

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE:

THE GARDEN OF LEONATO'S HOME. LEONATO AND FRIENDS ARE CHATTING. A MESSENGER ARRIVES

MESSENGER: Don Pedro of Arragon is on his way.

LEONATO: Good. Do you know how many have been lost in action?

MESSENGER Very few, I understand. Nobody you'll know.

LEONATO: Excellent. I believe that a young Florentine has particularly distinguished himself in battle.

MESSENGER You refer no doubt to young Claudio.

LEONATO: I do indeed.

MESSENGER Yes. Who would have thought it? He has the countenance and outward disposition of a lamb, but in battle he is a lion.

LEONATO His uncle here will be very glad of it. We have much to celebrate.

Song 1. Victory (Leonato and Chorus)

Leonato

The fighting's over now, the war has passed
So let's give thanks for victory
Our brave young soldiers will be home at last
It will be a most glorious page in history
It's time to celebrate their safe return
A battle won at little cost
Oh how much sweeter is our victory
When achieved with so little to mourn
So few lives lost

Chorus:

We plan to celebrate all through the night
Good times await us
No more wars to fight

Leonato & men:

It's time to celebrate
Bring on the wine
Set out the tables
Let's all have a good time

All:

Our brave young warriors are on their way

At any moment they'll be here
How long we've waited for this happy day
They've been gone on their noble crusade a good long year
Now we may jubilate
Now is our chance
Let's hear the music
Let us sing and dance
Now we can exultate let us give voice
Let us be merry let us sing and rejoice

Leonato:

Spare no expense; give them all that they ask for
Give them a welcome that's lavish and grand
No recompense is sufficient to pay for
All the good deeds they have done for this holy land

All:

It's time to celebrate
Vict'ry is won
Let's give three cheers now
Good times have begun
It's time to celebrate
Bring on the wine
Set out the tables
Let's all have a good time

Women:

It's been so dreary with no men around
With nothing left but fantasy
A dreadful lack but now they're back we'll see
How our dreams and our fantasies match reality
I hope there's one for me
Let's wait and see if there is one who'll match my fantasy
A man with eyes of blue
Muscular too
That's what I want
But if I can't get what i want
Someone who's less than perfect may have to do

BEATRICE STEPS FORWARD

BEATRICE: Has Signior Mountebank returned from the wars?

MESSENGER I do not know of the gentleman.

HERO: My cousin means Signior Benedick of Padua.

MESSENGER: Signior Benedick? He is a good soldier, lady - stuffed with all honourable virtues.

BEATRICE: Stuffed, perhaps. Stuffed up, certainly. But honourable virtues? Signior Mountebank? I hardly think so.

LEONATO: Do not mistake my niece. There is a kind of merry war between her and Signior Benedick. There's always a skirmish of wit between them.

BEATRICE: How could there be a skirmish of wit when Signior Mountebank has none? And pray, who is his companion now? They seem to change by the month - although even a month in his company must be an ordeal, unless one has a taste for suffering.

MESSENGER: He spends a lot of time with the noble Claudio.

BEATRICE: Poor Claudio. He will discover that Signior Benedick is like a disease - easily caught, difficult to get rid of, and leaves one feeling very poor indeed.

MESSENGER I get the impression that Signior Benedick is not in your good books.

BEATRICE: No, and if he were I'd burn the library.

LEONATO: Ah, here they are.

ENTER DON PEDRO, DON JOHN, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK AND BATHASAR

DON PEDRO Good Signior Leonato, how good of you to welcome us like this.

LEONATO: You are always welcome here, Don Pedro.

DON PEDRO Thank you. You know my brother Don John.

LEONATO: Yes of course. You are most welcome, Don John. I was very pleased to hear that you and your brother were reconciled.

DON JOHN: I thank you.

DON PEDRO (REFERRING TO HERO) This is your daughter, I believe.

LEONATO: So her mother has often assured me.

BENEDICK: Were you in any doubt?

LEONATO: I just wonder that I could have sired such a beauty.

BENEDICK: You are too modest, Leonato. But I grant you she has certainly grown to be a fine example of young womanhood - which is more than can be said for some ladies I might mention.

BEATRICE: I don't know why you waste so much breath, Signior Benedick, when nobody takes the slightest notice of what you have to say.

BENEDICK: What? My dear Lady Disdain! Are you still alive?

OTHERS CONTINUE THEIR DISCUSSION UNHEARD AS BEATRICE AND BENEDICK EXCHANGE WORDS.

Song 2. Disdain (Beatrice and Benedick)

Beatrice:

If I should be disdainful
Who can blame me
When disdain has such a feast as you before it
For it's so easy to disdain you
Courtesy itself could not ignore it
All you say and do invite it
So why fight it?
You demand disdain so much, why spite it?
I just give you what you ask for:
You invite disdain
There's no-one I can point to who respects you
Anyone with any sense of taste rejects you
You're just not nice, each vice infects you
No-one here of any note accepts you

Benedick:

You're no tasty dish to savour
Much too spicy! And you have a nasty flavour
Nothing you do wins my favour
You are such a pain!
All you say I disagree with
If you just had eyes to see with
You'd know you're no fun to be with
That's a fact that all agree with

Beatrice:

If you had your wits about you
You would notice everyone can do without you
It's no wonder they all doubt you for you have no brain
You are quite devoid of any saving virtue
All that you do lacks in style

Benedick:

Those who have been stung by your sharp tongue avoid you
All take heel and run a mile!
If you weren't quite so big-headed
You'd discover you're a creature to be dreaded
All who see you run for cover
They can't take the strain

Beatrice:

It's impossible to like you
Does it strike you that no woman would embrace you?
She'd outface you or debase you ev'ry time she could

I would really hate to be you
It is such a pain to see you

Benedick:

Those expressions go for me too

Both:

I just cannot stand to be with you

BENEDICK: Is it not true that I am loved by all ladies apart from you?

BEATRICE: None could compete with the love you have for yourself.

BENEDICK: Alas, it is true that I have a hard heart and love none.

BEATRICE: That's excellent news for all women, otherwise they might find themselves plagued by a pernicious suitor.

BENEDICK: You in particular need have no fears on that score.

BEATRICE: That is the best news of all.

DON PEDRO APPROACHES.

DON PEDRO Signior Benedick, our dear friend Leonato has invited us to stay a month. Leonato, your hand. We will go together.

EXIT EVERYONE EXCEPT CLAUDIO AND BENEDICK.

CLAUDIO Benedick, did you note Leonato's daughter Hero?

BENEDICK: No, I did not note her. I did notice her, however.

CLAUDIO: You said she was a fine specimen of womanhood.

BENEDICK: Merely observing courtesy, my dear Claudio. One is expected to compliment fathers on their daughters, particularly when the father is our host.

CLAUDIO Do you not think her a fine young lady?

BENEDICK: You want me to give you my opinion as a tyrant of their sex?

CLAUDIO No, I want your sober judgment on the matter.

BENEDICK: To be honest, I think she's too low for high praise, too brown for fair praise and too little for great praise. If she was anything other than she was, she would not be unattractive. But being what she is, I don't like her.

CLAUDIO Please Benedick, be serious. What do you think of her?

BENEDICK: Why is my opinion important? Do you wish to buy her?

CLAUDIO Can the world buy such a jewel?

BENEDICK: Yes - and a case to put it in too. But why so serious?

CLAUDIO I think she is the fairest lady I've ever looked upon.

BENEDICK: I can still see without spectacles, and I saw no such thing. Her cousin Beatrice, if she did not so badly need her tongue to be sheathed, is a much more attractive prospect. You don't intend to turn into a husband, do you?

CLAUDIO I think I would be a very lucky man if I could have Hero for a wife.

BENEDICK: Heavens! Is there not a man left who is immune from this contagion they call love? Will I be the only remaining bachelor when I am threescore in years?

Song 3. This Strange Affliction Called Love (Benedick)

Poor Claudio, my erstwhile comrade
Who once proclaimed he'd never wed
He once was such a wild and gay blade
But now he's lost his head to some infernal young maid
Once he was manly a proud young dandy
But now he warbles like a dove he sighs with langour
And fuels my anger
Now he's a victim of this strange affliction called love
Why must men act so indiscreetly
Whenever there's a girl around
Why do they alter so completely
Becoming so unsound
Their heads a league above ground
I'm touched by sadness to see such madness
If only I could make them see
This senseless folly brings melancholy
And touches all with lunacy
Oh what has happened to those young companions
With whom I hunted in the wood
With whom I shared a wild and free existence
I'd re-instate them if I could
I once had friends in great abundance
I never lacked for friends at all
But one by one I lose each one once
They fall a victim of this strange affliction called love
How can they do it? Don't they intuit how mad it is to take a wife?
This strange affliction just causes friction
And brings with it an end to all that's good in one's life

DON PEDRO APPEARS

DON PEDRO What secrets do you have that you failed to join us with Leonato?

BENEDICK: A dark secret indeed, which no torture could force from my lips.

DON PEDRO I thought we were brothers in arms, with no secrets between us.

BENEDICK: Well, since you put it like that... (TO CLAUDIO) I'm sorry, Claudio, but I am compelled to reveal all. (TO DON PEDRO:) It pains me to tell you that Count Claudio has been assailed by a most dreadful affliction.

DON PEDRO LOOKS CONCERNED.

DON PEDRO That is very disturbing news. May I ask the nature of this affliction?

BENEDICK: The worst, I am afraid. Count Claudio imagines himself to be in love.

DON PEDRO In love? With whom?

BENEDICK: Ah, now there's the rub. It is none other than Leonato's daughter, Hero.

DON PEDRO If this is so, then God let it be so.

BENEDICK: God forbid it should be so.

CLAUDIO God forbid it should be otherwise.

DON PEDRO She is a very well worthy of your affection, my dear Claudio. You must not take notice of Benedick's taunts. He has always been an heretic in the matter of love and beauty. But I venture it will not be too long before we see the great heretic himself looking pale with ardour for some young lady.

BENEDICK: If I am ever pale, it will be with sickness or hunger, but not love. That a woman bore me, I give thanks. That she brought me up, I likewise give thanks. But I will not surrender my independence simply for the purpose of acquiring a baldrick in which to hang my bugle.

DON PEDRO One day you shall quake for it.

BENEDICK: If I quake, it will only be from infirmity or from fever - but not the infirmity of marriage. Frogs shall sing lullabies before any woman puts a fence around me.

DON PEDRO Then we must prepare for a frog chorus.

BENEDICK: Why not? It is just as likely as the prospect of me getting married.

DON PEDRO We shall see. But now I suggest you go and see Leonato while I talk to Claudio. I think we need some respite from your cynicism in this matter. Tell Leonato we shall be along shortly. He has laid on a wonderful celebration for our return.

BENEDICK EXITS.

DON PEDRO So, dear Claudio, tell me your feelings about Hero. I shall not mock you, I promise.

CLAUDIO What is there to tell?

Song 4. On An Angel's Wing (Claudio)

I've been pre-occupied by things I had to do
I had no time for love at all
I listened only to the sound of marching drums
And heard the bugle call
No other music touched my heart before today
No poets caught my ear
The call of duty and the words of loyal friends
Were all I longed to hear
Now I hear symphonies
I can hear a skylark sing
Their music comes to me on an angel's wing
I'm filled with tenderness
There is joy in all I see
It's like a warm caress taking hold of me
I had no eyes for such fine beauty
I never had much time for art
I only lived to do my duty
I never listened to my heart
But now, oh how I've changed
I'm transfixed to see such grace
The music of her voice and her lovely face
Before today I looked on her with different eyes
In quite a different way
I never really took much notice of what she had to say
But now she fills my thoughts
She displaces ev'rything
She steals into my heart on an angel's wing

CLAUDIO Oh my lord, my heart is now thronging with soft and delicate desires. What am I to do?

DON PEDRO Dear Claudio, you are in danger of overwhelming the listener with too much poetic striving. But if you love her, cherish it. If you wish, I shall speak to her father on your behalf. I believe it is your intention that I should.

CLAUDIO How well you understand me.

DON PEDRO Well, you're not the most inscrutable of people. That's what I like about you. You are incapable of being devious. At least, not successfully. I shall speak to her

father tonight - and Hero shall be yours.

CLAUDIO: Thank you my lord.

SCENE TWO:

LEONATO'S HOUSE. LEONATO GREETES ANTONIO.

LEONATO: Hello dear brother. You are a little early for the celebrations.

ANTONIO: I come early to bring you a prophesy about the celebrations tonight. I prophesy that tonight Don Pedro will inform you that the noble Claudio wishes to marry my dear niece Hero.

LEONATO: Hero? My Hero?

ANTONIO: Is there any other?

LEONATO: But how do you know this? Did it come to you in a vision?

CLAUDIO One of my men heard Don Pedro and Claudio discussing it.

LEONATO: It's just as well to be fore-warned about such things. We must tell Hero, so she can prepare her answer. Come.

THEY EXIT. DON JOHN AND CONRADE ENTER.

CONRADE: I would urge patience, my lord. If you can at least give the appearance of forbearance, it would create a much better climate for you to achieve your aims.

DON JOHN Patience! For how much longer?

Song 5. Revenge (Don John)

I'm just so sick of it
I'm sick of playing his game
I've grown so tired of this weary sham
I cannot wait for the day
The day that I find a way
A way to show him just who I am
The whole world smiles on him
But someday soon they will see that I am no-one's fool
One day they'll see a new side to me
I have been forced to pretend to be a dutiful friend
I've had to bow and scrape
Oh I long for this farce to end
Right from my day of birth I've had to live in his shade
I found that nature had fixed the race
If only I'd been born first our states would now be reversed

But fate has cursed me to second place
He always acts so grand
He always gets his own way
They all take note of him while no-one listens to what I say
Oh how it galls me that he should have such sway over me
That he should always be ahead in all things instead of me
Each day how I pray to find a way
To bring great shame on his proud name and make him pay
Each day I pray to find a way to even up the score
To bring discomfort and disaster to his door
I think the time has come
I want the chance now to shake him, break him and make amends
A bit of cunning from me could bring him much misery
And bring catastrophe to all his friends
And then they'll turn on him and then the whole world will see
Just what a fool he is
Then they will have more respect for me
And when it happens he'll find it will unsettle his mind
He'll be caught up in it
A tragic story that never ends
I'll bring disgrace on him
I'll rid the place of him
I'll have revenge on him

ENTER BORACHIO.

DON JOHN What news, Borachio?

BORACHIO: I have heard that Claudio is to propose marriage to the young Hero. Your brother has gone to speak to her father about it.

DON JOHN: That is interesting news indeed, Borachio. Perhaps we can make use of this knowledge to cause a little mischief. Come.

SCENE THREE:

LEONATO'S HOUSE, LATER THAT EVENING.

BEATRICE: I saw Don John skulking about earlier this afternoon. He looked as if he was plotting something. And how acid the man always looks. I get heartburn just looking at him.

LEONATO: He is of a very melancholy disposition.

BEATRICE: That's what Benedick needs - a little melancholy to soften the excesses of his personality. Unfortunately, Don John takes it to extremes. But then no man is perfect.

LEONATO: I worry about you, my dear niece. I fear that your sharp tongue is perhaps a

little too lively to attract a husband.

BEATRICE: For which I thank God, for it is a blessing. Lord, I could not endure for a husband a man with a beard on his face.

LEONATO: What about a husband who has no beard?

BEATRICE: One without a beard is no more than a youth, and I have no interest in pandering to youth. I might just as well play with my dolls. So you can see what a position that puts me in. He who is more than a youth is not for me, and he that is less than a man I am not for him.

LEONATO: I can see your dilemma.

BEATRICE: Oh there's no dilemma. The consequence is quite clear: I shall never marry, and be glad of it.

Song 6. I'll Never Marry (Beatrice)

I cannot see much joy in being someone's wife
I shan't allow some beardless boy to rule my life
Some may find pleasure in the wedded state, I know,
But it's a pleasure I'll forgo
I'll never marry it's not meant to be
My independence means too much to me
All dreams miscarry as soon as you're wed
It is a fate that I just dread
I do not need a man to boost my self-esteem
I've never been seduced by thoughts of love's young dream
A man just wants a wife to cook and wash and sew
But that's a fate I'll never know
I'll never marry not while I am sane
Why trade one's freedom for heartache and pain?
To be a housemaid or nurse to some man is simply not part of my plan
I simply cannot see what good it is to me to have a husband around
I'll stay the way I am
I'll never wed a man
Not while my reason is sound
I'll never marry; of that I am sure
I'll stay a virgin unsullied and pure
No man shall make me a slave in his home
I'll be much better on my own

LEONATO: Well, dear niece, I hope one day to see you belie those words.

BEATRICE: Not until God makes men of a different metal.

LEONATO: (TO HERO:) They'll be arriving any minute, so daughter, remember what I told you. If Don Pedro approaches you, give the answer we have discussed.

HERO: I'll try and remember, but in the excitement I fear I may forget.

BEATRICE: Take your cue from the dance, dear Hero. It's all about measure and pace. Marriage is like a Scottish jig - hot and exhilarating to begin with, but rather tiring after a while. Like a dance, there are three steps to it - wooing, wedding and woe. The wooing is the exhilarating part of it, after which the wedding is a bit of an anti-climax. And after that - the woe, when you have the rest of your life to repent.

LEONATO: They are here.

ENTER DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, BALTHASAR, DON JOHN, BORACHIO, MARGARET, URSULA AND OTHERS. ALL ARE WEARING MASKS.

HERO With those masks, we shall not know who is who.

BEATRICE: You can usually detect a man by his bearing. Look at Benedick over there, for example. His disguise would fool nobody, since that swaggering gait of his immediately gives him away.

HERO IS APPROACHED BY DON PEDRO

DON PEDRO Would you walk with me, my lady?

Music: The World Is Brimming With Love Today (Instrumental Version)

DON PEDRO LEADS HERO AWAY. OTHERS TAKE PARTNERS FOR A DANCE. AT THE END OF THE DANCE BENEDICK FALLS INTO CONVERSATION WITH BEATRICE

BEATRICE: So you will not tell me who you are?

BENEDICK: Not now.

BEATRICE: Nor who told you about me?

BENEDICK: I cannot divulge my sources.

BEATRICE: But your source said I was disdainful and acquired my wit parrot-fashion from books of humour?

BENEDICK: I'm afraid so.

BEATRICE: Then it can only be the prince's jester who told you so.

BENEDICK: Who's he?

BEATRICE: Signior Benedick, of course - a dull and tiresome fool whose only gift lies in devising ludicrous slanders. None but libertines delight in his company - and then only

for a very limited period.

BORACHIO APPROACHES DON JOHN AND POINTS OUT CLAUDIO.

BORACHIO: That's Claudio over there.

DON JOHN: Are you sure?

BORACHIO: Quite sure.

DON JOHN: Then I shall make my approach.

DON JOHN GOES TO CLAUDIO.

DON JOHN: Signior Benedick, I need to talk to you most urgently. You are very close to my brother's heart. You must try and dissuade him from this mad passion he has for the young Hero. She is no match for him.

CLAUDIO: Don Pedro? What makes you think he loves Hero?

DON JOHN: Look at them together over there. Can you not see for yourself? Look how intimate they are together.

BORACHIO: I heard him say he would marry her tonight.

DON JOHN: Come, let us partake of the banquet.

DON JOHN AND BORACHIO EXIT, LEAVING CLAUDIO TO MUSE ALONE.