

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING | FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Shakespeare's language can seem scary, but give it a try! *Go at your own pace, and have fun!*



SHAKESPEARE IN PRISON

DETROIT PUBLIC THEATRE'S
SIGNATURE COMMUNITY PROGRAM

Welcome to Messina! Don Pedro has just returned from a successful war against his half-brother, Don John. Since he is "illegitimate," Don John has been rejected by his brother and society, so he develops a mean streak. Or maybe it was the mean streak that got him rejected—it depends on who you believe! In any case, Don John leads a rebellion and loses. Leonato, the governor of Messina, is pleased, and he wants to throw a big party for the victors.

Meanwhile, Claudio, a hero of the war against Don John, falls head over heels in love with Leonato's daughter, a woman named...Hero! Poor guy, he just can't get over how awesome Hero is. She's so dreamy, he's too afraid to say anything to her.

Never fear! Don Pedro, who might be the most confident person in all of Shakespeare, is here! There's going to be a masquerade ball that evening, so Don Pedro will dress up as Claudio and work his love-magic on Hero, who will, naturally, fall in love with him (can't help herself). Then all Claudio has to do is show up the next morning to claim the woman of his dreams. Brilliant!

Not so fast! Borachio, who is one of Don John's followers, was hiding behind a curtain the whole time! He decides his boss might want to hear about this plan. He goes to Don John's house, where Conrade, another of Don John's dudes, is trying to cheer the boss-man up.

Enter Conrade and Don John

CONRADE

What the goodyear, my lord, why are you thus out of measure* sad?

DON JOHN

There is no measure in the occasion that breeds it.* Therefore the sadness is without limit.

CONRADE

You should hear reason.

DON JOHN

And when I have heard it, what blessing brings it?

CONRADE

If not a present* remedy, at least a patient sufferance.*

DON JOHN

I wonder that thou, being, as thou sayst thou art, born under Saturn,* goest about to apply a moral medicine to a mortifying mischief.* I cannot hide what I am. I must be sad when I have cause, and smile at no man's jests; eat when I have stomach, and wait for no man's leisure; sleep when I am drowsy, and tend on no man's business; laugh when I am merry, and claw no man in his humor.*

CONRADE

Yea, but you must not make the full show of this till you may do it without controlment. You have of late stood out* against your brother, and he hath ta'en you newly into his grace, where it is impossible you should take true root but by the fair weather that you make yourself. It is needful that you frame the season for your own harvest.*

DON JOHN

I had rather be a canker* in a hedge than a rose in his grace, and it better fits my blood to be disdained of all* than to fashion a carriage to rob love from any.* In this, though I cannot be said to be a flattering honest man, it must not be denied but I am a plain-dealing villain. I am trusted with a muzzle and enfranchised with a clog;* therefore I have decreed* not to sing in my cage. If I had my mouth, I would bite; if I had my liberty, I would do my liking. In the meantime, let me be that I am, and seek not to alter me.

CONRADE

Can you make no use of your discontent?

DON JOHN

I make all use of it, for I use it only. Who comes here?

Enter Borachio.

What news, Borachio?

BORACHIO

I came yonder from a great supper. The Prince your brother is royally entertained by Leonato, and I can give you intelligence of an intended marriage.

DON JOHN

Will it serve for any model* to build mischief on? What is he for a fool that betroths himself to unquietness?

BORACHIO

Marry, it is your brother's right hand.

DON JOHN

Who, the most exquisite Claudio?

BORACHIO

Even he.

DON JOHN

A proper squire. And who, and who? Which way looks he?

BORACHIO

Marry, on Hero, the daughter and heir of Leonato.

DON JOHN

A very forward March chick!* How came you to this?

BORACHIO

Being entertained for a perfumer,* as I was smoking a musty room, comes me the Prince and Claudio, hand in hand, in sad conference. I whipped me behind the arras,* and there heard it agreed upon that the Prince should woo Hero for himself, and having obtained her, give her to Count Claudio.

DON JOHN

Come, come, let us thither. This may prove food to my displeasure.* That young start-up hath all the glory of my overthrow.* If I can cross* him any way, I bless myself every way. You are both sure, and will assist me?

CONRADE

To the death, my lord.

DON JOHN

Let us to the great supper. Their cheer is the greater that I am subdued. Would the cook were o' my mind!* Shall we go prove* what's to be done?

BORACHIO

We'll wait upon your Lordship.

They exit.

WHY IS DON JOHN, A NOBLEMAN, HANGING OUT WITH BORACHIO, WHO SEEMS TO BE WORKING-CLASS?

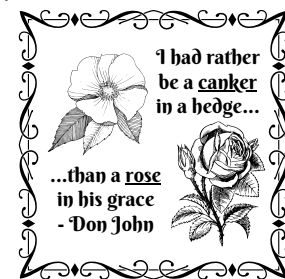
Their relationship is never established in the text; Borachio is usually listed as one of Don John's "followers" or "henchmen," but there's nothing in Shakespeare's original that hints at their connection. What's the backstory there, do you think?

How does that backstory change your understanding of the scene?

(Borachio's profession, by the way, is never established, either. He says he was "being entertained for a perfumer," but that doesn't mean he actually does that work regularly.)

WORDS, WORDS, WORDS

- **out of measure** - more than expected
- **the occasion that breeds it** - the cause of my sadness
- **present** - immediate
- **sufferance** - the ability to put up with something gracefully
- **born under Saturn** - it was believed that people born when Saturn was ascending were more likely to be depressed; we still call a gloomy person "saturnine"
- **mortifying mischief** - a deadly illness
- **claw no man in his humor** - not flatter anyone just because they're in a mood
- **stood out** - rebelled
- **frame the season for your own harvest** - make the conditions that will be most favorable to you
- **canker** - in this case, a wild rose, which is a weed; "canker" could refer to any parasite or disease on a plant, but in this case, Don John is contrasting the "canker" with a rose from a farm
- **of all** - by everybody
- **fashion a carriage... of any** - put up a front to try to get people to like me
- **trusted with a muzzle... with a clog** - I'm trusted to speak with a muzzle on and given my freedom with a restraint (in other words, not trusted at all)
- **decreed** - decided
- **model** - foundation
- **forward March chick** - kid who grew up too fast, like a bird hatched early
- **being entertained for a perfumer** - a "perfumer" was hired to burn herbs in bad-smelling rooms to hide the scent
- **arras** - wall hanging or curtain
- **food to my displeasure** - something that makes my grudge worse
- **that young start-up... overthrow** - the young Claudio won glory for defeating me in the civil war
- **cross** - block
- **would the cook were o' my mind** - if the cook shared my grievances, perhaps he'd poison the food
- **prove** - find out



let me be that I am, and seek not to alter me

Don John is one of several characters in Shakespeare who talks about knowing exactly who they are when we first meet them. As it happens, all of those characters are "villains"—or, at least, people who go on to do terrible things to others. ("I am determined to be a villain," says Richard III. "I am a plain-dealing villain," says Don John.)

Which raises some questions:

WHEN IS KNOWING YOURSELF A GOOD THING?
WHEN (IF EVER) IS IT A BAD THING AND WHY?

NERD ALERT! NERD ALERT! NERD ALERT! NERD ALERT! NERD ALERT! NERD ALERT! NERD ALERT! NERD ALERT! NERD ALERT! NERD ALERT! NERD ALERT! NERD ALERT! NERD ALERT! NERD ALERT! NERD ALERT!

"borachio" is Spanish for "wine bottle," which might tell you a little something about Borachio's state of mind in this play.

Can you think of other characters whose names tell you something about them? Think of TV, movies, books, anything!





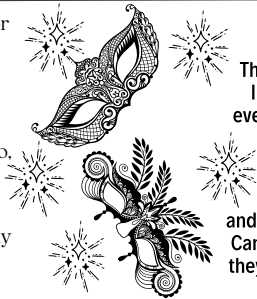
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As expected, Hero was no match for Don Pedro's charms. Don Pedro's disguise worked, so now Hero is in love with Claudio, even though she didn't even dance with the real Claudio at the party. Things are looking up for young Count Claudio, it seems.

Not so fast—again! Borachio has a plan of his own, and he's out to really ruin Claudio's day. He goes to Don John to lay it out...



A plot's afoot!

The clever plots in Shakespeare are sometimes a little tough to believe. (Like, even at a masked event, would Hero *really* not be able to tell Claudio and Don Pedro apart?)

This is what we call

Shakespeare-magic

and it's all over the plays—especially the comedies. Can you think of any other plots or events—even if they're not from Shakespeare's plays—that require a little Shakespeare-magic?

Listen up! One of you, drink a potion that makes you appear dead. Someone else, write a fake letter and drop it by the shrubbery. The rest of you, put on a costume! This is all in masks, switching names. Got it??

all real Shakespeare plots



Enter Don John and Borachio.

WORDS, WORDS, WORDS

- **cross, impediment** - barrier
- **med'cinable** - comforting, healing
- **whatsoever comes...evenly with mine** - I want whatever gets in the way of him getting what he wants
- **in the favor of** - liked by (romantically)
- **appoint her** - tell her
- **the poison of that lies in you to temper** - that's only half the plot; the other half you'll need to do yourself
- **whose estimation you to mightily hold up** - who you respect greatly
- **stale** - someone who sells their body
- **misuse** - deceive
- **vex** - torment
- **undo** - ruin her life
- **only to despite** - in order to get back at
- **intend a kind of zeal** - fake urgency
- **as** - as if
- **cozened with the semblance of a maid** - tricked into thinking that she's "pure"
- **jealousy shall be called assurance** - jealousy will be taken as seriously as proof
- **the preparation overthrown** - the wedding planning will be stopped
- **grow this to what adverse issue** - Whatever wicked thing this plan leads to



Borachio definitely has a plan....

But is it a good plan? What could go wrong? What are the plan's strengths and weaknesses?

Where do you see this plot leading?

There are many ways that this plan could go very wrong—or very right!

What happens if...

- Margaret doesn't agree to help?
- Don Pedro and Claudio don't believe Don John?
- Margaret's voice doesn't sound like Hero's?
- They see that Margaret isn't actually Hero?
- Borachio can't arrange for Hero to be away?

What elements of the plan need to work in order to have success?

WHILE WE'RE AT IT—

this is a pretty nasty plot.

Borachio is suggesting that Don John trick his brother and Claudio, which isn't nice. But the *real victim*, if the plan works, will be **Hero**. Her marriage to a perfectly nice guy will be *called off*, her reputation will be *ruined*, and she might even be *cut off* from her own family. This play is a comedy (one of Shakespeare's funniest!), but the *stakes are real* for Hero.

Is she "necessary" *collateral damage* in this plot? Could there be *another way* to get back at Claudio?

What's in it for Borachio?

It's easy to see why Don John is so mad—he just lost a war. And he seems like a generally bitter person, whether you think he has good reasons or not. Borachio is going to get a thousand ducats, but he proposes the plan *before* Don John proposes the reward. So what's in it for Borachio? What does he get out of this plan?



Gha-Ghing!



How much is 1,000 ducats?

It's a little bit hard to say.

"Ducat" referred to a number of different Italian gold and silver coins in Shakespeare's time—every kingdom had its own version. But we can figure out a little from context.

They're all over Shakespeare's Italian plays.

Here are some clues about the worth of a ducat:

- **Speed**, a servant in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, expects to get tipped **one ducat** for carrying a message.
- **Romeo** pays **40 ducats** for poison in *Romeo & Juliet*.
- In *The Merchant of Venice*, **Shylock** gets upset when he hears his daughter spent **80 ducats** in one night.
- **Sir Andrew Aguecheek** makes an "excellent income" of **3,000 ducats a year** in *Twelfth Night*.



Knowing all that, what would you do for 1,000 ducats?

What might be a better way for Don John to use that money? Is it a lot of money to him?

Wait, Don John just lost a war! What is he even doing here? Did Don Pedro punish him? What do you think the punishment was? Why is he just hanging out now?

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
Any bar, any cross, any impediment* will be med'cinable* to me. I am sick in displeasure to him, and whatsoever comes athwart his affection ranges evenly with mine.* How canst thou cross this marriage?

BORACHIO
Not honestly, my lord, but so covertly that no dishonesty shall appear in me.

DON JOHN
Show me briefly how.

BORACHIO
I think I told your Lordship a year since, how much I am in the favor of Margaret, the waiting gentlewoman to Hero.

DON JOHN
I remember.

BORACHIO
I can, at any unseasonable instant of the night, 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
The poison of that lies in you to temper.* Go you to the Prince your brother; spare not to tell him that he hath wronged his honor in marrying the renowned Claudio, whose estimation do you mightily hold up,* to a contaminated stale,* such a one as Hero.

DON JOHN
What proof shall I make of that?

BORACHIO
Proof enough to misuse* the Prince, to vex* Claudio, to undo* Hero, and kill Leonato. Look you for any other issue?

DON JOHN
Only to despite* them I will endeavor anything.

BORACHIO
Go then, find me a meet hour to draw Don Pedro and the Count Claudio alone. Tell them that you know that Hero loves me; intend a kind of zeal* both to the Prince and Claudio, as* in love of your brother's honor, who hath made this match, and his friend's reputation, who is thus like to be cozened with the semblance of a maid,* that you have discovered thus. They will scarcely believe this without trial. Offer them instances, which shall bear no less likelihood than* to see me at her chamber window, hear me call Margaret "Hero," hear Margaret term me "Claudio," and bring them to see this the very night before the intended wedding, for in the meantime I will so fashion the matter that Hero shall be absent, and there shall appear such seeming truth of Hero's disloyalty that jealousy shall be called assurance* and all the preparation overthrown.*

DON JOHN
Grow this to what adverse issue* it can, I will put it in practice. Be cunning in the working this, and thy fee is a thousand ducats.*

BORACHIO
Be you constant in the accusation, and my cunning shall not shame me.

DON JOHN
I will presently go learn their day of marriage.

They exit.