

The present death of Hamlet. Do it, England;  
 For like the hectic in my blood he rages,  
 And thou must cure me: till I know 'tis done,  
 Howe'er my haps, my joys were ne'er begun.<sup>11</sup> [Exit.

## ACT IV.

SCENE I. — *A Plain in Denmark.*

*Enter* FORTINBRAS, a Captain, and Soldiers, *marching.*

*Fortin.* Go, captain, from me greet the Danish King;  
 Tell him that by his license Fortinbras  
 Claims the conveyance of a promised march  
 Over his kingdom. You know the rendezvous.<sup>1</sup>  
 If that his Majesty would aught with us,  
 We shall express our duty in his eye;<sup>2</sup>  
 And let him know so.

*Capt.* I will do't, my lord.

*Fortin.* Go softly on.

[*Exeunt* FORTINBRAS and Soldiers.

*Enter* HAMLET, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN, and others.

*Ham.* Good sir, whose powers are these?

*Capt.* They are of Norway, sir.

<sup>11</sup> Of course strict grammar would here require "*will* ne'er *begin*"; the tense being changed for the rhyme. See page 96, note 26.

<sup>1</sup> The rendezvous here meant is the place where Fortinbras is to wait for the Captain after the latter has done his message to the King.

<sup>2</sup> In the *Regulations for the Establishment of the Queen's Household*, 1627: "All such as doe service in the queen's eye." And in *The Establishment of Prince Henry's Household*, 1610: "All such as doe service in the prince's eye." Fortinbras means, "I will wait upon his presence, and pay my respects to him in person."

*Ham.* How purposed, sir, I pray you?

*Capt.* Against some part of Poland.

*Ham.* Who commands them, sir?

*Capt.* The nephew to old Norway, Fortinbras.

*Ham.* Goes it against the main of Poland, sir,  
 Or for some frontier?

*Capt.* Truly to speak, sir, and with no addition,  
 We go to gain a little patch of ground  
 That hath in it no profit but the name.  
 To pay five ducats, five, I would not farm it;<sup>3</sup>  
 Nor will it yield to Norway or the Pole  
 A ranker rate, should it be sold in fee.

*Ham.* Why, then the Polack never will defend it.

*Capt.* Yes, 'tis already garrison'd.

*Ham.* Two thousand souls and twenty thousand ducats  
 Will not debate the question of this straw:  
 This is th' imposthume<sup>4</sup> of much wealth and peace,  
 That inward breaks, and shows no cause without  
 Why the man dies. — I humbly thank you, sir.

*Capt.* God b' wi' you, sir. [Exit.

*Rosen.* Will't please you go, my lord?

*Ham.* I'll be with you straight. Go a little before. —

[*Exeunt all but* HAMLET.

<sup>3</sup> The meaning is, "I would not pay five ducats for the exclusive privilege of collecting all the revenue it will yield to the State. To *farm* or *farm out* taxes is to sell commissions for collecting them, the buyers to have the privilege of making what they can by the process. Burke uses the word in a like sense in his *Articles of Charge against Hastings*: "The *farm*ing of the defence of a country, being wholly unprecedented and evidently abused, could have no real object but to enrich the contractors at the Company's expense." — To *pay* has the force of *by paying*. The infinitive again used *gerundively*. See page 169, note 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Imposthume* was in common use for *abscess* in Shakespeare's time. It is a corruption of *apostem*.



How all occasions do inform against me,  
 And spur my dull revenge ! (What is a man,  
 If his chief good and market of his time  
 Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more.)  
 Sure, He that made us with such large discourse,  
 Looking before and after, gave us not  
 That capability and godlike reason  
 To fust<sup>5</sup> in us unused. Now, whether it be  
 Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple  
 Of thinking too precisely on th' event,—  
 A thought which, quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom  
 And ever three parts coward, — I do not know  
 Why yet I live to say *This thing's to do*,  
 Sith<sup>6</sup> I have cause and will and strength and means  
 To do't. Examples gross as earth exhort me :  
 Witness this army of such mass and charge,  
 Led by a delicate and tender prince ;  
 Whose spirit, with divine ambition puff'd,<sup>7</sup>  
 Makes mouths at the invisible event ;  
 Exposing what is mortal and unsure  
 To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,  
 Even for an egg-shell. Rightly to be great  
 Is not to stir without great argument,  
 But greatly to find quarrel in a straw  
 When honour's at the stake. How stand I, then,  
 That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd,  
 Excitements of my reason and my blood,<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> To *fust* is to *become mouldy*; an old word now quite obsolete.

<sup>6</sup> *Sith* is merely an old form of *since*; now quite out of use.

<sup>7</sup> *Puff'd*, here, is *inspired* or *animated*.—To *make mouths* at a thing is to scorn it, or *hold it in contempt*.

<sup>8</sup> Provocations which excite both my reason and my passions.

And let all sleep? while, to my shame, I see  
 The imminent death of twenty thousand men,  
 That for a fantasy and trick of fame  
 Go to their graves like beds; fight for a plot  
 Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause;  
 Which is not tomb enough and continent<sup>9</sup>  
 To hide the slain? O, from this time forth,  
 My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!<sup>10</sup> [Exit.

SCENE II.—*Elsinore. A Room in the Castle.*

*Enter the QUEEN and HORATIO.*

*Queen.* I will not speak with her.

*Hora.* She is importunate, indeed distract;<sup>1</sup>  
 Her mood will needs be pitied.

*Queen.* What would she have?

*Hora.* She speaks much of her father; says she hears

<sup>9</sup> *Continent* means that which contains or encloses. "If there be no fulness, then is the *continent* greater than the content," — Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*.

<sup>10</sup> Weary is Hamlet, weary under his burden. Now, when he is shipped off to England, the charge of murder resting on him through his own fault, — comparing *his* lot, chained as he is to his task, with that of Fortinbras who is so free in all his movements, — now comes the fear that, notwithstanding all his trouble, all his patient endurance, his task has at last become impossible. This horrible dread penetrates him to the quick, and weighs down his soul. How, — considering the character of his task, — how he is to satisfy the *reason* of the thing, he cannot conceive; but he can at least content his blood, should he strike the decisive blow. And how it shrieks in his ear, how it surges over his soul! This horrible doubt, which has for its background the remorse he feels for the error he has made, — the doubt whether he shall throw all the dictates of reason to the winds, — this is the demon that rules in this soliloquy, and runs wild therein; and therefore I have said it is the shriek of Hamlet's agony which here relieves itself. — WERDER.

<sup>1</sup> *Distract* for *distracted*; just as *bloat* and *hoist* before.



There's tricks i' the world ; and hems, and beats her heart ;  
 Spurns enviously at straws ;<sup>2</sup> speaks things in doubt,  
 That carry but half sense : her speech is nothing,  
 Yet the unshapèd use of it doth move  
 The hearers to collection ;<sup>3</sup> they aim at it,  
 And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts ;  
 Which, as her winks and nods and gestures yield them,  
 Indeed would make one think there might be thought,  
 Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily.<sup>4</sup>  
 'Twere good she were spoken with ; for she may strew  
 Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds.

Queen. Let her come in. — [Exit HORATIO.  
 To my sick soul, as sin's true nature is,  
 Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss :<sup>5</sup>  
 So full of artless jealousy is guilt,  
 It spills itself in fearing to be spilt.

Re-enter HORATIO, with OPHELIA.<sup>6</sup>

Ophe. Where is the beauteous Majesty of Denmark ?

Queen. How now, Ophelia !

<sup>2</sup> Kicks spitefully at straws. Such was the common use of *spurn* in the Poet's time. So in *The Merchant*, i. 3 : "And foot me as you *spurn* a stranger cur over your threshold." And in *Julius Cæsar*, iii. 1 : "I *spurn* thee like a cur out of my way." — *Envy* and its derivatives were commonly used in the sense of *malice*.

<sup>3</sup> Collection is inference or conjecture. — Aim is guess.

<sup>4</sup> Unhappily is here used in the sense of mischievously.

<sup>5</sup> Shakespeare is not singular in the use of *amiss* as a substantive. "Each toy" is each trifle.

<sup>6</sup> There is no part of this play in its representation on the stage more pathetic than this scene ; which, I suppose, proceeds from the utter insensibility Ophelia has to her own misfortunes. A great sensibility, or none at all, seems to produce the same effects. In the latter case the audience supply what is wanting, and with the former they sympathize. — Sir J. REYNOLDS.

Ophe. [Sings.] *How should I your true love know  
 From another one ?  
 By his cockle hat and staff,  
 And his sandle shoon.<sup>7</sup>*

Queen. Alas, sweet lady, what imports this song ?

Ophe. Say you ? nay, pray you, mark.

[Sings.] *He is dead and gone, lady,  
 He is dead and gone ;  
 At his head a grass-green turf,  
 At his heels a stone.*

Queen. Nay, but, Ophelia, —

Ophe. Pray you, mark.

[Sings.] *White his shroud as the mountain snow, —*

*Enter the KING.*

Queen. Alas, look here, my lord.

Ophe. [Sings.] — *Larded<sup>8</sup> with sweet flowers ;  
 Which bewept to the grave did go,  
 With true-love showers.*

King. How do you, pretty lady ?

Ophe. Well, God 'ield you !<sup>9</sup> They say the owl was a baker's daughter.<sup>10</sup> Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be. God be at your table !

<sup>7</sup> These were the badges of pilgrims. The *cockle shell* was an emblem of their intention to go beyond sea. The habit, being held sacred, was often assumed as a disguise in love-adventures.

<sup>8</sup> Larded is garnished.

<sup>9</sup> God yield or reward you.

<sup>10</sup> There was a tradition that the Saviour went into a baker's shop and asked for some bread. The baker put some dough in the oven to bake for Him, and was rebuked by his daughter for doing so. For this wickedness the daughter was transformed into an owl.



*King.* Conceit upon her father.

*Ophe.* Pray you, let's have no words of this; but when they ask you what it means, say you this:—

[Sings.] *To-morrow is Saint Valentine's day,  
All in the morning betime,  
And I a maid at your window,  
To be your Valentine.*<sup>11</sup>

*King.* How long hath she been thus?

*Ophe.* I hope all will be well. We must be patient; but I cannot choose but weep, to think they should lay him i' the cold ground. My brother shall know of it; and so I thank you for your good counsel.—Come, my coach!—Good night, ladies; good night, sweet ladies; good night, good night.

[Exit.]

*King.* Follow her close; give her good watch, I pray you.—

[Exit HORATIO.]

O, this is the poison of deep grief; it springs  
All from her father's death. O, Gertrude, Gertrude,  
When sorrows come, they come not single spies,  
But in battalions.<sup>12</sup> First, her father slain:  
Next, your son gone; and he most violent author  
Of his own just remove: the people muddled,  
Thick and unwholesome in their thoughts and whispers,

<sup>11</sup> Of course *Valentine* stands for a person here; and it means much the same as *lover* or *sweet-heart*. The old use of the name is well shown in Scott's *Fair Maid of Perth*, where Simon Glover wishes to make a match between his daughter Catharine and Henry Smith, the hero of the tale. He therefore so arranges matters, that Smith shall be the first person whom Catharine sees on the morning of St. Valentine's day. This makes him her Valentine for the year: as such, he may claim a kiss of her on the spot, and also as often as they meet during the year.

<sup>12</sup> Men go out *singly*, or one by one, to act as spies; when they go forth to *fight*, they go in armies.

For good Polonius' death; and we have done but greenly,  
In hugger-mugger<sup>13</sup> to inter him: poor Ophelia  
Divided from herself and her fair judgment,  
Without the which we're pictures, or mere beasts:  
Last, and as much containing as all these,  
Her brother is in secret come from France;  
Feeds on his wonder, keeps himself in clouds,  
And wants not buzzers to infect his ear  
With pestilent speeches of his father's death;  
Wherein necessity, of matter beggar'd,  
Will nothing stick our person to arraign  
In ear and ear.<sup>14</sup> O my dear Gertrude, this,  
Like to a murdering-piece,<sup>15</sup> in many places  
Gives me superfluous death. [A noise within.]

*Queen.*

Alack, what noise is this?

*King.* Where are my Switzers?<sup>16</sup> Let them guard the door.—

*Enter a Gentleman.*

What is the matter?

*Gent.*

Save yourself, my lord:

The ocean, overpeering of his list,<sup>17</sup>

Eats not the flats with more impetuous haste

<sup>13</sup> This phrase was much used, before and in the Poet's time, for any thing done hurriedly and by stealth. Thus Florio explains *clandestinare*, "to hide or conceal by stealth, or in *hugger-mugger*." And in North's Plutarch Antony urges that Cæsar's "body should be honourably buried, and not in *hugger-mugger*."

<sup>14</sup> "In ear and ear" is used, apparently, to give a plural sense.

<sup>15</sup> A murdering-piece, or *murderer*, was a small piece of artillery. Case-shot, filled with small bullets, nails, old iron, &c., was often used in these *murderers*. This accounts for the raking fire attributed to them in the text.

<sup>16</sup> *Switzers*, for royal guards. The Swiss were then, as since, mercenary soldiers of any nation that could afford to pay them.

<sup>17</sup> *Overflowing* his bounds, or limits.



'Than young Laertes, in a riotous head,  
O'erbears your officers. The rabble call him lord ;  
And — as<sup>18</sup> the world were now but to begin,  
Antiquity forgot, custom not known,  
The ratifiers and props of every word —  
They cry, *Choose we ; Laertes shall be king !*  
Caps, hands, and tongues applaud it to the clouds,  
*Laertes shall be king, Laertes king !*

*Queen.* How cheerfully on the false trail they cry ! —  
O, this is counter,<sup>19</sup> you false Danish dogs !

*King.* The doors are broke. [*Noise within.*]

*Enter LAERTES, armed ; Danes following.*

*Laer.* Where is this King ? — Sirs, stand you all without.

*Danes.* No, let's come in.

*Laer.* I pray you, give me leave.

*Danes.* We will, we will. [*They retire without the door.*]

*Laer.* I thank you : keep the door. — O thou vile King,  
Give me my father !

*Queen.* Calmly, good Laertes.

*Laer.* That drop of blood that's calm proclaims me bas-  
tard,

And brands the harlot even here, between  
The chaste unsmirch'd<sup>20</sup> brows of my true mother.

*King.* What is the cause, Laertes,

<sup>18</sup> As has here the force of *as if*. The explanation sometimes given of the passage is, that the rabble are the ratifiers and props of every *idle* word. The plain sense is, that antiquity and custom are the ratifiers and props of every *sound* word touching the matter in hand, the ordering of human society, and the State.

<sup>19</sup> Hounds are said to run *counter* when they are upon a false scent, or hunt by the heel, running backward and mistaking the course of the game.

<sup>20</sup> *Unsmirched* is *unsullied, spotless*.

That thy rebellion looks so giant-like ? —  
Let him go, Gertrude ; do not fear our person :  
There's such divinity doth hedge a king,  
That treason can but peep to what it would,  
Acts little of his will. — Tell me, Laertes,  
Why thou art thus incensed. — Let him go, Gertrude. —  
Speak, man.

*Laer.* Where is my father ?

*King.* Dead. Dead.

*Queen.* But not by him.

*King.* Let him demand his fill.

*Laer.* How came he dead ? I'll not be juggled with :  
To Hell, allegiance ! vows, to the blackest devil !  
Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit !  
I dare damnation : to this point I stand, —  
That both the worlds I give to negligence,  
Let come what comes ; only I'll be revenged  
Most thoroughly<sup>21</sup> for my father.

*King.* Who shall stay you ?

*Laer.* My will, not all the world :  
And for my means, I'll husband them so well,  
They shall go far with little.

*King.* Good Laertes,  
If you desire to know the certainty  
Of your dear father's death, is't writ in your revenge,  
That, swoopstake,<sup>22</sup> you will draw both friend and foe,  
Winner and loser ?

<sup>21</sup> *Thoroughly* and *thoroughly*, as also *through* and *thorough*, were used indifferently in the Poet's time. They are, in fact, only different forms of the same word ; as to be *thorough* in a thing is to *go through* it.

<sup>22</sup> *Swoopstake* here means *indiscriminately*. A sweepstake is one who wins or *sweeps* in all the stakes, whether on the race-grounds or at the gaming-table.



Laer. None but his enemies.

King. Will you know them, then?

Laer. To his good friends thus wide I'll ope my arms,  
And, like the kind life-rendering pelican,  
Repast them with my blood.<sup>23</sup>

King. Why, now you speak  
Like a good child and a true gentleman.  
That I am guiltless of your father's death,  
And am most sensibly in grief for it,  
It shall as level to your judgment pierce<sup>24</sup>  
As day does to your eye.

Danes. [Within.] Let her come in.

Laer. How now! what noise is that? —

*Re-enter OPHELIA.*

O heat, dry up my brains! tears seven-times salt,  
Burn out the sense and virtue of mine eye! —  
By Heaven, thy madness shall be paid by weight,  
Till our scale turn the beam. O rose of May!  
Dear maid, kind sister, sweet Ophelia! —  
O Heavens! is't possible, a young maid's wits  
Should be as mortal as an old man's life?  
Nature is fine in love; and where 'tis fine  
It sends some precious instance of itself  
After the thing it loves.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> The pelican is a fabulous bird, often referred to by the old poets for illustration. An old book entitled *A Choice of Emblems and other Devices*, by Geoffrey Whitney, 1586, contains a picture of an eagle on her nest, tearing open her breast to feed her young.

<sup>24</sup> *Level*, again, for *direct*. — *Pierce*, here, has the sense of *penetrate*, that is, *go through or reach*.

<sup>25</sup> Here, as often, *instance* is *proof, example, specimen, assurance*. The precious thing which Ophelia's fineness of nature has sent after her father is "her fair judgment," that is, her sanity.

Ophe. [Sings.] *They bore him barefaced on the bier;  
Hey non nonny, nonny, hey nonny;  
And on his grave rain'd many a tear.* —

Fare you well, my dove!

Laer. Hadst thou thy wits, and didst persuade revenge,  
It could not move me thus.

Ophe. You must sing, *Down a-down, an you call him  
a-down-a*. O, how the wheel<sup>26</sup> becomes it! It is the false  
steward, that stole his master's daughter.<sup>27</sup>

Laer. This nothing's more than matter.<sup>28</sup>

Ophe. There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray  
you, love, remember: and there is pansies, that's for  
thoughts.<sup>29</sup>

Laer. A document<sup>30</sup> in madness; thoughts and remem-  
brance fitted.

<sup>26</sup> The *wheel* is the *burden* of a ballad; from the Latin *rota*, a *round*, which is usually accompanied with a burden frequently repeated.

<sup>27</sup> Meaning, probably, some old ballad, of which no traces have come to light.

<sup>28</sup> He means that Ophelia's nonsense tells more, as to her condition, than speaking sense would.

<sup>29</sup> The language of flowers is very ancient, and the old poets have many instances of it. In *The Winter's Tale*, iv. 3, Perdita makes herself delectable in the use of it, distributing her flowers much as Ophelia does here. Rosemary, being supposed to strengthen the memory, was held emblematic of remembrance, and in that thought was distributed at weddings and funerals. — Pansies, from the French *pensees*, were emblems of pensiveness, *thought* being here again used for *grief*, the same as in page 128, note 13. The next speech, "*thoughts and remembrance fitted*," is another instance of the same usage.

<sup>30</sup> *Document*, from the Latin *doceo*, was often used in the original sense of *lesson*, or *something taught*. So in *The Faerie Queene*, i. 10, 19, where Fidelia takes the Redcross Knight under her tuition, and draws upon "her sacred booke," —

And heavenly *documents* thereof did preach,  
That weaker witt of man could never reach.



*Ophe.* There's fennel for you, and columbines:<sup>31</sup>—there's rue for you; and here's some for me: we may call it herb of grace o' Sundays:—O, you must wear your rue with a difference.<sup>32</sup> There's a daisy:—I would give you some violets,<sup>33</sup> but they wither'd all when my father died: they say he made a good end,—

[Sings.] *For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy.*<sup>34</sup>

*Laer.* Thought and affliction, passion,<sup>35</sup> Hell itself, She turns to favour and to prettiness.

*Ophe.* [Sings.] *And will he not come again?  
And will he not come again?*

*No, no, he is dead,  
Gone to his death-bed;  
He never will come again.*

*His beard was white as snow,  
All flaxen was his poll:*

<sup>31</sup> Fennel and columbine were significant of cajolery and ingratitude; so that Ophelia might fitly give them to the guileful and faithless King.

<sup>32</sup> Rue was emblematic of sorrow or *ruth*, and was called *herb-grace* from the moral and medicinal virtues ascribed to it.—There may be some uncertainty as to Ophelia's meaning, when she says to the Queen, "you must wear your rue with a difference." *Bearing a difference* is an old heraldic phrase; and the difference here intended is probably best explained in Cogan's *Haven of Health*: "The second property is that *rue abateth carnal lust*, which is also confirmed by Galen." So that the difference in the Queen's case would be emblematic of her "hasty return to the nuptial state, and a severe reflection on her indecent marriage."

<sup>33</sup> The daisy was an emblem of dissembling; the violet, of faithfulness, and is so set down in *The Lover's Nosegay*.

<sup>34</sup> Poor Ophelia in her madness remembers fragments of many old popular ballads. *Bonny Robin* appears to have been a favourite, for there were many others written to that tune.

<sup>35</sup> *Thought*, again, for *grief*.—*Passion* for *suffering*; the classical sense.

*He is gone, he is gone,  
And we cast away moan:  
God ha' mercy on his soul!*

And of<sup>36</sup> all Christian souls, I pray God.—God b' wi' ye.

*Laer.* Do you see this, O God?

[Exit.

*King.* Laertes, I must commune<sup>37</sup> with your grief, Or you deny me right. Go but apart; Make choice of whom your wisest friends you will, And they shall hear and judge 'twixt you and me: If by direct or by collateral hand They find us touch'd, we will our kingdom give, Our crown, our life, and all that we call ours, To you in satisfaction; but, if not, Be you content to lend your patience to us, And we shall jointly labour with your soul To give it due content.

*Laer.* Let this be so: His means of death, his obscure burial,— No trophy, sword, nor hatchment o'er his bones, No noble rite nor formal ostentation,<sup>38</sup>— Cry to be heard, as 'twere from Heaven to Earth, That<sup>39</sup> I must call't in question.

*King.* So you shall; And where th' offence is let the great axe fall. I pray you, go with me.

[Exeunt.

<sup>36</sup> *Of*, again, for *on*. See page 108, note 38.

<sup>37</sup> *Commune* has the accent on the first syllable. Generally used so by the English poets; at least I have noted it so in Milton and Wordsworth.

<sup>38</sup> The funerals of knights and persons of rank were made with great ceremony and ostentation formerly. Sir John Hawkins observes that "the sword, the helmet, the gauntlet, spurs, and tabard are still hung over the grave of every knight."

<sup>39</sup> *That* is continually used by the old poets with the force of *so that*, or *inasmuch that*.