

Ophelia Chooses

by

Buddy White

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Ophelia Chooses**Copyright© 2022 Buddy White****CAST:**

CLAUDIUS: King of Denmark, late 30s – 50s

GERTRUDE: Queen of Denmark, late 30s – 50s

HAMLET: Prince of Denmark, early 20s

LAERTES: Nobleman of Denmark, early 20s

WOMAN (who becomes FAY): a feminist from the future, age unimportant

OPHELIA: Noblewoman of Denmark, mid to late teens

POLONIUS: Lord of Denmark, 40 – 50

MAN (who becomes SHAKESPEARE): famous playwright, ageless

THE SET: a Shakespearean stage of a production of *Hamlet*, as bare as a wooden “O” or as ornate as the production desires. There is a grave, movable or fixed.

NOTE 1: Slashes (/) are used to indicate the ends of phrases in iambic pentameter when the characters so speak. Often, one character will finish another’s started meter. The slash indicates the end of the pentameter. Single lines of iambic pentameter do not always have a slash. Neither do lines that are not iambic pentameter.

NOTE 2: The script indicates that the action of *Hamlet* continues silently beneath the scenes between Ophelia and Fay. In its inaugural production, Fay had the power to freeze the characters and reanimate them at will. Feel free to use either choice as befits your staging. Other elements of the first production included the use of frozen “snapshots” to both establish the opening scene and to point up the final deaths and Ophelia’s farewells. These were all production choices, artfully managed, and submitted for your approval, to utilize or ignore as best fits your vision.

OPHELIA CHOOSES was developed in part by the Zeiders American Dream Theater, Virginia Beach, Virginia and was first presented by the Zeiders American Dream Theater on February 16, 2022. The staff at the Zeiders American Dream Theater included Executive Director Terry S. Flint and Artistic Director Barton Kuebler. OPHELIA CHOOSES was directed by Sarah Norris; the technical director was Akin Ritchie; the scenic design was by Erin Morales; the lighting design was by Christina Tang; the sound design was by Carsen Joenk; and the costume design was by Katelyn Jackson. Casting was by Emel Ertugrul; the fight choreography was by Miguel Girona; the properties manager was Tiara Dimond; the production manager and head carpenter was Kurtis Wiley; the assistant stage manager was Suzanne Finnerty; and the production stage manager was Kim Fuller.

The cast was as follows:

OPHELIA	Felicia Fields
WOMAN (who becomes FAY)	Selena Gill
HAMLET.....	Nick Nauert
POLONIUS	Miguel Girona
GERTRUDE	Sibel Galindez
CLAUDIUS	Brad Breckenridge
LAERTES	Tré Porchia
MAN (who becomes SHAKESPEARE)	Patrick C. Taylor

OPHELIA CHOOSES

SCENE 1

At Rise: Lights rise on a scene of agitation. There is a commotion behind a mound of earth - onlookers attempt to separate two fighters while others watch in distress. A woman, in Renaissance garb references, oddly, a worn paperback. We hear a few lines, vaguely.

GERTRUDE: Pluck them asunder.

CLAUDIUS: Hamlet, Hamlet!

(Indeed, we are at the end of Act 5, Scene 1 of *Hamlet*. Claudius separates Laertes and Hamlet.)

HAMLET: Why I will fight with him upon this theme / Until my eyelids will no longer wag.

GERTRUDE: O my son, what theme?

HAMLET: I loved Ophelia: forty thousand brothers / Could not, with all their quantity of love, / Make up my sum. What wilt thou do for her?

CLAUDIUS: O, he is mad, Laertes.

GERTRUDE: For love of God, forbear him.

HAMLET: 'Swounds, show me what thou'lt do: / Woo't weep? woo't fight? . . .

(At this, Laertes makes for Hamlet; both are restrained. The lines continue, muffled to our ears. See prefatory production note.)

WOMAN: Yep. Act Five, Scene One. (Rolling her eyes) Boys.

(Her presence is unnoted by the others.)

HAMLET: (Audible again) . . . The cat will mew and dog will have his day.

(He exits, followed by Gertrude. Laertes starts after him, but is restrained by Claudius.)

CLAUDIUS: Strengthen your patience in our last night's speech; / We'll put the matter to the present push.

LAERTES: Too much of water hast thou, Ophelia / And therefore I forbid my tears. Adieu.

(They exit. Alone, the woman picks up a skull from the mound.)

WOMAN: Alas, poor Yorick. A rewrite of this piece is *long* overdue. Rest easy; I am here. (She unceremoniously flips the skull onto the mound and peers into the grave.) Uh, you can come out now. The coast is clear. Ollie-ollie oxen free. (Pause) They've all left you, sister.

(Slowly, Ophelia rises. We see her head above the mound. She is perplexed.)

OPHELIA: Where am I now? I prithee, tell me, maid.

WOMAN: Standing in your grave. You're dead, you know.

OPHELIA: I do not on me feel the pull of death.

WOMAN: Yeah, well if you don't get up, they'll come back and pelt you with dirt. (Ophelia scrambles over the mound, terrified.) Relax. The worst is over. Maybe. For you, I mean. All this trudges on to a bloodbath. You should be happy you drowned. Nowhere near as messy as the other deaths.

OPHELIA: Drownéd? How? I do not recollect it.

WOMAN: You weren't really in the best frame of mind. Cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs. (Ophelia does not comprehend.) Thou wert mad, maid.

OPHELIA: O, wherefore should it be that I grew mad?

WOMAN: For the worst of reasons. The loss of a man is no reason to kill yourself.

OPHELIA: A suicide? I?

WOMAN: Of course, some believe it an accident, but the church saw evidence to give you a bargain burial.

OPHELIA: But if my life I took by mine own hand, / Salvation's promise true have I forsook. (Hopefully) Are you from Heaven, come to bear me thence, / or 'haps an angel sent to give me hope?

WOMAN: I don't really put much stock in heaven and angels.

OPHELIA: Then devil must you be, to drag me down / to torment dire that has no end in sight.

WOMAN: I've been called a lot of names, but "devil's" a new one. Stop crying, Ophelia. I'm not here to haul you to hell.

OPHELIA: (Defiantly) If devil you deny, then pray explain. / You call my name, and yet I know you not.

WOMAN: Feisty! Let's use some of that spunk to your benefit. You need a life. We're going to—

OPHELIA: I'st possible? Such pow'r exists to kindle / Life again? A fairy must you be!

WOMAN: Since you insist on making me a mythical creature, let's go with fairy. Now, --

OPHELIA: And what am I to call you, fairy bright?

WOMAN: How about . . . Titania? Let's get star—

OPHELIA: Titania? You are the fairies' queen! (Ophelia bows.)

WOMAN: Well, thank you, but: no. No bowing. No queen. This is about my fixing things, and your independence.

OPHELIA: Independence?

WOMAN: Where I come from, we have the right to assert ourselves. "I am woman, hear me roar."

OPHELIA: Then you are an Amazon! Noble race! / Methinks I must call you Hippolyta.

WOMAN: Nope. She was also a queen. And "Hippolyta" doesn't exactly flow off the tongue.

OPHELIA: I could cut it short and call you "Hippo".

WOMAN: Not feelin' it. If I'm to be a fairy, why don't you call me . . . Fay?

OPHELIA: Then tell me, Fay, the reason you are here.

FAY: Thought you'd never ask. Ophelia, you define "doormat". I'm here for your re-do.

OPHELIA: Re-do?

FAY: Not just in the sense of a personality make-over, though we're going to do that, too. The re-do I'm talking about is an opportunity to go back and revisit the moments that got you into this mess. You're getting a second chance.

OPHELIA: So, I am damned to live it all again? / Zounds! You are a devil!

FAY: Not relive it as it happened. I'm going to coach you, teach you to stand up for what you want.

OPHELIA: Wilt that not serve to anger my betters?

FAY: Betters? You've got to come a long way, baby. Who are these "betters"?

OPHELIA: King Claudius, Queen Gertrude, my father / And my brother and, of course, Prince Hamlet.

FAY: Whoa. What puts them at a higher pay grade? (Ophelia looks confused.) Forget that. We're doomed if we start with salary equity. What I mean is, why do you think they're better than you? (Ophelia is silent, eyes down.) Don't you have feelings? Thoughts? Don't you deserve to be happy, just like them?

OPHELIA: I would like to be happy.

FAY: And I'm here to show you how it's done. Does that sound like something you would be willing to try?

OPHELIA: I must confess that it affrights me much, / yet happiness demands I take the risk.

FAY: It does, Ophelia, it does.

OPHELIA: Then help me, Fay, to don the garb I need. / A braver maid I'll seem, if not in deed.

FAY: Right. Garb. First thing we need to do is lose the shroud. (Fay grabs Ophelia's burial garment and rips it off with a violent tug. Ophelia screams and makes to cover herself, but realizes that she is dressed underneath in proper Elizabethan costume. She looks at Fay in wonder.) It's not magic. Coming from outside your world, I have some . . . editing privileges. Consider it a re-write.

(Fay produces a head covering for Ophelia and completes dressing her.)

OPHELIA: You gib and mouth of "re-do" and "re-write". / Your ways to me seem more than passing strange.

FAY: Yeah, I get that a lot. And now, since you're the only one who can see me, I'm gonna break out of fashion prison. (She grabs either side of her bodice and rips it down the middle, easily shucking all her costume pieces in one fell swoop. Fay is dressed beneath in jeans and a baggy T-shirt. Ophelia is slack-jawed.) Ta-da! Again, not magic. Velcro.

OPHELIA: You dress as a man. What are you wearing?

FAY: Freedom, baby. Freedom. You should try it sometime.

OPHELIA: And stand before all in naught but my shift / And be called mad? I have not your "freedom".

FAY: Let's work on that, shall we? But first things first. (Fay tosses the garments behind the mound.) Now, are you ready to have your mind blown? (Ophelia recoils, covering.) Sorry. Are you ready to be amazed?

(Ophelia nods, frightened.)

OPHELIA: Witchcraft you deny, yet so it doth seem. / E'en so, proceed with what you have in mind.

(She tenses. Fay chuckles.)

FAY: Chill, Ophelia. It's not that big a deal.

(She pulls out the book.)

OPHELIA: Summon forth your magic; speak incantations / Vile. What is this dark and mystic text?

FAY: "Incantations vile?" "Magic?" Really? This / "Dark and mystic text" . . . is a paperback. (She catches herself with a shudder.) Eww. Now *there's* an incantation vile! You had *me* speaking in iambic pentameter. Must be something in the air . . .

OPHELIA: Say your curséd "i-am-bra-ca-dab-ra!" / I am prepared for your dread conjuring.

(She takes a deep breath. Fay concentrates on the book.)

FAY: O-kay. Let's flip back a few pages.

(She thumbs back in the book. The lights flicker and the mound disappears.)

SCENE 2

(The action is continuous. Ophelia touches her arms. Fay is pleased with herself.)

OPHELIA: Am I beyond Death's cold, congealing grasp? / (Fay nods.) And what is this place you have whisked us to?

FAY: Wait for it.

(Laertes enters, the top of Act 1, Scene 3. Fay fist pumps a "yes!" and kisses her book.)

LAERTES: My necessities are embark'd: farewell: / And, sister, as the winds give benefit / And convoy is assistant, do not sleep, / But let me hear from you.

OPHELIA: (Automatically responding as Shakespeare wrote) Do you doubt that?

LAERTES: For Hamlet and the trifling of his favour, / 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; No more.

OPHELIA: No more but so?

(Fay refers to the text.)

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, / And now no soil nor cautel doth besmirch / The virtue of his will: but you must fear, / His greatness weigh'd, his will is not his own; / For he himself is subject to his birth: --

(Fay pulls Ophelia aside as Laertes silently continues his speech.)

FAY: Come on, girl. This is a re-do. Don't give him all the good lines!

OPHELIA: What is a "good line"?

FAY: It means don't let your brother shape the conversation.

OPHELIA: What would you have me say?

FAY: He's lecturing you about Hamlet! Who is he to tell you who - or how - to love?

OPHELIA: (A no-brainer) My brother.

FAY: It was a rhetorical question. Now use *your* rhetoric. You're an intelligent woman – get in there and fight for what you want!

(Fay nudges Ophelia back into the conversation.)

LAERTES: Be wary then; best safety lies in fear: / Youth to itself rebels, though none else near.

(Ophelia looks to Fay, who encourages.)

OPHELIA: Thou wrongs me quite, brother, if thou holds me / incapable of mastering my love. / (Laertes is startled. Who is this?) If Hamlet doth profess his love to me, / by Cupid's bow, I'll ope' to him—

LAERTES: --Nay, maid! / Didst not hear the advice I freely gave? / "Lose not your heart, or your chaste treasure open / To his unmaster'd importunity."

(Ophelia looks to Fay, who nods.)

OPHELIA: (Cautiously) So spake you, Laertes. I heard you, yet / I warrant it not.

LAERTES: Seems my sister so? / As hot and intemperate as any / unlearn'd wench or moll or common stale?

FAY: What?! Are you gonna let him get away with that?

OPHELIA: Do not the visage of piety don, / Lest ye hazard the foul name "hypocrite". / Is't not so that young men away at school / Do often play at love? Deny it not; / I oft have heard you boast.

LAERTES: Go to, go to!

FAY: Tell *him* where to go!
(Enter Polonius at a distance.)

POLONIUS: Yet here, Laertes! aboard, aboard, for shame!

(Fay refers to the text, irritated.)

FAY: Really? Already?

LAERTES: (Aside, to Ophelia) Shall I tell him of your wanton leanings?

OPHELIA: (Aside, to Laertes) Yea, verily. And I shall speak of yours.

FAY: Speak it, girl!

(Polonius stands off, gestures urgently.)

POLONIUS: The wind sits in the shoulder of your sail, / And you are stay'd for.

LAERTES: I'll not our father's ears besmirch with all / your womanly prattle.

OPHELIA: I think that wise. / (Laertes glares and snatches up his satchel.) Brother. Let us not part in anger so. / Godspeed, Laertes. Trust that I am wise / In matters of the heart. I wish you well. / Your sister is pure. Have you no words of / Comfort `ere you depart?

(He is at a loss. Then—)

LAERTES: Yea, sister; these. / (Points offstage, dramatically) Get thee to a nunnery.

POLONIUS: There; my blessing with thee!

(Polonius continues his advice to Laertes in silence. Fay looks surprised, references text.)

FAY: So. That happened.

OPHELIA: Speaks he of “nunnery”? This seems out of joint.

FAY: Out of joint? It seems more “out of body”.

OPHELIA: Spare me your saucy jibes! For all my pains, / Laertes' love is lost. He thinks me whore!

FAY: And are you a whore?

OPHELIA: I am not so, and therefore—

FAY: My point exactly. You put too much stock in what men say. A woman with a mind is a powerful thing. They label you because they're threatened.

OPHELIA: Threatened? By a mere maid?

FAY: You've gotta open your eyes, Ophelia. There's nothing "mere" here.

OPHELIA: Are all men threatened by a maid who speaks?

FAY: Some are. *Most* are. If you dare express an opinion, they'll call you "shrew" or "curst".

OPHELIA: (Looking downcast) Or "whore".

FAY: Hey! No time for a pity party! You do want to change your outcome, right? (Ophelia nods.) Then, back to it! (She pushes Ophelia in the direction of Polonius, who waves to a departing Laertes.) Faint heart never won, fair lady!

POLONIUS: Daughter! I have on your brother bestowed / A full portion of my good counselling. / Let us with all due haste go back indoors. /

FAY: Bossy! Answer him back with something strong.

OPHELIA: Dear father. Spake Laertes aught of me?

FAY: Or not.

POLONIUS: Nay, daughter, save that which bespoke his love. / (Ophelia looks doubtful.) But by this, I see your mind is troubled. / Wherefore do you inquire?

OPHELIA: No reason. /

POLONIUS: Your hesitation belies you, daughter. / Come now. Speak to me your heart so that you / May be blessed by a father's good advice. /

OPHELIA: After all you lavished on Laertes, / Have you still a word for me?

POLONIUS: (Confused at the conversation's direction) Yea, Marry. / You know not your father if you doubt it. / Come, Ophelia. Unburden yourself. /

OPHELIA: Of late, dear sir, I have been deep in thought.

POLONIUS: And therein lies the root of all your ills. / 'Tis not for maids to labor thus in thought. /

FAY: Tell him that you have a brain!

OPHELIA: And yet hath not our God given to maids / The capacity to reason like men, / Where we, too, might discern good from evil? /

FAY: Score!

POLONIUS: Would that were true; we'd be in Eden yet. / But enough, child, of your philosophies. / Pray tell me post-haste; what is the matter? /

OPHELIA: The matter, my lord, is betwixt myself / And Hamlet, who of late made many tenders / 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, my lord. I know what I should think.

POLONIUS: Nay, child! You must 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. /

FAY: And it's all about you, isn't it, Polonius?

OPHELIA: My lord, he hath importuned me with love / In honourable fashion.

POLONIUS: Ay, fashion you may call it; go to, go to.

FAY: Don't let him pull the "pretty face and clothing" ploy!

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

POLONIUS: Be somewhat scanter of your maiden presence; / Set your entreatments at a higher rate / Than a command to parley.

FAY: Stand up for yourself!

OPHELIA: You know him not, / By all that I believe.

POLONIUS: (Annoyed at her obstinance) For Lord Hamlet, / Believe so much in him, that he is young / And with a larger tether may he walk / Than may be given you.

OPHELIA: List me, dear father. / I would not mar our name.

POLONIUS: List me, Ophelia. / 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. /

OPHELIA: Not talk to him! O, father, thou art cruel.

POLONIUS: I must be cruel only to be kind. / (They all react to this line out of place.) Come your ways. It is my parental right.

OPHELIA: But father—

(Polonius roughly takes Ophelia's forearm. Fay, surprised, looks in the text.)

POLONIUS: —Look to't, I charge you.

(He releases her with a push. She rubs her arm.)

OPHELIA: (Through gritted teeth) I shall obey, my lord.

(Polonius regards her with some confusion and perhaps, guilt. He exits.)

FAY: Not cool. Did he hurt you?

OPHELIA: Verily. Mayhaps I shall not endure.

(Fay examines her arm.)

FAY: Where does it hurt?

OPHELIA: The pain in my arm is naught compared to / The pain in my heart. This must be my fault.

FAY: *Your* fault? Uh, no. Not today, not ever.

OPHELIA: I have offended my father, and the / Bruise I bear I have brought upon myself.

FAY: I see. And who told you that?

OPHELIA: The holy books instruct us, do they not, / To always show honor to our parents?

FAY: I'm pretty sure they also tell parents to love and protect their children.

OPHELIA: (Considering this.) He has never before corrected me / With more than stern visage and reprimand.

FAY: It took me by surprise, too.

OPHELIA: Wherefore does he treat me in such a way?

FAY: (Pondering) Because you never had an opinion before.

OPHELIA: If opinions thus serve, I'll avoid them.

FAY: Oh, stop it.

OPHELIA: How easy to dismiss wounds that touch you not.

(Ophelia nurses her arm.)

FAY: You'll survive the bruised arm. I'm more worried about your damaged self-esteem. That'll kill you. For your first time out, you did well.

OPHELIA: By what measure could anyone think that?

FAY: By all measures! Measure one – you controlled the conversation. It went where you wanted it to go. Measure two – you parried his thrusts with reason and wit. Have you ever done that before?

OPHELIA: Methinks not.

FAY: And, most important, measure three – you didn't roll over to his every idea and demand! Measure for measure, you came out on top.

OPHELIA: You heard me mewl, "I shall obey, my lord".

FAY: Give yourself some credit. Even *that* was defiant!

OPHELIA: And all my defiance has won me naught! / I am forbidden to even speak to him!

FAY: In all fairness, you should've won.

OPHELIA: And, as ever, my father had his way.

FAY: And I know why. It's this stupid Elizabethan verse. Da-DAH-da-DAH-da-DAH-da-DAH-da-DAH. This ridiculous insistence on ten syllables per line.

OPHELIA: More or less.

FAY: Say what?

OPHELIA: More or less, 'tis ten. / And verse in speech is for the noble class. /

FAY: Well, lah-dee-friggin-dah. It's stilted, and hinders you from getting to the issues at hand.

OPHELIA: I like the way the words flow off our lips, / Like honeyed rivulets of gossamer. / (Fay regards her archly.) Poetry is a most beautiful thing. /

FAY: So's a Hallmark movie, but it's not winning an Oscar.

OPHELIA: Movie? Oscar? I would you made more sense.

FAY: And I would you spoke English.

OPHELIA: English? Wherefore would I speak English when / We are in Denmark?

FAY: Uh . . . yeah. Look, do you want to win?

OPHELIA: Having lost, I see not how it matters.

FAY: (Mock resigned) Okay. Let's go back to the grave. You roll in, and I'll kick some dirt on you.

(Ophelia turns her back on Fay, petulant. Fay shrugs and starts off.)

OPHELIA: Do you perceive a way that I survive?

FAY: You betcha!

OPHELIA: You betcha?

FAY: It means "yes". You can survive – if you learn to stand up for yourself. You'll speak with your father again, you know. (Ophelia is unmoved. Fay, Grudgingly) And with Hamlet. (Ophelia spins around happily.) But you need to listen to me if you want *any* of this to end up well. Can you do that?

(Ophelia ponders. Then—)

OPHELIA: Yes. Yes, I can. (Struggling not to finish the meter.) If you . . . will help me. Fay.

(Ophelia is disgusted with herself.)

FAY: Ten syllables? (Ophelia nods, miserable.) Old habits die hard. (With forced patience) Will you try to lose the iambic pentameter? (Ophelia is confused.) Iambic pentameter. It's not a magic spell. It's the ten-syllable poetry you gush in. Can you lose it?

OPHELIA: (Takes a deep breath) You betcha! (Fay is unconvinced.) I will do my best.

(Ophelia claps her hand over her mouth.)

FAY: Only eight syllables! Not bad!

(Fay raises her hand for a high five. Ophelia recoils. Fay lowers her hand to a less threatening "thumbs up". Fay thumbs ahead in the text. The lights flicker and change.)

SCENE 3

(Continuous action.)

OPHELIA: What must I do now?

FAY: Stand up to your father.

(Enter Polonius, Act 2, Scene 1.)

OPHELIA: What? Him? Again? No!

FAY: Get back on the horse that threw you.

(She turns a petrified Ophelia toward Polonius.)

POLONIUS: How now, Ophelia! what's the matter? O, / my child, my child, why look you so affrighted? /

OPHELIA: (Grasping at straws) I have been . . . so affrighted.

FAY: That's right. Keep it short.

POLONIUS: With what, i' the name of God?

OPHELIA: Why, you father!

POLONIUS: Me? Wherefore should that be? / Unless you have defied me, and sought the / Company of the Prince against my will. /

OPHELIA: That is not the cause.

POLONIUS: Then what is it, child? /

(Ophelia looks to Fay.)

FAY: Speak your mind!

OPHELIA: Um . . . well . . . that is . . .

POLONIUS: Go on, child. Pray, go on. /

OPHELIA: . . . What I mean to say—

POLONIUS: Enough, Ophelia! / Your mammerings and natterings serve you ill. / “Hum” and “haw” doth surely point to some guilt. /

OPHELIA: (Sotto voce) I speak plain, but my father adds words to make it ten!

POLONIUS: Mutter not, but clearly confess your guilt.

FAY: Be smarter than him. Think, Ophelia!

OPHELIA: I haven't disobeyed you!

POLONIUS: Then what, child? /

OPHELIA: I fear for Hamlet.

POLONIUS: Then you have seen him! /

(Ophelia breathes deeply, reverts to her lines from the play.)

OPHELIA: My lord, as I was sewing in my closet, / Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced; /

FAY: Don't give in to him!

(Ophelia, never missing a beat, holds Fay off with a gesture.)

OPHELIA: No hat upon his head; his stockings foul'd, / Ungarter'd, and down-gyved to his ancle; /

FAY: Lose the iambic pentameter!

(Ophelia pays her no heed. Fay turns her back, disgusted.)

OPHELIA: Pale as his shirt; his knees knocking each other; / And with a look so piteous in purport / As if he had been loosed out of hell— /

POLONIUS: So, you sought him.

OPHELIA: No, father. He came to me – /

POLONIUS: Mad for thy love?

OPHELIA: Will you let me finish? /

(Fay turns back, intrigued.)

POLONIUS: And by what means came your arm so bruised? / Took you he by the wrist, holding you hard? /

OPHELIA: (Archly) Why, yes, father. How perceptive.

POLONIUS: Pray, continue, child, your portent discourse.

OPHELIA: In brief: (Very rapidly, like the disclaimer at the end of a commercial.) Hamlet steps back and then stares at me like he's trying to memorize my face. He shook my arm a little, nodded his head,

sighed and looked pitiful. He looked like a broken man as he backed out of the room without taking his eyes off of me, but I ignored him.

POLONIUS: And in his duress, you showed no pity?

OPHELIA: None whatsoever.

POLONIUS: Have you given him any hard words of late?

OPHELIA: Not a one. I only told him we couldn't see one another, and that he should stay away from me. Exactly like you told me to do.

POLONIUS: This is the very ecstasy of love / That hath made him mad.

OPHELIA: Poor Hamlet! He seemed so . . . destroyed. I hope he doesn't do anything rash. That would really upset King Claudius. (Gasps) Oh! Would he blame you?

(Polonius is galvanized.)

POLONIUS: Go I to the king. / This must be known; which, being kept close, might / Move more grief to hide than hate to utter love. /

(He exits in haste. Ophelia dances in victory.)

FAY: Not bad, kid.

OPHELIA: I tried so hard to avoid speaking in meter, but father kept finishing my thoughts in verse. So, I decided to join him in the verse on which he insisted.

FAY: I saw. And you had me a little worried.

OPHELIA: But I broke out of the pattern, and talked really quickly so he couldn't interrupt to make it scan. And it worked! He's going to the king, who will order him to let Hamlet and me be together!

FAY: Very clever.

OPHELIA: I won! I won!

(Ophelia squeals and hugs Fay, who pats her a bit condescendingly.)

FAY: We'll see where it goes.

OPHELIA: Oh, Fay. Thank you for my happiness.

FAY: Whoa, Ophelia. This is still more tragedy than fairy tale, despite what you've labeled me.

OPHELIA: Are you saying I'm still going to die?

FAY: I'm saying we're not finished yet. We have more to do.

OPHELIA: More?

FAY: You're doing fine. We need a happily ever after, so stand up for yourself!
(She turns the pages forward. The lights flicker. A flourish.)

SCENE 4

(The action is continuous. Polonius, Claudius and Gertrude enter, Act 3, Scene 1. Sort of.)

POLONIUS: Ophelia! Well met this happy hour. / (He ushers her to the royal couple.) We have concocted a most wond'rous plan. /

OPHELIA: What plan?

(Gertrude nurses a drink in a goblet.)

GERTRUDE: (Somewhat inebriated, though she carries it well) I'sooth, dear Claudius, pray, tell. (Hiccups)

CLAUDIUS: We have closely sent for Hamlet hither, / That he, as 'twere by accident, may here / Affront Ophelia—

OPHELIA: Hamlet hither? Oh / Thank you, father! Thank you, your majesty! /

(Fay rolls her eyes. Claudius is irritated at the interruption.)

POLONIUS: Make rein of yourself, and take heed of the / Plan's particulars. Continue, my liege.

(He bows deeply.)

CLAUDIUS: (His feathers smoothed) Your father and myself, lawful espials, / Will so bestow ourselves that, seeing, unseen, / We may of your encounter frankly judge. /

OPHELIA: You're going to hide and watch us?

POLONIUS: That is, more or less, the gist of the thing.

FAY: Eww.

CLAUDIUS: We'll gather by him, as he is behaved, / If 't be the affliction of his love / Or no that thus he suffers for.

POLONIUS: Brilliant! /

CLAUDIUS: Lord Polonius. Put not your shoulder / Out of joint patting yourself on the back.

POLONIUS: What I meant, my liege, is how brilliant you / Are, in glomming the merit of the plan.
(He smiles obsequiously. Claudius smirks, directs Polonius to Ophelia.) Ophelia, walk you here. Read on
this book; / That show of such an exercise may colour / Your loneliness.

OPHELIA: I like this not!

(Claudius looks to her, unbelieving, and Gertrude, too, pauses in her imbibing to glance warily
sidelong at the king.)

POLONIUS: (Covering) Ah, then. What method thinks thou wouldst better / Serve to ensnare the
melancholy prince? /

(Polonius turns to the royal couple for approval. Gertrude laughs to disarm the situation.
Claudius seems intrigued. All look to Ophelia, who turns to Fay for help.)

FAY: Tell him what you want!

POLONIUS: Daughter, speak. We're waiting for your answer.
(During the following, Claudius grows increasingly angrier.)

OPHELIA: My answer?

POLONIUS: Yes.

OPHELIA: A method?

POLONIUS: I'faith, yes. /

OPHELIA: To ensnare Prince Hamlet?

POLONIUS: Yes, child, pray speak. / (Lookig to the apoplectic King) And with all due haste!

OPHELIA: This spying is / Distasteful, and I'll play no part in't.

POLONIUS: (Under his breath.) Daughter—! /

(Claudius swaggers forward, pushing Polonius aside. Gertrude retreats to her drink.)

CLAUDIUS: Enough! I have heard insolence enough! / Who are you? this slip? this bauble? this woman-
child / To jeer and flaunt at plans of men? /

OPHELIA: It's not a good idea.

(Claudius roars. Ophelia rushes to Fay, who entreats her to face Claudius. Ophelia turns, petrified.)

CLAUDIUS: “Not a good idea?” “Not a good idea?” / I have had men’s heads on pikes for less than / “Not a good idea!” I’ll —

GERTRUDE:—Dear. A moment? /

(Claudius whirls to Gertrude, who disarms him with a “come-hither” look. He goes to her. They converse in whispers, her coquettish and flirty. Ophelia looks to Polonius, who stares daggers.)

OPHELIA: Fay?

FAY: You’re doing great!

OPHELIA: Am I standing up and being brave in order not to die?

FAY: That’s right.

OPHELIA: I will press on. But how will it help if the king has me killed?

(Fay is taken aback and feverishly consults the text. Gertrude and Claudius share a laugh.)

CLAUDIUS: (All unctuous ooze) Dear child. Pardon my display of temper. / You are young, and unaware of the ways, / Customs and manners of life in the court. / (Patting her on the head) Sweet thing. (He turns and smiles disarmingly to Polonius, who gushes.) I am certain this is all a . . . / Misunderstanding.

(Ophelia smiles and relaxes.)

FAY: Careful.

CLAUDIUS: Now, then. I am sure that you love Denmark.

OPHELIA: Oh, I do, I do.

CLAUDIUS: Why, yes, I thought so. / Nay, more than thought, I was positive of’t. / (Polonius and Gertrude laugh, nervously appreciative.) You have been raised a maiden Dane, loving / Care lavished on you in a Danish home, / Daughter of a Danish lord most loyal. / Would you your sacred duty leave undone? / Days are out of joint, and Denmark needs you.

OPHELIA: Something *is* rotten in the state—

CLAUDIUS: —Help me. / (Taking her hand) Help me put it right.

POLONIUS and GERTRUDE: Awww.

(Fay rolls her eyes. Ophelia is entranced.)

OPHELIA: But how does this help? / I'm not any good at this.

CLAUDIUS: (Puppy dog eyes) You could try. / (Ophelia wavers on the brink.) To shirk this shows a patriotic lack. / (Placing a hand to his heart) Do it for your Denmark. Do it for me. /

OPHELIA: (Snapping out of it) Which is it?

(Claudius leans in close, the *coup de grace*.)

CLAUDIUS: Know you not that I am more than king or man? / I *am* Denmark.

(He smiles disarmingly, staring deep into Ophelia's eyes.)

OPHELIA: Is not the fair Prince Hamlet Denmark, too?

(She stares back, unblinking, a showdown. Slowly, Claudius' smile fades and he withers.)

CLAUDIUS: (Long, rolling tones) Polonius! Gertrude!

(He stomps upstage in a royal tantrum. Polonius goes to him, following as Claudius storms offstage. Ophelia wilts and looks to Fay, who encourages her with an "Atta girl" fist.)

FAY: Hang in there, girlfriend!

GERTRUDE: (Crossing to Ophelia) Perhaps you'll take a cup with me, and talk? / (Handing Ophelia her goblet) I find the honeyed wine doth help to soothe. / (Producing a flask for herself from her bodice.) Let's unravel this tangled skein, shall we? /

(Ophelia sips and coughs violently.)

OPHELIA: There's nothing to unravel! I want no part of this skulking and spying and intrigue and lying to Hamlet and lying to myself and pretending to be what I'm not and trying to make everyone happy and making no one happy as a result! It's just not fair!

(Spent, she collapses on Gertrude's shoulder.)

GERTRUDE: (Not unsympathetically) Oh. Poor girl. Try not to spill the queen's cup. / (Mortified, Ophelia stops clinging. Gertrude wipes a tear from her cheek.) Forced to be worldly-wise despite your years. / It's enough to make one turn to drink. No? / (Ophelia shakes her head no. Gertrude takes the goblet from Ophelia.) In spite of all, methinks you love my son. / (Ophelia looks down demurely.) Your modest silence hath confirmed it quite. / Our only thought is making Hamlet whole. / And his being sick with love would quell the king. /

OPHELIA: But spying? Hamlet would see right through that.

GERTRUDE: What have you in mind?

OPHELIA: I will talk to him alone, without an audience. I know he loves me. And if he is upset that we cannot be together, might I allay his fears?

GERTRUDE: On that point you have our royal blessing.

(Overcome, Ophelia embraces Gertrude.)

OPHELIA: Thank you, dear queen.

GERTRUDE: Do not believe that we are in th' clear. / The king is blazing still, and must be quenched. /

(She drinks.)

OPHELIA: I'll go to him straight.

GERTRUDE: The course direct will benefit us not; / Tempests are approachéd best at a slant. /

FAY: Oh, no. Here it comes. Ignore this desperate housewife!

(Ophelia scowls at Fay, then looks to Gertrude attentively.)

GERTRUDE: Might I some helpful words impart?

OPHELIA: Pray, do. /

GERTRUDE: Rock not the craft that sails you to your port, / But ponder how, instead, to steer the bark / With gentle hand upon your Captain's own. / That way the rudder turns without a squall. /

FAY: This is *not* helpful!

OPHELIA: (Ignoring Fay) Would'st instruct me in this craft?

GERTRUDE: List and learn. / (Handing her goblet to Ophelia and calling off) My husband, regent wise, and Denmark's gem. / (Claudius enters, pouting. Polonius follows.) I have conferred with the maid your subject, / Who intended not to rouse your ire. / She is green and knows not our gentle ways. / She has always wanted to help, and has / Concocted a clever ruse to that end, / One more like to succeed than her father's. / (Polonius starts to object, but is stayed by Claudius.) Alone, she will plumb the depths of Hamlet's / Affection for her, avoiding the row / That would ensue were you detected in / Observance thereof. In this way shall we / Discern if Hamlet's madness be from love. / If so, we seek your royal blessing on / Their union, a physic most like to heal. / We await your command.

(Gertrude bows. Ophelia follows suit. Fay, disgusted, turns her back to Claudius and bows, lifting the hem of her T-shirt and showing her butt to the king.)

CLAUDIUS: Let it be so. /

(Ophelia is ecstatic. Gertrude winks at Ophelia, reclaims her goblet and drinks.)

POLONIUS: You shall report to us post-haste on the / Heels of your meeting.

OPHELIA: That was not my plan. /

(Polonius scoffs and Claudius bristles.)

GERTRUDE: (Quickly) Nay, indeed. Of what benefit is a / second-hand account? There is a troupe of / Players by Hamlet already ordered / This night to play before him.

POLONIUS: 'Tis most true. /

GERTRUDE: And there you shall as direct witnesses / Observe if there be not a change in him. /

POLONIUS: Hamlet did beseech me to entreat your / Majesties to hear and see the matter. /

CLAUDIUS: With all my heart; and it doth much content me / To hear him so inclined.

POLONIUS: The plan is agreed. /

(Ophelia heaves a sigh of relief. Gertrude takes a drink. Claudius and Polonius exit.)

GERTRUDE: Your headstrong defiance to your father / At the last was like to undo my good. /

FAY: Wrong! Because you voiced your opinion, you don't have to report back to them.

OPHELIA: (To Gertrude) I had to speak my mind or nothing changed.

GERTRUDE: Something changed because I interceded.

FAY: We don't need anyone's help!

OPHELIA: (To Fay) But—

GERTRUDE: I like your fire, but girls who burn so / Do oft consume themselves in the blaze. /

FAY: Don't let this sycophant take away your spark!

OPHELIA: Your majesty, I simply am not sure—

GERTRUDE: Hold not in scorn the advice of your queen! / (Calming herself with a deep draught) Who also desires to be your friend. / It would give me great comfort to have at / My side one such as you. I

could teach you / Much of what it is to be the wife of / The king; to navigate the royal life / And the pains it brings. You would to me be / A blessing, like a sister or daughter. /

FAY: Someone else to answer to.

OPHELIA: I am grateful for your advice, my queen.

FAY: Don't listen to everything you hear!

OPHELIA: What wisdom will you with me share, dear queen?

(Fay scoffs. Ophelia looks dismayed.)

GERTRUDE: Only this, dear. If you wish to govern, / In pretense defer to the plans of men. / Diverge not from this tried and proven way. /

CLAUDIUS: (O.S.) Come, sweet Gertrude, we go.

GERTRUDE: I shall obey. / (Starting off) And for your part, Ophelia, I do wish / That your good beauties be the happy cause / Of Hamlet's wildness: I hope your virtues / Will bring him to his wonted way again, / To both your honours.

OPHELIA: Madam, I wish it. /

(Gertrude exits)

FAY: You'll fall for anything!

OPHELIA: There was no need to be unkind to one / Who only counseled and wished for me good. /

FAY: I'm not here to be nice.

OPHELIA: Pity. A sweet disposition may turn / One who seems an enemy to a friend.

FAY: You sound like a fortune cookie.

(Polonius enters.)

POLONIUS: Saucy maid! Thou did'st almost unseat me!

OPHELIA: But I didn't. And the king and queen think my plan is better.

POLONIUS: I like not the wanton fashion of your tongue. / You speak like a fishwife—

OPHELIA: I spoke my mind! /

(Polonius slaps her. She turns to Fay.)

POLONIUS: Presume not to finish my sentences! / As my daughter, you will learn to heed me. (As she does not respond, Polonius changes his tack.) Very well, Mistress Snip. Have it your way. / But know you this: If in your machinations / You falter, you are no daughter mine!

(Polonius storms off.)

FAY: (Yelling after Polonius) Asshole! You should've slapped him back.

OPHELIA: I don't see how that would have helped matters.

FAY: Well, I would've loved to see it.

OPHELIA: Is this how it will be? Shunned and despised for speaking my mind? If so, I am not sure it is worth the effort.

FAY: Yeah. 'Cause it's so much better being dead.

OPHELIA: Well, that's not going to happen. You'll see. I'll talk to Hamlet and help him through his despair.

FAY: Hamlet! Why are you so obsessed with Hamlet?

OPHELIA: He is my love.

FAY: Love is a highly overrated prison.

OPHELIA: You are so cynical!

FAY: I'm realistic. I don't want you sacrificing yourself for love.

OPHELIA: Real love is no sacrifice! (Fay scoffs.) Ooh! What do you want of me?

FAY: I want you to be the woman I imagine you to be – a woman all women can look up to! Or do you plan to be another Gertrude, smiling and simpering and wheedling away your self-respect for a morsel of what you desire?

OPHELIA: She is the queen!

FAY: Queen of all that's false! She lives in the shadow of a man, dependent on his favor to think or hope or breathe. Is that what you want?

OPHELIA: That is not the path I plan to follow. (Pondering) I will talk to Hamlet, truthfully sharing my heart. Thus, will I mend the rift betwixt. You will see. Everything will be perfect.

FAY: Have you considered that Hamlet might be bothered by more than an unrequited love?

OPHELIA: He loves me. I am positive of it. Surely, he would share with me the burdens of his heart. Wouldn't he?

FAY: Let's find out.

(Fay flips pages. Hamlet enters, a knife in hand.)

OPHELIA: What has the prince in his hand?

FAY: That would be a bare bodkin.

OPHELIA: A dagger? But for what cause?

HAMLET: To be, or not to be, that is the question, / Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer / The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, / Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, / And by opposing end them?

OPHELIA: Talks he of suicide? It seems so.

(Fay indicates Ophelia should listen.)

HAMLET: To die: to sleep; / No more; and by a sleep to say we end / The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks / That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation / Devoutly to be wish'd.

(Ophelia looks to Fay for confirmation. Hamlet continues his soliloquy in silence.)

FAY: Suicide it is. Your dreamboat has a dark side.

OPHELIA: I must prevent him!

FAY: He's not going to kill himself. He's just talking about it.

OPHELIA: E'en that bodes ill! I will accost my lord!

FAY: And rub his nose in it? Not the best method for dealing with the depressed. Take a moment to collect your thoughts. Relax. He goes on for a bit. What are you going to say?

OPHELIA: Anything! He talks of killing himself.

FAY: But he doesn't.

OPHELIA: And yet he contemplates it. Oh, have my rejections brought him to this? I should never have listened to my father!

(She puts her face in her hands.)

FAY: This isn't about you, Ophelia.

OPHELIA: Then what *is* the problem?

FAY: Perhaps that should be your line of questioning.

(Ophelia nods. Fay nudges her to Hamlet who, seeing Ophelia, hastily sheathes his knife.)

HAMLET: The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons / Be all my sins remember'd.

OPHELIA: Good my lord, / How does your honour for this many a day? /

HAMLET: I humbly thank you; well, well, well.

OPHELIA: And yet, my lord, you seem not "well, well, well". / (She takes his hand.) Talk to me. And tell me true.

HAMLET: (Retracting his hand) Ha, ha! are you honest?

OPHELIA: My lord?

HAMLET: Are you fair?

OPHELIA: What means your lordship?

HAMLET: That if you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty.

OPHELIA: Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with honesty?

HAMLET: Ay, truly; for the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness: this was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof. I did love you once.

OPHELIA: Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

HAMLET: You should not have believed me; for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it: I loved you not.

OPHELIA: Liar. I know that you did. I know that you do, still.

(Hamlet is taken aback. He regroups.)

HAMLET: Get thee to –

OPHELIA: A nunnery? I have already heard that choice command. (Hamlet's jaw drops.) Men! Why do you all assume that because you desire a woman, it must be her fault?

HAMLET: I? Desire? —

OPHELIA: Go on, admit it. I know you want me. As do I, you.

(He considers this.)

HAMLET: Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? / I am myself indifferent honest; but yet — /

OPHELIA: Honest, my lord? Nay, if you were honest, you would tell me what troubles you.

HAMLET: (Darkly) There are more things in heaven and earth, Ophelia, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy. /

OPHELIA: Try me.

HAMLET: Thou wouldst think me mad. I will keep my counsel.

OPHELIA: All right. Then let me be honest with you. / Know you this: 'Tis true the king and queen doth / Both suspect your reason. (Hamlet smiles - his plan is working!) Furthermore know / That, by their command, I must sound you out.

HAMLET: (Betrayed) You—

(Fay smiles.)

OPHELIA: No! I told them I would not so do. / I am here to speak frankly of my love. / I had hoped you would do the same.

HAMLET: Fair maid! / I must to you also confess my heart. / (Ophelia regards him happily. Fay is startled, checks text.) It seems the mask I wear is incomplete. /

OPHELIA: Hamlet! You do love me, then!

HAMLET: "Do love" and "will love" are not the same thing. / The love I have for you stops me quite from / Grafting you into this poisonous weed, / This hellish rust that hath my life consumed. /

OPHELIA: A life without you is its own dark Hell.

FAY: Oh, cue the violins.

HAMLET: Your inwards would congeal if you but knew / the wrongs and horrors I must now revenge. /

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