

# Hamlet

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



 TIMELESS SHAKESPEARE

— Cast of Characters —

**HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK**

Son of the dead king; nephew of the present king

**CLAUDIUS, KING OF DENMARK**

Hamlet's uncle

**GERTRUDE, QUEEN OF DENMARK**

Hamlet's mother; now married to Claudius

**GHOST** Hamlet's murdered father

**POLONIUS** Chief adviser to Claudius

**HORATIO** Hamlet's loyal friend

**LAERTES** Polonius's son; Ophelia's brother

— Cast of Characters —

**OPHELIA** Polonius's daughter;  
Laertes's sister

**ROSENCRANTZ** and  
**GUILDENSTERN** Hamlet's former  
classmates

**VOLTIMAND, CORNELIUS,** and  
**OSRIC** Danish courtiers

**MARCELLUS, BERNARDO,** and  
**FRANCISCO** Castle guards

**REYNALDO** Polonius's servant

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

# 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, the ghost of Hamlet's father appears. He tells his son who murdered him. And he tells Hamlet to get revenge. As the play unfolds, Hamlet tries to talk himself into murdering Claudius.

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

# 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!