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
He.

FRANCISCO
You come most carefully upon your hour.

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

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

BARNARDO
Have you had quiet guard?

FRANCISCO
Not a mouse stirring.

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

FRANCISCO
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
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.

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

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

BARNARDO
Last night of all,
When yond same star that's westward from the pole
Had made his course 't illume that part of heaven
Where now it burns,
Marcellus and myself,
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
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.
What art thou that usurp'st this time of night
Together with that fair and warlike form
In which the majesty of buried Denmark
Did sometimes march? By heaven, I charge thee, speak.

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! 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.

HORATIO
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,
Thereo pricked on by a most emulate pride,
Dared to the combat; in which our valiant Hamlet
(For so this side of our known world esteemed him)
Did slay this Fortinbras, who by a sealed compact
Well ratified by law and heraldry,

HORATIO
That can I.

At least, the whisper goes so: our last king,
Whose image even but now appeared to us,
Was, as you know, by Fortinbras of Norway,
Thereto pricked on by a most emulate pride,
Dared to the combat; in which our valiant Hamlet
Is not this something more than just our imagination? What do you

HORATIO
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seen it with my own eyes.

MARCELLUS
Doesn't it look like the king?

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Thereto pricked on by a most emulate pride,
Dared to the combat; in which our valiant Hamlet
(For so this side of our known world esteemed him)
Did slay this Fortinbras, who by a sealed compact
Well ratified by law and heraldry,
Did forfeit, with his life, all those his lands
Which he stood seized of to the conqueror,
Against the which a moiety competent
Was gagèd by our king, which had returned
To the inheritance of Fortinbras
Had he been vanquisher, as, by the same covenant
And carriage of the article designed,
His fell to Hamlet.

Now, sir, young Fortinbras,
Of unimprovèd mettle hot and full,
Hath in the skirts of Norway here and there
Sharked up a list of lawless resolutes,
For food and diet, to some enterprise
That hath a stomach in 't, which is no other—
As it doth well appear unto our state—
But to recover of us, by strong hand
And terms compulsatory, those foresaid lands
So by his father lost. And this, I take it,
Is the main motive of our preparations,
The source of this our watch, and the chief head
Of this posthaste and rummage in the land.

BARNARDO
I think it be no other but e'en so.
Well may it sort that this portentous figure
Comes armèd through our watch so like the king
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,
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
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
Unto our climatures and countrymen.

The GHOST enters.

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

[To GHOST] Stop, you illusion!

The GHOST spreads his arms.

HORATIO
If thou hast any sound or use of voice,
Speak to me. 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,
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
—Stop it, Marcellus.

MARCELLUS
Shall I strike at it with my partisan?
Act 1, Scene 2

HORATIO
Do, if it will not stand.

BARNARDO
’Tis here.

HORATIO
’Tis here.

The GHOST exits.

BARNARDO
‘Tis here.

HORATIO
Yes, if it doesn’t stand still.

BARNARDO
It’s here.

HORATIO
It’s here.

The GHOST exits.

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

BARNARDO
It was about to speak when the cock crew.

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

MARCELLUS
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. 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, 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. 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.

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 ’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 bethiffled
To bear our hearts in grief and our whole kingdom
To be contracted in one brow of woe,
Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature
That we with wisest sorrow think on him
Together with remembrance of ourselves.
Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen,
Th' imperial jointness to this warlike state,
Have we—as 'twere with a defeated joy,
With an auspicious and a dropping eye,
With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage,
In equal scale weighing delight and dole—
Taken to wife. Nor have we herein barred
Your better 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
Our state to be disjoint and out of frame,
Colleagued with the dream of his advantage,
He hath not failed to pester us with message
Importing the surrender of those lands
Lost by his father, with all bonds of law,
To our most valiant brother. So much for him.

CLAUDIUS

Now for ourself and for this time of meeting
Thus much the business: we have here writ
To Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras—
Who, impotent and bedrid, scarcely hears
Of this his nephew's purpose —to suppress
His further gait herein, in that the levies,
The lists, and full proportions are all made
Out of his subject; and we here dispatch
You, good Cornelius, and you, Voltemand,
For bearers of this greeting to old Norway,
Giving to you no further personal power
To business with the king more than the scope
Of these dilated articles allow.
(gives them a paper)
Farewell, and let your haste commend your duty.

CLAUDIUS

We doubt it nothing. Heartily farewell.

CLAUDIUS

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

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, Voltemand, 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.

CLAUDIUS

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

CLAUDIUS

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

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

CLAUDIUS
Take thy fair hour, Laertes. Time be thine,
And thy best grace 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
Good Hamlet, cast thy nocturnal color off,
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.
Do not forever with thy vailèd lids
Seek for thy noble father in the dust.
Thou know’st ‘tis common. All that lives must die,
Passing through nature to eternity.

HAMLET
Ay, madam, it is common.

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

HAMLET
“Seems,” madam? Nay, it is. I know not “seems.”
’Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
Nor windy suspension of forced breath,
Nor no the fruitful river in the eye,
Nor the dejected ‘havior of the visage,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
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,
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.

GERTRUDE
Not at all, my lord. I am too much i’ the sun.

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
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
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 nobleness of love
Than that which dearest father bears his son
Do I imparte toward you. For your intent
In going back to school in Wittenberg,
It is most retrograde to our desire.
And we beseech you, bend you to remain
Here in the cheer and comfort of our eye,
Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.

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.

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 [1]. 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 [2]. Within a month of my father's death—before the salt from her 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
Hail to your lordship.
HAMLET
I am glad to see you well.—
Horatio? Or do I forget myself?

165

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

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

MARCELLUS
My good lord.

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

170

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 see your father’s funeral.

175

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

180

HAMLET
We’ll teach you to drink deep ere you depart.

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

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

HORATIO
Indeed, my lord, it followed hard upon.

HAMLET
Thrift, thrift, Horatio! The funeral baked meats 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.

185

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, my lord?

190

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
My lord, I think I saw him yesternight.

195

HAMLET
Saw who?
HORATIO
My lord, the king your father.

HAMLET
The king my father?!

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

HAMLET
For God’s love, let me hear.

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

These hands are not more like.

HAMLET
But where was this?

MARCELLUS
My lord, upon the platform where we watch.

HAMLET
Did you not speak to it?

HORATIO
My lord, I did,
But answer made it none. Yet once methought
It lifted up its head and did address
Itself to motion, like as it would speak.
But even then the morning cock crew loud,
And at the sound it shrunk in haste away
And vanished from our sight.

HAMLET
‘Tis very strange.

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

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

MARCELLUS, BARNARDO
We do, my lord.

HAMLET
Armed, say you?

MARCELLUS, BARNARDO
Armed, my lord.
HAMLET
From top to toe?

MARCELLUS, BARNARDO
My lord, from head to foot.

HAMLET
Then saw you not his face?

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

HAMLET
What, looked he frowningly?

HORATIO
A countenance more
In sorrow than in anger.

HAMLET
Pale or red?

HORATIO
Nay, very pale.

HAMLET
And fixed his eyes upon you?

HORATIO
Most constantly.

HAMLET
I wish I’d been there.

HORATIO
It would have much amazed you.

HAMLET
If it assume my noble father’s person,
I’ll speak to it, though Hell itself should gape
And bid me hold my peace. I pray you all,
If you have hitherto concealed this sight,
Let it be tenable in your silence still.
And whatsoever else shall hap tonight,
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
Do you doubt that?

LAERTES
For Hamlet and the trifling of his favor,
Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood,
A violet in the youth of primy nature,
Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,
The perfume and suppliance of a minute.
No more.

OPHELIA
No more but so?

LAERTES
Think it no more.
For nature, crescent, does not grow alone
In thews and bulk, but, as this temple waxes,
The inward service of the mind and soul
Grows wide withal. Perhaps he loves you now,
And now no soil nor cautel doth besmirch
The virtue of his will, but you must fear.
His greatness weighed, his will is not his own,
For he himself is subject to his birth.
He may not, as unvalued persons do,
Carve for himself, for on his choice depends
The safety and health of this whole state.
And therefore must his choice be circumscribed
Unto the voice and yielding of that body
Whereof he is the head. Then if he says he loves you,
It fits your wisdom so far to believe it
As he in his particular act and place
May give his saying deed, which is no further
Than the main voice of Denmark goes withal.
Then weigh what loss your honor may sustain.

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 it no more. 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 whichever 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
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
If she unmask her beauty to the moon.
Virtue itself 'scapes not calumnious strokes.
The canker galls the infants of the spring
Too oft before their buttons be disclosed.
And in the morn and liquid dew of youth,
Contagious blastments are most imminent.
Be wary, then. Best safety lies in fear.
Youth to itself rebels, though none else near.

OPHELIA
I shall the effect of this good lesson keep
As watchman to my heart.

But, good my brother,
Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven
Whiles, like a puffed and reckless libertine,
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads
And reck not his own rede.

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!
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.
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
Of entrance to a quarrel, but being in,
Bear 't that the 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,
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,
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.
Farewell. My blessing season this in thee.

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

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

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

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

LAERTES

Farewell.

LAERTES exits.

POLONIUS

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

OPHELIA

So please you, something touching the Lord Hamlet.

POLONIUS

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

OPHELIA

He hath, my lord, of late made many tenders
Of his affection to me.

POLONIUS

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

OPHELIA

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

POLONIUS

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

OPHELIA

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

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

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 hath importuned me with love
In 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, verbs 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.
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
No, it is struck.

HORATIO
Indeed? 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
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
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 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. So oft it chances 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, 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.

HORATIO
Really? 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 plausive manners— that these men, 
Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect, 
Being nature's livery or fortune's star, 
Their virtues else (be they as pure as grace, 
As infinite as man may undergo) 
Shall in the general censure take corruption 
From that particular fault. 

The dram of evil 
Doth all the noble substance of a doubt 
To his own scandal.

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, 
Be thy intents wicked or charitable, 
Thou comest in such a questionable shape 
That I will speak to thee. I'll call thee “Hamlet,” “King,” “Father,” “royal Dane.” O, answer me! 
Let me not burst in ignorance, but tell 
Why thy canonized bones, hearsed in death, 
Have burst their cerements; why the sepulcher, 
Wherein we saw thee quietly interred, 
Hath oped his ponderous and marble jaws 
To cast thee up again. 
What may this mean, 
That thou, dead corse, again in complete steel 
Revisits thus the glimpses of the moon, 
Making night hideous and we fools of nature, 
So horridly to shake our disposition 
With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls? 
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 
It waves you to a more removèd 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
Why, what should be the fear? 
I do not set my life in a pin’s fee, 
And for my soul—what can it do to that, 
Being a thing immortal as itself? 
It waves me forth again. I’ll follow it.

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

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

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

HAMLET
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HORATIO
It’s not going to speak here. So I will 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.

HORATIO
It motions you to go off with it, as if it wants to say something to you alone.
And hears it roar beneath.

**HAMLET**
85 It waves me still.
—Go on, I'll follow thee.

**MARCELLUS**
You shall not go, my lord.

**HAMLET**
Hold off your hands.

**HORATIO**
Be ruled. You shall not go.

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

**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**
Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

**HORATIO**
Heaven will direct it.

**MARCELLUS**
Nay, let's follow him.

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

**GHOST**
Mark me.

**HAMLET**
I will.

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

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

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.

**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.

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**GHOST**
Mark me.

**HAMLET**
I will.

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

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**

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 And for the day confined to fast in fires, Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature Are burnt and purged away. But that I am forbid To tell the secrets of my prison house, I could a tale unfold whose lightest word Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood, Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres, Thy knotted and combinèd locks to part And each particular hair to stand on end, Like quills upon the fearful porpentine. But this eternal blazon must not be To ears of flesh and blood. List, list, O, list! If thou didst ever thy dear father love—

**HAMLET**

O God!

**GHOST**

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 As meditation or the thoughts of love, May sweep to my revenge.

**GHOST**

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

**HAMLET**

Oh my prophetic soul! My uncle?

**GHOST**

Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast, With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts—

**GHOST**

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

**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—
O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power
To seduce!—worn to his shameful lust
The will of my most seeming virtuous queen.
O Hamlet, what a falling off was there!
From me, whose love was of that dignity
That it went hand in hand even with the vow
I made to her in marriage, and to decline
Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor
To those of mine.

But virtue, as it never will be moved,
Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven,
So lust, though to a radiant angel linked,
Will sate itself in a celestial bed
And prey on garbage.

But soft! Methinks I scent the morning air.
Brief let me be. Sleeping within my orchard,
My custom always of the afternoon,
Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole
With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial,
And in the porches of my ears did pour
The leperous distilment, whose effect
Holds such an enmity with blood of man
That swift as quicksilver it courses through
The natural gates and alleys of the body
And with a sudden vigor doth posset
And curd, like eager droppings into milk,
The thin and wholesome blood. So did it mine.
And a most instant tetter barked about,
Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust
All my smooth body.

Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand
Of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatched,
Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,
Unhoused, disappointed, unaneled.
No reckoning made, but sent to my account
With all my imperfections on my head.
Oh, horrible, oh, horrible, most horrible!
If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not.
Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch for luxury and damned incest.

But howsoever thou pursuest this act,
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught.

Turn not the wise sayings of books, all images and impressions from
My youth, so that your commandment alone will live there.

Remember you? Yes, you poor ghost, as long as I
Have any memory in my distracted head. Remember thee!

Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat
In this distracted globe. Remember thee!

But bear me stiffly up.
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
And shall I couple hell? Oh, fie! Hold me,
And muscles, don't grow suddenly old—hold me
Upright.

And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge
Against thy mother aught.

The glowworm shows the matin to be near,
To prick and sting her. Fare thee well at once.
The horizon shows that morning is near. Goodbye, goodbye,
And 'gins to pale his usefull fire.

O wicked wit and gifts, that have the 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
Skin 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!

There'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.

The GHOST exits.

HAMLET

O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?
And shall I couple hell? Oh, fie! Hold, hold, my heart,

And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,

But bear me stiffly up.

Yea, from the table of my memory

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,

Unmixed with baser matter.

O villain, villain, smiling, damnèd villain!

My tables!—Meet it is I set it down

That youth and observation copied there,

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,

Unmixed with baser matter.

And with a sudden vigor doth posset

And curd, like eager droppings into milk,

The thin and wholesome blood. So did it mine.

And a most instant tetter barked about,

Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust
All my smooth body.

Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand
Of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatched,
Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,
Unhoused, disappointed, unaneled.
No reckoning made, but sent to my account
With all my imperfections on my head.
Oh, horrible, oh, horrible, most horrible!
If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not.
Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch for luxury and damned incest.

But howsoever thou pursuest this act,
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught.

The glowworm shows the matin to be near,
And 'gins to pale his usefull fire.

Adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me.

The GHOST exits.
HORATIO
My lord, my lord!

MARCELLUS
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
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
Not I, my lord, by heaven.

MARCELLUS
Nor I, my lord.

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

HORATIO, MARCELLUS
Ay, by heaven, my lord.

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

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

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

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

HAMLET
I'm sorry they offend you, heartily. Yes faith, heartily.
HORATIO
There's no offense, my lord.

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

HORATIO
What is 't, my lord? We will.

HAMLET
Never make known what you have seen tonight.

HORATIO, MARCELLUS
My lord, we will not.

HAMLET
Nay, but swear 't.

HORATIO
In faith, my lord, not I.

MARCELLUS
Nor I, my lord, in faith.

HAMLET
Upon my sword.

MARCELLUS
We have sworn, my lord, already.

HAMLET
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
Propose the oath, my lord.

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

GHOST
[beneath] Swear.

HAMLET
Hic et ubique? Then we'll shift our ground. Come hither, gentlemen, And lay your hands again upon my sword. Swear by my sword Never to speak of this that you have heard.

GHOST
[beneath] Swear by his sword.

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, 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), With arms encumbered thus, or this headshake, Or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase, As “Well, well, we know,” or “We could an if we would,” Or “If we list to speak,” or “There be an if they might,” Or such ambiguous giving out— to note That you know aught of me. This not to do, So grace and mercy at your most need help you, Swear.

GHOST
[beneath] Swear!

HAMLET
Rest, rest, perturbèd spirit!— So, 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, 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.

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 inquiere 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

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

REYNALDO
As gaming, my lord?

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

REYNALDO
My lord, that would dishonor him!

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

REYNALDO
But, my good lord—

POLONIUS
Wherefore should you do this?

REYNALDO
Ay, my lord. I would know that.

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

REYNALDO
Very good, my lord.

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

REYNALDO
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
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.

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

REYNALDO
My lord, I have.

POLONIUS
God be wi’ you. Fare you well.

REYNALDO
My good lord.

POLONIUS
Observe his inclination in yourself.

REYNALDO
I shall, my lord.

POLONIUS
And let him ply his music.

REYNALDO
Well, my lord.

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

OPHELIA
As if he had been loosed out of hell To speak of horrors—he comes before me.

POLONIUS
Mad for thy love?

OPHELIA
My lord, I do not know.
Act 2, Scene 2

Shakespeare

But truly, I do fear it.

**POLONIUS**

What said he?

**OPHELIA**

He took me by the wrist and held me hard. Then goes he to the length of all his arm, And, with his other hand thus o’er his brow, He falls to such perusal of my face As it did seem to shatter all his bulk 100 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**

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

**OPHELIA**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

They exit.

Shakescleare Translation

**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.

**CLAUdiUS**

Welcome, dear Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Moreover that we much did long to see you, The need we have to use you did provoke Our hasty sending. Something have you heard Of Hamlet’s “transformation”—so call it Since nor th’ exterior nor the inward man Resembles that it was. What it should be, More than his father’s death, that thus hath put him So much from th’ understanding of himself, I cannot dream of. I entreat you both That, being of so young days brought up with him And since so neighbored to his youth and ‘havior,
That you vouchsafe your rest here in our court
Some little time so by your companies
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.
And sure I am two men there are not living
To whom he more adheres. If it will please you
To show us so much gentry and good will
As to expend your time with us awhile
For the supply and profit of our hope,
Your visitation shall receive such thanks
As fits a king's remembrance.

ROSENCRANTZ

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

GUILDENSTERN

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

CLAUDIUS

Thanks, Rosencrantz and gentle Guildenstern.

GERTRUDE

Thanks, Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz.

GERTRUDE

Ay, amen!

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit, escorted by attendants.

POLONIUS enters.

POLONIUS

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

CLAUDIUS

Thou still hast been the father of good news.

POLONIUS

Have I, my lord? I assure my good liege,
I hold my duty as I hold my soul,
Both to my God and to my gracious king,
And I do think—or else this brain of mine
Hunts not the trail of policy so sure
As it hath used to do—that I have found
The very cause of Hamlet's lunacy.

CLAUDIUS

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

POLONIUS

Give first admittance to th' ambassadors.
My news shall be the fruit to that great feast.
CLAUDIUS
Thyself do grace to them, and bring them in.

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

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

VOLTEMAND
Most fair return of greetings and desires.
Upon our first, he sent out to suppress
His nephew's levies, which to him appeared
To be a preparation 'gainst the Polack,
But, better looked into, he truly found
It was against your highness. Whereat grieved—
That so his sickness, age, and impotence
Was falsely borne in hand—sends out arrests
On Fortinbras, which he, in brief, obeys,
Receives rebuke from Norway, and in fine
Makes vow before his uncle never more
To give th' assay of arms against your majesty.
Whereon old Norway, overcome with joy,
Gives him three thousand crowns in annual fee
And his commission to employ those soldiers,
So levied as before, against the Polack,
With an entreaty, herein further shown,
That it might please you to give quiet pass
Through your dominions for this enterprise,
On such regards of safety and allowance
As therein are set down. [He gives CLAUDIUS a document]

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

VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS exit.

POLONIUS
This business is well ended.
My liege and madam, to expostulate
What majesty should be, what duty is,
Why day is day, night night, and time is time,
Were nothing but to waste night, day, and time.
Therefore, since brevity is the soul of wit
And tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes,
I will be brief: your noble son is mad.
Mad call I it, for, to define true madness,
What is 't but to be nothing else but mad?
But let that go.

GERTRUDE
More matter, with less art.
POLONIUS
Madam, I swear I use no art at all.
That he is mad, 'tis true. 'Tis true, 'tis true—
And pity 'tis 'tis true—a foolish figure,
But farewell it, for I will use no art.
Mad let us grant him then. And now remains
That we find out the cause of this effect,
Or rather say, the cause of this defect,
For this effect defective comes by cause.

Thus it remains, and the remainder thus. Perpend.
I have a daughter—have while she is mine—
Who in her duty and obedience, mark,
Hath given me this. Now gather and surmise.

[reads a letter] "To the celestial and my soul's idol,
the most beautified Ophelia"—That's an ill phrase, a vile phrase. "Beautified" is a vile phrase. But you shall hear. Thus. [reads the letter] "In her excellent white bosom, these," etc.—

GERTRUDE
Came this from Hamlet to her?

POLONIUS
Good madam, stay a while. I will be faithful.
[reads the letter]
"Doubt thou the stars are fire,
Doubt that the sun doth move,
Doubt truth to be a liar,
But never doubt I love.
O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers. I have not art to reckon my groans, but that I love thee best, oh, most best, believe it. Adieu. Thine evermore, most dear lady,
whilst this machine is to him,
Hamlet."
This in obedience hath my daughter shown me,
And more above, hath his solicitings,
As they fell out by time, by means, and place,
All given to mine ear.

CLAUDIUS
But how hath she received his love?

POLONIUS
What do you think of me?

CLAUDIUS
As of a man faithful and honorable.

POLONIUS
I would fain prove so. But what might you think,
When I had seen this hot love on the 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,
Or given my heart a winking, mute and dumb,
Or looked upon this love with idle sight?
What might you think? No, I went round to work,
And my young mistress thus I did bespeak:
"Lord Hamlet is a prince out of thy star.
This must not be." And then I prescripts gave her,
That she should lock herself from his resort,
Admit no messengers, receive no tokens.
Which done, she took the fruits of my advice;
And he, repelled—a short tale to make—
Fell into a sadness, then into a fast,
Thence to a watch, thence into a weakness,
Thence to a lightness, and, by this declension,
Into the madness wherein now he raves
And all we mourn for.

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—

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,
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.
CLAUDIUS
[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
Not that I know.

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

CLAUDIUS
How may we try it further?

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

GERTRUDE
So he does indeed.

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

CLAUDIUS
We will try it.

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
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
Then I would you were so honest a man.

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

[to HAMLET] What do you read, my lord?

HAMLET
Words, words, words.

POLONIUS
What is the matter, my lord?

HAMLET
Between who?

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

HAMLET
Slanders, sir. For the satirical rogue says here that old men have gray beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber and plum-tree gum, and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams—All which, sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down; for yourself, sir, should be old as I am, if like a crab you could go backward.

POLONIUS
[aside] Though this be madness, yet there is method in 't. [to HAMLET] Will you walk out of the air, my lord?

HAMLET
Into my grave.

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

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.

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

POLONIUS
Fare you well, my lord.

HAMLET
[aside] These tedious old fools!

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
My most dear lord!

HAMLET
My excellent good friends! How dost thou, Guildenstern? Ah, Rosencrantz! Good lads, how do you both?

ROSENCRANTZ
As the indifferent children of the earth.

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

HAMLET
Nor the soles of her shoes?

ROSENCRANTZ
Neither, my lord.

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

GUILDENSTERN
Faith, her privates we.

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

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

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

GUILDENSTERN
Prison, my lord?

HAMLET
Denmark’s a prison.

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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROSENSCRANTZ</th>
<th>Then is the world one.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HAMLET</td>
<td>A goodly one, in which there are many confines, wards, and dungeons, Denmark being one o' th' worst.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROSENSCRANTZ</td>
<td>We think not so, my lord.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAMLET</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROSENSCRANTZ</td>
<td>Why then, your ambition makes it one. 'Tis too narrow for your mind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAMLET</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GUILDENSTERN</td>
<td>Which dreams indeed are ambition, for the very substance of the ambitious is merely the shadow of a dream.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAMLET</td>
<td>A dream itself is but a shadow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROSENSCRANTZ</td>
<td>Truly, and I hold ambition of so airy and light a quality that it is but a shadow's shadow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAMLET</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROSENSCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN</td>
<td>We'll wait upon you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAMLET</td>
<td>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?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROSENSCRANTZ</td>
<td>To visit you, my lord, no other occasion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAMLET</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GUILDENSTERN</td>
<td>What should we say, my lord?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAMLET</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROSENSCRANTZ</td>
<td>To what end, my lord?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HAMLET
That you must teach me. But let me conjure you, by the
rights of our fellowship, by the consonancy of our
youth, by the obligation of our ever-preserved love, and
by what more dear a better proposer could charge you
withal: be even and direct with me whether you were sent
for or no.

ROSENCRANTZ
[to GUILDENSTERN] What say you?

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

HAMLET
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
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
godlike 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
340 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
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 wearing rapiers are afraid of goose quills and dare scarce come thither.

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

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

HAMLET
Is 't possible?

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

HAMLET
Do the boys carry it away?

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

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

GUILDENSTERN
There are the players.

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

GUILDENSTERN
In what, my dear lord?

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

POLONIUS
My lord, I have news to tell you.

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

POLONIUS
The actors are come hither, my lord.

HAMLET
Buzz, buzz.

POLONIUS
Upon my honor—

HAMLET
Then came each actor on his ass—

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

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

POLONIUS
What a treasure had he, my lord?

HAMLET
Why,
One fair daughter and no more,
The which he lov'd passing well.

POLONIUS
[Aside] Still on my daughter.

HAMLET
Am I not i' th' right, old Jephthah?
POLONIUS
If you call me Jephthah, my lord, I have a daughter that I love passing well.

HAMLET
Nay, that follows not.

POLONIUS
What follows, then, my lord?

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

HAMLET
You are welcome, masters, welcome, all! I am glad to see thee well. Welcome, good friends. —What, my young lady and mistress! By 'r Lady, your ladyship is nearer to heaven than when I saw you last, by the altitude of a chopine. Pray God, your voice, like a piece of uncurrent gold, be not cracked within the ring. —Masters, you are all welcome. We'll e'en to 't like French falconers, fly at anything we see. We'll have a speech straight. Come, give us a taste of your quality. Come, a passionate speech.

FIRST PLAYER
What speech, my good lord?

HAMLET
I heard thee speak me a speech once, but it was never acted. Or, if it was, not above once, for the play, I remember, pleased not the million. 'Twas caviary to the general. But it was—as I received it, and others, whose judgments in such matters cried in the top of mine—an excellent play, well digested in the scenes, set down with as much modesty as cunning. I remember, one said there were no sallents in the lines to make the matter savoury, nor matter in the phrase that might indic the author of affectation, but called it an honest method, as wholesome as sweet, and by very much more 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. Along the way, the titular character escapes Troy and founds Rome. Along the way, he courts the Carthaginian queen, Dido.

FIRST PLAYER
What 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. Along the way, the titular character escapes Troy and founds Rome. Along the way, he courts the Carthaginian queen, Dido.

FIRST PLAYER
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.

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.

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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, Rebellion to his arm, lies where it falls, Repugnant to command. Unequal matched, Pyrrhus at Priam drives, in rage strikes wide, But with the whirl and wind of his fell sword The unnerved father falls. Then senseless Ilium, Seeming to feel this blow, with flaming top Stoops to his base, and with a hideous crash Takes prisoner Pyrrhus’ ear. For, lo, his sword, Which was declining on the milky head Of reverend Priam, seemed i’ th’ air to stick.

So as a painted tyrant Pyrrhus stood, And, like a neutral to his will and matter, Did nothing. But as we often see against some storm A silence in the heavens, the rack stand still, The bold winds speechless, and the orb below As hush as death, anon the dreadful thunder Doth rend the region. So, after Pyrrhus’ pause, Arousèd vengeance sets him new a-work. And never did the Cyclops’ hammers fall On Mars’s armor forged for proof eterne With less remorse than Pyrrhus’ bleeding sword Now falls on Priam. Out, out, thou strumpet Fortune! All you gods In general synod take away her power, Break all the spokes and fellies from her wheel, And bowl the round nave down the hill of heaven, As low as to the fiends!

**POLONIUS**

This is too long.

**HAMLET**

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

**FIRST PLAYER**

“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, 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.

**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 Cyclopses 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 spikes 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.”

**FIRST PLAYER**

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

**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.

**FIRST PLAYER**

Run barefoot foot 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'ertimèd loins, A blanket, in the alarm of fear caught up— 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, 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
Look whe’e he has not turned his color and has tears in
’s eyes.—Prithee, no more.

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

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

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.

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
My lord, I will give them all they deserve.

HAMLET
Come, sirs.

POLONIUS
Come, sirs.

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

FIRST PLAYER
Ay, my lord.

HAMLET
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.

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

HAMLET
[To the FIRST PLAYER] 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 use them according to their desert.

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

POLONIUS
Come, sirs.

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

FIRST PLAYER
Ay, my lord.

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

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

ROSENCRANTZ
Good my lord.

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

ROSENCRANTZ
Good my lord.

HAMLET
Ay, so. Good-bye to you.

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, in a fiction, in a dream of passion, could force his soul so to his own conceit? That from her working all his visage wanned, tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect, a broken voice, and his whole function suiting with forms to his conceit? And all for nothing—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 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—Hm. 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.

HAMLET exits.

Act 3, Scene 1

Shakespeare

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

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

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

GERTRUDE
Did he receive you well?

ROSENCRANTZ
Most like a gentleman.

GUILDENSTERN
But with much forcing of his disposition.

ROSENCRANTZ
Niggard of question, but of our demands
Most free in his reply.

GERTRUDE
Did he assay him?
To any pastime?

ROSENCRANTZ
Madam, it so fell out, that certain players
We o'erraught on the way. Of these we told him,
And there did seem in him a kind of joy
To hear of it. They are about the court,
And, as I think, they have already order
This night to play before him.

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

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

ROSENCRANTZ
We shall, my lord.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.

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 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, we will bestow ourselves. [to OPHELIA] Read on this book that show of such an exercise may color your loneliness. —We are oft to blame in this, 'tis too much proved, that with devotion's visage and pious action we do sugar o'er the devil himself.

**CLAUDIUS**
[aside] Oh, 'tis too true! How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience! Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it than my deed to my most painted word? O heavy burden!

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

**CLAUDIUS**
(reads from book) The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to — 'tis a consummation devoutly to be wished! That show of such an exercise may color your loneliness. —We are oft to blame in this, 'tis too much proved, that with devotion's visage and pious action we do sugar o'er the devil himself.

**CLAUDIUS**
[to OPHELIA] 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**
(reads from book) The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to — 'tis a consummation devoutly to be wished! That show of such an exercise may color your loneliness. —We are oft to blame in this, 'tis too much proved, that with devotion's visage and pious action we do sugar o'er the devil himself.

**CLAUDIUS**
[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.

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(reads from book) The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to — 'tis a consummation devoutly to be wished! That show of such an exercise may color your loneliness. —We are oft to blame in this, 'tis too much proved, that with devotion's visage and pious action we do sugar o'er the devil himself.

**CLAUDIUS**
[to OPHELIA] Beauty, may you forgive all my sins in your prayers.
OPHELIA
Good my lord,
How does your honor for this many a day?

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

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 honored lord, you know right well you did,
And with them, words of so sweet breath composed
As made the things more rich.
Their perfume lost,
Take these again, for to the noble mind
Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.
There, my lord.

HAMLET
Ha ha, are you honest?

OPHELIA
Excuse me?

HAMLET
Are you beautiful?

OPHELIA
What do you mean?

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

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

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

OPHELIA
Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

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

OPHELIA
I was the more deceived.

HAMLET
Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a breeder of
sinners? I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I
could accuse me of such things that it were better my
mother had not borne me.
I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more
offences at my back than I have thoughts to put them in,
imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in.
What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth
and heaven? We are arrant knaves, all. Believe none of
us. Go thy ways to a nunnery. Where's your father?

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

HAMLET
Thank you for asking. Well, well, well.

OPHELIA
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wanting to return to you for a while. Please take them back.

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offences at my back than I have thoughts to put them in,
imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in.
What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth
and heaven? We are arrant knaves, all. Believe none of
us. Go thy ways to a nunnery. Where's your father?
OPHELIA
At home, my lord.

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

OPHELIA
O, help him, you sweet heavens!

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

OPHELIA
Heavenly powers, restore him!

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

HAMLET exits.

OPHELIA
Oh, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!—The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword, Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state, The glass of fashion and the mould of form, Th' observed of all observers, quite, quite down! And I, of ladies most deject and wretched, That sucked the honey of his music vows, Now see that noble and most sovereign reason Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh; That unmatched form and feature of blown youth Blasted with ecstasy. Oh, woe is me, To have seen what I have seen, see what I see!

CLAUDIUS and POLONIUS come forward.

CLAUDIUS
Love? His affections do not that way tend. Nor what he spake, though it lacked form a little, Was not like madness. There's something in his soul O'er which his melancholy sits on brood, And I do doubt the hatch and the disclose Will be some danger—wherefore to prevent, I have in quick determination 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, 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?

OPHELIA
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 cutey 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.
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 your hand thus, but use all gently, for in the very torrent, tempest, and (as I may say) whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. Oh, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb-shows and noise. I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant. It out-Herods Herod. Pray you, avoid it.

FIRST PLAYER

I warrant your honor.

HAMLET

Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. Now this overdone or come tardy off, though it make the unskilful 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 profanely, that, neither having the accent of Christians nor the gait of Christian, pagan, nor man, have so strutted and bellowed that I have thought some of nature's journeymen had made men and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably.

FIRST PLAYER

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

HAMLET

O, reform it altogether! And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them, for there be of them that will themselves laugh to set on madness in great ones must not unwatched go.

CLAUDIUS

It shall be so.

200

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

I'll do as you ask.

CLAUDIUS

Your wisdom best shall think. To England send him or confine him where you think best.

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

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 get some stupid spectators to
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.

HAMLET

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

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

O my dear lord—

HAMLET

Nay, do not think I flatter. For what advancement may I hope from thee That no revenue hast but thy good spirits, To feed and clothe thee? Why should the poor be flattered? No, let the candied tongue lick absurd pomp, And crook the pregnant hinges of the knee Where thrift may follow fawning. Dost thou hear? Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice And could of men distinguish, her election Hath sealed thee for herself, for thou hast been— As one in suffering all that suffers nothing— A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards Hast ta'en with equal thanks. And blessed are those Whose blood and judgment are so well commingled, That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger To sound what stop she please. Give me that man That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart, As I do thee. —Something too much of this.— There is a play tonight before the king. One scene of it comes near the circumstance Which I have told thee of my father's death. I prithee, when thou seest that act afoot, Even with the very comment of thy soul Observe mine uncle. If his occulted guilt Do not itself unkennel in one speech, 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.

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 damned ghost that we have seen,
And my imaginations are as foul
As Vulcan’s stithy.
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.

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

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

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

HAMLET
No, nor mine now.
[to POLONIUS]My lord, you played once i’ th’ university, you say?

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

HAMLET
What did you enact?

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

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

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

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

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

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

HAMLET
Lady, shall I lie in your lap?
OPHELIA
No, my lord.

HAMLET
I mean, my head upon your lap?

OPHELIA
Ay, my lord.

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

OPHELIA
What is, my lord?

HAMLET
Nothing.

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

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

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

HAMLET
That's a 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.”

OPHELIA
What means this, my lord?

*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.*

OPHELIA
What does this mean, my lord?

*The PLAYERS exit.*

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.

OPHELIA
You are merry, my lord.

HAMLET
Who, me?

OPHELIA
Ay, my lord.

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

OPHELIA
Nothing.

HAMLET
Nothing.

OPHELIA
You're happy tonight, my lord.

HAMLET
Who, I?

OPHELIA
Ay, my lord.

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

OPHELIA
What, my lord?

HAMLET
Nothing.

OPHELIA
I think nothing, 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.

OPHELIA
You are merry, my lord.

HAMLET
Who, me?

OPHELIA
Ay, my lord.

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

OPHELIA
What is, my lord?

HAMLET
Nothing.

OPHELIA
You are merry, my lord.

HAMLET
Who, I?

OPHELIA
Ay, my lord.

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

OPHELIA
What is, my lord?

HAMLET
Nothing.

OPHELIA
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HAMLET
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HAMLET
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OPHELIA
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HAMLET
Who, me?

OPHELIA
Ay, my lord.

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

OPHELIA
What is, my lord?

HAMLET
Nothing.
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
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
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
As woman’s love.

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, 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 love be done. But woe is me! You are so sick of late, So far from cheer and from your former state, That I distrust you. Yet though I distrust, Discomfit you, my lord, it nothing must. For women fear too much, even as they love, And women’s fear and love hold quantity, In neither aught, or in extremity. Now what my love is, proof hath made you know, As my love is sized, my fear is so: Where love is great, the littlest doubts are fear. Where little fears grow great, great love grows there.

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

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

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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.


PLAYER KING

I do believe you think what now you speak,
But what we do determine oft we break.
Purpose is but the slave to memory,
Of violent birth, but poor validity,
Which now, like fruit unripe, sticks on the tree,
But fall, unshaken, when they mellow be.

Most necessary 'tis that we forget
To pay ourselves what to ourselves is debt.
What to ourselves in passion we propose,
The passion ending, doth the purpose lose.
The violence of either grief or joy
Their own enactures with themselves destroy.
Where joy most revels, grief doth most lament.
This world is not for aye, nor 'tis not strange
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Purpose is but the slave to memory,
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I do believe you think what now you speak,
But what we do determine oft we break.
Purpose is but the slave to memory,
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 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 raven doth bellow for revenge—"

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

LUCIANUS
Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit, and time agreeing, Confederate season, else no creature seeing, 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.

[He pours poison into PLAYER KING 's ears]

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

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

CLAUDIUS stands up.

OPHELIA
The king rises.

HAMLET
What, frighted with false fire?

GERTRUDE
How fares my lord?

POLONIUS
Give o’er the play.

CLAUDIUS
Give me some light, away!

POLONIUS
Lights, lights, lights!

OPHELIA
The king rises.

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.

CLAUDIUS
Give me some light, away!

POLONIUS
Lights, lights, lights!

OPHELIA
The king rises.

Everyone except HAMLET and HORATIO exits.

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

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 might have rhymed.

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

HORATIO
Very well, my lord.

HAMLET
Upon the talk of the poisoning?

HORATIO
I did very well note him.

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

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter.

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
Ah! 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
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
Your wisdom should show itself more rich 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
I am tame, sir. Pronounce.

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

HAMLET
You are welcome.

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

HAMLET
Sir, I cannot.

GUILDENSTERN
What, my lord?

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

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

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

ROSENCRANTZ
She desires to speak with you in her closet ere you go to bed.
HAMLET
We shall obey, were she ten times our mother. Have you any further trade with us?

ROSENCRANTZ
My lord, you once did love me.

HAMLET
And do still, by these pickers and stealers.

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

HAMLET
Sir, I lack advancement.

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

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

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

HAMLET
Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me. You would seem to know my stops. You would pluck out the heart of my mystery. You would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass. And there is much music, excellent voice, in

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

[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
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
I do beseech you.

GUILDENSTERN
I know no touch of it, my lord.

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

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

HAMLET
Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me. You would seem to know my stops. You would pluck out the heart of my mystery. You would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass. And there is much music, excellent voice, in
this little organ, yet cannot you make it speak?
ˈSblood, 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
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
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
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 Would quake to look on. Soft, now to my mother.— O heart, lose not thy nature, let not ever The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom. Let me be cruel, not unnatural. I will speak daggers to her but use none. My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites. How in my words sometime 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 . 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.
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.

The terms of our estate may not endure
Hazard so dangerous as doth hourly grow
Out of his lunacies.

GUILDENSTERN
We will ourselves provide.

Most holy and religious fear it is
To keep those many, many bodies safe
That live and feed upon your majesty.

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

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

ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN
We will haste us.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.

POLONIUS enters.

POLONIUS
My lord, he’s going to his mother’s closet.
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
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.
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,
I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
And both neglect. What if this cursed hand
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood?
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
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 forestalled ere we come to fall
Or pardoned 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 pardoned and retain th' offense?
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?
0
O wretched state! O bosom black as death!
O limed soul that, struggling to be free,
Art more engaged! Help, angels. Make assay.
Bow, stubborn knees, and, heart with strings of steel,
Be soft as sinews of the newborn babe.
All may be well.
[kneels]

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.
A villain kills my father, and, for that,
I, his sole son, do this same villain send
To heaven.
Oh, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
He took my father grossly, full of bread,
With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May.
And how his audit stands who knows save heaven?
But in our circumstance and course of thought
'Tis heavy with him. And am I then revenged
But in our circumstance and course of thought
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,
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, whereeto it goes. My mother stays
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.

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 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.

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

HAMLET
Now mother, what's the matter?

GERTRUDE
Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

HAMLET
Mother, you have my father much offended.

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

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

GERTRUDE
Why, how now, Hamlet?

HAMLET
What's the matter now?

GERTRUDE
Have you forgot me?

HAMLET
No, by the rood, not so. You are the queen, your husband's brother's wife, And—would it were not so!—you are my mother.

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

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
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.

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

HAMLET
Now, mother, what's the matter?

GERTRUDE
Hamlet, you have insulted your father.

HAMLET
Mother, you have insulted my father.

GERTRUDE
Come now, you 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
Nay, I know not. Is it the king?

GERTRUDE
As kill a king?

HAMLET
Ay, lady, 'twas my word.

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

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

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

GERTRUDE
Killing a king?

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

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

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

GERTRUDE
Oh no, what have I done such a thing 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

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

HAMLET
O me, what hast thou done?

GERTRUDE
Yes, lady, that's what I said.

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

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
Killing a king?

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]
Leave wringing of your hands. Peace. Sit you down
And let me wring your heart.
If it be made of penetrable stuff,
If damnèd custom have not brassed it so
That it is proof and bulwark against sense.

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

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

HAMLET
Such an act
That roars so loud and thunders in the index?

HAMLET
Such an act

GERTRUDE
Oh, what a reckless, bloody act!

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

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

GERTRUDE
Oh, what a reckless, bloody act!

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

GERTRUDE
What have I done that sounds so terrible—even
though I don't yet know what it is?

GERTRUDE
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.

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To give the world assurance of a man.
This was your husband. Look you now, what follows.
Here is your husband, like a mildewed ear
Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?
Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed
And batten on this moor? Ha, have you eyes?
You cannot call it love, for at your age
The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble,
And waits upon the judgment. And what judgment
Would step from this to this? Sense sure you have,
Else could you not have motion. But sure that sense
Is apoplexed, for madness would not err,
Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thralled,
But it reserved some quantity of choice
To serve in such a difference.
Sense sure you have,
Else could you not have motion. But sure that sense
Is apoplexed, for madness would not err,
Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thralled,
But it reserved some quantity of choice
To serve in such a difference.
Sense sure you have,
Else could you not have motion. But sure that sense
Is apoplexed, for madness would not err,
Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thralled,
But it reserved some quantity of choice
To serve in such a difference.
Sense sure you have,
Else could you not have motion. But sure that sense
Is apoplexed, for madness would not err,
Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thralled,
But it reserved some quantity of choice
To serve in such a difference.
Sense sure you have,
Else could you not have motion. But sure that sense
Is apopleaxed, for madness would not err,
Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thralled,
But it reserved some quantity of choice
To serve in such a difference.
Sense sure you have,
Else could you not have motion. But sure that sense
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Is apopleaxed, for madness would not err,
Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thralled,
But it reserved some quantity of choice
To serve in such a difference.
Sense sure you have,
Else could you not have motion. But sure that sense
Is apopleaxed, for madness would not err,
Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thralled,
But it reserved some quantity of choice
To serve in such a difference.
O, say!

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

But look, amazement on thy mother sits.
Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works.
Speak to her, Hamlet.

HAMLET
How is it with you, lady?

GERTRUDE
To whom do you speak this?

HAMLET
Do you see nothing there?

GERTRUDE
Nothing at all, yet all that is I see.

HAMLET
Nor did you nothing hear?

GERTRUDE
No, nothing but ourselves.

HAMLET
Why, look you there! Look how it steals away—
My father, in his habit as he lived—
Look where he goes, even now, out at the portal!

The GHOST exits.

GERTRUDE
This the very coinage of your brain.
This bodiless creation ecstasy
Is very cunning in.

HAMLET
Ecstasy?
My pulse as yours doth temperately keep time
And makes as healthful music. It is not madness
That I have uttered. Bring me to the test,
And I the matter will reword, which madness
Would gambol from. Mother, for love of grace,
Lay not that flattering unction to your soul
That not your trespass but my madness speaks.

It will but skin and film the ulcerous place
Whilst rank corruption, mining all within,
Infests unseen. Confess yourself to heaven.
Repent what's past. Avoid what is to come.
HAMLET

Not this, by no means, that I bid you do—
Let the bloated king tempt you again to bed,
Pinch wanton on your cheek, call you his mouse,
And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses
Or paddling in your neck with his damned fingers,
That 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,
Such dear concernings hide? Who would do so?
No, in despite of sense and secrecy,
Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed,
Not this, by no means, that I bid you do—
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.

GERTRUDE

Oh, Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain.

GERTRUDE

I will bestow him and will answer well
The death I gave him. So, again, good night.
I will deal
Refrain tonight,
They're the ones who'll lead me
Refrain
They must sweep my way

GERTRUDE

I must to England, you know that?

GERTRUDE

Alack,
I had forgot. ‘Tis so concluded on.

GERTRUDE

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

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 me 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.

GERTRUDE

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,
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.

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.

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
[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
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
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?
It will be laid to us, whose providence
Should have kept short, restrained and out of haunt,
This mad young man.
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,
Shows itself pure. He weeps for what is done.

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

CLAUDIUS
What is it, 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.

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

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

HAMLET
Compounded it with dust, whereto 'tis kin.

ROSENCRANTZ
Tell us where 'tis, that we may take it thence
And bear it to the chapel.

HAMLET
Do not believe it.

ROSENCRANTZ
Believe what?

Shakescleare Translation

HAMLET enters.

HAMLET
Safely hidden.

GENTLEMEN
[Offstage] Hamlet, Lord Hamlet!

HAMLET

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?
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, who like not in their judgment, but their eyes. And where ‘tis so, th’offender’s scourge is weighed, but never the offense. To bear all smooth and even, this sudden sending him away must seem deliberate pause. Diseases desperate grown by desperate appliance are relieved, or not at all.

ROSENCRANTZ enters.

ROSENCRANTZ
Where the dead body is bestowed, my lord,

ROSENCRANTZ
Take you me for a sponge, my lord?

ROSENCRANTZ
You think that I am a sponge, my lord?

ROSENCRANTZ
I understand you not, my lord.

ROSENCRANTZ
I don’t understand you, my lord.

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

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

ROSENCRANTZ
The body is with the king, but the king is not with the body. The king is a thing—

GUILDENSTERN
A thing, my lord?

GUILDENSTERN
A “thing,” my lord?

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

They exit.

Shakespeare Translation

CLAUDIUS enters with two or three attendants.

CLAUDIUS
I’ve sent men to find Hamlet and the body. How dangerous is it 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.

ROSENCRANTZ
Where the dead body is bestowed, my lord,

ROSENCRANTZ
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.

ROSENCRANTZ
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

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

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

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

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.

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

**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

**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 Pays homage to us Our sovereign process, which imports at full, By letters congruing to that effect, The present death of Hamlet. Do it, England, For like the hectic in my blood he rages, And thou must cure me. Till I know 'tis done, Howe'er my haps, my joys were ne'er begun.

**CLAUDIUS exits.**

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**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. 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.

**Shakescleare Translation**

**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
Good sir, whose powers are these?

CAPTAIN
They are of Norway, sir.

HAMLET
How purposed, sir, I pray you?

CAPTAIN
Against some part of Poland.

HAMLET
Who commands them, sir?

CAPTAIN
The nephew to old Norway, Fortinbras.

HAMLET
Does it against the main of Poland, sir, Or for some frontier?

CAPTAIN
Truly to speak, and with no addition, We go to gain a little patch of ground That hath in it no profit but the name. To pay five ducats, five, I would not farm it. Nor will it yield to Norway or the Pole A ranker rate, should it be sold in fee.

HAMLET
Why, then the Polack never will defend it.

CAPTAIN
Yes, it is already garrisoned.

HAMLET
Two thousand souls and twenty thousand ducats Will not debate the question of this straw. This is th' impostume of much wealth and peace, That inward breaks and shows no cause without Why the man dies. —I humbly thank you, sir.

CAPTAIN
God be wi’ you, sir.

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 If his chief good and market of his time Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more. Sure, he that made us such a large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and godlike reason
Of thinking too precisely on’th event—
A thought which, quartered, hath but one part wisdom
And ever three parts coward—I do not know
Why yet I live to say “This thing’s to do,”
Sith I have cause and will and strength and means
To do ’t. Examples gross as earth exhort me.
Witness this army of such mass and charge
Led by a delicate and tender prince,
Whose spirit with divine ambition puffed
Makes mouths at the invisible event,
Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,
Even for an eggshell.

Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument,
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honor’s at the stake.

So
where do I stand,
That have a father killed, a mother stained,
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
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.

Act 4, Scene 5

Shakespeare

GERTRUDE
I will not speak with her.

GENTLEMAN
She is importunate, Indeed distract. Her mood will needs be pitied.

GERTRUDE
What would she have?

GENTLEMAN
She speaks much of her father, says she hears
There’s tricks i’ th’ world, and hems, and beats her heart,
Spurns enviously at straws, speaks things in doubt
That carry but half sense. Her speech is nothing,
Yet the unshaped use of it doth move
The hearers to collection. They aim at it,
And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts,
Which, as her winks and nods and gestures yield them,
Indeed would make one think there might be thought,
Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily.

HORATIO
Twere good she were spoken with, for she may strew
Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds.

GERTRUDE
Let her come in.

The GENTLEMAN exits.

Shakescleare Translation

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
do’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}
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 beauteous majesty of Denmark?

GERTRUDE
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.

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!

GERTRUDE
Nay, but, Ophelia—

OPHELIA
Pray you, mark.
{sings}
White his shroud as the mountain snow—

CLAUDIUS enters.

GERTRUDE
Alas, look here, my lord.

OPHELIA
{sings}
Larded all with sweet flowers,
Which bewept to the ground did not go
With true-love showers.

CLAUDIUS
How do you, pretty lady?

OPHELIA
Well, God’ield you! They say the owl was a baker’s
daughter. Lord, we know what we are, but know not what
we may be. God be at your table.

CLAUDIUS
Conceit upon her father.

OPHELIA
Pray you, let’s have no words of this, but when they
ask you what it means, say you this:
{sings}
Tomorrow is Saint Valentine’s day,
All in the morning betime,
And I a maid at your window,
To be your Valentine.

Then up he rose, and donned his clothes,
And dupped the chamber door.
Let in the maid that out a maid
Never departed more.

CLAUDIUS
Pretty Ophelia—

OPHELIA
Indeed, without an oath I'll make an end on 't:
[ sings ]
By Gis and by Saint Charity,
Alack, and fie, for shame!

Young men will do 't, if they come to 't.

By Cock, they are to blame.
Quoth she, “Before you tumbled me,
You promised me to wed.”

He answers,
“So would I ha' done, by yonder sun,
An thou hadst not come to my bed.”

CLAUDIUS
How long hath she been thus?

OPHELIA
I hope all will be well. We must be patient, but I
cannot choose but weep, to think they should lay him i' th' cold ground. My brother shall know of it, and so I
thank you for your good counsel. Come, my coach! Good night, ladies. Good night, sweet ladies. Good night, good night.

OPHELIA exits.

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

CLAUDIUS
Oh, this is the poison of deep grief. It springs
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
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,
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
With pestilent speeches of his father's death,
Wherein necessity, of matter beggared,
Will nothing stick our person to arraign In ear and ear. O my dear Gertrude, this,
Like to a murdering piece, in many places
Gives me superfluous death.

A noise offstage.

GERTRUDE
Alack, what noise is this?

CLAUDIUS
Where are my Switzers? Let them guard the door.

A MESSENGER enters.
CLAUDIUS
What is the matter?

MESSENGER
Save yourself, my lord.

The ocean, overpeering of his list,
Eats not the flats with more impiteous haste
Than young Laertes, in a riotous head,
O'erbears your officers.

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
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
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
That drop of blood that's calm proclaims me bastard,
Cries "Cuckold!" to my father, brands the "harlot"
Even here between the chaste unsmirèd brow
Of my true mother.

CLAUDIUS
What is the cause, Laertes,

That thy rebellion looks so giant-like?—
Let him go, Gertrude. Do not fear our person.
There's such divinity doth hedge a king
That treason can but peep to what it would,
Acts little of his will.

—Tell me, Laertes,
—Speak, man.

LAERTES
Where is my father?

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.

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
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
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.
And for my means, I'll husband them so well,
They shall go far with little.

CLAUDIUS
Good Laertes,
If you desire to know the certainty
Of your dear father's death,
is 't writ in your
revenge,
That, swoopstake, you will draw both friend and foe,
Winner and loser?

LAERTES
None but his enemies.

CLAUDIUS
Will you know them then?

LAERTES
To his good friends thus wide I'll ope my arms
And, like the kind life-rendering pelican,
Repast them with my blood.

CLAUDIUS
Why, now you speak
Like a good child and a true gentleman.
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.

LAERTES
How now? What noise is that?

A voice offstage, “Let her in!”

OPHELIA enters.

LAERTES
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!

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
maid, 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

[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

185 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

190 This nothing’s more than matter.

OPHELIA

There’s rosemary, that’s for remembrance. Pray you,
love, remember. And there is pansies, that’s for
thoughts.

LAERTES

A document in madness. Thoughts and remembrance fitted.

OPHELIA

There’s fennel for you, and columbines.—There’s rue for
you, and here’s some for me. We may call it “herb of
grace” o’ Sundays.—Oh, you must wear your rue with a
difference.—There’s a daisy. I 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]
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.

200 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.

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

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 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.
LAETRES

Let this be so.
His means of death, his obscure funeral—
No trophy, sword, nor hatchment o'er his bones,
No noble rite nor formal ostentation—
Cry to be heard as 'twere from heaven to earth,
That I must call 't in question.

CLAUDIUS

So you shall.

And where the offense is, let the great ax fall.
I pray you, go with me.

They exit.

CLAUDIUS

As you should. And may the great ax of justice fall on the guilty. Please, come with me.

They all exit.

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

I should be greeted, if not from Lord Hamlet.

SAILORS enter.

SAILOR

God bless you, sir.

HORATIO

Let him bless thee too.

SAILOR

He shall, sir, an 't please him. There's a letter for you, sir—it comes from the ambassador that was bound for England—if your name be Horatio, as I am let to know it is. [He gives HORATIO a letter]

HORATIO

[reading the letter]

"Horatio, When thou shalt have overlooked this, give these fellows some means to the king. They have letters for him. Ere we were two days old at sea, a pirate of very warlike appointment gave us chase. Finding ourselves too slow of sail, we put on a compelled valor, and in the grapple I boarded them. On the instant, they got clear of our ship, so I alone became their prisoner. For thieves, they've treated me very mercifully, 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

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Guildenstern hold their course for England. Of them I have much to tell thee. Fare-well.

He that thou knowest shine,
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.

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
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,
You mainly were stirred up.

CLAUDIUS

Oh, for two special reasons,
Which may to you perhaps seem much unsinewed,
But yet to me they are strong.
The queen his mother
Lives almost by his looks, and for myself—
My virtue or my plague, be it either which—
She's so conjunctive to my life and soul,
I could not but by her. The other motive
Why to a public count I might not go,
Is the great love the general gender bear him,
Who, dipping all his faults in their affection,
Convert his gyves to graces—so that my arrows,
Too slightly timbered for so loud a wind,
Would have reverted to my bow again,
And not where I had aimed them.

LAERTES

And so have I a noble father lost,
A sister driven into desperate terms,
Whose worth, if praises may go back again,
Stood challenger on mount of all the age
For her perfections. But my revenge will 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
And think it pastime.

But shortly you 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 must your conscience my acquaintance seal,
And you must put me in your heart for friend,
Sith you have heard, and with a knowing ear,
That he which hath your noble father slain
Pursued my life.

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

What’s going on? What’s your news?
MESSENGER
Letters, my lord, from Hamlet.

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 of him that brought them.

CLAUDIUS
Laertes, you shall hear them.—Leave us.

MESSENGER
My lord, I have letters from Hamlet. This one's for your Highness, and this one is for the queen. [gives CLAUDIUS letters]

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.

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
To thine own peace. If he be now returned, as checking at his voyage, and that he means no more to undertake it, I will work him to an exploit, now ripe in my devise, under which he shall not choose but fall. And for his death no wind of blame shall breathe, but even his mother shall uncharge the practice and call it accident.

LAERTES
My lord, I will be ruled the rather if you could devise it so that I might be the organ.

CLAUDIUS
My lord, I'll follow your lead. I want to be the sole agent of his death.

LAERTES
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
As did that one, and that, in my regard,
Of the unworthiest siege.

LAERTES
What part is that, my lord?

CLAUDIUS
A very ribbon in the cap of youth,
Yet needful too, for youth no less becomes
The light and careless livery that it wears
Than settled age his sables and his weeds,
Importing health and graveness. Two months since,
Here was a gentleman of Normandy,
I’ve seen myself, and served against, the French,
And they can well on horseback. But this 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.

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
A Norman was ’t?

CLAUDIUS
A Norman.

LAERTES
Upon my life, Lamond!

CLAUDIUS
The very same.

LAERTES
I know him well. He is the brooch indeed
And gem of all the nation.

CLAUDIUS
He made confession of you,
And gave you such a masterly report
For art and exercise in your defense,
And for your rapier most especially,
That he cried out ‘twould be a sight indeed
If one could match you. The ‘scrimers of their nation,
He swore, had had neither motion, guard, nor eye,
If you opposed them. Sir, this report of his
Did Hamlet so envenom with his envy
That he could nothing do but wish and beg
Your sudden coming o’er, to play with him.
Now, out of this—

LAERTES
What out of this, my lord?

CLAUDIUS
Laertes, was your father dear to you?
Or are you like the painting of a sorrow,
A face without a heart?

CLAUDIUS
Not that I think you did not love your father
But that I know love is begun by time,
And that I see, in passages of proof,
Time qualifies the spark and fire of it.
There lives within the very flame of love
A kind of wick or snuff that will abate it.
And nothing is at a like goodness still.

CLAUDIUS
He was from Normandy?

CLAUDIUS
From Normandy.

CLAUDIUS
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 you putting on a
show of grief—a face without a heart?

CLAUDIUS
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
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
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,
Will you do this, keep close within your chamber.
Hamlet returned shall know you are come home.
We’ll put on those shall praise your excellence
And set a double varnish on the fame
The Frenchman gave you, bring you in fine together
And wager on your heads. He, being remiss,
Most generous and free from all contriving,
Will not peruse the foils; so that, with ease,
Or with a little shuffling, you may choose
A sword unbated, and in a pass of practice
Requite him for your father.

LAERTES
I will do ‘t.
And for that purpose I’ll anoint my sword.
I bought an unction of a mountebank,
So mortal that, but dip a knife in it,
Where it draws blood no cataplasm so rare,
Collect 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
It may be death.

CLAUDIUS
Let’s further think of this,
Weigh what convenience both of time and means
May fit us to our shape. If this should fail,
And that our drift look through our bad performance,
’Twere better not assayed.
Therefore this project
Should have a back or second that might hold
If this should fail. —Soft, let me see.—
We’ll make a solemn wager on your cunnings.—
I ha’t! When in your motion you are hot and dry,
As make your bouts more violent to that end,
And that he calls for drink, I’ll have prepared him
A chalice for the nonce, whereon but sipping,
If he by chance escape your venomed stuck,
Our purpose may hold there. —But stay, what noise?

GERTRUDE enters.

GERTRUDE
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.
There with fantastic garlands did she come
Of cowflowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do “dead men’s fingers” call them.

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 cowflowers, 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
There, on the pendant boughs her coronet weeds
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver 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
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and indued
Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.

LAERTES
Alas, then she is drowned.

GERTRUDE
Drowned, drowned.

LAERTES
Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia,
And therefore I forbid my tears. But yet
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
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.

Two GRAVEDIGGERS enter.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER
Is she to be buried in Christian burial when she
willfully seeks her own salvation?

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER
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
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.

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.

in Shakespeare's time, women
were considered "leaky vessels,"
because of their tears, menstruation,
and lactation.
SECOND GRAVEDIGGER
Nay, but hear you, Goodman Delver—

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER
Give me leave. Here lies the water. Good. Here stands

the man. Good. If the man go to this water and drown himself, it is, will he nill he, he goes. Mark you that.

But if the water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself. Argal, he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life.

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

But is this law?

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

Is that the law?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

Ay, marry, is 't. Crowner’s quest law.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

Yes, indeed it is. The coroner’s inquest 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.

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

Why, there thou sayst. And the more pity that great folk should have countenance in this world to drown or hang themselves more than their even Christian. Come, my spade. There is no ancient gentleman but gardeners, ditchers, and grave-makers. They hold up Adam’s profession.

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

Was he a gentleman?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

He was the first that ever bore arms.

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

Was he a noble?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

He was the first person who ever bore arms. ¬

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

Why, he had none.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

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

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

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?”

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.

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?”
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.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER
To 't.

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
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.

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
[digs and sings]
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.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER
[digging and singing]
In my youth when I did love, did love,
I thought it was very sweet
To set—O—the date for—Ahh—my duty
Oh, I thought it—ahh—was not—ahh—right.

HAMLET
Has this fellow no feeling of his business? He sings at grave-making.

HAMLET
Does this man not understand the seriousness of what he’s doing? He’s singing while digging a grave.

HORATIO
Custom hath made it in him a property of easiness.

HORATIO
He’s gotten so used to digging graves that he does it with ease.

HAMLET
‘Tis e’en so. The hand of little employment hath the daintier sense.

HAMLET
That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once. How the knave jowls it to the ground, as if it were Cain’s jawbone, that did the first murder! It might be the pate of a politician, which this ass now o’erreaches, one that would circumvent God, might it not?

HORATIO
It might, my lord.

HAMLET
Or of a courtier, who could say, “Good morrow, sweet lord!” “How dost thou, good lord?” This might be my Lord Such-a-one that praised my Lord Such-a-one’s horse when he meant to beg it, might it not?

HORATIO
Ay, my lord.

HAMLET
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.
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 it. Did these bones cost no more the breeding but to play at loggets with them? Mine ache to think on’t.

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.

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.

There’s another. Why may not that be the skull of a lawyer? Where be his quiddities now, his quillities, his cases, his tenures, and his tricks? Why does he suffer this rude knave now to knock him about the sconce with a dirty shovel and will not tell him of his action of battery? Hum! This fellow might be in ‘s time a great buyer of land, with his statutes, his recognizances, his fines, his double vouchers, his recoveries. Is this the fine of his fines and the recovery of his recoveries, to have his fine pate full of fine dirt? Will his vouchers vouch him no more of his purchases, and double ones too, than the length and breadth of a pair of indentures? The very conveyances of his lands will hardly lie in this box, and must the inheritor himself have no more, ha?

Not a jot more, my lord.

They are sheep and calves which seek out assurance in that. I will speak to this fellow.—Whose grave’s this, sirrah?

Mine, sir.

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.

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.

‘Tis a quick lie, sir. ‘Twill away gain from me to you.

Oh, a pit of clay for to be made
For such a guest is meet.

It’s mine, sir.

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.

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.

That’s a lively lie, sir, jumping like that from me to you.

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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
What man dost thou dig it for?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER
For no man, sir.

HAMLET
What man are you digging 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
One that was a woman, sir, but, rest her soul, she's dead.

HAMLET
How absolute the knave is! We must speak by the card, or equivocation will undo us. By the Lord, Horatio, these three years I have taken a note of it. The age is grown so picked that the toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier he galls his kibe. —How long hast thou been a grave-maker?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER
Of all the days i' the year, I came to 't that day that our last King Hamlet overcame Fortinbras.

HAMLET
How long is that since?

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
Upon what ground?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

t'll not be seen in him there. There the men are as mad as he.

HAMLET
How did he go insane?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER
Very strangely, they say.

HAMLET
How “strangely”?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER
Faith, e'en with losing his wits.

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
Faith, if he be not rotten before he die—as we have many pocky corses nowadays that will scarce hold the laying in—he will last you some eight year or nine year. A tanner will last you nine year.

HAMLET
Why 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. Here's a skull now. This skull has lain in the earth three and twenty years.

HAMLET
Whose was it?

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER
A whoreson mad fellow's it was. Whose do you think it was?

HAMLET
I don't know.

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER
A pestilence on him for a mad rogue! He poured a flagon of Rhenish on my head once. This same skull, sir, was Yorick's skull, the king's jester.

HAMLET
Let me see. [He 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
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! [He puts down the skull]
HORATIO
E’en so, my lord.

HAMLET
To what base uses we may return, Horatio. Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander till he find it stopping a bunghole?

HORATIO
‘Twere to consider too curiously, to consider so.

HAMLET
No, faith, not a jot. But to follow him thither with modesty enough, and likelihood to lead it, as thus: Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth to dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make loam —and why of that loam, whereto he was converted, might they not stop a beer barrel?

Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay, Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.

Oh, that that earth, which kept the world in awe, Should patch a wall t’ expel the winter’s flaw!

But soft, but soft a while.

CLAUDIUS enters with GERTRUDE, LAERTES, and a coffin, with a PRIEST and other lords attendant.

LAERTES
What other rites will you perform?

PRIEST
Her obsequies have been as far enlarged As we have warranty. Her death was doubtful, And, but that great command o’ersways the order, She should in ground unsanctified have lodged Till the last trumpet. For charitable prayers Shards, flints and pebbles should be thrown on her. Yet here she is allowed her virgin crants, Her maiden strewments, and the bringing home Of bell and burial.

LAERTES
Must there no more be done?

PRIEST
No more be done. We should profane the service of the dead To sing a requiem and such rest to her As to peace-parted souls.

LAERTES
Lay her i’ th’ earth, And from her fair and unpolluted flesh May violets spring! I tell thee, churlish priest, A ministering angel shall my sister be When thou liest howling.

CLAUDIUS enters with GERTRUDE, LAERTES, and a coffin, with a PRIEST and other attending lords.

LAERTES
What other rites will you perform?

HAMLET
That is Laertes, a very noble youth, mark.

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 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 cursed 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.

GERTRUDE
255 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 your dust upon the quick and dead,
260 Till of this flat a mountain you have made,
T'o'ertop old Pelion or the skyish head
Of blue Olympus.

In ancient Greek mythology, Mount Pelion was home to the
centaurs, and Mount Olympus was
home to the gods.

HAMLET [comes forward] What is he whose grief
Bears such an emphasis, whose phrase of sorrow
Conjures the wandering stars,
And makes them stand
Like wonder-wounded hearers? This is I,
Hamlet the Dane. [leaps into the grave]

LAERTES
The devil take thy soul!

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
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.

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
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
For love of God, forbear him.

HAMLET
‘Swounds, show me what thou’lt do.
Woo’t weep? Woo’t fight? Woo’t fast? Woo’t tear thyself?
Woo’t drink up eisel, eat a crocodile?
I’ll do ‘t. Dost thou come here to whine,
To outface me with leaping in her grave?
Be buried quick with her?—and so will I.
And if thou prate of mountains let them throw
Millions of acres on us, till our ground,
Singeing his pate against the burning zone,
Make Ossa like a wart!

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.

GERTRUDE
This is mere madness.
And thus a while the fit will work on him.

HAMLET
Hear you, sir.
What is the reason that you use me thus?
I loved you ever.

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.

CLAUDIUS
I pray thee, good Horatio, wait upon him.

HAMLET
So much for this, sir. Now shall you see the other.
You do remember all the circumstances?

HORATIO
Remember it, my lord?

HAMLET
Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting
That would not let me sleep. Methought I lay
Worse than the mutines in the bilboes. Rashly—
And praised be rashness for it: let us know
Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well

CLAUDIUS
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.
Till then in patience our proceeding be.

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.

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.

According to ancient Greek
mythology, Ossa is a mountain
that giants were said to have
constructed, trying to reach the heavens.
When our deep plots do pall, and that should teach us
There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will—

HORATIO
That is most certain.

HAMLET
Up from my cabin,
My sea-gown scarfed about me, in the dark
Groped I to find out them, had my desire,
Fingered their packet, and in fine withdrew
To mine own room again, making so bold
(My fears forgetting manners) to unseal
Their grand commission, where I found, Horatio—
O royal knavery!—an exact command,
Larded with many several sorts of reasons
Importing Denmark's health, and England's too,
With—ho!—such bugs and goblins in my life
That, on the supervise (no leisure bated,
No, not to stay the grinding of the ax)
My head should be struck off.

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. Horato, 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 't possible?

HAMLET
[shows HORATIO a document]
Here's the commission. Read it at more leisure.
But wilt thou hear me how I did proceed?

HORATIO
I beseech you.

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,
As peace should stiff her wheaten garland wear
And stand a comma 'tween their amities,
And stand a comma 'tween their amities,
That, on the view and knowing of these contents,
Without debatement further, more or less,
He should the bearers put to sudden death,
Not shriving time allowed.

How was this sealed?

HAMLET
Why, even in that was heaven ordinant.
I had my father's signet in my purse,
Which was the model of that Danish seal.
Folded the writ up in form of th' other,
Subscribed it, gave 't th' impression, placed it safely,
The changeling never known. Now, the next day
Was our sea fight, and what to this was sequent
Thou know'st already.
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 Does by their own insinuation grow. 'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes Between the pass and fell incensed points Of mighty opposites.

HORATIO
Why, what a king is this!

HAMLET
Why, man, they did make love to this employment. They are not near my conscience. Their defeat Does by their own insinuation grow. 'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes Between the pass and fell incensed points Of mighty opposites.

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
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
I humbly thank you, sir. [aside to HORATIO] Dost know this water-fly?

HORATIO
[aside to HAMLET] No, my good lord.

OSRIC
Thy state is the more gracious, for 'tis a vice to know him. He hath much land, and fertile. Let a beast be lord of beasts and his crib shall stand at the king's mess. 'Tis a chough, but, as I say, spacious in the possession of dirt.

OSRIC
Dost know this water-fly?

HAMLET
Dost know this water-fly?

OSRIC
No, my good lord.

HAMLET
Thy state is the more gracious, for 'tis a vice to know him. He hath much land, and fertile. Let a beast be lord of beasts and his crib shall stand at the king's mess. 'Tis a chough, but, as I say, spacious in the possession of dirt.

OSRIC
Sweet lord, if your lordship were at leisure, I should impart a thing to you from His Majesty.

HAMLET
I will receive it, sir, with all diligence of spirit. Put your bonnet to his right use. 'Tis for the head.

OSRIC
I thank your lordship. It is very hot.
HAMLET
No, believe me, 'tis very cold. The wind is northerly.

OSRIC
It is indifferent cold, my lord, indeed.

HAMLET
No, believe me, it's very cold, with a northern wind.

OSRIC
It is indifferent cold, my lord, indeed.

HAMLET
But yet methinks it is very sultry and hot for my complexion.

OSRIC
Exceedingly, my lord. It is very sultry—as 'twere—I cannot tell how. My lord, his majesty bade me signify to you that he has laid a great wager on your head. Sir, this is the matter—

HAMLET
I beseech you, remember—[indicates that OSRIC should put on his hat]

OSRIC
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
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 exolument, I take him to be a soul of great article, and his infusion of such dearth and rareness as, to make true diction of him, his semblable is his mirror. And who else would trace him? His umbrage, nothing more.

OSRIC
Your lordship speaks most infallibly of him.

HAMLET
The concernancy, sir? Why do we wrap the gentleman in our more rawer breath?

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
Of Laertes?

HORATIO
[aside to HAMLET] His purse is empty already. All 's golden words are spent.

HAMLET
Of him, sir.

OSRIC
I know you are not ignorant—
HAMLET
I would you did, sir. Yet in faith, if you did, it would not much approve me. Well, sir?

OSRIC
You are not ignorant of what excellence Laertes is—

HAMLET
I dare not confess that lest I should compare with him in excellence, but to know a man well were to know himself.

OSRIC
I mean, sir, for his weapon. But in the imputation laid on him by them, in his meed he's unfellowed.

HAMLET
What's his weapon?

OSRIC
Rapier and dagger.

HAMLET
That's two of his weapons. But well.

OSRIC
The king, sir, hath wagered with him six Barbary horses, against 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?

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
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
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
Sir, I will walk here in the hall. If it please His Majesty, 'tis the breathing time of day with me. Let the foils be brought, the gentleman willing, and the king
hold his purpose. I will win for him an I can. If not, I will gain nothing but my shame and the odd hits.

OSRIC
Shall I redeliver you e’en so?

HAMLET
To this effect, sir, after what flourish your nature will.

OSRIC
I commend my duty to your lordship.

HAMLET
Yours, yours.

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
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.

HAMLET
I am constant to my purpose. They follow the king’s pleasure. If his fitness speaks, mine is ready, now or whenever, provided I be so able as now.

LORD
The king and queen and all are coming down.

HAMLET
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
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
Not a whit. We defy augury. There’s a special providence in the fall of a sparrow.

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.

LAERTES
I am satisfied in nature, Whose motive in this case should stir me most To my revenge. But in my terms of honor I stand aloof, and will no reconciliation Till by some elder masters, of known honor, I have a voice and precedent of peace To keep my name ungored. But till that time I do receive your offered love like love And will not wrong it.

LAERTES
I embrace it freely, And will this brother’s wager frankly play.— Give us the foils. Come on.

LAERTES
Come, one for me.
I’ll be your foil, Laertes. In mine ignorance
Your skill shall, like a star ‘th’ darkest night,
Stick fiery off indeed.

You mock me, sir.

No, by this hand.

Give them the foils, young Osric.—Cousin Hamlet,
You know the wager?

Very well, my lord.
Your grace hath laid the odds o’ th’ weaker side.

I do not fear it. I have seen you both.
But since he is better we have therefore odds.

[tests a rapier] This is too heavy. Let me see another.

[tests a rapier] This likes me well. These foils have all a length?

Ay, my good lord.

HAMLET and LAERTES prepare to fence.

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!

And in the cup an union shall he throw
Richer than that which four successive kings
In Denmark’s crown have worn. Give me the cups.
And let the kettle to the trumpet speak,
The trumpet to the cannoneer without,
The cannons to the heavens, the heavens to earth,
“Now the king dunks to Hamlet.” Come, begin.—
And you, the judges, bear a wary eye.

Trumpets

Come on, sir.

Come, my lord.

One.

No.

Judgment?

A hit, a very palpable hit.

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.

You’re making fun of me, sir.

No, I swear by my hand.

Give them the swords, Osric. Hamlet, you know the bet?

Very well. You’ve placed your bet on the weaker side.

I’m not worried. I’ve seen both of you fence. But since Laertes is better, we’ve given him a handicap.

[He tests a sword] This sword’s too heavy. Give me another one.

[He tests a sword] This one is good for me. Are they all the same length?

Yes, my good lord.

Hamlet and Laertes prepare to fence.

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.

Come on, sir.

Come on, my lord.

HAMLET and LAERTES fence.

That was one hit.

No.

Referee?

It was a hit, a clear hit.
LAERTES
Well, again.

CLAUDIUS
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 me some wine.

[To HAMLET]
Hamlet, this pearl is thine. 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.

CLAUDIUS
Our son shall win.

GERTRUDE
He's fat, and scant of breath.—The queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet. [picks up the cup with the pearl]

HAMLET
Good madam.

GERTRUDE
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, do not drink.

GERTRUDE
I will drink, my lord. Please excuse me. [She drinks]

CLAUDIUS
[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
[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.

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
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.

OSRIC
Look to the queen there, ho!

HORATIO
They bleed on both sides.—How is it, my lord?

OSRIC
How is 't, Laertes?

LAERTES
Why, as a woodcock to mine own springe, Osric. I am justly killed with mine own treachery. [falls]

HAMLET
How does the queen?

CLAUDIUS
She swoons to see them bleed.

OSRIC
How is your Majesty, 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?

GERTRUDE
She fainted at the sight of them bleeding.

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

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

OSRIC
We've been betrayed! Find the traitor.

CLAUDIUS
It's me, Hamlet. Hamlet, thou art slain.

LAERTES
The point envenomed too!—Then, venom, to thy work.

HAMLET wounds CLAUDIUS.
CLAUDIUS
O, yet defend me, friends. I am but hurt.

HAMLET
Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane,
Drink off this potion. Is thy union here?
Follow my mother.

HAMLET forces CLAUDIUS to drink. CLAUDIUS dies.

LAERTES
He is justly served.
It is a poison tempered by himself.
Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet.
Mine and my father's death come not upon thee,
Nor thine on me. [dies]

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
Never believe it.
I am more an antique Roman than a Dane.
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.
[to HORATIO]
O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,
Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart
Absent thee from felicity a while,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story.

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
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.

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

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. 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?

FORTINBRAS

Let four captains Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage, For he was likely, had he been put on, To have proved most royally. And, for his passage, The soldiers’ music and the rites of war Speak loudly for him.

HORATIO

[He points to CLAUDIUS] Not from his mouth, Had it th’ ability of life to thank you. He never gave commandment for their death. But since so jump upon this bloody question, You from the Polack wars, and you from England, Are here arrived, give order that these bodies High on a stage be placèd to the view, And let me speak to th’ yet-unknowing world How these things came about. So shall you hear Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts, Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters, Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause, And, in this upshot, purposes mistook Fall’n on th’ inventors’ heads. All this can I Truly deliver.

FORTINBRAS

Let us haste to hear it, And call the noblest to the audience. For me, with sorrow I embrace my fortune. I have some rights of memory in this kingdom, Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me.

HORATIO

Of that I shall have also cause to speak, And from his mouth whose voice will draw on more. But let this same be presently performed, Even while men’s minds are wild, lest more mischance On plots and errors happen.

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 exit marching, carrying the bodies, as cannons fire.

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

Not from his mouth, 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. 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

They all exit marching, carrying the bodies, as cannons fire.
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