Measure for Measure
By William Shakespeare
Presented by Paul W. Collins

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Contact: paul@wsrightnow.com

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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 her—” 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 touchèd 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 yourself: 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 preparèd 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. Vincentio 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 austerely 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 considerèd.”

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 demi god 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 Luci, 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 unscourèd 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-éd 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 embraced. 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 curtseys. “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, seeing 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, curtseying. “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 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 conceived, 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 ourself! 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!

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

- Lucio is surprised. Art advised 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
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’ whorehouses 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 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 wronged 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-wished 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 sweetness 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 restrainèd 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 accompt”—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, displayed!”
“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 supposèd 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!”

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 believed 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 austerity 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 approof!—bidding the law make curtsey 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 keepest! 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 provok'st—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.

“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 blessèd youth behaves as agèd, 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 dannèd’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 shamèd 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-ribbèd 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 loathèd 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 warped 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, you 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, 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 deceivèd 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 wreckèd 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 renowned 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— 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 saved, 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 curtseys. “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 innocency, 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 beastly 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 smartly 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?”

“You will 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 allied! 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 ungene rative”—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!”

“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 unskillfully! 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?”

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

“By your function, you have paid the heavens, Lord Escalus pats the monk’s sleeve kindly. “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….”
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 curtseys. “I am always bound to you.” She goes into the house as Isabella walks up the stone path.
Vincentio 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’ th’ 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 yeth 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.”
Vincentio 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.

Vincentio 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
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 marred 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 denièd 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 ministration. “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 amazèd; 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 Drophair, 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 unpreparèd, 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 curtseys.

“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 damnèd 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 enforcèd 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 dishonourèd life—by a ransom of such shame!

The sound of shame reverberates in his head.

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, splendidiferous 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 believèd, 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 true: 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.


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 unbelievèd 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 knows 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, curtseying. “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 avowed 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 touched! 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 concern[s] 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,” mutters 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 confessed 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 Esclus’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 amazèd 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 painèd 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 speak all!”

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.

“Sirrah, thou art said to have a stubborn soul,” he tells Barnardine, “that apprehends no further than this world, and squarest thy life accordingly.

Tho’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.

“Friar, advise him,” he tells Father Peter. “I leave him to your hand.”

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.

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 gratulate.” 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.