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 me truly how thou likest 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? 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.

Benedick.
I can see yet without spectacles and I see no such matter: there’s her cousin, Beatrice, if 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 fear horns and wear his cap with suspicion? Shall I never see a bachelor of three-score again? Go to, i’ faith, if thou wilt needs thrust thy neck into a yoke. Look Don Pedro is returned to seek you.  [Re-enter DON PEDRO]

Don Pedro.
What secret hath held you here that you followed not to Leonata’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 love. With who? now that is your grace’s part. Mark how short his answer is;—With Hero, Leonata’s short daughter.

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.

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.

**Don Pedro.**
Thou wast ever an obstinate heretic, 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 horn placed in my forehead, all women shall pardon me. Because I will not do them the wrong to mistrust any, I will do myself the right to trust none; and the finish is 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.

**Don Pedro.**
Well, if ever thou dost fall from this faith, thou wilt prove a notable argument.

**Benedick.**
If I do, hang me and shoot at me.

**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, and in great letters 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.

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

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

**Don Pedro.**
Well, you temporize with the hours. In the meantime, good Signior Benedick, repair to Leonata’s: commend me to her and tell him I will not fail her at supper; for indeed she hath made great preparation.

**Benedick.**
I have almost matter enough in me for such an embassage; and so I leave you. [Exit]
Dogberry.
Comparisons are odorous, neighbour Verges.

Leonata.
Neighbours, you are tedious. I would fain know what you have to say.

Dogberry.
One word, ma'am: our watch, have comprehended two auspicious persons, and we would have them this morning examined before your worship.

Leonata.
Take their examination yourself and bring it me: I am now in great haste.

Dogberry.
It shall be suffigance.

Leonata.
Drink some wine ere you go: fare you well.

Dogberry.
Go, good partner, go, get you to the sexton; bring him pen and ink to the jail: we are now to examination these two villains.

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 and meet me at the jail.

[Exeunt] 4.1 [Enter DON PEDRO, DONNA ANNA, LEONATA, FRIAR FRANCIS, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, HERO, BEATRICE, and Attendants]

Leonata.
Come, Friar Francis, be brief; only the plain form of marriage.

Friar Francis.
You come hither, my lord, to marry this lady.

Claudio.
No.

Leonata.
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, charge you, on your souls, to utter it.

Claudio.
Know you any, Hero?

Hero.
None, my lord.

Friar Francis.
Know you any, count?

Leonata.
I dare make his answer, none.

**Claudio.**
O, what we dare do! what we may do! what we daily do, not knowing what they do!

**Benedick.**
How now! interjections? Why, then, some be of laughing, as, ah, ha, he!

**Claudio.**
Stand thee by, friar. Mother, by your leave:  
Will you with free and unconstrained soul  
Give me this maid, your daughter?

**Leonata.**
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, Leonata, take her back again:  
Give not this rotten orange to your friend;  
She's but the sign and semblance of her honour.  
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.

**Leonata.**
What do you mean, my lord?

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

**Leonata.**
Dear my lord, if you, in your own proof,  
Have vanquish'd 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, Leonata,  
I never tempted her with word too large;  
But, as a brother to his sister, show'd  
Bashful sincerity and comely love.
Hero.
And seem'd I ever otherwise to you?
Claudio.
Out on thee! Seeming! I will speak against it:
Hero.
Is my lord well, that he doth speak so wide?
Leonata.
Sweet prince, why speak not you?
Don Pedro.
What should I speak?
I stand dishonour'd, that have gone about
To link my dear friend to a common stale.
Leonata.
Are these things spoken, or do I but dream?
Donna Anna.
Sir, they are spoken, and these things are true.
Benedick.
This looks not like a nuptial.
Hero.
True! O God!
Claudio.
    Leonata, stand I here?
Let me but move one question to your daughter;
Hero.
O, God defend me! how am I beset!
Claudio
What man was he talk'd with you yesternight
Out at your window betwixt twelve and one?
Now, if you are a maid, answer to this.
Hero.
I talk'd with no man at that hour, my lord.
Don Pedro.
Why, then are you no maiden. Leonata,
I am sorry you must hear: upon mine honour,
Myself, my sister and this griefèd count
Did see her, hear her, at that hour last night
Talk with a ruffian at her chamber-window,
Who hath confess'd encounters they have had
A thousand times in secret.
Donna Anna.
Fie, fie! they are not to be named, my lord;
There is not chastity enough in language
Without offence to utter them. Thus, pretty lady,
I am sorry for thy much misgovernment.
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.

Leonata.
Hath no man's dagger here a point for me? [HERO swoons]

Beatrice.
Why, how now, cousin! wherefore sink you down?

Donna Anna.
Come, let us go. These things, come thus to light,
Smother her spirits up. [Exeunt DON PEDRO, DONNA ANNA, and CLAUDIO]

Benedick.
How doth the lady?

Beatrice.
Dead, I think. Help, aunt!
Hero! why, Hero! aunt! Signior Benedick! Friar!

Leonata.
O Fate! take not away thy heavy hand.
Death is the fairest cover for her shame
That may be wish'd for.

Beatrice.
How now, cousin Hero!

Friar Francis.
Have comfort, lady.

Leonata.
Dost thou look up?

Friar Francis.
Yea, wherefore should she not?

Leonata.
Wherefore! Why, doth not every earthly thing
Cry shame upon her? Could she here deny
The story that is printed in her blood?

Benedick.
Ma'am, ma'am, be patient.
For my part, I am so attired in wonder,
I know not what to say.

Beatrice.
O, 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.

Leonata.
Confirm'd, confirm'd! O, that is stronger made!
Would the two princes lie, and Claudio lie,
Who loved her so, that, speaking of her foulness,
Wash’d it with tears? Hence from her! let her die.

**Friar Francis.**
Hear me a little; for I have only been
Silent so long. Now truly I have mark’d
That in her eye there hath appear’d a fire,
To burn the errors that these princes hold
Against her maiden truth. Call me a fool;
If this sweet lady lie not guiltless here
Under some biting error.

**Leonata.**
Friar, it cannot be.
Thou seest that all the grace that she hath left
Is that she will not add to her damnation
A sin of perjury; she not denies it.

**Friar Francis.**
Lady, what man is he you are accused of?

**Hero.**
They know that do accuse me; I know none!

**Friar Francis.**
There is some strange misprision in the princes.

**Benedick.**
Two of them have the very bent of honour;
And if their wisdoms be misled in this,
The practice of it lives in Anna the bastard.

**Leonata.**
I know not.; but if they wrong her honour,
The proudest of them shall well hear of it.

**Friar Francis.**
Pause awhile,
And let my counsel sway you in this case.
Your daughter here the princes left for dead:
Let her awhile be secretly kept in,
And publish it that she is dead indeed.

**Leonata.**
What shall become of this? what will this do?

**Friar Francis.**
Marry, this well carried shall on her behalf
Change slander to remorse; that is some good:
She dying, as it must so be maintain’d,
Upon the instant that she was accused,
Shall be lamented, pitied and excused
Of every hearer. So will it fare with Claudio:
When he shall hear she died upon his words,
The idea of her life shall sweetly creep
Into his study of imagination,
And thinking she is dead, then shall he mourn,
And wish he had not so accused her,
No, though he thought his accusation true.

**Benedick.**
Signiora Leonata, let the friar advise you:
And though you know my inwardness and love
Is very much unto the prince and Claudio,
Yet, by mine honour, I will deal in this
With secrecy and justice.

**Leonata.**
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 prolong’d: 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.**
As strange as the thing I know not. It were as possible for me to say I loved nothing so well as you: but believe me not; and yet I lie not; I confess nothing, nor I deny nothing. I am sorry for my cousin.

**Benedick.**
By my sword, Beatrice, thou lovest me.