

# Much Ado About Nothing

by William Shakespeare

## Cast

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

DON PEDRO, Prince of Aragon.

DON JOHN, the half-brother of Don Pedro.

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

LEONATO, governor of Messina; Hero's father.

ANTONIO, brother of Leonato.

BORACHIO, follower of Don John.

CONRADE, follower of Don John.

BEATRICE, niece of Leonato and daughter of Antonio

HERO, daughter of Leonato

MARGARET, waiting-gentlewoman attendant on Hero.

URSULA, waiting-gentlewoman attendant on Hero.

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

VERGES, the Headborough, Dogberry's partner

FRIAR FRANCIS, a priest.

COURT CLERK, the judge of the trial of Borachio

HUGH OATCAKE, a watchmen of Messina

GEORGE SEACOLE, another watchman of Messina

MESSENGER, in service of Leonato

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SCENE 1. In front of LEONATO'S house.

Enter LEONATO, HERO, and BEATRICE, with a Messenger

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

**MESSENGER** He hath borne himself beyond the promise of his age.

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

**MESSENGER** I know none of that name, lady.

**HERO** My cousin means Signior Benedick of Padua.

**MESSENGER** O, he's returned; and as pleasant as ever he was. He is a good soldier, lady.

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

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

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

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

**BEATRICE** In our last conflict four of his five wits went halting off, and now is the whole man governed with one. Who is his companion now? He hath every month a new sworn brother.

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

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

**LEONATO** You will never run mad, niece.

**BEATRICE** No, not till a hot January.

**MESSENGER** Don Pedro is approached.

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

**DON PEDRO** Good Signior Leonato! I think this is your daughter.

**LEONATO** Her mother hath many times told me so.

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

**LEONATO** Signior Benedick, no.

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

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

**BENEDICK** What, my dear Lady Disdain! Are you yet living?

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

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

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

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

**BEATRICE** Scratching could not make it worse, if it were such a face as yours.

**DON PEDRO** Signior Claudio and Signior Benedick, my dear friend Leonato hath invited us all to stay here and I have agreed to accept his offer for at the least a month.

**LEONATO** [*To DON JOHN*] Let me bid you welcome, my lord: being reconciled to the prince your brother, I owe you all duty.

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

**LEONATO** Please it your grace lead on?

Exeunt all except **BENEDICK** and **CLAUDIO**

**CLAUDIO** Benedick, didst thou note the daughter of Signior Leonato?

**BENEDICK** I noted her not; but I looked on her.

**CLAUDIO** Is she not a modest young lady?

**BENEDICK** Methinks she's too low for a high praise, too brown for a fair praise and too little for a great praise. I do not like her.

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

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

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

Re-enter DON PEDRO

**DON PEDRO** What secret hath held you here?

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

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

**CLAUDIO** That I love her, I feel.

**DON PEDRO** That she is worthy, I know.

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

**DON PEDRO** Thou wast ever an obstinate heretic to love.

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

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

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

Exit BENEDICK

**CLAUDIO** My liege, your highness now may do me good.

**DON PEDRO** I know we shall have revelling tonight: I will assume thy part in some disguise and tell fair Hero I am Claudio, and in her bosom I'll unclasp my heart then after to her father will I break; and the conclusion is, she shall be thine.

Exeunt

SCENE 2. A room in Leonato's house.

Enter DON JOHN and CONRADE

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

**DON JOHN** There is no measure in the occasion that breeds; therefore my sadness is without limit.

**CONRADE** You have of late stood out against your brother, and he hath taken you newly into his grace.

**DON JOHN** My brother trusts me, but with a muzzle; If I had my mouth, I would bite; if I had my liberty, I would do my liking.

**CONRADE** Can you make no use of your discontent?

*Enter BORACHIO*

What news, Borachio?

**BORACHIO** I can give you intelligence of an intended marriage.

**DON JOHN** Will it serve for any model to build mischief on?

**BORACHIO** Marry, it is your brother's right hand.

**DON JOHN** Who? the most exquisite Claudio?

**BORACHIO** He wishes to marry Hero, the daughter and heir of Leonato. I heard it agreed upon that the prince should woo Hero for himself, and having obtained her, give her to Count Claudio.

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

**CONRADE** To the death, my lord.

Exeunt

SCENE 3. A hall in LEONATO'S house.

Enter LEONATO, ANTONIO, HERO, BEATRICE, and others

**LEONATO** Was not Count John here at supper?

**ANTONIO** I saw him not.

**HERO** He is of a very melancholy disposition.

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

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

**ANTONIO** In faith, she's too curst.

**BEATRICE** I pray upon my knees every morning and evening: "Lord, let me not endure a husband with a beard on his face!"

**ANTONIO** You may light on a husband that hath no beard.

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

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

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

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

**HERO** The revellers are entering!

*All put on their masks*

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

*Dance, sing.*

**DON PEDRO** Lady, will you walk with me in your company?

*HERO curtsies to him; they walk aside*

**BORACHIO** Well, I would you did like me.

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

**BORACHIO** Which is one?

**MARGARET** I say my prayers aloud.

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

**MARGARET** God match me with a good dancer!

**BORACHIO** Amen.

*Exit Margaret and Borachio*

**URSULA** I know you well enough; you are Signior Antonio.

**ANTONIO** At a word, I am not.

**URSULA** I know you by the wagging of your head.

**ANTONIO** To tell you true, I counterfeit him.

*Exit Ursula and Antonio*

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

**BENEDICK** Not now.

**BEATRICE** Well this must have been Signior Benedick that said so.

**BENEDICK** What's he?

**BEATRICE** I am sure you know him well enough.

**BENEDICK** Not I, believe me.

**BEATRICE** Did he never make you laugh?

**BENEDICK** I pray you, what is he?

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

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

**BEATRICE** Do, do.

*Music*

Exeunt all except DON JOHN, BORACHIO, and CLAUDIO

**BORACHIO** Claudio remains: I know him by his bearing.

**DON JOHN** [*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. You may do the part of an honest man in it.

**CLAUDIO** How know you he loves her?

**DON JOHN** I heard him swear his affection.

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

Exeunt DON JOHN and BORACHIO

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

Re-enter BENEDICK

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

**CLAUDIO** I wish him joy of her.

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

**CLAUDIO** I pray you, leave me.

*Exit CLAUDIO*

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

Re-enter DON PEDRO

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

*BENEDICK motions to CLAUDIO as he re-enters, accompanied by BEATRICE, HERO, and LEONATO*

**DON PEDRO** Why, how now, count! wherefore are you sad?

**CLAUDIO** Not sad, my lord.

**DON PEDRO** How then? sick?

**BEATRICE** The count is neither sad, nor sick, nor merry, nor well; but something of that

jealous complexion.

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

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

**BEATRICE** Speak, count, 'tis your cue.

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

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

**DON PEDRO** In faith, lady, you have a merry heart.

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

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

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

**DON PEDRO** To be merry best becomes you, for, out of question, you were born in a merry hour.

**BEATRICE** No, sure, my mother cried. But then there was a star danced, and under that I was born.

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

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

Exit

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

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

**DON PEDRO** She were an excellent wife for Benedick.

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

**DON PEDRO** I will undertake one of Hercules' labours; which is, to bring Signior Benedick and

the Lady Beatrice into a mountain of affection the one with the other.

**LEONATO** My lord, I am for you.

**CLAUDIO** And I, my lord.

**DON PEDRO** And you too, gentle Hero?

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

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

Exeunt

SCENE 4. The same.

Enter DON JOHN and BORACHIO

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

**BORACHIO** Yea, my lord; but I can cross it.

**DON JOHN** How canst thou cross this marriage?

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

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

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

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

Exeunt

SCENE 5. LEONATO'S orchard.

Enter BENEDICK

**BENEDICK** I do much wonder that one man, seeing how much another man is a fool when he dedicates his behaviors to love, will, after he hath laughed at such shallow follies in others, become the argument of his own scorn by falling in love: and such a man is Claudio.

Enter DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, and LEONATO

**BENEDICK** Ha! the prince and Monsieur Love! I will hide me in the arbour.

*(Hides)*

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

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

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

**DON PEDRO** Why, what effects of passion shows she?

**CLAUDIO** *(as if whispering)* Bait the hook well; this fish will bite.

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

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

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

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

**CLAUDIO** *(as if whispering)* He hath ta'en the infection: hold it up.

**DON PEDRO** Hath she made her affection known to Benedick?

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

She wrote him of her love but tore the letter into a thousand pieces; railed at herself, that she should be so immodest.

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

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

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

**DON PEDRO** If he should, it were a kindness to hang him. She's an excellent sweet lady and virtuous.

**CLAUDIO** And she is exceeding wise.

**DON PEDRO** In every thing but in loving Benedick.

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

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

**CLAUDIO** (*as if whispering*) If he do not dote on her upon this, I will never trust my expectation.

**DON PEDRO** (*as if whispering*) Let there be the same net spread for her; and that must your daughter and her gentlewomen carry.

Exeunt DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, and LEONATO

**BENEDICK** [*Coming forward*] This can be no trick: the conference was sadly borne. They have the truth of this from Hero. They seem to pity the lady: it seems her affections have their full bent. Love me!

I did never think to marry. I have railed so long against marriage: but doth not the appetite alter?

Here comes Beatrice. By this day! she's a fair lady: I do spy some marks of love in her.

Enter BEATRICE

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

**BENEDICK** Fair Beatrice, I thank you for your pains.

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

**BENEDICK** You take pleasure then in the message?

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

Exit

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

Exit

SCENE 6. LEONATO'S orchard.

Enter HERO, MARGARET, and URSULA

**HERO** Good Margaret, run thee to the parlor; tell Beatrice that Ursula and I walk in the orchard and our whole discourse is all of her.

**MARGARET** I'll make her come.

Exit

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

*Enter BEATRICE, behind*

Now begin.

**URSULA** Are you sure that Benedick loves Beatrice so entirely?

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

**URSULA** Why did you so?

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

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

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

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

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

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

**HERO** Indeed, he hath an excellent good name.

**URSULA** (*as if whispering*) We have caught her, madam.

**HERO** (*as if whispering*) If it proves so, then loving goes by haps:  
Some Cupid kills with arrows, some with traps.

Exeunt HERO and URSULA

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

Exit

SCENE 7. A room in LEONATO'S house

Enter DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, and LEONATO

**CLAUDIO** I hope he be in love.

**DON PEDRO** There is no appearance of fancy in him, unless it be a fancy that he hath to strange disguises. For my life, he goes to speak with Leonato about Beatrice.

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

*Enter DON JOHN*

**DON JOHN** My lord and brother, God save you!  
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 PEDRO** Why, what's the matter?

**DON JOHN** I came hither to tell you the lady is disloyal.

**CLAUDIO** Who, Hero?

**DON JOHN** Even she.

**CLAUDIO** Disloyal?

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

**CLAUDIO** May this be so?

**DON PEDRO** I will not think it.

**CLAUDIO** If I see anything tonight why I should not marry her tomorrow in the

congregation, where I should wed, there will I shame her.

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

*Mime of seeing "Hero" at the window, hugging and kissing another man.*

**DON PEDRO** O day untowardly turned!

**CLAUDIO** O mischief strangely thwarting!

**DON JOHN** O plague right well prevented! so will you say when you have seen the sequel.

*Exeunt*

SCENE 8. A street.

Enter DOGBERRY and VERGES with the WATCH

**DOGBERRY** Are you good men and true?

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

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

**VERGES** Well, give them their charge, neighbour Dogberry.

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

**VERGES** Hugh Oatcake, sir, or George Seacole; for they can write and read.

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

**SEACOLE** Both which, master constable,--

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

**SEACOLE** How if he will not stand?

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

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

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

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

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

**OATCAKE** 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.

**OATCAKE** Well, sir.

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

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

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

**VERGES** You have been always called a merciful man, partner.

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

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

**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.

**VERGES** Very good.

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

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

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

Exeunt DOGBERRY and VERGES

Enter BORACHIO and CONRADE

**BORACHIO** Conrade, I say!

**CONRADE** Now forward with thy tale.

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

**SEACOLE** [*Aside*] Some treason, yet stand close.

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

**CONRADE** Is it possible that any villany should be so dear?

**BORACHIO** I have to-night wooed Margaret, the Lady Hero's gentlewoman, by the name of

Hero: she leans me out at her mistress' chamber-window, bids me a thousand times good night while the prince, Claudio and my master, planted and placed and possessed by my master Don John, saw afar off in the orchard this amiable encounter.

**CONRADE** And thought they Margaret was Hero?

**BORACHIO** They did.

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

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

**OATCAKE** And one Deformed is one of them. I know him!

**CONRADE** Masters, masters,--

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

**CONRADE** Masters,--

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

**CONRADE** Come, we'll obey you.

Exeunt

SCENE 9. HERO's room in Leonato's house.

Enter HERO, MARGARET, and URSULA

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

**URSULA** I will, lady.

Exit

**HERO** Good Meg, I'll wear this.

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

Enter BEATRICE

**HERO** Good morrow, coz.

**BEATRICE** Good morrow, sweet Hero.

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

**BEATRICE** I am out of all other tune, methinks.

**MARGARET** Oh ho!

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

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

**BEATRICE** I am stuffed, cousin; I cannot smell.

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

**HERO** There thou prickest her with a thistle.

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

**MARGARET** Moral! no, by my troth, I have no moral meaning; I meant, plain holy-thistle. You may think perchance that I think you are in love but I am not such a fool to think that you are in love or that you will be in love or that you can be in love. Yet Benedick was such another, and now is he become a man: he swore he would never marry, and yet now, in despite of his heart, he eats his meat without grudging: and how you may be converted I know not, but methinks you look with your eyes as other women do.

**BEATRICE** What pace is this that thy tongue keeps?

**MARGARET** Not a false gallop.

Re-enter URSULA

**URSULA** Madam, withdraw: the prince, the count, Signior Benedick, Don John, and all the gallants of the town, are come to fetch you to church.

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

Exeunt

SCENE 10. At the door to LEONATO'S house.

Enter DOGBERRY and VERGES; LEONATO answers their knock at his door.

**LEONATO** What would you with me, honest neighbour?

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

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

**DOGBERRY** Marry, this it is, sir.

**VERGES** Yes, in truth it is, sir.

**LEONATO** What is it, my good friends?

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

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

**LEONATO** 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.

**LEONATO** Fare you well.

Exit LEONATO

**DOGBERRY** We are now to examination these men.

**VERGES** And we must do it wisely.

**DOGBERRY** We will spare for no wit, I warrant you.

Exeunt

SCENE 11. Leonato's orchard, set up for a wedding.

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

**LEONATO** Come, Friar Francis, be brief.

**FRIAR FRANCIS** You come hither, my lord, to marry this lady.

**CLAUDIO** No.

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

**FRIAR FRANCIS** Lady, you come hither to be married to this count.

**HERO** I do.

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

**CLAUDIO** Know you any, Hero?

**HERO** None, my lord.

**FRIAR FRANCIS** Know you any, count?

**LEONATO** I dare make his answer, none.

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

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

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

**LEONATO** What do you mean, my lord?

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

**LEONATO** Sweet prince, why speak not you?

**DON PEDRO** What should I speak? I stand dishonour'd.

**LEONATO** Are these things spoken, or do I but dream?

**DON JOHN** Sir, they are spoken, and these things are true.

**BENEDICK** This looks not like a nuptial.

**HERO** O, God defend me! how am I beset! What kind of catechising call you this?

**CLAUDIO** To make you answer truly to your name.

**HERO** Is it not Hero? Who can blot that name with any just reproach?

**CLAUDIO** Marry, that can Hero;  
Hero itself can blot out Hero's virtue.  
What man was he talk'd with you yesternight  
Out at your window betwixt twelve and one?

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

**DON PEDRO** Leonato, I am sorry you must hear: upon mine honour,  
Myself, my brother and this griev'd count  
Did see her, hear her, at that hour last night  
Talk with a ruffian at her chamber-window.

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

*HERO faints*

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

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

Exeunt DON PEDRO, DON JOHN, and CLAUDIO

**BENEDICK** How doth the lady?

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

**LEONATO** O Fate! take not away thy heavy hand.

**FRIAR FRANCIS** Have comfort.

**LEONATO** Wherefore!

**BEATRICE** O, on my soul, my cousin is belied!

**HERO** I was with no one at that hour.

**FRIAR FRANCIS** There is some strange misprision in the princes.

**BENEDICK** If their wisdoms be misled in this,  
The practise of it lives in Don John, the prince's brother.

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

**LEONATO** What will this do?

**FRIAR FRANCIS** When Claudio hears she died upon his words,  
The idea of her life shall sweetly creep  
Into his study of imagination, then shall he mourn,  
And wish he had not so accused her,

**BENEDICK** Signior Leonato, let the friar advise you.

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

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

Exeunt all but **BENEDICK** and **BEATRICE**

**BENEDICK** Lady Beatrice, have you wept all this while?

**BEATRICE** Yea, and I will weep a while longer.

**BENEDICK** I will not desire that.

**BEATRICE** You have no reason; I do it freely.

**BENEDICK** Surely I do believe your fair cousin is wronged.

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

**BENEDICK** Is there any way to show such friendship?

**BEATRICE** A very even way, but no such friend.

**BENEDICK** May a man do it?

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

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

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

**BENEDICK** By my sword, Beatrice, thou lovest me. I protest I love thee.

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

**BENEDICK** Come, bid me do anything for thee.

**BEATRICE** Kill Claudio.

**BENEDICK** Ha! not for the wide world.

**BEATRICE** You kill me to deny it. Farewell.

**BENEDICK** Tarry, sweet Beatrice.

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

**BENEDICK** Is Claudio thine enemy?

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

**BENEDICK** Hear me, Beatrice,--

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

**BENEDICK** Beatrice --

**BEATRICE** O I will die a woman with grieving.

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

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

**BENEDICK** Enough, I am engaged; I will challenge him.

Exeunt

SCENE 12. A prison.

Enter DOGBERRY, VERGES, and COURT CLERK, in gowns; SEACOLE, OATCAKE, CONRADE and BORACHIO

**DOGBERRY** Is our whole dissembly here?

**CLERK** Which be the malefactors?

**DOGBERRY** That am I and my partner.

**VERGES** That's certain. We have been exhibitioned.

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

**DOGBERRY** What is your name, friend?

**BORACHIO** Borachio.

**DOGBERRY** Pray, write down, Borachio. Yours?

**CONRADE** My name is Conrade. I am a gentleman.

**DOGBERRY** Write down, master gentleman Conrade.

(to CONRADE and BORACHIO) Masters, it is proved already that you are little better than false knaves. How answer you for yourselves?

**CONRADE** Marry, sir, we say we are none.

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

**BORACHIO** Sir, I say to you we are none.

**DOGBERRY** Have you writ down, that they are none?

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

**DOGBERRY** (to OATCAKE and SEACOLE) Masters, I charge you, in the prince's name, accuse these men.

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

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

**CLERK** What heard you him say else?

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

**DOGBERRY** Flat burglary as ever was committed.

**CLERK**                   What else, fellow?

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

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

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

Exit

**DOGBERRY**       Come, bind them. Thou naughty varlet!

**CONRADE**       Away! you are an idiot, you are an idiot!

**DOGBERRY**       Dost thou not suspect my place? dost thou not suspect my years? O that he were here to write me down an idiot! But, masters, remember that I am an idiot; though it be not written down, yet forget not that I am an idiot.

Exeunt

SCENE 13. In front of LEONATO'S house.

Enter LEONATO and ANTONIO

**ANTONIO** If you go on thus, you will kill yourself.

**LEONATO** I pray thee, cease thy counsel.  
Bring me a father that so loved his child,  
Whose joy of her is overwhelmed like mine;  
He alone can speak comfort to this grief.

*Enter DON PEDRO and CLAUDIO*

Hear you. my lords,--

**DON PEDRO** We have some haste, Leonato.

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

**DON PEDRO** Nay, do not quarrel with us, good old man.

**ANTONIO** If he could right himself with quarreling, some of us would lie low.

**CLAUDIO** Who wrongs him?

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

**CLAUDIO** My villany?

**LEONATO** Thine, Claudio; thine, I say.

**DON PEDRO** You say not right, old man.

**CLAUDIO** Away! I will not have to do with you.

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

Exeunt LEONATO and ANTONIO

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

Enter **BENEDICK**

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

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

**BENEDICK** It is in my scabbard: shall I draw it?

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

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

**BENEDICK** [*To CLAUDIO*] You are a villain; I jest not:  
You have killed a sweet lady, and her death shall fall heavy on you.  
[*To DON PEDRO*] My lord, for your many courtesies I thank you: your brother is fled from Messina: you have among you killed a sweet and innocent lady. For my Lord Lackbeard there, he and I shall meet: and, till then, peace be with him.

Exit

**DON PEDRO** He is in earnest.

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

**DON PEDRO** And hath challenged thee.

**CLAUDIO** Most sincerely.

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

Enter **DOGBERRY**, **VERGES**, **SEACOLE**, **OATCAKE**, with **CONRADE** and **BORACHIO**

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

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

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

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

charge.

**BORACHIO** Sweet prince, let me go no farther to mine answer: do you hear me, and let this count kill me. I have deceived even your very eyes: what your wisdoms could not discover, these shallow fools have brought to light: who in the night overheard me confessing to this man how Don John your brother incensed me to slander the Lady Hero, how you were brought into the orchard and saw me court Margaret in Hero's garments, how you disgraced her, when you should marry her: my villany they have upon record; which I had rather seal with my death than repeat over to my shame. The lady is dead upon mine and my master's false accusation; and, briefly, I desire nothing but the reward of a villain.

**DON PEDRO** Runs not this speech like iron through your blood?

**CLAUDIO** I have drunk poison whiles he utter'd it.

**DON PEDRO** But did my brother set thee on to this?

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

**CLAUDIO** Sweet Hero!

**DOGBERRY** Come, the clerk hath reformed Signior Leonato of the matter: and, masters, do not forget to specify that I am an idiot.

Re-enter LEONATO and ANTONIO, with the Court CLERK

**LEONATO** Art thou the slave that with thy breath hast killed mine innocent child?

**BORACHIO** Yea, even I alone.

**LEONATO** No, not so, villain; thou beliest thyself:

Here stand a pair of honourable men;

A third is fled, that had a hand in it.

I thank you, princes, for my daughter's death.

**CLAUDIO** Choose your revenge upon me.

**LEONATO** I cannot bid you bid my daughter live;

To-morrow morning come you to my house,

And since you could not be my son-in-law,

Be yet my nephew: my brother hath a daughter,

Almost the copy of my child that's dead,  
And she alone is heir to both of us:  
Give her the right you should have given her cousin,  
And so dies my revenge.

**CLAUDIO** O noble sir,

Your over-kindness doth wring tears from me!

**DOGBERRY** Sir, this plaintiff here, the offender, did call me an idiot.

**LEONATO** There's for thy pains. [*Gives him money*]

**DOGBERRY** God save the foundation!

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

**DOGBERRY** We shall meet again, God prohibit it!

Exeunt

SCENE 14. Leonato's orchard.

Enter BENEDICK followed by BEATRICE

**BENEDICK** Sweet Beatrice, wouldst thou come when I called thee?

**BEATRICE** Yea, signior, and depart when you bid me.

**BENEDICK** O, stay but till then!

**BEATRICE** 'Then' is spoken; fare you well now: and yet, ere I go, let me go with that I came; which is, with knowing what hath passed between you and Claudio.

**BENEDICK** Only foul words; and thereupon I will kiss thee.

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

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

**BEATRICE** Very ill.

**BENEDICK** And how do you?

**BEATRICE** Very ill too.

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

Enter URSULA

**URSULA** Madam, you must come to your uncle.

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

**BEATRICE** Will you go hear this news, signior?

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

Exeunt

SCENE 15. Leonato's orchard, set up for a wedding.

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

**FR. FRANCIS** Did I not tell you she was innocent?

**LEONATO** So are the prince and Claudio, who accused her.

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

**LEONATO** Well, daughter, and you gentle-women all,  
Withdraw into a chamber by yourselves,  
And when I send for you, come hither masked.

Exit HERO

**BENEDICK** Friar, I must entreat your pains, I think.

**FR. FRANCIS** To do what, signior?

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

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

**BENEDICK** And I do with an eye of love requite her.

**ANTONIO** What's your will?

**BENEDICK** My will is your good will  
May stand with ours, this day to be conjoined  
In the state of honourable marriage.

Enter DON PEDRO and CLAUDIO, and others

**DON PEDRO** Good morrow to this fair assembly.

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

**CLAUDIO** Yes.

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

*Enter HERO, masked*

**ANTONIO** I do give you her.

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

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

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

**HERO** And when I lived, I was your other wife:  
(Unmasking)  
And when you loved, you were my other husband.

**CLAUDIO** Another Hero!

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

**DON PEDRO** The former Hero! Hero that is dead!

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

**BENEDICK** Beatrice? Do not you love me?

**BEATRICE** Why, no; no more than reason.

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

**BEATRICE** Do not you love me?

**BENEDICK** Troth, no; no more than reason.

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

**BENEDICK** They swore that you were almost sick for me.

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

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

**BEATRICE** No, truly, but in friendly recompense.

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

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

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

**BENEDICK** Here's our own hands against our hearts.

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

**BENEDICK** Peace!

(Embracing her)

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

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

Enter MESSENGER

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

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

*Dance*

*Exeunt*