

Much Ado About Nothing: Act II, scene iii

Leonato's orchard.

(Benedick; Boy; Prince Don Pedro; Leonato; Claudio; Balthazar; Musicians; Beatrice)

Benedick grouses to himself about how love makes men become foolish. Seeing Don Pedro and Claudio approaching, he hides in the bushes. The two see him do so, and put it to good use. Along with Leonato, they listen to a song sung by Balthazar, and then they loudly discuss how Beatrice is deeply in love with Benedick, though she refuses to show it. Benedick is rather taken aback, but is convinced this is not a prank because Leonato joins in. They discuss and dismiss the idea of telling Benedick, saying that he would only mock her to death if he knew. Once they are certain Benedick has taken the bait, they leave, planning to have Hero do much the same to Beatrice. Benedick reflects that after all, Beatrice is not such a bad party, and deciding that he is willing to put up with the mockery that will follow, determines to woo Beatrice. On this she enters, and shows absolutely no sign of being enamored, which Benedick manages to reinterpret as clearly showing her love.

(Enter Benedick alone.)

BENE.

Boy!

(Enter Boy.)

BOY.

Signior?

BENE.

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

BOY.

I am here already, sir.

(Exit.)

BENE.

I know that, but I would have thee hence, and here again. 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 laugh'd 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 with him but the drum and the fife, and now had he rather hear the tabor and the pipe; I have known when he would have walk'd ten mile afoot to see a good armor, and now will he lie ten nights awake carving 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 turn'd orthography—his words are a very fantastical banquet, just so many strange dishes. May I be so converted and see with these eyes? I cannot tell; I think not. I will not be sworn but love may transform me to an oyster, but I'll take my oath on it, till he have made an oyster of me, he shall never make me such a fool. One woman is fair, yet I am well; another is wise, yet I am well; another virtuous, yet I am well; but till all graces be in one woman, one woman shall not come in 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 color it please God. Hah! The Prince and Monsieur Love. I will hide me in the arbor.

(Withdraws. Enter Prince Don Pedro, Leonato, Claudio. Music within.)

D. PEDRO.

Come, shall we hear this music?

CLAUD.

Yea, my good lord. How still the evening is,
As hush'd on purpose to grace harmony!

D. PEDRO.

See you where Benedick hath hid himself?

CLAUD.

O, very well, my lord. The music ended,
We'll fit the hid-fox with a pennyworth.

(Enter Balthasar with Music.)

D. PEDRO.

Come, Balthasar, we'll hear that song again.

BALTH.

O good my lord, tax not so bad a voice
To slander music any more than once.

D. PEDRO.

It is the witness still of excellency
To put a strange face on his own perfection.
I pray thee sing, and let me woo no more.

BALTH.

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.

D. PEDRO.

Nay, pray thee come,
Or if thou wilt hold longer argument,
Do it in notes.

BALTH.

Note this before my notes:
There's not a note of mine that's worth the noting.

D. PEDRO.

Why, these are very crotchets that he speaks—
Note notes, forsooth, and nothing.
Air.

BENE.

Now, divine air! Now is his soul ravish'd! Is it not strange that sheep's guts should hale souls out
of men's bodies? Well, a horn for my money when all's done.

(The Song)

BALTH.

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 more,
Of dumps so dull and heavy;
The fraud of men was ever so,
Since summer first was leavy.
Then sigh not so, etc.

D. PEDRO.

By my troth, a good song.

BALTH.

And an ill singer, my lord.

D. PEDRO.

Ha, no, no, faith, thou sing'st well enough for a shift.

BENE.

And he had been a dog that should have howl'd thus, they would have hang'd 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.

D. PEDRO.

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.

BALTH.

The best I can, my lord.

(Exit Balthasar.)

D. PEDRO.

Do so, farewell. Come hither, Leonato. What was it you told me of today, that your niece Beatrice was in love with Signior Benedick?

CLAUD. (Aside.)

O ay, stalk on, stalk on, the fowl sits.—I did never think that lady would have lov'd any man.

LEON.

No, nor I neither, but most wonderful that she should so dote on Signior Benedick, whom she hath in all outward behaviors seem'd ever to abhor.

BENE.

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

LEON.

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

D. PEDRO.

May be she doth but counterfeit.

CLAUD.

Faith, like enough.

LEON.

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

D. PEDRO.

Why, what effects of passion shows she?

CLAUD. (Aside.)

Bait the hook well, this fish will bite.

LEON.

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

CLAUD.

She did indeed.

D. PEDRO.

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

LEON.

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

BENE.

I should think this a gull, but that the white-bearded fellow speaks it. Knavery cannot sure hide himself in such reverence.

CLAUD. (Aside.)

He hath ta'en th' infection. Hold it up.

D. PEDRO.

Hath she made her affection known to Benedick?

LEON.

No, and swears she never will. That's her torment.

CLAUD.

'Tis true indeed, so your daughter says. "Shall I," says she, "that have so oft encount'red him with scorn, write to him that I love him?"

LEON.

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.

CLAUD.

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

LEON.

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

CLAUD.

That.

LEON.

O, she tore the letter into a thousand half-pence; rail'd 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."

CLAUD.

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

LEON.

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

D. PEDRO.

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

CLAUD.

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

D. PEDRO.

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

CLAUD.

And she is exceeding wise.

D. PEDRO.

In every thing but in loving Benedick.

LEON.

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 uncle and her guardian.

D. PEDRO.

I would she had bestow'd this dotage on me, I would have daff'd all other respects, and made her half myself. I pray you tell Benedick of it, and hear what 'a will say.

LEON.

Were it good, think you?

CLAUD.

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 accustom'd crossness.

D. PEDRO.

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.

CLAUD.

He is a very proper man.

D. PEDRO.

He hath indeed a good outward happiness.

CLAUD.

Before God, and in my mind, very wise.

D. PEDRO.

He doth indeed show some sparks that are like wit.

CLAUD.

And I take him to be valiant.

D. PEDRO.

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.

LEON.

If he do fear God, 'a must necessarily keep peace; if he break the peace, he ought to enter into a quarrel with fear and trembling.

D. PEDRO.

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?

CLAUD.

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

LEON.

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

D. PEDRO.

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.

LEON.

My lord, will you walk? Dinner is ready.

CLAUD. (Aside.)

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

D. PEDRO. (Aside.)

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 Don Pedro, Claudio, and Leonato.)

BENE. 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 censur'd; 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 rail'd 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 humor? 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.)

BEAT.

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

BENE.

Fair Beatrice, I thank you for your pains.

BEAT.

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.

BENE.

You take pleasure then in the message?

BEAT.

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

(Exit.)

BENE.

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 a Jew. I will go get her picture.

(Exit.)