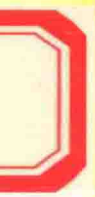




MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

I had rather be a canker in a hedge than a rose in his grace.

William Shakespeare



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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

DON PEDRO	Prince of Arragon.
DON JOHN	his bastard Brother.
CLAUDIO	a young Lord of Florence.
BENEDICK	a young Lord of Padua.
LEONATO	Governor of Messina.
ANTONIO	his Brother.
BALTHAZAR	Servant to Don Pedro.
BORACHIO	} follower of Don John.
CONRADE	
DOGBERRY	a Constable.
VERGES	a Headborough.
FRIAR FRANCIS	
A Sexton	
A Boy	
HERO	Daughter to Leonato.
BEATRICE	Niece to Leonato.
MARGARET	} Waiting-gentlewoman attending on Hero.
URSULA	
Messengers, Watch, Attendants, &c.	

SCENE

Messina

ACT I

Scene 1. Before LEONATO's House.

[Enter LEONATO, HERO, BEATRICE and others, 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 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 bestowed much honour on a young Florentine called Claudio.

MESSENGER. Much deserved on his part and equally remembered by Don Pedro. He hath borne himself beyond the promise of his age, doing in the figure of a lamb the feats of a lion: he hath indeed better bettered expectation than you must 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 delivered 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 into tears?

MESSENGER. In great measure.

LEONATO. A kind overflow of kindness. There are no faces truer than those that are so washed; how much better is it to weep at joy than to joy at weeping!

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

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

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

HERO. My cousin means Signior Benedick of Padua.

MESSENGER. O! he is returned, and as pleasant as ever he was.

BEATRICE. He set up his bills here in Messina and challenged Cupid at the flight; and my uncle's fool, reading the challenge, subscribed for Cupid, and challenged him at the bird-bolt. I pray you, how many hath he killed and eaten in these wars? But how many hath he killed? For, indeed, I promised to eat all of his killing.

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.

BEATRICE. You had musty victual, and he hath holp to eat it; he is a very valiant trencher-man; he hath an excellent stomach.

MESSENGER. And a good soldier too, lady.

BEATRICE. And a good soldier to a lady; but what is he to a lord?

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

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

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

BEATRICE. Alas! he gets nothing by that. In our last conflict four of his five wits went halting off, and now is the whole man

governed with one! so that if he have wit enough to keep himself warm, let him bear it for a difference between himself and his horse; for it is all the wealth that he hath left to be known a reasonable creature. 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; an he were, I would burn my study. But, I pray you, who is his companion? Is there no young squarer now that will make a voyage with him to the devil?

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

BEATRICE. O Lord, he will hang upon him like a disease: 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 cured.

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 approached.

[*Enter DON PEDRO, DON JOHN, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK,*

— *BALTHAZAR, and Others.*]

DON PEDRO. Good Signior Leonato, you are 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 asked 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 honourable 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 loved of all ladies, only you excepted; and I would I could find in my heart that I had not a hard heart; for, truly, I love none.

BEATRICE. A dear happiness to women: they would else have been troubled with a pernicious suitor. I thank God and my cold blood, I am of your humour for that. I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me.

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

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

BENEDICK. Well, you are a rare parrot-teacher.

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

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

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

DON PEDRO. That is the sum of all, Leonato: Signior Claudio, and

Signior Benedick, my dear friend Leonato hath invited you all. I tell him we shall stay here at the 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 reconciled to the prince your brother, I owe you all duty.

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

LEONATO. Please it your Grace lead on?

DON PEDRO. Your hand, Leonato; we will go together.

[*Exeunt all but BENEDICK and CLAUDIO.*]

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

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

CLAUDIO. Is she not a modest young lady?

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

CLAUDIO. No; I pray thee speak in sober judgment.

BENEDICK. Why, i' faith, methinks she's too low for a high praise, too brown for a fair praise, and too little for a great praise; only this commendation I can afford her, that were she other than she is, she were unhandsome, and being no other but as she is, I do not like her.

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

BENEDICK. Would you buy her, that you enquire after her?

CLAUDIO. Can the world buy such a jewel?

BENEDICK. Yea, and a case to put it into. But speak you this with a sad brow, or do you play the flouting Jack, to tell us Cupid is a good hare-finder, and Vulcan a rare carpenter? Come, in what key shall a man take you, to go in the song?

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

BENEDICK. I can see yet without spectacles and I see no such matter:
there's her cousin, an she were not possessed with a fury,
exceeds her as much in beauty as the first of May doth the last of
December. But I hope you have no intent to turn husband, have
you?

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

BENEDICK. Is't come to this, i' faith? Hath not the world one man but
he will wear his cap with suspicion? Shall I never see a bachelor
of threescore again? Go to, i' faith; an thou wilt needs thrust thy
neck into a yoke, wear the print of it and sigh away Sundays.
Look! Don Pedro is returned to seek you.

[*Re-enter DON PEDRO.*]

DON PEDRO. What secret hath held you here, that you followed not
to Leonato's?

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

DON PEDRO. I charge thee on thy allegiance.

BENEDICK. You hear, Count 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 this were so, so were it uttered.

BENEDICK. Like the old tale, my lord: 'it is not so, nor 'twas not so;
but indeed, God forbid it should be so.'

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 loved nor know how she should be worthy, is the opinion that fire cannot melt out of me: I will die in it at the stake.

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

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

BENEDICK. That a woman conceived me, I thank her; that she brought me up, I likewise give her most humble thanks; but that I will have a recheat winded in my forehead, or hang my bugle in an invisible baldrick, all women shall pardon me. 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: prove that ever I lose more blood with love than I will get again with drinking, pick out mine eyes with a ballad-maker's pen and hang me up at the door of a brothel-house for the sign of blind Cupid.

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

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

DON PEDRO. Well, as time shall try:

‘In time the savage bull doth bear the yoke.’

BENEDICK. The savage bull may; but if ever the sensible Benedick bear it, pluck off the bull's horns and set them in my forehead; and let me be vilely painted, and in such great letters as they

write, 'Here is good horse to hire,' let them signify under my sign 'Here you may see Benedick the married man.'

CLAUDIO. If this should ever happen, thou wouldst be horn-mad.

DON PEDRO. Nay, if Cupid have not spent all his quiver in Venice, thou wilt quake for this shortly.

BENEDICK. I look for an earthquake too then.

DON PEDRO. Well, you will temporize with the hours. In the meantime, 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 preparation.

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

CLAUDIO. To the tuition of God: from my house, if I had it,—

DON PEDRO. The sixth of July: your loving friend, Benedick.

BENEDICK. Nay, mock not, mock not. The body of your discourse is sometime guarded with fragments, and the guards are but slightly basted on neither: ere you flout old ends any further, examine your conscience: and so I leave you. [*Exit.*]

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 looked 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 lov'st,
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 practice let us put it presently.
[*Exeunt.*]

Scene 2. A Room in LEONATO's House.

[Enter LEONATO and ANTONIO, meeting.]

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

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 the better prepared 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.

[*Exeunt.*]

Scene 3. Another Room in LEONATO's House.

[Enter DON JOHN and CONRADE.]

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 blessings 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 humour.

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 had rather be a canker in a hedge than a rose in his grace; and it better fits my blood to be disdained of all than to fashion a carriage to rob love from any: 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 enfranchised with a clog; therefore I have decreed not to sing in my cage. If I had my mouth, I would bite; if I had my liberty, I would do my liking: in