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

Enter HORATIO and MARCELLUS

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

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

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
A piece of him.

BARNARDO
Welcome, Horatio.—Welcome, good Marcellus.

MARCELLUS
What, has this thing appeared again tonight?

BARNARDO
I have seen nothing.

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

HORATIO
Tush, tush, 'twill not appear.

Act 1, Scene 1, Page 3

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

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

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

Enter GHOST

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

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

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

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

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

BARNARDO
It would be spoke to.

MARCELLUS
Question it, Horatio.

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—

Enter GHOST

The GHOST enters.

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

BARNARDO
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.
**Act 1, Scene 1, Page 4**

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

MARCELLUS
It is offended.

BARNARDO
See, it stalks away.

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

Exit GHOST

MARCELLUS
'Tis gone and will not answer.

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

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

MARCELLUS
Is it not like the king?

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

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

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

**Act 1, Scene 1, Page 5**

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

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

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

BARNARDO
I think it be no other but e'en so.
Well may it sort that this portentous figure
Comes armèd through our watch so like the king
That was and is the question of these wars.

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

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

—Stop it, Marcellus.
MARCELLUS
Shall I strike at it with my partisan?
HORATIO
Do, if it will not stand.
BARNARDO
'Tis here.
HORATIO
'Tis here.

Exit GHOST

MARCELLUS
'Tis gone.
We do it wrong, being so majestical,
To offer it the show of violence,
For it is, as the air, invulnerable,
And our vain blows malicious mockery.
BARNARDO
It was about to speak when the cock crew.

Act 1, Scene 1, Page 8

HORATIO
And then it started like a guilty thing
Upon a fearful summons. I have heard
The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn,
Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
Awake the god of day, and, at his warning,
Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,

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

Th’ extravagant and erring spirit hies
To his confine, and of the truth herein
This present object made probation.

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

HORATIO
So have I heard and do in part believe it.
But look, the morn, in russet mantle clad,
Walks o’er the dew of yon high eastward hill.
Break we our watch up, and by my advice,
Let us impart what we have seen tonight
Unto young Hamlet, for, upon my life,
This spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him.

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

Exeunt They exit.

Modern Text

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.

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.

Act 1, Scene 2

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

CLAUDIUS
Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother’s death
The memory be green, and that it us befitted
To bear our hearts in grief and our whole kingdom
To be contracted in one brow of woe,
Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature
That we with wisest sorrow think on him
Together with remembrance of ourselves.
Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen,
Th’ imperial jointress to this warlike state,
Have we—as ’twere with a defeated joy,
With an auspicious and a dropping eye,
With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage,
In equal scale weighing delight and dole—
Taken to wife. Nor have we herein barred
Your better wisdoms, which have freely gone
With this affair along. For all, our thanks.
Now follows that you know. Young Fortinbras,
Holding a weak supposal of our worth
Or thinking by our late dear brother’s death

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.
Original Text

20 Our state to be disjoint and out of frame,  
Colleaguèd with the dream of his advantage,  
He hath not failed to pester us with message  
Importing the surrender of those lands  
Lost by his father, with all bonds of law,  
25 To our most valiant brother. So much for him.

Enter VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS

Now for ourself and for this time of meeting

Modern Text

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 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.

CLAUDIUS

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

CLAUDIUS

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

CLAUDIUS

Do you have your father’s permission? What does Polonius say?
POLONIUS
He hath, my lord, wrung from me my slow leave
By laborsome petition, and at last
Upon his will I sealed my hard consent.
I do beseech you, give him leave to go.

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

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

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

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

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

HAMLET
Ay, madam, it is common.

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

HAMLET
“Seems,” madam? Nay, it is. I know not “seems.”
’Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
Nor the dejected ‘havior of the visage,
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
That can denote me truly. These indeed “seem,”
For they are actions that a man might play.
But I have that within which passeth show,
These but the trappings and the suits of woe.

CLAUDIUS
’Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet,
To give these mourning duties to your father.
But you must know your father lost a father,
That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound
In filial obligation for some term
To do obsequious sorrow. But to persever
In obstinate condolement is a course

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
Of impious stubbornness. 'Tis unmanly grief.

It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,
A heart unfortified, a mind impatient,
An understanding simple and unschooled.
For what we know must be and is as common
As any the most vulgar thing to sense,

Why should we in our peevish opposition
Take it to heart? Fie! 'Tis a fault to heaven,
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,

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

And we beseech you, bend you to remain
Here in the cheer and comfort of our eye,
Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.

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

I shall in all my best obey you, madam.

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

Oh, that this too, too sullied flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew,
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God, God!
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!

Fie on 't, ah fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden
That grows to seed. Things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. That it should come to this.
But two months dead—nay, not so much, not two.
So excellent a king, that was to this

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.

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

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

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

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
140 Hyperion to a satyr. So loving to my mother

Act 1, Scene 2, Page 6

That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly.—Heaven and earth,
Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him
As if increase of appetite had grown
145 By what it fed on, and yet, within a month—
Let me not think on ‘t. Frailty, thy name is woman!—
A little month, or ere those shoes were old
With which she followed my poor father’s body,
Like Niobe, all tears. Why she, even she—
150 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,
155 Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her gallèd eyes,
She married. O most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
It is not nor it cannot come to good,
But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

Enter HORATIO, MARCELLUS, and BARNARDO

HORATIO
Hail to your lordship.

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

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

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

MARCELLUS
My good lord.

Act 1, Scene 2, Page 7

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

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
Against yourself. I know you are no truant.  
But what is your affair in Elsinore?  
We'll teach you to drink deep ere you depart.

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

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

HORATIO
Indeed, my lord, it followed hard upon.

HAMLET
Thrift, thrift, Horatio! The funeral baked meats  
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
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
Season your admiration for a while  
With an attent ear, till I may deliver,  
Upon the witness of these gentlemen,  
This marvel to you.

HAMLET
For God's love, let me hear.

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

HAMLET
But where was this?

MARCELLUS
My lord, upon the platform where we watch.

HAMLET
Did you not speak to it?

HORATIO
My lord, I did,

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

HAMLET
'Tis very strange.

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

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

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.
**Act 1, Scene 2, Page 10**

**HAMLET**
What, looked he frowningly?

**HORATIO**
A countenance more in sorrow than in anger.

**HAMLET**
Was he frowning?

**HORATIO**
He looked more sad than angry.

**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**
Longer, longer.

**HORATIO**
Not when I saw 't.

**HAMLET**
His beard was grizzled, no?

**HORATIO**
His beard was gray, right?

**HAMLET**
If it assume my noble father's person, I'll speak to it, even if Hell itself should gape
And bid me hold my peace. I pray you all,
If you have hitherto concealed this sight,
Let it be tenable in your silence still.
And whatsoever else shall hap tonight,
Give it an understanding, but no tongue.

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

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

**HAMLET**
I will requite your loves. So fare you well.
Upon the platform, 'twixt eleven and twelve, I'll visit you.

**Act 1, Scene 2, Page 11**

**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
Our duty to your honor.

HAMLET
Your loves, as mine to you. Farewell.

Exeunt all but HAMLET
My father’s spirit in arms. All is not well.

I doubt some foul play. Would the night were come!
Till then sit still, my soul. Foul deeds will rise,
Though all the earth o’erwhelm them, to men’s eyes.

Good-bye.

Exit

Act 1, Scene 3

Enter LAERTES and OPHELIA, his sister

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

OPHELIA
Do you doubt that?

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

No more.

OPHELIA
No more but so?

LAERTES
Think it no more.
For nature, crescent, does not grow alone
In thews and bulk, but, as this temple waxes,
The inward service of the mind and soul
Grows wide withal. Perhaps he loves you now,

And now no soil nor cautel doth besmirch
The virtue of his will, but you must fear.
His greatness weighed, his will is not his own,
For he himself is subject to his birth.
He may not, as unvalued persons do,

Carve for himself, for on his choice depends
The safety and health of this whole state.
And therefore must his choice be circumscribed
Unto the voice and yielding of that body
Whereof he is the head. Then if he says he loves you,

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.

So if he says he loves you, you should be wise
As he in his particular act and place
May give his saying deed, which is no further
Than the main voice of Denmark goes withal.
Then weigh what loss your honor may sustain
If with too credent ear you list his songs,
Or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure open
To his unmastered importunity.
Fear it, Ophelia. Fear it, my dear sister,
And keep you in the rear of your affection,
Out of the shot and danger of desire.
The chariest maid is prodigal enough
If she unmask her beauty to the moon.
Virtue itself 'scapes not calumnious strokes.
The canker galls the infants of the spring
Too oft before their buttons be disclosed.
And in the morn and liquid dew of youth,
Contagious blastments are most imminent.
Be wary, then. Best safety lies in fear.
Youth to itself rebels, though none else near.

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

LAERTES
O, fear me not.

Enter POLONIUS

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

Act 1, Scene 3, Page 3

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

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

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

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

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

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

LAERTES
Good-bye.

Exit LAERTES

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

OPHELIA
So please you, something touching the Lord Hamlet.

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

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

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

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

POLONIUS
"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
the friendship as well as the money, and
borrowing turns a person into a spendthrift. And,
above all, be true to 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.
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.

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

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

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

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.

OPHELIA
And his words 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.

OPHELIA
I shall obey, my lord.

OPHELIA
I’ll do as you say, father.

Exeunt

They exit.

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
It is a nipping and an eager air.
I think it lacks of twelve. A little before twelve, I think.

MARCELLUS
No, it is struck.

HORATIO
Indeed? I heard it not. It then draws near the season
Wherein the spirit held his wont to walk.

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

HORATIO
Is it a custom?

HAMLET
Ay, marry, is ‘t.
But to my mind, though I am native here
And to the manner born, it is a custom
More honored in the breach than the observance.
This heavy-headed revel east and west
Makes us traduced and taxed of other nations.

They clepe us drunkards and with swinish phrase
Soil our addition. And indeed it takes
From our achievements, though performed at height,
The pith and marrow of our attribute.
So oft it chances in particular men
That for some vicious mole of nature in them—
As in their birth (wherein they are not guilty,
Since nature cannot choose his origin),
By the o’ergrowth of some complexion,
Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason,
Or by some habit that too much o’erleavens
The form of plausible manners—that these men,
Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect,
Being nature’s livery or fortune’s star,
Their virtues else (be they as pure as grace,
As infinite as man may undergo)
Shall in the general censure take corruption
To his own scandal.

Enter GHOST

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.

HORATIO
Look, my lord, it comes!

HAMLET
Angels and ministers of grace defend us!
Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damned,
Original Text

Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell,
45 Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
Thou comest in such a questionable shape
That I will speak to thee. I'll call thee "Hamlet,"
"King," "Father," "royal Dane." O, answer me!
Let me not burst in ignorance, but tell
Why thy canonized bones, hearsed in death,
Have burst their cerements; why the sepulcher,

Act 1, Scene 4, Page 3

...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,

50 Wherein we saw thee quietly interred,
Hath oped his ponderous and marble jaws
To cast thee up again. What may this mean,
That thou, dead corse, again in complete steel
Revisits thus the glimpses of the moon,
Making night hideous and we fools of nature,
So horridly to shake our disposition
With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls?

55 Say why is this? Wherefore? What should we do?

The GHOST beckons HAMLET

GHOST beckons HAMLET

HAMLET

It will not speak. Then I will follow it.

HORATIO

No, by no means.

HAMLET

It will not speak. Then I will follow it.

HORATIO

Do not, my lord.

HAMLET

Why, what should be the fear?
I do not set my life in a pin's fee,
And for my soul—what can it do to that,
Being a thing immortal as itself?

70 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,

Act 1, Scene 4, Page 4

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

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
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)

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

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.

Exeunt GHOST and HAMLET

HORATIO
He waxes desperate with imagination.

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

HORATIO
Have after. To what issue will this come?

Act 1, Scene 4, Page 5

MARCELLUS
Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

HORATIO
Heaven will direct it.

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

HORATIO
Nay, let's follow him.

Exeunt GHOST and HAMLET

Act 1, Scene 5

Enter GHOST and HAMLET

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

GHOST
Mark me.

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

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

HAMLET
Speak. I am bound to hear.

GHOST
So art thou to revenge when thou shalt hear.

HAMLET
What?

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

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,

HAMLET
Oh God!

GHOST
Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

HAMLET
Murder?

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

HAMLET
Haste me to know 't, that I, with wings as swift
As meditation or the thoughts of love,

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 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.
May sweep to my revenge.

GHOST
I find thee apt,
And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed
That roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf,
Wouldst thou not stir in this. Now, Hamlet, hear.

'Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard,
A serpent stung me. So the whole ear of Denmark
Is by a forged 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
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 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.
Act 1, Scene 5, Page 4

Unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled.
No reckoning made, but sent to my account
With all my imperfections on my head.

Oh, horrible, oh, horrible, most horrible!
If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not.
Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch for luxury and damned incest.

But howsoever thou pursuest this act,
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught. Leave her to heaven
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 The GHOST exits.

HAMLET
O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?
And shall I couple hell? Oh, fie! Hold, hold, my heart,
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee!

Ay, thou poor ghost, whiles memory holds a seat
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
That youth and observation copied there,
Unmixed with baser matter. Yes, by heaven!
O most pernicious woman!
O villain, villain, smiling, damned 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.

Act 1, Scene 5, Page 5

It is “Adieu, adieu. Remember me.”
I have sworn ‘t.

Enter HORATIO and MARCELLUS

HORATIO
My lord, my lord!

MARCELLUS
Lord Hamlet—

HORATIO
Heaven secure him!

HAMLET
So be it.

HORATIO
Illo, ho, ho, my lord!

He said, “Remember me.” I swore I would.
HAMLET
Hillo, ho, ho, boy. Come, bird, come.

MARCELLUS
How is 't, my noble lord?

HORATIO
What news, my lord?

HAMLET
Oh, wonderful!

MARCELLUS
How is 't, my noble lord?

HORATIO
Good my lord, tell it.

HAMLET
Oh, ho, ho, kid! Come here.

HORATIO
What news, my lord?

HAMLET
No. You'll reveal it.

HORATIO
Not I, my lord, by heaven.

MARCELLUS
Nor I, my lord.

HAMLET
How say you, then? Would heart of man once think it?

HORATIO, MARCELLUS
Ay, by heaven, my lord.

HAMLET
But you'll be secret?

HORATIO, MARCELLUS
Yes, by heaven, my lord.

HAMLET
How say you, then? Would heart of man once think it?

HORATIO, MARCELLUS
Ay, by heaven, my lord.

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

HORATIO
What happened, sir?

HAMLET
It was incredible!

HORATIO
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.

Act 1, Scene 5, Page 6

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.

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

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

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

HORATIO
There's no offense, my lord.

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

HORATIO
What is ’t, my lord? We will.

HAMLET
Never make known what you have seen tonight.

HORATIO, MARCELLUS
My lord, we will not.

Act 1, Scene 5, Page 7

HAMLET
Nay, but swear ’t.

HORATIO
In faith, my lord, not I.

MARCELLUS
Nor I, my lord, in faith.

HAMLET
Upon my sword.

MARCELLUS
We have sworn, my lord, already.

HAMLET
Indeed, upon my sword, indeed.

GEST
(cries under the stage) Swear!

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

HORATIO
Propose the oath, my lord.

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

GEST
(beneath) Swear.

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

GEST
(beneath) Swear by his sword.

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

HORATIO
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
Yes, but swear by my sword this time.

GEST
(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.

GEST
(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.

GEST
(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
O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!

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

GHOST
(beneath) Swear!

HAMLET
Rest, rest, perturbèd spirit!—So, gentlemen,
With all my love I do commend me to you,
And what so poor a man as Hamlet is
May do, to express his love and friending to you,
God willing, shall not lack. Let us go in together,
And still your fingers on your lips, I pray.

Act 2, Scene 1

Enter POLONIUS with his man REYNALDO

POLONIUS
Give him this money and these notes, Reynaldo.

REYNALDO
I will, my lord.

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

REYNALDO
My lord, I did intend it.

POLONIUS
Marry, well said, very well said. Look you, sir,
Inquire me first what Danskers are in Paris,
And how, and who, what means, and where they keep
What company at what expense; and finding

Enter POLONIUS 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
By this encompassment and drift of question
That they do know my son, come you more nearer
Than your particular demands will touch it.
Take you, as 'twere, some distant knowledge of him,
As thus: “I know his father and his friends,
And, in part, him.” Do you mark this, Reynaldo?

REYNALDO
Ay, very well, my lord.

POLONIUS
“And in part him, but,” you may say, “not well.
But, if ‘t be he I mean, he’s very wild.
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
you’ll find out much more than if you asked specific questions about him. Just tell
them you vaguely know Laertes, say something
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—or of course,
nothing so bad that it would shame him. I mean
make up any stories that

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

REYNALDO
As gaming, my lord?

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

REYNALDO
My lord, that would dishonor him!

POLONIUS
“Faith, no, as you may season it in the charge.
You must not put another scandal on him
That he is open to incontinency.
That’s not my meaning. But breathe his faults so
quaintly
That they may seem the taints of liberty,
The flash and outbreak of a fiery mind,
A savageness in unreclaimed 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)
You, laying these slight sullies on my son
As ‘twere a thing a little soiled i’ th’ working—
Mark you, your party in converse, him you would
sound,
Having ever seen in the prenominate crimes
The youth you breathe of guilty, be assured
He closes with you in this consequence:
“Good sir” or so, or “Friend,” or “Gentleman,”
According to the phrase or the addition
Of man and country.

Act 2, Scene 1, Page 3

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
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 rouse, There falling out at tennis,” or, perchance, “I saw him enter such a house of sale”—Videlicet a brothel, or so forth. See you now, Your bait of falsehood takes this carp of truth. And thus do we of wisdom and of reach, With windlasses and with assays of bias, By indirections find directions out. So by my former lecture and advice Shall you my son. You have me, have you not?

REYNALDO
My lord, I have.

POLONIUS
God be wi’ you. Fare you well.

REYNALDO
Good my lord.

70 Observe his inclination in yourself.

REYNALDO
I shall, my lord.

Act 2, Scene 1, Page 4

POLONIUS
And let him ply his music.

REYNALDO
Well, my lord.

POLONIUS
Farewell.

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

REYNALDO
Got it, sir.

POLONIUS
Good-bye.
Exit REYNALDO
Enter OPHELIA

How now, Ophelia? What’s the matter?

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

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

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

POLONIUS
Mad for thy love?

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

POLONIUS
What said he?

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

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

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

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

**Modern Text**

POLONIUS
That's what made him crazy. I regret 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.

Exeunt

They exit.

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**Act 2, Scene 2**

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

CLAUDIUS
Welcome, dear Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.
Moreover that we much did long to see you,
The need we have to use you did provoke
Our hasty sending. Something have you heard
Of Hamlet's 'transformation'—so call it
Since nor th' exterior nor the inward man
Resembles that it was. What it should be,
More than his father's death, that thus hath put him
So much from th' understanding of himself,
I cannot dream of. I entreat you both
That, being of so young days brought up with him
And since so neighbored to his youth and 'havior,
That you vouchsafe your rest here in our court
Some little time so by your companies
To draw him on to pleasures and to gather,
So much as from occasion you may glean,
Whether aught, to us unknown, afflicts him thus
That, opened, lies within our remedy.

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

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, 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.

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**Act 2, Scene 2, Page 2**

ROSENCRANTZ
Both your majesties

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

GUILDENSTERN  
But we both obey

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

CLAUDIUS  
Thanks, Rosencrantz and gentle Guildenstern.

GERTRUDE  
Thanks, Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz.

And I beseech you instantly to visit  
My too much 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  
Th’ ambassadors from Norway, my good lord,  
Are joyfully returned.

CLAUDIUS  
Thou still hast been the father of good news.

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

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

GERTRUDE  
I doubt it is no other but the main:

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

CLAUDIUS  
Tell me! I want very much to find out.

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

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

Exit POLONIUS

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

GERTRUDE  
I doubt it is nothing but the main.

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 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.

The ambassadors are back from Norway, sir.

Once again you bring good news.

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.

Tell me! I want very much to find out.

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

Then be so kind as to show them in.

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

I doubt it’s anything but the obvious reason: his
Original Text

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
Most fair return of greetings and desires.

Upon our first, he sent out to suppress
His nephew’s levies, which to him appeared
To be a preparation 'gainst the Polack,
But, better looked into, he truly found
It was against your highness. Whereat grieved—
That so his sickness, age, and impotence
Was falsely borne in hand—sends out arrests
On Fortinbras, which he, in brief, obeys,
Receives rebuke from Norway, and in fine
Makes vow before his uncle never more
To give th’ assay of arms against your majesty.
Whereon old Norway, overcome with joy,

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.

Act 2, Scene 2, Page 4

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

CLAUDIUS
It likes us well,
And at our more considered time we’ll read,
Answer, and think upon this business.
Meantime we thank you for your well-took labor.

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!

POLENIUS
This business is well ended.
My liege and madam, to expostulate
What majesty should be, what duty is,
Why day is day, night night, and time is time,
Were nothing but to waste night, day, and time.
Therefore, since brevity is the soul of wit
And tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes,
I will be brief: your noble son is mad.

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

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

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That we find out the cause of this effect,
Or rather say, the cause of this defect,
For this effect defective comes by cause.
Thus it remains, and the remainder thus. Perpend.
I have a daughter—have while she is mine—
Who in her duty and obedience, mark,

110 Hath given me this. Now gather and surmise.
*(reads a letter)* “To the celestial and my soul’s idol,
the most beautified Ophelia”—That’s an ill phrase, a vile phrase. “Beautified” is a vile phrase. But you shall hear. Thus: *(reads the letter)* “In her excellent white bosom, these,” etc.—

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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 the 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,” etc. —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, most best, believe it. Amieu.

*Thine evermore, most dear lady,*

115 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?

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**CLAUDIUS**
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.

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**CLAUDIUS**
And how did she react to all this?

**POLONIUS**
Sir, what is your opinion of me?
As of a man faithful and honorable.

**POLONIUS**
I would fain prove so. But what might you think, When I had seen this hot love on the wing— As I perceived it, I must tell you that,

Before my daughter told me—what might you, Or my dear majesty your queen here, think, If I had played the desk or table-book, Or given my heart a winking, mute and dumb, Or looked upon this love with idle sight?

**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 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 'tis this?

**GERTRUDE**
It may be, very like.

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

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

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

**CLAUDIUS**
How may we try it further?

**POLONIUS**
(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
155  (to CLAUDIUS) Be you and I behind an arras then,
Mark the encounter. If he love her not
And be not from his reason fall’n thereon,
Let me be no assistant for a state
But keep a farm and carters.

CLAUDIUS
We will try it.

Enter HAMLET, reading on a book

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?

POLONIUS
Honest, my lord?

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

POLONIUS
That's very true, my lord.

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

POLONIUS
I have, my lord.

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

POLONIUS
(aside) How say you by that? Still harping on my daughter. Yet he knew me not at first. He said I was a fishmonger. He is far gone, far gone. And truly in 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'll try what you suggest.
Original Text

my youth I suffered much extremity for love, very near this. I'll speak to him again.—(to HAMLET) What do you read, my lord?

HAMLET
Words, words, words.

POLONIUS
What is the matter, my lord?

HAMLET
Between who?

Act 2, Scene 2, Page 9

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

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

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

HAMLET
Into my grave.

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

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

POLONIUS
Fare you well, my lord.

HAMLET
(aside) These tedious old fools!

Enter ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter.

POLONIUS
You go to seek the Lord Hamlet. There he is.
ROSENCRANTZ
God save you, sir!

ROSENCRANTZ
Thank you, sir.

Exit POLONIUS

POLONIUS exits.

GUILDENSTERN
My honored lord!

ROSENCRANTZ
My most dear lord!

HAMLET
My excellent good friends! How dost thou,

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

ROSENCRANTZ
As the indifferent children of the earth.

GUILDENSTERN
Happy, in that we are not overhappy.

On Fortune’s cap we are not the very button.

HAMLET
Nor the soles of her shoes?

ROSENCRANTZ
Neither, my lord.

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

GUILDENSTERN
Faith, her privates we.

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

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

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

GUILDENSTERN
Prison, my lord?

HAMLET
Denmark’s a prison.

ROSENCRANTZ
Then is the world one.

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

ROSENCRANTZ
We think not so, my lord.

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

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

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

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

HAMLET
A dream itself is but a shadow.

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

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

ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN
We’ll wait upon you.

Act 2, Scene 2, Page 12

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.

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

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
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?
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.

Act 2, Scene 2, Page 13

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
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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ROSENCRANTZ
No, indeed are they not.

HAMLET
How comes it? Do they grow rusty?

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

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 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.
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?

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.

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

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

HAMLET
Do the boys carry it away?

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

HAMLET
And the boys are winning so far?

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

HAMLET
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.

Flourish for the PLAYERS within

GUILDENSTERN
There are the players.

GUILDENSTERN
The actors are here.

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

GUILDENSTERN
In what, my dear lord?

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

Enter POLONIUS

GUILDENSTERN
In what sense, my lord?

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

GUILDENSTERN
Gentlemen, I hope you are well.

HAMLET
Listen, Guildenstern, and you too, Rosencrantz—
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
The actors are come hither, my lord.

HAMLET
Buzz, buzz.

POLONIUS
Upon my honor—

HAMLET
Then came each actor on his ass—

Act 2, Scene 2, Page 17

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

HAMLET
O Jephthah, judge of ancient 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

POLONIUS
They are the best actors in the world, either for tragedy, 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
that I love passing well.

HAMLET
Nay, that follows not.

POLONIUS
What follows, then, my lord?

HAMLET
Why,

Act 2, Scene 2, Page 18

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

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

FIRST PLAYER
What speech, my good lord?

HAMLET
I heard thee speak me a speech once, but it was never acted. Or, if it was, not above once, for the play, I remember, pleased not the million. ’Twas caviary to the general. But it was—as I received it, and others, whose judgments in such matters cried in the top of mine—an excellent play, well digested in the scenes, set down with as much modesty as cunning.

Act 2, Scene 2, Page 19

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

405 I remember, one said there were 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?

415 The rugged Pyrrhus, strong as a tiger—
Original Text

The rugged Pyrrhus, like th’ Hyrcanian beast—
It is not so. It begins with Pyrrhus—

425

The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms, Black as his purpose, did the night resemble When he lay couched 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 Pyrrhus Old grandsire Priam seeks.
So, proceed you.

POLONIUS

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

FIRST PLAYER

Anon he finds him
Striking too short at Greeks. His antique sword, Rebellious to his arm, lies where it falls,
Repugnant to command. Unequal matched,
Pyrrhus at Priam drives, in rage strikes wide,
But with the whiff and wind of his fell sword The unnerved father falls. Then senseless Ilium, Seeming to feel this blow, with flaming top Stoops to his base, and with a hideous crash

435

Takes prisoner Pyrrhus’ ear. For, lo, his sword, Which was declining on the milky head Of reverend Priam, seemed ’th air to stick. So as a painted tyrant Pyrrhus stood,

Act 2, Scene 2, Page 20

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, The bold winds speechless, and the orb below As hush as death, anon the dreadful thunder

Doth rend the region. So, after Pyrrhus’ pause, Aroused 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

455

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,

Modern Text

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, 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, 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,
**Original Text**

460  As low as to the fiends!

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 is too long.

**HAMLET**

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

**FIRST PLAYER**

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

"The moblèd queen"?

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.

**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.

**HAMLET**

(to FIRST PLAYER) Very fine. I’ll have you perform the rest of it soon. (to POLONIUS) My lord, will 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,
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  
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.

Act 2, Scene 2, Page 22

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?

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.

FIRST PLAYER  
Ay, my lord.

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

Exeunt POLONIUS and the PLAYERS

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

ROSENCRANTZ  
Good my lord.

HAMLET  
Ay, so. Good-bye to you.

Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

Now I am alone.

Oh, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!

Is it not monstrous that this player here, But in a fiction, in a dream of passion, Could force his soul so to his own conceit That from her working all his visage wannd, Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect, A broken voice, and his whole function suiting With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing— For Hecuba!
What’s Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba
That he should weep for her? What would he do
Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
Make mad the guilty and appall the free,

Confounded the ignorant, and amaze indeed
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,
Upon whose property and most dear life
A damned defeat was made. Am I a coward?
Who calls me “villain”? Breaks my pate across?
Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face?
Tweaks me by the nose? Gives me the lie i’ th’ throat
As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this?

Ha!
‘Swounds, I should take it, for it cannot be
But I am pigeon-livered and lack gall
To make oppression bitter, or ere this
I should have fatted all the region kites
With this slave’s offal. Bloody, bawdy villain!
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!
O vengeance!
Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,
That I, the son of a dear father murdered,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words
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
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,
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

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
Original Text

Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the king.

Modern Text

saw may be the devil, and the devil has the power to assume a pleasing disguise, and so he may be taking advantage of my weakness and sadness to bring about my damnation. I need better evidence than the ghost to work with. The play’s the thing to uncover the conscience of the king.

Exit

HAMLET exits.

Act 3, Scene 1

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

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

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

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

GERTRUDE
Did he receive you well?

ROSENCRANTZ
Most like a gentleman.

GUILDENSTERN
But with much forcing of his disposition.

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

GERTRUDE
Did you assay him?

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

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.

Act 3, Scene 1, Page 2

To hear of it. They are about the court. And, as I think, they have already order This night to play before him.

POLONIUS

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

POLONIUS
**Original Text**

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

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**  
We shall, my lord.

Exeunt **ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN**

**CLAUDIUS**  
Sweet Gertrude, leave us too,  
For we have closely sent for Hamlet hither,  
That he, as ’twere by accident, may here  
Affront Ophelia.  
Her father and myself (lawful espials)  
Will so bestow ourselves that, seeing unseen,  
We may of their encounter frankly judge,  
And gather by him, as he is behaved,  
If ’t be the affliction of his love or no  
That thus he suffers for.

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

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

Exit **GERTRUDE**

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

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

**Modern Text**

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.  

**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.

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

CLAUDIUS and POLONIUS withdraw
Enter HAMLET

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

Act 3, Scene 1, Page 4

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

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

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

OPHELIA
My lord, I have remembrances of yours
That I have longèd long to redeem;
I pray you now receive them.

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

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 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. But shh, 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 anything.
### Act 3, Scene 1, Page 5

**OPHELIA**

My honored lord, you know right well you did,
And with them, words of so sweet breath composed
As made the things more rich. Their perfume lost,

**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

**HAMLET**

Ha, ha, are you honest?

**OPHELIA**

My lord?

**HAMLET**

Are you fair?

**OPHELIA**

What means your lordship?

**HAMLET**

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

**OPHELIA**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**OPHELIA**

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.

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### Act 3, Scene 1, Page 6

I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more

I am arrogant, vengeful, ambitious, with more ill
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
O, help him, you sweet heavens!

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

OPHELIA
Heavenly powers, restore him!

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

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

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
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,
CLAUDIUS and POLONIUS come forward

CLAUDIUS

Love? His affections do not that way tend.
Nor what he spake, though it lacked form a little,
Was not like madness. There's something in his soul
O'er which his melancholy sits on brood,
And I do doubt the hatch and the disclose
Will be some danger—which for to prevent,
I have in quick determination
Thus set it down: he shall with speed to England
For the demand of our neglected tribute.
Haply the seas and countries different
With variable objects shall expel
This something-settled matter in his heart,
Whereon his brains still beating puts him thus
From fashion of himself. What think you on 't?

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue. But if you mouth it, as many of 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 in your allowance o'erweigh a whole theatre of others.

Act 3, Scene 2, Page 2
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.

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.

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.

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**

Will you two help them get ready?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Yes, my lord.

**Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN**

**HAMLET**

What ho, Horatio!

**Enter HORATIO**

**HORATIO**

Here, sweet lord, at your service.

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

O my dear lord—

**HAMLET**

Nay, do not think I flatter.

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

As one in suffering all that suffers nothing—
A man that Fortune’s buffets and rewards
Hast ta’en with equal thanks. And blessed are those
Whose blood and judgment are so well commingled,
That they are not a pipe for Fortune’s finger
To sound what stop she please. Give me that man
That is not passion’s slave, and I will wear him
In my heart’s core, ay, in my heart of heart,
As I do thee.—Something too much of this.—
There is a play tonight before the king.

One scene of it comes near the circumstance
Which I have told thee of my father’s death.
I prithee, when thou seest that act afoot,
Even with the very comment of thy soul
Observe mine uncle. If his occulted guilt
Do not itself unkennel in one speech,
It is a damned ghost that we have seen,
And my imaginations are as foul

**Act 3, Scene 2, Page 4**

As Vulcan’s stithy. Give him heedful note.
For I mine eyes will rivet to his face,

Watch him closely. I’ll stare at him too, and afterward we’ll compare notes on him.
And after we will both our judgments join
In censure of his seeming.

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

HORATIO
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, ROS
ENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN, and other
lords attendant with CLAUDIUS’s guard
carrying torches.

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

CLAUDIUS
How fares our cousin Hamlet?

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

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

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

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

HAMLET
What did you enact?

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

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

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

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

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

POLONIUS
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) Oh, do you mark that?

HAMLET
Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

OPHELIA
No, my lord.

HAMLET
I mean, my head upon your lap?

OPHELIA
Ay, my lord.

HAMLET
Do you think I meant country matters?

OPHELIA
I think nothing, my lord.

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

OPHELIA
What is, my lord?

HAMLET
Nothing.

OPHELIA
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.”

Trumpets sound. The dumb show begins

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

**Exeunt PLAYERS**

**OPHELIA**
What means this, my lord?

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

**OPHELIA**
Belike this show imports the argument of the play.

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

**OPHELIA**
Will he tell us what this show meant?

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

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

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

**OPHELIA**
'Tis brief, my lord.

**HAMLET**
As woman's love.

**Enter PLAYER KING and PLAYER QUEEN**

**PLAYER KING**

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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.

The **PLAYERS** exit.

**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.

**HAMLET**
This guy will tell us everything. 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.

**Enter PLAYER KING**

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**PLAYER KING**

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**Prologue**

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**Exit**

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**Prologue**

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**Exit**

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**Prologue**

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**Exit**

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**Prologue**

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**Exit**

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**Prologue**

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**Prologue**

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**Prologue**

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**Prologue**

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**Exit**

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**Prologue**

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**Exit**

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**Prologue**

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**Exit**

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**Prologue**

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**Exit**
Original Text

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

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

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

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

PLAYER KING
Faith, I must leave thee, love, and shortly too.
My operant powers their functions leave to do.
And thou shalt live in this fair world behind
Honored, beloved, and haply one as kind
For husband shalt thou—

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.

Modern Text

It's been thirty years since we were married.

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, 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
Where joy most revels, grief doth most lament.
Grief joys, joy grieves on slender accident.
This world is not for aye, nor 'tis not strange
That even our loves should with our fortunes change.
For 'tis a question left us yet to prove,
Whether love lead fortune, or else fortune love.
The great man down, you mark his favorite flies.
The poor advanced makes friends of enemies.
And hitherto doth love on fortune tend,
For who not needs shall never lack a friend,
And who in want a hollow friend doth try,
Directly seasons him his enemy.
But, orderly to end where I begun,
Our wills and fates do so contrary run
That our devices still are overthrown.
Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own.
So think thou wilt no second husband wed,
But die thy thoughts when thy first lord is dead.

Act 3, Scene 2, Page 10

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

HAMLET
If she should break it now!

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

HAMLET
Madam, how like you this play?

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
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.

HAMLET
Madam, how are you liking this play?

GERTRUDE
The lady protests too much, methinks.

HAMLET
Oh, but she'll keep her word.

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

HAMLET

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

HAMLET
CLAUDIUS
What do you call the play?

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. We can watch without being bothered.

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

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

OPHELIA
Still better and worse.

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

LUCIANUS
Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit, and time agreeing,
Confederate season, else no creature seeing,
Thou mixture rank, of midnight weeds collected,
With Hecate’s ban thrice blasted, thrice infected,
Thy natural magic and dire property

(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.
Original Text

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

CLAUDIUS stands up

OPHELIA
The king rises.

HAMLET
What, frightened with false fire?

GERTRUDE
How fares my lord?

POLONIUS
Give o’er the play.

CLAUDIUS
Give me some light, away!

POLONIUS
Lights, lights, lights!

Comotion. Exeunt all but HAMLET and HORATIO

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

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.

Modern Text

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 exits.

HAMLET
Let the deer that’s been shot go off 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.

Act 3, Scene 2, Page 13

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.

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.
**Original Text**

**HAMLET**

265 Ah ha! Come, some music! Come, the 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**

Ay, sir, what of him?

**GUILDENSTERN**

Is in his retirement marvelous distempered.

**Modern Text**

**HAMLET**

Ah ha! Hey, let's have some music 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.

**Act 3, Scene 2, Page 14**

**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.

**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.
**Original Text**

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.

**Modern Text**

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.

Act 3, Scene 2, Page 15

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

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

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

ROSENCRANTZ
My lord, you once did love me.

HAMLET
And do still, by these pickers and stealers.

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

HAMLET
Sir, I lack advancement.

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

HAMLET
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.

**Act 3, Scene 2, Page 16**

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 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?

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

My lord, I cannot.

**HAMLET**

I pray you.

**GUILDENSTERN**

Believe me, I cannot.

**HAMLET**

I do beseech you.

**GUILDENSTERN**

I know no touch of it, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

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

**HAMLET**

Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me. You would seem to know my stops. You would pluck out the heart of my mystery. You would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass. And there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ, yet cannot you make it speak? '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.

---

**Act 3, Scene 2, Page 17**

**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**

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.

**Enter POLONIUS**

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.
Original Text

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.

Exit all but HAMLET

350 Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world. Now could I drink hot blood
And do such bitter business as the bitter day
Would quake to look on. Soft, now to my mother.—
O heart, lose not thy nature, let not ever
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom.
Let me be cruel, not unnatural.

Modern Text

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 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.

Act 3, Scene 2, Page 18

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!

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

GUILDENSTERN
We will ourselves provide.
Most holy and religious fear it is
To keep those many, many bodies safe
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 more
That spirit upon whose weal depend and rest
The lives of many. The cease of majesty
Dies not alone, but, like a gulf, doth draw
What's near it with it. It is a massy wheel
Fixed on the summit of the highest mount,
To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things
Are mortised and adjoined, which, when it falls,
Each small annexment, petty consequence,
Attends the boisterous ruin. Never alone
Did the king sigh, but with a general groan.

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

ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN
We will haste us.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.

POLONIUS
Enter POLONIUS

My lord, he's going to his mother's closet.
Behind the arras I'll convey myself
To hear the process. I'll warrant she'll tax him home.
And, as you said (and wisely was it said)
'Tis meet that some more audience than a mother—
Since nature makes them partial—should o'erhear
The speech, of vantage. Fare you well, my liege.

CLAUDIUS
Thanks, dear my lord.

POLONIUS
Oh, my offence is rank. It smells to heaven.
It hath the primal eldest curse upon 't,
A brother's murder. Pray can I not.
Though inclination be as sharp as will,
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,
And, like a man to double business bound,
I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
And both neglect. What if this cursed hand
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood?
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy
But to confront the visage of offence?
And what's in prayer but this twofold force,
To be forestalled ere we come to fall
Or pardoned being down? Then I'll look up.
My fault is past. But oh, what form of prayer
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:
May one be pardoned and retain th' offense?
In the corrupted currents of this world
Offense's gilded hand may shove by justice,
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law. But 'tis not so above.
There is no shuffling. There the action lies
In his true nature, and we ourselves compelled,
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
To give in evidence. What then? What rests?
Try what repentance can. What can it not?
Yet what can it when one can not repent?
O wretched state! O bosom black as death!
O limèd soul that, struggling to break 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)

59

HAMLET enters.

60 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)

65

HAMLET
Now might I do it pat. Now he is a-praying.
And now I'll do 't. And so he goes to heaven.
And so am I revenged.—That would be scanned.
A villain kills my father, and, for that,
I, his sole son, do this same villain send
To heaven.
69

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 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.

70

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.

74

Hamlet exits.

CLAUDIUS
(rises) My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.
Words without thoughts never to heaven go.
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,
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**
(\textit{within}) Mother, mother, mother!

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

**POLONIUS** hides behind the arras

Enter **HAMLET**

**HAMLET**
Now mother, what's the matter?

**GERTRUDE**
Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

**HAMLET**
Mother, you have my father much offended.

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

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

**GERTRUDE**
Why, how now, Hamlet?

**HAMLET**
What's the matter now?

**GERTRUDE**
Have you forgot me?

**HAMLET**
No, by the rood, not so.

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

**Act 3, Scene 4, Page 2**

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

**HAMLET**
Come, come, and sit you down. You shall not budge.
You go not till I set you up a glass

Where you may see the inmost part of you.

**GERTRUDE**
What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me?

**GERTRUDE**
In that case I'll call in others who can still speak.

**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
Original Text

Help, help, ho!

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

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

(stabs his sword through the arras and kills POLONIUS)

POLONIUS
(from behind the tapestry) 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
A bloody deed? Almost as bad, good mother, as kill a king and marry with his brother.

GERTRUDE
As kill a king?

HAMLET
Ay, lady, 'twas my word.

draws back the arras 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.

Modern Text

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
That's what I said, my good woman.

Act 3, Scene 4, Page 3

 Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell. I took thee for thy better. Take thy fortune. Thou find'st to be too busy is some danger. (to GERTRUDE) Leave wringing of your hands. Peace. Sit you down And let me wring your heart. For so I shall If it be made of penetrable stuff, If damned custom have not brassed it so That it is proof and bulwark against sense.

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

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

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

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

**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 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, 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!

**HAMLET**
Nay, but to live
In the rank sweat of an enseamèd bed,
Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty—
Act 3, Scene 4, Page 5

GERTRUDE
O, speak to me no more!
These words like daggers enter in my ears.
No more, sweet Hamlet.

HAMLET
A murderer and a villain,
A slave that is not twentieth part the tithe
Of your precedent lord, a vice of kings,
A cutpurse of the empire and the rule,
That from a shelf the precious diadem stole,
And put it in his pocket—

GERTRUDE
No more!

HAMLET
A king of shreds and patches—

Enter GHOST

GHOST
Do not forget. This visitation
Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose.
But look, amazement on thy mother sits.
O, step between her and her fighting soul.
Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works.
Speak to her, Hamlet.

Act 3, Scene 4, Page 6

HAMLET
How is it with you, lady?

GERTRUDE
Alas, he's mad!

HAMLET
Do you not come your tardy son to chide,
That, lapsed in time and passion, lets go by
The important acting of your dread command?
O, say!

GHOST
Do not forget. This visitation
Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose.
But look, amazement on thy mother sits.
O, step between her and her fighting soul.

Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works.
Speak to her, Hamlet.

HAMLET
On him, on him! Look you, how pale he glares!
His form and cause conjoined, preaching to stones,
Would make them capable.
(to GHOST) Do not look upon me,

Lest with this piteous action you convert
My stern effects. Then what I have to do
Will want true color—tears perchance for blood.

**GERTRUDE**
To whom do you speak this?

**HAMLET**
Do you see nothing there?

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

**HAMLET**
Nor did you nothing hear?

**GERTRUDE**
No, nothing but ourselves.

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

*Exit GHOST*

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

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

**GERTRUDE**
To whom do you speak this?

**HAMLET**
Who are you talking to?

**GERTRUDE**
You don't see anything?

**GERTRUDE**
Nothing at all, but I can see everything that's here.

**HAMLET**
And you don't hear anything?

**GERTRUDE**
No, nothing but us talking.

**HAMLET**
Look, look how it's sneaking away! My father,
dressed just like he was when he was alive!
Look, he's going out the door right now!

*Exit GHOST*

**GERTRUDE**
This is only a figment of your imagination.
Madness is good at creating hallucinations.

**HAMLET**
Madness? My heart beats just as evenly as
yours does. There's nothing crazy in what I've
just uttered. Put me to the test. I'll rephrase
everything I've just said, which a lunatic couldn't
do. Mother, for the love of God, don't flatter
yourself into believing that it's my madness, not
your crime, that's the problem. You'd just be
concealing the rot that's eating you from the
inside. Confess your sins to heaven. Repent and
avoid damnation. 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
That monster, custom, who all sense doth eat,  
Of habits devil, is angel yet in this:

That to the use of actions fair and good  
He likewise gives a frock or livery  
That aptly is put on. Refrain tonight,  
And that shall lend a kind of easiness  
To the next abstinence, the next more easy.

---

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.

For use almost can change the stamp of nature,  
And either rein the devil or throw him out  
With wondrous potency. Once more, good night,  
And when you are desirous to be blessed,  
I’ll blessing beg of you. (points to POLONIUS)

For this same lord,  
I do repent. But heaven hath pleased it so,  
To punish me with this and this with me,  
That I must be their scourge and minister.  
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  
Not this, by no means, that I bid you do—  
Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed,  
Pinch wanton on your cheek, call you his mouse,  
And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses  
Or paddling in your neck with his damned fingers,

Make you to ravel all this matter out:  
That I essentially am not in madness  
But mad in craft. ’Twere good you let him know,  
For who that’s but a queen, fair, sober, wise,  
Would from a paddock, from a bat, a gib,  
Such dear concernings hide? Who would do so?  
No, in despite of sense and secrecy,  
Unpeg the basket on the house’s top.  
Let the birds fly, and like the famous ape,  
To try conclusions, in the basket creep  
And break your own neck down.

GERTRUDE  
Be thou assured, if words be made of breath  
And breath of life, I have no life to breathe  
What thou hast said to me.
Act 3, Scene 4, Page 9

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, They bear the mandate. They must sweep my way
And marshal me to knavery. Let it work, For 'tis the sport to have the engineer
Hoist with his own petard. And 't shall go hard, But I will delve one yard below their mines, And blow them at the moon. Oh, 'tis most sweet
When in one line two crafts directly meet. (indicates POLONIUS)
This man shall set me packing.
I'll lug the guts into the neighbor room.
Mother, good night. Indeed this counselor
Is now most still, most secret, and most grave
Who was in life a foolish prating knave.— Come, sir, to draw toward an end with you.—
Good night, mother.

Exeunt, HAMLET tugging in POLONIUS

Act 4, Scene 1

Enter King CLAUDIUS and Queen GERTRUDE,
with ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

CLAUDIUS (to GERTRUDE) There's matter in these sighs, these profound heaves. You must translate. 'Tis fit we understand them. Where is your son?

GERTRUDE (to ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN)
5 Bestow this place on us a little while.

Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

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

CLAUDIUS What, Gertrude? How does Hamlet?

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

CLAUDIUS
Original Text

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
Should have kept short, restrained and out of haunt,
20 This mad young man. But so much was our love,
We would not understand what was most fit,

Modern Text

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

Act 4, Scene 1, Page 2

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 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 further aid.

ROSENCRANTZ

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.

Enter ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

Come, Gertrude, we’ll call up our wisest friends,

GENTLEMEN

(From within) Hamlet! Lord Hamlet!

HAMLET

Safely stowed.

HAMLET

The body is safely hidden.

GENTLEMEN

(from within) Hamlet! Lord Hamlet!

GENTLEMEN

(from offstage) Hamlet, Lord Hamlet!

HAMLET

What’s that noise? Who’s calling on Hamlet? Oh,
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 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?

Act 4, Scene 2, Page 2

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.

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 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,
Who like not in their judgment, but their eyes.
And where ‘tis so, th’ offender’s scourge is weighed,
But never the offense. To bear all smooth and even,
This sudden sending him away must seem
Deliberate pause. Diseases desperate grown

CLAUDIUS enters with two or three of his attendants.

BY desperate appliance are relieved,
Or not at all.

Enter ROSENCRANTZ

ROSENCRANTZ
Where the dead body is bestowed, my lord,
We cannot get from him.

CLAUDIUS
But where is he?

ROSENCRANTZ
Without, my lord; guarded, to know your pleasure.

CLAUDIUS
Bring him before us.

ROSENCRANTZ
Ho, Guildenstern! Bring in my lord.

Enter HAMLET and GUILDENSTERN

CLAUDIUS
Now, Hamlet, where’s Polonius?

CLAUDIUS
Now, Hamlet, where’s Polonius?

Act 4, Scene 3, Page 2

HAMLET
At supper.

CLAUDIUS
At supper where?

HAMLET
Not where he eats, but where he is eaten. A certain convocation of politic worms are e’en at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet. We fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots. Your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service—two dishes, but to one table. That’s the end.

CLAUDIUS
Alas, ala–

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 may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.

CLAUDIUS
What dost you mean by this?

HAMLET
Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar.

CLAUDIUS
Where is Polonius?

HAMLET
In heaven. Send hither to see. If your messenger find him not there, seek him i’ th’ other place yourself. But if indeed you find him not within this month, you shall nose him as you go up the stairs into the lobby.

CLAUDIUS (to attendants) Go seek him there.

HAMLET
He will stay till ye come.

CLAUDIUS
Hamlet, this deed, for thine especial safety—Which we do tender as we dearly grieve
For that which thou hast done—must send thee hence
With fiery quickness. Therefore prepare thyself.
The bark is ready and the wind at help,Th’ associates tend, and everything is bent
For England.

HAMLET
For England?

CLAUDIUS
Ay, Hamlet.

HAMLET
Good.

CLAUDIUS
So is it, if thou knew’st our purposes.

HAMLET
I see a cherub that sees them. But come, for England.
Farewell, dear mother.

CLAUDIUS
Thy loving father, Hamlet.

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

CLAUDIUS
Follow him at foot. Tempt him with speed aboard.
Delay it not. I'll have him hence tonight.
Away! For everything is sealed and done
That else leans on the affair. Pray you, make haste.

Exit HAMLET

Exeunt all but CLAUDIUS

And, England, if my love thou hold'st at aught—
As my great power thereof may give thee sense,
Since yet thy cicatrice looks raw and red
After the Danish sword and thy free awe

Act 4, Scene 3, Page 4

Pays homage to us—thou mayst not coldly set
Our sovereign process, which imports at full,
By letters congruing to that effect,
The present death of Hamlet. Do it, England,
For like the hectic in my blood he rages,
And thou must cure me. Till I know 'tis done,
Howe'er my haps, my joys were ne'er begun.

Exit

Act 4, Scene 4

FORTINBRAS enters with his army and a CAPTAIN

FORTINBRAS
Go, Captain, from me greet the Danish king
Tell him that, by his license, Fortinbras
Craves the conveyance of a promised march
Over his kingdom. You know the rendezvous.
If that his majesty would aught with us,
We shall express our duty in his eye,
And let him know so.

CAPTAIN
I will do 't, my lord.

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

Everyone except the CAPTAIN exits.

HAMLET 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 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.

HAMLET, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN, and others enter.
Against some part of Poland.

HAMLET  Who commands them, sir?

CAPTAIN  The nephew to old Norway, Fortinbras.

HAMLET  Goes it against the main of Poland, sir, or for some frontier?

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

HAMLET  Why, then the Polack never will defend it.

CAPTAIN  Yes, it is already garrisoned.

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

CAPTAIN  God be wi’ you, sir.

ROSENCRANTZ  Will ‘t please you go, my lord?

HAMLET  I’ll be with you straight. Go a little before.

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 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 the CAPTAIN) Thank you very much for the information, sir.

CAPTAIN  Good-bye, sir.

Exit CAPTAIN

ROSENCRANTZ  Will you please come now, my lord?

HAMLET  I’ll be there in a minute. Start without me.

Everyone except HAMLET exits.
Of thinking too precisely on th' event—
A thought which, quartered, hath but one part wisdom
And ever three parts coward—I do not know
Why yet I live to say “This thing’s to do,”
Sith I have cause and will and strength and means
To do ‘t. Examples gross as earth exhort me.
Witness this army of such mass and charge
Led by a delicate and tender prince,
Whose spirit with divine ambition puffed
Makes mouths at the invisible event,
Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,
Even for an eggshell. Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument,
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honor’s at the stake. How stand I then,
That have a father killed, a mother stained,
Excitements of my reason and my blood,
And let all sleep—while, to my shame, I see
The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
That for a fantasy and trick of fame
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
Which is not tomb enough and continent
To hide the slain? Oh, from this time forth,
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!

Exit

Act 4, Scene 5

Enter HORATIO, GERTRUDE, and a GENTLEMAN

GERTRUDE
I will not speak with her.

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

GERTRUDE
What would she have?

GENTLEMAN
She speaks much of her father, says she hears
There’s tricks i’ th’ world, and hems, and beats her heart,
Spurns enviously at straws, speaks things in doubt
That carry but half sense. Her speech is nothing,
Yet the unshaped use of it doth move
The hearers to collection. They aim at it,
And both the words up fit to their own thoughts,
Which, as her winks and nods and gestures yield them,
Indeed would make one think there might be thought,
Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily.
HORATIO
’twere good she were spoken with, for she may strew
Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds.
GERTRUDE
Let her come in.

Exit GENTLEMAN

(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

OPHELIA
Where is the beauteous majesty of Denmark?
GERTRUDE
How now, Ophelia?
OPHELIA
(sings)
How should I your true love know
From another one?
By his cockle hat and staff,
And his sandal shoon.
GERTRUDE
Alas, sweet lady, what imports this song?

OPHELIA
Say you? Nay, pray you, mark.
(sings)
He is dead and gone, lady,
He is dead and gone,
At his head a grass-green turf,
At his heels a stone.
Oh, ho!

GERTRUDE
Nay, but, Ophelia—
OPHELIA
Pray you, mark.
(sings)
White his shroud as the mountain snow—

Enter CLAUDIUS

CLAUDIUS enters.

GERTRUDE
My lord, look at this poor girl.
OPHELIA
(sings)
Covered with sweet flowers
Which did not fall to the ground
In true-love showers.
Act 4, Scene 5, Page 3

CLAUDIUS
How do you, pretty lady?

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

CLAUDIUS
Conceit upon her father.

OPHELIA
Pray you, let’s have no words of this, but when they ask you what it means, say you this:

(sings)
Tomorrow is Saint Valentine’s day,
All in the morning betime,
And I a maid at your window,
To be your Valentine.
Then up he rose, and donned his clothes,
And dupped the chamber door.
Let in the maid that out a maid
Never departed more.

CLAUDIUS
Pretty Ophelia—

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

Act 4, Scene 5, Page 4

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. Keep an eye on her, please.
Exit HORATIO

Oh, this is the poison of deep grief. It springs
All from her father’s death, and now behold!
O Gertrude, Gertrude,
When sorrows come, they come not single spies
But in battalions. First, her father slain.
Next, your son gone, and he most violent author
Of his own just remove. The people muddied,
Thick, and unwholesome in their thoughts and whispers
For good Polonius’ death, and we have done but greenly
In hugger-mugger to inter him. Poor Ophelia
Divided from herself and her fair judgment,
Without the which we are pictures, or mere beasts.
Last—and as much containing as all these—
Her brother is in secret come from France,
Feeds on his wonder, keeps himself in clouds,
And wants not buzzers to infect his ear
With pestilent speeches of his father’s death,
Wherein necessity, of matter beggared,
Will nothing stick our person to arraign
In ear and ear. O my dear Gertrude, this,
Like to a murdering piece, in many places
Gives me superfluous death.

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.

GERTRUDE
Alack, what noise is this?

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

What is the matter?

MESSENGER
Save yourself, my lord.
The ocean, overpeering of his list,
Eats not the flats with more impiteous haste
Than young Laertes, in a riotous head,
O’erbears your officers. The rabble call him “lord”
And—as the world were now but to begin,
Antiquity forgot, custom not known,
The ratifiers and props of every word—
They cry, “Choose we! Laertes shall be king!”
Caps, hands, and tongues applaud it to the clouds:
“Laertes shall be king, Laertes king!”

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

GERTRUDE
Oh, no—what’s that noise?

CLAUDIUS
Listen! Where are my bodyguards? Let them guard the door.

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!
CLAUDIUS

85 The doors are broke.

CLAUDIUS

Enter LAERTES with others

LAERTES

The doors have been smashed open.

LAERTES enters with others.

Act 4, Scene 5, Page 6

LAERTES

Where is this king?—Sirs, stand you all without.

ALL

No, let’s come in!

LAERTES

I pray you, give me leave.

ALL

We will, we will.

LAERTES

I thank you. Keep the door.—O thou vile king, Give me my father!

GERTRUDE

Calmly, good Laertes.

LAERTES

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

CLAUDIUS

What is the cause, Laertes, That thy rebellion looks so giant-like?— Let him go, Gertrude. Do not fear our person. There’s such divinity doth hedge a king 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

Where is my father?

CLAUDIUS

Dead.

GERTRUDE

But not by him.

CLAUDIUS

Let him demand his fill.

LAERTES

Where’s this so-called king? Men, wait outside.

ALL

No, let us in!

LAERTES

Please wait.

ALL

All right, we will, we will.

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’s my father?

CLAUDIUS

He’s dead.

GERTRUDE

But the king didn’t kill him.

CLAUDIUS

Let him ask what he wants to ask.

Act 4, Scene 5, Page 7

LAERTES

How came he dead? I’ll not be juggled with.

To hell, allegiance! Vows, to the blackest devil! Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit! I dare damnation. To this point I stand

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
That both the worlds I give to negligence.
Let come what comes, only I’ll be revenged
Most thoroughly for my father.

CLAUDIUS
Who shall stay you?

LAERTES
My will, not all the world.
And for my means, I’ll husband them so well,
They shall go far with little.

CLAUDIUS
Good Laertes,

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

LAERTES
None but his enemies.

CLAUDIUS
Will you know them then?

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

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

CLAUDIUS
Good Laertes,

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

LAERTES
None but his enemies.

CLAUDIUS
Do you want to know who they are, then?

CLAUDIUS
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.

OA heat, dry up my brains! Tears seven times salt,
Burn out the sense and virtue of mine eye!
By heaven, thy madness shall be paid by weight,
Till our scale turn the beam. O rose of May,
Dear maid, kind sister, sweet Ophelia!
Nature is fine in love, and where ‘tis fine,
It sends some precious instance of itself
After the thing it loves.

OPHELIA
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.

Enter OPHELIA

LAERTES
How now? What noise is that?

OPHELIA
Oh, heat, dry up my brains! Salty tears, burn my eyes! By heaven, I’ll get revenge for your
madness! Oh, you springtime rose, dear maiden,
kind sister, sweet Ophelia! Is it possible that a
young woman’s mind could fade away as easily
as an old man’s life? Human nature is refined
and thoughtful—person graciously gives a
valuable part of herself away to her beloved, as
Ophelia has sent off her sanity to her dead
father.

OPHELIA
They carried him uncovered in the coffin,
Hey non nonny, nonny, hey nonny.
And tears poured down into his grave.
Good-bye, honey.
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.

OPHELIA
(to GERTRUDE) Here are fennel and columbines—they symbolize adultery. (to CLAUDIUS) And here's rue for you—it symbolizes repentance. We can call it the merciful Sunday 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 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.

LAERTES
Do you see this, O God?
CLAUDIUS
Laertes, I must commune with your grief,
Or you deny me right. Go but apart,
And they shall hear and judge 'twixt you and me.
If by direct or by collateral hand
They find us touched, we will our kingdom give,
Our crown, our life, and all that we can ours,
To you in satisfaction. But if not,
Be you content to lend your patience to us,
And we shall jointly labor with your soul
To give it due content.

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

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

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.

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
Let them come in.

Exit SERVANT

I do not know from what part of the world
I should be greeted, if not from Lord Hamlet.

Enter SAILORS

SAILOR
God bless you, sir.

HORATIO
Let him bless thee too.

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

HORATIO
(reads)
"Horatio,

When thou shalt have overlooked this, give these fellows some means to the king. They have letters for him. Ere we were two days old at sea, a pirate of very warlike appointment gave us chase. Finding ourselves too slow of sail, we put on a compelled valor, and in the grapple I boarded them. On the instant, they got clear of our ship, so I alone became their prisoner. They have dealt with me like thieves of mercy, but they knew what they did; I am to do a good turn for them.

 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.

Act 4, Scene 6, Page 2

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. Farewell.

He that thou knowest thine,
Hamlet."

Come, I will give you way for these your letters, And do 't the speedier, that you may direct me To him from whom you brought them.

Exeunt They exit.

Act 4, Scene 7

Enter CLAUDIUS and LAERTES

CLAUDIUS

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

LAERTES

It well appears. But tell me
Why you proceeded not against these feats,
So criminal and so capital in nature,
As by your safety, wisdom, all things else,
You mainly were stirred up.

CLAUDIUS

Oh, for two special reasons,
Which may to you perhaps seem much unsinewed,
But yet to me they are strong. The queen his mother Lives almost by his looks, and for myself—
My virtue or my plague, be it either which—
She’s so conjunctive to my life and soul,
That, as the star moves not but in his sphere,
I could not but by her. The other motive

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 it.

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
Original Text

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 gyes 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.

20

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

CLAUDIUS
Break not your sleeps for that. You must not think
That we are made of stuff so flat and dull
That we can let our beard be shook with danger
And think it pastime. 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.

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 asking your pardon thereunto,
recount the occasion of my sudden and more strange return.

Hamlet.”

Act 4, Scene 7, Page 3

What should this mean? Are all the rest come back?

Modern Text

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 have I 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.

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 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”

Act 4, Scene 7, Page 3

What does this mean? Has everyone else come back?
Or is it some abuse, and no such thing?

LAERTES
Know you the hand?

CLAUDIUS
'Tis Hamlet's character. "Naked"?
And in a postscript here, he says "alone."
Can you advise me?

LAERTES
I'm lost in it, my lord. But let him come. It warms the very sickness in my heart That I shall live and tell him to his teeth, "Thus diddest thou."

CLAUDIUS
If it be so, Laertes— As how should it be so? How otherwise?— Will you be ruled by me?

LAERTES
Ay, my lord—
So you will not o'errule me to a peace.

CLAUDIUS
To thine own peace. If he be now returned, As checking at his voyage, and that he means No more to undertake it, I will work him To an exploit, now ripe in my devise, Under the which he shall not choose but 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
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
I’ve seen myself, and served against, the French,  
And they can well on horseback. But this gallant  
Had witchcraft in ‘t. He grew unto his seat,  
And to such wondrous doing brought his horse  
As he had been encorpsed and demi-natured  
With the brave beast. So far he topped my thought,  
That I, in forgery of shapes and tricks,  
Come short of what he did.

LAERTES  
A Norman was ‘t?

CLAUDIUS  
A Norman.

LAERTES  
Upon my life, Lamond!

CLAUDIUS  
The very same.

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

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

LAERTES  
What out of this, my lord?

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

CLAUDIUS  
Not that I think you did not love your father  
But that I know love is begun by time,  
And that I see, in passages of proof,  
Time qualifies the spark and fire of it.  
There lives within the very flame of love  
A kind of wick or snuff that will abate it.  
And nothing is at a like goodness still.  
For goodness, growing to a pleurisy,  
Dies in his own too-much. That we would do,

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.
We should do when we would, for this “would” changes
And hath abatements and delays as many
As there are tongues, are hands, are accidents.

And then this “should” is like a spendthrift sigh
That hurts by easing.—But to the quick of th’ ulcer:
Hamlet comes back. What would you undertake
To show yourself in deed your father’s son
More than in words?

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?

LAERTES
To cut his throat i’ th’ church.

CLAUDIUS
No place, indeed, should murder sanctuarize.

Revenge should have no bounds. But, good Laertes,
Will you do this, keep close within your chamber.
Hamlet returned shall know you are come home.
We’ll put on those shall praise your excellence
And set a double varnish on the fame
The Frenchman gave you, bring you in fine together
And wager on your heads. He, being remiss,
Most generous and free from all contriving,
Will not peruse the foils; so that, with ease,
Or with a little shuffling, you may choose
A sword unbated, and in a pass of practice
Requite him for your father.

LAERTES
I will do ’t.

And for that purpose I’ll anoint my sword.
I bought an unction of a mountebank,
So mortal that, but dip a knife in it,
Where it draws blood no cataplasm so rare,
Collected from all simples that have virtue
Under the moon, can save the thing from death
That is but scratched withal. I’ll touch my point
With this contagion, that if I gall him slightly
It may be death.

CLAUDIUS
Let’s further think of this,
Weigh what convenience both of time and means
May fit us to our shape. If this should fail,
And that our drift look through our bad performance,
’Twere better not assayed. Therefore this project

CLAUDIUS
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.

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
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 cunnings.—
    I ha ‘t! When in your motion you are hot and dry,
    As make your bouts more violent to that end,
155 And that he calls for drink, I’ll have prepared him
    A chalice for the nonce, whereon but sipping,
    If he by chance escape your venomed stuck,
    Our purpose may hold there.—But stay, what noise?

Enter GERTRUDE

GERTRUDE
One woe doth tread upon another’s heel,
160 So fast they follow.—Your sister’s drowned, Laertes.

LAERTES
Drowned? Oh, where?

GERTRUDE
There is a willow grows aslant a brook
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.
There with fantastic garlands did she come
165 Of crowflowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do “dead men’s fingers” call them.
There, on the pendant boughs her coronet weeds
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke,
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,
Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and indued
Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.

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.

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.

Exit LAERTES

LAERTES exits.
CLAUDIUS
Let’s follow, Gertrude.
How much I had to do to calm his rage!
Now fear I this will give it start again.
Therefore let’s follow.

Exeunt

They exit.

Act 5, Scene 1

Enter a GRAVEDIGGER and the OTHER gravedigger

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

OTHER
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
drowns himself, it is, will he nill he, he goes. Mark you
that. But if the water come to him and drown him, he
drowns not himself. Argal, he that is not guilty of his
own death shortens not his own life.

OTHER
But is this law?

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

OTHER
Will you ha’ the truth on ’t? If this had not been a
gentlewoman, she should have been buried out o’
Christian burial.

GRAVEDIGGER
Why, there thou sayst. And the more pity that great
Original Text

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

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.

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.

Modern Text

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 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 thou dost ill to say the gallows is built stronger than the church. Argal, the gallows may do well to thee. To ’t again, come.

OTHER

“Who builds stronger than a mason, a shipwright, or a carpenter?”

GRAVEDIGGER

Ay, tell me that, and unyoke.

OTHER

Marry, now I can tell.

GRAVEDIGGER

To ’t.

OTHER

Mass, I cannot tell.

GRAVEDIGGER

Cudgel thy brains no more about it, for your dull ass will not mend his pace with beating. And when you

Enter HAMLET and HORATIO afar off

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
Original Text

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)
In youth when I did love, did love,
Methought it was very sweet
To contract—o—the time, for—a—my behave,
Oh, methought, there—a—was nothing—a—meet.

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

Act 5, Scene 1, Page 4

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

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

GRAVEDIGGER
(sings)
But age with his stealing steps
Hath clawed me in his clutch,
And hath shipped me into the land
As if I had never been such.

(throws up a skull)

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

HORATIO
It might, my lord.

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

HORATIO
Ay, my lord.

HAMLET
Why, e’en so. And now my Lady Worm’s, chapless and knocked about the mazard with a sexton’s spade. Here’s fine revolution, an we had the trick to see ’t. Did these bones cost no more the breeding but to play at loggets with them? Mine ache to think on ’t.

Modern Text

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 my youth I loved, I loved,
And I thought 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, “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.
Act 5, Scene 1, Page 5

GRAVEDIGGER
(sings)
A pickax and a spade, a spade,
For and a shrouding sheet,
Oh, a pit of clay for to be made
For such a guest is meet.

(throws up another skull)

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

HORATIO
Not a jot more, my lord.

HAMLET
Is not parchment made of sheepskins?

HORATIO
Ay, my lord, and of calfskins too.

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

GRAVEDIGGER
Mine, sir.
(sings)

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.

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.

Act 5, Scene 1, Page 6

GRAVEDIGGER
(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.
Original Text
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
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 gravedigger?

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?
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?

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

HAMLET
Why he more than another?

GRAVEDIGGER
Why, sir, his hide is so tanned with his trade that he will keep out water a great while, and your water is a sore decayer of your whoreson dead body. (indicates a skull) Here’s a skull now. This skull has lain in the earth three-and-twenty years.

HAMLET
Whose was it?

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

HAMLET
Nay, I know not.

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

HAMLET
This?

GRAVEDIGGER
E’en that.

HAMLET
Let me see. (takes the skull) Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath borne me on his back a thousand times, and now, how abhorred in my imagination it is! My gorge rises at it. Here hung
those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. —
Where be your gibes now? Your gambols? Your
songs? Your flashes of merriment that were wont to
set the table on a roar? Not one now to mock your
own grinning? Quite chapfallen? Now get you to my
lady’s chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch
thick, to this favor she must come. Make her laugh at
that.—Prithee, Horatio, tell me one thing.

HORATIO
What’s that, my lord?

HAMLET
Dost thou think Alexander looked o’ this fashion i’ th’
earth?

HORATIO
E’en so.

HAMLET
And smelt so? Pah! (puts down the skull)

HORATIO
E’en so, my lord.

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

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

HAMLET
No, faith, not a jot. But to follow him thither with
modesty enough, and likelihood to lead it, as thus:
Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander
returneth to dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make
loam—and why of that loam, whereto he was
converted, might they not stop a beer barrel?
Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay,
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.
Oh, that that earth, which kept the world in awe,
Should patch a wall t’ expel the winter’s flaw!
But soft, but soft a while.

Enter King CLAUDIUS,
Queen GERTRUDE, LAERTES, and a coffin, with
a PRIEST and other lords attendant.

Here comes the king,
The queen, the courtiers—who is this they follow,
And with such maiméd 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.

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.
Act 5, Scene 1, Page 10

**Original Text**

**HAMLET and HORATIO withdraw**

**LAERTES**
What ceremony else?

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

**LAERTES**
What ceremony else?

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

**LAERTES**
Must there no more be done?

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

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

**HAMLET**
(to HORATIO) What, the fair Ophelia?

**Act 5, Scene 1, Page 11**

**GERTRUDE**
Sweets to the sweet. Farewell! (scatters flowers)
I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife.
I thought thy bride-bed to have decked, sweet maid,
And not have strewed thy grave.

**LAERTES**
Oh, treble woe
Fall ten times treble on that cursèd head,
Whose wicked deed thy most ingenious sense
Deprived thee of! Hold off the earth awhile
Till I have caught her once more in mine arms.

(leaps into the grave)

Now pile your dust upon the quick and dead,
Till of this flat a mountain you have made,
T' o'ertop old Pelion or the skyish head

**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
cought 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.
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,
Hamlet the Dane. (leaps into the grave)

LAERTES 235 The devil take thy soul!

HAMLET and LAERTES grapple

HAMLET Thou prithee' st not well.
I prithee, take thy fingers from my throat,
For though I am not splenitive and rash,
Yet have I something in me dangerous,
Which let thy wisdom fear. Hold off thy hand.

CLAUDIUS Pluck them asunder.

Hamlet, Hamlet!

HAMLET Why, I will fight with him upon this theme
Until my eyelids will no longer wag.

GERTRUDE Hamlet! Hamlet!

ALL Gentlemen—

HORATIO (to HAMLET) Good my lord, be quiet.

Attendants separate HAMLET and LAERTES

HAMLET For love of God, forbear him.

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?

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 her?

CLAUDIUS O, he is mad, Laertes.

GERTRUDE Oh, he’s crazy, 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 you going to do for her?

CLAUDIUS For the love of God, be patient with him.

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
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

When that her golden couplets are disclosed,  
His silence will sit drooping.

Act 5, Scene 1, Page 13

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 day.

Exit HAMLET

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

Exit HORATIO

(to LAERTES) Strengthen your patience in our last night's speech.  
We'll put the matter to the present push.—  
Good Gertrude, set some watch over your son.—  
This grave shall have a living monument.  
An hour of quiet shortly shall we see.  
Till then in patience our proceeding be.

Exeunt

Act 5, Scene 2

Enter HAMLET and HORATIO

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

HORATIO  
Remember it, my lord?

HAMLET  
Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting  
That would not let me sleep. Methought I lay  
Worse than the mutines in the bilboes. Rashly—  
And praised be rashness for it: let us know  
Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well  
When our deep plots do pall, and that should teach us  
There's a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will—

HORATIO  
That is most certain.

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, however often we screw up—

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

HAMLET
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 't possible?

HORATIO
Is it possible?

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

HAMLET
Here's the document. Read it in your free time. But do you
want to hear what I did then?

HORATIO
I beseech you.

HORATIO
Yes, please tell me.

HAMLET
Being thus benetted round with villainies—
Ere I could make a prologue to my brains,
They had begun the play—I sat me down,
Devised a new commission, wrote it fair.

HAMLET
So there I was, caught in their evil net. Before I
could even start processing the 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
How was this sealed?

HORATIO
But how could you put an official seal on it?
Original Text

Act 5, Scene 2, Page 3

HAMLET
Why, even in that was heaven ordinant.
I had my father's signet in my purse,
Which was the model of that Danish seal.
Folded the writ up in form of th' other,
Subscribed it, gave 't th' impression, placed it safely,
The changeling never known. Now, the next day
Was our sea fight, and what to this was sequent
Thou know'st already.

HORATIO
So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to 't.

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

HORATIO
Why, what a king is this!

HAMLET
Does it not, think thee, stand me now upon—
He that hath killed my king and whored my mother,
Popped in between th' election and my hopes,
Thrown out his angle for my proper life
(And with such cozenage)—is 't not perfect
To quit him with this arm? And is 't not to be damned
To let this canker of our nature come
In further evil?

HORATIO
It must be shortly known to him from England

HAMLET
It will be short. The interim's mine.
And a man's life's no more than to say "one."
But I am very sorry, good Horatio,
That to Laertes I forgot myself,
For by the image of my cause I see
The portraiture of his. I'll court his favors.
But sure the bravery of his grief did put me
Into a towering passion.

HORATIO
Peace.—Who comes here?

Enter young OSRIC, a courtier, hat in hand
OSRIC
Your lordship is right welcome back to Denmark.

Modern Text

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 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
He'll find out soon what happened in England.

Act 5, Scene 2, Page 4

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
Welcome back to Denmark, my lord.
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, spacious in the possession of dirt.

HORATIO
(aside to HAMLET) No, my good lord.

HAMLET
(aside to HORATIO) Do you know this insect?

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

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 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 bonnet to his right use. 'Tis for the head.

OSRIC
I thank your lordship. It is very hot.

HAMLET
No, believe me, 'tis very cold. The wind is northerly.

OSRIC
It is indifferent cold, my lord, indeed.

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

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

HAMLET
I beseech you, remember—(indicates that OSRIC should put on his hat)

OSRIC
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
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
No, my lord, I'm comfortable like this, thank you. Sir, there's someone named Laertes who's recently come to the court. He's an absolute gentleman, totally outstanding in so many respects, very easy in society, and displaying all his excellent qualities. If I were to expose my true feelings about him, I'd have to say he's like a business card for the upper classes—he's that wonderful. You'll find that he's the sum total of what a perfect gentleman should be.
HAMLET
Sir, his definition 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.

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.

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

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.

Your lordship speaks most infallibly of him.

You speak absolutely correctly, sir.

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

And what’s the point, sir? Why are we talking about him like this?

Sir?

Sorry, sir?

Is ’t not possible to understand in another tongue? You will do ’t, sir, really.

Can’t you talk to him in a different way?

What imports the nomination of this gentleman?

What is the significance of referring to this individual?

Of Laertes?

Laertes, you mean?

I know you are not ignorant—

I know you know something—

I would you did, sir. Yet in faith, if you did, it would not much approve me. Well, sir?

Thanks for the compliment, I’m happy you know that. But in fact it doesn’t say much. I’m sorry, you were saying?

You are not ignorant of what excellence Laertes is—

I know you know something about how excellent Laertes is—

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

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

HAMLET
What’s his weapon?

OSRIC
Rapier and dagger.

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

OSRIC
The king, sir, hath wagered with him six Barbary horses, against the which he has impawned, as I take it, six French rapiers and poniards with their assigns—as girdle, hangers, and so. Three of the carriages, in faith, are very dear to fancy, very responsive to the hilts, most delicate carriages, and of very liberal conceit.

HAMLET
What call you the carriages?

OSRIC
The carriages, sir, are the hangers—where the swords hang.

HAMLET
The phrase would be more germane to the matter if we could carry cannon by our sides. I would it might be hangers till then. But, on: six Barbary horses against six French swords, their assigns, and three liberal-conceited carriages—that’s the French bet against the Danish. Why is this “impawned,” as you call it?

OSRIC
The king, sir, hath laid that in a dozen passes between yourself and him, he shall not exceed you three hits. He hath laid on twelve for nine, and it would come to immediate trial if your lordship would vouchsafe the answer.

Hamlet
How if I answer “No”?

OSRIC
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

OSRIC
Excellent in fencing, I mean, sir. His reputation in fencing is unrivaled.

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
(aside to Hamlet) I knew you must be edified by the margin ere you had done.

Hamlet
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
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.

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
wheneversoever, provided I be so able as now.

LORD
The king and queen and all are coming down.

HAMLET
In happy time.

LORD
The queen desires you to use some gentle
entertainment to
Laertes before you fall to play.

Exit LORD

HAMLET
195 She well instructs me.

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 wants you to chat with Laertes—
politely—before you begin your match.

The LORD exits.

HAMLET
She’s full of good advice.
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.

CLAUDIUS enters with GERTRUDE, LAERTES, OSRIC, lords, and other attendants with trumpets, drums, fencing swords, a table, and flagons of wine

CLAUDIUS
Come, Hamlet, come, and take this hand from me. (puts LAERTES’ hand into HAMLET’S)

HAMLET
Give me your pardon, sir. I’ve done you wrong.
But pardon ’t, as you are a gentleman.

CLAUDIUS
Come shake hands with Laertes, Hamlet. (CLAUDIUS places LAERTES’ and HAMLET’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.
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,

**Act 5, Scene 2, Page 11**

Let my disclaiming from a purposed evil
Free me so far in your most generous thoughts
That I have shot mine arrow o'er the house
And hurt my brother.

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

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

**LAERTES**
Come, one for me.

**HAMLET**
I'll be your foil, Laertes. In mine ignorance
Your skill shall, like a star i' th' darkest night,
Stick fiery off indeed.

**LAERTES**
You mock me, sir.

**HAMLET**
No, by this hand.

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

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

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

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

OSRIC
A hit, a very palpable hit.

270 HAMLET
One.

LAERTES
No.

HAMLET
Judgment?

OSRIC
A hit, a very palpable hit.

LAERTES
Well, again.

CLAUDIUS
Stay, give me drink.—Hamlet, this pearl is thine.

275 Here's to thy health.

Drums, trumpets sound, shot goes off

CLAUDIUS drops pearl into cup

Give him the cup.

HAMLET
I'll play this bout first. Set it by a while.

CLAUDIUS
drops a pearl into a cup.

Drums and trumpets play, and a gun is fired.

CL Audius drops a pearl into a cup.

Give him the goblet.

HAMLET
Let me just finish this round. Set it down awhile.
Act 5, Scene 2, Page 14

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

290 I dare not drink yet, madam. By and by.

GERTRUDE

Come, let me wipe thy face.

LAERTES

(aside to CLAUDIUS) My lord, I’ll hit him now.

CLAUDIUS

I do not think ’t.

LAERTES

(aside) And yet it is almost ’gainst my conscience.

HAMLET

295 Come, for the third, Laertes. You do but dally.

I pray you, pass with your best violence.

I am afeard you make a wanton of me.

LAERTES

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

CLAUDIUS

To himself) That was the poisoned drink. It’s too late.

CLAUDIUS

(to himself) I’d better not drink now. I’ll drink later.

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.
Part them! They are incensed.

Separate them. They’re overdoing it.

Act 5, Scene 2, Page 15

**HAMLET**
Nay, come, again.

**OSRIC**
Look to the queen there, ho!

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

**OSRIC**
How is ’t, Laertes?

**LAERTES**
Why, as a woodcock to mine own springe, Osric. I am justly killed with mine own treachery. *(falls)*

**HAMLET**
How does the queen?

**CLAUDIUS**
She swoons to see them bleed.

**GERTRUDE**
No, no, the drink, the drink!—O my dear Hamlet! The drink, the drink! I am poisoned. *(dies)*

**HAMLET**
O villainy! Ho, let the door be locked.

Treachery! Seek it out.

**LAERTES**
It is here, Hamlet. Hamlet, thou art slain.

No medicine in the world can do thee good. In thee there is not half an hour of life. The treacherous instrument is in thy hand. Unbated and envenomed. The foul practice Hath turned itself on me. Lo, here I lie,

Never to rise again. Thy mother’s poisoned. I can no more. The king, the king’s to blame.

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

We’ve been betrayed! Find out who did it!

**LANDS**
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.

**HAMLET**
The blade poisoned! Then get to work, poison!

Act 5, Scene 2, Page 16

**HAMLET** hurts **CLAUDIUS**

**ALL**
Treason! Treason!

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

**HAMLET**

**HAMLET** wounds **CLAUDIUS**

**ALL**
Treason! Treason!

**CLAUDIUS**
Protect me, my friends. I’ve only been hurt, not killed.

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

_HAMLET_ forces _CLAUDIUS_ to drink _CLAUDIUS_ dies  

_LAERTES_  
He is justly served.  
It is a poison tempered by himself.  
Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet.  

Mine and my father’s death come not upon thee,  
Nor thine on me.  

_HAMLET_  
Heaven make thee free of it. I follow thee.—  
I am dead, Horatio.—Wretched queen, adieu!—  
You that look pale and tremble at this chance,  
That are but mutes or audience to this act,  
Had I but time (as this fell sergeant, Death,  
Is strict in his arrest), O, I could tell you—  
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)  

_Act 5, Scene 2, Page 17_  

_HAMLET_  
As thou’rt a man,  
Give me the cup. Let go! By heaven, I’ll have ’t.  
(takes cup from _HORATIO_)  
O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,  
Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!  
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart  
Absent thee from felicity a while,  
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain  
To tell my story.  

March afar off and shout within  

What warlike noise is this?  

_Enter OSRIC_  

OSRIC  
Young Fortinbras, with conquest come from Poland,  
To th’ ambassadors of England gives  
This warlike volley.  

_HAMLET_  
O, I die, Horatio.  
The potent poison quite o’ercrows my spirit.  
I cannot live to hear the news from England.  
But I do prophesy the election lights  
On Fortinbras. He has my dying voice.  

_HAMLET_  
Here, you goddamn incest-breeding Danish  
murderer, drink this. Is your little pearl in there?  
Follow my mother.  

_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 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)  

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.  

_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
So tell him, with th' occurrents, more and less,
Which have solicited. The rest is silence.
O, O, O. (dies)

HORATIO
Now cracks a noble heart.—Good night, sweet prince,
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!—
Why does the drum come hither?

Enter FORTINBRAS and the English AMBASSADOR, with drummer and attendants

FORTINBRAS
Where is this sight?

HORATIO
What is it ye would see?
If aught of woe or wonder, cease your search.

FORTINBRAS
This quarry cries on havoc. O proud death,
What feast is toward in thine eternal cell,
That thou so many princes at a shot
So bloodily hast struck?

AMBASSADOR
The sight is dismal,
And our affairs from England come too late.
The ears are senseless that should give us hearing,
To tell him his commandment is fulfilled,
That Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead.
Where should we have our thanks?

HORATIO
(indicates CLAUDIUS) Not from his mouth,
Had it th' ability of life to thank you.

He never gave commandment for their death.
But since so jump upon this bloody question,
You from the Polack wars, and you from England,
Are here arrived, give order that these bodies
High on a stage be placèd to the view,
And let me speak to th' yet-unknowing world
How these things came about. So shall you hear
Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,
And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
Fall'n on th' inventors' heads. All this can I
Truly deliver.

FORTINBRAS
Let us haste to hear it,
And call the noblest to the audience.
For me, with sorrow I embrace my fortune.

I have some rights of memory in this kingdom,
Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me.

FORTINBRAS
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
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'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.
Act 5, Scene 2, Page 19

HORATIO
Of that I shall have also cause to speak,
And from his mouth whose voice will draw on more.
But let this same be presently performed.

Even while men's minds are wild, lest more
mischance
On plots and errors happen.

FORTINBRAS
Let four captains
Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage,
For he was likely, had he been put on,
To have proved most royally. And, for his passage,
The soldiers' music and the rites of war
Speak loudly for him.
Take up the bodies. Such a sight as this
Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss.

Go, bid the soldiers shoot.

Exeunt marching, carrying the bodies, after the
which a peal of ordnance are shot off

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.