

Act 1 Scene 1

An apartment in the DUKE'S palace.

Enter DUKE VINCENTIO, ESCALUS, Lords and Attendants

DUKE VINCENTIO

Escalus.

ESCALUS

My lord.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Of government the properties to unfold,
Would seem in me to affect speech and discourse;
5 Since I am put to know that your own science
Exceeds, in that, the lists of all advice
My strength can give you: then no more remains,
But that to your sufficiency as your Worth is able,
And let them work. The nature of our people,
10 Our city's institutions, and the terms
For common justice, you're as pregnant in
As art and practise hath enriched any
That we remember. There is our commission,
From which we would not have you warp. Call hither,
15 I say, bid come before us Angelo.

A room in the DUKE'S palace.

DUKE VINCENTIO enters, with ESCALUS and several lords and attendants.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Escalus.

ESCALUS

Yes, my lord?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Explaining government affairs always makes me talk excitedly.
But since you know more about matters of government than I
can ever tell you, the only thing left for me to say is this: rely on
your natural ability, and let it work with your knowledge. You
know as much, from both learning and experience, about the
nature of our people, our city's laws and procedures, and our
legal system as anyone I can think of. Here are your written
orders; do not deviate from them. [To Attendants.] Go and order
Angelo to come to me.

Exit an Attendant

What figure of us think you he will bear?
For you must know, we have with special soul
Elected him our absence to supply,
Lent him our terror, dress'd him with our love,
20 And given his deputation all the organs
Of our own power: what think you of it?

ESCALUS

If any in Vienna be of worth
To undergo such ample grace and honour,
It is Lord Angelo.

DUKE VINCENTIO

25 Look where he comes.

Enter ANGELO

ANGELO

Always obedient to your grace's will,
I come to know your pleasure.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Angelo,
There is a kind of character in thy life,
30 That to the observer doth thy history
Fully unfold. Thyself and thy belongings

An attendant exits.

How do you think he'll represent me?
For you must know, after careful consideration, I've chosen him
to rule in my absence, deputizing him with the dread and love
my presence inspires, and transferring to him all the tools in
my power. What do you think?

ESCALUS

If anyone in Vienna deserves such an honor, it's Lord Angelo.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Here he comes.

ANGELO enters.

ANGELO

Here I am, obedient as always; what can I do for you?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Angelo, there is a distinctive pattern to your life that tells
people what sort of man you are. But your talents don't belong
to you alone, and you mustn't waste them by keeping them to
yourself. Heaven uses us the way we use a torch—not to shine

Are not thine own so proper as to waste
Thyself upon thy virtues, they on thee.
Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,
35 Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues
Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike
As if we had them not. Spirits are not finely touch'd
But to fine issues, nor Nature never lends
The smallest scruple of her excellence
40 But, like a thrifty goddess, she determines
Herself the glory of a creditor,
Both thanks and use. But I do bend my speech
To one that can my part in him advertise;

Hold therefore, Angelo :—

45 In our remove be thou at full ourself;
Mortality and mercy in Vienna
Live in thy tongue and heart: old Escalus,
Though first in question, is thy secondary.
Take thy commission.

ANGELO

50 Now, good my lord,
Let there be some more test made of my metal,
Before so noble and so great a figure
Be stamp'd upon it.

DUKE VINCENTIO

No more evasion:

for itself, but to shed light onto the world. If we don't use our talents in the world, it would be the same as if we didn't have those talents at all. People are given certain natures to accomplish certain things. Mother Nature doesn't lend you even a smidgen of talent without expecting you to pay her back—with interest and gratitude. But here I am talking to someone who could instruct me! So, stand firm, Angelo—in my absence, you'll stand in for me completely. Vienna's criminals will be executed or pardoned based on what you feel and say. Although old Escalus is senior to you, he'll be your second-in-command. Take your written orders.

ANGELO

My good lord, please test me further before you raise me to such a high, prominent position.

DUKE VINCENTIO

55 We have with a leaven'd and prepared choice
Proceeded to you; therefore take your honours.
Our haste from hence is of so quick condition
That it prefers itself and leaves unquestion'd
Matters of needful value. We shall write to you,
60 As time and our concernings shall importune,
How it goes with us, and do look to know
What doth befall you here. So, fare you well;
To the hopeful execution do I leave you
Of your commissions.

ANGELO

65 Yet give leave, my lord,
That we may bring you something on the way.

DUKE VINCENTIO

My haste may not admit it;
Nor need you, on mine honour, have to do
With any scruple; your scope is as mine own
70 So to enforce or qualify the laws
As to your soul seems good. Give me your hand:
I'll privily away. I love the people,
But do not like to stage me to their eyes:
Through it do well, I do not relish well
75 Their loud applause and Aves vehement;
Nor do I think the man of safe discretion
That does affect it. Once more, fare you well.

No more procrastinating. I've chosen you after careful consideration, so accept the honor. It's imperative that I leave now, even if it means leaving some important matters undiscussed. I'll write to you when I have the time and feel the need, telling you how I am, and I'll expect to hear how you're doing. So, goodbye; I'll leave you to carry out your orders—successfully, no doubt.

ANGELO

My lord, will you allow us to escort you part of the way?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Sorry, I'm in too big a rush. But please don't have any doubts—you have all my authority to enforce or change the laws in any way that seems good to you. Let's shake hands, and I'll sneak off. I love the people but don't like to parade before them. I don't like their loud applause and emphatic cheering, though they can be politically useful; nor do I trust the judgment of any man who does desire such cheers and applause. Once again, goodbye.

ANGELO

The heavens give safety to your purposes!

ESCALUS

Lead forth and bring you back in happiness!

DUKE VINCENTIO

80 I thank you. Fare you well.

Exit

ESCALUS

I shall desire you, sir, to give me leave
To have free speech with you; and it concerns me
To look into the bottom of my place:
A power I have, but of what strength and nature
85 I am not yet instructed.

ANGELO

'Tis so with me. Let us withdraw together,
And we may soon our satisfaction have
Touching that point.

ESCALUS

I'll wait upon your honour.

Exeunt

ANGELO

May heaven grant you a safe trip!

ESCALUS

A happy departure, and a happy homecoming as well!

DUKE VINCENTIO

Thank you. Goodbye.

He exits.

ESCALUS

Sir, I'd like to have a frank talk with you because I want to figure out the exact nature of my new job. I know I've got some authority, but how much, and what kind, I'm not clear on.

ANGELO

Same with me. Let's leave together and we'll go figure it out.

ESCALUS

I'll accompany you.

Everyone exits.

Act 1 Scene 2

A Street.

Enter **LUCIO** and two Gentlemen

LUCIO

If the duke with the other dukes come not to composition with the King of Hungary, why then all the dukes fall upon the king.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Heaven grant us its peace, but not the King of
5 Hungary's!

SECOND GENTLEMAN

Amen.

LUCIO

Thou concludest like the sanctimonious pirate, that went to sea with the Ten Commandments, but scraped one out of the table.

SECOND GENTLEMAN

10 'Thou shalt not steal'?

LUCIO

Ay, that he razed.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Why, 'twas a commandment to command the captain and

A street.

LUCIO and two Gentlemen enter.

LUCIO

If our Duke, along with the other Dukes, can't reach an agreement with the King of Hungary, they're all going to attack him.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

May God give us peace—except not with Hungary.

SECOND GENTLEMAN

Amen.

LUCIO

You talk like the self-righteous pirate who went to sea with the Ten Commandments but cut out one of the commandments.

SECOND GENTLEMAN

Was it "Thou shalt not steal"?

LUCIO

Yep, that's the one.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

all the rest from their functions: they put forth
to steal. There's not a soldier of us all, that, in
15 the thanksgiving before meat, do relish the petition
well that prays for peace.

SECOND GENTLEMAN

I never heard any soldier dislike it.

LUCIO

I believe thee; for I think thou never wast where
grace was said.

SECOND GENTLEMAN

20 No? a dozen times at least.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

What, in metre?

LUCIO

In any proportion or in any language.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

I think, or in any religion.

LUCIO

Ay, why not? Grace is grace, despite of all
25 controversy: as, for example, thou thyself art a
wicked villain, despite of all grace.

Right, because that commandment would've put the captain
and his pirate crew out of business—they went to sea to steal.
When grace is being said before a meal, there's not a soldier
among us who likes a prayer for peace.

SECOND GENTLEMAN

I never heard any soldier say he dislikes it.

LUCIO

I believe you—I don't think you've ever been at a table where
they said grace.

SECOND GENTLEMAN

No? I've heard it a dozen times at least.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

What, in verse?

LUCIO

In any form or in any language.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Or in any religion.

LUCIO

Well, why not? Grace is grace, no matter what your religious
beliefs are, just like you're a scoundrel, no matter how much
grace you have.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Well, there went but a pair of shears between us.

LUCIO

I grant; as there may between the lists and the velvet. Thou art the list.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

30 And thou the velvet: thou art good velvet; thou'rt a three-piled piece, I warrant thee: I had as lief be a list of an English kersey as be piled, as thou art piled, for a French velvet. Do I speak feelingly now?

LUCIO

35 I think thou dost; and, indeed, with most painful feeling of thy speech: I will, out of thine own confession, learn to begin thy health; but, whilst I live, forget to drink after thee.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

I think I have done myself wrong, have I not?

SECOND GENTLEMAN

40 Yes, that thou hast, whether thou art tainted or free.

LUCIO

Behold, behold, where Madam Mitigation comes! I

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Hey, you and me are cut from the same cloth.

LUCIO

Right—the way a piece of velvet and the scrap ends are from the same cloth. You're the scrap.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

And you're the velvet: a nice, thick piece of piled velvet. I swear, I'd rather be a piece of plain, English cloth than be like you, a French velvet that's full of [piles](#) and STDs. Got you there, didn't I?

LUCIO

I think you did, and from the painful way you talk, I think something's got you down there. I'd be glad to toast your health; just remind me never to drink from your glass after you.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

I guess I set myself up, didn't I?

SECOND GENTLEMAN

Yeah, you did, whether you've got something or not.

LUCIO

have purchased as many diseases under her roof as come to

—

SECOND GENTLEMAN

To what, I pray?

LUCIO

Judge.

SECOND GENTLEMAN

45 To three thousand *dolours* a year.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Ay, and more.

LUCIO

A French crown more.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Thou art always figuring diseases in me; but thou
art full of error; I am sound.

LUCIO

50 Nay, not as one would say, healthy; but so sound as
things that are hollow: thy bones are hollow;
impiety has made a feast of thee.

Enter MISTRESS OVERDONE

Oh, look, here comes Madam Satisfaction. The number of
venereal diseases I've caught under her roof comes to—

SECOND GENTLEMAN

To what?

LUCIO

Guess.

SECOND GENTLEMAN

Three thousand dollars' worth.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Yeah, and more.

LUCIO

A syphilis sore more.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

You're always suggesting I'm diseased, but you're wrong. I'm
sound and healthy.

LUCIO

You may be sound, but you're not healthy. Your bones sound
hollow. Loose living has eaten out your insides.

MISTRESS OVERDONE enters.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

How now! which of your hips has the most profound sciatica?

MISTRESS OVERDONE

Well, well; there's one yonder arrested and carried
55 to prison was worth five thousand of you all.

SECOND GENTLEMAN

Who's that, I pray thee?

MISTRESS OVERDONE

Marry, sir, that's Claudio, Signior Claudio.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Claudio to prison? 'tis not so.

MISTRESS OVERDONE

Nay, but I know 'tis so: I saw him arrested, saw
60 him carried away; and, which is more, within these
three days his head to be chopped off.

LUCIO

But, after all this fooling, I would not have it so.
Art thou sure of this?

MISTRESS OVERDONE

I am too sure of it: and it is for getting Madam
65 Julietta with child.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Hey, there! In which hip is the pain of your sciatica worse?

MISTRESS OVERDONE

Well, well. There's someone over there who's been arrested
and hauled off to prison who was worth five thousand of you
all.

SECOND GENTLEMAN

Who's that?

MISTRESS OVERDONE

That's Claudio, Signior Claudio.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Claudio in prison? It can't be true.

MISTRESS OVERDONE

I know it's true: I saw him arrested and saw him carried away,
and what's more, they're chopping his head off in three days.

LUCIO

All kidding aside, I'd hate for this to be true. Are you sure?

MISTRESS OVERDONE

I'm all too sure. It's for getting Miss
Julietta pregnant.

LUCIO

Believe me, this may be: he promised to meet me two hours since, and he was ever precise in promise-keeping.

SECOND GENTLEMAN

Besides, you know, it draws something near to the
70 speech we had to such a purpose.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

But, most of all, agreeing with the proclamation.

LUCIO

Away! let's go learn the truth of it.

Exeunt LUCIO and Gentlemen

MISTRESS OVERDONE

Thus, what with the war, what with [the sweat](#), what
with the gallows and what with poverty, I am
75 custom-shrunk.

Enter POMPEY

How now! what's the news with you?

POMPEY

Yonder man is carried to prison.

LUCIO

She might be right about this. He promised to meet me two hours ago, and he always keeps his promises.

SECOND GENTLEMAN

You know, this is exactly the sort of thing we were just talking about.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Most of all it fits with the public proclamation that was made.

LUCIO

Let's go see if we can get to the bottom of this.

LUCIO and the Gentlemen exit.

MISTRESS OVERDONE

What with the war, plague, executions, and general poverty, I'm losing business.

POMPEY enters.

Hi! what's new with you?

POMPEY

That man over there is being hauled off to prison.

MISTRESS OVERDONE

Well; what has he done?

POMPEY

A woman.

MISTRESS OVERDONE

80 But what's his offence?

POMPEY

Groping for trouts in a peculiar river.

MISTRESS OVERDONE

What, is there a maid with child by him?

POMPEY

No, but there's a woman with maid by him. You have not heard of the proclamation, have you?

MISTRESS OVERDONE

85 What proclamation, man?

POMPEY

All houses in the suburbs of Vienna must be plucked down.

MISTRESS OVERDONE

And what shall become of those in the city?

POMPEY

They shall stand for seed: they had gone down too,

MISTRESS OVERDONE

What did he do?

POMPEY

A woman.

MISTRESS OVERDONE

But what's his crime?

POMPEY

Fishing in the "private part" of a river.

MISTRESS OVERDONE

What, a virgin is pregnant because of him?

POMPEY

No, but a woman's having a child because of him. You haven't heard about the proclamation, have you?

MISTRESS OVERDONE

What proclamation, man?

POMPEY

All the brothels in the suburbs of Vienna must be torn down.

MISTRESS OVERDONE

And what about those in the city?

POMPEY

but that a wise burgher put in for them.

MISTRESS OVERDONE

90 But shall all our houses of resort in the suburbs be pulled down?

POMPEY

To the ground, mistress.

MISTRESS OVERDONE

Why, here's a change indeed in the commonwealth!
What shall become of me?

POMPEY

95 Come; fear you not: good counsellors lack no clients: though you change your place, you need not change your trade; I'll be your *tapster* still.
Courage! there will be pity taken on you: you that have worn your eyes almost out in the service, you
100 will be considered.

MISTRESS OVERDONE

What's to do here, Thomas Tapster? Let's withdraw.

POMPEY

Here comes Signior Claudio, led by the provost to prison; and there's Madam Juliet.

They'll be left standing. They would've been destroyed, too, but a savvy businessman bought them.

MISTRESS OVERDONE

But all our brothels in the suburbs are going to be demolished?

POMPEY

Down to the ground, ma'am.

MISTRESS OVERDONE

Wow, *that's* a change for the country. What's going to happen to me?

POMPEY

Come on, don't worry. Good lawyers never lack for clients. Though you change locations, you don't need to change professions. I'll still be your pimp. Courage! They'll take pity on you; all of you that have grown old and gray servicing people will be repaid.

MISTRESS OVERDONE

What's all this fuss, Thomas Tapster? Let's get out of here.

POMPEY

Here comes Signior Claudio, led to prison by the provost. And there's Miss Juliet.

Exeunt

Enter Provost, CLAUDIO, JULIET, and Officers

CLAUDIO

Fellow, why dost thou show me thus to the world?

105 Bear me to prison, where I am committed.

PROVOST

I do it not in evil disposition,

But from Lord Angelo by special charge.

CLAUDIO

Thus can the demigod Authority

Make us pay down for our offence by weight

110 The words of heaven; on whom it will, it will;

On whom it will not, so ; yet still 'tis just.

Re-enter LUCIO and two Gentlemen

LUCIO

Why, how now, Claudio! Whence comes this restraint?

CLAUDIO

From too much liberty, my Lucio, liberty:

As surfeit is the father of much fast,

115 So every scope by the immoderate use

They exit.

The Provost enters, with CLAUDIO (his hands tied), JULIET, and officers.

CLAUDIO

Man, why are you parading me like this in front of everyone?

Take me off to prison already.

PROVOST

I'm not being cruel. It's Lord Angelo's special order.

CLAUDIO

This is how the authorities, like gods, make us pay for our crimes. As the Bible says, God has mercy on those he chooses to have mercy on, and doesn't have mercy on those he chooses not to, and so on. I suppose that's fair.

LUCIO and two gentlemen re-enter.

LUCIO

Claudio! Why are you being arrested?

CLAUDIO

For being too promiscuous, Lucio, too promiscuous. The same way overeating leads to fasting, and overdoing anything leads

Turns to restraint. Our natures do pursue,
Like rats that ravin down their proper bane,
A thirsty evil; and when we drink we die.

LUCIO

If I could speak so wisely under an arrest, I would
120 send for certain of my creditors: and yet, to say
the truth, I had as lief have the foppery of freedom
as the morality of imprisonment. What's thy
offence, Claudio?

CLAUDIO

What but to speak of would offend again.

LUCIO

125 What, is't murder?

CLAUDIO

No.

LUCIO

Lechery?

CLAUDIO

Call it so.

PROVOST

Away, sir, you must go.

to being restricted. Like rats gobbling up rat poison, we have a thirst for harmful things, and when we drink them we die.

LUCIO

If I could speak so well while under arrest, I'd ask a few creditors I know to come and lock me up. Though frankly, I'd rather be foolish and free than wise and a prisoner. What's your crime, Claudio?

CLAUDIO

To speak of it would be another crime.

LUCIO

What, is it murder?

CLAUDIO

No.

LUCIO

Lechery?

CLAUDIO

You could call it that.

PROVOST

Sir, you have to go.

CLAUDIO

130 One word, good friend. Lucio, a word with you.

LUCIO

A hundred, if they'll do you any good.
Is lechery so look'd after?

CLAUDIO

Thus stands it with me: upon a true contract
I got possession of Julietta's bed:
135 You know the lady; she is fast my wife,
Save that we do the denunciation lack
Of outward order: this we came not to,
Only for propagation of a dower
Remaining in the coffer of her friends,
140 From whom we thought it meet to hide our love
Till time had made them for us. But it chances
The stealth of our most mutual entertainment
With character too gross is writ on Juliet.

LUCIO

With child, perhaps?

CLAUDIO

145 Unhappily, even so.
And the new deputy now for the duke—
Whether it be the fault and glimpse of newness,

CLAUDIO

(to the Provost) Just a minute, good friend. Lucio, let me have a word with you.

LUCIO

A hundred, if they'll do you any good.
Is lechery regulated now?

CLAUDIO

Here's what happened: I slept with Julietta after we got engaged. You know her—she's practically my wife, except that we haven't had an official ceremony. The only reason we didn't was to increase the amount of the dowry she might receive from her friends and relatives. We thought we'd hide our love until we had a chance to win them over. But it turned out our secret intimacy had an all-too-obvious effect on Juliet.

LUCIO

Pregnant, huh?

CLAUDIO

Unfortunately, yes. And this new deputy of the duke's—I can't say whether he's been blinded by his new power or if he sees the public like a horse to be broken in, so he digs his spurs in

Or whether that the body public be
A horse whereon the governor doth ride,
150 Who, newly in the seat, that it may know
He can command, lets it straight feel the spur;
Whether the tyranny be in his place,
Or in his emmence that fills it up,
I stagger in:—but this new governor
155 Awakes me all the enrolled penalties
Which have, like unsavour'd armour, hung by the wall
So long that nineteen zodiacs have gone round
And none of them been worn; and, for a name,
Now puts the drowsy and neglected act
160 Freshly on me: 'tis surely for a name.

LUCIO

I warrant it is: and thy head stands so tickle on
thy shoulders that a milkmaid, if she be in love,
may sigh it off. Send after the duke and appeal to
him.

CLAUDIO

165 I have done so, but he's not to be found.
I prithee, Lucio, do me this kind service:
This day my sister should the cloister enter
And there receive her approbation:
Acquaint her with the danger of my state:
170 Implore her, in my voice, that she make friends

right away to show it who's boss; or if he's just a bully; or if being a bully is part of the job. But this new governor is taking all these old penalties that, like rusty armor hanging on the wall, haven't been used in years and is applying them to me. He's imposing all these unenforced, long-ignored laws on me to make a name for himself. That has to be it, to make his name.

LUCIO

I bet it is; and your head sits so precariously on your shoulders right now that the sigh of a lovesick milkmaid could knock it off. Get in touch with the duke and appeal to him.

CLAUDIO

I tried, but he can't be found. Please, Lucio, do this favor for me: My sister's entering a nunnery and starting her training period today. Tell her the danger I'm in, and implore her, in my name, to befriend this strict deputy and try to change his mind. I've got a lot of hope in her. Her youthful sweetness alone

To the strict deputy; bid herself assay him:
I have great hope in that; for in her youth
There is a prone and speechless dialect,
Such as move men; beside, she hath prosperous art
175 When she will play with reason and discourse,
And well she can persuade.

LUCIO

I pray she may; as well for the encouragement of the
like, which else would stand under grievous
imposition, as for the enjoying of thy life, who I
180 would be sorry should be thus foolishly lost at a
[game of tick-tack](#). I'll to her.

CLAUDIO

I thank you, good friend Lucio.

LUCIO

Within two hours.

CLAUDIO

Come, officer, away!

Exeunt

A monastery.

would move a man. Besides, she has a gift for rhetoric, and she can really persuade people.

LUCIO

I pray she can, for the lives of everyone like you who could now be punished, as well as for your own life, which I'd be sad to see lost so stupidly for playing with you. I'll go to her.

CLAUDIO

Thank you, Lucio. You're a good friend.

LUCIO

I'll be there in two hours.

CLAUDIO

OK, officer, let's go.

All exit.

A monastery.

Act 1 Scene 3

Enter DUKE VINCENTIO and FRIAR THOMAS

DUKE VINCENTIO

No, holy father; throw away that thought;
Believe not that the dribbling dart of love
Can pierce a complete bosom. Why I desire thee
To give me secret harbour, hath a purpose
5 More grave and wrinkled than the aims and ends
Of burning youth.

FRIAR THOMAS

May your grace speak of it?

DUKE VINCENTIO

My holy sir, none better knows than you
How I have ever loved the life removed
10 And held in idle price to haunt assemblies
Where youth, and cost, and witless bravery keeps.
I have deliver'd to Lord Angelo,
A man of stricture and firm abstinence,
My absolute power and place here in Vienna,
15 And he supposes me travell'd to Poland;
For so I have strew'd it in the common ear,
And so it is received. Now, pious sir,
You will demand of me why I do this?

FRIAR THOMAS

Gladly, my lord.

DUKE VINCENTIO and FRIAR THOMAS enter.

DUKE VINCENTIO

No, holy father, forget that idea. Don't think that Cupid's feeble arrow can pierce this invulnerable bosom. I want you to shelter me secretly for a reason more ageless and serious than any youthful, burning desire.

FRIAR THOMAS

Can you talk about it?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Reverend sir, no one knows better than you how I've always loved the quiet life and never cared much for the social scene where young people brag and throw their money around. I've given Lord Angelo, a man of strict self-discipline and self-denial, my absolute power and position here in Vienna. He thinks I've gone to Poland, since I've spread that rumor among the general public, and everybody believes it. Now, religious sir, do you want to know why I did this?

FRIAR THOMAS

Yes, my lord.

DUKE VINCENTIO

20 We have strict statutes and most biting laws.
The needful bits and curbs to headstrong weeds,
Which for this nineteen years we have let slip;
Even like an o'ergrown lion in a cave,
That goes not out to prey. Now, as fond fathers,
25 Having bound up the threatening twigs of birch,
Only to stick it in their children's sight
For terror, not to use, in time the rod
Becomes more mock'd than fear'd; so our decrees,
Dead to infliction, to themselves are dead;
30 And liberty plucks justice by the nose;
The baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart
Goes all decorum.

FRIAR THOMAS

It rested in your grace
To unloose this tied-up justice when you pleased:
35 And it in you more dreadful would have seem'd
Than in Lord Angelo.

DUKE VINCENTIO

I do fear, too dreadful:
Sith 'twas my fault to give the people scope,
'Twould be my tyranny to strike and gall them
40 For what I bid them do: for we bid this be done,

DUKE VINCENTIO

I instituted strict statutes and firm laws, necessary controls for headstrong human natures, but for nineteen years I've let them grow lax, like an old, fat lion that lies in his cave and never leaves to hunt. Now, a doting father can make a birch whipping rod and wave it in his children's faces, but if he only threatens and never uses it, eventually they'll laugh at it and not fear it. Similarly, our regulations have gone unenforced, and so they're as good as dead. People are flouting the law with their loose living. The proper order of things is turned upside down, as if babies were spanking their nannies.

FRIAR THOMAS

It was in your lordship's ability to get the justice system working again whenever you wanted. And it would've been taken more seriously if you'd done it, rather than Lord Angelo.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Too seriously, I'm afraid. Since it was my fault to give the people so much freedom, I'd seem like a real tyrant now to whip them for things I allowed them to do. We essentially tell people to misbehave when we give evil deeds a pass and

When evil deeds have their permissive pass
And not the punishment. Therefore indeed, my father,
I have on Angelo imposed the office;
Who may, in the ambush of my name, strike home,
45 And yet my nature never in the fight
To do in slander. And to behold his sway,
I will, as 'twere a brother of your order.
Visit both prince and people: therefore, I prithee,
Supply me with the habit and instruct me
50 How I may formally in person bear me
Like a true friar. More reasons for this action
At our more leisure shall I render you;
Only, this one: Lord Angelo is precise;
Stands at a guard with envy; scarce confesses
55 *That his blood flows, or that his appetite*
Is more to bread than stone: hence shall we see,
If power change purpose, what our seemers be.

Exeunt

A nunnery.

Enter ISABELLA and FRANCISCA

ISABELLA

And have you nuns no farther privileges?

don't punish them. So, friar, I've given the job to Angelo. He can effectively deal with this, in my name—but since I'm not personally involved, I won't look bad. To see how he rules, I'd like to visit him and the people disguised as one of your order's monks. So please furnish me with a robe and teach me how to behave like a real friar. When there's more time, I'll give you additional reasons for my actions. For now, I'll tell you this one: Lord Angelo is a puritanical man, constantly guarding himself against desire, the type who barely admits blood flows in his veins. So if power changes a person's principles, we'll see how he really is.

They exit.

Act 1 Scene 4

A nunnery.

ISABELLA and FRANCISCA enter.

ISABELLA

And so you nuns have no other privileges?

FRANCISCA

Are not these large enough?

ISABELLA

Yes, truly; I speak not as desiring more;
But rather wishing a more strict restraint
5 Upon the sisterhood, the votarists of Saint Clare.

LUCIO

[Within] Ho! Peace be in this place!

ISABELLA

Who's that which calls?

FRANCISCA

It is a man's voice. Gentle Isabella,
Turn you the key, and know his business of him;
10 You may, I may not; you are yet unsworn.
When you have vow'd, you must not speak with men
But in the presence of the priore
Then, if you speak, you must not show your face,
Or, if you show your face, you must not speak.
15 He calls again; I pray you, answer him.

Exit

ISABELLA

Peace and prosperity! Who is't that calls

FRANCISCA

Aren't these enough?

ISABELLA

Oh, yes. I didn't mean I wanted more freedom. Actually, I wish there were even more restrictions on the Saint Claire sisterhood.

LUCIO

(offstage) Hello! Peace to this place!

ISABELLA

Who's that?

FRANCISCA

It's a man's voice. Isabella, unlock the door and ask him what he wants. I can't, but you can, since you haven't taken your vows yet. Once you have, you'll only be able to speak with men in the presence of the Mother Superior. Then, if you speak, you mustn't show your face. Or if you show your face, you mustn't speak. He's calling again. Please answer him.

She exits.

ISABELLA

Peace and prosperity! Who's there?

Enter LUCIO

LUCIO

Hail, virgin, if you be, as those cheek-roses
Proclaim you are no less! Can you so stead me
As bring me to the sight of Isabella,
20 A novice of this place and the fair sister
To her unhappy brother Claudio?

ISABELLA

Why 'her unhappy brother'? let me ask,
The rather for I now must make you know
I am that Isabella and his sister.

LUCIO

25 Gentle and fair, your brother kindly greets you:
Not to be weary with you, he's in prison.

ISABELLA

Woe me! for what?

LUCIO

For that which, if myself might be his judge,
He should receive his punishment in thanks:
30 He hath got his friend with child.

ISABELLA

Sir, make me not your story.

LUCIO enters.

LUCIO

Well, hello, virgin—if you are one, as your rosy cheeks proclaim you to be. Can you help me to find Isabella, a novice here and the pretty sister to Claudio, her unlucky brother?

ISABELLA

Why "her unlucky brother"? I ask, because I'm Isabella, his sister.

LUCIO

Your brother sends you his love, sweet, pretty one. To get right to the point, he's in prison.

ISABELLA

How awful! For what?

LUCIO

For something which, if you ask me, he should be thanked rather than punished. He's gotten his lover pregnant.

ISABELLA

Sir, don't make things up.

LUCIO

It is true.

I would not—though 'tis my familiar sin
With maids to seem the lapwing and to jest,

35 Tongue far from heart—play with all virgins so:

I hold you as a thing ensky'd and sainted.

By your renouncement an immortal spirit,
And to be talk'd with in sincerity,
As with a saint.

ISABELLA

40 You do blaspheme the good in mocking me.

LUCIO

Do not believe it. Fewness and truth, 'tis thus:
Your brother and his lover have embraced:
As those that feed grow full, as blossoming time
That from the seedness the bare fallow brings
45 To teeming foison, even so her plenteous womb
Expresseth his full tilth and husbandry.

ISABELLA

Some one with child by him? My cousin Juliet?

LUCIO

Is she your cousin?

ISABELLA**LUCIO**

It's true. I admit, I often play the deceiver and joker with young virgins and say things I don't mean. But because of your religious vocation, I see you as a heavenly, spiritual being, and someone to speak to with sincerely, as I would a saint.

ISABELLA

You mock real saints by calling me one.

LUCIO

Don't think that. In brief: your brother and his girl have slept together. And the same way your stomach gets full when you eat—and as a bare field, when you plant it, yields a rich harvest—her body shows the results of his plowing.

ISABELLA

He's made someone pregnant? My cousin Juliet?

LUCIO

Is she your cousin?

ISABELLA

Adoptedly; as school-maids change their names

50 By vain though apt affection.

LUCIO

She it is.

ISABELLA

O, let him marry her.

LUCIO

This is the point.

The duke is very strangely gone from hence;

55 Bore many gentlemen, myself being one,

In hand and hope of action: but we do learn

By those that know the very nerves of state,

His givings-out were of an infinite distance

From his true-meant design. Upon his place,

60 And with full line of his authority,

Governs Lord Angelo; a man whose blood

Is very snow-broth; one who never feels

The wanton stings and motions of the sense,

But doth rebate and blunt his natural edge

65 With profits of the mind, study and fast.

He—to give fear to use and liberty,

Which have for long run by the hideous law,

As mice by lions—hath pick'd out an act,

Under whose heavy sense your brother's life

Unofficially, in the silly but sweet way schoolgirls swear to be sisters.

LUCIO

She's the one.

ISABELLA

Oh, let him marry her.

LUCIO

Here's the problem. The duke has mysteriously left town. He deluded many men—myself included—with the hope of some military action. But now we hear from government insiders that his publicly announced reasons for leaving were far from his real plans. In his place, and with his full authority, Lord Angelo rules. This is a man whose blood is like melted snow, never warmed by uncontrolled lust, but who represses and dulls his natural appetites with exercises for the mind—studying and fasting. To scare folks who are habitually promiscuous and have evaded the law like mice running past a lion, he's found a severe act that, if taken literally, would cost your brother his life. He's arrested him under it and plans to make an example of him by strictly applying this law. All hope is gone, unless you can soften Angelo with your pretty prayers. That's the essence of this errand between you and your poor brother.

70 Falls into forfeit: he arrests him on it;
And follows close the rigour of the statute,
To make him an example. All hope is gone,
Unless you have the grace by your fair prayer
To soften Angelo: and that's my pith of business
75 'Twixt you and your poor brother.

ISABELLA

Doth he so seek his life?

LUCIO

Has censured him
Already; and, as I hear, the provost hath
A warrant for his execution.

ISABELLA

80 Alas! what poor ability's in me
To do him good?

LUCIO

Assay the power you have.

ISABELLA

My power? Alas, I doubt—

LUCIO

Our doubts are traitors
85 And make us lose the good we oft might win

ISABELLA

Does he really intend to kill him?

LUCIO

He's already sentenced him to death, and I hear the provost
has the warrant for his execution.

ISABELLA

Oh, dear! What can a poor girl like me do to help?

LUCIO

Test the power you have.

ISABELLA

My power? I doubt—

LUCIO

Our doubts work against us and make us lose the good things
we often could win by making us scared to try. Go to Lord

By fearing to attempt. Go to Lord Angelo,
And let him learn to know, when maidens sue,
Men give like gods; but when they weep and kneel,
All their petitions are as freely theirs
90 As they themselves would owe them.

ISABELLA

I'll see what I can do.

LUCIO

But speedily.

ISABELLA

I will about it straight;
No longer staying but to give the mother
95 Notice of my affair. I humbly thank you:
Commend me to my brother: soon at night
I'll send him certain word of my success.

LUCIO

I take my leave of you.

ISABELLA

Good sir, adieu.

Exeunt

Angelo, and show him that when girls plead, men give like gods. But when girls cry and kneel, their requests are granted even more freely, as if the girls were asking themselves for permission.

ISABELLA

I'll see what I can do.

LUCIO

Make it fast.

ISABELLA

I'll go straightaway, as soon as I give notice of my business to the Mother Superior. Thank you so much. Give my brother my love. I'll let him know how I made out early this evening.

LUCIO

I'll go now.

ISABELLA

Goodbye, sir.

They exit.

Act 2 Scene 1

A hall in ANGELO's house.

Enter ANGELO, ESCALUS, and a Justice, Provost, Officers, and other Attendants, behind

ANGELO

We must not make a scarecrow of the law,
Setting it up to fear the birds of prey,
And let it keep one shape, till custom make it
Their perch and not their terror.

ESCALUS

5 Ay, but yet
Let us be keen, and rather cut a little,
Than fall, and bruise to death. Alas, this gentleman
Whom I would save had a most noble father!
Let but your honour know,
10 Whom I believe to be most strait in virtue,
That, in the working of your own affections,
Had time cohered with place or place with wishing,
Or that the resolute acting of your blood
Could have attain'd the effect of your own purpose,
15 Whether you had not sometime in your life
Err'd in this point which now you censure him,
And pull'd the law upon you.

A hall in ANGELO's house.

ANGELO and ESCALUS enter, followed by a justice, the Provost, officers, and other attendants.

ANGELO

We mustn't let the law turn into a scarecrow—something you set up to scare away birds of prey but then never change, until the birds get so used to it that they sit on it rather than fear it.

ESCALUS

Yes, but we should also be precise. Better to use a scalpel than a hatchet, cutting carefully instead of chopping to death. This gentleman whose life I'd like to save had such a noble father. I know you're a completely disciplined, virtuous man. But imagine you felt sexual stirrings for a woman, and you were in the right place at the right time, and by acting on that desire you could have her. If sometime in your life, you'd made the same mistake for which you now condemn him, you'd have brought the law down on yourself.

ANGELO

'Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus,
Another thing to fall. I not deny,
20 The jury, passing on the prisoner's life,
May in the sworn twelve have a thief or two
Guiltier than him they try. What's open made to justice,
That justice seizes: what know the laws
That thieves do pass on thieves? 'Tis very pregnant,
25 The jewel that we find, we stoop and take't
Because we see it; but what we do not see
We tread upon, and never think of it.
You may not so extenuate his offence
For I have had such faults; but rather tell me,
30 When I, that censure him, do so offend,
Let mine own judgment pattern out my death,
And nothing come in partial. Sir, he must die.

ESCALUS

Be it as your wisdom will.

ANGELO

Where is the provost?

PROVOST

35 Here, if it like your honour.

ANGELO

See that Claudio
Be executed by nine to-morrow morning;

It's one thing to be tempted, Escalus, but another thing to give in. I don't deny that the twelve members of a jury might include a thief or two who are far guiltier than the prisoner they're passing sentence on. But justice takes the opportunities it has; who knows what laws thieves pass against other thieves? Obviously, if we stumble across a jewel in the road, we'll bend down and take it, because we see it. But things we don't see, we step over and never think about. You can't excuse his crime on the grounds that I could have done the same thing. Instead, if I—the man who's condemning him—commit the same offense, let this verdict of mine act as a precedent for my death, and let no allowances be made for me. Sir, he must die.

ESCALUS

As you command.

ANGELO

Where is the provost?

PROVOST

Here, sir.

ANGELO

See that Claudio is executed by nine tomorrow morning. Give him a priest to confess to, and let him prepare himself for

Bring him his confessor, let him be prepared;
For that's the utmost of his pilgrimage.

Exit Provost

ESCALUS

40 [Aside] Well, heaven forgive him! and forgive us all!
Some rise by sin, and some by virtue fall:
Some run from brakes of ice, and answer none:
And some condemned for a fault alone.

Enter ELBOW, and Officers with FROTH and POMPEY

ELBOW

Come, bring them away: if these be good people in
45 a commonweal that do nothing but use their abuses in
common houses, I know no law: bring them away.

ANGELO

How now, sir! What's your name? and what's the matter?

ELBOW

If it Please your honour, I am the poor duke's
constable, and my name is Elbow: I do lean upon
50 justice, sir, and do bring in here before your good
honour two notorious benefactors.

death, for this is his journey's end.

The Provost exits.

ESCALUS

(*to himself*) Well, heaven forgive him—and forgive us all!
Some people succeed by sinning, and some are brought down
by virtue. Some people run from dubious situations and so
never suffer punishment, and some people get punished for a
single mistake.

ELBOW and officers holding FROTH and POMPEY enter.

ELBOW

Bring them this way. If these aren't the kind of people who do
nothing but dirty things in whorehouses, then I don't know the
law. Bring them this way.

ANGELO

Well, sir! What's your name? And what's the matter?

ELBOW

If it pleases your honor, I am the duke's poor
police officer, and my name is Elbow. I rely on the law, sir, and
bring in here before you two notorious benefactors (*confusing*
the word benefactor with malefactor).

ANGELO

Benefactors? Well; what benefactors are they? are they not malefactors?

ELBOW

If it please your honour, I know not well what they
55 are: but precise villains they are, that I am sure
of; and void of all profanation in the world that
good Christians ought to have.

ESCALUS

This comes off well; here's a wise officer.

ANGELO

Go to: what quality are they of? Elbow is your
60 name? why dost thou not speak, Elbow?

POMPEY

He cannot, sir; he's out at elbow.

ANGELO

What are you, sir?

ELBOW

He, sir! a tapster, sir; parcel-bawd; one that
serves a bad woman; whose house, sir, was, as they
65 say, plucked down in the suburbs; and now she

ANGELO

Benefactors? What benefactors are they? Aren't they
malefactors?

ELBOW

If it pleases your honor, I don't really know what they
are. But they're definitely scoundrels, that I'm sure
of, and lacking the universal piety that all good Christians
ought to have.

ESCALUS

(*to Angelo, sarcastically*) He's a good talker, and a real smart
cop.

ANGELO

Out with it. What's their rank? Your name's Elbow? Why don't
you speak, Elbow?

POMPEY

He can't, sir. He's been pushed out of the way.

ANGELO

(*to Pompey*) What do you do, sir?

ELBOW

Him, sir! He's a bartender, sir, and a part-time pimp, one who
works for a madam. Her brothel in the suburbs, sir, was, as they

professes a hot-house, which, I think, is a very ill house too.

ESCALUS

How know you that?

ELBOW

My wife, sir, whom I detest before heaven and your honour,—
(confusing detest with attest)

ESCALUS

70 How? thy wife?

ELBOW

Ay, sir; whom, I thank heaven, is an honest woman,—

ESCALUS

Dost thou detest her therefore?

ELBOW

I say, sir, I will detest myself also, as well as
she, that this house, if it be not a bawd's house,
75 it is pity of her life, for it is a naughty house.

ESCALUS

How dost thou know that, constable?

ELBOW

Marry, sir, by my wife; who, if she had been a woman

say, torn down, and now she claims to run a bathhouse, and I think that's a bad house too.

ESCALUS

How do you know that?

ELBOW

My wife sir, whom I detest with heaven and your honor as my witnesses—

ESCALUS

What, you detest your wife?

ELBOW

Yes, sir, whom, I thank heaven, is a morally upright woman—

ESCALUS

That's why you detest her?

ELBOW

I say, sir, I'll detest myself as well as her, if this house, if it's not a whorehouse, it's a great pity, for it's an immoral place.

ESCALUS

How do you know that?

ELBOW

cardinally given, might have been accused in
fornication, adultery, and all uncleanness there.

ESCALUS

80 By the woman's means?

ELBOW

Ay, sir, by Mistress Overdone's means: but as she
spit in his face, so she defied him.

POMPEY

Sir, if it please your honour, this is not so.

ELBOW

Prove it before these varlets here, thou honourable
85 man; prove it.

ESCALUS

Do you hear how he misplaces?

POMPEY

Sir, she came in great with child; and longing,
saving your honour's reverence, for stewed prunes;
sir, we had but two in the house, which at that very
90 distant time stood, as it were, in a fruit-dish, a
dish of some three-pence; your honours have seen
such dishes; they're not fine china, but they're very good dishes—

From my wife, who, if she had been a woman given to sin,
might have been accused of fornication, adultery, and all sorts
of dirty things there.

ESCALUS

Because of the actions of the madam of the whorehouse?

ELBOW

Yes, sir, by Mistress Overdone's doing. But my wife spit in this
man's face, defying him.

POMPEY

Please, sir, this is not true.

ELBOW

Prove it before these rogues here, you honorable man. Prove it.

ESCALUS

(to Angelo) Do you hear how he mixes up his words?

POMPEY

Sir, this very pregnant woman came in, longing—I beg your
honor's pardon—for [stewed prunes](#). Sir, we had only two in the
house, which at that very time were sitting, it so happened, in a
fruit dish, a three-cent dish. Your honors have seen such
dishes; they're not fine china, but they're very good dishes—

good dishes,—

ESCALUS

Go to, go to: no matter for the dish, sir.

POMPEY

95 No, indeed, sir, not of a pin; you are therein in
the right: but to the point. As I say, this
Mistress Elbow, being, as I say, with child, and
being great-bellied, and longing, as I said, for
prunes; and having but two in the dish, as I said,
100 Master Froth here, this very man, having eaten the
rest, as I said, and, as I say, paying for them very
honestly; for, as you know, Master Froth, I could
not give you three-pence again.

FROTH

No, indeed.

POMPEY

105 Very well: you being then, if you be remembered,
cracking the stones of the foresaid prunes,—

FROTH

Ay, so I did indeed.

POMPEY

Why, very well; I telling you then, if you be

ESCALUS

Get on with it. Never mind about the dish, sir.

POMPEY

No, sir, you're right. It's not worth a pin, but back to the point. As I was saying, this Mrs. Elbow, was, as I say, very pregnant, and longing, as I said, for prunes. We had only two left in the dish, as I said, and this very man, Mr. Froth here, having eaten the rest and paid for them very generously. Because as you know, Mr. Froth, I couldn't give you three cents' change.

FROTH

No, indeed.

POMPEY

Very well. If you remember, you were talking about the previously mentioned prunes—

FROTH

Right, I was.

POMPEY

remembered, that such a one and such a one were past
110 cure of the thing you wot of, unless they kept very
good diet, as I told you,—

FROTH

All this is true.

POMPEY

Why, very well, then,—

ESCALUS

Come, you are a tedious fool: to the purpose. What
115 was done to Elbow's wife, that he hath cause to
complain of? Come me to what was done to her.

POMPEY

Sir, your honour cannot come to that yet.

ESCALUS

No, sir, nor I mean it not.

POMPEY

Sir, but you shall come to it, by your honour's
120 leave. And, I beseech you, look into Master Froth
here, sir; a man of four-score pound a year; whose
father died at Hallowmas: was't not at Hallowmas,
Master Froth?

FROTH

Ok, and I was telling you, if you remember, that so-and-so
couldn't be cured of [you-know-what](#), unless they kept to a
strict diet—

FROTH

All this is true.

POMPEY

Why, very well, then—

ESCALUS

You're a tedious fool. Get to the point. What was done to
Elbow's wife that gave him a reason to complain? Come and
get to what was done to her.

POMPEY

Sir, your honor can't get to that yet.

ESCALUS

That's not what I meant, sir.

POMPEY

But you will get it, sir, if your honor pleases. And, I beg you,
look at Mr. Froth here, sir; a man who makes only 80 pounds a
year and whose his father died, leaving him an inheritance, on
All Saints' Day—wasn't it All Saints' Day, Mr. Froth?

FROTH

All-hallond eve.

POMPEY

125 Why, very well; I hope here be truths. He, sir,
sitting, as I say, in a lower chair, sir; 'twas in
the Bunch of Grapes, where indeed you have a delight
to sit, have you not?

FROTH

I have so; because it is an open room and good for winter.

POMPEY

130 Why, very well, then; I hope here be truths.

ANGELO

This will last out a night in Russia,
When nights are longest there: I'll take my leave.
And leave you to the hearing of the cause;
Hoping you'll find good cause to whip them all.

ESCALUS

135 I think no less. Good Morrow to your lordship.

Exit ANGELO

Now, sir, come on: what was done to Elbow's wife, once more?

POMPEY

Halloween.

POMPEY

Very well. I hope we'll get to the truth here. He, sir,
was sitting, as I say, in a reclining chair, sir. It was at the Bunch
of Grapes tavern, where you like to sit and relax, don't you?

FROTH

I do, because the room has a big open fire, good in winter.

POMPEY

Why, very well, then. I hope we'll get to the truth here.

ANGELO

This could last as long as a night in Russia, during the time of
year when nights are longest. I'm leaving. I'll leave you to get to
the bottom of this case, hoping you'll find reasons to whip
them all.

ESCALUS

I think I will. Good-bye, your lordship.

ANGELO exits.

Now, sir, come on: what happened to Elbow's wife, once more?

POMPEY

Once, sir? there was nothing done to her once.

ELBOW

I beseech you, sir, ask him what this man did to my wife.

POMPEY

I beseech your honour, ask me.

ESCALUS

140 Well, sir; what did this gentleman to her?

POMPEY

I beseech you, sir, look in this gentleman's face.

Good Master Froth, look upon his honour; 'tis for a good purpose. Doth your honour mark his face?

ESCALUS

Ay, sir, very well.

POMPEY

145 Nay; I beseech you, mark it well.

ESCALUS

Well, I do so.

POMPEY

Doth your honour see any harm in his face?

ESCALUS

Once, sir? Nothing happened to her once.

ELBOW

I beg you, sir, ask him what this man did to my wife.

POMPEY

I beg your honor, ask me.

ESCALUS

Well, sir; what did this gentleman do to her?

POMPEY

I beg you, sir, look at this gentleman's face. Good Mr. Froth, look at his honor—it's for a good reason. Does your honor see his face?

ESCALUS

Yes, sir, very well.

POMPEY

No, I beg you, really study it.

ESCALUS

Well, I am.

POMPEY

Does your honor see any harm in his face?

ESCALUS

Why, no.

POMPEY

I'll be supposed upon a book, his face is the worst
150 thing about him. Good, then; if his face be the
worst thing about him, how could Master Froth do the
constable's wife any harm? I would know that of
your honour.

ESCALUS

He's in the right. Constable, what say you to it?

ELBOW

155 First, an it like you, the house is a respected
house; next, this is a respected fellow; and his
mistress is a respected woman.

POMPEY

By this hand, sir, his wife is a more respected
person than any of us all.

ELBOW

160 Varlet, thou liest; thou liest, wicked varlet! The
time has yet to come that she was ever respected
with man, woman, or child.

POMPEY

Sir, she was respected with him before he married with her.

Why, no.

POMPEY

I'll swear upon a bible, his face is the worst
thing about him (*confusing supposed for deposed*). And if his
face is the worst thing about him, how could Mr. Froth do the
officer's wife any harm? I'd like your honor to explain that.

ESCALUS

He's right. Officer, what do you say to that?

ELBOW

(*confusing respected for suspected throughout*) First, if it
pleases you, the house is a respected house; next, this is a
respected fellow, and his employer a respected woman.

POMPEY

I swear, sir, his wife is a more respected person than any of us.

ELBOW

Scoundrel, you lie. You lie, wicked scoundrel! The
time has yet to come that she was ever respected
by man, woman, or child.

POMPEY

Sir, he respected her before he married her.

ESCALUS

Which is the wiser here? Justice or Iniquity? Is
165 this true?

ELBOW

O thou caitiff! O thou varlet! O thou wicked
Hannibal! I respected with her before I was married
to her! If ever I was respected with her, or she
with me, let not your worship think me the poor
170 duke's officer. Prove this, thou wicked Hannibal, or
I'll have mine action of battery on thee.

ESCALUS

If he took you a box o' the ear, you might have your
action of slander too.

ELBOW

Marry, I thank your good worship for it. What is't
175 your worship's pleasure I shall do with this wicked caitiff?

ESCALUS

Truly, officer, because he hath some offences in him
that thou wouldest discover if thou couldst, let him
continue in his courses till thou knowest what they
are.

ELBOW

ESCALUS

Who's smarter here? The
[representative of justice or the representative of sin](#)? Is this
true?

ELBOW

Oh, you wretch! Oh, you scoundrel! Oh, you cannibal! I
respected her before I was married to her! If I ever respected
her, or she respected me, I'm not the duke's poor officer. Prove
this, you wicked cannibal, or I'll sue you for assault.

ESCALUS

If he boxed your ears, you could sue him for slander, too.

ELBOW

Thank you, your worship. What would you like me to do with
this wicked wretch?

ESCALUS

Honestly, officer, because he's committed some crime that you
would expose if you were capable, let him keep on until you
figure out what it is.

ELBOW

180 Marry, I thank your worship for it. Thou seest, thou wicked varlet, now, what's come upon thee: thou art to continue now, thou varlet; thou art to continue.

ESCALUS

Where were you born, friend?

FROTH

Here in Vienna, sir.

ESCALUS

185 Are you of fourscore pounds a year?

FROTH

Yes, an't please you, sir.

ESCALUS

So. What trade are you of, sir?

POMPHEY

Tapster; a poor widow's tapster.

ESCALUS

Your mistress' name?

POMPHEY

190 Mistress Overdone.

ESCALUS

Thank you, your worship. Now, you wicked wretch, you see what's going to happen to you: you're to be kept on; they're keeping you on.

ESCALUS

Where were you born, friend?

FROTH

Here in Vienna, sir.

ESCALUS

Do you have an income of 80 pounds a year?

FROTH

Yes, sir.

ESCALUS

All right. What do you do, sir?

POMPHEY

Bartender; a poor widow's bartender.

ESCALUS

Your employer's name?

POMPHEY

Mistress Overdone.

ESCALUS

Hath she had any more than one husband?

POMPEY

Nine, sir; Overdone by the last.

ESCALUS

Nine! Come hither to me, Master Froth. Master Froth, I would not have you acquainted with
195 tapsters: they will draw you, Master Froth, and you will hang them. Get you gone, and let me hear no more of you.

FROTH

I thank your worship. For mine own part, I never come into any room in a tap-house, but I am drawn
200 in.

ESCALUS

Well, no more of it, Master Froth: farewell.

Exit FROTH

Come you hither to me, Master tapster. What's your name, Master tapster?

POMPEY

Pompey.

ESCALUS

Has she had more than one husband?

POMPEY

Nine, sir. She got the name Overdone from the last one.

ESCALUS

Nine! Come here, Mr. Froth. Mr. Froth, I'd prefer you not associate with bartenders.

[They'll draw you dry, Mr. Froth, and you'll get them hanged .](#)
Get out, and don't let me hear of you again.

FROTH

Thank you, your worship. Personally, I never go into bars, unless I'm [drawn in](#) .

ESCALUS

Well, not anymore, Mr. Froth. Goodbye.

FROTH exits.

Come here, Mr. Bartender. What's your name, Mr. Bartender?

POMPEY

Pompey.

ESCALUS

205 What else?

POMPEY

Bum, sir.

ESCALUS

Troth, and your bum is the greatest thing about you; so that in the beastliest sense you are Pompey the Great. Pompey, you are partly a bawd, Pompey,
210 howsoever you colour it in being a tapster, are you not? come, tell me true: it shall be the better for you.

POMPEY

Truly, sir, I am a poor fellow that would live.

ESCALUS

How would you live, Pompey? by being a bawd? What do you think of the trade, Pompey? Is it a lawful trade?

POMPEY

215 If the law would allow it, sir.

ESCALUS

But the law will not allow it, Pompey; nor it shall not be allowed in Vienna.

POMPEY

Does your worship mean to geld and splay all the

What else?

POMPEY

Ass, sir.

ESCALUS

Yes, and your ass is the biggest thing about you, so in the crudest sense you are Pompey the Great. Pompey, you're a part-time pimp, however much you hide it by bartending, aren't you? Come on, it'll be better for you if you tell me the truth.

POMPEY

Honestly, sir, I'm a poor man just trying to earn a living.

ESCALUS

How would you live, Pompey? By being a pimp? What do you think of that profession, Pompey? Is it a legal profession?

POMPEY

If the law allowed it, sir.

ESCALUS

But the law will not allow it, Pompey, nor will it be allowed in Vienna.

POMPEY

youth of the city?

ESCALUS

220 No, Pompey.

POMPEY

Truly, sir, in my poor opinion, they will tō't then.
If your worship will take order for the drabs and
the knaves, you need not to fear the bawds.

ESCALUS

There are pretty orders beginning, I can tell you:
225 it is but heading and hanging.

POMPEY

If you head and hang all that offend that way but
for ten year together, you'll be glad to give out a
commission for more heads: if this law hold in
Vienna ten year, I'll rent the fairest house in it
230 after three-pence a bay: if you live to see this
come to pass, say Pompey told you so.

ESCALUS

Thank you, good Pompey; and, in requital of your
prophecy, hark you: I advise you, let me not find
you before me again upon any complaint whatsoever;
235 no, not for dwelling where you do: if I do, Pompey,

Does your worship mean to castrate and spay all the young
men and women in town?

ESCALUS

No, Pompey.

POMPEY

Then, sir, in my poor opinion, they'll get it on. If your worship
would make arrangements for the whores and their clients,
you wouldn't need to fear the pimps.

ESCALUS

I can tell you, we're introducing some strong penalties—
specifically, beheading and hanging.

POMPEY

If you behead and hang everyone who breaks the law by
having sex, in just ten years you'll have to commission people
to repopulate the city. If this law lasts a decade in Vienna, I'll
rent the best house in town at three cents a square foot. If
you're alive to see this, say Pompey told you so.

ESCALUS

Thank you, Pompey, and, in return for your prediction, listen
carefully. I advise you, don't let me find you appearing before
me again upon any complaint whatsoever, not even for living
where you do. If I do, I'll beat you like Julius Caesar did to your

I shall beat you to your tent, and prove a shrewd
Caesar to you; in plain dealing, Pompey, I shall
have you whipt: so, for this time, Pompey, fare you well.

POMPEY

I thank your worship for your good counsel:

Aside

240 but I shall follow it as the flesh and fortune shall
better determine.

Whip me? No, no; let carman whip his jade:
The valiant heart is not whipt out of his trade.

Exit

ESCALUS

Come hither to me, Master Elbow; come hither, master
245 constable. How long have you been in this place of
constable?

ELBOW

Seven year and a half, sir.

ESCALUS

I thought, by your readiness in the office, you had
continued in it some time. You say, seven years together?

ELBOW

namesake— Pompey —and send you scurrying to your tent in defeat. To put it plainly, Pompey, I will have you whipped. So, for now, Pompey, goodbye.

POMPEY

I thank your worship for your good advice.

(to himself)

But I shall follow it only as my body and my opportunities dictate. Whip me? No, no; let a cart driver whip his old nag. A brave heart isn't whipt out of his job.

He exits.

ESCALUS

Come here, Mr. Elbow; come here, Mr. Policeman.
How long have you been a policeman?

ELBOW

Seven and a half years, sir.

ESCALUS

I thought you'd been at the job for a while, given your skill at it.
You say seven years altogether?

ELBOW

And a half, sir.

ESCALUS

250 Alas, it hath been great pains to you. They do you wrong to put you so oft upon 't: are there not men in your ward sufficient to serve it?

ELBOW

Faith, sir, few of any wit in such matters: as they are chosen, they are glad to choose me for them; I 255 do it for some piece of money, and go through with all.

ESCALUS

Look you bring me in the names of some six or seven, the most sufficient of your parish.

ELBOW

To your worship's house, sir?

ESCALUS

260 To my house. Fare you well.

Exit ELBOW

What's o'clock, think you?

JUSTICE

Eleven, sir.

And a half, sir.

ESCALUS

Oh, that's so hard on you. It's wrong that you have to work so much. Aren't there enough capable men in your precinct?

ELBOW

Honestly, sir, few who are bright enough. They're happy to have me substitute for them. They pay me a little money, and I handle all the duties.

ESCALUS

Please bring me some six or seven names, the most competent people in your parish.

ELBOW

To your worship's house, sir?

ESCALUS

To my house. Goodbye.

ELBOW exits.

What time is it?

JUSTICE

Eleven, sir.

ESCALUS

I pray you home to dinner with me.

JUSTICE

I humbly thank you.

ESCALUS

265 It grieves me for the death of Claudio;
But there's no remedy.

JUSTICE

Lord Angelo is severe.

ESCALUS

It is but needful:
Mercy is not itself, that oft looks so;
270 Pardon is still the nurse of second woe:
But yet,—poor Claudio! There is no remedy.
Come, sir.

Exeunt

Another room in the same.

Enter Provost and a Servant

SERVANT

ESCALUS

Please, come home to lunch with me.

JUSTICE

I'm most grateful. Thank you.

ESCALUS

Claudio's death saddens me, but there's no way to prevent it.

JUSTICE

Lord Angelo is severe.

ESCALUS

It's unfortunately necessary. Mercy isn't often what it seems,
since pardoning a crime can lead to additional pain. Even so—
poor Claudio! There's no way to prevent it. Let's go, sir.

They exit.

Act 2 Scene 2

Another room in ANGELO's house.

The Provost and a servant enter.

SERVANT

He's hearing of a cause; he will come straight
I'll tell him of you.

PROVOST

Pray you, do.

Exit Servant

I'll know
5 His pleasure; may be he will relent. Alas,
He hath but as offended in a dream!
All sects, all ages smack of this vice; and he
To die for't!

Enter ANGELO

ANGELO

Now, what's the matter, Provost?

PROVOST

10 Is it your will Claudio shall die tomorrow?

ANGELO

Did not I tell thee yea? Hadst thou not order?
Why dost thou ask again?

PROVOST

Lest I might be too rash:
Under your good correction, I have seen,

He's listening to a case. He'll come at once, when I tell him
you're here.

PROVOST

Please do.

The Servant exits.

I'll ask him his intentions; maybe he'll relent. Claudio didn't
consciously commit a crime. People of every class and age
indulge in this vice—and he's going to die for it!

ANGELO enters.

ANGELO

Now, what's the matter, Provost?

PROVOST

Do you want Claudio to die tomorrow?

ANGELO

Did I not tell you yes? Don't you have your orders? Why do you
ask again?

PROVOST

In case I might be too rash. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I've
seen judges regret imposing the death sentence after the

15 When, after execution, judgment hath
Repented o'er his doom.

ANGELO

Go to; let that be mine:
Do you your office, or give up your place,
And you shall well be spared.

PROVOST

20 I crave your honour's pardon.
What shall be done, sir, with the groaning Juliet?
She's very near her hour.

ANGELO

Dispose of her
To some more fitter place, and that with speed.

Re-enter Servant

SERVANT

25 Here is the sister of the man condemn'd
Desires access to you.

ANGELO

Hath he a sister?

PROVOST

Ay, my good lord; a very virtuous maid,
And to be shortly of a sisterhood,

execution.

ANGELO

Enough—that's my problem. Do your job, or resign your position. We can easily do without you.

PROVOST

I beg your honor's pardon. What should we do, sir, with Juliet?
She's in labor, very close to giving birth.

ANGELO

Make arrangements to get her to a more appropriate place,
and do it quickly.

The Servant re-enters.

SERVANT

The condemned man's sister is here and wants to speak to you.

ANGELO

He has a sister?

PROVOST

Yes, my good lord—a very virtuous girl who's entering a convent, if she hasn't already.

30 If not already.

ANGELO

Well, let her be admitted.

Exit Servant

See you the fornicatress be removed:
Let have needful, but not lavish, means;
There shall be order for't.

Enter ISABELLA and LUCIO

PROVOST

35 God save your honour!

ANGELO

Stay a little while.

To ISABELLA

You're welcome: what's your will?

ISABELLA

I am a woeful suitor to your honour,
Please but your honour hear me.

ANGELO

40 Well; what's your suit?

ANGELO

Well, bring her in.

The Servant exits.

See that the tramp Juliet is moved, and provide her with everything she needs, but nothing extravagant. I'll authorize it.

ISABELLA and LUCIO enter.

PROVOST

(departing) God save your honor!

ANGELO

Don't leave yet.

(to ISABELLA)

Welcome. What do you want?

ISABELLA

I sadly beg a request of your honor. Please hear me, your honor.

ANGELO

Well, what's your request?

ISABELLA

There is a vice that most I do abhor,
And most desire should meet the blow of justice;
For which I would not plead, but that I must;
For which I must not plead, but that I am
45 At war 'twixt will and will not.

ANGELO

Well; the matter?

ISABELLA

I have a brother is condemn'd to die:
I do beseech you, let it be his fault,
And not my brother.

PROVOST

50 [Aside] Heaven give thee moving graces!

ANGELO

Condemn the fault and not the actor of it?
Why, every fault's condemn'd ere it be done:
Mine were the very cipher of a function,
To fine the faults whose fine stands in record,
55 And let go by the actor.

ISABELLA

O just but severe law!
I had a brother, then. Heaven keep your honour!

ISABELLA

There's a certain vice that I hate, and would love to see struck down by law. I'd rather not plead for it, but I must. I shouldn't plead for it, but I'm torn between wanting and not wanting to.

ANGELO

Well, what's the matter?

ISABELLA

I have a brother who's condemned to death. I beg you, condemn his crime but not him.

PROVOST

(to himself) Heaven give you the power to persuade him!

ANGELO

Condemn the crime and not the person who commits it? Why, by definition every crime is condemned before it's committed. I would have a meaningless role if I just punished the crimes whose penalties were in the law books and let the criminal go.

ISABELLA

Oh, fair but harsh law! Then I had a brother but don't anymore.
(departing) Heaven protect your honor!

LUCIO

[Aside to ISABELLA] Give't not o'er so: to him
again, entreat him;
60 Kneel down before him, hang upon his gown:
You are too cold; if you should need a pin,
You could not with more tame a tongue desire it:
To him, I say!

ISABELLA

Must he needs die?

ANGELO

65 Maiden, no remedy.

ISABELLA

Yes; I do think that you might pardon him,
And neither heaven nor man grieve at the mercy.

ANGELO

I will not do't.

ISABELLA

But can you, if you would?

ANGELO

70 Look, what I will not, that I cannot do.

ISABELLA

But might you do't, and do the world no wrong,

LUCIO

(aside to ISABELLA) Don't give up so fast. Go to him again, beg
him, kneel down before him, cling to his gown.
You're too cold. You couldn't be more casual if you were asking
him for a pin. Go to him.

ISABELLA

Does he have to die?

ANGELO

Miss, there's no way out.

ISABELLA

Yes, there is. I think that you could pardon him, and no one on
heaven or earth would be sorry.

ANGELO

I won't do it.

ISABELLA

But could you, if you wanted to?

ANGELO

Look, what I won't do, I can't do.

ISABELLA

If so your heart were touch'd with that remorse
As mine is to him?

ANGELO

He's sentenced; 'tis too late.

LUCIO

75 [Aside to ISABELLA] You are too cold.

ISABELLA

Too late? why, no; I, that do speak a word.
May call it back again. Well, believe this,
No ceremony that to great ones 'longs,
Not the king's crown, nor the deputed sword,
80 The marshal's truncheon, nor the judge's robe,
Become them with one half so good a grace
As mercy does.

If he had been as you and you as he,
You would have slipt like him; but he, like you,
85 Would not have been so stern.

ANGELO

Pray you, be gone.

ISABELLA

I would to heaven I had your potency,
And you were Isabel! should it then be thus?
No; I would tell what 'twere to be a judge,

But might you do it, without harming the world, if your heart
felt as compassionate toward him as mine does?

ANGELO

He's sentenced; it's too late.

LUCIO

(aside to ISABELLA) You're too cold.

ISABELLA

Too late? why, no—I can speak a word and then take it back.
Believe this: no symbol of authority—not the king's crown, or
the deputy's sword, or the military officer's baton, or the judge's
robe—makes a person great as much as mercy does. If he'd
been you and you'd been him, you would have slipped like he
did; but he, in your place, wouldn't have been so stern.

ANGELO

Please leave.

ISABELLA

I wish to heaven I had your power, and you were Isabel! Would
things be like this? No, I'd decide what it is to be a judge, and
to be a prisoner.

90 And what a prisoner.

LUCIO

[Aside to ISABELLA] Ay, touch him; there's the vein.

ANGELO

Your brother is a forfeit of the law,
And you but waste your words.

ISABELLA

Alas, alas!

95 Why, all the souls that were forfeit once;
And He that might the vantage best have took
Found out the remedy. How would you be,
If He, which is the top of judgment, should
But judge you as you are? O, think on that;
100 And mercy then will breathe within your lips,
Like man new made.

ANGELO

Be you content, fair maid;
It is the law, not I condemn your brother:
Were he my kinsman, brother, or my son,
105 It should be thus with him: he must die tomorrow.

ISABELLA

To-morrow! O, that's sudden! Spare him, spare him!
He's not prepared for death. Even for our kitchens

LUCIO

(aside to ISABELLA) Yes, that's the way to talk.

ANGELO

Your brother is doomed for breaking the law. You're wasting
your breath.

ISABELLA

How sad! Why, all the souls on earth were
doomed once upon a time. And God, who might have seized
the chance to condemn us, instead
found a way to redeem our sins. What would happen to you, if
he who is the highest judge of all should judge you as you are
now? Oh, think about that, and then merciful speech will flow
out your mouth, as if you had been reborn.

ANGELO

Accept it, lovely lady. It's the law, not I, that condemns your
brother. Were he my cousin, brother, or my son, it'd be the
same. He must die tomorrow.

ISABELLA

Tomorrow! Oh, that's so sudden! Spare him, spare him!

We kill the fowl of season: shall we serve heaven
With less respect than we do minister
110 To our gross selves? Good, good my lord, bethink you;
Who is it that hath died for this offence?
There's many have committed it.

LUCIO

[Aside to ISABELLA] Ay, well said.

ANGELO

The law hath not been dead, though it hath slept:
115 Those many had not dared to do that evil,
If the first that did the edict infringe
Had answer'd for his deed: now 'tis awake
Takes note of what is done; and, like a prophet,
Looks in a glass, that shows what future evils,
120 Either new, or by remissness new-conceived,
And so in progress to be hatch'd and born,
Are now to have no successive degrees,
But, ere they live, to end.

ISABELLA

Yet show some pity.

ANGELO

125 I show it most of all when I show justice;
For then I pity those I do not know,
Which a dismiss'd offence would after gall;

He's not prepared for death. We only kill fowl in season, when they're in the best shape for eating. Should we serve him up to heaven with less respect than we show toward our inferior mortal bodies? My good, good lord, consider: who else has died for this crime? Many people have committed it.

LUCIO

(aside to ISABELLA) Yes, well said.

ANGELO

The law wasn't dead, but it was asleep. All those people wouldn't have dared to commit that crime if the first lawbreaker had been punished. Now the law's awake, notes what's going on, and, like a fortuneteller, looks in a crystal ball to see what future evils, either newly conceived or just being contemplated, will someday hatch. Now, they won't develop any further but will die before they're born.

ISABELLA

Show some pity.

ANGELO

I show it most of all when I show justice, for then I pity all those people I don't know who'd be harmed by an unpunished crime. I do right to the man who, by paying for one wrong act, doesn't

And do him right that, answering one foul wrong,

Lives not to act another. Be satisfied;

130 Your brother dies to-morrow; be content.

ISABELLA

So you must be the first that gives this sentence,
And he, that suffer's. O, it is excellent
To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous
To use it like a giant.

LUCIO

135 [Aside to ISABELLA] That's well said.

ISABELLA

Could great men thunder
As Jove himself does, Jove would ne'er be quiet,
For every pelting, petty officer
Would use his heaven for thunder;
140 Nothing but thunder! Merciful Heaven,
Thou rather with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt
Split'st the unwedgeable and gnarled oak
Than the soft myrtle: but man, proud man,
Drest in a little brief authority,
145 Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As make the angels weep; who, with our spleens,

live to commit another one. Be satisfied with this. Your brother dies tomorrow. Accept it.

ISABELLA

So you must be the first one to impose this sentence,
and he the first one to suffer it. Oh, it's excellent
to have a giant's strength, but it's tyranny to use it like a giant.

LUCIO

(aside to ISABELLA) That's well said.

ISABELLA

If men of power could thunder and wield lightning as the god
Jove himself does, Jove would never have any peace, for every
puny, petty official would use his heaven for thunder, nothing
but thunder! Merciful Heaven, you use your sharp, sulfur-
scented lightning bolts to split the hard gnarled oak tree,
rather than the soft myrtle bush. But give a proud man a little
bit of temporary authority and he forgets what it means to be
made in God's image. Instead, like an angry ape that mimics
people's behavior, he does such incredibly grotesque things
before high heaven that the angels, if they were human, would
either weep or die laughing.

Would all themselves laugh mortal.

LUCIO

150 [Aside to ISABELLA] O, to him, to him, wench! he
will relent;
He's coming; I perceive 't.

PROVOST

[Aside] Pray heaven she win him!

ISABELLA

We cannot weigh our brother with ourself:
155 Great men may jest with saints; 'tis wit in them,
But in the less foul profanation.

LUCIO

Thou'rt i' the right, girl; more o, that.

ISABELLA

That in the captain's but a choleric word,
Which in the soldier is flat blasphemy.

LUCIO

160 [Aside to ISABELLA] Art avised o' that? more on 't.

ANGELO

Why do you put these sayings upon me?

LUCIO

(*aside to ISABELLA*) Oh, keep at him, keep at him, girl! He's going to relent. He's coming around, I can tell.

PROVOST

(*to himself*) Pray heaven she wins him over!

ISABELLA

We can't use ourselves as a standard to judge others. Great men may joke about the saints; that's good fun. But if an ordinary person does it, it's profane.

LUCIO

You're right, girl. Keep talking like that.

ISABELLA

When a captain curses, it's just angry words. When a private does it, it's blasphemy.

LUCIO

(*aside to ISABELLA*) You know about that sort of stuff? Tell us more.

ANGELO

Why are you attacking me with these sayings?

ISABELLA

Because authority, though it err like others,
Hath yet a kind of medicine in itself,
That skins the vice o' the top. Go to your bosom;
165 Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know
That's like my brother's fault: if it confess
A natural guiltiness such as is his,
Let it not sound a thought upon your tongue
Against my brother's life.

ANGELO

170 [Aside] She speaks, and 'tis
Such sense, that my sense breeds with it. Fare you well.

ISABELLA

Gentle my lord, turn back.

ANGELO

I will bethink me: come again tomorrow.

ISABELLA

Hark how I'll bribe you: good my lord, turn back.

ANGELO

175 How! bribe me?

ISABELLA

Ay, with such gifts that heaven shall share with you.

ISABELLA

Because people in authority, even though they sin like everyone else, apply a sort of bandage to cover—but not cure—their sinful sores. Look in your heart and ask yourself if you've ever experienced anything like my brother's crime. If your heart admits to being guilty of the same natural impulses, don't say a word to condemn my brother.

ANGELO

(*to himself*) She speaks with such sense, she's got my senses and desire stirred up. Goodbye.

ISABELLA

My gracious lord, come back.

ANGELO

I'll consider the matter. Come again tomorrow.

ISABELLA

I'll bribe you—come back, my good lord.

ANGELO

What? Bribe me?

ISABELLA

Yes, with gifts from heaven.

LUCIO

[Aside to ISABELLA] You had marr'd all else.

ISABELLA

Not with fond shekels of the tested gold,
Or stones whose rates are either rich or poor
180 As fancy values them; but with true prayers
That shall be up at heaven and enter there
Ere sun-rise, prayers from preserved souls,
From fasting maids whose minds are dedicate
To nothing temporal.

ANGELO

185 Well; come to me to-morrow.

LUCIO

[Aside to ISABELLA] Go to; 'tis well; away!

ISABELLA

Heaven keep your honour safe!

ANGELO

[Aside] Amen:
For I am that way going to temptation,
190 Where prayers cross.

ISABELLA

At what hour to-morrow

LUCIO

(aside to ISABELLA) You nearly blew it.

ISABELLA

Not with silly coins of real gold, or jewels whose value rises and falls, depending on fashion; but with constant prayers that will rise up and enter heaven before dawn—the prayers of protected souls, nuns whose minds are dedicated only to spiritual things.

ANGELO

Well, come see me tomorrow.

LUCIO

(aside to ISABELLA) Great, that's enough. Let's go!

ISABELLA

Heaven keep your honor safe!

ANGELO

(to himself) Amen—for I'm falling into temptation, where desires and prayers work against each other.

ISABELLA

What time tomorrow should I come to your lordship?

Shall I attend your lordship?

ANGELO

At any time 'fore noon.

ISABELLA

'Save your honour!

Exeunt ISABELLA, LUCIO, and Provost

ANGELO

195 From thee, even from thy virtue!

What's this, what's this? Is this her fault or mine?

The tempter or the tempted, who sins most?

Ha!

Not she: nor doth she tempt: but it is I

200 That, lying by the violet in the sun,

Do as the carrion does, not as the flower,

Corrupt with virtuous season. Can it be

That modesty may more betray our sense

Than woman's lightness? Having waste ground enough,

205 Shall we desire to raze the sanctuary

And pitch our evils there? O, fie, fie, fie!

What dost thou, or what art thou, Angelo?

Dost thou desire her foully for those things

That make her good? O, let her brother live!

210 Thieves for their robbery have authority

ANGELO

Anytime before noon.

ISABELLA

God save your honor!

ISABELLA, LUCIO, and the Provost exit.

ANGELO

From you, and from your virtue, too! What's happening? Is this her fault or mine? The tempter or the tempted, who sins the most? Ha! It's not her, she's not trying to be a tempter. It's me. It's like I'm lying in a field of violets, only instead of blossoming and smelling like a flower, I'm rotting and stinking like a corpse from the same sun that makes the flowers grow. Is it possible that a modest woman can arouse desire more than a seductive one? Having destroyed enough land already, should a person want to tear down a holy place and establish evil there as well? Oh, damn, damn, damn! Angelo, what are you doing, who are you? Do you sinfully desire her for the things that make her good? Oh, I should let her brother live! Thieves are justified in robbing when the judges themselves are thieves. Can it be I'm in love with her, when I want to hear her speak again, and gaze into her eyes? What am I dreaming of? Oh, the devil's a cunning enemy—to catch a saint, he baits the hook with saints!

When judges steal themselves. What, do I love her,
That I desire to hear her speak again,
And feast upon her eyes? What is't I dream on?
O cunning enemy, that, to catch a saint,
215 With saints dost bait thy hook! Most dangerous
Is that temptation that doth goad us on
To sin in loving virtue: never could the strumpet,
With all her double vigour, art and nature,
Once stir my temper; but this virtuous maid
220 Subdues me quite. Even till now,
When men were fond, I smiled and wonder'd how.

Exit

A room in a prison.

Enter, severally, DUKE VINCENTIO disguised as a friar, and Provost

DUKE VINCENTIO

Hail to you, provost! so I think you are.

PROVOST

I am the provost. What's your will, good friar?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Bound by my charity and my blest order,

The most dangerous temptation is the one that uses our love of goodness to draw us into sin. A prostitute could never attract me, even with her two powers: her seductive skills and her natural endowments. But this virtuous girl totally overwhelms me. Whenever I saw men who were infatuated like idiots, I smiled and didn't understand—up until now.

He exits.

Act 2 Scene 3

A room in a prison.

DUKE VINCENTIO, disguised as a friar, and the Provost enter from opposite directions.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Hello, Provost—I think that's who you are.

PROVOST

I am the provost. What do you want, good friar?

DUKE VINCENTIO

I come to visit the afflicted spirits
5 Here in the prison. Do me the common right
To let me see them and to make me know
The nature of their crimes, that I may minister
To them accordingly.

PROVOST

I would do more than that, if more were needful.

Enter JULIET

10 Look, here comes one: a gentlewoman of mine,
Who, falling in the flaws of her own youth,
Hath blister'd her report: she is with child;
And he that got it, sentenced; a young man
More fit to do another such offence
15 Than die for this.

DUKE VINCENTIO

When must he die?

PROVOST

As I do think, to-morrow.

To JULIET

I have provided for you: stay awhile,
And you shall be conducted.

My sense of charity and my religious order make it my duty to come visit the troubled souls here in prison. Grant me the clergy's usual right to see them, and tell me the nature of their crimes, so I may minister to them accordingly.

PROVOST

I'd do more than that, if it were needed.

JULIET enters.

Look, here comes one: a gentlewoman in my charge who, by giving in to her youthful passion, has ruined her reputation. She's pregnant, and the child's father is sentenced to death. He's just a young man, who deserves the chance to make more babies, rather than to die for this one.

DUKE VINCENTIO

When must he die?

PROVOST

Tomorrow, I think.

(to JULIET)

I've gotten accommodations for you. Wait here, and you'll be escorted to them.

DUKE VINCENTIO

20 Repent you, fair one, of the sin you carry?

JULIET

I do; and bear the shame most patiently.

DUKE VINCENTIO

I'll teach you how you shall arraign your conscience,
And try your penitence, if it be sound,
Or hollowly put on.

JULIET

25 I'll gladly learn.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Love you the man that wrong'd you?

JULIET

Yes, as I love the woman that wrong'd him.

DUKE VINCENTIO

So then it seems your most offenceful act
Was mutually committed?

JULIET

30 Mutually.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Then was your sin of heavier kind than his.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Pretty one, do you repent the sin you're carrying?

JULIET

I do, and patiently bear the shame.

DUKE VINCENTIO

I'll teach you how to examine your conscience, and to test if
your repentance is real or insincere.

JULIET

I'll gladly learn.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Do you love the man who wronged you?

JULIET

Yes, as I love myself, the woman who wronged him.

DUKE VINCENTIO

So then it seems your sinful act was mutually committed?

JULIET

Mutually.

DUKE VINCENTIO

But your sin is **heavier** than his.

JULIET

I do confess it, and repent it, father.

DUKE VINCENTIO

'Tis meet so, daughter: but lest you do repent,
As that the sin hath brought you to this shame,
35 Which sorrow is always towards ourselves, not heaven,
Showing we would not spare heaven as we love it,
But as we stand in fear,—

JULIET

I do repent me, as it is an evil,
And take the shame with joy.

DUKE VINCENTIO

40 There rest.
Your partner, as I hear, must die to-morrow,
And I am going with instruction to him.
Grace go with you, Benedicite!

Exit

JULIET

Must die to-morrow! O injurious love,
45 That respites me a life, whose very comfort
Is still a dying horror!

PROVOST**JULIET**

I do confess it, and repent it, father.

DUKE VINCENTIO

That's appropriate, daughter. But if you're only sorry because your sin's been found out, that's being sorry for yourself, not for offending Heaven. We tend to repent out of fear of God, rather than love for him—

JULIET

I repent because my act was evil. I'm happy to be ashamed of it.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Maintain that attitude. I hear your partner must die tomorrow, and I'm going to give him spiritual guidance. Grace go with you, and God bless you!

He exits.

JULIET

Must die tomorrow! Oh, painful love! By making me pregnant, [it's spared my life](#). But that comfort means I have to live with the horror of Claudio's death.

PROVOST

'Tis pity of him.

Exeunt

A room in ANGELO's house.

Enter ANGELO

ANGELO

When I would pray and think, I think and pray
To several subjects. Heaven hath my empty words;
Whilst my invention, hearing not my tongue,
Anchors on Isabel: Heaven in my mouth,
5 As if I did but only chew his name;
And in my heart the strong and swelling evil
Of my conception. The state, whereon I studied
Is like a good thing, being often read,
Grown fear'd and tedious; yea, my gravity,
10 Wherein—let no man hear me—I take pride,
Could I with boot change for an idle plume,
Which the air beats for vain. O place, O form,
How often dost thou with thy case, thy habit,
Wrench awe from fools and tie the wiser souls
15 To thy false seeming! Blood, thou art blood:
Let's write good angel on the devil's horn:
'Tis not the devil's crest.

He's to be pitied.

They exit.

Act 2 Scene 4

A room in ANGELO's house.

ANGELO enters.

ANGELO

When I try to pray and think, I think and pray about different things. My *empty words* focus on heaven, while my imagination ignores what I'm saying and fixates on Isabel. It's as if I'm only mouthing God's name, while an evil idea grows in my heart. The politics I used to study with such interest now seem dry and tedious. The dignity I was so proud of (I hope no one hears this) is now worth even less than some silly hat feather waving uselessly in the wind. Oh, how often do rank and ceremonial trappings impress the foolish and entrap even the wise! Passions are passions—they cannot simply be swept away. You can write "good angel" on the devil's horns, but that doesn't change his devilish nature.

Enter a Servant

How now! who's there?

SERVANT

One Isabel, a sister, desires access to you.

ANGELO

20 Teach her the way.

Exit Servant

O heavens!

Why does my blood thus muster to my heart,

Making both it unable for itself,

And dispossessing all my other parts

25 Of necessary fitness?

So play the foolish throngs with one that swoons;

Come all to help him, and so stop the air

By which he should revive: and even so

The general, subject to a well-wish'd king,

30 Quit their own part, and in obsequious fondness

Crowd to his presence, where their untaught love

Must needs appear offence.

Enter ISABELLA

How now, fair maid?

A Servant enters.

Hello! Who's there?

SERVANT

One Isabel, a nun, wishes to see you.

ANGELO

Show her the way.

The Servant exits.

Oh, heavens! Why does my blood rush to my heart, both choking it and making the rest of my body weak? It's like a stupid crowd surrounding somebody who faints—they're all trying to help him and actually they're cutting off the air he needs. Or, like the common people who drop what they're doing and rush over to see their beloved king when he appears, fawning and crowding him so much that their ignorant adoration becomes offensive.

ISABELLA enters.

How are you, pretty lady?

ISABELLA

I am come to know your pleasure.

ANGELO

35 That you might know it, would much better please me
Than to demand what 'tis. Your brother cannot live.

ISABELLA

Even so. Heaven keep your honour!

ANGELO

Yet may he live awhile; and, it may be,
As long as you or I:
40 yet he must die.

ISABELLA

Under your sentence?

ANGELO

Yea.

ISABELLA

When, I beseech you? that in his reprieve,
Longer or shorter, he may be so fitted
45 That his soul sicken not.

ANGELO

Ha! fie, these filthy vices! It were as good
To pardon him that hath from nature stolen

ISABELLA

I've come to find out what you want to do.

ANGELO

If only you knew what I want to do and didn't have to ask. Your brother cannot live.

ISABELLA

Very well, then. Heaven keep your honor!

ANGELO

On the other hand, he may live awhile—maybe as long as you or me. Still, he must die.

ISABELLA

By your command?

ANGELO

Yes.

ISABELLA

I beg you, tell me when. So that, no matter how long or short his reprieve is, he'll be spiritually prepared and can save his soul.

ANGELO

Ha! Damn these filthy vices! One might as well pardon a murderer as forgive a fornicator who begets an illegitimate

A man already made, as to remit
Their saucy sweetness that do coin heaven's image
50 In stamps that are forbid: 'tis all as easy
Falsely to take away a life true made
As to put metal in restrained means
To make a false one.

ISABELLA

'Tis set down so in heaven, but not in earth.

ANGELO

55 Say you so? then I shall pose you quickly.
Which had you rather, that the most just law
Now took your brother's life; or, to redeem him,
Give up your body to such sweet uncleanness
As she that he hath stain'd?

ISABELLA

60 Sir, believe this,
I had rather give my body than my soul.

ANGELO

I talk not of your soul: our compell'd sins
Stand more for number than for accompt.

ISABELLA

How say you?

child. It's as easy to take a legitimate life as it is to create an illegitimate one.

ISABELLA

Heaven may regard the two sins as equal, but humans do not.

ANGELO

You think so? Then I'll put this question to you: which would you prefer, that this very fair law took your brother's life, or to save your brother, you give up your body to the same sort of sweet sin as did the girl he ruined?

ISABELLA

Sir, believe this, I'd rather give up my body than my soul.

ANGELO

I'm not talking about your soul: sins we're compelled to commit get counted, but they don't count against us.

ISABELLA

What are you saying?

ANGELO

65 Nay, I'll not warrant that; for I can speak
Against the thing I say. Answer to this:
I, now the voice of the recorded law,
Pronounce a sentence on your brother's life:
Might there not be a charity in sin
70 To save this brother's life?

ISABELLA

Please you to do't,
I'll take it as a peril to my soul,
It is no sin at all, but charity.

ANGELO

Pleased you to do't at peril of your soul,
75 Were equal poise of sin and charity.

ISABELLA

That I do beg his life, if it be sin,
Heaven let me bear it! you granting of my suit,
If that be sin, I'll make it my morn prayer
To have it added to the faults of mine,
80 And nothing of your answer.

ANGELO

Nay, but hear me.
Your sense pursues not mine: either you are ignorant,
Or seem so craftily; and that's not good.

ANGELO

No, don't hold me to that, for I can argue a point I don't really believe. Answer this. As the voice of the written law, I pronounce a death sentence on your brother's life. Might it not be charity to commit a sin to save this brother's life?

ISABELLA

If you want to do it, I'll risk the punishment on my soul, and say it'd be no sin at all, but charity.

ANGELO

If you felt like doing it, even at the risk of your soul, sin and charity would balance each other perfectly.

ISABELLA

If begging for his life is a sin, Heaven let me bear it! If your granting my request is a sin, I'll pray each morning to have it added to my faults and not one you have to answer for.

ANGELO

No, listen to me. You're not following me. Either you're dumb or you're playing dumb, and that's not good.

ISABELLA

Let me be ignorant, and in nothing good,

85 But graciously to know I am no better.

ANGELO

Thus wisdom wishes to appear most bright
When it doth tax itself; as these black masks
Proclaim an enshield beauty ten times louder
Than beauty could, display'd. But mark me;

90 To be received plain, I'll speak more gro
Your brother is to die.

ISABELLA

So.

ANGELO

And his offence is so, as it appears,
Accountant to the law upon that pain.

ISABELLA

95 True.

ANGELO

Admit no other way to save his life,—
As I subscribe not that, nor any other,
But in the loss of question,—that you, his sister,
Finding yourself desired of such a person,

ISABELLA

Call me dumb, then, and not very good. Let me accept by
God's grace that I'm not any better than that.

ANGELO

This is how smart people try to seem really bright: by knocking
their own intelligence. It's the same way hiding behind a black
mask makes a woman seem ten times more beautiful than her
naked face does. But pay attention. I'll be more blunt, so that
you get it. Your brother is to die.

ISABELLA

Yes.

ANGELO

That's the penalty for his crime, under the law.

ISABELLA

True.

ANGELO

Suppose that there was no other way to save his life—not that
I'm admitting this, it's just for the sake of argument—let's say
that you, his sister, were desired by someone whose influence
with the judge, or whose own powerful position, could rescue

100 Whose credit with the judge, or own great place,
Could fetch your brother from the manacles
Of the all-building law; and that there were
No earthly mean to save him, but that either
You must lay down the treasures of your body
105 To this supposed, or else to let him suffer;
What would you do?

ISABELLA

As much for my poor brother as myself:
That is, were I under the terms of death,
The impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies,
110 And strip myself to death, as to a bed
That longing have been sick for, ere I'd yield
My body up to shame.

ANGELO

Then must your brother die.

ISABELLA

And 'twere the cheaper way:
115 Better it were a brother died at once,
Than that a sister, by redeeming him,
Should die for ever.

ANGELO

Were not you then as cruel as the sentence
That you have slander'd so?

your brother from the law's binding chains. And there was no other earthly way to save him, unless you gave your virginity to this hypothetical man, or else your brother dies. What would you do?

ISABELLA

I would do this as much for my poor brother as myself—that is, if I were under a death sentence, I'd strip myself naked and display the whip's bloody lashes like rubies. And I'd go to my death like going to my bed, before I'd surrender my body to sin.

ANGELO

Then your brother must die.

ISABELLA

And that's the better bargain. Better a brother die once than a sister suffer eternal damnation to save him.

ANGELO

Then aren't you as cruel as the sentence you've so deplored?

ISABELLA

120 Ignomy in ransom and free pardon
Are of two houses: lawful mercy
Is nothing kin to foul redemption.

ANGELO

You seem'd of late to make the law a tyrant;
And rather proved the sliding of your brother
125 A merriment than a vice.

ISABELLA

O, pardon me, my lord; it oft falls out,
To have what we would have, we speak not what we mean:
I something do excuse the thing I hate,
For his advantage that I dearly love.

ANGELO

130 We are all frail.

ISABELLA

Else let my brother die,
If not a feodary, but only he
Owe and succeed thy weakness.

ANGELO

Nay, women are frail too.

ISABELLA**ISABELLA**

A shameful release and an unconditional pardon are two different things. Legal mercy is in no way related to an immoral rescue.

ANGELO

You said a little while ago the law was tyrannical, arguing that your brother's sinning was a lighthearted act, not a vice.

ISABELLA

Oh, forgive me, my lord. To get what we want, we often say things we don't mean. I've made excuses for something I hate in order to help the brother I love.

ANGELO

We're all weak.

ISABELLA

Yes. Otherwise, my brother would deserve to die, if he were the only person to have inherited this weakness.

ANGELO

No, women are weak too.

ISABELLA

135 Ay, as the glasses where they view themselves;
Which are as easy broke as they make forms.
Women! Help Heaven! men their creation mar
In profiting by them. Nay, call us ten times frail;
For we are soft as our complexions are,
140 And credulous to false prints.

ANGELO

I think it well:
And from this testimony of your own sex,—
Since I suppose we are made to be no stronger
Than faults may shake our frames,—let me be bold;
145 I do arrest your words. Be that you are,
That is, a woman; if you be more, you're none;
If you be one, as you are well express'd
By all external warrants, show it now,
By putting on the destined livery.

ISABELLA

150 I have no tongue but one: gentle my lord,
Let me entreat you speak the former language.

ANGELO

Plainly conceive, I love you.

ISABELLA

My brother did love Juliet,
And you tell me that he shall die for it.

Yes, as weak their mirrors, which break as easily as they reflect images. Women—Heaven help us!—are ruined by men who take advantage of us. Call us frail ten times over, for we're as soft as our skin, and gullible.

ANGELO

I agree. And based on what you say about your sex—since I suppose we're only as strong as our own weakest points—let me be bold. I take you at your word. Be what you are—a woman, that is. If you are better than that, then you're not a woman. But if you are one, as you certainly seem to be by all outward appearances, show it now by being weak.

ISABELLA

I can only speak with a sincere tongue. My gentle lord, please talk plainly, as you did before.

ANGELO

To put it plainly, I love you.

ISABELLA

My brother loved Juliet, and you tell me that he'll die for it.

ANGELO

155 He shall not, Isabel, if you give me love.

ISABELLA

I know your virtue hath a licence in't,
Which seems a little fouler than it is,
To pluck on others.

ANGELO

Believe me, on mine honour,
160 My words express my purpose.

ISABELLA

Ha! little honour to be much believed,
And most pernicious purpose! Seeming, seeming!
I will proclaim thee, Angelo; look for't:
Sign me a present pardon for my brother,
165 Or with an outstretch'd throat I'll tell the world aloud
What man thou art.

ANGELO

Who will believe thee, Isabel?
My unsoil'd name, the austerity of my life,
My vouch against you, and my place i' the state,
170 Will so your accusation outweigh,
That you shall stifle in your own report
And smell of calumny. I have begun,

ANGELO

He won't, Isabel, if you give me love.

ISABELLA

I know your virtue gives you the freedom to act wicked, in
order to test others.

ANGELO

Believe me, I swear I mean what I say.

ISABELLA

What! To believe so much in someone with so little honor and
such evil intentions! You deceiver! I'll denounce you, Angelo,
believe me. Sign a pardon for my brother immediately, or I'll
scream to the entire world what sort of man you are.

ANGELO

Who will believe you, Isabel? My spotless reputation, my strict
way of living, my testimony against you, and my position will
all outweigh your accusation. You'll be silenced and
discredited, accused of slander. The starting gate is open now,
and my desires are off and running. Feed my hunger—no more
of your modesty and time-wasting blushes, which charm me

And now I give my sensual race the rein:
Fit thy consent to my sharp appetite;
175 Lay by all nicety and prolixious blushes,
That banish what they sue for; redeem thy brother
By yielding up thy body to my will;
Or else he must not only die the death,
But thy unkindness shall his death draw out
180 To lingering sufferance. Answer me to-morrow,
Or, by the affection that now guides me most,
I'll prove a tyrant to him. As for you,
Say what you can, my false o'erweighs your true.

Exit

ISABELLA

To whom should I complain? Did I tell this,
185 Who would believe me? O perilous mouths,
That bear in them one and the self-same tongue,
Either of condemnation or approof;
Bidding the law make court'sy to their will:
Hooking both right and wrong to the appetite,
190 To follow as it draws! I'll to my brother:
Though he hath fallen by prompture of the blood,
Yet hath he in him such a mind of honour.
That, had he twenty heads to tender down
On twenty bloody blocks, he'd yield them up,
195 Before his sister should her body stoop

and then banish me for being charmed. Save your brother by sleeping with me, or he'll be put to death. And not only that, but it'll be death by torture, drawn out by your cruelty. Accept my offer tomorrow, or by my almighty passion, I'll tyrannize him. As for you, say what you want. My lie, which calls your claim false, will outweigh your true claim.

He exits.

ISABELLA

Who can I complain to? If I reported this, who would believe me? Oh, dangerous mouths, with double-talking tongues that can both condemn and approve, and make the law bow to their wishes. They put their sexual desires before notions of right and wrong! I'll go to my brother. Although he gave in to his body's demands, his mind's so honorable that, if he had twenty heads to lay on twenty bloody execution blocks, he'd give them all up, rather than let his sister pollute her body. So, Isabel, you'll live chaste, and brother, you'll die. My chastity is more important than my brother. I'll tell him of Angelo's request, and prepare him for death—and the eternal rest of his soul.

To such abhor'd pollution.

Then, Isabel, live chaste, and, brother, die:

More than our brother is our chastity.

I'll tell him yet of Angelo's request,

200 And fit his mind to death, for his soul's rest.

Exit

A room in the prison.

Enter **DUKE VINCENTIO** disguised as before, **CLAUDIO**, and
Provost

DUKE VINCENTIO

So then you hope of pardon from Lord Angelo?

CLAUDIO

The miserable have no other medicine

But only hope:

I've hope to live, and am prepared to die.

DUKE VINCENTIO

5 Be absolute for death; either death or life

Shall thereby be the sweeter. Reason thus with life:

If I do lose thee, I do lose a thing

That none but fools would keep: a breath thou art,

Servile to all the skyey influences,

She exits.

Act 3 Scene 1

A room in the prison.

DUKE VINCENTIO, disguised as before, enters with **CLAUDIO** and the Provost.

DUKE VINCENTIO

So, you hope for a pardon from Lord Angelo?

CLAUDIO

Hope is the only medicine miserable people have. I hope to live, and am prepared to die.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Be ready to die; then either death or life will be all the sweeter. Tell life this: if I lose you, I lose something that only fools would want to keep. You're just a breath, subject to all the changes of weather that hourly buffet the body you occupy. You're simply death's dupe, constantly struggling to run away from him,

10 That dost this habitation, where thou keep'st,
Hourly afflict: merely, thou art death's fool;
For him thou labour'st by thy flight to shun
And yet runn'st toward him still. Thou art not noble;
For all the accommodations that thou bear'st
15 Are nursed by baseness. Thou'rt by no means valiant;
For thou dost fear the soft and tender fork
Of a poor worm. Thy best of rest is sleep,
And that thou oft provokest; yet grossly fear'st
Thy death, which is no more. Thou art not thyself;
20 For thou exist'st on many a thousand grains
That issue out of dust. Happy thou art not;
For what thou hast not, still thou strivest to get,
And what thou hast, forget'st. Thou art not certain;
For thy complexion shifts to strange effects,
25 After the moon. If thou art rich, thou'rt poor;
For, like an ass whose back with ingots bows,
Thou bear'st thy heavy riches but a journey,
And death unloads thee. Friend hast thou none;
For thine own bowels, which do call thee sire,
30 The mere effusion of thy proper loins,
Do curse the gout, serpigo, and the rheum,
For ending thee no sooner. Thou hast nor youth nor age,
But, as it were, an after-dinner's sleep,
Dreaming on both; for all thy blessed youth
35 Becomes as aged, and doth beg the alms

while all the while you're running toward him. You're not noble, because all your civilized comforts come from lowly plants and animals. You're by no means brave, because the forked tongue of a little snake scares you. Sleep is your best way to rest, and you do that a lot, yet you stupidly fear death, which is basically the same thing. You're not a single being, because you're composed of thousands of grains of dust. You're not happy, because you're always trying to get what you don't have, and what you do have, you forget about. You're unstable, your moods changing as often as the phases of the moon. If you're rich, you're actually poor—like an ass staggering under a load of gold bars, you're just carrying your heavy wealth for a period, and you lose that wealth when you die. You don't have any friends, for even your children—the offspring of your own loins—curse the gout, skin rashes, and colds for not carrying you off sooner. You're neither old or young, but always suspended in a sort of mid-afternoon nap, because when young, you're like an old beggar, wheedling money from your feeble elders. And when you're old and rich yourself, you have neither the passion, love, agility, or beauty to enjoy your wealth. So, what in all this is worth living for? Life hides more than a thousand deaths. Yet it's death, which fixes all these problems, that we fear.

Of palsied eld; and when thou art old and rich,
Thou hast neither heat, affection, limb, nor beauty,
To make thy riches pleasant. What's yet in this
That bears the name of life? Yet in this life
40 Lie hid moe thousand deaths: yet death we fear,
That makes these odds all even.

CLAUDIO

I humbly thank you.
To sue to live, I find I seek to die;
And, seeking death, find life: let it come on.

ISABELLA

45 [Within] What, ho! Peace here; grace and good company!

PROVOST

Who's there? come in: the wish deserves a welcome.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Dear sir, ere long I'll visit you again.

CLAUDIO

Most holy sir, I thank you.

Enter ISABELLA

ISABELLA

My business is a word or two with Claudio.

CLAUDIO

I humbly thank you. In looking to live, I find I actually seek to die, and by seeking death, I find life. Let death come.

ISABELLA

(offstage) Hello, there! Peace, grace, and good company to everyone here!

PROVOST

Who's there? Come in. That wish deserves a welcome.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Dear sir, I'll visit you again soon.

CLAUDIO

Most holy sir, thank you.

ISABELLA enters.

ISABELLA

My business is a word or two with Claudio.

PROVOST

50 And very welcome. Look, signor, here's your sister.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Provost, a word with you.

PROVOST

As many as you please.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Bring me to hear them speak, where I may be concealed.

Exeunt DUKE VINCENTIO and Provost

CLAUDIO

Now, sister, what's the comfort?

ISABELLA

55 Why,

As all comforts are; most good, most good indeed.

Lord Angelo, having affairs to heaven,

Intends you for his swift ambassador,

Where you shall be an everlasting leiger:

60 Therefore your best appointment make with speed;

To-morrow you set on.

CLAUDIO

Is there no remedy?

PROVOST

And very welcome. Look, signor, here's your sister.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Provost, a word with you.

PROVOST

As many as you please.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Take me to a place where I can hide and overhear them.

DUKE VINCENTIO and Provost conceal themselves.

CLAUDIO

Now, sister, what's the good word?

ISABELLA

Why, as all good words are—very good indeed. Lord Angelo has business with heaven, and he's going to make you his ambassador there—an eternal appointment. So get ready, quickly. Tomorrow you set off.

CLAUDIO

Is there no way out?

ISABELLA

None, but such remedy as, to save a head,
To cleave a heart in twain.

CLAUDIO

65 But is there any?

ISABELLA

Yes, brother, you may live:
There is a devilish mercy in the judge,
If you'll implore it, that will free your life,
But fetter you till death.

CLAUDIO

70 Perpetual durance?

ISABELLA

Ay, just; perpetual durance, a restraint,
Though all the world's vastidity you had,
To a determined scope.

CLAUDIO

But in what nature?

ISABELLA

75 In such a one as, you consenting to't,
Would bark your honour from that trunk you bear,
And leave you naked.

ISABELLA

None, except a way that would save his head by breaking my
heart in two.

CLAUDIO

But is there any?

ISABELLA

Yes, brother, you can live. If you beg him, the judge will offer a
devilish sort of mercy that will free you, yet chain you until
death.

CLAUDIO

Lifetime imprisonment?

ISABELLA

Yes, exactly. A type of lifetime imprisonment that would limit
your movements, even if you had the freedom to roam the
entire world.

CLAUDIO

But what type?

ISABELLA

The type that, if you agreed to it, would strip your honor from
your body like bark from a tree trunk, and leave you exposed
to shame.

CLAUDIO

Let me know the point.

ISABELLA

O, I do fear thee, Claudio; and I quake,
80 Lest thou a feverous life shouldst entertain,
And six or seven winters more respect
Than a perpetual honour. Darest thou die?
The sense of death is most in apprehension;
And the poor beetle, that we tread upon,
85 In corporal sufferance finds a pang as great
As when a giant dies.

CLAUDIO

Why give you me this shame?
Think you I can a resolution fetch
From flowery tenderness? If I must die,
90 I will encounter darkness as a bride,
And hug it in mine arms.

ISABELLA

There spake my brother; there my father's grave
Did utter forth a voice. Yes, thou must die:
Thou art too noble to conserve a life
95 In base appliances. This outward-sainted deputy,
Whose settled visage and deliberate word
Nips youth i' the head and follies doth emmew

CLAUDIO

Get to the point.

ISABELLA

Oh, I'm afraid of you, Claudio. I tremble to think you would
cherish a wild existence and would value six or seven years of
life more than everlasting honor. Do you dare to die? The worst
part of death is anticipating it. A beetle we step on suffers as
much as a giant when it dies.

CLAUDIO

Why are you shaming me like this? Do you think I can summon
my resolve from flowery, comforting speeches?
If I have to die, I will meet the darkness like a bride,
and hug it in my arms.

ISABELLA

Now, that's my brother talking—like my father speaking from
his grave. Yes, you must die. You're too noble to save yourself
in a shameful way. This seemingly saintly deputy, whose
composed face and carefully calculated words target and
attack young people like some bird of prey, is really a devil. If

As falcon doth the fowl, is yet a devil
His filth within being cast, he would appear
100 A pond as deep as hell.

CLAUDIO

The prenzie Angelo!

ISABELLA

O, 'tis the cunning livery of hell,
The damned'st body to invest and cover
In prenzie guards! Dost thou think, Claudio?
105 If I would yield him my virginity,
Thou mightst be freed.

CLAUDIO

O heavens! it cannot be.

ISABELLA

Yes, he would give't thee, from this rank offence,
So to offend him still. This night's the time
110 That I should do what I abhor to name,
Or else thou diest to-morrow.

CLAUDIO

Thou shalt not do't.

ISABELLA

O, were it but my life,

you drained him of all the filth inside him, you'd reveal a pond
as deep as hell.

CLAUDIO

The "priestly" Angelo!

ISABELLA

Oh, it's a cunning disguise from hell, to cloak and cover the
wickedest people in priestly clothes. Can you believe it,
Claudio? If I gave him my virginity, you'd be freed.

CLAUDIO

Oh, heavens! It can't be.

ISABELLA

Yes, in exchange for this awful sin, he'd free you to keep on
sinning. Tonight's the time I have to do something I hate to
even pronounce, or else you die tomorrow.

CLAUDIO

You mustn't do it.

ISABELLA

Oh, if it were just my life, I'd throw it away like a pin to save you.

I'd throw it down for your deliverance

¹¹⁵ As frankly as a pin.

CLAUDIO

Thanks, dear Isabel.

ISABELLA

Be ready, Claudio, for your death tomorrow.

CLAUDIO

Yes. Has he affections in him,

That thus can make him bite the law by the nose,

¹²⁰ When he would force it? Sure, it is no sin,

Or of the deadly seven, it is the least.

ISABELLA

Which is the least?

CLAUDIO

If it were damnable, he being so wise,

Why would he for the momentary trick

¹²⁵ Be perdurable fined? O Isabel!

ISABELLA

What says my brother?

CLAUDIO

Death is a fearful thing.

CLAUDIO

Thanks, dear Isabel.

ISABELLA

Be ready, Claudio, for your death tomorrow.

CLAUDIO

Yes. Is his lust so great that it causes him to make a mockery of the law, even while he's enforcing it? Of course, it isn't a sin, or anyway it's the least of the seven deadly sins.

ISABELLA

Which is the least?

CLAUDIO

If it were a damnable thing, why—if he's so wise—would he risk being eternally punished for a momentary pleasure? Oh, Isabel!

ISABELLA

What are you saying?

CLAUDIO

Death is a fearful thing.

ISABELLA

And shamed life a hateful.

CLAUDIO

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;

130 To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;

This sensible warm motion to become

A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit

To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside

In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;

135 To be imprison'd in the viewless winds,

And blown with restless violence round about

The pendent world; or to be worse than worst

Of those that lawless and incertain thought

Imagine howling: 'tis too horrible!

140 The weariest and most loathed worldly life

That age, ache, penury and imprisonment

Can lay on nature is a paradise

To what we fear of death.

ISABELLA

Alas, alas!

CLAUDIO

145 Sweet sister, let me live:

What sin you do to save a brother's life,

Nature dispenses with the deed so far

ISABELLA

And a disgraced life a hateful one.

CLAUDIO

Yes, but to die, and go who knows where. To lie cold and congealing, and to rot—this conscious, warm body to become a compact lump of earth, and the vast spirit to swim in hell's fiery floods or reside in a frigid land of thick ice. To be confined inside invisible winds and perpetually, violently blown all around the world hanging in space. Or to be worse off than one of those tortured souls howling from punishment of sinful thoughts—it's too horrible! The weariest, most hateful life that old age, aches, poverty and imprisonment can inflict on us is paradise compared to our fears of death.

ISABELLA

Oh, no!

CLAUDIO

Sweet sister, let me live. Any sin you commit to save a brother's life, nature will pardon as though it were a good deed.

That it becomes a virtue.

ISABELLA

O you beast!

150 O faithless coward! O dishonest wretch!

Wilt thou be made a man out of my vice?

Is't not a kind of incest, to take life

From thine own sister's shame? What should I think?

Heaven shield my mother play'd my father fair!

155 For such a warped slip of wilderness

Ne'er issued from his blood. Take my defiance!

Die, perish! Might but my bending down

Reprise thee from thy fate, it should proceed:

I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death,

160 No word to save thee.

CLAUDIO

Nay, hear me, Isabel.

ISABELLA

O, fie, fie, fie!

Thy sin's not accidental, but a trade.

Mercy to thee would prove itself a bawd:

165 'Tis best thou diest quickly.

CLAUDIO

O hear me, Isabella!

ISABELLA

Oh, you beast! Treacherous coward! Shameful wretch!

Will you be given your life as a result of my vice? Isn't it a kind of incest, to gain life from your own sister's shame? What should I think? God forbid, my mother must have cheated on my father, for such a twisted son as you never could have sprung from his blood! I renounce you—die, perish! Even if all I had to do was pray on bended knees to stop your execution, I'd let it happen. I'll pray a thousand prayers for your death, and not one word to save you.

CLAUDIO

No, listen to me, Isabel.

ISABELLA

Oh, shame, shame, shame! Your sin was no one-time accident, but a habit. Granting you mercy would be like pimping, enabling you to do it again. It's best that you die right away.

CLAUDIO

Oh, listen to me, Isabella!

Re-enter DUKE VINCENTIO

DUKE VINCENTIO

Vouchsafe a word, young sister, but one word.

ISABELLA

What is your will?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Might you dispense with your leisure, I would by and
170 by have some speech with you: the satisfaction I
would require is likewise your own benefit.

ISABELLA

I have no superfluous leisure; my stay must be
stolen out of other affairs; but I will attend you awhile.

Walks apart

DUKE VINCENTIO

Son, I have overheard what hath passed between you
175 and your sister. Angelo had never the purpose to
corrupt her; only he hath made an essay of her
virtue to practise his judgment with the disposition
of natures: she, having the truth of honour in her,
hath made him that gracious denial which he is most
180 glad to receive. I am confessor to Angelo, and I
know this to be true; therefore prepare yourself to

DUKE VINCENTIO re-enters, from his hiding place.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Permit me to say a word, young sister, just one word.

ISABELLA

What do you want?

DUKE VINCENTIO

If you can spare the time, I'd like to talk with you in a little while.
You'd be doing yourself a favor as well as me.

ISABELLA

I don't have any spare time, but I'll wait for you a little while.

She moves off.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Son, I overheard what happened between you
and your sister. Angelo never meant to seduce her. He was
only testing her virtue, to test his ability to judge character.
Being a person of integrity, she virtuously refused him, and he
was happy to hear it. I'm Angelo's confessor, so I know this is
true. Therefore, prepare yourself for death. Don't prop yourself
up with false hopes. Tomorrow you must die. Fall to your knees
and prepare for confession.

death: do not satisfy your resolution with hopes
that are fallible: tomorrow you must die; go to
your knees and make ready.

CLAUDIO

185 Let me ask my sister pardon. I am so out of love
with life that I will sue to be rid of it.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Hold you there: farewell.

Exit CLAUDIO

Provost, a word with you!

Re-enter Provost

PROVOST

What's your will, father[?]

DUKE VINCENTIO

190 That now you are come, you will be gone. Leave me
awhile with the maid: my mind promises with my
habit no loss shall touch her by my company.

PROVOST

In good time.

Exit Provost. ISABELLA comes forward

CLAUDIO

Let me ask my sister to forgive me. I'm so out of love
with life that I'll pray to be rid of it.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Maintain that attitude. Farewell.

CLAUDIO exits.

Provost, a word with you!

The Provost re-enters.

PROVOST

What is it, father?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Now that you've come over, you should go away. Leave me
with the girl awhile. My intentions and the fact that I'm a friar
guarantee that nothing bad will happen to her.

PROVOST

Very well.

The Provost exits. ISABELLA comes forward.

DUKE VINCENTIO

The hand that hath made you fair hath made you good:
195 the goodness that is cheap in beauty makes beauty
brief in goodness; but grace, being the soul of
your complexion, shall keep the body of it ever
fair. The assault that Angelo hath made to you,
fortune hath conveyed to my understanding; and, but
200 that frailty hath examples for his falling, I should
wonder at Angelo. How will you do to content this
substitute, and to save your brother?

ISABELLA

I am now going to resolve him: I had rather my
brother die by the law than my son should be
205 unlawfully born. But, O, how much is the good duke
deceived in Angelo! If ever he return and I can
speak to him, I will open my lips in vain, or
discover his government.

DUKE VINCENTIO

That shall not be much ami Yet, as the matter
210 now stands, he will avoid your accusation; he made
trial of you only. Therefore fasten your ear on my
advisings: to the love I have in doing good a
remedy presents itself. I do make myself believe
that you may most uprighteously do a poor wronged
215 lady a merited benefit; redeem your brother from

DUKE VINCENTIO

He who made you lovely made you good, as well. Beauty has
a cheap kind of goodness, which is why beauty doesn't last.
But virtue lies at the heart of your character, so you will always
be beautiful. I've heard about Angelo's sexual advances to you,
and if there weren't other examples of such lapses, I'd be really
surprised. What are you going to do to satisfy this stand-in and
save your brother?

ISABELLA

I'm going now to give him my answer: I'd rather my brother die
by legitimate execution than have an illegitimate baby. But, oh,
how wrong the good duke was about Angelo! If he ever
returns and I can speak to him, the first words I speak will be to
expose Angelo's way of governing.

DUKE VINCENTIO

That's not a bad idea. But, as the matter now stands, he'll deny
your accusation. He'll say he was only testing you. So, listen to
my advice. My delight in doing good gives me an idea for a
solution. I'm convinced there's a way you righteously can do a
poor wronged lady some well-deserved good, save your
brother from the cruel law, keep your own gracious self pure,

the angry law; do no stain to your own gracious person; and much please the absent duke, if peradventure he shall ever return to have hearing of this business.

ISABELLA

220 Let me hear you speak farther. I have spirit to do anything that appears not foul in the truth of my spirit.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Virtue is bold, and goodness never fearful. Have you not heard speak of Mariana, the sister of Frederick the great soldier who miscarried at sea?

ISABELLA

225 I have heard of the lady, and good words went with her name.

DUKE VINCENTIO

She should this Angelo have married; was affianced to her by oath, and the nuptial appointed: between which time of the contract and limit of the solemnity, her brother Frederick was wrecked at sea, 230 having in that perished vessel the dowry of his sister. But mark how heavily this befell to the poor gentlewoman: there she lost a noble and renowned brother, in his love toward her ever most kind and natural; with him, the portion and sinew of 235 her fortune, her marriage-dowry; with both, her

and greatly please the absent duke, if he ever returns to hear about all this.

ISABELLA

Tell me more. I have the courage to do anything, as long as it doesn't strike me as wrong.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Virtue is bold, and goodness is never afraid. Have you ever heard of Mariana, the sister of Frederick, the great soldier who died at sea?

ISABELLA

I've heard of the lady, and people always spoke well of her.

DUKE VINCENTIO

She was supposed to marry this Angelo. They were engaged, and the wedding day was set. But before the ceremony, her brother Frederick was lost at sea, in the ship that was carrying his sister's dowry. The poor woman suffered a heavy blow. She lost a famous, noble brother, who loved her dearly and devotedly. She lost with him her dowry, the bulk of her fortune, and with both, she lost her husband-to-be, this oh-so-respectable Angelo.

combinant husband, this well-seeming Angelo.

ISABELLA

Can this be so? did Angelo so leave her?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Left her in her tears, and dried not one of them
with his comfort; swallowed his vows whole,
240 pretending in her discoveries of dishonour: in few,
bestowed her on her own lamentation, which she yet
wears for his sake; and he, a marble to her tears,
is washed with them, but relents not.

ISABELLA

What a merit were it in death to take this poor maid
245 from the world! What corruption in this life, that
it will let this man live! But how out of this can she avail?

DUKE VINCENTIO

It is a rupture that you may easily heal: and the
cure of it not only saves your brother, but keeps
you from dishonour in doing it.

ISABELLA

250 Show me how, good father.

DUKE VINCENTIO

This forenamed maid hath yet in her the continuance

ISABELLA

Can this be true? Did Angelo leave her?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Left her in her tears, without drying a single one of them. He
reneged on his vows completely, saying he discovered that
she'd been unfaithful to him. He gave her only grief, basically,
and she still wears it, like a wedding dress. Her tears wash over
him, but like a marble statue, he never budges.

ISABELLA

It's the equivalent of a death to take this poor girl away from
the world! And life is so unfair, that this man lives! But how can
she benefit from all this?

DUKE VINCENTIO

It's a break that you can easily heal, and the cure not only
saves your brother, but keeps you from dishonor.

ISABELLA

Show me how, good father.

DUKE VINCENTIO

of her first affection: his unjust unkindness, that
in all reason should have quenched her love, hath,
like an impediment in the current, made it more
255 violent and unruly. Go you to Angelo; answer his
requiring with a plausible obedience; agree with
his demands to the point; only refer yourself to
this advantage, first, that your stay with him may
not be long; that the time may have all shadow and
260 silence in it; and the place answer to convenience.

This being granted in course,—and now follows
all,—we shall advise this wronged maid to stead up
your appointment, go in your place; if the encounter
acknowledge itself hereafter, it may compel him to
265 her recompense: and here, by this, is your brother
saved, your honour untainted, the poor Mariana
advantaged, and the corrupt deputy scaled. The maid
will I frame and make fit for his attempt. If you
think well to carry this as you may, the doubleness
270 of the benefit defends the deceit from reproof.

What think you of it?

ISABELLA

The image of it gives me content already; and I
trust it will grow to a most prosperous perfection.

DUKE VINCENTIO

It lies much in your holding up. Haste you speedily

This maid still loves Angelo. Logically, his unfair cruelty should have ended her love, but it's actually intensified it, the way water becomes violent and choppy when it hits a barrier. Go to Angelo. Pretend to yield to his request, and obey his demands to the letter. But set some conditions: that you not spend much time together, that it be in the dark, that there be absolute silence, and that it be in a convenient place. When he agrees—and now here's the key part—we'll tell the wronged girl to go in your place. If their encounter later comes to light, it might compel him to compensate her. The result of all this: your brother is saved, your honor is maintained, poor Mariana is helped, and the corrupt deputy is punished. I'll prepare the girl and make her ready for the encounter. If you think you can manage this, the double benefit outweighs any blame for the deception. What do you think?

ISABELLA

I like the idea already, and I hope it'll be successful.

DUKE VINCENTIO

275 to Angelo: if for this night he entreat you to his bed, give him promise of satisfaction. I will presently to Saint Luke's: there, at the moated grange, resides this dejected Mariana. At that place call upon me; and dispatch with Angelo, that
280 it may be quickly.

ISABELLA

I thank you for this comfort. Fare you well, good father.

Exeunt severally

The street before the prison.

Enter, on one side, **DUKE VINCENTIO** disguised as before; on the other, **ELBOW**, and Officers with **POMPEY**

ELBOW

Nay, if there be no remedy for it, but that you will needs buy and sell men and women like beasts, we shall have all the world drink **brown and white bastard**.

DUKE VINCENTIO

O heavens! what stuff is here

POMPEY

5 'Twas never merry world since, of two usuries, the

A lot depends on your ability to pull it off. Hurry over to Angelo. If he begs you to sleep with him tonight, promise to satisfy him. I'll go to Saint Luke's; poor Mariana is living there, in a country house. Arrange things with Angelo and come see me there, the sooner the better.

ISABELLA

Thank you for your help. Goodbye, good father.

They exit, in separate directions.

Act 3 Scene 2

The street outside the prison.

DUKE VINCENTIO, disguised as before, enters on one side. **ELBOW** and officers with **POMPEY** enter on the other.

ELBOW

No, but if you go on buying and selling men and women like beasts, everyone in the world will end up spawning bastards.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Oh, heavens! What nonsense is this?

POMPEY

merriest was put down, and the worser allowed by order of law a furred gown to keep him warm; and furred with fox and lamb-skins too, to signify, that craft, being richer than innocence, stands for the facing.

ELBOW

10 Come your way, sir. 'Bless you, good father friar.

DUKE VINCENTIO

And you, good brother father. What offence hath this man made you, sir?

ELBOW

Marry, sir, he hath offended the law: and, sir, we take him to be a thief too, sir; for we have found 15 upon him, sir, a strange picklock, which we have sent to the deputy.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Fie, sirrah! a bawd, a wicked bawd!
The evil that thou causest to be done,
That is thy means to live. Do thou but think
20 What 'tis to cram a maw or clothe a back
From such a filthy vice: say to thyself,
From their abominable and beastly touches

Life's become a lot less fun since the law took two crimes—prostitution and moneylending—and suppressed the one that was the most fun, while condoning the worse of the two. The thriving moneylender wraps himself in a warm fur coat, made of skins from the innocent lamb and trimmed in fur from the crafty fox, proving that craftiness is worth more than innocence.

ELBOW

Come along, sir. Bless you, good [father friar](#).

DUKE VINCENTIO

And you, good brother father. How has this man offended you, sir?

ELBOW

Actually, sir, he has offended the law. And, sir, we take him to be a thief too, sir, because we found on him, sir, a strange device for [picking locks](#), which we have sent to the deputy.

DUKE VINCENTIO

(to POMPEY) Shame, [sirrah](#)! A pimp, a wicked pimp! You support yourself by doing evil. Do you ever stop to think what it is to stuff your mouth or clothe your back from such a filthy vice? Say to yourself, I eat, dress myself, and live off abominable, beastly sex. Can you believe your way of life is a

I drink, I eat, array myself, and live.
Canst thou believe thy living is a life,
25 So stinkingly depending? Go mend, go mend.

POMPEY

Indeed, it does stink in some sort, sir; but yet,
sir, I would prove—

DUKE VINCENTIO

Nay, if the devil have given thee proofs for sin,
Thou wilt prove his. Take him to prison, officer:
30 Correction and instruction must both work
Ere this rude beast will profit.

ELBOW

He must before the deputy, sir; he has given him
warning: the deputy cannot abide a whoremaster: if
he be a whoremonger, and comes before him, he were
35 as good go a mile on his errand.

DUKE VINCENTIO

That we were all, as some would seem to be,
From our faults, as faults from seeming, free!

ELBOW

His neck will come to your waist'—a cord, sir.

POMPEY

life, when it's dependent on such stinking acts? Change your ways, change your ways.

POMPEY

Yes, it does stink in a way, sir; but, sir, I would prove—

DUKE VINCENTIO

No, if the devil has given you excuses for sin, you'll prove only that you belong to him. Take him to prison, officer. Punishment and religion must both be used on this crude beast before he improves.

ELBOW

He has to appear before the deputy, sir, who's already given him a warning. The deputy can't stand pimps, and if he is a pimp, and appears before him, he would be better off being anywhere but there.

DUKE VINCENTIO

If only we were all—as some of us seem to be—as free from sin as this pimp is from hypocrisy!

ELBOW

Like your waist, his neck will soon have a rope around it, sir.

POMPEY

I spy comfort; I cry bail. Here's a gentleman and a
40 friend of mine.

Enter LUCIO

LUCIO

How now, noble Pompey! What, at the wheels of
Caesar? art thou led in triumph? What, is there
none of Pygmalion's images, newly made woman, to be
had now, for putting the hand in the pocket and
45 extracting it clutch'd? What reply, ha? What
sayest thou to this tune, matter and method? Is't
not drowned i' the last rain, ha? What sayest
thou, Trot? Is the world as it was, man? Which is
the way? Is it sad, and few words? or how? The
50 trick of it?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Still thus, and thus; still worse!

LUCIO

How doth my dear morsel, thy mistress? Procures she
still, ha?

POMPEY

Troth, sir,
she hath eaten up all her beef, and she is herself in the tub .

I see help coming—and bail. Here's a gentleman and a
friend of mine.

LUCIO enters.

LUCIO

Hey there, noble Pompey! Oh dear, are you being paraded like
a prisoner-of-war after the victorious Caesar's chariot? What,
aren't there any more girls just turned women who can be had
for a handful of dollars? Ha, don't you have any answers? How
do you feel about the new regime? Puts quite a damper on
things, right? What do you say, old man? Hasn't the world
changed? What's your mood nowadays, a bit sad and silent?
Or how? What's the plan?

DUKE VINCENTIO

This is getting worse and worse.

LUCIO

How's my sweetheart, your boss-lady? Is she still a madam?

POMPEY

Truthfully, sir, she's worn out all her prostitutes, and is herself
getting treated for an STD.

LUCIO

55 Why, 'tis good; it is the right of it; it must be so: ever your fresh whore and your powdered bawd: an unshunned consequence; it must be so. Art going to prison, Pompey?

POMPEY

Yes, faith, sir.

LUCIO

60 Why, 'tis not amiss, Pompey. Farewell: go, say I sent thee thither. For debt, Pompey? or how?

ELBOW

For being a bawd, for being a bawd.

LUCIO

Well, then, imprison him: if imprisonment be the due of a bawd, why, 'tis his right: bawd is he
65 doubtless, and of antiquity too; bawd-born.
Farewell, good Pompey. Command me to the prison,
Pompey: you will turn good husband now, Pompey; you
will keep the house.

POMPEY

I hope, sir, your good worship will be my bail.

LUCIO**LUCIO**

That's right, that's the way it goes: your fresh-faced whore ages into a heavily made-up madam. It's unavoidable. Are you going to prison, Pompey?

POMPEY

I am indeed, sir.

LUCIO

Not a bad thing, Pompey. Goodbye. Go and say I sent you. For debt, Pompey? Or something else?

ELBOW

For being a pimp, for being a pimp.

LUCIO

Well, then, put him in jail: if imprisonment is the punishment for being a pimp, then he deserves it. He's undoubtedly a pimp, and has been for a long time. Born a pimp. Goodbye, good Pompey. Give my regards to prison. You'll be a good husband now, Pompey—you'll never leave home.

POMPEY

I hope, sir, you'll post bail for me.

LUCIO

70 No, indeed, will I not, Pompey; it is not the wear.
I will pray, Pompey, to increase your bondage: If
you take it not patiently, why, your mettle is the
more. Adieu, trusty Pompey. 'Bless you, friar.

DUKE VINCENTIO

And you.

LUCIO

75 Does Bridget paint still, Pompey, ha?

ELBOW

Come your ways, sir; come.

POMPEY

You will not bail me, then, sir?

LUCIO

Then, Pompey, nor now. What news abroad, friar?
what news?

ELBOW

80 Come your ways, sir; come.

LUCIO

Go to kennel, Pompey; go.

Exeunt ELBOW, POMPEY and Officers

No, I won't, Pompey. It's not in style now. I will pray, Pompey, to
increase your sentence. Show an iron will while you're in iron
chains. *Adieu*, Pompey. God bless you, friar.

DUKE VINCENTIO

And you.

LUCIO

Does Bridget still get dolled up, Pompey, ha?

ELBOW

Come along, sir, come.

POMPEY

You won't bail me out, then, sir?

LUCIO

Neither then, Pompey, nor now. What's happening, friar?
What's the news?

ELBOW

Come along, sir, come.

LUCIO

Off to the doghouse, Pompey. Go.

ELBOW, POMPEY, and officers exit.

What news, friar, of the duke?

DUKE VINCENTIO

I know none. Can you tell me of any?

LUCIO

Some say he is with the Emperor of Russia; other
85 some, he is in Rome: but where is he, think you?

DUKE VINCENTIO

I know not where; but wheresoever, I wish him well.

LUCIO

It was a mad fantastical trick of him to steal from
the state, and usurp the beggary he was never born
to. Lord Angelo dukes it well in his absence; he
90 puts transgression to 't.

DUKE VINCENTIO

He does well in 't.

LUCIO

A little more lenity to lechery would do no harm in
him: something too crabbed that way, friar.

DUKE VINCENTIO

It is too general a vice, and severity must cure it.

LUCIO

Any news, friar, of the duke?

DUKE VINCENTIO

I don't know anything. Can you tell me any news?

LUCIO

Some say he's with the emperor of Russia. Others say that he's
in Rome. Where do you think he is?

DUKE VINCENTIO

I don't know, but wherever he is, I wish him well.

LUCIO

It was a crazy whim of his to sneak away from the city and
pretend to be the commoner he was never born to be. Lord
Angelo runs things well in his absence—he's hard on criminals.

DUKE VINCENTIO

He does a good job of it.

LUCIO

It wouldn't hurt him to go a little easier on sex. There's
something too harsh in the way he's handling that, friar.

DUKE VINCENTIO

It is too widespread a vice. It needs a severe cure.

LUCIO

95 Yes, in good sooth, the vice is of a great kindred;
it is well allied: but it is impossible to extirp
it quite, friar, till eating and drinking be put
down. They say this Angelo was not made by man and
woman after this downright way of creation: is it
100 true, think you?

DUKE VINCENTIO

How should he be made, then?

LUCIO

Some report a sea-maid spawned him; some, that he
was begot between two stock-fishes. But it is
certain that when he makes water his urine is
105 congealed ice; that I know to be true: and he is a
motion generative; that's infallible.

DUKE VINCENTIO

You are pleasant, sir, and speak apace.

LUCIO

Why, what a ruthless thing is this in him, for the
rebellion of a codpiece to take away the life of a
110 man! Would the duke that is absent have done this?
Ere he would have hanged a man for the getting a
hundred bastards, he would have paid for the nursing a
a thousand: he had some feeling of the sport: he
knew the service, and that instructed him to mercy.

Yes, to tell the truth, this is a vice a lot of people practice. But it's impossible to stamp it out totally, friar. You'd have to stop people eating and drinking first. They say this Angelo wasn't the result of a normal act between a man and woman. Do you think that's true?

DUKE VINCENTIO

What was he the result of, then?

LUCIO

Some say a mermaid gave birth to him, some that he was
conceived by two dried codfish. But it's a fact that when he
pees, his urine is congealed ice. That I know to be true. And
he's an impotent puppet—that's certain.

DUKE VINCENTIO

You're a funny guy, sir, and speak freely.

LUCIO

Well, what a cruel thing for him to do, to take a man's life
because his penis rose up! Would the absent duke have done
something like this? Before he would've hanged a man for
fathering a hundred bastards, he would've paid for nursing a
thousand. He had some understanding of prostitution. He
knew the game, and that made him merciful.

DUKE VINCENTIO

115 I never heard the absent duke much detected for women; he was not inclined that way.

LUCIO

O, sir, you are deceived.

DUKE VINCENTIO

'Tis not possible.

LUCIO

Who, not the duke? yes, your beggar of fifty; and
120 his use was to put a ducat in her clack-dish: the duke had crotchets in him. He would be drunk too; that let me inform you.

DUKE VINCENTIO

You do him wrong, surely.

LUCIO

Sir, I was an inward of his. A shy fellow was the
125 duke: and I believe I know the cause of his withdrawing.

DUKE VINCENTIO

What, I prithee, might be the cause?

LUCIO**DUKE VINCENTIO**

I never heard the absent duke accused of womanizing. He wasn't inclined that way.

LUCIO

Oh, sir, you're wrong.

DUKE VINCENTIO

That's not possible.

LUCIO

Who, the duke? Yes, your fifty-year-old beggar-woman—he'd habitually make a deposit in her dish. The duke was a little kinky. He'd get drunk, too, let me tell you.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Surely, you're being unfair to him.

LUCIO

Sir, I was a close friend of his. The duke was a shy fellow, and I believe I know the reason for his sudden departure.

DUKE VINCENTIO

What, please tell me, was the reason?

LUCIO

No, pardon; 'tis a secret must be locked within the teeth and the lips: but this I can let you
130 understand, the greater file of the subject held the duke to be wise.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Wise! why, no question but he was.

LUCIO

A very superficial, ignorant, unweighing fellow.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Either this is the envy in you, folly, or mistaking:
135 the very stream of his life and the business he hath helmed must upon a warranted need give him a better proclamation. Let him be but testimonied in his own bringings-forth, and he shall appear to the envious a scholar, a statesman and a soldier.
140 Therefore you speak unskilfully: or if your knowledge be more it is much darkened in your malice.

LUCIO

Sir, I know him, and I love him.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Love talks with better knowledge, and knowledge with dearer love.

No, sorry. It's a secret that must stay locked in my mouth. But this I can tell you: the majority of his subjects thought the duke a wise man.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Wise! Well, there's no doubt that he was.

LUCIO

A very superficial, ignorant, thoughtless fellow.

DUKE VINCENTIO

You're either jealous, mad, or mistaken. The way he conducts his life and his role as a ruler by themselves must earn him a better reputation. Judge him by his public actions and even the envious would see him as a scholar, a statesman, and a soldier. So, you don't know what you're talking about. Or, if you do, you're spitefully trying to tarnish his name.

LUCIO

Sir, I know him, and I love him.

DUKE VINCENTIO

If you loved him you would know him better, and if you knew him better you would love him more.

LUCIO

145 Come, sir, I know what I know.

DUKE VINCENTIO

I can hardly believe that, since you know not what you speak. But, if ever the duke return, as our prayers are he may, let me desire you to make your answer before him. If it be honest you have spoke,
150 you have courage to maintain it: I am bound to call upon you; and, I pray you, your name?

LUCIO

Sir, my name is Lucio; well known to the duke.

DUKE VINCENTIO

He shall know you better, sir, if I may live to report you.

LUCIO

155 I fear you not.

DUKE VINCENTIO

O, you hope the duke will return no more; or you imagine me too unhurtful an opposite. But indeed I can do you little harm; you'll forswear this again.

LUCIO

I'll be hanged first: thou art deceived in me,

LUCIO

Look, sir, I know what I know.

DUKE VINCENTIO

I can hardly believe that, since you don't know what you're talking about. But, if the duke ever returns, as we pray he will, I challenge you to justify your comments in front of him. If you've spoken the truth, you should have the courage to defend it. It's my duty to summon you to testify. May I ask your name?

LUCIO

Sir, my name is Lucio, and it's well known to the duke.

DUKE VINCENTIO

He'll know you even better, sir, if I live to report you.

LUCIO

I'm not afraid of you.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Oh, you hope the duke will never come back, or you think I'm too weak an enemy. But I really can do you a little harm—you'll end up denying this.

LUCIO

160 friar. But no more of this. Canst thou tell if
Claudio die to-morrow or no?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Why should he die, sir?

LUCIO

Why? For filling a bottle with a tundish. I would
the duke we talk of were returned again: the
165 ungenitured agent will unpeople the province with
continency; sparrows must not build in his
house-eaves, because they are lecherous. The duke
yet would have dark deeds darkly answered; he would
never bring them to light: would he were returned!
170 Marry, this Claudio is condemned for untrussing.
Farewell, good friar: I prithee, pray for me. The
duke, I say to thee again, would eat mutton on
Fridays. He's not past it yet, and I say to thee,
he would mouth with a beggar, though she smelt brown
175 bread and garlic: say that I said so. Farewell.

Exit

DUKE VINCENTIO

No might nor greatness in mortality
Can censure 'scape; back-wounding calumny
The whitest virtue strikes. What king so strong

I'll be hanged first. You're wrong about me, friar. But forget all
this. Can you tell me if Claudio is to die tomorrow or not?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Why should he die, sir?

LUCIO

Why? For plugging a hole. I wish the duke were back again. His
sexless deputy's abstinence policy will depopulate the
province. Even sparrows can't nest on his roof,
[because they're lecherous](#)! The duke would have punished
sexual acts privately—he'd never publicly expose them. I wish
he were back! Claudio is condemned for getting undressed.
Goodbye, good friar. Please pray for me. I tell you again, the
duke was no choir boy— [he would eat mutton on Fridays](#). He's
not past it yet, and I tell you, he'd French-kiss a beggar, even if
she smelled of moldy bread and garlic. Say that I said so.
Goodbye.

He exits.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Neither political power nor noble character can escape
criticism; even the most virtuous person can be stabbed in the

Can tie the gall up in the slanderous tongue?

180 But who comes here?

Enter **ESCALUS**, Provost, and Officers with **MISTRESS**

OVERDONE

ESCALUS

Go; away with her to prison!

MISTRESS OVERDONE

Good my lord, be good to me; your honour is accounted
a merciful man; good my lord.

ESCALUS

Double and treble admonition, and still forfeit in
185 the same kind! This would make mercy swear and play
the tyrant.

PROVOST

A bawd of eleven years' continuance, may it please
your honour.

MISTRESS OVERDONE

My lord, this is one Lucio's information against me.
190 Mistress Kate Keepdown was with child by him in the
duke's time; he promised her marriage: his child
is a year and a quarter old, come Philip and Jacob:

back by slurs. What king is so strong he can bottle up the
poison of a slandering tongue? But who's coming now?

ESCALUS, the Provost, and officers enter with MISTRESS

OVERDONE.

ESCALUS

Go on, take her to prison!

MISTRESS OVERDONE

My good lord, be good to me. Your honor is said to be that of a
merciful man, my good lord.

ESCALUS

You've been warned two, three times, and you're still
committing the same crime! This is enough to turn mercy itself
into a cursing tyrant.

PROVOST

A madam for eleven years, your honor.

MISTRESS OVERDONE

My lord, this is Lucio's accusation against me. He got Miss Kate
Keepdown pregnant, back in the days when the duke was still
here, and he promised to marry her. Now his child will be
fifteen months old on May Day. I kept the kid myself, and now
see how he goes out of his way to abuse me!

I have kept it myself; and see how he goes about to abuse me!

ESCALUS

That fellow is a fellow of much licence: let him be
195 called before us. Away with her to prison! Go to;
no more words.

Exeunt Officers with MISTRESS OVERDONE

Provost, my brother Angelo will not be altered;
Claudio must die to-morrow: let him be furnished
with divines, and have all charitable preparation.
200 if my brother wrought by my pity, it should not be
so with him.

PROVOST

So please you, this friar hath been with him, and
advised him for the entertainment of death.

ESCALUS

Good even, good father.

DUKE VINCENTIO

205 Bliss and goodness on you!

ESCALUS

Of whence are you?

ESCALUS

That fellow is a dangerous fellow. Bring him before me. Take
her away to prison! No more talking.

Officers exit with MISTRESS OVERDONE.

Provost, my colleague Angelo won't change his mind—Claudio
must die tomorrow. Furnish him with priests, to give him
spiritual consolation. If my colleague possessed my sense of
pity, this wouldn't be happening.

PROVOST

This friar's been with him, and helped him prepare for death.

ESCALUS

Good evening, good father.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Bliss and goodness to you!

ESCALUS

Where are you from?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Not of this country, though my chance is now
To use it for my time: I am a brother
Of gracious order, late come from the See

210 In special business from his holiness.

ESCALUS

What news abroad i' the world?

DUKE VINCENTIO

None, but that there is so great a fever on
goodness, that the dissolution of it must cure it:
novelty is only in request; and it is as dangerous
215 to be aged in any kind of course, as it is virtuous
to be inconstant in any undertaking. There is scarce
truth enough alive to make societies secure; but
security enough to make fellowships accurst: much
upon this riddle runs the wisdom of the world. This
220 news is old enough, yet it is every day's news. I
pray you, sir, of what disposition was the duke?

ESCALUS

One that, above all other strifes, contended
especially to know himself.

DUKE VINCENTIO

What pleasure was he given to?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Not from this country, though I happen to be here for the time
being. I belong to a holy brotherhood, and have just come from
Rome, on special business from the Vatican.

ESCALUS

What's the news from abroad?

DUKE VINCENTIO

None, except that goodness is so sick that only death can cure
it. People only want the latest thing, and it's as dangerous to be
faithful as it is virtuous to be promiscuous. There's barely
enough honesty left for it to be safe to get involved with
people, but there's enough blind trust to doom partnerships.
The wisdom of the world runs on paradoxes like this. It's old
news, but everyday news. Tell me, sir, what sort of man was
the duke?

ESCALUS

Someone who, above everything else, truly wanted to know
himself.

DUKE VINCENTIO

What sort of things did he enjoy?

ESCALUS

225 Rather rejoicing to see another merry, than merry at any thing which professed to make him rejoice: a gentleman of all temperance. But leave we him to his events, with a prayer they may prove prosperous; and let me desire to know how you find Claudio
230 prepared. I am made to understand that you have lent him visitation.

DUKE VINCENTIO

He professes to have received no sinister measure from his judge, but most willingly humbles himself to the determination of justice: yet had he framed
235 to himself, by the instruction of his frailty, many deceiving promises of life; which I by my good leisure have discredited to him, and now is he resolved to die.

ESCALUS

You have paid the heavens your function, and the
240 prisoner the very debt of your calling. I have laboured for the poor gentleman to the extremest shore of my modesty: but my brother justice have I found so severe, that he hath forced me to tell him he is indeed Justice.

DUKE VINCENTIO

ESCALUS

He enjoyed seeing someone else happy more than doing something that made himself happy—an even-tempered man. But let's leave him to his affairs, with a prayer that they'll be prosperous, and tell me how Claudio is. I understand you've visited him.

DUKE VINCENTIO

He claims to have received no unfair treatment from his judge, but willingly yields to the law's verdict. Out of human weakness, he'd formed many deceptive hopes about a reprieve. But gradually I showed him these made no sense, and now he is ready to die.

ESCALUS

You have fulfilled your duty to both God and the prisoner. I pleaded for the poor man as much as I could, without giving offense, but my fellow judge is so severe, I swear, he's like Justice itself.

DUKE VINCENTIO

245 If his own life answer the straitness of his proceeding, it shall become him well; wherein if he chance to fail, he hath sentenced himself.

ESCALUS

I am going to visit the prisoner. Fare you well.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Peace be with you!

Exeunt ESCALUS and Provost

250 He who the sword of heaven will bear
Should be as holy as severe;
Pattern in himself to know,
Grace to stand, and virtue go;
More nor less to others paying
255 Than by self-offences weighing.

Shame to him whose cruel striking
Kills for faults of his own liking!
Twice treble shame on Angelo,
To weed my vice and let his grow!

260 O, what may man within him hide,
Though angel on the outward side!
How may likeness made in crimes,
Making practise on the times,
To draw with idle spiders' strings

If his own behavior matches the strictness of his judgments, it's to his credit. But if he slips, he's written his own sentence.

ESCALUS

I'm going to visit the prisoner. Goodbye.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Peace be with you!

ESCALUS and the Provost exit.

(to himself) He who wants to be a ruler and enact heaven's justice should be as holy as he is severe. He should find in himself a model of proper conduct, the grace to stand firm, and the strength to go forward, punishing others no more or less than he'd punish his own sins. Shame on him who cruelly strikes and kills others for the very faults he possesses! Shame on Angelo six times over, for weeding out my vice while nurturing his own! Oh, what evil an angelic-looking man can hide in himself! How this seemingly virtuous behavior, born out of sin, can deceive everyone! It's like a spider web that traps small sins like small insects, but breaks when anything large and heavy touches it. I must combat vice with cunning. Tonight Angelo will sleep with his rejected, former fiancée. By deceit, the deceiver will be forced to pay for his wrongful demands, and fulfill his old contract.

265 Most ponderous and substantial things!

Craft against vice I must apply:

With Angelo to-night shall lie

His old betrothed but despised;

So disguise shall, by the disguised,

270 Pay with falsehood false exacting,

And perform an old contracting.

Exit

The moated grange at ST. LUKE's.

Enter **MARIANA** and a Boy

BOY

(sings) Take, O, take those lips away,

That so sweetly were forsworn;

And those eyes, the break of day,

Lights that do mislead the morn:

5 But my kisses bring again, bring again;

Seals of love, but sealed in vain, sealed in vain.

MARIANA

Break off thy song, and haste thee quick away:

Here comes a man of comfort, whose advice

Hath often still'd my brawling discontent.

He exits.

Act 4 Scene 1

The moated grange house at ST. LUKE's.

MARIANA and a Boy enter.

BOY

(singing) Take, oh take those lips away, that swore such sweet lies,

and those eyes, which trick the morning by shining bright as the sun at dawn. But give back, give back my kisses, which seal my love, but seal it in vain, seal it in vain.

MARIANA

Stop singing, and leave, quickly. Here comes a man whose advice has often calmed me down.

Exit Boy

Enter DUKE VINCENTIO disguised as before

10 I cry you mercy, sir; and well could wish
You had not found me here so musical:
Let me excuse me, and believe me so,
My mirth it much displeased, but pleased my woe.

DUKE VINCENTIO

'Tis good; though music oft hath such a charm
15 To make bad good, and good provoke to harm.

I pray, you, tell me, hath any body inquired
for me here to-day? much upon this time have
I promised here to meet.

MARIANA

You have not been inquired after:
20 I have sat here all day.

Enter ISABELLA

DUKE VINCENTIO

I do constantly believe you. The time is come even
now. I shall crave your forbearance a little: may
be I will call upon you anon, for some advantage to yourself.

MARIANA

The Boy exits.

DUKE VINCENTIO enters, disguised as a friar.

I beg your pardon, sir. I wish you hadn't found me listening to
music. Please excuse me, and believe me, it drove away my
joy and nurtured my sorrow.

DUKE VINCENTIO

That's good, though music often has a magical power to make
the bad seem good and encourage good people to
misbehave. Please tell me, has anybody been asking for me
here today? I promised to meet someone here about this time.

MARIANA

No one's been asking for you. I've been sitting here all day.

ISABELLA enters.

DUKE VINCENTIO

I believe you; she's here now. May I ask you to leave for a little
while? I'll be with you shortly, and it'll be to your advantage.

MARIANA

I am always bound to you.

Exit

DUKE VINCENTIO

25 Very well met, and well come.

What is the news from this good deputy?

ISABELLA

He hath a garden circummured with brick,
Whose western side is with a vineyard back'd;
And to that vineyard is a planched gate,
30 That makes his opening with this bigger key:
This other doth command a little door
Which from the vineyard to the garden leads;
There have I made my promise
Upon the heavy middle of the night
35 To call upon him.

DUKE VINCENTIO

But shall you on your knowledge find this way?

ISABELLA

I have ta'en a due and wary note upon't:
With whispering and most guilty diligence,
In action all of precept, he did show me
40 The way twice o'er.

I'm always grateful to you.

She exits.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Welcome—and perfect timing. What's the news from our favorite deputy?

ISABELLA

He has a garden surrounded by a brick wall, whose western side is backed by a vineyard. Leading to that vineyard is a gate of wooden planks that you open with this larger key. This other key opens a little door that leads from the vineyard to the garden. I've promised to meet him there, in the dark middle of the night.

DUKE VINCENTIO

But do you know how to find the way there?

ISABELLA

I've noted it carefully—he gave me the directions twice, whispering the details with care and using gestures to explain.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Are there no other tokens
Between you 'greed concerning her observance?

ISABELLA

No, none, but only a repair i' the dark;
And that I have possess'd him my most stay
45 Can be but brief; for I have made him know
I have a servant comes with me along,
That stays upon me, whose persuasion is
I come about my brother.

DUKE VINCENTIO

'Tis well borne up.
50 I have not yet made known to Mariana
A word of this. What, ho! within! come forth!

Re-enter MARIANA

I pray you, be acquainted with this maid;
She comes to do you good.

ISABELLA

I do desire the like.

DUKE VINCENTIO

55 Do you persuade yourself that I respect you?

MARIANA**DUKE VINCENTIO**

Are there any other agreed-on signals she has to give?

ISABELLA

No, none, only a visit in the dark. And I've let him know I can only stay a short time, because I told him a servant would be waiting for me, under the pretense that I was coming about my brother.

DUKE VINCENTIO

You've handled it well. I haven't told Mariana a word of this yet.
Hey, you in there! Come here!

MARIANA re-enters.

(to MARIANA) Please, let me introduce you to this girl. She's here to help you.

ISABELLA

That's what I want to do.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Do you believe that I've got your best interests at heart?

MARIANA

Good friar, I know you do, and have found it.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Take, then, this your companion by the hand,
Who hath a story ready for your ear.
I shall attend your leisure: but make haste;
60 The vaporous night approaches.

MARIANA

Will't please you walk aside?

Exeunt MARIANA and ISABELLA

DUKE VINCENTIO

O place and greatness! millions of false eyes
Are stuck upon thee: volumes of report
Run with these false and most contrarious quests
65 Upon thy doings: thousand escapes of wit
Make thee the father of their idle dreams
And rack thee in their fancies.

Re-enter MARIANA and ISABELLA

Welcome, how agreed?

ISABELLA

She'll take the enterprise upon her, father,
70 If you advise it.

Good friar, I know you do, and that you've found a way to help.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Then take the hand of your new friend, who has a tale to tell
you. I'll wait for you until you're ready, but hurry— night's falling.

MARIANA

Will you walk with me?

MARIANA and ISABELLA exit.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Oh, you people of high rank! Millions of treacherous eyes
are fixed on you, accompanied by a mass of hostile rumors
that follow everything you do. A thousand imaginations make
you the source of their silly fantasies and torture you with their
delusions.

MARIANA and ISABELLA re-enter.

Welcome back. What did you decide?

ISABELLA

She'll do it, father, if you recommend it.

DUKE VINCENTIO

It is not my consent,
But my entreaty too.

ISABELLA

Little have you to say
When you depart from him, but, soft and low,
75 'Remember now my brother.'

MARIANA

Fear me not.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Nor, gentle daughter, fear you not at all.
He is your husband on a pre-contract:
To bring you thus together, 'tis no sin,
80 Sith that the justice of your title to him
Doth flourish the deceit. Come, let us go:
Our corn's to reap, for yet our tithe's to sow.

Exeunt

A room in the prison.

Enter Provost and POMPEY

PROVOST

DUKE VINCENTIO

I don't just recommend it. I beg her to do it.

ISABELLA

When you leave him, all you have to do is say softly, "Now remember my brother."

MARIANA

Don't worry about me.

DUKE VINCENTIO

And, gentle daughter, don't worry for yourself. He is your husband-to-be, so it's no sin for you two to sleep together—your valid claim as his wife allows the deception. Come on, let's go. We have to sow the seeds before we can reap the harvest.

They exit.

Act 4 Scene 2

A room in the prison.

The Provost and POMPEY enter.

PROVOST

Come hither, sirrah. Can you cut off a man's head?

POMPEY

If the man be a bachelor, sir, I can; but if he be a married man, he's his [wife's head](#), and I can never cut off a woman's head.

PROVOST

5 Come, sir, leave me your snatches, and yield me a direct answer. To-morrow morning are to die Claudio and Barnardine. Here is in our prison a common executioner, who in his office lacks a helper: if you will take it on you to assist him, it shall
10 redeem you from your gyves; if not, you shall have your full time of imprisonment and your deliverance with an unpitied whipping, for you have been a notorious bawd.

POMPEY

Sir, I have been an unlawful bawd time out of mind;
15 but yet I will be content to be a lawful hangman. I would be glad to receive some instruction from my fellow partner.

PROVOST

What, ho! Abhorson! Where's Abhorson, there?

Come here, you. Can you cut off a man's head?

POMPEY

If the man's a bachelor, sir, I can. But if he's a married man, he's also his wife's head, and I can never cut off a woman's head.

PROVOST

Come on, sir, spare me your jokes and give me a straight answer. Claudio and Barnardine are to die tomorrow morning. Here in our prison we have a public executioner, who needs a helper. If you'll take on the job of assisting him, it'll free you from your chains. If you don't, you'll have to serve your full sentence, with a fierce whipping before you're released because you've been a notorious pimp.

POMPEY

Sir, I've been an illegal pimp for longer than I can remember, but I'll be happy to be a legal hangman. I'd be glad for my new partner to teach me.

PROVOST

Hey, [Abhorson](#)! Where are you, Abhorson?

ABHORSON (the executioner) enters.

Enter ABHORSON

ABHORSON

Do you call, sir?

PROVOST

20 Sirrah, here's a fellow will help you to-morrow in your execution. If you think it meet, compound with him by the year, and let him abide here with you; if not, use him for the present and dismiss him. He cannot plead his estimation with you; he hath been a bawd.

ABHORSON

25 A bawd, sir? fie upon him! he will discredit our mystery.

PROVOST

Go to, sir; you weigh equally; a feather will turn the scale.

Exit

POMPEY

Pray, sir, by your good favour,—for surely, sir, a good favour you have, but that you have a hanging 30 look,—do you call, sir, your occupation a mystery?

ABHORSON

Ay, sir; a mystery

ABHORSON

Did you call, sir?

PROVOST

Here's a fellow to help you with tomorrow's executions. If he works out, settle on an annual salary and let him stay here with you. If he doesn't, use him just for now and then fire him. He can't claim to be too good for the work since he's been a pimp.

ABHORSON

A pimp, sir? To hell with him! He'll discredit our profession.

PROVOST

Go on, sir. You two are worth the same. No more than a featherweight's difference, anyway.

He exits.

POMPEY

Sir, would you please—for you do have a pleasing face, except for your hanging expression—tell me if you call your job a profession?

ABHORSON

Yes, sir, a profession.

POMPEY

Painting, sir, I have heard say, is a mystery; and
your whores, sir, being members of my occupation,
using painting, do prove my occupation a mystery:
35 but what mystery there should be in hanging, if I
should be hanged, I cannot imagine.

ABHORSON

Sir, it is a mystery.

POMPEY

Proof?

ABHORSON

Every true man's apparel fits your thief: if it be
40 too little for your thief, your true man thinks it
big enough; if it be too big for your thief, your
thief thinks it little enough: so every true man's
apparel fits your thief.

Re-enter Provost

PROVOST

Are you agreed?

POMPEY

45 Sir, I will serve him; for I do find your hangman is

POMPEY

I've heard it said that painting, sir, is a profession, and since
whores—who are in my field—paint their faces, they prove my
occupation is a profession. But I'll be hanged if I can imagine
how hanging is a profession.

ABHORSON

Sir, it is a profession.

POMPEY

Can you prove it?

ABHORSON

A thief steals and puts on the clothes of an honest man. If the
thief thinks the clothes don't make him seem honest enough, a
truly honest man will think that's appropriate. If the thief thinks
the clothes make him seem extra honest, then the thief thinks
the disguise fits just right. So someone is always happy with
the way the disguise works for the thief.

The Provost re-enters.

PROVOST

Have you reached an agreement?

POMPEY

a more penitent trade than your bawd; he doth oftener ask forgiveness.

PROVOST

You, sirrah, provide your block and your axe to-morrow four o'clock.

ABHORSON

50 Come on, bawd; I will instruct thee in my trade; follow.

POMPEY

I do desire to learn, sir; and I hope, if you have occasion to use me for your own turn, you shall find me yare; for truly, sir, for your kindness I owe you a good turn.

POMPEY and ABHORSON exit.

PROVOST

55 Call hither Barnardine and Claudio:
The one has my pity; not a jot the other,
Being a murderer, though he were my brother.

Enter CLAUDIO

Look, here's the warrant, Claudio, for thy death:
'Tis now dead midnight, and by eight to-morrow
60 Thou must be made immortal. Where's Barnardine?

Sir, I'll work for him, because I think a hangman's job is a sorrier one than a pimp's— [he asks forgiveness more often](#).

PROVOST

You, fellow, have your block and your axe ready tomorrow at four o'clock.

ABHORSON

Come on, pimp, I'll show you the ropes. Follow me.

POMPEY

I want to learn, sir. And I hope, if you ever get the chance to use me for your own execution, you'll find me ready. Because, really, I owe you a good turn for your kindness.

POMPEY and ABHORSON exit.

PROVOST

Call Barnardine and Claudio here. I pity one, but not the other, even if he were my brother, as he's a murderer.

CLAUDIO enters.

Look, Claudio, here's your death warrant. It's now dead midnight, and by 8 a.m. tomorrow you must be laid to eternal rest. Where's Barnardine?

CLAUDIO

As fast lock'd up in sleep as guiltless labour
When it lies starkly in the traveller's bones:
He will not wake.

PROVOST

Who can do good on him?
65 Well, go, prepare yourself.

Knocking within

But, hark, what noise?
Heaven give your spirits comfort!

Exit CLAUDIO

By and by.
I hope it is some pardon or reprieve
70 For the most gentle Claudio.

Enter DUKE VINCENTIO disguised as before

Welcome father.

DUKE VINCENTIO

The best and wholesomest spirits of the night
Envelope you, good Provost! Who call'd here of late?

CLAUDIO

As fast asleep as the most innocent of exhausted laborers. He won't wake up.

PROVOST

Who could do him any good, anyway? Well, go, prepare yourself.
(*knocking is heard offstage*)

What's that noise? (*to Claudio*) Heaven give your spirits comfort!

CLAUDIO exits.

In a minute. I hope it's some pardon or reprieve for gentle Claudio.

DUKE VINCENTIO enters, disguised as a friar.

Welcome, father.

DUKE VINCENTIO

The best, most wholesome night spirits surround you, good Provost! Who's been here lately?

PROVOST

None, since the curfew rung.

DUKE VINCENTIO

75 Not Isabel?

PROVOST

No.

DUKE VINCENTIO

They will, then, ere't be long.

PROVOST

What comfort is for Claudio?

DUKE VINCENTIO

There's some in hope.

PROVOST

80 It is a bitter deputy.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Not so, not so; his life is parallel'd
Even with the stroke and line of his great justice:
He doth with holy abstinence subdue
That in himself which he spurs on his power
85 To qualify in others: were he meal'd with that
Which he corrects, then were he tyrannous;
But this being so, he's just.

PROVOST

No one, since the [curfew bell](#) rang.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Not Isabel?

PROVOST

No.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Someone will be, then, before long.

PROVOST

Is there any news to give comfort to Claudio?

DUKE VINCENTIO

There's comfort in hope.

PROVOST

Angelo's a cruel deputy.

DUKE VINCENTIO

No, no. His life parallels the same straight line that his mighty justice draws. With religious restraint, he suppresses in himself the same impulses he persecutes in others. If he were stained with the sort of sins he punishes, then he'd be a tyrant. But because he's virtuous, he's fair.

(knocking is heard offstage)

Knocking within

Now are they come.

Exit Provost

This is a gentle provost: seldom when
90 The steeled gaoler is the friend of men.

Knocking within

How now! what noise? That spirit's possessed with haste
That wounds the unsisting postern with these strokes.

Re-enter Provost

PROVOST

There he must stay until the officer
Arise to let him in: he is call'd up.

DUKE VINCENTIO

95 Have you no countermand for Claudio yet,
But he must die to-morrow?

PROVOST

None, sir, none.

DUKE VINCENTIO

They're here.

The Provost exits.

This provost is a nice man. It's rare that a hardened jailer has sympathy for his fellow men.

(*knocking is heard offstage*)

What is that noise? That messenger's so impatient he's going to hurt that poor door with his knocking.

The Provost re-enters.

PROVOST

He's stuck there until the officer at the gate wakes up to let him in. The officer's up now.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Haven't you received any order yet countermanding Claudio's execution tomorrow?

PROVOST

None, sir, none.

DUKE VINCENTIO

As near the dawning, provost, as it is,
You shall hear more ere morning.

PROVOST

100 Happily
You something know; yet I believe there comes
No countermand; no such example have we:
Besides, upon the very siege of justice
Lord Angelo hath to the public ear
105 Profess'd the contrary.

Enter a Messenger

This is his lordship's man.

DUKE VINCENTIO

And here comes Claudio's pardon.

MESSENGER

(Giving a paper)
My lord hath sent you this note; and by me this
110 further charge, that you swerve not from the
smallest article of it, neither in time, matter, or
other circumstance. Good morrow; for, as I take it,
it is almost day.

PROVOST

I shall obey him.

Even though it's almost dawn, provost, you'll have news before morning.

PROVOST

Perhaps you know something. But I don't think any reprieve is coming. There's no precedent for it. Besides, Lord Angelo declared the opposite, in public, from the judge's bench.

A Messenger enters.

This is his lordship's servant.

DUKE VINCENTIO

And here comes Claudio's pardon.

MESSENGER

(presenting a paper) My lord has sent you this note, and charged me to tell you not to swerve from the smallest item in it—not the time, details, or anything else. Good morning, since I gather it's almost morning.

PROVOST

I will obey him.

Exit Messenger

DUKE VINCENTIO

115 (Aside) This is his pardon, purchased by such sin
For which the pardoner himself is in.
Hence hath offence his quick celerity,
When it is born in high authority:
When vice makes mercy, mercy's so extended,
120 That for the fault's love is the offender friended.
Now, sir, what news?

PROVOST

I told you. Lord Angelo, belike thinking me remiss
in mine office, awakens me with this unwonted
putting-on; methinks strangely, for he hath not used it before.

DUKE VINCENTIO

125 Pray you, let's hear.

PROVOST

(Reads)
'Whatsoever you may hear to the contrary, let
Claudio be executed by four of the clock; and in the
afternoon Barnardine: for my better satisfaction,
130 let me have Claudio's head sent me by five. Let
this be duly performed; with a thought that more
depends on it than we must yet deliver. Thus fail

The Messenger exits.

DUKE VINCENTIO

(*to himself*) This is his pardon, bought by the same sin Angelo
committed. Crimes spread quickly when those in power
perpetrate them as well. When evildoers extend mercy, they
widen mercy's grasp, pardoning other sinners because they
love the sin. Now, sir, what's the news?

PROVOST

I told you. Lord Angelo, thinking me careless in my duties
maybe, is putting unusual pressure on me. It's strange—he's
never done this before.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Please, let's hear the letter.

PROVOST

(reads) "Whatever you may hear to the contrary, have
Claudio executed by four o'clock, and Barnardine in the
afternoon. Reassure me by sending me Claudio's head by five
o'clock. Be sure you do it, and be aware that more depends on
it than I can reveal at this time. Don't fail to do your duty, or you
will be held accountable." What do you say to this, sir?

not to do your office, as you will answer it at your peril.'

What say you to this, sir?

DUKE VINCENTIO

135 What is that Barnardine who is to be executed in the afternoon?

PROVOST

A Bohemian born, but here nursed un and bred; one that is a prisoner nine years old.

DUKE VINCENTIO

How came it that the absent duke had not either
140 delivered him to his liberty or executed him? I have heard it was ever his manner to do so.

PROVOST

His friends still wrought reprieves for him: and, indeed, his fact, till now in the government of Lord Angelo, came not to an undoubtful proof.

DUKE VINCENTIO

145 It is now apparent?

PROVOST

Most manifest, and not denied by himself.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Hath he born himself penitently in prison? how

DUKE VINCENTIO

Who is this Barnardine who's to be executed in the afternoon?

PROVOST

He was born in Bohemia, but raised here. He's been a prisoner for the last nine years.

DUKE VINCENTIO

How did it happen that the absent duke neither freed him nor executed him? I've heard he usually does one or the other.

PROVOST

Barnardine's friends kept getting him reprieves. And there was no clear evidence that he was actually guilty, until now, when Angelo came to power.

DUKE VINCENTIO

It's clear now?

PROVOST

Very clear, and he doesn't deny it himself.

DUKE VINCENTIO

seems he to be touched?

PROVOST

A man that apprehends death no more dreadfully but
150 as a drunken sleep; careless, reckless, and fearless
of what's past, present, or to come; insensible of
mortality, and desperately mortal.

DUKE VINCENTIO

He wants advice.

PROVOST

He will hear none: he hath evermore had the liberty
155 of the prison; give him leave to escape hence, he
would not: drunk many times a day, if not many days
entirely drunk. We have very oft awaked him, as if
to carry him to execution, and showed him a seeming
warrant for it: it hath not moved him at all.

DUKE VINCENTIO

160 More of him anon. There is written in your brow,
provost, honesty and constancy: if I read it not
truly, my ancient skill beguiles me; but, in the
boldness of my cunning, I will lay myself in hazard.
Claudio, whom here you have warrant to execute, is
165 no greater forfeit to the law than Angelo who hath
sentenced him. To make you understand this in a

Has he shown remorse while in prison? What effect has it had on him?

PROVOST

He's a man who fears death as no worse than a drunken sleep. He's careless, reckless, and fearless of the past, present, or future. He's unaware of the concept of death, and desperately clinging to life.

DUKE VINCENTIO

He needs counseling.

PROVOST

He won't listen to any. He's always had the freedom to go anywhere inside the prison. If you gave him a chance to escape, he wouldn't run. He's drunk many times a day, or spends many days entirely drunk. Often, we've woken him up, as if to take him to be executed, and shown him a pretend warrant. It's never affected him at all.

DUKE VINCENTIO

More of him soon. Provost, I see honesty and loyalty in your face. If I'm wrong, my old skill at reading people deceives me, but because I'm confident of my ability, I'll take a chance. Claudio, whom you have a warrant to execute, deserves to die no more than Angelo, who sentenced him. I can clearly demonstrate this, but I need four days, so I'm going to ask you to do me an immediate and dangerous favor.

manifested effect, I crave but four days' respite;
for the which you are to do me both a present and a
dangerous courtesy.

PROVOST

170 Pray, sir, in what?

DUKE VINCENTIO

In the delaying death.

PROVOST

A lack, how may I do it, having the hour limited,
and an express command, under penalty, to deliver
his head in the view of Angelo? I may make my case
175 as Claudio's, to cross this in the smallest.

DUKE VINCENTIO

By the vow of mine order I warrant you, if my
instructions may be your guide. Let this Barnardine
be this morning executed, and his head born to Angelo.

PROVOST

Angelo hath seen them both, and will discover the favour.

DUKE VINCENTIO

180 O, death's a great disguiser; and you may add to it.
Shave the head, and tie the beard; and say it was
the desire of the penitent to be so bared before his

PROVOST

What is it, sir?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Delay the death.

PROVOST

Sorry, but how can I, with the time fixed and an explicit
command to deliver his head to Angelo, at risk of penalty? I'll
find myself in Claudio's shoes if I swerve from this in even the
smallest way.

DUKE VINCENTIO

By my holy vows, I guarantee your safety if you follow my
instructions. Execute this Barnardine this morning, and take his
head to Angelo.

PROVOST

Angelo's seen both of them, and will recognize the face.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Oh, death's a great disguiser, and you can help disguise him
more. Shave his head and trim his beard, and say it was the
prisoner's request to be shaved before his death. You know

death: you know the course is common. If any thing
fall to you upon this, more than thanks and good
185 fortune, by the saint whom I profess, I will plead
against it with my life.

PROVOST

Pardon me, good father; it is against my oath.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Were you sworn to the duke, or to the deputy?

PROVOST

To him, and to his substitutes.

DUKE VINCENTIO

190 You will think you have made no offence, if the duke
avouch the justice of your dealing?

PROVOST

But what likelihood is in that?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Not a resemblance, but a certainty. Yet since I see
you fearful, that neither my coat, integrity, nor
195 persuasion can with ease attempt you, I will go
further than I meant, to pluck all fears out of you.
Look you, sir, here is the hand and seal of the
duke: you know the character, I doubt not; and the

that's a common thing. If anything happens to you because of
this—aside from thanks and good fortune —by the patron saint
of my brotherhood, I'll plead against it with my life.

PROVOST

Forgive me, good father. It's against my oath.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Did you swear allegiance to the duke, or to the deputy?

PROVOST

To him, and to his representatives.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Will you think you've done nothing wrong if the duke vouches
for the justice of your action?

PROVOST

But how likely is that?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Not a possibility, but a certainty. Yet since I see
you're afraid, that neither my religious robes, integrity, nor
arguments can easily persuade you, I'll go
farther than I meant to, to dispel all your fears. (*displays a letter*)
Look, sir, here's the duke's handwriting and seal. You recognize
them both, I'm sure.

signet is not strange to you.

PROVOST

200 I know them both.

DUKE VINCENTIO

The contents of this is the return of the duke: you shall anon over-read it at your pleasure; where you shall find, within these two days he will be here.

This is a thing that Angelo knows not; for he this
205 very day receives letters of strange tenor;
perchance of the duke's death; perchance entering
into some monastery; but, by chance, nothing of what
is writ. Look, the unfolding star calls up the
shepherd. Put not yourself into amazement how these
210 things should be: all difficulties are but easy
when they are known. Call your executioner, and off
with Barnardine's head: I will give him a present
shrift and advise him for a better place. Yet you
are amazed; but this shall absolutely resolve you.
215 Come away; it is almost clear dawn.

Exeunt

Another room in the same.

Enter POMPEY

PROVOST

I know them both.

DUKE VINCENTIO

This letter's contents describe the duke's return; you can read it over at your leisure, and you'll learn that he'll be here in two days. Angelo doesn't know this, since today he'll be getting some letters with strange news, maybe about the duke's death, maybe about him entering some monastery—but nothing about what's written here. Look, the morning star is out. Don't be confused by all this. Everything makes sense after it's been done. Call your executioner, and off with Barnardine's head. I'll give him confession, and prepare him for a better place. You're still stunned, but this absolutely will explain everything to you. Let's go, it's almost dawn.

They exit.

Act 4 Scene 3

Another room in the prison.

POMPEY enters.

POMPEY

I am as well acquainted here as I was in our house
of profession: one would think it were Mistress
Overdone's own house, for here be many of her old
customers. First, here's young Master Rash; he's in
5 for a commodity of brown paper and old ginger,
ninescore and seventeen pounds; of which he made
five marks, ready money: marry, then ginger was not
much in request, for the old women were all dead.
Then is there here one Master Caper, at the suit of
10 Master Three-pile the mercer, for some four suits of
peach-coloured satin, which now peaches him a
beggar. Then have we here young Dizzy, and young
Master Deep-vow, and Master Copperspur, and Master
Starve-lackey the rapier and dagger man, and young
15 Drop-heir that killed lusty Pudding, and Master
Forthlight the tilter, and brave Master Shooty the
great traveller, and wild Half-can that stabbed
Pots, and, I think, forty more; all great doers in
our trade, and are now 'for the Lord's sake.'

Enter ABHORSON

ABHORSON

20 Sirrah, bring Barnardine hither.

POMPEY

I've got as many friends here as I did back at the brothel. You'd
think it were Mistress Overdone's very own house, so many of
her old customers are here. First, here's young Mister Hasty;
he's in for debt, having paid 197 pounds for some coarse brown
paper and old ginger candy, and making back only three
pounds selling it. [Ginger](#) wasn't much in demand, because the
old ladies were all dead. Then there's one Mister Pirouette,
defendant in a suit about four suits, brought by Mister Thick
Velvet, the textile merchant. He's being impeached over
peach-colored satin. Then we've also got young Ditsy, and
young Mister Cross-My-Heart, and Mister Cubic Zirconia and
Mister Cheapskate, armed to fight duels, and young Kill-Heir
who murdered robust Stuffed-Guts, and Mister Forward-Thrust
the fighter, and dressed-to-kill Mister Shoe-Buckle, the world-
traveler, and wild Half-Pint who stabbed Pots, and, I think, forty
more gents—all great clients of our business, who now sing
that old prison refrain, "Give us food for the Lord's sake."

ABHORSON enters.

ABHORSON

You there, bring Barnardine here.

POMPEY

Master Barnardine! you must rise and be hanged.

Master Barnardine!

ABHORSON

What, ho, Barnardine!

BARNARDINE

(Within) A pox o' your throats! Who makes that
25 noise there? What are you?

POMPEY

Your friends, sir; the hangman. You must be so
good, sir, to rise and be put to death.

BARNARDINE

(Within) Away, you rogue, away! I am sleepy.

ABHORSON

Tell him he must awake, and that quickly too.

POMPEY

30 Pray, Master Barnardine, awake till you are
executed, and sleep afterwards.

ABHORSON

Go in to him, and fetch him out.

POMPEY**POMPEY**

Mister Barnardine! You've got to get up, and get onto the scaffold. Mister Barnardine!

ABHORSON

Hey, Barnardine!

BARNARDINE

(offstage) Damn your throats! Who's making all that noise? Who
are you?

POMPEY

Your friends, sir, the hangmen. Please be so
good, sir, as to rise and be put to death.

BARNARDINE

(offstage) Go away, scoundrel. Away! I'm sleepy.

ABHORSON

Tell him he has to wake up, and quickly too.

POMPEY

Please, Mister Barnardine, stay awake till you're
executed, and sleep afterwards.

ABHORSON

Get in there and fetch him.

POMPEY

He is coming, sir, he is coming; I hear his straw rustle.

ABHORSON

Is the axe upon the block, sirrah?

POMPEY

35 Very ready, sir.

Enter BARNARDINE

BARNARDINE

How now, Abhorson? what's the news with you?

ABHORSON

Truly, sir, I would desire you to clap into your
prayers; for, look you, the warrant's come.

BARNARDINE

You rogue, I have been drinking all night; I am not
40 fitted for 't.

POMPEY

O, the better, sir; for he that drinks all night,
and is hanged betimes in the morning, may sleep the
sounder all the next day.

ABHORSON

Look you, sir; here comes your ghostly father: do

He's coming, sir, he's coming. I hear the straw on his cell floor
rustling.

ABHORSON

Is the axe on the block, man?

POMPEY

Very ready, sir.

BARNARDINE enters.

BARNARDINE

How goes it, Abhorson? What's the news with you?

ABHORSON

Actually, sir, I'd like you to get on with your prayers, because
the warrant's arrived.

BARNARDINE

You jerk, I've been drinking all night. I'm not ready for it.

POMPEY

Oh, all the better, sir, for he who drinks all night
and is hanged early in the morning may sleep better all the
next day.

ABHORSON

45 we jest now, think you?

Enter DUKE VINCENTIO disguised as before

DUKE VINCENTIO

Sir, induced by my charity, and hearing how hastily you are to depart, I am come to advise you, comfort you and pray with you.

BARNARDINE

Friar, not I: I have been drinking hard all night,
50 and I will have more time to prepare me, or they shall beat out my brains with billets: I will not consent to die this day, that's certain.

DUKE VINCENTIO

O, sir, you must: and therefore I beseech you
Look forward on the journey you shall go.

BARNARDINE

55 I swear I will not die to-day for any man's persuasion.

DUKE VINCENTIO

But hear you.

BARNARDINE

Not a word: if you have any thing to say to me,

Look, sir, here comes your holy confessor. Think we're joking now?

DUKE VINCENTIO, disguised as a friar, enters.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Sir, out of my sense of charity, and hearing how hastily you have to leave, I came to advise you, comfort you, and pray with you.

BARNARDINE

Not me, friar. I've been drinking hard all night, and either I get more time to prepare, or they'll have to beat out my brains with clubs. I won't agree to die today, that's for sure.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Oh, sir, you must, and so I beg you to look forward to the journey you're going on.

BARNARDINE

I swear I will not die today, no matter who tries to persuade me.

DUKE VINCENTIO

But listen—

BARNARDINE

Not a word: if you got anything to say to me,

come to my ward; for thence will not I to-day.

Exit

DUKE VINCENTIO

60 Unfit to live or die: O gravel heart!
After him, fellows; bring him to the block.

Exeunt ABHORSON and POMPEY

Re-enter Provost

PROVOST

Now, sir, how do you find the prisoner?

DUKE VINCENTIO

A creature unprepared, unmeet for death;
And to transport him in the mind he is
65 Were damnable.

PROVOST

Here in the prison, father,
There died this morning of a cruel fever
One Ragozine, a most notorious pirate,
A man of Claudio's years; his beard and head
70 Just of his colour. What if we do omit
This reprobate till he were well inclined;
And satisfy the deputy with the visage

come to my cell. I'm not leaving it today.

He exits.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Unfit to live or die, that stony heart! After him, boys. Bring him to the block.

ABHORSON and POMPEY exit.

The Provost re-enters.

PROVOST

Now, sir, how is the prisoner?

DUKE VINCENTIO

A creature unprepared, unfit for death. To send him off in his current frame of mind would be damnable.

PROVOST

Here in prison, father, a notorious pirate named Ragozine just died this morning of a terrible fever. He was Claudio's age, with the same color beard and hair. What if we forget about this reprobate until he's agreeable, and send the deputy Ragozine's head, which is more like Claudio's?

Of Ragozine, more like to Claudio?

DUKE VINCENTIO

O, 'tis an accident that heaven provides!
75 Dispatch it presently; the hour draws on
Prefix'd by Angelo: see this be done,
And sent according to command; whiles I
Persuade this rude wretch willingly to die.

PROVOST

This shall be done, good father, presently.
80 But Barnardine must die this afternoon:
And how shall we continue Claudio,
To save me from the danger that might come
If he were known alive?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Let this be done.
85 Put them in secret holds, both Barnardine and Claudio:
Ere twice the sun hath made his journal greeting
To the under generation, you shall find
Your safety manifested.

PROVOST

I am your free dependant.

DUKE VINCENTIO

90 Quick, dispatch, and send the head to Angelo.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Oh, this is a heaven-sent chance! Do it at once. It's getting near the time Angelo set for the execution. See that it's done, and the head sent, as ordered. Meanwhile, I'll persuade this uncivilized wretch to die willingly.

PROVOST

We'll do it, good father, immediately. But Barnardine must die this afternoon. And what do we do with Claudio, to save me from the danger of word getting out that he's alive?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Let's do this: put both Barnardine and Claudio in secret cells. Before two more days, it'll be obvious you're safe.

PROVOST

I'm in your hands.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Hurry, get the head and send it to Angelo.

Exit Provost

Now will I write letters to Angelo,—
The provost, he shall bear them, whose contents
Shall witness to him I am near at home,
And that, by great injunctions, I am bound
95 To enter publicly: him I'll desire
To meet me at the consecrated fount
A league below the city; and from thence,
By cold gradation and well-balanced form,
We shall proceed with Angelo.

Re-enter Provost

PROVOST

100 Here is the head; I'll carry it myself.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Convenient is it. Make a swift return;
For I would commune with you of such things
That want no ear but yours.

PROVOST

I'll make all speed.

Exit

ISABELLA

The Provost exits.

Now I'll write letters to Angelo. The provost can deliver them. They'll say I'm close to home and it's of the utmost importance that I make a big public entrance. I'll ask him to meet me at the holy springs three miles out of town. And from there, step by cool step, and observing all the proper procedures, I'll deal with Angelo.

The Provost re-enters.

PROVOST

Here's the head. I'll carry it myself.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Suitable, isn't it? Come back soon, because I want to talk with you about things that are for your ears only.

PROVOST

I'll be as fast as I can.

He exits.

ISABELLA

105 (Within) Peace, ho, be here!

DUKE VINCENTIO

The tongue of Isabel. She's come to know
If yet her brother's pardon be come hither:
But I will keep her ignorant of her good,
To make her heavenly comforts of despair,

110 When it is least expected.

Enter ISABELLA

ISABELLA

Ho, by your leave!

DUKE VINCENTIO

Good morning to you, fair and gracious daughter.

ISABELLA

The better, given me by so holy a man.
Hath yet the deputy sent my brother's pardon?

DUKE VINCENTIO

115 He hath released him, Isabel, from the world:
His head is off and sent to Angelo.

ISABELLA

Nay, but it is not so.

DUKE VINCENTIO

(offstage) Hello! Peace to all here!

DUKE VINCENTIO

That's Isabel's voice. She's here to see if her brother's pardon has come yet. But I'll hide the news for her own good, to turn her despair into divine comfort when she least expects it.

ISABELLA enters.

ISABELLA

May I come in?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Good morning to you, fair and gracious daughter.

ISABELLA

All the better a morning when so holy a man says it to me. Has the deputy sent my brother's pardon yet?

DUKE VINCENTIO

He has released him, Isabel, from the world. His head is off and sent to Angelo.

ISABELLA

No, it's not true.

DUKE VINCENTIO

It is no other: show your wisdom, daughter,
In your close patience.

ISABELLA

120 O, I will to him and pluck out his eyes!

DUKE VINCENTIO

You shall not be admitted to his sight.

ISABELLA

Unhappy Claudio! wretched Isabel!
Injurious world! most damned Angelo!

DUKE VINCENTIO

This nor hurts him nor profits you a jot;
125 Forbear it therefore; give your cause to heaven.
Mark what I say, which you shall find
By every syllable a faithful verity:
The duke comes home to-morrow; nay, dry your eyes;
One of our convent, and his confessor,
130 Gives me this instance: already he hath carried
Notice to Escalus and Angelo,
Who do prepare to meet him at the gates,
There to give up their power. If you can, pace your wisdom
In that good path that I would wish it go,
135 And you shall have your bosom on this wretch,
Grace of the duke, revenges to your heart,
And general honour.

It is. Be smart, daughter, and keep control of yourself.

ISABELLA

Oh, I'll go and tear his eyes out!

DUKE VINCENTIO

They won't let you see him.

ISABELLA

Unhappy Claudio! Wretched Isabel! Cruel world! Damned
Angelo!

DUKE VINCENTIO

This neither hurts him nor helps you a bit. Control yourself and
leave your case to heaven. Pay attention to what I say. Every
syllable is truth you can rely on. The duke's coming home
tomorrow—no, dry your eyes. His confessor, who belongs to
our monastery, gave me this information. He's already sent
word to Escalus and Angelo, who are preparing to meet him at
the gates and surrender their authority to him there. If you can,
steer your mind along the path I want it to follow. You'll have
your desire inflicted on this wretch, the favor of the duke,
revenge to your heart's content, and general acclaim.

ISABELLA

I am directed by you.

DUKE VINCENTIO

This letter, then, to Friar Peter give;

140 'Tis that he sent me of the duke's return:

Say, by this token, I desire his company

At Mariana's house to-night. Her cause and yours

I'll perfect him withal, and he shall bring you

Before the duke, and to the head of Angelo

145 Accuse him home and home. For my poor self,

I am combined by a sacred vow

And shall be absent. Wend you with this letter:

Command these fretting waters from your eyes

With a light heart; trust not my holy order,

150 If I pervert your course. Who's here?

Enter LUCIO

LUCIO

Good even. Friar, where's the provost?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Not within, sir.

LUCIO

O pretty Isabella, I am pale at mine heart to see

ISABELLA

I'll do whatever you say.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Then give this letter to Friar Peter. It's the one he sent me about the duke's return. It'll be a sign that I want to meet him at Mariana's house tonight. I'll tell him all about her case and yours, and he'll bring you before the duke, and you can thoroughly accuse Angelo face-to-face. My poor self is bound by a sacred vow, so I won't be there. (*giving the letter*) Go with this letter. Banish those worried tears with a light heart. Never trust my holy order again if I steer you wrong. Who's here?

LUCIO enters.

LUCIO

Good evening. Friar, where's the provost?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Not inside, sir.

LUCIO

thine eyes so red: thou must be patient. I am fain
155 to dine and sup with water and bran; I dare not for
my head fill my belly; one fruitful meal would set
me to 't. But they say the duke will be here
to-morrow. By my troth, Isabel, I loved thy brother:
if the old fantastical duke of dark corners had been
160 at home, he had lived.

Exit ISABELLA

DUKE VINCENTIO

Sir, the duke is marvellous little beholding to your
reports; but the best is, he lives not in them.

LUCIO

Friar, thou knowest not the duke so well as I do:
he's a better woodman than thou takest him for.

DUKE VINCENTIO

165 Well, you'll answer this one day. Fare ye well.

LUCIO

Nay, tarry; I'll go along with thee
I can tell thee pretty tales of the duke.

DUKE VINCENTIO

You have told me too many of him already, sir, if
they be true; if not true, none were enough.

Oh, pretty Isabella, I'm sick at heart to see your eyes so red, but
try to calm down. I have to dine on plain bread and water—to
control my desire, I don't fill my belly, since one big meal
would get me excited. But they say the duke will be here
tomorrow. I swear, Isabel, I loved your brother. If the good old
whimsical duke, who loved to fool around in dark places, had
been at home, Claudio would've lived.

ISABELLA exits.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Sir, the duke is nothing at all like you report.

LUCIO

Friar, you don't know the duke as well as I do. He's more of a
womanizer than you think.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Well, you'll pay for this one day. Goodbye.

LUCIO

No, wait. I'll go along with you. I can tell you some great tales
about the duke.

DUKE VINCENTIO

You've already told me too many, sir, if they're true. If they're
not true, I don't want to hear any.

LUCIO

170 I was once before him for getting a wench with child.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Did you such a thing?

LUCIO

Yes, marry, did I but I was fain to forswear it;
they would else have married me to the rotten medlar.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Sir, your company is fairer than honest. Rest you well.

LUCIO

175 By my troth, I'll go with thee to the lane's end:
if bawdy talk offend you, we'll have very little of
it. Nay, friar, I am a kind of burr; I shall stick.

Exeunt

A room in ANGELO's house.

Enter ANGELO and ESCALUS

ESCALUS

Every letter he hath writ hath disvouched other.

ANGELO

LUCIO

I appeared before him once for getting a girl pregnant.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Did you do such a thing?

LUCIO

Yes, I did, but I denied it under oath. They would've made me
marry the rotten whore otherwise.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Sir, you look a lot nicer than you are. Goodbye.

LUCIO

I swear, I'll go with you to the end of the lane. If dirty talk
offends you, we'll avoid it. No, friar, I'm like a kind of burr—I'll
stick to you.

They exit.

Act 4 Scene 4

A room in ANGELO's house.

ANGELO and ESCALUS enter.

ESCALUS

Every letter he's written has contradicted the others.

ANGELO

In most uneven and distracted manner. His actions
show much like to madne pray heaven his wisdom be
not tainted! And why meet him at the gates, and
5 redeliver our authorities there[?]

ESCALUS

I guess not.

ANGELO

And why should we proclaim it in an hour before his
entering, that if any crave redress of injustice,
they should exhibit their petitions in the street?

ESCALUS

10 He shows his reason for that: to have a dispatch of
complaints, and to deliver us from devices
hereafter, which shall then have no power to stand
against us.

ANGELO

Well, I beseech you, let it be proclaimed betimes
15 i' the morn; I'll call you at your house: give
notice to such men of sort and suit as are to meet
him.

ESCALUS

I shall, sir. Fare you well.

In a very vague, inconsistent way. His behavior seems almost
insane—pray God he's not going mad! And why do we have to
meet him at the gates, and surrender our authority there?

ESCALUS

I can't guess.

ANGELO

And why, an hour before his arrival, should we announce that if
anyone wants compensation for unjust treatment, they should
come ready to present their petitions publicly?

ESCALUS

He gives a reason for that: to be able to deal promptly with the
complaints, and to save us from future lawsuits.

ANGELO

Well, I urge you to announce it early in the morning. I'll come
pick you up at your house. Alert all the high-ranking officials
who are supposed to meet him.

ESCALUS

I will, sir. Goodbye.

ANGELO

Good night.

Exit ESCALUS

20 This deed unshapes me quite, makes me unpregnant
And dull to all proceedings. A deflower'd maid!
And by an eminent body that enforced
The law against it! But that her tender shame
Will not proclaim against her maiden loss,
25 How might she tongue me! Yet reason dares her no;
For my authority bears of a credent bulk,
That no particular scandal once can touch
But it confounds the breather. He should have lived,
Save that riotous youth, with dangerous sense,
30 Might in the times to come have ta'en revenge,
By so receiving a dishonour'd life
With ransom of such shame. Would yet he had lived!
A lack, when once our grace we have forgot,
Nothing goes right: *we would, and we would not*.

Exit

Fields without the town.

Enter DUKE VINCENTIO in his own habit, and FRIAR PETER

ANGELO

Good night.

ESCALUS exits.

This thing I've done has totally destroyed me. I'm stupid, can't concentrate on anything. A girl robbed of her virginity, and by a respected public figure who enforced the law against sex! If she weren't too ashamed to admit it, she could easily denounce me! But her head tells her not to, because my credibility is so strong that any scandal would ruin the person who spreads it, not me. I would've let Claudio live, except that a hotheaded youth like him might have come after me someday, feeling that his life is dishonored because he paid such a shameful price for it. Even so, I wish I'd let him live. Sadly, nothing goes right once we forget virtue. I don't do the good thing, which I don't want to do, but the evil I don't want to commit, that I do.

He exits.

Act 4 Scene 5

Fields outside the town.

DUKE VINCENTIO enters in his own clothing, with FRIAR PETER.

DUKE VINCENTIO

These letters at fit time deliver me[.]

Giving letters

The provost knows our purpose and our plot.
The matter being afoot, keep your instruction,
And hold you ever to our special drift;
Though sometimes you do blench from this to that,
As cause doth minister. Go call at Flavius' house,
And tell him where I stay: give the like notice
To Valentinus, Rowland, and to Crassus,
And bid them bring the trumpets to the gate;
But send me Flavius first.

FRIAR PETER

It shall be speeded well.

Exit

Enter VARRIUS

DUKE VINCENTIO

I thank thee, Varrius; thou hast made good haste:
Come, we will walk. There's other of our friends
Will greet us here anon, my gentle Varrius.

Exeunt

DUKE VINCENTIO

At the right time, deliver these letters for me.

Holding letters

The provost knows about my plan. Once things get going, remember your orders and follow my lead, though sometimes you can deviate from the plan, if it seems appropriate. Go to Flavius' house, and tell him where I'm staying. Inform Valentinus, Rowland, and Crassus, too, and ask them to bring the trumpeters to the gate. But send me Flavius first.

FRIAR PETER

I'll do it right away.

He exits.

VARRIUS enters.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Thanks, Varrius, you got here fast. Let's get going. More of our friends will be here soon, honorable Varrius.

They exit.

Act 4 Scene 6

Street near the city gate.

Enter ISABELLA and MARIANA

ISABELLA

To speak so indirectly I am loath:
I would say the truth; but to accuse him so,
That is your part: yet I am advised to do it;
He says, to veil full purpose.

MARIANA

5 Be ruled by him.

ISABELLA

Besides, he tells me that, if peradventure
He speak against me on the adverse side,
I should not think it strange; for 'tis a physic
That's bitter to sweet end.

MARIANA

10 I would Friar Peter—

ISABELLA

O, peace! the friar is come.

Enter FRIAR PETER

A street near the city gate.

ISABELLA and MARIANA enter.

ISABELLA

I hate to speak so evasively. I'd rather tell the truth. But to accuse Angelo is your job, the friar says, and he advises me to lie, to hide our real aim.

MARIANA

We should do as he says.

ISABELLA

Besides, he tells me that I shouldn't think it strange if he happens to contradict me. It'll be like swallowing a bitter pill that offers a sweet cure.

MARIANA

I wish Friar Peter—

ISABELLA

Oh, wait! The friar's here.

FRIAR PETER enters.

FRIAR PETER

Come, I have found you out a stand most fit,
Where you may have such vantage on the duke,
He shall not pass you. Twice have the trumpets sounded;
15 The generous and gravest citizens
Have hent the gates, and very near upon
The duke is entering: therefore, hence, away!

Exeunt

The city gate.

MARIANA veiled, **ISABELLA**, and **FRIAR PETER**, at their stand.

Enter **DUKE VINCENTIO**, **VARRIUS**, Lords, **ANGELO**, **ESCALUS**,
LUCIO, Provost, Officers, and Citizens, at several doors

DUKE VINCENTIO

My very worthy cousin, fairly met!
Our old and faithful friend, we are glad to see you.

ANGELO, ESCALUS

Happy return be to your royal grace!

DUKE VINCENTIO

Many and hearty thankings to you both.
5 We have made inquiry of you; and we hear

FRIAR PETER

Come on, I've found you a good place to stand, where you'll be so positioned that the duke won't be able to bypass you. The trumpets have blown twice, the most high-born and important people have already gathered at the gates, and the duke's about to enter. So, let's go!

They exit.

Act 5 Scene 1

The city gate.

MARIANA wearing a veil, **ISABELLA**, and **FRIAR PETER** are at their stand. **DUKE VINCENTIO**, **VARRIUS**, lords, **ANGELO**, **ESCALUS**, **LUCIO**, the Provost, officers, and citizens enter from several directions.

DUKE VINCENTIO

(to Angelo) My fellow nobleman, welcome!
(to Escalus) My faithful old friend, I'm glad to see you.

ANGELO, ESCALUS

Welcome home, your royal grace!

DUKE VINCENTIO

Many hearty thanks to you both. I've been asking about you, and I've heard such good things about your rule that I just had

Such goodness of your justice, that our soul
Cannot but yield you forth to public thanks,
Forerunning more requital.

ANGELO

You make my bonds still greater.

DUKE VINCENTIO

10 O, your desert speaks loud; and I should wrong it,
To lock it in the wards of covert bosom,
When it deserves, with characters of brass,
A forted residence 'gainst the tooth of time
And razure of oblivion. Give me your hand,
15 And let the subject see, to make them know
That outward courtesies would fain proclaim
Favours that keep within. Come, Escalus,
You must walk by us on our other hand;
And good supporters are you.

FRIAR PETER and **ISABELLA** come forward

FRIAR PETER

20 Now is your time: speak loud and kneel before him.

ISABELLA

Justice, O royal duke! Vail your regard
Upon a wrong'd, I would fain have said, a maid!
O worthy prince, dishonour not your eye

to thank you publicly, as a preview of more rewards to come.

ANGELO

You make my debt to you even greater.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Oh, you're extremely worthy, and it'd be wrong of me to hide it
in my heart, when it deserves to be written in brass letters, as
on a monument, where time can't erase it. Give me your hand,
and let the people see, so they'll know how proud I am to
display my high regard for you. Come, Escalus, you must walk
with me on my other side. You make a fine [supporter](#).

FRIAR PETER and **ISABELLA** come forward.

FRIAR PETER

Now's the time: speak up and kneel before him.

ISABELLA

Justice, royal duke! Look down here, at a girl—I wish I could
say a virgin—who has been wronged. Oh, worthy prince, don't

By throwing it on any other object
25 Till you have heard me in my true complaint
And given me justice, justice, justice!

DUKE VINCENTIO

Relate your wrongs; in what? by whom? be brief.
Here is Lord Angelo shall give you justice:
Reveal yourself to him.

ISABELLA

30 O worthy duke,
You bid me seek redemption of the devil:
Hear me yourself; for that which I must speak
Must either punish me, not being believed,
Or wring redress from you. Hear me, O hear me, here!

ANGELO

35 My lord, her wits, I fear me, are not firm:
She hath been a suitor to me for her brother
Cut off by course of justice,—

ISABELLA

By course of justice!

ANGELO

And she will speak most bitterly and strange.

ISABELLA

consider anything else until you've heard my valid case and
given me justice, justice, justice, justice!

DUKE VINCENTIO

Describe how you've been wronged—in what way? By whom?
Be brief. Lord Angelo here will give you justice. Tell him your
complaint.

ISABELLA

Oh, worthy duke, you're urging me to ask the devil for help.
Listen to me yourself. What I have to say will result either in
you not believing and punishing me, or you feeling compelled
to right the wrong. Hear me, oh hear me, here!

ANGELO

My lord, I'm afraid she's not in her right mind. She's appeared
before me, begging for her brother, who was executed by the
justice system—

ISABELLA

By the justice system!

ANGELO

And she will speak in a very bitter, strange way.

ISABELLA

40 Most strange, but yet most truly, will I speak:
That Angelo's forsworn; is it not strange?
That Angelo's a murderer; is 't not strange?
That Angelo is an adulterous thief,
An hypocrite, a virgin-violator;
45 Is it not strange and strange?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Nay, it is ten times strange.

ISABELLA

It is not truer he is Angelo
Than this is all as true as it is strange:
Nay, it is ten times true; for truth is truth
50 To the end of reckoning.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Away with her! Poor soul,
She speaks this in the infirmity of sense.

ISABELLA

O prince, I conjure thee, as thou believest
There is another comfort than this world,
55 That thou neglect me not, with that opinion
That I am touch'd with madness! Make not impossible
That which but seems unlike: 'tis not impossible
But one, the wicked'st caitiff on the ground,
May seem as shy, as grave, as just, as absolute

I'll speak strangely, but truthfully. That Angelo's a liar, isn't that strange? That Angelo's a murderer, isn't that strange? That Angelo's an adulterous thief, a hypocrite, a man who rapes virgins, isn't that extremely strange?

DUKE VINCENTIO

That's strange to the tenth degree.

ISABELLA

It's just as true as the fact that he's Angelo, and this is all as true as it is strange. No, it's true to the tenth degree, for the truth is the truth, no matter how much you multiply it.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Take her away! Poor soul, she's insane.

ISABELLA

Oh, prince, I beg you, as you believe in a better world than this one, don't dismiss me by thinking I'm mad! Don't assume something's impossible because it's unlikely. It's not impossible that the wickedest wretch on the face of the earth may look just as cautious, as dignified, as fair, as perfect as Angelo—even as Angelo, for all his official finery, badges, titles, and ceremonies, can be an arch-villain. Believe it, royal prince. If

60 As Angelo; even so may Angelo,
In all his dressings, characts, titles, forms,
Be an arch-villain; believe it, royal prince:
If he be less, he's nothing; but he's more,
Had I more name for badness.

DUKE VINCENTIO

65 By mine honesty,
If she be mad,—as I believe no other,—
Her madness hath the oddest frame of sense,
Such a dependency of thing on thing,
As e'er I heard in madness.

ISABELLA

70 O gracious duke,
Harp not on that, nor do not banish reason
For inequality; but let your reason serve
To make the truth appear where it seems hid,
And hide the false seems true.

DUKE VINCENTIO

75 Many that are not mad
Have, sure, more lack of reason. What would you say?

ISABELLA

I am the sister of one Claudio,
Condemn'd upon the act of fornication
To lose his head; condemn'd by Angelo:

he's less than a wretch, he's nothing. But he's more, if only I had more names for badness.

DUKE VINCENTIO

I declare, if she's mad—as I believe she is—her madness has an oddly rational sound. I've rarely heard such coherent logic from someone insane.

ISABELLA

Oh, gracious duke, don't harp on that. But don't dismiss rational statements because they don't jibe with appearances. Use your intelligence to uncover the hidden truth, which is obscured by lies that seem like truth.

DUKE VINCENTIO

A lot of sane people make a lot less sense. What would you like to say?

ISABELLA

I am the sister of one Claudio, sentenced to die by the decree against fornication—sentenced by Angelo. I was about to enter

80 I, in probation of a sisterhood,
Was sent to by my brother; one Lucio
As then the messenger,—

LUCIO

That's I, an't like your grace:
I came to her from Claudio, and desired her
85 To try her gracious fortune with Lord Angelo
For her poor brother's pardon.

ISABELLA

That's he indeed.

DUKE VINCENTIO

You were not bid to speak.

LUCIO

No, my good lord;
90 Nor wish'd to hold my peace.

DUKE VINCENTIO

I wish you now, then;
Pray you, take note of it: and when you have
A business for yourself, pray heaven you then
Be perfect.

LUCIO

95 I warrant your honour.

a convent, when my brother contacted me. He sent me a message through a man named Lucio—

LUCIO

That's me, if it please your grace: I came to her from Claudio, and asked her to try her good luck in asking Lord Angelo for her poor brother's pardon.

ISABELLA

Yes, that's the man.

DUKE VINCENTIO

No one asked you to speak.

LUCIO

No, my good lord, but no one asked me to be quiet, either.

DUKE VINCENTIO

I'm asking you now, then. Remember it. And when you have your own business before me, pray heaven you behave yourself.

LUCIO

I'll take notice, your honor.

DUKE VINCENTIO

The warrants for yourself; take heed to't.

ISABELLA

This gentleman told somewhat of my tale,—

LUCIO

Right.

DUKE VINCENTIO

It may be right; but you are i' the wrong

100 To speak before your time. Proceed.

ISABELLA

I went

To this pernicious caitiff deputy,—

DUKE VINCENTIO

That's somewhat madly spoken.

ISABELLA

Pardon it;

105 The phrase is to the matter.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Mended again. The matter; proceed.

ISABELLA

In brief, to set the needless process by,

DUKE VINCENTIO

The notice is for yourself. Pay attention to it.

ISABELLA

This gentleman has told some of my story—

LUCIO

Right.

DUKE VINCENTIO

It may be right, but you're wrong to interrupt. Proceed.

ISABELLA

I went to this wicked, evil deputy—

DUKE VINCENTIO

You're sounding crazy.

ISABELLA

Excuse me—the choice of words is appropriate.

DUKE VINCENTIO

That's better. Continue.

ISABELLA

How I persuaded, how I pray'd, and kneel'd,
How he refell'd me, and how I replied,—
110 For this was of much length,—the vile conclusion
I now begin with grief and shame to utter:
He would not, but by gift of my chaste body
To his concupiscent intemperate lust,
Release my brother; and, after much debatement,
115 My sisterly remorse confutes mine honour,
And I did yield to him: but the next morn betimes,
His purpose surfeiting, he sends a warrant
For my poor brother's head.

DUKE VINCENTIO

This is most likely!

ISABELLA

120 O, that it were as like as it is true!

DUKE VINCENTIO

By heaven, fond wretch, thou knowist not what thou speak'st,
Or else thou art suborn'd against his honour
In hateful practise. First, his integrity
Stands without blemish. Next, it imports no reason
125 That with such vehemency he should pursue
Faults proper to himself: if he had so offended,
He would have weigh'd thy brother by himself
And not have cut him off. Some one hath set you on:

To make a long story short—because it took a while, how I begged, how I prayed and kneeled, how he refused me, and how I replied—I'll sadly and shamefully get to the awful ending. He wouldn't release my brother unless I gave my chaste body over to his yearning lust. And after much internal debate, my sisterly pity overcame my honor, and I gave in to him. But having got what he wanted, early the next morning he sent an order for my poor brother's head.

DUKE VINCENTIO

(sarcastically) This is very believable!

ISABELLA

Oh, I wish it were as believable as it is true!

DUKE VINCENTIO

Heavens above, you poor fool, you don't know what you're saying, or else you've been bribed to falsely accuse him. First of all, his integrity is beyond reproach. Next, it makes no sense that he should so vigorously prosecute crimes he himself commits. If he had committed such a crime, he would've judged your brother against himself, and not executed him. Someone has put you up to this. Confess the truth, and tell us who urged you to come here with this accusation.

Confess the truth, and say by whose advice

130 Thou camest here to complain.

ISABELLA

And is this all?

Then, O you blessed ministers above,
Keep me in patience, and with ripen'd time
Unfold the evil which is here wrapt up

135 In countenance! Heaven shield your grace from woe,
As I, thus wrong'd, hence unbelieved go!

DUKE VINCENTIO

I know you'l fain be gone. An officer!
To prison with her! Shall we thus permit
A blasting and a scandalous breath to fall

140 On him so near us? This needs must be a practise.
Who knew of Your intent and coming hither?

ISABELLA

One that I would were here, Friar Lodowick.

DUKE VINCENTIO

A ghostly father, belike. Who knows that Lodowick?

LUCIO

My lord, I know him; 'tis a meddling friar;
145 I do not like the man: had he been lay, my lord
For certain words he spake against your grace

ISABELLA

That's it? Then, oh, you blessed angels above, help me be patient, and let time reveal the evil hiding here behind appearances! Heaven protect your grace from harm. Since you don't believe me, I have to go.

DUKE VINCENTIO

I bet you'd like to go. Officer, take her to prison! Should I permit such destructive, scandalous rumors about someone so close to me? This must be a conspiracy. Who knew about your plan, and that you were coming here?

ISABELLA

Someone I wish were here now, Friar Lodowick.

DUKE VINCENTIO

A holy ghost, probably. Who knows this Lodowick?

LUCIO

My lord, I know him. He's the sort of friar who's always meddling in people's business. I don't like the man. If he hadn't been a member of the clergy, I would have punched him out

In your retirement, I had swunged him soundly.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Words against me? this is a good friar, belike!
And to set on this wretched woman here
¹⁵⁰ Against our substitute! Let this friar be found.

LUCIO

But yesternight, my lord, she and that friar,
I saw them at the prison: a saucy friar,
A very scurvy fellow.

FRIAR PETER

Blessed be your royal grace!
¹⁵⁵ I have stood by, my lord, and I have heard
Your royal ear abused. First, hath this woman
Most wrongfully accused your substitute,
Who is as free from touch or soil with her
As she from one ungot.

DUKE VINCENTIO

¹⁶⁰ We did believe no less.
Know you that Friar Lodowick that she speaks of?

FRIAR PETER

I know him for a man divine and holy;
Not scurvy, nor a temporary meddler,

for certain words he spoke against your grace while you were away.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Words against me? Some holy friar this is! And to set this wretched woman here against my replacement! Someone locate this friar.

LUCIO

Just yesterday, my lord, I saw her and this friar at the prison.
He's a smart-aleck, a very nasty piece of work.

FRIAR PETER

God bless your royal grace! I've stood by, my lord, and I've heard your royal ears deceived. First, this woman has wrongfully accused your replacement, who is as far from any sexual or moral misbehavior with her as she is from a virgin birth.

DUKE VINCENTIO

I never believed anything else. Do you know this Friar Lodowick she's talking about?

FRIAR PETER

I know him for a divine and holy man, not lowdown, and not someone who meddles in earthly pleasures, as this gentleman

As he's reported by this gentleman;

165 And, on my trust, a man that never yet
Did, as he vouches, misreport your grace.

LUCIO

My lord, most villainously; believe it.

FRIAR PETER

Well, he in time may come to clear himself;

But at this instant he is sick my lord,

170 Of a strange fever. Upon his mere request,
Being come to knowledge that there was complaint
Intended 'gainst Lord Angelo, came I hither,
To speak, as from his mouth, what he doth know
Is true and false; and what he with his oath
175 And all probation will make up full clear,
Whosoever he's converted. First, for this woman.
To justify this worthy nobleman,
So vulgarly and personally accused,
Her shall you hear disproved to her eyes,
180 Till she herself confess it.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Good friar, let's hear it.

ISABELLA is carried off guarded; and **MARIANA** comes forward

reports. And, trust me, he's a man that never slandered your grace.

LUCIO

My lord, he did, and very maliciously too. Believe it.

FRIAR PETER

Well, in time he may come to clear himself, but at this instant he's sick, my lord, suffering a rare fever. Learning there was an accusation planned against Lord Angelo, he personally asked me to come here and speak, as he would have, about what he knows is true and false. And when he's summoned, he'll give his oath and furnish proof that will clear everything up. This worthy nobleman, who's been so publicly and personally accused, will be vindicated, and this woman will be discredited to her face, to such an extent that she herself will have to admit it.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Good friar, let's hear it.

ISABELLA is taken away, under guard, and **MARIANA** comes forward, wearing a veil.

Do you not smile at this, Lord Angelo?
O heaven, the vanity of wretched fools!
Give us some seats. Come, cousin Angelo;
185 In this I'll be impartial; be you judge
Of your own cause. Is this the witness, friar?
First, let her show her face, and after speak.

MARIANA

Pardon, my lord; I will not show my face
Until my husband bid me.

DUKE VINCENTIO

190 What, are you married?

MARIANA

No, my lord.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Are you a maid?

MARIANA

No, my lord.

DUKE VINCENTIO

A widow, then?

MARIANA

195 Neither, my lord.

Isn't this funny, Lord Angelo? Oh, heaven, the nerve of these wretched fools! Give us some seats. Come, Angelo, my friend. I won't take any part in this. You be the judge of your own case. Is this the witness, friar? First, let her show her face, and then speak.

MARIANA

Pardon me, my lord. I will not show my face until my husband bids me to.

DUKE VINCENTIO

What, are you married?

MARIANA

No, my lord.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Are you single?

MARIANA

No, my lord.

DUKE VINCENTIO

A widow, then?

MARIANA

Neither, my lord.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Why, you are nothing then: neither maid, widow, nor wife?

LUCIO

My lord, she may be a punk; for many of them are neither maid, widow, nor wife.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Silence that fellow: I would he had some cause
200 To prattle for himself.

LUCIO

Well, my lord.

MARIANA

My lord; I do confess I ne'er was married;
And I confess besides I am no maid:
I have known my husband; yet my husband
205 Knows not that ever he knew me.

LUCIO

He was drunk then, my lord: it can be no better.

DUKE VINCENTIO

For the benefit of silence, would thou wert so too!

LUCIO

Well, my lord.

DUKE VINCENTIO

So, you are neither single, widow, nor wife?

LUCIO

My lord, she may be a prostitute. Many of them are neither virgin, widow, nor wife.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Keep that fellow quiet. I wish he were up on some charge of his own.

LUCIO

OK, my lord.

MARIANA

My lord, I do admit I've never been married, and I also admit I'm not a virgin. I've slept with my husband, but my husband doesn't know he's slept with me.

LUCIO

He was drunk then, my lord. That's the best explanation.

DUKE VINCENTIO

For silence's sake, be silent yourself!

LUCIO

OK, my lord.

DUKE VINCENTIO

This is no witness for Lord Angelo.

MARIANA

210 Now I come to't my lord
She that accuses him of fornication,
In self-same manner doth accuse my husband,
And charges him my lord, with such a time
When I'll depose I had him in mine arms
215 With all the effect of love.

ANGELO

Charges she more than me?

MARIANA

Not that I know.

DUKE VINCENTIO

No? you say your husband.

MARIANA

Why, just, my lord, and that is Angelo,
220 Who thinks he knows that he ne'er knew my body,
But knows he thinks that he knows Isabel's.

ANGELO

This is a strange abuse. Let's see thy face.

MARIANA

DUKE VINCENTIO

This is hardly a witness for Lord Angelo.

MARIANA

I'm coming to it now, my lord. The woman who's accusing him of fornication is actually accusing my husband. And she charges it was at the very time when, as I'll swear, he was in my arms, making love to me.

ANGELO

Is she accusing more men besides me?

MARIANA

Not that I know of.

DUKE VINCENTIO

No? You say your husband.

MARIANA

Why, exactly, my lord. He's Angelo, who believes he never slept with me, and who believes he slept with Isabel.

ANGELO

This is a strange deception. Let's see your face.

MARIANA

My husband bids me; now I will unmask.

Unveiling

This is that face, thou cruel Angelo,
225 Which once thou sworest was worth the looking on;
This is the hand which, with a vow'd contract,
Was fast belock'd in thine; this is the body
That took away the match from Isabel,
And did supply thee at thy garden-house
230 In her imagined person.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Know you this woman?

LUCIO

Carnally, she says.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Sirrah, no more!

LUCIO

Enough, my lord.

ANGELO

235 My lord, I must confess I know this woman:
And five years since there was some speech of marriage
Betwixt myself and her; which was broke off,

My husband bids me to, so I'll lift my veil.

Removing her veil.

This is the face, you cruel Angelo, that you once swore was well worth looking at. This is the hand that was locked in yours with a signed contract. This is the body that kept your appointment with Isabel, and satisfied you in your garden-house, pretending to be her.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Do you know this woman?

LUCIO

Sexually, she says.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Quiet, you!

LUCIO

Right, my lord.

ANGELO

My lord, I must confess I know this woman. Five years ago, there was some talk of marriage between she and I. It was broken off, partly because her dowry fell short of the agreed

Partly for that her promised proportions
Came short of composition, but in chief
240 For that her reputation was disvalued
In levity: since which time of five years
I never spake with her, saw her, nor heard from her,
Upon my faith and honour.

MARIANA

Noble prince,
245 As there comes light from heaven and words from breath,
As there is sense in truth and truth in virtue,
I am affianced this man's wife as strongly
As words could make up vows: and, my good lord,
But Tuesday night last gone in's garden-house
250 He knew me as a wife. As this is true,
Let me in safety raise me from my knees
Or else for ever be confixed here,
A marble monument!

ANGELO

I did but smile till now:
255 Now, good my lord, give me the scope of justice.
My patience here is touch'd. I do perceive
These poor informal women are no more
But instruments of some more mightier member
That sets them on: let me have way, my lord,
260 To find this practise out.

amount, but mainly because she had a reputation for promiscuity. For the last five years, I haven't spoken with her, seen her, or heard from her, I swear.

MARIANA

Noble prince, as light comes from heaven and words from breath, as there is meaning in truth and truth in virtue, I am engaged to this man as strongly as words can make vows. And, my good lord, last Tuesday night in a garden house, he treated me as a wife. This being the truth, let me safely rise from my knees, or else let me be fixed here forever, like a marble monument!

ANGELO

I was amused up until now, but now my patience is exhausted. My good lord, let me apply the full force of the law. I believe these poor, demented women are just tools of some more powerful person who has put them up to this. Give me the chance, my lord, to unravel this plot.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Ay, with my heart
And punish them to your height of pleasure.
Thou foolish friar, and thou pernicious woman,
Compact with her that's gone, think'st thou thy oaths,
265 Though they would swear down each particular saint,
Were testimonies against his worth and credit
That's seal'd in approbation? You, Lord Escalus,
Sit with my cousin; lend him your kind pains
To find out this abuse, whence 'tis derived.
270 There is another friar that set them on;
Let him be sent for.

FRIAR PETER

Would he were here, my lord! for he indeed
Hath set the women on to this complaint:
Your provost knows the place where he abides
275 And he may fetch him.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Go do it instantly.

Exit Provost

And you, my noble and well-warranted cousin,
Whom it concerns to hear this matter forth,
Do with your injuries as seems you best,

DUKE VINCENTIO

Yes, with all my heart, and punish them as much as you like.
You foolish friar and you wicked woman, in collusion with that
one we just took away—even if you swore by every single
saint, do you think your oaths would mean anything against his
worthiness and reputation, which are proven beyond a doubt?
You, Lord Escalus, sit with my colleague. Do all you can to help
him unravel this conspiracy and discover where it came from.
There's another friar who put them up to this. Send for him.

FRIAR PETER

I wish he were here, my lord! Because he did encourage the
women to make this accusation. Your provost knows where he
lives and can go get him.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Go do it, immediately.

The Provost exits.

(to Angelo) And you, my noble and respected friend, who have
a stake in seeing this matter to the end, deal with the crimes
against you as you think best, with any form of punishment. I'll

280 In any chastisement: I for a while will leave you;
But stir not you till you have well determined
Upon these slanderers.

ESCALUS

My lord, we'll do it throughly.

Exit DUKE

Signior Lucio, did not you say you knew that
285 Friar Lodowick to be a dishonest person?

LUCIO

'Cucullus non facit monachum:' honest in nothing
but in his clothes; and one that hath spoke most
villanous speeches of the duke.

ESCALUS

We shall entreat you to abide here till he come and
290 enforce them against him: we shall find this friar a
notable fellow.

LUCIO

As any in Vienna, on my word.

ESCALUS

Call that same Isabel here once again; I would speak with her.

Exit an Attendant

leave you for a while, but don't move until you have fully
decided the fate of these slanderers.

ESCALUS

My lord, we'll do it thoroughly.

DUKE VINCENTO exits.

Signor Lucio, didn't you say you knew this Friar Lodowick to be
a dishonest person?

LUCIO

"A hood does not make a monk"—his friar's clothes are the only
holy thing about him. And he's said very evil things about the
duke.

ESCALUS

We'll ask you to stay here until he comes and we lay those
charges against him. We think this friar's a notorious character.

LUCIO

As much as anyone in Vienna, on my word.

ESCALUS

Call that Isabel here once again. I want to speak with her.

An attendant exits.

Pray you, my lord, give me leave to question; you
295 shall see how I'll handle her.

LUCIO

Not better than he, by her own report.

ESCALUS

Say you?

LUCIO

Marry, sir, I think, if you handled her privately,
she would sooner confe perchance, publicly,
300 she'll be ashamed.

ESCALUS

I will go darkly to work with her.

LUCIO

That's the way; for women are light at midnight.

*Re-enter Officers with ISABELLA; and Provost with the DUKE
VINCENTIO in his friar's habit*

ESCALUS

Come on, mistre here's a gentlewoman denies all
that you have said.

LUCIO

305 My lord, here comes the rascal I spoke of; here with

Please, my lord, let me do the questioning. You'll see how I'll
handle her.

LUCIO

Not better than he, according to her.

ESCALUS

What did you say?

LUCIO

Frankly, sir, I think, if you handled her privately, she'd be more
likely to confess. She might be ashamed to do it in public.

ESCALUS

I'll keep the matter out of the spotlight.

LUCIO

That's the way. Women are easiest in the dark.

*Officers re-enter with ISABELLA. The Provost re-enters with
DUKE VINCENTIO in his friar's habit.*

ESCALUS

(to Isabella) Listen, mi this woman contradicts everything
you've said.

LUCIO

My lord, here comes the rascal I was talking about, with

the provost.

ESCALUS

In very good time: speak not you to him till we
call upon you.

LUCIO

Mum.

ESCALUS

310 Come, sir: did you set these women on to slander
Lord Angelo? they have confessed you did.

DUKE VINCENTIO

'Tis false.

ESCALUS

How! know you where you are?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Respect to your great place! and let the devil
315 Be sometime honour'd for his burning throne!
Where is the duke? 'tis he should hear me speak.

ESCALUS

The duke's in us; and we will hear you speak:
Look you speak justly.

DUKE VINCENTIO

the provost.

ESCALUS

All in good time. Don't speak to him until we summon you.

LUCIO

Mum's the word.

ESCALUS

Now, sir, did you egg these women on to slander
Lord Angelo? They have confessed you did.

DUKE VINCENTIO

It's a lie.

ESCALUS

What! Do you know where you are?

DUKE VINCENTIO

All due respect to your great office—even the devil gets some
respect for being the king of Hell. Where's the duke? He's the
one who should hear me speak.

ESCALUS

We represent the duke, and we will hear you speak.
See that you speak honestly.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Boldly, at least. But, O, poor souls,

320 Come you to seek the lamb here of the fox?

Good night to your redress! Is the duke gone?

Then is your cause gone too. The duke's unjust,

Thus to retort your manifest appeal,

And put your trial in the villain's mouth

325 Which here you come to accuse.

LUCIO

This is the rascal; this is he I spoke of.

ESCALUS

Why, thou unreverend and unhallow'd friar,

Is't not enough thou hast suborn'd these women

To accuse this worthy man, but, in foul mouth

330 And in the witness of his proper ear,

To call him villain? and then to glance from him

To the duke himself, to tax him with injustice?

Take him hence; to the rack with him! We'll touse you

Joint by joint, but we will know his purpose.

335 What 'unjust'?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Be not so hot; the duke

Dare no more stretch this finger of mine than he

Dare rack his own: his subject am I not,

Nor here provincial. My business in this state

Boldly, at least. But, oh, you poor souls, did you come to find
your lambs in the fox's den? Say goodnight to any justice, then.
Is the duke gone? Then your case is gone too. The duke's
unjust, rejecting your accusation and turning your case over to
the very villain you came here
to accuse.

LUCIO

This is the rascal I was talking about.

ESCALUS

Why, you disrespectful and unholy friar, it's not enough that
you've enlisted these women to accuse this worthy man, but
with your foul mouth you call him a villain within his earshot?
And then to shift your attack from him to the duke himself, to
accuse the duke of being unjust? Take him away, to the rack
with him! We'll tear you limb from limb, until we discover your
motive. To call the duke "unjust"!

DUKE VINCENTIO

Don't get so excited. The duke doesn't dare to hurt my little
finger any more than he'd torture his own. I'm not his subject, or
a native of this province. My business in this state has made
me an on-looker here in Vienna, where I've seen corruption

340 Made me a looker on here in Vienna,
Where I have seen corruption boil and bubble
Till it o'er-run the stew; laws for all faults,
But faults so countenanced, that the strong statutes
Stand like the forfeits in a barber's shop,

345 As much in mock as mark.

ESCALUS

Slander to the state! Away with him to prison!

ANGELO

What can you vouch against him, Signior Lucio?
Is this the man that you did tell us of?

LUCIO

'Tis he, my lord. Come hither, goodman baldpate:
350 do you know me?

DUKE VINCENTIO

I remember you, sir, by the sound of your voice: I
met you at the prison, in the absence of the duke.

LUCIO

O, did you so? And do you remember what you said of the
duke?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Most notedly, sir.

boil and bubble until it overflows out of the brothels. You've got laws for all the crimes, but the crimes are so tolerated that the strong statutes are like those [joke lists of "house rules" in stores](#) —people look at them just to laugh.

ESCALUS

Slandering the state! Take him away to prison!

ANGELO

What evidence do you have against him, Signior Lucio?
Is this the man you told us about?

LUCIO

He's the one, my lord. Come here, [baldy](#). Do you know me?

DUKE VINCENTIO

I remember you, sir, by the sound of your voice. I
met you at the prison, back when the duke was away.

LUCIO

Oh, you did? And do you remember what you said about the
duke?

DUKE VINCENTIO

Definitely, sir.

LUCIO

355 Do you so, sir? And was the duke a fleshmonger, a fool, and a coward, as you then reported him to be?

DUKE VINCENTIO

You must, sir, change persons with me, ere you make that my report: you, indeed, spoke so of him; and much more, much worse.

LUCIO

360 O thou damnable fellow! Did not I pluck thee by the nose for thy speeches?

DUKE VINCENTIO

I protest I love the duke as I love myself.

ANGELO

Hark, how the villain would close now, after his treasonable abuses!

ESCALUS

365 Such a fellow is not to be talked withal. Away with him to prison! Where is the provost? Away with him to prison! lay bolts enough upon him: let him speak no more. Away with those giglots too, and with the other confederate companion!

DUKE VINCENTIO**LUCIO**

Do you, sir? And was the duke a pimp, a fool, and a coward, as you then reported him to be?

DUKE VINCENTIO

You must, sir, switch identities with me, before you claim those were my words. You were the one who said that about him, and much more, much worse.

LUCIO

Damn you, fellow! Didn't I smack you in the nose for your comments?

DUKE VINCENTIO

I swear I love the duke like I love myself.

ANGELO

Look, how the villain would appease us now, after his treasonable slanders!

ESCALUS

You can't talk to this type of fellow. Take him away to prison! Where is the provost? Take him to prison! Put him in chains, gag him. Away with those loose women, too, and their co-conspirator.

DUKE VINCENTIO

370 (To Provost) Stay, sir; stay awhile.

ANGELO

What, resists he? Help him, Lucio.

LUCIO

Come, sir; come, sir; come, sir; foh, sir! Why, you bald-pated, lying rascal, you must be hooded, must you? Show your knave's visage, with a pox to you!
375 show your sheep-biting face, and be hanged an hour! Will't not off?

Pulls off the friar's hood, and discovers DUKE VINCENTIO

DUKE VINCENTIO

Thou art the first knave that e'er madest a duke.
First, provost, let me bail these gentle three. (To LUCIO)
Sneak not away, sir; for the friar and you
Must have a word anon. Lay hold on him.

LUCIO

380 This may prove worse than hanging.

DUKE VINCENTIO

(To ESCALUS) What you have spoke I pardon: sit you down:
We'll borrow place of him. (To ANGELO) Sir, by your leave.
Hast thou or word, or wit, or impudence,
That yet can do thee office? If thou hast,

(to the Provost) Wait, sir, stay a minute.

ANGELO

Is he resisting arrest? Help the provost, Lucio.

LUCIO

Come on, sir. Come on, sir. Come on, sir. Ugh! So, you bald, lying rascal, you want to keep your hood on, do you? Show your lowlife face, damn you! Show your thieving face, and be hanged in an hour! Won't it come off?

He pulls off the friar's hood, revealing DUKE VINCENTIO.

DUKE VINCENTIO

You're the first lowlife to ever turn someone into a duke.
First, provost, let me free these three gentle people. (to LUCIO)
Don't you sneak away, sir. The friar and you will have a chat
later on. Hold him.

LUCIO

This may turn out worse than hanging.

DUKE VINCENTIO

(to ESCALUS) I forgive the things you said to me. Sit down. We'll take Angelo's seat. (to ANGELO) Sir, if I may. Do you have any words, either intelligent or impudent, that can help you? If so,

385 Rely upon it till my tale be heard,

And hold no longer out.

ANGELO

O my dread lord,

I should be guiltier than my guiltiness,

To think I can be undiscernible,

390 When I perceive your grace, like power divine,

Hath look'd upon my passes. Then, good prince,

No longer session hold upon my shame,

But let my trial be mine own confession:

Immediate sentence then and sequent death

395 Is all the grace I beg.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Come hither, Mariana.

Say, wast thou e'er contracted to this woman?

ANGELO

I was, my lord.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Go take her hence, and marry her instantly.

400 Do you the office, friar; which consummate,

Return him here again. Go with him, provost.

Exeunt ANGELO, MARIANA, FRIAR PETER and Provost

keep them until I tell my story. Don't hold the truth back any longer.

ANGELO

Oh my dreaded lord, I'd be even more guilty to think I could go undiscovered, now that I realize your grace, like some divine power, has seen my sins. So, good prince, stop inquiring about my shame. Let my confession count as my trial. I beg only for the mercy of an immediate sentence and then death.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Come here, Mariana. (*to Angelo*) Were you ever engaged to this woman?

ANGELO

I was, my lord.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Take her and marry her at once. You perform the ceremony, friar, and when it's done, bring him back here. Go with him, provost.

ANGELO, MARIANA, FRIAR PETER, and the Provost exit.

ESCALUS

My lord, I am more amazed at his dishonour
Than at the strangeness of it.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Come hither, Isabel.

405 Your friar is now your prince: as I was then
Advertising and holy to your business,
Not changing heart with habit, I am still
Attorney'd at your service.

ISABELLA

O, give me pardon,
410 That I, your vassal, have employ'd and pain'd
Your unknown sovereignty!

DUKE VINCENTIO

You are pardon'd, Isabel:
And now, dear maid, be you as free to us.
Your brother's death, I know, sits at your heart;
415 And you may marvel why I obscured myself,
Labouring to save his life, and would not rather
Make rash remonstrance of my hidden power
Than let him so be lost. O most kind maid,
It was the swift celerity of his death,
420 Which I did think with slower foot came on,
That brain'd my purpose. But, peace be with him!

ESCALUS

My lord, I'm more amazed by Angelo's dishonesty than by the strangeness of this situation.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Come here, Isabel. Your friar is now your prince, but my heart hasn't changed with my clothes. I guided and devoted myself to your affairs then, and I'm still acting for you now.

ISABELLA

Oh, forgive me! To think that I, your servant, unknowingly used and created problems for your royal person!

DUKE VINCENTIO

You're forgiven, Isabel. And now, dear girl, be as generous to me. I know your brother's death hurts you deeply. And you may be wondering why I disguised myself, working behind the scenes to save his life, and didn't just use my authority rather than let him die. Sweet girl, it was the speed of his execution, which I thought would take longer, that ruined my plan. But, peace be with him! The afterlife is a better life, since you don't have to fear death anymore. Try to take comfort in the fact that your brother has that happiness.

That life is better life, past fearing death,
Than that which lives to fear: make it your comfort,
So happy is your brother.

ISABELLA

425 I do, my lord.

Re-enter ANGELO, MARIANA, FRIAR PETER, and Provost

DUKE VINCENTIO

For this new-married man approaching here,
Whose salt imagination yet hath wrong'd
Your well defended honour, you must pardon
For Mariana's sake: but as he adjudged your brother,—
430 Being criminal, in double violation
Of sacred chastity and of promise-breach
Thereon dependent, for your brother's life,—
The very mercy of the law cries out
Most audible, even from his proper tongue,
435 'An Angelo for Claudio, death for death!'
Haste still pays haste, and leisure answers leisure;
Like doth quit like, and **MEASURE still FOR MEASURE**.
Then, Angelo, thy fault's thus manifested;
Which, though thou wouldest deny, denies thee vantage.
440 We do condemn thee to the very block
Where Claudio stoop'd to death, and with like haste.
Away with him!

ISABELLA

I do, my lord.

ANGELO, MARIANA, FRIAR PETER, and the Provost re-enter.

DUKE VINCENTIO

For Mariana's sake, you must forgive this newly married man, whose lecherous imagination wronged your well-defended honor. But after he condemned your brother, he committed two crimes, violating your virginity and breaking his promise about the pardon that your brother's life depended on. Even the merciful part of the law cries out, "an Angelo for Claudio, death for death!" Haste always results in hasty decisions, and deliberation comes from slowness. One thing is rewarded by a similar thing, and the measure of justice you use will be the measure used against you. So, Angelo, your crime is clear for all to see, and it denies you the right to any preferential treatment, even if you yourself feel otherwise. I sentence you to be executed on the very block where Claudio knelt to die, and just as quickly. Take him away!

MARIANA

O my most gracious lord,
I hope you will not mock me with a husband.

DUKE VINCENTIO

445 It is your husband mock'd you with a husband.
Consenting to the safeguard of your honour,
I thought your marriage fit; else imputation,
For that he knew you, might reproach your life
And choke your good to come; for his possessions,
450 Although by confiscation they are ours,
We do instate and widow you withal,
To buy you a better husband.

MARIANA

O my dear lord,
I crave no other, nor no better man.

DUKE VINCENTIO

455 Never crave him; we are definitive.

MARIANA

Gentle my liege,—

Kneeling

DUKE VINCENTIO

You do but lose your labour.

MARIANA

Oh, my most gracious lord, please don't make a mockery of my marriage!

DUKE VINCENTIO

It's your husband who's made a mockery of your marriage. I thought it appropriate that you be married, to protect your honor. Otherwise, revealing that he'd slept with you would haunt your life and destroy your future prospects. As for his possessions, technically they belong to the state, but we are giving you a widow's rights and bequeathing them to you, to buy you a better husband.

MARIANA

Oh my dear lord, I don't want any other man or any better man.

DUKE VINCENTIO

You shouldn't want him. My decision is final.

MARIANA

My gentle lord—

kneeling

DUKE VINCENTIO

You're just wasting your time. Take him to his death!

Away with him to death!

(To **LUCIO**)

Now, sir, to you.

MARIANA

460 O my good lord! Sweet Isabel, take my part;
Lend me your knees, and all my life to come
I'll lend you all my life to do you service.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Against all sense you do importune her:
Should she kneel down in mercy of this fact,
465 Her brother's ghost his paved bed would break,
And take her hence in horror.

MARIANA

Isabel,
Sweet Isabel, do yet but kneel by me;
Hold up your hands, say nothing; I'll speak all.
470 They say, best men are moulded out of faults;
And, for the most, become much more the better
For being a little bad: so may my husband.
O Isabel, will you not lend a knee?

DUKE VINCENTIO

He dies for Claudio's death.

(to **LUCIO**)

Now, sir, about you.

MARIANA

Oh, my good lord! Sweet Isabel, take my side. Kneel with me,
and for the rest of my life I'll be at your service.

DUKE VINCENTIO

It makes no sense to beg her. If she were to kneel and plead
for mercy, her brother's horrified ghost would break through his
stone-covered grave and drag her away with him.

MARIANA

Isabel, sweet Isabel, just kneel beside me, and hold out your
hands. Don't say anything, I'll do all the talking. They say the
best men are formed out of their faults, and most of them
become much better for being a little bad. That might happen
with my husband. Oh, Isabel, won't you kneel?

DUKE VINCENTIO

He dies for Claudio's death.

ISABELLA

475 (*Kneeling*) Most bounteous sir, Look, if it please you, on this man condemn'd,

As if my brother lived: I partly think
A due sincerity govern'd his deeds,
Till he did look on me: since it is so,
Let him not die. My brother had but justice,

480 In that he did the thing for which he died:

For Angelo,
His act did not o'ertake his bad intent,
And must be buried but as an intent
That perish'd by the way: thoughts are no subjects;

485 Intents but merely thoughts.

MARIANA

Merely, my lord.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Your suit's unprofitable; stand up, I say.
I have bethought me of another fault.
Provost, how came it Claudio was beheaded

490 At an unusual hour?

PROVOST

It was commanded so.

DUKE VINCENTIO**ISABELLA**

(*kneeling*) Generous sir, please look on this condemned man as if my brother were still alive. To some extent, I think his behavior was sincere, until he laid eyes on me. So, don't let him die. My brother was justly treated, in the sense that he did the thing he was executed for. But Angelo didn't actually fulfill his bad intentions, and his behavior should be considered with that fact in mind. Intentions are merely thoughts, and thoughts aren't subject to our control.

MARIANA

Merely, my lord.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Your pleading's no use. Stand up, I say. Another crime has just occurred to me. Provost, why was Claudio beheaded at such an unusual hour?

PROVOST

It was so ordered.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Had you a special warrant for the deed?

PROVOST

No, my good lord; it was by private message.

DUKE VINCENTIO

For which I do discharge you of your office:

495 Give up your keys.

PROVOST

Pardon me, noble lord:

I thought it was a fault, but knew it not;

Yet did repent me, after more advice;

For testimony whereof, one in the prison,

500 That should by private order else have died,

I have reserved alive.

DUKE VINCENTIO

What's he?

PROVOST

His name is Barnardine.

DUKE VINCENTIO

I would thou hadst done so by Claudio.

505 Go fetch him hither; let me look upon him.

Exit Provost

Did you have a special warrant?

PROVOST

No, my good lord, it was a private message.

DUKE VINCENTIO

You're fired for this. Turn in your keys.

PROVOST

Forgive me, noble lord. I thought it might be wrong, but wasn't sure. After further consideration, I did change my mind, and to prove I did, I kept alive another prisoner who was to be executed by a private order.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Who's he?

PROVOST

His name is Barnardine.

DUKE VINCENTIO

I wish you had done the same with Claudio.

Go get him. Let me see him.

The Provost exits.

ESCALUS

I am sorry, one so learned and so wise
As you, Lord Angelo, have still appear'd,
Should slip so grossly, both in the heat of blood.
And lack of temper'd judgment afterward.

ANGELO

510 I am sorry that such sorrow I procure:
And so deep sticks it in my penitent heart
That I crave death more willingly than mercy;
'Tis my deserving, and I do entreat it.

*Re-enter Provost, with **BARNARDINE**, **CLAUDIO** muffled, and **JULIET***

DUKE VINCENTIO

Which is that Barnardine?

PROVOST

515 This, my lord.

DUKE VINCENTIO

There was a friar told me of this man.
Sirrah, thou art said to have a stubborn soul.
That apprehends no further than this world,
And squarest thy life according. Thou'rt condemn'd:
520 But, for those earthly faults, I quit them all;
And pray thee take this mercy to provide

ESCALUS

Lord Angelo, I am sorry that someone so educated and wise, as you always appeared to be, should slip so badly, both in the heat of desire and the lack of judgment afterward.

ANGELO

I am sorry that I cause such sorrow, and it sticks so deeply in my penitent heart that it makes me crave death more than mercy. I deserve death, and beg for it.

*The Provost re-enters, with **BARNARDINE**, **CLAUDIO** with his face covered, and **JULIET**.*

DUKE VINCENTIO

Which one is this Barnardine?

PROVOST

This one, my lord.

DUKE VINCENTIO

A certain friar told me about this man. (to **BARNARDINE**) Fellow, you're said to have a stubborn soul, one that can't imagine an existence beyond this one, and shapes your life accordingly. You're doomed. But I pardon you for all your crimes here on earth, and hope you'll take advantage of this mercy to prepare

For better times to come. Friar, advise him;
I leave him to your hand. What muffled fellow's that?

PROVOST

This is another prisoner that I saved.
525 Who should have died when Claudio lost his head;
As like almost to Claudio as himself.

Unmuffles CLAUDIO

DUKE VINCENTIO

[To ISABELLA] If he be like your brother, for his sake
Is he pardon'd; and, for your lovely sake,
Give me your hand and say you will be mine.
530 He is my brother too: but fitter time for that.
By this Lord Angelo perceives he's safe;
Methinks I see a quickening in his eye.
Well, Angelo, your evil quits you well:
Look that you love your wife; her worth worth yours.
535 I find an apt remission in myself;
And yet here's one in place I cannot pardon. [To LUCIO] You,
sirrah, that knew me for a fool, a coward,
One all of luxury, an ass, a madman;
Wherein have I so deserved of you,
That you extol me thus?

LUCIO

for the better world to come. Friar, counsel him. I leave him in
your hands. Who's that covered-up fellow?

PROVOST

This is another prisoner I saved, who should have died when
Claudio lost his head. He looks almost exactly like Claudio.

He uncovers CLAUDIO.

DUKE VINCENTIO

(to ISABELLA) If he resembles your brother, then for his sake,
he's pardoned. And for your own lovely sake, give me your
hand and say you'll be mine. He's my brother, too, but there'll
be a more appropriate time for that. By the way Angelo is
behaving, I think he realizes this means he's safe. Well, Angelo,
your evil has repaid you well. Make sure you love your wife
since her worth is equal to yours. I'm feeling merciful, and yet
here's someone I can't forgive. (to LUCIO) You, who called me a
fool, a coward, a lecher, an ass, a madman. What did I ever do
to you that you call me these things?

LUCIO

540 'Faith, my lord. I spoke it but according to the
trick. If you will hang me for it, you may; but I
had rather it would please you I might be whipt.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Whipt first, sir, and hanged after.
Proclaim it, provost, round about the city.
545 Is any woman wrong'd by this lewd fellow,
As I have heard him swear himself there's one
Whom he begot with child, let her appear,
And he shall marry her: the nuptial finish'd,
Let him be whipt and hang'd.

LUCIO

550 I beseech your highness, do not marry me to a whore.
Your highness said even now, I made you a duke:
good my lord, do not recompense me in making me a
cuckold.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Upon mine honour, thou shalt marry her.
Thy slanders I forgive; and therewithal
555 Remit thy other forfeits. Take him to prison;
And see our pleasure herein executed.

LUCIO

Marrying a punk, my lord, is pressing to death,
whipping, and hanging.

I swear, my lord, I only spoke according to what people say of
you. You can hang me for it, if you want, but I wouldn't mind if
you preferred to whip me.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Whipping first, sir, and hanging afterward. Proclaim it, provost,
around the city, that if this lecher wronged any woman, as I
heard him swear himself he got someone pregnant, let her
appear, and he'll marry her. After the wedding, let him be
whipped and hanged.

LUCIO

I beg your highness, don't marry me to a whore. Your highness
just said I made you a duke. My good lord, don't pay me back
by making me husband of a cheating wife.

DUKE VINCENTIO

By my honor, you will marry her. I forgive your slurs, and in so
doing, lift your other punishments. Take him to prison, and see
that my wishes are carried out.

LUCIO

Marrying a whore, my lord, is like being [pressed to death](#),
whipped, and hanged.

DUKE VINCENTIO

Slandering a prince deserves it.

Exit Officers with LUCIO

560 She, Claudio, that you wrong'd, look you restore.
Joy to you, Mariana! Love her, Angelo:
I have confess'd her and I know her virtue.
Thanks, good friend Escalus, for thy much goodne
There's more behind that is more gratulate.
565 Thanks, provost, for thy care and secrecy:
We shill employ thee in a worthier place.
Forgive him, Angelo, that brought you home
The head of Ragozine for Claudio's:
The offence pardons itself. Dear Isabel,
570 I have a motion much imports your good;
Whereto if you'll a willing ear incline,
What's mine is yours and what is yours is mine.
So, bring us to our palace; where we'll show
What's yet behind, that's meet you all should know.

Exeunt

DUKE VINCENTIO

You deserve it for slandering a prince.

Officers exit with LUCIO.

Claudio, the girl you wronged, make sure you marry her. Joy to you, Mariana! Love her, Angelo. I've heard her confession, and I know her virtue. Thanks, good friend Escalus, for being so good. A greater expression of my gratitude is yet to come. Thanks, provost, for your care and ability to keep secrets. I'm going to give you a better position. Forgive him, Angelo, for bringing you Ragozine's head in place of Claudio's. The crime redeems itself. Dear Isabel, I have a proposal that's greatly to your benefit, if you'll lend a willing ear. It's along the lines of what's mine is yours, and what's yours is mine. So, accompany me to my palace, where I'll show and tell you everything you ought to know.

All exit.