

# Measure for Measure



*William Shakespeare*

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## Act I

### SCENE I. An apartment in the DUKE'S palace.

*Enter DUKE VINCENTIO, ESCALUS, Lords and Attendants*

**DUKE VINCENTIO**

Escalus.

**ESCALUS**

My lord.

**DUKE VINCENTIO**

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

*Exit an Attendant*

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

**ESCALUS**

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

**DUKE VINCENTIO**

Look where he comes.

*Enter ANGELO*

**ANGELO**

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

**DUKE VINCENTIO**

Angelo,  
There is a kind of character in thy life,  
That to the observer doth thy history

Fully unfold. Thyself and thy belongings  
Are not thine own so proper as to waste  
Thyself upon thy virtues, they on thee.  
Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,  
Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues  
Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike  
As if we had them not. Spirits are not finely touch'd  
But to fine issues, nor Nature never lends  
The smallest scruple of her excellence  
But, like a thrifty goddess, she determines  
Herself the glory of a creditor,  
Both thanks and use. But I do bend my speech  
To one that can my part in him advertise;  
Hold therefore, Angelo:—  
In our remove be thou at full ourself;  
Mortality and mercy in Vienna  
Live in thy tongue and heart: old Escalus,  
Though first in question, is thy secondary.  
Take thy commission.

**ANGELO**

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

**DUKE VINCENTIO**

No more evasion:  
We have with a leaven'd and prepared choice  
Proceeded to you; therefore take your honours.  
Our haste from hence is of so quick condition  
That it prefers itself and leaves unquestion'd  
Matters of needful value. We shall write to you,  
As time and our concernings shall importune,  
How it goes with us, and do look to know  
What doth befall you here. So, fare you well;  
To the hopeful execution do I leave you  
Of your commissions.

**ANGELO**

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

**DUKE VINCENTIO**

My haste may not admit it;  
Nor need you, on mine honour, have to do  
With any scruple; your scope is as mine own  
So to enforce or qualify the laws  
As to your soul seems good. Give me your hand:

I'll privily away. I love the people,  
But do not like to stage me to their eyes:  
Through it do well, I do not relish well  
Their loud applause and Aves vehement;  
Nor do I think the man of safe discretion  
That does affect it. Once more, fare you well.

**ANGELO**

The heavens give safety to your purposes!

**ESCALUS**

Lead forth and bring you back in happiness!

**DUKE**

I thank you. Fare you well.

*Exit*

**ESCALUS**

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

**ANGELO**

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

**ESCALUS**

I'll wait upon your honour.

*Exeunt*



## SCENE II. A Street.

*Enter LUCIO and two Gentlemen*

**LUCIO**

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

**First Gentleman**

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

**Second Gentleman**

Amen.

**LUCIO**

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

**Second Gentleman**

'Thou shalt not steal'?

**LUCIO**

Ay, that he razed.

**First Gentleman**

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

**Second Gentleman**

I never heard any soldier dislike it.

**LUCIO**

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

**Second Gentleman**

No? a dozen times at least.

**First Gentleman**

What, in metre?

**LUCIO**

In any proportion or in any language.

**First Gentleman**

I think, or in any religion.

**LUCIO**

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

**First Gentleman**

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

**LUCIO**

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

**First Gentleman**

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

**LUCIO**

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

**First Gentleman**

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

**Second Gentleman**

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

**LUCIO**

Behold, behold. where Madam Mitigation comes! I have purchased as many diseases under her roof as come to—

**Second Gentleman**

To what, I pray?

**LUCIO**

Judge.

**Second Gentleman**

To three thousand dolours a year.

**First Gentleman**

Ay, and more.

**LUCIO**

A French crown more.

**First Gentleman**

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

**LUCIO**

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

*Enter MISTRESS OVERDONE*

**First Gentleman**

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

**MISTRESS OVERDONE**

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



**Second Gentleman**

Who's that, I pray thee?

**MISTRESS OVERDONE**

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

**First Gentleman**

Claudio to prison? 'tis not so.

**MISTRESS OVERDONE**

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

**LUCIO**

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

**MISTRESS OVERDONE**

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

**LUCIO**

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

**Second Gentleman**

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

**First Gentleman**

But, most of all, agreeing with the proclamation.

**LUCIO**

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

*Exeunt LUCIO and Gentlemen*

**MISTRESS OVERDONE**

Thus, what with the war, what with the sweat, what with the gallows and what with poverty, I am custom-shrunk.

*Enter POMPEY*

How now! what's the news with you?

**POMPEY**

Yonder man is carried to prison.

**MISTRESS OVERDONE**

Well; what has he done?

**POMPEY**

A woman.

**MISTRESS OVERDONE**

But what's his offence?

**POMPEY**

Groping for trouts in a peculiar river.

**MISTRESS OVERDONE**

What, is there a maid with child by him?

**POMPEY**

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

**MISTRESS OVERDONE**

What proclamation, man?

**POMPEY**

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

**MISTRESS OVERDONE**

And what shall become of those in the city?

**POMPEY**

They shall stand for seed: they had gone down too, but that a wise burgher put in for them.

**MISTRESS OVERDONE**

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

**POMPEY**

To the ground, mistress.

**MISTRESS OVERDONE**

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

**POMPEY**

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

**MISTRESS OVERDONE**

What's to do here, Thomas tapster? let's withdraw.

**POMPEY**

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

*Exeunt*

*Enter Provost, CLAUDIO, JULIET, and Officers*

**CLAUDIO**

Fellow, why dost thou show me thus to the world? Bear me to prison, where I am committed.

**Provost**

I do it not in evil disposition,  
But from Lord Angelo by special charge.

**CLAUDIO**

Thus can the demigod Authority  
Make us pay down for our offence by weight