

ACT I, SCENE I. Before LEONATO'S house.

Enter LEONATO, HERO, BEATRICE and a Messenger

LEONATO

I learn in this letter that Don Peter of Arragon comes this night to Messina.

Messenger

He is very near by this: he was not three leagues off when I left him.

BEATRICE

I pray you, is Signior Mountanto returned from the wars or no?

Messenger

I know none of that name, lady.

HERO

My cousin means Signior Benedick of Padua.

Messenger

O, he's returned.

BEATRICE

I pray you, how many hath he killed and eaten in these wars?
But how many hath he killed? For indeed I promised to eat all of his killing.

Messenger

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

LEONATO

You must not, sir, mistake my niece. There is a kind of merry war betwixt Signior Benedick and her:
they never meet but there's a skirmish of wit between them.

Messenger

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

BEATRICE

No; an he were, I would burn my study. But, I pray you,
who is his companion?

Messenger

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

BEATRICE

God help the noble Claudio!

Enter DON PEDRO, DON JOHN, CLAUDIO and BENEDICK

DON PEDRO

Good Signior Leonato! I think this is your daughter.

LEONATO

Her mother hath many times told me so.

BENEDICK

Were you in doubt, sir, that you asked her?

BEATRICE

I wonder that you will be talking, Signior Benedick: nobody marks you.

BENEDICK

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 Signior Benedick?

BENEDICK

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. 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, an 'twere such a face as yours were.

BENEDICK

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

BEATRICE

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

DON PEDRO

That is the sum of all, Leonato. Signior Claudio and Signior Benedick, my dear friend Leonato hath invited you all.

LEONATO

Please it your grace lead on?

Exeunt all except BENEDICK and CLAUDIO

3

CLAUDIO

Benedick, didst thou note the daughter of Signior Leonato? Is she not a modest young lady?

BENEDICK

Why, i' faith, methinks she's too low for a high praise and too little for a great praise. I do not like her.

CLAUDIO

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

BENEDICK

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? Look Don Pedro is returned to seek you.

Re-enter DON PEDRO

DON PEDRO

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

BENEDICK

He is in love. With who? Now that is your grace's part. Mark how short his answer is; with Hero, Leonato's short daughter.

DON PEDRO

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

CLAUDIO

That I love her, I feel.

DON PEDRO

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.

DON PEDRO

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

BENEDICK

With anger, with sickness, or with hunger, my lord, not with love.

DON PEDRO

In the meantime, good Signior Benedick, repair to Leonato's: commend me to him and tell him I will not fail him at supper.

BENEDICK

I have almost matter enough in me for such an embassy; and so I leave you.

Exit

CLAUDIO

Hath Leonato any son, my lord?

DON PEDRO

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

CLAUDIO

O, my lord,
When you went onward on this ended action,
I look'd upon her with a soldier's eye,
That liked, but had a rougher task in hand
Than to drive liking to the name of love:
But now I am return'd and that war-thoughts
Have left their places vacant, in their rooms
Come thronging soft and delicate desires,
All prompting me how fair young Hero is.

DON PEDRO

If thou dost love fair Hero, cherish it,
And I will break with her and with her father.
I know we shall have revelling to-night:
I will assume thy part in some disguise
And tell fair Hero I am Claudio,
And in her bosom I'll unclasp my heart
Then after to her father will I break;
And the conclusion is, she shall be thine.
In practise let us put it presently.

Exeunt

4

ACT I, SCENE II*. A room in LEONATO's house.

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

I cannot hide what I am: I must be sad when I have cause.

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
brother, and he hath ta'en you newly into his grace.

DON JOHN

I had rather be a canker in a hedge than a rose in
his grace. It must not be denied but I am a plain-dealing
villain. Let me be that I am and seek not to alter me.

Enter BORACHIO

What news, Borachio?