

blocks him again.) Can't you see how desperate I am?! (*Polonius tries yet another direction. Fortinbras doesn't move.*) Damn it, I need your advice! (*Polonius stops, fighting his urge to advise. Fortinbras falls to his knees.*) Please! Nothing makes sense anymore. I swore off ghosts, I even swore off Ophelia. But I can't make it stick! Every time I see her, I just crumble. I used to handle everything so well: battles, intrigues, women. I never even worked up a sweat. But here at Elsinore I've seen things — I've *done* things.... Give me advice, Polonius, please! One sentence, one phrase, one word.

POLONIUS. Ophelia.

FORTINBRAS. Ophelia?

POLONIUS. Lay off her.

FORTINBRAS. Ok — ok. I know I should. Why?

POLONIUS. It's obvious. You're not suited to treat with the dead. Hamlet was fathoms deeper than you. Now look at him: locked in a box of light — and he only *talked* to a ghost.

FORTINBRAS. What you're saying is, I'm in jeopardy here.

POLONIUS. At least.

FORTINBRAS. But I have these feelings about her. It's not like with any other girl.

POLONIUS. I should hope not.

FORTINBRAS. It's so *intense*. The minute I see her, the minute I touch her —

POLONIUS. I *am* her father.

FORTINBRAS. It's love. How can I resist that?

POLONIUS. What you feel isn't love, it's nostalgia. For non-existence.

FORTINBRAS. For non — ?

POLONIUS. The moment we become aware of our own existence, we secretly begin to long for the time before: when we never were. And why not? It's attractive — utter oblivion, utter peace. *Non-being*. We think death will give us that again. No wonder we fall in love with it. But that's not what death gives us. Nothing can erase, completely, what has been.

FORTINBRAS. So, um — how would I fit that into a plan of action?

POLONIUS. Tell the truth! To thine own self be —

FORTINBRAS. Nice?

POLONIUS. *TRUE!!*

FORTINBRAS. Right.

POLONIUS. And get married!

FORTINBRAS. To Ophelia?

POLONIUS. No, not to Ophelia! To someone else.

FORTINBRAS. Who?

POLONIUS. It doesn't matter. Someone living, that's all.

FORTINBRAS. Married? But there's no one.

POLONIUS. What about those two I saw in your bed?

FORTINBRAS. They were just — They don't even speak my language.

POLONIUS. All the better! Find them. Marry one. Then maybe Ophelia will leave you alone, and you can gain the courage to tell the truth.

FORTINBRAS. About *what*? What truth am I supposed to tell?

POLONIUS. Hamlet's truth. My truth. Without it, nothing can go forward — all is held back.

FORTINBRAS. But I've already told the Polish spy story —

POLONIUS. *Tell the truth!!* What did I just tell you?!

FORTINBRAS. But —

POLONIUS. *You can't take advice! None of you! You never take advice!!* I'm leaving.

FORTINBRAS. No — ! (*Polonius starts out, dragging the tapestry behind him. Fortinbras grabs a corner of it.*) What should I do about the army? They took Carpathia without a shot!

POLONIUS. (*Tugging at the tapestry.*) I don't care!

FORTINBRAS. Why's Hamlet in a box?

POLONIUS. Let go!

FORTINBRAS. Should I hang Osric?

POLONIUS. *I don't care!!* (*Polonius tugs the arras free.*) Tell the truth. Tell it soon. There isn't much time — for either of us.

FORTINBRAS. What do you mean? You're dead.

POLONIUS. You think eternity's forever? (*Polonius exits. Fortinbras stares after him. Fortinbras exits the opposite way. A moment passes, then Horatio hurries in, pushing Osric ahead of him. Osric is in chains.*)