

ACT THREE

SCENE 1

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

CLAUDIUS

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

GUILDENSTERN

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

GERTRUDE

Did he receive you well?

ROSENCRANTZ

Most like a gentleman.

GUILDENSTERN

But with much forcing of his disposition.

ROSENCRANTZ

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

GERTRUDE

Did you assay him?

15 To any pastime?

ROSENCRANTZ

Madam, it so fell out, that certain players
We o'erraught on the way. Of these we told him,
And there did seem in him a kind of joy

ACT THREE

SCENE 1

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

CLAUDIUS

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

GUILDENSTERN

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

GERTRUDE

Did he treat you well when you saw him?

ROSENCRANTZ

Yes, in a very gentlemanly way.

GUILDENSTERN

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

GERTRUDE

Did you try tempting him with some entertainment?

ROSENCRANTZ

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

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

POLONIUS

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

CLAUDIUS

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

ROSENCRANTZ

We shall, my lord.

Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

CLAUDIUS

30 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,
35 We may of their encounter frankly judge,
And gather by him, as he is behaved,
If 't be the affliction of his love or no
That thus he suffers for.

GERTRUDE

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

OPHELIA

Madam, I wish it may.

Exit GERTRUDE

NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

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

POLONIUS

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

CLAUDIUS

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

ROSENCRANTZ

We will, my lord.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.

CLAUDIUS

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

GERTRUDE

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

OPHELIA

I hope so too, Madam.

GERTRUDE exits.

POLONIUS

Ophelia, walk you here. *(to CLAUDIUS)* Gracious, so please you,

45

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

CLAUDIUS

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

POLONIUS

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

CLAUDIUS and POLONIUS withdraw

Enter HAMLET

HAMLET

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

NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

POLONIUS

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

CLAUDIUS

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

POLONIUS

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

CLAUDIUS and POLONIUS hide.

HAMLET enters.

HAMLET

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

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

OPHELIA

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

HAMLET

I humbly thank you. Well, well, well.

OPHELIA

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

HAMLET

No, not I. I never gave you aught.

OPHELIA

100 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,

After all, who would put up with all life's humiliations—the abuse from superiors, the insults of arrogant men, the pangs of unrequited love, the inefficiency of the legal system, the rudeness of people in office, and the mistreatment good people have to take from bad—when you could simply take out your knife and call it quits? Who would choose to grunt and sweat through an exhausting life, unless they were afraid of something dreadful after death, the undiscovered country from which no visitor returns, which we wonder about without getting any answers from and which makes us stick to the evils we know rather than rush off to seek the ones we don't? Fear of death makes us all cowards, and our natural boldness becomes weak with too much thinking. Actions that should be carried out at once get misdirected, and stop being actions at all. But *shh*, here comes the beautiful Ophelia. Pretty lady, please remember me when you pray.

OPHELIA

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

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

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

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

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

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

HAMLET

105 Ha, ha, are you honest?

OPHELIA

My lord?

HAMLET

Are you fair?

OPHELIA

What means your lordship?

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

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

HAMLET

115 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

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

OPHELIA

I was the more deceived.

HAMLET

125 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

perfume is gone now, so take them back. Nice gifts
lose their value when the givers turn out not to be so
nice. There, my lord.

HAMLET

Ha ha, are you good?

OPHELIA

Excuse me?

HAMLET

Are you beautiful?

OPHELIA

My lord, what are you talking about?

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

But could beauty be related to anything better than
goodness?

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

You certainly made me believe you did, my lord.

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

Then I guess I was misled.

HAMLET

*"Nunnery" could
mean either con-
vent or brothel.*

Get yourself to a convent at once. Why would you
want to give birth to more sinners? I'm fairly good
myself, but even so I could accuse myself of such hor-
rible crimes that it would've been better if my mother

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

OPHELIA

At home, my lord.

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

135

O, help him, you sweet heavens!

HAMLET

140

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

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

Exit HAMLET

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ORIGINAL TEXT

had never given birth to me. I am arrogant, vengeful, and ambitious, with more ill will in me than I can fit into my thoughts, and more than I have time to carry it out in. Why should people like me be crawling around between earth and heaven? Every one of us is a criminal. Don't believe any of us. Hurry to a convent. Where's your father?

OPHELIA

He's at home, my lord.

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

Oh, dear God, please help him!

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

Dear God, please make him normal again!

HAMLET

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

HAMLET exits.

MODERN TEXT

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OPHELIA

150 Oh, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!—
 The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword,
 Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state,
 The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
 Th' observed of all observers, quite, quite down!
 155 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
 160 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
 165 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
 170 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
 175 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.

NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

OPHELIA

Oh, how noble his mind used to be, and how lost he is now! He used to have a gentleman's grace, a scholar's wit, and a soldier's strength. He used to be the jewel of our country, the obvious heir to the throne, the one everyone admired and imitated. And now he has fallen so low! And of all the miserable women who once enjoyed hearing his sweet, seductive words, I am the most miserable. A mind that used to sing so sweetly is now completely out of tune, making harsh sounds instead of fine notes. The unparalleled appearance and nobility he had in the full bloom of his youth has been ruined by madness. O, how miserable I am to see Hamlet now and know what he was before!

CLAUDIUS and POLONIUS come forward.

CLAUDIUS

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

POLONIUS

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

180

We heard it all.—My lord, do as you please.
But, if you hold it fit, after the play
Let his queen mother all alone entreat him
To show his grief. Let her be round with him,
And I'll be placed, so please you, in the ear
185 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.

Exeunt

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ORIGINAL TEXT

ACT 3, SCENE 1

NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

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

CLAUDIUS

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

They all exit.

MODERN TEXT

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ACT 3, SCENE 2

Enter HAMLET and PLAYERS

HAMLET

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

15 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,
20 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
25 censure of the which one must in your allowance o'erweigh
a whole theatre of others.

NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

ACT 3, SCENE 2

HAMLET and the PLAYERS enter.

HAMLET

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

FIRST PLAYER

I will, sir.

HAMLET

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

30 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

35 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
40 considered. That's villainous, and shows a most pitiful
ambition in the fool that uses it. Go, make you ready.

*Exeunt PLAYERS**Enter POLONIUS, ROSENCRANTZ, and GUILDENSTERN*

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

POLONIUS

And the queen too, and that presently.

HAMLET

Bid the players make haste.

Exit POLONIUS

45 Will you two help to hasten them?

ROSENCRANTZ

Ay, my lord.

Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

HAMLET

What ho, Horatio!

*Enter HORATIO***NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE**

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

FIRST PLAYER

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

HAMLET

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

*The PLAYERS exit.**POLONIUS, GUILDENSTERN, and ROSENCRANTZ enter.*

So, my lord, will the king be attending the perfor-
mance?

POLONIUS

Yes, he will, and the queen as well.

HAMLET

Tell the actors to hurry.

POLONIUS exits.

Will you two help them get ready?

ROSENCRANTZ

Yes, my lord.

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.

HAMLET

Well, hello there, Horatio!

HORATIO enters.

HORATIO

Here, sweet lord, at your service.

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

O my dear lord—

HAMLET

Nay, do not think I flatter.

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

HORATIO

Here I am at your service, my dear lord.

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

Oh, sir—

HAMLET

Don't think I'm flattering you. What could I hope to get from you, who've got nothing but your charm to support you in life? Why would anyone flatter a poor person? No, keep flattery for kissing the hands of those who can pay well. You understand? Ever since I've been a free agent in my choice of friends, I've chosen you because you take everything life hands you with calm acceptance, grateful for both good and bad. Blessed are those who mix emotion with reason in just the right proportion, making them strong enough to resist the whims of Lady Luck. Show me the person who's master of his emotions, and I'll put him close to my heart—in my heart of hearts—as I do you. But I'm talking too much. The point is, there's a play being performed for the king tonight. One of the scenes comes very close to depicting the circumstances of my father's death, as I described them to you. Watch my uncle carefully when that scene begins. If his guilty secret does not reveal itself, then that ghost was just a devil, and my hunch wasn't, in fact, worth anything.

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

*Danish march. Sound a flourish. Enter King CLAUDIUS,
Queen GERTRUDE, POLONIUS, OPHELIA, ROSENCRANTZ,
GUILDENSTERN, and other lords attendant with CLAUDIUS's
guard carrying torches*

HAMLET

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

CLAUDIUS

How fares our cousin Hamlet?

HAMLET

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

CLAUDIUS

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

HAMLET

No, nor mine now. (To POLONIUS) My lord, you played once
i' th' university, you say?

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

What did you enact?

POLONIUS

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

NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

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

HORATIO

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

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

HAMLET

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

CLAUDIUS

So how's my nephew Hamlet doing?

HAMLET

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

CLAUDIUS

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

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

What role did you play?

POLONIUS

I played Julius Caesar. I was killed in the Capitol. Bru-
tus killed me.

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

Ay, my lord. They stay upon your patience.

GERTRUDE

Come hither, my dear Hamlet, sit by me.

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

OPHELIA

No, my lord.

HAMLET

I mean, my head upon your lap?

OPHELIA

105 Ay, my lord.

HAMLET

Do you think I meant country matters?

OPHELIA

I think nothing, my lord.

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

What is, my lord?

HAMLET

110 Nothing.

OPHELIA

You are merry, my lord.

HAMLET

Who, I?

OPHELIA

Ay, my lord.

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

GERTRUDE

Come here, my dear Hamlet. Sit by me.

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

(*to CLAUDIUS*) Hey, did you notice that?

HAMLET

My lady, should I lie in your lap?

OPHELIA

No, my lord.

HAMLET

I mean, with my head in your lap?

OPHELIA

Yes, my lord.

HAMLET

Did you think I was talking about sex?

OPHELIA

I think nothing, my lord.

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

What is, my lord?

HAMLET

Nothing.

OPHELIA

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

HAMLET

Who, me?

OPHELIA

Yes, my lord.

← In Shakespeare's time, "nothing" (or "O") was slang for the vagina.

HAMLET

115 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

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

Trumpets sound. The dumb show begins

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

Exeunt PLAYERS

OPHELIA

125 What means this, my lord?

HAMLET

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

NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

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

HAMLET

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

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

The PLAYERS exit.

OPHELIA

What does this mean, my lord?

HAMLET

This means we're having some mischievous fun.

OPHELIA

Belike this show imports the argument of the play.

Enter PROLOGUE

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

130 Will he tell us what this show meant?

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

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

PROLOGUE

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

Exit PROLOGUE

HAMLET

Is this a prologue or the posy of a ring?

OPHELIA

'Tis brief, my lord.

HAMLET

As woman's love.

Enter PLAYER KING and PLAYER QUEEN

NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

OPHELIA

This pantomime was probably a summary of the play.

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

HAMLET

This guy will tell us everything. Actors can't keep a secret. They'll tell all.

OPHELIA

Will he tell us what that pantomime meant?

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

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

PROLOGUE

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

The PROLOGUE exits.

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

It was a bit short, my lord.

HAMLET

Yes, as short as a woman's love.

Actors playing the roles of KING and QUEEN enter.

PLAYER KING

140 Full thirty times hath Phoebus' cart gone round
 Neptune's salt wash and Tellus' orbèd ground,
 And thirty dozen moons with borrowed sheen
 About the world have times twelve thirties been,
 Since love our hearts and Hymen did our hands
 145 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,
 So far from cheer and from your former state,
 150 That I distrust you. Yet though I distrust,
 Discomfort you, my lord, it nothing must.
 For women fear too much, even as they love,
 And women's fear and love hold quantity,
 In neither aught, or in extremity.
 155 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

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

PLAYER QUEEN

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

HAMLET

(aside) Wormwood, wormwood.

NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

PLAYER KING

It's been a full thirty years since we were married.

PLAYER QUEEN

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

PLAYER KING

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

PLAYER QUEEN

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

HAMLET

(to himself) Harsh!

PLAYER QUEEN

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

PLAYER KING

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

NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

PLAYER QUEEN

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

PLAYER KING

I know that's what you think now, but people change
their minds. Often our intentions are strong at first, but
as time goes on they weaken, just like an apple sticks to
the tree when it is unripe but falls to the ground once it
ripens. The promises we make to ourselves in emotional
moments lose their power once the emotion passes. Great
grief and joy may rouse us to action, but when the grief
or joy have passed, we're no longer motivated to act. Joy
turns to grief in the blink of an eye, and grief becomes joy
just as quickly. This world is not made for either one to
last long in, and it's no surprise that even our loves
change along with our luck. It's still a mystery to be
solved whether luck controls love, or love controls luck.
When a great man has a run of bad luck, watch how fol-
lowers desert him, and when a poor man advances to an
important position, he makes friends with the people he
used to hate. Love is unreliable. A person with lots of
money will always have friends, while one fallen on hard
times makes an enemy of any friend he turns to for money.
But back to my original point—what we want and what
we get are always at odds. We can have our little dreams,
but the fates decide our futures. You think now you'll
never remarry, but that thought will die with me, your
first husband.

PLAYER QUEEN

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

HAMLET

210 If she should break it now!

PLAYER KING

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

The PLAYER KING sleeps

PLAYER QUEEN

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

Exit PLAYER QUEEN

HAMLET

215 Madam, how like you this play?

GERTRUDE

The lady protests too much, methinks.

HAMLET

Oh, but she'll keep her word.

CLAUDIUS

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

HAMLET

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

CLAUDIUS

What do you call the play?

NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

PLAYER QUEEN

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

HAMLET

Nice vow, but what if she breaks it?

PLAYER KING

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

The PLAYER KING sleeps.

PLAYER QUEEN

Sleep tight, and may nothing come between us.

The PLAYER QUEEN exits.

HAMLET

Madam, how are you liking this play?

GERTRUDE

The lady's overdoing it, I think.

HAMLET

Oh, but she'll keep her word.

CLAUDIUS

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

HAMLET

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

CLAUDIUS

What's the play called?

HAMLET

225 *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.

Enter LUCIANUS

This is one Lucianus, nephew to the king.

OPHELIA

You are as good as a chorus, my lord.

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

You are keen, my lord, you are keen.

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

Still better and worse.

HAMLET

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

LUCIANUS

240 *Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit, and time agreeing,
Confederate season, else no creature seeing,
Thou mixture rank, of midnight weeds collected,
With Hecate's ban thrice blasted, thrice infected,*

HAMLET

The Mousetrap. Why on earth is it called that, you ask? It's a metaphor. This play is about a murder committed in Vienna. Gonzago is the duke's name, and his wife is Baptista. You'll see soon enough. It's a piece of garbage, but who cares? You and I have free souls, so it doesn't concern us. Let the guilty wince. We can watch without being bothered.

LUCIANUS enters.

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

OPHELIA

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

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

Ooh, you're sharp.

HAMLET

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

OPHELIA

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

HAMLET

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

LUCIANUS

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

*Thy natural magic and dire property
On wholesome life usurp immediately.
(pours poison into PLAYER KING's ears)*

HAMLET

245

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

250

How fares my lord?

POLONIUS

Give o'er the play.

CLAUDIUS

Give me some light, away!

POLONIUS

Lights, lights, lights!

Commotion. Exeunt all but HAMLET and HORATIO

HAMLET

255

*Why, let the stricken deer go weep,
The hart ungalled play.
For some must watch while some must sleep.
So runs the world away.*

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

260

HORATIO

Half a share.

HAMLET

A whole one, I.

NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

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

HAMLET

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

CLAUDIUS stands up.

OPHELIA

The king is getting up.

HAMLET

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

GERTRUDE

My lord, how are you feeling?

POLONIUS

Stop the play.

CLAUDIUS

Turn on the lights. Get me out of here!

POLONIUS

Lights, lights, get us some lights!

Everyone except HAMLET and HORATIO exits.

HAMLET

*Let the deer that's been shot go off and weep,
While the unharmed deer happily plays.
For some must watch while other must sleep,
That's how the world goes.*

Couldn't I get work as an actor (if I hit a run of bad luck) in some acting company, and wear flowers on my shoes?

HORATIO

They might even give you half a share of the company.

HAMLET

No, a whole share for me.

265

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

HORATIO

You might have rhymed.

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

270 Very well; my lord.

HAMLET

Upon the talk of the poisoning?

HORATIO

I did very well note him.

HAMLET

Ah ha! Come, some music! Come, the recorders!

For if the king like not the comedy,

275 *Why then, belike, he likes it not, perdy.*

Come, some music!

Enter ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

GUILDENSTERN

Good my lord, vouchsafe me a word with you.

HAMLET

Sir, a whole history.

GUILDENSTERN

The king, sir—

HAMLET

280 Ay, sir, what of him?

GUILDENSTERN

Is in his retirement marvelous distempered.

NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

*For you know, my dearest Damon,
That Jove, king of the gods, was
Thrown out of power here, and
Who's in charge? A big—peacock.*

HORATIO

*The obvious rhyme
is "ass."*

You could have at least rhymed.

HAMLET

Oh, Horatio, I'll bet you a thousand bucks the ghost was right. Did you notice?

HORATIO

Yes, I did, my lord.

HAMLET

When the actors were talking about poison?

HORATIO

I watched him very closely.

HAMLET

Ah ha! Hey, let's have some music here! Play your flutes!

For if the king doesn't like the play,

Then he doesn't like it, we may say.

Come on, music!

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter.

GUILDENSTERN

My lord, could I have a word with you?

HAMLET

You can have a whole story, not just a word.

GUILDENSTERN

Sir, the king—

HAMLET

Yes, what about him?

GUILDENSTERN

He's in his chambers now, and he's extremely upset.

HAMLET

With drink, sir?

GUILDENSTERN

No, my lord, with choler.

HAMLET

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

GUILDENSTERN

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

HAMLET

I am tame, sir. Pronounce.

GUILDENSTERN

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

HAMLET

You are welcome.

GUILDENSTERN

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

HAMLET

Sir, I cannot.

GUILDENSTERN

What, my lord?

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

What, an upset stomach from too much booze?

GUILDENSTERN

No, sir, he's angry.

HAMLET

You should be smart enough to tell this to a doctor, not me, since if I treated him, he'd just get angrier.

GUILDENSTERN

My lord, please try to stick to the subject at hand.

HAMLET

I'll be good, sir. Go ahead.

GUILDENSTERN

The queen your mother is upset, and sent me to see you.

HAMLET

It's lovely to see you.

GUILDENSTERN

No, my lord, your polite words are not to the point. If you could please stop fooling around, I'll tell you what your mother wants. If not, I'll leave you alone and that'll be the end of my business.

HAMLET

Sir, I can't.

GUILDENSTERN

Can't what, my lord?

HAMLET

Stop fooling around. My mind is confused. But I'll do my best to give you a straight answer, as you wish—or rather, as my mother wishes. Okay, to the point. My mother, you say . . . ?

ROSENCRANTZ

She says that your behavior has astonished her.

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

310 My lord, you once did love me.

HAMLET

And do still, by these pickers and stealers.

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

315 Sir, I lack advancement.

ROSENCRANTZ

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

Reenter the PLAYERS with recorders

HAMLET

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

(aside to ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN)

320 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.

NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

HAMLET

Oh, what a wonderful son, I can impress my mother!
But what's the upshot of her admiration? Do tell.

ROSENCRANTZ

She wants to have a word with you in her bedroom
before you go to bed.

HAMLET

I'd obey even if she were my mother ten times over. Is
there anything else I can do for you?

ROSENCRANTZ

My lord, you used to like me.

HAMLET

And still do, I swear by my hands.

ROSENCRANTZ

My lord, what's wrong with you? You're not doing
yourself any good by refusing to tell your friends
what's bothering you.

HAMLET

Sir, I have no future ahead of me.

ROSENCRANTZ

But how can you say that, when the king himself says
you're the heir to the Danish throne?

*A recorder is a
wind instrument
that sounds like
a flute*

→ *The PLAYERS enter with recorders.*

HAMLET

*The rest of the
proverb goes,
"... the horse
starves."*

Yes, eventually, but as the proverb goes, "While the
grass grows ..." But that's a tired old proverb. Oh, the
recorders! Let me see one. (he takes a recorder and
turns to GUILDENSTERN) Why are you hovering so
close, as if you want to ambush me?

GUILDENSTERN

Oh, my lord, I'm sorry if I'm forgetting my manners.
It's just that I'm worried about you.

HAMLET

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

GUILDENSTERN

325 My lord, I cannot.

HAMLET

I pray you.

GUILDENSTERN

Believe me, I cannot.

HAMLET

I do beseech you.

GUILDENSTERN

I know no touch of it, my lord.

HAMLET

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

GUILDENSTERN

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

HAMLET

340 Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me. You would seem to know my stops. You would pluck out the heart of my mystery. You would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass. And there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ, yet cannot you make it speak? 'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, yet you cannot play upon me.

ORIGINAL TEXT

HAMLET

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

GUILDENSTERN

I can't, my lord.

HAMLET

Please.

GUILDENSTERN

I'm serious, I can't.

HAMLET

I'm begging you.

GUILDENSTERN

I have no idea how.

HAMLET

Oh, it's as easy as lying. Just put your fingers and thumb over the holes and blow into it, and it'll produce the most moving music. Here, the holes are here.

GUILDENSTERN

But I can't play a melody. I don't know how.

HAMLET

Well, look how you play me—as if you knew exactly where to put your fingers, to blow the mystery out of me, playing all the octaves of my range—and yet you can't even produce music from this little instrument? My God, do you think I'm easier to manipulate than a pipe? You can push my buttons, but you can't play me for a fool.

MODERN TEXT

Enter POLONIUS

345 God bless you, sir.

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

Methinks it is like a weasel.

POLONIUS

350 It is backed like a weasel.

HAMLET

Or like a whale.

POLONIUS

Very like a whale.

HAMLET

Then I will come to my mother by and by. (*aside*) They fool me to the top of my bent.—I will come by and by.

POLONIUS

360 I will say so.

HAMLET

"By and by" is easily said.

Exit POLONIUS

Leave me, friends.

Exeunt all but HAMLET

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

NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

POLONIUS enters.

Hello and God bless you, sir.

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

Do you see that cloud up there that looks like a camel?

POLONIUS

By God, it does look like a camel.

HAMLET

To me it looks like a weasel.

POLONIUS

It does have a back like a weasel's.

HAMLET

Or like a whale.

POLONIUS

Yes, very much like a whale.

HAMLET

I'll go see my mother soon. (*to himself*) They're trying as hard as they can to mess with me.—I will go soon.

POLONIUS

I'll tell her.

HAMLET

It's easy enough to say "soon."

POLONIUS exits.

Now please leave me alone, my friends.

Everyone except HAMLET exits.

This is the time of night when witches come out, when graveyards yawn open and the stench of hell seeps out. I could drink hot blood and do such terrible deeds that people would tremble even in the daylight. But I've got to go see my mother.—Oh, heart, don't grow weak, like Nero. Let me be cruel, but not inhuman.

Nero was a Roman emperor known for his extreme cruelty.

I will speak daggers to her but use none.
My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites.
How in my words somever she be shent,
To give them seals never, my soul, consent!

Exit

NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

I'll speak as sharp as a dagger to her, but I won't use
one on her. And so, my words and thoughts will be at
odds.

HAMLET exits.

ACT 3, SCENE 3

Enter CLAUDIUS, ROSENCRANTZ, and GUILDENSTERN

CLAUDIUS

I like him not, nor stands it safe with us
 To let his madness range. Therefore prepare you.
 I your commission will forthwith dispatch,
 And he to England shall along with you.
 5 The terms of our estate may not endure
 Hazard so dangerous as doth hourly grow
 Out of his lunacies.

GUILDENSTERN

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

CLAUDIUS

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

NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

ACT 3, SCENE 3

CLAUDIUS, ROSENCRANTZ, and GUILDENSTERN enter.

CLAUDIUS

I don't like the way he's acting, and it's not safe for me
 to let his insanity get out of control. So get prepared.
 I'm sending you to England on diplomatic business,
 and Hamlet will go with you. As king, I cannot risk the
 danger he represents as he grows crazier by the hour.

GUILDENSTERN

We'll take care of it. It's a sacred duty to protect the
 lives of all those who depend on Your Highness.

ROSENCRANTZ

Everyone tries to avoid harm, but the public figure
 demands even more protection. When a great leader
 dies he doesn't die alone but, like a whirlpool, draws
 others with him. He's like a huge wheel on the top of
 the highest mountain whose spokes touch the rim of
 ten thousand smaller things—when it falls down the
 mountain, every little object goes down with it.
 Whenever a king sighs, everyone groans.

CLAUDIUS

Prepare yourself, please, for this trip. We'll put a leash
 on this danger that's now running wild.

ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN

We will haste us.

*Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN**Enter POLONIUS*

POLONIUS

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

CLAUDIUS

Thanks, dear my lord.

Exit POLONIUS

Oh, my offence is rank. It smells to heaven.
 It hath the primal eldest curse upon 't,
 A brother's murder. Pray can I not.
 Though inclination be as sharp as will,
 My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,
 And, like a man to double business bound,
 I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
 And both neglect. What if this 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
 But to confront the visage of offence?
 And what's in prayer but this twofold force,
 To be forestall'd ere we come to fall
 Or pardoned being down? Then I'll look up.
 My fault is past. But oh, what form of prayer
 Can serve my turn, "Forgive me my foul murder"?

NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN

We'll 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 hear what they say. I bet
 she'll chew him out. And as you said (and you said it
 wisely), it's good to have someone other than a mother
 listening in on them, since she can be too partial to
 him. Goodbye, my lord. I'll stop by before you go to
 bed, and tell you what I've heard.

CLAUDIUS

Thanks, my dear lord.

POLONIUS exits.

Oh, my crime is so rotten it stinks all the way to
 heaven. It has the mark of Cain on it, a brother's mur-
 der. I can't pray, though I want to desperately. My
 guilt is stronger even than my intentions. And like a
 person with two opposite things to do at once, I stand
 paralyzed and neglect them both. So what if this
 cursed hand of mine is coated with my brother's
 blood? Isn't there enough rain in heaven to wash it
 clean as snow? Isn't that what God's mercy is for? And
 doesn't prayer serve these two purposes—to keep us
 from sinning and to bring us forgiveness when we
 have sinned? So I'll pray. I've already committed my
 sin. But, oh, what kind of prayer is there for me? "Dear
 Lord, forgive me for my horrible murder"?

→
 In the Bible, Cain
 was the first
 murderer, killing
 his brother in
 Genesis 4:10-12.

55 That cannot be, since I am still possessed
Of those effects for which I did the murder:
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
May one be pardoned and retain th' offense?
In the corrupted currents of this world
60 Offense's gilded hand may shove by justice,
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law. But 'tis not so above.
There is no shuffling. There the action lies
In his true nature, and we ourselves compelled,
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
65 To give in evidence. What then? What rests?
Try what repentance can. What can it not?
Yet what can it when one can not repent?
O wretched state! O bosom black as death!
O limed soul that, struggling to be free,
70 Art more engaged! Help, angels. Make assay.
Bow, stubborn knees, and, heart with strings of steel,
Be soft as sinews of the newborn babe.
All may be well. (*kneels*)

Enter HAMLET

HAMLET

75 Now might I do it pat. Now he is a-praying.
And now I'll do 't. And so he goes to heaven.
And so am I revenged.—That would be scanned.
A villain kills my father, and, for that,
I, his sole son, do this same villain send
To heaven.
80 Oh, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
He took my father grossly, full of bread,
With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May.
And how his audit stands who knows save heaven?
But in our circumstance and course of thought
85 'Tis heavy with him. And am I then revenged

That won't work, since I'm still reaping the rewards of that murder: my crown and my queen. Can a person be forgiven and still keep the fruits of his crime? In this wicked world, criminals often take the money they stole and use it to buy off the law, shoving justice aside. But not in heaven. Up there, every action is judged for exactly what it's worth, and we're forced to confront our crimes. So what can I do? What is there left to do? Offer whatever repentance I can—that couldn't hurt. But it can't help either! Oh, what a lousy situation I'm in. My heart's as black as death. My soul is stuck to sin, and the more it struggles to break free, the more it sticks. Help me, angels! C'mon, make an effort. Bend, stubborn knees. Steely heart, be soft as a newborn babe, so I can pray. Perhaps everything will turn out okay after all. (*he kneels*)

HAMLET enters.

HAMLET

I could do it easily now. He's praying now. And now I'll do it. (*he draws out his sword*) And there he goes, off to heaven. And that's my revenge. I'd better think about this more carefully. A villain kills my father, and I, my father's only son, send this same villain to heaven. Seems like I just did him a favor. He killed my father when my father was enjoying life, with all his sins in full bloom, before my father could repent for any of them. Only God knows how many sins my father has to pay for. As for me, I don't think his prospects look so good.

To take him in the purging of his soul
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,
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

This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.

Exit HAMLET

CLAUDIUS

(rises) My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.

Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

Exit

ORIGINAL TEXT

NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

So is it really revenge for me if I kill Claudius right when he is confessing his sins, in perfect condition for a trip to heaven? No. Away, sword, and wait for a better moment to kill him. *(he puts his sword away)* When he's sleeping off some drunken orgy, or having incestuous sex, or swearing while he gambles, or committing some other act that has no goodness about it—that's when I'll trip him up and send him to hell with his heels kicking up at heaven. My mother's waiting. The king's trying to cure himself with prayer, but all he's doing is keeping himself alive a little longer.

HAMLET exits.

CLAUDIUS

(rising) My words fly up toward heaven, but my thoughts stay down here on earth. Words without thoughts behind them will never make it to heaven.

CLAUDIUS exits.

MODERN TEXT

ACT 3, SCENE 4

Enter GERTRUDE and POLONIUS

POLONIUS

He will come straight. Look you lay home to him.
 Tell him his pranks have been too broad to bear with,
 And that your grace hath screened and stood between
 Much heat and him. I'll silence me even here.
 5 Pray you, be round with him.

HAMLET

(within) Mother, mother, mother!

GERTRUDE

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

POLONIUS hides behind the arras

Enter HAMLET

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

What's the matter now?

GERTRUDE

15 Have you forgot me?

ACT 3, SCENE 4

GERTRUDE and POLONIUS enter.

POLONIUS

He'll come right away. Make sure you lay into him.
 Tell him his pranks have caused too much trouble,
 and that Your Highness has taken a lot of heat for
 them. I'll be right here, silent. Please be blunt with
 him.

HAMLET

(offstage) Mother, mother, mother!

GERTRUDE

Don't worry, I'll do what you say. Now hide; I hear
 him coming.

POLONIUS hides behind the tapestry.

HAMLET enters.

HAMLET

Now mother, what's this all about?

GERTRUDE

Hamlet, you've insulted your father.

HAMLET

Mother, you've insulted my father.

GERTRUDE

Come on, you're answering me foolishly.

HAMLET

Go on, you're questioning me evilly.

GERTRUDE

Hamlet, what, why?

HAMLET

What's the problem now?

GERTRUDE

Have you forgotten who I am?

HAMLET

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

GERTRUDE

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

HAMLET

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

GERTRUDE

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

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

How now, a rat? Dead for a ducat, dead!
(stabs his sword through the arras and kills POLONIUS)

POLONIUS

(from behind the arras) Oh, I am slain.

GERTRUDE

O me, what hast thou done?

HAMLET

Nay, I know not. Is it the king?

GERTRUDE

Oh, what a rash and bloody deed is this!

HAMLET

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

GERTRUDE

As kill a king?

HAMLET

Ay, lady, 'twas my word.
(draws back the arras and discovers POLONIUS)

HAMLET

For God's sake no, I haven't. You are the queen, your husband's brother's wife, and you are my mother, though I wish you weren't.

GERTRUDE

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

HAMLET

No, sit down. You won't budge until I hold a mirror up to you, where you will see what's deep inside you.

GERTRUDE

What are you going to do? You won't kill me, will you? Help!

POLONIUS

(from behind the tapestry) Hey! Help, help, help!

HAMLET

What's this, a rat? I'll bet a buck he's a dead rat now.
(he stabs his sword through the tapestry and kills POLONIUS)

POLONIUS

(from behind the tapestry) Oh, I've been killed!

GERTRUDE

Oh my God, what have you done?

HAMLET

I don't know. Is it the king?

GERTRUDE

Oh, what a senseless, horrible act!

HAMLET

A horrible act—almost as bad, my good mother, as killing a king and marrying his brother.

GERTRUDE

Killing a king?

HAMLET

That's what I said, my good woman.
(he pulls back the tapestry and discovers POLONIUS)

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.
 35 (to GERTRUDE) Leave wringing of your hands. Peace. Sit you
 down

And let me wring your heart. For so I shall
 If it be made of penetrable stuff,
 If damnèd custom have not brassed it so
 That it is proof and bulwark against sense.

GERTRUDE

40 What have I done, that thou dar'est wag thy tongue
 In noise so rude against me?

HAMLET

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

GERTRUDE

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

HAMLET

Look here upon this picture and on this,
 55 The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.
 See, what a grace was seated on this brow?
 Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,
 An eye like Mars to threaten and command,
 A station like the herald Mercury
 60 New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill—

You low-life, nosy, busybody fool, goodbye. I thought
 you were somebody more important. You've gotten
 what you deserve. I guess you found out it's danger-
 ous to be a busybody. (to GERTRUDE) Stop wringing
 your hands. Sit down and let me wring your heart
 instead, which I will do if it's still soft enough, if your
 evil lifestyle has not toughened it against feeling any-
 thing at all.

GERTRUDE

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

HAMLET

A deed that destroys modesty, turns virtue into
 hypocrisy, replaces the blossom on the face of true
 love with a nasty blemish, makes marriage vows as
 false as a gambler's oath—oh, you've done a deed that
 plucks the soul out of marriage and turns religion into
 meaningless blather. Heaven looks down on this
 earth, as angry as if Judgment Day were here, and is
 sick at the thought of what you've done.

GERTRUDE

C'mon, what's this deed that sounds so awful even
 before I know what it is?

HAMLET

Look at this picture here, and that one there, the
 painted images of two brothers. Look how kind and
 gentlemanly this one is, with his curly hair and his
 forehead like a Greek god. His eye could command
 like the god of war. His body is as agile as Mercury just
 landing on a high hill.

→ Hamlet may be
 referring to
 miniatures they
 wear around
 their necks, or
 to pictures on
 the wall.

A combination and a form indeed
 Where every god did seem to set his seal
 To give the world assurance of a man.
 This was your husband. Look you now, what follows.
 65 Here is your husband, like a mildewed ear
 Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?
 Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed
 And batten on this moor? Ha, have you eyes?
 You cannot call it love, for at your age
 70 The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble,
 And waits upon the judgment. And what judgment
 Would step from this to this? Sense sure you have,
 Else could you not have motion. But sure that sense
 Is apoplexed, for madness would not err,
 75 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
 That thus hath cozened you at hoodman-blind?
 Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,
 80 Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all,
 Or but a sickly part of one true sense
 Could not so mope. O shame, where is thy blush?
 Rebellious hell,
 If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,
 85 To flaming youth let virtue be as wax
 And melt in her own fire. Proclaim no shame
 When the compulsive ardor gives the charge,
 Since frost itself as actively doth burn,
 And reason panders will.

GERTRUDE

O Hamlet, speak no more!

90 Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul,
 And there I see such black and grain'd spots
 As will not leave their tinct.

A figure and a combination of good qualities that
 seemed like every god had set his stamp on this man.
 That was your husband. Now look at this other one.
 Here is your present husband, like a mildewed ear of
 corn infecting the healthy one next to it. Do you have
 eyes? How could you leave the lofty heights of this
 man here and descend as low as this one? Ha! Do you
 have eyes? You cannot say you did it out of love, since
 at your age romantic passions have grown weak, and
 the heart obeys reason. But what reason could move
 you from this one to that one? You must have some
 sense in your head, since you're able to get around, but
 it seems to be paralyzed, since even if you were crazy
 you would know the difference between these two
 men. No one ever went so insane that they couldn't
 get an easy choice like this one right. What devil was
 it that blindfolded you? Eyes without feeling, feeling
 without sight, ears without hands or eyes, smell with-
 out anything else, the use of even one impaired sense
 would not permit such a mistake as yours. Oh, for
 shame, why aren't you blushing? If evil can overtake
 even an old mother's bones, then let it melt my own. It
 turns out it's no longer shameful to act on impulse—
 now that the old are doing so, and now that reason is
 a servant to desire.

GERTRUDE

Oh, Hamlet, stop! You're making me look into my
 very soul, where the marks of sin are so thick and black
 they will never be washed away.

HAMLET

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

GERTRUDE

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

HAMLET

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

GERTRUDE

No more!

HAMLET

A king of shreds and patches—

Enter GHOST

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

GERTRUDE

Alas, he's mad!

HAMLET

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

GHOST

Do not forget. This visitation
Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose.
But look, amazement on thy mother sits.

HAMLET

Yes, and you lie in the sweaty stench of your dirty
sheets, wet with corruption, making love—

GERTRUDE

Oh, you must stop! Your words are like daggers.
Please, no more, sweet Hamlet.

HAMLET

A murderer and a villain, a low-life who's not worth a
twentieth of a tenth of your first husband—the worst
of kings, a thief of the throne, who took the precious
crown from a shelf and put it in his pocket—

GERTRUDE

Stop!

HAMLET

A ragtag king—

The GHOST enters.

Oh, angels in heaven, protect me with your wings!—
What can I do for you, my gracious lord?

GERTRUDE

Oh no! Hamlet's gone completely crazy.

HAMLET

Have you come to scold your tardy son for straying
from his mission, letting your important command
slip by? Tell me!

GHOST

Don't forget. I've come to sharpen your somewhat
dull appetite for revenge. But look, your mother is in
shock.

115 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

Alas, how is 't with you,

That you do bend your eye on vacancy
And with th' incorporal air do hold discourse?
120 Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep,
And, as the sleeping soldiers in th' alarm,
Your bedded hair, like life in excrements,
Starts up and stands on end. O gentle son,
Upon the heat and flame of thy distemper
125 Sprinkle cool patience. Whereon do you look?

HAMLET

On him, on him! Look you, how pale he glares!
His form and cause conjoined, preaching to stones,
Would make them capable.
(to GHOST) Do not look upon me,
130 Lest with this piteous action you convert
My stern effects. Then what I have to do
Will want true color—tears perchance for blood.

GERTRUDE

To whom do you speak this?

HAMLET

Do you see nothing there?

GERTRUDE

Nothing at all, yet all that is I see.

HAMLET

135 Nor did you nothing hear?

GERTRUDE

No, nothing but ourselves.

HAMLET

Why, look you there! Look how it steals away—
My father, in his habit as he lived—

Oh, keep her struggling soul from being overwhelmed by horrid visions. The imagination works strongest in those with the weakest bodies. Talk to her, Hamlet.

HAMLET

How are you doing, madam?

GERTRUDE

And how are you doing, staring into the empty air and talking to nobody? Your eyes give away your wild thoughts, and your hair is standing upright, like soldiers during a call to arms. Oh my dear son, calm yourself and cool off your overheated mind! What are you staring at?

HAMLET

At him, at him! Look how pale he is and how he glares at me. Preaching even at stones, he could get them to act. (to the GHOST) Don't look at me like that, unless you want me to cry instead of kill.

GERTRUDE

Who are you talking to?

HAMLET

You don't see anything?

GERTRUDE

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

HAMLET

And you don't hear anything?

GERTRUDE

No, nothing but us talking.

HAMLET

Look, look how it's sneaking away! My father, dressed just like he was when he was alive!

Look where he goes, even now, out at the portal!

Exit GHOST

GERTRUDE

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

HAMLET

Ecstasy?

My pulse as yours doth temperately keep time
And makes as healthful music. It is not madness
That I have uttered. Bring me to the test,
145 And I the matter will reword, which madness
Would gambol from. Mother, for love of grace,
Lay not that flattering unction to your soul
That not your trespass but my madness speaks.
It will but skin and film the ulcerous place
150 Whilst rank corruption, mining all within,
Infects unseen. Confess yourself to heaven.
Repent what's past. Avoid what is to come.
And do not spread the compost on the weeds
To make them ranker. Forgive me this my virtue,
155 For in the fatness of these pursy times
Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg,
Yea, curb and woo for leave to do him good.

GERTRUDE

O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain.

HAMLET

Oh, throw away the worser part of it,
160 And live the purer with the other half.
Good night—but go not to mine uncle's bed.
Assume a virtue if you have it not.
That monster, custom, who all sense doth eat,
Of habits devil, is angel yet in this:
165 That to the use of actions fair and good
He likewise gives a frock or livery
That aptly is put on. Refrain tonight,

NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

Look, he's going out the door right now!

The GHOST exits.

GERTRUDE

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

HAMLET

Madness? My heart beats just as evenly as yours does.
There's nothing crazy in what I've just uttered. Put
me to the test. I'll rephrase everything I've just said,
which a lunatic couldn't do. Mother, for the love of
God, don't flatter yourself into believing that it's my
madness, not your crime, that's the problem. You'd
just be concealing the rot that's eating you from the
inside. Confess your sins to heaven. Repent and avoid
damnation. Don't spread manure over the weeds in
your heart; it'll only make them more filthy. Forgive
me my good intentions here since in these fat and
spoiled times, virtuous people have to say, "Beg your
pardon" to vile ones and beg for the chance to do any
good.

GERTRUDE

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

HAMLET

Then throw away the worse half, and live a purer life
with the other! Good night to you. But don't go to my
uncle's bed tonight. At least pretend to be virtuous,
even if you're not. Habit is a terrible thing, in that it's
easy to get used to doing evil without feeling bad
about it. But it's also a good thing, in that being good
can also become a habit.

And that shall lend a kind of easiness
 To the next abstinence, the next more easy.
 For use almost can change the stamp of nature,
 And either rein the devil or throw him out
 With wondrous potency. Once more, good night,
 And when you are desirous to be blessed,
 I'll blessing beg of you. (*points to POLONIUS*)
 For this same lord,
 I do repent. But heaven hath pleased it so,
 To punish me with this and this with me,
 That I must be their scourge and minister.
 I will bestow him and will answer well
 The death I gave him. So, again, good night.
 I must be cruel only to be kind.
 Thus bad begins and worse remains behind.
 One word more, good lady—

GERTRUDE

What shall I do?

HAMLET

Not this, by no means, that I bid you do—
 Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed,
 Pinch wanton on your cheek, call you his mouse,
 And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses
 Or paddling in your neck with his damned fingers,
 Make you to ravel all this matter out:
 That I essentially am not in madness
 But mad in craft. 'Twere good you let him know,
 For who that's but a queen, fair, sober, wise,
 Would from a paddock, from a bat, a gib,
 Such dear concernings hide? Who would do so?
 No, in despite of sense and secrecy,
 Unpeg the basket on the house's top.
 Let the birds fly, and like the famous ape,
 To try conclusions, in the basket creep
 And break your own neck down.

NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

Say no to sex tonight, and that will make it easier to say
 no the next time, and still easier the time after that.
 Habit can change even one's natural instincts, and
 either rein in the devil in us, or kick him out. Once
 again, good night to you, and when you want to
 repent, I'll ask you for your blessing too. I'm sorry
 about what happened to this gentleman (*pointing to*
POLONIUS), but God wanted to punish me with this
 murder, and this man with me, so I'm both Heaven's
 executioner and its minister of justice. This is bad, but
 it'll get worse soon. Oh, and one other thing, madam.

GERTRUDE

What should I do?

HAMLET

Whatever you do, don't do this: let the fat king seduce
 you into his bed again, so he can pinch your cheek, call
 you his bunny, and with filthy kisses and a massage of
 your neck with his damned fingers, make you admit
 that my madness is fake, all calculated. What a great
 idea that would be, because why would a fair, sober,
 wise queen hide such things from a toad, a pig, a mon-
 ster like him? Who would do that? No, no, it's *much*,
much better to spill the beans right away, let the cat out
 of the bag, and break your neck in the process.

GERTRUDE

Be thou assured, if words be made of breath
And breath of life, I have no life to breathe
What thou hast said to me.

HAMLET

I must to England, you know that?

GERTRUDE

205 Alack,
I had forgot. 'Tis so concluded on.

HAMLET

210 There's letters sealed, and my two schoolfellows,
Whom I will trust as I will adders fanged,
They bear the mandate. They must sweep my way
And marshal me to knavery. Let it work,
For 'tis the sport to have the engineer
Hoist with his own petard. And 't shall go hard,
But I will delve one yard below their mines,
And blow them at the moon. Oh, 'tis most sweet
215 When in one line two crafts directly meet.

(indicates POLONIUS)

This man shall set me packing.

I'll lug the guts into the neighbor room.

Mother, good night. Indeed this counselor
Is now most still, most secret, and most grave
220 Who was in life a foolish prating knave.—

Come, sir, to draw toward an end with you.—
Good night, mother.

Exeunt, HAMLET tugging in POLONIUS

NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

GERTRUDE

You can rest easy, since words are made of breath, and
breathing requires that you be alive. I feel too dead to
breathe a word of what you've told me.

HAMLET

I have to go to England, don't you know that?

GERTRUDE

Ah, I'd forgotten all about that! It's been decided.

HAMLET

Yes, it's a done deal, the documents are ready, and my
two schoolmates, whom I trust about as much as rat-
tlesnakes, are in charge. They're the ones who'll lead
me on my march to mischief. Let it happen. It's fun to
watch the engineer get blown up by his own explo-
sives, and with any luck I'll dig a few feet below their
bombs and blow them to the moon. Oh, it's nice to kill
two birds with one stone. (points to POLONIUS) Now
that I've killed this guy, I'll be off in a hurry. I'll lug his
guts into the next room. Mother, have a good night.
This politician who was in life a babbling idiot is now
quiet and serious. Come on, sir, let's get to the end of
our business. Good night, mother.

They exit, HAMLET dragging POLONIUS offstage.