

CLAUDIO

Now, sister, what's the comfort?

ISABELLA

Why,

As all comforts are; most good, most good indeed.

Lord Angelo, having affairs to heaven,

Intends you for his swift ambassador,

Where you shall be an everlasting leiger:

Therefore your best appointment make with speed;

To-morrow you set on.

CLAUDIO

Is there no remedy?

ISABELLA

None, but such remedy as, to save a head,

To cleave a heart in twain.

CLAUDIO

But is there any?

ISABELLA

Yes, brother, you may live:

There is a devilish mercy in the judge,

If you'll implore it, that will free your life,

But fetter you till death.

CLAUDIO

Perpetual durance?

ISABELLA

Ay, just; perpetual durance, a restraint,

Though all the world's vastidity you had,

To a determined scope.

CLAUDIO

But in what nature?

ISABELLA

In such a one as, you consenting to't,

Would bark your honour from that trunk you bear,

And leave you naked.

CLAUDIO

Let me know the point.

ISABELLA

O, I do fear thee, Claudio; and I quake,

Lest thou a feverous life shouldst entertain,

And six or seven winters more respect

Than a perpetual honour. Darest thou die?

The sense of death is most in apprehension;
And the poor beetle, that we tread upon,
In corporal sufferance finds a pang as great
As when a giant dies.

CLAUDIO

Why give you me this shame?
Think you I can a resolution fetch
From flowery tenderness? If I must die,
I will encounter darkness as a bride,
And hug it in mine arms.

ISABELLA

There spake my brother; there my father's grave
Did utter forth a voice. Yes, thou must die:
Thou art too noble to conserve a life
In base appliances. This outward-sainted deputy,
Whose settled visage and deliberate word
Nips youth i' the head and follies doth emmew
As falcon doth the fowl, is yet a devil
His filth within being cast, he would appear
A pond as deep as hell.

CLAUDIO

The prenzie Angelo!

ISABELLA

O, 'tis the cunning livery of hell,
The damned'st body to invest and cover
In prenzie guards! Dost thou think, Claudio?
If I would yield him my virginity,
Thou mightst be freed.

CLAUDIO

O heavens! it cannot be.

ISABELLA

Yes, he would give't thee, from this rank offence,
So to offend him still. This night's the time
That I should do what I abhor to name,
Or else thou diest to-morrow.

CLAUDIO

Thou shalt not do't.

ISABELLA

O, were it but my life,
I'd throw it down for your deliverance
As frankly as a pin.

CLAUDIO

Thanks, dear Isabel.

ISABELLA

Be ready, Claudio, for your death tomorrow.

CLAUDIO

Yes. Has he affections in him,
That thus can make him bite the law by the nose,
When he would force it? Sure, it is no sin,
Or of the deadly seven, it is the least.

ISABELLA

Which is the least?

CLAUDIO

If it were damnable, he being so wise,
Why would he for the momentary trick
Be perdurably fined? O Isabel!

ISABELLA

What says my brother?

CLAUDIO

Death is a fearful thing.

ISABELLA

And shamed life a hateful.

CLAUDIO

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;
To be imprison'd in the viewless winds,
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendent world; or to be worse than worst
Of those that lawless and incertain thought
Imagine howling: 'tis too horrible!
The weariest and most loathed worldly life
That age, ache, penury and imprisonment
Can lay on nature is a paradise
To what we fear of death.

ISABELLA

Alas, alas!

CLAUDIO

Sweet sister, let me live:
What sin you do to save a brother's life,
Nature dispenses with the deed so far
That it becomes a virtue.

ISABELLA

O you beast!
O faithless coward! O dishonest wretch!
Wilt thou be made a man out of my vice?
Is't not a kind of incest, to take life
From thine own sister's shame? What should I think?
Heaven shield my mother play'd my father fair!
For such a warped slip of wilderness
Ne'er issued from his blood. Take my defiance!
Die, perish! Might but my bending down
Reprieve thee from thy fate, it should proceed:
I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death,
No word to save thee.

CLAUDIO

Nay, hear me, Isabel.

ISABELLA

O, fie, fie, fie!
Thy sin's not accidental, but a trade.
Mercy to thee would prove itself a bawd:
'Tis best thou diest quickly.

CLAUDIO

O hear me, Isabella!