

# William Shakespeare

## Measure for Measure

### Dramatis personae

**Vincentio**, the Duke

**Angelo**, the Deputy

**Escalus**, an ancient Lord

**Claudio**, a young gentleman

**Lucio**, a fantastic

Two other like **Gentlemen**

**Varrius**, a gentleman, servant to the Duke

**Provost**

**Thomas**, friar

**Peter**, friar

**A Justice**

**Elbow**, a simple constable

**Froth**, a foolish gentleman

**Pompey**, a clown and servant to Mistress Overdone

**Abhorson**, an executioner

**Barnardine**, a dissolute prisoner

**Isabella**, sister to Claudio

**Mariana**, betrothed to Angelo

**Juliet**, beloved of Claudio

**Francisca**, a nun

**Mistress Overdone**, a bawd

Lords, Officers, Citizens, Boy, and Attendants

# Act 1

## Scene I

*An apartment in the Duke's palace.*

*Enter Duke Vincentio, Escalus, Lords and Attendants.*

**Duke Vincentio**

Escalus.

**Escalus**

My lord.

**Duke Vincentio**

Of government the properties to unfold,  
Would seem in me to affect speech and  
discourse;  
Since I am put to know that your own science  
Exceeds, in that, the lists of all advice  
My strength can give you: then no more  
remains,  
But that to your sufficiency as your Worth is  
able,  
And let them work. The nature of our people,  
Our city's institutions, and the terms  
For common justice, you're as pregnant in  
As art and practise hath enriched any



## Duke Vincentio

Angelo,  
There is a kind of character in thy life,  
That to the observer doth thy history  
Fully unfold. Thyself and thy belongings  
Are not thine own so proper as to waste  
Thyself upon thy virtues, they on thee.  
Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,  
Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues  
Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike  
As if we had them not. Spirits are not finely  
touch'd

But to fine issues, nor Nature never lends  
The smallest scruple of her excellence  
But, like a thrifty goddess, she determines  
Herself the glory of a creditor,  
Both thanks and use. But I do bend my speech  
To one that can my part in him advertise;  
Hold therefore, Angelo: —  
In our remove be thou at full yourself;  
Mortality and mercy in Vienna  
Live in thy tongue and heart: old Escalus,  
Though first in question, is thy secondary.  
Take thy commission.

## Angelo

Now, good my lord,  
Let there be some more test made of my metal,

Before so noble and so great a figure  
Be stamp'd upon it.

### **Duke Vincentio**

No more evasion:

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

### **Angelo**

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

### **Duke Vincentio**

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

I'll privily away. I love the people,

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

**Angelo**

The heavens give safety to your purposes!

**Escalus**

Lead forth and bring you back in happiness!

**Escalus**

I thank you. Fare you well.

*Exit.*

**Escalus**

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

**Angelo**

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

Touching that point.

**Escalus**

I'll wait upon your honour.

*Exeunt*

**Scene II**

*A Street.*

*Enter Lucio and two Gentlemen.*

**Lucio**

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

**First gentleman**

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

**Second gentleman**

Amen.

**Lucio**

Thou concludest like the sanctimonious pirate,  
that

went to sea with the Ten Commandments, but  
scraped  
one out of the table.

**Second gentleman**

'Thou shalt not steal'?

**Lucio**

Ay, that he razed.

**First gentleman**

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

**Second gentleman**

I never heard any soldier dislike it.

**Lucio**

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

**Second gentleman**

No? a dozen times at least.



**Lucio**

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

I

live, forget to drink after thee.

**First gentleman**

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

**Second gentleman**

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

**Lucio**

Behold, behold. where Madam Mitigation

comes! I

have purchased as many diseases under her roof  
as come to —

**Second gentleman**

To what, I pray?

**Lucio**

Judge.

**Second gentleman**

To three thousand dolours a year.



**Second gentleman**

Who's that, I pray thee?

**Mistress Overdone**

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

**First gentleman**

Claudio to prison? 'tis not so.

**Mistress Overdone**

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

**Lucio**

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

**Mistress Overdone**

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

**Lucio**

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

**Second gentleman**

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

**First gentleman**

But, most of all, agreeing with the proclamation.

**Lucio**

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

*Exeunt Lucio and Gentlemen.*

**Mistress Overdone**

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

*Enter Pompey.*

How now! what's the news with you?

**Pompey**

Yonder man is carried to prison.

**Mistress Overdone**

Well; what has he done?

**Pompey**

A woman.

**Mistress Overdone**

But what's his offence?

**Pompey**

Groping for trouts in a peculiar river.

**Mistress Overdone**

What, is there a maid with child by him?

**Pompey**

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

**Mistress Overdone**

What proclamation, man?

**Pompey**

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

**Mistress Overdone**

And what shall become of those in the city?

## **Pompey**

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

## **Mistress Overdone**

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

## **Pompey**

To the ground, mistress.

## **Mistress Overdone**

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

## **Pompey**

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

## **Mistress Overdone**

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

## **Pompey**

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

*Exeunt.*

*Enter Provost, Claudio, Juliet, and Officers.*

## **Claudio**

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

## **Provost**

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

## **Claudio**

Thus can the demigod Authority  
Make us pay down for our offence by weight  
The words of heaven; on whom it will, it will;  
On whom it will not, so; yet still 'tis just.

*Re-enter Lucio and two Gentlemen.*

**Lucio**

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

**Claudio**

From too much liberty, my Lucio, liberty:  
As surfeit is the father of much fast,  
So every scope by the immoderate use  
Turns to restraint. Our natures do pursue,  
Like rats that ravin down their proper bane,  
A thirsty evil; and when we drink we die.

**Lucio**

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

**Claudio**

What but to speak of would offend again.

**Lucio**

What, is't murder?

**Claudio**

No.

**Lucio**

Lechery?

**Claudio**

Call it so.

**Provost**

Away, sir! you must go.

**Claudio**

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

**Lucio**

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

**Claudio**

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

**Lucio**

With child, perhaps?

**Claudio**

Unhappily, even so.

And the new deputy now for the duke —

Whether it be the fault and glimpse of newness,

Or whether that the body public be

A horse whereon the governor doth ride,

Who, newly in the seat, that it may know

He can command, lets it straight feel the spur;

Whether the tyranny be in his place,

Or in his emmence that fills it up,

I stagger in:-but this new governor

Awakes me all the enrolled penalties

Which have, like unscour'd armour, hung by the  
wall

So long that nineteen zodiacs have gone round

And none of them been worn; and, for a name,

Now puts the drowsy and neglected act

Freshly on me: 'tis surely for a name.

**Lucio**

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

him.

## **Claudio**

I have done so, but he's not to be found.  
I prithee, Lucio, do me this kind service:  
This day my sister should the cloister enter  
And there receive her approbation:  
Acquaint her with the danger of my state:  
Implore her, in my voice, that she make friends  
To the strict deputy; bid herself assay him:  
I have great hope in that; for in her youth  
There is a prone and speechless dialect,  
Such as move men; beside, she hath prosperous  
art  
When she will play with reason and discourse,  
And well she can persuade.

## **Lucio**

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

## **Claudio**

I thank you, good friend Lucio.

## **Lucio**

Within two hours.

**Claudio**

Come, officer, away!

*Exeunt.*

**Scene III**

*A monastery.*

*Enter Duke Vincentio and Friar Thomas.*

**Duke Vincentio**

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

**Friar Thomas**

May your grace speak of it?

**Duke Vincentio**

My holy sir, none better knows than you  
How I have ever loved the life removed  
And held in idle price to haunt assemblies  
Where youth, and cost, and witless bravery  
keeps.

I have deliver'd to Lord Angelo,  
A man of stricture and firm abstinence,  
My absolute power and place here in Vienna,  
And he supposes me travell'd to Poland;  
For so I have strew'd it in the common ear,  
And so it is received. Now, pious sir,

**Friar Thomas**

Gladly, my lord.

**Duke Vincentio**

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

**Friar Thomas**

It rested in your grace

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

### **Duke Vincentio**

I do fear, too dreadful:  
Sith 'twas my fault to give the people scope,  
'Twould be my tyranny to strike and gall them  
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 on Angelo imposed the office;  
Who may, in the ambush of my name, strike  
home,  
And yet my nature never in the fight  
To do in slander. And to behold his sway,  
I will, as 'twere a brother of your order,  
Visit both prince and people: therefore, I  
prithee,  
Supply me with the habit and instruct me  
How I may formally in person bear me  
Like a true friar. More reasons for this action  
At our more leisure shall I render you;  
Only, this one: Lord Angelo is precise;  
Stands at a guard with envy; scarce confesses  
That his blood flows, or that his appetite

Is more to bread than stone: hence shall we see,

*Exeunt.*

## **Scene IV**

*A nunnery.*

*Enter Isabella and Francisca.*

**Isabella**

And have you nuns no farther privileges?

**Francisca**

Are not these large enough?

**Isabella**

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

**Lucio** [*Within*]

Ho! Peace be in this place!

**Isabella**

Who's that which calls?

**Francisca**

It is a man's voice. Gentle Isabella,

Turn you the key, and know his business of  
him;  
You may, I may not; you are yet unsworn.  
When you have vow'd, you must not speak with  
men  
But in the presence of the prioress:  
Then, if you speak, you must not show your  
face,  
Or, if you show your face, you must not speak.

*Exit.*

### **Isabella**

Peace and prosperity! Who is't that calls

*Enter Lucio.*

### **Lucio**

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

### **Isabella**

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

**Lucio**

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

**Isabella**

Woe me! for what?

**Lucio**

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

**Isabella**

Sir, make me not your story.

**Lucio**

It is true.  
I would not-though 'tis my familiar sin  
With maids to seem the lapwing and to jest,  
Tongue far from heart-play with all virgins so:  
I hold you as a thing ensky'd and sainted.  
By your renouncement an immortal spirit,  
And to be talk'd with in sincerity,  
As with a saint.

**Isabella**

You do blaspheme the good in mocking me.

**Lucio**

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

**Isabella**

Some one with child by him? My cousin Juliet?

**Lucio**

Is she your cousin?

**Isabella**

Adoptedly; as school-maids change their names  
By vain though apt affection.

**Lucio**

She it is.

**Isabella**

O, let him marry her.

**Lucio**

This is the point.  
The duke is very strangely gone from hence;  
Bore many gentlemen, myself being one,  
In hand and hope of action: but we do learn

By those that know the very nerves of state,  
His givings-out were of an infinite distance  
From his true-meant design. Upon his place,  
And with full line of his authority,  
Governs Lord Angelo; a man whose blood  
Is very snow-broth; one who never feels  
The wanton stings and motions of the sense,  
But doth rebate and blunt his natural edge  
With profits of the mind, study and fast.  
He-to give fear to use and liberty,  
Which have for long run by the hideous law,  
As mice by lions-hath pick'd out an act,  
Under whose heavy sense your brother's life  
Falls into forfeit: he arrests him on it;  
And follows close the rigour of the statute,  
To make him an example. All hope is gone,  
Unless you have the grace by your fair prayer  
To soften Angelo: and that's my pith of business  
'Twixt you and your poor brother.

### **Isabella**

Doth he so seek his life?

### **Lucio**

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

**Isabella**

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

**Lucio**

Assay the power you have.

**Isabella**

My power? Alas, I doubt —

**Lucio**

Our doubts are traitors  
And make us lose the good we oft might win  
By fearing to attempt. Go to Lord Angelo,  
And let him learn to know, when maidens sue,  
Men give like gods; but when they weep and  
kneel,  
All their petitions are as freely theirs  
As they themselves would owe them.

**Isabella**

I'll see what I can do.

**Lucio**

But speedily.

**Isabella**

I will about it straight;

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

**Lucio**

I take my leave of you.

**Isabella**

Good sir, adieu.

*Exeunt*

## **Act II**

### **Scene I**

*A hall In Angelo's house.*

*Enter Angelo, Escalus, and a Justice,  
Provost, Officers, and other Attendants, behind.*

**Angelo**

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

## Escalus

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

## Angelo

'Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus,  
Another thing to fall. I not deny,  
The jury, passing on the prisoner's life,  
May in the sworn twelve have a thief or two  
Guiltier than him they try. What's open made to  
justice,  
That justice seizes: what know the laws  
That thieves do pass on thieves? 'Tis very  
pregnant,

The jewel that we find, we stoop and take't  
Because we see it; but what we do not see  
We tread upon, and never think of it.  
You may not so extenuate his offence  
For I have had such faults; but rather tell me,  
When I, that censure him, do so offend,  
Let mine own judgment pattern out my death,

**Escalus**

Be it as your wisdom will.

**Angelo**

Where is the provost?

**Provost**

Here, if it like your honour.

**Angelo**

See that Claudio  
Be executed by nine to-morrow morning:  
Bring him his confessor, let him be prepared;  
For that's the utmost of his pilgrimage.

*Exit Provost.*

**Escalus** [*Aside*]

Well, heaven forgive him! and forgive us all!  
Some rise by sin, and some by virtue fall:

Some run from brakes of vice, and answer none:  
And some condemned for a fault alone.

*Enter Elbow, and Officers with Froth and Pompey.*

**Elbow**

Come, bring them away: if these be good people  
in  
a commonweal that do nothing but use their  
abuses in

**Angelo**

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

**Elbow**

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

**Angelo**

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

## **Elbow**

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**

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

## **Angelo**

Go to: what quality are they of? Elbow is your

## **Pompey**

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

## **Angelo**

What are you, sir?

## **Elbow**

He, sir! a tapster, sir; parcel-bawd; one that  
serves a bad woman; whose house, sir, was, as  
they  
say, plucked down in the suburbs; and now she  
professes a hot-house, which, I think, is a very  
ill house too.

**Escalus**

How know you that?

**Elbow**

My wife, sir, whom I detest before heaven and your  
honour, —

**Escalus**

How? thy wife?

**Elbow**

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

**Escalus**

Dost thou detest her therefore?

**Elbow**

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

**Escalus**

How dost thou know that, constable?

**Elbow**

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

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

**Escalus**

By the woman's means?

**Elbow**

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

**Pompey**

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

**Elbow**

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

**Escalus**

Do you hear how he misplaces?

**Pompey**

Sir, she came in great with child; and longing,  
saving your honour's reverence, for stewed  
prunes;  
sir, we had but two in the house, which at that

very  
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, —

### **Escalus**

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

### **Pompey**

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

### **Froth**

No, indeed.

**Pompey**

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

**Froth**

Ay, so I did indeed.

**Pompey**

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

All this is true.

**Pompey**

Why, very well, then, —

**Escalus**

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

**Pompey**

Sir, your honour cannot come to that yet.

**Escalus**

No, sir, nor I mean it not.

**Pompey**

Sir, but you shall come to it, by your honour's  
leave. And, I beseech you, look into Master

Froth

here, sir; a man of four-score pound a year;

whose

father died at Hallowmas: was't not at

Hallowmas,

Master Froth?

**Froth**

All-hallond eve.

**Pompey**

Why, very well; I hope here be truths. He, sir,  
sitting, as I say, in a lower chair, sir; 'twas in  
the Bunch of Grapes, where indeed you have a  
delight

to sit, have you not?

**Froth**

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

for winter.

**Pompey**

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

**Angelo**

This will last out a night in Russia,  
When nights are longest there: I'll take my  
leave.

And leave you to the hearing of the cause;  
Hoping you'll find good cause to whip them all.

**Escalus**

I think no less. Good morrow to your lordship.

*Exit Angelo.*

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

**Pompey**

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

**Elbow**

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