

Measure for Measure

1.3

Enter the Duke and a Friar

DUKE

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. 5

FRIAR May your grace speak of it?

DUKE

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 a witless bravery keeps. 10
I have delivered to Lord Angelo±±
A man of stricture and firm abstinence±±
My absolute power and place here in Vienna;
And he supposes me travelled to Poland±±
For so I have strewed it in the common ear, 15
And so it is received. Now, pious sir,
You will demand of me why I do this.

FRIAR Gladly, my lord.

DUKE

We have strict statutes and most biting laws,
The needful bits and curbs to headstrong weeds, 20
Which for this fourteen 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 threat'ning twigs of birch
Only to stick it in their children's sight 25
For terror, not to use, in time the rod
More mocked becomes than feared: 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 30
Goes all decorum.

FRIAR It rested in your grace
To unloose this tied-up Justice when you pleased,
And it in you more dreadful would have seemed
Than in Lord Angelo.

DUKE I do fear, too dreadful.
Sith 'twas my fault to give the people scope, 35
'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, 40
Who may in th'ambush of my name strike home,
And yet my nature never in the fight
T'allow in slander. And to behold his sway,
I will as 'twere a brother of your order
Visit both prince and people. Therefore, I prithee, 45
Supply me with the habit, and instruct me
How I may formally in person bear
Like a true friar. More reasons for this action
At our more leisure shall I render you.
Only this one: Lord Angelo is precise, 50
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
If power change purpose, what our seemers be.

Exeunt