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Measure for Measure

By William Shakespeare

On the Main Stage: April 30 – May 18

Synopsis:

The play begins with the arrest of Egeon, a merchant from the city of Syracuse (on the island of Sicily) who has illegally entered the city of Ephesus (on the coast of modern-day Turkey). Due to their past conflicts, a law prescribes either death or a fine of 1,000 gold marks for any Syracusian found in Ephesus.

Egeon explains to Duke Solinus, the ruler of Ephesus, that he traveled to Syracuse in search of his wife and one of his identical twin sons, separated from him in a shipwreck some 25 years before. As Egeon explains, his twins (both named Antipholus) were being raised with another set of identical twins (both named Dromio) whom Egeon purchased from their destitute mother to be his sons' servants as they grew up. When the remaining Antipholus and Dromio (of Syracuse) became adults, they insisted that Egeon let them go off in search of their missing brothers, and so for the past five years, the merchant has been separated from them as well.

The duke is deeply moved by Egeon's tale, and allows him 24 hours to try and raise the ransom needed to save his life.

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to everyone, Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse have themselves arrived in Ephesus (taking care to conceal their Syracusian identity) as they continue their quest for their lost brothers. As it happens, the other Antipholus is now a native of Ephesus, a wealthy citizen with the other Dromio as his servant. Thus, the two Syracusian twins are almost immediately befuddled by the fact that everyone in Ephesus acts as if they know them.

Adriana, Antipholus of Ephesus' long-suffering wife, encounters Antipholus of Syracuse and, believing him to be her philandering husband, drags him home to dinner (along with the Syracusian Dromio). There, Antipholus of Syracuse finds himself more interested in his supposed sister-in-law, Luciana, while Dromio of Syracuse is horrified to learn he is engaged to a grotesquely fat kitchen wench, Nell. Meanwhile, the Ephesian Antipholus and Dromio arrive home for dinner and find themselves locked out because, as they are told, they are already inside.

Antipholus of Ephesus, furious, plans to revenge himself on his wife, while Antipholus of Syracuse plans a speedy escape from a city that seems to be inhabited by witches. Both their

plans are thwarted, however, by the fact that each time one man sends his Dromio on an errand, he encounters the other man's Dromio coming back.

Further confusion is created when Antipholus of Syracuse accidentally receives an expensive gold chain ordered by Antipholus of Ephesus. When the goldsmith Angelo bills Antipholus of Ephesus for it, he refuses to pay, claiming (justly) that he never received the goods. Angelo has Antipholus of Ephesus arrested for non-payment of debt, and Antipholus sends Dromio home for bail money.

Adriana, increasingly dismayed by her husband's odd behavior, is still more alarmed to learn that he has been arrested, and with Luciana she goes out to find him. Meanwhile Antipholus of Syracuse encounters a courtesan to whom Antipholus of Ephesus promised the gold chain (in exchange for a diamond ring of hers). When Antipholus of Syracuse refuses to give her the chain, believing her to be another witch, the courtesan decides to report the misconduct to Adriana.

The courtesan's story only confirms Adriana's fears that her husband has gone mad, so she enlists the services of an exorcist, Doctor Pinch. Meanwhile, when Dromio of Ephesus returns without the bail money (which Dromio of Syracuse was sent for), an exasperated Antipholus of Ephesus begins beating his hapless servant. He is discovered by Pinch and the women in this violent mood, which is only intensified when Pinch begins performing an absurd exorcism on him.

Just as Pinch and his associates succeed in binding and removing the Ephesian twins (who will be taken home to be "treated" for madness by locking them in the cellar), the Syracusian twins appear, swords drawn. The women (and the police officer) are terrified, believing that the madmen have escaped and found weapons. As the one group scatters, Angelo appears and is enraged to see Antipholus of Syracuse wearing the gold chain. When Adriana reappears, the Syracusians flee into an abbey for refuge. Although Adriana demands that the nuns release her husband into her custody, the abbess refuses to hand him over. Adriana decides that she will catch the duke as he passes by on his way to the impending execution and ask him to intervene.

However, when Duke Solinus appears with Egeon and the executioner, the confusion deepens. As Adriana tells her story and everyone's attention is focused on the abbey, a dishevelled Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus appear from the opposite direction. Having overpowered Doctor Pinch, they have returned so that Antipholus (now truly on the verge of madness) can plead his case to the duke as well. Egeon is at first thrilled to see his son and servant, then bewildered and saddened when they claim not to know him. Duke Solinus decides that all of them must be bewitched, and resolves to ask the abbess to help unravel the mystery.

The abbess emerges with the Syracusian twins, and everyone is astounded to see the pairs of twins side by side at last. The abbess reveals herself as Aemilia, Egeon's long-lost wife. After the shipwreck, she too was separated from the Ephesian Antipholus and Dromio, and went into a life of religious seclusion, believing her whole family to be lost. There is general rejoicing as the family is reunited and all the "errors" are explained. Antipholus of Ephesus pays Egeon's ransom, everyone is reconciled, and Aemilia invites the entire group to a "gossip's feast."