

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Part 3: The Masquerade

Act 2, Scene 1 - beginning through the end of the masked dance

BEFORE YOU READ

Leonato's household prepares for the evening's celebration. Beatrice jokes about husbands and marriage. The masked guests arrive, partners pair off, and hidden identities let characters flirt, tease, and say things they might not say face to face.

A HELPFUL SHAKESPEARE HABIT

Imagine the masks. Ask what each character knows about a partner's identity and what the audience knows. The comedy often lives in that gap.

Who's Who in This Reading

Beatrice: Jokes about marriage, then dances with the masked Benedick.

Hero: Has been told that Don Pedro may speak to her about marriage.

Leonato: Hosts the masked celebration.

Don Pedro (Prince): Dances with Hero while disguised.

Benedick: Speaks with Beatrice while hiding behind a mask.

Margaret and Ursula: Hero's waiting gentlewomen and dance partners in the revel.

Antonio and Balthasar: Masked guests drawn into comic exchanges.

SOURCE AND USE

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Quick Word Help

curst

sharp-tongued or bad-tempered

horns

a traditional joke about an unfaithful spouse

solicit

woo or ask for love

important

persistent or pressing

measure

a stately dance; also moderation

cinquepace

a lively five-step dance

ancientry

old-fashioned dignity

favor

face or appearance

visor

mask

Philemon's roof

the humble home in which the god Jove appeared

libertines

people who ignore moral restraints

in the fleet

in the group or company

boarded me

approached or confronted me

peradventure

perhaps

LOOK AND LISTEN FOR

- How masks make honesty and dishonesty difficult to separate.
- Beatrice's comparison of courtship, marriage, and regret to different dances.
- Why Benedick keeps listening when Beatrice insults him to his face without knowing it.

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

ACT 2, SCENE 1

LEONATO Was not Count John here at supper?

LEONATO'S BROTHER I saw him not.

BEATRICE How tartly that gentleman looks! I never can see him but I am heartburned 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 Signior Benedick's tongue in Count John's mouth, and half Count John's melancholy in Signior Benedick's face--

BEATRICE With a good leg and a good foot, uncle, and money enough in his purse, such a man would win any woman in the world if he could get her goodwill.

LEONATO By my troth, niece, thou wilt never get thee a husband if thou be so shrewd of thy tongue.

LEONATO'S BROTHER In faith, she's too curst.

BEATRICE Too curst is more than curst. I shall lessen God's sending that way, for it is said "God sends a curst cow short horns," but to a cow too curst, he sends none.

LEONATO So, by being too curst, God will send you no horns.

BEATRICE Just, if He send me no husband, for the which blessing I am at Him upon my knees every morning and

evening. Lord, 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. Therefore I will even take sixpence in earnest of the bearherd, and lead his apes into hell.

LEONATO Well then, go you into hell?

BEATRICE No, but to the gate, and there will the devil meet me like an old cuckold with horns on his head, and say "Get you to heaven, Beatrice, get you to heaven; here's no place for you maids." So deliver I up my apes and away to Saint Peter; for the heavens, he shows me where the bachelors sit, and there live we as merry as the day is long.

LEONATO'S BROTHER [to Hero] Well, niece, I trust you will be ruled by your father.

BEATRICE Yes, faith, it is my cousin's duty to make curtsy and say "Father, as it please you." But yet for all that, cousin, let him be a handsome fellow, or else make another curtsy and say "Father, as it please me."

LEONATO Well, niece, I hope to see you one day fitted with a husband.

BEATRICE Not till God make men of some other metal than earth. Would it not grieve a woman to be overmastered with a piece of valiant dust? To make an account of her

life to a clod of wayward marl? No, uncle, I'll none.
Adam's sons are my brethren, and truly I hold it a sin to
match in my kindred.

LEONATO [to Hero] Daughter, remember what I told you. If
the Prince do solicit you in that kind, you know your
answer.

BEATRICE The fault will be in the music, cousin, if you be
not wooed in good time. If the Prince be too important,
tell him there is measure in everything, and so dance out
the answer. For hear me, Hero, wooing, wedding, and
repenting is as a Scotch jig, a measure, and a
cinquepace. The first suit is hot and hasty like a Scotch
jig, and full as fantastical; the wedding, mannerly modest
as a measure, full of state and ancientry; and then comes
repentance, and with his bad legs falls into the
cinquepace faster and faster till he sink into his grave.

LEONATO Cousin, you apprehend passing shrewdly.

BEATRICE I have a good eye, uncle; I can see a church by
daylight.

LEONATO The revelers are entering, brother. Make good
room. [Leonato and his brother step aside.]

[Enter, with a Drum, Prince Pedro, Claudio, and Benedick,
Signior Antonio, and Balthasar, all in masks, with Borachio and
Don John.]

PRINCE [to Hero] Lady, will you walk a bout with your
friend? [They begin to dance.]

HERO So you walk softly, and look sweetly, and say
nothing, I am yours for the walk, and especially when I
walk away.

PRINCE With me in your company?

HERO I may say so when I please.

PRINCE And when please you to say so?

HERO When I like your favor, for God defend the lute should be like the case.

PRINCE My visor is Philemon's roof; within the house is Jove.

HERO Why, then, your visor should be thatched.

PRINCE Speak low if you speak love. [They move aside; Benedick and Margaret move forward.]

BENEDICK [to Margaret] Well, I would you did like me.

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

BENEDICK Which is one?

MARGARET I say my prayers aloud.

BENEDICK I love you the better; the hearers may cry "Amen."

MARGARET God match me with a good dancer. [They separate; Benedick moves aside; Balthasar moves forward.]

BALTHASAR Amen.

MARGARET And God keep him out of my sight when the dance is done. Answer, clerk.

BALTHASAR No more words. The clerk is answered. [They move aside; Ursula and Antonio move forward.]

URSULA I know you well enough. You are Signior Antonio.

ANTONIO At a word, I am not.

URSULA I know you by the waggling of your head.

ANTONIO To tell you true, I counterfeit him.

URSULA You could never do him so ill-well unless you were the very man. Here's his dry hand up and down. You are he, you are he.

ANTONIO At a word, I am not.

URSULA Come, come, do you think I do not know you by your excellent wit? Can virtue hide itself? Go to, mum, you are he. Graces will appear, and there's an end. [They move aside; Benedick and Beatrice move forward.]

BEATRICE Will you not tell me who told you so?

BENEDICK No, you shall pardon me.

BEATRICE Nor will you not tell me who you are?

BENEDICK Not now.

BEATRICE That I was disdainful, and that I had my good wit out of The Hundred Merry Tales! Well, this was Signior Benedick that said so.

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 the Prince's jester, a very dull fool; only his 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. I am sure he is in the fleet. I would he had boarded me.

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

BEATRICE Do, do. He'll but break a comparison or two on me, which peradventure not marked or not laughed at strikes him into melancholy, and then there's a partridge wing saved, for the fool will eat no supper that night. [Music for the dance.] We must follow the leaders.

BENEDICK In every good thing.

BEATRICE Nay, if they lead to any ill, I will leave them at the next turning. [Dance. Then exit all except Don John, Borachio, and Claudio.]

END OF PART 3

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?
