

Act 1, Scene 1

Original Text

Enter **LEONATO**, Governor of Messina; **HERO**, his daughter; and **BEATRICE** his niece, with a **MESSENGER**

LEONATO

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

MESSENGER

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

LEONATO

5 How many gentlemen have you lost in this action?

MESSENGER

But 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

10 Much deserved on his part, and equally remembered by Don Pedro. 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.

LEONATO

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

Modern Text

LEONATO, Governor of Messina; **HERO**, his daughter; and **BEATRICE**, his niece, enter with a **MESSENGER**

LEONATO

(holding a letter) According to this letter, [Don](#) Pedro of Aragon and his army are coming to Messina tonight.

MESSENGER

He must be very near by now. When I left him, he was less than nine miles from here.

LEONATO

How many noblemen were killed in the battle you just fought?

MESSENGER

Not many, and no one important.

LEONATO

A victory in battle is twice as victorious when all the soldiers return home safely. This letter also says that Don Pedro has given honors to a young man from Florence named Claudio.

MESSENGER

Claudio deserves to be honored, and Don Pedro has rewarded him accordingly. Claudio has done more than anyone would expect of a man his age. He looks like a lamb but fights like a lion. He has so greatly exceeded all expectations that I can't even describe all he's done.

LEONATO

He has an uncle here in Messina who will be glad to hear this news.

Act 1, Scene 1, Page 2

Original Text **Modern Text**

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.

LEONATO

20 Did he break out into
tears?

MESSENGER

In great measure.

LEONATO

A kind overflows 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

25 I pray you, is Signor
Montanto 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

30 My cousin means
Signor Benedick of
Padua.

MESSENGER

I have delivered some letters to his uncle, and he seemed very happy. He got so emotional that he actually looked like he was in pain.

LEONATO

Did he start weeping?

MESSENGER

Yes, heavily.

LEONATO

That's a very natural display of affection. There's no face more sincere than one washed in tears. And it's definitely better to cry because you're happy than laugh because you're sad!

BEATRICE

Please tell me, has Signor [Montanto](#) returned from battle?

MESSENGER

I don't know anyone with that name, ma'am. There was no Signior Montanto in our army.

LEONATO

Who are you talking about, niece?

HERO

My cousin means Signior Benedick of Padua.

MESSENGER

Oh, 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, and my uncle's Fool, reading the challenge, subscribed for Cupid and challenged him at the bird-bolt.

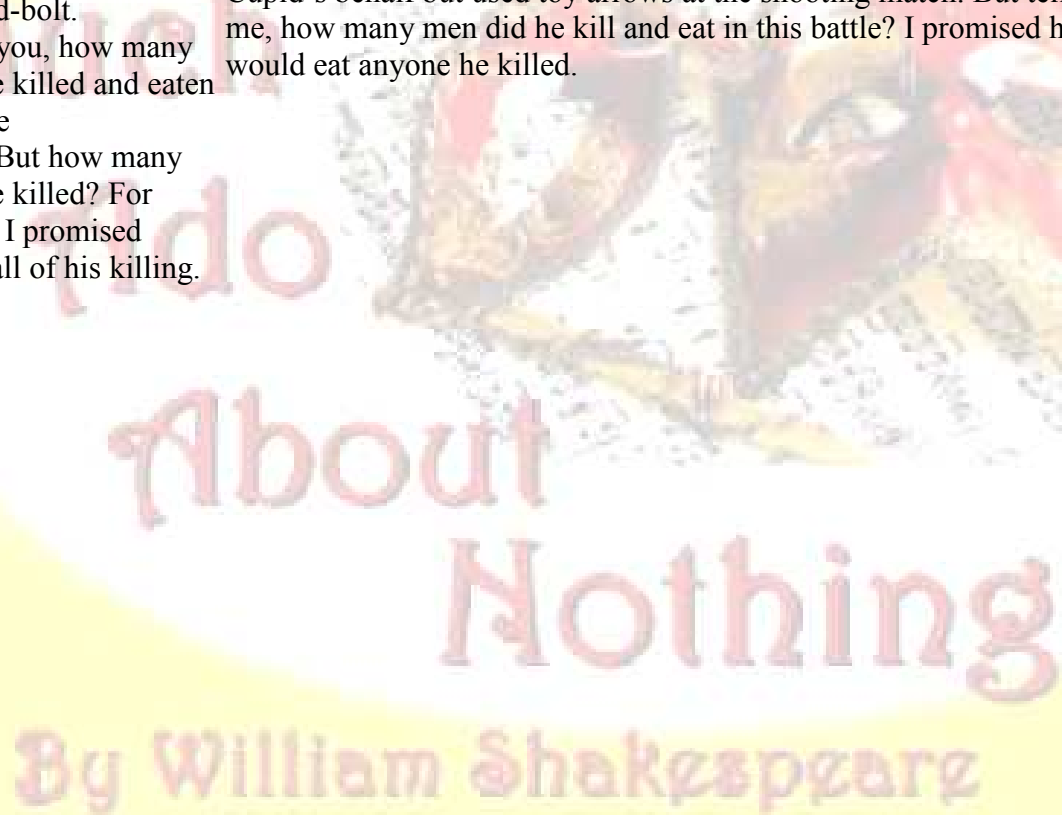
35 I pray you, how many hath he killed and eaten in these wars? But how many hath he killed? For indeed I promised to eat all of his killing.

MESSENGER

Oh, yes, Benedick has returned and is as cheerful as ever.

BEATRICE

[Benedick](#) once put up a public notice in Messina challenging Cupid to an archery match. My uncle's jester accepted the contest on Cupid's behalf but used toy arrows at the shooting match. But tell me, how many men did he kill and eat in this battle? I promised him I would eat anyone he killed.



Act 1, Scene 1, Page 3

Original Text

LEONATO

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

MESSENGER

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

BEATRICE

You had musty victual, and he hath help to 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

45 A lord to a lord, a man to a man, stuffed with all honorable virtues.

BEATRICE

It is so indeed. He is no less than a stuffed man. But for the stuffing—well, we are all mortal.

Modern Text

LEONATO

For God's sake, Beatrice, you're criticizing Signor Benedick too heavily. But I'm sure he'll get even with you.

MESSENGER

Signor Benedick served well in the war, my lady.

BEATRICE

You had rotten food, and he helped you eat it. He's a very brave eater—he has a strong stomach.

MESSENGER

He's a good soldier too, lady.

BEATRICE

He's a good soldier to a lady? Well then, what is he to a lord?

MESSENGER

He's a lord to a lord and a man to a man. He is positively stuffed with honorable virtues.

BEATRICE

Absolutely—he is stuffed, like a dummy. As for what he's stuffed with—well, nobody's perfect.

LEONATO

You must not, sir, mistake my niece. There is a kind of merry war betwixt Signor 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
55 to be known a reasonable creature. Who is his companion now? He hath every month a new sworn brother.

MESSENGER

Is 't possible?

LEONATO

Please don't take my niece the wrong way, sir. Benedick and Beatrice have been waging a war of wits between themselves. Whenever they meet, there's a little battle.

BEATRICE

And I always win. The last time we fought, he was so dazed by the end that he wasn't much smarter than his horse. So tell me, who is he hanging around with these days? Every month he has a new best friend.

MESSENGER

Is that possible?

Ado
About
Nothing
By William Shakespeare

Act 1, Scene 1, Page 4

Original Text

BEATRICE

Very easily possible. He wears his faith
but as the fashion of
60 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
65 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
70 have caught the
Benedick, it will cost him a thousand
pound ere a be cured.

MESSENGER

I will hold friends with you, lady.

BEATRICE

Do, good friend.

LEONATO

You will never run mad, niece.

BEATRICE

No, not till a hot January.

MESSENGER

75 Don Pedro is approached.

Enter **DON PEDRO**, Prince of Aragon,
with **CLAUDIO**,
BENEDICK, **BALTHASAR**, and

Modern Text

BEATRICE

It's entirely possible. He's incredibly fickle—his
affection changes faster than the latest fashions.

MESSENGER

I can see you don't like this gentleman.

BEATRICE

No, absolutely not. But please tell me, who's his best
friend? Isn't there some new swaggering young ruffian
who will happily go to hell with Benedick?

MESSENGER

He spends most of his time with the good, noble
Claudio.

BEATRICE

Oh God, Benedick will plague him like a disease!
Benedick is an infection that's easy to catch but hard to
get rid of—and he'll drive you crazy once you've been
infected. God help Claudio! If he's caught the
Benedick, he'll lose all his money before he's cured.

MESSENGER

I'm going to make sure I stay on your good side, lady.

BEATRICE

Do that, my friend.

LEONATO

You will never fall victim to Benedick's charms, my
niece.

BEATRICE

No, not until we see a hot January.

MESSENGER

Don Pedro is here.

DON PEDRO, Prince of Aragon, enters with
CLAUDIO, **BENEDICK**, **BALTHASAR**, and **DON**
JOHN, the bastard.

DON JOHN the bastard

DON PEDRO

Good Signor Leonato, are you come to meet your trouble?

The fashion of the world is to avoid cost, and you encounter it.

DON PEDRO

My dear Signior Leonato, hosting my whole army is such a huge burden, but you accept it—and me—with open arms. Most people choose to avoid trouble, but you run to it.

Act 1, Scene 1, Page 5

Original Text

LEONATO

Never came trouble to my house in the likeness of your Grace, for trouble being gone, 80 comfort should remain, but when you depart from me, sorrow abides and happiness Takes his leave.

DON PEDRO

You embrace your charge too willingly. I think this is your Daughter.

LEONATO

Her mother hath many times 85 told me so.

BENEDICK

Were you in doubt, sir that you asked her?

LEONATO

Signor Benedick, no, for then were you a child.

DON PEDRO

You have it full, Benedick. 90 We may guess by this what you

Modern Text

LEONATO

You are never trouble to this house, your Grace. It's comforting when trouble departs. But when *you* leave, you take happiness with you and leave sorrow in its place.

DON PEDRO

You take up your duties too cheerfully. (*turning to HERO*) This must be your daughter.

LEONATO

That's what her mother always tells me.

BENEDICK

Did you doubt that she was your daughter, since you had to ask her mother?

LEONATO

(*teasing*) Of course not, Signior Benedick. You were only a child when my daughter was born, and not yet old enough to seduce my wife.

DON PEDRO

Ah, he got you back, Benedick! Leonato clearly knows your reputation with women. Seriously, though, the lady resembles Leonato so much that there can be no doubt

Are, being a man. Truly, the lady fathers herself.—Be Happy, lady, for you are like an honorable father.

about who her father is. Congratulations, lady: you resemble a most honorable man.

(LEONATO and DON PEDRO move to one side, still talking)

(LEONATO and DON PEDRO move to one side, still talking.)

BENEDICK

If Signor Leonato be her father, she would not have his head on her shoulders for all Messina as like him as she is.

BENEDICK

Well, even if he is her father, I'm sure she wouldn't want to have the head of the old man on her shoulders!

BEATRICE

I wonder that you will still be talking, Signor Benedick. Nobody marks you.

BEATRICE

I'm amazed you're still talking, Signior Benedick. No one's listening to you.

BENEDICK

95 What, my dear Lady Disdain! Are you yet living?

BENEDICK

Look, it's my dear Lady Disdain! Aren't you dead yet?

Act 1, Scene 1, Page 6

Original Text

Modern Text

BEATRICE

Is it possible disdain should die while she hath such meet Food to feed it as Signor Benedick? Courtesy itself must Convert to disdain if you come in her presence.

BEATRICE

How could disdain die when you're here? When you're around, even Lady Courtesy becomes Lady Disdain.

BENEDICK

Then is courtesy a turncoat. But it is certain I am loved of All ladies, only you accepted. And I would I could find in My heart that I had not

BENEDICK

100 That makes Lady Courtesy a traitor. All ladies love me, except you. It's too bad I'm so hard-hearted, because I really don't love anyone.

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

105 humor 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 gentle-
man or other shall
'scape a predestinate
scratched face.

BEATRICE

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

BENEDICK

110 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.

BEATRICE

Women are lucky, then. You would make a nasty suitor. Thankfully,
I feel the same way you do. I have no need for romance. I would
rather listen to my dog bark at a crow than hear a man swear that he
loves me.

BENEDICK

Well, I hope you stay in that frame of mind or some poor man will
end up with his face all scratched up.

BEATRICE

If he has a face like yours, a good scratching couldn't make him look
any worse.

BENEDICK

Listen to you, instructing me like a parrot would.

BEATRICE

I'd rather be a squawking bird than an animal like you.

BENEDICK

I wish my horse moved as fast as your mouth and was as tireless.
That's it—I'm done.

BEATRICE

You always slip out of the argument like this. I know you from
before.

(LEONATO and DON PEDRO come forward)

(LEONATO and DON PEDRO come forward)

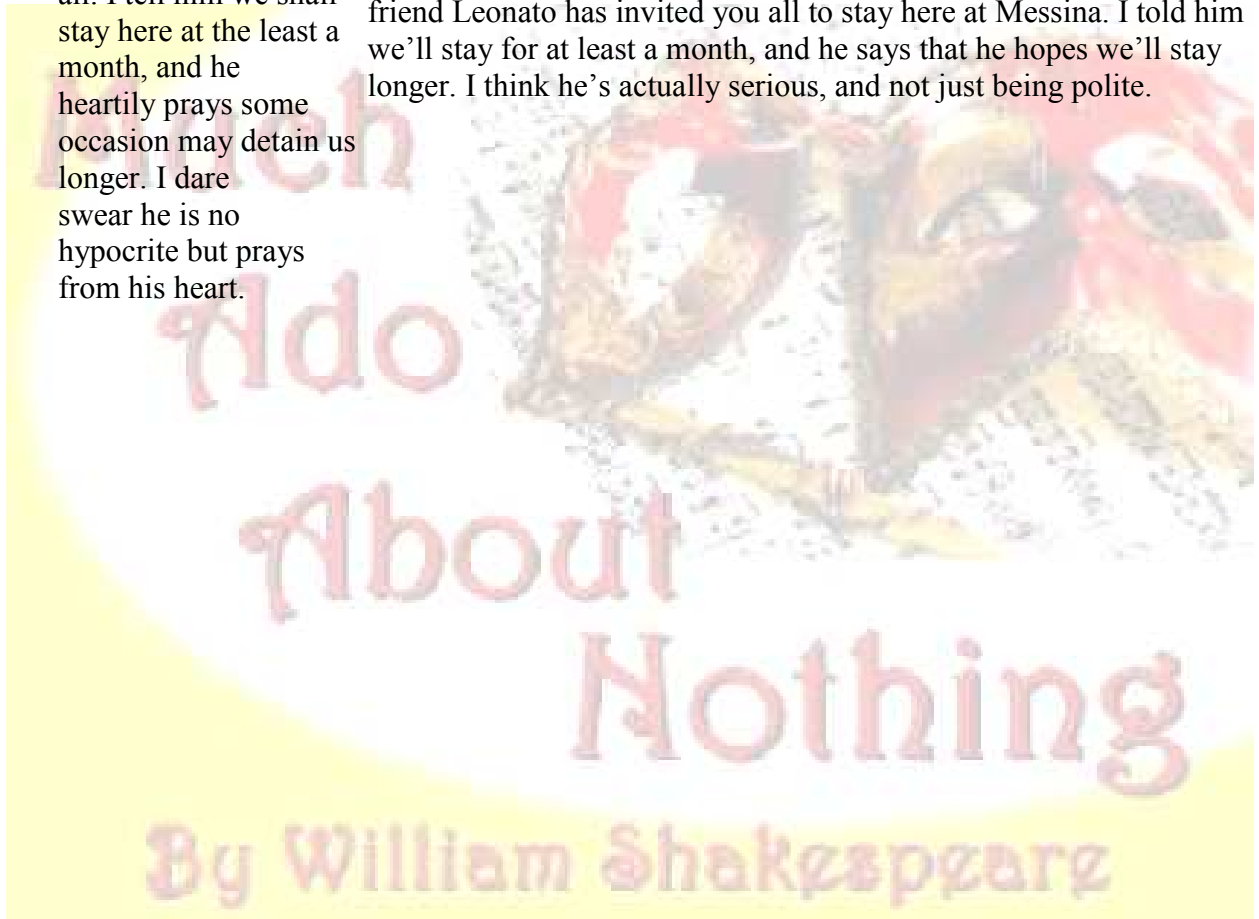
DON PEDRO

That is the sum of all,
Leonato.—Signior
Claudio and
Signior Benedick, my
dear friend Leonato

115 hath invited you
all. I tell him we shall
stay here at the least a
month, and he
heartily prays some
occasion may detain us
longer. I dare
swear he is no
hypocrite but prays
from his heart.

DON PEDRO

And that's everything, Leonato.—Claudio, Benedick—my dear
friend Leonato has invited you all to stay here at Messina. I told him
we'll stay for at least a month, and he says that he hopes we'll stay
longer. I think he's actually serious, and not just being polite.



**About
Nothing**
By William Shakespeare

Act 1, Scene 1, Page 7

Original Text

LEONATO

If you swear, my lord, you shall not be forsworn. *(to DON*

120 *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

125 Your hand, Leonato. We will go together.

Exeunt. Manent **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

Do you question me as an honest man should do, for my

130 simple true judgment? Or 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

135 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

Modern Text

LEONATO

I am being serious, my lord. *(to DON JOHN)* I welcome you here as well. Now that you and your brother have made friends again, I owe you the same allegiance I owe Don Pedro.

DON JOHN

Thank you. I'm not a man who talks a lot, but I thank you.

LEONATO

If it pleases you, your highness, will you lead us all inside?

DON PEDRO

Give me your hand, Leonato. We will go in together.

Everyone exits except **BENEDICK** and **CLAUDIO**.

CLAUDIO

Benedick, did you notice Signior Leonato's daughter?

BENEDICK

I saw her, but I didn't notice her.

CLAUDIO

Isn't she a well-mannered young lady?

BENEDICK

Do you want my true opinion? Or do you want me to criticize her like I do all women?

CLAUDIO

No, please, speak seriously.

BENEDICK

Well, it seems to me that she is too short to be praised highly, too dark to be praised fairly, and too small to be praised greatly. I can only say this about her: if she looked different than she does, she would be ugly, and since she can't be anything but herself, I

than she is, she were unhandsome, and don't like her.

being no other but
as she is, I do not like her.

CLAUDIO

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

CLAUDIO

You think I'm kidding. Please tell me seriously what
you think of her.

Act 1, Scene 1, Page 8

Original Text

Modern Text

BENEDICK

Would you buy her,

140 that you enquire after her? Are you thinking of buying her? Is that why you're asking?

CLAUDIO

Can the world buy
such a jewel?

CLAUDIO

Would it even be possible to buy a jewel as rare and precious as Hero?

BENEDICK

Yea, and a case to
put it into. But speak
you this with a sad
brow? Or do you
play the flouting

BENEDICK

145 a good hare-finder
and Vulcan a rare
carpenter? Come, in
what key shall a man
take you to go in the
song?

CLAUDIO

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

CLAUDIO

I think she's the most wonderful woman I've ever laid eyes on.

BENEDICK

I can see yet without spectacles, and I see
150 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?

CLAUDIO

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

BENEDICK

Is't comes to this? In
faith, hath not the
world one man but
He will wear his cap
with suspicion? Shall

I never see a
155 Bachelor of three-
score 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.

BENEDICK

I'm still young enough to see without glasses, and I don't see what
you're talking about. If her cousin Beatrice didn't have such a nasty
temper, she'd be so much more beautiful than Hero that it would be
like comparing May to December. But, hey, this doesn't mean you're
looking to get married, does it?

CLAUDIO

Even if I had sworn never to marry, I wouldn't trust myself to keep
that promise if Hero would marry me.

BENEDICK

What's going on these days? Isn't there one man left in the world
who knows not to take a wife? She's just going to cheat on him. Will I
never see a sixty-year old bachelor again or will all men be swindled
into marriage while they're young? Go ahead, then, if you have to
yoke yourself to marriage, like an ox carrying his load, and throw
away your free time. Look, Don Pedro has come back for you.

Enter **DON PEDRO**

DON PEDRO enters.

Act 1, Scene 1, Page 9

Original Text **Modern Text**

DON PEDRO

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

DON PEDRO

What secrets between you have kept you from following us to
Leonato's?

BENEDICK

I would your grace
would constrain me to
tell.

BENEDICK

Your highness will have to force me to tell.

DON PEDRO

I charge thee on thy
allegiance.

DON PEDRO

Your loyalty to me requires you to tell me what you've been talking
about.

BENEDICK

You hear, Count
Claudio? I can be
secret as a dumb man,
I
would have you think
so, but on my

BENEDICK

165 allegiance—mark you
this, on my
allegiance—(to DON
PEDRO) 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.

Look, Claudio, I can keep secrets like a mute; I want you to know
that. But I owe Don Pedro my allegiance—look, I *have* to tell him—
(to DON PEDRO) Claudio is in love. With whom? That's what
you're supposed to ask me next, your Grace. Look how short the
answer is—with Hero, Leonato's short daughter.

CLAUDIO

If this were so, so
were it uttered.

CLAUDIO

If you say so.

BENEDICK

170 Like the old tale, my
lord: "It is not so nor
'twas not so but,
indeed, God forbid it
should be so."

BENEDICK

Listen to him deny it, like that man in the old tale "Mr. Fox": "It isn't
true and wasn't true and God forbid it should be so."

CLAUDIO

If my passion change
not shortly, God

CLAUDIO

Unless my feelings change very soon, I have to admit it's true.

forbid it should be otherwise.

DON PEDRO

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

CLAUDIO

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

DON PEDRO

By my troth, I speak my thought.

CLAUDIO

And, in faith, my lord, I spoke mine.

DON PEDRO

It's good if you love Hero, because she's worthy of your love.

CLAUDIO

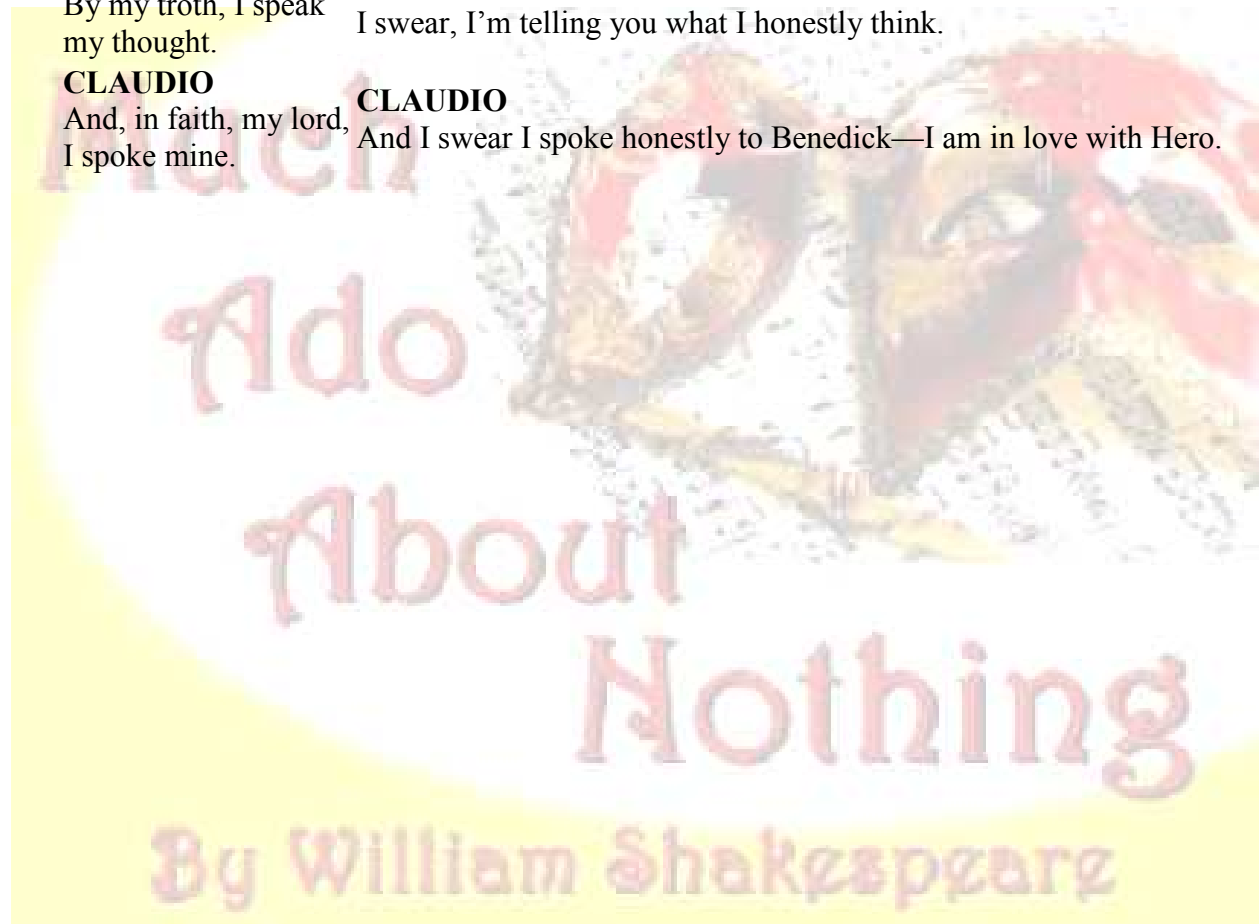
You're trying to trick me, my lord.

DON PEDRO

I swear, I'm telling you what I honestly think.

CLAUDIO

And I swear I spoke honestly to Benedick—I am in love with Hero.



Act 1, Scene 1, Page 10

Original Text **Modern Text**

BENEDICK

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

BENEDICK

And *I* swear all up and down I spoke honestly when I said that this
was a horrible idea.

CLAUDIO

That I love her, I feel.

CLAUDIO

I feel that I love her.

DON PEDRO

180 That she is worthy, I
know.

DON PEDRO

I know that she is worthy of that love.

BENEDICK

That I neither feel
how she should be
loved nor know how
she should be worthy
cannot melt
out
of me. I will die in it
at the stake.

BENEDICK

I, on the other hand, don't *feel* how she could be loved and don't *know*
is the opinion that fire how she could be worthy. Even fire can't melt that opinion out of me.
You could burn me at the stake, and I'd still think this.

DON PEDRO

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

DON PEDRO

You never did believe in the power of beauty.

CLAUDIO

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

CLAUDIO

Or in the power of reason.

BENEDICK

190 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 reheat
winded in my
forehead or hang my
bugle
in an invisible
baldrick, all women
shall pardon me.

BENEDICK

I was conceived by a woman, and I thank her very much for all her
effort. And then she brought me up, and I thank her for that, too. But
all the other women will have to forgive me for not being willing to be
made a fool of—cheated on by a wife. I don't want to insult any
particular woman by doubting and mistrusting her, so I'll just avoid
them all. And the conclusion of this is that I'll live as a bachelor—and,
with the money I save, dress better.

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.

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

195 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.

DON PEDRO

I swear, before I die I'm going to see you sick with love.

BENEDICK

With anger, with fever, or with hunger, sure, my friend, but never sick
with love. If you can prove that I'll ever be so in love that I can't be
brought to my senses with a good round of beers, you can pluck out
my eyes with a love-poet's pen and hang me on a brothel's door where
the picture of blind Cupid usually goes.

Nothing
By William Shakespeare

Act 1, Scene 1, Page 11

Original Text

DON PEDRO

200 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

205 Well, as time shall
try.
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
210 write "Here is good
horse to hire" let
them signify under
my
sign "Here you may
see Benedick the
married man."

CLAUDIO

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

DON PEDRO

Modern Text

DON PEDRO

I'll be sure to remember this fuss you've made, in case you ever do fall
in love. That'll be news.

BENEDICK

If I ever change my mind, you can use me for target practice. And
whoever hits the bull's eye gets to be a hero.

DON PEDRO

Well, time will tell. Even the most savage bull is eventually
domesticated.

BENEDICK

Maybe the bull is, but if *I* am ever domesticated, you can take that
bull's horns and put them right on my forehead, as my wife is sure to
cuckold me soon enough. You might as well hang a big sign with
enormous lettering around my neck. But instead of it saying "Horse
210 for hire," it will say "Take a look at Benedick, the married man."

CLAUDIO

If that ever happened, you'd go absolutely mad.

DON PEDRO

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

BENEDICK

215 I look for an
earthquake too, then.

DON PEDRO

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

BENEDICK

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

Well, if Cupid hasn't used up all his arrows in Venice, where the courtesans are famous for making men lovesick, he'll get you to quiver and shake. Just you wait.

BENEDICK

That's about as likely as an earthquake.

DON PEDRO

Oh, you'll soften as time passes. While you're waiting for that to happen, though, hurry to Leonato's. Give him my respects, and tell him I'll definitely be there for dinner, since I know he has gone to great lengths for this meal.

BENEDICK

I think I can handle this mission. And so I commit you—

Nothing

By William Shakespeare

Act 1, Scene 1, Page 12

Original Text

CLAUDIO

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

DON PEDRO

The sixth of July.
Your loving friend,
Benedick.

BENEDICK

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

Exit

CLAUDIO

My liege, your
highness now may do
me good.

DON PEDRO

230 My love is thine to
teach. Teach it but
how,
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?

DON PEDRO

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

Modern Text

CLAUDIO

“Into God’s hands. From my house, if I had a house—”

DON PEDRO

“The sixth of July. Sincerely, your loving friend, Benedick.”

BENEDICK

Oh, stop joking around. You know, sometimes you two dress up your conversation with flimsy little bits of wit that don’t hold together too well. Before you make fun of everyone else, look at yourselves in the mirror! And with that, I’m leaving.

He exits.

CLAUDIO

My lord, you could really help me out now.

DON PEDRO

I am at your service. Just tell me what you want me to do, and however hard it is, you’ll see that I’m eager to do it.

CLAUDIO

Does Leonato have a son, my lord?

DON PEDRO

Hero is his only child, and his only heir. Do you like her, Claudio?

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
rougner task in hand

235 Than to drive liking
to the name of love.
But now I am
returned and that war
thoughts

240 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.

CLAUDIO

Oh, my lord, when we left Messina to fight the war, I looked at Hero with the eyes of a soldier. I liked what I saw, but my mind was so occupied with the rough, violent task ahead of me that there was no chance that *like* would turn into *love*. But now that I'm back, the room in my head that I used to fill with war plans has become crowded with soft and delicate feelings. They all lead me to the same thought—how beautiful young Hero is and how I must have liked her even before I left to fight.



About
Nothing

By William Shakespeare

Act 1, Scene 1, Page 13

Original Text **Modern Text**

DON PEDRO

Thou wilt be like a
lover presently
And tire the hearer
with a book of
words.

If thou dost love
fair Hero, cherish

245 it,

And I will break
with her and with
her father,
And thou shalt have
her. Was 't not to
this end
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

250 complexion!

But lest my liking
might too sudden
seem,
I would have salved
it with a longer
treatise.

DON PEDRO

What need the

255 bridge much

broader than the
flood?

The fairest grant is
the necessity.

260 Look what will

serve is fit. 'Tis
once, thou lovest,
And I will fit thee
with the remedy.

DON PEDRO

You will become a true lover soon, and exhaust your friends with your endless chatter about your feelings. Look, if you really love the beautiful Hero, enjoy it. I will speak to her and her father about the matter, and I'll convince Leonato to promise Hero to you. Isn't that the reason you told me all this?

CLAUDIO

You can see that I'm sick with love, and you're taking care of me in just the right way! But I didn't want you to think that I'm hasty in my emotions. I was going to explain my feelings with a longer story.

DON PEDRO

Why speak longer than you have to? That's like building a bridge wider than the river it crosses. Whatever gets the job done is best. You love Hero; that's all I need to know to want to find a remedy. They're going to have a costume party with dancing tonight. I'll disguise myself as you and pour out "my" feelings to Hero, taking her prisoner with the force of my love story. Then I'll talk to her father. And in the end, she's yours! Let's get started right away.

265 I know we shall
have reveling
tonight.
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.
Then after to her
father will I break,
And the conclusion
is, she shall be
thine.

In practice let us
put it presently.

Exeunt

They exit.



Much Ado About Nothing

By William Shakespeare

Act 1, Scene 2

Original Text

Enter **LEONATO**
and **ANTONIO**

LEONATO

How now, brother,
where is my cousin,
your son? Hath he
provided this music?

ANTONIO

He is very busy about
it. But, brother, I can
tell you strange
news that you yet
dreamt not of.

LEONATO

5 Are they good?

ANTONIO

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 overheard

10 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 of it.

Modern Text

LEONATO and **ANTONIO** enter.

LEONATO

Hey, brother. Tell me, where is my nephew, your son? Has he taken care of the music?

ANTONIO

He is taking care of it as we speak. But brother, I have some strange news for you.

LEONATO

Is it good news?

ANTONIO

Well, it seems like good news. A servant of mine overheard the Prince and Claudio talking as they walked through my orchard. The Prince said that he is in love with Hero, your daughter, and that he is going to tell her so at the dance tonight. If she wants to marry him, too, he's going to find you and ask for her hand immediately.

LEONATO

Hath the fellow any
wit that told you this?

LEONATO

Is this servant of yours a smart man?

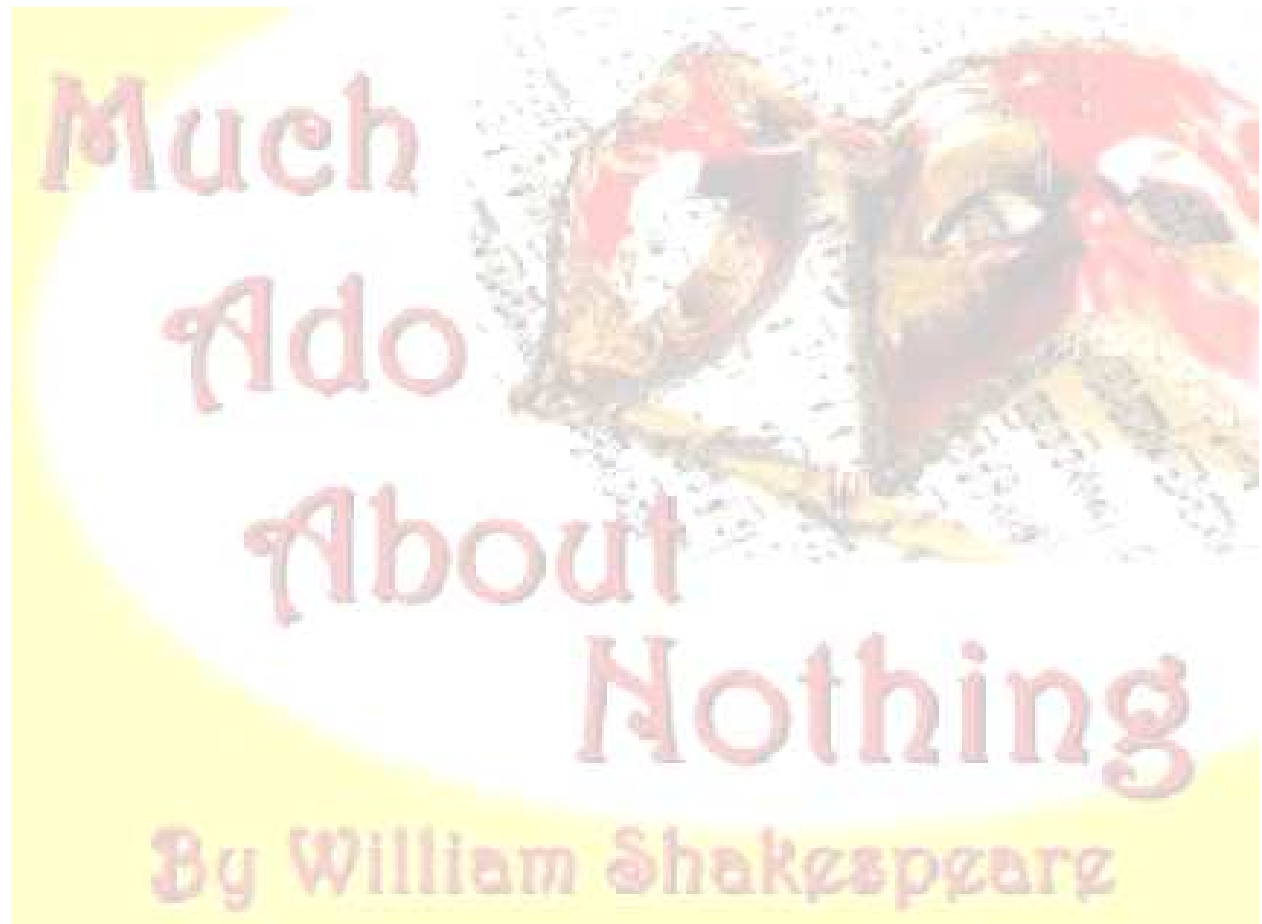
ANTONIO

A good sharp fellow.

ANTONIO

15 I will send for him,
and question him
yourself.

He's very bright. I'll get him to come here, and you can ask him
yourself.



Act 1, Scene 3

Original Text

Enter **DON JOHN**
and **CONRAD**

CONRAD

What the goodyear,
my lord, why are you
thus out of
measure sad?

DON JOHN

There is no measure in
the occasion that
breeds. Therefore
the sadness is without
limit.

CONRAD

5 You should hear
reason.

DON JOHN

And when I have
heard it, what blessing
brings it?

CONRAD

If not a present
remedy, at least a
patient sufferance.

Modern Text

DON JOHN and **CONRAD** enter.

CONRAD

Really, my lord, why are you so excessively sad?

DON JOHN

The things that cause my sadness are without limit. Therefore my sadness is without limit.

CONRAD

You should listen to reason. Then you'd stop being so gloomy.

DON JOHN

And after I have sat and listened to reason, what's my prize?

CONRAD

If not an end to your suffering, then at least you'll have the means to endure it patiently.

Nothing

By William Shakespeare

DON JOHN

I wonder that thou,
10 being, as thou sayst
thou art, born
under Saturn, goest
about to apply a moral
medicine to a
mortifying mischief. I
cannot hide what I am.
I must be sad
when I have cause and
smile at no man's
jests, eat when I
have stomach and wait
for no man's leisure,
sleep when I am
drowsy and tend on no
man's business, laugh
when I am
merry and claw no
man in his humor.

CONRAD

Yea, but you must not
make the full show of
this till you
may do it without
controlment. You have
15 of late stood out
against your brother,
and he hath ta'en you
newly into his
grace, where it is
20 impossible you should
take true root but
by the fair weather that
you make yourself. It
is needful that
you frame the season
for your own harvest.

DON JOHN

I'm amazed that you—being such a moody man yourself—are
moralizing about my deadly condition. I can't hide what I am. I'll be
sad when I have reason to be sad and won't smile at anybody's jokes.
I'll eat when I'm hungry and won't wait until it's convenient. I'll sleep
when I'm tired and won't rouse myself for anything. I'll laugh when
I'm happy and won't flatter and fawn over anyone.

CONRAD

Sure, but don't do it at full volume until there's no danger in it. Not
long ago you challenged and opposed your brother, and it is only very
recently that he has forgiven you. You need to act carefully if you're
going to stay in his good graces. You have to wait for the appropriate
time to let loose.



eh
do
About

William Shakespeare

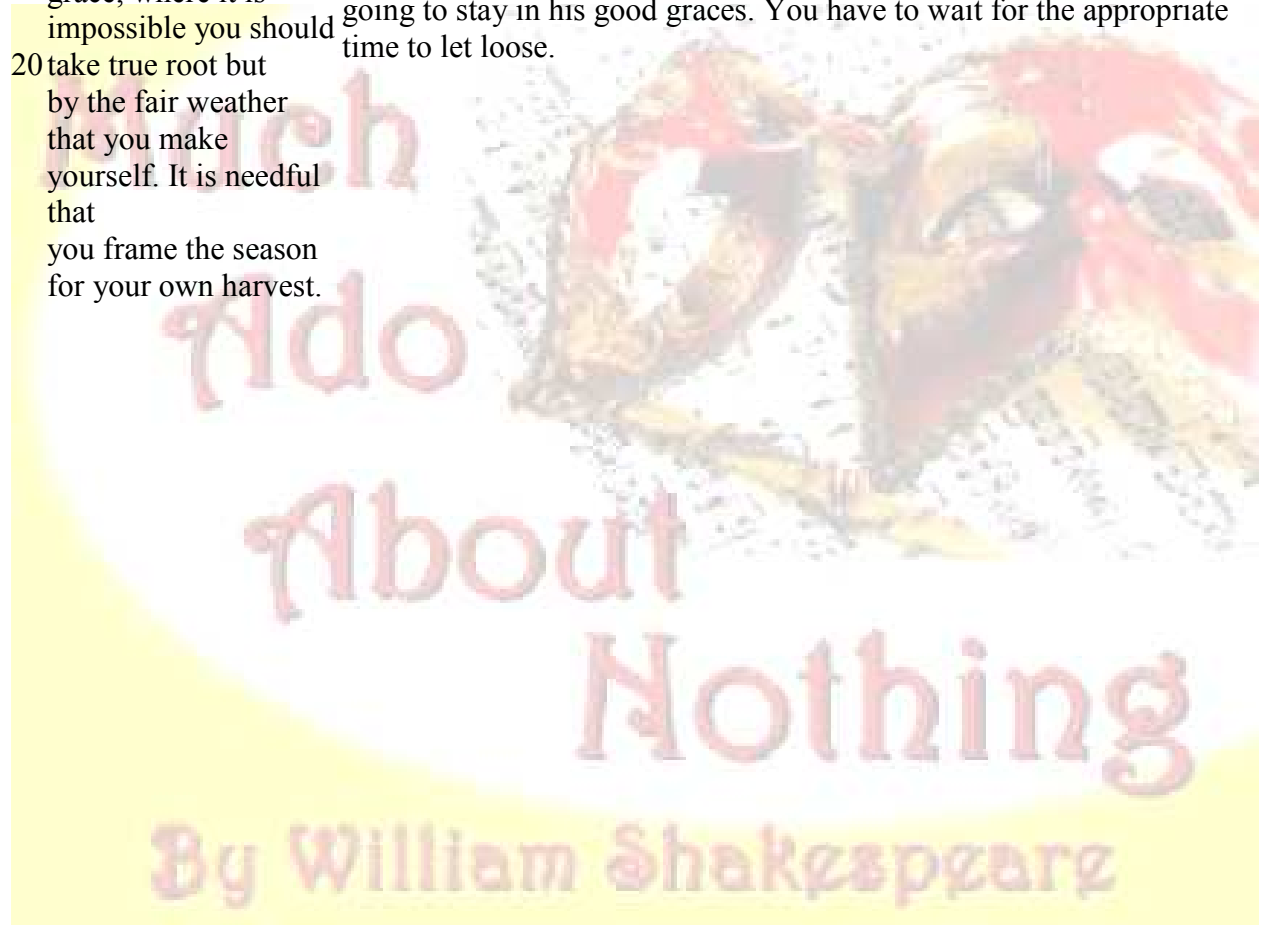
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About
Nothing
By William Shakespeare

Act 1, Scene 3, Page 2

Original Text

Modern Text

DON JOHN

I had rather be a
canker in a hedge
than a rose in his
grace,

and it better fits my
blood to be disdained
of all than to

fashion a carriage to
rob love from any. In
this, though I

cannot be said to be a
flattering honest man,
it must not be
denied but I am a

25 plain-dealing villain. I
am trusted with a
muzzle and

enfranchised with a
clog; therefore I have
decreed not to sing in

my cage. If I had my
mouth, I would
bite; if I had my

liberty, I would do
my liking. In the
meantime, let me be

that I am, and seek
not to alter me.

CONRAD

30 Can you make no use
of your discontent?

DON JOHN

I make all use of it,
for I use it only. Who
comes here?

Enter **BORACHIO**

What news,
Borachio?

BORACHIO

I came yonder from a
great supper. The

DON JOHN

I'd rather be a weed in a hedge than a rose in my brother's garden. It suits me more to be hated by everyone than to put on a fancy show and trick people into loving me. Though I am not a flattering, righteous man, at least you can say that I am honest about being a villain. My brother trusts me now? Yeah—as much as a master trusts the dog he muzzles or the peasant he “frees” by chaining a big block around the man's foot. If my mouth were unrestrained, I'd bite. If I were free, I'd do what I pleased. Until that happens, let me be who I am and don't try to change me.

CONRAD

Can't you somehow use your dissatisfaction to your own advantage?

DON JOHN

I use it all the time, since it's all that I have. Who's that?

BORACHIO enters.

What's going on, Borachio?

BORACHIO

I just came from a great feast where Leonato is entertaining the Prince, your brother. I can give you information about an intended marriage.

35 Prince your
brother
is royally entertained
by Leonato, and I can
give you
intelligence of an
intended marriage.

DON JOHN

Will it serve for any
model to build
mischief on? What is
he
for a fool that
betroths himself to
unquietness?

BORACHIO

Marry, it is your
brother's right hand.

DON JOHN

40 Who? The most
exquisite Claudio?

BORACHIO

Even he.

DON JOHN

Will this give me an opportunity to make some mischief? Who is this
fool who wants all the fuss of marriage?

BORACHIO

Your brother's right-hand man.

DON JOHN

Who? That pretty boy, Claudio?

BORACHIO

That's the one.



About
Nothing

By William Shakespeare

Act 1, Scene 3, Page 3

Original Text

DON JOHN

A proper squire. And who, and who?
Which way looks he?

BORACHIO

Marry, on Hero, the daughter and heir of Leonato.

DON JOHN

A very forward March-chick! How came you to this?

BORACHIO

Being entertained for a perfumer, as I was smoking a musty room, comes me the Prince and Claudio, 45 hand in hand, in sad conference. I whipped me behind the arras, and there heard it agreed upon 50 that the Prince should woo Hero for himself, and having obtained her, give her to Count Claudio.

DON JOHN

Come, come, let us thither. This may prove food to my displeasure. That young start-up hath all the glory of my overthrow. If I can cross him any way, I bless myself every way. You are both sure, and will assist me?

Modern Text

DON JOHN

He's a very fancy gentleman. And who's the girl who has caught his eye?

BORACHIO

Hero, the daughter and heir of Leonato.

DON JOHN

A lively young one! How did you learn about this?

BORACHIO

I was hired to perfume all the rooms in Leonato's house. As I was working on one musty room, the Prince and Claudio entered. They were in the middle of a serious conversation. I quickly hid behind a tapestry and heard them agree that the Prince would court Hero tonight at the dance and, once he won her consent to marry, would give her to Claudio.

DON JOHN

Come, let's go to the dance. This just may cheer me up. Claudio, the young upstart, was responsible for keeping me from gaining power over my brother. If there's any way I can spoil his life, I'll be overjoyed. You'll both help me, right?

CONRAD

55 To the death, my lord. Until the day we die, my lord.

DON JOHN

Let us to the great
supper. Their cheer is
the greater that I
am subdued. Would
the cook were o' my
mind! Shall we go
prove what's to be
done?

BORACHIO

We'll wait upon your
lordship.
Exeunt

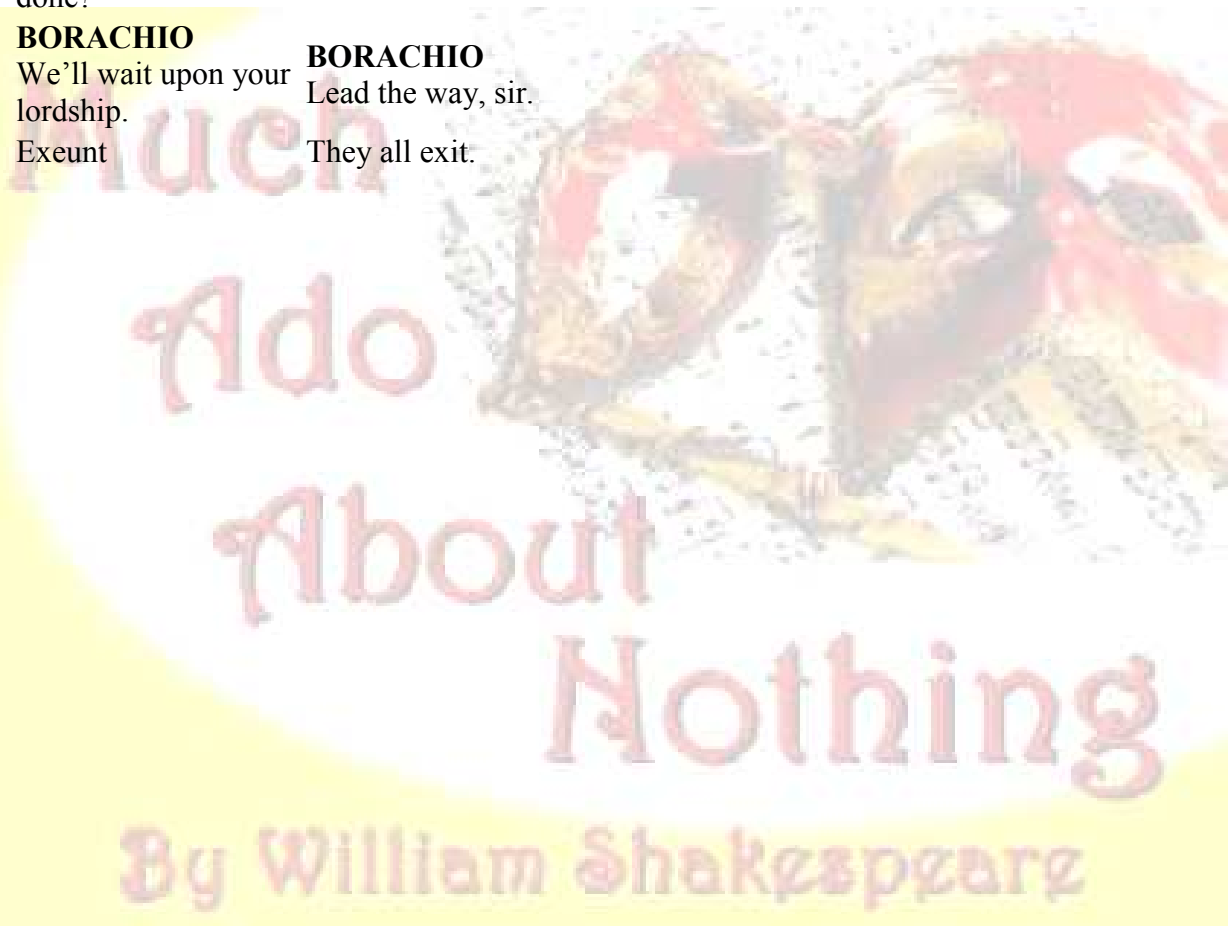
CONRAD

DON JOHN

Let's go to this great feast. They'll be even happier now that my mood has lightened. It's too bad the cook doesn't think like me; she would have poisoned them all if she did. Should we go check out the scene?

BORACHIO

Lead the way, sir.
They all exit.



Analysis of Major Characters

Beatrice

Beatrice is the niece of Leonato, a wealthy governor of Messina. Though she is close friends with her cousin Hero, Leonato's daughter, the two could not be less alike. Whereas Hero is polite, quiet, respectful, and gentle, Beatrice is feisty, cynical, witty, and sharp. Beatrice keeps up a "merry war" of wits with Benedick, a lord and soldier from Padua. The play suggests that she was once in love with Benedick but that he led her on and their relationship ended. Now when they meet, the two constantly compete to outdo one another with clever insults.

Although she appears hardened and sharp, Beatrice is really vulnerable. Once she overhears Hero describing that Benedick is in love with her (Beatrice), she opens herself to the sensitivities and weaknesses of love. Beatrice is a prime example of one of Shakespeare's strong female characters. She refuses to marry because she has not discovered the perfect, equal partner and because she is unwilling to eschew her liberty and submit to the will of a controlling husband. When Hero has been humiliated and accused of violating her chastity, Beatrice explodes with fury at Claudio for mistreating her cousin. In her frustration and rage about Hero's mistreatment, Beatrice rebels against the unequal status of women in Renaissance society. "O that I were a man for his sake! Or that I had any friend would be a man for my sake!" she passionately exclaims. "I cannot be a man with wishing, therefore I will die a woman with grieving" (IV.i.312–318).

Benedick

Benedick is the willful lord, recently returned from fighting in the wars, who vows that he will never marry. He engages with Beatrice in a competition to outwit, outsmart, and out-insult the other, but to his observant friends, he seems to feel some deeper emotion below the surface. Upon hearing Claudio and Don Pedro discussing Beatrice's desire for him, Benedick vows to be "horribly in love with her," in effect continuing the competition by outdoing her in love and courtship (II.iii.207). Benedick is one of the most histrionic characters in the play, as he constantly performs for the benefit of others. He is the entertainer, indulging in witty hyperbole to express his feelings. He delivers a perfect example of his inflated rhetoric when Beatrice enters during the masked ball. Turning to his companions, Benedick grossly exaggerates how Beatrice has misused him, bidding his friends to send him to the farthest corners of the earth rather than let him spend one more minute with his nemesis: "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 from the furthest inch of Asia . . . do you any embassy to the pigmies, rather than hold three words' conference with this harpy" (II.i.229–235).

Of course, since Benedick is so invested in performing for the others, it is not easy for us to tell whether he has been in love with Beatrice all along or falls in love with her suddenly during the play. Benedick's adamant refusal to marry does appear to change over the course of the play, once he decides to fall in love with Beatrice. He attempts to conceal this transformation from his friends but really might enjoy shocking them by shaving off his beard and professing undying love to Beatrice. This change in attitude seems most evident when Benedick challenges Claudio,

previously his closest friend in the world, to duel to the death over Claudio's accusation as to Hero's unchaste behavior. There can be no doubt at this point that Benedick has switched his allegiances entirely over to Beatrice.

Don Pedro, Prince of Aragon

Of all the main characters in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Don Pedro seems the most elusive. He is the noblest character in the social hierarchy of the play, and his friends Benedick and Claudio, though equals in wit, must always defer to him because their positions depend upon his favor. Don Pedro has power, and he is well aware of it; whether or not he abuses this power is open to question. Unlike his bastard brother, the villain Don John, Don Pedro most often uses his power and authority toward positive ends. But like his half-brother, Don Pedro manipulates other characters as much as he likes. For instance, he insists on wooing Hero for Claudio himself, while masked, rather than allowing Claudio to profess his love to Hero first. Of course, everything turns out for the best—Don Pedro's motives are purely in the interest of his friend. But we are left wondering why Don Pedro feels the need for such an elaborate dissimulation merely to inform Hero of Claudio's romantic interest. It seems simply that it is Don Pedro's royal prerogative to do exactly as he wishes, and no one can question it. Despite his cloudy motives, Don Pedro does work to bring about happiness. It is his idea, for instance, to convince Beatrice and Benedick that each is in love with the other and by doing so bring the two competitors together. He orchestrates the whole plot and plays the role of director in this comedy of wit and manners.

Don Pedro is the only one of the three gallants not to end up with a wife at the end. Benedick laughingly jokes in the final scene that the melancholy prince must "get thee a wife" in order to enjoy true happiness (V.iv.117). The question necessarily arises as to why Don Pedro is sad at the end of a joyous comedy. Perhaps his exchange with Beatrice at the masked ball—in which he proposes marriage to her and she jokingly refuses him, taking his proposal as mere sport—pains him; perhaps he is truly in love with Beatrice. The text does not give us a conclusive explanation for his melancholy, nor for his fascination with dissembling. This uncertainty about his character helps to make him one of the most thought-provoking characters in the play.

By William Shakespeare

Character List

Beatrice - Leonato's niece and Hero's cousin. Beatrice is "a pleasant-spirited lady" with a very sharp tongue. She is generous and loving, but, like Benedick, continually mocks other people with elaborately tooled jokes and puns. She wages a war of wits against Benedick and often wins the battles. At the outset of the play, she appears content never to marry.

Benedick - An aristocratic soldier who has recently been fighting under Don Pedro, and a friend of Don Pedro and Claudio. Benedick is very witty, always making jokes and puns. He carries on a "merry war" of wits with Beatrice, but at the beginning of the play he swears he will never fall in love or marry.

Claudio - A young soldier who has won great acclaim fighting under Don Pedro during the recent wars. Claudio falls in love with Hero upon his return to Messina. His unfortunately suspicious nature makes him quick to believe evil rumors and hasty to despair and take revenge.

Hero - The beautiful young daughter of Leonato and the cousin of Beatrice. Hero is lovely, gentle, and kind. She falls in love with Claudio when he falls for her, but when Don John slanders her and Claudio rashly takes revenge, she suffers terribly.

Don Pedro - An important nobleman from Aragon, sometimes referred to as "Prince." Don Pedro is a longtime friend of Leonato, Hero's father, and is also close to the soldiers who have been fighting under him—the younger Benedick and the very young Claudio. Don Pedro is generous, courteous, intelligent, and loving to his friends, but he is also quick to believe evil of others and hasty to take revenge. He is the most politically and socially powerful character in the play.

Leonato - A respected, well-to-do, elderly noble at whose home, in Messina, Italy, the action is set. Leonato is the father of Hero and the uncle of Beatrice. As governor of Messina, he is second in social power only to Don Pedro.

Don John - The illegitimate brother of Don Pedro; sometimes called "the Bastard." Don John is melancholy and sullen by nature, and he creates a dark scheme to ruin the happiness of Hero and Claudio. He is the villain of the play; his evil actions are motivated by his envy of his brother's social authority.

Margaret - Hero's serving woman, who unwittingly helps Borachio and Don John deceive Claudio into thinking that Hero is unfaithful. Unlike Ursula, Hero's other lady-in-waiting, Margaret is lower class. Though she is honest, she does have some dealings with the villainous world of Don John: her lover is the mistrustful and easily bribed Borachio. Also unlike Ursula, Margaret loves to break decorum, especially with bawdy jokes and teases.

Borachio - An associate of Don John. Borachio is the lover of Margaret, Hero's serving woman. He conspires with Don John to trick Claudio and Don Pedro into thinking that Hero is unfaithful to Claudio. His name means "drunkard" in Italian, which might serve as a subtle direction to the actor playing him.

Conrad - One of Don John's more intimate associates, entirely devoted to Don John. Several recent productions have staged Conrad as Don John's potential male lover, possibly to intensify Don John's feelings of being a social outcast and therefore motivate his desire for revenge.

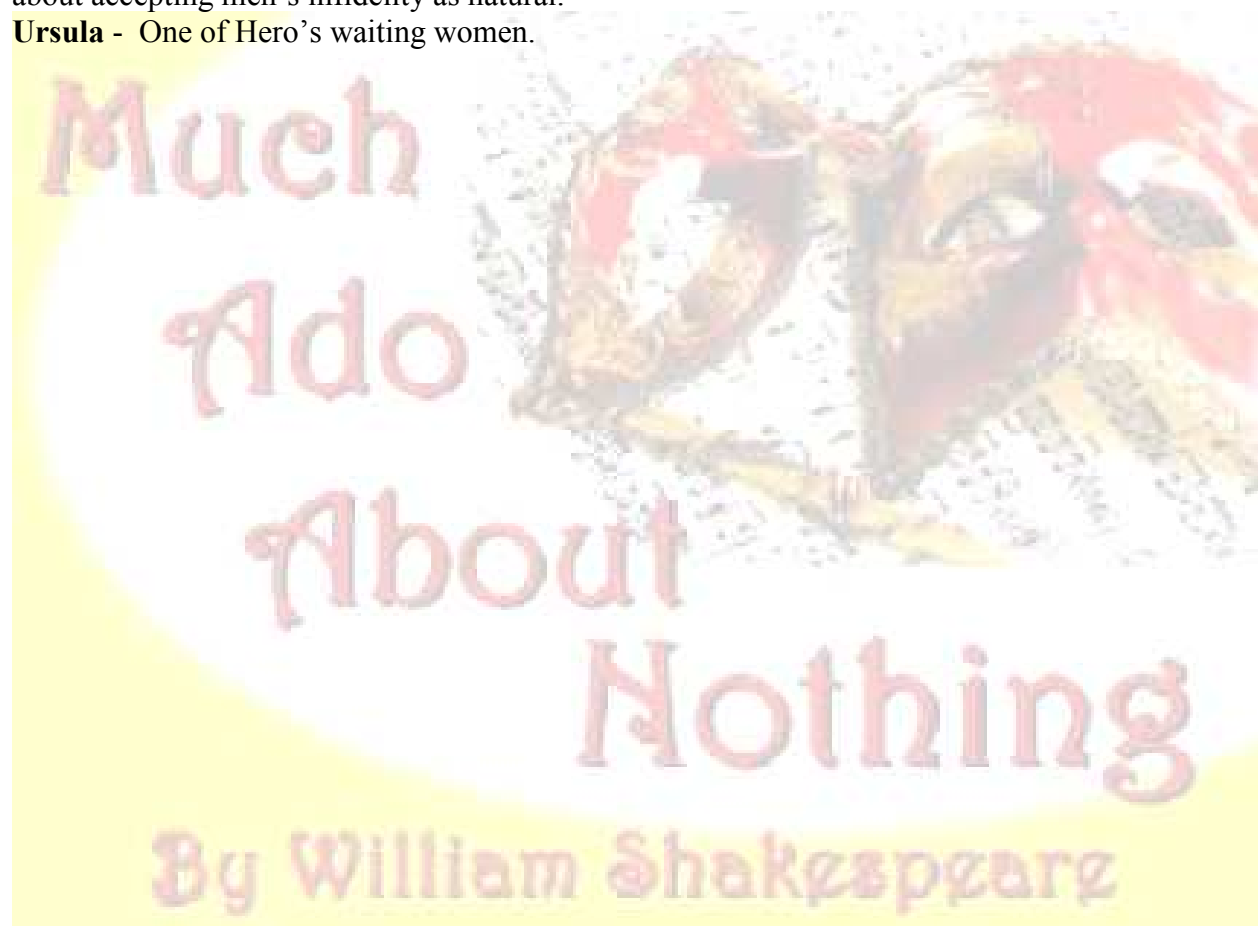
Dogberry - The constable in charge of the Watch, or chief policeman, of Messina. Dogberry is very sincere and takes his job seriously, but he has a habit of using exactly the wrong word to convey his meaning. Dogberry is one of the few “middling sort,” or middle-class characters, in the play, though his desire to speak formally and elaborately like the noblemen becomes an occasion for parody.

Verges - The deputy to Dogberry, chief policeman of Messina.

Antonio - Leonato’s elderly brother, and Hero and Beatrice’s uncle.

Balthasar - A waiting man in Leonato’s household and a musician. Balthasar flirts with Margaret at the masked party and helps Leonato, Claudio, and Don Pedro trick Benedick into falling in love with Beatrice. Balthasar sings the song, “Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more” about accepting men’s infidelity as natural.

Ursula - One of Hero’s waiting women.



SUMMARY Act I, scene i

Summary

In the Italian town of Messina, the wealthy and kindly Leonato prepares to welcome home some soldier friends who are returning from a battle. These friends include Don Pedro of Aragon, a highly respected nobleman, and a brave young soldier named Claudio, who has won much honor in the fighting. Leonato's young daughter, Hero, and her cousin, Beatrice, accompany him. Beatrice asks about the health of another soldier in Don Pedro's army, a man named Signor Benedick. Beatrice cleverly mocks and insults Benedick. A messenger from Don Pedro defends Benedick as an honorable and virtuous man, but Leonato explains that Beatrice and Benedick carry on a "merry war" of wits with one another, trading jibes whenever they meet. Beatrice confirms this statement, noting that in their most recent conflict, "four of his five wits went halting off, and now is the whole man governed with one" (I.i.52–54).

Don Pedro arrives at Leonato's house with his two friends, Claudio and Benedick, and they are joyfully welcomed. Also accompanying Don Pedro is his quiet, sullen, illegitimate brother, Don John "the Bastard," with whom Don Pedro has recently become friendly after a period of mutual hostility. While Leonato and Don Pedro have a private talk, Beatrice and Benedick take up their war of wits. In an extremely fast-paced exchange of barbs, they insult one another's looks, intelligence, and personality. When Benedick tells Beatrice proudly that he has never loved a woman and never will, Beatrice responds that women everywhere ought to rejoice.

Don Pedro tells Benedick, Claudio, and Don John that Leonato has invited them all to stay with him for a month, and that Don Pedro has accepted. Everyone goes off together except Claudio and Benedick. Claudio shyly asks Benedick what he thinks of Hero, announcing that he has fallen in love with her. Benedick jokingly plays down Hero's beauty, teasing Claudio for thinking about becoming a tame husband. But when Don Pedro returns to look for his friends, Benedick tells him Claudio's secret, and Don Pedro approves highly of the match. Since Claudio is shy and Leonato is Don Pedro's close friend, Don Pedro proposes a trick: at the costume ball to be held that night, Don Pedro will disguise himself as Claudio and declare his love to Hero. He will then talk with Leonato, her father, which should enable Claudio to win Hero without difficulty. Full of plans and excitement, the three friends head off to get ready for the ball.

Analysis: Act I, scene i

This opening scene introduces all of the major characters, as well as the play's setting—Leonato's welcoming, friendly house in Messina. Don Pedro and the others are just returning from a war in which they have been victorious, seemingly setting the stage for a relaxed, happy comedy in which the main characters fall in love and have fun together. While the play opens with a strong feeling of joy and calm, the harmony of Messina is certainly to be disturbed later on.

Beatrice and Benedick are perhaps Shakespeare's most famously witty characters; neither ever lets the other say anything without countering it with a pun or criticism. One notable

characteristic of their attacks upon each other is their ability to extend a metaphor throughout lines of dialogue. When Benedick calls Beatrice a “rare parrot-teacher,” Beatrice responds, “A bird of my tongue is better than a beast of yours” (I.i.114). Benedick continues the reference to animals in his response, saying, “I would my horse had the speed of your tongue” (I.i.115). It is as if each anticipates the other’s response. Though their insults are biting, their ability to maintain such clever, interconnected sparring seems to illustrate the existence of a strong bond between them.

Beatrice and Benedick have courted in the past, and Beatrice’s viciousness stems from the fact that Benedick previously abandoned her. When she insists that Benedick “set up his bills here in Messina and challenged Cupid at the flight, and my uncle’s fool, reading the challenge, subscribed for Cupid,” she describes a “battle” of love between herself and Benedick that she has lost (I.i.32–34). The result is what Leonato describes as “a kind of merry war betwixt Sir Benedick and [Beatrice]. They never meet but there’s a skirmish of wit between them” (I.i.49–51).

Another purpose of the dialogue between Benedick and Beatrice, as well as that among Benedick, Claudio, and Don Pedro, is to explore the complex relationships between men and women. Both Benedick and Beatrice claim to scorn love. As Benedick says to Beatrice, “[I]t is certain I am loved of all ladies, only you excepted. And I would I could find it in my heart that I had not a hard heart, for truly I love none” (I.i.101–104). Benedick thus sets himself up as an unattainable object of desire. With her mocking reply that “I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me,” Beatrice similarly puts herself out of reach (I.i.107–108). Both at this point appear certain that they will never fall in love or marry.

Benedick’s disdain for matrimony arises again when he realizes that Claudio is seriously contemplating asking Hero for her hand in marriage. Until this point, all the soldiers have exhibited a kind of macho pride in being bachelors, but Claudio now seems happy to find himself falling in love, and Don Pedro rejoices in his young friend’s decision. Benedick alone swears, “I will live a bachelor” (I.i.201). Don Pedro’s teasing rejoinder, “I shall see thee ere I die look pale with love. . . . ‘In time the savage bull doth bear the yoke,’ ” suggests his belief that love does conquer all, even those as stubborn as Benedick (I.i.202–214).

Act I, scenes ii–iii

Summary: Act I, scene ii

Inside his house, Leonato runs into his elder brother, Antonio. Antonio says that a servant of his overheard Don Pedro talking with Claudio outside. The servant thinks that he overheard Don Pedro professing his love for Hero and that he means to tell her that very night, during the dance, and then ask Leonato himself for Hero’s hand in marriage. Obviously, Antonio has misheard the truth: Claudio, not Don Pedro, loves Hero. Nevertheless, the only part of the conversation Antonio has intercepted is that Don Pedro will woo Hero that evening. Leonato’s prudent reply is that he will not consider the rumor to be true until his daughter is actually courted. But he declares that he will tell Hero about it, so that she may think about what she wants to say in response to Don Pedro, should this bit of information prove true.

Summary: Act I, scene iii

Elsewhere in the house, Don John converses with his servant, Conrad. Conrad asks Don John why he appears angry and melancholy. Don John replies that he is naturally depressed and somber; he lacks the skills—or the willpower—to change his face to suit other people. Conrad reminds Don John that Don Pedro has only very recently started to be friendly with him again, and if Don John wants to remain on good terms with his powerful brother, he ought to show a more cheerful face. But, bitter that he must depend both socially and economically on his much more successful and highly ranked brother, Don John bristles at having to conform to Don Pedro's expectations.

Borachio, another of Don John's servants, enters to tell Don John that he has overheard rumors of the upcoming marriage between Claudio and Hero. Borachio, like Leonato's servant, has also overheard Don Pedro and Claudio making plans, but Borachio correctly understands what he has heard. He realizes that Don Pedro plans to court Hero in order to give her to Claudio. Don John, who hates Claudio for being so well loved and respected, decides to try to use this information to make trouble for Claudio. Conrad and Borachio swear to help him.

