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Cast of Characters

OPHELIA
PLAYER-KING
HAMLET
FIRST PLAYER
SECOND PLAYER
POLONIUS
QUEEN
KING
LAERTES
GHOST
ATTENDANTS
FIRST SAILOR
SECOND SAILOR
OSRIC
PLAYER
ANOTHER PLAYER
PLAYER-QUEEN
LUCIANUS
THIRD PLAYER

Time

Many Years Ago

Place

Denmark, in and around the Royal Castle of Elsinore

Author's Note

That a playwright should attempt a variation on “Hamlet” wouldn’t have bothered William Shakespeare; that’s what he did himself around 1599-1600.

As T.S. Eliot observed: “Hamlet... represents the efforts of a series of men, each making what he could out of the work of his predecessors.”

The Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus wrote the first known version in his “History of Denmark” circa 1180-1208 (Hamlet was “Ambleth” back then). Francois de Belleforest retold it in his “Histoires Tragiques” of 1576 (his hero was “Hamblet.”) A stage version, now lost, the “Ur-Hamlet,” existed by 1589.

The Bard of Avon, perhaps goaded on by his Company, decided to revamp this popular old chestnut and “make it new.”

A.C. Bradley notes in “Shakespearean Tragedy,” “The character itself has probably exerted a greater fascination, and certainly has been the subject of more discussion, than any other in the whole literature of the world.”

Therefore we may perhaps be excused lengthy analysis of the melancholy Dane. Concerning the famous question of why Hamlet delays killing the king, among many learned commentaries we prefer that ascribed to “Anonymous” (1736): “Had Hamlet gone...to work, there would have been an end to our play.”

But what of Ophelia, the woman who might have been Hamlet’s wife? The prince, his love mingled with suspicion and resentment, behaves rudely toward her. To quote Northrop Frye, “Ophelia...bullied by her father, humiliated by being made a decoy for Hamlet...is crushed under the wheels of all the male egos.”

I cannot abide such a slight to stand (playfully) uncorrected. Ophelia’s only fault was, she loved the men in her life “not wisely but too well.”

And so this version, another kind of revenge play: “Ophelia’s Revenge,” in which the men yield center stage to the maiden—

a free and spirited adaptation, reverent and irreverent, of possibly the greatest of all stage plays.

Acknowledgments

Ophelia was originally produced by The National Theatre of the Deaf premiering on September 17, 1992, David Hays and Julianna Fjeld, Artistic Directors, Camille L. Jeter, Associate Artistic Director. The set design was based on "The Book of Kells." The cast and crew was as follows:

POLONIUS,
COUNCILLOR OF STATE,
GRAVEDIGGER..... Robert Demayo
QUEENSabrina Dennison
SECOND PLAYER (Voice Actor)..... Eileen Dulen
OPHELIA Camille L. Jeter
FIRST PLAYERJohn Kinstler
HAMLETTroy Kotsur
KINGJohn Maucere
PLAYER-KING Joseph Sarpy
THIRD PLAYER,
OSRIC (Voice Actor) Chris Tolliver
LAERTESJevon Whetter

Director Will Rhys and Robby Barnett
Set Design..... David Hays
Costume DesignFred Voepel
Lighting Design Frederick Geffken
Music Design Naaz Hosseini
Sign MasterAdrian Blue
Production Stage Manager..... Nan Webster
Sculptures for Sound ...Francois & Bernard Baschet

The author wishes to thank David Hays.

OPHELIA

by Jeff Wanshel

(WITH TEXT PIRATED FROM WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE)

Being the tragicall Historie of OPHELIA, Maide of Denmark. Newly Revised and Reduced to almost half againe as it was by Wan-shel, after the true Coppie by Shake-speare, from the lost original by Kyd; in which the Maide's part is Greatlie more Prominent.

Featuring a Ghost, a Sword Fight, a Drowning, Poetry and Mayhem.

ACT I

Scene 1

(OPHELIA in a pool of light. Movement.)

PLAYER-KING. A story told many times changes in the telling. We vagabond players have told this story four hundred years. If you say, "I've heard this one before," we say: perhaps some other version. Ours is called, "Ophelia."

(Denmark. The castle at Elsinore. OPHELIA and the PLAYERS rehearsing, i.e., trying their hands at a speech.)

OPHELIA. There is a willow grows aslant the brook,
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream:
Therewith fantastic garlands did she make
Of crowflowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples.
There on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds
Clamb'ring to hang, an envious sliver broke,
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,
And mermaidlike awhile they bore her up,
Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds,
As one incapable of her own distress,

Or like a creature native to
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.

(Pause.)

Alas, then she is drowned?

PLAYER-KING. Drowned, drowned.

OPHELIA. Lovely, but sad. She that drowned, who was it?

PLAYER-KING. A beauteous and chaste young maiden.

OPHELIA. 'Tis pity such an end could not have been avoided.

(Enter HAMLET, Prince of Denmark.)

My lord, here are the players, newly disembarked to start their
Bardish residency.

HAMLET. You are welcome, masters; welcome, good friends; wel-
come one and all to Elsinore.

(Indicating OPHELIA —)

This nymph I see thou know'st —

PLAYER-KING. My lord, we hope she'll join the troupe, and tour
the provinces.

FIRST PLAYER. Act the great parts —

SECOND PLAYER. Abandon all hope of making money.

HAMLET. May God in his bounty provide for her. Or, at minimum,
keep her out of the brook into which Ophelia plung'd her weeping
maiden.

OPHELIA. The poet said, "weeping brook." The maiden wasn't
weeping; the *brook* weeps. The water splashes up; streams down
like tears.

FIRST PLAYER. Sad indeed, methinks.

SECOND PLAYER. But why is the brook sad?

FIRST PLAYER. Dolt! The maid drowned there.

PLAYER-KING. “There is a willow”: a weeping tree, mirrored in the brook —

(Demonstrates how the speech should be acted or signed.)

FIRST PLAYER. I’d have done it differently. She drifts downstream ... feet first. No: head first. She spins a little, then she’s pulled under...

SECOND PLAYER. And croaks.

PLAYER-KING. Next time drown her your way. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action; hold the mirror up to nature.

SECOND PLAYER. Exactly my point. That’s not how people drown. So calmly —

OPHELIA. She’s not afraid. Her heavy garments pull her under. She sees the sun shining through the surface of the water ... looks up at the light for the last time ...

(During the preceding, enter POLONIUS, lord chamberlain and royal councillor. He stops, stands watching; attempts ineffectually to conceal himself. HAMLET, as though not noticing his presence, approaches him unseen.)

HAMLET. *(To POLONIUS, startling him; as though surprised:)*
Master Polonius! When did you arrive to grace us with your presence?

POLONIUS. Ah — just now, actually.

OPHELIA. Father! Here are the players —

POLONIUS. Obviously. My lord, are not these the best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, or tragical-comical-historical-pastoral?

HAMLET. They are the abstract and brief chronicle of the time. See them well housed.

POLONIUS. My lord, I will use them according to their worth.

HAMLET. Much better! Use every man after his worth, and who shall 'scape whipping? The less they deserve, the more merit is in your bounty.

POLONIUS. Come this way, sirs.

(Enter KING CLAUDIUS and GERTRUDE, QUEEN OF DENMARK. All bow obeisance. At their entrance HAMLET withdraws into himself; OPHELIA steps to one side.)

KING. The fair Ophelia —

(OPHELIA curtseys.)

My nephew Hamlet, and my son. How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

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

QUEEN. Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted color off,
And let thine eye look like a friend upon your uncle.
Do not forever with thy downcast eyes
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.

QUEEN. 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.
I have that within which passes show;
These but the trappings and the suits of woe.

KING. 'Tis commendable in your nature
To give these mourning duties to your father.
But you must know your father lost a father,
That father lost, lost his.
Nature's common theme
Is death of fathers, from Abel the first corpse
To he that died today; this must be so.
To persevere in stubborn condolment
Is unmanly grief —

QUEEN. Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet.
Throw to earth this unavailing woe.

HAMLET. I shall in all my best obey you, madam.

KING. 'Tis a loving and a fair reply.
This gentle and unforced accord
Sits smiling to my heart. Madam, come away.

(All but OPHELIA and HAMLET exit.)

HAMLET. Frailty, thy name is woman!
But two months dead,
So excellent a king, so loving to my mother
He would not permit the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly.
Yet within a month — before those shoes were old
With which she followed my poor father's body
All tears — within a little month
She married with my uncle, my father's brother.
A beast that cannot reason
Would have mourned longer. Within a month
She married —

OPHELIA. Thrift, thrift, my lord. The funeral baked meats
Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.

HAMLET. O, most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to adulterous sheets!
Ophelia, you knew my father.
He was a goodly king;
We shall not look upon his like again.

OPHELIA. My lord, I think I saw him yesternight.

HAMLET. The king my father?

OPHELIA. I could not sleep. Something drew me up to the cliff that
juts out above the restless flood. There upon the battlements in the
dead waste and middle of the night, he with martial stalk went
slow and stately by —

HAMLET. My father's spirit? Dost think 'twill walk again?

(Enter LAERTES, brother to OPHELIA. He regards them disapprovingly.)

LAERTES. Sister, a word with you ere I depart.

HAMLET. *(To OPHELIA:)* We'll watch tonight at midnight, upon the battlements.

(Exit HAMLET, bowing to LAERTES; LAERTES bows back coldly.)

LAERTES. Good sister, for Hamlet, and the trifling of his favor,
Hold it a violet in the youth of springlike nature,
Fast-blooming, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,
The perfume of a minute, no more.

OPHELIA. No more but so?

LAERTES. Think it no more. Perhaps he loves you now;
But weigh what loss your honor may sustain
If you lose your heart, or your chaste treasure open.
Of that which costs but little trial men soon
Grow heedless. If his intentions be honorable,
He should thee wed.

OPHELIA. What lesson is this, good brother?
“Never yield”; or “put him off awhile”?

LAERTES. Wouldst thou be Queen? Bring honor to our family? Or disgrace?

(Re-enter POLONIUS.)

POLONIUS. Yet here, Laertes? Aboard, aboard;
The wind sits in the shoulder of your sail,
And you are stayed for.

(LAERTES makes as though to leave.)

A moment. To guide thee flawlessly
On thy way, these sundry precepts inscribe
Into thy memory. Ophelia, attend me also.
Beware of entrance to a quarrel; but being in,
Bear't that th' opposed may beware of thee.

LAERTES AND OPHELIA. Yes, my lord.

POLONIUS. Not you, Ophelia; do not you quarrel;
You in all things be obedient.

OPHELIA. To Lord Hamlet too, my lord?

POLONIUS. Not to Lord Hamlet. Of that more later. Where was I?

LAERTES. “Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice” —

POLONIUS. Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
But not expressed in fancy; rich, not gaudy,
For the apparel oft proclaims the man.

LAERTES AND OPHELIA. Yes, father.

POLONIUS. Not you, Ophelia;
Fine clothing is uncalled-for in young maids;
Be modest; or try to look it, anyway.

LAERTES. 'Tis more important to learn to hold a broom
Than dress to dazzle. Wear clothes that won't be soil'd
When you mop and clean up.

(OPHELIA curtsies.)

POLONIUS. Where —

LAERTES. “Neither a borrower nor a lender be” —

POLONIUS. For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
This above all:

POLONIUS, LAERTES & OPHELIA. “To thine own self be true.
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.”

LAERTES. Most humbly do I take my leave, my lord.
Farewell, Ophelia; remember well
What I have told you.

(OPHELIA curtseys. Exit LAERTES.)

POLONIUS. And what did Laertes tell you, Ophelia?

OPHELIA. So please you, something touching the Lord Hamlet.

POLONIUS. What's between you? Give me up the truth.

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

POLONIUS. Pooh! You speak like a green girl,
Untried in such perilous circumstance.

OPHELIA. My lord, he hath wooed in honorable fashion —

POLONIUS. Ay, “fashion” you may call it.
When the blood burns, these blazes
You must not mistake for fire.
Do not believe his vows.
Your maiden presence refuse him henceforth.

OPHELIA. My lord —

POLONIUS. I would not from this time forth
Have you give words with Hamlet.

OPHELIA. Exchange no words?

POLONIUS. That’s right.

OPHELIA. Not see Lord Hamlet?

POLONIUS. Look to it, I charge you. You have me, have you not?

(Pause.)

OPHELIA. I shall obey, my lord.

(OPHELIA moves to exit; BUSINESS with PLAYER-KING.)

POLONIUS. This dance of her affections doth jig on too madly;
'twere best retard it. I trust her not; there’s language in her eye, her
cheek, her lip; her wanton spirits look out at every joint and motion
of her body. This daughter of mine may yet be queen; but not if she
o’erhastily open her chaste treasure. Next thing you know the court
will swarm with little Hamlets. Once she’s queen, let Ophelia do as
she likes. Until then, she’ll do as I tell her.

Scene 2

(Above the castle. Midnight. THE PLAYER-KING, OPHELIA, HAMLET standing alone.)

HAMLET. There's husbandry in heaven; their candles are all out.
The air bites shrewdly.

PLAYER-KING. Now o'er the one half-world
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
The curtain'd sleep; witchcraft celebrates,
And wither'd murder,
Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf,
Whose howl's his watch, with stealthy pace
Towards his design moves like a ghost.

(Enter GHOST.)

HAMLET. Angels and ministers of grace defend us! What art thou?
Be thou a heavenly spirit or goblin damned?

GHOST. I am thy father's spirit,
Doomed for a certain term to walk the night.

HAMLET. Then tell why the sepulcher
Hath oped his ponderous and marble jaws
To cast thee up again.

GHOST. If thou didst ever thy dear father love —
Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

HAMLET. Murder?

OPHELIA. Murder?

GHOST.

Murder most foul.

'Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard,
A serpent stung me. But know
The serpent that did sting thy father's life
Now wears his crown. That adulterous beast
Seduced and won to his shameful lust
The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen.
Then as I was sleeping
Thy uncle stole with poison in a vial

And in the porches of my ears did pour
The leperous distilment.
Thus was I by a brother's hand
Of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatched.
Hamlet, revenge!
But howsoever thou pursuest this act,
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother. Leave her to heaven
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge
To prick and sting her. Adieu. Remember me!
Swear it —

HAMLET. I swear.

GHOST.

Swear —

HAMLET. I swear! But —

(Exit GHOST. Crossing to OPHELIA:)

O Ophelia! Didst see? What shall I do?

(But OPHELIA, bound by her father's injunction, makes no reply.)

This spirit may be a demon,
An evil angel, enemy to man;
For the devil hath power
T' assume what shape he will.
Was it an honest ghost, or
Goblin cursed torn from hell?
Ophelia, answer me!

(But OPHELIA can't answer.)

... Ophelia!

(OPHELIA rushes off.)

Scene 3

PLAYER-KING. Lovers wrenched asunder ... Ophelia's hands tied
... A melancholy prince who, rather than murder anyone based on

the questionable testimony of a ghost, began to act brainsick. Things in the State of Denmark were rotten —

(POLONIUS and the players.)

FIRST PLAYER. But sir —

POLONIUS. A rock bed's good for the back.

SECOND PLAYER. But good my lord —

POLONIUS. Sirrah, one meal a day, as I grew up, was deem'd quite generous.

(Enter HAMLET apparently distracted; BUSINESS. Exit HAMLET. Exit POLONIUS in a different direction.)

FIRST PLAYER.

Lord Hamlet's gone nuts. What's wrong with him, Ophelia?

OPHELIA. I can't say. But I repelled Lord Hamlet's letters and refused to see him.

FIRST PLAYER. Jilted him? Why, good Lady?

OPHELIA. My father did command it.

PLAYER-KING. But dost thou love him; or dost thou not?

OPHELIA. I do.

SECOND PLAYER. Then if he give words to you, why not return them?

OPHELIA. Not return them? Don't you know I am a woman? When I think, I must speak. Shut the doors upon a woman's wit and it will out at the window; shut that and 'twill out at the key-hole; stop that, 'twill fly with the smoke out at the chimney. I *would* speak; but my father doth forbid it.

PLAYER-KING. I ne'er would council my lady to disobey her father.

But we would not have thee or Lord Hamlet, like cover'd fire,
Consume away in sighs, waste inwardly —

(Re-enter POLONIUS.)

POLONIUS. Daughter? The king will see us.

(Enter KING, QUEEN. PLAYERS withdraw.)

My lord, I do think that I have found
The very cause of Hamlet's lunacy.

QUEEN. I suspect it is no other but the main,
His father's death and our o'erhasty marriage.

POLONIUS. I have a daughter
Who in her duty and obedience
Hath given me these love-letters.

(Reading:)

"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 hear —

QUEEN. Came these from Hamlet to you?

OPHELIA. Yes, my Lady.

QUEEN. But how hath she received his love?

POLONIUS. When I had seen this hot love on the wing,
I prescripts gave her
That she should lock herself from him.
Which done, repelled, he lost his appetite,
Suffered insomnia, became debilitated,
Fell into depression, delirium
And, by this declension, derangement.

(Enter HAMLET who witnesses the following; no one sees him.)

KING. How may we try this further?

POLONIUS. He's pacing outside in the lobby.
I'll loose my daughter to him.
From behind the tapestry we'll mark the encounter.

KING. We'll hazard it.

POLONIUS. Ophelia!

(OPHELIA approaches.)

Read on this book, that show of such an exercise may color your loneliness.

(OPHELIA kneels in mock-prayer. POLONIUS sets her "just so.")

Here he comes. Withdraw! Away, I do beseech you.

(KING, QUEEN and POLONIUS withdraw. Re-enter HAMLET apparently reading.)

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

HAMLET. I humbly thank you; well, well, well.

OPHELIA. My lord, I have remembrances of yours
That I must redeliver.
I pray you now, receive them.

HAMLET. No, not I; I never gave you aught.

OPHELIA. My honored lord, you know right well you did,
And with them words of so sweet breath composed
As made these things more rich. Their perfume lost,
Take these again. There, my lord —

(She lays them by the screen in an attempt to attract his attention to the listeners behind; HAMLET doesn't notice.)

HAMLET. Are you honest?

OPHELIA. My lord?

HAMLET. I did love you once.

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

HAMLET. You should not have believed me. I loved you not.

OPHELIA. I was the more deceived.

HAMLET. Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves all; believe none of us. Denmark's a prison.

OPHELIA. To those who'd speak their minds, but jeering fortune ties their hands, all the world's a prison.

HAMLET. This most excellent canopy, the air, this majestic roof fretted with golden fire: why, it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors. Man delights not me; nor woman either. I have heard of your paintings. God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another. You jig, you amble, and you lisp... Go to, I'll no more on't; it hath made me mad. Where's your father?

OPHELIA. At home, my lord.

HAMLET. Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool nowhere but in his own house. I say we will have no more marriage. Those that are married already — all but one — shall live. The rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery, go, and quickly.

(Exit HAMLET. Re-enter KING and POLONIUS.)

POLONIUS. Thou hast done well. Begone, child.

QUEEN. Ophelia, if your good beauties be the happy cause Of Hamlet's wildness, I hope your virtues Will bring him to his way again.

OPHELIA. Madam, I wish so too.

(Exit OPHELIA and QUEEN.)

POLONIUS. My liege, since brevity is the soul of wit, 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?

KING. More matter, with less art.

POLONIUS. Sire, I swear, I use no art at all. That he's mad, 'tis true; 'tis true, 'tis pity, And pity 'tis, 'tis true. But fare well this, For I will use no art. Lovers and madmen have seething brains —

KING. Love? His inclinations do not that way tend. And what he spoke, 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 fear the hatch and the disclose

Will be some danger.

POLONIUS. Then to England send him, or confine him where
Your wisdom best shall think.

KING. It shall be so.

Madness in great ones must not unwatched go.

Scene 4

PLAYER-KING. In which Ophelia breaks through her enforced silence; and, with the players' help, remakes her marred fortunes.

(OPHELIA, PLAYERS.)

OPHELIA. Hast thou memorized the text I gave thee?

(PLAYERS *signal assent.*)

Retreat; he approacheth.

(*Enter HAMLET.*)

PLAYER-KING. Good my lord, a word with thee. Art thou mad, sir?

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

PLAYER-KING. I myself am all-winds mad; and in my antic humor would make request of thee.

(*Handing him text:*)

We've cobbled together some lines from diverse entertainments; the matter, untried, may need amendment; wouldst watch, and render thy opinion?

HAMLET. (*Regarding the text:*) Who takes this part?

PLAYER-KING. The beauteous Ophelia.

HAMLET. Ophelia?

PLAYER-KING. Ophelia.

HAMLET. It's cribbed from where?

PLAYER-KING. The Bard of Avon. An ancient author, yet one who may have e'en today some small validity.

HAMLET. The Bard, sir? Why, I am the Bard's own man! Begin immediately.

(Enter the players, who bow, and OPHELIA, who curtsies; HAMLET bows back.)

PLAYER-KING. The plot: a noble Lord has been estranged from his true love; unknown to him, her father hath forbid her to receive him. Rather than to the dotard elder's meddling, their falling-out he attributeth to some ulcerous fault in her; or, grandiloquizing, some canker-worm in nature. It's wildly fantastical —

HAMLET. It's not all that fantastic.

(Consulting text:)

It says, he's gloomy?

PLAYER-KING. His mood is inky; black as his cloak.

(The PLAYER portraying HAMLET adopts an exceedingly melancholy pose. Commence "performance.")

OPHELIA. My lord, you're melancholy.

PLAYER. I do love it more than laughing. 'Tis good to be sad and say nothing.

OPHELIA. Why then, 'tis good to be a post.
My lord, have I wronged thee?
Never so much as in a thought unborn
Did I offend thee.

PLAYER. Thus say all traitors.
Suffice it that I trust thee not.

OPHELIA. Yet your mistrust cannot make me traitor.

PLAYER. Thou art thy father's daughter; there's enough.

OPHELIA. Treason is not inherited, my lord.

PLAYER. 'Tis not just treason: thou art fallen
Into a pit of ink, that the wide sea

Hath drops too few to wash thee clean again.
I decline to have a horn placed on my forehead.
I will die a bachelor.

ANOTHER PLAYER. Beware, my lord, of jealousy;
It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock
The meat it feeds on.

OPHELIA. 'Tis not a year or two shows us a man:
They are all stomachs, and we all foods;
They eat us hungrily, and when they are full,
They belch us.
I do think it is their husbands' faults
If wives do fall: they pour our treasures
Into foreign laps,
Break out in peevish jealousies,
Or strike us in spite.
Yet have we some revenge.
So let men use us well; else let them know,
The ills we do, their ills instruct us so.

(HAMLET interrupts the play.)

HAMLET. The failure of wives laid at their husband's door?
Who says this? Ophelia?
Hang the play! Tell me: why didst scorn me,
Repel my letters, refuse to meet me?
Hast exchanged me in thy passions for another?

PLAYER-KING. Reply to you, alas, my lord, in her own person, she cannot.

HAMLET. Why not?

PLAYER-KING. Polonius, sage counselor maximatical, the king's long eyes and ears, prohibits it. Her hand was forced. Her acts were not her own —

HAMLET. *(Getting it:)* And therefore these theatricals?

PLAYER-KING. Herein, my lord, the puppet pulls the strings.

HAMLET. O rose of may, thou in thy silence
Ne'er spoke more truly.

PLAYER-KING. In this our play, the lovers do love truly; but the lady fears the prince hath her forsaken. She asks:

OPHELIA. Whom dost thou pine for?
She that longs for thee?

HAMLET. I said hang the play! If she that yearns is she I long for, her name's Ophelia.

PLAYER-KING. Wilt swear it?

HAMLET. By yonder moon I swear —

OPHELIA. O swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon
That monthly changes in her circled orb,
Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.

HAMLET. What shall I swear by?

OPHELIA. Don't swear at all.
If thy bent of love be honorable,
Thy purpose marriage,
The allegiance due my father
I'll give to thee;
All my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay
And follow thee throughout the world.

HAMLET. (*Throwing down text:*) We'll place our seal upon it.

(*Kisses OPHELIA. PLAYERS exit on tiptoe. Pause.*)

OPHELIA. Of this accursed machine, painted Queen, sham smiling King, false plotting Councillor, I thought thee cog.

OPHELIA. O my lord! Forgive me! I who love thee in the hour of thy need thus seeming to reject thee! ... But good my lord. As to thy father's spirit —

HAMLET. But *was* it his spirit? Or a foul demon
That deludes me
to lure me by my bloody acts
Into e'erlasting fire? I need proof —

OPHELIA. Thou mayst find a way to know this with more certainty.
Hast thou seen no example from this?

Guilty creatures sitting at a play
May by the very cunning of the scene
Be struck so to the soul that presently
They proclaim their malefactions. For
Murder, though it have no tongue, will speak.
Have our friends
Play something like the murder of thy father
Before thine uncle. Observe his looks.
If he doth flinch, thou know'st thy course.

HAMLET. I wish I'd thought of that myself.

(OPHELIA summons the PLAYERS.)

OPHELIA. Friends, can you play "The Murder of Gonzago"?

PLAYER-KING. Ay, my lady.

OPHELIA. And could you for a need study a speech of some dozen or sixteen lines inserted in't?

PLAYER-KING. Ay, my lady.

HAMLET. Tomorrow night we'll have it.

(Exit PLAYERS.)

OPHELIA. The play's the thing
Wherein we'll catch the conscience of the King.

Scene 5

(HAMLET and OPHELIA. Enter KING, QUEEN, POLONIUS, and ATTENDANTS.)

QUEEN. Come hither, my dear Hamlet, sit by me.

HAMLET. No, good mother. Here's metal more magnetic.

(To OPHELIA:)

Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

OPHELIA. No, my lord.

HAMLET. I mean, my head upon your lap? Do you think I meant country matters?

OPHELIA. You are merry, my lord.

HAMLET. What should a man do but be merry? For look you how cheerfully my mother looks, and my father died within two hours.

(The play begins: BUSINESS.)

QUEEN. What means this?

HAMLET. It means mischief.

QUEEN. Is the play brief, my lord?

HAMLET. As woman's love.

(Enter PLAYER-KING and PLAYER-QUEEN.)

PLAYER-KING. I must leave thee, love,
And thou shalt live in this fair world behind,
And haply for new husband take one as kind —

PLAYER-QUEEN. O, confound the rest!
Such love be treason in my breast.
A second time I kill my husband dead
When second husband kisses me in bed.

PLAYER-KING. The fruits unripe stick on the tree;
But fall unshaken when they mellow be.
So think thou wilt no second husband wed,
But die thy thoughts when thy first lord is dead.

PLAYER-QUEEN. Here and hence pursue me lasting strife,
If, once a widow, ever I be wife!

HAMLET. Madam, how like you this play?

QUEEN. The lady doth protest too much, methinks.

(PLAYER-KING sleeps; PLAYER-QUEEN exits. Enter LUCIANUS.)

KING. What do you call the play?

HAMLET. *The Mousetrap.*

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

HAMLET. No offense i' th' world. They do but jest, poison in jest. Your Majesty, and we that have free souls, it touches us not. This is one Lucianus, nephew to the King.

LUCIANUS.

Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit, time agreeing,
No creature seeing,
Thou mixture rank, thrice infected,
To thy task now unsuspected.

(Pours poison in the ears of the reclining PLAYER-KING.)

HAMLET. He poisons him in the garden for his estate. You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of his wife.

(KING gets up. BUSINESS.)

QUEEN. How fares my lord?

POLONIUS. Stop the play!

KING. Give me some light. Away!

POLONIUS. Lights, lights, lights!

(Chaos. Exit all but HAMLET and OPHELIA.)

HAMLET. I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pound. Didst perceive?

OPHELIA. Very well, my lord. Foul deeds will rise,
Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes.

HAMLET. Conceal thyself; thy father comes.

(OPHELIA retreats. Re-enter POLONIUS. HAMLET opens a book.)

POLONIUS. My lord, the Queen in most great affliction of spirit hath sent me to you.

HAMLET. Sir, you are welcome.

POLONIUS. She desires to speak with you in her chamber.

HAMLET. We shall obey were she ten times our mother.

POLONIUS. Good my lord, what is the cause of thy distemper?

(HAMLET hands POLONIUS a recorder.)

HAMLET. Will you play upon this pipe?

POLONIUS. My lord, I cannot.

HAMLET. I pray you.

POLONIUS. Believe me, I cannot.

HAMLET. I do beseech you.

POLONIUS. I know no touch of it, my lord.

HAMLET. Look you, these are the stops.

POLONIUS. I have not the skill.

HAMLET. Yet you would play upon me; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery. Do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? I will come to my mother by and by.

POLONIUS. I will say so.

HAMLET. “By and by” is easily said.

(Exit POLONIUS.)

HAMLET. O, full of scorpions is my mind!
'Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world. Now could I drink hot blood
And do such bitter business as the day
Would quake to look on —

(OPHELIA comes out of hiding and stands by HAMLET.)

Scene 6

FIRST PLAYER. In which Lord Hamlet finally does stab somebody.

(SPLIT-STAGE. QUEEN and POLONIUS in the queen's chambers.)

POLONIUS. Tell him his pranks have been too broad to bear with.

Behind the arras I'll convey myself
To watch.

(POLONIUS hides behind the arras. Nearby, OPHELIA with HAMLET.)

OPHELIA. When will I see thee again, in truth, my lord?
Tomorrow night, when the moon doth behold
Her silver visage in the watery glass,
Decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass,
A time that lovers flights doth still conceal,
Will we through Elsinore's gates devise to steal?

HAMLET. By all the vows that ever men have broke,
In number more than ever women spoke,
In that same place thou hast appointed me,
To-morrow truly will I meet with thee.

OPHELIA. I fear 'twill never happen thus.

HAMLET. Heaven will direct it.

(They kiss.)

OPHELIA. Adieu, my lord.

(OPHELIA begins to exit, then sees her father; she sneaks behind the arras.)

OPHELIA. *(To POLONIUS:)* What are you doing here?

POLONIUS. I'm the royal counselor! I have a right to eavesdrop!

OPHELIA. Father — get out of here!

POLONIUS. How dare you speak to me thus?

OPHELIA. This is dangerous! An accident could happen!

(OPHELIA tugs at POLONIUS. Resisting her, he holds on to the arras, which begins to flap wildly. HAMLET enters the queen's chambers. As they speak, the sight of POLONIUS and OPHELIA struggling is irregularly visible behind them.)

HAMLET. Mother, what's the matter?

QUEEN. Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

HAMLET. Mother, you have my father much offended.

QUEEN. How now, Hamlet? Have you forgot me?

HAMLET. Not so; you are the Queen, your husband's brother's wife,
And, would it were not so, you are my mother.

(HAMLET notices the flapping arras.)

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

(Makes a pass through the arras. Two SCREAMS.)

QUEEN. O me, what hast thou done?

HAMLET. Nay, I know not. Is it the King?

(OPHELIA falls out from behind the arras.)

Ophelia! She's fainted. But she's unwounded. No harm done!

(Removes the sword. Out falls POLONIUS dead.)

HAMLET. Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool!
I took thee for thy better. Take thy fortune.
Thou find'st to be too busy is some danger.

QUEEN. O, what a rash and bloody deed is this!

HAMLET. I'll lug the guts into the neighbor room.
Mother — good night.

(Exit HAMLET tugging POLONIUS and OPHELIA.)

End of Act I

ACT II

Scene 7

(Graveyard strewn with skulls. GRAVEDIGGER enters and throws down the corpse of POLONIUS. COMIC BUSINESS. PLAYERS enter hurling stones at unseen pursuers.)

PLAYER-KING. Well, they sure hated the play.

FIRST PLAYER. Goodbye residency.

SECOND PLAYER. So much for state funding of the arts.

PLAYER-KING. Want to know the *real* reason the King loathed that play? It was your crummy acting! “When second husband kisses me in bed.” That’s not how people go to bed! *This* is how —

(Illustrates how people go to bed.)

FIRST PLAYER. Why not like this?

(Illustrates how people go to bed.)

But I did it classical-style, see? No filth. What sank us like a stone was the way your pal acted “poison.” “Thou mixture rank, thrice infected.” That stank!

PLAYER-KING. Yeah. I hated that! Hated it —

FIRST PLAYER. Hated it, hated it, hated it —

GRAVEDIGGER. Hated it!

PLAYER-KING. Awful. Here’s how you smell poison ...

(Shows how you smell poison.)

FIRST PLAYER. Or you become the poison bottle ...

(Shows how you become the poison bottle.)

PLAYER-KING. Or become the poison itself, and croak a gentleman —

(Shows how you become the poison itself. The others join in, showing how the gentleman croaks, etc. As they do so, the GRAVEDIGGER resumes working, and tosses up a skull.)

PLAYER-KING. Has this fellow no feeling of his business?

FIRST PLAYER. Custom hath made it in him a property of easiness.

(The GRAVEDIGGER flips another skull into the air.)

PLAYER-KING. Whose skull might that be, sir?

GRAVEDIGGER. That skull, sir, belonged to a distinguished lawyer.

FIRST PLAYER. Why does he suffer this rude knave to knock him about with a dirty shovel, and not sue him for assault and battery?

GRAVEDIGGER. He was a great buyer of land; now his head's full of dirt. Tell me: who builds stronger than the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?

FIRST PLAYER. The gallowsmaker, for that frame outlives a thousand tenants.

GRAVEDIGGER. I like thy wit well. But who builds stronger yet?

PLAYER-KING. Who?

GRAVEDIGGER. The gravemaker. The house he makes lasts till doomsday. This skull here was, look you, a whoreson mad fellow's. This was Yorick's skull, the King's jester.

PLAYER-KING. *(Taking the skull:)* Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him well.

FIRST PLAYER. A fellow of infinite jest.

PLAYER-KING. Where be your wisecracks now? Not one to mock your own grinning?

FIRST PLAYER. Dost thou think great princes look o' this fashion in the earth?
And smell so? Pah!

PLAYER-KING. Who approacheth? And with such maimed rites?

(Enter KING, QUEEN, OPHELIA, PLAYERS and GRAVEDIGGER adopt a mourning pose. Enter LAERTES cloaked; he unmask.)

LAERTES. O thou vile king, how came my father dead? Why bury him secretly?

QUEEN. Calmly, quarrelsome Laertes.

LAERTES. That drop of blood that's calm proclaims me bastard.
I'll not be juggled with.
Let come what comes, only I'll be revenged
Most thoroughly for my father.

KING. Who shall stay you?

(The GRAVEDIGGER tosses dirt into the grave.)

LAERTES. Hold off the earth awhile,
Till I have caught him once more in mine arms.

(Leaps into the grave.)

Now pile your dust upon the quick and dead,
Until this grave o'ertop the skyish mountains!

OPHELIA. What will thy ranting do for our father?

(Leaps into the grave with him.)

Will you weep? fight? fast? tear thyself?
Drink up bitter vinegar? Eat a crocodile?
I'll do't. Dost come to outface me with thy grief?
Be buried quick with him, and so will I,
And let them pile a million acres on us,
Till a mountain you have made
To burst through heaven!

LAERTES. What is the reason that you use me thus?
I loved you ever.

QUEEN. This is the poison of deep grief.
O, she is mad, Laertes;
Mad as the sea and wind
When both contend which is the mightier.

LAERTES. O heavens, is it possible a young maid's wits
Should be as mortal as an old man's life?
Whose fault is this, ye Gods?

KING. Hamlet's. He killed Polonius.

LAERTES. Hamlet?

KING. Laertes, I must commune with your grief.
And where th' offense is,
Let the great axe fall.

(KING and QUEEN file out. LAERTES hangs back; casts a look back at OPHELIA.)

LAERTES. Stay away from Hamlet. He killed our father. He's worms' meat.

(Exit LAERTES.)

FIRST PLAYER. Poor Ophelia. If I were her I'd go nuts too. I'd weep, gnash my teeth, rend my garments ...

(He approaches her.)

Ophelia? Lord Hamlet —

OPHELIA. Shame come to Hamlet! I'll to my wedding-bed;
And death, not Hamlet, take my maidenhead!
How can I forgive him?

FIRST PLAYER. It was an accident.

PLAYER-KING. Take strength.

SECOND PLAYER. Take heart.

PLAYER-KING. Wilt thou slay thyself?
And slay the good prince too that lives in thee,
Thy dear sworn love but hollow perjury,
Killing that love which thou hast vowed to cherish?

(Pause.)

OPHELIA. To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them. To die, to sleep —
No more — and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to.
'Tis a consummation

Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep —
 To sleep — perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub,
 For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
 Must give us pause.
 There's the respect
 That makes calamity of so long life:
 For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
 Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely [*haughtiness*],
 The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
 The insolence of office,
 When he or she might quittance 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 loses the name of action.

SECOND PLAYER. These Danes sure get broody.

FIRST PLAYER. They drink too much, fall in love, jilt each other,
 and go nuts. Watch. Next she'll kill herself. All the Danes do it.

(He approaches her.)

Ophelia, honey? Knock it off. Forget killing yourself. That's out.
 You don't have the luxury. Who knows what plot the king may e'en
 now be hatching with your brother? Those two are up to no good.
 Unless "He's worms' meat" is a Danish compliment.

(OPHELIA goes to the grave of POLONIUS, strews it with flowers.)

OPHELIA. Father, farewell.

I thought thee my bride-bed to have sown,

And not have strewed thy grave —

(SONG.)

Scene 8

PLAYERS (UNISON). Having weighed what has been done and what she needs to do, Ophelia out-Hamlets Hamlet; and learns of a plot against his life.

(The castle. King's chambers. KING and LAERTES. As the king indicates that HAMLET spoke certain lines, HAMLET himself appears and delivers them, dragging the body of POLONIUS.)

KING. He was cruel and unnatural. Said I to him, “Hamlet, where’s Polonius?” He replies:

HAMLET. At supper. Not where he eats, but where he is eaten.

KING. I asked again, “Where’s Polonius?” Quoth he:

HAMLET. If you find him not within this month, you shall nose him as you go up the stairs.

KING. I commanded Osric to seek him there. Said the Prince:

HAMLET. He will stay till you come.

(Exit HAMLET.)

LAERTES. My revenge will come.

(BAWDY SONG. Enter OPHELIA “mad”.)

KING. ’Tis poor Ophelia, divided from herself and her fair judgment.

(OPHELIA sidles up to them.)

OPHELIA. Do you see yonder cloud almost in shape of a camel?

KING. Like a camel, indeed.

LAERTES. Very like a camel.

OPHELIA. Methinks it’s like a weasel.

KING. It *is* like a weasel.

LAERTES. Now that you point it out, extraordinarily like one.

OPHELIA. Or like a whale.

LAERTES. Terrifically like a whale.

OPHELIA. And now, my big, strong, strapping gentlemen, I'm off to see the king and my brother.

(Apparently exit OPHELIA; actually she conceals herself.)

LAERTES. Everyone goes berserk in Denmark.

KING. We have the highest madness and suicide rate in Europe.

LAERTES. We commit adultery and poison one another.

KING. I'm proud of it.

LAERTES. It's Danish.

KING. As for your beloved father,
I Hamlet for this crime have sent
To England, where, by my express decree,
His head shall be struck off.

LAERTES. His head struck off?
So: good England at Denmark's command and beck
Will generously shorten Hamlet's neck?

(The KING nods. OPHELIA tiptoes off.)

Scene 9

SECOND PLAYER. We the players now re-enact a harrowing rescue, in two parts. Part the first: our heroic response when Ophelia told us of her dangerous plan.

OPHELIA. So that's the dangerous plan.

PLAYERS (UNISON). WHAT?

SECOND PLAYER. She *is* crazy.

FIRST PLAYER. If it's our necks or Hamlet's, I say: let it be Hamlet's.

OPHELIA. Be you not of stout heart?

PLAYER-KING. No.

FIRST PLAYER. He's a coward. And I'm afraid of *him*.

OPHELIA. Isn't your boat seaworthy?

FIRST PLAYER. Swift as rushing air, thanks to our plentiful lack of possessions.

SECOND PLAYER. But Ophelia... will it work?

(OPHELIA shrugs. All look exceeding dubious and swallow with difficulty.)

Scene 10

SECOND PLAYER. Re-enactment part the second: in which the players, upon the pitiless untrustworthy sea, display contempt for fate, yea, superhuman courage; without necessarily feeling any.

(At sea. The ship containing the PLAYERS appears near the ship carrying HAMLET. Heav'ly costumed, all the cast excepting HAMLET herein double: player or sailor.)

PLAYER-KING. Halloo! Urgent message from the Royal Majesty of Denmark!

SECOND SAILOR. Tell him, thank you; we have one already.

PLAYER-KING. What, ho! Pull athwart! We board immediately.

FIRST SAILOR. What think'st thee?

SECOND SAILOR. Could be a trick.

FIRST PLAYER. Also we've replenishment for supplies exhausted — plenteous beer in hogsheads!

SAILORS (UNISON). CARLSBERG!

FIRST SAILOR. Prepare for boarding!

(The PLAYERS board; reveal garish pirate attire, etc.)

PLAYER-KING. O hapless victims of the Pirate Kidd! Surrender without resistance!

(The SAILORS train pistols on them; standoff.)

FIRST SAILOR. The Pirate Kidd? Never heard of him.

SECOND SAILOR. Is he terribly villainous, this pirate captain?

FIRST PLAYER. Merciless bloodthirsty.

PLAYERS. Who resisteth dies the death of ten thousand tortures!
Here he comes now.

FIRST PLAYER. Make way for the ferocious captain!

(Enter OPHELIA as The Pirate Kidd.)

OPHELIA. I am barbarous Pirate Kidd, invariably fatal!
Cry havoc, and let slip the dogs of war!

PIRATE-PLAYERS (UNISON). MURDER, SPOIL, AND VIL-
LAINY!

OPHELIA. Under my bootheel
Many a man will soon lie stiff and staring
To bloat and fester!
Upon this deck let a tide of blood go coursing
That arches to the moon and drowns the sun!

PIRATE-PLAYERS (UNISON). WINDPIPE-SLITTING, RAPE
AND LARCENY!

SECOND SAILOR. Take heed, O pirate! We confront thee with
cocked and loaded pistols!

OPHELIA. What's that to me, or to my fearless men?
Death, a necessary end,

Will come when it will come.

(PIRATES CONSENT ENTHUSIASTICALLY. To the SAILORS:)

For you it comes immediately.
Drape them from the mast like curtains!

PIRATES (UNISON). MAYHEM, BLOOD AND VIVISECTION!

FIRST SAILOR. *(Aside:)* They do sound kind of tough.

SECOND SAILOR. If one of us should die wretchedly in th' heat of combat, good friend, I hope it's you.

FIRST SAILOR. Cherish'd comrade, likewise.

OPHELIA. Now die thee dismally! LOP OFF THEIR HEADS, HACK THEM TO TARTARE!

Unless ...

(Pause.)

By extraordinary coincidence, would Lord Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, be on shipboard?

(Pause.)

FIRST SAILOR. Perhaps —

SECOND SAILOR. ... He might just possibly.

FIRST SAILOR. Why?

OPHELIA. Him do I abominate more than life itself!

Why, if thou him to my mercilessness

Hand over with no fussery excessive,

Him will I garrote, him will I tweeze,

Him will I hang upon the mast

For kites and daws to peck at!

And, incidentally, set thee free.

FIRST SAILOR. And incidentally set us free?

FIRST PLAYER. Free as the wind that escapes thy fundament.

FIRST SAILOR. One moment, my lord.

SECOND SAILOR. Restrain thy temper in the meanwhile.

OPHELIA. I'll try. It won't be easy.

(The FIRST SAILOR takes the SECOND aside.)

SECOND SAILOR. King Claudius will have our heads.

FIRST SAILOR. The king's commission orders England to divide Hamlet from his head. What difference does it make who lops it off — England or the pirates?

OPHELIA. *(Interrupting:)* Time's up! PULL THEIR INTESTINES OUT AND TRAMPLE ON THEM!

FIRST SAILOR. My lord! We'll do it.

SECOND SAILOR. Lord Hamlet we'll surrender to your merciless mercy.

OPHELIA. Let's have him.

(HAMLET is brought up bound.)

O young, attractive prince, now meet thy doom!

(Exit PIRATES. OPHELIA cuts Hamlet's bounds; he seizes a sword and poises it at her heart. He tears off her facial disguise to reveal —)

HAMLET. Ophelia?

PLAYER-KING. I told you she would make a trouper.

(HAMLET kisses her.)

To Elsinore!

Scene 11

FIRST PLAYER. Wherein a secret marriage takes place; while at the same time a fiendish plan is cleverly concocted.

(SPLIT-STAGE. To one side, OPHELIA, HAMLET and the PLAYERS on the shore by Elsinore: marriage ceremony.)

(To the other, the castle. KING and LAERTES. Enter the foppish OSRIC; sweeps hat pretentiously; hands King a note with flourish.)

OSRIC. My lord, this message is delivered you by seafaring men. "O High and Mighty: A narrow escape, thanks to warlike pirates! But I return home safely, head and everything. See you soon, Hamlet."

(Exit OSRIC ostentatiously.)

LAERTES. Let him come.

KING. Laertes, are you like the painting of a sorrow,
A face without a heart?

What would you undertake
To show yourself your father's son?

LAERTES. To cut his throat in' th' church.

KING. No. We must find the means how he may fall
And all call it accident.

(Shift focus to the shore. End secret marriage of HAMLET and OPHELIA.)

SECOND PLAYER. That was lovely.

THIRD PLAYER. I always cry at secret marriages.

OPHELIA. For your courage and good wishes,
Good friends, I thank you —

(Shift-focus. The castle.)

KING. We'll challenge him to duel
And wager on your heads. You may choose
A sword unblunted, and, in a treach'rous thrust
Requite him for your father.

LAERTES. And I'll anoint my sword
With an unction so mortal that,
Where it draws blood,
Nothing can save from death the thing
That is but scratched with't.

(The shore.)

OPHELIA. If it were now to die,
'Twere now to be most happy; for, I fear,
Nothing more felicitous than this
May follow —

(The castle.)

KING. We'll have prepared
A poison'd chalice;
So if he by chance escape your thrust,
Our purpose may hold there.

(The shore.)

HAMLET. Fear not, fair Ophelia. The heavens shall forbid
But that our loves and comforts should increase,
Even as our days do grow —

(The Castle.)

LAERTES. Then thank my poison'd sword or your infect'd cup
When Hamlet with the eager worms doth sup —

Scene 12

(The castle. OPHELIA, HAMLET. Enter OSRIC; sweeps his hat pretentiously.)

OSRIC. Your lordship is right welcome back to Denmark. If your lordship were at leisure, I should impart a thing to you from his Majesty.

HAMLET. Put your bonnet to his right use. 'Tis for the head.

(OSRIC puts the bonnet on.)

OSRIC. Sir, Laertes, this lady's brother, a gentleman of great showing, full of excellence — excellence unequalled at his weapon—

HAMLET. What's his weapon?

OSRIC. Rapier and dagger —

HAMLET. That's two of his weapons.

OSRIC. The king, sir, hath wagered with Laertes that in a dozen passes you shall not exceed him three hits; and it would come to immediate trial, if your lordship would vouchsafe the answer.

OPHELIA. Good lord, a moment.

(OPHELIA takes HAMLET aside.)

I have an ill-divining soul.
Do not do this.

(Pause.)

HAMLET. *(To OSRIC.)* How if I answer “no”?

OSRIC. No, my lord? What means my lord by “no”?

HAMLET. “No” means “no.”

OSRIC. You will not accept the challenge?

(Pause.)

HAMLET. Never mind. Let the foils be brought.

OPHELIA. My lord —

HAMLET. If his fitness speaks, mine is ready; now or whensoever.

(Exit OSRIC.)

OPHELIA. My lord, you will lose this wager —

HAMLET. I do not think so. I shall win at the odds. But thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart. But no matter.

OPHELIA. Nay, my lord. If your mind dislike anything, obey it. I will say you are not fit.

HAMLET. Not a whit. I defy augury. There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If death comes not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all. Let be —

Scene 13

PLAYERS (UNISON). Catastrophe.

(OPHELIA, HAMLET, KING, QUEEN, LAERTES, OSRIC, ATTENDANTS.)

OPHELIA. Come, Laertes, mend this rift; take this hand from me.

(Puts Hamlet's hand into her brother's.)

HAMLET. Sir, I have done you wrong; but pardon't.
I here disclaim from purposed evil;
I have shot my arrow o'er the house
And hurt my brother.

OPHELIA. O, pardon him. This you do play is but a game; yet good my brother, I beseech thee: pursue it not.

LAERTES. Give us the foils.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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