

Much Ado About Nothing

by William Shakespeare



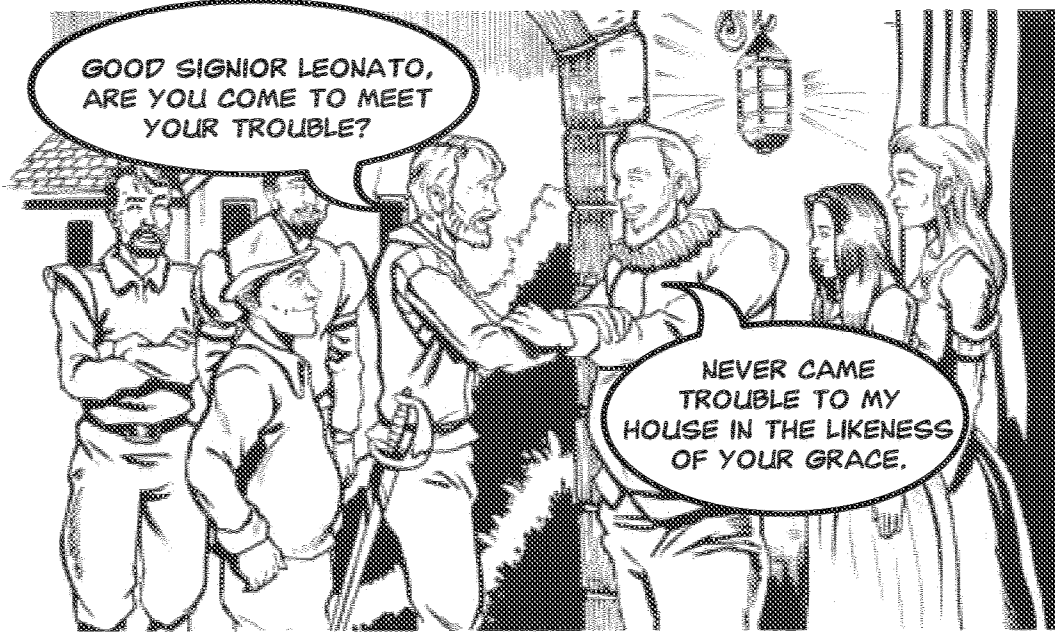
While Leonato introduced his daughter, Hero, to Don Pedro and Claudio, Benedick and Leonato's niece, Beatrice, spoke. From their tone, it was clear that they already knew each other. It was also clear that there was no love lost between them.



MY DEAR LADY
DISDAIN! ARE YOU
YET LIVING?

IS IT POSSIBLE
DISDAIN SHOULD DIE
WHILE SHE HATH SUCH
MEET FOOD TO FEED
IT AS SIGNIOR
BENEDICK?

Don Pedro, Prince of Arragon, came to Messina to visit Leonato, the governor, on his way home from a battle against his half-brother, Don John. With him came his friends, the young lords Claudio and Benedick, as well as Don John, with whom he had reconciled. Leonato warmly welcomed Don Pedro.



After their hosts had left to prepare a feast for them, Claudio confided to Benedick that he had fallen in love with the governor's daughter. Benedick was appalled. Don Pedro laughed to hear Benedick swear he would never marry.



That night there was a masked ball. Beatrice spoke to a masked man whom she didn't realize was Benedick. The words she used to describe him stung the prince's friend.



Don Pedro then asked for and received Leonato's approval of the marriage of Claudio and Hero. The prince and governor called the young couple and told them the good news. They were overjoyed.



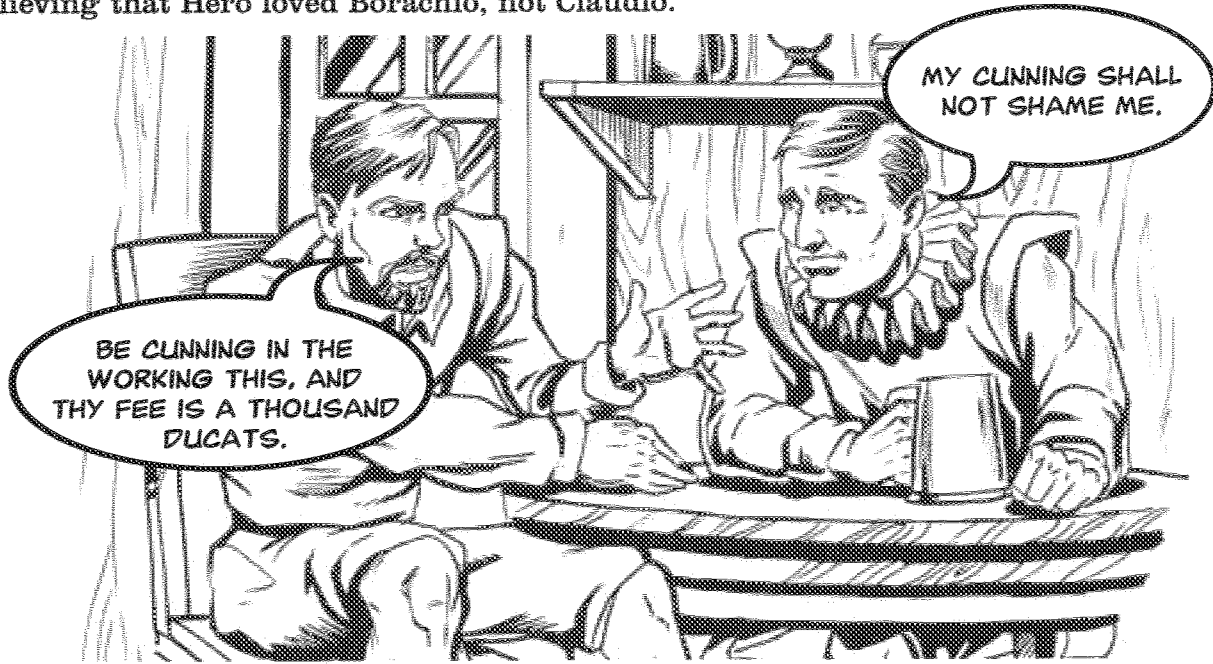
At the ball, a masked Don Pedro wooed Hero for Claudio. Then the prince spoke with Beatrice. Taken by her beauty and wit, he half-heartedly proposed to her. She refused, for she thought little of marriage as well. Don Pedro later told Leonato about his niece's refusal.



Then the prince proposed a plan to help the week pass quickly: He would use the time to make Benedick and Beatrice fall in love with each other. He asked if the others would help him fashion this plan.



While Don Pedro planned to bring Benedick and Beatrice together, his half-brother plotted to keep Claudio and Hero apart. Bitter over how Claudio had beaten him in battle, Don John and his follower, Borachio, planned to trick Claudio into believing that Hero loved Borachio, not Claudio.



Much Ado About Nothing

-9-

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After Don Pedro and the other men tricked Benedick, Hero and her waiting woman prepared to trick Beatrice. They, too, took a walk in the orchard, and spoke when they knew Beatrice was nearby.



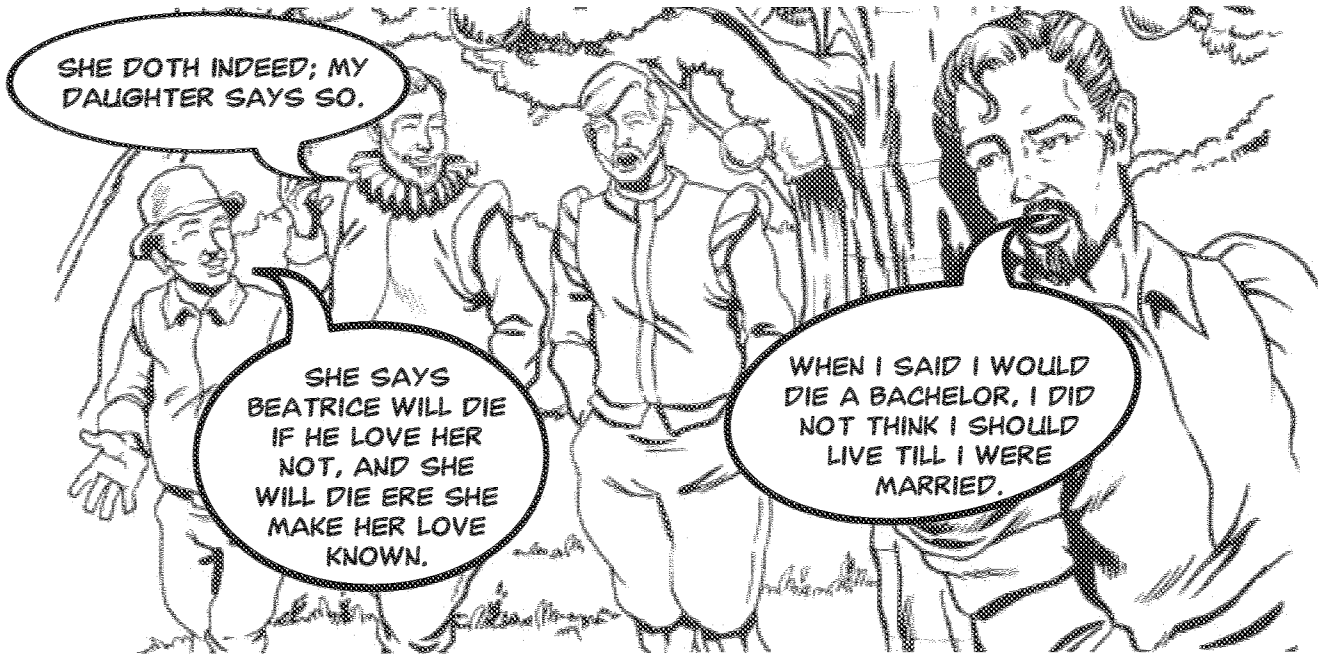
Much Ado About Nothing

-11-

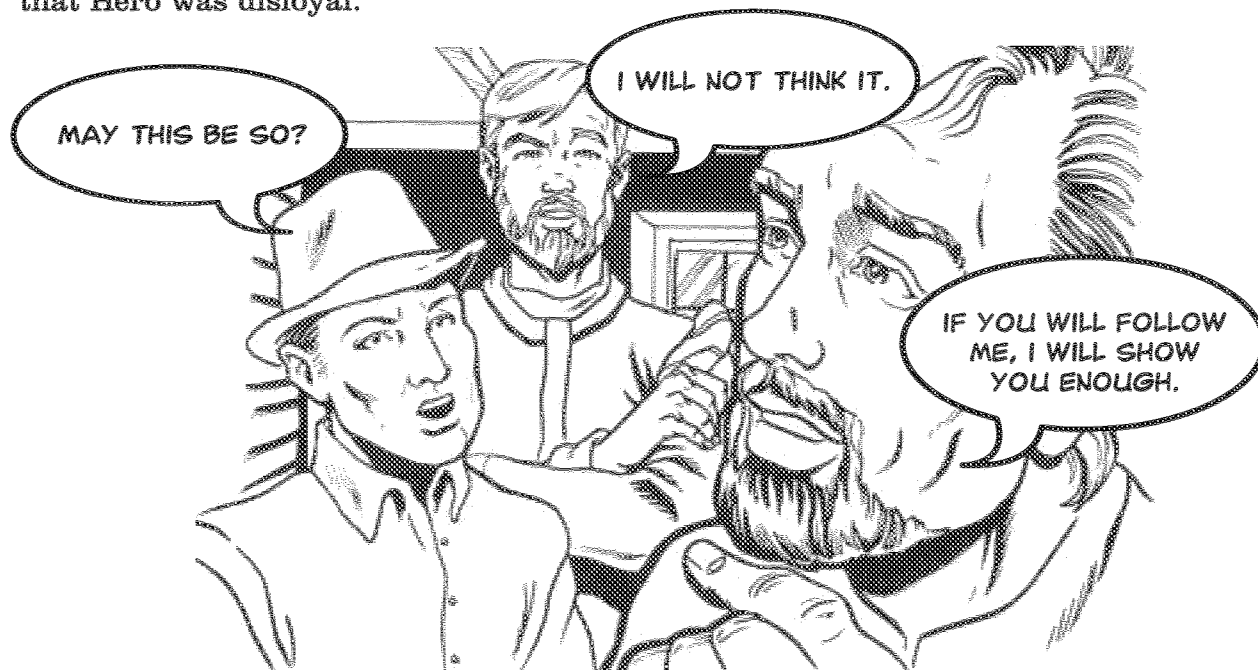
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Don Pedro put his plan into action. He, Claudio, and Leonato walked in the orchard near where Benedick was reading, knowing he could overhear them. Don Pedro asked Leonato if it was true that his niece Beatrice loved Benedick.



The night before the wedding, Don Pedro, Claudio, and Leonato teased Benedick, saying he looked lovesick. He admitted that this was true, and asked to speak to Leonato alone. After they left, Don John arrived and told the prince and Claudio that Hero was disloyal.



Don John led Don Pedro and Claudio to Hero's window. There they saw Borachio embracing a woman and calling her Hero. The prince and his friend were outraged.



-13-

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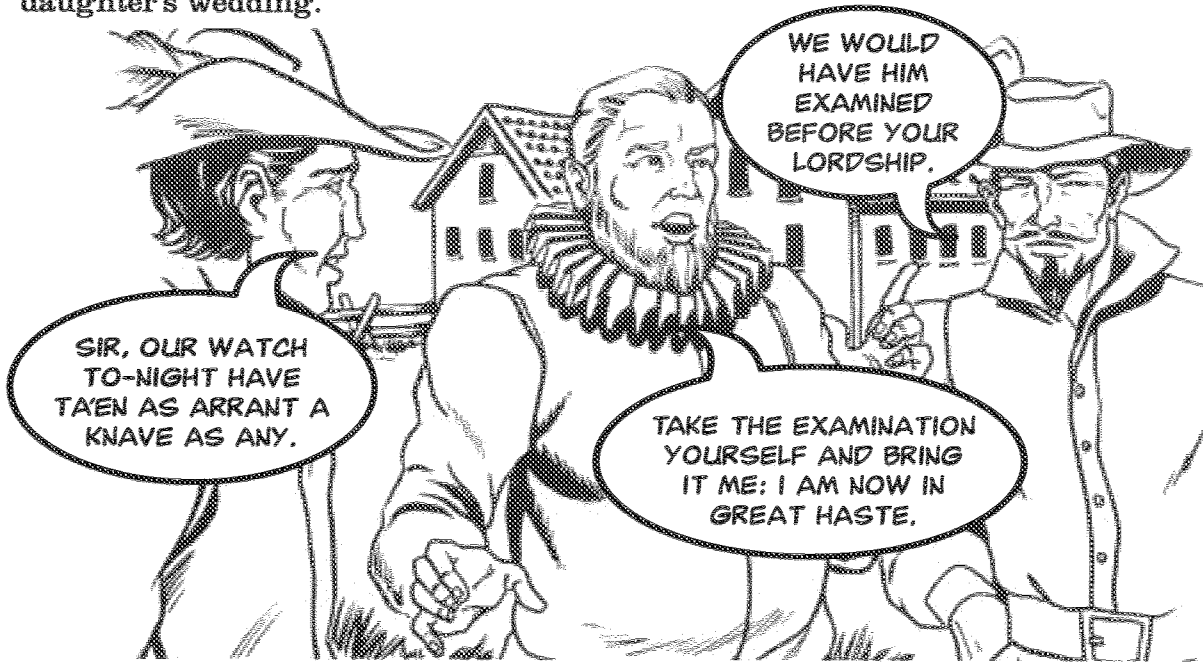
Beatrice, accompanying Hero to her wedding, confessed that she was in love. At the church, they met Friar Francis, Leonato, Benedick, Don Pedro, Claudio, and Don John. When the friar asked if anyone knew any reason Hero and Claudio should not be married, Claudio spoke up.



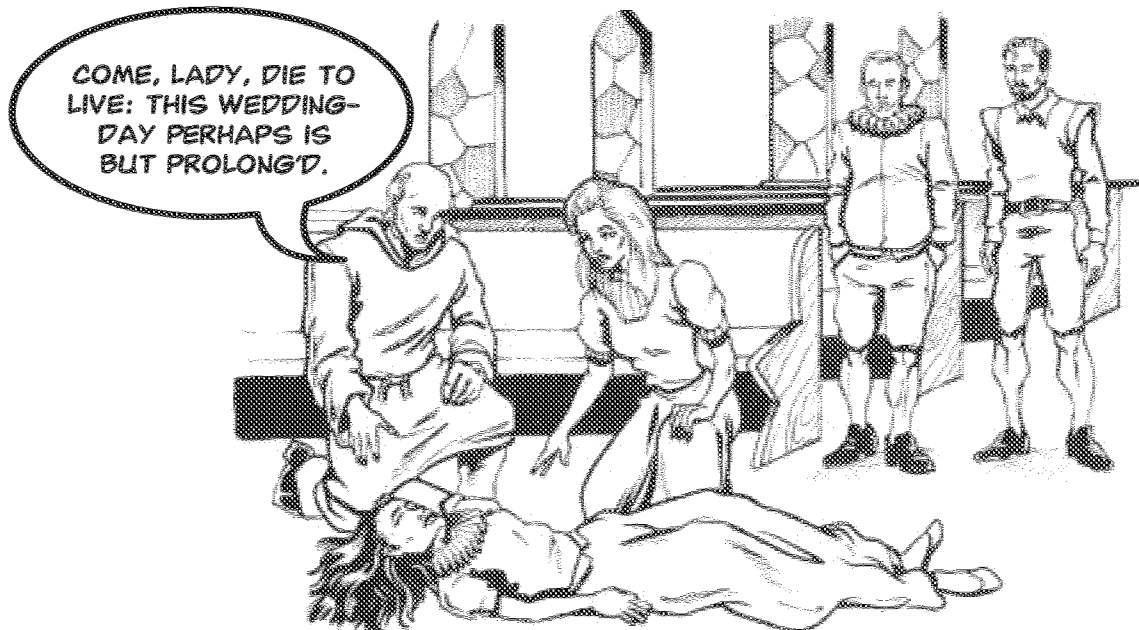
-15-

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Later, the night watchmen overheard Borachio bragging that Don John had paid him a thousand gold coins for deceiving the prince and Claudio. The watch arrested Borachio. The next morning, the constables stopped Leonato on his way to his daughter's wedding.



Denying the accusation, Hero collapsed. Claudio, Don Pedro, and Don John left the church. Leonato said he hoped his daughter was dead, as it would be “the fairest cover for her shame.” The friar, who believed that Hero was innocent, suggested that they pretend that she was indeed dead while they searched for the truth.



Everyone left the church, save Beatrice and Benedick. Beatrice wept over how Hero had been treated, and Benedick tried to comfort her. He said that he also believed her cousin had been wronged. Then, for the first time, the two professed their love to each other.



-17-

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The next morning, Claudio and Don Pedro met the friar, Leonato, and Benedick at the church. As Claudio stepped up to the altar, one of several masked women stepped forward as well. The friar performed the marriage ceremony. Then Claudio lifted his wife's mask. It was Hero.



-19-

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Leonato's shame and anger dissolved when he heard Borachio's confession: Don John had arranged the awful deception. When Don Pedro and Claudio learned the truth, they felt they had killed Hero. The governor told Claudio he could clear his daughter's name, visit her tomb, then marry his niece.



Benedick then asked for Beatrice. She stepped forward and took off her mask. When he asked if she loved him, she answered no more than reason. He said the same. Then Hero and Claudio revealed sonnets that Benedick and Beatrice had written for each other.

