

Much Ado About Nothing

By William Shakespeare



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- ACT 1
1.1 [Enter LEONATO Governour of Messina, HERO his daughter, and BEATRICE his neece, with a Messenger]
- Leon* I Learne in this Letter, that *Don Peter* of Arragon, comes this night to *Messina*.
- Mess* He is very neere by this: he was not three Leagues off when I left him.
- Leon* How many Gentlemen have you lost in this action?
- Mess* But few of any sort, and none of name.
- Leon* A victorie is twice it selfe, when the atchiever brings home full numbers: I finde heere, that *Don Peter* hath bestowed much honor on yong *Claudio*.
- Mess* Much deserv'd on his part, and equally remembred by *Don Pedro*, he hath borne himselfe beyond the promise of his age.
- Leon* He hath an Unckle heere in *Messina*, wil be very much glad of it.
- Mess* I have alreadie delivered him letters, and there appeares much joy in him, even so much, that he did breake out into teares?
- Leon* How much better is it to weepe at joy, then to joy at weeping?
- Beat* I pray you, is Signior *Mountanto* return'd from the warres, or no?
- Mess* I know none of that name, Lady.
- Hero* My cousin meanes Signior Benedick of *Padua*.
- Mess* O he's return'd, and as pleasant as ever he was.
- Beat* He set up his bills here in *Messina*, & challeng'd Cupid at the Flight: and my Unckle's foole, reading the Challenge, subscrib'd for Cupid, and challeng'd him at the Burbolt. I pray you, how many hath hee kil'd in these warres? for indeed, I promis'd to eate all of his killing.
- Leon* 'Faith Neece, you taxe Signior Benedicke too much.
- Mess* He hath done good service Lady in these wars.
- Beat* You had musty victuall, and he hath holpe to ease it: he's a very valiant Trencher-man, hee hath an excellent stomacke.
- Mess* And a good souldier too Lady.
- Beat* And a good souldier to a Lady. But what is he to a Lord?
- Mess* A Lord to a Lord, a man to a man, stuff with all honourable vertues.
- Beat* So, he is no lesse then a stuff man: but for the stuffing well, we are all mortall.
- Leon* You must not (sir) mistake my Neece, there is a kind of merry war betwixt Signior Benedick, & her: they never meet, but there's a skirmish of wit between them.

Beat Alas, he gets nothing by that. In our last conflict, foure of his five wits went halting off, and now is the whole man govern'd with one: so that if hee have wit enough to keepe himselfe warme, let him beare it for a difference betweene himselfe and his horse: Who is his companion now? He hath every month a new sworne brother; he weares his faith but as the fashion of his hat, it ever changes with the next block. But I pray you, who is his companion? Is there no young squarer now, that will make a voyage with him to the divell?

Mess He is most in the company of the right noble *Claudio*.

Beat O Lord, he will hang upon him like a disease: he is sooner caught then the pestilence, and the taker runs presently mad. God helpe the noble *Claudio*, if hee have caught the Benedict, it will cost him a thousand pound ere he be cur'd.

Mess I see (Lady) the Gentleman is not in your bookes. [Exit Messenger]

Beat No, and he were, I would burne my study.

Leon *Don Pedro* is approach'd. [Enter DON PEDRO and BENEDICKE]

Pedro Good Signior *Leonato*, you are come to meet your trouble: the fashion of the world is to avoid cost, and you encounter it.

Leon Never came trouble in the likenes of your Grace: for trouble being gone, comfort should remaine: but when you depart from me, happinesse takes his leave.

Pedro You embrace your charge too willingly: I thinke this is your daughter.

Leon Her mother hath many times told me so.

Bene Were you in doubt that you askt her?

Leon Signior Benedicke, no, for then were you a childe.

Pedro You have it full Benedicke, we may ghesse by this, what you are.

Bene If Signior *Leonato* be her father, she would not have his head on her shoulders for all Messina, as like him as she is.

Beat I wonder that you will still be talking, Signior Benedicke, no body markes you.

Bene What my deere Ladie Disdaine! are you yet living?

Beat Should Disdaine die, while shee hath such meete foode to feede it, as Signior Benedicke? Curtesie it selfe must becom Disdaine, if you come in her presence.

Bene Then is curtesie a turne-coate, but it is certaine I am loved of all Ladies, onely you excepted: and I would that I had not a hard heart, for truely I love none.

Beat A deere happinesse to women, they would else have beene troubled with a pernicious Suter, I thanke God and my cold blood, I am of your humour for that, I had rather heare my Dog barke at a Crow, than a man sweare he loves me.

Bene God keepe your Ladiship still in that minde, so some Gentleman or other shall scape a predestinate scratcht face.

Beat Scratchting could not make it worse, and 'twere such a face as yours were.

Bene Well, you are a rare Parrat teacher. [enter CLAUDIO]

Beat A bird of my tongue, is better than a beast of your.

Bene I would my horse had the speed of your tongue, and so good a continuer, but keepe your way, a Gods name, I have done.

Beat You alwaies end with a Jades tricke, I know you of old.

Pedro That is the summe of all: Signior *Claudio*, and signior *Benedicke*; my deere friend *Leonato*, hath invited us all, I tell him we shall stay here, at the least a moneth, and he heartily praies some occasion may detaine us longer: I dare sweare hee is no hypocrite, but praies from his heart.

Leon Please it your grace leade on?

[*Exeunt. Manet BENEDICKE and CLAUDIO*]

Claudio *Benedicke*, didst thou note the daughter of signior *Leonato*?

Bene I noted her not, but I lookt on her.

Claudio Is she not a modest yong Ladie?

Bene Doe you question me as an honest man should doe, for my simple true judgment? or would you have me speake after my custome, as being a professed tyrant to their sexe?

Claudio No, I pray thee speake in sober judgement.

Bene Why yfaith, me thinks shee's too low for a hie praise, too browne for a faire praise, and too little for a great praise, onely this commendation I can affoord her, that were shee other than she is, she were unhandsome, and being no other, but as she is, I doe not like her.

Claudio Thou think'st I am in sport, I pray thee tell me truely how thou lik'st her.

Bene Would you buie her, that you enquier after her?

Claudio Can the world buie such a jewell? She is the sweetest Ladie that ever I lookt on.

Bene I can see yet without spectacles, and I see no such matter: there's her cosin, and she were not possesst with a furie, exceedes her as much in beautie, as the first of Maie doth the last of December: but I hope you have no intent to turne husband, have you?

Claudio I would scarce trust my selfe, though I had sworne the contrarie, if *Hero* would be my wife.

Bene Ist come to this? shall I never see a batcheller of three score againe ? goe to yfaith, and thou wilt needes thrust thy necke into a yoke, weare the print of it, and sigh away sunndaies : looke *don Pedro* is returned to seeke you.

[*Enter DON PEDRO.*]

Pedro What secret hath held you here, that you followed not to *Leonatoes* ?

Bene I would your Grace would constraine mee to tell.

Pedro I charge thee on thy allegeance.

Bene You heare, *Claudio*, I can be secret as a dumbe man (but, marke you this, on my allegiance) hee is in love, With who ? now that is your Graces part : marke how short his answere is, with *Hero*, *Leonatoes* short daughter. Like the old tale, my Lord, it is not so, nor 'twas not so: but indeede, God forbid it should be so.

Pedro Amen, if you love her, for the Ladie is verie well worthie.