Much Ado About Nothing
by
William Shakespeare

Act One, Scene 1 (Act One, Scene 1)

Messina. Before Leonato's house.
Enter LEONATO, governor of Messina; HERO, his daughter; and BEATRICE, his niece, with a MESSENGER.

Leonato. 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.

Leonato. How many gentlemen have you lost in this action?

Messenger. But a few of any sort, and none of name.

Leonato. A victory is twice itself when the achiever brings home full numbers. I find here that Don Pedro hath bestow'd much honor on a young Florentine call'd Claudio.

Messenger. Much deserv'd on his part, and equally rememb'red 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. He hath indeed better bett'red expectation than you expect of me to tell you how.

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

Messenger. I have already deliver'd him letters, and there appears much joy in him, even so much that joy could not show itself modest enough without a badge of bitterness.

Leonato. Did he break out in tears?

Messenger. In great measure.

Leonato. A kind overflow of kindness. There are no faces truer than those that are so wash'd. How much better it is to weep at joy than to joy at weeping!

Beatrice. I pray you, is Signior Mountanto return'd from the wars or no?

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

Leonato. What is he that you ask for, niece?

Hero. My cousin means Signior Benedick of Padua.
Messenger. O, he's return'd, and as pleasant as ever he was.

Beatrice. I pray you, how many hath he kill'd and eaten in these wars? But how many hath he kill'd? for indeed I promis'd to eat all of his killing.

Leonato. 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 —

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

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

Messenger. Is't possible?

Beatrice. Very easily possible. He wears his faith but as the fashion of his hat: it ever changes with the next block.

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

Beatrice. No, and he were, I would burn my study. But I pray you, who is his companion? Is there no 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; he is sooner caught than the pestilence, and the taker runs presently mad. God help the noble Claudio! If he have caught the Benedick, it will cost him a thousand pound ere `a be cur'd.

Messenger. I will hold friends with you, lady.

Beatrice. Do, good friend.

Leonato. You will never run mad, niece.

Beatrice. No, not till a hot January.

Messenger. Don Pedro is approach'd.

Enter DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, DON JOHN the Bastard, BORACHIO and CONRADE.

Don Pedro. Good Signior Leonato, are you come to meet your trouble? The fashion of the world is to avoid cost, and you encounter it.

Leonato. 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.

Leonato. Her mother hath many times told me so.

Benedick. Were you in doubt, sir, that you ask'd her?

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

Don Pedro. You have it full, Benedick. We may guess by this what you are, being a man. Truly the lady fathers herself. Be happy, lady, for you are like an honorable father.

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

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

Benedick. What, my dear Lady Disdain! Are you yet living?

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

Benedick. Then is courtesy a turncoat. But it is certain I am lov'd 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 thank God and my cold blood, I am of your humor for that: I'd rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me.

Benedick. God help your ladyship still in that mind! So some gentleman or other shall scape a predestinate scratch'd face.

Beatrice. Scratching could not make it worse, and `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 a' 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: Leonato — Signior Claudio and Signior Benedick — my dear friend Leonato hath invited you all. I tell him we shall stay here at least a month, and he heartily prays some occasion may detain us longer. I dare swear he is no hypocrite, but prays from his heart.

Leonato. If you swear, my lord, you shall not be forsworn. [*To Don John*] Let me bid you welcome, my lord, being reconcil'd 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?

Don Pedro. Your hand, Leonato, we will go together.

Everyone exits except BENEDICK and CLAUDIO, who remain on stage.

Claudio. Benedick, didst thou note the daughter of Signior Leonato?

Benedick. I noted her not, but I look'd 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 profess'd 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 lik'st 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. 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 look'd on.

Benedick. I can see yet without spectacles, and I see no such matter. There's her cousin, and she were not possess'd 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 threescore again? Go to, i' faith, and thou wilt needs thrust thy neck into a yoke, wear the print of it, and sigh away Sundays. Look, Don Pedro is return'd to seek you.

Enter DON PEDRO.

Don Pedro. What secret hath held you here, that you follow'd not to Leonato's?

Benedick. I would your Grace would constrain me to tell.

Don Pedro. I charge thee on thy allegiance.

Benedick. You hear, County Claudio, I can be secret as a dumb man; I would have you think so; but on my allegiance, mark you this, on my allegiance, he is in love. With who? Now that is your Grace's part. Mark how short his answer is: with Hero, Leonato'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 fetch me in, my lord.

Don Pedro. By my troth, I speak my thought.

Claudio. And in faith, my lord, I spoke mine.

Benedick. And by my two faiths and troths, my lord, I spoke mine.

Claudio. That I love her, I feel.

Don Pedro. That she is worthy, I know.

Benedick. That I neither feel how she should be lov'd, 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. Thou wast ever an obstinate heretic in the despite of beauty.

Benedick. That a woman conceiv'd me, I thank her; that she brought me up, I likewise give her most humble thanks; but because I will not do them the wrong to mistrust any, I will do myself the right to trust none; and the fine is (for the which I may go the finer), 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. Nay, if Cupid have not spent all his quiver in Venice, thou shalt quake for this shortly.

Benedick. I look for an earthquake too then.

Don Pedro. In the mean time, good Signior Benedick, repair to Leonato's, commend me to him, and tell him I will not fail him at supper, for indeed he hath made great preparations.

Benedick. I have almost matter enough in me for such an embassage, and so I commit you — Nay, mock not, mock not. Ere you flout old ends any further, examine your conscience, and so, I leave you.

Exit BENEDICK

Claudio. My liege, your Highness now may do me good.

Don Pedro. My love is thine to teach; teach it but how,
And thou shalt see how apt it is to learn
Any hard lesson that may do thee good.

Claudio. Hath Leonato any son, my lord?

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

Claudio. O, my lord,
When you went onward on this ended action,
I look'd upon her with a soldier's eye,
That lik'd, but had a rougher task in hand
Than to drive liking to the name of love.
But now I am return'd, and that 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 lik'd her ere I went to wars.

Don Pedro. Thou wilt be like a lover presently,
And tire the hearer with a book of words.
If thou dost love fair Hero, cherish it,
And I will break with her, and with her father,
And thou shalt have her. Was't not to this end
That thou began'st to twist so fine a story?

Claudio. How sweetly you do minister to love,
That know love's grief by his complexion!
But lest my liking might too sudden seem,
I would have salv'd it with a longer treatise.

Don Pedro. What need the bridge much broader than the flood?
The fairest grant is the necessity.
Look what will serve is fit: 'tis once, thou lovest,
And 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
And strong encounter of my amorous tale;
Then after to her father will I break,
And the conclusion is, she shall be thine.
In the practice let us put it presently.

Exit DON PEDRO and CLAUDIO.

Act One, Scene 2 (Act One, Scene 2)

Enter LEONATO and ANTONIO, brother to Leonato.

Leonato. How now, brother, where is my cousin, your son? Hath he provided this music?

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

Leonato. Are they good?

Antonio. As the event stamps them, but they have a good cover; they show well outward. The Prince and Count Claudio, walking in a thick-pleach'd alley in my orchard, were thus much overheard by a man of mine. The Prince discover'd to Claudio that he lov'd 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.

Leonato. Hath the fellow any wit that told you this?

Antonio. A good sharp fellow. I will send for him, and question him yourself.

Leonato. No, no, we will hold it as a dream till it appear itself; but I will acquaint my daughter withal, that she may be better prepar'd for an answer, if peradventure this be true. Go you and tell her of it. [*Several persons cross the stage*.] Cousins, you know what you have to do. O, I cry you mercy, friend, go you with me, and I will use your skill. Good cousin, have a care this busy time.

All exit.

Act One, Scene 3 (Act One, Scene 3)

Enter DON JOHN, the Bastard and CONRADE, his companion.

Conrade. 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.

Conrade. You should hear reason.

Don John. And when I have heard it, what blessing brings it?

Conrade. If not a present remedy, at least a patient sufferance.

Don John. I wonder that thou (being, as thou say'st thou art, born under Saturn) goest about to apply a moral medicine to a mortifying mischief. I cannot hide what I am: I must be sad when I have cause, and smile at no man's jests; eat when I have stomach, and wait for no man's leisure; sleep when I am drowsy, and tend on no man's business; laugh when I am merry, and claw no man in his humor.

Conrade. Yea, but you must not make the full show of this till you may do it without controlment. 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 would rather be a canker in a hedge than a rose in his grace, and it better fits my blood to be disdain'd of all than to fashion a carriage to rob love from any. In this (though I cannot be said to be a flattering honest man) it must not be denied but I am a plain-dealing villain. I am trusted with a muzzle, and enfranchis'd 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 mean time let me be that I am, and seek not to alter me.

Conrade. Can you make no use of your discontents?

Don John. I make all use of it, for I use it only. Who comes here?

Enter BORACHIO.

Don John. What news, Borachio?

Borachio. I came yonder from a great supper. The Prince your brother is royally entertain'd by Leonato, 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?

Borachio. Marry, it is your brother's right hand.

Don John. Who, the most exquisite Claudio?

Borachio. Even he.

Don John. A proper squire! And who, and who? Which way looks he?

Borachio. Marry, one Hero, the daughter and heir of Leonato.

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

Borachio. Being entertain'd for a perfumer, as I was smoking a musty room, comes me the Prince and Claudio, hand in hand in sad conference. I whipt me behind the arras, and there heard it agreed upon that the Prince should woo Hero for himself, and having obtain'd 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 in any way, I bless myself every way. You are both sure and will assist me?

Conrade. To the death, my lord.

Don John. Let us to the great supper, their cheer is the greater that I am subdu'd. Would the cook were a' my mind! Shall we go prove what's to be done?

Borachio. We'll wait upon your lordship.

All exit.

Act One, Scene 4 (Act Two, Scene 1)

Enter LEONATO, ANTONIO his brother, HERO his daughter, and BEATRICE his niece, MARGARET, URSULA, and a KINSMAN.

Leonato. 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-burn'd 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: the one is too like an image and says nothing, and the other too like my lady's eldest son, evermore tattling.

Leonato. Then half Signior Benedick's tongue in Count John's mouth, and half Count John's melancholy in Signior Benedick's face —

Beatrice. With a good leg and a good foot, uncle, and money enough in his purse, such a man would win any woman in the world, if `a could get her good will.

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. Too curst is more than curst.

Leonato. So, by being too curst, God will send you —

Beatrice. If he send me no husband, for which blessing I am at him upon my knees every morning and evening. Lord, I could not endure a husband with a beard on his face, I'd rather lie in the woollen!

Leonato. 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? He that hath a beard is more than a youth, and he that hath no beard is less than a man; and he that is more than a youth is not for me, and he that is less than a man, I am not for him; therefore I will even take sixpence in earnest of the berrord, and lead his apes into hell.

Leonato. Well then, go you into hell.

Beatrice. No, but to the gate, and there will the devil meet me like an old cuckold with horns on his head, and say, "Get you to heaven, Beatrice, get you to heaven, here's no place for you maids." So deliver I up my apes, and away to Saint Peter. For the heavens, he shows me where the bachelors sit, and there live we as merry as the day is long.

Antonio. [*To Hero*.] Well, niece, I trust you will be rul'd by your father.

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

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

Beatrice. Not till God make men of some other mettle than earth. Would it not grieve a woman to be overmaster'd with a piece of valiant dust? To make an account of her life to a clod of wayward marl? No, uncle, I'll none. Adam's sons are my brethren, and truly I hold it a sin to march in my kinred.

Leonato. Daughter, remember what I told you. If the Prince do solicit you in that kind, you know your answer.

Beatrice. The fault will be in the music, cousin, if you be not woo'd in good time. If the Prince be too important, tell him there is a measure in every thing, and so dance out the answer. For hear me, Hero: wooing, wedding, and repenting, is as a Scotch jig, a measure, and a cinquepace; the first suit is hot and hasty, like a Scotch jig, and full as fantastical; the wedding, mannerly-modest, as a measure, full of state and ancientry; and then comes repentance, and with his bad legs falls into the cinquepace faster and faster, till he sink into his grave.

Leonato. Cousin, you apprehend passing shrewdly.

Beatrice. I have a good eye, uncle, I can see a church by daylight.

Leonato. The revelers are ent'ring, brother, make good room.

They put on their masks.

Enter PRINCE DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, and BENEDICK, and DON JOHN and BORACHIO as maskers.

Don Pedro. 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 favor, for God defend the lute should be like the case.

Don Pedro. Speak low if you speak of love.

They move 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.

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

Borachio. No more words; the clerk is answer'd.

They move aside.

Ursula. I know you well enough, you are Signior Antonio.

Antonio. At a word, I am not.

Ursula. I know you by the waggling 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 mum, you are he. Graces will appear, and there's an end.

They move aside.

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.

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 villainy, 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 have boarded me.

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

Beatrice. Do, do, he'll but break a comparison or two on me, which peradventure, not mark'd, or laugh'd at, strikes him into melancholy, and then there's a partridge wing sav'd, for the fool will eat no supper that night.

Music for the dance begins.

Beatrice. 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 all exit except DON JOHN, BORACHIO, and CLAUDIO.

Don John. Sure my brother is amorous on Hero, and hath withdrawn her father to break with him about it. The ladies follow her, and but one visor remains.

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

Don John. Are you not Signior Benedick?

Claudio. You know me well, I am he.

Don John. Signior, you are very near my brother in his love. He is enamor'd 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.

Don John. Come let us to the banquet.

DON JOHN and BORACHIO exit. CLAUDIO remains.

Claudio. Thus answer I in 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;
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!

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, like a usurer's chain? Or under your arm like a lieutenant's scarf? You must wear it one way, for the prince hath got your Hero.

Claudio. I wish him joy of her.

Benedick. Why, that's spoken like an honest drovier; so they sell bullocks. But did you think the Prince would have serv'd you thus?

Claudio. I pray you leave me.

Benedick. Ho, now you sound 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 CLAUDIO.

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! Hah, 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 give me out. Well, I'll be revenged as I may.

Enter the PRINCE DON PEDRO

Don Pedro. Now, signior, where's the Count? Did you see him?

Benedick. Troth, my lord, I have play'd the part of Lady Fame. 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 off'red him my company to a willow-tree, either to make him a garland, as being forsaken, or to bind him up a rod, as worthy to be whipt.

Don Pedro. To be whipt? What's his fault?

Benedick. The flat transgression of a schoolboy, who being overjoy'd with finding a bird's nest, shows it his companion, and he steals it.

Don Pedro. The transgression is in the stealer.

Benedick. And the rod he might have bestow'd on you, who (as I take it) have stol'n his bird's nest.

Don Pedro. I will 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 danc'd with her told her she is much wrong'd by you.

Benedick. O, she misus'd me past the endurance of a block; an oak but with one green leaf on it would have answer'd her. My very visor began to assume life, and scold with her. 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, though she were endow'd with all that Adam had left him before he transgress'd. Come, talk not of her. I would to God some scholar would conjure her, for certainly, while she is here, a man may live as quiet in hell as in a sanctuary, and people sin upon purpose, because they would go thither; so indeed all disquiet, horror, and perturbation follows her.

Enter CLAUDIO and BEATRICE, LEONATO and HERO.

Don Pedro. Look here she comes.

Benedick. Will your Grace command me any service to the world's end? I will go on the slightest arrand now to the Antipodes that you can devise to send me on; I will fetch you a toothpicker now from the furthest inch of Asia, bring you the length of Prester John's foot, fetch you a hair off the great Cham's beard, do you any embassage to the Pigmies, 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.

BENEDICK exits.

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. Marry, once before he won it of me with false dice, therefore your Grace may well say I have lost it.

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 woo'd in thy name, and fair Hero is won. I have broke with her father, and his good will obtain'd. 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 all grace say amen to it.

Beatrice. Speak, Count, 'tis your cue.

Claudio. Silence is the perfectest heralt 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. 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. 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 hath 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, for out a' question, you were born in a merry hour.

Beatrice. No, sure, my lord, my mother cried, but then there was a star danc'd and under that I was born. Cousins, God give you joy!

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

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

BEATRICE exits.

Don Pedro. By my troth, a pleasant-spirited lady.

Leonato. 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 dreamt of unhappiness, and wak'd herself with laughing.

Don Pedro. 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. County Claudio, when mean you to go to church?

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

Leonato. Not till Monday, my dear son, which is hence a just sevennight, 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 will not go dully by us. I will in the interim undertake one of Hercules' labors, which is, to bring Signior Benedick and the Lady Beatrice into a mountain of affection th' one with th' other. I would fain have it a match, and I doubt not but to fashion it, if you three will but minister such assistance as I shall give you direction.

Leonato. My lord, I am for you, though it cost me ten nights' watchings.

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 approv'd valor, and confirm'd honesty. I will teach you how to humor your cousin that she shall fall in love with Benedick, and I, with your two helps, will so practice on Benedick that, in despite of his quick wit and his queasy stomach, he shall fall in love with Beatrice. If we can do this, Cupid is no longer an archer; his glory shall be ours, for we are the only love-gods. Go in with me, and I will tell you my drift.

All exit.

Act One, Scene 5 (Act Two, Scene 2)

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. Any bar, any cross, any impediment will be med'cinable to me. I am sick in displeasure to him, and whatsoever comes athwart his affection ranges evenly with mine. How canst thou cross this marriage?

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

Don John. Show me briefly how.

Borachio. I think I told your lordship a year since, how much I am in the favor of Margaret, the waiting gentlewoman to Hero.

Don John. I remember.

Borachio. 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; spare not to tell him that he hath wrong'd his honor in marrying the renown'd 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?

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

Don John. Only to despite them, I will endeavor any thing.

Borachio. Go then, find me a meet hour to draw Don Pedro and the Count Claudio alone, tell them that you know that Hero loves me, intend a kind of zeal both to the Prince and Claudio — as in love of your brother's honor, who hath made this match, and his friend's reputation, who is thus like to be cozen'd with the semblance of a maid — that you have discover'd thus. They will scarcely believe this without trial. Offer them instances, which shall bear no less likelihood than to see me at her chamber-window, hear me call Margaret Hero, hear Margaret term me Claudio; and bring them to see this the very night before the intended wedding — for in the mean time 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 call'd assurance, and all the preparation overthrown.

Don John. Grow this to what adverse issue it can, I will put it in practice. Be cunning in the working this, and thy fee is a thousand ducats.

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

Don John. I will presently go learn their day of marriage.

All exit.

Act One, Scene 6 (Act Two, Scene 3)

Enter BENEDICK alone.

Benedick. I do wonder that one man, seeing how much another man is a fool when he dedicates his behaviors to love, will, after he hath laugh'd at such shallow follies in others, become the argument of his own scorn by falling 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 tabor and the pipe; I have known when he would have walk'd ten mile afoot to see a good armor, and now will he lie ten nights awake carving the fashion of a new doublet; he was wont to speak plain and to the purpose (like an honest man and a soldier), and now he turn'd ortography — his words are a very fantastical banquet, just so many strange dishes. May I be so converted and see with these eyes? I cannot tell; I think not. I will not be sworn but love may transform me to an oyster, but I'll take my oath on it, till he have made an oyster of me, he shall never make me such a fool. 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 whatever color it please God. Hah! The Prince and Monsieur Love. I will hide me in the arbor.

Enter DON PEDRO, LEONATO, CLAUDIO.

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. See you where Benedick hath hid himself?

Claudio. O, very well, my lord.

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. [*Aside*.] O, ay, stalk on, stalk on, the fowl sits — I did never think that lady would have lov'd 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 seem'd to abhor.

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

Leonato. By my troth, my lord, I cannot tell what to think of it but that she loves him with an enrag'd affection; it is past the infinite of thought.

Don Pedro. May be she doth but counterfeit.

Claudio. Faith, like enough.

Leonato. 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. [*Aside*.] Bait the hook well, this fish will bite.

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

Claudio. She did indeed.

Don Pedro. How, how, I pray you? You amaze me, I would have 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. Knavery cannot sure hide himself in such reverence.

Claudio. He hath ta'en th' 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.

Claudio. 'Tis true, indeed, so your daughter says. "Shall I," says she, "that have so oft encount'red him with scorn, write to him that I love him?"

Leonato. 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.

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

Claudio. That.

Leonato. O, she tore that letter into a thousand halfpence; rail'd at herself, that she should be so immodest to write to one that she knew would flout her. "I measure him," says she, "by my own spirit, for I should flout him, if he writ to me, yea, though I love him, I should."

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!"

Leonato. 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. And 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 everything but in loving Benedick.

Leonato. O my lord, wisdom and blood combating in so tender a body, we have ten proofs to one that blood hath the victory. I am sorry for her, as I have just cause, being her uncle and her guardian.

Don Pedro. I would she had bestow'd this dotage on me, I would have daff'd all other respects, and made her half myself. I pray you tell Benedick of it, and hear what 'a will say.

Leonato. 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 bate one breath of her accustom'd 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. 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. As Hector, I assure you, and in the managing of quarrels you may say he is wise, for either he avoids them with great discretion, or undertakes them with a most Christian-like fear.

Leonato. If he do fear God, 'a must necessarily keep peace; if he break the peace, he ought to enter into a quarrel with fear and trembling.

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.

Leonato. 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.

Leonato. My lord, will you walk? Dinner is ready.

Claudio. [*Aside*.] If he do not dote on her upon this, I will never trust my expectation.

Don Pedro. [*Aside*.] 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, which will be merely a dumb show. Let us send her to call him to dinner.

Exit DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO and LEONATO.

Benedick. 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? Why, it must be requited. I hear how I am censur'd; 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. I did never think to marry. I must seem proud; happy are they that hear their detrations, and can put them to mending. 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 rail'd so long against marriage; but doth not the appetite alter? A man loves meat in his youth that he cannot endure in his age. Shall quips and sentences and these paper bullets of the brain awe a man from the career of his humor? 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 take upon a knive's point. You have no stomach, signior, fare you well.

Exit BEATRICE.

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; if I do not love her, I am a Jew. I will go get her picture.

Exit BENEDICK.

Act One, Scene 7 (Act Three, Scene 1)

Enter HERO and two gentlewomen, MARGARET and URSULA.

Hero. Good Margaret, run thee to the parlor,
There shalt thou find my cousin Beatrice
Proposing with the Prince and Claudio.
Whisper her ear, and tell her I and Ursley
Walk in the orchard and our whole discourse
Is all of her. Say that thou overheardst us,
And bid her steal into the pleached bower.
There will she hide her,
To listen our propose. This is thy office;
Bear thee well in it, and leave us alone.

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

Exit MARGARET.

Hero. Now, Ursula, when Beatrice doth come,
As we do trace this alley up and down,
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. Of this matter
Is little Cupid's crafty arrow made,
That only wounds by hearsay.

Enter BEATRICE, behind.

Hero. Now begin,
For look where Beatrice, like a lapwing runs
Close by the ground to hear our conference.

Ursula. The pleasant'st angling is to see the fish
Cut with her golden oars the silver stream,
And greedily devour the treacherous bait;
So angle we now for Beatrice, who even now
Is couched in the woodbine coverture.
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.
No, truly, Ursula, she is too disdainful,
I know her spirits are as coy and wild
As haggards 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 lov'd Benedick,
To wish him wrastle 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 fram'd 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,
Nor take no shape nor project of affection,
She is so self-endeared.

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

Hero. Why, you speak truth. I never yet saw man,
How wise, how noble, young, how rarely featur'd,
But she would spell him backward. If fair-fac'd,
She would swear the gentleman should be her sister;
If black, why, Nature, drawing of an antic,
Made a foul blot; if tall, a lance ill-headed;
If low, an agot very vildly cut;
If speaking, why, a vane blown with all winds;
If silent, why, a block moved with none.
So turns she every man the wrong side out,
And never gives to truth and virtue that
Which simpleness and merit purchaseth.

Ursula. Sure, sure, such carping is not commendable.

Hero. No, not to be so odd, and from all fashions,
As Beatrice is, cannot be commendable.
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 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,
Which is as bad as die with tickling.

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 —
Having so swift and excellent a wit
As she is priz'd to have — 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 valor,
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 attires, and have thy counsel
Which is the best to furnish me to-morrow.

Ursula. [*Aside*.] She's limed, I warrant you. We have caught her, madam.

Hero. [*Aside*.] If it prove so, then loving goes by haps.
Some Cupid kills with arrows, some with traps.

Exit HERO and URSULA.

Beatrice. 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 in a holy band;
For others say thou dost deserve, and I
Believe it better than reportingly.

Exit BEATRICE.

Act One, Scene 8 (Act Three, Scene 2)

Enter DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK and LEONATO.

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 twice or thrice cut Cupid's bow-string, and the little hangman dare not shoot at him. 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.

Leonato. So say I, methinks you are sadder.

Claudio. I hope he be in love.

Don Pedro. Hang him, truant, there's no true drop of blood in him to be truly touch'd with love. If he be sad, he wants money.

Benedick. I have a toothache.

Don Pedro. Draw it.

Claudio. You must hang it first, and draw it afterwards.

Don Pedro. What? Sigh for the toothache?

Leonato. Where is but a humor or a worm.

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. 'A brushes his hat 'a mornings; what should that bode?

Don Pedro. Hath any man seen him at the barber's?

Claudio. No, but the barber's man hath been seen with him, and the old ornament of his cheek hath already stuff'd tennis balls.

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

Don Pedro. Nay, 'a rubs himself with civet. Can you smell him out by that?

Claudio. That's as much 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? For the which I hear what they say of him.

Claudio. Nay, but his jesting spirit, which is no crept into a lute-string and now govern'd by stops.

Don Pedro. Indeed that tells a heavy tale for him. Conclude, 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. Old signior, walk aside with me, I have studied eight or nine wise words to speak to you, which these hobby-horses must not hear.

Exit BENEDICK and LEONATO.

Don Pedro. For my life, to break with him about Beatrice.

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

Enter DON JOHN, the Bastard.

Don John. My lord and brother, God save you!

Don Pedro. Good den, brother.

Don John. If your leisure serv'd, 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. You may think I love you not; let that appear hereafter, and aim better at me by that I now will manifest. For my brother, I think he holds you well, and in dearness of heart hath holp to effect your ensuing marriage — surely suit ill spent and labor ill advised.

Don Pedro. Why, what's the matter?

Don John. I came hither to tell you, and circumstances short'ned (for she has been too long a-talking of), the lady is disloyal.

Claudio. Who, Hero?

Don John. Even she — Leonato'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 ent'red, even the night before her wedding-day. If you love her, the to-morrow wed her; but it would better fit your honor 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 woo'd 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.

Don Pedro. O day untowardly turn'd!

Claudio. O mischief strangely thwarting!

Don John. O plague right well prevented! So will you say when you have seen the sequel.

Exit all.

Act Two, Scene 1 (Act Three, Scene 3)

Enter DOGBERRY with his compartner 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, neighbor Dogberry.

Dogberry. First, who think you the most desartless man to be constable?

1 Watch. Hugh Oatcake, sir, or George Seacole, for they can write and read.

Dogberry. Come hither, neighbor Seacole. God hath blest you with a good name. To be a well-favor'd man is a gift of fortune, but to write and read comes by nature.

2 Watch. Both which, Master Constable —

Dogberry. You have: I knew it would be your answer. Well, for your favor, sir, why give God thanks and 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 lanthorn. This is your charge: you shall comprehend all vagrom men; you are to bid any man stand, in the Prince's name.

2 Watch. 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 the 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 endur'd.

2 Watch. We would 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 stol'n. Well, you are to call at all the alehouses, and bid those that are drunk get them to bed.

2 Watch. 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.

2 Watch. Well, sir.

Dogberry. If you meet a thief, you may suspect him, by virtue of your office, to be no true man; and for such kind of men, the less you meddle or make with them, why, the more is for your honesty.

2 Watch. 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 defil'd. 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. You have always been 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.

2 Watch. 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: you, constable, are to present the Prince's own person. If you meet the Prince in the night, you may stay him.

Verges. Nay, by'r lady, that I think 'a cannot.

Dogberry. Five shillings to one on't, with any man who knows the statues, he may stay him; marry, not without the Prince be willing, for indeed the watch ought to offend no man, and it is an offense to stay a man against his will.

Verges. By'r lady, I think it be so.

Dogberry. Ha, ah ha! Well, masters, good night. And there be any matter of weight chances, call up me. Keep your fellows' counsels and your own, and good night. Come, neighbor.

2 Watch. 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 neighbors. 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 vigitant, I beseech you.

Exit DOGBERRY and VERGES.

Enter BORACHIO and CONRADE.

Borachio. What, Conrade!

2 Watch. [*Aside*.] Peace, stir not.

Borachio. Conrade I say!

Conrade. Here, man, I am at thy elbow.

Borachio. And my elbow itch'd; I thought there would a scab follow.

Conrade. I will owe thee an answer for that, and now forward with thy tale.

Borachio. Stand thee close then under this penthouse, for it drizzles rain, and I will, like a true drunkard, utter all to thee.

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

Borachio. Therefore know I have earn'd of Don John a thousand ducats.

Conrade. Is it possible that any villainy should be so dear?

Borachio. Thou shouldst rather ask if it were possible any villainy should be so rich; for when rich villains have need of poor ones, poor ones may make what price they will.

Conrade. I wonder at it.

Borachio. That shows thou art unconfirm'd. But seest thou not what a deformed thief this fashion is?

1 Watch. [*Aside*.] I know that Deformed; 'a has been a vile thief this seven year: 'a goes up and down like a gentleman. I remember his name.

Borachio. Didst thou not hear somebody?

Conrade. No, 'twas the vane on the house. But art not thou thyself giddy that thou hast shifted out of thy tale?

Borachio. Not so neither, but know that I have to-night woo'd 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 — I tell this tell vildly, I should first tell thee how the Prince, Claudio, and my master, planted and plac'd and possess'd by my master Don John, saw afar off in the orchard this amiable encounter.

Conrade. And thought they Margaret was Hero?

Borachio. Two of them did, the Prince and Claudio, but the devil my master knew she was Margaret; and partly by his oaths, which first possess'd them, partly by the dark night, which did deceive them, but chiefly by my villainy, which did confirm any slander that Don John had made, away went Claudio enrag'd; 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.

1 Watch. We charge you in the Prince's name, stand!

2 Watch. Call up the right Master Constable. We have here recover'd the most dangerous piece of lechery that ever was known in the commonwealth.

1 Watch. And one Deformed is one of them; I know him.

Enter DOGBERRY and VERGES.

Dogberry. Masters, masters —

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

Dogberry. Master, never speak, we charge you; let us obey you to go with us.

Borachio. We are like to prove a goodly commodity, being taken up of these men's bills.

Conrade. A commodity in question, I warrant you. Come, we'll obey you.

Exit all.

Act Two, Scene 2 (Act Three, Scene 4)

Enter HERO and 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 URSULA.

Margaret. Troth, I think your other rebato 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. 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 asham'd?

Margaret. Of what, lady? Of speaking honorably? Is not marriage honorable in a beggar? An bad thinking do not wrest true speaking, 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. Ask my Lady Beatrice else, here she comes.

Enter BEATRICE.

Hero. Good morning, coz.

Beatrice. Good morning, sweet Hero.

Hero. Why, how now? Do you speak in the sick tune?

Beatrice. I am out of all other tune, methinks. 'Tis almost five a' 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 stuff'd, cousin, I cannot smell.

Margaret. A maid, and stuff'd! There's a goodly catching of cold!

Beatrice. O God, help me, God help me, how long have you profess'd apprehension?

Margaret. Ever 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 distill'd *carduus benedictus*, and lay it on your heart; it is the only thing for a qualm.

Hero. There thou prick'st her with a thistle.

Beatrice. *Benedictus*! Why *benedictus*? You have some moral in this *benedictus*?

Margaret. Moral? No, by my troth I have no moral meaning, I meant plain holy-thistle. You may think perchance that I think you are in love. Nay, by'r lady, I am not such a fool to think that you are in love, or that you will be in love, or that you can be love. But Benedick was such another, and now is he become a man. He swore he would never marry, and yet now in spite 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.

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

Exit all.

Act Two, Scene 3 (Act Three, Scene 5)

Enter LEONATO, DOGBERRY, and VERGES.

Leonato. What would you have with me, honest neighbor?

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, that it is, sir.

Verges. Yes, in truth it is, sir.

Leonato. What is it, my good friends?

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

Leonato. Neighbors, you are tedious.

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

Leonato. All thy tediousness on me, ah?

Dogberry. Yea, and 'twere a thousand pound more that 'tis, for I hear as good exclamation on your worship as of any man in the city, and though I be but a poor man, I am glad to hear of it.

Verges. And so am I.

Leonato. I would fain know what you have to say.

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

Dogberry. 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, neighbor Verges. Well, God's a good man; and two men ride of a horse, one must ride behind. An honest soul, i' Faith, sir, by my troth he is, as ever broke bread; but God is to be worshipp'd; all men are not alike, alas, good neighbor!

Leonato. Indeed, neighbor, he comes too short of you.

Dogberry. Gifts that God gives.

Leonato. I must leave you.

Dogberry. One word, sir. Our watch, sir, have indeed comprehended two aspicious persons, and we would have them this morning examin'd before your worship.

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

Dogberry. It shall be suffigance.

Leonato. Drink some wine ere you go; fare you well.

Enter BUTLER.

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

Leonato. I'll wait upon them, I am ready.

Exit LEONATO and BUTLER.

Dogberry. Go, good partner, go, get you to Francis Seacole, bid him to 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. Here's that shall drive some of them to a non-come; only get the learned writer to set down our excommunication, and meet me at the jail.

Exit all.

Act Two, Scene 4 (Act Four, Scene 1)

Enter DON PEDRO, DON JOHN the Bastard, LEONATO, FRIAR FRANCIS, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, HERO, and BEATRICE with ATTENDANTS.

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

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

Claudio. No.

Leonato. To be married to her. Friar, you come to marry her.

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

Hero. I do.

Friar. If either of you know any inward impediment why you should not be conjoin'd, I charge you on your souls to utter it.

Claudio. Know you any, Hero?

Hero. None, my lord.

Friar. Know you any, Count?

Leonato. I dare make his answer, none.

Claudio. O, what men dare do! What men may do! What men daily do, not knowing what they do!

Benedict. How now! Interjections? Why then, some be of laughing as, ah, ha, he!

Claudio. Stand thee by, friar. Father, by your leave,
Will you with free and unconstrained soul
Give me this maid, your daughter?

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

Claudio. And what have I to give you back whose worth
May counterpoise this rich and precious gift?

Don Pedro. Nothing, unless you render her again.

Claudio. Sweet Prince, you learn me noble thankfulness.
There, Leonato, take her back again.
Give not this rotten orange to your friend,
She's but the sign and semblance of her honor.
Behold how like a maid she blushes here!
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.

Leonato. What do you mean, my lord?

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

Leonato. 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, Leonato,
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. You seem to me as Dian in her orb,
As chaste as is the bud ere it be blown;
But you are more intemperate in your blood
Than Venus, or those pamp'red animals
That rage in savage sensuality.

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 dishonor'd that have gone about
To link my dear friend to a common stale.

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. "True"! O God!

Claudio. Leonato, stand I here?
Is this the Prince? Is this the Prince's brother?
Is this face Hero's? are our eyes our own?

Leonato. All of this is so, but what of this, my lord?

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

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

Hero. O God defend me, how am I beset!
What kind of catechizing 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 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 you are no maiden. Leonato,

I am sorry you must hear. Upon mine honor,
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. Fie, fie, they are not to be named, my lord,
Not to be spoke of;
There is not chastity enough in language
Without offense to utter them. Thus, pretty lady,
I am sorry for thy much misgovernment.

Claudio. O Hero! What a Hero hadst thou been,
If half thy outward graces hadst been placed
About thy thoughts and counsels of thy heart!
But fare thee well, most foul, most fair! Farewell,
Thou pure impiety and impious purity!
For thee I'll lock up all the gates of love,
And on my eyelids shall conjecture hang,
To turn all beauty into thoughts of harm,
And never shall it more be gracious.

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

[*Hero swoons*.]

Beatrice. Why, how now, cousin, wherefore sink you down?

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

Exit 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,
Death is the fairest cover for her shame
That may be wished for.

Beatrice. How now, cousin Hero?

Friar. Have comfort, lady.

Leonato. Dost thou look up?

Friar. Yea, wherefore should she not?

Leonato. 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. Griev'd I, I had but one?
Chid I for that at frugal nature's frame?
O, one too much by thee! Why had I one?
Why ever was thou lovely in my eyes?
Why had I not with charitable hand
Took up a beggar's issue at my gates,
Who smirched thus and mir'd with infamy,
I might have said, "No part of it is mine;
This shame derives itself from unknown loins"?
But mine, and mine I lov'd and mine I prais'd,
And mine that I was proud on, mine so much
That I myself was to myself not mine,
Valuing of her — why, she, O she is fall'n
Into a pit of ink, that the wide sea
Hath drops too few to wash her clean again,
And salt too little which may season give
To her foul tainted flesh!

Benedick. Sir, sir, 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. Lady, were you her bedfellow last night?

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

Leonato. Confirm'd, confirm'd! O, that is stronger made
Which was before barr'd up with ribs of iron!
Would the two princes lie, and Claudio lie,
Who lov'd her so, that speaking of her foulness,

Wash'd it with tears? Hence from her, let her die.

Friar. Hear me a little,
For I have only been silent so long,
And given way unto this course of fortune,
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,
Which with experimental seal doth warrant
The tenor of my book; trust not my age,
My reverence, calling, nor divinity,
If this sweet lady lie not guiltless here
Under some biting error.

Leonato. Friar, it cannot be.
Thou seest that all the grace that she hath left
Is that 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?

Friar. Lady, what man is he you are accus'd 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! O my father,
Prove you that any man with me convers'd
At hours unmeet, or that I yesternight
Maintain'd the change of words with any creature,
Refuse me, hate me, torture me to death!

Friar. There is some strange misprision in the princes.

Benedick. Two of them have the very bent of honor,
And if their wisdoms be misled in this,
The practice of it lives in John the Bastard,
Whose spirits toil in frame of villainies.

Leonato. I know not. If they speak truth of her,
These hands shall tear her; if they wrong her honor,

The proudest of them shall well hear of it.
Time hath not yet so dried this blood of mine,
Nor age so eat up my invention,
Nor fortune made such havoc of my means,
Nor my bad life reft me so much of friends,
But they shall find, awak'd in such a kind,
Both strength of limb, and policy of mind,
Ability in means, and choice of friends,
To quit me of them thoroughly.

Friar. 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.

Leonato. What shall become of this? What will this do?

Friar. Marry, this well carried shall on her behalf
Change slander to remorse; that is some good.
But not for that dream I on this strange course,
But on this travail look for greater birth:
She dying, as it must be so maintain'd,
Upon the instant she was accus'd
Shall be lamented, pitied, and excus'd
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,
Why then we rack the value; then 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,
Th' idea of her life shall sweetly creep
Into his study of imagination,
And every lovely organ of her life
Shall come apparell'd in more precious habit,
More moving, delicate and full of life,
Into the eye and prospect of his soul,
Than when she liv'd indeed. Then shall he mourn,
If ever love had interest in his liver,
And wish he had not so accused her;
No, though he thought his accusation true.

Let this be so, and doubt not but success
Will fashion the event in better shape
Than I can lay it down in likelihood.
But if all aim but this be levell'd false,
The supposition of the lady's death
Will quench the wonder of her infamy.
And if it sort not well, you may conceal her.
As best befits her wounded reputation,
In some reclusive and religious life,
Out of all eyes, tongues, minds, and injuries.

Benedick. Signior Leonato, let the friar advise you,
And though you know my inwardness and love
Is very much unto the Prince and Claudio,
Yet by mine honor, I will deal in this
As secretly and justly as your soul
Should with your body.

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

Friar. 'Tis well consented; presently away,
For to strange sores strangely they strain the cure.
Come, lady, die to live; this wedding-day
Perhaps is but prolong'd, have patience and endure.

Exit all but BENEDICK and BEATRICE.

Benedick. Lady Beatrice, have you wept all this while?

Beatrice. Yea, and I will weep a while longer.

Benedicki. I will not desire that.

Beatrice. You have no reason, I do it freely.

Benedick. Surely I do believe your fair cousin is wrong'd.

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 lov'd 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. Will you not eat your word?

Benedick. With no sauce that can be devis'd to it. I protest I love thee.

Beatrice. Why then God forgive me!

Benedick. What offense, sweet Beatrice?

Beatrice. You have stay'd me in a happy hour, I was about to protest I lov'd 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.

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. Beatrice —

Beatrice. 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. Is 'a not approv'd in the height a villain, that hath slander'd, scorn'd, dishonor'd my kinswoman? O that I were a man! What, bear her in hand until they come to take hands, and then with public accusation, uncover'd slander, unmitigated rancor — O God, that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the market-place.

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 wrong'd, she is sland'red, she is undone.

Benedick. Beat—

Beatrice. Princes and counties! Surely a princely testimony, a goodly count, Count Comfect, 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 cur'sies, valor into compliment, and men are only turn'd into tongue, and trim ones too. He is now valiant as Hercules that only tells a lie, and swears it. I cannot be a man with wishing, therefore I will die a woman with grieving.

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

Beatrice. Use it for my love some other way that swearing by it.

Benedick. Think you in your soul the Count Claudio hath wrong'd Hero?

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

Benedick. Enough, I am engag'd, 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.

Exit BENEDICK.

Act Two, Scene 5 (Act Four, Scene 2)

Enter DOGBERRY, VERGES and the SEXTON and the WATCH with CONRADE and BORACHIO.

Dogberry. Is our whole dissembly appear'd?

Verges. 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 examin'd? Let them come before Master Constable.

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

Borachio. Borachio**.**

Dogberry. Pray write down Borachio. Yours, sirrah?

Conrade. I am a gentleman, sir, and my name is Conrade.

Dogberry. Write down Master Gentleman Conrade. Masters, do you serve God?

Both [Conrade, Borachio]. Yea, sir, we hope.

Dogberry. Write down, that they hope they serve God; and write God first, for God defend that God should go before such villains! Masters, it is prov'd already that you are little better than false knaves, and it will go near to be thought so shortly. How answer you for yourselves?

Conrade. Marry, sir, we say we are none.

Dogberry. A marvelous witty fellow, I assure you, but I will go about with him. Come you hither, sirrah; a word in your ear, sir. I say to you, it is thought you are false knaves.

Borachio. 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. Yea, marry, that's the eftest way; let the watch come forth. Masters, I charge you in the Prince's name accuse these men.

1 Watch. 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.

Borachio. Master Constable —

Dogberry. Pray thee, fellow, peace. I do not like thy look, I promise thee.

Sexton. What heard you him say else?

2 Watch. Marry, that he had receiv'd a thousand ducats of Don John for accusing the Lady Hero wrongfully.

Dogberry. Flat burglary as ever was committed.

Verges. Yea, by mass, that it is.

Sexton. What else, fellow?

1 Watch. 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 condemn'd into everlasting redemption for this.

Sexton. What else?

1 and 2 Watch. This is all.

Sexton. And this is more, masters, than you can deny. Prince John is this morning secretly stol'n away. Hero was in this manner accus'd, in this very manner refus'd, and upon the grief of this suddenly died. Master Constable, let these men be bound, and brought to Leonato's. I will go before and show him their examination.

Exit SEXTON.

Dogberry. Come let them be opinion'd.

Verges. Let them be in the hands —

Conrade. 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 varlet!

Conrade. Away, you are an ass, you are an ass.

Dogberry. Dost thou not suspect my place? Dost thou not suspect my years? O that he were here to write me down an ass! But, masters, remember that I am an ass; though it be not written down, yet forget not that I am an ass. No, thou villain, thou art full of piety, as shall be prov'd upon thee by good witness. 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 a rich fellow enough, go to, and a fellow that hath had losses, and one that hath two gowns, and every thing handsome about him. Bring him away. O that I had been writ down an ass.

Exit all.

Act Two, Scene 6 (Act Five, Scene 1)

Enter LEONATO and his brother ANTONIO.

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

Leonato. I pray thee cease thy counsel,
Which falls into mine ears as profitless
As water in a sieve. Give not me counsel,
Nor let no comforter delight mine ear
But such a one whose wrongs do suit with mine.
Bring me a father that so lov'd his child,
Whose joy of her is overwhelm'd like mine,
And bid him speak of patience;
Measure his woe the length and breadth of mine,
And let it answer every strain for strain,
As thus for thus, and such a grief for such,
In every lineament, branch, shape, and form;
If such a one will smile and stroke his beard,
Bid sorrow wag, cry "hem!" when he should groan,
Patch grief with proverbs, make misfortune drunk
With candle-wasters, bring him yet to me,
And I of him will gather patience.
But there is no such man, for, brother, men
Can counsel and speak comfort to that grief

Which they themselves not feel, but tasting it,
Their counsel turns to passion, which before
Would give preceptial med'cine to rage,
Fetter strong madness in a silken thread,
Charm ache tith air, and agony with words.
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.

Leonato. I pray thee peace. I will be flesh and blood,
For there was never yet philosopher
That could endure the toothache patiently,
However they have writ the style of gods,
And made a push at chance and sufferance.

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

Leonato. 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 dishonor her.

Enter DON PEDRO and CLAUDIO.

Antonio. Here comes the Prince and Claudio hastily.

Don Pedro. Good den, good den.

Claudio. Good day to both of you.

Leonato. 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 quarrelling,

Some of us would lie low.

Claudio. Who wrongs him?

Leonato. Marry, thou dost wrong me, thou dissembler, thou —
Nay, never lay thy hand upon thy sword, I fear thee not.

Claudio. Marry, beshrew my hand,
If it should give your age such cause of fear,
In faith, my hand meant nothing to my sword.

Leonato. Tush, tush, man, never fleer and jest at me;
I speak not like a dotard nor a fool,
As under privilege of age to brag
What I have done being young, or what would do
Were I not old. Know, Claudio, to thy head,
Thou hast so wrong'd mine innocent child and me
That I am forc'd to lay my reverence by,
And with grey hairs and bruise of many days,
Do challenge thee to trial of a man.
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, fram'd by thy villainy!

Claudio. My villainy?

Leonato. Thine, Claudio, thine, I say.

Don Pedro. You say not right, old man.

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

Claudio. Away, I will not have to do with you.

Leonato. Canst thou so daff me? Thou hast kill'd my child.
If thou kill'st me, boy, thou shalt kill a man.

Antonio. He shall kill two of us, and men indeed;
But that's no matter, let him kill one first.
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 a gentleman, I will.

Leonato. Brother —

Antonio. Content yourself. God knows I lov'd my niece,
And she is dead, slander'd to death by villains,
That dare as well answer a man indeed
As I dare take a serpent by the tongue.
Boys, apes, braggarts, Jacks, milksops!

Leonato. Brother Anthony —

Antonio. Hold you content. What, man! I know them, yea,
And what they weigh, even to the utmost scruple —
Scambling, outfacing, fashion-mongering boys,
That lie and cog and flout, deprave and slander,
Go anticly, and show outward hideousness,
And speak off half a dozen dan'rous words,
How they might hurt their enemies — if they durst —
And this is all.

Leonato. But, brother Anthony —

Antonio. Come, 'tis no matter;
Do not meddle; let me deal in this.

Don Pedro. Gentlemen both, we will not wake your patience.
My heart is sorry for your daughter's death;
But on my honor she was charg'd with nothing
But what was true, and very full of proof.

Leonato. My lord, my lord —

Don Pedro. I will not hear you.

Leonato. No? Come, brother, away! I will be heard.

Antonio. And shall, or some of us will smart for it.

Exit LEONATO and ANTONIO.

Enter BENEDICK.

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

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 lik'd to have had our two noses snapp'd off with two old men without teeth.

Don Pedro. Leonato and his brother. What think'st thou? Had we fought, I doubt we should have been too young for them.

Benedick. In a false quarrel there is no true valor. 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?

Don Pedro. As I am an honest man, he looks pale. Art thou sick, or angry? 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. Shall I speak a word in your ear?

Claudio. God bless me from a challenge!

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 kill'd a sweet lady, and her death shall fall heavy on you. Let me hear from you.

Claudio. Well, I will meet you.

Benedick. Fare you well, boy, you know my mind. I will leave you now to your humor. 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 kill'd a sweet and innocent lady. For my Lord Lack-beard there, he and I shall meet, and then peace be with him.

Exit BENEDICK.

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 challeng'd 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 and VERGES and the WATCH with CONRADE and BORACHIO.

Dogberry. Come you, sir. If justice cannot tame you, she shall ne'er weigh more reasons in her balance. Nay, and you be a cursing hypocrite once, you must be look'd to.

Don Pedro. How now? Two of my brother's men bound? Borachio one!

Claudio. Hearken after their offense, my lord.

Don Pedro. Officers, what offense have these men done?

Dogberry. Marry, sir, they have committed false report; moreover they have spoken untruths; secondarily, they are slanders; sixt 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 offense; sixt and lastly, why they are committed; and to conclude, what you lay to their charge.

Claudio. Rightly reason'd, and in his own division, and by my troth there's one meaning well suited.

Don Pedro. Who have you offended, masters, that you are thus bound to your answer? This learned constable is too cunning to be understood. What's your offense?

Borachio. Sweet Prince, let me go no farther to mine answer; do you hear me, and let this count kill me. I have deceiv'd 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, incens'd me to slander the Lady Hero, how you were brought into the orchard, and saw me court Margaret in Hero's garments, how you disgrac'd her when you should marry her. My villainy 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 practice of it.

Don Pedro. He is compos'd and fram'd of treachery,
And fled he is upon this villainy.

Claudio. Sweet Hero, now thy image doth appear
In the rare semblance that I lov'd it first.

Dogberry. Come, bring away the plaintiffs. By this time our sexton hath reform'd Signior Leonato 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 Master Signior Leonato, and the Sexton, too.

Enter LEONATO, his brother ANTONIO, and the SEXTON.

Leonato. Which is the villain? Let me see his eyes,
That when I note another man like him,
I may try to avoid him. Which of these is he?

Borachio. If you would know your wronger, look on me.

Leonato. Art thou the slave that with thy breath hast kill'd
My innocent child?

Boarchio. Yea, even I alone.

Leonato. No, not so, villain, thou beliest thyself.
Here stand a pair of honorable 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 old man,
I would bend under any heavy weight
That he'll enjoin me to.

Leonato. 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 labor aught in sad invention,
Hang her an epitaph upon her tomb,
And sing it to her bones, sing it tonight.
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 giv'n her cousin,
And so dies my revenge.

Claudio. O noble sir!
Your overkindness doth wring tears from me.
I do embrace your offer, and dispose
For henceforth of poor Claudio.

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

Borachio. No, by my soul she was not,
Nor knew not what she did when she spoke to me,
But always hath been just and virtuous
In any thing that I do know by her.

Dogberry. Moreover, sir, which indeed is not under white and black, this plantiff here, the offender, did call me ass. I beseech you let it be rememb'red in his punishment. Pray you examine him upon that point.

Leonato. I thank thee for thy care and honest pains.

Dogberry. Your worship speaks like a most thankful and reverent youth, and I praise God for you

Leonato. There's for thy pains.

Dogberry. God save the foundation!

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

Dogberry. I heave an arrant knave with your worship, which I beseech your worship to correct yourself, for the example of others. God keep your worship! I wish your worship well. God restore you to health! I humbly give you leave to depart, and if a merry meeting may be wish'd, God prohibit it! Come, neighbor.

Exit DOGBERRY and VERGES.

Leonato. Until to-morrow morning, lords, farewell.

Antonio. Farewell, my lords, we look for you tomorrow.

Don Pedro. We will not fail.

Claudio. To-night I'll mourn with Hero.

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

Exit all.

Act Two, Scene 7 (Act Five, Scene 2)

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 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, it will not hurt a woman. And so I pray thee call Beatrice.

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

Exit MARGARET.

Benedick. And therefore will come.
"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

Benedick. Beatrice, wouldst thou come when I call'd thee?

Beatrice. Yea, signior, and depart when you bid thee.

Benedick. O, stay, but till then!

Beatrice. "Then" is spoken; fare you well now. And yet ere I go with that I came, which is, with knowing what hath pass'd 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 unkiss'd.

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 maintain'd 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, if you spite it for my sake, I will spite it for yours, for I will never love that which my friend hates.

Benedick. Thou and I are too wise to woo peaceably. 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 uncle. It is prov'd my Lady Hero hath been falsely accus'd, the Prince and Claudio mightily abus'd, 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.

Exit all.

Act Two, Scene 8 (Act Five, Scene 3)

Enter CLAUDIO, PRINCE DON PEDRO, BUTLER, FRIAR FRANCIS and others.

Claudio. Is this the monument of Leonato?

Butler. It is, my lord.

Claudio. [*Reading out of a scroll*]

EPITAPH

"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.

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.

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

Don Pedro. Good morrow, masters, put your torches out.
The wolves have preed, and look, the gentle day,
Before the wheels of Phoebus, round about
Dapples the drowsy east with spots of grey.
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 weeds,
And then to Leonato's we will go.

Claudio. And Hymen now with luckier issue speed's
Than this for who we rend'red up this woe.

Exit all.

Act Two, Scene 9 (Act Five, Scene 4)

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

Friar. Did I not tell you she was innocent?

Leonato. So are the Prince and Claudio, who accus'd 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 sorts so well.

Benedick. And so am I, being else by faith enforc'd
To call young Claudio to a reckoning for it.

Leonato. Well, daughter, and you gentlewomen all,
Withdraw into a chamber by yourselves,
And when I send for you, come hither masked.
The Prince and Claudio promis'd by this hour
To visit me. You know your office, brother:
You must be father to your brother's daughter,
And give her to Claudio.

Antonio. Which I will do with confirm'd countenance.

Exit Ladies.

Benedick. Friar, I must entreat your pains, I think.

Friar. 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 favor.

Leonato. That eye my daughter lent her, 'tis most true.

Benedick. And I do with an eye of love requite her.

Leonato. The sight whereof I think you had from me,
From Claudio, and the Prince. But what's your will?

Benedick. Your answer, sir, is enigmatical,
But for my will, my will is your good will
May stand with our, this day to be conjoin'd
In the state of honorable marriage,
In which, good friar, I shall desire your help.

Leonato. My heart is with your liking.

Friar. And my help.
Here comes the Prince and Claudio.

Enter PRINCE DON PEDRO and CLAUDIO and two or three other.

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?
Call her forth, brother, here's the friar 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?

Enter ANTONIO, HERO, BEATRICE, MARGARET and URSULA, the ladies masked.

Claudio. Here comes other reck'nings. Which is the lady I must seize upon?

Antonio. The same is she, and 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. [*Unmasking*] And when I liv'd, I was your other wife,
And when you lov'd, you were my other husband.

Claudio. Another Hero!

Hero. Nothing certainer:
One Hero died defil'd, but I do live,
And surely as I live, I am a maid.

Don Pedro. The former Hero! Hero that is dead!

Leonato. She died, my lord, but whiles her slander liv'd.

Friar. All this amazement can I qualify,
When after that the holy rites are ended,
I'll tell you largely of fair Hero's death.
Mean time let wonder seem familiar,
And to the chapel let us presently.

Benedick. Soft and fair, friar. 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 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 deceiv'd, 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.

Leonato. 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, stol'n 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: a college of wit-crackers cannot flout me out of my humor. Dost thou think I care for a satire or an epigram? No, if a man will be beaten with brains, 'a shall wear nothing handsome about him. 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 unbruis'd, and love my cousin.

Claudio. I had well hop'd thou wouldst have denied Beatrice, that I might have cudgell'd 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 exceeding 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.

Leonato. 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 BUTLER.

Butler. 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.

All exit.