

Measure for Measure

1.4

Enter Isabella, and Francesca, a nun

ISABELLA

And have you nuns no farther privileges?

FRANCESCA 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. 5

LUCIO (*within*)

Ho, peace be in this place!

ISABELLA [*to Francesca*] Who's that which calls?

FRANCESCA

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 vowed, you must not speak with men 10

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.

Lucio calls within

He calls again. I pray you answer him.

[*She stands aside*]

ISABELLA

Peace and prosperity! Who is't that calls? 15

She opens the door.

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? 20

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. 25

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

'Tis true. I would not±±though 'tis my familiar sin 30
With maids to seem the lapwing, and to jest
Tongue far from heart±±play with all virgins so.
I hold you as a thing enskied and sainted
By your renouncement, an immortal spirit,
And to be talked with in sincerity 35
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 40
That from the seedness the bare fallow brings
To teeming foison, even so her plenteous womb
Expresseth his full tilth and husbandry.

ISABELLA

Someone with child by him? My cousin Juliet?

LUCIO Is she your cousin? 45

ISABELLA

Adoptedly, as schoolmaids 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±± 50
In hand and hope of action; but we do learn,
By those that know the very nerves of state,
His giving out were of an infinite distance

From his true-meant design. Upon his place,
And with full line of his authority, 55
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. 60
He, to give fear to use and liberty,
Which have for long run by the hideous law
As mice by lions, hath picked out an act
Under whose heavy sense your brother's life
Falls into forfeit. He arrests him on it, 65
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. 70

ISABELLA

Doth he so seek his life?

LUCIO

Has censured him already,

And, as I hear, the Provost hath a warrant
For's execution.

ISABELLA

Alas, what poor

Ability's in me to do him good?

LUCIO

Assay the power you have. 75

ISABELLA

My power? Alas, I doubt.

LUCIO

Our doubts are traitors,

And makes 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, 80

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 85

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 [Isabella and Francesca at one door,
Lucio at another door]*