

Measure for Measure

2.4

Enter Angelo

ANGELO

When I would pray and think, I think and pray
To several subjects: heaven hath my empty words,
Whilst my invention, hearing not my tongue,
Anchors on Isabel; God in my mouth,
As if I did but only chew his name, 5
And in my heart the strong and swelling evil
Of my conception. The state whereon I studied
Is like a good thing, being often read,
Grown seared and tedious. Yea, my gravity,
Wherein±±let no man hear me±±I take pride, 10
Could I with boot change for an idle plume
Which the air beats in vain. O place, O form,
How often dost thou with thy case, thy habit,
Wrench awe from fools, and tie the wiser souls
To thy false seeming! Blood, thou art blood. 15
Let's write 'good angel' on the devil's horn±±
'Tis now the devil's crest.

Enter Servant

How now?

Who's there?

SERVANT One Isabel, a sister, desires access to you.

ANGELO

Teach her the way.

Exit Servant

O heavens,

Why does my blood thus muster to my heart, 20
Making both it unable for itself,
And dispossessing all my other parts
Of necessary fitness?
So play the foolish throngs with one that swoons±±
Come all to help him, and so stop the air 25
By which he should revive±±and even so
The general subject to a well-wished king
Quit their own part and, in obsequious fondness,

Crowd to his presence, where their untaught love
Must needs appear offence.

Enter Isabella

How now, fair

maid?

30

ISABELLA I am come to know your pleasure.

ANGELO (*aside*)

That you might know it would much better please me
Than to demand what 'tis. (*To Isabella*) Your brother
cannot live.

ISABELLA Even so. Heaven keep your honour.

ANGELO

Yet may he live a while, and it may be 35
As long as you or I. Yet he must die.

ISABELLA Under your sentence?

ANGELO Yea.

ISABELLA

When, I beseech you?±±that in his reprieve,
Longer or shorter, he may be so fitted 40
That his soul sicken not.

ANGELO

Ha, fie, these filthy vices! It were as good
To pardon him that hath from nature stolen
A man already made, as to remit
Their saucy sweetness that do coin God's image 45
In stamps that are forbid. 'Tis all as easy
Falsely to take away a life true made
As to put metal in restraineÁd moulds,
To make a false one.

ISABELLA

'Tis set down so in heaven, but not in earth. 50

ANGELO

Say you so? Then I shall pose you quickly.
Which had you rather: that the most just law
Now took your brother's life, or, to redeem him,
Give up your body to such sweet uncleanness
As she that he hath stained?

ISABELLA

Sir, believe this. 55

I had rather give my body than my soul.

ANGELO

I talk not of your soul. Our compelled sins

Stand more for number than for account.

ISABELLA

How say you?

ANGELO

Nay, I'll not warrant that, for I can speak
Against the thing I say. Answer to this. 60
I now, the voice of the recorded law,
Pronounce a sentence on your brother's life.
Might there not be a charity in sin
To save this brother's life?

ISABELLA

Please you to do't,

I'll take it as a peril to my soul 65
It is no sin at all, but charity.

ANGELO

Pleased you to do't at peril of your soul
Were equal poise of sin and charity.

ISABELLA

That I do beg his life, if it be sin,
Heaven let me bear it. You granting of my suit, 70
If that be sin, I'll make it my morn prayer
To have it added to the faults of mine,
And nothing of your answer.

ANGELO

Nay, but hear me.

Your sense pursues not mine. Either you are ignorant,
Or seem so craftily, and that's not good. 75

ISABELLA

Let me be ignorant, and in nothing good
But graciously to know I am no better.

ANGELO

Thus wisdom wishes to appear most bright
When it doth tax itself: as these black masks
Proclaim an enshield beauty ten times louder 80
Than beauty could, displayed. But mark me.
To be receiveÁd plain, I'll speak more gross.
Your brother is to die.

ISABELLA So.

ANGELO

And his offence is so, as it appears, 85
Accountant to the law upon that pain.

ISABELLA True.

ANGELO

Admit no other way to save his life±±

As I subscribe not that nor any other±±
But, in the loss of question, that you his sister, 90
Finding yourself desired of such a person
Whose credit with the judge, or own great place,
Could fetch your brother from the manacles
Of the all-binding law, and that there were
No earthly mean to save him, but that either 95
You must lay down the treasures of your body
To this supposed, or else to let him suffer±±
What would you do?

ISABELLA

As much for my poor brother as myself.
That is, were I under the terms of death, 100
Th'impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies,
And strip myself to death as to a bed
That longing have been sick for, ere I'd yield
My body up to shame.

ANGELO Then must your brother die. 105

ISABELLA And 'twere the cheaper way.
Better it were a brother died at once
Than that a sister, by redeeming him,
Should die for ever.

ANGELO

Were not you then as cruel as the sentence 110
That you have slandered so?

ISABELLA

Ignominy in ransom and free pardon
Are of two houses; lawful mercy
Is nothing kin to foul redemption.

ANGELO

You seemed of late to make the law a tyrant, 115
And rather proved the sliding of your brother
A merriment than a vice.

ISABELLA

O pardon me, my lord. It oft falls out
To have what we would have, we speak not what we
mean.

I something do excuse the thing I hate 120
For his advantage that I dearly love.

ANGELO

We are all frail.

ISABELLA Else let my brother die±±
If not a federy, but only he,
Owe and succeed thy weakness.

What man thou art.

ANGELO Who will believe thee, Isabel?
My unsoiled name, th'austereness of my life, 155
My vouch against you, and my place i'th' state,
Will so your accusation overweigh
That you shall stifle in your own report,
And smell of calumny. I have begun,
And now I give my sensual race the rein. 160
Fit thy consent to my sharp appetite.
Lay by all nicety and prolixious blushes
That banish what they sue for. Redeem thy brother
By yielding up thy body to my will,
Or else he must not only die the death, 165
But thy unkindness shall his death draw out
To ling'ring sufferance. Answer me tomorrow,
Or by the affection that now guides me most,
I'll prove a tyrant to him. As for you,
Say what you can, my false o'erweighs your true. 170

Exit

ISABELLA

To whom should I complain? Did I tell this,
Who would believe me? O perilous mouths,
That bear in them one and the selfsame tongue
Either of condemnation or approof,
Bidding the law make curtsy to their will, 175
Hooking both right and wrong to th'appetite,
To follow as it draws! I'll to my brother.
Though he hath fall'n by prompture of the blood,
Yet hath he in him such a mind of honour
That had he twenty heads to tender down 180
On twenty bloody blocks, he'd yield them up
Before his sister should her body stoop
To such abhorred pollution.
Then Isabel live chaste, and brother die:
More than our brother is our chastity. 185
I'll tell him yet of Angelo's request,
And fit his mind to death, for his soul's rest.

Exit