

BENEDICK The savage bull may, but if ever the sensible  
Benedick bear it, pluck off the bull's horns and set  
them in my forehead, and let me be vilely painted,  
and in 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."

260

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

265

PRINCE 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.

PRINCE Well, you will temporize with the hours. In the  
meantime, good Signior Benedick, repair to Leonato's.

270

Commend me to him, and tell him I will not  
fail him at supper, for indeed he hath made great  
preparation.

BENEDICK I have almost matter enough in me for such  
an embassy, and so I commit you—

275

CLAUDIO To the tuition of God. From my house, if I had  
it—

PRINCE The sixth of July. Your loving friend,  
Benedick.

BENEDICK Nay, mock not, mock not. The body of your  
discourse is sometimes 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.

*He exits.*

CLAUDIO

My liege, your Highness now may do me good.

PRINCE

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.

280

CLAUDIO

Hath Leonato any son, my lord?

PRINCE

No child but Hero; she's his only heir.

Dost thou affect her, Claudio?

285

CLAUDIO O, my lord,

When you went onward on this ended action,

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.

290

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,

Saying I liked her ere I went to wars.

295

PRINCE

Thou wilt be like a lover presently

And tire the hearer with a book of words.

If thou dost love fair Hero, cherish it,

And I will break with her and with her father,

And thou shalt have her. Was 't not to this end

300

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.

310

PRINCE

What need the bridge much broader than the flood?  
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 reveling tonight.  
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,  
And the conclusion of she shall be thine.  
In practice let us put it presently.

315

*They exit.*

Scene 2

*Enter Leonato, meeting an old man, brother to  
Leonato.*

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

LEONATO'S BROTHER He is very busy about it. But,  
brother, I can tell you strange news that you yet  
dreamt not of.

5

LEONATO Are they good?

LEONATO'S BROTHER As the events stamp them, but  
they have a good cover; they show well outward.

The Prince and Count Claudio, walking in a thick-pleached  
alley in mine orchard, were thus met  
overheard by a man of mine: the Prince discovered  
to Claudio that he loved my niece your daughter and  
meant to acknowledge it this night in a dance, and if  
he found her accordant, he meant to take the  
present time by the top and instantly break with you  
of it.

10

LEONATO Hath the fellow any wit that told you this?

LEONATO'S BROTHER A good sharp fellow. I will send  
for him, and question him yourself.

15

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

20

*Enter Antonio's son, with a Musician and Attendants.*

Cousins, you know what you have to do.—O, I cry  
you mercy, friend. Go you with me and I will use  
your skill.—Good cousin, have a care this busy  
time.

25

*They exit.*