

# ACT FOUR

## SCENE 1

*Enter King CLAUDIUS and Queen GERTRUDE, with  
ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN*

CLAUDIUS

(to GERTRUDE) There's matter in these sighs, these profound  
heaves.

You must translate. 'Tis fit we understand them.  
Where is your son?

GERTRUDE

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

*Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN*

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

CLAUDIUS

What, Gertrude? How does Hamlet?

GERTRUDE

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

CLAUDIUS

O heavy deed!

It had been so with us, had we been there.

His liberty is full of threats to all—

15 To you yourself, to us, to everyone.

Alas, how shall this bloody deed be answered?

It will be laid to us, whose providence

Should have kept short, restrained and out of haunt,

This mad young man. But so much was our love,

20 We would not understand what was most fit,

# ACT FOUR

## SCENE 1

*CLAUDIUS and GERTRUDE enter with ROSENCRANTZ and  
GUILDENSTERN.*

CLAUDIUS

(to GERTRUDE) These deep, heaving sighs of yours  
mean something. You have to tell me what. I need to  
know. Where's your son?

GERTRUDE

(to ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN) Let us speak  
privately awhile, please.

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.*

Ah, my lord, you wouldn't believe what I've wit-  
nessed tonight!

CLAUDIUS

What, Gertrude? How is Hamlet?

GERTRUDE

As mad as the waves and the wind when they struggle  
together in a storm. In an insane rage, he hears some-  
thing behind the tapestry, whips out his sword,  
shouts, "A rat, a rat!" and in his deranged state of  
mind he kills the good old man, who is still hidden.

CLAUDIUS

Oh, this is terrible! It would've happened to me if I'd  
been there. His wildness is a threat to all of us—to  
you, to me, to everyone. How will we deal with this  
violent deed? I'm the one who will be blamed for not  
restraining and confining this mad young man. But I  
loved him so much I didn't want to think about what  
I had to do.

But, like the owner of a foul disease,  
To keep it from divulging, let it feed  
Even on the pith of life. Where is he gone?

GERTRUDE

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

CLAUDIUS

O Gertrude, come away!  
The sun no sooner shall the mountains touch  
But we will ship him hence, and this vile deed  
We must, with all our majesty and skill,  
Both countenance and excuse.—Ho, Guildenstern!

*Enter ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN*

Friends both, go join you with some further aid.  
Hamlet in madness hath Polonius slain,  
And from his mother's closet hath he dragged him.  
Go seek him out, speak fair, and bring the body  
Into the chapel. I pray you, haste in this.

*Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN*

Come, Gertrude, we'll call up our wisest 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,  
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.

*Exeunt*

So, like someone suffering from a nasty disease who  
refuses to divulge his condition and lets it infect him  
to the core, I kept Hamlet's condition secret and let it  
grow more and more dangerous. Where has he gone?

GERTRUDE

To remove the corpse of the man he killed. His mad-  
ness allows a glimmering of morality to shine  
through, like a vein of gold in a chunk of coal. He  
weeps for what he has done.

CLAUDIUS

Oh, Gertrude, let's go. As soon as the sun sets we'll  
ship him off to England. It'll take all my diplomatic  
know-how to explain and excuse the murder he's  
committed. Hey, Guildenstern!

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter.*

My friends, go find others to help you. Hamlet in his  
madness has killed Polonius and dragged him out of  
his mother's bedroom. Go find him and speak nicely  
to him, and bring the corpse into the chapel. Please  
hurry.

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.*

Come, Gertrude. We'll confer with our wisest friends  
and tell them what we're going to do, and what terrible  
deed has been done already. Let's hope slander—a  
bullet that can travel halfway around the world and  
still hit its exact target—spares us. Oh, we must go.  
I'm full of confusion and despair.

*They exit.*

## ACT 4, SCENE 2

*Enter HAMLET*

HAMLET

Safely stowed.

GENTLEMEN

*(from within)* Hamlet! Lord Hamlet!

HAMLET

But soft, what noise? Who calls on Hamlet?  
Oh, here they come.

*Enter ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN, and others*

ROSENCRANTZ

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?

## ACT 4, SCENE 2

*HAMLET enters.*

HAMLET

The body is safely hidden.

GENTLEMEN

*(from offstage)* Hamlet, Lord Hamlet!

HAMLET

What's that noise? Who's calling for Hamlet? Oh,  
here they come.

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter with others.*

ROSENCRANTZ

What have you done with the corpse, my lord?

HAMLET

I've gotten it dirty—ashes to ashes, and dust to dust.

ROSENCRANTZ

But tell us where it is, so we can take it to the chapel.

HAMLET

Don't believe it.

ROSENCRANTZ

Believe what?

HAMLET

That I'd take your advice rather than keep my own  
secret. Besides, you're a sponge! What is the son of a  
king supposed to say to a sponge?

ROSENCRANTZ

You think I'm a sponge, my lord?

HAMLET

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  
20 you have gleaned, it is but squeezing you and, sponge, you  
shall be dry again.

ROSENCRANTZ

I understand you not, my lord.

HAMLET

I am glad of it. A knavish speech sleeps in a foolish ear.

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

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

GUILDENSTERN

A thing, my lord?

HAMLET

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

*Exeunt*

## NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

HAMLET

Yes, sir, a sponge that soaks up the king's approval, his  
rewards, and his decisions. Officers like that give the  
king the best service in the end. He keeps them in his  
mouth like an ape. First he moves them around, then  
he swallows them. When he needs what you have  
found out, he can just squeeze you like a sponge and  
you'll be dry again.

ROSENCRANTZ

I don't follow, my lord.

HAMLET

I'm glad about that. Sly words are never understood  
by fools.

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

The body's with the king, but the king's not with the  
body. The king's a thing . . .

GUILDENSTERN

A "thing," my lord?

HAMLET

A thing of no importance. Take me to him. Ready or  
not, here I come!

*They exit.*

## ACT 4, SCENE 3

*Enter King CLAUDIUS and two or three attendants*

CLAUDIUS

I have sent to seek him and to find the body.  
How dangerous is it that this man goes loose!  
Yet must not we put the strong law on him.  
He's loved of the distracted multitude,  
Who like not in their judgment, but their eyes.  
And where 'tis so, th' offender's scourge is weighed,  
But never the offense. To bear all smooth and even,  
This sudden sending him away must seem  
Deliberate pause. Diseases desperate grown  
By desperate appliance are relieved,  
Or not at all.

*Enter ROSENCRANTZ*

How now, what hath befall'n?

ROSENCRANTZ

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

CLAUDIUS

But where is he?

ROSENCRANTZ

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

CLAUDIUS

Bring him before us.

ROSENCRANTZ

Ho, Guildenstern! Bring in my lord.

*Enter HAMLET and GUILDENSTERN*

CLAUDIUS

Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius?

## ACT 4, SCENE 3

*CLAUDIUS enters with two or three of his attendants.*

CLAUDIUS

I've sent men to find him and retrieve the body. How dangerous to have this madman on the loose! But we can't throw him in jail. The people love him, because they judge based on appearance rather than reason. They'll pay attention to the severity of the punishment, not the severity of the crime. No, we must seem calm and fair-minded, and our sending him away must seem like a carefully considered move. But a terminal disease requires extreme treatment, or nothing at all.

*ROSENCRANTZ enters.*

So what's happened?

ROSENCRANTZ

We can't get him to tell us where he's put the body.

CLAUDIUS

But where is he?

ROSENCRANTZ

Outside, my lord, under guard, waiting for your orders.

CLAUDIUS

Bring him to me.

ROSENCRANTZ

Hey, Guildenstern! Bring in my lord.

*GUILDENSTERN enters with HAMLET.*

CLAUDIUS

Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius?



HAMLET

At supper.

CLAUDIUS

20 At supper where?

HAMLET

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

CLAUDIUS

Alas, alas!

HAMLET

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

CLAUDIUS

30 What dost you mean by this?

HAMLET

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

CLAUDIUS

Where is Polonius?

HAMLET

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.

*Exeunt some attendants*

HAMLET

He will stay till ye come.

## NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

HAMLET

At dinner.

CLAUDIUS

At dinner where?

HAMLET

→ Hamlet is punning on a famous event in European history, the Diet of Worms, which was a gathering convened by the Holy Roman Emperor in 1521.

Not where he's eating, but where he's being eaten. A certain conference of worms is chowing down on him. Worms are the emperor of all diets. We fatten up all creatures to feed ourselves, and we fatten ourselves for the worms to eat when we're dead. A fat king and a skinny beggar are just two dishes at the same meal. That's all I have to say.

CLAUDIUS

Oh no, oh no!

HAMLET

A man can fish with the worm that ate a king, and then eat the fish he catches with that worm.

CLAUDIUS

What do you mean by that?

HAMLET

Nothing much, just to demonstrate that a king can move through the bowels of a beggar.

CLAUDIUS

Where is Polonius?

HAMLET

In heaven. Send a messenger there if you want to be sure. If your messenger can't find him, you can check hell yourself. But seriously, if you don't find him within the next month, you'll be sure to smell him as you go upstairs into the main hall.

CLAUDIUS

(to attendants) Go look for him there.

*Some attendants exit.*

HAMLET

No need to hurry, he's not going anywhere.

CLAUDIUS

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

HAMLET

For England?

CLAUDIUS

Ay, Hamlet.

HAMLET

Good.

CLAUDIUS

50 So is it, if thou knew'st our purposes.

HAMLET

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

CLAUDIUS

Thy loving father, Hamlet.

HAMLET

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

CLAUDIUS

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

*Exeunt all but CLAUDIUS*

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

ACT 4, SCENE 3

## NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

CLAUDIUS

Hamlet, I care for you just as much as I grieve for  
Polonius. For your own protection, I must send you to  
England at once. So get ready to leave. The ship is set  
to sail, the wind is favorable, your servants are waiting  
for you—everything is ready for you to go to England.

HAMLET

To England?

CLAUDIUS

Yes, Hamlet.

HAMLET

Good.

CLAUDIUS

Yes, you'd think so, if you knew why I was sending  
you.

HAMLET

I know an angel who can read your mind. But okay, off  
to England! Good-bye, dear mother.

CLAUDIUS

I'm your father, Hamlet—your father who loves you.

HAMLET

You're my mother. When you married my mother, the  
two of you became one flesh, so if you're my father  
you're also my mother. Come on, off to England!

*HAMLET exits.*

CLAUDIUS

Follow him on foot, and get him on board as quickly  
as possible. Don't waste any time. I want him out of  
here tonight. Go now; everything else is ready. Please  
hurry.

*Everyone except CLAUDIUS exits.*

And you, dear king of England, if you care about me  
at all—and you should, since you can still feel the  
damage that Denmark has done to you in the past and,  
so, fear and respect us—then you won't ignore my let-

65

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

70

*Exit***NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE**

ters instructing you to kill Hamlet immediately. Do it,  
English king, since he's raging like a fever in my brain,  
and you must cure me. Until I know it's been done, I'll  
never be happy, no matter how much luck I have.

*He exits.*



## ACT 4, SCENE 4

*Enter FORTINBRAS with his army and a CAPTAIN*

FORTINBRAS

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

CAPTAIN

I will do 't, my lord.

FORTINBRAS

Go softly on.

*Exeunt all except the CAPTAIN*

*Enter HAMLET, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN, and others*

HAMLET

10 Good sir, whose powers are these?

CAPTAIN

They are of Norway, sir.

HAMLET

How purposed, sir, I pray you?

CAPTAIN

Against some part of Poland.

HAMLET

Who commands them, sir?

CAPTAIN

The nephew to old Norway, Fortinbras.

HAMLET

15 Goes it against the main of Poland, sir,  
Or for some frontier?

## ACT 4, SCENE 4

*FORTINBRAS enters with his army and a CAPTAIN.*

FORTINBRAS

Go, Captain, and give the Danish king my greetings.  
Tell him that Fortinbras asks permission to move his  
troops across Denmark. You know the meeting place  
we've arranged. If His Majesty wants us to do any  
favor for him, tell him his wish is my command.

CAPTAIN

I'll tell him, my lord.

FORTINBRAS

Go ahead, then.

*Everyone except the CAPTAIN exits.*

*HAMLET, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN,  
and others enter.*

HAMLET

Sir, whose troops are these?

CAPTAIN

The king of Norway's, sir.

HAMLET

What are they doing here, sir?

CAPTAIN

They're on their way to invade some part of Poland.

HAMLET

Who's commanding them, sir?

CAPTAIN

The nephew of the old king of Norway, Fortinbras.

HAMLET

Is he attacking the heartland of Poland or some  
frontier?

CAPTAIN

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

HAMLET

Why, then the Polack never will defend it.

CAPTAIN

Yes, it is already garrisoned.

HAMLET

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

CAPTAIN

God be wi' you, sir.

*Exit CAPTAIN*

ROSENCRANTZ

Will 't please you go, my lord?

HAMLET

I'll be with you straight. Go a little before.

*Exeunt all except HAMLET*

How all occasions do inform against me,  
And spur my dull revenge! What is a man  
If his chief good and market of his time  
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.  
Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,  
Looking before and after, gave us not  
That capability and godlike reason  
To fust in us unused. Now, whether it be  
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple

**NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE**

CAPTAIN

To tell the truth, we're fighting to win a little patch of ground that's not worth anything. I myself wouldn't pay five ducats for it, if someone offered it to me to farm. And it won't provide any more profits than that to either the Norwegian or the Pole.

HAMLET

So then the Poles won't be willing to defend it.

CAPTAIN

Oh, yes they will. They've already stationed troops there.

HAMLET

*(to himself)* Even two thousand men and twenty-thousand ducats are just the beginning of what it will cost to settle this pointless matter. This is what happens when countries have too much money and peace. This quarrel is like an abcess that grows inside someone until it bursts and kills them, and no one knows why.  
*(to the CAPTAIN)* Thank you very much for the information, sir.

CAPTAIN

Good-bye, sir.

*The CAPTAIN exits.*

ROSENCRANTZ

Will you please come now, my lord?

HAMLET

I'll be there in a minute. Start without me.

*Everyone except HAMLET exits.*

My God! Everything I see shows me how wrong I am and tells me to hurry up and get on with my revenge. What is a human being if he just eats and sleeps? Nothing more than a beast. God didn't create us with such a huge power of thought and a divine capacity for reason in order for us not to use them. Now, whether it's animal-like mindlessness, or the cowardly hesita-

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

*Exit***NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE**

tion that comes from thinking too much (thinking thoughts that are one part wisdom, three parts cowardice), I don't know why I'm still alive to say "I have to do this deed" rather than having done it already. I have the motivation, the willpower, the ability, and the means to do it. It's as plain as the ground beneath my feet that I must do it. Look at this massive army led by a delicate and tender prince who's so puffed up with divine ambition that he puts his fragile life at risk, exposing it to danger and death, for a reason as thin as an eggshell. To be truly great doesn't mean you'd only fight for a good reason. It means you'd fight over nothing if your honor was at stake. So where does that leave me, whose father has been murdered and mother defiled, ignoring these mental and emotional provocations and letting well enough alone? Meanwhile, to my shame, I watch twenty thousand men go marching to their deaths for an illusion and a little bit of fame, fighting for a tiny piece of land not even big enough to bury them all. From now on, if my thoughts aren't violent I'll consider them worthless.

*He exits.*

## ACT 4, SCENE 5

*Enter HORATIO, GERTRUDE, and a GENTLEMAN*

GERTRUDE

I will not speak with her.

GENTLEMAN

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

GERTRUDE

What would she have?

GENTLEMAN

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,  
Yet the unshaped use of it doth move  
10 The hearers to collection. They aim at it,  
And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts,  
Which, as her winks and nods and gestures yield them,  
Indeed would make one think there might be thought,  
Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily.

HORATIO

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

GERTRUDE

Let her come in.

*Exit GENTLEMAN*

(aside) To my sick soul (as sin's true nature is)  
Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss.  
So full of artless jealousy is guilt,  
It spills itself in fearing to be spilt.

*Enter OPHELIA, distracted*

## ACT 4, SCENE 5

*HORATIO, GERTRUDE, and a GENTLEMAN enter.*

GERTRUDE

I won't speak to her.

GENTLEMAN

She's insistent. In fact, she's crazed. You can't help  
feeling sorry for her.

GERTRUDE

What does she want?

GENTLEMAN

She talks about her father a lot, and says she hears  
there are conspiracies around the world, and coughs,  
and beats her breast, and gets angry over tiny matters,  
and talks nonsense. Her words don't mean anything,  
but her babbling causes her listeners to draw conclu-  
sions. They hear what they want to hear. Her winks  
and nods and gestures do suggest that she means to  
convey a message, and not a happy one.

HORATIO

It's a good idea to speak to her, since she might lead  
those with evil intentions to dangerous conclusions.

GERTRUDE

Show her in.

*The GENTLEMAN exits.*

(to herself) To my sick soul (since sin is always a sick-  
ness), every detail looks like an omen of disaster to  
come. Guilt makes you so full of stupid suspicions  
that you give yourself away because you're trying so  
hard not to.

*OPHELIA enters, insane.*

OPHELIA

20 Where is the beauteous majesty of Denmark?

GERTRUDE

How now, Ophelia?

OPHELIA

(sings)

How should I your true love know  
 From another one?  
 By his cockle hat and staff,  
 And his sandal shoon.

25

GERTRUDE

Alas, sweet lady, what imports this song?

OPHELIA

Say you? Nay, pray you, mark.

(sings)

He is dead and gone, lady,  
 He is dead and gone,  
 At his head a grass-green turf,  
 At his heels a stone.

30

Oh, ho!

GERTRUDE

Nay, but, Ophelia—

OPHELIA

Pray you, mark.

(sings)

35

White his shroud as the mountain snow—

*Enter CLAUDIUS*

GERTRUDE

Alas, look here, my lord.

OPHELIA

(sings)

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

OPHELIA

Where is the beautiful queen of Denmark?

GERTRUDE

What are you doing, Ophelia?

OPHELIA

(sings)

How can you tell the difference  
 Between your true lover and some other?  
 Your true one wears a pilgrim's hat  
 And a pilgrim's sandals and staff.

GERTRUDE

Oh heavens, what does that song mean, my dear?

OPHELIA

I'm sorry, did you say something? Please just listen.

(sings)

He is dead and gone, lady,  
 He is dead and gone.  
 At his head is a patch of green grass,  
 And at his feet there is a tomb stone.

Oh, ho!

GERTRUDE

No, Ophelia—

OPHELIA

Just listen, please.

(sings)

His death shroud was as white as snow—

*CLAUDIUS enters.*

GERTRUDE

My lord, look at this poor girl.

OPHELIA

(sings)

Covered with sweet flowers  
 Which did not fall to the ground  
 In true-love showers.



CLAUDIUS

40 How do you, pretty lady?

OPHELIA

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

CLAUDIUS

Conceit upon her father.

OPHELIA

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

(sings)

*Tomorrow is Saint Valentine's day,*

*All in the morning betime,*

*And I a maid at your window,*

50 *To be your Valentine.*

*Then up he rose, and donned his clothes,*

*And dupp'd the chamber door.*

*Let in the maid that out a maid*

*Never departed more.*

CLAUDIUS

55 Pretty Ophelia—

OPHELIA

Indeed, without an oath I'll make an end on 't:

(sings)

*By Gis and by Saint Charity,*

*Alack, and fie, for shame!*

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

60 *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,*

65 *An thou hadst not come to my bed."*

CLAUDIUS

How are you doing, my pretty lady?

OPHELIA

I'm quite well, and may God give you what you deserve. They say the baker's daughter was turned into an owl for refusing Jesus' bread. My lord, we know what we are now, but not what we may become. May God be at your table.

CLAUDIUS

She's talking about her dead father.

OPHELIA

Oh, let's not talk about that, but when they ask you what it means, just say:

(sings)

*Tomorrow is St. Valentine's Day*

*And early in the morning*

*I'm a girl below your window*

*Waiting to be your Valentine.*

*Then he got up and put on his clothes*

*And opened the door to his room.*

*He let in the girl, and when she left*

*She wasn't a virgin anymore.*

CLAUDIUS

Pretty Ophelia—

OPHELIA

Hang on, I'll end it soon, I promise:

(sings)

*By the name of Jesus and Saint Charity,*

*My goodness, what a shame it is,*

*Young men will do it if they get a chance:*

*By God, they're very bad.*

*She said, "Before you got me into bed,*

*You promised to marry me."*

*He answers:*

*"I would have married you, I swear,*

*If you hadn't gone to bed with me."*

CLAUDIUS

How long hath she been thus?

OPHELIA

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

*Exit OPHELIA*

CLAUDIUS

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

*Exit HORATIO*

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

CLAUDIUS

How long has she been like this?

OPHELIA

I hope everything will turn out fine. We must be patient, but I can't help crying when I think of him being laid in the cold ground. My brother will hear about this. And so I thank you for your good advice. Come, driver! Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.

*OPHELIA exits.*

CLAUDIUS

Follow her. Keep an eye on her, please.

*HORATIO exits.*

Oh, her grief has poisoned her mind. Her father died and now look at her! Oh, Gertrude, Gertrude, when bad things happen, they don't come one at a time, like enemy spies, but all at once like an army. First her father was killed, then your son was taken away—because of his own violent actions. The people are confused and spreading nasty rumors about Polonius's death, and I was a fool to bury him in a hurry, without a proper state funeral. Poor Ophelia has been robbed of her sanity, without which we're just pictures, or animals. Last but not least, her brother has secretly returned from France and is surrounded by gossip-mongers, who fill his ears with wicked stories about his father's death. Deprived of proper evidence, he'll naturally attribute the murder to me. Oh, dear Gertrude, I feel as though I'm being murdered many times over.

*A noise within.*

GERTRUDE

Alack, what noise is this?

CLAUDIUS

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

*Enter a MESSENGER*

What is the matter?

MESSENGER

Save yourself, my lord.

The ocean, overpeering of his list,  
Eats not the flats with more impiteous haste  
Than young Laertes, in a riotous head,  
100 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!"  
105 Caps, hands, and tongues applaud it to the clouds:  
"Laertes shall be king, Laertes king!"

GERTRUDE

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

*Noise within*

CLAUDIUS

The doors are broke.

*Enter LAERTES with others*

*A noise offstage.*

GERTRUDE

Oh, no—what's that noise?

CLAUDIUS

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

*A MESSENGER enters.*

What is it?

MESSENGER

You must save yourself, my lord. The young Laertes, like the ocean when it floods the shore and devours the lowlands, is leading a rebellion against your government. The crowd calls him "lord" and shouts, "We want Laertes to be king!" It's as if they were starting the world from scratch right now, throwing out the traditions and ancient customs that are the support of every word we utter. They throw their caps in the air and yell, "Laertes will be king! Laertes king!"

GERTRUDE

They sound so cheerful as they hunt down the wrong prey! Oh, you're on the wrong track, you disloyal Danish dogs!

*A noise offstage.*

CLAUDIUS

The doors have been smashed open.

*LAERTES enters with others.*

LAERTES

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

ALL

No, let's come in!

LAERTES

I pray you, give me leave.

ALL

We will, we will.

*Exeunt LAERTES' FOLLOWERS*

LAERTES

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

GERTRUDE

Calmly, good Laertes.

LAERTES

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

CLAUDIUS

What is the cause, Laertes,

120 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,  
125 Why thou art thus incensed.—Let him go, Gertrude.—  
Speak, man.

LAERTES

Where is my father?

CLAUDIUS

Dead.

GERTRUDE

But not by him.

CLAUDIUS

Let him demand his fill.

## NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

LAERTES

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

ALL

No, let us in!

LAERTES

Please wait.

ALL

All right, we will, we will.

*LAERTES' FOLLOWERS exit.*

LAERTES

Thank you. Guard the door. (to CLAUDIUS) Oh, you  
vile king, give me my father!

GERTRUDE

Calm down, good Laertes.

LAERTES

*Laertes suggests  
that since he  
hasn't yet pun-  
ished his father's  
murderer, he  
must not be his  
real son.*

I've got exactly one calm drop of blood in my body,  
and it proclaims that I'm a bastard, says my father was  
betrayed, and stamps the label "whore" on the pure  
forehead of my devoted mother.

CLAUDIUS

Laertes, what makes you so rebellious? Let him go,  
Gertrude. Don't worry about my getting hurt. God  
protects the king, so traitors can't hurt him.—Tell me,  
Laertes, why you're so angry.—Gertrude, let him  
go.—Tell me, man.

LAERTES

Where's my father?

CLAUDIUS

He's dead.

GERTRUDE

But the king didn't kill him.

CLAUDIUS

Let him ask what he wants to ask.

LAERTES

How came he dead? I'll not be juggled with.  
To hell, allegiance! Vows, to the blackest devil!  
Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit!  
I dare damnation. To this point I stand  
That both the worlds I give to negligence.  
Let come what comes, only I'll be revenged  
Most thoroughly for my father.

CLAUDIUS

Who shall stay you?

LAERTES

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

CLAUDIUS

Good Laertes,

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

LAERTES

None but his enemies.

CLAUDIUS

Will you know them then?

LAERTES

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

CLAUDIUS

Why, now you speak

Like a good child and a true gentleman.  
That I am guiltless of your father's death  
And am most sensible in grief for it,  
It shall as level to your judgment pierce  
As day does to your eye.

LAERTES

How did he end up dead? Don't mess with me. To hell with my vows of allegiance to you! Vows can go to hell! Conscience, too! I don't care if I'm damned. I don't care what happens to me in this world or the next. Whatever happens, happens, but I'll get revenge for my father's murder.

CLAUDIUS

Who's stopping you?

LAERTES

Only my free will—nothing else. What little means I have, I'll use against you.

CLAUDIUS

My dear Laertes, in your eagerness to know the truth about your father's death, are you determined to hurt your father's friends and enemies alike?

LAERTES

No, only his enemies.

CLAUDIUS

Do you want to know who they are, then?

LAERTES

I'll open my arms wide to his true friends, and like a mother pelican with her brood, I'll even give my life for them.

*Pelicans were believed to feed their young with their own blood.*

CLAUDIUS

Why, now you're talking like a good son and a true gentleman. I'll prove to you as clearly as daylight that I'm innocent of your father's death, and am struck with grief over it.



Noise within: "Let her come in!"

LAERTES

How now? What noise is that?

Enter OPHELIA

155 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!  
160 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

(sings)

165 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

170 Hadst thou thy wits, and didst persuade revenge,  
It could not move thus.

OPHELIA

You must sing *A-down a-down*—And you, *Call him a-down-a*—Oh, how the wheel becomes it! It is the false steward that stole his master's daughter.

LAERTES

This nothing's more than matter.

OPHELIA

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

A voice offstage, "Let her in!"

LAERTES

What's that noise?

OPHELIA enters.

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

OPHELIA

(sings)

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

LAERTES

If you were sane and could urge me to take revenge,  
you couldn't be more persuasive than you are now.

OPHELIA

You're supposed to sing, "*A down a-down*," and you,  
"*Call him a-down-a*." Oh, how it turns around like a  
wheel! Like the worker who stole his boss's daughter.

LAERTES

This nonsense means more than rational speech.

OPHELIA

Look at my flowers. There's rosemary, that's for  
remembering. Please remember, love. And there are  
pansies, they're for thoughts.

LAERTES

A document in madness. Thoughts and remembrance fitted.

OPHELIA

180 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

185 Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself,  
She turns to favor and to prettiness.

OPHELIA

(*sings*)

*And will he not come again?*

*And will he not come again?*

*No, no, he is dead,*

*Go to thy deathbed.*

190 *He never will come again.*

*His beard was as white as snow,*

*All flaxen was his poll.*

*He is gone, he is gone,*

*And we cast away moan,*

195 *God ha' mercy on his soul.—*

*And of all Christian souls, I pray God. God be wi' ye.*

*Exit OPHELIA*

LAERTES

Do you see this, O God?

## NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE

LAERTES

A case study in madness, to connect memory and thought.

OPHELIA

(*to GERTRUDE*) Here are fennel and columbines for you—they symbolize adultery. (*to CLAUDIUS*) And here's rue for you—it symbolizes repentance. We can call it the merciful Sunday flower. You should wear it for a different reason. And here's a daisy, for unhappy love. I'd give you some violets, flowers of faithfulness, but they all dried up when my father died. They say he looked good when he died. (*sings*) *For good sweet Robin is all my joy.*

LAERTES

Sadness and torment, suffering, hell itself—she makes them almost pretty.

OPHELIA

(*sings*)

*And won't he come again?*

*And won't he come again?*

*No, no, he's dead.*

*Go to your deathbed.*

*He'll never come again.*

*His beard was white as snow,*

*His hair was all white too.*

*He's gone, he's gone,*

*And we moan as we're cast away.*

*God have mercy on his soul.*

And on the souls of all good Christians, I hope. Good-bye, God be with you.

*OPHELIA exits.*

LAERTES

Do you see this, oh, God?

CLAUDIUS

200 Laertes, I must commune with your grief,  
 Or you deny me right. Go but apart,  
 Make choice of whom your wisest friends you will.  
 And they shall hear and judge 'twixt you and me.  
 If by direct or by collateral hand  
 205 They find us touched, we will our kingdom give,  
 Our crown, our life, and all that we can ours,  
 To you in satisfaction. But if not,  
 Be you content to lend your patience to us,  
 And we shall jointly labor with your soul  
 To give it due content.

LAERTES

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

CLAUDIUS

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

*Exeunt*

ACT 4, SCENE 5

**NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE**

CLAUDIUS

Laertes, I have a right to share your grief. Go choose your wisest friends, and have them listen to both of us and decide which of us is right. If directly or indirectly they find me implicated in your father's murder, I'll give up my kingdom, my crown, my life, and everything I call my own to you as restitution. But if they find me innocent, then be patient and I'll work to satisfy to the fullest extent your deepest need for revenge.

LAERTES

All right, then. The way he died, his secret funeral, no funeral rites or military display, no noble rites or formal ceremony—shout out from heaven and earth that I must call the way he died into question.

CLAUDIUS

And you're right to do so. May the guilty party be punished by death. Please, come with me.

*They exit.*

## ACT 4, SCENE 6

*Enter HORATIO and a SERVANT*

HORATIO

What are they that would speak with me?

SERVANT

Seafaring men, sir. They say they have letters for you.

HORATIO

Let them come in.

*Exit SERVANT*

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

*Enter SAILORS*

SAILOR

God bless you, sir.

HORATIO

Let him bless thee too.

SAILOR

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

HORATIO

*(reads)*

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

## ACT 4, SCENE 6

*HORATIO and a SERVANT enter.*

HORATIO

Who are the people who want to speak with me?

SERVANT

Sailors, sir. They say they have letters for you.

HORATIO

Show them in.

*SERVANT exits.*

I don't know who else would send me a letter from  
abroad except Hamlet.

*SAILORS enter.*

SAILOR

Hello, sir. God bless you.

HORATIO

May He bless you, too.

SAILOR

He will, sir, if He wants to. There's a letter for you, sir.  
It's from the ambassador, Lord Hamlet, who was  
going to England—if your name's Horatio, as they  
told me it is. (he hands HORATIO a letter)

HORATIO

*(reading the letter)*

"Horatio,

When you've read this letter, find a way to let these  
guys see the king. They have letters for him. Before  
we were at sea for even two days, a pirate ship  
equipped for battle pursued us. We were too slow  
to escape, so we were forced to stand and fight. In  
the battle that followed I ended up on the pirate  
ship. Just then they left our ship behind, so I  
became the only prisoner on board. They've  
treated me quite mercifully for thieves, but they  
knew what they were doing. They want me to do a

25 thou to me with as much speed as thou wouldst fly  
 death. I have words to speak in thine ear will make  
 thee dumb, yet are they much too light for the bore of  
 the matter. These good fellows will bring thee where  
 I am. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern hold their course  
 for England. Of them I have much to tell thee. Fare-  
 well.

He that thou knowest thine,  
 Hamlet."

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

*Exeunt*

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 half the story.  
 These guys will take you to me. Rosencrantz and  
 Guildenstern are on their way to England. I have a  
 lot to tell you about them. Good-bye.

Your trusted friend,  
 Hamlet."

Come, men. I'll show you where to deliver these let-  
 ters as quickly as possible, so that you can take me to  
 the man who sent them.

*They exit.*



## ACT 4, SCENE 7

*Enter CLAUDIUS and LAERTES*

CLAUDIUS

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

LAERTES

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

CLAUDIUS

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

## ACT 4, SCENE 7

*CLAUDIUS and LAERTES enter.*

CLAUDIUS

Now you've got to acknowledge my innocence and believe I'm your friend, since you've heard and understood that the man who killed your father was trying to kill me.

LAERTES

It looks that way. But tell me why you didn't take immediate action against his criminal acts, when your own safety and everything else would seem to call for it.

CLAUDIUS

Oh, for two main reasons which may seem weak to you, but strong to me. The queen, his mother, is devoted to him. And (for better or worse, whichever it is) she is such a part of my life and soul that I can't live apart from her, any more than a planet can leave its orbit. The other reason why I couldn't prosecute and arrest Hamlet is that the public loves him. In their affection they overlook all his faults. Like magic, they convert them into virtues, so whatever I said against him would end up hurting me, not him.

LAERTES

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

CLAUDIUS

30 Break not your sleeps for that. You must not think  
That we are made of stuff so flat and dull  
That we can let our beard be shook with danger  
And think it pastime. You shortly shall hear more.  
I loved your father, and we love ourself.  
35 And that, I hope, will teach you to imagine—

*Enter a MESSENGER*

How now, what news?

MESSENGER

Letters, my lord, from Hamlet.  
This to your majesty, this to the queen. (*gives CLAUDIUS letters*)

CLAUDIUS

From Hamlet? Who brought them?

MESSENGER

Sailors, my lord, they say. I saw them not.  
40 They were given me by Claudio. He received them  
Of him that brought them.

CLAUDIUS

Laertes, you shall hear them.—Leave us.

*Exit MESSENGER*

(*reads*)

"High and mighty,  
You shall know I am set naked on your kingdom.  
45 Tomorrow shall I beg leave to see your kingly eyes,  
when I shall, first asking your pardon thereunto,

LAERTES

And so I've lost my noble father, had my sister driven insane—my sister who once was (if I can praise her for what she once was, not what she is now) the most perfect girl who ever lived. But I'll get my revenge.

CLAUDIUS

Don't you worry about that. You must not think that I'm so lazy and dull that I can be severely threatened and think it's just a game. You'll hear more about my plans soon enough. I loved your father, and I love myself, which should be enough to—

*A MESSENGER enters with letters.*

What is it? What's the news?

MESSENGER

Letters, my lord, from Hamlet. This one's for Your Highness, this one for the queen. (*gives CLAUDIUS letters*)

CLAUDIUS

From Hamlet? Who delivered them?

MESSENGER

Sailors, my lord, or so they say. I didn't see them. Claudio gave them to me, and he got them from the one who delivered them.

CLAUDIUS

Laertes, I want you to hear what they say. Leave us alone now.

*The MESSENGER exits.*

(*reads*)

"High and Mighty one,  
You know I've been set down naked, you might say, in your kingdom. Tomorrow I'll beg permission to look into your kingly eyes, at which point

recount the occasion of my sudden and more strange return.

Hamlet."

50 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

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

CLAUDIUS

If it be so, Laertes—

As how should it be so? How otherwise?—

60 Will you be ruled by me?

LAERTES

Ay, my lord—

So you will not o'errule me to a peace.

CLAUDIUS

To thine own peace. If he be now returned,  
As checking at his voyage, and that he means  
No more to undertake it, I will work him

65 To an exploit, now ripe in my devise,  
Under the which he shall not choose but fall.  
And for his death no wind of blame shall breathe,  
But even his mother shall uncharge the practice  
And call it accident.

LAERTES

My lord, I will be ruled

70 The rather if you could devise it so  
That I might be the organ.

ACT 4, SCENE 7  
**NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE**

I'll tell you the story (after first apologizing) of how  
I came back to Denmark so strangely and sud-  
denly.

Hamlet."

What does this mean? Has everyone else come back  
too? Or is it all a lie—and no one has yet returned?

LAERTES

Do you recognize the handwriting?

CLAUDIUS

It's Hamlet's writing. "Naked," he says. And in a P.S.  
he adds, "alone." Can you help me out with this?

LAERTES

I have no clue, my lord. But let him come. It warms my  
weary heart to think I'll get the chance to look him in  
the eye and say, "You did this."

CLAUDIUS

If that's how you feel, Laertes—and why shouldn't  
you? Will you let me guide and direct you?

LAERTES

Yes, my lord, as long as you won't lead me toward  
peace.

CLAUDIUS

No, just toward your own peace of mind. If he's come  
back to Denmark without plans to continue on his  
trip, then I'll trick him into an undertaking, which I'm  
working out now, that's sure to kill him. When he dies,  
no one will be blamed, even his mother will call it an  
accident.

LAERTES

My lord, I'll let you make the decision. I only ask to be  
in on your plans, the agent of his death.

CLAUDIUS

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  
 75 Did not together pluck such envy from him  
 As did that one, and that, in my regard,  
 Of the unworthiest siege.

LAERTES

What part is that, my lord?

CLAUDIUS

A very ribbon in the cap of youth,  
 Yet needful too, for youth no less becomes  
 80 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,  
 85 And they can well on horseback. But this gallant  
 Had witchcraft in 't. He grew unto his seat,  
 And to such wondrous doing brought his horse  
 As he had been encorpsed and demi-natured  
 With the brave beast. So far he topped my thought,  
 90 That I, in forgery of shapes and tricks,  
 Come short of what he did.

LAERTES

A Norman was 't?

CLAUDIUS

A Norman.

LAERTES

Upon my life, Lamond!

CLAUDIUS

The very same.

LAERTES

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

CLAUDIUS

That'll be fine. Since you left, people have been talk-  
 ing about—and within earshot of Hamlet—a certain  
 quality of yours in which, they say, you shine. All your  
 talents and gifts didn't arouse as much envy from him  
 as this one quality did, though to me it's far from your  
 best attribute.

LAERTES

What quality is that, my lord?

CLAUDIUS

A trivial little ribbon on the cap of youth—yet an  
 important one, too, since casual clothes suit young  
 people as much as serious business suits and overcoats  
 suit the middle-aged. Two months ago I met a gentle-  
 man from Normandy. I've fought against the French  
 and have seen how well they ride, but this man was a  
 magician on horseback. It was as if he were part of the  
 horse, so skillful that even having seen him, I can  
 hardly conceive of the tricks he did.

LAERTES

Hmm, he was from Normandy, you say?

CLAUDIUS

Yes, from Normandy.

LAERTES

I bet it was Lamond.

CLAUDIUS

Yes, that's the one.

LAERTES

I know him well. He's his homeland's jewel.

CLAUDIUS

He made confession of you,

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

LAERTES

What out of this, my lord?

CLAUDIUS

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

LAERTES

Why ask you this?

CLAUDIUS

Not that I think you did not love your father  
 But that I know love is begun by time,  
 And that I see, in passages of proof,  
 Time qualifies the spark and fire of it.  
 There lives within the very flame of love  
 A kind of wick or snuff that will abate it.  
 And nothing is at a like goodness still.  
 For goodness, growing to a pleurisy,  
 Dies in his own too-much. That we would do,  
 We should do when we would, for this "would" changes  
 And hath abatements and delays as many  
 As there are tongues, are hands, are accidents.  
 And then this "should" is like a spendthrift sigh  
 That hurts by easing.—But to the quick of th' ulcer:

ACT 4, SCENE 7

**NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE**

CLAUDIUS

He mentioned you to me, giving you such high marks  
 in fencing that he exclaimed it would be a miracle if  
 someone could match you. French fencers wouldn't  
 be good enough for you, he said, since they don't have  
 the right moves or skills. Hamlet was so jealous when  
 he heard Lamond's report that he talked about nothing  
 else but having you come over and play against  
 him. Now, the point is . . .

LAERTES

What's the point, my lord?

CLAUDIUS

Laertes, did you love your father? Or is your grief just  
 an illusion—a mere painting of sorrow?

LAERTES

How could you ask?

CLAUDIUS

Not that I suspect you didn't love your father, but I've  
 seen it happen that, as the days go by, time dampens  
 the flame of love. The fire of love always burns itself  
 out, and nothing stays the way it began. Even a good  
 thing can grow too big and die from its own excess. We  
 should do what we intend to do right when we intend  
 it, since our intentions are subject to as many weak-  
 enings and delays as there are words in the dictionary  
 and accidents in life. And then all our "woulds" and  
 "shoulds" are nothing but hot air. But back to my  
 point:



125 Hamlet comes back. What would you undertake  
To show yourself in deed your father's son  
More than in words?

LAERTES

To cut his throat i' th' church.

CLAUDIUS

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

LAERTES

I will do 't.

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

CLAUDIUS

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

ACT 4, SCENE 7  
**NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE**

Hamlet's coming back. What proof will you offer—in  
action, not just words—that you're your father's son?

LAERTES

I'll cut Hamlet's throat in church.

CLAUDIUS

It's true, no place—not even a church—should offer  
refuge to that murderer. Revenge should have no lim-  
its. But Laertes, will you do this: stay in your room?  
When Hamlet comes home he'll learn you're here. I'll  
have people praise your excellence and put a double  
coat on the fame the Frenchman gave you. In short,  
we'll get you together and place bets on you. Hamlet's  
so careless, high-minded, and unsuspecting that he  
won't examine the swords beforehand, so you can eas-  
ily choose one with a sharpened point and in one  
thrust avenge the death of your father.

LAERTES

I'll do it, and I'll put a little dab of something on my  
sword as well. From a quack doctor I bought some oil  
so poisonous that if you dip a knife in it, no medicine  
in the world can save the person who's scratched by it.  
If I even graze his skin slightly, he's likely to die.

CLAUDIUS

Let's think about this, and consider what time and  
what method will be most appropriate. If our plan  
were to fail, and people found out about it, it would be  
better never to have tried it.

Should have a back or second that might hold  
 If this should blast in proof.—Soft, let me see.—  
 155 We'll make a solemn wager on your cunnings.—  
 I ha't! When in your motion you are hot and dry,  
 As make your bouts more violent to that end,  
 And that he calls for drink, I'll have prepared him  
 A chalice for the nonce, whereon but sipping,  
 160 If he by chance escape your venom'd stuck,  
 Our purpose may hold there.—But stay, what noise?

*Enter GERTRUDE*

GERTRUDE

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

LAERTES

Drowned? Oh, where?

GERTRUDE

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

We should have a backup ready in case the first plan doesn't work. Let me think. We'll place bets on you and Hamlet—that's it! When the two of you have gotten all sweaty and hot—keep him jumping around a lot for that purpose—Hamlet will ask for something to drink. I'll have a cup ready for him. If by chance he escapes your poisoned sword tip, the drink will kill him. But wait, what's that sound?

*GERTRUDE enters.*

GERTRUDE

The bad news just keeps on coming, one disaster after another. Your sister's drowned, Laertes.

LAERTES

Drowned? Oh, where?

GERTRUDE

There's a willow that leans over the brook, dangling its white leaves over the glassy water. Ophelia made wild wreaths out of those leaves, braiding in crowsflowers, thistles, daisies, and the orchises that vulgar shepherds have an obscene name for, but which pure-minded girls call "dead men's fingers." Climbing into the tree to hang the wreath of weeds on the hanging branches, she and her flowers fell into the gurgling brook. Her clothes spread out wide in the water, and buoyed her up for a while as she sang bits of old hymns, acting like someone who doesn't realize the danger she's in, or like someone completely accustomed to danger. But it was only a matter of time before her clothes, heavy with the water they absorbed, pulled the poor thing out of her song, down into the mud at the bottom of the brook.

LAERTES

Alas, then she is drowned.

GERTRUDE

Drowned, drowned.

LAERTES

185 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.  
190 I have a speech of fire that fain would blaze,  
But that this folly doubts it.

*Exit LAERTES*

CLAUDIUS

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

*Exeunt*

ACT 4, SCENE 7  
**NO FEAR SHAKESPEARE**

LAERTES

So she is drowned.

GERTRUDE

Drowned, drowned.

LAERTES

You've had too much water already, poor Ophelia, so I won't shed watery tears for you. But crying is what humans do. We do what's in our nature, even if we're ashamed of it. After I stop crying I'll be through acting like a woman. Good-bye, my lord. I have some fiery words I could speak now, but my foolish tears are drowning them out.

*LAERTES exits.*

CLAUDIUS

Let's follow him, Gertrude. I worked so hard to calm him down, and now I'm worried he's getting all excited again. Let's follow him.

*They exit.*