

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Part 7: The Watch Discovers the Truth

Act 3, Scenes 3-5

BEFORE YOU READ

Dogberry and Verges give the night watch a tangle of comic instructions. By accident, the Watch overhears Borachio describe the plot against Hero and arrests him and Conrade. On the wedding morning, Hero prepares while her friends tease Beatrice. Dogberry tries to warn Leonato, but his confusing speech delays the truth.

A HELPFUL SHAKESPEARE HABIT

Dogberry often chooses a grand-sounding word that means the opposite of what he intends. Circle those mistakes and replace each with the word he probably meant.

Who's Who in This Reading

Dogberry: Messina's master constable; confident, wordy, and frequently mistaken.

Verges: Dogberry's older partner.

The Watch: Ordinary citizens assigned to patrol the streets.

Borachio: Boasts about the deception used against Hero.

Conrade: Listens to Borachio and is arrested with him.

Hero: Prepares for her wedding.

Margaret and Ursula: Help Hero dress and tease Beatrice.

Beatrice: Claims she is ill while the others suspect love.

Leonato: Is too rushed for the wedding to understand Dogberry's warning.

SOURCE AND USE

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Quick Word Help

bills

pole weapons carried by watchmen

vagrom

Dogberry's mistake for vagrant

comprehended

Dogberry's mistake for apprehended, or arrested

auspicious

Dogberry's mistake for suspicious

charge

official instructions or duty

lechery

sexual misconduct

despite

spite or insult

fashion

manner or custom

examination

formal questioning

malapropism

a wrong word used because it sounds like the right one

salvation

Dogberry mistakenly uses it where he means damnation

tedious

tiresomely long

deformed

Dogberry mistakes this for a person's name

eftest

soonest or most quickly

LOOK AND LISTEN FOR

- How the least impressive characters become the first to discover the truth.
- Dogberry's malapropisms: incorrect words that sound close to the intended ones.
- The painful timing of truth arriving just a little too late.

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

ACT 3, SCENE 3

DOGBERRY Are you good men and true?

VERGES Yea, or else it were pity but they should suffer salvation, body and soul.

DOGBERRY Nay, that were a punishment too good for them if they should have any allegiance in them, being chosen for the Prince's watch.

VERGES Well, give them their charge, neighbor Dogberry.

DOGBERRY First, who think you the most desartless man to be constable?

FIRST WATCHMAN Hugh Oatcake, sir, or George Seacoal, for they can write and read.

DOGBERRY Come hither, neighbor Seacoal. [Seacoal steps forward.] God hath blessed you with a good name. To be a well-favored man is the gift of fortune, but to write and read comes by nature.

SEACOAL Both which, master constable--

DOGBERRY You have. I knew it would be your answer. Well, for your favor, sir, why, give God thanks, and make no boast of it, and for your writing and reading, let that appear when there is no need of such vanity. You are thought here to be the most senseless and fit man for the constable of the watch; therefore bear you the lantern. This is your charge: you shall comprehend all vagrom men; you are to bid any man stand, in the Prince's name.

SEACOAL How if he will not stand?

DOGBERRY Why, then, take no note of him, but let him go, and presently call the rest of the watch together and thank God you are rid of a knave.

VERGES If he will not stand when he is bidden, he is none of the Prince's subjects.

DOGBERRY True, and they are to meddle with none but the Prince's subjects.--You shall also make no noise in the streets; for, for the watch to babble and to talk is most tolerable and not to be endured.

SECOND WATCHMAN We will rather sleep than talk. We know what belongs to a watch.

DOGBERRY Why, you speak like an ancient and most quiet watchman, for I cannot see how sleeping should offend; only have a care that your bills be not stolen. Well, you are to call at all the alehouses and bid those that are drunk get them to bed.

SEACOAL How if they will not?

DOGBERRY Why then, let them alone till they are sober. If they make you not then the better answer, you may say they are not the men you took them for.

SEACOAL Well, sir.

DOGBERRY If you meet a thief, you may suspect him, by virtue of your office, to be no true man, and for such kind of men, the less you meddle or make with them, why, the more is for your honesty.

SEACOAL If we know him to be a thief, shall we not lay hands on him?

DOGBERRY Truly, by your office you may, but I think they that touch pitch will be defiled. The most peaceable way for you, if you do take a thief, is to let him show himself what he is and steal out of your company.

VERGES You have been always called a merciful man, partner.

DOGBERRY Truly, I would not hang a dog by my will, much more a man who hath any honesty in him.

VERGES [to the Watch] If you hear a child cry in the night, you must call to the nurse and bid her still it.

SECOND WATCHMAN How if the nurse be asleep and will not hear us?

DOGBERRY Why, then depart in peace, and let the child wake her with crying, for the ewe that will not hear her lamb when it baas will never answer a calf when he bleats.

VERGES 'Tis very true.

DOGBERRY This is the end of the charge. You, constable, are to present the Prince's own person. If you meet the Prince in the night, you may stay him.

VERGES Nay, by 'r Lady, that I think he cannot.

DOGBERRY Five shillings to one on 't, with any man that knows the statutes, he may stay him--marry, not without the Prince be willing, for indeed the watch ought to offend no man, and it is an offense to stay a man against his will.

VERGES By 'r Lady, I think it be so.

DOGBERRY Ha, ah ha!--Well, masters, goodnight. An there be any matter of weight chances, call up me. Keep your fellows' counsels and your own, and goodnight.--Come, neighbor. [Dogberry and Verges begin to exit.]

SEACOAL Well, masters, we hear our charge. Let us go sit here upon the church bench till two, and then all to bed.

DOGBERRY One word more, honest neighbors. I pray you watch about Signior Leonato's door, for the wedding being there tomorrow, there is a great coil tonight. Adieu, be vigilant, I beseech you. [Dogberry and Verges exit.]

[Enter Borachio and Conrade.]

BORACHIO What, Conrade!

SEACOAL [aside] Peace, stir not.

BORACHIO Conrade, I say!

CONRADE Here, man, I am at thy elbow.

BORACHIO Mass, and my elbow itched, I thought there would a scab follow.

CONRADE I will owe thee an answer for that. And now forward with thy tale.

BORACHIO Stand thee close, then, under this penthouse, for it drizzles rain, and I will, like a true drunkard, utter all to thee.

SEACOAL [aside] Some treason, masters. Yet stand close.

BORACHIO Therefore know, I have earned of Don John a thousand ducats.

CONRADE Is it possible that any villainy should be so dear?

BORACHIO Thou shouldst rather ask if it were possible any villainy should be so rich. For when rich villains have need of poor ones, poor ones may make what price they will.

CONRADE I wonder at it.

BORACHIO That shows thou art unconfirmed. Thou knowest that the fashion of a doublet, or a hat, or a cloak, is nothing to a man.

CONRADE Yes, it is apparel.

BORACHIO I mean the fashion.

CONRADE Yes, the fashion is the fashion.

BORACHIO Tush, I may as well say the fool's the fool. But seest thou not what a deformed thief this fashion is?

FIRST WATCHMAN [aside] I know that Deformed. He has been a vile thief this seven year. He goes up and down like a gentleman. I remember his name.

BORACHIO Didst thou not hear somebody?

CONRADE No, 'twas the vane on the house.

BORACHIO Seest thou not, I say, what a deformed thief this fashion is, how giddily he turns about all the hot bloods between fourteen and five-and-thirty, sometimes fashioning them like Pharaoh's soldiers in the reechy painting, sometimes like god Bel's priests in the old church window, sometimes like the shaven Hercules in the smirched worm-eaten tapestry, where his codpiece seems as massy as his club?

CONRADE All this I see, and I see that the fashion wears out more apparel than the man. But art not thou thyself giddy with the fashion too, that thou hast shifted out of thy tale into telling me of the fashion?

BORACHIO Not so, neither. But know that I have tonight wooed Margaret, the Lady Hero's gentlewoman, by the name of Hero. She leans me out at her mistress' chamber window, bids me a thousand times goodnight. I tell this tale vilely. I should first tell thee how the Prince, Claudio, and my master, planted and placed and possessed by my master Don John, saw afar off in the orchard this amiable amiable encounter.

CONRADE And thought they Margaret was Hero?

BORACHIO Two of them did, the Prince and Claudio, but the devil my master knew she was Margaret; and partly by his oaths, which first possessed them, partly by the dark night, which did deceive them, but chiefly by my villainy, which did confirm any slander that Don John had made, away went Claudio enraged, swore he would meet her as he was appointed next morning at the temple, and there, before the whole congregation, shame her with what he saw o'ernight and send her home again without a husband.

FIRST WATCHMAN We charge you in the Prince's name stand!

SEACOAL Call up the right Master Constable. [Second Watchman exits.] We have here recovered the most dangerous piece of lechery that ever was known in the commonwealth.

FIRST WATCHMAN And one Deformed is one of them. I know him; he wears a lock.

[Enter Dogberry, Verges, and Second Watchman.]

DOGBERRY Masters, masters--

FIRST WATCHMAN [to Borachio] You'll be made bring Deformed forth, I warrant you.

DOGBERRY [to Borachio and Conrade] Masters, never speak, we charge you, let us obey you to go with us.

BORACHIO [to Conrade] We are like to prove a goodly commodity, being taken up of these men's bills.

CONRADE A commodity in question, I warrant you.-- Come, we'll obey you. [They exit.]

ACT 3, SCENE 4

HERO Good Ursula, wake my cousin Beatrice and desire her to rise.

URSULA I will, lady.

HERO And bid her come hither.

URSULA Well. [Ursula exits.]

MARGARET Troth, I think your other rebato were better.

HERO No, pray thee, good Meg, I'll wear this.

MARGARET By my troth, 's not so good, and I warrant your cousin will say so.

HERO My cousin's a fool, and thou art another. I'll wear none but this.

MARGARET I like the new tire within excellently, if the hair were a thought browner; and your gown's a most rare fashion, i' faith. I saw the Duchess of Milan's gown that they praise so.

HERO O, that exceeds, they say.

MARGARET By my troth, 's but a nightgown in respect of yours--cloth o' gold, and cuts, and laced with silver, set with pearls, down sleeves, side sleeves, and skirts round underborne with a bluish tinsel. But for a fine, quaint, graceful, and excellent fashion, yours is worth ten on 't.

HERO God give me joy to wear it, for my heart is exceeding heavy.

MARGARET 'Twill be heavier soon by the weight of a man.

HERO Fie upon thee! Art not ashamed?

MARGARET Of what, lady? Of speaking honorably? Is not marriage honorable in a beggar? Is not your lord honorable without marriage? I think you would have me say "Saving your reverence, a husband." An bad thinking do not wrest true speaking, I'll offend nobody. Is there any harm in "the heavier for a husband"? None, I think, an it be the right husband and the right wife. Otherwise, 'tis light and not heavy. Ask my lady Beatrice else. Here she comes.

[Enter Beatrice.]

HERO Good morrow, coz.

BEATRICE Good morrow, sweet Hero.

HERO Why, how now? Do you speak in the sick tune?

BEATRICE I am out of all other tune, methinks.

MARGARET Clap 's into "Light o' love." That goes without a burden. Do you sing it, and I'll dance it.

BEATRICE You light o' love with your heels! Then, if your husband have stables enough, you'll see he shall lack no barns.

MARGARET O, illegitimate construction! I scorn that with my heels.

BEATRICE 'Tis almost five o'clock, cousin. 'Tis time you were ready. By my troth, I am exceeding ill. Heigh-ho!

MARGARET For a hawk, a horse, or a husband?

BEATRICE For the letter that begins them all, H.

MARGARET Well, an you be not turned Turk, there's no more sailing by the star.

BEATRICE What means the fool, trow?

MARGARET Nothing, I; but God send everyone their heart's desire.

HERO These gloves the Count sent me, they are an excellent perfume.

BEATRICE I am stuffed, cousin. I cannot smell.

MARGARET A maid, and stuffed! There's goodly catching of cold.

BEATRICE O, God help me, God help me! How long have you professed apprehension?

MARGARET Ever since you left it. Doth not my wit become me rarely?

BEATRICE It is not seen enough; you should wear it in your cap. By my troth, I am sick.

MARGARET Get you some of this distilled carduus benedictus and lay it to your heart. It is the only thing for a qualm.

HERO There thou prick'st her with a thistle.

BEATRICE Benedictus! Why benedictus? You have some moral in this benedictus?

MARGARET Moral? No, by my troth, I have no moral meaning; I meant plain holy thistle. You may think perchance that I think you are in love. Nay, by 'r Lady, I am not such a fool to think what I list, nor I list not to think what I can, nor indeed I cannot think, if I would think my heart out of thinking, that you are in love or that you will be in love or that you can be in love. Yet Benedick was such another, and now is he become a man. He swore he would never marry, and yet now, in despite of his heart, he eats his meat without grudging. And how you may be converted I know not, but methinks you look with your eyes as other women do.

BEATRICE What pace is this that thy tongue keeps?

MARGARET Not a false gallop.

[Enter Ursula.]

URSULA Madam, withdraw. The Prince, the Count, Signior Benedick, Don John, and all the gallants of the town are come to fetch you to church.

HERO Help to dress me, good coz, good Meg, good Ursula.
[They exit.]

ACT 3, SCENE 5

LEONATO What would you with me, honest neighbor?

DOGBERRY Marry, sir, I would have some confidence with you that decerns you nearly.

LEONATO Brief, I pray you, for you see it is a busy time with me.

DOGBERRY Marry, this it is, sir.

VERGES Yes, in truth, it is, sir.

LEONATO What is it, my good friends?

DOGBERRY Goodman Verges, sir, speaks a little off the matter. An old man, sir, and his wits are not so blunt as, God help, I would desire they were, but, in faith, honest as the skin between his brows.

VERGES Yes, I thank God I am as honest as any man living that is an old man and no honester than I.

DOGBERRY Comparisons are odorous. Palabras, neighbor Verges.

LEONATO Neighbors, you are tedious.

DOGBERRY It pleases your Worship to say so, but we are the poor duke's officers. But truly, for mine own part, if I were as tedious as a king, I could find in my heart to bestow it all of your Worship.

LEONATO All thy tediousness on me, ah?

DOGBERRY Yea, an 'twere a thousand pound more than 'tis, for I hear as good exclamation on your Worship as of any man in the city, and though I be but a poor man, I am glad to hear it.

VERGES And so am I.

LEONATO I would fain know what you have to say.

VERGES Marry, sir, our watch tonight, excepting your Worship's presence, ha' ta'en a couple of as arrant knaves as any in Messina.

DOGBERRY A good old man, sir. He will be talking. As they say, "When the age is in, the wit is out." God help us, it is a world to see!--Well said, i' faith, neighbor Verges.--Well, God's a good man. An two men ride of a horse, one must ride behind. An honest soul, i' faith, sir, by my troth he is, as ever broke bread, but God is to be worshiped, all men are not alike, alas, good neighbor.

LEONATO Indeed, neighbor, he comes too short of you.

DOGBERRY Gifts that God gives.

LEONATO I must leave you.

DOGBERRY One word, sir. Our watch, sir, have indeed comprehended two aspicious persons, and we would have them this morning examined before your Worship.

LEONATO Take their examination yourself and bring it me. I am now in great haste, as it may appear unto you.

DOGBERRY It shall be suffigance.

LEONATO Drink some wine ere you go. Fare you well.

[Enter a Messenger.]

MESSENGER My lord, they stay for you to give your daughter to her husband.

LEONATO I'll wait upon them. I am ready. [He exits, with the Messenger.]

DOGBERRY Go, good partner, go, get you to Francis Seacoal. Bid him bring his pen and inkhorn to the jail. We are now to examination these men.

VERGES And we must do it wisely.

DOGBERRY We will spare for no wit, I warrant you. Here's that shall drive some of them to a noncome. Only get the learned writer to set down our excommunication and meet me at the jail. [They exit.]

END OF PART 7

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?
