

ENTER FORTINBRAS

Fuck Fortinbras. Hamlet for five shows in college, I'm sick of lying dead, holding the ketchup-smearred sword up by my armpit, remembering that cue: *Enter Fortinbras*. It's not the play bothering me, not him taking Denmark—no one leaves here saying, "Fortinbras was great." No one remembers him; everyone talks about me: "Hamlet—awesome third soliloquy" or "Hamlet sucked, needing too much prompting from the chunky script girl." I'm dead, father, mother, friends abroad, dead, and then what? *Enter Fortinbras*.

It's personal. Ophelia's dead, too, not seen since Act IV, so the cute chick playing her hangs out backstage. During rehearsals she watched me, said I was great, put her hand on my arm—we were going somewhere. Then, *Enter Fortinbras*. His role's tiny, he skipped the early rehearsals, but when showtime approached, I'd be running through "that this too, too solid flesh" and he's in the wings, his hand on Ophelia's breast. She'd smile.

During a "what a piece of work is man" run-through they kissed for the first time. And the one time he was sick and Chunky Script Girl stood in for him while we blocked off the last scene, I saw the way Ophelia's lips trembled off stage when the director shouted, "*Enter Fortinbras*."

Fifth, last performance night, Sunday: I'm dead on stage, ketchup-y sword wobbling over me, the cross of its hilt like a, well, a cross I'll nail that fucker Fortinbras to because I sent her those late-arriving flowers and don't believe the card was "lost"—Fortinbras saw his opportunity during the nunnery scene. That's the kind of fucker he is: flowers enter the women's dressing room, he watches, counts the women in the cast exiting, then, *Enter Fortinbras*, exit card.

The brazen Norwegian, he's standing there with Ophelia—my Ophelia, one who should be mine but gives me only one phony, dry, lips-not-even-really-touching stage kiss. Herbs and flowers still ring her head like a crown—rosemary for remembrance, pansies for thoughts—and she's down on her knees in the wings stage left, face still pale with makeup from her scene as the corpse I fought over, and I'm now dead.

She's on her knees—bold bitch!—giving the guy who claims he sent flowers a blowjob. Everyone on stage and backstage can see, she doesn't care—he's Fortinbras, Young Norway, he'll be Denmark's king. Everyone on stage tries not to watch, to act dead like me and Gertrude and Claudius, etc., or else to look mournful like Horatio. Everyone stage right gawks, Polonius, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern—even the Ghost.



A fly lands on the ketchup-blood beneath Laertes's nose; he twitches, wants to slap it, stifles a sneeze. The theater's a world waiting for *him* to walk on stage. Fortinbras looks at the ceiling, Ophelia quickens her pace, tightens her hold on him. Chunky Script Girl stage right whispers it, then repeats it, then repeats and repeats, her cadence growing louder until all the theater—the world—must hear: *Enter Fortinbras!* 🎻

