

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Part 2: Plans for Love and Trouble

Act 1, Scene 1 (continued), and Act 1, Scenes 2-3

BEFORE YOU READ

Don Pedro promises to help Claudio win Hero by speaking to her at the masked celebration. Elsewhere, an overheard report twists that plan into a different story. Don John then learns the truth and looks for a way to use the coming marriage against Claudio.

A HELPFUL SHAKESPEARE HABIT

Keep a small 'who knows what?' list in your notes margin. In this comedy, correct information, mistaken information, and deliberate lies often travel side by side.

Who's Who in This Reading

Claudio: Has admitted that he loves Hero.

Benedick: Mocks marriage and insists he will remain a bachelor.

Don Pedro (Prince): Offers to woo Hero in Claudio's name.

Leonato: Receives a mistaken report about Don Pedro's intentions.

Leonato's Brother: Passes along what his servant overheard.

Don John: Resents his brother and wants to harm Claudio.

Conrade: A loyal follower of Don John.

Borachio: Brings Don John accurate news about the marriage plan.

SOURCE AND USE

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Quick Word Help

recheat

a hunting call sounded to call back the hounds

baldrick

a shoulder belt for carrying a horn or sword

the fine

the conclusion or final point

ballad-maker

a writer of popular songs or verses

notable argument

a famous example or subject of discussion

temporize

change with the times

break with

speak privately to or inform

affect

love or feel affection for

salved

soothed or covered over

reveling

festive dancing and entertainment

thick-pleached

closely woven or interlaced

accordant

agreeable; willing

take time by the top

seize the opportunity

arras

a wall tapestry

cross him

block or frustrate him

start-up

a newly risen person

LOOK AND LISTEN FOR

- How quickly a private conversation becomes a public rumor.
- Benedick's exaggerated promises about never falling in love.
- The contrast between Don Pedro's generous plan and Don John's destructive one.

Reading tip: Assign parts aloud. If a sentence feels confusing, read to the punctuation before stopping to define one word.

ACT 1, SCENE 1 - CONTINUED

PRINCE 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.

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

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.

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.

PRINCE 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.

PRINCE 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."

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

PRINCE 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.

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 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 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, 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,
 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?

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. 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.

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
 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.

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.
 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.
 [They exit.]

ACT 1, SCENE 2

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.

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 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 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 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 you mercy, friend. Go you with me and I will use your skill.--Good cousin, have a care this busy time. [They exit.]

ACT 1, SCENE 3

CONRADE 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.

CONRADE You should hear reason.

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

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

DON JOHN I wonder that thou, 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.

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. It is needful that you frame the season for your own harvest.

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. 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.

CONRADE 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 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 Who, the most exquisite Claudio?

BORACHIO Even he.

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, hand in hand, in sad conference. I whipped me behind the arras, and there heard it agreed upon 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?

CONRADE To the death, 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. [They exit.]

END OF PART 2

WEEKLY REFLECTION ON COMEDY

Return to these questions as you read, discuss, and notice new kinds of humor during the week.

1. What makes something funny? Think about words, timing, characters, misunderstandings, surprise, or experiences people recognize.

2. Why do people want to watch comedy? What place does humor have in our everyday lives?

3. Why is comedy important? What can it help us understand about ourselves, other people, or the world around us?
