ACT III SCENE 1

***CLAUDIUS****,* ***GERTRUDE****,* ***POLONIUS****,* ***OPHELIA****,* ***ROSENCRANTZ****, and* ***GUILDENSTERN*** *enter.*

**CLAUDIUS**

And you can’t put your heads together and figure out why he’s acting so dazed and confused, ruining his peace and quiet with such dangerous displays of lunacy?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

He admits he feels confused, but refuses to say why.

**GUILDENSTERN**

And he’s not exactly eager to be interrogated. He’s very sly and dances around our questions when we try to get him to talk about how he feels.

**GERTRUDE**

Did he treat you well when you saw him?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Yes, in a very gentlemanly way.

**GUILDENSTERN**

But it seemed like he had to force himself to be nice to us.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

He didn’t ask questions, but answered ours at length.

**GERTRUDE**

Did you try tempting him with some entertainment?

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Madam, some actors happened to cross our paths on the way here. We told Hamlet about them, and that seemed to do him good. They are here at court now, and I believe they’ve been told to give a performance for him tonight.

**POLONIUS**

It’s true, and he asked me to beg you both to attend.

**CLAUDIUS**

It makes me very happy to hear he’s so interested. Gentlemen, please try to sharpen his interest even more, and let this play do him some good.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

We will, my lord.

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

Dear Gertrude, please give us a moment alone. We’ve secretly arranged for Hamlet to come here so that he can run into Ophelia. Her father and I, justifiably acting as spies, will hide in the room and observe Hamlet’s behavior, to determine whether it’s love that’s making him suffer.

**GERTRUDE**

Yes, I’ll go. As for you, Ophelia, I hope that your beauty is the reason for Hamlet’s insane behavior, just as I hope your virtues will return him to normal some day, for the good of both of you.

**OPHELIA**

I hope so too, Madam.

GERTRUDE*exits.*

**POLONIUS**

Ophelia, come here.—*(to* CLAUDIUS*)* Your Majesty, we will hide. *(to* OPHELIA*)*—Read from this prayer book, so it looks natural that you’re all alone. Come to think of it, this happens all the time—people act devoted to God to mask their bad deeds.

**CLAUDIUS**

*(to himself)* How right he is! His words whip up my guilty feelings. The whore’s pockmarked cheek made pretty with make-up is just like the ugly actions I’m disguising with fine words. What a terrible guilt I feel!

**POLONIUS**

I hear him coming. Quick, let’s hide, my lord.

*CLAUDIUS and POLONIUS**hide.*

*HAMLET**enters.*

**HAMLET**

The question is: is it better to be alive or dead? Is it nobler to put up with all the nasty things that luck throws your way, or to fight against all those troubles by simply putting an end to them once and for all? Dying, sleeping—that’s all dying is—a sleep that ends all the heartache and shocks that life on earth gives us—that’s an achievement to wish for. To die, to sleep—to sleep, maybe to dream. Ah, but there’s the catch: in death’s sleep who knows what kind of dreams might come, after we’ve put the noise and commotion of life behind us. That’s certainly something to worry about. That’s the consideration that makes us stretch out our sufferings so long. After all, who would put up with all life’s humiliations—the abuse from superiors, the insults of arrogant men, the pangs of unrequited love, the inefficiency of the legal system, the rudeness of people in office, and the mistreatment good people have to take from bad—when you could simply take out your knife and call it quits? Who would choose to grunt and sweat through an exhausting life, unless they were afraid of something dreadful after death, the undiscovered country from which no visitor returns, which we wonder about without getting any answers from and which makes us stick to the evils we know rather than rush off to seek the ones we don’t? Fear of death makes us all cowards, and our natural boldness becomes weak with too much thinking. Actions that should be carried out at once get misdirected, and stop being actions at all. But shh, here comes the beautiful Ophelia. Pretty lady, please remember me when you pray.

**OPHELIA**

Hello, my lord, how have you been doing lately?

**HAMLET**

Very well, thank you. Well, well, well.

**OPHELIA**

My lord, I have some mementos of yours that I’ve been meaning to give back to you for a long time now. Please take them.

**HAMLET**

No, it wasn’t me. I never gave you anything.

**OPHELIA**

My lord, you know very well that you did, and wrote letters to go along with them, letters so sweetly written that they made your gifts even more valuable. Their perfume is gone now, so take them back. Nice gifts lose their value when the givers turn out not to be so nice. There, my lord.

**HAMLET**

Ha ha, are you good?

**OPHELIA**

Excuse me?

**HAMLET**

Are you beautiful?

**OPHELIA**

My lord, what are you talking about?   
  
**HAMLET**

I’m just saying that if you’re good and beautiful, your goodness should have nothing to do with your beauty.

**OPHELIA**

But could beauty be related to anything better than goodness?

**HAMLET**

Sure, since beauty’s power can more easily change a good girl into a whore than the power of goodness can change a beautiful girl into a virgin. This used to be a great puzzle, but now I’ve solved it. I used to love you.

**OPHELIA**

You certainly made me believe you did, my lord.

**HAMLET**

You shouldn’t have believed me, since we’re all rotten at the core, no matter how hard we try to be virtuous. I didn’t love you.

**OPHELIA**

Then I guess I was misled.

**HAMLET**

Get yourself to a convent at once. Why would you want to give birth to more sinners? I’m fairly good myself, but even so I could accuse myself of such horrible crimes that it would’ve been better if my mother had never given birth to me. and I am arrogant, vengeful, ambitious, with more ill will in me than I can fit into my thoughts, and more than I have time to carry it out in. Why should people like me be crawling around between earth and heaven? Every one of us is a criminal. Don’t believe any of us. Hurry to a convent. Where’s your father?

**OPHELIA**

He’s at home, my lord.

**HAMLET**

Lock him in, so he can play the fool in his own home only. Good-bye.

**OPHELIA**

Oh, dear God, please help him!

**HAMLET**

If you marry, I’ll give you this curse as your wedding present—be as clean as ice, as pure as the driven snow, and you’ll still get a bad reputation. Get yourself to a convent, at once. Good-bye. Or if you have to get married, marry a fool, since wise men know far too well that you’ll cheat on them. Good-bye.

**OPHELIA**

Dear God, please make him normal again!

**HAMLET**

I’ve heard all about you women and your cosmetics too. God gives you one face, but you paint another on top of it. You dance and prance and lisp; you call God’s creations by pet names, and you excuse your sexpot ploys by pleading ignorance. Come on, I won’t stand for it anymore. It’s driven me crazy. I hereby declare we will have no more marriage. Whoever is already married (except one person I know) will stay married—all but one person. Everyone else will have to stay single. Get yourself to a convent, fast.   
*HAMLET**exits.*

**OPHELIA**

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

*CLAUDIUS and POLONIUS**come forward.*

**CLAUDIUS**

Love? His feelings don’t move in that direction. And his words, although they were a little disorganized, weren’t crazy. No, his sadness is hatching something, like a hen does sitting on an egg. What hatches very well may be dangerous. So to prevent any harm being done, I’ve made a quick executive decision: he’ll be sent to England to try to get back the money they owe us. With any luck, the sea and new countries will push out these thoughts that have somehow taken root in his mind. What do you think of this plan?

**POLONIUS**

It should work. But I still believe that his madness was caused by unrequited love.—Hello, Ophelia. You don’t have to tell us what Lord Hamlet said. We heard everything.—My lord, do whatever you like, but if you like this idea, let his mother the queen get him alone and beg him to share his feelings with her. I’ll hide and listen in. If she can’t find out what his secret is, then send him off to England or wherever you think best.

**CLAUDIUS**

That’s how we’ll do it, then. When important people start to show signs of insanity, you have to watch them closely.

*They all exit.*