

SHAKESPEARE SIDE-BY-SIDE PLAIN ENGLISH

SPARKNOTES

NO FEAR
SHAKESPEARE™

HAMLET

THE PLAY *PLUS* A TRANSLATION ANYONE CAN UNDERSTAND



CHARACTERS

Hamlet

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

Claudius

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

Gertrude

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

Polonius

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

Horatio

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

Ophelia

Polonius's daughter, a beautiful young woman with whom Hamlet has been in love. A sweet and innocent young girl, Ophelia dutifully strives to obey her father and her brother, Laertes, allowing Polonius to use her in his scheme to spy on Hamlet. When her father dies, her sanity unravels, and in her madness she paints a scathing picture of young men as sexually exploitative and unfaithful, and her mad speeches about flowers conceal implied condemnations of Claudius and Gertrude.

Laertes

Polonius's son and Ophelia's brother, a young man who spends much of the play in France. Passionate and quick to action, Laertes is a foil for the reflective and agonized Hamlet.

Fortinbras

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

The Ghost

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

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

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

Osric

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

Voltimand and Cornelius

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

Marcellus and Barnardo

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

Francisco

A soldier and guardsman at Elsinore.

Reynaldo

Polonius's servant, sent to France by Polonius to check up on and spy on Laertes.

Original Text

Modern Text

Act 1, Scene 1

Enter **BARNARDO** and **FRANCISCO**,
two sentinels

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

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

FRANCISCO

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

BARNARDO

Have you had quiet guard?

FRANCISCO

Not a mouse stirring.

BARNARDO

Well, good night.

If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus,

10 The rivals of my watch, bid them make
haste.

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

BARNARDO

Who's there?

FRANCISCO

No, who are you? Stop and identify
yourself.

BARNARDO

Long live the king!

FRANCISCO

Is that Barnardo?

BARNARDO

Yes, it's me.

FRANCISCO

You've come right on time.

BARNARDO

The clock's just striking twelve. Go
home to bed, Francisco.

FRANCISCO

Thanks for letting me go. It's bitterly
cold out, and I'm depressed.

BARNARDO

Has it been a quiet night?

FRANCISCO

I haven't even heard a mouse squeak.

BARNARDO

Well, good night. If you happen to see

Horatio and Marcellus, who are

supposed to stand guard with me tonight,
tell them to hurry.

FRANCISCO

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

Enter **HORATIO** and **MARCELLUS**

HORATIO

Friends to this ground.

MARCELLUS

And liegemen to the Dane.

FRANCISCO

Give you good night.

MARCELLUS

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

FRANCISCO

Barnardo has my place. Give you good night.

Exit **FRANCISCO**

MARCELLUS

15 Holla, Barnardo.

BARNARDO

Say what, is Horatio there?

HORATIO

A piece of him.

BARNARDO

Welcome, Horatio.—Welcome, good Marcellus.

MARCELLUS

What, has this thing appeared again tonight?

BARNARDO

20 I have seen nothing.

MARCELLUS

FRANCISCO

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

MARCELLUS and **HORATIO** enter.

HORATIO

Friends of this country.

MARCELLUS

And servants of the Danish king.

FRANCISCO

Good night to you both.

MARCELLUS

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

FRANCISCO

Barnardo's taken my place. Good night.

FRANCISCO exits.

MARCELLUS

Hello, Barnardo.

BARNARDO

Hello. Is Horatio here too?

HORATIO

More or less.

BARNARDO

Welcome, Horatio. Welcome, Marcellus.

MARCELLUS

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

BARNARDO

I haven't seen anything.

MARCELLUS

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

25 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.

Horatio says we're imagining it, and
won't let himself believe anything about
this horrible thing that we've seen twice
now. That's why I've begged him to
come on our shift tonight, so that if the
ghost appears he can see what we see
and speak to it.

HORATIO

Oh, nonsense. It's not going to appear.

Act 1, Scene 1, Page 3

Original Text

BARNARDO

Sit down a while
And let us once again assail your ears,
30 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
35 the pole
Had made his course t' illume that part of
heaven
Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,
The bell then beating one—

Enter **GHOST**

MARCELLUS

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

BARNARDO

Modern Text

BARNARDO

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

HORATIO

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

BARNARDO

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

The **GHOST** enters.

MARCELLUS

Quiet, shut up! It's come again.

BARNARDO

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

MARCELLUS

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

BARNARDO

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

HORATIO

Most like. It harrows me with fear and
wonder.

BARNARDO

It would be spoke to.

MARCELLUS

Question it, Horatio.

HORATIO

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

MARCELLUS

It is offended.

BARNARDO

See, it stalks away.

HORATIO

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

Exit **GHOST**

MARCELLUS

50 'Tis gone and will not answer.

BARNARDO

How now, Horatio? You tremble and look
pale.

Looking just like the dead king.

MARCELLUS

(to HORATIO) You're well-educated,
Horatio. Say something to it.

BARNARDO

Doesn't he look like the king, Horatio?

HORATIO

Very much so. It's terrifying.

BARNARDO

It wants us to speak to it.

MARCELLUS

Ask it something, Horatio.

HORATIO

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

MARCELLUS

It looks like you've offended it.

BARNARDO

Look, it's going away.

HORATIO

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

The **GHOST** exits.

MARCELLUS

It's gone. It won't answer now.

BARNARDO

What's going on, Horatio? You're pale
and trembling. You agree now that we're

Is not this something more than fantasy?
What think you on 't?

HORATIO

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

MARCELLUS

Is it not like the king?

HORATIO

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

MARCELLUS

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

HORATIO

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

MARCELLUS

Good now, sit down and tell me, he that
70 knows,
Why this same strict and most observant
watch
So nightly toils the subject of the land,
And why such daily cast of brazen cannon
75 And foreign mart for implements of war,

not imagining this, don't you? What do
you think about it?

HORATIO

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

MARCELLUS

Doesn't it look like the king?

HORATIO

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

MARCELLUS

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

HORATIO

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

MARCELLUS

All right, let's sit down and discuss that
question. Somebody tell me why this
strict schedule of guards has been
imposed, and why so many bronze
cannons are being manufactured in
Denmark, and so many weapons bought
from abroad, and why the shipbuilders

Why such impress of shipwrights, whose
sore task
Does not divide the Sunday from the week.
What might be toward, that this sweaty
haste
Doth make the night joint laborer with the
day?
Who is 't that can inform me?

HORATIO

That can I.
At least, the whisper goes so: our last king,
80 Whose image even but now appeared to us,
Was, as you know, by Fortinbras of
Norway,
Thereto pricked on by a most emulate
pride,
85 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
90 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
95 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,
100 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 resolute,

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

HORATIO

I can. Or at least I can describe the
rumors. As you know, our late king,
whom we just now saw as a ghost, was
the great rival of Fortinbras, king of
Norway. Fortinbras dared him to battle.
In that fight, our courageous Hamlet (or
at least that's how we thought of him)
killed old King Fortinbras, who—on
the basis of a valid legal document—
surrendered all his territories, along
with his life, to his conqueror. If our
king had lost, he would have had to do
the same. But now old Fortinbras's
young son, also called Fortinbras—he
is bold, but unproven—has gathered a
bunch of thugs from the lawless
outskirts of the country. For some food,
they're eager to take on the tough
enterprise of securing the lands the
elder Fortinbras lost.

For food and diet, to some enterprise
That hath a stomach in 't, which is no
other—

As it doth well appear unto our state—
But to recover of us, by strong hand

And terms compulsory, those foresaid
lands

So by his father lost. And this, I take it,

105 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

110 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

115 sheeted dead

Did squeak and gibber in the Roman
streets

As stars with trains of fire and dews of
blood,

120 Disasters in the sun, and the moist star
Upon whose influence Neptune's empire
stands

Was sick almost to doomsday with
eclipse.

And even the like precursor of feared
events,

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

BARNARDO

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

HORATIO

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

As harbingers preceding still the fates
And prologue to the omen coming on,
Have heaven and earth together
demonstrated
Unto our climatures and countrymen.

Enter **GHOST**

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

GHOST spreads his arms

If thou hast any sound or use of voice,
Speak to me.
If there be any good thing to be done
130 That may to thee do ease and grace to me,
Speak to me.
If thou art privy to thy country's fate,
Which happily foreknowing may avoid,
Oh, speak!
135 Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life
Extorted treasure in the womb of earth,
For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in
death,
Speak of it. Stay and speak!

The cock crows

—Stop it, Marcellus.

MARCELLUS

Shall I strike at it with my partisan?

HORATIO

140 Do, if it will not stand.

BARNARDO

'Tis here.

HORATIO

The **GHOST** enters.

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

The **GHOST** spreads his arms.

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

A rooster crows.

Keep it from leaving, Marcellus.

MARCELLUS

Should I strike it with my spear?

HORATIO

Yes, if it doesn't stand still.

BARNARDO

It's over here.

HORATIO

'Tis here.

Exit **GHOST**

MARCELLUS

'Tis gone.

We do it wrong, being so majestic,

To offer it the show of violence,

For it is, as the air, invulnerable,

145 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. I have heard

The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn,

150 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

155 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,

160 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,

There it is.

The **GHOST** exits.

MARCELLUS

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

BARNARDO

It was about to say something when the
rooster crowed.

HORATIO

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

MARCELLUS

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

So hallowed and so gracious is that time.

HORATIO

So have I heard and do in part believe it.

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

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

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

MARCELLUS

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

Exeunt

HORATIO

Yes, I've heard the same thing and sort
of believe it. But look, morning is
breaking beyond that hill in the east,
turning the sky red. Let's interrupt our
watch and go tell young Hamlet what
we've seen tonight. I'm sure this ghost
that's so silent with us will speak to
him. Don't you agree that we owe it to
him to tell him about this, out of duty
and love?

MARCELLUS

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

They exit.

Act 1, Scene 2

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

CLAUDIUS

Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's
death

The memory be green, and that it us befitted
To bear our hearts in grief and our whole
5 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

CLAUDIUS, the king of Denmark, enters, along
with **GERTRUDE** the
queen, **HAMLET**, **POLONIUS**, **POLONIUS**'s
son **LAERTES** and daughter **OPHELIA**,
and **LORDS** who wait on the king.

CLAUDIUS

Although I still have fresh memories of my brother
the elder Hamlet's death, and though it was proper
to mourn him throughout our kingdom, life still
goes on—I think it's wise to mourn him while also
thinking about my own well being. Therefore, I've
married my former sister-in-law, the queen, with
mixed feelings of happiness and sadness. I know
that in marrying Gertrude I'm only doing what all

Together with remembrance of ourselves.
 10 Therefore our sometime sister, now our
 queen,
 Th' imperial jointress to this warlike state,
 Have we—as 'twere with a defeated joy,
 With an auspicious and a dropping eye,
 15 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
 20 gone
 With this affair along. For all, our thanks.
 Now follows that you know. Young
 Fortinbras,
 Holding a weak supposal of our worth
 25 Or thinking by our late dear brother's death
 Our state to be disjoint and out of frame,
 Colleague'd with the dream of his
 advantage,
 He hath not failed to pester us with message
 Importing the surrender of those lands
 Lost by his father, with all bonds of law,
 To our most valiant brother. So much for
 him.

Enter **VOLTEMAND** and **CORNELIUS**

Now for ourself and for this time of meeting
 Thus much the business is: we have here writ
 To Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras—
 Who, impotent and bedrid, scarcely hears
 30 Of this his nephew's purpose—to suppress
 His further gait herein, in that the levies,
 The lists, and full proportions are all made
 Out of his subject; and we here dispatch
 You, good Cornelius, and you, Voltemand,

of you have wisely advised all along—for which I
 thank you. Now, down to business. You all know
 what's happening. Young Fortinbras,
 underestimating my strength or imagining that the
 death of the king has thrown my country into
 turmoil, dreams of getting the better of me, and
 never stops pestering me with demands that I
 surrender the territory his father lost to the elder
 Hamlet, my dead brother-in-law. So much for
 Fortinbras.

VOLTEMAND and **CORNELIUS** enter.

Now, here's what needs to be done.
 I've written to Fortinbras's uncle, the
 present head of Norway, an old bedridden
 man who knows next to nothing about his
 nephew's plans. I've told the uncle to stop
 those plans, which he has the power to do,
 since all the troops assembled by young
 Fortinbras are Norwegian, and thus under
 the uncle's control. I'm giving the job of

35 For bearers of this greeting to old Norway,
Giving to you no further personal power
To business with the king more than the
scope
Of these dilated articles allow. (gives them a
paper)
Farewell, and let your haste commend your
duty.

CORNELIUS, VOLTEMAND

40 In that and all things will we show our duty.

CLAUDIUS

We doubt it nothing. Heartily farewell.

Exeunt **VOLTEMAND** and **CORNELIUS**

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

LAERTES

My dread lord,
Your leave and favor to return to France,
From whence though willingly I came to
Denmark
To show my duty in your coronation,
55 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.

delivering this letter to you, good
Cornelius, and you, Voltemand. Your
business in Norway will be limited to this
task. (he gives them a paper) Now good-
bye. Show your loyalty by leaving
quickly, rather than with elaborate
speeches.

CORNELIUS, VOLTEMAND

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

CLAUDIUS

I have no doubt you will. Good-bye.

CORNELIUS and **VOLTEMAND** exit.

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

LAERTES

My lord, I want your permission to go
back to France, which I left to come to
Denmark for your coronation. I confess,
my thoughts are on France, now that my
duty is done. Please, let me go.

CLAUDIUS

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

POLONIUS

He hath, my lord, wrung from me my slow
leave

60 By laborsome petition, and at last
Upon his will I sealed my hard consent.
I do beseech you, give him leave to go.

CLAUDIUS

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

HAMLET

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

CLAUDIUS

How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

HAMLET

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

GERTRUDE

Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted color off,
And let thine eye look like a friend on
70 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.

CLAUDIUS

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

POLONIUS

My son has worn me down by asking me
so many times. In the end I grudgingly
consented. I beg you, let him go.

CLAUDIUS

In that case, leave when you like, Laertes,
and spend your time however you wish. I
hereby grant your request, and hope you
have a good time. And now, Hamlet, my
nephew and my son—

HAMLET

(speaking so no one else can hear) Too
many family ties there for me.

CLAUDIUS

Why are you still so gloomy, with a cloud
hanging over you?

HAMLET

It's not true, sir. Your son is out in the
sun.

GERTRUDE

My dear Hamlet, stop wearing these
black clothes, and be friendly to the king.
You can't spend your whole life with
your eyes to the ground remembering
your noble father. It happens all the time,
what lives must die eventually, passing to
eternity.

HAMLET

Yes, mother, it happens all the time.

GERTRUDE

If it be,

75 Why seems it so particular with thee?

HAMLET

"Seems," madam? Nay, it is. I know not
"seems."

'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
80 Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
Nor the dejected 'havior of the visage,
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of
grief,
85 That can denote me truly. These indeed
"seem,"
For they are actions that a man might play.
But I have that within which passeth show,
These but the trappings and the suits of
woe.

CLAUDIUS

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

GERTRUDE

So why does it seem so particular to you?

HAMLET

"Seem," mother? No, it is. I don't know
what you mean by "seem." Neither my
black clothes, my dear mother, nor my
heavy sighs, nor my weeping, nor my
downcast eyes, nor any other display of
grief can show what I really feel. It's
true that all these things "seem" like
grief, since a person could use them to
fake grief if he wanted to. But I've got
more real grief inside me that you could
ever see on the surface. These clothes
are just a hint of it.

CLAUDIUS

Hamlet, you are so sweet and such a
good son to mourn your father like this.
But you have to remember, that your
father lost his father, who lost his father
before him, and every time, each son
has had to mourn his father for a certain
period. But overdoing it is just
stubborn. It's not manly. It's not what
God wants, and it betrays a vulnerable
heart and an ignorant and weak mind.
Since we know that everyone must die
sooner or later, why should we take it to
heart? You're committing a crime
against heaven, against the dead, and
against nature. And it's irration-al, since

For what we know must be and is as
common
As any the most vulgar thing to sense,
105 Why should we in our peevish opposition
Take it to heart? Fie! 'Tis a fault to heaven,
A fault against the dead, a fault to nature,
To reason most absurd, whose common
theme
Is death of fathers, and who still hath cried,
From the first corse till he that died today,
“This must be so.” We pray you, throw to
earth
This unprevailing woe, and think of us
As of a father. For let the world take note,
You are the most immediate to our throne,

110 And with no less nobility of love
Than that which dearest father bears his
son
Do I impart toward you. For your intent
In going back to school in Wittenberg,
115 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

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

CLAUDIUS

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

the truth is that all fathers must die.
Please give up this useless mourning of
yours and start thinking of me as your
new father.

Because everyone knows that you are
the man closest to this throne, and I love
you just as much as any father loves his
son. And your plans for going back to
Wittenberg are not what I want. I'm
asking you now to stay here in my
company as the number-one member of
my court, my nephew and now my son
too.

GERTRUDE

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

HAMLET

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

CLAUDIUS

That's the right answer—it shows your
love. Stay in Denmark like us.—My
dear wife, come. Hamlet's agreeing to

Sits smiling to my heart, in grace whereof
125 No jocund health that Denmark drinks
today
But the great cannon to the clouds shall
tell,
And the king's rouse the heavens shall
bruit again,
Respeaking earthly thunder. Come away.

Flourish. Exeunt all but **HAMLET**

HAMLET
Oh, that this too, too sullied flesh would
130 melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew,
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God,
God!
135 How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on 't, ah fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden
That grows to seed. Things rank and gross
in nature
140 Possess it merely. That it should come to
this.
But two months dead—nay, not so much,
not two.
So excellent a king, that was to this
Hyperion to a satyr. So loving to my
mother
That he might not beteem the winds of
heaven
Visit her face too roughly.—Heaven and
earth,
145 Must I remember? Why, she would hang on
him

stay makes me happy, and every merry
toast I'll drink today will be heard as far
as the clouds overhead. My drinking will
be echoed in the heavens. Let's go.

Trumpets play. Everyone
except **HAMLET** exits.

HAMLET
Ah, I wish my dirty flesh could melt
away into a vapor, or that God had not
made a law against suicide. Oh God,
God! How tired, stale, and pointless life
is to me. Damn it! It's like a garden that
no one's taking care of, and that's
growing wild. Only nasty weeds grow in
it now. I can't believe it's come to this.
My father's only been dead for two
months—no, not even two. Such an
excellent king, as superior to my uncle
as a god is to a beast, and so loving
toward my mother that he kept the wind
from blowing too hard on her face.

Oh God, do I have to remember that?
She would hang on to him, and the
more she was with him the more she
wanted to be with him; she couldn't get
enough of him. Yet even so, within a
month of my father's death (I don't

As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on, and yet, within a
month—

150 Let me not think on 't. Frailty, thy name is
woman!—

A little month, or ere those shoes were old
With which she followed my poor father's
body,

155 Like Niobe, all tears. Why she, even she—
O God, a beast that wants discourse of
reason

Would have mourned longer!—married
with my uncle,

My father's brother, but no more like my
father

Than I to Hercules. Within a month,
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her gallèd eyes,
She married. O most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
It is not nor it cannot come to good,
But break, my heart, for I must hold my
tongue.

Enter **HORATIO, MARCELLUS,**
and **BARNARDO**

HORATIO

160 Hail to your lordship.

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

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

HAMLET

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

HORATIO, MARCELLUS,
and **BARNARDO** enter.

HORATIO

Hello, sir.

HAMLET

Nice to see you again, Horatio—that is
your name, right?

HORATIO

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

HAMLET

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

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

MARCELLUS

My good lord.

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

A truant disposition, good my lord.

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

175 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
180 meats

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

MARCELLUS

Hello, sir.

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

I felt like skipping school, sir.

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

Sir, we came to see your father's funeral.

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

Well, sir, it's true it came soon after.

HAMLET

It was all about saving a few bucks, Horatio. The leftovers from the funeral

Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.

Would I had met my dearest foe in heaven
Or ever I had seen that day, Horatio.
My father—methinks I see my father.

HORATIO

Where, my lord?

HAMLET

In my mind's eye, Horatio.

HORATIO

185 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.

HAMLET

Saw who?

HORATIO

190 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,
195 This marvel to you.

HAMLET

For God's love, let me hear.

HORATIO

Two nights together had these gentlemen,

dinner made a convenient wedding banquet. Oh, I'd rather have met my fiercest enemy in heaven, Horatio, than have lived through that terrible day! My father—I think I see my father.

HORATIO

Where, sir?

HAMLET

In my imagination, Horatio.

HORATIO

I saw him once. He was an admirable king.

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

Sir, I think I saw him last night.

HAMLET

Saw who?

HORATIO

Your father, sir. The dead king.

HAMLET

The king my father?!

HORATIO

Don't get too excited yet, sir. Just listen carefully while I tell you the amazing thing I saw, with these gentlemen as witnesses.

HAMLET

For God's sake, let me hear it.

HORATIO

After midnight, for two nights running,

Marcellus and Barnardo, on their watch,
In the dead waste and middle of the night,
Been thus encountered: a figure like your
200 father,
Armed at point exactly, cap-à-pie,
Appears before them and with solemn
march
Goes slow and stately by them. Thrice he
205 walked
By their oppressed and fear-surprised eyes
Within his truncheon's length, whilst they,
distilled
Almost to jelly with the act of fear,
210 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,
215 But answer made it none. Yet once
methought

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

HAMLET

But where did this happen?

MARCELLUS

On the platform where we stand guard,
sir.

HAMLET

Didn't you talk to it?

HORATIO

I did, sir, but it didn't answer me. It
raised its head once as if it was about to
speak, but just then the rooster started

It lifted up its head and did address
Itself to motion, like as it would speak.
But even then the morning cock crew loud,
220 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.
225 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.

crowning, and the ghost vanished from
sight.

HAMLET

That's very strange.

HORATIO

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

HAMLET

Yes, I should know, but it disturbs me.
Are you on duty again tonight?

MARCELLUS, BARNARDO

Yes, sir.

HAMLET

It was armed, you say?

MARCELLUS, BARNARDO

Armed, sir.

HAMLET

From head to toe?

MARCELLUS, BARNARDO

Yes, from top to bottom, sir.

HAMLET

So you couldn't see his face, then?

HORATIO

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

HAMLET

Was he frowning?

HORATIO

He looked more sad than angry.

HAMLET

Pale or red?

HORATIO

Nay, very pale.

HAMLET

And fixed his eyes upon you?

HORATIO

Most constantly.

HAMLET

I would I had been there.

HORATIO

It would have much amazed you.

HAMLET

235 Very like. Stayed it long?

HORATIO

While one with moderate haste might tell a hundred.

MARCELLUS, BARNARDO

Longer, longer.

HORATIO

Not when I saw 't.

HAMLET

His beard was grizzled, no?

HORATIO

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

HAMLET

I will watch tonight. Perchance
'Twill walk again.

HORATIO

I warrant it will.

HAMLET

Was he pale or flushed and red-faced?

HORATIO

Very pale, sir.

HAMLET

Did he stare at you?

HORATIO

The whole time.

HAMLET

I wish I'd been there.

HORATIO

You would have been very shocked.

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

About as long as it would take someone to count slowly to a hundred.

MARCELLUS, BARNARDO

No, longer than that.

HORATIO

Not the time I saw it.

HAMLET

His beard was gray, right?

HORATIO

It was just like in real life, dark brown with silver whiskers in it.

HAMLET

I'll stand guard with you tonight.
Maybe it'll come again.

HORATIO

I bet it will.

HAMLET

If it assume my noble father's person,
I'll speak to it, though Hell itself should
245 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,
250 Give it an understanding, but no tongue.
I will requite your loves. So fare you well.
Upon the platform, 'twixt eleven and
twelve,
I'll visit you.

**HORATIO, MARCELLUS,
BARNARDO**

Our duty to your honor.

HAMLET

Your loves, as mine to you. Farewell.

Exeunt all but **HAMLET**

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

Exit

HAMLET

If it looks like my good father, I'll speak
to it, even if Hell itself opens up and
tells me to be quiet. I ask you, if you've
kept this a secret, keep doing so.
Whatever happens tonight, don't talk
about it. I'll return the favor. So good-
bye for now. I'll see you on the guards'
platform between eleven and twelve
tonight.

**HORATIO, MARCELLUS,
BARNARDO**

We'll do our duty to you, sir.

HAMLET

Give me your love instead, as I give you
mine. Good-bye.

Everyone except **HAMLET** exits.

My father's ghost—armed! Something's
wrong. I suspect some foul play. I wish
the night were here already! Until then, I
have to remain calm. Bad deeds will be
revealed, no matter how people try to
hide them.

HAMLET exits.

Act 1, Scene 3

Enter **LAERTES** and **OPHELIA**, his sister

LAERTES

My necessities are embarked. Farewell.

LAERTES and his
sister **OPHELIA** enter.

LAERTES

My belongings are on the ship already.

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

- 5 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.
10 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
15 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
20 own,
For he himself is subject to his birth.
He may not, as unvalued persons do,
Carve for himself, for on his choice
depends
The safety and health of this whole state.
And therefore must his choice be
circumscribed
Unto the voice and yielding of that body
Whereof he is the head. Then if he says he

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

OPHELIA

Do you doubt I'll write?

LAERTES

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

OPHELIA

No more than a minute?

LAERTES

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

loves you,

25 It fits your wisdom so far to believe it
As he in his particular act and place
May give his saying deed, which is no
further
Than the main voice of Denmark goes
30 withal.
Then weigh what loss your honor may
sustain
If with too credent ear you list his songs,
Or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure
35 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.
40 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

45 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
50 heaven
Whiles, like a puffed and reckless libertine,

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

OPHELIA

I'll keep your words of wisdom close to
my heart. But, my dear brother, don't be
like a bad priest who fails to practice
what he preaches, showing me the steep
and narrow way to heaven while you
frolic on the primrose path of sin.

Himself the primrose path of dalliance
treads
And reck's not his own rede.

LAERTES

O, fear me not.

Enter **POLONIUS**

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

POLONIUS

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

LAERTES

Don't worry, I won't.

POLONIUS enters.

I've been here too long. And here comes
father. What good luck, to have him
bless my leaving not once but twice.

POLONIUS

You're still here? Shame on you—get on
board! The wind is filling your ship's
sail, and they're waiting for you. Here, I
give you my blessing again. And just try
to remember a few rules of life. Don't
say what you're thinking, and don't be
too quick to act on what you think. Be
friendly to people but don't overdo it.
Once you've tested out your friends and
found them trustworthy, hold onto them.
But don't waste your time shaking hands
with every new guy you meet. Don't be
quick to pick a fight, but once you're in
one, hold your own. Listen to many
people, but talk to few. Hear everyone's
opinion, but reserve your judgment.
Spend all you can afford on clothes, but
make sure they're quality, not flashy,
since clothes make the man—which is
doubly true in France. Don't borrow
money and don't lend it, since when you
lend to a friend, you often lose the
friendship as well as the money, and
borrowing turns a person into a
spendthrift. And, above all, be true to

80 For the apparel oft proclaims the man,
And they in France of the best rank and
station
Are of a most select and generous chief in
that.

Neither a borrower nor a lender be,
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.
Farewell. My blessing season this in thee.

LAERTES

Most humbly do I take my leave, my lord.

POLONIUS

The time invites you. Go. Your servants
tend.

LAERTES

Farewell, Ophelia, and remember well

85 What I have said to you.

OPHELIA

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

LAERTES

Farewell.

Exit **LAERTES**

POLONIUS

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

OPHELIA

So please you, something touching the
Lord Hamlet.

POLONIUS

90 Marry, well bethought.

'Tis told me he hath very oft of late

yourself. Then you won't be false to
anybody else. Good-bye, son. I hope my
blessing will help you absorb what I've
said.

LAERTES

I humbly say good-bye to you, father.

POLONIUS

Now go, the time is right. Your servants
are waiting.

LAERTES

Good-bye, Ophelia. Remember what
I've told you.

OPHELIA

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

LAERTES

Good-bye.

LAERTES exits.

POLONIUS

What did he tell you, Ophelia?

OPHELIA

Something about Hamlet.

POLONIUS

A good thing he did, by God. I've heard
Hamlet's been spending a lot of time

Given private time to you, and you
yourself
Have of your audience been most free and
95 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
100 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

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

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

OPHELIA

He's offered me a lot of affection lately.

POLONIUS

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

OPHELIA

I don't know what to believe, father.

POLONIUS

Then I'll tell you. Believe that you are a
foolish little baby for believing these
“offers” are something real. Offer
yourself more respect, or—not to beat
this word to death—you'll offer me the
chance to be a laughing-stock.

OPHELIA

110 My lord, he hath importuned me with love
In honorable fashion.

POLONIUS

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

OPHELIA

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

POLONIUS

115 Ay, springes to catch woodcocks. I do
know,
When the blood burns, how prodigal the
soul
Lends the tongue vows. These blazes,
120 daughter,
Giving more light than heat, extinct in both
Even in their promise as it is a-making,
You must not take for fire. From this time
Be somewhat scanter of your maiden
125 presence.
Set your entreatments at a higher rate
Than a command to parley. For Lord
Hamlet,
Believe so much in him that he is young,
130 And with a larger tether may he walk
Than may be given you. In few, Ophelia,
Do not believe his vows, for they are
brokers
Not of that dye which their investments
135 show,
But mere implorators of unholy suits,
Breathing like sanctified and pious bawds,
The better to beguile. This is for all:

OPHELIA

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

POLONIUS

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

OPHELIA

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

POLONIUS

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

I would not, in plain terms, from this time
forth,

Have you so slander any moment leisure,
As to give words or talk with the Lord
Hamlet.

Look to 't, I charge you. Come your ways.

OPHELIA

I shall obey, my lord.

OPHELIA

I'll do as you say, father.

Exeunt

They exit.

Act 1, Scene 4

Enter **HAMLET, HORATIO,**
and **MARCELLUS**

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

HAMLET

The air bites shrewdly. It is very cold.

HORATIO

It is a nipping and an eager air.

HAMLET

What hour now?

HORATIO

I think it lacks of twelve.

MARCELLUS

5 No, it is struck.

HORATIO

Indeed? I heard it not. It then draws near
the season

Wherein the spirit held his wont to walk.

A flourish of trumpets and two pieces of
ordnance goes off

What does this mean, my lord?

HAMLET

The king doth wake tonight and takes his

HAMLET

The air is biting cold.

HORATIO

Yes, it's definitely nippy.

HAMLET

What time is it?

HORATIO

A little before twelve, I think.

MARCELLUS

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

HORATIO

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

Trumpets play offstage and two cannons
are fired.

What does that mean, sir?

HAMLET

The king is staying up all night drinking

10 rouse,
Keeps wassail and the swaggering upspring
reels,
And, as he drains his draughts of Rhenish
down,
The kettle-drum and trumpet thus bray out
The triumph of his pledge.

HORATIO

Is it a custom?

HAMLET

15 Ay, marry, is 't.
But to my mind, though I am native here
And to the manner born, it is a custom
More honored in the breach than the
observance.
20 This heavy-headed revel east and west
Makes us traduced and taxed of other
nations.
They clepe us drunkards and with swinish
phrase
Soil our addition. And indeed it takes
From our achievements, though performed
25 at height,
The pith and marrow of our attribute.
So oft it chances in particular men
That for some vicious mole of nature in
them—
30 As in their birth (wherein they are not
guilty,
Since nature cannot choose his origin),
By the o'ergrowth of some complexion,
Oft breaking down the pales and forts of
35 reason,
Or by some habit that too much o'erleavens
The form of plausible manners—that these

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

HORATIO

Is that a tradition?

HAMLET

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

They call us drunks and insult our noble
titles. And our drunkenness does detract
from our achievements, as great as they
are, and lessens our reputations. It's just
like what happens to certain people who
have some birth defect (which they are
not responsible for, since nobody
chooses how he's born), or some weird
habit or compulsion that changes them
completely. It happens sometimes that
one little defect in these people, as
wonderful and talented as they may be,
will make them look completely bad to
other people. A tiny spot of evil casts
doubt on their good qualities and ruins
their reputations.

men,
Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect,
40 Being nature's livery or fortune's star,
Their virtues else (be they as pure as grace,
As infinite as man may undergo)
Shall in the general censure take corruption
From that particular fault. The dram of evil
Doth all the noble substance of a doubt
To his own scandal.

Enter **GHOST**

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
45 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,"
50 "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,
55 That thou, dead corse, again in complete
steel
Revisits thus the glimpses of the moon,
Making night hideous and we fools of
nature,

The **GHOST** enters.

HORATIO

Look, sir—here it comes!

HAMLET

Oh angels, protect us! Whether you're a
good spirit or a cursed demon, whether
you bring heavenly breezes or blasts of
hell fire, whether your intentions are
good or evil, you look so strange I want
to talk to you. I'll call you "Hamlet
Senior," "King," "Father," "royal Dane."
Answer me! Don't drive me crazy with
curiosity, but tell me why your church-
buried bones have burst out of their
coffin, and why your tomb,

where we quietly buried you, has opened
up its heavy marble jaws to spit you out
again. What could it mean that you have
put on your armor again, you corpse,
and have come back to look at the moon,
making the night terrifying and stirring
us humans with supernatural fears?
Why? What do you want from us? What

60 So horridly to shake our disposition
With thoughts beyond the reaches of our
souls?
Say why is this? Wherefore? What should
we do?

GHOST beckons **HAMLET**

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 removed ground.

65 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,
70 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,

75 And there assume some other horrible form,
Which might deprive your sovereignty of

should we do?

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

HORATIO

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

MARCELLUS

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

HORATIO

Definitely not.

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

Don't do it, sir.

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

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

where it takes on some other horrible
form that drives you insane. Think about

reason

And draw you into madness? Think of it.

The very place puts toys of desperation,

80 Without more motive, into every brain

That looks so many fathoms to the sea

And hears it roar beneath.

HAMLET

It waves me still.

—Go on. I'll follow thee.

MARCELLUS

You shall not go, my lord.

MARCELLUS and **HORATIO** try to
hold **HAMLET** back

HAMLET

Hold off your hands.

HORATIO

85 Be ruled. You shall not go.

HAMLET

My fate cries out

And makes each petty artery in this body

As hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve.

Still am I called.—Unhand me, gentlemen.

(draws his sword)

90 By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that
lets me.

I say, away!—Go on. I'll follow thee.

Exeunt **GHOST** and **HAMLET**

HORATIO

He waxes desperate with imagination.

MARCELLUS

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

HORATIO

it. The edge of the sea makes people feel

despair even at the best of times. All

they have to do is look into its depths

and hear it roar far below.

HAMLET

It's still waving to me. —Go ahead, I'll

follow.

MARCELLUS

You're not going, sir.

MARCELLUS and **HORATIO** try to
hold **HAMLET** back.

HAMLET

Let go of me.

HORATIO

Calm down. You're not going anywhere.

HAMLET

It's my fate calling me. Every nerve in

my body is now as tough as steel. The

ghost is still waving me over. Let me go,

gentlemen. (he draws his sword)

I swear, if anyone holds me back, I'll

make a ghost of him! I say, get away!—

Go ahead, I'll follow you.

The **GHOST** and **HAMLET** exit.

HORATIO

His imagination is making him crazy.

MARCELLUS

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

HORATIO

Have after. To what issue will this come?

MARCELLUS

95 Something is rotten in the state of
Denmark.

HORATIO

Heaven will direct it.

MARCELLUS

Nay, let's follow him.

Exeunt

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

MARCELLUS

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

HORATIO

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

MARCELLUS

No, let's follow him.

They exit.

Act 1, Scene 5

Enter **GHOST** and **HAMLET**

HAMLET

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

GHOST

Mark me.

HAMLET

I will.

GHOST

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

HAMLET

Alas, poor ghost!

GHOST

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

HAMLET

Speak. I am bound to hear.

GHOST

The **GHOST** and **HAMLET** enter.

HAMLET

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

GHOST

Listen to me.

HAMLET

I will.

GHOST

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

HAMLET

Ah, poor ghost!

GHOST

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

HAMLET

Speak. I'm ready to hear you.

GHOST

So art thou to revenge when thou shalt hear.

HAMLET

What?

GHOST

I am thy father's spirit,

10 Doomed for a certain term to walk the night

And for the day confined to fast in fires,
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature

15 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 combined locks to part

20 And each particular hair to stand on end,
Like quills upon the fearful porpentine.

But this eternal blazon must not be
To ears of flesh and blood. List, list, O, list!
If thou didst ever thy dear father love—

HAMLET

O God!

GHOST

25 Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

HAMLET

Murder?

GHOST

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

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

HAMLET

What?

GHOST

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

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

HAMLET

Oh God!

GHOST

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

HAMLET

Murder?

GHOST

His most horrible murder. Murder's
always horrible, but this one was

HAMLET

Haste me to know 't, that I, with wings as
30 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,
35 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
40 Is by a forgèd process of my death
Rankly abused. But know, thou noble
youth,
The serpent that did sting thy father's life
Now wears his crown.

HAMLET

O my prophetic soul! My uncle?

GHOST

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

especially horrible, weird, and unnatural.

HAMLET

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

GHOST

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

HAMLET

I knew it! My uncle?

GHOST

Yes, that incestuous, adulterous animal.
With his clever words and fancy gifts, he
seduced my seemingly virtuous queen,
persuading her to give in to his lust.
They were evil words and gifts to seduce
her like that! Oh, Hamlet, how far she
fell! She went from me, who loved her
with the dignity and devotion that suits a
legitimate marriage, to a wretch whose
natural gifts were poor compared to
mine. But just as you can't corrupt a

I made to her in marriage, and to decline
Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were
55 poor
To those of mine.
But virtue, as it never will be moved,
Though lewdness court it in a shape of
heaven,
60 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
65 orchard,
My custom always of the afternoon,
Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole
With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial,
And in the porches of my ears did pour
70 The leperous distilment, whose effect
Holds such an enmity with blood of man
That swift as quicksilver it courses through
The natural gates and alleys of the body
And with a sudden vigor doth posset
75 And curd, like eager droppings into milk,
The thin and wholesome blood. So did it
mine.
And a most instant tetter barked about,
Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome
crust
All my smooth body.
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,
Unhousel'd, disappointed, unanel'd.
No reckoning made, but sent to my
account

truly virtuous person no matter how you
try, the opposite is also true: a lustful
person like her can satisfy herself in a
heavenly union and then move on to
garbage. But hang on, I think I smell the
morning air. So let me be brief here.
Your uncle snuck up to me while I was
sleeping in the orchard, as I always used
to do in the afternoon, and poured a vial
of henbane poison into my ear—that
poison that moves like quicksilver
through the veins and curdles the blood,
which is just what it did to me. I broke
out in a scaly rash that covered my
smooth body with a revolting crust. And
that's how my brother robbed me of my
life, my crown, and my queen all at
once. He cut me off in the middle of a
sinful life.

I had no chance to repent my sins or
receive last rites. Oh, it's horrible,
horrible, so horrible! If you are human,

80 With all my imperfections on my head.
Oh, horrible, oh, horrible, most horrible!
If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not.
Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch for luxury and damnèd incest.
85 But howsoever thou pursuest this act,
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul
contrive
Against thy mother aught. Leave her to
heaven
90 And to those thorns that in her bosom
lodge
To prick and sting her. Fare thee well at
once.
The glowworm shows the matin to be
near,
And 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire.
Adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me.

Exit

HAMLET

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

don't stand for it. Don't let the Danish
king's bed be a nest of incest. But
however you go about your revenge,
don't corrupt your mind or do any harm
to your mother. Leave her to God and
her own guilt. Now, good-bye. The
glowworm's light is beginning to fade,
so morning is near. Good-bye, good-
bye, good-bye. Remember me.

The **GHOST** exits.

HAMLET

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

Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmixed with baser matter. Yes, by
heaven!

110 O most pernicious woman!

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

At least I'm sure it may be so in

Denmark. (writes)

So, uncle, there you are. Now to my word.

It is "Adieu, adieu. Remember me."

I have sworn 't.

Enter **HORATIO** and **MARCELLUS**

HORATIO

My lord, my lord!

MARCELLUS

Lord Hamlet—

HORATIO

115 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

120 Oh, wonderful!

HORATIO

smile, and be a villain. At least it's
possible in Denmark. (he writes) So,
uncle, there you are. Now it's time to
deal with the vow I made to my father.

He said, "Remember me." I swore I
would.

MARCELLUS and **HORATIO** enter.

HORATIO

Sir, sir!

MARCELLUS

Lord Hamlet.—

HORATIO

Please let him be all right!

HAMLET

I'm all right.

HORATIO

Oh-ho-ho, sir!

HAMLET

Oh-ho-ho, kid! Come here.

MARCELLUS

So how did it go, sir?

HORATIO

What happened, sir?

HAMLET

It was incredible!

HORATIO

Good my lord, tell it.

HAMLET

No. You'll reveal it.

HORATIO

Not I, my lord, by heaven.

MARCELLUS

Nor I, my lord.

HAMLET

How say you, then? Would heart of man
125 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.

130 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,

135 Such as it is—and for my own poor part,
Look you, I'll go pray.

HORATIO

These are but wild and whirling words, my
lord.

HAMLET

Oh, please, tell us, sir.

HAMLET

No, you'll talk.

HORATIO

I swear I won't, sir.

MARCELLUS

I won't either, sir.

HAMLET

Okay. But you promise you can keep a
secret?

HORATIO, MARCELLUS

Yes, I swear.

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

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

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

You're talking in such a crazy way, sir.

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,
140 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,
145 O'ermaster 't as you may. And now, good
friends,
As you are friends, scholars and soldiers,
Give me one poor request.

HORATIO

What is 't, my lord? We will.

HAMLET

Never make known what you have seen
tonight.

HORATIO, MARCELLUS

My lord, we will not.

HAMLET

Nay, but swear 't.

HORATIO

In faith, my lord, not I.

MARCELLUS

Nor I, my lord, in faith.

HAMLET

Upon my sword.

MARCELLUS

We have sworn, my lord, already.

HAMLET

I'm sorry if I offended you; yes, very
sorry.

HORATIO

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

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

What is it, sir? Of course we will.

HAMLET

Don't ever tell anyone what you've seen
tonight.

HORATIO, MARCELLUS

We won't, sir.

HAMLET

No, you have to swear it.

HORATIO

I swear to God I won't.

MARCELLUS

Me too, I won't, I swear to God.

HAMLET

Swear by my sword.

MARCELLUS

But we already swore, sir.

HAMLET

150 Indeed, upon my sword, indeed.

GHOST

(cries under the stage) Swear!

HAMLET

Ha, ha, boy! Sayst thou so? Art thou there, truepenny?

Come on, you hear this fellow in the cellarage.

Consent to swear.

HORATIO

155 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.

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

GHOST

(beneath) Swear by his sword.

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!

Yes, but swear by my sword this time.

GHOST

(calls out from under the stage) Swear!

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

Tell us what to swear, sir.

HAMLET

You swear never to mention what you've seen. Swear by my sword.

GHOST

(from under the stage) Swear.

HAMLET

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

GHOST

(from under the stage) Swear by his sword.

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

My God, this is unbelievably strange.

HAMLET

And therefore as a stranger give it
welcome.

There are more things in heaven and earth,

170 Horatio,

Than are dreamt of in your philosophy. But
come,

Here, as before, never, so help you mercy,
How strange or odd so'er I bear myself

175 (As I perchance hereafter shall think meet
To put an antic disposition on),

That you, at such times seeing me, never
shall—

With arms encumbered thus, or this

180 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 ought of me. This not to do,

So grace and mercy at your most need help
you,

Swear.

GHOST

(beneath) Swear!

HAMLET

Rest, rest, perturbed spirit!—So,

185 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,

HAMLET

Then give it a nice welcome, as you
would give to any stranger. There are
more things in heaven and earth,

Horatio, than you've even dreamed of.

But now listen to me. No matter how
strangely I act (since I may find it

appropriate to act a little crazy in the
near future), you must never, ever let

on—with a gesture of your hands or a
certain expression on your face—that

you know anything about what

happened to me here tonight. You must

never say anything like, “Ah, yes, just

as we suspected,” or “We could tell you

a thing or two about him,” or anything

like that. Swear you won't.

GHOST

(from under the stage) Swear.

HAMLET

Okay, then, unhappy ghost, you can rest
now. So, gentlemen, I thank you

heartily and with all my love, and I'll

repay you however I can some day.

Let's go back to court together,

but shhh, please. No talking about this.

190 God willing, shall not lack. Let us go in
together,
And still your fingers on your lips, I pray.
The time is out of joint. O cursèd spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!
Nay, come, let's go together.

Exeunt

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

They exit.

Act 2, Scene 1

Enter **POLONIUS** with his
man **REYNALDO**

POLONIUS

Give him this money and these notes,
Reynaldo.

REYNALDO

I will, my lord.

POLONIUS

You shall do marvelous wisely, good
Reynaldo,

5 Before you visit him, to make inquire
Of his behavior.

REYNALDO

My lord, I did intend it.

POLONIUS

Marry, well said, very well said. Look you,
sir,

Inquire me first what Danskers are in Paris,
And how, and who, what means, and where

10 they keep

What company at what expense; and
finding

By this encompassment and drift of
question

15 That they do know my son, come you more

POLONIUS enters with his
servant **REYNALDO**.

POLONIUS

Give him this money and these letters,
Reynaldo.

REYNALDO

I will, sir.

POLONIUS

It would be wonderfully wise of you, my
dear Reynaldo, to ask around about his
behavior a little before you visit him.

REYNALDO

That's what I thought too, sir.

POLONIUS

Excellent, very good. Ask around and
find out what Danish people are in
Paris—who they are, where they live
and how much money they have, who
their friends are. And if you find out in
this general sort of questioning that they
happen to know my son, you'll find out
much more than if you asked specific
questions about him. Just tell them you
vaguely know Laertes, say something

nearer

Than your particular demands will touch it.
Take you, as 'twere, some distant
knowledge of him,

As thus: "I know his father and his friends,
And, in part, him." Do you mark this,
Reynaldo?

REYNALDO

Ay, very well, my lord.

POLONIUS

"And in part him, but," you may say, "not
well.

But, if 't be he I mean, he's very wild.

20 Addicted so and so.—" And there put on
him

What forgeries you please. Marry, none so
rank

As may dishonor him. Take heed of that.

But, sir, such wanton, wild, and usual slips

As are companions noted and most known
To youth and liberty.

REYNALDO

As gaming, my lord?

POLONIUS

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

REYNALDO

My lord, that would dishonor him!

POLONIUS

'Faith, no, as you may season it in the
charge.

30 You must not put another scandal on him
That he is open to incontinency.
That's not my meaning. But breathe his

like, "I'm a friend of his father and I sort
of know him," or whatever. Do you get
what I'm saying, Reynaldo?

REYNALDO

Yes, very well, sir.

POLONIUS

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

sound like your average young guy, the
kind of trouble they get into.

REYNALDO

Like gambling, sir?

POLONIUS

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

REYNALDO

But that would ruin his reputation!

POLONIUS

Oh no, not if you say it right. I don't
want you to say he's a sex fiend, that's
not what I mean. Just mention his faults
lightly, so they make him seem like a
free spirit who's gone a little too far.

faults so quaintly
That they may seem the taints of liberty,
35 The flash and outbreak of a fiery mind,
A savageness in unreclaimèd blood,
Of general assault.

REYNALDO

But, my good lord—

POLONIUS

Wherefore should you do this?

REYNALDO

Ay, my lord. I would know that.

POLONIUS

Marry, sir, here's my drift:

(And I believe it is a fetch of wit)

40 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,

45 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

REYNALDO

But, sir—

POLONIUS

Why should you do this, you want to
know?

REYNALDO

Yes, sir. I'd like to know.

POLONIUS

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

REYNALDO

Yes, sir.

POLONIUS

And then he'll ... he'll ... wait, what
was I about to say? Good God, I was
about to say something. What was I
saying?

REYNALDO

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

POLONIUS

At “closes in the consequence.” Ay, marry.

55 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
60 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,
65 Your bait of falsehood takes this carp of
truth.
And thus do we of wisdom and of reach,
With windlasses and with assays of bias,
By indirections find directions out.
So by my former lecture and advice
Shall you my son. You have me, have you
not?

REYNALDO

My lord, I have.

POLONIUS

God be wi' you. Fare you well.

REYNALDO

Good my lord.

POLONIUS

70 Observe his inclination in yourself.

REYNALDO

I shall, my lord.

POLONIUS

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

POLONIUS

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

REYNALDO

Yes, I do, sir.

POLONIUS

God bless you. Have a safe trip.

REYNALDO

Thank you, sir.

POLONIUS

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

REYNALDO

I will, sir.

POLONIUS

And let him ply his music.

REYNALDO

Well, my lord.

POLONIUS

Farewell.

Exit **REYNALDO**

Enter **OPHELIA**

How now, Ophelia? What's the matter?

OPHELIA

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

POLONIUS

With what, i' th' name of God?

OPHELIA

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

POLONIUS

85 Mad for thy love?

OPHELIA

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

POLONIUS

What said he?

OPHELIA

He took me by the wrist and held me hard.

And I hope he's studying his music like
he's supposed to.

REYNALDO

Got it, sir.

POLONIUS

Good-bye.

REYNALDO exits.

OPHELIA enters.

Ophelia, what's the matter?

OPHELIA

Oh, father, father, I've just had such a
scare!

POLONIUS

From what, in God's name?

OPHELIA

Father, I was up in my room sewing
when Hamlet came in with no hat on his
head, his shirt unbuttoned, and his
stockings dirty, undone, and down
around his ankles. He was pale as his
undershirt, and his knees were knocking
together. He looked so out of sorts, as if
he'd just come back from hell. He came
up to me.

POLONIUS

Is he crazy with love for you?

OPHELIA

I'm not sure, but I'm afraid he might be.

POLONIUS

What did he say?

OPHELIA

He grabbed me by the wrist and held me

Then goes he to the length of all his arm,
And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow,
90 He falls to such perusal of my face
As he would draw it. Long stayed he so.

At last, a little shaking of mine arm
And thrice his head thus waving up and
down,
95 He raised a sigh so piteous and profound
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk
And end his being. That done, he lets me
go,
And, with his head over his shoulder
100 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
105 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
110 I did repel his fetters and denied
His access to me.

POLONIUS

That hath made him mad.

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

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

POLONIUS

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

OPHELIA

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

POLONIUS

That's what made him crazy. I regret

I am sorry that with better heed and
judgment
I had not quoted him. I feared he did but
trifle
115 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
120 To lack discretion. Come, go we to the
king.
This must be known, which, being kept
close, might move
More grief to hide than hate to utter love.
Come.

Exeunt

not observing him more closely before I
told you to do that. I thought he was just
toying with you and meant to ruin your
reputation. Damn my suspicious
thoughts! It's as common for us old
people to assume we know more than
we do as for young people to be too
wild and crazy. Come on, let's go see
the king. We've got to discuss this
matter, which could cause more trouble
if we keep it secret than if we discuss it
openly.

They exit.

Act 2, Scene 2

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

Trumpets
play. **CLAUDIUS** and **GERTRUDE** enter
with **ROSENCRANTZ**, **GUILDENSTERN**, and attendants.

CLAUDIUS
Welcome, dear Rosencrantz and
Guildenstern.
Moreover that we much did long to see you,
The need we have to use you did provoke
5 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
10 put him

CLAUDIUS
Welcome, dear Rosencrantz and
Guildenstern. I've wanted to see you
for a long time now, but I sent for you
so hastily because I need your help
right away. You've probably heard
about the "change" that's come over
Hamlet—that's the only word for it,
since inside and out he's different from
what he was before. I can't imagine
what's made him so unlike himself,

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

- 15 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.

- 20 And sure I am two men there are not living
To whom he more adheres. If it will please
you
To show us so much gentry and good will
As to expend your time with us awhile
25 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
30 And here give up ourselves, in the full bent,
To lay our service freely at your feet
To be commanded.

CLAUDIUS

other than his father's death. Since you
both grew up with him and are so
familiar with his personality and
behavior, I'm asking you to stay a
while at court and spend some time
with him. See if you can get Hamlet to
have some fun, and find out if there's
anything in particular that's bothering
him, so we can set about trying to fix it.

GERTRUDE

Gentlemen, Hamlet's talked a lot about
you, and I know there are no two men
alive he's fonder of. If you'll be so
good as to spend some time with us
and help us out, you'll be thanked on a
royal scale.

ROSENCRANTZ

Both you and the king might have
ordered us to execute your
command, instead of asking us so
politely.

GUILDENSTERN

But we'll obey. Our services are
entirely at your command.

CLAUDIUS

Thanks, Rosencrantz and gentle Guildenstern.

GERTRUDE

Thanks, Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz.

35 And I beseech you instantly to visit

My too much changèd son. Go, some of you,
And bring these gentlemen where Hamlet is.

GUILDENSTERN

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

GERTRUDE

Ay, amen!

Exeunt **ROSENCRANTZ** and **GUILDENSTERN**, escorted by attendants

Enter **POLONIUS**

POLONIUS

40 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,

45 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

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

Thanks, Rosencrantz and worthy
Guildenstern.

GERTRUDE

Thanks, Guildenstern and worthy
Rosencrantz.

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

GUILDENSTERN

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

GERTRUDE

Amen to that!

ROSENCRANTZ and **GUILDENSTERN** exit, escorted by
attendants.

POLONIUS enters.

POLONIUS

The ambassadors are back from
Norway, sir.

CLAUDIUS

Once again you bring good news.

POLONIUS

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

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

CLAUDIUS

Tell me! I want very much to find out.

POLONIUS

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

CLAUDIUS

Thyself do grace to them, and bring them in.

Exit **POLONIUS**

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

GERTRUDE

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

Enter **POLONIUS** with
ambassadors **VOLTEMAND** and **CORNELIUS**

CLAUDIUS

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

VOLTEMAND

60 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
65 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,
70 Receives rebuke from Norway, and in fine
Makes vow before his uncle never more
To give th' assay of arms against your

POLONIUS

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

CLAUDIUS

Then be so kind as to show them in.

POLONIUS exits.

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

GERTRUDE

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

POLONIUS enters with the
ambassadors **VOLTEMAND** and **CORNELIUS**.

CLAUDIUS

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

VOLTEMAND

Greetings to you too, your Highness. As
soon as we raised the matter, the king sent
out messengers to stop his nephew's war
preparations, which he originally thought
were directed against Poland but learned on
closer examination were directed against
you. He was very upset that Fortinbras had
taken advantage of his being old and sick to
deceive him, and he ordered Fortinbras's
arrest. Fortinbras swore never to threaten
Denmark again.

majesty.

Whereon old Norway, overcome with joy,

75 Gives him three thousand crowns in annual
fee
And his commission to employ those
soldiers,
So levied as before, against the Polack,
With an entreaty, herein further shown,
80 That it might please you to give quiet pass
Through your dominions for this enterprise,
On such regards of safety and allowance
As therein are set
down. (gives CLAUDIUS a document

CLAUDIUS

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

Exeunt **VOLTEMAND** and **CORNELIUS**

POLONIUS

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

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

CLAUDIUS

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

VOLTEMAND and **CORNELIUS** exit

POLONIUS

Well, that turned out well in the end. Sir
and madam, to make grand speeches
about what majesty is, what service is,
or why day is day, night is night, and
time is time is just a waste of a lot of
day, night, and time. Therefore, since
the essence of wisdom is not talking too
much, I'll get right to the point here.
Your son is crazy. "Crazy" I'm calling

95 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.
100 That he is mad, 'tis true. Tis true, 'tis pity,
And pity 'tis 'tis true—a foolish figure,
But farewell it, for I will use no art.
Mad let us grant him then. And now
remains

That we find out the cause of this effect,
105 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
110 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

it, since how can you say what craziness
is except to say that it’s craziness? But
that’s another story.

GERTRUDE

Please, stick to the point.

POLONIUS

Madam, I’m doing nothing but sticking
to the point. It’s true he’s crazy, and it’s
a shame it’s true, and it’s truly a shame
he’s crazy—but now I sound foolish, so
I’ll get right to the point.

Now, if we agree Hamlet’s crazy, then
the next step is to figure out the cause
of this effect of craziness, or I suppose
I should say the cause of this defect,
since this defective effect is caused by
something. This is what we must do,
and that’s exactly what needs to be
done. Think about it. I have a daughter
(I have her until she gets married)
who’s given me this letter, considering
it her duty. Listen and think about
this: (he reads a letter) “To the
heavenly idol of my soul, the most
beautified Ophelia”—By the way,
“beautified” sounds bad, it sounds
awful, it sounds crude, it’s a terrible
use of the word. But I’ll go on: (he
reads the letter) “In her excellent white
bosom,” et cetera, et cetera—you
don’t need to hear all this stuff—

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,
115 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

120 What do you think of me?

CLAUDIUS

As of a man faithful and honorable.

POLONIUS

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

Hamlet wrote this letter to Ophelia?

POLONIUS

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

(he reads the letter)

“You may wonder if the stars are fire,

You may wonder if the sun moves across the sky.

You may wonder if the truth is a liar,

But never wonder if I love.
Oh, Ophelia, I'm bad at poetry. I can't put my feelings into verse, but please believe I love you best, oh, best of all. Believe it.

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

Hamlet.”

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

CLAUDIUS

And how did she react to all this?

POLONIUS

Sir, what is your opinion of me?

CLAUDIUS

I know you are loyal and honorable.

POLONIUS

I would like to prove to you that I am. But what would you have thought of me if I had kept quiet when I found

125 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,
130 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
135 sight?
What might you think? No, I went round
to work,
And my young mistress thus I did
bespeak:
140 “Lord Hamlet is a prince out of thy star.
This must not be.” And then I prescripts
gave her,
That she should lock herself from his
resort,
Admit no messengers, receive no
tokens.
Which done, she took the fruits of my
advice;
And he, repelled—a short tale to
make—
Fell into a sadness, then into a fast,
Thence to a watch, thence into a
weakness,
Thence to a lightness, and, by this
declension,
Into the madness wherein now he raves
And all we mourn for.

CLAUDIUS

(to GERTRUDE) Do you think ’tis
this?

out about this hot little love (which I
noticed even before my daughter told
me about it)? My dear queen, what
would you have thought of me if I had
turned a blind eye to what was
happening between Hamlet and my
daughter? No, I had to do something.
And so I said to my daughter: “Lord
Hamlet is a prince, he’s out of your
league. You have to end this.” And
then I gave her orders to stay away
from him, and not to accept any
messages or little gifts from him. She
did what I said. When she rejected
Hamlet, he became sad, and stopped
eating, stopped sleeping, got weak, got
dizzy, and as a result lost his mind.
And that’s why he’s crazy now, and all
of us feel sorry for him.

CLAUDIUS

(to GERTRUDE) Do you think that’s
why Hamlet’s crazy?

GERTRUDE

It may be, very like.

POLONIUS

Hath there been such a time—I would
145 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
150 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
155 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.

GERTRUDE

It may be, it certainly may be.

POLONIUS

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

CLAUDIUS

Not that I know of.

POLONIUS

(pointing to his head and
shoulders) Chop my head off if I’m
wrong. I’ll follow the clues and
uncover the truth, even if it’s at the
very center of the earth.

CLAUDIUS

What can we do to find out if it’s true?

POLONIUS

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

GERTRUDE

Yes, he does.

POLONIUS

When he’s there next time, I’ll send
my daughter to see him. (to
CLAUDIUS) You and I will hide
behind the arras and watch what
happens. If it turns out that Hamlet’s
not in love after all, and hasn’t gone
mad from love, then you can fire me
from my court job and I’ll go work on
a farm.

CLAUDIUS

We will try it.

Enter **HAMLET**, reading on a book

GERTRUDE

160 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.

Exeunt **CLAUDIUS** and **GERTRUDE**

How does my good Lord Hamlet?

HAMLET

Well, God-'a'-mercy.

POLONIUS

165 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

Honest, my lord?

HAMLET

170 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

CLAUDIUS

We'll try what you suggest.

HAMLET enters, reading a book.

GERTRUDE

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

POLONIUS

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

CLAUDIUS and **GERTRUDE** exit.

How are you, Hamlet?

HAMLET

Fine, thank you.

POLONIUS

Do you know who I am?

HAMLET

Of course. You sell fish.

POLONIUS

No, not me, sir.

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

Good, sir?

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

That's definitely true, my lord.

HAMLET

Since if the sun breeds maggots on a

dog, being a good kissing carrion— Have you a daughter?

POLONIUS

175 I have, my lord.

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

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

(to HAMLET) What do you read, my lord?

HAMLET

Words, words, words.

POLONIUS

What is the matter, my lord?

HAMLET

185 Between who?

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

Slanders, sir. For the satirical rogue says here that old men have gray beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber and plum-tree gum, and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams—all

dead dog, kissing the corpse—by the way, do you have a daughter?

POLONIUS

I do indeed, my lord.

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

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

(to HAMLET) What are you reading, your highness?

HAMLET

A lot of words.

POLONIUS

And what is the subject?

HAMLET

Between whom?

POLONIUS

I mean, what do the words say?

HAMLET

Oh, just lies, sir. The sly writer says here that old men have gray beards, their faces are wrinkled, their eyes full of gunk, and that they have no wisdom and weak thighs. Of course I believe it all, but I don't think it's good manners to write it down, since you

which, sir, though I most powerfully and
potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty
to have it thus set down; for yourself, sir,
should be old as I am, if like a crab you
could go backward.

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

Into my grave.

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

Fare you well, my lord.

HAMLET

(aside) These tedious old fools!

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

POLONIUS

210 You go to seek the Lord Hamlet. There

yourself, sir, would grow as old as I am, if
you could only travel backward like a crab.

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

Into my grave.

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

Good-bye, my lord.

HAMLET

(to himself) These boring old fools!

ROSENCRANTZ and **GUILDENSTERN** e
nter.

POLONIUS

You're looking for Lord Hamlet. He's right

he is.

ROSENCRANTZ

God save you, sir!

Exit **POLONIUS**

GUILDENSTERN

My honored lord!

ROSENCRANTZ

My most dear lord!

HAMLET

215 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

220 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?

over there.

ROSENCRANTZ

Thank you, sir.

POLONIUS exits.

GUILDENSTERN

My lord!

ROSENCRANTZ

My dear sir!

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

Oh, as well as anybody.

GUILDENSTERN

Happy that we're not too happy,
lucky in being not too lucky. We're
not exactly at the top of our luck.

HAMLET

But you're not down and out, either,
are you?

ROSENCRANTZ

No, we're just somewhere in the
middle, my lord.

HAMLET

So you're around Lady Luck's waist?

GUILDENSTERN

Yes, we're the privates in her army.

HAMLET

Ha, ha, so you've gotten into her
private parts? Of course—Lady Luck
is such a slut. Anyway, what's up?

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

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

GUILDENSTERN

Prison, my lord?

HAMLET

Denmark's a prison.

ROSENCRANTZ

Then is the world one.

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

We think not so, my lord.

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space,

ROSENCRANTZ

Not much, my lord. Just that the world's become honest.

HAMLET

In that case, the end of the world is approaching. But you're wrong. Let me ask you a particular question.

What crimes have you committed to be sent here to this prison?

GUILDENSTERN

Prison, my lord?

HAMLET

Denmark's a prison.

ROSENCRANTZ

Then I guess the whole world is one.

HAMLET

Yes, quite a large one, with many cells and dungeons, Denmark being one of the worst.

ROSENCRANTZ

We don't think so, my lord.

HAMLET

Well, then it isn't one to you, since nothing is really good or bad in itself—it's all what a person thinks about it. And to me, Denmark is a prison.

ROSENCRANTZ

That must be because you're so ambitious. It's too small for your large mind.

HAMLET

Small? No, I could live in a walnut shell and feel like the king of the

were it not that I have bad dreams.

GUILDENSTERN

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

HAMLET

245 A dream itself is but a shadow.

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN

We'll wait upon you.

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

To visit you, my lord, no other occasion.

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

GUILDENSTERN

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

HAMLET

But a dream itself is just a shadow.

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ,

GUILDENSTERN

We're at your service, whatever you say.

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

Visiting you, my lord. There's no other reason.

HAMLET

Beggar that I am, I am even poor in thanks; but I thank you, and sure, dear friends, my thanks are too dear a halfpenny. Were you not sent for? Is it your own inclining? Is it a free visitation? Come, come, deal justly with me. Come, come. Nay, speak.

GUILDENSTERN

What should we say, my lord?

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

To what end, my lord?

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

(to GUILDENSTERN) What say you?

HAMLET

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

GUILDENSTERN

My lord, we were sent for.

HAMLET**HAMLET**

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

GUILDENSTERN

What should we say, my lord?

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

Why would they do that, my lord?

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

(to GUILDENSTERN) What do you think?

HAMLET

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

GUILDENSTERN

My lord, we were sent for.

HAMLET

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

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

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

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

ROSENCRANTZ

My lord, I wasn't thinking anything like that.

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

coming to offer you service.

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

315 No, indeed are they not.

HAMLET

How comes it? Do they grow rusty?

ROSENCRANTZ

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

just a while ago, and they're coming to entertain you.

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

No, not like before.

HAMLET

Why? Are they getting rusty?

ROSENCRANTZ

No, they're busy and as excellent as ever. The problem is that they have to

children, little eyases, that cry out on the top of question and are most tyrannically clapped for 't. These are now the fashion, and so berattle the common stages—so they call them—that many wearing rapiers are afraid of goose quills and dare scarce come thither.

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

Is 't possible?

GUILDENSTERN

Oh, there has been much throwing about of brains.

HAMLET

335 Do the boys carry it away?

ROSENCRANTZ

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

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

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

Are you kidding?

GUILDENSTERN

Oh, there's been a lot of quarreling.

HAMLET

And the boys are winning so far?

ROSENCRANTZ

Yes, they are, my lord—little boys are carrying the whole theater on their

HAMLET

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

Flourish for the **PLAYERS** within

GUILDENSTERN

There are the players.

HAMLET

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

GUILDENSTERN

350 In what, my dear lord?

HAMLET

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

Enter **POLONIUS**

backs, like Hercules carried the world.

HAMLET

Actually, it's not so unusual when you think about it. My uncle is king of Denmark, and the same people who made fun of him while my father was still alive are now rushing to pay twenty, forty, fifty, a hundred ducats apiece for miniature portraits of him. There's something downright unnatural about it, if a philosopher stopped to think about it.

Trumpets play offstage, announcing the arrival of the **PLAYERS** .

GUILDENSTERN

The actors are here.

HAMLET

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

GUILDENSTERN

In what sense, my lord?

HAMLET

I'm only crazy sometimes. At other times, I know what's what.

POLONIUS 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

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

POLONIUS

My lord, I have news to tell you.

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

365 The actors are come hither, my lord.

HAMLET

Buzz, buzz.

POLONIUS

Upon my honor—

HAMLET

Then came each actor on his ass—

POLONIUS

The best actors in the world, either for

POLONIUS

Gentlemen, I hope you are well.

HAMLET

Listen, Guildenstern, and you too, Rosencrantz—listen as close as you can! (he gestures toward POLONIUS)This big baby is still in diapers.

ROSENCRANTZ

Yes, the second time around, since, as they say, old people become children again.

HAMLET

(whispering to ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN) I bet he's coming to tell me about the actors; just watch. (to POLONIUS) You're right, sir, that happened on Monday morning.

POLONIUS

My lord, I have news for you.

HAMLET

My lord, I have news for you. When Roscius was an actor in ancient Rome —

POLONIUS

The actors have arrived, my lord.

HAMLET

Yawn, snore.

POLONIUS

I swear—

HAMLET

—each actor arrived on his ass.

POLONIUS

They are the best actors in the world,

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

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

What a treasure had he, my lord?

HAMLET

Why,
One fair daughter and no more,
The which he lovèd passing well.

POLONIUS

(aside) Still on my daughter.

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

Nay, that follows not.

POLONIUS

What follows, then, my lord?

HAMLET

either fortragedy, comedy, history,
pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-
pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-
comical-historical, one-act plays, or
long poems. The tragic playwright
Seneca is not too heavy for them to
handle nor is the comic writer Plautus
too light. For formal plays or freer
dramas, these are the best actors
around.

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

What treasure did he have, my lord?

HAMLET

Well, (sings)
One fine daughter, and no more,
Whom he loved more than
anything—.

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

Aren't I right, Jephthah, old man?

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

No, that's not logical.

POLONIUS

What is logical, then, my lord?

HAMLET

Why,

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

Enter the **PLAYERS**

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

FIRST PLAYER

What speech, my good lord?

HAMLET

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

Why,

As if by chance, God knows, and then, you know,

It happened, as you'd expect— If you want to know more, you can refer to the popular song, because now I have to stop.

The **PLAYERS** enter.

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

FIRST PLAYER

Which speech, my lord?

HAMLET

I heard you recite a speech for me once that was never acted out, or if it was, it was performed only once, since the play was not popular—like caviar for a slob who couldn't appreciate it. But the critics and I found it to be an excellent

cried in the top of mine—an excellent play, well digested in the scenes, set down with as much modesty as cunning.

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

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

425 The rugged Pyrrhus, like th' Hyrcanian beast—

It is not so. It begins with Pyrrhus—
The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms,
Black as his purpose, did the night resemble

When he lay couchèd in the ominous horse,

Hath now this dread and black complexion smeared

With heraldry more dismal. Head to foot
Now is he total gules, horridly tricked
With blood of fathers, mothers, daughters,
sons,

Baked and impasted with the parching streets,

That lend a tyrannous and damnèd light
To their lord's murder. Roasted in wrath
and fire,

And thus o'ersizèd with coagulate gore,
With eyes like carbuncles, the hellish

play, with well-ordered scenes that were clever but not fancy.

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

The rugged Pyrrhus, strong as a tiger—

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

Savage Pyrrhus, whose black armor was

As dark plans, and was like the night
When he crouched inside the Trojan Horse,

Has now smeared his dark armor
With something worse. From head to foot

He's now covered in red, decorated
horribly

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

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

Fires that lend a terrible light to his
horrible murders.

Boiling with anger and fire,
And coated thick with hard-baked
blood,

Pyrrhus
Old grandsire Priam seeks.
So, proceed you.

POLONIUS

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

FIRST PLAYER

Anon he finds him
Striking too short at Greeks. His antique
sword,
Rebellious to his arm, lies where it falls,
435 Repugnant to command. Unequal
matched,
Pyrrhus at Priam drives, in rage strikes
wide,
But with the whiff and wind of his fell
440 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,
445 Did nothing.
But as we often see against some storm
A silence in the heavens, the rack stand
still,

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

POLONIUS

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

FIRST PLAYER

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

But the wind created by his sword is
enough to make
The weakened old man fall. Just then
the city of Ilium,
As if feeling this fatal blow to its ruler,

The bold winds speechless, and the orb
450 below
As hush as death, anon the dreadful
thunder
Doth rend the region. So, after Pyrrhus'
pause,
455 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
460 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.

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

POLONIUS

This speech is going on too long.

HAMLET

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

FIRST PLAYER

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

HAMLET

“The moblèd queen”?

POLONIUS

That's good. “Moblèd queen” is good.

FIRST PLAYER

Run barefoot up and down, threatening the
flames

470 With bisson rheum, a clout upon that head
Where late the diadem stood, and for a
robe,

About her lank and all o'erteemèd loins,
A blanket, in the alarm of fear caught up—

475 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

480 When she saw Pyrrhus make malicious
sport

In mincing with his sword her husband's
limbs,

The instant burst of clamor that she made,
(Unless things mortal move them not at all)

Would have made milch the burning eyes

HAMLET

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

FIRST PLAYER

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

HAMLET

“The muffled queen”?

POLONIUS

That's good. “The muffled queen” is
good.

FIRST PLAYER

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

of heaven,
And passion in the gods.

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

490 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

495 Come, sirs.

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

My lord, I will give them all they
deserve.

HAMLET

Good heavens, man, give them more
than that! If you pay everyone what
they deserve, would anyone ever escape
a whipping? Treat them with honor and
dignity.

The less they deserve, the more your
generosity is worth. Lead them inside.

POLONIUS

Come, everyone.

HAMLET

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

FIRST PLAYER

Ay, my lord.

HAMLET

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

FIRST PLAYER

Ay, my lord.

HAMLET

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

Exeunt **POLONIUS** and the **PLAYERS**

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

ROSENCRANTZ

Good my lord.

HAMLET

Ay, so. Good-bye to you.

Exeunt **ROSENCRANTZ** and **GUILDENSTERN**

Now I am alone.

Oh, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
510 Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from her working all his visage
wanned,
515 Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function
suited
With forms to his conceit? And all for
nothing—

FIRST PLAYER

Yes, my lord.

HAMLET

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

FIRST PLAYER

Yes, my lord.

HAMLET

Very well. Follow that gentleman now, and be careful not to make fun of him.

POLONIUS and the **PLAYERS** exit.

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

ROSENCRANTZ

Yes, my lord.

HAMLET

Ah yes, good-bye to you both.

ROSENCRANTZ and **GUILDENSTERN** exit.

Now I'm alone. Oh, what a mean low-life I am! It's awful that this actor could force his soul to feel made-up feelings in a work of make-believe. He grew pale, shed real tears, became overwhelmed, his voice breaking with feeling and his whole being, even, meeting the needs of his act—and all for nothing. For Hecuba!

520 For Hecuba!

What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba
That he should weep for her? What would
he do

Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage
with tears

And cleave the general ear with horrid
speech,

Make mad the guilty and appall the free,

Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed

525 The very faculties of eyes and ears. Yet I,

A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my
cause,

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

530 Upon whose property and most dear life

A damned defeat was made. Am I a
coward?

Who calls me “villain”? Breaks my pate
across?

535 Plucks off my beard and blows it in my
face?

Tweaks me by the nose? Gives me the lie i'
th' throat

As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this?

540 Ha!

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

But I am pigeon-livered and lack gall

To make oppression bitter, or ere this

I should have fatted all the region kites

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

Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous,

kindless villain!

O vengeance!

What is Hecuba to him, or he to

Hecuba, that he would weep for her?

Just imagine what he would do if he
had the cause for feeling that I do. He

would drown the stage with his tears

and burst the audience's ears with his

terrible words, drive the guilty

spectators crazy, terrify the innocent

ones, confuse the ignorant ones, and

astound absolutely everyone's eyes and

ears. But what do I, a grim and

uncourageous rascal, do? Mope around

like a dreamer, not even bothering with

plans for revenge, and I can say

nothing—nothing at all—on behalf of

a king whose dear life was stolen. Am

I a coward? Is there anyone out there

who'll call me “villain” and slap me

hard? Pull off my beard? Pinch my

nose? Call me the worst liar? By God,

if someone would do that to me, I'd

take it, because I'm a lily-livered

man—otherwise, I would've fattened

up the local vultures with the intestines

of that low-life king a long time ago.

Bloody, inhuman villain! Remorseless,

550 Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,
That I, the son of a dear father murdered,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and
hell,
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with
555 words
And fall a-cursing like a very drab,
A scullion! Fie upon 't, foh!
About, my brain.—Hum, I have heard
That guilty creatures sitting at a play
560 Have, by the very cunning of the scene,
Been struck so to the soul that presently
They have proclaimed their malefactions.
For murder, though it have no tongue, will
speak
With most miraculous organ. I'll have these
players
Play something like the murder of my father
Before mine uncle. I'll observe his looks.
I'll tent him to the quick. If he do blench,
I know my course. The spirit that I have
seen
May be the devil, and the devil hath power
T' assume a pleasing shape. Yea, and
perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
565 As he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me. I'll have grounds
More relative than this. The play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the
king.

treacherous, sex-obsessed, unnatural
villain! Ah, revenge! What an ass I am.
I'm so damn brave. My dear father's
been murdered, and I've been urged to
seek revenge by heaven and hell, and
yet all I can do is stand around cursing
like a whore in the streets. Damn it! I
need to get myself together here!
Hmm.... I've heard that guilty people
watching a play have been so affected
by the artistry of the scene that they are
driven to confess their crimes out loud.

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

the thing to uncover the conscience of
the king.

Exit

HAMLET exits.

Act 3, Scene 1

Enter **CLAUDIUS, GERTRUDE, POLONIUS, OPHELIA, ROSENCRANTZ,**
and **GUILDENSTERN**

CLAUDIUS

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

GUILDENSTERN

- Nor do we find him forward to be sounded.
But with a crafty madness keeps aloof
When we would bring him on to some
10 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.

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

CLAUDIUS

And you can't put your heads together and
figure out why he's acting so dazed and
confused, ruining his peace and quiet with
such dangerous displays of lunacy?

ROSENCRANTZ

He admits he feels confused, but refuses to
say why.

GUILDENSTERN

And he's not exactly eager to be
interrogated. He's very sly and dances
around our questions when we try to get
him to talk about how he feels.

GERTRUDE

Did he treat you well when you saw him?

ROSENCRANTZ

Yes, in a very gentlemanly way.

GUILDENSTERN

But it seemed like he had to force himself
to be nice to us.

ROSENCRANTZ

He didn't ask questions, but answered ours
at length.

GERTRUDE

Did you assay him?

15 To any pastime?

ROSENCRANTZ

Madam, it so fell out, that certain players
We o'erraught on the way. Of these we told
him,

And there did seem in him a kind of joy

To hear of it. They are about the court,

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

POLONIUS

'Tis most true,

And he beseeched me to entreat your
Majesties

To hear and see the matter.

CLAUDIUS

With all my heart, and it doth much content

25 me

To hear him so inclined.

Good gentlemen, give him a further edge,
And drive his purpose on to these delights.

ROSENCRANTZ

We shall, my lord.

Exeunt **ROSENCRANTZ** and **GUILDENS**
TERN

CLAUDIUS

Sweet Gertrude, leave us too,

30 For we have closely sent for Hamlet hither,
That he, as 'twere by accident, may here
Affront Ophelia.

Her father and myself (lawful espials)

Will so bestow ourselves that, seeing unseen,

35 We may of their encounter frankly judge,

GERTRUDE

Did you try tempting him with some
entertainment?

ROSENCRANTZ

Madam, some actors happened to cross our
paths on the way here. We told Hamlet
about them, and that seemed to do him
good.

They are here at court now, and I believe
they've been told to give a performance for
him tonight.

POLONIUS

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

CLAUDIUS

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

ROSENCRANTZ

We will, my lord.

ROSENCRANTZ and **GUILDENSTERN**
exit.

CLAUDIUS

Dear Gertrude, please give us a moment
alone. We've secretly arranged for Hamlet
to come here so that he can run into
Ophelia. Her father and I, justifiably acting
as spies, will hide in the room and observe
Hamlet's behavior, to determine whether
it's love that's making him suffer.

And gather by him, as he is behaved,
If 't be the affliction of his love or no
That thus he suffers for.

GERTRUDE

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

OPHELIA

Madam, I wish it may.

Exit **GERTRUDE**

POLONIUS

Ophelia, walk you
45 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
50 Your loneliness.—We are oft to blame in
this,
'Tis too much proved, that with devotion's
visage
And pious action we do sugar o'er
The devil himself.

CLAUDIUS

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

GERTRUDE

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

OPHELIA

I hope so too, Madam.

GERTRUDE exits.

POLONIUS

Ophelia, come here.—
(to CLAUDIUS) Your Majesty, we will
hide. (to OPHELIA)—Read from this
prayer book, so it looks natural that
you're all alone. Come to think of it, this
happens all the time—people act
devoted to God to mask their bad deeds.

CLAUDIUS

(to himself) How right he is! His words
whip up my guilty feelings. The whore's
pockmarked cheek made pretty with
make-up is just like the ugly actions I'm
disguising with fine words. What a
terrible guilt I feel!

O heavy burden!

POLONIUS

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

CLAUDIUS and **POLONIUS** withdraw

Enter **HAMLET**

HAMLET

To be, or not to be? That is the question—
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous

60 fortune,

Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And, by opposing, end them? To die, to
sleep—

No more—and by a sleep to say we end

65 The heartache and the thousand natural
shocks

That flesh is heir to—'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished! To die, to sleep.

To sleep, perchance to dream—ay, there's

70 the rub,

For in that sleep of death what dreams may
come

When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,

Must give us pause. There's the respect

That makes calamity of so long life.

For who would bear the whips and scorns
of time,

Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's
contumely,

75 The pangs of despised love, the law's
delay,

The insolence of office, and the spurns

That patient merit of th' unworthy takes,

POLONIUS

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

CLAUDIUS and **POLONIUS** hide.

HAMLET enters.

HAMLET

The question is: is it better to be alive or
dead? Is it nobler to put up with all the
nasty things that luck throws your way,
or to fight against all those troubles by
simply putting an end to them once and
for all? Dying, sleeping—that's all dying
is—a sleep that ends all the heartache
and shocks that life on earth gives us—
that's an achievement to wish for. To
die, to sleep—to sleep, maybe to dream.
Ah, but there's the catch: in death's
sleep who knows what kind of dreams
might come, after we've put the noise
and commotion of life behind us. That's
certainly something to worry about.
That's the consideration that makes us
stretch out our sufferings so long.

After all, who would put up with all
life's humiliations—the abuse from
superiors, the insults of arrogant men,
the pangs of unrequited love, the
inefficiency of the legal system, the
rudeness of people in office, and the
mistreatment good people have to take
from bad—when you could simply take

When he himself might his quietus make
80 With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels
bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after
death,
85 The undiscovered country from whose
bourn
No traveler returns, puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear those ills we
have
90 Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us
all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of
thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.—Soft you
now,
The fair Ophelia!—Nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins remembered.

OPHELIA

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

HAMLET

I humbly thank you. Well, well, well.

OPHELIA

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

HAMLET

No, not I. I never gave you aught.

out your knife and call it quits? Who
would choose to grunt and sweat
through an exhausting life, unless they
were afraid of something dreadful after
death, the undiscovered country from
which no visitor returns, which we
wonder about without getting any
answers from and which makes us stick
to the evils we know rather than rush
off to seek the ones we don't? Fear of
death makes us all cowards, and our
natural boldness becomes weak with too
much thinking. Actions that should be
carried out at once get misdirected, and
stop being actions at all. Butshh, here
comes the beautiful Ophelia. Pretty
lady, please remember me when you
pray.

OPHELIA

Hello, my lord, how have you been
doing lately?

HAMLET

Very well, thank you. Well, well, well.

OPHELIA

My lord, I have some mementos of
yours that I've been meaning to give
back to you for a long time now. Please
take them.

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

My honored lord, you know right well you
100 did,

And with them, words of so sweet breath
composed

As made the things more rich. Their
perfume lost,

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

There, my lord.

HAMLET

105 Ha, ha, are you honest?

OPHELIA

My lord?

HAMLET

Are you fair?

OPHELIA

What means your lordship?

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

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

HAMLET

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

anything.

OPHELIA

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

Their perfume is gone now, so take
them back. Nice gifts lose

their value when the givers turn out not
to be so nice. There, my lord.

HAMLET

Ha ha, are you good?

OPHELIA

Excuse me?

HAMLET

Are you beautiful?

OPHELIA

My lord, what are you talking about?

HAMLET

I'm just saying that if you're good and
beautiful, your goodness should have
nothing to do with your beauty.

OPHELIA

But could beauty be related to anything
better than goodness?

HAMLET

Sure, since beauty's power can more
easily change a good girl into a whore
than the power of goodness can change
a beautiful girl into a virgin. This used
to be a great puzzle, but now I've
solved it. I used to love you.

OPHELIA

Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

I was the more deceived.

HAMLET

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

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

OPHELIA

At home, my lord.

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

135 O, help him, you sweet heavens!

OPHELIA

You certainly made me believe you did, my lord.

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

Then I guess I was misled.

HAMLET

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

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

OPHELIA

He's at home, my lord.

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

Oh, dear God, please help him!

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

Heavenly powers, restore him!

HAMLET

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

Exit **HAMLET**

OPHELIA

150 Oh, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!—
The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye,
tongue, sword,
Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state,

HAMLET

If you marry, I'll give you this curse as your wedding present—be as clean as ice, as pure as the driven snow, and you'll still get a bad reputation. Get yourself to a convent, at once. Good-bye. Or if you have to get married, marry a fool, since wise men know far too well that you'll cheat on them. Good-bye.

OPHELIA

Dear God, please make him normal again!

HAMLET

I've heard all about you women and your cosmetics too. God gives you one face, but you paint another on top of it. You dance and prance and lisp; you call God's creations by pet names, and you excuse your sexpot ploys by pleading ignorance. Come on, I won't stand for it anymore. It's driven me crazy. I hereby declare we will have no more marriage. Whoever is already married (except one person I know) will stay married—all but one person. Everyone else will have to stay single. Get yourself to a convent, fast.

HAMLET exits.

OPHELIA

Oh, how noble his mind used to be, and how lost he is now! He used to have a gentleman's grace, a scholar's wit, and a soldier's strength. He used to be the jewel of our country, the obvious heir to

155 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,
160 That sucked the honey of his music vows,
Now see that noble and most sovereign
reason
Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and
harsh;
That unmatched form and feature of
blown youth
Blasted with ecstasy. Oh, woe is me,
T' have seen what I have seen, see what I
see!

CLAUDIUS and **POLONIUS** come
forward

CLAUDIUS
Love? His affections do not that way tend.
Nor what he spake, though it lacked form
a little,
165 Was not like madness. There's something
in his soul
O'er which his melancholy sits on brood,
And I do doubt the hatch and the disclose
Will be some danger—which for to
170 prevent,
I have in quick determination
Thus set it down: he shall with speed to
England
For the demand of our neglected tribute.
175 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

the throne, the one everyone admired
and imitated. And now he has fallen so
low! And of all the miserable women
who once enjoyed hearing his sweet,
seductive words, I am the most
miserable. A mind that used to sing so
sweetly is now completely out of tune,
making harsh sounds instead of fine
notes. The unparalleled appearance and
nobility he had in the full bloom of his
youth has been ruined by madness. O,
how miserable I am to see Hamlet now
and know what he was before!

CLAUDIUS and **POLONIUS** come
forward.

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

thus

From fashion of himself. What think you
on 't?

POLONIUS

It shall do well. But yet do I believe
The origin and commencement of his grief
Sprung from neglected love.—How now,
Ophelia?

You need not tell us what Lord Hamlet
said.

180 We heard it all.—My lord, do as you
please.

But, if you hold it fit, after the play
Let his queen mother all alone entreat him
To show his grief. Let her be round with

185 him,

And I'll be placed, so please you, in the
ear

Of all their conference. If she find him not,
To England send him or confine him
where

Your wisdom best shall think.

CLAUDIUS

It shall be so.

Madness in great ones must not unwatched
go.

POLONIUS

It should work. But I still believe that
his madness was caused by unrequited
love.—Hello, Ophelia. You don't have
to tell us what Lord Hamlet said.

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

CLAUDIUS

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

Exeunt

They all exit.

Act 3, Scene 2

Enter **HAMLET** and **PLAYERS**

HAMLET

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

HAMLET and the **PLAYERS** enter.

HAMLET

Perform the speech just as I taught you,
musically and smoothly. If you exaggerate the

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

FIRST PLAYER

I warrant your honor.

HAMLET

Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. Now this overdone or come tardy off, though it make the unskillful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve, the censure of the which one must

words the way some actors do, I might as well have some newscaster read the lines. Don't use too many hand gestures; just do a few, gently, like this. When you get into a whirlwind of passion on stage, remember to keep the emotion moderate and smooth. I hate it when I hear a blustery actor in a wig tear a passion to shreds, bursting everyone's eardrums so as to impress the audience on the lower levels of the playhouse, who for the most part can only appreciate loud noises and pantomime shows. I would whip a guy for making a tyrant sound too tyrannical. That's as bad as those old plays in which King Herod ranted. Please avoid doing that.

FIRST PLAYER

I will, sir.

HAMLET

But don't be too tame, either—let your good sense guide you. Fit the action to the word and the word to the action. Act natural at all costs. Exaggeration has no place in the theater, where the purpose is to represent reality, holding a mirror up to virtue, to vice, and to the spirit of the times. If you handle this badly, it just makes ignorant people laugh while regular theater-goers are miserable—and they're the ones you should be keeping happy.

in your allowance o'erweigh a whole
theatre of others.

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

FIRST PLAYER

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

HAMLET

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

Exeunt **PLAYERS**

Enter **POLONIUS, ROSENCRANTZ,**
and **GUILDENSTERN**

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

POLONIUS

And the queen too, and that presently.

HAMLET

Bid the players make haste.

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

FIRST PLAYER

I hope we've corrected that fault pretty well
in our company, sir.

HAMLET

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

The **PLAYERS** exit.

POLONIUS, GUILDENSTERN,
and **ROSENCRANTZ** enter.

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

POLONIUS

Yes, he will, and the queen as well.

HAMLET

Tell the actors to hurry.

Exit **POLONIUS**

POLONIUS exits.

4 Will you two help to hasten them?

Will you two help them get ready?

5

ROSENCRANTZ

ROSENCRANTZ

Ay, my lord.

Yes, my lord.

Exeunt **ROSENCRANTZ** and **GUILDENSTERN**

ROSENCRANTZ and **GUILDENSTERN**
exit.

HAMLET

HAMLET

What ho, Horatio!

Well, hello there, Horatio!

Enter **HORATIO**

HORATIO enters.

HORATIO

HORATIO

Here, sweet lord, at your service.

Here I am at your service, my dear
lord.

HAMLET

HAMLET

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

Horatio, you're the best man I've ever
known.

HORATIO

HORATIO

O my dear lord—

Oh, sir—

HAMLET

HAMLET

Nay, do not think I flatter.

Don't think I'm flattering you. What
could I hope to get from you, who've
got nothing but your charm to support
you in life? Why would anyone flatter
a poor person? No, keep flattery for
kissing the hands of those who can
pay well. You understand? Ever since
I've been a free agent in my choice of
friends, I've chosen you because you
take everything life hands you with
calm acceptance, grateful for both
good and bad. Blessed are those who
mix emotion with reason in just the
right proportion, making them strong

5 For what advancement may I hope from
0 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

5 pomp,

5 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

6 And could of men distinguish, her election

0 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
 6 Hast ta'en with equal thanks. And blessed
 5 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
 7 that man
 0 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.—
 7 There is a play tonight before the king.
 5 One scene of it comes near the
 circumstance
 Which I have told thee of my father's
 death.
 I prithee, when thou seest that act afoot,
 Even with the very comment of thy soul
 Observe mine uncle. If his occulted guilt
 Do not itself unkennel in one speech,
 It is a damnèd ghost that we have seen,
 And my imaginations are as foul
 As Vulcan's stithy. Give him heedful
 note.
 For I mine eyes will rivet to his face,
 80 And after we will both our judgments
 join
 In censure of his seeming.

HORATIO

enough to resist the whims of Lady
 Luck. Show me the person who's
 master of his emotions, and I'll put
 him close to my heart—in my heart of
 hearts—as I do you. But I'm talking
 too much. The point is, there's a play
 being performed for the king tonight.
 One of the scenes comes very close to
 depicting the circumstances of my
 father's death, as I described them to
 you. Watch my uncle carefully when
 that scene begins. If his guilty secret
 does not reveal itself, then that ghost
 was just a devil, and my hunch wasn't,
 in fact, worth anything.

Watch him closely. I'll stare at him too, and
 afterward we'll compare notes on him.

HORATIO

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

Danish march. Sound a flourish. Enter
King **CLAUDIUS**, Queen **GERTRUDE**,
POLONIUS, **OPHELIA**, **ROSE**
NCRANTZ, **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

85 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?

My lord, I'll watch him as closely as I would
a thief. I won't miss a trick.

Trumpets play. **CLAUDIUS** enters
with **GERTRUDE**, **POLONIUS**, **OPHELIA**,
ROSENCRANTZ, **GUILDENSTERN**, and
other lords attendant with **CLAUDIUS**'s
guard carrying torches.

HAMLET

They're coming. I can't talk now. Take your
seat.

CLAUDIUS

So how's my nephew Hamlet doing?

HAMLET

Wonderful! I eat the air, like chameleons do.
I'm positively stuffed with air, I eat so much
of it.

CLAUDIUS

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

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

What role did you play?

POLONIUS

I did enact Julius Caesar. I was killed in the Capitol. Brutus killed me.

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

Ay, my lord. They stay upon your patience.

GERTRUDE

Come hither, my dear Hamlet, sit by me.

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

OPHELIA

No, my lord.

HAMLET

I mean, my head upon your lap?

OPHELIA

105 Ay, my lord.

HAMLET

Do you think I meant country matters?

OPHELIA

I think nothing, my lord.

HAMLET

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

Yes, my lord. They're ready whenever you are.

GERTRUDE

Come here, my dear Hamlet. Sit by me.

HAMLET

No thanks, my good mother. There's a nicer piece of work right here.
(he sits down near OPHELIA)

POLONIUS

(to CLAUDIUS) Hey, did you notice that?

HAMLET

My lady, should I lie in your lap?

OPHELIA

No, my lord.

HAMLET

I mean, with my head in your lap?

OPHELIA

Yes, my lord.

HAMLET

Did you think I was talking about sex?

OPHELIA

I think nothing, my lord.

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

What is, my lord?

HAMLET

110 Nothing.

OPHELIA

You are merry, my lord.

HAMLET

Who, I?

OPHELIA

Ay, my lord.

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

Nay, 'tis twice two months, my lord.

HAMLET

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

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

OPHELIA

What is, my lord?

HAMLET

Nothing.

OPHELIA

You're in a good mood tonight, my
lord.

HAMLET

Who, me?

OPHELIA

Yes, my lord.

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

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

HAMLET

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

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

Exeunt **PLAYERS**

OPHELIA

What means this, my lord?

HAMLET

Marry, this is miching malhecho. It
means mischief.

OPHELIA

Belike this show imports the argument
of the play.

Enter **PROLOGUE**

HAMLET

We shall know by this fellow. The

Trumpets play. The pantomime show
begins. A king and queen enter and embrace
lovingly. She kneels before him and resists
his passion. He lifts her up and lays his
head on her neck. He lies down on a bank
of flowers. When she sees him sleeping,
she leaves. Another man comes in, takes
the crown from the king, pours poison in
the sleeping man's ear, and leaves. The
queen returns and finds the king dead. She
becomes hysterical. The killer comes back
with three others and calms the queen.
The body is carried away. The killer woos
the queen with gifts. She is cold toward
him for a while but then relents and
accepts his advances.

OPHELIA

What does this mean, my lord?

HAMLET

This means we're having some
mischievous fun.

OPHELIA

This pantomime was probably a
summary of the play.

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

HAMLET

This guy will tell us everything.

players cannot keep counsel. They'll tell all.

OPHELIA

Will he tell us what this show meant?

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

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

PROLOGUE

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

Exit **PROLOGUE**

HAMLET

Is this a prologue or the posy of a ring?

OPHELIA

140 'Tis brief, my lord.

HAMLET

As woman's love.

Enter **PLAYER KING** and **PLAYER QUEEN**

PLAYER KING

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

Actors can't keep a secret. They'll tell all.

OPHELIA

Will he tell us what that pantomime meant?

HAMLET

Sure, or anything else you show him. As long as you aren't ashamed to show it, he won't be ashamed to tell you what it means.

OPHELIA

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

PROLOGUE

We beg you most courteously
To be patient with us
And watch our humble tragedy.

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

It was a bit short, my lord.

HAMLET

Yes, as short as a woman's love.

Actors playing the roles of **KING** and **QUEEN** enter.

PLAYER KING

It's been thirty years since we were married.

sheen

About the world have times twelve thirties
been,

Since love our hearts and Hymen did our
hands

Unite commutual in most sacred bands.

PLAYER QUEEN

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

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

155 For women fear too much, even as they
love,
And women's fear and love hold quantity,
In neither aught, or in extremity.

Now what my love is, proof hath made you
160 know,
And as my love is sized, my fear is so:
Where love is great, the littlest doubts are
fear.

Where little fears grow great, great love
grows there.

PLAYER KING

Faith, I must leave thee, love, and shortly
too.

My operant powers their functions leave to
do.

165 And thou shalt live in this fair world
behind,

Honored, beloved, and haply one as kind
For husband shalt thou—

PLAYER QUEEN

PLAYER QUEEN

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

PLAYER KING

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

PLAYER QUEEN

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

HAMLET

(aside) Wormwood, wormwood.

PLAYER QUEEN

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

PLAYER KING

I do believe you think what now you
175 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
180 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,
185 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
190 lament.
Grief joys, joy grieves on slender accident.
This world is not for aye, nor 'tis not
strange

Oh, damn everyone else! Remarrying
would be treason to my heart. Curse me
if I take a second husband. When a
woman takes a second husband, it's
because she's killed off the first.

HAMLET

(to himself) Harsh!

PLAYER QUEEN

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

PLAYER KING

I know that's what you think now, but
people change their minds. Often our
intentions are strong at first, but as time
goes on they weaken, just like an apple
sticks to the tree when it is unripe but
falls to the ground once it ripens. The
promises we make to ourselves in
emotional moments lose their power
once the emotion passes. Great grief and
joy may rouse us to action, but when the
grief or joy have passed, we're no longer
motivated to act. Joy turns to grief in the
blink of an eye, and grief becomes joy
just as quickly. This world is not made
for either one to last long in, and it's no
surprise that even our loves change along
with our luck. It's still a mystery to be
solved whether luck controls love, or
love controls luck. When a great man has
a run of bad luck, watch how followers

That even our loves should with our
195 fortunes change.
For 'tis a question left us yet to prove,
Whether love lead fortune, or else fortune
love.
The great man down, you mark his favorite
200 flies.
The poor advanced makes friends of
enemies.
And hitherto doth love on fortune tend,
For who not needs shall never lack a
friend,
And who in want a hollow friend doth try,
Directly seasons him his enemy.
But, orderly to end where I begun,
Our wills and fates do so contrary run
That our devices still are overthrown.
Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of
our own.
So think thou wilt no second husband wed,
But die thy thoughts when thy first lord is
dead.

PLAYER QUEEN

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

HAMLET

If she should break it now!

PLAYER KING

desert him, and when a poor man
advances to an important position, he
makes friends with the people he used to
hate. Love is unreliable. A person with
lots of money will always have friends,
while one fallen on hard times makes an
enemy of any friend he turns to for
money. But back to my original point—
what we want and what we get are
always at odds. We can have our little
dreams, but the fates decide our futures.
You think now you'll never remarry, but
that thought will die with me, your first
husband.

PLAYER QUEEN

May the earth refuse me food and the
heavens go dark, may I have no rest day
and night, may my trust and hope turn
to despair—may the gloom of a prison
overtake me, and may my every joy be
turned to sorrow.
May I know no peace either in this life
or the next one, if I become a wife
again after I am a widow.

HAMLET

Nice vow, but what if she breaks it?

PLAYER KING

'Tis deeply sworn. Sweet, leave me here
awhile.

215 My spirits grow dull, and fain I would
beguile

The tedious day with sleep.

The **PLAYER KING** sleeps

PLAYER QUEEN

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

Exit **PLAYER QUEEN**

HAMLET

Madam, how like you this play?

GERTRUDE

The lady protests too much, methinks.

HAMLET

Oh, but she'll keep her word.

CLAUDIUS

220 Have you heard the argument? Is there no
offense in 't?

HAMLET

No, no, they do but jest. Poison in jest. No
offense i' th' world.

CLAUDIUS

What do you call the play?

HAMLET

The Mousetrap. Marry, how? Tropically.
This play is the image of a murder done in
Vienna. Gonzago is the duke's name, his
wife Baptista. You shall see anon. 'Tis a
knave's 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.

You have made this vow with deep
sincerity. My dear, leave me alone now
awhile. My mind is getting foggy, and I
would like to sleep and escape this
endless day.

The **PLAYER KING** sleeps.

PLAYER QUEEN

Sleep tight, and may nothing come
between us.

The **PLAYER QUEEN** exits.

HAMLET

Madam, how are you liking this play?

GERTRUDE

The lady's overdoing it, I think.

HAMLET

Oh, but she'll keep her word.

CLAUDIUS

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

HAMLET

No, no, it's just a joke, a little jibe but
all in good fun. Not offensive at all.

CLAUDIUS

What's the play called?

HAMLET

The Mousetrap. Why on earth is it
called that, you ask? It's a metaphor.
This play is about a murder committed
in Vienna. Gonzago is the duke's name,
and his wife is Baptista. You'll see soon
enough. It's a piece of garbage, but who
cares? You and I have free souls, so it
doesn't concern us. Let the guilty wince.

Enter **LUCIANUS**

This is one Lucianus, nephew to the king.

OPHELIA

230 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

You are keen, my lord, you are keen.

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

235 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—”

LUCIANUS

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

We can watch without being bothered.

LUCIANUS enters.

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

OPHELIA

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

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

Ooh, you’re sharp.

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

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

HAMLET

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

LUCIANUS

Evil thoughts, ready hands, the right poison, and the time is right too. The dark night is on my side, for no one can see me. You deadly mixture of weeds and plants, which Hecate, goddess of witchcraft, has put a spell on, use your

245 With Hecate's ban thrice blasted, thrice
infected,
Thy natural magic and dire property
On wholesome life usurp immediately.
(pours poison into PLAYER KING 's ears)

HAMLET

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

CLAUDIUS stands up

OPHELIA

250 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

255 Lights, lights, lights!

Commotion. Exeunt all
but **HAMLET** and **HORATIO**

HAMLET

Why, let the stricken deer go weep,

magic to steal this healthy person's life
away. (pours the poison into
the PLAYER KING 's ears)

HAMLET

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

CLAUDIUS stands up.

OPHELIA

The king is getting up.

HAMLET

What—is he scared of a gun that only
fired a blank?

GERTRUDE

My lord, how are you feeling?

POLONIUS

Stop the play.

CLAUDIUS

Turn on the lights. Get me out of
here!

POLONIUS

Lights, lights, get us some lights!

Everyone
except **HAMLET** and **HORATIO** ex
its.

HAMLET

Let the deer that's been shot go off

The hart ungallèd play.
For some must watch while some must
sleep.

So runs the world away.
Would not this, sir, and a forest of
feathers—if the rest of my fortunes turn
Turk with me—with two Provincial roses
on my razed shoes, get me a fellowship in a
cry of players?

HORATIO

Half a share.

HAMLET

A whole one, I.

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

HORATIO

You might have rhymed.

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

Very well, my lord.

HAMLET

Upon the talk of the poisoning?

HORATIO

I did very well note him.

HAMLET

265 Ah ha! Come, some music! Come, the

and weep,

While the unharmed deer happily
plays.

For some must watch while other
must sleep,

That's how the world goes.
Couldn't I get work as an actor (if I
hit a run of bad luck) in some acting
company, and wear flowers on my
shoes?

HORATIO

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

HAMLET

No, a whole share for me.

For you know, my dearest Damon,
That Jove, king of the gods, was
Thrown out of power here, and
Who's in charge? A big—peacock.

HORATIO

You could have at least rhymed.

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

Yes, I did, my lord.

HAMLET

When the actors were talking about
poison?

HORATIO

I watched him very closely.

HAMLET

Ah ha! Hey, let's have some music

recorders!

For if the king like not the comedy,
Why then, belike, he likes it not,
perdy.

Come, some music!

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

GUILDENSTERN

Good my lord, vouchsafe me a word with you.

HAMLET

Sir, a whole history.

GUILDENSTERN

The king, sir—

HAMLET

270 Ay, sir, what of him?

GUILDENSTERN

Is in his retirement marvelous
distempered.

HAMLET

With drink, sir?

GUILDENSTERN

No, my lord, with choler.

HAMLET

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

GUILDENSTERN

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

here! Play your flutes!

For if the king doesn't like the play,
Then he doesn't like it, we may say.
Come on, music!

ROSENCRANTZ and **GUILDENSTERN** enter.

GUILDENSTERN

My lord, could I have a word with you?

HAMLET

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

GUILDENSTERN

Sir, the king—

HAMLET

Yes, what about him?

GUILDENSTERN

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

HAMLET

What, an upset stomach from too much
booze?

GUILDENSTERN

No, sir, he's angry.

HAMLET

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

GUILDENSTERN

My lord, please try to stick to the subject
at hand.

HAMLET

I am tame, sir. Pronounce.

GUILDENSTERN

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

HAMLET

You are welcome.

GUILDENSTERN

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

HAMLET

Sir, I cannot.

GUILDENSTERN

What, my lord?

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

We shall obey, were she ten times our

HAMLET

I'll be good, sir. Go ahead.

GUILDENSTERN

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

HAMLET

It's lovely to see you.

GUILDENSTERN

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

HAMLET

Sir, I can't.

GUILDENSTERN

Can't what, my lord?

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

She says that your behavior has astonished her.

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

I'd obey even if she were my mother

mother. Have you any further trade with us?

ROSENCRANTZ

300 My lord, you once did love me.

HAMLET

And do still, by these pickers and stealers.

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

305 Sir, I lack advancement.

ROSENCRANTZ

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

Reenter the **PLAYERS** with recorders

HAMLET

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

ten times over. Is there anything else I can do for you?

ROSENCRANTZ

My lord, you used to like me.

HAMLET

And still do, I swear by my hands.

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

Sir, I have no future ahead of me.

ROSENCRANTZ

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

The **PLAYERS** enter with recorders .

HAMLET

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

GUILDENSTERN

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

HAMLET

I don’t really understand what you

upon this pipe?

GUILDENSTERN

My lord, I cannot.

HAMLET

I pray you.

GUILDENSTERN

Believe me, I cannot.

HAMLET

320 I do beseech you.

GUILDENSTERN

I know no touch of it, my lord.

HAMLET

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

GUILDENSTERN

But these cannot I command to any utterance of harmony.

I have not the skill.

HAMLET

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

mean. Will you play this recorder?

GUILDENSTERN

I can't, my lord.

HAMLET

Please.

GUILDENSTERN

I'm serious, I can't.

HAMLET

I'm begging you.

GUILDENSTERN

I have no idea how.

HAMLET

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

GUILDENSTERN

But I can't play a melody. I don't know how.

HAMLET

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

*Enter **POLONIUS***

God bless you, sir.

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

340 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.

*Exit **POLONIUS***

Leave me, friends.

*Exeunt all but **HAMLET***

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

***POLONIUS** enters.*

Hello and God bless you, sir.

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

By God, it does look like a camel.

HAMLET

To me it looks like a weasel.

POLONIUS

It does have a back like a weasel's.

HAMLET

Or like a whale.

POLONIUS

Yes, very much like a whale.

HAMLET

I'll go see my mother soon. (*to
himself*) They're trying as hard as they
can to mess with me.—I will go soon.

POLONIUS

I'll tell her.

HAMLET

It's easy enough to say “soon.”

***POLONIUS** exits.*

Now please leave me alone, my friends.

*Everyone except **HAMLET** exits.*

This is the time of night when witches
come out, when graveyards yawn open
and the stench of hell seeps out. I could

Contagion to this world. Now could I
drink hot blood
355 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.
360 How in my words somever she be shent,
To give them seals never, my soul,
consent!

drink hot blood and do such terrible
deeds that people would tremble even in
the daylight. But I've got to go see my
mother.—Oh, heart, don't grow weak,
like Nero Let me be cruel, but not
inhuman.

I'll speak as sharp as a dagger to her,
but I won't use one on her. And so, my
words and thoughts will be at odds.

Exit

HAMLET exits.

Act 3, Scene 3

*Enter CLAUDIUS, ROSENCRANTZ,
and GUILDENSTERN*

CLAUDIUS
I like him not, nor stands it safe with us
To let his madness range. Therefore
prepare you.
I your commission will forthwith
5 dispatch,
And he to England shall along with you.
The terms of our estate may not endure
Hazard so dangerous as doth hourly
grow
Out of his lunacies.

GUILDENSTERN

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

*CLAUDIUS, ROSENCRANTZ,
and GUILDENSTERN enter.*

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

GUILDENSTERN

We'll take care of it. It's a sacred duty to
protect the lives of all those who depend
on Your Highness.

10 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
15 more
That spirit upon whose weal depend and
rest
The lives of many. The cease of majesty
Dies not alone, but, like a gulf, doth
20 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
25 voyage.
For we will fetters put upon this fear,
Which now goes too free-footed.

ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN

We will haste us.

Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

ROSENCRANTZ

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

CLAUDIUS

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

ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN

We'll hurry.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.

Enter POLONIUS

POLONIUS enters.

POLONIUS

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

30 Behind the arras I'll convey myself
To hear the process. I'll warrant she'll
tax him home.
And, as you said (and wisely was it said)
'Tis meet that some more audience than a
35 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.

Exit POLONIUS

Oh, my offence is rank. It smells to
heaven.
It hath the primal eldest curse upon 't,
40 A brother's murder. Pray can I not.
Though inclination be as sharp as will,
My stronger guilt defeats my strong
intent,
And, like a man to double business
45 bound,
I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
And both neglect. What if this cursèd
hand
Were thicker than itself with brother's
50 blood?
Is there not rain enough in the sweet
heavens

POLONIUS

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

CLAUDIUS

Thanks, my dear lord.

POLONIUS exits.

Oh, my crime is so rotten it stinks all the way to heaven. It has the mark of Cain on it, a brother's murder. I can't pray, though I want to desperately. My guilt is stronger even than my intentions. And like a person with two opposite things to do at once, I stand paralyzed and neglect them both. So what if this cursed hand of mine is coated with my brother's blood? Isn't there enough rain in heaven to wash it clean as snow? Isn't that what God's mercy is for? And doesn't prayer serve these two purposes—to keep us from sinning and to bring us forgiveness when we have sinned? So I'll pray. I've already committed my sin. But, oh, what kind of prayer is there for me? “Dear Lord, forgive

To wash it white as snow? Whereto
serves mercy
But to confront the visage of offence?
And what's in prayer but this twofold
force,
To be forestallèd ere we come to fall
Or pardoned being down? Then I'll look
up.
My fault is past. But oh, what form of
prayer
Can serve my turn, "Forgive me my foul
murder"?

55 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'
60 offense?
In the corrupted currents of this world
Offense's gilded hand may shove by
justice,
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
65 Buys out the law. But 'tis not so above.
There is no shuffling. There the action
lies
In his true nature, and we ourselves
compelled,
70 Even to the teeth and forehead of our
faults,
To give in evidence. What then? What
rests?
Try what repentance can. What can it
not?
Yet what can it when one can not repent?
O wretched state! O bosom black as

me for my horrible murder"?

That won't work, since I'm still reaping
the rewards of that murder: my crown
and my queen. Can a person be
forgiven and still keep the fruits of his
crime? In this wicked world, criminals
often take the money they stole and use
it to buy off the law, shoving justice
aside. But not in heaven. Up there,
every action is judged for exactly what
it's worth, and we're forced to confront
our crimes. So what can I do? What is
there left to do? Offer whatever
repentance I can—that couldn't hurt.
But it can't help either! Oh, what a
lousy situation I'm in. My heart's as
black as death. My soul is stuck to sin,
and the more it struggles to break free,
the more it sticks. Help me, angels!
C'mon, make an effort. Bend, stubborn
knees. Steely heart, be soft as a
newborn babe, so I can pray. Perhaps
everything will turn out okay after all.
(*he kneels*)

death!

O limèd soul that, struggling to be free,
Art more engaged! Help, angels. Make
assay.

Bow, stubborn knees, and, heart with
strings of steel,
Be soft as sinews of the newborn babe.
All may be well. (*kneels*)

Enter HAMLET

HAMLET enters.

HAMLET

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

HAMLET

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

So is it really revenge for me if I kill
Claudius right when he is confessing his
sins, in perfect condition for a trip to
heaven? No. Away, sword, and wait for
a better moment to kill him. (*he puts his
sword away*) When he's sleeping off

When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
Or in th' incestuous pleasure of his bed,
At game a-swearing, or about some act
95 That has no relish of salvation in 't—
Then trip him, that his heels may kick at
heaven,
And that his soul may be as damned and
black
As hell, whereto it goes. My mother stays
This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.

Exit HAMLET

CLAUDIUS

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

Exit

some drunken orgy, or having
incestuous sex, or swearing while he
gambles, or committing some other act
that has no goodness about it—that's
when I'll trip him up and send him to
hell with his heels kicking up at heaven.
My mother's waiting. The king's trying
to cure himself with prayer, but all he's
doing is keeping himself alive a little
longer.

HAMLET exits.

CLAUDIUS

(rising) My words fly up toward
heaven, but my thoughts stay down here
on earth. Words without thoughts
behind them will never make it to
heaven.

CLAUDIUS exits.

Act 3, Scene 4

Enter GERTRUDE and POLONIUS

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

(within) Mother, mother, mother!

GERTRUDE

GERTRUDE and POLONIUS enter.

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

(offstage) Mother, mother, mother!

GERTRUDE

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

POLONIUS hides behind the arras

Enter HAMLET

HAMLET

Now mother, what's the matter?

GERTRUDE

Hamlet, thou hast thy father much
offended.

HAMLET

10 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.

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

GERTRUDE

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

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

POLONIUS hides behind the tapestry.

HAMLET enters.

HAMLET

Now mother, what's this all about?

GERTRUDE

Hamlet, you've insulted your father.

HAMLET

Mother, you've insulted my father.

GERTRUDE

Come on, you're answering me
foolishly.

HAMLET

Go on, you're questioning me evilly.

GERTRUDE

Hamlet, what, why?

HAMLET

What's the problem now?

GERTRUDE

Have you forgotten who I am?

HAMLET

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

GERTRUDE

In that case I'll call in others who can
still speak.

HAMLET

Come, come, and sit you down. You shall not budge.

20 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!

HAMLET

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

*(stabs his sword through the arras and kills***POLONIUS***)*

POLONIUS

25 *(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

Oh, what a rash and bloody deed is this!

HAMLET

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

GERTRUDE

As kill a king?

HAMLET

HAMLET

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

GERTRUDE

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

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

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

*(he stabs his sword through the tapestry and kills***POLONIUS***)*

POLONIUS

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

GERTRUDE

Oh my God, what have you done?

HAMLET

I don't know. Is it the king?

GERTRUDE

Oh, what a senseless, horrible act!

HAMLET

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

GERTRUDE

Killing a king?

HAMLET

Ay, lady, 'twas my word.

*(draws back the arras and
discovers **POLONIUS**)*

Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool,
farewell.

I took thee for thy better. Take thy
35 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. For so I
shall

If it be made of penetrable stuff,

If damnèd custom have not brassed it so

That it is proof and bulwark against sense.

GERTRUDE

40 What have I done, that thou darest wag
thy tongue

In noise so rude against me?

HAMLET

Such an act

That blurs the grace and blush of
modesty,

Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose

45 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

50 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,

That's what I said, my good woman.

*(he pulls back the tapestry and
discovers **POLONIUS**)*

You low-life, nosy, busybody fool,
goodbye. I thought you were somebody
more important. You've gotten what you
deserve. I guess you found out it's
dangerous to be a

busybody. *(to GERTRUDE)* Stop
wringing your hands. Sit down and let
me wring your heart instead, which I
will do if it's still soft enough, if your
evil lifestyle has not toughened it against
feeling anything at all.

GERTRUDE

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

HAMLET

A deed that destroys modesty, turns
virtue into hypocrisy, replaces the
blossom on the face of true love with a
nasty blemish, makes marriage vows as
false as a gambler's oath—oh, you've
done a deed that plucks the soul out of
marriage and turns religion into
meaningless blather. Heaven looks down
on this earth, as angry as if Judgment
Day were here, and is sick at the thought
of what you've done.

Is thought-sick at the act.

GERTRUDE

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

HAMLET

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

To give the world assurance of a man.
This was your husband. Look you now,
65 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
70 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
75 humble,

GERTRUDE

C'mon, what's this deed that sounds so
awful even before I know what it is?

HAMLET

Look at this picture here, and that one
there, the painted images of two
brothers. Look how kind and
gentlemanly this one is, with his curly
hair and his forehead like a Greek god.
His eye could command like the god of
war. His body is as agile as Mercury just
landing on a high hill.
A figure and a combination of good
qualities that seemed like every god had
set his stamp on this man.

That was your husband. Now look at this
other one. Here is your present husband,
like a mildewed ear of corn infecting the
healthy one next to it. Do you have eyes?
How could you leave the lofty heights of
this man here and descend as low as this
one? Ha! Do you have eyes? You cannot
say you did it out of love, since at your
age romantic passions have grown weak,
and the heart obeys reason. But what
reason could move you from this one to
that one? You must have some sense in
your head, since you're able to get

And waits upon the judgment. And what
judgment
Would step from this to this? Sense sure
you have,
80 Else could you not have motion. But sure
that sense
Is apoplexed, for madness would not err,
Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thrall'd,
But it reserved some quantity of choice
85 To serve in such a difference. What devil
was 't
That thus hath cozened you at hoodman-
blind?
Eyes without feeling, feeling without
sight,
Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans
all,
Or but a sickly part of one true sense
Could not so mope. O shame, where is
thy blush?
Rebellious hell,
If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,
To flaming youth let virtue be as wax
And melt in her own fire. Proclaim no
shame
When the compulsive ardor gives the
charge,
Since frost itself as actively doth burn,
And reason panders will.

GERTRUDE

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

around, but it seems to be paralyzed,
since even if you were crazy you would
know the difference between these two
men. No one ever went so insane that
they couldn't get an easy choice like this
one right. What devil was it that
blindfolded you? Eyes without feeling,
feeling without sight, ears without hands
or eyes, smell without anything else, the
use of even one impaired sense would
not permit such a mistake as yours. Oh,
for shame, why aren't you blushing? If
evil can overtake even an old mother's
bones, then let it melt my own. It turns
out it's no longer shameful to act on
impulse—now that the old are doing so,
and now that reason is a servant to
desire.

GERTRUDE

Oh, Hamlet, stop! You're making me
look into my very soul, where the marks
of sin are so thick and black they will
never be washed away.

HAMLET

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

GERTRUDE

O, speak to me no more!
These words like daggers enter in my ears.
No more, sweet Hamlet.

HAMLET

A murderer and a villain,
A slave that is not twentieth part the tithe
Of your precedent lord, a vice of kings,
100 A cutpurse of the empire and the rule,
That from a shelf the precious diadem
stole,
And put it in his pocket—

GERTRUDE

No more!

HAMLET

A king of shreds and patches—

Enter GHOST

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

GERTRUDE

Alas, he's mad!

HAMLET

Do you not come your tardy son to chide,
That, lapsed in time and passion, lets go by
110 The important acting of your dread
command?

HAMLET

Yes, and you lie in the sweaty stench of
your dirty sheets, wet with corruption,
making love—

GERTRUDE

Oh, you must stop! Your words are like
daggers. Please, no more, sweet Hamlet.

HAMLET

A murderer and a villain, a low-life
who's not worth a twentieth of a tenth
of your first husband—the worst of
kings, a thief of the throne, who took the
precious crown from a shelf and put it in
his pocket—

GERTRUDE

Stop!

HAMLET

A ragtag king—

The GHOST enters.

Oh, angels in heaven, protect me with
your wings!—What can I do for you,
my gracious lord?

GERTRUDE

Oh no! Hamlet's gone completely crazy.

HAMLET

Have you come to scold your tardy son
for straying from his mission, letting
your important command slip by? Tell
me!

O, say!

GHOST

Do not forget. This visitation
Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose.
But look, amazement on thy mother sits.
O, step between her and her fighting soul.
115 Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works.
Speak to her, Hamlet.

HAMLET

How is it with you, lady?

GERTRUDE

Alas, how is 't with you,
That you do bend your eye on vacancy
And with th' incorporal air do hold
120 discourse?
Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep,
And, as the sleeping soldiers in th' alarm,
Your bedded hair, like life in excrements,
Starts up and stands on end. O gentle son,
125 Upon the heat and flame of thy distemper
Sprinkle cool patience. Whereon do you
look?

HAMLET

On him, on him! Look you, how pale he
glares!
His form and cause conjoined, preaching
to stones,
130 Would make them capable.
(to GHOST) Do not look upon me,
Lest with this piteous action you convert
My stern effects. Then what I have to do
Will want true color—tears perchance for
blood.

GHOST

Don't forget. I've come to sharpen your
somewhat dull appetite for revenge. But
look, your mother is in shock. Oh, keep
her struggling soul from being
overwhelmed by horrid visions. The
imagination works strongest in those
with the weakest bodies. Talk to her,
Hamlet.

HAMLET

How are you doing, madam?

GERTRUDE

And how are *you* doing, staring into the
empty air and talking to nobody? Your
eyes give away your wild thoughts, and
your hair is standing upright, like
soldiers during a call to arms. Oh my
dear son, calm yourself and cool off
your overheated mind! What are you
staring at?

HAMLET

At him, at him! Look how pale he is and
how he glares at me. Preaching even at
stones, he could get them to act. (*to*
the GHOST) Don't look at me like that,
unless you want me to cry instead of
kill.

GERTRUDE

To whom do you speak this?

HAMLET

Do you see nothing there?

GERTRUDE

Nothing at all, yet all that is I see.

HAMLET

135 Nor did you nothing hear?

GERTRUDE

No, nothing but ourselves.

HAMLET

Why, look you there! Look how it steals
away—

My father, in his habit as he lived—

Look where he goes, even now, out at the
portal!

Exit GHOST

GERTRUDE

This the very coinage of your brain.

140 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

145 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

150 grace,

Lay not that flattering unction to your soul

GERTRUDE

Who are you talking to?

HAMLET

You don't see anything?

GERTRUDE

Nothing at all, but I can see everything
that's here.

HAMLET

And you don't hear anything?

GERTRUDE

No, nothing but us talking.

HAMLET

Look, look how it's sneaking away! My
father, dressed just like he was when he
was alive!

Look, he's going out the door right
now!

The GHOST exits.

GERTRUDE

This is only a figment of your
imagination. Madness is good at
creating hallucinations.

HAMLET

Madness? My heart beats just as evenly
as yours does. There's nothing crazy in
what I've just uttered. Put me to the test.
I'll rephrase everything I've just said,
which a lunatic couldn't do. Mother, for
the love of God, don't flatter yourself
into believing that it's my madness, not
your crime, that's the problem. You'd
just be concealing the rot that's eating
you from the inside. Confess your sins
to heaven. Repent and avoid damnation.

That not your trespass but my madness
speaks.

It will but skin and film the ulcerous place

155 Whilst rank corruption, mining all within,
Infects unseen. Confess yourself to
heaven.

Repent what's past. Avoid what is to
come.

And do not spread the compost on the
weeds

To make them ranker. Forgive me this my
virtue,

For in the fatness of these pursy times
Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg,
Yea, curb and woo for leave to do him
good.

GERTRUDE

O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in
twain.

HAMLET

Oh, throw away the worser part of it,
160 And live the purer with the other half.
Good night—but go not to mine uncle's
bed.

Assume a virtue if you have it not.

That monster, custom, who all sense doth
165 eat,

Of habits devil, is angel yet in this:
That to the use of actions fair and good
He likewise gives a frock or livery
That aptly is put on. Refrain tonight,
And that shall lend a kind of easiness
To the next abstinence, the next more easy.

Don't spread manure over the weeds in
your heart; it'll only make them more
filthy. Forgive me my good intentions
here since in these fat and spoiled times,
virtuous people have to say, "Beg your
pardon" to vile ones and beg for the
chance to do any good.

GERTRUDE

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

HAMLET

Then throw away the worse half, and
live a purer life with the other! Good
night to you. But don't go to my uncle's
bed tonight. At least pretend to be
virtuous, even if you're not. Habit is a
terrible thing, in that it's easy to get
used to doing evil without feeling bad
about it. But it's also a good thing, in
that being good can also become a habit.
Say no to sex tonight, and that will
make it easier to say no the next time,
and still easier the time after that. Habit
can change even one's natural instincts,
and either rein in the devil in us, or kick
him out. Once again, good night to you,

170 For use almost can change the stamp of
nature,
And either rein the devil or throw him out
With wondrous potency. Once more, good
night,
175 And when you are desirous to be blessed,
I'll blessing beg of you. (*points
to POLONIUS*)
For this same lord,
I do repent. But heaven hath pleased it so,
180 To punish me with this and this with me,
That I must be their scourge and minister.
I will bestow him and will answer well
The death I gave him. So, again, good
night.
I must be cruel only to be kind.
Thus bad begins and worse remains
behind.
One word more, good lady—

GERTRUDE

What shall I do?

HAMLET

185 Not this, by no means, that I bid you do—
Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed,
Pinch wanton on your cheek, call you his
mouse,
And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses
190 Or paddling in your neck with his damned
fingers,
Make you to ravel all this matter out:

and when you want to repent, I'll ask
you for your blessing too. I'm sorry
about what happened to this
gentleman (*pointing to POLONIUS*),
but

God wanted to punish me with this
murder, and this man with me, so I'm
both Heaven's executioner and its
minister of justice. This is bad, but it'll
get worse soon. Oh, and one other
thing, madam.

GERTRUDE

What should I do?

HAMLET

Whatever you do, don't do this: let the
fat king seduce you into his bed again,
so he can pinch your cheek, call you his
bunny, and with filthy kisses and a
massage of your neck with his damned
fingers, make you admit that my
madness is fake, all calculated. What a
great idea that would be, because why

That I essentially am not in madness
But mad in craft. 'Twere good you let him
195 know,
For who that's but a queen, fair, sober,
wise,
Would from a paddock, from a bat, a gib,
Such dear concernings hide? Who would
200 do so?

No, in despite of sense and secrecy,
Unpeg the basket on the house's top.
Let the birds fly, and like the famous ape,
To try conclusions, in the basket creep
And break your own neck down.

GERTRUDE

Be thou assured, if words be made of
breath
And breath of life, I have no life to breathe
What thou hast said to me.

HAMLET

I must to England, you know that?

GERTRUDE

205 Alack,
I had forgot. 'Tis so concluded on.

HAMLET

There's letters sealed, and my two
schoolfellows,
Whom I will trust as I will adders fanged,
210 They bear the mandate. They must sweep
my way
And marshal me to knavery. Let it work,
For 'tis the sport to have the engineer
Hoist with his own petard. And 't shall go
215 hard,
But I will delve one yard below their

would a fair, sober, wise queen hide
such things from a toad, a pig, a
monster like him? Who would do that?
No, no, it's *much, much* better to spill
the beans right away, let the cat out of
the bag, and break your neck in the
process.

GERTRUDE

You can rest easy, since words are
made of breath, and breathing requires
that you be alive. I feel too dead to
breathe a word of what you've told me.

HAMLET

I have to go to England, don't you know
that?

GERTRUDE

Ah, I'd forgotten all about that! It's
been decided.

HAMLET

Yes, it's a done deal, the documents are
ready, and my two schoolmates, whom I
trust about as much as rattlesnakes, are
in charge. They're the ones who'll lead
me on my march to mischief. Let it
happen. It's fun to watch the engineer
get blown up by his own explosives, and
with any luck I'll dig a few feet below
their bombs and blow them to the moon.
Oh, it's nice to kill two birds with one

mines,
And blow them at the moon. Oh, 'tis most
sweet
220 When in one line two crafts directly meet.
(*indicates POLONIUS*)
This man shall set me packing.
I'll lug the guts into the neighbor room.
Mother, good night. Indeed this counselor
Is now most still, most secret, and most
grave
Who was in life a foolish prating knave.—
Come, sir, to draw toward an end with
you.—
Good night, mother.

*Exeunt, **HAMLET** tugging
in **POLONIUS***

stone. (*points to POLONIUS*) Now that
I've killed this guy, I'll be off in a
hurry. I'll lug his guts into the next
room. Mother, have a good night. This
politician who was in life a babbling
idiot is now quiet and serious. Come on,
sir, let's get to the end of our business.
Good night, mother.

*They exit, **HAMLET** dragging
POLONIUS offstage.*

Act 4, Scene 1

*Enter King **CLAUDIUS** and
Queen **GERTRUDE**,
with **ROSENCRANTZ** and **GUILDENSTERN***

CLAUDIUS

(*to GERTRUDE*) There's matter in these
sighs, these profound heaves.
You must translate. 'Tis fit we understand
them.
Where is your son?

GERTRUDE

5 (*to ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN*)
Bestow this place on us a little while.

*Exeunt **ROSENCRANTZ** and **GUILDENSTERN***

***CLAUDIUS** and **GERTRUDE**
enter with **ROSENCRANTZ** and
GUILDENSTERN.*

CLAUDIUS

(*to GERTRUDE*) These deep, heaving
sighs of yours mean something. You
have to tell me what. I need to know.
Where's your son?

GERTRUDE

(*to ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN*)
Let us speak privately awhile, please.

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

STERN

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

- 10 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.

- 15 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
20 Should have kept short, restrained and out
of haunt,
This mad young man. But so much was
our love,
We would not understand what was most
fit,
But, like the owner of a foul disease,
To keep it from divulging, let it feed
Even on the pith of life. Where is he
gone?

GERTRUDE

- 25 To draw apart the body he hath killed,
O'er whom his very madness, like some

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

CLAUDIUS

What, Gertrude? How is Hamlet?

GERTRUDE

As mad as the waves and the wind when
they struggle together in a storm. In an
insane rage, he hears something behind the
tapestry, whips out his sword, shouts, "A
rat, a rat!" and in his deranged state of mind
he kills the good old man, who is still hidden.

CLAUDIUS

Oh, this is terrible! It would've happened
to me if I'd been there. His wildness is a
threat to all of us—to you, to me, to everyone.
How will we deal with this violent deed?
I'm the one who will be blamed for not
restraining and confining this mad young
man. But I loved him so much I didn't
want to think about what I had to do.
So, like someone suffering from a nasty
disease who refuses to divulge his condition
and lets it infect him to

the core, I kept Hamlet's condition secret
and let it grow more and more dangerous.
Where has he gone?

GERTRUDE

To remove the corpse of the man he killed.
His madness allows a glimmering of

ore
Among a mineral of metals base,
Shows itself pure. He weeps for what is
done.

CLAUDIUS

O Gertrude, come away!

30 The sun no sooner shall the mountains
touch
But we will ship him hence, and this vile
deed
We must, with all our majesty and skill,
Both countenance and excuse.—Ho,
Guildenstern!

Enter ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

Friends both, go join you with some
35 further aid.
Hamlet in madness hath Polonius slain,
And from his mother's closet hath he
dragged him.
Go seek him out, speak fair, and bring the
body
Into the chapel. I pray you, haste in this.

Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

Come, Gertrude, we'll call up our wisest
40 friends,
And let them know both what we mean to
do
And what's untimely done. So dreaded
slander—
45 Whose whisper o'er the world's diameter,
As level as the cannon to his blank,
Transports the poisoned shot—may miss

morality to shine through, like a vein of
gold in a chunk of coal. He weeps for what
he has done.

CLAUDIUS

Oh, Gertrude, let's go. As soon as the sun
sets we'll ship him off to England. It'll
take all my diplomatic know-how to explain
and excuse the murder he's committed.
Hey, Guildenstern!

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter.

My friends, go find others to help you. Hamlet
in his madness has killed Polonius and
dragged him out of his mother's bedroom.
Go find him and speak nicely to him, and
bring the corpse into the chapel. Please hurry.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.

Come, Gertrude. We'll confer with our
wisest friends and tell them what we're going
to do, and what terrible deed has been
done already. Let's hope slander—a
bullet that can travel halfway around the
world and still hit its exact target—spares
us. Oh, we must go. I'm full of confusion
and despair.

our name
And hit the woundless air. Oh, come
away!
My soul is full of discord and dismay

Exeunt

They exit.

Act 4, Scene 2

Enter HAMLET

HAMLET enters.

HAMLET

Safely stowed.

GENTLEMEN

(from within) Hamlet! Lord Hamlet!

HAMLET

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

*Enter ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN,
and others*

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

Compounded it with dust, whereto 'tis kin.

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

Do not believe it.

ROSENCRANTZ

Believe what?

HAMLET

That I can keep your counsel and not mine

HAMLET

The body is safely hidden.

GENTLEMEN

(from offstage) Hamlet, Lord Hamlet!

HAMLET

What's that noise? Who's calling for Hamlet?
Oh, here they come.

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter
with others.*

ROSENCRANTZ

What have you done with the corpse, my lord?

HAMLET

I've gotten it dirty—ashes to ashes, and dust to
dust.

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

Don't believe it.

ROSENCRANTZ

Believe what?

HAMLET

That I'd take your advice rather than keep my

own. Besides, to be demanded of a sponge!
What replication should be made by the son
of a king?

ROSENCRANTZ

Take you me for a sponge, my lord?

HAMLET

Ay, sir, that soaks up the king's countenance,
his rewards, his authorities. But such officers
do the king best service in the end. He keeps
them, like an ape, in the corner of his jaw,
first mouthed to be last swallowed. When he
needs what you have gleaned, it is but
squeezing you and, sponge, you shall be dry
again.

ROSENCRANTZ

I understand you not, my lord.

HAMLET

I am glad of it. A knavish speech sleeps in a
foolish ear.

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

The body is with the king, but the king is not
with the body.

The king is a thing—

GUILDENSTERN

A thing, my lord?

HAMLET

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

own secret. Besides, you're a sponge! What is
the son of a king supposed to say to a sponge?

ROSENCRANTZ

You think I'm a sponge, my lord?

HAMLET

Yes, sir, a sponge that soaks up the king's
approval, his rewards, and his decisions. Officers
like that give the king the best service in the end.
He keeps them in his mouth like an ape. First he
moves them around, then he swallows them.
When he needs what you have found out, he can
just squeeze you like a sponge and you'll be dry
again.

ROSENCRANTZ

I don't follow, my lord.

HAMLET

I'm glad about that. Sly words are never
understood by fools.

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

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

GUILDENSTERN

A "thing," my lord?

HAMLET

A thing of no importance. Take me to him.
Ready or not, here I come!

Exeunt

They exit.

Act 4, Scene 3

*Enter King **CLAUDIUS** and two or three attendants*

CLAUDIUS

I have sent to seek him and to find the body.
How dangerous is it that this man goes loose!
Yet must not we put the strong law on him.
He's loved of the distracted multitude,
5 Who like not in their judgment, but their eyes.
And where 'tis so, th' offender's scourge is
weighed,
But never the offense. To bear all smooth and
even,
10 This sudden sending him away must seem
Deliberate pause. Diseases desperate grown
By desperate appliance are relieved,
Or not at all.

*Enter **ROSENCRANTZ***

How now, what hath befall'n?

ROSENCRANTZ

Where the dead body is bestowed, my lord,
We cannot get from him.

CLAUDIUS

But where is he?

ROSENCRANTZ

15 Without, my lord; guarded, to know your
pleasure.

CLAUDIUS

Bring him before us.

ROSENCRANTZ

Ho, Guildenstern! Bring in my lord.

*Enter **HAMLET** and **GUILDENSTERN***

CLAUDIUS

Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius?

***CLAUDIUS** enters with two or three of his attendants.*

CLAUDIUS

I've sent men to find him and retrieve the body.
How dangerous to have this madman on the
loose! But we can't throw him in jail. The
people love him, because they judge based on
appearance rather than reason. They'll pay
attention to the severity of the punishment, not
the severity of the crime. No, we must seem
calm and fair-minded, and our sending him
away must seem like a carefully considered
move. But a terminal disease requires extreme
treatment, or nothing at all.

***ROSENCRANTZ** enters.*

So what's happened?

ROSENCRANTZ

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

CLAUDIUS

But where is he?

ROSENCRANTZ

Outside, my lord, under guard, waiting for your
orders.

CLAUDIUS

Bring him to me.

ROSENCRANTZ

Hey, Guildenstern! Bring in my lord.

***GUILDENSTERN** enters with **HAMLET**.*

CLAUDIUS

Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius?

HAMLET

At supper.

CLAUDIUS

20 At supper where?

HAMLET

Not where he eats, but where he is eaten. A certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet. We fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots. Your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service—two dishes, but to one table. That's the end.

CLAUDIUS

Alas, alas!

HAMLET

A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.

CLAUDIUS

30 What dost you mean by this?

HAMLET

Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar.

CLAUDIUS

Where is Polonius?

HAMLET

In heaven. Send hither to see. If your messenger find him not there, seek him i' th' other place yourself. But if indeed you find him not within this month, you shall nose him as you go up the stairs into the lobby.

CLAUDIUS

HAMLET

At dinner.

CLAUDIUS

At dinner where?

HAMLET

Not where he's eating, but where he's being eaten. A certain conference of worms is chowing down on him. Worms are the emperor of all diets. We fatten up all creatures to feed ourselves, and we fatten ourselves for the worms to eat when we're dead. A fat king and a skinny beggar are just two dishes at the same meal. That's all I have to say.

CLAUDIUS

Oh no, oh no!

HAMLET

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

CLAUDIUS

What do you mean by that?

HAMLET

Nothing much, just to demonstrate that a king can move through the bowels 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 hell yourself. But seriously, if you don't find him within the next month, you'll be sure to smell him as you go upstairs into the main hall.

CLAUDIUS

(to attendants) Go seek him there.

Exeunt some attendants

HAMLET

He will stay till ye come.

CLAUDIUS

40 Hamlet, this deed, for thine especial safety—
Which we do tender as we dearly grieve
For that which thou hast done—must send thee
hence

With fiery quickness. Therefore prepare
45 thyself.

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

HAMLET

For England?

CLAUDIUS

Ay, Hamlet.

HAMLET

Good.

CLAUDIUS

50 So is it, if thou knew'st our purposes.

HAMLET

I see a cherub that sees them. But come, for
England.
Farewell, dear mother.

CLAUDIUS

Thy loving father, Hamlet.

HAMLET

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

(to attendants) Go look for him there.

Some attendants exit.

HAMLET

No need to hurry, he's not going anywhere.

CLAUDIUS

Hamlet, I care for you just as much as I grieve
for Polonius. For your own protection, I must
send you to England at once. So get ready to
leave. The ship is set to sail, the wind is
favorable, your servants are waiting for you—
everything is ready for you to go to England.

HAMLET

To England?

CLAUDIUS

Yes, Hamlet.

HAMLET

Good.

CLAUDIUS

Yes, you'd think so, if you knew why I was
sending you.

HAMLET

I know an angel who can read your mind. But
okay, off to England! Good-bye, dear mother.

CLAUDIUS

I'm your father, Hamlet—your father who loves
you.

HAMLET

You're my mother. When you married my
mother, the two of you became one flesh, so if
you're my father you're also my mother. Come

on, off to England!

Exit HAMLET

HAMLET exits.

CLAUDIUS

Follow him at foot. Tempt him with speed
aboard.
Delay it not. I'll have him hence tonight.
Away! For everything is sealed and done
That else leans on the affair. Pray you, make
haste.

Exeunt all but CLAUDIUS

CLAUDIUS

Follow him on foot, and get him on board as
quickly as possible. Don't waste any time. I
want him out of here tonight. Go now;
everything else is ready. Please hurry.

Everyone except CLAUDIUS exits.

60 And, England, if my love thou hold'st at
aught—
As my great power thereof may give thee
sense,
Since yet thy cicatrice looks raw and red
After the Danish sword and thy free awe
Pays homage to us—thou mayst not coldly set
65 Our sovereign process, which imports at full,
By letters congruing to that effect,
The present death of Hamlet. Do it, England,
For like the hectic in my blood he rages,
And thou must cure me. Till I know 'tis done,
70 Howe'er my haps, my joys were ne'er begun.

Exit

And you, dear king of England, if you care
about me at all—and you should, since you can
still feel the damage that Denmark has done to
you in the past and, so, fear and respect us—
then you won't ignore my letters instructing you
to kill Hamlet immediately. Do it,
English king, since he's raging like a fever in
my brain, and you must cure me. Until I know
it's been done, I'll never be happy, no matter
how much luck I have.

He exits.

Act 4, Scene 4

*Enter FORTINBRAS with his army and
a CAPTAIN*

FORTINBRAS

Go, Captain, from me greet the Danish king
Tell him that, by his license, Fortinbras
Craves the conveyance of a promised march
Over his kingdom. You know the rendezvous.

*FORTINBRAS enters with his army and
a CAPTAIN.*

FORTINBRAS

Go, Captain, and give the Danish king my
greetings. Tell him that Fortinbras asks
permission to move his troops across
Denmark. You know the meeting place

5 If that his majesty would aught with us,
We shall express our duty in his eye,
And let him know so.

CAPTAIN

I will do 't, my lord.

FORTINBRAS

Go softly on.

Exeunt all except the CAPTAIN

Enter HAMLET, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN, and others

HAMLET

10 Good sir, whose powers are these?

CAPTAIN

They are of Norway, sir.

HAMLET

How purposed, sir, I pray you?

CAPTAIN

Against some part of Poland.

HAMLET

Who commands them, sir?

CAPTAIN

The nephew to old Norway, Fortinbras.

HAMLET

Goes it against the main of Poland, sir,

15 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.

20 Nor will it yield to Norway or the Pole

we've arranged. If His Majesty wants us to
do any favor for him, tell him his wish is
my command.

CAPTAIN

I'll tell him, my lord.

FORTINBRAS

Go ahead, then.

Everyone except the CAPTAIN exits.

HAMLET, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN, and others enter.

HAMLET

Sir, whose troops are these?

CAPTAIN

The king of Norway's, sir.

HAMLET

What are they doing here, sir?

CAPTAIN

They're on their way to invade some part
of Poland.

HAMLET

Who's commanding them, sir?

CAPTAIN

The nephew of the old king of Norway,
Fortinbras.

HAMLET

Is he attacking the heartland of Poland or
some frontier?

CAPTAIN

To tell the truth, we're fighting to
win a little patch of ground that's not
worth anything. I myself wouldn't
pay five ducats for it, if someone
offered it to me to farm. And it won't

A ranker rate, should it be sold in fee.

HAMLET

Why, then the Polack never will defend it.

CAPTAIN

Yes, it is already garrisoned.

HAMLET

Two thousand souls and twenty thousand
25 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.

Exit CAPTAIN

ROSENCRANTZ

Will 't please you go, my lord?

HAMLET

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

Exeunt all except 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.
35 Sure, he that made us with such large
discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not

provide any more profits than that to
either the Norwegian or the Pole.

HAMLET

So then the Poles won't be willing to
defend it.

CAPTAIN

Oh, yes they will. They've already
stationed troops there.

HAMLET

(*to himself*) Even two thousand men and
twenty-thousand ducats are just the
beginning of what it will cost to settle this
pointless matter. This is what happens
when countries have too much money and
peace. This quarrel is like an abcess that
grows inside someone until it bursts and
kills them, and no one knows why. (*to*
theCAPTAIN) Thank you very much for
the information, sir.

CAPTAIN

Good-bye, sir.

The CAPTAIN exits.

ROSENCRANTZ

Will you please come now, my lord?

HAMLET

I'll be there in a minute. Start without me.

Everyone except HAMLET exits.

My God! Everything I see shows me how
wrong I am and tells me to hurry up and
get on with my revenge. What is a human
being if he just eats and sleeps? Nothing
more than a beast. God didn't create us
with such a huge power of thought and a
divine capacity for reason in order for us

That capability and godlike reason
To fust in us unused. Now, whether it be
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple

40 Of thinking too precisely on th' event—
A thought which, quartered, hath but one part
wisdom
And ever three parts coward—I do not know
Why yet I live to say “This thing’s to do,”

45 Sith I have cause and will and strength and
means
To do ’t. Examples gross as earth exhort me.
Witness this army of such mass and charge
Led by a delicate and tender prince,

50 Whose spirit with divine ambition puffed
Makes mouths at the invisible event,
Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,
Even for an eggshell. Rightly to be great

55 Is not to stir without great argument,
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honor’s at the stake. How stand I then,
That have a father killed, a mother stained,
Excitements of my reason and my blood,

60 And let all sleep—while, to my shame, I see
The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
That for a fantasy and trick of fame
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,

65 Which is not tomb enough and continent
To hide the slain? Oh, from this time forth,
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!

Exit

not to use them. Now, whether it’s animal-
like mindlessness, or the cowardly
hesitation

that comes from thinking too much
(thinking thoughts that are one part
wisdom, three parts cowardice), I don’t
know why I’m still alive to say “I have
to do this deed” rather than having done
it already. I have the motivation, the
willpower, the ability, and the means to
do it. It’s as plain as the ground beneath
my feet that I must do it. Look at this
massive army led by a delicate and
tender prince who’s so puffed up with
divine ambition that he puts his fragile
life at risk, exposing it to danger and
death, for a reason as thin as an
eggshell. To be truly great doesn’t
mean you’d only fight for a good
reason. It means you’d fight over
nothing if your honor was at stake. So
where does that leave me, whose father
has been murdered and mother defiled,
ignoring these mental and emotional
provocations and letting well enough
alone? Meanwhile, to my shame, I
watch twenty thousand men go
marching to their deaths for an illusion
and a little bit of fame, fighting for a
tiny piece of land not even big enough
to bury them all. From now on, if my
thoughts aren’t violent I’ll consider
them worthless.

He exits.

Act 4, Scene 5

*Enter HORATIO, GERTRUDE, and
a GENTLEMAN*

GERTRUDE

I will not speak with her.

GENTLEMAN

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

GERTRUDE

What would she have?

GENTLEMAN

She speaks much of her father, says she hears
5 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
10 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
15 may strew
Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds.

GERTRUDE

Let her come in.

Exit GENTLEMAN

(aside) To my sick soul (as sin's true nature

*HORATIO, GERTRUDE, and
a GENTLEMAN enter.*

GERTRUDE

I won't speak to her.

GENTLEMAN

She's insistent. In fact, she's crazed. You
can't help feeling sorry for her.

GERTRUDE

What does she want?

GENTLEMAN

She talks about her father a lot, and says
she hears there are conspiracies around
the world, and coughs, and beats her
breast, and gets angry over tiny matters,
and talks nonsense. Her words don't
mean anything, but her babbling causes
her listeners to draw conclusions. They
hear what they want to hear. Her winks
and nods and gestures do suggest that
she means to convey a message, and not
a happy one.

HORATIO

It's a good idea to speak to her, since she
might lead those with evil intentions to
dangerous conclusions.

GERTRUDE

Show her in.

The GENTLEMAN exits.

(to herself) To my sick soul (since sin is

is)
Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss.
So full of artless jealousy is guilt,
It spills itself in fearing to be spilt.

Enter OPHELIA, distracted

*Enter HORATIO, GERTRUDE, and
a GENTLEMAN*

GERTRUDE

I will not speak with her.

GENTLEMAN

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

GERTRUDE

What would she have?

GENTLEMAN

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

always a sickness), every detail looks
like an omen of disaster to come. Guilt
makes you so full of stupid suspicions
that you give yourself away because
you're trying so hard not to.

OPHELIA enters, insane.

*HORATIO, GERTRUDE, and
a GENTLEMAN enter.*

GERTRUDE

I won't speak to her.

GENTLEMAN

She's insistent. In fact, she's crazed.
You can't help feeling sorry for her.

GERTRUDE

What does she want?

GENTLEMAN

She talks about her father a lot, and says
she hears there are conspiracies around
the world, and coughs, and beats her
breast, and gets angry over tiny matters,
and talks nonsense. Her words don't
mean anything, but her babbling causes
her listeners to draw conclusions. They
hear what they want to hear. Her winks
and nods and gestures do suggest that
she means to convey a message, and not
a happy one.

HORATIO

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

GERTRUDE

Let her come in.

Exit GENTLEMAN

(aside) To my sick soul (as sin's true
nature is)
Each toy seems prologue to some great
amiss.
So full of artless jealousy is guilt,
It spills itself in fearing to be spilt.

Enter OPHELIA, distracted

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.*

HORATIO

It's a good idea to speak to her, since
she might lead those with evil intentions
to dangerous conclusions.

GERTRUDE

Show her in.

The GENTLEMAN exits.

(to herself) To my sick soul (since sin is
always a sickness), every detail looks
like an omen of disaster to come. Guilt
makes you so full of stupid suspicions
that you give yourself away because
you're trying so hard not to.

OPHELIA enters, insane.

CLAUDIUS

How are you doing, my pretty lady?

OPHELIA

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

CLAUDIUS

She's talking about her dead father.

OPHELIA

Oh, let's not talk about that, but when
they ask you what it means, just say:

(sings)

*Tomorrow is St. Valentine's Day
And early in the morning
I'm a girl below your window
Waiting to be your Valentine.
Then he got up and put on his clothes*

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

CLAUDIUS

Pretty Ophelia—

OPHELIA

40 Indeed, without an oath I'll make an end on
't:

(sings)

*By Gis and by Saint Charity,
Alack, and fie, for shame!
Young men will do 't, if they come to 't.
By Cock, they are to blame.
Quoth she, "Before you tumbled me,
You promised me to wed."
He answers,
"So would I ha' done, by yonder sun,
An thou hadst not come to my bed."*

CLAUDIUS

How long hath she been thus?

OPHELIA

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

Exit OPHELIA

CLAUDIUS

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

*And opened the door to his room.
He let in the girl, and when she left
She wasn't a virgin anymore.*

CLAUDIUS

Pretty Ophelia—

OPHELIA

Hang on, I'll end it soon, I promise:
(sings)

*By the name of Jesus and Saint
Charity,
My goodness, what a shame it is,
Young men will do it if they get a
chance:
By God, they're very bad.
She said, "Before you got me into bed,
You promised to marry me."
He answers:
"I would have married you, I swear,
If you hadn't gone to bed with me."*

CLAUDIUS

How long has she been like this?

OPHELIA

I hope everything will turn out fine. We
must be patient, but I can't help crying
when I think of him being laid in the cold
ground. My brother will hear about this.
And so I thank you for your good advice.
Come, driver! Good night, ladies, good
night, sweet ladies, good night, good
night.

OPHELIA exits.

CLAUDIUS

Follow her. Keep an eye on her, please.

Exit HORATIO

HORATIO exits.

Oh, this is the poison of deep grief. It
50 springs
All from her father's death, and now
behold!
O Gertrude, Gertrude,
When sorrows come, they come not single
55 spies
But in battalions. First, her father slain.
Next, your son gone, and he most violent
author
Of his own just remove. The people
60 muddled,
Thick, and unwholesome in their thoughts
and whispers
For good Polonius' death, and we have
done but greenly
65 In hugger-mugger to inter him. Poor
Ophelia
Divided from herself and her fair judgment,
Without the which we are pictures, or mere
beasts.
70 Last—and as much containing as all
these—
Her brother is in secret come from France,
Feeds on his wonder, keeps himself in
clouds,
And wants not buzzers to infect his ear
With pestilent speeches of his father's
death,
Wherein necessity, of matter beggared,
Will nothing stick our person to arraign
In ear and ear. O my dear Gertrude, this,
Like to a murdering piece, in many places
Gives me superfluous death.

Oh, her grief has poisoned her mind. Her
father died and now look at her! Oh,
Gertrude, Gertrude, when bad things
happen, they don't come one at a time,
like enemy spies, but all at once like an
army. First her father was killed, then
your son was taken away—because of his
own violent actions. The people are
confused and spreading nasty rumors
about Polonius's death, and I was a fool
to bury him in a hurry, without a proper
state funeral. Poor Ophelia has been
robbed of her sanity, without which we're
just pictures, or animals. Last but not
least, her brother has secretly returned
from France and is surrounded by gossip-
mongers, who fill his ears with wicked
stories about his father's death. Deprived
of proper evidence, he'll naturally
attribute the murder to me. Oh, dear
Gertrude, I feel as though I'm being
murdered many times over.

A noise within

GERTRUDE

Alack, what noise is this?

CLAUDIUS

Where are my Switzers? Let them guard the door.

Enter a MESSENGER

What is the matter?

MESSENGER

Save yourself, my lord.
The ocean, overpeering of his list,
Eats not the flats with more impiteous haste
75 Than young Laertes, in a riotous head,
O'erbears your officers. The rabble call him
"lord"
And—as the world were now but to begin,
Antiquity forgot, custom not known,
80 The ratifiers and props of every word—
They cry, "Choose we! Laertes shall be
king!"
Caps, hands, and tongues applaud it to the
clouds:
"Laertes shall be king, Laertes king!"

GERTRUDE

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

Noise within

CLAUDIUS

85 The doors are broke.

Enter LAERTES with others

LAERTES

Where is this king?—Sirs, stand you all

A noise offstage.

GERTRUDE

Oh, no—what's that noise?

CLAUDIUS

Listen! Where are my bodyguards? Let them guard the door.

A MESSENGER enters.

What is it?

MESSENGER

You must save yourself, my lord. The young Laertes, like the ocean when it floods the shore and devours the lowlands, is leading a rebellion against your government. The crowd calls him "lord" and shouts, "We want Laertes to be king!" It's as if they were starting the world from scratch right now, throwing out the traditions and ancient customs that are the support of every word we utter. They throw their caps in the air and yell, "Laertes will be king! Laertes king!"

GERTRUDE

They sound so cheerful as they hunt down the wrong prey! Oh, you're on the wrong track, you disloyal Danish dogs!

A noise offstage.

CLAUDIUS

The doors have been smashed open.

LAERTES enters with others.

LAERTES

Where's this so-called king? Men, wait

without.

ALL

No, let's come in!

LAERTES

I pray you, give me leave.

ALL

We will, we will.

Exeunt LAERTES' FOLLOWERS

LAERTES

90 I thank you. Keep the door.—O thou vile
king,
Give me my father!

GERTRUDE

Calmly, good Laertes.

LAERTES

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

CLAUDIUS

What is the cause, Laertes,
That thy rebellion looks so giant-like?—
Let him go, Gertrude. Do not fear our
person.
There's such divinity doth hedge a king
100 That treason can but peep to what it would,
Acts little of his will.—Tell me, Laertes,
Why thou art thus incensed.—Let him go,
Gertrude.—
Speak, man.

LAERTES

outside.

ALL

No, let us in!

LAERTES

Please wait.

ALL

All right, we will, we will.

LAERTES' FOLLOWERS exit.

LAERTES

Thank you. Guard the door.
(to CLAUDIUS) Oh, you vile king, give
me my father!

GERTRUDE

Calm down, good Laertes.

LAERTES

I've got exactly one calm drop of blood
in my body, and it proclaims that I'm a
bastard, says my father was betrayed,
and stamps the label "whore" on the
pure forehead of my devoted mother.

CLAUDIUS

Laertes, what makes you so rebellious?
Let him go, Gertrude. Don't worry
about my getting hurt. God protects the
king, so traitors can't hurt him.—Tell
me, Laertes, why you're so angry.—
Gertrude, let him go.—Tell me, man.

LAERTES

Where is my father?

CLAUDIUS

Dead.

GERTRUDE

But not by him.

CLAUDIUS

Let him demand his fill.

LAERTES

How came he dead? I'll not be juggled
105 with.
To hell, allegiance! Vows, to the blackest
devil!
Conscience and grace, to the profoundest
pit!
110 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,
115 If you desire to know the certainty
Of your dear father's death, is 't writ in
your revenge,
That, swoopstake, you will draw both
friend and foe,
Winner and loser?

Where's my father?

CLAUDIUS

He's dead.

GERTRUDE

But the king didn't kill him.

CLAUDIUS

Let him ask what he wants to ask.

LAERTES

How did he end up dead? Don't mess
with me. To hell with my vows of
allegiance to you! Vows can go to hell!
Conscience, too! I don't care if I'm
damned. I don't care what happens to me
in this world or the next. Whatever
happens, happens, but I'll get revenge for
my father's murder.

CLAUDIUS

Who's stopping you?

LAERTES

Only my free will—nothing else. What
little means I have, I'll use against you.

CLAUDIUS

My dear Laertes, in your eagerness to
know the truth about your father's death,
are you determined to hurt your father's
friends and enemies alike?

LAERTES

None but his enemies.

CLAUDIUS

120 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.

125 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.

Noise within: "Let her come in!"

LAERTES

How now? What noise is that?

Enter OPHELIA

130 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,

135 Till our scale turn the beam. O rose of
May,

Dear maid, kind sister, sweet Ophelia!

O heavens, is 't possible a young maid's
wits

Should be as mortal as an old man's life?

Nature is fine in love, and where 'tis fine,

It sends some precious instance of itself

LAERTES

No, only his enemies.

CLAUDIUS

Do you want to know who they are,
then?

LAERTES

I'll open my arms wide to his true
friends, and like a mother pelican with
her brood, I'll even give my life for
them.

CLAUDIUS

Why, now you're talking like a good son
and a true gentleman. I'll prove to you as
clearly as daylight that I'm innocent of
your father's death, and am struck with
grief over it.

A voice offstage, "Let her in!"

LAERTES

What's that noise?

OPHELIA enters.

Oh, heat, dry up my brains! Salty tears,
burn my eyes! By heaven, I'll get
revenge for your madness! Oh, you
springtime rose, dear maiden, kind
sister, sweet Ophelia! Is it possible that
a young woman's mind could fade away
as easily as an old man's life? Human
nature is refined and thoughtful—person
graciously gives a valuable part of
herself away to her beloved, as Ophelia
has sent off her sanity to her dead father.

After the thing it loves.

OPHELIA

140 (*sings*)

*They bore him barefaced on the bier,
Hey, non nonny, nonny, hey, nonny,
And in his grave rained many a tear.
Fare you well, my dove.*

LAERTES

Hadst thou thy wits, and didst persuade
revenge,
It could not move thus.

OPHELIA

You must sing *A-down a-down*—And
you, *Call him a-down-a*—Oh, how the
wheel becomes it! It is the false steward
that stole his master's daughter.

LAERTES

This nothing's more than matter.

OPHELIA

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

LAERTES

A document in madness. Thoughts and
remembrance fitted.

OPHELIA

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

OPHELIA

(*sings*)

*They carried him uncovered in the
coffin,
Hey non nonny, nonny, hey nonny.
And tears poured down into his grave.
Good-bye, honey.*

LAERTES

If you were sane and could urge me to
take revenge, you couldn't be more
persuasive than you are now.

OPHELIA

You're supposed to sing, "A down a-
down," and you, "Call him a-down-a."
Oh, how it turns around like a wheel!
Like the worker who stole his boss's
daughter.

LAERTES

This nonsense means more than rational
speech.

OPHELIA

Look at my flowers. There's rosemary,
that's for remembering. Please
remember, love. And there are pansies,
they're for thoughts.

LAERTES

A case study in madness, to connect
memory and thought.

OPHELIA

(*to GERTRUDE*) Here are fennel and
columbines for you—they symbolize
adultery. (*to CLAUDIUS*) And here's
rue for you—it symbolizes repentance.
We can call it the merciful Sunday

would give you some violets, but they
withered all when my father died. They
say he made a good end(*sings*) *For bonny
sweet Robin is all my joy—*

LAERTES

Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself,
She turns to favor and to prettiness.

OPHELIA

160 (*sings*)

*And will he not come again?
And will he not come again?
No, no, he is dead,
Go to thy deathbed.
He never will come again.
His beard was as white as snow,
All flaxen was his poll.
He is gone, he is gone,
And we cast away moan,
God ha' mercy on his soul.—*

And of all Christian souls, I pray God. God
be wi' ye.

Exit OPHELIA

LAERTES

Do you see this, O God?

CLAUDIUS

Laertes, I must commune with your grief,
Or you deny me right. Go but apart,
165 Make choice of whom your wisest friends
you will.
And they shall hear and judge 'twixt you
and me.

flower. You should wear it for a
different reason. And here's a daisy, for
unhappy love. I'd give you some
violets, flowers of faithfulness, but they
all dried up when my father died. They
say he looked good when he
died. (*sings*) *For good sweet Robin is
all my joy.*

LAERTES

Sadness and torment, suffering, hell
itself—she makes them almost pretty.

OPHELIA

(*sings*)

*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 as we're cast away.
God have mercy on his soul.*

And on the souls of all good Christians,
I hope. Goodbye, God be with you.

OPHELIA exits.

LAERTES

Do you see this, oh, God?

CLAUDIUS

Laertes, I have a right to share your
grief. Go choose your wisest friends,
and have them listen to both of us and
decide which of us is right. If directly or
indirectly they find me implicated in
your father's murder, I'll give up my

If by direct or by collateral hand
170 They find us touched, we will our kingdom
give,
Our crown, our life, and all that we can
ours,
To you in satisfaction. But if not,
Be you content to lend your patience to us,
And we shall jointly labor with your soul
To give it due content.

LAERTES

Let this be so.
His means of death, his obscure funeral—
175 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
180 fall.
I pray you, go with me.

kingdom, my crown, my life, and
everything I call my own to you as
restitution. But if they find me innocent,
then be patient and I'll work to satisfy
to the fullest extent your deepest need
for revenge.

LAERTES

All right, then. The way he died, his
secret funeral, no funeral rites or
military display, no noble rites or
formal ceremony—shout out from
heaven and earth that I must call the
way he died into question.

CLAUDIUS

And you're right to do so. May the
guilty party be punished by death.
Please, come with me.

Exeunt

They exit.

Act 4, Scene 6

Enter HORATIO and a SERVANT

HORATIO

What are they that would speak with me?

SERVANT

Seafaring men, sir. They say they have
letters for you.

HORATIO

HORATIO and a SERVANT enter.

HORATIO

Who are the people who want to speak
with me?

SERVANT

Sailors, sir. They say they have letters
for you.

HORATIO

Let them come in.

Exit SERVANT

I do not know from what part of the world
5 I should be greeted, if not from Lord
Hamlet.

Enter SAILORS

SAILOR

God bless you, sir.

HORATIO

Let him bless thee too.

SAILOR

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

HORATIO

(reads)

“Horatio,

When thou shalt have overlooked this,
give these fellows some means to the king.
They have letters for him. Ere we were
two days old at sea, a pirate of very
warlike appointment gave us chase.
Finding ourselves too slow of sail, we put
on a compelled valor, and in the grapple I
boarded them. On the instant, they got
clear of our ship, so I alone became their
prisoner. They have dealt with me like
thieves of mercy, but they knew what they
did; I am to do a good turn for them.

Show them in.

SERVANT exits.

I don't know who else would send me a
letter from abroad except Hamlet.

SAILORS enter.

SAILOR

Hello, sir. God bless you.

HORATIO

May He bless you, too.

SAILOR

He will, sir, if He wants to. There's a
letter for you, sir. It's from the
ambassador, Lord Hamlet, who was
going to England—if your name's
Horatio, as they told me it is. *(he
hands HORATIO a letter)*

HORATIO

(reading the letter)

“Horatio,

When you've read this letter, find a
way to let these guys see the king. They
have letters for him. Before we were at
sea for even two days, a pirate ship
equipped for battle pursued us. We were
too slow to escape, so we were forced to
stand and fight. In the battle that
followed I ended up on the pirate ship.
Just then they left our ship behind, so I
became the only prisoner on board.
They've treated me quite mercifully for
thieves, but they knew what they were
doing. They want me to do a favor for
them.

Let the king have the letters I have sent,
and repair thou to me with as much speed
as thou wouldst fly death. I have words to
speak in thine ear will make thee dumb,
yet are they much too light for the bore of
the matter. These good fellows will bring
thee where I am. Rosencrantz and
Guildenstern hold their course for
England. Of them I have much to tell thee.
Fare-well.

He that thou knowest thine,
Hamlet.”

Come, I will give you way for these your
letters, And do ’t the speedier, that you
may direct me To him from whom you
brought them.

Exeunt

Give the king the letters I’ve sent, and
come to me as fast as you would run
from death. I’ve got things to tell you
that will make you speechless, and they
aren’t even half the story. These guys
will take you to me. Rosencrantz and
Guildenstern are on their way to
England. I have a lot to tell you about
them. Good-bye.

Your trusted friend,
Hamlet.”

Come, men. I’ll show you where to
deliver these letters as quickly as
possible, so that you can take me to the
man who sent them.

They exit.

Act 4, Scene 7

Enter CLAUDIUS and LAERTES

CLAUDIUS

Now must your conscience my
acquaintance seal,

And you must put me in your heart for
friend,

5 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,

CLAUDIUS and LAERTES enter.

CLAUDIUS

Now you’ve got to acknowledge my
innocence and believe I’m your friend,
since you’ve heard and understood that
the man who killed your father was
trying to kill me.

LAERTES

It looks that way. But tell me why you
didn’t take immediate action against his
criminal acts, when your own safety and
everything else would seem to call for

As by your safety, wisdom, all things else, it.
You mainly were stirred up.

CLAUDIUS

Oh, for two special reasons,
10 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
15 myself—
 My virtue or my plague, be it either
 which—
 She's so conjunctive to my life and soul,
 That, as the star moves not but in his
20 sphere,
 I could not but by her. The other motive
 Why to a public count I might not go,
 Is the great love the general gender bear
 him,
 Who, dipping all his faults in their
 affection,
 Would, like the spring that turneth wood
 to stone,
 Convert his gyves to graces—so that my
 arrows,
 Too slightly timbered for so loud a wind,
 Would have reverted to my bow again,
 And not where I had aimed them.

LAERTES

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

CLAUDIUS

Oh, for two main reasons which may
seem weak to you, but strong to me.
The queen, his mother, is devoted to
him. And (for better or worse,
whichever it is) she is such a part of my
life and soul that I can't live apart from
her, any more than a planet can leave its
orbit. The other reason why I couldn't
prosecute and arrest Hamlet is that the
public loves him. In their affection they
overlook all his faults. Like magic, they
convert them into virtues, so whatever I
said against him would end up hurting
me, not him.

LAERTES

And so I've lost my noble father, had
my sister driven insane—my sister who
once was (if I can praise her for what
she once was, not what she is now) the
most perfect girl who ever lived. But I'll
get my revenge.

come.

CLAUDIUS

- 30 Break not your sleeps for that. You must
not think
That we are made of stuff so flat and dull
That we can let our beard be shook with
danger
35 And think it pastime. You shortly shall
hear more.
I loved your father, and we love ourself.
And that, I hope, will teach you to
imagine—

Enter a MESSENGER

How now, what news?

MESSENGER

Letters, my lord, from Hamlet.
This to your majesty, this to the
queen. *(gives CLAUDIUS letters)*

CLAUDIUS

From Hamlet? Who brought them?

MESSENGER

- Sailors, my lord, they say. I saw them not.
40 They were given me by Claudio. He
received them
Of him that brought them.

CLAUDIUS

Laertes, you shall hear them.—Leave us.

Exit MESSENGER

(reads)

“High and mighty,
You shall know I am set naked on your
kingdom. Tomorrow shall I beg leave to
see your kingly eyes, when I shall, first

CLAUDIUS

Don’t you worry about that. You must
not think that I’m so lazy and dull that I
can be severely threatened and think it’s
just a game. You’ll hear more about my
plans soon enough. I loved your father,
and I love myself, which should be
enough to—

A MESSENGER enters with letters.

What is it? What’s the news?

MESSENGER

Letters, my lord, from Hamlet. This
one’s for Your Highness, this one for
the queen. *(gives CLAUDIUS letters)*

CLAUDIUS

From Hamlet? Who delivered them?

MESSENGER

Sailors, my lord, or so they say. I didn’t
see them. Claudio gave them to me, and
he got them from the one who delivered
them.

CLAUDIUS

Laertes, I want you to hear what they
say. Leave us alone now.

The MESSENGER exits.

(reads)

“High and Mighty one,
You know I’ve been set down naked,
you might say, in your kingdom.
Tomorrow I’ll beg permission to look

asking your pardon thereunto, recount the occasion of my sudden and more strange return.

Hamlet.”

What should this mean? Are all the rest come back? Or is it some abuse, and no such thing?

LAERTES

Know you the hand?

CLAUDIUS

’Tis Hamlet’s character. “Naked”?
50 And in a postscript here, he says “alone.”
Can you advise me?

LAERTES

I’m lost in it, my lord. But let him come.
It warms the very sickness in my heart
That I shall live and tell him to his teeth,
55 “Thus diddest thou.”

CLAUDIUS

If it be so, Laertes—
As how should it be so? How
otherwise?—
Will you be ruled by me?

LAERTES

Ay, my lord—
So you will not o’errule me to a peace.

CLAUDIUS

To thine own peace. If he be now returned,
60 As checking at his voyage, and that he means
No more to undertake it, I will work him
To an exploit, now ripe in my devise,
Under the which he shall not choose but

into your kingly eyes, at which point I’ll tell you the story (after first apologizing) of how I came back to Denmark so strangely and suddenly.

Hamlet”

What does this mean? Has everyone else come back too? Or is it all a lie—and no one has yet returned?

LAERTES

Do you recognize the handwriting?

CLAUDIUS

It’s Hamlet’s writing. “Naked,” he says. And in a P.S. he adds, “alone.” Can you help me out with this?

LAERTES

I have no clue, my lord. But let him come. It warms my weary heart to think I’ll get the chance to look him in the eye and say, “You did this.”

CLAUDIUS

If that’s how you feel, Laertes—and why shouldn’t you? Will you let me guide and direct you?

LAERTES

Yes, my lord, as long as you won’t lead me toward peace.

CLAUDIUS

No, just toward your own peace of mind. If he’s come back to Denmark without plans to continue on his trip, then I’ll trick him into an undertaking, which I’m working out now, that’s sure to kill him. When he dies, no one will

65 fall.
And for his death no wind of blame shall
breathe,
But even his mother shall uncharge the
practice
And call it accident.

LAERTES

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

CLAUDIUS

It falls right.
You have been talked of since your travel
70 much—
And that in Hamlet's hearing—for a
quality
Wherein, they say, you shine. Your sum of
parts
Did not together pluck such envy from
him
As did that one, and that, in my regard,
Of the unworthiest siege.

LAERTES

What part is that, my lord?

CLAUDIUS

75 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
80 months since,
Here was a gentleman of Normandy.
I've seen myself, and served against, the
French,
And they can well on horseback. But this

be blamed, even his mother will call it
an accident.

LAERTES

My lord, I'll let you make the decision.
I only ask to be in on your plans, the
agent of his death.

CLAUDIUS

That'll be fine. Since you left, people
have been talking about—and within
earshot of Hamlet—a certain quality of
yours in which, they say, you shine. All
your talents and gifts didn't arouse as
much envy from him as this one quality
did, though to me it's far from your best
attribute.

LAERTES

What quality is that, my lord?

CLAUDIUS

A trivial little ribbon on the cap of
youth—yet an important one, too, since
casual clothes suit young people as
much as serious business suits and
overcoats suit the middle-aged. Two
months ago I met a gentleman from
Normandy. I've fought against the
French and have seen how well they
ride, but this man was a magician on
horseback. It was as if he were part of

85 gallant
Had witchcraft in 't. He grew unto his
seat,
And to such wondrous doing brought his
horse
As he had been encorpsed and demi-
natured
With the brave beast. So far he topped my
thought,
That I, in forgery of shapes and tricks,
Come short of what he did.

LAERTES

A Norman was 't?

CLAUDIUS

A Norman.

LAERTES

90 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,
95 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,
100 nor eye,
If you opposed them. Sir, this report of his
Did Hamlet so envenom with his envy

the horse, so skillful that even having
seen him, I can hardly conceive of the
tricks he did.

LAERTES

Hmm, he was from Normandy, you
say?

CLAUDIUS

Yes, from Normandy.

LAERTES

I bet it was Lamond.

CLAUDIUS

Yes, that's the one.

LAERTES

I know him well. He's his homeland's
jewel.

CLAUDIUS

He mentioned you to me, giving you
such high marks in fencing that he
exclaimed it would be a miracle if
someone could match you. French
fencers wouldn't be good enough for
you, he said, since they don't have the
right moves or skills. Hamlet was so
jealous when he heard Lamond's report
that he talked about nothing else but
having you come over and play against
him. Now, the point is ...

That he could nothing do but wish and beg
Your sudden coming o'er, to play with him.
Now, out of this—

LAERTES

What out of this, my lord?

CLAUDIUS

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

LAERTES

Why ask you this?

CLAUDIUS

Not that I think you did not love your
father
But that I know love is begun by time,
110 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.
115 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
120 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

LAERTES

What's the point, my lord?

CLAUDIUS

Laertes, did you love your father? Or is
your grief just an illusion—a mere
painting of sorrow?

LAERTES

How could you ask?

CLAUDIUS

Not that I suspect you didn't love your
father, but I've seen it happen that, as
the days go by, time dampens the flame
of love. The fire of love always burns
itself out, and nothing stays the way it
began. Even a good thing can grow too
big and die from its own excess. We
should do what we intend to do right
when we intend it, since our intentions
are subject to as many weakenings and
delays as there are words in the
dictionary and accidents in life. And
then all our “woulds” and “shoulds” are
nothing but hot air. But back to my
point:
Hamlet's coming back. What proof will
you offer—in action, not just words—
that you're your father's son?

More than in words?

LAERTES

To cut his throat i' th' church.

CLAUDIUS

No place, indeed, should murder

125 sanctuarize.

Revenge should have no bounds. But, good
Laertes,

Will you do this, keep close within your
chamber.

130 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

135 The Frenchman gave you, bring you in fine
together

And wager on your heads. He, being
remiss,

Most generous and free from all contriving,
Will not peruse the foils; so that, with ease,
Or with a little shuffling, you may choose
A sword unbated, and in a pass of practice
Requite him for your father.

LAERTES

I will do 't.

And for that purpose I'll anoint my sword.

I bought an unction of a mountebank,
So mortal that, but dip a knife in it,

140 Where it draws blood no cataplasm so rare,
Collected from all simples that have virtue
Under the moon, can save the thing from
death

That is but scratched withal. I'll touch my

145 point

LAERTES

I'll cut Hamlet's throat in church.

CLAUDIUS

It's true, no place—not even a church—
should offer refuge to that murderer.

Revenge should have no limits. But
Laertes, will you do this: stay in your
room? When Hamlet comes home he'll
learn you're here. I'll have people praise
your excellence and put a double coat
on the fame the Frenchman gave you. In
short, we'll get you together and place
bets on you. Hamlet's so careless, high-
minded, and unsuspecting that he won't
examine the swords beforehand, so you
can easily choose one with a sharpened
point and in one thrust avenge the death
of your father.

LAERTES

I'll do it, and I'll put a little dab of
something on my sword as well. From a
quack doctor I bought some oil so
poisonous that if you dip a knife in it,
no medicine in the world can save the
person who's scratched by it. If I even
graze his skin slightly, he's likely to die.

With this contagion, that if I gall him
slightly
It may be death.

CLAUDIUS

Let's further think of this,
Weigh what convenience both of time and
means
May fit us to our shape. If this should fail,
And that our drift look through our bad
performance,
'Twere better not assayed. Therefore this
project

150 Should have a back or second that might
hold
If this should blast in proof.—Soft, let me
see.—
We'll make a solemn wager on your
155 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 venom'd
stuck,
Our purpose may hold there.—But stay,

CLAUDIUS

Let's think about this, and consider
what time and what method will be
most appropriate. If our plan were to
fail, and people found out about it, it
would be better never to have tried it.
We should have a backup ready in case
the first plan doesn't work. Let me
think. We'll place bets on you and
Hamlet—that's it! When the two of you
have gotten all sweaty and hot—keep
him jumping around a lot for that
purpose—Hamlet will ask for
something to drink. I'll have a cup
ready for him. If by chance he
escapes your poisoned sword tip, the
drink will kill him. But wait, what's that
sound?

what noise?

Enter GERTRUDE

GERTRUDE enters.

GERTRUDE

One woe doth tread upon another's heel,
160 So fast they follow.—Your sister's
drowned, Laertes.

LAERTES

Drowned? Oh, where?

GERTRUDE

There is a willow grows aslant a brook
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy
stream.
165 There with fantastic garlands did she come
Of crowflowers, nettles, daisies, and long
purples,
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do "dead men's
170 fingers" call them.
There, on the pendant boughs her coronet
weeds
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver
broke,
175 When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes
spread wide,
And mermaid-like a while they bore her
up,
Which time she chanted snatches of old
lauds
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and indued
Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their
drink,
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious

GERTRUDE

The bad news just keeps on coming, one
disaster after another. Your sister's
drowned, Laertes.

LAERTES

Drowned? Oh, where?

GERTRUDE

There's a willow that leans over the
brook, dangling its white leaves over the
glassy water. Ophelia made wild
wreaths out of those leaves, braiding in
crowflowers, thistles, daisies, and the
orchises that vulgar shepherds have an
obscene name for, but which pure-
minded girls call "dead men's fingers."
Climbing into the tree to hang the
wreath of weeds on the hanging
branches, she and her flowers fell into
the gurgling brook. Her clothes spread
out wide in the water, and buoyed her
up for a while as she sang bits of old
hymns, acting like someone who
doesn't realize the danger she's in, or
like someone completely accustomed to
danger. But it was only a matter of time
before her clothes, heavy with the water
they absorbed, pulled the poor thing out
of her song, down into the mud at the
bottom of the brook.

lay
To muddy death.

LAERTES

180 Alas, then she is drowned.

GERTRUDE

Drowned, drowned.

LAERTES

Too much of water hast thou, poor
Ophelia,

And therefore I forbid my tears. But yet

185 It is our trick. Nature her custom holds,
Let shame say what it will. When these are
gone,
The woman will be out.—Adieu, my lord.
I have a speech of fire that fain would
blaze,
But that this folly doubts it.

Exit LAERTES

CLAUDIUS

Let's follow, Gertrude.

How much I had to do to calm his rage!

190 Now fear I this will give it start again.
Therefore let's follow.

Exeunt

LAERTES

So she is drowned.

GERTRUDE

Drowned, drowned.

LAERTES

You've had too much water already,
poor Ophelia, so I won't shed watery
tears for you. But crying is what
humans do. We do what's in our nature,
even if we're ashamed of it. After I stop
crying I'll be through acting like a
woman. Good-bye, my lord. I have
some fiery words I could speak now,
but my foolish tears are drowning them
out.

LAERTES exits.

CLAUDIUS

Let's follow him, Gertrude. I worked so
hard to calm him down, and now I'm
worried he's getting all excited again.
Let's follow him.

They exit.

Act 5, Scene 1

*Enter a GRAVEDIGGER and
the OTHERgravedigger*

GRAVEDIGGER

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

OTHER

*A GRAVEDIGGER and
the OTHERgravedigger enter.*

GRAVEDIGGER

Are they really going to give her a
Christian burialafter she killed herself?

OTHER

I tell thee she is. Therefore make her grave straight. The crowner hath sat on her and finds it Christian burial.

GRAVEDIGGER

How can that be, unless she drowned herself in her own defense?

OTHER

Why, 'tis found so.

GRAVEDIGGER

It must be *se offendendo*. It cannot be else. For here lies the point: if I drown myself wittingly, it argues an act. And an act hath three branches—it is to act, to do, to perform. Argal, she drowned herself wittingly.

OTHER

Nay, but hear you, Goodman Delver—

GRAVEDIGGER

Give me leave. Here lies the water.

Good. Here stands the man. Good. If the man go to this water and drown himself, it is, will he nill he, he goes. Mark you that. But if the water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself.

Argal, he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life.

OTHER

But is this law?

GRAVEDIGGER

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

OTHER

Will you ha' the truth on 't? If this had not been a gentlewoman, she should have

I'm telling you, yes. So finish that grave right away. The coroner examined her case and says it should be a Christian funeral.

GRAVEDIGGER

But how, unless she drowned in self-defense?

OTHER

That's what they're saying she did.

GRAVEDIGGER

Sounds more like "self-offense," if you ask me. What I'm saying is, if she knew she was drowning herself, then that's an act. An act has three sides to it: to do, to act, and to perform. Therefore she must have known she was drowning herself.

OTHER

No, listen here, gravedigger sir—

GRAVEDIGGER

Let me finish. Here's the water, right?

And here's a man, okay? If the man goes into the water and drowns himself, he's the one doing it, like it or not. But if the water comes to him and drowns him, then he doesn't drown himself. Therefore, he who is innocent of his own death does not shorten his own life.

OTHER

Is that how the law sees it?

GRAVEDIGGER

It sure is. The coroner's inquest law.

OTHER

Do you want to know the truth? If this woman hadn't been rich, she wouldn't

been buried out o' Christian burial.

GRAVEDIGGER

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

OTHER

30 Was he a gentleman?

GRAVEDIGGER

He was the first that ever bore arms.

OTHER

Why, he had none.

GRAVEDIGGER

What, art a heathen? How dost thou understand the Scripture? The Scripture says Adam digged. Could he dig without arms? I'll put another question to thee. If thou answerest me not to the purpose, confess thyself—

OTHER

Go to.

GRAVEDIGGER

What is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?

OTHER

The gallows-maker, for that frame outlives a thousand tenants.

have been given a Christian burial.

GRAVEDIGGER

Well there, now you've said it. It's a pity that the rich have more freedom to hang or drown themselves than the rest of us Christians. Come on, shovel. The most ancient aristocrats in the world are gardeners, ditch-diggers, and gravediggers. They keep up Adam's profession.

OTHER

Was he an aristocrat? With a coat of arms?

GRAVEDIGGER

He was the first person who ever had arms.

OTHER

He didn't have any.

GRAVEDIGGER

What, aren't you a Christian? The Bible says Adam dug in the ground. How could he dig without arms? I'll ask you another question. If you can't answer it—

OTHER

Go ahead!

GRAVEDIGGER

What do you call a person who builds stronger things than a stonemason, a shipbuilder, or a carpenter does?

OTHER

The one who builds the gallows to hang people on, since his structure outlives a

GRAVEDIGGER

I like thy wit well, in good faith. The gallows does well, but how does it well? It does well to those that do ill.

Now thou dost ill to say the gallows is built stronger than the church. Argal, the gallows may do well to thee. To 't again, come.

OTHER

“Who builds stronger than a mason, a shipwright, or a carpenter?”

GRAVEDIGGER

Ay, tell me that, and unyoke.

OTHER

Marry, now I can tell.

GRAVEDIGGER

50 To 't.

OTHER

Mass, I cannot tell.

Enter HAMLET and HORATIO afar off

GRAVEDIGGER

Cudgel thy brains no more about it, for your dull ass will not mend his pace with beating. And when you are asked this question next, say “A grave-maker.” The houses that he makes last till doomsday. Go, get thee in. Fetch me a stoup of liquor.

Exit OTHER

(digs and sings)

thousand inhabitants.

GRAVEDIGGER

You're funny, and I like that. The gallows do a good job. But how? It does a good job for those who do bad.

Now, it's wrong to say that the gallows are stronger than a church. Therefore, the gallows may do *you* some good. Come on, your turn.

OTHER

Let's see, “Who builds stronger things than a stonemason, a shipbuilder, or a carpenter?”

GRAVEDIGGER

That's the question, so answer it.

OTHER

Ah, I've got it!

GRAVEDIGGER

Go ahead.

OTHER

Damn, I forgot.

HAMLET and HORATIO enter in the distance.

GRAVEDIGGER

Don't beat your brains out over it. You can't make a slow donkey run by beating it. The next time someone asks you this riddle, say “a gravedigger.” The houses he makes last till Judgment Day. Now go and get me some booze.

The OTHER GRAVEDIGGER exits.

(the 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.*

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

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

HAMLET

'Tis e'en so. The hand of little employment hath the daintier sense.

GRAVEDIGGER

(sings)

*But age with his stealing steps
Hath clawed me in his clutch,
And hath shipped me into the land
As if I had never been such.*

(throws up a skull)

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

70 It might, my lord.

HAMLET

Or of a courtier, which could say, "Good

*In my youth I loved, I loved,
And I though it was very sweet
To set—ohh—the date for—ahh—my
duty
Oh, I thought it—ahh—was not
right.*

HAMLET

Doesn't this guy realize what he's doing? He's singing while digging a grave.

HORATIO

He's gotten so used to graves that they don't bother him anymore.

HAMLET

Yes, exactly. Only people who don't have to work can afford to be sensitive.

GRAVEDIGGER

(sings)

*But old age has sneaked up on me
And grabbed me in his claws,
And has shipped me into the ground
As if I'd never been like that.*

(he throws up a skull)

HAMLET

That skull had a tongue in it once and could sing. That jackass is throwing it around as if it belonged to Cain, who did the first murder! It might be the skull of a politician once capable of talking his way around God, right? And now this idiot is pulling rank on him.

HORATIO

Indeed, my lord.

HAMLET

Or a courtier, who could say things like,

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

75 Ay, my lord.

HAMLET

Why, e’en so. And now my Lady Worm’s, chapless and knocked about the mazard with a sexton’s spade. Here’s fine revolution, an we had the trick to see ’t. Did these bones cost no more the breeding but to play at loggets with them? Mine ache to think on ’t.

GRAVEDIGGER

(sings)

*A pickax and a spade, a spade,
For and a shrouding sheet,
Oh, a pit of clay for to be made
For such a guest is meet.*

(throws up another skull)

HAMLET

There’s another. Why may not that be the skull of a lawyer? Where be his quiddities now, his quillities, his cases, his tenures, and his tricks? Why does he suffer this rude knave now to knock him about the scone with a dirty shovel and will not tell him of his action of battery? Hum! This fellow might be in ’s time a great buyer of land, with his statutes, his recognizances, his fines, his double vouchers, his recoveries. Is this the fine of his fines and

“Good night, my sweet lord! How are you doing, good lord?” This might be the skull of Lord So-and-So, who praised Lord Such-and-Such’s horse when he wanted to borrow it, right?

HORATIO

Yes, my lord.

HAMLET

Exactly. And now it’s the property of Lady Worm, its lower jaw knocked off and thwacked on the noggin with a shovel. That’s quite a reversal of fortune, isn’t it, if we could only see it? Are these bones worth nothing more than bowling pins now? It makes my bones ache to think about it.

GRAVEDIGGER

(sings)

*A pickax and a shovel, a shovel,
And a sheet for a funeral shroud,
Oh, a pit of dirt is what we need
For a guest like this one here.*

(he throws up another skull)

HAMLET

There’s another. Could that be a lawyer’s skull? Where’s all his razzle-dazzle legal jargon now? Why does he allow this idiot to knock him on the head with a dirty shovel, instead of suing him for assault and battery? Maybe this guy was once a great landowner, with his deeds and contracts, his tax shelters and his annuities. Is it part of his deed of ownership to have his skull filled up with dirt? Does he only

the recovery of his recoveries, to have his fine pate full of fine dirt? Will his vouchers vouch him no more of his purchases, and double ones too, than the length and breadth of a pair of indentures? The very conveyances of his lands will hardly lie in this box, and must the inheritor himself have no more, ha?

HORATIO

Not a jot more, my lord.

HAMLET

Is not parchment made of sheepskins?

HORATIO

Ay, my lord, and of calfskins too.

HAMLET

100 They are sheep and calves which seek out assurance in that.

I will speak to this fellow.—Whose grave's this, sirrah?

GRAVEDIGGER

Mine, sir.

(sings)

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

HAMLET

I think it be thine, indeed, for thou liest in 't.

GRAVEDIGGER

You lie out on 't, sir, and therefore it is not yours. For my part, I do not lie in 't, and yet it is mine.

HAMLET

get to keep as much land as a set of contracts would cover if you spread them out on the ground? The deeds to his properties would barely fit in this coffin—and the coffin's all the property he gets to keep?

HORATIO

No more than that, my lord.

HAMLET

Isn't the parchment of a legal document made of sheepskin?

HORATIO

Yes, my lord, and calfskin too.

HAMLET

Anyone who puts his trust in such documents is a sheep or a calf. I'll talk to this guy.—Excuse me, sir, whose grave is this?

GRAVEDIGGER

It's mine, sir.

(sings)

*Oh, a pit of dirt is what we need
For a guest like this one here.*

HAMLET

I think it really must be yours, since you're the one lying in it.

GRAVEDIGGER

And you're lying outside of it, so it's not yours. As for me, I'm not lying to you in it—it's really mine.

HAMLET

Thou dost lie in 't, to be in 't and say it is thine. 'Tis for the dead, not for the quick. Therefore thou liest.

GRAVEDIGGER

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

HAMLET

110 What man dost thou dig it for?

GRAVEDIGGER

For no man, sir.

HAMLET

What woman, then?

GRAVEDIGGER

For none, neither.

HAMLET

Who is to be buried in 't?

GRAVEDIGGER

115 One that was a woman, sir, but, rest her soul, she's dead.

HAMLET

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

GRAVEDIGGER

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

HAMLET

How long is that since?

But you *are* lying in it, being in it and saying it's yours. It's for the dead, not the living. So you're lying.

GRAVEDIGGER

That's a lively lie, sir—it jumps so fast from me to you.

HAMLET

What man are you digging it for?

GRAVEDIGGER

For no man, sir.

HAMLET

What woman, then?

GRAVEDIGGER

For no woman, either.

HAMLET

Who's to be buried in it?

GRAVEDIGGER

One who used to be a woman but—bless her soul—is dead now.

HAMLET

How literal this guy is! We have to speak precisely, or he'll get the better of us with his wordplay. Lord, Horatio, I've been noticing this for a few years now. The peasants have become so clever and witty that they're nipping at the heels of noblemen.—How long have you been a gravedigger?

GRAVEDIGGER

Of all the days in the year, I started the day that the late King Hamlet defeated Fortinbras.

HAMLET

How long ago was that?

GRAVEDIGGER

Cannot you tell that? Every fool can tell that. It was the very day that young Hamlet was born, he that is mad and sent into England.

HAMLET

Ay, marry, why was he sent into England?

GRAVEDIGGER

Why, because he was mad. He shall recover his wits there, or, if he do not, it's no great matter there.

HAMLET

Why?

GRAVEDIGGER

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

HAMLET

How came he mad?

GRAVEDIGGER

135 Very strangely, they say.

HAMLET

How "strangely"?

GRAVEDIGGER

Faith, e'en with losing his wits.

HAMLET

Upon what ground?

GRAVEDIGGER

Why, here in Denmark. I have been sexton here, man and boy, thirty years.

HAMLET

How long will a man lie i' the earth ere he rot?

GRAVEDIGGER

GRAVEDIGGER

You don't know that? Any fool could tell you, it was the day that young Hamlet was born—the one who went crazy and got sent off to England.

HAMLET

Why was he sent to England?

GRAVEDIGGER

Because he was crazy. He'll recover his sanity there. Or if he doesn't, it won't matter in England.

HAMLET

Why not?

GRAVEDIGGER

Because nobody will notice he's crazy. Everyone there is as crazy as he is.

HAMLET

How did he go crazy?

GRAVEDIGGER

In a strange way, they say.

HAMLET

What do you mean, "in a strange way"?

GRAVEDIGGER

By losing his mind.

HAMLET

On what grounds?

GRAVEDIGGER

Right here in Denmark. I've been the church warden here for thirty years, since childhood.

HAMLET

How long will a man lie in his grave before he starts to rot?

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 he more than another?

GRAVEDIGGER

Why, sir, his hide is so tanned with his trade that he will keep out water a great while, and your water is a sore decayer of your whoreson dead body.*(indicates a skull)* Here's a skull now. This skull has lain in the earth three-and-twenty years.

HAMLET

Whose was it?

GRAVEDIGGER

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

HAMLET

Nay, I know not.

GRAVEDIGGER

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

HAMLET

This?

GRAVEDIGGER

E'en that.

HAMLET

Let me see. *(takes the skull)* Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of

Well, if he's not rotten before he dies (and there are a lot of people now who are so rotten they start falling to pieces even before you put them in the coffin), he'll last eight or nine years. A leathermaker will last nine years.

HAMLET

Why does he last longer?

GRAVEDIGGER

Because his hide is so leathery from his trade that he keeps the water off him a long time, and water is what makes your goddamn body rot more than anything. Here's a skull that's been here twenty-three years.

HAMLET

Whose was it?

GRAVEDIGGER

A crazy bastard. Who do you think?

HAMLET

I really don't know.

GRAVEDIGGER

Damn that crazy madman! He poured a pitcher of white wine on my head once. This is the skull of Yorick, the king's jester.

HAMLET

This one?

GRAVEDIGGER

Yes, that one.

HAMLET

Let me see. *(he takes the skull)* Oh, poor Yorick! I used to know him, Horatio—a

infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath borne me on his back a thousand times, and now, how abhorred in my imagination it is! My gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. —Where be your gibes now? Your gambols? Your songs? Your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now to mock your own grinning? Quite chapfallen? Now get you to my lady's chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favor she must come. Make her laugh at that.—Prithee, Horatio, tell me one thing.

HORATIO

What's that, my lord?

HAMLET

Dost thou think Alexander looked o' this fashion i' th' earth?

HORATIO

175 E'en so.

HAMLET

And smelt so? Pah! (*puts down the skull*)

HORATIO

E'en so, my lord.

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

very funny guy, and with an excellent imagination. He carried me on his back a thousand times, and now—how terrible—this is him. It makes my stomach turn. I don't know how many times I kissed the lips that used to be right here. Where are your jokes now? Your pranks? Your songs? Your flashes of wit that used to set the whole table laughing? You don't make anybody smile now. Are you sad about that? You need to go to my lady's room and tell her that no matter how much makeup she slathers on, she'll end up just like you some day. That'll make her laugh. Horatio, tell me something.

HORATIO

What's that, my lord?

HAMLET

Do you think Alexander the Great looked like this when he was buried?

HORATIO

Exactly like that.

HAMLET

And smelled like that, too? Whew! (*he puts down the skull*)

HORATIO

Just as bad, my lord.

HAMLET

How low we can fall, Horatio. Isn't it possible to imagine that the noble ashes of Alexander the Great could end up plugging a hole in a barrel?

HORATIO

'Twere to consider too curiously, to consider so.

HAMLET

No, faith, not a jot. But to follow him
thither with modesty enough, and
likelihood to lead it, as thus: Alexander
190 died, Alexander was buried, Alexander
returneth to dust, the dust is earth, of earth
we make loam—and why of that loam,
whereto he was converted, might they not
stop a beer barrel?
Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay,
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.
Oh, that that earth, which kept the world
in awe,
Should patch a wall t' expel the winter's
flaw!
But soft, but soft a while.

*Enter King **CLAUDIUS**,
Queen **GERTRUDE**, **LAERTES**, and a
coffin, with a **PRIEST** and other lords
attendant.*

Here comes the king,
The queen, the courtiers—who is this they
follow,
195 And with such maimèd rites? This doth
betoken
The corse they follow did with desperate
hand
Fordo its own life. 'Twas of some estate.
Couch we a while and mark.

***HAMLET** and **HORATIO** withdraw*

LAERTES

What ceremony else?

If you thought that you'd be thinking too much.

HAMLET

No, not at all. Just follow the logic:
Alexander died, Alexander was buried,
Alexander returned to dust, the dust is
dirt, and dirt makes mud we use to stop
up holes. So why can't someone plug a
beer barrel with the dirt that used to be
Alexander? The great emperor Caesar,
dead and turned to clay, might plug up a
hole to keep the wind away. Oh, to think
that the same body that once ruled the
world could now patch up a wall! But
quiet, be quiet a minute.

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

Here comes the king, the queen, and the
noblemen of court. Who are they
following? And with such a plain and
scrawny ceremony? It means the corpse
they're following took its own life. Must
have been from a wealthy family. Let's
stay and watch a while.

***HAMLET** and **HORATIO** step aside.*

LAERTES

What other rites are you going to give

HAMLET

That is Laertes, a very noble youth, mark.

LAERTES

What ceremony else?

PRIEST

200 Her obsequies have been as far enlarged
As we have warranty. Her death was
doubtful,
And, but that great command o'ersways the
order,
205 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

210 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
215 May violets spring! I tell thee, churlish
priest,

her?

HAMLET

That's Laertes, a very noble young
man. Listen.

LAERTES

What other rites are you going to give
her?

PRIEST

I've performed as many rites as I'm
permitted. Her death was suspicious,
and were it not for the fact that the king
gave orders to bury her here, she'd have
been buried outside the church
graveyard. She deserves to have rocks
and stones thrown on her body. But she
has had prayers read for her and is
dressed up like a pure virgin, with
flowers tossed on her grave and the bell
tolling for her.

LAERTES

Isn't there any other rite you can
perform?

PRIEST

No, nothing. We would profane the
other dead souls here if we sang the
same requiem for her that we sang for
them.

LAERTES

Lay her in the ground, and let violets
bloom from her lovely and pure flesh!
I'm telling you, you jerk priest, my
sister will be an angel in heaven while

A ministering angel shall my sister be
When thou liest howling.

HAMLET

(to HORATIO) What, the fair Ophelia?

GERTRUDE

Sweets to the sweet. Farewell! (*scatters*
220 *flowers*)

I hoped thou shouldst have been my
Hamlet's wife.

I thought thy bride-bed to have decked,
sweet maid,

And not have strewed thy grave.

LAERTES

Oh, treble woe

Fall ten times treble on that cursèd head,
Whose wicked deed thy most ingenious

225 sense

Deprived thee of! Hold off the earth
awhile

Till I have caught her once more in mine
arms.

(leaps into the grave)

Now pile your dust upon the quick and
dead,

Till of this flat a mountain you have made,

230 T' o'ertop old Pelion or the skyish head
Of blue Olympus.

HAMLET

(*comes forward*) What is he whose grief
Bears such an emphasis, whose phrase of
sorrow

Conjures the wandering stars, and makes
them stand

Like wonder-wounded hearers? This is I,

you're howling in hell.

HAMLET

(to HORATIO) What, the beautiful
Ophelia?

QUEEN

Sweet flowers for a sweet girl.

Goodbye! (*she scatters flowers*) I once
hoped you'd be my Hamlet's wife. I
thought I'd be tossing flowers on your
wedding bed, my sweet girl, not on your
grave.

LAERTES

Oh, damn three times, damn ten times
the evil man whose wicked deed
deprived you of your ingenious mind.
Hold off burying her until I've caught
her in my arms once more.

(he jumps into the grave)

Now pile the dirt onto the living and the
dead alike, till you've made a mountain
higher than Mount Pelion or Mount
Olympus.

HAMLET

(*coming forward*) Who is the one whose
grief is so loud and clear, whose words
of sadness make the planets stand still in
the heavens as if they've been hurt by
what they've heard? It's me, Hamlet the
Dane. (*he jumps into the grave*)

Hamlet the Dane. (*leaps into the grave*)

LAERTES

235 The devil take thy soul!

HAMLET and LAERTES grapple

HAMLET

Thou pray'st not well.

I prithee, take thy fingers from my throat,
For though I am not splenitive and rash,
Yet have I something in me dangerous,

240 Which let thy wisdom fear. Hold off thy
hand.

CLAUDIUS

Pluck them asunder.

GERTRUDE

Hamlet, Hamlet!

ALL

Gentlemen—

HORATIO

(to HAMLET) Good my lord, be quiet.

Attendants

separate HAMLET and LAERTES

HAMLET

Why, I will fight with him upon this
245 theme

Until my eyelids will no longer wag.

GERTRUDE

O my son, what theme?

HAMLET

I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers
Could not with all their quantity of love
Make up my sum. What wilt thou do for

LAERTES

To hell with your soul!

*HAMLET and LAERTES wrestle with
each other.*

HAMLET

That's no way to pray. (*they
fight*) Please take your hands off my
throat. I may not be rash and quick to
anger, but I have something dangerous
in me which you should beware of. Take
your hands off.

CLAUDIUS

Pull them apart.

GERTRUDE

Hamlet! Hamlet!

ALL

Gentlemen!

HORATIO

(to HAMLET) Please, my lord, calm
down.

Attendants

separate HAMLET and LAERTES

HAMLET

I'll fight him over this issue till I don't
have the strength to blink.

GERTRUDE

Oh, my son, what issue is that?

HAMLET

I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand
brothers, if you added all their love
together, couldn't match mine. What are

her?

CLAUDIUS

250 O, he is mad, Laertes.

GERTRUDE

For love of God, forbear him.

HAMLET

'Swounds, show me what thou'lt do.

Woo't weep? Woo't fight? Woo't fast?

Woo't tear thyself?

255 Woo't drink up eisel, eat a crocodile?

I'll do 't. Dost thou come here to whine,

To outface me with leaping in her grave?

Be buried quick with her?—and so will I.

And if thou prate of mountains let them

260 throw

Millions of acres on us, till our ground,

Singeing his pate against the burning
zone,

Make Ossa like a wart! Nay, an thou'lt
mouth,

I'll rant as well as thou.

GERTRUDE

This is mere madness.

And thus a while the fit will work on him.

Anon, as patient as the female dove

265 When that her golden couplets are
disclosed,

His silence will sit drooping.

HAMLET

Hear you, sir.

What is the reason that you use me thus?

I loved you ever. But it is no matter.

Let Hercules himself do what he may,

The cat will mew and dog will have his

you going to do for her?

CLAUDIUS

Oh, he's crazy, Laertes!

GERTRUDE

For the love of God, be patient with
him.

HAMLET

Damn it, show me what you're going to
do for her. Will you cry? Fight? Stop
eating? Cut yourself? Drink vinegar?

Eat a crocodile? I'll do all that. Did you
come here to whine? To outdo me by
jumping into her grave so theatrically?
To be buried alive with her? So will I.

And if you rattle on about mountains,
then let them throw millions of acres
over us. It will be so high a peak that it
scrapes against heaven and makes
Mount Ossa look like a wart. See? I can
talk crazy as well as you.

GERTRUDE

This is pure insanity. He'll be like this
for a little while. Then he'll be as calm
and quiet as a dove waiting for her eggs
to hatch.

HAMLET

Listen, sir, why do you treat me like
this? I always loved you. But it doesn't
matter. Even a hero like Hercules can't
keep cats from acting like cats, and dogs
like dogs.

270 day.

Exit HAMLET

HAMLET exits.

CLAUDIUS

I pray thee, good Horatio, wait upon him.

Exit HORATIO

CLAUDIUS

Please, Horatio, go with him.

HORATIO exits.

(to LAERTES) Strengthen your patience
in our last night's speech.

We'll put the matter to the present push.—

275 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.

(to LAERTES) Don't forget our talk
last night, and try to be patient. We'll
take care of this problem soon.—

Gertrude, have the guards keep an eye
on your son. A monument shall be built
for Ophelia that will last forever, I
promise. We'll have the quiet we need
soon. In the meantime, let's proceed
patiently.

Exeunt

They exit.

Act 5, Scene 2

Enter HAMLET and HORATIO

HAMLET and HORATIO enter.

HAMLET

So much for this, sir. Now shall you see the
other.

You do remember all the circumstance?

HORATIO

Remember it, my lord?

HAMLET

Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting

5 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

10 Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well
When our deep plots do pall, and that

HAMLET

That's enough about that. Now I'll tell
you the other story about my journey. Do
you remember the circumstances?

HORATIO

How could I forget, my lord!

HAMLET

There was a kind of war in my brain that
wouldn't let me sleep. It was worse than
being a captive in chains. Sometimes it's
good to be rash—sometimes it works out
well to act impulsively when our careful
plans lose steam. This should show us
that there's a God in heaven who's
always guiding us in the right direction,

should teach us
There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will—

HORATIO

That is most certain.

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

Is 't possible?

HAMLET

(shows HORATIO a document)

Here's the commission. Read it at more
leisure.

But wilt thou hear me how I did proceed?

HORATIO

30 I beseech you.

HAMLET

Being thus benetted round with villainies—
Ere I could make a prologue to my brains,

however often we screw up—

HORATIO

Well, of course.

HAMLET

So I came up from my cabin with my
robe tied around me, groped in the dark
to find what I was looking for, found it,
looked through their packet of papers,
and returned to my cabin again. I was
bold enough (I guess my fears made me
forget my manners) to open the
document containing the king's
instructions. And there I found, Horatio,
such royal mischief—a precisely worded
order, sugared with lots of talk about
Denmark's well-being and England's
too, to cut off my head, without even
waiting to sharpen the ax.

HORATIO

Is it possible?

HAMLET

(he shows HORATIO a

document) Here's the document. Read it
in your free time. But do you want to
hear what I did then?

HORATIO

Yes, please tell me.

HAMLET

So there I was, caught in their evil net.
Before I could even start processing the

They had begun the play—I sat me down,
Devised a new commission, wrote it fair.
35 I once did hold it, as our statist do,
A baseness to write fair, and labored much
How to forget that learning, but, sir, now
It did me yeoman's service. Wilt thou
know
Th' effect of what I wrote?

HORATIO

40 Ay, good my lord.

HAMLET

An earnest conjuration from the king,
As England was his faithful tributary,
As love between them like the palm might
flourish,
45 As peace should stiff her wheaten garland
wear
And stand a comma 'tween their amities,
And many suchlike "as's" of great charge,
That, on the view and knowing of these
50 contents,
Without debatement further, more or less,
He should the bearers put to sudden death,
Not shriving time allowed.

HORATIO

How was this sealed?

HAMLET

Why, even in that was heaven ordant.
I had my father's signet in my purse,
Which was the model of that Danish seal.
55 Folded the writ up in form of th' other,
Subscribed it, gave 't th' impression, placed

situation, they had started the ball rolling.
I sat down and wrote out a new official
document with new instructions. I wrote
it in a bureaucrat's neat handwriting. I
used to think having nice handwriting
was for servants, just like our politicians
think, and I had to work hard to
overcome that prejudice—but it sure
came in handy then. Do you want to
know what I wrote?

HORATIO

Yes, my lord.

HAMLET

A sincere plea from the king, who
commands the respect of England, and
who hopes that the love between the two
countries can flourish, and that peace can
join them in friendship—and other fancy
mumbo jumbo like that—saying that,
once they read this document, without
any debate, the ones delivering the letter
should be put to death immediately,
without giving them time to confess to a
priest.

HORATIO

But how could you put an official seal on
it?

HAMLET

Heaven helped me out with that too. I
had my father's signet ring in my pocket,
with the royal seal of Denmark on it. I
folded up the new document, signed it,
sealed it, and put it safely back so that no

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

60 So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to 't.

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

Why, what a king is this!

HAMLET

Does it not, think thee, stand me now
upon—
70 He that hath killed my king and whored my
mother,
Popped in between th' election and my
hopes,
Thrown out his angle for my proper life
75 (And with such cozenage!)—is 't not
perfect conscience
To quit him with this arm? And is 't not to
be damned
To let this canker of our nature come
In further evil?

one noticed any difference. The next day
we had our fight at sea, and you know
what happened after that.

HORATIO

So Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are in
for it.

HAMLET

Man, they were asking for it. I don't feel
guilty about them at all. They got what
they deserved. It's always dangerous
when little people get caught in the
crossfire of mighty opponents.

HORATIO

What a king Claudius is!

HAMLET

Don't you think it's my duty now to kill
him with this weapon? This man who
killed my king, made my mother a
whore, took the throne that I hoped for,
and set a trap to kill me. Isn't it
completely moral to kill him now with
this sword—and an easy conscience?
And wouldn't I be damned if I let this
monster live to do more harm?

HORATIO

It must be shortly known to him from
England
What is the issue of the business there.

HAMLET

It will be short. The interim's mine.
And a man's life's no more than to say
80 "one."
But I am very sorry, good Horatio,
That to Laertes I forgot myself,
For by the image of my cause I see
The portraiture of his. I'll court his favors.
85 But sure the bravery of his grief did put me
Into a towering passion.

HORATIO

Peace.—Who comes here?

*Enter young OSRIC, a courtier, hat in
hand*

OSRIC

Your lordship is right welcome back to
Denmark.

HAMLET

I humbly thank you, sir. *(aside
to HORATIO)* Dost know this water-fly?

HORATIO

(aside to HAMLET) No, my good lord.

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

He'll find out soon what happened in
England.

HAMLET

Soon enough. But I have the meantime.
A human life is hardly long enough to
count to one in. But I really feel bad,
Horatio, about losing control of myself
with Laertes. His situation is very much
like my own. I'll be nice to him. It was
just that the showiness of his grief sent
me into a fury.

HORATIO

Hang on a minute—who are you?

*OSRIC, a young courtier, enters with his
hat in his hand.*

OSRIC

Welcome back to Denmark, my lord.

HAMLET

Thank you kindly, sir. *(speaking so that
only HORATIO can hear)* Do you know
this insect?

HORATIO

*(speaking so that only HAMLET can
hear)* No, my lord.

HAMLET

*(speaking so that only HORATIO can
hear)* You're lucky, since knowing him is
most unpleasant. He owns a lot of good
land. Give an animal a lot of money, and
he'll be welcome at the king's table. He's

spacious in the possession of dirt.

OSRIC

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

HAMLET

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

OSRIC

I thank your lordship. It is very hot.

HAMLET

100

No, believe me, 'tis very cold. The wind is northerly.

OSRIC

It is indifferent cold, my lord, indeed.

HAMLET

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

OSRIC

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

HAMLET

I beseech you, remember—(*indicates that OSRIC should put on his hat*)

a jerk, but he owns a whole lot of dirt, so he's treated well.

OSRIC

My lord, if you have a free moment, I have a message from His Majesty.

HAMLET

I'll hang on every word you say. Put your hat back on, where it belongs: it's for your head, not for your hands to hold.

OSRIC

No thank you, my lord. It's very hot.

HAMLET

No, I'm telling you, it's very cold, with a northerly wind.

OSRIC

It is rather cold, indeed, my lord.

HAMLET

And yet I feel it's very hot and humid, which is bad for my complexion.

OSRIC

Yes indeed it is, sir. Very humid, I can't tell you how humid it is. My lord, His Majesty wanted me to tell you that he's placed a large bet on you. This is what it's all about—

HAMLET

Please, I beg you—(*he points to OSRIC's hat*)

OSRIC

Nay, good my lord, for mine ease, in good faith. Sir, here is newly come to court Laertes, believe me, an absolute gentleman, full of most excellent differences, of very soft society and great showing. Indeed, to speak feelingly of him, he is the card or calendar of gentry, for you shall find in him the continent of what part a gentleman would see.

HAMLET

Sir, his definement suffers no perdition in you, though I know to divide him inventorially would dizzy th' arithmetic of memory, and yet but yaw neither, in respect of his quick sail.

But in the verity of extolment, I take him to be a soul of great article, and his infusion of such dearch 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

No, my lord, I'm comfortable like this, thank you. Sir, there's someone named Laertes who's recently come to the court. He's an absolute gentleman, totally outstanding in so many respects, very easy in society, and displaying all his excellent qualities. If I were to expose my true feelings about him, I'd have to say he's like a business card for the upper classes—he's that wonderful. You'll find that he's the sum total of what a perfect gentleman should be.

HAMLET

Sir, your description of him doesn't detract from his good qualities, though I know that trying to list them all would make your head spin, and even so you wouldn't be able to keep up with him.

Speaking the very truth of high praise, I can honestly say that I find him to possess a soul of such great importance, and so rare and unique in every respect, that—to speak the absolute truth—he can find an equal only when he gazes into a mirror. Anyone else is just a pale copy of him.

OSRIC

You speak absolutely correctly, sir.

HAMLET

And what's the point, sir? Why are we talking about him like this?

OSRIC
125 Sir?

HORATIO
(*aside to HAMLET*) Is 't not possible to understand in another tongue? You will do 't, sir, really.

HAMLET
What imports the nomination of this gentleman?

OSRIC
Of Laertes?

HORATIO
(*aside to HAMLET*) His purse is empty already. All 's golden words are spent.

HAMLET
Of him, sir.

OSRIC
I know you are not ignorant—

HAMLET
I would you did, sir. Yet in faith, if you did, it would not much approve me. Well, sir?

OSRIC
You are not ignorant of what excellence Laertes is—

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

OSRIC
I mean, sir, for his weapon. But in the imputation laid on him by them, in his

OSRIC
Sorry, sir?

HORATIO
(*speaking so that only HAMLET can hear*) Can't you talk to him in a different way?

HAMLET
(*to OSRIC*) What is the significance of referring to this individual?

OSRIC
Laertes, you mean?

HORATIO
(*speaking so that only HAMLET can hear*) All his fancy language has run out finally; his pockets are empty.

HAMLET
Yes, Laertes, sir.

OSRIC
I know you know something—

HAMLET
Thanks for the compliment, I'm happy you know that. But in fact it doesn't say much. I'm sorry, you were saying?

OSRIC
I know you know something about how excellent Laertes is—

HAMLET
I can't admit that, since you'd have to compare his excellence to mine. But knowing a person well is a bit like knowing oneself.

OSRIC
Excellent in fencing, I mean, sir. His reputation in fencing is unrivaled.

meed he's unfellowed.

HAMLET

What's his weapon?

OSRIC

Rapier and dagger.

HAMLET

That's two of his weapons. But well.

OSRIC

The king, sir, hath wagered with him six Barbary horses, against the which he has impawned, as I take it, six French rapiers and poniards with their assigns—as girdle, hangers, and so. Three of the carriages, in faith, are very dear to fancy, very responsive to the hilts, most delicate carriages, and of very liberal conceit.

HAMLET

150 What call you the carriages?

HORATIO

(aside to HAMLET) I knew you must be edified by the margin ere you had done.

OSRIC

The carriages, sir, are the hangers.

HAMLET

The phrase would be more germane to the matter if we could carry cannon by our sides. I would it might be hangers till then. But, on: six Barbary horses against six French swords, their assigns, and three liberal-conceited carriages—that's

HAMLET

What kind of weapon does he use?

OSRIC

The rapier and the dagger.

HAMLET

Those are only two of his weapons. But, go on.

OSRIC

The king has bet six Barbary horses, and he has prepared six French rapiers and daggers with all their accessories. Three of the carriages are very imaginatively designed, and they match the fencing accessories.

HAMLET

What do you mean by "carriages"?

HORATIO

(speaking so that only HAMLET can hear) I knew you'd have to look something up in the dictionary before we were finished.

OSRIC

The carriages, sir, are the hangers—where the swords hang.

HAMLET

"Carriage" makes it sound like it's pulling around a cannon. I prefer to call it a "hanger." But anyway. Six Barbary horses, six French swords with accessories, and three imaginatively designed carriages—sounds like a French bet against the Danish.

the French bet against the Danish. Why is this “impawned,” as you call it?

OSRIC

The king, sir, hath laid that in a dozen passes between yourself and him, he shall not exceed you three hits. He hath laid on twelve for nine, and it would come to immediate trial if your lordship would vouchsafe the answer.

HAMLET

How if I answer “No”?

OSRIC

165 I mean, my lord, the opposition of your person in trial.

HAMLET

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

OSRIC

Shall I redeliver you e'en so?

HAMLET

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

OSRIC

I commend my duty to your lordship.

HAMLET

Yours, yours.

Exit OSRIC

He does well to commend it himself. There are no tongues else for 's turn.

Why has all this been put on the table?

OSRIC

The king, sir, has bet that in a dozen rounds between you and Laertes, he won't beat you by more than three hits. You could get started immediately if you'll give me your answer.

HAMLET

But what if my answer's no?

OSRIC

I mean, if you'd agree to play against Laertes, sir.

HAMLET

Sir, I'm going to go for a walk in the hall here whether the king likes it or not. It's my exercise time. Bring in the swords, if the king still wants to go through with it and if Laertes is still willing. I'll have the king win his bet if I can. If not, I'll only have suffered some embarrassment and a few sword hits.

OSRIC

Shall I quote you in those exact words, sir?

HAMLET

Just get the point across, however flowery you want to be.

OSRIC

My services are at your command.

HAMLET

Thank you.

OSRIC exits.

It's a good thing he's here to recommend himself. No one else would.

HORATIO

This lapwing runs away with the shell on his head.

HAMLET

He did comply, sir, with his dug before he sucked it. Thus has he—and many more of the same bevy that I know the drossy age dotes on—only got the tune of the time and outward habit of encounter, a kind of yeasty collection, which carries them through and through the most fond and winnowed opinions; and do but blow them to their trial, the bubbles are out.

Enter a LORD

LORD

My lord, his majesty commended him to you by young Osric, who brings back to him that you attend him in the hall. He sends to know if your pleasure hold to play with Laertes, or that you will take longer time.

HAMLET

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

LORD

The king and queen and all are coming down.

HAMLET

In happy time.

LORD

HORATIO

That crazy bird's only half-hatched.

HAMLET

He used to praise his mother's nipple before he sucked it. He's like so many successful people in these trashy times—he's patched together enough fancy phrases and trendy opinions to carry him along. But blow a little on this bubbly talk, and it'll burst. There's no substance here.

A LORD enters.

LORD

My lord, Osric has told the king about your agreeing to the fencing match. The king wishes to know if you want to play against him right away, or wait awhile.

HAMLET

I'll do whatever the king wants. If he's ready now, so am I. Otherwise, I'll do it anytime, as long as I'm able.

LORD

The king and queen are coming down with everyone else.

HAMLET

Right on cue.

LORD

The queen desires you to use some
gentle entertainment to
Laertes before you fall to play.

Exit LORD

HAMLET

195 She well instructs me.

HORATIO

You will lose this wager, my lord.

HAMLET

I do not think so. Since he went into
France, I have been in continual practice.
I shall win at the odds. But thou wouldst
not think how ill all's here about my
heart. But it is no matter.

HORATIO

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. If it be now, 'tis not to come. If
it be not to come, it will be now. If it be
not now, yet it will come—the readiness
is all. Since no man of aught he leaves
knows, what is 't to leave betimes? Let
be.

The queen wants you to chat with Laertes—
politely—before you begin your match.

The LORD exits.

HAMLET

She's full of good advice.

HORATIO

You're going to lose this bet, my lord.

HAMLET

I don't think so. I've been practicing fencing
constantly since he went off to France. With
the handicap they've given me, I think I'll
win. But I have a sinking feeling anyway.
Oh well.

HORATIO

Wait, my lord—

HAMLET

I know I'm being foolish, but I have the kind
of vague misgiving women often get.

HORATIO

If something is telling you not to play,
listen to it. I'll say you're not feeling well.

HAMLET

You'll do no such thing. I thumb my nose
at superstitions. God controls everything—
even something as trivial as a sparrow's
death. Everything will work out as it is
destined. If something is supposed to
happen now, it will. If it's supposed to
happen later, it won't happen now. What's
important is to be prepared. Since nobody
knows anything about what he leaves

behind, then what does it mean to leave early? Let it be.

*Enter King **CLAUDIUS**,
Queen **GERTRUDE**, **LAERTES**, **OSRIC**,
C, lords, and other attendants with
trumpets, drums, foils, a table, and
flagons of wine*

***CLAUDIUS** enters
with **GERTRUDE**, **LAERTES**, **OSRIC**,
lords, and other attendants with trumpets,
drums, fencing swords, a table, and
pitchers of wine.*

CLAUDIUS

Come, Hamlet, come, and take this hand
from me. (*puts LAERTES' hand
into HAMLET's*)

HAMLET

Give me your pardon, sir. I've done you
wrong.

But pardon 't, as you are a gentleman.

215 This presence knows,

And you must needs have heard, how I
am punished

With sore distraction. What I have done,
That might your nature, honor, and

220 exception

Roughly awake, I here proclaim was
madness.

Was 't Hamlet wronged Laertes? Never
Hamlet.

225 If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,

And when he's not himself does wrong
Laertes,

Then Hamlet does it not. Hamlet denies
it.

Who does it, then? His madness. If't be
so,

Hamlet is of the faction that is wronged.

His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy.

Sir, in this audience,

CLAUDIUS

Come shake hands with Laertes, Hamlet.
(*CLAUDIUS places LAERTES' and HAM
LET's hands together*)

HAMLET

(*to LAERTES*) I beg your pardon, sir. I've
done you wrong. Forgive me as a

gentleman. Everyone here knows—and
I'm sure you've heard—that I'm suffering

from a serious mental illness. When I
insulted you it was due to insanity. Was

Hamlet the one who insulted Laertes? No,
not Hamlet. If Hamlet is robbed of his own

mind, and insults Laertes when he's not
really himself, then Hamlet's not guilty of

the offense. Who is guilty, then? Hamlet's
mental illness is.

Let my disclaiming from a purposed evil
Free me so far in your most generous
thoughts

230 That I have shot mine arrow o'er the
house
And hurt my brother.

LAERTES

I am satisfied in nature,
Whose motive in this case should stir me
most
To my revenge. But in my terms of
honor

235 I stand aloof, and will no reconcilment
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.

HAMLET

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

LAERTES

Come, one for me.

HAMLET

I'll be your foil, Laertes. In mine
ignorance
Your skill shall, like a star i' th' darkest
night,
Stick fiery off indeed.

And if that's true, then Hamlet is the
victim of his own illness—his illness is
his enemy. Sir, with this audience as
witness, let me declare that I'm as
innocent of premeditated evil against you
as I would be if I had happened to shoot
an arrow over my house and accidentally
hit my brother.

LAERTES

My feelings are satisfied—even though
what you have done to my father and
sister should drive me to revenge. Yet
when it comes to my honor, I can't
forgive you so fast. I will accept no
apology until experts in matters of honor
show me how to make peace with you
without staining my own reputation in
doing so. Until then I will accept your
love as love.

HAMLET

I'm grateful for your love. Come on, give
us the swords, and we will play this
friendly fencing match enthusiastically.

LAERTES

Yes, hand me one too.

HAMLET

I'm going to make you look sharp,
Laertes. I'm so bad at the game that your
skill will shine like the brightest star in
the darkest night.

LAERTES

You mock me, sir.

HAMLET

245 No, by this hand.

CLAUDIUS

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

HAMLET

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

CLAUDIUS

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

LAERTES

(tests a rapier) This is too heavy. Let me
see another.

HAMLET

(tests a rapier) This likes me well. These
foils have all a length?

OSRIC

Ay, my good lord.

HAMLET and LAERTES prepare to play

CLAUDIUS

Set me the stoups of wine upon that table.
255 If Hamlet give the first or second hit
Or quit in answer of the third exchange,
Let all the battlements their ordnance fire!
The king shall drink to Hamlet's better
breath,

LAERTES

You're making fun of me.

HAMLET

No, I swear I'm not.

CLAUDIUS

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

HAMLET

Yes, my lord, quite well. You've bet on
the weaker fencer.

CLAUDIUS

I'm not worried. I've seen both of you
fence. But since Laertes is better,
we've given him a handicap. He's got
to outdo you by three hits to win.

LAERTES

This sword's too heavy. Show me
another one.

HAMLET

I like this one. Are they all the same
length?

OSRIC

Yes, my lord.

*HAMLET and LAERTES get ready
to fence.*

CLAUDIUS

Put the goblets of wine on that table. If
Hamlet makes the first or second hit,
or gets back at Laertes by making the
third hit, then let my soldiers give him
a military salute. I'll drink to Hamlet's
health, and into his goblet I'll drop a

260 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.
265 And let the kettle to the trumpet speak,
The trumpet to the cannoneer without,
The cannons to the heavens, the heavens to
earth,
"Now the king dunks to Hamlet." Come,
begin.—
And you, the judges, bear a wary eye.

Trumpets

HAMLET

Come on, sir.

LAERTES

Come, my lord.

HAMLET and LAERTES play

HAMLET

One.

LAERTES

270 No.

HAMLET

Judgment?

OSRIC

A hit, a very palpable hit.

LAERTES

Well, again.

CLAUDIUS

Stay, give me drink.—Hamlet, this pearl
275 is thine.
Here's to thy health.

Drums, trumpets sound, shot goes off

pearl even more costly than those in
the crowns of the last four Danish
kings. Give me the goblets. And now
let the drum and the trumpet play, and
the trumpet signal the cannon outside
to fire, and let the cannon tell the
heavens, and the heavens tell all the
earth that the king is drinking now to
Hamlet's health. Come on, let's begin.
Judges, pay close attention.

Trumpets play.

HAMLET

Come on, sir.

LAERTES

Come on, my lord.

HAMLET and LAERTES fence.

HAMLET

That was one hit.

LAERTES

No, it wasn't.

HAMLET

Referee!

OSRIC

It was obviously a hit.

LAERTES

Well, let's go on.

CLAUDIUS

Give me a goblet.—Hamlet, this pearl's
yours. Here's to your health.

Drums and trumpets play, and a gun is

fired.

CLAUDIUS *drops pearl into cup*

Give him the cup.

HAMLET

I'll play this bout first. Set it by a while.
Come.

HAMLET and LAERTES *play*

Another hit. What say you?

LAERTES

A touch, a touch, I do confess 't.

CLAUDIUS

280 Our son shall win.

GERTRUDE

He's fat, and scant of breath.—

Here, Hamlet, take my napkin, rub thy
brows.

The queen carouses to thy fortune,
Hamlet.

(picks up the cup with the pearl)

HAMLET

285 Good madam.

CLAUDIUS

Gertrude, do not drink.

GERTRUDE

I will, my lord. I pray you, pardon
me. *(drinks)*

CLAUDIUS

(aside) It is the poisoned cup. It is too late.

HAMLET

I dare not drink yet, madam. By and by.

CLAUDIUS *drops a pearl into a cup.*

Give him the goblet.

HAMLET

Let me just finish this round. Set it down
awhile. Let's play.

HAMLET and LAERTES *fence.*

Another hit. What do you say?

LAERTES

You got me, I admit it.

CLAUDIUS

My son will win.

GERTRUDE

He's flabby and out of breath.—Here,

Hamlet, take my handkerchief and wipe
your forehead.

The queen drinks to your good luck and
happiness, Hamlet. *(she lifts the cup with
the pearl)*

HAMLET

Thank you, madam.

CLAUDIUS

Gertrude, don't drink that.

GERTRUDE

Excuse me. I'll drink it if I like. *(she
drinks)*

CLAUDIUS

(to himself) That was the poisoned
drink. It's too late.

HAMLET

I'd better not drink now. I'll drink
later.

GERTRUDE

Come, let me wipe thy face.

LAERTES

290 *(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.

295 I pray you, pass with your best violence.
I am afeard you make a wanton of me.

LAERTES

Say you so? Come on.

HAMLET and LAERTES play

OSRIC

Nothing, neither way.

LAERTES

Have at you now!

*LAERTES wounds HAMLET In scuffling,
they change
rapiers. HAMLET wounds LAERTES*

CLAUDIUS

Part them! They are incensed.

HAMLET

Nay, come, again.

GERTRUDE falls

OSRIC

Look to the queen there, ho!

GERTRUDE

Come on, let me wipe your face.

LAERTES

(to CLAUDIUS) I'll get him now.

CLAUDIUS

I doubt it.

LAERTES

(to himself) But I almost feel guilty.

HAMLET

Get ready for the third hit, Laertes.
You're just playing around. Come on,
give me your best shot. I sense you're
treating me like a child.

LAERTES

You think so? Come on.

HAMLET and LAERTES fence.

OSRIC

They're neck and neck.

LAERTES

Take this!

*LAERTES wounds HAMLET. Then in
a scuffle they end up with each other's
swords,
and HAMLET wounds LAERTES.*

CLAUDIUS

Separate them. They're overdoing it.

HAMLET

No, come on, one more time.

GERTRUDE collapses.

OSRIC

Take care of the queen!

HORATIO

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

OSRIC

How is 't, Laertes?

LAERTES

Why, as a woodcock to mine own springe, Osric. I am justly killed with mine own treachery. (*falls*)

HAMLET

How does the queen?

CLAUDIUS

She swoons to see them bleed.

GERTRUDE

305 No, no, the drink, the drink!—O my dear Hamlet!

The drink, the drink! I am poisoned. (*dies*)

HAMLET

O villainy! Ho, let the door be locked.

Exit OSRIC

Treachery! Seek it out.

LAERTES

It is here, Hamlet. Hamlet, thou art slain.

310 No medicine in the world can do thee good.

In thee there is not half an hour of life.

The treacherous instrument is in thy hand,

315 Unbated and envenomed. The foul practice

Hath turned itself on me. Lo, here I lie, Never to rise again. Thy mother's

HORATIO

Both fencers are bleeding—how do you feel, my lord?

OSRIC

How do you feel, Laertes?

LAERTES

Like a mouse caught in my own trap, Osric. (*he collapses*) I've been killed by my own evil tricks.

HAMLET

How's the queen?

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! Lock the door.

OSRIC exits

We've been betrayed! Find out who did it!

LAERTES

I'm the one, Hamlet. Hamlet, you're dead. No medicine in the world can cure you. You don't have more than half an hour to live. The treacherous weapon is right in your hand, sharp and dipped in poison. The foul plan backfired on me. Here I lie and will never get up again. Your mother's been poisoned. I can't speak anymore. The king, the king's to blame.

poisoned.

I can no more. The king, the king's to
blame.

HAMLET

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

HAMLET hurts CLAUDIUS

ALL

Treason! Treason!

CLAUDIUS

O, yet defend me, friends. I am but hurt.

HAMLET

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

*HAMLET forces CLAUDIUS to
drink CLAUDIUS dies*

LAERTES

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

HAMLET

Heaven make thee free of it. I follow
thee.—
I am dead, Horatio.—Wretched queen,
330 adieu!—
You that look pale and tremble at this
chance,

HAMLET

The blade poisoned! Then get to work,
poison!

HAMLET wounds CLAUDIUS.

ALL

Treason! Treason!

CLAUDIUS

Protect me, my friends. I've only been
hurt, not killed.

HAMLET

Here, you goddamn incest-breeding
Danish murderer, drink this. Is your
little pearl in there? Follow my mother.

*HAMLET forces CLAUDIUS to
drink. CLAUDIUS dies.*

LAERTES

He got what he deserved. He mixed that
poison himself. Please forgive me as I
forgive you, Hamlet. You're not
responsible for my death and my
father's, and I'm not responsible for
yours. (*he dies*)

HAMLET

God will free you from blame. I'll
follow you to heaven in a minute.—I'm
dying, Horatio.—Goodbye, miserable
queen.—And all you people watching,
pale and trembling, speechless
spectators of these acts, I could tell you

That are but mutes or audience to this act,
Had I but time (as this fell sergeant, Death,
335 Is strict in his arrest), O, I could tell you—
But let it be.—Horatio, I am dead.
Thou livest. Report me and my cause
aright
To the unsatisfied.

HORATIO

Never believe it.
I am more an antique Roman than a Dane.
Here's yet some liquor left.
(*lifts the poisoned cup*)

HAMLET

As thou'rt a man,
Give me the cup. Let go! By heaven, I'll
340 have 't.
(*takes cup from HORATIO*)
O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,
Things standing thus unknown, shall live
behind me!
345 If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart
Absent thee from felicity a while,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath
in pain
To tell my story.

March afar off and shout within

What warlike noise is this?

Enter OSRIC

OSRIC

Young Fortinbras, with conquest come
from Poland,
350 To th' ambassadors of England gives

a thing or two if I had the time (though
this cruel officer, Death, doesn't allow
much free time). Let it be.—Horatio,
I'm dying. You're alive. Tell everyone
what happened; set the story straight.

HORATIO

Not for a second. I'm more like an
ancient Roman than a corrupt modern
Dane. Some of this liquor's still left in
the goblet. (*he picks up the poisoned
cup to drink*)

HAMLET

Please, give me that goblet, if you love
me. Let go of it! I'll get it from you, I
swear. Oh God, Horatio, what a
damaged reputation I'm leaving behind
me, as no one knows the truth. If you
ever loved me, then please postpone the
sweet relief of death awhile, and stay in
this harsh world long enough to tell my
story.

*A military march is heard from offstage,
and a cannon fires.*

What are these warlike noises?

OSRIC enters.

OSRIC

Young Fortinbras, returning in triumph
from Poland, is firing his guns to greet
the English ambassadors.

This warlike volley.

HAMLET

O, I die, Horatio.

The potent poison quite o'ercrows my spirit.

I cannot live to hear the news from England.

355 But I do prophesy the election lights
On Fortinbras. He has my dying voice.
So tell him, with th' occurrents, more and
less,
Which have solicited. The rest is silence.
O, O, O, O. (*dies*)

HORATIO

Now cracks a noble heart.—Good night,
sweet prince,

360 And flights of angels sing thee to thy
rest!—
Why does the drum come hither?

*Enter FORTINBRAS and the
English AMBASSADOR, with drummer
and attendants*

FORTINBRAS

Where is this sight?

HORATIO

What is it ye would see?
If aught of woe or wonder, cease your
search.

FORTINBRAS

This quarry cries on havoc. O proud
365 death,
What feast is toward in thine eternal cell,
That thou so many princes at a shot
So bloodily hast struck?

HAMLET

Oh, I'm dying, Horatio! This strong
poison's overpowering me. I will not
live to hear the news from England. But
I bet Fortinbras will win the election to
the Danish crown. He's got my vote as I
die. So tell him that, given the recent
events here—oh, the rest is silence. Oh,
oh, oh, oh. (*he dies*)

HORATIO

Now a noble heart is breaking. Good
night, sweet prince. May hosts of angels
sing you to sleep.—Why are those drums
approaching?

*FORTINBRAS and the
English AMBASSADOR enter with a
drummer and attendants.*

FORTINBRAS

What do I see here?

HORATIO

What would you like to see? If it's a
tragedy, you've come to the right place.

FORTINBRAS

These corpses suggest mayhem. Oh,
proud Death, what banquet are you
preparing that you've needed to knock
off so many princes at one stroke?

AMBASSADOR

The sight is dismal,
And our affairs from England come too late.

370 The ears are senseless that should give us hearing,
To tell him his commandment is fulfilled,
That Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead.
Where should we have our thanks?

HORATIO

(*indicates* CLAUDIUS) Not from his mouth,

375 Had it th' ability of life to thank you.
He never gave commandment for their death.
But since so jump upon this bloody question,
380 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,
385 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.

AMBASSADOR

This is a horrible sight. Our news arrives from England too late, since the people that should have heard it are dead. We meant to tell the king that his orders have been carried out, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead. Who will thank us now?

HORATIO

(*indicates* CLAUDIUS) Not the king, even if he were still alive to thank you. He never ordered their deaths. But since you've come so soon after this bloodbath, you from battles in Poland and you from England, then give your men orders to display these corpses on a high platform, and let me tell the world how all this happened. You'll hear of violent and unnatural acts, terrible accidents, casual murders, deaths caused by trickery and by threat, and finally murderous plans that backfired on their perpetrators. All this I can explain.

FORTINBRAS

Let us haste to hear it,
 And call the noblest to the audience.
 For me, with sorrow I embrace my
 390 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.
 395 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
 Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage,
 For he was likely, had he been put on,
 400 To have proved most royally. And, for his
 passage,
 The soldiers' music and the rites of war
 Speak loudly for him.
 Take up the bodies. Such a sight as this
 405 Becomes the field, but here shows much
 amiss.
 Go, bid the soldiers shoot.

*Exeunt marching, carrying the bodies,
 after the which a peal of ordnance are
 shot off*

FORTINBRAS

Let's hear about it right away and invite
 all the noblemen to listen. As for me, I
 welcome my good luck with sadness. I
 have some rights to claim this kingdom,
 and by arriving at this moment I have an
 opportunity to put them into effect.

HORATIO

I also have a few things to say about
 that, which Hamlet just told me. But
 let's get down to business—even though
 people are in a frenzy of grief—to avoid
 any further plots and mishaps.

FORTINBRAS

Let four captains carry Hamlet like a
 soldier onto the stage. He would have
 been a great king if he had had the
 chance to prove himself. Military music
 and military rites will speak for his
 heroic qualities. Pick up the corpses. A
 sight like this suits a battlefield, but here
 at court it shows that much went wrong.
 Go outside and tell the soldiers to fire
 their guns in honor of Hamlet.

*They exit marching, carrying the bodies.
 Cannons are fired.*