

# Measure for Measure

[Shakespeare homepage](#) | [Measure for Measure](#) | Act 3, Scene 1  
[Previous scene](#) | [Next scene](#)

## SCENE I. A room in the prison.

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

### DUKE VINCENTIO

So then you hope of pardon from Lord Angelo?

### CLAUDIO

The miserable have no other medicine  
But only hope:  
I've hope to live, and am prepared to die.

### DUKE VINCENTIO

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

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

**CLAUDIO**

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

**ISABELLA**

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

**Provost**

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

**DUKE VINCENTIO**

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

**CLAUDIO**

Most holy sir, I thank you.

*Enter ISABELLA*

**ISABELLA**

My business is a word or two with Claudio.

**Provost**

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

**DUKE VINCENTIO**

Provost, a word with you.

**Provost**

As many as you please.

**DUKE VINCENTIO**

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

*Exeunt DUKE VINCENTIO and Provost*

**CLAUDIO**

Now, sister, what's the comfort?

**ISABELLA**

Why,  
As all comforts are; most good, most good indeed.  
Lord Angelo, having affairs to heaven,  
Intends you for his swift ambassador,  
Where you shall be an everlasting leiger:  
Therefore your best appointment make with speed;  
To-morrow you set on.

**CLAUDIO**

Is there no remedy?

**ISABELLA**

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

**CLAUDIO**

But is there any?

**ISABELLA**

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

**CLAUDIO**

Perpetual durance?

**ISABELLA**

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

**CLAUDIO**

But in what nature?

**ISABELLA**

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

**CLAUDIO**

Let me know the point.

**ISABELLA**

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

**CLAUDIO**

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

**ISABELLA**

There spake my brother; there my father's grave  
Did utter forth a voice. Yes, thou must die:  
Thou art too noble to conserve a life  
In base appliances. This outward-sainted deputy,  
Whose settled visage and deliberate word  
Nips youth i' the head and follies doth emmew  
As falcon doth the fowl, is yet a devil  
His filth within being cast, he would appear  
A pond as deep as hell.

**CLAUDIO**

The prenzie Angelo!

**ISABELLA**

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

**CLAUDIO**

O heavens! it cannot be.

**ISABELLA**

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

**CLAUDIO**

Thou shalt not do't.

**ISABELLA**

O, were it but my life,  
I'd throw it down for your deliverance  
As frankly as a pin.

**CLAUDIO**

Thanks, dear Isabel.

**ISABELLA**

Be ready, Claudio, for your death tomorrow.

**CLAUDIO**

Yes. Has he affections in him,  
That thus can make him bite the law by the nose,  
When he would force it? Sure, it is no sin,  
Or of the deadly seven, it is the least.

**ISABELLA**

Which is the least?

**CLAUDIO**

If it were damnable, he being so wise,  
Why would he for the momentary trick  
Be perdurably fined? O Isabel!

**ISABELLA**

What says my brother?

**CLAUDIO**

Death is a fearful thing.

**ISABELLA**

And shamed life a hateful.

**CLAUDIO**

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;  
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;  
This sensible warm motion to become  
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit  
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside  
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;  
To be imprison'd in the viewless winds,  
And blown with restless violence round about  
The pendent world; or to be worse than worst  
Of those that lawless and incertain thought  
Imagine howling: 'tis too horrible!  
The weariest and most loathed worldly life  
That age, ache, penury and imprisonment  
Can lay on nature is a paradise  
To what we fear of death.

**ISABELLA**

Alas, alas!

**CLAUDIO**

Sweet sister, let me live:  
What sin you do to save a brother's life,  
Nature dispenses with the deed so far  
That it becomes a virtue.

**ISABELLA**

O you beast!  
O faithless coward! O dishonest wretch!  
Wilt thou be made a man out of my vice?  
Is't not a kind of incest, to take life  
From thine own sister's shame? What should I think?  
Heaven shield my mother play'd my father fair!  
For such a warped slip of wilderness  
Ne'er issued from his blood. Take my defiance!  
Die, perish! Might but my bending down  
Relieve thee from thy fate, it should proceed:  
I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death,  
No word to save thee.

**CLAUDIO**

Nay, hear me, Isabel.

**ISABELLA**

O, fie, fie, fie!  
Thy sin's not accidental, but a trade.  
Mercy to thee would prove itself a bawd:  
'Tis best thou diest quickly.

**CLAUDIO**

O hear me, Isabella!

*Re-enter DUKE VINCENTIO*

**DUKE VINCENTIO**

Vouchsafe a word, young sister, but one word.

**ISABELLA**

What is your will?

**DUKE VINCENTIO**

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

**ISABELLA**

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

*Walks apart*

**DUKE VINCENTIO**

Son, I have overheard what hath passed between you and your sister. Angelo had never the purpose to corrupt her; only he hath made an essay of her virtue to practise his judgment with the disposition of natures: she, having the truth of honour in her, hath made him that gracious denial which he is most glad to receive. I am confessor to Angelo, and I know this to be true; therefore prepare yourself to death: do not satisfy your resolution with hopes that are fallible: tomorrow you must die; go to your knees and make ready.

**CLAUDIO**

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

**DUKE VINCENTIO**

Hold you there: farewell.

*Exit CLAUDIO*

Provost, a word with you!

**Provost**

What's your will, father

**DUKE VINCENTIO**

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

**Provost**

In good time.

*Exit Provost. ISABELLA comes forward*

**DUKE VINCENTIO**

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

**ISABELLA**

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

**DUKE VINCENTIO**

That shall not be much amiss: Yet, as the matter now stands, he will avoid your accusation; he made trial of you only. Therefore fasten your ear on my advisings: to the love I have in doing good a remedy presents itself. I do make myself believe that you may most uprightly do a poor wronged lady a merited benefit; redeem your brother from the angry law; do no stain to your own gracious person; and much please the absent duke, if peradventure he shall ever return to have hearing of this business.



**ISABELLA**

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

**DUKE VINCENTIO**

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

**ISABELLA**

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

**DUKE VINCENTIO**

She should this Angelo have married; was affianced to her by oath, and the nuptial appointed: between which time of the contract and limit of the solemnity, her brother Frederick was wrecked at sea, 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, her combinate husband, this well-seeming Angelo.

**ISABELLA**

Can this be so? did Angelo so leave her?

**DUKE VINCENTIO**

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

**ISABELLA**

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

**DUKE VINCENTIO**

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

## ISABELLA

Show me how, good father.

## DUKE VINCENTIO

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. Go you to Angelo; answer his requiring with a plausible obedience; agree with his demands to the point; only refer yourself to this advantage, first, that your stay with him may not be long; that the time may have all shadow and silence in it; and the place answer to convenience. This being granted in course,--and now follows all,--we shall advise this wronged maid to stead up your appointment, go in your place; if the encounter acknowledge itself hereafter, it may compel him to her recompense: and here, by this, is your brother saved, your honour untainted, the poor Mariana advantaged, and the corrupt deputy scaled. The maid will I frame and make fit for his attempt. If you think well to carry this as you may, the doubleness of the benefit defends the deceit from reproof. What think you of it?

## ISABELLA

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

## DUKE VINCENTIO

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

## ISABELLA

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

*Exeunt severally*