ACT II SCENE 2

*Trumpets play. CLAUDIUS and GERTRUDE enter with ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN, and attendants.*

**CLAUDIUS**

Welcome, dear Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. I’ve wanted to see you for a long time now, but I sent for you so hastily because I need your help right away. You’ve probably heard about the “change” that’s come over Hamlet—that’s the only word for it, since inside and out he’s different from what he was before. I can’t imagine what’s made him so unlike himself, other than his father’s death. Since you both grew up with him and are so familiar with his personality and behavior, I’m asking you to stay a while at court and spend some time with him. See if you can get Hamlet to have some fun, and find out if there’s anything in particular that’s bothering him, so we can set about trying to fix it.

**GERTRUDE**

Gentlemen, Hamlet’s talked a lot about you, and I know there are no two men alive he’s fonder of. If you’ll be so good as to spend some time with us and help us out, you’ll be thanked on a royal scale.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Both you and the king might have ordered us to execute your command, instead of asking us so politely.

**GUILDENSTERN**

But we’ll obey. Our services are entirely at your command.

**CLAUDIUS**

Thanks, Rosencrantz and worthy Guildenstern.

**GERTRUDE**

Thanks, Guildenstern and worthy Rosencrantz. I beg you to pay a visit right away to my son, who’s changed too much. Servants, take these gentlemen to see Hamlet.

**GUILDENSTERN**

I hope to God we can make him happy and do him some good!

**GERTRUDE**

Amen to that!

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN**exit, escorted by attendants. POLONIUS**enters.*

**POLONIUS**

The ambassadors are back from Norway, sir.

**CLAUDIUS**

Once again you bring good news.

**POLONIUS**

Do I, sir? I assure your majesty I’m only doing my duty both to my God and my good king. And I believe—unless this brain of mine is not so politically cunning as it used to be—that I’ve found out why Hamlet’s gone crazy.

**CLAUDIUS**

Tell me! I want very much to find out.

**POLONIUS**

All right, but first let the ambassadors speak. Then you can hear my news, as dessert.

**CLAUDIUS**

Then be so kind as to show them in.

*POLONIUS**exits.*

Gertrude, he says he’s found out the reason for your son’s insanity.

**GERTRUDE**

I doubt it’s anything but the obvious reason: his 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. 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**

Please, stick to the point.

**POLONIUS**

Madam, I’m doing nothing but sticking to the point. It’s true he’s crazy, and it’s a shame it’s true, and it’s truly a shame he’s crazy—but now I sound foolish, so I’ll get right to the point. Now, if we agree Hamlet’s crazy, then the next step is to figure out the cause of this effect of craziness, or I suppose I should say the cause of this defect, since this defective effect is caused by something. This is what we must do, and that’s exactly what needs to be done. Think about it. I have a daughter (I have her until she gets married) who’s given me this letter, considering it her duty. Listen and think about this: *(he reads a letter)* “To the heavenly idol of my soul, the most beautified Ophelia”—By the way, “beautified” sounds bad, it sounds awful, it sounds crude, it’s a terrible use of the word. But I’ll go on: *(he reads the letter)* “In her excellent white bosom,” et cetera, et cetera—you don’t need to hear all this stuff—

**GERTRUDE**

Hamlet wrote this letter to Ophelia?

**POLONIUS**

Madam, please be patient. I’ll read it to you.

*(he reads the letter)*

“You may wonder if the stars are fire,

You may wonder if the sun moves across the sky.

You may wonder if the truth is a liar,

But never wonder if I love.

Oh, Ophelia, I’m bad at poetry. I can’t put my feelings into verse, but please believe I love you best, oh, best of all. Believe it.

Yours forever, my dearest one,

as long as I live—still chugging along,

Hamlet.”

Dutifully and obediently my daughter showed me this letter, and more like it. She’s told me all about how Hamlet has been courting her—all the details of where, and what he said, and when.

**CLAUDIUS**

And how did she react to all this?

**POLONIUS**

Sir, what is your opinion of me?

**CLAUDIUS**

I know you are loyal and honorable.

**POLONIUS**

I would like to prove to you that I am. But what would you have thought of me if I had kept quiet when I found out about this hot little love (which I noticed even before my daughter told me about it)? My dear queen, what would you have thought of me if I had turned a blind eye to what was happening between Hamlet and my daughter? No, I had to do something. And so I said to my daughter: “Lord Hamlet is a prince, he’s out of your league. You have to end this.” And then I gave her orders to stay away from him, and not to accept any messages or little gifts from him. She did what I said. When she rejected Hamlet, he became sad, and stopped eating, stopped sleeping, got weak, got dizzy, and as a result lost his mind. And that’s why he’s crazy now, and all of us feel sorry for him.

**CLAUDIUS**

**(***to GERTRUDE*) Do you think that’s why Hamlet’s crazy?

**GERTRUDE**

It may be, it certainly may be.

**POLONIUS**

Has there ever been a time—I’d really like to know—when I’ve definitely said something was true, and it turned out not to be true?

**CLAUDIUS**

Not that I know of.

**POLONIUS**

*(pointing to his head and shoulders)* Chop my head off if I’m wrong. I’ll follow the clues and uncover the truth, even if it’s at the very center of the earth.

**CLAUDIUS**

What can we do to find out if it’s true?

**POLONIUS**

Well, you know he sometimes walks here in the lobby for four hours at a time.

**GERTRUDE**

Yes, he does.

**POLONIUS**

When he’s there next time, I’ll send my daughter 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 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 seller. He’s far gone. But when I was young I went crazy for love too, almost as bad as this. I’ll talk to him again.—*(to HAMLET)* What are you reading, your highness?

**HAMLET**

A lot of words.

**POLONIUS**

And what is the subject?

**HAMLET**

Between whom?

**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!

**ROSENCRANTZ** *and* **GUILDENSTERN** *enter.*

**POLONIUS**

You’re looking for Lord Hamlet. He’s right over there.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Thank you, sir.

**POLONIUS** *exits.*

**GUILDENSTERN**

My lord!

**ROSENCRANTZ**

My dear sir!

**HAMLET**

Ah, my good old friends! How are you, Guildenstern? And Rosencrantz! Boys, how are you both doing?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Oh, as well as anybody.

**GUILDENSTERN**

Happy that we’re not too happy, lucky in being not too lucky. We’re not exactly at the top of our luck.

**HAMLET**

But you’re not down and out, either, are you?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

No, we’re just somewhere in the middle, my lord.

**HAMLET**

So you’re around Lady Luck’s waist?

**GUILDENSTERN**

Yes, we’re the privates in her army.

**HAMLET**

Ha, ha, so you’ve gotten into her private parts? Of course—Lady Luck is such a slut. Anyway, what’s up?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Not much, my lord. Just that the world’s become honest.

**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?

**GUILDENSTERN**

Prison, my lord?

**HAMLET**

Denmark’s a prison.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Then I guess the whole world is one.

**HAMLET**

Yes, quite a large one, with many cells and dungeons, Denmark being one of the worst.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

We don’t think so, my lord.

**HAMLET**

Well, then it isn’t one to you, since nothing is really good or bad in itself—it’s all what a person thinks about it. And to me, Denmark is a prison.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

That must be because you’re so ambitious. It’s too small for your large mind.

**HAMLET**

Small? No, I could live in a walnut shell and feel like the king of the universe. The real problem is that I have bad dreams.

**GUILDENSTERN**

Dreams are a sign of ambition, since ambition is nothing more than the shadow of a dream.

**HAMLET**

But a dream itself is just a shadow.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Exactly. In fact, I consider ambition to be so light and airy that it’s only the shadow of a shadow.

**HAMLET**

Then I guess beggars are the ones with bodies, while ambitious kings and heroes are just the shadows of beggars. Should we go inside? I seem to be losing my mind a bit.

**ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN**

We’re at your service, whatever you say.

**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?

**HAMLET**

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. (*to* GUILDENSTERN) If you care about me, you’ll be honest with me.

**GUILDENSTERN**

My lord, we were sent for.

**HAMLET**

I’ll tell you why—so you won’t have to tell me and give away any secrets you have with the king and queen. Recently, though I don’t know why, I’ve lost all sense of fun, stopped exercising—the whole world feels sterile and empty. This beautiful canopy we call the sky—this majestic roof decorated with golden sunlight—why, it’s nothing more to me than disease-filled air. What a perfect invention a human is, how noble in his capacity to reason, how unlimited in thinking, how admirable in his shape and movement, how angelic in action, how godlike in understanding! There’s nothing more beautiful. We surpass all other animals. And yet to me, what are we but dust? Men don’t interest me. No—women neither, but you’re smiling, so you must think they do.

**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**

I was just thinking that if people don’t interest you, you’ll be pretty bored by the actors on their way here. We crossed paths with a drama company just a while ago, and they’re coming to entertain you.

**HAMLET**

The one who plays the part of the king will be particularly welcome. I’ll treat him like a real king. The adventurous knight will wave around his sword and shield, the lover will be rewarded for his

sighs, the crazy character can rant all he wants, the clown will make everybody laugh, and the lady character can say whatever’s on her mind, or I’ll stop the play. Which troupe is it?

**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 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.

**GUILDENSTERN**

In what sense, my lord?

**HAMLET**

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

**POLONIUS** *enters.*

**POLONIUS**

Gentlemen, I hope you are well.

**HAMLET**

Listen, Guildenstern, and you too, Rosencrantz—listen as close as you can! (*he gestures toward* POLONIUS). This big baby is still in diapers.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Yes, the second time around, since, as they say, old people become children again.

**HAMLET**

(*whispering to* ROSENCRANTZ *and* GUILDENSTERN) I bet he’s coming to tell me about the actors; just watch. (*to* POLONIUS) You’re right, sir, that happened on Monday morning.

**POLONIUS**

My lord, I have news for you.

**HAMLET**

My lord, I have news for you. When Roscius was an actor in ancient Rome —

**POLONIUS**

The actors have arrived, my lord.

**HAMLET**

Yawn, snore.

**POLONIUS**

I swear—

**HAMLET**

—each actor arrived on his ass.

**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 a daughter I love more than anything, yes.

**HAMLET**

No, that’s not logical.

**POLONIUS**

What is logical, then, my lord?

**HAMLET**

Why,

As if by chance, God knows,

and then, you know,

It happened, as you’d expect—

If you want to know more, you can refer to the popular song, because now I have to stop. *The* **PLAYERS** *enter.*

Welcome, welcome to all of you. (*he turns to one of the actors*)—Oh, you, I’m glad to see you. (*turns back to all of them*)—Welcome, my good friends. (*turns to another actor*)—Oh, it’s you! You’ve grown a beard since I saw you last. Are you going to put a beard on me too? (*turns to an actor dressed as a woman*) —Well hello, my young lady friend. You’ve grown as much as the height of a pair of platform shoes at least! I hope your voice hasn’t changed yet. (*to the whole company*)—All of you are most welcome here. We’ll get right to business. First, a speech. Come on, give us a little speech to whet our appetites. A passionate speech, please.

**FIRST PLAYER**

Which speech, my lord?

**HAMLET**

I heard you recite a speech for me once that was never acted out, or if it was, it was performed only once, since the play was not popular—like caviar for a slob who couldn’t appreciate it. But the critics and I found it to be an excellent play, with well-ordered scenes that were clever but not fancy. 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—

No, that’s wrong; it begins like this:

Savage Pyrrhus, whose black armor was

As dark plans, and was like the night

When he crouched inside the Trojan Horse,

Has now smeared his dark armor

With something worse. From head to foot

He’s now covered in red, decorated horribly

With the blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons.

The blood is baked to a paste by fires he set in the streets, Fires that lend a terrible light to his horrible murders.

Boiling with anger and fire,

And coated thick with hard-baked blood,

His eyes glowing like rubies, the hellish Pyrrhus

Goes looking for grandfather Priam.

Sir, take it from there.

**POLONIUS**

My God, that was well done, my lord, with the right accent and a good ear.

**FIRST PLAYER**

Soon he finds Priam

Failing in his battle against the Greeks. His old sword,

Which Priam cannot wield anymore, lies where it fell.

An unfair opponent,

Pyrrhus rushes at Priam, and in his rage he misses;

But the wind created by his sword is enough to make

The weakened old man fall. Just then the city of Ilium,

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,

And then soon after the region is split apart by dreadful thunderclaps, In the same way, after Pyrrhus paused,

His newly awakened fury set him to work again.

When the Cyclopses 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 speech is going on too long.

**HAMLET**

We’ll have the barber trim it later, along with your beard. Please, continue, players. This old man only likes the dancing or the sex scenes; he sleeps through all the rest. Go on, come to the part about Hecuba.

**FIRST PLAYER**

But who—ah, the sadness—had seen the muffled queen—

**HAMLET**

“The muffled queen”?

**POLONIUS**

That’s good. “The muffled queen” is good.

**FIRST PLAYER**

Running back and forth, spraying the flames with her tears, a cloth on that head where a crown had recently sat and a blanket instead of a robe wrapped around her body, which has withered from childbearing: anyone seeing her in such a state, no matter how spiteful he was, would have cursed Lady Luck for bringing her down like that. If the gods had seen her while she watched Pyrrhus chopping her husband into bits, the terrible cry she uttered would have made all the eyes in heaven burn with hot tears—unless the gods don’t care at all about human affairs.

**POLONIUS**

Look how flushed the actor is, with tears in his eyes. All right, that’s enough, please.

**HAMLET**

(*to* FIRST PLAYER) Very fine. I’ll have you perform the rest of it soon. (*to* POLONIUS)—My lord, will you make sure the actors are made comfortable? Make sure you’re good to them, since what they say about us later will go down in history. It’d be better to have a bad epitaph on our graves than to have their ill will while we’re alive.

**POLONIUS**

My lord, I will give them all they deserve.

**HAMLET**

Good heavens, man, give them more than that! If you pay everyone what they deserve, would anyone ever escape a whipping? Treat them with honor and dignity.

The less they deserve, the more your generosity is worth. Lead them inside.

**POLONIUS**

Come, everyone.

**HAMLET**

Follow him, friends. We’ll watch a whole play tomorrow. (*to* FIRST PLAYER) My friend, can you perform The Murder of Gonzago?

**FIRST PLAYER**

Yes, my lord.

**HAMLET**

Then we’ll see that tomorrow night. By the way, if I were to compose an extra speech of twelve to sixteen lines and stick it into the play, you could learn it by heart for tomorrow, right?

**FIRST PLAYER**

Yes, my lord.

**HAMLET**

Very well. Follow that gentleman now, and be careful not to make fun of him. **POLONIUS** *and the* **PLAYERS** *exit.*

My good friends, I’ll see you tomorrow. Welcome to Elsinore.   
**ROSENCRANTZ**

Yes, my lord.

**HAMLET**

Ah yes, good-bye to you both.

**ROSENCRANTZ** *and* **GUILDENSTERN** *exit.*

Now I’m alone. Oh, what a mean low-life I am! It’s awful that this actor could force his soul to feel made-up feelings in a work of make-believe. He grew pale, shed real tears, became overwhelmed, his voice breaking with feeling and his whole being, even, meeting the needs of his act—and all for nothing. For Hecuba! What is Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, that he would weep for her? Just imagine what he would do if he had the cause for feeling that I do. He would drown the stage with his tears and burst the audience’s ears with his terrible words, drive the guilty spectators crazy, terrify the innocent ones, confuse the ignorant ones, and astound absolutely everyone’s eyes and ears. But what do I, a grim and uncourageous rascal, do? Mope around like a dreamer, not even bothering with plans for revenge, and I can say nothing—nothing at all—on behalf of a king whose dear life was stolen. Am I a coward? Is there anyone out there who’ll call me “villain” and slap me hard? Pull off my beard? Pinch my nose? Call me the worst liar? By God, if someone would do that to me, I’d take it, because I’m a lily-livered man—otherwise, I would’ve fattened up the local vultures with the intestines of that low-life king a long time ago. Bloody, inhuman villain! Remorseless, treacherous, sex-obsessed, unnatural villain! Ah, revenge! What an ass I am. I’m so damn brave. My dear father’s been murdered, and I’ve been urged to seek revenge by heaven and hell, and yet all I can do is stand around cursing like a whore in the streets. Damn it! I need to get myself together here! Hmm…. I’ve heard that guilty people watching a play have been so affected by the artistry of the scene that they are driven to confess their crimes out loud. 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 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.

**HAMLET** *exits.*