He is the only man of Italy.  
Always excepted my dear Claudio.

URSULA

I pray you, be not angry with me, madam,  
Speaking my fancy: Signior Benedick,  
For shape, for bearing, argument and valour,  
Goes foremost in report through Italy.

HERO

Indeed, he hath an excellent good name.

URSULA

His excellence did earn it, ere he had it.  
When are you married, madam?

HERO

Why, every day, to-morrow. Come, go in:  
I'll show thee some garments, and have thy counsel  
Which is the best to wear to-morrow.

URSULA (**aside to Hero**)

She's limed, I warrant you: we have caught her, madam.

HERO

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

**Exeunt HERO and URSULA**

BEATRICE

**[Coming forward]**

What fire is in mine ears? Can this be true?  
Stand I condemn'd for pride and scorn so much?  
Contempt, farewell! and maiden pride, adieu!  
No glory lives behind the back of such.  
And, Benedick, love on; I will requite thee,  
Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand:  
If thou dost love, my kindness shall incite thee  
To bind our loves up in a holy band;  
For others say thou dost deserve, and I  
Believe it.

**Exit**

**SCENE II. A room in LEONATA'S house**

**Enter DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, and LEONATA**

DON PEDRO

I do but stay till your marriage be consummate, and  
then go I toward Arragon.

CLAUDIO

I'll bring you thither, my lord, if you'll  
vouchsafe me.

DON PEDRO

Nay, that would be as great a soil in the new gloss  
of your marriage as to show a child his new coat  
and forbid him to wear it. I will only be bold  
with Benedick for his company; for, from the crown  
of his head to the sole of his foot, he is all  
mirth: he hath a heart as sound as a bell and his  
tongue is the clapper, for what his heart thinks his  
tongue speaks.

BENEDICK

Gallants, I am not as I have been.

LEONATA

So say I methinks you are sadder.

CLAUDIO

I hope he be in love.

BENEDICK

I have the toothache.

DON PEDRO

Draw it.

BENEDICK

Hang it!

CLAUDIO

You must hang it first, and draw it afterwards.

DON PEDRO

What! sigh for the toothache?

BENEDICK

Well, every one can master a grief but he that has it.

CLAUDIO

Yet say I, he is in love.

DON PEDRO

There is no appearance of fancy in him, unless it be a fancy that he hath to strange disguises; Unless he have a fancy to this foolery, as it appears he hath, he is no fool for fancy, as you would have it appear he is.

CLAUDIO

If he be not in love with some woman, there is no believing old signs.

DON PEDRO

Hath any man seen him at the barber's?

CLAUDIO

No, but the barber's man hath been seen with him.

LEONATA

Indeed, he looks younger than he did, by the loss of a beard.

DON PEDRO

Nay, a' rubs himself with musk: can you smell him out by that?

CLAUDIO

That's as much as to say, the sweet youth's in love.

DON PEDRO

The greatest note of it is his melancholy.

CLAUDIO

And when was he wont to wash his face?

DON PEDRO

Yea, or to paint himself?

CLAUDIO

Nay, but his jesting spirit; which is now crept into a lute-string and now governed by stops.

DON PEDRO

Indeed, that tells a heavy tale for him: conclude he is in love.

CLAUDIO

Nay, but I know who loves him.

DON PEDRO

That would I know too: I warrant, one that knows him not.

CLAUDIO

Yes, and his ill conditions; and, in despite of all, dies for him.

DON PEDRO

She shall be buried with her face upwards.

BENEDICK

Yet is this no charm for the toothache.  
Signiora Leonata, walk aside with me: I have studied eight or nine wise words to speak to you, which these hobby-horses must not hear.

**Exeunt BENEDICK and LEONATA**

DON PEDRO

For my life, to break with him 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

[**To CLAUDIO**] 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 JOHN

I came hither to tell you; the lady is disloyal.

CLAUDIO

Who, Hero?

DON JOHN

Even she; Leonata's Hero, your Hero, every man's Hero:

CLAUDIO

Disloyal?

DON JOHN

The word is too good to paint out her wickedness; I could say she were worse: think you of a worse title, and I will fit her to it. Wonder not till further warrant: 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.

DON JOHN

If you dare not trust that you see, confess not that you know: if you will follow me, I will show you enough; and when you have seen more and heard more, proceed accordingly.

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.

DON JOHN

I will disparage her no farther till you are my witnesses: bear it coldly but till midnight, and let the issue show itself.

**Exit, leaving Don Pedro and Claudio befuddled**

**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?

FIRST WATCHMAN

George Seacole; for he can write and read.

DOGBERRY

Come hither, neighbour Seacole. God hath blessed  
you with a good name: to be a well-favoured man is  
the gift of fortune; but to write and read comes by nature.

SEACOLE (a watchman)

Both which, master constable,--

DOGBERRY

You have: I knew it would be your answer.  
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 (he means "vagrant")  
to bid any man stand, in the prince's name.

SEACOLE

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 the watch to babble and to talk is most tolerable and not to be endured.

SEACOLE

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. Well, you are to call at all the ale-houses, and bid those that are drunk get them to bed.

SEACOLE

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.

SEACOLE

Well, sir.

DOGBERRY

If you meet a thief, you may suspect him, by virtue of your office, to be no true man.

SEACOLE

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 they that touch pitch will be defiled: the most peaceable way for you, if you do take a thief, is to let him

show himself what he is and steal out of your company.

VERGES

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

SEACOLE

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; for the ewe that will not hear her  
lamb when it baes will never answer a calf when he bleats.

VERGES

'Tis very true.

DOGBERRY

This is the end of the charge.

SEACOLE

Well, masters, 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 Signiora Leonata'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 BORACHIA and CONSTANZA**

BORACHIA

What Constanza!

SEACOLE (**he hides**)

[**Aside**] Peace! stir not.

BORACHIA

Constanza, I say!

CONSTANZA

Here, I am at thy elbow.

BORACHIA

Stand thee close, then, under this pent-house, for  
it drizzles rain; and I will utter all to thee.

SEACOLE

[**Aside**] Some treason, masters: yet stand close.

BORACHIA

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

CONSTANZA

Is it possible that any villany should be so dear?

BORACHIA

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.

CONSTANZA

I wonder at it.

SEACOLE

[**Aside**] I know that voice; a' has been a vile  
thief this seven year; a' goes up and down like a  
Lady: I remember her name.

BORACHIA

Didst thou not hear somebody?

CONSTANZA

No; 'twas the vane on the house.

BORACHIA

Know that Panthino has to-night  
wooed Margaret, the Lady Hero's gentlewoman, by the  
name of Hero: she leans out at her mistress'  
chamber-window, bids him a thousand times good  
night,--I tell this tale vilely:--I should first  
tell thee how the prince, Claudio and my master,  
planted and placed in the orchard saw  
this amiable encounter.

CONSTANZA

And thought they Margaret was Hero?

BORACHIA

Two of them did, the prince and Claudio; but the devil my master knew she was Margaret; and partly by his oaths, which first possessed them, partly by the dark night, which did deceive them, but chiefly by Panthino's villany, which did confirm any slander that Don John had made, away went Claudio enraged; swore he would meet her, as he was appointed, next morning at the temple, and there, before the whole congregation, shame her with what he saw o'er night and send her home again without a husband.

SEACOLE (**coming out of hiding**)

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

FIRST WATCHMAN

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

SEACOLE

And one Deformed is one of them: I know her; a' wears a lock.

CONSTANZA

Masters, masters,--

FIRST WATCHMAN

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

CONSTANZA

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.

HERO

And bid her come hither.

URSULA

Well.

**Exit**

MARGARET

Troth, I think your other gown were better.

HERO

No, pray thee, good Meg, I'll wear this.

MARGARET

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

HERO

My cousin's a fool, and thou art another: I'll wear none but this.

MARGARET (**buttering her up**)

I like the new tire within excellently, if the hair were a thought browner; and your gown's a most rare fashion, i' faith. I saw the Duchess of Milan's gown that they praise so.

HERO

O, that exceeds, they say.

MARGARET

By my troth, 's but a night-gown in respect of yours: cloth o' gold, and cuts, and laced with silver, set with pearls, down sleeves, side sleeves, and skirts, round underborne with a bluish tinsel: but for a fine, quaint, graceful and excellent fashion, yours is worth ten on 't.

HERO

God give me joy to wear it! for my heart is exceeding heavy.

MARGARET

'Twill be heavier soon by the weight of a man.

HERO

Fie upon thee! art not ashamed?

MARGARET

Of what, lady? of speaking honourably? I'll offend nobody: is there any harm in 'the heavier for a husband'? None, I think, and it be the right husband and the right wife; otherwise 'tis light, and not heavy: ask my Lady Beatrice else; here she comes.

**Enter BEATRICE**

HERO

Good morrow, coz.

BEATRICE

Good morrow, sweet Hero.  
'Tis almost five o'clock, cousin; tis time you were ready. By my troth, I am exceeding ill: heigh-ho!

MARGARET

For a hawk, a horse, or a husband?

BEATRICE

For the letter that begins them all, H.

HERO

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

BEATRICE

I am stuffed, cousin; I cannot smell.

MARGARET

A maid, and stuffed! there's goodly catching of cold.

BEATRICE

O, God help me! God help me! how long have you professed apprehension?

MARGARET

Even since you left it. Doth not my wit become me rarely?

BEATRICE

It is not seen enough, you should wear it in your cap. By my troth, I am sick.

MARGARET

Get you some of this distilled Carduus Benedictus,

and lay it to your heart: it is the only thing for a qualm.

**HERO (referring to the mention of the name Benedick)**

There thou prickest her with a thistle.

**BEATRICE (enraged)**

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

**MARGARET (backpeddling)**

Moral! no, by my troth, I have no moral meaning; I meant, you may think perchance that I think you are in love: nay, 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 plans to marry: 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 LEONATA'S house.  
Enter LEONATA, with DOGBERRY and VERGES**

**LEONATA**

What would you with me, honest neighbour?

DOGBERRY

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

LEONATA

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

DOGBERRY

Marry, this it is, lady.

VERGES

Yes, in truth it is, lady.

LEONATA

What is it, my good friends?

DOGBERRY

Goodman Verges, lady, speaks a little off the matter: an old man, lady, and his wits are not so blunt as, God help, I would desire they were; but, in faith, honest as the skin between his brows.

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.

LEONATA

Neighbours, you are tedious.

DOGBERRY

It pleases your ladyship to say so, but we are the poor duke's officers; but truly, for mine own part, if I were as tedious as a king, I could find it in my heart to bestow it all of your ladyship.

LEONATA

I would fain know what you have to say.

VERGES

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

DOGBERRY

A good old man, sir; he will be talking: as they say, when the age is in, the wit is out: God help us! it is a world to see. Well said, i' faith, neighbour Verges.

LEONATA (**getting away from their babbling**)

I must leave you.

DOGBERRY

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

LEONATA

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.

LEONATA

Drink some wine ere you go: fare you well.

**Enter a Messenger**

Messenger

My Lady, they stay for you to give your daughter to her husband.

LEONATA

I'll wait upon them: I am ready.

**Exeunt LEONATA and Messenger**

DOGBERRY

Go, good partner, go, get you to Francis Seacole; bid him bring his pen and inkhorn to the jail: we are now to examination these men.

VERGES

And we must do it wisely.

DOGBERRY

We will spare for no wit, I warrant you; only get the learned writer to set down our

excommunication and meet me at the jail.

**Exeunt**

**ACT IV**

**SCENE I. A church.**

**Enter DON PEDRO, DON JOHN, LEONATA, ABBESS FRANCIS, CLAUDIO,  
BENEDICK, HERO, BEATRICE, and Attendants**

LEONATA

Come, Abbess Francis, be brief; only to the plain form of marriage, and you shall recount their particular duties afterwards.

ABBESS FRANCIS

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

CLAUDIO

No.

LEONATA (**points out the “joke”**)

To be married *to* her: abbess, you come to *marry* her.

ABBESS FRANCIS

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

HERO

I do.

ABBESS 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.

ABBESS FRANCIS

Know you any, Count?

LEONATA

I dare make his answer, none.

CLAUDIO (**to Leonata**)

Stand thee by, abbess. Madam, by your leave:  
Will you with free and unconstrained soul  
Give me this *maid*, your daughter?

LEONATA

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

CLAUDIO

There, Leonata, take her back again:  
Give not this rotten orange to your friend;  
She's but the sign and semblance of her honour.  
Behold how like a maid she blushes here!  
Comes not that blood as modest evidence  
To witness simple virtue? Would you not swear,  
All you that see her, that she were a *maid*,  
By these *exterior* shows? But she is none:  
She knows the heat of a luxurious bed;  
Her blush is guiltiness, not modesty.

LEONATA

What do you mean, my lord?

CLAUDIO

Not to be married,  
Not to knit my soul to an approved wanton.

LEONATA (**offended and negotiating**)

Dear my lord, if you, in your own proof,  
Have vanquish'd the resistance of her youth,  
And made defeat of her virginity,--

CLAUDIO

I know what you would say: if I have known her,  
You will say she did embrace me as a husband,  
And so extenuate the 'forehand sin:  
No, Leonata,  
I never tempted her with word too large;  
But, as a brother to his sister, show'd  
Bashful sincerity and comely love.

HERO

And seem'd I ever otherwise to you?

CLAUDIO

Out on thee! Seeming! I will write against it:

You are more intemperate in your blood  
Than Venus, or those pamper'd animals  
That rage in savage sensuality.

HERO

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

LEONATA

Sweet prince, why speak not you?

DON PEDRO

What should I speak?  
I stand dishonour'd, that have gone about  
To link my dear friend to a common stale.

LEONATA

Are these things spoken, or do I but dream?

DON JOHN

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

**BENEDICK (to group but especially to Hero)**

This looks not like a nuptial.

HERO

True! O God!

CLAUDIO

Leonata, stand I here?  
Is this the prince? is this the prince's brother?  
Is this face Hero's? are our eyes our own?

**LEONATA (trying to make sense of it all)**

All this is so: but what of this, my lord?

CLAUDIO

Let me but move one question to your daughter;  
And, by that motherly and kindly power  
That you have in her, bid her answer truly.

**LEONATA (to Hero, confused and somewhat angered)**

I charge thee do so, as thou art my child.

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

Hero herself can blot out Hero's virtue.  
What man was he talk'd with you yesternight  
Out at your window betwixt twelve and one?  
Now, if you are a maid, answer to this.

HERO

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

DON PEDRO

Why, then are you no maiden. Leonata,  
I am sorry you must hear: upon mine honour,  
Myself, my brother and this grieved count  
Did see her, hear her, at that hour last night  
Talk with a ruffian at her chamber-window  
Who hath indeed, most like a liberal villain,  
Confess'd the vile encounters they have had  
A thousand times in secret.

DON JOHN (to Pedro)

Fie, fie! they are not to be named, my lord,  
Not to be spoke of.

CLAUDIO

O Hero, what a Hero hadst thou been,  
If half thy outward graces had been placed  
About thy thoughts and counsels of thy heart!  
But fare thee well, most foul, most fair! farewell,

LEONATA (in total disgrace)

Hath no man's dagger here a point for me?

**HERO swoons. This is an important moment!**

BEATRICE (goes to Hero)

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! Auntie! Signior Benedick! Abbess!  
**(No one should go to her buy Beatrice)**

LEONATA

O Fate! take not away thy heavy hand.  
Death is the fairest cover for her shame  
That may be wish'd for.

BEATRICE **(trying to revive her)**

How now, cousin Hero!

ABBESS FRANCIS **(to Hero)**

Have comfort, lady.

LEONATA

Dost thou look up?

ABBESS FRANCIS

Yea, wherefore should she not?

LEONATA

Wherefore! Why, doth not every earthly thing  
Cry shame upon her? Could she here deny  
The story that is printed in her blood?  
Do not live, Hero; do not ope thine eyes:  
For, did I think thou wouldst not quickly die,  
Thought I thy spirits were stronger than thy shames,  
Myself would, on the rearward of reproaches,  
Strike at thy life. Why ever wast thou lovely in my eyes?  
This shame derives itself from unknown loins?  
Mine I loved and mine I praised  
And mine that I was proud on, --why, she, O, she is fallen  
Into a pit of ink, that the wide sea  
Hath drops too few to wash her clean again.

**BENEDICK (to Leonata)**

Lady, lady, be patient.  
For my part, I am so attired in wonder,  
I know not what to say.

**BEATRICE**

O, on my soul, my cousin is belied!

**BENEDICK (to Beatrice)**

Lady, were you her bedfellow last night?

**BEATRICE**

No, truly not; although, until last night,  
I have this twelvemonth been her bedfellow.

**LEONATA**

Confirm'd, confirm'd! Would the two princes lie, and Claudio lie,  
Who loved her so, that, speaking of her foulness,  
Wash'd it with tears? Hence from her! let her die.

**ABBESS FRANCIS**

Hear me a little;  
For I have only been silent so long ...  
By noting of the lady I have mark'd  
A thousand blushing apparitions  
To start into her face, a thousand innocent shames  
In angel whiteness beat away those blushes;  
And in her eye there hath appear'd a fire,  
To burn the errors that these princes hold  
Against her maiden truth. Call me a fool;  
Trust not my reading nor my observations,  
trust not my age, my reverence, calling, nor divinity,  
If this sweet lady lie not guiltless here  
Under some biting error.

**LEONATA**

Abbess, it cannot be.  
She will not add to her damnation  
A sin of perjury; she not denies it:  
Why seek'st thou then to cover with excuse  
That which appears in proper nakedness?

**ABBESS FRANCIS**

Lady, what man is he you are accused of?

HERO

They know that do accuse me; I know none:  
If I know more of any man alive  
Than that which maiden modesty doth warrant,  
Let all my sins lack mercy! (**throws herself at her feet**) O my mother,  
Prove you that any man with me conversed  
At hours unmeet, or that I yesternight  
Maintain'd the change of words with any creature,  
Refuse me, hate me, torture me to death!

ABBESS FRANCIS

There is some strange misprision in the princes.

BENEDICK

Two of them have the very bent of honour;  
And if their wisdoms be misled in this,  
The practise of it lives in John the bastard,  
Whose spirits toil in frame of villanies.

LEONATA

I know not. If they speak but truth of her,  
These hands shall tear her; if they wrong her honour,  
The proudest of them shall well hear of it.  
Time hath not yet so dried this blood of mine,  
But they shall find,  
Strength of limb and policy of mind,  
Ability in means and choice of friends,  
To quit me of them throughly.

ABBESS FRANCIS

Pause awhile,  
And let my counsel sway you in this case.  
Your daughter here the princes left for dead:  
Let her awhile be secretly kept in,  
And publish it that she is dead indeed;  
Maintain a mourning ostentation  
And on your family's old monument  
Hang mournful epitaphs and do all rites  
That appertain unto a burial.

LEONATA

What shall become of this? what will this do?

ABBESS FRANCIS

Marry, this well carried shall on her behalf  
Change slander to remorse;

She dying, as it must so be maintain'd,  
Upon the instant that she was accused,  
Shall be lamented, pitied and excused  
Of every hearer: for it so falls out  
That what we have we prize not to the worth  
Whiles we enjoy it, but being lack'd and lost,  
we find  
The virtue that possession would not show us  
Whiles it was ours. So will it fare with Claudio:  
When he shall hear she died upon his words,  
The idea of her life shall sweetly creep  
Into his study of imagination,  
Into the eye and prospect of his soul, more  
Than when she lived indeed; then shall he mourn,  
And wish he had not so accused her,  
No, though he thought his accusation true.  
And if it sort not well, you may conceal her,  
In some reclusive and religious life,  
Out of all eyes, tongues, minds and injuries.

BENEDICK

Signiora Leonata, let the abbess advise you:  
And though you know my inwardness and love  
Is very much unto the prince and Claudio,  
Yet, by mine honour, I will deal in this  
Secretly and justly.

LEONATA

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

ABBESS FRANCIS

'Tis well consented: presently away.  
**(She goes to Hero)** Come, lady, die to live: this wedding-day  
Perhaps is but prolong'd: 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 by it that you love me; and I will make  
him eat it that says I love not you.

BEATRICE

Why, then, God forgive me!

BENEDICK

What offence, sweet Beatrice?

BEATRICE

You have stayed me in a happy hour: I was about to declare I loved you.

BENEDICK

And do it with all thy heart.

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. **(leave)**

BENEDICK **(stop her)**

Tarry, sweet Beatrice.

BEATRICE **(pulling away)**

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

BENEDICK **(stopping her)**

Beatrice,--

BEATRICE **(conflicted)**

In faith, I will go.

BENEDICK

We'll be friends first.

BEATRICE

You dare easier be friends with me than fight with mine enemy.

BENEDICK

Is Claudio thine enemy?

**BEATRICE (begins to anger, her anger builds through this sequence. She must keep cutting him off as she becomes more angry until he finally gives in to her request.)**

Is he not approved in the height a villain, that  
hath slandered, scorned, dishonoured my kinswoman? O  
that I were a man! What, bear her in hand until they  
come to take hands; and then, with public  
accusation, uncovered slander, unmitigated rancour,  
--O God, that I were a man!

BENEDICK

Hear me, Beatrice,--

BEATRICE

Talk with a man out at a window! A proper saying!

BENEDICK

Nay, but, Beatrice,--

BEATRICE

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

BENEDICK

Beat--

BEATRICE

Princes and counties! Surely, a princely testimony,  
a goodly count, Count Comfekt; a sweet gallant,  
surely! O that I were a man for his sake! or that I  
had any friend would be a man for my sake! But  
manhood is melted into courtesies, valour into  
compliment, and men are only turned into tongue, and  
trim ones too: he is now as valiant as Hercules  
that only tells a lie and swears it.

BENEDICK

Tarry, good Beatrice. By this hand, I love thee.

BEATRICE

Use it for my love some other way than swearing by it.

**BENEDICK (important moment for Benedick, he turns from friends to Beatrice)**

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

**BEATRICE (her reaction is important)**

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

BENEDICK

Enough, I am engaged; I will challenge him. I will kiss your hand, and so I leave you. By this hand, Claudio shall render me a dear account. As you hear of me, so think of me. Go, comfort your cousin: I must say she is dead: and so, farewell.

**Exeunt**

**SCENE II. A prison.**

**Enter DOGBERRY, VERGES, and Sexton, in gowns; and the Watch, with CONSTANZA and BORACHIA**

DOGBERRY

Is our whole dissembly appeared?

VERGES (**present a seat**)

O, a stool and a cushion for the sexton.

SEXTON

Which be the malefactors?

DOGBERRY

Marry, that am I and my partner.

VERGES

Nay, that's certain; we have the exhibition to examine.

SEXTON

But which are the offenders that are to be examined? let them come before master constable.

DOGBERRY

Yea, marry, let them come before me. What is your name, friend?

BORACHIA

Borachia.

DOGBERRY

Pray, write down, Borachia. Yours, wench?

CONSTANZA

I am a lady, sir, and my name is Constanza.

DOGBERRY

Write down, *madam lady* Constanza. Ladies, do

you serve God?

CONSTANZA and BORACHIA

Yea, sir, we hope.

DOGBERRY

Write down, that they *hope* they serve God:  
Ladies, it is proved already  
that you are little better than liars; How answer  
you for yourselves?

CONSTANZA

Marry, sir, we say we are none.

DOGBERRY

A marvellous witty woman, I assure you: you  
madam, I say to you, it is thought  
you are liars.

BORACHIA

Sir, I say to you we are none.

DOGBERRY

Well, stand aside. 'Fore God, they are both in a  
tale. 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

Let the watch come forth. **(enter Seacole and First Watchman)**  
Masters, I charge you, in the prince's  
name, accuse these men.

FIRST WATCHMAN

This woman 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 her say else?

SEACOLE

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

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 villainess! thou wilt be condemned into everlasting  
redemption for this.

SEXTON

What else?

FIRST WATCHMAN

This is all.

SEXTON

And this is more, ladies, than you can deny.  
Prince John is this morning secretly stolen away;  
Hero was in this manner accused, in this very manner  
refused, and upon the grief of this suddenly died.  
Master constable, let these woman be  
brought to Leonata's: I will go before and show  
her their examination.

**Exit**

DOGBERRY

Come, let them be opinioned.

VERGES

Let them be bound--

CONSTANZA

Off, coxcomb!

DOGBERRY

God's my life, where's the sexton? let him write  
down the prince's officer coxcomb. Come, bind them.  
Thou naughty harlot!

CONSTANZA

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, ladies, remember that I am an ass; though it be not written down, yet forget not that I am an ass. I am a wise fellow, and, which is more, an officer, and, which is more, a householder, and, which is more, as pretty a piece of flesh as any is in Messina, and one that knows the law, go to; and one that hath two gowns and every thing handsome about him. Take her away. O that I had been writ down an ass!

**Exeunt**

**ACT V**

**SCENE I. Before LEONATA'S house.**

**Enter LEONATA and ANTONIO**

ANTONIO

If you go on thus, you will kill yourself:  
And 'tis not wisdom thus to second grief  
Against yourself.

LEONATA

I pray thee, cease thy counsel,  
Which falls into mine ears as profitless  
As water in a sieve: give not me counsel.  
Show me a mother that so loved her child,  
Whose joy of her is overwhelm'd like mine,  
And bid her speak of patience.  
But there is no such person: for, brother, men  
Can counsel and speak comfort to that grief  
Which they themselves not feel; but, tasting it,  
Their counsel turns to passion.  
No, no; 'tis all men's office to speak patience  
To those that wring under the load of sorrow,  
But no man's virtue nor sufficiency  
To be so moral when he shall endure  
The like himself. Therefore give me no counsel:  
My griefs cry louder than advertisement.

ANTONIO

Therein do men from children nothing differ.

LEONATA

I pray thee, peace. I will endure the toothache patiently.

ANTONIO

Yet bend not all the harm upon yourself;  
Make those that do offend you suffer too.

LEONATA

There thou speak'st reason: nay, I will do so.  
My soul doth tell me Hero is belied;  
And that shall Claudio know; so shall the prince  
And all of them that thus dishonour her.

ANTONIO

Here comes the prince and Claudio hastily.

**Enter DON PEDRO and CLAUDIO**

DON PEDRO

Good den, good den.

CLAUDIO

Good day to both of you.

LEONATA

Hear you, my lords,--

DON PEDRO

We have some haste, Leonata.

LEONATA

Some haste, my lord! Are you so hasty now?

DON PEDRO

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

ANTONIO

If she could right herself with quarreling,  
Some of us would lie low.

CLAUDIO

Who wrongs her?

LEONATA

Tush, tush, man; never jest at me:  
I speak not like a dotard nor a fool.  
Know, Claudio, to thy head,  
Thou hast so wrong'd mine innocent child and me.  
I say thou hast belied mine innocent child;  
Thy slander hath gone through and through her heart,  
And she lies buried with her ancestors;  
O, in a tomb where never scandal slept,  
Save this of hers, framed by thy villany!

CLAUDIO

My villany?

LEONATA

Thine, Claudio; thine, I say.

DON PEDRO

You say not right, old woman.

LEONATA

My lord, my lord,  
I'll prove it on his body, if he dare,  
Despite his nice fence and his active practise,  
His May of youth and bloom of lustihood.

CLAUDIO

Away! I will not have to do with you.

LEONATA

Canst thou so dismiss me? Thou hast kill'd my child.

ANTONIO

Win me and wear me; let him answer me.  
Come, follow me, boy; come, sir boy, come, follow me:  
Sir boy, I'll whip you from your foining fence;  
Nay, as I am a gentleman, I will.

LEONATA

Brother,--

ANTONIO

Content yourself. God knows I loved my niece;  
And she is dead, slander'd to death by villains.

LEONATA

Brother Antony,--

ANTONIO

Hold you content. What, man! I know them, yea,  
Scrambling, out-facing, fashion-monging boys,  
That lie and cog and flout, deprave and slander,  
Go anticly, show outward hideousness,  
And speak off half a dozen dangerous words.

LEONATA

But, brother Antony,--

ANTONIO

Do not you meddle; let me deal in this.

DON PEDRO

We will not wake your patience.  
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.

LEONATA

My lord, my lord,--

DON PEDRO

I will not hear you.

LEONATA

No? Come, brother; away! I will be heard.  
**(roughly push past the prince in a threatening way)**

**Exeunt LEONATA and ANTONIO**

DON PEDRO

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

**Enter BENEDICK**

CLAUDIO

Now, signior, what news?

BENEDICK

Good day, my lord.

DON PEDRO

Welcome, signior: you are almost come to part  
almost a fray.

CLAUDIO

We had like to have had our two noses snapped off  
By the two old ones without teeth.

DON PEDRO

Leonata and his brother. What thinkest thou?

BENEDICK

In a false quarrel there is no true valour. 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?

DON PEDRO

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

BENEDICK

Sir, I shall meet your wit in the career, and you  
charge it against me. I pray you choose another subject.

DON PEDRO

By this light, he changes more and more: I think  
he be angry indeed.

CLAUDIO

If he be, he knows how to turn his girdle.

BENEDICK

You are a villain; I jest not:  
I will make it good how you dare, with what you  
dare, and when you dare. Do me right, or I will  
protest your cowardice. You have killed a sweet  
lady, and her death shall fall heavy on you. Let me  
hear from you.

CLAUDIO

He hath bid me to a calf's  
head and a capon; the which if I do not carve most  
curiously, say my knife's naught. Shall I not find  
a woodcock too?

BENEDICK

Sir, your wit ambles well; it goes easily.

DON PEDRO

I'll tell thee how Beatrice praised thy wit the  
other day. I said, thou hadst a fine wit: 'True,'  
said she, 'a fine little one.' 'No,' said I, 'a  
great wit:' 'Right,' says she, 'a great gross one.'  
Thus did she, an hour together, transshape thy particular  
virtues: yet at last she concluded with a sigh, thou  
wast the properest man in Italy.

CLAUDIO

For the which she wept heartily and said she cared  
not.

DON PEDRO

Yea, that she did: but yet, for all that, an if she  
did not hate him deadly, she would love him dearly:  
the old woman's daughter told us all.

CLAUDIO

All, all; and, moreover, God saw him when he was  
hid in the garden.

DON PEDRO

But when shall we set the savage bull's horns on  
the sensible Benedick's head?

CLAUDIO

Yea, and text underneath, 'Here dwells Benedick the  
married man'?

BENEDICK

Fare you well, boy: you know my mind, you break jests  
as braggarts do their blades, which God be thanked,  
hurt not. My lord, for your many courtesies I thank  
you: I must discontinue your company: 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: pluck up, my heart, and be sad. Did he not say, my brother was fled?

**Enter DOGBERRY, VERGES, and the Watch, with CONSTANZA and BORACHIA**

DON PEDRO

How now? two of my brother's company bound! Borachia one!

CLAUDIO

Hearken after their offence, my lord.

DON PEDRO

Officers, what offence have these women 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 wenches.

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.

**(Dogberry reacts, confused by the joke. He does not realize that he makes no sense)**

Who have you offended, ladies, that you are thus bound to your answer? this learned constable is too cunning to be understood: what's your offence?

BORACHIA

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. Don John your brother incensed me to slander the Lady Hero, how you were brought into the orchard and saw the servant Panthino 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 while she utter'd it.

DON PEDRO

But did my brother set thee on to this?

BORACHIA

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

DON PEDRO

He is composed and framed of treachery:  
And fled he is upon this villany.

CLAUDIO

Sweet Hero! now thy image doth appear  
In the rare semblance that I loved it first.

DOGBERRY

Come, bring away the plaintiffs: by this time our sexton hath reformed Signiora Leonata of the matter: and, masters, do not forget to specify, when time and place shall serve, that I am an ass.

VERGES

Here, here comes mistress Signiora Leonata, and the  
Sexton too.

**Re-enter LEONATA and ANTONIO, with the Sexton**

**LEONATA (spoken upon entrance, she must not realize that the villains are woman  
until they confess)**

Which is the villain? let me see his eyes,  
That, when I note another man like him,  
I may avoid him: which of these is he?

BORACHIA

If you would know your wronger, look on me.

**LEONATA (confused by the woman confessing rather than a man)**

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

BORACHIA

Yea, even I alone.

LEONATA

No, not so, wench; 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:  
Record it with your high and worthy deeds:  
'Twas bravely done, if you bethink you of it.

CLAUDIO

I know not how to pray your patience;  
Yet I must speak. Choose your revenge yourself;  
Impose me to what penance your invention  
Can lay upon my sin: yet sinn'd I not  
But in mistaking.

DON PEDRO

By my soul, nor I:  
And yet, to satisfy this good lady,  
I would bend under any heavy weight  
That she'll enjoin me to.

LEONATA

I cannot bid you bid my daughter live;  
That were impossible: but, I pray you both,

Possess the people in Messina here  
How innocent she died; and if your love  
Can labour ought in sad invention,  
Hang her an epitaph upon her tomb  
And sing it to her bones, sing it to-night:  
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 lady,  
Your over-kindness doth wring tears from me!  
I do embrace your offer; and dispose  
For henceforth of poor Claudio.

LEONATA

To-morrow then I will expect your coming;  
To-night I take my leave. This naughty woman  
Shall face to face be brought to Margaret,  
Who I believe was pack'd in all this wrong,  
Hired to it by your brother.

DOGBERRY

Madam, this plaintiff here, the offender, did call  
me ass: I beseech you, let it be remembered in her  
punishment. And also, the watch heard them talk of  
one Deformed: they say he wears a key in his ear and  
a lock hanging by it. Pray you, examine her upon that point.

LEONATA

I thank thee for thy care and honest pains.

DOGBERRY

Your ladyship speaks like a most thankful and  
reverend youth; and I praise God for you.

LEONATA (**give him a coin**)

There's for thy pains.  
Go, I discharge thee of thy prisoner, and I thank thee.

DOGBERRY

I leave an arrant wench with your ladyship.

God keep your ladyship! I wish  
your ladyship well; I  
humbly give you leave to depart; and if a merry  
meeting may be wished, God prohibit it! Come, neighbour.

**Exeunt DOGBERRY and VERGES**

LEONATA

Until to-morrow morning, lords, farewell.

ANTONIO

Farewell, my lords: we look for you to-morrow.

DON PEDRO

We will not fail.

CLAUDIO

To-night I'll mourn with Hero.

LEONATA

**[To the Watch]** Bring you these fellows on. We'll  
talk with Margaret, How her acquaintance grew with this lewd woman.

**Exeunt, severally**

**SCENE II. LEONATA'S garden.  
Enter BENEDICK and MARGARET, meeting**

BENEDICK

Pray thee, sweet Mistress Margaret, deserve well at  
my hands by helping me to the speech of Beatrice.

MARGARET

Will you then write me a sonnet in praise of my beauty?

BENEDICK

In so high a style, Margaret, that no man living  
shall come over it; for, in most comely truth, thou  
deservest it.

MARGARET

To have no man come over me! why, shall I always  
keep below stairs?

BENEDICK

Thy wit is as quick as the greyhound's mouth; it catches.

A most manly wit, Margaret.  
I pray thee, call Beatrice.

MARGARET

Well, I will call Beatrice to you, who I think hath legs.

BENEDICK

And therefore will come.

**Exit MARGARET**

**Sings**

The god of love,  
That sits above,  
And knows me, and knows me,  
How pitiful I deserve,-- Marry, I  
cannot show it in rhyme; I have tried: I can find  
out no rhyme to 'lady' but 'baby,' an innocent  
rhyme; for 'scorn,' 'horn,' a hard rhyme; for,  
'school,' 'fool,' a babbling rhyme; very ominous  
endings: no, I was not born under a rhyming planet,  
nor I cannot woo in festival terms.

**Enter BEATRICE**

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 unkissed.

BENEDICK

Thou hast frighted the word out of his right sense,  
so forcible is thy wit. But 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 for  
which of my bad parts didst thou first fall in love with me?

BEATRICE

For them all together; which maintained so politic  
a state of evil that they will not admit any good  
part to intermingle with them. But for which of my  
good parts did you first suffer love for me?

BENEDICK

Suffer love! a good epithet! I do suffer love  
indeed, for I love thee against my will.

BEATRICE

In spite of your heart, I think; alas, poor heart!  
For I will never love that which my friend hates.

BENEDICK

Thou and I are too wise to woo peaceably.

BEATRICE

It appears not in this confession: there's not one  
wise man among twenty that will praise himself.

BENEDICK

If a man do not erect  
in this age his own tomb ere he dies, he shall live  
no longer in monument than the bell rings and the  
widow weeps.

BEATRICE

And how long is that, think you?

BENEDICK

Question: What if Don Worm, in his conscience, find no  
impediment to the contrary, to be the trumpet of his  
own virtues, as I am to myself? So much for  
praising myself, who, I myself will bear witness, is  
praiseworthy: and 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 Aunt.  
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 aunt's.

**Exeunt**

**SCENE III. A church.**

**Enter DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, BALTHASAR, and others with tapers**

CLAUDIO

Is this the monument of Leonata?

Lord

It is, my lord.

CLAUDIO

**[Reading out of a scroll]**

Done to death by slanderous tongues  
Was the Hero that here lies:  
Death, in guerdon of her wrongs,  
Gives her fame which never dies.

So the life that died with shame  
Lives in death with glorious fame.  
Hang thou there upon the tomb,  
Praising her when I am dumb.

**(to Balthasar)**

Now, music, sound, and sing your solemn hymn.

**BALTHASAR (Sings)**

Pardon, goddess of the night,  
Those that slew thy virgin knight;  
For the which, with songs of woe,  
Round about her tomb they go.  
Midnight, assist our moan;  
Help us to sigh and groan,  
Heavily, heavily:  
Graves, yawn and yield your dead,  
Till death be uttered,  
Heavily, heavily.

**CLAUDIO**

Now, unto thy bones good night!  
Yearly will I do this rite.

**DON PEDRO**

Good morrow, masters; put your torches out:  
Thanks to you all, and leave us: fare you well.

**CLAUDIO**

Good morrow, masters: each his several way.

**DON PEDRO**

Come, let us hence, and put on other clothes;  
And then to Leonata's we will go.

**Exeunt**

**SCENE IV. A room in LEONATA'S house.**

**Enter LEONATA, ANTONIO, BENEDICK, BEATRICE, MARGARET, URSULA,  
ABBESS FRANCIS, and HERO**

**ABBESS FRANCIS**

Did I not tell you she was innocent?

**LEONATA**

So are the prince and Claudio, who accused her  
Upon the error that you heard debated:

But Margaret was in some fault for this,  
Although against her will, as it appears  
In the true course of all the question.

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.

LEONATA

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

**Exeunt Ladies**

The prince and Claudio promised by this hour  
To visit me. You know your office, brother:  
You must be father to your sister's daughter  
And give her to young Claudio.

ANTONIO

Which I will do with confirm'd countenance.

BENEDICK

Abbess, I must entreat your pains, I think.

ABBESS FRANCIS

To do what, signior?

BENEDICK

To bind me, or undo me; one of them.  
Signiora Leonata, truth it is, good signiora,  
Your niece regards me with an eye of favour.

LEONATA

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

BENEDICK

And I do with an eye of love requite her.

LEONATA

The sight whereof I think you had from me,  
From Claudio and the prince: but what's your will?

BENEDICK

My will is this day to be conjoin'd  
In the state of honourable marriage:  
In which, good abbess, I shall desire your help.

LEONATA

My heart is with your liking.

ABBESS FRANCIS

And my help.  
Here comes the prince and Claudio.

**Enter DON PEDRO and CLAUDIO, and two or three others**

DON PEDRO

Good morrow to this fair assembly.

LEONATA

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

CLAUDIO

I'll hold my mind.

LEONATA

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

**Exit ANTONIO**

DON PEDRO

Good morrow, Benedick. Why, what's the matter,  
That you have such a February face,  
So full of frost, of storm and cloudiness?

CLAUDIO

I think he thinks he would play the noble beast in love.

BENEDICK

Sir, some such strange beast leap'd your father's cow,  
And got a calf in that same noble feat  
Much like to you, for you have just his bleat.

CLAUDIO

For this I owe you: here comes other reckonings.  
**Re-enter ANTONIO, with the Ladies masked**

Which is the lady I must seize upon?

ANTONIO

This same is she, and I do give you her.

CLAUDIO

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

LEONATA

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

CLAUDIO

Give me your hand: before this holy abbess,  
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,  
And surely as I live, I am a maid.

DON PEDRO

The former Hero! Hero that is dead!

LEONATA

She died, my lord, but whiles her slander lived.

ABBESS FRANCIS

All this amazement can I qualify:  
When after that the holy rites are ended,  
I'll tell you largely of fair Hero's death:  
Meantime to the chapel let us presently.

BENEDICK

Soft and fair, abbess. Which is Beatrice?

BEATRICE

**[Unmasking]** I answer to that name. What is your will?

BENEDICK

Do not you love me?

BEATRICE

Why, no; no more than reason.

BENEDICK

Why, then your aunt 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.

LEONATA

Come, cousin, 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

A miracle! here's our own hands against our hearts.  
Come, I will have thee; but, by this light, I take  
thee for pity.

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! I will stop your mouth.

**Kissing her**

DON PEDRO

How dost thou, Benedick, the married man?

BENEDICK

I'll tell thee what, prince; In brief, since I do  
purpose to marry, I will think nothing to any  
purpose that the world can say against it; and  
therefore never flout at me for what I have said  
against it; for man is a giddy thing, and this is my  
conclusion. For thy part, Claudio, I did think to  
have beaten thee, but in that thou art like to be my  
kinsman, live unbruised and love my cousin.

CLAUDIO

I had well hoped thou wouldst have denied Beatrice,  
that I might have cudgelled thee out of thy single  
life, to make thee a double-dealer; which, out of  
question, thou wilt be, if my cousin do not look  
exceedingly narrowly to thee.

BENEDICK

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.

LEONATA

We'll have dancing afterward.

BENEDICK

First, of my word; therefore play, music. Prince,  
thou art sad; get thee a wife, get thee a wife.

**Enter a 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**