

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Part 10: Truth, Forgiveness, and Marriage

Act 5, Scenes 2-4

BEFORE YOU READ

Benedick tells Beatrice that he challenged Claudio, and news arrives that Hero's innocence is proven. Claudio mourns at the family tomb and returns for the promised second wedding. The masked bride is revealed as Hero. Beatrice and Benedick finally agree to marry, written love poems expose their true feelings, and the comedy ends with music and dancing.

A HELPFUL SHAKESPEARE HABIT

A Shakespearean comedy often ends by rebuilding a community. Notice who is forgiven, who is paired, who is still outside the celebration, and what remains unresolved.

Who's Who in This Reading

Beatrice and Benedick: Test each other's love before finally agreeing to marry.

Hero: Returns in disguise and reveals the truth to Claudio.

Claudio: Performs his penance and accepts Leonato's unknown 'niece.'

Leonato: Directs the final revelation and grants forgiveness.

Don Pedro: Witnesses the restored marriages.

Friar Francis: Helps guide the revelation.

Margaret and Ursula: Join the household at the final ceremony.

Messenger: Reports that Don John has been captured.

SOURCE AND USE

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Quick Word Help

fashion

manner, custom, or outward form

voyage

undertaking or attempt

poesy

poetry or a short poetic motto

epitaph

memorial words for the dead

monument

tomb or memorial structure

requited

repaid or returned

accord

agreement

affection

love or strong feeling

halting

limping; imperfect

masked

wearing a disguise over the face

amends

action taken to repair a wrong

valiant

brave

device

plan or trick

measure

a dance; also moderation

LOOK AND LISTEN FOR

- The repeated use of masks, writing, and public performance to reveal private truth.
- What forgiveness requires - and what the play leaves for later.
- How the final dance answers the broken wedding in Part 8.

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

ACT 5, SCENE 2

BENEDICK Pray thee, sweet Mistress Margaret, deserve well at my hands by helping me to the speech of Beatrice.

MARGARET Will you then write me a sonnet in praise of my beauty?

BENEDICK In so high a style, Margaret, that no man living shall come over it, for in most comely truth thou deservest it.

MARGARET To have no man come over me? Why, shall I always keep below stairs?

BENEDICK Thy wit is as quick as the greyhound's mouth; it catches.

MARGARET And yours as blunt as the fencer's foils, which hit but hurt not.

BENEDICK A most manly wit, Margaret; it will not hurt a woman. And so, I pray thee, call Beatrice. I give thee the bucklers.

MARGARET Give us the swords; we have bucklers of our own.

BENEDICK If you use them, Margaret, you must put in the pikes with a vice, and they are dangerous weapons for maids.

MARGARET Well, I will call Beatrice to you, who I think hath legs.

BENEDICK And therefore will come. [Margaret exits.]
[Sings] The god of love That sits above, And knows me,

and knows me, How pitiful I deserve-- I mean in singing. But in loving, Leander the good swimmer, Troilus the first employer of panders, and a whole book full of these quondam carpetmongers, whose names yet run smoothly in the even road of a blank verse, why, they were never so truly turned over and over as my poor self in love. Marry, I cannot show it in rhyme. I have tried. I can find out no rhyme to "lady" but "baby"--an innocent rhyme; for "scorn," "horn"--a hard rhyme; for "school," "fool"--a babbling rhyme; very ominous endings. No, I was not born under a rhyming planet, nor I cannot woo in festival terms.

[Enter Beatrice.]

Sweet Beatrice, wouldst thou come when I called thee?

BEATRICE Yea, signior, and depart when you bid me.

BENEDICK O, stay but till then!

BEATRICE "Then" is spoken. Fare you well now. And yet, ere I go, let me go with that I came, which is, with knowing what hath passed between you and Claudio.

BENEDICK Only foul words, and thereupon I will kiss thee.

BEATRICE Foul words is but foul wind, and foul wind is but foul breath, and foul breath is noisome. Therefore I will depart unknissed.

BENEDICK Thou hast frightened the word out of his right sense, so forcible is thy wit. But I must tell thee plainly, Claudio undergoes my challenge, and either I must shortly hear from him, or I will subscribe him a coward. And I pray thee now tell me, for which of my bad parts didst thou first fall in love with me?

BEATRICE For them all together, which maintained so politic a state of evil that they will not admit any good part to intermingle with them. But for which of my good parts did you first suffer love for me?

BENEDICK Suffer love! A good epithet. I do suffer love indeed, for I love thee against my will.

BEATRICE In spite of your heart, I think. Alas, poor heart, if you spite it for my sake, I will spite it for yours, for I will never love that which my friend hates.

BENEDICK Thou and I are too wise to woo peaceably.

BEATRICE It appears not in this confession. There's not one wise man among twenty that will praise himself.

BENEDICK An old, an old instance, Beatrice, that lived in the time of good neighbors. If a man do not erect in this age his own tomb ere he dies, he shall live no longer in monument than the bell rings and the widow weeps.

BEATRICE And how long is that, think you?

BENEDICK Question: why, an hour in clamor and a quarter in rheum. Therefore is it most expedient for the wise, if Don Worm, his conscience, find no impediment to the contrary, to be the trumpet of his own virtues, as I am to myself. So much for praising myself, who, I myself will bear witness, is praiseworthy. And now tell me, how doth your cousin?

BEATRICE Very ill.

BENEDICK And how do you?

BEATRICE Very ill, too.

BENEDICK Serve God, love me, and mend. There will I leave you too, for here comes one in haste.

[Enter Ursula.]

URSULA Madam, you must come to your uncle. Yonder's old coil at home. It is proved my Lady Hero hath been falsely accused, the Prince and Claudio mightily abused, and Don John is the author of all, who is fled and gone. Will you come presently? [Ursula exits.]

BEATRICE Will you go hear this news, signior?

BENEDICK I will live in thy heart, die in thy lap, and be buried in thy eyes--and, moreover, I will go with thee to thy uncle's. [They exit.]

ACT 5, SCENE 3

CLAUDIO Is this the monument of Leonato?

FIRST LORD It is, my lord.

CLAUDIO

[reading an Epitaph.]

Done to death by slanderous tongues Was the Hero that here
lies. Death, in guerdon of her wrongs, Gives her fame which
never dies. So the life that died with shame Lives in death with
glorious fame. [He hangs up the scroll.] Hang thou there upon
the tomb, Praising her when I am dumb. Now music, sound, and
sing your solemn hymn.

Song

Pardon, goddess of the night, Those that slew thy virgin knight,
For the which with songs of woe, Round about her tomb they go.
Midnight, assist our moan. Help us to sigh and groan Heavily,
heavily. Graves, yawn and yield your dead, Till death be uttered,
Heavily, heavily.

CLAUDIO

Now, unto thy bones, goodnight.
Yearly will I do this rite.

PRINCE

Good morrow, masters. Put your torches out.
The wolves have preyed, and look, the gentle day
Before the wheels of Phoebus, round about
Dapples the drowsy east with spots of gray.
Thanks to you all, and leave us. Fare you well.

CLAUDIO

Good morrow, masters. Each his several way.
[Lords and Musicians exit.]

PRINCE

Come, let us hence, and put on other weeds,
And then to Leonato's we will go.

CLAUDIO

And Hymen now with luckier issue speed 's,
Than this for whom we rendered up this woe.
[They exit.]

ACT 5, SCENE 4**FRIAR**

Did I not tell you she was innocent?

LEONATO

So are the Prince and Claudio, who accused her
Upon the error that you heard debated.
But Margaret was in some fault for this,
Although against her will, as it appears
In the true course of all the question.

LEONATO'S BROTHER

Well, I am glad that all things sorts so well.

BENEDICK

And so am I, being else by faith enforced
To call young Claudio to a reckoning for it.

LEONATO

Well, daughter, and you gentlewomen all,
Withdraw into a chamber by yourselves,
And when I send for you, come hither masked.
The Prince and Claudio promised by this hour
To visit me.--You know your office, brother.
You must be father to your brother's daughter,
And give her to young Claudio. [The ladies exit.]

LEONATO'S BROTHER

Which I will do with confirmed countenance.

BENEDICK

Friar, I must entreat your pains, I think.

FRIAR To do what, signior?

BENEDICK

To bind me, or undo me, one of them.--
Signior Leonato, truth it is, good signior,
Your niece regards me with an eye of favor.

LEONATO

That eye my daughter lent her; 'tis most true.

BENEDICK

And I do with an eye of love requite her.

LEONATO

The sight whereof I think you had from me,
From Claudio, and the Prince. But what's your will?

BENEDICK

Your answer, sir, is enigmatical.
But for my will, my will is your goodwill
May stand with ours, this day to be conjoined
In the state of honorable marriage--
In which, good friar, I shall desire your help.

LEONATO

My heart is with your liking.

FRIAR And my help. Here comes the Prince and Claudio.

[Enter Prince, and Claudio, and two or three other.]

PRINCE Good morrow to this fair assembly.

LEONATO

Good morrow, prince; good morrow, Claudio.
We here attend you. Are you yet determined
Today to marry with my brother's daughter?

CLAUDIO

I'll hold my mind were she an Ethiop.

LEONATO

Call her forth, brother. Here's the Friar ready.
[Leonato's brother exits.]

PRINCE

Good morrow, Benedick. Why, what's the matter
That you have such a February face,
So full of frost, of storm, and cloudiness?

CLAUDIO

I think he thinks upon the savage bull.
 Tush, fear not, man. We'll tip thy horns with gold,
 And all Europa shall rejoice at thee,
 As once Europa did at lusty Jove
 When he would play the noble beast in love.

BENEDICK

Bull Jove, sir, had an amiable low,
 And some such strange bull leapt your father's cow
 And got a calf in that same noble feat
 Much like to you, for you have just his bleat.

CLAUDIO

For this I owe you. Here comes other reck'nings.

[Enter Leonato's brother, Hero, Beatrice, Margaret, Ursula, the ladies masked.]

Which is the lady I must seize upon?

LEONATO

This same is she, and I do give you her.

CLAUDIO

Why, then, she's mine.--Sweet, let me see your face.

LEONATO

No, that you shall not till you take her hand
 Before this friar and swear to marry her.

CLAUDIO

[to Hero]

Give me your hand before this holy friar.

[They take hands.]

I am your husband, if you like of me.

HERO

And when I lived, I was your other wife,
 And when you loved, you were my other husband.
 [She unmaskes.]

CLAUDIO

Another Hero!

HERO Nothing certainer. One Hero died defiled, but I do live, And surely as I live, I am a maid.

PRINCE

The former Hero! Hero that is dead!

LEONATO

She died, my lord, but whiles her slander lived.

FRIAR

All this amazement can I qualify,
 When after that the holy rites are ended,
 I'll tell you largely of fair Hero's death.
 Meantime let wonder seem familiar,
 And to the chapel let us presently.

BENEDICK

Soft and fair, friar.--Which is Beatrice?

BEATRICE

[unmasking]
 I answer to that name. What is your will?

BENEDICK

Do not you love me?

BEATRICE Why no, no more than reason.

BENEDICK

Why then, your uncle and the Prince and Claudio
Have been deceived. They swore you did.

BEATRICE

Do not you love me?

BENEDICK Troth, no, no more than reason.

BEATRICE

Why then, my cousin, Margaret, and Ursula
Are much deceived, for they did swear you did.

BENEDICK

They swore that you were almost sick for me.

BEATRICE

They swore that you were well-nigh dead for me.

BENEDICK

'Tis no such matter. Then you do not love me?

BEATRICE

No, truly, but in friendly recompense.

LEONATO

Come, cousin, I am sure you love the gentleman.

CLAUDIO

And I'll be sworn upon 't that he loves her,
For here's a paper written in his hand,
A halting sonnet of his own pure brain,
Fashioned to Beatrice. [He shows a paper.]

HERO And here's another, Writ in my cousin's hand, stol'n
from her pocket, Containing her affection unto Benedick.
[She shows a paper.]

BENEDICK A miracle! Here's our own hands against our hearts. Come, I will have thee, but by this light I take thee for pity.

BEATRICE I would not deny you, but by this good day, I yield upon great persuasion, and partly to save your life, for I was told you were in a consumption.

BENEDICK Peace! I will stop your mouth. [They kiss.]

PRINCE

How dost thou, Benedick, the married man?

BENEDICK I'll tell thee what, prince: a college of wit-crackers cannot flout me out of my humor. Dost thou think I care for a satire or an epigram? No. If a man will be beaten with brains, he shall wear nothing handsome about him. In brief, since I do purpose to marry, I will think nothing to any purpose that the world can say against it, and therefore never flout at me for what I have said against it. For man is a giddy thing, and this is my conclusion.--For thy part, Claudio, I did think to have beaten thee, but in that thou art like to be my kinsman, live unbruised, and love my cousin.

CLAUDIO I had well hoped thou wouldst have denied Beatrice, that I might have cudgeled thee out of thy single life, to make thee a double-dealer, which out of question thou wilt be, if my cousin do not look exceeding narrowly to thee.

BENEDICK Come, come, we are friends. Let's have a dance ere we are married, that we may lighten our own hearts and our wives' heels.

LEONATO We'll have dancing afterward.

BENEDICK First, of my word! Therefore play, music.--
Prince, thou art sad. Get thee a wife, get thee a wife.
There is no staff more reverend than one tipped with
horn.

[Enter Messenger.]

MESSENGER

[to Prince]

My lord, your brother John is ta'en in flight,
And brought with armed men back to Messina.

BENEDICK [to Prince] Think not on him till tomorrow. I'll
devise thee brave punishments for him.--Strike up,
pipers! [Music plays. They dance.] [They exit.]

END OF PART 10

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?
