

Act 1, Scene 1 Messina - before Leonato's house

(LEONATO, BEATRICE, HERO, URSULA, MARGARET, MESSENGER and NELL.)

LEONATO

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

MESSENGER

He was not three leagues* off when I left him.

LEONATO

How many gentlemen have you lost in this battle?

MESSENGER

Few of any sort, and none of name.

LEONATO

A victory is twice itself when the achiever brings home full numbers.
I find here that Don Pedro hath bestowed much honor on a young Florentine called Claudio.

MESSENGER

He hath borne himself beyond the promise of his age, doing in the figure of a lamb the feats of a lion.

LEONATO

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

BEATRICE

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

MESSENGER

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

LEONATO

What is he that you ask for, niece?

HERO

My cousin means Signior Benedick of Padua.

MESSENGER

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

BEATRICE

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

league - about 3 miles

LEONATO

Faith niece, you tax Signior Benedick too much. But he'll be meet* with you, I doubt it not.
You must not sir, mistake my niece. There is a kind of merry war between Signior Benedick and her.
They never meet but there's a skirmish of wit between them.

BEATRICE

Alas, he gets nothing by that.
In our last conflict four of his five wits went halting off,
and now is the whole man governed with one;
so that if he have wit enough to keep himself warm,
let him bear it for a difference between himself and his horse.

MESSENGER

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

BEATRICE

No. And he were, I would burn my study.

MESSENGER

I will stay friends with you, lady.

BEATRICE

Do, good friend.

LEONATO

Don Pedro is approaching.

(Enter DON PEDRO, DON JOHN, BORACHIO, CONRADE, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, BALTHASAR and soldiers.)

DON PEDRO

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

LEONATO

Never came trouble to my house in the likeness of your grace.

DON PEDRO

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

LEONATO

Her mother hath many times told me so.

BENEDICK

Were you in doubt sir, that you asked her?

be meet - get even, *charge* - expense and responsibility

LEONATO

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

(LEONATO and DON PEDRO draw aside in private conversation.)

BENEDICK

If Signior Leonato be her father, she would not have his head on her shoulders for all Messina.

BEATRICE

I wonder that you will always be talking, Signior Benedick; nobody marks you.

BENEDICK

My dear Lady Disdain. Are you yet living?

BEATRICE

Is it possible disdain should die while she hath such meet* food to feed her as Signior Benedick?

BENEDICK

It is certain I am loved of all ladies, only you excepted;
and I would I could find in my heart that I had not a hard heart, for truly, I love none.

BEATRICE

A dear happiness to women. They would else have been troubled with a pernicious* suitor.
I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me.

BENEDICK

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

BEATRICE

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

BENEDICK

Well, you are a rare parrot-teacher.

BEATRICE

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

BENEDICK

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

BEATRICE

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

DON PEDRO

That is the sum of all, Leonato.

meet - suitable, *pernicious* - wicked; evil; fatal, *jade's trick* - horse joke

Signior Claudio and Signior Benedick, my dear friend Leonato hath again invited you all.
I tell him we shall stay here at least a month,
and he heartily prays some occasion may detain us longer.

LEONATO
(To DON JOHN.) Let me bid you welcome, my lord.
Being reconciled to the Prince your brother, I owe you all duty.

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

LEONATO
Please it your grace lead on?

DON PEDRO
Your hand Leonato; we will go together.

(Exeunt all except BENEDICK and CLAUDIO.)

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

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

CLAUDIO
Is she not a modest young lady?

BENEDICK
Would you have me speak after my custom, as being a professed tyrant to their sex?

CLAUDIO
No. I pray thee speak in sober judgment.

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

CLAUDIO
Thou thinkst I am in sport. I pray thee, tell me how thou truly lik'st her.

BENEDICK
Would you buy her, that you inquire after her?

CLAUDIO
Can the world buy such a jewel?

BENEDICK

Yea, and a case to put it into.

CLAUDIO

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

BENEDICK

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

CLAUDIO

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

BENEDICK

Is it come to this? Hath not the world one man but he will wear his cap with suspicion?*

Shall I never see a bachelor of threescore* again?

Look, Don Pedro is returned to seek you.

(Re-enter DON PEDRO.)

DON PEDRO

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

BENEDICK

I would your Grace would constrain* me to tell.

DON PEDRO

I charge you on your allegiance.

BENEDICK

You hear count Claudio. I can be secret as a dumb man, I would have you think so,
but on my allegiance—mark you this—on my allegiance, he is in love.
With who? Mark how short his answer is; with Hero, Leonato's short daughter.

DON PEDRO

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

CLAUDIO

You speak this to fetch me in my lord.

DON PEDRO

By my troth,* I speak my thought.

wear his cap with suspicion - for fear he has horns under it because his wife has made him a cuckold,
threescore - sixty, **constrain** - force, **troth** - truth

CLAUDIO

And in faith, my lord, I spoke mine.

BENEDICK

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

CLAUDIO

That I love her, I feel.

DON PEDRO

That she is worthy, I know.

BENEDICK

That I neither feel how she should be loved, nor know how she should be worthy, is the opinion that fire cannot melt out of me. I will live a bachelor.

DON PEDRO

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

BENEDICK

With anger, with sickness, or with hunger, my lord, not with love. Prove that ever I lose more blood with love than I will get again with drinking, pick out my eyes with a ballad maker's pen and hang me up at the door of a tavern for the sign of blind Cupid.

DON PEDRO

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

BENEDICK

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

DON PEDRO

Well, as time shall try.*
Good Signior Benedick, repair to Leonato's.
Commend me to him and tell him I will not fail him at supper.

BENEDICK

I leave you.

(Exit BENEDICK.)

CLAUDIO

Hath Leonato any son, my lord?

DON PEDRO

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

ere - before, *notable argument* - famous example, *as time shall try* - we shall see, *affect* - desire

CLAUDIO

My lord, when you went to fight this battle, 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 I am returned and war-thoughts having left their places vacant, in their rooms come thronging soft and delicate desires, all prompting me how fair young Hero is.

DON PEDRO

If thou dost love fair Hero, cherish it, and I will break* with her and with her father, and thou shalt have her. Was it not to this end that thou began'st to twist so fine a story?

CLAUDIO

How sweetly you do minister to love.

DON PEDRO

I know we shall have revelling tonight. I will assume thy part in some disguise and tell fair Hero I am Claudio, and in her bosom I'll unclasp your heart. Then after to her father will I break, and the conclusion is, she shall be thine. In practice let us put it presently.

(Exeunt.)

rougher task in hand - the coming battle, *break* - broach the subject

Act 3, Scene 5 The street in front of Leonato's house

(LEONATO, DOGBERRY and VERGES.)

LEONATO

What would you with me, honest neighbor?

DOGBERRY

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

LEONATO

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

DOGBERRY

Marry, this it is sir.

VERGES

Yes, in truth it is, sir.

LEONATO

What is it, my good friends?

DOGBERRY

Goodman Verges, sir, speaks a little off the matter.

An old man sir, and his wits are not so blunt* as, God help, I would desire they were; but, in faith, honest as the skin between his brows.

VERGES

Yes, I thank God I am as honest as any man living, that is an old man, and no honester than I.

DOGBERRY

Comparisons are odorous.*

LEONATO

Neighbors, you are tedious.

DOGBERRY

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

LEONATO

All thy tediousness on me, ah?

confidence - he means conference, *discerns* - he means concerns,

blunt - he means sharp, *odorous* - he means odious

DOGBERRY

Yea, 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.

VERGES

And so am I.

LEONATO

I would fain* know what you have to say.

VERGES

Marry sir, our watch tonight have taken a couple of as arrant knaves as any in Messina.

DOGBERRY

A good old man, sir; he will be talking. As they say, 'When the age is in the wit is out.' And two men ride of a horse, one must ride behind. All men are not alike, alas, good neighbor.

LEONATO

Indeed neighbor, he comes too short of you.

DOGBERRY

Gifts that God gives.

LEONATO

I must leave you.

DOGBERRY

One word, sir.

Our watch sir, have indeed comprehended* two aspicious* persons, and we would have them this morning examined before your worship.

LEONATO

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

DOGBERRY

It shall be suffigance.*

LEONATO

Drink some wine ere you go. Fare you well.

(Enter NELL.)

NELL

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

exclamation - he means acclamation, *fain* - be eager to, *comprehended* - he means apprehended, *aspicious* - he means suspicious, *suffigance* - he means sufficient

LEONATO

I'll wait upon them. I am ready.

(Exeunt LEONATO and NELL.)

DOGBERRY

Go good partner, go! Get you the Sexton. Bid him bring his pen and inkhorn to the jail.
We are now to examination* these men.

VERGES

And we must do it wisely.

DOGBERRY

We will spare for no wit, I warrant you.
Only get the learned writer to set down our excommunication.*
Go!

(Exeunt.)

examination - he means examine, *excommunication* - he means examination