Narrator
It was a windy November day. William Shakespeare is at the palace of King James 1. He’s having dinner with the King and Queen.

King James
Mr Shakespeare, have some more wine. What's this? Water? Where's my wine!!

The Queen
Now dear, you know you mustn't drink too much wine. The doctor says it's bad for your health!

King James
No wine!! Madam, you are very cruel to me. Don’t you agree, Mr Shakespeare?

Will
Your Majesty, the Queen is being cruel, only to be kind, like my character Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark.

King James
Does Hamlet take away the King's wine?

Will
No, no, your Majesty: Hamlet says cruel and terrible things to his mother, the Queen. He's angry because she married his uncle Claudius, very soon after his father's death. Hamlet suspects that his mother, or his uncle, or both of them, killed his father, so that they could marry each other.

King James
Well! No wonder he's saying cruel things. But how is he going to be kind, I wonder? Go on, go on…

Will
Your Majesty. Hamlet tells his mother that he said these cruel and terrible things to shock her into realising that this marriage is wrong – it's a sin. But he says she can begin to make
up for the sin and be a better person if she leaves her new husband. That's why he says 'I must be cruel, only to be kind'.

Robert Harley as Hamlet
So, again, good night.
I must be cruel, only to be kind:
Thus bad begins and worse remains behind.
One word more, good lady.

Narrator
We'll leave them there for now. Shakespeare's audiences loved the violence and powerful emotions in his revenge tragedies. But Hamlet is not your typical revenge character. He's a thinker who becomes a man of action. In modern English, Shakespeare's phrase is usually shortened to I must be cruel to be kind. Or just cruel to be kind. People say it when they do something unkind that will actually benefit someone. It's the title of a song in the American movie 10 Things I Hate About You.

Clip 1
Cruel to be kind, it's a very good sign
Cruel to be kind, means that I love you, baby…

Clip 2
I know I upset her when I told her to get a haircut, but it was such a mess: I had to be cruel to be kind.

King James
Tell me Mr Shakespeare, does the Queen follow Hamlet's advice?

Will
I'm afraid not, your Majesty.

The Queen
She should have listened to him.

King James
Quite right, quite right.

The Queen
And you should listen to me dear. No more wine!

King James
Hmmm. To listen or not to listen, that is the question.