*ACT III SCENE 3*

*CLAUDIUS , ROSENCRANTZ , and GUILDENSTERN enter.*

**CLAUDIUS**

I don’t like the way he’s acting, and it’s not safe for me to let his insanity get out of control. So get prepared. I’m sending you to England on diplomatic business, and Hamlet will go with you. As king, I cannot risk the danger he represents as he grows crazier by the hour.

**GUILDENSTERN**

We’ll take care of it. It’s a sacred duty to protect the lives of all those who depend on Your Highness.

**ROSENCRANTZ**

Everyone tries to avoid harm, but the public figure demands even more protection. When a great leader dies he doesn’t die alone but, like a whirlpool, draws others with him. He’s like a huge wheel on the top of the highest mountain whose spokes touch the rim of ten thousand smaller things—when it falls down the mountain, every little object goes down with it. Whenever a king sighs, everyone groans.

**CLAUDIUS**

Prepare yourself, please, for this trip. We’ll put a leash on this danger that’s now running wild.

**ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN**

We’ll hurry.

*ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN exit.*

*POLONIUS enters.*

**POLONIUS**

My lord, Hamlet’s going to his mother’s room. I’ll hide behind the tapestry to hear what they say. I bet she’ll chew him out. And as you said (and you said it wisely), it’s good to have someone other than a mother listening in on them, since she can be too partial to him. Goodbye, my lord. I’ll stop by before you go to bed, and tell you what I’ve heard.

**CLAUDIUS**

Thanks, my dear lord.

*POLONIUS exits.*

Oh, my crime is so rotten it stinks all the way to heaven. It has the mark of Cain on it, a brother’s murder. I can’t pray, though I want to desperately. My guilt is stronger even than my intentions. And like a person with two opposite things to do at once, I stand paralyzed and neglect them both. So what if this cursed hand of mine is coated with my brother’s blood? Isn’t there enough rain in heaven to wash it clean as snow? Isn’t that what God’s mercy is for? And doesn’t prayer serve these two purposes—to keep us from sinning and to bring us forgiveness when we have sinned? So I’ll pray. I’ve already committed my sin. But, oh, what kind of prayer is there for me? “Dear Lord, forgive me for my horrible murder”? That won’t work, since I’m still reaping the rewards of that murder: my crown and my queen. Can a person be forgiven and still keep the fruits of his crime? In this wicked world, criminals often take the money they stole and use it to buy off the law, shoving justice aside. But not in heaven. Up there, every action is judged for exactly what it’s worth, and we’re forced to confront our crimes. So what can I do? What is there left to do? Offer whatever repentance I can—that couldn’t hurt. But it can’t help either! Oh, what a lousy situation I’m in. My heart’s as black as death. My soul is stuck to sin, and the more it struggles to break free, the more it sticks. Help me, angels! C’mon, make an effort. Bend, stubborn knees. Steely heart, be soft as a newborn babe, so I can pray. Perhaps everything will turn out okay after all. (he kneels)

*HAMLET enters.*

**HAMLET**

I could do it easily now. He’s praying now. And now I’ll do it. (he draws out his sword) And there he goes, off to heaven. And that’s my revenge. I’d better think about this more carefully. A villain kills my father, and I, my father’s only son, send this same villain to heaven. Seems like I just did him a favor. He killed my father when my father was enjoying life, with all his sins in full bloom, before my father could repent for any of them. Only God knows how many sins my father has to pay for. As for me, I don’t think his prospects look so good. So is it really revenge for me if I kill Claudius right when he is confessing his sins, in perfect condition for a trip to heaven? No. Away, sword, and wait for a better moment to kill him. (he puts his sword away) When he’s sleeping off some drunken orgy, or having incestuous sex, or swearing while he gambles, or committing some other act that has no goodness about it—that’s when I’ll trip him up and send him to hell with his heels kicking up at heaven. My mother’s waiting. The king’s trying to cure himself with prayer, but all he’s doing is keeping himself alive a little longer.

*HAMLET exits.*

**CLAUDIUS**

(rising) My words fly up toward heaven, but my thoughts stay down here on earth. Words without thoughts behind them will never make it to heaven.

*CLAUDIUS exits.*