

Hamlet

3.3

Enter King Claudius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern

KING CLAUDIUS

I like him not, nor stands it safe with us
To let his madness range. Therefore prepare you.
I your commission will forthwith dispatch,
And he to England shall along with you.
The terms of our estate may not endure 5
Hazard so dangerous as doth hourly grow
Out of his lunacies.

GUILDENSTERN We will ourselves provide.

Most holy and religious fear it is
To keep those many many bodies safe
That live and feed upon your majesty. 10

ROSENCRANTZ

The single and peculiar life is bound
With all the strength and armour of the mind
To keep itself from noyance; but much more
That spirit upon whose weal depends and rests
The lives of many. The cease of majesty 15
Dies not alone, but like a gulf doth draw
What's near it with it. It is a massy wheel
Fixed on the summit of the highest mount,
To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things
Are mortised and adjoined, which when it falls 20
Each small annexment, petty consequence,
Attends the boist'rous ruin. Never alone
Did the King sigh, but with a general groan.

KING CLAUDIUS

Arm you, I pray you, to this speedy voyage,
For we will fetters put upon this fear 25
Which now goes too free-footed.

ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN We will haste us.

Exeunt both

Enter Polonius

POLONIUS

My lord, he's going to his mother's closet.

Behind the arras I'll convey myself
To hear the process. I'll warrant she'll tax him home.
And, as you said±±and wisely was it said±± 30
'Tis meet that some more audience than a mother,
Since nature makes them partial, should o'erhear
The speech of vantage. Fare you well, my liege.
I'll call upon you ere you go to bed,
And tell you what I know.

KING CLAUDIUS Thanks, dear my lord. 35

Exit Polonius

O, my offence is rank! It smells to heaven.
It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,
A brother's murder. Pray can I not.
Though inclination be as sharp as will,
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent, 40
And like a man to double business bound
I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
And both neglect. What if this curseÁd hand
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens 45
To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy
But to confront the visage of offence?
And what's in prayer but this twofold force,
To be forestall'd ere we come to fall,
Or pardoned being down? Then I'll look up. 50
My fault is past±±but O, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? 'Forgive me my foul murder'?
That cannot be, since I am still possessed
Of those effects for which I did the murder±±
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen. 55
May one be pardoned and retain th'offence?
In the corrupted currents of this world
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law. But 'tis not so above. 60
There is no shuffling, there the action lies
In his true nature, and we ourselves compelled
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults
To give in evidence. What then? What rests?
Try what repentance can. What can it not? 65

Yet what can it when one cannot repent?
O wretched state, O bosom black as death,
O limeÁd soul that, struggling to be free,
Art more engaged! Help, angels! Make assay.
Bow, stubborn knees; and heart with strings of steel, 70
Be soft as sinews of the new-born babe.
All may be well.

He kneels.

Enter Prince Hamlet behind him

HAMLET

Now might I do it pat, now a is praying,
And now I'll do't,
[He draws his sword]

and so a goes to heaven,

And so am I revenged. That would be scanned. 75

A villain kills my father, and for that
I, his sole son, do this same villain send
To heaven.

O, this is hire and salary, not revenge!
A took my father grossly, full of bread, 80
With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May;
And how his audit stands, who knows save heaven?
But in our circumstance and course of thought
'Tis heavy with him. And am I then revenged
To take him in the purging of his soul, 85
When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?
No.

He sheathes his sword

Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hint.
When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
Or in th'incestuous pleasure of his bed, 90
At gaming, swearing, or about some act
That has no relish of salvation in't,
Then trip him that his heels may kick at heaven,
And that his soul may be as damned and black
As hell whereto it goes. My mother stays. 95
This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.

Exit

KING CLAUDIUS

My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.

Words without thoughts never to heaven go.
Exit