

Benedick is set up by The Prince, Claudio & Leonato

PRINCE Come hither, Leonato. What was it you told me of today, that your niece Beatrice was in love with Signior Benedick?

CLAUDIO O, ay. [*Aside to Prince.*] Stalk on, stalk on; the fowl sits. – I did never think that lady would have loved any man.

LEONATO No, nor I neither, but most wonderful that she should so dote on Signior Benedick, whom she hath in all outward behaviours seemed ever to abhor.

BENEDICK [*aside*] Is 't possible? Sits the wind in that corner?

LEONATO By my troth, my lord, I cannot tell what to think of it, but that she loves him with an enraged affection, it is past the infinite of thought.

PRINCE Maybe she doth but counterfeit.

CLAUDIO Faith, like enough.

LEONATO O God! Counterfeit? There was never counterfeit of passion came so near the life of passion as she discovers it.

PRINCE Why, what effects of passion shows she?

CLAUDIO [*aside to Leonato*] Bait the hook well; this fish will bite.

LEONATO What effects, my lord? She will sit you – you heard my daughter tell you how.

CLAUDIO She did indeed.

PRINCE How, how I pray you? You amaze me. I would have thought her spirit had been invincible against all assaults of affection.

LEONATO I would have sworn it had, my lord, especially against Benedick.

BENEDICK [*aside*] I should think this a gull but that the white-bearded fellow speaks it. Knavery cannot, sure, hide himself in such reverence.

CLAUDIO [*aside to Prince*] He hath ta'en th' infection. Hold it up.

PRINCE Hath she made her affection known to Benedick?

LEONATO No, and swears she never will. That's her torment.

CLAUDIO 'Tis true indeed, so your daughter says. "Shall I," says she, "that have so oft encountered him with scorn, write to him that I love him?"

LEONATO This says she now when she is beginning to write to him, for she'll be up twenty times a night, and there will she sit in her smock till she have writ a sheet of paper. My daughter tells us all.

CLAUDIO Now you talk of a sheet of paper, I remember a pretty jest your daughter told us of.

LEONATO O, when she had writ it and was reading it over, she found "Benedick" and "Beatrice" between the sheet?

CLAUDIO That.

LEONATO O, she tore the letter into a thousand halfpence, railed at herself that she should be so immodest to write to one that she knew would flout her. "I measure him," says she, "by my own spirit, for I should flout him if he writ to me, yea, though I love him, I should."

CLAUDIO	Then down upon her knees she falls, weeps, sobs, beats her heart, tears her hair, prays, curses: "O sweet Benedick, God give me patience!"
LEONATO	She doth indeed, my daughter says so, and the ecstasy hath so much overborne her that my daughter is sometimes afear'd she will do a desperate outrage to herself. It is very true.
PRINCE	It were good that Benedick knew of it by some other, if she will not discover it.
CLAUDIO	To what end? He would make but a sport of it and torment the poor lady worse.
PRINCE	An he should, it were an alms to hang him. She's an excellent sweet lady, and, out of all suspicion, she is virtuous.
CLAUDIO	And she is exceeding wise.
PRINCE	In everything but in loving Benedick.
LEONATO	O, my lord, wisdom and blood combating in so tender a body, we have ten proofs to one that blood hath the victory. I am sorry for her, as I have just cause, being her uncle and her guardian.
PRINCE	I would she had bestowed this dotage on me. I would have daff'd all other respects and made her half myself. I pray you tell Benedick of it, and hear what he will say.
LEONATO	Were it good, think you?
CLAUDIO	Hero thinks surely she will die, for she says she will die if he love her not, and she will die ere she make her love known, and she will die if he woo her rather than she will bate one breath of her accustomed crossness.
PRINCE	She doth well. If she should make tender of her love, 'tis very possible he'll scorn it, for the man, as you know all, hath a contemptible spirit.
CLAUDIO	He is a very proper man.
PRINCE	He hath indeed a good outward happiness.
CLAUDIO	Before God, and in my mind, very wise.
PRINCE	He doth indeed show some sparks that are like wit.
CLAUDIO	And I take him to be valiant.
PRINCE	As Hector, I assure you, and in the managing of quarrels you may say he is wise, for either he avoids them with great discretion or undertakes them with a most Christianlike fear.
LEONATO	If he do fear God, he must necessarily keep peace. If he break the peace, he ought to enter into a quarrel with fear and trembling.
PRINCE	And so will he do, for the man doth fear God, howsoever it seems not in him by some large jests he will make. Well, I am sorry for your niece. Shall we go seek Benedick and tell him of her love?
CLAUDIO	Never tell him, my lord, let her wear it out with good counsel.
LEONATO	Nay, that's impossible; she may wear her heart out first.

PRINCE Well, we will hear further of it by your daughter. Let it cool the while. I love Benedick well, and I could wish he would modestly examine himself to see how much he is unworthy so good a lady.

LEONATO My lord, will you walk? Dinner is ready.

[Leonato, Prince, and Claudio begin to exit.]

CLAUDIO *[aside to P & L]* If he do not dote on her upon this, I will never trust my expectation.

PRINCE *[aside to Leonato]* Let there be the same net spread for her, and that must your daughter and her gentlewomen carry. The sport will be when they hold one an opinion of another's dotage, and no such matter. That's the scene that I would see, which will be merely a dumb show. Let us send her to call him in to dinner.

[Prince, Leonato, and Claudio exit.]

BENEDICK *[coming forward]* This can be no trick. The conference was sadly borne; they have the truth of this from Hero; they seem to pity the lady. It seems her affections have their full bent. Love me? Why, it must be requited! I hear how I am censured. They say I will bear myself proudly if I perceive the love come from her. They say, too, that she will rather die than give any sign of affection. I did never think to marry. I must not seem proud. Happy are they that hear their detractions and can put them to mending. They say the lady is fair; 'tis a truth, I can bear them witness. And virtuous; 'tis so, I cannot reprove it. And wise, but for loving me; by my troth, it is no addition to her wit, nor no great argument of her folly, for I will be horribly in love with her! I may chance have some odd quirks and remnants of wit broken on me because I have railed so long against marriage, but doth not the appetite alter? A man loves the meat in his youth that he cannot endure in his age. Shall quips and sentences and these paper bullets of the brain awe a man from the career of his humour? No! The world must be peopled. When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married. Here comes Beatrice. By this day, she's a fair lady. I do spy some marks of love in her.