

OPHELIA. *Will you stop talking like that!?* Maybe those of you who had lives will disappear, since you don't need afterlives. But ... people like me —

LAERTES. *(Moving to Ophelia.)* Come on, Sis.

OPHELIA. *People like me ... ! (She can't finish.)*

LAERTES. Let's take a walk.

OPHELIA. With you? You can't even believe you're dead yet.

LAERTES. It's sinking in. *(Laertes escorts her out. Gertrude picks up the bouquet of dead flowers and drops them into the moat. She and Claudius exit as well.)*

FORTINBRAS. I'm sorry I killed you, Osric.

OSRIC. You ought to be. It was a dreadful mistake.

FORTINBRAS. Can you forgive me?

OSRIC. *(Making the bold choice.)* No. *(Osric smiles, pleased with himself, and exits. Fortinbras and Hamlet are alone. Hamlet bends down and picks up the only remaining object: the book.)*

HAMLET. For the moat? *(A beat. Hamlet moves towards the moat.)*

FORTINBRAS. No! Um ...

HAMLET. Yes?

FORTINBRAS. I ... can't decide.

HAMLET. Well, when you read it, how did you like it?

FORTINBRAS. I was ... captivated. Is that the right word?

HAMLET. Yes. *(With a look around.)* They'll tell a story about this place, no matter what we do. It could still be this one. *(Fortinbras hesitates, then reaches for the book. Hamlet hands it to him. Fortinbras holds it a moment, takes in the view one last time, then sets the book down on the battlement. The two men exit together, smiling. After a moment, Marcellus and Barnardo enter quickly — each of them arm in arm with one of the Maidens. They stare out over the battlement.)*

MARCELLUS. *(Pointing.)* There! There's where we saw it!

1st MAIDEN. *(Not understanding, but catching his mood.)* Oooo!

BARNARDO. The ghost of Hamlet's father!

2nd MAIDEN. Ooooo.

MARCELLUS. *(Picking up the book.)* What's this?

BARNARDO. I don't know. *(Barnardo prepares to throw it over the battlement. The Maidens quickly reach for it.)*

MAIDENS. Oooooo — !

BARNARDO. You want it? *(The Maidens nod. The 2nd Maiden opens the book, turns to a page at random. She starts to sound out the words with her usual strong accent.)*

2nd MAIDEN. "For in ... For in dat —

MARCELLUS. *(Looking over her shoulder.)* That.

2nd MAIDEN. "That ... Sleep? Sleep of ... "

BARNARDO. Death.

2nd MAIDEN. "Death. For in that sleep of death, what ... um — "

MARCELLUS. Dreams may come.

2nd MAIDEN. "Dreams".

1st MAIDEN. *(Also starting to read.)* "Venn ve haf ... haf —"

BARNARDO. "When. When we have shuffled off — "

1st MAIDEN. *(Eager to continue by herself.)* "Shuffled off ... dis ... mortal ... um —"

2nd MAIDEN. "Mortal ... ?"

MARCELLUS. "Coil."

MAIDENS. *(Together, nodding and smiling with accomplishment.)* Ah! "Coil."

MARCELLUS. That's right — coil. *(The Maidens beam at their book. Barnardo looks uncertainly at Marcellus.)*

BARNARDO. Coil? *(Marcellus shrugs. The Maidens look at the book. The men too are drawn back to its pages. Lights fade to black.)*

THE END