



## *Measure for Measure*

Vincentio, Duke of Vienna, decides to take a sabbatical, appointing his deputy, Angelo, to rule as his proxy while the Duke is gone. The Duke, it seems, has grown lax in the enforcement of laws regarding wanton or unchaste behavior, and Angelo is given his powers for two specific reasons: a) the Duke doesn't want to seem a bad man, and b) someone has to accept the unpleasant and unpopular task of being more strict. Angelo is a zealous man, and the Duke feels he is perfect for the task. In the meantime, the Duke secretly remains in town disguised as a friar in order to keep an eye on things from the people's point of view.

Angelo's enthusiasm and harshness in carrying out his duties take everyone aback. When Claudio is arrested for getting his fiancée, Juliet, pregnant before they are married, Angelo condemns him with a death sentence. Claudio's sister, Isabella, hastens to Angelo to plead for her brother's life. Isabella is a novice preparing to enter a nunnery. Angelo is at first unwilling to budge, but Isabella's pleading (and beauty) eventually moves him in an unexpected way—he will grant a pardon to Claudio if she will yield her virginity to him. Isabella scorns his proposition; her chastity and honor are her life. She relates her tale to Claudio, who understandably is more willing to trade his sister's virtue for his life. While in the jail, the Duke (in disguise) eavesdrops upon the conversation and sets into motion a plot to save both Claudio and Isabella from their predicament.

The Duke knows of one Mariana, formerly engaged to Angelo, who still loves him. He persuades Isabella to feign acceptance of Angelo's offer; when the moment comes, Mariana will switch places in the dark with Isabella (the bed trick of *All's Well That Ends Well* being used again). Mariana agrees readily to the plot, and the events transpire as planned. Angelo, however, decides to execute Claudio anyway. When the Duke gets this news, he persuades the jailer to substitute another condemned man for Claudio and to carry out the execution "as planned." All he tells Isabella is that she has been betrayed by Angelo, and she should seek justice from the Duke (who is soon expected to return). With that, the Duke abandons his disguise as a friar to make his entrance into Vienna.

When Isabel and Mariana make their accusations, Angelo is cornered. At first he charges Isabella with lying and lays blame with the secret friar (the Duke's disguised alter-ego). When the Duke is revealed as the friar, Angelo can do nothing but throw himself on the mercy of the Duke and Isabella. Claudio is revealed to be alive,

Mariana pleads for Angelo's life, and the Duke orders that Angelo should marry Mariana and Claudio should marry Juliet. The Duke makes his own arrangements to be married with Isabella.

### *Dramatis Personae*

*Vincentio*, Duke of Vienna  
*Angelo*, his deputy  
*Escalus*, an ancient lord  
*Claudio*, a young gentleman  
*Lucio*, a fantastic  
*Two Gentlemen*  
*Provost*  
*Thomas*, a friar  
*Peter*, a friar  
*A Justice*  
*Varrius*  
*Elbow*, a simple constable  
*Froth*, a foolish gentleman  
*Pompey*, servant to Mistress Overdone  
*Abhorson*, an executioner  
*Barnadine*, a dissolute prisoner  
*Isabella*, sister of Claudio  
*Mariana*, betrothed to Angelo  
*Juliet*, beloved of Claudio  
*Francisca*, a nun  
*Mistress Overdone*, a bawd  
*Lords, Officers, Citizens, Boy, and Attendants*