

Much Ado About Nothing

1.1

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 How many gentlemen have you lost in this action? 5

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 honour on a young Florentine called Claudio. 10

MESSENGER 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 15 expectation than you must expect of me to tell you how.

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

MESSENGER I have already delivered him letters, and there 20 appears much joy in him±±even so much that joy could not show itself modest enough without a badge of bitterness.

LEONATO Did he break out into tears?

MESSENGER In great measure. 25

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

BEATRICE I pray you, is Signor Montanto returned from the wars, or no? 30

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 My cousin means Signor Benedick of Padua.

MESSENGER O, he's returned, and as pleasant as ever he 35
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. I pray you, how many 40
hath he killed and eaten in these wars? But how many
hath he killed? For indeed I promised to eat all of his
killing.

LEONATO Faith, niece, you tax Signor Benedick too much.
But he'll be meet with you, I doubt it not. 45

MESSENGER 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. 50

MESSENGER And a good soldier too, lady.

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

MESSENGER A lord to a lord, a man to a man, stuffed with
all honourable virtues. 55

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

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 60
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 65
difference between himself and his horse, for it is all
the wealth that he hath left to be known a reasonable
creature. Who is his companion now? He hath every
month a new sworn brother.

MESSENGER Is't possible? 70

BEATRICE Very easily possible. He wears his faith but as
the fashion of his hat, it ever changes with the next
block.

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

BEATRICE No. An he were, I would burn my study. But I 75
pray you, who is his companion? Is there no young
squarer now that will make a voyage with him to the
devil?

MESSENGER He is most in the company of the right noble
Claudio. 80

BEATRICE O Lord, he will hang upon him like a disease.
He is sooner caught than the pestilence, and the taker
runs presently mad. God help the noble Claudio. If he
have caught the Benedick, it will cost him a thousand
pound ere a be cured. 85

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 Don Pedro is approached. 90

*Enter Don Pedro, Claudio, Benedick, Balthasar, and
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.

LEONATO Never came trouble to my house in the likeness
of your grace; for trouble being gone, comfort should 95
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 told me so. 100

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. We may guess by
this what you are, being a man. Truly, the lady fathers
herself. Be happy, lady, for you are like an honourable 105
father.

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.

BEATRICE I wonder that you will still be talking, Signor 110
Benedick. Nobody marks you.

BENEDICK What, my dear Lady Disdain! Are you yet

living?

BEATRICE Is it possible disdain should die while she hath
such meet food to feed it as Signor Benedick? Courtesy 115
itself must convert to disdain if you come in her
presence.

BENEDICK Then is courtesy a turncoat. But it is certain I
am loved of all ladies, only you excepted. And I would
I could find in my heart that I had not a hard heart, 120
for truly I love none.

BEATRICE A dear happiness to women. They would else
have been troubled with a pernicious suitor. I thank
God and my cold blood I am of your humour for that.
I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man 125
swear he loves me.

BENEDICK God keep your ladyship still in that mind. So
some gentleman or other shall scape a predestinate
scratched face.

BEATRICE Scratching could not make it worse an 'twere 130
such a face as yours were.

BENEDICK Well, you are a rare parrot-teacher.

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

BENEDICK I would my horse had the speed of your tongue, 135
and so good a continuer. But keep your way, o' God's
name. I have done.

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

DON PEDRO That is the sum of all, Leonato. Signor Claudio 140
and Signor Benedick, my dear friend Leonato 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. 145

LEONATO If you swear, my lord, you shall not be forsworn.
(*To Don 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 150
thank you.

LEONATO (*to Don Pedro*) Please it your grace lead on?

DON PEDRO Your hand, Leonato. We will go together.

Exeunt all but Benedick and Claudio

CLAUDIO Benedick, didst thou note the daughter of Signor
Leonato? 155

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 simple true judgement, or would you have
me speak after my custom, as being a professed tyrant 160
to their sex?

CLAUDIO No, I pray thee speak in sober judgement.

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, 165
that were she other than she is she were unhandsome,
and 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 likest her.

BENEDICK Would you buy her, that you enquire after her? 170

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 175
go in the song?

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 180
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. 185

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 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 190
Pedro is returned to seek you.

Enter Don Pedro

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

BENEDICK I would your grace would constrain me to tell.

DON PEDRO I charge thee on thy allegiance. 195

BENEDICK You hear, Count Claudio? I can be secret as 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. 200

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. 205

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

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

DON PEDRO By my troth, I speak my thought. 210

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.

DON PEDRO That she is worthy, I know. 215

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.

DON PEDRO Thou wast ever an obstinate heretic in the despite of beauty. 220

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. 225 230

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 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. 235

DON PEDRO 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. 240

DON PEDRO 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 write 'Here is good horse to hire' let them signify under my sign 'Here you may see Benedick, the married man'. 245 250

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

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

BENEDICK I look for an earthquake too, then. 255

DON PEDRO Well, you will temporize with the hours. In the mean time, good Signor 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. 260

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 it±±

DON PEDRO The sixth of July, 265
Your loving friend,
Benedick.

BENEDICK Nay, mock not, mock not. The body of your discourse is sometime guarded with fragments, and the guards are but slightly basted on neither. Ere you flout 270

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

My love is thine to teach. Teach it but how
And thou shalt see how apt it is to learn 275
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?

CLAUDIO

O my lord,

When you went onward on this ended action 280
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.
But now I am returned, and that war-thoughts
Have left their places vacant, in their rooms 285
Come thronging soft and delicate desires,
All prompting me how fair young Hero is,
Saying I liked her ere I went to wars.

DON PEDRO

Thou wilt be like a lover presently,
And tire the hearer with a book of words. 290
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
That thou began'st to twist so fine a story?

CLAUDIO

How sweetly you do minister to love, 295
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.

DON PEDRO

What need the bridge much broader than the flood?
The fairest grant is the necessity. 300
Look what will serve is fit. 'Tis once: thou lovest,
And I will fit thee with the remedy.

I know we shall have revelling 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.

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Exeunt