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978-1-108-00596-8 - Much Ado About Nothing, Volume 24

William Shakespeare

Excerpt

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## MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

[1.1.] *An orchard, adjoining the house of Leonato; at one side a covered alley of thick-pleached fruit-trees; at the back an arbour overgrown with honeysuckle*

*'LEONATO, governor of Messina, HERO, his daughter, and BEATRICE, his niece, with a messenger'*

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

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

*Leonato.* How many gentlemen have you lost in this action?

*Messenger.* But few of any sort, and none of name.

*Leonato.* A victory is twice itself when the achiever brings home full numbers. I find here that Don Pedro hath bestowed much honour on a young Florentine <sup>10</sup> called Claudio.

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

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

*Messenger.* I have already delivered him letters, and there appears much joy in him—even so much, that joy <sup>20</sup> could not show itself modest enough without a badge of bitterness.

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## 4 MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING 1.1.23

*Leonato.* Did he break out into tears?*Messenger.* In great measure.*Leonato.* A kind overflow of kindness. There are no faces truer than those that are so washed. How much better is it to weep at joy than to joy at weeping!*Beatrice.* I pray you, is Signior Mountanto returned from the wars or no?30 *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.40 *Beatrice.* He set up his bills here in Messina and challenged Cupid at the flight, and my uncle's fool reading the challenge subscribed for Cupid, and challenged him at the birdbolt. 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.*Messenger.* He hath done good service, lady, in these wars.*Beatrice.* You had musty victual, and he hath help to eat it. He is a very valiant trencher-man, he hath an excellent stomach.50 *Messenger.* And a good soldier too, lady.*Beatrice.* And a good soldier to a lady, but what is he to a lord?*Messenger.* A lord to a lord, a man to a man—stuffed with all honourable virtues.*Beatrice.* It is so, indeed. He is no less than a stuffed man, but for the stuffing—well, we are all mortal.

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## 1.1.57 MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING 5

*Leonato.* You must not, sir, mistake my niece. There is a kind of merry war betwixt Signior Benedick and her. They never meet but there's a skirmish of wit between them. 60

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

*Messenger.* Is't possible?

*Beatrice.* Very easily possible. He wears his faith but 70 as the fashion of his hat, it ever changes with the next block.

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

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

*Messenger.* He is most in the company of the right noble Claudio. 80

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

*Messenger.* I will hold friends with you, lady.

*Beatrice.* Do, good friend.

*Leonato.* You will never run mad, niece.

*Beatrice.* No, not till a hot January.

*Messenger.* Don Pedro is approached. 90

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## 6 MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING 1.1.91

'DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, BALTHAZAR  
and JOHN the Bastard' enter the orchard

*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.

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

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

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

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

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

*Don Pedro.* You have it full, Benedick—we may guess by this what you are, being a man. Truly the lady fathers herself. Be happy, lady, for you are like an honourable father. [*he talks apart with Hero and Leonato*]

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

*Beatrice.* I wonder that you will still be talking, Signior Benedick—nobody marks you.

*Benedick.* What, my dear Lady Disdain! are you yet living?

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

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

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## 1.1.122 MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING 7

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

*Benedick.* God keep your ladyship still in that mind, so some gentleman or other shall 'scape a predestinate scratched face.

*Beatrice.* Scratching could not make it worse, an 130  
'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 a God's name—I have done.

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

*Don Pedro.* That is the sum of all, Leonato. [*he turns*] 140  
Signior Claudio and Signior Benedick, my dear friend Leonato hath invited you all. I tell him we shall stay here at the least a month, and he heartily prays some occasion may detain us longer. I dare swear he is no hypocrite, but prays from his heart.

*Leonato.* If you swear, my lord, you shall not be forsworn. [*to Don John*] Let me bid you welcome, my lord—being reconciled to the prince your brother. [*bows*] I owe you all duty.

*Don John.* I thank you. I am not of many words, but 150  
I thank you.

*Leonato.* Please it your grace lead on?

*Don Pedro.* Your hand, Leonato—we will go together.

[*all depart save Benedick and Claudio*]

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## 8 MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING 1.1.155

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

*Claudio.* No, I pray thee speak in sober judgement.

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

*Claudio.* Thou thinkest I am in sport. I pray thee tell  
170 me truly how thou 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. But speak you this with a sad brow? or do you play the flouting Jack, to tell us Cupid is a good hare-finder, and Vulcan a rare carpenter? Come, in what key shall a man take you to go in the song?

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

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

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

*Benedick.* Is't come to this? In faith hath not the world one man but he will wear his cap with suspicion?

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## 1.1.189 MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING 9

Shall I never see a bachelor of threescore again? Go to i'faith, an thou wilt needs thrust thy neck into a yoke, 190 wear the print of it, and sigh away Sundays.

*DON PEDRO re-enters the orchard*

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 thee on thy allegiance.

*Benedick.* You hear, Count Claudio. I can be secret as a dumb man, I would have you think so—but on my allegiance, mark you this, on my allegiance! He is in 200 love—with who? now that is your grace's part. Mark, how short his answer is—with Hero, Leonato's short daughter.

*Claudio.* If this were so, so were it uttered.

*Benedick.* Like the old tale, my lord—'it is not so, nor 'twas not so: but indeed, God forbid it should be so.'

*Claudio.* If my passion change not shortly, God forbid it should be otherwise.

*Don Pedro.* Amen, if you love her—for the lady is very well worthy. 210

*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 die in it at the stake. 220

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## 10 MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING I.I.221

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

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

*Benedick.* That a woman conceived me, I thank her: that she brought me up, I likewise give her most humble thanks: but that I will have a recheat winded in my forehead, or hang my bugle in an invisible baldrick, all women shall pardon me. Because I will not do them  
230 the wrong to mistrust any, I will do myself the right to trust none: and the fine is—for the which I may go the finer—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 mine eyes with a ballad-maker's pen, and hang me up at the door of a brothel-house for the sign of blind Cupid.

240 *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.

*Don Pedro.* Well, as time shall try:

'In time the savage bull doth bear the yoke.'

*Benedick.* The savage bull may—but if ever the sensible Benedick bear it, pluck off the bull's horns and set them in my forehead. And let me be vilely painted—  
250 and in such great letters as they write, 'Here is good horse to hire,' let them signify under my sign, 'Here you may see Benedick the married man.'

*Claudio.* If this should ever happen, thou wouldst be horn-mad.

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## 1.1.255 MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING 11

*Don Pedro.* Nay, if Cupid have not spent all his quiver in Venice, thou wilt quake for this shortly.

*Benedick.* I look for an earthquake too then.

*Don Pedro.* Well, you will temporize with the hours. In the meantime, good Signior Benedick, repair to Leonato's, commend me to him, and tell him I will not fail him at supper—for indeed he hath made great preparation. 260

*Benedick.* I have almost matter enough in me for such an embassage, and so I commit you—

*Claudio.* To the tuition of God: from my house if I had it—

*Don Pedro.* The sixth of July: your loving friend, Benedick.

*Benedick.* Nay, mock not, mock not. The body of your discourse is sometime guarded with fragments, and the guards are but slightly basted on neither. Ere you flout old ends any further, examine your conscience—and so I leave you. 270

*Claudio.* My liege, your highness now may do me good. [he goes

*Don Pedro.* My love is thine to teach. Teach it but how, And thou shalt see how apt it is to learn Any hard lesson that may do thee good.

*Claudio.* Hath Leonato any son, my lord?

*Don Pedro.* No child but Hero, she's his only heir: Dost thou affect her, Claudio?

*Claudio.* O my lord,  
When you went onward on this ended action, 280  
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 that war-thoughts  
Have left their places vacant, in their rooms  
Come thronging soft and delicate desires,  
All prompting me how fair young Hero is,

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## 12 MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING I.I.288

Saying I liked her ere I went to wars.

*Don Pedro.* Thou wilt be like a lover presently,  
290 And tire the hearer with a book of words.

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

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

*Don Pedro.* What need the bridge much broader than  
the flood?

300 The fairest grant is the necessity:  
Look, what will serve is fit: 'tis once, thou lovest,  
And I will fit thee with the remedy.

I know we shall have revelling to-night—

I will assume thy part in some disguise,

And tell fair Hero I am Claudio,

And in her bosom I'll unclasp my heart,

And take her hearing prisoner with the force

And strong encounter of my amorous tale:

Then after to her father will I break—

310 And the conclusion is, she shall be thine.

In practice let us put it presently. [*they leave the orchard*]

[1.2.] *The hall of Leonato's house; three doors, one in the centre leading to the great chamber; above it a gallery with doors at the back. Servants preparing the room for a dance; ANTONIO directing them*

*LEONATO enters in haste*

*Leonato.* How now brother, where is my cousin  
your son? Hath he provided this music?