

Measure for Measure

by William Shakespeare

Presented by Paul W. Collins

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Chapter One

Powers, Assigned and Applied

Surprised lords and ladies of the vast realm governed from Vienna gather in the crowded throne room of the palace for a ceremony just announced early this Monday morning.

The sovereign, they have been told, intends to travel abroad, and he has summoned those who are to hold sway in his stead. The archduke has devoted considerable study and thought to governance, and he will invest his sovereign powers in a deputy.

Duke Vincentio, thirty-four, steps to the front. “Escalus!” He smiles as a venerable judge comes before him.

The white-haired peer bows. “My lord.”

Vincentio begins modestly: “In *me*, unfolding the properties of governing would seem to be effecting but discourse—*speech*. Since I am given to know that your own science exceeds *lists* of all advice *my* strength can give you,” he tells the sage modestly, “then no more remains—to your sufficiency, and *let it work* as your worth is able!”

Lord Escalus bows, pleased by the recognition of his knowledge, experience, and judgment.

The duke regards the fatherly nobleman fondly and respectfully. “You’re as replete with the nature of our *people*, our city’s *institutions*, and the terms for common *justice* as art and practise have enriched any that we remember.

“There is our commission,” he says, handing Escalus a rolled document sealed with scarlet wax, “from which we would not have you warp.”

The duke turns to an attendant. “Call hither—” The wording lacks appropriate dignity for the younger judge. “I say, bid come before us Lord Angelo.” The man bows and runs to the nearby courthouse, where a trial is under way.

“What figure of *us* think you he will bear?” the philosopher-ruler asks his courtiers, as they wait. “For you must know we have elected him, with *this* special soul,” he nods to Escalus, “to *supply* in our absence—lent him our dread authority, dressed him with our love, and given to his deputation all the *organs* of our own power. What think you of it?”

Angelo is to manage the state’s day-to-day operations. The courtiers smile; Vincentio’s reign, like his father’s, has been markedly benign. But the silence is pregnant; the other judge is highly efficient, but cold.

Says Escalus, “If any in Vienna be of worth to undergo such ample grace and honour, it is Lord Angelo.”

“Look where he comes,” says Vincentio, as the nobleman enters the tall chamber.

Angelo is solidly built at forty-one; his full beard is black, but the hair at his temples is graying. He walks to the throne and bows courteously. “Always obedient to Your Grace’s will, I come to know your pleasure.”

“Angelo, there is a kind of character in thy life that to the observer thy history doth fully unfold,” the duke tells the exemplar of diffident decorum. “But thyself and thy belongings are not thine *own*; thy virtues are not properly to be dispensed wastefully upon *thyself*—on thee alone.

“Heaven doth with *us* as we with *torches* do: light them not for *themselves*—for if our virtues did not go *forth* from us, ’twere all alike as if we had them not!”

Lord Angelo is well known for diligence in performing his duties at law, but the duke has sometimes thought, observing him, that he construes process and punishment as wisdom and justice, harsh indifference as judicious impartiality.

“Spirits are not *finely* touched but to fine *issue*,” he cautions the nobleman. “Nor does Nature ever lend the smallest particle of her excellence but that, like a *thrifty* goddess, she determines for herself the glory of a *creditor*: both use and *thanks*”—lends *assistance*, and expects *appreciation* as interest.

Vincentio smiles at the assembly. “But I do bend my speech to one who can my part in him

advertise”—justify the trust by actions. “Hold therefore, Angelo.” He places a hand on the judge’s shoulder. “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*,”—theory, “is thy secondary.” He motions to an attendant and receives a sealed document; he proffers it to Angelo. “Take thy commission.”

“Now, good my lord, let there be some more test made of my metal,” says Angelo, “before so noble and so great a figure be stamped upon it.” He has been serving comfortably as an official who is always guided by legal precedent.

“No more *evasion*,” the duke tells him, smiling. “We have with a leavened and prepared choice proceeded to *you*; therefore take your honours. Our *haste* from hence is of so urgent a condition that it prefers *itself*, and leaves, unresolvèd, needful matters of value.”

Angelo bows and accepts the scroll.

Vincenzio is already looking toward the doors; he nods to a serving-man, who goes to alert the waiting coachmen that the duke will soon depart. “We shall write to you, 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,” the duke tells Angelo and Escalus. “Hopefully do I leave you to the execution of your commissions.”

“Yet give us leave, my lord,” pleads Angelo, troubled by the abruptness, “so that we may bring you somewhat along the way....”

The duke shakes his head. “My haste may not admit of it—nor need you, on mine honour, have to do with any concern about it.

“Your scope is as mine own: to enforce, or qualify, the laws as to your soul seems good.

“Give me your hand,” he says, and shakes it warmly. “I’ll privily away. I love the people, but do not like to stage me to their eyes; though it go well, I do not relish well their loud applause and vehement *Ave*’s—nor do I think the man that *does* affect it of safe discretion.

“Once more, fare you well!”

Says Angelo, “The heavens give safety to your purposes.”

Adds Escalus, “Lead you forth and bring you back in *happiness!*”

“I thank you,” says the duke. “Fare you well!” He and his attendants leave the hall.

As the courtiers cluster, and the buzz of conversation swells, Escalus approaches Angelo. “I shall desire you, sir, to give me leave to have free speech with you.” He opens his sealed commission. “And it concerns me to look into the bottom of my place; a power I have, but of what strength and nature I am not yet instructed.”

“’Tis so with me. Let us withdraw together, and we may soon have our satisfaction, touching that point.”

“I’ll wait upon Your Honour.” Escalus will follow the surrogate sovereign to his large but austere furnished home, not far from the graybeard’s own.

News of the duke’s sudden departure spreads through the city’s thriving markets this morning; soon it reaches one of the sprawling riverside districts that furnish the people with amusements. Among those drawing conclusions about it here are Signior Lucio and two of his merchant friends.

For some time the threat of war has loomed; with the weakened realm to the east in turmoil, the Viennese speak mockingly of its ruler. “If the duke and the *other* dukes come not to composition with the King of *Hungry*,” Lucio tells the others, “why then *all* the dukes fall—upon the king!”—as in fall upon *supper*; each will take a portion.

“May heaven grant *us* its peace, but not the King of Hungary!” says the tall gentleman; his weapons business has been bolstered by the troubles there.

“*Amen!*” says the heavy one, also a trader in arms.

Lucio, a profligate gentleman, is amused by their unaccustomed reverence. “Thou concludest like the *sanctimonious pirate*—that went to sea with the Ten Commandments, but scraped one

out of the tablet!”

““Thou shalt not steal?” asks the portly purveyor of daggers, swords and axes.

Lucio laughs. “Aye, *that* he razed!”

“Why, ’twas a Commandment to command the captain and all the rest *away from their functions*—they *put forth* to steal!” says the slender gentleman. “There’s not a soldier of *us* all that, in the thanks-giving before meat, does relish well the petition that prays for *peace!*” But each stands to profit considerably from the expected military conflict.

“I never heard any *real* soldier dislike it,” the heavy gentleman admits.

Lucio gibes, “I *believe* thee—for I think *thou* never wast where grace was *said!*”

The merchant shrugs comically. “No? A *dozen* times at least.”

His friend chuckles. “What, in *metre?*”—in a twelve-beat line of verse, often thought too long.

“In *any* proportion,” laughs Lucio, “or in any *language!*”

The tall gentleman concurs: “So *I* think!—or in any *religion!*”

But liberal Lucio shrugs. “Ah, why not? Grace is *grace*, in despite of all controversy—as, for example, thou thyself art a wicked *villain*, in despite of all grace!”

“Well, there went but a pair of shears between *us!*”—they’re cut from the same cloth, argues the frail purveyor of cannon.

Lucio nods. “I grant it: as there may be between the *velvet* and lists; *thou* art the *lists!*”—trimmed-away scraps.

“And thou the velvet? Thou art *good* velvet: thou’rt a *three-piled* piece,”—thick-napped and costly, “I warrant thee! *I* had as lief be the list of an English kersey”—wool cloth—“as be piled as *thou* art—*pilled* for a *French* velvet!” To be left bald, he implies, by a treatment for syphilis. “Do I speak *feelingly* now?”

Lucio winces. “I think thou *dost!* And, indeed, with most *painful* feeling of thy speech, I will, considering thine *own* confessions, yearn to *salute thy health*—but, whilst I live, forego drinking *after* thee!”—avoid his infected cup.

The tall one laughs with the others, but sheepishly. “I think I have done myself wrong, have I not?”

Lucio replies, “Yes, that thou *hast!*”—indulged in self abuse. Adds the wag, “Whether thou art tainted *or* free!”—diseased or not.

As the genteel rascals laugh at the gibe, Lucio cries, theatrically, “*Behold!*” He points down the broad street, where a well-known courtesan is emerging from her house. “Behold where Madam *Mitigation* comes! I have purchased as many diseases under her roof as come to....”

“To what, I pray?” demands his grinning fat friend, pretending to ask for the total. They know his habits.

“*Judge,*” says Lucio, always unapologetic.

“To three thousand *dolours* a year!”—the tall gentleman’s wry pronunciation of *dollars*, a word for German *thalers*.

“Aye! And more!” adds the other.

“A *French crown* more!” laughs the tall merchant, in a jest on both the coin and the itchy-crotch symptom.

Lucio complains: “Thou art always figuring *diseases* in me, but thou art full of error: I am *sound!*”

“Nay, not so as one would say *healthy*, but as sound as things that are *hollow!*” his friend retorts. “Thy *bones* are hollow! Impiety has made a *feast* of thee!”—another effect, supposedly, of the venereal ailment.

Mistress Overdone has reached them, and she strikes a professional stance, with a colorful umbrella to keep the sunlight from her face, which is caked with powder and rouge.

Says the first gentleman, observing her posture, “How now. Which of your hips has the more *profound* sciatica?”

“Well, well,” she says, brushing aside the taunt, “there’s one *yonder*, arrested and carried to prison, was worth *five thousand of you* all!”

“Who’s that, I pray thee?” asks the heavier gentleman.

“Marry, sir, that’s Claudio, Signior Claudio.”

“*Claudio to prison?*” The tall gentleman is taken aback. “’Tis not so!”

“Nay, but I know *’tis* so!” she insists. “I saw him *arrested*, saw him carried away—and, which is *more*, within these three days his *head* is to be *chopped off!*”

Says Lucio wryly, concerning Claudio’s masculine member, “Despite all its fooling, I would not have it *so!* Art thou sure of this?”

“I am *too* sure of it!” says Mistress Overdone gravely, “and it is for getting Madam Julietta with child!” She is very upset; the nobleman and his lady have always been polite to her—a unique distinction.

Lucio, now worried, tells the stunned men, “Believe me, this may be! He promised to meet me *two hours* since, and he was ever precise in promise-keeping.”

Notes the bigger merchant. “Besides, you know, it draws something near to the speech we had—”

“But, most of all, agreeing with the *proclamation* of such a purpose!” says the slender one, alarmed.

“Away!” urges Lucio. “Let’s go learn the truth of it!” He and the others head for their customary public haunts, eager to find out more about the generous young lord’s arrest.

Mistress Overdone frets: *Thus, what with the war, what with the sweat, —tub treatment for syphilis— what with the gallows, and what with poverty, I am custom-shrunk!*

Pompey, her burly panderer and procurer, arrives on his way to her house, where he also works behind the bar. He sports a grimy apron, and the frayed sleeves of a stained shirt are rolled up on his hairy arms.

“How now! What’s the news with you?” she demands as the work-week begins.

“Yonder a man is carried to prison.”

“Well, what has *he* done?”

“A woman.”

“But what’s his *offence?*”

“Groping for trouts in a peculiar river,” quips the tapster.

For her, that’s an everyday matter. “What, is there a *maid* with *child* by him?”

“No, but there’s a *woman* was *made* by him.” But Pompey frowns. “You have not heard of the *proclamation*, have you?”

“What proclamation, man?”

“All ‘houses’ here in the suburbs of Vienna must be *plucked down!*”—often a rude term: *unerected*.

“And what shall become of those *in the city?*” she asks indignantly.

His reply is ribald: “They shall *stand* for *seed!*”—be preserved, like seed corn. “They had *gone down* too, but that a wise burgher *put in* for them.” A nobleman paid bribes to shield them.

“But shall all our houses of resort in the suburbs be *pulled down?*”

“To the ground, mistress.”

She is appalled. “Why, *here’s* a change indeed in the commonwealth! What shall *become* of me?”

“Come, fear you not! Good ‘counsellors’ lack no clients,” says Pompey. “Though you change your *place*, you need not change your *trade!* I’ll be your ‘tapster’ still!

“Courage!” he says. “There will be pity taken on you—you that have almost worn out your eyes in the service!”—many *ayes* indeed. “You will be considered.”

Mistress Overdone peers around, now fearful in this public a place; Claudio has been *considered*. “What’s there to do *here*, Thomas Tapster?—let’s withdraw!”

“Here comes Signior Claudio, led by the provost to the prison where Madam Julietta is!”

To avoid the court official and his men, Mistress Overdone and Pompey pass quickly into an alley, taking a back way to their work, now much more dangerous. She will have to find a new house—soon.

Leading leather-clad officers who carry tall halberds, the provost is marching Signior Claudio—conspicuously, his hands bound with cord—through several busy but unsavory areas of the suburbs.

“Fellow, why dost thou show me thus to the world?” demands Claudio angrily. “Bear me to prison, where I am committed!”

The provost replies, unhappily, “I do it not in evil disposition, but by special charge from Lord Angelo.”

Mutters Claudio, “Thus can the *demigod* Authority, weighèd down with the *words* of Heaven, make us pay for our offences: whom it will, it will; whom it will not, so.” He adds, with sarcasm, “Yet still ’tis *just!*”

Lucio has hurried back. “Why, how now, Claudio?” he cries, running up. “Whence comes this *restraint?*”

“From too much *liberty*, my Lucio, liberty! As *surfeit* is the father of much *fasting*, so every scope turns by *immoderate* use to restraint. Like rats that ravin down their proper bane, our natures do pursue evil *thirstily*—and when we drink we *die!*”

The usually jocund lover of wine has surprised Lucio. “If *I* could speak so wisely under an arrest, I would send for certain of my creditors!”—to argue away debts. “And yet, to say the truth, I’d as lief have the *foppery* of freedom as the morality of *imprisonment!*”

“What’s thine offence, Claudio?”

“What but to *speak* of would offend *again!*”

“What, is’t *murder?*”

“No.”

“Lechery?”

“They *call* it so,” says Claudio.

The provost intercedes. “*Away*, sir. You must go.”

“One word, good friend,” pleads Claudio; the official nods. “Lucio, a word with you. . . .”

“A *hundred*, if they’ll do you any good!” Lucio is amazed at the imposition of a severe statute long held in abeyance. “Is lechery so *looked after?*”

Claudio speaks urgently. “Thus stands it with me: upon a true contract”—betrothal—“I got possession of Julietta’s bed. You know the lady—*she is fast my wife*, save that, of *outward* order, we do lack *enunciation*”—banns. “That we came *not* to only in order to propagate a dower remaining in the coffers of her friends, from whom we thought it meet to hide our love till time had made them favor us.

“But it chances that the stealth of our most mutual entertainment is, with character too gross, *writ* on Julietta.”

“With child, perhaps?”

Says Claudio wryly. “As it *happens*, even so. And the new *deputy* for the *duke*—whether it be a fault in the glimpse of newness, or that the body politic be a *horse* whereon the governor doth ride—so that it may know he can *command*, newly in the saddle he straight lets it *feel the spur!*” The gentleman’s voice rises with anger. “Whether the tyranny be in his *place* or in his *eminence* who fills it up, I stagger in!

“But this new governor awakens all the enrollèd *penalties* which have, like unscoured armour, hung by the wall so long that nineteen zodiacs have gone round,”—years passed in the reigns of the duke and his father, “and in none of them been *worn!*”

“And now for a *name*”—to make a reputation—“he puts the drowsy and neglected law freshly on *me!* ’Tis surely for a *name!*”

“I warrant it is,” says Lucio. “But thy head stands so *fickly* on thy shoulders that a milkmaid, if she be in love, may *sigh* it off! Send after the duke, and appeal to *him!*”

“I have *done* so, but he’s not to be found!” moans Claudio. “I prithee, Lucio, do me this kind service: this day my *sister* should the cloister enter, and there receive her approbation”—begin as a novice nun. “Acquaint her with the danger of my state; *implore* her, in my voice, that she *make friends* with the strict deputy, bid herself to assay him!

“I have great hope in that—for in her *youth* there is such a prone and speechless dialect as moves men; beside, she hath a prosperous *art* when she will ply with reason and discourse, and well she can persuade!”

“I pray she *may*,” says Lucio, “as well for the enjoying of *my* happy life, that else would stand under grievous *imposition*, as for the encouragement of *thy* life, which I would be sorry should be thus foolishly lost at a game of tick-tack!”—peg-board. “I’ll to her,” he promises.

“I thank you, good friend Lucio!”

“Within the hour!”

Claudio hopes to comfort his betrothed. “Come, officer, away.”

The provost nods—but he must wend a meandering way toward the city jail.

Chapter Two Changing Roles

The stone monastery is cool and quiet in the shadow of a tall cathedral spire, despite the heat of a summer in Vienna.

Sitting in the chambers of the rector, old Friar Thomas, the petitioner laughs. “No, holy father!—throw away *that* thought! Believe not that the drifting dart of *Love*”—Cupid—“can pierce a *complete* bosom. Why I desire thee to give me secret harbour hath a *purpose* more grave and wrinkled than the aims and ends of burning youth.” And he is resigned to being a bachelor.

“May Your Grace speak of it?” inquires the monk, a frequent companion and thinker, well read in temporal philosophy in addition to the Scriptures of his lifelong study.

Duke Vincentio nods. He has ruled since he was twenty, when he left the university in the city following the five-year reign of his late father—also a friend to Father Thomas.

“My holy sir, none better knows than you how I have ever loved the life removed, and held it idle pride to haunt assemblies where youth and cost and witless bravery keep.

“I have delivered to Lord Angelo, a man of stricture and firm abstinence, my absolute power and place here in Vienna, and he supposes me travelled to Poland—for so I have strewed it in the common ear, and so it is received.

“Now, pious sir, will you demand of me *why* I do this?”

Friar Thomas smiles. “Gladly, my lord.”

“We have *strict* statutes, and most-biting *laws*—the needful bits and curbs to *headstrong needs*—which for this nineteen years we have let slip, even like an o’erfed lion in a cave, that goes not out for prey.

“Now, as *fathers* find, having gathered the threatening twigs of birch only to stick in their children’s sight for terror, not to *use*, in time the rod becomes more *mocked* than feared. So our decrees, dead to infliction, in *themselves* are dead—and liberty *plucks Justice by the nose!*—the baby beats the nurse, and quite *athwart* goes all *decorum!*”

Friar Thomas’s gaze is direct. “It rested in Your Grace to unloose this tied-up justice when you pleased,” he notes. “And in *you* it would have seemed more fearful than in Lord Angelo.”

“*Too* fearful, I do fear,” says Duke Vincentio. “Sith ’twas my mistake to give the people scope, ’twould be my *tyranny* to strike and gall them for what I bid them do—for we *bid* this be done, when evil deeds have their permissive pass and not the *punishment*.

“Therefore, indeed, my father, I have imposed the office on Angelo, who may from the ambush of my *name* strike home, and yet never in the fight slander my *nature*.

“And to *behold* his sway, I will, as if I were a brother of your order, visit both prince and

people. Therefore, I prithee, supply me with a habit, and instruct me how I may in person bear me, formally, like a true friar.”

The younger man rises, as does Friar Thomas. “More reasons for this action at our more leisure shall I render you,” the duke assures the priest. “Now, only this *one*: Lord Angelo is precise—stands guard against envy, scarce confesses that his *blood* flows, or that his appetite is more toward bread than *stone*.

“Hence shall we see if *power* change *purpose*—what our seemers *be*.”

In the convent nearby, white habits glide silently past in the corridor as a bright-eyed novice listens to Sister Francisca.

“And have you nuns no further privileges?” asks Isabella, in the contemplatives’ cloistered quarters.

“Are not these large enough?”

“Yes, truly! I speak not as desiring more, but rather wishing a *more strict restraint* upon the sisterhood, the votarists of Saint Clare!” The gray-haired nun only nods patiently; for more than thirty years she has found the order’s strictures of poverty, silence and chastity to be quite sufficient.

From beyond the heavy oaken door comes a loud cry, breaking the calm silence: “*Ho! Peace* be in this place!”

The gentlewoman looks to the entrance. “Who’s that which calls?”

“It is a man’s voice,” Sister Francisca notes. “Gentle Isabella, turn you the key, and know his business of him. *You* may, I may not. You are yet unsworn; when you have vowed, you must not speak with men but in the presence of the prioress. Then, if you speak, you must not show your face; or, if you show your face, you must not speak.

“He calls again. I pray you, answer him.” She steps into the next room, and closes the door softly behind her.

Isabella goes to the door. “Peace and prosperity,” she says, opening it. “Who is’t that calls?”

“*Hail, virgin*, if you *be*—and those cheek-roses proclaim you are no less!” says Lucio blithely as he slips past her. “Can you so stead me as bring me to the sight of Isabella, a novice of this place, and the fair sister to her unhappy brother Claudio?”

“Why her ‘*unhappy*’ brother? Let me ask the matter, for I now must make you know *I* am that Isabella, and his sister.”

“Gentle and fair, your brother kindly greets you! Not to be weary with you—he’s in prison.”

“*Woe is me!* For *what?*”

“For that which, if *myself* might be his judge, he should receive his punishment in *thanks!* He hath got his friend with child.”

“Sir, make *me* not your *story!*” she cries angrily, sure he’s making a prank.

“It is *true!* Though ’tis my familiar sin to seem the lapwing”—odd bird—“with maidens, and to *jest*, tongue far from heart, I would not play with *all* virgins so! I hold *you* as a thing en-*sky*-èd and sanctified by your renouncements—an immortal spirit, and to be talked with in sincerity, as with a saint.”

She flushes. “You do blaspheme the *good* in mocking me!”

“Do not believe it.” Surprised, himself, at his earnestness, Lucio quickly resumes his usual glibness: “In fewness and truth, ’tis thus: your brother and his lover have embracèd. As those that feed grow full, as blossoming *time* from the seedless, bare fallow brings teeming foison, even so her plenteous womb expresseth his full tilth and husbandry.”

“Someone with child by him.” Young Isabella thinks. “My cousin Julietta?”

“Is she your *cousin?*”

“*Adoptedly*—as school-maids change their names by vain-though-apt *affection.*”

“She it is.”

Isabella is quite pleased. “Oh, let him *marry* her!”

“That is the *point!*” says Lucio. “The duke is very strangely gone from hence—bore many gentlemen, myself being one, in hand and hope of *an action.*” Merchants who would supply the counties’ militias had looked forward to a flourishing business of war—lucrative, for those not fighting it. “But we do learn, from those that know the very nerves of state, that his givings-out were of an infinite distance from his true-meant design!

“Upon his place, 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 *senses*, but with profits rebated from the mind in study and fasting doth blunt his *natural* edge.

“He—to give *fear* to custom and liberty, which have for long *run past* the hideous law as mice by *lions*—hath picked out an act under whose heavy sentence your brother’s *life* falls into forfeit! He arrests him on it, and closely follows 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 the pith of my business ’twixt you and your poor brother.”

Isabella is dismayed. “Doth he so seek his *life?*”

Lucio nods. “Has censured him already; and, as I hear, the provost hath a warrant for his execution.”

“*Alas!*” she cries, “what poor ability’s in *me* to do him good?”

“Assay the power you have!”

“*My* power? *Alas*, I doubt—”

“Our doubts are *traitors*, and make us, by fearing to attempt, lose the good we oft might *win!* Go to Lord Angelo! And let him learn to know that when maidens *sue*, men give like the *gods*”—capriciously, if at all. “But when they *weep* and *kneel*, all their petitions are as freely granted as they themselves would have them!”

Isabella must try. “I’ll see what I can do . . .”

“But speedily!”

“I will go about it straight!—no longer staying but to give the mother notice of my affair!”

She touches his hand. “I humbly *thank you!* Commend me to my brother! Soon at night I’ll send him certain word of my effect.”

Lucio bows. “I take my leave of you.”

She curtsies. “Good sir, *adieu!*”

He ambles away from the convent, confused—much aware of his hand, and the concern that grows as he thinks of her and her brother.

We must not make a *scarecrow* of the *law*,” pronounces Lord Angelo at the courthouse, “setting it up to affright the birds of prey, but letting it keep one shape till custom make it their *perch*, and not their terror.”

“Aye, but yet let us be keen, and cut *a little*, rather than fell, and *bruise to death!*” replies Lord Escalus. “*Alas*, this gentleman whom I would save had a most noble father!” He has come to a corridor outside the tall room from which Angelo now dispenses Vienna’s severe verdicts.

Escalus tries another tack. “Let but Your Honour, whom I believe to be most strait in virtue, consider whether—if the working of your *own* affections, had time cohered with place, or place with *wishing*; or if the resolute acting of your blood could have *attained* the effect of your *purpose*—you had not sometime in your life erred in this point for which now you censure him, and pulled the law upon *you!*”

“’Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus, another thing to fall,” Angelo counters. “I’ll not deny that the jury passing on the prisoner’s life may, in the sworn twelve, have a thief or two guiltier than him they try. What knows *the law* about thieves’ passing on thieves?”

“What’s made *open* to justice, that justice seizes. ’Tis very pregnant that the jewel we *find*, we stoop and take’t up, because we *see* it; but what we do *not* see, we tread upon, and never think of it.

“You may not extenuate his *offence* because *I* have had such flaws; rather, tell me when I who censure him *do* so offend—and let mine own judgment pattern-out *my* death, and nothing partial come in.

“Sir, he must die.”

“Be it as your *wisdom* will,” says Escalus—in frustration; his role is secondary, and attempts to temper rulings have been futile.

Angelo looks down the corridor. “Where is the provost?” he calls.

That officer steps out from a room by the entrance. “Here, if it like Your Honour.”

“See that Claudio be executed by nine Wednesday morning. Bring him his confessor; let him be preparèd, for that’s the utmost of his pilgrimage.” The provost, grim-faced at the unwelcome order, bows and goes down the stairs, then into the jail.

Old Escalus watches the confident Lord Angelo. *Well, Heaven forgive him, and forgive us all! Some rise by sin, and some by virtue fall. Some can run from outbreaks of vice, and answer to none—and some are condemnèd for a weakness alone!*

At the front doors, a constable bursts in, then turns back to urge two of his deputies forward, as they deliver two captives whose arms are bound. “Come, bring them away!” cries the arresting officer. “If these be *good* people in the commonweal, who do nothing but use their *abuses* in common *houses*, I know no *law*! Bring them away!”

Angelo goes to the man. “How now, sir! What’s your name, and what’s the matter?”

The officer bows awkwardly. “If it please Your Honour, I am the poor duke’s constable, and my name is Elbow. I do lean upon *justice*, sir, and do bring in here before Your Good Honour two notorious benefactors!”

“*Benefactors?*” The judge looks at the prisoners. “Why, what benefactors are *they*? Are they not *malefactors?*”

“If it please Your Honour, I know not well *what* they 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 chuckles. “This comes off *well*; here’s a *wise* officer!”

Angelo is annoyed with the constable. “Go to,” he mutters. “What are they guilty of?” he demands imperiously—quite overawing the officer. “Elbow is your name? Why dost thou not speak, Elbow?”

“He cannot, sir,” says Pompey, one of those being held. “He’s ‘*out at*’ Elbow”—threadbare in thought.

Angelo regards him sternly. “What are *you*, sir?”

Elbow now answers. “*He*, sir?—a *tapster*, sir!—a *parcel-bawd*!—one that serves a bad woman whose *house*, sir, was, as they say, *plucked down* in the suburbs! And now she *professes* a hothouse—which I think is a very *ill* house, too!”

“How know you that?” asks Escalus.

“My *wife*, sir,” says Elbow, “whom I detest, before heaven and Your Honour—” he begins, intending to *attest* to her merits.

“*What?*—thy *wife*!”

“*Aye*, sir—whom, I thank heaven, is an *honest* woman—”

Escalus laughs. “Dost thou detest her *therefore*?”

“I say, sir, I will detest *myself also*, as well as *she*, that this house—If it be not a *bawd*’s house, it is the pity of her life—for it *is* a *naughty* house!”

“How dost thou *know* that, constable?”

“Marry, sir, by my *wife*!—who, if she had been a woman cardinally given,”—open to the procurer’s carnal invitation, “might have been accused in *fornication*, *adultery*, and all *uncleanliness* there!”

Escalus asks who solicited the wife. “By the woman’s means?”

“*Aye*, sir, by Mistress Overdone’s *means*!” says Elbow, angrily, glaring at Pompey. “But as she spit in his face, so she *defiled* him!”

The tapster objects: "Sir, if it please Your Honour, this is not so!"

"*Prove it!*" sputters Elbow angrily, "before these varlets here, thou '*honourable*' man, *prove it!*"

Escalus, never before called a *varlet*, is tickled. "Do you hear how he misplaces?" Lord Angelo, he sees, is frowning.

Pompey relates the wife's visit to Mistress Overdone's new establishment—which is right beside Elbow's home. "Sir, she came in, great with child, and longing, saving Your Honours' reverence, for prunes"—a whorehouse staple. "Sirs, we had but two in the house, which at that very distant time stood, as it were, in a fruit-dish—a dish of some three-pence—Your Honours have seen such dishes; they are not China dishes, but very good dishes—"

"Go to, *go to*," interrupts Angelo, "no matter for the *dish*, sir."

"No, indeed, sir, not of a pin!—you are therein in the right!" says Pompey obsequiously. "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, Master Froth here, this very man,"—he points at the other prisoner, a mild-mannered if disconcerted young gentleman, "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...."

Nods Froth, "No, indeed." That much change, though, means the fruit was overpriced.

"Very well," says Pompey. "You being then, if you be remembered, cracking the stones from the foresaid prunes—"

"Aye, so I did indeed," Froth confirms.

"Why, very well. I was telling you then, if you be remembered, that such a one and such a one were past cure of the thing you wot of, unless they kept very good *diet*, as I told you—"

Froth nods. "All this is true." The women he asked for are too sick to be serviceable.

Pompey continues: "Why, very well. Then—"

"Come, you *are* a tedious fool," says Angelo. "To the *purpose!* What was done to Elbow's wife, that he hath cause to complain of it? Can we come to what was done to her?"

Pompey grins. "Sir, Your Honour cannot come to *that* yet!"

"No, sir!—nor I *mean* it not!" cries Lord Angelo, flushing at the unseemly notion.

Pompey proceeds. "But we shall come to it, sir, by Your Honour's 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?"

"All-hallond *eve*," the gentleman corrects.

"Why, very well," says Pompey. He scowls at the constable. "I hope *here* be truths!" He points at Froth. "He, sir, sitting, as I say, in a lower chair, sir—'twas in the Bunch of Grapes," the downstairs tavern, "where indeed you have a delight to sit, have you not?"

"I *have* so," says simple Froth, "because it is an open room, and good for winter."

"Why, very *well*, then! I hope here be *truths*," says Pompey.

Angelo is weary of the tenuous testimony. "This will last out a night in Russia when nights are *longest* there! I'll take my leave," he tells Escalus, "and leave you to the hearing of the cause—hoping you'll find good cause to whip them all!"

Escalus laughs. "I think no less! Good morrow to Your Lordship," he says, as Angelo goes into his hearing room for the late-morning session, and closes the door.

Escalus motions for the deputies to return to their rounds. "Now, sir, come on," he says to Pompey. "Once more, what was done to Elbow's wife?"

"Once *more*, sir? There was nothing done to her *once!*"

Says Elbow angrily, "I beseech you, sir, ask *him* what this man *did to my wife!*" Froth had witnessed the offer.

Pompey intrudes hotly, "I beseech Your Honour ask *me!*"

"Well, sir, what *did* this gentleman to her?" asks Escalus patiently.

Pompey motions toward the docile customer. "I beseech you, sir, look in this gentleman's

face. Good Master Froth, look upon his honour—'tis for a good purpose," he adds apologetically. "Doth Your Honour mark his face?"

"Aye, sir. Very well."

Pompey hears an unwarranted compliment. "Nay, I beseech you: mark it *well*."

"Well, I do so."

"Doth Your Honour see any *harm* in his face?"

Escalus shrugs. "Why, no...."

Cries Pompey triumphantly, "And his face is the *worst* thing about him, I'll be supposed upon a book!" Even if deposed on the Book, the bawd would have little credibility; but he goes on. "Good, then!—if his face be the worst thing about him, how could Master Froth do the constable's wife any *harm*?" he demands. "I would know *that* of Your Honour!"

Escalus regards the sheepish gentleman again for a moment. "He's in the right, constable. What say you to it?"

Elbow is furious. "First, an it like you, the house is a *respected house!*"—he means *suspected*. "Next, this is a respected *fellow!*—and his mistress is a respected *woman!*"

Cries Pompey, "By this hand, sir, his *wife* is a more respected person than any of *us* all!"

"Varlet, thou *liest!*" shrieks Elbow, "thou *liest*, wicked varlet! The time has yet to come that she was *ever* respected!—by man, woman, or child!"

"Sir, she was respected by *him* before he married her!" notes Pompey.

Lord Escalus is amused by them both; they almost seem to parody figures in an allegory. He ponders: *Which is the wiser here: Justice or Iniquity?* He asks the constable, "Is this true?"

Elbow rails at Pompey. "Oh, thou *caitiff!* Oh, thou *varlet!* Oh, thou wicked *cannibal!* I *respected* her before I was *married* to her?" he cries, indignantly. "If ever I was respected by *her*, or she by *me*, let not Your Worship think me the poor duke's officer!" He grabs Pompey's shirt. "Prove this, thou wicked Hannibal, or I'll have mine action of *battery* on thee!"

"If he gave you a box o' the ear, you might have your action of *slander*, too," says Escalus dryly.

Elbow notes the counsel. "Marry, I thank Your Good Worship for it!" He roughly releases his grip on Pompey. "What is't your worship's pleasure I shall do with this wicked caitiff?"

"Officer," says Escalus, "because he surely hath *some* offences in him that thou wouldst discover if thou *couldst*, let him continue in his courses till thou knowest what they *are*."

Elbow takes that to mean continuance in custody. "Marry, I thank Your Worship for it!

"Thou seest *now*, thou wicked varlet, what's come upon thee!" he tells Pompey. "Thou art to *continue* now, thou varlet!—thou art to *continue!*"

Escalus asks Master Froth, "Where were you born, friend?"

The bland young man slowly blinks. "Here in Vienna, sir."

"Are you of fourscore pounds a year?"

"Yes, an't please you, sir."

"So." Hands behind his back, Escalus looks down at his own clean white hose, polished black shoes. "What trade are you of, sir?" he asks Pompey.

"Tapster—a poor *widow's* tapster."

"Your mistress' name?"

"Mistress Overdone."

"Hath she had any more than one husband?"

"Nine, sir; Overdone by the last."

"*Nine!*" says Escalus, shaking his head. "Come hither to me, Master Froth," he says, taking the fop aside.

"Master Froth, I would not have you acquainted with tapsters; they will draw *you*, Master Froth—and you will *hang them!* Get you gone, and let me hear no more of you," he says kindly, untying the young gentleman's hands.

Froth smiles. "I thank Your Worship. For mine own part, I never come into any room in a

tap-house, but I *am* sucked in,” he confesses.

“Well, no more of it, Master Froth!” says Escalus. “Farewell,” he says, as Froth wanders past the constable’s angry looks, happy to go home.

“Come you hither to me, Master Tapster,” says Escalus. What’s your name, Master Tapster?”

“Pompey.”

“What else?”

“Butt, sir.”

Escalus regards the corpulent man. “In troth your butt *is* the greatest thing about you, so that, in the beastliest sense, you are *Pompey the Great!*”—the famous Roman general.

“Pompey, you are partly a *bawd*, Pompey, howsoever you colour it in being a tapster, are you not? Come, tell me *true*; it shall be the better for you.”

Pompey doubts that. “*Truly*, sir, I am a poor fellow that would *live*.”

“*How* would you live, Pompey? By being a *bawd*? What do you think of the trade, Pompey? Is it a *lawful* trade?”

Pompey nods. “If the law would allow it, sir.”

“But the law will *not* allow it, Pompey—nor *shall* it be allowed in Vienna.”

The bawd asks the gray-bearded nobleman, “Does Your Worship mean to geld and splay all the youth of the city?”

“No, Pompey.”

“*Truly*, sir, in my poor opinion, they will *to’t* then.” He looks at the judge. “If Your Worship will keep the drabs and the knaves *in order*,”—control whores and their customers, “you need not fear the *bawds*.”

Says Escalus, sadly, “There *are* pretty orders, I can tell you—for *beheading* and *hanging*.”

The tapster scoffs. “If you ’head and hang all that offend *that* way but for ten years together, you’ll be glad to offer a *reward*—for *finding more heads!* If that law holds in Vienna for ten years, afterward I’ll rent the fairest house in it for *three-pence* a day! If you live to see that come to pass, say *Pompey told you so!*”

“*Thank you*, good Pompey!—and, in requital of your prophecy, hark you, I’ll *advise* you: let me not find you before me again upon *any complaint whatsoever!*—no, not for *dwelling* where you now do! If I do, *Pompey*, I shall beat you to your tent, and prove a harsh *Caesar* to you!”

He sees that the man knows nothing of the ancient general’s grave defeat by Julius. “In plain dealing, Pompey: *I shall have you whipt!* So—for *this* time, Pompey—fare you well.” He unties the man’s big, rough hands.

Pompey bows. “I thank Your Worship for your good counsel.” To himself he adds: *But I shall follow it as the flesh and Fortune shall better determine! Whip me?—no, no, let the cart-man whip his jade!*—his nag. *The valiant heart is not whipt out of his trade!*

Still, he quickly leaves the hall of justice.

Escalus turns to the disheartened deputy. “Come hither to me, Master Elbow; come hither, Master Constable. How long have you been in this assignment?”

“Seven years and a half, sir.”

Escalus nods. “I thought, by your readiness in the office, you had continued in it some time. Seven years altogether, you say?”

“And a half, sir.”

“Alas, it hath been great pains for you. They do you wrong to put you so oft upon’t! Are there not men in your ward”—others—“sufficient to serve it?”

“I’ faith, sir, few of any *wit* in such matters,” says Elbow. “As they are chosen, they are glad to choose me *for* them”—hire him to substitute. “I do it for some piece of money, and go through with all,” he says glumly.

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

“To Your Worship’s house, sir?”

“To my house. Fare you well.” Elbow leaves the building, wondering who else might, as city

constable, actually perform his thankless tasks.

“What’s o’clock, think you?” Escalus asks a black-robed young judge now emerging from a courtroom.

“Eleven, sir.”

“I pray you home to dinner with me.”

The guest is pleased. “I humbly thank you.”

As they hang their judicial gowns on pegs in his chambers, Escalus tells the nobleman, “It grieves me, but there’s no remedy for the death of Claudio!”

“Lord Angelo is... *severe*.”

“It is but needful. Often mercy is not *itself* that *looks* so; pardon is ever the nurse of second woe,” says Escalus—dutifully, if doubtfully. “But yet—poor *Claudio!*” He shakes his head sadly. “There is no remedy.

“Come, sir.” They go out for lunch.

Chapter Three Pleas—and Demands

In a corridor of the courthouse, the troubled provost stops one of Lord Angelo’s servants. “He’s hearing of a cause,” says the man, opening the door to the chief judge’s chambers. “He will come straight. I’ll tell him of you.”

“Pray you, do,” says the provost politely. “I’ll know his pleasure; it may be he will relent.” The servant bows and goes into the adjacent hearing room.

The officer has left Claudio, alone and desolate, deep within the city prison. *Alas, he hath offended, but as in a dream! All sects, all ages smack of this vice—and he to die for’t?*

Angelo comes in, obviously annoyed by the interruption. “Now, provost, what’s the matter?”

“Is it your will Claudio shall *die* Wednesday?”

“Did not I *tell* thee so? Hadst thou not an *order*? Why dost thou ask again?”

“Lest I might be too rash.” The jailer, seeing the frown, removes his hat respectfully. “Under your good correction, I have *seen* when, after execution, judgment hath *repented* o’er its doom.”

Angelo rejects the concern. “Go to; let that be mine. Do you *your* office—or give up your place, and you shall well be spared,” he says coldly.

The provost flushes. “I crave Your Honour’s pardon. What shall be done, sir, with the groaning Julietta? She’s very near her hour.”

“Dispose of her to some more fitter place, and that with speed.”

The servant returns with news of another visitor. “Here is the sister of the man condemnèd; she desires access to you.”

Angelo asks the provost, “Hath he a sister?”

“Aye, my good lord—a very virtuous maid, and to be shortly of a *sisterhood*, if not already.”

Angelo has recessed his proceedings. “Well, let her be admitted,” he tells the servant. He turns back to the bailiff. “See you the fornicatress be removed. Let her have needful but not lavish means; there shall be order for’t”—one in writing.

Lady Isabella, accompanied by Signior Lucio, is shown into the judge’s chambers.

The provost bows. “God save Your Honour,” he says, according to form, starting to go.

“Stay a little while,” Angelo tells him, aware of the rapier hanging at the visiting gentleman’s side. He bows courteously to Isabella. “You’re welcome. What’s your will?”

“I am a woeful suitor to Your Honour,” says the lady, curtsying. “Please, Your Honour, but *hear* me.”

“Well; what’s your suit?”

“There is a *vice* that I do most *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 at war ’twixt

will and will not!"

"Well. The matter?"

Isabella faces him. "I have a brother you condemned—to *die!* I do beseech you, let it be his *fault*, and not my *brother!*"

Thinks the provost, *Heaven give thee moving graces!*

"Condemn the fault and not the actor of it?" says Lord Angelo. "Why, every *fault* is condemned ere it be done! Mine were then the very *cipher* of a function,"—one of zero value, "to find a fault whose penalty stands in record, but let go by the *actor!*"

"Oh, just but *severe* law!" cries Isabella, turning away in tears. "I *had* a brother, then," she moans, finding a handkerchief to dab her eyes. She starts to go. "Heaven keep Your Honour."

Lucio, waiting by the door, intercepts her. He whispers: "Give't not o'er so! *To* him again, *entreat* him!—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 request it! *To him*, I say!"

Isabella turns to the arbiter of justice. "Must he needs *die?*"

He nods. "Maiden, no remedy."

She contradicts: "*Yes!*—I do think that you might *pardon* him!—and neither *Heaven* nor *Man* grieve at the mercy!"

Angelo is firm. "I will not do't."

"But *can* you, if you would?"

"Look you, what I *will* not do, that I *cannot* do," he replies, despite the soft appeal of her beautiful face.

"But you *might* do't, and do the world no wrong, if your heart were so touched with compassion for him as *mine* is!"

"He's sentenced; 'tis too late."

- Lucio whispers to Isabella: "You are too *cold!*"

She faces Angelo. "Too *late?* Why, *no!*—even *I* who do speak a word may *call it back again!* Well believe this: no complement that to great ones belongs—not the king's crown, nor the deputy's sword, the marshal's truncheon, nor the judge's robe—*becomes* them with one-half so good a grace as *mercy* does!

"If he had been like you and you like him, *you* would have slipt as he did, but *he* would not have been so *stern!*"

Angelo is still looking at her—and struggling inside. "Pray you, be gone."

She grows angry, now, having been dismissed so curtly. "I would to Heaven *I* had your potency, and you were *Isabella!*" she cries, grasping his sleeve. "Would it then be *thus?* *No!*—I would take account of what 'twere to be a *judge*—and what a *prisoner!*"

- Lucio smiles encouragingly. *Aye, touch him! There's the vein!*

Angelo moves to stand at his desk. "Your brother is a forfeit of *the law*, and you but waste your words." He puts some papers into a drawer and closes it.

"Alas, *alas!*" cries Isabella. "Why, *all* the souls that *were* were forfeit, once!—and He that might the best advantage have took"—claimed his Father's favor—"found out the *remedy!* How would you be if He, who is the *top* of judgment, should but judge you as *you* do? Oh, think on *that*, like a man new-made!—and then *mercy* will breathe within your lips!"

"Be you *content*, fair maid. It is *the law*, not I, condemns your brother. Were he my kinsman, brother, or my son, it should be thus with him. He must die Wednesday."

Isabella is stunned. "*Wednesday!* Oh, that's sudden! Spare him, *spare* him! He's not prepared for death!" says the near-novice. "Even for our kitchens we kill the fowl *in season!* Shall we serve *Heaven* with less respect than we do minister 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!"

- "Aye, *well said!*" whispers Lucio.

But Angelo comes around the desk. "Those many had not *dared* to do that evil if the *first* that

did infringe the edict had *answered* for his deed! The law hath not been *dead*, though it hath slept! Now 'tis *awake*—takes note of what is done—and, like a prophet, looks in a glass that shows what *future evils*—either new, or by remissness newly conceivèd, and so in progress to be hatched and born—are now to have *no* successive degrees, but, ere they live, to *end!*”

Isabella pleads, hands clasped before her: “Yet show some *pity!*”

“I show it *most* of all when I show *justice!*—for then I pity those I do not know, whom a dismissed offence would afterward *gall!*—and do him *right* that, answering one foul wrong, lives not to act another!”

He regards the blue-eyed lady. “Be satisfied; your brother dies Wednesday. Be content.”

“So *you* must be the *first* who gives this sentence—and *he* who *suffers* it!” she cries. “Oh, it is excellent to have a giant’s *strength*—but it is *tyrannous* to *use* it like a giant!”

- Lucio’s glance seconds her speech. *That’s well said!* He watches as Angelo studies her face.

Gentle Isabella is angrier, and more animated. “Could *great men* thunder as God himself does, He would ne’er have quiet!—for every pelting, petty officer would use his heaven for *thunder!*—*nothing but thunder!*”

She looks up. “Merciful Heaven, Thou, with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt, split’st the unwedgeable and gnarlèd *oak* rather than the soft *myrtle!* But *man*, proud *man*, drest in a little brief *authority*, 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, had they *our* temperament, would all *laugh themselves mortal!*”

- *On!*—*to him, to him, wench!* Lucio moves next to the provost, and whispers, “He will *relent*—he’s coming; I perceive’t!”

- The provost, too, is encouraged. “*Pray heaven she win him!*”

Angelo returns to sit behind his massive desk; he looks at her past piles of leather-bound law books. He manages to seem indifferent.

Isabella moves forward. “We cannot weigh our *brother* without *ourselves!* Great men may attest with saints; in *them* ’tis *wit*—but in those less, flat *blasphemy!*”

- *Thou’rt i’ the right, girl!* thinks Lucio. *More o’ that!*

“That which in the *captain* is but a choleric *word*, in the *soldier* is foul *profanation!*”

- Lucio is surprised. *Art avised o’ that? More of ’t!*

Angelo, increasingly aware of the young woman’s beauty and vivacity, lays both hands flat on the desk before him. “Why do you put these sayings upon *me?*”

“Because *authority*, though it err like others, hath yet a kind of *medicine* in itself, and skims advice from the *top*.”

“Go to your bosom: 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, watching her lips, has in fact been moved. *She speaks, and ’tis such sense that my senses breed with it!* He looks up at her, aware of his power, her desperation. But he closes his eyes. “Fare you well.”

Isabella beseeches, “Gentle my lord, *turn back!*”

For a moment, Angelo is silent. “I will bethink me. Come again tomorrow.”

The devout Isabella sees faint hope. “Good my lord, hark how I’ll bribe you!”

“What!” Angelo frowns. “*Bribe* me?”

“*Aye!*—with such gifts as *Heaven* shall share with you!”

Lucio is relieved. *You had marred all else!*

Isabella’s eyes glisten; she will ask the nuns for help. “Not with plain shekels of untested gold, or stones whose rates are either rich or poor as fancy values them, but with *true prayers* that shall go up to heaven, and *enter* there ere sun-rise!—prayers from reservèd souls, from fasting maids whose minds are dedicate to nothing temporal!”

The lonely judge sits, still and silent, gazing at her lovely features. “Well, come to me

tomorrow.”

- Behind Isabella, Lucio urges softly, “Go, ’tis well! Away!”

“Heaven keep Your Honour safe!” she says earnestly.

Amen! thinks Angelo, *for I am going to the way where temptation crosses prayers!*

“At what hour tomorrow shall I attend Your Lordship?” she asks.

“At any time ’fore noon.” Instantly he wishes he’d named an earlier hour.

Isabella curtsies to Angelo and starts to go, but pauses at the door. “God save Your Honour!”

From thee!—even from thy virtue! thinks Angelo, highly disturbed, as Lucio and the provost follow her out.

Alone, the judge ponders. *What’s this, what’s this? Is this her fault or mine—the tempter or the tempted who sins most?*

Hah! Not she!—nor doth she tempt, he admits. *It is but I that, lying by the violet in the sun, do as carrion does, not as the flower: corrupt in a virtuous season!*

Can it be that modesty may more betray our senses than a woman’s lightness?

Light women—those whose easy accessibility is quite apparent—have never attracted him.

But Isabella’s radiant innocence fascinates and arouses him—and has left him perturbed.

He has ordered that the suburbs’ warehouses be torn down. *Having wasted grounds enough, shall we raze the sanctuary, and pitch our evils there?*

Oh, fie, fie, fie! What dost thou—or what art thou, Angelo? Dost thou desire her foully for those things that make her good? Oh, let her brother live! Thieves have authority for their robbery, when judges themselves steal!

What?—do I love her, that I desire to hear her speak again, and to feast upon her eyes? What is’t I dream of?

O cunning Enemy, that, to catch a saint, with saints dost bait thy hook! Most dangerous is that temptation that doth goad us on to sin through loving virtue! Never could a strumpet, with all her doubled vigour, art and nature, once stir my temper, but this virtuous maid subdues me quite!

Even till now, when men were besotted, I smiled and wondered how.

At the city prison, the provost has been told he has a visitor. He is surprised, upon rising from a battered old chair, to find a monk—his face shadowed under the robe’s hood—standing at the door of the dimly lit chamber. Nearby, close enough for groaning to be heard, are rows of dank cells.

Says the priest. “Hail to you, provost, as I think you are.”

“I am the provost. What’s your will, good friar?”

“Bound by my charity and my blest order, I come to visit the afflicted spirits here in the prison,” Friar Lodowick tells him. “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,” says the disguised Duke Vincentio.

“I would do *more* than that if more were *helpful*.” The kindly bailiff watches as an officer brings Lady Julietta, pale and distressed, from her cell. “Look, here comes one of mine: a gentlewoman who, falling, in the flaws of her own youth, hath blistered her report. She is with child, and he that begot it sentenced—a young man more fit to do *another* such offence than to *die for this!*”

“When must he die?” asks the monk.

“As I do think, Wednesday.” He looks sadly at the lady; her eyes are red from weeping. “I have provided for you,” he tells Julietta. “Stay awhile, and you shall be conducted.”

The priest approaches her. “*Repent* you, fair one, of the sin you carry?”

“I do,” says Julietta, “and bear the shame most patiently.”

“I’ll teach you how you shall arraign your *conscience*, and *try* your penitence—if it be sound, or hollowly put on.”

Julietta looks up at him, tears again in her eyes. “I’ll gladly learn.”

“Love you the man that wronged you?”

“Yes, as I love the woman that wrongèd *him!*”

“So then it seems your most offenceful act was mutually committed?”

She nods. “Mutually.”

“Then was *your* sin of heavier kind than his.” Women are considered the primary guardians of their own virtue.

“I do confess it, and *repent* it, father.”

“’Tis meet so, daughter. But lest you do repent because the sin hath brought you to this *shame*—which sorrow is always towards *ourselves*, not heaven, showing we would not square with heaven because we *love* it, but as we stand in *fear*—”

“I do repent as it is an *evil!*—and *take* the shame with joy.”

“Then rest,” says priest gently. “Your partner, as I hear, must die Wednesday, and I am going with instruction to him.”

At the provost’s nod, the officer moves to take her to a private home, where her childbearing will be attended, under guard, by a nurse.

“Grace go with you,” says the monk. “*Benedicite!*”

She leans and kisses the priest’s hand. But as she follows the officer she moans. “‘Must *die* Wednesday’—oh, *injurious* law, that respites me to a *life* whose ‘comfort’ is a *dying honour!*”

The provost is ashamed, seeing the suffering caused by the harshness—Lord Angelo’s—he administers. “’Tis pity of him,” he says—intending no irony.

Angelo, feverish with desire, has been unable to eat a midday meal. As Monday wears on, he remains agitated, tormented by pangs of guilt. *When I would pray and think, I think and pray on separate subjects: Heaven hath my empty words, whilst my intention, hearing not my tongue, anchors on Isabella!*

Heaven in my mouth, as if I did but only chew His name!—and in my heart, the strong and swelling evil of my conception!

He deepest learning now seems empty. *‘The state,’ whereon I studied is, like a good thing being often read, grown sere and tedious. Yea, my gravity, wherein—let no man hear me!—I take pride, I could with profit exchange for an idle plume which beats the air in vain!—the long, fashionable feather on a courtier’s hat.*

He slides off the dark robe of his office. *O form of place, how often dost thou with thy casing, thy habit, wrench awe from fools, entice the wiser souls to thy false seeming!*

Blood, thou art blood! But he despises his own horniness. *Let’s paint ‘Good angel’ on the Devil’s horn—is’t not the Devil’s crest?*

He looks up as a servant comes to the chamber door. “How now? Who’s there?”

“One Isabella, a Sister, desires access to you.”

“Teach her the way.”

He feels flushed. *Oh, heavens!—why does my blood thus muster to my heart, both making it unable for itself, and dispossessing all my other parts of necessary fitness? So plays the foolish throng with one who swoons: all come to help him—and so stop the air by which he should revive! And even so the populace, subject to a well-wishèd king, quit their own role, and in obsequious fondness crowd into his presence, where their untaught love must needs appear offence!*

Isabella is alone this time.

“How now, fair maid?”

“I am come to know your pleasure”—an unfortunate use of a standard phrase.

He smiles, raising an eyebrow. “That you might know *it* would much better please me than to demand what ’tis.” He immediately regrets such bluntness; but she has not taken his meaning. He tries to end this dangerous interview quickly. “Your brother cannot live.”

She pales. “Even so.” She bows her head sadly, and whispers, “Heaven keep Your Honour.”

As she turns to go, Angelo clears his throat. “But may he live *a while*—and, it may be, as long as you or I. Yet he must die.”

Everyone must eventually die. “Under your sentence?”

“Yes.”

“*When*, I beseech you?—so that in his reprieve, longer or shorter, he may be so fitted that his *soul* sicken not.” She has just come from the convent.

But the judge objects to religious reconciliation for Claudio. His anger rekindles. “Oh, *fie!*—these *filthy vices!*”

“It were as good to pardon him that hath from Nature stolen a man already made”—one who murders another—“as to forgive their saucy *sweatiness* who do *coin Heaven’s image* in stampings that are *forbidden!*”—who produce illegitimate offspring, counterfeit lives in his view. “’Tis all as evil to put *mettle* in restrained means to make a *false life* as falsely to take away a *true-made* one!”

She shakes her head. “’Tis set down so on earth, but not in heaven.”

“*Say* you so?” he asks testily, annoyed by her calm certainty. “Then I shall depose you quickly! Which had you rather, now: that the most-just law took your brother’s life; or, to *redeem* him, give up your body to such sweet uncleanness as she whom he hath stained?”

“Sir, believe *this*: I had rather give my *body* than my *soul*.”

“I talk not of your soul,” mutters Angelo, intensely aware of his desire. “Our *compellèd* sins stand more for *number* than for *accomp’t*”—are noted, but untotaled as to culpability.

Isabella is puzzled. “How say you?”

“Nay, I’ll not warrant that, for I can speak against the thing I say,” the lawyer admits, stroking his beard, and going to his desk.

Seated, he faces her, lacing his fingers together before him. “Answer to *this*: if now the voice of the recorded law pronounce sentence on your brother’s life, might there not be a *charity* in sin to *save* this brother’s life?”

The innocent lady thinks he’s trying to justify a pardon that, to him, seems wrong. “If it pleasèd you to *do’t*,” she says, hopefully, “I’ll take it as a peril to *my* soul that it is but *charity*, and *no sin at all!*”

While the seducer is eager, the judge is still conservative. “Pleased *you* to do’t at peril of your soul, it were an *equal* poise of sin and charity.”

She reassures the pardoner: “If it be *sin* that I do beg his life, may heaven let me *bear* it! As for your granting of my suit—if *that* be sin, I’ll make it my morning prayer to have it added to the faults of *mine*, and nothing for you to answer!”

“Nay, but *hear* me,” says Angelo, fingernails tapping on his desk in frustration, “your sense pursues not mine! Either you are ignorant, or *seem* so *craftily*—and that’s not good.”

“Let me *be* ignorant, then!—if in nothing good but knowing, through *grace*, that I am no better,” says Isabella, in accordance with a nun’s humility.

The prideful judge sees only coyness; he scoffs: “Thus wisdom wishes to *appear* most bright when it doth *tax itself*—as these black *masks* proclaim an enshielded beauty *ten times louder* than beauty could, displayèd!

“But *mark me!* To be perceived plainly, I’ll speak more gross.” He leans forward. “Your brother is to die.”

Isabella listens intently. “So.”

“And his offence is, as it appears, *accountable to the law* upon that pain.”

“True.”

“Allow that there were *no other way* to save his life—and I endorse not this nor any other for the loss in question—but that you, his sister, finding yourself *desirèd* by a person whose credit with the judge, or whose own great place, could fetch your brother from the manacles of the all-binding law—and if there were no earthly means to save him but that either you must lay down the treasures of your *body* to this supposed one, or else let Claudio suffer...

“*What would you do?*”

“As much for my poor brother as my self,” Isabella replies—to a hypothetical question. “That is: were *I* under the terms of death, I’d wear the welts of keen whips as *rubies*, and strip myself for death as for a *sickbed* that I had been *longing* for, ere I’d yield my body up to shame!”

Angelo sits back in his chair. “Then must your brother die.”

“And ’twere the cheaper way! Better it were that a brother die *that once*, than a sister, by redeeming him, should die *forever*.”

“Were not *you* then as cruel as the sentence that you have slandered so?”

“*Ignominy as ransom* and *free pardon* are of two houses: lawful *mercy* is nothing akin to *foul redemption*.”

Angelo challenges her rectitude. “You seemed of late to make *the law* a *tyrant*—and rather approved the sliding of your brother as more a *merriment* than a vice.”

“Oh, *pardon* me, my lord,” she says earnestly. “It oft falls out that, to have what we would have, we speak not what we *mean*! I somewhat did excuse the thing I hate, for his advantage whom I dearly *love*!”

“We are *all* frail . . .”

She nods eagerly, thinking he has shown some sympathy. “Else *let* my brother die, if he does not only *share* thy weakness in *fraternity*!”

Angelo eyes her carefully. “Nay, *women* are frail, too.”

“*Aye!*—as the mirrors where they view themselves, which are as easily broken as the images they make! *Help* women, Heaven!—men mar your creations in profiting by them! Nay, call us *ten times* frail, for we are soft as our complexions are, and credulous to false pictures!”

He hopes so; he nods. “I think that, as well. And from this testimony of your own sex, since I suppose we are *made* to be no stronger than the faults that may shake our frames, let me be bold: I do *arrest your words!*—*be* what you are—that is, a *woman*!”

“If you be *more*, you’re not one! If you *be* one—and you *are*, as well expressed by all external warrants,” he adds, glancing over her form, “show it now by putting on the destined livery!” By yielding.

Isabella now understands his lecherous aim—and his duplicity. “*I* have no tongue but one, gentle my lord; let me entreat you speak the *former* language”—return to propriety.

Angelo stares at her boldly. “Plainly conceive: I love you!”

She stares back, unblinking. “My brother did ‘love’ Julietta—and you tell me that he shall die for it.”

“He shall not, Isabella, if *you* give *me* love!”

“I know your virtue hath a licence in’t which can *seem* a little fouler than it is,” says Isabella, “to pluck-on others . . .” She offers him a chance to claim the proposition was merely to test her.

“Believe me, on mine honour, my words express my purpose.”

“*Hah!*—little *honour*, being much believèd for most *pernicious purpose!* *Seeming, seeming!*”

“I will *proclaim thee!*”—reveal this to all, she cries. “Angelo, *look for’t!*”

“Sign me a present pardon for my brother,” she now demands, “or with an extended voice I’ll tell the *world, aloud*, what man *thou* art!”

Angelo shrugs. “Who will believe thee, Isabella? My unsoilèd name, the austereness of my life, my vouch against you, and my place i’ the state will so your accusation overweigh that you shall stifle in your own report, and smell of calumny!”

“I have *begun*, and now I give my sensual racing its *rein!*” He stands and leans forward. “Fit thy consent to my sharp appetite!—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 not only must he die the death, but thy unkindness shall *draw out* his death to *lingering in suffering!*”

“Answer me *tonight!*—or, by the desire 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!”

He opens the door beside the desk and goes into the hearing room, leaving her, appalled and alone, to agonize.

To whom should I complain? Did I tell this, who would believe me?

Oh, perilous mouths, that bear, in the one and self-same tongue, either condemnation or approval!—bidding the law make curtesy to their will!—hooking both right and wrong to the appetite, following 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 before his sister should her body stoop to such abhorred pollution!

Then, Isabella, live chaste, and, brother, die; more than our brother is our chastity.

Although still of the laity, she intends to minister to Claudio. *Yet I'll tell him of Angelo's request, and fit his mind to death, for his soul's rest.*

Chapter Four Desperation and Regret

The cell is nearly dark; a narrow window high in the stone wall admits only a thin, slanting shaft of pale afternoon light. “So then you hope for pardon from Lord Angelo?” asks Father Lodowick.

“The miserable have no other medicine, but *only* hope,” says Claudio. “I’ve hope to live, and am resolved to die.”

The monk regards the young nobleman. “Be *prepared* for death; either death or life shall thereby be the sweeter.” He stands between the closed, iron-bound door and a ragged bed of straw. “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 starry influence that dost hourly afflict *this* habitation where thou keep’st! Merely thou art Death’s *fool!*—for thou labour’st to shun him by thy flight, and yet runn’st toward him still.

“Thou art not *noble*, for all the appurtenances that thou bear’st are nursed by *baseness*”—material sustenance. “Thou’rt by no means *valiant*, for thou dost fear the soft and tender form of the 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*, for thou existesth on many a thousand grains that issue out of *dust!*

“*Happy* thou art not: for what thou hast not, ever thou strivest to *get*—and what thou hast, *forget’st!* Thou art not *certain*, for thy complexion shifts to strange effects, 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*, the mere effusion of thy proper loins—do curse the gout, serpigo, and the rheum *for ending thee no sooner!*

“*Thou* hast neither youth nor age, only an after-dinner’s *sleep*, as it were, *dreaming* of both! For all thy blessed youth *behaves* as aged, and doth beg alms from thy palsied *elder*”—mortgage its future. “And when thou art old and rich, thou hast neither heat, affection, limb, nor beauty to make thy riches *pleasant.*”

Says the monk, “What’s left in this that bears even the *name* of life? In this ‘life’ lie hidden a thousand more *deaths!* Yet Death we fear, who makes these odds all even.”

Claudio regards Friar Lodowick calmly. “I humbly thank you. In suing to live, I find I seek to die; and seeking death, find *life!*”—eternal grace. “Let it come on,” he says with resignation.

A woman’s voice calls at the door. “*What, ho....?*” Coming in, Isabella says, “*Peace* here!—*grace* and good company!”—a greeting well intended, but ill-suited for prison.

“Who’s there?” asks the provost, who has been writing at his table; he sees the young lady

and stands. "Come in. Thy *wish* deserves a 'Well come.'" She introduces herself, and asks to see her brother.

In the cell the monk tells the prisoner, "Dear sir, ere long I'll visit you again." Claudio bows. "Most holy sir, I thank you."

The provost comes to the cell door, then unlocks and opens it.

"My business is a word or two with Claudio," Isabella tells him.

"And very welcome," says the official. "Look, signior, here's your sister!"

She hurries in to receive a tearful embrace from Claudio.

"Provost, a word with you," says the monk urgently.

"As many as you please." The officer locks the door behind them and heads toward the prison entrance.

The duke whispers: "Bring me where I may be concealèd to hear them speak!" The provost leads the monk back to a dark storage space beside the condemned nobleman's cell.

Claudio regards Isabella hopefully. "Now, sister, what's the comfort?"

"Why, as *all* comforts are: most *good*, most good in *deed*." She faces him sadly. "Lord Angelo, having affairs for *heaven*, intends you for his swift ambassador where you shall be an *everlasting* leiger." She takes his hand. "Therefore your best appointment"—readiness—"make with speed," she says softly. "Wednesday you set on."

"Is there no remedy?"

Isabella flushes angrily and turns away. "None but such remedy as, to save a head, to cleave a *heart* in twain!"

"But *is* there any?"

"Yes, brother, you *may* live; there is a *devilish* mercy in the judge that, if you'll implore it, will free your life—but *fetter* you till death!"

"Permanent durance?"—life in prison.

"Aye, *just!*—*durance*, *restraint* to a determinèd scope—though you had *all the world's vastidity!*"

"But of what nature?"

"Of such a one as, you *consenting* to't, would *strip your honour* from that trunk you bear, and *leave you naked!*"

He can see that she is stalling. "Let me know the point!"

She moans. "Oh, I do *fear* for thee, Claudio! And I quake lest thou a *feverous* life shouldst entertain, and more respect six or seven winters than *perpetual honour!*"

"Dearest, thou die. The poor beetle that we tread upon finds, in *corporal* suffering, a pang as great as when a giant dies. But the *sensing* of death is most in the *apprehension*," she says, wringing her hands.

"Why give you me *this shit?*" demands Claudio. The young man has expected to live much more than a half-dozen years longer. "Think you I can fetch *resolution* from *flowery tenderness?*" He straightens. "If I *must* die, I will encounter darkness as my *bride*, and hug it in mine arms!"

Isabella smiles tearfully. "*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 through base appliances!"

She turns to pace the narrow cell. She cries angrily, "This *outwardly sainted* deputy, whose settled visage and deliberate words rip *youth* for its follies, is yet a *devil* who doth enmew a head as *falcon* doth *fowl!*"—*lethally*. "His *filth within* being cast up,"—vomited, "it would appear a pond as deep as *Hell!*"

"The fastidious *Angelo?*"

"Oh, 'tis the *cunning livery of Hell*—investing the *damnèd'st* body, then *covering* it in precise guards!"

She faces him. "Dost thou think, Claudio, if I would *yield him my virginity*, thou mightst be *free?*"

“O heavens! *It cannot be!*”

“Yes, he would *give't* thee—for that rank offence still so offensive to him! *This night* is the time that I should *do* what I abhor to *name*, or else thou diest Wednesday.”

“*Thou shalt not do't!*” exclaims Claudio.

“Oh, were it but my *life*,” says Isabella earnestly, “I'd throw it down for your deliverance as lightly as a pin!”

Claudio is blinking. “Thanks, dear Isabella.”

She offers churchly counsel: “Be ready, Claudio, for your death day after tomorrow.”

“Yes,” he says quietly. He goes to the cell-door and grips the bars of its small window. “Has *he* affections in him that thus can make him *bite the law by the nose* while he would *enforce* it?”

He looks back at her. “Surely it is no *sin*,” he mumbles. “Or of the deadly seven, it is the least...”

Anger, covetousness, envy, gluttony, lust, pride and sloth. “*Which* is the least?” she asks.

“If it were *damnable*, he being so wise, why would he, for the momentary trick, be perdurably fined?” Claudio stares at her for a moment. “Oh, Isabella...”

“What says my brother?”

“Death is a fearful thing.”

“And *shamed* life a *hateful*.”

“Aye—but to *die!*—and go we know not where! To lie in cold *obstruction!*—and to *rot*, this warm, sensing motion to become a kneaded *lump!* And the dilated *spirit* to bathe in *fiery floods*, or to reside, shivering, in regions of thick-ribbed *ice!*—to be imprisoned, viewless, in the *winds*, and blown, pendent, with restless violence round about the world!—or to be worse than the *worst* of those incertain thoughts that the *lawless* imagine, *howling!*”

“’Tis *too horrible!* The weariest and most loathed worldly *life* that age, ache, penury and imprisonment can lay on nature is a *paradise* to what we fear in *death!*”

Isabella turns away. “Alas, *alas!*”

“Sweet sister, let me *live!*” pleads Claudio. “Whatever sin you do to *save a brother's life*, nature dispenses with the deed so far that it becomes a *virtue!*”

Isabella turns back, weeping—and livid. “*Oh, you beast! O faithless coward! O dishonest wretch!*” she cries. “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, assure that my mother played my father fair!—for such a *warpèd* slip of *wilderness* ne'er issued from *his* blood!”

“Take my *defiance! Die, perish!* Might but my *bending down* reprieve thee from thy fate, it should *proceed!* I'll pray a thousand *prayers* for thy death, no *word* to save *thee!*”

Claudio moves toward her. “Nay, hear me, Isabella!”

She backs away angrily. “Oh, *fie, fie, fie!* Thy sin's not an *incident* but a *trade!*—mercy to *thee* would prove itself a *bawd!* 'Tis best thou diest quickly!”

Claudio is desperate. “Oh, *hear* me, Isabella!”

But they are interrupted. Friar Lodowick has returned, with the provost. “Vouchsafe a word, young sister—but one word!”

Isabella calms herself, and curtseys. “What is your will?” she asks the monk.

“Might you dispense with your leisure, I would by and by have some speech with you; the satisfaction I would require is likewise to your *own* benefit.”

“I *have* no superfluous leisure,” says the dejected lady; she still intends to join the nuns. “My stay must be stolen out of other affairs; but I will attend you a while.” Not looking back, she walks with the provost to his chamber.

Father Lodowick turns to the despairing Claudio. “Son, I have overheard what hath passed between you and your sister. Angelo had never the purpose to corrupt her—he hath made only a *trial* of her *virtue*, to practice his judgment as to the disposition of natures. She, having the proof of honour in her, hath made him that gracious denial which he was most glad to receive.

“I am confessor to Angelo, and I know this to be true; therefore *prepare* yourself regarding death; do not qualify your resolution with hopes that are fallible. Wednesday you must die,” he says solemnly. “Go to your knees, and make ready.”

“Let me ask my sister’s pardon!” sobs Claudio, “I am so out of love with life that I will sue to be *rid* of it!”

The friar gently places a hand on the prisoner’s shoulder as he kneels to pray. “Hold you there. Farewell.”

From the cell, Duke Vincentio strides up the dim row toward the chamber where Isabella waits. He summons the bailiff into the corridor. “Provost, a word with you.”

“What’s your will, father?”

“That now you are come, you will be gone. Leave me a while with the maid. My mind promises with my habit: no loss shall touch her by my company,” he assures the jailer.

The provost nods. “In good time.” He goes up to the guards’ chamber at the entrance, where they are playing cards.

As the priest enters the room, Isabella comes forward, ready to hear.

“The hand that hath made you *fair* hath made you *good*,” he tells her. “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 on you, Fortune hath conveyed to my understanding—and, but that frailty hath many examples for this failing, I should *wonder* at Angelo!” He regards her. “What will you do to *content* this substitute, and to save your brother?”

“I am going now to resolve him,” Isabella tells the priest firmly. “I had rather my *brother* die by the *law* than my *son* should be *unlawfully born*!”

“But, oh, 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 if I fail to expose *this* government!”

“That shall not be much amiss,” says the monk. “Yet, as the matter now stands, he will avoid your accusation: he only ‘made *trial*’ of you.

“Therefore fasten your ear on my advisings! To the love I have for *doing* good, a *remedy* presents itself! I do make myself believe that you may, most uprighteously, do a poor, wrongèd lady a merited benefit, redeem your brother from the angry law, yet 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 is instantly eager to try for such outcomes. “Let me hear you speak further!” she urges the monk. “I have spirit to do anything that appears not foul to the truth of my spirit!”

Duke Vincentio smiles, watching her honest, open countenance, now aglow with hope. “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?”

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

“She should this Angelo have *married*!—he was affianced to her by oath, and the nuptial appointed. But between the time of which contract and the limit of its solemnity, her brother Frederick was wrecked at sea—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 renownèd *brother*, in his love toward her ever most kind and natural; with him, the portion and sinew of her fortune, her marriage *dowry*—with both combine, her *husband*, this well-seeming Angelo!”

“Can this be *so*?” asks Isabella. “Did Angelo so *leave her*?”

“Left her in her *tears*!—and dried not *one* of them with his comfort—swallowed his vows whole, pretending discoveries of *dishonour* in her!—in few, bestowed on her her own lamentation,” he says sadly, “which she *yet* wears for his sake. And he, marble to her tears, is wash’d with them, but relents not.”

“What a merit were it in Death to take this poor maid from the world! What corruption in this life, that it will let this man live!” She looks at the priest. “But what can *she* avail, out of this?”

“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 is encouraged. “Show me how, good father!”

“This forenamed maid hath *yet* in her the continuance 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 violent and unruly.”

The duke sees a slight frown; but she continues to listen.

“Go you to Angelo; answer his requiring with a *plausible* obedience. Agree with his demands, to a point—but first reserve to yourself this advantage: that your stay with him may not be long, that the time may have all *shadow* and *silence* in it, and that the place answer to convenience.

“That being granted, in course now follows all: we shall advise this wrongèd maid to stand up your appointment—to *go in your place!* If the encounter acknowledge itself thereafter, it may compel him to her recompense.

“And then by this is your brother savèd, your honour untainted, the poor Mariana advantaged, and the corrupt deputy scalded!”

He sees that she is nodding approval. “The maid will I frame and make fit for his attempt. If you try to carry this out, as well you may, the doubleness of the benefit defends the deceit from reproof.

“What think you of it?”

“The *image* of it gives me content already,” says Isabella, “and I trust it will grow to a most prosperous perfection!”

“It lies much in *your* holding up,” the duke cautions. “Haste you speedily to Angelo! If for *this night* he entreat you to his bed, give him promise of satisfaction. I will go immediately to Saint Luke’s; there, at the moated grange, resides this dejected Mariana. At that place call upon me—and use dispatch with Angelo, that it may be *quickly!*”

Isabella curtsies. “I thank you for this comfort,” she says, gratefully, touching his hand. “Fare you well, good father!”

As they hurry from the prison late this afternoon, both expect demanding encounters.

Cries Elbow, making an arrest, “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!*”—sweet, cheap wines.

Duke Vincentio, striding swiftly south along the thoroughfare in his priestly disguise, hears the constable. *Oh, heavens, what stuff is here?*

Pompey is scornful as the officer’s men, who have seized him, bind his arms. “’Twas never a *merry* world since, of two usuries,”—lending money for profit, and pandering, “the merrier was *put down*, and the *worse* allowed, by order of *law*, a fur gown to keep it warm!” Usurers wear such garb. “*Furrèd with fox* on *lamb* skins, too—signifying that *craft*, being richer than innocence, stands for the facing!”

“*Come your way*, sir!” demands Elbow, grabbing the tapster’s arm roughly. Seeing the priest, he nods. “Bless you, good father friar.”

“And *you*, good brother, *farther*. What offence hath this man made you, sir?”

“Marry, sir, he hath offended *the law!* And, sir, we take him to be a *thief*, too, sir; for we have found upon him, sir, a strange *picklock*, which we have sent to the deputy!”

Vincentio suppresses a smile; Lord Escalus, a judge, will know that the pander’s key is for chastity belts. But the monk regards the tapster. “*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* what ’tis to cram a maw or clothe a back from such a *filthy vice!* Say to thyself, ‘From their abominable

and *bestly touches* I drink, I eat, array myself, and live! Canst thou believe thy living is a *life*, so *stinkingly* depending?

“Go mend, go mend!”

Pompey considers. “Indeed, it does stink in *some* sort, sir,” he allows. “But yet, sir, I would prove—”

“Nay, if *the Devil* have given thee proofs”—arguments—“for sin, *thou* wilt prove to be *his*!”

“Take him to *prison*, officer! Correction and instruction must *both* work ere *this* rude beast will profit!”

“He must go before the deputy, sir,” Elbow notes happily. “He has given him *warning*; the deputy cannot abide a whoremaster! If he be a whoremonger and comes before him, he were as good as gone the mile on *his* errand!”—reached his fate.

Says the priest, thinking of Angelo, “Would that we were *all*, as some *seem* to be, as far from our faults as faults from seemly be.”

Elbow thinks Pompey will soon atone; he points to the rope securing Friar Lodowick’s robe. “His *neck* will come to your *waist’s accord*, sir!”—a dour jest on *cord*.

Pompey is more sanguine. “I spy *comfort*!” he says eagerly, looking past them. “I cry *bail*! Here’s a *gentleman*—and a friend of mine!”

Signior Lucio sways toward them. “How now, noble Pompey!” The genial gentleman has assuaged, with strong drink, his concern for Claudio. He sees that the tapster is in custody. “What, *at the wheels of Caesar*?” he teases. “Art thou *led in triumph*?”—paraded on display, as were war prisoners in olden days.

Lucio laughs, and asks, wryly, “What, is there not to be had now *one* of Pygmalion’s image, a woman *newly made*?—for putting the hand in the *pocket*, and extracting it *clutched*!” That legendary sculptor’s beautiful statue was brought to life—but not for profit.

“What *reply, eh?* What sayest thou to *this* turn, in manner and method?” demands the jovial gent, regarding Lord Angelo’s assault on the city’s commerce in sex. “Was’t not drownèd i’ *the last rain*?”—the Flood, which left only couples, no third parties. “What sayest thou, *trot*?”—midwife, go-between. “Is the world as it *was*, man? In few words, is it sad, or how? Which is the *way*?” he asks the tapster. “The *trick* of it?”

The play on *trick* amuses Elbow, but the monk shakes head, because the brothels find new locations. “Still *thus*—and thus still *worse*!”

Signior Lucio inquires after Mistress Overdone. “How doth my dear *morsel*, thy mistress? Procures she still, *eh*?”

“In troth, sir, she hath eaten up all *her* best, and she is *herself* in the tub!” reports Pompey. Her business is nearly gone, and she is trying to soak away a venereal affliction.

Says the libertine cheerfully, “Why, ’tis good! It is the *right* of it; it *must* be so! Ever your *fresh* whore, and your *powdered* bawd! An unshunnèd consequence—it *must* be so!” he cries, spreading his arms wide.

Put off balance by the gesture, he needs a few stumbling steps, back and forth, to steady himself. He peers at the tapster. “Art going to prison, Pompey?”

“Yes, i’ faith, sir.”

“Well, ’tis not *amiss*, Pompey. *Farewell*! Go say I sent thee thither *for debt*, Pompey!” The tapster smarts under the gibe; no one would lend money to him. “Or how?”

“For being a *bawd*!” insists Elbow, “for being a *bawd*!”

“Why then *imprison* him!” cries the gentleman tipsily. “If imprisonment be the *due* of a bawd, why ’tis his *right*! Bawd *is* he doubtless—and of *antiquity*, too—*bawd-born*! *Farewell*, good Pompey! Commend me to the prison, Pompey! You will turn *good husband* now, Pompey: you will keep to the house!”

Pompey pleads: “I hope, sir, Your Good Worship will be my *bail*!”

“No, indeed, will I *not*, Pompey; it is not *the wear*”—no longer fashionable, under Angelo. “I *will* pray, Pompey, to *increase* your bondage; if you take it *patiently*, why then your *mettle* is the

more!" He laughs heartily, enjoying his play on the metal in coins. "*Adieu, trusty Pompey!*"

He becomes aware of the priest. "'Bless you, friar."

"And you," says the duke.

Lucio looks again to the prisoner and inquires about a cosmetic-laden favorite. "Does Bridget *paint* still, *eh*, Pompey?"

Elbow tugs at the prisoner's bound wrists. "Come your ways, sir; *come!*"

The tapster is crestfallen. "You will not bail me then, sir?"

"Not *then*, Pompey, nor *now*." Lucio belches. "What news abroad, friar? What news?"

Elbow pulls the tapster with him. "Come your ways, sir; *come!*"

"Go to *kennel*, Pompey; *go!*" laughs Lucio, as Elbow and his men haul their captive away.

"What news, friar, of the *duke*?"

"I know of none. Can *you* tell me any?"

"Some say he is with the Emperor of Russia; *other* some, he is in Rome. But where is he, think *you*?"

"I know not where," replies the duke; Vienna has changed considerably—much of it for the worse. "But wheresoever, I wish him well."

"It was a mad, capricious trick for him to steal away from the state, and *usurp* the beggary he was never *born* to!" says Lucio, momentarily staggering in his indignation. "Lord Angelo dukes it well in his absence; he *puts transgression to 't!*"

The monk replies, dryly, "He does well in it"—in transgression.

Lucio considers the consequences of Angelo's law. "A little more lenity to *lechery* would do no harm in him." He grins. "Something too *crabbèd* that way, friar!"

The duke frowns. "It is too general a vice, and severity must *cure* it."

"Yes, in good sooth, the vice *is* of a great *kindred*; it is well allièd! But it is impossible to extirp it quite, friar, till *eating* and *drinking* be put down!" As if by way of proof, he takes a swig from a flask. He laughs—but soon is troubled again. "They say this Angelo was not made by man and woman after this *down-right* way of creation; is it true, think you?"

"How would he be made, then?"

Lucio shrugs. "Some report a *sea-maid*"—mermaid—"spawned him; some, that he was begot between two *stockfishes*"—dried fish. "But it is certain that when he makes water, his urine is *congealèd ice*; that I know to be *true!* And his is a motion ungenerative"—jerking off. "*That's* infallible!" he tells the priest, cackling again.

"You *are* pleasant, sir, and speak *apace*"—chatter.

But Lucio angrily recalls the high magistrate's ruling. "Why, what a *ruthless* thing is this in him—for the *rebellion* of a *codpiece* to take away *the life of a man!*"

"Would the *duke* who is absent have done this? Ere he would have *hanged* a man for the 'getting of a *hundred* bastards, he would have *paid for the nursing of a thousand!* He had some feeling of the *sport!*—he *knew* the services—and that instructed him to *mercy!*"

"I never heard the absent duke much detracted as for women; he was not inclinèd that way."

"Oh, sir, you are deceived!"

"'Tis not possible."

"Who?—not the *duke*? *Yes!*—your beggar of *fifty* of them! And his use was to put a *ducat*"—a gold coin—"in her clack-dish! The duke had *crotchets*"—deviant desires—"in him! He would be *drunk*, too, *that* let me inform you!"

"You do wrong him, surely!"

"I was an inward"—close companion—"of his," claims Lucio. "A *shy* fellow was the duke—and I believe I know the *cause* of his withdrawing...."

"What, I prithee, might be the cause?"

But Signior Lucio is drunkenly discreet. "*No*, pardon! 'Tis a secret must be locked within the teeth and the lips! But this I can let you understand: the greater file of his subjects held the duke to be wise—"

“*Wise*—why, no question but he *was!*”

Lucio shakes his head. “A very *superficial, ignorant, unweighing* fellow!”

The priest protests: “Either this is *envy* in you, *folly*, or *mistaking!* 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, even to the *envious*, a scholar, a statesman, and a soldier!

“Therefore you speak unskilfully! Or if your knowledge be more, it is much *darkened* in your *malice!*”

“Sir, I *know* him,” Lucio declares blearily, “but I love him.”

“*Love* talks with better knowledge, and *knowledge* with dearer love!”

Lucio moves—unsteadily—to stand more upright. “Come, sir, I know what I know.”

“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*, what you have spoken, have you courage to *maintain* it! I am bound to call upon you—and, I pray you, your *name?*”

“Sir, my name is *Lucio*—well known to the duke.”

“He shall know you *better*, sir, if I may live to report you!”

“I fear you not.”

“Oh, you hope the duke will return no more!—or you imagine *me* too unhurtful an opposite,” says the priest. “Indeed, I *can* do you little harm,”—since the duke already knows. “And, *then* you’ll *forswear* this.”

“I’ll be hanged first!” insists Lucio, oblivious—for now—to the real possibility. He sounds quite hurt: “Thou art *deceived* in me, friar!

“But no more of this. Canst thou tell me if Claudio dies Wednesday or no?”

“Why would he *die*, sir?”

“*Why?*” cries Lucio angrily. “For filling a bottle from a *tundish!*”—a channel for molten metal. “I would the duke we talk of *were* returned again! The ungenitured *agent!*—sexless surrogate—“will *unpeople* the province with *continency!* *Sparrows* must not build in *his* house-eaves, because they are *lecherous!*”

“Marry, this Claudio is condemned for *untrussing!*”

“The *duke* would have dark deeds darkly *answerèd!*—punish private matters privately. “He would never bring them to light. Would he were *returned!*”

As painful awareness begins to return, the degenerate gentleman’s thirst again hails him, but he finds the flask empty. “Farewell, good friar. I prithee, pray for me.

“The duke, I say to thee again, would *eat mutton*—on *Fridays!*” the rascal alleges crudely. “He’s not passed it up *yet*—and I say to thee, he would mouth with a *beggar*, though she smelt of brown bread and garlic!”

Lucio glimpses the scowl. “Say that *I said so!*” he adds defiantly. “Farewell!” And with that, he totters away down the street.

Duke Vincentio shakes his head. *Not might nor greatness in mortality can ’scape censure; back-wounding calumny the purest virtue strikes! What king is so strong as can tie up the gall in the slanderous tongue?*

But who comes here?

He is being approached by other querulous parties; these are headed toward the jail.

Chapter Five Awaiting Justice

Lord Escalus motions to the provost and two of his deputies. “*Go!*—away with her to prison!” he commands.

“Good my lord, be *good* to me!” pleads Mistress Overdone, arrested yet again. “Your Honour is accounted a *merciful* man, good my lord!”

He waves away her entreaties. “*Double* and *treble* admonition, and still forfeit *in the same kind!*” he says, disgusted. “This would make *Mercy* swear and play the tyrant!”

“A bawd of *eleven years’* continuance, may it please Your Honour,” the provost notes, remembering what she had looked like at forty.

“My lord, this is on *Lucio’s* information against me!” protests Mistress Overdone. “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”—the festival on May first. “I have kept it *myself!*—yet see how he goes about *abusing* me!”

“That fellow *is* a fellow of much licence,” says Escalus. “Let him be called before us.

“Away with her to prison!” he tells the officers, lifting a palm to silence her: “*Go to;* no more words!” The men escort the indignant woman toward the jail.

“Provost, my brother judge will not be altered,” Escalus informs the bailiff, who has awaited word of this latest appeal. “Claudio must die on Wednesday. Let him be furnished with divines, and have all charitable preparation.” He shakes his head sadly. “If Angelo were wrought by my pity, it should not be so with him.”

The provost nods toward the monk. “So please you,” he tells Escalus, “this friar hath been with him, and advised him in the preparation for death.”

“Good even, good father,” says the old judge, as the provost goes to the jail for his supper.

“Bliss and goodness on you,” says the monk.

“Of whence are you?”

“Not of *this* country,” says the disenchanted duke, “though my charge is now to use it for my time,” he adds. “I am a brother of a gracious order, late come from the See”—Rome—“in special business from His Holiness.”

“What news abroad i’ the world?”

Vincentio replies gravely: “None but that there is so great a *fever* on goodness that its own *dissolution* must cure it! *Newness* alone is in request: it is now as *dangerous* to be aged in any kind of course as it once was *virtuous* to be constant in an undertaking.”

The young sovereign has become more like the holy man he appears to be. “There is scarce *truth* enough alive to make *societies* secure, but *security* enough to make fellowships that are *accurst.*” Doubts trouble good institutions, and their debility permits miscreants to combine for crime.

Seeing that the veteran judge is nonplussed, Father Lodowick smiles and shrugs. “*This* ‘news’ is *old* enough! Much upon that paradox runs the wisdom of the world; it is every day’s news, always.”

The man in the cowl, still smarting from Lucio’s complaints, asks the nobleman, “I pray you, sir, of what disposition was the duke?”

“One that, above all other strifes,” Escalus recalls fondly, “contended especially to *know himself.*”

“What pleasure was he given to?”

“Rather rejoicing to see *another* merry, than merry at anything which he professed as making *him* rejoice. A gentleman of all *temperance.*”

“But leave we him to his events, with a prayer they he may prove prosperous, and let me desire to know how you find *Claudio* prepared. I am made to understand that you have lent him visitation....”

The monk nods. “He confesses to have received no sinister measure from his judge, and most willingly humbles himself to the determination of justice.

“But he had framed 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.”

Lord Escalus pats the monk’s sleeve kindly. “By your function, you have paid the heavens,

and the prisoner owes the very debt of your calling.

“I have laboured for the poor gentleman to the extremest shore of my reserve,” he says mournfully, “but my brother justice have I found so severe that he hath forcèd me to tell him he is, in *deed*, *injustice!*”

“If *his own* life echoes the straitness of his *proceeding*,” says the priest, “it shall become him well; wherein if he chance to *fail*, he hath sentenced *himself*.”

“I am going to visit the prisoner,” sighs Escalus. “Fare you well.”

“Peace be with you,” says the duke.

Vincentio ruminates. *He that the sword of heaven will bear should be as holy as severe— pattern himself to know how grace does stand, and to go in virtue, paying to others neither more nor less 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 but let his grow!

Oh, what may man within him hide, though angel on the outward side! How may a likeness— made in crimes, making practise on the times—draw with spiders’ slender strings most ponderous and substantial things!

He reflects on the scheme he has set in motion. *Craft against vice I must apply.*

With Angelo tonight his old betrothèd but despisèd shall lie. So shall his guise by the disguisèd play—and with falsehood’s false exacting, perform an old contracting!

On a broad plain skirting Vienna, well away from its city spires and the vigorous commerce along the Danube, lies St. Luke’s Church, nestled, with its grounds and garden, between town and country. The old pastoral residence, near the city’s southern gate, sometimes provides solitude for priests and scholars—and quiet solace for souls in pain.

In the yard late this sunny afternoon, an altar boy of ten practices his singing, attended by a black-clad lady who dwells within the ivy-laden walls:

*“Take, oh, take those lips away
That so sweetly were forsworn!
And those eyes—the break of day!—
Lights that do mislead the morn.
But my kisses bring again, bring again;
Seals of love—but sealed in vain, sealed in vain!”*

The words bring a pang to Lady Mariana; still, she smiles at the sweet-faced child’s attempts to portray the misery of a forsaken, adult lover. But now she must interrupt; a tall monk is approaching, in a hurry. “Break off thy song, and haste thee quick away!” she urges the boy gently. “Here comes a man of comfort, whose advice hath often stilled my brawling discontent.”

Duke Vincentio has long been her patron; but the lad has seen “Father Lodowick” visit her only once before; he bows politely, and goes into the old house.

“I cry you mercy, sir,” the lady tells the duke, “and well could wish you had not found me here so *musical!* Let me excuse me, and believe me so: my mirth it much displeasèd, pleasèd but my woe.”

“‘Tis good,” he replies, “though music oft hath such a charm as to make bad good, and provoke good to harm. I pray you tell me, hath anybody inquired for me here today? Much upon this time have I promised here to meet...” He was delayed leaving the city.

“You have not been inquired after; I have sat here all day.”

“I do constantly believe you.” He turns back to look toward the road, where they can see that Isabella has arrived at the gate. “The time is come even now. I shall crave your forbearance a little,” he says. “It may be I will call upon you anon, for some advantage to yourself.”

Mariana curtsseys. “I am always bound to you.” She goes into the house as Isabella walks up the stone path.

Vincenzio pulls the hood forward, and his features are again hidden in shadowy repose. The monk greets Isabella. “Very well met, and well come! What is the news from this good deputy?”

She answers carefully. “He hath a garden circummured with brick, whose western side is with a vineyard backed; and to that vineyard is a planchèd gate, that makes its opening with this bigger key.” She shows him one of black iron, and a smaller one. “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* to call upon him!”

The duke wants no mishap. “But shall you on your knowledge *find* this way?”

“I have ta’ en a due and wary note upon’t,” she says. “With *whispering* and most-guilty diligence, in action all of *precept*,”—setting, lawyerly, a precedent, “he did show me the way—*twice o’er!*”

“Are there no other tokens agreed between you concerning *her* observance?”—Lady Mariana’s part.

“No, none,” says Isabella, “but only a repair i’ the dark. And I have impressed upon him that my stay must be but *brief*, for I have made him know I have a servant who comes along with me and waits for me—whose persuasion is that I come about my brother.”

“’Tis well borne up!” says the priest. “I have not yet made known to Mariana a word of this.” He calls: “*What ho! Within! Come forth!*”

“I pray you,” he tells Mariana, as she joins them, “be acquainted with this maid; she comes to do you good!”

Isabella confirms it: “I *do* desire the like.”

Vincenzio faces Mariana. “Do you persuade yourself that I respect you?”

She smiles at the kindly duke “Good friar, I *know* you do, and have so *found* it.”

“Take, then, this your companion by the hand, who hath a *story* ready for your ear. I shall attend your leisure—but make *haste*; the vaporous *night* approaches!”

Mariana motions toward the garden. “Will’t please you walk aside?” She and Isabella stroll in among the tall white trellises, laden with new greenery and fresh, fragrant blooms, and soon the gentlewomen are deep in conversation.

Vincenzio ponders the speculation about his rule. *O place in greatness! Millions of false eyes are stuck upon thee! Volumes of report run with these false and most contrarious inquests upon thy doings! A thousand escapers from wit make thee the father of their idle dreams, and rack thee in their fancies!*

Gossip galls him, but it may contain hints of truth; he is troubled by what his lax governance has wrought, and he intends to assume greater responsibility.

“Well come,” he says, when Mariana and Isabella return. “How agreed?”

Isabella answers. “She’ll take the enterprise upon her, father, if you advise it.”

“It is not my consent but my *entreaty* to!” he tells them.

Isabella advises Mariana: “You have but little to say when you depart from him: soft and low, ‘Remember now *my brother!*’”—Mariana’s own brother, drowned along with her dowry.

The older lady is confident. “Fear me not!”

Father Lodowick tells her, “Nor, gentle daughter, fear *you* not at all. He is *your husband* on a pre-contract; you thus *together*, ’tis no sin, sith that the *justice* of your title to him doth flourish in the deceit!

“Come, let us go! Our corn’s yet to reap, for now’s our time to *sow!*”

Come hither, sirrah,” the provost tells Pompey, who has been brought from his cell to the bailiff’s chamber late tonight. “Can you cut off a man’s head?”

The tapster purses his lips, considering. “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.”

The provost laughs at the rude play on *head*, and offers one of his own: “Come, sir, leave your *snatches* and yield me a direct answer! Wednesday morning are Claudio and Barnardine to

die. Here in our prison is a common executioner, who for his office lacks a *helper*; if you will take it on you to assist him, it shall redeem you from your gyves”—shackles.

At his desk, the jailer leans forward. “If not, you shall have your full time of imprisonment—and your deliverance with an unpitied *whipping*, for you have been a notorious bawd!”

“Sir, I *have* been an unlawful bawd, time out of mind,” says Pompey, “but yet I will be content to be a lawful hangman. I would be glad to receive some instruction from my fellow partner.”

“*What, ho!* Abhorson!” the provost shouts toward the dark corridor. “Where’s *Abhorson*, there?”

That dull, burly man comes to the door. “Do you call, sir?”

“Sirrah, here’s a fellow will help you Wednesday with your executions. If you think it meet, compound with him by the year,”—agree on his pay, “and let him abide here with you; if not, use him for the present and dismiss him,” he says, rising at the desk to go. “He cannot plead his *estimation* with you; he hath been a bawd.”

“A *bawd*, sir? *Fie* upon him!” The headsman would protect the dignity of his calling. “He will discredit our mystery!”

“*Go to*, sir,” says the provost, “you weigh equally!” Looking back at the two men as he passes into the row of cells, he laughs. “A feather will turn the scale!”

His employment is gone; facing time in prison—and the lash—Pompey is eager to please. “Pray, sir, by your good favour—for surely, sir, a good favour”—face—“you *have*, but that you have a hanging look—do you call, sir, your occupation a *mystery*?”

Abhorson regards him with contempt. “Aye, sir; a mystery.”

“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. But what *mystery* there should be in *hanging*, if I should be hanged I cannot imagine!”

The executioner is adamant. “Sir, it *is* a mystery.”

“Proof?”

“Every *thief’s* apparel fits your *true* man.” A hangman can claim the deceased’s clothes; but the maxim is cautionary.

Pompey examines the saying. “If it be too *little* for your thief, your true man thinks it big *enough*; if it be too *big* for your thief, your true man thinks it *little enough*”—just deserts. “So every thief’s apparel fits your true man!” he concludes, approvingly.

The provost returns, keys jangling. “Are you agreed?”

Pompey answers quickly. “Sir, I will serve him; for I do find your hangman is a more *penitent* trade than your bawd—he doth oftener ask forgiveness.” By tradition, an executioner asks for the condemned’s pardon.

The official is content. “You, sirrah,” he tells Abhorson, “provide your block and your axe Wednesday morning, four o’clock.”

Abhorson frowns at Pompey. “Come on, bawd; I will instruct thee in *my* trade; follow.”

“I do desire to learn, sir!” says Pompey. “And I hope, if you have occasion to use me for your own turn, you shall find me yare!”—ready. Abhorson thinks, mistakenly, he means ready *to assist*. “For truly, sir, for your *kindness* I owe you a good turn!”—a prodding to twist, for Abhorson as he dangles at the end of a rope; beheading is reserved for gentlemen.

The provost tells Abhorson, as they head toward the cells, “Call hither Claudio and Barnardine.” *The one has my pity*, he thinks. *Not a jot the other, being a murderer, though he were my brother!*

Isabella’s brother is soon brought into the chamber. The provost tells him, as the law requires: “Look; here’s the warrant, Claudio, for thy death. ’Tis now after midnight; by nine *tomorrow* thou must be made immortal.

“Where’s Barnardine?”

“As fast locked up in *sleep* as guiltless *labour* when it lies starkly in the traveller’s bones,”

Claudio tells him. "He will not wake."

The provost is unconcerned about notifying that lost soul. "Who can do good on *him*?"

"Well, go, prepare yourself," he says. "Heaven give your spirits comfort!" he tells Claudio as he is returned to his cell.

—
Hark, what noise? Despite the very late hour, a knock sounds at the prison entrance. "By and by!" calls the provost, as the rapping continues. *I hope it is some pardon or reprieve for the most gentle Claudio!* He unlocks and opens the heavy door, and finds Friar Lodowick. "Welcome, father."

"The best and wholesomest spirits of the night envelope you, good provost!" says the monk cheerfully, as they enter the chamber. "Who called here of late?"

"None, since the curfew rung."

"Not Isabella?"

"No."

"They will, then, ere't be long," says the priest.

"What comfort is for Claudio?" asks the provost.

"There's some in *hope*."

The bailiff, thinking of Lord Angelo, shakes his head angrily. "It is a bitter deputy!"

"Not so, not so. His *life* is paralleled 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 to qualify in others. Were *he* marrèd with that which he corrects, then were he *tyrannous*," says the monk. "But that not being so, he's just." The duke has put the judge on trial.

Again there is knocking. "Now are they come!" says the priest, as the bailiff goes out to the door. *This is a gentle provost!* thinks Vincentio. *Seldom when the steelèd jailer is the friend of men!* The rapping persists. "How now! What *noise*?"

He tells the returning provost, "That spirit's possessed with *haste*, who wounds the unresisting postern with these strokes!" The duke is eagerly expecting from Angelo, who by now should have concluded the assignation, a written reprieve for Claudio.

But it seems the prison is to entertain an added guest, who is now waiting under guard just outside. The bailiff tells those deputies, "There he must stay until the officer arise to let him in; he is called up." He returns to take a seat, wearily, at his table.

The monk sees no paper. "Have you no countermand for Claudio yet, but that he must die tomorrow?"

"None, sir, none."

A deputy yawns as he passes the chamber door on his way to the entrance.

Says the priest, smiling confidently, "Provost, as near the *dawning* as it is, you shall hear more ere *mourning!*"

"Haply you something *know*," says the provost, "yet I believe there comes no countermand; no such example have we. Besides, upon the very stage of Justice"—in open court—"Lord Angelo hath to the public ear professèd the contrary."

And then a messenger enters the room. "This is his lordship's man!" says the provost, rising.

"And here comes Claudio's pardon!" says the monk.

The messenger hands the provost a paper. "My lord hath sent you this note, and by me this further charge: that you *swerve not* from the *smallest article* of it!—neither in time, manner, nor other circumstance!" He turns to go. "Good morrow; for, as I take it, it is almost day."

"I shall obey him," says the provost. He reads the note.

Thinks Duke Vincentio, *Thus is his pardon purchased—from such sin as that which the pardoner himself is in! Hence hath offence a quick celerity, when it is born in high authority! When Vice makes merry, mercy's so extended that for love of the fault is the offender friended!*

"Now, sir, what news?"

"I told you," says the provost sadly. "Lord Angelo, belike thinking me remiss in mine office,

awakens me with this unwanted putting-on—*strangely*, methinks, for he hath not used it before.”

The monk frowns. “Pray you, let’s hear.”

The provost reads aloud: “*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, let me have Claudio’s head sent me by five.*

“*Let this be duly performed with the thought that more depends on it than we must explain. Thus fail not to do your office, as you will answer it at your peril.*” He looks up. “What say you to this, sir?”

The monk thinks. “Who is this Barnardine that is to be executed in the afternoon?”

“A Bohemian born, but here nursèd up and bred; one that is a prisoner of nine years.”

The priest is surprised—and taken aback. “How came it that the absent duke had not either executed him, or delivered him to his liberty? I have heard it was ever his manner to do so.”

“His friends ever wrought reprieves for him; and, indeed, his case came not to an *undoubtful* proof till *now*, in the government of Lord Angelo.”

“It is now apparent?”

“And most *manifest*, not denied by himself.”

“Hath he born himself *penitently* in prison? How seems he to be touchèd?”

“As a man who apprehends death as no more dreadful than a drunken *sleep*—careless, reckless, and fearless of what’s past, present, or to come: insensible of mortality, and desperately mortal”—despairing of life.

“He needs advice,” says the priest.

“He will hear none.” Barnardine has turned away all ministrations. “He hath evermore had the liberty of the prison; give him *leave* to escape hence, he would not! *Drunk* many times a day, if not many days *entirely* drunk.” Prisoners can easily secure liquors, if they have money. “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.”

The duke is mindful of the passing time. “More of him anon,” he says. “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 no greater forfeit to the law than Angelo who hath sentenced him! To make you understand this *as a manifested effect*, I crave but one day’s respite—for the which you are to do me both an immediate and a dangerous courtesy!”

“Pray, sir, in what?”

“In *delaying* the death!”

“*Alack*,” cries the provost, “*how may I do it*, having the limited hours and an express command—under penalty!—to deliver his *head* unto the view of Angelo? Crossing this in the smallest I may make *my case* as is *Claudio’s*!”

Says the monk, “By the vows of mine order, *I’ll warrant you!*”—shield him. “If my instructions may be your guide, let this *Barnardine* be this morning executed, and *his* head born to Angelo.”

“Angelo hath seen them both, and will discover the wrong *favour!*”—face.

“Oh, *Death’s* a great *disguiser*—and you may add to it: shave the head and dye the beard—and say it was the desire of the penitent to be so barèd before his death; you know the course is common.” Long hair can impede the axe’s stroke; nobody wants more than one.

“If anything fall to you upon this more than *thanks* and *good fortune*, by the saint whom I profess, I will plead against it with *my life!*”

The provost is torn. “Pardon me, good father—it is against my oath!”

“Were you sworn to the deputy, or to the *duke*?”

“To *him*—and to his substitutes.”

“Will you think you have made no offence if the *duke* avouch the justice of your dealing?”

“But what likelihood is in that?”

“Not a resemblance, but a *certainty!*” The duke has been writing—and he has anticipated a possible hindrance. “Since I see you are fearful that neither my coat, integrity, nor persuasion can with ease exempt you, I will go further than I meant, to pluck all fears out of you.” He hands the bailiff a folded document bearing an impression stamped in red wax. “Look you, sir: here is the hand and seal of the *duke!* You know the character,”—*handwriting*, “I doubt not; and the signet is not strange to you....”

“I know them both!”

The priest taps the paper. “The contents of this is *the return of the duke!* You shall anon over-read it at your leisure—where you shall find that within these two days”—today and tomorrow—“*he will be here!*”

“This is a thing that *Angelo* knows not, for he this very day receives *letters of strange tenor:* perchance of the duke’s *death*, perchance *entering into some monastery*—but by *no* chance anything of what is writ here!”

The monk glances past the front door, now standing open, at the stark black sky, tinged a dark blue at the horizon. “Look... the unfolding star calls up the shepherd!”—sunlight is approaching. “Put not yourself into amazement how these 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 immediate shrift, and advise him for a better place.

“Yet you are amazed; but this shall absolutely resolve you,” he says, as the provost continues to read—nodding as he does.

“Come away,” says Vincentio urgently, “it is near, almost, *dawn!*”

Chapter Six Retribution Approaches

As the prisoners lie snoring, oblivious to others’ imminent execution, Pompey feels at home ambling down the aisle between two rows of dark cells, glancing back and forth. *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 for a commodity of brown paper and old ginger: ninescore and seventeen pound—off which he made five marks, ready money!—in a usury cheat based on grossly overpriced goods. *Marry, ginger was not much in request, then, for the old women were all dead!* notes Pompey wryly to himself; prostitutes are not known for longevity.

Then is there here one Master Caper, at the suit of Master Three-pile the mercer for some four suits of peach-coloured satin—which now impeach him a beggar! Unable to pay for the costly clothes he ordered, the fop must languish here.

Pompey walks on. *Then have we here young Dicey; and young Master Deepvow; and Master Copperspur; and Master Starve-Lackey, the rapier-and-dagger man—and young Drophaire, that killed hasty Pudding; and Master Forthlight, the tilter*—quick to challenge, slow to appear.

...and brave Master Shoetie, the great traveller...—urbane but penniless.

...and mild Half-can, that stubbèd pots—poured from short-measure tankards.

He looks down the long gallery ahead. *And, I think, forty more—all great doers in our trade, and all now ‘for the Lord’s sake!’*—inmates’ common plea when begging from visitors.

Barrel-shaped Abhorson enters and comes to Pompey. “Sirrah, bring Barnardine hither.”

Turning, the tapster says brightly, “Master Barnardine, you must rise and be hanged! Master Barnardine....”

“*What, ho!—Barnardine!*” bellows Abhorson at the man’s cell.

“A *pox* o’ your throats!” growls the startled prisoner, waking. “Who makes that *noise* there? What are you?”

“Your *friend*, sir; the hangman,” Pompey replies politely. “You must be so good, sir, as to rise and be put to death.”

“*Away*, you rogue, *away*,” comes a rasping voice. “I am sleepy.”

Abhorson elbows his new helper. “Tell him he must awaken—and that *quickly*, too!”

“Master Barnardine, pray you be awake till you are executed, and sleep afterwards,” Pompey suggests.

“Go in to him and fetch him out!” orders Abhorson.

“He is coming, sir, he is coming; I hear his straw rustle.”

Asks Abhorson, “Is the axe upon the block, sirrah?”

“Very ready, sir!” Pompey unlocks the door.

Barnardine slowly turns to sit, then holds his aching head between his hands. He slouches queasily against a stone wall of his cell and peers up at them. “How now, Abhorson?” he croaks. “What’s the news with you?”

The headsman wastes no time. “Truly, sir, I would desire you to clap into your prayers; for, look you,” he says, showing a folded paper, “the warrant’s come.”

Barnardine lifts his head—and winces. “You *rogue*, I have been *drinking* all night!—I am not fitted for ’t!”

“All the better, sir,” says Pompey, “for he that drinks all night and is hanged betimes in the morning may sleep the *sounder* the following day.”

Abhorson motions toward the front of the cell rows, where the disguised duke is entering. “Look you, sir; here comes your ghostly father. Do we jest *now*, think you?”

The priest approaches Barnardine. “Sir, induced by my charity, and hearing how hasty you are to *depart*, I am come to advise you, comfort you, and *pray* with you.”

“Friar, not *I!* I have been drinking hard all night, and I will have *more time* to prepare me, or they shall beat out my brains with billets!” says Barnardine obstinately. “I will not consent to die *this day*, that’s certain!”

“Ah, sir, you must,” the holy man tells him quietly. “And therefore I beseech you look *forward*, to the journey you shall go on.”

Barnardine staggers up, and manages to straighten. “I swear I will not die today for *any* man’s persuasion.”

“But hear you . . .”

“Not a *word!* If you have anything to say to me, come to my ward—for thence will I *not be* today!”—and he dashes, with surprising speed, down past the line of cell doors and into the dark passage at the end.

“Oh, *gravel heart!* Unfit to live *or die!*” says the duke. “*After* him, fellows; bring him to the block.”

Abhorson squares his broad shoulders and, with Pompey following, stamps after the trapped fugitive.

But soon, in his chamber, the provost greets the pretended priest. “How, sir, how do you find the prisoner?”

“A creature unprepared, unmeet for death,” the duke admits grimly; “and to transport him in the mind *he* is in were damnable.”

The provost nods. He thinks. “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 hair of just his colour.” He looks toward the cells; they can hear Barnardine’s defiant shouts. “What if we do remit this reprobate till he were well inclinèd, and satisfy the deputy with the visage of *Ragozine*, more like to Claudio’s?”

“Oh, ’tis an accident that *heaven* provides!” says the monk. “*Dispatch* it *instantly!*—the hour prefixèd by Angelo draws on! See this be done, and sent according to command, whiles I persuade *this* rude wretch willingly to die.”

“That shall be done, good father, immediately! But Barnardine must die this afternoon. And

how shall we continue with Claudio, to save me from the danger that might come if he were known *alive*?”

“Let this be done: 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*.”

The bailiff smiles. “I am your free dependant.”

“*Quickly!*—*dispatch*, and send the head to Angelo!”

The provost goes to perform a grisly task.

Duke Vincentio sits at the jailer’s table, and pulls the inkhorn forward. *Now will I write letters to Angelo—the provost, he shall bear them—whose contents shall witness to him I am nearly home, and that, by great injunctions, I am bound to enter publicly.*

Him I’ll desire to meet me at the consecrated font a league below the city—at St. Luke’s Church.

And from thence, by cold graduation, in well-balanced form, we shall proceed with Angelo!

Just as he finishes writing, the provost returns with a heavy, covered wicker basket. “Here is the head. I’ll carry it myself.”

The monk nods, handing him several letters. “Convenient it *is!* Make a *swift return*, for I would commune with you of such things that want no ear but yours!”

“I’ll make all speed!” says the provost, already on his way. He goes out into the dark.

A feminine voice calls from the front entrance. “*Peace, ho, be here!*”

The tongue of Isabella! thinks the duke. *She’s come to know if yet her brother’s pardon be come hither.*

He thinks the ingenuous young lady would prove a poor dissembler in his new scheme: her lovely face reveals too well what she feels. *I will keep her ignorant for her good—to bring her heavenly comfort from despair when it is least expected.*

“By your leave,” says Isabella, coming in. Seeing the priest, she curtsseys.

“Good *morning* to you, fair and gracious daughter.”

Says she, smiling, “The *better*, given me by so holy a man! Hath yet the deputy sent my brother’s pardon?”

The monk speaks gravely. “He hath released him, Isabella, from the *world*—his head is off, and sent to Angelo.”

Isabella gasps, stunned. “*Nay*, but it is not *so!*”

“It is no other. Show your wisdom, daughter, in your close *patience*.”

But she wants vengeance on the reneging judge: “Oh, I will *to* him and *pluck out his eyes!*”

“You shall not be admitted to his sight,” the priest points out.

And now she sobs. “Unhappy *Claudio!* Wretched Isabella! *Injurious* world! Most *damned Angelo!*”

“This neither hurts him nor profits you a jot,” says the monk. “Forbear it therefore; give your cause to *heaven*.”

“Mark what I say!—which you shall find by every *syllable* a faithful *verity!*” The deep urgency in his voice commands her attention, despite her grief. “The *duke* comes home tomorrow... *nay, dry your eyes!* One of our convent, and his *confessor*, gave me *this instance*.” He shows her a letter sporting the sovereign’s red-wax seal.

“Already the monk hath carried notice to Escalus and Angelo, who do prepare to meet the duke at the city gates, there to give up their power.

“If you *can*, place your wisdom in the good path that *I* would wish it! *Do*, and you shall *have your voice* on this wretch, *grace* from the duke, *revenges* for your heart—and general *honour!*”

Isabella searches his face, and agrees, tearfully. “I am directed by you.”

He gives her the missive. “This letter, then, to *Friar Peter* give; ’tis the one he sent *me* of the duke’s return. Say, with this token, that I desire his company at *Mariana’s* house *this night!*”

“Her cause and yours I’ll perfect him withal,”—see that he understands them, “and he shall bring you before the duke.

“And to the head of *Angelo*, *accuse him home and home!*”

“As for my poor self, I am confinèd 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 if *I* pervert your course!”

She nods, but again must wipe away tears.

The priest hears another dead-of-night visitor to the jail. “Who’s here?”

Lucio greets them with a feeble bow. “Good even. Friar, where’s the provost?”

“Not within, sir,” Father Lodowick tells him.

Lucio observes the lady’s distress. “Oh, pretty Isabella, I am pale at mine heart to see thine eyes so red! Thou must be *patient*,” he says earnestly. Concern for Claudio and her has kept him sober for some hours now—at considerable cost. “I’ll need to dine and sup with water and bran; because of my *head*, I dare not fill my belly—one fruitful meal would set me to ’t!”—vomiting.

Says Lucio hopefully, “But they say the *duke* will be here *tomorrow!*” He regards her tenderly. “By my troth, Isabella, I *loved* thy brother! If the old, eccentric ‘duke of dark corners’ had been at *home*, he had *lived!*” he says angrily.

Clutching her handkerchief, Isabella nods sadly, then heads into the chilly darkness on her early errand to Friar Peter.

“Sir, the duke is marvellously little beholding to *your* reports,” says the monk, “but the best is: he *lives not in them!*”

“Friar, thou knowest not the duke so well as I do. He’s a better-wooèd man than thou takest him for!”

“Well, you’ll *answer* for this one day! Fare ye well.” He starts toward the door.

“Nay, tarry; I’ll go along with thee,” says Lucio. “I can tell thee pretty tales of the duke....”

“You have told me too many of him already, sir, if they be *true*; if *not* true, *none* were enough!”

Lucio rubs his chin. “I was once before him for getting a wench with child.”

“*Did* you such a thing?”

Lucio confesses glibly. “Yes, marry, did I, but I had to forswear it—they would else have *married* me to the rotten medlar!”—a dark fruit, edible when overly ripe.

Father Lodowick is amused by the rascal’s candor. “Sir, your company is *fairer* than *honest*. Rest you well.”

“By my troth, I’ll go with thee to the lane’s end,” Lucio insists. “If bawdy talk offend you, we’ll have... very *little* of it.” But the monk is already hurrying away.

“Nay, friar, I am a kind of *bur*,” cries Lucio, trying valiantly to keep pace, despite his throbbing head. “I shall *stick!*”

Lord Escalus is puzzled: he was awakened very early by a monk at his door, and now, having come to Lord Angelo’s house, he learns that they have both received odd messages from the duke—sent and delivered, posthaste, during the night.

“Every letter he hath writ hath disavouchèd another!” says Escalus.

Angelo concurs: “In most uneven and *distracted* manner!” He regards the older lord. “His actions show much like to *madness*; pray heaven his wisdom be not *tainted!*”

“And why meet him at the *gates*, and deliver our authorities *there?*”

“I cannot guess.”

Angelo frowns, thinking. “And why should we proclaim, an hour before his entering, that if any crave redress of injustice, they should *exhibit* their petitions *in the street?*”

Escalus looks through his letters and unfolds one. “He shows his reason for that,” he says, pointing to a passage: “to have a dispatch of complaints, and to deliver us from devices thereafter, which shall then have no power to stand against us.” He looks at Angelo. The duke had no ceremonial farewell; complaints would detract from his return. And neither lawyer knows what the “devices” might be.

Angelo shrugs. “Well, I beseech you, let it *be* proclaimed betimes 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 bows. “I shall, sir. Fare you well.”

“Good night,” says Angelo. He closes the door—and stands, alone, in the dark.

His recent triumph has left him cold and miserable. *This deed unshapes me quite—makes me empty, and dull to all proceedings.*

A maid deflowered!—and by an eminent body that enforced the law against it!

But that her tender shame will not proclaim against her maiden loss, how might she tongue me! Yet reason tells her ‘No!’—for my authority bears a credent bulk that no particular scandal can once touch but that it confounds the breather.

And he thinks of young Claudio, executed at four this morning. *He would have lived, save that the dangerous youth with riotous senses might, in time to come, have ta’en revenge for so receiving a dishonoured life—by a ransom of such shame!*

The sound of *shame* reverberates in his head. *Yet I would he had lived!*

Alack, when once our grace we have forgot, nothing goes right: we would, and we would not....

Chapter Seven Confrontation

In the sacristy of St. Luke’s, Duke Vincentio, once again wearing his own, splendiferous vestments and gleaming gold coronet, has been confiding in three monks.

He turns to Friar Peter. “These letters at fit time deliver for me. The provost knows our purpose and our plot.

“The matter being afoot, keep to your instruction, and hold you ever to our special drift,” he urges, “though sometimes you do blench from this or that—as *cause* doth *minister!*”

Change is needed, and the duke wants to involve his chief courtiers. “Go call at Flavius’s 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 first send me Flavius.”

Friar Peter nods. “It shall be speeded well!” The monks are hurrying away just as a nobleman arrives.

The duke is very pleased to see him. “I thank thee, Varrius; thou hast made good haste! Come, we will walk.” They go outside, and turn south toward the barn. “There’s other of our friends will greet us here *anon*, my gentle Varrius.”

The sovereign has much to accomplish, but little time; the sun has peeked up over the horizon, and now it rises.

Dazzling under the clear, azure sky, highly polished trumpets blare, heralding Duke Vincentio’s procession as it moves slowly northward on the rutted highway between fertile fields, and nears this entrance to Vienna.

Just inside of the wide gates, two veiled noblewomen in black dresses join the commoners gathering eagerly, under the careful watch of the provost and his deputies, to greet their returning sovereign.

Lady Mariana’s concern rises as they wait. “To speak so *indirectly* I am loath: I would *say the truth!* But so to accuse him, that is *your* part.” She considers Friar Lodowick’s scheme. “I am advised to do thus, to veil the full purpose.”

“Be ruled by him,” Isabella urges.

Still, Mariana is puzzled: “Besides which, he tells me that, if peradventure he *speak against me*—on the adverse side—I should not think it strange, for ’tis a *medicine*, that’s bitter for a sweet *end.*”

Isabella looks around, ill at ease on the public highway. "I would Friar Peter—"

"*Ah, peace,*" says Mariana, pointing, "the friar is come!"

Father Peter motions for the ladies to follow him quickly. "Come, I have found you out a stand most fit, where you may have such vantage of the duke that he shall not pass you!"—fail to see them. "Twice have the trumpets sounded," the priest notes. "The noblest and gravest citizens have gone to the gates, and very near upon them the duke is entering! Therefore, *hence, away!*"

Accompanying Duke Vincentio, who is riding on a white stallion, are primary lords of his domain, along with a contingent of prominent and prosperous city gentlemen, all followed by a colorful troop of soldiers and a wagon.

"My very worthy cousin, fairly met!" calls the duke to a waiting well-wisher. "Our old and faithful friend, we are glad to see you!" he tells another. He beams as others throng to him, while he dismounts before the citizens.

Lord Angelo and Lord Escalus, their robes bespeaking the dignity of high judicial office, approach. "Happy return be to Your Royal Grace!" says Angelo. He and Escalus bow deeply in welcome.

"Many and hearty thankings to you both!" says the ruler jovially.

He tells Escalus, "We have made inquiry of you, and we hear such goodness of *your* justice that our soul cannot but yield forth to you *public thanks!*—forerunning *more* requital!"

Angelo bows. "You make my bonds still greater."

"Oh, *your* desert speaks *loud,*" says the duke, "and I should wrong it to lock it in the wards of *covert bosom,* when it deserves a residence *in characters of brass!*—forted 'gainst the tooth of time, and razure of oblivion! Give me your hand, and *let these subjects see,*" he says, lifting it high with his left hand, "to make them know what *outward* courtesies *proclaim,* but faces would fain keep *within!*"

Angelo thinks his modesty has just been complimented.

Says Vincentio, "Come, Escalus, you must walk by us on our *other* side!—and good supporters with you!"

As they proceed, Friar Peter urges Isabella to move forward. "Now is your time! Speak loud, and kneel before him!"

"*Justice,* O royal duke!" she calls. "Avail your regard upon a wrongèd... I would fain have said '*maid!*' O worthy prince, dishonour not your eye by throwing it on any other object till you have heard *me* and my *true complaint!*"

"And *given me justice!*" she adds, lifting her black veil. "*Justice, justice, justice!*"

Duke Vincentio turns to his left to regard her. "Relate your wrongs: in what?—by whom? Be brief. Here is Lord Angelo, who shall give you justice—reveal yourself to *him.*" The crowd moves closer, gathering around the nobles.

"Oh, worthy duke, you bid me seek *redemption* from *the Devil!*" cries Isabella. "Hear me *yourself!*—for that which I must speak must either punish me, not being *believed,* or wring *redress* from you! Hear me, oh, *hear me! Hear!*"

Says Angelo, "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—"

"By course of *justice?*" cries the lady scornfully.

"—and she will speak most bitterly and strangely."

Isabella steps forward, raging. "*Most* strangely!—but yet most *truly* will I speak!

"Angelo's *forsworn;* is *that* not strange? Angelo's a *murderer;* is *that* not strange? That Angelo is an adulterous *thief,* an *hypocrite,* a *virgin-violator!*—is it not *strange* and *stranger?*"

Duke Vincentio looks doubtful. "Nay, it is *ten times* strange!"

"It is no truer he is *Angelo* than this is all as *true* as it is strange!" insists Isabella. "Nay, it is ten times *truer:* for *truth* is true to the end of reckoning!"—of time.

Duke Vincentio summons the provost. "Away with her," he says calmly. "Poor soul, she speaks this in the infirmity of sense."

Isabella kneels in supplication. “O prince, I conjure thee, as thou believest there is *another* comfort than *this* world, that thou neglect me not with the opinion that I am touchèd with madness! Make not *impossible* that which but seems unlikely!

“’Tis not impossible that *one*, the *wickedest caitiff on the ground*, might *seem* as shy, as grave, as just, as *absolute* 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 *names* for badness!”

Duke Vincentio raises an eyebrow. “By mine honesty, if she be mad, and I believe no other, her madness hath the oddest *frame of sense*—such a dependency of thing on thing as ne’er I heard in *madness*....”

“O gracious duke, harp not on that,” pleads Isabella, her hands clasped together, “nor do not banish *reason* for *inequality*,”—because of the accuser’s lesser social stature, “but let *your* reason serve to make the truth appear where it seems *hidden*, and hide the false that *seems* true!”

“Many that are *not* mad have, surely, more lack of reason,” Duke Vincentio admits, watching her closely. “What would you say?”

Isabella rises to her feet. “I am the sister of one *Claudio*, condemned upon the act of fornication to *lose his head*!—condemnèd by *Angelo*! I, in probation of a sisterhood, was sent to him by my brother, one Lucio then the messenger—”

“*That’s I*, an’t like Your Grace!” interjects Lucio. “I went to her from Claudio, and desired her to try her gracious fortune with Lord Angelo for her poor brother’s *pardon*.”

“That’s he, indeed,” says Isabella.

Duke Vincentio frowns at Lucio. “You were not bid to speak.”

“No, my good lord—nor wished to hold my peace.”

“*I* wish you to! Then; pray you, take note of it! And when you have a business for *yourself*, pray *heaven* you then be perfect!”—fully prepared to answer.

“I warrant Your Honour,” says Lucio confidently.

“The *warrant’s* for *yourself*,” counters the sovereign. “Take heed to’t.”

Isabella continues. “This gentleman told something of my tale....”

“Right!” says Lucio.

The duke glares. “It may be right, but you are i’ the *wrong* to speak *before your time*!” “Proceed,” he tells the lady.

“I went to this *pernicious, caitiff deputy*—”

“*That’s* somewhat *madly* spoken,” the duke observes.

“Pardon it,” asks Isabella. “The *phrase* is fitted to the *matter*!”

“I am amended *again*,” grumbles the duke. “*To* the matter; *proceed*.”

“In brief,” she says, “to set the needless process by—how I persuaded, how I prayed and kneeled, how he repelled me, and how I replied, 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 concupiscible, intemperate *lust*, release my brother!

“And, after much debatement, my sisterly sympathy confounded mine honour, and I did *yield* to him!

“But the next morn, betimes, his *purpose* satèd—he sends a *warrant* for my poor brother’s *head*!”

The duke scoffs: “*This* is most *likely*!”

Seeing his frown, Isabella moans. “Oh, that it were as likely as it is *true*!”

“By heaven, fond wretch, either thou art *subornèd* against his honour in hateful practise, or else thou knowest not what thou speak’st!” says the duke. “*First*, his integrity stands without blemish. *Next*, it comports not with *reason* that he should with such vehemency pursue faults *found in himself*! If he had so offended, he would have weighed thy brother against himself, and

not have cut him off!

“Someone hath *set you on!* Confess the truth, and say by whose advice thou camest here to complain!”

Isabella is overwhelmed. “And is this all?” she groans. “Then, O you blessed ministers above, keep me in patience, and in ripened *time* unfold the evil which is here wrapt up in good countenance!

“Heaven shield Your Grace from woe,” she says sadly, “as I, thus wronged, hence unbelieved go.”

“I know you’d *fain* be gone,” says the duke contemptuously. “An *officer!*” he calls. “*To prison* with her! Shall we thus permit a blasting and a scandalous breath to fall on him so near *us?*” He glares at her. “This needs must be a *scheme!* *Who knew* of your intent in coming hither?”

“One that I would were here!” moans Isabella. “Friar Lodowick.”

“A *ghostly* father, belike,” says the duke dubiously. “Who knows that ‘Lodowick?’”

Lucio pipes up—again unbidden. “My lord, *I* know him!—’tis a *meddling* friar! I do not like the man! Had he been layman, my lord, for certain words he spake against Your Grace in your absence, I had swung him soundly!”

“Words against *me?* *This* is a *good* friar, belike!—and setting on this wretched woman here against our substitute! Let this friar be found!”

“Just *yesternight*, my lord,” says Lucio, “I saw them at the *prison*, she and that friar—a *saucy* friar, a very *scurvy* fellow!”

Friar Peter now steps forward. “Blessèd be Your Royal Grace! 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 unbegot!”—unborn.

“We did believe no less,” says Vincentio, also truthfully. “Know you that Friar *Lodowick* that she speaks of?”

“I know him for a man *divine* and *holy*—not ‘scurvy,’ nor a temporal *meddler*, as he’s reported by *this* gentleman! And, on my trust,” he says with only the trace of a grin, “a man who never yet did, as *he* avouches, misreport Your Grace.”

“My lord, he *did*, most *villainously*—believe it!” counters Lucio.

“Well, he in time may come to clear *himself*,” says Friar Peter of the missing monk, “but at this instant he is sick, my lord, with a strange fever. *Upon his request*, he 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 and all probation will make full clear, whensoever he’s summoned.

“First, as for this woman,” he says, as Isabella is placed under guard. “To justify this worthy nobleman, so vulgarly and personally accused, you shall *hear her disprovèd ’fore her eyes*, till she *herself* confess it!”

The lady is led away.

“Good friar, let’s hear it.” The duke turns to his former surrogate. “Do you not *smile* at this, Lord Angelo?”

The magistrate, his face ashen, smiles weakly—but stands silent.

“O Heaven, the vanity of wretched fools!” says the duke.

Angelo thinks he means Isabella.

Vincentio motions to attendants. “Give us some seats.”

The servants have soon set out chairs, brought here on the wagon, for a makeshift hearing. “Come, cousin Angelo. In this I’ll be impartial: be *you* judge of your own cause!

“Is this a witness, friar?”

Father Peter nods, and brings Lady Mariana forward.

“First, let her show her face, and after speak.”

“Pardon, my lord,” says she, curtsying. “I will not show my face until my *husband* bid me.”

“What, are you married?”

“No, my lord.”

“Are you a maid?”—a virgin.

“No, my lord.”

“A widow, then.”

“Neither, my lord.”

The duke frowns. “Why, you are *nothing* then!—neither widow nor wife, nor maiden!”

Offers Lucio helpfully, “My lord, she may be a *whore*, for many of *them* are neither maid nor wife, nor widow!”

Says the duke, frowning at the on-lookers’ laughter, “Silence that fellow! I would he had some cause to prattle for *himself!*”—were speaking at his own trial.

Lucio, chastised, bows. “Well, my lord.”

The veiled lady tells the duke, “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 knows not that ever he knew *me.*”

“He was *drunk* then, my lord,” injects Lucio. “It can be no better.”

“For the benefit of *silence,*” says the duke, exasperated, “I would *thou* wert so, too!”

Lucio backs away. “Well, my lord.”

The duke grows impatient. “This is no witness about *Lord Angelo...*”

“Now I come to’t my lord,” says the lady. “She who accuses *him* of fornication, in self-same manner doth accuse *my husband!*—and charges him, my lord, with it at such a time as I’ll depose I had him *in mine arms*, with all the *effect* of love!”

Angelo shakes his head. “She charges other than *me!*”

“Not that I know of,” says the veiled lady firmly.

Now Duke Vincentio seems puzzled. “No? You say your *husband...*”

“Why, *just,* my lord,” says she. “And that is *Angelo!*—who *thinks* he knows that he ne’er knew my body, and knows he *thinks* that he’s known *Isabella’s!*”

“This is a *strange abuse!*” cries Angelo angrily. “Let’s see thy face!”

She nods. “My *husband* bids me; now will I unmask!”

Lady Mariana pulls away the veil. “This is that *face*, thou cruel Angelo, which once thou sworest was worth the looking on! This is the *hand* which, with *avowèd contract*, was fast belocked in thine! *This* is the *body* that *took away* thy match with Isabella!—and did *supply* thee, at thy garden-house in her imagined person!”

Duke Vincentio stares at Angelo. “Know you this woman?”

“*Carnally,* she says!” lively Lucio points out.

“No more, sirrah!” says the duke.

Lucio nods. “*Enough,* my lord”—for him, *carnally* is exactly enough.

Angelo is flustered. “My lord, I must confess I know this woman. And five years ago there *was* some speech of marriage betwixt myself and her; which was *broken off*, partly for that her promised proportions came short of composition, but in chief for that her *reputation* was disvalued for *levity*”—by rumored *lightness*, looseness. “Since which time, upon my faith and honour, for five years I never spake with her, saw her, nor *heard from her!*”

“Noble prince,” says Mariana, kneeling, “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 *last night* in’s garden-house, he *knew me as a wife!*”

“As this is true, let me in *safety* raise me from my knees—or else for ever be confixèd here, a marble monument!”

“I did but *smile* till *now,*” says Angelo, irate. “Now, good my lord, give me the scope of *justice!* My patience here is touchèd! I do perceive these poor women are no more than *infernal instruments* of some more mightier member that *sets them on!*”

“Let me have way, my lord, to find this practise out!”

“*Aye*, with all my heart!—and punish them to your height of pleasure!” says Vincentio—his irony unnoticed.

The duke regards Father Peter and Lady Mariana. “Thou, foolish friar—and thou, pernicious woman, compacted with her that’s gone—think’st thou thine *oaths*, though they would *swear down* each particular *saint*, were testimonies against *his* worth and credit, who’s *sealed in approbation*?”

“You, Lord Escalus, sit with my cousin; lend him your kind pains to *find out* this abuse, whence ’tis *derivèd*!”

“There is another friar that *set them on!*—let him be sent for!”

“Would he *were* here, my lord,” says Friar Peter, “for *he indeed* hath set the women on to this complaint. Your provost knows the place where he abides; and he may fetch him.”

“Go do it instantly!” the duke tells the provost, who bows and leaves. “And you, my noble and well-warranted cousin,” he tells Lord Angelo, “whom it concerns to hear this matter forth, given your injuries, do as seems to you best in any *chastisement*.”

Vincentio yawns, apparently weary from his travels. “I for a while will leave you; but stir not *you* till you have well determinèd upon these slanderers!”

“My lord, we’ll do it thoroughly,” says Escalus, as the duke retires into the tent his servants have just erected for him at the edge of the highway.

Chapter Eight Benediction

Escalus asks, courteously, “Signior Lucio, did not you say you knew that Friar Lodowick to be a dishonest person?”

Lucio replies, “*“Cucullus non facit monachum!”*”—a robe doesn’t make a monk. “Honest in nothing but his *clothes!*—and one who hath spoken most *villainous* speeches of the duke!”

“We shall entreat you to abide here till he come, and enforce them against him,” says Escalus. “We shall find *this* friar a notable fellow!”

“As any in Vienna, upon my word!” says Lucio.

Escalus tells an attendant, “Call that same Isabella here once again; I would speak with her.” The man bows and goes. The judge turns to Angelo. “Pray you, my lord, give *me* leave to question; you shall see how I’ll handle her.”

“Better than *he*, by *her* own report,” mumbles Lucio.

Old Escalus frowns. “Say you?”

Lucio wants to protect the lady. “Marry, sir, I think, if you handled her privately, she would sooner confess. Perchance publicly she’ll be ashamed....”

“I will go *darkly*”—stealthily—“to work with her.”

Uncomfortable with caring, Lucio quips: “That’s the way; for women are *light* at midnight.”

Deputies, the blades of their tall halberds gleaming, now, in the sunlight, march before the judges and crowd, escorting Isabella—and the provost brings along a hooded monk.

Escalus motions Isabella forward. “Come on, mistress.” He points to Mariana. “Here’s a gentlewoman denies all that you have said!”

Lucio spots the priest. “My lord, here comes the rascal I spoke of!” he cries, “here with the provost!”

“In very good time!” says Lord Escalus, nodding to the provost. But he warns Lucio: “Speak not *you* to him till we call upon you.”

“*Mum*,” pledges Lucio, a finger at his lips.

Escalus turns to Friar Lodowick. “Come, sir! Did you set these women on to *slander* Lord Angelo? They have confessèd you did.”

“That’s false,” the robed man tells the judge.

“*What?*” cries Escalus, affronted. “Know you where you *are?*”

“Respect *you* your great *place!*” counters the monk, frowning. He adds, with a glance at Angelo, “And let *the Devil* be honoured for his burning throne.” He looks around. “Where is the duke? ’Tis *he* should hear me speak.”

“The duke’s in *us,*” says Escalus, of their authority, “and *we* will hear you speak. Look you speak justly!”

Vincentio has witnessed the slipperiness of justice—even in his own. “Boldly, at least,” he replies.

He looks at the ladies. “But, oh, poor souls!—come you to seek from the *fox*, here, for the *lamb?* Good night to *your* redress!

“Is *the duke* gone? Then so is your *cause* gone, too! The duke is *unjust*, thus retorting to your manifest appeal, and putting your trial in the mouth of the villain you are accusing!”

Lucio seizes the opportunity: “*This* is the rascal!—this is he I spoke of!”

“Why, thou *unreverend* and *unhallowed* friar!” growls Escalus. “Is’t not enough thou hast *suborned* these women to accuse this worthy man, and with foul mouth, in the witness of his proper ear, called him *villain?* But then to glance from him *to the duke himself*—to tax *him* with *injustice!*”

“Take him hence!” he orders the guards. “To the *rack* with him!

“We’ll tease you *joint* by *joint,*” he tells the monk, “but we will know this purpose!” But Friar Lodowick simply shakes his head. “What?—*unjust?*”

“Be not so hot,” says the monk. “The *duke* dare no more *stretch* this finger of mine than he dare *rack his own!*”

“His *subject* am I not, but here provisionally,” says the Pope’s emissary. “My business in this state made me a looker-on here in Vienna—where I have seen *corruption boil and bubble* till it *o’er-ran the stew!*” Stew is also a term for *brothel*. “*Laws* for *all* faults—but *faults* so countenanced that the strong statutes stand like the admonitions posted in a *barber’s shop*—as much *mocked* as marked!”

Escalus is furious. “*Slander to the state!* Away with him to *prison!*”

But Angelo intervenes—to strengthen his own case. “What can you vouch against him, Signior Lucio? Is this the man that you did tell us of?”

“’Tis *he,* my lord,” Lucio confirms. “Come hither, *Goodman Baldpate!*” he tells the monk. “Do you know me?”

“I remember you, sir, by the *tone of your voice,*” says the friar dryly. “I met you by the prison, in the absence of the duke.”

“Oh, *did* you so?—and do you remember what you *said* of the duke?”

“Most notably, sir.”

“*Do* you so, sir?—and was the duke a *fleshmonger*, a *fool*, and a *coward*, as you then reported him to be?”

The monk hears the scandalized bystanders’ outcries. “You must, sir, exchange persons with me, ere you make that *my* report! *You,* indeed, spoke so of him—and much *more,* much *worse!*”

“Oh, thou *damnable fellow!*” cries Lucio. “Did I not *pluck thee by the nose* for thy speeches?”

The monk says, quietly. “I protest I love the duke as I love myself.”

Angelo laughs harshly. “Hark how the villain would close—*now,* after his treasonable abuses!”

Escalus concurs. “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!” he orders. “Let him speak no more!”

He looks at the ladies, as the provost comes forward with his men. “Away with *those giglets,* too!—and with the *other* confederate companion!” he adds, including Friar Peter in the conspiracy.

“Stay, sir!—*stay* a while!” the monk tells Lord Escalus.

“What?—*resists* he?” says Angelo angrily. “*Help* him, Lucio!”

“Come, sir,” cries Lucio, hurrying over to Friar Lodowick, “come, sir! *Come, sir! Fie, sir!* Why, you bald-pated, *lying rascal*—you must be *hooded*, must you? *Show* your knave’s visage, with a pox to you! *Show* your sheep-biting face, and be *hanged an hour!*”

“Will’t not off?” Brusquely he pulls back the friar’s hood—revealing Duke Vincentio.

As the throng gasps, the sovereign enjoys Lucio’s amazement. “Thou art the first *knave* that e’er madest a *duke!*” he laughs.

“*First*, provost, let me bail these gentle three.” Vincentio nods to the man beside him, and the deputies step aside from the ladies and the real priest. The duke catches Lucio by the arm. “Sneak not away, sir!—for ‘the friar’ and you must have a *word* anon!”

“Lay hold on him,” he tells a guard.

Lucio remembers their conversations all too accurately now. *This may prove worse than hanging!* he thinks ruefully.

The judges have risen. With a kindly smile, the duke places a hand gently on Escalus’s sleeve. “What *you* have spoken I pardon! Sit you down. We’ll borrow a place from *him!*” He moves before Angelo. “Sir, by your leave.” The substitute steps aside, yielding the seat.

“Hast thou *word* or *wit*—or *impudence!*—that *yet* can do thee office?” demands the disgusted duke. “If thou hast, rely upon it till *my* tale be heard—then hold out no longer!”

Angelo stares, mortified. “O my dread lord, I should be *guiltier* in my guiltiness, to think I can be undiscernible, when I perceive that Your Grace, like a power divine, hath looked upon my trespasses!”

“Then, good prince, no longer hold session upon my shame,” Angelo beseeches, “but let my *trial* be mine own *confession!* Immediate sentence, then, and sequent *death* is all the grace I beg,” he says, his head hanging.

Duke Vincentio motions to a lady. “Come hither, Mariana.”

“Say,” the duke orders Angelo, “wast thou e’er contracted to this woman?”

“I was, my lord.”

“Go take her hence—and *marry her instantly!*”

“Do you the office, friar,” he tells Father Peter, “which consummate, return him here again. Go with him, provost.”

The officer leads the bridegroom away; the priest follows, with Lady Mariana.

Escalus is distraught. “My lord,” he confesses, “I am more amazed at *his dishonour* than at the *strangeness* of it!”

“Come hither, Isabella,” says the duke, watching the lady intently. “Your *friar* is now your *prince!*”

“As I was then—adherent and holy in your business—not changing *heart* with habit, I am still attorneyed to your service.”

Isabella blushes as she curtseys. “Oh, give me *pardon*, that I, your vassal, have employed and pained your unknown sovereignty!”

Duke Vincentio smiles. “You are pardoned, Isabella!”

“And now, dear maid, be *you* as free to *us!*”—as forgiving. “Your brother’s death, I know, strains at your heart, and you may wonder why I *obscured myself* in labouring to save his life—and would make rather rash *remonstrance* that my *hidden* power let him so be lost!”

“O most kind maid, it was the swift *celerity* of his death, which I did think with slower foot came on, that stunted my purpose!”

“But, peace be with him. That life past fearing *death* is *better* life than that which lives to *fear!* Make it your comfort; thus happy is your brother.”

Murmurs Isabella tearfully, “I do, my lord.”

The provost and Friar Peter return, flanking Angelo and Mariana.

“As for this new-married man approaching here,” the duke tells Isabella, “whose salty imagination hath wronged your well defended honour, you must yet *pardon* him—for *Mariana’s*

sake.

“But as he adjudged *your brother*—of being *criminal* in double violation, of sacred *chastity* and of *promise-breach*—he is thereon defendant for your brother’s *life!* The very *mercy* of the law cries out, even in its proper tongue, most audibly: an *Angelo* for a *Claudio*—*death for death!*”

“Haste still pays haste, and leisure answers leisure; like doth acquit like, and measure still for measure.

“Then, Angelo, thy fault’s thus *manifested*, which, though thou wouldst deny *it*, denies thee vantage. We do *condemn* thee to the very block where Claudio stooped to death, and with like haste!

“Away with him!” he tells the provost.

“O my most *gracious lord*,” gasps Mariana, appalled, “I hope you will not *mock* me with a *dead* husband!”

“It is your *husband* who mocks you, as a *husband!* In consideration of safeguarding your *honour*, I thought your marriage would be fit; else imputation, for that he *knew* you, might reproach your life, and choke your good to come. As for his possessions, although by confiscation they are ours, we do instate and widow *you* withal, to buy you a *better* husband.”

“O my dear lord,” she cries, “I *crave* no other, nor no *better* man!”

“Never *crave* *him*,” says the duke adamantly. “We are definitive.”

Mariana kneels. “Gentle my *liege!*—”

“You do but lose your labour. *Away* with him to *death!*”

He points at Lucio. “*Now*, sir, to *you*.”

“Oh, my good lord!” cries Mariana, in tears. “Sweet *Isabella*, take my part!—lend me your knees, and all my life to come I’ll lend you to do you service!”

Duke Vincentio frowns. “Against all *sense* you do importune *her!* If *she* should kneel down in mercy for this malefactor, *her brother’s ghost* from his pavèd bed would break, and take her hence in horror!”

Mariana is sobbing. “Isabella, sweet Isabella, do yet but kneel by me—hold up your hands, say nothing—I’ll speak all!

“They say most men are moulded out of *faults!*”—shaped by learning from mistakes. “And the *best* become much *more* the better, for being a little bad! So may my husband!

“O Isabella, will you not lend a knee?”

Duke Vincentio regards the gentlewomen sternly. “He dies for Claudio’s death.”

The younger lady now steps forward—and she kneels. “Most bounteous sir, if it please you, look on this condemnèd man as if my brother *lived*.” She watches Angelo, who is devastated. “I partly think a due *sincerity* governed his deeds—till he did look on *me*. Since it is so, let him not die.

“My brother had but justice, in that he *did* the thing for which he died. As for Angelo, his *act* did not o’ertake his bad *intent*, and must be buried as but an intent that perished by the way,” she argues. “Thoughts are no *subjects*,”—not answerable, “intents but merely *thoughts*.”

“*Merely*, my lord!” says Mariana desperately.

“Your suit’s unprofitable,” the duke tells them. “Stand up, I say! I have bethought me of *another* crime!

“Provost, how came it Claudio was beheaded at an *unusual* hour?”

“It was commanded so.”

“Had you a special *warrant* for the deed?”

“No, my good lord; it was done by private message.”

“For which I do *discharge* you from your *office!*” rules Duke Vincentio severely. “Give up your keys!” The crowd gapes; the provost is well known, liked and respected.

“*Pardon* me, noble lord!” cries the bailiff. “I thought it was a fault, but *knew* it not!—and did *repent* me, after more advice! For testimony whereof: one *else* in the prison, who should by private order have died, I have preservèd *alive!*”

“What’s he?”

“His name is Barnardine.”

“I would thou hadst done so by *Claudio!* Go fetch him hither; let me look upon him.” The provost bows, and goes into the tent.

Escalus is further amazed. “I am sorry that one so learnèd and so wise as you, Lord Angelo, have always *appearèd*, should slip *so grossly*, both in the heat of blood, and the lack of tempered judgment *afterward!*”

Angelo is disconsolate. “*I am sorry that such sorrow I procured!* 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!” he sobs.

The provost returns with two prisoners—the face of one hidden under a wide, gray blindfold—and Lady Julietta.

“Which is that Barnardine?” demands the duke.

The provost brings the hopeless inmate forward. “This, my lord.”

“There was a friar told me of this man.

“Sirrah, thou art said to have a *stubborn* soul,” he tells Barnardine, “that apprehends no further than *this* world, and squarest thy life accordingly.

“Thou’rt condemnèd; but, as for those earthly faults, I *acquit them all!*—and pray thee take this mercy to provide for *better* times to come!

“Friar, advise him,” he tells Father Peter. “I leave him to your hand.”

Wide-eyed Barnardine—after nine years of regret and anguish, suddenly sober and faced with hope—blinks in disbelief as the monk leads him away.

“What muffled fellow’s that?” asks the duke.

“This is another prisoner that I saved,” the provost replies, “who should have died when Claudio lost his head—almost as like to Claudio as himself!” Grinning, he removes the blindfold from that nobleman.

Duke Vincentio smiles as Isabella, who, crying out in delight, rushes to embrace Claudio. “If he be like your *brother*, for *his* sake he is *pardoned!*”

Isabella turns to him, her eyes streaming tears of joy.

He goes to her. “And, for *your* lovely sake, give me your hand—and say you will be mine!”

She takes his hand, and beams.

With that, the duke notes, smiling at Claudio, “Now he is *my* brother, too!

“But fitter time for that.” He turns to the disgraced magistrate—who is clearly happier to see Claudio than anyone but Isabella. “By this Lord Angelo perceives he’s safe!—methinks I see a quickening”—returning to life—“in his eye.

“Well, Angelo, your smile *acquits you well!*” he says, as Mariana embraces her new husband. “Look that you *love* your wife—*your* worth is now *her* worth,” he adds, pointedly.

Angelo nods humbly, as Mariana pats his hand.

“And I find in *myself* an apt *remission*,” says the duke.

He turns to Signior Lucio. “And yet there’s *one* in place I *cannot* pardon. *You*, sirrah!—that *knew* me for a *fool*, a *coward!*—one all of *lechery*, an *ass*, a *madman!*

“Wherein have I so *deserved* of you, that you extol me *thus?*”

“Faith, my lord. I spoke it but according to the drink,” says the gentleman. “If you will hang me for it, you may; but I had rather it would please you I might be *whipt*....”

Duke Vincentio smiles wryly. “Whipt *first*, sir—and hanged *after!*

“*Proclaim* it, provost, *round about the city*: if any woman be wrongèd by this lewd fellow—and I have heard him swear himself there’s *one* whom he got with child—let her appear, and he shall *marry* her! The nuptial finished, let him be whipt and hanged!”

Lucio looks aghast: “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!*”

“Upon mine honour, thou *shalt* marry her!” But Vincentio softens a bit, remembering Lucio’s encouraging words to Isabella. “Thy *slanders* I forgive; and therewithal remit thy *other* forfeits”—whipping and hanging. “Take him to prison,” he tells the provost, “and see our pleasure herein executed.”

Lucio gapes in dismay at the thought of his new family: wife Kate Keepdown, a year-old son—and the boy’s nurse, Mistress Overdone. “Marrying a slut, my lord, is *pressing* to death, whipping, *and* hanging!”

Duke Vincentio laughs. “Slandering a prince *deserves* it!”

He turns to the others.

“She, Claudio, that you *wronged*, look you *restore*.” The nobleman and Lady Julietta, his bulging betrothed, smile at each other happily.

“Joy to you, Mariana! *Love* her, Angelo! I have confessed her,” say the erstwhile priest, “and I know her *virtue*!”

“Thanks, good friend Escalus, for thy much *goodness*! There’s more coming that is more gratefully.” He will reward the kindly lord well—and wisdom will again temper jurisdiction in Vienna.

“Thanks, provost, for thy care and secrecy! We shall employ thee in a worthier place.

“Forgive him, Angelo, that brought you home the head of *Ragozine* for Claudio’s! The offence pardons itself,” say the duke. Angelo, much relieved not to have caused an innocent man’s death, knows who the pirate was; his bow to the provost shows his grateful concurrence.

“Dear Isabella, I have a notion that 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,” he tells his subjects, “where we’ll show what’s yet behind that’s meet you all should know!”

The procession finally resumes, and all the now-festive folk head homeward into a renewed Vienna.