

HAMLET

A line-by-line translation

Act 1, Scene 1

Shakespeare

*Two watchmen, BARNARDO and FRANCISCO, enter.***BARNARDO**

Who's there?

FRANCISCO

Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself.

BARNARDO

Long live the king!

FRANCISCO

Barnardo?

BARNARDO

5 He.

FRANCISCO

You come most carefully upon your hour.

BARNARDO

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

FRANCISCOFor this relief much thanks. 'Tis bitter cold,
And I am sick at heart.**BARNARDO**

10 Have you had quiet guard?

FRANCISCO

Not a mouse stirring.

BARNARDOWell, good night.
If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus,
The rivals of my watch, bid them make haste.**FRANCISCO**

15 I think I hear them.—Stand, ho! Who's there?

*HORATIO and MARCELLUS enter.***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

20 Barnardo has my place. Give you good night.

Shakescleare Translation

*Two watchmen, BARNARDO and FRANCISCO, enter.***BARNARDO**

Who's there?

FRANCISCO

No, you answer me. Stop and reveal yourself.

BARNARDO

Long live the king!

FRANCISCO

Barnardo?

BARNARDO

Yes, me.

FRANCISCO

You arrived right on schedule.

BARNARDO

The clock just struck twelve. Go to bed, Francisco.

FRANCISCO

Thanks for relieving me. It's bitterly cold, and I'm miserable.

BARNARDO

Has your guard duty been quiet?

FRANCISCO

Not a mouse stirred.

BARNARDOWell, good night. If you see Horatio and Marcellus—who are
going to stand guard with me—tell them to hurry.**FRANCISCO**

I think I hear them. Stop! Who's there?

*HORATIO and MARCELLUS enter.***HORATIO**

Friends of this country.

MARCELLUS

And loyal servants of the Danish king.

FRANCISCO

Good night to you.

MARCELLUS

Oh, goodbye, honorable soldier. Who's relieved you?

FRANCISCO

Barnardo's taken my place. Good night.

*FRANCISCO exits.***MARCELLUS**

Holla, Barnardo.

BARNARDO

Say what, is Horatio there?

HORATIO

A piece of him.

BARNARDO

Welcome, Horatio.—Welcome, good Marcellus.

MARCELLUS

25 What, has this thing appeared again tonight?

BARNARDO

I have seen nothing.

MARCELLUS

Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy
And will not let belief take hold of him
Touching this dreaded sight twice seen of us.
30 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.

BARNARDO

35 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

40 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,
45 The bell then beating one—

*The GHOST enters.***MARCELLUS**

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

BARNARDO

In the same figure like the king that's dead.

MARCELLUS

[*to HORATIO*] Thou art a scholar. Speak to it, Horatio.

BARNARDO

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

HORATIO

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

BARNARDO

It would be spoke to.

MARCELLUS

Question it, Horatio.

*FRANCISCO exits.***MARCELLUS**

Hello, Barnardo.

BARNARDO

Say, is Horatio here too?

HORATIO

More or less.

BARNARDO

Welcome, Horatio. Welcome, Marcellus.

MARCELLUS

So, has the thing appeared again tonight?

BARNARDO

I haven't seen anything.

MARCELLUS

Horatio says it's all our imagination, and he won't let himself believe in this awful thing we've now seen twice. I asked him to join us in our guard duty tonight, so that if the ghost appears he can confirm what we see and speak to it.

HORATIO

Oh, come now. It's not going to appear.

BARNARDO

Sit down for a while, and let us tell you again the story you refuse to believe, about what we've seen the last two nights.

HORATIO

Sure, let's sit down and listen to Barnardo tell us about it.

BARNARDO

Last night, when that star to the west of the North Star had moved across the heavens to brighten that spot in the sky where it's shining now, at precisely one o'clock, Marcellus and I—

*The GHOST enters.***MARCELLUS**

Quiet, stop talking! Look, it's come again.

BARNARDO

Looking exactly like the dead king.

MARCELLUS

[*To HORATIO*] You're well-educated. Speak to it, Horatio.

BARNARDO

Doesn't he look like the king, Horatio?

HORATIO

Exactly like him. It fills me with fear and wonder.

BARNARDO

It wants us to speak to it.

MARCELLUS

Ask it something, Horatio.

HORATIO

What art thou that usurp'st this time of night
 Together with that fair and warlike form
 55 In which the majesty of buried Denmark
 Did sometimes march? By heaven, I charge thee, speak.

MARCELLUS

It is offended.

BARNARDO

See, it stalks away.

HORATIO

Stay! Speak, speak! I charge thee, speak!

The GHOST exits.

MARCELLUS

60 'Tis gone and will not answer.

BARNARDO

How now, Horatio? You tremble and look pale.
 Is not this something more than fantasy?
 What think you on 't?

HORATIO

Before my God, I might not this believe
 65 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
 70 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,
 75 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,
 80 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,
 Why such impress of shipwrights, whose sore task
 85 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.
 90 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
 95 (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,

HORATIO

Who are you, disturbing this time of night, and appearing
 just like the dead king of Denmark, dressed in his battle
 armor? By God, I order you to speak.

MARCELLUS

You've offended it.

BARNARDO

Look, it's moving away.

HORATIO

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

The GHOST exits.

MARCELLUS

It's gone, and won't answer.

BARNARDO

How are you, Horatio? You're pale and trembling. Isn't this
 something more than just our imagination? What do you
 think about it?

HORATIO

I swear by God, I would never have believed this if I hadn't
 seen it with my own eyes.

MARCELLUS

Doesn't it look like the king?

HORATIO

As much as you look like yourself. That was the same armor
 the king wore when he fought the ambitious king of
 Norway. And the ghost frowned just like the king did once
 when he fought the Poles, who traveled on the ice in sleds.
 It's eerie.

MARCELLUS

It's happened like this twice before, always at this time of
 night. Dressed like a warrior, the ghost walks by us at our
 guard post.

HORATIO


I don't know exactly what this means, but I have a general
 feeling it signals that something bad is about to happen to
 our country.

MARCELLUS

Speaking of that, let's sit down so that, whoever knows
 about it, can tell me why we've been keeping such a strict
 schedule of nightly watches. And why we've been building
 so many cannons, and buying so many weapons from other
 countries. And why the shipbuilders are kept so busy that
 they don't even rest on Sunday. What's coming that forces
 us to work day and night in this way? Who can tell me?

HORATIO

I can do that. At least, I can tell you the rumors: the
 greatness of our former king—whose ghost just now
 appeared to us—inspired the competitive pride of King
 Fortinbras of Norway. Fortinbras challenged him to hand-
 to-hand combat. During that fight, our courageous Hamlet
 (as we Danes thought of him) killed old King Fortinbras,
 who—on the basis of a signed and sealed agreement and in
 full accordance with the law and rules of
 combat—surrendered, along with his life, all the lands he

 Hamlet is also the name of the titular character's father (the ghost), not to be confused here with this play's main character.

Did forfeit, with his life, all those his lands
 Which he stood seized of to the conqueror,
 100 Against the which a moiety competent
 Was gaged 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,
 105 His fell to Hamlet. Now, sir, young Fortinbras,
 Of unimproved mettle hot and full,
 Hath in the skirts of Norway here and there
 Sharked up a list of lawless resolute,
 For food and diet, to some enterprise
 110 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,
 115 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
 120 Comes armed through our watch so like the king
 That was and is the question of these wars.

HORATIO

A mote it is to trouble the mind's eye.
 In the most high and palmy state of Rome,
 A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
 125 The graves stood tenantless and the sheeted dead
 Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets
 As stars with trains of fire and dews of blood,
 Disasters in the sun, and the moist star
 Upon whose influence Neptune's empire stands
 130 Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse.
 And even the like precurse of feared events,
 As harbingers preceding still the fates
 And prologue to the omen coming on,
 Have heaven and earth together demonstrated
 135 Unto our climates and countrymen.

The GHOST enters.

HORATIO

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

The GHOST spreads his arms.

HORATIO

If thou hast any sound or use of voice,
 Speak to me.
 140 If there be any good thing to be done
 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,
 145 Oh, speak!
 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!

A rooster crows.

HORATIO

150 —Stop it, Marcellus.

MARCELLUS

Shall I strike at it with my partisan?

possessed to his conqueror. By that same agreement, our king bet lands of equal value that he would have had to give up had he been defeated. Now, Fortinbras' son, young Fortinbras, who is daring but has yet to prove himself, has hastily gathered a group lawless brutes. For no pay other than food on the outskirts of Norway. They're willing to give their courage to the effort of forcefully regaining the lands the elder Fortinbras lost. I believe this is the reason that we've been sent on guard duty, and the primary source of all the recent hustle and bustle in Denmark.

BARNARDO

I think that's right. It makes sense that this ghost of the late king would haunt our guard duty now, since he was such an important part of these wars.

HORATIO

The ghost is definitely something to worry about, like a speck of dust bothering your eye. In the powerful Roman Empire, just before the mighty emperor Julius Caesar was assassinated, the graves stood empty while the ghostly dead ran through the streets of Rome, squeaking and delirious. Shooting stars streaked across the sky, blood fell along with the morning dew, and omens of disaster appeared on the sun. The moon, which controls the tides of the sea, was so eclipsed that it almost disappeared completely. We've had similar signs of disaster, as if heaven and earth have joined together to warn us of what's to come.

The GHOST enters.

HORATIO

Wait, look! It has returned. I'll meet it if it's the last thing I do.

[To GHOST] Stop, you illusion!

The GHOST spreads his arms.

HORATIO

If you have a voice or can make sounds, speak to me. If there's anything that I can do that might bring peace to you and honor to me, speak to me. If you know something about your country's fate—which we could avoid if we knew about it—then, oh, speak! Or if you have a treasure buried somewhere in the earth—which they say often makes ghosts restless—then speak of it. Stay and speak!

A rooster crows.

HORATIO

Don't let it leave, Marcellus.

MARCELLUS

Should I hit it with my spear?

HORATIO

Do, if it will not stand.

BARNARDO

'Tis here.

HORATIO

'Tis here.

The GHOST exits.

MARCELLUS

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

BARNARDO

160 It was about to speak when the cock crew.

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
165 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.

MARCELLUS

170 It faded on the crowing of the cock.
Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long.
And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad.
175 The nights are wholesome. Then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
So hallowed and so gracious is that time.

HORATIO

So have I heard and do in part believe it.
But look, the morn, in russet mantle clad,
180 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
Unto young Hamlet, for, upon my life,
This spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him.
185 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.

They exit.

HORATIO

Yes, if it doesn't stand still.

BARNARDO

It's here.

HORATIO

It's here.

The GHOST exits.

MARCELLUS

It's gone. We were wrong to threaten it with violence, since
it looked so kingly. And, like the air, we couldn't hurt it. Our
useless blows amounted to cruel taunts.

BARNARDO

It was about to say something when the rooster crowed.

HORATIO

And then it looked startled, like a guilty person summoned
to appear in court. I've heard that the rooster--which calls
to signal the coming morning--awakens the god of day, and
makes all wandering ghosts--wherever they are--hurry back
to their hiding places. What we've just seen is proof of that.

MARCELLUS

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
for all. Then, on that night, no dark fates control us, no fairy
can cast a spell on us, and witches cannot hurt us with their
charms. That's how holy and blessed Christmas is.

HORATIO

I've heard the same thing, and partially believe it. But look,
the red glow of morning is breaking beyond that hill in the
east. Let's end our patrol, and go tell young Hamlet what
we've seen tonight. I'd bet my life that this ghost, which will
not speak to us, will speak to him. Do you agree that we
should tell Hamlet, that we owe it to him to him out of our
duty and our love?

MARCELLUS

Let's do it. And I know where we can find him this morning.

They all exit.

Act 1, Scene 2

Shakespeare

*CLAUDIUS, the king of Denmark, enters, as do GERTRUDE the queen,
HAMLET, POLONIUS, POLONIUS's son LAERTES and daughter
OPHELIA, and LORDS of Claudius's court.*

Shakescleare Translation

*King CLAUDIUS of Denmark; Queen GERTRUDE; HAMLET;
POLONIUS; POLONIUS's son LAERTES and daughter
OPHELIA; and LORDS of Claudius' court enter.*

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,
 5 Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature
 That we with wisest sorrow think on him
 Together with remembrance of ourselves.
 Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen,
 Th' imperial jointress to this warlike state,
 10 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
 15 Your better wisdoms, 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
 20 Our state to be disjoint and out of frame,
 Colleague'd 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,
 25 To our most valiant brother. So much for him.

VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS enter.

CLAUDIUS

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
 30 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, Voltmand,
 35 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)
 40 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.

CORNELIUS and VOLTEMAND exit.

CLAUDIUS

And now, Laertes, what's the news with you?
 You told us of some suit. What is 't, Laertes?
 45 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,
 50 Than is the throne of Denmark to thy father.
 What wouldst thou have, Laertes?

LAERTES

My dread lord,
 Your leave and favor to return to France,
 From whence though willingly I came to Denmark
 55 To show my duty in your coronation,
 Yet now, I must confess, that duty done,
 My thoughts and wishes bend again toward France
 And bow them to your gracious leave and pardon.

CLAUDIUS

Though my memories of my brother Hamlet are still fresh—
 and though it was proper for me and our entire kingdom to
 grieve for him—life doesn't stop. And so while we must
 remember to mourn for him, it is also wise to remember our
 own happiness. Therefore—with a sad joy; with one eye
 merry and the other crying; with laughter at a funeral and
 grieving at a wedding; with equal measures of happiness
 and sadness—I have married my former sister-in-law and
 made her my queen. In this marriage, I know I've done
 exactly what all of you have been advising me to do all
 along. To all of you, my thanks. Now, let's move on to news
 that you all know: young Fortinbras, dreaming of glory and
 thinking that I am weak—or perhaps that the death of my
 brother has thrown our country into chaos—continues to
 bother me with demands that I surrender the lands that his
 father lost to my brother when he was alive. That's the news
 on Fortinbras.

VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS enter.

CLAUDIUS

As for me and this meeting, here's the story: *[He holds up a letter]* I've written to the King of Norway—Fortinbras' uncle—a weak and bedridden old man who's barely heard a thing about his nephew's aims. I've told the Norwegian King to put a halt to Fortinbras' plans, since all of Fortinbras' troops are Norwegian.

[To CORNELIUS and VOLTEMAND] You, good Cornelius, and you, Voltmand, we send you to carry this letter to the old King of Norway, but give you no more power to negotiate with the Norwegian King beyond what is outlined in this letter. *[He gives them the letter]* Goodbye, and may you show your loyalty through the speed with which you bring this letter to Norway.

CORNELIUS, VOLTEMAND

We'll show our loyalty to you in that and all other ways.

CLAUDIUS

I do not doubt it. A fond goodbye to you.

CORNELIUS and VOLTEMAND exit.

CLAUDIUS

And now, Laertes, what's your news? You mentioned that you have a favor to ask of me. What is it, Laertes? You'll never be wasting your words by making a reasonable request of the King of Denmark. What could you possibly ask for that I wouldn't give you? Your father is as vital to the Danish throne as the head is to the heart, or the hand to the mouth. What do you want, Laertes?

LAERTES

My powerful lord, I'd like your permission to go back to France. Though I came willingly to Denmark to show my loyalty at your coronation, now that my duty is done, I must admit that my thoughts are once more directed toward France. I hope you will give me your permission to go.

CLAUDIUS

Have you your father's leave? What says Polonius?

POLONIUS

60 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

65 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

[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

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

HAMLET

Ay, madam, it is common.

GERTRUDE

If it be,
Why seems it so particular with thee?

HAMLET

80 "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,
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
Nor the dejected 'havior of the visage,
85 Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
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

90 'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet,
To give these mourning duties to your father.
But you must know your father lost a father,
That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound
In filial obligation for some term
95 To do obsequious sorrow. But to persevere
In obstinate condolement is a course
Of impious stubbornness. 'Tis unmanly grief.
It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,
A heart unfortified, a mind impatient,
100 An understanding simple and unschooled.
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,
105 A fault against the dead, a fault to nature,

CLAUDIUS

Do you have your father's permission? What does Polonius say?

POLONIUS

My lord, he has won my permission by asking me over and over again so that, finally, I reluctantly gave my approval. I ask you to please give him permission to go.

CLAUDIUS

Leave when you like, Laertes. Your time is your own, to be spent however you want. And now, Hamlet, my nephew and my son—

HAMLET


[To himself] I'm more closely related to you than I used to be, but without any feelings of affection.

CLAUDIUS

Why are you so gloomy that it seems like you are covered by clouds?

HAMLET

Not at all, my lord. The problem is that I am covered in sun 

 Hamlet puns on the words "sun" and "son," implying that he is gloomy because of the events that have made him Claudius' stepson.

GERTRUDE

Dearest Hamlet, stop wearing these black clothes, and look upon the King of Denmark as a friend. You can't spend your whole life with your eyes aimed down at the ground, looking for your noble father in the dust. You know it's common. Everything that lives must die, passing from nature to heaven.

HAMLET

Yes, madam, it is common.

GERTRUDE

If that's so, why does it seem like such an issue to you?

HAMLET

"Seem," mother? No, it *is*. I don't know the meaning of "seems." Good mother, the black clothes I wear each day, my heavy sighs, the tears from my eyes, the sadness visible in my face, or any other show of grief cannot capture what I actually feel. All these things "seem" like grief, since they're just what a person would do to act like they were grieving in a play. But inside of me I have real grief, of which these clothes and displays of grief are just an outward representation.

CLAUDIUS

Hamlet, it is sweet and good that you mourn like this for your father. But you must also remember that your father lost his father, who in turn lost his father, and each time the son had a duty to mourn for his father for a certain time. But to continue to mourn out of sheer stubbornness is blasphemous. It isn't manly. It does not fit with God's desires, and it indicates a too-soft heart, an undisciplined mind, and a general lack of knowledge. When we know that something must eventually happen--and that it happens to everyone--why should we get it into our heads to oppose it? Indeed! Acting this way is a crime against heaven, a crime against the dead, a crime against nature. To a reasonable mind, it is absurd, since the death of fathers--from the first corpse until the most recent--is an inescapable theme of life. I ask you, give up your ceaseless mourning, and think of me as your new father. Let the world understand: you are

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
110 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,
And with no less nobility of love
Than that which dearest father bears his son
115 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,
120 Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.

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.
125 Be as ourself in Denmark. —Madam, come.
This gentle and unforced accord of Hamlet
Sits smiling to my heart, in grace whereof
No jocund health that Denmark drinks today
But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell,
130 And the king's rouse the heavens shall bruit again,
Respeaking earthly thunder. Come away.

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
135 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
140 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
145 Visit her face too roughly.—Heaven and earth,
Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him
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!—
150 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,
155 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
160 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.

HORATIO, MARCELLUS, and BARNARDO enter.

HORATIO

Hail to your lordship.

the next in line for the throne, and I feel as much love for you as any father feels for his son. As for your desire to return to Wittenberg, it's not what I would want. So I beg you, please give in to my request and remain here, where you can bring joy and comfort—as the highest-ranking member of my court, my nephew, and now my son.

GERTRUDE

Please don't let my prayers be in vain, Hamlet. I beg you, stay with us. Don't return to Wittenberg.

HAMLET

I'll obey you as best I can, madam.

CLAUDIUS

That loving response is what I hoped for: stay with us in Denmark.

[To GERTRUDE] My dear wife, come. Hamlet's easy willingness to stay has made me glad, and in honor of it, every happy toast I'll drink today will sound like cannons up to the clouds above. My drinking will echo against the heavens like thunder. Come on.

Trumpets play. Everyone except HAMLET exits.

HAMLET

Oh, if only my dirty flesh would melt and then evaporate into a dew, or that God had not outlawed suicide. Oh God, God! How tired, stale, dull, and worthless all of life seems to me. Curse it! Yes, curse it! It's like an untended garden, growing wild. Nasty, gross weeds cover it completely. That it has come to this point. My father, dead for just two months—no, not even that much, not two. A king so excellent, in comparison to Claudius he was like a god compared to a goat ². My father was so loving toward my mother that he would not let the wind blow too hard on her face. Heaven above, must I remember? She would hang on his arm, as if the more time she spent with him, the more she wanted to be with him. And yet, within a month of my father's death—no, don't think about it. Women, curse your weakness!—in just a month, before she had even broken in the shoes she wore to his funeral, weeping endlessly—oh, God, a wild beast would have mourned longer than she did!—she married my uncle, my father's brother, who's no more like my father than I'm like Hercules ³. Within a month of my father's death—before the salt from her crocodile tears had washed out of her red eyes—she remarried. Oh, what wicked speed! To jump so quickly into a bed of incest! It is not good, and will not lead to any good either. But my heart must break in silence, because I must remain quiet

HORATIO, MARCELLUS, and BARNARDO enter.

HORATIO

Hello, my lord.

² The original text refers to Hyperion—a Titan in Greek mythology—and to a satyr, a notoriously drunken and promiscuous mythological creature who was half-man and half-goat.

³ Hercules was a mythological Greek hero, known for his strength.

HAMLET

I am glad to see you well.—

165 Horatio? Or I do forget myself?

HORATIO

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

HAMLET

Sir, my good friend, I'll change that name with you.
And what make you from Wittenberg, Horatio?—
Marcellus!

MARCELLUS

170 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

175 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?
180 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

185 Thrift, thrift, Horatio! The funeral baked meats
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

190 Where, my lord?

HAMLET

In my mind's eye, Horatio.

HORATIO

I saw him once. He was a goodly king.

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

195 My lord, I think I saw him yesternight.

HAMLET

Saw who?

HAMLET

I'm pleased to see you doing well. You are Horatio, right? Or
am I mistaken?

HORATIO

I am Horatio, my lord, your loyal servant forever.

HAMLET

Sir, my good friend, not my servant. Why are you not at
Wittenberg, Horatio?

[To MARCELLUS] Oh, Marcellus!

MARCELLUS

My good lord.

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 have the heart of a dropout, my good lord.

HAMLET

I wouldn't let your enemies say that about you, so I won't
let you say it—or believe you if you did. I know you'd never
drop out. So why are you here at Elsinore? I'll teach you to
drink deeply before you leave.

HORATIO

My lord, I came to attend your father's funeral.

HAMLET

Please, don't make fun of me, my fellow student. I think you
came to see my mother's wedding.

HORATIO

Well, my lord, it's true the wedding came soon after the
funeral.

HAMLET

It's called being frugal, Horatio. The leftovers from the
funeral dinner made a great cold lunch for the wedding.
Horatio, I would rather have met my worst enemy in heaven
than have lived to see that awful 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 impressive king.

HAMLET

He was a great man, perfect in all things. I'll never see his
equal again.

HORATIO

My lord, I think I saw him last night.

HAMLET

Saw who?

HORATIO

My lord, the king your father.

HAMLET

The king my father?!

HORATIO

200 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

205 Two nights together had these gentlemen,
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
210 Goes slow and stately by them. Thrice he walked
By their oppressed and fear-surprised 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
215 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.
220 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

225 My lord, I did,
But answer made it none. Yet once methought
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
230 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

235 Indeed, indeed, sirs, but this troubles me.
Hold you the watch tonight?

MARCELLUS, BARNARDO

We do, my lord.

HAMLET

Armed, say you?

MARCELLUS, BARNARDO

Armed, my lord.

HORATIO

The king your father, my lord.

HAMLET

The king my father?!

HORATIO

Hold back your excitement for a while, and listen while I tell you about this astonishing thing, with these two gentlemen as my witnesses.

HAMLET

For God's sake, let me hear it.

HORATIO

For the last two nights, these two guardsmen--Marcellus and Barnardo--during their watch in the middle of the night, encountered a figure that looked very much like your father, dressed in full armor from head to toe. It appeared in front of them and marched by them, slowly and with dignity, at no greater distance than the length of his staff. He walked by them three times as they stood shaking in fear like jelly, too shocked to speak. They told me all about what they'd seen, swearing me to secrecy. On the third night, I stood guard with them, and the ghost appeared, just when they said it would and looking just as they had described. I knew your father. The ghost looked as much like him as my hands look like each other.

HAMLET

Where did this happen?

MARCELLUS

On the platform where we stand guard, my lord.

HAMLET

Didn't you talk to it?

HORATIO

I did, my lord. But it didn't answer. Though once I thought that it raised its head as if it were about to speak, but just then the rooster began to crow, and at the sound the ghost flinched and then vanished from sight.

HAMLET

That's very strange.

HORATIO

I swear on my life that it's true, my lord. We thought that it was our duty to tell you about it.

HAMLET

Yes, you're right. but I'm disturbed by this story. Do you have guard duty again tonight?

MARCELLUS, BARNARDO

We do, my lord.

HAMLET

The ghost was armed, you say?

MARCELLUS, BARNARDO

Armed, my lord.

HAMLET

240 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

245 A countenance more
In sorrow than in anger.

HAMLET

Pale or red?

HORATIO

Nay, very pale.

HAMLET

And fixed his eyes upon you?

HORATIO

250 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

255 Longer, longer.

HORATIO

Not when I saw 't.

HAMLET

His beard was grizzled, no?

HORATIO

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

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

I warrant it will.

HAMLET

265 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,

HAMLET

From head to toe?

MARCELLUS, BARNARDO

From head to toe, my lord.

HAMLET

Then you didn't see his face?

HORATIO

Oh, yes, we could, my lord. He had his helmet visor up.

HAMLET

Did he look angry?

HORATIO

His expression looked more sad than angry.

HAMLET

Was he pale or flushed?

HORATIO

Very pale.

HAMLET

Did he look straight at you?

HORATIO

The entire time.

HAMLET

I wish I'd been there.

HORATIO

You would have been shocked and amazed.

HAMLET

I'm sure I would have. Did it stay a long time?

HORATIO

As long as it would take a person to count to one hundred
at a moderate speed.

MARCELLUS, BARNARDO

No, longer.

HORATIO

Not the time I saw it.

HAMLET

His beard was gray, right?

HORATIO

It was, just as it looked when I saw it when he was alive:
dark brown with silver streaks.

HAMLET

I'll join you for guard duty tonight. Perhaps the ghost will
appear again.

HORATIO

I bet it will.

HAMLET

If it looks like my noble father, I'll speak to it, even if Hell
itself opens up and tells me to be quiet. I beg all of you, if
you've kept this a secret so far, continue to be silent. And
whatever happens tonight, think about it, but don't discuss
it with anyone. I'll do the same. So goodbye. I'll come see
you on the guards' platform between eleven and twelve.

Give it an understanding, but no tongue.
 270 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.

Everyone but HAMLET exits.

HAMLET

275 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.

HAMLET exits.

HORATIO, MARCELLUS, BARNARDO

We'll do our duty to your Honor.

HAMLET

Instead give me your friendship, just as I give mine to you.
 Goodbye.

Everyone except HAMLET exits.

HAMLET

My father's ghost, wearing armor. This is not good. I suspect
 some foul play. I wish it were night already! Until then, I
 must stay calm. Bad deeds will always be revealed, no
 matter how deeply they've been buried.

HAMLET exits.

Act 1, Scene 3

Shakespeare

LAERTES and his sister OPHELIA enter.

LAERTES

My necessaries are embarked. Farewell.
 And, sister, as the winds give benefit
 And convey is assistant, do not sleep,
 But let me hear from you.

OPHELIA

5 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,
 10 The perfume and suppliance of a minute.
 No more.

OPHELIA

No more but so?

LAERTES

Think it no more.
 For nature, crescent, does not grow alone
 15 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.
 20 His greatness weigh'd, 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.
 25 And therefore must his choice be circumscrib'd
 Unto the voice and yielding of that body
 Whereof he is the head. Then if he says he loves you,
 It fits your wisdom so far to believe it
 As he in his particular act and place
 30 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

Shakesclare Translation

LAERTES and his sister OPHELIA enter.

LAERTES

My belongings are on the ship. Goodbye. And, sister, as long
 as the winds are blowing and ships are traveling, make sure
 to send me news.

OPHELIA

Do you doubt I will?

LAERTES

As for Hamlet and the attention he's given you, consider it
 no more than a passing thing--the product of his hot-
 blooded youth. Like a violet, it's sweet and beautiful, but
 won't last more than a single minute.

OPHELIA

No more than a single minute?

LAERTES

Think of it that way, at least. When a youth becomes a man,
 it's not just his body that grows in size. So do the
 responsibilities that weigh on his mind and soul. Perhaps
 he loves you now, and currently nothing stains the purity of
 that love. But you must take into account that he cannot
 make his own decisions. He is bound by the needs of the
 royal family, and can't just choose whomever he wants--
 because the choice he makes could affect the safety and
 security of the entire country. He must do what is right for
 the the country that he leads when he makes his choice. So
 if he says he loves you, it would be smart for you to
 understand that his words can't mean any more than what
 the needs of Denmark allow it to mean. Then think about
 how it would stain your reputation if you believe his words
 of love, or fall in love, or give up your virginity to him. Be
 careful, Ophelia. Be careful, my dear sister. Keep your
 feelings under control, and keep yourself free from the
 danger of his desire. Avoid exposing your beauty, even to
 the moon. Your reputation can be ruined if other people
 even think that you're doing something you shouldn't. Too

If with too credent ear you list his songs,
Or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure open
35 To his unmastered importunity.
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
40 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,
45 Contagious blastments are most imminent.
Be wary, then. Best safety lies in fear.
Youth to itself rebels, though none else near.

OPHELIA

I shall the effect of this good lesson keep
As watchman to my heart. But, good my brother,
50 Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven
Whiles, like a puffed and reckless libertine,
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads
And reck's not his own rede.

LAERTES

55 O, fear me not.

POLONIUS enters.

LAERTES

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

POLONIUS

Yet here, Laertes? Aboard, aboard, for shame!
60 The wind sits in the shoulder of your sail
And you are stayed for. There, my blessing with thee.
And these few precepts in thy memory
Look thou character. Give thy thoughts no tongue,
Nor any unproportioned thought his act.
65 Be thou familiar but by no means vulgar.
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
Of each new-hatched, unfledged comrade. Beware
70 Of entrance to a quarrel, but being in,
Bear 't that th' opposèd may beware of thee.
Give every man thy ear but few thy voice.
Take each man's censure but reserve thy judgment.
Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
75 But not expressed in fancy—rich, not gaudy,
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,
80 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.
85 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.

often, worms or disease ruin flowers before they blossom--
and young flowers are the most vulnerable. Be careful. You
will be safest if you maintain a healthy fear. Young people
can lose their self-control without any outside help.

OPHELIA

I'll take your wise words and hold them close to my heart.
But, my good brother, don't be like a bad priest who does
not follow his own advice, preaching about the need to
follow the strict and righteous path to heaven while--like a
reckless playboy--he pursues pleasure.

LAERTES

Don't worry about me.

POLONIUS enters.

LAERTES

I should be on the ship by now. And here comes our father.
Having him bless my leaving a second time will give my
journey double the luck.

POLONIUS

Still here, Laertes? Get going, get going—shame on you! The
wind gusts in the sails of your ship, and yet it is forced to
wait for you. Here, I give you my blessing. And I'll give you a
few rules to live by in order to maintain your good
character. Keep quiet about your own thoughts, and don't
act on any idea you haven't fully thought through. Be
friendly but not too friendly. Hold onto those friends you
have that you know are trustworthy, with all your heart. But
don't go shaking hands with every new, unknown person
you meet. Try not to get caught up in any fights or
arguments. But, if you do become involved, act to make
sure that those you're facing respect you. Listen to
everyone, but give advice to few. Hear every man's
opinions, but keep your own judgments to yourself. Buy the
most expensive clothes you can afford—but buy clothes that
are high-end, not gaudy, because clothes make the man.
And that is especially true in France. Neither borrow money
nor lend it--because lending money to a friend usually
results in the loss of the money and the friend, while
borrowing makes people reckless with money. Above all: be
true to yourself, which carries with it the natural result that
you won't be false to anybody else. Goodbye. May my
blessing help you remember my advice.

LAERTES

I will humbly be on my way, my lord.

POLONIUS

The time is right. Go. Your servants await you.

LAERTES

Goodbye, Ophelia. Remember what I've told you.

OPHELIA

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

LAERTES

Farewell.

LAERTES exits.

POLONIUS

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

OPHELIA

So please you, something touching the Lord Hamlet.

POLONIUS

95 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—
100 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

105 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

110 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.

OPHELIA

115 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

120 Ay, springes to catch woodcocks. I do know,
When the blood burns, how prodigal the soul
Lends the tongue vows. These blazes, daughter,
Giving more light than heat, extinct in both
Even in their promise as it is a-making,
125 You must not take for fire. From this time
Be somewhat scanner of your maiden presence.
Set your entreatments at a higher rate
Than a command to parley. For Lord Hamlet,
Believe so much in him that he is young,
130 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,
135 Breathing like sanctified and pious bawds,

OPHELIA

It's locked away in my memory, and you have the key.

LAERTES

Goodbye.

LAERTES exits.

POLONIUS

What did he say to you, Ophelia?

OPHELIA

Something about the Lord Hamlet.

POLONIUS

He did? That's good. I've been told that recently Hamlet's
spent a lot of time with you in private, and that you've been
very open to his visits. If what I've been told is true—and
they're only telling me this to warn me—then I must say,
you're not acting in a way a daughter of mine should. You
endanger your honor. What's going on between you two?
Tell me the truth.

OPHELIA

Father, lately he has offered his affection for me, many
times.

POLONIUS

"Affection!" Bah! You're talking like some innocent girl,
unlearned in the dangerous ways of love and lust. Do you
believe his "offers," as you call them?

OPHELIA

I don't know what I should think, my lord.

POLONIUS

Then I'll explain to you. Think of yourself as a foolish child
for believing that these "offers" are something real. Give
yourself more respect, or—not to beat this phrase to death,
continuing on like this—you'll "offer" me the chance to
look like a fool.

OPHELIA

My lord, he's always talked about his love for me in an
honorable fashion—

POLONIUS

Yes, "fashion," that's the right word for it. Come on now.

OPHELIA

And he's backed up his words of love with nearly every holy
vow.

POLONIUS

Yes, vows that are like traps for birds. I know that when a
man's blood burns, he'll be quick to swear to anything. You
should not mistake such blazes for the true fire of love.
They give off more light than heat, and will go out entirely
before he's even finished making his promises. From now
on, make sure to spend less time with him. And make him
do more than just ask to get you to talk with him. Do not
forget that Hamlet is young, and that he has much more
freedom to experiment and fool around than you do. In
short, Ophelia, don't believe his vows--which are little more
than pimps dressed up in good clothes, pretending to be
pious in an effort to lead you into bad behavior. To
summarize: from now on, don't waste even another
moment of your time. Do not talk with Hamlet. Do as I say, I
order you. Now come with me.

The better to beguile. This is for all:
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.
140 Look to 't, I charge you. Come your ways.

OPHELIA

I shall obey, my lord.

*They exit.***OPHELIA**

I will obey, my lord.

They exit.

Act 1, Scene 4

Shakespeare

*HAMLET, HORATIO, and MARCELLUS enter.***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.

MARCELLUS

5 No, it is struck.

HORATIOIndeed? I heard it not. It then draws near the season
Wherein the spirit held his wont to walk.*Trumpets sound, and two cannons fire.***HORATIO**

What does this mean, my lord?

HAMLET

10 The king doth wake tonight and takes his 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.
This heavy-headed revel east and west
20 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 at height,
The pith and marrow of our attribute.
25 So oft it chanceth in particular men
That for some vicious mole of nature in them—
As in their birth (wherein they are not guilty,
Since nature cannot choose his origin),
By the o'ergrowth of some complexion,
30 Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason,
Or by some habit that too much o'erleavens

Shakescleare Translation

*HAMLET, HORATIO, and MARCELLUS enter.***HAMLET**

The air bites wickedly. It is very cold.

HORATIO

Yes, the air is nipping and sharp.

HAMLET

What time is it now?

HORATIO

Just before twelve, I think.

MARCELLUS

No, the clock struck twelve.

HORATIOReally? I didn't hear it. So it's getting close to the time when
the ghost usually appears.*Trumpets sound, and two cannons fire.***HORATIO**

What does that mean, sir?

HAMLET

The king is staying up late partying. And as he carouses, and
dances, and guzzles his German wine, the musicians play
the drum and trumpet to mark each time he drinks another
cup.

HORATIO

Is that a tradition?

HAMLET

It is. But in my opinion—though I was born here and should
think it natural—I'd say it's a custom that we'd be better off
ignoring rather than observing. Countries to the east and
west mock and criticize us for our partying. They call us
drunks and pigs, staining our reputation. And they're
right—our behavior does reduce our achievements, despite
their greatness, because it is a flaw in our core qualities. It's
similar to what happens to certain people who are born
with some terrible defect (a defect for which they bear no
responsibility, since no one can choose his own beginning);
or some excess of a more normal trait; or some kind of
compulsion that makes it impossible for them to act in a
way that pleases others. For such men as these—even if
they are kind or limitlessly talented—this single defect,
whether they were born with it or got it through some
misfortune, will result in others always seeing them as

The form of plausible manners— that these men,
 Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect,
 Being nature's livery or fortune's star,
 35 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
 40 To his own scandal.

The GHOST enters.

HORATIO

Look, my lord, it comes!

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,
 45 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
 50 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,
 55 That thou, dead corse, again in complete steel
 Revisits thus the glimpses of the moon,
 Making night hideous and we fools of nature,
 So horridly to shake our disposition
 With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls?
 60 Say why is this? Wherefore? What should we do?

The GHOST motions for HAMLET to follow it.

HORATIO

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

MARCELLUS

Look, with what courteous action
 65 It waves you to a more removed ground.
 But do not go with it.

HORATIO

No, by no means.

HAMLET

It will not speak. Then I will follow it.

HORATIO

Do not, my lord.

HAMLET

70 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

75 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 reason
 80 And draw you into madness? Think of it.
 The very place puts toys of desperation,
 Without more motive, into every brain
 That looks so many fathoms to the sea

corrupt or evil. That tiny bit of evil casts doubt on all their
 good qualities and wrecks their reputations.

The GHOST enters.

HORATIO

Look, here comes the ghost, my lord!

HAMLET

Angels protect us! Whether you're a good spirit bringing
 breezes from heaven, or an evil demon wielding hell fire,
 whether your intentions are wicked or friendly, you appear
 in a shape that invites so many questions that I must speak
 to you. I'll call you "Hamlet," "King," "Father," "royal Dane."
 Oh, answer me! Don't make me explode from curiosity. Tell
 me why your bones, which were blessed and sanctified in
 burial rites, have burst out of their coffin, and why your
 tomb, in whose quiet we buried you, has opened up its
 weighty marble jaws to spit you out again. What does it
 mean that you, dead corpse, once again walk beneath the
 moon in full armor—making the night terrifying, and forcing
 on us mere mortals to face thoughts that are beyond our
 ability to understand? Tell me why? Why? What should we
 do?

The GHOST motions for HAMLET to follow it.

HORATIO

It motions you to go off with it, as if it wants to say
 something to you alone.

MARCELLUS

Look how politely it's directing you to go to a spot that's
 farther away. But don't go with it.

HORATIO

No, by all means do not.

HAMLET

It's not going to speak here. So I will follow it.

HORATIO

Don't, my lord.

HAMLET

Why, what should I fear? I don't value my life at even the
 price of a pin. And as for my soul, what can the ghost do to
 that, since it's as immortal as the ghost is? It's waving for
 me to come after it again. I'll follow it.

HORATIO

What if it leads you toward the sea, my lord? Or to the high
 cliff that overhangs the ocean, and then morphs into a
 beast so horrible that seeing it drives you insane? Think
 about it. That cliff's edge over the sea—with its view into
 those watery depths and the roar of the crashing waves—
 makes people feel despair even when they have no reason
 to.

And hears it roar beneath.

HAMLET

85 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

Be ruled. You shall not go.

HAMLET

90 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]
95 By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that lets me.
I say, away! —Go on. I'll follow thee.

The GHOST and HAMLET exit.

HORATIO

He waxes desperate with imagination.

MARCELLUS

Let's follow. 'Tis not fit thus to obey him.

HORATIO

Have after. To what issue will this come?

MARCELLUS

100 Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

HORATIO

Heaven will direct it.

MARCELLUS

Nay, let's follow him.

They exit.

HAMLET

It's still waving to me.

[To the GHOST] Go on, I'll follow you.

MARCELLUS

You will not go, my lord.

MARCELLUS and HORATIO try to hold HAMLET back.


HAMLET

Let go of me.

HORATIO

Listen to us. You must not go.

HAMLET

My fate calls out to me, making every sinew of my body as taut as those of the legendary Nemean lion . The ghost still motions for me. Let go of me, gentlemen. *[He draws his sword]* By God, I'll make a ghost of any of you who holds me back! I say, move away!

[To the GHOST] Go on. I'll follow you.

The GHOST and HAMLET exit.

HORATIO

His wild thoughts have made him desperate.

MARCELLUS

Let's follow him. It's not right for us to obey his orders to stay away.

HORATIO

Let's go after him. But what does all this mean?

MARCELLUS

That something is wrong in the state of Denmark.


HORATIO

God will determine what will come of all this.

MARCELLUS

No, let's follow him.

They exit.

 The Nemean lion was a monster in Greek mythology known for its vicious strength. Hercules was the only one able to kill it.

Act 1, Scene 5

Shakespeare

The GHOST and HAMLET enter.

HAMLET

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

GHOST

Mark me.

HAMLET

I will.

GHOST

My hour is almost come
5 When I to sulfurous and tormenting flames

Shakesclare Translation

The GHOST and HAMLET enter.

HAMLET

Where are you leading me? Speak. I'm not going any farther.

GHOST

Listen to me.

HAMLET

I will.

GHOST

The hour has almost come when I must return to the torment of the flames of purgatory.

Must render up myself.

HAMLET

Alas, poor ghost!

GHOST

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

HAMLET

10 Speak. I am bound to hear.

GHOST

So art thou to revenge when thou shalt hear.

HAMLET

What?

GHOST

I am thy father's spirit,
Doomed for a certain term to walk the night
15 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
20 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,
25 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

30 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.

HAMLET

Haste me to know 't, that I, with wings as swift
35 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,
40 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,
45 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—
50

HAMLET

Oh no, poor ghost!

GHOST

Don't pity me. But listen carefully to what I have to say.

HAMLET

Speak. I promise to listen.

GHOST

Then you must promise to avenge my death, too, when you
hear what I say.

HAMLET

What?

GHOST

I'm the ghost of your father, doomed for a certain time to
walk the earth at night. During the day, I'm confined in the
fires of purgatory, until those flames have burned away the
sins I committed in my life. If I weren't forbidden to tell you
the secrets of purgatory, I could tell you stories that would
cut up your soul, freeze your blood, make your eyes bulge
from their sockets, and your hair stand on end like the quills
of a frightened porcupine. But the secrets of purgatory
must not be told to mortals. Listen, listen, oh, listen! If you
ever loved your dear father—

HAMLET

Oh God!

GHOST

Take revenge for his awful and horrible murder.

HAMLET

Murder?


GHOST


His most awful murder. All murder is awful, but this one was
even more awful, startling, and unnatural.

HAMLET

Tell me quickly about it, so that I can rush to take revenge,
even faster than a person can think thoughts of love.

GHOST

I like your words. You'd have to be as slow and dull as a
weed growing on the banks of Lethe  not to be brought
to anger by my story. Now, Hamlet, listen. The official story
is that a poisonous snake bit me while I was sleeping in the
orchard. That is a lie that deceives all of Denmark. You
noble youth, know that the snake that killed your father is
now wearing his crown.

 The Lethe was the river of
forgetfulness in ancient Greek
mythology.

HAMLET

Oh, my far-seeing soul! My uncle?

GHOST

Yes, that incestuous, adulterous beast. With his evil wit and
traitorous gifts—oh wicked wit and gifts, that have the

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
 55 That it went hand in hand even with the vow
 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,
 60 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.
 65 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
 70 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
 75 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.
 80 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
 85 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 damnèd incest.
 90 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 her. Fare thee well at once.
 95 The glowworm shows the matin to be near,
 And 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire.
 Adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me.

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,
 100 And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
 But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee!
 Ay, thou poor ghost, whiles memory holds a seat
 In this distracted globe. Remember thee!
 Yea, from the table of my memory
 105 I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
 All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
 That youth and observation copied there,
 And thy commandment all alone shall live
 Within the book and volume of my brain,
 110 Unmixed with baser matter. Yes, by heaven!
 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.
 115 At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark. [*writes*]
 So, uncle, there you are. Now to my word.
 It is "Adieu, adieu. Remember me."
 I have sworn 't.

HORATIO and MARCELLUS enter.

power to seduce!—he convinced my seemingly virtuous
 queen to give in to his lust. Oh, Hamlet, she fell so far! From
 me, who loved her with the dignity that goes hand in hand
 with my marriage vows, to a wretch whose natural abilities
 could not compare to mine. But just as true virtue can't be
 corrupted, so will lust show its true nature by satisfying
 itself first in the blessing of heavenly marriage and then by
 wallowing in garbage. But wait. I think I smell the morning
 air. I must speak quickly. As I was sleeping in the orchard--
 as I used to do every afternoon--your uncle snuck up and
 poured a vial of henbane poison into my ear. That poison--
 which is like a natural enemy of blood--spreads like
 quicksilver through the veins and curdles the blood. So it
 did to mine. I broke instantly into a rash that covered my
 smooth body with a revolting crust. And so, as I slept, my
 brother stole my life, my crown, and my queen. He killed
 me even as I was still gripped by sin, because I did not get to
 repent my sins or receive last rites. I was sent to death with
 all my sins still on my head. Oh, horrible, horrible, most
 horrible! If you have any natural feelings of a son for a
 father in you, don't let this stand. Don't let the bed of the
 Danish king be a nest of incest. But however you attempt to
 get revenge, don't allow your mind or soul to contemplate
 harming your mother. Leave her fate to God, and to the
 sting of her own guilt. Goodbye now. The glow of light on
 the horizon shows that morning is near. Goodbye, goodbye,
 goodbye. Remember me.

The GHOST exits.

HAMLET

Oh, all you angels of heaven! Oh, everyone on earth! What
 else? Should I include hell too? Oh, curses! Keep beating,
 my heart, and muscles, don't grow suddenly old—hold me
 upright. Remember you? Yes, you poor ghost, as long as I
 have any memory in my distracted head. Remember you?
 Yes, I'll wipe clean my memory of all unimportant facts, all
 the wise sayings of books, all images and impressions from
 my youth, so that your commandment alone will live there.
 Yes, by heaven! Oh, you wicked woman! Oh, you villain,
 villain, damned, smiling villain! Where's my notebook? I
 should write down that one can smile and smile, and still be
 a villain. At least it's possible to do so in Denmark. [*He*
writes] So, uncle, there you are. Now I must fulfill my vow.
 He said, "Remember me." I've sworn I would.

HORATIO and MARCELLUS enter.

HORATIO

My lord, my lord!

MARCELLUS

120 Lord Hamlet—

HORATIO

Heaven secure him!

HAMLET

So be it.

HORATIO

Illo, ho, ho, my lord!

HAMLET

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

MARCELLUS

125 How is 't, my noble lord?

HORATIO

What news, my lord?

HAMLET

Oh, wonderful!

HORATIO

Good my lord, tell it.

HAMLET

No. You'll reveal it.

HORATIO

130 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

135 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.
140 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,
145 Look you, I'll go pray.

HORATIO

These are but wild and whirling words, my lord.

HAMLET

I'm sorry they offend you, heartily.
Yes faith, heartily.

HORATIO

My lord, my lord!

MARCELLUS

Lord Hamlet—

HORATIO

God protect him!

HAMLET

So be it.

HORATIO

Hello, hello there, my lord!

HAMLET

Hello, hello there, boy! Come to me.

MARCELLUS

What happened, my noble lord?

HORATIO

What did you learn, my lord?

HAMLET

Oh, it was amazing!

HORATIO

My lord, tell us.

HAMLET

No. You'll reveal my secret.

HORATIO

I swear to God I won't, my lord.

MARCELLUS

Nor will I, my lord.

HAMLET

You say so, but can you promise you'll keep the secret?

HORATIO, MARCELLUS

Yes, I swear to God, my lord.

HAMLET

There's not a villain in Denmark who isn't a complete liar.

HORATIO

My lord, we didn't need a ghost returning from the grave to
tell us that.

HAMLET

Why, right, you are right. So, with that, I'd say that the best
thing would be for us to shake hands and go our separate
ways. You go wherever your business takes you—since
every man has some business to take care of, whatever it is.
As for me, I'll go and pray.

HORATIO

Your words are wild and meaningless, my lord.

HAMLET

I'm very sorry they offended you. Yes, by God, very sorry.

HORATIO

There's no offense, my lord.

HAMLET

150 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,
155 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

160 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

165 Indeed, upon my sword, indeed.

GHOST

[cries under the stage] Swear!

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

170 Propose the oath, my lord.

HAMLET

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

GHOST

[beneath] Swear.

HAMLET

175 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.

HORATIO

There was no offense, my lord.

HAMLET

Ah, but I swear by Saint Patrick  that there is, Horatio. A lot of offense. As for this ghost, he's an honest one, I'll tell you that. But as for your desire to know what happened between us, control yourself and don't ask. And now, good friends--and you are friends, scholars, and soldiers--do me one small favor.

 In Shakespeare's time, Saint Patrick was considered the keeper of a gateway to purgatory, found at a cave on an Irish island.

HORATIO

What is it, my lord? We'll do it.

HAMLET

Never tell anyone what you've seen tonight.

HORATIO, MARCELLUS

We won't, my lord.

HAMLET

No, you must swear it.

HORATIO

I swear to God I won't.

MARCELLUS

Nor I, my lord, I swear to God.

HAMLET

Swear on my sword.

MARCELLUS

But we swore already, my lord.

HAMLET

True, but still, swear on my sword.

GHOST

[He calls out from under the stage] Swear!

HAMLET

Aha, do you say so, boy? Are you down there, my trusty fellow?

[To HORATIO and MARCELLUS] Come on, you heard the man down in the basement. Agree to swear.

HORATIO

Tell us what to swear, my lord.

HAMLET

Never to speak of what you've seen. Swear by my sword.

GHOST

[From under the stage] Swear.

HAMLET

You're everywhere, huh? We'll move somewhere else.

[To HORATIO and MARCELLUS] Come over here, gentlemen, and rest your hands once more on my sword. Swear by my sword never to speak of what you've heard.

GHOST

[From under the stage] Swear by his sword.

HAMLET

180 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!

HAMLET

And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.
There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
185 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),
190 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
195 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

200 [*beneath*] Swear!

HAMLET

Rest, rest, perturbed spirit! —So, gentlemen,
With all my love I do commend me to you,
And what so poor a man as Hamlet is
May do, to express his love and friending to you,
205 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 cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!
Nay, come, let's go together.

They exit.

HAMLET

That's right, old mole. Can you really move through the dirt so quickly? What a miner you are!

[*TO HORATIO and MARCELLUS*] Let's move once more, my friends.

HORATIO

Oh, by God, this is incredibly strange.

HAMLET

So welcome it like a stranger. Horatio, there are more things in heaven and earth than you can dream of with all your scientific learning. Now listen: just as you swore before, no matter how strangely I act (since from now on I may find it necessary to act a bit crazy), you must never, ever let on—with a gesture of your arms, or a shake of your head, or by saying something like "well, well, we understand," or "we'd tell you if we could," or "if we were allowed to speak," or anything like that—that you know anything about what happened to me here tonight. Swear you won't, by all of your hopes of going to heaven.

GHOST

[*From under the stage*] Swear.

HAMLET

Rest, rest, unhappy ghost!

[*To HORATIO and MARCELLUS*] So, gentlemen, I thank you with all my love, and promise that some day I'll repay you as fully as I can, God willing. Let's go back inside together. But keep your lips sealed, please. Everything is wrong these days. Oh, curse the fact that I'm the one who has to set things right! Now come, let's go.

They all exit.

Act 2, Scene 1

Shakespeare

POLONIUS enters with his servant 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
5 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
10

Shakescleare Translation

POLONIUS enters with his servant REYNALDO.

POLONIUS

Give Laertes this money and these letters, Reynaldo.

REYNALDO

I will, my lord.

POLONIUS

Good Reynaldo, it would be extremely wise of you to ask around about his behavior before you visit him.

REYNALDO

That was my plan, my lord.

POLONIUS

Excellent, good, good. First find out what Danish people are in Paris—who they are, how much money they have, where they live, who their friends are, and how much they spend.

What company at what expense; and finding
 By this encompassment and drift of question
 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,
 15 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
 25 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

30 'Faith, no, as you may season it in the charge.
 You must not put another scandal on him
 That he is open to incontinency.
 That's not my meaning. But breathe his faults so
 quaintly
 35 That they may seem the taints of liberty,
 The flash and outbreak of a fiery mind,
 A savageness in unrequited blood,
 Of general assault.

REYNALDO

But, my good lord—

POLONIUS

40 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)
 You, laying these slight sullies on my son
 45 As 'twere a thing a little soiled i' th' working—
 Mark you, your party in converse, him you would sound,
 Having ever seen in the prenominate crimes
 The youth you breathe of guilty, be assured
 He closes with you in this consequence:
 50 "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
 55 to say? By the mass, I was about to say something. Where
 did I leave?

And if--through this roundabout and indirect questioning--
 that they happen to know my son, you'll end up finding out
 much more than if you asked specific questions about him.
 Talk as if you vaguely know Laertes, such as, "I know his
 father and his friends, and know him a little." Do you
 understand all this, Reynaldo?

REYNALDO

Yes, very well, my lord.

POLONIUS

You should say, "I know him a little, but not well. I think,
 from what I've heard, that he's very wild, and addicted to
 this and that." From there create whatever lies about him
 that you can think up. Of course, nothing so bad that it
 would shame him. Be careful about that. But feel free to
 make up stories about the wild and crazy things that young
 men who are on their own typically get into.

REYNALDO

Like gambling, sir?

POLONIUS

Yes, or drinking, dueling, swearing, fighting, going to
 prostitutes—that sort of thing.

REYNALDO

My lord, that would bring dishonor on him!

POLONIUS

Oh, no, not if you say it with the right spin. You shouldn't
 say that he's sexually indulgent, that's not what I mean.
 Instead, just mention these faults lightly, as if you think
 they're nothing more than the minor faults that sprout in
 someone new to freedom--like the products of a strong
 mind and untamed youth--and the kind of thing that occurs
 in lots of young men.

REYNALDO

But, my lord—

POLONIUS


Why should you do this?

REYNALDO

Yes, my lord. I would like to know that.

POLONIUS

All right! Here's my idea. (And I do think it's a bit clever.)
 As you casually mention these minor faults and small
 blemishes as if everyone has heard of them, watch the
 person with whom you're talking. If whoever you're talking
 to has ever seen Laertes do any of the things you mention,
 he'll mark his agreement by saying something like "good
 sir" or "friend" or "gentleman"—or something like that,
 depending on the person's background.

 In the original text, Polonius uses
 the mild oath "marry," derived from
 the Virgin Mary's name.

REYNALDO

I understand, sir.

POLONIUS

And then, sir, he'll ...after he does that ... he'll ... What was I
 about to say? By God, I was about to say something. Where
 did I leave off?

REYNALDO

At “closes in the consequence,” at “friend,
Or so” and “gentleman.”

POLONIUS

At “closes in the consequence.” Ay, marry.
60 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,
65 “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,
70 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

75 Good my lord.

POLONIUS

Observe his inclination in yourself.

REYNALDO

I shall, my lord.

POLONIUS

And let him ply his music.

REYNALDO

Well, my lord.

POLONIUS

80 Farewell.

REYNALDO exits.

OPHELIA enters.

POLONIUS

How now, Ophelia? What’s the matter?

OPHELIA

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,
85 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
90 As if he had been loosèd out of hell
To speak of horrors—he comes before me.

POLONIUS

Mad for thy love?

OPHELIA

My lord, I do not know.

REYNALDO

At, “he’ll mark his agreement by saying sir, or friend, or
gentleman.”

POLONIUS

“He’ll mark his agreement by saying...” Yes, right. He’ll
respond like this: “I know the gentleman. I just saw him
yesterday,” or “the other day,” or whenever. And he’ll say
with whom—“and, as you said, there he was gambling,” or
“there he was, completely drunk,” or “getting into a fight
over a tennis match,” or, possibly, “I saw him going into a
house of ill repute”—that means a whorehouse—or some
such thing. In this way, make sure your little lie is like bait
that lures the larger truth into the open. And that’s how we
get wisdom and knowledge, by gradually drawing others in
and indirectly finding out what we want to know. Follow my
advice and you’ll learn about my son. You understand me,
right?

REYNALDO

I do, my lord.

POLONIUS

God bless you. Goodbye.

REYNALDO

My good lord.

POLONIUS

Make sure to observe him also with your own eyes.

REYNALDO

I will, my lord.

POLONIUS

I hope he’s studying his music as he’s supposed to.

REYNALDO

I understand, my lord.

POLONIUS

Goodbye.

REYNALDO exits.

OPHELIA enters.

POLONIUS

How are you, Ophelia? What’s the matter?

OPHELIA

Oh, my lord, my lord, I’ve had a terrible scare!

POLONIUS

From what, in God’s name?

OPHELIA

Father, as I was sewing in my room, Lord Hamlet came in
with his shirt unbuttoned; no hat on his head; his stockings
dirty, undone, and hanging around his ankles. He was pale
as his white undershirt, and his knees were knocking
together. He looked so awful, as if he’d just escaped from
hell.

POLONIUS

Is he madly in love with you?

OPHELIA

Father, I don’t know. But to be honest, I think he might be.

But truly, I do fear it.

POLONIUS

95 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
100 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
105 And end his being. That done, he lets me go,
And, with his head over his shoulder turned,
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

110 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
115 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

120 That hath made him mad.
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
125 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.
130 Come.

They exit.

POLONIUS

What did he say?

OPHELIA

He grabbed me by the wrist and held me tightly, then
backed a full arm's length away. And, standing with his
other arm raised over his forehead, he stared at my face as
if studying it in order to draw it. He stood like that for a long
while. Then, he gently shook my arm and glancing up and
down three times, and sighed so sadly it seemed like he
would collapse in on himself and die. Then he let me go,
and walked away while staring back at me. He found his
way out without looking away from me the entire time.

POLONIUS

Come with me to see the king. This is clearly the madness
of love, which is an emotion so violently powerful that it
can destroy itself, leading people to act as desperately and
insanely as often as any other emotion known to man. I'm
so sorry. Have you said anything tough or unfriendly
recently?

OPHELIA

No, my good lord. But I followed your commands and sent
back his letters and refused to let him see me.

POLONIUS

That has driven him crazy. I'm sorry that I didn't observe
him more closely. I feared that he was just toying with you,
and did not care if he wrecked your reputation. A curse on
my suspicions! By God, it's as common for us old people to
think too much as it is for young people to think too little.
Come, let's go see the king. We have to make this matter
known. Keeping it secret could cause more harm than
revealing it.

They exit.

Act 2, Scene 2

Shakespeare

*Trumpets sound. CLAUDIUS and GERTRUDE enter, with
ROSENCRANTZ, 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
5 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,
10 I cannot dream of. I entreat you both
That, being of so young days brought up with him
And since so neighbored to his youth and 'havior,

Shakescleare Translation

*Trumpets sound. CLAUDIUS, GERTRUDE, ROSENCRANTZ,
GUILDENSTERN, and attendants enter.*

CLAUDIUS

Welcome, dear Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Not only
have I wanted to see you, but I also urgently need your
help, which is why I sent for you. You may have heard about
Hamlet's recent "transformation"—that's the right word,
since he's changed both inside and out from what he was
before. Other than his father's death, I can't imagine what's
made him so unlike himself. Since you both grew up with
him and are so familiar with him, I ask you both to stay here
at court for a while. Spend time with Hamlet, get him to
enjoy life again, and try to find out if there's anything we
don't know about that's bothering him--so we can try to fix
it.

That you vouchsafe your rest here in our court
Some little time so by your companies
15 To draw him on to pleasures and to gather,
So much as from occasion you may glean,
Whether aught, to us unknown, afflicts him thus
That, opened, lies within our remedy.

GERTRUDE

Good gentlemen, he hath much talked of you.
20 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,
25 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
30 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

35 Thanks, Rosencrantz and gentle Guildenstern.

GERTRUDE

Thanks, Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz.
And I beseech you instantly to visit
My too much changèd son. Go, some of you,
And bring these gentlemen where Hamlet is.

GUILDENSTERN

40 Heavens make our presence and our practices
Pleasant and helpful to him!

GERTRUDE

Ay, amen!

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit, escorted by attendants.

POLONIUS enters.

POLONIUS

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

CLAUDIUS

45 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
50 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

Give first admittance to th' ambassadors.
55 My news shall be the fruit to that great feast.

GERTRUDE

Gentlemen, Hamlet's talked about you a lot. I'm certain that here are no two men alive with whom he's closer. If you'd be willing to show us the kindness of staying with us a while to try to help us, we'll reward you in such a way as only a king can.

ROSENCRANTZ

Based on the power you have over us as your subjects, both your Majesties could have ordered us to follow your command, instead of asking us.

GUILDENSTERN

But we'll obey. We give ourselves to you, and lay our services at your command.

CLAUDIUS

Thanks, Rosencrantz and worthy Guildenstern.

GERTRUDE

Thanks, Guildenstern and worthy Rosencrantz. I beg you to immediately visit my son, who's changed too much.

[To attendants] Go, servants, and bring these gentlemen to Hamlet.

GUILDENSTERN

I hope God makes us able to bring him help and happiness!

GERTRUDE

Yes, amen!

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit, escorted by attendants.

POLONIUS enters.

POLONIUS

The ambassadors have returned from Norway in great spirits, my good lord.

CLAUDIUS

You once more have brought good news.

POLONIUS

Have I, my lord? I assure you, my lord, my duty is as important to me as my soul. And I give both to my God and my blessed king. And—unless this brain of mine is not able to track the twists and turns of politics as it used to—I believe that I've discovered the cause of Hamlet's madness.

CLAUDIUS

Oh, tell me! I'd love to hear it.

POLONIUS

First, let the ambassadors come in. My news will be like the dessert to the feast that is their news.

CLAUDIUS

Thyself do grace to them, and bring them in.

POLONIUS exits.

CLAUDIUS

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:
60 His father's death and our o'erhasty marriage.

POLONIUS enters with the ambassadors VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS.

CLAUDIUS

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

VOLTEMAND

Most fair return of greetings and desires.
Upon our first, he sent out to suppress
65 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
70 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 majesty.
75 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,
80 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,
85 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

90 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.
95 Therefore, since brevity is the soul of wit
And tediousness the limbs and outward 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?
100 But let that go.

GERTRUDE

More matter, with less art.

CLAUDIUS

Please go to them yourself, and bring them in.

POLONIUS exits.

CLAUDIUS

My dear Gertrude, he says he's discovered the cause of your
son's anger and moodiness.

GERTRUDE

I doubt it's anything other than the obvious reason: his
father's death and our overly quick marriage.

POLONIUS enters with the ambassadors VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS.

CLAUDIUS

Well, we'll investigate until we figure it out.

[*To VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS*] Welcome, my good
friends. So, Voltmand, what's the news from the King of
Norway?

VOLTEMAND

And our greetings to you. The moment we spoke with the
king, he moved to put a stop to his nephew's war
preparations—which he had thought were directed against
Poland, but, when he looked closer, he saw were directed
against you. He was upset that Fortinbras took advantage
of his sickness and weakness to deceive him, and he
arrested and rebuked Fortinbras, forcing him to swear
never again to lift arms against your Majesty. The old
Norwegian king was so overjoyed by this turn of events that
he gave young Fortinbras an annual income of three
thousand crowns, as well as permission to lead the soldiers
he had gathered against Poland. In this letter, the king
officially asks you to let Fortinbras' troops pass quietly
through your lands on their way to Poland, and assures you
of your safety. [*He gives CLAUDIUS a document*]

CLAUDIUS

This is good news, and when I have more time to
concentrate, I'll read this, think about it, and reply.
Meanwhile, thank you for your work. Go now, and rest.
Tonight we'll feast. And welcome home!

VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS exit.

POLONIUS

That's a good outcome to this situation. My lord and my
lady, to make grand speeches about what majesty is, what
service is, or why day is day, night is night, and time is time,
would be nothing more than a waste of day, night, and
time. Therefore, since being concise is the essence of
wisdom--and nothing is so boring as endless verbal
flourishes--I'll get to the point. Your son is crazy. "Crazy" I'm
saying, because how can you define craziness other than to
say that it's craziness? But that's a different issue.

GERTRUDE

More substance, less style.

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,
105 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.
110 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,*
115 *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.—

GERTRUDE

Came this from Hamlet to her?

POLONIUS

120 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,
125 *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,
130 *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,
135 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,
140 When I had seen this hot love on the wing—
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,
145 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.
150 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—
155 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.

POLONIUS

Madam, I swear I'm using no style at all. It's true that he's
crazy. It's true, it's a pity, and it's a pity that it's true—but
now I'm talking like a fool, so I'll let that go and get to the
point. We all agree that Hamlet's crazy. Now all we have to
do is to figure out the cause behind the effect—or I guess I
should say defect, since this defective effect must have a
cause. That's what we have to do, and now I will continue
with the rest of what I have to say. Consider this: I have a
daughter—until she gets married—who in her obedience
and duty to me has given me this letter. Now listen to this:
[He reads a letter] “*To the heavenly idol of my soul, the*
most beautified Ophelia”—That's an ugly phrase, an ugly
phrase. That “beautified” is a terrible use of the word. But
I'll continue: *[He reads the letter]* “*In her excellent white*
bosom,” et cetera—

 Polonius speaks to the fact that fathers held absolute authority over their daughters until given away in marriage, which was common practice in Shakespeare's time.

GERTRUDE

This is from Hamlet to Ophelia?

POLONIUS

Madam, please be patient. I'll read it as its written. *[He*
reads the letter]
“You may doubt that the stars are fire,
Doubt that the sun moves across the sky,
Doubt if the truth is actually a liar,
125 *But never doubt my love.*
Oh, sweet Ophelia, I'm bad at poetry. I have no skill to put
my feelings into words. But please believe that I love you
best, oh, best of all—believe it. Goodbye. Yours forever, my
dearest lady, as long as this body is still mine, Hamlet.” In
her obedience to me, my daughter showed me this letter
and more besides, as well as telling me how Hamlet has
been courting her—when, how, and where.

CLAUDIUS

And how did she respond to his love?

POLONIUS

What is your opinion of me?

CLAUDIUS

You are a loyal and honorable man.

POLONIUS

I would gladly prove that I am. But what would you have
thought if I had learned of this hot affair—and I must tell
you, I noticed it before my daughter told me of it—what
would your dear wife, her Majesty the Queen, have thought
if I had been silent in the face of what I say? Or if I had just
allowed it to continue, or just ignored it? No, I had to do
something. And so I said to my daughter: “Lord Hamlet is a
prince and above your social rank. You must end this.” And
then I ordered her to make it impossible for him to see her,
to refuse all messages, and accept no gifts. She followed my
advice. In short, Hamlet, faced with this rejection, became
sad. He stopped eating, stopped sleeping, got weak, got
dizzy, and, moving step by step downward, eventually
descended into the insanity that now holds him. And all of
us grieve for him.

CLAUDIUS

160 [to GERTRUDE] Do you think 'tis this?

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

165 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
170 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

175 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
180 But keep a farm and carters.

CLAUDIUS

We will try it.

HAMLET enters, reading a book.

GERTRUDE

But look where sadly the poor wretch comes reading.

POLONIUS

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

CLAUDIUS and GERTRUDE exit.

POLONIUS

185 How does my good Lord Hamlet?

HAMLET

Well, God-'a'-mercy.

POLONIUS

Do you know me, my lord?

HAMLET

Excellent well. You are a fishmonger.

POLONIUS

Not I, my lord.

HAMLET

190 Then I would you were so honest a man.

CLAUDIUS

[To GERTRUDE] Do you think this is the cause of Hamlet's
behavior?

GERTRUDE

It may be, it very well may be.

POLONIUS

Has there ever been a time—I'd gladly like to know—when
I've definitively said something was true, and it turned out
not to be true?

CLAUDIUS

Not that I know of.

POLONIUS

[Pointing to his head and shoulders] Take my head from my
body if I'm wrong. I'll follow the evidence and discover the
truth, even if it's hidden at the center of the earth.

CLAUDIUS

How can we test your theory?

POLONIUS

Well, you know he sometimes walks here in the main hall
for four hours at a time.

GERTRUDE

Yes, he does indeed.

POLONIUS

During one such time, I'll send my daughter to see him.

[To CLAUDIUS] You and I will hide behind the tapestry and
observe their encounter. If he does not love her and has not
lost his sense because of it, then I should not be your
assistant in statecraft and should instead go work on a farm.

CLAUDIUS

We'll try it.

HAMLET enters, reading a book.

GERTRUDE

Look how sadly he's coming in, reading.

POLONIUS

I beg you, please go away, both of you. I'll speak to him
now. Oh, please leave me to do it.

CLAUDIUS and GERTRUDE exit.

POLONIUS

How do you do, Lord Hamlet?

HAMLET

Fine, thank you.

POLONIUS

Do you know who I am, my lord?

HAMLET

Of course. You are a fish seller.

POLONIUS

No, not me, my lord.

HAMLET

Then I wish you were as honorable a man as a fish seller.

POLONIUS

Honest, my lord?

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

That's very true, my lord.

HAMLET

195 For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing carrion— Have you a daughter?

POLONIUS

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

200 *[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

205 Words, words, words.

POLONIUS

What is the matter, my lord?

HAMLET

Between who?

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

210 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 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

220 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.

POLONIUS

Honorable, my lord?

HAMLET

Yes, sir. In this world of ours, just one man in ten thousand is honorable.

POLONIUS

That's very true, my lord.

HAMLET

Because if the sun breeds maggots on a dead dog, kissing the corpse with its rays—do you have a daughter?

POLONIUS

I do, my lord.

HAMLET

Don't let her walk out in the sun. Pregnancy is a blessing, but if your daughter gets pregnant—think about it, friend.

POLONIUS

[To himself] What does that mean? Still focused on my daughter. But he didn't recognize me at first. He thought I was a fish seller. He's far gone, far gone. And yet it's true that when I was young I suffered terribly for love, almost as badly as Hamlet. I'll talk to him again.

[To HAMLET] What are you reading, my lord?

HAMLET

Words, words, words.

POLONIUS

What is the subject?

HAMLET

Between whom?

POLONIUS

I mean, the subject of what you're reading?

HAMLET

Oh, lies, sir. The joking rascal who wrote this says here that old men have gray beards, their faces are wrinkled, their eyes full of crust and gunk, and that they both lack wisdom and have weak thighs. And though I believe all of that is true, I still would argue that it's not good behavior to write it down. For instance, you yourself would be as old as I am, if you could just travel backward like a crab, sir.

POLONIUS

[To himself] There's a method to his madness.

[To HAMLET] Will you come in from outside, my lord?

HAMLET

Into my grave.

POLONIUS

Well, that's certainly not outside.

[To himself] His answers sometimes seem so full of meaning! That's a talent that many insane people share, and that is less evident in people who are sane. I'll leave him now and arrange a way for him to run into my daughter.

[To HAMLET] My noble lord, I'll now humbly leave 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

230 Fare you well, my lord.

HAMLET

[aside] These tedious old fools!

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter.

POLONIUS

You go to seek the Lord Hamlet. There he is.

ROSENCRANTZ

God save you, sir!

POLONIUS exits.

GUILDENSTERN

My honored lord!

ROSENCRANTZ

235 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

240 Happy, in that we are not overhappy.
On Fortune's cap we are not the very button.

HAMLET

Nor the soles of her shoes?

ROSENCRANTZ

Neither, my lord.

HAMLET

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

GUILDENSTERN

245 Faith, her privates we.

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

None, my lord, but that the world's grown honest.

HAMLET

250 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.

HAMLET

There's nothing I would more willingly give up than that—except my life, except my life, except my life.

POLONIUS

Take care, my lord.

HAMLET

[To himself] These boring old fools!

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter.

POLONIUS

You're looking for Lord Hamlet. There he is.

ROSENCRANTZ

Thank you, sir.

POLONIUS exits.

GUILDENSTERN

My honorable lord!

ROSENCRANTZ

My most dear lord!

HAMLET

Ah, my good old friends! How are you, Guildenstern? And Rosencrantz! Good friends, how are you both doing?

ROSENCRANTZ

As well as any old average man.

GUILDENSTERN

Happy that we're not too happy. We're not exactly the luckiest men in the world.

HAMLET

But not the unluckiest either, right?

ROSENCRANTZ

Neither, my lord.

HAMLET

So you're hanging around Lady Luck's waist, right in the middle of her favors?

GUILDENSTERN

Yup, we're like privates in her army.

HAMLET

You're in Lady Luck's private parts? Ah, it's true. She is a whore. So what's the news?

ROSENCRANTZ

Nothing other than that the world's become honest, , my lord.

HAMLET

Then the end of the world must be coming. But you're wrong. Let me ask you one question in particular: my good friends, what have you done to anger the fates that they have sent you here to this prison?

GUILDENSTERN

Prison, my lord?

HAMLET

Denmark's a prison.

ROSENCRANTZ

255 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

260 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

265 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

270 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

275 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

280 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.

HAMLET

285 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

290 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?

ROSENCRANTZ

Then the whole world is one as well.

HAMLET

A big one, with lots of cells and dungeons--Denmark being
one of the worst.

ROSENCRANTZ

We don't think so, my lord.

HAMLET

Well, then it isn't one to you, since nothing is inherently
good or bad—it's what you think of it that makes it so. To
me, Denmark is a prison.

ROSENCRANTZ

It must be your ambition that makes it one. It's too small for
your big ideas.

HAMLET

Oh God, I could be trapped inside a nutshell and consider
myself a king of infinite space, if only I didn't have bad
dreams.

GUILDENSTERN

Dreams are a mark of ambition. After all, ambition is just
the shadow of a dream.

HAMLET

A dream is itself just a shadow.

ROSENCRANTZ

True, and I'd argue that ambition is so light and airy that it's
just a shadow of a shadow.

HAMLET

Then beggars without ambition must be the ones with
substance, while ambitious kings and heroes are just the
shadows of those beggars. Should we go inside to the
court? I swear, I can't think straight any longer.

ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN

We're at your service.

HAMLET

Not at all. I won't treat you like my servants, because, to be
honest with you, my servants are pretty dreadful. Now, as
my friends, tell me why you've returned here to Elsinore?

ROSENCRANTZ

To visit you, my lord. No other reason.

HAMLET

Though I'm such a beggar that my thanks aren't worth
much, I still thank you. But did someone ask you to come?
Or was it an idea you had all on your own? Come on, be
honest with me. Come now. Tell me.

GUILDENSTERN

What should we say, my lord?

HAMLET

Anything, as long as it answers my question. You were sent
for. I can see it in your faces. You're not good enough liars to
hide your thoughts. I know the king and queen sent for you.

ROSENCRANTZ

Why would they do that, my lord?

HAMLET

295 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

300 [aside] Nay, then, I have an eye of you—If you love me, hold not off.

GUILDENSTERN

My lord, we were sent for.

HAMLET

305 I will tell you why. So shall my anticipation prevent your discovery, and your secrecy to the king and queen moult 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

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

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

325 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 coming to offer you service.

HAMLET

330 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

335 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

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

HAMLET

You’ll have to tell me that. But first, let me remind you of our longstanding friendship, the childhood we spent together, the duties of our love for each other, and everything else that a person more eloquent than I would describe. Now: answer me honestly and directly whether or not you were sent for.

ROSENCRANTZ

[To GUILDENSTERN] What do you think?

HAMLET

[To himself] Ah, I’ve got my eye on you.

[To ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN] If you care about me, you’ll tell me.

GUILDENSTERN

My lord, we were sent for.

HAMLET

I’ll tell you why. That way you won’t have to reveal anything, and you can preserve the secrecy you promised to the king and queen. Lately, for reasons I don’t now, I’ve lost all my joy, stopped exercising, and feel so depressed that the entire world seems to be empty to me. This beautiful canopy, the sky—look at it, this splendid overarching sky, a majestic roof adorned with golden sunlight—why, to me it seems like nothing more than a foul collection of diseased air. What a masterpiece each human is! How noble in his ability to think, how unlimited in abilities, how attractive in his body and movement, how angelic in action, how godlike in understanding! The most beautiful thing in the world. The perfect ideal, standing above all other animals. And yet, for me, what are humans like, except dust? Men don’t delight me. No, women neither—though your smiles seem to suggest that’s what you were thinking.

ROSENCRANTZ

My lord, I wasn’t thinking that at all.

HAMLET

Why did you laugh, then, when I said that men don’t delight me?

ROSENCRANTZ

My lord, I was thinking that if men don’t delight you, what a poor welcome you’ll give the coming troupe of actors. We crossed paths with them as we were on our way here, and they’re coming to entertain you.

HAMLET

The one who plays the part of the king will be particularly welcome. He will be treated like a true king. The adventurous knight will get to use his sword and shield; the lover’s sighs will not go unrewarded; the crazy one will be allowed to finish without interruption; the clown will make everybody who laughs easily laugh; and the lady will get to speak her mind completely—or else I’ll stop the play. Which troupe is it?

ROSENCRANTZ

The troupe you used to love so much, the actors from the city who perform tragedies.

HAMLET

Why are they traveling? They’re better known in the city and make more money there.

ROSENCRANTZ

New theatrical fads in the city have made it more difficult for the troupe to do well there.

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

345 Nay, their endeavor keeps in the wonted pace. But there is, sir, an eyrie of 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
350 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
355 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

360 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

365 Do the boys carry it away?

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

It is not very strange. For my uncle is King of Denmark, and those that would make mouths at him while
370 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.

Trumpets sound offstage for the PLAYERS' arrival.

GUILDENSTERN

There are the players.

HAMLET

375 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
380 aunt-mother are deceived.

GUILDENSTERN

In what, my dear lord?

HAMLET

Are they as popular as they were when I was in the city? Do they still draw crowds?

ROSENCRANTZ

No, they don't.

HAMLET

Why not? Are they getting rusty?

ROSENCRANTZ

No, they're as good as they always were. But they now have to compete with troupes of child actors who shout out their lines and get unbelievable applause for it. These child actors are now in fashion. And they so dominate the public theaters that high-society types are afraid to come, because they fear getting made fun of by the satirical playwrights who write for the boys.

HAMLET

What, they're actually children? Who takes care of them? Who supports them financially? Will they stop working once their voices change during puberty? Once they've grown to be adult actors (as is likely), won't these children complain that their former playwrights have done them wrong by causing harm to the profession of acting?

ROSENCRANTZ

I swear, there's been a big debate on the topic, with strong opinions on both sides. For a while, no one could even sell a play unless the play contained a scene in which a poet and an actor had a fistfight.

HAMLET

Can that be possible?

GUILDENSTERN

Oh, there's been a lot of arguing.


HAMLET


The boys are winning?

ROSENCRANTZ

Yes, they are, my lord. The boys carry all of theater on their shoulders, just as Hercules carried the world.

HAMLET

Actually, it's not so strange. My uncle is King of Denmark, and the same people who made fun of him when my father was alive now pay twenty, forty, fifty, a hundred gold coins apiece for a little painting of him. By God ! There's something unnatural about it, if you puzzle it out.

 In the original text, Hamlet uses the strong oath "'Sblood," meaning "God's blood."

Trumpets sound offstage for the PLAYERS' arrival.

GUILDENSTERN

There are the actors.

HAMLET

Gentlemen, welcome to Elsinore. Now come, shake my hand. Giving a proper welcome is a matter of following the current customs. Let's follow the customs, then, so that my exuberant welcome to the players doesn't make it seem like I'm happier to see them than I am to see you. You are welcome here. Even so, my uncle-father and aunt-mother are confused.

GUILDENSTERN

In what way, my dear lord?

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS enters.

POLONIUS

Well be with you, gentlemen.

HAMLET

385 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

390 [*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

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

POLONIUS

The actors are come hither, my lord.

HAMLET

Buzz, buzz.

POLONIUS

Upon my honor—

HAMLET

400 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.

405

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

410 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

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

HAMLET

I'm only crazy at certain times. At others, I know exactly what's happening.

POLONIUS enters.

POLONIUS

Gentlemen, I hope you're well.

HAMLET

Now listen, Guildenstern, and you too, Rosencrantz—each of you listen close. [*He gestures toward POLONIUS*] That big baby you see there is still wearing diapers.

ROSENCRANTZ

It's his second time around, as they say--since an old man is like a child again.

HAMLET

[*To ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN so that only they can hear*] I predict he's coming to tell me about the actors. Watch.

[*To POLONIUS*] You're correct, sir. On Monday morning, that was it.

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

The actors have arrived, my lord.

HAMLET

Gossip, gossip.

POLONIUS

I swear—

HAMLET

Then each actor came in on his ass.

POLONIUS

They're the best actors in the world, for all sorts of plays--tragic, comic, historical, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical, one-act plays, or epic poems. The tragic playwright Seneca is not too serious for them, nor is the comic writer Plautus too silly. For both formal plays and freer dramas, these are the actors you want.

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

What treasure did he have, my lord?

HAMLET

Well, [*He sings*]
*One fine daughter, and no more,
Whom he loved beyond all others—*

POLONIUS

[*To himself*] Still focused on my daughter.

HAMLET

Aren't I right, old man 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

420 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,
425 for look where my abridgement comes.

The PLAYERS enter.

HAMLET

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
430 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
435 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
440 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 cried in the top of mine—an
excellent play, well digested in the scenes, set down
445 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
450 handsome than fine. One speech in it I chiefly loved.
'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—
455 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,
460 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,
465 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 Pyrrhus
Old grandsire Priam seeks.
470

POLONIUS

My lord, if you're calling me Jephthah, I do have a daughter
I love beyond all other things.

HAMLET

No, you don't understand.

POLONIUS

What should I understand, then, my lord?

HAMLET

Why, "as if by chance, God knows," and then, you know, "it
happened, as was most likely expect"—you can learn more
by looking at the first verse of the popular song, because
I'm stopping now.

The PLAYERS enter.

HAMLET

You are welcome. Welcome to all of you!

[To an actor] I'm glad to see you doing well.

[To the entire company] Welcome, my good friends.

[To an actor] Oh, it's you, old friend! You've grown a beard
since I last saw you. Have you come to put a beard on me?

[To an actor dressed as a woman] My young lady. By the
Virgin Mary, you've grown taller by the height of a pair of
platform shoes! I pray to God that your voice, like a gold
coin, has not yet cracked.


[To the entire company] You are all welcome here. Let's see
something, and like a French falconer I won't be choosy.
Show us a speech. Come on, show us a bit of your skill.
Come on, a passionate speech.


FIRST PLAYER


Which speech, my lord?

HAMLET

I heard you recite a speech for me once that was never
acted on stage. Or, if it was, not more than once—because
the play I remember didn't please the masses. It was like
caviar for the masses—too sophisticated for them. But I,
along with the better-informed critics, thought that it was
excellent, with scenes that flowed one to the next and
written in language that was clever and yet not overdone. I
remember one critic commented that the play lacked spicy
jokes to liven it up, and did not display any fancy language,
but that it was well-done, and beautiful rather than showy.
There was one speech in it that I loved the most. It was the
story Aeneas told Dido, particularly the part about
450 Priam's murder. If you remember it, begin at line—let me
see, let me see—The rugged Pyrrhus, fierce as a tiger...No,
that's not it; it begins like this: Rugged Pyrrhus—whose
armor was as black as his desire, resembled the night when
he crouched inside the Trojan Horse—has now smeared his
terrible black armor with a more awful coat of arms. Head
to foot, he's now all red, decorated horribly with the blood
of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons. The blood baked solid
by fires in the streets—fires that lend a terrible, damned
light to his murders. Roasted by anger and fire—and covered
with hardened gore—with eyes like rubies, the hellish
Pyrrhus goes looking for grandfather Priam. Continue from
there.

 In Shakespeare's time, women were not allowed to perform on the public stage. Young men dressed as women to play female roles.

 Aeneas was the main character of Virgil's epic poem *The Aeneid*, in which the titular character escapes Troy and founds Rome. Along the way, he courts the Carthaginian queen, Dido.

 Priam was the King of Troy. The Greek hero Achilles' son, Pyrrhus, killed Priam, to avenge his father's death.

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,
475 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,
480 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.
485 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,
490 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
495 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,
500 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!

POLONIUS

This is too long.

HAMLET

It shall to the barber's, with your beard.—Prithee, say
505 on. He's for a jig or a tale of bawdry, or he sleeps.
Say on. Come to Hecuba.

FIRST PLAYER

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
With bisson rheum, a clout upon that head
Where late the diadem stood, and for a robe,
About her lank and all o'erteemèd loins,
A blanket, in the alarm of fear caught up—
515 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
When she saw Pyrrhus make malicious sport
In mincing with his sword her husband's limbs,
520 The instant burst of clamor that she made,
(Unless things mortal move them not at all)
Would have made milch the burning eyes of heaven,
And passion in the gods.

POLONIUS

By God, my lord, well done—with the right accent and capturing all the meaning.

FIRST PLAYER


Soon he finds Priam vainly fighting off the Greeks. His old sword, too heavy for him to wield, lies where it fell, refusing his commands. An unfair opponent, Pyrrhus rushes Priam, and in a rage, strikes and misses. But the wind made by his dreadful sword knocks the old man down. Then the city of Troy, seeming to feel this fatal blow to its ruler, collapses in flames, and the hideous crash arrests Pyrrhus' attention. Now his sword, which was lowering on the white-haired head of old, revered Priam, seemed stuck in the air. Pyrrhus stood like a tyrant in a painting, and, caught between act and intention, did nothing. But just as a storm is often broken by a sudden silence—with the clouds growing still and the bold winds calming and the earth below, as quiet as death, once more finds the sky split by sudden thunder—so too did Pyrrhus' pause renew his fury, and set him back to work. Not even when the Cyclopes worked to make the unbreakable armor of the god of war, their hammers did not fall as cruelly as Pyrrhus' bloody sword now falls on Priam. Be gone, goddess of Fortune, you whore! All you gods should join together to take away her power—break all the spokes on her wheel of fortune, and roll it down the hill of heaven into hell.

POLONIUS

This speech is too long.

HAMLET

We'll trim it later, along with your beard. Please, continue with your speech. If it's not a comic dance or sex scene, this man here falls to sleep. Go on, get to the part about [Hecuba](#)

 [Hecuba was King Priam's grieving widow.](#)

FIRST PLAYER

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

HAMLET

"The muffled queen?"

POLONIUS

That's good. "The muffled queen" is good.

FIRST PLAYER

Run barefoot back and forth, dousing the flames with her tears, a cloth on the head where just before a crown had sat, and instead of a robe, she wore a blanket wrapped around her body, withered from childbearing. Anyone seeing her this way would have screamed out in anger against the goddess Fortune. If the gods themselves had seen her while she watched Pyrrhus make a game of cutting her husbands limbs to bits, the awful cry she made would have made the blazing stars of heaven weep hot tears, and bring passion to the gods—unless the gods don't care about mortals.

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

530 *[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

535 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

540 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*?

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

545 Ay, my lord.

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS and the PLAYERS exit.

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

Good my lord.

HAMLET

550 Ay, so. Good-bye to you.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.

POLONIUS

Look how he's gone pale, and has tears in his eyes. Please,
no more.

HAMLET

[To the FIRST PLAYER] Very good. I'll have you perform the
rest of it soon.

[To POLONIUS] My lord, please make sure the actors are
given comfortable rooms. Do you hear? Make sure they're
treated well, because they are the reporters of our time.
You'd be better off with a bad epitaph on your grave than to
have their ill will while you're alive.

POLONIUS

My lord, I will give them all they deserve.

HAMLET

By God, man, give them more than that! If you gave
everyone just what they deserved, would anyone ever
escape a whipping? How you treat them speaks to your
honor and dignity. The less they deserve, the more merit
you'll earn through your generosity. Bring them inside.

POLONIUS

Come with me, sirs.

HAMLET

Follow him, friends. We'll watch a play tomorrow.

[To the FIRST PLAYER] My old friend, do you know the play
called *The Murder of Gonzago*?

FIRST PLAYER

Yes, my lord.

HAMLET

We'll see that play tomorrow night. If I were to write a
speech of twelve to sixteen lines to insert into the play, you
could, if necessary, learn it for tomorrow's performance,
right?

FIRST PLAYER

Yes, my lord.

HAMLET

Very well. Follow that gentleman, and please don't make
fun of him.

POLONIUS and the PLAYERS exit.

HAMLET

My good friends, I'll see you tonight. Welcome to Elsinore.

ROSENCRANTZ

Yes, my good lord.

HAMLET

Goodbye to you both.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.

HAMLET

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,

555 Could force his soul so to his own conceit

That from her working all his visage waned,

Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,

A broken voice, and his whole function suiting

With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing—

560 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 with tears

565 And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,

Make mad the guilty and appall the free,

Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed

The very faculties of eyes and ears. Yet I,

A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak

570 Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,

And can say nothing—no, not for a king,

Upon whose property and most dear life

A damned defeat was made. Am I a coward?

Who calls me "villain"? Breaks my pate across?

575 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?

Ha!

'Swounds, I should take it, for it cannot be

580 But I am pigeon-livered and lack gall

To make oppression bitter, or ere this

I should have fatted all the region kites

With this slave's offal. Bloody, bawdy villain!

Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!

585 O vengeance!

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 words

590 And fall a-cursing like a very drab,

A stallion! Fie upon 't, foh!

About, my brain.—Hum, I have heard

That guilty creatures sitting at a play

Have, by the very cunning of the scene,

595 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

600 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

605 Out of my weakness and my melancholy,

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.

HAMLET exits.

HAMLET

Now I'm alone. Oh, what a low-life scoundrel I am! Isn't it

terrible that this actor--reciting a work of fiction--could

force his soul to feel the passion so completely that he grew

pale, tears welled in his eyes? He got overwhelmed, his

voice broke, and the entirety of his being matched the

emotions he was supposed to be playing. And all for

nothing—for Hecuba! What does Hecuba mean to him, or

he to Hecuba, that he would weep for her? What would he

do if he had the motive or reason for passion that I have? He

would drown the stage with tears, and split the ears of all

who heard him with angry words. He would drive the guilty

crazy with shame, horrify the innocent, confuse the

ignorant, and shock anyone with eyes and ears. Meanwhile

I—a stupid fool—mope like a daydreamer, don't have a plan,

and have nothing, nothing, to say for a king whose throne

and life were brought to destruction. Am I a coward? Who

will stand up and call me a villain, or slap me across the

face? Pluck hairs from my beard and blow them in my face?

Tweak my nose? Call me a liar? Who does any of those

things? Ha! By God 🙏, I'd accept it, because I must have a

nature that doesn't respond to wrongs by making life for

the evildoer bitter. Otherwise, I would have long ago

fattened up the local birds with the intestines of this

scoundrel, King Claudius. Bloody, vulgar villain!

Remorseless, treacherous, lustful, unnatural villain! Oh,

revenge! Why, what an ass I am. Look how brave I am--the

son of a beloved, murdered father; told to take revenge by

heaven and hell; and yet all I can do is talk about my

problems and curse like a whore in the street. I'm a male

whore! Curses on it! Now think, brain—Hmm..I've heard

that guilty people watching a play have been so affected by

the performance that they have confessed their crimes.

Though murder has no tongue, it still miraculously finds

other ways to speak. I'll have these actors perform

something like my father's murder in front of my uncle.

Meanwhile, I'll watch my uncle, and probe him to his very

core. If he flinches, I'll know what to do. The ghost I saw

may be the devil, who has the power to appear in a pleasing

manner. Perhaps he has taken advantage of my

sadness—because he has great influence over melancholy

people—to trick me into damnation. I need more solid

evidence. The play's the thing I'll use to reveal the

conscience of the king.

🙏 In the original text, Hamlet uses another strong Elizabethan oath, "Swounds," meaning "God's wounds."

HAMLET exits.

Act 3, Scene 1

Shakespeare

CLAUDIUS, GERTRUDE, POLONIUS, OPHELIA, ROSENCRANTZ, and
GUILDENSTERN enter.

Shakesclare Translation

CLAUDIUS, GERTRUDE, POLONIUS, OPHELIA,
ROSENCRANTZ, and GUILDENSTERN enter.

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

5 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
10 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
15 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,
20 And there did seem in him a kind of joy
To hear of it. They are about the court,
And, as I think, they have already order
This night to play before him.

POLONIUS

'Tis most true,
25 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,
30 And drive his purpose on to these delights.

ROSENCRANTZ

We shall, my lord.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.

CLAUDIUS

Sweet Gertrude, leave us too,
For we have closely sent for Hamlet hither,
That he, as 'twere by accident, may here
35 Affront Ophelia.
Her father and myself (lawful espials)
Will so bestow ourselves that, seeing unseen,
We may of their encounter frankly judge,
And gather by him, as he is behaved,
40 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
45

CLAUDIUS

And the two of you haven't been able to figure out why he's
acting so oddly, with a dangerous lunacy that's such a huge
shift from his earlier calm and quiet behavior?

ROSENCRANTZ

He admits he feels somewhat crazy, but won't talk about
the cause.

GUILDENSTERN

And he's not willing to be questioned. His insanity is sly and
smart, and he slips away from our questions when we try to
get him to tell us about how he's feeling.

GERTRUDE

Did he treat you well?

ROSENCRANTZ

Yes, he treated us like a gentleman.

GUILDENSTERN

But also as if he had to force himself to act that way.

ROSENCRANTZ

He didn't ask many questions, but answered our questions
extensively.

GERTRUDE

Did you try to get him to do something fun?

ROSENCRANTZ

Madam, as it happened, we crossed paths with some actors
on the way here. When we mentioned them to Hamlet, he
seemed to feel a kind of joy. They are at the court now, and I
think they've been told to perform for him tonight.

POLONIUS

That's true, and he asked me to beg both of you, your
Majesties, to come and watch.

CLAUDIUS

With all my heart, I'm glad to hear of his interest.
Gentlemen, try to nurture this interest of his, and keep him
focused on these amusements.

ROSENCRANTZ

We will, my lord.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.

CLAUDIUS

Dear Gertrude, please go as well. We've sent for Hamlet as a
way for him to meet with Ophelia, seemingly by chance. Her
father and I--spying for justifiable reasons--will place
ourselves so that we can't be seen, but can observe the
encounter and judge from Hamlet's behavior whether love
is the cause of his madness.

GERTRUDE

I'll do as you ask.

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.

GERTRUDE exits.

POLONIUS

Ophelia, walk you here. *[to CLAUDIUS]* Gracious, so
please you,
50 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,
55 '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!
60 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.
O heavy burden!

POLONIUS

I hear him coming. Let's withdraw, my lord.

CLAUDIUS and POLONIUS hide.

HAMLET enters.

HAMLET

65 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—
70 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,
75 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,
80 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
85 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
90 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,
95 And enterprises of great pitch 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.

[To OPHELIA] As for you, Ophelia, I hope that your beauty is
the reason for Hamlet's insane behavior. I hope also that
your virtues will get him to return to normality, for both of
your benefits.

OPHELIA

I hope it too, madam.

GERTRUDE exits.

POLONIUS

Ophelia, walk over here.

[To CLAUDIUS] Your Majesty, if you agree, let's go hide.

[To OPHELIA] Read this prayer book, to make you're being
alone seem natural. You know, this is actually something
people can be blamed for doing all the time—acting as if
they're religious and devoted to God as a way to hide their
bad deeds.

CLAUDIUS

[To himself] Oh, that's all too true! His words are like a whip
against my conscience! The whore's ugly cheek—only made
beautiful with make-up—is no more terrible than the things
I've done and hidden with fine words. Oh, what guilt!

POLONIUS

I hear him coming. Quick, let's hide, my lord.

CLAUDIUS and POLONIUS hide.

HAMLET enters.

HAMLET

To live, or to die? That is the question. Is it nobler to suffer
through all the terrible things fate throws at you, or to fight
off your troubles, and, in doing so, end them completely?
To die, to sleep—because that's all dying is—and by a sleep
I mean an end to all the heartache and the thousand
injuries that we are vulnerable to—that's an end to be
wished for! To die, to sleep. To sleep, perhaps to
dream—yes, but there's there's the catch. Because the kinds
of dreams that might come in that sleep of death—after you
have left behind your mortal body—are something to make
you anxious. That's the consideration that makes us suffer
the calamities of life for so long. Because who would bear
all the trials and tribulations of time—the oppression of the
powerful, the insults from arrogant men, the pangs of
unrequited love, the slowness of justice, the disrespect of
people in office, and the general abuse of good people by
bad—when you could just settle all your debts using
nothing more than an unsheathed dagger? Who would bear
his burdens, and grunt and sweat through a tiring life, if
they weren't frightened of what might happen after death—
that undiscovered country from which no visitor returns,
which we wonder about and which makes us prefer the
troubles we know rather than fly off to face the ones we
don't? Thus, the fear of death makes us all cowards, and our
natural willingness to act is made weak by too much
thinking. Actions of great urgency and importance get
thrown off course because of this sort of thinking, and they
cease to be actions at all. But wait, here is the beautiful
Ophelia!

[To OPHELIA] Beauty, may you forgive all my sins in your
prayers.

OPHELIA

100 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 longèd long to redeliver.
105 I pray you now receive them.

HAMLET

No, not I. I never gave you aught.

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,
110 Take these again, for to the noble mind
Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.
There, my lord.

HAMLET

Ha, ha, are you honest?

OPHELIA

My lord?

HAMLET

115 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

120 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
125 proof. I did love you once.

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

130 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.
135 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
140 us. Go thy ways to a nunnery. Where's your father?

OPHELIA

My good lord, how have you been doing these last few
days?

HAMLET

Thank you for asking. Well, well, well.

OPHELIA

My lord, I have some mementos of yours that I've been
wanting to return to you for a while. Please take them back.

HAMLET

No, it wasn't me. I never gave you anything.

OPHELIA

My honorable lord, you know very well that you did. And
along with these gifts, you wrote letters with words so
sweet that they made the gifts seem even more valuable.
But now the joy they brought me is gone, so please take
them back. Beautiful gifts lose their value when the givers
turn out to be unkind. There, my lord.

HAMLET

Ha ha, are you pure?

OPHELIA

Excuse me?

HAMLET

Are you beautiful?

OPHELIA

What do you mean?

HAMLET

That if you're pure and beautiful, your purity should be
unconnected to your beauty.

OPHELIA

But, my lord, could beauty be related to anything better
than purity?

HAMLET

Yes, definitely, because the power of beauty is more likely
to change a good girl into a whore than the power of purity
is likely to 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

Yes, my lord, you made me believe you did.


HAMLET


You shouldn't have believed me. No matter how hard we try
to be virtuous, our natural sinfulness will always come out
in the end. I didn't love you.

OPHELIA

I fell for your trick, then.

HAMLET

Go to a [convent](#) . Why would you want to give birth to
sinners? I'm as good as the next man, and yet I could accuse
myself of such horrible crimes that it would've been better
if my mother had never given birth to me. I'm arrogant,
vengeful, ambitious, and have more criminal desires than I
have thoughts or imagination to fit them in--or time in
which to commit them. Why should people like me be
allowed to crawl between heaven and earth? We're all
absolute criminals. Don't believe any of us. Get yourself to
to a convent. Where's your father?

 In the original text, Hamlet uses
the word "nunnery," which could
mean both "convent" and, in
Elizabethan slang, "brothel."

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

O, help him, you sweet heavens!

HAMLET

145 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
150 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
155 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.

HAMLET exits.

OPHELIA

160 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,
165 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;
170 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,
175 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
180 Thus set it down: he shall with speed to England
For the demand of our neglected tribute.
Haply the seas and countries different
With variable objects shall expel
This something-settled matter in his heart,
185 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?
190 You need not tell us what Lord Hamlet said.
We heard it all. —My lord, do as you please.
But, if you hold it fit, after the play

OPHELIA

He's at home, my lord.

HAMLET

May he get locked in, so he can play the fool in his own home only. Goodbye.

OPHELIA

Oh, dear God, please help him!

HAMLET

If you marry, I'll give you this curse as your wedding present—even if you are as clean as ice, as pure as snow, you'll still get a bad reputation. Get yourself to a convent, now. Goodbye. Or if you must get married, marry a fool, because wise men know that women will eventually cheat on them. Goodbye.

OPHELIA

Dear God, make him sane again!

HAMLET

And I know all about you women and your make-up. God gives you one face, but you use make-up to give yourself another. You dance and sway as you walk, and talk in a cutesy way. You call God's creations by pet names, and claim you don't realize you're being seductive. No more. I won't allow it anymore. It has made me angry. I proclaim: we will have no more marriages. Of those who are married already—all but one person—will live on as couples. Everyone else will have to stay single. Go to a convent.

HAMLET exits.

OPHELIA

Oh, his great mind has been overcome by insanity! He had a courtier's persuasiveness, a soldier's courage, a scholar's wisdom. He was the perfect rose and great hope of our country--the model of good manners, the trendsetter, the center of attention. Now he's fallen so low! I am the most miserable of all the women who once enjoyed hearing his sweet words. A once noble and disciplined mind that sang sweetly is now harsh and out of tune. The unmatched beauty he had in the full bloom of his youth has been destroyed by madness. Oh, poor me, to have seen Hamlet as he was, and now to see him in this way!

CLAUDIUS and POLONIUS come forward.

CLAUDIUS

Love? His feelings don't move in that direction. And his words--although they were a bit all over the place--weren't crazy. No, his sadness is like a bird sitting on an egg. And I think that whatever hatches is going to be dangerous. To prevent that danger, I've made a quick decision: he'll be sent to England to try to get back the tribute money they owe to us. Hopefully the sea and all the new things to see in a different country will push out these thoughts that have somehow taken root in his mind, making him a stranger to his former self. What do you think?

POLONIUS

It should work. But I still think that the cause of his madness was unrequited love.

[To OPHELIA] Hello, Ophelia. You don't have to tell us what Lord Hamlet said. We heard it all.

Let his queen mother all alone entreat him
To show his grief. Let her be round with him,
195 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.
200 Madness in great ones must not unwatched go.

They all exit.

[To CLAUDIUS] My lord, do whatever you like. But, if you think it's a good idea, after the play let his mother the queen get him alone and beg him to share the source of his grief. She should be blunt with him. Meanwhile, if you think it's all right, I'll hide and listen to what they say. If she can't find the source of his madness, send him to England or confine him wherever you think best.

CLAUDIUS

That's what we'll do. Madness in important people must be closely watched.

They all exit.

Act 3, Scene 2

Shakespeare

HAMLET and the PLAYERS enter.

HAMLET

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue. But if you mouth it, as many of our players do, I had as lief the town crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with
5 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
10 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

15 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
20 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
25 tardy off, though it make the unskillful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve, the censure of the which one must 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
30 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

35 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
40

Shakescleare Translation

HAMLET and the PLAYERS enter.

HAMLET

Please repeat the speech just as I said it to you--smoothly and easily. If you exaggerate it in the way so many current actors do, I'd rather have the town crier say the lines. Don't make huge gestures with your hands, like this. Gesture just a bit--because to truly communicate a whirlwind of passion, you must present it in a way that's smooth and real. Oh, I absolutely hate it when I hear some overexcited actor in a wig shout his "passionate" lines--splitting the audience's eardrums in an effort to impress the unsophisticated
watchers standing just in front of the stage , who for the most part can only appreciate loud noises and pantomime shows. I would whip a guy for overdoing the part of a tyrant . That's worse than those old plays in which King Herod ranted. Please, don't do that.

FIRST PLAYER

I'll do as you ask.

HAMLET


Don't be too tame, either. Instead, let your judgment guide you. Fit the action to the word and the word to the action. And never overact in a way that seems unnatural. Exaggerated overacting is the opposite of what acting should be. The purpose of acting--both when it began and until now--is to hold a mirror up to nature, virtue, vice, and to the spirit of the times. If you overact or have bad timing, it may make the unknowledgeable laugh, but will make those who know theater grieve. And you should care more about a single knowledgeable theater-lover than an entire theater of the uninformed. I've seen actors perform who are highly praised by others, but who--not to be rude--can't perform a credible Christian, pagan, or even a man. They strut around and bellow like beasts that had been made by some apprentice to God--they imitate men, but extremely badly.


FIRST PLAYER

I hope we've removed that fault almost entirely from our acting company, sir.

HAMLET

Oh, get rid of it completely. And make sure that the clowns speak exactly the lines written for them--because some of them will laugh in order to to get some stupid spectators to

 In the original text, Hamlet refers to "groundlings"--members of the audience who would pay a penny for theatre admission, and have to stand on the ground of the theatre's pit to watch a play.

 In the original text, Hamlet refers to Termagant and Herod--both very dramatic tyrant roles in medieval plays.

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.

The PLAYERS exit.

POLONIUS, GUILDENSTERN, and ROSENCRANTZ enter.

HAMLET

45 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.

POLONIUS exits.

HAMLET

Will you two help to hasten them?

ROSENCRANTZ

50 Ay, my lord.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.

HAMLET

What ho, Horatio!

HORATIO enters.

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

55 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
60 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

65 And could of men distinguish, her election
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
70 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,

75 As I do thee. —Something that act afoot,
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,
80 Even with the very comment of thy soul
Observe mine uncle. If his occulted guilt
Do not itself unkennel in one speech,

laugh, while in the meantime an important part of the plot is then unfolding. That's villainous, and displays a pitiful ambition in the offending fool to get noticed at the expense of the play. Go, get ready.

The PLAYERS exit.

POLONIUS, GUILDENSTERN, and ROSENCRANTZ enter.

HAMLET

What's the news, my lord? Will the king come to see the performance?

POLONIUS

Yes, and the queen too, and soon.

HAMLET

Tell the actors to hurry.

POLONIUS exits.

HAMLET

Will you two help to speed the actors along?

ROSENCRANTZ

Yes, my lord.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.

HAMLET

Hello, Horatio!

HORATIO enters.

HORATIO

My dear lord, here I am at your service.


HAMLET


Horatio, you are as much what a man should be as any I have ever met.

HORATIO

Oh, my dear lord—

HAMLET

No, don't think I'm flattering you. What could I hope to get from you, who has nothing other than your good graces to support you? Why would anyone flatter a poor person? No, only flatter the rich, or bow to those who might respond to your fawning with money or favors. Do you understand me? Since I have the power and ability to distinguish between men, my soul has chosen you for a friend because you are—as one who endures everything, and therefore allows nothing to make you suffer—a man who accepts all the twists and turns of fate, positive or negative, with the same calm thankfulness. Blessed are those who have a perfect balance of passion and reason, because they cannot be simply played by Fate any which way she chooses. Show me a man who is not a slave to his emotions, and I will keep him close to my heart—yes, in my heart of hearts, as I do you. But I've said too much. A play will be performed tonight in front of the king. One of the scenes in it comes close to showing the circumstances I told you about regarding my father's death. During that scene, please watch my uncle with all of your care and attention. If his hidden guilt is not revealed during the scene, then that ghost was a demon—and my ideas about my uncle were dirty  and wrong. Watch him carefully, as will I. Afterwards, we'll meet and come to a joint conclusion about whether or not he is guilty.

 *Hamlet refers to Vulcan in the original text. In ancient Roman mythology, Vulcan was the god of fire, often depicted as a blacksmith.*

It is a damnèd ghost that we have seen,
 And my imaginations are as foul
 85 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.

HORATIO

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

A Danish march plays. Trumpets play. CLAUDIUS enters with 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

95 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

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

HAMLET

What did you enact?

POLONIUS

I did enact Julius Caesar. I was killed i' th' Capitol.
 Brutus killed me.

HAMLET

105 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

No, good mother. Here's metal more attractive. *[sits
 next to OPHELIA]*

POLONIUS

110 *[to CLAUDIUS]* Oh, ho, do you mark that?

HAMLET

Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

HORATIO

Very well, my lord. I'll watch him so closely that if he
 manages to steal anything and I don't notice it, I promise to
 pay the cost of the stolen item.

A Danish march plays. Trumpets play. CLAUDIUS enters with GERTRUDE, POLONIUS, OPHELIA, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN, and other attending lords with CLAUDIUS' guard carrying torches.

HAMLET


They're coming. I must look like I'm doing nothing. Find a
 seat.

CLAUDIUS

How do you fare, my nephew Hamlet?

HAMLET

Excellent! In fact, I eat the air--full as it is of promise--just as
 chameleons do. That's no way to feed a chicken.

 In the original text, Hamlet refers to a capon, a male chicken castrated in youth to result in tender meat.

CLAUDIUS

I don't know what you're saying, Hamlet. These words don't
 answer my question.

HAMLET

No, nor mine.

[To POLONIUS] My lord, you were in plays during college,
 right?

POLONIUS

That I was, my lord. And I was considered to be a good
 actor.

HAMLET


What role did you play?

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

That was brutish of him to kill so capital a man. Are the
 actors ready?

 Hamlet puns on the similarities between "capitol"--a site in ancient Rome--and "capital," meaning "excellent."

ROSENCRANTZ

Yes, my lord. They wait only for you to call them.

GERTRUDE

Come here, my dear Hamlet. Sit by me.

HAMLET


No thanks, my good mother. Here's something more
 attractive. *[He sits down near OPHELIA]*

POLONIUS

[To CLAUDIUS] Aha! Did you hear that?

HAMLET

My lady, should I lie in your lap?

 Here, Hamlet begins a series of bawdy phrases with sexual overtones.

OPHELIA

No, my lord.

HAMLET

I mean, my head upon your lap?

OPHELIA

Ay, my lord.

HAMLET

115 Do you think I meant country matters?

OPHELIA

I think nothing, my lord.

HAMLET

That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs.

OPHELIA

What is, my lord?

HAMLET

Nothing.

OPHELIA

120 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.

125

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."

130

Trumpets play. The pantomime begins. A king and queen enter and embrace each other lovingly. She kneels before him and makes a show of her devotion to him. He lifts her up and rests his head on her neck, then lies down on a bank of flowers. She sees he is asleep, and leaves. Soon another man enters, takes the crown off the sleeping king's head and kisses it, then pours poison in the king's ear, and exits. The queen returns and finds the king dead. She weeps passionately. The killer returns, along with three others, and pretends to grieve with the queen. The dead body is carried away. The killer woos the queen with gifts. For a while she is cold and unwilling, but eventually accepts his advances.

The PLAYERS exit.

OPHELIA

135 What means this, my lord?

OPHELIA

No, my lord.

HAMLET

I mean, put 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 nice thought to lie between a girl's legs.

OPHELIA

What is, my lord?

HAMLET

Nothing .

 "Nothing" was Elizabethan slang for genitalia.

OPHELIA

You're happy tonight, my lord.

HAMLET

Who, me?

OPHELIA

Yes, my lord.


HAMLET


Oh, God—the ultimate puppeteer. What else can a man do but be happy? For example, look how cheerful my mother is—and my father's been dead for just two hours.

OPHELIA

No, my lord, it's been four months.

HAMLET

That long? Well, then may the devil wear black mourning clothes, while I go about in a suit of fine fur. Heaven forbid! He's been dead for two months already and hasn't been forgotten yet? I guess there's hope that memories of a great man may outlive him by six months. But, by God , he must build churches for that to happen, or else he'll have to put up with being forgotten, like the hobby-horse in the popular song: "Hey-ho, hey-ho, the hobby-horse is forgotten."

 In the original text, Hamlet uses the oath "by 'r Lady," which is a literal invocation of the Virgin Mary.

Trumpets play. The pantomime begins. A king and queen enter and embrace each other lovingly. She kneels before him and makes a show of her devotion to him. He lifts her up and rests his head on her neck, then lies down on a bank of flowers. She sees he is asleep, and leaves. Soon another man enters, takes the crown off the sleeping king's head and kisses it, then pours poison in the king's ear, and exits.

The queen returns and finds the king dead. She weeps passionately. The killer returns, along with three others, and pretends to grieve with the queen. The dead body is carried away. The killer woos the queen with gifts. For a while she is cold and unwilling, but eventually accepts his advances.

The PLAYERS exit.

OPHELIA

What does this mean, my lord?

HAMLET

Marry, this is miching mallecho. It means mischief.

OPHELIA

Belike this show imports the argument of the play.

The actor who will introduce the play enters.

HAMLET

We shall know by this fellow. The players cannot keep counsel. They'll tell all.

OPHELIA

140 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

You are naught, you are naught. I'll mark the play.

PROLOGUE

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

The PROLOGUE exits.

HAMLET

Is this a prologue or the posy of a ring?

OPHELIA

'Tis brief, my lord.

HAMLET

150 As woman's love.

Actors playing the roles of KING and QUEEN enter.

PLAYER KING

Full thirty times hath Phoebus' cart gone round
Neptune's salt wash and Tellus' orbèd ground,
And thirty dozen moons with borrowed sheen
About the world have times twelve thirties been,
155 Since love our hearts and Hymen did our hands
Unite commutual in most sacred bands.

PLAYER QUEEN

So many journeys may the sun and moon
Make us again count o'er ere love be done.
But woe is me! You are so sick of late,
160 So far from cheer and from your former state,
That I distrust you. Yet though I distrust,
Discomfort you, my lord, it nothing must.
For women fear too much, even as they love,
And women's fear and love hold quantity,
165 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

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

HAMLET

This means we're having some mischievous fun.

OPHELIA

This pantomime most likely gives a sense of the plot of the play.

The PROLOGUE--an actor who will introduce the play-- enters.

HAMLET

We'll learn the truth from this fellow. Actors can't keep secrets. They'll tell all.

OPHELIA

Will he tell us what that pantomime meant?

HAMLET

Yes, or anything else you show him. If you're not ashamed to show it, he won't be ashamed to tell you what it means.

OPHELIA

You're just naughty, naughty. I'm watching the play.

PROLOGUE

Appealing to your forgiving nature, we beg you patiently to watch us perform our tragedy.

The PROLOGUE exits.

HAMLET

Was that a prologue or the inscription on a ring?

OPHELIA

It was short, my lord.

HAMLET

As short as a woman's love.

The PLAYER KING⁹ and PLAYER QUEEN enter.

PLAYER KING

The earth circled the sun thirty times; and the moon has waxed and waned over the ocean; and the earth for thirty times twelve months, since love joined our hearts and Hymen¹⁰ joined our hands in the sacred bonds of marriage.

PLAYER QUEEN

May we continue to love each other for another thirty years. But I am sad. You've been so sick recently--so different from your former cheerful self--that I worry about you. But though I worry, don't let it upset you, my lord. Women in love are always afraid. For women, love and fear go hand in hand--whether or not there is reason to worry. I've proven the quality of my love. And as my love is deep, so too is my fear. When someone's love is great, little worries become big. Little fears grown big are a sign of great love.

PLAYER KING

In truth, I will soon have to leave you, love. My body is growing weak, ceasing to function. I will leave you behind in

⁹ The Player King and Player Queen are actors playing the roles of the monarchs, not to be confused with King Claudius and Queen Gertrude.

¹⁰ Hymen was the ancient Greek god of marriage.

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

PLAYER QUEEN

175 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.

PLAYER QUEEN

180 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 KING

I do believe you think what now you speak,
185 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.
190 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
195 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
That even our loves should with our fortunes change.
200 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,
205 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
210 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.
215 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.
220 Both here and hence pursue me lasting strife
If, once a widow, ever I be wife!

HAMLET

If she should break it now!

PLAYER KING

'Tis deeply sworn. Sweet, leave me here awhile.
My spirits grow dull, and fain I would beguile
225 The tedious day with sleep.

The PLAYER KING sleeps.

PLAYER QUEEN

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

this beautiful world, my honorable beloved. Perhaps you'll
find another husband—

PLAYER QUEEN

Oh, curse everyone else! Loving another would be treason
in my heart. May I be cursed if I take a second husband.
Only a woman who killed her first husband would marry a
second.

HAMLET

[To himself] That's bitter!

PLAYER QUEEN

The reasons for a second marriage might be money, but
never love. When my second husband kissed me in bed, it
would be like killing my first husband again.

PLAYER KING

I believe that's what you think now. But what we swear we'll
do we often don't. Intentions are driven by memory. They
are strong at first, but fade over time—like an unripe apple
that sticks to the tree, but falls on its own to the ground
when ripe. It's necessary for us to forget to meet the
obligation we impose on ourselves. We forget to do what
we promise to do in moments of passion once that passion
fades. Grief or joy might spur us to action, but that call to
action fades along with the grief or joy. Grief becomes joy,
and joy turns to grief, based on little twists of fate. The
world won't last forever, so it's not odd that even love can
change as our fate changes. It remains an open question
whether love propels your fate, or your fate propels love.
When the great man falls, he is deserted. When a poor man
rises, enemies become friends. Love is similarly dependent
on fortune. A person with money will never lack friends,
while a friend who asks another for money will make that
friend an enemy. Back to the point on which I began: our
desires and our fates will never match. So our plans never
end up as we hope. What we want to happen, and what
happens, will never be the same. So you think you'll never
marry again, but those thoughts will die when I do.

PLAYER QUEEN

May the earth give me no food and the sky no light; may I
have no rest or leisure, day or night; may my trust and hope
turn to despair; may cheap prison food be all the comfort I
can hope for; may all the forces that turn joy to sadness
destroy all of my desires. For now and forever may I know
no peace if, after becoming a widow, I ever again become a
wife.

HAMLET

What if she breaks that vow?

PLAYER KING

You swear sincerely. Sweetheart, leave me alone a while.
I'm getting sleepy, and I would like to escape this tiresome
day by going to sleep.

The PLAYER KING falls asleep.

PLAYER QUEEN

May you sleep well, and may no twist of fate ever come
between us.

The *PLAYER QUEEN* exits.

HAMLET

Madam, how like you this play?

GERTRUDE

The lady protests too much, methinks.

HAMLET

230 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

235 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
240 galled jade wince, our withers are unwrung.

LUCIANUS enters.

HAMLET

This is one Lucianus, nephew to the king.

OPHELIA

You are as good as a chorus, my lord.

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

245 You are keen, my lord, you are keen.

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

Still better and worse.

HAMLET

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

LUCIANUS

Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit, and time
agreeing,
Confederate season, else no creature seeing,
255 Thou mixture rank, of midnight weeds collected,
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

260 He poisons him i' th' garden for 's estate. His name's
Gonzago. The story is extant, and writ in choice

The *PLAYER QUEEN* exits.

HAMLET

Madam, how do you like this play?

GERTRUDE

The lady's promising a bit much, I think.

HAMLET

Oh, but she'll keep her word.

CLAUDIUS

Do you know the plot? Is there anything offensive in it?

HAMLET

No, no, it's just pretend. Just a little joke. Not offensive at
all.

CLAUDIUS

What's the title of the play?

HAMLET

The Mousetrap. Indeed, why? It's a metaphor. This play re-
enacts a murder committed in Vienna. Gonzago is the
duke's name, and his wife is Baptista. You'll see soon. It's
really a mischievous piece of work, but who cares? You and
I have clear consciences, so it doesn't concern us. Let the
guilty flinch. We can watch without being bothered.

LUCIANUS enters.

HAMLET

This is Lucianus, the king's nephew.

OPHELIA

You're as good as a play-by-play announcer, my lord.

HAMLET

I could do a play-by-play between you and your lover, if you
put on a little puppet show for me.

OPHELIA

You are witty, my lord, and sharp.

HAMLET

You could take my edge off, but doing it might make you
moan.

OPHELIA


Your jokes get better, even as your manners get worse.


HAMLET

"For better, for worse"—that's the vow you take when you
take a husband.

[*To LUCIANUS*] Get moving, murderer! Curses, stop making
those stupid faces and begin. Come on, we're all waiting for
the revenge!

LUCIANUS

Evil thoughts, willing hands, the perfect poison, and the
opportunity to act. The darkness of the night protects me:
no one can see me. You foul mixture of deadly weeds, which
Hecate  has cursed and infected, use your deadly
properties to steal away health and life. [*He pours the
poison into the PLAYER KING's ears*]

 Hecate was the ancient Greek
goddess of darkness, often associated
with witchcraft.

HAMLET

He poisons the king in the garden to get the kingdom. The
king's name is Gonzago. The original story was written in

Italian. You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife.

CLAUDIUS stands up.

OPHELIA

The king rises.

HAMLET

What, frightened with false fire?

GERTRUDE

265 How fares my lord?

POLONIUS

Give o'er the play.

CLAUDIUS

Give me some light, away!

POLONIUS

Lights, lights, lights!

Everyone except HAMLET and HORATIO exits.

HAMLET

Why, let the stricken deer go weep,
270 The hart ungalld 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
275 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,
280 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
285 thousand pound. Didst perceive?

HORATIO

Very well, my lord.

HAMLET

Upon the talk of the poisoning?

HORATIO

I did very well note him.

HAMLET

Ah ha! Come, some music! Come, the recorders!
290 For if the king like not the comedy,
Why then, belike, he likes it not, perdy.
Come, some music!

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter.

Italian. You'll see shortly how the murderer wins the love of Gonzago's wife.

CLAUDIUS stands up.

OPHELIA

The king is standing up.

HAMLET

What—is he scared of a gun firing a blank?

GERTRUDE

My lord, how are you feeling?

POLONIUS

Stop the play.

CLAUDIUS

Turn on the lights. I'm leaving!

POLONIUS

Lights, lights, lights!

Everyone except HAMLET and HORATIO exits.

HAMLET

[Reciting like an actor] Let the deer that's been shot go weep alone, while the uninjured deer plays. For some must watch while others must sleep—that's the way of the world.

[To HORATIO] Don't you think that with my acting skill—if I wore some plumes of feathers and had decorative flowers on my shoes—I could get a job in a troupe of actors, if things went wrong in the rest of my life?

HORATIO

They'd probably give you half a share of the company.

HAMLET

A whole share for me. *[Reciting like an actor]* For you know, my dearest Damon, that this kingdom lost Its Jove-like king. And now who rules? A big, big--peacock.

HORATIO

You could have at least rhymed ¹².

¹² In the original text, Horatio jibes with Hamlet, implying that the appropriate rhyme for "was" would be "ass" (instead of "pajock").

HAMLET

Oh, Horatio. I'd wager a thousand dollars the ghost spoke the truth. Did you see?

HORATIO

Very well, my lord.

HAMLET

When the actors mentioned the poison?

HORATIO

I watched him closely.

HAMLET

Aha! Hey, some music please! Play your flutes! For if the king does not like the play, then, that's it--he does not like it, I say. Come on now, music!

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter.

GUILDENSTERN

Good my lord, vouchsafe me a word with you.

HAMLET

Sir, a whole history.

GUILDENSTERN

295 The king, sir—

HAMLET

Ay, sir, what of him?

GUILDENSTERN

Is in his retirement marvelous distempered.

HAMLET

With drink, sir?

GUILDENSTERN

No, my lord, with choler.

HAMLET

300 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.

HAMLET

305 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

310 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

315 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

320 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

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

GUILDENSTERN

My lord, might I have a word with you?

HAMLET

You can have a whole story.

GUILDENSTERN

The king, sir—

HAMLET

Yes, what about him?

GUILDENSTERN

He's in his chambers now, and very upset.

HAMLET

He has an upset stomach from drinking too much?

GUILDENSTERN

No, my lord, he's angry.

HAMLET

You'd be a lot smarter if you told this to a doctor. If I were to treat him, he would only end up angrier.

GUILDENSTERN

My lord, please try to make sense and not to veer on such wild tangents from the point of my question.

HAMLET

I'll behave, sir. Speak.

GUILDENSTERN

The queen your mother, who is extremely unhappy, has sent me to you.

HAMLET

You are very welcome here.

GUILDENSTERN

No, my lord, your polite words don't make any sense in this situation. If you'd be so kind as to give me a real answer, I'll carry out your mother's request. If not, I'll say goodbye and that'll be the end of my business.

HAMLET

Sir, I can't.

GUILDENSTERN

Can't what, my lord?

HAMLET

Give you a real answer. My mind is not right. But I'll try to give the best answer I can to you—or rather, to my mother. Therefore, let's get to the point. My mother, you say--

ROSENCRANTZ

She says that your behavior has shocked astonished her.

HAMLET

Oh, what a wonderful son I am to be able to impress my mother! But what are the details of my mother's admiration? Explain.

ROSENCRANTZ

She wants to speak with you in her bedroom before you go to bed.

HAMLET

We shall obey, were she ten times our mother. Have you any further trade with us?

ROSENCRANTZ

My lord, you once did love me.

HAMLET

330 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

Sir, I lack advancement.

ROSENCRANTZ

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

The PLAYERS enter with recorders.

HAMLET

Ay, sir, but "While the grass grows—" The proverb is something musty—Oh, the recorders! Let me see one.

340 *[takes a recorder] [aside to ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN]* To withdraw with you, why do you go about to recover the wind of me as if you would drive me into a toil?

GUILDENSTERN

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

HAMLET

345 I do not well understand that. Will you play upon this pipe?

GUILDENSTERN

My lord, I cannot.

HAMLET

I pray you.

GUILDENSTERN

Believe me, I cannot.

HAMLET

350 I do beseech you.

GUILDENSTERN

I know no touch of it, my lord.

HAMLET

355 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

360 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

HAMLET

I will obey, as if she were ten times my mother. Have you any other business with me?

ROSENCRANTZ

My lord, you once liked me.

HAMLET

And I still do, I swear by my hands.

ROSENCRANTZ

My lord, what's the cause of your anger? You're locking yourself into a prison by refusing to reveal your problems to your friends.

HAMLET

Sir, I have no future prospects.

ROSENCRANTZ

How can that be, when the king himself has proclaimed you the heir to the Danish throne?

The PLAYERS enter with recorders.

HAMLET

Yes, but as the proverb goes, "While the grass grows..." Though that is an old, stale proverb. Oh, the recorders! Let me see one. *[He takes a recorder]*

[To ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN so that only they can hear] Step back. Why are you moving around me, as if to ambush me into a trap?

GUILDENSTERN

Oh, my lord, if I'm being too bold, it's only because I care about you too much to show good manners.

HAMLET

I don't understand you. Will you play this recorder?

GUILDENSTERN

My lord, I can't.

HAMLET

Please.

GUILDENSTERN

Believe me, I can't.

HAMLET

I beg you.

GUILDENSTERN

I don't know how, my lord.

HAMLET

It's as easy as lying. Cover these holes with your fingers and thumb and blow into it, and it will produce the most beautiful music. See, here are the holes.

GUILDENSTERN

But I can't play any kind of song or melody. I don't have the skill.

HAMLET

Well, look at that, how you treat me like such a fool. You keep trying to play me--as if you knew exactly where to put your fingers--to tease out my mystery--playing the full scale of all my notes. There is so much music in this little instrument, and yet you can't make it speak? By God, do

365 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.

POLONIUS enters.

HAMLET

God bless you, sir.

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

Methinks it is like a weasel.

POLONIUS

It is backed like a weasel.

HAMLET

Or like a whale.

POLONIUS

375 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.

POLONIUS exits.

HAMLET

380 Leave me, friends.

Everyone except HAMLET exits.

HAMLET

‘Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world. Now could I drink hot blood
And do such bitter business as the bitter day
385 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.
390 My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites.
How in my words somever she be shent,
To give them seals never, my soul, consent!

HAMLET exits.

you think I’m easier to play than a recorder? Call me
whatever instrument you want—even though you try to
push my buttons, you can’t play me.

POLONIUS enters.

HAMLET

God bless you, sir.

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

Do you see the cloud over there that looks almost like a
camel?

POLONIUS

By God, it does look like a camel.

HAMLET

To me it looks like a weasel.

POLONIUS

Its back is like a weasel’s.

HAMLET

Or like a whale.

POLONIUS

Very much like a whale.

HAMLET

I’ll come to see my mother soon.

[To himself] They’re trying to play me as a fool, and now I’m
almost to my breaking point

[To POLONIUS] I’ll come soon.

POLONIUS

I’ll tell her that.

HAMLET

It’s easy enough to say “soon.”

POLONIUS exits.

HAMLET

Leave me alone, my friends.

Everyone except HAMLET exits.

HAMLET

It’s now the time of night when witches roam, when
graveyards open and the stench of hell breathes sickness
into the world. Now I could drink hot blood and do things
so terrible it would make people tremble the next day. But
wait, I must now go to see my mother. Oh, my heart, do not
lose your humanity, don’t let yourself become like Nero ¹³.
Let me be cruel, but not inhuman. I’ll speak to her as
sharply as a dagger, but not use a dagger. Though my words
will condemn her to hell, my soul must never make that
condemnation into reality by letting me kill her.

HAMLET exits.

¹³ Nero was a debauched Roman emperor who ordered his mother’s execution.

Act 3, Scene 3

Shakespeare

CLAUDIUS, ROSENCRANTZ, and GUILDENSTERN enter.

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.
5 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
10 To keep those many, many bodies safe
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
15 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,
20 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

25 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.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.

POLONIUS enters.

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—
Since nature makes them partial—should o'erhear
35 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.

POLONIUS exits.

CLAUDIUS

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

Shakescleare Translation

CLAUDIUS, ROSENCRANTZ, and GUILDENSTERN enter.

CLAUDIUS

I don't like it. It's not safe to let his madness rage all over the place, so get ready. I'm sending you to England on a diplomatic mission, and Hamlet will go with you. My duty as a king does not allow me to let such a dangerous man as Hamlet to run loose, especially as he's getting crazier each hour.

GUILDENSTERN

We'll get ourselves ready. It's a sacred duty to protect all of those people whose lives depend on you, your Majesty.

ROSENCRANTZ

Each person tries to avoid injury, with the full effort of his or her mind. But it is even more important to protect that person upon whose health the entire nation depends. A king does not die alone. Instead, like a whirlpool, he sucks down all that is near. A king is like a huge wheel on the top of the highest mountain, with a thousand smaller things attached to its spokes. When that wheel rolls down the mountain, everything attached goes down with it, spinning wildly into ruin. A king never sighs alone; everyone else always groans with him.

CLAUDIUS

Please, prepare yourselves for this trip. We'll put chains on this danger that's now running free.

ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN

We will hurry.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.

POLONIUS enters.

POLONIUS


My lord, Hamlet's going to his mother's room. I'll hide behind the tapestry to listen in. I bet she'll let him have it. And as you said (and you said it wisely), it's good to have someone other than a mother listening to what he says—since, as a mother, she naturally loves him. Goodbye, my lord. I'll come to see you before you go to bed, and tell you what I've learned.


CLAUDIUS

Thanks, my dear lord.

POLONIUS exits.

CLAUDIUS

Oh, my crime is foul. It stinks all the way to heaven. It is the oldest  and worst, of all crimes: a brother's murder. I can't pray. Though I badly want to pray, my guilt is stronger than my hope to pray. And—like a person with two things he has to do at the same time—I stand paralyzed, unsure which to start first, and thus neglect them both. Even if this cursed

 Here, Claudius refers to Cain murdering Abel in the biblical Book of Genesis.

I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
 And both neglect. What if this cursèd hand
 Were thicker than itself with brother's blood?
 Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
 To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy
 50 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 pardonèd being down? Then I'll look up.
 My fault is past. But oh, what form of prayer
 55 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 pardonèd and retain th' offence?
 60 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
 65 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?
 70 O wretched state! O bosom black as 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.
 75 All may be well.
[kneels]

HAMLET enters.

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.
 80 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,
 85 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
 90 When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?
 No!
 Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent.
 When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
 Or in th' incestuous pleasure of his bed,
 95 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
 100 This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.

HAMLET exits.

CLAUDIUS

[rises] My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.
 Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

CLAUDIUS exits.

hand of mine is covered with my brother's blood, isn't there enough rain in sweet heaven to wash it white as snow? What's the purpose of God's mercy if not to forgive the sinner? And doesn't prayer have these two powers: to stop us from sinning before we do, and to offer forgiveness when we've sinned? So I'll pray. My sin is in the past. But, oh, what prayer can possibly give me what I want: "Forgive me for my awful murder?" That won't work, since I still have all the things I gained by committing the murder: my crown--the object of my ambition--and my queen. Is it possible to be forgiven and keep what you got from the crime? In this corrupt world, criminals can use the wealth they get from their crime to shove justice aside by bribing officers of the law. But that's not how it is heaven. You can't hide from the law up there. There, every action is judged strictly on its merits, and everyone must confront their sins face-to-face. What then? What remains for me to do? Repent as best I can. That can't hurt. But it can't help much either, since I can't really repent. Oh, what a wretched situation! Oh, my heart is as black as death. My soul is trapped in sin, and the more it struggles to be free, the more trapped it gets. Help me, angels! Make an effort. Now bend, my stubborn knees, and may my hard heart become soft as the muscle of a newborn baby. Perhaps all will be well. *[He kneels]*

HAMLET enters.

HAMLET

Now I could do it. Now as he's praying. And now I'll do it. *[He draws his sword]* And so he'll go to heaven, and I'll have my revenge. Wait, that needs more thought. A villain kills my father, and, in revenge, I--my father's only son--send this same villain to heaven. Send him to heaven--oh, that's doing him a service, not getting revenge. He killed my father before my father could pray and spiritually prepare himself, so that my father's sins were in full bloom. Only God knows how many sins my father has standing against him. But as far as I can tell, it doesn't look good for him. So do I get revenge if I kill Claudius while he's praying and confessing his sins, so that he's all set to go right up to heaven? No! Go away, sword, and wait for a more horrid moment to kill him. *[He sheathes his sword]* When he's drunk and asleep, or partying, or having incestuous sex, or swearing and gambling, or doing some other thing that has no trace of heaven in it--then I'll kill him, so that his heels kick up toward heaven while his damned, black soul falls straight down to hell. My mother's waiting. Claudius, this attempt to cure yourself through prayer is only going to prolong your sickly life a little longer.

HAMLET exits.

CLAUDIUS

[Standing up] My words fly up to the sky, but my thoughts remain down here. Words without thoughts will never get to heaven.

CLAUDIUS exits.

Act 3, Scene 4

Shakespeare

GERTRUDE and POLONIUS enter.

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.
5 Pray you, be round with him.

HAMLET

[within] Mother, mother, mother!

GERTRUDE

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

POLONIUS hides behind the tapestry.

HAMLET enters.

HAMLET

Now mother, what's the matter?

GERTRUDE

10 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

15 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

20 Nay, then I'll set those to you that can speak.

HAMLET

Come, come, and sit you down. You shall not budge.
You go not till I set you up a glass
Where you may see the inmost part of you.

GERTRUDE

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

POLONIUS

[from behind the arras] What, ho? Help, help, help!

Shakescleare Translation

GERTRUDE and POLONIUS enter.

POLONIUS

He'll be here right away. Be sure to really yell at him. Tell him his pranks have been too big to ignore, and that you have protected him from feeling the full heat of their consequences. I'll be silent, right here. Please, be tough with him.

HAMLET

[Offstage] Mother, mother, mother!

GERTRUDE

I'll do as you say. Don't worry. Hide, I hear him coming.

POLONIUS hides behind the tapestry.

HAMLET enters.

HAMLET

Now, mother, what's the matter?

GERTRUDE

Hamlet, you have insulted your father.

HAMLET

Mother, *you* have insulted my father.

GERTRUDE

Come now, your answer is foolish.

HAMLET

Go on, your question is wicked.

GERTRUDE

Hamlet, what, why?

HAMLET

What's the matter now?

GERTRUDE

Have you forgotten who I am?

HAMLET

By the Holy Cross, no. You are the queen, your husband's brother's wife, and—though I wish it wasn't so—you are my mother.

GERTRUDE

Well then, I'll go get someone who will speak and make you listen.

HAMLET

Come now, sit down. Don't budge. You will not leave until I hold a mirror up to you, so that you can see the inner most part of yourself.

GERTRUDE

What are you going to do? Would you murder me? Help, help, hey!

POLONIUS

[From behind the tapestry] Hey! Help, help, help!

HAMLET

How now, a rat? Dead for a ducat, dead!

HAMLET stabs his sword through the tapestry and kills POLONIUS

POLONIUS

[from behind the arras] Oh, I am slain.

GERTRUDE

O me, what hast thou done?

HAMLET

30 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

35 Ay, lady, 'twas my word.

HAMLET pulls back the tapestry and discovers POLONIUS

HAMLET

Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell.
I took thee for thy better. Take thy fortune.
Thou find'st to be too busy is some danger.
[to GERTRUDE]

40 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 damnèd custom have not brass'd it so
That it is proof and bulwark against sense.

GERTRUDE

45 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
50 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
55 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
60 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,
65 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
70

HAMLET

What's this, a rat? I'll bet a gold coin that he's dead now.

HAMLET stabs his sword through the tapestry and kills POLONIUS.

POLONIUS

[From behind the tapestry] Oh, I've been killed!

GERTRUDE

Oh my God, what have you done?

HAMLET

I don't know. Is it the king?

GERTRUDE

Oh, what a reckless, bloody act!

HAMLET

A bloody act? Almost as bad, my good mother, as killing a
king and marrying his brother.

GERTRUDE

Killing a king?

HAMLET

Yes, lady, that's what I said.

HAMLET pulls back the tapestry and discovers POLONIUS.

HAMLET

You sad, silly, interfering fool, goodbye. I mistook you for
your superior. You've gotten what you deserve, and found
that meddling can be dangerous.

[To GERTRUDE] Stop wringing your hands. Quiet. Sit down
and let me wring your heart--if it's still soft enough, and
your evil behavior hasn't made it too tough to be touched
by feelings.

GERTRUDE

What have I done that you dare to talk to me so rudely?


HAMLET


Something that corrupts modesty, turns virtue into
hypocrisy, removes the blossom from the face of true love
and replaces it with a blister, makes marriage vows as false
as a gambler's oath—oh, you've done such a thing that
plucks the soul out of marriage, and turns religion into just
a bunch of words. Heaven looks down on earth, its face
glowing with anger as if it were Judgment Day now, and is
sick because of what you've done.

GERTRUDE

Oh no, what have I done that sounds so terrible--even
though I don't yet know what it is?

HAMLET

Look at this picture here and at that one there, the painted
portraits of two brothers. See the saintly goodness in this
face? He has curls like those of Hyperion , a forehead like
that of Jove, eyes that command like those of Mars, and a
stance as light as Mercury's when that god lands on the
peak of a hill. He was such a combination of good qualities
that it seemed like he was put together by all the gods to be
the perfect man. That was your husband. Now look at what
came after: this is your husband, like a rotten ear of corn

 *Hamlet begins a series of references to figures from classical mythology: Hyperion, the sun god; Jove, the king of the gods; Mars, the god of war; and Mercury, the messenger god with winged sandals.*

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
 75 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,
 And waits upon the judgment. And what judgment
 Would step from this to this? Sense sure you have,
 80 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 thrall'd,
 But it reserved some quantity of choice
 To serve in such a difference. What devil was 't
 85 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?
 90 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,
 95 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 grain'd spots
 100 As will not leave their tinct.

HAMLET

Nay, but to live
 In the rank sweat of an enseam'd bed,
 Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love
 Over the nasty sty—

GERTRUDE

105 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
 110 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

115 A king of shreds and patches—

The GHOST enters.

HAMLET

Save me and hover o'er me with your wings,
 You heavenly guards!—What would your gracious figure?

GERTRUDE

Alas, he's mad!

HAMLET

120 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?

infecting the one next to it. Do you have eyes? How could you leave the beautiful heights of this man and descend down to this dank swamp of this one? Ha! Do you have eyes? You can't say it was love—because at your age romantic passions have been tamed with humility and reason. But there must be something wrong with your reason, because why else would you go from this to that? Your senses must still work, or else you wouldn't be able to move. But those senses seem paralyzed, because madness would not make this mistake. And even senses overcome by desire would still be able to distinguish the huge difference between your former and current husband. What devil was it that tricked and blindfolded you? Even if you had eyes without feeling, feeling without sight, ears without hands or eyes, smell without any other senses, or the use of just one impaired sense, you would not make a mistake like this. Oh, for shame, why aren't you blushing? If a rebellion can rage even in a mother's bones, then in the fire of youth all virtue must burn away. There's no longer any shame in acting on impulse when old people burn to act on impulse, and reason acts as a servant to desire.

GERTRUDE

Oh, Hamlet, no more! You're forcing me to look into my very soul, where the marks of sin are so black they'll never be cleaned away.

HAMLET

Yes, and how could you lie in the rank sweat of your dirty sheets, wet with corruption, making love in this gross pigpen—

GERTRUDE

Oh, please, stop speaking to me! Your words are like daggers stabbing my ears. No more, sweet Hamlet.

HAMLET

A murderer and a villain; a scoundrel who's not worth even a twentieth of ten percent of your previous husband; an awful king; a thief of the throne and the kingdom, who stole the precious crown from a shelf and put it in his pocket—

GERTRUDE

No more!

HAMLET

A patched-up king—

The GHOST enters.

HAMLET

Heavenly angels, protect me with your wings!

[To the GHOST] What do you want me to do, my gracious lord?

GERTRUDE

Oh no! He's crazy!

HAMLET

Have you come to scold your tardy son for delaying and losing his passion, and failing to carry out your deadly command? Tell me!

O, say!

GHOST

Do not forget. This visitation
Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose.
125 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

130 Alas, how is 't with you,
That you do bend your eye on vacancy
And with th' incorporal air do hold discourse?
Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep,
And, as the sleeping soldiers in th' alarm,
135 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!
140 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
145 Will want true color—tears perchance for blood.

GERTRUDE

To whom do you speak this?

HAMLET

Do you see nothing there?

GERTRUDE

Nothing at all, yet all that I see.

HAMLET

Nor did you nothing hear?

GERTRUDE

150 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!

The GHOST exits.

GERTRUDE

This the very coinage of your brain.
155 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
160 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
That not your trespass but my madness speaks.
165 It will but skin and film the ulcerous place
Whilst rank corruption, mining all within,
Infects unseen. Confess yourself to heaven.
Repent what's past. Avoid what is to come.

GHOST

Don't forget. I've come to sharpen your almost dulled sense of revenge. But look, your mother is astonished. Oh, protect her from her struggling soul. The imagination works strongest in those with the weakest bodies. Speak to her, Hamlet.

HAMLET

How are you doing, madam?

GERTRUDE

Oh, how are *you* doing, since you stare into empty space and talk to the air? The wildness of your thoughts is visible in your eyes, and your hair is standing upright. Oh, my noble son, sprinkle some cooling patience on the hot fury of your anger! What are you staring at?

HAMLET

At him, at him! Look how pale he is and how he glares at me. With the way he looks and the power of his cause, he could preach to stones and get them to act.

[To the GHOST] Don't look at me like that, unless you want to break down my strength. Then you'll end up with the wrong color liquid—tears instead of blood.

GERTRUDE

Who are you talking to?

HAMLET

You don't see anything there?

GERTRUDE

Nothing at all, other than what's there.

HAMLET

And you don't hear anything?

GERTRUDE

No, nothing but us.

HAMLET

See, look there! Look how it sneaks away! My father, dressed just as he was when he was alive! Look, now he's going out the door!

The GHOST exits.

GERTRUDE

This is all in your mind. Madness is good at creating hallucinations.

HAMLET

Madness? My heart beats just as evenly, and is in the same good health, as yours. I've said nothing crazy. Ask me to, and I'll rephrase what I've said, which a crazy person wouldn't be able to do. Mother, for the love of God, don't soothe your soul by saying that the problem is my madness and not your crime. That would just be putting a bandage on the open sore of your crime, and failing to see how its bad effects are spreading like an infection inside of you. Confess your sins to heaven. Repent what you've done, and avoid damnation. Refusing to repent would be like spreading manure over the weeds, making them even dirtier. Forgive me for having the virtue to speak to you

And do not spread the compost on the weeds
 170 To make them ranker. Forgive me this my virtue,
 For in the fatness of these pury 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

175 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,
 180 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
 185 To the next abstinence, the next more easy.
 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,
 And when you are desirous to be blessed,
 190 I'll blessing beg of you. [*points to POLONIUS*]
 For this same lord,
 I do repent. But heaven hath pleased it so,
 To punish me with this and this with me,
 That I must be their scourge and minister.
 195 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

200 What shall I do?

HAMLET

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
 205 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,
 210 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,
 215 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

220 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,
 225 They bear the mandate. They must sweep my way
 And marshal me to knavery. Let it work,

honestly, but in the grossness of these spoiled times, the
 virtuous must be willing to intervene with sinners, and beg
 them for the chance to help them.

GERTRUDE

Oh, Hamlet, you've broken my heart in two!

HAMLET

Oh, then throw away the worse part, and live a purer life
 with the other half. Good night—but don't sleep with my
 uncle tonight. Pretend to be virtuous, even if you're not.
 Habit can be a devil or an angel: it can get you used to
 doing either good or evil without thinking about it. Refrain
 from sleeping with Claudius tonight, and that will make it
 easier to say no the next time, and even easier each time
 after that. How you act can change your nature, and either
 keep the devil inside or kick him out. Once more, good
 night, and when you want me to bless you for following this
 advice, I'll beg you to forgive me for being so harsh. [*He*
points to POLONIUS] I apologize for what happened to this
 lord. But God decided to punish me by making me commit
 this murder—and to punish this man by having me kill him--
 so that I'm both Heaven's judge and executioner. I will deal
 with the body, and suffer the consequences of the death I
 gave him. So, again, good night. I have been cruel only in
 order to perform a greater act of kindness. This is bad, and
 there are even worse things to come. One more thing,
 madam.

GERTRUDE

What should I do?

HAMLET

By no means should you do this: let the bloated king seduce
 you into bed, pinch your cheek, call you his pet, or with
 smelly kisses and caresses of your neck with his damned
 fingers get you to reveal that I am not crazy, but am just
 pretending to be. What a good thing it would be if you told
 him that, because why would a queen who's fair, sober, and
 wise hide such important things from a toad, a pig, a tom-
 cat like him? Who would do such a thing? No, forget about
 good sense and secrecy, and open the door of the cage and
 let the birds fly out, and--like that ape in the famous story
 who tried to imitate birds and try to fly--break your neck in
 the process.

GERTRUDE

Trust me: as words are made of breath, and breath is a
 necessity of life, I will give up my life rather than breathe a
 word of what you've said to me.

HAMLET

I must go to England, did you know that?

GERTRUDE

Oh no, I'd forgotten. It's been decided.

HAMLET

The documents are signed and sealed, and my two
 schoolmates--whom I'll trust like I would a poisonous
 snake--are the messengers. They're the ones who'll lead me
 on to whatever trickery I'm going to face. Let it come,

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 mines,
230 And blow them at the moon. Oh, 'tis most sweet
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.
235 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.

They exit, HAMLET dragging POLONIUS.

because it's fun to fix things so the engineer gets blow up by
his own bombs. It's going to be tough on them. I'm going to
dig down below their bombs and blow them up to the
moon. Oh, it's sweet when you can kill two birds with one
stone. *[He points to POLONIUS]* Killing this man is going to
make me have to leave even sooner. I'll drag his guts into
the next room. Mother, good night. This adviser—who was in
life a foolish, moralizing liar—is now so quiet, secretive, and
serious.

[To POLONIUS' corpse] Come on, sir, let me drag you
toward your end.

[To GERTRUDE] Good night, mother.

They exit, with HAMLET dragging POLONIUS' body.

Act 4, Scene 1

Shakespeare

*CLAUDIUS and GERTRUDE enter 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

5 *[to ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN]*
Bestow this place on us a little while.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.

GERTRUDE

Ah, my good lord, what have I seen tonight!

CLAUDIUS

What, Gertrude? How does Hamlet?

GERTRUDE

10 Mad as the sea and wind when both contend
Which is the mightier. In his lawless fit,
Behind the arras hearing something stir,
Whips out his rapier, cries, "A rat, a rat!"
And in this brainish apprehension kills
The unseen good old man.

CLAUDIUS

15 O heavy deed!
It had been so with us, had we been there.
His liberty is full of threats to all—
To you yourself, to us, to everyone.
Alas, how shall this bloody deed be answered?
20 It will be laid to us, whose providence
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,
But, like the owner of a foul disease,
25 To keep it from divulging, let it feed
Even on the pith of life. Where is he gone?

GERTRUDE

To draw apart the body he hath killed,
O'er whom his very madness, like some ore
Among a mineral of metals base,
30 Shows itself pure. He weeps for what is done.

Shakescleare Translation

*CLAUDIUS and GERTRUDE enter with ROSENCRANTZ and
GUILDENSTERN.*

CLAUDIUS

[To GERTRUDE] Your deep, heavy sighs mean something.
You must tell me what they mean. It's important that I
know. Where's your son?

GERTRUDE

[To ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN] Please leave us for
a while.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.

GERTRUDE

Ah, my good lord, you wouldn't believe what I've seen
tonight!

CLAUDIUS

What, Gertrude? How is Hamlet?

GERTRUDE

As mad as the waves and the wind when they struggle
against each other in a storm. In an insane rage, he hears
something stir behind the tapestry, whips out his sword,
and shouts "A rat, a rat!" And with this crazy idea, he kills
the good old man, who was hidden there.

CLAUDIUS

Oh, what a terrible crime! It would've happened to me if I'd
been there. His freedom is a threat to all of us—to you, to
me, to everyone. How should we react to this violent deed?
I'll be blamed for not controlling or restraining this crazy
young man. But I loved him so much that I avoided doing
the right thing. Now, I'm like a man who hides the fact that
he is suffering from a foul disease, and in doing so, lets it kill
him. Where has Hamlet gone?

GERTRUDE

To remove the body of the man he killed. His madness does
not stop a sliver of his former self from shining through, like
a bit of gold in an otherwise worthless rock. He weeps for
what he has done.

CLAUDIUS

O Gertrude, come away!
 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,
 35 Both countenance and excuse. —Ho, Guildenstern!

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter.

CLAUDIUS

Friends both, go join you with some further aid.
 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
 40 Into the chapel. I pray you, haste in this.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.

CLAUDIUS

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—
 Whose whisper o'er the world's diameter,
 45 As level as the cannon to his blank,
 Transports the poisoned shot—may miss our name
 And hit the woundless air. Oh, come away!
 My soul is full of discord and dismay.

They exit.

CLAUDIUS

Oh, Gertrude, let's go. By the time the sun rises, lighting up
 those distant mountains, we'll have him on a ship to
 England. It'll take all my power and skill to explain and
 excuse what Hamlet has done.

[To GUILDENSTERN] Hey, Guildenstern!

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter.

CLAUDIUS

My friends, go find others to help you. In his insanity,
 Hamlet has killed Polonius and dragged him out of his
 mother's bedroom. Go find him and speak nicely to him,
 and bring the body into the chapel. I beg you, hurry in this.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.

CLAUDIUS

Come, Gertrude. We'll confer with our wisest friends and
 tell them what we're going to do—and what Hamlet has
 already done. Let's hope slander—like a cannonball that
 can shoot across half the world and still hit its
 target—misses us. Oh, we must go. I'm full of confusion and
 sadness.

They exit.

Act 4, Scene 2

Shakespeare

HAMLET enters.

HAMLET

Safely stowed.

GENTLEMEN

[from within] Hamlet! Lord Hamlet!

HAMLET

But soft, what noise? Who calls on Hamlet?
 Oh, here they come.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter with others.

ROSENCRANTZ

5 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

10 Believe what?

Shakescleare Translation

HAMLET enters.

HAMLET

Safely hidden.

GENTLEMEN

[Offstage] Hamlet, Lord Hamlet!

HAMLET

But wait, what's that noise? Who's calling for Hamlet? Oh,
 here they come.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter with others.

ROSENCRANTZ

What have you done with the dead body, my lord?

HAMLET

Gotten it dirty—ashes to ashes, and dust to dust.

ROSENCRANTZ

Tell us where it is, so we can take it to the chapel.

HAMLET

Don't believe it.

ROSENCRANTZ

Believe what?

HAMLET

That I can keep your counsel and not mine 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

15 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
20 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

25 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

30 Of nothing. Bring me to him. Hide, fox, and all after.

They exit.

HAMLET

That I'd take your advice and then keep my own secret. Besides, to be questioned by a sponge! How should the son of a king respond to a sponge?

ROSENCRANTZ

You think that 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, moving them around from one side of his mouth to the other. When he needs to know what you have learned, he can just squeeze you like a sponge, and then you'll be dry again.

ROSENCRANTZ

I don't understand you, my lord.

HAMLET

I'm glad about that. Mischievous words will never get a response from a fool, because the fool won't understand them.

ROSENCRANTZ

My lord, you must tell us where the body is, and then go with us to the king.

HAMLET

The body's with the real king, but the current king's not with the body. The king's a thing--

GUILDENSTERN

A "thing," my lord?

HAMLET

Of no importance. Take me to him. Actually, try and catch me!

They all exit.

Act 4, Scene 3

Shakespeare

CLAUDIUS enters with 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,

5 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
10 By desperate appliance are relieved,
Or not at all.

ROSENCRANTZ enters.

CLAUDIUS

How now, what hath befall'n?

ROSENCRANTZ

Where the dead body is bestowed, my lord,

Shakescleare Translation

CLAUDIUS enters with two or three attendants.

CLAUDIUS

I've sent men to find Hamlet and the body. How dangerous it is to have this madman on the loose! But we can't just use the strong arm of the law on him. He's loved by the masses, who base their feelings on appearances instead of using good judgment. They'll focus on the punishment, not the crime. So, sending him away suddenly must seem like it was long-planned and carefully considered move. Curing a fatal disease requires immediate treatment, or you won't cure it at all.

ROSENCRANTZ enters.

CLAUDIUS

What's going on? What's happened?

ROSENCRANTZ

We can't get him to tell us where he put the body.

We cannot get from him.

CLAUDIUS

15 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.

GUILDENSTERN enters with HAMLET.

CLAUDIUS

Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius?

HAMLET

20 At supper.

CLAUDIUS

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

30 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

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

35 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.

Some attendants exit.

HAMLET

40 He will stay till ye come.

CLAUDIUS

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.

45 The bark is ready and the wind at help, Th' associates tend, and everything is bent

CLAUDIUS

But where is he?

ROSENCRANTZ

Outside, my lord, and under guard, as we wait to hear what you want us to do.

CLAUDIUS

Bring him to me.

ROSENCRANTZ

Hey, Guildenstern! Bring in my lord.

GUILDENSTERN enters with HAMLET.

CLAUDIUS

Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius?

HAMLET

At dinner.

CLAUDIUS

At dinner where?

HAMLET

Not where he's eating, but where he's being eaten. A certain gathering of worms are working on him right now. Worms are the kings of all eating. We fatten up all creatures to feed ourselves--and we fatten ourselves to eventually feed the worms. A fat king and a skinny beggar are just different dishes at the same meal. And that's that.

CLAUDIUS

Oh no, oh no!

HAMLET

A man can fish with a worm that ate a king, and then eat the fish he catches with that worm.

CLAUDIUS

What do you mean by that?

HAMLET

Nothing, except to make it clear that a king can move through the guts of a beggar.

CLAUDIUS

Where is Polonius?

HAMLET

In heaven. Send a messenger there if you want to be sure. If your messenger can't find him, you can check for him in hell yourself. Now, if you don't find him within the next month, you'll smell him as you go upstairs into the main hall.

CLAUDIUS

[To attendants] Go look for him there.

Some attendants exit.

HAMLET

No need to hurry--he'll wait for you.

CLAUDIUS

Hamlet, I care about your safety as much as I grieve over what you've done. Therefore I must send you away at once. Prepare yourself. The ship is ready, and the wind is favorable. Your servants wait for you—everything is set for you to go to England.

For England.

HAMLET

For England?

CLAUDIUS

Ay, Hamlet.

HAMLET

50 Good.

CLAUDIUS

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

55 My mother. Father and mother is man and wife, man and
wife is one flesh, and so, my mother.—Come, for England!

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

60 That else leans on the affair. Pray you, make haste.

Everyone except CLAUDIUS exits.

CLAUDIUS

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
65 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,
70 And thou must cure me. Till I know 'tis done,
Howe'er my haps, my joys were ne'er begun.

CLAUDIUS exits.

HAMLET

To England?

CLAUDIUS

Yes, Hamlet.

HAMLET

Good.

CLAUDIUS

Yes, it is, if you knew why I was sending you.

HAMLET

I know an angel who can read your mind. But now, off to
England! Goodbye, dear mother.

CLAUDIUS

I'm your loving father, Hamlet.

HAMLET

No, 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, to England!

HAMLET exits.

CLAUDIUS

Follow him on foot, and hurry him onto the ship. Don't let
there be any delays. I want him gone tonight. Gone!
Everything is signed and sealed to put an end to this affair.
Please hurry.

Everyone except CLAUDIUS exits.

CLAUDIUS

And you, dear King of England, if you think me at all
important—as you should, considering you can still feel the
strength that Denmark bludgeoned you with in the past,
causing you to pay us tribute money—then you'll have to
listen to the instruction in my letters that you kill Hamlet
immediately. Do it, King of England. Hamlet is raging like a
fever in my blood, and you must cure me. Until I know it's
been done, I'll never be happy, no matter what else
happens to me.

CLAUDIUS exits.

Act 4, Scene 4

Shakespeare

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.
5 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.

Shakesclare Translation

FORTINBRAS enters with his army and a CAPTAIN.

FORTINBRAS

Go, Captain, bring my greetings to the Danish king. Tell him
that, as was promised, Fortinbras asks for permission to
march his troops across Denmark. You know the place
where you should meet back up with our army. If His
Majesty wants anything at all from us, let him know that we
will do it.

CAPTAIN

I'll do that, my lord.

FORTINBRAS

Go softly on.

All except the CAPTAIN exits.

HAMLET, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN, and others enter.

HAMLET

10 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

15 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
20 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
A ranker rate, should it be sold in fee.

HAMLET

Why, then the Polack never will defend it.

CAPTAIN

25 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
30 Why the man dies. —I humbly thank you, sir.

CAPTAIN

God be wi' you, sir.

The CAPTAIN exits.

ROSENCRANTZ

Will 't please you go, my lord?

HAMLET

I'll be with you straight. Go a little before.

Everyone exits except HAMLET.

HAMLET

How all occasions do inform against me,
And spur my dull revenge! What is a man
35 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,

FORTINBRAS

Go on, then.

Everyone except the CAPTAIN exits.

HAMLET, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN, and others enter.

HAMLET

Good sir, whose troops are these?

CAPTAIN

The are from Norway, sir.

HAMLET

Please tell me, what's their goal, sir?

CAPTAIN

They're headed to invade some part of Poland.

HAMLET

Who commands them, sir?

CAPTAIN

The nephew of the old Norwegian king, Fortinbras.

HAMLET

Sir, is he attacking central Poland, or some borderlands?

CAPTAIN

To be honest, we're going to fight for a little patch of ground
that's not worth anything beyond its name. I wouldn't even
pay five gold coins for the right to own and farm it. And it
won't give either the Norwegians or the Poles more value
than that, even if they sold it.

HAMLET

Well, then the Poles won't even try to defend it.

CAPTAIN

They will. They've already put soldiers there.

HAMLET

[To himself] It will take more than two thousand men and
twenty-thousand gold coins to settle the battle for this
pointless bit of land. This is the curse of having too much
wealth and peace—it's like an abscess that grows inside
someone until it bursts and kills them, without anyone
knowing why.

[To the CAPTAIN] I give my humble thanks to you, sir.

CAPTAIN

God be with you, sir.

The CAPTAIN exits.

ROSENCRANTZ

Will you please come now, my lord?

HAMLET

I'll follow you right away. Go on ahead of me.

Everyone except HAMLET exits.

HAMLET

Everything that I see shames me, and spurs me to sharpen
my dulled efforts to get revenge. What is a man who does
nothing but eat and sleep? A beast, nothing more. God
didn't give us such a great and godlike ability to think and
reason so that those capabilities would grow moldy from

Looking before and after, gave us not
 40 That capability and godlike reason
 To fust in us unused. Now, whether it be
 Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
 Of thinking too precisely on th' event—
 A thought which, quartered, hath but one part wisdom
 45 And ever three parts coward—I do not know
 Why yet I live to say “This thing’s to do,”
 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
 50 Led by a delicate and tender prince,
 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,
 55 Even for an eggshell. Rightly to be great
 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,
 60 Excitements of my reason and my blood,
 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
 65 Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
 Which is not tomb enough and continent
 To hide the slain? Oh, from this time forth,
 My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!

He exits.

disuse. Now, whether the cause is an animal-like lack of thought or over-thinking exactly how to do it—thoughts which are one part wisdom, three parts cowardice—I can’t explain how I could still be alive and yet be able to say that “this is something I still have to do.” I have the motive, the will, the ability, and the opportunity to do it. Claudius’ guilt is as obvious as the ground beneath my feet. Look at this huge, expansive army led by a young and unproven prince, who’s so full of divine ambition that he mocks death and exposes his life to all the risks of fortune and danger—all for a cause as thin as an eggshell. To be great doesn’t require simply fighting for a good reason, but rather boldly fighting for barely any reason at all, so long as honor is at stake. So where do I stand, with my father murdered and my mother dishonored—and yet I do nothing in response to all of these slights and insults? Meanwhile, to my shame, I watch twenty thousand men—because of a whim and and wish for fame—march off to death for a tiny bit of land that’s not even large enough to hold all their graves. Oh, from this time forward, my thoughts will be violent, or else I’ll consider them worthless.

He exits.

Act 4, Scene 5

Shakespeare

HORATIO, GERTRUDE, and a GENTLEMAN enter.

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

5 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,
 10 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,
 15 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.

The GENTLEMAN exits.

Shakesclare Translation

HORATIO, GERTRUDE, and a GENTLEMAN enter.

GERTRUDE

I won’t speak to her.

GENTLEMAN

She demands it. In fact, she’s crazed. Her behavior will
 inspire your pity.

GERTRUDE

What does she want?

GENTLEMAN

She talks often of her father, and says she’s learned there
 are deceptions in the world, and coughs, and beats her
 chest, and takes offense at little things, and says things that
 don’t make sense. Her words are meaningless—yet those
 who hear her babbling attempt to understand its meaning.
 They patch up the gaps within her words, and end up
 hearing what they want to hear. And the winks and nods
 and gestures she makes while speaking imply—without
 being at all clear—that she’s hinting at some terrible deeper
 meaning.

HORATIO

It would be good for someone to speak to her, because her
 words might make people think dangerous things.

GERTRUDE

Bring her in.

The GENTLEMAN exits.

GERTRUDE*[aside]*

- 20 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.

*OPHELIA enters, insane.***OPHELIA**

Where is the beautiful majesty of Denmark?

GERTRUDE

- 25 How now, Ophelia?

OPHELIA*[sings]*

*How should I your true love know
From another one?
By his cockle hat and staff,
And his sandal shoon.*

- 30

GERTRUDE

Alas, sweet lady, what imports this song?

OPHELIA

Say you? Nay, pray you, mark.

[sings]

*He is dead and gone, lady,
He is dead and gone,
At his head a grass-green turf,
At his heels a stone.
Oh, ho!*

- 35

GERTRUDE

Nay, but, Ophelia—

OPHELIA

- 40 Pray you, mark.

*[sings]**White his shroud as the mountain snow—**CLAUDIUS enters.***GERTRUDE**

Alas, look here, my lord.

OPHELIA*[sings]*

- 45 *Larded all with sweet flowers,
Which bewept to the ground did not go
With true-love showers.*

CLAUDIUS

How do you, pretty lady?

OPHELIA

- 50 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.

OPHELIAPray you, let's have no words of this, but when they
ask you what it means, say you this:

- 55 *[sings]*

*Tomorrow is Saint Valentine's day,
All in the morning betime,*

GERTRUDE

[To herself] To my sick soul--since sin is actually sickness--
each little detail seems like a sign of coming disaster. Guilt
fills you up with suspicions that are so hard to hide, that
you give yourself away by trying so hard not to reveal them.

*OPHELIA enters, insane.***OPHELIA**

Where is the beautiful queen of Denmark?

GERTRUDE

How are you, Ophelia?

OPHELIA*[Singing]*

*How can you tell
Your true love from some other?
By his pilgrim's hat and staff
And the sandals on his feet.*

GERTRUDE

Oh no, sweet lady, what's the meaning of this song?

OPHELIA

Did you say something? No, please, listen.

[Singing]

*He is dead and gone, lady,
He is dead and gone.
At his head is green grass,
At his feet a tomb stone.
Oh, ho!*

GERTRUDE

No, listen, Ophelia—

OPHELIA

Please, listen.

*[Singing]**His death shroud was as white as snow—**CLAUDIUS enters.***GERTRUDE**

Alas, look at this, my lord.

OPHELIA*[Singing]*

*Covered with sweet flowers
Which did not fall to the ground
In true-love showers.*

CLAUDIUS

How are you, pretty lady?

OPHELIA

I'm well. May God reward you as you deserve. They say the
baker's daughter was turned into an owl for refusing to
answer Jesus' request for bread. My lord, we know what we
are now, but not what we may become. May God be at your
table.

CLAUDIUS

She's thinking about her dead father.

OPHELIAPlease, let's have no words about that, but when they ask
you what it means, say this:*[Singing]*

*Tomorrow is St. Valentine's Day
And early in the morning,*

And I a maid at your window,
To be your Valentine.
60 Then up he rose, and donned his clothes,
And duffed the chamber door.
Let in the maid that out a maid
Never departed more.

CLAUDIUS

Pretty Ophelia—

OPHELIA

65 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.
70 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,
75 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
80 thank you for your good counsel. Come, my coach! Good
night, ladies. Good night, sweet ladies. Good night,
good night.

OPHELIA exits.

CLAUDIUS

Follow her close. Give her good watch, I pray you.

HORATIO exits.

CLAUDIUS

Oh, this is the poison of deep grief. It springs
85 All from her father's death, and now behold!
O Gertrude, Gertrude,
When sorrows come, they come not single spies
But in battalions. First, her father slain.
Next, your son gone, and he most violent author
90 Of his own just remove. The people muddied,
Thick, and unwholesome in their thoughts and whispers
For good Polonius' death, and we have done but greenly
In hugger-mugger to inter him. Poor Ophelia
Divided from herself and her fair judgment,
95 Without the which we are pictures, or mere beasts.
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
100 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
105 Gives me superfluous death.

A noise offstage.

GERTRUDE

Alack, what noise is this?

CLAUDIUS

Where are my Switzers? Let them guard the door.

A MESSENGER enters.

I'm a girl waiting at your window
Waiting to be your valentine.
Then he woke and put on his clothes
And opened his bedroom door.
He let in the girl, who when she left
Wasn't a virgin anymore.

CLAUDIUS

Pretty Ophelia—

OPHELIA

Yes, I'll get to the end soon:
[Singing]
By Jesus and Saint Charity,
Alas, what a shame!
Young men will do it if they get a chance:
By God, they're the ones to blame.
She said, "Before you took me to bed,
You promised to marry me."
He answers:
"And by the sun, I would have done just that,
If you hadn't gone to bed with me."

CLAUDIUS

How long has she been like this?

OPHELIA

I hope everything will be all right. We must be patient, but I
can't stop crying when I think of how they laid him in the
cold ground. My brother will learn of this. And so I thank
you for your good advice. Come, driver! Good night, ladies.
Good night, sweet ladies. Good night, good night.

OPHELIA exits.

CLAUDIUS

Follow her. Watch her closely, please.

HORATIO exits.

CLAUDIUS

Oh, her terrible grief has poisoned her mind. All a result of
her father's death—look at her! Oh, Gertrude, Gertrude,
when troubles come, they don't come one at time like
spies, but all at once like an army. First her father was killed.
Then your son had to leave because of the violent thing he
did. The people are stirred up and confused--thinking up
dark theories and whispering about Polonius's death--while
we recklessly buried him in secrecy, without an official state
funeral. Poor Ophelia has been split from her sanity--
without which we're just pictures, or even beasts. Last, and
as bad as all of the rest of these, her brother has secretly
returned from France. His questions about his father's
death are answered by vicious gossipers who fill his ears
with nasty stories, and who--without knowing what really
happened--blame it all on me. Oh, my dear Gertrude, I feel
as though I'm being murdered many times at once.

A noise offstage.

GERTRUDE

Oh, what's that noise?

CLAUDIUS

Where are my Swiss guards? Let them guard the door.

A MESSENGER enters.

CLAUDIUS

What is the matter?

MESSENGER

Save yourself, my lord.

- 110 The ocean, overpeering of his list,
Eats not the flats with more impetuous haste
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,
115 Antiquity forgot, custom not known,
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

- 120 How cheerfully on the false trail they cry.
O, this is counter, you false Danish dogs!

A noise offstage.

CLAUDIUS

The doors are broke.

LAERTES enters with others.

LAERTES

Where is this king?—Sirs, stand you all without.

ALL

No, let's come in!

LAERTES

- 125 I pray you, give me leave.

ALL

We will, we will.

LAERTES' FOLLOWERS exit.

LAERTES

I thank you. Keep the door.—O thou vile king,
Give me my father!

GERTRUDE

Calmly, good Laertes.

LAERTES

- 130 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,

- 135 That thy rebellion looks so giant-like?—
Let him go, Gertrude. Do not fear our person.
There's such divinity doth hedge a king
That treason can but peep to what it would,
Acts little of his will. —Tell me, Laertes,
140 Why thou art thus incensed. —Let him go, Gertrude.—
Speak, man.

LAERTES

Where is my father?

CLAUDIUS

What's going on?

MESSENGER

Save yourself, my lord. Not even the ocean, when it floods
and devours the lowlands, is as ferocious as Laertes. He
now leads your officers in rebellion against you. The
commoners call him "lord" and—as if they were starting the
world from scratch and had forgotten all the traditions and
customs that are the bedrock of what we are—they shout,
"we choose Laertes to be king!" They throw their caps in
the air, applaud, and shout, "Laertes will be king! King
Laertes!"

GERTRUDE

How cheerfully they shout as they hunt the wrong prey! Oh,
this is wrong, you disloyal Danish dogs!

A noise offstage.

CLAUDIUS

They've broken down the doors.

LAERTES enters with others.

LAERTES

Where's this king?

[To his FOLLOWERS] Gentlemen, wait outside.

ALL

No, let us in!

LAERTES

I beg you, give me a moment.

ALL

We will, we will.

LAERTES' FOLLOWERS exit.

LAERTES


Thank you. Guard the door.


[To CLAUDIUS] Oh, you vile king, give me my father!

GERTRUDE

Be calm, good Laertes.

LAERTES

Any calm drop of blood in my body would mark me as my
father's bastard son , and stamp the label "whore" on the
pure, unstained forehead of my true and devoted mother.

 *Laertes implies that if he doesn't
take revenge for his father's death,
then he must not be his father's
legitimate son.*

CLAUDIUS

[To LAERTES] What is the cause of this rebellion, Laertes?

*[To GERTRUDE] Let him go, Gertrude. Don't worry that I'll
be hurt. God protects the king, so that while traitors can see
what they want to do, they cannot make it happen.*

[To LAERTES] Tell me, Laertes, why you are so angry?

[To GERTRUDE] Gertrude, let him go.

[To LAERTES] Tell me, man.

LAERTES

Where is my father?

CLAUDIUS

Dead.

GERTRUDE

But not by him.

CLAUDIUS

145 Let him demand his fill.

LAERTES

How came he dead? I'll not be juggled with.
To hell, allegiance! Vows, to the blackest devil!
Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit!
I dare damnation. To this point I stand

150 That both the worlds I give to negligence.
Let come what comes, only I'll be revenged
Most thoroughly for my father.

CLAUDIUS

Who shall stay you?

LAERTES

My will, not all the world.

155 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,

160 That, swoopstake, you will draw both friend and foe,
Winner and loser?

LAERTES

None but his enemies.

CLAUDIUS

Will you know them then?

LAERTES

165 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.
That I am guiltless of your father's death
And am most sensible in grief for it,
It shall as level to your judgment pierce
As day does to your eye.

A voice offstage, "Let her in!"

LAERTES

How now? What noise is that?

OPHELIA enters.

LAERTES

175 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!
180 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.

CLAUDIUS

Dead.

GERTRUDE

But the king didn't kill him.

CLAUDIUS

Let him ask his questions.

LAERTES

How did he die? I won't be lied to. To hell with my oaths of
allegiance! Vows can go to hell! Conscience, too! I don't
care if I'm damned. I swear that I don't care about what
happens to me in this world or the next. No matter what
happens, I'll get revenge for my father's murder.

CLAUDIUS

Who could stop you?

LAERTES

My own will, and nothing else in all the world. I'll gather up
the little means I have, and use them so well that they'll
take me a long way.

CLAUDIUS

Good Laertes, if you wish to know the truth about your dear
father's death, answer me this: are you so angry that in your
search for revenge you are willing to hurt both your father's
enemies and his friends?

LAERTES

Only his enemies.

CLAUDIUS

Do you want to know who they are, then?

LAERTES

I'll open my arms wide to his friends, and like a mother
pelican with her chicks, I'll give my own heart's blood for
them.

CLAUDIUS

Why, now you're talking like a faithful son and a true
gentleman. I will prove to you as plain as day that I am
innocent of your father's death, and feel great grief over it.

A voice offstage cries, "Let her in!"

LAERTES

What's going on? What's that noise?

OPHELIA enters.

LAERTES

Oh, heat, dry up my brains! Oh, salt in my tears, burn the
vision out of my eyes! By heaven, I'll get revenge equal to
the depth of your madness! Oh, you rose of May, dear
maiden, kind sister, sweet Ophelia! Oh God, is it possible
that a young woman's mind could die as easily as an old
man's life? Human nature is made spiritual by love. And
when it is spiritual, it gives itself to the one it loves--just as
Ophelia has given her sanity to her father, whom she loved.

OPHELIA

185 *[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

190 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

195 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

200 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 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

[sings]
 210 *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.*
 215 *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. —*
 220 And of all Christian souls, I pray God. God be wi' ye.

OPHELIA exits.

LAERTES

Do you see this, O God?

CLAUDIUS

Laertes, I must commune with your grief,
 Or you deny me right. Go but apart,
 Make choice of whom your wisest friends you will.
 225 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 call ours,
 To you in satisfaction. But if not,
 230 Be you content to lend your patience to us,
 And we shall jointly labor with your soul

OPHELIA

[Singing]
*They carried him uncovered in the coffin,
 Hey non nonny, nonny, hey nonny.
 And tears poured down into his grave.
 Goodbye, my dove.*

LAERTES

Even if you were sane and urged me to take revenge, you couldn't be more persuasive than this.

OPHELIA

You have to sing, "A down a-down," and you, "Call him a-down-a." Oh, how it turns around like a wheel! Like the lying worker who stole his boss' daughter.

LAERTES

This apparent nonsense has more meaning than rational speech.


OPHELIA


Here's some rosemary, that's for remembering. Please remember, love. And here are pansies, they're for thoughts.

LAERTES

In her madness, she gives us a lesson: memory and thought belong together.

OPHELIA

Here's fennel  for you, and columbines. And here's rue for you, and some for me. We call it the merciful Sunday flower, though you should wear it for a different reason. Here's a daisy. I'd give you some violets, but they all dried up when my father died. They say he had a good death. *[Singing]* *For good sweet Robin is all my joy.*

 *The flowers Ophelia continues to list are laden with symbolism. Fennel and columbine were symbols of adultery and insincerity. Rue symbolized repentance; the daisy, unhappy love; and violets, faithfulness.*

LAERTES

Sad thoughts, terrible suffering, hell itself—she makes them almost graceful and pretty.

OPHELIA

[Singing]
*And won't he come again?
 And won't he come again?
 No, no, he's dead.
 Go to your deathbed.
 He'll never come again.
 His beard was white as snow,
 His hair was all white too.
 He's gone, he's gone,
 And we moan our useless grief.
 God have mercy on his soul.*
 And on the souls of all good Christians, I pray to God. God be with you.

OPHELIA exits.

LAERTES

Oh, God: did you see this?

CLAUDIUS

Laertes, let me share in your grief, or else you deny me my right. Go and choose your wisest friends, and they will sit in judgment of us. If they find me at all responsible for your father's murder, directly or indirectly, then I'll give up my kingdom, my crown, my life, and everything I call my own to you. But if they find me innocent, then be patient, and I'll work with you to ensure that your soul gets what it desires.

To give it due content.

LAERTES

Let this be so.

235 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.

240 And where the offense is, let the great ax fall.
I pray you, go with me.

They exit.

LAERTES

That's what we'll do. The way he died, and his hushed-up funeral without military display, noble rites, or formal ceremony—all these things shout out as if heaven and earth themselves are demanding that I question the way he died.

CLAUDIUS

As you should. And may the great ax of justice fall on the guilty. Please, come with me.

They all exit.

Act 4, Scene 6

Shakespeare

HORATIO and a SERVANT enter.

HORATIO

What are they that would speak with me?

SERVANT

Seafaring men, sir. They say they have letters for you.

HORATIO

Let them come in.

SERVANT exits.

HORATIO

I do not know from what part of the world
5 I should be greeted, if not from Lord Hamlet.

SAILORS enter.

SAILOR

God bless you, sir.

HORATIO

Let him bless thee too.

SAILOR

10 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. [*He gives HORATIO a letter*]

HORATIO

[*reads*]

"Horatio,

15 *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. 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*

25

Shakescleare Translation

HORATIO and a SERVANT enter.

HORATIO

Who wants to speak with me?

SERVANT

Sailors, sir. They say they have letters for you.

HORATIO

Bring them in.

SERVANT exits.

HORATIO

I don't know who else in the world would send me letters, except Lord Hamlet.

SAILORS enter.

SAILOR

God bless you, sir.

HORATIO

May he bless you as well.

SAILOR

Sir, he will if it pleases him. Here's a letter for you, sir. It's from the ambassador, Lord Hamlet, who was going to England—if your name's Horatio, as I've been told it is. [*He hands HORATIO a letter*]

HORATIO

[*Reading the letter*] "Horatio, When you've read this, make sure these men see the king. They have letters for him. Before we were at sea for even two days, a pirate ship equipped for battle came after us. Realizing we were too slow to escape, we were forced to fight, and during the battle I boarded the pirate ship. At that moment, the pirates disengaged from our ship, making me their sole prisoner. For thieves, they've treated me very mercifully, but they knew what they were doing. They want me to do a favor for them. Give the king the letters I've sent, and come to me as fast as you would run from death. I've got things to tell you that will make you speechless, and they aren't even the most important details. These sailors will bring you to me. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern continue on their way to England. I have a lot to tell you about them. Goodbye. From the man that you know is your friend, Hamlet." Come, men.

Guildestern hold their course for England. Of them I have much to tell thee. Fare-well.

30 *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.

They exit.

I'll bring you to the place where you can deliver these letters as quickly as possible, so that you can lead me to the man who sent them.

They all exit.

Act 4, Scene 7

Shakespeare

CLAUDIUS and LAERTES enter.

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
5 Pursued my life.

LAERTES

It well appears. But tell me
Why you proceeded not against these feats,
So criminal and so capital in nature,
As by your safety, wisdom, all things else,
10 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—
15 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,
20 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,
25 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,
30 Stood challenger on mount of all the age
For her perfections. But my revenge will come.

CLAUDIUS

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—

A MESSENGER enters with letters.

CLAUDIUS

How now, what news?

Shakescleare Translation

CLAUDIUS and LAERTES enter.

CLAUDIUS

Now you must admit that I'm innocent, and accept me as a friend, since you've heard and been convinced that that the man who killed your father was actually trying to kill me.

LAERTES

It looks that way. But explain to me why you didn't take legal action against Hamlet for his capital crimes--when both your wisdom and your own safety must have demanded that you should?

CLAUDIUS

Oh, for two key reasons which to you may seem weak to you, but yet to me are strong. The queen, his mother, loves him and is devoted to him. And, whether it's a virtue or a curse, she is so closely connected to my life and soul that I can't live apart from her--just as a planet can't leave its orbit. The other reason why I couldn't bring charges against Hamlet in a public court is that the commoners loves him. In their affection for him, they overlook all his faults. In fact--like a stream that turns wood to stone--they actually somehow see all his faults as virtues. Whatever I said against him would end up coming back to hurt me, like an arrow aimed into a strong wind.

LAERTES

And so I've lost my noble father, and my sister has been driven crazy. My sister--if I can praise her for what she used to be--was the equal in perfection to any other woman who ever lived. But I'll get my revenge.

CLAUDIUS

Don't lose sleep over that. You must not think that I'm so lazy and stupid that I will let someone threaten and mock me and act as if it's just a game. Soon you'll hear more about my plans. I loved your father, and I love myself. And that, I hope, will help you see—

A MESSENGER enters with letters.

CLAUDIUS

Whats' going on? What's your news?

MESSENGER

Letters, my lord, from Hamlet.

40 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.

They were given me by Claudio. He received them
45 Of him that brought them.

CLAUDIUS

Laertes, you shall hear them.—Leave us.

The MESSENGER exits.

CLAUDIUS

[*reads*]

“High and mighty,

You shall know I am set naked on your kingdom. Tomorrow
50 *shall I beg leave to see your kingly eyes, when I*
shall, first 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
55 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

60 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—

65 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,

70 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 fall.

And for his death no wind of blame shall breathe,
75 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

80 It falls right.

You have been talked of since your travel much—
And that in Hamlet’s hearing—for a quality

MESSENGER

My lord, I have letters from Hamlet. This one’s for your
Highness, and this one is for the queen. [*He gives letters*
to CLAUDIUS]

CLAUDIUS

From Hamlet? Who delivered them?

MESSENGER

I was told that sailors did, my lord. I didn’t see them.

Claudio gave the letters to me, and he got them from the
one who delivered them.

CLAUDIUS

Laertes, you will hear what these letters say.

[*To the MESSENGER*] Leave us now.

The MESSENGER exits.

CLAUDIUS

[*Reading*] “Your majesty, I’ve been returned to your
kingdom naked—with nothing to call my own. Tomorrow I’ll
ask permission to meet with you, at which point I’ll first
apologize and then tell the story of how I came back to
Denmark so suddenly and strangely. Hamlet”

What does this mean? Have all the others come back also?
Or is it some trick, and none of this is true?

LAERTES

Do you recognize the handwriting?

CLAUDIUS

It’s Hamlet’s handwriting. “Naked,” he says. And in a
postscript, he adds, “alone.” What do you think about that?

LAERTES

It confuses me, my lord. But let him come. It warms my sick
heart that I’ll get to look him in the face and say, “You did
this.”

CLAUDIUS

If that’s how it should be, Laertes—and why shouldn’t it?
How could it be otherwise? Will you follow my orders?

LAERTES

Yes, my lord, as long as you won’t try to force me toward
peace.

CLAUDIUS

Only to your own peace of mind. If he has returned, and
now has no plans to continue his trip, then I’ll trick him into
taking on some new challenge—which I’m coming up with
now—that will surely kill him. His death will result in no
blame. Even his mother will call it an accident.

LAERTES

My lord, I’ll follow your lead. I want to be the sole agent of
his death.

CLAUDIUS

That seems only right. Since you left, people have been
talking about a quality of yours in which, they say, you
shine—and Hamlet has overheard it. All your other talents

Wherein, they say, you shine. Your sum of parts
Did not together pluck such envy from him
85 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
90 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,
95 And they can well on horseback. But this 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,
100 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

105 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
110 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,
115 If you opposed them. Sir, this report of his
Did Hamlet so envenom with his envy
That he could nothing do but wish and beg
Your sudden coming o'er, to play with him.
Now, out of this—

LAERTES

120 What out of this, my lord?

CLAUDIUS

Laertes, was your father dear to you?
Or are you like the painting of a sorrow,
A face without a heart?

LAERTES

Why ask you this?

CLAUDIUS

125 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
130 A kind of wick or snuff that will abate it.
And nothing is at a like goodness still.

together didn't make him as envious as this one quality did,
though to me it's of the least importance.

LAERTES

What quality is that, my lord?

CLAUDIUS

One of those decorative ribbons on the cap of youth—yet a
necessary one, too, since casual clothes are like the
uniforms of youth, just as formal clothes are the necessary
outfits of full maturity. Two months ago, I met a gentleman
from Normandy. I've watched and fought against the
French and know how well they ride, but this man's skill
was almost magical. He seemed a part of the saddle, and
made his horse do such amazing things that he appeared as
if he were one with the horse. His skill was beyond my
understanding, and even in my imagination I can't do the
tricks he did.

LAERTES

He was from Normandy?

CLAUDIUS

From Normandy.

LAERTES

I swear by my life it must have been Lamond.

CLAUDIUS

That's who it was.

LAERTES

I know him well. He's the jewel of his country.

CLAUDIUS

He mentioned you, giving you such high praise for four skill
at fencing that he exclaimed that he could not imagine
anyone being able to match you. He swore that French
fencers would be clumsy, defenseless, and seem as if they
were blind if they ever tried to duel with you. This
description made Hamlet so jealous that he talked about
nothing else but having you return to practice dueling
against him. Now, the point is--

LAERTES

What's the point, my lord?

CLAUDIUS

Laertes, did you love your father? Or are your putting on a
show of grief—a face without a heart?

LAERTES

How could you ask this?

CLAUDIUS

Not because I think you didn't love your father, but because
I know that love exists in a particular time and place--and
that the passage of time can weaken the spark and fire of
that love. Every flame of love eventually burns itself out.
Nothing remains the same forever. Even a good thing can
grow too big and die from its extreme size. We should do
what we want in the moment, because our desires might be

For goodness, growing to a pleurisy,
Dies in his own too-much. That we would do,
We should do when we would, for this “would” changes
135 And hath abatements and delays as many
As there are tongues, are hands, are accidents.
And then this “should” is like a spendthrift sigh
That hurts by easing. —But to the quick of th’ ulcer:
Hamlet comes back. What would you undertake
140 To show yourself in deed your father’s son
More than in words?

LAERTES

To cut his throat i’ th’ church.

CLAUDIUS

No place, indeed, should murder sanctuarize.
Revenge should have no bounds. But, good Laertes,
145 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
150 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
155 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,
160 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
With this contagion, that if I gall him slightly
165 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,
170 ‘Twere better not assayed. Therefore this project
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.—
I ha’ t! When in your motion you are hot and dry,
175 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 venom’d stuck,
Our purpose may hold there. —But stay, what noise?

GERTRUDE enters.

GERTRUDE

180 One woe doth tread upon another’s heel,
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.
185 There with fantastic garlands did she come
Of crowsflowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do “dead men’s fingers” call them.

blocked by as many obstructions or delays as words in the dictionary, or accidents in life. And then all our “woulds” and “shoulds” become like little more than sighs. But back to the heart of the matter: Hamlet’s coming back. What would you *do*, rather than simply *say*, to prove that you you are your father’s son?

LAERTES

Cut Hamlet’s throat in the church.

CLAUDIUS

I agree that no place should protect that murderer. Revenge should have no limits. But, good Laertes, will you do this: stay inside your room? When Hamlet returns, he’ll learn that you’ve come home. I’ll have people praise your excellence and add an extra shine to the compliment the Frenchman paid you. Finally, we’ll bring the two of you together and bet on which of you will win. Hamlet—who is so careless and trusting—won’t examine the swords beforehand. So you’ll easily be able to choose a sword with a sharpened point, and in the middle of this practice duel, you’ll get revenge for your father’s death.

LAERTES

I’ll do it. And I’ll also cover my sword with an oil that I bought from a snake-oil salesman. This oil is so poisonous that if a knife dipped in it draws blood, no cure in the world can save the victim. I’ll cover the point of my sword with it, so that if I even graze him, he’ll probably die.

CLAUDIUS

Let’s think more about this, and consider whether there’s anything else we’ll have the opportunity to do to ensure we get the outcome we want. If our plan should fail—and if people figure out our plot because we execute it badly—we’d be better off not having tried it at all. Therefore, we should have a backup plan that will do the trick if we fail in our first attempt. Hmm, let me think—we’re going to bet on your dueling skill—I’ve got it! When from all your exertion the two of you have gotten hot and thirsty—make sure the duel is very active to guarantee that happens—Hamlet will want a drink. I’ll have a cup ready with poison for just that purpose, and once he sips from it—even if he escapes your poisoned sword—we will get what we want. But hold on, what’s that sound?

GERTRUDE enters.

GERTRUDE

The bad news keeps coming, as if each piece follows right on the heels of the one before. Your sister’s drowned, Laertes.

LAERTES

Drowned? Oh, where?

GERTRUDE

There’s a willow that leans over the brook, with its white leaves hanging over the glassy water. Ophelia came there—making braided crowns from crowsflowers, nettles, daisies, and those wild purple orchids that free-spoken shepherds call by an obscene name, but which innocent girls call “dead men’s fingers.” She climbed out onto the tree to hang

190 There, on the pendant boughs her coronet weeds
Clambering to hang, an envious siver broke,
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
195 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
200 To muddy death.

LAERTES

Alas, then she is drowned.

GERTRUDE

Drowned, drowned.

LAERTES

205 Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia,
And therefore I forbid my tears. But yet
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.

LAERTES exits.

CLAUDIUS

210 Let's follow, Gertrude.
How much I had to do to calm his rage!
Now fear I this will give it start again.
Therefore let's follow.

They exit.

her crowns from a bending branch. But the branch broke, and she and her flowery treasures fell into the swiftly moving brook. Her clothes spread wide in the water, and held her up while she sang bits of old hymns. She acted as if she could not comprehend the danger, or as if she were a creature that naturally lived in water. But eventually her clothes—heavy with absorbed water—pulled the poor girl out of her song and down to a muddy death.


LAERTES


Alas, then she drowned.

GERTRUDE

Drowned, drowned.

LAERTES

Poor Ophelia, you've had too much water already, so I won't cry for you. But crying is what humans do. We all follow our natures, no matter what shame we feel for it. When I've stopped crying, I'll be done acting like a woman 

 In Shakespeare's time, women were considered "leaky vessels," because of their tears, menstruation, and lactation.

[To CLAUDIUS] Goodbye, my lord. I have fiery words I'd dearly like to say, but my foolish tears drown them.

LAERTES exits.

CLAUDIUS

Let's follow him, Gertrude. I had to do so much to calm him down! Now I fear this might start him up again. Therefore, let's follow him.

They exit.

Act 5, Scene 1

Shakespeare

Two GRAVEDIGGERS enter.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

Is she to be buried in Christian burial when she willfully seeks her own salvation?

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

5 I tell thee she is. Therefore make her grave straight.
The crowner hath sat on her and finds it Christian burial.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

How can that be, unless she drowned herself in her own defense?

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

Why, 'tis found so.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER


10 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.

Shakescleare Translation

Two GRAVEDIGGERS enter.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

Is she really going to receive a Christian burial  after she took her own life?

 In Shakespeare's time, those who died by suicide—which was considered a sin—were not allowed a Christian burial. Instead, they were interred outside of church cemeteries.

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

I'm telling you, she is. So make that grave immediately. The coroner examined her says it should be a Christian funeral.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

How can that be, unless she drowned herself in self-defense?

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

That's exactly what they've determined.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

They must mean "self-offense." It couldn't be anything else. Here's my point: if you drown yourself on purpose, then that's an act. An act has three sides to it: to act, to do, and to perform. Therefore, she must have known she was drowning herself.

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

Nay, but hear you, Goodman Delver—

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

15 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 kill 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.

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

20 But is this law?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

Ay, marry, is 't. Crowner's quest law.

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

Will you ha' the truth on 't? If this had not been a
gentlewoman, she should have been buried out o'
Christian burial.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

25 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
30 profession.

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

Was he a gentleman?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

He was the first that ever bore arms.

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

Why, he had none.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

35 What, art a heathen? How dost thou understand the
Scripture? The Scripture says Adam digged. Could he dig
without arms? I'll put another question to thee. If thou
answerest me not to the purpose, confess thyself—

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

Go to.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

40 What is he that builds stronger than either the mason,
the shipwright, or the carpenter?

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

The gallows-maker, for that frame outlives a thousand
tenants.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

45 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.

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

"Who builds stronger than a mason, a shipwright, or a
carpenter?"

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

No, but listen to me, Mister Gravedigger—

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

Let me finish. Here's the water, right? Now here stands a
man, right? If the man goes into the water and drowns
himself, he is--whether you like or not--the one doing it. Got
that? But if the water comes to him and drowns him, then
he doesn't drown himself. Therefore, he who is not guilty of
his own death does not shorten his own life.

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

Is that the law?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

Yes, indeed it is. The coroner's inquest law.

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

Do you want the truth? If this woman hadn't been a noble,
she wouldn't have been given a Christian burial.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

Well, now you've said it. It's a pity that the nobles are given
more leeway to drown or hang themselves than other
Christians are. Come on, shovel. The most ancient nobles in
the world are gardeners, ditch-diggers, and gravediggers.
They keep up Adam's profession.

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

Was he a noble?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

He was the first person who ever bore [arms](#) ².

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

He didn't bear any arms.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

What, are you not a Christian? Do you not know the Bible?
The Bible says Adam dug. Could he dig without arms? I'll
ask you another question. If you can't answer it, admit it—

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

Go ahead!

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

Who builds stronger things than a stonemason, a
shipbuilder, or a carpenter?

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

The one who builds the gallows where people are hung,
because the gallows outlive a thousand users.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

I like your humor, I swear. The gallows do well. But how?
They do well to those who do bad. But you do bad to say
that the gallows are stronger than a church. Therefore, the
gallows may do well to you. Come on, try again.

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

"Who builds stronger things than a stonemason, a
shipbuilder, or a carpenter?"

² Noble families have symbols called "coat of arms;" to display that symbol was to "bear arms." The First Gravedigger also puns on Adam being the first man, and literally the first human to have "arms," as in limbs.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

50 Ay, tell me that, and unyoke.

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

Marry, now I can tell.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

To 't.

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

Mass, I cannot tell.

HAMLET and HORATIO enter, in the distance.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

55 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.

The SECOND GRAVEDIGGER exits.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

[digs and sings]

60 *In youth when I did love, did love,
Methought it was very sweet
To contract—o—the time, for—a—my behove,
Oh, methought, there—a—was nothing—a—meet.*

HAMLET

65 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.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

[sings]

70 *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

75 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

80 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

85 Ay, my lord.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

Yes, tell me that, then you can call it a day.

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER


Indeed, I'll give you answer!

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

Do it.

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

By God , I forgot.

 In the original text, the Second Gravedigger uses the common oath, "mass," an abbreviated form of "by the mass," or church service.

HAMLET and HORATIO enter, in the distance.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

Stop wracking your brains about it. After all, 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. Go inside, now, and get me some alcohol.

The SECOND GRAVEDIGGER exits.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

[Digging and singing]

*In my youth when I did love, did love,
I though it was very sweet
To set—O—the date for—Ahh—my duty
Oh, I thought it—ahh—was not—ahh—right.*

HAMLET

Does this man not understand the seriousness of what he's doing? He's singing while digging a grave.

HORATIO

He's gotten so used to digging graves that he does it with ease.

HAMLET

That's it exactly. Only those who aren't used to that kind of work are more sensitive to it.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

[Singing]

*But old age has snuck up on me
And caught me in his claws,
And has shipped me into the ground
As if I'd never been like that.
[He throws up a skull]*

HAMLET

That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once. That fool flings it to the ground as if belonged to Cain, who committed the first murder! It might be the skull of a power-grabbing politician who could talk his way around God, right? And now this idiot is grasping it.

HORATIO

It could be, my lord.

HAMLET

Or a courtier, who used to say, "Good night, my sweet lord! How are you, good lord?" This might be the skull of Lord So-and-So, who praised Lord So-and-So's horse when he wanted to borrow it, right?

HORATIO

Yes, 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.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

[sings]

*A pickax and a spade, a spade,
For and a shrouding sheet,
Oh, a pit of clay for to be made*
95 *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
100 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
105 fine of his fines and 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
110 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

115 They are sheep and calves which seek out assurance in
that.
I will speak to this fellow.—Whose grave's this,
sirrah?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

Mine, sir.

120 *[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.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

125 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

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.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

'Tis a quick lie, sir. 'Twill away gain from me to you.

HAMLET

Why, yes. Exactly. And now it's the property of Lady Worm,
with its lower jaw knocked off, and thwacked on the head
with a little shovel. What a change of fortune, if we could
only see it. Were these bones grown and used so that they
would be worth no more than bowling pins now? My bones
ache to think about it.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

[Singing]

*A pickax and a shovel, a shovel,
A sheet for a funeral shroud,
Oh, a pit of dirt to be made up*
Is the right thing for our guest.
[He throws up another skull]

HAMLET

There's another. Why, couldn't that be a lawyer's skull?
Where are all his lawyerly quibbles, his cases, and his
tricks? Why does he let this rude fool knock him on the
head with a shovel without suing him for assault and
battery? Maybe he was a great landowner, with his bonds,
his deeds, and his rents. Was it part of his contracts and
deeds that his skull should get filled up with dirt? Does he
get to keep only as much of his land as equals the width
and length of a pair of his contracts spread out on the
ground? The deeds to his properties would barely fit in this
coffin—and that coffin is all he gets to have?

HORATIO

Not a bit more, my lord.

HAMLET

Aren't legal documents made of sheepskin?

HORATIO

Yes, my lord, and calfskin too.

HAMLET

Anyone who looks for assurance in such documents is a
sheep or a calf. I'm going to talk to this man.

[To the FIRST GRAVEDIGGER] Excuse me, sir, whose grave is
this?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

It's mine, sir.

[Singing]
Oh, a pit of dirt to be made up
Is the right thing for our guest.

HAMLET

I think it must be yours, because you're lying in it.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER


You're lying outside of it, sir, so therefore it's not yours. As
for me, I'm not lying in it—it's really mine.

HAMLET

But you are **lying** in it, since you're in it and saying it's
yours. It's for the dead, not the living. Therefore, you're
lying.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

That's a lively lie, sir, jumping like that from me to you.

 Hamlet takes the verb "lying" as
in to tell a falsehood. The First
Gravedigger may be physically "lying"
in the grave, but he "lies," or tells a
falsehood, that it's his, because he
doesn't own the grave.

HAMLET

130 What man dost thou dig it for?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

For no man, sir.

HAMLET

What woman, then?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

For none, neither.

HAMLET

Who is to be buried in 't?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

135 One that was a woman, sir, but, rest her soul, she's dead.

HAMLET

140 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?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

Of all the days i' the year, I came to 't that day that our last

145 King Hamlet overcame Fortinbras.

HAMLET

How long is that since?

FIRST 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

150 Ay, marry, why was he sent into England?

FIRST 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?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

155 'Twill not be seen in him there. There the men are as mad as he.

HAMLET

How came he mad?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

Very strangely, they say.

HAMLET

How "strangely?"

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

Faith, e'en with losing his wits.

HAMLET

160 Upon what ground?

HAMLET

What man are you digging it for?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

For no man, sir.

HAMLET

What woman, then?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

For no woman, either.

HAMLET

Who's to be buried in it?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

One who used to be a woman, sir, but is now dead, bless her soul.

HAMLET

How literal this jokester is! We have to speak precisely, or his word play will defeat us. Lord, Horatio, I've been noticing this for the last three years. The commoners have become so sophisticated that they're nipping at the heels of noblemen.

[To the FIRST GRAVEDIGGER] How long have you been a gravedigger?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

Of all the days in the year, I started this work on the day that the late King Hamlet defeated Fortinbras.

HAMLET

How long ago was that?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

You don't know that? Any fool could tell you that. It was the day that young Hamlet was born—the one who's insane and got sent to England.

HAMLET

Yes, right, and why was he sent to England?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

Why? Because he was insane. He'll recover his sanity there. Or if he doesn't, it won't matter in England.

HAMLET

Why?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

Nobody there will notice. All the people there are as crazy as he is.

HAMLET

How did he go insane?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

Very strangely, they say.

HAMLET

What do you mean, "strangely?"

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

By losing his mind, of course.

HAMLET

On what grounds?

FIRST 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?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

165 Faith, if he be not rotten before he die—as we have many pocky corsers 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?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

170 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?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

175 A whoreson mad fellow's it was. Whose do you think it was?

HAMLET

Nay, I know not.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

180 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?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

E'en that.

HAMLET

185 Let me see. [*takes the skull*] Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of 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

195 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*]

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

Why, right here in Denmark. I've been the handyman here for thirty years, since I was a boy.

HAMLET

How long will a man lie in his grave before he starts to rot?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

Well, if he's not rotten before he dies—and we do have many corpses nowadays that are so rotten that they fall apart just from being laid in the grave—he'll last eight or nine years. A man who makes leather will last nine years.

HAMLET

Why does he last longer than anyone else?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

Well, sir, because his skin is so leathery from the work he does that he keeps the water out for a long time, and water is the main cause of decay in your son-of-a-bitch body. [*He points to a skull*] Here's a skull now. It's been buried in the earth twenty-three years.

HAMLET

Whose was it?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

An insane son-of-a-bitch. Whose do you think it was?

HAMLET

I don't know.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

A curse on him, that crazy scoundrel! He poured a pitcher of German wine on my head once. Sir, this skull belonged to Yorick, the king's jester.

HAMLET

This one?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

That one.

HAMLET

Let me see. [*He takes the skull*] Oh, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio. He was a man of endless humor, a great wit. He gave me piggy-back rides a thousand times, and now..how awful my imagination is! It makes me nauseated to think of it. Here hung his lips, which I kissed I don't know how many times. Where are your jokes now? Your dances? Your songs? Your flashes of high spirits that used to set the whole table roaring with laughter? You're not able to mock your own grinning skull now, are you? Now go to my lady's bedroom and tell her that, even if she piles on the makeup an inch thick, she'll still wind up looking like you. Make her laugh at that.

[*To HORATIO*] Please, 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

Just like that.

HAMLET

And smelled like this? Yuck! [*He puts down the skull*]

HORATIO

200 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 bung-hole?

HORATIO

'Twere to consider too curiously, to consider so.

HAMLET

205 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,
210 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!
215 But soft, but soft a while.

CLAUDIUS enters with GERTRUDE, LAERTES, and a coffin, with a PRIEST and other lords attendant.

HAMLET

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
220 Fordo its own life. 'Twas of some estate.
Couch we a while and mark.

HAMLET and HORATIO step aside.

LAERTES

What ceremony else?

HAMLET

That is Laertes, a very noble youth, mark.

LAERTES

What ceremony else?

PRIEST

225 Her obsequies have been as far enlarged
As we have warranty. Her death was doubtful,
And, but that great command o'ersways the order,
She should in ground unsanctified have lodged
Till the last trumpet. For charitable prayers
230 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

235 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

240 Lay her i' th' earth,
And from her fair and unpolluted flesh
May violets spring! I tell thee, churlish priest,
A ministering angel shall my sister be
When thou liest howling.

HORATIO

Just like that, my lord.

HAMLET

Look how badly we end up, Horatio. Why, you could imagine how the noble ashes of Alexander the Great might end up plugging a hole in a barrel?

HORATIO

You'd be thinking about it too much, if you thought about that.

HAMLET

No, I swear, not at all. It's perfectly reasonable to think of it: Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returned to dust, the dust is dirt, and dirt is used to make the material we use to stop up holes. So why can't someone use the clay made from Alexander to plug up a beer barrel? The Roman Emperor Caesar, dead and turned to clay, might block a hole to keep the wind away. Oh, that the body that once ruled the entire world could now patch up a wall to keep out the winter! But quiet, be quiet for a moment.

CLAUDIUS enters with GERTRUDE, LAERTES, and a coffin, with a PRIEST and other attending lords.

HAMLET

Here comes the king, the queen, and all of their court. Who is it that they're following? And with such a plain ceremony? This must mean that the corpse they're following committed suicide. Must have been someone of quite noble birth. Let's hide and watch for a while.

HAMLET and HORATIO step aside.

LAERTES

What other rites will you perform?

HAMLET

That's Laertes, a very noble young man. Listen.

LAERTES

What other rites will you perform?

PRIEST

I've performed all the rites that I'm allowed to perform. Her death was questionable. And if the king had not given a command that overruled our normal customs, she'd have been buried in the unholy ground outside the church graveyard until Judgment Day. Instead of prayers, she would have had rocks and broken pottery thrown on her body. But she is dressed up like a pure virgin, with flowers scattered on her grave, and the bell tolling for her.

LAERTES

Can nothing more be done?

PRIEST

Nothing more. We would be disrespectful to the other dead if we sang the same requiem for her that we sang for those who died peacefully.

LAERTES

Lay her in the ground, and may violets bloom from her pure and beautiful body! I'm telling you, you uncharitable priest, my sister will be an angel in heaven while you're howling in hell.

HAMLET

[to HORATIO] What, the fair Ophelia?

GERTRUDE

245 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
250 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.

LAERTES jumps into the grave.

LAERTES

Now pile your dust upon the quick and dead,
255 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
260 Conjures the wandering stars, and makes them stand
Like wonder-wounded hearers? This is I,
Hamlet the Dane. [*leaps into the grave*]

LAERTES

The devil take thy soul!

HAMLET and LAERTES wrestle.

HAMLET

Thou pray'st not well.
265 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

270 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

275 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 her?

CLAUDIUS

O, he is mad, Laertes.

HAMLET

[*To HORATIO*] What, the beautiful Ophelia?

GERTRUDE


Sweet flowers for a sweet girl. Goodbye! [*She scatters flowers*]
I had hoped you'd be my Hamlet's wife. I thought
I'd be scattering flowers on your wedding bed, not strewing
them on your grave, sweet girl.


LAERTES

Oh, damn three times, damn thirty times the cursed one
whose actions stole your brilliant mind. Do not bury her
until I've held her in my arms once more.

LAERTES jumps into the grave.

LAERTES

Now pile the dirt onto the living and the dead, until you've
made this flat ground into mountain higher than Mount
Pelion  or the towering peaks of Mount Olympus.

 In ancient Greek mythology, Mount Pelion was home to the centaurs, and Mount Olympus was home to the gods.

HAMLET

[*He comes forward*] Who is the man whose grief is so
profound, whose words of sadness makes the stars stand
still in the heavens as if struck dumb by what they've
heard? It is me, Hamlet the Dane. [*He jumps into the grave*]

LAERTES

The devil take your soul!

HAMLET and LAERTES wrestle.

HAMLET

That's not the right way to pray. [*They fight*] I ask you,
please remove your fingers from my throat. I'm not
impulsive and quick-tempered, but I have something
dangerous in me which you would be wise to fear. Take
your hands off me.

CLAUDIUS

Separate them.

GERTRUDE

Hamlet! Hamlet!

ALL

Gentlemen!

HORATIO

[*To HAMLET*] My lord, calm down.

Attendants separate HAMLET and LAERTES.

HAMLET

I'll fight him on this topic until my eyelids cease to blink.

GERTRUDE

Oh, my son, what topic?

HAMLET

I loved Ophelia. The love of forty thousand brothers, added
together, could not match mine. What are you going to do
for her?

CLAUDIUS

Oh, he is crazy, Laertes!

GERTRUDE

280 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?

285 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 throw
Millions of acres on us, till our ground,
290 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.
295 Anon, as patient as the female dove
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?
300 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 day.

HAMLET exits.

CLAUDIUS

I pray thee, good Horatio, wait upon him.

HORATIO exits.

CLAUDIUS

[to LAERTES]

305 Strengthen your patience in our last night's speech.
We'll put the matter to the present push.—
Good Gertrude, set some watch over your son.—
This grave shall have a living monument.
An hour of quiet shortly shall we see.
310 Till then in patience our proceeding be.


They exit.

GERTRUDE

For the love of God, leave him alone.

HAMLET

By God! Show me what you're going to do for her. Will you
cry? Will you fight? Will you cease to eat? Will you cut
yourself? Will you drink vinegar, or eat a crocodile? I'll do it.
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 babble about mountains, then let them
throw millions of acres over us until the peak scrapes
against sun and makes Mount Ossa look like a wart.
See? I can rant as well as you.

 According to ancient Greek mythology, Ossa is a mountain that giants were said to have constructed, trying to reach the heavens.

GERTRUDE

This is pure madness. This fit will stay with him for a little
while. Then he'll be as calm as a female dove waiting for a
pair of eggs to hatch.

HAMLET

Listen to me, sir. Why do you treat me like this? I always
loved you. But it doesn't matter. No matter what a hero like
Hercules does, fools will seek to draw attention to
themselves.

HAMLET exits.

CLAUDIUS

Horatio, please go with him.

HORATIO exits.

CLAUDIUS

[To LAERTES] Control yourself by thinking of our talk last
night. We'll handle this issue very soon.

[To GERTRUDE] Good Gertrude, please set some kind of
watch over your son. We will build a monument for this
grave that will last forever. Soon we'll have the calm we
need. Until then we must work patiently.

They all exit.

Act 5, Scene 2

Shakespeare

HAMLET and HORATIO enter.

HAMLET

So much for this, sir. Now shall you see the other.
You do remember all the circumstances?

HORATIO

Remember it, my lord?

HAMLET

5 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

Shakescleare Translation

HAMLET and HORATIO enter.

HAMLET

That's everything about that, sir. Now I'll tell you my other
story. You do remember the circumstances of my situation,
right?

HORATIO

How could I not, my lord?

HAMLET

Sir, there was a kind of war in my heart that wouldn't let me
sleep. It seemed to me that I was in worse shape even than
captive rebels in chains. I impulsively—let me praise
impulsiveness. Sometimes acting impulsively works even

When our deep plots do pall, and that should teach us

- 10 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
15 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—
20 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,
25 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.
30 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,
They had begun the play—I sat me down,
35 Devised a new commission, wrote it fair.
I once did hold it, as our statisticians 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
40 Th' effect of what I wrote?

HORATIO

Ay, good my lord.

HAMLET

- An earnest conjuration from the king,
As England was his faithful tributary,
As love between them like the palm might flourish,
45 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,
50 He should the bearers put to sudden death,
Not shirving time allowed.

HORATIO

How was this sealed?

HAMLET

- Why, even in that was heaven ordinaunt.
I had my father's signet in my purse,
55 Which was the model of that Danish seal.
Folded the writ up in form of th' other,
Subscribed it, gave 't th' impression, placed it
safely,
The changeling never known. Now, the next day
60 Was our sea fight, and what to this was sequent
Thou know'st already.

when our complicated plans don't work out, showing us
that a God who shapes our destiny—

HORATIO

That is a certainty.

HAMLET

I came up from my cabin with my robe tied around me. In the dark, I groped around and found what I was looking for. I stole Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's packet of papers, and snuck back to my cabin again. My fears overcoming my manners, I was bold enough to open the letter they carried from Claudius to the English king. Horatio, there I found—oh, royal mischief!—an explicit command, fattened up with blather about Denmark's well-being and England's too—listen!—that described all the terrors that would come from letting me live. The letter contained instructions to cut off my head, without even taking any time to sharpen the ax.

HORATIO

Is it possible?

HAMLET

[He shows HORATIO a document] Here's the letter. Read it when you have a moment. But do you want to hear what I did next?

HORATIO

Please.

HAMLET

Stuck as I was in their cruel net—before I could even fully think about the problem, my brain had already started playing with possible solutions—I sat down and wrote a new letter. I wrote it in a bureaucrat's neat handwriting. I used to think, just as our politicians do, that having nice handwriting was for servants. So I had to really work to forget that bias. And, sir, it certainly helped me then. Would you like to know what I wrote?

HORATIO

Yes, my good lord.

HAMLET

A sincere request from the King of Denmark, to the King of England—his faithful vassal subject—with hopes that the love between the two countries can flourish, and that peace can rise up and join them together in friendship, and some other important-sounding statements like that. I instructed the King of England that, after reading and reviewing the letter, without any further debate, he should immediately kill the men who delivered the letter, without even giving them time to confess to a priest.

HORATIO

How did you get an official seal on it?

HAMLET

Even there, heaven gave me a helping hand. I had my father's signet ring in my pocket, which has a small version of the Danish royal seal on it. I folded up the letter, signed it, sealed it, and put it safely back without anyone noticing the change. The next day brought our fight at sea, and you already know what happened afterwards.

HORATIO

So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to 't.

HAMLET

Why, man, they did make love to this employment.
They are not near my conscience. Their defeat
65 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

70 Does it not, think thee, stand me now upon—
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
75 To quit him with this arm? And is 't not to be damned
To let this canker of our nature come
In further evil?

HORATIO

It must be shortly known to him from England
What is the issue of the business there.

HAMLET

80 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
85 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?

OSRIC, a young courtier, enters with his hat in his hand.

OSRIC

Your lordship is right welcome back to Denmark.

HAMLET

90 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.
95 Let a beast be lord of beasts and his crib shall stand
at the king's mess. 'Tis a cough, but, as I say,
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

100 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.

HORATIO

So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to their deaths.

HAMLET

Well, man, they loved doing the king's every bidding. I don't
feel any guilt. Their deaths grew out of their meddling. It's
dangerous when inferior people get in between the sword
thrusts of mighty opponents.

HORATIO

Oh, what a king this Claudius is!

HAMLET

Don't you think that it's now my duty to kill him? He killed
my king, made my mother a whore, stole the throne that I
wanted, and plotted against my life with shocking trickery.
Wouldn't killing him be completely justified? And, in fact,
wouldn't I be damned if I were to let this cancer live to do
more harm?

HORATIO

He's going to get the news from England soon about what
happened there.

HAMLET

He will, soon. But I have time before the news arrives. And it
only takes the time to count to one to kill a man. But I do
feel very sorry, Horatio, that I lost control of myself with
Laertes. I can see my own cause for revenge mirrored in his.
I'll try to win him over. But the melodramatic showiness of
his grief pushed me into a fury.

HORATIO

Stop—who's coming in here?

OSRIC, a young courtier, enters with his hat in his hand.

OSRIC

My lord, welcome back to Denmark.

HAMLET

I humbly thank you, sir.

[To HORATIO so that only he can hear] Do you know this
flitting little bug?

HORATIO

[To HAMLET so that only he can hear] No, my lord.

HAMLET

[To HORATIO so that only he can hear] You're better off for
that. It's a curse to know him. He owns a lot of good, fertile
land. Give a beast a lot of cattle, and his food trough will be
welcome at the king's table. He's a fool who spouts
nonsense, but, as I said, he owns a lot of dirt.

OSRIC

Sweet lord, if you were to have a free moment, I would like
to tell you a message from His Majesty.

HAMLET

Sir, I'll listen, with all of my being. Now put your hat to its
proper use. Put it on your head.

OSRIC

Thank you for the advice, my lord. But it's very hot.

HAMLET

No, believe me, 'tis very cold. The wind is northerly.

OSRIC

It is indifferent cold, my lord, indeed.

HAMLET

105 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,
110 this is the matter—

HAMLET

I beseech you, remember—*[indicates that OSRIC should put on his 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.

HAMLET

120 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
125 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

130 The concernancy, sir? Why do we wrap the gentleman in our more rawer breath?

OSRIC

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

135 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

No, believe me, it's very cold, with a northern wind.

OSRIC

My lord, it is quite cold, indeed.

HAMLET

But yet I think it's too humid and hot for me.

OSRIC

Exceedingly hot, sir. It is very humid—so humid I can't even describe it. My lord, His Majesty asked me to tell you that he's placed a large bet on you. Sir, here's what's going on—

HAMLET

I beg you, remember—*[He gestures that OSRIC should put on his hat]*

OSRIC

No, my lord, I'm more comfortable like this, I swear. Sir, a recent arrival to the royal court named Laertes is an absolute gentleman, believe me. He is full of the most excellent qualities, with agreeable manners and good looks. In fact, if I were to reveal my true feelings about him, he is like a checklist of what a gentleman should be. You'll find that he's the embodiment of a perfect gentleman.

HAMLET

Sir, your description of him suffers no loss of accuracy, though I know that to try to describe all of his good qualities would dizzy the mind. And even trying to do so, you still would not be able to capture them all. But in true and sincere praise, I can say that he has a soul of great nobility, and that he is so unique—to be honest about him—that his equal can only be found when he looks in a mirror. Anyone else is just a shadow of him.

OSRIC

Your lordship describes him perfectly.

HAMLET

What's the relevance? Why do we wrap him up in our breathless words?

OSRIC

Sir?

HORATIO

[To HAMLET so that only he can hear] You must speak in a different style for him to understand you? You can do it, sir.

HAMLET

What is the significance of our discussion of this gentleman?

OSRIC

Of Laertes?

HORATIO

[To HAMLET so that only he can hear] His purse is already empty. He has spent all of his golden words.

HAMLET

Yes, of him. Of Laertes, sir.

OSRIC

I know you are not ignorant—

HAMLET

140 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 meed he's unfollowed.

HAMLET

What's his weapon?

OSRIC

Rapier and dagger.

HAMLET

150 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

What call you the carriages?

HORATIO

160 *[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 the French bet against the Danish. Why is this "impawned," as you call it?

OSRIC

170 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

175 I mean, my lord, the opposition of your person in trial.

HAMLET

180 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

HAMLET

I wish you did, sir. But in truth, if you did, it would not be much to my credit. Well, sir?

OSRIC

I know you're not ignorant about how excellent Laertes is—

HAMLET

I don't dare to admit it, because you might compare his excellence to mine. But to know excellence in another you must know it in yourself.

OSRIC

I mean, sir, he's known for his weapon. Popular opinion holds him to be unrivaled.

HAMLET

What kind of weapon does he use?

OSRIC

The light sword and the dagger.

HAMLET

Those are just two of his weapons. But no matter.

OSRIC

Sir, the king has gambled with Laertes, betting six Barbary horses against—as I understand it—six French light swords and daggers with all their accessories. Three of the carriages, in fact, are very beautifully designed, and match the fencing accessories. Very imaginative carriages.

HAMLET

What are you calling "carriages?"

HORATIO

[To HAMLET so that only he can hear] I knew you'd have to look a word up before we were finished with him.

OSRIC

The carriages, sir, are the hangers on which we hang swords.

HAMLET

That word would make more sense if it were describing something that pulled a cannon. I'd prefer to call it a "hanger." But, still. Six Barbary horses against six French swords with accessories, and three imaginatively designed carriages—sounds like a French bet against the Danish. Why has all this been "gambled," as you put it?

OSRIC

Sir, the king has bet that in a dozen rounds between you and Laertes, he won't beat you by more than three hits. We could start the match immediately if you'll do me the honor of giving me your answer.

HAMLET

What if my answer is "no?"

OSRIC

I mean, my lord, if you'd agree to compete in the wager.

HAMLET

Sir, I'm going to take a walk in the hall. Tell the king that it is my time to exercise. If the king still wants to do this, and if Laertes is willing, tell them to bring in the swords. I'll win

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

185 I commend my duty to your lordship.

HAMLET

Yours, yours.

OSRIC exits.

HAMLET

He does well to commend it himself. There are no tongues else for 's turn.

HORATIO

This lapwing runs away with the shell on his head.

HAMLET

190 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.

A LORD enters.

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.

200

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

205 In happy time.

LORD

The queen desires you to use some gentle entertainment to Laertes before you fall to play.

The LORD exits.

HAMLET

She well instructs me.

HORATIO

210 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

the king's bet for him if I can. If not, I'll have suffered just a bit of shame for losing, and a few sword hits.

OSRIC

Shall I quote you with those precise words?

HAMLET

Just get the meaning across, sir. And be as flowery as you want in doing it.

OSRIC

I am at your service, your lordship.

HAMLET

Thank you.

OSRIC exits.

HAMLET

He's smart to recommend himself. There's no one else who'd do it for him.

HORATIO

That fool looks like a newly hatched bird running around with its egg still on its head.

HAMLET

He used to shower flowery praise on his mother's nipple before he sucked it. In that way he—and so many others in this frivolous age—follow the fashionable way of talking. It's a kind of wispy collection of words through which he can express the most trendy opinions. But blow a little on these ideas to test them, and they'll burst.

A LORD enters.

LORD

My lord, His Majesty has learned from Osric that you will soon come to the main hall. The king would like to know if you would like to duel against Laertes now, or if you'd like a little more time.

HAMLET

I'll do as I said before: whatever the king wants. If he's ready now, so am I. If he prefers some other time, I'll do it then, so long as I'm able.

LORD

The king and queen are coming down with everyone else to watch.

HAMLET

And right on time, too.

LORD

The queen would like you to speak a few polite words to Laertes before the match begins.

The LORD exits.

HAMLET

Her advice is good.

HORATIO

You're going to lose this bet, my lord.

HAMLET

I don't think so. Since Laertes left, I've been practicing fencing constantly. With the odds they've given me, I'm

heart. But it is no matter.

HORATIO

215 Nay, good my lord—

HAMLET

It is but foolery, but it is such a kind of gain-giving as would perhaps trouble a woman.

HORATIO

If your mind dislike anything, obey it. I will forestall their repair hither and say you are not fit.

HAMLET

220 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.

CLAUDIUS enters with GERTRUDE, LAERTES, OSRIC, lords, and other attendants with trumpets, drums, fencing swords, a table, and pitchers 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.
230 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.
235 Was 't Hamlet wronged Laertes? Never Hamlet.
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,
240 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
245 That I have shot mine arrow o'er the house
And hurt 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
250 I stand aloof, and will no reconciliation
Till by some elder masters, of known honor,
I have a voice and precedent of peace
To keep my name ungor'd. But till that time
I do receive your offered love like love
255 And will not wrong it.

HAMLET

I embrace it freely,
And will this brother's wager frankly play.—
Give us the foils. Come on.

LAERTES

Come, one for me.

going to win. But even so, I have a bad feeling in my heart. But forget about that.

HORATIO

No, my lord—

HAMLET

It's just foolishness, but I have the kind of misgiving that might bother a woman.

HORATIO

If your conscience is telling you not to do this, obey it. I'll go and stop them and say you're not feeling well.

HAMLET

You will not. I ignore omens. God controls everything—even the death of a sparrow. If I am to die now, then it will not be later. If I am to die later, then it will not be now. All that matters is being ready for it when it does happen. Since no man knows about what he leaves behind when he dies, then what's it to him if he leaves early? Let it be.

CLAUDIUS enters with GERTRUDE, LAERTES, OSRIC, lords, and other attendants with trumpets, drums, fencing swords, a table, cups, and pitchers of wine.

CLAUDIUS

Come, Hamlet, shake hands with Laertes. [*CLAUDIUS places LAERTES' and HAMLET's hands together*]

HAMLET

I ask your forgiveness, sir. I've done you wrong. Forgive me, as a gentleman. Everyone here knows—and you must have heard it too—that I'm suffering from insanity. What I did to insult your nature and your honor, I did only out of madness. Was it Hamlet who insulted Laertes? Not Hamlet. If Hamlet has had his mind stolen, and insults Laertes when he's not himself, then it is not Hamlet who did it. Who did it, then? Hamlet's madness. If that's true, then it's Hamlet who was the victim. His madness is his enemy. Sir, with this audience as my witness, let me declare that I intended no harm and am as innocent as a man who shoots an arrow over his house and accidentally hits his brother.

LAERTES

My personal feelings are satisfied—even though what you've done should stir them to seek revenge. Yet, as a man who values honor, I must for now hold off and will not accept an apology—until some experts in matters of honor show me that accepting your apology will not stain my reputation. Until then, I accept the love you offer as love, and won't do anything to offend it.

HAMLET

I accept it gladly, and will engage in this friendly match without reservations. Come on, give me a sword.

LAERTES

And one for me.

HAMLET

260 I'll be your foil, Laertes. In mine ignorance
Your skill shall, like a star i' th' darkest night,
Stick fiery off indeed.

LAERTES

You mock me, sir.

HAMLET

No, by this hand.

CLAUDIUS

265 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.
270 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 fence.

CLAUDIUS

275 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,
280 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,
285 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 fence.

HAMLET

290 One.

LAERTES

No.

HAMLET

Judgment?

OSRIC

A hit, a very palpable hit.

HAMLET

I'm going to make you look good, Laertes. My lack of skill
will make yours blaze like the brightest star in the darkest
night.

LAERTES

You're making fun of me, sir.

HAMLET

No, I swear by my hand.

CLAUDIUS

Give them the swords, Osric. Hamlet, you know the bet?

HAMLET

Very well, my lord. You've placed your bet on the weaker
side.

CLAUDIUS

I'm not worried. I've seen both of you fence. But since
Laertes is better, we've given him a handicap.

LAERTES

[He tests a sword] This sword's too heavy. Give me another
one.

HAMLET

[He tests a sword] This one is good for me. Are they all the
same length?

OSRIC

Yes, my good lord.

HAMLET and LAERTES prepare to fence.

CLAUDIUS

Put the cups of wine on that table. If Hamlet gets the first or
second hit, or even responds to Laertes challenge by just
making the third hit, then we will fire the cannons in his
honor! I'll then drink to Hamlet's health, and into his cup I'll
drop a pearl more valuable than those the last four Danish
kings worn in their crowns. Give me the cups. Play the drum
to signal the trumpeter, so the trumpet will signal the
cannons outside, and the cannons will signal the heavens,
and the heavens will echo the sound in order to tell all the
world that the king now drinks to Hamlet's health. Come
on, begin. And you, judges, watch carefully.

Trumpets play.

HAMLET

Come on, sir.

LAERTES

Come on, my lord.

HAMLET and LAERTES fence.

HAMLET

That was one hit.

LAERTES

No.

HAMLET

Referee?

OSRIC

It was a hit, a clear hit.

LAERTES

Well, again.

CLAUDIUS

295 Stay, give me drink.—Hamlet, this pearl is thine.
Here's to thy health.

CLAUDIUS drops the pearl into a cup.

Drums, trumpets sound, shot goes off

CLAUDIUS

Give him the cup.

HAMLET

I'll play this bout first. Set it by a while.
Come.

HAMLET and LAERTES fence.

HAMLET

300 Another hit. What say you?

LAERTES

A touch, a touch, I do confess 't.

CLAUDIUS

Our son shall win.

GERTRUDE

305 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

Good madam.

CLAUDIUS

Gertrude, do not drink.

GERTRUDE

I will, my lord. I pray you, pardon me. *[drinks]*

CLAUDIUS

310 *[aside]* It is the poisoned cup. It is too late.

HAMLET

I dare not drink yet, madam. By and by.

GERTRUDE

Come, let me wipe thy face.

LAERTES

[aside to CLAUDIUS] My lord, I'll hit him now.

CLAUDIUS

I do not think 't.

LAERTES

315 *[aside]* And yet it is almost 'gainst my conscience.

HAMLET

Come, for the third, Laertes. You do but dally.
I pray you, pass with your best violence.
I am afeard you make a wanton of me.

LAERTES

Well, another round.

CLAUDIUS

Give me some wine.

[To HAMLET] Hamlet, this pearl is yours. Here's to your health.

CLAUDIUS drops the pearl into a cup.

Drums play and trumpets sound. A gun is fired.

CLAUDIUS

Give him the cup.

HAMLET

I'll finish this round first. Set the cup down for a while. Let's go.

HAMLET and LAERTES fence.

HAMLET

Another hit. What do you say?

LAERTES

It was a small hit, a small hit, I admit it.

CLAUDIUS

My son will win.

GERTRUDE

He's fat and out of breath.

[To HAMLET] Here, Hamlet, take my handkerchief and wipe the sweat from your forehead. The queen drinks to your good luck, Hamlet. *[She lifts the cup with the pearl]*

HAMLET

Thank you, madam.

CLAUDIUS

Gertrude, don't drink.

GERTRUDE

I will drink, my lord. Please excuse me. *[She drinks]*

CLAUDIUS

[To himself] That was the poisoned drink. It's too late.

HAMLET

I can't afford to drink now, madam. Soon.

GERTRUDE

Come on, let me wipe your face.

LAERTES

[To CLAUDIUS so that only he can hear] I'll hit him now.

CLAUDIUS

I doubt it.

LAERTES

[To himself] And yet, it almost makes me feel guilty.

HAMLET

Come for the third round, Laertes. You're just playing. Come on, try your hardest. I fear that you're treating me like a spoiled child.

LAERTES

Say you so? Come on.

HAMLET and LAERTES fence.

OSRIC

320 Nothing, neither way.

LAERTES

Have at you now!

LAERTES wounds HAMLET. They scuffle and end up with each other's swords. HAMLET wounds LAERTES.

CLAUDIUS

Part them! They are incensed.

HAMLET

Nay, come, again.

GERTRUDE collapses.

OSRIC

Look to the queen there, ho!

HORATIO

325 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

330 She swoons to see them bleed.

GERTRUDE

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.

OSRIC exits

HAMLET

Treachery! Seek it out.

LAERTES

335 It is here, Hamlet. Hamlet, thou art slain.
No medicine in the world can do thee good.
In thee there is not half an hour of life.
The treacherous instrument is in thy hand,
Unbated and envenomed. The foul practice
340 Hath turned itself on me. Lo, here I lie,
Never to rise again. Thy mother's poisoned.
I can no more. The king, the king's to blame.

HAMLET

The point envenomed too!—Then, venom, to thy work.

HAMLET wounds CLAUDIUS.

LAERTES

You believe so? Come on.

HAMLET and LAERTES fence.

OSRIC

There's little difference between them.

LAERTES

Take this!

LAERTES wounds HAMLET. They scuffle and end up with each other's swords. HAMLET wounds LAERTES.

CLAUDIUS

Separate them. They're too angry.

HAMLET

No, come on, again.

GERTRUDE collapses.

OSRIC

Hey! Take care of the queen!

HORATIO

Both fencers are bleeding.

[To HAMLET] How are you, my lord?

OSRIC

How are you, Laertes?

LAERTES

Why, I'm like a bird caught in my own trap, Osric. *[He collapses]* I've been killed by my own betrayal, as I deserve.

HAMLET

How is the queen doing?

CLAUDIUS

She fainted at the sight of them bleeding.

GERTRUDE

No, no! The drink, the drink! Oh, my dear Hamlet! The drink, the drink! I've been poisoned. *[She dies]*

HAMLET

Oh, what evil! Hey, lock the door!

OSRIC exits.

HAMLET

We've been betrayed! Find the traitor.

LAERTES

It's me, Hamlet. Hamlet, you're dead. No medicine in the world can cure you. You don't have more than a half hour left to live. The treacherous weapon is in your hand, sharpened and dipped in poison. The dirty plan backfired on me. And so, here I lie, never to rise again. Your mother's been poisoned. I can't say anymore. The king, the king's to blame.

HAMLET

The sword is poisoned! Then, poison, do your job!

HAMLET wounds CLAUDIUS.

ALL

Treason! Treason!

CLAUDIUS

345 O, yet defend me, friends. I am but hurt.

HAMLET

Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damnèd Dane,
Drink off this potion. Is thy union here?
Follow my mother.

HAMLET forces CLAUDIUS to drink. CLAUDIUS dies.

LAERTES

He is justly served.

350 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]*

HAMLET

Heaven make thee free of it. I follow thee.—
355 I am dead, Horatio. —Wretched queen, adieu!—
You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
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—
360 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.
365 Here's yet some liquor left.
[lifts the poisoned cup]

HAMLET

As thou'rt a man,
Give me the cup. Let go! By heaven, I'll have 't.
[takes cup from HORATIO]

370 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
375 To tell my story.

A military march plays offstage.

HAMLET

What warlike noise is this?

OSRIC enters.

OSRIC

Young Fortinbras, with conquest come from Poland,
To th' ambassadors of England gives
This warlike volley.

HAMLET

380 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.
385 So tell him, with th' occurrences, more and less,
Which have solicited. The rest is silence.
O, O, O, O. *[dies]*

ALL

Treason! Treason!

CLAUDIUS

Oh, defend me, my friends. I've only been hurt.

HAMLET

Here, you incestuous, murderous, damned Dane! Drink this
poisoned wine. Is your pearl in there? Follow my mother.

*HAMLET forces CLAUDIUS to drink from the cup of poisoned
wine. CLAUDIUS dies.*

LAERTES

He got what he deserved. He made that poison himself.
Forgive me as I forgive you, noble Hamlet. My death and my
father's death are not your fault, and my death is not yours.
[He dies]

HAMLET

God frees you from blame. I'll follow you.


[To HORATIO] I'm dead, Horatio.


[To GERTRUDE] Unlucky queen, goodbye.

[To the others] You who watch, pale and trembling--a
speechless audience to this show--if I had just a little time, I
could tell you things. But this dread officer, Death, allows no
mercy or extra time. Let it be.

[To HORATIO] Horatio, I'm dying. You live on. Tell my story
and my cause to everyone.

HORATIO

Don't believe it. I'm more like an ancient Roman  than a
Dane. There's still some of this wine. *[He picks up the
poisoned cup]*

 Horatio implies that he will follow
an ancient Roman custom by
committing suicide after a person he
cares about so deeply dies.

HAMLET

On your manhood, give me that cup. Let it go! By heaven,
give it to me. *[He takes the cup from HORATIO]* Oh God,
Horatio, what a bad reputation I'm leaving behind--because
no one knows what happened. If you ever loved me, then
avoid the sweet relief of death for a while, and stay in this
harsh world long enough to draw painful breaths and tell
my story.

A military march plays offstage.

HAMLET

What are these sounds of war?

OSRIC enters.

OSRIC

Young Fortinbras returns triumphantly from Poland, and
fires his cannons to greet the English ambassadors.

HAMLET

Oh, I'm dying, Horatio! This powerful poison is too much for
me. I won't live to hear the news from England. But I predict
that Fortinbras will win the election for the Danish crown. I
give him my dying vote. So tell him what has happened
here. The rest is silence. Oh, oh, oh, oh. *[He dies]*

HORATIO

Now cracks a noble heart.—Good night, sweet prince,
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!—
390 Why does the drum come hither?

*FORTINBRAS and the English AMBASSADOR enter, with a 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

395 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?

AMBASSADOR

The sight is dismal,
And our affairs from England come too late.
400 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?

HORATIO

[*indicates CLAUDIUS*] Not from his mouth,
405 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
410 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,
415 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.

FORTINBRAS

Let us haste to hear it,
420 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.

HORATIO

Of that I shall have also cause to speak,
425 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.

FORTINBRAS

Let four captains
430 Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage,
For he was likely, had he been put on,
To have proved most royally. And, for his passage,
The soldiers' music and the rites of war
Speak loudly for him.
435 Take up the bodies. Such a sight as this
Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss.
Go, bid the soldiers shoot.

They exit marching, carrying the bodies, as cannons fire.

HORATIO

Now a noble heart breaks. Good night, sweet prince. May
hosts of angels sing you to your sleep. Why are those drums
coming near?

*FORTINBRAS and the English AMBASSADOR enter, with a
drummer and attendants.*

FORTINBRAS

What am I seeing?

HORATIO

What would you like to see? If it's a tragedy or other
astonishment, you've found it.

FORTINBRAS

These corpses suggest a massacre. Oh, proud Death, what
banquet are you preparing that you've struck down so
many princes at once?

AMBASSADOR

This is an awful sight. Our news arrives from England too
late. The people who were meant to hear it are all dead. We
came to tell the king his orders have been followed:
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead. Who will thank us
now?

HORATIO

[*He points to CLAUDIUS*] Not him, even if he were still alive
to thank you. He never ordered their deaths. But since
you've arrived to see this bloody scene--you from the war in
Poland and you from England--then order that these bodies
be displayed on a high platform to be viewed, and let me
tell the world how all this happened. You'll hear of violent,
bloody, and unnatural acts; accidental revenge; casual
murders; deaths caused by trickery and by threat; and
plans that backfired on their inventors. All this I will tell you
truthfully.

FORTINBRAS

Let us hurry to listen to it now, and call in all the noblemen
as audience. As for me, I accept my good fortune with
sadness. I have some rights to claim the throne of this
kingdom, and now I have the chance to make that claim.

HORATIO

I also have much to say about that, from the mouth of one
who only added to your claim. Let's do this now, even
though everyone's minds are racing, to make sure no
further mistakes, plots, or errors occur.

FORTINBRAS

Let four captains carry Hamlet like a soldier to the viewing
platform. If he only had the chance, it's likely he would have
been a great king. Military music and military rites shall
proclaim his greatness. Lift up the bodies. A sight like this
looks right on a battlefield, but here shows that much has
gone wrong. Go, tell the soldiers to fire their cannons.

They all exit marching, carrying the bodies, as cannons fire.

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