

DON JOHN I thank you. I am not of many words, but I
thank you. 155

LEONATO Please it your Grace lead on?

PRINCE Your hand, Leonato. We will go together.
All exit except Benedick and Claudio.

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

BENEDICK I noted her not, but I looked on her. 160

CLAUDIO Is she not a modest young lady?

BENEDICK Do you question me as an honest man
should do, for my simple true judgment? Or would
you have me speak after my custom, as being a
professed tyrant to their sex? 165

CLAUDIO No, I pray thee, speak in sober judgment.

BENEDICK Why, i' faith, methinks she's too low 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. 170

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

BENEDICK Would you buy her that you enquire after
her? 175

CLAUDIO Can the world buy such a jewel?

BENEDICK Yea, and a case to put it into. But speak you
this with a sad brow? Or do you play the flouting
jack, to tell us Cupid is a good hare-finder and
Vulcan a rare carpenter? Come, in what key shall a
man take you to go in the song? 180

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, an 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? 185

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

BENEDICK Is 't come to this? In faith, hath not the
world one man but he will wear his cap with
suspicion? Shall I never see a bachelor of threescore
again? Go to, i' faith, an thou wilt needs thrust
thy neck into a yoke, wear the print of it, and sigh
away Sundays. Look, Don Pedro is returned to seek
you. 195

Enter Don Pedro, Prince of Aragon.

PRINCE What secret hath held you here that you followed
not to Leonato's? 200

BENEDICK I would your Grace would constrain me to
tell.

PRINCE I charge thee on thy allegiance.

BENEDICK You hear, Count Claudio, I can be secret as
205

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? Now, that is your Grace’s part. Mark how short his answer is: with Hero, Leonato’s short daughter. 210

CLAUDIO If this were so, so were it uttered.

BENEDICK Like the old tale, my lord: “It is not so, nor ’twas not so, but, indeed, God forbid it should be so.”

CLAUDIO If my passion change not shortly, God forbid it should be otherwise. 215

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

CLAUDIO You speak this to fetch me in, my lord.

PRINCE By my troth, I speak my thought. 220

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.

PRINCE That she is worthy, I know. 225

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 die in it at the stake.

PRINCE Thou wast ever an obstinate heretic in the despite of beauty. 230

CLAUDIO And never could maintain his part but in the force of his will.

BENEDICK That a woman conceived me, I thank her; that she brought me up, I likewise give her most humble thanks. But that I will have a recheat winded in my forehead or hang my bugle in an invisible baldrick, all women shall pardon me. Because I will not do them the wrong to mistrust any, I will do myself the right to trust none. And the fine is, for the which I may go the finer, I will live a bachelor. 240

PRINCE 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 mine eyes with a ballad-maker’s pen and hang me up at the door of a brothel house for the sign of blind Cupid. 245

PRINCE Well, if ever thou dost fall from this faith, thou wilt prove a notable argument. 250

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.

PRINCE Well, as time shall try. 255

In time the savage bull doth bear the yoke.

BENEDICK The savage bull may, but if ever the sensible Benedick bear it, pluck off the bull’s horns and set them in my forehead, and let me be vilely painted, and in such great letters as they write “Here is good horse to hire” let them signify under my sign “Here 260

you may see Benedick the married man.”

CLAUDIO If this should ever happen, thou wouldst be
horn-mad.

PRINCE Nay, if Cupid have not spent all his quiver in 265
Venice, thou wilt quake for this shortly.

BENEDICK I look for an earthquake too, then.

PRINCE Well, you will temporize with the hours. In the
meantime, good Signior Benedick, repair to Leonato’s.
Commend me to him, and tell him I will not 270
fail him at supper, for indeed he hath made great
preparation.

BENEDICK I have almost matter enough in me for such
an embassy, and so I commit you—

CLAUDIO To the tuition of God. From my house, if I had 275
it—

PRINCE The sixth of July. Your loving friend,
Benedick.

BENEDICK Nay, mock not, mock not. The body of your
discourse is sometimes guarded with fragments, 280
and the guards are but slightly basted on neither.
Ere you flout old ends any further, examine your
conscience. And so I leave you. *He exits.*

CLAUDIO
My liege, your Highness now may do me good.

PRINCE
My love is thine to teach. Teach it but how, 285
And thou shalt see how apt it is to learn
Any hard lesson that may do thee good.

CLAUDIO
Hath Leonato any son, my lord?

PRINCE
No child but Hero; she’s his only heir.
Dost thou affect her, Claudio? 290

CLAUDIO O, my lord,
When you went onward on 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. 295
But now I am returned and that 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. 300

PRINCE
Thou wilt be like a lover presently
And tire the hearer with a book of words.
If thou dost love fair Hero, cherish it,
And I will break with her and with her father,
And thou shalt have her. Was ’t not to this end 305
That thou began’st to twist so fine a story?

CLAUDIO
How sweetly you do minister to love,
That know love’s grief by his complexion!
But lest my liking might too sudden seem,
I would have salved it with a longer treatise. 310

PRINCE

What need the bridge much broader than the flood?
The fairest grant is the necessity.
Look what will serve is fit. 'Tis once, thou lovest,
And I will fit thee with the remedy.
I know we shall have reveling tonight. 315
I will assume thy part in some disguise
And tell fair Hero I am Claudio,
And in her bosom I'll unclasp my heart
And take her hearing prisoner with the force
And strong encounter of my amorous tale. 320
Then after to her father will I break,
And the conclusion is, she shall be thine.
In practice let us put it presently.

They exit.

Scene 2

*Enter Leonato, meeting an old man, brother to
Leonato.*

LEONATO How now, brother, where is my cousin, your
son? Hath he provided this music?
LEONATO'S BROTHER He is very busy about it. But,
brother, I can tell you strange news that you yet
dreamt not of. 5
LEONATO Are they good?
LEONATO'S BROTHER As the events stamps them, but
they have a good cover; they show well outward.
The Prince and Count Claudio, walking in a thick-pleached
alley in mine orchard, were thus much 10
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 in a dance, and if
he found her accordant, he meant to take the
present time by the top and instantly break with you 15
of it.
LEONATO Hath the fellow any wit that told you this?
LEONATO'S BROTHER A good sharp fellow. I will send
for him, and question him yourself.
LEONATO No, no, we will hold it as a dream till it 20
appear itself. But I will acquaint my daughter
withal, that she may be the better prepared for an
answer, if peradventure this be true. Go you and tell
her of it.

Enter Antonio's son, with a Musician and Attendants.

Cousins, you know what you have to do.—O, I cry 25
you mercy, friend. Go you with me and I will use
your skill.—Good cousin, have a care this busy
time.

They exit.

Scene 3

*Enter Sir John the Bastard, and Conrade, his
companion.*