

Meeting of the Minds

Friends HAMLET and RASKOLNIKOV go to see a criminal psychic. RASKOLNIKOV is being brought there by HAMLET who is rather excited to learn some information about how he should kill Claudius. At the same time, RASKOLNIKOV looks distraught, nervous, and about ready to run out of the room. The psychic, MADAME CASSANDRA, is a very gifted prophet and sits imposingly behind an ornate table.

NARRATOR

Many years into the future, a fascinating meeting of three individuals happens to emerge: a meeting among Shakespeare's own Hamlet, the infamous lady killer in *Crime and Punishment* who goes by the name Raskolnikov and the Greek prophet, Cassandra. Hamlet and Raskolnikov—arguably two very perturbed individuals—have come to meet Cassandra, where they hope to be given advice that will help them deal with their uncertainties and unfortunate situations. These individuals, though intended to be separated indefinitely, by time, context, and three hypothetically fictional scenarios, are here before you today, in a meeting of the minds.

CASSANDRA

Bye Oedipus! See you on Tuesday at three. Don't worry about your parents; everything will be okay...Ohhhh! Hamlet and Raskolnikov! I predicted that you would come and see me...please, do sit down!

(RASKOLNIKOV looks to the door. SHE looks at him inquisitively)

Sit down!

(CASSANDRA gets her crystal ball out from under the table and fidgets with the arrangements.)

RASKOLNIKOV

(Whispering to HAMLET)

Why do we have to do this now? I have business to attend to!

(HE moves to leave, but is pulled back down by HAMLET)

HAMLET

Leave not, thy mad ass! O, wert best sit? Thou hast given me thy promise at the University that you wouldst be here. What art thou trying to hide?

RASKOLNIKOV

Nothing. I really wish you wouldn't speak in iambic pentameter.

HAMLET

Thou hast been acting strange. O, is 't possible, thy friend, that something has brought thy hither?

RASKOLNIKOV

It's nothing!

(HE jumps up angrily as if he is about to leave. Again, HAMLET pulls him down)

And drop the old English. No one speaks like that anymore. You don't hear me speaking Russian, do you?

HAMLET

Don't sass at me because you were translated poorly.

CASSANDRA

Boys, boys! We haven't even begun! Let me channel my Oracle reading powers!

(SHE puts her fingers to her temples, starts humming and swaying)

Now...why have you come to see me?

HAMLET

I seek your guidance, Madame. Wouldst thou tell me what to do with situation? My father has been murdered – and I fear my uncle is to blame.

RASKOLNIKOV begins to act paranoid

CASSANDRA

Ah, yes. I knew your father; he was a good person. But he had a terrible future ahead of him. I told him that once... but he didn't believe me. Come to think of it, people never believe me.

RASKOLNIKOV

Such is life.

HAMLET

Yes.

CASSANDRA

I feel a bit of tension in the room. It is time for you to stop thinking and take action.

HAMLET

Thou think'st that nothing can truly be accomplished unless the plan is well conceived beforth. Plans are not to be planned unless they are planned to be a plan.

CASSANDRA

Hamlet, you're avoiding the truth and I would advise you to stop acting like a moron.

Procrastination never got anybody anywhere. And remember: I can read your mind, and you are fully aware that you are not making sense.

RASKOLNIKOV

He makes perfect sense! There is a plan, but there is no possible way that you could know the plan.

CASSANDRA

Well, just so long as the plan doesn't involve hiring a wandering troupe of actors to act out your father's death in front of your uncle in hopes that he'll cry like a little girl and admit what he did, because that never works. I'm going to tell you the same thing I told the last president: plans aren't necessary if you're doing something for daddy.

(Pause)

Now, let us all take hands and breathe deeply. Breathe. Raskolnikov, you need you loosen up.

(THEY begin chanting. Suddenly, SHE is possessed and HER voice changes)

Hamlet, this is your father. I need you to avenge my death. Preferably soon, before things get even more out of hand.

HAMLET

But father...I just don't know. Killing someone is an awfully big thing. I need some time to think about it.

CASSANDRA

(Still Poppa Hamlet)

No! If you waste time there's no telling what will happen. You could die before I am avenged...

HAMLET

Shouldn't I at least talk to mother first?

CASSANDRA

No! This is not about Gertrude! Your mother's blinded by Claudius who stole her from me and took my life. Drop the mother thing, my son, and do as I ask. Don't you love me?

HAMLET

Well of course! Do you think I hang around graveyards talking to dead people for fun?

CASSANDRA

I think you are playing crazy because it absolves you from guilt. But that is irrelevant. You need to kill the king. That's it. It's called filial responsibility, Hams.

(The ghost leaves. CASSANDRA returns to her body)

Now Hamlet. You heard what your father had to say. What is the big deal?

HAMLET

Well...I have already killed my girlfriend's father, which forced her to drown herself, so then I had to duel her brother – and he was a champion dueller. Oh. And I, um, sent my two best college buddies to their deaths.

RASKOLNIKOV

Who?

HAMLET

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

RASKOLNIKOV

(Opens a copy of HAMLET and begins pouring through)
I don't remember them.

HAMLET

No one does! Except Tom Stoppard.

RASKOLNIKOV

Why do you waste so much time talking? Your father told you to kill Claudius, so why are you still sitting here?

HAMLET

I just haven't had the opportunity. I mean, I thought I did, but I accidentally killed someone else. And I had to be sure!

RASKOLNIKOV

Every moment is opportunity! Yet, you sit here and talk about how hard it is for you, but in the process of looking for that perfect opportunity Polonius, Ophelia and Laertes have already died – either at your hands or because of something you did – and the one person you were supposed to kill is still walking around planning ways to dispose of you! What have you got to lose? There is poison in your blood! You're mad!

HAMLET

Mad?! You're talking to me about madness?! How incredulous! You're the one who killed two women, and has been delirious with madness for days and even your own family and best friend thing you're mad! You didn't even have a significant reason to commit murder!

RASKOLNIKOV

I was ridding society of an evil woman! You were a bloody prince; you have no idea what it is like to grow up in poverty. You didn't see what I did! Women selling themselves; marrying for money; men who drink away their pathetic lives – it must have been nice growing up in a frickin' palace! At least my murders served a purpose; you were responsible for the death of three innocent people!

HAMLET

Five.

RASKOLNIKOV

Five! How is that less severe than what I have done?

CASSANDRA

(Snaps suddenly back into the trance; this time it is the voice of an old woman that comes out)

This is Aliona Ivanova! I knew you were bad blood from the first time that I met you! I can't believe that I trusted you to pay me back. What did you think? That you could pawn my life – my sister's life – and get away with it?

RASKOLNIKOV

...Yeah. Your death was a blessing to society. It was justified by the moral boost society gained from your passing.

CASSANDRA

But why me? I am not the only pawnbroker in St. Petersburg. You didn't even use the things you took. Why? I don't understand.

RASKOLNIKOV

At first I thought I wanted to kill you for the money. I wanted to get rich quickly. But I realised that you were the only person – the one person holding me down. You kept me in poverty. If you weren't sucking the life out of the poor, I wouldn't have kept pawning all of my most meaningful possessions. But then, in my delirium, I was reminded of something different: that perhaps I was extraordinary and so I could kill measly little leaches like you on my way to greatness.

But I was clumsy and suspected.

CASSANDRA

And my sister? Do you have no guilt for killing the mentally handicapped?

HAMLET

You killed a handicapped person? At least the people I killed deserved it! And you think you can call me mad? You're insane!

RASKOLNIKOV

(Ignoring HAMLET)

Of course I have guilt! Why do you think I have been sick for the past few days? I am guilty; I am wracked with guilt, but I am not sorry for what I have done.

CASSANDRA

You should probably turn yourself in.

RASKOLNIKOV

...I was thinking that.

CASSANDRA

Well, good.

RASKOLNIKOV

But I just don't know. Should I turn myself in? Should I try to go on, take a job with a friend, shack up with a prostitute...I'm very conflicted.

HAMLET

(Muttered)
And he calls me indecisive?

CASSANDRA

(HERSELF again)
Mind your tongue, Hamlet. Now, Rasko –

HAMLET

(Interrupting)
No! My problem first! It is more significant and besides – I am dying.

RASKOLNIKOV

Excuse me? My problem is much more significant.
(To CASSANDRA)
He has had everything handed to him; I've had to drop out of school because I can't afford tuition. My problem is worse.

HAMLET

You're a megalomaniac!
(To CASSANDRA)
Did you know he fancies himself some kind of Napoleon? Him!

RASKOLNIKOV

At least I tried to do something about my problem instead of just whining about it!

CASSANDRA

Boys, please calm down. We shall deal with your problems separately.

HAMLET

Okay. But mine first. I have been fatally wounded and poison is slowly dispersing through my perfect body.

CASSANDRA

Fine. You first.

HAMLET

What should I do?

CASSANDRA

I'd recommend you bucking up and doing what your father asked. It might turn out all right. It did for Simba.

HAMLET

But how?

CASSANDRA

That is up to you. I'd recommend a good ol' fashioned foil-to-the-heart, but no one ever listens to me.

RASKOLNIKOV

I have an axe you can borrow.

HAMLET

Thanks, man! That really means a lot.

CASSANDRA

Okay – you.

(To RASKOLNIKOV)

First, you should change your name. You're never going to make it in this country with a name like Raskolinkov. How do you feel about Jones?

RASKOLNIKOV

I guess I could get used to that.

CASSANDRA

Good. Next, you should probably find yourself a nice girl, a nice little square yard of earth somewhere, and settle down. If that doesn't work, you could always try religion. Or turning yourself in. In fact, I'd recommend turning yourself in first, just to save you the heartbreak, but I know you won't listen. People never believe me. So I'll just stick with the girl, the earth, and God. Oh – and be nicer to your friends!

RASKOLNIKOV

(Sigh)

All right.

CASSANDRA

Good. Now go. Both of you. I have a meeting with Medea and if I'm late I'm afraid she'll do something completely irrational.

HAMLET and RASKOLNIKOV both stand.

CASSANDRA

Oh! By the way, Hamlet, you are going to die in about ten seconds.

RASKOLNIKOV

(Ignoring CASSANDRA's warning)

So, want to grab breakfast?

HAMLET

(Cheerily)

Just call me green eggs and Hamlet.

HAMLET starts convulsing and in ten seconds he is lying on the floor, dead. RASKOLNIKOV looks around suspiciously, drops some money, and walks away, muttering about something. CASSANDRA frowns wearily.

CASSANDRA

...They never listen.