

Act 1, Scene 1

[The battlements⁹ of the King's castle, Elsinore, Denmark. It is night. A soldier, Francisco, is on guard duty¹⁰. Enter another soldier, Barnardo]

Francisco: Stop! Who's there? Stop and answer me!

Barnardo: Long live the King! I come to take your place, Francisco.

Francisco: I'm glad. It's very cold. All has been quiet tonight. The ghost has not appeared.

[Exit Francisco. Enter Marcellus and Horatio]

Barnardo: Welcome, good Marcellus. And Horatio too.

Marcellus: Horatio does not believe what we have seen, Barnardo.

Horatio: That's true. I've never seen a ghost and never will.

Barnardo: We've seen it twice. The ghost of our dead king was walking here.

At just this time, last night...

[Enter Ghost]

Marcellus: Look! It is here again! It is the King.
Speak to it, Horatio!

Horatio: What are you? Why do you walk at night?
You have the shape of the dead King of Denmark.
Speak to me now and tell me who you are!

[The Ghost walks on]

Barnardo: It is angry and it walks away!

Horatio: Speak! Speak! You must tell us what you are!

[Exit Ghost]

Marcellus: It has gone and will not answer.

Barnardo: So now, Horatio. Do you believe your eyes or not?

Horatio: It is the ghost of our dead king – King Hamlet.
He's wearing armour¹¹, as he did in battle,
When he killed old King Fortinbras of Norway.

Fortinbras and Hamlet had agreed to fight,
Over a piece of land that both states¹² wanted.
So Denmark won the land from Norway's king,
Land which young Fortinbras now demands from us,
Thinking our state is weak.

So now our enemies prepare for war and so do we.
Such war-like ghosts appear in time of trouble.

Is this is a warning to the state of Denmark?

[Enter Ghost]

Look where it comes again!

If you can speak, then tell me why you're here.

Oh, do not go again! Stay here and speak!

[A cock¹³ crows. The soldiers try to stop the Ghost, but it walks away]

Barnardo: It was about to speak, but then the cock crew.

Marcellus: The bird of dawn warned it that the night was over.

When daylight comes, all ghosts return to darkness.

Horatio: Yes, look, the sky is red with the first light of dawn.

We must tell Hamlet we have seen his father.

The ghost will speak to him, I'm sure of that.



Horatio: *But look, the morn in russet mantle clad,
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill;
Break we our watch up, and by my advice
Let us impart what we have seen tonight
Unto young Hamlet. For upon my life,
This spirit dumb to us will speak to him.*

russet = red-brown

mantle = cloak

dew = water seen on the ground in the early morning

watch = guard duty

impart = tell

Marcellus: Let's do it. It's our duty.

Act 1, Scene 2

[The Great Hall of the castle. Enter King Claudius, Queen Gertrude, Hamlet, Polonius, Laertes and all the courtiers¹⁴. The King and Queen sit on their thrones and Hamlet, who is dressed in black, sits by himself]

Claudius: My brother's death brought sorrow¹⁵ to our lives. All Denmark mourned¹⁶ him as a gracious¹⁷ king. But after sadness, joy has come again. I am your king – Queen Gertrude is my wife. My brother's queen is now my queen and Denmark's. The state is stronger too and all men fear it.

[To Laertes]

I hear you wish to leave us – is that true?

Laertes: It is, my lord.

I came to Denmark for your coronation¹⁸.

Now, with your permission, I'll return to France.

Claudius: Your father, Lord Polonius, is my dearest friend. If he agrees, then so do I.

Polonius: I do, my lord.

Claudius: You are a good son, Laertes. You are free to go.

[He speaks to Hamlet]

My nephew, Hamlet, we are closer now.

Your mother is my wife – you are my son.

Hamlet: *[Very quietly]*

Closer by marriage – not in any other way.

Gertrude: Why do you still wear black, my dearest Hamlet?

Your father died, but you know men die.

We mourn death for a time and then move on.

You seem to think that mourning lasts forever.



Closer by marriage – not in any other way.



Gertrude: Good Hamlet cast thy nightly colour off,
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.
Do not for ever with thy veiled lids
Seek for thy noble father in the dust;
Thou know'st 'tis common, all that lives must die,
Passing through nature to eternity.

cast = throw

nightly = black

veiled = looking down

lids = eyelids

seek = look for

common = usual

nature = life on earth

eternity = endless life after death

Hamlet: Seems? I know it does.

If I wear black or not, my grief¹⁹ will never end.

Claudius: But life goes on, in spite of death, my son.

I am your father now – do not forget it.

And when at last I die, you will become a king.

Do not leave Denmark as you plan to do.

I need you here – so does your mother too.

Gertrude: Stay here with us, my dearest Hamlet.

Hamlet: I shall obey you, mother

Claudius: That is a loving answer, my dear son.

Enjoy your life in Denmark. All men must honour²⁰ you.

[Exit everyone except Hamlet, who tells us his thoughts]

Hamlet: Enjoy my life? No, it is a great weight to me.

I do not wish to live in this sad world at all.

And Denmark is my prison. How I wish

That I could kill myself, but God forbids²¹ it.

Everything that once seemed fair, disgusts me.

My mother's tears were false. Women cannot be trusted.

How could she marry her dead husband's brother?
How could her tears be dried so soon and turn to smiles?
In two short months, the tearful widow²² has become
a whore²³.

No good at all will come from this quick marriage.
I know that's true, but yet I must say nothing.

[Enter Horatio and the soldiers]

Hamlet: My dear friend, Horatio! Welcome to Denmark.
Why are you not in Wittenberg?

Horatio: My lord. I came here for your father's funeral²⁴.

Hamlet: I think you came to see my mother's wedding!

Horatio: Indeed, that followed quickly.

Hamlet: My poor dead father! I can see his face!

Horatio: See? Where, my lord?

Hamlet: I see him in my mind, Horatio.

Horatio: I think I saw him yesterday, my lord.

Hamlet: Saw? The King, my father?

What do you mean, Horatio?

Horatio: For two nights past, the ghost of your dead father
has appeared.

These soldiers saw him – last night I saw him too.

We were on guard together and his ghost walked by us,
Dressed in his armour, but he did not speak.

Hamlet: How did he look? Was his face sad or angry?

Horatio: His face was pale and sad, my lord.

Hamlet: I must speak to him, Horatio.

I'll watch with you tonight.

My father's ghost! Something is wrong, I knew it.

He has bad news for me and I will hear it!

[Exit]

Act 1, Scene 3

[Enter Laertes and Ophelia]

Laertes: My dearest sister, I must leave you now.
My ship is ready, but before I go
I'll warn you once again about Prince Hamlet.

Ophelia: Why warn me? His words are full of love.
He sends me gifts and letters.
Prince Hamlet loves me, brother.

Laertes: Great princes are not free to love like other men.
They cannot choose their wives – they are chosen for them.
A royal marriage is decided by the state, not love.
Hamlet may say he loves you, don't believe it.
He gives you gifts and he wants one from you.
You, sister, have one precious gift – your chastity²⁵.
Hamlet may want it, but you must not give it.
Do you understand me, dearest sister?

Ophelia: Be sure I do. Your words are locked within
my heart.

[Enter Polonius]

Polonius: Now, Laertes, you must be on your way.
Take my blessing²⁶ with you.
Keep your money safe. Be honest, careful, true to all your
friends. Goodbye.

Laertes: I shall obey you father. Remember my advice, my
dearest sister.

[Exit Laertes]

Polonius: What advice? What did your brother say
to you, Ophelia?

Ophelia: Something about Prince Hamlet, Father,

Polonius: I want to speak to you about Prince Hamlet.
You have been seen together many times.

Act 1, Scene 3

You are having a relationship, I'm sure of that.

What has Prince Hamlet said? Tell me the truth.

Ophelia: With gifts and words he's told me of his love.

He has promised to be true and I believe him.

Polonius: You're thinking like a child, Ophelia!

When young men speak of love, do not believe them.

A young man's promises cover his desires.

Then words may lead to actions you'll regret.

You must not be alone with Hamlet any more.

Do you understand me, daughter?

Ophelia: Yes. I shall obey you, Father.

[Exit Polonius and Ophelia]

Act 1, Scene 4

[The castle battlements. It is night. Enter Hamlet, Horatio and Marcellus]

Hamlet: It's very cold. Midnight has come and gone.
Will the ghost come tonight, Horatio?

Horatio: This is its usual time.
[Music is heard and the sound of great guns]
What does that mean, my lord?

Hamlet: My uncle, our King Claudius, is in a cheerful mood tonight.
There is a feast and every time he drinks, the music sounds.
The whole court cheers and then the great guns roar.

Horatio: Is that a custom²⁷?

Hamlet: Yes, but not one my father followed.
Our enemies now think we Danes are drunkards
And not the fine soldiers that you know we are.
So one fault can ruin reputation²⁸ and make wise men look like fools.

[Enter Ghost]

Horatio: Look, my lord, it comes!

Hamlet: May all the powers of heaven help us. It is my father.

King Hamlet, royal Dane!

Why have you risen from your grave to find me?
No word was missing from your funeral speeches
And everything the Church wished for was done.
Why then have you burst out of your royal tomb²⁹
Where you were laid to rest? And why do you return,
Dressed as a soldier, to terrify the living?
Speak, tell me what you want. Why are you here?
I fear you, dreadful ghost, but I must learn the truth!



May all the powers of heaven help us. It is my father.

[The Ghost beckons³⁰ to Hamlet and walks away]

Hamlet: The ghost wants to speak to me alone. Go on, I'll follow you!

Horatio: Do not go with it, my good lord. It may wish to harm you.

Hamlet: Why should I care? My life is worthless now. It cannot harm my soul. I'll follow it.

Horatio: It may take you into danger, my good lord. Or take another shape and drive you mad.

Hamlet: It has a message for me and I'll hear it.

Marcellus: I will not let you go!

Hamlet: You cannot stop me now! I'll kill you if you try!
[Hamlet follows the Ghost to another part of the battlements]

Speak to me here. I'll go no further.

Ghost: I am your father's most unhappy ghost,
Who cannot rest until I have revenge!

Hamlet: Revenge? What must I do?

Ghost: Revenge my terrible and most unnatural murder!

Hamlet: Murder?

Ghost: Yes, murder.

Hamlet: Tell me what happened. My revenge will follow quickly.

Ghost: People were told a snake attacked me while I slept,
And that its poison killed me, but the truth is worse.

The wicked snake that killed me was my brother.

He poisoned me and now he wears my crown!

Hamlet: My uncle! Oh, my God, I partly guessed it.

Ghost: My brother is a traitor³¹ and a liar. He tricked³²
the people

And he deceived³³ my wife. He married her, to cover his
great sin³⁴.

How weak she was to listen to his lies.

To listen and believe them! It is too cruel.
But dawn is coming, I have more to tell.
As I slept beneath a tree, one afternoon,
My brother poured strong poison in my ear.
The poison acted fast – I did not wake
And so I died, with no time left to pray.

Hamlet: That was most cruel. Now I must kill the King.

Ghost: You must, but do not harm your mother, Hamlet.
Her conscience³⁵ will accuse³⁶ her foolish heart.
Now I must go, dear son. Remember me! Goodbye.

[Exit Ghost]

Hamlet: Remember you? Yes, I'll remember you.
All other memories will fade, but not your story.
Your foolish, wicked wife and her new husband,
The greatest villain³⁷ in the whole of Denmark!
Their names are written in the note-book of my mind.
I have sworn³⁸ revenge. Poor ghost, I'll not forget you!

[Enter Horatio and Marcellus]

Horatio: What news my noble³⁹ lord? What did it tell you?

Hamlet: Wonderful news!

Marcellus: Then tell us, my dear lord!

Hamlet: No, it's a secret.

Horatio: We will keep it safe, believe me.

Hamlet: Well then, all the wicked men we know,
are villains.

Horatio: We don't need a ghost to tell us that.

Hamlet: Yes, you are right, of course. I'll leave you now.
Thanks to you all, goodbye.

Horatio: Do you not trust us? We will keep your secret.

Hamlet: I'm sorry. Let me tell you, I believe the ghost.
It is an honest one. Now, one thing more,
Swear never to reveal⁴⁰ what you have seen tonight.

Ghost's voice: Swear!

Marcellus: We swear.

Horatio: I will obey the ghost. How strange this is! I do not understand it.

Hamlet: There are many things you do not understand, Horatio.

In days to come, you may not understand me either.

I may act strangely and seem a little mad. You must say nothing.

Swear that too before we go!

Ghost's voice: Swear!

[They swear]

Hamlet: You can rest now, unhappy ghost. Now, friends, Remember what we all have sworn tonight.

These troubled times concern us all, Horatio.

But I'm the one man who can put them right.