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William Shakespeare

Excerpt

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# MEASURE FOR MEASURE

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## The scene: Vienna

### CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

VINCENTIO, *the Duke*ANGELO, *the Deputy*ESCALUS, *an ancient Lord*CLAUDIO, *a young gentleman*LUCIO, *a fantastic**Two other like gentlemen*

†VARRIUS

*A Provost*THOMAS } *two friars*

PETER }

†*A Justice*ELBOW, *a simple constable*FROTH, *a foolish gentleman*POMPEY, *a clown, 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*

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## MEASURE FOR MEASURE

[1. 1.] *The council-chamber in the Duke's palace  
at Vienna*

*ESCALUS and other councillors seated at a table:  
the DUKE in his chair of state: two attendants with  
partisans at the door*

*Duke.* Escalus.

*Escalus.* My lord.

*Duke.* Of government the properties to unfold  
Would seem in me t'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, y'are as pregnant in  
As art and practice hath enriched any  
That we remember...There is our commission,  
From which we would not have you warp...Call hither,  
I say, bid come before us Angelo...

10

*[an attendant bows and goes forth*

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

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## 4 MEASURE FOR MEASURE I. I. 22

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

*Duke.* Look where he comes.

*ANGELO enters and kneels before the Duke*

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

*Duke* [*gazes at him*]. *Angelo...*

There is a kind of character in thy life,  
That to th'observer doth thy history  
Fully unfold: thyself and thy belongings  
30 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 touched  
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,  
40 Both thanks and use...But I do bend my speech  
To one that can my part in him advertise;  
Hold therefore, Angelo... [*he proffers the commission*]  
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 mettle,  
Before so noble and so great a figure  
50 Be stamped upon it.

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## 1.1.50 MEASURE FOR MEASURE 5

*Duke.* No more evasion:  
 We have with a leavened and preparéd choice  
 Proceeded to you; therefore take your honours...  
*[Angelo rises and takes the commission]*

Our haste from hence is of so quick condition,  
 That it prefers itself, and leaves unquestioned  
 Matters of needful value... We shall write to you,  
 As time and our concernings shall impórtune,  
 How it goes with us—and do look to know  
 What doth befall you here.... So, fare you well:  
 To th'hopeful execution do I leave you  
 Of your commissions.

*Angelo.* Yet give leave, my lord, 60  
 That we may bring you something on the way.

*Duke.* 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:  
 Though it do well, I do not relish well  
 Their loud applause and 'aves' vehement: 70  
 Nor do I think the man of safe discretion  
 That does affect it.... Once more, fare you well.

*Angelo.* The heavens give safety to your purposes.

*Escalus.* Lead forth and bring you back in happiness.

*Duke.* I thank you. Fare you well. *[he departs]*

*Escalus [to Angelo].* 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. 80

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## 6 MEASURE FOR MEASURE I. I. 81

*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.  
[*they go out together, the councillors following*]

[1. 2.] *A street in Vienna*

*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 conclud'st like the sanctimonious pirate, that went to sea with the Ten Commandments, but scraped one out of the table.

10 *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.

20 *Lucio.* I believe thee: for I think thou never wast where grace was said.

*Second Gentleman.* No? a dozen times at least.

*First Gentleman.* What? in metre?

*Lucio.* In any proportion or in any language.

*First Gentleman.* I think, or in any religion.

*Lucio.* Ay, why not? Grace is grace, despite of all

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## 1.2.26 MEASURE FOR MEASURE 7

controversy: as for example; thou thyself art a wicked villain, despite of all grace.

*First Gentleman.* Well: there went but a pair of shears between us.

*Lucio.* I grant: as there may between the lists and the velvet....Thou art the list. 30

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

*Lucio.* I think thou dost: and, indeed, with most painful feeling of thy speech: I will, out of thine own confession, learn to begin thy health; but, whilst I live, forget to drink after thee. 40

*First Gentleman.* I think I have done myself wrong, have I not?

*Second Gentleman.* Yes, that thou hast; whether thou art tainted or free.

*MISTRESS OVERDONE the bawd is seen approaching*

*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. 50

*First Gentleman.* Ay, and more.

*Lucio.* A French crown more.

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

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

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## 8 MEASURE FOR MEASURE I. 2. 58

*MISTRESS OVERDONE comes up**First Gentleman* [*to her*]. How now! Which of your hips has the most profound sciatica?60 *Overdone*. Well, well: there's one yonder arrested and carried to prison was worth five thousand of you all.*Second Gentleman*. Who's that, I pray thee?*Overdone*. Marry, sir, that's Claudio, Signior Claudio.*First Gentleman*. Claudio to prison! 'tis not so.*Overdone*. Nay, but I know 'tisso: 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?70 *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.*[Lucio and the gentlemen hurry away]*80 *Overdone*. Thus, what with the war, what with the sweat, what with the gallows, and what with poverty, I am custom-shrunk.*POMPEY approaches*

How now! what's the news with you?

*Pompey*. Yonder man is carried to prison.*Overdone*. Well: what has he done?*Pompey*. A woman.*Overdone*. But what's his offence?



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## 1.2.88 MEASURE FOR MEASURE 9

*Pompey.* Groping for trouts in a peculiar river.*Overdone.* What, is there a maid with child by him?*Pompey.* No: but there's a woman with maid by him... 90  
You have not heard of the proclamation, have you?*Overdone.* What proclamation, man?*Pompey.* All houses in the suburbs of Vienna must be plucked down.*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.*Overdone.* But shall all our houses of resort in the suburbs be pulled down?*Pompey.* To the ground, mistress. 100*Overdone.* Why, here's a change indeed in the commonwealth... What shall become of me? [*she weeps*]*Pompey.* Come: fear not you: 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.*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. [*they go*] 110*The PROVOST and officers come up with CLAUDIO and JULIET in custody; LUCIO and the two gentlemen following**Claudio.* Fellow, why dost thou show me thus to th' 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 demi-god, Authority, Make us pay down for our offence by weight—

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## 10 MEASURE FOR MEASURE 1.2.118

†The words of heaven; on whom it will, it will—  
On whom it will not, so. Yet still 'tis just.

*An officer moves on with Juliet*

120 *Lucio* [*coming forward*]. 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.

130 *Lucio*. If I 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. [*they talk aside*]

140 *Lucio*. A hundred, if they'll do you any good...  
Is lechery so looked 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 coffèr of her friends,