Claudio.
My liege, your highness now may do me good.
Hath Leonata any son, my lord?

Don Pedro.
No child but Hero; she’s the only heir. Dost thou affect her, Claudio?

Claudio.
O, my lord,
When you went onward on this ended action,
I look’d 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 return’d 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.

Don Pedro.
Thou wilt be like a lover presently
And tire the hearer with a book of words.
If thou dost love fair Hero, cherish it,
I know we shall have reveling to-night: [Borachio enters unnoticed and eavesdrops.]
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 mother will I break; [Exit Borachio]
And the conclusion is, she shall be thine.
In practice let us put it presently. [Exeunt]

[1.2] [Enter DONNA ANNA and CONSTANCE]

Constance.
What the good-year, my lady! why are you thus out of measure sad?

Donna Anna.
There is no measure in the occasion that breeds sadness; therefore the sadness is without limit.

Constance.
You should hear reason.

Donna Anna.
And when I have heard it, what blessing brings it?

Constance.
If not a present remedy, at least a patient sufferance.

Donna Anna.
I wonder that thou go about to apply a moral medicine to a mortifying mischief. I cannot hide what I am:
I must be sad when I have cause and smile at no one’s jests, eat when I have stomach and wait for no
one’s leisure, sleep when I am drowsy and tend on no one’s business, laugh when I am merry and claw no man in his humor.

Constance.
Yea, but you must not make the full show of this till you may do it without controlment. You have of late warred against your brother, and he hath ta’en you newly into his grace; where it is impossible you should take true root, but by the fair weather that you make yourself: it is needful that you frame the season for your own harvest.

Donna Anna.
I had rather be a canker in a hedge than a rose in his grace, and it better fits my blood to be disdained of all than to rob love from any: in this, though I cannot be said to be a flattering honest woman, it must not be denied but I am a plain-dealing villain. I am trusted with a muzzle; therefore I have decreed not to sing in my cage. If I had my mouth, I would bite; if I had my liberty, I would do my liking: in the meantime let me be that I am and seek not to alter me.

Constance.
Can you make no use of your discontent?

Donna Anna.
I make all use of it, for I use it only. Who comes here? [Enter BORACHIO] What news, Borachio?

Borachio.
I came yonder from a great supper: the prince your brother is royally entertained by Leonata: and I can give you intelligence of an intended marriage.

Donna Anna.
Will it serve for any model to build mischief on? What is he for a fool that betroths himself to unquietness?

Borachio.
Marry, it is your brother’s right hand.

Donna Anna.
Who? the most exquisite Claudio?

Borachio.
Even he.

Donna Anna.
A proper squire! And who, and who? which way looks he?

Borachio.
Marry, on Hero, the daughter and heir of Leonata.

Donna Anna.
A very forward March-chick! How came you to this?

Borachio.
Being by the doorway, comes me the prince and Claudio, in sad conference: I whipt me behind the curtain; and there heard it agreed upon that the prince should woo Hero for himself, and having obtained her, give her to Count Claudio.

Donna Anna.
Come, come, let us thither: this may prove food to my displeasure. That young start-up hath all the glory of my overthrow: if I can cross him any way, I bless myself every way. You are both sure, and will assist me?

Constance.
To the death, my lady.
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 grievèd 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.