ACT I SCENE 3

*LAERTES and his sister OPHELIA**enter.*

**LAERTES**

My belongings are on the ship already. Good-bye. And, my dear sister, as long as the winds are blowing and ships are sailing, let me hear from you—write.

**OPHELIA**

Do you doubt I’ll write?

**LAERTES**

As for Hamlet and his attentions to you, just consider it a big flirtation, the temporary phase of a hot-blooded youth. It won’t last. It’s sweet, but his affection will fade after a minute. Not a second more.

**OPHELIA**

No more than a minute?

**LAERTES**

Try to think of it like that, anyway. When a youth grows into a man, he doesn’t just get bigger in his body—his responsibilities grow too. He may love you now, and may have only the best intentions, but you have to be on your guard. Remember that he belongs to the royal family, and his intentions don’t matter that much—he’s a slave to his family obligations. He can’t simply make personal choices for himself the way common people can, since the whole country depends on what he does. His choice has to agree with what the nation wants. So if he says he loves you, you should be wise enough to see that his words only mean as much as the state of Denmark allows them to mean. Then think about how shameful it would be for you to give in to his seductive talk and surrender your treasure chest to his greedy hands. Watch out, Ophelia. Just keep your love under control, and don’t let yourself become a target of his lust. Simply exposing your beauty to the moon at night is risky enough—you don’t have to expose yourself to him. Even good girls sometimes get a bad reputation. Worms ruin flowers before they blossom. Baby blooms are most susceptible to disease. So be careful. Fear will keep you safe. Young people often lose their self-control even without any help from others.

**OPHELIA**

I’ll keep your words of wisdom close to my heart. But, my dear brother, don’t be like a bad priest who fails to practice what he preaches, showing me the steep and narrow way to heaven while you frolic on the primrose path of sin.

**LAERTES**

Don’t worry, I won’t.   
*POLONIUS**enters.*

I’ve been here too long. And here comes father. What good luck, to have him bless my leaving not once but twice

**POLONIUS**

You’re still here? Shame on you—get on board! The wind is filling your ship’s sail, and they’re waiting for you. Here, I give you my blessing again. And just try to remember a few rules of life. Don’t say what you’re thinking, and don’t be too quick to act on what you think. Be friendly to people but don’t overdo it. Once you’ve tested out your friends and found them trustworthy, hold onto them. But don’t waste your time shaking hands with every new guy you meet. Don’t be quick to pick a fight, but once you’re in one, hold your own. Listen to many people, but talk to few. Hear everyone’s opinion, but reserve your judgment. Spend all you can afford on clothes, but make sure they’re quality, not flashy, since clothes make the man—which is doubly true in France. Don’t borrow money and don’t lend it, since when you lend to a friend, you often lose the friendship as well as the money, and borrowing turns a person into a spendthrift. And, above all, be true to yourself. Then you won’t be false to anybody else. Good-bye, son. I hope my blessing will help you absorb what I’ve said.

**LAERTES**

I humbly say good-bye to you, father.

**POLONIUS**

Now go, the time is right. Your servants are waiting.

**LAERTES**

Good-bye, Ophelia. Remember what I’ve told you.

**OPHELIA**

It’s locked away in my memory, and you’ve got the key.

**LAERTES**

Good-bye.

*LAERTES**exits.*

**POLONIUS**

What did he tell you, Ophelia?

**OPHELIA**

Something about Hamlet.

**POLONIUS**

A good thing he did, by God. I’ve heard Hamlet’s been spending a lot of time alone with you recently, and you’ve made yourself quite available to him. If things are the way people tell me they are—and they’re only telling me this to warn me—then I have to say, you’re not conducting yourself with the self-restraint a daughter of mine should show. What’s going on between you two? Tell me the truth.

**OPHELIA**

He’s offered me a lot of affection lately.

**POLONIUS**

“Affection!” That’s nothing! You’re talking like some innocent girl who doesn’t understand the ways of the world. Do you believe his “offers,” as you call them?

**OPHELIA**

I don’t know what to believe, father.

**POLONIUS**

Then I’ll tell you. Believe that you are a foolish little baby for believing these “offers” are something real. Offer yourself more respect, or—not to beat this word to death—you’ll offer me the chance to be a laughing-stock.

**OPHELIA**

Father, he’s always talked about love in an honorable fashion—

**POLONIUS**

Yes, “fashion” is just the word—a passing whim. Go on.

**OPHELIA**

And he’s made the holiest vows to me, to back up what he says.

**POLONIUS**

These vows are just traps for stupid birds. I know when a man is on fire, he’ll swear anything. But when a heart’s on fire, it gives out more light than heat, and the fire will be out even before he’s done making his promises. Don’t mistake that for true love. From now on, spend a little less time with him and talk to him less. Make yourself a precious commodity. Remember that Hamlet is young and has a lot more freedom to fool around than you do. In short, Ophelia, don’t believe his love vows, since they’re like flashy pimps who wear nice clothes to lead a woman into filthy acts. To put it plainly, don’t waste your time with Hamlet. Do as I say. Now come along.  **OPHELIA**

I’ll do as you say, father.

*They exit.*