Much Ado About Nothing

Playscript

Act One

A street in Messina. LEONATO, HERO and BEATRICE are walking together. Enter a MESSENGER.

MESSENGER: The Prince of Aragon is coming to Messina. He will arrive soon.
LEONATO: I see that Don Pedro is very pleased with Claudio.
BEATRICE: What about Benedick? Have you got any news about him?
MESSENGER: He, too, has come home safely. He is famous for his humour.
BEATRICE: His humour’s the only good thing about him.
MESSENGER: Benedick is not in your good books.
BEATRICE: If Benedick were in my good books, I would never read them again.

Enter DON PEDRO, DON JOHN, BENEDICK and CLAUDIO.

LEONATO: Welcome to Messina. I am happy that you will be my guest while you are here.
DON PEDRO: Is this beautiful young girl your daughter?
LEONATO: Yes. At least her mother has always said Hero was my daughter!
BENEDICK: Do you doubt it, sir?
BEATRICE: What a fool you are. Can’t you see how everyone is laughing at you?
BENEDICK: I see you’re still alive, Lady Scornful.
BEATRICE: Of course I’m still alive. My scorn feeds off you – didn’t you know that?
BENEDICK: All the ladies love me, except you. But I don’t care for any of them.
BEATRICE: At least you won’t marry one of them and make her unhappy.

Everyone moves towards Leonato’s house, except CLAUDIO and BENEDICK.
CLAUDIO: I want to talk to you. Did you notice Leonato’s daughter Hero? Did you see how beautiful she is?
BENEDICK: You’re in love! But surely you’re not thinking of getting married?
CLAUDIO: If Hero would marry me, I’d certainly be very happy!

DON PEDRO re-enters.

DON PEDRO: What are you two talking about? Is it a secret?
BENEDICK: Claudio is in love with Hero – that’s our secret, sir!
DON PEDRO: You’ll fall in love one day, my young friend. I shall see you pale with love one day.
BENEDICK: Never! I’ll never surrender to just one woman.

Act Two

The garden in Leonato’s house. Enter DON PEDRO and CLAUDIO.

DON PEDRO: What’s all this about you and Hero?

CLAUDIO: I liked her when I saw her last, before we went away to the war. Now that I’ve seen her again, I’m sure of it – that’s the girl for me!

DON PEDRO: She’s a beautiful girl, and she comes from a good family. I’ll do what I can to help you. There’s going to be a big party at Leonato’s house tonight. Everybody will be wearing masks. I’ll talk to Hero. I’ll pretend to be you, you see?

Enter one of Antonio’s servants. He hides behind a tree, to hear what DON PEDRO and CLAUDIO are saying.

CLAUDIO: What do you mean, sir?

DON PEDRO: I’ll tell Hero I love her. I’ll tell her I can’t live without her. Then I’ll go to her father and tell him everything.

SERVANT: Don Pedro’s in love with Hero – I must go and tell my master immediately!

Exit the servant.

DON PEDRO: Then you’ll be able to marry her!

LEONATO and ANTONIO meet in the house.

ANTONIO: I’ve got some extraordinary news for you!
LEONATO: What kind of news?
ANTONIO: The Prince is in love with your Hero. One of my servants saw Don
Pedro and Claudio talking together. The Prince said he would speak to Hero at the party tonight. He’s going to tell her he loves her!
LEONATO: I’d better tell Hero about this – then she’ll know what to do if the Prince speaks to her.

_A room in Leonato’s house. DON JOHN, CONRAD and BORACHIO are talking together._

DON JOHN: What’s the news, Borachio?
BORACHIO: Claudio is going to marry Hero.
DON JOHN: Claudio – I hate that young man! I wish I could do something that would damage Claudio. Will you two help me?
BORACHIO: Whatever you wish, sir – you know that.
CONRAD: I’ll do what I can to please you, sir.

**Act Three**

_The masked ball at Leonato’s house. Enter HERO, DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, wearing masks._

DON PEDRO: Will you walk with me?
HERO: I’ll walk with you if you are handsome, and if you don’t talk too much.
DON PEDRO: Let’s talk about love.

_Another part of the chamber._

BENEDICK: Someone told me that you get all of your jokes from books.
BEATRICE: I bet it was Benedick who said that. He doesn’t like me at all – it’s just the kind of thing Benedick would say about me!
BENEDICK: Who’s Benedick?
BEATRICE: Oh, he’s Don Pedro’s clown. He’s a fool really, and not funny at all. He just says rude things about everyone, and that makes fools laugh. If people don’t laugh at what he says, he gets very unhappy. He thinks he’s very clever, but everyone hates him, really.

_Another part of the chamber._

DON JOHN: You’re Benedick, aren’t you? You’re a friend of my brother the Prince. Please tell him that he cannot marry Hero. She does not come from a noble family.
CLAUDIO: What makes you think Don Pedro wants to marry Hero?
DON JOHN: I heard them talking. He told her he loves her. I don’t like it at all!

Exit DON JOHN. Enter BENEDICK.

BENEDICK: You’ve heard the news? The Prince has stolen Hero from you, Claudio!
CLAUDIO: Leave me alone, Benedick, just leave me alone!

Act Four

BENEDICK and DON PEDRO talking outside the chamber.

DON PEDRO: Have you seen Claudio? I want to talk to him.
BENEDICK: He’s in the hall. He’s very upset. You shouldn’t have stolen Hero from him.
DON PEDRO: I haven’t stolen Hero from Claudio. I’ve just asked Leonato if Claudio can marry her! By the way, why is Beatrice so angry with you?
BENEDICK: It’s a silly business – I can’t stand her!

Enter CLAUDIO and HERO, holding hands and smiling. BEATRICE enters with them.

DON PEDRO: You see, I told you the truth. Leonato has said that Claudio and Hero can be married. Now do you believe that I’m Claudio’s friend?
BEATRICE: Everyone is getting married except me.
DON PEDRO: I’ll find you a husband.
BEATRICE: Thank you, sir, but I’ll never marry.

Exit BEATRICE. DON PEDRO, LEONATO and CLAUDIO remain talking together.

DON PEDRO: Well, you’ll be a married man one week from now.
CLAUDIO: I wish the wedding were tomorrow!
DON PEDRO: I know you’re impatient, but we’ll make this week a very pleasant one for you. I’m going to arrange another wedding – between Beatrice and Benedick! Will you all help me to arrange it?
LEONATO: Very well.
CLAUDIO: Of course we will.
HERO: I promise.
DON PEDRO: I’ve got a plan.

Another room in the house. DON JOHN, BORACHIO and CONRAD are talking together.
BORACHIO: I think I know how we can spoil this wedding.
DON JOHN: Well, what is it? What are we going to do?
BORACHIO: You know that I’m very close to Margaret – very, very close, if you
know what I mean?
DON JOHN: How can that help us?
BORACHIO: Don Pedro thinks that Hero is a beautiful and honourable girl. Go
and tell him that she is not honourable at all, sir. Tell the Prince that Hero
has a secret lover – me! Say that you can prove it. Make Claudio and Don
Pedro stand under Hero’s bedroom window. I will then stand at the window.
I’ll talk to Margaret as if she were Hero. The Prince and Claudio will think
Hero is in love with me – Claudio will call off the wedding!
DON JOHN: It might just work! Let’s try your plan, Borachio.

Act Five

The garden. BENEDICK is walking by himself, when he sees DON
PEDRO, CLAUDIO, LEONATO and OTHERS. He hides in order to hear
what they are saying.

DON PEDRO: What was that you were saying before, about Beatrice being in love
with Benedick?
LEONATO: It’s true. She loves him, there’s no doubt about that.
DON PEDRO: What makes you think she’s really in love?
LEONATO: She told you all about it, didn’t she?
CLAUDIO: She’s really in love. She told me herself. But she can’t tell him, you see,
because she thinks Benedick would just laugh at her.
LEONATO: She’s even tried writing a letter to tell him what she feels. But she
didn’t send it. Poor girl, she’s suffering very badly!
DON PEDRO: Let’s help Beatrice by letting Benedick know that she loves him.
CLAUDIO: No, no! Benedick would just laugh at her. We mustn’t say anything, sir.

Exit DON PEDRO, LEONATO and CLAUDIO. BENEDICK remains alone
in the garden.

BENEDICK: They say she loves me. Perhaps I’ve been wrong about her. She’s a
lovely girl, after all!

BEATRICE comes into the garden.

BEATRICE: I’ve been sent to look for you. Dinner is ready, and everyone is waiting
for you.
BENEDICK: Thank you for the trouble you have taken to find me.
BEATRICE: Trouble? It was no trouble to come and look for you.
BENEDICK: If it was no trouble, perhaps it was a pleasure to come and look for me?
BEATRICE: What makes you think it was a pleasure?

BEATRICE walks back to the house. BENEDICK watches her thoughtfully.

BENEDICK: There’s no doubt about it. She said it was ‘no trouble’ to come and look for me. She really does love me!

Later in the garden. HERO and URSULA are talking. BEATRICE is listening to their conversation.

HERO: Poor Benedick is terribly in love with Beatrice.
URSULA: Are you sure? I thought that Benedick did not like Beatrice at all.
HERO: Claudio and the Prince told me all about it. They asked me to talk to Beatrice, but I said it would do no good. Beatrice is very proud, and she would just laugh at Benedick.
URSULA: You’re probably right. Beatrice is so proud that she can’t love anyone. It’s better not to say anything to her about Benedick. She would just make the poor man suffer horribly with her cruelty and her jokes.
HERO: I’m going to talk to Benedick. I’m going to tell him that he’s far too good for Beatrice.
URSULA: It’s true that Benedick is very handsome.

HERO and URSULA leave the garden. BEATRICE is left alone.

BEATRICE: My friends think I am too proud! They say Benedick is a good man. Perhaps they’re right – perhaps I should love Benedick!

Act Six

Enter DON PEDRO, LEONATO, CLAUDIO and BENEDICK.

DON PEDRO: I must go home after your wedding.
CLAUDIO: Then I will accompany you. It’s the least I can do after your kindness to me.
DON PEDRO: No. You don’t want to go on a long journey just after your wedding. No, I’ll take Benedick with me. The journey will be short once he starts telling his jokes and stories.
BENEDICK: I’m not as witty as I once was. I don’t know why it is.
CLAUDIO: You do look quite sad. Is anything the matter?
BENEDICK: It’s just a toothache.
DON PEDRO: I never knew that toothache could make a man look sad, Benedick.
CLAUDIO: I think he’s in love. Look at the careful way he’s dressed, and the trouble he takes with his hair – he’s a man in love, I tell you!

_BENEDICK frowns angrily at his friends’ jokes, then he touches LEONATO’s arm and goes away with him. DON PEDRO and CLAUDIO are left alone._

DON PEDRO: He’s going to speak to Leonato! He’s going to ask for permission to marry Beatrice.

_Enter DON JOHN. He greets DON PEDRO and CLAUDIO politely._

DON JOHN: I have something to tell you.
DON PEDRO: Is it something private, or can Claudio stay and hear?
DON JOHN: My news is about Hero. I’ve discovered that she is not an honourable girl – she has a lover! I can prove that Hero is disloyal to you. Come with me tonight, both of you. We’ll stand outside Hero’s bedroom window – you’ll see that what I’ve told you is the truth!
CLAUDIO: I can’t believe it!
DON PEDRO: Neither can I!
DON JOHN: I don’t want you to make a terrible mistake, Claudio. You can’t marry a girl who behaves like Hero – she would dishonour you!’
CLAUDIO: Very well, I’ll come with you tonight. If you’re right about Hero I’ll disgrace her at the church tomorrow morning. I’ll tell everyone what sort of girl she is!

Act Seven

_Messina at night. Enter DOGBERRY and other constables._

DOGBERRY: I’ll tell you what you have to do. You walk around the gardens at night, and if you see anyone strange, you stop them. Is that clear?
WATCHMAN: What do we do if the person doesn’t obey us?
DOGBERRY: If someone doesn’t obey you, let him go. That kind of person can be dangerous, you know! Don’t make a noise as you walk about. We don’t want to disturb people. Don’t wake people up by talking loudly.
WATCHMAN: I’d rather sleep than talk.
DOGGERLY: Well said! You can’t make any mistakes if you go to sleep. But remember, you have to go to all the alehouses. Tell the people who have drunk too much that they should go home to bed.

WATCHMAN: What if they don’t obey us?

DOGGERLY: Leave them alone if they don’t obey you. You don’t want to get into arguments with people who have been drinking. And the same thing for thieves. If you meet any thieves, stay away from them. No good can come from mixing with thieves.

*Exit DOGGERLY. Enter BORACHIO and CONRAD.*

BORACHIO: I’ve just earned a thousand crowns!

WATCHMAN: Ssh! I know that man, and I don’t trust him. Let’s listen, and see what happens.

CONRAD: A thousand crowns! How did you earn such a lot of money?

BORACHIO: It was easy. I spent the evening with Hero’s lady-in-waiting, Margaret. She’s just leant out of Hero’s window to say goodnight to me. Claudio and the Prince saw everything!

CONRAD: They thought Margaret was Hero?

BORACHIO: That’s right. Claudio is furious with Hero – he’ll never marry her now!

WATCHMAN: You’re under arrest! Come on, you’re coming with us. Dogberry will want to talk to you.

*A room in Leonato’s house, very early the next morning. DOGGERLY, VERGES and LEONATO are talking.*

LEONATO: Well, my friends, what can I do for you?

DOGGERLY: I’ll tell you, sir.

VERGES: The constables have arrested two thieves.

DOGGERLY: Correct, the constables have arrested two thieves. We want to question them in front of you, sir. That’s why we’re here.

LEONATO: I’m too busy today. Question them, and come and tell me what you’ve learned from them later.
Act Eight

*The church. All the main characters are present.*

FRIAR FRANCIS: Have you come here to marry Hero?
CLAUDIO: No, I have not.
LEONATO: Quite right, quite right. Claudio has come here to be married to Hero – it’s you who will marry Hero, friar!
FRIAR FRANCIS: Do either of you know anything that makes you think this marriage should not take place? Do you, Claudio?
LEONATO: Of course he doesn’t!
CLAUDIO: Are you happy to give me your daughter?
LEONATO: Yes, I am.
CLAUDIO: Must I give you something in exchange for this precious gift?
LEONATO: Of course not.
DON PEDRO: Unless you give her back to him!
CLAUDIO: Take your daughter back again. Don’t give your friend a rotten gift. Your daughter looks lovely, I admit, but she’s dishonourable. I don’t want her! She is disloyal.
DON PEDRO: I am ashamed that I encouraged Claudio to marry Hero. She is not worthy of him.
LEONATO: I can’t believe that this is happening.
CLAUDIO: I want to ask your daughter one question. You were speaking to a man from your window last night. Who was he?
HERO: I didn’t speak to any man last night
DON PEDRO: You’re lying! We saw you talking to a man, Hero!

*HERO faints, and falls to the floor of the church. DON PEDRO and CLAUDIO walk out of the church.*

BEATRICE: Help her! Help her, uncle!
LEONATO: I hope she dies! Hero has brought dishonour on our family.
FRIAR FRANCIS: I have been watching Hero very carefully. I believe that she is innocent. I believe there has been a mistake.
LEONATO: It’s impossible. Claudio and the Prince both saw her talking to a man. The evidence is clear!

*HERO regains consciousness.*

FRIAR FRANCIS: Were you speaking to a man last night?
HERO: No, I swear it.
FRIAR FRANCIS: I believe her. There has been a mistake somewhere. I have an

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idea. Claudio and the others think that Hero is dead. Let’s pretend that she really is dead for a while.

LEONATO: What’s the point of pretending that Hero is dead?
FRIAR FRANCIS: When people hear that Hero is dead, they will feel sorry for her. Claudio will remember that Hero died as a result of his accusation. He will wonder whether he was right about her.

BENEDICK: I like this plan of yours, friar. I’ll do everything I can to help you.

*Everyone leaves the church except BENEDICK and BEATRICE.*

BENEDICK: I think Hero is innocent.
BEATRICE: I wish someone could prove that she’s innocent.
BENEDICK: I have something to tell you. I love you, Beatrice.
BEATRICE: How strange, I feel the same. I don’t know how it’s happened, but I think I love you, too.
BENEDICK: I’d do anything for you!
BEATRICE: Kill Claudio, then!
BENEDICK: Kill Claudio? Never!
BEATRICE: Then you don’t really love me. You won’t fight my enemy.
BENEDICK: Why is Claudio your enemy?
BEATRICE: Claudio has behaved very badly. I hate him for what he has done to Hero!
BENEDICK: Listen, Beatrice…
BEATRICE: She would never talk to a man from her window. She loves Claudio, I know she does!
BENEDICK: Do you really think that Claudio has behaved badly?
BEATRICE: Of course I do!
BENEDICK: Then I’ll fight him! I’ll fight Claudio for you.

**Act Nine**

*LEONATO and ANTONIO in a street in Messina.*

LEONATO: Don’t tell me to be calm! I love Hero, and I can’t bear the idea that she has been dishonoured.
ANTONIO: Think of the people who accused her. It’s only right that they should suffer.
LEONATO: You’re right. I’m sure that Hero is innocent. Claudio and the Prince have lied about her.
Enter DON PEDRO and CLAUDIO.

LEONATO: Just a moment. I want to speak to you. You have wronged my daughter. Claudio, you lied about Hero, and now she’s dead. I’m going to fight you, young man!

CLAUDIO: You’re too old for fighting. I won’t fight you, Leonato.

ANTONIO: Then you’ll fight me, young man. I loved my niece. You’ll fight me, I say!

LEONATO: Brother…

ANTONIO: Leave me alone! I’m not scared of fighting him.

DON PEDRO: Don’t quarrel, gentlemen. I am sorry that Hero’s dead, but she was guilty.

LEONATO leads ANTONIO away. DON PEDRO and CLAUDIO remain talking. Enter BENEDEICK.

CLAUDIO: You’re just the man we want. We’re both sad, Benedick. We need you to cheer us up a little.

BENEDICK: I’m going to fight you. If you don’t fight me, I’ll tell everyone you’re a coward!

DON PEDRO: Beatrice loves you. You’ll be married soon, my friend – just as I told you!

BENEDICK: My lord, you have always treated me well. I thank you for that. I will not serve you any longer. Your brother Don John has left Messina. The three of you have killed an innocent young child.

Exit BENEDEICK.

DON PEDRO: I wonder what’s the matter with him!

Enter DOGBERRY, with BORACHIO and CONRAD as prisoners.

DON PEDRO: Stop! Tell me why these two men are prisoners. What have they done?

DOGBERRY: These two men have told lies about a lady here in Messina.

BORACHIO: The constables heard me telling Conrad about Don John’s plan to deceive you and Claudio. It was your brother who invented the story about Hero. She was innocent. And now she’s dead. I am very sorry, sir.

CLAUDIO: Poor Hero!

Enter LEONATO.

LEONATO: Where’s the man who killed my daughter with his lies?

BORACHIO: It was me, sir.

LEONATO: You didn’t do it by yourself. Don John, Don Pedro and Claudio – they killed her as well.
CLAUDIO: I was wrong, I treated Hero badly. You must punish me if you wish. But I made an honest mistake.

LEONATO: You can’t bring my daughter back. Tell the people of Messina that my daughter was innocent. And tonight, come to her grave and pray for her there. Write an epitaph for her tomb. There’s something else you can do. My brother Antonio has a daughter. She’s very like poor Hero. Marry my brother’s daughter, just as you would have married mine. Will you do that?

CLAUDIO: I’ll marry your niece. It’s the least I can do.

**Act Ten**

*A church at night. DON PEDRO and CLAUDIO are praying.*

DON PEDRO: It’s time to go. Remember you are going to marry Antonio’s daughter this morning – you promised you would.

CLAUDIO: I’m ready.

*Leonato’s house that morning.*

FRIAR FRANCIS: I told you Hero was innocent! Didn’t I say she was innocent, all the time?

LEONATO: Claudio and Don Pedro are innocent, as well. It was all Don John’s fault. Now, Antonio, you know what we’re going to do when Claudio and Don Pedro arrive. We will pretend that Hero is your daughter. She will wear a heavy mask. Claudio will be marrying the girl he loves, but he won’t know it – it’ll be a great joke!

BENEDICK: I’m in love with your niece, Beatrice – I want your permission to marry her.

LEONATO: Just as Don Pedro and Claudio predicted! I give you my permission to marry Beatrice.

*Enter DON PEDRO and CLAUDIO.*

LEONATO: Well, Claudio, do you remember your promise? Are you ready to marry Antonio’s daughter?

CLAUDIO: I’ll keep my promise.

ANTONIO leaves the room. He returns with HERO and BEATRICE, who are wearing masks.

CLAUDIO: We are going to be husband and wife. May I see your face before the wedding?
LEONATO: No! You may not see her face until the wedding is concluded.

CLAUDIO: Then take my hand. I will lead you to the friar. I will be your husband if you wish it.

HERO: I’ve been your wife before.

    HERO removes her mask.

    

CLAUDIO: Another Hero!

HERO: The first Hero died in shame. Here I am, another one.

DON PEDRO: It really is Hero – she didn’t die at all!

FRIAR FRANCIS: I’ll explain everything. But first, let’s have the wedding!

BENEDICK: One moment, Friar Francis. Which one is Beatrice?

BEATRICE: I am. What do you want, Benedick?

BENEDICK: Do you love me?

BEATRICE: Beyond reason, no.

BENEDICK: Then Don Pedro, Claudio and Leonato were wrong. They told me you loved me madly.

BEATRICE: And you, do you love me, Benedick?

BENEDICK: Beyond reason, no.

BEATRICE: Then Margaret, Ursula and Hero were wrong. They said you loved me madly.

BENEDICK: Then you really don’t love me?

BEATRICE: Not really. I only love you because you love me.

CLAUDIO: This is all nonsense! Benedick loves Beatrice, I’m sure of it. Look, I’ve got a poem he wrote to her!

HERO: And Beatrice loves Benedick! I’ve got a letter she wrote to him. Look, here it is!

BENEDICK: We do not love each other, but it seems our hands are in love. Let’s marry, all the same.

BEATRICE: I’ll marry you, but only to save your life, Benedick – they said you were so unhappy without me!