

Act I, Scene I

LEONATA

I learn in this letter that Prince Peter of Arragon comes this night to Messina.

Messenger

He is very near by this: he was not three leagues off when I left him.

LEONATA

How many gentlemen have you lost in this action?

Messenger

But few of any sort, and none of name.

LEONATA

A victory is twice itself when the achiever brings home full numbers. I find here that Prince Peter hath bestowed much honour on a young soldier called Claudio.

Messenger

Much deserved on his part and equally remembered by Prince Peter: 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.

LEONATA

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

Messenger

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

LEONATA

Did he break out into tears?

Messenger

In great measure.

LEONATA

A kind overflow of kindness: there are no faces truer than those that are so washed. How much better is it to weep at joy than to joy at weeping!

BEATRICE

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

Messenger

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

LEONATA

What is he that you ask for, niece?

HERO

My cousin means Captain Benedick of Padua.

Messenger

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

BEATRICE

He set up his bills here in Messina and challenged Cupid at the flight; 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.

LEONATA

Faith, niece, you tax Captain Benedick too much; but he'll be meet with you, I doubt it not.

Messenger

He hath done good service, lady, in these wars.

BEATRICE

You had musty victual, and he hath helped you eat it: he is a very valiant trencherman; he hath an excellent stomach.

Messenger

And a good soldier too, lady.

BEATRICE

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

Messenger

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

BEATRICE

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

LEONATA

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

BEATRICE

Alas! he gets nothing by that. In our last conflict four of his five wits went halting off, and now is the whole man governed with one: so that if he have wit enough to keep himself warm, let him bear it for a difference between himself and his horse; for it is all the wealth that he hath left, to be known a reasonable creature. Who is his companion now? He hath every month a new sworn brother.

Messenger

Is't possible?

BEATRICE

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

Messenger

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

BEATRICE

No; an he were, I would burn my study. But, I pray you, who is his companion? Is there no young squarer now that will make a voyage with him to the devil?

Messenger

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

BEATRICE

O Lord, he will hang upon him like a disease: he is sooner caught than the pestilence, and the taker runs presently mad. God help the noble Claudio! If he have caught the Benedick, it will cost him a thousand pound ere he be cured.

Messenger

I will hold friends with you, lady.

BEATRICE

Do, good friend.

LEONATA

You will never run mad, niece.

BEATRICE

No, not till a hot January.

Messenger

Prince Peter is approached.

Enter PRINCE PETER, SIR JOHN, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, BORACHIO, CONRADE

PRINCE PETER

Good Lady Leonata, you are come to meet your trouble: the fashion of the world is to avoid cost, and you encounter it.

LEONATA

Never came trouble to my house in the likeness of your grace: for trouble being gone, comfort should remain; but when you depart from me, sorrow abides and happiness takes his leave.

PRINCE PETER

You embrace your charge too willingly. I think this is your daughter. Her father hath many times told me so.

LEONATA

Were you in doubt, sir, that you asked him?

BENEDICK

Truly, the lady fathers herself. Be happy, lady; for you are like an honourable mother.

If Lady Leonata be her mother, she would not have her head on her shoulders for all Messina, as like her as she is.

BEATRICE

I wonder that you will still be talking, Captain Benedick: nobody marks you.

BENEDICK

What, my dear Lady Disdain! are you yet living?

BEATRICE

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

BENEDICK

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

BEATRICE

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

BENEDICK

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

BEATRICE

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

BENEDICK

Well, you are a rare parrot-teacher.

BEATRICE

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

BENEDICK

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

BEATRICE

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

PRINCE PETER

That is the sum of all, Leonata. Lieutenant Claudio and Captain Benedick, my dear friend Leonata hath invited you all. I tell her we shall stay here at the least a month; and she heartily prays some occasion may detain us longer. I dare swear she is no hypocrite, but prays from her heart.

LEONATA

If you swear, my lord, you shall not be forsworn.

To SIR JOHN

Let me bid you welcome, my lord: being reconciled to the prince your brother, I owe you all duty.

SIR JOHN

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

LEONATA

Please it your grace lead on?

PRINCE PETER

Your hand, Leonata; we will go together.

Act II, Scene III

PRINCE PETER

Come hither, Leonata. What was it you told me of to-day, that your niece Beatrice was in love with Captain Benedick?

CLAUDIO

O, ay: stalk on. stalk on; the fowl sits. I did never think that lady would have loved any man.

LEONATA

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

BENEDICK

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

LEONATA

By my troth, my lord, I cannot tell what to think of it but that she loves him with an enraged affection: it is past the infinite of thought.

PRINCE PETER

May be she doth but counterfeit.

CLAUDIO

Faith, like enough.

LEONATA

O God, counterfeit! There was never counterfeit of passion came so near the life of passion as she discovers it.

PRINCE PETER

Why, what effects of passion shows she?

CLAUDIO

Bait the hook well; this fish will bite.

LEONATA

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

CLAUDIO

She did, indeed.

PRINCE PETER

How, how, pray you? You amaze me: I would have I thought her spirit had been invincible against all assaults of affection.

LEONATA

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

BENEDICK

I should think this a gull, but that the lady speaks it: knavery cannot, sure, hide himself in such reverence.

CLAUDIO

He hath ta'en the infection: hold it up.

PRINCE PETER

Hath she made her affection known to Benedick?

LEONATA

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

CLAUDIO

'Tis true, indeed; so your daughter says: 'Shall I,' says she, 'that have so oft encountered him with scorn, write to him that I love him?'

LEONATA

This says she now when she is beginning to write to him; for she'll be up twenty times a night, and there will she sit in her smock till she have writ a sheet of paper: my daughter tells us all.

CLAUDIO

Now you talk of a sheet of paper, I remember a pretty jest your daughter told us of.

LEONATA

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

CLAUDIO

That.

LEONATA

O, she tore the letter into a thousand halfpence; railed at herself, that she should be so immodest to write to one that she knew would flout her; 'I measure him,'

says she, 'by my own spirit; for I should flout him, if he writ to me; yea, though I love him, I should.'

CLAUDIO

Then down upon her knees she falls, weeps, sobs, beats her heart, tears her hair, prays, curses; 'O sweet Benedick! God give me patience!'

LEONATA

She doth indeed; my daughter says so: and the ecstasy hath so much overborne her that my daughter is sometime afeared she will do a desperate outrage to herself: it is very true.

PRINCE PETER

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

CLAUDIO

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

PRINCE PETER

An he should, it were an alms to hang him. She's an excellent sweet lady; and, out of all suspicion, she is virtuous.

CLAUDIO

And she is exceeding wise.

PRINCE PETER

In every thing but in loving Benedick.

LEONATA

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

PRINCE PETER

I would she had bestowed this dotage on me: I would have daffed all other respects and made her half myself. I pray you, tell Benedick of it, and hear what he will say.

LEONATA

Were it good, think you?

CLAUDIO

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

PRINCE PETER

She doth well: if she should make tender of her love, 'tis very possible he'll scorn it; for the man, as you know all, hath a contemptible spirit.

CLAUDIO

He is a very proper man.

PRINCE PETER

He hath indeed a good outward happiness.

CLAUDIO

Before God! and, in my mind, very wise.

PRINCE PETER

He doth indeed show some sparks that are like wit.

CLAUDIO

And I take him to be valiant.

PRINCE PETER

As Hector, I assure you: and in the managing of quarrels you may say he is wise; for either he avoids them with great discretion, or undertakes them with a most Christian-like fear.

LEONATA

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.

PRINCE PETER

And so will he do; for the man doth fear God, howsoever it seems not in him by some large jests he will make. Well I am sorry for your niece. Shall we go seek Benedick, and tell him of her love?

CLAUDIO

Never tell him, my lord: let her wear it out with good counsel.

LEONATA

Nay, that's impossible: she may wear her heart out first.

PRINCE PETER

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

LEONATA

My lord, will you walk? dinner is ready.

CLAUDIO

If he do not dote on her upon this, I will never trust my expectation.

PRINCE PETER

Let there be the same net spread for her; and that must your daughter and her gentlewomen carry. The sport will be, when they hold one an opinion of another's dotage, and no such matter: that's the scene that I would see, which will be merely a dumb-show. Let us send her to call him in to dinner.

Exeunt PRINCE PETER, CLAUDIO, and LEONATA

BENEDICK

[Coming forward]

This can be no trick: the conference was sadly borne. They have the truth of this from Hero. They seem to pity the lady: it seems her affections have their full bent. Love me! why, it must be requited. I hear how I am censured: they say I will bear myself proudly, if I perceive the love come from her; they say too that she will rather die than give any sign of affection. I did never think to marry: I must not seem proud: happy are they that hear their detractions and can put them to mending. They say the lady is fair; 'tis a truth, I can bear them witness; and virtuous; 'tis so, I cannot reprove it; and wise, but for loving me; by my troth, it is no addition to her wit, nor no great argument of her folly, for I will be horribly in love with her. I may chance have some odd quirks and remnants of wit broken on me, because I have 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 and these paper bullets of the brain awe a man from the career 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. Here comes Beatrice. By this day! She's a fair lady: I do spy some marks of love in her.

Enter BEATRICE

BEATRICE

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

BENEDICK

Fair Beatrice, I thank you for your pains.

BEATRICE

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

BENEDICK

You take pleasure then in the message?

BEATRICE

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

Exit

BENEDICK

Ha! 'Against my will I am sent to bid you come in to dinner;' there's a double meaning in that. 'I took no more pains for those thanks than you took pains to thank me.' that's as much as to say, Any pains that I take for you is as easy as thanks. If I do not take pity of her, I am a villain; if I do not love her, I am hard hearted. I will go get her picture.

Exit

ACT III

SCENE I. LEONATA'S garden.

Enter HERO, MARGARET, and URSULA

HERO

Good Margaret, run thee to the parlor;
There shalt thou find my cousin Beatrice
Proposing with the prince and Claudio:
Whisper her ear and tell her, I and 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 pleached bower,
Where honeysuckles, ripen'd by the sun,
Forbid the sun to enter, like favourites,
Made proud by princes, that advance their pride
Against that power that bred it: there will she hide her,
To listen our purpose. This is thy office;
Bear thee well in it and leave us alone.

MARGARET

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

Exit

HERO

Now, Ursula, when Beatrice doth come,
As we do trace this alley up and down,
Our talk must only be of Benedick.
When I do name him, let it be thy part
To praise him more than ever man did merit:
My talk to thee must be how Benedick
Is sick in love with Beatrice. Of this matter
Is little Cupid's crafty arrow made,
That only wounds by hearsay.

Enter BEATRICE, behind

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

URSULA

The pleasant'st angling is to see the fish
Cut with her golden oars the silver stream,
And greedily devour the treacherous bait:
So angle we for Beatrice; who even now
Is couched in the woodbine coverture.
Fear you not my part of the dialogue.

HERO

Then go we near her, that her ear lose nothing
Of the false sweet bait that we lay for it.

Approaching the bower

No, truly, Ursula, she is too disdainful;
I know her spirits are as coy and wild
As haggards of the rock.

URSULA

But are you sure
That Benedick loves Beatrice so entirely?

HERO

So says the prince and my new-trothed lord.

URSULA

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

HERO

They did entreat me to acquaint her of it;
But I persuaded them, if they loved Benedick,
To wish him wrestle with affection,
And never to let Beatrice know of it.

URSULA

Why did you so? Doth not the gentleman
Deserve as full as fortunate a bed
As ever Beatrice shall couch upon?

HERO

O god of love! I know he doth deserve
As much as may be yielded to a man:
But Nature never framed a woman's heart
Of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice;
Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes,

Misprising what they look on, and her wit
Values itself so highly that to her
All matter else seems weak: she cannot love,
Nor take no shape nor project of affection,
She is so self-endear'd.

URSULA

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

HERO

Why, you speak truth. I never yet saw man,
How 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 speaking, why, a vane blown with all winds;
If silent, why, a block moved with none.
So turns she every man the wrong side out
And never gives to truth and virtue that
Which simpleness and merit purchaseth.

URSULA

Sure, sure, such carping is not commendable.

HERO

No, not to be so odd and from all fashions
As Beatrice is, cannot be commendable:
But who dare tell her so? If I should speak,
She would mock me into air; O, she would laugh me
Out of myself, press me to death with wit.
Therefore let Benedick, like cover'd fire,
Consume away in sighs, waste inwardly:
It were a better death than die with mocks,
Which is as bad as die with tickling.

URSULA

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

HERO

No; rather I will go to Benedick
And counsel him to fight against his passion.
And, truly, I'll devise some honest slanders

To stain my cousin with: one doth not know
How much an ill word may empoison liking.

URSULA

O, do not do your cousin such a wrong.
She cannot be so much without true judgment--
Having so swift and excellent a wit
As she is prized to have--as to refuse
So rare a gentleman as Captain Benedick.

HERO

He is the only man of Europe
Always excepted my dear Claudio.

URSULA

I pray you, be not angry with me, madam,
Speaking my fancy: Captain Benedick,
For shape, for bearing, argument and valour,
Goes foremost in report through Europe.

HERO

Indeed, he hath an excellent good name.

URSULA

His excellence did earn it, ere he had it.
When are you married, madam?

HERO

Why, every day, to-morrow. Come, go in:
I'll show thee some attires, and have thy counsel
Which is the best to furnish me to-morrow.

URSULA

She's limed, I warrant you: we have caught her, madam.

HERO

If it proves so, then loving goes by haps:
Some Cupid kills with arrows, some with traps.

Exeunt HERO and URSULA

BEATRICE

[Coming forward]

What fire is in mine ears? Can this be true?

Stand I condemn'd for pride and scorn so much?
Contempt, farewell! and maiden pride, adieu!
No glory lives behind the back of such.
And, Benedick, love on; I will requite thee,
Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand:
If thou dost love, my kindness shall incite thee
To bind our loves up in a holy band;
For others say thou dost deserve, and I
Believe it better than reportingly.

Exit

From Act IV, Scene I

BENEDICK

Lady Beatrice, have you wept all this while?

BEATRICE

Yea, and I will weep a while longer.

BENEDICK

I will not desire that.

BEATRICE

You have no reason; I do it freely.

BENEDICK

Surely I do believe your fair cousin is wronged.

BEATRICE

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

BENEDICK

Is there any way to show such friendship?

BEATRICE

A very even way, but no such friend.

BENEDICK

May a man do it?

BEATRICE

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

BENEDICK

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

BEATRICE

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

BENEDICK

By my sword, Beatrice, thou lovest me.

BEATRICE

Do not swear, and eat it.

BENEDICK

I will swear by it that you love me; and I will make him eat it that says I love not you.

BEATRICE

Will you not eat your word?

BENEDICK

With no sauce that can be devised to it. I protest I love thee.

BEATRICE

Why, then, God forgive me!

BENEDICK

What offence, sweet Beatrice?

BEATRICE

You have stayed me in a happy hour: I was about to protest I loved you.

BENEDICK

And do it with all thy heart.

BEATRICE

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

BENEDICK

Come, bid me do any thing for thee.

BEATRICE

Kill Claudio.

BENEDICK

Ha! Not for the wide world.

BEATRICE

You kill me to deny it. Farewell.

BENEDICK

Tarry, sweet Beatrice.

BEATRICE

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

BENEDICK

Beatrice,--

BEATRICE

In faith, I will go.

BENEDICK

We'll be friends first.

BEATRICE

You dare easier be friends with me than fight with mine enemy.

BENEDICK

Is Claudio thine enemy?

BEATRICE

Is he not approved in the height a villain, that hath slandered, scorned, dishonoured my kinswoman? O that I were a man! What, bear her in hand until they come to take hands; and then, with public accusation, uncovered slander, unmitigated rancour, --O God, that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the market-place.

BENEDICK

Hear me, Beatrice,--

BEATRICE

Talk with a man out at a window! A proper saying!

BENEDICK

Nay, but, Beatrice,--

BEATRICE

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

BENEDICK

Beat—

BEATRICE

Princes and counties! Surely, a princely testimony, a goodly count, Count Comfect; a sweet gallant, surely! O that I were a man for his sake! or that I had

any friend would be a man for my sake! But manhood is melted into courtesies, valour into compliment, and men are only turned into tongue, and trim ones too: he is now as valiant as Hercules that only tells a lie and swears it. I cannot be a man with wishing, therefore I will die a woman with grieving.

BENEDICK

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

BEATRICE

Use it for my love some other way than swearing by it.

BENEDICK

Think you in your soul the Lieutenant Claudio hath wronged Hero?

BEATRICE

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

BENEDICK

Enough, I am engaged; I will challenge him. I will kiss your hand, and so I leave you. By this hand, Claudio shall render me a dear account. As you hear of me, so think of me. Go, comfort your cousin: I must say she is dead: and so, farewell.

Exeunt

Act IV SCENE II. A prison.

Enter DOGBERRY, VERGES, and SEXTON, in gowns; and the Watch, with CONRADE and BORACHIO

DOGBERRY

Is our whole dissembly appeared?

VERGES

O, a stool and a cushion for the Sexton.

SEXTON

Which be the malefactors?

DOGBERRY

Marry, that am I and my partner.

VERGES

Nay, that's certain; we have the exhibition to examine.

SEXTON

But which are the offenders that are to be examined? let them come before master constable.

DOGBERRY

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

BORACHIO

Borachio.

DOGBERRY

Pray, write down, Borachio. Yours, sirrah?

CONRADE

I am an officer, sir, and my name is Conrade.

DOGBERRY

Write down, master Officer Conrade. Masters, do you serve God?

CONRADE/BORACHIO

Yea, sir, we hope.

DOGBERRY

Write down, that they hope they serve God: and write God first; for God defend but 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?

CONRADE

Marry, sir, we say we are none.

DOGBERRY

A marvellous witty lady, I assure you: but I will go about with her. Come you hither, sirrah; a word in your ear: ma'am, I say to you, it is thought you are false knaves.

BORACHIO

Sir, I say to you we are none.

DOGBERRY

Well, stand aside. 'Fore God, they are both in a tale. Have you writ down, that they are none?

SEXTON

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

DOGBERRY

Yea, marry, that's the eetest way. Let the watch come forth. Masters, I charge you, in the prince's name, accuse these men.

First Watchman

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

DOGBERRY

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

BORACHIO

Master constable,--

DOGBERRY

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

SEXTON

What heard you him say else?

Second Watchman

Marry, that he had received a thousand pounds of Sir John for accusing the Lady Hero wrongfully.

DOGBERRY

Flat burglary as ever was committed.

VERGES

Yea, by mass, that it is.

SEXTON

What else, fellow?

First Watchman

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

DOGBERRY

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

SEXTON

What else?

Second Watchman

This is all.

SEXTON

And this is more, masters, than you can deny. Prince John is this morning secretly stolen away; Hero was in this manner accused, in this very manner refused, and upon the grief of this suddenly died. Master constable, let these officers be bound, and brought to Leonata's: I will go before and show her their examination.

Exit

DOGBERRY

Come, let them be opinioned.

VERGES

Let them be in the hands—

CONRADE

Off, coxcomb!

DOGBERRY

God's my life, where's the Sexton? Let him write down the prince's officer
coxcomb. Come, bind them. Thou naughty varlet!

CONRADE

Away! You are an ass, you are an ass.

DOGBERRY

Dost thou not suspect my place? Dost thou not suspect my years? O that he
were here to write me down an ass! But, masters, remember that I am an ass;
though it be not written down, yet forget not that I am an ass. No, thou villain,
thou art full of piety, as shall be proved upon thee by good witness. I am a wise
fellow, and, which is more, an officer, and, which is more, a householder, and,
which is more, as pretty a piece of flesh as any is in Messina, and one that knows
the law, go to; and a rich fellow enough, go to; and a fellow that hath had losses,
and one that hath two gowns and every thing handsome about him. Bring them
away. O that I had been writ down an ass!

Exeunt