

Hamlet

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



TIMELESS SHAKESPEARE



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- INTRODUCTION -

About 500 years ago, Hamlet's father, the king of Denmark, was murdered by his own brother, Claudius. Then Claudius quickly married Hamlet's mother, Gertrude. As the play opens, Hamlet's father's ghost appears and tells his son who murdered him. He urges Hamlet to seek revenge. As the play unfolds, Hamlet tries to convince himself that he should murder Claudius.

This is Shakespeare's most famous play, known for the anguished character of Hamlet.

- CAST OF CHARACTERS -

HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK Son of the dead King Hamlet, and nephew of the present King of Denmark

CLAUDIUS, PRINCE OF DENMARK Hamlet's uncle

GERTRUDE Queen of Denmark and Hamlet's mother

GHOST The ghost of Hamlet's murdered father

POLONIUS Chief adviser to Claudius

HORATIO A commoner and loyal friend of Hamlet

LAERTES Son of Polonius and the brother of Ophelia

OPHELIA Daughter of Polonius and the sister of Laertes

ROSENCRANTZ and **GUILDENSTERN** Former classmates of Hamlet

VOLTIMAND and **CORNELIUS** Danish courtiers

MARCELLUS, **BERNARDO**, and **FRANCISCO** Guards at the castle

REYNALDO Polonius's servant

OSRIC A Danish courtier

GRAVEDIGGERS, **LORDS**, **ATTENDANTS**, **ACTORS**, and **SERVANTS**

ACT 1

| Scene 1 |

*(Francisco is at his post before the castle in Elsinore.
Bernardo enters.)*

BERNARDO: The clock has struck 12.

I'll take over the watch now, Francisco.

FRANCISCO: Thank you for relieving me.

It is bitter cold, and I am sick at heart.

BERNARDO: Has it been quiet tonight?

FRANCISCO: Not a mouse stirring.

BERNARDO: Well, good night. Tell my
Partners on watch to hurry.

FRANCISCO: I think I hear them now.

(Horatio and Marcellus enter as Francisco exits.)

MARCELLUS: Hello, Bernardo!

BERNARDO: Welcome, Horatio and Marcellus.

MARCELLUS: Has it appeared again—the *thing*?

BERNARDO: I have seen nothing.

MARCELLUS: Horatio says it is only our fantasy.
He will not believe that we saw it twice!
By standing watch with us tonight, he can
See it for himself.

HORATIO: It will not appear.

BERNARDO: Sit down awhile,
And let us once again tell you about
What we have seen two nights in a row.
Last night, about this same time,
The clock was striking one—

MARCELLUS: Quiet! It's coming again!

(The Ghost enters, dressed in armor.)

BERNARDO: It looks just like the dead King!

MARCELLUS: Speak to it, Horatio!

HORATIO *(to the Ghost):* Who are you?
Why do you wear the armor in which
Our buried King did sometimes march?
By heaven, I order you to speak!

MARCELLUS: It seems to be offended.

BERNARDO: See, it stalks away!

HORATIO: Stay! Speak! I order you, speak!

(The Ghost exits.)

MARCELLUS: It will not answer. It is gone.

BERNARDO: What do you think now, Horatio?
You tremble and look pale.
Isn't this something more than fantasy?

HORATIO: Before my God,
I would never have believed it
Unless I saw it with my own eyes.

MARCELLUS: Isn't it like the King?

HORATIO: As like as you are to yourself!
That was the very armor he had on when
He fought the ambitious King of Norway.
And he frowned just like that once,
When angry. It is strange.
I have no idea what to think.
But it seems like a bad sign.

MARCELLUS: Tell me, if you know,
Why this quiet and watchful ghost
Has come here these past nights.
And why does our country seem
To be preparing for war?

HORATIO: I'll tell what I've heard.
Our last King, whose image just appeared,
Killed King Fortinbras of Norway.
Along with his life,
Fortinbras lost all the lands
He had risked in the battle.
If Fortinbras had won, our good King
Would have had to give up his lands.
That was their agreement, so it was only fair.
Now, sir, young Fortinbras, his son,
Rash, hot, and foolish,
Has raised an army of lawless men
To recover the land lost by his father.
This must be why we are preparing for war,
And the reason we must keep watch at night.

BERNARDO: I think you must be right.

HORATIO: Quiet! Look! Here it comes again!

*(The **Ghost** enters again.)*

Stay, illusion! If you have any use of voice,
Speak to me. If I may help you in any way,
Speak to me. If you know anything about
Your country's fate, which,
By knowing in advance, we may avoid,
Oh, speak!

*(A rooster crows. The **Ghost** exits.)*

BERNARDO: It was about to speak,
When the rooster crowed.

HORATIO: I have heard that spirits
Must leave the earth during the day,
And what we just saw proves that story!
The sun is rising. Our watch is over.
Let us report what we have seen tonight
To young Hamlet. I think that
This spirit, silent to us, will speak to him.

MARCELLUS: Let's do it. I know where he is.

(All exit.)

| Scene 2 |

(King Claudius, Queen Gertrude, Prince Hamlet, Polonius, Laertes, Voltimand, Cornelius, Lords, and Attendants enter a room of state in the castle at Elsinore.)

KING: The memory of our dear brother's death
 Is still fresh. Our hearts are full of grief.
 Yet, we must think of our kingdom,
 Which needs a leader in this warlike time.
 Therefore we have taken as wife
 Our former sister-in-law.
 Now, as you know, young Fortinbras
 Thinks that we are weak. He thinks that
 Our late dear brother's death
 Has left our state in confusion and chaos.
 Thinking he has an advantage, he has been
 Pestering us to surrender those lands
 Lost by his father to our brother.
 That is the reason for this meeting.
 We have written to the King of Norway,
 The uncle of young Fortinbras.
 He is sick and bedridden. He knows little
 Of his nephew's actions. We asked him
 To order his nephew to leave us alone.
 We want you, Cornelius and Voltimand,
 To take this letter to the King of Norway.
 Now farewell—and do your duty quickly!

(King Claudius hands them a letter.)

CORNELIUS AND VOLTIMAND: Yes, my lord.

(They bow and exit.)

KING: Now, Laertes, what's the news with you?
 You mentioned a request. What is it?

LAERTES: My good lord, I ask your permission

To return to France. I came here willingly
To show my support for your coronation.
Now, I must confess, that duty done,
My wishes bend again toward France.

KING: Do you have your father's permission?
What does Polonius say?

POLONIUS: My lord, he has my permission.

KING: Enjoy your youth, Laertes. Time is yours,
And you may spend it as you like!
But now, my nephew Hamlet, and my son—

HAMLET (*aside*): I may be your nephew,
But I will never be your son!

KING: Why are you still so gloomy?

QUEEN: Good Hamlet, cast off your dark mood.
You know that all living things must die,
Passing through nature to eternity.

HAMLET: Yes, madam, I know.

KING: It is sweet of you, Hamlet,
To mourn this way for your father.
But, your father lost a father.
And that lost father also lost his.
You must mourn for a time. But to keep on
Mourning so long is stubborn and unmanly.
It shows a weak heart, an impatient mind.
It is a fault against heaven, against the dead,
And against nature. Please stop grieving.
Think of us as a father. Let all see that

You are heir to the throne, and I love you
 No less than the dearest father loves his son!
 Your wish to return to school in Wittenberg
 Goes against our wishes. We ask you to stay
 Here in the cheer and comfort of our eye,
 Our chief courtier, nephew, and our son.

QUEEN: Please, Hamlet, stay here with us.

HAMLET: I shall obey you, Mother.

KING: Why, it is a loving and fair reply.

(to the Queen): Madam, come.

(All exit but Hamlet.)

HAMLET: Oh, that this too, too solid flesh
 Would melt, thaw, and turn into a dew!
 Or if only suicide were not a sin!
 Oh, God! Oh, God!
 How weary, stale, flat, and useless
 The world seems! It is an unweeded garden,
 Gone to seed. That it should come to this!
 Not even two months dead, so fine a king!
 He loved my mother so much that
 He wouldn't allow the wind to blow too hard
 On her face. She would hang on him
 As if her appetite grew by what it fed on.
 Yet, within a month—let me not think of it!
 Frailty, your name is woman!
 Oh, God! A beast with no power to reason
 Would have mourned longer! Now,

Married to my uncle—my father's brother—
 But no more like my father
 Than I am like Hercules. Within a month,
 Before the salt of her tears had left her eyes,
 She married. Oh, most wicked speed!
 This marriage can come to no good.
 But break, my heart—I must hold my
 tongue!

(Horatio, Marcellus, and Bernardo enter.)

HORATIO: Hail to your lordship!

HAMLET: Hello, Horatio! What brought you
 Here from Wittenberg?

HORATIO: I came to see your father's funeral.

HAMLET: Do not mock me, fellow student.
 I think it was to see my mother's wedding.

HORATIO: Indeed, it followed soon after.

HAMLET: Thrift, Horatio! The funeral meats
 Were served cold at the marriage tables.
 I wish I had never seen that day, Horatio!
 My father!—I think I see my father.

HORATIO *(surprised)*: Where, my lord?

HAMLET: In my mind's eye, Horatio.

HORATIO: I saw him once. He was a good king.

HAMLET: He was a man, all in all.
 I shall not look upon his like again.

HORATIO: My lord, I think I saw him last night.

HAMLET: Saw who?

HORATIO: My lord . . . the king, your father.

HAMLET: My father? Let me hear!

HORATIO: Yes. Listen, I will tell you about it.

For two nights, Marcellus and Bernardo

Saw a figure like your father,

Dressed from head to toe in armor.

They told me about it in secret.

I kept watch with them the third night.

The ghostly figure came.

I *knew* your father. It looked just like him.

HAMLET: Did you speak to it?

HORATIO: I did, but it did not answer.

HAMLET: It is very strange.

HORATIO: As I live, my honored lord, it is true.

We thought it our duty to let you know of it.

HAMLET: Indeed, sirs—but it troubles me.

Are you on watch tonight?

MARCELLUS AND BERNARDO: We are, my lord.

HAMLET: He was dressed in armor, you say?

BOTH: Yes, my lord.

HAMLET: Then you did not see his face?

HORATIO: We did. He wore the visor up.

HAMLET: Was he frowning?

HORATIO: His face was more sad than angry.

HAMLET: I wish I had been there!

I will watch with you tonight.
Perhaps it will walk again. If it looks like
My noble father, I'll speak to it.
Do not tell anyone else about this.
I'll see you tonight, between 11 and 12.

ALL: Until then, farewell.

(Horatio, Marcellus, and Bernardo exit.)

HAMLET: My father's spirit—in arms! All is
not well.
I wish night had already come! Until then,
Be still, my soul. Foul deeds will rise,
Though the earth hides them from our eyes.

(Hamlet exits.)

| Scene 3 |

(Laertes and Ophelia enter a room in Polonius's house.)

LAERTES: My bags are on board. Farewell.
And, sister, please write to me.

OPHELIA: Do you doubt that I would?

LAERTES: As for Hamlet, and his affections,
Do not expect too much.
They are like violets in the spring,
Fast-growing and sweet, but not lasting,
The perfume of a minute. No more.

OPHELIA: No more than that?

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Hamlet

The ghost of the murdered king begs his son to get revenge. But young Prince Hamlet is beset by doubts and unable to bring himself to action. If he waits *too* long, however, he could well become the murderer's next target.

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