

Hamlet

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

TIMELESS SHAKESPEARE



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ACT 1

— Scene 1 —

(Francisco is at his post. He's guarding Elsinore castle. Bernardo enters.)

BERNARDO: The clock has struck 12. I'll take over the watch now, Francisco.

FRANCISCO: Thank you. It's so cold. I'm upset.

BERNARDO: Has it been quiet tonight?

FRANCISCO: Yes.

BERNARDO: Goodnight. Tell my partners to hurry. They are guarding too.

FRANCISCO: I think I hear them now.

(Horatio and Marcellus enter. Francisco exits.)

MARCELLUS: Hello, Bernardo!

BERNARDO: Welcome, Horatio and Marcellus.

MARCELLUS: Has the *thing* come again?

BERNARDO: I haven't seen it.

MARCELLUS: Horatio says it's all in our minds. He doesn't believe we saw it twice! Maybe he'll see it for himself tonight.

HORATIO: It won't appear.

MARCELLUS: Quiet! It's coming!

*(The **Ghost** enters, dressed in armor.)*

BERNARDO: It looks like the dead king!

HORATIO *(to the Ghost):* Who are you?
Are you our dead king? Speak!

BERNARDO: It's leaving.

HORATIO: Stay! Speak!

(The Ghost exits.)

BERNARDO: What do you think now,
Horatio? You saw it too. You look pale.

HORATIO: I would not have believed it.
But I saw it with my own eyes.

MARCELLUS: Isn't it the king?

HORATIO: It looked just like him. It seems
like a bad sign.

MARCELLUS: Why do you think he's
come here? And why does our country
seem to be getting ready for war?

HORATIO: I'll tell you what I've heard.
Our last king killed King Fortinbras of
Norway. We took all their land. His son is
young Fortinbras. He has a temper. And

he's foolish. Now he's raised an army. He wants the land back. That's why we're getting ready.

BERNARDO: I think you're right.

HORATIO: Here it comes again!

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

HORATIO: Please stay! Speak to me. Can I help you in any way? Can you help your country somehow? Please speak!

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

BERNARDO: It was about to speak. Then the rooster crowed.

HORATIO: Ghosts don't come during the day. Let's tell young Hamlet what we've seen tonight. Maybe this ghost will speak to him.

(All exit.)

— Scene 2 —

(King Claudius, Queen Gertrude, Prince Hamlet, Polonius, Laertes, Voltimand, Cornelius, lords, and attendants enter a room in Elsinore castle.)

KING: The memory of our dear brother's death is still fresh. We are very sad. Yet, we must think of our kingdom. We need a leader in wartime. So I have married my former sister-in-law. Young Fortinbras thinks we're weak. He thinks our late brother's death has left us puzzled. He's trying to win back the land his father lost.

We have written a letter to the king of Norway. He's the uncle of young Fortinbras. But he's ill. He doesn't know what his nephew is doing. We asked him to order his nephew to leave us alone. Cornelius and Voltimand, take this letter to the king of Norway. Quickly!

(King Claudius hands them a letter.)

CORNELIUS and VOLTIMAND: Yes,
my lord.

(They bow and exit.)

KING: Now, Laertes, what's your news?
You have a request.

LAERTES: I ask your permission, my
lord, to return to France. I gave you my
support. Now I wish to go.

KING: Do you have your father's okay?
What does Polonius want?

LAERTES: Yes, he approves.

KING: Enjoy your youth, Laertes. Do what
you want. Now, my nephew and my son,
Hamlet ...

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

KING: Why are you still so upset?

QUEEN: Hamlet, cheer up! All living things must die.

HAMLET: Yes, I know.

KING: It is sweet of you, Hamlet, to miss your father. But to keep on crying is unmanly. It shows weakness. Please stop being so sad. Think of me as a father. I love you like my own son! Please stay with us.

QUEEN: Yes, please stay. Don't go back to school in Wittenberg.

HAMLET: I will obey you, Mother.

(All exit but Hamlet.)

HAMLET: I wish I could kill myself! I can't believe my father has been dead for two months. He was a fine king. And he loved my mother so much. But within a

month, she married my uncle! What a weak woman! This marriage won't work. But I must be quiet!

(Horatio, Marcellus, and Bernardo enter.)

HORATIO: Hello, Hamlet!

HAMLET: Hello, Horatio! What brings you here?

HORATIO: I think I saw your father last night.

HAMLET: What? Tell me about it.

HORATIO: A ghostly form came while we were standing watch. It looked just like your father. It didn't speak to us.

HAMLET: That's very odd. Are you on watch tonight?

MARCELLUS and BERNARDO: Yes, we are.

HAMLET: I'll go with you. If it comes, I'll speak to it. Don't tell anyone else about this. I'll see you tonight.

ALL: Good-bye.

(Horatio, Marcellus, and Bernardo exit.)

HAMLET: My father's spirit—dressed in armor! This isn't good. I'll see him tonight!

(Hamlet exits.)

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.
