Act 1, Scene 1

Enter BARNARDO and FRANCISCO, two sentinels

BARNARDO
Who’s there?
FRANCISCO
Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself.
BARNARDO
Long live the king!
FRANCISCO
Barnardo?
BARNARDO
He.
FRANCISCO
You come most carefully upon your hour.
BARNARDO
’Tis now struck twelve. Get thee to bed, Francisco.
FRANCISCO
For this relief much thanks. ’Tis bitter cold, And I am sick at heart.
BARNARDO
Have you had quiet guard?
FRANCISCO
Not a mouse stirring.
BARNARDO
Well, good night.
FRANCISCO
I think I hear them.—Stand, ho! Who’s there?

Enter HORATIO and MARCELLUS

HORATIO
Friends to this ground.
MARCELLUS
And liegemen to the Dane.
FRANCISCO
Give you good night.
MARCELLUS
O, farewell, honest soldier. Who hath relieved you?
FRANCISCO
Barnardo has my place. Give you good night.

Exit FRANCISCO

MARCELLUS
Holla, Barnardo.
BARNARDO
Say what, is Horatio there?
Act 1, Scene 1, Page 3

**BARNARDO**

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

**HORATIO**

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

**BARNARDO**

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

Enter GHOST

**MARCELLUS**

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

**BARNARDO**

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

**MARCELLUS**

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

**BARNARDO**

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

**HORATIO**

Most like. It harrows me with fear and wonder.

**BARNARDO**

It would be spoke to.

**MARCELLUS**

Question it, Horatio.

**BARNARDO**

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

**HORATIO**

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

**BARNARDO**

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

Enter GHOST

The GHOST enters.

**MARCELLUS**

Quiet, shut up! It’s come again.

**BARNARDO**

Looking just like the dead king.

**MARCELLUS**

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

**BARNARDO**

Doesn’t he look like the king, Horatio?

**HORATIO**

Very much so. It’s terrifying.

**BARNARDO**

It wants us to speak to it.

**MARCELLUS**

Ask it something, Horatio.
Act 1, Scene 1, Page 4

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

MARCELLUS
It is offended.

BARNARDO
See, it stalks away.

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

MARCELLUS
It's gone and will not answer.

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

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

MARCELLUS
Is it not like the king?

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

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

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

Act 1, Scene 1, Page 5

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

MARCELLUS
All right, let's sit down and discuss that question.
Somebody tell me why this strict schedule of
guards has been imposed, and why so many
bronze cannons are being manufactured in
Denmark, and so many weapons bought from
Why such impress of shipwrights, whose sore task
Does not divide the Sunday from the week.
What might be toward, that this sweaty haste
Doth make the night joint laborer with the day?
Who is 't that can inform me?

HORATIO
That can I.
At least, the whisper goes so: our last king,
Whose image even but now appeared to us,
Was, as you know, by Fortinbras of Norway,
Thereto pricked on by a most emulate pride,
Dared to the combat; in which our valiant Hamlet
(For so this side of our known world esteemed him)
Did slay this Fortinbras, who by a sealed compact
Well ratified by law and heraldry,
Did forfeit, with his life, all those his lands
Which he stood seized of to the conqueror,
Against the which a moiety competent
Was gagèd by our king, which had returned
To the inheritance of Fortinbras
Had he been vanquisher, as, by the same covenant
And carriage of the article designed,
His fell to Hamlet. Now, sir, young Fortinbras,
Of unimprovèd mettle hot and full,
Hath in the skirts of Norway here and there
Sharked up a list of lawless resolutes,
For food and diet, to some enterprise
That hath a stomach in 't, which is no other—
As it doth well appear unto our state—
But to recover of us, by strong hand

And terms compulsatory, those foresaid lands
So by his father lost. And this, I take it,
Is the main motive of our preparations,
The source of this our watch, and the chief head
Of this posthaste and rummage in the land.

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

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

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

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

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

Enter GHOST  

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

GHOST spreads his arms  

If thou hast any sound or use of voice,  
Speak to me.

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

—Stop it, Marcellus.

MARCELLUS  
Shall I strike at it with my partisan?

HORATIO  
Do, if it will not stand.

BARNARDO  
‘Tis here.

HORATIO  
‘Tis here.

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

BARNARDO  
It was about to speak when the cock crew.

The cock crows  

A rooster crows.

Keep it from leaving, Marcellus.

MARCELLUS  
Should I strike it with my spear?

HORATIO  
Yes, if it doesn't stand still.

BARNARDO  
It's over here.

HORATIO  
There it is.

Exit GHOST  

The GHOST exits.

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

BARNARDO  
It was about to say something when the rooster crowed.

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

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

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

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

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

Exeunt

Act 1, Scene 2

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

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

CLAUDIUS
Although I still have fresh memories of my brother
the elder Hamlet’s death, and though it was
proper to mourn him throughout our kingdom, life
still goes on—I think it’s wise to mourn him while
also thinking about my own well being. Therefore,
I’ve married my former sister-in-law, the queen,
with mixed feelings of happiness and sadness. I
know that in marrying Gertrude I’m only doing
what all of you have wisely advised all along—for
which I thank you. Now, down to business. You
all know what’s happening. Young Fortinbras,
underestimating my strength or imagining that the
death of the king has thrown my country into
turmoil, dreams of getting the better of me, and
never stops pestering me with demands that I
surrender the territory his father lost to the elder
Hamlet, my dead brother-in-law. So much for
Fortinbras.
Act 1, Scene 2, Page 2

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

CLAUDIUS
We doubt it nothing. Heartily farewell.

Exeunt VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS

And now, Laertes, what's the news with you?
You told us of some suit. What is 't, Laertes?
You cannot speak of reason to the Dane

And lose your voice. What wouldst thou beg, Laertes,
That shall not be my offer, not thy asking?
The head is not more native to the heart,
The hand more instrumental to the mouth,
Than is the throne of Denmark to thy father.

What wouldst thou have, Laertes?

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

Act 1, Scene 2, Page 3

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

HAMLET
Ay, madam, it is common.

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

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

CLAUDIUS
’Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet,
To give these mourning duties to your father.
But you must know your father lost a father,
That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound
In filial obligation for some term
To do obsequious sorrow. But to persever
In obstinate condolement is a course
Of impious stubbornness. 'Tis unmanly grief. It shows a will most incorrect to heaven, A heart unfortified, a mind impatient, An understanding simple and unschooled. For what we know must be and is as common As any the most vulgar thing to sense, Why should we in our peevish opposition Take it to heart? Fie! 'Tis a fault to heaven, A fault against the dead, a fault to nature, To reason most absurd, whose common theme Is death of fathers, and who still hath cried, From the first corse till he that died today, “This must be so.” We pray you, throw to earth This unprevailing woe, and think of us As of a father. For let the world take note, You are the most immediate to our throne, And with no less nobility of love Than that which dearest father bears his son Do I impart toward you. For your intent In going back to school in Wittenberg, It is most retrograde to our desire. And we beseech you, bend you to remain Here in the cheer and comfort of our eye, Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son. GERTRUDE Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet. I pray thee, stay with us. Go not to Wittenberg. HAMLET I shall in all my best obey you, madam. CLAUDIUS Why, 'tis a loving and a fair reply. Be as ourself in Denmark.—Madam, come. This gentle and unforced accord of Hamlet Sits smiling to my heart, in grace whereof No jocund health that Denmark drinks today But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell, And the king's rouse the heavens shall bruit again, Respeaking earthly thunder. Come away. HAMLET Oh, that this too, too sullied flesh would melt, Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew, Or that the Everlasting had not fixed His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God, God! How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable Seem to me all the uses of this world! Fie on 't, ah fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden That grows to seed. Things rank and gross in nature Possess it merely. That it should come to this. But two months dead—nay, not so much, not two. So excellent a king, that was to this vulnerable heart and an ignorant and weak mind. Because everyone knows that you are the man closest to this throne, and I love you just as much as any father loves his son. And your plans for going back to Wittenberg are not what I want. I'm asking you now to stay here in my company as the number-one member of my court, my nephew and now my son too. GERTRUDE Please answer my prayers, Hamlet, and stay with us. Don't go back to Wittenberg. HAMLET I'll obey you as well as I can, ma'am. CLAUDIUS That's the right answer—it shows your love. Stay in Denmark like us.—My dear wife, come. Hamlet's agreeing to stay makes me happy, and every merry toast I'll drink today will be heard as far as the clouds overhead. My drinking will be echoed in the heavens. Let's go. Trumpets play. Everyone except HAMLET exits. HAMLET Ah, I wish my dirty flesh could melt away into a vapor, or that God had not made a law against suicide. Oh God, God! How tired, stale, and pointless life is to me. Damn it! It's like a garden that no one's taking care of, and that's growing wild. Only nasty weeds grow in it now. I can't believe it's come to this. My father's only been dead for two months—no, not even two. Such an excellent king, as superior to my uncle as a god is to a beast, and so loving toward my mother that he kept the wind from blowing too hard on
Act 1, Scene 2, Page 6

That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly.—Heaven and earth,
Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on, and yet, within a month—
Let me not think on ‘t. Frailty, thy name is woman!—
A little month, or ere those shoes were old
With which she followed my poor father’s body,
Like Niobe, all tears. Why she, even she—
O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason
Would have mourned longer!—married with my
uncle,
My father’s brother, but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules. Within a month,
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
She married. O most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
It is not nor it cannot come to good,
But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

Enter HORATIO, MARCELLUS, and BARNARDO.

HORATIO
Hail to your lordship.

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

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

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

MARCELLUS
My good lord.

HORATIO
A truant disposition, good my lord.

HAMLET
I would not hear your enemy say so,
Nor shall you do mine ear that violence,
To make it truster of your own report.

Act 1, Scene 2, Page 7

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

HORATIO
A truant disposition, good my lord.

HAMLET
I would not hear your enemy say so,
Nor shall you do mine ear that violence,
To make it truster of your own report.

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

HORATIO
I felt like skipping school, sir.

HAMLET
I wouldn’t allow your enemies to say that, and I
won’t believe it from you. I know you’d never skip
school. What are you doing here in Elsinore? I’ll
Against yourself. I know you are no truant.
But what is your affair in Elsinore?
We'll teach you to drink deep ere you depart.

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

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

**HORATIO**
Indeed, my lord, it followed hard upon.

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

**HORATIO**
Where, my lord?

**HAMLET**
In my mind's eye, Horatio.

**HORATIO**
I saw him once. He was a goodly king.

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

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

**HAMLET**
For God's love, let me hear.

**HORATIO**
Two nights together had these gentlemen,
Marcellus and Barnardo, on their watch,
In the dead waste and middle of the night,
Been thus encountered: a figure like your father,
Armed at point exactly, cap-à-pie,
Appears before them and with solemn march
Goes slow and stately by them. Thrice he walked

**HORATIO**
Sir, I think I saw him last night.

**HAMLET**
Saw who?

**HORATIO**
Your father, sir. The dead king.

**HAMLET**
The king my father?!

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

**HAMLET**
For God's sake, let me hear it.

**HORATIO**
After midnight, for two nights running, these two
guards, Marcellus and Barnardo, saw a figure
that looked very much like your father, in full
armor from head to toe. It just appeared before
them and marched past them with slow dignity
three times, a staff's distance from their amazed
eyes, while they turned, quaking with fear and
By their oppressed and fear-surprisèd eyes
Within his truncheon's length, whilst they, distilled
Almost to jelly with the act of fear,
Stand dumb and speak not to him. This to me
In dreadful secrecy impart they did,
And I with them the third night kept the watch,
Where—as they had delivered, both in time,
Form of the thing, each word made true and good—
The apparition comes. I knew your father.
These hands are not more like.

HAMLET
But where was this?

MARCELLUS
My lord, upon the platform where we watch.

HAMLET
Did you not speak to it?

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

HAMLET
'Tis very strange.

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

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

MARCELLUS, BARNARDO
We do, my lord.

HORATIO
Armed, say you?

MARCELLUS, BARNARDO
Armed, my lord.

HORATIO
Then saw you not his face?

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

HAMLET
But where did this happen?

MARCELLUS
On the platform where we stand guard, sir.

HAMLET
Didn't you talk to it?

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

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

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

MARCELLUS, BARNARDO
Yes, sir.

HORATIO
From head to toe?

MARCELLUS, BARNARDO
Yes, from top to bottom, sir.

HORATIO
Oh, yes, we could, sir. He had his helmet visor
up.
HAMLET
What, looked he frowningly?

HORATIO
A countenance more in sorrow than in anger.

HAMLET
Was he frowning?

HORATIO
He looked more sad than angry.

HAMLET
Was he pale or flushed and red-faced?

HORATIO
Very pale, sir.

HAMLET
Did he stare at you?

HORATIO
The whole time.

HAMLET
You would have been very shocked.

HORATIO
It would have much amazed you.

HAMLET
I wish I’d been there.

HORATIO
You would have been very shocked.

HAMLET
Did he stare at you?

HORATIO
Most constantly.

HAMLET
I would I had been there.

HORATIO
The whole time.

HAMLET
I wish I’d been there.

HORATIO
You would have been very shocked.

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

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

MARCELLUS, BARNARDO
Longer, longer.

HORATIO
Not when I saw ‘t.

HAMLET
His beard was grizzled, no?

HORATIO
His beard was gray, right?

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

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

HAMLET
I will watch tonight. Perchance ‘Twill walk again.

HORATIO
I warrant it will.

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

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

HAMLET
I will requite your loves. So fare you well.

HORATIO
I warrant it will.

HAMLET
Upon the platform, ‘twixt eleven and twelve, I’ll visit you.
Original Text

HORATIO, MARCELLUS, BARNARDO
Our duty to your honor.

HAMLET
Your loves, as mine to you. Farewell.

Exeunt all but HAMLET

My father’s spirit in arms. All is not well.

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

Exit

Act 1, Scene 3

Enter LAERTES and OPHELIA, his sister

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

OPHELIA
Do you doubt that?

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

OPHELIA
No more but so?

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

OPHELIA
No more than a minute?

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

Modern Text

HORATIO, MARCELLUS, BARNARDO
We’ll do our duty to you, sir.

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

Everyone except HAMLET exits.

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

HAMLET exits.

Enter LAERTES and OPHELIA, his sister

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

OPHELIA
Do you doubt I’ll write?

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

OPHELIA
No more than a minute?

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

It fits your wisdom so far to believe it

So if he says he loves you, you should be wise
As he in his particular act and place
May give his saying deed, which is no further
Than the main voice of Denmark goes withal.
Then weigh what loss your honor may sustain
If with too credent ear you list his songs,
Or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure open
To his unmastered importunity.
Fear it, Ophelia. Fear it, my dear sister,
And keep you in the rear of your affection,
Out of the shot and danger of desire.
The chariest maid is prodigal enough
If she unmask her beauty to the moon.
Virtue itself 'scapes not calumnious strokes.
The canker galls the infants of the spring
Too oft before their buttons be disclosed.
And in the morn and liquid dew of youth,
Contagious blastments are most imminent.
Be wary, then. Best safety lies in fear.
Young people often lose their self-control even
without any help from others.

OPHELIA

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

LAERTES

O, fear me not.

Enter POLONIUS

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

Act 1, Scene 3, Page 3

POLONIUS

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

OPHELIA

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

LAERTES

Don't worry, I won't.

POLONIUS

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

POLONIUS

You're still here? Shame on you—get on board!
The wind is filling your ship's sail, and they're
waiting for you. Here, I give you my blessing
again. And just try to remember a few rules of life.
Don't say what you're thinking, and don't be too
quick to act on what you think. Be friendly to
people but don't overdo it. Once you've tested out
your friends and found them trustworthy, hold
onto them. But don't waste your time shaking
hands with every new guy you meet. Don't be
quick to pick a fight, but once you're in one, hold
your own. Listen to many people, but talk to few.
Hear everyone's opinion, but reserve your
judgment. Spend all you can afford on clothes,
but make sure they're quality, not flashy, since
clothes make the man—which is doubly true in
France. Don't borrow money and don't lend it,
since when you lend to a friend, you often lose
And they in France of the best rank and station
Are of a most select and generous chief in that.
Neither a borrower nor a lender be,
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.
Farewell. My blessing season this in thee.

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

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

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

Exit LAERTES

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

LAERTES
Farewell.

Exit LAERTES

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

OPHELIA
So please you, something touching the Lord Hamlet.

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

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

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

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

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

OPHELIA
I don't know what to believe, father.

POLONIUS
the friendship as well as the money, and
borrowing turns a person into a spendthrift. And, above all, be true to yourself. Then you won't be false to anybody else. Good-bye, son. I hope my blessing will help you absorb what I've said.
Original Text

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

Modern Text

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

Act 1, Scene 3, Page 5

OPHELIA

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

POLONIUS

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

OPHELIA

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

POLONIUS

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

OPHELIA

I shall obey, my lord.

Exeunt

Act 1, Scene 4

Enter HAMLET, HORATIO, and MARCELLUS

HAMLET

The air bites shrewdly. It is very cold.

HORATIO

It is a nipping and an eager air.

HAMLET

What hour now?

HORATIO

Exeunt

HAMLET

The air is biting cold.

HORATIO

Yes, it’s definitely nippy.

HAMLET

What time is it?

HORATIO

They exit.
I think it lacks of twelve. A little before twelve, I think.

MARCELLEUS
No, it is struck.

HORATIO
Indeed? I heard it not. It then draws near the season
Wherein the spirit held his wont to walk.
A flourish of trumpets and two pieces of ordnance goes off

What does this mean, my lord?

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

HORATIO
Is it a custom?

HAMLET
Ay, marry, is ’t.
But to my mind, though I am native here
And to the manner born, it is a custom
More honored in the breach than the observance.

This heavy-headed revel east and west
Makes us traduced and taxed of other nations.

They clepe us drunkards and with swinish phrase
Soil our addition. And indeed it takes
From our achievements, though performed at height,
The pith and marrow of our attribute.

So oft it chances in particular men
That for some vicious mole of nature in them—
As in their birth (wherein they are not guilty,
Since nature cannot choose his origin),
By the o'ergrowth of some complexion,
Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason,
Or by some habit that too much o'erleavens
The form of plausible manners—that these men,
Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect,
Being nature’s livery or fortune’s star,
Their virtues else (be they as pure as grace,
As infinite as man may undergo)
Shall in the general censure take corruption
To his own scandal.

Enter GHOST

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

HORATIO
Look, my lord, it comes!

HAMLET
Angels and ministers of grace defend us!
Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damned,
Act 1, Scene 4, Page 3

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

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

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

GHOST beckons HAMLET

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

MARCELLUS
Look, with what courteous action
It waves you to a more removèd ground.

But do not go with it.

HORATIO
No, by no means.

HAMLET
It will not speak. Then I will follow it.

HORATIO
Do not, my lord.

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

Being a thing immortal as itself?
It waves me forth again. I'll follow it.

HORATIO
What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff
That beetles o'er his base into the sea,

Act 1, Scene 4, Page 4

And there assume some other horrible form,
Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason
And draw you into madness? Think of it.
The very place puts toys of desperation,
Original Text

Without more motive, into every brain
That looks so many fathoms to the sea
And hears it roar beneath.

HAMLET
It waves me still.
—Go on. I’ll follow thee.

MARCELLUS
You shall not go, my lord.

—Go on. I’ll follow thee.

MARCELLUS and HORATIO try to hold HAMLET back

HAMLET
Hold off your hands.

HORATIO
Be ruled. You shall not go.

HAMLET
My fate cries out
And makes each petty artery in this body
As hardy as the Nemean lion’s nerve.
Still am I called.—Unhand me, gentlemen.

(draws his sword)

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

Exeunt GHOST and HAMLET

HORATIO
He waxes desperate with imagination.

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

HORATIO
Have after. To what issue will this come?

Act 1, Scene 4, Page 5

MARCELLUS
Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

HORATIO
Heaven will direct it.

MARCELLUS
Nay, let’s follow him.

Exeunt

Act 1, Scene 5

Enter GHOST and HAMLET

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

GHOST
Mark me.

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

GHOST
Listen to me.
HAMLET
I will.

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

HAMLET
Alas, poor ghost!

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

HAMLET
Speak. I am bound to hear.

GHOST
So art thou to revenge when thou shalt hear.

HAMLET
What?

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

HAMLET
O God!

GHOST
Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

HAMLET
Murder?

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

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

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

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

HAMLET
Murder?

GHOST
His most horrible murder. Murder’s always
horrible, but this one was especially horrible,
weird, and unnatural.

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

_GHOST_

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

‘Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard,
A serpent stung me. So the whole ear of Denmark
Is by a forged process of my death
Rankly abused. But know, thou noble youth,
The serpent that did sting thy father’s life
Now wears his crown.

_HAMLET_

O my prophetic soul! My uncle?

**Act 1, Scene 5, Page 3**

_GHOST_

Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts—
O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power
So to seduce!—won to his shameful lust
The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen.
O Hamlet, what a falling off was there!
From me, whose love was of that dignity
That it went hand in hand even with the vow
I made to her in marriage, and to decline
Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor
To those of mine.
But virtue, as it never will be moved,
Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven,
So lust, though to a radiant angel linked,
Will sate itself in a celestial bed
And prey on garbage.
But soft! Methinks I scent the morning air.
Brief let me be. Sleeping within my orchard,
My custom always of the afternoon,
Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole
With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial,
And in the porches of my ears did pour
The leperous distilment, whose effect
Holds such an enmity with blood of man
That swift as quicksilver it courses through
The natural gates and alleys of the body
And with a sudden vigor doth posset
And curd, like eager droppings into milk,
The thin and wholesome blood. So did it mine.
And a most instant tetter barked about,
Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust
All my smooth body.
Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother’s hand
Of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatched,
Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,
Act 1, Scene 5, Page 4

Unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled.
No reckoning made, but sent to my account
With all my imperfections on my head.
Oh, horrible, oh, horrible, most horrible!
If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not.
Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch for luxury and damned incest.
But howsoever thou pursuest this act,
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught. Leave her to heaven
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge
To prick and sting her. Fare thee well at once.
The glowworm shows the matin to be near,
And 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire.
Adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me.

Exit The

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

(he writes)

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

Enter HORATIO and MARCELLUS

HORATIO
My lord, my lord!
MARCELLUS
Lord Hamlet—
HORATIO
Heaven secure him!
HAMLET
So be it.
HORATIO
Illo, ho, ho, my lord!

He said, “Remember me.” I swore I would.

Enter HORATIO and MARCELLUS

MARCELLUS and HORATIO enter.

HORATIO
Sir, sir!
MARCELLUS
Lord Hamlet—
HORATIO
Please let him be all right!
HAMLET
I’m all right.
HORATIO
Oh-ho-ho, sir!
HAMLET
Hillo, ho, ho, boy. Come, bird, come.

MARCELLUS
How is 't, my noble lord?

HORATIO
What news, my lord?

HAMLET
120 Oh, wonderful!

HORATIO
Good my lord, tell it.

HAMLET
No. You'll reveal it.

HORATIO
Not I, my lord, by heaven.

MARCELLUS
Nor I, my lord.

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

HORATIO, MARCELLUS
Ay, by heaven, my lord.

But you'll be secret?

HAMLET
You, as your business and desire shall point you—
For every man has business and desire, such as it is—and for my own poor part,
Look you, I'll go pray.

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

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

HORATIO
There's no offense, my lord.

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

HAMLET

What is 't, my lord? We will.

HORATIO

Never make known what you have seen tonight.

HORATIO, MARCELLUS

My lord, we will not.

HORATIO

What is it, sir? Of course we will.

HORATIO

We won't, sir.

HAMLET

Nay, but swear 't.

HORATIO

In faith, my lord, not I.

MARCELLUS

Nor I, my lord, in faith.

HORATIO

Propose the oath, my lord.

HORATIO

Tell us what to swear, sir.

HAMLET

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

GHOST

(cries under the stage) Swear!

HAMLET

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

HORATIO

Propose the oath, my lord.

HAMLET

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

GHOST

(beneath) Swear.

HAMLET

Hic et ubique? Then we'll shift our ground. Come hither, gentlemen,

GHOST

(from under the stage) Swear by his sword.

HAMLET

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

GHOST

(from under the stage) Swear by his sword.

HAMLET

You said it right, old mole. You're pretty busy down there in the dirt, aren't you? What a tunneler! Let's move again, my friends.
HORATIO
O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!

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

HAMLET
Then give it a nice welcome, as you would give
to any stranger. There are more things in heaven
and earth, Horatio, than you’ve even dreamed of.
But now listen to me. No matter how strangely I
act (since I may find it appropriate to act a little
crazy in the near future), you must never, ever let
on—with a gesture of your hands or a certain
expression on your face—that you know
anything about what happened to me here
tonight. You must never say anything like, “Ah,
yes, just as we suspected,” or “We could tell you
a thing or two about him,” or anything like that.
Swear you won’t.

GHOST
(beneath) Swear!

HAMLET
Rest, rest, perturbèd spirit!—So, gentlemen,
With all my love I do commend me to you,
And what so poor a man as Hamlet is
May do, to express his love and friending to you,
God willing, shall not lack. Let us go in together,
And still your fingers on your lips, I pray.
The time is out of joint. O cursèd spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!
Nay, come, let’s go together.

Exeunt

Act 2, Scene 1

Enter POLONIUS with his man REYNALDO

POLONIUS
Give him this money and these notes, Reynaldo.

REYNALDO
I will, my lord.

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

REYNALDO
My lord, I did intend it.

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

POLONIUS enters with his servant REYNALDO.

POLONIUS
Give him this money and these letters, Reynaldo.

REYNALDO
I will, sir.

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

REYNALDO
That's what I thought too, sir.

POLONIUS
Excellent, very good. Ask around and find out
what Danish people are in Paris—who they are,
where they live and how much money they have,
who their friends are. And if you find out in this
general sort of questioning that they happen to
By this encompassment and drift of question
That they do know my son, come you more nearer
Than your particular demands will touch it.
Take you, as 'twere, some distant knowledge of him,
As thus: “I know his father and his friends,
And, in part, him.” Do you mark this, Reynaldo?

REYNALDO
Ay, very well, my lord.

POLONIUS
“And in part him, but,“ you may say, “not well.
But, if ’t be he I mean, he's very wild.
Addicted so and so.—” And there put on him
What forgeries you please. Marry, none so rank
As may dishonor him. Take heed of that.
But, sir, such wanton, wild, and usual slips
know my son, you’ll find out much more than if
you asked specific questions about him. Just tell
them you vaguely know Laertes, say something
like, “I’m a friend of his father and I sort of know
him,” or whatever. Do you get what I’m saying,
Reynaldo?

REYNALDO
Yes, very well, sir.

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

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

REYNALDO
As gaming, my lord?

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

REYNALDO
My lord, that would dishonor him!

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

REYNALDO
But, my good lord—

POLONIUS
Wherefore should you do this?

REYNALDO
Ay, my lord. I would know that.

POLONIUS
Marry, sir, here’s my drift:
(And I believe it is a fetch of wit)
You, laying these slight sullies on my son
As ‘twere a thing a little soiled i’ th’ working—
Mark you, your party in converse, him you would sound,
Having ever seen in the prenominate crimes
The youth you breathe of guilty, be assured
He closes with you in this consequence:
sound like your average young guy, the kind of
trouble they get into.

REYNALDO
Like gambling, sir?

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

REYNALDO
But that would ruin his reputation!

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

REYNALDO
But, sir—

POLONIUS
Why should you do this, you want to know?

REYNALDO
Yes, sir. I’d like to know.

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

Act 2, Scene 1, Page 3

REYNALDO
Very good, my lord.

POLONIUS
And then, sir, does he this, he does—What was I about to say? By the mass, I was about to say something. Where did I leave?

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

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

REYNALDO
At “closes in the consequence.”

POLONIUS
He closes thus: “I know the gentleman.
I saw him yesterday”—or “t’ other day,”
Or then, or then, with such or such—“and, as you say,
There was he gaming, there o’ertook in’s rouse,
There falling out at tennis,” or, perchance,
“I saw him enter such a house of sale”—
Videlicet a brothel, or so forth. See you now,
Your bait of falsehood takes this carp of truth.
And thus do we of wisdom and of reach,
With windlasses and with assays of bias,
By indirections find directions out.
So by my former lecture and advice
Shall you my son. You have me, have you not?

REYNALDO
My lord, I have.

POLONIUS
God be wi’ you. Fare you well.

REYNALDO
Good my lord.

POLONIUS
Observe his inclination in yourself.

REYNALDO
I shall, my lord.

Act 2, Scene 1, Page 4

POLONIUS
And let him ply his music.

REYNALDO
Well, my lord.

POLONIUS
Farewell.
Exit REYNALDO

Enter OPHELIA

How now, Ophelia? What’s the matter?

OPHELIA

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

POLONIUS

With what, i’ th’ name of God?

OPHELIA

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

POLONIUS

Mad for thy love?

OPHELIA

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

POLONIUS

What said he?

OPHELIA

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

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

POLONIUS

Come with me. I will go seek the king.

This is the very ecstasy of love,
Whose violent property fordoes itself
And leads the will to desperate undertakings
As oft as any passion under heaven
That does afflict our natures. I am sorry.

What, have you given him any hard words of late?

OPHELIA

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

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

Exeunt

Modern Text

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

They exit.

Act 2, Scene 2

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

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

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

ROSENCRANTZ
Both your majesties

Act 2, Scene 2, Page 2

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

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

**CLAUDIUS**  
Thanks, Rosencrantz and gentle Guildenstern.

**GERTRUDE**  
Thanks, Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz.

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

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

**GERTRUDE**  
Ay, amen!

_Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN, escorted by attendants_

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

**CLAUDIUS**  
Thou still hast been the father of good news.

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

**GERTRUDE**  
I doubt it is no other but the main:

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

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

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

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

_Exit POLONIUS_

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

**GERTRUDE**  
I doubt it is nothing but the main:
**Original Text**

His father’s death and our o’erhasty marriage.

Enter POLONIUS with ambassadors VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS

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

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

**Modern Text**

father’s dying and our quick marriage.

POLONIUS enters with the ambassadors VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS.

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

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

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

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

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

Go to your rest. At night we’ll feast together. Most welcome home!

**Exeunt VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS**

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

Mad call I it, for, to define true madness, What is ‘t but to be nothing else but mad? But let that go.

GERTRUDE

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

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

**VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS exit.**

POLONIUS
Well, that turned out well in the end. Sir and madam, to make grand speeches about what majesty is, what service is, or why day is day, night is night, and time is time is just a waste of a lot of day, night, and time. Therefore, since the essence of wisdom is not talking too much, I’ll get right to the point here. Your son is crazy. “Crazy” I’m calling it, since how can you say what craziness is except to say that it’s craziness? But that’s another story.

GERTRUDE
More matter, with less art.

POLONIUS

Madam, I swear I use no art at all.

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

Act 2, Scene 2, Page 5

That we find out the cause of this effect,
Or rather say, the cause of this defect,
For this effect defective comes by cause.
Thus it remains, and the remainder thus. Perpend.
I have a daughter—have while she is mine—
Who in her duty and obedience, mark,
Hath given me this. Now gather and surmise.
(Reads a letter) “To the celestial and my soul’s idol,
the most beautified Ophelia”—That’s an ill phrase, a vile phrase. “Beautified” is a vile phrase. But you shall hear. Thus:
(Reads the letter) “In her excellent white bosom, these,” etc.—

GERTRUDE

Came this from Hamlet to her?

POLONIUS

Good madam, stay a while. I will be faithful.
(Reads the letter)

“Doubt thou the stars are fire,
Doubt that the sun doth move,
Doubt truth to be a liar,
But never doubt I love.
O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers. I have not art to reckon my groans, but that I love thee best,
oh, most best, believe it. Adieu.
Thine evermore, most dear lady,
whilst this machine is to him,
Hamlet.”

This in obedience hath my daughter shown me,
And more above, hath his solicitings,
As they fell out by time, by means, and place,
All given to mine ear.

CLAUDIUS

But how hath she received his love?

POLONIUS

What do you think of me?

CLAUDIUS

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

POLONIUS
I would fain prove so. But what might you think, When I had seen this hot love on the wing— As I perceived it, I must tell you that,
Before my daughter told me—what might you, Or my dear majesty your queen here, think, If I had played the desk or table-book, Or given my heart a winking, mute and dumb, Or looked upon this love with idle sight?

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

CLAUDIUS
(to GERTRUDE) Do you think ’tis this?

GERTRUDE
It may be, very like.

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

CLAUDIUS
Not that I know.

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

CLAUDIUS
How may we try it further?

POLONIUS
You know sometimes he walks four hours together Here in the lobby.

GERTRUDE
So he does indeed.

POLONIUS
At such a time I’ll loose my daughter to him.
Original Text

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

CLAUDIUS

We will try it.

Gertrude, reading on a book

Enter HAMLET, reading on a book

160 But look where sadly the poor wretch comes reading.

POLONIUS

Away, I do beseech you, both away. I'll board him presently. O, give me leave.

Exeunt CLAUDIUS and GERTRUDE

How does my good Lord Hamlet?

HAMLET

Well, God-'a'-mercy.

POLONIUS

Do you know me, my lord?

HAMLET

Excellent well. You are a fishmonger.

POLONIUS

Not I, my lord.

HAMLET

Then I would you were so honest a man.

POLONIUS

Honest, my lord?

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

That's very true, my lord.

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

I have, my lord.

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

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

Modern Text

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

CLAUDIUS

We'll try what you suggest.

HAMLET enters, reading on a book

GERTRUDE

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

POLONIUS

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

CLAUDIUS and GERTRUDE exit.

How are you, Hamlet?

HAMLET

Fine, thank you.

POLONIUS

Do you know who I am?

HAMLET

Of course. You sell fish.

POLONIUS

No, not me, sir.

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

Good, sir?

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

That's definitely true, my lord.

HAMLET

Since if the sun breeds maggots on a dead dog, kissing the corpse—by the way, do you have a daughter?

POLONIUS

I do indeed, my lord.

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

(to himself) Now, what does he mean by that? Still harping on my daughter. But he didn't recognize me at first. He mistook me for a fish
my youth I suffered much extremity for love, very near this. I'll speak to him again.—(to HAMLET) What do you read, my lord?

HAMLET
Words, words, words.

POLONIUS
What is the matter, my lord?

HAMLET
Between who?

Act 2, Scene 2, Page 9

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

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

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

HAMLET
Into my grave.

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

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

POLONIUS
Fare you well, my lord.

HAMLET
(aside) These tedious old fools!

Enter ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

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

POLONIUS
I mean, what do the words say?

HAMLET
Oh, just lies, sir. The sly writer says here that old men have gray beards, their faces are wrinkled, their eyes full of gunk, and that they have no wisdom and weak thighs. Of course I believe it all, but I don’t think it’s good manners to write it down, since you yourself, sir, would grow as old as I am, if you could only travel backward like a crab.

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

HAMLET
Into my grave.

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

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

POLONIUS
Good-bye, my lord.

HAMLET
(to himself) These boring old fools!

POLONIUS
You’re looking for Lord Hamlet. He’s right over there.
Act 2, Scene 2, Page 10

ROSENCRANTZ
God save you, sir!

ROSENCRANTZ
Thank you, sir.

Exit POlonius

GUILDENSTERN
My honored lord!

ROSENCRANTZ
My most dear lord!

HAMLET
My excellent good friends! How dost thou, Guildenstern?

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

ROSENCRANTZ
As the indifferent children of the earth.

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

HAMLET
Nor the soles of her shoes?

ROSENCRANTZ
Neither, my lord.

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

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

GUILDENSTERN
Faith, her privates we.

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

GUILDENSTERN
Yes, we’re the privates in her army.

HAMLET
In that case, the end of the world is approaching. But you’re wrong. Let me ask you a particular question. What crimes have you committed to be sent here to this prison?

Act 2, Scene 2, Page 11

GUILDENSTERN
Prison, my lord?

HAMLET
Denmark’s a prison.

ROSENCRANTZ
Then is the world one.

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

ROSENCRANTZ
We think not so, my lord.

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

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

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

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

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

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

ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN
We’ll wait upon you.

Act 2, Scene 2, Page 12

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

ROSENCRANTZ
To visit you, my lord, no other occasion.

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

GUILDENSTERN
What should we say, my lord?

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

ROSENCRANTZ
Visiting you, my lord. There’s no other reason.

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

GUILDENSTERN
What should we say, my lord?
Original Text

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

ROSENCRANTZ
To what end, my lord?

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

ROSENCRANTZ
(to GUILDENSTERN) What say you?

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

GUILDENSTERN
My lord, we were sent for.

Modern Text

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

ROSENCRANTZ
Why would they do that, my lord?

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

ROSENCRANTZ
(to GUILDENSTERN) What do you think?

HAMLET
(to himself) I've got my eye on you.

GUILDENSTERN
My lord, we were sent for.

Act 2, Scene 2, Page 13

HAMLET
I will tell you why. So shall my anticipation prevent your discovery, and your secrecy to the king and queen mout no feather. I have of late—but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises, and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air—look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire—why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors. What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world. The paragon of animals. And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me. No, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.

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

HAMLET
Why did you laugh then, when I said "man delights not me"?

ROSENCRANTZ
My lord, I wasn’t thinking anything like that.

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

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

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

No, indeed are they not.

HAMLET

How comes it? Do they grow rusty?

ROSENCRANTZ

Nay, their endeavor keeps in the wonted pace. But there is, sir, an eyrie of children, little eyases, that cry out on the top of question and are most tyrannically clapped for ‘t. These are now the fashion, and so berattle the common stages—so they call them—that many wearing rapiers are afraid of goose quills and dare scarce come thither.

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

No, not like before.

HAMLET

Why? Are they getting rusty?

ROSENCRANTZ

No, they’re busy and as excellent as ever. The problem is that they have to compete with a group of children who yell out their lines and receive outrageous applause for it. These child actors are now in fashion, and they’ve so overtaken the public theaters that society types hardly come at all, they’re so afraid of being mocked by the playwrights who write for the boys.

HAMLET

What, you mean kid actors? Who takes care of them? Who pays their way? Will they stop working when their voices mature? Aren’t the playwrights hurting them by making them upstage adult actors, which they are going to grow up and become? (Unless, of course, they
exclaim against their own succession?

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

HAMLET
Is 't possible?

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

HAMLET
Are you kidding?

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

HAMLET
Do the boys carry it away?

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

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

GUILDENSTERN
There are the players.

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

GUILDENSTERN
In what, my dear lord?

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

GUILDENSTERN
In what sense, my lord?

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

Enter POLONIUS

POLONIUS
Well be with you, gentlemen.

HAMLET
Hark you, Guildenstern, and you too—at each ear a
have trust funds.)

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

HAMLET
Are you kidding?

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

HAMLET
And the boys are winning so far?

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

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

Trumpets play offstage, announcing the arrival of
the PLAYERS.

GUILDENSTERN
The actors are here.

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

Act 2, Scene 2, Page 16

GUILDENSTERN
In what sense, my lord?

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

POLONIUS
Gentlemen, I hope you are well.

HAMLET
Listen, Guildenstern, and you too, Rosencrantz—
hearer. *(indicates POLONIUS)* That great baby you see there is not yet out of his swaddling-clouts.

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

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

POLONIUS
My lord, I have news to tell you.

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

365

HAMLET
Buzz, buzz.

POLONIUS
The actors are come hither, my lord.

HAMLET
Buzz, buzz.

POLONIUS
Upon my honor—

HAMLET
Then came each actor on his ass—

Act 2, Scene 2, Page 17

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

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

POLONIUS
What a treasure had he, my lord?

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

POLONIUS
*(aside)* Still on my daughter.

HAMLET
Am I not i’ th’ right, old Jephthah?

POLONIUS
If you call me Jephthah, my lord, I have a daughter

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

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

POLONIUS
What treasure did he have, my lord?

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

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

HAMLET
Aren’t I right, Jephthah, old man?

POLONIUS
If you’re calling me Jephthah, my lord, I do have
that I love passing well.

HAMLET
Nay, that follows not.

POLONIUS
What follows, then, my lord?

HAMLET
Why,

Act 2, Scene 2, Page 18

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

Enter the PLAYERS

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

FIRST PLAYER
What speech, my good lord?

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

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

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

425
The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms, 
Black as his purpose, did the night resemble 
When he lay couched in the ominous horse, 
Hath now this dread and black complexion smeared 
With heraldry more dismal. Head to foot 
Now is he total gules, horridly tricked 
With blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons, 
Baked and impasted with the parching streets, 
That lend a tyrannous and damnèd light 
To their lord’s murder. Roasted in wrath and fire, 
And thus o’ersizèd with coagulate gore, 
With eyes like carbuncles, the hellish Pyrrhus 
Old grandsire Priam seeks.
So, proceed you.

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

FIRST PLAYER
Anon he finds him 
Striking too short at Greeks. His antique sword, 
Rebellious to his arm, lies where it falls, 
Repugnant to command. Unequal matched, 

435
Pyrrhus at Priam drives, in rage strikes wide, 
But with the whiff and wind of his fell sword 
The unnerved father falls. Then senseless Ilium, 
Seeming to feel this blow, with flaming top 
Stoops to his base, and with a hideous crash 

440
Takes prisoner Pyrrhus’ ear. For, lo, his sword, 
Which was declining on the milky head 
Of reverend Priam, seemed ‘th’ air to stick. 
So as a painted tyrant Pyrrhus stood,

Act 2, Scene 2, Page 20

And, like a neutral to his will and matter, 

445
Did nothing. 
But as we often see against some storm 
A silence in the heavens, the rack stand still, 
The bold winds speechless, and the orb below 
As hush as death, anon the dreadful thunder 

450
Doth rend the region. So, after Pyrrhus’ pause, 
Arousèd vengeance sets him new a-work 
And never did the Cyclops’ hammers fall 
On Mars’s armor forged for proof eterne 
With less remorse than Pyrrhus’ bleeding sword 
Now falls on Priam.
Out, out, thou strumpet Fortune! All you gods 

455
In general synod take away her power, 
Break all the spokes and fellies from her wheel, 
And bowl the round nave down the hill of heaven,

But the wind created by his sword is enough to make 
The weakened old man fall. Just then the city of Ilium, 

460
As if feeling this fatal blow to its ruler, 
Collapses in flames, and the crash 
Captures Pyrrhus’s attention. His sword, 
Which was falling onto Priam’s white-haired head 
Seemed to hang in the air. 
Pyrrhus stood there like a man in a painting, 
Doing nothing. 
But just as a raging thunderstorm 
Is often interrupted by a moment’s silence, 

465
And then soon after the region is split apart by dreadful thundershock, 
In the same way, after Pyrrhus paused,
460  As low as to the fiends!

His newly awakened fury set him to work again. When the Cyclopes were making unbreakable armor
For the god of war, their hammers never fell
So mercilessly as Pyrrhus’s bloody sword
Now falls on Priam.

Get out of here, Lady Luck, you whore! All you gods
Should come together to rob her of her powers,
Break all the spokes on her wheel of fortune,
And send it rolling down the hills of heaven
Into the depths of hell.

POLONIUS
This is too long.

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

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

HAMLET
“The moblèd queen”? 

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

POLONIUS
Look whe’er he has not turned his color and has tears in ’s eyes.—Prithee, no more.

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

POLONIUS

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

HAMLET

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

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Act 2, Scene 2, Page 22

POLONIUS

495 Come, sirs.

HAMLET

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

FIRST PLAYER

Ay, my lord.

HAMLET

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

FIRST PLAYER

Ay, my lord.

HAMLET

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

*Exeunt POLONIUS and the PLAYERS*

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

ROSENCRANTZ

Good my lord.

HAMLET

Ay, so. Good-bye to you.

*Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN*

Now I am alone.

Oh, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!

Is it not monstrous that thisplayer here, But in a fiction, in a dream of passion, Could force his soul so to his own conceit That from her working all his visage wanned, Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,

515 A broken voice, and his whole function suiting With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing— For Hecuba!
What’s Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba
That he should weep for her? What would he do

Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
Make mad the guilty and appall the free,

Confounded the ignorant, and amaze indeed
The very faculties of eyes and ears. Yet I,
A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
And can say nothing—no, not for a king,
Upon whose property and most dear life
A damned defeat was made. Am I a coward?
Who calls me “villain”? Breaks my pate across?
Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face?
Tweaks me by the nose? Gives me the lie i’ th’ throat
As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this?

Ha!
‘Swounds, I should take it, for it cannot be
But I am pigeon-livered and lack gall
To make oppression bitter, or ere this
I should have fatted all the region kites

With this slave’s offal. Bloody, bawdy villain!
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!
O vengeance!
Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,

That I, the son of a dear father murdered,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words
And fall a-cursing like a very drab,
A scullion! Fie upon ’t, foh!

About, my brain.—Hum, I have heard
That guilty creatures sitting at a play
Have, by the very cunning of the scene,
Been struck so to the soul that presently
They have proclaimed their malefactions.

For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
With most miraculous organ. I’ll have these players
Play something like the murder of my father
Before mine uncle. I’ll observe his looks.
I’ll tent him to the quick. If he do blench,

I know my course. The spirit that I have seen

Murder has no tongue, but miraculously it still
finds a way to speak. I’ll have these actors
perform something like my father’s murder in
front of my uncle. I’ll watch my uncle. I’ll probe
his conscience and see if he flinches. If he
becomes pale, I know what to do. The ghost I
Original Text

Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the king.

Modern Text

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

Exit

HAMLET exits.

Act 3, Scene 1

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

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

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

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

GERTRUDE
Did he receive you well?

ROSENCRANTZ
Most like a gentleman.

GUILDENSTERN
But with much forcing of his disposition.

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

GERTRUDE
Did you assay him?

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

GERTRUDE
Did you try tempting him with some entertainment?

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

Act 3, Scene 1, Page 2

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

POLONIUS

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

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

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

ROSENCRANTZ
We shall, my lord.

Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

CLAUDIUS
Sweet Gertrude, leave us too,

For we have closely sent for Hamlet hither,
That he, as ‘twere by accident, may here

Afront Ophelia.
Her father and myself (lawful espials)
Will so bestow ourselves that, seeing unseen,

We may of their encounter frankly judge,
And gather by him, as he is behaved,
If ‘t be the affliction of his love or no
That thus he suffers for.

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

OPHELIA
Madam, I wish it may.

Exit GERTRUDE

Act 3, Scene 1, Page 3

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

We will bestow ourselves. (to OPHELIA) Read on this book

That show of such an exercise may color
Your loneliness.—We are oft to blame in this,

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

CLAUDIUS
(aside) Oh, ‘tis too true!

How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!
The harlot’s cheek, beautied with plastering art,
Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it

Than is my deed to my most painted word.
O heavy burden!

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!
ACT 3, SCENE 1, PAGE 4

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

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

OPHELIA
My lord, you know very well that you did, and
wrote letters to go along with them, letters so
sweetly written that they made your gifts even
more valuable. Their perfume is gone now, so
take them back. Nice gifts lose

Act 3, Scene 1, Page 5
Take these again, for to the noble mind
Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.
There, my lord.

HAMLET
Ha, ha, are you honest?

OPHELIA
My lord?

OPHELIA
Excuse me?

HAMLET
Are you fair?

OPHELIA
What means your lordship?

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

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

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

OPHELIA
Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

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

OPHELIA
I was the more deceived.

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

Act 3, Scene 1, Page 6
I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more

I am arrogant, vengeful, ambitious, with more ill
Original Text

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

OPHELIA
At home, my lord.

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

OPHELIA
O, help him, you sweet heavens!

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

OPHELIA
Heavenly powers, restore him!

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

Modem Text

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.

Exit HAMLET

HAMLET exits.

Act 3, Scene 1, Page 7

OPHELIA
Oh, what a noble mind is here o'errthrown!—
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,

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

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

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

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.

Act 3, Scene 1, Page 8

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 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

They all exit.

Act 3, Scene 2

Enter HAMLET and PLAYERS

HAMLET
Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue. But if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand thus, but use all gently, for in the very torrent, tempest, and (as I may say) whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. Oh, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the

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 moderate and smooth. I hate it when I hear a blustery actor in a wig tear a passion to shreds, bursting everyone’s eardrums so as to impress the
groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb-shows and noise. I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant. It out-Herods Herod. Pray you, avoid it.

FIRST PLAYER
I warrant your honor.

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

FIRST PLAYER
I will, sir.

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

Act 3, Scene 2, Page 2

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

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

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

Exeunt PLAYERS

Enter POLONIUS, ROSENCRANTZ, and GUILDENSTERN

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

POLONIUS
And the queen too, and that presently.

HAMLET
Bid the players make haste.

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

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

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

The PLAYERS exit.

POLONIUS, GUILDENSTERN, and ROSENCRANTZ enter.

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

POLONIUS
Yes, he will, and the queen as well.

HAMLET
Tell the actors to hurry.
**Act 3, Scene 2, Page 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Text</th>
<th>Modern Text</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exit POLONIUS</td>
<td>POLONIUS exits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 Will you two help to hasten them?</td>
<td>Will you two help them get ready?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROSENCRANTZ</td>
<td>ROSENCRANTZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ay, my lord.</td>
<td>Yes, my lord.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN</td>
<td>ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAMLET</td>
<td>HAMLET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What ho, Horatio!</td>
<td>Well, hello there, Horatio!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enter HORATIO</td>
<td>HORATIO enters.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Text</th>
<th>Modern Text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HORATIO</td>
<td>Here, sweet lord, at your service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAMLET</td>
<td>Horatio, thou art e’en as just a man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As e’er my conversation coped withal.</td>
<td>As e’er my conversation coped withal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HORATIO</td>
<td>O my dear lord—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAMLET</td>
<td>Nay, do not think I flatter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For what advancement may I hope from thee That no revenue hast but thy good spirits, To feed and clothe thee? Why should the poor be flattered? No, let the candied tongue lick absurd pomp, And crook the pregnant hinges of the knee Where thrift may follow fawning. Dost thou hear? Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice And could of men distinguish, her election Hath sealed thee for herself, for thou hast been— As one in suffering all that suffers nothing— A man that Fortune’s buffets and rewards Hast ta’en with equal thanks. And blessed are those Whose blood and judgment are so well commingled, That they are not a pipe for Fortune’s finger To sound what stop she please. Give me that man That is not passion’s slave, and I will wear him In my heart’s core, ay, in my heart of heart, As I do thee.—Something too much of this.— There is a play tonight before the king. One scene of it comes near the circumstance Which I have told thee of my father’s death. I prithee, when thou seest that act afoot, Even with the very comment of thy soul Observe mine uncle. If his occulted guilt Do not itself unkennel in one speech, It is a damned ghost that we have seen, And my imaginations are as foul</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act 3, Scene 2, Page 4</th>
<th>Watch him closely. I’ll stare at him too, and afterward we’ll compare notes on him.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As Vulcan’s stithy. Give him heedful note. For I mine eyes will rivet to his face,</td>
<td>Watch him closely. I’ll stare at him too, and afterward we’ll compare notes on him.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.

HORATIO

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

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.

HAMLET

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

ROSENCRANTZ

Ay, my lord. They stay upon your patience.

GERTRUDE

Come hither, my dear Hamlet, sit by me.

HAMLET

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

POLONIUS

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

ROSENCRANTZ

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

GERTRUDE

Come here, my dear Hamlet. Sit by me.

HAMLET

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

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

HAMLET
Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

OPHELIA
No, my lord.

HAMLET
I mean, my head upon your lap?

OPHELIA
Ay, my lord.

HAMLET
Do you think I meant country matters?

OPHELIA
I think nothing, my lord.

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

OPHELIA
What is, my lord?

HAMLET
Nothing.

OPHELIA
You are merry, my lord.

HAMLET
Who, I?

OPHELIA
Ay, my lord.

Act 3, Scene 2, Page 6

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

OPHELIA
Nay, 'tis twice two months, my lord.

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

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

Exeunt PLAYERS

OPHELIA
What means this, my lord?

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

OPHELIA
Belike this show imports the argument of the play.

Enter PROLOGUE

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

OPHELIA
Will he tell us what this show meant?

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

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

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

Exit PROLOGUE

HAMLET
Is this a prologue or the posy of a ring?

OPHELIA
140 'Tis brief, my lord.

HAMLET
As woman's love.

Enter PLAYER KING and PLAYER QUEEN

Act 3, Scene 2, Page 8

PLAYER KING

sleeping, she leaves. Another man comes in, takes the crown from the king, pours poison in the sleeping man's ear, and leaves. The queen returns and finds the king dead. She becomes hysterical. The killer comes back with three others and calms the queen. The body is carried away. The killer woos the queen with gifts. She is cold toward him for a while but then relents and accepts his advances.

The PLAYERS exit.

OPHELIA
What does this mean, my lord?

HAMLET
This means we're having some mischievous fun.

OPHELIA
This pantomime was probably a summary of the play.

Enter PROLOGUE

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.

Exit PROLOGUE

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.

Act 3, Scene 2, Page 8

PLAYER KING

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

It's been thirty years since we were married.

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

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

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

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

HAMLET
(aside) Wormwood, wormwood.

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.

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

PLAYER KING
I know that's what you think now, but people
change their minds. Often our intentions are
strong at first, but as time goes on they weaken,
just like an apple sticks to the tree when it is
unripe but falls to the ground once it ripens. The
promises we make to ourselves in emotional
moments lose their power once the emotion
passes. Great grief and joy may rouse us to
action, but when the grief or joy have passed,
we're no longer motivated to act. Joy turns to
grief in the blink of an eye, and grief becomes joy
just as quickly. This world is not made for either
Where joy most revels, grief doth most lament. 
Grief joys, joy grieves on slender accident. 
This world is not for aye, nor 'tis not strange 
That even our loves should with our fortunes change.

For 'tis a question left us yet to prove, 
Whether love lead fortune, or else fortune love. 
The great man down, you mark his favorite flies. 
The poor advanced makes friends of enemies.

And hitherto doth love on fortune tend, 
For who not needs shall never lack a friend, 
And who in want a hollow friend doth try, 
Directly seasons him his enemy.

But, orderly to end where I begun, 
Our wills and fates do so contrary run 
That our devices still are overthrown.

Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own. 
So think thou wilt no second husband wed, 
But die thy thoughts when thy first lord is dead.

Nor earth to me give food, nor heaven light. 
Sport and repose lock from me day and night. 
To desperation turn my trust and hope. 
An anchor's cheer in prison be my scope.

Each opposite that blanks the face of joy 
Meet what I would have well and it destroy. 
Both here and hence pursue me lasting strife 
If, once a widow, ever I be wife!

If she should break it now! 
Nice vow, but what if she breaks it?

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

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

Exit PLAYER QUEEN

Madam, how like you this play? 
Nice vow, but what if she breaks it?

The lady protests too much, methinks. 
The lady's overdoing it, I think.

Oh, but she'll keep her word. 
Oh, but she'll keep her word.

Have you heard the argument? Is there no offense in 't? 
Do you know the plot? Is there anything offensive in it?

one to last long in, and it's no surprise that even our loves change along with our luck. It's still a mystery to be solved whether luck controls love, or love controls luck. When a great man has a run of bad luck, watch how followers 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.
No Fear Shakespeare – Hamlet (by SparkNotes)

Original Text

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

CLAUDIUS
What do you call the play?

CLAUDIUS
What’s the play called?

Act 3, Scene 2, Page 11

HAMLET
*The Mousetrap.* Marry, how? Tropically. This play is the image of a murder done in Vienna. Gonzago is the duke’s name, his wife Baptista. You shall see anon. ‘Tis a 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
230 You are as good as a chorus, my lord.

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

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

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

OPHELIA
235 Still better and worse.

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

LUCIANUS
*Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit, and time agreeing,*

*Confederate season, else no creature seeing,*

*Thou mixture rank, of midnight weeds collected,*

*With Hecate’s ban thrice blasted, thrice infected,*

*Thy natural magic and dire property*

240 On wholesome life usurp immediately. *(pours poison into PLAYER KING ’s ears)*

Act 3, Scene 2, Page 12

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

CLAUDIUS stands up

OPHELIA The king rises.

HAMLET What, frighted with false fire?

GERTRUDE How fares my lord?

POLONIUS Give o’er the play.

CLAUDIUS Give me some light, away!

POLONIUS Lights, lights, lights!

Comotion. Exeunt all but HAMLET and HORATIO

HAMLET

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

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

HORATIO Half a share.

HAMLET A whole one, I.

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

Act 3, Scene 2, Page 13

HORATIO You might have rhymed.

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

HORATIO Very well, my lord.

HAMLET Upon the talk of the poisoning?

HORATIO I did very well note him.

HORATIO You could have at least rhymed.

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

HORATIO Yes, I did, my lord.

HAMLET When the actors were talking about poison?

HORATIO I watched him very closely.
HAMLET
265 Ah ha! Come, some music! Come, the recorders!
     For if the king like not the comedy,
     Why then, belike, he likes it not, perdy.
     Come, some music!

Enter ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

GUILDENSTERN
Good my lord, vouchsafe me a word with you.

HAMLET
Sir, a whole history.

GUILDENSTERN
The king, sir—

HAMLET
Ay, sir, what of him?

GUILDENSTERN
Is in his retirement marvelous distempered.

Enter ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN enter.

GUILDENSTERN
My lord, could I have a word with you?

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

GUILDENSTERN
Sir, the king—

HAMLET
Yes, what about him?

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

Act 3, Scene 2, Page 14

HAMLET
With drink, sir?

GUILDENSTERN
No, my lord, with choler.

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

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

HAMLET
I am tame, sir. Pronounce.

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

HAMLET
You are welcome.

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

HAMLET
Sir, I cannot.

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.
Act 3, Scene 2, Page 15

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

ROSECRANTZ
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?

ROSECRANTZ
My lord, you once did love me.

HAMLET
And do still, by these pickers and stealers.

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

HAMLET
Sir, I lack advancement.

ROSECRANTZ
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. (taketh a recorder) (aside to ROSECRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN) To withdraw with you, why do you go about to recover the wind of me as if you would drive me into a toil?

GUILDENSTERN
O my lord, if my duty be too bold, my love is too unmannerly.

Act 3, Scene 2, Page 16

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

GUILDENSTERN
Oh, my lord, I’m sorry if I’m forgetting my manners. It’s just that I’m worried about you.
I do not well understand that. Will you play upon this pipe?

GUILDENSTERN
My lord, I cannot.

HAMLET
I pray you.

GUILDENSTERN
Believe me, I cannot.

HAMLET
I do beseech you.

GUILDENSTERN
I know no touch of it, my lord.

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

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

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

Enter POLONIUS

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

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

POLONIUS
By th’ mass, and ‘tis like a camel indeed.

HAMLET
Methinks it is like a weasel.

POLONIUS
It is backed like a weasel.

HAMLET
Or like a whale.

POLONIUS enters.

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**
Very like a whale.

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

**Polonius**
I will say so.

**Hamlet**
“By and by” is easily said.

**Exit Polonius**

**Hamlet**
I’ll go see my mother soon.

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.”

*Exit Polonius*

Leave me, friends.

*Exeunt all but Hamlet*

**Hamlet**
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 Hamlet**

**Act 3, Scene 2, Page 18**

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!

**CLAUDIUS, ROSENCRANTZ, and GUILDENSTERN enter.**

**Claudius**
I like him not, nor stands it safe with us
To let his madness range. Therefore prepare you.
I your commission will forthwith dispatch,
And he to England shall along with you.

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
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

**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
The lives of many. The cease of majesty<br>Dies not alone, but, like a gulf, doth draw<br>What's near it with it. It is a massy wheel<br>Fixed on the summit of the highest mount,<br>To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things<br>Are mortised and adjoined, which, when it falls,<br>Each small annexment, petty consequence,<br>Attends the boisterous ruin. Never alone<br>Did the king sigh, but with a general groan.

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

ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN
We will haste us.

Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

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

CLAUDIUS
Thanks, dear my lord.

Exit POLONIUS

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

Exit HAMLET

CLAUDIUS
(rises) My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.
Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

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.

Exit HAMLET

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
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

HAMLET
(within) Mother, mother, mother!

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

POLONIUS hides behind the arras

Enter GERTRUDE and POLONIUS

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
(of stage) 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 the matter?

GERTRUDE
Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

HAMLET
Mother, you have my father much offended.

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

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

GERTRUDE
Why, how now, Hamlet?

HAMLET
What's the matter now?

GERTRUDE
Have you forgot me?

HAMLET
No, by the rood, not so.

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

HAMLET
Now mother, what's this all about?

GERTRUDE
Hamlet, you've insulted your father.

HAMLET
Mother, you've insulted my father.

GERTRUDE
Come on, you're answering me foolishly.

HAMLET
Go on, you're questioning me evilly.

GERTRUDE
Hamlet, what, why?

HAMLET
What's the problem now?

GERTRUDE
Have you forgotten who I am?

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

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

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

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

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

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

GERTRUDE
What are you going to do? You won't kill me, will
Original Text

Help, help, ho!

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

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

(stabs his sword through the arras and kills POLONIUS)

POLONIUS
(from behind the 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)

Act 3, Scene 4, Page 3

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

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

HAMLET
Such an act That blurs the grace and blush of modesty, Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose From the fair forehead of an innocent love And sets a blister there, makes marriage vows As false as dicers' oaths—oh, such a deed As from the body of contraction plucks The very soul, and sweet religion makes A rhapsody of words. Heaven's face doth grow You low-life, nosy, busybody fool, goodbye. I thought you were somebody more important. You've gotten what you deserve. I guess you found out it's dangerous to be a busybody. Stop wringing your hands. Sit down and let me wring your heart instead, which I will do if it's still soft enough, if your evil lifestyle has not toughened it against feeling anything at all.

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

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

Is thought-sick at the act.

GERTRUDE

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

HAMLET

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

GERTRUDE

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

HAMLET

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

GERTRUDE

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 without anything else, the use of even one impaired sense would not permit such a mistake as yours. Oh, for shame, why aren’t you blushing? If evil can overtake even an old mother’s bones, then let it melt my own. It turns out it’s no longer shameful to act on impulse—now that the old are doing so, and now that reason is a servant to desire.

GERTRUDE

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

HAMLET

Yes, and you lie in the sweaty stench of your dirty sheets, wet with corruption, making love—
Act 3, Scene 4, Page 5

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

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

GERTRUDE
No more!

HAMLET
A king of shreds and patches—

Enter GHOST

The GHOST enters.

GERTRUDE
Alas, how is 't with you, staring into the empty air
And with th' incorporeal air do hold discourse?
That you do bend your eye on vacancy
And with th' incorporeal air do hold discourse?

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

Hamlet
On him, on him! Look you, how pale he glares!
His form and cause conjoined, preaching to stones,

Act 3, Scene 4, Page 6

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—

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. 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.

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

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. 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.
Would make them capable.  
(to GHOST) Do not look upon me, 
Lest with this piteous action you convert 
My stern effects. Then what I have to do 
Will want true color—tears perchance for blood. 

Gertrude  
To whom do you speak this? 

Hamlet  
Do you see nothing there? 

Gertrude  
Nothing at all, yet all that is I see. 

Hamlet  
Nor did you nothing hear? 

Gertrude  
No, nothing but ourselves. 

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

Exit Ghost

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

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

Gertrude  
O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain. 

Hamlet  
Oh, throw away the worser part of it, 
And live the purer with the other half. 
Good night—but go not to mine uncle’s bed. 
Assume a virtue if you have it not.

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

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

Gertrude  
Oh Hamlet, you’ve broken my heart in two! 

Hamlet  
Then throw away the worse half, and live a purer 
life with the other! Good night to you. But don’t 
go to my uncle’s bed tonight. At least pretend to 
be virtuous, even if you’re not. Habit is a terrible
That monster, custom, who all sense doth eat,
Of habits devil, is angel yet in this:
That to the use of actions fair and good
He likewise gives a frock or livery
That aptly is put on. Refrain tonight,
And that shall lend a kind of easiness
To the next abstinence, the next more easy.

thing, in that it’s easy to get used to doing evil
without feeling bad about it. But it’s also a good
thing, in that being good can also become a
habit.
Say no to sex tonight, and that will make it easier
to say no the next time, and still easier the time
after that. Habit can change even one’s natural
instincts, and either rein in the devil in us, or kick
him out. Once again, good night to you, 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

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—

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.

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.

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.
No Fear Shakespeare – Hamlet (by SparkNotes) -75-

Original Text

Act 3, Scene 4, Page 9

HAMLET
I must to England, you know that?

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

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

(indicates POLONIUS)
This man shall set me packing.
I'll lug the guts into the neighbor room.
Mother, good night. Indeed this counselor
Is now most still, most secret, and most grave
Who was in life a foolish prating knave.—
Come, sir, to draw toward an end with you.—
Good night, mother.

Exeunt, HAMLET tugging in POLONIUS

Modern Text

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

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

HAMLET
Yes, it's a done deal, the documents are ready, and my two schoolmates, whom I trust about as much as rattlesnakes, are in charge. They're the ones who'll lead me on my march to mischief. Let it happen. It's fun to watch the engineer get blown up by his own explosives, and with any luck I'll dig a few feet below their bombs and blow them to the moon. Oh, it's nice to kill two birds with one 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.

Exeunt, HAMLET dragging POLONIUS offstage.

Act 4, Scene 1

Enter King CLAUDIUS and Queen GERTRUDE, with ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

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

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

Exeunt ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

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

CLAUDIUS
What, Gertrude? How does Hamlet?

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

CLAUDIUS

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 witnessed tonight!

CLAUDIUS
What, Gertrude? How is Hamlet?

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

CLAUDIUS
Original Text

O heavy deed!
It had been so with us, had we been there.
15 His liberty is full of threats to all—
To you yourself, to us, to everyone.
Alas, how shall this bloody deed be answered?
It will be laid to us, whose providence
Should have kept short, restrained and out of haunt,
20 This mad young man. But so much was our love,
We would not understand what was most fit,

Modern Text

Oh, this is terrible! It would’ve happened to me if
I’d been there. His wildness is a threat to all of
us—to you, to me, to everyone. How will we deal
with this violent deed? I’m the one who will be
blamed for not restraining and confining this mad
young man. But I loved him so much I didn’t want
to think about what I had to do.
So, like someone suffering from a nasty disease
who refuses to divulge his condition and lets it
infect him to

Act 4, Scene 1, Page 2

But, like the owner of a foul disease,
To keep it from divulging, let it feed
Even on the pith of life. Where is he gone?
GERTRUDE
25 To draw apart the body he hath killed,
O’er whom his very madness, like some ore
Among a mineral of metals base,
Shows itself pure. He weeps for what is done.
CLAUDIUS
O Gertrude, come away!
30 The sun no sooner shall the mountains touch
But we will ship him hence, and this vile deed
We must, with all our majesty and skill,
Both countenance and excuse.—Ho, Guildenstern!

Enter ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

Friends both, go join you with some further aid.

Hamlet in madness hath Polonius slain,
And from his mother’s closet hath he dragged him.
Go seek him out, speak fair, and bring the body
Into the chapel. I pray you, haste in this.

Enter ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN

Come, Gertrude, we’ll call up our wisest friends,
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
45 And hit the woundless air. Oh, come away!
My soul is full of discord and dismay.

Exeunt

Act 4, Scene 2

Enter HAMLET

HAMLET
Safely stowed.

GENTLEMEN
(from within) Hamlet! Lord Hamlet!

HAMLET
But soft, what noise? Who calls on Hamlet?

Enter HAMLET

HAMLET
The body is safely hidden.

GENTLEMEN
(from offstage) Hamlet, Lord Hamlet!

HAMLET
What’s that noise? Who’s calling for Hamlet? Oh,
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?

HAMLET
Ay, sir, that soaks up the king's countenance, his rewards, his authorities. But such officers do the king best service in the end. He keeps them, like an ape, in the corner of his jaw, first mouthed to be last swallowed. When he needs what you have gleaned, it is but squeezing you and, sponge, you shall be dry again.

ROSENCRANTZ
I understand you not, my lord.

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

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

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

GUILDENSTERN
A thing, my lord?

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

Exeunt

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

CLAUDIUS has 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.

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?

HAMLET
At supper.

CLAUDIUS
At supper where?

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

CLAUDIUS
Alas, ala! HAMLET
A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.

CLAUDIUS

What dost you mean by this?

HAMLET

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

CLAUDIUS

Where is Polonius?

HAMLET

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

CLAUDIUS

(to attendants) Go seek him there.

Exeunt some attendants

HAMLET

He will stay till ye come.

CLAUDIUS

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

HAMLET

For England?

CLAUDIUS

Ay, Hamlet.

HAMLET

Good.

CLAUDIUS

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

HAMLET

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

Farewell, dear mother.

CLAUDIUS

Thy loving father, Hamlet.

HAMLET

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

HAMLET

Exit

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

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

60

65

70

Act 4, Scene 3, Page 4

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

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.

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. 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

Sir, whose troops are these?

CAPTAIN

The king of Norway’s, sir.

HAMLET

What are they doing here, sir?

CAPTAIN


Against some part of Poland.

HAMLET
Who commands them, sir?

CAPTAIN
The nephew to old Norway, Fortinbras.

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

Act 4, Scene 4, Page 2

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.

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.

ROSENDENCRANTZ
Will ’t please you go, my lord?

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

Exit CAPTAIN

ROSENDENCRANTZ
Will you please come now, my lord?

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

Exit 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
Act 4, Scene 4, Page 3

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
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,
45 Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,
Even for an eggshell. Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument,
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honor’s at the stake. So where does that leave me,
That have a father killed, a mother stained,
Excitements of my reason and my blood,
And let all sleep—while, to my shame, I see
The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
That for a fantasy and trick of fame
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
Which is not tomb enough and continent
To hide the slain? Oh, from this time forth,
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!

Exit

Act 4, Scene 5

Enter HORATIO, GERTRUDE, and a GENTLEMAN

GERTRUDE
I will not speak with her.

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

GERTRUDE
What would she have?

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

GERTRUDE
I won’t speak to her.

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

GERTRUDE
What does she want?

GENTLEMAN
She talks about her father a lot, and says she hears there are conspiracies around the world, and coughs, and beats her breast, and gets angry over tiny matters, and talks nonsense. Her words don’t mean anything, but her babbling causes her listeners to draw conclusions. They hear what they want to hear. Her winks and nods and gestures do suggest that she means to convey a message, and not a happy one.
HORATIO
'Twere good she were spoken with, for she may strew
Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds.

GERTRUDE
Let her come in.

Exit GENTLEMAN

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

Enter OPHELIA, distracted

OPHELIA

Where is the beauteous majesty of Denmark?

GERTRUDE

How now, Ophelia?

OPHELIA

(sings)

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

GERTRUDE

Alas, sweet lady, what imports this song?

OPHELIA

Say you? Nay, pray you, mark.

(sings)

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

Oh, ho!

GERTRUDE

Nay, but, Ophelia—

OPHELIA

Pray you, mark.

(sings)

White his shroud as the mountain snow—

Enter CLAUDIUS

GERTRUDE

My lord, look at this poor girl.

OPHELIA

(sings)

Covered with sweet flowers
Which did not fall to the ground
In true-love showers.
Act 4, Scene 5, Page 3

CLAUDIUS
How do you, pretty lady?

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

CLAUDIUS
Conceit upon her father.

OPHELIA
Pray you, let’s have no words of this, but when they ask you what it means, say you this:
(sings)
Tomorrow is Saint Valentine’s day,
All in the morning betime,
And I a maid at your window,
To be your Valentine.
Then up he rose, and donned his clothes,
And dupped the chamber door.
Let in the maid that out a maid
Never departed more.

CLAUDIUS
Pretty Ophelia—

OPHELIA
Indeed, without an oath I’ll make an end on ’t:
(sings)
By Gis and by Saint Charity,
Alack, and fie, for shame!
Young men will do ’t, if they come to ’t.
By Cock, they are to blame.
Quoth she, “Before you tumbled me,
You promised me to wed.”
He answers,
“So would I ha’ done, by yonder sun,
An thou hadst not come to my bed.”

CLAUDIUS
How long hath she been thus?

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

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

Act 4, Scene 5, Page 4

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.

CLAUDIUS
Follow her. Keep an eye on her, please.
Exit HORATIO

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

Act 4, Scene 5, Page 5

A noise within

GERTRUDE
Alack, what noise is this?

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

Enter a MESSENGER

What is the matter?

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

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

Noise within

A noise offstage.

GERTRUDE
Oh, no—what's that noise?

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

MESSENGER
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!

Noise within

A noise offstage.
CLAUDIUS

85 The doors are broke.

Enter LAERTES with others

CLAUDIUS

The doors have been smashed open.

LAERTES enters with others.

LAERTES

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

ALL

No, let us in!

LAERTES

I pray you, give me leave.

ALL

We will, we will.

LAERTES' FOLLOWERS exit.

LAERTES

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

GERTRUDE

Calm down, good Laertes.

LAERTES

That drop of blood that's calm proclaims me bastard, cries "Cuckold!" to my father, brands the "harlot" even here between the chaste unsmirched brow of my true mother.

CLAUDIUS

What is the cause, Laertes, that thy rebellion looks so giant-like?—Let him go, Gertrude. Do not fear our person.

There's such divinity doth hedge a king that treason can but peep to what it would, acts little of his will.—Tell me, Laertes, why thou art thus incensed.—Let him go, Gertrude.—Speak, man.

CLAUDIUS

Dead.

GERTRUDE

But not by him.

CLAUDIUS

Let him demand his fill.

LAERTES

Where is my father?

CLAUDIUS

He's dead.

GERTRUDE

But the king didn't kill him.

CLAUDIUS

Let him ask what he wants to ask.

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 did he end up dead? Don't mess with me. To hell with my vows of allegiance to you! Vows can go to hell! Conscience, too! I don't care if I'm damned. I don't care what happens to me in this
That both the worlds I give to negligence. Let come what comes, only I’ll be revenged
Most thoroughly for my father.

CLAUDIUS
Who shall stay you?

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

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

LAERTES
None but his enemies.

CLAUDIUS
Will you know them then?

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

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

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

LAERTES
None but his enemies.

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

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

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

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Act 4, Scene 5, Page 8

Noise within: “Let her come in!”

LAERTES
How now? What noise is that?

Enter OPHELIA

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! 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)
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.

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

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

OPHELIA

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

LAERTES

This nothing’s more than matter.

OPHELIA

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

Act 4, Scene 5, Page 9

LAERTES

A document in madness. Thoughts and remembrance fitted.

OPHELIA

There’s fennel for you, and columbines.—There’s rue for you, and here’s some for me. We may call it “herb of grace” o’ Sundays.—Oh, you must wear your rue with a difference.—There’s a daisy. I 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*—

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 will he not come again?*
*And will he not come again?*
*No, no, he is dead.*
*Go to thy deathbed.*
*He never will come again.*
*His beard was as white as snow,*
*All flaxen was his poll.*
*He is gone, he is gone,*
*And we cast away moan,*
*God ha’ mercy on his soul.*—
*And of all Christian souls, I pray God. God be wi’ ye.*

LAERTES

Do you see this, O God?

Exit OPHELIA

OPHELIA exits.
CLAUDIUS
Laertes, I must commune with your grief, or you deny me right. Go but apart, and they shall hear and judge 'twixt you and me. If by direct or by collateral hand they find us touched, we will our kingdom give, our crown, our life, and all that we can ours, to you in satisfaction. But if not, be you content to lend your patience to us, and we shall jointly labor with your soul to give it due content.

CLAUDIUS
Laertes, I have a right to share your grief. Go 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 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.

CLAUDIUS
So you shall. And where the offense is, let the great ax fall.

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.

5 Enter SAILORS

SAILOR
God bless you, sir.

HORATIO
Let him bless thee too.

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

HORATIO
(reads)

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

Act 4, Scene 6, Page 2

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

He that thou knowest thine,
Hamlet.”

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

Exeunt

They exit.

Act 4, Scene 7

Enter CLAUDIUS and LAERTES

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

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

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

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

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

CLAUDIUS
Oh, for two main reasons which may seem weak
to you, but strong to me. The queen, his mother,
is devoted to him. And (for better or worse,
whichever it is) she is such a part of my life and
soul that I can’t live apart from her, any more than
a planet can leave its orbit. The other reason why
I couldn’t prosecute and arrest Hamlet is that the
public loves him. In their affection they overlook
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,
20 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.

all his faults. Like magic, they convert them into virtues, so whatever I said against him would end up hurting me, not him.

Act 4, Scene 7, Page 2

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.  
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.  
They were given me by Claudio. He received them  
Of him that brought them.

CLAUDIUS
Laertes, you shall hear them.—Leave us.

Exit MESSENGER

(reads)
“High and mighty,  
You shall know I am set naked on your kingdom.  
Tomorrow shall I beg leave to see your kingly eyes,  
when I shall, first asking your pardon thereunto,  
recount the occasion of my sudden and more strange return.  
Hamlet.”

What should this mean? Are all the rest come back?
Or is it some abuse, and no such thing?

LAERTES
Know you the hand?

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

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

55 “Thou diddest thou.”

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

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

CLAUDIUS
To thine own peace. If he be now returned,
As checking at his voyage, and that he means
No more to undertake it, I will work him
To an exploit, now ripe in my devise,
Under the which he shall not choose but fall.
And for his death no wind of blame shall breathe,

65 But even his mother shall uncharge the practice
And call it accident.

LAERTES
My lord, I will be ruled
The rather if you could devise it so
That I might be the organ.

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

LAERTES
What quality is that, my lord?

CLAUDIUS
A trivial little ribbon on the cap of youth—yet an
important one, too, since casual clothes suit
young people as much as serious business suits
and overcoats suit the middle-aged. Two months
ago I met a gentleman from Normandy. I’ve
fought against the French and have seen how
I've seen myself, and served against, the French, And they can well on horseback. But this gallant Had witchcraft in 't. He grew unto his seat, And to such wondrous doing brought his horse As he had been encorpsed and demi-natured With the brave beast. So far he topped my thought, That I, in forgery of shapes and tricks, Come short of what he did.

LAERTES
A Norman was 't?

CLAUDIUS
A Norman.

LAERTES
Upon my life, Lamond!

CLAUDIUS
The very same.

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

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

LAERTES
What out of this, my lord?

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

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, 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 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 weakenings and delays as there are words in the
**Original Text**

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

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

**Modern Text**

dictionary and accidents in life. And then all our “woulds” and “shoulds” are nothing but hot air.

But back to my point:

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

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**Act 4, Scene 7, Page 6**

**LAERTES**

To cut his throat i’ th’ church.

**CLAUDIUS**

No place, indeed, should murder sanctuarize.

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

**LAERTES**

I will do ’t.

And for that purpose I’ll anoint my sword.

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

**CLAUDIUS**

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

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**Act 4, Scene 7, Page 7**

**CLAUDIUS**

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

We should have a backup ready in case the first plan doesn’t work. Let me think. We’ll place bets on you and Hamlet—that’s it! When the two of you have gotten all sweaty and hot—keep him jumping around a lot for that purpose—Hamlet will ask for something to drink. I’ll have a cup ready for him. If by chance he
150 Should have a back or second that might hold
If this should blast in proof.—Soft, let me see.—
We’ll make a solemn wager on your cunnings.—
I ha’ t! When in your motion you are hot and dry,
As make your bouts more violent to that end,
155 And that he calls for drink, I’ll have prepared him
A chalice for the nonce, whereon but sipping,
If he by chance escape your venomed stuck,
Our purpose may hold there.—But stay, what noise?

Enter GERTRUDE

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

LAERTES
Drowned? Oh, where?

GERTRUDE
There is a willow grows aslant a brook
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.
There with fantastic garlands did she come
Of crowflowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do “dead men’s fingers” call

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,
And mermaid-like a while they bore her up,
Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and indued
Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.

165

LAERTES
Alas, then she is drowned.

GERTRUDE
Drowned, drowned.

LAERTES
Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia,
And therefore I forbid my tears. But yet
It is our trick. Nature her custom holds,
170 Let shame say what it will. When these are gone,
The woman will be out.—Adieu, my lord.
I have a speech of fire that fain would blaze,
But that this folly doubts it.

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

LAERTES
Drowned? Oh, where?

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

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

Exit LAERTES

LAERTES exits.
**Original Text**

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

**Modern Text**

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.

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**Act 5, Scene 1**

Enter a GRAVEDIGGER and the OTHER gravedigger

GRAVEDIGGER

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

OTHER

I tell thee she is. Therefore make her grave straight. The crowner hath sat on her and finds it Christian burial.

GRAVEDIGGER

How can that be, unless she drowned herself in her own defense?

OTHER

Why, ’tis found so.

GRAVEDIGGER

It must be se offendendo. It cannot be else. For here lies the point: if I drown myself wittingly, it argues an act. And an act hath three branches—it is to act, to do, to perform. Argal, she drowned herself wittingly.

OTHER

Nay, but hear you, Goodman Delver—

GRAVEDIGGER

Give me leave. Here lies the water. Good. Here stands the man. Good. If the man go to this water and drown himself, it is, will he nill he, he goes. Mark you that. But if the water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself. Argal, he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life.

OTHER

But is this law?

GRAVEDIGGER

Aye, marry, is ’t. Crowner’s quest law.

OTHER

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

GRAVEDIGGER

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

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**Act 5, Scene 1, Page 2**

GRAVEDIGGER

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

OTHER

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

GRAVEDIGGER

Why, there thou sayst. And the more pity that great
fear should have countenance in this world to drown or hang themselves more than their even Christian. Come, my spade. There is no ancient gentleman but gardeners, ditchers, and grave-makers. They hold up Adam’s profession.

OTHER

Was he a gentleman?

GRAVEDIGGER

He was the first that ever bore arms.

OTHER

Why, he had none.

GRAVEDIGGER

What, art a heathen? How dost thou understand the Scripture? The Scripture says Adam digged. Could he dig without arms? I’ll put another question to thee. If thou answerest me not to the purpose, confess thyself—

OTHER

Go to.

GRAVEDIGGER

What is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?

OTHER

The gallows-maker, for that frame outlives a thousand tenants.

GRAVEDIGGER

I like thy wit well, in good faith. The gallows does well, but how does it well? It does well to those that do ill.

Act 5, Scene 1, Page 3

Now thou dost ill to say the gallows is built stronger than the church. Argal, the gallows may do well to thee. To ‘t again, come.

OTHER

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

GRAVEDIGGER

Ay, tell me that, and unyoke.

OTHER

Marry, now I can tell.

GRAVEDIGGER

To ‘t.

OTHER

Mass, I cannot tell.

GRAVEDIGGER

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

rich have more freedom to hang or drown themselves than the rest of us Christians. Come on, shovel. The most ancient aristocrats in the world are gardeners, ditch-diggers, and gravediggers. They keep up Adam’s profession.

OTHER

Was he an aristocrat? With a coat of arms?

GRAVEDIGGER

He was the first person who ever had arms.

OTHER

He didn’t have any.

GRAVEDIGGER

What, aren’t you a Christian? The Bible says Adam dug in the ground. How could he dig without arms? I’ll ask you another question. If you can’t answer it—

OTHER

Go ahead!

GRAVEDIGGER

What do you call a person who builds stronger things than a stonemason, a shipbuilder, or a carpenter does?

OTHER

The one who builds the gallows to hang people on, since his structure outlives a thousand inhabitants.

GRAVEDIGGER

You’re funny, and I like that. The gallows do a good job. But how? It does a good job for those who do bad.

Now, it’s wrong to say that the gallows are stronger than a church. Therefore, the gallows may do you some good. Come on, your turn.

OTHER

Let’s see, “Who builds stronger things than a stonemason, a shipbuilder, or a carpenter?”

GRAVEDIGGER

That’s the question, so answer it.

OTHER

Ah, I’ve got it!

GRAVEDIGGER

Go ahead.

OTHER

Damn, I forgot.

Enter HAMLET and HORATIO afar off

HAMLET and HORATIO enter in the distance.

GRAVEDIGGER

Don’t beat your brains out over it. You can’t make a slow donkey run by beating it. The next time
are asked this question next, say “A grave-maker.”
The houses that he makes last till doomsday. Go, get thee in. Fetch me a stoup of liquor.

Exit OTHER

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

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

Act 5, Scene 1, Page 4

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

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

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

(throws up a skull)

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

HORATIO
70 It might, my lord.

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

HORATIO
75 Ay, my lord.

HAMLET
Why, e’en so. And now my Lady Worm’s, chapless and knocked about the mazard with a sexton’s spade. Here’s fine revolution, an we had the trick to see ’t. Did these bones cost no more the breeding but to play at loggets with them? Mine ache to think on ’t.
Act 5, Scene 1, Page 5

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

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

HORATIO
Not a jot more, my lord.

HAMLET
Isn’t the parchment of a legal document made of sheepskin?

HORATIO
Ay, my lord, and of calfskins too.

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

GRAVEDIGGER
Mine, sir.
(sings)

HORATIO
Not a jot more, my lord.

HAMLET
I think it be thine, indeed, for thou liest in ’t.

GRAVEDIGGER
You lie out on ’t, sir, and therefore it is not yours. For my part, I do not lie in ’t, and yet it is mine.

HAMLET
There’s another. Could that be a lawyer’s skull? Where’s all his razzle-dazzle legal jargon now? Why does he allow this idiot to knock him on the head with a dirty shovel, instead of suing him for assault and battery? Maybe this guy was once a great landowner, with his deeds and contracts, his tax shelters and his annuities. Is it part of his deed of ownership to have his skull filled up with dirt? Does he only get to keep as much land as a set of contracts would cover if you spread them out on the ground? The deeds to his properties would barely fit in this coffin—and the coffin’s all the property he gets to keep?

HORATIO
No more than that, my lord.

HAMLET
Isn’t the parchment of a legal document made of sheepskin?

HORATIO
Yes, my lord, and calfskin too.

HAMLET
Anyone who puts his trust in such documents is a sheep or a calf. I’ll talk to this guy.—Excuse me, sir, whose grave is this?

GRAVEDIGGER
It’s mine, sir.

Act 5, Scene 1, Page 6

Oh, a pit of clay for to be made
For such a guest is meet.

HAMLET
I think it really must be yours, since you’re the one lying in it.

GRAVEDIGGER
And you’re lying outside of it, so it’s not yours. As for me, I’m not lying to you in it—it’s really mine.

HAMLET

Original Text

Thou dost lie in 't, to be in 't and say it is thine. 'Tis for the dead, not for the quick. Therefore thou liest.

GRAVEDIGGER
'Tis a quick lie, sir. 'Twill away gain from me to you.

HAMLET
110 What man dost thou dig it for?

GRAVEDIGGER
For no man, sir.

HAMLET
What woman, then?

GRAVEDIGGER
For none, neither.

HAMLET
Who is to be buried in 't?

GRAVEDIGGER
One that was a woman, sir, but, rest her soul, she's dead.

HAMLET
How absolute the knave is! We must speak by the card, or equivocation will undo us. By the Lord, Horatio, these three years I have taken a note of it. The age is grown so picked that the toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier he galls his kibe.—How long hast thou been a grave-maker?

GRAVEDIGGER
Of all the days i' the year, I came to 't that day that our last King Hamlet overcame Fortinbras.

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Act 5, Scene 1, Page 7

HAMLET
How long is that since?

GRAVEDIGGER
Cannot you tell that? Every fool can tell that. It was the very day that young Hamlet was born, he that is mad and sent into England.

HAMLET
Ay, marry, why was he sent into England?

GRAVEDIGGER
Why, because he was mad. He shall recover his wits there, or, if he do not, it's no great matter there.

HAMLET
Why?

GRAVEDIGGER
'Twill not be seen in him there. There the men are as mad as he.

HAMLET
How came he mad?

Modern Text

But you are lying in it, being in it and saying it's yours. It's for the dead, not the living. So you're lying.

GRAVEDIGGER
That's a lively lie, sir—it jumps so fast from me to you.

HAMLET
What man are you digging it for?

GRAVEDIGGER
For no man, sir.

HAMLET
What woman, then?

GRAVEDIGGER
For no woman, either.

HAMLET
Who's to be buried in it?

GRAVEDIGGER
One who used to be a woman but—bless her soul—is dead now.

HAMLET
How literal this guy is! We have to speak precisely, or he'll get the better of us with his wordplay. Lord, Horatio, I've been noticing this for a few years now. The peasants have become so clever and witty that they're nipping at the heels of noblemen.—How long have you been a gravedigger?

GRAVEDIGGER
Of all the days in the year, I started the day that the late King Hamlet defeated Fortinbras.

HAMLET
How long ago was that?

GRAVEDIGGER
You don't know that? Any fool could tell you, it was the day that young Hamlet was born—the one who went crazy and got sent off to England.

HAMLET
Why was he sent to England?

GRAVEDIGGER
Because he was crazy. He'll recover his sanity there. Or if he doesn't, it won't matter in England.

HAMLET
Why not?

GRAVEDIGGER
Because nobody will notice he's crazy. Everyone there is as crazy as he is.

HAMLET
How did he go crazy?
GRAVEDIGGER

135 Very strangely, they say.

HAMLET

How “strangely”?

GRAVEDIGGER

Faith, e’en with losing his wits.

HAMLET

Upon what ground?

GRAVEDIGGER

Why, here in Denmark. I have been sexton here, man and boy, thirty years.

HAMLET

How long will a man lie i’ the earth ere he rot?

GRAVEDIGGER

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

HAMLET

Why he more than another?

GRAVEDIGGER

Well, if he’s not rotten before he dies (and there are a lot of people now who are so rotten they start falling to pieces even before you put them in the coffin), he’ll last eight or nine years. A leathermaker will last nine years.

HAMLET

Whose was it?

GRAVEDIGGER

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

HAMLET

Nay, I know not.

GRAVEDIGGER

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

HAMLET

This?

GRAVEDIGGER

E’en that.

HAMLET

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

**Act 5, Scene 1, Page 9**

**HORATIO**
What's that, my lord?

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

**HORATIO**
E'en so.

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

**HORATIO**
E'en so, my lord.

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

**HORATIO**
'Twere to consider too curiously, to consider so.

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

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

Here comes the king,
The queen, the courtiers—who is this they follow,
And with such maimed rites? This doth betoken
The corse they follow did with desperate hand
Fordo its own life. 'Twas of some estate.
Couch we a while and mark.
Act 5, Scene 1, Page 10

HAMLET and HORATIO withdraw

LAERTES What ceremony else?

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

LAERTES What ceremony else?

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

LAERTES Must there no more be done?

PRIEST No more be done.

We should profane the service of the dead
To sing a requiem and such rest to her
As to peace-parted souls.

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

HAMLET (to HORATIO) What, the fair Ophelia?

Act 5, Scene 1, Page 11

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

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

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

QUEEN Sweet flowers for a sweet girl. Goodbye! (she scatters flowers) I once hoped you’d be my Hamlet’s wife. I thought I’d be tossing flowers on your wedding bed, my sweet girl, not on your grave.

LAERTES Oh, damn three times, damn ten times the evil man whose wicked deed deprived you of your ingenious mind. Hold off burying her until I’ve caught her in my arms once more.

LAERTES Now pile the dirt onto the living and the dead alike, till you’ve made a mountain higher than Mount Pelion or Mount Olympus.
Of blue Olympus.

HAMLET
(comes forward) What is he whose grief
Bears such an emphasis, whose phrase of sorrow
Conjures the wandering stars, and makes them stand
Like wonder-wounded hearers? This is I, Hamlet the Dane. (leaps into the grave)

LAERTES
The devil take thy soul!

HAMLET and LAERTES grapple

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

CLAUDIUS
Pluck them asunder.

Act 5, Scene 1, Page 12

GERTRUDE
Hamlet, Hamlet!

ALL
Gentlemen—

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

Attendants separate HAMLET and LAERTES

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

GERTRUDE
O my son, what theme?

HAMLET
I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers
Could not with all their quantity of love
Make up my sum. What wilt thou do for her?

CLAUDIUS
O, he is mad, Laertes.

GERTRUDE
For love of God, forbear him.

HAMLET
‘Swounds, show me what thou’lt do.
Woo’t weep? Woo’t fight? Woo’t fast? Woo’t tear thyself?

Woo’t drink up eisel, eat a crocodile?
I’ll do ‘t. Dost thou come here to whine,
To outface me with leaping in her grave?
Be buried quick with her?—and so will I.
And if thou prate of mountains let them throw

Millions of acres on us, till our ground,
Original Text

Singeing his pate against the burning zone,
Make Ossa like a wart! Nay, an thou'lt mouth,
I'll rant as well as thou.

GERTRUDE
This is mere madness.
And thus a while the fit will work on him.
Anon, as patient as the female dove

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

GERTRUDE
This is pure insanity. He'll be like this for a little while. Then he'll be as calm and quiet as a dove waiting for her eggs to hatch.

Act 5, Scene 1, Page 13

HAMLET
Hear you, sir.
What is the reason that you use me thus?
I loved you ever. But it is no matter.
Let Hercules himself do what he may,
The cat will mew and dog will have his day.

Exit HAMLET

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

Exit HORATIO

(to LAERTES) Strengthen your patience in our last night's speech.
We'll put the matter to the present push.—

Good Gertrude, set some watch over your son.—
This grave shall have a living monument.
An hour of quiet shortly shall we see.
Till then in patience our proceeding be.

Exeunt

Act 5, Scene 2

Enter HAMLET and HORATIO

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

HORATIO
Remember it, my lord?

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

HORATIO
That is most certain.

HAMLET
That's enough about that. Now I'll tell you the other story about my journey. Do you remember the circumstances?

HORATIO
How could I forget, my lord!

HAMLET
There was a kind of war in my brain that wouldn't let me sleep. It was worse than being a captive in chains. Sometimes it's good to be rash—sometimes it works out well to act impulsively when our careful plans lose steam. This should show us that there's a God in heaven who's always guiding us in the right direction, however often we screw up—

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

So I came up from my cabin with my robe tied
around me, groped in the dark to find what I was
looking for, found it, looked through their packet
of papers, and returned to my cabin again. I was
bold enough (I guess my fears made me forget
my manners) to open the document containing
the king's instructions. And there I found, Horatio,
such royal mischief—a precisely worded order,
sugared with lots of talk about Denmark's well-
being and England's too, to cut off my head,
without even waiting to sharpen the ax.

HORATIO
Is 't possible?

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

HORATIO
I beseech you.

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

I once did hold it, as our statists do,
A baseness to write fair, and labored much
How to forget that learning, but, sir, now
It did me yeoman's service. Wilt thou know
Th' effect of what I wrote?

HORATIO
Ay, good my lord.

HAMLET
An earnest conjuration from the king,
As England was his faithful tributary,
As love between them like the palm might flourish,
As peace should stiff her wheaten garland wear
And stand a comma 'tween their amities,
And many suchlike "as's" of great charge,
That, on the view and knowing of these contents,
Without debatement further, more or less,
He should the bearers put to sudden death,
Not shriving time allowed.

HORATIO
How was this sealed?

HAMLET
A sincere plea from the king, who commands the
respect of England, and who hopes that the love
between the two countries can flourish, and that
peace can join them in friendship—and other
fancy mumbo jumbo like that—saying that, once
they read this document, without any debate, the
ones delivering the letter should be put to death
immediately, without giving them time to confess
to a priest.

HORATIO
But how could you put an official seal on it?
Act 5, Scene 2, Page 3

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

HORATIO
So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to ’t.

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

HORATIO
Why, what a king is this!

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

HORATIO
It must be shortly known to him from England. He’ll find out soon what happened in England.

Act 5, Scene 2, Page 4

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

HORATIO
Peace.—Who comes here?  

Enter young OSRIC, a courtier, hat in hand

OSRIC
Your lordship is right welcome back to Denmark.
HAMLET
I humbly thank you, sir. (aside to HORATIO) Dost know this water-fly?

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

HAMLET
(aside to HORATIO) Thy state is the more gracious, for 'tis a vice to know him. He hath much land, and fertile. Let a beast be lord of beasts and his crib shall stand at the king's mess. 'Tis a chough, but, as I say, spacious in the possession of dirt.

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

HAMLET
I will receive it, sir, with all diligence of spirit. Put your bonnet to his right use. 'Tis for the head.

OSRIC
I thank your lordship. It is very hot.

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

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

OSRIC
Nay, good my lord, for mine ease, in good faith. Sir, here is newly come to court Laertes, believe me, an absolute gentleman, full of most excellent differences, of very soft society and great showing. Indeed, to speak feelingly of him, he is the card or calendar of gentry, for you shall find in him the continent of what part a gentleman would see.

OSRIC
No, my lord, I'm comfortable like this, thank you. Sir, there's someone named Laertes who's recently come to the court. He's an absolute gentleman, totally outstanding in so many respects, very easy in society, and displaying all his excellent qualities. If I were to expose my true feelings about him, I'd have to say he's like a business card for the upper classes—he's that wonderful. You'll find that he's the sum total of what a perfect gentleman should be.
HAMLET
Sir, his definement suffers no perdition in you, though I know to divide him inventorially would dizzy th’ arithmetic of memory, and yet but yaw neither, in respect of his quick sail.

OSRIC
Your lordship speaks most infallibly of him.

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

OSRIC
Sir?

HORATIO
(aside to HAMLET) Is ’t not possible to understand in another tongue? You will do ’t, sir, really.

HAMLET
What imports the nomination of this gentleman?

OSRIC
Of Laertes?

HORATIO
(aside to HAMLET) His purse is empty already. All ’s golden words are spent.

HAMLET
Of him, sir.

OSRIC
I know you are not ignorant—

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

OSRIC
You are not ignorant of what excellence Laertes is—

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

OSRIC
You speak absolutely correctly, sir.

OSRIC
Laertes, you mean?

HORATIO
(speaking so that only HAMLET can hear) Can’t you talk to him in a different way?

HAMLET
(to OSRIC) What is the significance of referring to this individual?

OSRIC
I know you know something—

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

OSRIC
I know you know something about how excellent Laertes is—

HAMLET
I can’t admit that, since you’d have to compare his excellence to mine. But knowing a person well is a bit like knowing oneself.
OSRIC
I mean, sir, for his weapon. But in the imputation laid
on him by them, in his meed he’s unfellowed.

HAMLET
What’s his weapon?

OSRIC
Rapier and dagger.

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

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

HAMLET
What call you the carriages?

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

OSRIC
The carriages, sir, are the hangers.

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

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

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

HAMLET
What kind of weapon does he use?

OSRIC
The rapier and the dagger.

HAMLET
Those are only two of his weapons. But, go on.

OSRIC
The king has bet six Barbary horses, and he has
prepared six French rapiers and daggers with all
their accessories. Three of the carriages are very
imaginatively designed, and they match the
fencing accessories.

HAMLET
What do you mean by “carriages”?

HORATIO
(speaking so that only HAMLET can hear) I knew
you’d have to look something up in the dictionary
before we were finished.

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

HAMLET
“Carriage” makes it sound like it’s pulling around
a cannon. I prefer to call it a “hanger.” But
anyway. Six Barbary horses, six French swords
with accessories, and three imaginatively
designed carriages—sounds like a French bet
against the Danish. Why has all this been put on
the table?

OSRIC
The king, sir, has bet that in a dozen rounds
between you and Laertes, he won’t beat you by
more than three hits. You could get started
immediately if you’ll give me your answer.

HAMLET
But what if my answer’s no?

OSRIC
I mean, if you’d agree to play against Laertes, sir.

HAMLET
Sir, I’m going to go for a walk in the hall here
whether the king likes it or not. It’s my exercise
time. Bring in the swords, if the king still wants to
go through with it and if Laertes is still willing. I’ll
not, I will gain nothing but my shame and the odd 
hits.

OSRIC
Shall I redeliver you e’en so?

HAMLET
To this effect, sir, after what flourish your nature will.

OSRIC
I commend my duty to your lordship.

HAMLET
Yours, yours.

Exit OSRIC

He does well to commend it himself. There are no 
tongues else for ’s turn.

HORATIO
This lapwing runs away with the shell on his head.

HAMLET
He did comply, sir, with his dug before he sucked it. 
Thus has he—and many more of the same bevy that 
I know the drossy age dotes on—only got the tune of 
the time and outward habit of encounter, a kind of 
yeasty collection, which carries them through and 
through the most fond and winnowed opinions; and 
do but blow them to their trial, the bubbles are out.

Exit OSRIC

It’s a good thing he’s here to recommend himself. 
No one else would.

HORATIO
That crazy bird’s only half-hatched.

HAMLET
He used to praise his mother’s nipple before he 
sucked it. He’s like so many successful people in 
these trashy times—he’s patched together 

enough fancy phrases and trendy opinions to 
carry him along. But blow a little on this bubbly 
talk, and it’ll burst. There’s no substance here.

Enter a LORD

A LORD enters.

LORD
My lord, his majesty commended him to you by 
young Osric, who brings back to him that you attend 
him in the hall. He sends to know if your pleasure 
hold to play with Laertes, or that you will take longer 
time.

HAMLET
I am constant to my purpose. They follow the king’s 
pleasure. If his fitness speaks, mine is ready, now or 
whensoever, provided I be so able as now.

LORD
The king and queen and all are coming down.

HAMLET
In happy time.

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

Exit LORD

HAMLET
She well instructs me.

LORD
My lord, Osric has told the king about your 
agreeing to the fencing match. The king wishes 
to know if you want to play against him right 
away, or wait awhile.

HAMLET
I’ll do whatever the king wants. If he’s ready now, 
so am I. Otherwise, I’ll do it anytime, as long as 
I’m able.

LORD
The king and queen are coming down with 
everyone else.

HAMLET
Right on cue.

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

HAMLET
She’s full of good advice.
HORATIO
You will lose this wager, my lord.

HAMLET
I do not think so. Since he went into France, I have been in continual practice. I shall win at the odds. But thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart. But it is no matter.

HAMLET
I don't think so. I've been practicing fencing constantly since he went off to France. With the handicap they've given me, I think I'll win. But I have a sinking feeling anyway. Oh well.

HORATIO
Nay, good my lord—

HORATIO
Wait, my lord—

HAMLET
It is but foolery, but it is such a kind of gain-giving as would perhaps trouble a woman.

HAMLET
I know I'm being foolish, but I have the kind of vague misgiving women often get.

Act 5, Scene 2, Page 10

HORATIO
If your mind dislike anything, obey it. I will forestall their repair hither and say you are not fit.

HAMLET
Not a whit. We defy augury. There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet it will come—the readiness is all. Since no man of aught he leaves knows, what is 't to leave betimes? Let be.

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

HAMLET
(puts LAERTES' hand into HAMLET's)

HAMLET
Give me your pardon, sir. I've done you wrong. But pardon 't, as you are a gentleman. This presence knows, And you must needs have heard, how I am punished With sore distraction. What I have done, That might your nature, honor, and exception Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness. Was 't Hamlet wronged Laertes? Never Hamlet.

HAMLET
(To LAERTES) I beg your pardon, sir. I've done you wrong. Forgive me as a gentleman. Everyone here knows—and I'm sure you've heard—that I'm suffering from a serious mental illness. When I insulted you it was due to insanity. Was Hamlet the one who insulted Laertes? No, not Hamlet. If Hamlet is robbed of his own mind, and insults Laertes when he's not really himself, then Hamlet's not guilty of the offense. Who is guilty, then? Hamlet's mental illness is.
Then Hamlet does it not. Hamlet denies it.
Who does it, then? His madness. If't be so,
Hamlet is of the faction that is wronged.
His madness is poor Hamlet’s enemy.
Sir, in this audience,

Act 5, Scene 2, Page 11

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

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

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

LAERTES
Come, one for me.

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

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

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

LAERTES
(tests a rapier) This is too heavy. Let me see another.

HAMLET
(tests a rapier) This likes me well. These foils have all a length?

OSRIC
Ay, my good lord.

HAMLET and LAERTES prepare to play

CLAUDIUS
Set me the stoups of wine upon that table.

If Hamlet give the first or second hit
Or quit in answer of the third exchange,
Let all the battlements their ordnance fire!
The king shall drink to Hamlet’s better breath,
And in the cup an union shall he throw
Richer than that which four successive kings
In Denmark’s crown have worn. Give me the cups.
And let the trumpet to the trumpeter speak,
The trumpet to the cannoneer without,
The cannons to the heavens, the heavens to earth,
“Now the king dunks to Hamlet.” Come, begin.—
And you, the judges, bear a wary eye.

HAMLET
Come on, sir.

LAERTES
Come on, my lord.

Act 5, Scene 2, Page 13

HAMLET and LAERTES play

HAMLET One.

LAERTES No.

HAMLET Judgment?

OSRIC A hit, a very palpable hit.

LAERTES Well, again.

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

Here’s to thy health.

Drums, trumpets sound, shot goes off
CLAUDIUS drops pearl into cup

Give him the cup.

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

Modern Text

LAERTES
This sword’s too heavy. Show me another one.

HAMLET I like this one. Are they all the same length?

OSRIC
Yes, my lord.

HAMLET and LAERTES get ready to fence.

CLAUDIUS
Put the goblets of wine on that table. If Hamlet makes the first or second hit, or gets back at Laertes by making the third hit, then let my soldiers give him a military salute. I’ll drink to Hamlet’s health, and into his goblet I’ll drop a pearl even more costly than those in the crowns of the last four Danish kings. Give me the goblets. And now let the drum and the trumpet play, and the trumpet signal the cannon outside to fire, and let the cannon tell the heavens, and the heavens tell all the earth that the king is drinking now to Hamlet’s health. Come on, let’s begin. Judges, pay close attention.

CLAUDIUS
Drums and trumpets play, and a gun is fired.

CLAUDIUS drops a pearl into a cup.

Give him the goblet.

HAMLET
Let me just finish this round. Set it down awhile.
Come. Let's play.

**HAMLET** and **LAERTES** play

**LAERTES**
A touch, a touch, I do confess 't.

**CLAUDIUS**
Our son shall win.

**GERTRUDE**
He’s fat, and scant of breath.—Here, Hamlet, take my napkin, rub thy brows. The queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet. *(picks up the cup with the pearl)*

**CLAUDIUS**
Gertrude, do not drink.

**GERTRUDE**
I will, my lord. I pray you, pardon me. *(drinks)*

**CLAUDIUS** *(aside)* It is the poisoned cup. It is too late.

**HAMLET**
I dare not drink yet, madam. By and by.

**GERTRUDE**
Come, let me wipe thy face.

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

**CLAUDIUS**
I do not think ‘t.

**LAERTES** *(aside)* And yet it is almost ‘gainst my conscience.

**HAMLET**
Come, for the third, Laertes. You do but dally. I pray you, pass with your best violence.

**LAERTES**
I am afeard you make a wanton of me.

**LAERTES** Say you so? Come on.

**HAMLET** and **LAERTES** play

**OSRIC**
Nothing, neither way.

**LAERTES**
Have at you now!

**LAERTES** wounds **HAMLET** In scuffling, they change rapiers. **HAMLET** wounds **LAERTES**

**CLAUDIUS**
Part them! They are incensed.

Separate them. They're overdoing it.

Act 5, Scene 2, Page 15

HAMLET
Nay, come, again.

OSRIC
Look to the queen there, ho!

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

OSRIC
How is 't, Laertes?

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

HAMLET
How does the queen?

CLAUDIUS
She swoons to see them bleed.

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

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

Treachery! Seek it out.

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

No medicine in the world can do thee good. In thee there is not half an hour of life. The treacherous instrument is in thy hand, Unbated and envenomed. The foul practice Hath turned itself on me. Lo, here I lie, Never to rise again. Thy mother's poisoned. I can no more. The king, the king's to blame.

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

CLAUDIUS
I can no more. The king, the king's to blame.

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

Act 5, Scene 2, Page 16

HAMLET hurts CLAUDIUS

ALL
Treason! Treason!

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

HAMLET

HAMLET wounds CLAUDIUS.

ALL
Treason! Treason!

CLAUDIUS
Protect me, my friends. I've only been hurt, not killed.
Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damnèd Dane,
Drink off this potion. Is thy union here?
Follow my mother.

**HAMLET** forces **CLAUDIUS** to drink **CLAUDIUS** dies

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

Mine and my father's death come not upon thee,
Nor thine on me. (dies)

**HAMLET**
Heaven make thee free of it. I follow thee.—
I am dead, Horatio.—Wretched queen, adieu!—
That you that look pale and tremble at this chance,
Had I but time (as this fell sergeant, Death,
Is strict in his arrest), O, I could tell you—
But let it be.—Horatio, I am dead.
Thou livest. Report me and my cause aright
To the unsatisfied.

**HORATIO**
Never believe it.
I am more an antique Roman than a Dane.
Here's yet some liquor left.
(lifts the poisoned cup)

**HORATIO**
Not for a second. I'm more like an ancient
Roman than a corrupt modern Dane. Some of
this liquor's still left in the goblet. (he picks up the
poisoned cup to drink)

**Act 5, Scene 2, Page 17**

**HORATIO**
March afar off and shout within

What warlike noise is this?

**OSRIC**
Young Fortinbras, with conquest come from Poland,
To th' ambassadors of England gives

This warlike volley.

**HORATIO**
As thou'rt a man,
Give me the cup. Let go! By heaven, I'll have 't.

(takes cup from **HORATIO**)
O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,
Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart
Absent thee from felicity a while,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story.

**HAMLET**
Please, give me that goblet, if you love me. Let
go of it! I'll get it from you, I swear. Oh God,
Horatio, what a damaged reputation I'm leaving
behind me, as no one knows the truth. If you
ever loved me, then please postpone the sweet
relief of death awhile, and stay in this harsh world
long enough to tell my story.

A military march is heard from offstage, and a
cannon fires.

What are these warlike noises?

**OSRIC**
Young Fortinbras, returning in triumph from
Poland, is firing his guns to greet the English
ambassadors.

**HORATIO**
Not for a second. I'm more like an ancient
Roman than a corrupt modern Dane. Some of
this liquor's still left in the goblet. (he picks up the
poisoned cup to drink)
355 So tell him, with th’ occurrents, more and less,  
Which have solicited. The rest is silence.  
O, O, O. (dies)

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

Enter FORTINBRAS and the English AMBASSADOR, with drummer and attendants

360 And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!—  
Why does the drum come hither?

FORTINBRAS
Where is this sight?

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

AMBASSADOR
The sight is dismal,  
And our affairs from England come too late.

The ears are senseless that should give us hearing,  
To tell him his commandment is fulfilled,  
That Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead.  
Where should we have our thanks?

HORATIO
Not from his mouth,  
Had it th’ ability of life to thank you.

He never gave commandment for their death.  
But since so jump upon this bloody question,  
You from the Polack wars, and you from England,  
Are here arrived, give order that these bodies  
High on a stage be placèd to the view,

And let me speak to th’ yet-unknowing world  
How these things came about. So shall you hear  
Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,  
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,  
Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,

And, in this upshot, purposes mistook  
Fall’n on th’ inventors’ heads. All this can I  
Truly deliver.

FORTINBRAS
What do I see here?

HORATIO
What would you like to see? If it’s a tragedy,  
you’ve come to the right place.

FORTINBRAS
These corpses suggest mayhem. Oh, proud Death, what banquet are you preparing that  
you’ve needed to knock off so many princes at one stroke?

AMBASSADOR
This is a horrible sight. Our news arrives from  
England too late, since the people that should  
have heard it are dead. We meant to tell the king  
that his orders have been carried out, and  
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead. Who  
will thank us now?

HORATIO
Not the king, even if he  
were still alive to thank you. He never ordered  
their deaths. But since you’ve come so soon after  
this bloodbath, you from battles in Poland and  
you from England, then give your men orders to  
display these corpses on a high platform, and let  
me tell the world how all this happened. You’ll  
hear of violent and unnatural acts, terrible  
accidents, casual murders, deaths caused by  
trickery and by threat, and finally murderous  
plans that backfired on their perpetrators. All this  
I can explain.

FORTINBRAS
Let’s hear about it right away and invite all the  
noblemen to listen. As for me, I welcome my  
good luck with sadness. I have some rights to  
claim this kingdom, and by arriving at this  
moment I have an opportunity to put them into  
effect.
Act 5, Scene 2, Page 19

HORATIO
Of that I shall have also cause to speak,
And from his mouth whose voice will draw on more.
But let this same be presently performed,
Even while men's minds are wild, lest more
mischance
On plots and errors happen.

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

Go, bid the soldiers shoot.

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

HORATIO
I also have a few things to say about that, which Hamlet just told me. But let's get down to business—even though people are in a frenzy of grief—to avoid any further plots and mishaps.

FORTINBRAS
Let four captains carry Hamlet like a soldier onto the stage. He would have been a great king if he had had the chance to prove himself. Military music and military rites will speak for his heroic qualities. Pick up the corpses. A sight like this suits a battlefield, but here at court it shows that much went wrong. Go outside and tell the soldiers to fire their guns in honor of Hamlet.

They exit marching, carrying the bodies.
Cannons are fired.