

Much Ado About Nothing

By William Shakespeare

Sample

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Cast of Characters

Leonato, *father of Hero and uncle of Beatrice*

Benedick, *a young lord*

Claudio, *a young lord*

Don Pedro, *commander of Claudio and Benedick*

Don John, *illegitimate brother to Don Pedro*

Dogberry, *a constable*

Borachio, *confidant to Don John*

Conrade, *friend to Borachio*

Friar Francis

A Judge/A Messenger

A Watchman

Beatrice, *niece to Leonato*

Hero, *daughter to Leonato*

Margaret, *attendant to Hero*

Act 1, Scene 1

Before LEONATO'S house. Enter LEONATO, HERO, and BEATRICE, with a MESSENGER.

LEONATO

I learn in this letter that Don Pedro of Arragon comes here this night.

MESSENGER

He was not three leagues off when I left him.

LEONATO

I find here that Don Pedro hath bestowed much honour on a young man called Claudio.

MESSENGER

He hath borne himself beyond the promise of his age, doing, in the figure of a lamb, the feats of a lion.

BEATRICE

I pray you, is Signior Mountanto returned from the wars or no?

MESSENGER

I know none of that name, lady.

HERO

My cousin means Benedick.

MESSENGER

O, he's returned; and as pleasant as ever he was.

BEATRICE

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

MESSENGER

He hath done good service. 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.

BEATRICE

It is so, indeed; he is no less than a stuffed man.

LEONATO

You must not, sir, mistake my niece. There is a kind of merry war betwixt Benedick and her: they never meet but there's a skirmish of wit between them.

BEATRICE

Who is his companion now? He hath every month a new sworn brother.

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 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.

MESSENGER
Don Pedro is approached.

Enter DON PEDRO, DON JOHN, CLAUDIO, and BENEDICK

DON PEDRO
Good Leonato, you are 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.

DON PEDRO
I think this is your daughter.

LEONATO
Her mother hath many times told me so.

BENEDICK
Were you in doubt, sir, that you asked her?

LEONATO
Benedick, no.

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

BEATRICE
I wonder that you will still be talking: 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 Benedick? Courtesy 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; for, truly, I love none.

BEATRICE
A dear happiness to women. 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 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 such a face as yours were.

BENEDICK
I would my horse had the speed of your tongue. But keep your way, i' God's name; I have done.

DON PEDRO

Claudio and Benedick, my dear friend Leonato hath invited you all. I tell him we shall stay here at the least a month.

LEONATO

To DON JOHN

Let me bid you welcome, my lord: being reconciled to Don Pedro 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 you lead on?

DON PEDRO

We will go together.

Exeunt all except BENEDICK and CLAUDIO

CLAUDIO

Benedick, didst thou note the daughter of 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 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

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.

CLAUDIO

Thou thinkest I am in sport: I pray thee tell me truly how thou likest her. 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?

CLAUDIO

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

BENEDICK

Is't come to this? Shall I never see a bachelor of three-score again?

Re-enter DON PEDRO

DON PEDRO

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

BENEDICK

He is in love. With Hero, Leonato's short daughter.

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.

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.

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.

BENEDICK

That a woman conceived me, I thank her; that she brought me up, I likewise give her most humble thanks: but that I hang my bugle in an invisible baldrick, all women shall pardon me. 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.

DON PEDRO

Good 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.

Exit

CLAUDIO

My liege, your highness now may do me good.
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,
I look'd upon her with a soldier's eye:
But now I am return'd 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.

DON PEDRO

If thou dost love fair Hero, cherish it,
I will break with her and thou shalt have her.
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:
Then after to her father will I break;
And the conclusion is, she shall be thine.
In practise let us put it presently.

Exeunt

Act 1, Scene 2

The same. Enter DON JOHN and CONRADE

CONRADE

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.

CONRADE

You should hear reason.

DON JOHN

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

CONRADE

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

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 plain-dealing villain. 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.

CONRADE

Can you make no use of your discontent?

DON JOHN

I make all use of it, for I use it only.

Enter BORACHIO

What news, Borachio?

BORACHIO

I can give you intelligence of an intended marriage.

DON JOHN

Will it serve for any model to build mischief on?

BORACHIO

Marry, it is your brother's right hand.

DON JOHN

Who? the most exquisite Claudio?

BORACHIO

Even he.

DON JOHN

How came you to this?

BORACHIO

I heard it agreed upon that the Don Pedro should woo Hero for himself, and having obtained her, give her to 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?

CONRADE
To the death, my lord.

Exeunt

Act 2, Scene 1

A hall in LEONATO'S house. Enter LEONATO, HERO, BEATRICE, and others

LEONATO

Was not Don John at supper?

HERO

I saw him not.

BEATRICE

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

HERO

He is of a very melancholy disposition.

BEATRICE

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

LEONATO

Then half Benedick's tongue in Don John's mouth, and half Don John's melancholy in Benedick's face,--

BEATRICE

I could not endure a husband with a beard on his face: I had rather lie in the woolen.

LEONATO

You may light on a husband that hath no beard.

BEATRICE

What should I do with him? dress him in my apparel and make him my waiting-gentlewoman? He that hath a beard is more than a youth, and he that hath no beard is less than a man: and he that is more than a youth is not for me, and he that is less than a man, I am not for him.

LEONATO

Well, niece, I hope to see you one day fitted with a husband. The revelers are entering: make good room.

All put on their masks

Enter DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, DON JOHN, BORACHIO, MARGARET, and others, masked

DON PEDRO

Lady, will you walk about with your friend?

Drawing HERO aside

BORACHIO

Well, I would you did like me.

MARGARET

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

BORACHIO

Which is one?

MARGARET

I say my prayers aloud. God match me with a good dancer!

BORACHIO

Amen!

Dance

BEATRICE

Will you not tell me who you are, Benedick?

BENEDICK

What's he?

BEATRICE

I am sure you know him well enough.

BENEDICK

Not I, believe me.

BEATRICE

Did he never make you laugh?

BENEDICK

I pray you, what is he?

BEATRICE

Why, he is Don Pedro's jester: a very dull fool; his only gift is in devising impossible slanders: none but libertines delight in him; and the commendation is not in his wit, but in his villainy; for he both pleases men and angers them, and then they laugh at him and beat him.

BENEDICK

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

BEATRICE

Do, do.

Dance. Then exeunt all except DON JOHN, BORACHIO, and CLAUDIO

DON JOHN

Are not you Benedick?

CLAUDIO

You know me well; I am he.

DON JOHN

Sir, you are very near my brother, Don Pedro, in his love: he is enamoured on Hero; I pray you, dissuade him from her: she is no equal for his birth.

CLAUDIO

How know you he loves her?

DON JOHN

I heard him swear his affection.

BORACHIO

So did I too; and he swore he would marry her to-night.

DON JOHN

Come, let us to the banquet.

Exeunt DON JOHN and BORACHIO

CLAUDIO

Answer I in the name of Benedick,
But hear ill news with the ears of Claudio.

'Tis certain so; Don Pedro woos for himself.
Friendship is constant in all other things
Save in the office and affairs of love:
This is an accident of hourly proof,
Which I mistrusted not. Farewell, Hero!

Re-enter BENEDICK

BENEDICK
Claudio?

CLAUDIO
Yea, the same.

BENEDICK
Come, will you go with me?

CLAUDIO
Whither?

BENEDICK
About your own business. Don Pedro hath got your Hero.

CLAUDIO
I wish him joy of her.

Exit

Re-enter DON PEDRO

DON PEDRO
Now, where's Claudio? did you see him?

BENEDICK
Troth, my lord. I found him here as melancholy as a lodge in a warren: I told him, and I think I told him true, that your grace had got the good will of this young lady.

DON PEDRO
The Lady Beatrice hath a quarrel to you: the gentleman that danced with her told her she is much wronged by you.

BENEDICK
O, she misused me past endurance! She told me, not thinking I had been myself, that I was Don Pedro's jester; huddling jest upon jest with such impossible conveyance upon me that I stood like a man at a mark, with a whole army shooting at me. She speaks, and every word stabs: if her breath were as terrible as her terminations, there were no living near her; she would infect to the north star; so, indeed, all disquiet, horror and perturbation follows her.

DON PEDRO
Look, here she comes.

Enter CLAUDIO, BEATRICE, HERO, and LEONATO

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

DON PEDRO

None, but to desire your good company.