

Act I, scene 3

ORIGINAL TEXT

Enter **LAERTES** and **OPHELIA**, his sister

LAERTES

My necessities are embarked. Farewell.
And, sister, as the winds give benefit
And convey is assistant, do not sleep,
But let me hear from you.

OPHELIA

Do you doubt that?

LAERTES

5 For Hamlet and the trifling of his favor,
Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood,
A violet in the youth of primy nature,
Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,
The perfume and suppliance of a minute.
10 No more.

OPHELIA

No more but so?

LAERTES

Think it no more.

For nature, crescent, does not grow alone
In thews and bulk, but, as this temple waxes,
The inward service of the mind and soul
Grows wide withal. Perhaps he loves you now,
15 And now no soil nor cautel doth besmirch
The virtue of his will, but you must fear.
His greatness weighed, his will is not his own,
For he himself is subject to his birth.
He may not, as unvalued persons do,
20 Carve for himself, for on his choice depends
The safety and health of this whole state.
And therefore must his choice be
circumscribed
Unto the voice and yielding of that body
Whereof he is the head. Then if he says he
loves you,

ORIGINAL TEXT

MODERN TEXT

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

MODERN TEXT

25 It fits your wisdom so far to believe it
As he in his particular act and place
May give his saying deed, which is no
further

Than the main voice of Denmark goes
withal.

Then weigh what loss your honor may
sustain

30 If with too credent ear you list his songs,
Or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure
open

To his unmastered importunity.

Fear it, Ophelia. Fear it, my dear sister,
And keep you in the rear of your affection,

35 Out of the shot and danger of desire.

The chariest maid is prodigal enough

If she unmask her beauty to the moon.

Virtue itself 'scapes not calumnious
strokes.

The canker galls the infants of the spring

40 Too oft before their buttons be
disclosed.

And in the morn and liquid dew of youth,
Contagious blastments are most imminent.

Be wary, then. Best safety lies in fear.

Youth to itself rebels, though none else
near.

OPHELIA

45 I shall the effect of this good lesson keep
As watchman to my heart. But, good my
brother,

Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,
Show me the steep and thorny way to
heaven

Whiles, like a puffed and reckless libertine,

50 Himself the primrose path of dalliance
treads

And recks not his own rede.

LAERTES

O, fear me not.

Enter POLONIUS

What does this
mean?

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.

per 1, 3, 4, 5

Laertes

I stay too long. But here my father comes.
A double blessing is a double grace.
Occasion smiles upon a second leave.

ORIGINAL TEXT

POLONIUS

55 Yet here, Laertes? Aboard, aboard, for
shame!

The wind sits in the shoulder of your sail
And you are stayed for. There, my blessing
with thee.

And these few precepts in thy memory
Look thou character. Give thy thoughts no
tongue,

60 Nor any unproportioned thought his act.
Be thou familiar but by no means vulgar.
Those friends thou hast, and their adoption
tried,

Grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of
steel,

But do not dull thy palm with
entertainment

65 Of each new-hatched, unfledged
comrade. Beware

Of entrance to a quarrel, but being in,
Bear 't that th' opposèd may beware of
thee.

Give every man thy ear but few thy voice.
Take each man's censure but reserve thy
judgment.

70 Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
But not expressed in fancy—rich, not
gaudy,

* For the apparel oft proclaims the man,
And they in France of the best rank and
station

Are of a most select and generous chief in
that.

* 75 Neither a borrower nor a lender be,
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of
husbandry.

* This above all: to thine own self be true,

79

3

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

MODERN TEXT

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.

And it must follow, as the night the day,
80Thou canst not then be false to any man.
Farewell. My blessing season this in thee.

LAERTES
Most humbly do I take my leave, my lord.

POLONIUS
The time invites you. Go. Your servants
tend.

LAERTES
Farewell, Ophelia, and remember well
85What I have said to you.

ORIGINAL TEXT

OPHELIA
'Tis in my memory locked,
And you yourself shall keep the key of it.

LAERTES
Farewell.

Exit LAERTES

POLONIUS
What is 't, Ophelia, he hath said to you?

OPHELIA
So please you, something touching the Lord
Hamlet.

POLONIUS
90Marry, well bethought.
'Tis told me he hath very oft of late
Given private time to you, and you yourself
Have of your audience been most free and
bounteous.
If it be so as so 'tis put on me—
95And that in way of caution—I must tell
you,
You do not understand yourself so clearly

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.

MODERN TEXT

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.

As it behooves my daughter and your honor.
What is between you? Give me up the truth.

OPHELIA

He hath, my lord, of late made many tenders
100 Of his affection to me.

POLONIUS

Affection! Pooh, you speak like a green girl,
Unsifted in such perilous circumstance.
Do you believe his "tenders," as you call them?

OPHELIA

I do not know, my lord, what I should think.

POLONIUS

105 Marry, I'll teach you. Think yourself a baby
That you have ta'en these tenders for true pay,
Which are not sterling. Tender yourself more dearly,
Or—not to crack the wind of the poor phrase,
Running it thus—you'll tender me a fool.

ORIGINAL TEXT

OPHELIA

110 My lord, he hath importuned me with love
In honorable fashion.

POLONIUS

Ay, "fashion" you may call it. Go to, go to.

OPHELIA

And hath given countenance to his speech, my lord,
With almost all the holy vows of heaven.

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.

MODERN TEXT

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

115 Ay, springes to catch woodcocks. I do
know,
When the blood burns, how prodigal the
soul
Lends the tongue vows. These blazes,
daughter,
Giving more light than heat, extinct in both
Even in their promise as it is a-making,
120 You must not take for fire. From this
time
Be somewhat scanter of your maiden
presence.
Set your entreatments at a higher rate
Than a command to parley. For Lord
Hamlet,
Believe so much in him that he is young,
125 And with a larger tether may he walk
Than may be given you. In few, Ophelia,
Do not believe his vows, for they are
brokers
Not of that dye which their investments
show,
But mere implorators of unholy suits,
130 Breathing like sanctified and pious
bawds,
The better to beguile. This is for all:
I would not, in plain terms, from this time
forth,
Have you so slander any moment leisure,
As to give words or talk with the Lord
Hamlet.
135 Look to 't, I charge you. Come your
ways.

OPHELIA

I shall obey, my lord.

Exeunt

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.