

prides himself on his ice-cold demeanor and uncompromising restraint, is distressed to realize that he is enamored of Isabella. The next day, he offers her a bargain: if she will sleep with him, he will release her brother.

Isabella is initially too innocent to grasp Angelo's hints. When Angelo directly proposes it to her, she refuses, shocked by his inappropriate suggestion. She visits Claudio in jail and reports this interaction to him, and he initially supports her decision to remain pure. However, Claudio changes his mind and begs his sister to take up Angelo's offer.

Isabella is offended by her brother's request. However, the disguised Duke arrives and convinces her to orchestrate a liaison with Angelo: when the time comes to seduce Angelo, a woman named Mariana—a former fiancée of Angelo's whom he abandoned after she lost her brother and her dowry in a shipwreck—will take Isabella's place.

However, even after this encounter takes place, Angelo breaches on his word and orders Claudio's beheading. At the Duke's urging, the Provost who runs the jail deceives Angelo by sending him the head of a dead pirate, claiming it belonged to Claudio. The Duke sends a letter to Angelo announcing that he will soon return to Vienna.

On his arrival, the Duke requests a public hearing before the city gates, where citizens can go to seek redress for injustices. When he reads this letter, Angelo nervously wonders whether Isabella will denounce him publicly, and regrets ordering Claudio's execution out of a fear of retribution. At the hearing, Isabella speaks out against Angelo, but the now undisguised Duke pretends not to believe her. Mariana, too, tells her story, but the Duke remains unconvinced. The Duke then reappears in his friar costume, and Lucio accuses him of disrespecting the Duke. In an ensuing scuffle, the Duke's disguise is removed. His masquerade revealed, the Duke carries out long-overdue justice. He forces Angelo to marry Mariana, and though he wishes to sentence him to death, Mariana and Isabella convince the Duke to spare Angelo. Claudio is permitted to marry Juliet, and Lucio is reprimanded and compelled to marry a prostitute who has borne him a child (and who he had refused to wed). Finally, the Duke asks Isabella to reconsider her monastic vows and marry him instead.

AR: Examine Escalus' contradictions.

Isabella, like the Duke and Escalus, seems uncertain about whether to apply strict punishment or mercy when dealing with offenders. She acknowledges that she must ask for mercy, even though she would prefer to see justice carried out in normal circumstances. This suggests that, under ordinary conditions, she would want to see someone in Claudio's position punished, but because of her familial ties and emotional attachment, she feels compelled to plead for mercy on his behalf. This means her appeals for mercy may not be entirely genuine; she is simply advocating for her loved one. This realization reduces the impact of her emotional pleas, as she admits that, in her desire to protect her brother, she is willing to excuse something she personally dislikes for his benefit.

Furthermore, when Isabella hears that Claudio has been executed, her reaction is not one of mercy but of vengeful anger. She even threatens to go to Angelo and tear out his eyes. In the prison scene, when Claudio pleads for her to take him, her response is harsh and unforgiving, showing no mercy at all. Despite these moments, Isabella demonstrates true compassion in the final scene of the play when she pleads for Angelo's life, showing a capacity for forgiveness.

AR: Describe Isabella's contradictions now.

In the play, mercy is not always effective or suitable, and even Escalus, known for his patience, becomes frustrated by Mistress Overdone's repeated offenses. Her being let off with warnings has had no impact, and Escalus reflects that continued leniency only encourages further wrongdoings. Mistress Overdone pleads for mercy, calling Escalus a merciful man, but Escalus responds with growing irritation, stating that if mercy continues to be shown without consequence, it risks becoming tyranny itself.

AR: What's Escalus's take on Mistress Overdone?

The arguments in favor of mercy, rather than strict justice, presented in the play are not particularly convincing. For example, Isabella, in Act II Scene 2, argues that Angelo should