

A WOMAN OR NOT TO BE

SCENE 1

*[Hamlet is sitting on the small cube with the superheroes standing behind her; she has the appearance of a hardcore fan of Japanese anime. As the music begins to play which includes her father's voice, she is baffled by it.]*

Hamlet Sr

My Angel...

Hamlet

Fuck you!!!

*[As the heavy metal guitar music begins to play, with each note, Hamlet starts to swing, slowly gets up, and walks towards the center stage; she starts hip hop movements with the four superheroes, showcasing her frenzied mind. When the music mellows down a bit, Hamlet and the superheroes minimize their movements gradually; they start swinging their chest—doing a heartbeat like movement with the drum beats]*

Hamlet

I heard news today from the northern wind  
News that will throw me into obscurity faster than a blink.

That white carriage at the curb  
Holds no promise of hope.  
Dust is still rising...  
Did I hear a hushed weep, Mother?  
And *shush* came her reply.

We hold our breath, as if to die—but only to live.  
A man at the curb screams:  
"Hide your presence like a shadow in the dark!"  
Do shadows die or vanish?  
And I want to scream back—

I heard news today from the northern wind,  
News that will throw me into obscurity faster than a blink.  
A seed of murk waits to germinate.  
Will it grow into a monster? I do not know yet.

If it does, I know their branches are poised  
To cast me away with the northern wind.

In the end...

In the end there is no glory.

Let it all unfold.

Alas, we are all flawed—

Let that be in the open,

For all to see, for all to judge.

*[Superheroes exit the stage; Hamlet picks up the sword and moves to stage right; blue light fades in- she forms a sitting posture and then walks towards the cubes.]*

## SCENE 2

*[Hamlet speaks with her mother's ghost; swears revenge.]*

*[A castle like structure has been set up with six cubes, a small cube and a bench—all white. Ross and Guild are sleeping below the structure. Hamlet stands on the topmost cube, staring intently. With slow movements, she turns her back and walks down till the edge of the bench. Then, she walks back again and proceeds to sit on the second cube. Suddenly, the light on Mother's Ghost sitting on a white chair, with a book-A Divine Comedy in her hand, fades in, and she looks at Hamlet.]*

**Mother's Ghost**

You are late.

**Hamlet**

I am late? What time is it now?

**Mothers Ghost**

It's past midnight now. The clock just struck twelve.

**Hamlet**

Really? I didn't hear it. Remember, I am too much in the sun.

**Mothers Ghost**

Have you eaten?

**Hamlet**

My appetite is long gone , mother!

**Mothers Ghost**

Why? Don't be sad.

All that lives must die, passing through nature to eternity.

**Hamlet**

Now I am really sad, Mother. What do you want?

**Mothers Ghost**

You need so many explanations. Okay, here we go. Mark me, pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing to what I shall tell thee.

**Hamlet**

Maa? *[Irritatingly]*

**Mother's Ghost**

I am your mother's spirit. Neither am I doomed for a certain term to walk the night, nor am I confined to waste in fire. I am done! *[Ghost's light goes off. She gets up, walks slowly and sits on the small cube.]*

**Hamlet**

Mother, mother, where are you? Mother...

**Mother's Ghost**

Listen to me, baby -I am your mother's spirit. Neither am I doomed for a certain term to walk the night, nor am I confined to waste in fire. Baby, listen, don't be consumed by rage.

**Hamlet**

Time is out of joint, mother. I was born to set it right.

**Mothers Ghost**

Set right what?

**Hamlet**

Your death!

**Mother's Ghost**

You are not listening to me, are you? What did I say just five lines before? All that lives must die, passing through nature to eternity.

**Hamlet**

Did you just pass through nature to eternity, or did someone push you in it, mother?

*[Hamlet sits on the bench]*

**Mother's Ghost**

I am sorry , baby. I had forgotten you are still in mourning; I shouldn't be so harsh on you. You look too thin, are you not sleeping well, eating well?

**Hamlet**

You are still not answering me, mother!

**Mother's ghost**

It's complicated, baby.

**Hamlet**

So, you don't blame him!

**Mother's ghost**

Who?

**Hamlet**

You are toxic, mother.

**Mother's ghost**

Could have been an accident!

**Hamlet**

That's poison, ma!

**Mother's ghost**

It could have been meant for him.

**Hamlet**

And?

**Mother's ghost**

He could have accidentally passed the glass to me!

**Hamlet**

How naive you are, mother! How naive. Tell me the truth, you were murdered, weren't you?

**Mother's ghost**

I am not going to answer that.

**Hamlet**

Why not? Are you real? Can't you see my point? All I want is revenge— a simple idea, to be executed or not to be executed. You never understood me, you never gave me hope.

**Mother's ghost**

Do what you want.

*[Mother's Ghost gets up and walks towards the cube behind Hamlet.]*

**Mother's Ghost**

But if you have any natural feeling of a daughter for a mother, then don't let this stand. Don't let your mind or soul contemplate harming anyone. Be good, my love. I still love you, and goodbye for now. The glow of light on the horizon shows that morning is near. Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye.

*[Mother's Ghost walks away slowly; she shouts from the wings.]*

Remember me!

*[Hamlet sits on the bench, pondering in silence]*

**Hamlet**

Remember you? Remember you?

*[Hamlet gets up, climbs and reaches the topmost cube.]*

**Hamlet**

Yes, I will remember you the way I want to. I'll wipe clean my memory of all unimportant facts, all the wise sayings of books, all images and impressions from my youth, so that your commandment alone will live there.

**Hamlet**

And my father. Oh, you wicked man! Oh, you villain, villain, damned, smiling villain! *[Hamlet climbs down the cubes angrily.]* Now I must fulfil my vow. She said, "Remember me." And I have sworn I would.

*[Rosencrantz and Guildenstern wake up, startled by the noise of the sword.]*

**Ross**

What was that? Strange...

**Guild**

Did you hear anything?

**Rosencrantz**

Hamlet, did you hear anything?

*[Hamlet gradually climbs up while Ross and Guild are speaking and stands on the second cube.]*

**Hamlet**

Oh, it was amazing!

**Guildenstern**

Then tell us.

**Hamlet**

Ghost!

**Rosencrantz**

A good one or a bad one?

**Hamlet**

An honest one. I'll tell you that. But as for your desire to know what happened between us, control yourself and don't ask.

**Guildenstern (to Ross)**

Don't ask.

**Ross**

Why would I ask?

*[Hamlet climbs up to the topmost cube]*

**Hamlet**

Rest, rest, you unhappy ghost!

**[To Guildenstern and Rosencrantz]** My friends, I thank you with all my love. Keep your lips sealed, please. Everything is wrong these days. Oh, curse the fact that I'm the one who has to set things right!

*[Hamlet climbs down the cubes and exits.]*

**Rosencrantz**

What is that?

**Guildenstern**

I don't know.

*[Hamlet walks on stage from one end of the wings to another.]*

**Rosencrantz**

What is that? Strange!

**Guildenstern**

A ghost from the grave!

**Rosencrantz**

Ghost, I love Gosht, can you see the gosht?

**Guildenstern**

Nobody can see the ghost. You know what, the ghost is in her head.

**Rosencrantz**

So no gosht, there is no gosht?

**Guildenstern**

Abe, gosht nahi, ghost!!!

**Rosencrantz**

But you know what. I can smell the gosht, Hamlet is eating  
gosht, I also want to eat the gosht...

*[Hamlet passes by again. Ross follows, Guil follows Ross. All  
of them exit. Light fades off slowly with the music.]*

**SCENE 3**

*[Hamlet in therapy. Hamlet feigns madness.]*

*[Hamlet is sitting on the edge of the bench. The room is in a  
hospital. Music and light fade in. A beeping machine provides  
an intermittent rhythm. The janitor enters with a mop to  
clean the squares drawn by Hamlet; vacuum cleaner sound comes  
in the background, and she exits from behind the cubes after  
cleaning.]*

*Hamlet draws a square in front of her slowly with a chalk.  
Then she gets up as if calculating something, and puts dots  
in a few places on the stage. She comes back and sits on the  
bench again, pondering deeply. Then she gets up and starts  
connecting the dots and making patterns of multiple  
squares on stage. After completing, she stands quietly  
looking down at the final square she has drawn.]*

**Hamlet**

Mother, mother, where are you?

*[She starts to weep. Then, she walks slowly and sits on the  
ground on stage right, as if for meditation.]*

**Hamlet**

*[sobbing]*

He married my aunt, my mother's sister, who is no more like  
my mother than before. The salt from his crocodile tears had  
washed out of his red eyes, and he remarried. My heavy sighs,  
the tears from my eyes, the sadness visible on my face, or  
any other show of grief cannot capture what I actually feel.

*[The janitor walks in from stage left with the mop to clean  
the drawings; the vacuum cleaner sound beeps in. The*

*assistant doctor walks in from stage right with an X-ray of skull and a prescription.]*

**Hamlet**

My heart must break in silence, but I will not remain quiet...  
Revenge, revenge, revenge.

*[The janitor stops suddenly while cleaning and stares at Hamlet, indicating to her to stop drawing and blabbering. Hamlet glares at her intently and goes back to drawing the square. Meanwhile, the assistant doctor drags the white chair, keeps it behind the janitor and stares at Hamlet. Hamlet stares back at the janitor and the assistant, gets up and slowly walks towards the chair. The janitor exits after cleaning.]*

*Hamlet sits on the chair, reluctantly; the assistant drags the chair back to the position where she was sitting on the ground and walks back towards the cubes. Meanwhile, the doctor enters from stage left and sits on the bench.]*

**Doctor**

And the prognosis, Doctor?

**Assistant Tripura Sundari**

You heard her, Doc...you heard her say the word "revenge". Did you feel the murderous coldness in her voice?

*[Hamlet stops drawing suddenly and stares at Ross & Guild. She starts moving her body towards them while being seated.]*

**Doctor**

Absolutely. That's a very cold voice.

**Guildenstern**

I told you she is planning for revenge.

**Rosentcrantz**

But how can it be possible, she is she.

**Doctor**

This is?

**Assistant**

A

**Guildenstern**

But she wants it.

**Doc**

This is?

**Assistant**

B

**Rosentcrantz**

What does she want?

**Guildenstern**

She wants to do but can't do it...

**Doc**

This is still A.

**Rosentcrantz**

What?

**Guildenstern**

She can't do it, but wants to do it...

**Doc**

Where is C ?

**Rosentcrantz**

Say that again?

**Guildenstern**

Revenge.

**Assistant**

This is C sir.

**Rosentcrantz**

Oh revenge.

**Guildenstern**

Don't say it loud. We will only find the motive much later;  
remember, we were sent for?

**Hamlet**

**(to Ross & Guild)** Are you my friends? If you are, then talk to me. I am here, talk to me. I am here, talk to me, don't paraphrase me, I am here, in flesh and blood, talk to me.

**Assistant**

Shall we?

**Doctor (to Assistant)**

Ignore. We don't engage with our subject of interest at any given point; she is very delicate now. Doctor, put the sensors, please.

*[The Assistant starts putting the sensors on Hamlet's head and chest.]*

**Rosencrantz**

What is that?

**Guildenstern**

Sensor.

**Rosencrantz**

What does sensors do?

**Guildenstern**

Sensors sense.

**Rosencrantz**

Sense what?

**Guildenstern**

Revenge.

**Doctor**

So, how are you feeling today Hamlet? Did you enjoy your yoga session? Okay Doctor, note down- Hamlet- session 7, October 13th. So, where were we? **(to Hamlet)**

**Hamlet**

My spirit is delicate now, my grief, a torrent unrestrained, threatens to overwhelm me with the tempest of hysteria. Shall

I then, in silence, bear the lament in some lonely corner, whilst another, more resolute male, doth take revenge? For a mere feminine mortal to speak of such a deed...

**Doctor**

Excellent, now simplify please.

**Hamlet**

Revenge! Come on, what am I asking? A legit request, a historical necessity for a woman, a request so classic that everyone will pay to be in my shoes.

**Doctor**

*[starts walking towards the cubes, ignoring her; stops center stage.]* All of you closely watch. The subject appears to be exhibiting a heightened awareness of the meta-narrative.

**Hamlet**

And if I am a man?

**Doctor**

A classic case of the observational bias paradox, perhaps.

**Hamlet**

And if I am a man? My non-legit need will be a legit fodder for a good tragedy, isn't it?

**Assistant**

Sir, I am a general surgeon, please enlighten me.

*[Doctor walks away and sits on the bench]*

**Doctor**

Ahh...What's your name?

**Assistant**

Doctor Tripura Sundari sir.

**Doctor**

And where did you study?

**Assistant**

Madras Medical College sir.

**Doctor**

Do you know Doctor Muthuswamy?

**Assistant**

Yes, yes, he was my mentor sir.

**Doctor**

Ohhhh, he is a very good doctor.

*[Doctor and Assistant starts reading from the X- ray.  
Meanwhile, Hamlet and the others listen intently.]*

**Assistant**

The current hypothesis, supported by functional magnetic resonance imaging (**FMRI**) data of audience members, indicates a strong correlation between her soliloquies and heightened activity in the insula and amygdala, suggesting a primal emotional response.

**Rosencrantz**

**(excitedly, nudging Guildenstern)** See, Guildenstern? What did I say on the way. It's all about brain chemistry!

**Guildenstern**

**(Nodding vigorously)** Absolutely, Rosencrantz! The neural pathways of despair!

**Hamlet**

Soliloquies and Metaphors? Are you all analysing me? Don't you always swear by science? How can they have their revenge, while I cannot? Give me a reason, one that is grounded in science and not in paradox.

**Assistant**

Doc, can I answer that question?

**Doctor**

You are a house surgeon right. So, watch her.

**Assistant**

Can we apply the unconscious desires, the unresolved conflict  
as a...

**Hamlet**

Are you reducing the entire human experience to a series of  
predictable responses? What about the sheer, genderless,  
magnificent, illogical, glorious absurdity of it all? The  
baffling enigma of existence itself!

**Doctor**

Your excessive grief is impious, womanly, and shows a lack of  
understanding and maturity. You will never get your revenge.

**Hamlet**

Why not?

**Doctor**

Point number 1, that's not in your biology and point number  
2, if you do get that revenge, you will be like any other  
man.

**Hamlet**

I don't care.

**Doc 1**

Don't you remember, simply mimicking male violence and  
adopting manly tactics and weapons, may unintentionally  
reinforce harmful gender stereotypes.

**Hamlet**

Do you expect any moral character from a vengeful male? You  
don't, so let me be, let my anger flow, I don't care where  
you box me, you can keep your perception to yourself.

**Doctor**

Your wish

[Doctor takes the injection from the assistant and starts walking towards Hamlet.]

**Guildenstern** [steps down along with Roz]

Shall we wait a bit, Doc?

**Hamlet**

What are you doing?

**Doctor**

For what?

**Hamlet**

Is that a PRN?

**Guildenstern**

Me and Ross are sent for..

**Hamlet**

Caught you, so you are sent for.

**Guildenstern (to Hamlet)**

No

**Rosencrantz (to Guildenstern)**

No?

**Guildenstern (to Rosencrantz)**

Yes

**Rosencrantz (to Hamlet)**

Yes

**Hamlet**

Yes?

**Rosencrantz (to Hamlet)**

Yes

**Guildenstern (to Rosencrantz)**

No

**Rosencrantz (to Guildenstern)**

No?

**Guildenstern (to Rosencrantz)**

No

**Guildenstern & Rosencrantz (To Hamlet)**

No

**Hamlet**

So you are not?

**Rosencrantz (to Hamlet)**

No

**Rosencrantz (to Guildenstern)**

No?

**Guildenstern (to Rosencrantz)**

Yes

**Rosencrantz (to Hamlet)**

Yes

**Hamlet**

So you are sent for!

**Rosencrantz**

Yes

**Guildenstern (to Rosencrantz)**

Yes, we were sent for to find out what's on her mind.

**Hamlet (to Doctor; in a mocking voice)**

Doctor can you please find out what's in my head?

**Doctor**

You don't worry. **(to Hamlet)** You see, there is nothing to find out. Her mind is blind and blank except for a loud voice shouting in her cranium... revenge, revenge. Who are these people? **(to Assistant)**

**Assistant**

They are just her bystanders.

**Hamlet**

Why not Doc? If your father murdered your mother, then married your aunt, and then they lived happily ever after, what would you feel?

**Doctor**

What should I feel? Okay, I feel happy for them. Let them enjoy the cherished bliss of marital life. Yes, of course, I will be sad about your mother's death... You see, mothers die either today or tomorrow. But how can you say your mother's death is murder? And that too, your father... How can you connect your father to your mother's death, can you? No evidence... except for some midnight ghost whispers, only you heard and no one else ...that too you yourself don't believe.

**Hamlet**

And what about my intuition?

**Doctor**

They are impulsive, my dear. Your consciousness is not passive but actively shaped by the world you observe. Your inward reflection destabilises your reality, so I can't imagine how you handle something enormous as revenge. My advice: enjoy your privileges, get married and have kids!

**Hamlet**

So you are not any different from the others. *To hell with your science.*

**[Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: *hesitate a bit, looks at Hamlet*]**

**Hamlet**

Now I am alone.

Oh, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!

I can't have revenge? Why not? Everyone can, as long as they will it. We will watch the play and I will write twelve to

sixteen lines... sixteen lines...yes I have to write sixteen lines...sixteen lines.....

***[Hamlet lies down on stage right and starts drawing.]***

**Rosencrantz**

Shit, what is that?

**Guildenstern**

What he gave!

**Rosencrantz**

And what did he give!

**Guildenstern**

***[pointing to Hamlet]*** What he wants.

**Rosencrantz**

Did she say she feels distracted?

**Guildenstern**

That will be revealed much later, don't pre-empt.

**Rosencrantz**

So, we don't know anything?

**Guildenstern**

Yes, for now... we don't know anything

We don't know...

**Rosencrantz**

Anything.

**Guildenstern**

Hmmm...We will watch her. Hungry?

**Rosencrantz**

Famished.

**Guildenstern**

Let's grab something. What do you want?

**Guildenstern**

I want [Shrewsbury Cakes](#) and a Gooseberry Fool and Sack  
Posset.

**Rosencrantz**

I want Warden pie, Junket and Roast mutton.

**Guildenstern**

I want a sallet.

**Rosencrantz**

Marchpane, cakes and ale.

**Guildenstern**

Biriyani

**Rosencrantz**

Biriyani indeed.

**Hamlet**

To die, to sleep;

To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;

For in that sleep of death what dreams may come

When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,

Must give us pause: there's the respect

That makes calamity of so long life.

To die, to sleep...*[light fades off slowly]*

**Scene 4**

**Hamlet's hallucinatory space.**

*[Hamlet is sitting with Ophelia, sharing a very tender and private moment. She is holding a paper plane that she passes to Ophelia, they are engaged in a game of their own. Hamlet gives Ophelia letters, one after the other. As she reads them, Hamlet gets up and gives her a smaller letter and a flower and together they proceed to read the letter. The Doctor enters as the king, while the Assistant Doctor enters*

*as the new queen. Ros and Guil follows them. All of them are laughing rowdily. Queen and the king are playing cards. The aunt (now the queen) and the King engages in flirtatious on the cheek merry making as they play cards. This action repeats. Hamlet notices and stops Ophelia from reading.]*

**Hamlet**

Did you see that? Did you see that?

That wily woman is trapping your father and my father. **[Queen laughs]**

**Ophelia**

Oh!

**King**

You are radiant my queen

**Hamlet[moves towards Ophelia]**

Oh...

**Queen**

Is that so?

**Hamlet**

Are you pure?

**Ophelia**

What do you mean, virgin virgin pure or pure pure pure?

**King**

Jack

**Queen**

**King**

6

**Queen**

9

**King**

69, hahaha

**Hamlet**

Doesn't matter. That used to be a great puzzle but now I have solved it. I used to love you Ophelia.

**Ophelia**

Can I confess? I used to wait for your sweet voice, not anymore. You have fallen too low.

**Hamlet**

Go to a convent then.

**Ophelia**

You are toxic.

**Hamlet**

Ophelia, can I lie down on your lap?

**Ophelia**

No

**Hamlet**

No?

**Ophelia**

No

**Hamlet**

No

**Ophelia**

No means no

**Hamlet**

I mean, can I put my head on your lap.

**Ophelia**

Yes

**Hamlet**

Yes means yes or?

**Ophelia**

Yes means yes

**Hamlet**

Did you think I was talking about sex?

**Ophelia**

Yes

**Hamlet**

You don't realise you are being seductive.

**Ophelia**

Your jokes get better even as your manners get worse.

**Queen**

What are you two reading?

**Hamlet**

Words words words...

**Queen**

What is the matter?

**Hamlet**

Between who?

**Queen**

I mean the matter you read!

**Hamlet**

**(to Ophelia)** Should I tell her?

**Queen**

Please!

**Ophelia**

Aunty Queen, can you stay out of our moments?

**Queen**

Bacche, here's a bit of free advice. Know that when a woman is filled with passion and desire, her spirit makes her tongue utter many promises, my dear. Bye Hammy.

**Hamlet**

She is correct. If you must get married, marry a fool, because wise women know that men will eventually cheat on them or better go to a nunnery.

**Ophelia**

Or better hear this. To write your worth which no pen can express, where but to eclipse your fame and make it lesse. Goodbye Hamlet.

**(Ophelia exits. Hamlet follows her.)**

**Queen**

Your daughter is obnoxious. Why is she acting so oddly, acting with a wild and dangerous lunacy that's such a huge shift from her earlier calm behaviour?

**Rosencrantz**

She does confess she feels herself distracted.

But from what cause she will by no means speak.

**King**

You two, make sure Hamlet has some fun without her.

**Queen**

Exactly, that girl is the problem. Dig deeper. I mean deeper.

**(King and Queen exits)**

**Ross**

What now?

**Guild**

We will wait.

**(playful fighting sequence)**

**Hamlet**

My excellent good friends! You are here and why?

**Rosencrantz**

To visit you, my princess.

**Guildenstern**

Yes my princess. To visit you!

**Hamlet**

Are you spying on me, speak?

**Guildenstern**

No princess. We know everything already. [ **Ros gives Guil a nasty look**]

**Rosencrantz**

He meant in general.

**Hamlet**

[ **Hamlet looks at Guil and shakes her head mildly.**] Men don't delight me. No, women neither—though your smiles seem to suggest that's what you were thinking.

**Rosencrantz**

My Princess, I was thinking that if men don't delight you, then those actors who you called for will definitely do, they are already out there.

**Hamlet**

Aha the actors, I forgot sometimes art can be a leveler. Let's hurry. During the scene, please watch my father with all your care and attention. If his hidden guilt is not revealed during the scene, then that ghost was a demon—and my ideas about my father were dirty and wrong. Watch him carefully, as will I. Afterwards, we'll meet and come to a joint conclusion about whether or not he is guilty.

**Guildenstern**

What did you say?

**Hamlet**

Of course. During the scene, please watch my father with all your care and attention. If his hidden guilt is not revealed

during the scene, then that ghost was a demon—and my ideas about my father were dirty and wrong. Watch him carefully, as will I. Afterwards, we'll meet and come to a joint conclusion about whether or not he is guilty.

**Guilderstern**

Yes, We'll both watch him closely.

**Hamlet**

[ **Hamlet to himself**] I need more solid evidence. The play's the thing, I'll use that to reveal the conscience of the king.

They're coming. I must look like I'm doing nothing. Find a seat.

*[King moves towards Hamlet]*

**Queen**

What play are we watching?

**King**

What play are we watching?

**Hamlet**

Mouse trap

**Queen**

Is it a comedy or a tragedy

**Hamlet**

Tragedy

**Hamlet Sr**

Is it where a mouse finds the trap and warns the animals, then a snake bites the landlady, the land owner kills the goose, and, eventually the cow, and in the end everyone dies.

**Queen**

They are all having a feast

**Hamlet**

I wish things happened that fast father. It's a metaphor... It's really a mischievous piece of work, but who cares? You and I have clear consciences, so it doesn't concern us. Let the guilty flinch. We can watch without being bothered.

**King**

Are you reading that or it is an accessory?

**Hamlet**

Accessory?

*[ A long bench is brought forward, the king is sitting between Hamlet and Rosencrantz, they are keenly and periodically watching him, audio sound track only at the end when clapping happens no emotion on the king's face]*

**Hamlet Sr**

That's a very avant-garde Hamlet play. [King claps] Now can I have a word with you? Sit. Hamlet, It is sweet and good that you mourn like this for your mother. But you must also remember that your mother lost her mother, who in turn lost her mother, and each time the daughter had a duty to mourn for her mother for a certain time. But to continue to mourn out of sheer stubbornness is blasphemous. It isn't womanly.

It does not fit with God's desires, and it indicates a too-soft heart, an undisciplined mind, and a general lack of knowledge

**Hamlet**

You already told me this once. didn't he? In the beginning

**Hamlet Sr**

When? **[deep thought]** hmmm, a loving response is what I hoped for. **[to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern]** Once you finish, meet me, we have much to ponder on

**Queen**

Thanks Guildenstern and worthy Rosencrantz

**Guildenstern**

I am Guil

**Queen**

Thanks Guildenstern and worthy Rosencrantz

**King**

Come my love

**[they exit]**

**Hamlet**

So?

**[ looking at Rosencrantz]**

**Rosencrantz**

So?

**Guildenstern**

So?

**Hamlet**

Didn't he flinch?

Did you see? Did you watch it?

**Rosencrantz**

I watched him closely.

**Guildenstern [to Ros]**

Didn't you closely watch the king?

**Rosencrantz**

I did!

**Guildenstern**

Then he did, I will vouch for him, he never lies

**Rosencrantz**

I do!

**Hamlet**

Then?

**Rosencrantz**

I think he is very pleased with his performance I say

**Hamlet**

Who are you talking about

**Guildenstern**

The actor who played the king, isn't he wonderful?

**Hamlet**

So, both of you didn't look at my father?

**[Ros and Guil look at each other]**

**Hamlet**

When the actors mention the poison?

**[They shake their heads in negatives]**

**Hamlet**

Why? How will I proceed if I don't have an iota of evidence? **[pause]** One simple thing I asked for? And both of you **[Silence]** Look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me. You would seem to know my stops. Why? because I am a woman? I should let it go, that's what you are thinking

**[ walking closer to Ros and Guil]**

I will not give in, remember I have a key piece of evidence, I heard the Ghost's testimony. **[afterthought]**

But nobody's there except me when the ghost came, so no one will believe me, and if they don't believe me then I can't act, and if I can't do a justifiable act what is the point? That's not enough for me to act, what if this ghost is not a wronged, sweet soul, but some demonic fiend, a thing of hell, sent to manipulate a hand to murder?

I need evidence, I am born to set it right ...I want the king  
to flinch in his guilt tell the actors we need more  
rehearsals

**[shouting at Ros and Guil. Get the players, tell them to  
speak the speech. We will start the scene where mother is  
sleeping.]**

**[a visibly irritated king walks in]**

**Hamlet Sr**

What... again?

**Hamlet**

We need to watch the play again, the play is the thing.

**Hamlet Sr**

I just finished watching it once.

**Hamlet**

Yes, but the actors think they were unable to translate the  
inherent meaning so they made loads of changes,

**Hamlet Sr [reluctantly]**

In fifteen minutes?

**Hamlet**

the play has improved a lot from the last time

**Hamlet Sr [reluctantly]**

Ok, if you say so.

**Queen**

Can I say the name of the play?

**Hamlet Sr [reluctantly]**

Yes my love

**Queen**

a mouse finds the trap and warns the animals, then a snake  
bites the landlady, the land owner kills the goose,  
and, eventually the the cow, and in the end everyone dies

**[interrupted by music, play starts again]**

**[They all sit and settle down to watch, and look at the king,  
he is not changed in his emotion. Hamlet and Ros and Guil are  
watching, this will stretch a bit. The king gets up]**

**Hamlet Sr [to Ros and Guil]**

like I said, other than her mother's death, I can't imagine  
what made her so unlike herself. Since you both grew up with  
her and are so familiar with her, I ask you both to stay here  
at court for a while. Spend time with Hamlet, get her to  
enjoy life again, and try to find out if there's anything we  
don't know about that's bothering her—so we can try to fix  
it.

**[Queen walk towards Hamlet and extends her hand to her,  
Hamlet turns her head away]**

**[Exit the king, queen and Ross and Guil follow]**

**Hamlet**

Can we do the play one more time? I think the actors are  
unable to translate the emotional meaning of the play.

**[A dejected Hamlet looks at them. Black out]**

**Scene 5**

**Player 1 (playing Queen Gertrude)**

**(Sighing, looking at his prop dagger)**

Speak the speech, speak the speech; how dare she tell me  
what to do. I am a trained actor. I have studied from RADA,  
does she even know how difficult it is get in? She, sitting  
in her palace telling me how to take my monologue. I am the

queen of monologue. She has not taken a single acting class,  
and instructing me, Speak the speech, speak the speech.

{player 4 and player 5 enters}

**Player 4 (playing Claudius)**

Sir sir sir sir...We are packing everything but they are  
putting the first mirror in the second box and the second  
mirror in the first box. Is it ok?

**Player 5 (Director)**

No no no...tell them to put the first mirror in the first box  
and the second mirror in the second box.

**Player 5 (Director)**

**[On phone]** Book a tempo traveller, no 18 seater...

**Player 4**

Ok sir. I will tell them to put the first mirror in the  
second box and the second box in the first box.

**Player 3 (playing Polonius) to Player 1**

What happened?

**Player 1**

Speak the speech, speak the speech; what does the princess  
mean? And the King, Bruh, No flicker. Just... nothing. I poured  
my whole uterus into that monologue Hamlet gave and the king  
just-sat there giving major NPC energy. Big yikes. Big big  
yikes

**Player 4 (playing Claudius)**

Guys listen. I found these three balls. Have you seen my two  
other balls?

**Player 3**

I saw I saw

**Player 4**

Where?

**Player 1**

What was I saying?

**Player 3**

NPC energy

**Player 1**

Major NPC energy.

**Player 2 (playing Ophelia)**

Are the king was more than sitting yaar. He was smirking. Low key. Making it feel like we are cringe. And the aunty Queen?

**Player 1**

She is a bitch.

**Player 4**

Bhabi bohut buzzing hai.

**Player 2**

Bullshit

**Player 3**

Salty?

**Player 2 to Player 3**

Arey, she was so uninterested. She had zero aura. Just fanning herself like it was a whole mood.

**Player 1 [mimics aunty queen]**

What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me? Help help

**Player 2**

Help help. Exactly. That's so chewgy.

**Player 5**

Settle down. We slayed. Our part was fire. We hit all the marks. It's not our fault if these baujees have no taste. They don't get the vision.

**Player 3**

Sir sir sir...Tomorrow I will only come for the second half of the first show and the first half of the second show.

**Player 5**

Why?

**Player 3**

I am expecting a funeral.

**Player 1**

No vision. It's a matter of taste. Wearing flashy clothes doesn't give you taste. One has to cultivate it. You have to watch Mubi, read Marquez, listen to Beethoven. This. This. This was an indictment! We spilled the tea on a whole ghost story! The guy we were calling out for the murder, the king, just looked at us like we were a bunch of noobs doing a 'college' skit.

**First Player**

Fam that's the thing. He saw through it. He wasn't even phased. Or... what if the whole thing is cap?

**Player 2** (Pauses, looking up)

Cap? You're delulu.

**Player 4**

he is delulu

**Player 3**

You both are delulu. She was so specific.

**Player 1**

Who was specific?

**Player 3**

Princess hamlet."The poison in the ear. the poison in the ear  
" We fucked it up. It was our dumb-show. Some so called actors were giving "so precise". Imagine, if something like that happen how can it be a coincidence" energy.

**Player 4**

Aeee, bro, fucker, listen I was in my character. Aur tumlogon ne Raja ko nahi dekha? The King is emotionally constipated.  
And The plot

**[Player 2 picks player 4 poison and throws it in the prop bag]**

Aee chana, tokhe bar bole chi amar jeenish chua chui korish na, bujhti parish na?

Aar to aar golpota kono bhalo nahi

**Player 1**

What are you saying?

Player

The plot is also not so unique.

**Player 3**

Plot is not the problem. It's Hamlet, female Hamlet  
People are already saying "Female Hamlet lacks bite.

**Second Player**

Heloo, her father stole her peace, not her crown. Her revenge is a quiet rebellion not a power play.

**First Player**

I don't know. Maybe. I mean... if Hamlet's a man, it hits differently. Here Revenge feels less "honour" and more... "trauma response"?

**Second Player**

Yeah like-male Hamlet screams "I must avenge my father's ghost!" Ha ha ha

**Player 5 Director**

Okay let's unpack. Like, legit. Do we think the audience didn't buy that a woman could be out for blood?

**Player 2**

I mean, they might not. That's their fault. For the princess  
It's not "To be or not to be," it's "Do I spiral in silence  
or set this whole monarchy on fire?"

**Player**

But that's why it's brilliant. You're not just avenging,  
You're dismantling the entire structure that told you  
"Silence is noble."

**Player 1**

I know why the king didn't flinch. Because if Hamlet's a  
woman, her rage isn't a threat. It's... dismissed. Like, "Oh  
she's just emotional, hysterical." Lol King didn't fear her,  
he pitied her.

**Player**

Brooooo...Did she even meet the ghost?

**Player 1**

You didn't ask her?

**Player 2**

So no one met the ghost

**Player 3**

No one did. We just bought whatever she said.

**Player 4**

Deshvashiyon, sab bakchodi kar rahein ho. Perhaps the  
Princess was wrong. Ikkisvi sadi me akar kya bhoot preton ki  
baatein kar rahein ho? Perhaps the ghost was a lie. Or a  
trick. She did say it could be an "evil spirit."

**Player 1**

Or a demon

**Player 2**

Or a witch

**Player 3**

Yeah, bro, how will we know?

**Player 4**

We will never know. I agree with you. Anyway, being caught in the middle of a private quarrel is not desirable.

**Player 5**

(Turns sharply to the Murderer) Be silent with such talk. We know nothing.

**Player 5**

Our job is to pack up our props and move on to the next town. It is best to leave quickly, before the Princess decides to have the players reenact another part of her imagination. The show is over, and for the players, that is best.

**[exit]**

## **Scene 6**

**[Two experiments]**

**[Hamlet in handcuffs, officer taking different angles of mug shots. Vital stats checking]**

**Hamlet**

Are you spying on me?

**Ross**

No princess.

**Hamlet**

Then, why are you here?

**Guild**

The king sent us. Hah.

**Hamlet**

Why?

**Guild**

We couldn't find what's in your head.

**Hamlet**

Oh. What's in my head?

**Ross**

We don't know princess

**Hamlet**

Good

**Ross**

Thank you.

**Hamlet**

Why am I in handcuffs? Why am I in handcuffs?

**Officer**

Because you are dangerous. We are trying to prevent a  
bloodbath.

**Hamlet**

What do you mean?

**Officer**

You are unpredictable. You can go berserk anytime.

**Hamlet**

Trust me, I will not do anything. You know that, don't you?  
Look you now. How unworthy a thing you make of me. You would  
play upon me. You would seem to know my stops. You would  
pluck out the heart of my mystery and I would go berserk? I  
am not a man.

**Officer**

Nowadays that's irrelevant.

**Hamlet**

Trust me, I will not do anything.

**Officer**

I know that.

**Hamlet**

Oh. How do you know?

**Officer**

You said so.

**Hamlet**

I am going to escape now.

**Officer**

You will not

**Hamlet**

I have the letter.

**Officer**

So? Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead?

**Ross and Guild**

No

**Hamlet**

How do you know?

**Officer**

You said so.

**Hamlet**

I am escaping now.

**Officer**

You will not.

**Hamlet**

I have almost.

**Officer**

You are not.

**Hamlet**

I am.

**Officer**

NOOOOO

**Hamlet**

Why not? Because the game is over, the King didn't flinch, that means he is not guilty. So I can't act now. So, can I go now?

**Officer**

What about plan B?

**Hamlet**

There is no plan B.

**Officer 1**

Come on, only existentialists live without plan B.

**Hamlet**

If I am stuck between, to be or not to be, then I think I am an existentialist. Oh shit, but I don't want to.

**Officer 1**

What about the Ghost?

**Hamlet**

If I am an existentialist then the Ghost is in my head.

**Officer**

Fair enough.

**Hamlet**

What about the handcuffs?

**Officer**

What about the handcuffs?

**Hamlet**

What about the handcuffs?

**Officer**

Ahh yes. You can take them off.

**Ross and Guild**

Us?

**Officer**

You too.

**Hamlet**

I am free now.

**Ross**

You are free, then tell us what's in your head.

**Hamlet**

What's in my head?

**Ross**

We want to know.

**Hamlet**

In my head?

**Guild**

Remember, we were sent for.

**Hamlet**

Ahh. Caught you. So you are sent for!

**Ross**

Yesss. I have been saying that.

**Hamlet**

When?

**Ross**

Two scenes back.

**Guild**

Chup reh. We are getting late. So please tell us what's in your head.[Silence]

**Hamlet**

Emptiness.

**Ross and guild**

Revenge.

**Hamlet**

No, emptiness.

**Ross and Guild together-**

Revenge.

**Hamlet**

I cannot, and I will never achieve it, however hard I try. Do you really think I will be able to make the king flinch in my presence? Do not be ignorant; far too many things are stacked against me from birth."

**Guild**

Pee please?

**Officer**

What's your name?

**Guild**

Guildstern

**Officer**

And yours

**Ross**

Rozencrantz

**[they exit]**

**Hamlet**

There was a kind of war in my heart that wouldn't let me sleep. It seemed to me that I was in worse shape even than captive rebels in chains.

**[Enter Ophelia]**

**Ophelia**

And early in the morning

I am a girl waiting at your window.  
Then she woke and put her clothes on  
And opened her bedroom door.  
She let in the girl and when she left  
She wasn't a virgin anymore.  
And you want to travel with her.  
And you want to travel blind.

Here's a rosemary. This is for remembering. Please remember  
me my love. These are some pansies. These are for thought.

**Hamlet**

In her madness, she gives us a lesson.

**Ophelia**

Here's a daisy. I will give you some violets.

**Hamlet**

She is bubbly today. Why?

**Ophelia**

Why can't I? Why can't I? You can doubt that the stars have  
fire. You can doubt that the sun moves across the sky. but  
never doubt... We almost became collateral for your single  
minded quest.

**Hamlet**

I am sorry for that.

**Ophelia**

And what about those nasty misogynist lines that you uttered  
to us?

**Hamlet**

I am ashamed about that too. Mirroring male traits in  
execution is very cruel.

**Ophelia**

I came here to disappoint you. I am not going to the convent.  
I am going to study. **[Hamlet tries to open her mouth and**

**Ophelia puts a finger on Hamlet's lips]** shhh... don't say a word. **[ She kisses him]** Bye Hamlet.

**[Ophelia Exit, and Guild enters with guitar]**

**Hamlet**

No sword in hand

No poisoned cup

Time is up

The story's done

And I choose to live to see another day

**Officer**

I am thinking.

**Hamlet**

Thinking of what?

**Officer**

How do we end this?

**Hamlet**

I already told you it's over. Now we will wait for me to kick the bucket.

**Ross**

I agree.

**Guild**

No. What will we tell our grandchildren, that we spied for nothing?

**Officer**

**[shaking his head]** This is too simplistic and has lots of loose ends.

**Hamlet**

This story doesn't have many fireworks my friend, so you two can stop spying.

**Officer**

This is a meek surrender, I must say.

**Hamlet**

Okay, let me put it this way. (to the Officer)

Imagine. What is possible in this world! Now, if I were a man whose uncle killed his father and then married his mother.

What would happen to me then?

**Ross**

You will be boiling with anger.

**Hamlet**

And what will happen to the play and its narrative?

**Ross**

You will be able to make the king react and flinch

**Guild**

That too with the sixteen lines

**Hamlet**

Now what do I have?

**Officer**

Your licence to be miserable.

**Hamlet**

And when I am miserable

**Ross and Guild**

You can make everyone's life miserable.

**Hamlet**

And?

**Ross**

Now officially you can start the bloodbath till everyone is dead.

**Hamlet**

And what does it prove?

**Officer**

Gender matters. Never thought that this story would end in a whimper. I always wanted this story to end in a dishkyu dishkyu fight.

**Hamlet**

Sorry to disappoint you.

**Officer**

I wish you were a man. Then this story would have reached a classical height. Besides I didn't like the way that girl spoke to you.

**Hamlet**

I can see that. Can I go now?

**Officer**

of course of course, all of you can go. But you will not change your mind, know?

**Hamlet**

**[Shakes his head] After your dishkyu dishkyu story Officer, would you ever follow up on the characters and their miserable life, gifted by death and loss of dear ones?**

**Officer**

Why should I? They are just stories.

**Hamlet**

Sometimes they are not. They can take ominous forms with painful consequences that others pay for. **[silence]** Revenge is still a male fantasy my friend... until **[ She looks at Rosencrana and Guilderstern before leaving and hands them a letter. Officer exits in deep thought. Guild and Ros reads the letter]**

**Ros and Guild**

We don't die

**SCENE 7**

**The final**

**[Opening credits and theme music play. We cut to anchor, sitting at the table, looking directly at the camera.]**

**Anchor Asha**

Welcome back to The World Today. This is Asha and we have our exclusive guest tonight whose recent actions have sparked intense public speculation and have fuelled rumours of a personal crisis. She is none other than Princess Hamlet

**[applause]** welcome to World Today, thank you for joining us.

**Hamlet**

**[Smiling faintly]** Thank you for having me Asha I am a huge fan of yours.

**Anchor Asha**

Oh, my, my, you made my day princess. Let's cut to the chase, princess. For the past year, your public statements have been cryptic. Social media posts are filled with dark, philosophical musings. People are concerned. Is everything alright with you in your personal life?

**Hamlet**

Is everything ever "alright" in life? It's a gilded cage. Cages, no matter how shiny, restrict movement. Grief is not linear, you know I am coming to terms with my Mother's sudden death and my father's remarkable... swift second marriage.

It's a process that swings between spectrums. I am slowly going into traction.

**Anchor Asha**

"Swift" is a loaded word. [ Hamlet is silent] What do you think of that blog post addressed to you regarding "frailty" and "womanhood".

**Hamlet**

You seem to have done your research, tell me about it

**Asha**

It goes something like, Frailty thy name is woman, woman thy name is frailty

**Hamlet**

No exactly though, but yeah somewhat

**Asha**

Was that a reference to your queen aunt?

**Hamlet [Expression remains calm, but eyes are sharp]**

People can interpret poetry as they wish. It's the beauty of art.

**Anchor Asha**

I like the way you obfuscate a question" Last month you commissioned a play"—The mousetrap "about a king being murdered by poison—that was art, too?

**Hamlet**

Yes of course!

**Anchor Asha**

But in the middle of the play  
The King, and the rest, left the room very disturbed.  
is it true?

**Hamlet [Leans forward slightly, with theatricality]**

I wish

**Anchor Asha**

Pardon me?

**Hamlet**

A good play stirs the soul, you know. Art should be provocative, shouldn't it? If the art was so effective that it disturbed the King, perhaps praise goes to the actors. They were very impressive.

**Anchor Asha**

Perhaps it was less about their talent and more about your accusation. Princess, the rumour is that you believe your father murdered your mother. Is that true?

**Hamlet [Pauses, a long, calculated pause, and then lets out a small, bitter laugh]**

What is the truth, Asha? Is it what can be proven in a court of law? Or is it something a person knows in their soul? My truth is defined by what I observe and engage.

**Asha**

We would like to know then, what is your truth Hamlet?

**Hamlet**

The kingdom has moved on. The doctors found no evidence. My father is still the King. Who am I to challenge all this? A grieving daughter? A "hysterical" woman?

**Anchor Asha**

Are you suggesting that if you were a man, your accusations would be taken more seriously?

**Hamlet**

I am not suggesting anything. I am merely observing the world around me., much like the anthropic principle suggests that our existence as observers shapes our understanding of life

and beyond. In it all our roles are assigned long, long before we are born. Maybe I am not cast in the role of a vengeful daughter.

**Anchor Asha [smile and pause]**

Can I ask a candid question; does philosophising events around help you?

**Hamlet**

To be frank, it sucks, but yes when you are confused it reminds you how confused you are?

**Anchor Asha**

So, you have given up? Your fire, your rage, your need for justice—are they gone?

**Hamlet [Face fades for a split second, revealing true pain]**

They are not gone. They are just... contained. What I realised was my fantasies of revenge can serve as a potent form of reclaiming agency and regaining a sense of control. Imagining retribution can be an emotionally satisfying psychological tool.

**Anchor Asha**

Don't tell me [she giggles]

**Hamlet**

Yes, yes aren't we all ... jokes apart **[pause]** some time I ask myself, am I merely mirroring the very masculine power structures that victimised me to be an honorary woman, **[pause]** may be maybe not. See Asha, my to be or not be is still a work in progress. **[laughs]** for me now Revenge is to live. To watch. To wait. The truth has a way of revealing itself in the end, doesn't it? Patience is key. And knowing how to frame the narrative.

**Anchor**

Framing your narrative. So a final word for our viewers, what narrative are you framing, Princess?

**Hamlet**

(Looks directly into the camera, a chilling intensity in the eyes, and a slow, deliberate smile appears on the lips. She is not mad, but in control, and the control is terrifying. A final, chilling, unwavering gaze directly into the camera)

Power isn't always a crown or a sword, Asha. Sometimes, power is simply knowing the truth. And knowing that eventually, a kingdom built on lies will have to face its own reflection. That, it can be assured, is an end neither the king nor his backers will enjoy watching. And this person, for one, intends to be in the front row.

**[The camera holds on Hamlet's face for a long moment, before fading out.]**

**Asha**

Thank you for a truly candid, honest and insightful conversation.

Now before I let you go, all your fans including me have a special request. Could you please recite few lines from one of your blogs?

**Hamlet**

No no, I am not much of a performer

**Asha**

Your reputation precedes you, we are well aware of your flair for dramatics.

**Hamlet**

No you will regret it

**Asha**

And we also know you never refuse a good dare, come on

**Hamlet**

That are but mutes or audience to this act, Had I but time  
(as this fell sergeant, Death, Is strict in his arrest), O, I  
could tell you— 360 But let it be

**The end**

a play by

Vinay Kumar