

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

By William Shakespeare

Adapted by Dale Ahlquist

Cast of Characters

6 Females; 10 Males; 2 Either

<u>CLAUDIO:</u>	A young Lord of Florence.
<u>BENEDICK:</u>	A young Lord of Padua.
<u>DON JOHN:</u>	Bastard Brother of Donna Pedra.
<u>ANTONIO:</u>	Brother of Leonata.
<u>BORACHIO:</u>	Follower of Don John.
<u>CONRADE:</u>	Follower of Don John.
<u>DOGBERRY:</u>	A Constable.
<u>VERGES:</u>	A Watchman.
<u>SEACOLE:</u>	A Watchman.
<u>FRIAR FRANCIS:</u>	A friar.
<u>DONNA PEDRA:</u>	Princess of Arragon.
<u>LEONATA:</u>	A Noblewoman of Messina, Hero's mother.
<u>HERO:</u>	Daughter to Leonata.
<u>BEATRICE:</u>	Niece to Leonata.
<u>MARGARET:</u>	A Waiting-gentlewoman attending on Hero.
<u>URSULA:</u>	A Waiting-gentlewoman attending on Hero.
<u>MESSENGER:</u> *	A messenger.
<u>SEXTON:</u> *	The sexton.

* Denotes character that may be played by either male or female. Minor editing is permitted for this purpose only.

ACT I

Scene 1 – A Room in Leonata’s House

Scene 2 – The Same

Scene 3 – The Same

ACT II

Scene 1 – Leonata’s Courtyard

Scene 2 – The Same

Scene 3 – Leonata’s Garden

ACT III

Scene 1 – Leonata’s Garden

Scene 2 – The Same

Scene 3 – A Street

Scene 4 – A Room in Leonata’s House

Scene 5 – Hero’s Apartment

ACT IV

Scene 1 – A Church

Scene 2 – A Prison

ACT V

Scene 1 – Before Leonata’s House

Scene 2 – Leonata’s Garden

Scene 3 – The Same

Approximate Length

105 Minutes

Time

Any Time

Place

Any Place

ACT I
Scene 1

Setting: Before LEONATA'S house.

At Rise: Enter LEONATA, HERO, and BEATRICE, with a MESSENGER.

LEONATA

I learn in this letter that Donna Pedra, Princess of Aragon, comes this night to Messina.

MESSENGER

She is very near by this. She was not three leagues off when I left her.

LEONATA

I find here that Donna Pedra hath bestowed much honor on a young Florentine called Claudio.

MESSENGER

Much deserved on his part, and equally remembered by Donna Pedra. He hath borne himself beyond the promise of his age, doing in the figure of a lamb the feats of a lion. He hath indeed better bettered expectation than you must expect of me to tell you how.

BEATRICE

I pray you, is Signor Montanto returned from the wars or no?

MESSENGER

I know none of that name, lady. There was none such in the army of any sort.

LEONATA

What is he that you ask for, niece?

HERO

My cousin means Signor Benedick of Padua.

MESSENGER

O, he's returned, and as pleasant as ever he was.

BEATRICE

He is a fool.

LEONATA

Faith, niece, you tax Signor Benedick too much, but he'll be meet with you, I doubt it not.

MESSENGER

He hath done good service, lady, in these wars.

BEATRICE

He hath an excellent stomach.

MESSENGER

And is a good soldier too, lady.

BEATRICE

And a good soldier to a lady, but what is he to a lord?

MESSENGER

A lord to a lord, a man to a man, stuffed with all honorable virtues.

BEATRICE

It is so, indeed. He is no less than a stuffed man; but for the stuffing—well, we are all mortal.

LEONATA

You must not, good messenger, mistake my niece. There is a kind of merry war betwixt Signor Benedick and her. They never meet but there's a skirmish of wit between them.

BEATRICE

Alas, he gets nothing by that! In our last conflict four of his five wits went halting off, and now is the whole man governed with one, so that if he have wit enough to keep himself warm, let him bear it for a difference between himself and his horse, for it is all the wealth that he hath left to be known a reasonable creature. Who is his companion now? He hath every month a new sworn brother.

MESSENGER

Is't possible?

BEATRICE

Very easily possible. He wears his faith but as the fashion of his hat: it ever changes with the next block.

MESSENGER

I see, lady, the gentleman is not in your books.

BEATRICE

No. If he were, I would burn my study. But I pray you, who is his companion? Is there no young squarer now that will make a voyage with him to the devil?

MESSENGER

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

BEATRICE

O Lord, he will hang upon him like a disease! He is sooner caught than the pestilence, and the taker runs presently mad. God help the noble Claudio! If he have caught the Benedick, it will cost him a thousand pound ere he be cured.

LEONATA

You will never run mad, niece.

BEATRICE

No, not till a hot January.

MESSENGER

Donna Pedra is approached.

(Enter DONNA PEDRA, DON JOHN, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK,
and BALTHASAR)

DONNA PEDRA

Good Lady Leonata, are you come to meet your trouble? The fashion of the world is to avoid cost, and you encounter it.

LEONATA

Never came trouble to my house in the likeness of your grace, for trouble being gone, comfort should remain, but when you depart from me, sorrow abides and happiness takes his leave.

DONNA PEDRA

You embrace your charge too willingly.

BENEDICK

(To BEATRICE)

What, my dear Lady Disdain! Are you yet living?

BEATRICE

Is it possible disdain should die while she hath such meet food to feed it as Signor Benedick? Courtesy itself must convert to disdain, if you come in her presence.

BENEDICK

Then is courtesy a turncoat. But it is certain I am loved of all ladies, only you excepted, and I would I could find in my heart that I had not a hard heart, for truly I love none.

BEATRICE

A dear happiness to women! They would else have been troubled with a pernicious suitor. I thank God and my cold blood, I am of your humor for that. I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me.

BENEDICK

God keep your ladyship still in that mind! So some gentleman or other shall 'scape a predestinate scratched face.

BEATRICE

Scratching could not make it worse, if 'twere such a face as yours were.

BENEDICK

Well, you are a rare parrot teacher.

BEATRICE

A bird of my tongue is better than a beast of yours.

BENEDICK

I would my horse had the speed of your tongue. But keep your way, in God's name! I have done.

BEATRICE

You always end with a jade's trick. I know you of old.

DONNA PEDRA

That is the sum of all, Leonata. Signor Claudio and Signor Benedick, my dear friend Leonata hath invited you all. I tell her we shall stay here at the least a month, and she heartily prays some occasion may detain us longer. I dare swear she is no hypocrite, but prays from her heart.

LEONATA

(To DON JOHN)

Let me bid you welcome, my lord. Being reconciled to the princess your sister, I owe you all duty.

DON JOHN

I thank you. I am not of many words, but I thank you.

LEONATA

(To DONNA PEDRA)

Please it your grace lead on?

DONNA PEDRA

Your hand, Leonata. We will go together.

(All exit except BENEDICK and CLAUDIO)

CLAUDIO

Benedick, didst thou note the daughter of Signora Leonata?

BENEDICK

I noted her not, but I looked on her.

CLAUDIO

Is she not a modest young lady?

BENEDICK

Do you question me, as an honest man should do, for my simple true judgment? Or would you have me speak after my custom, as being a professed tyrant to their sex?

CLAUDIO

No, I pray thee speak in sober judgment.

BENEDICK

Why, in faith, methinks she's too low for a high praise, too brown for a fair praise and too little for a great praise. Only this commendation I can afford her, that were she other than she is, she were unhandsome, and being no other but as she is, I do not like her.

CLAUDIO

Thou thinkest I am in sport. I pray thee tell me truly how thou likest her.

BENEDICK

Would you buy her, that you inquire after her?

CLAUDIO

Can the world buy such a jewel?

BENEDICK

Yea, and a case to put it into.

CLAUDIO

In mine eye she is the sweetest lady that ever I looked on.

BENEDICK

I can see yet without spectacles and I see no such matter. There's her cousin, if she were not possessed with a fury, exceeds her as much in beauty as the first of May doth the last of December. But I hope you have no intent to turn husband, have you?

CLAUDIO

I would scarce trust myself, though I had sworn the contrary, if Hero would be my wife.

BENEDICK

Is't come to this? Shall I never see a bachelor of threescore again? Go to, i' faith; if thou wilt needs thrust thy neck into a yoke, wear the print of it and sigh away Sundays. Look! Donna Pedra is returned to seek you.

(Re-enter DONNA PEDRA)

DONNA PEDRA

What secret hath held you here, that you followed not to Leonata's?

BENEDICK

I would your grace would constrain me to tell.

DONNA PEDRA

I charge thee on thy allegiance.

BENEDICK

You hear, Count Claudio. I can be secret as a dumb man, I would have you think so, but, on my allegiance—mark you this—on my allegiance! He is in love. With who? Now that is your grace's part. Mark how short his answer is: with Hero, Leonata's little daughter.

CLAUDIO

If this were so, so were it uttered. If my passion change not shortly, God forbid it should be otherwise.

DONNA PEDRA

Amen, if you love her, for the lady is very well worthy.

CLAUDIO

You speak this to fetch me in, my lady.

DONNA PEDRA

By my troth, I speak my thought.

CLAUDIO

And, in faith, my lady, I spoke mine.

BENEDICK

And, by my two faiths and troths, my lady, I spoke mine.

CLAUDIO

That I love her, I feel.

DONNA PEDRA

That she is worthy, I know.

BENEDICK

That I neither feel how she should be loved, nor know how she should be worthy, is the opinion that fire cannot melt out of me: I will die in it at the stake.

DONNA PEDRA

Thou wast ever an obstinate heretic in the despite of beauty.

CLAUDIO

And never could maintain his part but in the force of his will.

BENEDICK

That a woman conceived me, I thank her; that she brought me up, I likewise give her most humble thanks; but because I will not do them the wrong to mistrust any, I will do myself the right to trust none; I will live a bachelor.

DONNA PEDRA

I shall see thee, ere I die, look pale with love.

BENEDICK

With anger, with sickness, or with hunger, my lady, not with love. Prove that ever I lose more blood with love than I will get again with drinking, pick out mine eyes with a ballad-maker's pen and hang me up at the door of a brothel-house for the sign of blind Cupid.

DONNA PEDRA

Well, if ever thou dost fall from this faith, thou wilt prove a notable argument.

BENEDICK

If I do, hang me in a bottle like a cat and shoot at me; and he that hits me, let him be clapped on the shoulder and called Adam.

DONNA PEDRA

Well, as time shall try. "In time the savage bull doth bear the yoke."

BENEDICK

The savage bull may; but if ever the sensible Benedick bear it, pluck off the bull's horns and set them in my forehead, and let me be vilely painted, and in great letters write on my sign "Here you may see Benedick the married man."

(Exit BENEDICK)

CLAUDIO

Your highness now may do me good. Hath Leonata any son, my lady?

DONNA PEDRA

No child but Hero; she's her only heir.
Dost thou affect her, Claudio?

CLAUDIO

O, my lady,
Come thronging soft and delicate desires,
All prompting me how fair young Hero is.

DONNA PEDRA

Thou wilt be like a lover presently
And tire the hearer with a book of words.
If thou dost love fair Hero, cherish it,
And I will speak with her mother, and thou shalt have her.

CLAUDIO

How sweetly you do minister to love,
That know love's grief by his complexion!
But lest my liking might too sudden seem,
I would have salved it with a longer treatise.

DONNA PEDRA

What need the bridge much broader than the flood?
The fairest grant is the necessity.
I know we shall have reveling tonight.
Then after to her mother will I speak,
And the conclusion is, she shall be thine.

(They exit)

Scene 2

Setting: A room in Leonata's house.

At Rise: Enter LEONATA and ANTONIO, meeting.

LEONATA

How now, brother!

ANTONIO

Sister, I can tell you strange news that you yet dreamt not of. The princess and Count Claudio, walking in a thick-pleached alley in mine orchard, were thus much overheard by a man of mine: the Princess discovered from Claudio that he loved my niece your daughter and meant to acknowledge it this night in a dance, and, if he found her accordant, the Princess meant to take the present time by the top and instantly break with you of it.

LEONATA

Hath the fellow any wit that told you this?

ANTONIO

A good sharp fellow. I will send for him, and question him yourself.

LEONATA

No, no. We will hold it as a dream till it appear itself, but I will acquaint my daughter withal, that she may be the better prepared for an answer, if peradventure this be true. Go you and tell her of it.

(They exit)

Scene 3

Setting: The same.

At Rise: Enter DON JOHN and CONRADE.

CONRADE

What the goodyear, my lord! Why are you thus out of measure sad?

DON JOHN

There is no measure in the occasion that breeds, therefore the sadness is without limit.

CONRADE

You should hear reason.

DON JOHN

And when I have heard it, what blessing brings it?

CONRADE

If not a present remedy, at least a patient sufferance.

DON JOHN

I wonder that thou goest about to apply a moral medicine to a mortifying mischief. I cannot hide what I am: I must be sad when I have cause and smile at no man's jests; eat when I have stomach, and wait for no man's leisure, sleep when I am drowsy and tend on no man's business; laugh when I am merry and claw no man in his humor.

CONRADE

Yea, but you must not make the full show of this till you may do it without controlment. You have of late stood out against your sister, and she hath taken you newly into her grace, where it is impossible you should take true root but by the fair weather that you make yourself. It is needful that you frame the season for your own harvest.

DON JOHN

I had rather be a canker in a hedge than a rose in her grace, and it better fits my blood to be disdained of all than to fashion a carriage to rob love from any. In this, though I cannot be said to be a flattering honest man, it must not be denied but I am a plain-dealing villain. I am trusted with a muzzle and enfranchised with a clog, therefore I have decreed not to sing in my cage. If I had my mouth, I would bite; if I had my liberty, I would do my liking. In the meantime let me be that I am and seek not to alter me.

CONRADE

Can you make no use of your discontent?

DON JOHN

I make all use of it, for I use it only. Who comes here?

(Enter BORACHIO)

What news, Borachio?

BORACHIO

I came yonder from a great supper. The princess your sister is royally entertained by Leonata, and I can give you intelligence of an intended marriage.

DON JOHN

Will it serve for any model to build mischief on? What is he for a fool that betroths himself to unquietness?

BORACHIO

Marry, it is your sister's right hand.

DON JOHN

Who? the most exquisite Claudio?

BORACHIO

Even he.

DON JOHN

A proper squire! And who, and who? which way looks he?

BORACHIO

Marry, one Hero, the daughter and heir of Leonata.

DON JOHN

A very forward March chick! How came you to this?

BORACHIO

Being entertained for a perfumer, as I was smoking a musty room, comes me the princess and Claudio, in sad conference. I whipt me behind the arras and there heard it agreed upon that the princess should help win Hero for Count Claudio.

DON JOHN

Come, come, let us thither. This may prove food to my displeasure. That young start-up hath all the glory of my overthrow. If I can cross him any way, I bless myself every way. You are both sure, and will assist me?

CONRADE

To the death, my lord.

DON JOHN

Let us to the great supper. Their cheer is the greater that I am subdued. Would the cook were of my mind! Shall we go prove what's to be done?

BORACHIO

We'll wait upon your lordship.

(They exit)

ACT II
Scene 1

Setting: A hall in Leonata's house.

At Rise: Enter LEONATA, ANTONIO, HERO, BEATRICE, and others.

LEONATA

Was not Count John here at supper?

ANTONIO

I saw him not.

BEATRICE

How tartly that gentleman looks! I never can see him but I am heart-burned an hour after.

HERO

He is of a very melancholy disposition.

BEATRICE

He were an excellent man that were made just in the midway between him and Benedick. The one is too like an image and says nothing, and the other too like my lady's eldest son, evermore tattling.

LEONATA

Then half Signor Benedick's tongue in Count John's mouth, and half Count John's melancholy in Signor Benedick's face—

BEATRICE

With a good leg and a good foot, aunt, and money enough in his purse, such a man would win any woman in the world—if he could get her good will.

LEONATA

By my troth, niece, thou wilt never get thee a husband, if thou be so shrewd of thy tongue.

ANTONIO

In faith, she's too curst.

BEATRICE

If God send me no husband, for the which blessing I am at him upon my knees every morning and evening. Lord, I could not endure a husband with a beard on his face. I had rather lie in the woolen.

LEONATA

You may light on a husband that hath no beard.

BEATRICE

What should I do with him? dress him in my apparel and make him my waiting gentlewoman? He that hath a beard is more than a youth, and he that hath no beard is less than a man: and he that is more than a youth is not for me, and he that is less than a man, I am not for him. Therefore, I will even take sixpence in earnest of the bear-herd and lead his apes into hell.

LEONATA

Well then, go you into hell?

BEATRICE

No, but to the gate; and there will the devil meet me like an old cuckold with horns on his head, and say, "Get you to heaven, Beatrice, get you to heaven. Here's no place for you maids." So deliver I up my apes, and away to Saint Peter. For the heavens, he shows me where the bachelors sit, and there live we as merry as the day is long.

ANTONIO

(To HERO)

Well, niece, I trust you will be ruled by your mother.

BEATRICE

Yes, faith. It is my cousin's duty to make curtsy and say, "Mother, as it please you." But yet for all that, cousin, let him be a handsome fellow, or else make another curtsy and say "Mother, as it please me."

LEONATA

Well, niece, I hope to see you one day fitted with a husband.

BEATRICE

Not till God make men of some other metal than earth. Would it not grieve a woman to be overmastered with a pierce of valiant dust? to make an account of her life to a clod of wayward marl? No: Adam's sons are my brethren, and truly I hold it a sin to match in my kindred.

LEONATA

Daughter, remember what I told you. If the count do solicit you in that kind, you know your answer.

BEATRICE

Hear me, Hero: wooing, wedding, and repenting is as a Scotch jig, a measure, and a cinquepace. The first suit is hot and hasty like a Scotch jig (and full as fantastical); the wedding, mannerly modest, as a measure, full of state and ancientry; and then comes Repentance and with his bad legs falls into the cinquepace faster and faster, till he sink into his grave.

LEONATA

Cousin, you apprehend passing shrewdly.

BEATRICE

I have a good eye, cousin, I can see a church by daylight.

LEONATA

The revelers are entering, brother. Make good room.

(All put on their masks)

(Enter DONNA PEDRA, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, BALTHASAR,
DON JOHN [unmasked], BORACHIO, MARGARET, URSULA
and others, masked)

CLAUDIO

(To HERO)

Lady, will you walk about with your friend?

HERO

So you walk softly and look sweetly and say nothing, I am yours for the walk; and especially when I walk away.

CLAUDIO

With me in your company?

HERO

I may say so when I please.

CLAUDIO

And when please you to say so?

HERO

When I like your favor; for God defend the lute should be like the case!

CLAUDIO

Speak low if you speak love.

(Drawing her aside)

(BORACHIO and MARGARET come forward)

BORACHIO

Well, I would you did like me.

MARGARET

So would not I, for your own sake, for I have many ill-qualities.

BORACHIO

Which is one?

MARGARET

I say my prayers aloud.

BORACHIO

I love you the better. The hearers may cry amen.

MARGARET

God match me with a good dancer!

BORACHIO

Amen.

MARGARET

And God keep him out of my sight when the dance is done!

BORACHIO

No more words.

(They go aside)

(URSULA and ANTONIO come forward)

URSULA

I know you well enough. You are Signor Antonio.

ANTONIO

At a word, I am not.

URSULA

I know you by the wagging of your head.

ANTONIO

To tell you true, I counterfeit him.

URSULA

You could never do him so ill-well unless you were the very man. Here's his dry hand up and down: you are he, you are he.

ANTONIO

At a word, I am not.

URSULA

Come, come, do you think I do not know you by your excellent wit? Can virtue hide itself? Go to, mum, you are he. Graces will appear, and there's an end.

(They go aside)

(BEATRICE and BENEDICK come forward)

BEATRICE

Will you not tell me who you are?

BENEDICK

Not now.

BEATRICE

That I was disdainful. This was Signor Benedick that said so.

BENEDICK

What's he?

BEATRICE

I am sure you know him well enough.

BENEDICK

Not I, believe me.

BEATRICE

Did he never make you laugh?

BENEDICK

I pray you, what is he?

BEATRICE

Why, he is the princess' jester, a very dull fool. He both pleases men and angers them, and then they laugh at him and beat him.

BENEDICK

When I know the gentleman, I'll tell him what you say.

BEATRICE

Do, do.

(Music)

We must follow the leaders.

BENEDICK

In every good thing.

BEATRICE

Nay, if they lead to any ill, I will leave them at the next turning.

(Dance. Then they all exit except DON JOHN, BORACHIO, and CLAUDIO.)

DON JOHN

Sure my sister hath withdrawn to speak with Leonata about Hero. The rest follow but one mask remains.

BORACHIO

And that is Claudio. I know him by his bearing.

DON JOHN

(To CLAUDIO)

Are not you Signor Benedick?

CLAUDIO

You know me well. I am he.

DON JOHN

Signor, you are very near my sister in her favor, but I pray you trust her not. She dissembles to solicit Leonata on behalf of Claudio for the hand of her daughter Hero. But she works on behalf of another, not Claudio.

CLAUDIO

How know you she works for another?

DON JOHN

I heard her speak the plan.

BORACHIO

So did I too, and she would arrange for Hero to marry another. Even tonight.

DON JOHN

Come, let us to the banquet.

(They exit DON JOHN and BORACHIO)

CLAUDIO

Thus answer I in the name of Benedick,
But hear these ill news with the ears of Claudio.
'Tis certain so. The princess speaks for another and not I.
Friendship is constant in all other things
Save in the office and affairs of love.
Therefore, all hearts in love use their own tongues.
Let every eye negotiate for itself
And trust no agent, for beauty is a witch
Against whose charms faith melteth into blood.

This is an accident of hourly proof,
Which I mistrusted not. Farewell therefore, Hero!

(Exits as BENEDICK enters)

BENEDICK

Alas, poor hurt fowl! But, that my Lady Beatrice should know me, and not know me! The princess' fool! Ha! Well, I'll be revenged as I may.

(Re-enter DONNA PEDRA)

DONNA PEDRA

Now, Signor, where's the count? Did you see him?

BENEDICK

I found him here as melancholy as a lodge in a warren.

DONNA PEDRA

The Lady Beatrice hath a quarrel with you. The gentleman that danced with her told her she is much wronged by you.

BENEDICK

O, she misused me past the endurance of a block! An oak but with one green leaf on it would have answered her; my very mask began to assume life and scold with her. She told me, not thinking I had been myself, that I was the princess' jester, that I was duller than a great thaw, huddling jest upon jest with such impossible conveyance upon me that I stood like a man at a mark, with a whole army shooting at me. She speaks daggers, and every word stabs. If her breath were as terrible as her terminations, there were no living near her; she would infect to the North Star. I would not marry her, though she were endowed with all that Adam had before he transgressed. While she is here, a man may live as quiet in hell as in a sanctuary, and people sin upon purpose, because they would go thither. So indeed all disquiet, horror and perturbation follows her.

DONNA PEDRA

Look, here she comes.

(Enter CLAUDIO, BEATRICE, HERO, and LEONATA)

BENEDICK

O God, here's a dish I love not! I cannot endure my Lady Tongue.

(Exit BENEDICK)

DONNA PEDRA

Come, lady, come, you have lost the heart of Signor Benedick.

BEATRICE

Indeed, my lady, he lent it me awhile, and I gave him use for it—a double heart for his single one. Marry, once before he won it of me with false dice; therefore your grace may well say I have lost it.

DONNA PEDRA

You have put him down, lady; you have put him down.

BEATRICE

So I would not he should do me, my lady, lest I should prove the mother of fools. I have brought Count Claudio, whom you sent me to seek.

DONNA PEDRA

Why, how now, count! Wherefore are you sad?

CLAUDIO

Not sad, my lady.

DONNA PEDRA

How then? Sick?

CLAUDIO

Neither, my lady.

BEATRICE

The count is neither sad, nor sick, nor merry, nor well; but civil count—civil as an orange, and something of that jealous complexion.

DONNA PEDRA

In faith, lady, I think your blazon to be true, though I'll be sworn, if he be so, his conceit is false. Here, Claudio, fair Hero is won: I have spoke with her mother, and her good will obtained. name the day of marriage, and God give thee joy!

LEONATA

Count, take of me my daughter, and with her my fortunes. Her grace hath made the match, and I say amen to it.

BEATRICE

Speak, count, 'tis your cue.

CLAUDIO

Silence is the perfectest herald of joy. I were but little happy, if I could say how much.

(To HERO)

Lady, as you are mine, I am yours. I give away myself for you and dote upon the exchange.

BEATRICE

(To HERO)

Speak, cousin, or, if you cannot, stop his mouth with a kiss, and let not him speak neither.

DONNA PEDRA

In faith, lady, you have a merry heart.

BEATRICE

Yea, my lady, I thank it. Poor fool, it keeps on the windy side of care. My cousin tells him in his ear that he is in her heart.

CLAUDIO

And so she doth, cousin.

BEATRICE

Good Lord, for alliance! Thus goes everyone to the world but I, and I may sit in a corner and cry "Heigh-ho for a husband!"

DONNA PEDRA

Lady Beatrice, I will get you one.

BEATRICE

No, my lady; I beseech your grace, pardon me. I was born to speak all mirth and no matter.

DONNA PEDRA

To be merry best becomes you, for out of question you were born in a merry hour.

BEATRICE

No, sure, my lady, my mother cried, but then there was a star danced, and under that was I born.

(To HERO and CLAUDIO)

Cousins, God give you joy!

(Exit BEATRICE)

DONNA PEDRA

By my troth, a pleasant-spirited lady.

LEONATA

There's little of the melancholy element in her, my lady. She is never sad but when she sleeps, and not ever sad then, for I have heard my daughter say she hath often dreamt of unhappiness and waked herself with laughing.

DONNA PEDRA

She cannot endure to hear tell of a husband.

LEONATA

O, by no means! She mocks all her wooers out of suit.

DONNA PEDRA

She were an excellent wife for Benedick.

LEONATA

O Lady, my lady, if they were but a week married, they would talk themselves mad.

DONNA PEDRA

Count Claudio, when mean you to go to church?

CLAUDIO

Tomorrow, my lady. Time goes on crutches till love have all his rites.

LEONATA

Not till Monday, my dear son, which is hence a just sevennight; and a time too brief too, to have all things answer my mind.

DONNA PEDRA

Come, you shake the head at so long a breathing, but, I warrant thee, Claudio, the time shall not go dully by us. I will in the interim undertake one of Hercules' labors, which is, to bring Signor Benedick and the Lady Beatrice into a mountain of affection the one with the other. I would fain have it a match, and I doubt not but to fashion it if you three will but minister such assistance as I shall give you direction.

LEONATA

My lady, I am for you, though it cost me ten nights' watchings.

CLAUDIO

And I, my lady.

DONNA PEDRA

And you too, gentle Hero?

HERO

I will do any modest office, my lady, to help my cousin to a good husband.

DONNA PEDRA

And Benedick is not the unhopefullest husband that I know. Thus far can I praise him: he is of a noble strain, of approved valor, and confirmed honesty. I will teach you how to humor your cousin, that she shall fall in love with Benedick; and I, with your two helps,

(To LEONATA and CLAUDIO)

will so practice on Benedick that, in despite of his quick wit and his queasy stomach, he shall fall in love with Beatrice. If we can do this, Cupid is no longer an archer; his glory shall be ours, for we are the only love gods. Go in with me, and I will tell you my drift.

(They exit)

Scene 2

Setting: The same.

At Rise: Enter DON JOHN and BORACHIO.

DON JOHN

It is so. The Count Claudio shall marry the daughter of Leonata.

BORACHIO

Yea, my lord, but I can cross it.

DON JOHN

Any bar, any cross, any impediment will be medicinable to me. I am sick in displeasure to him. How canst thou cross this marriage?

BORACHIO

Not honestly, my lord, but so covertly that no dishonesty shall appear in me.

DON JOHN

Show me how.

BORACHIO

I think I told your lordship, a year since, how much I am in the favor of Margaret, the waiting gentlewoman to Hero.

DON JOHN

I remember.

BORACHIO

I can, at any unseasonable instant of the night, appoint her to look out at her lady's chamber window.

DON JOHN

What life is in that to be the death of this marriage?

BORACHIO

The poison of that lies in you to temper. Go you to the princess your sister, spare not to tell her that she hath wronged her honor in marrying the renowned Claudio (whose estimation do you mightily hold up) to a contaminated stale, such a one as Hero.

DON JOHN

What proof shall I make of that?

BORACHIO

Proof enough to misuse the princess, to vex Claudio, to undo Hero and kill Leonata. Look you for any other issue?

DON JOHN

Only to despise them I will endeavour anything.

BORACHIO

Go then, find me a meet hour to draw Donna Pedra and the Count Claudio alone, tell them that you know that Hero loves me, intend a kind of zeal both to the princess and Claudio, as, in love of your sister's honor, who hath made this match, and his friend's reputation, who is thus like to be cozened with the semblance of a maid, that you have discovered thus. They will scarcely believe this without trial. Offer them instances, which shall bear no less likelihood than to see me at her chamber window, hear me call Margaret Hero, hear Margaret term me Claudio; and bring them to see this the very night before the intended wedding (for in the meantime I will so fashion the matter that Hero shall be absent) and there shall appear such seeming truth of Hero's disloyalty that jealousy shall be called assurance and all the preparation overthrown.

DON JOHN

Grow this to what adverse issue it can, I will put it in practice. Be cunning in the working this, and thy fee is a thousand ducats.

BORACHIO

Be you constant in the accusation, and my cunning shall not shame me.

DON JOHN

I will presently go learn their day of marriage.

(They exit)