

Much Ado About Nothing: Act II, scene i

A hall in Leonato's house.

(Leonato; Antonio; Hero; Beatrice; Margaret; Ursula; Kinsman; Prince Don Pedro; Claudio; Benedick; Don John; Borachio)

As they wait for the guests to arrive at the masked ball, Leonato, Antonio, Hero and Beatrice discuss Don John and Benedick, Beatrice seizing the first opportunity to engage in yet more mocking of the latter, to the men's amusement. Hero is reminded to say yes if Don Pedro asks her to marry him. Don Pedro's masked party enters, and he quickly takes Hero aside, while Borachio attempts to dance with Margaret and Antonio tries to deny to Ursula that it is he behind the mask. Beatrice and Benedick, both masked, converse, and Beatrice badmouths him, knowing perfectly well who she's speaking to, though he does not realize that she knows. Don John sidles up to Claudio, pretending to mistake him for Benedick, and tells him that Don Pedro is actually wooing Hero on his own account. Claudio is quite convinced and decides to have nothing more to do with Hero, and is surly when Benedick tries to joke with him, soon leaving him. Don Pedro comes looking for Claudio, but is distracted by chatting with Benedick and egging him on to discourse on Beatrice. Claudio, Leonato, Beatrice and Hero come in, and Don Pedro reveals that he has obtained Hero for the Count. Claudio is overjoyed. Beatrice rejects the idea of a husband for herself. After she leaves, the four left behind decide that for their own amusement and to occupy the time until Claudio and Hero's wedding, they will try to make Beatrice and Benedick fall in love with each other.

Enter Leonato, Antonio his brother, Hero his daughter, and Beatrice his niece, Margaret, Ursula, and a Kinsman.

LEON.

Was not Count John here at supper?

ANT.

I saw him not.

BEAT.

How tartly that gentleman looks! I never can see him but I am heart-burn'd an hour after.

HERO.

He is of a very melancholy disposition.

BEAT.

He were an excellent man that were made just in the midway between him and Benedick: the one is too like an image and says nothing, and the other too like my lady's eldest son, evermore tattling.

LEON.

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

BEAT.

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

LEON.

By my troth, niece, thou wilt never get thee a husband, if thou be so shrewd of thy tongue.

ANT.

In faith, she's too curst.

BEAT.

Too curst is more than curst. I shall lessen God's sending that way, for it is said, "God sends a curst cow short horns"—but to a cow too curst he sends none.

LEON.

So, by being too curst, God will send you no horns.

BEAT.

Just, if he send me no husband, 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 woollen!

LEON.

You may light on a husband that hath no beard.

BEAT.

What should I do with him? Dress him in my apparel and make him my waiting-gentlewoman? He that hath a beard is more than a youth, and he that hath no beard is less than a man; and he that is more than a youth is not for me, and he that is less than a man, I am not for him; therefore I will even take sixpence in earnest of the berrord, and lead his apes into hell.

LEON.

Well then, go you into hell.

BEAT.

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

ANT. To Hero.

Well, niece, I trust you will be rul'd by your father.

BEAT.

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

LEON.

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

BEAT.

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

LEON.

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

BEAT.

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

LEON.

Cousin, you apprehend passing shrewdly.

BEAT.

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

LEON.

The revellers are ent'ring, brother, make good room.

(They put on their masks. Enter Prince Don Pedro, Claudio, and Benedick, and Don John, and Borachio as maskers, with a Drum.)

D. PEDRO.

Lady, will you walk about with your friend?

HERO.

So you walk softly, and look sweetly, and say nothing, I am yours for the walk, and especially when I walk away.

D. PEDRO.

With me in your company?

HERO.

I may say so when I please.

D. PEDRO.

And when please you to say so?

HERO.

When I like your favor, for God defend the lute should be like the case!

D. PEDRO.

My visor is Philemon's roof, within the house is Jove.

HERO.

Why then your visor should be thatch'd.

D. PEDRO.

Speak low if you speak love.

(They move aside.)

BORA.

Well, I would you did like me.

MARG.

So would not I for your own sake, for I have many ill qualities.

BORA.

Which is one?

MARG.

I say my prayers aloud.

BORA.

I love you the better; the hearers may cry amen.

MARG.

God match me with a good dancer!

BORA.

Amen.

MARG.

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

BORA.

No more words; the clerk is answer'd.

(They move aside.)

URS.

I know you well enough, you are Signior Antonio.

ANT.

At a word, I am not.

URS.

I know you by the waggling of your head.

ANT.

To tell you true, I counterfeit him.

URS.

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.

ANT.

At a word, I am not.

URS.

Come, come, do you think I do not know you by your excellent wit? Can virtue hide itself? Go to, mum, you are he. Graces will appear, and there's an end.

(They move aside.)

BEAT.

Will you not tell me who told you so?

BENE.

No, you shall pardon me.

BEAT.

Nor will you not tell me who you are?

BENE.

Not now.

BEAT.

That I was disdainful, and that I had my good wit out of the "Hundred Merry Tales"—well, this was Signior Benedick that said so.

BENE.

What's he?

BEAT.

I am sure you know him well enough.

BENE.

Not I, believe me.

BEAT.

Did he never make you laugh?

BENE.

I pray you, what is he?

BEAT.

Why, he is the Prince's jester, a very dull fool; only his gift is in devising impossible slanders. None but libertines delight in him, and the commendation is not in his wit, but in his villainy, for he both pleases men and angers them, and then they laugh at him and beat him. I am sure he is in the fleet; I would he had boarded me.

BENE.

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

BEAT.

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

(Music for the dance begins.)

We must follow the leaders.

BENE.

In every good thing.

BEAT.

Nay, if they lead to any ill, I will leave them at the next turning.

(Dance. Then exeunt all but Don John, Borachio, and Claudio.)

D. JOHN.

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

BORA.

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



D. JOHN.

Are not you Signior Benedick?

CLAUD.

You know me well, I am he.

D. JOHN.

Signior, you are very near my brother in his love. He is enamor'd on Hero. I pray you dissuade him from her, she is no equal for his birth. You may do the part of an honest man in it.

CLAUD.

How know you he loves her?

D. JOHN.

I heard him swear his affection.

BORA.

So did I too, and he swore he would marry her tonight.

D. JOHN.

Come let us to the banquet.

(Exeunt. Manet Claudio.)

CLAUD.

Thus answer I in name of Benedick,  
But hear these ill news with the ears of Claudio.  
'Tis certain so, the Prince woos for himself.  
Friendship is constant in all other things  
Save in the office and affairs of love;  
Therefore all hearts in love use their own tongues.  
Let every eye negotiate for itself,  
And trust no agent; for beauty is a witch  
Against whose charms faith melteth into blood.  
This is an accident of hourly proof,

Which I mistrusted not. Farewell therefore Hero!

(Enter Benedick.)

BENE.

Count Claudio?

CLAUD.

Yea, the same.

BENE.

Come, will you go with me?

CLAUD.

Whither?

BENE.

Even to the next willow, about your own business, County. What fashion will you wear the garland of? About your neck, like an usurer's chain? Or under your arm, like a lieutenant's scarf? You must wear it one way, for the Prince hath got your Hero.

CLAUD.

I wish him joy of her.

BENE.

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

CLAUD.

I pray you leave me.

BENE.

Ho, now you strike like the blind man. 'Twas the boy that stole your meat, and you'll beat the post.

CLAUD.

If it will not be, I'll leave you.

(Exit.)

BENE.

Alas, poor hurt fowl, now will he creep into sedges. But that my Lady Beatrice should know me, and not know me! The Prince's fool! Hah, it may be I go under that title because I am merry. Yea, but so I am apt to do myself wrong. I am not so reputed. It is the base (though bitter) disposition of Beatrice that puts the world into her person, and so gives me out. Well, I'll be reveng'd as I may.

(Enter the Prince Don Pedro.)

D. PEDRO.

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

BENE.

Troth, my lord, I have play'd the part of Lady Fame. I found him here as melancholy as a lodge in a warren. I told him, and I think I told him true, that your Grace had got the good will of this young lady, and I off'ed him my company to a willow-tree, either to make him a garland, as being forsaken, or to bind him up a rod, as being worthy to be whipt.

D. PEDRO.

To be whipt? What's his fault?

BENE.

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

D. PEDRO.

Wilt thou make a trust a transgression? The transgression is in the stealer.

BENE.

Yet it had not been amiss the rod had been made, and the garland too, for the garland he might have worn himself, and the rod he might have bestow'd on you, who (as I take it) have stol'n his bird's nest.

D. PEDRO.

I will but teach them to sing, and restore them to the owner.

BENE.

If their singing answer your saying, by my faith you say honestly.

D. PEDRO.

The Lady Beatrice hath a quarrel to you. The gentleman that danc'd with her told her she is much wrong'd by you.

BENE.

O, she misus'd me past the endurance of a block; an oak but with one green leaf on it would have answer'd her. My very visor began to assume life, and scold with her. She told me, not thinking I had been myself, that I was the Prince's jester, that I was duller than a great thaw, huddling jest upon jest with such impossible conveyance upon me that I stood like a man at a mark, with a whole army shooting at me. She speaks poniards, and every word stabs. If her breath were as terrible as her terminations, there were no living near her, she would infect to the north star. I would not marry her, though she were endow'd with all that Adam had left him before he transgress'd. She would have made Hercules have turn'd spit, 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. I would to God some scholar would conjure her, for certainly, while she is here, a man may live as quiet in hell as in a sanctuary, and people sin upon purpose, because they would go thither; so indeed all disquiet, horror, and perturbation follows her.

(Enter Claudio and Beatrice, Leonato and Hero.)

D. PEDRO.

Look here she comes.

BENE.

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

Cham's beard, do you any embassy to the Pigmies, rather than hold three words' conference with this harpy. You have no employment for me?

D. PEDRO.

None, but to desire your good company.

BENE.

O God, sir, here's a dish I love not, I cannot endure my Lady Tongue.

(Exit.)

D. PEDRO.

Come, lady, come, you have lost the heart of Signior Benedick.

BEAT.

Indeed, my lord, he lent it me awhile, and I gave him use for it, a double heart for his single one. Marry, once before he won it of me with false dice, therefore your Grace may well say I have lost it.

D. PEDRO.

You have put him down, lady, you have put him down.

BEAT.

So I would not he should do me, my lord, lest I should prove the mother of fools. I have brought Count Claudio, whom you sent me to seek.

D. PEDRO.

Why, how now, Count, wherefore are you sad?

CLAUD.

Not sad, my lord.

D. PEDRO.

How then? Sick?

CLAUD.

Neither, my lord.

BEAT.

The Count is neither sad, nor sick, nor merry, nor well; but civil count, civil as an orange, and something of that jealous complexion.

D. PEDRO.

I' faith, lady, I think your blazon to be true, though I'll be sworn, if he be so, his conceit is false. Here, Claudio, I have woo'd in thy name, and fair Hero is won. I have broke with her father, and his good will obtain'd. Name the day of marriage, and God give thee joy!

LEON.

Count, take of me my daughter, and with her my fortunes. His Grace hath made the match, and all grace say amen to it.

BEAT.

Speak, Count, 'tis your cue.

CLAUD.

Silence is the perfectest heralt of joy; I were but little happy, if I could say how much! Lady, as you are mine, I am yours. I give away myself for you, and dote upon the exchange.

BEAT.

Speak, cousin, or (if you cannot) stop his mouth with a kiss, and let not him speak neither.

D. PEDRO.

In faith, lady, you have a merry heart.

BEAT.

Yea, my lord, I thank it—poor fool, it keeps on the windy side of care. My cousin tells him in his ear that he is in her heart.

CLAUD.

And so she doth, cousin.

BEAT.

Good Lord, for alliance! Thus goes every one to the world but I, and I am sunburnt. I may sit in a corner and cry "Heigh-ho for a husband!"

D. PEDRO.

Lady Beatrice, I will get you one.

BEAT.

I would rather have one of your father's getting. Hath your Grace ne'er a brother like you? Your father got excellent husbands, if a maid could come by them.

D. PEDRO.

Will you have me, lady?

BEAT.

No, my lord, unless I might have another for working-days. Your Grace is too costly to wear every day. But I beseech your Grace pardon me, I was born to speak all mirth and no matter.

D. PEDRO.

Your silence most offends me, and to be merry best becomes you, for out a' question, you were born in a merry hour.

BEAT.

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

LEON.

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

BEAT.

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

(Exit Beatrice.)

D. PEDRO.

By my troth, a pleasant-spirited lady.

LEON.

There's little of the melancholy element in her, my lord. She is never sad but when she sleeps, and not ever sad then; for I have heard my daughter say, she hath often dreamt of unhappiness, and wak'd herself with laughing.

D. PEDRO.

She cannot endure to hear tell of a husband.

LEON.

O, by no means, she mocks all her wooers out of suit.

D. PEDRO.

She were an excellent wife for Benedick.

LEON.

O Lord, my lord, if they were but a week married, they would talk themselves mad.

D. PEDRO.

County Claudio, when mean you to go to church?

CLAUD.

Tomorrow, my lord. Time goes on crutches till love have all his rites.

LEON.

Not till Monday, my dear son, which is hence a just sevennight, and a time too brief too, to have all things answer my mind.



D. PEDRO.

Come, you shake the head at so long a breathing, but I warrant thee, Claudio, the time shall not go dully by us. I will in the interim undertake one of Hercules' labors, which is, to bring Signior Benedick and the Lady Beatrice into a mountain of affection th' one with th' other. I would fain have it a match, and I doubt not but to fashion it, if you three will but minister such assistance as I shall give you direction.

LEON.

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

CLAUD.

And I, my lord.

D. PEDRO.

And you too, gentle Hero?

HERO.

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

D. PEDRO.

And Benedick is not the unhopefullest husband that I know. Thus far can I praise him: he is of a noble strain, of approv'd valor, and confirm'd honesty. I will teach you how to humor your cousin, that she shall fall in love with Benedick, and I, with your two helps, will so practice on Benedick that, in despite of his quick wit and his queasy stomach, he shall fall in love with Beatrice. If we can do this, Cupid is no longer an archer; his glory shall be ours, for we are the only love-gods. Go in with me, and I will tell you my drift.

(Exeunt.)