

Act I.

Shakespeare's longest play begins in Denmark with the news that King Hamlet of Denmark has recently died.

Denmark is now in a state of high alert and preparing for possible war with Young Fortinbras of Norway. A ghost resembling the late King Hamlet is spotted on a platform before Elsinore Castle in Denmark. King Claudius, who now rules Denmark, has taken King Hamlet's wife, Queen Grtrude as his new wife and Queen of Denmark.

King Claudius fearing Young Fortinbras of Norway may invade, has sent ambassadors to Norway to urge the King of Norway to restrain Young Fortinbras. Young Hamlet distrusts King Claudius. The King and Queen do not understand why Hamlet still mourns his father's death over two months ago.

KING CLAUDIUS : But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son,--

HAMLET [Aside]: A little more than kin, and less than kind.

KING CLAUDIUS: How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

HAMLET: Not so, my lord; I am too much i' the sun.

**QUEEN GERTRUDE: Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted 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.**

HAMLET: Ay, madam, it is common.

**QUEEN GERTRUDE: If it be,
Why seems it so particular with thee?**

**HAMLET: Seems, madam! nay it is; I know not 'seems.'
'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
Nor the dejected 'havior of the visage,
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
That can denote me truly: these indeed seem,
For they are actions that a man might play:
But I have that within which passeth show;
These but the trappings and the suits of woe.**

In his first soliloquy, Hamlet explains that he does not like his mother marrying the next King of

Denmark so quickly within a month of his father's death...

Laertes, the son of Lord Chamberlain Polonius, gives his sister Ophelia some brotherly advice. He warns Ophelia not to fall in love with Young Hamlet; she will only be hurt. Polonius tells his daughter Ophelia not to return Hamlet's affections for her since he fears Hamlet is only using her...

Hamlet meets the Ghost of his father, King Hamlet and follows it to learn more...

MARCELLUS: Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

HORATIO: Heaven will direct it.

MARCELLUS: Nay, let's follow him.

Exeunt

SCENE V. Another part of the platform.

Enter GHOST and HAMLET

HAMLET: Where wilt thou lead me? speak; I'll go no further.

Ghost: Mark me.

HAMLET: I will.

**Ghost : My hour is almost come,
When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames
Must render up myself.**

HAMLET : Alas, poor ghost!

**Ghost : Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing
To what I shall unfold.**

HAMLET : Speak; I am bound to hear.

Ghost : So art thou to revenge, when thou shalt hear.

HAMLET : What?

**Ghost : I am thy father's spirit,
Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,
And for the day confined to fast in fires,
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
Are burnt and purged away. But that I am forbid
To tell the secrets of my prison-house,
I could a tale unfold whose lightest word**

Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,
Thy knotted and combined locks to part
And each particular hair to stand on end,
Like quills upon the fretful porpentine:
But this eternal blazon must not be
To ears of flesh and blood. List, list, O, list!
If thou didst ever thy dear father love--

HAMLET : O God!

Ghost : Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

HAMLET : Murder!

Ghost : Murder most foul, as in the best it is;
But this most foul, strange and unnatural.

HAMLET : Haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift
As meditation or the thoughts of love,
May sweep to my revenge.

Ghost : I find thee apt;
And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed
That roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf,
Wouldst thou not stir in this. Now, Hamlet, hear:
'Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard,
A serpent stung me; so the whole ear of Denmark
Is by a forged process of my death
Rankly abused: but know, thou noble youth,
The serpent that did sting thy father's life
Now wears his crown.

(...)

Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand
Of life, of crown, of queen, at once dispatch'd:
Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,
Unhousel'd, disappointed, unanel'd,
No reckoning made, but sent to my account
With all my imperfections on my head:
O, horrible! O, horrible! most horrible!
If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not;
Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch for luxury and damned incest.
But, howsoever thou pursuest this act,
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught: leave her to heaven
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge,

**To prick and sting her. Fare thee well at once!
The glow-worm shows the matin to be near,
And 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire:
Adieu, adieu! Hamlet, remember me.**

Hamlet learns from King Hamlet's Ghost that he was poisoned by King Claudius, the current ruler of Denmark. The Ghost tells Hamlet to avenge his death but not to punish Queen Gertrude for remarrying; it is not Hamlet's place and her conscience and heaven will judge her... Hamlet swears Horatio and Marcellus to silence over Hamlet meeting the Ghost.

**HAMLET: There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy. But come;
Here, as before, never, so help you mercy,
How strange or odd soe'er I bear myself,
As I perchance hereafter shall think meet
To put an antic disposition on**

(...)

**The time is out of joint: O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!
Nay, come, let's go together.**

Act II.

Polonius tells Reynaldo to spy on his son Laertes in Paris. Polonius learns from his daughter Ophelia that a badly dressed Hamlet met her, studied her face and promptly left. Polonius believes that Hamlet's odd behavior is because Ophelia has rejected him. Polonius decides to tell King Claudius the reason for Hamlet's recently odd behavior.

King Claudius instructs courtiers Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to find out what is causing Hamlet's strange "transformation," or change of character.

HAMLET : Denmark's a prison.

ROSENCRANTZ : Then is the world one.

**HAMLET : A goodly one; in which there are many confines,
wards and dungeons, Denmark being one o' the worst.**

ROSENCRANTZ : We think not so, my lord.

**HAMLET : Why, then, 'tis none to you; for there is nothing
either good or bad, but thinking makes it so: to me
it is a prison.**

ROSENCRANTZ: Why then, your ambition makes it one; 'tis too

narrow for your mind.

HAMLET : O God, I could be bounded in a nut shell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.

GUILDENSTERN : Which dreams indeed are ambition, for the very substance of the ambitious is merely the shadow of a dream.

HAMLET : A dream itself is but a shadow.

ROSENCRANTZ : Truly, and I hold ambition of so airy and light a quality that it is but a shadow's shadow.

HAMLET : Then are our beggars bodies, and our monarchs and outstretched heroes the beggars' shadows. Shall we to the court? for, by my fay, I cannot reason.

ROSENCRANTZ GUILDENSTERN : We'll wait upon you.

HAMLET : No such matter: I will not sort you with the rest of my servants, for, to speak to you like an honest man, I am most dreadfully attended. But, in the beaten way of friendship, what make you at Elsinore?

ROSENCRANTZ : To visit you, my lord; no other occasion.

HAMLET : Beggar that I am, I am even poor in thanks; but I thank you: and sure, dear friends, my thanks are too dear a halfpenny. Were you not sent for? Is it your own inclining? Is it a free visitation? Come, deal justly with me: come, come; nay, speak.

GUILDENSTERN : What should we say, my lord?

HAMLET : Why, any thing, but to the purpose. You were sent for; and there is a kind of confession in your looks which your modesties have not craft enough to colour: I know the good king and queen have sent for you.

ROSENCRANTZ : To what end, my lord?

HAMLET : That you must teach me. But let me conjure you, by the rights of our fellowship, by the consonancy of our youth, by the obligation of our ever-preserved love, and by what more dear a better proposer could charge you withal, be even and direct with me, whether you were sent for, or no?

ROSENCRANTZ [Aside to GUILDENSTERN] What say you?

HAMLET [Aside] Nay, then, I have an eye of you.--If you love me, hold not off.

GUILDENSTERN : My lord, we were sent for.

HAMLET : I will tell you why; so shall my anticipation prevent your discovery, and your secrecy to the king and queen moult no feather. I have of late--but wherefore I know not--lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestic roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?

Queen Gertrude reveals that only King Hamlet's death and her recent remarriage could be upsetting Hamlet.

We learn more of Young Fortinbras' movements and Polonius has his own theory about Hamlet's transformation; it is caused by Hamlet's love for his daughter Ophelia. Hamlet makes his famous speech about the greatness of man. Hamlet plans to use a play to test if King Claudius really did kill his father as King Hamlet's Ghost told him...

Act III.

The King's spies, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern report to King Claudius on Hamlet's behavior. Hamlet is eager for King Claudius and Queen Gertrude to watch a play tonight which Hamlet has added lines to.

HAMLET

**To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation**

**Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause: there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life;
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.--Soft you now!
The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins remember'd.**

King Claudius and Polonius listen in on Hamlet's and Ophelia's private conversation. Hamlet suspects Ophelia is spying on him and is increasingly hostile to her before leaving.

King Claudius decides to send Hamlet to England, fearing danger in Hamlet since he no longer believes Hamlet is merely lovesick. The King agrees to Polonius' plan to eavesdrop on Hamlet's conversation with his mother after the play to hopefully learn more from Hamlet. The play Hamlet had added lines to is performed. The mime preceding the play which mimics the Ghost's description of King Hamlet's death goes unnoticed.

The main play called "The Murder of Gonzago" is performed, causing King Claudius to react in a way which convinces Hamlet that his uncle did indeed poison his father King Hamlet as the Ghost previously had told him... Hamlet pretends not to know that the play has offended King Claudius. Hamlet agrees to speak with his mother in private...

King Claudius admits his growing fear of Hamlet and decides to send him overseas to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in order to protect himself. Alone, King Claudius reveals in soliloquy his own knowledge of the crime he has committed (poisoning King Hamlet) and realizes that he cannot escape divine justice...

Queen Gertrude attempts to scold her son but Hamlet instead scolds his mother for her actions. Queen Gertrude cries out in fear, and Polonius echoes it and is stabbed through the arras

(subdivision of a room created by a hanging tapestry) where he was listening in. Hamlet continues scolding his mother but the Ghost reappears, telling Hamlet to be gentle with the Queen. For her part, Queen Gertrude agrees to stop living with King Claudius, beginning her redemption....

Act IV.

King Claudius speaks with his wife, Queen Gertrude. He learns of Polonius' murder which shocks him; it could easily have been him. Queen Gertrude lies for her son, saying that Hamlet is as mad as a tempestuous sea. King Claudius, now scared of Hamlet, decides to have Hamlet sent away to England immediately... He also sends courtiers and spies Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to speak with Hamlet to find out where Hamlet has hidden Polonius' body so they can take it to the chapel.

Hamlet refuses to tell Rosencrantz and Guildenstern where Polonius' dead body is hidden. He calls Rosencrantz and Guildenstern lapdogs revealing his true awareness that they are not his friends. Hamlet agrees to see King Claudius.

Hamlet continues to refuse to tell Rosencrantz and Guildenstern where Polonius' body is. Hamlet is brought before the King. The two exchange words, clearly circling each other, each aware that the other is a threat. Hamlet tells King Claudius where Polonius' body is. King Claudius ominously tells Hamlet to leave for England supposedly for Hamlet's own safety. With Hamlet gone, King Claudius reveals his plans for Hamlet to be killed in England, freeing King Claudius from further worry from this threat...

Young Fortinbras marches his army across Denmark to fight the Polish. Hamlet laments that he does not have in him the strength of Young Fortinbras, who will lead an army into pointless fighting, if only to maintain honor. Hamlet asks himself how he cannot fight for honor when his father has been killed and his mother made a whore in his eyes by becoming King Claudius' wife.

The death of Polonius leaves its mark on Ophelia who becomes mad from the grief of losing her father. Laertes storms King Claudius' castle, demanding to see his father and wanting justice when he learns that his father, Polonius has been killed. King Claudius remains calm, telling Laertes that he too mourned his father's loss...

Horatio is greeted by sailors who have news from Hamlet. Horatio follows the sailors to learn more... King Claudius explains to Laertes that Hamlet killed his father, Polonius. Deciding they have a common enemy, they plot Hamlet's death at a fencing match to be arranged between Laertes and Hamlet. Laertes learns of his sister Ophelia's death by drowning...

Act V.

Hamlet and Horatio speak with a cheerful Clown or gravedigger. Hamlet famously realizes that man's accomplishments are transitory (fleeting) and holding the skull of Yorick, a childhood jester he remembered, creates a famous scene about man's insignificance and inability to control his fate following death.

At Ophelia's burial, the Priest reveals a widely held belief that Ophelia committed suicide,

angering Laertes. Hamlet fights Laertes over Ophelia's grave, angered by Laertes exaggerated emphasis of his sorrow and because he believes he loved Ophelia much more than her brother.

Hamlet explains to Horatio how he avoided the death planned for him in England and had courtiers' Rosencrantz and Guildenstern put to death instead. Hamlet reveals his desire to kill King Claudius.

Summoned by Osric to fence against Laertes, Hamlet arrives at a hall in the castle and fights Laertes. Queen Gertrude drinks a poisoned cup meant for Hamlet, dying but not before telling all that she has been poisoned.

Hamlet wins the first two rounds against Laertes but is stabbed and poisoned fatally in the third round. Exchanging swords whilst fighting, Hamlet wounds and poisons Laertes who explains that his sword is poison tipped.

Now dying, Hamlet stabs King Claudius with this same sword, killing him.

Hamlet, dying, tells Horatio to tell his story and not to commit suicide. Hamlet recommends Young Fortinbras as the next King of Denmark. Young Fortinbras arrives, cleaning up the massacre. Horatio promises to tell all the story we have just witnessed, ending the play.

**LAERTES : He is justly served;
It is a poison temper'd by himself.
Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet:
Mine and my father's death come not upon thee,
Nor thine on me.**

Dies

**HAMLET : Heaven make thee free of it! I follow thee.
I am dead, Horatio. Wretched queen, adieu!
You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
That are but mutes or audience to this act,
Had I but time--as this fell sergeant, death,
Is strict in his arrest--O, I could tell you--
But let it be. Horatio, I am dead;
Thou livest; report me and my cause aright
To the unsatisfied.**

**HORATIO : Never believe it:
I am more an antique Roman than a Dane:
Here's yet some liquor left.**

**HAMLET : As thou'rt a man,
Give me the cup: let go; by heaven, I'll have't.
O good Horatio, what a wounded name,
Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart
Absent thee from felicity awhile,**

And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
To tell my story.

March afar off, and shot within

What warlike noise is this?

OSRIC : Young Fortinbras, with conquest come from Poland,
To the ambassadors of England gives
This warlike volley.

HAMLET : O, I die, Horatio;
The potent poison quite o'er-crows my spirit:
I cannot live to hear the news from England;
But I do prophesy the election lights
On Fortinbras: he has my dying voice;
So tell him, with the occurrents, more and less,
Which have solicited. The rest is silence.

Dies

HORATIO Now cracks a noble heart. Good night sweet prince:
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!
