

Start

HAMLET. Go to, I'll no more on't; it hath made me mad! *(She falls on her knees weeping.)* I say we will have no more marriage! *(His voice drops to in lude the TRAGEDIANS, who have frozen.)* Those that are married already— *(He leans close to the PLAYER-QUEEN and POISONER, speaking with quiet edge.)* all but one shall live. *(He smiles briefly at them without mirth, and starts to back out, his parting shot rising again.)* The rest shall keep as they are. *(As he leaves, OPHELIA tottering Upstage, he speaks into her ear a quick clipped sentence.)* To a nunnery, go.

(He goes out. OPHELIA falls on to her knees Upstage, her sobs barely audible. A slight silence.)

PLAYER-KING. Full thirty times hath Phoebus' cart—

(CLAUDIUS enters with POLONIUS and goes over to OPHELIA and lifts her to her feet. The TRAGEDIANS jump back with heads inclined.)

CLAUDIUS.

Love? His affections do not that way tend,
Or what he spake, though it lacked form a little,
Was not like madness. There's something
In his soul o'er which his melancholy sits on
Brood, and I do doubt the hatch and the
Disclose will be some danger; which for to
Prevent I have in quick determination thus set
It down: he shall with speed to England . . .

(Which carries the three of them—CLAUDIUS, POLONIUS, OPHELIA—out of sight. The PLAYER moves, clapping his hands for attention.)

PLAYER. Gentlemen! *(They look at him.)* It doesn't seem to be coming. We are not getting it at all. *(To GUIL.)* What did you think?

GUIL. What was I supposed to think?

PLAYER. (*To TRAGEDIANS.*) You're not getting across!

(*Ros had gone halfway up to OPHELIA; he returns.*)

Ros. That didn't look like love to me.

GUIL. Starting from scratch again . . .

PLAYER. Act Two! Positions!

GUIL. Wasn't that the end?

PLAYER. Do you call that an ending?—with practically everyone on his feet? My goodness no—over your dead body. (*He laughs briefly and in a second seems never to have laughed in his life.*) There's a design at work in all art—surely you know that? Events must play themselves out to aesthetic, moral and logical conclusion.

GUIL. And what's that, in this case?

PLAYER. It never varies—we aim at the point where everyone who is marked for death dies.

GUIL. Marked?

PLAYER. Between "just deserts" and "tragic irony" we are given quite a lot of scope for our particular talent. Generally speaking, things have gone about as far as they can possibly go when things have got about as bad as they reasonably get. (*He switches on a smile.*)

GUIL. Who decides?

PLAYER. (*Switching off his smile.*) Decides? It is written. (*He turns away. GUIL grabs him and spins him back violently. Unflustered.*) [Now if you're going to be subtle, we'll miss each other in the dark. I'm referring to oral tradition. So to speak. (*GUIL releases him.*)] We're tragedians, you see. We follow directions—there is no choice involved. The bad end unhappily, the good un-
luckily. That is what tragedy means. (*Calling.*) Positions! (*The TRAGEDIANS have taken up positions for the continuation of the mime: which in this case means a love scene, sexual and passionate, between the QUEEN and the POISONER/KING.*) Go! (*MUSIC CUE H. The lovers begin. The PLAYER contributes a breathless commentary for*

End