ACT 2 SCENE 1

*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 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 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.

**REYNALDO**

Yes, sir.

**POLONIUS**

And then he’ll … he’ll … wait, what was I about to say? Good God, I was about to say something. What was I saying?

**REYNALDO**

At, “It will be natural for him to agree with you … he’ll call you ‘sir,’ ‘friend,’” et cetera.

**POLONIUS**

“It will be natural for him to agree with you.” Ah, yes, that’s right. If he agrees he’ll say something like this: “Yes, I know the gentleman you’re referring to. I just saw him yesterday,” or “the other day,” or whenever it is, you know, “and there he was gambling,” or “there he was, totally wasted, or fighting with somebody about a tennis match, or going into a house of ill repute”—that means a whorehouse, you know—or whatever. Make sure your little lie brings out the truth. We’re doing this wisely and intelligently, indirectly, finding out things by roundabout means. That’s how you’ll find out what my son is up to in Paris. You get my point, don’t you?

**REYNALDO**

Yes, I do, sir.

**POLONIUS**

God bless you. Have a safe trip.

**REYNALDO**

Thank you, sir.

**POLONIUS**

Don’t forget to see what he’s up to with your own eyes. Don’t trust gossip.

**REYNALDO**

I will, sir.

**POLONIUS**

And I hope he’s studying his music like he’s supposed to.

**REYNALDO**

Got it, sir.

**POLONIUS**

Good-bye.

*REYNALDO**exits. OPHELIA**enters.*

Ophelia, what’s the matter?

**OPHELIA**

Oh, father, father, I’ve just had such a scare!

**POLONIUS**

From what, in God’s name?

**OPHELIA**

Father, I was up in my room sewing when Hamlet came in with no hat on his head, his shirt unbuttoned, and his stockings dirty, undone, and down around his ankles. He was pale as his undershirt, and his knees were knocking together. He looked so out of sorts, as if he’d just come back from hell. He came up to me.

**POLONIUS**

Is he crazy with love for you?

**OPHELIA**

I’m not sure, but I’m afraid he might be.

**POLONIUS**

What did he say?

**OPHELIA**

He grabbed me by the wrist and held me hard, then backed away an arm’s length and just looked at me, staring at me like an artist about to paint my picture. He stayed like that a long time. 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’ll go tell the king about this. This is definitely love-craziness. Love is such a violent emotion that it makes people self-destruct, as much as any strong emotion. I’m so sorry. Did you tell him anything that might have hurt his feelings lately?

**OPHELIA**

No, father, but I did what you told me to do and sent back his letters and wouldn’t let him visit me.

**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.*