

OSRIC. The Electors are ... a bit reluctant about coming to see you, m'lord.

FORTINBRAS. Why?

OSRIC. The phrase you've been using, "Bring me the head of the Electors." It seems to make them nervous.

FORTINBRAS. You're kidding. Oh, God. I'm so sorry — that's really funny. I never heard it that way till right now. No wonder they don't want to come. *(The Captain enters and bows. He has a sealed parchment and a cloth bag, weighted down by something the shape and heft of a human head. He hands Fortinbras the parchment. Fortinbras reads it.)* Good. Good, good, good. I've been elected. *(To Osric.)* Take all these things and put them in the King's chambers. We'll go through them later.

OSRIC. Yes, m'lor — *(Correcting himself, with a deep bow.)* Yes, my sovereign lord. And may I be the first to say —

FORTINBRAS. *(Taking the sack from the Captain.)* Is this for me, too? *(Osric, Marcellus and Barnardo instantly bundle up everything.)* What were you saying, Osric?

OSRIC. It'll keep. *(Osric, Marcellus and Barnardo hurry out with the objects.)*

FORTINBRAS. Horatio, we've got to have a new story.

HORATIO. But there's only the truth.

FORTINBRAS. That's the problem. You want to tell everyone in Denmark that their entire royal family killed itself, plus a family of reasonably innocent nobles, *plus* two attendant lords? Good God, Horatio — how much do you think people can take? No one wants to hear their whole royal family's incompetent. Personally, I think we should just replace the whole story.

HORATIO. Replace it?

FORTINBRAS. We need a story that'll do something for us: explain the bodies, preserve the monarchy, give the people some kind of focus for all their — I don't know — anger, loss, *whatever*. And most of all, something that'll show people that everything that's happened up till now had to happen so that I could become king. I know how I'd like to explain it.

HORATIO. How?

FORTINBRAS. A Polish spy.

HORATIO. A Polish — ?!

FORTINBRAS. Exactly! It's the perfect idea. Look — the Poles, bitter at Claudius's pact with my uncle to grant me and my troops free passage through Denmark so that I can kick their Polish butts, send a spy to the court here in Elsinore. His job is to destroy the entire Danish royal family. You know, as a lesson to all who would conspire against the Polish crown — all that crap. Anyhow, he successfully sabotages the fencing match, bares the swordtip, poisons the weapon, the wine — see how easy this is, all one guy — sets the unsuspecting participants against each other in a sort of frenzy of sudden rage and paranoia, and executes the most extraordinary mass-regicide in the history of Europe.

HORATIO. But —

FORTINBRAS. *And we can even add a lot of stuff about the horror when the royal Danes, each mortally wounded and/or poisoned, suddenly realized that Poland had achieved its ultimate revenge — blah, blah, blah.*

HORATIO. That's not what happened.

FORTINBRAS. I bet it will be. It's just so much better. Anyone can understand it. And the best thing is, it gives me that historical reason-for-being that's so important to a new king. You see? I'm here to save Denmark from an imminent attack by Poland. *(Horatio looks incredibly dubious.)* Of course, if you want to tell people that ridiculous story of yours, be my guest. But I'll bet mine's the one that catches on. In fact, Captain, I want you to promulgate the true story you've just heard.

CAPTAIN. Which true story?

FORTINBRAS. The Polish —

CAPTAIN. Yes, my liege.

FORTINBRAS. Make it known throughout Denmark. And begin the amalgamation of Danish and Norwegian forces, preparatory to a full invasion.

CAPTAIN. Of — ?

FORTINBRAS. Poland.

CAPTAIN. Yes, my liege.

HORATIO. Invasion — !?