

## Act I

### Scene 1

*(Thunder. Enter four Guards and Bernardo.)*

BERNARDO. This way, my Lords.

*(Enter Albrecht, Eggert, Lords, and Bishops.)*

EGGERT. Ah, yes. There's that familiar scent of rotten eggs and pickled herring.

ALBRECHT. What? Is the air of Elsinore's throne room not pleasing to your senses, Eggert?

EGGERT. As pleasing as is spending time in your company, Albrecht.

ALBRECHT. Oh, how I've missed your wit, my Lord.

EGGERT. Only you could mistake insult for wit.

*(Flourish. Enter Hamlet, Gertrude, Wilhelmina, and Attendants. Hamlet carries a sack with something round inside.)*

HAMLET. Noble counterparts, trusted compatriots, dearest friends, fellow Danes ... Our Person is gladdened by your company.

LORDS. Very good, my Lord.

HAMELT. It is with great sorrow that I must inform you that our neighbour to the North has rejected Our kind advances and betrayed Our goodwill. How thankful Our Person is that those of you here today are in the possession of a more honourable quality than Fortinbras, that bastard brother of Norway. Have we not extended to him a great courtesy? And have we not also shown him a greater mercy still? *(Beat.)*

WILHELMINA. Look on them. Silent.

HAMLET. Have we not?

WILHELMINA. Silent as stone.

HAMLET. Will not one of you answer me?

WILHELMINA. Craven invertebrates.

HAMLET. Look at you! An idiot would make for better company than you lot. He, at least, would speak. Albrecht!

ALBRECHT. Yes, Your Majesty?

HAMLET. Oh, so you do speak?

ALBRECHT. Yes, Your Majesty.

HAMLET. Then tell me this, Lord of Aarhus: say there was a man who made a living out of raising cocks – they were the only sustenance available to him and his children... and say that a fox from the nearby wood took this cock-farmer's cocks to his liking... You must understand that in the circumstance of this hypothetical situation the fox had an abundance of voles and other creatures readily available to it in the comfort of its own habitat... Thus, the fox needed no cocks... Should the man permit the fox to continue stealing that which is his livelihood?

ALBRECHT. No, my Lord.

HAMLET. Should the man let his children starve in order to slake the fox's hunger?

WILHELMINA. No such person would be worthy of being called a man.

ALBRECHT. No, my Lord. T'would not be just.

HAMLET. If you were that man, Albrecht, what would you do?

ALBRECHT. Your Majesty, I would kill the fox.

HAMLET. You would kill the fox?

ALBRECHT. Yes, Your Majesty.

HAMLET. You? Albrecht? You would kill the fox?

ALBRECHT. My Lord, yes.

HAMLET. You would kill the fox for stealing your cocks?

ALBRECHT. Yes.

HAMLET. And you think such a course of action to be proper and just given the offence?

ALBRECHT. Indeed.

WILHELMINA. Well-spoken.

HAMLET. Yes, well-spoken, Albrecht. This is the course of justice, is it not? That each must repay his debts?

ALBRECHT. This is true, my Lord.

HAMLET. So naught but this course of action – the fox's death, I mean – should be expected from a just steward?

ALBRECHT. If a steward did nothing to ensure the prosperity of that which he was steward over, then he would not be just.

WILHELMINA. Nor would he be a steward. For a steward of nothing is no steward at all.

HAMLET. As I thought. And what, then, could be said of this man, should he simply erect barriers around his garden, keeping that which was his own property safe, and sparing the fox's life.

ALBRECHT. He has shown a great mercy to the fox, my Lord.

HAMLET. And what if he were to give the fox the scraps from his table by tossing them over the barrier?

ALBRECHT. Then he would be kinder man than I, Your Majesty.

HAMLET. Is he merciful?

ALBRECHT. More than any man I have met.

HAMLET. So, what, then, do you make of your King?

ALBRECHT. My Lord?

HAMLET. Is not your King like the man and Fortinbras like the fox?

ALBRECHT. One could look at it that way, yes.

HAMLET. Are not the cocks like the goods the Hansa bring from the East?

ALBRECHT. I suppose so.

HAMLET. Is it not right that we should profit from their shipment West, seeing as they must pass through our waters?

ALBRECHT. It is just, my Lord, that each man obtains that which he rightly deserves.

HAMLET. Should we let Fortinbras steal the profits which are rightly ours?

ALBRECHT. No, my Lord.

HAMLET. Is it then unjust that we have established a blockade in the Øresund Strait here at Elsinore?

ALBRECHT. No, Your Majesty.

HAMLET. Has Our Person not shown mercy and kindness to Fortinbras by allowing him – after his many years of thievery – to live? And – what is more – by granting him reduced customs duties at all of my peoples' ports?

ALBRECHT. Truly, my Lord, you have acted in accordance with the virtue of mercy.  
HAMLET. And is it true that one who acts in accordance with virtue possesses virtue?  
ALBRECHT. It is, my Lord.  
HAMLET. So, is your King merciful?  
ALBRECHT. Again, my Lord, more merciful than any man I have ever known.  
HAMLET. And how has Fortinbras repaid this merciful King?  
ALBRECHT. Your Majesty...  
HAMLET. He has raided a Danish merchant caravan from Fredericia as it rounded Skagen! The goods he took for himself and the wreckage he left adrift in the Skagerrak. And the Crews? He forcibly divorced the heads of the crews from their bodies! My people, you worthless cur! *(Hamlet reaches into his sack and pulls out a disembodied head, which he holds up for the entire congregation to see.)* This is how my mercy is met. Do you not think that virtue is wasted on such bastard blackguards as Fortinbras?  
WILHELMINA. Is the finest cooked lamb wasted on a pack of wild dogs? *(Hamlet turns and addresses Wilhelmina directly. The people gathered seem to grow in discomfort.)*  
HAMLET. Certainly.  
WILHELMINA. Then, yes, your virtue is wasted.  
HAMLET. If my virtue is wasted, what should I do?  
WILHELMINA. Claim what debts he owes you.  
HAMLET. He owes me a pretty price.  
WILHELMINA. For someone that will not accept virtue, what else can be done?  
HAMLET. Nothing. Nothing can be done but claim flesh for flesh.  
EGGERT. What does the King speak with?  
ALBRECHT. With nothing but air.  
GERTRUDE. My Lord!  
WILHELMINA. Remember, Hamlet; if you disclose my presence, they shall think you mad and all will be lost. *(Hamlet turns back to the assembled party.)*  
HAMLET. Would you judge me for gathering my thoughts? Or do you have so little faith in your King that you think my ponderings to be signs of madness.  
LORDS. No, my Lord.  
HAMLET. Good.  
WILHELMINA. Well spoken.  
HAMLET. Then speak no more of it. We have far more pressing matters to attend to than my eccentricities. You see, there is a Judas among you.  
EGGERT. A Judas, my Lord?  
HAMLET. Oh yes. And he has already betrayed his nation and claimed his thirty pieces.  
EGGERT. Who, Your Majesty?  
HAMLET. Is the villain?  
EGGERT. Yes, my Lord.  
HAMLET. Albrecht, would you like to tell them? Or shall I? *(Beat.)*  
ALBRECHT. Your Majesty, I do not understand... I have nothing to tell.  
HAMLET. Is that so?  
ALBRECHT. Yes, Your Majesty.  
HAMLET. Are you certain?  
ALBRECHT. Yes!  
HAMLET. Are you honest?

ALBRECHT. Do you doubt my honesty?

WILHELMINA. Yes.

HAMLET. Yes.

ALBRECHT. My Lord, I should sooner have my tongue plucked from my mouth and burned than become a dishonest man.

HAMLET. Be careful. That may yet be arranged.

ALBRECHT. Very well. If there is a charge against me, let it be heard – seeing as you seem to know my faults better than I myself do. Elsewise let me go, for I do not wish to be slandered any longer.

LORDS. He speaks well. Let us hear the charge.

HAMLET. Right! The charge is – I'll amend myself – the *charges* are this: collusion with those who seek to bring harm to the Danish people, accessory to murder, and treason. Yes, I think that about sums it up.

WILHELMINA. Agreed.

ALBRECHT. You really are mad.

HAMLET. No. I'm not. I am not mad.

ALBRECHT. Right then, what proof do you have to sustain these claims?

HAMLET. Bernardo! (*Bernardo crosses to Hamlet.*)

BERNARDO. Yes, Your Highness.

HAMLET. Do you have the letter?

BERNARDO. Yes, my Lord, here. (*Bernardo hands a letter to Hamlet.*)

HAMLET. Thank you, sirrah.

BERNARDO. Good, my Lord. (*Bernardo crosses back to his station at the side of the hall.*)

ALBRECHT. And what is this?

HAMLET. Words, Albrecht. Words. Such power in words. It is a letter. Intercepted by my man as it was being delivered to the Lord of Aarhus a week ago. It reads, *My faithful friend, I thank you for the valuable information regarding Skagen. You shall soon be compensated for information.* Signed, *F.* (*Beat.*) How curious that a mere three days after this piece of paper was obtained, my ships are ransacked by Norwegian whoresons just north of the exact port mentioned.

ALBRECHT. Is this your damning evidence?

HAMLET. Did not the caravan in question make port at Aarhus before departing for the Skagerrak?

ALBRECHT. It did. To trade. And would I could go back I would have implored them to stay a while longer.

HAMLET. You knew, then, when they were departing?

ALBRECHT. ...Yes.

HAMLET. And knew their course?

ALBRECHT. What ship sails from Fredericia to Aarhus if it does not make for the Skagerrak? I hardly see how this is—

HAMLET. So, you knew they were rounding Skagen-

ALBRECHT. Yes.

HAMLET. And then are sent a letter, signed by *F.*, thanking you for valuable information concerned with Skagen-

ALBRECHT. That's what you say.

HAMLET. And then within the next week, the ships which you knew were rounding Skagen were destroyed by Fortinbras's men. My lords, I fail to see how this could be mistaken for anything other than treachery.

ALBRECHT. Your Majesty is out of order!

HAMLET. Am I out of order?

LORDS. No. He is a traitor!

HAMLET. How much was it?

ALBRECHT. I will not stand for this.

HAMLET. How much did Fortinbras offer you for your perfidy? Thirty silver pieces?

ALBRECHT. My Lords, do not believe a word from this lying madman!

HAMLET. You abuse your station, betray your kinsmen, have them killed and their goods stolen, and you eat the crumbs off the murderous thief's plate.

ALBRECHT. I do not!

HAMLET. You really are a model for nobility, aren't you?

ALBRECHT. I am an honourable man!

HAMLET. No. Men like you... you're a putrid pile of human excrement: fit only for worm-food.

ALBRECHT. You are a fool, Hamlet.

HAMLET. I'm not the one who leaves his letters out to dry.

ALBRECHT. I will—

HAMLET. What? You'll what?

ALBRECHT. I swear on my life I will—

HAMLET. Then do it. (*Albrecht attacks Hamlet and they fight. Hamlet, after gaining the upper hand, holds Albrecht at his mercy.*) What now? Shall I show mercy? Shall I waste my waning virtue on this endless liar?

WILHELMINA. Blood for blood. Flesh for flesh.

HAMLET. No. I shall have what I am owed. And as this rotten turncoat has given up his brothers' lives, so too shall he give up his own.

GERTRUDE. My Lord.

HAMLET. Blood for blood.

GERTRUDE. My Lord!

HAMLET. Flesh for flesh. (*Hamlet kills Albrecht and then turns to the nobles.*) Now, my good sirs, there is much to be done. From this point on, any Norwegian vessels seeking to trade for goods at a port in our Union shall pay double the normal Customs Duties.

LORDS. Very good, my Lord. (*Exit Lords.*)

HAMLET. Eggert. (*Stay Eggert.*)

EGGERT. My Lord.

HAMLET. Take your ships in Grenaa and patrol the Kattegat for a fortnight. If you happen upon any Norwegian vessel, burn it. This is how Fortinbras shall repay his debt.

EGGERT. It will be done. (*Eggert exits, leaving the stage bare except for the body of Albrecht, the guards, Gertrude, Hamlet, and Wilhelmina. Gertrude stands and beckons to Bernardo.*)

GERTRUDE. Sirrah.

BERNARDO. Your Majesty.

GERTRUDE. Gather your men and dispose of this mess.

BERNARDO. Yes, Your Majesty. Right. To the gravediggers with this one. (*All the guards but Bernardo exit, carrying the lifeless body of Albrecht.*)

GERTRUDE. *(To Bernardo.)* Leave us.  
BERNARDO. Very good, Your Majesty. *(Exit Bernardo.)*  
GERTRUDE. You also.  
ATTENDANTS. Yes, Your Majesty. *(Exit Attendants.)*  
GERTRUDE. Hamlet.  
HAMLET. What?  
GERTRUDE. What in the bleeding hell was that?  
HAMLET. What?  
GERTRUDE. What do you mean what?  
HAMLET. My Queen, if you have a complaint, you shall need more specific in describing it. “*what*” could apply to so many different things.  
GERTRUDE. You know very well what!  
WILHELMINA. Ah, the treasonous cur.  
HAMLET. What? Executing a traitor?  
GERTRUDE. A lord.  
WILHELMINA. Hardly.  
HAMLET. A traitor.  
GERTRUDE. In our throne room?  
WILHELMINA. Is she worried about the stone floors?  
HAMLET. It will be cleaned.  
GERTRUDE. With a letter as your evidence?  
HAMLET. It was more than a letter.  
GERTRUDE. In front of the whole court like an animal sent to slaughter!  
WILHELMINA. Was he not?  
HAMLET. A traitor is little more than a beast, Lord though he may be.  
GERTRUDE. Such actions, methinks, are unseemly for Kings.  
HAMLET. This is not about me.  
GERTRUDE. Oh? What’s it about then? Go on. Do tell me.  
HAMLET. It is about them.  
GERTRUDE. Them?  
HAMLET. Yes. This is about the Lords. What? You think I would do such things for myself?  
GERTRUDE. I don’t know. Would you? I don’t know why you do many of the things you do currently.  
WILHELMINA. What a shame: I thought I raised a more perceptive daughter.  
HAMLET. I do it for the people.  
GERTRUDE. The people?  
HAMLET. For Denmark.  
GERTRUDE. Do not lie to me Hamlet Hansson. I do not take kindly to being lied to.  
HAMLET. I do not lie.  
GERTRUDE. I don’t believe you.  
WILHELMINA. Is she truly so utterly blind?  
HAMLET. Can you not see?  
GERTRUDE. See what?  
HAMLET. Too long have they acted without regard to those who might suffer.  
GERTRUDE. Spare me your self-righteous soliloquies, King.

HAMLET. I am honest! Times are not what they were. New considerations for the welfare of the people must be made.

GERTRUDE. The people are fine.

HAMLET. They are not—I swear you've gone deaf.

GERTRUDE. I've gone deaf? Look around, Hamlet-King! Look at what you have given your people! What cause have they to be discontented?

HAMLET. They have every cause!

GERTRUDE. Are they not wealthier now than they have been in a hundred years?

WILHELMINA. Is not a slave in the house of a rich man still a slave?

HAMLET. It is not just about wealth, Gertrude.

GERTRUDE. Then what is it about? Is it about proving yourself to the people? Making them love you? Is that what this is about?

HAMLET. No!

WILHELMINA. I really did raise an imperceptive fool.

HAMLET. You know, I don't think you'd listen if I told you.

GERTRUDE. Oh, so your motives you keep to yourself, now?

HAMLET. Why would I waste my breath telling them to someone who is incapable of hearing? Be like talking to thin air.

GERTRUDE. You seemed perfectly apt to that earlier.

HAMLET. What?

GERTRUDE. You know very well what I am referring to.

WILHELMINA. Tell her nothing.

HAMLET. What? Taking an aside like a player in a play?

WILHELMINA. How very theatrical.

GERTRUDE. Speaking to nothing.

WILHELMINA. Not to nothing.

HAMLET. As I have already said, I was merely collecting my thoughts.

GERTRUDE. That's not what it looked like.

HAMLET. Well, that is what it was. I am sorry if you are dissatisfied with reality.

GERTRUDE. Hamlet, will you not tell your wife what troubles you?

HAMLET. I am not troubled.

GERTRUDE. Are you well?

WILHELMINA. The epitome of health.

GERTRUDE. If you are not well, I would that you would tell me. I can do nothing to help you if I do not know what troubles your mind.

HAMLET. Can a King not sort out his thoughts before addressing his court?

GERTRUDE. I have no doubt that he can. But-

HAMLET. Then why do you think me ill?

GERTRUDE. I do not know.

HAMLET. You do not know?

GERTRUDE. I have a feeling.

HAMLET. And I suppose fact is determined by feeling now?

GERTRUDE. No, but—

HAMLET. But what?

GERTRUDE. I feel as though something is wrong, Hamlet!

HAMLET. Then you are as stupid as you are deaf.

GERTRUDE. It does not do for a King to be seen as a clown, babbling to himself in front of his nobles. *(Exit Gertrude. Hamlet turns to Wilhelmina.)*

HAMLET. Must you intrude on every conversation?

WILHELMINA. Do you not enjoy my presence?

HAMLET. Not always.

WILHELMINA. Well, that's too bad isn't it? Come now; the chapel bell is rings: there is much to be done. *(Beat.)* Hamlet. We have work to do.

HAMLET. Very good, Mor. *(Exit Hamlet and Wilhelmina.)*

## Scene 2

*(Flourish. Enter Polonius and Claudius.)*

POLONIUS. My Lord Claudius, welcome back to Helsingborg.

CLAUDIUS. Thank you, Polonius. I trust you've kept it well in my absence?

POLONIUS. I should be hanged if I did not, my Lord.

CLAUDIUS. My good Polonius, I see you have well maintained your love of life which takes precedent over all other things.

POLONIUS. My Lord?

CLAUDIUS. Never mind.

POLONIUS. Ah, very good my Lord. I see you've well maintained your wit.

CLAUDIUS. Indeed.

POLONIUS. How goes your business in Stockholm?

CLAUDIUS. Well, I think.

POLONIUS. Well?

CLAUDIUS. Yes. My brother was wise to appoint Alboldus as steward: if one can command respect in times of war it is certain he can also do so in peace and stillness. That I had doubt in him because of his station, I do regret.

POLONIUS. Aye my lord. But who would blame you for questioning the ability of a vassal?

CLAUDIUS. True. It is not often that one of such a lowly status should achieve such an office.

POLONIUS. 'Tis a far happier day when disappointment pairs with skepticism than with optimism.

CLAUDIUS. Right you are. And how is Helsingborg?

POLONIUS. Good, my Lord.

CLAUDIUS. And the blockade?

POLONIUS. Holding fast.

CLAUDIUS. Good. And you?

POLONIUS. Holding fast.

CLAUDIUS. Holding fast?

POLONIUS. Yes, my Lord.

CLAUDIUS. What current rages against you that you must resist it so?

POLONIUS. Time, my Lord.

CLAUDIUS. Time?

POLONIUS. Time.



CLAUDIUS. I must admit, I didn't take you for one so close to death that life itself was a struggle. Then again, how could I have missed something so plainly evident as the stink which rises from your rotting corpse? Shall I send for the Bishop?

POLONIUS. The Bishop?

CLAUDIUS. Yes. To perform your last rites.

POLONIUS. Ah, yes. Most generous of you.

CLAUDIUS. I do try.

POLONIUS. And I thank you for it. No, what time brings – what I speak of – is a thing far more terrifying than death.

CLAUDIUS. Than death? What on earth could the passage of time bear that would instill more fear in the heart of a noble man than the fate of being separated from life?

POLONIUS. Ophelia is nearly a woman, now.

CLAUDIUS. Ah. Yes. That'd do it.

POLONIUS. And she has grown quite silent – and all but withdrawn from the world – since your nephew departed for Wittenburg.

CLAUDIUS. I pity you and wish you well, my friend. A daughter's passion is a tempestuous thing.

POLONIUS. Thank you, my Lord. (*Enter Wrangle.*)

WRANGE. Hail, Prince of Denmark. Forgive my intrusion.

CLAUDIUS. Wrangle!

POLONIUS. Lord Wrangle?

CLAUDIUS. My Lord, what brings you here from Odense so unannounced?

WRANGE. My Lord, I heard you had returned and...I shan't mince words: Albrecht is dead.

CLAUDIUS. What?

POLONIUS. Lord Albrecht? Dead?

CLAUDIUS. How?

WRANGE. Yesternight, your brother the King killed him in front of the whole assembly of the Crown.

CLAUDIUS. You jest.

WRANGE. I wish that I were.

POLONIUS. Why, my lord?

CLAUDIUS. What cause did Hamlet give for such an act?

WRANGE. Treason.

CLAUDIUS. In what way was the Lord of Aarhus treasonous?

WRANGE. Letters were intercepted disclosing an agreement between the Lord of Bergen and Albrecht.

POLONIUS. Albrecht was in collusion with Fortinbras?

WRANGE. That was the charge.

POLONIUS. Treacherous devil!

WRANGE. Sirrah, might I have a word with your Lord?

POLONIUS. Very good, my Lord. (*Exit Claudius.*)

WRANGE. My Lord, methinks the King is unwell.

CLAUDIUS. What? Unwell? What do you mean by unwell?

WRANGE. Claudius, your brother seemed possessed by some mad fury.

CLAUDIUS. Fury is but his temperament. And should he not be rightly angry when betrayed by a member of his own court?

WRANGE. I have been in his company before and am quite familiar with his temperament. This was not his normal self. He toyed with Albrecht like a cat does its prey and when he pounced there was some devilish gleam in his eye.

CLAUDIUS. I know he tends towards a choleric humour, but I assure you that he is not beholden to it.

WRANGE. He spoke to a spectre.

CLAUDIUS. What?

WRANGE. He spoke to a spectre while addressing the court.

CLAUDIUS. A spectre?

WRANGE. Yes. All those assembled witnessed it. In the midst of interrogating Albrecht, some presence in the ether called his attention elsewhere.

CLAUDIUS. You are certain?

WRANGE. I know what I saw.

CLAUDIUS. That is cause for concern.

WRANGE. My Lord, I am worried that his actions are not entirely his own.

CLAUDIUS. You think something maleficent is at play?

WRANGE. I do not wish to assume—

CLAUDIUS. And yet you do.

WRANGE. But I would not do so unless I thought it necessary. When dealing with a king, to be skeptic is to be well-prepared.

CLAUDIUS. This is my brother you speak of.

WRANGE. Indeed. But is it not so that your brother – the King – has made some questionable decisions of late? Certainly, the blockade was a tremendous victory over our economic rivals, no honest man would dispute that; but to grant vassals the station of Lords as recompense for service? Does this seem like the work of a man who is in his right mind?

CLAUDIUS. Lord Wrangle, might it be that you overstep?

WRANGE. Do you not see? He has bought the loyalty of men like Alboldus: they have sworn fealty to him and will not dare rise against him! Sweden is his to do with as he well pleases.

CLAUDIUS. That is enough.

WRANGE. He continually seizes power for himself and does not part with it, he ignores the procedures of our parliament, and spills the blood of nobles on Elsinore's stones: My Lord, I would not dare to voice such concerns were they unfounded!

CLAUDIUS. Thank you, Wrangle. You may go.

WRANGE. My Lord—

CLAUDIUS. Your fearmongering has quite exhausted my hospitality and now I must implore you to leave me be.

WRANGE. Mark my words, Claudius: The King is ill. (*Exit Wrangle.*)

CLAUDIUS. That men should think they truly know the hearts of one another: they are but fools. Each man is but his own. And that which we perceive is not always what is true: Each man doth search for things which suit his fancy or disgust. The honest nature of a soul is cloaked by blinded vision. So how, now, shall I believe these claims against my brother? Is he not an honourable man? Sirrah! (*Enter Attendant.*)

ATTENDANT. My lord?

CLAUDIUS. Send word to my brother. Tell him I have returned and that I would have an audience with His Majesty.

ATTENDANT. Good, my Lord. (*Exit Attendant.*)

CLAUDIUS. Now I shall see if madness therein lies. (*Exit Claudius.*)