Act Two

Scene 1 [3.3] The street in Messina. Enter DOGBERRY and VERGES with the Watch: Cobweb, Mustardseed, Seacole and Oatcake.

Dogberry.
Are you good folk and true?

Verges.
Yea, or else it were pity but they should suffer salvation, body and soul.

Dogberry.
Nay, that were a punishment too good for them, if they should have any allegiance in them, being chosen for the prince’s watch.

Verges.
Well, give them their charge, neighbour Dogberry.

Dogberry.
First, who think you the most desertless one to be constable?

Verges.
Oatcake, sir, or Seacole; for they can write and read.

Dogberry.
Come hither, neighbour Seacole. You are thought here to be the most senseless and fit man for the constable of the watch; therefore bear you the lantern. For your writing and reading, let that appear when there is no need of such vanity. This is your charge: you are to bid any man stand, in the prince’s name.

Seacole.
How if he will not stand?

Dogberry.
Why, then, take no note of him, but let him go; and presently call the rest of the watch together and thank God you are rid of a knave.

Verges.
If he will not stand 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, for the watch to babble and to talk is most tolerable and not to be endured.

Oatcake.
We will rather sleep than talk: we know what belongs to a watch.

Dogberry.
Why, you speak like an ancient and most quiet watchman; for I cannot see how sleeping should offend: only, have a care that your bills be not stolen. Well, you are to call at all the ale-houses, and bid those that are drunk get them to bed.

Mustardseed.
How if they will not?

Dogberry.
Why, then, let them alone till they are sober: if they make you not then the better answer, you may say they are not the men you took them for.

Mustardseed.
Well, sir.
Dogberry.
If you meet a thief, you may suspect him, by virtue of your office, to be no true man; and, for such kind of men, the less you meddle or make with them, why the more is for your honesty. 
Seacole.
If we know him to be a thief, shall we not lay hands on him? 
Dogberry.
Truly, by your office, you may; but I think they that touch pitch will be defiled: the most peaceable way, if you do take a thief, is to let him be 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. 
Cobweb.
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; for the ewe that will not hear her lamb when it baahs will never answer a calf when he bleats. 
Verges.
'Tis very true. 
Dogberry.
This is the end of the charge. Well, masters, good night: and if there be any matter of weight chances, call up me: keep your fellows' counsels and your own; and good night. Come, neighbour. 
Seacole.
Well, masters, we hear our charge: let us go sit here upon the bench till two, and then all to bed. 
Dogberry.
One word more, honest neighbours. I pray you watch about Signior Leonata’s door; for the wedding being there to-morrow, there is a great coil to-night. Adieu: be vigilant, I beseech you. [Exeunt DOGBERRY and VERGES; Enter BORACHIO and CONSTANCE]
Borachio.
What Constance!
Oatcake.
Borachio.
Constance, I say! 
Constance.
Here, man; I am at thy elbow. 
Borachio.
Stand thee close, then; and I will, like a true drunkard, utter all to thee. Know that I have earned of Donna Anna a thousand ducats. I have to-night 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— Not so, neither: I tell this tale like a deformed villain— I should first tell thee how the prince, Claudio, and my master, planted and placed and possessed by my mistress Donna Anna, saw afar off in the orchard this amiable encounter. 
Constance.
And thought they Margaret was Hero? 
Borachio.
Watchman Four Cobweb.
This is all.
Sexton.
And this is more, fellows, than you can deny. Donna Anna 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 Leonata’s: I will go before and show him their examination. [Exit]
Dogberry.
Come, let them be opinioned. Come, bind them. Thou naughty varlet!
Constance.
Away! you are an ass, you are an ass.
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, watchmen, 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! Bring them away. O that I had been writ down an ass! [Exeunt]

5.1[Enter LEONATA and ANTONIA]
Antonia.
If you go on thus, you will kill yourself:
And ’tis not wisdom thus to second grief
Against yourself.
Leonata.
I pray thee, cease thy counsel,
Which falls into mine ears as profitless
As water in a sieve: give not me counsel;
Antonia.
Yet bend not all the harm upon yourself;
Make those that do offend you suffer too.
Leonata.
There thou speak’st reason: nay, I will do so.
My soul doth tell me Hero is belied;
And that shall Claudio know; so shall the prince
And all of them that thus dishonour her.
Antonia.
Here comes the prince and Claudio hastily. [Enter DON PEDRO and CLAUDIO]
Don Pedro.
Good day, good day.
Claudio.
Good day to both of you.
Leonata.
Hear you, my lords,—
Don Pedro.
We have some haste, Leonata.