

worry—take my word for it—] (*Looks out—is appalled.*)
He's coming!

Start

GUIL. What's he doing?

Ros. Walking.

GUIL. Alone?

Ros. No.

GUIL. Who's with him?

Ros. The old man.

GUIL. Walking?

Ros. No.

GUIL. Not walking?

Ros. No.

GUIL. Ah. That's an opening if ever there was one.
(*And is suddenly galvanized into action.*) Let him walk
into the trap!

Ros. What trap?

GUIL. You stand there! Don't let him pass!

(*He positions Ros with his back to one Wing, facing
HAMLET'S entrance. GUIL positions himself next to
Ros, a few feet away, so that they are covering one
side of the Stage, facing the opposite side. GUIL un-
fastens his belt. Ros does the same. They join the
two belts, and hold them taut between them. Ros's
trousers slide slowly down. HAMLET enters opposite,
slowly, dragging POLONIUS'S body. He enters Up-
stage, makes a small arc and leaves by the same side,
a few feet Downstage. Ros and GUIL, holding the
belts taut, stare at him in some bewilderment. HAM-
LET leaves, dragging the body. They relax the strain
on the belts.*)

Ros. That was close.

GUIL. There's a limit to what two people can do.

(*They undo the belts: Ros pulls up his trousers.*)

Ros. (*Worriedly—he walks a few paces towards HAM-
LET'S exit.*) He was dead.

GUIL. Of course he's dead!

ROS. (*Turns to GUIL.*) Properly.

GUIL. (*Angrily.*) Death's death, isn't it? (*Ros falls silent. Pause.*) Perhaps he'll come back this way. (*Ros starts to take off his belt.*) No, no, no!—if we can't learn by experience, what else have we got? (*Ros desists. Pause.*)

ROS. Give him a shout.

GUIL. I thought we'd been into all that.

ROS. (*Shouts.*) Hamlet!

GUIL. Don't be absurd.

ROS. (*Shouts.*) Lord Hamlet! (*HAMLET enters. Ros is a little dismayed.*) What have you done, my lord, with the dead body?

HAMLET. Compounded it with dust, whereto 'tis kin.

ROS. Tell us where 'tis, that we may take it thence and bear it to the chapel.

HAMLET. Do not believe it.

ROS. Believe what?

HAMLET. That I can keep your counsel and not mine own. Besides, to be demanded of a sponge, what replication should be made by the son of a king?

ROS. Take you me for a sponge, my lord?

HAMLET. Ay, sir, that soaks up the King's countenance, his rewards, his authorities. But such officers do the King best service in the end. He keeps them, like an ape, in the corner of his jaw, first mouthed, to be last swallowed. When he needs what you have gleaned, it is but squeezing you and, sponge, you shall be dry again.

ROS. I understand you not, my lord.

HAMLET. I am glad of it: a knavish speech sleeps in a foolish ear.

ROS. My lord, you must tell us where the body is and go with us to the King.

HAMLET. The body is with the King, but the King is not with the body. The King is a thing—

GUIL. A thing, my lord—?

HAMLET. Of nothing. Bring me to him.

(HAMLET moves resolutely towards one Wing. They move with him, shepherding. Just before they reach the exit, HAMLET, apparently seeing CLAUDIUS approaching from Offstage, bends low in a sweeping bow. ROS and GUIL, cued by Hamlet, also bow deeply—a sweeping ceremonial bow with their cloaks swept round them. HAMLET, however, continues the movement into an about-turn and walks off in the opposite direction. ROS and GUIL, with their heads low, do not notice. No one comes on. ROS and GUIL squint upwards and find that they are bowing to nothing. CLAUDIUS enters behind them. At his first words they leap up and do a double-take.)

CLAUDIUS. How now? What hath befallen?

ROS. Where the body is bestowed, my lord, we cannot get from him.

CLAUDIUS. But where is he?

ROS. (*Fractional hesitation.*) Without, my lord; guarded to know your pleasure.

CLAUDIUS. (*Moves.*) Bring him before us.

(*This hits ROS between the eyes but only his eyes show it. Again his hesitation is fractional. And then with great deliberation he turns to GUIL.*)

ROS. Ho! Bring in the lord. (*Again there is a fractional moment in which ROS is smug, GUIL is trapped and betrayed. GUIL opens his mouth and closes it. The situation is saved: HAMLET, escorted, is marched in just as CLAUDIUS leaves. HAMLET and his ESCORT cross the stage and go out, following CLAUDIUS.]] LIGHTING changes to Exterior. ROS moves to go.*) All right, then?

GUIL. (*Does not move; thoughtfully.*) And yet it doesn't seem enough; to have breathed such significance. Can that be all? And why us?—anybody would have done. And we have contributed nothing.

ROS. It was a trying episode while it lasted, but they've done with us now.

GUIL. Done what?

ROS. I don't pretend to have understood. Frankly, I'm not very interested. If they won't tell us, that's their affair. (*He wanders Upstage towards the exit.*) For my part, I'm only glad that that's the last we've seen of him— (*And he glances Offstage and turns front, his face betraying the fact that HAMLET is there.*)

GUIL. I knew it wasn't the end. . . .

ROS. (*High.*) What else?!

GUIL. We're taking him to England. What's he doing?

(*Ros goes Upstage and returns.*)

ROS. Talking.

GUIL. To himself? (*Ros makes to go, GUIL cuts him off.*) Is he alone?

ROS. No, he's with a soldier.

GUIL. Then he's not talking to himself, is he?

ROS. Not by himself. . . . Should we go?

GUIL. Where?

ROS. Anywhere.

GUIL. Why?

ROS. (*He puts up his head listening.*) There it is again. [*In anguish.*] All I ask is a change of ground!

GUIL. (*Coda.*) Give us this day our daily round. . . .]

(*HAMLET enters behind them, talking with a SOLDIER in arms. Ros and GUIL don't look round.*)

ROS. They'll have us hanging about till we're dead. At least. And the weather will change. (*Looks up.*) The spring can't last for ever.

HAMLET. Good sir, whose powers are these?

SOLDIER. They are of Norway, sir.

HAMLET. How purposed, sir, I pray you?

SOLDIER. Against some part of Poland.

HAMLET. Who commands them, sir?

SOLDIER. The nephew to old Norway, Fortinbras.

ROS. We'll be cold. The summer won't last.

GUIL. It's autumnal.

GUIL. (*Examining the ground.*) No leaves.

GUIL. Autumnal—no'ing to do with leaves. It is to do with a certain brownness at the edges of the day. . . . Brown is creeping up on us, take my word for it. . . . Russets and tangerine shades of old gold flushing the very outside edge of the senses . . . deep shining ochres, burnt umber and parchments of baked earth—reflecting on itself and through itself, filtering the light. At such times, perhaps, coincidentally, the leaves might fall, somewhere, by repute. Yesterday was blue, like smoke.

ROS. (*Head up, listening.*) I got it again then.

(MUSIC CUE 1.)

(*They listen—faintest sound of TRAGEDIANS' BAND.*)

HAMLET. I humbly thank you, sir.

SOLDIER. God by you, sir. (*Exits.*)

(*Ros gets up quickly and goes to HAMLET.*)

ROS. Will it please you go, my lord?

HAMLET. I'll be with you straight. Go you a little before.

(*HAMLET turns to face Upstage. ROS returns down. GUIL faces front, doesn't turn.*)

GUIL. Is he there?

ROS. Yes.

GUIL. What's he doing?

ROS. (*He looks over his shoulder.*) Talking.

GUIL. To himself?

ROS. Yes. (*Pause. Ros makes to leave. MUSIC CUE # 10.*) He said we can go. Cross my heart.

GUIL. I like to know where I am. Even if I don't know

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where I am, I like to know *that*. If we go there's no knowing.

ROS. No knowing what?

GUIL. If we'll ever come back.

ROS. We don't want to come back.

GUIL. That may very well be true, but do we want to go?

ROS. We'll be free.

GUIL. I don't know. It's the same sky.

ROS. We've come this far. (*He moves towards exit.*

GUIL *follows him.*) And besides, anything could happen yet.

(*They go.*)

BLACKOUT

End