

# **Much Ado About Nothing**

**by William Shakespeare**

Presented by Paul W. Collins

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## Chapter One A Royal Visit

A chestnut steed, slowed by having to negotiate busy streets of the old seaport, now trots steadily up toward the estate from which Governor Leonato presides, here at the capital, overlooking Messina, a prosperous province in northeastern Sicily at the close of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The rider, a soldier, bears tidings from the prince.

Leading his mount, which glistens with sweat in the late-afternoon sun, the messenger finds the gray-haired governor strolling down a wide lawn in front of his home. He is accompanied on the stone path by two beautiful gentlewomen—his daughter, Hero, just turned twenty-two, and his niece, Beatrice, alleged to be around thirty.

The governor pauses to read his message, and the ladies look out over the city, glimpsing the tops of tall wooden masts and the sails of ships that line the teeming docks.

“I learn in this letter that Don Pedro of Aragon comes this night to Messina!” Leonato tells his finely dressed companions.

“He is very near by now,” says the messenger. “He was not three leagues off when I left him.”

“How many gentlemen have you lost in this action?” the governor asks, as they walk toward the gate. The illegitimate half-brother of Prince Don Pedro, lord of Sicily, had recently stirred a civil uprising, and the ruler responded forcefully, leading his troops from Italy, also controlled by Aragon, across the strait and into battle against the rebels.

“But few of *any* sort—and none of name.”

Leonato is relieved. “A victory is twice itself when the achiever brings home full numbers!” He looks through the letter. “I find here that Don Pedro hath bestowed much honour on a young Florentine called *Claudio*.”

“Much *deservèd* on his part,” says the soldier, “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!”

Governor Leonato knows many of his subjects. “He hath an uncle here in Messina will be very glad of it.”

“I have already delivered him letters, and there appears much *joy* in him!” the messenger confirms. “But even such joy could not show itself modestly enough without a badge of bitterness....”

“Did he break out into tears?”

“In great measure.”

Leonato smiles. “A kindly overflow of kindness; there are no faces truer than those that are so washèd. How much better is it to weep at joy than to joy at weeping!”

Lady Beatrice asks the rider: “I pray you, is Signior *Mountanto* returned from the wars, or no?”

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

Nor does Leonato know of any Signior *Sword-Thrust*. “Who is he that you ask for, Niece?”

His daughter answers—with a knowing smile. “My cousin means Signior *Benedick* of Padua,” says Lady Hero.

“Oh, *he*’s returned!” says the messenger, “and as pleasant as he ever was!”

Beatrice’s eyebrows rise and her lips purse—sure signs of coming derision. “He set up his *bills*”—posted notice, as it were—“here in Messina, and challenged *Cupid* to a flight!”—targeting women’s hearts. She is mocking the gallant unmarried officer, who presented a highly attractive—and equally slippery—figure of romance in the city. “And my uncle’s *fool*,”—the lady means herself, “reading the challenge, sided with Cupid, and *challenged* the man at the bird-

bolt!”—at shooting with short arrows. Their contentious flirting, a struggle steeped in sarcasm, was inconclusive.

“I pray you, how many hath he ‘killed and eaten’”—a warrior’s brag—“in these wars?” she asks, glibly. She amends: “But how many hath he killed?—for indeed *I* promised to eat all of *his* killing!”

“Faith, Niece,” laughs Leonato, “you tax Signior Benedick *too much!* But he’ll be meet with *you*, I doubt it not!”

“He hath done *good service*, lady, in these wars,” the soldier reports.

Beatrice decides to take that as *table service*; she shrugs. “You had musty victual, and he hath help to eat *it*; he is a very valiant *platter* man—he hath an *excellent* stomach!”—sarcasm: *stomach* can be a term for *courage*.

“And a good *soldier*, too, lady!”

“And a good soldier to a *lady*—but what is he to a *lord*?”

“A *lord* to a lord, a *man* to a man—stuffed with all honourable virtues!”

“It is *so*; indeed: he is no less than a *stuffed* man!”—a scarecrow, Beatrice counters. “But as for the stuffing—well, we are all mortal.” Straw is dead stalks.

Leonato reassures the soldier: “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!”

“Alas, *he* wins nothing by that,” she asserts. “In our last conflict, *four* of his five wits went halting off,”—limped away, “and now is the whole man governed by *one!* So if he have wit enough to keep himself warm,”—the saying is that *a fool has barely enough sense to stay warm*, “let him bear it as the difference between *himself* and his *horse*—for it is all the wealth that he hath left to be known as a *reasoning* creature!”

“Who is his companion now?” she asks, wondering about Benedick’s women. She adds, as a cover, “He hath every month a new sworn *brother!*”

The soldier finds that doubtful. “Is’t possible?”

“Very *easily* possible,” Beatrice tells him. “He wears his *loyalty* but as the fashion of his *hat*: it ever changes with the next *blocking!*”—brushing and shaping.

“I see, lady, the gentleman is not in *your* books!”—diaries.

“*No*—if he were I would *burn my study!* But, I pray you, who *is* his companion? Is there no young battler, now, that will make a voyage with him to the devil?”

“He is most in the company of the right-noble Claudio...”

“Oh, *Lord!*” moans Beatrice. “He will hang upon him like a *disease!*—he is sooner caught than the *pestilence*, and the taker presently *runs mad!* God help the noble Claudio! If he have caught *the Benedick*, it will cost him a thousand pound ere he be cured!”

The messenger, laughing, shakes his head: “I will remain *friends* with *you*, lady!”

“Do, good friend.”

“*You* will never run mad, Niece!” Leonato has witnessed the lady’s caustic exchanges with Count Benedick.

She concurs: “No—not till a hot January!”

They hear the dull pounding of hoof beats; looking out to the road, they can see that visitors are coming. They move to the fence as the governor calls for servants.

“Don Pedro is approaching.” The military messenger salutes as the prince and his party ride to the gate, halting a dozen yards away to stall the cloud of ocher dust stirred up by their horses.

Among those with the prince are Count Don John, his defeated but newly reconciled half-brother; Count Claudio of Florence and Count Benedick of Padua; and one Balthasar, a singer who entertains the prince and, at home, his court.

As Leonato’s attendants gather the horses’ reins, he strides forward to Don Pedro.

The prince beams at his host. “Good Signior Leonato, you are come to *meet* your trouble! The fashion of the world is to *avoid* cost, and you *encounter* it!”

The governor bows, and smiles. “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 its leave.”

“You embrace your charge too willingly!” laughs Don Pedro. He turns to Hero. “I think this is your daughter....”

Dainty and demure, she curtsies.

“Her mother hath many times told me so,” says Leonato.

Count Benedick grins. “Were you in doubt, sir, that you *asked* her?”

“Signior Benedick, no; for then were *you* a *child!*” Leonato replies.

The prince laughs. “You have it full, Benedick! Being a man, I may guess by that what *you* are!” He regards Hero. “Truly, the lady fathers *herself!*”—is *sui generis*, unique. “Be happy, lady; for you are like an *honourable* father!”

The messenger, dismissed by the prince with a smart salute, goes to rejoin his company of troops. The prince and his brother move onto the porch to confer with the governor about the outcome of the recent conflict; the others stand and chat.

Benedick leans to slap road dust from a boot with his leather gloves. “If Signior Leonato *be* her father, she would not have his head on her shoulders for all Messina, even as like him as she is!”—she would not want the gray hair.

“I wonder that you will still be *talking*, Signior Benedick,” says Beatrice tartly. “Nobody marks you.”

“What?” Benedick glances up, apparently in mild surprise. “My dear Lady Disdain, are *you* yet living?”

“Is it possible disdain should *die* while it hath such meet food to feed it as Signior *Benedick?* Courtesy *itself* must convert to disdain if *you* come into its presence!”

“Then is courtesy a *turncoat!*” the officer retorts. “But it *is* certain I am beloved by all ladies—only you excepted.” He sighs in mock sadness. “And I would I could find in my heart that I had not a *hard* heart—for, truly, I love *none.*”

“A dear *happiness* to women!—they would else have been troubled with a pernicious suitor!” says Beatrice. “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!”

“God *keep* Your Ladyship ever in that mind; thus some gentleman or other shall ’scape a predestinate scratchèd face!” says Benedick, smoothing his glossy beard, which matches dark hairs on the back of the strong, tanned hand.

“Scratching could not make it *worse*, if ’twere such a face as yours!”

“Well, you are a rare *parrot*-teacher,” he answers—a dig at her brief retorts.

“The bird of *my* tongue is better than the beast of *yours!*”

“I would my *horse* had the speed of your tongue—and was so good a continuer! But keep your way, i’ God’s name; I have done!” Benedick turns to join the nobles.

“You always end with a jade’s trick!”—bolting, Beatrice complains, not yet finished with him. “I know *you* of *old!*”

Prince Don Pedro and the governor, still talking, walk forward on the portico, to which they have summoned the others.

“... That is the sum of all, Leonato,” the prince concludes. “Signior Claudio and Signior Benedick, my dear friend Leonato hath invited *you,*” he informs them. “I tell him we all 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!”

“If you so swear, my lord, you shall not be forsworn!” the courtly Leonato assures him. He turns to Don John. “Let me bid *you* welcome, my lord!—being reconciled to the prince your brother, I owe you all duty.”

“I thank you. I am not of many words,” says Don John gruffly, “but I thank you.”

“Please it Your Grace lead on?” the governor asks the prince.

“Your hand, Leonato; we will go together!” says Don Pedro. The noble party goes into house—except for two; Count Claudio has asked Benedick to talk with him.

## Chapter Two Claudio and Benedick

The officers walk beneath a trellised arbor, laden with white-and-yellow honeysuckle, near the estate’s old orchard.

“Benedick, didst thou note the daughter of Signior Leonato?”

“I *noted* her not; but I looked on her.”

“Is she not a modest young lady?”

His older friend raises an eyebrow. “Do you question me, as an honest man should do, for my simple true judgment?” asks Benedick, “or would you have me speak after my *custom*—as being a professèd *tyrant* to their sex!”

“No, I pray thee speak in sober judgment.”

“Well, i’ faith methinks she’s too low”—short—“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 is amused; before seeing Hero he, too, had reveled in the posture of a resolute bachelor. “Thou thinkest I am in *sport*! I pray thee, tell me *truly* how thou likest her.”

“Would you *buy* her, that you inquire after her?”

“Can the *world* buy such a jewel?” ask the smitten count.

“*Yes*—and a case to put it *into*!” says Benedick. “But speak you this with a serious brow? Or do you play the *flouting Jack*, telling us Cupid is a good *hare-finder* and Vulcan a rare *carpenter*!”—mocking those gods. “Come—in what key shall a man take you, to join in the song?”

“In *mine* eye she is the sweetest lady that ever I looked on!”

Benedick shrugs. “I can see yet without spectacles, and I see no such matter! There’s her *cousin*, who, if she were not possessed by 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 is beyond denial. “I would scarce trust myself though I had *sworn* the contrary, if Hero would be my wife!”

“Is’t come to *this*?” cries Benedick, sounding scandalized. “In faith, hath not the world *one man* who will wear his cap without *suspicion*?”—of husbands’ cuckolding. “Shall I never see a *bachelor* of three-score again? *Go to*, i’ faith, if thou wilt needs *thrust* thy neck into a yoke, wear the *print* of it, and sigh away *Sundays*!” He shakes his head in comical pity.

He spots movement back at the doors. “Look, Don Pedro is returned to seek you.”

The prince comes from the house in a most cheerful mood. “What secret hath held you here, that you followed not to Leonato’s?”

Benedick pretends to have learned a secret. “I would Your Grace would *constrain* me to tell...” he says, invitingly.

Don Pedro complies: “I charge thee on thy allegiance!”

“You *hear*, Count Claudio,” says Benedick. “I can be secret as a speechless man—”

Claudio laughs at the idea of a silent Benedick.

“Well, I would have you *think* so. But—on my *allegiance*, mark you this, on my *allegiance*: he is *in love*! ‘*With whom*?’—now that is Your Grace’s part. Mark how short his answer is—‘*With Hero*!’—Leonato’s short daughter!”

“If this were *so*, so were it not *uttered*!” protests Claudio; he would say *diminutive*.

“Like the old tale, my lord,” replies Benedick. “It *is* not so nor *'twas not* so—and, indeed, God forbid it *should* be so!”—a specious denial.

Claudio is not denying: “If my *passion* change not *shortly*, God forbid it should be otherwise!”

“*Amen*, if you *love* her!” says Don Pedro heartily, “for the lady is very well worthy!”

Claudio is surprised by another older bachelor’s enthusiasm. “You speak this to fetch me in, my lord,” he says, suspiciously.

“By my troth, I speak my thought!” says the prince.

“And, in faith, my lord, I spoke mine!”

Adds Benedick, “And by thy *two* faiths and troths, my lords, I spoke *mine!*”

“That I love her, I feel,” says Claudio.

“That she is worthy, I know,” declares Don Pedro.

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

Don Pedro laughs. “Thou wast ever an obstinate *heretic* in the despite of *beauty!*”

Adds newly devout Claudio, “But never could *maintain* his part but by the force of his *will!*”

Benedick is obstinate. “That a woman *conceived* me, I thank her. That she *brought me up*, I likewise give her most humble thanks.

“But that I will not have a *retreat* sounded from my *forehead*,”—by horns, cuckoldry’s emblem, “nor hang *my* bugle in an invisible *baldrick*,”—be emasculated into silence, “all women shall *pardon* me! Because I will not do *any* the wrong of *mistrusting* them, I will do myself the *right* to trust *none!*”

“And the *fine* is,”—to finish, “so that I may *go* the finer, I will live a *bachelor!*”

Don Pedro has observed many young officers. “I shall see *thee*, ere I die, look pale with love!”

Benedick laughs. “With anger, with sickness, or with hunger, my lord, not with *love!* If it 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 as the sign of *blind Cupid!*”

“Well, if ever thou *dost* fall from this faith,” says the prince, “thou wilt prove a *notable* argument!”—example.

“If I do, hang me in a basket like a stuffed cat and *shoot* at me—and he that hits me, let him be clapped on the shoulder and called *Adam!*”—first among men.

The prince only smiles. “Well, as Time shall try! ‘In *time*, the savage *bull* doth bear the yoke!’”

“The savage bull may—but if ever the sensible *Benedick* bear it, pluck off the bull’s horns and set them in my forehead! Then let me be vilely *painted*, and with such great letters as write ‘Here is good horse to hire,’ let them signify, under my sign, ‘Here you may see Benedick, the *married* man!’”

“If *that* should ever happen,” laughs Claudio, “thou wouldst be horn-mad!”

Still, Don Pedro foresees romance for the adamantly single soldier. “Nay, if Cupid have not spent all his quiver in *Venice*, thou wilt *shake* for this shortly!”

“I look for an *earthquake*, too, then!”

“Well, you temporize with the hours,” laughs the prince. “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.”

The count bows, saying, dryly, “I have *almost* mater enough”—*pia mater*, brains—“in me for such an embassy; ‘and so I commend you—’”

Claudio supplies more of a stock phrase for closing a polite letter: “—to the tuition of God. From my house, if I *had* one—”

“—the sixth of July. Your loving friend, Benedick,” laughs the prince, concluding the jape.

“*Nay, mock not, mock not!*” cries Benedick, laughing as well. “The body of *your* discourse is sometimes guarded by *fragments*,”—incomplete sentences, “and *regards* are but slightly sewn on nether! Ere you flout old endings any further, examine your conscience!

“And so I leave you.” He bows, and goes in to find Lord Leonato.

“My liege,” says Claudio, after a moment’s pause in the quiet arbor, “Your Highness now may do me good....” Don Pedro has already made clear his intention to reward the young officer’s performance in their recent military adventure.

“My love is thine to teach!” the prince tells him. “Teach it but *how*, and thou shalt see how apt it is to learn any hard lesson that may do thee good!”

“Hath Leonato any son, my lord?”

“No child but Hero; she’s his only heir. Dost thou affect her, Claudio?”

“Oh, my lord, when you went onward in this ended action, I looked upon her with a soldier’s eye—that *liked*, but had a rougher task in hand than to drive liking to the name of *love*. But now that I am returned, and war thoughts have left their places vacant, in their rooms come thronging soft and delicate *desires*—all prompting me how *fair* young Hero is—saying *I liked* her ere I went to wars....”

Don Pedro, an eager proponent of romance, teases the shy, cautious lad: “Thou wilt be like a *lover* presently, and tire the hearer with a *book* of words!”

The prince knows both of the attractive young people, and he approves of the match; the middle-aged soldier decides to intervene on behalf of his rising officer. “If thou dost love fair Hero, *cherish* it, and I will break with her and with her father,”—broach the subject with them, “and thou shalt *have* her!

“Was’t not to *this* end that thou began’st to twist so careful a story?” he asks.

Claudio is relieved. “How sweetly you do minister to love, who know love’s grief by its *complexion*! But lest my liking might too *sudden* seem, I would have it salved with a longer treatise....”

“What needs the bridge be much broader than the river? The fairest grant is the *necessary*; look you—what will *serve* is *fit*.” The general immediately takes command of the project. “’Tis *at once* thou lovest—and I will so fit thee with the *remedy*!

“Know we shall have reveling tonight. I will *assume thy part*, in some disguise, and tell fair Hero I am *Claudio*—and into 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 it. And the conclusion is, she shall be *thine*!

“In practise let us put it immediately!” says the prince, a soldier decisive in action.

As they go into Leonato’s house to change into clean clothes for lunch, young Claudio savors the prospect, held in this evening’s masked ball, of growing good fortune.

Governor Leonato has taken some time this afternoon to work in his study before the festive supper and dancing; but he has a visitor. “How now, Brother! Where is my cousin, your son? Hath he provided that music?” Antonio has promised that the lad’s fellow musicians will perform. But the unsteady old man’s poor hearing sometimes leads to unfortunate results.

“He is very busy about it,” Antonio replies. “But, Brother, I can tell you strange *news* that you’ve yet dreamt not of!”

“Are they good?”

Antonio shrugs. “As the event stamps them.” He eases himself into a sturdy chair beside the desk and rolls his cane between his thin, bony hands. “But they have a good *cover*—they show well *outward*.”



“The prince and Count Claudio, walking in a thick-pleachèd alley by mine orchard, were thus much overheard by a man of mine: the prince discovered to Claudio that he *loved my niece your daughter*, and meant to *acknowledge* it this night during the 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 is surprised, but pleasantly. “Hath the fellow any wit that told you this?”

“A good, sharp fellow,” the old man says of Borachio. “I will send for him; then question him yourself...”

“No, no,” says Leonato, “we will hold it as a *dream*, till it appear *itself*.”

“But I would acquaint my daughter withal, that she may be the better prepared with an answer, if peradventure this be true! Go you and tell her of it.” The white-haired man nods agreement, and shuffles away to speak with Lady Hero.

Antonio’s son has arrived; he and the musicians crowd into the room, and position themselves before the governor.

“Cousins, you know what you have to do,” says Leonato doubtfully. But they play quite well, and sweetly.

The music-loving governor is contrite. “Oh, I cry you mercy, friends!” he says happily, approving the brief audition. He rises. “Go you with me, and I will *use* your skill.” As they all leave together, he urges the leader, “Good cousin, have a care this busy time!”

He wants to make the best possible impression on the visiting Prince of Aragon.

**H**is defeat still rankles Don John, despite the prince’s magnanimous acceptance of surrender and readiness to forgive. In his rooms at the governor’s home in Messina, the visiting count mopes, resenting reconciliation.

His lieutenant, Conrad, comes in to find him scowling. “What the good year, my lord! Why are you thus out of measure sad?”

“There is no measure in the occasion that *breeds*,” complains Don John. “Therefore the sadness is without limit.” Whatever the prospects, though, his view is chronically bleak.

“You should hear reason—”

“And when I have heard it, what blessing brings it?”

“If not a present remedy, at least a patient sufferance.”

“I wonder that *thou*, being, as thou sayest 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 join no man in *his* humour!”

“Yea, but you must not make the full show of this till you may do it without controlment,” Conrad cautions. “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 *root* but by the fair weather that you make *yourself*! It is needful that you frame the season for your own harvest.”

Don John is determinedly dour. “I had rather be a canker in a *hedge* than a rose in *his* grace, and it better fits my blood to be disdained by *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 that I am a *plain-dealing* villain!

“I am trusted—with a *muzzle*, and enfranchisèd—with a *clog*! Therefore I have decreed not to *sing* in my cage. If I had my mouth, I would *bite*; if I had my liberty, I would *do my liking*. In the meantime, let me be what I am, and seek not to alter me.”

“Can you make no *use* of your discontent?”

“I make *all* use of it, for I use *it only*.” He hears a knock. “Who comes here?” A man employed in Governor Leonato’s household enters. “What news, Borachio?”

“I came from the great supper, yonder; the prince your brother is royally entertained by Leonato,” says Borachio, who during the rebellion served Don John as a spy. As he moves closer, his eyes widen. “And I can give you intelligence of an intended *marriage!*”

“Will it serve for any model to build *mischief* on? Who is the fool that betroths himself to unquietness?”

“Marry, it is your brother’s right hand!”

“Who?—the most exquisite *Claudio?*”

“Even he.”

Don John sneers. “A proper *squire!* And who, and *who?*—which way looks he?”

“Marry, on *Hero*—the daughter and heir of *Leonato!*” says Borachio.

“A very *forward* March-chick!” Claudio’s youth makes humiliation at his hands even harder to bear. “How came you to this?”

Borachio had been sleeping off the effects of too much drink in the shade of an arbor when he awoke in time to overhear the prince’s conversation with Claudio; but he invents a more dutiful-sounding explanation. “Being employed as a perfumer, as I was smoking a musty room with incense, came the prince and Claudio, hand in hand in serious conference. I whipt me behind the arras, and there heard it agreed upon that the prince should woo Hero for himself—and having obtained her, give her to Count Claudio!”

Don John has regained his appetite. “Come, come, let us thither! This may prove food to my displeasure! That young start-up hath all the glory of my overthrow; if I can cross him *any* way, I bless myself *every* way! You are both sure, and will assist me?”

“To the death, my lord!” pledges Conrad.

“Let us to the great supper,” says the count—encouraged, now that trouble can be caused.

“Their cheer is the greater that *I* am subdued,” he grumbles. “Would the *cook* were of my mind!”

“Shall we go find out what’s to be done?”

“We’ll wait upon Your Lordship,” says Borachio as they go.

### Chapter Three ‘Dance out the answer’

After a sumptuous meal, Leonato and his brother emerge from the stately dining hall of the governor’s mansion with Hero and Beatrice. “Was not Count John here at supper?” asks Leonato.

“I saw him not,” says Antonio.

Beatrice does not mourn the count’s absence. “How tartly that gentleman looks! I never can see him but I am *heartburned* an hour after!”

Hero nods. “He *is* of a very melancholy disposition.”

“He were an excellent man that were made just in the *midway* between him and *Benedick,*” opines Beatrice. “The one is too like an image, and says nothing; and the other too like my lady’s eldest boy,”—a forward child, “evermore tattling!”

Leonato grins. “Then half Signior Benedick’s tongue in Count John’s mouth—and half Count John’s melancholy on Signior Benedick’s face?”

Beatrice laughs. “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!” She adds, “If he could get *her good will!*”

The governor laughs, but he warns, and not for the first time, “By my troth, Niece, thou wilt never get thee a husband if thou be so shrewd with thy tongue!”

Old Antonio nods. “In faith, she’s too curst.”

“Too curst is *more* than curst, so I shall lessen God’s sending in that way. For it is said, ‘God sends a cursèd cow short horns’”—a poor mate. “But to a cow too *curst* he sends *none.*”

Leonato is puzzled: “So, by being too curst, God will send you no *horns*...”

“*Exactly*,” she crows, “if he send me no *husband!*”—cuckold. “For the 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 had rather lie in the *woolens!*!’”

“You may light on a husband that *hath* no beard,” notes Leonato.

“What should I do with *him*? Dress him in *my* apparel and make him my waiting-*gentlewoman*? He that hath a beard is no *more* than a youth, but he that hath *no* beard is *less than a man!*”

“And he that is no more than a *youth* is not for me—and he that is less than a man, *I* am not for *him!*”

“Therefore,” she adds blithely, “I will take sixpence in earnest money from the *Beroarer*”—the Devil—“and lead his *apes!*” Custom holds that driving horny men’s souls down to perdition is the final fate of unmarried virgins.

Leonato chuckles. “Why, then go *you* into Hell!”

“No, only to the *gate*,” replies Beatrice. “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!*” She hears the laugh at *peter*. “To the *heavens!* He shows me where the *bachelors* sit—and there live we as merry as the day is long!”

Antonio’s disapproval is apparent. “Well, Niece, I trust *you* will be ruled by your *father!*” Hero nods compliantly.

Beatrice seems to concur: “Yes, ’faith, it is my cousin’s *duty* to make curtsy, and say, ‘Father, as it please you.’” She turns to Hero. “But yet for all that, Cousin, let him be a *handsome* fellow—or else make another curtsy, and say, ‘Father, as it please *me!*’”

“Well, Niece,” says Leonato, buoyantly, “I hope to see *you* one day fitted with a husband!”

Beatrice shakes her head. “Not till God make men of some other metal than earth. Would it not *grieve* a woman to be overmastered by a piece of valiant *dust?*—to make an account of her life to a clod of wayward marl?”—clay. “No, Uncle, I’ll none. Adam’s sons are my *brethren*—and, truly, I hold it a sin to match in my kindred!”

The governor looks at docile Hero. “Daughter, remember what I told you; if the prince do solicit you in that kind, you know *your* answer!”

“The fault will be in the *music*, Cousin, if *you* be not wooed in good time,” Beatrice assures the younger lady. “If the prince be too demanding, tell him there is *measure*”—in music, a term about timing—“in *everything*—and so *dance* out the answer!”

“For, hear me, Hero: wooing, wedding, and repenting are like a Scottish jig, a measure, and a cinque-pace”—three dance moves. “The *first suit* is hot and hasty, like a jig, and fully as fantastical; the *wedding* mannerly, modest as a measure, full of state and ancientry—and then comes *repentance*, and with its bad legs falls into the cinque-pace, faster and faster, till it sink into its grave!”

Leonato laughs. “Cousin, you apprehend surpassingly harsh!”

“Uncle, I have a good eye: *I* can see a church by daylight!”—spot the obvious.

Soft pink clouds float above, gilt-edged in the dimming sunset, and long blue shadows now stretch across the ground below. Leonato grasps old Antonio’s elbow and edges him aside from the white double doors of the hall’s entrance. “The revelers are entering, Brother; make good room.”

Attendants bring colorfully decorated masks to the nobles, and after a moment for tying, the governor’s party have their disguises fixed in place. They move into the spacious hall just as more guests arrive, some having changed from dining attire into clothes for dancing; they, too, are masked.

Inside, candles around the spacious room impart a warm glow to the ladies' gowns, adding sheen to the silken fashions and carefully styled hair, depth to the amplitude of glimpsed bosoms. From the affluent assembly's considerable display of jewelry, reflections sparkle.

The music begins softly, and the dancers pair in preparation for a slow and stately *pavane*, linking hands at arms' length; then, as the music requires, they turn and glide, moving forward and back, all in graceful symmetry.

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Prince Don Pedro—elegant in disguise as a foppish Florentine lord—has no trouble recognizing diminutive Hero despite her white-kitten mask. “Lady, will you walk about with your friend?”

She teases: “If you walk softly, look sweetly, and say nothing, I am yours for a *walk*—and especially when I walk *away*.”

“With me in your *company!*” He takes her hand.

“I *may* say so—when I please,” says Hero coyly.

“And *when* please you to say so?”

“When I like your *favour*,”—face, “for God defend the lute should be like the *case!*” she gibes, looking at his extravagant mask.

“My visor is Philemon's *roof*,” says Don Pedro. “*Within* the house is *Jove!*”

“Why, then your visor should be *thatched!*” In the tale, the god's earthly host seemed poor.

“Speak low, if you speak *love!*” he says warmly, as they move away toward a corner.

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Borachio (for it is he behind the mask) dances with Margaret, one of Hero's waiting-gentlewomen. “Well, I would you *did* like me!” he says—having courted her long, and with ardor.

“So would not I, for your *own* sake,” she sighs coquettishly, “for I have many ill qualities.”

“Which is one?”

She smiles at him with a ribald slyness. “I say my prayers *aloud*.”

He grins. “I love you the *better*: the hearer may cry, *Amen!*”

“God match me with a good *dancer*—” prays lusty Margaret.

“*Amen!*” says Borachio confidently.

“—and God keep him out of my *sight* when the dance is done!” She eyes him imperiously. “*Answer*, clerk!”

Borachio says, pulling her very close, “No more words. The clerk *is* answered”—the request has been fulfilled.

As they glide away, enjoying the music, she feels that he is indeed a promising partner.

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“I know *you* well enough: you are Signior Antonio!” says another of Hero's ladies, blonde Ursula.

The ancient denies it: “In a word, I am not.”

“I know you by the waggling of your head!”

“To tell you true, I *counterfeit* him,” says Antonio.

“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!*” she giggles.

Antonio insists, “At a word, I am not.”

“Come, come,” Ursula insists, “do you think I do not know you by your excellent *wit*? Can *virtue* hide itself? Go *to*, man!—you are he; graces will appear, and there's an end!”

He is, of course, quite pleased.

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Masked, Beatrice has partnered with a well disguised stranger. “Will you not tell me *who* told you so?”

“No, you shall pardon me,” says Benedick—who, in addition to wearing a large mask, has shaved off his dark beard. And, for this evening, he deepens his baritone.

“Nor will you not tell me who you are?”

“Not now.”

Beatrice frowns. “That I was ‘*disdainful*,’ and that I had my good wit out of *The Hundred Merry Tales*— Well, that was Signior *Benedick* who said so!”

“Who’s he?”

“I am sure you know *him* well enough!”

“Not I, believe me.”

“Did he never make you laugh?”

“I pray you, what is he?”

“Why, he is the prince’s *jester*, a very dull *fool*; his only gift is in devising impossible slanders! None but *libertines* delight in him, and their commendation is not in his wit but in his *crudeness*—for he both pleases men and angers them—and then they laugh at him and beat him!” She looks, crossly, around the dance floor. “I am *sure* he is in the fleet; I would he had boarded *me!*”

“When I know the gentleman; I’ll tell him what you say,” he laughs; he has taken her remark differently.

“Do, *do!* He’ll but break a comparison or two on me; which, peradventure not *markèd*, or not *laughed* at, strikes him into melancholy—and then there’s a partridge-wing *saved*, for the fool will eat no supper that night!” She sees a line of dancers forming. “We must follow the leaders.”

“In every good thing.”

“But if they lead to any *ill*, I will leave them at the next turning!”

The candles have burned down, the night air drifting at the door in is cooler, and the music draws to an end. The tired, happy dancers—some grateful for their anonymity after too much mask-induced candor—bow and curtsy, bid each other good evening, and depart. For those still unsated, wine and cheese await them on a table.

Standing outside, now, are Don John and Borachio. “It’s sure: my brother is amorous with Hero,” the count confirms to his man, “and hath withdrawn her father to break with him about it. The ladies follow her, and but one visor remains.”

“And that is *Claudio*,” says Borachio. “I know him by his bearing.”

Don John, who is not in disguise, approaches masked Claudio as he leaves the hall. “Are not you Signior Benedick?”

“You know me well; I am he.”

“Signior, you are very near my brother, in his love. He is *enamoured* of *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...”

“How *know* you he loves her?” asks Claudio calmly. But he is taken aback.

“I heard him *swear* his affection!”

“So did I too,” claims Borachio. “And tonight he swore he would *marry* her!”

Claudio shrugs.

Don John shakes his head, apparently in sad resignation. He says to Borachio, “Come, let us to the banquet.” They head back inside.

Claudio is stunned. Thinks the young officer, *Thus answer I in the name of Benedick, but hear these ill news with the ears of Claudio! ’Tis certainly so!—the prince woos for himself! Friendship is constant in all other things save in the office and affairs of love!*

*Therefore let all hearts in love use their own tongues!—every eye negotiate for itself, and trust no agent, for beauty is a witch against whose charms faith melteth into the blood! This is an occurrence of hourly proof—which I did not expect!*

He stares glumly into the night sky. *Farewell, therefore, Hero!*

Benedick, now unmasked, has come looking for his comrade in arms. "Count Claudio?"

"Yea, the same."

"Come, will you go with me?"

"Whither?"

"Even to the next *willow!*—about your own business, count!" Its leaves, stems tied together, are the emblem of rejected suitors. "What fashion will you wear the garland in? About your neck, like an usurer's chain?—or under your arm, like a lieutenant's sash? You must wear it *some* way—for the *prince* hath got your Hero!" In the love-wary officer's view, his friend has had a lucky escape.

"I wish him joy of her," mumbles Claudio.

Benedick laughs. "Why, that's spoken like an honest *drover!*—so they sell *bullocks!*"—young bulls. "But did you think the prince would have *served* you thus?"—done this favor.

Claudio waves him away. "I pray you, leave me!"

"*Ho!*—now you strike like a blind man! 'Twas a boy that stole your meat, yet you'll beat the *messenger!*"

"If it will not be, *I'll leave you,*" mutters Claudio, stalking away.

Care-free Benedick watches him go, amused by the youth's sensitive response. *Alas, poor hurt fowl! Now will he creep into sedges.*

He reflects on his own evening's encounter. *But that my Lady Beatrice should not know me, and know me! 'The prince's fool!'*

*Huh! It may be I go under that title because I am merry—*

*Nay, thus I am apt to do myself wrong: I am not so reputed! It is the base thoughts, bitter disposition of Beatrice that put the world into her person, and so give me out!*

*Well, I'll be revenged as I may!*

Prince Don Pedro emerges. "Now, signior, where's the count? Did you see him?"

"Troth, my lord, I have played the part of Lady *Fame!* I found him here as melancholy as a badger in a warren! I told him, and I think I told him true, that Your Grace had got the good will of his young lady. And I offered him my company to a willow-tree, either to make him a *garland*, as being forsaken, or to find him up a *rod*, as being worthy to be whipped!"

"To be *whipped?*" The prince frowns. "What's his *fault?*"

"The flat transgression of a *schoolboy* who, being overjoyed with finding a bird's nest, shows it to his companion—who *steals* it!"

Don Pedro is puzzled. "Wilt thou make a *trust* a transgression? The transgression is in the stealer."

"Yet it had not been *amiss* had the rod been made, and the garland, too: for the garland he might have worn himself—and the *rod* he might have *bestowed on you*, who, as I take it, have stolen into his bird's nest!"

Don Pedro dismisses the charge: "I will but teach hearts to *sing*, and restore them to their owners."

Benedick is pleased. "If the singing answer your *saying*, by my faith, you say *honestly.*"

The prince, too, has challenging news. "The Lady Beatrice hath a *quarrel* with you: the gentleman that danced with her told her she is *much wronged* by you!"

Benedick is indignant. "*Oh, she* misused *me*, past the endurance of a *block!*—an *oak* with but *one green leaf* on it would have answered 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!*—hurled jest upon jest upon me with such impossible conveyance that I stood like a man at a *mark,*"—set before a target, "with a whole *army* shooting at me!

"She speaks *daggers*, and every word *stabs!* If her *breath* were as terrible as her estimations, there were no living *near* her!—she would infect to the North Star!

“I would not marry *her*,” he vows, “though she were endowed with all that *Adam* had left to him before he transgressed! She would have made *Hercules* to *turn a spit!*”—reduced him to kitchen work. “Yea, and have *cleft his club* to make the *fire*, too!

“Come, talk not of *her*; you shall find her the infernal *Ate* in good *apparel!*”—a well dressed version of the Greek goddess of strife. “I would to God some scholar would *conjure* her; for certainly while *she* is here a man may live quietly in *Hell* as a *sanctuary!*—and people *sin on purpose* because they would go thither! So, indeed, do all *disquiet, horror* and *perturbation* follow her!”

Don Pedro is struck by the count’s intense—and revealing—vehemence. He points. “Look, here she comes.”

Governor Leonato approaches, accompanied by Beatrice, Hero and, finally, crestfallen Claudio, all leaving after the evening’s final collation of fruit and wine.

Benedick is again smarting. “Will Your Grace command me to any service *at the world’s end?* I will go now on the slightest errand to the *Antipodes* that you can devise to send me on! I will fetch you a *toothpick* from the *farthest inch of Asia*; now bring you the *length* of Prester John’s *foot*; catch you a *hair* off the great Cham’s beard; do you any embassy to the *Pigmies*,” he cries, glaring at Beatrice, “rather than hold *three words’* conference with this *harpy!*”

“Have you no employment for me?”

Mellow Don Pedro smiles. “None but to desire your good company.”

“Oh, *God*, sir!” groans Benedick. “Here’s a dish I love not: I cannot endure my lady’s *tongue!*” He stalks away, fuming.

Says the prince wryly, in mock sympathy, “Come, lady, come—you have lost the heart of Signior Benedick!”

Her face flushes. “Indeed, my lord, he *lent* it me awhile, and I gave him *use*”—paid interest—“for it: a doubled 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!”

“You have put him down, lady,” says Don Pedro, “you have *put him down.*”

“So I would not he should do *me*, my lord!—lest I should prove the mother of *fools!*”

Beatrice pulls a sullen companion forward. “I have brought Count Claudio, whom you sent me to seek.”

“Why, how now, count? Wherefore are you sad?” the prince asks him.

“Not sad, my lord.”

“How then? Sick?”

“Neither, my lord.”

Beatrice comments wryly: “The count is neither sad, nor sick, nor merry, nor well, but a *civil* count—civil as in orange, one of that *jealous* complexion!” she gibes, in a play on the stale, puckered fruit imported from *Seville*.

“I’ faith, lady, I think your blazon to be true—though, I’ll be sworn, if he be *so*, his notion is false!” says Don Pedro. “Hear, Claudio: I have wooed in *thy* name, and fair Hero is won! I have broke with her father, and his good will obtained! Name the day of *marriage*, and God give thee joy!”

Governor Leonato steps toward Claudio. “Count, take of me my daughter, and with her my fortunes! His grace hath made the match, and may *all* grace say *Amen* to it!”

Claudio’s smile is quite unmilitary.

“*Speak*, count—’tis your cue!” prompts Beatrice.

“Silence is the perfectest herald of joy,” he replies. “I were but little happy if I could *say* how much.” Claudio kneels before Hero. “Lady,” he says, taking her hand, “as you are mine, I am *yours!* I give away myself for you, and *dote* upon the exchange.”

Hero, her eyes sparkling, draws him to his feet.

“*Speak*, Cousin!” insists Beatrice. “Or, if you cannot, stop his mouth with a *kiss*, and let *him* not speak either!”

Don Pedro laughs. "In faith, lady, you have a merry heart!"

"Yea, my lord. I *thank* it, poor fool; it keeps on the windy side of care." She watches the mild couple kissing and whispering, content with what has been arranged. "My cousin tells him in his ear that he is in her heart...."

Claudio smiles at Beatrice: "And so she *doth*, Cousin!"

"Good Lord!" she cries. "*Fair alliance*—thus goes every one to the world but *I*," she groans, "and *I* am *sunburnt!*"—as opposed to *fair*. "I may sit in a corner and cry *heigh-ho* for a husband!"

The prince feigns belief in her pretended plight. "Lady Beatrice, I will *get* you one!"

"I would rather have one of your *father's* getting!"—a play on *begetting*—she replies. "Hath Your Grace ne'er a brother *like you*? Your father got excellent husbands, if a maid could come by them!"

Don Pedro flashes an arch grin. "Will you have *me*, lady?"

"No, my lord!—unless I might have *another* for *working-days*; Your Grace is too costly to wear *every* day!" She blushes and curtseys. "But, I beseech Your Grace, pardon me: I was born to speak all *mirth* and no *matter!*"

Don Pedro kindly reassures her: "Your *silence* most offends me; and to be merry best becomes you; for, out of question, you were born in a merry hour!"

"No, to be sure, my lord, my mother *cried*. But then there *was* a *star* that danced—and under that was I born!" She smiles at Hero and Claudio. "Cousins, God give you joy!"

As the noble party exchange happy comments on the turn of events, Governor Leonato asks Beatrice, quietly, "Niece, will you look to those things I told you of...?"

"I cry you mercy, Uncle," she says, apologizing for the delay. "By Your Grace's pardon." With a polite curtsy to the prince she leaves the regal party.

Don Pedro watches her go. "By my troth, a *pleasant*-spirited lady!"

Leonato concurs. "There's little of the melancholy element in *her*, my lord. She is never serious but when she sleeps, and not even *then*—for I have heard my daughter say she hath often dreamed of misfortune—and waked herself with *laughing!*"

"She cannot endure to hear tell of a *husband.*"

"Oh, by no *means!* She mocks all her wooers out of suit."

Don Pedro gives his friend a significant look. "She were an excellent wife for Benedick!"

"Oh, *Lord,*" laughs Leonato. "My lord, if they were but a *week* married, they would *talk themselves mad!*"

"Count Claudio, when mean you to go to church?" asks the prince.

"*Tomorrow*, my lord!" the bridegroom replies. "Time goes on crutches till Love have all his rites!" When Cupid's rites are done, the *husband* can claim *rights*.

The father of the bride lifts a palm in polite objection. "Not till *Monday*, my dear son, which is hence just a seven-night—and that a time too *brief*, too, to have all things answer *my* mind."

"Come, you shake the head at so long a breathing," says the prince, "but, I warrant thee, Claudio, the time shall not go *dully* by us!"

"I will in the interim undertake one of *Hercules'* labours!—which is to bring Signior Benedick and the Lady Beatrice unto the mountain—of *affection*, the one with the 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 beams, rubbing his hands together. "My lord, I am *for* you, though it cost me ten nights' watchings!"

"And I, my lord," says Claudio.

"And you, too, gentle Hero?" Don Pedro asks.

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

"Then Benedick is not the *unhopefullest* husband that I know," says Don Pedro charitably. "Thus far can I praise him: he is of a noble strain, of approvèd valour and confirmèd honesty."



“I will teach you how to humour your cousin so that she shall fall in love with Benedick,” he tells Hero. He turns to the men. “And I, with your two helps, will so practise on Benedick that, in despite of his quick wit and his queasy stomach, he shall fall in love with Beatrice!

“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....”

## Chapter Four Hoaxes

With Borachio, Don John broods in his rooms in the governor’s mansion. His foray foiled, the count fumes. “It is so; the Count Claudio *shall* marry the daughter of Leonato.”

“Yea, my lord—but I can *cross* it!” offers rascally Borachio, always eager to please.

Don John is listening. “Any bar, any cross, any impediment will be *medicinable* to me! I am *sick* in displeasure toward him, and whatsoever comes athwart *his* affection ranges evenly with *mine*. How canst thou cross this marriage?”

“Not *honestly*, my lord—but so covertly that no dishonesty shall *appear* in me!”

“Show me briefly how.”

“I think I told Your Lordship, a year since, how much I am in the favour of Margaret, the waiting gentlewoman to Hero....”

“I remember.”

“I can, at any unseasonable instant of the night, appoint her to look out at her lady’s chamber window.”

Don John is impatient. “What life is in *that* to be the death of this marriage?”

“The poison of that lies in *you* to temper: go you to the prince your brother; spare not to tell him that he hath *wronged his honour* in marrying the renowned Claudio—whose estimation do *you* mightily hold up—to a *contaminated stale*, such a one as Hero!”

“What *proof* shall I make of *that*?”

Borachio, usually genial in wine’s embracing warmth, now grows enthusiastic: “Proof enough to misuse the *prince*, to vex *Claudio*, to undo *Hero*, and kill *Leonato*! Look you for any *other* issue?”

“Only to despise *them*, I will endeavour *anything*!”

“Go, then; find thee a fitting hour to draw Don Pedro and the Count Claudio alone,” Borachio urges. “Tell them that you know that Hero loves *me*! Portray a kind of *zeal* to both the prince and Claudio—as if out of love for your brother’s *honour*, who hath made this match, and for his friend’s *reputation*, who is thus likely to be cozened with the *semblance* of a maid,”—fooled by a false virgin, “you have divulged thus.

“They will scarcely believe this without trial; offer them *instances*—which shall bear no less likelihood than *seeing* me at a chamber-window, *hearing* me call Margaret *Hero*! And bring them to see that the very *night* before the intended *wedding*!

“For in the meantime I will so fashion the matter that Hero shall be *absent*—and there shall appear such seeming truth of her disloyalty that *jealousy* shall be called *assurance*, and all the preparations overthrown!”

Don John approves the scheme. “Grow this to what adverse issue it can, I will put it in practise! Be cunning in the working of this, and thy fee is a thousand ducats!”

Borachio is confident. “Be you constant in the *accusation*, and my cunning shall not shame me!”

The count heads for the door. “I will presently go learn their day of marriage.”

Late the following morning, Benedick stands outside the mansion, ruminating near the garden's long arbor of white-painted trellises. Slowly rotating his hat, held in his hands by the brim, he stares down at flat gray stones paving a path through the soft grass. His dark hair and broad shoulders are rimmed in early sunshine. "Boy!"

The young servant runs up. "Signior?"

"In my chamber-window lies a book; bring it hither to me in the orchard."

"I am here already, sir!" boasts the pert lad.

"I know that, but I would have thee hence and *here again*." As he trots away, the boy makes a face.

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

*I have known when there was no music for him but the drum and the fife!—and now had he rather hear the tabour and the pipe! I have known when he would have walked ten mile afoot to see a good armour—and now will he lie ten nights awake craving 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 is he turned orthography—his very words are a fantastical banquet: just so many unusual dishes!*

He smoothes his long hair. *May I see with these eyes and be so converted? I cannot tell.*

*I think not! I'll not be sworn that love may not transform me to an oyster—but I will take my oath on this: till it have made an oyster of me, it shall never make me such a fool!*

He paces beside the delicate, fragrant blooms. *One woman is fair; yet I am well. Another is wise; yet I am well. Another virtuous; yet I am well. And till all graces be in one woman, one woman shall not come into my grace!*

*Rich she shall be, that's certain; wise, or I'll none; virtuous, or I'll never cheapen her; fair, or I'll never look on her; mild, or come not near me; noble, or not I for an angel! Of good discourse... an excellent musician... and her hair shall be of what colour it please God!* Benedick dislikes the effects of bleach and dye.

*Humph!* His musing is to be interrupted, he sees. *The prince and Monsieur Love!*

But Benedick is surprised to find himself disturbed by the younger man's personal progress. *I will hide me in the arbour.* He slips behind a veritable wall of white-and-yellow honeysuckle flowers.

Don Pedro is strolling happily with Claudio. "Come, shall we hear this music?" They intend to surprise Lady Hero with a song, as Borachio has suggested.

"Yea, my good lord," says the count, glancing about at the pleasant scene. "How still the evening is—as if hushed on purpose to grace harmony!"

Don Pedro turns aside, apparently examining the blossoms—and lowers his voice. "See you where Benedick hath hid himself?"

"Oh, very well, my lord!" whispers Claudio, enjoying the game. "The music ended, we'll fit the hid-fox with a pennyworth!"—play a worthy trick on him.

They nod to the court musician as he arrives with a lute. "Come, Balthasar, we'll hear that song again."

"O good my lord, tax not so bad a voice to slander music any more than once," pleads the singer, obsequious as usual.

"It is the witness ever of excellency to put a strange face on its own perfection," says Don Pedro. "I pray thee, *sing*, and let me woo no more."

"Because you talk of *wooing*, I will sing, since many a wooer doth commence his suit to her he thinks not *worthy*—yet he woos; yet will he swear he *loves*."

The prince is impatient. "Now pray thee *come on*; if thou wilt hold longer argument, do it in *notes!*"

“Note *this* before my notes: there’s not a note of mine that’s worth the noting,” replies humble Balthasar.

As the crooner tests the tuning of his instrument, Don Pedro complains quietly to Claudio: “Why, these are very *crotchets* that he speaks—note, *notes*, forsooth, and *noting*—*air!*”

- While they listen to Balthasar pluck out the lilting tune on his lute, Benedick watches love-stricken Claudio—sourly. *Now divine air! Now is his soul ravished! Is it not strange that sheep’s guts should haul souls out of men’s bodies?*

*Well, a horn for my money, when all’s done!* He means martial music, not desire.

Balthasar sings:

“*Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more!  
Men were deceivers ever!—  
One foot in sea and one on shore,  
To one thing constant never!  
Then sigh not so, but let them go,  
And be you blithe and bonny,  
Converting all your sounds of woe  
Into ‘Hey nonny, nonny!’  
Sing no more ditties, sing no moe  
Of tunes so dull and heavy!  
The fraud of men was ever so  
Since summer first was levied.  
Then sigh not so!*”

“By my troth, a good song!” says Don Pedro, after the lyrics’ somewhat cynical sentiment is repeated to the melody.

“And an ill *singer*, my lord,” insists Balthasar.

“No, no, ’faith—thou singest well enough for a shift.”

- *If he had been a dog that should have howled thus*, thinks Benedick, *they would have hanged him! And I pray God his bad voice bode no mischief; I had as lief have heard the night-raven, come what plague could have come after it!*

“Yea, marry. Dost thou hear, Balthasar: I pray thee, get us some *excellent* music; for tomorrow night we would have it at the Lady Hero’s chamber-window!” Borachio has offered to guide the visiting singer there.

“The best I *can*, my lord.”

“Do so. Farewell.” The singer bows and leaves, already thinking of a ballad better for courtship.

The prince waves to his host, who arrives just now—by chance, it would seem—in the splendidly glowing bower. “Come hither, Leonato! What was it you told me of, today?—that your niece Beatrice was in love with Signior *Benedick*....”

As the governor approaches, Claudio whispers: “Oh, *aye!*—stalk on, *stalk on!*—the fowl sits!” Then, aloud so that the eavesdropper may overhear: “I did never think *that* lady would have loved *any* man!”

“No, nor I neither,” says Leonato, “but *most* wonderful is that she should so dote on Signior *Benedick*—whom she hath in all outward behaviors seemed ever to *abhor!*”

- Benedick blinks. *Is ’t possible? Sits the wind in that corner?*

“By my troth, my lord,” says the governor, “I cannot tell what to think of it but that she loves him with an *enragèd* affection!—it is past the infinity of *thought!*”

“May be she doth but *counterfeit*,” suggests Don Pedro.

“Faith, likely enough,” says the count.

“Oh, a *good* counterfeit!” cries Leonato. “There was never counterfeit of passion came so near the *life* of passion as *she* reveals it!”

“Why, what effects of passion shows she?” asks Don Pedro.

- Urges Claudio, very softly, “Bait the hook well!—*this* fish will bite!”

“What *effects*, my lord?” asks Leonato. “She will sit... you heard my daughter tell you how...”

“She did, indeed,” says Claudio.

“How, *how*, pray you?” demands Don Pedro. “You *amaze* me! I would have thought her spirit had been invincible against all assaults of affection!”

Leonato nods. “I would have *sworn* it had, my lord—especially against *Benedick!*”

- That gentleman is perplexed. *I should think this a trick, but that the white-bearded fellow speaks it! Knavery cannot, surely, hide itself in such reverence.*

- Claudio whispers, “He hath ta’*en* the infection! *Keep it up!*”

The prince asks, “Hath she made her affection *known* to Benedick?”

“*No!*” replies Leonato. “And swears she never *will!* That’s her *torment.*”

Claudio confirms: “’Tis true, indeed; so your daughter says. ‘Shall *I,*’ says Beatrice, ‘who have so oft encountered him with *scorn*, write to him that I *love* him?’”

Leonato laughs. “Now, this says she 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!”

“Now that you talk of a sheet of paper,” says Claudio, “I remember a pretty jest your daughter told us of...”

Leonato chuckles, recalling. “When she had writ and was reading it over, she found ‘Benedick and Beatrice’ *between the sheets!*”

“That!”

“*Oh, she tore* the letter into a thousand *half-pieces!*—*railed* at herself, that she should be so immodest as 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!’”

“Then down upon her knees she falls,” claims Claudio, “*weeps, sobs, beats her heart, tears her hair, prays, curses!* ‘O sweet *Benedick!* God give me *patience!*’”

“She doth indeed,” adds Leonato. “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 seems alarmed. “It were good that Benedick knew of it by some *other*, if *she* will not uncover it!”

“To what end?” asks Claudio. “He would make but a *sport* of it, and torment the poor lady worse!”

Don Pedro seems severe: “An if he should, it were not amiss to *hang* him! She’s an excellent, *sweet* lady!—and out of all doubt she is virtuous.”

“And she is exceeding *wise,*” adds Claudio.

“In everything but in loving *Benedick!*” says the prince.

Leonato seems worried. “Oh, 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.”

“I would she had bestowed this dotage on *me!*” says Don Pedro. “I would have doffed all other respects and made her *half myself!*”—married her. “I pray you, tell Benedick of it, and hear what he will say.”

“Were it good, think you?” asks the governor.

“Hero thinks surely Beatrice will die,” Claudio tells the lords. “For she says she will die if he love her *not*, and she will die ere she make her love *known!* And she will die if he *woo* her, rather than she will abate one *breath* of her accustomed crossness!”

Don Pedro nods. “She doth well; if she should make a tender of her love, ’tis very possible he’d *scorn* it; for the man, as you know all, hath a contentious spirit.”

“He is a very *proper* man....” says Claudio tenuously.

Don Pedro shrugs. “He hath indeed a good *outward* happiness.” Benedick is handsome.

“Before God. And, in my mind, very *wise*,” says young Claudio.

“He doth indeed show some sparks that are like wit,” the prince allows.

“And I take him to be *valiant*,” notes Claudio.

“As *Hector*, I assure you,” says the prince, their general, as the hidden officer listens. “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 approves: “If he do fear *God*, he must necessarily keep peace; if he *break* the peace, he *ought* to enter into a quarrel with fear and trembling.”

“And so *will* he do,” says Don Pedro, “for the man doth fear God, howsoever it *seems not in him*, judging 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?”

- Silently, Benedick is weighing the shrewd compliments.

“Never tell him, my lord,” urges Claudio. “Let her wear it out, with good *counsel*.”

Says Leonato sadly, “Nay, that’s impossible: she may wear her *heart* out first!”

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

“My lord, will you walk?” asks the governor. “Dinner is ready.”

- As they leave the bright arbor, now abuzz with only honeybees, Claudio whispers: “If he do not *dote on her* after this, I will never trust my expectation!”

- Don Pedro replies, also in a hush: “Let there be the same net spread for *her*; and *that* must your daughter and her gentlewomen carry! The *sport* will be when they *both* hold an opinion of one another’s *dotage*—and no such matter! That’s the scene *I* would see—which will be merely a speechless *show*!

- “Let us send her to call him in to dinner!” They proceed away, merrily, to find Beatrice before their luncheon is served.

Benedick emerges from behind his floral screen. *This can be no trick! The conference was seriously borne. They have the truth of this from Hero.*

He frowns, pacing. *They seem to pity the lady!*

*It seems her affections have their full bent! Loves me!*

He stops, stricken by an epiphany. *Why, it must be requited!*

*I hear how I am censured: they say I will bear myself proudly, if I perceive that love come from her. They say, too, that she will rather die than give any sign of affection.*

*I did never think to marry....*

Suddenly, he decides. *I must not seem proud!. Happy are they that hear their detractions, and can put them to mending!*

*They say the lady is fair—’tis the truth!—I can bear them witness! And virtuous—’tis so; I cannot reprove it. He had certainly assailed it, in the past. 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!* he vows.

He paces again, anticipating teasing. *I may perchance have some odd quirks and remnants of wit broken upon me because I have railed so long against marriage... but doth not the appetite alter? A man loves the meat in his youth that he cannot endure in his age. Shall quips and sentences, all these paper bullets of the brain, awe a man from the surge of his humour? 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,* he admits. He sees movement at the door. *Here comes Beatrice!*

*By this day, she’s a fair lady! I do spy some marks of love in her!*

She marches up to him, cheeks flushed. “Against my will I am *sent* to bid you come in to dinner!”

“Fair Beatrice, I thank you for your pains.”

She scoffs. “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!”

“You take *pleasure*, then, in the message?”

“Yea—just so much as *you* may take upon a *knife’s point!*—can *choke a crow* withal!” He is gazing at her happily. “You have no appetite, signior?” She frowns and turns away. “Fare you well.” She goes back inside, still piqued by her uncle’s strange request.

*Hah! Benedick’s eyes now see in a new way. ‘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 are as easy as thanks!’*

*If I do not take pity on her, I am a villain! If I do not love her, I am a heathen!*

He smiles, the fascination growing, moment by moment.

*I will go get her picture!*

## Chapter Five Changes of Heart

**A**mong the apple trees with her waiting-gentlewomen, also in their twenties, Hero sees past the tall white arches that Leonato’s exquisite arbor is unoccupied.

“Good Margaret,” says the lady, “run thee to the parlor! There shalt thou find my cousin Beatrice holding forth with the prince and Claudio. Whisper in her ear, and tell her I and Ursula walk in the orchard—and our whole discourse is all of *her!*”

“Say that thou overheard’st us, and bid her steal into the pleachèd bower, where honeysuckles ripened by the sun forbid the sun to enter, like favourites, made proud by princes, who advance their pride against that power that bred it.

“She will hide her there to *listen*—to our purpose!

“This is *thy* office; bear thee *well* in it, then leave us alone.”

“*I’ll* make her come, I warrant you, *immediately!*” promises Margaret, hurrying away.

“Now, Ursula, when Beatrice doth come, as we do trace this alley up and down our talk must be only 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 of how Benedick is *sick in love* with Beatrice!

“Of this matter is little *Cupid’s* crafty arrow made, that only wounds by *hearsay!*”

“Now *begin,*” says Hero, “for look where Beatrice, like a lapwing,”—a low-swooping bird, “runs close by the ground,”—ducking down—“to hear our conference!”

- Ursula whispers as they begin to walk: “The pleasant’st angling is to see the fish cut the silver stream with her golden oars, and greedily devour the treacherous bait! So angle we for Beatrice—who even now is couchèd in the woodbine coverture. Fear you not *my* part of the dialogue!”

- “Then go we near her,” says Hero softly, moving forward, “that her ear lose nothing of the false, sweet bait that we lay for it!”

They walk near the hidden lady. “No, *truly,* Ursula, she is *too disdainful!*—I know her spirits are as coy and wild as *hawks* of the *rocks!*”

“But are you sure that Benedick loves Beatrice so *entirely?*”

“So say the prince and my new-trothèd lord.”

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

“They did *entreat* me to acquaint her with it! But I persuaded them, if they loved Benedick, to wish him *wrestle* with the affection, and never to let Beatrice know of it!”

“Why did you so? Doth not the gentleman deserve as full and fortunate a bed as ever Beatrice shall couch upon?”

“O god of *love!*” cries Hero. “I know *he* doth deserve as much as may be *yielded* to a man! But Nature never framed a *woman’s* heart of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice! *Disdain* and *scorn* ride sparking 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 prospect of *affection*, she is so self-endearèd!”

“I surely think so,” nods Ursula, “and therefore certainly it were not good she knew his love, lest she make *sport* at it!”

“Why, you speak truth! I never yet saw man, however wise, how noble, young, how rarely featured, but she would spell him *backward!*—if *fair*-faced, she would swear the gentleman should be her *sister*; if *dark*, why, Nature, drawing an *antique*, made a foul blot; if *tall*, a *lance* ill-headed; if short, an *agate* very vilely cut! If *speaking*, why, a vane blown by *all winds*; if *silent*, why, a *block* movèd by *none!*”

“She turns *every* man the wrong side out, and never gives to Truth and Virtue that which *simpleness* and *merit* purchaseth!”

“Surely, surely, such carping is not commendable.”

“No, *not!*” says Hero. “To be so odd and *from* all fashions as *Beatrice* is cannot be commendable. But who dare *tell* her? If I should so speak, she would *mock* me into *air!*—oh, she would *laugh* me out of myself, *press* me to death with *wit!*”

“Therefore let Benedick like covered fire consume away in *sighs*, waste *inwardly*; it were a better death than to die with *mocks!*—which is as bad as to die of tickling!”

Ursula seems to feel sisterly concern. “Yet *tell* her of it; hear what she will say....”

“*No!*—rather I will go to *Benedick*, and counsel him to *fight* against his passion!” says Hero. “And, truly, I’ll devise some honest slanders to stain my cousin with! One doth not know how such an ill word may *empoison* liking....”

Ursula objects: “Oh, do not do your cousin such a *wrong!* Having so swift and excellent a *wit* as she is prized to have, she cannot be so much lacking in true *judgment* as to refuse so rare a gentleman as Signior *Benedick!*”

“He *is* the *only* man of Italy,” sighs Sicilian Hero, “—always excepted my dear Claudio.”

“I pray you, be not angry with me, madam, for speaking *my* fancy,” says Ursula. “Signior Benedick, for shape, for bearing, argument and valour, goes *foremost* in report through Italy!”

“Indeed, he hath an excellent good name.”

“His excellence did *earn* it, ere he had it!”

- As they stroll further down the path, Beatrice follows silently, both hands holding her skirts’ hems above the turf as she crouches low behind the interlacing vines and blossoms.

“When are you married, madam?”

“Why, *every* day, as of tomorrow!” says Hero happily. “Come, go in. I’ll show thee some attires, and have thy counsel which is the best to furnish me tomorrow.”

- As they head for the house, Ursula whispers gleefully. “She’s snared, I warrant you; we have *caught* her, madam!”

- Hero whispers back. “If it proves so, then loving goes by haps!—some, Cupid kills with arrows, some with *traps!*”

Their girlish laughter floats back as they run to the mansion,

Alone, Beatrice rises, astonished. *What fire is in mine ears!*

*Can this be true? Stand I condemnèd 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 up our loves in a holy band; for others say thou dost deserve—and I believe it better than reportingly!*

On sun-warmed benches of carved stone in his garden, Governor Leonato relaxes with the prince and his two Italian officers.

"I do but stay till your marriage be consummate," Don Pedro tells Claudio, "and then go I toward Aragon"—his home in Spain.

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

"Nay," says the avuncular ruler, "that would be as greatly soil the new gloss of your marriage as to show a child his new coat and forbid him to *wear* it!

"I will be bold with only 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!"

Not long ago, Benedick would have relished the description, but Cupid's new dart is still quivering within him. "Gallants, I am not as I have been."

Leonato regards him. "So say I. Methinks you are sadder."

Claudio grins mischievously. "*I hope he be in love!*"

Don Pedro scoffs at such a defection. "Hang him as *truant!*—there's no drop of *true* blood in him to be truly touched with *love!*" He laughs. "If *he* be sad, he lacks *money!*"

"I have a toothache," says Benedick.

"*Draw* it!" advises Don Pedro.

Benedick waves away concern. "Hang it."

Claudio cites the executioner's cure: hanging, drawing and quartering. "You must hang it first, then draw it afterwards."

Don Pedro is watching Benedick. "What! *Sigh* for a *toothache?*"

"Which is but a *mood,*" says Leonato, "or a *worm!*"

Benedick grumbles, "Well, everyone can master a grief but he that *has* it."

Claudio regards his friend closely. "*Yet* say I, he is *in love!*"

"There is no *appearance* of fancy in him," says the prince, eyeing Benedick's attire up and down, "unless it be a fancy that he hath for strange *disguises!*—such as to be a Dutchman today, a Frenchman tomorrow, or in the shape of *two* countries at once—as, a *German* from the waist downward, all *slops,*"—short trousers, "and a *Spaniard* from the hip upward—no *doublet!*

"Unless he have a fancy for *that* foolery—as it appears he *hath!*—he is no fool for fancy, as you would have it appear he is."

Claudio persists. "If he be not in love with some *woman*, there is no believing old signs! He *brushes his hat* o' mornings—what should *that* bode?"

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

"No—but the barber's man hath been seen with *him,*" Claudio reports; they have noted Count Benedick's freshly whiskerless jowls. "And the old ornament of his cheek hath already stuffed tennis-balls!"

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

"Aye, and he rubs himself with civet!"—perfume. "Can you smell him out?"—detect the change—"by that?" asks Claudio.

Leonato nods. "That's as much as to say the sweet youth's in love."

"The greatest note of it is his melancholy," says the prince, starting to concur. "And when was he wont to *wash his face?*"

Claudio adds, "Yea, or to *paint* himself?—for the which I hear what they say of him!"

Benedick blushes beneath the faint touch of rouge.

"Aye, and his jesting spirit is now crept into a *lute-string!* And not governed by *slops!*"—a play on those of a musician's pipe. "Indeed, *that* tells a heavy tale for him!" Don Pedro throws up his hands. "Conclude, *conclude:* he is *in love!*"

"*Aye*—and I know who loves *him!*" says Claudio.



“That would I know too!” says Don Pedro. “One that *knows him not*, I warrant!” Benedick’s reputation offers no encouragement to marriage-minded ladies.

“Yes,” says Claudio, “or his ill requirements!—but, in despite of all, *dies* for him!”

The prince laughs knowingly. “*She* shall be buried with her face upwards!”—lying on her back.

Benedick, though grinning himself at the ribald jape, has had enough. He rises. “Yet is this no charm against *toothache!*”—known as a symptom of lovesickness. “Signior, walk aside with me,” he asks Leonato. “I have studied eight or nine wise words to speak to you, which these *hobby-horses*”—gossip riders—“must not hear!” They walk together toward the arbor.

The others, watching them, rise and exchange a glance. “For my life, it’s to break with him about Beatrice!” says Don Pedro.

“’Tis even so. Hero and Margaret have by now played their parts with Beatrice, and so the two *bears* will *not bite* one another when they meet!”

But their good cheer soon ends; as if conjured up by the mention of beasts, the dismal Don John now comes to the prince. “My lord and brother, God save you.”

“Good evening, Brother,” says Don Pedro.

“If your leisure serves, I would speak with you.”

“In private?”

“If it so please you; but Count Claudio may hear, for what I would speak of concerns him.”

“Why, what’s the matter?”

“Means Your Lordship to be married tomorrow?” Don John asks Claudio.

“You *know* he does,” says Don Pedro frowning.

“I know *not* that!—once *he* knows what *I* know!”

“If there be any impediment,” says Claudio, “I pray you disclose it.”

“You may think I love you not,” says Don John. “Let that disappear hereafter, and aim *better* at me by what I now will manifest! As for my brother, I think he holds you *well*, and in dearness of heart hath help to effect your ensuing marriage—surely a suit *ill spent* and labour *ill bestowed!*”

“What’s the matter?” asks Don Pedro sharply.

“I came hither to *tell* you! Then to put it briefly, for she has been too *long* a-talking of—*the lady is disloyal!*”

Claudio pales at the allegation. “Who, *Hero?*”

“Even *she*—Leonato’s Hero, your Hero—*every man’s* Hero!”

Claudio struggles with the idea. “Disloyal?”

“The word is too *good* to paint-out her *wickedness!*” says Don John harshly. “I could say she were *worse*—*you* think of a worse *title*, and I will fit her to it!” He lifts both palms in defense against their imminent challenge. “Wonder not till further warrant!”

“Go but with me tonight—you shall see her chamber-window entered, even the night before her *wedding* day! If you love her *then*, tomorrow *wed* her!—but it would better fit your honour to change your mind!”

Claudio stares, astonished. “May this be *so?*”

“I will not *think* it!” says Don Pedro.

“If you *dare* not trust what you’ll *see*, profess not that you *know!*” says Don John. “If you follow me, I will show you enough; and when you have seen more, and heard more, proceed accordingly.”

Fearless among men, proud Claudio dreads being dishonored by a woman. “If I see anything tonight why I should not marry, tomorrow in the congregation where I should *wed* her, there will I *shame* her!” he vows.

Don Pedro, the veteran commander of men, lays a hand on his shoulder. “And as I wooed for thee to obtain her, I will *join* with thee to disgrace her!”

Says 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*.”

“Oh, day untowardly turned!” moans the prince.

“Oh, mischief strangely thwarting!” groans Claudio.

“Oh, *plague* right well *prevented!*” says Don John. “So will *you* say when you have seen the sequel!”

## Chapter Six Clouds Gather

Down in the sprawling town, on a muddy street between an old stone church and a sagging warehouse sided with weathered-gray boards, two municipal officials with lanterns prepare to execute their duty in setting tonight’s watch. They are to inspect and advise the men, most of whom will rove the parish, looking out for trouble.

Master Constable Dogberry is responsible for their effort; his chief deputy for maintaining civil order after the curfew is Headborough Verges.

Beefy, red-faced Dogberry finishes curling the ends of his substantial mustache with thick fingers. He surveys the unkempt constabulary before him, and speaks the formal query with solemn gravity. “Are you good men and true?”

Verges, wizened and gray, comments sourly: “*Yea*—or else it were pity but they should *suffer salvation*, body and soul!” He means *damnation*.

“Nay,” says Dogberry sternly, “that were a punishment too *good* for them, if they should have any allegiance in them, being chosen for the *prince’s* watch!”

“Well, give them their charge, neighbour Dogberry.”

“First,” says the master, “who think you the most desertless man to be constable?”—chief for tonight.

One watchman pipes up: “Hugh Oatcake, sir, or George Seacoal—for they can write and read!”

“Come hither, neighbour Seacoal,” commands Dogberry. “*God* hath blessed you with a good name; to be a well-favoured man is the gift of *Fortune*; but to *write* and *read*,” says he, frowning, “comes by nature”—a dubious personal quality, in his view.

“Both of which, master constable—” Seacoal begins.

“—you *have*; I knew it would be your answer,” says Dogberry shrewdly. “Well, as for your favour, sir, why, give God thanks, and make no boast of it; and as for your writing and reading, let that not appear when there is no *need* of such vanity!”—keep skills acquired in vain to yourself.

“You are thought to be the most senseless and fit man here for the constable of the watch; therefore bear you the lantern.” He bestows it.

The master addresses the restless ranks. “This is your charge: you shall comprehend all vagrom men; you are to bid any man stand”—halt—“in the prince’s name.”

There is a question regarding such a vagrant’s apprehension: “How if ’a will not stand?”

“Why, then, take no note of him, but let him go,” the master constable advises, “and presently call the rest of the watch together and thank God you are rid of a knave!”

Verges nods sagely. “If he will not stand when he is bidden, he is none of the *prince’s* subjects!”

“True,” says Dogberry. “And they are to meddle with none *but* the prince’s subjects.” He looks to the men. “You shall also make no noise in the streets; for for the *watch* to babble and to talk is most tolerable, and not to be endured.”

“We will rather *sleep* than talk,” mutters one of the men. “We know what belongs to a watch.” They have seen—occasionally—others.

Says the master, approvingly, "Why, you speak like an *ancient* and most *quiet* watchman! For I cannot see how sleeping could offend. Only," he adds, "have a care that your halberds be not stolen." The conscripted citizens, duly warned, grip more firmly the worn handles of their tarnished weapons, issued for carrying during the watch.

The master continues: "Well. You are to call at all the ale-houses, and bid those that are drunk get them to bed."

"How if they will not?"

"Why, then let them alone till they are *sober*; if they make you not *then* a better answer, you may say they are not the men you *took* them for!"

The questioner nods, satisfied. "Well, sir."

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

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

"Truly, by your office, you *may*," Dogberry admits. "But I think they that touch *pitch* will be *defiled*! The most peaceable way for you, if you do take a thief, is to let him show himself to be what he is, and steal out of your company!"

Verges smiles at the master constable. "You *have* been always called a merciful man, partner."

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

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

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

Dogberry answers: "Why then depart in peace, and let the *child* wake her with *crying*; for the ewe that will not hear her lamb when it *baas* will never answer a *calf* when it bleats!" *Mooncalf* is term for *fool*.

"'Tis very true," says Verges, watching as the men yawn and shift from foot to foot.

"This is the end of thy charge," says Dogberry. He turns to Seacoal: "You, constable, are to represent the prince's own person"—act with full authority. "If you meet the *prince* in the night, you may stay *him*!"

Verges frowns; arrest the sovereign? "Nay, by'r our lady, that I think he cannot..."

"*Five* shillings to *one* on't, with any man that knows the statutes! He *may* stay him," says Dogberry—implying that the watchman also may *not*. "Marry, not unless the prince be *willing*," he adds, reasonably, in case any dullard missed the obvious. "For, indeed, the watch ought to *offend no man*; and it is an offence to stay a man against his will."

Verges can support that. "By'r lady, I think it be so."

Dogberry smiles contentedly; his business is now concluded. "Well, masters, good night. If there be any matter of weight that chances, call up me. Keep your fellows' counsels and your own; and *good night*! Come, neighbour."

Seacoal tells his fellows, "Well, masters, we hear our charge; let us go sit here upon the church-bench till two, and then all to bed."

Dogberry turns back, briefly. "One word more, honest neighbours: I pray you watch about Signior Leonato's door; for, a *wedding* being there tomorrow, there is a *great coil* tonight!

"Adieu! Be *vigilant*, I beseech you!"

Seacoal and two others settle in on the churchside bench. The rest of the watchmen disperse.

**B**orachio staggers down the dark street, slowed significantly by the accrued effects of much imbibing. He peers around, looking for his straggling companion. "What, *Conrad*!"

- Across the way at the churchyard, a watchman is alerted. "*Peace!*" he whispers to his mates. "Stir not..."

“Conrad, I say!”

“Here, man!” calls his wine-besotted friend, hurrying clumsily to catch up. “I am at thy elbow!”

“Mass! My elbow itched—I *thought* there would follow a *scab!*” gibes Borachio.

“I will owe thee an answer for that!” laughs Conrad. “And now, forward with thy tale....”

“Stand thee close, then, under this shed, for it drizzles rain,” says Borachio, “and I will, like a true drunkard, utter *all* to thee.”

- In the dim church grounds, Seacoal quietly warns his men as they rise: “Some *treason*, masters! Yet stand close!”

Borachio boasts: “Therefore know I have earned of Don John *a thousand ducats!*”

Conrad is wide-eyed. “Is it possible that *any* villainy should be so dear?”—so highly rewarded.

“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 take what price they will!”

Conrad is impressed with the fat fee that Borachio has exacted: “I *wonder* at it!”

“That shows thou art unconfirmèd,” Borachio tells the acolyte villain.

He begins the story of his exploit: “Thou knowest that the fashion of a doublet, or a hat, or a cloak, is nothing to a *man*—”

Conrad frowns. “Yes it is—*apparel.*”

“I mean, the *fashion.*”

“Yes, a fashion is the *fashion,*”—craze, Conrad observes, trying to be agreeable.

“*Pah!* I may as well say the fool’s the *fool!*” mutters Borachio. “But seest thou not what a deformèd *thief* this ‘fashion’ is?”

- One of the listening watchmen’s eyes narrow as he harkens to Borachio’s voice: “I know that ‘deformèd,’” he whispers. “He has been a vile *thief* this seven-year; ’a goes up and down like a *gentleman!* I remember *his* name!”

Borachio looks up. “Didst thou not hear somebody?”

“No; ’twas the vane on the house”—weathercock.

Borachio continues. “Seest thou not, I say, what a deformèd thief this *fashion* is?—how giddily it turns about all the hot bloods between fourteen and five-and-thirty: sometimes fashioning them like Pharaoh’s soldiers in the reeky painting, sometime like the god Bel’s priests in the old church-window, sometime like the shaven Hercules in the smirchèd, worm-eaten tapestry, where his *codpiece* seems as massive as his *club!*”

“All this I see,” says Conrad, “and I see that the fashion *wears out* more apparel than the *man!* But art not thou *thyselves* giddy with the fashion, too—thou that hast shifted out of thy tale into *telling* me of the fashion?”

“Not so, neither.” Borachio moves closer. “But know that I have tonight wooed Margaret, the Lady Hero’s gentlewoman, by the name of ‘*Hero!*’ She leans out at her chamber-window, bids me a thousand times good night!—”

He belches. “I tell this tale vilely!—I should *first* tell thee how the prince, Claudio, and my master, planted and placèd—and *possessed!*—by my master Don John, *saw*, from afar off in the orchard, this amiable encounter!”

“And thought they Margaret was *Hero?*”

“*Two* of them did—the prince and Claudio. But that devil my *master* knew she was *Margaret!*”

“And partly by his oaths, which first possessèd 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 *enragèd!*—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!*”

Deputy Seacoal has heard enough. He and his fellows rush across the dark street, brandishing their halberds and confronting Borachio and Conrad: “We charge you, in the prince’s name, *stand!*”

“Call up the right master constable!” says a watchman, much pleased with the apprehension. “We have here recovered the most dangerous piece of lechery”—he means *treachery*—“that ever was known in the commonwealth!” The third man goes to find Dogberry.

Seacoal’s doubts about the fashionable Borachio are confirmed. “And our ‘deformèd’ is one of them! I know him: ’a wears a *lock!*” He points, disgusted, at the lovelock, a ribbon-tied twist of hair dangling from under Borachio’s hat brim.

Conrad is upset. “Masters, *masters...*”

The second watchman sneers: “You’ll be made to bring your ‘deformèd’ *forth*, I warrant you!” Conrad’s laugh is crude, but the citizen means only *testify against him*.

“*Masters—*”

“Never *speak!* We charge you: let us *obey* you to go with us!” demands Seacoal, Dogberry’s surrogate bungler.

Borachio is bleakly blithe. “We are likely to prove a goodly *commodity*, being taken up under these men’s *bills!*” he jests, on a term for the weapons.

“A commodity in *question*, I warrant you!” quips queasy Conrad. But, already beginning to sober as a menacing blades are pushed closer, he will not challenge *this* billing. “Come, we’ll obey you,” he tells the officers.

Seacoal leads the crestfallen villains to face Master Constable Dogberry.

Under the starlight very early this new morning, the governor’s mansion is a dark, massive form; but the tall window of Lady Hero’s chamber is aglow with candle light, and the other rooms are already stirring with busy preparations for a joyous wedding.

“Good Ursula, wake my cousin Beatrice, and desire her to rise!”

“I will, lady!”

“And bid her come hither!”

“Will!” Ursula hurries away.

Margaret looks askance at the high, ruffled collar selected by Hero. “’Troth, I think your other *rebato* were better.”

“No, pray thee, good Meg, I’ll wear this.”

“By my troth, it’s not as good—and I warrant your *cousin* will say so!” She anticipates Beatrice’s reliable rebuking.

“My cousin’s a fool, and thou art *another*,” laughs the playful, happy bride-to-be. “I’ll wear none but this!”

“I’d like the new tire, within, excellently,” says Margaret, of the periwig, “if the hair were a thought *browner*. And your gown’s a most *rare* fashion, i’ faith. I saw the Duchess of *Milan*’s gown that they praise so....”

“Oh, that *exceeds*, they say!”

“By my troth, ’s but a *night-gown* in respect of yours,” says the urbane Margaret. She describes the famous frock: “Cloth o’ *gold*, and cuts, and laced with *silver*, set with *pearls*, down sleeves, side sleeves, and skirts, round underborne, with a bluish *tinsel!*”

“But for a fine, *quaint*, graceful and excellent fashion, yours is worth ten of ’t.”

Hero, who has had no time to order an elaborate wedding gown, is undaunted. “God give me joy to wear it, for my heart is *excelling* heavy!”—full.

Margaret grins. “’Twill be heavier soon—by the weight of a *man!*”

Hero blushes. “*Fie* upon thee! Art not ashamed?”

“Of *what*, lady? Of speaking *honourably*? Is not *marriage* honourable, even in a beggar; is not your *lord* honourable?”

She adds, mischievously, “Saving Your Reverence, I think you would not have me say, ‘A husband even without marriage.’ If bad *thinking* do not arrest true *speaking*, I’ll offend nobody!”

“Is there any harm in ‘the heavier by a husband?’ None, I think—if it be the *right* husband with the *right* wife; otherwise ’tis *light*,”—wanton, “not heavy!”

“For *else*, ask my Lady Beatrice,” says Margaret, laughing. “Here she comes!”

Hero smiles. “Good *morrow*, coz!”

“Good *morrow*, sweet Hero,” moans Beatrice, holding a handkerchief to her nose.

“Why, how *now*? Do you speak in a *sick* tune?”

“I am out of all *other* tune, methinks!”

“Clap us into ‘Light o’ Love’—that goes without a burden!” jests Margaret cheerfully; the song requires no bass part—no male voice. “Do you *sing* it, and I’ll *dance* it!”

Beatrice grins. “Ye’ll be light o’ love with your *heels!*”—held above her. “Then, if your husband have *stables* enough, you’ll see he shall lack no *barns!*”—playing on *bairns*, sons.

“Oh, *illegitimate construction!*” laughs Margaret. “I’d *scorn* that with my heels!”—run away.

Beatrice goes to Hero. “’Tis almost five o’ clock, Cousin. ’Tis time you were ready!” She blows her nose. “By my troth, I am exceedingly ill!” She sighs, in annoyance, “*Heigh-ho!*”

Margaret pursues that sporting term: “For a hawk, a horse, or a *husband?*”

“For the *letter* that begins them *all—H,*” groans Beatrice, her “aitch” suggesting “*ache.*”

The conspirators share a meaningful glance. “Well, if *you* be turned Turk, there’s no more sailing by the star!” says Margaret. If Beatrice’s aversion to marriage softens, *nothing* can be relied upon.

Beatrice frowns. “What *means* the fool, trow?” she asks the others.

“*Nothing*, I,” claims Margaret, all innocence. “But God send *every* one her heart’s desire!”

“These *gloves* the count sent me,” murmurs Hero fondly, touching them to her cheek. “They are in excellent perfume!” She offers a sniff.

Beatrice scowls. “I am stuffed, Cousin; I cannot smell!”

Margaret laughs lustily: “A *maid*,”—virgin—“and *stuffed!* There’s *goodly* catching of cold!”

“Oh, *God help me!* God, *help* me!—how long have *you* professed to apprehend?” demands Beatrice, surprised by the display of drollery.

“Ever since *you left off!*” retorts Margaret. “Doth not my wit become me rarely?” she smirks.

“It is not enough *seen!* You should wear it in your cap!” But Beatrice wags her head in pain. “By my troth, I am *sick!*”

With an arch smile, Margaret prescribes: “Get you some of this distilled *carduus benedictus*,”—holy thistle, but the liniment’s name suggests *arduous Benedick*, “and lay it to your heart—it is the *only* thing for a qualm!”

Hero laughs. “There thou *prickest* her with a thistle!”

“*Benedictus!* Why *benedictus?*” demands Beatrice sharply. “You have some moral in this *benedictus?*”

“Moral? *No*, by my troth, I have no *moral* meaning!” says Margaret wryly. “I meant plain, holy *thistle!*” Her chin tips up in girlish defiance. “You may *think*, perchance, that I think you are in *love*,” she declares. “*Nay*, by’r lady!—I am not such a fool as to think what I *wish*; nor do I wish to think whatever I *can*.”

“But indeed I *cannot* think, even if I would *think my heart out* in thinking, that *you* are in love!—or that you *will* be in love, or that you *can* be in love!”

“*Benedick* was ever such another”—a similar case, “and now is he become a *man!* He *swore* he would never marry—and yet now, in despite of his heart, he eats his meat without grudging!”

Margaret regards Beatrice. “And how *you* may be converted I know not—but methinks you look with your eyes as *other* women do!”

Despite her aching head, the lady can’t keep from smiling. “What a *pace* is *this* that thy tongue keeps!”

“Not a false gallop!”—a runaway notion, insists Margaret.

Ursula, smiling in happy anticipation, has returned to the room. “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, her slender hands trembling, her young heart fluttering, looks to her friends. “Help to dress me, good coz, good Meg, good Ursula!”

Beams of the bright sunrise are just now touching the mansion overlooking Messina, but the governor—although his daughter’s wedding is imminent—already has visitors: Master Constable Dogberry and Headborough Verges. “What would you with me, honest neighbour?” asks Leonato.

“Marry, sir,” says Dogberry, “I would have some confidence with you that discerns you nearly!”

“*Briefly*, I pray you; for you see it is a busy time with me.”

“Marry, that it *is*, sir!” Dogberry has seen the household’s frenzy, on his way in.

Verges concurs: “Yes, in truth it *is*, sir!”

“What is it, my good friends?”

Dogberry steps closer, to confide. “Goodman *Verges*, sir, speaks a little off the *matter*—an old man, sir, and his wits are not so blunt as, God help us, I would desire they were! But, in faith, honest as the shine between his brows!”

“Yes, I thank God I am as honest as any man living—any who is an *old* man, and no honester than I,” declares Verges.

“Comparisons are odorous,” says Dogberry. “*Palabras*, neighbour Verges!” *Pocas palabras* means *speak briefly*.

Leonato feels precious minutes slipping by. “Neighbours, you are tedious.”

Dogberry hears a compliment. “It pleases Your Worship to say so, but we are poor duty’s officers. But truly, for mine own part, if I were as tedious as a *king*, I could find it in my heart to bestow it all on Your Worship!”

“All thy tediousness on *me, eh?*”

“Yea, an ’twere a thousand pound more than ’tis!” says Dogberry, “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* it!”

“And so am I!” adds Verges.

Leonato strives to be pleasant, but to speed the officers on their way. “I would fain know what you have to say.”

Verges blurts it out: “Marry, sir, our watch tonight, ha’ ta’en a couple of as *arrant knaves* as any in Messina, excepting Your Worship’s presence!”

Dogberry quietly apologizes for that brusque effort. “A good old man, sir; he *will* be talking—as they say, when the age is in, the wit is out! God help us! It is a world to see!

“Well *said*, i’ faith, neighbour Verges!” he says charitably. “Well, he’s a *good* man. If two men ride of a horse, *one* must ride behind; as honest a soul, i’ faith, sir, by my troth he is, as ever broke bread! *God* is to be worshipped; but all *men* are not alike, alas, good neighbour!”

Leonato tells the verbose visitor, dryly, “Indeed, neighbour, he comes too short of *you*.”

Dogberry shrugs modestly. “Gifts that God gives.”

Leonato moves to the door. “I must leave you.”

“One word, sir!” says Dogberry. “Our watch, sir, have indeed comprehended two auspicious persons, and we would have them examined this morning before Your Worship.”

“Take their examination *yourself*, and bring it me,” says Leonato, still moving. “I am now in great *haste*, as it may *appear* unto you!”

That is sufficient for Dogberry. “It shall be sufferance.”

“Drink some wine ere you go; fare you well!” says Leonato graciously, at the door—where he meets a breathless messenger.

“My lord, they stay for you to give your daughter to her husband!”

“I’ll wait upon them!—I am *ready!*” cries the governor, hurrying away.

Dogberry tells Verges, “Go, good partner, go, get you to the town clerk. Bid him bring his pen and inkhorn to the jail; we are now to examination these men.”

Verges nods. “And we must do it wisely.”

“We will spare for no *wit*, I warrant you!” Dogberry tells his partner. “*Here’s* that which shall drive some of them to a non-come!”—leave them without reply, he means, having once heard *non compos mentis*, distracted.

“Only get the learned *writer*, to set down our excommunication, and meet me at the jail!”

## Chapter Seven Avowed in the Church

**D**awn is glorious this clear morning, and at the church a noble assembly has gathered to bear witness to the vows of Count Claudio, the gallant young officer from Florence, and of Hero, the charming daughter of Messina’s esteemed governor.

“Come, Friar Francis,” urges Leonato, quietly, at the alter, aware of the distinguished guests—including the Prince of Aragon. “Be brief! Only do the *plain* form of marriage, and you shall recount their particular duties afterwards.”

The priest nods. As the smiling congregation looks on, he turns to Claudio and formally begins the ceremony. “You come hither, my lord, to marry this lady?”

“No,” says Claudio.

“To be married *to* her, friar—you come to marry her!” amends Leonato jovially.

Friar Francis looks to Hero. “Lady, you come hither to be married to this count?”

Hero smiles shyly. “I do.”

The priest nods. “If either of you know any inward impediment why you should not be conjoined, I charge you, on your souls, to utter it.”

“Know you any, Hero?” demands Claudio.

“None, my lord.”

Friar Francis asks Claudio, “Know you any, count?”

Leonato smiles. “I dare make his answer: none!”

Claudio bursts out angrily: “*Oh*, what men *dare* do! What men *may* do! What men *daily* do, not knowing *what* they do!”

Thinks Benedick, surprised—and alarmed, as are all the other onlookers, *How now?*

*Interjections!*

“Stand thee by, friar,” says Claudio. “Father, by your leave,” he says to Leonato, “will you with free and unconstrained soul give me this *maid*, your daughter?”

“As freely, son, as God did give her to me,” says the governor.

Claudio glances toward the hushed pews. “And what have I to give you *back*, whose *worth* may counterpoise this rich and precious gift?”

Prince Don Pedro stands and replies from the front row: “*Nothing*—unless you render *her* again!”

“Sweet prince, you teach me noble thankfulness,” says Claudio. “*There*, Leonato!” he cries dramatically, “take her *back* again!”

“Give not this *rotten orange* to your *friend!*—she’s but the *sign* and *semblance* of her honour!”

Hero, stunned, her face flushed, stares with disbelief.

“Behold how like a maid she *blushes* here!” cries Claudio. “*Oh*, what authority and show of truth can cunning *sin* cover itself withal!”



“Comes not that blood as modest evidence to witness simple *virtue!* Would you not swear, all you that see her, that she were a *maid* by these exterior shows? But she *is none!*—she knows the heat of a luxurious *bed!* Her blush is *guiltiness*, not modesty!”

Leonato is baffled: “What do you *mean*, my lord?”

“*Not to be married!*” cries Claudio. “Not to knit my *soul* to a proven *wanton!*”

Leonato frowns: “Dear my lord, if *you*, by your *own* proof, have vanquished the resistance of her youth, and made defeat of her virginity—”

“I knew what you would say!” mutters Claudio, livid with contempt. “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*, showed bashful sincerity and comely love!”

“And seemèd I ever *otherwise* to you?” asks Hero, shocked and perplexed.

“*Out on thee!*” shouts Claudio, tears lining his cheeks. “*Seeming!* I will *write* against it: 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 pampered *animals* that rage in savage *sensuality!*”

Hero, clutching her pink bouquet, looks at him, aghast. “Is my lord *well*, he that doth speak so *wildly?*”

Leonato, struggling with the indictment, turns in desperation to Don Pedro. “Sweet prince, why speak not you?” he pleads.

“What should *I* speak?” asks the general, coldly. “I stand *dishonoured*, who have gone about to link my dear friend to a common *stale!*”

Leonato pales. “Are these things *spoken*, or do I but *dream?*”

The lugubrious voice of Count Don John replies. “Sir, they *are* spoken, and these things are true.”

Poor Hero can only stare. “*True?*” she gasps. “*Oh, God!*”

Benedick moves to the prince. “This looks not like a nuptial,” he says dryly.

Claudio demands attention. “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, dismayed, nods. “All this is so; but what *of this*, my lord?”

“Let me but move one question to your daughter, and, by that fatherly and kindly power that you have in her, bid her *answer truly!*”

Leonato turns to Hero. “I charge thee do so, as thou art my child!”

“O God, *defend* me!” she cries. “How am I *beset!* What kind of catechising call you *this?*”

Claudio glares. “To make you answer truly to your *name!*”

“Is it not Hero?” She wipes away tears. “Who can blot that name with any just reproach?”

“Marry, that can ‘*Hero,*’” says Claudio sternly. “‘*Hero*’ itself can blot out Hero’s virtue!—what man was he that talked with you yesternight out at your window betwixt twelve and one? Now, if you are a maid, answer to this!”

She is nearly numb; but her voice is clear: “I talked with *no* man at that hour, my lord!”

The prince bursts out in anger: “Why then you are no *maiden!*”

“Leonato, I am sorry you must hear: upon mine honour, myself, my brother and this grievèd count did *see* her, *hear* her, at that hour last night, at her chamber-window talk with a ruffian!—who hath indeed, most like a liberal villain, *boasted* of the vile encounters they have had a thousand times in secret!”

Benedick immediately frowns. Shy little Hero? Vile encounters?—a *thousand?*

“*Fie, fie!* They are not to be *named*, my lord, not to be *spoken of!*” declaims Don John, his righteousness apparently wounded by mere mention of such sins. “There is not chastity enough in *language* to utter them without *offence!* Thus, pretty lady, I am sorry for thy”—he strains for words—“much misgovernment!”

“*O Hero,*” cries Claudio, “what a Hero *hadst* thou been, if *half* thy outward graces had been placed about the thoughts and counsels of thy heart!” He wipes his eyes with the heel of a hand.

“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, turning all *beauty*, though it shall never be more gracious, into thoughts of *harm*!”

Hero looks upward briefly—and faints. Tiny flowers lie strewn on the stone floor beside her delicate, white-gloved fingers.

**B**eatrice rushes to Hero. “Why, *how now*, Cousin! Wherefore sink you down?”

Benedick stands beside them. “How doth the lady?”

Beatrice kneels to touch Hero’s ashen face, clasps the cold hands in her own. “*Dead*, I think! *Help*, Uncle!” she calls to Leonato. “Hero! *Hero*!” She looks to the men nearby. “*Uncle*! Signior Benedick! *Friar*!”

“Come, let us go,” says Don John grimly, at the doors. “These things, come thus to light, smother her spirits up.” The prince and his brother stalk from the house of worship, already starting to console Count Claudio. Soon the church has nearly emptied.

The governor is limp, devastated. “Hath no man’s dagger here a point for me?” he moans. Leonato glares down at his daughter. “O Fate, take not away thy heavy hand!—*death* is the fairest cover for her shame that may be wished for!”

Beatrice rubs the bride’s hands. “How now, cousin Hero?”

Friar Francis, kneels beside them. He sees Hero’s eyes flutter and open. “Have *comfort*, lady,” he says kindly.

Leonato asks Hero angrily, “Dost thou *look up*?”

The monk is surprised. “Yea—wherefore should she not?”

“*Wherefore*?—why, doth not every earthly thing cry *shame* upon her? Could she here *deny* the story that is *printed in her blood*?”—apparent in blushing. “*Do not live*, Hero!—*do not open 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!”

The old man bewails his own misery. “*Grievèd* I that I had but *one* child?—chided I for that at frugal *Nature*’s frame? Oh, one *too much*, by *thee*! Why had I *one*?”

“Why ever wast *thou* lovely in my eyes? Why had I not with charitable hand took up a *beggar*’s issue at my gates?—of whom, smirchèd thus, and mired with *infamy*, I might have said, ‘No part of it is *mine*!—this shame derives itself from *unknown* loins!’

“But *mine*!—and mine I *loved*, mine I *praised*, mine that I was proud of, mine so much that I myself was to *myself* not mine, valuing of her!—why, she, *oh she*, is fallen into a pit of such *ink* that the wide *sea* hath drops too few to wash her clean again, and too little *salt* which may season give to her foul-tainted flesh!”

During the stream of execration, Benedick has tried to account for what else he has heard. “Sir, sir, be *patient*! For my part, I am so attired in wonder I know not *what* to say.”

Beatrice has no doubt: “*Oh*, on my *soul*, my cousin is *belied*!”

“Lady, were you her bedfellow last night?” asks Benedick.

“No, truly not—although, until last night, I have this *twelvemonth* been her bedfellow!”

“*Confirmed*,” cries Leonato, not hearing the implication of *a year*; “confirmed! Oh, that is *stronger* made which was before barred up with *ribs of iron*!”

“Would the two princes *lie*?—and *Claudio* lie, who loved her so, that, speaking of her foulness, he washed it with *tears*?”

“Hence—*from* her! *Let her die*!”

With that the wise and gentle priest reaches his limit: this holy place is not to be the venue for demands of death. And he has observed carefully. He rises. “Hear *me* a little! I have only been silent so long, and given way unto this course of fortune, for *noting of the lady*!”

“I have marked the thousand blushing shames starting into her face—and a thousand *innocent* apparitions in *angels*’ whiteness *beat away* those blushes! And in her eye there hath appeared 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 experiential 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!*”

But her father is obdurate. “Friar, it cannot *be!* Thou seest that all the grace she hath *left* is that she will not add to her damnation the sin of *perjury!*—she *denies it not!* Why seek’st thou then to cover with excuse that which appears in proper nakedness?”

Beatrice and Benedick help Hero to stand.

Friar Francis has questions. “Lady, what man is he you are accused of?”

Hero shakes her head. “They know that do *accuse* me; I know *none!*” She tells her confessor, “If I know *more* of any man alive than that which maiden modesty doth warrant, let *all* my sins *lack mercy!*” She looks at Leonato. “Oh, my father, find you that *any* man with me conversèd at hours unmeet, or that I yesternight maintained exchange of words with any creature, then refuse me, hate me, torture me to death!”

Father Francis’s conviction is confirmed. “There is some strange misprision in the princes!”

“*Two* of them have the very bent of *honour,*” says Benedick. “And if their wisdoms be misled in this, the practise of it lives in *John the bastard,* whose spirit toils in framing of villainies!”

Leonato’s anger runs on; he shakes his head. “I know not; if they speak but *truth* of her, these hands shall *tear her!* If they *wrong* her honour, the proudest of them shall *well hear of it!*”

“Time hath not yet so dried this blood of mine, nor age so eaten up my invention, nor fortune made such havoc of my means, nor my bad life reft me so much of friends, but that they shall find, awakened in such a kind, both strength of limb and policy of mind, ability in means and choice of friends, to *repay them thoroughly!*”

The monk interrupts his new blustering. “*Pause* awhile!—and let my *counsel* sway you in this case!

“Your daughter the princes left here for *dead;* let her 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 frowns. “What shall become of *this?* What will this *do?*”

“Marry, well carried out on her behalf, this shall change *slander* to *remorse,*” says Friar Francis. “That is some good. But not for *that* do I dream of this strange course, but from this travail look for greater *birth:* her dying—as it must so be maintained—upon the instant that she was accused shall be *lamented*—pitied and excused by every hearer! For it so falls out that we prize not what we *have* to the worth whiles we enjoy; but it being *lost and lacked,* why then we stretch out 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, the idea of her *life* shall sweetly creep into his realm of imagination, and every lovely aspect of her life shall come appareled in more precious habit—more *moving,* delicate, and *full* of life—into the eye and prospect of his soul, than when she lived indeed!

“Then shall he *mourn,* if ever love had interest within him, and wish he had not so accused her!—not though he thought his accusation *true!*”

“Let this be so, and doubt not but that success will fashion the event in a better shape than I can lay it down as likelihood. If all *false aim* be revealed by this as *supposition,* the lady’s death will quench the wonder at her ‘infamy,’” the priest argues. “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 appeals to the governor. “Signior Leonato, let the friar advise you. And though you know my inwardness of love is very much unto the prince and Claudio, yet, by mine honour, I will deal in this as secretly and justly as your soul should with your body!”

Leonato, his fury spent, is exhausted. He nods tearful agreement. “Being that I flow in grief, the smallest twine may lead me.”

“’Tis well consented,” Friar Francis tells him. “*Presently away!* Forget strange sores; strangely, they retain the *cure!*”

“Come, lady, *die to live!* This wedding-day is perhaps but protracted; have patience and endure.”

With Leonato following, he guides the gentlewoman through a side door—and into a secret, sheltered seclusion.

The last of the wedding party come out into the sunshine. Benedick asks, kindly, “Lady Beatrice, have you wept all this while?”

Still clutching a wrinkled handkerchief, she returns his smile. “Yea, and I will weep a while longer!”

“I will not desire that,” he says softly.

“You have no reason to; I do it freely.”

Benedick rubs his newly shaven chin. “I do surely believe your fair cousin is *wronged!*”

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

“Is there any way to show such friendship?”

“A very even *way*—but no such friend.”

“May a man do it?”—is it feasible.

“It is a *man’s* office, but not *yours*,” she taunts.

Benedick regards her thoughtfully. “I do love nothing in the world so well as you.” His eyes search her face. “Is not that strange?”

Beatrice looks down. “As strange a thing *I* know now,” she admits.

Her reddened eyes sparkle. “It *were* as possible for me to say I loved *nothing* so well as you!” she teases. Then she faces his earnest gaze. “But *believe* me not. And yet I *lie* not—I confess nothing, nor deny I nothing!” she says, distraught. “I am sorry for my *cousin*....”

He beams at her. “By my *sword*, Beatrice, thou *lovest* me!”

“Do not swear—and then *eat* it!”—retract.

“I *will* swear by it that *you love me!*—and I will make *him* eat it that says I love not *you!*”

“Will you not eat your *word?*”

“With no sauce that can be *devised* for it!” he exclaims. “I protest *I love thee!*”

“Why, then, God forgive me....”

“What offence, sweet Beatrice?”

“You have stayed me just in time—I was about to protest I love you!”

“Then *do* it with all thy heart!”

She studies his strong, familiar features. “I love you with so much of my heart that none is *left* to protest!”

Benedick takes her hands in his. “Come, bid me do anything for thee!”

“Kill Claudio.”

“*Ha!* Not for the wide world!”

“You kill *me*, denying it! Farewell.”

Benedick still has her hands. “Tarry, sweet Beatrice...”

“I am gone, though I am here. There is no *love* in you!” She pulls away. “Nay, I pray you, let me go.”

“Beatrice—”

“In faith, I will go!”

“We’ll be friends first!” he pleads.

“You easier dare be *friends* with *me* than fight with mine *enemy!*” she says scornfully.

“Is *Claudio* thine enemy?”

Her tears expended, rage bursts forth: “Is he not proven the *height* of *villainy*, that hath slandered, scorned, *dishonourèd* my kinswoman?”

“Oh, that I were a *man!*”

“*What?* To bear her in hand”—deceive her—“until they come to *take* hands, and *then*, with *public accusation*, *uncovered slander*, *unmitigated rancour!*—  
 “*Oh, God*, that I were a *man!*” she shouts. “I would *eat his heart* in the *market-place!*”  
 “Hear me, *Beatrice!*—”  
 “Talk with a *man* out at a *window!*”—a waste of breath. “A *proper* saying!”  
 “Nay, but, *Beatrice!*—”  
 “Sweet *Hero!* She is wronged!—she is slandered!—she is *undone!*”  
 “*Beat!*—”  
 “*Princes* and *counts!* Surely, a *princely* testimony, a *goodly* count!” she cries bitterly. “*Count Confection!*—a *sweet* gallant, surely!  
 “Oh, that I were a *man* for *his* sake!—or that I had any friend who would *be* a man for *my* sake!  
 “But manhood is melted into *curtsies*, valour into *compliments*, and men are turned into *tongues!*—and *trim* ones, too: he is now as valiant as *Hercules* that no more than *tells a lie*, then *swears* to it!  
 “I cannot be a man by *wishing*; therefore I will die a *woman* with *grieving!*”  
 “Tarry, good *Beatrice!*—by this hand, I *love* thee!”  
 “*Use* it for my love some *other* way than swearing by it!”  
 Benedick releases her. “Think you in your soul the Count *Claudio* hath wronged *Hero?*”  
 “*Yea*, as sure as I *have* a thought or a soul!”  
 He nods slowly. “Enough. I am engaged. I will challenge him.  
 “I will kiss your hand; and so I leave you.  
 “By this hand, *Claudio* shall render me a dear accounting. As you *hear* of me, so think of me.  
 “Go, comfort your cousin; I must say she is dead.  
 “And so, farewell.”

## Chapter Eight Examination, Recrimination

**D**ogberry, Verges and, recently returned from the church, the sexton who also serves as city clerk, have met in the dim, dreary arraignment chamber at the jail—a bleak building of moldy, eroding stone, dark-stained oak and rusting iron. Dogberry wears a threadbare juridical gown, black but dusty.

Borachio and Conrad stand, in custody, with Seacoal and his men.

“Is our whole dissembly appeared?” asks Dogberry, heading to the bench.

Verges motions to Seacoal. “Go—a stool and a cushion for the sexton.”

Soon seated with his book, pen and ink arrayed on the stand before him, the clerk asks, “Which be the malefactors?”

“Marry, that am I and my partner,” Dogberry testifies.

“Nay, that’s certain; we have the exhibition to *examine*,” Verges confirms, given the governor’s authorization.

“But which are the offenders that are to *be* examined?” asks the clerk. “Let them come before the master constable.”

“Yea, marry, let them come before *me!*” says Dogberry. “What is your name, friend?”

“Borachio.”

Dogberry instructs the clerk: “Pray, write down, ‘Borachio.’” He turns to Conrad. “Yours, sirrah?”

The man resents *sirrah*: “I am a *gentleman*, sir; and my name is Conrad.”

“Write down, ‘Master Gentleman Conrad.’ Masters, do you serve God?”

“Yea, sir, we hope,” says Borachio, his head still aching. Conrad nods sullenly.

Dogberry: "Write down that they hope they serve God—but write God *first*; for God defend that God should go before such villains!

"Masters, it is proved already that you are little better than *false knaves*; and it will go near to be *thought* so shortly! How answer you for yourselves?"

Conrad says, testily: "Marry, sir, we say we are *none!*"

Dogberry spots a cunning dodge: denial of existence. He pulls Verges aside to confide: "A marvelous witty fellow, I assure you! But I will go about with him!

"Come *you* hither, sirrah," he tells Borachio, waving Conrad away. "A word in your ear, sir." He whispers, "I say to you, it is thought you are *false knaves*...."

"Sir, I say to you we are *none!*" Borachio replies.

"Well, stand aside," says Dogberry, annoyed. "Fore God, they are *both* in the *tale!*" he says, seeing collusion. He frowns in frustration. "Have you *writ down* that they are none?"

"Master Constable, you go not the way to examine," protests the clerk. "You must call first the *watch* that are their *accusers*."

"Yea, marry, that's the efiest way," Dogberry rules. "Let the watch come forth.

"Masters, I charge you, in the prince's name, *accuse these men!*"

Seacoal complies eagerly. "*This* man said, sir, that Don John, the prince's brother, was a villain!"

"Write down, 'Prince John a villain,'" Dogberry tells the clerk. "Why, this is flat *perjury*, to call a *prince's* brother villain!"—city commoner.

Borachio begins, "Master Constable—"

Dogberry cuts him off. "Pray thee, fellow, *peace!*" His eyes narrow. "I do not like thy look, I promise thee!"

"What heard you him say else?" the clerk asks the watchmen.

"Marry, that he had received *a thousand ducats* of Don John for accusing the Lady Hero *wrongfully!*" reports one of Seacoal's men.

"Flat *burglary* as ever was committed!" cries Dogberry.

"Yea, by the Mass, that it is!" affirms Verges.

"What *else*, fellow?" asks the clerk/sexton—now very much interested.

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

Dogberry is outraged at the idea. "Oh, *villain!*—thou wilt be condemned into everlasting redemption for this!"

"What else?" asks the sexton.

"This is all."

The clerk closes the record book decisively. He glares at the defendants. "And *this* is more, masters, than you can *deny*: Prince John is this morning *secretly stolen away*; Hero was in this manner *accusèd*, in this very manner *refusèd*—and upon the *grief* of this, suddenly *died!*"

Borachio is appalled; he blinks, gaping; no one was supposed to die.

"Master Constable, let these men be bound and brought to Leonato's! I will go before, and show him their examination." He gathers up his book and implements and leaves the jail.

Dogberry motions for the watchmen to pinion the prisoners' arms. "Come, let them be opinioned!"

Verges consigns them to the governor's justice: "Let them be in the hands—"

But Conrad resists restraint: "*Off, coxcomb!*"—fool.

"God's my life, where's the *sexton?*" demands Dogberry. "Let him *write down*, 'The prince's officer, *coxcomb!*' Come, *bind* them!"

"Thou wicked *varlet!*"

Conrad shoves the deputy. "*Away!* You are an *ass*," he shouts at Dogberry, "you are an *ass!*"

The master constable's indignation is immediate—high and vociferous: “Dost thou not suspect my *place*? Dost thou not suspect my *years*? *Oh*, that he were here to *write me down an ass!*”

“But, masters,” he tells the deputies, bent on retribution, “*remember* that I am an ass!—though it be not written down, yet forget not that *I am an ass!*”

Dogberry, deeply affronted, glares at Conrad. “*Oh*, thou *villain!* Thou art full of *piety*, as shall be proved upon thee by good *witness!*” he thunders, as the man is securely bound with cord. The deputies bind Borachio, who is stunned and pale, as well.

“I am a *wise* fellow,” insists Dogberry, “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!*” he cries, his deep voice rising.

“And one that *knows the law*, go to!—

“And a *rich* fellow enough, go to!—

“And a fellow that hath had *lasses!*—and one that hath *two gowns*, and every thing *handsome* about him!

“Bring him away!” the magistrate commands with an imperious wave.

But he bemoans the incomplete record: “*Oh*, that I had been *writ down* an ass!”

**O**n the wide portico of the governor's house, old Antonio attempts to stem his brother's insistently loud lamentation. “If you go *on* thus, you will *kill* yourself!—and 'tis not wisdom thus to second Grief against *yourself!*”

“I pray thee, *cease thy counsel*, which falls into mine ears as profitless as water in a sieve!” wails Leonato. “Give not *me* counsel!

“And let no *comforter* delight mine ear but such a one whose *wrongs* do suit with *mine!* Bring me a *father* that so loved his child, whose joy in her is *overwhelmed* like mine, and bid *him* speak of patience! Measure his woe by 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 ‘*Amen!*’ when he should *groan*, patch grief with *proverbs*, make misfortune *drunk* with *candle-wax*—bring him yet to me, and I from *him* will gather patience!

“But there *is* no such man!

“For, Brother, men can counsel and speak comfort to that grief which they themselves *do not feel!* But, *tasting* it, their counsel turns to *passion* who before would give *preceptive* medicine to *rage*, fetter strong *madness* in a *silken threads*, charm *ache* with *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 advising!”

*Indeed*, thinks Antonio, frowning at the protracted petulance. “Therein do men from *children* nothing differ.”

“I pray thee, *peace!*” groans Leonato. “I *will* be *flesh and blood!*—for there was never yet *philosopher* that could endure a *toothache* patiently, however they have writ in the style of gods, and claimed to *accept* chance by sufferance!”

“Yet bend not all the harm upon *yourself!*” urges Antonio. “Make those that do *offend* you suffer, too!”

Leonato looks over at the older man. “*There* thou speak'st reason. Aye, I will *do* so! My soul doth tell me Hero is *belièd*—and *that shall Claudio know!* So shall the *prince*—and *all* of them that thus dishonour her!”

Antonio points. “Here come the prince and Claudio—*hastily*,” he notes, as the two noblemen ride up.

“Good den, good den,” says Don Pedro stiffly as he dismounts.

“Good day to both of you,” says Claudio, with formal courtesy. The military officers are accustomed to the judgments made in war—sudden, harsh and often irreversible. When a conflict is done, they must leave it behind, whatever it has cost.

The governor glares at them. “*Hear you, my lords—*”

The prince interrupts: “We have some haste, Leonato.” They are eager to find Benedick, and take up again their pleasant, manly diversions.

“Some *haste*, my lord? Well, *fare you well*, my lord!” says Leonato scornfully. “Are you so hasty *now*?” He shakes his head in disgust. “Well, all is one.”

“Nay, do not quarrel with us, good old man,” says the prince, with the dignity of his rank.

“If he could *right* himself with *quarreling*,” cries Antonio angrily, “*some* of ‘us’ would lie low!”—die.

“Who *wrongs* him?” demands Claudio.

“Marry, *thou* dost wrong me!” cries Leonato, “*thou dissembler*, *thou*!” He moves back quickly, pointing: “*Nay*, never lay thy hand upon thy sword! I fear thee not!”

Claudio denies the notion: “Marry, *besprew* my hand if it should give your age such cause of fear! In faith, my hand meant nothing with my *sword*.”

Leonato scowls, his face red with rage. “Never *flee* and *jest* at *me*! I speak not like a *dotard* nor a *fool*, as if under *privilege of age* to brag what I have done being young, or what *would* do were I not *old*!” He steps boldly toward the count.

“*Know*, Claudio, to thy *face*: *thou* hast so *wronged* mine innocent child and me that I am forced to lay my reverence by!—and, with gray hair and bruises 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*!—*oh*, in a tomb where *scandal* never slept, save this of hers!—*framed* by *thy villainy*!”

“My *villainy*?”

“*Thine*, Claudio!—*thine*, I say!”

Don Pedro shakes his head. “You say not right, old man.”

Leonato’s anger rises further. “My lord, my lord, I’ll *prove it on his body*, if he *dare*, despite his fine fencing and his active practise, his May of youth and bloom of lustihood!”

“*Away*!” says Claudio. The warrior is a foot taller and thirty years younger. “I will not have to do with you!”

“*Canst* thou so *doff* me?” demands Leonato. “*Thou* hast *killed my child*! If thou kill’st *me*, boy, *thou* shalt kill a *man*!” he cries, in hot defiance.

Old Antonio’s ire has now swollen, too, and he hobbles over to confront. “He shall kill *two* of us!—and *men indeed*! But that’s no matter. Let him kill *one* first! *Win* me and *wear* me!”—boast of it afterward. “Let him answer *me*!”

“Come, *follow* me, *boy*! Come, *Sir Boy*, come! *Follow* me, *Sir Boy*!—I’ll whip you from your foining *fencing*!—aye, as I am a gentleman, I *will*!” his reedy voice avers.

Leonato resists being supplanted in fury. “Brother—”

“*Content* yourself!” demands the white-bearded nobleman. “God knows I loved my niece!—and she is *dead*, *slandered* to death by *villains* that dare as well answer a *man* in deed as I dare *take a serpent* by the *tongue*!” He hurls abuse at the prince and count: “*Boys*, *apes*, *braggarts*, *Jacks*, *milksops*!”

“Brother Antony—”

“Hold you *content*!” insists the elderly battler. “*What*, man? I *know* them—yea, and what they *weigh*, even to the utmost scruple!—*scrambling*, *out-facing*, *fashion-mongering boys*, that *lie* and *cog* and *flout*, deprave and *slander*!—go *anticy*, show outward *hideousness*!” he cries, his dry voice rasping, “and *speak*, in half-a-dozen dangerous *words*, of how they *might* hurt their enemies, if they *durst*! Yet that is *all*!”

“But, brother Antony—”



“Come, ’tis no *matter!*” says Antonio, steaming. “Do not you *meddle!*—let *me* deal in this!” Don Pedro, secure in his actions; dismisses their complaint. “Gentlemen both, we will not await your *patience*.”

“My heart is sorry for your daughter’s death,” he tells Leonato, “but, on my honour, she was charged with nothing but what was true, and very full of proof.”

“My lord, *my lord!*—” says Leonato, pushing forward with further issues yet unaired.

Don Pedro shakes his head, and he waves the brothers away. “I will not hear you.”

“*No?*” says the governor, livid. “Come, Brother; away! I *will* be heard!” he vows.

“And *shall*, or *some* of us will smart for it!” adds Antonio, as a parting shot.

The old men withdraw into the sorrowful mansion.

Don Pedro and Claudio are left to muse about their furious reception and the lords’ powerful indignation—responses they consider patently unwarranted.

The prince nods toward town as Count Benedick rides in their direction. “See, here comes the man we went to seek!”

“Now, signior, what *news?*” asks Claudio brightly.

Benedick addresses the prince as he ties the reins to an iron post. “Good day, my lord.”

“*Welcome*, signior—you are almost come to part a *fray!*”

“We had like to have had our two *noses* snapped off by two old men without *teeth!*” laughs Claudio.

“Leonato and his brother!” says the general. “What thinkest thou?—had we fought, I suspect we should have been *too young* for them!”

Benedick speaks gravely. “In a false quarrel there is no true valour. I came to seek you both.”

“We have been *up and down* seeking *thee!*” says Claudio, smiling, “for we are in high-proof melancholy, and would fain have it *beaten away!* Wilt thou use thy wit?”

“It is in my *scabbard*,” says Benedick coldly. “Shall I draw it?” The others fail to perceive the menace in his voice.

Don Pedro smiles. “Dost thou wear thy wit *by thy side?*”

“Never did any so—though very many have been *beside* their wits!” jests Claudio. “I will bid thee draw as we do the *minstrels*: draw it to pleasure us!”—use wit for amusement.

A young woman’s supposed death has apparently had little effect on the other soldiers. Benedick finds himself increasingly disturbed by his comrades’ callous indifference.

The prince now looks more closely at Benedick’s stony countenance. “As I am an honest man, he looks *pale!* Art thou sick, or angry?”

“What?—*courage*, man!” urges Claudio jovially. “What? Though care killed the *cat*, thou hast mettle enough in thee to kill *care!*”

Glibness is a hardly the posture to adopt before Benedick today. His silent stare should be warning enough, but he cautions Claudio: “Sir, I shall meet your wit on the rise, if you aim it against me. I pray you choose another subject.”

Claudio, still jousting amiably, chuckles. “Nay, then, give him another *staff!*” he tells the prince, “this last was *broken across!*”

But Don Pedro frowns, now concerned. “By this light, he changes more and more; I think he be angry indeed!”

But still Claudio gibes at the usually sprightly officer: “If he *be*, he knows how to turn his *buckler!*”—parry a thrust with his shield.

“Shall I speak a word in your ear?” says Benedick; motioning for the count to step aside with him.

Claudio expects to hear a wry confidence. “God bless me from a *challenge!*” he laughs.

Benedick says, intensely, to Claudio alone: “You are a *villain!*”

“I jest not; I will make it good however you dare, with what you dare, and when you dare.

“Do me the right, or I will proclaim your *cowardice*.”

“You have *killed a sweet lady*, and her death shall fall *heavily* on you. Let me hear from you.” Claudio frowns, his reply seems confident: “Well, I *will* meet you—so that I may have *good cheer*.”

Don Pedro hears only that response. “What?—a feast, a *feast!*”

“I’ faith, I *thank* him,” says Claudio, affecting to be lighthearted despite the demand to duel. “He *hath* bid me to a *calf’s* head and a *capon*,”—tender meats, “the which if I do not *carve* most curiously, say my knife’s *naught!*”

“Shall I not find a *woodcock*, too?”—a fool. He looks at Benedick, still hoping he has spoken in jest.

“Sir, your wit ambles well,” says Benedick. “It *goes easily*”—soon disappears.

Don Pedro, sensing the tension, speaks to lessen it; he lays a hand on Benedick’s shoulder. “I’ll tell thee how Beatrice praised thy wit the other day!” he offers. “I said thou hadst a fine wit. ‘True,’ said she, ‘a fine *little* one!’”

“‘No,’ said I, ‘a great wit.’ ‘Right,’ says she, ‘a great *gross* one!’”

“‘Nay,’ said I, ‘a *good* wit.’ ‘Just,’ said she, ‘—it *hurts nobody!*’”

“‘Nay,’ said I, ‘the gentleman is wise.’ ‘Certainly,’ said she, ‘a *wiseacre!*’”

“‘Nay,’ said I, ‘he hath two tongues!’—another language. ‘*That I believe,*’ said she, ‘for he swore a thing to me on Monday night which he *forsook* on Tuesday morning—*there’s* a double tongue!—*there’s* two tongues!’”

The prince laughs. “Thus did she, an *hour* altogether, transshape thy particular virtues! Yet at last she concluded, with a sigh, thou wast the *properest* man in *Italy!*”

Claudio laughs, trying to enter into the happier mood. “For the which she wept heartily—then said she care’d not!”

“Yea, that she *did!* But yet, for all that, an if she did not hate him *deadly*, she would love him *dearly!*” chuckles Don Pedro. “The old man’s daughter told us all!”

Benedick’s jaws tighten at the careless mention of Hero.

“All, *all!*” laughs Claudio, “And, moreover, *God* saw *him* when he was hid in the garden!” he tells the prince, remembering the trick they had played.

Benedick flushes, realizing he had been taken in.

Don Pedro laughs. “But when shall we set the savage bull’s *horns* on the sensible Benedick’s head?”

“Yea, and text *underneath*: ‘Here dwells Benedick the *married man!*’” laughs Claudio.

Benedick goes to his horse. “Fare you well, boy. You know my mind.

“I will leave you now to your housewife humour; you break *jests* as braggarts do their *blades,*”—nicking them to simulate battle wear, “which, God be thanked, hurt not.”

He addresses the prince: “My lord, for your many courtesies, I thank you. I must discontinue your company.

“Your brother the bastard is fled from Messina! You have, between you, killed a sweet and innocent lady!

“As for my Lord Lackbeard there, he and I shall *meet*; but till then, peace be with him.”

Benedick unties his steed from the post, and leads it away toward the stable.

Don Pedro watches, all merriment gone. “He is in earnest!”

“In most profound earnest—and, I’ll warrant you, for the love of Beatrice.”

“And hath *challenged* thee?”

“Most sincerely.”

The inexplicable changes he has met exasperate the prince. “What a *pretty thing* man is when he puts on his doublet and hose, but leaves off his *wit!*”

“He then seems a giant—compared to an *ape,*” says Claudio. “But then an ape is as a *doctor* to such a man!”

Yet again, the soldiers find themselves in complete, silent accord. Concerns associated with women have been chronic disrupters of men's peace, but in that regard, Benedick has always been the exemplar of resistance.

As Claudio starts to speak, Don Pedro stops him. "But, soft you, let me be." He needs to do some thinking. "Did he not say my brother was *fled*?"

Claudio nods, frowning as he watches Benedick, down at the stable doors.

The prince feels uneasy. Something is very wrong.

## Chapter Nine Revelations and Regrets

Don Pedro has been pacing, silently reviewing the indisputable evidence against the late Lady Hero which he himself witnessed, when Claudio brings the master constable to the governor's porch; with them are the deputy and several men of the watch, guarding two prisoners.

They stop. "Come, you, sir!" says Dogberry, prodding the sullen Conrad forward. "If Justice cannot tame *you*, she shall ne'er weigh more raisins"—he means reasons—"in her balance! Nay, as you be a-cursing '*Hypocrite!*' once, you must be looked to."

"*How now?*" says the prince, surprised. "One of my *brother's* men, *bound*—*Borachio*, too!"

"Hearken after their offences, my lord," urges Claudio grimly.

"Officers, what offence have these men done?" asks Don Pedro.

Dogberry replies. "Marry, sir, they have committed *false report*; moreover, they have spoken *untruths*! Secondarily, they are *slanders*; sixth and lastly, they have belied a *lady*! Thirdly, they have verified *unjust* things—and, to conclude: they are *lying knaves*!"

The prince tries again, with his own enumeration. "First," he says, "I ask thee what they have *done*; thirdly, I ask thee what's their *offence*; sixth and lastly, why they are *committed*—and, to conclude, what you lay to their *charge*."

Claudio laughs. "Rightly reasoned, and in his own division!—and, by my troth, there's even *one* meaning well *suitèd*!"

Don Pedro asks the prisoners: "Whom have you offended, masters, that you are thus bound to your answer? This learned constable is too cunning to be understood. What's your offence?"

Borachio is sober at last, and after painful, guilty reflection upon the outcome of his scheme, deeply repentant and remorseful. "Sweet prince, let me go no further to mine answer: do you *hear* me, and let this count *kill* me!" He stares at the ground, unable to face them. "I have deceived even your very *eyes*!"

"What your wisdoms could not discover, these shallow *fools*"—he glances at the deputies—"have brought to light—who in the night overheard me confessing to this man how Don John your brother was incited by me to slander the Lady Hero; how you were brought into the orchard, and saw me court *Margaret* in Hero's garments!"

"Now, when you should *marry* her, you *disgraced* her!"

"My villainy they have upon record—which I had rather *seal with my death* than repeat, even to my *shame*!" he says, eyes brimming. "The lady is *dead*," he sobs, "upon mine and my master's false accusation! And, briefly, I desire nothing but the reward of a *villain*!"

Don Pedro, pale, looks at Claudio. "Runs not this speech like *iron* through your body?"

"I have *drunk poison* while he uttered it!"

"But did my brother *set thee on* to this?" the prince asks Borachio.

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

"He is *composed* and framed of *treachery*!" growls the prince. "And *fled* he is, upon this villainy!"

Claudio, miserable, closes his eyes. "*Sweet Hero!* Now thine image doth appear, in the rare semblance that I loved at first!"

Dogberry rouses the constable to movement. “Come, bring away the plaintiffs; by this time our sexton hath reformed Signior Leonato of the matter.

“And, masters, do not forget to specify, when time and place shall serve, that *I am an ass!*”

“Here,” says Verges, pointing, “here comes Master Signior Leonato, and the sexton, too.”

The churchman-clerk follows the governor and his brother.

“*Which* is the villain?” snarls Leonato. “Let me see his *eyes*—so that, when I note another man like him, I may avoid him! Which of these is he?”

“If you would know your wronger, look on me,” says Borachio, stepping forward.

“Art thou the slave that with thy breath hast killed mine innocent child?”

Borachio weeps. “Yea, even I alone!”

“*No*, not *so*, villain!” cries Leonato, “thou *beliest* thyself!” He motions toward the prince and the count. “Here stand a pair of *honourable* men!—a third is *fled*—that had a hand in it!

“I *thank* you princes for my daughter’s death!” he cries, with scalding irony. “Record it with your *high* and *worthy deeds!* ’Twas *bravely* done, if you’ll *bethink* you of it!”

“I know not *how* to pray your patience,” says Claudio—stunned, chastised, defeated—“yet I must speak! Choose your revenge *yourselves!*—impose upon me what penance your invention can lay upon my sin!

“Yet, sinned I not but in *mistaking*,” he protests weakly.

“By my soul, nor *I*,” says Don Pedro. “And yet, to satisfy this good old man, I would bend under any heavy weight that he’ll enjoin me to!”

The governor speaks slowly, solemnly. “I cannot bid you bid my daughter *live*,” says Leonato. “That were impossible.

“But, I pray you both: make known to the people in Messina here how *innocently* she died!

“And if your love can labour aught in sad invention, hang an *epitaph* upon her tomb, and sing it to her bones!—sing it *tonight!*”

“Tomorrow 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 now heir to both of us”—an untruth; Antonio has only a son. “Give *her* the right you *should* have given her cousin—and so dies my revenge.”

Claudio, crushed by guilt, anguished in loss, is eager to comply. “O noble sir, your over-kindness doth wring tears from me! I do embrace your offer!—and henceforth dispose to you poor Claudio!”

Says Leonato, “Tomorrow, then, I will expect your coming; tonight I take my leave.”

Pointing to Borachio, he tells Don Pedro, “This wicked man shall face-to-face be brought to *Margaret*, who I believe was packed in all this wrong, hired to it by your brother!”

“*No*, by my *soul*, she was *not!*” cries Borachio, “nor knew what she did when she spoke to me, but always hath been *just* and *virtuous* in anything that I do know of her!”

Despite his anger, the old man is cheered; his daughter has loved Margaret as she would a sister; and Borachio, expecting—wanting—only death, likely speaks the truth. Leonato decides he will find out.

Dogberry has been silent, but he would draw the governor’s attention to a further crime—an egregious one. “Moreover, sir—which indeed is not under white and black,” he admits, “*this* plaintiff here, the *offender*”—he shakes Conrad by the collar—“did call me *ass!* I beseech you, let it be remembered in his punishment!”

He notes a puzzling loose end in the case: a missing accomplice. “And also, the watch heard them talk of one *deformèd*. They say he wears a *key* in his ear, the lock hanging by it!—and he ‘borrows *money*, for God’s sake!’—the which he hath used so long, but never repaid, that now men grow hard-hearted, and will lend nothing in *God’s* name!

“Pray you, examine him upon that point.”

Leonato—who can see Borachio’s lovelock—only nods to the master constable. “I thank thee for thy care and honest pains.”

“Your Worship speaks like a most thankful and reverend youth, and I praise God for you!”  
Gold ducats clink as they are passed to the official. “There’s for thy pains.”

Dogberry bows. “God save the foundation!” he says gratefully—although the phrase usually commends an almshouse.

“Go; I discharge thee of thy prisoner,” says Leonato, “and I thank thee.”

“I leave 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 wished, God prohibit it!”

He waves Verges along. “Come, neighbour.” Together they head back down into the city.

Leonato bows curtsy to the prince and Count Claudio. “Until tomorrow morning, lords, farewell.”

“Farewell, my lords,” says old Antonio gruffly. “We look for you tomorrow!”

“We will not fail,” Don Pedro pledges.

Claudio is subdued, deep in sorrowful remembrance and regret. “Tonight I’ll mourn with Hero,” he says, very softly.

Leonato addresses the watchmen guarding Borachio and Conrad. “Bring you these fellows on.

“We’ll talk with Margaret as to how her acquaintance grew with this crude fellow!”

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Behind the governor’s mansion, at the entrance to the elaborate formal garden, Count Benedick encounters one of Hero’s waiting-gentlewomen.

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

Meg craves attention; she was upset by the wedding’s dreadful outcome, and she chafes at having heard nothing from her *inamorato* since, after some wine, she accommodated his nighttime whimsy—styling themselves as the upright lady and her young count in a playful parody. “Will you then write me a *sonnet* in praise of my *beauty*?” she asks dryly.

“In so high a style, Margaret, that no man living shall come *over* it!—for, in most comely truth, thou *deservest* it!”

She grins. “To have no man *come over* me!” She offers a more polite jest: “Why, shall I always keep *below stairs*?”

Benedick laughs. “Thy *wit* is as quick as the greyhound’s mouth: it catches!”

“And yours as blunt as the *fencers*’ foils, which hit but hurt not!”

He says, thoughtfully, “A most *manly* wit, Margaret; it will not hurt a *woman*.” He smiles. “And so, I pray thee, call Beatrice; I’ll give thee these bucklers,” he tells her, offering coins; a buckler is actually a small, convex shield with a spike at the center.

The buxom gentlewoman laughs. “Give us the *swords*; we have bucklers of our *own*!”

Now Benedick grins. “If you use *them*, Margaret, you must put in the pikes with a *vice*! And they are *dangerous* weapons for maids!”—virgins.

She laughs at the play on *vice*—and makes another. “Well, I will call Beatrice to you—who I think hath *legs*!” she laughs, heading into the house.

Murmurs Benedick, “And thereby will come!”

He composes a bit of ballad about wooing:

“The god of love,  
That sits above,  
And knows me,  
And knows me,  
How plentifully I deserve—”

He makes a face. *I mean in singing.*

*But in loving...* He paces, worried about achieving, now, more than seduction.

Benedick considers famous lovers. *Leander the good swimmer, Troilus the first employer of panders, and the whole bookful of these quondam carpet-mongers, whose names yet run smoothly in the even road of a blank verse—why, they were never so truly turned over and over in love as my poor self!*

*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, for I cannot woo in festival terms.*

The lady interrupts his musing. “Sweet Beatrice! Wouldst thou come when I call thee?” he teases—although quite pleased to find it so.

“Yea, signior—and *depart* when you *bid* me!”—ask for anything.

He smiles sweetly. “Oh, stay but till then.”

A request. “And it is *spoken!*—fare you well now!

“And yet, ere I go, let me go with that I came for—which is with knowing what hath passed between you and Claudio.”

“Only foul *words,*” says Benedick, leaning toward her, “but thereupon, I will *kiss* thee!”

She backs away. “Foul words is but foul *breath,* and foul breath is but foul *wind,* and foul wind”—farting—“is *noisome!* Therefore I will depart *unkissed!*”

“Thou hast *frighted* the word out of its *right* sense, so forcible is thy wit!” says the count. “But I’ll tell thee plainly: Claudio undergoes my challenge; and either I must shortly hear from him or I will declare him a coward.

“And, I pray thee now, tell me: for which of my bad parts didst thou first fall in love with me?”

“For them *all together*—which maintain, as policy, a state so *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 laughs. “*Suffer love!*—a good epithet! I *do* suffer love, indeed, for I love thee against my will!”

“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!”

They stroll into the garden. “Thou and I are too *wise* to woo peaceably,” he admits, mindful of their chronically contentious reflexes.

“It appears not in *that* confession!” laughs Beatrice. “There’s not one *wise* man among twenty that will praise *himself!*”—a maxim on modesty.

“An old, *old* instance, Beatrice, that lived back in the time of good *neighbours.* In *this* age if a man do not erect his *own* tomb ere he dies, he shall live no longer in monument than the bell rings and the widow weeps!”

“And how long is *that,* think you?”

“It’s in question,” he says, as they walk. “Why, at most an *hour* in clamour, then a quarter in *rheum*”—nose-blowing. “Therefore is it expedient for the wise man, if his conscience, Don *Worm,* find no impediment to the contrary, to be the trumpet of his own virtues—as I am!

“So much for praising my self—which, I myself will bear witness, is *praiseworthy!*” He stops. “And now tell me: how doth your cousin?”

“Very ill.”

“And how do you?”

“Very ill, too.”

Benedick touches her hand tenderly. “Serve God, love me, and mend.

“There will I leave you—for here comes one in haste....”

Ursula is running into the garden, wide-eyed. “Madam, you must come to your *uncle!* Yonder’s all *coil* at home! It is proven my Lady Hero hath been *falsely accused!*—the prince and Claudio mightily *abused!*—and *Don John*, who is the author of all, is *fled and gone!*”

She starts to hurry away, then turns back to Beatrice, “Will you come *immediately?*”

“Will you go hear this news, signior?” asks the lady.

“I will live in thy *heart*, die in thy *lap*, and be buried”—he sees her eyebrow rise anticipating a rude implication—“in thine *eyes!*”

“And moreover, I will go with thee to thine uncle’s.”

**I**n the chill darkness of the Messina churchyard just before dawn, Don Pedro and Claudio watch as four monks, each carrying a lantern, come to stand before the stone pillars of a wide, stately tomb.

“Is this the monument of Leonato?” Claudio asks an old lord, one of the many black-clad nobles summoned to the mausoleum by the Prince of Aragon to hear about the cruel injustice done to the governor’s late daughter.

“It is, my lord.”

Another priest, the cowl of a dark cloak keeping his face in shadow, unties the ribbon on a scroll, and reads aloud: “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!*”

He carries the scroll, a cord at each end of its rod, to the crypt’s black iron gate. “Hang thou there upon the tomb, praising her when I am silent.” Friar Francis turns to the visitors. “Now, sound music, and sing your solemn hymn.”

Balthasar is cloaked in black—and without a ballad, a different singer, his voice deep and strong. The prince and Claudio slowly circle the burial chamber as he intones, mournfully:

*“Pardon, goddess of the night,  
Those that slew thy virgin slight;  
For the which, with songs of woe,  
Round about her tomb they go.  
Middle night, assist our moan!  
Help us now to sigh and groan,  
Heavily, heavily!  
Grave, yawn, and yield your dead,  
Till her death be utterèd  
Heavenly, heavenly!”*

The noblemen stop before the witnesses at the entrance to the monument.

“Now, unto thy bones, good night!” sobs Claudio. “Yearly will I do this rite!”

Don Pedro speaks. “Good morrow, masters; put your torches out.

“The wolves have preyed; and look, the gentle day before the wheels of Phoebus round about dapples the drowsy east with spots of gray.

“Thanks to you all, and leave us. Fare you well!”

“Good morrow, masters. Each his several way,” Claudio tells the throng, wiping his eyes.

The prince lays a hand on Claudio’s shoulder. “Come, let us hence, and put on other attire; and then to Leonato’s we will go.

“And may Hymen”—the ancient Greeks’ god of marriage—“now with luckier issue speed *us* than she for whom we rendered up this woe!”

## Chapter Ten Commitments

Sunlight, slanting through rows of tall windows, illuminates the high state chamber of the governor's mansion, where Leonato and Antonio have been conferring with Benedick and Beatrice, Margaret and Ursula, Friar Francis—and Lady Hero.

"Did I not *tell* you she was innocent?" demands the monk, his judgment now confirmed.

"So are the prince and Claudio, who accused her upon the error that you heard detailed," Leonato allows. "But Margaret was in *some* fault for this, although against her will, as it appears in the true course of all the question."

Meg flushes, but Hero takes her hand and smiles kindly.

"Well, I am glad that all things sort so well!" says Antonio.

"And so am *I*," says Benedick, "being else by honour enforced to call young Claudio to a *reckoning* for it!"

Leonato knows that the time of retribution is approaching. "Well, daughter, and you, gentlewomen, all withdraw into a chamber by yourselves; and when I send for you, come hither, masked."

The ladies know what he intends to do, and they go to prepare.

"The prince and Claudio promised by this hour to visit me," says the governor. "You know *your* office, Brother," he tells Antonio. "You must be 'father' to your brother's daughter, and give her to young Claudio."

Antonio nods. "Which I will do with a conformèd countenance!"

Count Benedick speaks to the priest. "Friar, I must entreat your pains, I think."

"To do what, signior?"

"To bind me—or *undo* me—one of them," says Benedick, turning to the governor. "Signior Leonato, truth it is, good signior, your niece regards me with an eye of favour."

The governor knows just how Beatrice's change was induced. "*That* eye my *daughter* lent her!—'tis most true!"

"And I do with an eye of love *requite* her," Benedick tells him.

"The sight whereof I think you had from me, from Claudio and the prince," chuckles Leonato, remembering the count's gulling at the arbor. "But what is your will?"

Benedick pretends, wryly, he's being asked to define *will*. "Your answer, sir, is enigmatical. As for *my* will, my will is that *your* good will may stand with *ours*: this day to be conjoined in the state of honourable *marriage!*

"In which, good friar, I shall desire your help."

Leonato smiles happily. "My heart is *with* your liking!"

"As is my *help!*" says Friar Francis. But he points. "Here come the prince and Claudio."

Don Pedro and the count solemnly enter the long room, and walk to the front. "Good morrow to this fair assembly," the sovereign pronounces, with careful decorum.

Leonato greets him with a bow. "Good morrow, prince.

"Good morrow, Claudio. We here attend you. Are you yet determined today to marry with my brother's daughter?"

"I'll hold my mind," Claudio affirms; he will fulfill the pledge of penance—marry a lady he has never seen.

"Call her forth, Brother," says Leonato. Antonio nods silently and walks to the side room. "Here's the friar, ready."

Don Pedro, if unusually submissive, is content. "Good morrow, Benedick," he says, quietly, as they wait. "Why, what's the matter that *you* have such a February face, so full of frost, of storm and cloudiness?"



Claudio regards his erstwhile comrade; his voice is hushed, but his smile friendly. "I think he thinks upon 'the savage bull!'" He reassures the proud bachelor who has been led into love: "Fear not, man!—we'll tip thy horns with *gold*, and all Europe shall rejoice at thee, as once *Europa* did at lusty Jove when *he* would play the noble beast in love!"

Benedick's grin is wide; he has prepared for teasing, with this:

"Bull *Jove*, sir, had an *amiable* low!"—*moo*.

"Some such strange bull leaped your *father's* cow,

And begot a *calf* in that same noble feat—

Much like to *you!* You have just his *bleat!*"—sound of a sheep.

"For that I owe you!" laughs Claudio. But then he sees Antonio returning, followed by several masked gentlewomen. He gulps, and surreptitiously wipes his palms dry on his coat.

"Here come *other* reckonings.

"Which is the lady I must seize upon?" he asks, as Antonio approaches—with his daughter.

"This same is she, and I do give you her," says the ancient, releasing her hand.

Claudio is gracious in his acceptance. "Why, then she's mine. Sweet, let me see your face."

But Leonato shakes his head. "No, that you shall *not*, till you take her hand before this friar and swear to marry her!"

"Give me your hand," says Claudio, kneeling before the lady. "Before this holy friar, I am your husband, if you like of me."

Hero removes her mask. "When I *lived*, I was your other *wife*. And when you *loved*, you were my other *husband*."

Claudio, thunderstruck, stares up at her. "Another *Hero!*"

"Nothing is certainer," says she. "*One* Hero died defiled; but *I* do live! And as surely as I live, I am a *maid!*"—a virgin, she adds pointedly.

Don Pedro, stunned, and feeling sharply renewed pangs of guilt, murmurs, "The *former* Hero; Hero that is dead—"

"She died, my lord, only whiles her *slander* lived," says Leonato kindly.

Friar Francis raises his palms. "All this amazement can I qualify! When after that the holy *rites* are ended, I'll tell you largely of fair Hero's 'death.'

"Meantime let *wonder* seem *familiar*, and to the chapel let us go immediately!"

"As for 'soft and fair,'" says Benedick, touching the monk's sleeve, "friar, which is Beatrice?"

"I answer to that name," says she, unmasking. "What is your will?" she asks casually.

He frowns. "Do not you *love* me?"

"Why, no... no more than *reason*."

"Well then your uncle and the prince and Claudio have been *deceived!*—they swore you *did!*"

"Do not you love *me?*" counters Beatrice.

Benedick shrugs. "Troth, no—no more than *reason*."

"Why then my cousins Margaret and Ursula are *much* deceived!—for *they* did swear *you* did."

"They swore that you were almost *sick* for me!" says Benedick.

"They swore that you were well-nigh *dead* for *me!*" says indignant Beatrice.

Benedick looks at her. "'Tis no such matter. Then you do not love me?"

"No, truly, but in friendly recompense," claims Beatrice.

Governor Leonato must now laugh. "*Come*, Cousin, I am *sure* you love the gentleman!"

Claudio has risen to his feet and regained his composure. "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, fashioned to Beatrice!"

"And here's another writ in my cousin's hand, stolen from her pocket, containing her affection unto Benedick!" says Hero.

Benedick concedes—happily, in fact. “A *miracle!*” he cries. “Here’s our own *hands* against our *hearts!*” He reaches for Beatrice’s hand. “Come, I *will* have thee! But, by this light, I take thee for *pity* . . .”

“I would *deny* you; but, on this good day, I yield unto great *persuasion*,” says Beatrice—adding, “and partly to *save your life*—for I was told you were in a *consumption*.”

Benedick laughs. “*Peace!* I will stop your mouth!”—upon which he kisses her soundly.

Hero, Margaret and Ursula applaud vigorously with their white-gloved hands.

Don Pedro teases: “How *dost* thou, Benedick?—*the married man!*”

But no mockery will diminish Count Benedick’s full smile—nor the sparkle in his eyes. “I’ll tell thee *what*, prince—a *college* of wit-crackers cannot flout *me* out of my humour! Dost thou think I care about a satire or an epigram? *No!* If a man will *let* himself be beaten with brains, he shall hear nothing *attractive* about him!

“In brief, since *I* do propose 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!—that is my *conclusion!*”

“And as for *thy* part, Claudio, I did think to have *beaten* thee; but in that thou art likely to be my *kinsman*, live unbruised, and love my *cousin!*”

Claudio replies in kind: “I had well hoped thou wouldst have *denied* Beatrice, so that I might have *cut-gelled* thee out of thy single life—made thee a *double-dealer!* Which, out of question, thou *wilt* be, if my cousin do not look exceedingly narrowly to thee!”—watch him closely.

Benedick motions to him. “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, the father of one bride, uncle of the other, nods. “We’ll have dancing afterward.”

“*First*, upon my word!” insists Benedick. “Therefore *play*, music!” Antonio’s son and the other musicians, brought for the occasion, emerge from the side chamber and takes seats, preparing to play.

“Prince, thou art sad,” Benedick tell Don Pedro. “Get thee a wife, get thee a *wife!*—there is no staff more venerable than one tipped with *horn!*”

A messenger arrives with news for the prince. “My lord, your brother John is ta’en in flight, and brought by armed men back to Messina!”

But Benedick, finally a wholly happy man, is elated beyond such concerns. “Think not on *him* till tomorrow!” he urges Don Pedro. “I’ll devise thee brave punishments for him.”

He claps his hands joyfully above his head. “Strike *up*, pipers!”

Joining the others, he and his lady dance—together, and beautifully.