*ACT III SCENE 4*

*GERTRUDE and POLONIUS enter.*

**POLONIUS**

He’ll come right away. Make sure you lay into him. Tell him his pranks have caused too much trouble, and that Your Highness has taken a lot of heat for them. I’ll be right here, silent. Please be blunt with him.

**HAMLET**

*(offstage)* Mother, mother, mother!

**GERTRUDE**

Don’t worry, I’ll do what you say. Now hide, I hear him coming.

*POLONIUS hides behind the tapestry.*

*HAMLET enters.*

**HAMLET**

Now mother, what’s this all about?

**GERTRUDE**

Hamlet, you’ve insulted your father.

**HAMLET**

Mother, you’ve insulted my father.

**GERTRUDE**

Come on, you’re answering me foolishly.

**HAMLET**

Go on, you’re questioning me evilly.

**GERTRUDE**

Hamlet, what, why?

**HAMLET**

What’s the problem now?

**GERTRUDE**

Have you forgotten who I am?

**HAMLET**

For God’s sake no, I haven’t. You are the queen, your husband’s brother’s wife, and you are my mother, though I wish you weren’t.

**GERTRUDE**

In that case I’ll call in others who can still speak.

**HAMLET**

No, sit down. You won’t budge until I hold a mirror up to you, where you will see what’s deep inside you.

**GERTRUDE**

What are you going to do? You won’t kill me, will you? Help!

**POLONIUS**

*(from behind the tapestry)* Hey! Help, help, help!

**HAMLET**

What’s this, a rat? I’ll bet a buck he’s a dead rat now.

*(he stabs his sword through the tapestry and kills POLONIUS )*

**POLONIUS**

*(from behind the tapestry)* Oh, I’ve been killed!

**GERTRUDE**

Oh my God, what have you done?

**HAMLET**

I don’t know. Is it the king?

**GERTRUDE**

Oh, what a senseless, horrible act!

**HAMLET**

A horrible act—almost as bad, my good mother, as killing a king and marrying his brother.

**GERTRUDE**

Killing a king?

**HAMLET**

That’s what I said, my good woman.

*(he pulls back the tapestry and discovers POLONIUS )*

You low-life, nosy, busybody fool, goodbye. I thought you were somebody more important. You’ve gotten what you deserve. I guess you found out it’s dangerous to be a busybody. (*to GERTRUDE*) Stop wringing your hands. Sit down and let me wring your heart instead, which I will do if it’s still soft enough, if your evil lifestyle has not toughened it against feeling anything at all.

**GERTRUDE**

What have I done that you dare to talk to me so rudely?

**HAMLET**

A deed that destroys modesty, turns virtue into hypocrisy, replaces the blossom on the face of true love with a nasty blemish, makes marriage vows as false as a gambler’s oath—oh, you’ve done a deed that plucks the soul out of marriage and turns religion into meaningless blather. Heaven looks down on this earth, as angry as if Judgment Day were here, and is sick at the thought of what you’ve done.

**GERTRUDE**

C’mon, what’s this deed that sounds so awful even before I know what it is?

**HAMLET**

Look at this picture here, and that one there, the painted images of two brothers. Look how kind and gentlemanly this one is, with his curly hair and his forehead like a Greek god. His eye could command like the god of war. His body is as agile as Mercury just landing on a high hill. A figure and a combination of good qualities that seemed like every god had set his stamp on this man. That was your husband. Now look at this other one. Here is your present husband, like a mildewed ear of corn infecting the healthy one next to it. Do you have eyes? How could you leave the lofty heights of this man here and descend as low as this one? Ha! Do you have eyes? You cannot say you did it out of love, since at your age romantic passions have grown weak, and the heart obeys reason. But what reason could move you from this one to that one? You must have some sense in your head, since you’re able to get around, but it seems to be paralyzed, since even if you were crazy you would know the difference between these two men. No one ever went so insane that they couldn’t get an easy choice like this one right. What devil was it that blindfolded you? Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight, ears without hands or eyes, smell without anything else, the use of even one impaired sense would not permit such a mistake as yours. Oh, for shame, why aren’t you blushing? If evil can overtake even an old mother’s bones, then let it melt my own. It turns out it’s no longer shameful to act on impulse—now that the old are doing so, and now that reason is a servant to desire.

**GERTRUDE**

Oh, Hamlet, stop! You’re making me look into my very soul, where the marks of sin are so thick and black they will never be washed away.

**HAMLET**

Yes, and you lie in the sweaty stench of your dirty sheets, wet with corruption, making love—

**GERTRUDE**

Oh, you must stop! Your words are like daggers. Please, no more, sweet Hamlet.

**HAMLET**

A murderer and a villain, a low-life who’s not worth a twentieth of a tenth of your first husband—the worst of kings, a thief of the throne, who took the precious crown from a shelf and put it in his pocket—

**GERTRUDE**

Stop!

**HAMLET**

A ragtag king—

*The GHOST enters.*

Oh, angels in heaven, protect me with your wings!—What can I do for you, my gracious lord?

**GERTRUDE**

Oh no! Hamlet’s gone completely crazy.

**HAMLET**

Have you come to scold your tardy son for straying from his mission, letting your important command slip by? Tell me!

**GHOST**

Don’t forget. I’ve come to sharpen your somewhat dull appetite for revenge. But look, your mother is in shock. Oh, keep her struggling soul from being overwhelmed by horrid visions. The imagination works strongest in those with the weakest bodies. Talk to her, Hamlet.

**HAMLET**

How are you doing, madam?

**GERTRUDE**

And how are you doing, staring into the empty air and talking to nobody? Your eyes give away your wild thoughts, and your hair is standing upright, like soldiers during a call to arms. Oh my dear son, calm yourself and cool off your overheated mind! What are you staring at?

**HAMLET**

At him, at him! Look how pale he is and how he glares at me. Preaching even at stones, he could get them to act. (*to the GHOST*) Don’t look at me like that, unless you want me to cry instead of kill.

**GERTRUDE**

Who are you talking to?

**HAMLET**

You don’t see anything?

**GERTRUDE**

Nothing at all, but I can see everything that’s here.

**HAMLET**

And you don’t hear anything?

**GERTRUDE**

No, nothing but us talking.

**HAMLET**

Look, look how it’s sneaking away! My father, dressed just like he was when he was alive!

Look, he’s going out the door right now!

*The GHOST exits.*

**GERTRUDE**

This is only a figment of your imagination. Madness is good at creating hallucinations.

**HAMLET**

Madness? My heart beats just as evenly as yours does. There’s nothing crazy in what I’ve just uttered. Put me to the test. I’ll rephrase everything I’ve just said, which a lunatic couldn’t do. Mother, for the love of God, don’t flatter yourself into believing that it’s my madness, not your crime, that’s the problem. You’d just be concealing the rot that’s eating you from the inside. Confess your sins to heaven. Repent and avoid damnation. Don’t spread manure over the weeds in your heart; it’ll only make them more filthy. Forgive me my good intentions here since in these fat and spoiled times, virtuous people have to say, “Beg your pardon” to vile ones and beg for the chance to do any good.

**GERTRUDE**

Oh Hamlet, you’ve broken my heart in two!

**HAMLET**

Then throw away the worse half, and live a purer life with the other! Good night to you. But don’t go to my uncle’s bed tonight. At least pretend to be virtuous, even if you’re not. Habit is a terrible thing, in that it’s easy to get used to doing evil without feeling bad about it. But it’s also a good thing, in that being good can also become a habit. Say no to sex tonight, and that will make it easier to say no the next time, and still easier the time after that. Habit can change even one’s natural instincts, and either rein in the devil in us, or kick him out. Once again, good night to you, and when you want to repent, I’ll ask you for your blessing too. I’m sorry about what happened to this gentleman (*pointing to POLONIUS*), but God wanted to punish me with this murder, and this man with me, so I’m both Heaven’s executioner and its minister of justice. This is bad, but it’ll get worse soon. Oh, and one other thing, madam.

**GERTRUDE**

What should I do?

**HAMLET**

Whatever you do, don’t do this: let the fat king seduce you into his bed again, so he can pinch your cheek, call you his bunny, and with filthy kisses and a massage of your neck with his damned fingers, make you admit that my madness is fake, all calculated. What a great idea that would be, because why would a fair, sober, wise queen hide such things from a toad, a pig, a monster like him? Who would do that? No, no, it’s much, much better to spill the beans right away, let the cat out of the bag, and break your neck in the process.

**GERTRUDE**

You can rest easy, since words are made of breath, and breathing requires that you be alive. I feel too dead to breathe a word of what you’ve told me.

**HAMLET**

I have to go to England, don’t you know that?

**GERTRUDE**

Ah, I’d forgotten all about that! It’s been decided.

**HAMLET**

Yes, it’s a done deal, the documents are ready, and my two schoolmates, whom I trust about as much as rattlesnakes, are in charge. They’re the ones who’ll lead me on my march to mischief. Let it happen. It’s fun to watch the engineer get blown up by his own explosives, and with any luck I’ll dig a few feet below their bombs and blow them to the moon. Oh, it’s nice to kill two birds with one stone. (points to POLONIUS) Now that I’ve killed this guy, I’ll be off in a hurry. I’ll lug his guts into the next room. Mother, have a good night. This politician who was in life a babbling idiot is now quiet and serious. Come on, sir, let’s get to the end of our business. Good night, mother.

*They exit, HAMLET dragging POLONIUS offstage.*