



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Measure For Measure (Short Story)

Shakespeare

More centuries ago than I care to say, the people of Vienna were governed too mildly. The reason was that the reigning Duke Vicentio was excessively good-natured, and disliked to see offenders made unhappy.

The consequence was that the number of ill-behaved persons in Vienna was enough to make the Duke shake his head in sorrow when his chief secretary showed him it at the end of a list. He decided, therefore, that wrongdoers must be punished. But popularity was dear to him. He knew that, if he were suddenly strict after being lax, he would cause people to call him a tyrant. For this reason he told his Privy Council that he must go to Poland on important business of state. "I have chosen Angelo to rule in my absence," said he.

Now this Angelo, although he appeared to be noble, was really a mean man. He had promised to marry a girl called Mariana, and now would have nothing to say to her, because her dowry had been lost. So poor Mariana lived forlornly, waiting every day for the footstep of her stingy lover, and loving him still.

Having appointed Angelo his deputy, the Duke went to a friar called Thomas and asked him for a friar's dress and instruction in the art of giving religious counsel, for he did not intend to go to Poland, but to stay at home and see how Angelo governed.

Angelo had not been a day in office when he condemned to death a young man named Claudio for an act of rash selfishness which nowadays would only be punished by severe reproof.

Claudio had a queer friend called Lucio, and Lucio saw a chance of freedom for Claudio if Claudio's beautiful sister Isabella would plead with Angelo.

Isabella was at that time living in a nunnery. Nobody had won her heart, and she thought she would like to become a sister, or nun.

Meanwhile Claudio did not lack an advocate.

An ancient lord, Escalus, was for leniency. "Let us cut a little, but not kill," he said. "This gentleman had a most noble father."

Angelo was unmoved. "If twelve men find me guilty, I ask no more mercy than is in the law."

Angelo then ordered the Provost to see that Claudio was executed at nine the next morning.

After the issue of this order Angelo was told that the sister of the condemned man desired to see him.

"Admit her," said Angelo.

On entering with Lucio, the beautiful girl said, "I am a woeful suitor to your Honor."

"Well?" said Angelo.

She colored at his chill monosyllable and the ascending red increased the beauty of her face. "I have a brother who is condemned to die," she continued. "Condemn the fault, I pray you, and spare my brother."

"Every fault," said Angelo, "is condemned before it is committed. A fault cannot suffer. Justice would be void if the committer of a fault went free."

She would have left the court if Lucio had not whispered to her, "You are too cold; you could not speak more tamely if you wanted a pin."

So Isabella attacked Angelo again, and when he said, "I will not pardon him," she was not discouraged, and when he said, "He's sentenced; 'tis too late," she returned to the assault. But all her fighting was with reasons, and with reasons she could not prevail over the Deputy.



She told him that nothing becomes power like mercy. She told him that humanity receives and requires mercy from Heaven, that it was good to have gigantic strength, and had to use it like a giant. She told him that lightning rives the oak and spares the myrtle. She bade him look for fault in his own breast, and if he found one, to refrain from making it an argument against her brother's life.

Angelo found a fault in his breast at that moment. He loved Isabella's beauty, and was tempted to do for her beauty what he would not do for the love of man.

He appeared to relent, for he said, "Come to me to-morrow before noon."

She had, at any rate, succeeded in prolonging her brother's life for a few hours.'

In her absence Angelo's conscience rebuked him for trifling with his judicial duty.

When Isabella called on him the second time, he said, "Your brother cannot live."

Isabella was painfully astonished, but all she said was, "Even so. Heaven keep your Honor."

But as she turned to go, Angelo felt that his duty and honor were slight in comparison with the loss of her.

"Give me your love," he said, "and Claudio shall be freed."

"Before I would marry you, he should die if he had twenty heads to lay upon the block," said Isabella, for she saw then that he was not the just man he pretended to be.

So she went to her brother in prison, to inform him that he must die. At first he was boastful, and promised to hug the darkness of death. But when he clearly understood that his sister could buy his life by marrying Angelo, he felt his life more valuable than her happiness, and he exclaimed, "Sweet sister, let me live."

"O faithless coward! O dishonest wretch!" she cried.

At this moment the Duke came forward, in the habit of a friar, to request some speech with Isabella. He called himself Friar Lodowick.

The Duke then told her that Angelo was affianced to Mariana, whose love-story he related. He then asked her to consider this plan. Let Mariana, in the dress of Isabella, go closely veiled to Angelo, and say, in a voice resembling Isabella's, that if Claudio were spared she would marry him. Let her take the ring from Angelo's little finger, that it might be afterwards proved that his visitor was Mariana.

Isabella had, of course, a great respect for friars, who are as nearly like nuns as men can be. She agreed, therefore, to the Duke's plan. They were to meet again at the moated grange, Mariana's house.

In the street the Duke saw Lucio, who, seeing a man dressed like a friar, called out, "What news of the Duke, friar?" "I have none," said the Duke.



Lucio then told the Duke some stories about Angelo. Then he told one about the Duke. The Duke contradicted him. Lucio was provoked, and called the Duke "a shallow, ignorant fool," though he pretended to love him. "The Duke shall know you better if I live to report you," said the Duke, grimly. Then he asked Escalus, whom he saw in the street, what he thought of his ducal master. Escalus, who imagined he was speaking to a friar, replied, "The Duke is a very temperate gentleman, who prefers to see another merry to being merry himself."

The Duke then proceeded to call on Mariana.

Isabella arrived immediately afterwards, and the Duke introduced the two girls to one another, both of whom thought he was a friar. They went into a chamber

apart from him to discuss the saving of Claudio, and while they talked in low and earnest tones, the Duke looked out of the window and saw the broken sheds and flower-beds black with moss, which betrayed Mariana's indifference to her country dwelling. Some women would have beautified their garden: not she. She was for the town; she neglected the joys of the country. He was sure that Angelo would not make her unhappier.

"We are agreed, father," said Isabella, as she returned with Mariana.

So Angelo was deceived by the girl whom he had dismissed from his love, and put on her finger a ring he wore, in which was set a milky stone which flashed in the light with secret colors.

Hearing of her success, the Duke went next day to the prison prepared to learn that an order had arrived for Claudio's release. It had not, however, but a letter was banded to the Provost while he waited. His amazement was great when the Provost read aloud these words, "Whatsoever you may hear to the contrary, let Claudio be executed by four of the clock. Let me have his head sent me by five."

But the Duke said to the Provost, "You must show the Deputy another head," and he held out a letter and a signet. "Here," he said, "are the hand and seal of the Duke. He is to return, I tell you, and Angelo knows it not. Give Angelo another head."

The Provost thought, "This friar speaks with power. I know the Duke's signet and I know his hand."

He said at length, "A man died in prison this morning, a pirate of the age of Claudio, with a beard of his color. I will show his head."

The pirate's head was duly shown to Angelo, who was deceived by its resemblance to Claudio's.

The Duke's return was so popular that the citizens removed the city gates from their hinges to assist his entry into Vienna. Angelo and Escalus duly presented themselves, and were profusely praised for their conduct of affairs in the Duke's absence.

It was, therefore, the more unpleasant for Angelo when Isabella, passionately angered by his treachery, knelt before the Duke, and cried for justice.

When her story was told, the Duke cried, "To prison with her for a slanderer of our right hand! But stay, who persuaded you to come here?"

"Friar Lodowick," said she.

"Who knows him?" inquired the Duke.

"I do, my lord," replied Lucio. "I beat him because he spake against your Grace."

A friar called Peter here said, "Friar Lodowick is a holy man."

Isabella was removed by an officer, and Mariana came forward. She took off her veil, and said to Angelo, "This is the face you once swore was worth looking on."

Bravely he faced her as she put out her hand and said, "This is the hand which wears the ring you thought to give another."

"I know the woman," said Angelo. "Once there was talk of marriage between us, but I found her frivolous."

Mariana here burst out that they were affianced by the strongest vows. Angelo replied by asking the Duke to insist on the production of Friar Lodowick.

"He shall appear," promised the Duke, and bade Escalus examine the missing witness thoroughly while he was elsewhere.

Presently the Duke re-appeared in the character of Friar Lodowick, and accompanied by Isabella and the Provost. He was not so much examined as abused and threatened by Escalus. Lucio asked him to deny, if he dared, that he called the Duke a fool and a coward, and had had his nose pulled for his impudence.

"To prison with him!" shouted Escalus, but as hands were laid upon him, the Duke pulled off his friar's hood, and was a Duke before them all.

"Now," he said to Angelo, "if you have any impudence that can yet serve you, work it for all it's worth."

"Immediate sentence and death is all I beg," was the reply.

"Were you affianced to Mariana?" asked the Duke.

"I was," said Angelo.

"Then marry her instantly," said his master. "Marry them," he said to Friar Peter, "and return with them here."

"Come hither, Isabel," said the Duke, in tender tones. "Your friar is now your Prince, and grieves he was too late to save your brother;" but well the roguish Duke knew he had saved him.

"O pardon me," she cried, "that I employed my Sovereign in my trouble."

"You are pardoned," he said, gaily.

At that moment Angelo and his wife re-entered. "And now, Angelo," said the Duke, gravely, "we condemn thee to the block on which Claudio laid his head!"

"O my most gracious lord," cried Mariana, "mock me not!"

"You shall buy a better husband," said the Duke.

"O my dear lord," said she, "I crave no better man."

Isabella nobly added her prayer to Mariana's, but the Duke feigned inflexibility.

"Provost," he said, "how came it that Claudio as executed at an unusual hour?"

Afraid to confess the lie he had imposed upon Angelo, the Provost said, "I had a private message."

"You are discharged from your office," said the Duke. The Provost then departed. Angelo said, "I am sorry to have caused such sorrow. I prefer death to mercy." Soon there was a motion in the crowd. The Provost re-appeared with Claudio. Like a big child the Provost said, "I saved this man; he is like Claudio." The Duke was amused, and said to Isabella, "I pardon him because he is like your brother. He is like my brother, too, if you, dear Isabel, will be mine."

She was his with a smile, and the Duke forgave Angelo, and promoted the Provost.

Lucio he condemned to marry a stout woman with a bitter tongue.



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