

# Measure for Measure

## 4.2

*Enter the Provost and Pompey*

**PROVOST** Come hither, sirrah. Can you cut off a man's head?

**POMPEY** 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. 5

**PROVOST** Come, sir, leave me your snatches, and yield me a direct answer. Tomorrow morning are to die Claudio and Barnardine. Here is in our prison a common executioner, who in his office lacks a helper. If you will take it on you to assist him, it shall redeem you from 10 your gyves; if not, you shall have your full time of imprisonment, and your deliverance with an unpitied whipping; for you have been a notorious bawd.

**POMPEY** Sir, I have been an unlawful bawd time out of mind, but yet I will be content to be a lawful hangman. 15 I would be glad to receive some instruction from my fellow partner.

**PROVOST** What ho, Abhorson! Where's Abhorson there?

*Enter Abhorson*

**ABHORSON** Do you call, sir?

**PROVOST** Sirrah, here's a fellow will help you tomorrow 20 in your execution. If you think it meet, compound with him by the year, and let him abide here with you; if not, use him for the present, and dismiss him. He cannot plead his estimation with you; he hath been a bawd. 25

**ABHORSON** A bawd, sir? Fie upon him, he will discredit our mystery.

**PROVOST** Go to, sir, you weigh equally; a feather will turn the scale.

*Exit*

**POMPEY** Pray, sir, by your good favour±±for surely, sir, a 30 good favour you have, but that you have a hanging look±±do you call, sir, your occupation a mystery?

**ABHORSON** Ay, sir, a mystery.

**POMPEY** Painting, sir, I have heard say is a mystery; and  
your whores, sir, being members of my occupation, 35  
using painting, do prove my occupation a mystery. But  
what mystery there should be in hanging, if I should  
be hanged I cannot imagine.

**ABHORSON** Sir, it is a mystery.

**POMPEY** Proof. 40

**ABHORSON** Every true man's apparel fits your thief±±

**POMPEY** If it be too little for your thief, your true man  
thinks it big enough. If it be too big for your thief, your  
thief thinks it little enough. So every true man's apparel  
fits your thief. 45

*Enter Provost*

**PROVOST** Are you agreed?

**POMPEY** Sir, I will serve him, for I do find your hangman  
is a more penitent trade than your bawd±±he doth  
oftener ask forgiveness.

**PROVOST** (to Abhorson) You, sirrah, provide your block and 50  
your axe tomorrow, four o'clock.

**ABHORSON** (to Pompey) Come on, bawd, I will instruct thee  
in my trade. Follow.

**POMPEY** I do desire to learn, sir, and I hope, if you have  
occasion to use me for your own turn, you shall find 55  
me yare. For truly, sir, for your kindness I owe you a  
good turn.

**PROVOST**

Call hither Barnardine and Claudio.

*Exeunt Abhorson and Pompey*

Th'one has my pity; not a jot the other,  
Being a murderer, though he were my brother. 60

*Enter Claudio*

Look, here's the warrant, Claudio, for thy death.  
'Tis now dead midnight, and by eight tomorrow  
Thou must be made immortal. Where's Barnardine?

**CLAUDIO**

As fast locked up in sleep as guiltless labour  
When it lies starkly in the travailer's bones. 65  
He will not wake.

**PROVOST** Who can do good on him?  
Well, go prepare yourself.

*Knocking within*

But hark, what

noise?

Heaven give your spirits comfort!

*Exit Claudio*

*[Knocking again]*

By

and by!

I hope it is some pardon or reprieve

For the most gentle Claudio.

*Enter the Duke, disguised as a friar*

Welcome,

father.

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**DUKE**

The best and wholesom'st spirits of the night

Envelop you, good Provost! Who called here of late?

**PROVOST** None since the curfew rung.

**DUKE** Not Isabel?

**PROVOST** No.

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**DUKE** They will then, ere't be long.

**PROVOST** What comfort is for Claudio?

**DUKE** There's some in hope.

**PROVOST** It is a bitter deputy.

**DUKE**

Not so, not so; his life is paralleled

80

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 mealed with that

Which he corrects, then were he tyrannous;

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But this being so, he's just.

*Knocking within*

Now are

they come.

*[The Provost goes to a door]*

This is a gentle Provost. Seldom when

The steele-Ad jailer is the friend of men.

*Knocking within*

*(To Provost)* How now, what noise? That spirit's  
possessed with haste

That wounds th'unlisting postern with these strokes. 90

**PROVOST**

There he must stay until the officer  
Arise to let him in. He is called up.

**DUKE**

Have you no countermand for Claudio yet,  
But he must die tomorrow?

**PROVOST**

None, sir, none.

**DUKE**

As near the dawning, Provost, as it is, 95  
You shall hear more ere morning.

**PROVOST**

Happily

You something know, yet I believe there comes  
No countermand. No such example have we;  
Besides, upon the very siege of justice  
Lord Angelo hath to the public ear 100  
Professed the contrary.

*Enter a Messenger*

This is his lordship's man.

**[DUKE]** And here comes Claudio's pardon.

**MESSENGER** (*giving a paper to Provost*) My lord hath sent  
you this note, and by me this further charge: that you 105  
swerve not from the smallest article of it, neither in  
time, matter, or other circumstance. Good morrow;  
for, as I take it, it is almost day.

**PROVOST** I shall obey him.

*Exit Messenger*

**DUKE** (*aside*)

This is his pardon, purchased by such sin 110  
For which the pardoner himself is in.  
Hence hath offence his quick celerity,  
When it is borne in high authority.  
When vice makes mercy, mercy's so extended  
That for the fault's love is th'offender friended.±± 115  
Now sir, what news?

**PROVOST** I told you: Lord Angelo, belike thinking me  
remiss in mine office, awakens me with this unwonted  
putting-on; methinks strangely, for he hath not used  
it before. 120

**DUKE** Pray you let's hear.

**[PROVOST]** *(reading the letter)* '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. 125 Let this be duly performed, with a thought that more depends on it than we must yet deliver. Thus fail not to do your office, as you will answer it at your peril.' What say you to this, sir?

**DUKE** What is that Barnardine, who is to be executed in 130 th'afternoon?

**PROVOST** A Bohemian born, but here nursed up and bred; one that is a prisoner nine years old.

**DUKE** How came it that the absent Duke had not either delivered him to his liberty or executed him? I have 135 heard it was ever his manner to do so.

**PROVOST** His friends still wrought reprieves for him; and indeed his fact, till now in the government of Lord Angelo, came not to an undoubtful proof.

**DUKE** It is now apparent? 140

**PROVOST** Most manifest, and not denied by himself.

**DUKE** Hath he borne himself penitently in prison? How seems he to be touched?

**PROVOST** A man that apprehends death no more dreadfully but as a drunken sleep; careless, reckless, and fearless 145 of what's past, present, or to come; insensible of mortality, and desperately mortal.

**DUKE** He wants advice.

**PROVOST** He will hear none. He hath evermore had the liberty of the prison. Give him leave to escape hence, 150 he would not. Drunk many times a day, if not many days entirely drunk. 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.

**DUKE** More of him anon. There is written in your brow, 155 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 160 make you understand this in a manifested effect, I crave

but four days' respite, for the which you are to do me  
both a present and a dangerous courtesy.

**PROVOST** Pray sir, in what?

**DUKE** In the delaying death. 165

**PROVOST** Alack, how may I do it, having the hour limited,  
and an express command under penalty to deliver his  
head in the view of Angelo? I may make my case as  
Claudio's to cross this in the smallest.

**DUKE** By the vow of mine order, I warrant you, if my 170  
instructions may be your guide, let this Barnardine be  
this morning executed, and his head borne to Angelo.

**PROVOST** Angelo hath seen them both, and will discover  
the favour.

**DUKE** O, death's a great disguiser, and you may add to 175  
it. Shave the head and tie the beard, and say it was  
the desire of the penitent to be so bared before his  
death; you know the course is common. If anything  
fall to you upon this more than thanks and good  
fortune, by the saint whom I profess, I will plead against 180  
it with my life.

**PROVOST** Pardon me, good father, it is against my oath.

**DUKE** Were you sworn to the Duke or to the deputy?

**PROVOST** To him and to his substitutes.

**DUKE** You will think you have made no offence if the 185  
Duke avouch the justice of your dealing?

**PROVOST** But what likelihood is in that?

**DUKE** Not a resemblance, but a certainty. Yet since I see  
you fearful, that neither my coat, integrity, nor  
persuasion can with ease attempt you, I will go further 190  
than I meant, to pluck all fears out of you. (*Showing a  
letter*) Look you, sir, here is the hand and seal of the  
Duke. You know the character, I doubt not, and the  
signet is not strange to you?

**PROVOST** I know them both. 195

**DUKE** The contents of this is the return of the Duke. You  
shall anon over-read it at your pleasure, where you  
shall find within these two days 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 200  
death, perchance entering into some monastery; but

by chance nothing of what is writ. Look, th'unfolding  
star calls up the shepherd. Put not yourself into  
amazement how these things should be. All difficulties  
are but easy when they are known. Call your <sup>205</sup>  
executioner, and off with Barnardine's head. I will give  
him a present shrift, and advise him for a better place.  
Yet you are amazed; but this shall absolutely resolve  
you. Come away, it is almost clear dawn.

*Exeunt*