

## Much Ado About Nothing Introduction

This guide is to encourage high school teachers to mount a production of the SOL, *Much Ado About Nothing*.

I recently re-watched Kenneth Branagh's film, *Much Ado About Nothing*. I estimate it to contain about 47% of the original text. My SOL version has 54%. Branagh's film has many fine qualities and a few Hollywood clichés as well. Since it was so popular I am going to reference it occasionally through this guide, assuming readers have seen it. It is easy to buy and basic homework for anyone directing the play.

The SOL *Much Ado About Nothing* is the most heavily vacuumed play and the shortest script of the twelve-play series. It was also the first - I created it for a specific middle school. I have directed this SOL version at that school and my children's high school. I seem to remember it running about 75 minutes, with the characters thinking and speaking quickly. I have understudied Leonato and played Borachio at Stratford; I also played Claudio at the University of British Columbia. I have seen many wonderful performances of the play, as well. There is actually much ado about lots, in this play.

As with any production of any play, casting is critical. Matching the qualities of actors with the qualities of the characters, as well as pairing the actors well, actually creates most of the magic of any production. Casting is the director's primary job and what makes every new production valid. For a high school production of this play, if you have a large-spirited, brilliant female student, that is possessed of Dogberry's pontifical swagger and lust for life and status, I say, 'Give her the role!' Dress her as a man, maybe even give her a full beard, and let her have a go. I don't favor actually changing the sex of many characters, although both Balthasar and Friar Francis could easily be females, but since a high school group is likely to have more females than males, just let them do what Shakespeare did: disguise one sex as another. I recently saw an all-female *The Winter's Tale* here in Vancouver that was delightful and quite moving. The beards completely transformed the female faces. I found it all stimulating and provocative. An actor's ability to think, speak and understand any Shakespearean role is all that really matters. The wonder will always be in the words. Cast the actors who invent Shakespeare's words the best.

If you have the time and the inclination you can read the unabridged *Much Ado About Nothing* aloud with your cast. It is actually topically and linguistically very dense. Some of your students might appreciate the multitude of decisions necessary in creating the *Shakespeare Out Loud* scripts. Perhaps they would like to try reshaping one for themselves. If you have an aspiring director who you get on well with, and who doesn't want to act, keep that person close to you. Use their good ideas, and let them take occasional secondary rehearsals or line-runs. Lots of people might have ideas. Steal from everyone. Nurture them all. Using the SOL script is your best, first choice. An SOL script will facilitate you making all your other choices. This guide is what I have learned acting in the play and directing this script with teenagers. My intention is that it may help you share a wonderful Shakespearean experience with a group of young people.

After the sumptuous poem/song by Emma Thompson, as rich a passage as any in the film, Branagh begins the action of his Hollywood version of *Much Ado About Nothing* with shots of our heroes returning, all saluting in unison at full gallop. The montage that follows of two huge simultaneous baths filled with excited, naked, young men and women preparing to celebrate, is my most enduring memory of the film, and Hollywood at its storytelling clearest and sexiest. Don't let your cast blame me for not including this scene in the SOL script. Besides, I suggest a small pond or stream downstage of your set anyway. Do as you will.

I once watched the film of *Little Foxes* before rehearsing a production. My poor director - I wasted the first two weeks of rehearsal just erasing what the film had imprinted upon me. I would therefore suggest that your young actors not watch Branagh's film. While there are many admirable performances, Billy Crystal's Dogberry was total nonsense and Kennu Reeves' Don John was one boring note. You don't want young actors emulating mislead or incompetent movie stars; they can interpret, and play, the SOL *Much Ado About Nothing* all on their own. I will discuss the film with you primarily as a way of comparing choices.

As with working on all of Shakespeare's plays we need to, what I call, assume some complexities. Elizabethans accepted, nay encouraged, behavior different than our own. To us Dogberry's social position seems disproportionately important to him. Hero's virginity and good name are worth more to Leonato's than all his wealth. Duels were deadly and men often died fighting them. It would not be uncommon for several young women to be raised in the house of one wealthy man. Elizabethans lived comparatively short, violent and intoxicated lives. Stuff like that! Complexity explains much. It is when directors try to make it all simple for their *supposedly stupid* audiences that it stops making sense.

In vacuuming the character of Antonio I have left Leonato as the sole male in charge of four young women and a child/maid. (For my son's high school production, my young daughter was hanging about and became Nell, the young servant who loved to do scene changes and carry around her cat, Romeo.) She is the only character added to the 12-play series and Antonio the only principal part cut. So Leonato, alone, actually maintains and protects a stable of five young women in the SOL version. To succeed at such responsibilities he may choose to be very alert or slightly intoxicated through the action of the play. He may try a bit of both. My vacuuming has intensified his position of single parent and sole protector. Perhaps it is because I am the right age for the role, or perhaps it is because I have raised a daughter by myself, but the dynamics of such a family, without a mature female, intrigue me. Also, Leonato may exist in a comedy, but from the church-scene until the resolution, his thoughts and emotions appear more like those of Titus or Lear. Leonato is a most challenging role.

We might assume a natural pecking order among the young women of Leonato's daughter Hero, his niece Beatrice, then the two gentlewomen Ursula and Margaret. Margaret has spirit and appetites, and her lowest position might afford her easier access to the odd roaming soldier. We might wonder about the experiences of Beatrice and Ursula, but Hero is most definitely a virgin, a state highly prized and guarded by her father, Leonato. No birth control is really the main assumed complexity of Elizabethan life, that and the odd outbreak of the bubonic plague.

Borachio and Conrad follow Don John purely for economic reasons and are redeemable. Borachio repents his deeds and Conrad does no real harm. I had Conrad dancing with Ursula at the masqued ball, when I did the show with kids. I also color-coded the couples: Conrad and Ursula both wore yellow. Margaret and Borachio got red, Hero/Claudio were in white, of course, and Benedick/Beatrice fancied blue. These colors made it possible to visually pair the couples and keep everyone clear when they were wearing masks, lurking in shadows, or twisting plots. Don Pedro alone wore Royal Purple, with Don John trying to dominate black. Three arches in the back wall worked very well for all comings and goings, hidings and high jinx. I also like to imagine a creek downstage for the gulling of Beatrice. Simple furniture, maybe a box tree, benches and props are then all you need. Wine might flow freely at Leonato's.

We learn from the play that Don Pedro has pursued his rebellious brother, Don John, from his home in Aragon, Spain, all the way down Italy, crossed over to Messina in Sicily, stayed with Leonato briefly, then kept pursuing Don John till they had a small battle. We meet Don Pedro, his captured brother and his victorious soldiers in Messina again, as they are about to cross over to Italy and head northwards towards Spain. They decide to stay a month with Leonato first. It is conceivable that after the events of the play Claudio might end up taking Hero to Florence, as Benedick whisks Beatrice away to his family in Padua. Don Pedro might be left with his troubled brother, no close friends and no wife. There is a price to be paid for being prince.

While it is tempting to make Hero's affection towards Claudio obvious and publicly known as in the film, I am not sure this is the best choice. Besides, we don't know that yet. Hero possibly has been a bit smitten upon first meeting Claudio but perhaps his visit was brief and since he was so fixated on war, she never got the chance to express her affections. Beatrice likely knows of Hero's feelings yet well knows how such aspirations can be easily dashed. Hero might just be in silent turmoil until she sees Claudio again and knows whether he might care for her. Well guarded secrets are interesting for an intelligent audience. Well guarded secrets depict life.

I was very fortunate to be Borachio in a Stratford production starring Maggie Smith and Brian Bedford. One day after several previews Robyn, our director, pointed out that their brilliance wasn't just in the delivery of lines, but how they accepted them. They could both pitch and catch. These two extraordinary actors got as many laughs listening to each other and thinking, as they did speaking. They allowed themselves to be wounded before striking back. The unabridged text also suggests that Beatrice and Benedick got somewhat close before Benedick left to fight, but something went wrong. I imagine they both got hurt over some slight misunderstanding and are now both fragile and wary. Besides, they are both bright and proud, and neither likes being controlled or rejected by the opposite sex.

**Act 1, Scene 1 Messina - before Leonato's house****(LEONATO, BEATRICE, HERO, URSULA, MARGARET, MESSENGER and NELL)**

There is a choice to be made about what everyone is doing before the messenger arrives. They can be all listening to poetry, playing backgammon and eating grapes as in the film, or perhaps a bugle and the messenger's arrival brings them all scurrying from their various duties. Perhaps everyone works hard for their good life at Leonato's

**LEONATO**

**I learn in this letter that Don Pedro comes this night to Messina.**

**MESSENGER**

**He was not three leagues\* off when I left him.**

Since the battle was so swift everyone might be quite surprised at Don Pedro's imminent arrival.

**LEONATO**

**How many gentlemen have you lost in this battle?**

**MESSENGER**

**Few of any sort, and none of name.**

That is good, but still, some men have died.

**LEONATO**

**A victory is twice itself when the achiever brings home full numbers.**

**I find here that Don Pedro hath bestowed much honor on a young Florentine called Claudio.**

So, this is the choice. Does Leonato know of Hero's wishes or not? I say no. She may not be sure of them. Don't start by making the world all lovey-dovey from the beginning. They are returning from a battle.

**MESSENGER**

**He hath borne himself beyond the promise of his age, doing in the figure of a lamb the feats of a lion.**

So the hackneyed response for Hero would now be to smile, jump up and down, and clap her hands for her hero. A more realistic and moving response might include some stillness, a bit of wonder that such a sweet youth could actually kill others, and perhaps a worry that her new war-hero might now disdain women and a domestic existence. There is nothing in the text that says any promises have yet been made. Starting Hero with just some hope and no real promise then allows Claudio to experience an almost miraculous revelation of his feelings towards her. The same can happen to her when Don Pedro makes his proposal. Romance can just burst into bloom, right in front of us. It happens.

**LEONATO**

**He hath an uncle here in Messina will be very much glad of it.**

He might find that fact in the letter or pluck it from his faint memory. It is likely that Don Pedro stopped only briefly while pursuing Don John. All these soldiers and their relationships may remain a bit fuzzy for Leonato. Anyway, before he can begin to pursue who this Claudio actually is...

**BEATRICE**

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

**MESSENGER**

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

**LEONATO**

What is he that you ask for, niece?

**HERO**

My cousin means Signior Benedick of Padua.

**MESSENGER**

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

Before we even meet him Benedick, he is characterized as the funny guy of the group, the one with the good lines and quick wit. It is not always easy maintaining such a reputation - people expect you to be *on* all the time. (I spent two summers playing Edgar to Peter Ustinov's *King Lear* at Stratford. Peter was famous worldwide. People would always encircle him with stupid grins on their faces, just dying to laugh at whatever he chose to say. He would unfailingly and gracefully oblige. He spent a lot of himself in such a manner.)

**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.

**LEONATO**

Faith niece, you tax Signior Benedick too much. But he'll be meet\* with you, I doubt it not.  
You must not sir, mistake my niece. There is a kind of merry war between Signior Benedick and her.  
They never meet but there's a skirmish of wit between them.

They never meet implies more than one meeting between them. Perhaps Benedick has served with Don Pedro for a while.

**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.

**MESSENGER**

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

**BEATRICE**

No. And he were, I would burn my study.

It is interesting that Beatrice needs to get in first licks without Benedick even being present to protect himself. Perhaps she is holding a bit of a grudge.

**MESSENGER**

I will stay friends with you, lady.

**BEATRICE**

Do, good friend.

**LEONATO**

Don Pedro is approaching.

Perhaps Leonato doesn't know of Hero's affection but Beatrice does. Even with communicative and open daughters, fathers know about 10% of what is actually going on. Hero will be happy to see her father impressed with her secret love's accomplishments. We don't need large Bugs Bunny signs saying, "HERO LOVES CLAUDIO," Claudio later tells Don Pedro that he didn't really appreciate Hero before he left because he was thinking of the coming battle. She can't, therefore, have been sure of his affections. She is just hoping and trying not to get hurt! If she is GONZO for him with no outward encouragement, she is stupid. We don't want that. Hollywood specializes in stupid. Your audience has come to your production because they are smart, because they like unearthing secrets.

**(Enter DON PEDRO, DON JOHN, BORACHIO, CONRADE, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, BALTHASAR and soldiers.)**

If you are going to do the songs in Shakespearean plays they should be painfully beautiful. Why not? Balthasar can be anyone, male or female. Cast the student with the sweetest voice in the school, and don't take no for an answer. Then, treasure them!

**DON PEDRO**

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

*Meet your trouble* demonstrates that Don Pedro is well aware of the burden he brings to Leonato again. This burden might seem heightened since it is so soon after their departure. The house may just be getting back to normal. Since our version starts with no baths, perhaps this scene is more about meeting exhausted soldiers and a ragged, overworked household. We don't experience the pleasurable Messina until after dinner.

**LEONATO**

**Never came trouble to my house in the likeness of your grace.**

**DON PEDRO**

**You embrace your charge\* too willingly.  
I think this is your daughter.**

If he is not sure of who Hero is, his initial visit must have been very brief.

**LEONATO**

**Her mother hath many times told me so.**

I am assuming that Hero's mother, Leonato's wife, has passed away, and this is joke has a wistfulness about it.

**BENEDICK**

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

**LEONATO**

**Signior Benedick, no; for then were you a child.**

This is a joke about Benedick being a rogue with the ladies, because of his wit, and yet as we learn of his character we might expect him to actually be a most faithful friend or lover.

**(LEONATO and DON PEDRO draw aside in private conversation.)**

**BENEDICK**

If Signior Leonato be her father, she would not have his head on her shoulders for all Messina.

**BEATRICE**

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

**BENEDICK**

My dear Lady Disdain. Are you yet living?

**BEATRICE**

Is it possible disdain should die while she hath such meet\* food to feed her 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. They would else have been troubled with a pernicious\* suitor.  
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 escape a predestinate scratched face.

**BEATRICE**

Scratching could not make it worse, and '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, and so good a continuer.  
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.

As in the film, this small scene needs to be briefly private. Since everyone knows one another, combining together in small groups upstage speaking privately should look quite natural. While this skirmish happens privately, Claudio becomes smitten with Hero - perhaps it is just a smile, perhaps a brief hello and chat with Hero and Ursula. Cupid's arrow however, pierces his heart dead centre, and that is it! He is in love, just like in the movies.

The best Claudio I ever saw was at Ashland Oregon. He was so moony, so young in his affections that it could be painful just watching him stand around by himself. He was as vulnerable as a baby. Your cutest male student who has no guile might make a fine Claudio. Branagh's Claudio is quite wonderful! He gives a lovely performance, as does Hero, as does the whole household, except Antonio, who I have cut anyway. Branagh's Antonio does way too much laughing-acting for my taste. I quite loathe groups of actors doing group-laughter in Shakespearean productions. Actors should always laugh as individuals think, and let those collective thoughts be the sound of the group.

I have seen countless productions where Beatrice and Benedick just dole out pain by hammering away at one another, without listening. I never believe that they fall in love because they are never vulnerable, they never get hurt. When they listen keenly I understand that they are using

their words and their wit to primarily protect themselves, not to attack. The B&Bs that have bored me over the years always seemed to be thinking, “How do I get him/her back?” The ones that have interested me have invariably dwelt upon, “Ow, that hurt.”

**DON PEDRO**

**That is the sum of all, Leonato.**

**Signior Claudio and Signior Benedick, my dear friend Leonato hath again invited you all.**

**I tell him we shall stay here at least a month,  
and he heartily prays some occasion may detain us longer.**

That month could just make Claudio’s heart start pounding!

I am going to digress here for a moment. I know this dramatically, but I mainly know this from life - whenever a big change just happens to me, I invariably go very still. Why? I need to focus my mind completely on how that change is going to affect my future, or my family’s future, or my survival. I waste no energy moving, I just think. Claudio is doing that now; he is re-examining everything. We don’t need to tell an audience anything; they may not even notice his behavior until later in the story, until they think back. This is something that smart audiences love to do. When they learn that a production merits it, they will go back repeatedly, identifying the silences, searching them for the secrets hiding within.

Because unabridged texts are so dense, directors who won’t cut their *pure* productions often assume we won’t understand such complexity unless their actors employ a heightened style, a demonstration style, a style of large gestures, slow speech and lots of volume, a style with no secrets - *Shakespeare for Dummies*. Pivotal moments of real change in a character’s life are then expressed with even larger movements, more dramatic biz, increased vocal volume, or the truly desperate, dramatic musical underscoring. Paradoxically, the more archaic and *authentic* a script, the more likely it will resemble a cartoon in performance.

The SOL scripts allow for clear, quick and unpredictable thinking and speaking. The text can move quickly, and clearly, and the silences can be filled with thought. It all should be filled with thought. With no archaic babble blocking our paths, we actors can now employ all our energies specifying our thoughts, strengthening our connections, layering our inner worlds and guarding our secrets. The SOL scripts even encourage us to be still.

**LEONATO**

**(To DON JOHN.) Let me bid you welcome, my lord.  
Being reconciled to the Prince your brother, I owe you all duty.**

**DON JOHN**

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

Kennu Reeves as Don John is a perfect example of that wretched, cartoon acting style, I loathe. I would have rather cast Wile E Coyote. I marvel that Branagh could create such a brilliant film as *Hamlet* and yet allow this performance in his *Much Ado*. Perhaps he has trouble directing big film stars. Jack Lemmon’s Marcellus in *Hamlet* was also overdone and weak. His stage actors perform wonderfully under his direction. Beatrice soon accuses Don John of giving her *heartburn*. *Heartburn* the text supports, not the *gallbladder cancer* of a performance that Reeves provides. If your young student actor tries to emulate Reeves, strangle him.

**LEONATO**

Please it your grace lead on?

**DON PEDRO**

Your hand Leonato; we will go together.

This little interchange reinforces the fact that Don Pedro is Leonato's leige lord and entitled to his allegiance and service.

(Exeunt all except **BENEDICK** and **CLAUDIO**.)

The best Don John I ever saw was in that Stratford production. Nicholas Pennel played the part and while nothing was overt, I think Nicky decided that Don John was gay. All the heterosexual coupling and happiness made him sick and he was going to make everyone pay. Nothing was overt but his distemper and viciousness had an underlying unity. It was a classy, subtle performance. It made sense. Whoever is cast, Don John is an outsider in the world of Messina. If you have a student who makes an art of being a malcontent, Don John may be the perfect role to keep them happy and occupied.

**CLAUDIO**

Benedick, didst thou note the daughter of Signior Leonato?

**BENEDICK**

I noted her not; but I looked on her.

**CLAUDIO**

Is she not a modest young lady?

**BENEDICK**

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, methinks she's too low for a high 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 thinkst I am in sport. I pray thee, tell me how thou truly lik'st 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.

If Claudio has never mentioned Hero to Benedick he couldn't have given Hero that much to hope for before he left. See how one decision to make Hero gushy and dumb at the beginning, and the plot all easy for your *stupid* audience, can skew several performances or relationships?

**BENEDICK**

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

possessed with a fury might not be a bad phrase for the actress playing Beatrice to consider well. It is so often the males in Shakespeare who are accused of such traits.

How can one not love a writer who just allows truth to surface like that? For all of his dueling with Beatrice, Shakespeare also allows Benedick (granted in a snide way) to reveal that he finds her beautiful.

**But I hope you have no intent to turn husband, have you?**

**CLAUDIO**

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

**BENEDICK**

Is it come to this? Hath not the world one man but he will wear his cap with suspicion?\*

*Wearing a cap with suspicion* has to do with being a cuckold. Has Benedick already been hurt by an unfaithful woman? Does he know others who have been hurt? He seems a bit fragile.

Shall I never see a bachelor of threescore\* again?

Look, Don Pedro is returned to seek you.

**DON PEDRO**

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

**BENEDICK**

I would your Grace would constrain\* me to tell.

**DON PEDRO**

I charge you on your 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? 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**

You speak this to fetch me in my lord.

**DON PEDRO**

By my troth,\* I speak my thought.

**CLAUDIO**

And in faith, my lord, I spoke mine.

**BENEDICK**

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

**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 live a bachelor.

**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.  
Prove that ever I lose more blood with love than I will get again with drinking,  
pick out my eyes with a ballad maker's pen and hang me up at the door of a tavern for the sign of blind Cupid.

**DON PEDRO**

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.

The more Beatrice and Benedick rail against the opposite sex the more I suspect that they have been hurt and are determined to protect themselves. They are both impressive people with good right to be proud. Perhaps needing others feels like a weakness to them.

**DON PEDRO**

Well, as time shall try.\*  
Good Signior Benedick, repair to Leonato's. (piss off)  
Commend me to him and tell him I will not fail him at supper.

**BENEDICK**

I leave you. (heart-mockingly)

(Exit **BENEDICK**.)

**CLAUDIO**

Hath Leonato any son, my lord?

That is a pretty hard-nosed question. Claudio may be young in love, but perhaps less young in ways of the world. Perhaps he visited his uncle on his initial way through and was told that Leonato is loaded.

**DON PEDRO**

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

**CLAUDIO**

My lord, when you went to fight this battle, I looked 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 returned and war-thoughts having left their places vacant,  
in their rooms come thronging soft and delicate desires, all prompting me how fair young Hero is.

So, that is clear - **thronging soft and delicate desires**. In purely human terms, it is likely that young men returning from fighting would be very vulnerable to the imperative of reproducing, as would the females. **WHATEVER!** Claudio is now officially in love!

**DON PEDRO**

If thou dost love fair Hero, cherish it, and I will break\* with her and with her father, and thou shalt have her.  
Was it not to this end that thou began'st to twist so fine a story?

**CLAUDIO**

How sweetly you do minister to love.

Claudio is grateful but might also be slightly surprised at this plan of action. That word **sweetly** may have a dash of wonder in it.

**DON PEDRO**

I know we shall have revelling tonight.

I will assume thy part in some disguise and tell fair Hero I am Claudio, and in her bosom I'll unclasp your heart.

Then after to her father will I break,\* and the conclusion is, she shall be thine.

In practice let us put it presently.

So the clichéd exit has Don Pedro clapping Claudio on the back and them both chuckling their way offstage. While Don Pedro may be full of enthusiasm, Claudio may still be chewing on how his prince expects it all will work. Don Pedro is going to just woo her with a mask on? OK. Will that work? Isn't that Claudio's job?

(Exeunt.)

So, Don Pedro, the plot-engine of this play, assumes control. In another life he might get to be a real matchmaker. A caring ruler, he takes control so swiftly to protect his fragile and innocent young Achilles from stumbling and hurting himself. He was born for this role; in Wikipedia his picture is linked to the page for *charm*.

**Act 1, Scene 3 Leonato's house**

(DON JOHN and CONRADE.)

This really is a dreadful scene in the movie. Not only is the whole scene underscored with scary villain-music, Kennu Reeves does nothing but take off his shirt while trying to act *I am a bad, bad man*. The fact that I missed his *Hamlet* at the MTC in Winnipeg has never bothered me. And admittedly, I loved him as Neo in *The Matrix*.

**CONRADE**

Why are you thus out of measure\* sad?

This is a reasonable question. All of Don John's behavior seems **out of measure**.

**DON JOHN**

I cannot hide what I am.

Perhaps he has tried through life and never been successful. Perhaps having such a lenient older brother has facilitated his habitual negativity.

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;  
laugh when I am merry, and claw\* no man in his humor.  
And though I cannot be said to be a flattering honest man,  
it must not be denied that I am a plain-dealing villain.

**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 taken you newly into his grace,  
where it is impossible you should take true root but by the fair weather that you make yourself.

This is good advice for Don John but will also make Conrade's life easier and more profitable.

**DON JOHN**

I had rather be a canker\* in a hedge, than a rose in his grace.  
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.

The text doesn't give us any solid reason why Don John should so hate his brother, but he obviously does. The actor needs to give himself reasons, and then let those reasons fester and grow. Perhaps like Edmund in *King Lear*, he primarily hates Don Pedro for getting all the lands.

(Enter BORACHIO.)

What news, Borachio?

Perhaps Don John expect no good news and then is genuinely pleased with an unexpected opportunity to wreak some havoc

**BORACHIO**

I came yonder from a great supper, 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 brother's right hand.

Borachio may be taking some pleasure in baiting his boss with such news. I remember Nicky stirring at right hand.

**DON JOHN**

Who, the most exquisite Claudio?

As I remember Nicky also squeezed quite a bit out of that one, brief word, *exquisite*.

**BORACHIO**

Even he.

**DON JOHN**

And who? And who? Which way looks he?

**BORACHIO**

Marry, on Hero, the daughter and heir of Leonato.

**DON JOHN**

A very forward March-chick.\*

So interesting how Don John accuses the pure Hero of forwardness. He may be jealous of her freedom.

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.

Conrade is actually a rather stylish part. He says little, but most of what he says drips with sarcasm.

**DON JOHN**

Let us to the great supper. Their cheer is the greater that I am subdued.

Would the cook were of my mind.\*

Good old poison!

Shall we go prove what's to be done?

**BORACHIO**

We'll wait upon your lordship.

We are your servants...until we find more gainful employment.

(Exeunt DON JOHN, BORACHIO and CONRADE.)

## Act 2, Scene 1 Leonato's house

(LEONATO, HERO and BEATRICE.)

**LEONATO**

Was not Count John here at supper?

**HERO**

I saw him not.

There is enough of a crowd for someone not to be seen. I think Leonato drinks and eats well at home. That's probably the deal with the girls - he keeps them available, protected and moving forward with their lives, and they keep him well fed and comfy.

**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.

Nicky used tartly. I never can see him could imply that Beatrice has had former social interaction with Don John, as though she knows the brother that Don Pedro has pursued down the length of Italy. Leonato seems to owe fealty to Don Pedro so perhaps the households intermingled somewhat regularly, perhaps seasonally. If Don Pedro seems very lenient towards his rebellious brother, perhaps it is because of the great family landholdings that need to be titled or administered. I have seen productions where, for strong soldier-design reasons, Claudio, Benedick and Don Pedro are all dressed alike. This blurs Don Pedro's role in the plot and is a mistake. Don Pedro is a prince and far, far wealthier than everyone else.

**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.\*

**LEONATO**

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

**BEATRICE**

With a good leg, and money enough in his purse, such a man would win any woman in the world.

**LEONATO**

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

His job is to get them all happily married off!

**BEATRICE:**

For the which blessing I am 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 woollen.\*

**LEONATO**

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.

**LEONATO**

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 piece of valiant dust, to make account of her life to a clod of wayward marl?\*

No, uncle, I'll none.

“I hear you, Beatrice!” As so often happens, even today, an intelligent, attractive young woman might be bound to a brutish or stupid man. As the single parent of a female engineer I am fully in Beatrice’s camp. “Wait for a decent catch!”

**LEONATO**

Niece, you apprehend shrewdly.

**BEATRICE**

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

**HERO**

The revellers are entering.

*(All put on their masks.)*

*(Enter DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, DON JOHN, BORACHIO, MARGARET, URSULA and others, masked. The dance begins.)*

**DON PEDRO**

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.

**DON PEDRO**

With me in your company?

**HERO**

I may say so when I please.

**DON PEDRO**

And when please you to say so?

**HERO**

When I like your face, for God defend the lute\* should be like the case.\*

I suppose that implies a rather brutish or perhaps sexual mask. There is nothing wrong with Hero being slightly coquettish during this dance. That is what the masks are for. Besides, she might be hoping that Claudio will dance with her!

**DON PEDRO**

Speak low if you speak love. *(Drawing her aside.)*

**BORACHIO**

Well, I would you did like me.

**MARGARET**

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

Margaret is one of Shakespeare’s best flirts!

**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. (or sex-partner)

**BORACHIO**  
Amen.

**MARGARET**  
And God keep him out of my sight when the dance is done! Answer, clerk.\* (We won't get caught.)

**BORACHIO**  
No more words. (*They step aside.*)

They are likely now going to go find some place to have some form of sex, maybe just some necking. They are both party animals and this is a good party! Through the plot of this play, Margaret plays an essential role. The fact that she doesn't speak up in the church scene implies she might feel a some guilt about her risky and perhaps addictive sexual behavior.

**BEATRICE**  
Will you not tell me who told you so?

**BENEDICK**  
No, you shall pardon me.

**BEATRICE**  
Nor will you not tell me who you are?

**BENEDICK**  
Not now.

**BEATRICE**  
That I was disdainful? Well this was Signior 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 Prince's jester, a very dull fool.  
His only gift is in devising impossible slanders.  
None but libertines\* delight in him;  
and the commendation is not in his wit, but in his villainy;  
for he both pleases men and angers them, and then they laugh at him and beat him.  
I am sure he is in the fleet. I would he had boarded me.

**BENEDICK**

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

**BEATRICE**

Do, do. He'll but break a comparison\* or two on me;  
which peradventure, not marked or not laughed at, strikes him into a melancholy;  
and then there's a partridge wing saved, for the fool will eat no supper that night.  
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.

They do this scene rather well in the film. This is very simple but must be clear: *Benedick thinks his disguise is perfect; Beatrice knows that it is him.* Benedick should, as did Branagh, attempt a broad accent to disguise himself further. The Prince's jester then stings! It hurts! We will speak more of conventions, especially with the two gulling scenes coming up. Amateur directors constantly fool with them to the cancerous detriment of their productions. They are gifts from Shakespeare; don't mess with them. *She knows it is him and he thinks he is disguised!*

*(Dance concludes.)*

*(All exit except DON JOHN, BORACHIO and CLAUDIO.)*

**DON JOHN**

Are not you Signior Benedick?

**CLAUDIO** *(still masked.)*

You know me well, I am he.

Now Claudio is impersonating Benedick behind his mask. These masks facilitate a lot of plot! Thank the Italians!

**DON JOHN**

Signior, you are very near my brother in love.

He is enamored of Hero. I pray you dissuade him from her as she is no equal to his birth.

It is helpful if Claudio also watches Don Pedro wooing Hero from a distance, then perhaps watches them disappear just before Don John descends. He is young enough that any man touching his beloved wrenches at his guts. Don Pedro is likely having a ball, employing all his considerable charms, while assisting his young friend. Hero could hardly be resisting.

**CLAUDIO**

How know you he loves her?

**DON JOHN**

I heard him swear his affection.

**BORACHIO**

So did I too, and swore he would marry her tonight.

**DON JOHN**

Come, let us to the banquet.

*(Exeunt 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 Prince woos for himself.

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.

Farewell therefore Hero.

The young essence of Claudio is right here in this speech. His lack of knowledge about the females of his species, his idealization of them leaves him completely vulnerable to Don John's machinations. Our young lion is being brought low by his first sip of jealousy.

**BENEDICK**

Count Claudio?

**CLAUDIO**

Yea, the same.

**BENEDICK**

Come, will you go with me?

**CLAUDIO**

Whither?

**BENEDICK**

About your own business, for the Prince hath got your Hero.

**CLAUDIO**

I wish him joy of her.

**BENEDICK**

Did you think the Prince would have served you thus?

As far as Benedick is concerned the plan has worked. He is genuinely surprised to encounter the childish jealousy of Claudio.

**CLAUDIO**

I pray you, leave me.

**BENEDICK**

Ho! Now you strike like the blind man.

**CLAUDIO**

If you'll not leave me, I'll leave you.

*(Exit CLAUDIO.)*

**BENEDICK**

Alas, poor hurt fowl. Now will he creep into sedges.\*

But that my Lady Beatrice should know me, and not know me!

The Prince's fool! Ha! It may be I go under that title because I am merry.

Nay, I am not so reputed. It is the bitter disposition of Beatrice that so gives me out.

Well, I'll be revenged as I may.

gives me out. Since Beatrice obviously didn't know it was him she is openly mocking him as the Prince's Jester to anyone - a public mocking. She also gets him with some truth, *The Prince's fool*. Kept close because he is so entertaining, does afford Benedick an easier life. Perhaps it is truth Benedick is not wholly proud of; perhaps he would like to be in full control of his own destiny. When Hero later skewers Beatrice for her poison tongue we might think back to the accuracy of this particular barb. Benedick's painful reaction determines its accuracy and potency.

*(Enter DON PEDRO.)*

**DON PEDRO**

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!  
She told me, not thinking I had been myself, that I was the Prince's jester, that I was duller than a great thaw;\*  
huddling jest upon jest, that I stood like a man at a mark,\* with a whole army shooting at me.  
She speaks poniards,\* 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.

*(Enter CLAUDIO, BEATRICE, HERO and LEONATO.)*

**DON PEDRO**

Look, here she comes.

**BENEDICK**

Will your grace command me to any service to the world's end?  
I will go on the slightest errand now to the Antipodes;\*  
I will fetch you a toothpicker now from the furthest inch of Asia;  
fetch you a hair off the Great Cham's\* beard;  
do you any embassy to the Pigmies, rather than hold three words conference with this harpy.\*  
You have no employment for me?

**DON PEDRO**

None but to desire your good company.

**BENEDICK**

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

*(Exit BENEDICK.)*

I loved Brian Bedford's Benedick. He played all the conventions right down the middle. With the masks he totally believed that Beatrice was spreading vicious rumors about him to everyone. Sure, he used these last two speeches to entertain his prince, but his admissions cost his pride, and he left the stage still smarting!

So maintaining the mask convention well, allows Benedick to be severely hurt by Beatrice's barb, and also supports Hero's criticism of her cousin's nasty tongue. Even Beatrice's own almost instant repudiation of her past behavior begins to make sense. It all makes sense if Benedick feels the pain and no one tries to adjust or improve the mask-rules.

**DON PEDRO**

Come lady, come; you have lost the heart of Signior Benedick.  
You have put him down lady, you have put him down.

**BEATRICE**

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

**DON PEDRO**

How now Count, wherefore are you sad?

**CLAUDIO**

Not sad, my lord.

**DON PEDRO**

How then, sick?

**CLAUDIO**

Neither, my lord.

**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.

**DON PEDRO**

If he be so, his conceit is false.

That must come as a bit of a shock to Don Pedro, that Claudio has not trusted him. ‘Goodness, Claudio is even younger than he had imagined.’

Here Claudio, I have wooed in thy name and fair Hero is won.

I have broke with her father and his good will obtained.

Name the day of marriage and God give thee joy.

If anyone is waiting for Claudio to speak, he must first understand that he has not lost his girl. He is having difficulty keeping up.

**LEONATO**

Count, take of me my daughter, and with her my fortunes.

His grace hath made the match, and all grace say amen to it.

He is now filled with wonder and still processing.

**BEATRICE**

Speak count, 'tis your cue.

**CLAUDIO**

Silence is the perfectest herald of joy. (Nice save, Claudio.) I were little happy if I could say how much.

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

Yoiks, more wonder from Hero.

**BEATRICE**

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

Hero could never do that right in public, kiss him on the mouth in front of everybody...but he sure looks yummy.

**DON PEDRO**

In faith lady, you have a merry heart.

**BEATRICE**

Yea my lord; 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 every one to the world but I.

I may sit in a corner and cry 'heigh-ho for a husband.'

**DON PEDRO**

Lady Beatrice, I will get you one. (Princes can do anything!)

**BEATRICE**

I would rather have one of your father's getting. Hath your grace ne'er a brother like you?  
Your father got\* excellent husbands, if a maid could come by them.

**DON PEDRO**

Will you have me, lady?

Sometimes we surprise ourselves. This question may surprise Don Pedro. He could shade it as a whimsical joke, but he also waits for the answer. He might not even breathe before she speaks. She is quite a prize. She is actually quite magnificent.

**BEATRICE**

No, my lord, unless I might have another for working days: your grace is too costly to wear every day.

Beatrice employs eloquent truth, while letting him down lightly. To be a good mate for a prince one would have to subjugate one's individuality to the office. Perhaps Beatrice intuitively knows that she would not be able to live freely enough to be truly happy.

But I beseech your grace pardon me. I was born to speak all mirth and no matter.

**DON PEDRO**

Your silence most offends me.

**LEONATO**

Niece, will you look to those things I told you of?

Leonato rescues them all. It is fun deciding whether those things are real or not.

**BEATRICE**

I cry you mercy, uncle.  
Cousins, God give you joy.  
By your grace's pardon.

A lovely embarrassed exit. Even Beatrice can be disarmed.

*(Exit BEATRICE.)*

**DON PEDRO**

By my troth, a pleasant-spirited lady.

That was invigorating for Don Pedro, to actually ask a woman he admires something heartfelt and important. He spends most of his time plotting for others.

**LEONATO**

There's little of the melancholy element in her, my lord.

**DON PEDRO**

She cannot endure to hear tell of a husband.

**LEONATO**

O by no means. She mocks all her wooers.

**DON PEDRO**

She were an excellent wife for Benedick.

Here he goes again.

**LEONATO**

O Lord! My lord, if they were but a week married, they would talk themselves mad.

**DON PEDRO**

Count Claudio, when mean you to go to church?

**CLAUDIO**

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

Yoiks! Leonato has his work cut out for him now!

**LEONATO**

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

**DON PEDRO**

Come, you shake your 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 Signior 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.

This plot will actually accomplish two things: it will sidetrack Hero and Claudio from having sex, while encouraging Benedick and Beatrice to consider it.

**LEONATO**

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

See what a good sport Leonato is? I am Leonato's age and begrudge even one night of lost sleep.

**CLAUDIO**

And I, my lord.

**DON PEDRO**

And you too, gentle Hero?

**HERO**

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

Hero keeps up her goody-goody facade on around dad at all times. Thankfully, we learn she has some spunk from how she skewers Beatrice later. I feel like downgrading Leonato's understanding of his daughter to just 8%.

**DON PEDRO**

And Benedick 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, will so practice on Benedick,  
that in despite of his quick wit and 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.  
(*Exeunt.*)

Don Pedro wants to be a love-god. Like Sir Toby in *Twelfth Night* Don Pedro is another of Shakespeare's great plot facilitators. The actors work hard in these roles for little recognition. They don't have a lot of laugh lines yet the overall quality of the production very much depends on their intelligence and engine. Sir Toby's considerable engine runs on alcohol and revenge; Don Pedro's is fueled by play-acting and romance.

**Act 2, Scene 2 Leonato's house***(DON JOHN and BORACHIO.)***DON JOHN**

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

The little twerp not only defeats him but now gets all of Leonato's cash. To Don John, the world reeks of injustice.

**BORACHIO**

Yea my lord; but I can cross\* it.

**DON JOHN**

How canst thou cross this marriage?

He doesn't believe him for a moment!

**BORACHIO**

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

**DON JOHN**

I remember.

How could he forget? All of Borachio's sexual boastings are disgusting, drunken, up-against-the-wall affairs. The tales likely leave Don John slightly queasy, perhaps with distasteful mental after-images.

**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 can be very irritating to Don John. Who cares about a little garden titty-show?

**BORACHIO**

Go, find Don Pedro and the Count Claudio alone.

Tell them that you know that Hero loves me. They will scarcely believe this without trial.

**DUH!**

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.

Don John needn't rush here. Perhaps Borachio and Margaret are into sexual role-playing games. Perhaps this could work. Yes, this makes sense!

**DON JOHN**

Be cunning in the working of this, and thy fee is a thousand ducats.

This figure momentarily immobilizes Borachio; 1000 ducats is a friggin fortune!

**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.

If Borachio is left on the stage with the warm glow of thousand ducat-dreams, his lizard-brain just might speculate as to the danger of working for such a whacko.

*(Exeunt.)*

### **Act 2, Scene 3 Leonato's garden**

**(BENEDICK.)**

**BENEDICK**

I do much wonder that one man,  
seeing how much another man is a fool when he dedicates his behaviors to love,  
will, after he hath laughed at such shallow follies in others,  
become the argument of his own scorn by falling in love;  
and such a man is Claudio.

I have known when he would have walked ten mile afoot to see a good armor;  
and now will he lie ten nights awake carving the fashion of a new doublet.  
He was wont to speak plain and to the purpose, like an honest man and a soldier;  
and now is he turned orthography;\* his words a very fantastical banquet—just so many strange dishes.  
May I be so converted and see with these eyes? I cannot tell; I think not.  
One woman is fair, yet I am well; another is wise, yet I am well; another virtuous, yet I am well;  
but till all graces be in one woman, one woman shall not come in my grace.  
Rich she shall be, that's certain; wise, or I'll none; virtuous, or I'll never cheapen her;  
fair, or I'll never look on her; mild, or come not near me;  
of good discourse, an excellent musician and her hair—shall be of what color it please God.  
Ha! The Prince and Monsieur Love. I will hide me in the arbor.

**(BENEDICK hides.)**

This speech is pretty straight forward; I have my version on my website. The speech is pretty simple, yet rich.

You might remember from the film that Branagh's Benedick then got involved in a lot of folding-chair and running-amongst-the-hedges acting. This was designed to help an uneducated Shakespearean audience understand that Benedick was overhearing the boys - Leonato, Claudio and Don Pedro. Once that convention is set and clear however, directors need to leave it alone. Bedford solved this brilliantly. Upon seeing the boys entering, he went straight downstage centre and sat in front of a large potted plant, facing the audience, with the plant at his back and between the boys and him.

I seem to remember Brian picking a small book out of his pocket just before Balthasar's song, and didn't really stop reading it until *Beatrice was in love with Signior Benedick?* At that point he just stopped breathing and started listening fiercely. No matter how we stared at his face, his listening was so focused we kept getting pushed back to the boys, and their performance. Since he stayed staring out and they could see him, they just had to put on a radio show that would convince him. Benedick didn't have to watch them because he could hear them clearly. He dared not move because he was desperate not to be discovered. The convention was rock-solid, our attention on the boys, where it should be.

This time of day might be considered 'drinks before dinner.' Perhaps Leonato carries not only his own glass but a martini shaker as well. Perhaps Nell brings in a plate of finger food. Perhaps Leonato drinks enough in this scene to get slightly tipsy before dinner. Perhaps not.

**(Enter DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, LEONATO and BALTHASAR.)**

**DON PEDRO**

Come, shall we hear this music?  
See you where Benedick hath hid himself?

**CLAUDIO**

Very well, my lord.

**DON PEDRO**

Come Balthasar, we'll hear that song again.

You can do some perfectly motivated furniture shuffling here so everyone can get comfy and hear Balthasar. I envisioned most of the play taking place in Leonato's garden with the pond or stream.

**BALTHASAR**

(Sings.) Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more,  
Men were deceivers ever,  
One foot in sea and one on shore,  
To one thing constant never:  
Then sigh not so, but let them go,  
And be you blithe and bonny,  
Coverting all your sounds of woe  
Into Hey nonny, nonny.  
Sing no more ditties, sing no more,  
Of dumps so dull and heavy;  
The fraud of men was ever so,  
Since summer first was leafy:  
Then sigh not so, but let them go,  
And be you blithe and bonny,  
Converting all your sounds of woe  
Into Hey nonny, nonny.

**DON PEDRO**

By my troth, a good song.

**BENEDICK**

And he had been a dog that should have howled thus, they would have hanged him.

That is simply not true. Benedick does not like the subject of the song. The song is sung beautifully. Shakespeare inserts songs purely for the pleasure of listening to the beauty of the human voice. Unless it is Sir Toby and Sir Andrew howling at night - and even they should be acceptable - always allow your best singers their moment!

**DON PEDRO**

Balthazar, I pray thee get us some excellent music;  
for tomorrow night we would have it at the lady Hero's chamber window.

**BALTHASAR**

The best I can my lord.

**DON PEDRO**

Do so, farewell.

(Exit BALTHASAR.)

**DON PEDRO**

Come hither, Leonato.

What was it you told me of today, that your niece Beatrice was in love with Signior Benedick?

So in your classic BOTB production, Benedick would be taking a drink at this moment and then spew a huge stream across the stage to show us all how surprised he is at this news. The boys would then have to pretend like hell that they didn't see anything. Then Benedick would noisily bolt across the stage to get supposedly closer, perhaps getting tangled in some laundry or furniture, and we would be mocking the convention in no time. Not only is that only **one** bad joke but it destroys the logic of your whole plot. Brilliant!!!

If Benedick goes stone-still instead, as Brian did, making himself as small as possible, our attention goes straight back to the boys. If the boys then do a bang-up, though not unstressful, job of relating poor Beatrice's plight, Benedick's declaration **This can be no trick**, will not only be deeply funny, it can also make complete sense. It needs to make sense; that is the story!

Keeping the gulling scenes believable is also why I vacuumed the scene where the boys kid Benedick about shaving because he is in love. If they mock Benedick's love-sickness he might rightly begin to suspect that he had been tricked in the first place. Directors need to insist upon the integrity of Shakespeare's conventions, such as people hiding in site, or characters being tricked, or disguising themselves. The stories are built upon them. Distort, or comment upon, these conventions and you diminish Shakespeare's greatness to your personal idea of cute.

**CLAUDIO**

**I did never think that lady would have loved any man.**

**LEONATO**

**No, nor I neither; but most wonderful that she should so dote on Signior Benedick, whom she hath in all outward behaviors seemed ever to abhor.**

That word **wonderful** is so potent

**BENEDICK**

**Is it possible? Sits the wind in that corner?**

**DON PEDRO**

**Why, what effects of passion shows she?**

**LEONATO**

**What effects, my lord? She will sit you—(To CLAUDIO.) you heard my daughter tell you how.**

**CLAUDIO**

**She did, indeed.**

**DON PEDRO**

**How, how, I pray you?**

This **effects of passion** stumps Leonato as it does Claudio. How would they know about what passion does to a young woman? Don Pedro re-directs the conversation and away they go again.

**Hath she made her affection known to Benedick?**

**LEONATO**

**No, and swears she never will. That's her torment.**

**CLAUDIO**

**'Tis true, indeed. So your daughter says.**

**'Shall I,' says she, 'that have so oft encountered him with scorn, write to him that I love him?'**

This bit of personification may impress Leonato and Don Pedro. It may raise the performance bar and urge Leonato to elevate his game for this next bit.

**LEONATO**

**This says she now when she is beginning to write to him;  
for she'll be up twenty times a night, and there will she sit, in her smock, till she have writ a sheet of paper.  
My daughter tells us all.**

The **in her smock** is a lovely detail for Benedick. Don't encourage your Leonato to bludgeon the line, direct him to drop it lightly and accurately.

**Then, she tore the letter into a thousand halfpence,  
railed at herself that she should be so immodest to write to one that she knew would flout\* her.**

**CLAUDIO**

**Then down upon her knees she falls, weeps, sobs, beats her heart, tears her hair, prays, curses—  
'O sweet Benedick! God give me patience!'**

Claudio has taken up the challenge and perhaps begins to overact a bit. Leonato needs to verify this excess, and then justify it with a fear of her committing suicide.

**LEONATO**

**She doth indeed; my daughter says so.  
And the ecstasy hath so much overborne her that my daughter is sometime afeared  
she will do a desperate outrage to herself.**

**Ecstasy, overborne and desperate outrage**, are words that all have sexual overtones - lovely shadings on the fly by our inspired, and perhaps lubricated, Leonato. Now he deserves a big drink.

**CLAUDIO**

**Hero thinks surely she will die; for she says she will die, if he love her not,  
and she will die, ere she make her love known.**

**DON PEDRO**

**Shall we go seek Benedick and tell him of her love?**

**CLAUDIO**

**Never tell him, my lord.**

**DON PEDRO**

**I love Benedick well, and could wish he would modestly examine himself  
to see how much he is unworthy so good a lady.**

**NELL**

**Dinner!**

Perhaps Nell even enters with something for Leonato to sample. Life is good at his table.

**LEONATO**

**My lord, will you walk? Dinner is ready.**

Don Pedro relishes his meals as well...thus the month!

**CLAUDIO**

**If he do not dote on her after this, I will never trust my expectation.**

He is feeling pretty good about his performance. He must have kept it real.

**DON PEDRO**

Let there be the same net spread for her, and that must your daughter and her gentlewomen carry.  
Let us send her to call him in to dinner.

Rather than sending Beatrice in to only celebrate the success of their gulling, which is the coarse, obvious, ha-ha reading of the line, perhaps Don Pedro wants to use Beatrice as a test of the gulling, as well. They will surely watch her re-enter the house to confirm their success.

(Exeunt DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO and LEONATO. BENEDICK comes forward.)

**BENEDICK**

This can be no trick.

Now if the Benedick has not broken the convention of overhearing by making such a fuss the boys couldn't have missed him, this line can make complete sense. If the audience should then protest his change of heart, Benedick can use the rest of the speech to defend himself. In the end, the world must be peopled! cannot be disputed.

The conference was sadly borne. They have the truth of this from Hero. They seem to pity the lady.  
It seems her affections have their full bent.

Love me? Why, it must be requited!\*

I may chance have some odd quirks and remnants of wit broken on me,  
because I have railed so long against marriage. But doth not the appetite alter?

A man loves the meat in his youth that he cannot endure in his age.

Shall quips and sentences and these paper bullets of the brain awe\* a man from the career of his humor?\*

No! The world must be peopled!

When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married.

Here comes Beatrice. By this day she's a fair lady. I do spy some marks of love in her.

Beatrice does not like being ordered about by men, much less being bullied into a task she does not want to do, by three men. Perhaps she too is slaving away at Leonato's dinner. She might even have gloves on and be carrying a knife, dripping with blood. If she were a man, perhaps she too could spend her pre-dinner hours getting pissed and wolfing down finger-food.

(Enter BEATRICE.)

**BEATRICE**

Against my will I am sent to bid you come in to dinner.

**BENEDICK**

Fair Beatrice, I thank you for your pains.

**BEATRICE**

I took no more pains for those thanks than you take pains to thank me.

If it had been painful, I would not have come.

**BENEDICK**

You take pleasure then in the message?

**BEATRICE**

Yea, just so much as you may take upon a knife's point, and choke a daw\* withal.

Is everybody pissed?

You have no stomach,\* signor? Fare you well.

(Exit BEATRICE.)

**BENEDICK**

Ha! 'Against my will I am sent to bid you come in to dinner.' There's a double meaning in that.  
 'I took no more pains for those thanks than you take pains to thank me.'  
 That's as much to say, 'any pains I take for you is as easy as thanks.'  
 If I do not take pity on her, I am a villain; if I do not love her, I am a knave.  
 I will go get her picture.

How Benedick plans to get her picture, I am not sure. Perhaps he bribes Margaret to steal one for him, or persuades Nell to 'borrow' one for his use.

(Exit **BENEDICK**.)

**Act 3, Scene 1 Leonato's orchard**

(**HERO, MARGARET and URSULA**.)

For this scene I am going to make a directorial suggestion. A couple speeches down Ursula uses a fishing metaphor when describing how they intend to ensnare Beatrice. In both of my productions I had the girls fishing during this scene in an imaginary pond/stream down stage. This decision was justified from the textual reference but also gave the girls a bit of substance.

Since Beatrice gets most of the wit in the story and Margaret all the sex, Hero is left with little to do but be victimized. Yes, she is strong and faithful under terrible duress, but she is going to need other qualities, usually bestowed upon Shakespearean heroines, to compensate for the qualities lacking in her future mate. Let's face it; Claudio is young. I'm suggesting that Leonato has taught his daughter how to fish! You don't need to do this, you can pick apples or just watch the flowers grow while tricking Beatrice. I use fishing because I fish, my daughter fishes and it is in the text. You can also catch a fish at the end of the scene if you like.

So...next time I do this show, this is what I would want. Not only will Ursula be fishing but Hero will be preparing a second rod with a complicated setup, involving a hook, leader, weights and bobber. She might even put a nice fat live worm on at the end. Ursula can be squeamish. All this complicated rigging while thoroughly dissing Beatrice should be a very impressive performance, and take a LOT of rehearsal and practice. Your AD might come in handy here. It might need constant work, just like a fight scene. Beatrice gets nailed and tricked but we also give Hero some character and abilities.

So, if the girls fish downstage, Beatrice can perhaps move at some point from upstage down to them. She can be close, the girls can speak naturally and we can watch her actually absorb Hero's criticisms. This is her turn to become hurt. Whether the girls catch anything, I leave completely up to you. As far as Beatrice is concerned the girls do not know she is listening.

**HERO**

Good Margaret, run thee to the parlor. There shalt thou find my cousin Beatrice.  
 Whisper her ear and tell her I and Ursley walk in the orchard, and our whole discourse is all of her.

**MARGARET**

I'll make her come, I warrant you.

(Exit **MARGARET**.)

**HERO**

Now Ursula, when Beatrice doth come, our talk must only be of Benedick.  
 When I do name him, let it be thy part to praise him more than ever man did merit.  
 My talk to thee must be how Benedick is sick in love with Beatrice.

(Enter BEATRICE.)

Look where Beatrice like a lapwing\* runs close by the ground, to hear our conference.

I must admit that I judge Beatrices by how well they embody this direction. Maggie's lapwing seemed a bit reckless as I remember. It is such a wonderful direction, not just because it clarifies the overhearing convention, but it bestows an emotional vulnerability upon Beatrice - her dread of being criticized, her need to hear.

**URSULA**

The pleasantest angling is to see the fish cut with her golden oars the silver stream  
 and greedily devour the treacherous bait.  
 So angle we for Beatrice, who even now is couched in the woodbine coverture.\*  
 Fear you not my part of the dialogue.

So using the fishing metaphor, while fishing or getting ready to fish, AND being clear, is difficult.  
 Who says Ursula is an easy part?

**HERO**

Then go we near her, that her ear lose nothing of the false sweet bait that we lay for it.

**URSULA**

But are you sure that Benedick loves Beatrice so entirely?

**HERO**

So says the Prince, and my new-trothed lord.

**URSULA**

And did they bid you tell her of it, madam?

**HERO**

They did entreat me to acquaint her of it; but I persuaded them, if they loved Benedick,  
 to wish him wrestle with affection and never to let Beatrice know of it.

**URSULA**

Why did you so? Doth not the gentleman deserve as worthy a companion as Beatrice?

**HERO**

O God of love! I know he doth deserve as much as may be yielded to a man;  
 but Nature never framed a woman's heart of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice.

**URSULA**

Sure, I think so; and therefore certainly it were not good she knew his love, lest she make sport of it.

With all this fishing, and rigging, and gossiping going on Beatrice has to have a secure place to stay well hidden, perhaps such a good spot that we can only really see her face.

**HERO**

Why you speak truth.  
 I never yet saw man, how wise, how noble, young, how rarely featured, but she would spell him backward:  
 if fair-faced, she would swear the gentleman should be her sister;  
 if speaking, why, a vane\* blown with all winds;  
 if silent, why, a block moved with none.  
 So turns she every man the wrong side out.

That truth must feel good for Hero to get out. Beatrice critiques her a lot too!

**URSULA**

Sure sure, such carping\* is not commendable.

Leonato could also keep a carp pond - fresh fish for his plate!

**HERO**

But who dare tell her so?

If I should speak, she would mock me into air, she would laugh me out of myself, press me to death with wit.

Therefore let Benedick, like covered fire, consume away in sighs, waste inwardly.

It were a better death than die with mocks, which is as bad as die with tickling.

**URSULA**

Yet tell her of it. Hear what she will say.

**HERO**

No; rather I will go to Benedick and counsel him to fight against his passion.

And truly, I'll devise some honest slanders to stain my cousin with.

One doth not know how much an ill word may empoison liking.

Go in with me. I'll show thee some attires, and have thy counsel which is the best to furnish\* me tomorrow.

Ooh, Hero even sticks in a fashion dagger - new clothes to wear for flirting with Claudio.

**URSULA**

She's hooked, I warrant you. We have caught her, madam.

**HERO**

If it proves so, then loving goes by haps;\* some Cupid kills with arrows, some with traps.

(Exeunt HERO and URSULA.)

A very inventive director could also devise it so the girls catch something with a fish trap. My point is, the gulling text is clear and the girls can fill it passionately, and Beatrice will be tricked. We know this is going to happen; it happened with the boys. If Hero and Ursula can also perform complex and useful tasks with great skill, while weaving these tasks seamlessly with their gulling tasks, the scene can bestow attributes upon them that will be useful in the future. Let's face it, Claudio is young. He will need a girl who can plan, perform and fish.

**BEATRICE**

What fire is in mine ears?

Can this be true? Stand I condemned for pride and scorn so much?

Contempt farewell, and maiden pride adieu. And Benedick, love on!

I will requite\* thee, taming my wild heart to thy loving hand.

For others say thou dost deserve, and I believe it better than reported.

(Exit BEATRICE.)

That speech is like the warm-woman switch being turned on. It is hot! That side to her personality might prove rather overwhelming for Benedick, as well.

### **Act 3, Scene 2 Leonato's garden**

(DON PEDRO and CLAUDIO, then enters DON JOHN.)

**DON JOHN**

My lord and brother, God save you.

**DON PEDRO**  
Good den,\* brother.

**DON JOHN**  
If your leisure serve, I would speak with you.

**DON PEDRO**  
In private?

**DON JOHN**  
If it please you. Yet count Claudio may hear, for what I would speak of concerns him.

**DON PEDRO**  
What's the matter?

I bet Don Pedro gets an ache in his gut right about here; he knows his brother too well. Don John carries bad news about like a decaying odor.

**DON JOHN**  
(To CLAUDIO.) Means your lordship to be married tomorrow?

**DON PEDRO**  
You know he does.

**DON JOHN**  
I know not that when he knows what I know.

**CLAUDIO**  
If there be any impediment, I pray you discover it.

Claudio may envision some food being soiled or some natural disaster.

**DON JOHN**  
I came hither to tell you the lady is disloyal.

Claudio is completely unprepared for such a possibility.

**CLAUDIO**  
Who? Hero?

**DON JOHN**  
Even she—Leonato's Hero, your Hero, every man's Hero!

**CLAUDIO**  
Disloyal?

He still doesn't get it.

**DON JOHN**  
The word is too good to paint out her wickedness.  
I could say she were worse; think you of a worse title, and I will fit her to it.

Claudio might look ready to attack Don John; this emotional child is also a warrior.

Go but with me tonight, and you shall see her chamber-window entered,  
even the night before her wedding-day.  
If you love her then, tomorrow wed her. But it would better fit your honor to change your mind.

**CLAUDIO**  
May this be so?

He has no idea what is even possible. Hero is his first love.

**DON PEDRO**  
I will not think it.

**CLAUDIO**  
If I see any thing tonight why I should not marry her,  
tomorrow in the congregation where I should wed, there will I shame her.

He springs so quickly to the idea of revenge without ever stopping to consider other options. Our warrior is an emotional 14 year-old.

**DON PEDRO**  
And as I wooed for thee to obtain her, I will join with thee to disgrace her.

Don Pedro must be loyal but he can't be looking forward to this possibility.

**DON JOHN**  
I will disparage her no farther till you are my witnesses.  
Bear it coldly but till midnight, and let the issue show itself.

(Exeunt.)

### **Act 3, Scene 3 The town square**

(Enter **DOGBERRY, VERGES, SIMPLE, NYM, HUGH OATCAKE and GEORGE SEACOLE.**)

Concerning Dogberry, I assume the Constable of the Watch is elected. Even if he isn't, he is an important public official; his job is to protect the public. He eats at the public trough; he is open to suspicion.

You will notice from the film that Billy Crystal plays Dogberry as though he were just crazy, riding an imaginary horse about town, mugging so much MY face hurt. Perhaps they couldn't envision these distinctly London characters inhabiting their Messinian fantasyland and decided to overwhelm the screen instead with Crystal's buggy eyes, flaring nostrils, bad teeth and coarse choices. These scenes can work well on stage however, especially with a good ensemble. These six local guys are each unique yet cut out of the same cloth. We know what Dogberry, Verges and Seacole are thinking; rehearsal time has to be spent making sure that Nym, Simple and Oatcake are each specific and unique. If you fully accept how stupid these characters actually are it takes real intelligence and creativity to plot conceivable mental journeys for each of them. When these journeys are woven carefully, they can be glorious to re-travel.

**DOGBERRY**  
Are you good men and true?

Dogberry combines the well-earned stature of any elected official with the pontifical swagger of a fine amateur actor. He might even wear a chain of office.

**VERGES**  
Yea, or else it were pity but they should suffer salvation.\*

**DOGBERRY**

Nay, that were a punishment too good for them.

Dogberry and Verges know exactly what they mean and sometimes inject odd words with extra vigor. They don't allow specific knowledge to cloud emotional truth.

Dogberry and Verges seem to be meeting a new nightly watch, men who have never stood watch at night before. Perhaps the previous watch went with Don Pedro and were the few of any sort that actually got killed in the battle. I hope not. Anyway, these guys are new and Dogberry knows that if he can make his instructions crystal clear, he has a good chance of enjoying long restful nights.

**VERGES**

Well, give them their charge,\* neighbor Dogberry.

**DOGBERRY**

First, who think you the most desertless\* man to be constable?

That first is necessary. Verges is already stepping beyond his place.

**NYM**

Hugh Oatcake sir, or George Seacole, for they can write and read.

**DOGBERRY**

Come hither, neighbor Seacole.

And that is one way a corrupt system can actually work: for some reason Dogberry picks the most competent man for his second in command. Dumb luck wins again. The community wins again!

You are thought here to be the most senseless\* and fit man for the constable of the watch, therefore bear you the lantern.

I think it is all right if Dogberry has a manner of speaking that is somehow elevated, perhaps how a self-important politician might speak, perhaps how someone who loves to listen to his own voice may speak. This manner of speaking may add moral weight to the duties of these new recruits.

This is your charge.

You shall comprehend\* all vagrom\* men.

You are to bid any man stop, in the Prince's name.

**SEACOLE**

How if he will not stop?

Perhaps Seacole plays dumber than he really is, just to keep everyone else comfortable.

**DOGBERRY**

Why then, take no note of him, but let him go, and thank God you are rid of a knave.

Dogberry's instinct is to always avoid conflict, his best bet for maintaining the status quo, not getting injured and ensuring a good night's sleep.

**VERGES**

If he will not stop when he is bidden, he is none of the Prince's subjects.

**DOGBERRY**

True, and they are to meddle with none but the Prince's subjects.  
 You shall also make no noise in the streets;  
 for the watch to babble and to talk is most tolerable,\* and not to be endured.

So tolerable is an easy one; he just forgets the in. The actual joke works because he infuses the word with emotional distaste. Only Seacole might think, "Oh my God, he did it again!"  
 Everyone else is moved.

**SIMPLE**

We will rather sleep than talk.

That might have taken some courage for Simple to speak up, but he wants to contribute and move ahead in the group.

**DOGBERRY**

Why you speak like an ancient and most quiet watchman, for I cannot see how sleeping should offend.  
 Only have a care your pikes be not stolen.

That could come out of his pocket.

You are to call at all the ale-houses and bid those that are drunk get them to bed.

**SEACOLE**

How if they will not?

**DOGBERRY**

Why then, let them alone till they are sober.

**SEACOLE**

Well, sir.

**DOGBERRY**

If you meet a thief, you may suspect him to be no true man;  
 and the less you meddle with him the more is for your honesty.

**SIMPLE**

If we know him to be a thief, shall we not lay hands upon him?

Simple is catching on; he is understanding his job description.

**DOGBERRY**

Truly you may, but I think they that touch pitch shall be defiled.  
 The most peaceable way for you, if you do meet a thief,  
 is to let him show himself what he is, and steal out of your company.

**VERGES**

If you hear a child cry in the night, you must call to the nurse and bid her still it.

Here I must pay everlasting tribute to a long-time company member of the Stratford Festival, Brian Tree. Brian's miraculous delivery of this line will never leave me. He did it very slowly, with excruciating pain, managing to make the words *still it* sound exactly like ~~kill~~ it. T'was truly memorable. Brian is a modest Englishman with a large nose and working class accent. His voice has always had the timbre of an old man, although he has always made himself reliably heard. He is a unique actor and, for my money, retired Verges. While never being slow - quite

the opposite, almost sprightly - he also sounded and seemed truly ancient - late nineties or early hundreds. He was the perfect butt for all of Dogberry's cruel, age-related putdowns.

The big temptation with the Watch is to make them generically funny, some comic cliché - *The Marx Brothers* or *The Three Stooges* - and let them all go wild. If you actually insist that actors keep their minds focused on the thoughts of these well-intentioned but very dim lads, on the logical or possible choices within their scenes, they can become impassioned and fun characters to play. There is nothing quite so blissful to watch, or exacting to play, as the stupid leading the stupid. Anyway, Verges should be ancient. That is where his laughs lurk.

**SEACOLE**

How if the nurse be asleep and will not hear us?

**DOGBERRY**

Why then, depart in peace and let the child wake her with crying.

Dogberry may be getting a little irritated at all these obvious questions. He likely has a warm drink, cooling somewhere.

Well masters, good night. If there be any matter of weight chances, call up me.  
Come, neighbor.

**SEACOLE**

Well masters, we hear our charge.

Let us go sit here upon the church-bench till two, and then all to bed.

See? Seacole is smart. He immediately understands the system. When Dogberry retires or dies of gout, the foundation will be secure.

**DOGBERRY**

One word more, honest neighbors. I pray you watch about Signior Leonato's door;  
for the wedding being there tomorrow, there is a great coil\* tonight.

Adieu. Be vigilant,\* I beseech you.

(Exeunt DOGBERRY and VERGES.)

(Enter BORACHIO and CONRADE.)

**BORACHIO**

Conrade!

**CONRADE**

Here man. I am at thy elbow.

It has gotten very dark, or perhaps Seacole has decided to save his candle and put out his lantern.

**BORACHIO**

Stand thee close; and I will, like a true drunkard, utter all to thee.

**SEACOLE**

(Aside.) Some treason masters. Stand close.

I am not sure how Seacole knows they speak of treason but he sure has the instincts of a good cop.

**BORACHIO**

Therefore know I have earned of Don John a thousand ducats.

**CONRADE**

Is it possible that any villainy should be so dear?\*

**BORACHIO**

Didst thou not hear somebody?

That noise might have been Simple or Oatcake involuntarily reacting to the huge number of 1000.

**CONRADE**

No; 'twas the vane on the house.

The amateur director will make this sound highly improbable while the professional will make it highly believable. Guess which one an intelligent audience will appreciate.

Again, don't make Borachio and Conrade stupid by making the watch hiding improbable. Perhaps just light their faces and let the watch exist in dark. Even though Borachio may be a bit tipsy, it is critically important that his next two speeches be crystal-clear.

Here we must address the main problem with this play - Margaret does not speak up at the church; she does not confess that Claudio saw her and not Hero. So what were Margaret and Borachio actually up to? Perhaps Margaret is addicted to sex and will do it with almost anybody, anywhere. Perhaps Borachio's stories to Don John are true and rather lewd. Her behavior is known and embarrasses her. That can be the blue version, as the film depicts. The white, or middle-school, version has her dressing up as just teasing behavior, and Borachio's tales to Don John wishful boasting. Perhaps Margaret is so pure that just admitting that she was hanging her tits out a window at Borachio is too embarrassing to publicly admit. Margaret is not only easily forgiven by Leonato but is allowed to flirt with Benedick, so her personality type is known, and an accepted complexity. I think the text supports either possibility. This decision about Margaret's specific behavior likely depends upon the age of your cast. Agreeing what happens offstage though is very important for the characters living onstage, especially Margaret.

**BORACHIO**

Know that I have tonight wooed Margaret, the Lady Hero's gentlewoman, by the name of Hero. She leans me out at her mistress' chamber-window, bids me a thousand times good night—I tell this tale vilely—I should first tell thee how the Prince, Claudio and my master, planted and placed and possessed\* by my master Don John, saw afar off in the orchard this amiable encounter.

**CONRADE**

And thought they Margaret was Hero?

**BORACHIO**

Two of them did, the Prince and Claudio; but the devil my master knew she was Margaret. Away went Claudio enraged; swore he would meet her, as he was appointed, next morning at the temple, and there before the whole congregation, shame her with what he saw overnight and send her home again without a husband.

**SEACOLE**

We charge you in the Prince's name, stand!

**OATCAKE**

Call up the right master constable.

We have here recovered\* the most dangerous piece of lechery\* that ever was known in the commonwealth.

There you go. Dogberry did well choosing Seacole over Oatcake. All hail, dumb luck! Oatcake has the malapropism disease as well.

**CONRADE**

Masters, masters—

**NYM**

Never speak! We charge you let us obey you\* to go with us.

Dogberry's communication techniques seem to have gone viral.

### **Act 3, Scene 5 The street in front of Leonato's house**

**(LEONATO, DOGBERRY and VERGES.)**

I love how this scene follows immediately. We are preparing for bad things to happen in the church yet we know that the bad guys have already been caught. Even though the church showdown is not to be diverted we are at least allowed to breathe a bit and enjoy Dogberry's social posturing.

**LEONATO**

What would you with me, honest neighbor?

**DOGBERRY**

Marry, sir, I would have some confidence\* with you that discerns\* you nearly.

Dogberry's deferential intimacy and expansive vocabulary worry Leonato; He can feel a long speech coming and Nell just sped by carrying something he didn't see.

**LEONATO**

Brief, I pray you, for you see it is a busy time with me.

**DOGBERRY**

Marry, this it is sir.

**VERGES**

Yes, in truth it is, sir.

Dogberry stops to dispute Verges interrupting.

**LEONATO**

What is it, my good friends?

Dogberry thinks he means the pause.

**DOGBERRY**

Goodman Verges, sir, speaks a little off the matter.

An old man sir, and his wits are not so blunt\* as, God help, I would desire they were; but, in faith, honest as the skin between his brows.

**VERGES**

Yes, I thank God I am as honest as any man living, that is an old man, and no honestier than I.

**DOGBERRY**

Comparisons are odorous.\*

**LEONATO**  
Neighbors, you are tedious.

Leonato is not an impolite man but others are waiting on him!!!

**DOGBERRY**  
It pleases your worship to say so, but we are the poor Duke's officers;  
but truly, for mine own part, if I were as tedious as a King,  
I could find it in my heart to bestow it all on your worship.

**LEONATO**  
All thy tediousness on me, ah?

**DOGBERRY**  
Yea, for I hear as good exclamation\* on your worship as of any man in the city,  
and though I be but a poor man, I am glad to hear it.

**VERGES**  
And so am I.

**LEONATO**  
I would fain\* know what you have to say.

It seems almost excruciatingly unfair that public employees are unable to communicate with the public!

**VERGES**  
Marry sir, our watch tonight have taken a couple of as arrant knaves as any in Messina.

**DOGBERRY**  
A good old man, sir; he will be talking. As they say, 'When the age is in the wit is out.'  
And two men ride of a horse, one must ride behind.  
All men are not alike, alas, good neighbor.

**LEONATO**  
Indeed neighbor, he comes too short of you.

**DOGBERRY**  
Gifts that God gives.

One of my favorite sayings in Shakespeare, and one that can describe any personal attribute.

**LEONATO**  
I must leave you.

**DOGBERRY**  
One word, sir.  
Our watch sir, have indeed comprehended\* two aspicious\* persons,  
and we would have them this morning examined before your worship.

**LEONATO**  
Take their examination yourself and bring it me. I am now in great haste, as it may appear unto you.

Dogberry might actually puff up with pride at, **Take their examination yourself**. This is a great honor, a chance for him to shine in public. Dogberry definitely has some Bottom in him. He loves parading about, centre stage.

**DOGBERRY**  
It shall be suffigance.\*

**LEONATO**

Drink some wine ere you go. Fare you well.

Another great honor, the drinking of wine. I leave the biz of whether Verges gets any and Dogberry gets two glasses up to you.

(Enter NELL.)

**NELL**

My lord, they stay for you to give your daughter to her husband.

This line, delivered by Nell with real aplomb, can leave us with little doubt as to the most competent member of Leonato's household.

**LEONATO**

I'll wait upon them. I am ready.

My daughter is not married yet, but I bet he is nervous as a cat. Nell might primp him up a bit, just to settle him.

(Exeunt LEONATO and NELL.)

**DOGBERRY**

Go good partner, go! Get you the Sexton. Bid him bring his pen and inkhorn to the jail.  
We are now to examination\* these men.

**VERGES**

And we must do it wisely.

**DOGBERRY**

We will spare for no wit, I warrant you.  
Only get the learned writer to set down our excommunication.\*  
Go!

If there are small pies on a tray he might just add a couple to his pockets; to fuel his upcoming interrogation for Leonato.

(Exeunt.)

#### **Act 4, Scene 1 A Church**

(DON PEDRO, DON JOHN, LEONATO, FRIAR FRANCIS, BALTHASAR,  
CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, HERO, BEATRICE, URSULA, MARGARET, NELL and attendants.)

As I grew to know this play it took me a few years to fully accept and appreciate this scene. I rejected the idea of such a horrible scene being be in a comedy, and so far into the plot. I now have one child left, that I raised my self, and she is my daughter. Leonato and I likely love equally fiercely. Trying to imagine myself so angry with my child to wish her death is inconceivable. I have lost my son, so I know grief, but I am not sure I could ever find such anger as this. It would be a great challenge to try.

**LEONATO**

Come Friar Francis, be brief.

I rail against Shakespearean coarseness every day, but I do love Friar Francis closing a big dusty bible with an sizeable whump at this moment. Ascending dust particles are also acceptable. He does it with dignity of course, even though he had a week to create a beautiful sermon about marriage and duty. He and Leonato likely drink together and this will be mentioned, regularly. I think it is hot, and Leonato mainly wants to get out of the sun.

**Only to the plain form of marriage.  
You shall recount their particular duties afterwards.**

**FRIAR FRANCIS**  
**You come hither, my lord, to marry this lady?**

**CLAUDIO**  
**No.**

Perhaps Claudio wants to say more at this point, but perhaps he is absolutely immobilized by her smiling face, by how monstrous her duplicity really is.

**LEONATO**  
**To be married to her Friar. You come to marry her.**

**FRIAR FRANCIS**  
**Lady, you come hither to be married to this count?**

**HERO**  
**I do.**

**FRIAR FRANCIS**  
**If either of you know any inward impediment why you should not be conjoined,  
I charge you on your souls to utter it.**

**CLAUDIO**  
**Know you any Hero?**

**HERO**  
**None, my lord.**

**FRIAR FRANCIS**  
**Know you any count?**

**LEONATO**  
**I dare make his answer—none.**

**CLAUDIO**  
**What men dare do, what men may do, what men daily do, not knowing what they do.  
Stand thee by, Friar.  
Father, by your leave, will you with free and unconstrained soul give me this maid, your daughter?**

**LEONATO**  
**As freely, son, as God did give her me.**

**CLAUDIO**  
**And what have I to give you back whose worth may counterpoise this rich and precious gift?**

**DON PEDRO**  
**Nothing, unless you render\* her again.**

**CLAUDIO**

Sweet Prince, you learn me noble thankfulness.  
 There, Leonato, take her back again. Give not this rotten orange to your friend.  
 She's but the sign and semblance of her honor.  
 Behold how like a maid she blushes here.  
 O what authority and show of truth can cunning sin cover itself withal.  
 Comes not that blood as modest evidence to witness simple virtue?  
 Would you not swear, all you that see her, that she were a maid by these exterior shows?  
 But she is none. She knows the heat of a luxurious bed; her blush is guiltiness not modesty.

A phrase such as **the heat of a luxurious bed** makes me sure that Claudio is a virgin, just like Hero.  
 He is very jealous about something he knows nothing about

**LEONATO**

What do you mean, my lord?

**CLAUDIO**

Not to be married, not to knit my soul to an approved wanton.\*

**LEONATO**

Dear my lord, if you, in your own proof, have vanquished the resistance of her youth,  
 and made defeat of her virginity—

**CLAUDIO**

I know what you would say. If I have known her, you will say she did embrace me as a husband.  
 No, Leonato, I never tempted her with word too large,  
 but as a brother to his sister, showed bashful sincerity and comely love.

**HERO**

And seemed I ever otherwise to you?

It is so unfair as Hero feels as though she has been holding back like crazy.

**CLAUDIO**

Out on thee! Seeming! You seemed to me as Dian\* in her orb,\* as chaste as is the bud ere it be blown;\*  
 but you are more intemperate\* in your blood than Venus,  
 or those pampered animals that rage in savage sensuality.

Poor Claudio is so young. Later in his life he might actually grow to appreciate a little savage sensuality.

**HERO**

Is my lord well that he doth speak so wide?

**LEONATO**

Sweet Prince, why speak not you?

**DON PEDRO**

What should I speak?

I stand dishonored that have gone about to link my dear friend to a common stale.\*

**LEONATO**

Are these things spoken, or do I but dream?

Wonder again - Shakespeare's most valuable emotion.

**DON JOHN**

Sir they are spoken, and these things are true.

**HERO**  
True? O God!

**CLAUDIO**  
Let me but move one question to your daughter,  
and by that fatherly and kindly power that you have in her, bid her answer truly.

**LEONATO**  
I charge thee do so, as thou art my child.

That is almost like having her lineage questioned. She is not responsible for that.

**HERO**  
O God defend me! How am I beset!\*

**CLAUDIO**  
What man was he talked with you yesternight out at your window between twelve and one?  
Now if you are a maid, answer to this.

**HERO**  
I talked with no man at that hour, my lord.

That may be the most ludicrous thing she has ever heard. It may be one of the most frightening for Margaret.

**DON PEDRO**  
Why then are you no maiden.  
Leonato, I am sorry you must hear.  
Upon mine honor myself, my brother, and this grieved count did see her, hear her,  
at that hour last night talk with a ruffian at her chamber-window,  
who hath confessed the vile encounters they have had a thousand times in secret.

Margaret might leave here.

**DON JOHN**  
Fie, fie! They are not to be named my lord, not to be spoke of.  
There is not chastity enough in language without offence to utter them.  
Thus, pretty lady, I am sorry for thy much misgovernment.\*

This is a timely save by Don John; if accusations are allowed to become specific the whole ruse could fail. If Margaret is still there, she could reveal all.

**CLAUDIO**  
O Hero, what a Hero hadst thou been,  
if half thy outward graces had been placed about thy thoughts and counsels of thy heart.  
But fare thee well, most foul, most fair. Farewell. Thou pure impiety\* and impious purity.  
For thee I'll lock up all the gates of love, and on my eyelids shall conjecture\* hang,  
to turn all beauty into thoughts of harm, and never shall it more be gracious.

Claudio is so young he declares here that he will never fall in love again. He is wrong, often.

**LEONATO**  
Hath no man's dagger here a point for me?

(HERO faints.)

Margaret may exit here in this confusion, if not before.

**BEATRICE**

Why, how now, cousin! Wherefore sink you down?

**DON JOHN**

Come, let us go. These things, come thus to light, smother her spirits up.

(Exeunt DON PEDRO, DON JOHN and CLAUDIO.)

**BENEDICK**

How doth the lady?

**BEATRICE**

Dead, I think. Help, uncle! Hero! Why Hero? Uncle! Signior Benedick! Friar!

**LEONATO**

O Fate, take not away thy heavy hand!

Death is the fairest cover for her shame that may be wished for.

**BEATRICE**

How now, cousin Hero?

**FRIAR FRANCIS**

Have comfort, lady.

**LEONATO**

Dost thou look up?

**FRIAR FRANCIS**

Yea, wherefore should she not?

The Friar might afford himself a little anger here; his sole purpose in life is preserving life.

**LEONATO**

Wherefore? Why, doth not every earthly thing cry shame upon her?

Could she here deny the story that is printed in her blood?\*

Do not live Hero; do not open thine eyes.

I am unsure how Leonato can say such a thing and realize what he is saying.

**BENEDICK**

Sir, sir, be patient. For my part, I am so attired in wonder, I know not what to say.

**BEATRICE**

On my soul, my cousin is belied!\*

**BENEDICK**

Lady, were you her bedfellow last night?

**BEATRICE**

No, truly not; although until last night, I have this twelvemonth been her bedfellow.

It is fortunate Hero has fainted here - there is no Margaret related explanation provided for this room-swap.

**LEONATO**

Confirmed, confirmed! That is stronger made which was before barred up with ribs of iron.

Would the two Princes lie, and Claudio lie, who loved her so, that speaking of her foulness,

washed it with tears? Hence from her! Let her die!

It is difficult for us to understand such feelings with the birth control methods we now have.

Religious beliefs and dogma, bonds between families, wealth and land distribution, all depended upon the marriage of virgins. The trust between a father and daughter, and how he could provide for her future, completely depended upon her remaining a virgin till marriage. At this point Leonato feels powerless and hopeless. Perhaps Hero revives at this point.

**FRIAR FRANCIS**

Hear me a little. Trust not my age, my reverence, calling, nor divinity,  
if this sweet lady lie not guiltless here under some biting error.

**LEONATO**

Friar, it cannot be.

**FRIAR FRANCIS**

Lady, what man is he you are accused of?

**HERO**

They know that do accuse me; I know none.

O my father, prove that any man with me conversed at hours unmeet,\* refuse me, hate me, torture me to death.

**FRIAR FRANCIS**

There is some strange misprision\* in the Princes.

**BENEDICK**

Two of them have the very bent\* of honor; and if their wisdoms be misled in this,  
the practice of it lives in Don John, whose spirits toil in frame of\* villainies.

**LEONATO**

I know not. If they speak but truth of her, these hands shall tear her.

If they wrong her honor, the proudest of them shall well hear of it.

Leonato the lion is awakening and once again the Friar judiciously intervenes.

**FRIAR FRANCIS**

Pause awhile. Your daughter here the Princes left for dead.

Let her awhile be secretly kept in, and publish it that she is dead indeed.

**LEONATO**

What shall become of this? What will this do?

**FRIAR FRANCIS**

You may conceal her, as best befits her wounded reputation,

out of all eyes, tongues and minds till these wrongs may be put to right.

**BENEDICK**

Signior Leonato, let the Friar advise you.

**LEONATO**

Being that I flow\* in grief, the smallest twine may lead me.

**FRIAR FRANCIS**

'Tis well consented. Presently away.

Come lady, die to live. This wedding-day perhaps is but prolonged. Have patience and endure.

(Exeunt all but **BENEDICK** and **BEATRICE**.)

**BENEDICK**

Lady Beatrice, have you wept all this while?

**BEATRICE**

Yea, and I will weep a while longer.

**BENEDICK**  
I will not desire that.

**BEATRICE**  
You have no reason. I do it freely.

**BENEDICK**  
Surely I do believe your fair cousin is wronged.

**BEATRICE**  
Ah, how much might the man deserve of me that would right her.

**BENEDICK**  
Is there any way to show such friendship?

**BEATRICE**  
A very even way, but no such friend.

**BENEDICK**  
May a man do it?

**BEATRICE**  
It is a man's office, but not yours.

**BENEDICK**  
I do love nothing in the world so well as you: is not that strange?

**BEATRICE**  
I was about to protest I loved you.

**BENEDICK**  
Then do it with all thy heart.

**BEATRICE**  
I love you with so much of my heart that none is left to protest.

**BENEDICK**  
Come, bid me do anything for thee.

**BEATRICE**  
Kill Claudio!

**BENEDICK**  
Ha! Not for the wide world.

It was all going rather well to this point. Killing a comrade in arms is completely antithetical to all soldiers. He simply reacts instinctively.

**BEATRICE**  
You kill me to deny it. Farewell.

**BENEDICK**  
Tarry, sweet Beatrice.

**BEATRICE**  
Is Claudio not approved in the height a villain, that hath slandered, scorned, dishonored my kinswoman?  
O God, that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the market-place!

**BENEDICK**  
Nay, but Beatrice—

**BEATRICE**

Sweet Hero. She is wronged, she is slandered, she is undone.

**BENEDICK**

Beat—

**BEATRICE**

Count Claudio, a sweet gallant surely. O that I were a man for his sake,  
or that I had any friend would be a man for my sake.  
But manhood is melted into curtsies, and valor into compliments.  
I cannot be a man with wishing, therefore I will die a woman with grieving.

**BENEDICK**

Tarry, good Beatrice. By this hand, I love thee.

**BEATRICE**

Use it for my love some other way than swearing by it.

**BENEDICK**

Think you in your soul the Count Claudio hath wronged Hero?

**BEATRICE**

Yea, as sure as I have a thought or a soul.

She cannot clear her mind of anything but the pain her cousin is experiencing. This deep loyalty and courage she shows towards Hero is something Benedick, the soldier, must find deeply admirable.

**BENEDICK**

Enough, I am engaged. I will challenge him.  
I will kiss your hand, and so I leave you.  
By this hand, Claudio shall render me a dear account.  
As you hear of me, so think of me.

She may be beginning to worry about this upcoming challenge and duel right about here.

Go, comfort your cousin. I must say she is dead.  
And so, farewell.

This last farewell, perhaps only slightly milked by Benedick, may leave her deeply worried.

(Exeunt.)

## **Act 4, Scene 2 The jail**

**(DOGBERRY, VERGES, SEXTON, CONRADE, BORACHIO and the WATCH.)**

**DOGBERRY**

Is our whole dissembly\* appeared?

**SEXTON**

Which be the malefactors?\*

To say the Sexton is long-suffering is a gross, unpleasant understatement. Having to deal with Dogberry likely gives him migraines, stomach ulcers, bad dreams and an occasional physical tick. He too is part of the system however, the part that actually works, and must endure.

**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?

**VERGES**

There!

Verges' vicious arm thrust literally condemns them.

**DOGBERRY**

Masters, it is proved already that you are little better than false knaves.

How answer you for yourselves?

**CONRADE**

Marry, sir, we say we are none.

Dogberry is essentially an innocent; he expects Conrade to just confess.

**DOGBERRY**

A marvellous witty fellow, I assure you.

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.\*

Dogberry is surprised to find Borachio and Conrade colluding in their denials. This makes his job much more difficult.

Have you writ down that they are none?

That might mean he has lost the case!

**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 eftest\* way. Accuse these men!

**SEACOLE**

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.

**SEXTON**

What heard you him say else?

**SEACOLE**

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 the mass, that it is.

**SEXTON**

What else fellow?

**SEACOLE**

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

**DOGBERRY**

O villain! Thou wilt be condemned into everlasting redemption\* for this.

**SEXTON**

What else?

**SEACOLE**

This is all.

Thank goodness for Seacole. The Foundation will survive.

**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.

(Exit SEXTON.)

We may begin to understand Billy Crystal's decision to so overplay Dogberry, in that he is allowed considerable power over others yet retains an almost childlike simplicity in his convictions and vocabulary. He, a relative simpleton, has been elected to the supreme position from which to protect the public. Wondrously, his malaprops rarely muddy the clarity of his message. He *mistakenly uses words with a similar sounding ones* quite liberally and creatively. He also represents well-fed municipal employees everywhere, intent on maintaining a status quo that has kept them safe and comfy. Dogberry even takes the duty of educating the next generation of municipal employees seriously. Future brothers of the union need to understand the system to keep it functioning smoothly, to keep him sleeping at night. So Shakespeare is digging at the fat-assed middle class with Dogberry. I can't help it, I see Dogberry as middle aged, short, with a large tummy, a bald fringe, a big voice, a red complexion and perhaps even an unfortunate bulbous nose. He is not in shape; he has a chair at home that loves him.

**DOGBERRY**

Come, let them be opinioned.\*

**CONRADE**

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

Dogberry's indignation at these criminals has been building throughout this scene. When accused of being an ass, it can no longer contain itself. Dogberry may even experience genuine wonder that someone has said something so absurdly false about his person!

**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!

(Exeunt.)

**Act 5, Scene 1 A street in Messina**

(Enter DON PEDRO and CLAUDIO, then LEONATO by a separate entrance.)

**DON PEDRO**  
Good den,\* Leonato.

**CLAUDIO**  
Good day to you, sir.

Just by seeing Leonato, Don Pedro and Claudio know he is going to verbally assault them, and therefore try to avoid him.

**LEONATO**  
Hear you my lords—

**DON PEDRO**  
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.

**DON PEDRO**  
Nay do not quarrel with us, good old man.

**LEONATO**  
Nay, never lay thy hand upon thy sword; I fear thee not.

**CLAUDIO**  
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.  
Know Claudio, thou hast so wronged mine innocent child and me  
that I am forced to lay my reverence by and, with grey 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, in a tomb where never scandal slept, save this of hers,  
framed\* by thy villany!

**CLAUDIO**  
My villany?

**LEONATO**  
Thine Claudio; thine I say.

**DON PEDRO**  
You say not right, old man.

**LEONATO**  
My lord, my lord, I'll prove\* it on his body if he dare.

**CLAUDIO**  
Away. I will not have to do with you.

**LEONATO**  
Canst thou so daff\* me? Thou hast killed my child. If thou killest me, boy, thou shalt kill a man.

**DON PEDRO**

Leonato, 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—

**DON PEDRO**

I will not hear you.

**LEONATO**

No? I will be heard!

Messina is controlled by Don Pedro of Aragon. Leonato's allegiance is to Don Pedro. He is his lord. This is as conflicted as it gets for fathers.

(Exit LEONATO.)

Being youthful Claudio knows that a fight with Leonato would be a complete mismatch. Leonato does not feel this way. Leonato is still an alpha male. I think Claudio might be wrong, yet again.

(Enter BENEDICK.)

**DON PEDRO**

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

**CLAUDIO**

Now signior, what news?

**BENEDICK**

Good day, my lord. 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?

High-proof melancholy might seem a bit glib for Benedick's liking. As far as Claudio knows, Hero is dead!

**BENEDICK**

It is in my scabbard. Shall I draw it?

**DON PEDRO**

Dost thou wear thy wit by thy side?

**BENEDICK**

Shall I speak a word in your ear?

**CLAUDIO**

God bless me from a challenge.

**BENEDICK**

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.

**CLAUDIO**

Well, I will meet you.

Yes, he has performed well in battle. He cannot feel all that confident taking on a seasoned soldier like Benedick.

**BENEDICK**

My lord, for your many courtesies I thank you. I must discontinue your company. Your brother is fled from Messina. You have among you killed a sweet and innocent lady. (To CLAUDIO.) Fare you well boy; you know my mind.

(Exit BENEDICK.)

**DON PEDRO**

He is in earnest.

**CLAUDIO**

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

(Enter DOGBERRY, VERGES and the WATCH, with CONRADE and BORACHIO.)

**DON PEDRO**

But soft, did he not say my brother was fled?  
How now? Two of my brother's men bound?

**CLAUDIO**

Hearken after their offence, my lord.

**DON PEDRO**

Officers, what offence 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.

That order could make sense, perhaps it is in emotional order. Dogberry may also still be so outraged at being called an ass, he is unable to control his indignation when asked their crimes.

**DON PEDRO**

First, I ask thee what they have done; thirdly, ask thee what's their offence; sixth and lastly, why they are committed; and to conclude, what you lay to their charge? This learned constable is too cunning to be understood. What's your offence?

**BORACHIO**

Sweet Prince, I have deceived even your very eyes. What your wisdoms could not discover, these shallow fools have brought to light.

Gawd, he just did again. He just insulted Dogberry again!

Don John brought you into the orchard where you saw me court Margaret in Hero's garments.

Nothing wrong with taking some time here. It is one heck of a revelation for Claudio and Don Pedro to digest.

**DON PEDRO**

Runs not this speech like iron through your blood?

**CLAUDIO**

Sweet Hero. Now thy image doth appear in the rare semblance that I loved at 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!

(Enter LEONATO with SEXTON.)

**LEONATO**  
Art thou the slave that with thy breath hast killed mine innocent child?

**BORACHIO**  
Yea, even I alone.

I played this part. It is very unpleasant having to accept the huge guilt for the death of an innocent young woman. “Stuff” happens in life; it really happens in Shakespeare!

**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.

That word honorable should have all sorts of meanings to 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.

Leonato is now looking closely at his future son. This is also the young man who he gulled Benedick with. This will be a complex and important relationship in the future.

**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 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 given her cousin, and so dies my revenge.

**CLAUDIO**  
O noble sir! I do embrace your offer; and dispose for henceforth of poor Claudio.

This has got to be astonishing to Claudio. We haven't met a brother of Leonato, and everyone might be quite surprised that she looks like Hero.

**LEONATO**  
Tomorrow then I will expect your coming.  
This naughty man shall face-to-face be brought to Margaret, who I believe was packed\* in all this wrong.

**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.

Well you have to give Borachio points for faithfulness. Perhaps he has a future in Messina

**DOGBERRY**

Moreover, sir, which indeed is not written in white and black,  
this plaintiff here, the offender, did call me ass!  
I beseech you, let it be remembered in his punishment.

**LEONATO (Giving DOGBERRY money.)** Lots

There's for thy pains.\*

**DOGBERRY**

God save the foundation!

This is one of my favorite lines in Shakespeare. The *foundation* to me represents that mythical power that is somehow, supposedly, is looking out for the welfare of everyone - like the market, your pension plan or rich elderly parents. Somehow, we are all taken care of. Personally, I don't trust the *foundation*, not one bit, not ever.

**LEONATO**

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

**DOGBERRY**

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 can communicate better than that, but not under such exciting circumstances. I am surprised he didn't just burst today, with all the excitement!

(Exeunt DOGBERRY and VERGES.)

**LEONATO**

Until tomorrow morning lords, farewell. Bring you these fellows on.  
We'll talk with Margaret, how her acquaintance grew with this lewd fellow.

Yoiks, sounds like Margaret might have done stuff like this before.

(Exeunt.)

**Act 5, Scene 2 Leonato's garden**  
**(BENEDICK and MARGARET.)**

**BENEDICK**

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

This of course is all inner work since the subject is not raised in the scene, but I assume this scene is after Leonato has had a talk with Margaret. She is likely still chewing over what she had to admit to Leonato and how he accepted it. It was all likely agony to admit, but perhaps a revelation that he forgave her so easily. Perhaps he had a wild youth and relished a *Margaret* during his prime. Anyway, she has been forgiven, and as you can see, is back to her old flirting ways.

**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 truth, thou deservest it.

Benedick plays a good straight man too.

**MARGARET**

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

I love the Margarets of the world. Some will tease into their 90s.

**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.

**MARGARET**

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

There she teases again, this time using Beatrice's legs.

(Exit MARGARET.)

**BENEDICK**

And therefore will come.

(Sings.) The god of love,

That sits above

And knows me, and knows me,

How pitiful I deserve—

I mean in singing.

I think there was never any so turned over and over as my poor self in love.

Marry, I cannot show it in rhyme. I have tried.

I can find 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.)

**BENEDICK**

Sweet Beatrice, wouldst thou come when I called thee?

**BEATRICE**

Yea signor, and depart when you bid me.

**BENEDICK**

O, stay but till then.

**BEATRICE**

'Then' is spoken. Fare you well.

And yet ere I go, let me go with that I came for,

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 frighted the word out of his right sense, so forcible is thy wit.  
I tell thee plainly Claudio undergoes my challenge;  
and either I must shortly hear from him or I will subscribe him a coward.

Okay, that settles her, until the thought of Benedick actually fighting enters her mind.

And I pray thee now tell me, for which of my bad parts didst thou first fall in love with me?

**BEATRICE**

For them altogether,  
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 you 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.  
And now tell me, how doth your cousin?

**BEATRICE**

Very ill.

**BENEDICK**

And how do you?

**BEATRICE**

Very ill too.

She feels very deeply for Hero; she is extremely loyal and her moral compass points true north.  
Benedick wants to make her happy.

**BENEDICK**

Serve God, love me and mend.

(Enter URSULA.)

**URSULA**

Madam, you must come to your uncle.  
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?

I think Ursula flees right here. The news is so exciting and others have not heard it yet.  
Spreading it about is wonderful fun, if heart-pounding.

**BEATRICE**

Will you go hear this news, signor?

**BENEDICK**

I will live in thy heart, die in thy lap and be buried in thy eyes;

How can she not love a man who can invent buried in thy eyes?

and moreover, I will go with thee to thy uncle's.

(Exeunt.)

**Act 5, Scene 3 A church graveyard****(Enter DON PEDRO and CLAUDIO, with other MOURNERS.)**

CLAUDIO (Reading a scroll.)  
 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.  
 Hang thou there upon the tomb,  
 Praising her when I am dumb.  
 Now, music, sound, and sing your solemn hymn.  
 (Song sung by mourners.)  
 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.  
 (Exeunt.)

This scene allows Claudio to experience remorse for his youthful behavior, and it provides a chance for everyone to get prepared for the last scene. It only requires the two boys and the poem. If, however, you have shops that want work, technicians that want challenges, scrimms that want hanging or lights that would like wrenching, classes that need labor, perhaps a choir that wants singing or an organ that wants air, someone might even find a fog machine, this scene can provide creative outlets for many. The parents of my first school production went wild here!

**Act 5, Scene 4 Leonato's house****(LEONATO, BENEDICK, BEATRICE, MARGARET, URSULA, FRIAR FRANCIS, HERO and NELL.)**

FRIAR FRANCIS  
 Did I not tell you she was innocent?

Still smarting from being cut short at the wedding, this might actually feel good.

LEONATO  
 So are the Prince and Claudio, who accused her.  
 Margaret was in some fault for this, although against her will\* as it appears.

Margaret is going to make him gray before she is married off.

Well, daughter, and you gentle-women all, withdraw into a chamber by yourselves,  
 and when I send for you, come hither masked.

(Exeunt ladies.)

BENEDICK  
 Friar, I must entreat your pains, I think.

FRIAR FRANCIS  
 To do what, signior?

**BENEDICK**

To bind me, or undo me—one of them.  
Signior Leonato, truth 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 my will is 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 FRANCIS**

And my help. Here comes the Prince and Claudio.

(Enter DON PEDRO and CLAUDIO.)

**DON PEDRO**

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 Ethiopie.\*

Ethiopie might also translate universally distasteful - not an attractive thought for our modern sensibilities.  
Poor Claudio, he can appear priggish at times.

**LEONATO**

Call her forth. Here's the Friar ready.

Leonato can't help but enjoy the sweat beads forming on Claudio's brow. He will enjoy refining his telling of this story through the years.

**DON PEDRO**

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

Could Benedick be suffering some last minute inner debate about freedom?

(Enter HERO, BEATRICE, MARGARET and URSULA [all masked].)

**CLAUDIO**

Which is the lady I must seize upon?

Seize? He doesn't sound very hopeful.

**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.

This really is Claudio's defining moment. Being married to one person, faithfully and happily for a whole life means a great deal to Claudio; not being stuck with an unattractive, dull wife also means something to him. He needs to really suck it up here to deserve what he gets.

**CLAUDIO**

Give me your hand before this holy Friar. I am your husband, if you like of me.

**HERO**

And when I lived, I was your other wife;  
(Unmasking.)  
and when you loved, you were my other husband.

**CLAUDIO**

Another Hero!

For this brief moment, that is what he believes. This girl is the copy of his dead love. His innocence is the joke.

**HERO**

Nothing certainer. One Hero died defiled; but I do live, and surely as I live, I am yours.

Maybe that is where Claudio gets it, touching her, but his understanding is not immediate. Those who tell this story might remember it as *Claudio's lost moment*. An audience will surely want to revisit this moment. This is a moment of Shakespearean wonder; a moment when something happens that is impossible.

**DON PEDRO**

The former Hero! Hero that is dead!

**LEONATO**

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

**FRIAR FRANCIS**

Let us to the chapel presently.

Before Hero and Claudio go nutz on each other; and this time they are getting the full sermon.

**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 it that he loves her; for here's a paper written in his hand, a halting sonnet of his own pure brain, fashioned to Beatrice.

I wonder if he left his poem in the previous scene and perhaps Nell found it during the scene change.

(BEATRICE grabs the sonnet.)

**HERO**  
And here's another writ in my cousin's hand, stolen from her pocket, containing her affection unto Benedick.

(BENEDICK grabs BEATRICE'S sonnet.)

We know what Benedick wrote and it does deserve a guffaw or a bray from Beatrice. Perhaps Benedick finds something sexy or hot in her note and leers at her.

**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. (BEATRICE and BENEDICK kiss.)

If that messenger hits the stage too early shoot him. We have been waiting for this kiss.

(Enter a MESSENGER.)

**MESSENGER**  
My lord, your brother John is taken in flight, and brought with armed men back to Messina.

**BENEDICK**  
Think not on him till tomorrow. I'll devise brave punishments for him.

Brave punishments but it sounds like Don John is, once again, going to be accepted back into the family. I don't think he will ever change. Don Pedro should just take him home and lock him in his room.

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.

Come come, we are friends.

**DON PEDRO**

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!

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.

I have always thought that man is a giddy thing would make a good subtitle for this play.

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!

It is too hot and there is nothing to drink.

**BENEDICK**

First, on my word.

Prince, thou art sad. Get thee a wife, get thee a wife!

Strike up, pipers!

(Dance.)

I betcha Nell finds Leonato a drink and something to sit on.

the end

