Act I

Scene One [1.1] War ends between Don Pedro and his rebellious bastard sister Don Anna. All come to Messina, governed by Lady Leonata, to celebrate the peace. LEONATA'S garden. [Enter LEONATA reading letter, HERO, and BEATRICE, Antonia, with BALTHASAR]

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

Balthasar.
He is very near by this: he was not three leagues off when I left him.

Leonata.
How many gentlemen have you lost in this action against Donna Anna?

Balthasar.
But few of any sort, and none of name.

Leonata.
A victory is twice itself when the achiever brings home full numbers. I find here that Don Pedro hath bestowed much honor on that young Florentine called Claudio.

Balthasar.
Much deserved on his part and equally remembered by Don Pedro: he hath borne himself beyond the promise of his age.

Beatrice.
I pray you, is Signior Mountanto returned from the wars or no?

Balthasar.
I know none of that name, lady: there was none such in the army of any sort.

Leonata.
What is he that you ask for, niece?

Hero.
My cousin means Signior Benedick of Padua.

Balthasar.
O, he's returned; and as pleasant as ever he was.

Beatrice.
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.

Balthasar.
He hath done good service in these wars.
And a good soldier too, lady.

Beatrice.
And a good soldier to a lady: but what is he to a lord?

Balthasar.
A lord to a lord, a man to a man; stuffed with all honorable virtues.

Beatrice.
It is so, indeed; he is no less than a stuffed man: but for the stuffing,—well, we are all mortal.

Leonata.
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.
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.

Balthasar.
I see, lady, the gentleman is not in your good books.

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

Balthasar.
He is most in the company of the right noble Claudio.

Beatrice.
God help the noble Claudio!

Balthasar.
I will hold friends with you, lady.

Beatrice.
Do, good friend.

Balthasar.
Don Pedro is approached. [Enter DON PEDRO, DONNA ANNA, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, Borachio, Constance]

Don Pedro.
Good Madam Leonata, you are come to meet your trouble: the fashion of the world is to avoid cost, and you encounter it.

Leonata.
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 true daughter.

Leonata.
Her father did many times tell me so.

Benedick.
Were you in doubt, ma’am, that you asked him?

Leonata.
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 proclaims herself. Be happy, lady; for you are like your honorable mother. [He and Leonata talk aside.]

Benedick.
Though Madam Leonata be her mother, she would not like a gray head on her shoulders, as like her as she is.

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

Benedick.
Dogberry.
Comparisons are odorous, neighbour Verge.
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.
Verge.
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!

Come 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 vanquished 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.