

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Part 6: Beatrice Is Tricked

Act 3, Scenes 1-2

BEFORE YOU READ

Hero and Ursula stage a conversation so Beatrice will overhear that Benedick loves her. Beatrice accepts the story and resolves to change. Later, Benedick's friends notice his new appearance and behavior. Don John then tells Claudio and Don Pedro that Hero is unfaithful and offers to show them proof.

A HELPFUL SHAKESPEARE HABIT

Notice the shift in sound and rhythm. Beatrice's overheard scene is in verse, while the friends' teasing often moves in quick prose. Let punctuation guide your breathing.

Who's Who in This Reading

Hero: Leads the plan to trick Beatrice.

Ursula: Helps Hero praise Benedick and criticize Beatrice's pride.

Margaret: Lures Beatrice into the garden.

Beatrice: Overhears the staged conversation and decides to change.

Benedick: Appears newly groomed and lovesick.

Don Pedro and Claudio: Tease Benedick, then listen to Don John's accusation.

Don John: Claims Hero is unfaithful and promises visible proof.

SOURCE AND USE

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Quick Word Help

haggards

untamed hawks; a comparison for proud women

baiting

attacking or tormenting

disdain

scorn or proud contempt

self-endeard

valued only by oneself

taming

bringing under control

limed

caught as with sticky birdlime

doublet

a fitted man's jacket

melancholy

sadness, often associated with being in love

toothache

Benedick's excuse for his changed behavior

blazon

describe or display publicly

chamber window

bedroom window

disloyal

unfaithful

countenance

face or appearance

practice

plot or trick

LOOK AND LISTEN FOR

- How Hero and Ursula make their invented story sound believable.
- The words Beatrice uses when she decides to answer love with love.
- How humor gives way to danger when Don John enters.

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

ACT 3, SCENE 1**HERO**

Good Margaret, run thee to the parlor.
There shalt thou find my cousin Beatrice
Proposing with the Prince and Claudio.
Whisper her ear and tell her I and Ursula
Walk in the orchard, and our whole discourse
Is all of her. Say that thou overheardst us,
And bid her steal into the pleached bower
Where honeysuckles ripened by the sun
Forbid the sun to enter, like favorites,
Made proud by princes, that advance their pride
Against that power that bred it. There will she hide
her
To listen our propose. This is thy office.
Bear thee well in it, and leave us alone.

MARGARET

I'll make her come, I warrant you, presently.
[She exits.]

HERO

Now, Ursula, when Beatrice doth come,
As we do trace this alley up and down,
Our talk must only be of Benedick.
When I do name him, let it be thy part
To praise him more than ever man did merit.
My talk to thee must be how Benedick
Is sick in love with Beatrice. Of this matter
Is little Cupid's crafty arrow made,
That only wounds by hearsay. Now begin,
For look where Beatrice like a lapwing runs
Close by the ground, to hear our conference.

[Enter Beatrice, who hides in the bower.]

URSULA

[aside to Hero]

The pleasant'st angling is to see the fish
Cut with her golden oars the silver stream
And greedily devour the treacherous bait.
So angle we for Beatrice, who even now
Is couched in the woodbine coverture.
Fear you not my part of the dialogue.

HERO

[aside to Ursula]

Then go we near her, that her ear lose nothing
Of the false sweet bait that we lay for it.--
[They walk near the bower.]
No, truly, Ursula, she is too disdainful.
I know her spirits are as coy and wild
As haggards of the rock.

URSULA But are you sure That Benedick loves Beatrice so entirely?

HERO

So says the Prince and my new-trothed lord.

URSULA

And did they bid you tell her of it, madam?

HERO

They did entreat me to acquaint her of it,
But I persuaded them, if they loved Benedick,
To wish him wrestle with affection
And never to let Beatrice know of it.

URSULA

Why did you so? Doth not the gentleman
 Deserve as full as fortunate a bed
 As ever Beatrice shall couch upon?

HERO

O god of love! I know he doth deserve
 As much as may be yielded to a man,
 But Nature never framed a woman's heart
 Of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice.
 Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes,
 Misprizing what they look on, and her wit
 Values itself so highly that to her
 All matter else seems weak. She cannot love,
 Nor take no shape nor project of affection,
 She is so self-endear'd.

URSULA Sure, I think so, And therefore certainly it were
 not good She knew his love, lest she'll make sport at it.

HERO

Why, you speak truth. I never yet saw man,
 How wise, how noble, young, how rarely featured,
 But she would spell him backward. If fair-faced,
 She would swear the gentleman should be her
 sister;
 If black, why, Nature, drawing of an antic,
 Made a foul blot; if tall, a lance ill-headed;
 If low, an agate very vilely cut;
 If speaking, why, a vane blown with all winds;
 If silent, why, a block moved with none.
 So turns she every man the wrong side out,
 And never gives to truth and virtue that
 Which simpleness and merit purchaseth.

URSULA

Sure, sure, such carping is not commendable.

HERO

No, not to be so odd and from all fashions
 As Beatrice is cannot be commendable.
 But who dare tell her so? If I should speak,
 She would mock me into air. O, she would laugh
 me
 Out of myself, press me to death with wit.
 Therefore let Benedick, like covered fire,
 Consume away in sighs, waste inwardly.
 It were a better death than die with mocks,
 Which is as bad as die with tickling.

URSULA

Yet tell her of it. Hear what she will say.

HERO

No, rather I will go to Benedick
 And counsel him to fight against his passion;
 And truly I'll devise some honest slanders
 To stain my cousin with. One doth not know
 How much an ill word may empoison liking.

URSULA

O, do not do your cousin such a wrong!
 She cannot be so much without true judgment,
 Having so swift and excellent a wit
 As she is prized to have, as to refuse
 So rare a gentleman as Signior Benedick.

HERO

He is the only man of Italy,
 Always excepted my dear Claudio.

URSULA

I pray you be not angry with me, madam,
 Speaking my fancy: Signior Benedick,
 For shape, for bearing, argument, and valor,
 Goes foremost in report through Italy.

HERO

Indeed, he hath an excellent good name.

URSULA

His excellence did earn it ere he had it.
 When are you married, madam?

HERO

Why, every day, tomorrow. Come, go in.
 I'll show thee some attires and have thy counsel
 Which is the best to furnish me tomorrow.
 [They move away from the bower.]

URSULA

[aside to Hero]
 She's limed, I warrant you. We have caught her,
 madam.

HERO

[aside to Ursula]
 If it prove so, then loving goes by haps;
 Some Cupid kills with arrows, some with traps.
 [Hero and Ursula exit.]

BEATRICE

[coming forward]
 What fire is in mine ears? Can this be true?
 Stand I condemned for pride and scorn so much?
 Contempt, farewell, and maiden pride, adieu!

No glory lives behind the back of such.
 And Benedick, love on; I will requite thee,
 Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand.
 If thou dost love, my kindness shall incite thee
 To bind our loves up in a holy band.
 For others say thou dost deserve, and I
 Believe it better than reportingly.
 [She exits.]

ACT 3, SCENE 2

PRINCE I do but stay till your marriage be consummate,
 and then go I toward Aragon.

CLAUDIO I'll bring you thither, my lord, if you'll vouchsafe
 me.

PRINCE Nay, that would be as great a soil in the new gloss
 of your marriage as to show a child his new coat and
 forbid him to wear it. I will only be bold with Benedick
 for his company, for from the crown of his head to the
 sole of his foot he is all mirth. He hath twice or thrice cut
 Cupid's bowstring, and the little hangman dare not shoot
 at him. He hath a heart as sound as a bell, and his tongue
 is the clapper, for what his heart thinks, his tongue
 speaks.

BENEDICK Gallants, I am not as I have been.

LEONATO So say I. Methinks you are sadder.

CLAUDIO I hope he be in love.

PRINCE Hang him, truant! There's no true drop of blood in
 him to be truly touched with love. If he be sad, he wants
 money.

BENEDICK I have the toothache.

PRINCE Draw it.

BENEDICK Hang it!

CLAUDIO You must hang it first, and draw it afterwards.

PRINCE What, sigh for the toothache?

LEONATO Where is but a humor or a worm.

BENEDICK Well, everyone can master a grief but he that has it.

CLAUDIO Yet say I, he is in love.

PRINCE There is no appearance of fancy in him, unless it be a fancy that he hath to strange disguises, as to be a Dutchman today, a Frenchman tomorrow, or in the shape of two countries at once, as a German from the waist downward, all slops, and a Spaniard from the hip upward, no doublet. Unless he have a fancy to this foolery, as it appears he hath, he is no fool for fancy, as you would have it appear he is.

CLAUDIO If he be not in love with some woman, there is no believing old signs. He brushes his hat o' mornings. What should that bode?

PRINCE Hath any man seen him at the barber's?

CLAUDIO No, but the barber's man hath been seen with him, and the old ornament of his cheek hath already stuffed tennis balls.

LEONATO Indeed he looks younger than he did, by the loss of a beard.

PRINCE Nay, he rubs himself with civet. Can you smell him out by that?

CLAUDIO That's as much as to say, the sweet youth's in love.

PRINCE The greatest note of it is his melancholy.

CLAUDIO And when was he wont to wash his face?

PRINCE Yea, or to paint himself? For the which I hear what they say of him.

CLAUDIO Nay, but his jesting spirit, which is now crept into a lute string and now governed by stops--

PRINCE Indeed, that tells a heavy tale for him. Conclude, conclude, he is in love.

CLAUDIO Nay, but I know who loves him.

PRINCE That would I know, too. I warrant, one that knows him not.

CLAUDIO Yes, and his ill conditions; and, in despite of all, dies for him.

PRINCE She shall be buried with her face upwards.

BENEDICK Yet is this no charm for the toothache.-- Old signior, walk aside with me. I have studied eight or nine wise words to speak to you, which these hobby-horses must not hear. [Benedick and Leonato exit.]

PRINCE For my life, to break with him about Beatrice!

CLAUDIO 'Tis even so. Hero and Margaret have by this played their parts with Beatrice, and then the two bears will not bite one another when they meet.

[Enter John the Bastard.]

DON JOHN My lord and brother, God save you.

PRINCE Good e'en, brother.

DON JOHN If your leisure served, I would speak with you.

PRINCE In private?

DON JOHN If it please you. Yet Count Claudio may hear, for what I would speak of concerns him.

PRINCE What's the matter?

DON JOHN [to Claudio] Means your Lordship to be married tomorrow?

PRINCE You know he does.

DON JOHN I know not that, when he knows what I know.

CLAUDIO If there be any impediment, I pray you discover it.

DON JOHN You may think I love you not. Let that appear hereafter, and aim better at me by that I now will manifest. For my brother, I think he holds you well, and in dearness of heart hath help to effect your ensuing marriage--surely suit ill spent and labor ill bestowed.

PRINCE Why, what's the matter?

DON JOHN I came hither to tell you; and, circumstances shortened, for she has been too long a-talking of, the lady is disloyal.

CLAUDIO Who, Hero?

DON JOHN Even she: Leonato's Hero, your Hero, every man's Hero.

CLAUDIO Disloyal?

DON JOHN The word is too good to paint out her wickedness. I could say she were worse. Think you of a worse title, and I will fit her to it. Wonder not till further warrant. Go but with me tonight, you shall see her chamber window entered, even the night before her wedding day. If you love her then, tomorrow wed her. But it would better fit your honor to change your mind.

CLAUDIO [to Prince] May this be so?

PRINCE I will not think it.

DON JOHN If you dare not trust that you see, confess not that you know. If you will follow me, I will show you enough, and when you have seen more and heard more, proceed accordingly.

CLAUDIO If I see anything tonight why I should not marry her, tomorrow in the congregation, where I should wed, there will I shame her.

PRINCE And as I wooed for thee to obtain her, I will join with thee to disgrace her.

DON JOHN I will disparage her no farther till you are my witnesses. Bear it coldly but till midnight, and let the issue show itself.

PRINCE O day untowardly turned!

CLAUDIO O mischief strangely thwarting!

DON JOHN O plague right well prevented! So will you say when you have seen the sequel. [They exit.]

END OF PART 6

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?
