

## HAMLET

A line-by-line translation

## Act 1, Scene 1

## Shakespeare

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

Who's there?

**FRANCISCO**

Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself.

**BARNARDO**

Long live the king!

**FRANCISCO**

Barnardo?

**BARNARDO**

5 He.

**FRANCISCO**

You come most carefully upon your hour.

**BARNARDO**

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

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

10 Have you had quiet guard?

**FRANCISCO**

Not a mouse stirring.

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

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

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

Friends to this ground.

**MARCELLUS**

And liegemen to the Dane.

**FRANCISCO**

Give you good night.

**MARCELLUS**

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

**FRANCISCO**

20 Barnardo has my place. Give you good night.

## Shakescleare Translation

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

Who's there?

**FRANCISCO**

No, you answer me. Stop and reveal yourself.

**BARNARDO**

Long live the king!

**FRANCISCO**

Barnardo?

**BARNARDO**

Yes, me.

**FRANCISCO**

You arrived right on schedule.

**BARNARDO**

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

**FRANCISCO**

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

**BARNARDO**

Has your guard duty been quiet?

**FRANCISCO**

Not a mouse stirred.

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

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

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

Friends of this country.

**MARCELLUS**

And loyal servants of the Danish king.

**FRANCISCO**

Good night to you.

**MARCELLUS**

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

**FRANCISCO**

Barnardo's taken my place. Good night.

*FRANCISCO exits.***MARCELLUS**

Holla, Barnardo.

**BARNARDO**

Say what, is Horatio there?

**HORATIO**

A piece of him.

**BARNARDO**

Welcome, Horatio.—Welcome, good Marcellus.

**MARCELLUS**

25 What, has this thing appeared again tonight?

**BARNARDO**

I have seen nothing.

**MARCELLUS**

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

**HORATIO**

Tush, tush, 'twill not appear.

**BARNARDO**

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

**HORATIO**

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

**BARNARDO**

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

*The GHOST enters.***MARCELLUS**

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

**BARNARDO**

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

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

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

**HORATIO**

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

**BARNARDO**

It would be spoke to.

**MARCELLUS**

Question it, Horatio.

*FRANCISCO exits.***MARCELLUS**

Hello, Barnardo.

**BARNARDO**

Say, is Horatio here too?

**HORATIO**

More or less.

**BARNARDO**

Welcome, Horatio. Welcome, Marcellus.

**MARCELLUS**

So, has the thing appeared again tonight?

**BARNARDO**

I haven't seen anything.

**MARCELLUS**

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

**HORATIO**

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

**BARNARDO**

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

**HORATIO**

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

**BARNARDO**

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

*The GHOST enters.***MARCELLUS**

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

**BARNARDO**

Looking exactly like the dead king.

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

Doesn't he look like the king, Horatio?

**HORATIO**

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

**BARNARDO**

It wants us to speak to it.

**MARCELLUS**

Ask it something, Horatio.

**HORATIO**

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

**MARCELLUS**

It is offended.

**BARNARDO**

See, it stalks away.

**HORATIO**

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

*The GHOST exits.*

**MARCELLUS**

60 'Tis gone and will not answer.

**BARNARDO**

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

**HORATIO**

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

**MARCELLUS**

Is it not like the king?

**HORATIO**

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

**MARCELLUS**

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

**HORATIO**

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

**MARCELLUS**

Good now, sit down and tell me, he that knows,  
 80 Why this same strict and most observant watch  
 So nightly toils the subject of the land,  
 And why such daily cast of brazen cannon  
 And foreign mart for implements of war,  
 Why such impress of shipwrights, whose sore task  
 85 Does not divide the Sunday from the week.  
 What might be toward, that this sweaty haste  
 Doth make the night joint laborer with the day?  
 Who is 't that can inform me?

**HORATIO**

That can I.  
 90 At least, the whisper goes so: our last king,  
 Whose image even but now appeared to us,  
 Was, as you know, by Fortinbras of Norway,  
 Thereto pricked on by a most emulate pride,  
 Dared to the combat; in which our valiant Hamlet  
 95 (For so this side of our known world esteemed him)  
 Did slay this Fortinbras, who by a sealed compact  
 Well ratified by law and heraldry,

**HORATIO**

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

**MARCELLUS**

You've offended it.

**BARNARDO**

Look, it's moving away.

**HORATIO**

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

*The GHOST exits.*

**MARCELLUS**

It's gone, and won't answer.

**BARNARDO**

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

**HORATIO**

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

**MARCELLUS**

Doesn't it look like the king?

**HORATIO**

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

**MARCELLUS**

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

**HORATIO**


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

**MARCELLUS**

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

**HORATIO**

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

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

Did forfeit, with his life, all those his lands  
 Which he stood seized of to the conqueror,  
 100 Against the which a moiety competent  
 Was gaged by our king, which had returned  
 To the inheritance of Fortinbras  
 Had he been vanquisher, as, by the same covenant  
 And carriage of the article designed,  
 105 His fell to Hamlet. Now, sir, young Fortinbras,  
 Of unimproved mettle hot and full,  
 Hath in the skirts of Norway here and there  
 Sharked up a list of lawless resolute,  
 For food and diet, to some enterprise  
 110 That hath a stomach in 't, which is no other—  
 As it doth well appear unto our state—  
 But to recover of us, by strong hand  
 And terms compulsatory, those foresaid lands  
 So by his father lost. And this, I take it,  
 115 Is the main motive of our preparations,  
 The source of this our watch, and the chief head  
 Of this posthaste and rummage in the land.

**BARNARDO**

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

**HORATIO**

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

*The GHOST enters.*

**HORATIO**

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

*The GHOST spreads his arms.*

**HORATIO**

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

*A rooster crows.*

**HORATIO**

150 —Stop it, Marcellus.

**MARCELLUS**

Shall I strike at it with my partisan?

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

**BARNARDO**

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

**HORATIO**

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

*The GHOST enters.*

**HORATIO**

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

*[To GHOST] Stop, you illusion!*

*The GHOST spreads his arms.*

**HORATIO**

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

*A rooster crows.*

**HORATIO**

Don't let it leave, Marcellus.

**MARCELLUS**

Should I hit it with my spear?

**HORATIO**

Do, if it will not stand.

**BARNARDO**

'Tis here.

**HORATIO**

'Tis here.

*The GHOST exits.*

**MARCELLUS**

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

**BARNARDO**

160 It was about to speak when the cock crew.

**HORATIO**

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

**MARCELLUS**

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

**HORATIO**

So have I heard and do in part believe it.  
But look, the morn, in russet mantle clad,  
180 Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill.  
Break we our watch up, and by my advice,  
Let us impart what we have seen tonight  
Unto young Hamlet, for, upon my life,  
This spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him.  
185 Do you consent we shall acquaint him with it,  
As needful in our loves, fitting our duty?

**MARCELLUS**

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

*They exit.*

**HORATIO**

Yes, if it doesn't stand still.

**BARNARDO**

It's here.

**HORATIO**

It's here.

*The GHOST exits.*

**MARCELLUS**

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

**BARNARDO**

It was about to say something when the rooster crowed.

**HORATIO**

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

**MARCELLUS**

It faded away when the rooster crowed. Some people say  
that just before Christmas the rooster crows all night long,  
so that no ghost dares go wandering, and the night is safe  
for all. Then, on that night, no dark fates control us, no fairy  
can cast a spell on us, and witches cannot hurt us with their  
charms. That's how holy and blessed Christmas is.

**HORATIO**

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

**MARCELLUS**

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

*They all exit.*

## Act 1, Scene 2

### Shakespeare

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

**CLAUDIUS**

Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death

### Shakescleare Translation

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

**CLAUDIUS**

Though my memories of my brother Hamlet are still

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

*VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS enter.*

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**CORNELIUS, VOLTEMAND**

In that and all things will we show our duty.

**CLAUDIUS**

We doubt it nothing. Heartily farewell.

*CORNELIUS and VOLTEMAND exit.*

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**LAERTES**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

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

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

*VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS enter.*

**CLAUDIUS**

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

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

**CORNELIUS, VOLTEMAND**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

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

*CORNELIUS and VOLTEMAND exit.*

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**LAERTES**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

*[aside]* A little more than kin and less than kind.

**CLAUDIUS**

How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

**HAMLET**

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

**GERTRUDE**

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

**HAMLET**

Ay, madam, it is common.

**GERTRUDE**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

90 ‘Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet,  
To give these mourning duties to your father.  
But you must know your father lost a father,  
That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound  
In filial obligation for some term  
95 To do obsequious sorrow. But to persever  
In obstinate condolement is a course  
Of impious stubbornness. ‘Tis unmanly grief.  
It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,  
A heart unfortified, a mind impatient,  
100 An understanding simple and unschooled.  
For what we know must be and is as common  
As any the most vulgar thing to sense,  
Why should we in our peevish opposition  
Take it to heart? Fie! ‘Tis a fault to heaven,  
105 A fault against the dead, a fault to nature,  
To reason most absurd, whose common theme  
Is death of fathers, and who still hath cried,

say?

**POLONIUS**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**HAMLET**


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

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

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

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

**GERTRUDE**

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

**HAMLET**

Yes, madam, it is common.

**GERTRUDE**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

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

From the first corse till he that died today,  
 “This must be so.” We pray you, throw to earth  
 110 This unprevailing woe, and think of us  
 As of a father. For let the world take note,  
 You are the most immediate to our throne,  
 And with no less nobility of love  
 Than that which dearest father bears his son  
 115 Do I impart toward you. For your intent  
 In going back to school in Wittenberg,  
 It is most retrograde to our desire.  
 And we beseech you, bend you to remain  
 Here in the cheer and comfort of our eye,  
 120 Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.

**GERTRUDE**

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

**HAMLET**

I shall in all my best obey you, madam.

**CLAUDIUS**

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

*Trumpets play. Everyone except HAMLET exits.*

**HAMLET**

Oh, that this too, too sullied flesh would melt,  
 Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew,  
 Or that the Everlasting had not fixed  
 135 His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God, God!  
 How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable  
 Seem to me all the uses of this world!  
 Fie on 't, ah fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden  
 That grows to seed. Things rank and gross in nature  
 140 Possess it merely. That it should come to this.  
 But two months dead—nay, not so much, not two.  
 So excellent a king, that was to this  
 Hyperion to a satyr. So loving to my mother  
 That he might not beitem the winds of heaven  
 145 Visit her face too roughly.—Heaven and earth,  
 Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him  
 As if increase of appetite had grown  
 By what it fed on, and yet, within a month—  
 Let me not think on 't. Frailty, thy name is woman!—  
 150 A little month, or ere those shoes were old  
 With which she followed my poor father's body,  
 Like Niobe, all tears. Why she, even she—  
 O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason  
 Would have mourned longer!—married with my uncle,  
 155 My father's brother, but no more like my father  
 Than I to Hercules. Within a month,  
 Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears  
 Had left the flushing in her gallèd eyes,  
 She married. O most wicked speed, to post  
 160 With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!  
 It is not nor it cannot come to good,  
 But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

*HORATIO, MARCELLUS, and BARNARDO enter.*

**HORATIO**

Hail to your lordship.

**HAMLET**

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

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

**GERTRUDE**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

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

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

*Trumpets play. Everyone except HAMLET exits.*

**HAMLET**

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

*HORATIO, MARCELLUS, and BARNARDO enter.*

**HORATIO**

Hello, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

<sup>1</sup> The original text refers to Hyperion—a Titan in Greek mythology—and to a satyr, a notoriously drunken and promiscuous mythological creature who was half-man and half-goat.

<sup>2</sup> Hercules was a mythological Greek hero, known for his strength.



**HORATIO**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**MARCELLUS**

170 My good lord.

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

A truant disposition, good my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

Indeed, my lord, it followed hard upon.

**HAMLET**

185 Thrift, thrift, Horatio! The funeral baked meats  
Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.  
Would I had met my dearest foe in heaven  
Or ever I had seen that day, Horatio.  
My father—methinks I see my father.

**HORATIO**

190 Where, my lord?

**HAMLET**

In my mind's eye, Horatio.

**HORATIO**

I saw him once. He was a goodly king.

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

195 My lord, I think I saw him yesternight.

**HAMLET**

Saw who?

**HORATIO**

My lord, the king your father.

**HORATIO**

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

**HAMLET**

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

[*To MARCELLUS*] Oh, Marcellus!

**MARCELLUS**

My good lord.

**HAMLET**

[*To MARCELLUS*] So nice to see you.

[*To BARNARDO*] Hello, sir.

[*To HORATIO*] But what are you doing away from  
Wittenberg, Horatio?

**HORATIO**

I have the heart of a dropout, my good lord.

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

Where, sir?

**HAMLET**

In my imagination, Horatio.

**HORATIO**

I saw him once. He was an impressive king.

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

My lord, I think I saw him last night.

**HAMLET**

Saw who?

**HORATIO**

The king your father, my lord.

**HAMLET**

The king my father?!

**HORATIO**

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

**HAMLET**

For God's love, let me hear.

**HORATIO**

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

**HAMLET**

But where was this?

**MARCELLUS**

My lord, upon the platform where we watch.

**HAMLET**

Did you not speak to it?

**HORATIO**

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

**HAMLET**

'Tis very strange.

**HORATIO**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**MARCELLUS, BARNARDO**

We do, my lord.

**HAMLET**

Armed, say you?

**MARCELLUS, BARNARDO**

Armed, my lord.

**HAMLET**

240 From top to toe?

**HAMLET**

The king my father?!

**HORATIO**

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

**HAMLET**

For God's sake, let me hear it.

**HORATIO**

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

**HAMLET**

Where did this happen?

**MARCELLUS**

On the platform where we stand guard, my lord.

**HAMLET**

Didn't you talk to it?

**HORATIO**

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

**HAMLET**

That's very strange.

**HORATIO**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**MARCELLUS, BARNARDO**

We do, my lord.

**HAMLET**

The ghost was armed, you say?

**MARCELLUS, BARNARDO**

Armed, my lord.

**HAMLET**

From head to toe?

**MARCELLUS, BARNARDO**

My lord, from head to foot.

**HAMLET**

Then saw you not his face?

**HORATIO**

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

**HAMLET**

What, looked he frowningly?

**HORATIO**

245 A countenance more  
In sorrow than in anger.

**HAMLET**

Pale or red?

**HORATIO**

Nay, very pale.

**HAMLET**

And fixed his eyes upon you?

**HORATIO**

250 Most constantly.

**HAMLET**

I would I had been there.

**HORATIO**

It would have much amazed you.

**HAMLET**

Very like. Stayed it long?

**HORATIO**

While one with moderate haste might tell a hundred.

**MARCELLUS, BARNARDO**

255 Longer, longer.

**HORATIO**

Not when I saw 't.

**HAMLET**

His beard was grizzled, no?

**HORATIO**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

I warrant it will.

**HAMLET**

If it assume my noble father's person,  
I'll speak to it, though Hell itself should gape  
265 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.  
270 I will requite your loves. So fare you well.  
Upon the platform, 'twixt eleven and twelve,

**MARCELLUS, BARNARDO**

From head to toe, my lord.

**HAMLET**

Then you didn't see his face?

**HORATIO**

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

**HAMLET**

Did he look angry?

**HORATIO**

His expression looked more sad than angry.

**HAMLET**

Was he pale or flushed?

**HORATIO**

Very pale.

**HAMLET**

Did he look straight at you?

**HORATIO**

The entire time.

**HAMLET**

I wish I'd been there.

**HORATIO**

You would have been shocked and amazed.

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

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

**MARCELLUS, BARNARDO**

No, longer.

**HORATIO**

Not the time I saw it.

**HAMLET**

His beard was gray, right?

**HORATIO**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

I bet it will.

**HAMLET**

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

I'll visit you.

**HORATIO, MARCELLUS, BARNARDO**

Our duty to your honor.

**HAMLET**

Your loves, as mine to you. Farewell.

*Everyone but HAMLET exits.*

**HAMLET**

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

*HAMLET exits.*

**HORATIO, MARCELLUS, BARNARDO**

We'll do our duty to your Honor.

**HAMLET**

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

*Everyone except HAMLET exits.*

**HAMLET**

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

*HAMLET exits.*

## Act 1, Scene 3

### Shakespeare

*LAERTES and his sister OPHELIA enter.*

**LAERTES**

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

**OPHELIA**

5 Do you doubt that?

**LAERTES**

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

**OPHELIA**

No more but so?

**LAERTES**

Think it no more.  
For nature, crescent, does not grow alone  
15 In thews and bulk, but, as this temple waxes,  
The inward service of the mind and soul  
Grows wide withal. Perhaps he loves you now,  
And now no soil nor cautel doth besmirch  
The virtue of his will, but you must fear.  
20 His greatness 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.  
25 And therefore must his choice be circumscribed  
Unto the voice and yielding of that body  
Whereof he is the head. Then if he says he loves you,  
It fits your wisdom so far to believe it  
As he in his particular act and place  
30 May give his saying deed, which is no further  
Than the main voice of Denmark goes withal.  
Then weigh what loss your honor may sustain  
If with too credent ear you list his songs,  
Or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure open  
35 To his unmastered importunity.

### Shakesclare Translation

*LAERTES and his sister OPHELIA enter.*

**LAERTES**

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

**OPHELIA**

Do you doubt I will?

**LAERTES**

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

**OPHELIA**

No more than a single minute?

**LAERTES**

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

Fear it, Ophelia. Fear it, my dear sister,  
 And keep you in the rear of your affection,  
 Out of the shot and danger of desire.  
 The chariest maid is prodigal enough  
 40 If she unmask her beauty to the moon.  
 Virtue itself 'scapes not calumnious strokes.  
 The canker galls the infants of the spring  
 Too oft before their buttons be disclosed.  
 And in the morn and liquid dew of youth,  
 45 Contagious blastments are most imminent.  
 Be wary, then. Best safety lies in fear.  
 Youth to itself rebels, though none else near.

**OPHELIA**

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

**LAERTES**

55 O, fear me not.

*POLONIUS enters.*

**LAERTES**

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

**POLONIUS**

Yet here, Laertes? Aboard, aboard, for shame!  
 60 The wind sits in the shoulder of your sail  
 And you are stayed for. There, my blessing with thee.  
 And these few precepts in thy memory  
 Look thou character. Give thy thoughts no tongue,  
 Nor any unproportioned thought his act.  
 65 Be thou familiar but by no means vulgar.  
 Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,  
 Grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of steel,  
 But do not dull thy palm with entertainment  
 Of each new-hatched, unfledged comrade. Beware  
 70 Of entrance to a quarrel, but being in,  
 Bear 't that th' opposèd may beware of thee.  
 Give every man thy ear but few thy voice.  
 Take each man's censure but reserve thy judgment.  
 Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,  
 75 But not expressed in fancy—rich, not gaudy,  
 For the apparel oft proclaims the man,  
 And they in France of the best rank and station  
 Are of a most select and generous chief in that.  
 Neither a borrower nor a lender be,  
 80 For loan oft loses both itself and friend,  
 And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.  
 This above all: to thine own self be true,  
 And it must follow, as the night the day,  
 Thou canst not then be false to any man.  
 85 Farewell. My blessing season this in thee.

**LAERTES**

Most humbly do I take my leave, my lord.

**POLONIUS**

The time invites you. Go. Your servants tend.

**LAERTES**

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

**OPHELIA**

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

Young people can lose their self-control without any  
 outside help.

**OPHELIA**

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

**LAERTES**

Don't worry about me.

*POLONIUS enters.*

**LAERTES**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

**LAERTES**

I will humbly be on my way, my lord.

**POLONIUS**

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

**LAERTES**

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

**OPHELIA**

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

**LAERTES**

Farewell.

*LAERTES exits.*

**POLONIUS**

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

**OPHELIA**

So please you, something touching the Lord Hamlet.

**POLONIUS**

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

**OPHELIA**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

**OPHELIA**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

**OPHELIA**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

**OPHELIA**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

140

**LAERTES**

Goodbye.

*LAERTES exits.*

**POLONIUS**

What did he say to you, Ophelia?

**OPHELIA**

Something about the Lord Hamlet.

**POLONIUS**

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

**OPHELIA**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

**OPHELIA**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

**OPHELIA**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

**OPHELIA**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

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

**OPHELIA**

I shall obey, my lord.

*They exit.*

**OPHELIA**

I will obey, my lord.

*They exit.*

## Act 1, Scene 4

### Shakespeare

*HAMLET, HORATIO, and MARCELLUS enter.*

**HAMLET**

The air bites shrewdly. It is very cold.

**HORATIO**

It is a nipping and an eager air.

**HAMLET**

What hour now?

**HORATIO**

I think it lacks of twelve.

**MARCELLUS**

5 No, it is struck.

**HORATIO**

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

*Trumpets sound, and two cannons fire.*

**HORATIO**

What does this mean, my lord?

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

Is it a custom?

**HAMLET**

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

### Shakescleare Translation

*HAMLET, HORATIO, and MARCELLUS enter.*

**HAMLET**

The air bites wickedly. It is very cold.

**HORATIO**

Yes, the air is nipping and sharp.

**HAMLET**

What time is it now?

**HORATIO**

Just before twelve, I think.

**MARCELLUS**

No, the clock struck twelve.

**HORATIO**

Really? I didn't hear it. So it's getting close to the time when  
the ghost usually appears.

*Trumpets sound, and two cannons fire.*

**HORATIO**

What does that mean, sir?

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

Is that a tradition?

**HAMLET**

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

As infinite as man may undergo)  
 Shall in the general censure take corruption  
 From that particular fault. The dram of evil  
 Doth all the noble substance of a doubt  
 40 To his own scandal.

*The GHOST enters.*

**HORATIO**

Look, my lord, it comes!

**HAMLET**

Angels and ministers of grace defend us!  
 Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damned,  
 Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell,  
 45 Be thy intents wicked or charitable,  
 Thou comest in such a questionable shape  
 That I will speak to thee. I'll call thee "Hamlet,"  
 "King," "Father," "royal Dane." O, answer me!  
 Let me not burst in ignorance, but tell  
 50 Why thy canonized bones, hearsed in death,  
 Have burst their cerements; why the sepulcher,  
 Wherein we saw thee quietly interred,  
 Hath oped his ponderous and marble jaws  
 To cast thee up again. What may this mean,  
 55 That thou, dead corse, again in complete steel  
 Revisits thus the glimpses of the moon,  
 Making night hideous and we fools of nature,  
 So horridly to shake our disposition  
 With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls?  
 60 Say why is this? Wherefore? What should we do?

*The GHOST motions for HAMLET to follow it.*

**HORATIO**

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

**MARCELLUS**

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

**HORATIO**

No, by no means.

**HAMLET**

It will not speak. Then I will follow it.

**HORATIO**

Do not, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

75 What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,  
 Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff  
 That beetles o'er his base into the sea,  
 And there assume some other horrible form,  
 Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason  
 80 And draw you into madness? Think of it.  
 The very place puts toys of desperation,  
 Without more motive, into every brain  
 That looks so many fathoms to the sea  
 And hears it roar beneath.

*The GHOST enters.*

**HORATIO**

Look, here comes the ghost, my lord!

**HAMLET**

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

*The GHOST motions for HAMLET to follow it.*

**HORATIO**

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

**MARCELLUS**

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

**HORATIO**

No, by all means do not.

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

Don't, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

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



**HAMLET**

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

**MARCELLUS**

You shall not go, my lord.

*MARCELLUS and HORATIO try to hold HAMLET back.*

**HAMLET**

Hold off your hands.

**HORATIO**

Be ruled. You shall not go.

**HAMLET**

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

*The GHOST and HAMLET exit.*

**HORATIO**

He waxes desperate with imagination.

**MARCELLUS**

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

**HORATIO**

Have after. To what issue will this come?

**MARCELLUS**

100 Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

**HORATIO**

Heaven will direct it.

**MARCELLUS**

Nay, let's follow him.

*They exit.*

**HAMLET**

It's still waving to me.

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

**MARCELLUS**

You will not go, my lord.

*MARCELLUS and HORATIO try to hold HAMLET back.*


**HAMLET**

Let go of me.

**HORATIO**

Listen to us. You must not go.

**HAMLET**

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

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

*The GHOST and HAMLET exit.*

**HORATIO**

His wild thoughts have made him desperate.

**MARCELLUS**

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

**HORATIO**

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

**MARCELLUS**

That something is wrong in the state of Denmark.


**HORATIO**

God will determine what will come of all this.

**MARCELLUS**

No, let's follow him.

*They exit.*

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

## Act 1, Scene 5

### Shakespeare

*The GHOST and HAMLET enter.*

**HAMLET**

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

**GHOST**

Mark me.

**HAMLET**

I will.

**GHOST**

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

### Shakescleare Translation

*The GHOST and HAMLET enter.*

**HAMLET**

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

**GHOST**

Listen to me.

**HAMLET**

I will.

**GHOST**

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

**HAMLET**

Alas, poor ghost!

**GHOST**

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

**HAMLET**

10 Speak. I am bound to hear.

**GHOST**

So art thou to revenge when thou shalt hear.

**HAMLET**

What?

**GHOST**

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

**HAMLET**

O God!

**GHOST**

30 Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

**HAMLET**

Murder?

**GHOST**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**GHOST**

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

**HAMLET**

O my prophetic soul! My uncle?

**GHOST**

Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,  
With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts—  
50 O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power  
So to seduce!—won to his shameful lust

**HAMLET**

Oh no, poor ghost!

**GHOST**

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

**HAMLET**

Speak. I promise to listen.

**GHOST**

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

**HAMLET**

What?

**GHOST**

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

**HAMLET**

Oh God!

**GHOST**

Take revenge for his awful and horrible murder.

**HAMLET**

Murder?


**GHOST**


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

**HAMLET**

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

**GHOST**

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

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

**HAMLET**

Oh, my far-seeing soul! My uncle?

**GHOST**

Yes, that incestuous, adulterous beast. With his evil wit and  
traitorous gifts—oh wicked wit and gifts, that have the  
power to seduce!—he convinced my seemingly virtuous  
queen to give in to his lust. Oh, Hamlet, she fell so far! From

The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen.  
 O Hamlet, what a falling off was there!  
 From me, whose love was of that dignity

55 That it went hand in hand even with the vow  
 I made to her in marriage, and to decline  
 Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor  
 To those of mine.  
 But virtue, as it never will be moved,  
 60 Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven,  
 So lust, though to a radiant angel linked,  
 Will sate itself in a celestial bed  
 And prey on garbage.  
 But soft! Methinks I scent the morning air.  
 65 Brief let me be. Sleeping within my orchard,  
 My custom always of the afternoon,  
 Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole  
 With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial,  
 And in the porches of my ears did pour  
 70 The leperous distilment, whose effect  
 Holds such an enmity with blood of man  
 That swift as quicksilver it courses through  
 The natural gates and alleys of the body  
 And with a sudden vigor doth posset  
 75 And curd, like eager droppings into milk,  
 The thin and wholesome blood. So did it mine.  
 And a most instant tetter barked about,  
 Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust  
 All my smooth body.  
 80 Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand  
 Of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatched,  
 Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,  
 Unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled.  
 No reckoning made, but sent to my account  
 85 With all my imperfections on my head.  
 Oh, horrible, oh, horrible, most horrible!  
 If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not.  
 Let not the royal bed of Denmark be  
 A couch for luxury and damnèd incest.  
 90 But howsoever thou pursuest this act,  
 Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive  
 Against thy mother aught. Leave her to heaven  
 And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge  
 To prick and sting her. Fare thee well at once.  
 95 The glowworm shows the matin to be near,  
 And 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire.  
 Adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me.

*The GHOST exits.*

**HAMLET**

O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?  
 And shall I couple hell? Oh, fie! Hold, hold, my heart,  
 100 And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,  
 But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee!  
 Ay, thou poor ghost, whiles memory holds a seat  
 In this distracted globe. Remember thee!  
 Yea, from the table of my memory  
 105 I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,  
 All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past  
 That youth and observation copied there,  
 And thy commandment all alone shall live  
 Within the book and volume of my brain,  
 110 Unmixed with baser matter. Yes, by heaven!  
 O most pernicious woman!  
 O villain, villain, smiling, damnèd villain!  
 My tables!—Meet it is I set it down  
 That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain.  
 115 At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark. [*writes*]  
 So, uncle, there you are. Now to my word.  
 It is "Adieu, adieu. Remember me."  
 I have sworn 't.

*HORATIO and MARCELLUS enter.*

**HORATIO**

My lord, my lord!

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

*The GHOST exits.*

**HAMLET**

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

*HORATIO and MARCELLUS enter.*

**HORATIO**

My lord, my lord!

**MARCELLUS**  
120 Lord Hamlet—

**HORATIO**  
Heaven secure him!

**HAMLET**  
So be it.

**HORATIO**  
Illo, ho, ho, my lord!

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

**MARCELLUS**  
125 How is 't, my noble lord?

**HORATIO**  
What news, my lord?

**HAMLET**  
Oh, wonderful!

**HORATIO**  
Good my lord, tell it.

**HAMLET**  
No. You'll reveal it.

**HORATIO**  
130 Not I, my lord, by heaven.

**MARCELLUS**  
Nor I, my lord.

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

**HORATIO, MARCELLUS**  
Ay, by heaven, my lord.

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

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

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

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

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

**HORATIO**  
There's no offense, my lord.

**MARCELLUS**  
Lord Hamlet—

**HORATIO**  
God protect him!

**HAMLET**  
So be it.

**HORATIO**  
Hello, hello there, my lord!

**HAMLET**  
Hello, hello there, boy! Come to me.

**MARCELLUS**  
What happened, my noble lord?

**HORATIO**  
What did you learn, my lord?

**HAMLET**  
Oh, it was amazing!

**HORATIO**  
My lord, tell us.

**HAMLET**  
No. You'll reveal my secret.

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

**MARCELLUS**  
Nor will I, my lord.

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

**HORATIO, MARCELLUS**  
Yes, I swear to God, my lord.

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

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

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

**HORATIO**  
Your words are wild and meaningless, my lord.

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

**HORATIO**  
There was no offense, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

What is 't, my lord? We will.

**HAMLET**

Never make known what you have seen tonight.

**HORATIO, MARCELLUS**

My lord, we will not.

**HAMLET**

160 Nay, but swear 't.

**HORATIO**

In faith, my lord, not I.

**MARCELLUS**

Nor I, my lord, in faith.

**HAMLET**

Upon my sword.

**MARCELLUS**

We have sworn, my lord, already.

**HAMLET**

165 Indeed, upon my sword, indeed.

**GHOST**

*[cries under the stage]* Swear!

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

170 Propose the oath, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

**GHOST**

*[beneath]* Swear.

**HAMLET**

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


**GHOST**

*[beneath]* Swear by his sword.

**HAMLET**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

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

**HAMLET**

Never tell anyone what you've seen tonight.

**HORATIO, MARCELLUS**

We won't, my lord.

**HAMLET**

No, you must swear it.

**HORATIO**

I swear to God I won't.

**MARCELLUS**

Nor I, my lord, I swear to God.

**HAMLET**

Swear on my sword.

**MARCELLUS**

But we swore already, my lord.

**HAMLET**

True, but still, swear on my sword.

**GHOST**

*[He calls out from under the stage]* Swear!

**HAMLET**

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

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

**HORATIO**

Tell us what to swear, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

**GHOST**

*[From under the stage]* Swear.

**HAMLET**

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

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


**GHOST**

*[From under the stage]* Swear by his sword.

**HAMLET**

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

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

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

**HORATIO**

O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!

**HAMLET**

And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,

185 Than are dreamt of in your philosophy. But come,

Here, as before, never, so help you mercy,

How strange or odd so'er I bear myself

(As I perchance hereafter shall think meet

To put an antic disposition on),

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

With arms encumbered thus, or this headshake,

Or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase,

As “Well, well, we know,” or “We could an if we would,”

195 Or “If we list to speak,” or “There be an if they

might,”

Or such ambiguous giving out— to note

That you know ought of me. This not to do,

So grace and mercy at your most need help you,

Swear.

**GHOST**

200 *[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,

205 God willing, shall not lack. Let us go in together,

And still your fingers on your lips, I pray.

The time is out of joint. O cursèd spite,

That ever I was born to set it right!

Nay, come, let's go together.

*They exit.*

**HORATIO**

Oh, by God, this is incredibly strange.

**HAMLET**

So welcome it like a stranger. Horatio, there are more things

in heaven and earth than you can dream of with all your

scientific learning. Now listen: just as you swore before, no

matter how strangely I act (since from now on I may find it

necessary to act a bit crazy), you must never, ever let

on—with a gesture of your arms, or a shake of your head, or

by saying something like “well, well, we understand,” or

“we'd tell you if we could,” or “if we were allowed to speak,”

or anything like that—that you know anything about what

happened to me here tonight. Swear you won't, by all of

your hopes of going to heaven.

**GHOST**

*[From under the stage]* Swear.

**HAMLET**

Rest, rest, unhappy ghost!

*[To HORATIO and MARCELLUS]* So, gentlemen, I thank you

with all my love, and promise that some day I'll repay you

as fully as I can, God willing. Let's go back inside together.

But keep your lips sealed, please. Everything is wrong these

days. Oh, curse the fact that I'm the one who has to set

things right! Now come, let's go.

*They all exit.*

## Act 2, Scene 1

### Shakespeare

*POLONIUS enters with his servant REYNALDO.*

**POLONIUS**

Give him this money and these notes, Reynaldo.

**REYNALDO**

I will, my lord.

**POLONIUS**

You shall do marvelous wisely, good Reynaldo,

Before you visit him, to make inquire

5 Of his behavior.

**REYNALDO**

My lord, I did intend it.

**POLONIUS**

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

Inquire me first what Danskers are in Paris,

And how, and who, what means, and where they keep

10 What company at what expense; and finding

By this encompassment and drift of question

That they do know my son, come you more nearer

Than your particular demands will touch it.

Take you, as 'twere, some distant knowledge of him,

15 As thus: “I know his father and his friends,

And, in part, him.” Do you mark this, Reynaldo?

### Shakescleare Translation

*POLONIUS enters with his servant REYNALDO.*

**POLONIUS**

Give Laertes this money and these letters, Reynaldo.

**REYNALDO**

I will, my lord.

**POLONIUS**

Good Reynaldo, it would be extremely wise of you to ask

around about his behavior before you visit him.

**REYNALDO**

That was my plan, my lord.

**POLONIUS**

Excellent, good, good. First find out what Danish people are

in Paris—who they are, how much money they have, where

they live, who their friends are, and how much they spend.

And if—through this roundabout and indirect

questioning—that they happen to know my son, you'll end

up finding out much more than if you asked specific

questions about him. Talk as if you vaguely know Laertes,

such as, “I know his father and his friends, and know him a

little.” Do you understand all this, Reynaldo?

**REYNALDO**

Ay, very well, my lord.

**POLONIUS**

“And in part him, but,” you may say, “not well. But, if ’t be he I mean, he’s very wild.

- 20 Addicted so and so. —” And there put on him  
What forgeries you please. Marry, none so rank  
As may dishonor him. Take heed of that.  
But, sir, such wanton, wild, and usual slips  
As are companions noted and most known  
25 To youth and liberty.

**REYNALDO**

As gaming, my lord?

**POLONIUS**

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

**REYNALDO**

My lord, that would dishonor him!

**POLONIUS**

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

**REYNALDO**

But, my good lord—

**POLONIUS**

- 40 Wherefore should you do this?

**REYNALDO**

Ay, my lord. I would know that.

**POLONIUS**

Marry, sir, here’s my drift:

(And I believe it is a fetch of wit)

You, laying these slight sullies on my son

- 45 As ’twere a thing a little soiled i’ th’ working—  
Mark you, your party in converse, him you would sound,  
Having ever seen in the prenominate crimes  
The youth you breathe of guilty, be assured  
He closes with you in this consequence:  
50 “Good sir” or so, or “Friend,” or “Gentleman,”  
According to the phrase or the addition  
Of man and country.

**REYNALDO**

Very good, my lord.

**POLONIUS**

- 55 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.

- 60 He closes thus: “I know the gentleman.  
I saw him yesterday”—or “t’ other day,”  
Or then, or then, with such or such —“and, as you say,

**REYNALDO**

Yes, very well, my lord.

**POLONIUS**

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

**REYNALDO**

Like gambling, sir?

**POLONIUS**

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

**REYNALDO**

My lord, that would bring dishonor on him!

**POLONIUS**

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

**REYNALDO**

But, my lord—


**POLONIUS**

Why should you do this?


**REYNALDO**

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

**POLONIUS**

All right . Here’s my idea. (And I do think it’s a bit clever.)

As you casually mention these minor faults and small blemishes as if everyone has heard of them, watch the person with whom you’re talking. If whoever you’re talking to has ever seen Laertes do any of the things you mention, he’ll mark his agreement by saying something like “good sir” or “friend” or “gentleman”—or something like that, depending on the person’s background.

 In the original text, Polonius uses the mild oath “marry,” derived from the Virgin Mary’s name.

**REYNALDO**

I understand, sir.

**POLONIUS**

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

**REYNALDO**

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

**POLONIUS**

“He’ll mark his agreement by saying...” Yes, right. He’ll respond like this: “I know the gentleman. I just saw him yesterday,” or “the other day,” or whenever. And he’ll say with whom—“and, as you said, there he was gambling,” or

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

**REYNALDO**

My lord, I have.

**POLONIUS**

God be wi' you. Fare you well.

**REYNALDO**

75 Good my lord.

**POLONIUS**

Observe his inclination in yourself.

**REYNALDO**

I shall, my lord.

**POLONIUS**

And let him ply his music.

**REYNALDO**

Well, my lord.

**POLONIUS**

80 Farewell.

*REYNALDO exits.**OPHELIA enters.***POLONIUS**

How now, Ophelia? What's the matter?

**OPHELIA**

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

**POLONIUS**

With what, i' th' name of God?

**OPHELIA**

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

**POLONIUS**

Mad for thy love?

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

95 What said he?

**OPHELIA**He took me by the wrist and held me hard.  
 Then goes he to the length of all his arm,  
 And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow,

"there he was, completely drunk," or "getting into a fight  
 over a tennis match," or, possibly, "I saw him going into a  
 house of ill repute"—that means a whorehouse—or some  
 such thing. In this way, make sure your little lie is like bait  
 that lures the larger truth into the open. And that's how we  
 get wisdom and knowledge, by gradually drawing others in  
 and indirectly finding out what we want to know. Follow my  
 advice and you'll learn about my son. You understand me,  
 right?

**REYNALDO**

I do, my lord.

**POLONIUS**

God bless you. Goodbye.

**REYNALDO**

My good lord.

**POLONIUS**

Make sure to observe him also with your own eyes.

**REYNALDO**

I will, my lord.

**POLONIUS**

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

**REYNALDO**

I understand, my lord.

**POLONIUS**

Goodbye.

*REYNALDO exits.**OPHELIA enters.***POLONIUS**

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

**OPHELIA**

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

**POLONIUS**

From what, in God's name?

**OPHELIA**

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

**POLONIUS**

Is he madly in love with you?

**OPHELIA**

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

**POLONIUS**

What did he say?

**OPHELIA**He grabbed me by the wrist and held me tightly, then  
 backed a full arm's length away. And, standing with his  
 other arm raised over his forehead, he stared at my face as



He falls to such perusal of my face  
 100 As he would draw it. Long stayed he so.  
 At last, a little shaking of mine arm  
 And thrice his head thus waving up and down,  
 He raised a sigh so piteous and profound  
 As it did seem to shatter all his bulk  
 105 And end his being. That done, he lets me go,  
 And, with his head over his shoulder turned,  
 He seemed to find his way without his eyes,  
 For out o' doors he went without their helps,  
 And to the last bended their light on me.

**POLONIUS**

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

**OPHELIA**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

*They exit.*

if studying it in order to draw it. He stood like that for a long while. Then, he gently shook my arm and glancing up and down three times, and sighed so sadly it seemed like he would collapse in on himself and die. Then he let me go, and walked away while staring back at me. He found his way out without looking away from me the entire time.

**POLONIUS**

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

**OPHELIA**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

*They exit.*

## Act 2, Scene 2

### Shakespeare

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

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**GERTRUDE**

20 Good gentlemen, he hath much talked of you.

### Shakescleare Translation

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

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**GERTRUDE**

Gentlemen, Hamlet's talked about you a lot. I'm certain that

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

35 Thanks, Rosencrantz and gentle Guildenstern.

**GERTRUDE**

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

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

**GERTRUDE**

Ay, amen!

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit, escorted by attendants.*

*POLONIUS enters.*

**POLONIUS**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

45 Thou still hast been the father of good news.

**POLONIUS**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

Thyself do grace to them, and bring them in.

*POLONIUS exits.*

**CLAUDIUS**

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

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

Thanks, Rosencrantz and worthy Guildenstern.

**GERTRUDE**

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

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

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

**GERTRUDE**

Yes, amen!

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit, escorted by  
 attendants.*

*POLONIUS enters.*

**POLONIUS**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

You once more have brought good news.

**POLONIUS**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

Please go to them yourself, and bring them in.

*POLONIUS exits.*

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**GERTRUDE**

I doubt it is no other but the main:

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

*POLONIUS enters with the ambassadors VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS.*

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**VOLTEMAND**

Most fair return of greetings and desires.

Upon our first, he sent out to suppress

65 His nephew's levies, which to him appeared  
To be a preparation 'gainst the Polack,  
But, better looked into, he truly found  
It was against your highness. Whereat grieved—  
That so his sickness, age, and impotence

70 Was falsely borne in hand—sends out arrests  
On Fortinbras, which he, in brief, obeys,  
Receives rebuke from Norway, and in fine  
Makes vow before his uncle never more  
To give th' assay of arms against your majesty.

75 Whereon old Norway, overcome with joy,  
Gives him three thousand crowns in annual fee  
And his commission to employ those soldiers,  
So levied as before, against the Polack,  
With an entreaty, herein further shown,

80 That it might please you to give quiet pass  
Through your dominions for this enterprise,  
On such regards of safety and allowance  
As therein are set down. [*gives CLAUDIUS a document*]

**CLAUDIUS**

It likes us well,

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

*VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS exit.*

**POLONIUS**

90 This business is well ended.

My liege and madam, to expostulate  
What majesty should be, what duty is,  
Why day is day, night night, and time is time,  
Were nothing but to waste night, day, and time.

95 Therefore, since brevity is the soul of wit  
And tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes,  
I will be brief: your noble son is mad.  
Mad call I it, for, to define true madness,  
What is 't but to be nothing else but mad?

100 But let that go.

**GERTRUDE**

More matter, with less art.

**POLONIUS**

Madam, I swear I use no art at all.

That he is mad, 'tis true. 'Tis true, 'tis pity,  
And pity 'tis 'tis true—a foolish figure,

105 But farewell it, for I will use no art.  
Mad let us grant him then. And now remains  
That we find out the cause of this effect,  
Or rather say, the cause of this defect,  
For this effect defective comes by cause.

110 Thus it remains, and the remainder thus. Perpend.  
I have a daughter—have while she is mine—

**GERTRUDE**

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

*POLONIUS enters with the ambassadors VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS.*

**CLAUDIUS**

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

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

**VOLTEMAND**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

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

*VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS exit.*

**POLONIUS**


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

**GERTRUDE**

More substance, less style.

**POLONIUS**

Madam, I swear I'm using no style at all. It's true that he's  
crazy. It's true, it's a pity, and it's a pity that it's true—but  
now I'm talking like a fool, so I'll let that go and get to the  
point. We all agree that Hamlet's crazy. Now all we have to  
do is to figure out the cause behind the effect—or I guess I  
should say defect, since this defective effect must have a  
cause. That's what we have to do, and now I will continue  
with the rest of what I have to say. Consider this: I have a  
daughter—until she gets married—who in her obedience  
and duty to me has given me this letter. Now listen to this:

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

Who in her duty and obedience, mark,  
Hath given me this. Now gather and surmise.  
*[reads a letter]* "To the celestial and my soul's idol,  
115 the most beautified Ophelia"—That's an ill phrase, a  
vile phrase. "Beautified" is a vile phrase. But you  
shall hear. Thus: *[reads the letter]* "In her excellent  
white bosom, these," etc.—

**GERTRUDE**

Came this from Hamlet to her?

**POLONIUS**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

But how hath she received his love?

**POLONIUS**

What do you think of me?

**CLAUDIUS**

As of a man faithful and honorable.

**POLONIUS**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**GERTRUDE**

It may be, very like.

**POLONIUS**

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

*[He reads a letter]* "To the heavenly idol of my soul, the  
most beautified Ophelia"—That's an ugly phrase, an ugly  
phrase. That "beautified" is a terrible use of the word. But  
I'll continue: *[He reads the letter]* "In her excellent white  
bosom," et cetera—

**GERTRUDE**

This is from Hamlet to Ophelia?

**POLONIUS**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

And how did she respond to his love?

**POLONIUS**

What is your opinion of me?

**CLAUDIUS**

You are a loyal and honorable man.

**POLONIUS**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**GERTRUDE**

It may be, it very well may be.

**POLONIUS**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

165 Not that I know.

**POLONIUS**

*[points to his head and shoulders]*

Take this from this if this be otherwise.

If circumstances lead me, I will find

Where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed

170 Within the center.

**CLAUDIUS**

How may we try it further?

**POLONIUS**

You know sometimes he walks four hours together

Here in the lobby.

**GERTRUDE**

So he does indeed.

**POLONIUS**

175 At such a time I'll loose my daughter to him.

*[to CLAUDIUS]* Be you and I behind an arras then,

Mark the encounter. If he love her not

And be not from his reason fall'n thereon,

Let me be no assistant for a state

180 But keep a farm and carters.

**CLAUDIUS**

We will try it.

*HAMLET enters, reading a book.*

**GERTRUDE**

But look where sadly the poor wretch comes reading.

**POLONIUS**

Away, I do beseech you, both away.

I'll board him presently. O, give me leave.

*CLAUDIUS and GERTRUDE exit.*

**POLONIUS**

185 How does my good Lord Hamlet?

**HAMLET**

Well, God-'a'-mercy.

**POLONIUS**

Do you know me, my lord?

**HAMLET**

Excellent well. You are a fishmonger.

**POLONIUS**

Not I, my lord.

**HAMLET**

190 Then I would you were so honest a man.

**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.

**CLAUDIUS**

Not that I know of.

**POLONIUS**

*[Pointing to his head and shoulders]* Take my head from my

body if I'm wrong. I'll follow the evidence and discover the

truth, even if it's hidden at the center of the earth.

**CLAUDIUS**

How can we test your theory?

**POLONIUS**

Well, you know he sometimes walks here in the main hall

for four hours at a time.

**GERTRUDE**

Yes, he does indeed.

**POLONIUS**

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

*[To CLAUDIUS]* You and I will hide behind the tapestry and

observe their encounter. If he does not love her and has not

lost his sense because of it, then I should not be your

assistant in statecraft and should instead go work on a farm.

**CLAUDIUS**

We'll try it.

*HAMLET enters, reading a book.*

**GERTRUDE**

Look how sadly he's coming in, reading.

**POLONIUS**

I beg you, please go away, both of you. I'll speak to him

now. Oh, please leave me to do it.

*CLAUDIUS and GERTRUDE exit.*

**POLONIUS**

How do you do, Lord Hamlet?

**HAMLET**

Fine, thank you.

**POLONIUS**

Do you know who I am, my lord?

**HAMLET**

Of course. You are a fish seller.

**POLONIUS**

No, not me, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

Honorable, my lord?

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

That's very true, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

I have, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

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

**HAMLET**

205 Words, words, words.

**POLONIUS**

What is the matter, my lord?

**HAMLET**

Between who?

**POLONIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

Into my grave.

**POLONIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

230 Fare you well, my lord.

**HAMLET**

*[aside]* These tedious old fools!

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter.

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

I do, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

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

**HAMLET**

Words, words, words.

**POLONIUS**

What is the subject?

**HAMLET**

Between whom?

**POLONIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

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

**HAMLET**

Into my grave.

**POLONIUS**

Well, that's certainly not outside.

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

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

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

Take care, my lord.

**HAMLET**

*[To himself]* These boring old fools!

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter.

**POLONIUS**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

God save you, sir!

*POLONIUS exits.*

**GUILDENSTERN**

My honored lord!

**ROSENCRANTZ**

235 My most dear lord!

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

As the indifferent children of the earth.

**GUILDENSTERN**

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

**HAMLET**

Nor the soles of her shoes?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Neither, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

245 Faith, her privates we.

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

Prison, my lord?

**HAMLET**

Denmark's a prison.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

255 Then is the world one.

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

We think not so, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Thank you, sir.

*POLONIUS exits.*

**GUILDENSTERN**

My honorable lord!

**ROSENCRANTZ**

My most dear lord!

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

As well as any old average man.

**GUILDENSTERN**

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

**HAMLET**

But not the unluckiest either, right?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Neither, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

Yup, we're like privates in her army.

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

Prison, my lord?

**HAMLET**

Denmark's a prison.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Then the whole world is one as well.

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

We don't think so, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

is a prison.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

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

**HAMLET**

270 A dream itself is but a shadow.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN**

We'll wait upon you.

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

To visit you, my lord, no other occasion.

**HAMLET**

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

What should we say, my lord?

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

To what end, my lord?

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

[to GUILDENSTERN] What say you?

me, Denmark is a prison.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

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

**HAMLET**

A dream is itself just a shadow.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN**

We're at your service.

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

To visit you, my lord. No other reason.

**HAMLET**

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

What should we say, my lord?

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Why would they do that, my lord?

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

[To GUILDENSTERN] What do you think?



**HAMLET**

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

My lord, we were sent for.

**HAMLET**

I will tell you why. So shall my anticipation prevent  
your discovery, and your secrecy to the king and queen  
305 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  
310 you, this brave o’erhanging firmament, this majestic  
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  
315 express and admirable! In action how like an angel, in  
apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world.  
The paragon of animals. And yet, to me, what is this  
quintessence of dust? Man delights not me. No, nor woman  
neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

I think their inhibition comes by the means of the late  
340 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?

**HAMLET**

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

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

My lord, we were sent for.

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

No, they don’t.

**HAMLET**

Why not? Are they getting rusty?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

345 Nay, their endeavor keeps in the wonted pace. But there  
is, sir, an eyrie of children, little eyases, that cry  
out on the top of question and are most tyrannically  
clapped for 't. These are now the fashion, and so  
berattle the common stages—so they call them—that many  
350 wearing rapiers are afraid of goose quills and dare  
scarce come thither.

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

Is 't possible?

**GUILDENSTERN**

Oh, there has been much throwing about of brains.

**HAMLET**

365 Do the boys carry it away?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

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

*Trumpets sound offstage for the PLAYERS' arrival.*

**GUILDENSTERN**

There are the players.

**HAMLET**

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

In what, my dear lord?

**HAMLET**

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

*POLONIUS enters.*

**POLONIUS**

Well be with you, gentlemen.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

Can that be possible?

**GUILDENSTERN**

Oh, there's been a lot of arguing.

**HAMLET**


The boys are winning?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

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

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

*Trumpets sound offstage for the PLAYERS' arrival.*

**GUILDENSTERN**

There are the actors.

**HAMLET**

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

In what way, my dear lord?

**HAMLET**

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

*POLONIUS enters.*

**POLONIUS**

Gentlemen, I hope you're well.

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

My lord, I have news to tell you.

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

The actors are come hither, my lord.

**HAMLET**

Buzz, buzz.

**POLONIUS**

Upon my honor—

**HAMLET**

400 Then came each actor on his ass—

**POLONIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

410 What a treasure had he, my lord?

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

[*aside*] Still on my daughter.

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

Nay, that follows not.

**POLONIUS**

What follows, then, my lord?

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

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

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

**POLONIUS**

My lord, I have news to tell you.

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

The actors have arrived, my lord.

**HAMLET**

Gossip, gossip.

**POLONIUS**

I swear—

**HAMLET**

Then each actor came in on his ass.

**POLONIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

What treasure did he have, my lord?

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

Aren't I right, old man Jephthah?

**POLONIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

No, you don't understand.

**POLONIUS**

What should I understand, then, my lord?

**HAMLET**

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

*The PLAYERS enter.*

**HAMLET**

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

**FIRST PLAYER**

What speech, my good lord?

**HAMLET**

I heard thee speak me a speech once, but it was never acted. Or, if it was, not above once, for the play, I remember, pleased not the million. 'Twas caviary to the general. But it was—as I received it, and others, whose judgments in such matters cried in the top of mine—an excellent play, well digested in the scenes, set down with as much modesty as cunning. I remember, one said there were no sallets in the lines to make the matter savory, nor no matter in the phrase that might indict the author of affectation, but called it an honest method, as wholesome as sweet, and by very much more handsome than fine. One speech in it I chiefly loved. 'Twas Aeneas' tale to Dido and thereabout of it, especially where he speaks of Priam's slaughter. If it live in your memory, begin at this line—Let me see, let me see—  
455 The rugged Pyrrhus, like th' Hyrcanian beast—  
It is not so. It begins with Pyrrhus—  
The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms,  
Black as his purpose, did the night resemble  
When he lay couchèd in the ominous horse,  
460 Hath now this dread and black complexion smeared  
With heraldry more dismal. Head to foot  
Now is he total gules, horribly tricked  
With blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons,  
Baked and impasted with the parching streets,  
465 That lend a tyrannous and damnèd light  
To their lord's murder. Roasted in wrath and fire,  
And thus o'ersizèd with coagulate gore,  
With eyes like carbuncles, the hellish Pyrrhus  
Old grandsire Priam seeks.  
470 So, proceed you.

**POLONIUS**

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

**FIRST PLAYER**

Anon he finds him  
Striking too short at Greeks. His antique sword,  
475 Rebellious to his arm, lies where it falls,

**HAMLET**

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

*The PLAYERS enter.*

**HAMLET**

You are welcome. Welcome to all of you!

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

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

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

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

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

**FIRST PLAYER**

Which speech, my lord?

**HAMLET**

I heard you recite a speech for me once that was never acted on stage. Or, if it was, not more than once—because the play I remember didn't please the masses. It was like caviar for the masses—too sophisticated for them. But I, along with the better-informed critics, thought that it was excellent, with scenes that flowed one to the next and written in language that was clever and yet not overdone. I remember one critic commented that the play lacked spicy jokes to liven it up, and did not display any fancy language, but that it was well-done, and beautiful rather than showy. There was one speech in it that I loved the most. It was the story Aeneas told Dido<sup>4</sup>, particularly the part about Priam's<sup>5</sup> murder. If you remember it, begin at line—let me see, let me see—The rugged Pyrrhus, fierce as a tiger...No, that's not it; it begins like this: Rugged Pyrrhus—whose armor was as black as his desire, resembled the night when he crouched inside the Trojan Horse—has now smeared his terrible black armor with a more awful coat of arms. Head to foot, he's now all red, decorated horribly with the blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons. The blood baked solid by fires in the streets—fires that lend a terrible, damned light to his murders. Roasted by anger and fire—and covered with hardened gore—with eyes like rubies, the hellish Pyrrhus goes looking for grandfather Priam. Continue from there.

**POLONIUS**

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

**FIRST PLAYER**

Soon he finds Priam vainly fighting off the Greeks. His old sword, too heavy for him to wield, lies where it fell, refusing his commands. An unfair opponent, Pyrrhus rushes Priam,

<sup>3</sup> In Shakespeare's time, women were not allowed to perform on the public stage. Young men dressed as women to play female roles.

<sup>4</sup> Aeneas was the main character of Virgil's epic poem *The Aeneid*, in which the titular character escapes Troy and founds Rome. Along the way, he courts the Carthaginian queen, Dido.

<sup>5</sup> Priam was the King of Troy. The Greek hero Achilles' son, Pyrrhus, killed Priam, to avenge his father's death.

Repugnant to command. Unequal matched,  
 Pyrrhus at Priam drives, in rage strikes wide,  
 But with the whiff and wind of his fell sword  
 The unnerved father falls. Then senseless Ilium,  
 480 Seeming to feel this blow, with flaming top  
 Stoops to his base, and with a hideous crash  
 Takes prisoner Pyrrhus' ear. For, lo, his sword,  
 Which was declining on the milky head  
 Of reverend Priam, seemed i' th' air to stick.  
 485 So as a painted tyrant Pyrrhus stood,  
 And, like a neutral to his will and matter,  
 Did nothing.  
 But as we often see against some storm  
 A silence in the heavens, the rack stand still,  
 490 The bold winds speechless, and the orb below  
 As hush as death, anon the dreadful thunder  
 Doth rend the region. So, after Pyrrhus' pause,  
 Arousèd vengeance sets him new a-work.  
 And never did the Cyclops' hammers fall  
 495 On Mars's armor forged for proof eterne  
 With less remorse than Pyrrhus' bleeding sword  
 Now falls on Priam.  
 Out, out, thou strumpet Fortune! All you gods  
 In general synod take away her power,  
 500 Break all the spokes and fellies from her wheel,  
 And bowl the round nave down the hill of heaven,  
 As low as to the fiends!

**POLONIUS**

This is too long.

**HAMLET**

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

**FIRST PLAYER**

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

**HAMLET**

“The moblèd queen?”

**POLONIUS**

That's good. “Moblèd queen” is good.

**FIRST PLAYER**

Run barefoot up and down, threatening the flames  
 With bisson rheum, a clout upon that head  
 Where late the diadem stood, and for a robe,  
 About her lank and all o'erteemèd loins,  
 A blanket, in the alarm of fear caught up—  
 515 Who this had seen, with tongue in venom steeped,  
 'Gainst fortune's state would treason have pronounced.  
 But if the gods themselves did see her then  
 When she saw Pyrrhus make malicious sport  
 In mincing with his sword her husband's limbs,  
 520 The instant burst of clamor that she made,  
 (Unless things mortal move them not at all)  
 Would have made milch the burning eyes of heaven,  
 And passion in the gods.

**POLONIUS**

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

**HAMLET**


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

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

**POLONIUS**

This speech is too long.

**HAMLET**

We'll trim it later, along with your beard. Please, continue  
 with your speech. If it's not a comic dance or sex scene, this  
 man here falls to sleep. Go on, get to the part about [Hecuba](#) <sup>6</sup>  Hecuba was King Priam's grieving  
 widow.

**FIRST PLAYER**

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

**HAMLET**

“The muffled queen?”

**POLONIUS**

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

**FIRST PLAYER**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

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

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

**POLONIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

Come, sirs.

**HAMLET**

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

**FIRST PLAYER**

Ay, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

**FIRST PLAYER**

545 Ay, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

*POLONIUS and the PLAYERS exit.*

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Good my lord.

**HAMLET**

550 Ay, so. Good-bye to you.

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.*

**HAMLET**

Now I am alone.

Oh, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!

Is it not monstrous that this player here,

But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,

555 Could force his soul so to his own conceit

That from her working all his visage wanned,

Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,

A broken voice, and his whole function suiting

With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing—

560 For Hecuba!

What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba

That he should weep for her? What would he do

Had he the motive and the cue for passion

That I have? He would drown the stage with tears

565 And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,

Make mad the guilty and appall the free,

Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed

The very faculties of eyes and ears. Yet I,

A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak

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

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

have their ill will while you're alive.

**POLONIUS**

My lord, I will give them all they deserve.

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

Come with me, sirs.

**HAMLET**

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

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

**FIRST PLAYER**

Yes, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

**FIRST PLAYER**

Yes, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

*POLONIUS and the PLAYERS exit.*

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**


Yes, my good lord.


**HAMLET**

Goodbye to you both.

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.*

**HAMLET**

Now I'm alone. Oh, what a low-life scoundrel I am! Isn't it terrible that this actor—reciting a work of fiction—could force his soul to feel the passion so completely that he grew pale, tears welled in his eyes? He got overwhelmed, his voice broke, and the entirety of his being matched the emotions he was supposed to be playing. And all for nothing—for Hecuba! What does Hecuba mean to him, or he to Hecuba, that he would weep for her? What would he do if he had the motive or reason for passion that I have? He would drown the stage with tears, and split the ears of all who heard him with angry words. He would drive the guilty crazy with shame, horrify the innocent, confuse the ignorant, and shock anyone with eyes and ears. Meanwhile I—a stupid fool—mope like a daydreamer, don't have a plan, and have nothing, nothing, to say for a king whose throne and life were brought to destruction. Am I a coward? Who will stand up and call me a villain, or slap me across the face? Pluck hairs from my beard and blow them in my face? Tweak my nose? Call me a liar? Who does any of those things? Ha! By God , I'd accept it, because I must have a nature that doesn't respond to wrongs by making life for

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

Upon whose property and most dear life  
 A damned defeat was made. Am I a coward?  
 Who calls me "villain"? Breaks my pate across?  
 575 Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face?  
 Tweaks me by the nose? Gives me the lie i' th' throat  
 As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this?  
 Ha!  
 'Swounds, I should take it, for it cannot be  
 580 But I am pigeon-livered and lack gall  
 To make oppression bitter, or ere this  
 I should have fatted all the region kites  
 With this slave's offal. Bloody, bawdy villain!  
 Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!  
 585 O vengeance!  
 Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,  
 That I, the son of a dear father murdered,  
 Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,  
 Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words  
 590 And fall a-cursing like a very drab,  
 A stallion! Fie upon 't, foh!  
 About, my brain.—Hum, I have heard  
 That guilty creatures sitting at a play  
 Have, by the very cunning of the scene,  
 595 Been struck so to the soul that presently  
 They have proclaimed their malefactions.  
 For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak  
 With most miraculous organ. I'll have these players  
 Play something like the murder of my father  
 600 Before mine uncle. I'll observe his looks.  
 I'll tent him to the quick. If he do blench,  
 I know my course. The spirit that I have seen  
 May be the devil, and the devil hath power  
 T' assume a pleasing shape. Yea, and perhaps  
 605 Out of my weakness and my melancholy,  
 As he is very potent with such spirits,  
 Abuses me to damn me. I'll have grounds  
 More relative than this. The play's the thing  
 Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.

*HAMLET exits.*

the evildoer bitter. Otherwise, I would have long ago fattened up the local birds with the intestines of this scoundrel, King Claudius. Bloody, vulgar villain! Remorseless, treacherous, lustful, unnatural villain! Oh, revenge! Why, what an ass I am. Look how brave I am—the son of a beloved, murdered father; told to take revenge by heaven and hell; and yet all I can do is talk about my problems and curse like a whore in the street. I'm a male whore! Curses on it! Now think, brain—Hmm..I've heard that guilty people watching a play have been so affected by the performance that they have confessed their crimes. Though murder has no tongue, it still miraculously finds other ways to speak. I'll have these actors perform something like my father's murder in front of my uncle. Meanwhile, I'll watch my uncle, and probe him to his very core. If he flinches, I'll know what to do. The ghost I saw may be the devil, who has the power to appear in a pleasing manner. Perhaps he has taken advantage of my sadness—because he has great influence over melancholy people—to trick me into damnation. I need more solid evidence. The play's the thing I'll use to reveal the conscience of the king.

*HAMLET exits.*

## Act 3, Scene 1

### Shakespeare

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

#### CLAUDIUS

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

#### ROSENCRANTZ

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

#### GUILDENSTERN

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

#### GERTRUDE

Did he receive you well?

#### ROSENCRANTZ

Most like a gentleman.

### Shakesclare Translation

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

#### CLAUDIUS

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

#### ROSENCRANTZ

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

#### GUILDENSTERN

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

#### GERTRUDE

Did he treat you well?

#### ROSENCRANTZ

Yes, he treated us like a gentleman.

**GUILDENSTERN**

But with much forcing of his disposition.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**GERTRUDE**

Did you assay him?  
To any pastime?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

We shall, my lord.

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.*

**CLAUDIUS**

35 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,  
40 If 't be the affliction of his love or no  
That thus he suffers for.

**GERTRUDE**

I shall obey you .  
And for your part, Ophelia, I do wish  
45 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.

*GERTRUDE exits.*

**POLONIUS**

50 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,  
55 'Tis too much proved, that with devotion's visage  
And pious action we do sugar o'er  
The devil himself.

**CLAUDIUS**

[*aside*] Oh, 'tis too true!

**GUILDENSTERN**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**GERTRUDE**

Did you try to get him to do something fun?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

We will, my lord.

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.*

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**GERTRUDE**

I'll do as you ask.

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

**OPHELIA**

I hope it too, madam.

*GERTRUDE exits.*

**POLONIUS**

Ophelia, walk over here.

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

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

**CLAUDIUS**

[*To himself*] Oh, that's all too true! His words are like a whip



How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!  
 60 The harlot's cheek, beautied with plastering art,  
 Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it  
 Than is my deed to my most painted word.  
 O heavy burden!

**POLONIUS**

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

*CLAUDIUS and POLONIUS hide.*

*HAMLET enters.*

**HAMLET**

65 To be, or not to be? That is the question—  
 Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
 And, by opposing, end them? To die, to sleep—  
 70 No more—and by a sleep to say we end  
 The heartache and the thousand natural shocks  
 That flesh is heir to—'tis a consummation  
 Devoutly to be wished! To die, to sleep.  
 To sleep, perchance to dream—ay, there's the rub,  
 75 For in that sleep of death what dreams may come  
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
 Must give us pause. There's the respect  
 That makes calamity of so long life.  
 For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,  
 80 Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,  
 The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,  
 The insolence of office, and the spurns  
 That patient merit of th' unworthy takes,  
 When he himself might his quietus make  
 85 With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,  
 To grunt and sweat under a weary life,  
 But that the dread of something after death,  
 The undiscovered country from whose bourn  
 No traveler returns, puzzles the will  
 90 And makes us rather bear those ills we have  
 Than fly to others that we know not of?  
 Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,  
 And thus the native hue of resolution  
 Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,  
 95 And enterprises of great pitch and moment  
 With this regard their currents turn awry,  
 And lose the name of action. —Soft you now,  
 The fair Ophelia! —Nymph, in thy orisons  
 Be all my sins remembered.

**OPHELIA**

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

**HAMLET**

I humbly thank you. Well, well, well.

**OPHELIA**

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

**HAMLET**

No, not I. I never gave you aught.

**OPHELIA**

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

against my conscience! The whore's ugly cheek—only made  
 beautiful with make-up—is no more terrible than the things  
 I've done and hidden with fine words. Oh, what guilt!

**POLONIUS**

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

*CLAUDIUS and POLONIUS hide.*

*HAMLET enters.*

**HAMLET**

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

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

**OPHELIA**

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

**HAMLET**

Thank you for asking. Well, well, well.

**OPHELIA**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**OPHELIA**

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

**HAMLET**

Ha, ha, are you honest?

**OPHELIA**

My lord?

**HAMLET**

115 Are you fair?

**OPHELIA**

What means your lordship?

**HAMLET**

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

**OPHELIA**

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

**HAMLET**

125 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**

130 I was the more deceived.

**HAMLET**

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

**OPHELIA**

At home, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

**OPHELIA**

O, help him, you sweet heavens!

**HAMLET**

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

**OPHELIA**

Heavenly powers, restore him!

**HAMLET**

Ha ha, are you pure?

**OPHELIA**

Excuse me?

**HAMLET**

Are you beautiful?

**OPHELIA**

What do you mean?

**HAMLET**

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

**OPHELIA**

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

**HAMLET**

Yes, definitely, because the power of beauty is more likely to change a good girl into a whore than the power of purity is likely to change a beautiful girl into a virgin. This used to be a great puzzle, but now I've solved it. I used to love you.

**OPHELIA**

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


**HAMLET**

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

**OPHELIA**

I fell for your trick, then.

**HAMLET**

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

**OPHELIA**

He's at home, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

**OPHELIA**


Oh, dear God, please help him!

**HAMLET**

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

**OPHELIA**

Dear God, make him sane again!

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

**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.

*HAMLET exits.*

**OPHELIA**

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

*CLAUDIUS and POLONIUS come forward.*

**CLAUDIUS**

Love? His affections do not that way tend.  
Nor what he spake, though it lacked form a little,  
Was not like madness. There's something in his soul  
O'er which his melancholy sits on brood,  
And I do doubt the hatch and the disclose  
Will be some danger—which for to prevent,  
I have in quick determination  
Thus set it down: he shall with speed to England  
For the demand of our neglected tribute.  
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.  
We heard it all. —My lord, do as you please.  
But, if you hold it fit, after the play  
Let his queen mother all alone entreat him  
To show his grief. Let her be round with him,  
And I'll be placed, so please you, in the ear  
Of all their conference. If she find him not,  
To England send him or confine him where  
Your wisdom best shall think.

**CLAUDIUS**

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

*They all exit.*

**HAMLET**

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

*HAMLET exits.*

**OPHELIA**

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

*CLAUDIUS and POLONIUS come forward.*

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

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

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

**CLAUDIUS**

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

*They all exit.*

## Act 3, Scene 2

HAMLET and the PLAYERS enter.

**HAMLET**

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

The PLAYERS exit.

POLONIUS, GUILDENSTERN, and ROSENCRANTZ enter.

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

And the queen too, and that presently.

**HAMLET**

Bid the players make haste.

POLONIUS exits.

HAMLET and the PLAYERS enter.

**HAMLET**

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

**FIRST PLAYER**

I'll do as you ask.

**HAMLET**

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

**FIRST PLAYER**

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

**HAMLET**

Oh, get rid of it completely. And make sure that the clowns speak exactly the lines written for them—because some of them will laugh in order to get some stupid spectators to laugh, while in the meantime an important part of the plot is then unfolding. That's villainous, and displays a pitiful ambition in the offending fool to get noticed at the expense of the play. Go, get ready.

The PLAYERS exit.

POLONIUS, GUILDENSTERN, and ROSENCRANTZ enter.

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

Yes, and the queen too, and soon.

**HAMLET**

Tell the actors to hurry.

POLONIUS exits.

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

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

**HAMLET**

Will you two help to hasten them?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

50 Ay, my lord.

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.*

**HAMLET**

What ho, Horatio!

*HORATIO enters.*

**HORATIO**

Here, sweet lord, at your service.

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

55 O my dear lord—

**HAMLET**

Nay, do not think I flatter.

For what advancement may I hope from thee  
That no revenue hast but thy good spirits,  
To feed and clothe thee? Why should the poor be  
60 flattered?

No, let the candied tongue lick absurd pomp,  
And crook the pregnant hinges of the knee  
Where thrift may follow fawning. Dost thou hear?  
Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice

65 And could of men distinguish, her election  
Hath sealed thee for herself, for thou hast been—  
As one in suffering all that suffers nothing—  
A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards  
Hast ta'en with equal thanks. And blessed are those

70 Whose blood and judgment are so well commingled,  
That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger  
To sound what stop she please. Give me that man  
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him  
In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,

75 As I do thee. —Something 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,  
80 Even with the very comment of thy soul  
Observe mine uncle. If his occulted guilt  
Do not itself unkennel in one speech,  
It is a damnèd ghost that we have seen,  
And my imaginations are as foul

85 As Vulcan's stithy. Give him heedful note.  
For I mine eyes will rivet to his face,  
And after we will both our judgments join  
In censure of his seeming.

**HORATIO**

Well, my lord.

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

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

**HAMLET**

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

**HAMLET**

Will you two help to speed the actors along?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Yes, my lord.

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.*

**HAMLET**

Hello, Horatio!

*HORATIO enters.*

**HORATIO**

My dear lord, here I am at your service.


**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

Oh, my dear lord—

**HAMLET**

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


**HORATIO**

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

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

**HAMLET**

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

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

**CLAUDIUS**

How fares our cousin Hamlet?

**HAMLET**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

No, nor mine now.

*[to POLONIUS]* My lord, you played once i' th' university, you say?

**POLONIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

What did you enact?

**POLONIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Ay, my lord. They stay upon your patience.

**GERTRUDE**

Come hither, my dear Hamlet, sit by me.

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

**OPHELIA**

No, my lord.

**HAMLET**

I mean, my head upon your lap?

**OPHELIA**

Ay, my lord.

**HAMLET**

115 Do you think I meant country matters?

**OPHELIA**

I think nothing, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

How do you fare, my nephew Hamlet?

**HAMLET**

Excellent! In fact, I eat the air—full as it is of promise—just as chameleons do. That's no way to feed a [chicken](#) <sup>4</sup>.

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

No, nor mine.

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

**POLONIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

What role did you play?

**POLONIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

That was brutish of him to kill so [capital](#) <sup>5</sup> a man. Are the actors ready?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**GERTRUDE**

Come here, my dear Hamlet. Sit by me.

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

*[To CLAUDIUS]* Aha! Did you hear that?

**HAMLET**

My lady, should I [lie in your lap](#) <sup>6</sup>?

**OPHELIA**

No, my lord.

**HAMLET**

I mean, put my head in your lap?

**OPHELIA**

Yes, my lord.

**HAMLET**

Did you think I was talking about sex?

**OPHELIA**

I think nothing, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

<sup>4</sup> In the original text, Hamlet refers to a capon, a male chicken castrated in youth to result in tender meat.

<sup>5</sup> Hamlet puns on the similarities between "capitol"—a site in ancient Rome—and "capital," meaning "excellent."

<sup>6</sup> Here, Hamlet begins a series of bawdy phrases with sexual overtones.

**OPHELIA**

What is, my lord?

**HAMLET**

Nothing.

**OPHELIA**

120 You are merry, my lord.

**HAMLET**

Who, I?

**OPHELIA**

Ay, my lord.

**HAMLET**

125 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**

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

*The PLAYERS exit.*

**OPHELIA**

135 What means this, my lord?

**HAMLET**

Marry, this is miching mallecho. It means mischief.

**OPHELIA**

Belike this show imports the argument of the play.

*The actor who will introduce the play enters.*

**HAMLET**

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

**OPHELIA**

140 Will he tell us what this show meant?

**OPHELIA**

What is, my lord?

**HAMLET**

Nothing <sup>7</sup>.

**OPHELIA**

You're happy tonight, my lord.

**HAMLET**

Who, me?

**OPHELIA**

Yes, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

**OPHELIA**

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

**HAMLET**

That long? Well, then may the devil wear black mourning clothes, while I go about in a suit of fine fur. Heaven forbid! He's been dead for two months already and hasn't been forgotten yet? I guess there's hope that memories of a great man may outlive him by six months. But, by God <sup>8</sup>, he must build churches for that to happen, or else he'll have to put up with being forgotten, like the hobby-horse in the popular song: "Hey-ho, hey-ho, the hobby-horse is forgotten."

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

*The PLAYERS exit.*

**OPHELIA**

What does this mean, my lord?

**HAMLET**

This means we're having some mischievous fun.

**OPHELIA**

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

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

**HAMLET**

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

**OPHELIA**

Will he tell us what that pantomime meant?

<sup>7</sup> "Nothing" was Elizabethan slang for genitalia.

<sup>8</sup> In the original text, Hamlet uses the oath "by 'r Lady," which is a literal invocation of the Virgin Mary.

**HAMLET**

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

**OPHELIA**

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

**PROLOGUE**

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

*The PROLOGUE exits.*

**HAMLET**

Is this a prologue or the posy of a ring?

**OPHELIA**

'Tis brief, my lord.

**HAMLET**

150 As woman's love.

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

**PLAYER KING**

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

**PLAYER QUEEN**

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

**PLAYER KING**

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

**PLAYER QUEEN**

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

**HAMLET**

*[aside]* Wormwood, wormwood.

**PLAYER QUEEN**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**OPHELIA**

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

**PROLOGUE**

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

*The PROLOGUE exits.*

**HAMLET**

Was that a prologue or the inscription on a ring?

**OPHELIA**

It was short, my lord.

**HAMLET**

As short as a woman's love.

*The [PLAYER KING](#)<sup>9</sup> and [PLAYER QUEEN](#) enter.*

**PLAYER KING**

The earth circled the sun thirty times; and the moon has waxed and waned over the ocean; and the earth for thirty times twelve months, since love joined our hearts and [Hymen](#)<sup>10</sup> joined our hands in the sacred bonds of marriage.

**PLAYER QUEEN**

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

**PLAYER KING**

In truth, I will soon have to leave you, love. My body is growing weak, ceasing to function. I will leave you behind in this beautiful world, my honorable beloved. Perhaps you'll find another husband—

**PLAYER QUEEN**

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

**HAMLET**

*[To himself]* That's bitter!

**PLAYER QUEEN**

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

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

<sup>10</sup> Hymen was the ancient Greek god of marriage.



**PLAYER KING**

I do believe you think what now you speak,  
 185 But what we do determine oft we break.  
 Purpose is but the slave to memory,  
 Of violent birth, but poor validity,  
 Which now, like fruit unripe, sticks on the tree,  
 But fall, unshaken, when they mellow be.  
 190 Most necessary 'tis that we forget  
 To pay ourselves what to ourselves is debt.  
 What to ourselves in passion we propose,  
 The passion ending, doth the purpose lose.  
 The violence of either grief or joy  
 195 Their own enactures with themselves destroy.  
 Where joy most revels, grief doth most lament.  
 Grief joys, joy grieves on slender accident.  
 This world is not for aye, nor 'tis not strange  
 That even our loves should with our fortunes change.  
 200 For 'tis a question left us yet to prove,  
 Whether love lead fortune, or else fortune love.  
 The great man down, you mark his favorite flies.  
 The poor advanced makes friends of enemies.  
 And hitherto doth love on fortune tend,  
 205 For who not needs shall never lack a friend,  
 And who in want a hollow friend doth try,  
 Directly seasons him his enemy.  
 But, orderly to end where I begun,  
 Our wills and fates do so contrary run  
 210 That our devices still are overthrown.  
 Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own.  
 So think thou wilt no second husband wed,  
 But die thy thoughts when thy first lord is dead.

**PLAYER QUEEN**

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

**HAMLET**

If she should break it now!

**PLAYER KING**

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

*The PLAYER KING sleeps.*

**PLAYER QUEEN**

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

*The PLAYER QUEEN exits.*

**HAMLET**

Madam, how like you this play?

**GERTRUDE**

The lady protests too much, methinks.

**HAMLET**

230 Oh, but she'll keep her word.

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**PLAYER KING**

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

**PLAYER QUEEN**

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

**HAMLET**

What if she breaks that vow?

**PLAYER KING**

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

*The PLAYER KING falls asleep.*

**PLAYER QUEEN**

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

*The PLAYER QUEEN exits.*

**HAMLET**

Madam, how do you like this play?

**GERTRUDE**

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

**HAMLET**

Oh, but she'll keep her word.

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

What do you call the play?

**HAMLET**

235 The Mousetrap. Marry, how? Tropically. This play is the image of a murder done in Vienna. Gonzago is the duke's name, his wife Baptista. You shall see anon. 'Tis a knavish piece of work, but what o' that? Your majesty and we that have free souls, it touches us not. Let the galled jade wince, our withers are unwrung.

*LUCIANUS enters.*

**HAMLET**

This is one Lucianus, nephew to the king.

**OPHELIA**

You are as good as a chorus, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

**OPHELIA**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**OPHELIA**

Still better and worse.

**HAMLET**

250 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,  
255 With Hecate's ban thrice blasted, thrice infected,  
Thy natural magic and dire property  
On wholesome life usurp immediately.  
*[pours poison into PLAYER KING 's ears]*

**HAMLET**

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

*CLAUDIUS stands up.*

**OPHELIA**

The king rises.

**HAMLET**

What, frightened with false fire?

**GERTRUDE**

265 How fares my lord?

**POLONIUS**

Give o'er the play.

**CLAUDIUS**

What's the title of the play?

**HAMLET**

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

*LUCIANUS enters.*

**HAMLET**

This is Lucianus, the king's nephew.

**OPHELIA**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**OPHELIA**

You are witty, my lord, and sharp.

**HAMLET**

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

**OPHELIA**


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


**HAMLET**

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

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

**LUCIANUS**

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

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

**HAMLET**

He poisons the king in the garden to get the kingdom. The king's name is Gonzago. The original story was written in Italian. You'll see shortly how the murderer wins the love of Gonzago's wife.

*CLAUDIUS stands up.*

**OPHELIA**

The king is standing up.

**HAMLET**

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

**GERTRUDE**

My lord, how are you feeling?

**POLONIUS**

Stop the play.

**CLAUDIUS**

Give me some light, away!

**POLONIUS**

Lights, lights, lights!

*Everyone except HAMLET and HORATIO exits.*

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

Half a share.

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

You might have rhymed.

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

Very well, my lord.

**HAMLET**

Upon the talk of the poisoning?

**HORATIO**

I did very well note him.

**HAMLET**

290 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!

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter.*

**GUILDENSTERN**

Good my lord, vouchsafe me a word with you.

**HAMLET**

Sir, a whole history.

**GUILDENSTERN**

295 The king, sir—

**HAMLET**

Ay, sir, what of him?

**GUILDENSTERN**

Is in his retirement marvelous distempered.

**HAMLET**

With drink, sir?

**CLAUDIUS**

Turn on the lights. I'm leaving!

**POLONIUS**

Lights, lights, lights!

*Everyone except HAMLET and HORATIO exits.*

**HAMLET**

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

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

**HORATIO**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

You could have at least rhymed <sup>12</sup>.

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

**HAMLET**

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

**HORATIO**

Very well, my lord.

**HAMLET**

When the actors mentioned the poison?

**HORATIO**

I watched him closely.

**HAMLET**

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

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter.*

**GUILDENSTERN**

My lord, might I have a word with you?

**HAMLET**

You can have a whole story.

**GUILDENSTERN**

The king, sir—

**HAMLET**

Yes, what about him?

**GUILDENSTERN**

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

**HAMLET**

He has an upset stomach from drinking too much?

**GUILDENSTERN**

No, my lord, with choler.

**HAMLET**

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

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

**HAMLET**

305 I am tame, sir. Pronounce.

**GUILDENSTERN**

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

**HAMLET**

You are welcome.

**GUILDENSTERN**

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

**HAMLET**

Sir, I cannot.

**GUILDENSTERN**

315 What, my lord?

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

My lord, you once did love me.

**HAMLET**

330 And do still, by these pickers and stealers.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

Sir, I lack advancement.

**GUILDENSTERN**

No, my lord, he's angry.

**HAMLET**

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

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

**HAMLET**

I'll behave, sir. Speak.

**GUILDENSTERN**

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

**HAMLET**

You are very welcome here.

**GUILDENSTERN**

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

**HAMLET**

Sir, I can't.

**GUILDENSTERN**

Can't what, my lord?

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

She says that your behavior has shocked astonished her.

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

My lord, you once liked me.

**HAMLET**

And I still do, I swear by my hands.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

Sir, I have no future prospects.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

*The PLAYERS enter with recorders.*

**HAMLET**

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

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

My lord, I cannot.

**HAMLET**

I pray you.

**GUILDENSTERN**

Believe me, I cannot.

**HAMLET**

350 I do beseech you.

**GUILDENSTERN**

I know no touch of it, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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  
355 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  
360 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  
365 pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, yet you cannot play upon me.

*POLONIUS enters.*

**HAMLET**

God bless you, sir.

**POLONIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

*The PLAYERS enter with recorders.*

**HAMLET**

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

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

My lord, I can’t.

**HAMLET**

Please.

**GUILDENSTERN**

Believe me, I can’t.

**HAMLET**

I beg you.

**GUILDENSTERN**

I don’t know how, my lord.

**HAMLET**

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

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

**HAMLET**

Well, look at that, how you treat me like such a fool. You keep trying to play me—as if you knew exactly where to put your fingers—to tease out my mystery—playing the full scale of all my notes. There is so much music in this little instrument, and yet you can’t make it speak? By God, do you think I’m easier to play than a recorder? Call me whatever instrument you want—even though you try to push my buttons, you can’t play me.

*POLONIUS enters.*

**HAMLET**

God bless you, sir.

**POLONIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

Methinks it is like a weasel.

**POLONIUS**

It is backed like a weasel.

**HAMLET**

Or like a whale.

**POLONIUS**

375 Very like a whale.

**HAMLET**

Then I will come to my mother by and by. *[aside]* They fool me to the top of my bent.—I will come by and by.

**POLONIUS**

I will say so.

**HAMLET**

“By and by” is easily said.

*POLONIUS exits.*

**HAMLET**

380 Leave me, friends.

*Everyone except HAMLET exits.*

**HAMLET**

'Tis now the very witching time of night,  
When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out  
Contagion to this world. Now could I drink hot blood  
And do such bitter business as the bitter day

385 Would quake to look on. Soft, now to my mother.—

O heart, lose not thy nature, let not ever  
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom.  
Let me be cruel, not unnatural.

I will speak daggers to her but use none.

390 My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites.

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

*HAMLET exits.*

**POLONIUS**

By God, it does look like a camel.

**HAMLET**

To me it looks like a weasel.

**POLONIUS**

Its back is like a weasel's.

**HAMLET**

Or like a whale.

**POLONIUS**

Very much like a whale.

**HAMLET**

I'll come to see my mother soon.

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

*[To POLONIUS]* I'll come soon.

**POLONIUS**

I'll tell her that.

**HAMLET**

It's easy enough to say “soon.”

*POLONIUS exits.*

**HAMLET**

Leave me alone, my friends.

*Everyone except HAMLET exits.*

**HAMLET**

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

*HAMLET exits.*

<sup>13</sup> Nero was a debauched Roman emperor who ordered his mother's execution.

## Act 3, Scene 3

### Shakespeare

*CLAUDIUS, ROSENCRANTZ, and GUILDENSTERN enter.*

**CLAUDIUS**

I like him not, nor stands it safe with us  
To let his madness range. Therefore prepare you.  
I your commission will forthwith dispatch,  
And he to England shall along with you.

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

We will ourselves provide.

### Shakescleare Translation

*CLAUDIUS, ROSENCRANTZ, and GUILDENSTERN enter.*

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

We'll get ourselves ready. It's a sacred duty to protect all of

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN**

We will haste us.

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.*

*POLONIUS enters.*

**POLONIUS**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

Thanks, dear my lord.

*POLONIUS exits.*

**CLAUDIUS**

Oh, my offence is rank. It smells to heaven.  
 40 It hath the primal eldest curse upon 't,  
 A brother's murder. Pray can I not.  
 Though inclination be as sharp as will,  
 My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,  
 And, like a man to double business bound,  
 45 I stand in pause where I shall first begin,  
 And both neglect. What if this cursèd hand  
 Were thicker than itself with brother's blood?  
 Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens  
 To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy  
 50 But to confront the visage of offence?  
 And what's in prayer but this twofold force,  
 To be forestallèd ere we come to fall  
 Or pardoned being down? Then I'll look up.  
 My fault is past. But oh, what form of prayer  
 55 Can serve my turn, "Forgive me my foul murder?"  
 That cannot be, since I am still possessed  
 Of those effects for which I did the murder:  
 My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.  
 May one be pardoned and retain th' offence?  
 60 In the corrupted currents of this world  
 Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,  
 And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself  
 Buys out the law. But 'tis not so above.  
 There is no shuffling. There the action lies

65

those people whose lives depend on you, your Majesty.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN**

We will hurry.

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.*

*POLONIUS enters.*

**POLONIUS**


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


**CLAUDIUS**

Thanks, my dear lord.

*POLONIUS exits.*

**CLAUDIUS**

Oh, my crime is foul. It stinks all the way to heaven. It is the oldest , and worst, of all crimes: a brother's murder. I can't pray. Though I badly want to pray, my guilt is stronger than my hope to pray. And—like a person with two things he has to do at the same time—I stand paralyzed, unsure which to start first, and thus neglect them both. Even if this cursed hand of mine is covered with my brother's blood, isn't there enough rain in sweet heaven to wash it white as snow? What's the purpose of God's mercy if not to forgive the sinner? And doesn't prayer have these two powers: to stop us from sinning before we do, and to offer forgiveness when we've sinned? So I'll pray. My sin is in the past. But, oh, what prayer can possibly give me what I want: "Forgive me for my awful murder?" That won't work, since I still have all the things I gained by committing the murder: my crown—the object of my ambition—and my queen. Is it possible to be forgiven and keep what you got from the crime? In this corrupt world, criminals can use the wealth they get from their crime to shove justice aside by bribing officers of the law. But that's not how it is heaven. You can't hide from the law up there. There, every action is judged strictly on its merits, and everyone must confront their sins face-to-face. What then? What remains for me to do? Repent as best I can. That can't hurt. But it can't help much either, since I can't really repent. Oh, what a wretched situation! Oh, my heart is as black as death. My soul is

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

In his true nature, and we ourselves compelled,  
 Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,  
 To give in evidence. What then? What rests?  
 Try what repentance can. What can it not?  
 Yet what can it when one can not repent?  
 70 O wretched state! O bosom black as death!  
 O limed soul that, struggling to be free,  
 Art more engaged! Help, angels. Make assay.  
 Bow, stubborn knees, and, heart with strings of steel,  
 Be soft as sinews of the newborn babe.

75 All may be well.  
*[kneels]*

HAMLET enters.

#### HAMLET

Now might I do it pat. Now he is a-praying.  
 And now I'll do 't. And so he goes to heaven.  
 And so am I revenged.—That would be scanned.

80 A villain kills my father, and, for that,  
 I, his sole son, do this same villain send  
 To heaven.

Oh, this is hire and salary, not revenge.  
 He took my father grossly, full of bread,

85 With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May.  
 And how his audit stands who knows save heaven?  
 But in our circumstance and course of thought  
 'Tis heavy with him. And am I then revenged  
 To take him in the purging of his soul

90 When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?  
 No!

Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent.  
 When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,  
 Or in th' incestuous pleasure of his bed,

95 At game a-swearing, or about some act  
 That has no relish of salvation in 't—  
 Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,  
 And that his soul may be as damned and black  
 As hell, whereto it goes. My mother stays

100 This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.

HAMLET exits.

#### CLAUDIUS

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

CLAUDIUS exits.

trapped in sin, and the more it struggles to be free, the  
 more trapped it gets. Help me, angels! Make an effort. Now  
 bend, my stubborn knees, and may my hard heart become  
 soft as the muscle of a newborn baby. Perhaps all will be  
 well. *[He kneels]*

HAMLET enters.

#### HAMLET

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

HAMLET exits.

#### CLAUDIUS

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

CLAUDIUS exits.

## Act 3, Scene 4

### Shakespeare

GERTRUDE and POLONIUS enter.

#### POLONIUS

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

5 Pray you, be round with him.

#### HAMLET

*[within]* Mother, mother, mother!

#### GERTRUDE

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

### Shakescleare Translation

GERTRUDE and POLONIUS enter.

#### POLONIUS

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

#### HAMLET

*[Offstage]* Mother, mother, mother!

#### GERTRUDE

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



*POLONIUS hides behind the tapestry.*

*HAMLET enters.*

**HAMLET**

Now mother, what's the matter?

**GERTRUDE**

10 Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

**HAMLET**

Mother, you have my father much offended.

**GERTRUDE**

Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.

**HAMLET**

Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue.

**GERTRUDE**

Why, how now, Hamlet?

**HAMLET**

15 What's the matter now?

**GERTRUDE**

Have you forgot me?

**HAMLET**

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

**GERTRUDE**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**GERTRUDE**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

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

*HAMLET stabs his sword through the tapestry and kills POLONIUS*

**POLONIUS**

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

**GERTRUDE**

O me, what hast thou done?

**HAMLET**

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

**GERTRUDE**

Oh, what a rash and bloody deed is this!

**HAMLET**

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

*POLONIUS hides behind the tapestry.*

*HAMLET enters.*

**HAMLET**

Now, mother, what's the matter?

**GERTRUDE**

Hamlet, you have insulted your father.

**HAMLET**

Mother, you have insulted my father.

**GERTRUDE**

Come now, you answer is foolish.

**HAMLET**

Go on, your question is wicked.

**GERTRUDE**

Hamlet, what, why?

**HAMLET**

What's the matter now?

**GERTRUDE**

Have you forgotten who I am?

**HAMLET**

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

**GERTRUDE**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**GERTRUDE**

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

**POLONIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

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

*HAMLET stabs his sword through the tapestry and kills  
POLONIUS.*

**POLONIUS**

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

**GERTRUDE**

Oh my God, what have you done?

**HAMLET**

I don't know. Is it the king?

**GERTRUDE**

Oh, what a reckless, bloody act!

**HAMLET**

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

**GERTRUDE**

As kill a king?

**HAMLET**

35 Ay, lady, 'twas my word.

*HAMLET pulls back the tapestry and discovers POLONIUS*

**HAMLET**

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

40 Leave wringing of your hands. Peace. Sit you down  
And let me wring your heart. For so I shall  
If it be made of penetrable stuff,  
If damnèd custom have not brass'd it so  
That it is proof and bulwark against sense.

**GERTRUDE**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**GERTRUDE**

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

**HAMLET**

Look here upon this picture and on this,  
The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.  
See, what a grace was seated on this brow?  
Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,  
65 An eye like Mars to threaten and command,  
A station like the herald Mercury  
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill—  
A combination and a form indeed  
Where every god did seem to set his seal  
70 To give the world assurance of a man.  
This was your husband. Look you now, what follows.  
Here is your husband, like a mildew'd ear  
Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?  
Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed  
75 And batten on this moor? Ha, have you eyes?  
You cannot call it love, for at your age  
The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble,  
And waits upon the judgment. And what judgment  
Would step from this to this? Sense sure you have,  
80 Else could you not have motion. But sure that sense  
Is apoplex'd, for madness would not err,  
Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thrall'd,  
But it reserved some quantity of choice  
To serve in such a difference. What devil was 't  
85 That thus hath cozened you at hoodman-blind?  
Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,  
Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all,  
Or but a sickly part of one true sense  
Could not so mope. O shame, where is thy blush?  
90 Rebellious hell,  
If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,  
To flaming youth let virtue be as wax

**GERTRUDE**

Killing a king?

**HAMLET**

Yes, lady, that's what I said.

*HAMLET pulls back the tapestry and discovers POLONIUS.*

**HAMLET**

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

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

**GERTRUDE**

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


**HAMLET**


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

**GERTRUDE**

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

**HAMLET**

Look at this picture here and at that one there, the painted  
portraits of two brothers. See the saintly goodness in this  
face? He has curls like those of Hyperion , a forehead like  
that of Jove, eyes that command like those of Mars, and a  
stance as light as Mercury's when that god lands on the  
peak of a hill. He was such a combination of good qualities  
that it seemed like he was put together by all the gods to be  
the perfect man. That was your husband. Now look at what  
came after: this is your husband, like a rotten ear of corn  
infecting the one next to it. Do you have eyes? How could  
you leave the beautiful heights of this man and descend  
down to this dank swamp of this one? Ha! Do you have  
eyes? You can't say it was love—because at your age  
romantic passions have been tamed with humility and  
reason. But there must be something wrong with your  
reason, because why else would you go from this to that?  
Your senses must still work, or else you wouldn't be able to  
move. But those senses seem paralyzed, because madness  
would not make this mistake. And even senses overcome by  
desire would still be able to distinguish the huge difference  
between your former and current husband. What devil was  
it that tricked and blindfolded you? Even if you had eyes  
without feeling, feeling without sight, ears without hands or  
eyes, smell without any other senses, or the use of just one  
impaired sense, you would not make a mistake like this. Oh,  
for shame, why aren't you blushing? If a rebellion can rage  
even in a mother's bones, then in the fire of youth all virtue  
must burn away. There's no longer any shame in acting on  
impulse when old people burn to act on impulse, and  
reason acts as a servant to desire.

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

95 And melt in her own fire. Proclaim no shame  
When the compulsive ardor gives the charge,  
Since frost itself as actively doth burn,  
And reason panders will.

**GERTRUDE**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**GERTRUDE**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**GERTRUDE**

No more!

**HAMLET**

115 A king of shreds and patches—

*The GHOST enters.*

**HAMLET**

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

**GERTRUDE**

Alas, he's mad!

**HAMLET**

Do you not come your tardy son to chide,  
120 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.  
125 But look, amazement on thy mother sits.  
O, step between her and her fighting soul.  
Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works.  
Speak to her, Hamlet.

**HAMLET**

How is it with you, lady?

**GERTRUDE**

130 Alas, how is 't with you,  
That you do bend your eye on vacancy  
And with th' incorporal air do hold discourse?  
Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep,  
And, as the sleeping soldiers in th' alarm,  
135 Your bedded hair, like life in excrements,  
Starts up and stands on end. O gentle son,  
Upon the heat and flame of thy distemper

**GERTRUDE**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**GERTRUDE**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**GERTRUDE**

No more!

**HAMLET**

A patched-up king—

*The GHOST enters.*

**HAMLET**

Heavenly angels, protect me with your wings!

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

**GERTRUDE**

Oh no! He's crazy!

**HAMLET**

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

**GHOST**

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

**HAMLET**

How are you doing, madam?

**GERTRUDE**

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

Sprinkle cool patience. Whereon do you look?

**HAMLET**

On him, on him! Look you, how pale he glares!  
 140 His form and cause conjoined, preaching to stones,  
 Would make them capable.  
 [to GHOST] Do not look upon me,  
 Lest with this piteous action you convert  
 My stern effects. Then what I have to do  
 145 Will want true color—tears perchance for blood.

**GERTRUDE**

To whom do you speak this?

**HAMLET**

Do you see nothing there?

**GERTRUDE**

Nothing at all, yet all that is I see.

**HAMLET**

Nor did you nothing hear?

**GERTRUDE**

150 No, nothing but ourselves.

**HAMLET**

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

*The GHOST exits.*

**GERTRUDE**

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

**HAMLET**

Ecstasy?  
 My pulse as yours doth temperately keep time  
 And makes as healthful music. It is not madness  
 160 That I have uttered. Bring me to the test,  
 And I the matter will reword, which madness  
 Would gambol from. Mother, for love of grace,  
 Lay not that flattering unction to your soul  
 That not your trespass but my madness speaks.  
 165 It will but skin and film the ulcerous place  
 Whilst rank corruption, mining all within,  
 Infects unseen. Confess yourself to heaven.  
 Repent what's past. Avoid what is to come.  
 And do not spread the compost on the weeds  
 170 To make them ranker. Forgive me this my virtue,  
 For in the fatness of these 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**

175 Oh, throw away the worse part of it,  
 And live the purer with the other half.  
 Good night—but go not to mine uncle's bed.  
 Assume a virtue if you have it not.  
 That monster, custom, who all sense doth eat,  
 180 Of habits devil, is angel yet in this:  
 That to the use of actions fair and good  
 He likewise gives a frock or livery  
 That aptly is put on. Refrain tonight,  
 And that shall lend a kind of easiness  
 185 To the next abstinence, the next more easy.  
 For use almost can change the stamp of nature,

**HAMLET**

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

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

**GERTRUDE**

Who are you talking to?

**HAMLET**

You don't see anything there?

**GERTRUDE**

Nothing at all, other than what's there.

**HAMLET**

And you don't hear anything?

**GERTRUDE**

No, nothing but us.

**HAMLET**

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

*The GHOST exits.*

**GERTRUDE**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**GERTRUDE**

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

**HAMLET**

Oh, then throw away the worse part, and live a purer life  
 with the other half. Good night—but don't sleep with my  
 uncle tonight. Pretend to be virtuous, even if you're not.  
 Habit can be a devil or an angel: it can get you used to  
 doing either good or evil without thinking about it. Refrain  
 from sleeping with Claudius tonight, and that will make it  
 easier to say no the next time, and even easier each time  
 after that. How you act can change your nature, and either  
 keep the devil inside or kick him out. Once more, good  
 night, and when you want me to bless you for following this  
 advice, I'll beg you to forgive me for being so harsh. [He  
 points to POLONIUS] I apologize for what happened to this

And either rein the devil or throw him out  
 With wondrous potency. Once more, good night,  
 And when you are desirous to be blessed,  
 190 I'll blessing beg of you. [*points to POLONIUS*]  
 For this same lord,  
 I do repent. But heaven hath pleased it so,  
 To punish me with this and this with me,  
 That I must be their scourge and minister.  
 195 I will bestow him and will answer well  
 The death I gave him. So, again, good night.  
 I must be cruel only to be kind.  
 Thus bad begins and worse remains behind.  
 One word more, good lady—

**GERTRUDE**

200 What shall I do?

**HAMLET**

Not this, by no means, that I bid you do—  
 Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed,  
 Pinch wanton on your cheek, call you his mouse,  
 And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses  
 205 Or paddling in your neck with his damned fingers,  
 Make you to ravel all this matter out:  
 That I essentially am not in madness  
 But mad in craft. 'Twere good you let him know,  
 For who that's but a queen, fair, sober, wise,  
 210 Would from a paddock, from a bat, a gib,  
 Such dear concernings hide? Who would do so?  
 No, in despite of sense and secrecy,  
 Unpeg the basket on the house's top,  
 Let the birds fly, and like the famous ape,  
 215 To try conclusions, in the basket creep  
 And break your own neck down.

**GERTRUDE**

Be thou assured, if words be made of breath  
 And breath of life, I have no life to breathe  
 What thou hast said to me.

**HAMLET**

220 I must to England, you know that?

**GERTRUDE**

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

**HAMLET**

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

*They exit, HAMLET dragging POLONIUS.*

lord. But God decided to punish me by making me commit  
 this murder—and to punish this man by having me kill  
 him—so that I'm both Heaven's judge and executioner. I will  
 deal with the body, and suffer the consequences of the  
 death I gave him. So, again, good night. I have been cruel  
 only in order to perform a greater act of kindness. This is  
 bad, and there are even worse things to come. One more  
 thing, madam.

**GERTRUDE**

What should I do?

**HAMLET**

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

**GERTRUDE**

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

**HAMLET**

I must go to England, did you know that?

**GERTRUDE**

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

**HAMLET**

The documents are signed and sealed, and my two  
 schoolmates—whom I'll trust like I would a poisonous  
 snake—are the messengers. They're the ones who'll lead  
 me on to whatever trickery I'm going to face. Let it come,  
 because it's fun to fix things so the engineer gets blow up by  
 his own bombs. It's going to be tough on them. I'm going to  
 dig down below their bombs and blow them up to the  
 moon. Oh, it's sweet when you can kill two birds with one  
 stone. [*He points to POLONIUS*] Killing this man is going to  
 make me have to leave even sooner. I'll drag his guts into  
 the next room. Mother, good night. This adviser—who was  
 in life a foolish, moralizing liar—is now so quiet, secretive,  
 and serious.

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

[*To GERTRUDE*] Good night, mother.

*They exit, with HAMLET dragging POLONIUS' body.*

## Act 4, Scene 1

## Shakespeare

*CLAUDIUS and GERTRUDE enter with ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN.*

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**GERTRUDE**

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

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.*

**GERTRUDE**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

What, Gertrude? How does Hamlet?

**GERTRUDE**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

15 O heavy deed!  
It had been so with us, had we been there.  
His liberty is full of threats to all—  
To you yourself, to us, to everyone.  
Alas, how shall this bloody deed be answered?  
20 It will be laid to us, whose providence  
Should have kept short, restrained and out of haunt,  
This mad young man. But so much was our love,  
We would not understand what was most fit,  
But, like the owner of a foul disease,  
25 To keep it from divulging, let it feed  
Even on the pith of life. Where is he gone?

**GERTRUDE**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

O Gertrude, come away!  
The sun no sooner shall the mountains touch  
But we will ship him hence, and this vile deed  
We must, with all our majesty and skill,  
35 Both countenance and excuse. —Ho, Guildenstern!

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter.*

**CLAUDIUS**

Friends both, go join you with some further aid.  
Hamlet in madness hath Polonius slain,  
And from his mother's closet hath he dragged him.  
Go seek him out, speak fair, and bring the body  
40 Into the chapel. I pray you, haste in this.

## Shakescleare Translation

*CLAUDIUS and GERTRUDE enter with ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN.*

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**GERTRUDE**

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

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.*

**GERTRUDE**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

What, Gertrude? How is Hamlet?

**GERTRUDE**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**GERTRUDE**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

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

[*To GUILDENSTERN*] Hey, Guildenstern!

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter.*

**CLAUDIUS**

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

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

Come, Gertrude, we'll call up our wisest friends,  
 And let them know both what we mean to do  
 And what's untimely done. So dreaded slander—  
 Whose whisper o'er the world's diameter,  
 45 As level as the cannon to his blank,  
 Transports the poisoned shot—may miss our name  
 And hit the woundless air. Oh, come away!  
 My soul is full of discord and dismay.

*They exit.**ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.***CLAUDIUS**

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

*They exit.*

## Act 4, Scene 2

**Shakespeare***HAMLET enters.***HAMLET**

Safely stowed.

**GENTLEMEN***[from within]* Hamlet! Lord Hamlet!**HAMLET**

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

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter with others.***ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

Compounded it with dust, whereto 'tis kin.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

Do not believe it.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

10 Believe what?

**HAMLET**

That I can keep your counsel and not mine own. Besides,  
 to be demanded of a sponge! What replication should be  
 made by the son of a king?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Take you me for a sponge, my lord?

**HAMLET**

15 Ay, sir, that soaks up the king's countenance, his  
 rewards, his authorities. But such officers do the king  
 best service in the end. He keeps them, like an ape, in  
 the corner of his jaw, first mouthed to be last  
 swallowed. When he needs what you have gleaned, it is  
 20 but squeezing you and, sponge, you shall be dry again.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

I understand you not, my lord.

**Shakescleare Translation***HAMLET enters.***HAMLET**

Safely hidden.

**GENTLEMEN***[Offstage]* Hamlet, Lord Hamlet!**HAMLET**

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

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter with others.***ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

Don't believe it.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Believe what?

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

You think that I'm a sponge, my lord?

**HAMLET**

Yes, sir, a sponge that soaks up the king's approval, his  
 rewards, and his decisions. Officers like that give the king  
 the best service in the end. He keeps them in his mouth like  
 an ape, moving them around from one side of his mouth to  
 the other. When he needs to know what you have learned,  
 he can just squeeze you like a sponge, and then you'll be  
 dry again.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

I don't understand you, my lord.

**HAMLET**

I am glad of it. A knavish speech sleeps in a foolish ear.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

A thing, my lord?

**HAMLET**

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

*They exit.*

**HAMLET**

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

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**GUILDENSTERN**

A "thing," my lord?

**HAMLET**

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

*They all exit.*

## Act 4, Scene 3

### Shakespeare

*CLAUDIUS enters with two or three attendants.*

**CLAUDIUS**

I have sent to seek him and to find the body.  
How dangerous is it that this man goes loose!  
Yet must not we put the strong law on him.  
He's loved of the distracted multitude,  
5 Who like not in their judgment, but their eyes.  
And where 'tis so, th' offender's scourge is weighed,  
But never the offense. To bear all smooth and even,  
This sudden sending him away must seem  
Deliberate pause. Diseases desperate grown  
10 By desperate appliance are relieved,  
Or not at all.

*ROSENCRANTZ enters.*

**CLAUDIUS**

How now, what hath befall'n?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

15 But where is he?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

Bring him before us.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Ho, Guildenstern! Bring in my lord.

*GUILDENSTERN enters with HAMLET.*

**CLAUDIUS**

Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius?

### Shakescleare Translation

*CLAUDIUS enters with two or three attendants.*

**CLAUDIUS**

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

*ROSENCRANTZ enters.*

**CLAUDIUS**

What's going on? What's happened?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

But where is he?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

Bring him to me.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Hey, Guildenstern! Bring in my lord.

*GUILDENSTERN enters with HAMLET.*

**CLAUDIUS**

Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius?



**HAMLET**

20 At supper.

**CLAUDIUS**

At supper where?

**HAMLET**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

Alas, alas!

**HAMLET**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

What dost you mean by this?

**HAMLET**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

Where is Polonius?

**HAMLET**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

*[to attendants]* Go seek him there.

*Some attendants exit.*

**HAMLET**

40 He will stay till ye come.

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

For England?

**CLAUDIUS**

Ay, Hamlet.

**HAMLET**

50 Good.

**CLAUDIUS**

So is it, if thou knew'st our purposes.

**HAMLET**

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

**HAMLET**

At dinner.

**CLAUDIUS**

At dinner where?

**HAMLET**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

Oh no, oh no!

**HAMLET**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

What do you mean by that?

**HAMLET**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

Where is Polonius?

**HAMLET**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

*[To attendants]* Go look for him there.

*Some attendants exit.*

**HAMLET**

No need to hurry—he'll wait for you.

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

To England?

**CLAUDIUS**

Yes, Hamlet.

**HAMLET**

Good.

**CLAUDIUS**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

Thy loving father, Hamlet.

**HAMLET**

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

*HAMLET exits.*

**CLAUDIUS**

Follow him at foot. Tempt him with speed aboard.  
Delay it not. I'll have him hence tonight.  
Away! For everything is sealed and done

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

*Everyone except CLAUDIUS exits.*

**CLAUDIUS**

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

65 After the Danish sword and thy free awe  
Pays homage to us — thou mayst not coldly set  
Our sovereign process, which imports at full,  
By letters congruing to that effect,

The present death of Hamlet. Do it, England,  
For like the hectic in my blood he rages,

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

*CLAUDIUS exits.*

**CLAUDIUS**

I'm your loving father, Hamlet.

**HAMLET**

No, my mother. When you married my mother, the two of you became one flesh, so if you're my father you're also my mother. Come on, to England!

*HAMLET exits.*

**CLAUDIUS**

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

*Everyone except CLAUDIUS exits.*

**CLAUDIUS**

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

*CLAUDIUS exits.*

## Act 4, Scene 4

### Shakespeare

*FORTINBRAS enters with his army and a CAPTAIN.*

**FORTINBRAS**

Go, Captain, from me greet the Danish king  
Tell him that, by his license, Fortinbras  
Craves the conveyance of a promised march  
Over his kingdom. You know the rendezvous.

5 If that his majesty would aught with us,  
We shall express our duty in his eye,  
And let him know so.

**CAPTAIN**

I will do 't, my lord.

**FORTINBRAS**

Go softly on.

*All except the CAPTAIN exits.*

*HAMLET, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN, and others enter.*

**HAMLET**

10 Good sir, whose powers are these?

**CAPTAIN**

They are of Norway, sir.

**HAMLET**

How purposed, sir, I pray you?

### Shakescleare Translation

*FORTINBRAS enters with his army and a CAPTAIN.*

**FORTINBRAS**

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

**CAPTAIN**

I'll do that, my lord.

**FORTINBRAS**

Go on, then.

*Everyone except the CAPTAIN exits.*

*HAMLET, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN, and others enter.*

**HAMLET**

Good sir, whose troops are these?

**CAPTAIN**

The are from Norway, sir.

**HAMLET**

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

**CAPTAIN**

Against some part of Poland.

**HAMLET**

Who commands them, sir?

**CAPTAIN**

15 The nephew to old Norway, Fortinbras.

**HAMLET**

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

**CAPTAIN**

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

**HAMLET**

Why, then the Polack never will defend it.

**CAPTAIN**

25 Yes, it is already garrisoned.

**HAMLET**

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

**CAPTAIN**

God be wi' you, sir.

*The CAPTAIN exits.*

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Will 't please you go, my lord?

**HAMLET**

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

*Everyone exits except HAMLET.*

**HAMLET**

How all occasions do inform against me,  
35 And spur my dull revenge! What is a man  
If his chief good and market of his time  
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.  
Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,  
Looking before and after, gave us not  
40 That capability and godlike reason  
To fust in us unused. Now, whether it be  
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple  
Of thinking too precisely on th' event—  
A thought which, quartered, hath but one part wisdom  
45 And ever three parts coward—I do not know  
Why yet I live to say "This thing's to do,"  
Sith I have cause and will and strength and means  
To do 't. Examples gross as earth exhort me.  
Witness this army of such mass and charge  
50 Led by a delicate and tender prince,  
Whose spirit with divine ambition puffed  
Makes mouths at the invisible event,  
Exposing what is mortal and unsure  
To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,  
55 Even for an eggshell. Rightly to be great

**CAPTAIN**

They're headed to invade some part of Poland.

**HAMLET**

Who commands them, sir?

**CAPTAIN**

The nephew of the old Norwegian king, Fortinbras.

**HAMLET**

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

**CAPTAIN**

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

**HAMLET**

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

**CAPTAIN**

They will. They've already put soldiers there.

**HAMLET**

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

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

**CAPTAIN**

God be with you, sir.

*The CAPTAIN exits.*

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Will you please come now, my lord?

**HAMLET**

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

*Everyone except HAMLET exits.*

**HAMLET**

Everything that I see shames me, and spurs me to sharpen  
my dulled efforts to get revenge. What is a man who does  
nothing but eat and sleep? A beast, nothing more. God  
didn't give us such a great and godlike ability to think and  
reason so that those capabilities would grow moldy from  
disuse. Now, whether the cause is an animal-like lack of  
thought or over-thinking exactly how to do it—thoughts  
which are one part wisdom, three parts cowardice—I can't  
explain how I could still be alive and yet be able to say that  
"this is something I still have to do." I have the motive, the  
will, the ability, and the opportunity to do it. Claudius' guilt  
is as obvious as the ground beneath my feet. Look at this  
huge, expansive army led by a young and unproven prince,  
who's so full of divine ambition that he mocks death and  
exposes his life to all the risks of fortune and danger—all for  
a cause as thin as an eggshell. To be great doesn't require  
simply fighting for a good reason, but rather boldly fighting  
for barely any reason at all, so long as honor is at stake. So  
where do I stand, with my father murdered and my mother  
dishonored—and yet I do nothing in response to all of these  
slights and insults? Meanwhile, to my shame, I watch  
twenty thousand men—because of a whim and and wish for

Is not to stir without great argument,  
 But greatly to find quarrel in a straw  
 When honor's at the stake. How stand I then,  
 That have a father killed, a mother stained,  
 60 Excitements of my reason and my blood,  
 And let all sleep—while, to my shame, I see  
 The imminent death of twenty thousand men,  
 That for a fantasy and trick of fame  
 Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot  
 65 Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,  
 Which is not tomb enough and continent  
 To hide the slain? Oh, from this time forth,  
 My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!

*He exits.*

fame—march off to death for a tiny bit of land that's not  
 even large enough to hold all their graves. Oh, from this  
 time forward, my thoughts will be violent, or else I'll  
 consider them worthless.

*He exits.*

## Act 4, Scene 5

### Shakespeare

*HORATIO, GERTRUDE, and a GENTLEMAN enter.*

**GERTRUDE**

I will not speak with her.

**GENTLEMAN**

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

**GERTRUDE**

What would she have?

**GENTLEMAN**

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

**HORATIO**

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

**GERTRUDE**

Let her come in.

*The GENTLEMAN exits.*

**GERTRUDE**

*[aside]*

20 To my sick soul (as sin's true nature is)  
 Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss.  
 So full of artless jealousy is guilt,  
 It spills itself in fearing to be spilt.

*OPHELIA enters, insane.*

**OPHELIA**

Where is the beauteous majesty of Denmark?

**GERTRUDE**

25 How now, Ophelia?

### Shakescleare Translation

*HORATIO, GERTRUDE, and a GENTLEMAN enter.*

**GERTRUDE**

I won't speak to her.

**GENTLEMAN**

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

**GERTRUDE**

What does she want?

**GENTLEMAN**

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

**HORATIO**

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

**GERTRUDE**

Bring her in.

*The GENTLEMAN exits.*

**GERTRUDE**

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

*OPHELIA enters, insane.*

**OPHELIA**

Where is the beautiful queen of Denmark?

**GERTRUDE**

How are you, Ophelia?

**OPHELIA***[sings]*

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

**GERTRUDE**

Alas, sweet lady, what imports this song?

**OPHELIA**

Say you? Nay, pray you, mark.

*[sings]*

35 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**

40 Pray you, mark.

*[sings]*

White his shroud as the mountain snow—

CLAUDIUS enters.

**GERTRUDE**

Alas, look here, my lord.

**OPHELIA***[sings]*

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

**CLAUDIUS**

How do you, pretty lady?

**OPHELIA**

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

**CLAUDIUS**

Conceit upon her father.

**OPHELIA**

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

55 *[sings]*

Tomorrow is Saint Valentine's day,  
All in the morning betime,  
And I a maid at your window,  
To be your Valentine.

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

**CLAUDIUS**

Pretty Ophelia—

**OPHELIA**

65 Indeed, without an oath I'll make an end on 't:

*[sings]*

By Gis and by Saint Charity,  
Alack, and fie, for shame!  
Young men will do 't, if they come to 't.

70

**OPHELIA***[Singing]*

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

**GERTRUDE**

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

**OPHELIA**

Did you say something? No, please, listen.

*[Singing]*

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

**GERTRUDE**

No, listen, Ophelia—

**OPHELIA**

Please, listen.

*[Singing]*

His death shroud was as white as snow—

CLAUDIUS enters.

**GERTRUDE**

Alas, look at this, my lord.

**OPHELIA***[Singing]*

Covered with sweet flowers  
Which did not fall to the ground  
In true-love showers.

**CLAUDIUS**

How are you, pretty lady?

**OPHELIA**

I'm well. May God reward you as you deserve. They say the  
baker's daughter was turned into an owl for refusing to  
answer Jesus' request for bread. My lord, we know what we  
are now, but not what we may become. May God be at your  
table.

**CLAUDIUS**

She's thinking about her dead father.

**OPHELIA**

Please, let's have no words about that, but when they ask  
you what it means, say this:

*[Singing]*

Tomorrow is St. Valentine's Day  
And early in the morning,  
I'm a girl waiting at your window  
Waiting to be your valentine.  
Then he woke and put on his clothes  
And opened his bedroom door.  
He let in the girl, who when she left  
Wasn't a virgin anymore.

**CLAUDIUS**

Pretty Ophelia—

**OPHELIA**

Yes, I'll get to the end soon:

*[Singing]*

By Jesus and Saint Charity,  
Alas, what a shame!  
Young men will do it if they get a chance:

By 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."

75

**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.

80

*OPHELIA exits.*

**CLAUDIUS**

Follow her close. Give her good watch, I pray you.

*HORATIO exits.*

**CLAUDIUS**

Oh, this is the poison of deep grief. It springs  
 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.

85

90

95

100

105

*A noise offstage.*

**GERTRUDE**

Alack, what noise is this?

**CLAUDIUS**

Where are my Switzers? Let them guard the door.

*A MESSENGER enters.*

**CLAUDIUS**

What is the matter?

**MESSENGER**

Save yourself, my lord.  
 The ocean, overpeering of his list,  
 Eats not the flats with more impiteous haste  
 Than young Laertes, in a riotous head,  
 O'erbears your officers. 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!"

110

115

By God, they're the ones to blame.  
 She said, "Before you took me to bed,  
 You promised to marry me."  
 He answers:  
 "And by the sun, I would have done just that,  
 If you hadn't gone to bed with me."

**CLAUDIUS**

How long has she been like this?

**OPHELIA**

I hope everything will be all right. We must be patient, but I  
 can't stop crying when I think of how they laid him in the  
 cold ground. My brother will learn of this. And so I thank  
 you for your good advice. Come, driver! Good night, ladies.  
 Good night, sweet ladies. Good night, good night.

*OPHELIA exits.*

**CLAUDIUS**

Follow her. Watch her closely, please.

*HORATIO exits.*

**CLAUDIUS**

Oh, her terrible grief has poisoned her mind. All a result of  
 her father's death—look at her! Oh, Gertrude, Gertrude,  
 when troubles come, they don't come one at time like  
 spies, but all at once like an army. First her father was killed.  
 Then your son had to leave because of the violent thing he  
 did. The people are stirred up and confused—thinking up  
 dark theories and whispering about Polonius's  
 death—while we recklessly buried him in secrecy, without  
 an official state funeral. Poor Ophelia has been split from  
 her sanity—without which we're just pictures, or even  
 beasts. Last, and as bad as all of the rest of these, her  
 brother has secretly returned from France. His questions  
 about his father's death are answered by vicious gossipers  
 who fill his ears with nasty stories, and who—without  
 knowing what really happened—blame it all on me. Oh, my  
 dear Gertrude, I feel as though I'm being murdered many  
 times at once.

*A noise offstage.*

**GERTRUDE**

Oh, what's that noise?

**CLAUDIUS**

Where are my Swiss guards? Let them guard the door.

*A MESSENGER enters.*

**CLAUDIUS**

What's going on?

**MESSENGER**

Save yourself, my lord. Not even the ocean, when it floods  
 and devours the lowlands, is as ferocious as Laertes. He  
 now leads your officers in rebellion against you. The  
 commoners call him "lord" and—as if they were starting the  
 world from scratch and had forgotten all the traditions and  
 customs that are the bedrock of what we are—they shout,  
 "we choose Laertes to be king!" They throw their caps in  
 the air, applaud, and shout, "Laertes will be king! King  
 Laertes!"

**GERTRUDE**

120 How cheerfully on the false trail they cry.  
O, this is counter, you false Danish dogs!

*A noise offstage.*

**CLAUDIUS**

The doors are broke.

*LAERTES enters with others.*

**LAERTES**

Where is this king?—Sirs, stand you all without.

**ALL**

No, let's come in!

**LAERTES**

125 I pray you, give me leave.

**ALL**

We will, we will.

*LAERTES' FOLLOWERS exit.*

**LAERTES**

I thank you. Keep the door.—O thou vile king,  
Give me my father!

**GERTRUDE**

Calmly, good Laertes.

**LAERTES**

130 That drop of blood that's calm proclaims me bastard,  
Cries "Cuckold!" to my father, brands the "harlot"  
Even here between the chaste unsmirch'd brow  
Of my true mother.

**CLAUDIUS**

What is the cause, Laertes,

135 That thy rebellion looks so giant-like?—  
Let him go, Gertrude. Do not fear our person.  
There's such divinity doth hedge a king  
That treason can but peep to what it would,  
Acts little of his will. —Tell me, Laertes,

140 Why thou art thus incensed. —Let him go, Gertrude.—  
Speak, man.

**LAERTES**

Where is my father?

**CLAUDIUS**

Dead.

**GERTRUDE**

But not by him.

**CLAUDIUS**

145 Let him demand his fill.

**LAERTES**

How came he dead? I'll not be juggled with.  
To hell, allegiance! Vows, to the blackest devil!  
Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit!  
I dare damnation. To this point I stand

150 That both the worlds I give to negligence.

**GERTRUDE**

How cheerfully they shout as they hunt the wrong prey! Oh,  
this is wrong, you disloyal Danish dogs!

*A noise offstage.*

**CLAUDIUS**

They've broken down the doors.

*LAERTES enters with others.*

**LAERTES**

Where's this king?

*[To his FOLLOWERS] Gentlemen, wait outside.*

**ALL**

No, let us in!

**LAERTES**

I beg you, give me a moment.

**ALL**

We will, we will.

*LAERTES' FOLLOWERS exit.*

**LAERTES**

Thank you. Guard the door.


*[To CLAUDIUS] Oh, you vile king, give me my father!*

**GERTRUDE**

Be calm, good Laertes.

**LAERTES**

Any calm drop of blood in my body would mark me as my  
father's bastard son, and stamp the label "whore" on the  
pure, unstained forehead of my true and devoted mother.

 Laertes implies that if he doesn't  
take revenge for his father's death,  
then he must not be his father's  
legitimate son.

**CLAUDIUS**

*[To LAERTES] What is the cause of this rebellion, Laertes?*

*[To GERTRUDE] Let him go, Gertrude. Don't worry that I'll  
be hurt. God protects the king, so that while traitors can see  
what they want to do, they cannot make it happen.*

*[To LAERTES] Tell me, Laertes, why you are so angry?*

*[To GERTRUDE] Gertrude, let him go.*

*[To LAERTES] Tell me, man.*

**LAERTES**

Where is my father?

**CLAUDIUS**

Dead.

**GERTRUDE**

But the king didn't kill him.

**CLAUDIUS**

Let him ask his questions.

**LAERTES**

How did he die? I won't be lied to. To hell with my oaths of  
allegiance! Vows can go to hell! Conscience, too! I don't  
care if I'm damned. I swear that I don't care about what  
happens to me in this world or the next. No matter what  
happens, I'll get revenge for my father's murder.

Let come what comes, only I'll be revenged  
Most thoroughly for my father.

**CLAUDIUS**

Who shall stay you?

**LAERTES**

My will, not all the world.  
155 And for my means, I'll husband them so well,  
They shall go far with little.

**CLAUDIUS**

Good Laertes,  
If you desire to know the certainty  
Of your dear father's death, is 't writ in your  
160 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**

165 To his good friends thus wide I'll ope my arms  
And, like the kind life-rendering pelican,  
Repast them with my blood.

**CLAUDIUS**

Why, now you speak  
Like a good child and a true gentleman.  
170 That I am guiltless of your father's death  
And am most sensible in grief for it,  
It shall as level to your judgment pierce  
As day does to your eye.

*A voice offstage, "Let her in!"*

**LAERTES**

How now? What noise is that?

*OPHELIA enters.*

**LAERTES**

175 O heat, dry up my brains! Tears seven times salt,  
Burn out the sense and virtue of mine eye!  
By heaven, thy madness shall be paid by weight,  
Till our scale turn the beam. O rose of May,  
Dear maid, kind sister, sweet Ophelia!  
180 O heavens, is 't possible a young maid's wits  
Should be as mortal as an old man's life?  
Nature is fine in love, and where 'tis fine,  
It sends some precious instance of itself  
After the thing it loves.

**OPHELIA**

185 *[Sings]*  
*They bore him barefaced on the bier,*  
*Hey, non nonny, nonny, hey, nonny,*  
*And in his grave rained many a tear.*  
*Fare you well, my dove.*

**LAERTES**

190 Hadst thou thy wits, and didst persuade revenge,  
It could not move thus.

**OPHELIA**

You must sing A-down a-down—And you, Call him a-  
down-a—Oh, how the wheel becomes it! It is the false  
steward that stole his master's daughter.

**CLAUDIUS**

Who could stop you?

**LAERTES**

My own will, and nothing else in all the world. I'll gather up  
the little means I have, and use them so well that they'll  
take me a long way.

**CLAUDIUS**

Good Laertes, if you wish to know the truth about your dear  
father's death, answer me this: are you so angry that in your  
search for revenge you are willing to hurt both your father's  
enemies and his friends?

**LAERTES**

Only his enemies.

**CLAUDIUS**

Do you want to know who they are, then?

**LAERTES**

I'll open my arms wide to his friends, and like a mother  
pelican with her chicks, I'll give my own heart's blood for  
them.

**CLAUDIUS**

Why, now you're talking like a faithful son and a true  
gentleman. I will prove to you as plain as day that I am  
innocent of your father's death, and feel great grief over it.

*A voice offstage cries, "Let her in!"*

**LAERTES**

What's going on? What's that noise?

*OPHELIA enters.*

**LAERTES**

Oh, heat, dry up my brains! Oh, salt in my tears, burn the  
vision out of my eyes! By heaven, I'll get revenge equal to  
the depth of your madness! Oh, you rose of May, dear  
maiden, kind sister, sweet Ophelia! Oh God, is it possible  
that a young woman's mind could die as easily as an old  
man's life? Human nature is made spiritual by love. And  
when it is spiritual, it gives itself to the one it loves—just as  
Ophelia has given her sanity to her father, whom she loved.

**OPHELIA**

*[Singing]*  
*They carried him uncovered in the coffin,*  
*Hey non nonny, nonny, hey nonny.*  
*And tears poured down into his grave.*  
*Goodbye, my dove.*

**LAERTES**

Even if you were sane and urged me to take revenge, you  
couldn't be more persuasive than this.

**OPHELIA**

You have to sing, "A down a-down," and you, "Call him a-  
down-a." Oh, how it turns around like a wheel! Like the  
lying worker who stole his boss' daughter.



**LAERTES**

195 This nothing's more than matter.

**OPHELIA**

There's rosemary, that's for remembrance. Pray you, love, remember. And there is pansies, that's for thoughts.

**LAERTES**

A document in madness. Thoughts and remembrance fitted.

**OPHELIA**

200 There's fennel for you, and columbines.—There's rue for you, and here's some for me. We may call it "herb of grace" o' Sundays.—Oh, you must wear your rue with a difference.— There's a daisy. I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died. They say he made a good end [*sings*] *For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy—*

**LAERTES**

Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself,  
She turns to favor and to prettiness.

**OPHELIA**

*[sings]*

210 *And will he not come again?*

*And will he not come again?*

*No, no, he is dead,*

*Go to thy deathbed.*

*He never will come again.*

215 *His beard was as white as snow,*

*All flaxen was his poll.*

*He is gone, he is gone,*

*And we cast away moan,*

*God ha' mercy on his soul. —*

220 And of all Christian souls, I pray God. God be wi' ye.

*OPHELIA exits.*

**LAERTES**

Do you see this, O God?

**CLAUDIUS**

Laertes, I must commune with your grief,  
Or you deny me right. Go but apart,  
Make choice of whom your wisest friends you will.

225 And they shall hear and judge 'twixt you and me.

If by direct or by collateral hand

They find us touched, we will our kingdom give,

Our crown, our life, and all that we call ours,

To you in satisfaction. But if not,

230 Be you content to lend your patience to us,

And we shall jointly labor with your soul

To give it due content.

**LAERTES**

Let this be so.

His means of death, his obscure funeral—

235 No trophy, sword, nor hatchment o'er his bones,

No noble rite nor formal ostentation—

Cry to be heard as 'twere from heaven to earth,

That I must call 't in question.

**CLAUDIUS**

So you shall.

240 And where the offense is, let the great ax fall.

I pray you, go with me.

*They exit.*

**LAERTES**

This apparent nonsense has more meaning than rational speech.

**OPHELIA**


Here's some rosemary, that's for remembering. Please remember, love. And here are pansies, they're for thoughts.

**LAERTES**

In her madness, she gives us a lesson: memory and thought belong together.

**OPHELIA**

Here's fennel for you, and columbines. And here's rue for you, and some for me. We call it the merciful Sunday flower, though you should wear it for a different reason. Here's a daisy. I'd give you some violets, but they all dried up when my father died. They say he had a good death. [*Singing*] *For good sweet Robin is all my joy.*

 The flowers Ophelia continues to list are laden with symbolism. Fennel and columbine were symbols of adultery and insincerity. Rue symbolized repentance; the daisy, unhappy love; and violets, faithfulness.

**LAERTES**

Sad thoughts, terrible suffering, hell itself—she makes them almost graceful and pretty.

**OPHELIA**

*[Singing]*

*And won't he come again?*

*And won't he come again?*

*No, no, he's dead.*

*Go to your deathbed.*

*He'll never come again.*

*His beard was white as snow,*

*His hair was all white too.*

*He's gone, he's gone,*

*And we moan our useless grief.*

*God have mercy on his soul.*

And on the souls of all good Christians, I pray to God. God be with you.

*OPHELIA exits.*

**LAERTES**

Oh, God: did you see this?

**CLAUDIUS**

Laertes, let me share in your grief, or else you deny me my right. Go and choose your wisest friends, and they will sit in judgment of us. If they find me at all responsible for your father's murder, directly or indirectly, then I'll give up my kingdom, my crown, my life, and everything I call my own to you. But if they find me innocent, then be patient, and I'll work with you to ensure that your soul gets what it desires.

**LAERTES**

That's what we'll do. The way he died, and his hushed-up funeral without military display, noble rites, or formal ceremony—all these things shout out as if heaven and earth themselves are demanding that I question the way he died.

**CLAUDIUS**

As you should. And may the great ax of justice fall on the guilty. Please, come with me.

*They all exit.*

## Act 4, Scene 6

## Shakespeare

*HORATIO and a SERVANT enter.*

**HORATIO**

What are they that would speak with me?

**SERVANT**

Seafaring men, sir. They say they have letters for you.

**HORATIO**

Let them come in.

*SERVANT exits.*

**HORATIO**

I do not know from what part of the world  
5 I should be greeted, if not from Lord Hamlet.

*SAILORS enter.*

**SAILOR**

God bless you, sir.

**HORATIO**

Let him bless thee too.

**SAILOR**

He shall, sir, an 't please him. There's a letter for  
10 you, sir— it comes from the ambassador that was bound  
for England—if your name be Horatio, as I am let to know  
it is. [*He gives HORATIO a letter*]

**HORATIO**

*[reads]*

"Horatio,

15 *When thou shalt have overlooked this, give these  
fellows some means to the king. They have letters for  
him. Ere we were two days old at sea, a pirate of very  
warlike appointment gave us chase. Finding ourselves too  
slow of sail, we put on a compelled valor, and in the  
20 grapple I boarded them. On the instant, they got clear  
of our ship, so I alone became their prisoner. They have  
dealt with me like thieves of mercy, but they knew what  
they did; I am to do a good turn for them. Let the king  
have the letters I have sent, and repair thou to me  
25 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  
30 have much to tell thee. Fare-well.*

*He that thou knowest thine,  
Hamlet."*

Come, I will give you way for these your letters, And  
do 't the speedier, that you may direct me To him from  
whom you brought them.

*They exit.*

## Shakescleare Translation

*HORATIO and a SERVANT enter.*

**HORATIO**

Who wants to speak with me?

**SERVANT**

Sailors, sir. They say they have letters for you.

**HORATIO**

Bring them in.

*SERVANT exits.*

**HORATIO**

I don't know who else in the world would send me letters,  
except Lord Hamlet.

*SAILORS enter.*

**SAILOR**

God bless you, sir.

**HORATIO**

May he bless you as well.

**SAILOR**

Sir, he will if it pleases him. Here's a letter for you, sir. It's  
from the ambassador, Lord Hamlet, who was going to  
England—if your name's Horatio, as I've been told it is. [*He  
hands HORATIO a letter*]

**HORATIO**

*[Reading the letter]* "Horatio, When you've read this, make  
sure these men see the king. They have letters for him.  
Before we were at sea for even two days, a pirate ship  
equipped for battle came after us. Realizing we were too  
slow to escape, we were forced to fight, and during the  
battle I boarded the pirate ship. At that moment, the pirates  
disengaged from our ship, making me their sole prisoner.  
For thieves, they've treated me very mercifully, but they  
knew what they were doing. They want me to do a favor for  
them. Give the king the letters I've sent, and come to me as  
fast as you would run from death. I've got things to tell you  
that will make you speechless, and they aren't even the  
most important details. These sailors will bring you to me.  
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern continue on their way to  
England. I have a lot to tell you about them. Goodbye. From  
the man that you know is your friend, Hamlet." Come, men.  
I'll bring you to the place where you can deliver these  
letters as quickly as possible, so that you can lead me to the  
man who sent them.

*They all exit.*

## Act 4, Scene 7

## Shakespeare

*CLAUDIUS and LAERTES enter.*

## Shakescleare Translation

*CLAUDIUS and LAERTES enter.*

**CLAUDIUS**

Now must your conscience my acquaintance seal,  
And you must put me in your heart for friend,  
Sith you have heard, and with a knowing ear,  
That he which hath your noble father slain  
5 Pursued my life.

**LAERTES**

It well appears. But tell me  
Why you proceeded not against these feats,  
So criminal and so capital in nature,  
As by your safety, wisdom, all things else,  
10 You mainly were stirred up.

**CLAUDIUS**

Oh, for two special reasons,  
Which may to you perhaps seem much unsinewed,  
But yet to me they are strong. The queen his mother  
Lives almost by his looks, and for myself—  
15 My virtue or my plague, be it either which—  
She's so conjunctive to my life and soul,  
That, as the star moves not but in his sphere,  
I could not but by her. The other motive  
Why to a public count I might not go,  
20 Is the great love the general gender bear him,  
Who, dipping all his faults in their affection,  
Would, like the spring that turneth wood to stone,  
Convert his gyves to graces—so that my arrows,  
Too slightly timbered for so loud a wind,  
25 Would have reverted to my bow again,  
And not where I had aimed them.

**LAERTES**

And so have I a noble father lost,  
A sister driven into desperate terms,  
Whose worth, if praises may go back again,  
30 Stood challenger on mount of all the age  
For her perfections. But my revenge will come.

**CLAUDIUS**

Break not your sleeps for that. You must not think  
That we are made of stuff so flat and dull  
That we can let our beard be shook with danger  
35 And think it pastime. You shortly shall hear more.  
I loved your father, and we love ourself.  
And that, I hope, will teach you to imagine—

*A MESSENGER enters with letters.*

**CLAUDIUS**

How now, what news?

**MESSENGER**

Letters, my lord, from Hamlet.  
40 This to your majesty, this to the queen. [*gives*  
*CLAUDIUS letters*]

**CLAUDIUS**

From Hamlet? Who brought them?

**MESSENGER**

Sailors, my lord, they say. I saw them not.  
They were given me by Claudio. He received them  
45 Of him that brought them.

**CLAUDIUS**

Laertes, you shall hear them.—Leave us.

*The MESSENGER exits.*

**CLAUDIUS**

Now you must admit that I'm innocent, and accept me as a  
friend, since you've heard and been convinced that that the  
man who killed your father was actually trying to kill me.

**LAERTES**

It looks that way. But explain to me why you didn't take  
legal action against Hamlet for his capital crimes—when  
both your wisdom and your own safety must have  
demanded that you should?

**CLAUDIUS**

Oh, for two key reasons which to you may seem weak to  
you, but yet to me are strong. The queen, his mother, loves  
him and is devoted to him. And, whether it's a virtue or a  
curse, she is so closely connected to my life and soul that I  
can't live apart from her—just as a planet can't leave its  
orbit. The other reason why I couldn't bring charges against  
Hamlet in a public court is that the commoners loves him.  
In their affection for him, they overlook all his faults. In  
fact—like a stream that turns wood to stone—they actually  
somehow see all his faults as virtues. Whatever I said  
against him would end up coming back to hurt me, like an  
arrow aimed into a strong wind.

**LAERTES**

And so I've lost my noble father, and my sister has been  
driven crazy. My sister—if I can praise her for what she used  
to be—was the equal in perfection to any other woman who  
ever lived. But I'll get my revenge.

**CLAUDIUS**

Don't lose sleep over that. You must not think that I'm so  
lazy and stupid that I will let someone threaten and mock  
me and act as if it's just a game. Soon you'll hear more  
about my plans. I loved your father, and I love myself. And  
that, I hope, will help you see—

*A MESSENGER enters with letters.*

**CLAUDIUS**

Whats' going on? What's your news?

**MESSENGER**

My lord, I have letters from Hamlet. This one's for your  
Highness, and this one is for the queen. [*He gives letters*  
*to CLAUDIUS*]

**CLAUDIUS**

From Hamlet? Who delivered them?

**MESSENGER**

I was told that sailors did, my lord. I didn't see them.  
Claudio gave the letters to me, and he got them from the  
one who delivered them.

**CLAUDIUS**

Laertes, you will hear what these letters say.

*[To the MESSENGER] Leave us now.*

*The MESSENGER exits.*

**CLAUDIUS***[reads]**"High and mighty,*

50 *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."*

55 What should this mean? Are all the rest come back? Or  
is it some abuse, and no such thing?

**LAERTES**

Know you the hand?

**CLAUDIUS**

'Tis Hamlet's character. "Naked"?

And in a postscript here, he says "alone."

Can you advise me?

**LAERTES**

60 I'm lost in it, my lord. But let him come.  
It warms the very sickness in my heart  
That I shall live and tell him to his teeth,  
"Thus diddest thou."

**CLAUDIUS**

If it be so, Laertes—

65 As how should it be so? How otherwise?—  
Will you be ruled by me?

**LAERTES**

Ay, my lord—

So you will not o'errule me to a peace.

**CLAUDIUS**

To thine own peace. If he be now returned,

70 As checking at his voyage, and that he means  
No more to undertake it, I will work him  
To an exploit, now ripe in my devise,  
Under the which he shall not choose but fall.  
And for his death no wind of blame shall breathe,  
75 But even his mother shall uncharge the practice  
And call it accident.

**LAERTES**

My lord, I will be ruled

The rather if you could devise it so

That I might be the organ.

**CLAUDIUS**

80 It falls right.

You have been talked of since your travel much—  
And that in Hamlet's hearing—for a quality  
Wherein, they say, you shine. Your sum of parts  
Did not together pluck such envy from him

85 As did that one, and that, in my regard,  
Of the unworthiest siege.

**LAERTES**

What part is that, my lord?

**CLAUDIUS**

A very ribbon in the cap of youth,

Yet needful too, for youth no less becomes

90 The light and careless livery that it wears  
Than settled age his sables and his weeds,  
Importing health and graveness. Two months since,  
Here was a gentleman of Normandy.

I've seen myself, and served against, the French,

95 And they can well on horseback. But this gallant  
Had witchcraft in 't. He grew unto his seat,  
And to such wondrous doing brought his horse  
As he had been encorpsed and demi-natured

**CLAUDIUS**

*[Reading]* "Your majesty, I've been returned to your  
kingdom naked—with nothing to call my own. Tomorrow I'll  
ask permission to meet with you, at which point I'll first  
apologize and then tell the story of how I came back to  
Denmark so suddenly and strangely. Hamlet"

What does this mean? Have all the others come back also?

Or is it some trick, and none of this is true?

**LAERTES**

Do you recognize the handwriting?

**CLAUDIUS**

It's Hamlet's handwriting. "Naked," he says. And in a

postscript, he adds, "alone." What do you think about that?

**LAERTES**

It confuses me, my lord. But let him come. It warms my sick  
heart that I'll get to look him in the face and say, "You did  
this."

**CLAUDIUS**

If that's how it should be, Laertes—and why shouldn't it?

How could it be otherwise? Will you follow my orders?

**LAERTES**

Yes, my lord, as long as you won't try to force me toward  
peace.

**CLAUDIUS**

Only to your own peace of mind. If he has returned, and  
now has no plans to continue his trip, then I'll trick him into  
taking on some new challenge—which I'm coming up with  
now—that will surely kill him. His death will result in no  
blame. Even his mother will call it an accident.

**LAERTES**

My lord, I'll follow your lead. I want to be the sole agent of  
his death.

**CLAUDIUS**

That seems only right. Since you left, people have been  
talking about a quality of yours in which, they say, you  
shine—and Hamlet has overheard it. All your other talents  
together didn't make him as envious as this one quality did,  
though to me it's of the least importance.

**LAERTES**

What quality is that, my lord?

**CLAUDIUS**

One of those decorative ribbons on the cap of youth—yet a  
necessary one, too, since casual clothes are like the  
uniforms of youth, just as formal clothes are the necessary  
outfits of full maturity. Two months ago, I met a gentleman  
from Normandy. I've watched and fought against the  
French and know how well they ride, but this man's skill  
was almost magical. He seemed a part of the saddle, and  
made his horse do such amazing things that he appeared as  
if he were one with the horse. His skill was beyond my  
understanding, and even in my imagination I can't do the  
tricks he did.

100 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**

105 The very same.

**LAERTES**

I know him well. He is the brooch indeed  
And gem of all the nation.

**CLAUDIUS**

110 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,  
115 If you opposed them. Sir, this report of his  
Did Hamlet so envenom with his envy  
That he could nothing do but wish and beg  
Your sudden coming o'er, to play with him.  
Now, out of this—

**LAERTES**

120 What out of this, my lord?

**CLAUDIUS**

Laertes, was your father dear to you?  
Or are you like the painting of a sorrow,  
A face without a heart?

**LAERTES**

Why ask you this?

**CLAUDIUS**

125 Not that I think you did not love your father  
But that I know love is begun by time,  
And that I see, in passages of proof,  
Time qualifies the spark and fire of it.  
There lives within the very flame of love  
130 A kind of wick or snuff that will abate it.  
And nothing is at a like goodness still.  
For goodness, growing to a pleurisy,  
Dies in his own too-much. That we would do,  
We should do when we would, for this "would" changes  
135 And hath abatements and delays as many  
As there are tongues, are hands, are accidents.  
And then this "should" is like a spendthrift sigh  
That hurts by easing. —But to the quick of th' ulcer:  
Hamlet comes back. What would you undertake  
140 To show yourself in deed your father's son  
More than in words?

**LAERTES**

To cut his throat i' th' church.

**CLAUDIUS**

145 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

**LAERTES**

He was from Normandy?

**CLAUDIUS**

From Normandy.

**LAERTES**

I swear by my life it must have been Lamond.

**CLAUDIUS**

That's who it was.

**LAERTES**

I know him well. He's the jewel of his country.

**CLAUDIUS**

He mentioned you, giving you such high praise for four skill at fencing that he exclaimed that he could not imagine anyone being able to match you. He swore that French fencers would be clumsy, defenseless, and seem as if they were blind if they ever tried to duel with you. This description made Hamlet so jealous that he talked about nothing else but having you return to practice dueling against him. Now, the point is—

**LAERTES**

What's the point, my lord?

**CLAUDIUS**

Laertes, did you love your father? Or are you putting on a show of grief—a face without a heart?

**LAERTES**

How could you ask this?

**CLAUDIUS**

Not because I think you didn't love your father, but because I know that love exists in a particular time and place—and that the passage of time can weaken the spark and fire of that love. Every flame of love eventually burns itself out. Nothing remains the same forever. Even a good thing can grow too big and die from its extreme size. We should do what we want in the moment, because our desires might be blocked by as many obstructions or delays as words in the dictionary, or accidents in life. And then all our "woulds" and "shoulds" become like little more than sighs. But back to the heart of the matter: Hamlet's coming back. What would you *do*, rather than simply *say*, to prove that you you are your father's son?

**LAERTES**

Cut Hamlet's throat in the church.

**CLAUDIUS**

I agree that no place should protect that murderer. Revenge should have no limits. But, good Laertes, will you do this: stay inside your room? When Hamlet returns, he'll learn that you've come home. I'll have people praise your excellence and add an extra shine to the compliment the

And set a double varnish on the fame  
 The Frenchman gave you, bring you in fine together  
 150 And wager on your heads. He, being remiss,  
 Most generous and free from all contriving,  
 Will not peruse the foils; so that, with ease,  
 Or with a little shuffling, you may choose  
 A sword unbated, and in a pass of practice  
 155 Requite him for your father.

**LAERTES**

I will do 't.  
 And for that purpose I'll anoint my sword.  
 I bought an unction of a mountebank,  
 So mortal that, but dip a knife in it,  
 160 Where it draws blood no cataplasm so rare,  
 Collected from all simples that have virtue  
 Under the moon, can save the thing from death  
 That is but scratched withal. I'll touch my point  
 With this contagion, that if I gall him slightly  
 165 It may be death.

**CLAUDIUS**

Let's further think of this,  
 Weigh what convenience both of time and means  
 May fit us to our shape. If this should fail,  
 And that our drift look through our bad performance,  
 170 'Twere better not assayed. Therefore this project  
 Should have a back or second that might hold  
 If this should blast in proof.—Soft, let me see.—  
 We'll make a solemn wager on your cunning.—  
 I ha' t! When in your motion you are hot and dry,  
 175 As make your bouts more violent to that end,  
 And that he calls for drink, I'll have prepared him  
 A chalice for the nonce, whereon but sipping,  
 If he by chance escape your venom'd stuck,  
 Our purpose may hold there.—But stay, what noise?

*GERTRUDE enters.*

**GERTRUDE**

180 One woe doth tread upon another's heel,  
 So fast they follow.—Your sister's drowned, Laertes.

**LAERTES**

Drowned? Oh, where?

**GERTRUDE**

There is a willow grows aslant a brook  
 That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.  
 185 There with fantastic garlands did she come  
 Of crowsflowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,  
 That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,  
 But our cold maids do "dead men's fingers" call them.  
 There, on the pendant boughs her coronet weeds  
 190 Clambering to hang, an envious siver broke,  
 When down her weedy trophies and herself  
 Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,  
 And mermaid-like a while they bore her up,  
 Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds  
 195 As one incapable of her own distress,  
 Or like a creature native and indued  
 Unto that element. But long it could not be  
 Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,  
 Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay  
 200 To muddy death.

**LAERTES**

Alas, then she is drowned.

**GERTRUDE**

Drowned, drowned.

Frenchman paid you. Finally, we'll bring the two of you  
 together and bet on which of you will win. Hamlet—who is  
 so careless and trusting—won't examine the swords  
 beforehand. So you'll easily be able to choose a sword with  
 a sharpened point, and in the middle of this practice duel,  
 you'll get revenge for your father's death.

**LAERTES**

I'll do it. And I'll also cover my sword with an oil that I  
 bought from a snake-oil salesman. This oil is so poisonous  
 that if a knife dipped in it draws blood, no cure in the world  
 can save the victim. I'll cover the point of my sword with it,  
 so that if I even graze him, he'll probably die.

**CLAUDIUS**

Let's think more about this, and consider whether there's  
 anything else we'll have the opportunity to do to ensure we  
 get the outcome we want. If our plan should fail—and if  
 people figure out our plot because we execute it  
 badly—we'd be better off not having tried it at all.  
 Therefore, we should have a backup plan that will do the  
 trick if we fail in our first attempt. Hmm, let me think—we're  
 going to bet on your dueling skill—I've got it! When from all  
 your exertion the two of you have gotten hot and  
 thirsty—make sure the duel is very active to guarantee that  
 happens—Hamlet will want a drink. I'll have a cup ready  
 with poison for just that purpose, and once he sips from  
 it—even if he escapes your poisoned sword—we will get  
 what we want. But hold on, what's that sound?

*GERTRUDE enters.*

**GERTRUDE**

The bad news keeps coming, as if each piece follows right  
 on the heels of the one before. Your sister's drowned,  
 Laertes.

**LAERTES**

Drowned? Oh, where?

**GERTRUDE**

There's a willow that leans over the brook, with its white  
 leaves hanging over the glassy water. Ophelia came  
 there—making braided crowns from crowsflowers, nettles,  
 daisies, and those wild purple orchids that free-spoken  
 shepherds call by an obscene name, but which innocent  
 girls call "dead men's fingers." She climbed out onto the  
 tree to hang her crowns from a bending branch. But the  
 branch broke, and she and her flowery treasures fell into  
 the swiftly moving brook. Her clothes spread wide in the  
 water, and held her up while she sang bits of old hymns.  
 She acted as if she could not comprehend the danger, or as  
 if she were a creature that naturally lived in water. But  
 eventually her clothes—heavy with absorbed water—pulled  
 the poor girl out of her song and down to a muddy death.

**LAERTES**

Alas, then she drowned.

**GERTRUDE**

Drowned, drowned.

**LAERTES**

205 Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia,  
And therefore I forbid my tears. But yet  
It is our trick. Nature her custom holds,  
Let shame say what it will. When these are gone,  
The woman will be out. —Adieu, my lord.  
I have a speech of fire that fain would blaze,  
But that this folly doubts it.


*LAERTES exits.*

**CLAUDIUS**

210 Let's follow, Gertrude.  
How much I had to do to calm his rage!  
Now fear I this will give it start again.  
Therefore let's follow.

*They exit.*

**LAERTES**

Poor Ophelia, you've had too much water already, so I won't cry for you. But crying is what humans do. We all follow our natures, no matter what shame we feel for it. When I've stopped crying, I'll be done acting like a [woman](#) 


[To **CLAUDIUS**] Goodbye, my lord. I have fiery words I'd dearly like to say, but my foolish tears drown them.

*LAERTES exits.*

**CLAUDIUS**

Let's follow him, Gertrude. I had to do so much to calm him down! Now I fear this might start him up again. Therefore, let's follow him.

*They exit.*

 In Shakespeare's time, women were considered "leaky vessels," because of their tears, menstruation, and lactation.

## Act 5, Scene 1

### Shakespeare

*Two GRAVEDIGGERS enter.*

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

Is she to be buried in Christian burial when she willfully seeks her own salvation?

**SECOND GRAVEDIGGER**

5 I tell thee she is. Therefore make her grave straight.  
The crowner hath sat on her and finds it Christian burial.

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

How can that be, unless she drowned herself in her own defense?

**SECOND GRAVEDIGGER**

Why, 'tis found so.

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

10 It must be se offendendo. It cannot be else. For here lies the point: if I drown myself wittingly, it argues an act. And an act hath three branches—it is to act, to do, to perform. Argal, she drowned herself wittingly.

**SECOND GRAVEDIGGER**

Nay, but hear you, Goodman Delver—

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

15 Give me leave. Here lies the water. Good. Here stands the man. Good. If the man go to this water and drown himself, it is, will he nill he, he goes. Mark you that. But if the water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself. Argal, he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life.

**SECOND GRAVEDIGGER**

20 But is this law?


**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

Ay, marry, is 't. Crowner's quest law.

### Shakesclore Translation

*Two GRAVEDIGGERS enter.*

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

Is she really going to receive a [Christian burial](#)  after she took her own life?

**SECOND GRAVEDIGGER**

I'm telling you, she is. So make that grave immediately. The coroner examined her says it should be a Christian funeral.

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

How can that be, unless she drowned herself in self-defense?

**SECOND GRAVEDIGGER**

That's exactly what they've determined.

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

They must mean "self-offense." It couldn't be anything else. Here's my point: if you drown yourself on purpose, then that's an act. An act has three sides to it: to act, to do, and to perform. Therefore, she must have known she was drowning herself.

**SECOND GRAVEDIGGER**

No, but listen to me, Mister Gravedigger—

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**


Let me finish. Here's the water, right? Now here stands a man, right? If the man goes into the water and drowns himself, he is—whether you like or not—the one doing it. Got that? But if the water comes to him and drowns him, then he doesn't drown himself. Therefore, he who is not guilty of his own death does not shorten his own life.

**SECOND GRAVEDIGGER**

Is that the law?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

Yes, indeed it is. The coroner's inquest law.

 In Shakespeare's time, those who died by suicide—which was considered a sin—were not allowed a Christian burial. Instead, they were interred outside of church cemeteries.

**SECOND GRAVEDIGGER**

Will you ha' the truth on 't? If this had not been a gentlewoman, she should have been buried out o' Christian burial.

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

25 Why, there thou sayst. And the more pity that great folk should have countenance in this world to drown or hang themselves more than their even Christian. Come, my spade. There is no ancient gentleman but gardeners, ditchers, and grave-makers. They hold up Adam's  
30 profession.

**SECOND GRAVEDIGGER**

Was he a gentleman?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

He was the first that ever bore arms.

**SECOND GRAVEDIGGER**

Why, he had none.

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

35 What, art a heathen? How dost thou understand the Scripture? The Scripture says Adam digged. Could he dig without arms? I'll put another question to thee. If thou answerest me not to the purpose, confess thyself—

**SECOND GRAVEDIGGER**

Go to.

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

40 What is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?

**SECOND GRAVEDIGGER**

The gallows-maker, for that frame outlives a thousand tenants.

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

45 like thy wit well, in good faith. The gallows does well, but how does it well? It does well to those that do ill. Now thou dost ill to say the gallows is built stronger than the church. Argal, the gallows may do well to thee. To 't again, come.

**SECOND GRAVEDIGGER**

"Who builds stronger than a mason, a shipwright, or a carpenter?"

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

50 Ay, tell me that, and unyoke.

**SECOND GRAVEDIGGER**

Marry, now I can tell.

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

To 't.

**SECOND GRAVEDIGGER**

Mass, I cannot tell.

*HAMLET and HORATIO enter, in the distance.*

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

Cudgel thy brains no more about it, for your dull ass

55

**SECOND GRAVEDIGGER**

Do you want the truth? If this woman hadn't been a noble, she wouldn't have been given a Christian burial.


**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**


Well, now you've said it. It's a pity that the nobles are given more leeway to drown or hang themselves than other Christians are. Come on, shovel. The most ancient nobles in the world are gardeners, ditch-diggers, and gravediggers. They keep up Adam's profession.

**SECOND GRAVEDIGGER**

Was he a noble?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

He was the first person who ever bore [arms](#) .

 Noble families have symbols called "coat of arms;" to display that symbol was to "bear arms." The First Gravedigger also puns on Adam being the first man, and literally the first human to have "arms," as in limbs.

**SECOND GRAVEDIGGER**

He didn't bear any arms.

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

What, are you not a Christian? Do you not know the Bible? The Bible says Adam dug. Could he dig without arms? I'll ask you another question. If you can't answer it, admit it—

**SECOND GRAVEDIGGER**

Go ahead!

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

Who builds stronger things than a stonemason, a shipbuilder, or a carpenter?

**SECOND GRAVEDIGGER**

The one who builds the gallows where people are hung, because the gallows outlive a thousand users.

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

I like your humor, I swear. The gallows do well. But how? They do well to those who do bad. But you do bad to say that the gallows are stronger than a church. Therefore, the gallows may do well to you. Come on, try again.

**SECOND GRAVEDIGGER**

"Who builds stronger things than a stonemason, a shipbuilder, or a carpenter?"

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

Yes, tell me that, then you can call it a day.

**SECOND GRAVEDIGGER**


Indeed, I'll give you answer!

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

Do it.

**SECOND GRAVEDIGGER**

By [God](#) , I forgot.

 In the original text, the Second Gravedigger uses the common oath, "mass," an abbreviated form of "by the mass," or church service.

*HAMLET and HORATIO enter, in the distance.*

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

Stop wracking your brains about it. After all, you can't make



will not mend his pace with beating. And when you are asked this question next, say "A grave-maker." The houses that he makes last till doomsday. Go, get thee in. Fetch me a stoup of liquor.

*The SECOND GRAVEDIGGER exits.*

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

*[digs and sings]*

60 *In youth when I did love, did love,  
Methought it was very sweet  
To contract—o—the time, for—a—my behove,  
Oh, methought, there—a—was nothing—a—meet.*

**HAMLET**

65 Has this fellow no feeling of his business? He sings at grave-making.

**HORATIO**

Custom hath made it in him a property of easiness.

**HAMLET**

'Tis e'en so. The hand of little employment hath the daintier sense.

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

*[sings]*

70 *But age with his stealing steps  
Hath clawed me in his clutch,  
And hath shipped me into the land  
As if I had never been such.  
[throws up a skull]*

**HAMLET**

75 That skull had a tongue in it and could sing once. How the knave jowls it to the ground, as if it were Cain's jawbone, that did the first murder! It might be the pate of a politician, which this ass now o'erreaches, one that would circumvent God, might it not?

**HORATIO**

80 It might, my lord.

**HAMLET**

Or of a courtier, which could say, "Good morrow, sweet lord!" "How dost thou, good lord?" This might be my Lord Such-a-one that praised my Lord Such-a-one's horse when he meant to beg it, might it not?

**HORATIO**

85 Ay, my lord.

**HAMLET**

90 Why, e'en so. And now my Lady Worm's, chapless and knocked about the mazard with a sexton's spade. Here's fine revolution, an we had the trick to see 't. Did these bones cost no more the breeding but to play at loggets with them? Mine ache to think on 't.

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

*[sings]*

95 *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

a slow donkey run by beating it. The next time someone asks you this riddle, say "a gravedigger." The houses he makes last till Judgment Day. Go inside, now, and get me some alcohol.

*The SECOND GRAVEDIGGER exits.*

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

*[Digging and singing]*

*In my youth when I did love, did love,  
I though it was very sweet  
To set—O—the date for—Ahh—my duty  
Oh, I thought it—ahh—was not—ahh—right.*

**HAMLET**

Does this man not understand the seriousness of what he's doing? He's singing while digging a grave.

**HORATIO**

He's gotten so used to digging graves that he does it with ease.

**HAMLET**

That's it exactly. Only those who aren't used to that kind of work are more sensitive to it.

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

*[Singing]*

*But old age has snuck up on me  
And caught me in his claws,  
And has shipped me into the ground  
As if I'd never been like that.  
[He throws up a skull]*

**HAMLET**

That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once. That fool flings it to the ground as if belonged to Cain, who committed the first murder! It might be the skull of a power-grabbing politician who could talk his way around God, right? And now this idiot is grasping it.

**HORATIO**

It could be, my lord.

**HAMLET**

Or a courtier, who used to say, "Good night, my sweet lord! How are you, good lord?" This might be the skull of Lord So-and-So, who praised Lord So-and-So's horse when he wanted to borrow it, right?

**HORATIO**

Yes, my lord.

**HAMLET**

Why, yes. Exactly. And now it's the property of Lady Worm, with its lower jaw knocked off, and thwacked on the head with a little shovel. What a change of fortune, if we could only see it. Were these bones grown and used so that they would be worth no more than bowling pins now? My bones ache to think about it.

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

*[Singing]*

*A pickax and a shovel, a shovel,  
A sheet for a funeral shroud,  
Oh, a pit of dirt to be made up  
Is the right thing for our guest.  
[He throws up another skull]*

**HAMLET**

There's another. Why, couldn't that be a lawyer's skull? Where are all his lawyerly quibbles, his cases, and his tricks? Why does he let this rude fool knock him on the

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**

115 They are sheep and calves which seek out assurance in that.  
I will speak to this fellow.—Whose grave's this, sirrah?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

120 Mine, sir.  
*[sings]*  
*Oh, a pit of clay for to be made*  
*For such a guest is meet.*

**HAMLET**

I think it be thine, indeed, for thou liest in 't.

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

125 You lie out on 't, sir, and therefore it is not yours.  
For my part, I do not lie in 't, and yet it is mine.

**HAMLET**

Thou dost lie in 't, to be in 't and say it is thine.  
'Tis for the dead, not for the quick. Therefore thou liest.

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

'Tis a quick lie, sir. 'Twill away gain from me to you.

**HAMLET**

130 What man dost thou dig it for?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

For no man, sir.

**HAMLET**

What woman, then?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

For none, neither.

**HAMLET**

Who is to be buried in 't?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

135 One that was a woman, sir, but, rest her soul, she's dead.

head with a shovel without suing him for assault and battery? Maybe he was a great landowner, with his bonds, his deeds, and his rents. Was it part of his contracts and deeds that his skull should get filled up with dirt? Does he get to keep only as much of his land as equals the width and length of a pair of his contracts spread out on the ground? The deeds to his properties would barely fit in this coffin—and that coffin is all he gets to have?

**HORATIO**

Not a bit more, my lord.

**HAMLET**

Aren't legal documents made of sheepskin?

**HORATIO**

Yes, my lord, and calfskin too.

**HAMLET**

Anyone who looks for assurance in such documents is a sheep or a calf. I'm going to talk to this man.

*[To the FIRST GRAVEDIGGER]* Excuse me, sir, whose grave is this?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

It's mine, sir.  
*[Singing]*  
*Oh, a pit of dirt to be made up*  
*Is the right thing for our guest.*

**HAMLET**

I think it must be yours, because you're lying in it.

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

You're lying outside of it, sir, so therefore it's not yours. As for me, I'm not lying in it—it's really mine.

**HAMLET**

But you are lying <sup>4</sup> in it, since you're in it and saying it's yours. It's for the dead, not the living. Therefore, you're lying.

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

That's a lively lie, sir, jumping like that from me to you.

**HAMLET**

What man are you digging it for?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

For no man, sir.

**HAMLET**

What woman, then?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

For no woman, either.

**HAMLET**

Who's to be buried in it?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

One who used to be a woman, sir, but is now dead, bless her soul.

<sup>4</sup> Hamlet takes the verb "lying" as in to tell a falsehood. The First Gravedigger may be physically "lying" in the grave, but he "lies," or tells a falsehood, that it's his, because he doesn't own the grave.

**HAMLET**

140 How absolute the knave is! We must speak by the card, or equivocation will undo us. By the Lord, Horatio, these three years I have taken a note of it. The age is grown so picked that the toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier he galls his kibe. —How long hast thou been a grave-maker?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

145 Of all the days i' the year, I came to 't that day that our last King Hamlet overcame Fortinbras.

**HAMLET**

How long is that since?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

Cannot you tell that? Every fool can tell that. It was the very day that young Hamlet was born, he that is mad and sent into England.

**HAMLET**

150 Ay, marry, why was he sent into England?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

Why, because he was mad. He shall recover his wits there, or, if he do not, it's no great matter there.

**HAMLET**

Why?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

155 'Twill not be seen in him there. There the men are as mad as he.

**HAMLET**

How came he mad?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

Very strangely, they say.

**HAMLET**

How "strangely?"

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

Faith, e'en with losing his wits.

**HAMLET**

160 Upon what ground?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

Why, here in Denmark. I have been sexton here, man and boy, thirty years.

**HAMLET**

How long will a man lie i' the earth ere he rot?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

165 Faith, if he be not rotten before he die—as we have many pocky corsers nowadays that will scarce hold the laying in— he will last you some eight year or nine year. A tanner will last you nine year.

**HAMLET**

Why he more than another?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

170 Why, sir, his hide is so tanned with his trade that he will keep out water a great while, and your water is a sore decayer of your whoreson dead body. [*Indicates a*

**HAMLET**

How literal this jokester is! We have to speak precisely, or his word play will defeat us. Lord, Horatio, I've been noticing this for the last three years. The commoners have become so sophisticated that they're nipping at the heels of noblemen.

[*To the FIRST GRAVEDIGGER*] How long have you been a gravedigger?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

Of all the days in the year, I started this work on the day that the late King Hamlet defeated Fortinbras.

**HAMLET**

How long ago was that?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

You don't know that? Any fool could tell you that. It was the day that young Hamlet was born—the one who's insane and got sent to England.

**HAMLET**

Yes, right, and why was he sent to England?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

Why? Because he was insane. He'll recover his sanity there. Or if he doesn't, it won't matter in England.

**HAMLET**

Why?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

Nobody there will notice. All the people there are as crazy as he is.

**HAMLET**

How did he go insane?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

Very strangely, they say.

**HAMLET**

What do you mean, "strangely?"

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

By losing his mind, of course.

**HAMLET**

On what grounds?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

Why, right here in Denmark. I've been the handyman here for thirty years, since I was a boy.

**HAMLET**

How long will a man lie in his grave before he starts to rot?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

Well, if he's not rotten before he dies—and we do have many corpses nowadays that are so rotten that they fall apart just from being laid in the grave—he'll last eight or nine years. A man who makes leather will last nine years.

**HAMLET**

Why does he last longer than anyone else?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

Well, sir, because his skin is so leathery from the work he does that he keeps the water out for a long time, and water is the main cause of decay in your son-of-a-bitch body. [*He*

*skull*] Here's a skull now. This skull has lain in the earth three-and-twenty years.

**HAMLET**

Whose was it?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

175 A whoreson mad fellow's it was. Whose do you think it was?

**HAMLET**

Nay, I know not.

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

180 A pestilence on him for a mad rogue! He poured a flagon of Rhenish on my head once. This same skull, sir, was Yorick's skull, the king's jester.

**HAMLET**

This?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

E'en that.

**HAMLET**

185 Let me see. [*takes the skull*] Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath borne me on his back a thousand times, and now, how abhorred in my imagination it is! My gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. —Where be your gibes now? Your gambols? Your songs? Your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now to mock your own grinning? Quite chapfallen? Now get you to my lady's chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favor she must come. Make her laugh at that. —Prithee, Horatio, tell me one thing.

**HORATIO**

195 What's that, my lord?

**HAMLET**

Dost thou think Alexander looked o' this fashion i' th' earth?

**HORATIO**

E'en so.

**HAMLET**

And smelt so? Pah! [*puts down the skull*]

**HORATIO**

200 E'en so, my lord.

**HAMLET**

To what base uses we may return, Horatio. Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander till he find it stopping a bung-hole?

**HORATIO**

'Twere to consider too curiously, to consider so.

**HAMLET**

205 No, faith, not a jot. But to follow him thither with modesty enough, and likelihood to lead it, as thus: Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth to dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make loam —and why of that loam, whereto he was converted, 210 might they not stop a beer barrel?

*points to a skull*] Here's a skull now. It's been buried in the earth twenty-three years.

**HAMLET**

Whose was it?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

An insane son-of-a-bitch. Whose do you think it was?

**HAMLET**

I don't know.

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

A curse on him, that crazy scoundrel! He poured a pitcher of German wine on my head once. Sir, this skull belonged to Yorick, the king's jester.

**HAMLET**

This one?

**FIRST GRAVEDIGGER**

That one.

**HAMLET**

Let me see. [*He takes the skull*] Oh, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio. He was a man of endless humor, a great wit. He gave me piggy-back rides a thousand times, and now...how awful my imagination is! It makes me nauseated to think of it. Here hung his lips, which I kissed I don't know how many times. Where are your jokes now? Your dances? Your songs? Your flashes of high spirits that used to set the whole table roaring with laughter? You're not able to mock your own grinning skull now, are you? Now go to my lady's bedroom and tell her that, even if she piles on the makeup an inch thick, she'll still wind up looking like you. Make her laugh at that.

[*To HORATIO*] Please, Horatio, tell me something.

**HORATIO**

What's that, my lord?

**HAMLET**

Do you think Alexander the Great looked like this when he was buried?

**HORATIO**

Just like that.

**HAMLET**

And smelled like this? Yuck! [*He puts down the skull*]

**HORATIO**

Just like that, my lord.

**HAMLET**

Look how badly we end up, Horatio. Why, you could imagine how the noble ashes of Alexander the Great might end up plugging a hole in a barrel?

**HORATIO**

You'd be thinking about it too much, if you thought about that.

**HAMLET**

No, I swear, not at all. It's perfectly reasonable to think of it: Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returned to dust, the dust is dirt, and dirt is used to make the material we use to stop up holes. So why can't someone use the clay made from Alexander to plug up a beer barrel? The Roman Emperor Caesar, dead and turned to clay, might

Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay,  
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.  
Oh, that that earth, which kept the world in awe,  
Should patch a wall t' expel the winter's flaw!  
215 But soft, but soft a while.

*CLAUDIUS enters with GERTRUDE, LAERTES, and a coffin, with a PRIEST and other lords attendant.*

**HAMLET**

Here comes the king,  
The queen, the courtiers—who is this they follow,  
And with such maimèd rites? This doth betoken  
The corse they follow did with desperate hand  
220 Fordo its own life. 'Twas of some estate.  
Couch we a while and mark.

*HAMLET and HORATIO step aside.*

**LAERTES**

What ceremony else?

**HAMLET**

That is Laertes, a very noble youth, mark.

**LAERTES**

What ceremony else?

**PRIEST**

225 Her obsequies have been as far enlarged  
As we have warranty. Her death was doubtful,  
And, but that great command o'ersways the order,  
She should in ground unsanctified have lodged  
Till the last trumpet. For charitable prayers  
230 Shards, flints and pebbles should be thrown on her.  
Yet here she is allowed her virgin crants,  
Her maiden strewments, and the bringing home  
Of bell and burial.

**LAERTES**

Must there no more be done?

**PRIEST**

235 No more be done.  
We should profane the service of the dead  
To sing a requiem and such rest to her  
As to peace-parted souls.

**LAERTES**

240 Lay her i' th' earth,  
And from her fair and unpolluted flesh  
May violets spring! I tell thee, churlish priest,  
A ministering angel shall my sister be  
When thou liest howling.

**HAMLET**

*[to HORATIO]* What, the fair Ophelia?

**GERTRUDE**

245 Sweets to the sweet. Farewell! *[scatters flowers]*  
I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife.  
I thought thy bride-bed to have decked, sweet maid,  
And not have strewed thy grave.

**LAERTES**

250 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.

*LAERTES jumps into the grave.*

block a hole to keep the wind away. Oh, that the body that  
once ruled the entire world could now patch up a wall to  
keep out the winter! But quiet, be quiet for a moment.

*CLAUDIUS enters with GERTRUDE, LAERTES, and a coffin,  
with a PRIEST and other attending lords.*

**HAMLET**

Here comes the king, the queen, and all of their court. Who  
is it that they're following? And with such a plain ceremony?  
This must mean that the corpse they're following  
committed suicide. Must have been someone of quite noble  
birth. Let's hide and watch for a while.

*HAMLET and HORATIO step aside.*

**LAERTES**

What other rites will you perform?

**HAMLET**

That's Laertes, a very noble young man. Listen.

**LAERTES**

What other rites will you perform?

**PRIEST**

I've performed all the rites that I'm allowed to perform. Her  
death was questionable. And if the king had not given a  
command that overruled our normal customs, she'd have  
been buried in the unholy ground outside the church  
graveyard until Judgment Day. Instead of prayers, she  
would have had rocks and broken pottery thrown on her  
body. But she is dressed up like a pure virgin, with flowers  
scattered on her grave, and the bell tolling for her.

**LAERTES**

Can nothing more be done?

**PRIEST**

Nothing more. We would be disrespectful to the other dead  
if we sang the same requiem for her that we sang for those  
who died peacefully.

**LAERTES**

Lay her in the ground, and may violets bloom from her pure  
and beautiful body! I'm telling you, you uncharitable priest,  
my sister will be an angel in heaven while you're howling in  
hell.

**HAMLET**

*[To HORATIO]* What, the beautiful Ophelia?

**GERTRUDE**

Sweet flowers for a sweet girl. Goodbye! *[She scatters  
flowers]* I had hoped you'd be my Hamlet's wife. I thought  
I'd be scattering flowers on your wedding bed, not strewing  
them on your grave, sweet girl.

**LAERTES**

Oh, damn three times, damn thirty times the cursed one  
whose actions stole your brilliant mind. Do not bury her  
until I've held her in my arms once more.

*LAERTES jumps into the grave.*

**LAERTES**

Now pile your dust upon the quick and dead,  
 255 Till of this flat a mountain you have made,  
 T' o'ertop old Pelion or the skyish head  
 Of blue Olympus.

**HAMLET**

*[comes forward]* What is he whose grief  
 Bears such an emphasis, whose phrase of sorrow  
 260 Conjures the wandering stars, and makes them stand  
 Like wonder-wounded hearers? This is I,  
 Hamlet the Dane. *[leaps into the grave]*

**LAERTES**

The devil take thy soul!

*HAMLET and LAERTES wrestle.*

**HAMLET**

Thou pray'st not well.  
 265 I prithee, take thy fingers from my throat,  
 For though I am not splenitive and rash,  
 Yet have I something in me dangerous,  
 Which let thy wisdom fear. Hold off thy hand.

**CLAUDIUS**

Pluck them asunder.

**GERTRUDE**

270 Hamlet, Hamlet!

**ALL**

Gentlemen—

**HORATIO**

*[to HAMLET]* Good my lord, be quiet.

*Attendants separate HAMLET and LAERTES.*

**HAMLET**

Why, I will fight with him upon this theme  
 Until my eyelids will no longer wag.

**GERTRUDE**

275 O my son, what theme?

**HAMLET**

I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers  
 Could not with all their quantity of love  
 Make up my sum. What wilt thou do for her?

**CLAUDIUS**

O, he is mad, Laertes.

**GERTRUDE**

280 For love of God, forbear him.

**HAMLET**

'Swounds, show me what thou'lt do.  
 Woo't weep? Woo't fight? Woo't fast? Woo't tear  
 thyself?  
 Woo't drink up eisel, eat a crocodile?  
 285 I'll do 't. Dost thou come here to whine,  
 To outface me with leaping in her grave?  
 Be buried quick with her?—and so will I.  
 And if thou prate of mountains let them throw  
 Millions of acres on us, till our ground,  
 290 Singeing his pate against the burning zone,  
 Make Ossa like a wart! Nay, an thou'lt mouth,  
 I'll rant as well as thou.

**LAERTES**

Now pile the dirt onto the living and the dead, until you've  
 made this flat ground into mountain higher than Mount  
 Pelion <sup>5</sup> or the towering peaks of Mount Olympus.

<sup>5</sup> In ancient Greek mythology, Mount Pelion was home to the centaurs, and Mount Olympus was home to the gods.

**HAMLET**

*[He comes forward]* Who is the man whose grief is so  
 profound, whose words of sadness makes the stars stand  
 still in the heavens as if struck dumb by what they've  
 heard? It is me, Hamlet the Dane. *[He jumps into the grave]*

**LAERTES**

The devil take your soul!

*HAMLET and LAERTES wrestle.*

**HAMLET**

That's not the right way to pray. *[They fight]* I ask you,  
 please remove your fingers from my throat. I'm not  
 impulsive and quick-tempered, but I have something  
 dangerous in me which you would be wise to fear. Take  
 your hands off me.

**CLAUDIUS**

Separate them.

**GERTRUDE**

Hamlet! Hamlet!

**ALL**

Gentlemen!

**HORATIO**

*[To HAMLET]* My lord, calm down.

*Attendants separate HAMLET and LAERTES.*

**HAMLET**

I'll fight him on this topic until my eyelids cease to blink.

**GERTRUDE**

Oh, my son, what topic?

**HAMLET**

I loved Ophelia. The love of forty thousand brothers, added  
 together, could not match mine. What are you going to do  
 for her?

**CLAUDIUS**

Oh, he is crazy, Laertes!

**GERTRUDE**

For the love of God, leave him alone.

**HAMLET**

By God! Show me what you're going to do for her. Will you  
 cry? Will you fight? Will you cease to eat? Will you cut  
 yourself? Will you drink vinegar, or eat a crocodile? I'll do it.  
 Did you come here to whine? To outdo me by jumping into  
 her grave so theatrically? To be buried alive with her? So  
 will I. And if you babble about mountains, then let them  
 throw millions of acres over us until the peak scrapes  
 against sun and makes Mount Ossa <sup>6</sup> look like a wart.  
 See? I can rant as well as you.

<sup>6</sup> According to ancient Greek mythology, Ossa is a mountain that giants were said to have constructed, trying to reach the heavens.

**GERTRUDE**

This is mere madness.  
And thus a while the fit will work on him.  
295 Anon, as patient as the female dove  
When that her golden couplets are disclosed,  
His silence will sit drooping.

**HAMLET**

Hear you, sir.  
What is the reason that you use me thus?  
300 I loved you ever. But it is no matter.  
Let Hercules himself do what he may,  
The cat will mew and dog will have his day.

*HAMLET exits.*

**CLAUDIUS**

I pray thee, good Horatio, wait upon him.

*HORATIO exits.*

**CLAUDIUS**

*[to LAERTES]*

305 Strengthen your patience in our last night's speech.  
We'll put the matter to the present push.—  
Good Gertrude, set some watch over your son.—  
This grave shall have a living monument.  
An hour of quiet shortly shall we see.  
310 Till then in patience our proceeding be.

*They exit.*

**GERTRUDE**

This is pure madness. This fit will stay with him for a little while. Then he'll be as calm as a female dove waiting for a pair of eggs to hatch.

**HAMLET**

Listen to me, sir. Why do you treat me like this? I always loved you. But it doesn't matter. No matter what a hero like Hercules does, fools will seek to draw attention to themselves.

*HAMLET exits.*

**CLAUDIUS**

Horatio, please go with him.

*HORATIO exits.*

**CLAUDIUS**

*[To LAERTES]* Control yourself by thinking of our talk last night. We'll handle this issue very soon.

*[To GERTRUDE]* Good Gertrude, please set some kind of watch over your son. We will build a monument for this grave that will last forever. Soon we'll have the calm we need. Until then we must work patiently.

*They all exit.*

## Act 5, Scene 2

### Shakespeare

*HAMLET and HORATIO enter.*

**HAMLET**

So much for this, sir. Now shall you see the other.  
You do remember all the circumstances?

**HORATIO**

Remember it, my lord?

**HAMLET**

Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting  
5 That would not let me sleep. Methought I lay  
Worse than the mutines in the bilboes. Rashly—  
And praised be rashness for it: let us know  
Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well  
When our deep plots do pall, and that should teach us  
10 There's a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will—

**HORATIO**

That is most certain.

**HAMLET**

Up from my cabin,  
My sea-gown scarfed about me, in the dark  
15 Groped I to find out them, had my desire,  
Fingered their packet, and in fine withdrew  
To mine own room again, making so bold  
(My fears forgetting manners) to unseal  
Their grand commission, where I found, Horatio—  
20 O royal knavery!—an exact command,  
Larded with many several sorts of reasons

### Shakesclare Translation

*HAMLET and HORATIO enter.*

**HAMLET**

That's everything about that, sir. Now I'll tell you my other story. You do remember the circumstances of my situation, right?

**HORATIO**

How could I not, my lord?

**HAMLET**

Sir, there was a kind of war in my heart that wouldn't let me sleep. It seemed to me that I was in worse shape even than captive rebels in chains. I impulsively—let me praise impulsiveness. Sometimes acting impulsively works even when our complicated plans don't work out, showing us that a God who shapes our destiny—

**HORATIO**

That is a certainty.

**HAMLET**

I came up from my cabin with my robe tied around me. In the dark, I groped around and found what I was looking for. I stole Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's packet of papers, and snuck back to my cabin again. My fears overcoming my manners, I was bold enough to open the letter they carried from Claudius to the English king. Horatio, there I found—oh, royal mischief!—an explicit command, fattened up with blather about Denmark's well-being and England's too—listen!—that described all the terrors that would come

Importing Denmark's health, and England's too,  
With—ho!—such bugs and goblins in my life  
That, on the supervise (no leisure bated,  
25 No, not to stay the grinding of the ax)  
My head should be struck off.

**HORATIO**

Is 't possible?

**HAMLET**

*[shows HORATIO a document]*

Here's the commission. Read it at more leisure.  
30 But wilt thou hear me how I did proceed?

**HORATIO**

I beseech you.

**HAMLET**

Being thus benetted round with villainies—  
Ere I could make a prologue to my brains,  
They had begun the play—I sat me down,  
35 Devised a new commission, wrote it fair.  
I once did hold it, as our statistes do,  
A baseness to write fair, and labored much  
How to forget that learning, but, sir, now  
It did me yeoman's service. Wilt thou know  
40 Th' effect of what I wrote?

**HORATIO**

Ay, good my lord.

**HAMLET**

An earnest conjuration from the king,  
As England was his faithful tributary,  
As love between them like the palm might flourish,  
45 As peace should stiff her wheaten garland wear  
And stand a comma 'tween their amities,  
And many suchlike "as's" of great charge,  
That, on the view and knowing of these contents,  
Without debatement further, more or less,  
50 He should the bearers put to sudden death,  
Not shriving time allowed.

**HORATIO**

How was this sealed?

**HAMLET**

Why, even in that was heaven ordinant.  
I had my father's signet in my purse,  
55 Which was the model of that Danish seal.  
Folded the writ up in form of th' other,  
Subscribed it, gave 't th' impression, placed it  
safely,  
The changeling never known. Now, the next day  
60 Was our sea fight, and what to this was sequent  
Thou know'st already.

**HORATIO**

So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to 't.

**HAMLET**

Why, man, they did make love to this employment.  
They are not near my conscience. Their defeat  
65 Does by their own insinuation grow.  
'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes  
Between the pass and fell incensèd points  
Of mighty opposites.

**HORATIO**

Why, what a king is this!

**HAMLET**

70 Does it not, think thee, stand me now upon—

from letting me live. The letter contained instructions to cut  
off my head, without even taking any time to sharpen the  
ax.

**HORATIO**

Is it possible?

**HAMLET**

*[He shows HORATIO a document]* Here's the letter. Read it  
when you have a moment. But do you want to hear what I  
did next?

**HORATIO**

Please.

**HAMLET**

Stuck as I was in their cruel net—before I could even fully  
think about the problem, my brain had already started  
playing with possible solutions—I sat down and wrote a  
new letter. I wrote it in a bureaucrat's neat handwriting. I  
used to think, just as our politicians do, that having nice  
handwriting was for servants. So I had to really work to  
forget that bias. And, sir, it certainly helped me then. Would  
you like to know what I wrote?

**HORATIO**

Yes, my good lord.

**HAMLET**

A sincere request from the King of Denmark, to the King of  
England—his faithful vassal subject—with hopes that the  
love between the two countries can flourish, and that peace  
can rise up and join them together in friendship, and some  
other important-sounding statements like that. I instructed  
the King of England that, after reading and reviewing the  
letter, without any further debate, he should immediately  
kill the men who delivered the letter, without even giving  
them time to confess to a priest.

**HORATIO**

How did you get an official seal on it?

**HAMLET**

Even there, heaven gave me a helping hand. I had my  
father's signet ring in my pocket, which has a small version  
of the Danish royal seal on it. I folded up the letter, signed it,  
sealed it, and put it safely back without anyone noticing the  
change. The next day brought our fight at sea, and you  
already know what happened afterwards.

**HORATIO**

So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to their deaths.

**HAMLET**

Well, man, they loved doing the king's every bidding. I don't  
feel any guilt. Their deaths grew out of their meddling. It's  
dangerous when inferior people get in between the sword  
thrusts of mighty opponents.

**HORATIO**

Oh, what a king this Claudius is!

**HAMLET**

Don't you think that it's now my duty to kill him? He killed



75 He that hath killed my king and whored my mother,  
Popped in between th' election and my hopes,  
Thrown out his angle for my proper life  
(And with such cozenage!) —is 't not perfect conscience  
To quit him with this arm? And is 't not to be damned  
To let this canker of our nature come  
In further evil?

**HORATIO**

It must be shortly known to him from England  
What is the issue of the business there.

**HAMLET**

80 It will be short. The interim's mine.  
And a man's life's no more than to say "one."  
But I am very sorry, good Horatio,  
That to Laertes I forgot myself,  
For by the image of my cause I see  
85 The portraiture of his. I'll court his favors.  
But sure the bravery of his grief did put me  
Into a towering passion.

**HORATIO**

Peace.—Who comes here?

*OSRIC, a young courtier, enters with his hat in his hand.*

**OSRIC**

Your lordship is right welcome back to Denmark.

**HAMLET**

90 I humbly thank you, sir. [*aside to HORATIO*] Dost know  
this water-fly?

**HORATIO**

[*aside to HAMLET*] No, my good lord.

**HAMLET**

[*aside to HORATIO*] Thy state is the more gracious, for  
'tis a vice to know him. He hath much land, and fertile.  
95 Let a beast be lord of beasts and his crib shall stand  
at the king's mess. 'Tis a cough, but, as I say,  
spacious in the possession of dirt.

**OSRIC**

Sweet lord, if your lordship were at leisure, I should  
impart a thing to you from His Majesty.

**HAMLET**

100 I will receive it, sir, with all diligence of spirit.  
Put your bonnet to his right use. 'Tis for the head.

**OSRIC**

I thank your lordship. It is very hot.

**HAMLET**

No, believe me, 'tis very cold. The wind is northerly.

**OSRIC**

It is indifferent cold, my lord, indeed.

**HAMLET**

105 But yet methinks it is very sultry and hot for my  
complexion.

**OSRIC**

110 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—

my king, made my mother a whore, stole the throne that I  
wanted, and plotted against my life with shocking trickery.  
Wouldn't killing him be completely justified? And, in fact,  
wouldn't I be damned if I were to let this cancer live to do  
more harm?

**HORATIO**

He's going to get the news from England soon about what  
happened there.

**HAMLET**

He will, soon. But I have time before the news arrives. And it  
only takes the time to count to one to kill a man. But I do  
feel very sorry, Horatio, that I lost control of myself with  
Laertes. I can see my own cause for revenge mirrored in his.  
I'll try to win him over. But the melodramatic showiness of  
his grief pushed me into a fury.

**HORATIO**

Stop—who's coming in here?

*OSRIC, a young courtier, enters with his hat in his hand.*

**OSRIC**

My lord, welcome back to Denmark.

**HAMLET**

I humbly thank you, sir.

[*To HORATIO so that only he can hear*] Do you know this  
flitting little bug?

**HORATIO**

[*To HAMLET so that only he can hear*] No, my lord.

**HAMLET**

[*To HORATIO so that only he can hear*] You're better off for  
that. It's a curse to know him. He owns a lot of good, fertile  
land. Give a beast a lot of cattle, and his food trough will be  
welcome at the king's table. He's a fool who spouts  
nonsense, but, as I said, he owns a lot of dirt.

**OSRIC**

Sweet lord, if you were to have a free moment, I would like  
to tell you a message from His Majesty.

**HAMLET**

Sir, I'll listen, with all of my being. Now put your hat to its  
proper use. Put it on your head.

**OSRIC**

Thank you for the advice, my lord. But it's very hot.

**HAMLET**

No, believe me, it's very cold, with a northern wind.

**OSRIC**

My lord, it is quite cold, indeed.

**HAMLET**

But yet I think it's too humid and hot for me.

**OSRIC**

Exceedingly hot, sir. It is very humid—so humid I can't even  
describe it. My lord, His Majesty asked me to tell you that  
he's placed a large bet on you. Sir, here's what's going on—

**HAMLET**

I beseech you, remember— [*indicates that OSRIC should put on his hat*]

**OSRIC**

115 Nay, good my lord, for mine ease, in good faith. Sir, here is newly come to court Laertes, believe me, an absolute gentleman, full of most excellent differences, of very soft society and great showing. Indeed, to speak feelingly of him, he is the card or calendar of gentry, for you shall find in him the continent of what part a gentleman would see.

**HAMLET**

120 Sir, his definement suffers no perdition in you, though I know to divide him inventorially would dizzy th' arithmetic of memory, and yet but yaw neither, in respect of his quick sail. But in the verity of extolment, I take him to be a soul of great article, and  
125 his infusion of such dearth and rareness as, to make true diction of him, his semblable is his mirror. And who else would trace him? His umbrage, nothing more.

**OSRIC**

Your lordship speaks most infallibly of him.

**HAMLET**

130 The concernancy, sir? Why do we wrap the gentleman in our more rawer breath?

**OSRIC**

Sir?

**HORATIO**

[*aside to HAMLET*] Is 't not possible to understand in another tongue? You will do 't, sir, really.

**HAMLET**

What imports the nomination of this gentleman?

**OSRIC**

135 Of Laertes?

**HORATIO**

[*aside to HAMLET*] His purse is empty already. All 's golden words are spent.

**HAMLET**

Of him, sir.

**OSRIC**

I know you are not ignorant—

**HAMLET**

140 I would you did, sir. Yet in faith, if you did, it would not much approve me. Well, sir?

**OSRIC**

You are not ignorant of what excellence Laertes is—

**HAMLET**

145 I dare not confess that lest I should compare with him in excellence, but to know a man well were to know himself.

**OSRIC**

I mean, sir, for his weapon. But in the imputation laid on him by them, in his meed he's unfollowed.

**HAMLET**

What's his weapon?

**HAMLET**

I beg you, remember— [*He gestures that OSRIC should put on his hat*]

**OSRIC**

No, my lord, I'm more comfortable like this, I swear. Sir, a recent arrival to the royal court named Laertes is an absolute gentleman, believe me. He is full of the most excellent qualities, with agreeable manners and good looks. In fact, if I were to reveal my true feelings about him, he is like a checklist of what a gentleman should be. You'll find that he's the embodiment of a perfect gentleman.

**HAMLET**

Sir, your description of him suffers no loss of accuracy, though I know that to try to describe all of his good qualities would dizzy the mind. And even trying to do so, you still would not be able to capture them all. But in true and sincere praise, I can say that he has a soul of great nobility, and that he is so unique—to be honest about him—that his equal can only be found when he looks in a mirror. Anyone else is just a shadow of him.

**OSRIC**

Your lordship describes him perfectly.

**HAMLET**

What's the relevance? Why do we wrap him up in our breathless words?

**OSRIC**

Sir?

**HORATIO**

[*To HAMLET so that only he can hear*] You must speak in a different style for him to understand you? You can do it, sir.

**HAMLET**

What is the significance of our discussion of this gentleman?

**OSRIC**

Of Laertes?

**HORATIO**

[*To HAMLET so that only he can hear*] His purse is already empty. He has spent all of his golden words.

**HAMLET**

Yes, of him. Of Laertes, sir.

**OSRIC**

I know you are not ignorant—

**HAMLET**

I wish you did, sir. But in truth, if you did, it would not be much to my credit. Well, sir?

**OSRIC**

I know you're not ignorant about how excellent Laertes is—

**HAMLET**

I don't dare to admit it, because you might compare his excellence to mine. But to know excellence in another you must know it in yourself.

**OSRIC**

I mean, sir, he's known for his weapon. Popular opinion holds him to be unrivaled.

**HAMLET**

What kind of weapon does he use?

**OSRIC**

Rapier and dagger.

**HAMLET**

150 That's two of his weapons. But well.

**OSRIC**

The king, sir, hath wagered with him six Barbary horses, against the which he has impawned, as I take it, six French rapiers and poniards with their assigns—as girde, hangers, and so. Three of the carriages, in  
155 faith, are very dear to fancy, very responsive to the hilts, most delicate carriages, and of very liberal conceit.

**HAMLET**

What call you the carriages?

**HORATIO**

160 [*aside to HAMLET*] I knew you must be edified by the margin ere you had done.

**OSRIC**

The carriages, sir, are the hangers.

**HAMLET**

The phrase would be more germane to the matter if we could carry cannon by our sides. I would it might be hangers till then. But, on: six Barbary horses against  
165 six French swords, their assigns, and three liberal-conceited carriages—that's the French bet against the Danish. Why is this "impawned," as you call it?

**OSRIC**

170 The king, sir, hath laid that in a dozen passes between yourself and him, he shall not exceed you three hits. He hath laid on twelve for nine, and it would come to immediate trial if your lordship would vouchsafe the answer.

**HAMLET**

How if I answer "No"?

**OSRIC**

175 I mean, my lord, the opposition of your person in trial.

**HAMLET**

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  
180 hold his purpose. I will win for him an I can. If not, I will gain nothing but my shame and the odd hits.

**OSRIC**

Shall I redeliver you e'en so?

**HAMLET**

To this effect, sir, after what flourish your nature will.

**OSRIC**

185 I commend my duty to your lordship.

**HAMLET**

Yours, yours.

*OSRIC exits.*

**OSRIC**

The light sword and the dagger.

**HAMLET**

Those are just two of his weapons. But no matter.

**OSRIC**

Sir, the king has gambled with Laertes, betting six Barbary horses against—as I understand it—six French light swords and daggers with all their accessories. Three of the carriages, in fact, are very beautifully designed, and match the fencing accessories. Very imaginative carriages.

**HAMLET**

What are you calling "carriages?"

**HORATIO**

[*To HAMLET so that only he can hear*] I knew you'd have to look a word up before we were finished with him.

**OSRIC**

The carriages, sir, are the hangers on which we hang swords.

**HAMLET**

That word would make more sense if it were describing something that pulled a cannon. I'd prefer to call it a "hanger." But, still. Six Barbary horses against six French swords with accessories, and three imaginatively designed carriages—sounds like a French bet against the Danish. Why has all this been "gambled," as you put it?

**OSRIC**

Sir, the king has bet that in a dozen rounds between you and Laertes, he won't beat you by more than three hits. We could start the match immediately if you'll do me the honor of giving me your answer.

**HAMLET**

What if my answer is "no?"

**OSRIC**

I mean, my lord, if you'd agree to compete in the wager.

**HAMLET**

Sir, I'm going to take a walk in the hall. Tell the king that it is my time to exercise. If the king still wants to do this, and if Laertes is willing, tell them to bring in the swords. I'll win the king's bet for him if I can. If not, I'll have suffered just a bit of shame for losing, and a few sword hits.

**OSRIC**

Shall I quote you with those precise words?

**HAMLET**

Just get the meaning across, sir. And be as flowery as you want in doing it.

**OSRIC**

I am at your service, your lordship.

**HAMLET**

Thank you.

*OSRIC exits.*

**HAMLET**

He does well to commend it himself. There are no tongues else for 's turn.

**HORATIO**

This lapwing runs away with the shell on his head.

**HAMLET**

190 He did comply, sir, with his dug before he sucked it.  
Thus has he—and many more of the same bevy that I know  
the drossy age dotes on—only got the tune of the time  
and outward habit of encounter, a kind of yeasty  
collection, which carries them through and through the  
195 most fond and winnowed opinions; and do but blow them to  
their trial, the bubbles are out.

*A LORD enters.*

**LORD**

My lord, his majesty commended him to you by young  
Osric, who brings back to him that you attend him in the  
hall. He sends to know if your pleasure hold to play  
200 with Laertes, or that you will take longer time.

**HAMLET**

I am constant to my purpose. They follow the king's  
pleasure. If his fitness speaks, mine is ready, now or  
whensoever, provided I be so able as now.

**LORD**

The king and queen and all are coming down.

**HAMLET**

205 In happy time.

**LORD**

The queen desires you to use some gentle entertainment  
to  
Laertes before you fall to play.

*The LORD exits.*

**HAMLET**

She well instructs me.

**HORATIO**

210 You will lose this wager, my lord.

**HAMLET**

I do not think so. Since he went into France, I have  
been in continual practice. I shall win at the odds. But  
thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my  
heart. But it is no matter.

**HORATIO**

215 Nay, good my lord—

**HAMLET**

It is but foolery, but it is such a kind of gain-giving  
as would perhaps trouble a woman.

**HORATIO**

If your mind dislike anything, obey it. I will  
forestall their repair hither and say you are not fit.

**HAMLET**

220 Not a whit. We defy augury. There's a special  
providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis  
not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it  
be not now, yet it will come—the readiness is all.

**HAMLET**

He's smart to recommend himself. There's no one else  
who'd do it for him.

**HORATIO**

That fool looks like a newly hatched bird running around  
with its egg still on its head.

**HAMLET**

He used to shower flowery praise on his mother's nipple  
before he sucked it. In that way he—and so many others in  
this frivolous age—follow the fashionable way of talking. It's  
a kind of wispy collection of words through which he can  
express the most trendy opinions. But blow a little on these  
ideas to test them, and they'll burst.

*A LORD enters.*

**LORD**

My lord, His Majesty has learned from Osric that you will  
soon come to the main hall. The king would like to know if  
you would like to duel against Laertes now, or if you'd like a  
little more time.

**HAMLET**

I'll do as I said before: whatever the king wants. If he's ready  
now, so am I. If he prefers some other time, I'll do it then, so  
long as I'm able.

**LORD**

The king and queen are coming down with everyone else to  
watch.

**HAMLET**

And right on time, too.

**LORD**

The queen would like you to speak a few polite words to  
Laertes before the match begins.

*The LORD exits.*

**HAMLET**

Her advice is good.

**HORATIO**

You're going to lose this bet, my lord.

**HAMLET**

I don't think so. Since Laertes left, I've been practicing  
fencing constantly. With the odds they've given me, I'm  
going to win. But even so, I have a bad feeling in my heart.  
But forget about that.

**HORATIO**

No, my lord—

**HAMLET**

It's just foolishness, but I have the kind of misgiving that  
might bother a woman.

**HORATIO**

If your conscience is telling you not to do this, obey it. I'll go  
and stop them and say you're not feeling well.

**HAMLET**

You will not. I ignore omens. God controls everything—even  
the death of a sparrow. If I am to die now, then it will not be  
later. If I am to die later, then it will not be now. All that  
matters is being ready for it when it does happen. Since no

225 Since no man of aught he leaves knows, what is 't to  
leave betimes? Let be.

*CLAUDIUS enters with GERTRUDE, LAERTES, OSRIC, lords, and other attendants with trumpets, drums, fencing swords, a table, and pitchers of wine.*

**CLAUDIUS**

Come, Hamlet, come, and take this hand from me. [*puts LAERTES' hand into HAMLET'S*]

**HAMLET**

Give me your pardon, sir. I've done you wrong.  
But pardon 't, as you are a gentleman.  
230 This presence knows,  
And you must needs have heard, how I am punished  
With sore distraction. What I have done,  
That might your nature, honor, and exception  
Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.  
235 Was 't Hamlet wronged Laertes? Never Hamlet.  
If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,  
And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,  
Then Hamlet does it not. Hamlet denies it.  
Who does it, then? His madness. If't be so,  
240 Hamlet is of the faction that is wronged.  
His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy.  
Sir, in this audience,  
Let my disclaiming from a purposed evil  
Free me so far in your most generous thoughts  
245 That I have shot mine arrow o'er the house  
And hurt my brother.

**LAERTES**

I am satisfied in nature,  
Whose motive in this case should stir me most  
To my revenge. But in my terms of honor  
250 I stand aloof, and will no reconciliation  
Till by some elder masters, of known honor,  
I have a voice and precedent of peace  
To keep my name ungor'd. But till that time  
I do receive your offered love like love  
255 And will not wrong it.

**HAMLET**

I embrace it freely,  
And will this brother's wager frankly play.—  
Give us the foils. Come on.

**LAERTES**

Come, one for me.

**HAMLET**

260 I'll be your foil, Laertes. In mine ignorance  
Your skill shall, like a star i' th' darkest night,  
Stick fiery off indeed.

**LAERTES**

You mock me, sir.

**HAMLET**

No, by this hand.

**CLAUDIUS**

265 Give them the foils, young Osric.—Cousin Hamlet,  
You know the wager?

**HAMLET**

Very well, my lord.  
Your grace hath laid the odds o' th' weaker side.

**CLAUDIUS**

I do not fear it. I have seen you both.  
270 But since he is better we have therefore odds.

man knows about what he leaves behind when he dies,  
then what's it to him if he leaves early? Let it be.

*CLAUDIUS enters with GERTRUDE, LAERTES, OSRIC, lords, and other attendants with trumpets, drums, fencing swords, a table, cups, and pitchers of wine.*

**CLAUDIUS**

Come, Hamlet, shake hands with Laertes. [*CLAUDIUS places LAERTES' and HAMLET'S hands together*]

**HAMLET**

I ask your forgiveness, sir. I've done you wrong. Forgive me, as a gentleman. Everyone here knows—and you must have heard it too—that I'm suffering from insanity. What I did to insult your nature and your honor, I did only out of madness. Was it Hamlet who insulted Laertes? Not Hamlet. If Hamlet has had his mind stolen, and insults Laertes when he's not himself, then it is not Hamlet who did it. Who did it, then? Hamlet's madness. If that's true, then it's Hamlet who was the victim. His madness is his enemy. Sir, with this audience as my witness, let me declare that I intended no harm and am as innocent as a man who shoots an arrow over his house and accidentally hits his brother.

**LAERTES**

My personal feelings are satisfied—even though what you've done should stir them to seek revenge. Yet, as a man who values honor, I must for now hold off and will not accept an apology—until some experts in matters of honor show me that accepting your apology will not stain my reputation. Until then, I accept the love you offer as love, and won't do anything to offend it.

**HAMLET**

I accept it gladly, and will engage in this friendly match without reservations. Come on, give me a sword.

**LAERTES**

And one for me.

**HAMLET**

I'm going to make you look good, Laertes. My lack of skill will make yours blaze like the brightest star in the darkest night.

**LAERTES**

You're making fun of me, sir.

**HAMLET**

No, I swear by my hand.

**CLAUDIUS**

Give them the swords, Osric. Hamlet, you know the bet?

**HAMLET**

Very well, my lord. You've placed your bet on the weaker side.

**CLAUDIUS**

I'm not worried. I've seen both of you fence. But since Laertes is better, we've given him a handicap.

**LAERTES**

*[tests a rapier]* This is too heavy. Let me see another.

**HAMLET**

*[tests a rapier]* This likes me well. These foils have all a length?

**OSRIC**

Ay, my good lord.

*HAMLET and LAERTES prepare to fence.*

**CLAUDIUS**

275 Set me the stoups of wine upon that table.  
If Hamlet give the first or second hit  
Or quit in answer of the third exchange,  
Let all the battlements their ordnance fire!  
The king shall drink to Hamlet's better breath,  
280 And in the cup an union shall he throw  
Richer than that which four successive kings  
In Denmark's crown have worn. Give me the cups.  
And let the kettle to the trumpet speak,  
The trumpet to the cannoneer without,  
285 The cannons to the heavens, the heavens to earth,  
"Now the king dunks to Hamlet." Come, begin.—  
And you, the judges, bear a wary eye.

*Trumpets*

**HAMLET**

Come on, sir.

**LAERTES**

Come, my lord.

*HAMLET and LAERTES fence.*

**HAMLET**

290 One.

**LAERTES**

No.

**HAMLET**

Judgment?

**OSRIC**

A hit, a very palpable hit.

**LAERTES**

Well, again.

**CLAUDIUS**

295 Stay, give me drink.—Hamlet, this pearl is thine.  
Here's to thy health.

*CLAUDIUS drops the pearl into a cup.*

*Drums, trumpets sound, shot goes off*

**CLAUDIUS**

Give him the cup.

**HAMLET**

I'll play this bout first. Set it by a while.  
Come.

*HAMLET and LAERTES fence.*

**LAERTES**

*[He tests a sword]* This sword's too heavy. Give me another one.

**HAMLET**

*[He tests a sword]* This one is good for me. Are they all the same length?

**OSRIC**

Yes, my good lord.

*HAMLET and LAERTES prepare to fence.*

**CLAUDIUS**

Put the cups of wine on that table. If Hamlet gets the first or second hit, or even responds to Laertes challenge by just making the third hit, then we will fire the cannons in his honor! I'll then drink to Hamlet's health, and into his cup I'll drop a pearl more valuable than those the last four Danish kings worn in their crowns. Give me the cups. Play the drum to signal the trumpeter, so the trumpet will signal the cannons outside, and the cannons will signal the heavens, and the heavens will echo the sound in order to tell all the world that the king now drinks to Hamlet's health. Come on, begin. And you, judges, watch carefully.

*Trumpets play.*

**HAMLET**

Come on, sir.

**LAERTES**

Come on, my lord.

*HAMLET and LAERTES fence.*

**HAMLET**

That was one hit.

**LAERTES**

No.

**HAMLET**

Referee?

**OSRIC**

It was a hit, a clear hit.

**LAERTES**

Well, another round.

**CLAUDIUS**

Give me some wine.

*[To HAMLET]* Hamlet, this pearl is yours. Here's to your health.

*CLAUDIUS drops the pearl into a cup.*

*Drums play and trumpets sound. A gun is fired.*

**CLAUDIUS**

Give him the cup.

**HAMLET**

I'll finish this round first. Set the cup down for a while. Let's go.

*HAMLET and LAERTES fence.*

**HAMLET**

300 Another hit. What say you?

**LAERTES**

A touch, a touch, I do confess 't.

**CLAUDIUS**

Our son shall win.

**GERTRUDE**

He's fat, and scant of breath.—

Here, Hamlet, take my napkin, rub thy brows.

305 The queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet.  
[picks up the cup with the pearl]

**HAMLET**

Good madam.

**CLAUDIUS**

Gertrude, do not drink.

**GERTRUDE**

I will, my lord. I pray you, pardon me. [drinks]

**CLAUDIUS**

310 [aside] It is the poisoned cup. It is too late.

**HAMLET**

I dare not drink yet, madam. By and by.

**GERTRUDE**

Come, let me wipe thy face.

**LAERTES**

[aside to CLAUDIUS] My lord, I'll hit him now.

**CLAUDIUS**

I do not think 't.

**LAERTES**

315 [aside] And yet it is almost 'gainst my conscience.

**HAMLET**

Come, for the third, Laertes. You do but dally.

I pray you, pass with your best violence.

I am afeard you make a wanton of me.

**LAERTES**

Say you so? Come on.

HAMLET and LAERTES fence.

**OSRIC**

320 Nothing, neither way.

**LAERTES**

Have at you now!

LAERTES wounds HAMLET. They scuffle and end up with each other's swords. HAMLET wounds LAERTES.

**CLAUDIUS**

Part them! They are incensed.

**HAMLET**

Nay, come, again.

GERTRUDE collapses.

**HAMLET**

Another hit. What do you say?

**LAERTES**

It was a small hit, a small hit, I admit it.

**CLAUDIUS**

My son will win.

**GERTRUDE**

He's fat and out of breath.

[To HAMLET] Here, Hamlet, take my handkerchief and wipe the sweat from your forehead. The queen drinks to your good luck, Hamlet. [She lifts the cup with the pearl]

**HAMLET**

Thank you, madam.

**CLAUDIUS**

Gertrude, don't drink.

**GERTRUDE**

I will drink, my lord. Please excuse me. [She drinks]

**CLAUDIUS**

[To himself] That was the poisoned drink. It's too late.

**HAMLET**

I can't afford to drink now, madam. Soon.

**GERTRUDE**

Come on, let me wipe your face.

**LAERTES**

[To CLAUDIUS so that only he can hear] I'll hit him now.

**CLAUDIUS**

I doubt it.

**LAERTES**

[To himself] And yet, it almost makes me feel guilty.

**HAMLET**

Come for the third round, Laertes. You're just playing. Come

on, try your hardest. I fear that you're treating me like a

spoiled child.

**LAERTES**

You believe so? Come on.

HAMLET and LAERTES fence.

**OSRIC**

There's little difference between them.

**LAERTES**

Take this!

LAERTES wounds HAMLET. They scuffle and end up with each other's swords. HAMLET wounds LAERTES.

**CLAUDIUS**

Separate them. They're too angry.

**HAMLET**

No, come on, again.

GERTRUDE collapses.

**OSRIC**

Look to the queen there, ho!

**HORATIO**

325 They bleed on both sides.—How is it, my lord?

**OSRIC**

How is 't, Laertes?

**LAERTES**

Why, as a woodcock to mine own springe, Osric. I am justly killed with mine own treachery. [*falls*]

**HAMLET**

How does the queen?

**CLAUDIUS**

330 She swoons to see them bleed.

**GERTRUDE**

No, no, the drink, the drink!—O my dear Hamlet! The drink, the drink! I am poisoned. [*dies*]

**HAMLET**

O villainy! Ho, let the door be locked.

*OSRIC exits*

**HAMLET**

Treachery! Seek it out.

**LAERTES**

335 It is here, Hamlet. Hamlet, thou art slain.  
No medicine in the world can do thee good.  
In thee there is not half an hour of life.  
The treacherous instrument is in thy hand,  
Unbated and envenomed. The foul practice  
340 Hath turned itself on me. Lo, here I lie,  
Never to rise again. Thy mother's poisoned.  
I can no more. The king, the king's to blame.

**HAMLET**

The point envenomed too!—Then, venom, to thy work.

*HAMLET wounds CLAUDIUS.*

**ALL**

Treason! Treason!

**CLAUDIUS**

345 O, yet defend me, friends. I am but hurt.

**HAMLET**

Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damnèd Dane,  
Drink off this potion. Is thy union here?  
Follow my mother.

*HAMLET forces CLAUDIUS to drink. CLAUDIUS dies.*

**LAERTES**

350 He is justly served.  
It is a poison tempered by himself.  
Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet.  
Mine and my father's death come not upon thee,  
Nor thine on me. [*dies*]

**HAMLET**

355 Heaven make thee free of it. I follow thee.—  
I am dead, Horatio. —Wretched queen, adieu!—

**OSRIC**

Hey! Take care of the queen!

**HORATIO**

Both fencers are bleeding.

[*To HAMLET*] How are you, my lord?

**OSRIC**

How are you, Laertes?

**LAERTES**

Why, I'm like a bird caught in my own trap, Osric. [*He collapses*] I've been killed by my own betrayal, as I deserve.

**HAMLET**

How is the queen doing?

**CLAUDIUS**

She fainted at the sight of them bleeding.

**GERTRUDE**

No, no! The drink, the drink! Oh, my dear Hamlet! The drink, the drink! I've been poisoned. [*She dies*]

**HAMLET**

Oh, what evil! Hey, lock the door!

*OSRIC exits.*

**HAMLET**

We've been betrayed! Find the traitor.

**LAERTES**

It's me, Hamlet. Hamlet, you're dead. No medicine in the world can cure you. You don't have more than a half hour left to live. The treacherous weapon is in your hand, sharpened and dipped in poison. The dirty plan backfired on me. And so, here I lie, never to rise again. Your mother's been poisoned. I can't say anymore. The king, the king's to blame.

**HAMLET**

The sword is poisoned! Then, poison, do your job!

*HAMLET wounds CLAUDIUS.*

**ALL**

Treason! Treason!

**CLAUDIUS**

Oh, defend me, my friends. I've only been hurt.

**HAMLET**

Here, you incestuous, murderous, damned Dane! Drink this poisoned wine. Is your pearl in there? Follow my mother.

*HAMLET forces CLAUDIUS to drink from the cup of poisoned wine. CLAUDIUS dies.*

**LAERTES**

He got what he deserved. He made that poison himself.  
Forgive me as I forgive you, noble Hamlet. My death and my father's death are not your fault, and my death is not yours.  
[*He dies*]

**HAMLET**

God frees you from blame. I'll follow you.



You that look pale and tremble at this chance,  
That are but mutes or audience to this act,  
Had I but time (as this fell sergeant, Death,  
Is strict in his arrest), O, I could tell you—  
360 But let it be. —Horatio, I am dead.  
Thou livest. Report me and my cause aright  
To the unsatisfied.

**HORATIO**

Never believe it.  
I am more an antique Roman than a Dane.  
365 Here's yet some liquor left.  
*[lifts the poisoned cup]*

**HAMLET**

As thou'rt a man,  
Give me the cup. Let go! By heaven, I'll have 't.  
*[takes cup from HORATIO]*  
370 O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,  
Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!  
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart  
Absent thee from felicity a while,  
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain  
375 To tell my story.

*A military march plays offstage.*

**HAMLET**

What warlike noise is this?

*OSRIC enters.*

**OSRIC**

Young Fortinbras, with conquest come from Poland,  
To th' ambassadors of England gives  
This warlike volley.

**HAMLET**

380 O, I die, Horatio.  
The potent poison quite o'ercrows my spirit.  
I cannot live to hear the news from England.  
But I do prophesy the election lights  
On Fortinbras. He has my dying voice.  
385 So tell him, with th' occurments, more and less,  
Which have solicited. The rest is silence.  
O, O, O, O. *[dies]*

**HORATIO**

Now cracks a noble heart.—Good night, sweet prince,  
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!—  
390 Why does the drum come hither?

*FORTINBRAS and the English AMBASSADOR enter, with a drummer  
and attendants.*

**FORTINBRAS**

Where is this sight?

**HORATIO**

What is it ye would see?  
If aught of woe or wonder, cease your search.

**FORTINBRAS**

This quarry cries on havoc. O proud death,  
395 What feast is toward in thine eternal cell,  
That thou so many princes at a shot  
So bloodily hast struck?


*[To HORATIO]* I'm dead, Horatio.


*[To GERTRUDE]* Unlucky queen, goodbye.

*[To the others]* You who watch, pale and trembling—a  
speechless audience to this show—if I had just a little time, I  
could tell you things. But this dread officer, Death, allows no  
mercy or extra time. Let it be.

*[To HORATIO]* Horatio, I'm dying. You live on. Tell my story  
and my cause to everyone.

**HORATIO**

Don't believe it. I'm more like an ancient Roman  than a  
Dane. There's still some of this wine. *[He picks up the  
poisoned cup]*

 Horatio implies that he will follow  
an ancient Roman custom by  
committing suicide after a person he  
cares about so deeply dies.

**HAMLET**

On your manhood, give me that cup. Let it go! By heaven,  
give it to me. *[He takes the cup from HORATIO]* Oh God,  
Horatio, what a bad reputation I'm leaving  
behind—because no one knows what happened. If you ever  
loved me, then avoid the sweet relief of death for a while,  
and stay in this harsh world long enough to draw painful  
breaths and tell my story.

*A military march plays offstage.*

**HAMLET**

What are these sounds of war?

*OSRIC enters.*

**OSRIC**

Young Fortinbras returns triumphantly from Poland, and  
fires his cannons to greet the English ambassadors.

**HAMLET**

Oh, I'm dying, Horatio! This powerful poison is too much for  
me. I won't live to hear the news from England. But I predict  
that Fortinbras will win the election for the Danish crown. I  
give him my dying vote. So tell him what has happened  
here. The rest is silence. Oh, oh, oh, oh. *[He dies]*

**HORATIO**

Now a noble heart breaks. Good night, sweet prince. May  
hosts of angels sing you to your sleep. Why are those drums  
coming near?

*FORTINBRAS and the English AMBASSADOR enter, with a  
drummer and attendants.*

**FORTINBRAS**

What am I seeing?

**HORATIO**

What would you like to see? If it's a tragedy or other  
astonishment, you've found it.

**FORTINBRAS**

These corpses suggest a massacre. Oh, proud Death, what  
banquet are you preparing that you've struck down so  
many princes at once?

**AMBASSADOR**

The sight is dismal,  
And our affairs from England come too late.  
400 The ears are senseless that should give us hearing,  
To tell him his commandment is fulfilled,  
That Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead.  
Where should we have our thanks?

**HORATIO**

*[indicates CLAUDIUS]* Not from his mouth,  
405 Had it th' ability of life to thank you.  
He never gave commandment for their death.  
But since so jump upon this bloody question,  
You from the Polack wars, and you from England,  
Are here arrived, give order that these bodies  
410 High on a stage be placèd to the view,  
And let me speak to th' yet-unknowing world  
How these things came about. So shall you hear  
Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,  
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,  
415 Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,  
And, in this upshot, purposes mistook  
Fall'n on th' inventors' heads. All this can I  
Truly deliver.

**FORTINBRAS**

Let us haste to hear it,  
420 And call the noblest to the audience.  
For me, with sorrow I embrace my fortune.  
I have some rights of memory in this kingdom,  
Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me.

**HORATIO**

Of that I shall have also cause to speak,  
425 And from his mouth whose voice will draw on more.  
But let this same be presently performed,  
Even while men's minds are wild, lest more mischance  
On plots and errors happen.

**FORTINBRAS**

Let four captains  
430 Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage,  
For he was likely, had he been put on,  
To have proved most royally. And, for his passage,  
The soldiers' music and the rites of war  
Speak loudly for him.  
435 Take up the bodies. Such a sight as this  
Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss.  
Go, bid the soldiers shoot.

*They exit marching, carrying the bodies, as cannons fire.*

**AMBASSADOR**

This is an awful sight. Our news arrives from England too late. The people who were meant to hear it are all dead. We came to tell the king his orders have been followed: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead. Who will thank us now?

**HORATIO**

*[He points to CLAUDIUS]* Not him, even if he were still alive to thank you. He never ordered their deaths. But since you've arrived to see this bloody scene—you from the war in Poland and you from England—then order that these bodies be displayed on a high platform to be viewed, and let me tell the world how all this happened. You'll hear of violent, bloody, and unnatural acts; accidental revenge; casual murders; deaths caused by trickery and by threat; and plans that backfired on their inventors. All this I will tell you truthfully.

**FORTINBRAS**

Let us hurry to listen to it now, and call in all the noblemen as audience. As for me, I accept my good fortune with sadness. I have some rights to claim the throne of this kingdom, and now I have the chance to make that claim.

**HORATIO**

I also have much to say about that, from the mouth of one who only added to your claim. Let's do this now, even though everyone's minds are racing, to make sure no further mistakes, plots, or errors occur.

**FORTINBRAS**

Let four captains carry Hamlet like a soldier to the viewing platform. If he only had the chance, it's likely he would have been a great king. Military music and military rites shall proclaim his greatness. Lift up the bodies. A sight like this looks right on a battlefield, but here shows that much has gone wrong. Go, tell the soldiers to fire their cannons.

*They all exit marching, carrying the bodies, as cannons fire.*

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