

*A room in the Castle. Enter King, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern.*

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

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

**Rosencrantz:** The single and peculiar life is bound  
With all the strength and armour of the mind  
To keep itself from noyance; but much more  
15 That spirit upon whose weal depends and rests  
The lives of many. The cess of majesty  
Dies not alone, but like a gulf doth draw  
What's near it with it. It is a massy wheel,  
Fix'd on the summit of the highest mount,  
20 To whose (huge) spokes ten thousand lesser things  
Are mortis'd and adjoin'd; which when it falls,  
Each small annexment, petty consequence,  
Attends the boist'rous ruin. Never alone  
Did the king sigh, but with a general groan.

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

**Both:** We will haste us.

*Exeunt Gentlemen.*

*Enter Polonius.*

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

**King:** Thanks, dear my lord.

*Exit Polonius.*

40 O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven;  
It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,  
A brother's murder! Pray can I not,

- 1. I...not: I do not like the way he is acting
- 3. dispatch: prepare at once
- 5. The terms of our estate: my position as a king
- 12. single and peculiar: individual and private
- 14. noyance: injury
- 16. cess: cessation, decease
- 17. gulf: whirlpool
- 21. mortised: securely fastened
- 25. Arm you...to: i.e., prepare yourself for
- 31-2. tax him home: reprimand him strongly

Though inclination be as sharp as will.  
 My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,  
 45 And, like a man to double business bound,  
 I stand in pause where I shall first begin,  
 And both neglect. What if this cursed hand  
 Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,  
 Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens  
 50 To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy  
 But to confront the visage of offence?  
 And what's in prayer but this twofold force,  
 To be forestalled ere we come to fall,  
 Or pardon'd being down? Then I'll look up;  
 55 My fault is past. But, O, what form of prayer  
 Can serve my turn? 'Forgive me my foul murder'?  
 That cannot be; since I am still possess'd  
 Of those effects for which I did the murder-  
 My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.  
 60 May one be pardon'd and retain th' offence?  
 In the corrupted currents of this world  
 Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,  
 And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself  
 Buys out the law; but 'tis not so above.  
 65 There is no shuffling; there the action lies  
 In his true nature, and we ourselves compell'd,  
 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?  
 70 Yet what can it when one cannot repent?  
 O wretched state! O bosom black as death!  
 O limed soul, that, struggling to be free,  
 Art more engag'd! Help, angels! Make assay.  
 Bow, stubborn knees; and heart with strings of steel,  
 75 Be soft as sinews of the new-born babe!  
 All may be well. *He kneels.*

*Enter Hamlet.*

*Hamlet:* Now might I do it (pat,) now he is praying;  
 And now I'll do't [*He draws his sword*]

80                                   And so he goes to heaven,  
 And so am I (reveng'd.) That would be scann'd.  
 A villain kills my father; and for that,  
 I, his sole son, do this same villain send  
 To heaven.  
 85 Why, 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?

**36. of vantage:** from the vantage point of concealment

**41. primal eldest curse:** The first curse, which condemned Cain to a life of "a fugitive and a vagabond," was laid on him for his murder of his brother, Abel (Genesis 4.10-12)

**50-1. Whereto...offense?:** i.e., what purpose does mercy serve except to confront the face of condemnation?

**53-4. forestalled...down:** i.e., the twofold force of prayers is that we not be "led into temptation" and that we be "forgiven our trespasses"

**60. th' offense:** that which has been gained through the crime

**61. currents:** course of events

**62. Offense's gilded hand:** the golden hand of the offender, "gilded" through money illegally obtained; **shove by:** thrust aside

**64. 'tis not so above:** this is not the case in heaven

**65. There is no shuffling:** in heaven, one cannot escape through evasion

**65-8. the action...in evidence:** i.e., in god's court, the legal action must be brought in accord with the facts; we are forced even to testify against ourselves

**68. rests:** remains

**72. limed:** trapped, like a bird caught in birdlime

**73. engag'd:** entangled; **Make assay:** put forth all your efforts

90 But in our circumstance and course of thought,  
'Tis heavy with him; and am I then reveng'd,  
To take him in the purging of his soul,  
When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?  
No.  
95 Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent.  
When he is drunk asleep; or in his rage;  
At game a-swearing, or about some act  
That has no relish of salvation in't-  
Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,  
100 And that his soul may be as damn'd and black  
As hell, whereto it goes. My mother stays.  
This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.  
*Exit.*  
**King:** *Rises.* My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.  
Words without thoughts never to heaven go.  
*Exit.*

### Act III, Scene iv:

In Gertude's room, Polonius hides behind a tapestry. Hamlet's entrance so alarms Gertrude that she cries out for help. Polonius echoes her cry, and Hamlet, thinking Polonius to be Claudius, stabs him to death. Hamlet then verbally attacks his mother for marrying Claudius. In the middle of Hamlet's attack, the Ghost returns to remind Hamlet that his real purpose is to avenge his father's death. Gertrude cannot see the ghost and pities Hamlet's apparent madness. After the Ghost exits, Hamlet tells Gertrude about Claudius's plan to send him to England and reveals his suspicions that the journey is a plot against him, which he resolves to counter violently. He exits dragging out Polonius's body.

*The Queen's closet. Enter Queen and Polonius.*

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

**Hamlet:** *Within.* Mother, mother, mother!

**Queen:** I'll (warrant) you; fear me not. Withdraw;  
10 I hear him coming.

*Polonius hides behind the arras.*

*Enter Hamlet.*

**Hamlet:** Now, mother, what's the matter?

**Queen:** Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

**Hamlet:** Mother, you have my father much offended.

**Queen:** Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.

**80. would be scann'd:** i.e., needs to be examined

**84. hire and salary:** i.e., something Claudius should pay me for

**85. grossly, full of bread:** in full enjoyment of the world

**87. audit:** final account

**89. heavy with him:** i.e., his spirit is in a serious condition

**90. him:** i.e., Claudius

**93. know thou a more horrid hent:** i.e., wait for a more horrible occasion

**100. stays:** waits

**101. This physic:** this medicine (i.e., this postponement of the killing; or, Claudius's purging of himself through prayer

**1. straight:** immediately; **lay home to him:** prove him thoroughly

15 *Hamlet:* Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue.  
*Queen:* Why, how now, Hamlet?  
*Hamlet:* What's the matter now?  
*Queen:* Have you forgot me?  
*Hamlet:* No, by the rood, not so!  
 20 You are the Queen, your husband's brother's wife,  
 And, - would it were not so! - you are my mother.  
*Queen:* Nay, then I'll set those to you that can speak.  
*Hamlet:* Come, come, and sit you down. You shall not budge I  
 You go not till I set you up a glass  
 25 Where you may see the inmost part of you.  
*Queen:* What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me?  
 Help, help, ho!  
*Polonius:* *Behind.* What, ho! help, help, help!  
*Hamlet:* *Draws.* How now? a rat? Dead for a ducat, dead!  
*[Makes a pass through the arras and] kills Polonius.*  
 30 *Polonius:* *Behind.* O, I am slain!  
*Queen:* O me, what hast thou done?  
*Hamlet:* Nay, I know not. Is it the King?  
*Queen:* O, what a rash and bloody deed is this!  
*Hamlet:* A bloody deed - almost as bad, good mother,  
 35 As kill a king, and marry with his brother.  
*Queen:* As kill a king?  
*Hamlet:* Ay, lady, it was my word.  
*Lifts up the arras and sees Polonius.*  
*To Polonius.* Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell!  
 I took thee for thy better. Take thy fortune.  
 40 Thou find'st to be too busy is some danger.  
 Leave wringing of your hinds. Peace! sit you down  
 And let me wring your heart; for so I shall  
 If it be made of penetrable stuff;  
 45 If habitual wickedness have not braz'd it so  
 That it is proof and bulwark against sense.  
*Queen:* What have I done that thou dar'st wag thy tongue  
 In noise so rude against me?  
*Hamlet:* Such an act  
 50 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. O, such a deed  
 55 As from the body of contraction plucks  
 The very soul, and sweet religion makes  
 A rhapsody of words! Heaven's face doth glow;  
 Yea, this solidity and compound mass,  
 With tristful visage, as against the doom,

7. **round:** blunt

9. **fear me not:** don't doubt me

14. **idle:** foolish

18. **forgot me:** forgotten who I am

24. **glass:** mirror

29. **Dead for a ducat:** i.e., dead, I'll wager a ducat

46. **proof:** invulnerable (like armor); **sense:** feeling

60 Is thought-sick at the act.  
**Queen:** Ay me, what act,  
 That roars so loud and thunders in the index?  
**Hamlet:** Look here upon th's picture, and on this,  
 The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.  
 65 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:  
 70 A combination and a form indeed  
 Where every god did seem to set his seal  
 To give the world assurance of a man.  
 This was your husband. Look you now what follows.  
 Here is your husband, like a mildew'd ear  
 75 Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?  
 Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed,  
 And batten on this moor? Ha! have you eyes  
 You cannot call it love; for at your age  
 The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble,  
 80 And waits upon the judgment; and what judgment  
 Would step from this to this? [Sense sure you have,  
 Else could you not have motion; but sure that sense  
 Is apoplex'd; for madness would not err,  
 Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thrall'd  
 85 But it reserv'd some quantity of choice  
 To serve in such a difference.] What devil was't  
 That thus hath cozen'd you at hoodman-blind?  
 [Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,  
 Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all,  
 90 Or but a sickly part of one true sense  
 Could not so mope.]  
 O shame! where is thy blush? Rebellious hell,  
 If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,  
 To flaming youth let virtue be as wax  
 95 And melt in her own fire. Proclaim no shame  
 When the compulsive ardour gives the charge,  
 Since frost itself as actively doth burn,  
 And reason (panders) will.  
**Queen:** O Hamlet, speak no more!  
 100 Thou turn'st mine eyes into my (very) soul,  
 And there I see such black and (grained) spots  
 As will (not) leave their tinct.

O, speak to me no more!

These words like daggers enter in mine ears.  
 No more, sweet Hamlet!

55. **contraction:** i.e., the marriage contract  
 57. **rhapsody:** jumble  
 58. **this...mass:** i.e., the earth  
 59. **against the doom:** when Judgment day comes  
 60. **Is thought-sick:** i.e., Heaven is thought-sick  
 62. **That roars...index:** i.e., that receives such a violent introduction  
 64. **counterfeit presentment:** representation in portraits (miniatures or portraits on a wall)  
 66. **front:** brow  
 74. **ear:** i.e., of a cereal plant like wheat  
 75. **Blasting:** blighting; **his:** its  
 76. **leave to feed:** stop feeding  
 77. **batten:** glut yourself; **moor:** barren land  
 79. **heyday:** state of excitement; **blood:** passion  
 81. **Sense:** perception through the senses  
 83. **apoplex'd:** suffering from apoplexy, hence without sensation or consciousness  
 84. **sense...thrilled:** i.e., the five senses are never so subjected by lunacy (Hamlet's argument is that, even in madness, Gertrude's sense would have reserved some quantity of choice, retained power to choose)  
 87. **cozened:** tricked; **hoodman-blind:** the game of blindman's buff  
 89. **sans all:** without the other senses  
 91. **so mope:** be so stupefied  
 93. **mutine:** incite rebellion  
 94-5. **be...fire:** i.e., melt like the wax in a burning candle  
 95-8. **Proclaim...will:** i.e., do not call it shameful when youthful passion acts impetuously, since the frost of age is itself aflame and reason is acting as a pander for desire instead of controlling it

- 110 **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  
 115 And put it in his pocket –  
**Queen:** No more!  
**Hamlet:** A king of shreds and patches –  
*Enter the Ghost in his nightgown.*  
 Save me and hover o'er me with your wings,  
 120 You heavenly guards! – What would your gracious figure?  
**Queen:** Alas, he's mad!  
**Hamlet:** Do you not come your tardy son to chide,  
 That, laps'd in time and passion, lets go by  
 Th' important acting of your dread command?  
 125 O, say!  
**Ghost:** Do not forget. This visitation  
 Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose.  
 But look, amazement on thy mother sits.  
 O, step between her and her fighting soul  
 130 Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works.  
 Speak to her, Hamlet.  
**Hamlet:** How is it with you, lady?  
**Queen:** Alas, how is't with you,  
 That you do bend your eye on vacancy,  
 135 And with th' encorporal air do hold discourse?  
 Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep;  
 And, as the sleeping soldiers in th' alarm,  
 Your bedded hairs, like life in excrements,  
 Start up and stand an end. O gentle son,  
 140 Upon the heat and flame of thy distemper  
 Sprinkle cool patience! Whereon do you look?  
**Hamlet:** On him, on him! Look you how pale he glares!  
 His form and cause conjoin'd, preaching to stones,  
 145 Would make them capable.- Do not look upon me,  
 Lest with this piteous action you convert  
 My stern effects. Then what I have to do  
 Will want true colour- tears perchance for blood.  
**Queen:** To whom do you speak this?  
 150 **Hamlet:** Do you see nothing there?  
**Queen:** Nothing at all; yet all that is I see.  
**Hamlet:** Nor did you nothing hear?  
**Queen:** No, nothing but ourselves.  
**Hamlet:** Why, look you there! Look how it steals away!  
 155 My father, in his habit as he liv'd!  
 Look where he goes even now out at the portal!

101. **grained:** indelible  
 102. **leave their tinct:** give up their color  
 104. **enseamed:** greasy  
 112. **a vice of a king:** a buffoon of a king  
 113. **cutpurse:** thief  
 123. **lapsed in time and passion:** i.e., having  
 let time slip by and passion cool  
 124. **important:** importunate, urgent  
 128. **amazement on my mother sits:** i.e., your  
 mother is in a state of extreme shock  
 130. **Conceit:** imagination  
 135. **incorporal:** immaterial  
 137. **in th' alarm:** waked by the call to arms  
 138. **hair, like life in excrements:** as if hair, a  
 lifeless outgrowth had come to life  
 139. **an end:** on end  
 144. **capable:** responsive

*Exit Ghost.*

**Queen:** This is the very coinage of your brain.  
This bodiless creation ecstasy  
Is very cunning in.

160 **Hamlet:** (Ecstasy?)  
My pulse as yours doth temperately keep time  
And makes as healthful music. It is not madness  
That I have utt'ed. Bring me to the test,  
And (I) the matter will reword; which madness

165 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,  
Whiles rank corruption, mining all within,

170 Infects unseen. Confess yourself to heaven;  
Repent what's past; avoid what is to come;  
And do not spread the compost on the weeds  
To make them ranker. Forgive me this my virtue;  
For in the fatness of these pursy times

175 Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg-  
Yea, curb and woo for leave to do him good.

**Queen:** O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain!

**Hamlet:** O, throw away the worsers part of it,  
And live the purer with the other half!

180 Good night. But go not to my uncle.  
Assume a virtue if you have it not.  
[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

185 He likewise gives a frock or livery  
That aptly is put on.] Refrain [now]  
And that shall lend a kind of easiness  
To the next abstinence, [the next more easy;  
For use almost can change the stamp of nature

190 And either "... the devil or throw him out  
With wondrous potency.] Once more, good night,  
And, when you are desirous to be blest,  
I'll blessing beg of you. For this same lord,  
*Pointing to Polonius*

I do repent; but heaven hath pleas'd it so,  
195 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;

200 This bad begins, and worse remains behind.

147. **effects:** purposes

148. **want:** lack

155. **in...lived:** dressed as he did when he lived

158. **ecstasy:** madness

165. **gambol from:** skip away from

166. **flattering unction:** soothing salve

174. **fatness:** grossness; **pursy:** fat, flabby

176. **curb:** bow

182-3. **That monster...devil:** This passage may contain mistakes in the printing. The general meaning may be "custom, a monster that consumes all sense, is therefore like a devil in suggesting evil habits."

184. **use:** habit

186. **aptly:** easily

190. **either "... the devil:** A word seems to have been lost; Q2 reads "either the devil"; many editors (to complete the line and the thought) insert the verb "master," found in the quarto of *Hamlet* printed in 1611

196. **their scourge and minister:** heaven's scourge (of punishment) and heaven's minister (agent of divine retribution); **their:** heaven's

200. **remains behind:** is yet to come

[One word more, good lady.]

**Queen:** What shall I do?

**Hamlet:** Not this, by no means, that I bid you do:

Let the bloat King tempt you [and]

Make you to ravel all this matter out,

That I essentially am not in madness,

210 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,

215 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.

**Queen:** Be thou assur'd, if words be made of breath,

220 And breath of life, I have no life to breathe

What thou hast said to me.

**Hamlet:** I must to England; you know that.

**Queen:** Alack,

I had forgot! 'Tis so concluded on.

225 **Hamlet:** [There's letters seal'd; and my two schoolfellows,

Whom I will trust as I will adders fang'd,

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

230 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. O, 'tis most sweet

When in one line two crafts directly meet.]

This man shall set me packing.

235 I'll lug the guts into the neighbour room.

Mother, good night indeed. This counsellor

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.

240 Good night, mother.

*They exit, Hamlet tugging out Polonius.*

**203. Not...means...:** After this general statement of negation, Hamlet lists the things he would have Gertrude *not* do

**206. reechy:** filthy

**210. 'Twere good you let him know:** said very sarcastically, as are lines 211-18

**212. paddock:** toad; **gib:** tomcat

**213. Such dear concernings:** such important matters

**215-8. Unpeg the basket...and break your own neck down:** The story that Hamlet alludes to here is lost. **Unpeg:** fasten; **To try conclusions:** to experiment

**229-30. to have the engineer...petard:** to have the maker of military devices blown up by his own explosives

**230-1. and 't...I will:** i.e., with any luck, I will

**234. packing:** leaving the country; carrying off a burden

**239. to draw toward an end with you:** to come to the end of my business with you (with a pun on **draw**, as Hamlet drags him away)