CHARACTERS

Hamlet
The prince of Denmark, and a student at the University of Wittenberg. At the beginning of the play, Hamlet’s father, King Hamlet, has recently died, and his mother, Queen Gertrude, has married the new king, Hamlet’s uncle Claudius. Hamlet is melancholy, bitter, and cynical, full of hatred for his uncle and disgust at his mother for marrying him. When the ghost of Hamlet’s father appears and claims to have been murdered by Claudius, Hamlet becomes obsessed with avenging his father’s death but keeps thinking of reasons why he should wait before killing Claudius—then chastizes himself for failing to act boldly. Hamlet is a character of contradictions. He admires characters like Fortinbras and the Player King, who behave passionately and even violently for no good reason, but is himself thoughtful, reflective, and philosophical. At times Hamlet is indecisive and hesitant, but at other times he is prone to rash and impulsive acts of violence.

Claudius
The king of Denmark, Hamlet’s uncle. The villain of the play, Claudius is a calculating, ambitious politician, adept at manipulating others for his own ends and willing to execute, assassinate, or murder to stay in power. He doesn’t understand Hamlet or Hamlet’s motives, but he is quick to perceive Hamlet as a threat and take decisive action against him. Claudius does occasionally show signs of remorse and human feeling—his affection for Gertrude, for instance, seems sincere.

Gertrude
The queen of Denmark, Hamlet’s mother, recently married to Claudius. We never get to observe Gertrude on her own, so we know much more about how Hamlet feels about her than about how she sees herself. She seems clearly to love Hamlet, but Hamlet sees her as a weak, even depraved, woman motivated wholly by lust. Hamlet has such strong feelings about her sex life that he becomes momentarily distracted from his revenge quest, urging her toward a life of chastity.

Polonius
The Lord Chamberlain of Claudius’s court, and the father of Laertes and Ophelia. Polonius has good intentions, but he tends to be somewhat conniving and underhanded. He frequently leaps to the wrong conclusions, and his speeches are comically pompous and long-winded. He is completely incapable of figuring out what Hamlet is up to.

Horatio
Hamlet’s close friend, who studied with the prince at the University of Wittenberg. Hamlet trusts Horatio above any of the other characters, valuing him for his even temper and equanimity—qualities that Hamlet seems to despise in himself. Horatio is loyal and helpful to Hamlet throughout the play. After Hamlet’s death, Horatio remains alive to tell Hamlet’s story.

Ophelia
Polonius’s daughter, a beautiful young woman with whom Hamlet has been in love. A sweet and innocent young girl, Ophelia dutifully strives to obey her father and her brother, Laertes, allowing Polonius to use her in his scheme to spy on Hamlet. When her father dies, her sanity unravels, and in her madness she paints a scathing picture of young men as sexually exploitative and unfaithful, and her mad speeches about flowers conceal implied condemnations of Claudius and Gertrude.
Laertes
Polonius’s son and Ophelia’s brother, a young man who spends much of the play in France. Passionate and quick to action, Laertes is a foil for the reflective and agonized Hamlet.

Fortinbras
The young prince of Norway, whose father the king (also named Fortinbras) was killed by Hamlet’s father (also named Hamlet). Now Fortinbras wishes to attack Denmark to avenge his father’s honor, making him another foil for Prince Hamlet. Hamlet admires Fortinbras for his willingness to fight for no good reason.

The Ghost
The specter of Hamlet’s recently deceased father. The ghost, who claims to have been murdered by Claudius, calls upon Hamlet to avenge him. However, it is not entirely certain whether the ghost is what it appears to be. Hamlet speculates that the ghost might be a devil sent to deceive him and tempt him into murder, and the question of what the ghost is or where it comes from is never definitively resolved.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern
Two slightly bumbling courtiers, former friends of Hamlet from Wittenberg, who are summoned by Claudius and Gertrude to discover the cause of Hamlet’s strange behavior.

Osric
The foolish courtier who summons Hamlet to his duel with Laertes. His speeches are pretentious and difficult to understand.

Voltimand and Cornelius
Courtiers whom Claudius sends to Norway to persuade the king to prevent Fortinbras from attacking.

Marcellus and Barnardo
The officers who first see the ghost walking the ramparts of Elsinore and who summon Horatio to witness it. Marcellus is present when Hamlet first encounters the ghost.

Francisco
A soldier and guardsman at Elsinore.

Reynaldo
Polonius’s servant, sent to France by Polonius to check up on and spy on Laertes.
Enter BARNARDO and FRANCISCO, two sentinels, enter.

BARNARDO
Who’s there?

FRANCISCO
Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself.

BARNARDO
Long live the king!

FRANCISCO
Barnardo?

BARNARDO
He.

FRANCISCO
You come most carefully upon your hour.

BARNARDO
'Tis now struck twelve. Get thee to bed, Francisco.

FRANCISCO
For this relief much thanks. 'Tis bitter cold, And I am sick at heart.

BARNARDO
Have you had quiet guard?

FRANCISCO
Not a mouse stirring.

BARNARDO
Well, good night. 
If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus, 
10 The rivals of my watch, bid them make haste.
FRANCISCO
I think I hear them.—Stand, ho! Who’s there?

Enter HORATIO and MARCELLUS

HORATIO
Friends to this ground.

MARCELLUS
And liegemen to the Dane.

FRANCISCO
Give you good night.

MARCELLUS
O, farewell, honest soldier. Who hath relieved you?

FRANCISCO
Barnardo has my place. Give you good night.

Exit FRANCISCO

MARCELLUS
15 Holla, Barnardo.

BARNARDO
Say what, is Horatio there?

HORATIO
A piece of him.

BARNARDO
Welcome, Horatio.—Welcome, good Marcellus.

MARCELLUS
What, has this thing appeared again tonight?

BARNARDO
20 I have seen nothing.

MARCELLUS

FRANCISCO
I think I hear them. —Stop! Who’s there?

MARCELLUS and HORATIO enter.

HORATIO
Friends of this country.

MARCELLUS
And servants of the Danish king.

FRANCISCO
Good night to you both.

MARCELLUS
Good-bye. Who’s taken over the watch for you?

FRANCISCO
Barnardo’s taken my place. Good night.

Exit FRANCISCO

MARCELLUS
Hello, Barnardo.

BARNARDO
Hello. Is Horatio here too?

HORATIO
More or less.

BARNARDO
Welcome, Horatio. Welcome, Marcellus.

MARCELLUS
So, tell us, did you see that thing again tonight?

BARNARDO
I haven’t seen anything.

MARCELLUS
Horatio says ’tis but our fantasy
And will not let belief take hold of him
Touching this dreaded sight twice seen of us.
Therefore I have entreated him along
With us to watch the minutes of this night,
That if again this apparition come
He may approve our eyes and speak to it.

HORATIO
Tush, tush, ’twill not appear.

Act 1, Scene 1, Page 3

Original Text

BARNARDO
Sit down a while
And let us once again assail your ears,
That are so fortified against our story,
What we have two nights seen.

HORATIO
Well, sit we down,
And let us hear Barnardo speak of this.

BARNARDO
Last night of all,
When yond same star that’s westward from
the pole
Had made his course t’ illumine that part of
heaven
Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,
The bell then beating one—

Enter GHOST

MARCELLUS
Peace, break thee off. Look where it comes again!

BARNARDO

Modern Text

BARNARDO
Sit down for a while, and we’ll tell you
again the story you don’t want to believe,
about what we’ve seen two nights now.

HORATIO
Well, let’s sit down and listen to
Barnardo tell us.

BARNARDO
Last night, when that star to the west of
the North Star had traveled across the
night sky to that point where it’s shining
now, at one o’clock, Marcellus and I—

The GHOST enters.

MARCELLUS
Quiet, shut up! It’s come again.

BARNARDO
In the same figure like the king that’s dead.

MARCELLUS
40 (to HORATIO) Thou art a scholar. Speak to it, Horatio.

BARNARDO
Looks it not like the king? Mark it, Horatio.

HORATIO
Most like. It harrows me with fear and wonder.

BARNARDO
Doesn’t he look like the king, Horatio?

HORATIO
Very much so. It’s terrifying.

BARNARDO
It wants us to speak to it.

MARCELLUS
Ask it something, Horatio.

HORATIO
What are you, that you walk out so late at night, looking like the dead king of Denmark when he dressed for battle? By God, I order you to speak.

MARCELLUS
It looks like you’ve offended it.

BARNARDO
Look, it’s going away.

HORATIO
Stay! Speak! Speak! I order you, speak!

Exit GHOST

The GHOST exits.

MARCELLUS
It’s gone. It won’t answer now.

BARNARDO
What’s going on, Horatio? You’re pale and trembling. You agree now that we’re
Is not this something more than fantasy? What think you on ’t?

HORATIO
Before my God, I might not this believe
Without the sensible and true avouch Of mine own eyes.

MARCELLUS
Is it not like the king?

HORATIO
As thou art to thyself.
Such was the very armour he had on
When he the ambitious Norway combated.
So frowned he once when, in an angry parle,
He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice.
’Tis strange.

MARCELLUS
Thus twice before, and jump at this dead hour,
With martial stalk hath he gone by our watch.

HORATIO
In what particular thought to work I know not,
But in the gross and scope of mine opinion
This bodes some strange eruption to our state.

MARCELLUS
Good now, sit down and tell me, he that knows,
Why this same strict and most observant watch
So nightly toils the subject of the land,
And why such daily cast of brazen cannon
And foreign mart for implements of war,
not imagining this, don’t you? What do you think about it?

HORATIO
I swear to God, if I hadn’t seen this with my own eyes I’d never believe it.

MARCELLUS
Doesn’t it look like the king?

HORATIO
Yes, as much as you look like yourself.
The king was wearing exactly this armor when he fought the king of Norway. And the ghost frowned just like the king did once when he attacked the Poles, traveling on the ice in sleds. It’s weird.

MARCELLUS
It’s happened like this twice before, always at this exact time. He stalks by us at our post like a warrior.

HORATIO
I don’t know exactly how to explain this, but I have a general feeling this means bad news for our country.

MARCELLUS
All right, let’s sit down and discuss that question. Somebody tell me why this strict schedule of guards has been imposed, and why so many bronze cannons are being manufactured in Denmark, and so many weapons bought from abroad, and why the shipbuilders
Why such impress of shipwrights, whose
sore task
Does not divide the Sunday from the week.
What might be toward, that this sweaty haste
Doth make the night joint laborer with the day?
Who is ’t that can inform me?

HORATIO
That can I.
At least, the whisper goes so: our last king,
Whose image even but now appeared to us,
Was, as you know, by Fortinbras of Norway,
Thereto pricked on by a most emulate pride,
Dared to the combat; in which our valiant Hamlet
(For so this side of our known world esteemed him)
Did slay this Fortinbras, who by a sealed compact
Well ratified by law and heraldry,
Did forfeit, with his life, all those his lands Which he stood seized of to the conqueror, Against the which a moiety competent
Was gagèd by our king, which had returned To the inheritance of Fortinbras
Had he been vanquisher, as, by the same covenant
And carriage of the article designed,
His fell to Hamlet. Now, sir, young Fortinbras,
Of unimprovèd mettle hot and full,
Hath in the skirts of Norway here and there Sharked up a list of lawless resolutes,

are so busy they don’t even rest on Sunday. Is something about to happen that warrants working this night and day? Who can explain this to me?

HORATIO
I can. Or at least I can describe the rumors. As you know, our late king, whom we just now saw as a ghost, was the great rival of Fortinbras, king of Norway. Fortinbras dared him to battle. In that fight, our courageous Hamlet (or at least that’s how we thought of him) killed old King Fortinbras, who—on the basis of a valid legal document—surrendered all his territories, along with his life, to his conqueror. If our king had lost, he would have had to do the same. But now old Fortinbras’s young son, also called Fortinbras—he is bold, but unproven—has gathered a bunch of thugs from the lawless outskirts of the country. For some food, they’re eager to take on the tough enterprise of securing the lands the elder Fortinbras lost.
For food and diet, to some enterprise
That hath a stomach in ’t, which is no other—
As it doth well appear unto our state—
But to recover of us, by strong hand
And terms compulsatory, those foresaid lands
So by his father lost. And this, I take it,

As far as I understand, that’s why we’re posted here tonight and why there’s such a commotion in Denmark lately.

Is the main motive of our preparations,
The source of this our watch, and the chief head
Of this posthaste and rummage in the land.

**BARNARDO**
I think it be no other but e’en so.
Well may it sort that this portentous figure
Comes armèd through our watch so like the king

**HORATIO**
That was and is the question of these wars.

**BARNARDO**
I think that’s exactly right—that explains why the ghost of the late king would haunt us now, since he caused these wars.

**HORATIO**
The ghost is definitely something to worry about. In the high and mighty Roman Empire, just before the emperor Julius Caesar was assassinated, corpses rose out of their graves and ran through the streets of Rome speaking gibberish. There were shooting stars, and blood mixed in with the morning dew, and threatening signs on the face of the sun. The moon, which controls the tides of the sea, was so eclipsed it almost went completely out. And we’ve had similar omens of terrible things to come, as if heaven and earth have joined together to warn us what’s going to happen.
As harbingers preceding still the fates
And prologue to the omen coming on,
Have heaven and earth together
demonstrated
Unto our climatures and countrymen.

Enter GHOST

125  But soft, behold! Lo, where it comes again.
I’ll cross it though it blast me.—Stay, illusion!

GHOST spreads his arms

If thou hast any sound or use of voice,
Speak to me.
If there be any good thing to be done

130  That may to thee do ease and grace to me,
Speak to me.
If thou art privy to thy country’s fate,
Which happily foreknowing may avoid,
Oh, speak!

135  Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life
Extorted treasure in the womb of earth,
For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death,
Speak of it. Stay and speak!

The cock crows

—Stop it, Marcellus.

MARCELLOUS
Shall I strike at it with my partisan?

140  Do, if it will not stand.

BARNARDO
’Tis here.

HORATIO

The GHOST enters.

Wait, look! It has come again. I’ll meet it if it’s the last thing I do. —Stay here, you hallucination!

The GHOST spreads his arms.

If you have a voice or can make sounds, speak to me.
If there’s any good deed I can do that will bring you peace and me honor, speak to me. If you have some secret knowledge of your country’s sad fate—which might be avoided if we knew about it—then, please, speak. Or if you’ve got some buried treasure somewhere, which they say often makes ghosts restless, then tell us about it. Stay and speak!

A rooster crows.

Keep it from leaving, Marcellus.

MARCELLOUS
Should I strike it with my spear?

145  Yes, if it doesn’t stand still.

BARNARDO
It’s over here.

HORATIO
‘Tis here.

Exit GHOST

There it is.

The GHOST exits.

MARCELLUS
‘Tis gone.
We do it wrong, being so majestical,
To offer it the show of violence,
For it is, as the air, invulnerable,
And our vain blows malicious mockery.

145

MARCELLUS
It’s gone. We were wrong to threaten it with violence, since it looks so much like a king. Besides, we can’t hurt it anymore than we can hurt the air. Our attack was stupid, futile, and wicked.

BARNARDO
It was about to speak when the cock crew.

BARNARDO
It was about to say something when the rooster crowed.

HORATIO
And then it started like a guilty thing
Upon a fearful summons. I have heard
The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn,
Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
Awake the god of day, and, at his warning,
Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,
Th’ extravagant and erring spirit hies
To his confine, and of the truth herein
This present object made probation.

HORATIO
And then it acted startled, like a guilty person caught by the law. I’ve heard that the rooster awakens the god of day with its trumpetlike crowing, and makes all wandering ghosts, wherever they are, hurry back to their hiding places. We’ve just seen proof of that.

MARCELLUS
Yes, it faded away when the rooster crowed. Some people say that just before Christmas the rooster crows all night long, so that no ghost dares go wandering, and the night is safe. The planets have no sway over us, fairies' spells don’t work, and witches can’t bewitch us. That’s how holy that night is.
So hallowed and so gracious is that time.

HORATIO
So have I heard and do in part believe it.

165 But look, the morn, in russet mantle clad,
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill.

Break we our watch up, and by my advice,
Let us impart what we have seen tonight

170 Unto young Hamlet, for, upon my life,
This spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him.
Do you consent we shall acquaint him with it,
As needful in our loves, fitting our duty?

MARCELLUS
Let’s do ’t, I pray, and I this morning know
Where we shall find him most conveniently.

Exeunt

Act 1, Scene 2

Enter CLAUDIUS, king of Denmark; GERTRUDE the queen; HAMLET; POLONIUS; his son LAERTES; and his daughter OPHELIA; LORDS attendant

CLAUDIUS
Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother’s death
The memory be green, and that it us befitted
To bear our hearts in grief and our whole kingdom
To be contracted in one brow of woe,
Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature
That we with wisest sorrow think on him
Together with remembrance of ourselves. 
10 Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen, 
Th' imperial jointress to this warlike state, 
Have we—as ’twere with a defeated joy, 
With an auspicious and a dropping eye, 
With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage, 
In equal scale weighing delight and dole— 
Taken to wife. Nor have we herein barred 
Your better wisoms, which have freely gone 
With this affair along. For all, our thanks. 
Now follows that you know. Young Fortinbras, 
Holding a weak supposal of our worth 
Or thinking by our late dear brother’s death 
Our state to be disjoint and out of frame, 
Colleaguèd with the dream of his advantage, 
He hath not failed to pester us with message 
Importing the surrender of those lands 
Lost by his father, with all bonds of law, 
To our most valiant brother. So much for him. 

Enter VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS

Now for ourself and for this time of meeting 
Thus much the business is: we have here writ 
To Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras— 
Who, impotent and bedrid, scarcely hears 
Of this his nephew’s purpose—to suppress 
His further gait herein, in that the levies, 
The lists, and full proportions are all made 
Out of his subject; and we here dispatch 
You, good Cornelius, and you, Voltemand,
of you have wisely advised all along—for which I thank you. Now, down to business. You all know what’s happening. Young Fortinbras, underestimating my strength or imagining that the death of the king has thrown my country into turmoil, dreams of getting the better of me, and never stops pestering me with demands that I surrender the territory his father lost to the elder Hamlet, my dead brother-in-law. So much for Fortinbras.

Enter VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS

Now, here’s what needs to be done. 
I’ve written to Fortinbras’s uncle, the present head of Norway, an old bedridden man who knows next to nothing about his nephew’s plans. I’ve told the uncle to stop those plans, which he has the power to do, since all the troops assembled by young Fortinbras are Norwegian, and thus under the uncle’s control. I’m giving the job of
For bearers of this greeting to old Norway,
Giving to you no further personal power
To business with the king more than the scope
Of these dilated articles allow. (gives them a paper)
Farewell, and let your haste commend your duty.

CORNELIUS, VOLTEMAND

In that and all things will we show our duty.

CLAUDIUS

We doubt it nothing. Heartily farewell.

Exeunt VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS

And now, Laertes, what’s the news with you?
You told us of some suit. What is ’t, Laertes?
You cannot speak of reason to the Dane
And lose your voice. What wouldst thou beg, Laertes,
That shall not be my offer, not thy asking?
The head is not more native to the heart,
The hand more instrumental to the mouth,
Than is the throne of Denmark to thy father.

CLAUDIUS

I have no doubt you will. Good-bye.

Exeunt VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS

LAERTES

My dread lord,
Your leave and favor to return to France,
From whence though willingly I came to Denmark
To show my duty in your coronation,

CLAUDIUS

We’ll do our duty to you in that and everything else.

Exeunt VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS

And now, Laertes, what do you have to tell me? You have a favor you to ask of me. What is it, Laertes? You’ll never waste your words when talking to the king of Denmark. What could you ever ask for that I wouldn’t give you? Your father and the Danish throne are as close as the mind and the heart, or the hand and the mouth. What would you like, Laertes?

LAERTES

My lord, I want your permission to go back to France, which I left to come to Denmark for your coronation. I confess, my thoughts are on France, now that my duty is done. Please, let me go.
CLAUDIUS
Have you your father’s leave? What says
Polonius?

POLONIUS
He hath, my lord, wrung from me my slow
leave
By laborsome petition, and at last
Upon his will I sealed my hard consent.
I do beseech you, give him leave to go.

CLAUDIUS
Take thy fair hour, Laertes. Time be thine,
And thy best graces spend it at thy will.—
But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son—

HAMLET
65 (aside) A little more than kin and less than
kind.

CLAUDIUS
How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

HAMLET
Not so, my lord. I am too much i’ the sun.

GERTRUDE
Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted color off,
And let thine eye look like a friend on
Denmark.
Do not forever with thy vailèd lids
Seek for thy noble father in the dust.
Thou know’st ’tis common. All that lives
must die,
Passing through nature to eternity.

HAMLET
Ay, madam, it is common.
GERTRUDE
If it be,

75 Why seems it so particular with thee?

HAMLET
“Seems,” madam? Nay, it is. I know not “seems.”
'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother, 
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
Nor windy suspiration of forced breath, 
Nor the dejected 'havior of the visage, 
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,

80 That can denote me truly. These indeed “seem,”
For they are actions that a man might play.
But I have that within which passeth show,
These but the trappings and the suits of woe.

CLAUDIUS
'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, 
Hamlet, 
To give these mourning duties to your father.

90 But you must know your father lost a father, 
That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound 
In filial obligation for some term

To do obsequious sorrow. But to perseve 
In obstinate condolement is a course 
Of impious stubbornness. 'Tis unmanly grief.

95 It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,
A heart unfortified, a mind impatient, 
An understanding simple and unschooled.

CLAUDIUS
Hamlet, you are so sweet and such a good son to mourn your father like this.
But you have to remember, that your father lost his father, who lost his father before him, and every time, each son has had to mourn his father for a certain period. But overdoing it is just stubborn. It’s not manly. It’s not what God wants, and it betrays a vulnerable heart and an ignorant and weak mind. Since we know that everyone must die sooner or later, why should we take it to heart? You’re committing a crime against heaven, against the dead, and against nature. And it’s irration-al, since
For what we know must be and is as common
As any the most vulgar thing to sense,
Why should we in our peevish opposition
Take it to heart? Fie! 'Tis a fault to heaven,
A fault against the dead, a fault to nature,
To reason most absurd, whose common theme
Is death of fathers, and who still hath cried,
From the first corse till he that died today,
“This must be so.” We pray you, throw to earth
This unprevailing woe, and think of us
As of a father. For let the world take note,
You are the most immediate to our throne,
the truth is that all fathers must die.
Please give up this useless mourning of yours and start thinking of me as your new father.

And with no less nobility of love
Than that which dearest father bears his son
Do I impart toward you. For your intent
In going back to school in Wittenberg,
It is most retrograde to our desire.
And we beseech you, bend you to remain
Here in the cheer and comfort of our eye,
Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.
Because everyone knows that you are the man closest to this throne, and I love you just as much as any father loves his son. And your plans for going back to Wittenberg are not what I want. I'm asking you now to stay here in my company as the number-one member of my court, my nephew and now my son too.

GERTRUDE
Let not thy mother lose her prayers,
Hamlet.
I pray thee, stay with us. Go not to Wittenberg.

HAMLET
I shall in all my best obey you, madam.

CLAUDIUS
Why, 'tis a loving and a fair reply.
Be as ourself in Denmark.—Madam, come.
This gentle and unforced accord of Hamlet

GERTRUDE
Please answer my prayers, Hamlet, and stay with us. Don’t go back to Wittenberg.

HAMLET
I’ll obey you as well as I can, ma'am.

CLAUDIUS
That’s the right answer—it shows your love. Stay in Denmark like us.—My dear wife, come. Hamlet’s agreeing to
Sits smiling to my heart, in grace whereof
No jocund health that Denmark drinks today
But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell,
And the king’s rouse the heavens shall bruit again,
Respeaking earthly thunder. Come away.

Flourish. Exeunt all but HAMLET

Trumpets play. Everyone except HAMLET exits.

HAMLET
Oh, that this too, too sullied flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew,
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God, God!

How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on 't, ah fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden
That grows to seed. Things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. That it should come to this.
But two months dead—nay, not so much, not two.
So excellent a king, that was to this
Hyperion to a satyr. So loving to my mother
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly.—Heaven and earth,

Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him
stay makes me happy, and every merry toast I’ll drink today will be heard as far as the clouds overhead. My drinking will be echoed in the heavens. Let’s go.

HAMLET
Ah, I wish my dirty flesh could melt away into a vapor, or that God had not made a law against suicide. Oh God, God! How tired, stale, and pointless life is to me. Damn it! It’s like a garden that no one’s taking care of, and that’s growing wild. Only nasty weeds grow in it now. I can’t believe it’s come to this.
My father’s only been dead for two months—no, not even two. Such an excellent king, as superior to my uncle as a god is to a beast, and so loving toward my mother that he kept the wind from blowing too hard on her face.
Oh God, do I have to remember that?
She would hang on to him, and the more she was with him the more she wanted to be with him; she couldn’t get enough of him. Yet even so, within a month of my father’s death (I don’t
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on, and yet, within a month—
Let me not think on ’t. Frailty, thy name is woman!—
A little month, or ere those shoes were old
With which she followed my poor father’s body,
Like Niobe, all tears. Why she, even she—
O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason
Would have mourned longer!—married with my uncle,
My father’s brother, but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules. Within a month,
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her gallèd eyes,
She married. O most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
It is not nor it cannot come to good,
But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

Enter HORATIO, MARCELLUS, and BARNARDO

HORATIO

Hail to your lordship.

HAMLET

I am glad to see you well.—
Horatio? Or I do forget myself?

HORATIO

The same, my lord, and your poor servant ever.

HAMLET

even want to think about it. Oh women!
You are so weak!), even before she had
broken in the shoes she wore to his funeral, crying like crazy—even an animal would have mourned its mate longer than she did!—there she was marrying my uncle, my father’s brother, who’s about as much like my father as I’m like Hercules. Less than a month after my father’s death, even before the tears on her cheeks had dried, she remarried. Oh, so quick to jump into a bed of incest! That’s not good, and no good can come of it either. But my heart must break in silence, since I can’t mention my feelings aloud.

HAMLET

I am glad to see you again, Horatio—that is your name, right?

HORATIO

That’s me, sir. Still your respectful servant.

HAMLET
Sir, my good friend, I’ll change that name with you.

And what make you from Wittenberg, Horatio?—
Marcellus!

MARCELLUS
My good lord.

HAMLET
(to MARCELLUS) I am very glad to see you.—(to BARNARDO) Good even, sir.
(to HORATIO) —But what, in faith, make you from Wittenberg?

HORATIO
A truant disposition, good my lord.

HAMLET
I would not hear your enemy say so,
Nor shall you do mine ear that violence,
To make it truster of your own report
Against yourself. I know you are no truant.
But what is your affair in Elsinore?
We’ll teach you to drink deep ere you depart.

HORATIO
My lord, I came to see your father’s funeral.

HAMLET
I pray thee, do not mock me, fellow student.
I think it was to see my mother’s wedding.

HORATIO
Indeed, my lord, it followed hard upon.

HAMLET
Thrift, thrift, Horatio! The funeral baked meats

Not my servant, but my friend. I’ll change that name for you. But what are you doing so far from Wittenberg, Horatio? —Oh, Marcellus?

MARCELLUS
Hello, sir.

HAMLET
(to MARCELLUS) So nice to see you.—(to BARNARDO) Hello, sir.(to HORATIO)—But what are you doing away from Wittenberg, Horatio?

HORATIO
I felt like skipping school, sir.

HAMLET
I wouldn’t allow your enemies to say that, and I won’t believe it from you. I know you’d never skip school. What are you doing here in Elsinore? I’ll teach you to drink hard by the time you leave.

HORATIO
Sir, we came to see your father’s funeral.

HAMLET
Please, don’t make fun of me. I think you came to see my mother’s wedding instead.

HORATIO
Well, sir, it’s true it came soon after.

HAMLET
It was all about saving a few bucks, Horatio. The leftovers from the funeral
Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables. Would I had met my dearest foe in heaven Or ever I had seen that day, Horatio. My father—methinks I see my father.

HORATIO
Where, my lord?

HAMLET
In my mind’s eye, Horatio.

HAMLET
He was a man. Take him for all in all. I shall not look upon his like again.

HORATIO
My lord, I think I saw him yesternight.

HORATIO
Two nights together had these gentlemen, dinner made a convenient wedding banquet. Oh, I’d rather have met my fiercest enemy in heaven, Horatio, than have lived through that terrible day! My father—I think I see my father.

HORATIO
Where, sir?

HAMLET
In my imagination, Horatio.

HORATIO
I saw him once. He was an admirable king.

HAMLET
He was a great human being. He was perfect in everything. I’ll never see the likes of him again.

HORATIO
Sir, I think I saw him last night.

HORATIO
Saw who?

HAMLET
Your father, sir. The dead king.

HAMLET
The king my father?!

HORATIO
Season your admiration for a while With an attent ear, till I may deliver, Upon the witness of these gentlemen, This marvel to you.

HAMLET
For God’s love, let me hear.

HORATIO
Two nights together had these gentlemen, After midnight, for two nights running,
Marcellus and Barnardo, on their watch,
In the dead waste and middle of the night,
Been thus encountered: a figure like your
father,
Armed at point exactly, cap-à-pie,
Appears before them and with solemn
march
Goes slow and stately by them. Thrice he
walked
By their oppressed and fear-surprisèd eyes
Within his truncheon’s length, whilst they,
distilled
Almost to jelly with the act of fear,
Stand dumb and speak not to him. This to me
In dreadful secrecy impart they did,
And I with them the third night kept the
watch,
Where—as they had delivered, both in
time,
Form of the thing, each word made true
and good—
The apparition comes. I knew your father.
These hands are not more like.

HAMLET
But where was this?

MARCELLUS
My lord, upon the platform where we
watch.

HAMLET
Did you not speak to it?

HORATIO
My lord, I did,

But answer made it none. Yet once
methought

these two guards, Marcellus and
Barnardo, saw a figure that looked very
much like your father, in full armor
from head to toe. It just appeared before
them and marched past them with slow
dignity three times, a staff’s distance
from their amazed eyes, while they
turned, quaking with fear and too
shocked to speak. They told me all
about this, so on the third night I agreed
to come stand guard with them, to see
for myself. It happened again, just as
they had described. I knew your father.
This ghost looked as much like him as
my two hands are like each other.

HAMLET
But where did this happen?

MARCELLUS
On the platform where we stand guard,
sir.

HAMLET
Didn’t you talk to it?

HORATIO
I did, sir, but it didn’t answer me. It
raised its head once as if it was about to
speak, but just then the rooster started
It lifted up its head and did address
Itself to motion, like as it would speak.
But even then the morning cock crew loud,
And at the sound it shrunk in haste away
And vanished from our sight.

HAMLET
'Tis very strange.

HORATIO
As I do live, my honored lord, 'tis true.
And we did think it writ down in our duty
To let you know of it.

HAMLET
Indeed, indeed, sirs, but this troubles me.

HORATIO
I swear to God it's true, sir. We thought
you ought to know about it.

HAMLET
Hold you the watch tonight?

MARCELLUS, BARNARDO
We do, my lord.

HAMLET
Armed, say you?

MARCELLUS, BARNARDO
Armed, my lord.

HAMLET
From top to toe?

MARCELLUS, BARNARDO
My lord, from head to foot.

HAMLET
Then saw you not his face?

HORATIO
Oh yes, my lord. He wore his beaver up.

HAMLET
What, looked he frowningly?

HORATIO
A countenance more
In sorrow than in anger.

crowing, and the ghost vanished from
sight.
HAMLET
Pare or red?

HORATIO
Nay, very pale.

HAMLET
And fixed his eyes upon you?

HORATIO
Most constantly.

HAMLET
I would I had been there.

HORATIO
It would have much amazed you.

HAMLET
Very like. Stayed it long?

HORATIO
While one with moderate haste might tell a hundred.

MARCELLUS, BARNARDO
Longer, longer.

HORATIO
Not when I saw 't.

HAMLET
His beard was grizzled, no?

HORATIO
240 It was, as I have seen it in his life,
A sable silvered.

HAMLET
I will watch tonight. Perchance
'Twill walk again.

HORATIO
I warrant it will.
HAMLET
If it assume my noble father’s person,
I’ll speak to it, though Hell itself should
gape
And bid me hold my peace. I pray you all,
If you have hitherto concealed this sight,
Let it be tenable in your silence still.
And whatsoever else shall hap tonight,
I will requite your loves. So fare you well.
Upon the platform, ’twixt eleven and twelve,
I’ll visit you.

HORATIO, MARCELLUS,
BARNARDO
Our duty to your honor.

HAMLET
Your loves, as mine to you. Farewell.

Exeunt all but HAMLET

My father’s spirit in arms. All is not well.
I doubt some foul play. Would the night were come!
Till then sit still, my soul. Foul deeds will rise,
Though all the earth o’erwhelm them, to men’s eyes.

Exit

HAMLET exits.

Act 1, Scene 3

Enter LAERTES and OPHELIA, his sister

LAERTES
My necessaries are embarked. Farewell.

LAERTES and his sister OPHELIA enter.
And, sister, as the winds give benefit
And convey is assistant, do not sleep,
But let me hear from you.

OPHELIA
Do you doubt that?

LAERTES
For Hamlet and the trifling of his favor,
Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood,
A violet in the youth of primy nature,
Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,
The perfume and suppliance of a minute.

OPHELIA
No more but so?

LAERTES
Think it no more.
For nature, crescent, does not grow alone
In thews and bulk, but, as this temple
waxes,
The inward service of the mind and soul
Grows wide withal. Perhaps he loves you now,
And now no soil nor cautel doth besmirch
The virtue of his will, but you must fear.
His greatness weighed, his will is not his own,
For he himself is subject to his birth.
He may not, as unvalued persons do,
Carve for himself, for on his choice depends
The safety and health of this whole state.
And therefore must his choice be circumscribed
Unto the voice and yielding of that body
Whereof he is the head. Then if he says he

Good-bye. And, my dear sister, as long as the winds are blowing and ships are sailing, let me hear from you—write.

OPHELIA
Do you doubt I’ll write?

LAERTES
As for Hamlet and his attentions to you, just consider it a big flirtation, the temporary phase of a hot-blooded youth. It won’t last. It’s sweet, but his affection will fade after a minute. Not a second more.

OPHELIA
No more than a minute?

LAERTES
Try to think of it like that, anyway. When a youth grows into a man, he doesn’t just get bigger in his body—his responsibilities grow too. He may love you now, and may have only the best intentions, but you have to be on your guard. Remember that he belongs to the royal family, and his intentions don’t matter that much—he’s a slave to his family obligations. He can’t simply make personal choices for himself the way common people can, since the whole country depends on what he does. His choice has to agree with what the nation wants.
loves you,

25 It fits your wisdom so far to believe it
   As he in his particular act and place
   May give his saying deed, which is no further
   Than the main voice of Denmark goes withal.

   Then weigh what loss your honor may sustain
   If with too credent ear you list his songs,
   Or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure open
   To his unmastered importunity.

30 Fear it, Ophelia. Fear it, my dear sister,
   And keep you in the rear of your affection,
   Out of the shot and danger of desire.

   The chariest maid is prodigal enough
   If she unmask her beauty to the moon.
   Virtue itself ’scapes not calumnious strokes.
   The canker galls the infants of the spring
   Too oft before their buttons be disclosed.
   And in the morn and liquid dew of youth,
   Contagious blastments are most imminent.
   Be wary, then. Best safety lies in fear.
   Youth to itself rebels, though none else near.

   OPHELIA

40 I shall the effect of this good lesson keep
   As watchman to my heart. But, good my brother,
   Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,
   Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven
   While, like a puffed and reckless libertine,

So if he says he loves you, you should be wise enough to see that his words only mean as much as the state of Denmark allows them to mean. Then think about how shameful it would be for you to give in to his seductive talk and surrender your treasure chest to his greedy hands. Watch out, Ophelia. Just keep your love under control, and don’t let yourself become a target of his lust. Simply exposing your beauty to the moon at night is risky enough—you don’t have to expose yourself to him. Even good girls sometimes get a bad reputation. Worms ruin flowers before they blossom. Baby blooms are most susceptible to disease. So be careful. Fear will keep you safe. Young people often lose their self-control even without any help from others.

   OPHELIA

50 I’ll keep your words of wisdom close to my heart. But, my dear brother, don’t be like a bad priest who fails to practice what he preaches, showing me the steep and narrow way to heaven while you frolic on the primrose path of sin.
Himself the primrose path of dalliance
treads
And recks not his own rede.

**LAERTES**

O, fear me not.

Enter **POLONIUS**

I stay too long. But here my father comes. A double blessing is a double grace. Occasion smiles upon a second leave.

**POLONIUS**

55 Yet here, Laertes? Aboard, aboard, for shame!
The wind sits in the shoulder of your sail
And you are stayed for. There, my blessing with thee.

60 And these few precepts in thy memory
Look thou character. Give thy thoughts no tongue,
Nor any unproportioned thought his act.
Be thou familiar but by no means vulgar.

65 Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of steel,
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment

70 Of each new-hatched, unfledged comrade.
Beware
Of entrance to a quarrel, but being in,
Bear ’t that th’ opposèd may beware of thee.

75 Take each man’s censure but reserve thy judgment.
Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
But not expressed in fancy—rich, not gaudy,
80 For the apparel oft proclaims the man,  
And they in France of the best rank and station  
Are of a most select and generous chief in that.
Neither a borrower nor a lender be,  
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,  
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.  
This above all: to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.
Farewell. My blessing season this in thee.

LAERTES  
Most humbly do I take my leave, my lord.

POLONIUS  
The time invites you. Go. Your servants tend.

LAERTES  
Farewell, Ophelia, and remember well  
What I have said to you.

OPHELIA  
'Tis in my memory locked,  
And you yourself shall keep the key of it.

LAERTES  
Farewell.

Exit LAERTES

POLONIUS  
What is 't, Ophelia, he hath said to you?

OPHELIA  
So please you, something touching the Lord Hamlet.

POLONIUS  
Marry, well bethought.  
'Tis told me he hath very oft of late
Given private time to you, and you yourself
Have of your audience been most free and bounteous.
If it be so as so ’tis put on me—
And that in way of caution—I must tell you,
You do not understand yourself so clearly
As it behooves my daughter and your honor.
What is between you? Give me up the truth.

OPHELIA
He hath, my lord, of late made many

tenders
Of his affection to me.

POLONIUS
Affection! Pooh, you speak like a green girl,
Unsifted in such perilous circumstance.
Do you believe his “tenders,” as you call them?

OPHELIA
I do not know, my lord, what I should think.

POLONIUS
Marry, I’ll teach you. Think yourself a baby
That you have ta’en these tenders for true pay,
Which are not sterling. Tender yourself more dearly,
Or—not to crack the wind of the poor phrase,
Running it thus—you’ll tender me a fool.

alone with you recently, and you’ve made yourself quite available to him. If things are the way people tell me they are—and they’re only telling me this to warn me—then I have to say, you’re not conducting yourself with the self-restraint a daughter of mine should show. What’s going on between you two? Tell me the truth.

OPHELIA
He’s offered me a lot of affection lately.

POLONIUS
“Affection!” That’s nothing! You’re talking like some innocent girl who doesn’t understand the ways of the world. Do you believe his “offers,” as you call them?

OPHELIA
I don’t know what to believe, father.

POLONIUS
Then I’ll tell you. Believe that you are a foolish little baby for believing these “offers” are something real. Offer yourself more respect, or—not to beat this word to death—you’ll offer me the chance to be a laughing-stock.
OPHELIA
110 My lord, he hath importuned me with love
In honorable fashion.

POLONIUS
Ay, “fashion” you may call it. Go to, go to.

OPHELIA
And hath given countenance to his speech,
my lord,
With almost all the holy vows of heaven.

POLONIUS
115 Ay, springes to catch woodcocks. I do know,
When the blood burns, how prodigal the soul
Lends the tongue vows. These blazes,
Giving more light than heat, extinct in both
Even in their promise as it is a-making,
You must not take for fire. From this time
Be somewhat scanter of your maiden presence.

120 Set your entreatments at a higher rate
Than a command to parley. For Lord Hamlet,
Believe so much in him that he is young,
And with a larger tether may he walk
Than may be given you. In few, Ophelia,
Do not believe his vows, for they are brokers
Not of that dye which their investments show,
But mere implorators of unholy suits,
Breathing like sanctified and pious bawds,
The better to beguile. This is for all:

OPHELIA
Father, he’s always talked about love in an honorable fashion—

POLONIUS
Yes, “fashion” is just the word—a passing whim. Go on.

OPHELIA
And he’s made the holiest vows to me, to back up what he says.

POLONIUS
These vows are just traps for stupid birds. I know when a man is on fire, he’ll swear anything. But when a heart’s on fire, it gives out more light than heat, and the fire will be out even before he’s done making his promises. Don’t mistake that for true love. From now on, spend a little less time with him and talk to him less. Make yourself a precious commodity. Remember that Hamlet is young and has a lot more freedom to fool around than you do. In short, Ophelia, don’t believe his love vows, since they’re like flashy pimps who wear nice clothes to lead a woman into filthy acts. To put it plainly, don’t waste your time with Hamlet. Do as I say. Now come along.
I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth,
Have you so slander any moment leisure,
As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet.
Look to ’t, I charge you. Come your ways.

OPHELIA
I shall obey, my lord.

OPHELIA
I’ll do as you say, father.

Exeunt

They exit.

Act 1, Scene 4

Enter HAMLET, HORATIO, and MARCELLUS

HAMLET
The air bites shrewdly. It is very cold.

HORATIO
It is a nipping and an eager air.

HAMLET
What hour now?

HORATIO
I think it lacks of twelve.

HAMLET
The air is biting cold.

HORATIO
Yes, it’s definitely nippy.

HAMLET
What time is it?

HORATIO
A little before twelve, I think.

MARCELLUS
No, it is struck.

MARCELLUS
No, it’s just after twelve; I heard the clock strike.

HORATIO
Really? I didn’t hear it. So it’s nearly the time when the ghost likes to appear.

A flourish of trumpets and two pieces of ordnance goes off

Trumpets play offstage and two cannons are fired.

What does this mean, my lord?

HAMLET
The king doth wake tonight and takes his

HAMLET
The king is staying up all night drinking
10 rouse,
    Keeps wassail and the swaggering upspring reels,
And, as he drains his draughts of Rhenish down,
The kettle-drum and trumpet thus bray out
The triumph of his pledge.

HORATIO
Is it a custom?

HAMLET
15 Ay, marry, is ’t.
    But to my mind, though I am native here
And to the manner born, it is a custom
More honored in the breach than the observance.

20 This heavy-headed revel east and west
    Makes us traduced and taxed of other nations.

    They clepe us drunkards and with swinish phrase
    Soil our addition. And indeed it takes
From our achievements, though performed
25 at height,
    The pith and marrow of our attribute.

    So oft it chances in particular men
That for some vicious mole of nature in them—

30 As in their birth (wherein they are not guilty,
    Since nature cannot choose his origin),
By the o’ergrowth of some complexion,
Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason,

35 Or by some habit that too much o’erleavens
    The form of plausible manners—that these

and dancing. As he guzzles down his German wine, the musicians make a ruckus to celebrate his draining another cup.

HORATIO
Is that a tradition?

HAMLET
Yes, it is. But though I was born here and should consider that tradition part of my own heritage, I think it would be better to ignore it than practice it. Other countries criticize us for our loud partying.

They call us drunks and insult our noble titles. And our drunkenness does detract from our achievements, as great as they are, and lessens our reputations. It’s just like what happens to certain people who have some birth defect (which they are not responsible for, since nobody chooses how he’s born), or some weird habit or compulsion that changes them completely. It happens sometimes that one little defect in these people, as wonderful and talented as they may be, will make them look completely bad to other people. A tiny spot of evil casts doubt on their good qualities and ruins their reputations.
men,
Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect,
Being nature’s livery or fortune’s star,
Their virtues else (be they as pure as grace,
As infinite as man may undergo)
Shall in the general censure take corruption
From that particular fault. The dram of evil
Doth all the noble substance of a doubt
To his own scandal.

Enter GHOST

HAMLET
Angels and ministers of grace defend us!
Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damned,
Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts
from hell,
Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
Thou comest in such a questionable shape
That I will speak to thee. I’ll call thee
“Hamlet,”
“King,” “Father,” “royal Dane.” O, answer
me!
Let me not burst in ignorance, but tell
Why thy canonized bones, hearsed in death,
Have burst their cerements; why the
sepulcher,
Wherein we saw thee quietly interred,
Hath oped his ponderous and marble jaws
To cast thee up again. What may this mean,
That thou, dead corse, again in complete
steel
Revisits thus the glimpses of the moon,
Making night hideous and we fools of
nature,

HORATIO
Look, my lord, it comes!

HORATIO
Look, sir—here it comes!

HAMLET
Oh angels, protect us! Whether you’re a
good spirit or a cursed demon, whether
you bring heavenly breezes or blasts of
hell fire, whether your intentions are
good or evil, you look so strange I want
to talk to you. I’ll call you “Hamlet
Senior,” “King,” “Father,” “royal Dane.”
Answer me! Don’t drive me crazy with
curiosity, but tell me why your church-
buried bones have burst out of their
coffin, and why your tomb,
60 So horridly to shake our disposition
With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls?
Say why is this? Wherefore? What should we do?

GHOST beckons HAMLET  The GHOST motions for HAMLET to come with it.

HORATIO
It beckons you to go away with it,
As if it some impartation did desire
To you alone.

MARCELLUS
Look, with what courteous action
It waves you to a more removèd ground.

HORATIO
No, by no means.

HAMLET
It will not speak. Then I will follow it.

HORATIO
Do not, my lord.

HAMLET
Why, what should be the fear?
I do not set my life in a pin’s fee,
And for my soul—what can it do to that,
Being a thing immortal as itself?
It waves me forth again. I’ll follow it.

HORATIO
What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff
That beetles o'er his base into the sea,
And there assume some other horrible form,
Which might deprive your sovereignty of

75 should we do?

HORATIO
It wants you to go off with it, as if it wants to tell you something alone.

MARCELLUS
Look how politely it’s pointing you to a place that’s farther away. But don’t go.

HORATIO
Definitely not.

HAMLET
It’s not going to speak, so I’ll follow it.

HORATIO
Don’t do it, sir.

HAMLET
Why, what’s the danger? I don’t value my life one bit. And as for my soul, how can the ghost endanger that, since it’s as immortal as the ghost is? Look, it’s waving me over again. I’ll follow it.

HORATIO
What if it tempts you to jump into the sea, sir? Or to the terrifying cliff that overhangs the water,

where it takes on some other horrible form that drives you insane. Think about
reason
And draw you into madness? Think of it.
The very place puts toys of desperation,
80 Without more motive, into every brain
That looks so many fathoms to the sea
And hears it roar beneath.

HAMLET
It waves me still.
—Go on. I’ll follow thee.

MARCELLUS
You shall not go, my lord.

MARCELLUS and HORATIO try to hold HAMLET back

HAMLET
Hold off your hands.

HORATIO
85 Be ruled. You shall not go.

HAMLET
My fate cries out
And makes each petty artery in this body
As hardy as the Nemean lion’s nerve.
Still am I called.—Unhand me, gentlemen.
(draws his sword)
90 By heaven, I’ll make a ghost of him that lets me.
I say, away!—Go on. I’ll follow thee.

Exeunt GHOST and HAMLET

HORATIO
He waxes desperate with imagination.

MARCELLUS
Let’s follow. ’Tis not fit thus to obey him.

HORATIO
The GHOST and HAMLET exit.

HORATIO
His imagination is making him crazy.

MARCELLUS
Let’s follow them. It’s not right to obey his orders to let him go alone.

HORATIO
Have after. To what issue will this come?

MARCELLUS
95 Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

HORATIO
Heaven will direct it.

MARCELLUS
Nay, let’s follow him.

Go ahead and follow him. But what does all this mean, where will it all end?

MARCELLUS
It means that something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

HORATIO
If that’s true, we should let God take care of it.

MARCELLUS
No, let’s follow him.

Exeunt

Act 1, Scene 5

Enter GHOST and HAMLET

HAMLET
Where wilt thou lead me? Speak, I’ll go no further.

GHOST
Mark me.

HAMLET
I will.

GHOST
My hour is almost come
When I to sulfurous and tormenting flames
Must render up myself.

HAMLET
Alas, poor ghost!

GHOST
5 Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing
To what I shall unfold.

HAMLET
Speak. I am bound to hear.

GHOST

The GHOST and HAMLET enter.

HAMLET
Where are you taking me? Speak. I’m not going any farther.

GHOST
Listen to me.

HAMLET
I will.

GHOST
The hour has almost come when I have to return to the horrible flames of purgatory.

HAMLET
Ah, poor ghost!

GHOST
Don’t pity me. Just listen carefully to what I have to tell you.

HAMLET
Speak. I’m ready to hear you.

GHOST
So art thou to revenge when thou shalt hear.

**HAMLET**
What?

**GHOST**
I am thy father’s spirit,

10 Doomed for a certain term to walk the night
And for the day confined to fast in fires,
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
Are burnt and purged away. But that I am forbid
To tell the secrets of my prison house,
I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,

Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,
Thy knotted and combinèd locks to part
And each particular hair to stand on end,
Like quills upon the fearful porpentine.
But this eternal blazon must not be
To ears of flesh and blood. List, list, O, list!
If thou didst ever thy dear father love—

**HAMLET**
O God!

**GHOST**
25 Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

**HAMLET**
Murder?

**GHOST**
Murder most foul, as in the best it is.
But this most foul, strange and unnatural.

You must be ready for revenge, too, when you hear me out.

**HAMLET**
What?

**GHOST**
I’m the ghost of your father, doomed for a certain period of time to walk the earth at night, while during the day I’m trapped in the fires of purgatory until I’ve done penance for my past sins. If I weren’t forbidden to tell you the secrets of purgatory, I could tell you stories that would slice through your soul, freeze your blood,

make your eyes jump out of their sockets, and your hair stand on end like porcupine quills. But mortals like you aren’t allowed to hear this description of the afterlife. Listen, listen! If you ever loved your poor dear father—

**HAMLET**
Oh God!

**GHOST**
Take revenge for his horrible murder, that crime against nature.

**HAMLET**
Murder?

**GHOST**
His most horrible murder. Murder’s always horrible, but this one was
HAMLET

Haste me to know 't, that I, with wings as swift
As meditation or the thoughts of love,
May sweep to my revenge.

GHOST

I find thee apt,
And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed
That roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf,
Wouldst thou not stir in this. Now, Hamlet, hear.
'Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard,
A serpent stung me. So the whole ear of Denmark
Is by a forgèd process of my death
Rankly abused. But know, thou noble youth,
The serpent that did sting thy father's life
Now wears his crown.

HAMLET

O my prophetic soul! My uncle?

GHOST

Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts—
O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power
So to seduce!—won to his shameful lust
The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen.
O Hamlet, what a falling off was there!
From me, whose love was of that dignity
That it went hand in hand even with the vow
especially horrible, weird, and unnatural.

HAMLET

Hurry and tell me about it, so I can take revenge right away, faster than a person falls in love.

GHOST

I’m glad you’re eager. You’d have to be as lazy as a weed on the shores of Lethe not to get riled up here. Now listen, Hamlet. Everyone was told that a poisonous snake bit me when I was sleeping in the orchard. But in fact, that’s a lie that’s fooled everyone in Denmark. You should know, my noble son, the real snake that stung your father is now wearing his crown.

HAMLET

I knew it! My uncle?

GHOST

Yes, that incestuous, adulterous animal. With his clever words and fancy gifts, he seduced my seemingly virtuous queen, persuading her to give in to his lust. They were evil words and gifts to seduce her like that! Oh, Hamlet, how far she fell! She went from me, who loved her with the dignity and devotion that suits a legitimate marriage, to a wretch whose natural gifts were poor compared to mine. But just as you can’t corrupt a
I made to her in marriage, and to decline
Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor
To those of mine.
But virtue, as it never will be moved,
Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven,
So lust, though to a radiant angel linked,
Will sate itself in a celestial bed
And prey on garbage.
But soft! Methinks I scent the morning air.
Brief let me be. Sleeping within my orchard,
My custom always of the afternoon,
Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole
With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial,
And in the porches of my ears did pour
The leperous distilment, whose effect
Holds such an enmity with blood of man
That swift as quicksilver it courses through
The natural gates and alleys of the body
And with a sudden vigor doth posset
And curd, like eager droppings into milk,
The thin and wholesome blood. So did it mine.
And a most instant tetter barked about,
Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust
All my smooth body.
Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother’s hand
Of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatched,
Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,
Unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled.
No reckoning made, but sent to my account
I had no chance to repent my sins or receive last rites. Oh, it’s horrible, horrible, so horrible! If you are human,
80 With all my imperfections on my head. 
Oh, horrible, oh, horrible, most horrible!
If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not. 
Let not the royal bed of Denmark be 
A couch for luxury and damned incest.
85 But howsoever thou pursuest this act, 
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul 
contrive 
Against thy mother aught. Leave her to 
heaven
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge 
To prick and sting. Fare thee well at once. 
The glowworm shows the matin to be 
near, 
And 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire. 
Adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me.

Exit 

The GHOST exits.

HAMLET
O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else? 
And shall I couple hell? Oh, fie! Hold, hold, my heart,
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old, 
But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee! 
Ay, thou poor ghost, whilsts memory holds a seat
95 In this distracted globe. Remember thee! 
Yea, from the table of my memory 
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records, 
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past 
100 That youth and observation copied there, 
And thy commandment all alone shall live 

HAMLET
Ah, all you up in heaven! And earth!
What else? Shall I include hell as well?
Damn it! Keep beating, my heart, and muscles, don't grow old yet—keep me standing. Remember you! Yes, you poor ghost, as long as I have any power of memory in this distracted head. 
Remember you! Yes, I'll wipe my mind clean of all trivial facts and memories and preserve only your commandment there. Yes, by God! Oh, you evil woman! Oh, you villain, villain, you damned, smiling villain! Where's my notebook?—It's a good idea for me to write down that one can smile and
Within the book and volume of my brain, Unmixed with baser matter. Yes, by heaven!

110 O most pernicious woman! O villain, villain, smiling, damnèd villain! My tables!—Meet it is I set it down That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain.

At least I’m sure it may be so in Denmark. (writes) So, uncle, there you are. Now it’s time to deal with the vow I made to my father.

He said, “Remember me.” I swore I would.

It is “Adieu, adieu. Remember me.” I have sworn ’t.

Enter HORATIO and MARCELLUS

HORATIO My lord, my lord!

MARCELLUS Lord Hamlet—

115 Heaven secure him!

HORATIO Illo, ho, ho, my lord!

HORATIO So be it.

HORATIO Illo, ho, ho, my lord!

HAMLET Hillo, ho, ho, boy. Come, bird, come.

MARCELLUS How is ’t, my noble lord?

HORATIO What news, my lord?

HAMLET Oh-ho-ho, sir!

HORATIO Oh-ho-ho, kid! Come here.

MARCELLUS So how did it go, sir?

HORATIO What happened, sir?

HAMLET It was incredible!

HORATIO
Good my lord, tell it.

HAMLET
   No. You’ll reveal it.

HORATIO
Not I, my lord, by heaven.

MARCELLUS
Nor I, my lord.

HAMLET
How say you, then? Would heart of man once think it?
   But you’ll be secret?

HORATIO, MARCELLUS
   Ay, by heaven, my lord.

HAMLET
There’s ne'er a villain dwelling in all Denmark
   But he’s an arrant knave.

HORATIO
There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave
   To tell us this.

HAMLET
   Why, right, you are in the right.
   And so, without more circumstance at all,
   I hold it fit that we shake hands and part.
   You, as your business and desire shall point you—
   For every man has business and desire,
   Such as it is—and for my own poor part,
   Look you, I’ll go pray.

HORATIO
These are but wild and whirling words, my lord.

HAMLET
Oh, please, tell us, sir.

HAMLET
No, you’ll talk.

HORATIO
I swear I won’t, sir.

MARCELLUS
I won’t either, sir.

HAMLET
Okay. But you promise you can keep a secret?

HORATIO, MARCELLUS
Yes, I swear.

HAMLET
Any villain in Denmark is going to be, well, a villain.

HORATIO
You don’t need a ghost returning from the grave to tell you that, sir.

HAMLET
Yes, you’re absolutely right. So, without further ado, the best thing to do now is probably just to shake hands and go our separate ways. You go and take care of your business (since everybody has some business to take care of, whatever it is worth), and I’ll go and pray.

HORATIO
You’re talking in such a crazy way, sir.
I’m sorry they offend you, heartily.
Yes faith, heartily.

HORATIO
There’s no offense, my lord.

HAMLET
Yes, by Saint Patrick, but there is, Horatio,
And much offense too. Touching this vision here,
It is an honest ghost, that let me tell you.
For your desire to know what is between us,
O'ermaster ’t as you may. And now, good friends,
As you are friends, scholars and soldiers,
Give me one poor request.

HORATIO
What is ’t, my lord? We will.

HAMLET
Never make known what you have seen tonight.

HORATIO, MARCELLUS
My lord, we will not.

HAMLET
Nay, but swear ’t.

HORATIO
In faith, my lord, not I.

MARCELLUS
Nor I, my lord, in faith.

HAMLET
Upon my sword.

MARCELLUS
We have sworn, my lord, already.

HAMLET
I’m sorry if I offended you; yes, very sorry.

HORATIO
Oh, don’t worry about it, sir. No offense taken.

HAMLET
Ah, but there is, Horatio, there’s a lot of offense. As for this ghost we just saw, he’s a real one, I can tell you that much. But regarding what happened between us, don’t ask—I can’t tell you. And now, my friends, my courageous and educated friends, do me one small favor.

HORATIO
What is it, sir? Of course we will.

HAMLET
Don’t ever tell anyone what you’ve seen tonight.

HORATIO, MARCELLUS
We won’t, sir.

HAMLET
No, you have to swear it.

HORATIO
I swear to God I won’t.

MARCELLUS
Me too, I won’t, I swear to God.

HAMLET
Swear by my sword.

MARCELLUS
But we already swore, sir.
Indeed, upon my sword, indeed.

**GHOST**
(cries under the stage) Swear!

**HAMLET**
Ha, ha, boy! Sayst thou so? Art thou there, truepenny?
Come on, you hear this fellow in the cellarage.
Consent to swear.

**HORATIO**
Propose the oath, my lord.

**HAMLET**
Never to speak of this that you have seen.
Swear by my sword.

**GHOST**
(beneath) Swear.

**HAMLET**
Hic et ubique? Then we’ll shift our ground.

Come hither, gentlemen,
And lay your hands again upon my sword.
Swear by my sword
Never to speak of this that you have heard.

**GHOST**
(beneath) Swear by his sword.

**HAMLET**
Well said, old mole! Canst work i’ th’ earth so fast?
A worthy pioneer! Once more remove, good friends.

**HORATIO**
O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!

Yes, but swear by my sword this time.

**GHOST**
(calls out from under the stage) Swear!

**HAMLET**
Ha ha, is that what you say, kid? Are you down there, my man?—Come on, you hear this guy down in the basement. Agree to swear.

**HORATIO**
Tell us what to swear, sir.

**HAMLET**
You swear never to mention what you’ve seen. Swear by my sword.

**GHOST**
(from under the stage) Swear.

**HAMLET**
You’re everywhere, aren’t you? Maybe we should move. Come over here, gentlemen, and put your hands on my sword again. Swear by my sword you’ll never mention what you’ve heard.

**GHOST**
(from under the stage) Swear by his sword.

**HAMLET**
You said it right, old mole. You’re pretty busy down there in the dirt, aren’t you? What a tunneler! Let’s move again, my friends.

**HORATIO**
My God, this is unbelievably strange.
HAMLET
And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.
There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy. But come,
Here, as before, never, so help you mercy,
How strange or odd soe'er I bear myself
(As I perchance hereafter shall think meet
To put an antic disposition on),
That you, at such times seeing me, never shall—
With arms encumbered thus, or this headshake,
Or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase,
As “Well, well, we know,” or “We could an if we would,”
Or “If we list to speak,” or “There be an if they might,”
Or such ambiguous giving out—to note
That you know aught of me. This not to do,
So grace and mercy at your most need help you,
Swear.

GHOST
(beneath) Swear!

HAMLET
Rest, rest, perturbèd spirit!—So,

GHOST
(from under the stage) Swear.

HAMLET
Okay, then, unhappy ghost, you can rest now. So, gentlemen, I thank you heartily and with all my love, and I’ll repay you however I can some day. Let’s go back to court together, but shhh, please. No talking about this.
190  God willing, shall not lack. Let us go in
together,
And still your fingers on your lips, I pray.
The time is out of joint. O cursèd spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!
Nay, come, let’s go together.

Exeunt

There is so much out of whack in these
times. And damn the fact that I’m
supposed to fix it! Come on, let’s go.

Act 2, Scene 1

Enter POLONIUS with his
man REYNALDO

POLONIUS
Give him this money and these notes,
Reynaldo.

REYNALDO
I will, my lord.

POLONIUS
You shall do marvelous wisely, good
Reynaldo,
Before you visit him, to make inquire
Of his behavior.

REYNALDO
My lord, I did intend it.

POLONIUS
Marry, well said, very well said. Look you,
sir,
Inquire me first what Danskers are in Paris,
And how, and who, what means, and where
they keep
What company at what expense; and
finding
By this encompassment and drift of
question
15  That they do know my son, come you more
nearer
Than your particular demands will touch it.
Take you, as 'twere, some distant
knowledge of him,
As thus: “I know his father and his friends,
And, in part, him.” Do you mark this,
Reynaldo?

REYNALDO
Ay, very well, my lord.

POLONIUS
“And in part him, but,” you may say, “not
well.
But, if ’t be he I mean, he’s very wild.
20 Addicted so and so.—” And there put on
him
What forgeries you please. Marry, none so
rank
As may dishonor him. Take heed of that.
But, sir, such wanton, wild, and usual slips
As are companions noted and most known
To youth and liberty.

REYNALDO
As gaming, my lord?

POLONIUS
Ay, or drinking, fencing, swearing,
Quarreling, drabbing—you may go so far.

REYNALDO
My lord, that would dishonor him!

POLONIUS
‘Faith, no, as you may season it in the
charge.
30 You must not put another scandal on him
That he is open to incontinency.
That’s not my meaning. But breathe his

REYNALDO
Like, “I’m a friend of his father and I sort
of know him,” or whatever. Do you get
what I’m saying, Reynaldo?

REYNALDO
Yes, very well, sir.

POLONIUS
You should say, “I sort of know him, but
not well. Is it the same Laertes who’s a
wild party animal? Isn’t he the one
who’s always,” and so on. Then just
make up whatever you want—of course,
nothing so bad that it would shame him.
I mean make up any stories that

REYNALDO
That’s right, or drinking, swearing, fist-
fighting, visiting prostitutes—that kind
of thing.

REYNALDO
But that would ruin his reputation!

POLONIUS
Oh no, not if you say it right. I don’t
want you to say he’s a sex fiend, that’s
not what I mean. Just mention his faults
lightly, so they make him seem like a
free spirit who’s gone a little too far.
faults so quaintly
    That they may seem the taints of liberty,
35 The flash and outbreak of a fiery mind,
    A savageness in unreclaimèd blood,
    Of general assault.

REYNALDO
    But, my good lord—

POLONIUS
    Wherefore should you do this?

REYNALDO
    Ay, my lord. I would know that.

POLONIUS
    Marry, sir, here’s my drift:
    (And I believe it is a fetch of wit)
30 You, laying these slight sullies on my son
    As ’twere a thing a little soiled i’ th’
    working—
    Mark you, your party in converse, him you
    would sound,
40 Having ever seen in the prenominate crimes
    The youth you breathe of guilty, be assured
    He closes with you in this consequence:
    “Good sir” or so, or “Friend,” or
    “Gentleman,”
    According to the phrase or the addition
    Of man and country.

REYNALDO
    Very good, my lord.

POLONIUS
    And then, sir, does he this, he does— What
    was I about to say? By the mass, I was
    about to say something. Where did I leave?

REYNALDO
    But, sir—

POLONIUS
    Why should you do this, you want to
    know?

REYNALDO
    Yes, sir. I’d like to know.

POLONIUS
    Well, here’s what I’m thinking. (I’m
    quite proud of myself for coming up
    with this.) As you talk with someone and
    hint about my son’s faults and little sins,
    you’ll watch his reaction, and if he’s
    ever seen Laertes do any of these things,
    it will only be natural for him to agree
    with you, at which point he’ll call you
    “sir,” or “my good friend,” depending on
    who the person is, where he comes from,
    and so on.

REYNALDO
    Yes, sir.

POLONIUS
    And then he’ll … he’ll … wait, what
    was I about to say? Good God, I was
    about to say something. What was I
    saying?
At “closes in the consequence,” at “friend,’
Or so” and “gentleman.”

POLONIUS
At “closes in the consequence.” Ay, marry. He closes thus: “I know the gentleman.
I saw him yesterday”—or “t’ other day,”
Or then, or then, with such or such—“and,
as you say,
There was he gaming, there o'ertook in’s rouse,
There falling out at tennis,” or, perchance,
“I saw him enter such a house of sale”—Videlicet a brothel, or so forth. See you now,
Your bait of falsehood takes this carp of truth.
And thus do we of wisdom and of reach,
With windlasses and with assays of bias,
By indirections find directions out.
So by my former lecture and advice
Shall you my son. You have me, have you not?

REYNALDO
My lord, I have.

POLONIUS God be wi’ you. Fare you well.

REYNALDO Good my lord.

POLONIUS 70 Observe his inclination in yourself.

REYNALDO I shall, my lord.

POLONIUS At, “It will be natural for him to agree with you … he’ll call you ‘sir,’
‘friend,’” et cetera.

POLONIUS “It will be natural for him to agree with you.” Ah, yes, that’s right. If he agrees he’ll say something like this: “Yes, I know the gentleman you’re referring to.
I just saw him yesterday,” or “the other day,” or whenever it is, you know, “and there he was gambling,” or “there he was, totally wasted, or fighting with somebody about a tennis match, or going into a house of ill repute”—that means a whorehouse, you know—or whatever. Make sure your little lie brings out the truth. We’re doing this wisely and intelligently, indirectly, finding out things by roundabout means. That’s how you’ll find out what my son is up to in Paris. You get my point, don’t you?

REYNALDO Yes, I do, sir.

POLONIUS God bless you. Have a safe trip.

REYNALDO Thank you, sir.

POLONIUS Don’t forget to see what he’s up to with your own eyes. Don’t trust gossip.

REYNALDO I will, sir.

POLONIUS
And let him ply his music.

REYNALDO
Well, my lord.

POLONIUS
Farewell.

Exit REYNALDO

Enter OPHELIA

How now, Ophelia? What’s the matter?

OPHELIA
75 O my lord, my lord, I have been so affrighted!

POLONIUS
With what, i' th' name of God?

OPHELIA
My lord, as I was sewing in my closet, Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced; No hat upon his head; his stockings fouled, Ungartered, and down-gyvèd to his ankle; Pale as his shirt; his knees knocking each other; And with a look so piteous in purport As if he had been loosèd out of hell To speak of horrors—he comes before me.

POLONIUS
85 Mad for thy love?

OPHELIA
My lord, I do not know. But truly, I do fear it.

POLONIUS
What said he?

OPHELIA
He took me by the wrist and held me hard.
Then goes he to the length of all his arm,
And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow,
He falls to such perusal of my face
As he would draw it. Long stayed he so.

At last, a little shaking of mine arm
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
He raised a sigh so piteous and profound
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk
And end his being. That done, he lets me go,
And, with his head over his shoulder

He seemed to find his way without his eyes,
For out o' doors he went without their helps,
And to the last bended their light on me.

POLONIUS
Come, go with me. I will go seek the king.
This is the very ecstasy of love,
Whose violent property fordoes itself
And leads the will to desperate undertakings
As oft as any passion under heaven
That does afflict our natures. I am sorry.
What, have you given him any hard words of late?

OPHELIA
No, my good lord. But as you did command
I did repel his fetters and denied
His access to me.

POLONIUS
That hath made him mad.

hard, then backed away an arm’s length and just looked at me, staring at me like an artist about to paint my picture. He stayed like that a long time.

Finally, after shaking my arm a little, and jerking his head up and down three times, he sighed like it was his last breath. After that he let me go. He left the room with his head turned back on me, finding his way out without looking, since his eyes were on me the whole time.

POLONIUS
Come with me. I’ll go tell the king about this. This is definitely love-craziness. Love is such a violent emotion that it makes people self-destruct, as much as any strong emotion. I’m so sorry. Did you tell him anything that might have hurt his feelings lately?

OPHELIA
No, father, but I did what you told me to do and sent back his letters and wouldn’t let him visit me.

POLONIUS
That’s what made him crazy. I regret
I am sorry that with better heed and judgment
I had not quoted him. I feared he did but trifle
And meant to wreck thee. But beshrew my jealousy!
By heaven, it is as proper to our age
To cast beyond ourselves in our opinions
As it is common for the younger sort
To lack discretion. Come, go we to the king.
This must be known, which, being kept close, might move
More grief to hide than hate to utter love.
Come.

Exeunt

They exit.

Act 2, Scene 2

Flourish. Enter King CLAUDIUS and Queen GERTRUDE, ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN, and attendants

CLAUDIUS
Welcome, dear Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.
Moreover that we much did long to see you,
The need we have to use you did provoke
Our hasty sending. Something have you heard
Of Hamlet’s “transformation”—so call it
Since nor th' exterior nor the inward man Resembles that it was. What it should be,
More than his father’s death, that thus hath put him
So much from th' understanding of himself, I cannot dream of. I entreat you both...other than his father’s death. Since you both grew up with him and are so familiar with his personality and behavior, I’m asking you to stay a while at court and spend some time with him. See if you can get Hamlet to have some fun, and find out if there’s anything in particular that’s bothering him, so we can set about trying to fix it.

GERTRUDE
Good gentlemen, he hath much talked of you. And sure I am two men there are not living To whom he more adheres. If it will please you To show us so much gentry and good will As to expend your time with us awhile For the supply and profit of our hope, Your visitation shall receive such thanks As fits a king’s remembrance.

ROSENCRANTZ
Both your majesties Might, by the sovereign power you have of us, Put your dread pleasures more into command Than to entreaty.

GUILDENSTERN
But we both obey And here give up ourselves, in the full bent, To lay our service freely at your feet To be commanded.

CLAUDIUS
Thanks, Rosencrantz and gentle Guildenstern.

GERTRUDE
Thanks, Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz.

And I beseech you instantly to visit
My too much changed son. Go, some of you,
And bring these gentlemen where Hamlet is.

GERTRUDE
Thanks, Guildenstern and worthy Rosencrantz.

And I beseech you to pay a visit right away
to my son, who’s changed too much. Servants, take these
gentlemen to see Hamlet.

GUILDENSTERN
I hope to God we can make him
happy and do him some good!

GERTRUDE
Amen to that!

Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENS TERN, escorted by attendants

Enter POLONIUS

POLONIUS
Th’ ambassadors from Norway, my good lord,
Are joyfully returned.

CLAUDIUS
Thou still hast been the father of good news.

POLONIUS
Have I, my lord? I assure my good liege,
I hold my duty as I hold my soul,
Both to my God and to my gracious king.

And I do think—or else this brain of mine
Hunts not the trail of policy so sure
As it hath used to do—that I have found
The very cause of Hamlet’s lunacy.

CLAUDIUS
Oh, speak of that. That do I long to hear.

POLONIUS
The ambassadors are back from
Norway, sir.

CLAUDIUS
Once again you bring good news.

POLONIUS
Do I, sir? I assure your majesty I’m
only doing my duty both to my God
and my good king.

And I believe—unless this brain of mine is
not so politically cunning as it used to be—
that I’ve found out why Hamlet’s gone
crazy.

CLAUDIUS
Tell me! I want very much to find out.
POLONIUS
Give first admittance to th' ambassadors.
My news shall be the fruit to that great feast.

CLAUDIUS
Thyself do grace to them, and bring them in.

Exit POLONIUS

He tells me, my dear Gertrude, he hath found
The head and source of all your son’s
distemper.

GERTRUDE
I doubt it is no other but the main:
His father’s death and our o'erhasty marriage.

Enter POLONIUS with
ambassadors VOLTEMANDand CORNELIUS

CLAU DIUS
Well, we shall sift him.—Welcome, my good friends!
Say, Voltemand, what from our brother
Norway?

VOLTEMAND
Most fair return of greetings and desires.
Upon our first, he sent out to suppress
His nephew’s levies, which to him appeared
To be a preparation 'gainst the Polack,
But, better looked into, he truly found
It was against your highness. Whereat
grieved—
That so his sickness, age, and impotence
Was falsely borne in hand—sends out arrests
On Fortinbras, which he, in brief, obeys,

Receives rebuke from Norway, and in fine
Makes vow before his uncle never more
To give th' assay of arms against your

POLONIUS
All right, but first let the ambassadors speak.
Then you can hear my news, as dessert.

CLAU DIUS
Then be so kind as to show them in.

POLONIUS exits.

Gertrude, he says he’s found out the reason
for your son’s insanity.

GERTRUDE
I doubt it’s anything but the obvious reason:
his father’s dying and our quick marriage.

POLONIUS enters with the
ambassadors VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS.

CLAU DIUS
Well, we’ll get to the bottom of it.
Welcome, my good friends. Tell me,
Voltemand, what’s the news from the king
of Norway?

VOLTEMAND
Greetings to you too, your Highness. As
soon as we raised the matter, the king sent
out messengers to stop his nephew’s war
preparations, which he originally thought
were directed against Poland but learned on
closer examination were directed against
you. He was very upset that Fortinbras had
taken advantage of his being old and sick to
deceive him, and he ordered Fortinbras’s
arrest. Fortinbras swore never to threaten
Denmark again.
Whereon old Norway, overcome with joy,
Gives him three thousand crowns in annual fee
And his commission to employ those soldiers,
So levied as before, against the Polack,
With an entreaty, herein further shown,
That it might please you to give quiet pass
Through your dominions for this enterprise,
On such regards of safety and allowance
As therein are set down. (gives CLAUDIUS a document)

CLAUDIUS
    It likes us well,
    And at our more considered time we’ll read,
    Answer, and think upon this business.
Meantime we thank you for your well-took labor.
Go to your rest. At night we’ll feast together.
Most welcome home!

VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS exit

POLONIUS
This business is well ended.
My liege and madam, to expostulate
What majesty should be, what duty is,
Why day is day, night night, and time is time,
Were nothing but to waste night, day, and time.
Therefore, since brevity is the soul of wit
And tediousness the limbs and outward

The old king was so overjoyed by this promise that he gave young Fortinbras an annual income of three thousand crowns and permission to lead his soldiers into Poland, asking you officially in this letter to allow his troops to pass through your kingdom on their way to Poland. He’s assuring you of your safety. (he gives CLAUDIUS a document)

CLAUDIUS
    I like this news, and when I have time
    I’ll read this and think about how to reply. Meanwhile, thank you for your efforts. Go relax now. Tonight we’ll have dinner. Welcome back!

VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS exit

POLONIUS
Well, that turned out well in the end. Sir and madam, to make grand speeches about what majesty is, what service is, or why day is day, night is night, and time is time is just a waste of a lot of day, night, and time. Therefore, since the essence of wisdom is not talking too much, I’ll get right to the point here. Your son is crazy. “Crazy” I’m calling
flourishes, I will be brief: your noble son is mad.
Mad call I it, for, to define true madness,
What is ’t but to be nothing else but mad?
But let that go.

**GERTRUDE**
More matter, with less art.

**POLONIUS**
Madam, I swear I use no art at all.
That he is mad, ’tis true. Tis true, ’tis pity,
And pity ’tis ’tis true—a foolish figure,
But farewell it, for I will use no art.
Mad let us grant him then. And now remains
That we find out the cause of this effect,
Or rather say, the cause of this defect,
For this effect defective comes by cause.
Thus it remains, and the remainder thus. Perpend.
I have a daughter—have while she is mine—
Who in her duty and obedience, mark,
Hath given me this. Now gather and surmise.
(reads a letter) “To the celestial and my soul’s idol, the most beautified Ophelia”—That’s an ill phrase, a vile phrase. “Beautified” is a vile phrase. But you shall hear. Thus: (reads the letter) “In her excellent white bosom, these,” etc.—

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**GERTRUDE**
More matter, with less art.
Came this from Hamlet to her?

POLONIUS

Good madam, stay a while. I will be faithful.

(reads the letter)

“Doubt thou the stars are fire,
   Doubt that the sun doth move,
   Doubt truth to be a liar,
   But never doubt I love.

O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers. I have not art to reckon my groans, but that I love thee best, oh, most best, believe it. Adieu.

Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst this machine is to him, Hamlet.”

This in obedience hath my daughter shown me,
And more above, hath his solicitings,
As they fell out by time, by means, and place,
All given to mine ear.

CLAUDIUS

But how hath she received his love?

POLONIUS

What do you think of me?

CLAUDIUS

As of a man faithful and honorable.

POLONIUS

I would fain prove so. But what might you think,
When I had seen this hot love on the

Hamlet wrote this letter to Ophelia?

POLONIUS

Madam, please be patient. I’ll read it to you.

(he reads the letter)

“You may wonder if the stars are fire,
   You may wonder if the sun moves across the sky.
   You may wonder if the truth is a liar,
   But never wonder if I love.

Oh, Ophelia, I’m bad at poetry. I can’t put my feelings into verse, but please believe I love you best, oh, best of all. Believe it.

Yours forever, my dearest one,
   as long as I live—still chugging along,
   Hamlet.”

Dutifully and obediently my daughter showed me this letter, and more like it. She’s told me all about how Hamlet has been courting her—all the details of where, and what he said, and when.

CLAUDIUS

And how did she react to all this?

POLONIUS

Sir, what is your opinion of me?

CLAUDIUS

I know you are loyal and honorable.

POLONIUS

I would like to prove to you that I am. But what would you have thought of me if I had kept quiet when I found
As I perceived it, I must tell you that, before my daughter told me—what might you, or my dear majesty your queen here, think, if I had played the desk or table-book, or given my heart a winking, mute and dumb, or looked upon this love with idle sight? What might you think? No, I went round to work, and my young mistress thus I did bespeak: “Lord Hamlet is a prince out of thy star. This must not be.” And then I prescripts gave her, that she should lock herself from his resort, admit no messengers, receive no tokens. Which done, she took the fruits of my advice; and he, repelled—a short tale to make—fell into a sadness, then into a fast, thence to a watch, thence into a weakness, thence to a lightness, and, by this declension, into the madness wherein now he raves and all we mourn for.

**CLAUDIUS**

(to GERTRUDE) Do you think ’tis this?

**CLAUDIUS**

(to GERTRUDE) Do you think that’s why Hamlet’s crazy?
GERTRUDE
    It may be, very like.

POLONIUS
    Hath there been such a time—I would fain know that—
    That I have positively said, “Tis so,”
    When it proved otherwise?

CLAUDIUS
    Not that I know.

POLONIUS
    (points to his head and shoulders)
    Take this from this if this be otherwise.
    If circumstances lead me, I will find
    Where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed
    Within the center.

CLAUDIUS
    How may we try it further?

POLONIUS
    You know sometimes he walks four hours together
    Here in the lobby.

GERTRUDE
    So he does indeed.

POLONIUS
    At such a time I’ll loose my daughter to him.
    (to CLAUDIUS) Be you and I behind an arras then,
    Mark the encounter. If he love her not
    And be not from his reason fall’n thereon,
    Let me be no assistant for a state
    But keep a farm and carters.
CLAUDIUS
We will try it.

Enter HAMLET, reading on a book

HAMLET enters, reading a book.

CLAUDIUS
We’ll try what you suggest.

GERTRUDE
But look where sadly the poor wretch comes reading.

Look how sadly he’s coming in, reading his book.

POLONIUS
Away, I do beseech you, both away.
I’ll board him presently. O, give me leave.

Please go away, both of you. I’ll speak to him now. Oh, please let me.

Exeunt CLAUDIUS and GERTRUDE

CLAUDIUS and GERTRUDE exit.

HAMLET
How are you, Hamlet?

How does my good Lord Hamlet?

POLONIUS
Do you know me, my lord?

Do you know who I am?

HAMLET
Excellent well. You are a fishmonger.

Of course. You sell fish.

POLONIUS
Not I, my lord.

No, not me, sir.

HAMLET
Then I would you were so honest a man.

In that case I wish you were as good a man as a fish seller.

POLONIUS
Honest, my lord?

Good, sir?

HAMLET
170 Ay, sir. To be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand.

Yes, sir. Only one man in ten thousand is good in this world.

POLONIUS
That’s very true, my lord.

That’s definitely true, my lord.

HAMLET
For if the sun breed maggots in a dead

Since if the sun breeds maggots on a
dog, being a good kissing carrion—Have you a daughter?

POLONIUS
175 I have, my lord.

HAMLET
Let her not walk i' th' sun. Conception is a blessing, but, as your daughter may conceive—Friend, look to 't.

POLONIUS
(aside) How say you by that? Still harping on my daughter. Yet he knew me not at first. He said I was a fishmonger. He is far gone, far gone. And truly in my youth I suffered much extremity for love, very near this. I'll speak to him again.—
(to HAMLET) What do you read, my lord?

HAMLET
Words, words, words.

POLONIUS
What is the matter, my lord?

HAMLET
185 Between who?

POLONIUS
I mean, the matter that you read, my lord.

HAMLET
Slanders, sir. For the satirical rogue says here that old men have gray beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber and plum-tree gum, and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams—all
dead dog, kissing the corpse—by the way, do you have a daughter?

POLONIUS
I do indeed, my lord.

HAMLET
Then by all means never let her walk in public. Procreation is a good thing, but if your daughter gets pregnant … look out, friend.

POLONIUS
(to himself) Now, what does he mean by that? Still harping on my daughter. But he didn't recognize me at first. He mistook me for a fish seller. He's far gone. But when I was young I went crazy for love too, almost as bad as this. I'll talk to him again.—
(to HAMLET) What are you reading, your highness?

HAMLET
A lot of words.

POLONIUS
And what is the subject?

HAMLET
Between whom?

POLONIUS
I mean, what do the words say?

HAMLET
Oh, just lies, sir. The sly writer says here that old men have gray beards, their faces are wrinkled, their eyes full of gunk, and that they have no wisdom and weak thighs. Of course I believe it all, but I don't think it's good manners to write it down, since you
which, sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down; for yourself, sir, should be old as I am, if like a crab you could go backward.

**POLONIUS**

(aside) Though this be madness, yet there is method in ’t.—(to HAMLET) Will you walk out of the air, my lord?

**HAMLET**

Into my grave.

**POLONIUS**

Indeed, that is out of the air. (aside) How pregnant sometimes his replies are. A happiness that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be delivered of. I will leave him and suddenly contrive the means of meeting between him and my daughter.—(to HAMLET) My honorable lord, I will most humbly take my leave of you.

**HAMLET**

You cannot, sir, take from me any thing that I will more willingly part withal—except my life, except my life, except my life.

**POLONIUS**

Fare you well, my lord.

**HAMLET**

(aside) These tedious old fools!

Enter **ROSENCRANTZ** and **GUILDENSTERN**

**POLONIUS**

You go to seek the Lord Hamlet. There yourself, sir, would grow as old as I am, if you could only travel backward like a crab.

**POLONIUS**

(to himself) There’s a method to his madness.(to HAMLET) Will you step outside, my lord?

**HAMLET**

Into my grave.

**POLONIUS**

Well, that’s certainly out of this world, all right. (to himself) His answers are so full of meaning sometimes! He has a way with words, as crazy people often do, and that sane people don’t have a talent for. I’ll leave him now and arrange a meeting between him and my daughter. (toHAMLET) My lord, I’ll take my leave of you now.

**HAMLET**

You can’t take anything from me that I care less about—except my life, except my life, except my life.

**POLONIUS**

Good-bye, my lord.

**HAMLET**

(to himself) These boring old fools!

**ROSENCRANTZ** and **GUILDENSTERN** e

**POLONIUS**

You’re looking for Lord Hamlet. He’s right
he is.

**ROSENCRANTZ**
God save you, sir!

**Exit POLONIUS**

**POLONIUS** exits.

**ROSENCRANTZ**
Thank you, sir.

**GUILDENSTERN**
My honored lord!

**ROSENCRANTZ**
My most dear lord!

**HAMLET**
My excellent good friends! How dost thou, Guildenstern?

Ah, Rosencrantz! Good lads, how do you both?

**ROSENCRANTZ**
As the indifferent children of the earth.

**GUILDENSTERN**
Happy, in that we are not overhappy.
On Fortune’s cap we are not the very button.

**HAMLET**
Nor the soles of her shoes?

Neither, my lord.

**ROSENCRANTZ**
No, we’re just somewhere in the middle, my lord.

**HAMLET**
Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favors?

**GUILDENSTERN**
Faith, her privates we.

**HAMLET**
In the secret parts of Fortune? Oh, most true. She is a strumpet. What news?

**GUILDENSTERN**
Yes, we’re the privates in her army.

**HAMLET**
Ha, ha, so you’ve gotten into her private parts? Of course—Lady Luck is such a slut. Anyway, what’s up?
ROSENCRANTZ
None, my lord, but that the world’s grown honest.

HAMLET
Then is doomsday near. But your news is not true. Let me question more in particular. What have you, my good friends, deserved at the hands of fortune that she sends you to prison hither?

GUILDENSTERN
Prison, my lord?

HAMLET
Denmark’s a prison.

ROSENCRANTZ
Then is the world one.

HAMLET
A goodly one, in which there are many confines, wards, and dungeons, Denmark being one o’ th’ worst.

ROSENCRANTZ
We think not so, my lord.

HAMLET
Why, then, ’tis none to you, for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so. To me it is a prison.

ROSENCRANTZ
Why then, your ambition makes it one. ’Tis too narrow for your mind.

HAMLET
O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space,
were it not that I have bad dreams.

GUILDENSTERN
Which dreams indeed are ambition, for the very substance of the ambitious is merely the shadow of a dream.

HAMLET
A dream itself is but a shadow.

ROSENCRANTZ
Truly, and I hold ambition of so airy and light a quality that it is but a shadow’s shadow.

HAMLET
Then are our beggars bodies, and our monarchs and outstretched heroes the beggars' shadows. Shall we to th' court? For by my fay, I cannot reason.

ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN
We’ll wait upon you.

HAMLET
No such matter. I will not sort you with the rest of my servants, for, to speak to you like an honest man, I am most dreadfully attended. But in the beaten way of friendship, what make you at Elsinore?

ROSENCRANTZ
To visit you, my lord, no other occasion.

universe. The real problem is that I have bad dreams.

GUILDENSTERN
Dreams are a sign of ambition, since ambition is nothing more than the shadow of a dream.

HAMLET
But a dream itself is just a shadow.

ROSENCRANTZ
Exactly. In fact, I consider ambition to be so light and airy that it’s only the shadow of a shadow.

HAMLET
Then I guess beggars are the ones with bodies, while ambitious kings and heroes are just the shadows of beggars. Should we go inside? I seem to be losing my mind a bit.

ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN
We’re at your service, whatever you say.

HAMLET
No, no, I won’t class you with my servants, since—to be frank with you—my servants are terrible. But tell me as my friends, what are you doing here at Elsinore?

ROSENCRANTZ
Visiting you, my lord. There’s no other reason.
HAMLET
Beggar that I am, I am even poor in thanks; but I thank you, and sure, dear friends, my thanks are too dear a halfpenny. Were you not sent for? Is it your own inclining? Is it a free visitation? Come, come, deal justly with me. Come, come. Nay, speak.

GUILDENSTERN
What should we say, my lord?

HAMLET
Why, any thing, but to th' purpose. You were sent for, and there is a kind of confession in your looks which your modesties have not craft enough to color. I know the good king and queen have sent for you.

ROSENCRANTZ
To what end, my lord?

HAMLET
That you must teach me. But let me conjure you, by the rights of our fellowship, by the consonancy of our youth, by the obligation of our ever-preserved love, and by what more dear a better proposer could charge you withal: be even and direct with me whether you were sent for or no.

ROSENCRANTZ
(to GUILDENSTERN) What say you?

HAMLET
(aside) Nay, then, I have an eye of you—If you love me, hold not off.

GUILDENSTERN
My lord, we were sent for.

HAMLET
Well, then, I thank you, though I’m such a beggar that even my thanks are not worth much. Did someone tell you to visit me? Or was it just your whim, on your own initiative? Come on, tell me the truth.

GUILDENSTERN
What should we say, my lord?

HAMLET
Anything you like, as long as it answers my question. You were sent for. You’ve got a guilty look on your faces, which you’re too honest to disguise. I know the king and queen sent for you.

ROSENCRANTZ
Why would they do that, my lord?

HAMLET
That’s what I want you to tell me. Let me remind you of our old friendship, our youth spent together, the duties of our love for each other, and whatever else will make you answer me straight.

ROSENCRANTZ
(to GUILDENSTERN) What do you think?

HAMLET
(to himself) I’ve got my eye on you. (to GUILDENSTERN) If you care about me, you’ll be honest with me.

GUILDENSTERN
My lord, we were sent for.

HAMLET
I will tell you why. So shall my anticipation prevent your discovery, and your secrecy to the king and queen molt no feather. I have of late—but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises, and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air—look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire—why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors. What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world. The paragon of animals. And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me. No, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.

ROSENCRANTZ
My lord, there was no such stuff in my thoughts.

HAMLET
Why did you laugh then, when I said “man delights not me”? 

ROSENCRANTZ
To think, my lord, if you delight not in man, what Lenten entertainment the players shall receive from you. We coted them on the way, and hither are they

I’ll tell you why—so you won’t have to tell me and give away any secrets you have with the king and queen. Recently, though I don’t know why, I’ve lost all sense of fun, stopped exercising—the whole world feels sterile and empty. This beautiful canopy we call the sky—this majestic roof decorated with golden sunlight—why, it’s nothing more to me than disease-filled air. What a perfect invention a human is, how noble in his capacity to reason, how unlimited in thinking, how admirable in his shape and movement, how angelic in action, how godlike in understanding! There’s nothing more beautiful. We surpass all other animals. And yet to me, what are we but dust? Men don’t interest me. No—women neither, but you’re smiling, so you must think they do.

ROSENCRANTZ
My lord, I wasn’t thinking anything like that.

HAMLET
So why did you laugh when I said that men don’t interest me?

ROSENCRANTZ
I was just thinking that if people don’t interest you, you’ll be pretty bored by the actors on their way here. We crossed paths with a drama company
coming to offer you service.

HAMLET
300  He that plays the king shall be welcome. His majesty shall have tribute of me. The adventurous knight shall use his foil and target, the lover shall not sigh gratis, the humorous man shall end his part in peace, the clown shall make those laugh whose lungs are tickle o’ th’ sear, and the lady shall say her mind freely, or the blank verse shall halt for ’t. What players are they?

ROSENCRANTZ
Even those you were wont to take delight in, the tragedians of the city.

HAMLET
How chances it they travel? Their residence, both in reputation and profit, was better both ways.

ROSENCRANTZ
I think their inhibition comes by the means of the late innovation.

HAMLET
Do they hold the same estimation they did when I was in the city? Are they so followed?

ROSENCRANTZ
No, indeed are they not.

HAMLET
How comes it? Do they grow rusty?

ROSENCRANTZ
Nay, their endeavor keeps in the wonted pace. But there is, sir, an eyrie of just a while ago, and they’re coming to entertain you.

HAMLET
The one who plays the part of the king will be particularly welcome. I’ll treat him like a real king. The adventurous knight will wave around his sword and shield, the lover will be rewarded for his sighs, the crazy character can rant all he wants, the clown will make everybody laugh, and the lady character can say whatever’s on her mind, or I’ll stop the play. Which troupe is it?

ROSENCRANTZ
The tragic actors from the city, the ones you used to enjoy so much.

HAMLET
What are they doing on the road? They made more money and got more attention in the city.

ROSENCRANTZ
But things have changed there, and it’s easier for them on the road now.

HAMLET
Are they as popular as they used to be when I lived in the city? Do they attract big audiences?

ROSENCRANTZ
No, not like before.

HAMLET
Why? Are they getting rusty?

ROSENCRANTZ
No, they’re busy and as excellent as ever. The problem is that they have to
children, little eyases, that cry out on the top of question and are most tyrannically clapped for 't. These are now the fashion, and so berattle the common stages—so they call them—that many wearing rapiers are afraid of goose quills and dare scarce come thither.

HAMLET
What, are they children? Who maintains 'em? How are they escoted? Will they pursue the quality no longer than they can sing? Will they not say afterwards, if they should grow themselves to common players (as it is most like if their means are no better), their writers do them wrong to make them exclaim against their own succession?

ROSENCRANTZ
Faith, there has been much to do on both sides, and the nation holds it no sin to tar them to controversy. There was, for a while, no money bid for argument unless the poet and the player went to cuffs in the question.

HAMLET
Is 't possible?

GUILDENSTERN
Oh, there has been much throwing about of brains.

HAMLET
Do the boys carry it away?

ROSENCRANTZ
Ay, that they do, my lord. Hercules and his load too.

compete with a group of children who yell out their lines and receive outrageous applause for it. These child actors are now in fashion, and they’ve so overtaken the public theaters that society types hardly come at all, they’re so afraid of being mocked by the playwrights who write for the boys.

HAMLET
What, you mean kid actors? Who takes care of them? Who pays their way? Will they stop working when their voices mature? Aren’t the playwrights hurting them by making them upstage adult actors, which they are going to grow up and become? (Unless, of course, they have trust funds.)

ROSENCRANTZ
There’s been a whole debate on the topic. For a while, no play was sold to the theaters without a big fight between the children’s playwright and the actors playing adult roles.

HAMLET
Are you kidding?

GUILDENSTERN
Oh, there’s been a lot of quarreling.

HAMLET
And the boys are winning so far?

ROSENCRANTZ
Yes, they are, my lord—little boys are carrying the whole theater on their
backs, like Hercules carried the world.

HAMLET
It is not very strange. For my uncle is
King of Denmark, and those that would
make mouths at him while my father
lived give twenty, forty, fifty, a hundred
ducats apiece for his picture in little.
'Sblood, there is something in this more
than natural, if philosophy could find it
out.

Flourish for the PLAYERS within

GUILDENSTERN
There are the players.

HAMLET
Gentlemen, you are welcome to Elsinore.
Your hands, come then. Th'
appurtenance of welcome is fashion and
ceremony. Let me comply with you in
this garb—lest my extent to the players,
which, I tell you, must show fairly
outwards, should more appear like
entertainment than yours. You are
welcome. But my uncle-father and aunt-
mother are deceived.

GUILDENSTERN
In what, my dear lord?

HAMLET
I am but mad north-north-west. When the
wind is southerly, I know a hawk from a
handsaw.

Enter POLONIUS

GUILDENSTERN
In what sense, my lord?

HAMLET
Gentlemen, welcome to Elsinore. Don’t
be shy—shake hands with me. If I’m
going to welcome you I have to go
through all these polite customs, don’t
I? And if we don’t shake hands, when I
act all nice to the players it will seem
like I’m happier to see them than you.
You are very welcome here. But still,
my uncle-father and aunt-mother have
got the wrong idea.

GUILDENSTERN
In what sense, my lord?

HAMLET
I’m only crazy sometimes. At other times, I
know what’s what.
POLONIUS
Well be with you, gentlemen.

HAMLET
Hark you, Guildenstern, and you too—at each ear a hearer. (indicates POLONIUS )That great baby you see there is not yet out of his swaddling-clouts

ROSENCRANTZ
Happily he’s the second time come to them, for they say an old man is twice a child.

HAMLET
(aside to ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN ) I will prophesy he comes to tell me of the players. Mark it. (to POLONIUS)—You say right, sir. O’ Monday morning, ’twas so indeed.

POLONIUS
My lord, I have news to tell you.

HAMLET
My lord, I have news to tell you. When Roscius was an actor in Rome—

POLONIUS
365 The actors are come hither, my lord.

HAMLET
Buzz, buzz.

POLONIUS
Upon my honor—

HAMLET
Then came each actor on his ass—

POLONIUS
The best actors in the world, either for
tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individable, or poem unlimited. Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light. For the law of writ and the liberty, these are the only men.

**HAMLET**

375  O Jephthah, judge of Israel, what a treasure hadst thou!

**POLONIUS**

What a treasure had he, my lord?

**HAMLET**

Why,

One fair daughter and no more,

The which he lovèd passing well.

**POLONIUS**

(aside) Still on my daughter.

**HAMLET**

Am I not i' th' right, old Jephthah?

**POLONIUS**

If you call me Jephthah, my lord, I have a daughter that I love passing well.

**HAMLET**

Nay, that follows not.

**POLONIUS**

What follows, then, my lord?

**HAMLET**

either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individable, or poem unlimited. Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light. For the law of writ and the liberty, these are the only men.

**HAMLET**

Oh, Jephthah, judge of ancient Israel, what a treasure you had!

**POLONIUS**

What treasure did he have, my lord?

**HAMLET**

Well, (sings)

One fine daughter, and no more,

Whom he loved more than anything—.

**POLONIUS**

(to himself) Still talking about my daughter, I see.

**HAMLET**

Aren’t I right, Jephthah, old man?

**POLONIUS**

If you’re calling me Jephthah, my lord, I do have a daughter I love more than anything, yes.

**HAMLET**

No, that’s not logical.

**POLONIUS**

What is logical, then, my lord?

**HAMLET**
Why,
   As by lot, God wot, and then, you know,
   It came to pass, as most like it was—The first row of the pious chanson will show you more, for look where my abridgement comes.

Enter the PLAYERS

You are welcome, masters, welcome, all!—I am glad to see thee well.— Welcome, good friends.—O old friend? Why, thy face is valenced since I saw thee last. Comest thou to beard me in Denmark?—What, my young lady and mistress! By ’r Lady, your ladyship is nearer to heaven than when I saw you last, by the altitude of a chopine. Pray God, your voice, like a piece of uncurrent gold, be not cracked within the ring.—Masters, you are all welcome. We’ll e’en to ’t like French falconers, fly at any thing we see. We’ll have a speech straight. Come, give us a taste of your quality. Come, a passionate speech.

FIRST PLAYER
What speech, my good lord?

HAMLET
I heard thee speak me a speech once, but it was never acted. Or, if it was, not above once, for the play, I remember, pleased not the million. ’Twas caviary to the general. But it was—as I received it, and others, whose judgments in such matters

Why,
   As if by chance, God knows, and then, you know,
   It happened, as you’d expect— If you want to know more, you can refer to the popular song, because now I have to stop.

The PLAYERS enter.

Welcome, welcome to all of you. (he turns to one of the actors)—Oh, you, I’m glad to see you. (turns back to all of them)—Welcome, my good friends. (turns to another actor)—Oh, it’s you! You’ve grown a beard since I saw you last. Are you going to put a beard on me too? (turns to an actor dressed as a woman) —Well hello, my young lady friend. You’ve grown as much as the height of a pair of platform shoes at least! I hope your voice hasn’t changed yet. (to the whole company)—All of you are most welcome here. We’ll get right to business. First, a speech. Come on, give us a little speech to whet our appetites. A passionate speech, please.

FIRST PLAYER
Which speech, my lord?

HAMLET
I heard you recite a speech for me once that was never acted out, or if it was, it was performed only once, since the play was not popular—like caviar for a slob who couldn’t appreciate it. But the critics and I found it to be an excellent
cried in the top of mine—an excellent play, well digested in the scenes, set down with as much modesty as cunning.

I remember, one said there were no sallets in the lines to make the matter savory, nor no matter in the phrase that might indict the author of affectation, but called it an honest method, as wholesome as sweet, and by very much more handsome than fine. One speech in it I chiefly loved.

415 'Twas Aeneas' tale to Dido and thereabout of it, especially where he speaks of Priam's slaughter. If it live in your memory, begin at this line—Let me see, let me see—

420 The rugged Pyrrhus, like th' Hyrcanian beast—

It is not so. It begins with Pyrrhus—

The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms, Black as his purpose, did the night resemble

When he lay couchèd in the ominous horse,

Hath now this dread and black complexion smeared

With heraldry more dismal. Head to foot

Now is he total gules, horridly tricked

With blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons,

Baked and impasted with the parching streets,

That lend a tyrannous and damnèd light

To their lord's murder. Roasted in wrath and fire,

And thus o'ersizèd with coagulate gore,

With eyes like carbuncles, the hellish play, with well-ordered scenes that were clever but not fancy.

I remember one critic said there was no vulgar language to spice up the dialogue, and showing off on playwright's part. That critic called it an excellent play, containing things to reflect upon as well as sweet music to enjoy. I loved one speech in particular. It was when Aeneas told Dido about Priam's murder. If you happen to remember this scene, begin at line—let me see, how does it go?

The rugged Pyrrhus, strong as a tiger—

No, that's wrong; it begins like this:

Savage Pyrrhus, whose black armor was

As dark plans, and was like the night

When he crouched inside the Trojan Horse,

Has now smeared his dark armor

With something worse. From head to foot

He's now covered in red, decorated horribly

With the blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons.

The blood is baked to a paste by fires he set in the streets,

Fires that lend a terrible light to his horrible murders.

Boiling with anger and fire,

And coated thick with hard-baked blood,
Pyrrhus
Old grandsire Priam seeks.
So, proceed you.

POLONIUS
'Fore God, my lord, well spoken, with good accent and good discretion.

FIRST PLAYER
Anon he finds him
Striking too short at Greeks. His antique sword,
Rebellious to his arm, lies where it falls,
Repugnant to command. Unequal matched,
Pyrrhus at Priam drives, in rage strikes wide,
But with the whiff and wind of his fell sword
The unnerved father falls. Then senseless Ilium,
Seeming to feel this blow, with flaming top
Stoops to his base, and with a hideous crash
Takes prisoner Pyrrhus' ear. For, lo, his sword,
Which was declining on the milky head
Of reverend Priam, seemed i' th' air to stick.
So as a painted tyrant Pyrrhus stood,
And, like a neutral to his will and matter,
Did nothing.
But as we often see against some storm
A silence in the heavens, the rack stand still,

His eyes glowing like rubies, the hellish Pyrrhus
Goes looking for grandfather Priam. Sir, take it from there.

POLONIUS
My God, that was well done, my lord, with the right accent and a good ear.

FIRST PLAYER
Soon he finds Priam failing in his battle against the Greeks. His old sword, Which Priam cannot wield anymore, lies where it fell. An unfair opponent, Pyrrhus rushes at Priam, and in his rage he misses;

But the wind created by his sword is enough to make The weakened old man fall. Just then the city of Ilium, As if feeling this fatal blow to its ruler,
The bold winds speechless, and the orb below
As hush as death, anon the dreadful thunder
Doth rend the region. So, after Pyrrhus' pause,
Arousèd vengeance sets him new a-work.
And never did the Cyclops' hammers fall
On Mars's armor forged for proof eterne
With less remorse than Pyrrhus' bleeding sword
Now falls on Priam.
Out, out, thou strumpet Fortune! All you gods
In general synod take away her power,
Break all the spokes and fellies from her wheel,
And bowl the round nave down the hill of heaven,
As low as to the fiends!

Collapses in flames, and the crash captures Pyrrhus's attention. His sword,
Which was falling onto Priam's white-haired head
Seemed to hang in the air.
Pyrrhus stood there like a man in a painting,
Doing nothing.
But just as a raging thunderstorm is often interrupted by a moment's silence,
And then soon after the region is split apart by dreadful thunderclaps,
In the same way, after Pyrrhus paused, His newly awakened fury set him to work again.
When the Cyclopses were making unbreakable armor
For the god of war, their hammers never fell
So mercilessly as Pyrrhus's bloody sword
Now falls on Priam.
Get out of here, Lady Luck, you whore!
All you gods
Should come together to rob her of her powers,
Break all the spokes on her wheel of fortune,
And send it rolling down the hills of heaven
Into the depths of hell.

**POLONIUS**
This is too long.
HAMLET
It shall to the barber’s, with your beard.—
Prithee, say on. He’s for a jig or a tale of bawdry, or he sleeps. Say on. Come to Hecuba.

FIRST PLAYER
465 But who, ah woe, who had seen the moblèd queen—

HAMLET
“The moblèd queen”?

POLONIUS
That’s good. “Moblèd queen” is good.

FIRST PLAYER
Run barefoot up and down, threatening the flames
470 With bisson rheum, a clout upon that head
Where late the diadem stood, and for a robe,
About her lank and all o’eremèd loins,
A blanket, in the alarm of fear caught up—

FIRST PLAYER
Who this had seen, with tongue in venom steeped,
'Gainst fortune’s state would treason have pronounced.
But if the gods themselves did see her then
475 When she saw Pyrrhus make malicious sport
In mincing with his sword her husband’s limbs,
The instant burst of clamor that she made,
(Unless things mortal move them not at all)
Would have made milch the burning eyes

HAMLET
We’ll have the barber trim it later, along with your beard. Please, continue, players. This old man only likes the dancing or the sex scenes; he sleeps through all the rest. Go on, come to the part about Hecuba.

FIRST PLAYER
But who—ah, the sadness—had seen the muffled queen—

HAMLET
“The muffled queen”?

POLONIUS
That’s good. “The muffled queen” is good.

FIRST PLAYER
Running back and forth, sprays the flames with her tears, a cloth on that head where a crown had recently sat and a blanket instead of a robe wrapped around her body, which has withered from childbearing: anyone seeing her in such a state, no matter how spiteful he was, would have cursed Lady Luck for bringing her down like that. If the gods had seen her while she watched Pyrrhus chopping her husband into bits, the terrible cry she uttered would have made all the eyes in heaven burn with hot tears—unless the gods don’t care at all about human affairs.
of heaven,
   And passion in the gods.

POLONIUS
   Look whe'e he has not turned his color and has tears in 's eyes.—Prithee, no more.

HAMLET
   (to FIRST PLAYER) 'Tis well. I’ll have thee speak out the rest soon. (to POLONIUS) Good my lord, will you see the players well bestowed? Do you hear, let them be well used, for they are the abstract and brief chronicles of the time. After your death you were better have a bad epitaph than their ill report while you live.

POLONIUS
   My lord, I will use them according to their desert.

HAMLET
   God’s bodykins, man, much better. Use every man after his desert, and who should 'scape whipping? Use them after your own honor and dignity. The less they deserve, the more merit is in your bounty. Take them in.

POLONIUS
   Come, sirs.

HAMLET
   Follow him, friends. We’ll hear a play tomorrow. (to FIRST PLAYER)—Dost thou hear me, old friend? Can you play The Murder of Gonzago?

POLONIUS
   Look how flushed the actor is, with tears in his eyes. All right, that’s enough, please.

HAMLET
   (to FIRST PLAYER) Very fine. I’ll have you perform the rest of it soon. (to POLONIUS)—My lord, will you make sure the actors are made comfortable? Make sure you’re good to them, since what they say about us later will go down in history. It’d be better to have a bad epitaph on our graves than to have their ill will while we’re alive.

POLONIUS
   My lord, I will give them all they deserve.

HAMLET
   Good heavens, man, give them more than that! If you pay everyone what they deserve, would anyone ever escape a whipping? Treat them with honor and dignity. The less they deserve, the more your generosity is worth. Lead them inside.

POLONIUS
   Come, everyone.

HAMLET
   Follow him, friends. We’ll watch a whole play tomorrow. (to FIRST PLAYER) My friend, can you perform The Murder of Gonzago?
FIRST PLAYER
Ay, my lord.

HAMLET
We’ll ha ’t tomorrow night. You could, for a need, study a speech of some dozen or sixteen lines which I would set down and insert in ’t, could you not?

FIRST PLAYER
Ay, my lord.

HAMLET
Then we’ll see that tomorrow night. By the way, if I were to compose an extra speech of twelve to sixteen lines and stick it into the play, you could learn it by heart for tomorrow, right?

FIRST PLAYER
Yes, my lord.

HAMLET
Very well. Follow that lord, and look you mock him not.

Exeunt POLONIUS and the PLAYERS

My good friends, I’ll leave you till night. You are welcome to Elsinore.

ROSENCRANTZ
Good my lord.

HAMLET
Ay, so. Good-bye to you.

Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

Now I am alone.
Oh, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!

Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from her working all his visage wanned,

Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suitings
With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing—

Now I’m alone. Oh, what a mean low-life I am! It’s awful that this actor could force his soul to feel made-up feelings in a work of make-believe. He grew pale, shed real tears, became overwhelmed, his voice breaking with feeling and his whole being, even, meeting the needs of his act—and all for nothing. For Hecuba!
520  For Hecuba!
    What’s Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba
    That he should weep for her? What would he do
Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
Make mad the guilty and appall the free,
Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
525  The very faculties of eyes and ears. Yet I,
    A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
And can say nothing—no, not for a king,
530  Upon whose property and most dear life
    A damned defeat was made. Am I a coward?
Who calls me “villain”? Breaks my pate across?
Tweaks me by the nose? Gives me the lie i’ th’ throat
As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this?
535  Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face?
    Tweaks me by the nose? Gives me the lie i’ th’ throat
As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this?

540  Ha!
    'Swounds, I should take it, for it cannot be
But I am pigeon-livered and lack gall
To make oppression bitter, or ere this
I should have fatted all the region kites
545  With this slave’s offal. Bloody, bawdy villain!
    Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!
O vengeance!

What is Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, that he would weep for her? Just imagine what he would do if he had the cause for feeling that I do. He would drown the stage with his tears and burst the audience’s ears with his terrible words, drive the guilty spectators crazy, terrify the innocent ones, confuse the ignorant ones, and astound absolutely everyone’s eyes and ears. But what do I, a grim and uncourageous rascal, do? Mope around like a dreamer, not even bothering with plans for revenge, and I can say nothing—nothing at all—on behalf of a king whose dear life was stolen. Am I a coward? Is there anyone out there who’ll call me “villain” and slap me hard? Pull off my beard? Pinch my nose? Call me the worst liar? By God, if someone would do that to me, I’d take it, because I’m a lily-livered man—otherwise, I would’ve fattened up the local vultures with the intestines of that low-life king a long time ago. Bloody, inhuman villain! Remorseless,
550 Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,
That I, the son of a dear father murdered,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and
hell,
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with
555 words
And fall a-cursing like a very drab,
A scullion! Fie upon ’t, foh!
About, my brain.—Hum, I have heard
That guilty creatures sitting at a play
560 Have, by the very cunning of the scene,
Been struck so to the soul that presently
They have proclaimed their malefactions.
For murder, though it have no tongue, will
speak
With most miraculous organ. I’ll have these
players
Play something like the murder of my father
Before mine uncle. I’ll observe his looks.
I’ll tent him to the quick. If he do blench,
I know my course. The spirit that I have
seen
May be the devil, and the devil hath power
T’ assume a pleasing shape. Yea, and
perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
565 As he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me. I’ll have grounds
More relative than this. The play’s the thing
Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the
king.

Murder has no tongue, but
miraculously it still finds a way to
speak. I’ll have these actors perform
something like my father’s murder in
front of my uncle. I’ll watch my uncle.
I’ll probe his conscience and see if he
flinches. If he becomes pale, I know
what to do. The ghost I saw may be the
devil, and the devil has the power to
assume a pleasing disguise, and so he
may be taking advantage of my
weakness and sadness to bring about
my damnation. I need better evidence
than the ghost to work with. The play’s
the thing to uncover the conscience of
the king.

Exit

HAMLET exits.

Act 3, Scene 1

Enter CLAUDIUS, GERTRUDE, POLONIUS, OPHelia, ROSEncRANTZ, and GUILDENSTERN

CLAUDIUS
And can you by no drift of conference
Get from him why he puts on this confusion,
Grating so harshly all his days of quiet
With turbulent and dangerous lunacy?

ROSEncRANTZ
He does confess he feels himself distracted.
But from what cause he will by no means
speak.

GUILDENSTERN
Nor do we find him forward to be sounded.
But with a crafty madness keeps aloof
When we would bring him on to some
confession
Of his true state.

GERTRUDE
Did he receive you well?

ROSEncRANTZ
Most like a gentleman.

GUILDENSTERN
But with much forcing of his disposition.

ROSEncRANTZ
Niggard of question, but of our demands
Most free in his reply.
GERTRUDE
Did you assay him?
To any pastime?

ROSENCRANTZ
Madam, it so fell out, that certain players
We o'erraught on the way. Of these we told
him,
And there did seem in him a kind of joy
To hear of it. They are about the court,

20 And, as I think, they have already order
This night to play before him.

POLONIUS
'Tis most true,
And he beseeched me to entreat your
Majesties
To hear and see the matter.

CLAUDIUS
With all my heart, and it doth much content
me
To hear him so inclined.
Good gentlemen, give him a further edge,
And drive his purpose on to these delights.

ROSENCRANTZ
We shall, my lord.

Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

CLAUDIUS
Sweet Gertrude, leave us too,

30 For we have closely sent for Hamlet hither,
That he, as 'twere by accident, may here
Affront Ophelia.
Her father and myself (lawful espials)
Will so bestow ourselves that, seeing unseen,
We may of their encounter frankly judge,

GERTRUDE
Did you try tempting him with some
entertainment?

ROSENCRANTZ
Madam, some actors happened to cross our
paths on the way here. We told Hamlet
about them, and that seemed to do him
good.
They are here at court now, and I believe
they’ve been told to give a performance for
him tonight.

POLONIUS
It’s true, and he asked me to beg you both to
attend.

CLAUDIUS
It makes me very happy to hear he’s so
interested. Gentlemen, please try to sharpen
his interest even more, and let this play do
him some good.

ROSENCRANTZ
We will, my lord.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN
exit.

CLAUDIUS
Dear Gertrude, please give us a moment
alone. We’ve secretly arranged for Hamlet
to come here so that he can run into
Ophelia. Her father and I, justifiably acting
as spies, will hide in the room and observe
Hamlet’s behavior, to determine whether
it’s love that’s making him suffer.
And gather by him, as he is behaved,
If ’t be the affliction of his love or no
That thus he suffers for.

**GERTRUDE**
I shall obey you.
And for your part, Ophelia, I do wish
That your good beauties be the happy cause
Of Hamlet’s wildness. So shall I hope your virtues
Will bring him to his wonted way again,
To both your honors.

**OPHELIA**
Madam, I wish it may.

Exit **GERTRUDE**

**POLONIUS**
Ophelia, walk you here.
(to **CLAUDIUS**) Gracious, so please you,
We will bestow ourselves. (to **OPHELIA**) Read on this book
That show of such an exercise may color
Your loneliness.—We are oft to blame in this,
’Tis too much proved, that with devotion’s visage
And pious action we do sugar o’er The devil himself.

**CLAUDIUS**
(aside) Oh, ’tis too true!
How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!
The harlot’s cheek, beautied with plastering art,
Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it Than is my deed to my most painted word.

**GERTRUDE**
Yes, I’ll go. As for you, Ophelia, I hope that your beauty is the reason for Hamlet’s insane behavior, just as I hope your virtues will return him to normal some day, for the good of both of you.

**OPHELIA**
I hope so too, Madam.

**GERTRUDE** exits.
O heavy burden!

**POLONIUS**
I hear him coming. Let’s withdraw, my lord.

**CLAUDIUS** and **POLONIUS** withdraw

Enter **HAMLET**

**HAMLET**
To be, or not to be? That is the question—
Whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And, by opposing, end them? To die, to sleep—
No more—and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to—’tis a consummation Devoutly to be wished! To die, to sleep. To sleep, perchance to dream—ay, there’s the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil, Must give us pause. There’s the respect That makes calamity of so long life.

For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
Th’ oppressor’s wrong, the proud man’s contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law’s delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns That patient merit of th’ unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country from whose bourn
No traveler returns, puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.—Soft you now,
The fair Ophelia!—Nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins remembered.

OPHELIA
Good my lord,
How does your honor for this many a day?

HAMLET
I humbly thank you. Well, well, well.

OPHELIA
My lord, I have remembrances of yours
That I have longed long to redeliver.
I pray you now receive them.

HAMLET
No, not I. I never gave you aught.

OPHELIA
Out your knife and call it quits? Who would choose to grunt and sweat through an exhausting life, unless they were afraid of something dreadful after death, the undiscovered country from which no visitor returns, which we wonder about without getting any answers from and which makes us stick to the evils we know rather than rush off to seek the ones we don’t? Fear of death makes us all cowards, and our natural boldness becomes weak with too much thinking. Actions that should be carried out at once get misdirected, and stop being actions at all. Butshh, here comes the beautiful Ophelia. Pretty lady, please remember me when you pray.
OPHELIA
My honored lord, you know right well you did,
And with them, words of so sweet breath composed
As made the things more rich. Their perfume lost,
Take these again, for to the noble mind Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.
There, my lord.

HAMLET
105 Ha, ha, are you honest?

OPHELIA
My lord?

HAMLET
Are you fair?

OPHELIA
What means your lordship?

HAMLET
That if you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty.

OPHELIA
Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with honesty?

HAMLET
Ay, truly, for the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness. This was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof. I did love you once.

OPHELIA
My lord, you know very well that you did, and wrote letters to go along with them, letters so sweetly written that they made your gifts even more valuable.

HAMLET
Sure, since beauty’s power can more easily change a good girl into a whore than the power of goodness can change a beautiful girl into a virgin. This used to be a great puzzle, but now I’ve solved it. I used to love you.
OPHELIA
Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

HAMLET
You should not have believed me, for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it. I loved you not.

OPHELIA
I was the more deceived.

HAMLET
Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me.

I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves, all. Believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery. Where’s your father?

OPHELIA
At home, my lord.

HAMLET
Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool no where but in ’s own house. Farewell.

OPHELIA
135 O, help him, you sweet heavens!

OPHELIA
You certainly made me believe you did, my lord.

HAMLET
You shouldn’t have believed me, since we’re all rotten at the core, no matter how hard we try to be virtuous. I didn’t love you.

OPHELIA
Then I guess I was misled.

HAMLET
Get yourself to a convent at once. Why would you want to give birth to more sinners? I’m fairly good myself, but even so I could accuse myself of such horrible crimes that it would’ve been better if my mother had never given birth to me. and

I am arrogant, vengeful, ambitious, with more ill will in me than I can fit into my thoughts, and more than I have time to carry it out in. Why should people like me be crawling around between earth and heaven? Every one of us is a criminal. Don’t believe any of us. Hurry to a convent. Where’s your father?

OPHELIA
He’s at home, my lord.

HAMLET
Lock him in, so he can play the fool in his own home only. Good-bye.

OPHELIA
Oh, dear God, please help him!
HAMLET
If thou dost marry, I’ll give thee this plague for thy dowry. Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunnery, go. Farewell. Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool, for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery, go, and quickly too. Farewell.

OPHELIA
Heavenly powers, restore him!

HAMLET
I have heard of your paintings too, well enough. God has given you one face and you make yourselves another. You jig and amble, and you lisp, you nickname God’s creatures and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go to, I’ll no more on ’t. It hath made me mad. I say, we will have no more marriages. Those that are married already, all but one, shall live. The rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery, go.

Exit HAMLET

OPHELIA
150 Oh, what a noble mind is here o’erthrown!—
The courtier’s, soldier’s, scholar’s, eye, tongue, sword,
Th’ expectancy and rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
Th’ observed of all observers, quite, quite down!
And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,
That sucked the honey of his music vows,
Now see that noble and most sovereign reason
Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh;
That unmatched form and feature of blown youth
Blasted with ecstasy. Oh, woe is me,
T’ have seen what I have seen, see what I see!

CLAUDIUS and POLONIUS come forward

CLAUDIUS
Love? His affections do not that way tend.
Nor what he spake, though it lacked form a little,
Was not like madness. There’s something in his soul
O’er which his melancholy sits on brood,
And I do doubt the hatch and the disclose
Will be some danger—which for to prevent,
I have in quick determination
Thus set it down: he shall with speed to England
For the demand of our neglected tribute.

CLAUDIUS
Love? His feelings don’t move in that direction. And his words, although they were a little disorganized, weren’t crazy. No, his sadness is hatching something, like a hen does sitting on an egg. What hatches very well may be dangerous. So to prevent any harm being done, I’ve made a quick executive decision: he’ll be sent to England to try to get back the money they owe us. With any luck, the sea and new countries will push out these thoughts that have somehow taken root in his mind. What do you think of this plan?

Haply the seas and countries different
With variable objects shall expel
This something-settled matter in his heart,
Whereon his brains still beating puts him
thus
From fashion of himself. What think you
on ’t?

POLONIUS
It shall do well. But yet do I believe
The origin and commencement of his grief
Sprung from neglected love.—How now, Ophelia?
You need not tell us what Lord Hamlet said.

180 We heard it all.—My lord, do as you please.
But, if you hold it fit, after the play
Let his queen mother all alone entreat him
To show his grief. Let her be round with
him,
And I’ll be placed, so please you, in the ear
Of all their conference. If she find him not,
To England send him or confine him where
Your wisdom best shall think.

CLAUDIUS
It shall be so.
Madness in great ones must not unwatched
go.

We heard everything.—My lord, do whatever you like, but if you like this idea, let his mother the queen get him alone and beg him to share his feelings with her. I’ll hide and listen in. If she can’t find out what his secret is, then send him off to England or wherever you think best.

CLAUDIUS
That’s how we’ll do it, then. When important people start to show signs of insanity, you have to watch them closely.

Exeunt

Act 3, Scene 2

Enter HAMLET and PLAYERS

HAMLET
Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the

HAMLET
Perform the speech just as I taught you, musically and smoothly. If you exaggerate the
tongue. But if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand thus, but use all gently, for in the very torrent, tempest, and (as I may say) whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. Oh, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb-shows and noise. I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant. It out-Herods Herod. Pray you, avoid it.

FIRST PLAYER
I warrant your honor.

HAMLET
Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. Now this overdone or come tardy off, though it make the unskillful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve, the censure of the which one must words the way some actors do, I might as well have some newscaster read the lines. Don't use too many hand gestures; just do a few, gently, like this. When you get into a whirlwind of passion on stage, remember to keep the emotion moderate and smooth. I hate it when I hear a blustery actor in a wig tear a passion to shreds, bursting everyone’s eardrums so as to impress the audience on the lower levels of the playhouse, who for the most part can only appreciate loud noises and pantomime shows. I would whip a guy for making a tyrant sound too tyrannical. That’s as bad as those old plays in which King Herod ranted. Please avoid doing that.
in your allowance o'erweigh a whole theatre of others.

Oh, there be players that I have seen play and heard others praise (and that highly), not to speak it profanely, that, neither having th' accent of Christians nor the gait of Christian, pagan, nor man, have so strutted and bellowed that I have thought some of nature’s journeymen had made men and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably.

FIRST PLAYER
I hope we have reformed that indifferently with us, sir.

HAMLET
O, reform it altogether! And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them, for there be of them that will themselves laugh to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too, though in the meantime some necessary question of the play be then to be considered. That’s villainous, and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it. Go, make you ready.

Exeunt PLAYERS

Enter POLONIUS, ROSENCRANTZ, and GUILDENSTERN

How now, my lord! Will the king hear this piece of work?

POLONIUS
And the queen too, and that presently.

HAMLET
Bid the players make haste.

I’ve seen actors who are highly praised, but who—not to be too rude here—can’t even talk or walk like human beings. They bellow and strut about like weird animals that were made to look like men, but very badly.

FIRST PLAYER
I hope we’ve corrected that fault pretty well in our company, sir.

HAMLET
Oh, correct it completely. Make sure that the clowns do not ad-lib, since some of them will make certain dumb audience members laugh mindlessly at them, while an important issue in the play needs to be addressed. It’s bad behavior for an actor, anyway, and displays a pitiful ambition to hog the limelight on stage.

The PLAYERS exit.

POLONIUS, GUILDENSTERN, and ROSENCRANTZ enter.

So, my lord, will the king be attending the performance?

POLONIUS
Yes, he will, and the queen as well.

HAMLET
Tell the actors to hurry.
Exit **POLONIUS**

**ROSENCRANTZ**
Ay, my lord.

Exeunt **ROSENCRANTZ** and **GUILDE NSTERN**

**HAMLET**
What ho, Horatio!

Enter **HORATIO**

**HORATIO**
Here, sweet lord, at your service.

**HAMLET**
Horatio, thou art e'en as just a man
As e'er my conversation coped withal.

**HORATIO**
O my dear lord—

**HAMLET**
Nay, do not think I flatter.

For what advancement may I hope from thee
That no revenue hast but thy good spirits,
To feed and clothe thee? Why should the poor be flattered?
No, let the candied tongue lick absurd pomp,
And crook the pregnant hinges of the knee
Where thrift may follow fawning. Dost thou hear?
Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice
And could of men distinguish, her election

**POLONIUS** exits.

Will you two help to hasten them?

Will you two help them get ready?

**ROSENCRANTZ**
Yes, my lord.

**ROSENCRANTZ** and **GUILDENSTERN** exit.

**HAMLET**
Well, hello there, Horatio!

**HORATIO** enters.

**HORATIO**
Here I am at your service, my dear lord.

**HAMLET**
Horatio, you’re the best man I’ve ever known.

**HORATIO**
Oh, sir—

**HAMLET**
Don’t think I’m flattering you. What could I hope to get from you, who’ve got nothing but your charm to support you in life? Why would anyone flatter a poor person? No, keep flattery for kissing the hands of those who can pay well. You understand? Ever since I’ve been a free agent in my choice of friends, I’ve chosen you because you take everything life hands you with calm acceptence, grateful for both good and bad. Blessed are those who mix emotion with reason in just the right proportion, making them strong.
Hath sealed thee for herself, for thou hast been—
As one in suffering all that suffers nothing—
A man that Fortune’s buffets and rewards
Hast ta’en with equal thanks. And blessed are those
Whose blood and judgment are so well commingled,
That they are not a pipe for Fortune’s finger
To sound what stop she please. Give me that man
That is not passion’s slave, and I will wear him
In my heart’s core, ay, in my heart of heart,
As I do thee.—Something too much of this.—

There is a play tonight before the king.
One scene of it comes near the circumstance
Which I have told thee of my father’s death.
I prithee, when thou seest that act afoot,
Even with the very comment of thy soul
Observe mine uncle. If his occulted guilt
Do not itself unkennel in one speech,
It is a damndèd ghost that we have seen,
And my imaginations are as foul
As Vulcan’s stithy. Give him heedful note.
For I mine eyes will rivet to his face,
And after we will both our judgments join
In censure of his seeming.

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HORATIO

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HORATIO
Well, my lord. If he steal aught the whilst this play is playing, And ’scape detecting, I will pay the theft.

Danish march. Sound a flourish. Enter King CLAUDIUS, Queen GERTRUDE, POLONIUS, OPHELIA, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN and other lords attendant with CLAUDIUS’s; guard carrying torches

Hamlet
They are coming to the play. I must be idle. Get you a place.

Claudius
How fares our cousin Hamlet?

Hamlet
Excellent, i’ faith, of the chameleon’s dish. I eat the air, promise-crammed. You cannot feed capons so.

Claudius
I have nothing with this answer, Hamlet. These words are not mine.

Hamlet
No, nor mine now. (to POLONIUS) My lord, you played once i’ th’ university, you say?

Polonius
That did I, my lord, and was accounted a good actor.

Hamlet
What did you enact?

Claudius
I have no idea what you’re talking about, Hamlet. You’re not answering my question.

Hamlet
Mine, neither. (to POLONIUS) My lord, you performed in amateur dramatic productions in college, right?

Polonius
Indeed I did, my lord. I was considered to be quite a good actor.

Hamlet
What role did you play?
POLONIUS
I did enact Julius Caesar. I was killed i’ th’ Capitol. Brutus killed me.

HAMLET
It was a brute part of him to kill so capital a calf there.—Be the players ready?

ROSENCRANTZ
Ay, my lord. They stay upon your patience.

GERTRUDE
Come hither, my dear Hamlet, sit by me.

HAMLET
100 No, good mother. Here’s metal more attractive. (sits next to OPHELIA )

POLONIUS
(to CLAUDIUS) Oh, ho, do you mark that?

HAMLET
Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

OPHELIA
No, my lord.

HAMLET
I mean, my head upon your lap?

OPHELIA
105 Ay, my lord.

HAMLET
Do you think I meant country matters?

OPHELIA
I think nothing, my lord.

HAMLET

POLONIUS
I played Julius Caesar. I was killed in the Capitol. Brutus killed me.

HAMLET
That was brutish of them, to kill so capital a guy. —Are the actors ready?

ROSENCRANTZ
Yes, my lord. They’re ready whenever you are.

GERTRUDE
Come here, my dear Hamlet. Sit by me.

HAMLET
No thanks, my good mother. There’s a nicer piece of work right here. (he sits down nearOPHELIA )

POLONIUS
(to CLAUDIUS) Hey, did you notice that?

HAMLET
My lady, should I lie in your lap?

OPHELIA
No, my lord.

HAMLET
I mean, with my head in your lap?

OPHELIA
Yes, my lord.

HAMLET
Did you think I was talking about sex?

OPHELIA
I think nothing, my lord.

HAMLET
That’s a fair thought to lie between maids’ legs.

OPHELIA
What is, my lord?

HAMLET
110 Nothing.

OPHELIA
You are merry, my lord.

HAMLET
Who, I?

OPHELIA
Ay, my lord.

HAMLET
O God, your only jig-maker. What should a man do but be merry? For, look you, how cheerfully my mother looks, and my father died within these two hours.

OPHELIA
Nay, ’tis twice two months, my lord.

HAMLET
So long? Nay then, let the devil wear black, for I’ll have a suit of sables. O heavens! Die two months ago and not forgotten yet? Then there’s hope a great man’s memory may outlive his life half a year. But, by ’r Lady, he must build churches then, or else shall he suffer not thinking on, with the hobby-horse, whose epitaph is “For, oh, for, oh, the hobby-horse is forgot.”

That’s a nice thought to lie between a girl’s legs.

OPHELIA
What is, my lord?

HAMLET
Nothing.

OPHELIA
You’re in a good mood tonight, my lord.

HAMLET
Who, me?

OPHELIA
Yes, my lord.

HAMLET
Oh God—who is, by the way, the best comic of them all. What can you do but be happy? Look how cheerful my mother is, only two hours after my father died.

OPHELIA
No, my lord, it’s been four months.

HAMLET
As long as that? Well, in that case these mourning clothes can go to hell. I’ll get myself a fur-trimmed suit. Good heavens, he died two months ago and hasn’t been forgotten yet? In that case, there’s reason to hope a man’s memory may outlive him by six months. But he’s got to build churches for that to happen, my lady, or else he’ll have to put up with being forgotten, like the hobby-horse in the popular song that goes, “Heigh-ho, heigh-ho, the hobby-horse is forgotten.”
Trumpets sound. The dumb show begins.

Enter a King and a Queen very lovingly, the Queen embracing him and he her. She kneels and makes show of protestation unto him. He takes her up and declines his head upon her neck, lays him down upon a bank of flowers. She, seeing him asleep, leaves him. Anon comes in a fellow, takes off his crown, kisses it, pours poison in the King’s ears, and exits. The Queen returns, finds the King dead, and makes passionate action. The Poisoner, with some two or three Mutes, comes in again, seeming to lament with her. The dead body is carried away. The Poisoner woos the Queen with gifts. She seems loath and unwilling awhile, but in the end accepts his love.

Exeunt PLAYERS

OPHELIA
What means this, my lord?

HAMLET
Marry, this is miching malhecho. It means mischief.

OPHELIA
Belike this show imports the argument of the play.

Enter PROLOGUE

OPHELIA
What does this mean, my lord?

HAMLET
This means we’re having some mischievous fun.

OPHELIA
This pantomime was probably a summary of the play.

The PROLOGUE—the actor who will introduce the play—enters.

HAMLET
This guy will tell us everything.
players cannot keep counsel. They’ll tell all.

OPHELIA
Will he tell us what this show meant?

HAMLET
Ay, or any show that you will show him. Be not you ashamed to show, he’ll not shame to tell you what it means.

OPHELIA
135 You are naught, you are naught. I’ll mark the play.

PROLOGUE
For us and for our tragedy, Here stooping to your clemency, We beg your hearing patiently.

Exit PROLOGUE

HAMLET
Is this a prologue or the posy of a ring?

OPHELIA
140 'Tis brief, my lord.

HAMLET
As woman’s love.

Enter PLAYER KING and PLAYER QUEEN

PLAYER KING
Full thirty times hath Phoebus' cart gone round Neptune’s salt wash and Tellus’ orbèd ground, And thirty dozen moons with borrowed

HAMLET
Was that the prologue or the inscription on some wedding ring?

OPHELIA
It was a bit short, my lord.

HAMLET
Yes, as short as a woman’s love.

Players playing the roles of KING and QUEEN enter.

PLAYER KING
It’s been thirty years since we were married.
sheen
About the world have times twelve thirties been,
Since love our hearts and Hymen did our hands
Unite communual in most sacred bands.

PLAYER QUEEN
So many journeys may the sun and moon
Make us again count o'er ere love be done.

150 But woe is me! You are so sick of late,
So far from cheer and from your former state,
That I distrust you. Yet though I distrust,
Discomfort you, my lord, it nothing must.

155 For women fear too much, even as they love,
And women's fear and love hold quantity,
In neither aught, or in extremity.
Now what my love is, proof hath made you know,
And as my love is sized, my fear is so:
Where love is great, the littlest doubts are fear.
Where little fears grow great, great love grows there.

PLAYER KING
Faith, I must leave thee, love, and shortly too.
My operant powers their functions leave to do.

160 And thou shalt live in this fair world behind,
Honored, beloved, and haply one as kind
For husband shalt thou—

PLAYER QUEEN
I hope we stay in love for thirty more years! But I'm sad. You’ve been so gloomy lately, so unlike your usual cheerful self, that I worry something is wrong. But don’t let this upset you, since women are too afraid in love—for them, love and fear go hand in hand. You know very well how much I love you, and my fear is just as deep. When someone’s love is great, the little worries become very big. So when you see someone who worries a lot about little things, you know they’re really in love.

PLAYER KING
My love, I will have to leave you soon. My body is growing weak, and I will leave you behind in this beautiful world, honored and much loved. Perhaps you’ll find another husband—

PLAYER QUEEN

PLAYER QUEEN
Oh, confound the rest!
Such love must needs be treason in my breast.
In second husband let me be accursed!
None wed the second but who killed the first.

HAMLET
(aside)Wormwood, wormwood.

HAMLET
(to himself) Harsh!

PLAYER QUEEN
The instances that second marriage move
Are base respects of thrift, but none of love.
A second time I kill my husband dead
When second husband kisses me in bed.

PLAYER QUEEN
Someone might marry a second time for money, but never for love. Any time I kissed my second husband in bed, I’d kill the first one all over again.

PLAYER KING
I do believe you think what now you speak,
But what we do determine oft we break.
Purpose is but the slave to memory,
Of violent birth, but poor validity,
Which now, like fruit unripe, sticks on the tree,
But fall, unshaken, when they mellow be.
Most necessary ‘tis that we forget
To pay ourselves what to ourselves is debt.
What to ourselves in passion we propose,
The passion ending, doth the purpose lose.
The violence of either grief or joy
Their own enactures with themselves destroy.
Where joy most revels, grief doth most lament.
Grief joys, joy grieves on slender accident.
This world is not for aye, nor ’tis not strange
Oh, damn everyone else! Remarrying would be treason to my heart. Curse me if I take a second husband. When a woman takes a second husband, it’s because she’s killed off the first.

PLAYER KING
I know that’s what you think now, but people change their minds. Often our intentions are strong at first, but as time goes on they weaken, just like an apple sticks to the tree when it is unripe but falls to the ground once it ripens. The promises we make to ourselves in emotional moments lose their power once the emotion passes. Great grief and joy may rouse us to action, but when the grief or joy have passed, we’re no longer motivated to act. Joy turns to grief in the blink of an eye, and grief becomes joy just as quickly. This world is not made for either one to last long in, and it’s no surprise that even our loves change along with our luck. It’s still a mystery to be solved whether luck controls love, or love controls luck. When a great man has a run of bad luck, watch how followers
That even our loves should with our fortunes change.
For 'tis a question left us yet to prove,
Whether love lead fortune, or else fortune love.
The great man down, you mark his favorite flies.
The poor advanced makes friends of enemies.
And hitherto doth love on fortune tend,
For who not needs shall never lack a friend,
And who in want a hollow friend doth try,
Directly seasons him his enemy.
But, orderly to end where I begun,
Our wills and fates do so contrary run
That our devices still are overthrown.
Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own.
So think thou wilt no second husband wed,
But die thy thoughts when thy first lord is dead.

PLAYER QUEEN
Nor earth to me give food, nor heaven light.
Sport and repose lock from me day and night.
To desperation turn my trust and hope.
An anchor’s cheer in prison be my scope.
Each opposite that blanks the face of joy
Meet what I would have well and it destroy.
Both here and hence pursue me lasting strife
If, once a widow, ever I be wife!

PLAYER KING
May the earth refuse me food and the heavens go dark, may I have no rest day and night, may my trust and hope turn to despair—may the gloom of a prison overtake me, and may my every joy be turned to sorrow.
May I know no peace either in this life or the next one, if I become a wife again after I am a widow.
'Tis deeply sworn. Sweet, leave me here awhile. My spirits grow dull, and fain I would beguile The tedious day with sleep. The PLAYER KING sleeps. You have made this vow with deep sincerity. My dear, leave me alone now awhile. My mind is getting foggy, and I would like to sleep and escape this endless day. The PLAYER KING sleeps. 

PLAYER QUEEN Sleep rock thy brain, And never come mischance between us twain. 

Exit PLAYER QUEEN 

HAMLET Madam, how like you this play? GERTRUDE The lady protests too much, methinks. HAMLET Oh, but she’ll keep her word. CLAUDIUS Have you heard the argument? Is there no offense in ’t? HAMLET No, no, they do but jest. Poison in jest. No offense i’ th’ world. CLAUDIUS What do you call the play? HAMLET The Mousetrap. Marry, how? Tropically. This play is the image of a murder done in Vienna. Gonzago is the duke’s name, his wife Baptista. You shall see anon. 'Tis a knavish piece of work, but what o’ that? Your majesty and we that have free souls, it touches us not. Let the galled jade wince, our withers are unwrung.
Enter LUCIANUS

This is one Lucianus, nephew to the king.

LUCIANUS

This is Lucianus, the king’s nephew in the play.

OPHELIA

230 You are as good as a chorus, my lord.

OPHELIA

You’re an expert commentator, aren’t you?

HAMLET

I could interpret between you and your love, if I could see the puppets dallying.

HAMLET

Yes. I could even supply the dialogue between you and your lover if you did your little puppet show of love for me.

OPHELIA

You are keen, my lord, you are keen.

OPHELIA

Ooh, you’re sharp.

HAMLET

It would cost you a groaning to take off mine edge.

HAMLET

Yes, pointy, but you could take the edge off me—though it might make you moan a little.

OPHELIA

You get better in your jokes and worse in your manners.

OPHELIA

Still better and worse.

HAMLET

So you must take your husbands.—Begin, murderer. Pox, leave thy damnable faces, and begin. Come, “The croaking raven doth bellow for revenge—”

HAMLET

That’s what you women get when you trick us into marriage.—Let’s get started, murderer on stage, please! Damn it, stop fussing with the makeup, and get going. We’re all waiting for the revenge!

LUCIANUS

Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit, and time agreeing.

LUCIANUS

Evil thoughts, ready hands, the right poison, and the time is right too. The dark night is on my side, for no one can see me. You deadly mixture of weeds and plants, which Hecate, goddess of witchcraft, has put a spell on, use your
With Hecate’s ban thrice blasted, thrice infected,
Thy natural magic and dire property
On wholesome life usurp immediately.
(pours poison into PLAYER KING’s ears)

HAMLET
He poisons him i’ th’ garden for ’s estate.
His name’s Gonzago. The story is extant,
and writ in choice Italian. You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago’s wife.

HAMLET
You see, he poisons the king in his own garden to get the kingdom for himself. The king’s name is Gonzago. The original story was written in the finest Italian. You’ll see shortly how the murderer wins the love of Gonzago’s wife.

CLAUDIUS stands up

OPHELIA
The king rises.

HAMLET
What, frightened with false fire?

GERTRUDE
How fares my lord?

POLONIUS
Give o’er the play.

CLAUdIUS
Give me some light, away!

POLONIUS
Lights, lights, lights!

Commotion. Exeunt all but HAMLET and HORATIO

HAMLET
Why, let the stricken deer go weep,

HAMLET
Let the deer that’s been shot go off
The hart ungallèd play.
For some must watch while some must sleep.
So runs the world away.
Would not this, sir, and a forest of feathers—if the rest of my fortunes turn Turk with me— with two Provincial roses on my razed shoes, get me a fellowship in a cry of players?

HORATIO
Half a share.

HAMLET
A whole one, I.
For thou dost know, O Damon dear,
This realm dismantled was
Of Jove himself. And now reigns here
A very, very—pajock.

HORATIO
You might have rhymed.

HAMLET
O good Horatio, I’ll take the ghost’s word for a thousand pound. Didst perceive?

HORATIO
Very well, my lord.

HAMLET
Upon the talk of the poisoning?

HORATIO
I did very well note him.

HAMLET
265 Ah ha! Come, some music! Come, the and weep,
While the unharmed deer happily plays.
For some must watch while other must sleep,
That’s how the world goes.
Couldn’t I get work as an actor (if I hit a run of bad luck) in some acting company, and wear flowers on my shoes?

HORATIO
They might even give you half a share of the company.

HAMLET
No, a whole share for me.
For you know, my dearest Damon,
That Jove, king of the gods, was
Thrown out of power here, and
Who’s in charge? A big—peacock.

HORATIO
You could have at least rhymed.

HAMLET
Oh, Horatio, I’ll bet you a thousand bucks the ghost was right. Did you notice?

HORATIO
Yes, I did, my lord.

HAMLET
When the actors were talking about poison?

HORATIO
I watched him very closely.

HAMLET
Ah ha! Hey, let’s have some music
recorders!
For if the king like not the comedy,
Why then, belike, he likes it not,
perdy.
Come, some music!

Enter ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

GUILDENSTERN
Good my lord, vouchsafe me a word with you.

HAMLET
Sir, a whole history.

GUILDENSTERN
The king, sir—

HAMLET
270 Ay, sir, what of him?

GUILDENSTERN
Is in his retirement marvelous distempered.

HAMLET
With drink, sir?

GUILDENSTERN
No, my lord, with choler.

HAMLET
Your wisdom should show itself more richer to signify this to the doctor. For, for me to put him to his purgation would perhaps plunge him into far more choler.

GUILDENSTERN
Good my lord, put your discourse into some frame and start not so wildly from my affair.

here! Play your flutes!
For if the king doesn’t like the play,
Then he doesn’t like it, we may say.
Come on, music!

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter.

GUILDENSTERN
My lord, could I have a word with you?

HAMLET
You can have a whole story, not just a word.

GUILDENSTERN
Sir, the king—

HAMLET
Yes, what about him?

GUILDENSTERN
He’s in his chambers now, and he’s extremely upset.

HAMLET
What, an upset stomach from too much booze?

GUILDENSTERN
No, sir, he’s angry.

HAMLET
You should be smart enough to tell this to a doctor, not me, since if I treated him, he’d just get angrier.

GUILDENSTERN
My lord, please try to stick to the subject at hand.
HAMLET
I am tame, sir. Pronounce.

GUILDENSTERN
The queen your mother, in most great affliction of spirit, hath sent me to you.

HAMLET
You are welcome.

GUILDENSTERN
Nay, good my lord, this courtesy is not of the right breed. If it shall please you to make me a wholesome answer, I will do your mother’s commandment. If not, your pardon and my return shall be the end of my business.

HAMLET
Sir, I cannot.

GUILDENSTERN
What, my lord?

HAMLET
Make you a wholesome answer. My wit’s diseased. But, sir, such answer as I can make, you shall command. Or, rather, as you say, my mother. Therefore no more but to the matter. My mother, you say—

ROSENCRANTZ
Then thus she says: your behavior hath struck her into amazement and admiration.

HAMLET
O wonderful son that can so ’stonish a mother! But is there no sequel at the heels of this mother’s admiration? Impart.

ROSENCRANTZ
She desires to speak with you in her closet ere you go to bed.

HAMLET
We shall obey, were she ten times our

HAMLET
I’ll be good, sir. Go ahead.

GUILDENSTERN
The queen your mother is upset, and sent me to see you.

HAMLET
It’s lovely to see you.

GUILDENSTERN
No, my lord, your polite words are not to the point. If you could please stop fooling around, I’ll tell you what your mother wants. If not, I’ll leave you alone and that’ll be the end of my business.

HAMLET
Sir, I can’t.

GUILDENSTERN
Can’t what, my lord?

HAMLET
Stop fooling around. My mind is confused. But I’ll do my best to give you a straight answer, as you wish—or rather, as my mother wishes. Okay, to the point. My mother, you say …?

ROSENCRANTZ
She says that your behavior has astonished her.

HAMLET
Oh, what a wonderful son, I can impress my mother! But what’s the upshot of her admiration? Do tell.

ROSENCRANTZ
She wants to have a word with you in her bedroom before you go to bed.

HAMLET
I’d obey even if she were my mother
mother. Have you any further trade with us?

ROSENCRANTZ
300 My lord, you once did love me.

HAMLET
And do still, by these pickers and stealers.

ROSENCRANTZ
Good my lord, what is your cause of distemper? You do surely bar the door upon your own liberty if you deny your griefs to your friend.

HAMLET
305 Sir, I lack advancement.

ROSENCRANTZ
How can that be, when you have the voice of the king himself for your succession in Denmark?

ROSENCRANTZ
But how can you say that, when the king himself says you’re the heir to the Danish throne?

Reenter the PLAYERS with recorders

HAMLET
Ay, sir, but “While the grass grows—” The proverb is something musty—Oh, the recorders! Let me see one. (takes a recorder) (aside to ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN)

HAMLET
Yes, eventually, but as the proverb goes, “While the grass grows …” But that’s a tired old proverb. Oh, the recorders! Let me see one. (he takes a recorder and turns to GUILDENSTERN) Why are you hovering so close, as if you want to ambush me?

GUILDENSTERN
O my lord, if my duty be too bold, my love is too unmannerly.

GUILDENSTERN
Oh, my lord, I’m sorry if I’m forgetting my manners. It’s just that I’m worried about you.

HAMLET
I do not well understand that. Will you play ten times over. Is there anything else I can do for you?

ROSENCRANTZ
My lord, you used to like me.

HAMLET
And still do, I swear by my hands.

ROSENCRANTZ
My lord, what’s wrong with you? You’re not doing yourself any good by refusing to tell your friends what’s bothering you.

HAMLET
Sir, I have no future ahead of me.

ROSENCRANTZ
But how can you say that, when the king himself says you’re the heir to the Danish throne?

The PLAYERS enter with recorders.
upon this pipe?

**GUILDENSTERN**
My lord, I cannot.

**HAMLET**
I pray you.

**GUILDENSTERN**
Believe me, I cannot.

**HAMLET**
I do beseech you.

**GUILDENSTERN**
I know no touch of it, my lord.

**HAMLET**
It is as easy as lying. Govern these ventages with your fingers and thumb, give it breath with your mouth, and it will discourse most eloquent music. Look you, these are the stops.

**GUILDENSTERN**
But these cannot I command to any utterance of harmony. I have not the skill.

**HAMLET**
Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me. You would seem to know my stops. You would pluck out the heart of my mystery. You would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass. And there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ, yet cannot you make it speak? 'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, yet you cannot play upon me.

mean. Will you play this recorder?

**GUILDENSTERN**
I can't, my lord.

**HAMLET**
Please.

**GUILDENSTERN**
I’m serious, I can’t.

**HAMLET**
I’m begging you.

**GUILDENSTERN**
I have no idea how.

**HAMLET**
Oh, it’s as easy as lying. Just put your fingers and thumb over the holes and blow into it, and it’ll produce the most moving music. Here, the holes are here.

**GUILDENSTERN**
But I can’t play a melody. I don’t know how.

**HAMLET**
Well, look how you play me—as if you knew exactly where to put your fingers, to blow the mystery out of me, playing all the octaves of my range—and yet you can’t even produce music from this little instrument? My God, do you think I’m easier to manipulate than a pipe? You can push my buttons, but you can’t play me for a fool.
Enter POLONIUS

God bless you, sir.

POLONIUS

My lord, the queen would speak with you, and presently.

HAMLET

Do you see yonder cloud that’s almost in shape of a camel?

340 By th’ mass, and ’tis like a camel indeed.

POLONIUS

My lord, the queen wants to speak with you right away.

HAMLET

Do you see that cloud up there that looks like a camel?

340 By God, it does look like a camel.

POLONIUS

It is backed like a weasel.

HAMLET

Methinks it is like a weasel.

POLONIUS

Or like a whale.

HAMLET

Or like a whale.

POLONIUS

Very like a whale.

HAMLET

Then I will come to my mother by and by. (aside) They fool me to the top of my bent.—I will come by and by.

POLONIUS

I will say so.

HAMLET

“By and by” is easily said.

Exit POLONIUS

Leave me, friends.

Exeunt all but HAMLET

Now please leave me alone, my friends.

Everyone except HAMLET exits.

350 ’Tis now the very witching time of night, When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out

Polonius exits.

This is the time of night when witches come out, when graveyards yawn open and the stench of hell seeps out. I could
Contagion to this world. Now could I
drink hot blood

And do such bitter business as the bitter
day
Would quake to look on. Soft, now to my
mother.—
O heart, lose not thy nature, let not ever
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom.
Let me be cruel, not unnatural.

I will speak daggers to her but use none.
My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites.

How in my words somever she be shent,
To give them seals never, my soul,
consent!

Exit

HAMLET exits.

Act 3, Scene 3

Enter CLAUDIUS, ROSENCRANTZ, andGUILDENSTERN

CLAUDIUS

I like him not, nor stands it safe with us
To let his madness range. Therefore
prepare you.
I your commission will forthwith

dispatch,
And he to England shall along with you.
The terms of our estate may not endure
Hazard so dangerous as doth hourly
grow
Out of his lunacies.

GUILDENSTERN

We will ourselves provide.
Most holy and religious fear it is
To keep those many, many bodies safe

CLAUDIUS

I don’t like the way he’s acting, and it’s
not safe for me to let his insanity get out
of control. So get prepared. I’m sending
you to England on diplomatic business,
and Hamlet will go with you. As king, I
cannot risk the danger he represents as he
grows crazier by the hour.

GUILDENSTERN

We’ll take care of it. It’s a sacred duty to
protect the lives of all those who depend
on Your Highness.
That live and feed upon your majesty.

ROSENCRANTZ
The single and peculiar life is bound
With all the strength and armor of the mind
To keep itself from noyance, but much more
That spirit upon whose weal depend and rest
The lives of many. The cease of majesty
Dies not alone, but, like a gulf, doth draw
What’s near it with it. It is a massy wheel
Fixed on the summit of the highest mount,
To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things
Are mortised and adjoined, which, when it falls,
Each small annexment, petty consequence,
Attends the boisterous ruin. Never alone
Did the king sigh, but with a general groan.

CLAUDIUS
Arm you, I pray you, to this speedy voyage.
For we will fetters put upon this fear,
Which now goes too free-footed.

ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN
We will haste us.

Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

ROSENCRANTZ
Everyone tries to avoid harm, but the public figure demands even more protection. When a great leader dies he doesn’t die alone but, like a whirlpool, draws others with him. He’s like a huge wheel on the top of the highest mountain whose spokes touch the rim of ten thousand smaller things—when it falls down the mountain, every little object goes down with it. Whenever a king sighs, everyone groans.

CLAUDIUS
Prepare yourself, please, for this trip. We’ll put a leash on this danger that’s now running wild.

ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN
We’ll hurry.
Enter **POLONIUS**

**POLONIUS**

My lord, he’s going to his mother’s closet.

30 Behind the arras I’ll convey myself
To hear the process. I’ll warrant she’ll tax him home.

And, as you said (and wisely was it said)
'Tis meet that some more audience than a mother—

35 Since nature makes them partial—should o'erhear
The speech, of vantage. Fare you well, my liege.
I’ll call upon you ere you go to bed
And tell you what I know.

**CLAUDIUS**

Thanks, dear my lord.

Exit **POLONIUS**

**POLONIUS**

My lord, Hamlet’s going to his mother’s room. I’ll hide behind the tapestry to hear what they say. I bet she’ll chew him out. And as you said (and you said it wisely), it’s good to have someone other than a mother listening in on them, since she can be too partial to him. Goodbye, my lord. I’ll stop by before you go to bed, and tell you what I’ve heard.

**CLAUDIUS**

Thanks, my dear lord.

Oh, my offence is rank. It smells to heaven.
It hath the primal eldest curse upon ’t,

40 A brother’s murder. Pray can I not.
Though inclination be as sharp as will,
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,
And, like a man to double business bound,

45 I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
And both neglect. What if this cursed hand
Were thicker than itself with brother’s blood?

Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
Oh, my crime is so rotten it stinks all the way to heaven. It has the mark of Cain on it, a brother’s murder. I can’t pray, though I want to desperately. My guilt is stronger even than my intentions. And like a person with two opposite things to do at once, I stand paralyzed and neglect them both. So what if this cursed hand of mine is coated with my brother’s blood? Isn’t there enough rain in heaven to wash it clean as snow? Isn’t that what God’s mercy is for? And doesn’t prayer serve these two purposes—to keep us from sinning and to bring us forgiveness when we have sinned? So I’ll pray. I’ve already committed my sin. But, oh, what kind of prayer is there for me? “Dear Lord, forgive
To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy
But to confront the visage of offence?
And what’s in prayer but this twofold force,
To be forestallèd ere we come to fall
Or pardoned being down? Then I’ll look up.

My fault is past. But oh, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn, “Forgive me my foul murder”?

That cannot be, since I am still possessed
Of those effects for which I did the murder:
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
May one be pardoned and retain th’ offense?

In the corrupted currents of this world
Offense’s gilded hand may shove by justice,
And oft ’tis seen the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law. But ’tis not so above.
There is no shuffling. There the action lies
In his true nature, and we ourselves compelled,

Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
To give in evidence. What then? What rests?
Try what repentance can. What can it not?
Yet what can it when one can not repent?
O wretched state! O bosom black as

That won’t work, since I’m still reaping the rewards of that murder: my crown and my queen. Can a person be forgiven and still keep the fruits of his crime? In this wicked world, criminals often take the money they stole and use it to buy off the law, shoving justice aside. But not in heaven. Up there, every action is judged for exactly what it’s worth, and we’re forced to confront our crimes. So what can I do? What is there left to do? Offer whatever repentance I can—that couldn’t hurt. But it can’t help either! Oh, what a lousy situation I’m in. My heart’s as black as death. My soul is stuck to sin, and the more it struggles to break free, the more it sticks. Help me, angels!

C’mon, make an effort. Bend, stubborn knees. Steely heart, be soft as a newborn babe, so I can pray. Perhaps everything will turn out okay after all.

(he kneels)
death!
O limèd soul that, struggling to be free,
Art more engaged! Help, angels. Make
assay.
Bow, stubborn knees, and, heart with
strings of steel,
Be soft as sinews of the newborn babe.
All may be well. (kneels)

Enter HAMLET

HAMLET
Now might I do it pat. Now he is a-
praying.
And now I’ll do ’t. And so he goes to
heaven.
And so am I revenged.—That would be
scanned.
A villain kills my father, and, for that,
I, his sole son, do this same villain send
To heaven.
Oh, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
He took my father grossly, full of bread,
With all his crimes broad blown, as flush
as May.
And how his audit stands who knows
save heaven?
But in our circumstance and course of
thought
’Tis heavy with him. And am I then
revenged
To take him in the purging of his soul
When he is fit and seasoned for his
passage?
No.

HAMLET
I could do it easily now. He’s praying
now. And now I’ll do it. (he draws out
his sword) And there he goes, off to
heaven. And that’s my revenge. I’d
better think about this more carefully. A
villain kills my father, and I, my
father’s only son, send this same villain
to heaven. Seems like I just did him a
favor. He killed my father when my
father was enjoying life, with all his
sins in full bloom, before my father
could repent for any of them. Only God
knows how many sins my father has to
pay for. As for me, I don’t think his
prospects look so good.

So is it really revenge for me if I kill
Claudius right when he is confessing his
sins, in perfect condition for a trip to
heaven? No. Away, sword, and wait for
a better moment to kill him. (he puts his
sword away) When he’s sleeping off
When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
Or in th' incestuous pleasure of his bed,
At game a-swearing, or about some act
That has no relish of salvation in 't—
Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,
And that his soul may be as damned and black
As hell, whereto it goes. My mother stays
This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.

Exit HAMLET

CLAUDIUS
(rises) My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.
Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

Exit CLAUDIUS

Act 3, Scene 4

Enter GERTRUDE and POLONIUS

HAMLET
(within) Mother, mother, mother!

GERTRUDE

5

POLONIUS
He will come straight. Look you lay home to him.
Tell him his pranks have been too broad to bear with,
And that your grace hath screened and stood between
Much heat and him. I’ll silence me even here.
Pray you, be round with him.

POLONIUS
He’ll come right away. Make sure you lay into him. Tell him his pranks have caused too much trouble, and that Your Highness has taken a lot of heat for them. I’ll be right here, silent. Please be blunt with him.

HAMLET
(offstage) Mother, mother, mother!

GERTRUDE
I’ll warrant you. Fear me not. Withdraw, I hear him coming.

POLONIUS hides behind the arras

Enter HAMLET

HAMLET
Now mother, what’s the matter?

GERTRUDE
Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

HAMLET
Mother, you have my father much offended.

GERTRUDE
Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.

HAMLET
Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue.

GERTRUDE
Why, how now, Hamlet?

HAMLET
What’s the matter now?

GERTRUDE
Have you forgot me?

HAMLET
No, by the rood, not so.

You are the queen, your husband’s brother’s wife, And—would it were not so!—you are my mother.

GERTRUDE
Nay, then I’ll set those to you that can speak.

Don’t worry, I’ll do what you say. Now hide, I hear him coming.

POLONIUS hides behind the tapestry.

HAMLET enters.

HAMLET
Now mother, what’s this all about?

GERTRUDE
Hamlet, you’ve insulted your father.

HAMLET
Mother, you’ve insulted my father.

GERTRUDE
Come on, you’re answering me foolishly.

HAMLET
Go on, you’re questioning me evilly.

GERTRUDE
Hamlet, what, why?

HAMLET
What’s the problem now?

GERTRUDE
Have you forgotten who I am?

HAMLET
For God’s sake no, I haven’t. You are the queen, your husband’s brother’s wife, and you are my mother, though I wish you weren’t.

GERTRUDE
In that case I’ll call in others who can still speak.
HAMLET
Come, come, and sit you down. You shall not budge.

GERTRUDE
What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me?
Help, help, ho!

POLONIUS
(from behind the arras) What, ho? Help, help, help!

HAMLET
How now, a rat? Dead for a ducat, dead!
(stabs his sword through the arras and kills POLONIUS)

POLONIUS
(from behind the tapestry) Hey! Help, help, help!

HAMLET
What’s this, a rat? I’ll bet a buck he’s a dead rat now.

POLONIUS
(from behind the tapestry) Oh, I’ve been killed!

GERTRUDE
O me, what hast thou done?

HAMLET
Nay, I know not. Is it the king?

GERTRUDE
Oh, what a rash and bloody deed is this!

HAMLET
A bloody deed? Almost as bad, good mother,
As kill a king and marry with his brother.

GERTRUDE
As kill a king?

HAMLET
No, sit down. You won’t budge until I hold a mirror up to you, where you will see what’s deep inside you.

GERTRUDE
What are you going to do? You won’t kill me, will you? Help!

POLONIUS
(from behind the tapestry) Oh, I am slain.

GERTRUDE
What’s this, a rat? I’ll bet a buck he’s a dead rat now.

HAMLET
I don’t know. Is it the king?

GERTRUDE
Oh, what a senseless, horrible act!

HAMLET
A horrible act—almost as bad, my good mother, as killing a king and marrying his brother.

GERTRUDE
Killing a king?
Ay, lady, ’twas my word.  
That’s what I said, my good woman.

(draws back the arras and discoveries POLONIUS) 
(he pulls back the tapestry and discoveries POLONIUS)

Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell.  
You low-life, nosy, busybody fool, goodbye. I thought you were somebody more important. You’ve gotten what you deserve. I guess you found out it’s dangerous to be a busybody. (to GERTRUDE) Stop wringing your hands. Sit down and let me wring your heart instead, which I will do if it’s still soft enough, if your evil lifestyle has not toughened it against feeling anything at all.

(to GERTRUDE) Leave wringing of your hands. Peace. Sit you down
And let me wring your heart. For so I shall
If it be made of penetrable stuff,
If damned custom have not brassed it so
That it is proof and bulwark against sense.

GERTRUDE
What have I done, that thou darest wag thy tongue
In noise so rude against me?

HAMLET
Such an act
That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose
From the fair forehead of an innocent love
And sets a blister there, makes marriage vows
As false as dicers’ oaths—oh, such a deed
As from the body of contraction plucks
The very soul, and sweet religion makes
A rhapsody of words. Heaven’s face doth glow
O’er this solidity and compound mass
With tristful visage, as against the doom,
Is thought-sick at the act.

GERTRUDE  
Ay me, what act  
That roars so loud and thunders in the index?

HAMLET  
Look here upon this picture and on this,  
The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.  
See, what a grace was seated on this brow?  
Hyperion’s curls, the front of Jove himself,  
An eye like Mars to threaten and command,  
A station like the herald Mercury new-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill—  
A combination and a form indeed  
Where every god did seem to set his seal

To give the world assurance of a man.  
This was your husband. Look you now,  
what follows.  
Here is your husband, like a mildewed ear  
Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?  
Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed  
And batten on this moor? Ha, have you eyes?  
You cannot call it love, for at your age  
The heyday in the blood is tame, it’s humble,  
That was your husband. Now look at this other one. Here is your present husband,  
like a mildewed ear of corn infecting the healthy one next to it. Do you have eyes?  
How could you leave the lofty heights of this man here and descend as low as this one? Ha! Do you have eyes? You cannot say you did it out of love, since at your age romantic passions have grown weak, and the heart obeys reason. But what reason could move you from this one to that one? You must have some sense in your head, since you’re able to get
And waits upon the judgment. And what judgment
Would step from this to this? Sense sure you have,
Else could you not have motion. But sure that sense
Is apoplexed, for madness would not err,
Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thralled,
But it reserved some quantity of choice
To serve in such a difference. What devil was 't
That thus hath cozened you at hoodman-blind?
Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,
Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all,
Or but a sickly part of one true sense
Could not so mope. O shame, where is thy blush?
Rebellious hell,
If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,
To flaming youth let virtue be as wax
And melt in her own fire. Proclaim no shame
When the compulsive ardor gives the charge,
Since frost itself as actively doth burn,
And reason panders will.

GERTRUDE
O Hamlet, speak no more!
Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul,
And there I see such black and grainèd spots
As will not leave their tinct.

around, but it seems to be paralyzed,
since even if you were crazy you would
know the difference between these two men. No one ever went so insane that
they couldn't get an easy choice like this one right. What devil was it that
blindfolded you? Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight, ears without hands
or eyes, smell without anything else, the use of even one impaired sense would
not permit such a mistake as yours. Oh, for shame, why aren't you blushing? If
evil can overtake even an old mother's bones, then let it melt my own. It turns
out it's no longer shameful to act on impulse—now that the old are doing so,
and now that reason is a servant to desire.

GERTRUDE
Oh, Hamlet, stop! You're making me
look into my very soul, where the marks of sin are so thick and black they will
never be washed away.
HAMLET

Nay, but to live
In the rank sweat of an enseamèd bed,
Stewed in corruption, honeying and
making love
Over the nasty sty—

GERTRUDE

O, speak to me no more!
These words like daggers enter in my ears.
No more, sweet Hamlet.

HAMLET

A murderer and a villain,
A slave that is not twentieth part the tithe
Of your precedent lord, a vice of kings,
A cutpurse of the empire and the rule,
That from a shelf the precious diadem
stole,
And put it in his pocket—

GERTRUDE

No more!

HAMLET

A king of shreds and patches—

Enter GHOST

The GHOST enters.

Save me and hover o'er me with your
wings,
You heavenly guards!—What would your
gracious figure?

GERTRUDE

Alas, he’s mad!

HAMLET

Do you not come your tardy son to chide,
That, lapsed in time and passion, lets go by
The important acting of your dread
command?

HAMLET

Yes, and you lie in the sweaty stench of
your dirty sheets, wet with corruption,
making love—

GERTRUDE

Oh, you must stop! Your words are like
daggers. Please, no more, sweet Hamlet.

HAMLET

A murderer and a villain, a low-life
who’s not worth a twentieth of a tenth
of your first husband—the worst of
kings, a thief of the throne, who took the
precious crown from a shelf and put it in
his pocket—

GERTRUDE

Stop!

HAMLET

A ragtag king—

Oh, angels in heaven, protect me with
your wings!—What can I do for you,
my gracious lord?

GERTRUDE

Oh no! Hamlet’s gone completely crazy.

HAMLET

Have you come to scold your tardy son
for straying from his mission, letting
your important command slip by? Tell
me!
O, say!

**GHOST**

Do not forget. This visitation
Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose.
But look, amazement on thy mother sits.
O, step between her and her fighting soul.

Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works.
Speak to her, Hamlet.

**HAMLET**

How is it with you, lady?

**GERTRUDE**

Alas, how is ’t with you,
That you do bend your eye on vacancy
And with th’ incorporeal air do hold
discourse?

Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep,
And, as the sleeping soldiers in th’ alarm,
Your bedded hair, like life in excrements,
Starts up and stands on end. O gentle son,

Upon the heat and flame of thy distemper
Sprinkle cool patience. Whereon do you look?

**HAMLET**

On him, on him! Look you, how pale he glares!
His form and cause conjoined, preaching to stones,

Would make them capable.

*(to GHOST)* Do not look upon me,
Lest with this piteous action you convert
My stern effects. Then what I have to do
Will want true color—tears perchance for blood.

**GHOST**

Don’t forget. I’ve come to sharpen your somewhat dull appetite for revenge. But look, your mother is in shock. Oh, keep her struggling soul from being overwhelmed by horrid visions. The imagination works strongest in those with the weakest bodies. Talk to her, Hamlet.

**HAMLET**

How are you doing, madam?

**GERTRUDE**

And how are you doing, staring into the empty air and talking to nobody? Your eyes give away your wild thoughts, and your hair is standing upright, like soldiers during a call to arms. Oh my dear son, calm yourself and cool off your overheated mind! What are you staring at?
GERTRUDE
To whom do you speak this?

HAMLET
Do you see nothing there?

GERTRUDE
Nothing at all, yet all that is I see.

HAMLET
135 Nor did you nothing hear?

GERTRUDE
No, nothing but ourselves.

HAMLET
Why, look you there! Look how it steals away—
My father, in his habit as he lived—
Look where he goes, even now, out at the portal!

Exit GHOST

GERTRUDE
140 This the very coinage of your brain.
This bodiless creation ecstasy
Is very cunning in.

HAMLET
Ecstasy?
My pulse as yours doth temperately keep time
And makes as healthful music. It is not madness
That I have uttered. Bring me to the test,
And I the matter will reword, which madness
Would gambol from. Mother, for love of grace,
Lay not that flattering unction to your soul

GERTRUDE
Who are you talking to?

HAMLET
You don’t see anything?

GERTRUDE
Nothing at all, but I can see everything that’s here.

HAMLET
And you don’t hear anything?

GERTRUDE
No, nothing but us talking.

HAMLET
Look, look how it’s sneaking away! My father, dressed just like he was when he was alive!
Look, he’s going out the door right now!

Exit GHOST

GERTRUDE
This is only a figment of your imagination. Madness is good at creating hallucinations.

HAMLET
Madness? My heart beats just as evenly as yours does. There’s nothing crazy in what I’ve just uttered. Put me to the test. I’ll rephrase everything I’ve just said, which a lunatic couldn’t do. Mother, for the love of God, don’t flatter yourself into believing that it’s my madness, not your crime, that’s the problem. You’d just be concealing the rot that’s eating you from the inside. Confess your sins to heaven. Repent and avoid damnation.
That not your trespass but my madness speaks.
It will but skin and film the ulcerous place
Whilst rank corruption, mining all within,
Infests unseen. Confess yourself to heaven.
Repent what’s past. Avoid what is to come.
And do not spread the compost on the weeds
To make them ranker. Forgive me this my virtue,
For in the fatness of these pursy times
Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg,
Yea, curb and woo for leave to do him good.

GERTRUDE
O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain.

HAMLET
Oh, throw away the worser part of it,
And live the purer with the other half.
Good night—but go not to mine uncle’s bed.
Assume a virtue if you have it not.
That monster, custom, who all sense doth eat,
Of habits devil, is angel yet in this:
That to the use of actions fair and good
He likewise gives a frock or livery
That aptly is put on. Refrain tonight,
And that shall lend a kind of easiness
To the next abstinence, the next more easy.

Don’t spread manure over the weeds in your heart; it’ll only make them more filthy. Forgive me my good intentions here since in these fat and spoiled times, virtuous people have to say, “Beg your pardon” to vile ones and beg for the chance to do any good.

GERTRUDE
Oh Hamlet, you’ve broken my heart in two!

HAMLET
Then throw away the worse half, and live a purer life with the other! Good night to you. But don’t go to my uncle’s bed tonight. At least pretend to be virtuous, even if you’re not. Habit is a terrible thing, in that it’s easy to get used to doing evil without feeling bad about it. But it’s also a good thing, in that being good can also become a habit. Say no to sex tonight, and that will make it easier to say no the next time, and still easier the time after that. Habit can change even one’s natural instincts, and either rein in the devil in us, or kick him out. Once again, good night to you,
and when you want to repent, I’ll ask you for your blessing too. I’m sorry about what happened to this gentleman (pointing to POLONIUS), but God wanted to punish me with this murder, and this man with me, so I’m both Heaven’s executioner and its minister of justice. This is bad, but it’ll get worse soon. Oh, and one other thing, madam.

170 For use almost can change the stamp of nature,
   And either rein the devil or throw him out
   With wondrous potency. Once more, good night,
175 And when you are desirous to be blessed,
   I’ll blessing beg of you. (points to POLONIUS)
   For this same lord,
   I do repent. But heaven hath pleased it so,
180 To punish me with this and this with me,
   That I must be their scourge and minister.
   I will bestow him and will answer well
   The death I gave him. So, again, good night.
   I must be cruel only to be kind.
   Thus bad begins and worse remains behind.
   One word more, good lady—

GERTRUDE
What shall I do?

HAMLET
185 Not this, by no means, that I bid you do—
   Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed,
   Pinch wanton on your cheek, call you his mouse,
   And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses
   Or paddling in your neck with his damned fingers,
   Make you to ravel all this matter out:
That I essentially am not in madness
But mad in craft. ’Twere good you let him know,
For who that’s but a queen, fair, sober, wise,
Would from a paddock, from a bat, a gib,
Such dear concernings hide? Who would do so?
No, in despite of sense and secrecy,
Unpeg the basket on the house’s top.
Let the birds fly, and like the famous ape,
To try conclusions, in the basket creep
And break your own neck down.

**GERTRUDE**
Be thou assured, if words be made of breath
And breath of life, I have no life to breathe
What thou hast said to me.

**HAMLET**
I must to England, you know that?

**GERTRUDE**
Alack, I had forgot. ’Tis so concluded on.

**HAMLET**
There’s letters sealed, and my two schoolfellows,
Whom I will trust as I will adders fanged,
They bear the mandate. They must sweep my way
And marshal me to knavery. Let it work,
For ’tis the sport to have the engineer
Hoist with his own petard. And ’t shall go hard,
But I will delve one yard below their

would a fair, sober, wise queen hide such things from a toad, a pig, a monster like him? Who would do that?
No, no, it’s much, much better to spill the beans right away, let the cat out of the bag, and break your neck in the process.

**GERTRUDE**
You can rest easy, since words are made of breath, and breathing requires that you be alive. I feel too dead to breathe a word of what you’ve told me.

**HAMLET**
I have to go to England, don’t you know that?

**GERTRUDE**
Ah, I’d forgotten all about that! It’s been decided.

**HAMLET**
Yes, it’s a done deal, the documents are ready, and my two schoolmates, whom I trust about as much as rattlesnakes, are in charge. They’re the ones who’ll lead me on my march to mischief. Let it happen. It’s fun to watch the engineer get blown up by his own explosives, and with any luck I’ll dig a few feet below their bombs and blow them to the moon. Oh, it’s nice to kill two birds with one
mines,
And blow them at the moon. Oh, 'tis most sweet

220 When in one line two crafts directly meet.
(indicates POLONIUS )
This man shall set me packing.
I’ll lug the guts into the neighbor room.
Mother, good night. Indeed this counselor
Is now most still, most secret, and most grave
Who was in life a foolish prating knave.—
Come, sir, to draw toward an end with you.—
Good night, mother.

Exeunt, HAMLET tugging
in POLONIUS

They exit, HAMLET dragging
POLONIUS offstage.

Act 4, Scene 1

Enter King CLAUDIUS and
Queen GERTRUDE,
with ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

CLAUDIUS
(to GERTRUDE) There’s matter in these sighs, these profound heaves.
You must translate. 'Tis fit we understand them.
Where is your son?

GERTRUDE
(to ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN)
Bestow this place on us a little while.

Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

CLAUDIUS
(to GERTRUDE) These deep, heaving sighs of yours mean something. You have to tell me what. I need to know. Where’s your son?

GERTRUDE
(to ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN)
Let us speak privately awhile, please.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.
Ah, my good lord, what have I seen tonight!

CLAUDIUS
What, Gertrude? How does Hamlet?

GERTRUDE
Mad as the sea and wind when both contend
Which is the mightier. In his lawless fit,
Whips out his rapier, cries, “A rat, a rat!”
And in this brainish apprehension kills
The unseen good old man.

CLAUDIUS
O heavy deed!
It had been so with us, had we been there.

GERTRUDE
To draw apart the body he hath killed,
O'er whom his very madness, like some

CLAUDIUS
Ah, my lord, you wouldn’t believe what I’ve witnessed tonight!

CLAUDIUS
What, Gertrude? How is Hamlet?

GERTRUDE
As mad as the waves and the wind when they struggle together in a storm. In an insane rage, he hears something behind the tapestry, whips out his sword, shouts, “A rat, a rat!” and in his deranged state of mind he kills the good old man, who is still hidden.

CLAUDIUS
Oh, this is terrible! It would’ve happened to me if I’d been there. His wildness is a threat to all of us—to you, to me, to everyone. How will we deal with this violent deed?

CLAUDIUS
I’m the one who will be blamed for not restraining and confining this mad young man. But I loved him so much I didn’t want to think about what I had to do. So, like someone suffering from a nasty disease who refuses to divulge his condition and lets it infect him to

CLAUDIUS
the core, I kept Hamlet’s condition secret and let it grow more and more dangerous. Where has he gone?

CLAUDIUS
The liberty is full of threats to all—
To you yourself, to us, to everyone.

CLAUDIUS
Alas, how shall this bloody deed be answered?
It will be laid to us, whose providence

CLAUDIUS
Should have kept short, restrained and out of haunt,
This mad young man. But so much was our love,
We would not understand what was most fit,

CLAUDIUS
But, like the owner of a foul disease,
To keep it from divulging, let it feed
Even on the pith of life. Where is he gone?

GERTRUDE
To remove the corpse of the man he killed.
His madness allows a glimmering of
ore
Among a mineral of metals base,
Shows itself pure. He weeps for what is
done.

CLAUDIUS
O Gertrude, come away!

30  The sun no sooner shall the mountains
touch
But we will ship him hence, and this vile
deed
We must, with all our majesty and skill,
Both countenance and excuse.—Ho,
Gildenstern!

Enter ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

Friends both, go join you with some
further aid.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter.

Hamlet in madness hath Polonius slain,
And from his mother’s closet hath he
dragged him.
Go seek him out, speak fair, and bring the
body
Into the chapel. I pray you, haste in this.

Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

Come, Gertrude, we’ll call up our wisest
friends,
And let them know both what we mean to
do
And what’s untimely done. So dreaded
slander—

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.

Whose whisper o'er the world’s diameter,
As level as the cannon to his blank,
Transports the poisoned shot—may miss
morality to shine through, like a vein of
gold in a chunk of coal. He weeps for what
he has done.

CLAUDIUS
Oh, Gertrude, let’s go. As soon as the sun
sets we’ll ship him off to England. It’ll
take all my diplomatic know-how to explain
and excuse the murder he’s committed.
Hey, Gildenstern!

My friends, go find others to help you. Hamlet
in his madness has killed Polonius and
dragged him out of his mother’s bedroom.
Go find him and speak nicely to him, and
bring the corpse into the chapel. Please hurry.

Come, Gertrude. We’ll confer with our
wisest friends and tell them what we’re going
to do, and what terrible deed has been
done already. Let’s hope slander—a
bullet that can travel halfway around the
world and still hit its exact target—sparing
us. Oh, we must go. I’m full of confusion
and despair.
our name
And hit the woundless air. Oh, come
away!
My soul is full of discord and dismay

Exeunt

They exit.

Act 4, Scene 2

Enter HAMLET

HAMLET
Safely stowed.

GENTLEMEN
(from within) Hamlet! Lord Hamlet!

HAMLET
But soft, what noise? Who calls on Hamlet?
Oh, here they come.

Enter ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN, and others

ROSENCRANTZ
What have you done, my lord, with the dead body?

HAMLET
Compounded it with dust, whereto ’tis kin.

ROSENCRANTZ
Tell us where ’tis, that we may take it thence
And bear it to the chapel.

HAMLET
Do not believe it.

ROSENCRANTZ
Believe what?

HAMLET
That I can keep your counsel and not mine

ROSENCRANTZ
What have you done with the corpse, my lord?

HAMLET
I’ve gotten it dirty—ashes to ashes, and dust to dust.

ROSENCRANTZ
But tell us where it is, so we can take it to the chapel.

HAMLET
Don’t believe it.

ROSENCRANTZ
Believe what?

HAMLET
That I’d take your advice rather than keep my
own. Besides, to be demanded of a sponge!
What replication should be made by the son
of a king?

**ROSENCRANTZ**
Take you me for a sponge, my lord?

**HAMLET**
Ay, sir, that soaks up the king’s countenance,
his rewards, his authorities. But such officers
do the king best service in the end. He keeps
them, like an ape, in the corner of his jaw,
first mouthed to be last swallowed. When he
needs what you have gleaned, it is but
squeezing you and, sponge, you shall be dry
again.

**ROSENCRANTZ**
I understand you not, my lord.

**HAMLET**
I am glad of it. A knavish speech sleeps in a
foolish ear.

**ROSENCRANTZ**
My lord, you must tell us where the body is
and go with us to the king.

**HAMLET**
The body is with the king, but the king is not
with the body.
The king is a thing—

**GUILDENSTERN**
A thing, my lord?

**HAMLET**
Of nothing. Bring me to him. Hide, fox, and
all after.

*Exeunt*

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**Act 4, Scene 3**

own secret. Besides, you’re a sponge! What is
the son of a king supposed to say to a sponge?

**ROSENCRANTZ**
You think I’m a sponge, my lord?

**HAMLET**
Yes, sir, a sponge that soaks up the king’s
approval, his rewards, and his decisions. Officers
like that give the king the best service in the end.
He keeps them in his mouth like an ape. First he
moves them around, then he swallows them.
When he needs what you have found out, he can
just squeeze you like a sponge and you’ll be dry
again.

**ROSENCRANTZ**
I don’t follow, my lord.

**HAMLET**
I’m glad about that. Sly words are never
understood by fools.

**ROSENCRANTZ**
My lord, you have to tell us where the body is,
and then go with us to see the king.

**HAMLET**
The body’s with the king, but the king’s not with
the body. The king’s a thing …

**GUILDENSTERN**
A “thing,” my lord?

**HAMLET**
A thing of no importance. Take me to him.
Ready or not, here I come!

*They exit.*
Enter King **CLAUDIUS** and two or three attendants

**CLAUDIUS**

I have sent to seek him and to find the body.
How dangerous is it that this man goes loose!
Yet must not we put the strong law on him.
He’s loved of the distracted multitude,

Who like not in their judgment, but their eyes.
And where ’tis so, th’ offender’s scourge is weighed,
But never the offense. To bear all smooth and even,

This sudden sending him away must seem Deliberate pause. Diseases desperate grown
By desperate appliance are relieved,
Or not at all.

Enter **ROSENCRANTZ**

How now, what hath befall'n?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Where the dead body is bestowed, my lord,
We cannot get from him.

**CLAUDIUS**

But where is he?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Without, my lord; guarded, to know your pleasure.

**CLAUDIUS**

Bring him before us.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Ho, Guildenstern! Bring in my lord.

Enter **HAMLET** and **GUILDENSTERN**

**CLAUDIUS**

Now, Hamlet, where’s Polonius?

**CLAUDIUS**

I’ve sent men to find him and retrieve the body.
How dangerous to have this madman on the loose! But we can’t throw him in jail. The people love him, because they judge based on appearance rather than reason. They’ll pay attention to the severity of the punishment, not the severity of the crime. No, we must seem calm and fair-minded, and our sending him away must seem like a carefully considered move. But a terminal disease requires extreme treatment, or nothing at all.

**ROSENCRANTZ enters.**

So what’s happened?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

We can’t get him to tell us where he’s put the body.

**CLAUDIUS**

But where is he?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Outside, my lord, under guard, waiting for your orders.

**CLAUDIUS**

Bring him to me.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Hey, Guildenstern! Bring in my lord.

**GUILDENSTERN enters with HAMLET.**

**CLAUDIUS**

Now, Hamlet, where’s Polonius?
HAMLET
At supper.

CLAUDIUS
20 At supper where?

HAMLET
Not where he eats, but where he is eaten. A certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet. We fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots. Your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service—two dishes, but to one table. That's the end.

CLAUDIUS
Alas, alas!

HAMLET
A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.

CLAUDIUS
30 What dost you mean by this?

HAMLET
Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar.

CLAUDIUS
Where is Polonius?

HAMLET
In heaven. Send hither to see. If your messenger find him not there, seek him i' th' other place yourself. But if indeed you find him not within this month, you shall nose him as you go up the stairs into the lobby.

CLAUDIUS
(to attendants) Go seek him there.

Exeunt some attendants

HAMLET
He will stay till ye come.

CLAUDIUS
40 Hamlet, this deed, for thine especial safety—
Which we do tender as we dearly grieve
For that which thou hast done—must send thee hence
With fiery quickness. Therefore prepare thyself.
The bark is ready and the wind at help,
Th' associates tend, and everything is bent For England.

HAMLET
For England?

CLAUDIUS
Ay, Hamlet.

HAMLET
Good.

CLAUDIUS
50 So is it, if thou knew’st our purposes.

HAMLET
I see a cherub that sees them. But come, for England.
Farewell, dear mother.

CLAUDIUS
Thy loving father, Hamlet.

HAMLET
My mother. Father and mother is man and wife, man and wife is one flesh, and so, my mother.—Come, for England!

HAMLET
No need to hurry, he’s not going anywhere.

CLAUDIUS
Hamlet, I care for you just as much as I grieve for Polonius. For your own protection, I must send you to England at once. So get ready to leave. The ship is set to sail, the wind is favorable, your servants are waiting for you—everything is ready for you to go to England.

HAMLET
To England?

CLAUDIUS
Yes, Hamlet.

HAMLET
Good.

CLAUDIUS
Yes, you’d think so, if you knew why I was sending you.

HAMLET
I know an angel who can read your mind. But okay, off to England! Good-bye, dear mother.

CLAUDIUS
I’m your father, Hamlet—your father who loves you.

HAMLET
You’re my mother. When you married my mother, the two of you became one flesh, so if you’re my father you’re also my mother. Come
on, off to England!

Exit HAMLET  HAMLET exits.

CLAUDIUS
Follow him at foot. Tempt him with speed aboard.
Delay it not. I'll have him hence tonight.
Away! For everything is sealed and done
That else leans on the affair. Pray you, make haste.

Exeunt all but CLAUDIUS  Everyone except CLAUDIUS exits.

CLAUDIUS
Follow him on foot, and get him on board as quickly as possible. Don’t waste any time. I want him out of here tonight. Go now; everything else is ready. Please hurry.

60 And, England, if my love thou hold’st at aught—
As my great power thereof may give thee sense,
Since yet thy cicatrice looks raw and red
After the Danish sword and thy free awe
Pays homage to us—thou mayst not coldly set
Our sovereign process, which imports at full,
By letters congruing to that effect,
The present death of Hamlet. Do it, England,
For like the hectic in my blood he rages,
And thou must cure me. Till I know 'tis done,
70 Howe'er my haps, my joys were ne'er begun.

Exit  He exits.

Act 4, Scene 4

Enter FORTINBRAS with his army and a CAPTAIN  FORTINBRAS enters with his army and a CAPTAIN.

FORTINBRAS
Go, Captain, from me greet the Danish king
Tell him that, by his license, Fortinbras
Craves the conveyance of a promised march
Over his kingdom. You know the rendezvous.

FORTINBRAS
Go, Captain, and give the Danish king my greetings. Tell him that Fortinbras asks permission to move his troops across Denmark. You know the meeting place
If that his majesty would aught with us,
We shall express our duty in his eye,
And let him know so.

CAPTAIN
I will do 't, my lord.

FORTINBRAS
Go softly on.

Exeunt all except the CAPTAIN

Enter HAMLET, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN, and others

HAMLET
Good sir, whose powers are these?

CAPTAIN
They are of Norway, sir.

HAMLET
How purposed, sir, I pray you?

CAPTAIN
Against some part of Poland.

HAMLET
Who commands them, sir?

CAPTAIN
The nephew to old Norway, Fortinbras.

HAMLET
Goes it against the main of Poland, sir,
Or for some frontier?

CAPTAIN
Truly to speak, and with no addition,
We go to gain a little patch of ground
That hath in it no profit but the name.
To pay five ducats, five, I would not farm it.

Nor will it yield to Norway or the Pole

we’ve arranged. If His Majesty wants us to do any favor for him, tell him his wish is my command.

CAPTAIN
I’ll tell him, my lord.

FORTINBRAS
Go ahead, then.

Exeunt all except the CAPTAIN

Everyone except the CAPTAIN exits.

HAMLET
Sir, whose troops are these?

CAPTAIN
The king of Norway’s, sir.

HAMLET
What are they doing here, sir?

CAPTAIN
They’re on their way to invade some part of Poland.

HAMLET
Who’s commanding them, sir?

CAPTAIN
The nephew of the old king of Norway, Fortinbras.

HAMLET
Is he attacking the heartland of Poland or some frontier?

CAPTAIN
To tell the truth, we’re fighting to win a little patch of ground that’s not worth anything. I myself wouldn’t pay five ducats for it, if someone offered it to me to farm. And it won’t
A ranker rate, should it be sold in fee.

HAMLET
Why, then the Polack never will defend it.

CAPTAIN
Yes, it is already garrisoned.

HAMLET
Two thousand souls and twenty thousand ducats
Will not debate the question of this straw. This is th’ impostume of much wealth and peace,
That inward breaks and shows no cause without
Why the man dies.—I humbly thank you, sir. (to himself) Even two thousand men and twenty-thousand ducats are just the beginning of what it will cost to settle this pointless matter. This is what happens when countries have too much money and peace. This quarrel is like an abcess that grows inside someone until it bursts and kills them, and no one knows why. (to the CAPTAIN) Thank you very much for the information, sir.

CAPTAIN
God be wi’ you, sir.

Exit CAPTAIN
The CAPTAIN exits.

ROSENCRANTZ
Will ‘t please you go, my lord?

HAMLET
I’ll be with you straight. Go a little before.

Exeunt all except HAMLET
Everyone except HAMLET exits.

How all occasions do inform against me,
And spur my dull revenge! What is a man
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.
Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not

provide any more profits than that to either the Norwegian or the Pole.

HAMLET
So then the Poles won’t be willing to defend it.

CAPTAIN
Oh, yes they will. They’ve already stationed troops there.

HAMLET
(to himself) My God! Everything I see shows me how wrong I am and tells me to hurry up and get on with my revenge. What is a human being if he just eats and sleeps? Nothing more than a beast. God didn’t create us with such a huge power of thought and a divine capacity for reason in order for us
That capability and godlike reason
To fust in us unused. Now, whether it be
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
40 Of thinking too precisely on th' event—
A thought which, quartered, hath but one part
wisdom
And ever three parts coward—I do not know
Why yet I live to say “This thing’s to do,”
45 Sith I have cause and will and strength and
means
To do ’t. Examples gross as earth exhort me.
Witness this army of such mass and charge
Led by a delicate and tender prince,
50 Whose spirit with divine ambition puffed
Makes mouths at the invisible event,
Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,
Even for an eggshell. Rightly to be great
55 Is not to stir without great argument,
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honor’s at the stake. How stand I then,
That have a father killed, a mother stained,
Excitements of my reason and my blood,
60 And let all sleep—while, to my shame, I see
The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
That for a fantasy and trick of fame
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
65 Which is not tomb enough and continent
To hide the slain? Oh, from this time forth,
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!

not to use them. Now, whether it’s animal-
like mindlessness, or the cowardly
hesitation
that comes from thinking too much
(thinking thoughts that are one part
wisdom, three parts cowardice), I don’t
know why I’m still alive to say “I have
to do this deed” rather than having done
it already. I have the motivation, the
willpower, the ability, and the means to
do it. It’s as plain as the ground beneath
my feet that I must do it. Look at this
massive army led by a delicate and
tender prince who’s so puffed up with
divine ambition that he puts his fragile
life at risk, exposing it to danger and
death, for a reason as thin as an
eggshell. To be truly great doesn’t
mean you’d only fight for a good
reason. It means you’d fight over
nothing if your honor was at stake. So
where does that leave me, whose father
has been murdered and mother defiled,
ignoring these mental and emotional
provocations and letting well enough
alone? Meanwhile, to my shame, I
watch twenty thousand men go
marching to their deaths for an illusion
and a little bit of fame, fighting for a
tiny piece of land not even big enough
to bury them all. From now on, if my
thoughts aren’t violent I’ll consider
them worthless.

Exit

He exits.

Act 4, Scene 5
Enter HORATIO, GERTRUDE, and a GENTLEMAN.

GERTRUDE
I will not speak with her.

GENTLEMAN
She is importunate,
Indeed distract. Her mood will needs be pitied.

GERTRUDE
What would she have?

GENTLEMAN
She speaks much of her father, says she hears
There's tricks i' th' world, and hems, and beats her heart,
Spurns enviously at straws, speaks things in doubt
That carry but half sense. Her speech is nothing,
Yet the unshaped use of it doth move
The hearers to collection. They aim at it,
And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts,
Which, as her winks and nods and gestures yield them,
Indeed would make one think there might be thought,
Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily.

HORATIO
'Twere good she were spoken with, for she may strew
Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds.

GERTRUDE
Let her come in.

Exit GENTLEMAN

HORATIO, GERTRUDE, and a GENTLEMAN enter.

GERTRUDE
I won't speak to her.

GENTLEMAN
She's insistent. In fact, she's crazed. You can't help feeling sorry for her.

GERTRUDE
What does she want?

GENTLEMAN
She talks about her father a lot, and says she hears there are conspiracies around the world, and coughs, and beats her breast, and gets angry over tiny matters, and talks nonsense. Her words don't mean anything, but her babbling causes her listeners to draw conclusions. They hear what they want to hear. Her winks and nods and gestures do suggest that she means to convey a message, and not a happy one.

HORATIO
It's a good idea to speak to her, since she might lead those with evil intentions to dangerous conclusions.

GERTRUDE
Show her in.

Exit GENTLEMAN

(aside) To my sick soul (as sin's true nature
(to herself) To my sick soul (since sin is
Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss. So full of artless jealousy is guilt, It spills itself in fearing to be spilt.

*Enter* OPHELIA, *distracted*

*Enter* HORATIO, GERTRUDE, and a GENTLEMAN

GERTRUDE

I will not speak with her.

GENTLEMAN

She is importunate, Indeed distract. Her mood will needs be pitied.

GERTRUDE

What would she have?

GENTLEMAN

She speaks much of her father, says she hears

There’s tricks i' th' world, and hems, and
beats her heart,
Spurns enviously at straws, speaks things in doubt

That carry but half sense. Her speech is nothing,
Yet the unshaped use of it doth move
The hearers to collection. They aim at it,
And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts,
Which, as her winks and nods and gestures yield them,
Indeed would make one think there might be thought,
Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily.

always a sickness), every detail looks like an omen of disaster to come. Guilt makes you so full of stupid suspicions that you give yourself away because you’re trying so hard not to.

OPHELIA enters, insane.

*Enter* HORATIO, GERTRUDE, and a GENTLEMAN enter.

GERTRUDE

I won’t speak to her.

GENTLEMAN

She’s insistent. In fact, she’s crazed. You can’t help feeling sorry for her.

GERTRUDE

What does she want?

GENTLEMAN

She talks about her father a lot, and says she hears there are conspiracies around the world, and coughs, and beats her breast, and gets angry over tiny matters, and talks nonsense. Her words don’t mean anything, but her babbling causes her listeners to draw conclusions. They hear what they want to hear. Her winks and nods and gestures do suggest that she means to convey a message, and not a happy one.
HORATIO
Twere good she were spoken with, for she
may strew
Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds.

GERTRUDE
Let her come in.

Exit GENTLEMAN

(aside) To my sick soul (as sin’s true
nature is)
Each toy seems prologue to some great
amiss.
So full of artless jealousy is guilt,
It spills itself in fearing to be spilt.

Enter OPHELIA, distracted

TO MY SICK SOUL (AS SIN’S TRUE
NATURE IS)
EACH TOY SEEMS PROLOGUE TO SOME GREAT
AMISS.
SO FULL OF ARTLESS JEALOUSY IS GUILT,
IT SPILLS ITSELF IN FEARING TO BE SPILT.

CLAUDIUS
How do you, pretty lady?

OPHELIA
Well, God’ield you! They say the owl was
a baker’s daughter. Lord, we know what
we are, but know not what we may be. God
be at your table.

CLAUDIUS
Conceit upon her father.

OPHELIA
Pray you, let’s have no words of this, but
when they ask you what it means, say you
this:

(sings)

Tomorrow is Saint Valentine’s day,
All in the morning betime,
And I a maid at your window,
To be your Valentine.

CLAUDIUS
How are you doing, my pretty lady?

OPHELIA
I’m quite well, and may God give you
what you deserve. They say the baker’s
dughter was turned into an owl for
refusing Jesus’ bread. My lord, we know
what we are now, but not what we may
become. May God be at your table.

CLAUDIUS
She’s talking about her dead father.

OPHELIA
Oh, let’s not talk about that, but when
they ask you what it means, just say:

(sings)

Tomorrow is St. Valentine’s Day
And early in the morning
I’m a girl below your window
Waiting to be your Valentine.

Then he got up and put on his clothes
Then up he rose, and donned his clothes,  
And dupped the chamber door.  
Let in the maid that out a maid  
Never departed more.

CLAUDIUS  
Pretty Ophelia—

OPHELIA  
40 Indeed, without an oath I’ll make an end on ’t:  
(sings)  
By Gis and by Saint Charity,  
Alack, and fie, for shame!  
Young men will do ’t, if they come to ’t.  
By Cock, they are to blame.  
Quoth she, “Before you tumbled me,  
You promised me to wed.”  
He answers,  
“So would I ha’ done, by yonder sun,  
An thou hadst not come to my bed.”

CLAUDIUS  
How long hath she been thus?

OPHELIA  
I hope all will be well. We must be patient,  
but I cannot choose but weep, to think they should lay him i’ th’ cold ground. My brother shall know of it, and so I thank you for your good counsel. Come, my coach! Good night, ladies. Good night, sweet ladies. Good night, good night.

Exit OPHELIA

CLAUDIUS  
Follow her close. Give her good watch, I pray you.

CLAUDIUS  
Follow her. Keep an eye on her, please.
Exit HORATIO

Oh, this is the poison of deep grief. It
50 springs
All from her father’s death, and now behold!
O Gertrude, Gertrude,
When sorrows come, they come not single
55 spies
But in battalions. First, her father slain.
Next, your son gone, and he most violent author
Of his own just remove. The people
60 muddied,
Thick, and unwholesome in their thoughts and whispers
For good Polonius' death, and we have done but greenly
65 In hugger-mugger to inter him. Poor Ophelia
Divided from herself and her fair judgment,
Without the which we are pictures, or mere beasts.
70 Last—and as much containing as all these—
Her brother is in secret come from France,
Feeds on his wonder, keeps himself in clouds,
And wants not buzzers to infect his ear
With pestilent speeches of his father’s death,
Wherein necessity, of matter beggared,
Will nothing stick our person to arraign
In ear and ear. O my dear Gertrude, this,
Like to a murdering piece, in many places
Gives me superfluous death.

HORATIO exits.

Oh, her grief has poisoned her mind. Her father died and now look at her! Oh, Gertrude, Gertrude, when bad things happen, they don’t come one at a time, like enemy spies, but all at once like an army. First her father was killed, then your son was taken away—because of his own violent actions. The people are confused and spreading nasty rumors about Polonius’s death, and I was a fool to bury him in a hurry, without a proper state funeral. Poor Ophelia has been robbed of her sanity, without which we’re just pictures, or animals. Last but not least, her brother has secretly returned from France and is surrounded by gossip-mongers, who fill his ears with wicked stories about his father’s death. Deprived of proper evidence, he’ll naturally attribute the murder to me. Oh, dear Gertrude, I feel as though I’m being murdered many times over.
A noise within

GERTRUDE
Alack, what noise is this?

CLAUDIUS
Where are my Switzers? Let them guard the door.

Enter a MESSENGER

What is the matter?

MESSENGER
Save yourself, my lord.
The ocean, overpeering of his list,
Eats not the flats with more impiteous haste
75 Than young Laertes, in a riotous head,
O'erbears your officers. The rabble call him “lord”
And—as the world were now but to begin,
Antiquity forgot, custom not known,
80 The ratifiers and props of every word—
They cry, “Choose we! Laertes shall be king!”
Caps, hands, and tongues applaud it to the clouds:
“Laertes shall be king, Laertes king!”

GERTRUDE
How cheerfully on the false trail they cry.
O, this is counter, you false Danish dogs!

GERTRUDE
Oh, no—what’s that noise?

CLAUDIUS
Listen! Where are my bodyguards? Let them guard the door.

MESSENGER
You must save yourself, my lord. The young Laertes, like the ocean when it floods the shore and devours the lowlands, is leading a rebellion against your government. The crowd calls him “lord” and shouts, “We want Laertes to be king!” It’s as if they were starting the world from scratch right now, throwing out the traditions and ancient customs that are the support of every word we utter. They throw their caps in the air and yell, “Laertes will be king! Laertes king!”

GERTRUDE
They sound so cheerful as they hunt down the wrong prey! Oh, you’re on the wrong track, you disloyal Danish dogs!

CLAUDIUS
The doors have been smashed open.

LAERTES
Where is this king?—Sirs, stand you all

LAERTES
Where’s this so-called king? Men, wait
without.

ALL
No, let’s come in!

LAERTES
I pray you, give me leave.

ALL
We will, we will.

Exeunt LAERTES’ FOLLOWERS

LAERTES
90 I thank you. Keep the door.—O thou vile king,
Give me my father!

GERTRUDE
Calmly, good Laertes.

LAERTES
That drop of blood that’s calm proclaims me bastard,
Cries “Cuckold!” to my father, brands the “harlot”
Even here between the chaste unsmirched brow
Of my true mother.

CLAUDIUS
What is the cause, Laertes,
That thy rebellion looks so giant-like?—Let him go, Gertrude. Do not fear our person.
There’s such divinity doth hedge a king
100 That treason can but peep to what it would, Acts little of his will.—Tell me, Laertes, Why thou art thus incensed.—Let him go, Gertrude.—
Speak, man.

LAERTES

CLAUDIUS
Laertes, what makes you so rebellious?
Let him go, Gertrude. Don’t worry about my getting hurt. God protects the king, so traitors can’t hurt him.—Tell me, Laertes, why you’re so angry.—Gertrude, let him go.—Tell me, man.

LAERTES

outside.

ALL
No, let us in!

LAERTES
Please wait.

ALL
All right, we will, we will.

LAERTES’ FOLLOWERS exit.
Where is my father?

CLAUDIUS
Dead.

GERTRUDE
But not by him.

CLAUDIUS
Let him demand his fill.

LAERTES
How came he dead? I’ll not be juggled
105 with.
To hell, allegiance! Vows, to the blackest
devil!
Conscience and grace, to the profoundest
pit!
I dare damnation. To this point I stand
That both the worlds I give to negligence.
Let come what comes, only I’ll be
revenge
Most thoroughly for my father.

CLAUDIUS
Who shall stay you?

LAERTES
My will, not all the world.
And for my means, I’ll husband them so
well,
They shall go far with little.

CLAUDIUS
Good Laertes,

If you desire to know the certainty
Of your dear father’s death, is ’t writ in
your revenge,
That, swoopstake, you will draw both
friend and foe,
Winner and loser?

Where’s my father?

CLAUDIUS
He’s dead.

GERTRUDE
But the king didn’t kill him.

CLAUDIUS
Let him ask what he wants to ask.

LAERTES
How did he end up dead? Don’t mess
with me. To hell with my vows of
allegiance to you! Vows can go to hell!
Conscience, too! I don’t care if I’m
dammed. I don’t care what happens to me
in this world or the next. Whatever
happens, happens, but I’ll get revenge for
my father’s murder.

CLAUDIUS
Who’s stopping you?

LAERTES
Only my free will—nothing else. What
little means I have, I’ll use against you.

CLAUDIUS
My dear Laertes, in your eagerness to
know the truth about your father’s death,
are you determined to hurt your father’s
friends and enemies alike?
LAERTES
None but his enemies.

CLAUDIUS
Will you know them then?

LAERTES
To his good friends thus wide I’ll ope my arms
And, like the kind life-rendering pelican,
Repast them with my blood.

CLAUDIUS
Why, now you speak
Like a good child and a true gentleman.

LAERTES
To his good friends thus wide I”ll ope my arms
And, like the kind life-rendering pelican,
Repast them with my blood.

CLAUDIUS
Why, now you’re talking like a good son and a true gentleman. I’ll prove to you as clearly as daylight that I’m innocent of your father’s death, and am struck with grief over it.

LAERTES
To his good friends thus wide I”ll ope my arms
And, like the kind life-rendering pelican,
Repast them with my blood.

CLAUDIUS
Why, now you speak
Like a good child and a true gentleman.

LAERTES
To his good friends thus wide I”ll ope my arms
And, like the kind life-rendering pelican,
Repast them with my blood.

CLAUDIUS
Why, now you’re talking like a good son and a true gentleman. I’ll prove to you as clearly as daylight that I’m innocent of your father’s death, and am struck with grief over it.

Noise within: “Let her come in!”

A voice offstage, “Let her in!”

LAERTES
How now? What noise is that?

Enter OPHELIA

OPHELIA enters.

LAERTES
What’s that noise?

OPHELIA
Oh, heat, dry up my brains! Salty tears, burn my eyes! By heaven, I’ll get revenge for your madness! Oh, you springtime rose, dear maiden, kind sister, sweet Ophelia! Is it possible that a young woman’s mind could fade away as easily as an old man’s life? Human nature is refined and thoughtful—person graciously gives a valuable part of herself away to her beloved, as Ophelia has sent off her sanity to her dead father.

OPHELIA
O heat, dry up my brains! Tears seven times salt,
Burn out the sense and virtue of mine eye!
By heaven, thy madness shall be paid by weight,
Till our scale turn the beam. O rose of May,
Dear maid, kind sister, sweet Ophelia!
O heavens, is ’t possible a young maid’s wits
Should be as mortal as an old man’s life?
Nature is fine in love, and where ’tis fine,
It sends some precious instance of itself
After the thing it loves.

**OPHELIA**

140 (sings)

_They bore him barefaced on the bier,
Hey, non nonny, nonny, hey, nonny,
And in his grave rained many a tear._

Fare you well, my dove.

**LAERTES**

Hadst thou thy wits, and didst persuade revenge,
It could not move thus.

**OPHELIA**

You must sing _A-down a-down_—And you, _Call him a- down-a_—Oh, how the wheel becomes it! It is the false steward that stole his master’s daughter.

**LAERTES**

This nothing’s more than matter.

**OPHELIA**

There’s rosemary, that’s for remembrance.
Pray you, love, remember. And there is pansies, that’s for thoughts.

**LAERTES**

A document in madness. Thoughts and remembrance fitted.

**OPHELIA**

There’s fennel for you, and columbines.—There’s rue for you, and here’s some for me. We may call it “herb of grace” o’ Sundays.—Oh, you must wear your rue with a difference.—There’s a daisy. I

**OPHELIA**

_(sings)_

_They carried him uncovered in the coffin,_

_Hey non nonny, nonny, hey nonny._

_And tears poured down into his grave._

Good-bye, honey.

**LAERTES**

If you were sane and could urge me to take revenge, you couldn’t be more persuasive than you are now.

**OPHELIA**

You’re supposed to sing, “A down a-down,” and you, “Call him a-down-a.” Oh, how it turns around like a wheel! Like the worker who stole his boss’s daughter.

**LAERTES**

This nonsense means more than rational speech.

**OPHELIA**

Look at my flowers. There’s rosemary, that’s for remembering. Please remember, love. And there are pansies, they’re for thoughts.

**LAERTES**

A case study in madness, to connect memory and thought.

**OPHELIA**

_(to GERTRUDE ) Here are fennel and columbines for you—they symbolize adultery. (to CLAUDIUS) And here’s rue for you—it symbolizes repentance. We can call it the merciful Sunday_
would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died. They say he made a good end (sings) *For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy—*

**LAERTES**

Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself, She turns to favor and to prettiness.

**OPHELIA**

160 (sings)

*And will he not come again?*

*And will he not come again?*

*No, no, he is dead, Go to thy deathbed.*

*He never will come again.*

*His beard was as white as snow, All flaxen was his poll.*

*He is gone, he is gone, And we cast away moan, God ha’ mercy on his soul.—*

And of all Christian souls, I pray God. God be wi’ ye.

*Exit OPHelia*

**LAERTES**

Do you see this, O God?

**CLAUDIUS**

Laertes, I must commune with your grief, Or you deny me right. Go but apart, 165 Make choice of whom your wisest friends you will.

And they shall hear and judge ’twixt you and me.
If by direct or by collateral hand
They find us touched, we will our kingdom
give,
Our crown, our life, and all that we can
ours,
To you in satisfaction. But if not,
Be you content to lend your patience to us,
And we shall jointly labor with your soul
To give it due content.

LAERTES
Let this be so.
His means of death, his obscure funeral—
No trophy, sword, nor hatchment o'er his
bones,
No noble rite nor formal ostentation—
Cry to be heard as 'twere from heaven to
earth,
That I must call 't in question.

CLAUDIUS
So you shall.
And where the offense is, let the great ax
fall.
I pray you, go with me.

CLAUDIUS
All right, then. The way he died, his
secret funeral, no funeral rites or
military display, no noble rites or
formal ceremony—shout out from
heaven and earth that I must call the
way he died into question.

CLAUDIUS
And you're right to do so. May the
guilty party be punished by death.
Please, come with me.

Exeunt

Act 4, Scene 6

Enter HORATIO and a SERVANT

HORATIO
What are they that would speak with me?

SERVANT
Seafaring men, sir. They say they have
letters for you.

HORATIO

HORATIO
Who are the people who want to speak
with me?

SERVANT
Sailors, sir. They say they have letters
for you.

HORATIO
Let them come in.

Exit SERVANT

I do not know from what part of the world
I should be greeted, if not from Lord Hamlet.

Enter SAILORS

SAILOR
God bless you, sir.

HORATIO
Let him bless thee too.

SAILOR
He shall, sir, an ’t please Him. There’s a letter for you, sir— it comes from the ambassador that was bound for England— if your name be Horatio, as I am let to know it is. (gives HORATIO a letter)

HORATIO
(reads)
“Horatio,
When thou shalt have overlooked this, give these fellows some means to the king. They have letters for him. Ere we were two days old at sea, a pirate of very warlike appointment gave us chase. Finding ourselves too slow of sail, we put on a compelled valor, and in the grapple I boarded them. On the instant, they got clear of our ship, so I alone became their prisoner. They have dealt with me like thieves of mercy, but they knew what they did; I am to do a good turn for them.

SAILOR
Hello, sir. God bless you.

HORATIO
May He bless you, too.

SAILOR
He will, sir, if He wants to. There’s a letter for you, sir. It’s from the ambassador, Lord Hamlet, who was going to England—if your name’s Horatio, as they told me it is. (he hands HORATIO a letter)

HORATIO
(reading the letter)
“Horatio,
When you’ve read this letter, find a way to let these guys see the king. They have letters for him. Before we were at sea for even two days, a pirate ship equipped for battle pursued us. We were too slow to escape, so we were forced to stand and fight. In the battle that followed I ended up on the pirate ship. Just then they left our ship behind, so I became the only prisoner on board. They’ve treated me quite mercifully for thieves, but they knew what they were doing. They want me to do a favor for them.
Let the king have the letters I have sent, and repair thou to me with as much speed as thou wouldst fly death. I have words to speak in thine ear will make thee dumb, yet are they much too light for the bore of the matter. These good fellows will bring thee where I am. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern hold their course for England. Of them I have much to tell thee. Fare-well.

He that thou knowest thine, Hamlet.”

Come, I will give you way for these your letters, And do ’t the speedier, that you may direct me To him from whom you brought them.

Exeunt

They exit.

Act 4, Scene 7

Enter CLAUDIUS and LAERTES

CLAUDIUS

Now must your conscience my acquaintance seal,
And you must put me in your heart for friend,

Sith you have heard, and with a knowing ear,
That he which hath your noble father slain
Pursued my life.

CLAUDIUS

Now you’ve got to acknowledge my innocence and believe I’m your friend, since you’ve heard and understood that the man who killed your father was trying to kill me.

LAERTES

It well appears. But tell me Why you proceeded not against these feats,
So criminal and so capital in nature,

LAERTES

It looks that way. But tell me why you didn’t take immediate action against his criminal acts, when your own safety and everything else would seem to call for
As by your safety, wisdom, all things else,
You mainly were stirred up.

CLAUDIUS

Oh, for two special reasons,
Which may to you perhaps seem much unsinewed,
But yet to me they are strong. The queen his mother
Lives almost by his looks, and for myself—
My virtue or my plague, be it either which—
She’s so conjunctive to my life and soul,
That, as the star moves not but in his sphere,
I could not but by her. The other motive
Why to a public count I might not go,
Is the great love the general gender bear him,
Who, dipping all his faults in their affection,
Would, like the spring that turneth wood to stone,
Convert his gyves to graces—so that my arrows,
Too slightly timbered for so loud a wind,
Would have reverted to my bow again,
And not where I had aimed them.

LAERTES

And so have I a noble father lost,
A sister driven into desperate terms,
Whose worth, if praises may go back again,
Stood challenger on mount of all the age
For her perfections. But my revenge will

CLAUDIUS

Oh, for two main reasons which may seem weak to you, but strong to me. The queen, his mother, is devoted to him. And (for better or worse, whichever it is) she is such a part of my life and soul that I can’t live apart from her, any more than a planet can leave its orbit. The other reason why I couldn’t prosecute and arrest Hamlet is that the public loves him. In their affection they overlook all his faults. Like magic, they convert them into virtues, so whatever I said against him would end up hurting me, not him.

LAERTES

And so I’ve lost my noble father, had my sister driven insane—my sister who once was (if I can praise her for what she once was, not what she is now) the most perfect girl who ever lived. But I’ll get my revenge.
come.

CLAUDIUS
30 Break not your sleeps for that. You must not think
That we are made of stuff so flat and dull
That we can let our beard be shook with danger
35 And think it pastime. You shortly shall hear more.
I loved your father, and we love ourself.
And that, I hope, will teach you to imagine—

Enter a MESSENGER

How now, what news?

MESSENGER
Letters, my lord, from Hamlet.
This to your majesty, this to the queen. (gives CLAUDIUS letters)

CLAUDIUS
From Hamlet? Who brought them?

MESSENGER
Sailors, my lord, they say. I saw them not.
40 They were given me by Claudio. He received them
Of him that brought them.

CLAUDIUS
Laertes, you shall hear them.—Leave us.

Exit MESSENGER

(reads)
“High and mighty,
You shall know I am set naked on your kingdom. Tomorrow shall I beg leave to see your kingly eyes, when I shall, first

CLAUDIUS
Don’t you worry about that. You must not think that I’m so lazy and dull that I can be severely threatened and think it’s just a game. You’ll hear more about my plans soon enough. I loved your father, and I love myself, which should be enough to—

A MESSENGER enters with letters.

What is it? What’s the news?

MESSENGER
Letters, my lord, from Hamlet. This one’s for Your Highness, this one for the queen. (gives CLAUDIUS letters)

CLAUDIUS
From Hamlet? Who delivered them?

MESSENGER
Sailors, my lord, or so they say. I didn’t see them. Claudio gave them to me, and he got them from the one who delivered them.

CLAUDIUS
Laertes, I want you to hear what they say. Leave us alone now.

The MESSENGER exits.

(reads)
“High and Mighty one,
You know I’ve been set down naked, you might say, in your kingdom.
Tomorrow I’ll beg permission to look
asking your pardon thereunto, recount the occasion of my sudden and more strange return.

Hamlet.”

What should this mean? Are all the rest come back? Or is it some abuse, and no such thing?

LAERTES
Know you the hand?

CLAUDIUS
’Tis Hamlet’s character. “Naked”? And in a postscript here, he says “alone.” Can you advise me?

LAERTES
I’m lost in it, my lord. But let him come. It warms the very sickness in my heart That I shall live and tell him to his teeth, “Thus diddest thou.”

CLAUDIUS
If it be so, Laertes— As how should it be so? How otherwise?— Will you be ruled by me?

LAERTES
Ay, my lord— So you will not o’errule me to a peace.

CLAUDIUS
To thine own peace. If he be now returned, As checking at his voyage, and that he means No more to undertake it, I will work him To an exploit, now ripe in my devise, Under the which he shall not choose but into your kingly eyes, at which point I’ll tell you the story (after first apologizing) of how I came back to Denmark so strangely and suddenly. Hamlet”

What does this mean? Has everyone else come back too? Or is it all a lie—and no one has yet returned?

LAERTES
Do you recognize the handwriting?

CLAUDIUS
It’s Hamlet’s writing. “Naked,” he says. And in a P.S. he adds, “alone.” Can you help me out with this?

LAERTES
I have no clue, my lord. But let him come. It warms my weary heart to think I’ll get the chance to look him in the eye and say, “You did this.”

CLAUDIUS
If that’s how you feel, Laertes—and why shouldn’t you? Will you let me guide and direct you?

LAERTES
Yes, my lord, as long as you won’t lead me toward peace.

CLAUDIUS
No, just toward your own peace of mind. If he’s come back to Denmark without plans to continue on his trip, then I’ll trick him into an undertaking, which I’m working out now, that’s sure to kill him. When he dies, no one will
fall.
And for his death no wind of blame shall breathe,
But even his mother shall uncharge the practice
And call it accident.

LAERTES
My lord, I will be ruled
The rather if you could devise it so
That I might be the organ.

CLAUDIUS
It falls right.
You have been talked of since your travel
much—
And that in Hamlet’s hearing—for a quality
Wherein, they say, you shine. Your sum of parts
Did not together pluck such envy from him
As did that one, and that, in my regard,
Of the unworthiest siege.

LAERTES
What part is that, my lord?

CLAUDIUS
A very ribbon in the cap of youth,
Yet needful too, for youth no less becomes
The light and careless livery that it wears
Than settled age his sables and his weeds,
Importing health and graveness. Two months since,
Here was a gentleman of Normandy.
I’ve seen myself, and served against, the French,
And they can well on horseback. But this
be blamed, even his mother will call it an accident.

LAERTES
My lord, I’ll let you make the decision.
I only ask to be in on your plans, the agent of his death.

CLAUDIUS
That’ll be fine. Since you left, people
have been talking about—and within earshot of Hamlet—a certain quality of yours in which, they say, you shine. All your talents and gifts didn’t arouse as much envy from him as this one quality did, though to me it’s far from your best attribute.

LAERTES
What quality is that, my lord?

CLAUDIUS
A trivial little ribbon on the cap of youth—yet an important one, too, since casual clothes suit young people as much as serious business suits and overcoats suit the middle-aged. Two months ago I met a gentleman from Normandy. I’ve fought against the French and have seen how well they ride, but this man was a magician on horseback. It was as if he were part of
gallant
Had witchcraft in ’t. He grew unto his seat,
And to such wondrous doing brought his horse
As he had been encorpsed and demi-natured
With the brave beast. So far he topped my thought,
That I, in forgery of shapes and tricks,
Come short of what he did.

LAERTES
A Norman was ’t?

CLAUDIUS
A Norman.

LAERTES
Upon my life, Lamond!

CLAUDIUS
The very same.

LAERTES
I know him well. He is the brooch indeed
And gem of all the nation.

CLAUDIUS
He made confession of you,
And gave you such a masterly report
For art and exercise in your defense,
And for your rapier most especially,
That he cried out ’twould be a sight indeed
If one could match you. The ’scrimers of their nation,
He swore, had had neither motion, guard,
nor eye,
If you opposed them. Sir, this report of his
Did Hamlet so envenom with his envy
the horse, so skillful that even having seen him, I can hardly conceive of the tricks he did.

LAERTES
Hmm, he was from Normandy, you say?

CLAUDIUS
Yes, from Normandy.

LAERTES
I bet it was Lamond.

CLAUDIUS
Yes, that’s the one.

LAERTES
I know him well. He’s his homeland’s jewel.

CLAUDIUS
He mentioned you to me, giving you such high marks in fencing that he exclaimed it would be a miracle if someone could match you. French fencers wouldn’t be good enough for you, he said, since they don’t have the right moves or skills. Hamlet was so jealous when he heard Lamond’s report that he talked about nothing else but having you come over and play against him. Now, the point is …
That he could nothing do but wish and beg
Your sudden coming o'er, to play with him.
Now, out of this—

LAERTES
What out of this, my lord?

CLAUDIUS
Laertes, was your father dear to you?

LAERTES
Why ask you this?

CLAUDIUS
Not that I think you did not love your father
But that I know love is begun by time,
And that I see, in passages of proof,
Time qualifies the spark and fire of it.
There lives within the very flame of love
A kind of wick or snuff that will abate it.
And nothing is at a like goodness still.

LAERTES
Or are you like the painting of a sorrow,
A face without a heart?

CLAUDIUS
What out of this, my lord?

LAERTES
What’s the point, my lord?

CLAUDIUS
Laertes, did you love your father? Or is your grief just an illusion—a mere painting of sorrow?

LAERTES
How could you ask?

CLAUDIUS
Not that I suspect you didn’t love your father, but I’ve seen it happen that, as the days go by, time dampens the flame of love. The fire of love always burns itself out, and nothing stays the way it began. Even a good thing can grow too big and die from its own excess. We should do what we intend to do right when we intend it, since our intentions are subject to as many weakenings and delays as there are words in the dictionary and accidents in life. And then all our “woulds” and “shoulds” are nothing but hot air. But back to my point: Hamlet’s coming back. What proof will you offer—in action, not just words—that you’re your father’s son?

CLAUDIUS
Laertes, was your father dear to you?

LAERTES
Why ask you this?

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A face without a heart?

CLAUDIUS
What out of this, my lord?

LAERTES
What’s the point, my lord?

CLAUDIUS
Laertes, did you love your father? Or is your grief just an illusion—a mere painting of sorrow?

LAERTES
How could you ask?

CLAUDIUS
Not that I suspect you didn’t love your father, but I’ve seen it happen that, as the days go by, time dampens the flame of love. The fire of love always burns itself out, and nothing stays the way it began. Even a good thing can grow too big and die from its own excess. We should do what we intend to do right when we intend it, since our intentions are subject to as many weakenings and delays as there are words in the dictionary and accidents in life. And then all our “woulds” and “shoulds” are nothing but hot air. But back to my point: Hamlet’s coming back. What proof will you offer—in action, not just words—that you’re your father’s son?
More than in words?

**LAERTES**

To cut his throat i’ th’ church.

**CLAUDIUS**

No place, indeed, should murder

125 sanctuarize.

Revenge should have no bounds. But, good Laertes,

Will you do this, keep close within your chamber.

Hamlet returned shall know you are come home.

We’ll put on those shall praise your excellence

And set a double varnish on the fame

The Frenchman gave you, bring you in fine together

And wager on your heads. He, being remiss,

Most generous and free from all contriving,

Will not peruse the foils; so that, with ease,

Or with a little shuffling, you may choose

A sword unbated, and in a pass of practice

Requite him for your father.

**LAERTES**

I will do ’t.

And for that purpose I’ll anoint my sword.

I bought an unction of a mountebank,

So mortal that, but dip a knife in it,

140 Where it draws blood no cataplasm so rare,

Collected from all simples that have virtue

Under the moon, can save the thing from death

That is but scratched withal. I’ll touch my point

**LAERTES**

I’ll cut Hamlet’s throat in church.

**CLAUDIUS**

It’s true, no place—not even a church—should offer refuge to that murderer.

Revenge should have no limits. But

Laertes, will you do this: stay in your room? When Hamlet comes home he’ll learn you’re here. I’ll have people praise your excellence and put a double coat on the fame the Frenchman gave you. In short, we’ll get you together and place bets on you. Hamlet’s so careless, high-minded, and unsuspecting that he won’t examine the swords beforehand, so you can easily choose one with a sharpened point and in one thrust avenge the death of your father.

**LAERTES**

I’ll do it, and I’ll put a little dab of something on my sword as well. From a quack doctor I bought some oil so poisonous that if you dip a knife in it, no medicine in the world can save the person who’s scratched by it. If I even graze his skin slightly, he’s likely to die.
With this contagion, that if I gall him slightly
It may be death.

CLAUDIUS
Let’s further think of this,
Weigh what convenience both of time and means
May fit us to our shape. If this should fail,
And that our drift look through our bad performance,
’Twere better not assayed. Therefore this project

CLAUDIUS
Let’s think about this, and consider what time and what method will be most appropriate. If our plan were to fail, and people found out about it, it would be better never to have tried it. We should have a backup ready in case the first plan doesn’t work. Let me think. We’ll place bets on you and Hamlet—that’s it! When the two of you have gotten all sweaty and hot—keep him jumping around a lot for that purpose—Hamlet will ask for something to drink. I’ll have a cup ready for him. If by chance he escapes your poisoned sword tip, the drink will kill him. But wait, what’s that sound?

150 Should have a back or second that might hold
If this should blast in proof.—Soft, let me see.—
We’ll make a solemn wager on your cunning.—
155 I ha ’t! When in your motion you are hot and dry,
As make your bouts more violent to that end,
And that he calls for drink, I’ll have prepared him
A chalice for the nonce, whereon but sipping,
If he by chance escape your venomed stuck,
Our purpose may hold there.—But stay,
what noise?

Enter GERTRUDE

GERTRUDE
One woe doth tread upon another’s heel,
160 So fast they follow.—Your sister’s
drowned, Laertes.

LAERTES
Drowned? Oh, where?

GERTRUDE
There is a willow grows aslant a brook
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy
stream.
165 There with fantastic garlands did she come
Of crowflowers, nettles, daisies, and long
purples,
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do “dead men’s
170 fingers” call them.
There, on the pendant boughs her coronet
weeds
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver
broke,
175 When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes
spread wide,
And mermaid-like a while they bore her
up,
Which time she chanted snatches of old
lauds
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and indued
Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their
drink,
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious
lay
To muddy death.

**LAERTES**
180 Alas, then she is drowned.

**GERTRUDE**
Drowned, drowned.

**LAERTES**
Too much of water hast thou, poor
Ophelia,
And therefore I forbid my tears. But yet
185 It is our trick. Nature her custom holds,
Let shame say what it will. When these are
gone,
The woman will be out.—Adieu, my lord.
I have a speech of fire that fain would
blaze,
But that this folly doubts it.

*Exit LAERTES*

**CLAUDIUS**
Let’s follow, Gertrude.
How much I had to do to calm his rage!
190 Now fear I this will give it start again.
Therefore let’s follow.

*Exeunt*

**CLAUDIUS**
Let’s follow him, Gertrude. I worked so hard to calm him down, and now I’m worried he’s getting all excited again. Let’s follow him.

*They exit.*

Act 5, Scene 1

*Enter a GRAVEDIGGER and the OTHER gravedigger*

**GRAVEDIGGER**
Is she to be buried in Christian burial when she willfully seeks her own salvation?

**OTHER**

*A GRAVEDIGGER and the OTHER gravedigger enter.*

**GRAVEDIGGER**
Are they really going to give her a Christian burial after she killed herself?

**OTHER**
I tell thee she is. Therefore make her grave straight. The crowner hath sat on her and finds it Christian burial.

GRAVEDIGGER
How can that be, unless she drowned herself in her own defense?

OTHER
Why, ’tis found so.

GRAVEDIGGER
It must be se offendendo. It cannot be else. For here lies the point: if I drown myself wittingly, it argues an act. And an act hath three branches—it is to act, to do, to perform. Argal, she drowned herself wittingly.

OTHER
Nay, but hear you, Goodman Delver—

GRAVEDIGGER
Give me leave. Here lies the water. Good. Here stands the man. Good. If the man go to this water and drown himself, it is, will he nill he, he goes. Mark you that. But if the water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself. Argal, he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life.

OTHER
But is this law?

GRAVEDIGGER
Ay, marry, is ’t. Crowner’s quest law.

OTHER
Will you ha’ the truth on ’t? If this had not been a gentlewoman, she should have I’m telling you, yes. So finish that grave right away. The coroner examined her case and says it should be a Christian funeral.

GRAVEDIGGER
But how, unless she drowned in self-defense?

OTHER
That’s what they’re saying she did.

GRAVEDIGGER
Sounds more like “self-offense,” if you ask me. What I’m saying is, if she knew she was drowning herself, then that’s an act. An act has three sides to it: to do, to act, and to perform. Therefore she must have known she was drowning herself.

OTHER
No, listen here, gravedigger sir—

GRAVEDIGGER
Let me finish. Here’s the water, right? And here’s a man, okay? If the man goes into the water and drowns himself, he’s the one doing it, like it or not. But if the water comes to him and drowns him, then he doesn’t drown himself. Therefore, he who is innocent of his own death does not shorten his own life.

OTHER
Is that how the law sees it?

GRAVEDIGGER
It sure is. The coroner’s inquest law.

OTHER
Do you want to know the truth? If this woman hadn’t been rich, she wouldn’t
been buried out o' Christian burial.

GRAVEDIGGER
Why, there thou sayst. And the more pity that great folk should have countenance in this world to drown or hang themselves more than their even Christian. Come, my spade. There is no ancient gentleman but gardeners, ditchers, and grave-makers. They hold up Adam’s profession.

OTHER
30 Was he a gentleman?

GRAVEDIGGER
He was the first that ever bore arms.

OTHER
Why, he had none.

GRAVEDIGGER
What, art a heathen? How dost thou understand the Scripture? The Scripture says Adam dug. Could he dig without arms? I’ll put another question to thee. If thou answerest me not to the purpose, confess thyself—

OTHER
Go to.

GRAVEDIGGER
What is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?

OTHER
The gallows-maker, for that frame outlives a thousand tenants.

GRAVEDIGGER
What do you call a person who builds stronger things than a stonemason, a shipbuilder, or a carpenter does?

OTHER
The one who builds the gallows to hang people on, since his structure outlives a...
GRAVEDIGGER
I like thy wit well, in good faith. The gallows does well, but how does it well? It does well to those that do ill.

Now thou dost ill to say the gallows is built stronger than the church. Argal, the gallows may do well to thee. To ’t again, come.

OTHER
“Who builds stronger than a mason, a shipwright, or a carpenter?”

GRAVEDIGGER
Ay, tell me that, and unyoke.

OTHER
Marry, now I can tell.

GRAVEDIGGER
To ’t.

OTHER
Mass, I cannot tell.

Enter HAMLET and HORATIO afar off

GRAVEDIGGER
Cudgel thy brains no more about it, for your dull ass will not mend his pace with beating. And when you are asked this question next, say “A grave-maker.” The houses that he makes last till doomsday. Go, get thee in. Fetch me a stoup of liquor.

GRAVEDIGGER
Don’t beat your brains out over it. You can’t make a slow donkey run by beating it. The next time someone asks you this riddle, say “a gravedigger.” The houses he makes last till Judgment Day. Now go and get me some booze.

Exit OTHER

The OTHER GRAVEDIGGER exits.

(digs and sings)
In youth when I did love, did love,
Methought it was very sweet
To contract–o—the time, for–a—my
behave,
Oh, methought, there–a–was
nothing–a–meet.

HAMLET
Has this fellow no feeling of his
business? He sings at grave- making.

HORATIO
Custom hath made it in him a property of
easiness.

HAMLET
'Tis e'en so. The hand of little
employment hath the daintier sense.

GRAVEDIGGER
(sings)
But age with his stealing steps
Hath clawed me in his clutch,
And hath shipped me into the land
As if I had never been such.

(throws up a skull)

HAMLET
That skull had a tongue in it and could
sing once. How the knave jowls it to the
ground, as if it were Cain’s jawbone, that
did the first murder! It might be the pate
of a politician, which this ass now
o'erreaches, one that would circumvent
God, might it not?

HORATIO
It might, my lord.

HAMLET
Or of a courtier, which could say, “Good
morrow, sweet lord!” “How dost thou, good lord?” This might be my Lord Such-a-one that praised my Lord Such-a-one’s horse when he meant to beg it, might it not?

HORATIO
Ay, my lord.

HAMLET
Why, e’en so. And now my Lady Worm’s, chapless and knocked about the mazard with a sexton’s spade. Here’s fine revolution, an we had the trick to see ’t. Did these bones cost no more the breeding but to play at loggets with them? Mine ache to think on ’t.

GRAVEDIGGER
(sings)
A pickax and a spade, a spade,
For and a shrouding sheet,
Oh, a pit of clay for to be made
For such a guest is meet.

(throws up another skull)

HAMLET
There’s another. Why may not that be the skull of a lawyer? Where be his quiddities now, his quillities, his cases, his tenures, and his tricks? Why does he suffer this rude knave now to knock him about the sconce with a dirty shovel and will not tell him of his action of battery? Hum! This fellow might be in ’s time a great buyer of land, with his statutes, his recognizances, his fines, his double vouchers, his recoveries. Is this the fine of his fines and

“Good night, my sweet lord! How are you doing, good lord?” This might be the skull of Lord So-and-So, who praised Lord Such-and-Such’s horse when he wanted to borrow it, right?

HORATIO
Yes, my lord.

HAMLET
Exactly. And now it’s the property of Lady Worm, its lower jaw knocked off and thwacked on the noggin with a shovel. That’s quite a reversal of fortune, isn’t it, if we could only see it? Are these bones worth nothing more than bowling pins now? It makes my bones ache to think about it.

GRAVEDIGGER
(sings)
A pickax and a shovel, a shovel,
And a sheet for a funeral shroud,
Oh, a pit of dirt is what we need
For a guest like this one here.

(he throws up another skull)

HAMLET
There’s another. Could that be a lawyer’s skull? Where’s all his razzle-dazzle legal jargon now? Why does he allow this idiot to knock him on the head with a dirty shovel, instead of suing him for assault and battery? Maybe this guy was once a great landowner, with his deeds and contracts, his tax shelters and his annuities. Is it part of his deed of ownership to have his skull filled up with dirt? Does he only
the recovery of his recoveries, to have his fine pate full of fine dirt? Will his vouchers vouch him no more of his purchases, and double ones too, than the length and breadth of a pair of indentures? The very conveyances of his lands will hardly lie in this box, and must the inheritor himself have no more, ha?

HORATIO
Not a jot more, my lord.

HAMLET
Is not parchment made of sheepskins?

HORATIO
Ay, my lord, and of calfskins too.

HAMLET
They are sheep and calves which seek out assurance in that.
I will speak to this fellow.—Whose grave’s this, sirrah?

GRAVEDIGGER
Mine, sir.

(sings)
Oh, a pit of clay for to be made
For such a guest is meet.

HAMLET
I think it be thine, indeed, for thou liest in ’t.

GRAVEDIGGER
You lie out on ’t, sir, and therefore it is not yours. For my part, I do not lie in ’t, and yet it is mine.

HAMLET
get to keep as much land as a set of contracts would cover if you spread them out on the ground? The deeds to his properties would barely fit in this coffin—and the coffin’s all the property he gets to keep?

HORATIO
No more than that, my lord.

HAMLET
Isn’t the parchment of a legal document made of sheepskin?

HORATIO
Yes, my lord, and calfskin too.

HAMLET
Anyone who puts his trust in such documents is a sheep or a calf. I’ll talk to this guy.—Excuse me, sir, whose grave is this?

GRAVEDIGGER
It’s mine, sir.

(sings)
Oh, a pit of dirt is what we need
For a guest like this one here.

HAMLET
I think it really must be yours, since you’re the one lying in it.

GRAVEDIGGER
And you’re lying outside of it, so it’s not yours. As for me, I’m not lying to you in it—it’s really mine.

HAMLET
Thou dost lie in ’t, to be in ’t and say it is thine. ’Tis for the dead, not for the quick. Therefore thou liest.

GRAVEDIGGER
'Tis a quick lie, sir. 'Twill away gain from me to you.

HAMLET
What man dost thou dig it for?

GRAVEDIGGER
For no man, sir.

HAMLET
What woman, then?

GRAVEDIGGER
For none, neither.

HAMLET
Who is to be buried in ’t?

GRAVEDIGGER
One that was a woman, sir, but, rest her soul, she’s dead.

HAMLET
How absolute the knave is! We must speak by the card, or equivocation will undo us. By the Lord, Horatio, these three years I have taken a note of it. The age is grown so picked that the toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier he galls his kibe.—How long hast thou been a grave-maker?

GRAVEDIGGER
Of all the days i’ the year, I came to ’t that day that our last King Hamlet overcame Fortinbras.

HAMLET
How long is that since?

But you are lying in it, being in it and saying it’s yours. It’s for the dead, not the living. So you’re lying.

GRAVEDIGGER
That’s a lively lie, sir—it jumps so fast from me to you.

HAMLET
What man are you digging it for?

GRAVEDIGGER
For no man, sir.

HAMLET
What woman, then?

GRAVEDIGGER
For no woman, either.

HAMLET
Who’s to be buried in it?

GRAVEDIGGER
One who used to be a woman but—bless her soul—is dead now.

HAMLET
How literal this guy is! We have to speak precisely, or he’ll get the better of us with his wordplay. Lord, Horatio, I’ve been noticing this for a few years now. The peasants have become so clever and witty that they’re nipping at the heels of noblemen.—How long have you been a gravedigger?

GRAVEDIGGER
Of all the days in the year, I started the day that the late King Hamlet defeated Fortinbras.

HAMLET
How long ago was that?
GRAVEDIGGER
Cannot you tell that? Every fool can tell that. It was the very day that young Hamlet was born, he that is mad and sent into England.

HAMLET
Ay, marry, why was he sent into England?

GRAVEDIGGER
Why, because he was mad. He shall recover his wits there, or, if he do not, it’s no great matter there.

HAMLET
Why?

GRAVEDIGGER
’Twill not be seen in him there. There the men are as mad as he.

HAMLET
How came he mad?

GRAVEDIGGER
Very strangely, they say.

HAMLET
How “strangely”? 

GRAVEDIGGER
Faith, ’en with losing his wits.

HAMLET
Upon what ground? 

GRAVEDIGGER
Why, here in Denmark. I have been sexton here, man and boy, thirty years.

HAMLET
How long will a man lie i’ the earth ere he rot?

GRAVEDIGGER
You don’t know that? Any fool could tell you, it was the day that young Hamlet was born—the one who went crazy and got sent off to England.

HAMLET
Why was he sent to England?

GRAVEDIGGER
Because he was crazy. He’ll recover his sanity there. Or if he doesn’t, it won’t matter in England.

HAMLET
Why not?

GRAVEDIGGER
Because nobody will notice he’s crazy. Everyone there is as crazy as he is.

HAMLET
How did he go crazy?

GRAVEDIGGER
In a strange way, they say.

HAMLET
What do you mean, “in a strange way”?

GRAVEDIGGER
By losing his mind.

HAMLET
On what grounds?

GRAVEDIGGER
Right here in Denmark. I’ve been the church warden here for thirty years, since childhood.

HAMLET
How long will a man lie in his grave before he starts to rot?
Faith, if he be not rotten before he die—as we have many pocky corses nowadays that will scarce hold the laying in—he will last you some eight year or nine year. A tanner will last you nine year.

HAMLET
Why he more than another?

GRAVEDIGGER
Why, sir, his hide is so tanned with his trade that he will keep out water a great while, and your water is a sore decayer of your whoreson dead body. (indicates a skull) Here’s a skull now. This skull has lain in the earth three-and-twenty years.

HAMLET
Whose was it?

GRAVEDIGGER
A whoreson mad fellow’s it was. Whose do you think it was?

HAMLET
Nay, I know not.

GRAVEDIGGER
A pestilence on him for a mad rogue! He poured a flagon of Rhenish on my head once. This same skull, sir, was Yorick’s skull, the king’s jester.

HAMLET
This?

GRAVEDIGGER
E’en that.

HAMLET
Let me see. (takes the skull) Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of

Well, if he’s not rotten before he dies (and there are a lot of people now who are so rotten they start falling to pieces even before you put them in the coffin), he’ll last eight or nine years. A leathermaker will last nine years.

HAMLET
Why does he last longer?

GRAVEDIGGER
Because his hide is so leathery from his trade that he keeps the water off him a long time, and water is what makes your goddamn body rot more than anything. Here’s a skull that’s been here twenty-three years.

HAMLET
Whose was it?

GRAVEDIGGER
A crazy bastard. Who do you think?

HAMLET
I really don’t know.

GRAVEDIGGER
Damn that crazy madman! He poured a pitcher of white wine on my head once. This is the skull of Yorick, the king’s jester.

HAMLET
This one?

GRAVEDIGGER
Yes, that one.

HAMLET
Let me see. (he takes the skull) Oh, poor Yorick! I used to know him, Horatio—a
infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath borne me on his back a thousand times, and now, how abhorred in my imagination it is! My gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. —Where be your gibes now? Your gambols? Your songs? Your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now to mock your own grinning? Quite chapfallen? Now get you to my lady’s chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favor she must come. Make her laugh at that.—Prithee, Horatio, tell me one thing.

HORATIO
What’s that, my lord?

HAMLET
Dost thou think Alexander looked o’ this fashion i’ th’ earth?

HORATIO
E’en so.

HAMLET
And smelt so? Pah! (puts down the skull)

HORATIO
E’en so, my lord.

HAMLET
To what base uses we may return, Horatio. Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander till he find it stopping a bunghole?

HORATIO
very funny guy, and with an excellent imagination. He carried me on his back a thousand times, and now—how terrible—this is him. It makes my stomach turn. I don’t know how many times I kissed the lips that used to be right here. Where are your jokes now? Your pranks? Your songs? Your flashes of wit that used to set the whole table laughing? You don’t make anybody smile now. Are you sad about that? You need to go to my lady’s room and tell her that no matter how much makeup she slathers on, she’ll end up just like you some day. That’ll make her laugh. Horatio, tell me something.

HORATIO
What’s that, my lord?

HAMLET
Do you think Alexander the Great looked like this when he was buried?

HORATIO
Exactly like that.

HAMLET
And smelled like that, too? Whew! (he puts down the skull)

HORATIO
Just as bad, my lord.

HAMLET
How low we can fall, Horatio. Isn’t it possible to imagine that the noble ashes of Alexander the Great could end up plugging a hole in a barrel?

HORATIO
'Twere to consider too curiously, to consider so.

HAMLET
No, faith, not a jot. But to follow him thither with modesty enough, and likelihood to lead it, as thus: Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth to dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make loam—and why of that loam, whereto he was converted, might they not stop a beer barrel?

Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay, Might stop a hole to keep the wind away. Oh, that that earth, which kept the world in awe, Should patch a wall t' expel the winter's flaw!

But soft, but soft a while.

Enter King CLAUDIUS, Queen GERTRUDE, LAERTES, and a coffin, with a PRIEST and other lords attendant.

CLAUDIUS enters with GERTRUDE, LAERTES, and a coffin, with a PRIEST and other lords attendant.

Here comes the king, The queen, the courtiers—who is this they follow,

And with such maimèd rites? This doth betoken The corse they follow did with desperate hand Fordo its own life. 'Twas of some estate. Couch we a while and mark.

HAMLET and HORATIO withdraw

LAERTES
What ceremony else?

HAMLET and HORATIO step aside.

LAERTES
What other rites are you going to give
HAMLET
That is Laertes, a very noble youth, mark.

LAERTES
What ceremony else?

PRIEST
Her obsequies have been as far enlarged
As we have warranty. Her death was
doubtful,
And, but that great command o'ersways the order,

200 She should in ground unsanctified have
lodged
Till the last trumpet. For charitable prayers
Shards, flints and pebbles should be
thrown on her.
Yet here she is allowed her virgin crants,
Her maiden strewments, and the bringing home
Of bell and burial.

LAERTES
Must there no more be done?

PRIEST
No more be done.
We should profane the service of the dead
To sing a requiem and such rest to her
As to peace-parted souls.

LAERTES
Lay her i' th' earth,
And from her fair and unpolluted flesh

210 May violets spring! I tell thee, churlish priest,
her?

HAMLET
That's Laertes, a very noble young man. Listen.

LAERTES
What other rites are you going to give her?

PRIEST
I've performed as many rites as I'm permitted. Her death was suspicious, and were it not for the fact that the king gave orders to bury her here, she'd have been buried outside the church graveyard. She deserves to have rocks and stones thrown on her body. But she has had prayers read for her and is dressed up like a pure virgin, with flowers tossed on her grave and the bell tolling for her.

LAERTES
Isn't there any other rite you can perform?

PRIEST
No, nothing. We would profane the other dead souls here if we sang the same requiem for her that we sang for them.

LAERTES
Lay her in the ground, and let violets bloom from her lovely and pure flesh! I'm telling you, you jerk priest, my sister will be an angel in heaven while
A ministering angel shall my sister be
When thou liest howling.

**HAMLET**
*(to HORATIO)* What, the fair Ophelia?

**GERTRUDE**
Sweets to the sweet. Farewell! *(scatters flowers)*
I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet’s wife.
I thought thy bride-bed to have decked, sweet maid,
And not have strewed thy grave.

**LAERTES**
Oh, treble woe
Fall ten times treble on that cursèd head,
Whose wicked deed thy most ingenious sense
Deprived thee of! Hold off the earth awhile
Till I have caught her once more in mine arms.

 *(leaps into the grave)*

Now pile your dust upon the quick and dead,
Till of this flat a mountain you have made,
T’ o’ertop old Pelion or the skyish head
Of blue Olympus.

**HAMLET**
*(comes forward)* What is he whose grief
Bears such an emphasis, whose phrase of sorrow
Conjures the wandering stars, and makes them stand
Like wonder-wounded hearers? This is I,

you’re howling in hell.

**HAMLET**
*(to HORATIO)* What, the beautiful Ophelia?

**QUEEN**
Sweet flowers for a sweet girl.
Goodbye! *(she scatters flowers)* I once hoped you’d be my Hamlet’s wife. I thought I’d be tossing flowers on your wedding bed, my sweet girl, not on your grave.

**LAERTES**
Oh, damn three times, damn ten times the evil man whose wicked deed deprived you of your ingenious mind. Hold off burying her until I’ve caught her in my arms once more.

 *(he jumps into the grave)*

Now pile the dirt onto the living and the dead alike, till you’ve made a mountain higher than Mount Pelion or Mount Olympus.

**HAMLET**
*(coming forward)* Who is the one whose grief is so loud and clear, whose words of sadness make the planets stand still in the heavens as if they’ve been hurt by what they’ve heard? It’s me, Hamlet the Dane. *(he jumps into the grave)*
Hamlet the Dane. *(leaps into the grave)*

**LAERTES**

235 The devil take thy soul!

**HAMLET and LAERTES grapple**

**HAMLET and LAERTES wrestle with each other.**

**HAMLET**

Thou pray'st not well.
I prithee, take thy fingers from my throat,
For though I am not splenitive and rash,
Yet have I something in me dangerous,
Which let thy wisdom fear. Hold off thy hand.

**CLAUDIUS**

Pluck them asunder.

**GERTRUDE**

Hamlet, Hamlet!

**ALL**

Gentlemen—

**HORATIO**

*(to HAMLET)* Good my lord, be quiet.

**ATTENDANTS separate HAMLET and LAERTES**

**HAMLET**

Why, I will fight with him upon this theme
Until my eyelids will no longer wag.

**GERTRUDE**

O my son, what theme?

**HAMLET**

I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers
Could not with all their quantity of love
Make up my sum. What wilt thou do for

**CLAUDIUS**

Pull them apart.

**GERTRUDE**

Hamlet! Hamlet!

**ALL**

Gentlemen!

**HORATIO**

*(to HAMLET)* Please, my lord, calm down.

**ATTENDANTS separate HAMLET and LAERTES**

**HAMLET**

I’ll fight him over this issue till I don’t have the strength to blink.

**GERTRUDE**

Oh, my son, what issue is that?

**HAMLET**

I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers, if you added all their love together, couldn’t match mine. What are
her?

CLAUDIUS
250 O, he is mad, Laertes.

GERTRUDE
For love of God, forbear him.

HAMLET
'Swounds, show me what thou'lt do.
Woo't weep? Woo't fight? Woo't fast?
Woo't tear thyself?
Woo't drink up eisel, eat a crocodile?
I'll do 't. Dost thou come here to whine,
To outface me with leaping in her grave?
Be buried quick with her?—and so will I.
And if thou prate of mountains let them
260 throw
Millions of acres on us, till our ground,
Singeing his pate against the burning zone,
Make Ossa like a wart! Nay, an thou'lt mouth,
I'll rant as well as thou.

GERTRUDE
This is mere madness.
And thus a while the fit will work on him.
Anon, as patient as the female dove
265 When that her golden couplets are disclosed,
His silence will sit drooping.

HAMLET
Hear you, sir.
What is the reason that you use me thus?
I loved you ever. But it is no matter.
Let Hercules himself do what he may,
The cat will mew and dog will have his
you going to do for her?

CLAUDIUS
Oh, he's crazy, Laertes!

GERTRUDE
For the love of God, be patient with him.

HAMLET
Damn it, show me what you’re going to do for her. Will you cry? Fight? Stop eating? Cut yourself? Drink vinegar? Eat a crocodile? I’ll do all that. Did you come here to whine? To outdo me by jumping into her grave so theatrically? To be buried alive with her? So will I. And if you rattle on about mountains, then let them throw millions of acres over us. It will be so high a peak that it scrapes against heaven and makes Mount Ossa look like a wart. See? I can talk crazy as well as you.

GERTRUDE
This is pure insanity. He’ll be like this for a little while. Then he’ll be as calm and quiet as a dove waiting for her eggs to hatch.

HAMLET
Listen, sir, why do you treat me like this? I always loved you. But it doesn’t matter. Even a hero like Hercules can’t keep cats from acting like cats, and dogs like dogs.
Exit HAMLET

HAMLET exits.

CLAUDIUS
I pray thee, good Horatio, wait upon him.

Exit HAMLET

CLAUDIUS
Please, Horatio, go with him.

Exit HORATIO

HORATIO

(to LAERTES) Strengthen your patience in our last night’s speech.
We’ll put the matter to the present push.—

CLAUDIUS

(to LAERTES) Don’t forget our talk last night, and try to be patient. We’ll take care of this problem soon.—

Good Gertrude, set some watch over your son.—
This grave shall have a living monument.
An hour of quiet shortly shall we see.
Till then in patience our proceeding be.

Gertrude, have the guards keep an eye on your son. A monument shall be built for Ophelia that will last forever, I promise. We’ll have the quiet we need soon. In the meantime, let’s proceed patiently.

Exeunt

They exit.

Act 5, Scene 2

Enter HAMLET and HORATIO

HAMLET and HORATIO enter.

HAMLET
So much for this, sir. Now shall you see the other.
You do remember all the circumstance?

HORATIO
Remember it, my lord?

HAMLET
Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting
That would not let me sleep. Methought I lay
Worse than the mutines in the bilboes.
Rashly—
And praised be rashness for it: let us know
Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well
When our deep plots do pall, and that

That’s enough about that. Now I’ll tell you the other story about my journey. Do you remember the circumstances?

HORATIO
How could I forget, my lord!

HAMLET
There was a kind of war in my brain that wouldn’t let me sleep. It was worse than being a captive in chains. Sometimes it’s good to be rash—sometimes it works out well to act impulsively when our careful plans lose steam. This should show us that there’s a God in heaven who’s always guiding us in the right direction,
should teach us
There’s a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will—

**HORATIO**
That is most certain.

**HAMLET**
Up from my cabin,
My sea-gown scarfed about me, in the dark
Groped I to find out them, had my desire,
Fingered their packet, and in fine withdrew
To mine own room again, making so bold
(My fears forgetting manners) to unseal
Their grand commission, where I found,

**HORATIO**—
O royal knavery!—an exact command,
Larded with many several sorts of reasons
Importing Denmark’s health, and
England’s too,

With—ho!—such bugs and goblins in my
life
That, on the supervise (no leisure bated,
No, not to stay the grinding of the ax)
My head should be struck off.

**HORATIO**
Is ’t possible?

**HAMLET**
*(shows HORATIO a document)*
Here’s the commission. Read it at more
leisure.
But wilt thou hear me how I did proceed?

**HORATIO**
I beseech you.

**HAMLET**
Being thus benetted round with villainies—
Ere I could make a prologue to my brains,

**HORATIO**
Well, of course.

**HAMLET**
So I came up from my cabin with my robe tied around me, groped in the dark to find what I was looking for, found it, looked through their packet of papers, and returned to my cabin again. I was bold enough (I guess my fears made me forget my manners) to open the document containing the king’s instructions. And there I found, Horatio, such royal mischief—a precisely worded order, sugared with lots of talk about Denmark’s well-being and England’s too, to cut off my head, without even waiting to sharpen the ax.

**HORATIO**
Is it possible?

**HAMLET**
*(he shows HORATIO a document)* Here’s the document. Read it in your free time. But do you want to hear what I did then?

**HORATIO**
Yes, please tell me.

**HAMLET**
So there I was, caught in their evil net. Before I could even start processing the
They had begun the play—I sat me down,
Devised a new commission, wrote it fair.

I once did hold it, as our statists do,
A baseness to write fair, and labored much
How to forget that learning, but, sir, now
It did me yeoman’s service. Wilt thou know
Th’ effect of what I wrote?

**HORATIO**

**HAMLET**

An earnest conjuration from the king,
As England was his faithful tributary,
As love between them like the palm might flourish,

As peace should stiff her wheaten garland wear
And stand a comma ’tween their amities,
And many suchlike “as’s” of great charge,
That, on the view and knowing of these contents,
Without debatement further, more or less,
He should the bearers put to sudden death,
Not shriving time allowed.

**HORATIO**

How was this sealed?

**HAMLET**

Why, even in that was heaven ordinant.
I had my father’s signet in my purse,
Which was the model of that Danish seal.

Folded the writ up in form of th’ other,
Subscribed it, gave ’t th’ impression, placed

situation, they had started the ball rolling.
I sat down and wrote out a new official
document with new instructions. I wrote
it in a bureaucrat’s neat handwriting. I
used to think having nice handwriting was for servants, just like our politicians
think, and I had to work hard to
overcome that prejudice—but it sure
came in handy then. Do you want to
know what I wrote?

**HORATIO**

Yes, my lord.

**HAMLET**

A sincere plea from the king, who
commands the respect of England, and
who hopes that the love between the two
countries can flourish, and that peace can
join them in friendship—and other fancy mumbo jumbo like that—saying that,

once they read this document, without
any debate, the ones delivering the letter
should be put to death immediately,
without giving them time to confess to a priest.

**HORATIO**

But how could you put an official seal on
it?

**HAMLET**

Heaven helped me out with that too. I
had my father’s signet ring in my pocket,
with the royal seal of Denmark on it. I
folded up the new document, signed it,
sealed it, and put it safely back so that no
The changeling never known. Now, the next day
Was our sea fight, and what to this was sequent
Thou know’st already.

**HORATIO**

60 So Rosencrantz and Guildenstern go to ’t.

**HAMLET**

Why, man, they did make love to this employment.
They are not near my conscience. Their defeat
Does by their own insinuation grow.
’Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes
Between the pass and fell incensèd points
Of mighty opposites.

**HORATIO**

Why, what a king is this!

**HAMLET**

Does it not, think thee, stand me now upon—

70 He that hath killed my king and whored my mother,
Popped in between th’ election and my hopes,
Thrown out his angle for my proper life
(And with such cozenage!)—is ’t not perfect conscience
To quit him with this arm? And is ’t not to be damned
To let this canker of our nature come
In further evil?

one noticed any difference. The next day we had our fight at sea, and you know what happened after that.

**HORATIO**

So Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are in for it.

**HAMLET**

Man, they were asking for it. I don’t feel guilty about them at all. They got what they deserved. It’s always dangerous when little people get caught in the crossfire of mighty opponents.

**HORATIO**

What a king Claudius is!

**HAMLET**

Don’t you think it’s my duty now to kill him with this weapon? This man who killed my king, made my mother a whore, took the throne that I hoped for, and set a trap to kill me. Isn’t it completely moral to kill him now with this sword—and an easy conscience?

And wouldn’t I be damned if I let this monster live to do more harm?
HORATIO
It must be shortly known to him from England
What is the issue of the business there.

HAMLET
It will be short. The interim’s mine.
And a man’s life’s no more than to say “one.”
But I am very sorry, good Horatio,
That to Laertes I forgot myself,
For by the image of my cause I see
The portraiture of his. I’ll court his favors.
But sure the bravery of his grief did put me
Into a towering passion.

HORATIO
Peace.—Who comes here?

Enter young OSRIC, a courtier, hat in hand

OSRIC
Your lordship is right welcome back to Denmark.

HAMLET
I humbly thank you, sir. (aside to HORATIO) Dost know this water-fly?

HORATIO
(aside to HAMLET) No, my good lord.

HAMLET
(aside to HORATIO) Thy state is the more gracious, for ’tis a vice to know him. He hath much land, and fertile. Let a beast be lord of beasts and his crib shall stand at the king’s mess. ’Tis a chough, but, as I say,

HORATIO
He’ll find out soon what happened in England.

HAMLET
Soon enough. But I have the meantime. A human life is hardly long enough to count to one in. But I really feel bad, Horatio, about losing control of myself with Laertes. His situation is very much like my own. I’ll be nice to him. It was just that the showiness of his grief sent me into a fury.

HORATIO
Hang on a minute—who are you?

OSRIC, a young courtier, enters with his hat in his hand

OSRIC
Welcome back to Denmark, my lord.

HAMLET
Thank you kindly, sir. (speaking so that only HAMLET can hear) Do you know this insect?

HORATIO
(speaking so that only HAMLET can hear) No, my lord.

HAMLET
(speaking so that only HAMLET can hear) You’re lucky, since knowing him is most unpleasant. He owns a lot of good land. Give an animal a lot of money, and he’ll be welcome at the king’s table. He’s
spacious in the possession of dirt.

OSRIC
Sweet lord, if your lordship were at leisure, I should impart a thing to you from His Majesty.

HAMLET
I will receive it, sir, with all diligence of spirit. Put your bonnet to his right use. 'Tis for the head.

OSRIC
I thank your lordship. It is very hot.

HAMLET
No, believe me, 'tis very cold. The wind is northerly.

OSRIC
It is indifferent cold, my lord, indeed.

HAMLET
But yet methinks it is very sultry and hot for my complexion.

OSRIC
Exceedingly, my lord. It is very sultry—as 'twere—I cannot tell how. My lord, his majesty bade me signify to you that he has laid a great wager on your head. Sir, this is the matter—

HAMLET
I beseech you, remember—(indicates that OSRIC should put on his hat)

OSRIC
Yes indeed it is, sir. Very humid, I can’t tell you how humid it is. My lord, His Majesty wanted me to tell you that he’s placed a large bet on you. This is what it’s all about—

HAMLET
Please, I beg you—(he points to OSRIC’s hat)
OSRIC

Nay, good my lord, for mine ease, in good faith. Sir, here is newly come to court Laertes, believe me, an absolute gentleman, full of most excellent differences, of very soft society and great showing. Indeed, to speak feelingly of him, he is the card or calendar of gentry, for you shall find in him the continent of what part a gentleman would see.

OSRIC

No, my lord, I’m comfortable like this, thank you. Sir, there’s someone named Laertes who’s recently come to the court. He’s an absolute gentleman, totally outstanding in so many respects, very easy in society, and displaying all his excellent qualities. If I were to expose my true feelings about him, I’d have to say he’s like a business card for the upper classes—he’s that wonderful. You’ll find that he’s the sum total of what a perfect gentleman should be.

HAMLET

Sir, his definement suffers no perdition in you, though I know to divide him inventorially would dizzy th’ arithmetic of memory, and yet but yaw neither, in respect of his quick sail.

But in the verity of extolment, I take him to be a soul of great article, and his infusion of such dearth and rareness as, to make true diction of him, his semblable is his mirror. And who else would trace him? His umbrage, nothing more.

OSRIC

Your lordship speaks most infallibly of him.

HAMLET

The concernancy, sir? Why do we wrap the gentleman in our more rawer breath?

Speaking the very truth of high praise, I can honestly say that I find him to possess a soul of such great importance, and so rare and unique in every respect, that—to speak the absolute truth—he can find an equal only when he gazes into a mirror. Anyone else is just a pale copy of him.

OSRIC

You speak absolutely correctly, sir.

HAMLET

And what’s the point, sir? Why are we talking about him like this?
OSRIC
125 Sir?

HORATIO
(aside to HAMLET) Is ’t not possible to understand in another tongue? You will do ’t, sir, really.

HAMLET
What imports the nomination of this gentleman?

OSRIC
Of Laertes?

HORATIO
(aside to HAMLET) His purse is empty already. All ’s golden words are spent.

HAMLET
Of him, sir.

OSRIC
I know you are not ignorant—

HAMLET
I would you did, sir. Yet in faith, if you did, it would not much approve me. Well, sir?

OSRIC
You are not ignorant of what excellence Laertes is—

HAMLET
I dare not confess that lest I should compare with him in excellence, but to know a man well were to know himself.

OSRIC
I mean, sir, for his weapon. But in the imputation laid on him by them, in his

OSRIC
Sorry, sir?

HORATIO
(speaking so that only HAMLET can hear) Can’t you talk to him in a different way?

HAMLET
(to OSRIC) What is the significance of referring to this individual?

OSRIC
Laertes, you mean?

HORATIO
(speaking so that only HAMLET can hear) All his fancy language has run out finally; his pockets are empty.

HAMLET
Yes, Laertes, sir.

OSRIC
I know you know something—

HAMLET
Thanks for the compliment, I’m happy you know that. But in fact it doesn’t say much. I’m sorry, you were saying?

OSRIC
I know you know something about how excellent Laertes is—

HAMLET
I can’t admit that, since you’d have to compare his excellence to mine. But knowing a person well is a bit like knowing oneself.

OSRIC
Excellent in fencing, I mean, sir. His reputation in fencing is unrivaled.
meed he’s unfellowed.

HAMLET
What’s his weapon?

OSRIC
Rapier and dagger.

HAMLET
That’s two of his weapons. But well.

OSRIC
The king, sir, hath wagered with him six Barbary horses, against the which he has impawned, as I take it, six French rapiers and poniards with their assigns—as girdle, hangers, and so. Three of the carriages, in faith, are very dear to fancy, very responsive to the hilts, most delicate carriages, and of very liberal conceit.

HAMLET
150 What call you the carriages?

HORATIO
(aside to HAMLET) I knew you must be edified by the margin ere you had done.

OSRIC
The carriages, sir, are the hangers.

HAMLET
The phrase would be more germane to the matter if we could carry cannon by our sides. I would it might be hangers till then. But, on: six Barbary horses against six French swords, their assigns, and three liberal-conceited carriages—that’s

HAMLET
What kind of weapon does he use?

OSRIC
The rapier and the dagger.

HAMLET
Those are only two of his weapons. But, go on.

OSRIC
The king has bet six Barbary horses, and he has prepared six French rapiers and daggers with all their accessories. Three of the carriages are very imaginatively designed, and they match the fencing accessories.

HAMLET
What do you mean by “carriages”?

HORATIO
(speaking so that only HAMLET can hear) I knew you’d have to look something up in the dictionary before we were finished.

OSRIC
The carriages, sir, are the hangers—where the swords hang.

HAMLET
“Carriage” makes it sound like it’s pulling around a cannon. I prefer to call it a “hanger.” But anyway. Six Barbary horses, six French swords with accessories, and three imaginatively designed carriages—sounds like a French bet against the Danish.
the French bet against the Danish. Why is this “impawned,” as you call it?

OSRIC
The king, sir, hath laid that in a dozen passes between yourself and him, he shall not exceed you three hits. He hath laid on twelve for nine, and it would come to immediate trial if your lordship would vouchsafe the answer.

HAMLET
How if I answer “No”?

OSRIC
I mean, my lord, the opposition of your person in trial.

HAMLET
Sir, I will walk here in the hall. If it please His Majesty, ’tis the breathing time of day with me. Let the foils be brought, the gentleman willing, and the king hold his purpose. I will win for him an I can. If not, I will gain nothing but my shame and the odd hits.

OSRIC
Shall I redeliver you e'en so?

HAMLET
To this effect, sir, after what flourish your nature will.

OSRIC
I commend my duty to your lordship.

HAMLET
Yours, yours.

Exit OSRIC

He does well to commend it himself. There are no tongues else for ’s turn.

OSRIC exits.

Why has all this been put on the table?

OSRIC
The king, sir, has bet that in a dozen rounds between you and Laertes, he won’t beat you by more than three hits. You could get started immediately if you’ll give me your answer.

HAMLET
But what if my answer’s no?

OSRIC
I mean, if you’d agree to play against Laertes, sir.

HAMLET
Sir, I’m going to go for a walk in the hall here whether the king likes it or not. It’s my exercise time. Bring in the swords, if the king still wants to go through with it and if Laertes is still willing. I’ll have the king win his bet if I can. If not, I’ll only have suffered some embarrassment and a few sword hits.

OSRIC
Shall I quote you in those exact words, sir?

HAMLET
Just get the point across, however flowery you want to be.

OSRIC
My services are at your command.

HAMLET
Thank you.
HORATIO
This lapwing runs away with the shell on his head.

HAMLET
He did comply, sir, with his dug before he sucked it. Thus has he—and many more of the same bevy that I know the drossy age dotes on—only got the tune of the time and outward habit of encounter, a kind of yeasty collection, which carries them through and through the most fond and winnowed opinions; and do but blow them to their trial, the bubbles are out.

Enter a LORD

LORD
My lord, his majesty commended him to you by young Osric, who brings back to him that you attend him in the hall. He sends to know if your pleasure hold to play with Laertes, or that you will take longer time.

HAMLET
I am constant to my purpose. They follow the king’s pleasure. If his fitness speaks, mine is ready, now or whensoever, provided I be so able as now.

LORD
The king and queen and all are coming down.

HAMLET
In happy time.

LORD
The king and queen are coming down with everyone else.

HAMLET
Right on cue.

LORD

A LORD enters.

LORD
My lord, Osric has told the king about your agreeing to the fencing match. The king wishes to know if you want to play against him right away, or wait awhile.

HAMLET
I’ll do whatever the king wants. If he’s ready now, so am I. Otherwise, I’ll do it anytime, as long as I’m able.

LORD
The king and queen has told the king about your agreeing to the fencing match. The king wishes to know if you want to play against him right away, or wait awhile.

HAMLET
I’ll do whatever the king wants. If he’s ready now, so am I. Otherwise, I’ll do it anytime, as long as I’m able.

LORD
The king and queen are coming down with everyone else.

HAMLET
Right on cue.

LORD
The queen desires you to use some gentle entertainment to
Laertes before you fall to play.

Exit LORD

The queen wants you to chat with Laertes—politely—before you begin your match.

HAMLET
She well instructs me.

HORATIO
You will lose this wager, my lord.

HAMLET
I do not think so. Since he went into France, I have been in continual practice.
I shall win at the odds. But thou wouldst not think how ill all’s here about my heart. But it is no matter.

HORATIO
You will lose this wager, my lord.

HAMLET
I do not think so. Since he went into France, I have been in continual practice. With the handicap they’ve given me, I think I’ll win. But I have a sinking feeling anyway. Oh well.

HORATIO
If your mind dislike anything, obey it. I will forestall their repair hither and say you are not fit.

HAMLET
Not a whit. We defy augury. There’s a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, ’tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet it will come—the readiness is all. Since no man of aught he leaves knows, what is ’t to leave betimes? Let be.
behind, then what does it mean to leave early? Let it be.

Enter King CLAUDIUS, Queen GERTRUDE, LAERTES, OSRIC, lords, and other attendants with trumpets, drums, foils, a table, and flagons of wine

CLAUDIUS

Come, Hamlet, come, and take this hand from me. (puts LAERTES' hand into HAMLET's)

HAMLET

Give me your pardon, sir. I've done you wrong.

But pardon 't, as you are a gentleman.

215 This presence knows,

And you must needs have heard, how I am punished

With sore distraction. What I have done,

That might your nature, honor, and exception

Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.

Was 't Hamlet wronged Laertes? Never Hamlet.

220 If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,

And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,

Then Hamlet does it not. Hamlet denies it.

Who does it, then? His madness. If't be so,

Hamlet is of the faction that is wronged.

His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy.

Sir, in this audience,
Let my disclaiming from a purposed evil
Free me so far in your most generous thoughts
That I have shot mine arrow o'er the house
And hurt my brother.

And if that’s true, then Hamlet is the victim of his own illness—his illness is his enemy. Sir, with this audience as witness, let me declare that I’m as innocent of premeditated evil against you as I would be if I had happened to shoot an arrow over my house and accidentally hit my brother.

LAERTES
I am satisfied in nature,
Whose motive in this case should stir me most
To my revenge. But in my terms of honor
I stand aloof, and will no reconcilement
Till by some elder masters, of known honor,
I have a voice and precedent of peace
To keep my name ungored. But till that time
I do receive your offered love like love
And will not wrong it.

LAERTES
My feelings are satisfied—even though what you have done to my father and sister should drive me to revenge. Yet when it comes to my honor, I can’t forgive you so fast. I will accept no apology until experts in matters of honor show me how to make peace with you without staining my own reputation in doing so. Until then I will accept your love as love.

HAMLET
I embrace it freely,
And will this brother’s wager frankly play.—
Give us the foils. Come on.

LAERTES
Come, one for me.

HAMLET
I’ll be your foil, Laertes. In mine ignorance
Your skill shall, like a star i’ th’ darkest night,
Stick fiery off indeed.

HAMLET
I’m grateful for your love. Come on, give us the swords, and we will play this friendly fencing match enthusiastically.

LAERTES
Yes, hand me one too.

HAMLET
I’m going to make you look sharp, Laertes. I’m so bad at the game that your skill will shine like the brightest star in the darkest night.
LAERTES
You mock me, sir.

HAMLET
No, by this hand.

CLAUDIUS
Give them the foils, young Osric.—Cousin Hamlet,
You know the wager?

HAMLET
Very well, my lord.
Your grace hath laid the odds o' th' weaker side.

CLAUDIUS
I do not fear it. I have seen you both.
But since he is better we have therefore odds.

LAERTES
(tests a rapier) This is too heavy. Let me see another.

HAMLET
(tests a rapier) This likes me well. These foils have all a length?

OSRIC
Ay, my good lord.

HAMLET and LAERTES prepare to play

CLAUDIUS
Set me the stoups of wine upon that table.
If Hamlet give the first or second hit
Or quit in answer of the third exchange,
Let all the battlements their ordnance fire!
The king shall drink to Hamlet’s better breath,

CLAUDIUS
I do not fear it. I have seen you both.
But since Laertes is better, we’ve given him a handicap. He’s got to outdo you by three hits to win.

LAERTES
This sword’s too heavy. Show me another one.

HAMLET
I like this one. Are they all the same length?

OSRIC
Yes, my lord.

HAMLET and LAERTES get ready to fence.

CLAUDIUS
Put the goblets of wine on that table. If Hamlet makes the first or second hit, or gets back at Laertes by making the third hit, then let my soldiers give him a military salute. I’ll drink to Hamlet’s health, and into his goblet I’ll drop a
And in the cup an union shall he throw
Richer than that which four successive kings
In Denmark’s crown have worn. Give me the cups.

And let the kettle to the trumpet speak,
The trumpet to the cannoneer without,
The cannons to the heavens, the heavens to earth,
“Now the king dunks to Hamlet.” Come, begin.—
And you, the judges, bear a wary eye.

Trumpets

HAMLET
Come on, sir.

LAERTES
Come, my lord.

HAMLET and LAERTES play

HAMLET
One.

LAERTES
No.

HAMLET
Judgment?

OSRIC
A hit, a very palpable hit.

LAERTES
Well, again.

CLAUDIUS
Stay, give me drink.—Hamlet, this pearl is thine.

Here’s to thy health.

Drums, trumpets sound, shot goes off

Drums and trumpets play, and a gun is
CLAUDIUS drops pearl into cup

Give him the cup.

HAMLET
I’ll play this bout first. Set it by a while. Come.

HAMLET and LAERTES play

Another hit. What say you?

LAERTES
A touch, a touch, I do confess ’t.

CLAUDIUS
280 Our son shall win.

GERTRUDE
He’s fat, and scant of breath.—
Here, Hamlet, take my napkin, rub thy brows.
The queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet.
(picks up the cup with the pearl)

HAMLET
285 Good madam.

CLAUDIUS
Gertrude, do not drink.

GERTRUDE
I will, my lord. I pray you, pardon me. (drinks)

CLAUDIUS
(aside) It is the poisoned cup. It is too late.

HAMLET
I dare not drink yet, madam. By and by.

cfired.

CLAUDIUS drops a pearl into a cup.

Give him the goblet.

HAMLET
Let me just finish this round. Set it down awhile. Let’s play.

HAMLET and LAERTES fence.

Another hit. What do you say?

LAERTES
You got me, I admit it.

CLAUDIUS
My son will win.

GERTRUDE
He’s flabby and out of breath.—Here, Hamlet, take my handkerchief and wipe your forehead.
The queen drinks to your good luck and happiness, Hamlet. (she lifts the cup with the pearl)

HAMLET
Thank you, madam.

CLAUDIUS
Gertrude, don’t drink that.

GERTRUDE
Excuse me. I’ll drink it if I like. (she drinks)

CLAUDIUS
(to himself) That was the poisoned drink. It’s too late.

HAMLET
I’d better not drink now. I’ll drink later.
GERTRUDE
Come, let me wipe thy face.

LAERTES
Come on, let me wipe your face.

CLAUDIUS
My lord, I’ll hit him now.

CLAUDIUS
I doubt it.

LAERTES
(aside) And yet it is almost 'gainst my conscience.

LAERTES
(to himself) But I almost feel guilty.

HAMLET
Come, for the third, Laertes. You do but dally.

HAMLET
Get ready for the third hit, Laertes. You’re just playing around. Come on, give me your best shot. I sense you’re treating me like a child.

LAERTES
You think so? Come on.

OSRIC
Nothing, neither way.

OSRIC
They’re neck and neck.

LAERTES
Have at you now!

LAERTES wounds HAMLET In scuffling, they change rapiers. HAMLET wounds LAERTES

LAERTES wounds HAMLET. Then in a scuffle they end up with each other’s swords, and HAMLET wounds LAERTES.

CLAUDIUS
Part them! They are incensed.

CLAUDIUS
Separate them. They’re overdoing it.

HAMLET
Nay, come, again.

HAMLET
No, come on, one more time.

GERTRUDE falls

GERTRUDE collapses.

OSRIC
Look to the queen there, ho!

OSRIC
Take care of the queen!
HORATIO
300 They bleed on both sides.—How is it, my lord?

OSRIC
How is 't, Laertes?

LAERTES
Why, as a woodcock to mine own springe, Osric. I am justly killed with mine own treachery. (falls)

HAMLET
How does the queen?

CLAUDIUS
She swoons to see them bleed.

GERTRUDE
305 No, no, the drink, the drink!—O my dear Hamlet!
The drink, the drink! I am poisoned. (dies)

HAMLET
O villainy! Ho, let the door be locked.

Exit OSRIC

Treachery! Seek it out.

LAERTES
It is here, Hamlet. Hamlet, thou art slain.

HAMLET
O villainy! Ho, let the door be locked. (dies)

Exit OSRIC

We’ve been betrayed! Find out who did it!

LAERTES
I’m the one, Hamlet. Hamlet, you’re dead. No medicine in the world can cure you. You don’t have more than half an hour to live. The treacherous weapon is right in your hand, sharp and dipped in poison. The foul plan backfired on me. Here I lie and will never get up again. Your mother’s been poisoned. I can’t speak anymore. The king, the king’s to blame.
poisoned.
I can no more. The king, the king’s to blame.

**HAMLET**
The point envenomed too!—Then, venom, to thy work.

**HAMLET**
The blade poisoned! Then get to work, poison!

**HAMLET hurts CLAUDIUS**

**HAMLET wounds CLAUDIUS.**

**ALL**
Treason! Treason!

**CLAUDIUS**
O, yet defend me, friends. I am but hurt.

**HAMLET**
320 Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damnèd Dane,
Drink off this potion. Is thy union here?
Follow my mother.

**HAMLET forces CLAUDIUS to drink CLAUDIUS dies**

He is justly served.
It is a poison tempered by himself.
Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet.
Mine and my father’s death come not upon thee,
Nor thine on me. *(dies)*

**LAERTES**
He got what he deserved. He mixed that poison himself. Please forgive me as I forgive you, Hamlet. You’re not responsible for my death and my father’s, and I’m not responsible for yours. *(he dies)*

**HAMLET**
God will free you from blame. I’ll follow you to heaven in a minute.—I’m dying, Horatio.—Goodbye, miserable queen.—And all you people watching, pale and trembling, speechless spectators of these acts, I could tell you...
That are but mutes or audience to this act,
Had I but time (as this fell sergeant, Death,
Is strict in his arrest), O, I could tell you—
But let it be.—Horatio, I am dead.
Thou livest. Report me and my cause
aright
To the unsatisfied.

**HORATIO**

Never believe it.
I am more an antique Roman than a Dane.
Here’s yet some liquor left.
(lifts the poisoned cup)

**HORATIO**

Not for a second. I’m more like an ancient Roman than a corrupt modern Dane. Some of this liquor’s still left in the goblet. (he picks up the poisoned cup to drink)

**HAMLET**

As thou’rt a man,
Give me the cup. Let go! By heaven, I’ll have ’t.
(takes cup from HORATIO)
O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,
Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart
Absent thee from felicity a while,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story.

March afar off and shout within

A military march is heard from offstage,
and a cannon fires.

What warlike noise is this?

Enter OSRIC

**OSRIC**

Young Fortinbras, with conquest come from Poland,
To th’ ambassadors of England gives

Young Fortinbras, returning in triumph from Poland, is firing his guns to greet the English ambassadors.
This warlike volley.

**HAMLET**

O, I die, Horatio.
The potent poison quite o'ercrows my spirit.
I cannot live to hear the news from England.

But I do prophesy the election lights On Fortinbras. He has my dying voice.
So tell him, with th' occurrents, more and less,
Which have solicited. The rest is silence.
O, O, O, O. *(dies)*

**HORATIO**

Now cracks a noble heart.—Good night, sweet prince,
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!—
Why does the drum come hither?

*Enter FORTINBRAS and the English AMBASSADOR, with drummer and attendants*

**FORTINBRAS**

Where is this sight?

**HORATIO**

What is it ye would see?
If aught of woe or wonder, cease your search.

**FORTINBRAS**

This quarry cries on havoc. O proud death,
What feast is toward in thine eternal cell,
That thou so many princes at a shot
So bloodily hast struck?

**HAMLET**

Oh, I’m dying, Horatio! This strong poison’s overpowering me. I will not live to hear the news from England. But I bet Fortinbras will win the election to the Danish crown. He’s got my vote as I die. So tell him that, given the recent events here—oh, the rest is silence. Oh, oh, oh. *(he dies)*

**HORATIO**

Now a noble heart is breaking. Good night, sweet prince. May hosts of angels sing you to sleep.—Why are those drums approaching?

**FORTINBRAS**

What do I see here?

**HORATIO**

What would you like to see? If it’s a tragedy, you’ve come to the right place.

**FORTINBRAS**

These corpses suggest mayhem. Oh, proud Death, what banquet are you preparing that you’ve needed to knock off so many princes at one stroke?
AMBASSADOR
The sight is dismal,
And our affairs from England come too late.
The ears are senseless that should give us hearing,
To tell him his commandment is fulfilled,
That Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead.
Where should we have our thanks?

AMBASSADOR
This is a horrible sight. Our news arrives from England too late, since the people that should have heard it are dead. We meant to tell the king that his orders have been carried out, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead. Who will thank us now?

HORATIO
(indicates CLAUDIUS) Not from his mouth,
Had it th' ability of life to thank you.
He never gave commandment for their death.
But since so jump upon this bloody question,
You from the Polack wars, and you from England,
Are here arrived, give order that these bodies
High on a stage be placèd to the view,
And let me speak to th' yet-unknowing world
How these things came about. So shall you hear
Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,
And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
Fall'n on th' inventors' heads. All this can I
Truly deliver.

HORATIO
(indicates CLAUDIUS) Not the king, even if he were still alive to thank you. He never ordered their deaths. But since you’ve come so soon after this bloodbath, you from battles in Poland and you from England, then give your men orders to display these corpses on a high platform, and let me tell the world how all this happened. You’ll hear of violent and unnatural acts, terrible accidents, casual murders, deaths caused by trickery and by threat, and finally murderous plans that backfired on their perpetrators. All this I can explain.
FORTINBRAS
Let us haste to hear it,
And call the noblest to the audience. For me, with sorrow I embrace my fortune.
I have some rights of memory in this kingdom, Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me.

FORTINBRAS
Let’s hear about it right away and invite all the noblemen to listen. As for me, I welcome my good luck with sadness. I have some rights to claim this kingdom, and by arriving at this moment I have an opportunity to put them into effect.

HORATIO
Of that I shall have also cause to speak, And from his mouth whose voice will draw on more.
But let this same be presently performed, Even while men’s minds are wild, lest more mischance On plots and errors happen.

HORATIO
I also have a few things to say about that, which Hamlet just told me. But let’s get down to business—even though people are in a frenzy of grief—to avoid any further plots and mishaps.

FORTINBRAS
Let four captains Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage, For he was likely, had he been put on, To have proved most royalty. And, for his passage, The soldiers’ music and the rites of war Speak loudly for him. Take up the bodies. Such a sight as this Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss. Go, bid the soldiers shoot.

Exeunt marching, carrying the bodies, after the which a peal of ordnance are shot off

FORTINBRAS
Let four captains carry Hamlet like a soldier onto the stage. He would have been a great king if he had had the chance to prove himself. Military music and military rites will speak for his heroic qualities. Pick up the corpses. A sight like this suits a battlefield, but here at court it shows that much went wrong. Go outside and tell the soldiers to fire their guns in honor of Hamlet.

They exit marching, carrying the bodies. Cannons are fired.