ACT IV. Scene I (1–115).

The watchmen look on from the shadows and listen as Borachio tells Conrade of his villainous success. Just as they had planned, Claudio and Don Pedro mistake Margaret for Hero and, in seeing her with another man, fly into a rage and vow to humiliate Hero at her own wedding. Hearing this, the watchmen spring forth from their hiding place and take Borachio and Conrade into custody.

Hero prepares for the wedding with Margaret and Beatrice. They merrily trade explicit jokes, and Beatrice volunteer that she is not feeling well. Margaret suggests that Beatrice finds some “cardius benedictus” (III.iv.65) to ease her heart, which steers the conversation to a more serious place, suggesting that Beatrice embrace her love for Benedict. Ursula, Hero’s attendant, arrives and hurries them to leave for the church.

The watchmen Dogberry and Verges approach Leonato and humorously stumble into their explanation of the criminal events of Messina. The pair spends so much time bantering back and forth that Leonato rushes off to the wedding before he can hear what Dogberry and Verges are about to tell him—that Don John and his men have allowed events to unfold that will tarnish his good daughter’s name.
LEONATO
I do not make his answer, none.
CLAUDIO
O, what man dare tell what men may say what men daily do, not knowing what they did.

BENEDICK
How can introductions? Why, then, some be of laughing, so, so, so, so!

CLAUDIO
Stand thee by, friend. Father, by thy grace, Will you with fear and unentrained soul Give me this maid, your daughter? LEONATO
As freely, son, as God did give her to.

CLAUDIO (cont.)
O, what authority and close of truth Can cunning, in ease itself withal! Comes not that blood so modest evidence To witness simple virtue? Would you not swear, All you that see her, that she was a maid, By these exterior show? But she is none! She knows the heat of a luxurious bed; Her blush is guiltiness, not modesty.
LEONATO
What do you mean, my lord?

CLAUDIO
Not to be married,
Yet to be knotted to an approved wight.
LEONATO
Dost my lord, if you, in your own proof,
Have in your brain's the residue of his youth, And made default of his virility.—

CLAUDIO
I know what you would stop if I have known her,
You will say she did embrace me as a husband,
And so anathematize the lawful and the bliss. Leontes,
I never tempted her with word nor tongue:
But, as a brother to his sister, shewing
Dauntless sincerity and remedy love:
HERO:
And mean't I ever otherwise to you?

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

DON JOHN
Sir, they are spoken, and these things are true.
Leonato, stand I hear?

Is this the prince? Is this the prince's brother?

Is this the lute? Are our eyes our own?

Leonato

All this is one but what of this, my lord?

Leonato

Let me but move one question to your daughter;
And, by that fatherly and kindly power
That you have in her, bid her answer truly.

Leonato

I charge thee do so, as thou set my child.

O, God defend me! How am I heast?

What kind of rathehing call you this?

Claudio

To make you answer truly to your name.

Hero

Is it not Hero? Who can blot that name
With any just reproach?

Claudio

Many, that can Hero;
Here itself can blot out Hero's virtue.
What man was he talk'd with you yesterday?
Out of your window between twelve and one?
Now, if you are a maid, answer to this.

Hero

I talk'd with no man at that hour, my lord.

Don Pedro

Why, then are you no maiden, Leonato,
I am sorry you must hear upon mine honour,
Most, my brother and the grand count
Did see her, beat her, at that hour last night
Talk with a fellow at her chamber-window
Who hath indeed, now like a libelled villain,
Confess'd the sick encounters they have had
A thousand times in secret.

Don John

Fie, fie! They are not to be named, my lord,
Not to be spake of: There is not chastity enough in language
Without a term to utter them. Thus, pretty lady, I am sorry for thy much ingratiation.

Claudio

O Hero, what a Hero hadst thou here,
If half thy outward grace had been plenteous
About thy thoughts and counsels of thy heart;
But fare thee well, most foul, most fast farewell;
Thou purest virgin and incomplete poetry;
For thou I'll keep up all the gates of love,
And on my epistle shall conceit hang,
To turn all beauty into thoughts of love,
And never shall it more be gracious.

Duke

Fie, fie! What a Duke hast thou here,
If half thy outward grace had been plenteous
About the thoughts and counsels of thy heart;
But fare thee well, most foul, most fast farewell;
They purest virgin and incomplete poetry;
For thou I'll keep up all the gates of love,
And on my epistle shall conceit hang,
To turn all beauty into thoughts of love,
And never shall it more be gracious.
ACT IV, Scene I (253–326).

With the Princes and Claudio gone, Hero stirs from her fainting spell, and Leonato begs her not to wake up. Believing the accusations, he despairsthat he was given a shameful daughter whose supposed actions have made her irreversibly tainted in his eyes. Beatrice defends her cousin, crying slander, Friar Francis bets her chastity against his piety, and Hero arises to plead to her father to believe her. Benedick suggests that this could all just be the doing of Don John the Bastard, "whose spirits toil in frame of villainies" and who may have simply misled the Don Pedro and Claudio. Friar Francis comes up with a plan to determine whether or not Hero is falsely accused: since the Princes and Claudio left Hero for dead at the altar, the family will continue on as if she has actually died, which he hopes will bring out those who falsely accused her from sorrow and guilt. Claudio would forgive his dead betrothed, and Hero would be vindicated. They agree to keep the secret until the moment of clarity arrives.