

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Part 9: The Plot Is Exposed

Act 4, Scene 2, and Act 5, Scene 1

BEFORE YOU READ

Dogberry's examination finally records Borachio and Conrade's crime. Leonato and his brother confront Claudio and Don Pedro, and Benedick delivers his challenge. When the prisoners arrive, Borachio confesses the entire plot. Claudio learns that Hero was innocent, asks forgiveness, and accepts Leonato's acts of penance.

A HELPFUL SHAKESPEARE HABIT

Two styles of justice meet here: Dogberry's comic investigation and Leonato's serious demand for honor. Track how both help move the truth into public view.

Who's Who in This Reading

Dogberry and Verges: Question the prisoners and bring them to Leonato.

Sexton: Records the evidence clearly despite Dogberry's confusion.

Borachio and Conrade: Prisoners accused of plotting against Hero.

Leonato: Grieves for Hero and demands accountability.

Leonato's Brother: Supports Leonato and challenges the younger men.

Claudio and Don Pedro: First defend their actions, then learn the truth.

Benedick: Breaks with Claudio and formally challenges him.

SOURCE AND USE

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Quick Word Help

coxcomb

a fool; also a fool's cap

knave

dishonest man

sexton

church officer who also keeps records

perjury

lying under oath

dotage

weakness of mind associated with old age

shrewd

sharp or severe

counterpoise

equal weight or balance

amends

reparation for a wrong

monument

tomb or memorial

epitaph

words honoring a dead person

penitently

with sorrow and repentance

requital

repayment or return

attested

confirmed by witnesses

defame

damage a person's reputation

LOOK AND LISTEN FOR

- How the truth sounds different when told by the Sexton, Borachio, and Dogberry.
- The movement from anger and challenge toward confession and repair.
- What Claudio agrees to do before Leonato forgives him.

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

ACT 4, SCENE 2

DOGBERRY Is our whole dissembly appeared?

VERGES O, a stool and a cushion for the Sexton. [A stool is brought in; the Sexton sits.]

SEXTON Which be the malefactors?

DOGBERRY Marry, that am I, and my partner.

VERGES Nay, that's certain, we have the exhibition to examine.

SEXTON But which are the offenders that are to be examined? Let them come before Master Constable.

DOGBERRY Yea, marry, let them come before me. [Conrade and Borachio are brought forward.] What is your name, friend?

BORACHIO Borachio.

DOGBERRY Pray, write down "Borachio."--Yours, sirrah?

CONRADE I am a gentleman, sir, and my name is Conrade.

DOGBERRY Write down "Master Gentleman Conrade."--Masters, do you serve God?

BORACHIO/CONRADE Yea, sir, we hope.

DOGBERRY Write down that they hope they serve God; and write God first, for God defend but God should go before such villains!--Masters, it is proved already that you are little better than false knaves, and it will go near to be thought so shortly. How answer you for yourselves?

CONRADE Marry, sir, we say we are none.

DOGBERRY A marvelous witty fellow, I assure you, but I will go about with him.--Come you hither, sirrah, a word in your ear. Sir, I say to you it is thought you are false knaves.

BORACHIO Sir, I say to you we are none.

DOGBERRY Well, stand aside.--'Fore God, they are both in a tale. Have you writ down that they are none?

SEXTON Master constable, you go not the way to examine. You must call forth the watch that are their accusers.

DOGBERRY Yea, marry, that's the efastest way.--Let the watch come forth. Masters, I charge you in the Prince's name, accuse these men.

FIRST WATCHMAN This man said, sir, that Don John, the Prince's brother, was a villain.

DOGBERRY Write down Prince John a villain. Why, this is flat perjury, to call a prince's brother villain!

BORACHIO Master constable--

DOGBERRY Pray thee, fellow, peace. I do not like thy look, I promise thee.

SEXTON [to Watch] What heard you him say else?

SEACOAL Marry, that he had received a thousand ducats of Don John for accusing the Lady Hero wrongfully.

DOGBERRY Flat burglary as ever was committed.

VERGES Yea, by Mass, that it is.

SEXTON What else, fellow?

FIRST WATCHMAN And that Count Claudio did mean, upon his words, to disgrace Hero before the whole assembly, and not marry her.

DOGBERRY [to Borachio] O, villain! Thou wilt be condemned into everlasting redemption for this!

SEXTON What else?

SEACOAL This is all.

SEXTON And this is more, masters, than you can deny. Prince John is this morning secretly stolen away. Hero was in this manner accused, in this very manner refused, and upon the grief of this suddenly died.--Master constable, let these men be bound and brought to Leonato's. I will go before and show him their examination. [He exits.]

DOGBERRY Come, let them be opinioned.

VERGES Let them be in the hands--

CONRADE Off, coxcomb!

DOGBERRY God's my life, where's the Sexton? Let him write down the Prince's officer "coxcomb." Come, bind them.--Thou naughty varlet!

CONRADE Away! You are an ass, you are an ass!

DOGBERRY Dost thou not suspect my place? Dost thou not suspect my years? O, that he were here to write me down an ass! But masters, remember that I am an ass, though it be not written down, yet forget not that I am an ass.--No, thou villain, thou art full of piety, as shall be proved upon thee by good witness. I am a wise fellow and, which is more, an officer and, which is more, a

householder and, which is more, as pretty a piece of flesh as any is in Messina, and one that knows the law, go to, and a rich fellow enough, go to, and a fellow that hath had losses, and one that hath two gowns and everything handsome about him.--Bring him away.--O, that I had been writ down an ass! [They exit.]

ACT 5, SCENE 1

LEONATO'S BROTHER

If you go on thus, you will kill yourself,
And 'tis not wisdom thus to second grief
Against yourself.

LEONATO I pray thee, cease thy counsel, Which falls into mine ears as profitless As water in a sieve. Give not me counsel, Nor let no comforter delight mine ear But such a one whose wrongs do suit with mine. Bring me a father that so loved his child, Whose joy of her is overwhelmed like mine, And bid him speak of patience. Measure his woe the length and breadth of mine, And let it answer every strain for strain, As thus for thus, and such a grief for such, In every lineament, branch, shape, and form. If such a one will smile and stroke his beard, Bid sorrow wag, cry "hem" when he should groan, Patch grief with proverbs, make misfortune drunk With candle-wasters, bring him yet to me, And I of him will gather patience. But there is no such man. For, brother, men Can counsel and speak comfort to that grief Which they themselves not feel, but tasting it, Their counsel turns to passion, which before Would give preceptual med'cine to rage, Fetter strong madness in a silken thread, Charm ache with air and agony with words. No, no, 'tis all men's office to speak patience To those that wring under the

load of sorrow, But no man's virtue nor sufficiency To be
 so moral when he shall endure The like himself.
 Therefore give me no counsel. My griefs cry louder than
 advertisement.

LEONATO'S BROTHER

Therein do men from children nothing differ.

LEONATO

I pray thee, peace. I will be flesh and blood,
 For there was never yet philosopher
 That could endure the toothache patiently,
 However they have writ the style of gods
 And made a push at chance and sufferance.

LEONATO'S BROTHER

Yet bend not all the harm upon yourself.
 Make those that do offend you suffer too.

LEONATO

There thou speak'st reason. Nay, I will do so.
 My soul doth tell me Hero is belied,
 And that shall Claudio know; so shall the Prince
 And all of them that thus dishonor her.

[Enter Prince and Claudio.]

LEONATO'S BROTHER

Here comes the Prince and Claudio hastily.

PRINCE

Good e'en, good e'en.

CLAUDIO Good day to both of you.

LEONATO

Hear you, my lords--

PRINCE We have some haste, Leonato.

LEONATO

Some haste, my lord! Well, fare you well, my lord.
Are you so hasty now? Well, all is one.

PRINCE

Nay, do not quarrel with us, good old man.

LEONATO'S BROTHER

If he could right himself with quarrelling,
Some of us would lie low.

CLAUDIO Who wrongs him?

LEONATO

Marry, thou dost wrong me, thou dissembler, thou.
Nay, never lay thy hand upon thy sword.
I fear thee not.

CLAUDIO Marry, beshrew my hand If it should give your
age such cause of fear. In faith, my hand meant nothing
to my sword.

LEONATO

Tush, tush, man, never fleer and jest at me.
I speak not like a dotard nor a fool,
As under privilege of age to brag
What I have done being young, or what would do
Were I not old. Know, Claudio, to thy head,
Thou hast so wronged mine innocent child and me
That I am forced to lay my reverence by,
And with gray hairs and bruise of many days
Do challenge thee to trial of a man.
I say thou hast belied mine innocent child.
Thy slander hath gone through and through her

heart,
 And she lies buried with her ancestors,
 O, in a tomb where never scandal slept,
 Save this of hers, framed by thy villainy.

CLAUDIO

My villainy?

LEONATO Thine, Claudio, thine, I say.

PRINCE

You say not right, old man.

LEONATO My lord, my lord, I'll prove it on his body if he dare, Despite his nice fence and his active practice, His May of youth and bloom of lustihood.

CLAUDIO

Away! I will not have to do with you.

LEONATO

Canst thou so daff me? Thou hast killed my child.
 If thou kill'st me, boy, thou shalt kill a man.

LEONATO'S BROTHER

He shall kill two of us, and men indeed,
 But that's no matter. Let him kill one first.
 Win me and wear me! Let him answer me.--
 Come, follow me, boy. Come, sir boy, come, follow me.

Sir boy, I'll whip you from your foining fence,
 Nay, as I am a gentleman, I will.

LEONATO Brother--

LEONATO'S BROTHER

Content yourself. God knows I loved my niece,
 And she is dead, slandered to death by villains
 That dare as well answer a man indeed
 As I dare take a serpent by the tongue.--
 Boys, apes, braggarts, jacks, milksops!

LEONATO Brother Anthony--

LEONATO'S BROTHER

Hold you content. What, man! I know them, yea,
 And what they weigh, even to the utmost scruple--
 Scambling, outfacing, fashionmonging boys,
 That lie and cog and flout, deprave and slander,
 Go anticly and show outward hideousness,
 And speak off half a dozen dang'rous words
 How they might hurt their enemies, if they durst,
 And this is all.

LEONATO But brother Anthony--

LEONATO'S BROTHER Come, 'tis no matter. Do not you
 meddle. Let me deal in this.

PRINCE

Gentlemen both, we will not wake your patience.
 My heart is sorry for your daughter's death,
 But, on my honor, she was charged with nothing
 But what was true and very full of proof.

LEONATO My lord, my lord--

PRINCE I will not hear you.

LEONATO

No? Come, brother, away. I will be heard.

LEONATO'S BROTHER

And shall, or some of us will smart for it.
[Leonato and his brother exit.]

[Enter Benedick.]

PRINCE

See, see, here comes the man we went to seek.

CLAUDIO Now, signior, what news?

BENEDICK [to Prince] Good day, my lord.

PRINCE Welcome, signior. You are almost come to part almost a fray.

CLAUDIO We had like to have had our two noses snapped off with two old men without teeth.

PRINCE Leonato and his brother. What think'st thou? Had we fought, I doubt we should have been too young for them.

BENEDICK In a false quarrel there is no true valor. I came to seek you both.

CLAUDIO We have been up and down to seek thee, for we are high-proof melancholy and would fain have it beaten away. Wilt thou use thy wit?

BENEDICK It is in my scabbard. Shall I draw it?

PRINCE Dost thou wear thy wit by thy side?

CLAUDIO Never any did so, though very many have been beside their wit. I will bid thee draw, as we do the minstrels: draw to pleasure us.

PRINCE As I am an honest man, he looks pale.--Art thou sick, or angry?

CLAUDIO [to Benedick] What, courage, man! What though care killed a cat? Thou hast mettle enough in thee to kill care.

BENEDICK Sir, I shall meet your wit in the career, an you charge it against me. I pray you, choose another subject.

CLAUDIO [to Prince] Nay, then, give him another staff. This last was broke 'cross.

PRINCE By this light, he changes more and more. I think he be angry indeed.

CLAUDIO If he be, he knows how to turn his girdle.

BENEDICK Shall I speak a word in your ear?

CLAUDIO God bless me from a challenge!

BENEDICK [aside to Claudio] You are a villain. I jest not. I will make it good how you dare, with what you dare, and when you dare. Do me right, or I will protest your cowardice. You have killed a sweet lady, and her death shall fall heavy on you. Let me hear from you.

CLAUDIO Well, I will meet you, so I may have good cheer.

PRINCE What, a feast, a feast?

CLAUDIO I' faith, I thank him. He hath bid me to a calf's head and a capon, the which if I do not carve most curiously, say my knife's naught. Shall I not find a woodcock too?

BENEDICK Sir, your wit ambles well; it goes easily.

PRINCE I'll tell thee how Beatrice praised thy wit the other day. I said thou hadst a fine wit. "True," said she, "a fine little one." "No," said I, "a great wit." "Right," says she,

"a great gross one." "Nay," said I, "a good wit." "Just," said she, "it hurts nobody." "Nay," said I, "the gentleman is wise." "Certain," said she, "a wise gentleman." "Nay," said I, "he hath the tongues." "That I believe," said she, "for he swore a thing to me on Monday night which he forswore on Tuesday morning; there's a double tongue, there's two tongues." Thus did she an hour together transshape thy particular virtues. Yet at last she concluded with a sigh, thou wast the proper'st man in Italy.

CLAUDIO For the which she wept heartily and said she cared not.

PRINCE Yea, that she did. But yet for all that, an if she did not hate him deadly, she would love him dearly. The old man's daughter told us all.

CLAUDIO All, all. And, moreover, God saw him when he was hid in the garden.

PRINCE But when shall we set the savage bull's horns on the sensible Benedick's head?

CLAUDIO Yea, and text underneath: "Here dwells Benedick, the married man"?

BENEDICK Fare you well, boy. You know my mind. I will leave you now to your gossip-like humor. You break jests as braggarts do their blades, which, God be thanked, hurt not.--My lord, for your many courtesies I thank you. I must discontinue your company. Your brother the Bastard is fled from Messina. You have among you killed a sweet and innocent lady. For my Lord Lackbeard there,

he and I shall meet, and till then peace be with him.
[Benedick exits.]

PRINCE He is in earnest.

CLAUDIO In most profound earnest, and, I'll warrant you, for the love of Beatrice.

PRINCE And hath challenged thee?

CLAUDIO Most sincerely.

PRINCE What a pretty thing man is when he goes in his doublet and hose and leaves off his wit!

CLAUDIO He is then a giant to an ape; but then is an ape a doctor to such a man.

PRINCE But soft you, let me be. Pluck up, my heart, and be sad. Did he not say my brother was fled?

[Enter Constables Dogberry and Verges, and the Watch, with Conrade and Borachio.]

DOGBERRY Come you, sir. If justice cannot tame you, she shall ne'er weigh more reasons in her balance. Nay, an you be a cursing hypocrite once, you must be looked to.

PRINCE How now, two of my brother's men bound? Borachio one!

CLAUDIO Hearken after their offense, my lord.

PRINCE Officers, what offense have these men done?

DOGBERRY Marry, sir, they have committed false report; moreover, they have spoken untruths; secondarily, they are slanders; sixth and lastly, they have belied a lady; thirdly, they have verified unjust things; and, to conclude, they are lying knaves.

PRINCE First, I ask thee what they have done; thirdly, I ask thee what's their offense; sixth and lastly, why they are committed; and, to conclude, what you lay to their charge.

CLAUDIO Rightly reasoned, and in his own division; and, by my troth, there's one meaning well suited.

PRINCE [to Borachio and Conrade] Who have you offended, masters, that you are thus bound to your answer? This learned constable is too cunning to be understood. What's your offense?

BORACHIO Sweet prince, let me go no farther to mine answer. Do you hear me, and let this count kill me. I have deceived even your very eyes. What your wisdoms could not discover, these shallow fools have brought to light, who in the night overheard me confessing to this man how Don John your brother incensed me to slander the Lady Hero, how you were brought into the orchard and saw me court Margaret in Hero's garments, how you disgraced her when you should marry her. My villainy they have upon record, which I had rather seal with my death than repeat over to my shame. The lady is dead upon mine and my master's false accusation. And, briefly, I desire nothing but the reward of a villain.

PRINCE

[to Claudio]

Runs not this speech like iron through your blood?

CLAUDIO

I have drunk poison whiles he uttered it.

PRINCE

[to Borachio]

But did my brother set thee on to this?

BORACHIO Yea, and paid me richly for the practice of it.

PRINCE

He is composed and framed of treachery,
And fled he is upon this villainy.

CLAUDIO

Sweet Hero, now thy image doth appear
In the rare semblance that I loved it first.

DOGBERRY Come, bring away the plaintiffs. By this time
our sexton hath reformed Signior Leonato of the matter.
And, masters, do not forget to specify, when time and
place shall serve, that I am an ass.

VERGES Here, here comes Master Signior Leonato, and
the Sexton too.

[Enter Leonato, his brother, and the Sexton.]

LEONATO

Which is the villain? Let me see his eyes,
That, when I note another man like him,
I may avoid him. Which of these is he?

BORACHIO

If you would know your wronger, look on me.

LEONATO

Art thou the slave that with thy breath hast killed
Mine innocent child?

BORACHIO Yea, even I alone.

LEONATO

No, not so, villain, thou beliest thyself.
 Here stand a pair of honorable men--
 A third is fled--that had a hand in it.--
 I thank you, princes, for my daughter's death.
 Record it with your high and worthy deeds.
 'Twas bravely done, if you bethink you of it.

CLAUDIO

I know not how to pray your patience,
 Yet I must speak. Choose your revenge yourself.
 Impose me to what penance your invention
 Can lay upon my sin. Yet sinned I not
 But in mistaking.

PRINCE By my soul, nor I, And yet to satisfy this good old
 man I would bend under any heavy weight That he'll
 enjoin me to.

LEONATO

I cannot bid you bid my daughter live--
 That were impossible--but, I pray you both,
 Possess the people in Messina here
 How innocent she died. And if your love
 Can labor aught in sad invention,
 Hang her an epitaph upon her tomb
 And sing it to her bones. Sing it tonight.
 Tomorrow morning come you to my house,
 And since you could not be my son-in-law,
 Be yet my nephew. My brother hath a daughter,
 Almost the copy of my child that's dead,
 And she alone is heir to both of us.
 Give her the right you should have giv'n her cousin,
 And so dies my revenge.

CLAUDIO O, noble sir! Your overkindness doth wring tears from me. I do embrace your offer and dispose For henceforth of poor Claudio.

LEONATO

Tomorrow then I will expect your coming.
Tonight I take my leave. This naughty man
Shall face to face be brought to Margaret,
Who I believe was packed in all this wrong,
Hired to it by your brother.

BORACHIO No, by my soul, she was not, Nor knew not what she did when she spoke to me, But always hath been just and virtuous In anything that I do know by her.

DOGBERRY [to Leonato] Moreover, sir, which indeed is not under white and black, this plaintiff here, the offender, did call me ass. I beseech you, let it be remembered in his punishment. And also the watch heard them talk of one Deformed. They say he wears a key in his ear and a lock hanging by it and borrows money in God's name, the which he hath used so long and never paid that now men grow hardhearted and will lend nothing for God's sake. Pray you, examine him upon that point.

LEONATO I thank thee for thy care and honest pains.

DOGBERRY Your Worship speaks like a most thankful and reverent youth, and I praise God for you.

LEONATO [giving him money] There's for thy pains.

DOGBERRY God save the foundation.

LEONATO Go, I discharge thee of thy prisoner, and I thank thee.

DOGBERRY I leave an arrant knave with your Worship, which I beseech your Worship to correct yourself, for the example of others. God keep your Worship! I wish your Worship well. God restore you to health. I humbly give you leave to depart, and if a merry meeting may be wished, God prohibit it.-- Come, neighbor. [Dogberry and Verges exit.]

LEONATO

Until tomorrow morning, lords, farewell.

LEONATO'S BROTHER

Farewell, my lords. We look for you tomorrow.

PRINCE

We will not fail.

CLAUDIO Tonight I'll mourn with Hero.

LEONATO

[to Watch]

Bring you these fellows on.--We'll talk with

Margaret,

How her acquaintance grew with this lewd fellow.

[They exit.]

END OF PART 9

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?
