Scene 2

Enter Hamlet and the Players.

Hamlet  Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue; but if you mouth it as many of your players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb-shows and noise. I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant. It out-Herods Herod. Pray you avoid it.

1st Player  I warrant your honour.

Hamlet  Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so o'erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. Now this overdone, or come tardy off, though it makes the unskilful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve, the censure of the which one must in your allowance o'erweigh a whole theatre of others. O, there be players that I have seen play — and heard others praise, and that highly — not to speak it profanely, that neither having th' accent of Christians, nor the gait of Christian, pagan, nor man, have

Scene 2

Hamlet enters with three of the Actors. He is advising them on their acting techniques.

Hamlet  Please speak the speech as I recited it to you, in a natural way. If you overdo it, as many actors do, I'd rather the town crier spoke my lines. And don't saw the air too much with your hand, either, like this [he demonstrates a histrionic gesture] but do everything with restraint: because as your passion reaches torrential, tempestuous, and, as it were, whirlwind proportions, you must develop a self-control that will give it a natural ease. Oh, it gets on my nerves to hear a ham actor in a wig tear a passion to shreds — to rags even — just to play to the unsophisticated standees in the pit who for the most part are capable only of appreciating mindless mime-shows and spectacles. I'd have a fellow like that whipped for overacting the villain's part: a Demon King would seem mild by comparison. Do avoid that, please!

1st Actor  Of course, your honor.

Hamlet  Don't be too feeble, either. Use your discretion. Make your gestures suit what you say, and vice-versa. One proviso: don't overact. Anything overdone is against the purpose of acting, which was (and still is) to reflect reality; to demonstrate what's virtuous, to expose the deplorable, and to depict faithfully the essential nature of contemporary life. To be larger than life, or to fall short of it, may make the undiscerning laugh, but it makes people with taste groan — and their opinion, you must admit, outweighs an entire theaterful of the others. Oh, I've seen some actors — and heard people praise them, and very highly too — who neither speak like decent, ordinary men, nor move like Christian, pagan or what-have-you. They've
so struttet and bellowed that I have thought some of
Nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them
well, they imitated humanity so abominably.

1st Player I hope we have reformed that indifferently with
us, sir.

Hamlet O reform it altogether. And let those that play your
clowns speak no more than is set down for them; for there be
of them that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity
of barren spectators to laugh too, though in the meantime
some necessary question of the play be then to be
considered. That's villainous, and shows a most pitiful
ambition in the fool that uses it. Go make you ready.

[Exeunt Players]

[Enter Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern]

How now, my lord? Will the King hear this piece of work?

Polonius And the Queen too, and that presently.

Hamlet Bid the players make haste.

[Exit Polonius]

Will you two help to hasten them?

Rosencrantz Ay, my lord.

[Exeunt Rosencrantz and Guildenstern]

Hamlet What ho, Horatio!

[Enter Horatio]

Horatio Here, sweet lord, at your service.

struttet about and bellowed so much that I've concluded
men must be the product of Nature's shoddy workmanship,
so abominably is humanity represented.

1st Actor I hope we've got that under reasonable control in
our case.

Hamlet Oh, control it absolutely. And let your comedians stick
to their lines. There are some who laugh themselves, to get
a number of foolish spectators to laugh too, in the meantime
causing some necessary part of the plot to be delayed.
That's unforgivable, and demonstrates a contemptible
ambition in the comic who indulges in it. Go and get ready.

[The Actors leave]

[Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter]

Well now, my lord: will the King hear this play?

Polonius And the Queen too, and right away.

Hamlet Tell the actors to hurry.

[Polonius leaves]

Will you two help to hurry them on?

Rosencrantz Yes, my lord.

[Rosencrantz and Guildenstern leave]

Hamlet Horatio!

[Horatio enters]

Horatio Here, sweet lord: at your service.
Hamlet Horatio, thou art e'en as just a man
As e'er my conversation coped withal.

Horatio O my dear lord!

Hamlet Nay, do not think I flatter,
For what advancement may I hope from thee
That no revenue hast but thy good spirits

To feed and clothe thee? Why should the poor be flattered?
No, let the candied tongue lick absurd pomp,
And crook the pregnant hinges of the knee
Where thrift may follow fawning. Dost thou hear?
Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice,

And could of men distinguish her election,
Hath sealed thee for herself; for thou hast been
As one, in suff'ring all, that suffers nothing,
A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards
Hast ta'en with equal thanks; and blest are those

Whose blood and judgment are so well co-mingled
That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger
To sound what stop she please. Give me that man
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of hearts,

As I do thee. Something too much of this.
There is a play tonight before the King:
One scene of it comes near the circumstance
Which I have told thee of my father's death.
I prithee, when thou seest that act afoot,

Even with the very comment of thy soul
Observe my uncle. If his occulted guilt
Do not itself unkennel in one speech,
It is a damned ghost that we have seen,
And my imaginations are as foul

As Vulcan's stithy. Give him heedful note;
For I mine eyes will rivet to his face,
And after we will both our judgments join
In censure of his seeming.
ACT THREE  Scene 2

Horatio    Well, my lord.
85  If he steal aught the whilst this play is playing
   And scape detecting, I will pay the theft.

Hamlet    They are coming to the play. I must be idle.
   Get you a place.

[Enter King, Queen, Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz,
Guildesterne, and the other Lords attendant, with the King's
Guard carrying torches]

King    How fares our cousin Hamlet?

Hamlet    Excellent, i'faith, of the chameleon's dish. I eat the
   air, promise-crammed. You cannot feed capons so.

King    I have nothing with this answer, Hamlet. These words
   are not mine.

Hamlet    No, nor mine now. [To Polonius] My lord, you
95  played once i' th'university, you say?

Polonius    That did I, my lord, and was accounted a good
   actor.

Hamlet    What did you enact?

Polonius    I did enact Julius Caesar. I was killed i' th'Capitol.

Brutus killed me.

Hamlet    It was a brute part of him to kill so capital a calf
   there. Be the players ready?

Rosencrantz    Ay, my lord, they stay upon your patience.

Queen    Come hither, my dear Hamlet, sit by me.

[Trumpets and kettledrums are heard approaching]

Hamlet    They're coming to the play. I must act crazy. Get
   yourself a seat.

[The King, Queen, Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz,
Guildesterne, and other Lords and Attendants enter, with
Guards carrying torches]

King    How is our nephew Hamlet?

Hamlet    Excellent, indeed. Eating the same food as
   chameleons: fresh air and empty promises. You can't feed
   chickens like that.

King    I don't follow your answer, Hamlet. These words don't
   relate to me.

Hamlet    No, or to me either, now. [To Polonius] My lord, you
   acted once at the University, you say?

Polonius    I certainly did, my lord, and was considered a good
   actor.

Hamlet    What did you play?

Polonius    I was Julius Caesar. I was killed in the Capitol.
   Brutus killed me.

Hamlet    What a brute he was, to kill so capital an idiot there!
   Are the actors ready?

Rosencrantz    Yes, my lord; ready when you are.

Queen    Come here, my dear Hamlet, and sit by me.
105 Hamlet No, good mother, here's metal more attractive.  
              [Turns to Ophelia]

Polonius  [aside to the King] O ho! Do you mark that?

Hamlet  [lying down at Ophelia's feet] Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

Ophelia No, my lord.

110 Hamlet I mean, my head upon your lap.

Ophelia Ay, my lord.

Hamlet Do you think I meant country matters?

Ophelia I think nothing, my lord.

Hamlet That's a far thought to lie between maids' legs.

115 Ophelia What is, my lord?

Hamlet Nothing.

Ophelia You are merry, my lord.

Hamlet Who, I?

Ophelia Ay, my lord.

120 Hamlet O God, your only jester! What should a man do but be merry? For look you how cheerfully my mother looks and my father died within's two hours.

Ophelia Nay, 'tis twice two months, my lord.

Hamlet So long? Nay then, let the devil wear black, for I'll have a suit of sables. O heavens, die two months ago and not forgotten yet! Then there's hope a great man's memory may outlive his life half a year. But by'r lady he must build
churches then, or else shall he suffer not thinking on, with the hobby-horse, whose epitaph is, For O, for O, the hobby-horse is forgot.

[The trumpets sound. A dumb-show follows]

Enter a King and a Queen, very lovingly, the Queen embracing him and he her. She kneels, and makes show of protestation unto him. He takes her up, and declines his head upon her neck. He lies him down upon a bank of flowers. She, seeing him asleep, leaves him. Anon comes in another Man, takes off his crown, kisses it, pours poison in the sleeper’s ears, and leaves him. The Queen returns, finds the King dead, makes passionate action. The Poisoner with some Three or Four comes in again. They seem to console with her. The dead body is carried away. The Poisoner woos the Queen with gifts. She seems harsh awhile, but in the end accepts his love.

[Exeunt]

Ophelia What means this, my lord?

Hamlet Marry, this is miching mallecho. It means mischief.

Ophelia Belike this show imports the argument of the play.

[Enter Prologue]

Hamlet We shall know by this fellow. The players cannot keep counsel: they’ll tell all.

Ophelia Will he tell us what this show meant?

Hamlet Ay, or any show that you will show him. Be not you ashamed to show, he’ll not shame to tell you what it means.

Ophelia You are naught, you are naught. I’ll mark the play.

Ophelia What does this mean, my lord?

Hamlet This is dirty work at the crossroads. It means mischief.

Ophelia No doubt this mime depicts the plot of the play.

[The Prologue enters]

Hamlet This fellow will tell us. The actors can’t keep a secret. They’ll reveal all.

Ophelia Will he tell us the meaning of the dumb show?

Hamlet Yes, or anything you like to show him. If you don’t mind letting him see, he won’t be too embarrassed to explain what it’s for.

Ophelia You are very naughty, very naughty. I’ll watch the play.
140 Prologue  For us and for our tragedy,
            Here stooping to your clemency,
            We beg your hearing patiently.  [Exit]

Hamlet  Is this a prologue, or the posy of a ring?

Ophelia  'Tis brief, my lord.

145 Hamlet  As woman's love.

[Enter the Player King and Queen]

Player King  Full thirty times hath Phoebus' cart gone round
            Neptune's salt wash and Tellus' orb'd ground,
            And thirty dozen moons with borrowed sheen
            About the world have times twelve thirties been
            Since love our hearts and Hymen did our hands
            Unite commutual in most sacred bands.

Player Queen  So many journeys may the sun and moon
            Make us again count o' er ere love be done.
            But woe is me, you are so sick of late,
            So far from cheer and from your former state,
            That I distrust you. Yet though I distrust,
            Discomfit you, my lord, it nothing must;
            For women's fear and love hold quantity,
            In neither aught, or in extremity.
            Now what my love is, proof hath made you know,
            And as my love is sized, my fear is so.
            Where love is great, the littlest doubts are fear;
            Where little fears grow great, great love grows there.

Player King  Faith, I must leave thee, love, and shortly too:
            My operant powers their functions leave to do;
            And thou shalt live in this fair world behind,
            Honoured, beloved; and happily one as kind
            For husband shalt thou —
Player Queen

O confound the rest.

170 Such love must needs be treason in my breast.
    In second husband let me be accurst;
    None wed the second but who killed the first.

Hamlet [aside] That’s wormwood.

Player Queen The instances that second marriage move

175 Are base respects of thrive, but none of love.
    A second time I kill my husband dead,
    When second husband kisses me in bed.

Player King I do believe you think what now you speak;
    But what we do determine, oft we break.

180 Purpose is but the slave to memory,
    Of violent birth but poor validity,
    Which now, the fruit unripe, sticks on the tree,
    But fall unshaken when they mellow be.
    Most necessary ‘tis that we forget

185 To pay ourselves what to ourselves is debt.
    What to ourselves in passion we propose,
    The passion ending, doth the purpose lose.
    The violence of either grief or joy
    Their own enactures with themselves destroy.

190 Where joy most revels grief doth most lament;
    Grief joys, joy grieves, on slender accident.
    This world is not for aye, nor ‘tis not strange
    That even our loves should with our fortunes change,
    For ‘tis a question left us yet to prove,

195 Whether love lead fortune or else fortune love.
    The great man down, you mark his favourite flies;
    The poor advanced makes friends of enemies;
    And hitherto doth love on fortune tend:
    For who not needs shall never lack a friend,

200 And who in want a hollow friend doth try
    Directly seasons him his enemy.
    But orderly to end where I begun,
ACT THREE  Scene 2

Our wills and fates do so contrary run
That our devices still are overthrown:
Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own.
So think thou wilt no second husband wed,
But die thy thoughts when thy first lord is dead.

Player Queen  Nor earth to me give food, nor heaven light,
Sport and repose lock from me day and night,
To desperation turn my trust and hope,
An anchor’s cheer in prison be my scope,
Each opposite, that blanks the face of joy,
Meet what I would have well and it destroy,
Both here and hence pursue me lasting strife,
If, once a widow, ever I be a wife.

Hamlet  If she should break it now.

Player King  ’Tis deeply sworn. Sweet, leave me here awhile.
My spirits grow dull, and fain I would beguile
The tedious day with sleep.

Player Queen  Sleep rock thy brain,
And never come mischance between us twain.

[Exit. He sleeps]

Hamlet  Madam, how like you this play?
Queen  The lady doth protest too much, methinks.
Hamlet  Oh, but she’ll keep her word.

225  King  Have you heard the argument? Is there no offence in’t?
Hamlet  No, no, they do but jest — poison in jest. No offence
i’th’world.
King  What do you call the play?
Hamlet  The Mousetrap — marry, how tropically! This play is

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So different are our wants from fate’s own plan,
That schemes and plots are always overthrown.
Our thoughts are ours; the outcome’s not our own.
You think you will no second husband wed;
Intent will die when your first lord is dead.

"Queen"  May earth deny me food, and heaven light;
Dull be my days, and sleepless be my night;
To desperation turn my hope and trust;
My comforts not exceed a hermit’s crust;
Thwart my desires; frustrate all my joy;
Note my ambition; all my hopes destroy;
Now and hereafter, punish me with strife
If once a widow, ever I be wife.

Hamlet  If she should break such a promise!

"King"  A solemn vow. Sweet, for a time depart.
I’m feeling tired. It would do my heart
Much good to take a nap.

"Queen"  Sleep come to you.
And never must ill luck divide us two.

[She goes. The "King" sleeps]

Hamlet  Madam, what do you think of this play?
Queen  I think the lady is overdoing it.
Hamlet  Oh, but she’ll keep her word.
King  Do you know the plot? Is it offensive?
Hamlet  No, no, they’re only joking; the poison isn’t real. They
commit no offense whatsoever.
King  What’s the play called?
Hamlet  The Mousetrap. What a catching metaphor! This play
the image of a murder done in Vienna; Gonzago is the
Duke's name, his wife Baptist; you shall see anon. 'Tis a
knave's piece of work, but what o'these? Your Majesty, and
we that have free souls, it touches us not. Let the galled jade
wince, our withers are unwrung.

[Enter Lucianus]

This is one Lucianus, nephew to the King.

Ophelia   You are as good as a chorus, my lord.

Hamlet   I could interpret between you and your love if I
could see the puppets dallying.

Ophelia   You are keen, my lord; you are keen.

Hamlet   It would cost you a groaning to take off my edge.

Ophelia   Still better, and worse.

Hamlet   So you must take your husbands. Begin, murderer.
Leave thy damnable faces and begin. Come, the croaking
raven doth bellow for revenge.

Lucianus   Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit, and time
agreeing,
Confederate season, else no creature seeing,
Thou mixture rank, of midnight weeds collected,
With Hecate's band thrice blasted, thrice infected,

Hamlet   Thy natural magic and dire property
On wholesome life usurps immediately.

[Pour the poison in the sleeper's ears]

Hamlet   He poisons him 'tis garden for his estate. His name's
Gonzago. The story is extant, and written in very choice

is a real-life story about a murder done in Vienna. Gonzago is
the Duke's name. His wife is Baptist. You'll see soon. It's
a provocative sort of play, but who cares? Your majesty,
and those of us with clear consciences - it's nothing to
do with us. It's no skin off our noses.

["Lucianus" enters]

This is a character called Lucianus, the King's nephew in the
play.

Ophelia   You are as good as a guide, my lord.

Hamlet   I could do a commentary on you and your lover if I
could see you both performing.

Ophelia   You are sharp, my lord; you are sharp.

Hamlet   You'd have your work cut out to take the edge off
me!

Ophelia   Better still! You are getting worse.

Hamlet   "For better, for worse" is how you deceive your
husbands. [To "Lucianus"] Begin, murderer. Stop
making those awful faces and begin. Come on. [Hamlet
misquotes lines from an old play] The croaking raven is
bellowing for revenge.

"Lucianus"   Evil thoughts - skilled hands - poison -
privacy -
All's right: the perfect opportunity!
Vile mixture of rank weeds, midnight collected,
With witch's curse thrice blasted, thrice infected,
Your natural gift and dreadful faculty
Steals worthy life and kills immediately!

[He pours poison in the ear of the "King"]

Hamlet   He poisons him in his garden for his money.
[Pointing to the corpse] His name's Gonzago. The story is
ACT THREE  Scene 2

Italian. You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago’s wife.

255 Ophelia  The King rises.
Hamlet  What, frightened with false fire?
Queen  How fares my lord?
Polonius  Give o’er the play.

260 King  Give me some light. Away.
Polonius  Lights, lights, lights.

[Exeunt all but Hamlet and Horatio]

Hamlet  Why, let the stricken deer go weep,
The hart ungalled play;
For some must watch while some must sleep,
Thus runs the world away.

Would not this, sir, and a forest of feathers, if the rest of my fortunes turn Turk with me, with two Provincial roses on my razed shoes, get me a fellowship in a cry of players?

Polonius  Half a share.

270 Hamlet  A whole one, I.

For thou dost know, Oh Damon dear,
This realm dismantled was
Of love himself, and now reigns here
A very, very — pajock.

Polonius  You might have rhymed.

Hamlet  Oh good Horatio, I’ll take the ghost’s word for a thousand pound. Didst perceive?

in current circulation, and written in very stylish Italian. You’ll see soon how the murderer wins the love of Gonzago’s wife.

Ophelia  The King has risen to his feet.
Hamlet  What, frightened by blank shots?
Queen  [to her husband]  How is my lord?
Polonius  Stop the play!
King  Turn on the lights. Let’s go!
Polonius  [to Attendants]  More lights, more lights!

[Everyone leaves except Hamlet and Horatio]

Hamlet  Why, let the wounded deer go weep;
The hart, uninjured, play —
For some must guard, while some do sleep,
That is the world’s own way.

[Referring to the play and the words he has written for it]  If I struck hard times, wouldn’t this get me a place in a company of actors, sir, with feathers in my hat and big rose ribbons on my fashion shoes?

Horatio  Half a share in one!

Hamlet  A whole share for me!

‘Cos you must know, my rural lad,
This kingdom now, alas,
No longer has Jove as its King.
Its ruler is — a peacock!

Horatio  You might have rhymed!  [In which case, Hamlet would have said “an ass”]

Hamlet  Oh, good Horatio — I’ll back the truth of the ghost’s words for a thousand pounds. Did you notice?
ACT THREE Scene 2

Horatio Very well, my lord.

Hamlet Upon the talk of the poisoning?

280 Horatio I did very well note him.

Hamlet Ah ha! Come, some music; come, the recorders.

For if the King like not the comedy,

Why then, belike he likes it not, perdie.

Come, some music.

[Enter Rosencrantz and Guildenstern]

285 Guildenstern Good my lord, vouchsafe me a word with you.

Hamlet Sir, a whole history.

Guildenstern The King, sir –

Hamlet Ay, sir, what of him?

Guildenstern Is in his retirement marvellous distempered.

290 Hamlet With drink, sir?

Guildenstern No, my lord, with choler.

Hamlet Your wisdom should show itself more richer to

signify this to the doctor, for, for me to put him to his

purgation would perhaps plunge him into more choler.

295 Guildenstern Good my lord, put your discourse into some

frame, and start not so wildly from my affair.

Hamlet I am tame, sir. Pronounce.

Guildenstern The Queen your mother, in most great

affliction of spirit, hath sent me to you.

300 Hamlet You are welcome.

Guildenstern Nay, good my lord, this courtesy is not of the

Horatio Very clearly, my lord.

Hamlet When they talked about poisoning?

Horatio I watched him closely.

Hamlet Ah ha! Come, some music! Come, let’s have the

recorders!

For if the King dislikes the comic plot

Why then, by God, it seems he likes it not!

Come on, some music!

[Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter]

Guildenstern Good my lord, grant me a word with you.

Hamlet Sir, a whole history!

Guildenstern The King, sir –

Hamlet Yes, sir, what about him?

Guildenstern He’s retired to his room extremely out of sorts.

Hamlet With drink, sir?

Guildenstern No, my lord. With anger.

Hamlet You ought to have more sense than to tell this to the

doctor. If it were up to me to cure him, he’d be angrier still.

Guildenstern Good my lord, do restrain your tongue and don’t

go off at a tangent.

Hamlet I’ve pulled myself together. Speak on.

Guildenstern Your mother the Queen, in great distress, has

sent me to you.

Hamlet You are welcome.

Guildenstern Really, my lord, this kind of politeness is not
right breed. If it shall please you to make me a wholesome answer, I will do your mother’s commandment; if not, your pardon and my return shall be the end of my business.

Hamlet Sir, I cannot.

Rosencrantz What, my lord?

Hamlet Make you a wholesome answer. My wit’s diseased. But sir, such answer as I can make, you shall command — or rather, as you say, my mother. Therefore no more, but to the matter. My mother, you say —

Rosencrantz Then thus she says: your behaviour hath struck her into amazement and admiration.

Hamlet O wonderful son, that can so astonish a mother! But is there no sequel at the heels of this mother’s admiration? Impart.

Rosencrantz She desires to speak with you in her closet ere you go to bed.

Hamlet We shall obey, were she ten times our mother. Have you any further trade with us?

Rosencrantz My lord, you once did love me.

Hamlet And do still, by these pickers and stealers.

Rosencrantz Good my lord, what is your cause of distemper? You do surely bar the door upon your own liberty if you deny your griefs to your friend.

Hamlet Sir, I lack advancement.

Rosencrantz How can that be, when you have the voice of the King himself for your succession in Denmark?

Hamlet Ay, sir, but while the grass grows — the proverb is something musty.

good manners. If you’ll be so good as to give me a rational answer, I’ll carry out your mother’s instructions. If not, your permission to leave and my return to her will conclude my business.

Hamlet Sir, I cannot.

Rosencrantz Cannot what, my lord?

Hamlet Give you a rational answer. My brain is addled. But, sir, such answer as I can give you, is yours — or rather, as you say, my mother’s. Therefore, enough said. To resume; my mother, you say —

Rosencrantz She says this: your behavior has amazed and astonished her.

Hamlet What a wonderful son, to bewilder his mother! But is there no follow-up to this mother’s astonishment? Reveal all!

Rosencrantz She wishes to speak with you in her room before you go to bed.

Hamlet We shall obey, even if she were our mother ten times over. Have you any further business with us?

Rosencrantz My lord, you used to like me.

Hamlet And still do, by these hands!

Rosencrantz Good my lord, what’s the reason for your malady? You close the door upon your cure if you won’t share your troubles with your friend.

Hamlet Sir, my ambitions are frustrated.

Rosencrantz How can that be, when you have been named heir to the throne of Denmark by the King himself?

Hamlet Yes sir, but while the grass grows the horse starves, to quote a stale old proverb.
[Enter the Players with recorders]

Oh, the recorders. Let me see one. To withdraw with you, why do you go about to recover the wind of me, as if you would drive me into a toil?

Guildenstern Oh my lord, if my duty be too bold, my love is too unmanly.

Hamlet I do not well understand that. Will you play upon this pipe?

Guildenstern My lord, I cannot.

Hamlet I pray you.

Guildenstern Believe me, I cannot.

Hamlet I do beseech you.

Guildenstern I know no touch of it, my lord.

Hamlet It is as easy as lying. Govern these ventages with your fingers and thumb, give it breath with your mouth, and it will discourse most eloquent music. Look you, these are the stops.

Guildenstern But these cannot I command to any utterance of harmony. I have not the skill.

Hamlet Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me. You would play upon me, you would seem to know my stops, you would pluck out the heart of my mystery, you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass; and there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ, yet cannot you make it speak. Why, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me.

[Enter Polonius]

God bless you, sir.
ACT THREE  Scene 2

Polonius  My lord, the Queen would speak with you, and presently.

Hamlet  Do you see yonder cloud that’s almost in shape of a camel?

Polonius  By th’mass and ’tis like a camel indeed.

Hamlet  Methinks it is like a weasel.

Polonius  It is backed like a weasel.

Hamlet  Or like a whale.

Polonius  Very like a whale.

Hamlet  Then I will come to my mother by and by.  [Aside]

They fool me to the top of my bent. I will come by and by.

Polonius  I will say so.

[Exit Polonius]

Hamlet  ‘By and by’ is easily said. Leave me, friends.

[Execunt all but Hamlet]

’Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out Contagion to this world. Now could I drink hot blood,
And do such bitter business as the day
Would quake to look on. Soft, now to my mother.

O heart, lose not thy nature. Let not ever
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom;
Let me be cruel, not unnatural.
I will speak daggers to her, but use none. My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites: How in my words someever she be shent, To give them seals never, my soul, consent.

[Exit]

Polonius  My lord, the Queen wishes to speak to you, straight away.

Hamlet  Do you see that cloud over there that’s shaped almost like a camel?

Polonius  By heaven, so it is. It’s like a camel indeed.

Hamlet  I think it’s like a weasel.

Polonius  It has a back like a weasel.

Hamlet  Or like a whale.

Polonius  Very like a whale.

Hamlet  Then I’ll visit my mother by and by.  [Aside] They mock me past endurance!  [To Polonius] I’ll come by and by.

Polonius  I’ll say so.  [He goes]

Hamlet  ‘’By and by’’ is easily said.  [To Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and the Actors] Leave me, friends.

[They leave]

It’s the dead of night, witchcraft time, when graves in churchyards open, and hell itself breathes foul air upon the world. Now I could drink hot blood, and do such ghastly business as would make the day shudder to look at. Right now to my mother. Oh, heart, don’t lose your natural feelings! The spirit of Nero, that mother-killer, must not influence me. Let me be ruthless, but not unnatural. My tongue will speak daggers, but I’ll use none. In this respect I’ll speak with a forked tongue. However much I chastise her in words, my soul would never consent to putting them into action.

[He goes]