Scene Summary

- Ophelia asks to speak with Gertrude. Gertrude reluctantly grants her permission.
- Ophelia is clearly insane. She sings about love, loss and sex.
- Laertes, with the support of an angry mob, forces his way into the room.
- He is furious, demanding his father's body and blaming Claudius for Polonius' death.
- Claudius successfully calms Laertes, promising him that Polonius' death will not go unpunished.

Elsinore. A room in the castle. Enter GERTRUDE, HORATIO and a Gentleman

GERTRUDE

I will not speak with her.¹

GENTLEMAN

She is importunate,² indeed distract.³ Her mood⁴ will needs be pitied.

GERTRUDE

What would she have?

GENTLEMAN

- She speaks much of her father, says she hears There's tricks⁵ i' th' world, and hems⁶ and beats her heart, Spurns enviously at straws,⁷ speaks things in doubt,⁸ That carry but half sense. Her speech is nothing,⁹ Yet the unshaped use of it doth move The hearers to collection.¹⁰ They aim at it,
- And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts
 Which, as her winks and nods and gestures yield¹¹ them,
 Indeed would make one think there might be thought,
 Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily.¹²

HORATIO

'Twere good she were spoken with, for she may strew Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds.¹³

Gertrude

Let her come in.

1 her: Ophelia

- ² importunate: persistent
- ³ distract: mad
- ⁴ mood: state of mind

- 5 tricks: plots / schemes
- ⁶ **hems:** makes a throat-clearing sound 'ahem'
- ⁷ Spurns...straws: is easily offended by insignificant things
- ⁸ in doubt: with an unclear meaning
- ⁹ nothing: nonsense
- ¹⁰Yet the unshaped...collection: although the random nature of her words inspires her listeners to find meaning in them
- ¹¹ yield: deliver
- 12 unhappily: maliciously

¹³**ill-breeding minds:** minds that think evil thoughts

[Exit GENTLEMAN]

[Aside] To my sick soul, as sin's true nature is, Each toy¹⁴ seems prologue to some great amiss,¹⁵ So full of artless jealousy is guilt
20 It spills itself in fearing to be spilt.¹⁶

[Re-enter GENTLEMAN with OPHELIA]

OPHELIA Where is the beauteous Majesty of Denmark?

GERTRUDE How now, Ophelia!

OPHELIA

[Sings]¹⁷ How should I your true love know From another one? By his cockle hat and staff,¹⁸ And his sandal shoon.¹⁹

GERTRUDE Alas, sweet lady, what imports²⁰ this song

Ophelia

Say you?²¹ Nay, pray you, mark.² [Sings]
He is dead and gone, lady, He is dead and gone. At his head a grass-green turf, At his heels a stone.

Oh, ho!

GERTRUDE Nay, but, Ophelia –

OPHELIA

Pray you, mark. [Sings] White his shroud as the mountain snow –

[Enter CLAUDIUS]

 ¹⁴toy: trivial thing
 ¹⁵amiss: disaster
 ¹⁶So full of artless...spilt: guilt creates such uncontrollable paranoia that fear of disaster creates more misery than the disasters themselves

¹⁷Sings: This song is a popular ballad which describes a woman whose lover has died ¹⁸cockie hat and staff: a pilgrim

traditionally wore a hat decorated with cockleshells and carried a staff. In Shakespeare's time a pilgrim often represented a lover ¹⁹shoon: shoes

²⁰imports: is the meaning of

²¹Say you?: What did you say?²²mark: pay attention

GERTRUDE Alas, look here, my lord.

OPHELIA [Sings] Larded²³ with sweet flowers Which bewept to the grave did go 40 With true-love showers.²⁴

CLAUDIUS How do you, pretty lady?

OPHELIA

Well, God dild you!²⁵ They say the owl was a baker's daughter.²⁶ Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be. God be at your table!

CLAUDIUS

Conceit upon her father.27

OPHELIA

Pray you, let's have no words of this, but when they you what it means, say you this: [Sings] Tomorrow is Saint Valentine's Day All in the morning betime,²⁹ 50 And I a maid at your window To be your Valentine. Then up he rose, and donned his clothes And dupped³⁰ the chamber-door. Let in the maid, that out a maid Never departed more.³¹

CLAUDIUS Pretty Ophelia!

OPHELIA

Indeed, la, without an oath,³² I'll make an end on't:³³ [Sings] By Gis³⁴ and by Saint Charity,³⁵ Alack, and fie for shame! 60 Young men will do't, if they come to't: By Cock,³⁶ they are to blame.

²³Larded: Strewn

²⁴showers: tears

²⁵God dild you: God reward you i.e. Thank you

²⁶They say the owl...daughter: This is a reference to a folk-tale in which a baker's daughter refused to give bread to a begging Jesus. He then turned her into an owl

Conceit upon her father: These fantasies are inspired by the death of her father

²⁸Saint Valentine's Day: Traditionally it was said that the first person of the opposite sex one met on this day would become one's lover ²⁹betime: early

³⁰dupped: opened

³¹Let in the maid...departed more: i.e. the girl entered the door a virgin but when she was left she was no longer a virgin

³²without an oath: without blaspheming ³³I'll make an end on't: I'll finish it ³⁴Gis: Jesus

- ³⁵Saint Charity: the saintly quality of charity
- ³⁶Cock: 1.God. This corruption allows Ophelia to avoid blaspheming 2. penis. This possible double meaning adds more obscenity to Ophelia's song

Quoth she, 'Before you tumbled³⁷ me, You promised me to wed'

He answers:

'So would I ha' done, by yonder sun, An³⁸ thou hadst not come to my bed.'

CLAUDIUS

How long hath she been thus?

OPHELIA

I hope all will be well. We must be patient. But I cannot choose but weep, to think they should lay him³⁹ i' th' cold 70 ground. My brother shall know of it. And so I thank you for your good counsel. Come, my coach! Goodnight, ladies, goodnight. Sweet ladies, goodnight, goodnight. [*Exit*]

CLAUDIUS

Follow her close.⁴⁰ Give her good watch, I pray you.

[Exit HORATIO and GENTLEMAN]

O, this is the poison of deep grief. It spring All from her father's death. And now behold O Gertrude, Gertrude, When sorrows come, they come not single spies⁴¹ But in battalions. First, her father slain; Next, your son gone, and he most violent author⁴² 80 Of his own just remove; the people muddied,⁴³ Thick and unwholesome in their thoughts and whispers For good Polonius' death, and we have done but greenly⁴⁴ In hugger-mugger⁴⁵ to inter him. Poor Ophelia, Divided from herself and her fair judgement, Without the which we are pictures, or mere beasts;⁴⁶ Last, and as much containing⁴⁷ as all these, Her brother is in secret come from France, Feeds on his wonder,⁴⁸ keeps himself in clouds,⁴⁹ And wants not buzzers⁵⁰ to infect his ear

With pestilent speeches of his father's death;
 Wherein necessity, of matter beggared,⁵¹
 Will nothing stick⁵² our person to arraign⁵³
 In ear and ear. O my dear Gertrude, this,

37tumbled: had sex with

³⁸An: if

39 him: i.e. Polonius

40 close: closely

⁴¹single spies: individual soldiers (sent in advance of the main army)
⁴²author: cause

- ⁴³muddied: 1. stirred up 2. confused
- ⁴⁴greenly: foolishly as if inexperienced ⁴⁵hugger-mugger: secretly and
- hurriedly
- ⁴⁶pictures, beasts: Both 'pictures' and 'beasts' lack reason. Claudius is explaining that without reason ('judgement') we are not fully human
- ⁴⁷as much containing: having as much potential for trouble
- ⁴⁸Feeds on his wonder: broods on his doubts (about his father's death)
- ⁴⁹keeps himself in clouds: remains suspicious
- ⁵⁰buzzers: gossip-mongers
- ⁵¹of matter beggared: lacking evidence
- ⁵²Will nothing stick: will stick at nothing
- ⁵³our person to arraign: to accuse me

Like to a murdering-piece,⁵⁴ in many places Gives me superfluous death.⁵⁵

[A noise within]

GERTRUDE Alack, what noise is this?

CLAUDIUS

Attend!

[Enter a Messenger]

Where are my Switzers?⁵⁶ Let them guard the door. What is the matter?

MESSENGER

Save yourself, my lord. The ocean, overpeering of his list,⁵⁷ 100 Eats not the flats⁵⁸ with more impetuous haste Than young Laertes in a riotous head⁵⁹ O'erbears your officers. The rabble call him lord And, as the world were now but to begin, Antiquity forgot, custom not known, The ratifiers and props⁶⁰ of every word, They cry, 'Choose we: Laertes shall be King!'-Caps,⁶¹ hands and tongues, applaud it to the clouds – 'Laertes shall be King! Laertes King!'

GERTRUDE

How cheerfully on the false trail⁶² they cry! 110 O, this is counter,⁶³ you false Danish dogs!

[Noise within]

CLAUDIUS The doors are broke.⁶⁴

[Enter LAERTES with his Followers]

LAERTES Where is this king? Sirs, stand you all without. ⁵⁴murdering-piece: a type of cannon that fired many shots, killing more widely
 ⁵⁵superfluous death: kills me many

⁵⁶Switzers: Swiss bodyguards

times over

 ⁵⁷ overdeering of his list: looking over the shoreline
 ⁵⁸ Eats not the flats: doesn't overrun the low-lying ground
 ⁵⁹ riotous head: rebellion

60 The ratifiers and props: supporters

⁶¹**Caps:** i.e. hats thrown into the air in celebration

 ⁶²false trail: i.e. like hounds on the wrong scent trail (because Claudius is not responsible for Polonius' death)
 ⁶³counter: contrary (to the truth)

64 broke: broken in

Hamlet

Followers No, let's come in.

LAERTES

I pray you, give me leave.65

FOLLOWERS We will, we will. [*They retire without the door*]

LAERTES

I thank you. Keep⁶⁶ the door. O thou vile King, Give me my father!

Gertrude

Calmly, good Laertes.

LAERTES

That drop of blood that's calm proclaims me bastard, Cries 'Cuckold!'⁶⁷ to my father, brands the harlot⁶⁸ Even here, between the chaste unsmirched brow⁶⁹ 120 Of my true mother.

CLAUDIUS

What is the cause, Laertes, That thy rebellion looks so giant-like?⁷⁰ Let him go, Gertrude; do not fear our person. There's such divinity doth hedge a king⁷¹ That treason can but peep to what it would,⁷² Acts little of his will.⁷³ Tell nte, Laertes, Why thou art thus incensed. Let him go, Gertrude. Speak, man.

LAERTES

Where is my father?

CLAUDIUS

Dead.

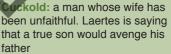
GERTRUDE But not by him.

CLAUDIUS

Let him demand his fill.

⁶⁵give me leave: leave me alone (with the King)

66 Keep: Guard



- ⁶⁶brands the harlot: puts the brand of a prostitute. Prostitutes were sometimes branded on their foreheads
- ⁶⁹chaste unsmirched brow: loyal, unblemished forehead
- ⁷⁰giant-like: large
- ⁷¹**There's such divinity...king:** The divine right of kings protects ('hedge') me
- ⁷²peep to what it would: peep at what it wants to overthrow
 ⁷³Acts little of his will: cannot
- achieve what it wants

Hamlet

Act 4 Scene 5

LAERTES

How came he dead? I'll not be juggled with.⁷⁴
130 To hell allegiance! Vows to the blackest devil!
Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit!⁷⁵
I dare damnation. To this point I stand,⁷⁶
That both the worlds I give to negligence.⁷⁷
Let come what comes, only I'll be revenged
Most thoroughly for my father.

CLAUDIUS

Who shall stay⁷⁸ you?

LAERTES

My will, not all the world's.⁷⁹ And for my means⁸⁰ I'll husband⁸¹ them so well They shall go far with little.

CLAUDIUS

Good Laertes,

If you desire to know the certainty

140 Of your dear father's death, is't writ in your revenge That swoopstake you will draw both friend and foe, Winner and loser?⁸²

LAERTES

None but his enemies.

CLAUDIUS

Will you know them then?

LAERTES

To his good friends thus wide I'll ope my arms And like the kind life-rendering pelican⁸³ Repast⁸⁴ them with my blood.

CLAUDIUS

Why, now you speak

Like a good child and a true gentleman. That I am guiltless of your father's death, And am most sensible⁸⁵ in grief for it,

150 It shall as level⁸⁶ to your judgement 'pear⁸⁷ As day does to your eye. 74 juggled with: tricked / manipulated

- ⁷⁵profoundest pit: deepest pit (of hell)
 ⁷⁶To this point I stand: I stand by this principle
- ⁷⁷That both the...negligence: I neglect the consequences of both heaven and hell ('both worlds')

78 stay: stop

⁷⁹My will...world's: I will have my way despite what the world wants
 ⁸⁰means: resources
 ⁸¹husband: manage

⁸²That swoopstake...loser: like a sweepstakes draw, you will have it all indiscriminately, making friends and enemies alike

⁸³kind life-rendering pelican: It was thought that pelicans fed their young with their own blood
⁸⁴Repast: feed

⁸⁵sensible: feelingly
⁸⁶level: plain
⁸⁷'pear: appear

Followers [Within] Let her come in.

LAERTES How now! What noise is that?

[Re-enter OPHELIA]

O heat,⁸⁸ dry up my brains! Tears seven times salt Burn out the sense and virtue⁸⁹ of mine eye!
By heaven, thy madness shall be paid with weight, Till our scale turn the beam.⁹⁰ O rose of May!
Dear maid, kind sister, sweet Ophelia!
O heavens! Is't possible, a young maid's wits
160 Should be as mortal as an old man's life?
Nature is fine in love, and where 'tis fine, It sends some precious instance of itself After the thing it loves.⁹¹

OPHELIA

[Sings]

They bore him barefaced⁹² on the bier;⁹³ Hey non nonny, nonny, hey nonny, And in his grave rained many a tear –

Fare you well, my dove!

LAERTES

Hadst thou thy wits, and didst persuade revenge, It could not move thus.⁹⁴

OPHELIA

170 You must sing 'A-down a-down', an you call him adown-a. O, how the wheel⁹⁵ becomes it! It is the false steward that stole his master's daughter.

LAERTES

This nothing's more than matter.96

OPHELIA

There's rosemary: that's for remembrance. Pray you, love, remember. And there is pansies: that's for thoughts.⁹⁷

88 heat: anger 89 virtue: power

⁹⁰**thy madness...beam:** i.e. I shall take revenge for you being made mad and with an act that outdoes the original crime

⁹¹Natures, if loves: Human nature is pure when inspired by love. It often sends something precious (i.e. Ophelia's sanity) of itself after its loved one (i.e. Polonius)

 ⁹²barefaced: i.e. the coffin was open or there was no coffin
 ⁹³bier: a frame on which a corpse is laid out

⁹⁴move thus: urge me so

95 wheel: 1. refrain 2. wheel of Fortune

⁹⁶This nothing...matter: This apparent nonsense is more meaningful than ordinary speech
 ⁹⁷There's rosemary...thoughts:
 Each of the flowers have a symbolic meaning and therefore are given to specific characters. However, the text does not specify who gets which flower. Rosemary = remembrance, pansies = thought, probably given to Laertes

LAERTES

A document⁹⁸ in madness: thoughts and remembrance fitted.

OPHELIA

There's fennel for you, and columbines. There's rue for 180 you; and here's some for me. We may call it herb of grace o' Sundays. You must wear your rue with a difference. There's a daisy. I would give you some violets,⁹⁹ but they withered all when my father died. They say he made a good end – [Sings]

For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy.¹⁰⁰

LAERTES

Thought¹⁰¹ and affliction, passion,¹⁰² hell itself, She turns to favour and to prettiness.

OPHELIA

[Sings] And will he not come again? And will he not come again? 190 No, no, he is dead, Go to thy deathbed. He never will come again.

> His beard was as white as snow, All flaxen was his poll.¹⁰³ He is gone, he is gone, And we cast away moan.¹⁰⁴ God ha'¹⁰⁵ mercy on his soul!

And of all Christian souls. God buy you. *[Exit]*

LAERTES Do you see this, O God?

CLAUDIUS

200 Laertes, I must commune¹⁰⁶ with your grief
Or you deny me right. Go but apart,
Make choice of whom your wisest friends you will.
And they shall hear and judge 'twixt you and me.
If by direct or by collateral¹⁰⁷ hand

98 document: lesson

⁹⁹There's fennel...violets: See note 97 above. Fennel = flattery, probably given to a courtier or Claudius. Columbines = infidelity, probably given to Gertrude. Rue/Herb of Grace = repentance, probably given to Claudius or Gertrude. Daisy = unrequited love, Ophelia probably keeps these for herself. Violets = fidelity

¹⁰⁰ For bopny...joy: A line from a popular song

¹⁰¹ Thought: Sadness ¹⁰² passion: suffering

¹⁰³ All flaxen was his poll: all white was his hair

 ¹⁰⁴ we cast away moan: 1. we waste our time mourning 2. we who are left alone now mourn
 ¹⁰⁵ ha': have

¹⁰⁶ commune: share / join

¹⁰⁷ collateral: indirect

They find us touched,¹⁰⁸ we will our kingdom give – Our crown, our life, and all that we can ours – To you in satisfaction. But, if not, Be you content to lend your patience to us, And we shall jointly labour with your soul 210 To give it due content.

LAERTES

Let this be so. His means of death, his obscure¹⁰⁹ funeral – No trophy,¹¹⁰ sword, nor hatchment¹¹¹ o'er his bones, No noble rite, nor formal ostentation –¹¹² Cry to be heard, as 'twere from heaven to earth, That I must call't in question.¹¹³

CLAUDIUS

So you shall, And where th' offence is let the great axe¹¹⁴ fall. I pray you go with me. [*Exeunt*]

ey Quotation

Gertrude	To my sick soul, as sin's true nature is,
	Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss,
	So full of artless jealousy is guilt
	It spills itself in fearing to be spilt.
CLAUDIUS	There's such divinity doth hedge a king
	That treason can but peep to what it would,
	Acts little of his will.
LAERTES	To hell allegiance! Vows to the blackest devil!
	Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit!
	I dare damnation. To this point I stand,
	That both the worlds I give to negligence.
	Let come what comes, only I'll be revenged
	Most thoroughly for my father.

¹⁰⁸ **touched:** guilty / implicated (in Polonius' murder)

¹⁰⁹ obscure: secret
¹¹⁰ trophy: memorial
¹¹¹ hatchment: coat of arms
¹¹² ostentation: ceremony

¹¹³ That I must...question: that I must question it

¹¹⁴ great axe: executioner's axe

Scene Commentary

- **Ophelia's madness is made dramatically clear**. Claudius states that her madness comes 'All from her father's death'. However, the themes of Ophelia's songs suggest that there is more contributing to her insanity. She sings about death but also about lost love. The combination of her father's murder and the ending of her relationship with Hamlet has driven her mad. This is compounded by the fact that it is her former lover, Hamlet, who is responsible for her father's death.
- Gertrude clearly harbours a degree of guilt. However, she never wavers in her support for Claudius. In an aside she expresses her own sense of guilt, acknowledging her sinful state. This has led her to fear that some great tragedy may befall her:
 - 'To my sick soul, as sin's true nature is,
 - Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss,
 - So full of artless jealousy is guilt
 - It spills itself in fearing to be spilt.'

Despite this, Gertrude supports Claudius throughout this scene. She looks to protect her husband when Laertes leads an angry mob into the chamber and is quick to tell Laertes that Claudius did not kill Polonius.

- Claudius continues to exhibit his skill in manipulating those around him. He successfully manages to placate the fiery Laertes. Claudius allows Laertes room to vent his anger while managing to sidestep any suggestion of blame. He combines a mix of charm ('Good Laertes') and lies ('I am guiltless of your father's death, / And am most sensible in grief for it'). By the end of the scene, Laertes is coming to see Claudius as an ally rather than an enemy. He doesn't realise that Claudius has manoeuvred him into becoming the instrument of Hamlet's downfall.
- **Claudius' hypocrisy is apparent to the audience in this scene.** He assures Gertrude that as King he enjoys a certain degree of divine protection: 'There's such divinity doth hedge a king / That treason can but peep to what it would, / Acts little of his will.' The dramatic irony is that both Claudius and the audience know that no such 'divinity' protected Old King Hamlet when Claudius poisoned him.
- As a passionate and confrontational avenger, Laertes provides a dramatic contrast to Hamlet. While Hamlet is constrained by his conscience, Laertes is driven by impulse. He swears to ignore his conscience in his desire for retribution: 'To hell allegiance! Vows to the blackest devil! / Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit!' While both men desire revenge for the murder of their fathers, Laertes' need to act is in sharp contrast to Hamlet's moral reflections and lack of action.

Questions

- **1.** Do you agree with Claudius' estimation of Ophelia's madness, that it springs 'All from her father's death'?
- 2. What does this scene reveal about the character of Gertrude?
- **3.** How does Claudius show himself to be a cunning and skilful manipulator in this scene?
- **4.** Laertes and Hamlet approach revenge in radically different ways. How is this illustrated in this scene?