

# Much Ado



# About Nothing

## Sample Pages from Much Ado About Nothing

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# MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

A PLAY IN ONE ACT ADAPTED BY  
*John Minigan*

FROM THE ORIGINAL BY  
*William Shakespeare*



*Much Ado About Nothing*

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## Characters

### MALE

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**DON PEDRO:** A Prince from Aragon. Benedick and Claudio's commanding officer.

**DON JOHN:** Don Pedro's bastard brother.

**BENEDICK:** A soldier. In a relationship with Beatrice.

**CLAUDIO:** A soldier. In a relationship with Hero.

\* **FRIAR FRANCIS**

### FEMALE

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**BEATRICE:** Leonato's/Leonata's niece. In a relationship with Benedick.

**HERO:** Leonato's/Leonata's daughter. In a relationship with Claudio.

**MARGARET:** Gentlewoman to Hero.

**URSULA:** Gentlewoman to Hero.

### EITHER MALE OR FEMALE

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**LEONATO/LEONATA:** Governor of Messina. Hero's father/mother and Beatrice's uncle/aunt.

**BORACHIO/BORACHIA:** Follower of Don John.

**CONRADE/CONSTANZA:** Follower of Don John.

**DOGBERRY:** A constable.

**VERGES:** A police recruit.

\* **MESSENGER:** A messenger.

\* **SEXTON:** Interrogator.

\*One performer can play the roles of FRIAR FRANCIS, MESSENGER and SEXTON.

### A NOTE ON CROSS-GENDER CASTING

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Replacement dialogue for female casting of BORACHIA or LEONATA is included throughout the script, denoted by ♀.

If LEONATO becomes LEONATA, change all titled references from "Signior" to "Signiora" and "Master" to "Mistress."

Female casting of CONRADE, DOGBERRY, VERGES or SEXTON requires changing only the personal pronouns referring to them and, in the case of CONRADE, the name. It is also possible to cast DON JOHN as DONNA GIANNA and replace references to "brother" and "bastard" to "sister."



*SCENE 1. Messina. Before Leonato's house.*

*Enter LEONATO, HERO, BEATRICE, followed by a MESSENGER from DON PEDRO. The MESSENGER gives LEONATO a letter.*

LEONATO: I learn in this letter that Don Pedro of Aragon comes this night to Messina. Don Pedro hath bestowed much honour on a young Florentine called Claudio.

MESSENGER: Much deserved.

BEATRICE: I pray you, is Signior Mountanto returned from the wars or no?

LEONATO: What is he, niece?

HERO: My cousin means Signior Benedick.

MESSENGER: O, he's returned. And stuffed with all honourable virtues.

BEATRICE: It is so, indeed; he is no less than a **stuffed man**.

LEONATO: *[to the MESSENGER]* You must not mistake my niece. There is a kind of merry war **betwixt** Signior Benedick and her.

BEATRICE: Alas, **he gets nothing by that!**

MESSENGER: I see, lady, that **the gentleman is not in your books**.

BEATRICE: No. **An** he were, I would burn my **study**. But, I pray you, who is his companion?

MESSENGER: The right noble Claudio.

BEATRICE: O Lord, he will hang upon him like a disease. God help the noble Claudio if he have **caught the Benedick**.

*Enter DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, and DON JOHN.*

DON PEDRO: Good Signior Leonato, are you come to meet **your trouble**?

LEONATO: Never came trouble to my house in the likeness of your Grace.

DON PEDRO: I think this is your daughter. *[F]*

LEONATO: **Her mother hath told me so.**

BENEDICK: Were you in doubt, sir, that you asked her?

♣ *If Leonata is female, substitute three lines as follows:*

DON PEDRO: The lady mothers herself.

LEONATO: *[line cut]*

BENEDICK: She would not have Leonata's head on her shoulders for all Messina.

*Much Ado About Nothing is set in Messina, in Sicily, after a war, on land owned by Messina's governor, Leonato. As the war ends, Don Pedro, a military commander from the Spanish region of Aragon, brings some of his troops, including Benedick and Claudio, to visit his old friend the governor. He has also brought his illegitimate brother Don John. Although the war has been left behind, there are still battles of wit to be fought between Benedick and Leonato's niece, Beatrice, and a more sinister battle between Don Pedro and Don John, who resents his brother's admiration for Claudio.*

*What is Leonato's feeling about the letter? Is it good news? Did he know before this that his friend had survived the war?*

**Florentine:** Claudio is from Florence, a town on the Italian mainland.

**Signior Mountanto:** Beatrice insults Benedick. A "mountanto" is a thrust in fencing.

*Beatrice's first words in the play are about whether Benedick has survived the war. How does she feel about him? Has she been worried about him when he was at war, even though she begins the play with an insulting comment about him?*

**a stuffed man:** a mannequin

**betwixt:** between

**he gets nothing by that:** Benedick never beats me in our battles of wit

**the gentleman is not in your books:** you don't like him

**an:** if **study:** a place to keep books

**caught the Benedick:** another insult; Beatrice implies that "benedick" is a disease Claudio suffers with

**your trouble:** Don Pedro jokes that his visits cause Leonato nothing but trouble.

**Her mother hath told me so:** Leonato jokes that he can't know if Hero is his daughter; he has to accept his wife's word that she was legitimate.

**nobody marks you:** nobody is listening to your jokes

**Lady Disdain:** Benedick insults Beatrice, calling her disdain personified  
**yet:** still

*What is their history? Are they older than Claudio and Hero? As old as Don Pedro or Leonato?*

*Who wins this first battle? Do the other characters overhear it? What is their reaction if they do? Who roots for Benedick, who for Beatrice? If they don't overhear, what occupies them during the exchange?*

**scape:** escape

**an 'twere:** if it were

*Benedick implies that Beatrice would claw at any man in a relationship with her.*

**continuer:** a horse with stamina (also a dirty joke, since "horse" is similar to a word for prostitute)

**I have done:** I'm finished insulting you.

**a jade's trick:** a jade is 1) an old horse, likely to drop out of a race and 2) a prostitute, hinting that Benedick is only successful with prostitutes

**I know you of old:** this is the first indication that Benedick and Beatrice have known each other a long time

**I am not of many words:** Don John claims he does not speak as much or as well as the others  
*Is this proven true or false later? Is it a comment on the conversation of Benedick and Beatrice?*

*The word "nothing" in the title of the play would have originally been pronounced like "noting," meaning that this play is centered around what and whom the characters note or notice.*

**note:** notice.

**I noted her not, but I looked on her:** I saw her, but I didn't pay much attention to her.  
*Is he honest or is he teasing his friend Claudio?*

**speak in sober judgment:** Claudio knows Benedick is likely to joke rather than speak honestly.

**low:** socially inferior

**brown:** dark-haired **fair:** light **little:** short

*Benedick admits only that Hero is not ugly.*

**threescore:** sixty years old.

*Benedick, a confirmed bachelor, expresses anger that Claudio suddenly wants to marry Hero.*

- BEATRICE: I wonder that you will be talking, Signior Benedick; **nobody marks you.**
- BENEDICK: What, my dear **Lady Disdain**! Are you **yet** living?
- BEATRICE: Is it possible Disdain should die while she hath such food to feed it as Signior Benedick?
- BENEDICK: It is certain I am loved of all ladies, only you excepted; and truly I love none.
- BEATRICE: A dear happiness to women! I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me.
- BENEDICK: God keep your ladyship still in that mind, so some gentleman or other shall **scape** a scratched face.
- BEATRICE: Scratching could not make it worse **an 'twere** such a face as yours.
- BENEDICK: I would my horse had the speed of your tongue, and so good a **continuer**. **I have done.**
- BEATRICE: You always end with a **jade's trick**. **I know you of old.**
- LEONATO: [*to DON JOHN*] Let me bid you welcome, my lord; being reconciled to the Prince your brother, I owe you all duty.
- DON JOHN: **I am not of many words**, but I thank you.
- LEONATO: Please it your Grace lead on?
- DON PEDRO: We will go together.
- Exit all but BENEDICK and CLAUDIO.*
- CLAUDIO: Benedick, didst thou **note** the daughter of Signior Leonato?
- BENEDICK: **I noted her not, but I looked on her.**
- CLAUDIO: Is she not a modest young lady? I pray thee, **speak in sober judgment.**
- BENEDICK: Why, i' faith, methinks she's too **low** for a high praise, too **brown** for a **fair** praise, and too **little** for a great praise. Only this commendation I can afford her, that were she other than she is, she were unhandsome, and being no other but as she is, I do not like her.
- CLAUDIO: In my eye, she is the sweetest lady that ever I looked on.
- BENEDICK: I can see without spectacles, and I see no such matter. I hope you have no intent to turn husband, have you?
- CLAUDIO: If Hero would be my wife.
- BENEDICK: Shall I never see a bachelor of **threescore** again? Look! Don Pedro is returned to seek you.
- Enter DON PEDRO.*

DON PEDRO: What secret hath held you here, that you followed not to Leonato's?

BENEDICK: He is in love. With who? Mark you how short his answer is — with Hero, Leonato's short daughter.

DON PEDRO: The lady is very well worthy.

CLAUDIO: You speak this to **fetch me in**, my lord.

DON PEDRO: **I speak my thought.**

CLAUDIO: That I love her, I feel.

DON PEDRO: That she is worthy, I know.

BENEDICK: That I neither feel how she should be loved nor know how she should be worthy, is the opinion that fire cannot melt out of me. That a woman conceived me, I thank her; that she brought me up, I likewise give her most humble thanks. But all women shall pardon me. I will live a bachelor.

DON PEDRO: I shall see thee, **ere** I die, look pale with love.

BENEDICK: If I do, hang me in a **bottle** like a cat and shoot at me. And so I leave you.

*Exit BENEDICK.*

DON PEDRO: If thou dost love fair Hero,  
I will fit thee with the remedy.  
I know we shall have **reveling** tonight.  
I will **assume thy part** in some disguise  
And tell fair Hero I am Claudio,  
And in her bosom I'll unclasp my heart;  
Then after to her father will I break,  
And the conclusion is, she shall be thine.  
In practice let us put it presently.

*Exit DON PEDRO and CLAUDIO.*

*SCENE 2. Don John's rooms.*

*DON JOHN, and CONRADE*

CONRADE: **What the good-year**, my lord! Why are you thus **out of measure sad**?

DON JOHN: There is no measure in the occasion that **breeds**; therefore the sadness is without limit.

CONRADE: You should hear reason.

**fetch me in**: trick me

*Claudio is worried that Don Pedro is just trying to trick him so that, like Benedick, he can tease him for being in love with Hero.*

**I speak my thought**: I am not trying to trick you

*Benedick claims he would rather burn at the stake than agree with Claudio and Pedro in praising Hero's worth as a possible wife for Claudio.*

**ere**: before

*This is the first hint of Don Pedro's upcoming plan to trick Benedick into falling in love with Beatrice.*

**bottle**: basket (Cats were sometimes suspended in baskets as archery targets)

*What is Benedick's mood when he leaves? How do Claudio and Don Pedro react to his sudden exit?*

*Don Pedro pledges to help Claudio get Hero's love.*

**reveling**: a party

**assume thy part**: pretend to be you

*Don Pedro, disguised as Claudio, will win Hero's love and also get Leonato's permission for the marriage.*

*For the first time in the play, a character speaks in verse (poetry) instead of prose. This is usually a sign that the emotional state of the character has changed. Is Don Pedro more serious? How does Claudio respond to his friend's plan?*

*What is the mood of this scene? How will the actions of the characters indicate their bitterness or foreshadow the cruelty of the plan they will later develop? What is the cause of the bitterness between Don John and Don Pedro? Is it because of Don John's illegitimacy and, therefore, his inability to inherit the princely title that goes to Don Pedro? Did they fight together in the war or on opposite sides? Is Don John's greatest concern that Claudio has become more of a brother to Don Pedro than he himself is?*

**what the good-year**: a mild curse

**out of measure sad**: sadder than you should be given your circumstances

**breeds**: causes the sadness



**ta'en you newly into his grace:** welcomed you and forgiven you

**canker:** thorn; also a spreading sore in plants

*Borachio is a Spanish word for drunkard. Borachio is often played in various stages of inebriation.*

**right hand:** his "right hand man," Claudio

**Which way looks he:** Whom does he want to marry?

**start-up:** upstart

**cross:** harm, foil, double-cross

*Don John puns on the word "cross" (meaning to make the sign of the cross) by saying that crossing Claudio will be a blessing.*

**prove:** find out

*How will you convey the spirit of this party? The characters are masked (DON PEDRO will pretend to be CLAUDIO when he speaks to HERO), and the focus of the scene will shift from person to person or group to group fairly quickly. What style of music and movement will work best for the atmosphere and the shifting of focus required?*

*Beatrice hopes that Hero will speak up for herself at this party, and not agree to any romantic arrangements just because Leonato likes them.*

**metal:** material

*Beatrice is as determined to remain single as Benedick was in the first scene.*

*Where should Don John and Borachio be in order to observe the action but not be suspected? If they are also masked, how will your audience know who is who?*

DON JOHN: I must be sad when I have cause.

CONRADE: But your brother hath **ta'en you newly into his grace**.

DON JOHN: I had rather be a **canker** in a hedge than a rose in his grace. In the meantime, seek not to alter me.

*Enter BORACHIO.*

What news, Borachio?

BORACHIO: I can give you intelligence of an intended marriage.

DON JOHN: Will it serve for any model to build mischief on?

BORACHIO: It is your brother's **right hand**.

DON JOHN: Claudio?

BORACHIO: Even he.

DON JOHN: **Which way looks he?**

BORACHIO: Hero, the daughter of Leonato.

DON JOHN: That young **start-up** hath all the glory of my overthrow. If I can **cross** him any way, I bless myself every way. You will assist me?

CONRADE: To the death, my lord.

DON JOHN: Shall we go **prove** what's to be done?

BORACHIO: We'll wait upon your lordship.

*Exit DON JOHN, CONRADE, and BORACHIO.*

*SCENE 3. Leonato's Garden.*

*Enter LEONATO, HERO and BEATRICE.*

LEONATO: [*to HERO*] Well, daughter, I trust you will be ruled by your father.

BEATRICE: It is my cousin's duty to say, "Father, as it please you." But let him be a handsome fellow, or else say, "Father, as it please me."

LEONATO: [*to BEATRICE*] Well, niece, I hope to see you one day fitted with a husband.

BEATRICE: Not till God make men of some other **metal** than earth. Would it not grieve a woman to be overmastered with a piece of valiant dust? No, uncle, I'll none. [F]

LEONATO: The revelers are entering. Make good room.

*Enter DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO and BENEDICK, all masked, with BORACHIO and DON JOHN.*

♣ *Substitute "aunt" if Leonata is a woman*

DON PEDRO: [to HERO] Lady, will you walk about with me in your company?

HERO: I may say so when I please.

DON PEDRO: And when please you to say so?

HERO: When I like your **favour**, for **God defend the lute should be like the case**.

DON PEDRO: Speak **low** if you speak love.

*They move aside.*

BEATRICE: [to BENEDICK] Will you not tell me who told you I was disdainful, and that **I had my wit out of the "Hundred Merry Tales"**? Well, this was Signior Benedick that said so.

BENEDICK: What's he?

BEATRICE: Why, he is the **Prince's jester**, a very dull fool. He'll but **break a comparison** or two on me; which (not being laughed at) strikes him into melancholy, and then the fool will eat no supper that night.

*Music plays.*

We must follow the **leaders**.

BENEDICK: In every good thing.

BEATRICE: Nay, if they lead to any ill, I will leave them at the next turning.

*Exit BEATRICE. Enter DON PEDRO, HERO and LEONATO.*

DON PEDRO: The Lady Beatrice hath a quarrel to you.

BENEDICK: O, she **misused** me past the endurance of a block! She told me, **not thinking I had been myself**, that I was the Prince's jester, that I was dull; I stood like a man **at a mark**, with a whole army shooting at me. She speaks **poinards**, and every word stabs. If her breath were as terrible as her **terminations**, there were no living near her; she would infect to the North Star.

*Enter CLAUDIO and BEATRICE.*

DON PEDRO: Look, here she comes.

BENEDICK: Will your Grace command me any service to the world's end? I will fetch you a **toothpicker** now from the furthest inch of Asia rather than hold three word's conference with this **harpy**. You have no employment for me?

DON PEDRO: None.

BENEDICK: O God, sir, here's a dish I love not! I cannot endure my Lady Tongue.

**favour:** face

**God defend the lute should be like the case:** I hope your face is not as ugly as the mask that covers it

**low:** quietly

**I had my wit out of the "Hundred Merry Tales":** none of my jokes are original, but all taken from a popular book of humour.

**Prince's jester:** fool employed by Don Pedro.

**break a comparison:** crack an insulting joke

**leaders:** leaders in the dance that has started

*Although Benedick thinks he is cleverly disguised, Beatrice knows it is he and insults him freely; she knows he can't respond without revealing his true identity.*

**misused:** insulted, abused

**not thinking I had been myself:** although Beatrice knew it was Benedick, he has not figured that out

**at a mark:** in front of a target

**poinards:** arrows

**terminations:** terms, words

**toothpicker:** toothpick

**harpy:** a mythical monster with the face of a woman but the claws of a bird of prey

*Is Don Pedro enjoying this? How do the other characters react to Benedick's frustration at being insulted and outwitted by Beatrice?*

*Again, Beatrice hints that her relationship with Benedick is not new, and, specifically that he once loved her and she loved him, even twice as much.*

*Beatrice's line implies that Claudio is speechless, struck dumb by Hero's beauty and his sudden engagement.*

*Is Beatrice happy about Hero's engagement? Does she admire Claudio's expression of love or does she think it is foolish?*

**alliance:** marriage

**Thus goes everyone to the world:** everyone else finds someone to marry

**I would rather have one of your father's getting:** If I were to marry, I would choose someone in your family.

*Is Beatrice joking casually or flirting? How does Don Pedro interpret her remarks? He is a bachelor, but would he marry her if she were willing?*

**working days:** weekdays, as opposed to Sundays  
**costly:** expensive, refined

*Having joked about marrying someone like Don Pedro, how does Beatrice back away from the joke? Is this a purely comic moment or are Don Pedro's feelings hurt? Does Beatrice "let him down easy" after building up his hopes or are they flirtatiously joking as equals?*

*Don Pedro proposes the idea of tricking Benedick and Beatrice into falling in love with each other.*

**but minister assistance:** help me with my plan

**I am for you:** I'll work with you in the plan  
**it cost me ten nights' watchings:** even if it kept me awake for ten nights in a row making the plan work

**tell you my drift:** let you know how my plan will work

*BENEDICK exits.*

DON PEDRO: Come, lady, come; you have lost the heart of Signior Benedick.

BEATRICE: Indeed, my lord, he lent it me awhile, and I gave him a double heart for his single one.

DON PEDRO: Here, Claudio, I have wooed in thy name, and fair Hero is won. Name the day of marriage, and God give thee joy!

LEONATO: Count, take of me my daughter, and with her my fortunes.

BEATRICE: Speak, Count, 'tis your cue.

CLAUDIO: Silence is the perfectest herald of joy. I were but little happy if I could say how much.

BEATRICE: Speak, cousin; or (if you cannot) stop his mouth with a kiss and let not him speak neither. Good Lord, for **alliance! Thus goes everyone to the world**, but I may sit in a corner and cry "Heigh-ho for a husband!"

DON PEDRO: Lady Beatrice, I will get you one.

BEATRICE: **I would rather have one of your father's getting.** Hath your Grace ne'er a brother like you?

DON PEDRO: Will you have me, lady?

BEATRICE: No, my lord, unless I might have another for **working days**; your Grace is too **costly** to wear every day.

DON PEDRO: Out o' question, you were born in a merry hour.

BEATRICE: No, my mother cried; but then a star danced, and under that was I born. Cousins, God give you joy!

*Exit BEATRICE.*

DON PEDRO: She were an excellent wife for Benedick.

LEONATO: O Lord! If they were but a week married, they would talk themselves mad.

DON PEDRO: Come, I will undertake one of Hercules' labours, which is, to bring Signior Benedick and the Lady Beatrice into a mountain of affection, the one with the other. If you three will **but minister assistance**—

LEONATO: My lord, **I am for you**, though it **cost me ten nights' watchings**.

CLAUDIO: And I, my lord.

HERO: I will do any modest office, my lord, to help my cousin to a good husband.

DON PEDRO: Go in with me, and I will **tell you my drift**.

*They exit.*

*SCENE 4. Another part of the garden.**DON JOHN and BORACHIO.*

DON JOHN: It is so. The Count Claudio shall marry the daughter of Leonato.

BORACHIO: Yea, my lord; but I can **cross** it.

DON JOHN: How?

BORACHIO: So **covertly** that no dishonesty shall appear in me.

DON JOHN: Show me.

BORACHIO: I am in the favour of Margaret, the waiting gentlewoman to Hero. [F]


DON JOHN: I remember.

BORACHIO: I can appoint her to look out at her lady's **chamber** window.

DON JOHN: What life is in that to be the death of this marriage?

BORACHIO: Draw Don Pedro and the Count Claudio alone; tell them that you know that Hero loves me. They will see me at her chamber window, hear me call Margaret Hero; and bring them to see this the very night before the intended wedding. I will so fashion the matter that Hero shall be absent; and there shall appear seeming truth of Hero's disloyalty.

DON JOHN: Be cunning in the working this, and thy fee is a thousand ducats.

*They exit.**SCENE 5. The Garden, later.**BENEDICK is alone.*BENEDICK: I do much wonder that one man, seeing how much another man is a fool when he dedicates his behaviours to love, will become the argument of his own scorn by falling in love; and such a man is Claudio. May I be so converted? I think not. One woman is **fair**, yet **I am well**; another is wise, yet I am well; another is virtuous, yet I am well. But till all graces be in one woman, one woman shall not come in my grace. Rich shall she be, that's certain; wise, or I'll none; virtuous, or I'll never cheapen*The action can flow continuously from the previous scene if DON JOHN and BORACHIO have been eavesdropping on the prior conversations.***cross:** foil**covertly:** secretly**chamber:** bedroom**fair:** light-haired **I am well:** I am not love-sick *If Borachio is female, substitute as follows:*

BORACHIA: I am in the favour of Panthino, servant to Leonato.

DON JOHN: I remember.

BORACHIA: I can appoint him to look out at the lady Hero's chamber window.

DON JOHN: What life is in that to be the death of this marriage?

BORACHIA: Draw Don Pedro and the Count Claudio alone; tell them that you know that Hero loves Panthino. They will see me at her chamber window, hear Panthino call me Hero; and bring them to see this the very night before the intended wedding. I will so fashion the matter that Hero shall be absent; and there shall appear seeming truth of Hero's disloyalty.

**of good discourse:** witty in conversation

**Monsieur Love:** Benedick's mocking name for Claudio

**arbour:** an area shaded by trees

*Don Pedro's plan to make Benedick fall in love with Beatrice involves Benedick overhearing a staged conversation about Beatrice's supposed love for him. Benedick hides while he overhears, but, of course, Don Pedro, Leonato and Claudio know where he is at all times. The staging can allow for great visual humour and physical comedy as Benedick overhears a "secret" conversation.*

**Come hither:** Come here, come closer

**ay:** yes

**so dote on:** be so in love with

**Is't:** Is it

**smock:** nightgown

**writ a sheet of paper:** written down on paper her deep emotions for Benedick

**pretty jest:** funny story

**between the sheet:** Leonato jokes that the names on the sheets of paper made her think about the two of them on the sheets of a bed.

**'tis:** it is **scorn:** mock, make a joke of

**contemptible:** vile, despicable

**let her wear it out with good counsel:** let her friends convince her not to love him

**There must be the same net spread for her:** Now Beatrice must be tricked the same way

**carry:** carry out

**her:** Beatrice

her; **of good discourse**, an excellent musician, and her hair shall be of what color it please God. Ha, the Prince and **Monsieur Love**! I will hide me in the **arbour**.

*Enter DON PEDRO, LEONATO and CLAUDIO.  
BENEDICK hides.*

DON PEDRO: See you where Benedick hath hid himself?

CLAUDIO: O, very well, my lord.

DON PEDRO: **Come hither**, Leonato. What was it you told me of today? That your niece Beatrice was in love with Signior Benedick?

CLAUDIO: O, **ay**! I did never think that lady would have loved any man.

LEONATO: Most wonderful that she should **so dote on** Signior Benedick.

BENEDICK: **Is't** possible?

LEONATO: She loves him with an enraged affection.

CLAUDIO: [*Whispers*] Bait the hook well, this fish will bite.

DON PEDRO: I would have thought her spirit had been invincible against all assaults of affection.

LEONATO: Especially against Benedick.

DON PEDRO: Hath she made her affection known to Benedick?

LEONATO: No, and swears she never will. 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: Hero thinks she will surely die; for she says she will die if he love her not, and she will die ere she make her love known.

DON PEDRO: If she should, 'tis very possible he'll **scorn** it; for the man, as you know, hath a **contemptible** spirit.

CLAUDIO: Never tell him, my lord; **let her wear it out with good counsel**.

DON PEDRO: I 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.

DON PEDRO: [*Quiet*] **There must be the same net spread for her**, and that must your daughter and her gentlewomen **carry**. Let us send **her** to call him in to dinner.

*Exit all but BENEDICK.*

## 10 MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

BENEDICK: This can be no trick; the conference was **sadly borne**. Love me? Why, it must be **requited**. Happy are they that can hear their detractions and can put them to mending. 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.

*Enter BEATRICE.*

BEATRICE: Against my will I am sent to bid you come in to dinner.

BENEDICK: Fair Beatrice, I thank you for your pains.

BEATRICE: I took no pains. If it had been painful, I would not have come.

BENEDICK: You take pleasure then in the message?

BEATRICE: Yes, just so much as you may take upon a knife's point. Fare you well.

*Exit BEATRICE.*

BENEDICK: Ha! "Against my will I am sent to bid you come in to dinner." There's a double meaning in that. If I do not take pity of her, I am a villain.

*Exit BENEDICK.*

*SCENE 6. Another part of the Garden.*

*HERO, MARGARET, and URSULA.*

HERO: Good Margaret, run thee to the parlour; there shalt thou find my cousin Beatrice. **Whisper her ear**, and tell her I and **Ursley** walk in the orchard and our whole **discourse** is all of her.

MARGARET: I'll make her come, I warrant you, presently.

HERO: Now, Ursula, when Beatrice doth come,  
Our talk must only be of Benedick.

*Enter BEATRICE.*

URSULA: Fear you not.

HERO: Then go we near her, that her ear lose  
nothing.

URSULA: Are you sure that Benedick loves Beatrice so entirely?

HERO: So says the Prince, and my **new-trothed** lord.  
They did **entreat** me to acquaint her of it;  
But I persuaded them, if they loved Benedick,  
Never to let Beatrice know of it.  
She cannot love, she is so **self-endear'd**.

URSULA: And therefore certainly it were not good  
She knew his love.

**sadly borne**: carried out in a serious way

**requited**: returned in kind

**the world must be peopled**: I must fall in love and marry her because humans must continue to reproduce

*How does Benedick talk to Beatrice now? Find the comedy in his "loving" tone of voice compared to hers, and in her confusion about why he seems so suddenly friendly.*

*While this scene has much the same format as the previous one, the tricking of Beatrice is done in verse (poetry) rather than prose. What does that indicate about the way these women speak, about how they trick Beatrice? Are they more emotional? Are they speaking in an overly romantic style?*

**Whisper her ear**: Whisper in her ear

**Ursley**: a nickname for Ursula    **discourse**: conversation

*What tone of voice do Ursula and Hero shift into in order to be overheard by Beatrice?*

**new-trothed**: newly betrothed, newly engaged

**entreat**: beg

**self-endear'd**: in love with herself



**Consume away in sighs:** burn himself out with love-sighs

**Always excepted:** with the exception of

**bearing:** how he holds himself

**argument:** his manner of conversation

**report:** reputation

**name:** reputation

**His excellence did earn:** he deserved his good name

**ere:** before

**everyday, tomorrow:** as of tomorrow, I'll be married every day

**haps:** accident, luck

*Beatrice uses "thee" rather than "you" to refer to Benedick, a sign that her feelings have changed.*

**incite:** cause

**a holy band:** a bond of matrimony

*The arrival of Don John in the middle of this otherwise teasing comic scene should have a strong impact.*

**Gallants:** noble friends

**Methinks:** I think

**buried with her face upwards:** a dirty joke, meaning "beneath Benedick"

**Old Signior:** Leonato **studied:** prepared a speech of

**hobby-horses:** fools

HERO: Therefore, let Benedick, like covered fire,  
**Consume away in sighs.**

URSULA: Yet tell her of it.

HERO: No; rather I will go to Benedick  
And counsel him to fight against his passion.

URSULA: She cannot refuse so rare a gentleman as Signior Benedick.

HERO: He is the only man of Italy,  
**Always excepted** my dear Claudio.

URSULA: Signior Benedick,  
For shape, for **bearing, argument** and valour,  
Goes foremost in **report** through Italy.

HERO: Indeed he hath an excellent good **name**.

URSULA: **His excellence did earn** it ere he had it.  
When are you married, madam?

HERO: Why, **everyday, tomorrow!** Come, go in.

URSULA: [*Quietly*] We have caught her, madam.

HERO: If it prove so, then loving goes by **haps**  
Some Cupid kills with arrows, some with traps.

*Exit HERO and URSULA.*

BEATRICE: What fire is in mine ears? Can this be true?  
Contempt farewell! And maiden pride, adieu!  
And, Benedick, love on; I will requite thee,  
Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand.  
If thou dost love, my kindness shall **incite** thee  
To bind our loves up in a **holy band**.

*Exit BEATRICE.*

*SCENE 7. Leonata's house.*

*DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, LEONATO.*

*Enter BENEDICK.*

BENEDICK: **Gallants**, I am not as I have been.

LEONATO: So say I. **Methinks** you are sadder.

CLAUDIO: He is in love.

DON PEDRO: He is in love.

CLAUDIO: Nay, but I know who loves him.

DON PEDRO: She shall be **buried with her face upwards**.

BENEDICK: **Old Signior**, walk aside with me; I have **studied** eight or nine  
wise words to speak to you, which these **hobby-horses** must  
not hear.

*Exit BENEDICK and LEONATO.*

DON PEDRO: **For my life!**

*Enter DON JOHN.*

DON JOHN: My lord and brother, I would speak with you.

DON PEDRO: In private?

DON JOHN: Count Claudio may hear, for what I would speak of concerns him.

DON PEDRO: What's the matter?

DON JOHN: Means your **lordship** to be married tomorrow?

DON PEDRO: You know he does.

DON JOHN: Not when he knows what I know.

CLAUDIO: If there be any **impediment**, I pray you **discover** it.

DON JOHN: The lady is **disloyal**.

CLAUDIO: Who, Hero?

DON JOHN: Even she — Leonato's Hero, your Hero, every man's Hero.

CLAUDIO: Disloyal?

DON JOHN: The word is too good to point out her wickedness. Go with me tonight, you shall see her **chamber** window entered, even the night before her wedding day.

CLAUDIO: May this be so?

DON PEDRO: I will not think it.

DON JOHN: I will **disparage** her no farther till you are my witnesses. Bear it **coldly** till midnight, and let the issue show itself.

*They exit.*

*SCENE 8. A street.*

*DOGBERRY and VERGES.*

DOGBERRY: Are you good man and true?

VERGES: Yea, or else it were pity I should suffer **salvation**, body and soul.

DOGBERRY: You are thought here to be the most **senseless** and fit man for the constable of the **watch**. This is your charge: you shall **comprehend** all **vagrom** men; you are to bid any man **stand** in the Prince's name.

VERGES: How if 'a will not stand?

DOGBERRY: Why then, **take no note of him**, but let him go, and presently thank God you are rid of a **knave**.

**For my life:** a mild curse

**lordship:** Claudio

**impediment:** obstacle    **discover:** reveal

**disloyal:** unfaithful

*Although both brothers, Don Pedro and Don John, engage in trickery, their personalities are different. What weakness in Benedick does Don Pedro play on? What weaknesses in Don Pedro and Claudio does Don John exploit?*

**chamber:** bedroom

**disparage:** speak in a belittling way

**coldly:** calmly

*Much of the comedy of Dogberry and Verges is in their trouble with language. Both often use "malapropisms," speaking a word that is close to but not quite the correct word. Dogberry, here instructing his assistant Verges, has a great deal of trouble with complex words, and almost as much with how to go about being a good night watchman.*

**salvation:** he means "damnation"

**senseless:** he means "sensible"

**watch:** night watchmen

**comprehend:** he means "apprehend"

**vagrom:** he means "vagrant"

**stand:** stop

'a: he

**take no note of him:** ignore him

**knave:** criminal



**meddle:** interfere

**coil:** commotion  
**vigilant:** he means "vigilant," or watchful  
**beseech:** beg, plead

**stand close:** stay out of sight

**possessed:** informed

**recovered:** he means "discovered"  
**lechery:** he means "treachery"

VERGES: If he will not stand when he is bidden, he is none of the Prince's subjects.

DOGBERRY: True, and you are to **meddle** with none but the Prince's subjects. If you hear a child cry in the night, you must call to the nurse and bid her still it.

VERGES: How if the nurse be asleep and will not hear?

DOGBERRY: Why then, depart in peace and let the child wake her with crying. This is the end of the charge. One more thing, honest neighbour. I pray you watch about Signior Leonato's door; for the wedding being there tomorrow, there is a great **coil** tonight. Adieu. Be **vigilant**, I **beseech** you.

*BORACHIO and CONRADE enter.*

BORACHIO: [*whispers*] What, Conrade!

CONRADE: Here, man. I am at thy elbow.<sup>[f]</sup>

VERGES: Some treason, master; yet **stand close**.

*DOGBERRY and VERGES hide.*

BORACHIO: Know that I have tonight wooed Margaret by the name of Hero. I should first tell thee the Prince, Claudio and my master, planted and placed and **possessed** by my master Don John, saw this encounter.

CONRADE: And thought they Margaret was Hero?

BORACHIO: Two of them did, the Prince and Claudio; away went Claudio enraged; swore he would meet her next morning at the temple and there, before the whole congregation, shame her with what he saw.

*DOGBERRY and VERGES come forward.*

VERGES: We charge you in the Prince's name stand!

DOGBERRY: We have here **recovered** the most dangerous piece of **lechery** that ever was known in the commonwealth.

CONRADE: Come, we'll obey you.

*They exit.*

---

† If Borachio is female, substitute as follows:

CONRADE: Here, I am at thy elbow.

BORACHIA: Know that Panthino has tonight wooed me by the name of Hero. I should first tell thee the Prince, Claudio and my master, planted and placed and possessed by my master Don John, saw this encounter.

VERGES: Some treason, master; yet stand close.

*DOGBERRY and VERGES hide.*

CONRADE: And thought they thou wast Hero?

*SCENE 9. Hero's room.*

*Enter HERO and MARGARET, then BEATRICE.*

- BEATRICE: 'Tis almost five o'clock, cousin; 'tis time you were ready. **By my troth**, I am **exceeding** ill. **Heigh-ho!**
- MARGARET: For a hawk, a horse, or a husband.
- BEATRICE: For the letter that begins them all, **H**.
- MARGARET: Get you some of this **distilled Carduus Benedictus** and **lay** it to your heart.
- HERO: Here thou prick'st her with a thistle.
- BEATRICE: Benedictus? Why Benedictus? You have some **moral** in this Benedictus?
- MARGARET: Moral? No, by my troth. You may think that I think you are in love. I am not such a fool to think what I **list**; nor list not to think what I can; nor indeed I cannot think, if I would think my heart out of thinking, that you are in love; but methinks you look with your eyes as other women do.
- BEATRICE: What pace is this that thy tongue keeps?
- MARGARET: Not a false gallop.

*Enter URSULA.*

- URSULA: Madam, **withdraw**. The Prince, the Count, Signior Benedick, Don John, and all the gallants of the town are come to fetch you to church.
- HERO: Help to dress me, good **coz**, good Meg, good Ursula.

*They all exit.*

*SCENE 10. Before Leonato's house.*

*LEONATO, DOGBERRY and VERGES.*

- LEONATO: What would you with me, honest neighbour?
- DOGBERRY: **Marry**, sir, I would have some **confidence** with you that **decerns** you nearly.
- LEONATO: I would **fain** know what you have to say.
- VERGES: Marry, sir, our watch tonight, excepting your worship's presence, **ha' ta'en** a couple of as **arrant** knaves as any in Messina.
- DOGBERRY: Our watch, sir, have indeed **comprehended** two **aspicious** persons, and we would have them this morning examined before your worship.

*In the early morning before the wedding as Hero dresses for the ceremony, she, Ursula and especially Margaret tease Beatrice for being in love with Benedick.*

**By my troth**: by my faith, truthfully

**exceeding**: extremely    **Heigh-ho**: a sigh

*Margaret cleverly reminds Beatrice of her statement that she would sit in a corner and cry "Heigh-ho for a husband."*

**H**: originally pronounced like "ache," but sometimes now performed as a gagging exclamation

**distilled Carduus Benedictus**: Margaret teases Beatrice; this medicine was made from thistle, a plant that could prick like a thorn    **lay**: apply

**moral**: hidden meaning

**list**: like

*Beatrice may be amazed that Margaret is suddenly as clever with words as she was herself, before loving Benedick.*

**withdraw**: come with me

**coz**: cousin (Beatrice)

*Dogberry attempts to explain to Leonato, the governor, that criminals have been taken into custody, but, because of Leonato's haste in preparing for his daughter's wedding and Dogberry's inability to make himself understood, he fails to get his point across.*

**Marry**: a mild curse, "By the Virgin Mary"

**confidence**: he means "conference"

**decerns**: he means "concerns"

**fain**: gladly

**ha' ta'en**: have taken into custody    **arrant**: notorious

**comprehended**: again, he means "apprehended"

**aspicious**: he means "suspicious"

**suffigance:** he means “sufficient”

**inkhorn:** inkwell

**examination:** he means “examine”

**the learned writer:** Francis Seacole, the sexton  
**excommunication:** he mixes together “examine” and “communication.” Excommunication is a religious ceremony in which the soul is condemned.

*This first of two wedding scenes might be elaborate, with music, flowers, etc. How will the mood shift when Claudio makes his accusation?*

*Leonato thinks that Claudio's objection is to the way Friar Francis has worded his question, since the Friar has come to “marry” Hero to Claudio.*

*Benedick tries to defuse a tense situation by joking about Claudio's angry comment.*

*How does Claudio's explosion affect Hero, Beatrice and Leonato? Some will believe Claudio and some not, but make sure that your actors make clear decisions about their response to the outburst and the long, angry accusation. Where is Don John placed on the stage at this moment? He sees his plan working perfectly. Does the audience get to see his reaction? Note also that the emotional outburst moves the speakers into verse.*

**maid:** virgin

**luxurious:** lustful

LEONATO: Take their examination yourself and bring it me; I am now in great haste, as it may appear unto you.

DOGBERRY: It shall be **suffigance**.

*Exit LEONATO.*

Go to Francis Seacole; bid him bring his pen and **inkhorn** to the jail. We are now to **examination** these men.

VERGES: And we must do it wisely.

DOGBERRY: Get **the learned writer** to set down our **excommunication**, and meet me at the jail.

*They exit.*

*SCENE 11. A Chapel.*

*DON PEDRO, DON JOHN, LEONATO, FRIAR, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, HERO and BEATRICE.*

FRIAR: You come hither, my lord, to marry this lady?

CLAUDIO: No.

LEONATO: To be married to her; Friar, you come to marry her.

FRIAR: Lady, you come hither to be married to this Count?

HERO: I do.

FRIAR: If either of you know why you should not be conjoined, I charge you on your souls to utter it.

LEONATO: I dare make his answer, none.

CLAUDIO: O, what men dare do! What men may do! What men daily do, not knowing what they do!

BENEDICK: How now? Interjections? Why then some be of laughing, as, ah, ha, he!

CLAUDIO: Will you give me this maid your daughter?

LEONATO: As freely, son, as God did give her me.

CLAUDIO: There, Leonato, take her back again.  
 Give not this rotten orange to your friend.  
 Behold how like a **maid** she blushes here!  
 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.

LEONATO: Dear my lord, if you have vanquished her virginity —

CLAUDIO: No, Leonato,  
 I never tempted her,

But, as a brother to his sister, showed  
 Bashful sincerity and **comely** love.  
 But you rage in savage sensuality.

HERO: Is my lord well that he doth speak so **wide**?

LEONATO: Are these things spoken, or do I but dream?

DON JOHN: Sir, they are spoken, and these things are true.

BENEDICK: This looks not like a **nuptial**.

HERO: "True," O God!

CLAUDIO: What man was he talked with you yesternight,  
 Out at your window betwixt twelve and one?  
 Now, if you are a maid, answer to this.

HERO: I talked with no man at that hour, my lord.

DON PEDRO: Why, then you are no maiden. Leonato,  
 I am sorry you must hear. Upon mine honour  
 Myself, my brother, and this grieved Count  
 Did see her, hear her, at that hour last night  
 Talk with a **ruffian** at her chamber window.

*HERO faints.*

BEATRICE: Why how now, cousin? **Wherefore** sink you down?

DON JOHN: Come let us go. These things, **come thus to light**,  
 Smother her spirits up.

*Exit DON PEDRO, DON JOHN and CLAUDIO.*

BENEDICK: How doth the lady?

BEATRICE: Dead, I think. Help, uncle! [F]

LEONATO: Death is the **fairest cover** for her shame  
 That may be wished for. She, O, she is fall'n  
 Into a pit of ink, that the wide sea  
 Hath drops too few to wash her clean again.  
 Hence from her, let her die!

FRIAR: Hear me a little;  
 For I have only been silent so long  
 By **noting** of the lady. I have **marked**  
 A thousand **blushing apparitions**  
 To **start** in her face.  
 Trust not my **reverence**,  
 If this sweet lady lie not guiltless here  
 Under some **biting** error.

♣ If Leonata is female, substitute as follows:

BEATRICE: Dead, I think. Help, aunt!

**comely**: proper

**wide**: far from the truth

**nuptial**: wedding ceremony

**ruffian**: a brute

*Hero's fainting is a key moment in the play, leading to much of what comes later. Where will she faint? How will the others respond? Who goes to her?*

**Wherefore**: why

**come thus to light**: now that they are revealed

**fairest cover**: best concealment

*The Friar, who has been silently watching, speaks forcefully against the violent language and wishes of Leonato. This can be a very powerful moment on stage.*

**noting**: watching, noticing **marked**: observed

**blushing apparitions**: blushes

**start**: appear

**reverence**: holiness

**biting**: harsh

**of:** of being with in your bedroom

**misprision:** misunderstanding

**practice:** planning

**in frame of villainies:** in creating villainous plots

**let my counsel sway you:** take my advice

**publish it:** spread the word

*How eager or reluctant are all to agree to the Friar's plan to say Hero is dead until her reputation is restored? Does Hero agree or not? How quickly does Leonato's rage disappear? What is his mood by the end of the scene?*

**consented:** agreed

**die to live:** pretend to be dead in order to live more happily later

**prolonged:** delayed

*This is the first time Benedick and Beatrice have been alone since each has been persuaded that the other is in love. How do they speak to each other? How do they handle not just their own feelings but the difficulty of the accusation against Hero? Note that, after a long scene in verse, they speak in prose. Is this a calmer conversation? Does it have a more intimate feeling?*

*What is Beatrice really saying? Is she confessing her love or denying, or is she trying to do both? Is she confused by the events at the wedding and by Benedick's sudden declaration? How does Benedick take this risk? Quickly, quietly, boldly? Has he ever said this to her or to anyone before?*

LEONATO: It cannot be.

FRIAR: Lady, what man is he you are accused **of**?

HERO: They know that do accuse me; I know none.  
If I know more of any man alive  
Than that which maiden modesty doth warrant,  
Let all my sins lack mercy!

FRIAR: There is some strange **misprision** in the princes.

BENEDICK: The **practice** of it lives in John the bastard,  
Whose spirits toil **in frame of villainies**.

LEONATO: I know not. If they speak but truth of her,  
These hands shall tear her. If they wrong  
her honour, the proudest of them shall well hear of it.

FRIAR: Pause awhile  
And **let my counsel sway you** in this case.  
And **publish it** that she is dead indeed.

LEONATO: What will this do?

FRIAR: She dying,  
Upon the instant that she was accused,  
Shall be lamented, pitied and excused  
Of every hearer. Claudio,  
When he shall hear she died upon his words,  
Shall wish he had not so accused her.

BENEDICK: Signior Leonato, let the Friar advise you.

LEONATO: Being that I flow in grief,  
The smallest twine may lead me.

FRIAR: 'Tis well **consented**. Presently away;  
Come, lady, **die to live**. This wedding day  
Perhaps is but **prolonged**.

*Exit all but BENEDICK and BEATRICE.*

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: 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 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.

BEATRICE: You have stayed me in a happy hour. I was about to **protest** I loved you.

BENEDICK: And do it with all thy heart.

BEATRICE: I love thee with so much of my heart that none is left to **protest**.

BENEDICK: Come, bid me do anything for thee.

BEATRICE: Kill Claudio.

BENEDICK: Ha! Not for the wide world.

BEATRICE: You kill me to deny it. I am gone, though I am here; there is no love in you. Let me go.

BENEDICK: We'll be friends first.

BEATRICE: You dare easier be friends with me than fight with mine enemy.

BENEDICK: Is Claudio thine enemy?

BEATRICE: O God, that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the market place!

BENEDICK: Hear me, Beatrice —

BEATRICE: Talk with a man out a window!

BENEDICK: Nay, but Beatrice —

BEATRICE: She is wronged, she is sland'ed, she is undone.

BENEDICK: Beat —

BEATRICE: Princes and counties! O that I were a man! Or that I had any friend who would be a man! But manhood is melted into curtsies, valour into compliment, and **men are only turned into tongue**, and **trim** ones, too.

BENEDICK: **Tarry**, good Beatrice. By this hand, I love thee.

BEATRICE: Use it for my love some other way than swearing by it.

BENEDICK: Think you in your soul the Count Claudio hath wronged Hero?

BEATRICE: Yea, as sure as I have a thought or a soul.

BENEDICK: I will challenge him. I will kiss your hand, and so I leave you. By this hand, Claudio shall **render me a dear account**. And so farewell.

*Exit BENEDICK and BEATRICE.*

*Benedick refers to Beatrice as "thou" for the first time. Now that he believes that she loves him, he can use this more emotionally rich word.*

**protest:** declare (also, when Beatrice uses the word again, it means "object")

*For the only time in the play, Beatrice speaks directly to Benedick as "thee" rather than "you." Her only other use of this more emotionally rich term was in her poem, alone onstage at the end of Scene 6. Her feelings have shifted, too, at least temporarily.*

*Note that she again refers to him as "you," rather than "thou," though Benedick will continue to use the more emotionally charged pronouns to refer to her.*

*Beatrice's interruptions of Benedick keep him from completing his thoughts. Make sure that her anger outdoes him until he makes his promise to help.*

**men are only turned into tongue:** men can only talk, not act  
**trim:** refined

**Tarry:** wait

*Benedick, in this declaration, turns away from the brotherhood of soldiers he felt with Don Pedro and Claudio and toward Beatrice. This is a key moment for the character. How does Beatrice respond?*

**render me a dear account:** pay dearly for what he has done



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