

Hamlet

4.7

Enter King Claudius and Laertes

KING CLAUDIUS

Now must your conscience my acquittance seal,
And you must put me in your heart for friend,
Sith you have heard, and with a knowing ear,
That he which hath your noble father slain
Pursued my life.

LAERTES It well appears. But tell me 5
Why you proceeded not against these feats,
So crimeful and so capital in nature,
As by your safety, wisdom, all things else,
You mainly were stirred up.

KING CLAUDIUS O, for two special reasons, 10
Which may to you perhaps seem much unsinewed,
And yet to me they're strong. The Queen his mother
Lives almost by his looks; and for myself±±
My virtue or my plague, be it either which±±
She's so conjunctive to my life and soul
That, as the star moves not but in his sphere, 15
I could not but by her. The other motive
Why to a public count I might not go
Is the great love the general gender bear him,
Who, dipping all his faults in their affection,
Would, like the spring that turneth wood to stone, 20
Convert his guilts to graces; so that my arrows,
Too slightly timbered for so loud a wind,
Would have reverted to my bow again,
And not where I had aimed them.

LAERTES

And so have I a noble father lost, 25
A sister driven into desp'rate terms,
Who has, if praises may go back again,
Stood challenger, on mount, of all the age
For her perfections. But my revenge will come.

KING CLAUDIUS

Break not your sleeps for that. You must not think 30

That we are made of stuff so flat and dull
That we can let our beard be shook with danger,
And think it pastime. You shortly shall hear more.
I loved your father, and we love ourself.
And that, I hope, will teach you to imagine±± 35

Enter a Messenger with letters

How now? What news?

MESSENGER Letters, my lord, from Hamlet.

This to your majesty; this to the Queen.

KING CLAUDIUS From Hamlet? Who brought them?

MESSENGER

Sailors, my lord, they say. I saw them not.

They were given me by Claudio. He received them. 40

KING CLAUDIUS

Laertes, you shall hear them.±±Leave us.

Exit Messenger

(Reads) `High and mighty, you shall know I am set
naked on your kingdom. Tomorrow shall I beg leave
to see your kingly eyes, when I shall, first asking your
pardon, thereunto recount th'occasions of my sudden 45
and more strange return.

Hamlet.'

What should this mean? Are all the rest come back?

Or is it some abuse, and no such thing?

LAERTES

Know you the hand?

KING CLAUDIUS 'Tis Hamlet's character. 50

`Naked'±±and in a postscript here he says

`Alone'. Can you advise me?

LAERTES

I'm lost in it, my lord. But let him come.

It warms the very sickness in my heart

That I shall live and tell him to his teeth, 55

`Thus diddest thou'.

KING CLAUDIUS If it be so, Laertes±±

As how should it be so, how otherwise?±±

Will you be ruled by me?

LAERTES

If so you'll not o'errule me to a peace.

KING CLAUDIUS

To thine own peace. If he be now returned, 60

As checking at his voyage, and that he means
No more to undertake it, I will work him
To an exploit, now ripe in my device,
Under the which he shall not choose but fall;
And for his death no wind of blame shall breathe; 65
But even his mother shall uncharge the practice
And call it accident. Some two months since
Here was a gentleman of Normandy.
I've seen myself, and served against, the French,
And they can well on horseback; but this gallant 70
Had witchcraft in't. He grew into his seat,
And to such wondrous doing brought his horse
As had he been incorpsed and demi-natured
With the brave beast. So far he passed my thought
That I in forgery of shapes and tricks 75
Come short of what he did.

LAERTES A Norman was't?

KING CLAUDIUS A Norman.

LAERTES

Upon my life, Lamord.

KING CLAUDIUS The very same.

LAERTES

I know him well. He is the brooch indeed,
And gem, of all the nation.

KING CLAUDIUS He made confession of you, 80

And gave you such a masterly report
For art and exercise in your defence,
And for your rapier most especially,
That he cried out 'twould be a sight indeed
If one could match you. Sir, this report of his 85
Did Hamlet so envenom with his envy
That he could nothing do but wish and beg
Your sudden coming o'er to play with him.
Now, out of this±±

LAERTES What out of this, my lord?

KING CLAUDIUS

Laertes, was your father dear to you? 90
Or are you like the painting of a sorrow,
A face without a heart?

LAERTES Why ask you this?

KING CLAUDIUS

Not that I think you did not love your father,
But that I know love is begun by time,
And that I see, in passages of proof, 95
Time qualifies the spark and fire of it.
Hamlet comes back. What would you undertake
To show yourself your father's son in deed
More than in words?

LAERTES To cut his throat i'th' church.

KING CLAUDIUS

No place indeed should murder sanctuarize. 100
Revenge should have no bounds. But, good Laertes,
Will you do this?±±keep close within your chamber.
Hamlet returned shall know you are come home.
We'll put on those shall praise your excellence,
And set a double varnish on the fame 105
The Frenchman gave you; bring you, in fine, together,
And wager on your heads. He, being remiss,
Most generous, and free from all contriving,
Will not peruse the foils; so that with ease,
Or with a little shuffling, you may choose 110
A sword unbated, and, in a pass of practice,
Requite him for your father.

LAERTES I will do't,
And for that purpose I'll anoint my sword.
I bought an unction of a mountebank
So mortal that, but dip a knife in it, 115
Where it draws blood no cataplasm so rare,
Collected from all simples that have virtue
Under the moon, can save the thing from death
That is but scratched withal. I'll touch my point
With this contagion, that if I gall him slightly, 120
It may be death.

KING CLAUDIUS Let's further think of this;
Weigh what convenience both of time and means
May fit us to our shape. If this should fail,
And that our drift look through our bad performance,
'Twere better not essayed. Therefore this project 125
Should have a back or second that might hold
If this should blast in proof. Soft, let me see.

We'll make a solemn wager on your cunnings . . .
I ha't! When in your motion you are hot and dry±±
As make your bouts more violent to that end±± 130
And that he calls for drink, I'll have prepared him
A chalice for the nonce, whereon but sipping,
If he by chance escape your venom'd stuck,
Our purpose may hold there.±±
Enter Queen Gertrude

How now, sweet Queen?

QUEEN GERTRUDE

One woe doth tread upon another's heel, 135
So fast they follow. Your sister's drowned, Laertes.

LAERTES Drowned? O, where?

QUEEN GERTRUDE

There is a willow grows aslant a brook
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.
Therewith fantastic garlands did she make 140
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them.
There on the pendent boughs her crownet weeds
Clamb'ring to hang, an envious sliver broke, 145
When down the weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,
And mermaid-like a while they bore her up;
Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes,
As one incapable of her own distress, 150
Or like a creature native and endued
Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death. 155

LAERTES Alas, then is she drowned.

QUEEN GERTRUDE Drowned, drowned.

LAERTES

Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia,
And therefore I forbid my tears. But yet
It is our trick; nature her custom holds, 160
Let shame say what it will.

He weeps

When these

are gone,

The woman will be out. Adieu, my lord.

I have a speech of fire that fain would blaze,

But that this folly douts it.

Exit

KING CLAUDIUS

Let's follow, Gertrude.

How much I had to do to calm his rage!

165

Now fear I this will give it start again;

Therefore let's follow.

Exeunt