

# HAMLET

Translated

SJ Hills

and

William Shakespeare

Faithfully Translated  
into Performable Modern English  
Side by Side with Original Text

Includes Stage Directions



THE TRAGEDY OF HAMLET

Book 24 in a series of 42



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Translated from *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*,  
by Shakespeare, circa 1602.

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Melody

Eve

James

Hamilton

*“From an ardent love of literature, a profound admiration of the men who have left us legacies of thought and beauty, and, I suppose, from that feature in man that induces us to strive to follow those we most admire, and looking upon the pursuit of literature as one of the noblest in which no labour should be deemed too great, I have sought to add a few thoughts to the store already bequeathed to the world. If they are approved, I shall have gained my desire; if not, I shall hope to receive any hints in the spirit of one who loves his work and desires to progress.”*

R. Hilton. 1869

## PREFACE

When we studied Shakespeare at school we had to flick back and forth to the notes at the back of the book to understand a confusing line, words we were not familiar with, expressions lost in time, or even current or political references of Shakespeare's time.

What if the text was rewritten to make each line clear without looking up anything?

There are plenty of modern translations just for this. But they are cumbersome to read, no flow, matter of fact translations (and most this author has found are of varying inaccuracy, despite being approved by exam boards).

As a writer and producer of drama, I wanted not only to translate the play faithfully line by line, but also to include the innuendos, the political satire, the puns and the bawdy humour in a way which would flow and bring the work to life for students, actors prepping for a performance or lovers of the work to enjoy today, faithful to the feel and meaning of the original script and language without going into lengthy explanations for a modern day audience.

A faithful line-by-line translation into modern phrasing that flows, along with additional staging directions making the play interesting to read, easy to understand, and very importantly, an invaluable study aid.

For me it all started at about eight or nine years of age. I was reading a comic which contained the story of Macbeth serialized in simple comic strip form. I could not wait to see what happened next so I rushed out to the public library to get a copy of the book. Of course, when I got it home I didn't even recognise it as being the same story. It made no sense to me, being written in 'Olde English' and often using 'flowery' language. I remember thinking at the time that one day I should write my version of the story for others to understand.

Years went by and I had pretty much forgotten my idea. Then quite by chance I was approached by Encyclopaedia Britannica to produce a series of dramatised classic dramas as educational aids for children learning English as a second language. Included in the selection was Romeo And Juliet which I was to condense down to fifty minutes using modern English.

This brought flooding back the memories of being eight years old again, reading my comic and planning my modern version of Shakespeare. In turn it also led me to the realisation that even if a reader could understand English well, this did not mean they could fully understand and enjoy Shakespeare. I could understand English, yet I did not fully understand some of Shakespeare's text without serious research. So what hope did a person whose first language was not English have?

After some investigation, I discovered there was a great desire around the world to understand the text fully without the inconvenience of referring to footnotes or sidelines, or worse still, the internet. How can one enjoy the wonderful drama with constant interruption? I was also surprised to discover the desire was equally as great in English speaking countries as ones whose first language was not English.

The final kick to get me started was meeting fans of Shakespeare's works who knew scripts off by heart but secretly admitted to me that they did have trouble fully understanding the meaning of some lines. Although they knew the storyline well they could miss some of the subtlety and innuendo Shakespeare was renowned for. It is hardly surprising in this day and age as many of the influences, trends, rumours, beliefs and current affairs of Shakespeare's time are not valid today.

I do not pretend my work is any match for the great master, but I do believe in the greater enjoyment for all. These great works deserve to be understood by all, Shakespeare himself wrote for all levels of audience, he would even aim his work to suit a particular audience at times – for example changing historical facts if he knew a member of royalty would be seeing his play and it would cause them any embarrassment, or of course to curry favour with a monarch by the use of flattery.

I have been as faithful as possible with my version, but the original, iambic pentameter, (the tempo and pace the lines were written for), and other Elizabethan tricks of the trade that Shakespeare was so brilliant at are not included unless vital to the text and meaning. For example, rhyming couplets to signify the end of a scene, for in Shakespeare's day there were no curtains, no lights and mostly static scenery, so scene changes were not so obvious, these couplets, though not strictly necessary, are included to maintain the feel of the original.

This makes for a play that sounds fresh to today's listening audience. It is also a valuable educational tool; English Literature courses often include a section on translating Shakespeare. I am often asked the meaning of a particular line, sometimes scholars argue over the meaning of particular lines. I have taken the most widely agreed version and the one which flows best with the story line where there is dispute, and if you read this translation before reading the original work or going to see a stage version, you will find the play takes on a whole new meaning, making it infinitely more enjoyable.

SJ Hills. London. 2018

**Author's Note:** This version contains stage directions. These are included purely as a guide to help understand the script better. Any director staging the play would have their own interpretation of the play and decide their own directions. These directions are my own personal interpretation and not those of Shakespeare. You may change these directions to your own choosing or ignore them completely. For exam purposes these should be only regarded as guidance to the dialogue and for accuracy should not be quoted in any studies or examinations.

*Hamlet* (or to give the play its full title, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*) is a tragedy. A tragedy is typically a serious drama based around a central character, usually flawed, culminating in an unhappy or disastrous ending. The origin of tragedies can be traced back to ancient Greece, particularly Aristotle in his work, *Poetics*. The tragic hero would usually be a great man who made a grave mistake, and have weaknesses we as an audience can relate to or sympathise with. The four major tragedies Shakespeare wrote are *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *King Lear*.

To aid in understanding speeches and for learning lines, where possible, speeches by any character are not broken over two pages unless they have a natural break. As a result of this, gaps will be noticeable at the bottom of pages where the next speech will not fully fit onto the page. This was intentional. A speech can not be fully appreciated if one has to turn the page back and forth when studying or learning lines.

Coming soon, *Hamlet for All Ages* by SJ Hills, by SJ Hills, which includes the script in modern English with study note stickies, illustrations and simplified text running alongside the main text for younger readers to share with students, actors and fans of the great work.

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## Historical Notes

The sources for Hamlet can be found as far back as the 12th century in Icelandic tales. A Scandinavian version of *Hamlet*, *Amleth* or *Amlóði* - a Norse word meaning, "not sane" - was written down in the 12th century by Danish historian, *Saxo Grammaticus* entitled *Gesta Danorum* (Deeds of the Danes). Similar storylines can be found in the Icelandic Saga, *Hrolf Kraki*, and the Roman legend *Lucius Junius Brutus*, both include heroes who pretend to be insane in order to gain revenge. A version of *Saxo's* story was translated into French in 1570 by *François de Belleforest* in his *Histoires Tragiques* from which Shakespeare would obtain many sources for his plays. *Belleforest* added to *Saxo's* text substantially, doubling its length, and introducing the hero's gloomy sadness.

Another source Shakespeare used was an earlier play of which no known copy survives, referred to today as the *Ur-Hamlet*, possibly written by *Thomas Kyd* around 1589. This was the first known version to include a ghost in the story. Some scholars suggest that the *Ur-Hamlet* is an early draft by Shakespeare rather than the work of *Kyd*. Whoever the author was, Shakespeare, as he always did, added elements of his own to the original versions, including additional characters and a change of location to Elsinore Castle.

Shakespeare's use of pre-existing material was not considered a lack of originality. In Elizabethan times copyright law did not exist, copying whole passages of text was frequently practiced and not considered theft as it is today. Nowadays, stage and movie productions are frequently 'adaptations' from other sources, the only difference being the need to obtain permission or rights to do so, unless the work is out of copyright.

The real skill Shakespeare displays is in how he adapts his sources in new ways, displaying a remarkable understanding of human psyche and emotion, and including a talent at building characters, adding characters for effect - in the case of Hamlet, completely reinventing the hero's personality - dramatic pacing, tension building, interspersed by short bouts of relief before building the tension even further, and above all of course, his extraordinary ability to use and miss-use language to his and dramatic, bawdy or playful advantage.

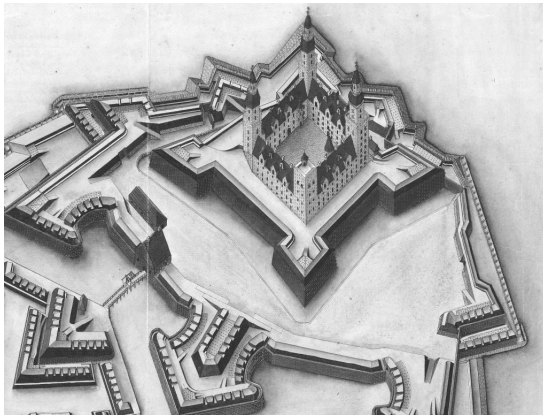
It has been said Shakespeare almost wrote screenplays, predating modern cinema by over 400 years, however you view it, he wrote a powerful story and understood how to play on human emotions and weaknesses.

*A piece of Hamlet trivia:* there is a tradition going back centuries of productions using a real skull for the character Yorick in the graveyard scene (Act 5, Scene 1), with many people donating their skulls to be used after their death.



Kronborg Castle from a 1580 geography book.

Elsinore Castle is based on Kronborg Castle in Helsingør, Denmark. It is strategically placed, overlooking a narrow stretch of sea between Denmark and present day Sweden allowing passage through to the Baltic Sea. The platform would have been a gun placement, with cannons aimed at any threat from the sea and also as a threat to ships which were required to pay a ‘Sound Fee’ to pass this point.



Circa 1750 relief drawing of Kronborg castle

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

PRINCE HAMLET	Son of the late King Hamlet of Denmark
KING CLAUDIUS	New crowned King of Denmark, uncle of Prince Hamlet
QUEEN GERTRUDE	Prince Hamlet's mother, widow of King Hamlet, recently married to King Claudius, brother of her late husband
GHOST	The ghost of the late King Hamlet
POLONIUS	An elderly councillor in the royal court
LAERTES	Son of Polonius, a student studying abroad
OPHELIA	Daughter of Polonius, love interest of Hamlet
HORATIO	Friend of Prince Hamlet, scholar
ROSENCRANTZ	Courtier. Formerly a fellow student of Prince Hamlet
GUILDENSTERN	Courtier. Formerly a fellow student of Prince Hamlet
PRINCE FORTINBRAS	Prince of Norway, enemy of Denmark
VOLTEMAND	Danish councillor
CORNELIUS	Danish councillor
MARCELLUS	Member of the king's guard
FRANCISCO	Member of the king's guard
OSRIC	A fashionable courtier
REYNALDO	Servant to Polonius
GRAVEDIGGER	
GRAVEDIGGER'S ASSISTANT	
CAPTAIN	Captain in Fortinbras's army
PLAYERS	Actors
GENTLEMAN	In the Danish court
PRIEST	
SAILORS	
LORDS	
LADIES	
SOLDIERS	
MESSENGERS	
ATTENDANTS	

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# *ACT I*



*DENMARK*  
*ELSINORE, WHERE OUR TALE IS SET.*

*SIXTEENTH CENTURY A.D.*

## ACT I

### ACT I SCENE I

ELSNORE. A PLATFORM BEFORE THE CASTLE. MIDNIGHT.

*Note: Elsinore Castle is based on Kronborg Castle in Helsingør, Denmark. The platform would have been a gun placement for cannons.*

*To show characters are comedic or to vary the overall structure of the play, Shakespeare sometimes writes lines in prose rather than the usual blank verse (a form of poetry which doesn't rhyme except for dramatic effect). He moves between prose and verse to give his characters more depth and variety by breaking the rhythm.*

*Deliberate bawdy use of words is underlined, rhymed lines are in italics.*

---

THE PLAY STARTS WITH FRANCISCO, A SOLDIER, STANDING WATCH ON A GUARD PLATFORM OF THE ROYAL CASTLE AT ELSINORE IN DENMARK. IT IS BITTERLY COLD AND FRANCISCO IS DEPRESSED, HE IS SUFFERING FROM THE COLD MORE SO THIS NIGHT AS HE IS NOT FEELING WELL.

AS THE CLOCK TOWER BELL STRIKES TWELVE, BARNARDO, THE GUARD WHO IS TO RELIEVE FRANCISCO, ARRIVES. IT IS TOO DARK TO FULLY RECOGNISE ANYONE BY SIGHT UNLESS THEY STAND BY A BURNING TORCH. FRANCISCO RAISES HIS PIKE IN CHALLENGE.

---

BARNARDO  
*(arriving)* Who goes there?

FRANCISCO  
No, you answer me. Halt and reveal yourself.

BARNARDO  
Who's there?

FRANCISCO  
Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold\* yourself.

*\*Note: 'Unfold' means to pull back his hood, it also suggests to us it is cold.*

---

FRANCISCO PULLS BACK THE HOOD SHIELDING HIM FROM THE COLD TO REVEAL HIS IDENTITY AND GIVES THE PASSWORD.

---

BARNARDO  
Long live the king!

FRANCISCO  
Bernardo?

BARNARDO  
Long live the king!

FRANCISCO  
Barnardo?



Act I Scene I - Elsinore. A Platform Before The Castle. Midnight.

---

BARNARDO  
Himself.

FRANCISCO  
You arrive most punctually on the hour.

BARNARDO  
The clock has already struck twelve, get to bed, Francisco.

FRANCISCO  
I'm most grateful you are relieving me, it's bitterly cold and I'm not feeling so good.

BARNARDO  
Has your guard been a quiet one?

FRANCISCO  
Not even a mouse is stirring.

BARNARDO  
Well, goodnight then. If you see my fellow watchers, Horatio and Marcellus, tell them to hurry up.

BARNARD  
He.

FRANCISCO  
You come most carefully upon your hour.

BARNARDO  
'Tis now struck twelve; get thee to bed, Francisco.

FRANCISCO  
For this relief much thanks; 'tis bitter cold, And I am sick at heart.

BARNARDO  
Have you had quiet guard?

FRANCISCO  
Not a mouse stirring.

BARNARDO  
Well, good night.  
If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus, The rivals\* of my watch, bid them make haste.

*\*Note: 'Rivals' - used here in its original meaning of people who share something. But people who share often fall out or become competitive, hence the current meaning of rival. From Latin, Rivalis, a group of people who lived on a bank of the same river.*

---

BARNARDO WALKS AWAY, STARTING HIS GUARD DUTY.  
FRANCISCO COLLECTS HIS THINGS PREPARING TO LEAVE.

---

FRANCISCO  
(aside) I think I hear them.  
(calls) Halt! Who goes there?

FRANCISCO  
I think I hear them. Stand ho! Who is there?

---

ENTER MARCELLUS, A SOLDIER, AND HORATIO, A CIVILIAN.

---

HORATIO  
Friends of this land.

MARCELLUS  
And loyal subjects of the Danish king.

FRANCISCO  
I wish you a good night then.

HORATIO  
Friends to this ground.

MARCELLUS  
And liegemen to the Dane.

FRANCISCO  
Give you good night.

*Note: It seems strange that he doesn't ask them to reveal themselves as he did Barnardo, especially as they gave a different answer when challenged.*

Hamlet Translated

---

---

FRANCISCO MAKES TO LEAVE.

---

MARCELLUS

Oh, goodnight, good soldier. Who has relieved you?

FRANCISCO

Barnardo has taken my place. Good night to you.

MARCELLUS

O, farewell, honest soldier. Who hath relieved you?

FRANCISCO

Barnardo hath my place. Give you good night.

---

FRANCISCO LEAVES.

---

MARCELLUS

*(calling out)* Hello? Barnardo?

BARNARDO

*(calling back)* Who calls? Is that Horatio?

MARCELLUS

Holla, Barnardo!

BARNARDO

Say, what, is Horatio there?

---

BARNARDO APPEARS OUT OF THE DARKNESS.

HORATIO OFFERS HIS HAND TO SHAKE.

---

HORATIO

A piece of him.

BARNARDO

Welcome, Horatio. Welcome, good Marcellus.

HORATIO

Well, has the thing appeared again tonight?

BARNARDO

I've seen nothing.

MARCELLUS

Horatio says it's just our imagination, and refuses to believe in the frightening sight we've seen twice now. That's why I've brought him along to spend the long minutes of this night watching with us. If the apparition appears again he may confirm what we've seen and speak to it himself.

HORATIO

Tush, tush. It will not appear.

HORATIO

A piece of him.

BARNARDO

Welcome Horatio. Welcome good Marcellus.

HORATIO

What, has this thing appeared again tonight?

BARNARDO

I have seen nothing.

MARCELLUS

Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy, And will not let belief take hold of him, Touching this dreaded sight twice seen of us. Therefore I have entreated him along With us to watch the minutes of this night, That if again this apparition come, He may approve our eyes and speak to it.

HORATIO

Tush, tush, 'twill not appear.

Act I Scene I - Elsinore. A Platform Before The Castle. Midnight.

---

BARNARDO

Sit here awhile, and let us once again assault your ears with the story of what we have seen these past two nights that you are so set against believing.

HORATIO

Very well, let us sit down and hear what Barnardo has to say.

BARNARDO

Sit down a while,  
And let us once again assail your ears,  
That are so fortified against our story,  
What we have two nights seen.

HORATIO

Well, sit we down,  
And let us hear Barnardo speak of this.

---

THEY SIT.

---

BARNARDO

Just last night, when that same star up there, west of the Northern Star, had made its way to illuminate that part of the heavens where it now shines, and just as the clock was chiming one, Marcellus and myself...

BARNARDO

Last night of all,  
When yond same star that's westward from the pole\*  
Had made his course t' illumine that part of heaven  
Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,  
The bell then beating one -

---

A CLOCK STRIKES ONE.

A GHOST ENTERS IN THE LIKENESS OF THE RECENTLY DECEASED KING OF DENMARK, OLD HAMLET, WEARING BATTLE ARMOUR.

---

*\*Note: The Pole Star, or the North Star is a constant position bright star in the northern hemisphere, always due north in the sky. It was used by sailors or travellers as a reference to the direction they were travelling.*

MARCELLUS

*(hushed)* Wait, be quiet. Look, here it comes again!

BARNARDO

In the same likeness of the dead king.

MARCELLUS

You're the educated one, Horatio, speak to it.

BARNARDO

Doesn't it look like the king? See, Horatio?

HORATIO

Very like him. It chills me with fear and astonishment.

BARNARDO

It wishes to be spoken to.

MARCELLUS

Peace, break thee off. Look where it comes again!

BARNARDO

In the same figure like the king that's dead.

MARCELLUS

Thou art a scholar, speak to it, Horatio.

BARNARDO

Looks a' not like the king? Mark it, Horatio.

HORATIO

Most like. It harrows me with fear and wonder.

BARNARDO

It would be spoke to.

Hamlet Translated

---

MARCELLUS

Ask it a question, Horatio.

MARCELLUS

Question it\*, Horatio.

*\*Note: It was believed that a ghost could only speak if it was spoken to first. In Shakespeare's day everyone believed ghosts existed.*

HORATIO

(to Ghost) Who are you that disturbs our peace this time of night? And clad in armour like the late King of Denmark sometimes wore? By the heavens above, I order you to speak!

HORATIO

What art thou that usurp'st this time of night, Together with that fair and warlike form In which the majesty of buried Denmark Did sometimes march? By heaven, I charge thee speak!

---

THE GHOST TURNS, THEN SLOWLY AND REGALLY WALKS AWAY.

---

MARCELLUS

You've offended it.

MARCELLUS

It is offended.

BARNARDO

Look, it strides away.

BARNARDO

See, it stalks away.

HORATIO

(to Ghost) Wait, speak, speak! I order you to speak!

HORATIO

Stay, speak, speak! I charge thee speak!

---

THE GHOST DISAPPEARS.

---

MARCELLUS

It's gone, and would not answer.

MARCELLUS

'Tis gone, and will not answer.

BARNARDO

Well, Horatio? You're shaking, and look pale. Is this not something more than wild imagination? What do you think now?

BARNARDO

How now, Horatio? You tremble and look pale. Is not this something more than fantasy? What think you on't?

HORATIO

As God is my witness, I would not have believed this if not for the sober confirmation of my own eyes.

HORATIO

Before my God, I might not this believe Without the sensible and true avouch Of mine own eyes.

MARCELLUS

Does it not look like the king?

MARCELLUS

Is it not like the king?

Act I Scene I - Elsinore. A Platform Before The Castle. Midnight.

---

HORATIO

As alike as you are to yourself. Wearing the very same armour he wore in his fight against the arrogant king of Norway. Scowling the way he did in an angry exchange before he defeated the Polish army on the snow fields. It's very strange.

MARCELLUS

Twice before, in the dead of night at exactly this hour, he has marched past us.

HORATIO

I don't know what to think about this, but from the limits of my experience I suspect this is a forewarning of new disruption for our country.

MARCELLUS

In that case, sit here and tell me, who would know why there is such a strict nightly watch over this land, and why so many bronze cannons and implements of war are manufactured and imported daily? Why ship builders are ordered to work seven days a week, even on Sunday? What might be the reason for such arduous haste to labour night and day? Who can tell me that?

HORATIO

I can tell you. At least, as far as rumour goes;

HORATIO

As thou art to thyself.  
Such was the very armour he had on  
When he the ambitious Norway combated;  
So frowned he once when in an angry parle  
He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice.  
'Tis strange.

MARCELLUS

Thus twice before, and jump at this dead hour,  
With martial stalk hath he gone by our watch.

HORATIO

In what particular thought to work I know not,  
But, in the gross and scope of my opinion,  
This bodes some strange eruption to our state.

MARCELLUS

Good now, sit down, and tell me, he that knows,  
Why this same strict and most observant watch  
So nightly toils the subject of the land,  
And why such daily cast of brazen cannon,  
And foreign mart for implements of war,  
Why such impress of shipwrights, whose sore task  
Does not divide the Sunday from the week;  
What might be toward that this sweaty haste  
Doth make the night joint-labourer with the day:  
Who is't that can inform me?

HORATIO

That can I;  
At least, the whisper goes so:

---

THEY HUDDLE CLOSER TO LISTEN.

---

HORATIO (CONTD)

Our late king, whose image you have just seen before you, was, as you know, goaded - due to the arrogant pride of King Fortinbras of Norway - to a duel, in which our valiant King Hamlet, revered around the world, killed this Fortinbras, who, by order of a sealed contract, approved by law and the ancient rules of combat, forfeited, along with his life, all his lands to the conqueror. Our king had put forward lands of equal size which would have been inherited by Fortinbras had he won by the same terms. Hence Fortinbras' lands fell to King Hamlet.

HORATIO

our last king,  
Whose image even but now appeared to us,  
Was, as you know, by Fortinbras of Norway,  
Thereto pricked on by a most emulate pride,  
Dared to the combat; in which our valiant Hamlet -  
For so this side of our known world esteemed him -  
Did slay this Fortinbras, who, by a sealed compact  
Well ratified by law and heraldry,  
Did forfeit with his life all those his lands  
Which he stood seized of, to the conqueror;  
Against the which a moiety competent  
Was gaged by our king, which had returned  
To the inheritance of Fortinbras,  
Had he been vanquisher; as, by the same cov'nant  
And carriage of the article designed,  
His fell to Hamlet.

*Note: Later on in Act 5, Scene 1 we will learn this happened 30 years ago.*

HORATIO (CONT'D)

Now, sir, his son, young Fortinbras, unproven in battle but itching for a fight, has, from the outlying regions of Norway, gathered up a group of unpaid lawless reprobates, willing in return for food and shelter to fight and stand as cannon fodder, in - as it appears to our generals - some daring attempt to retake by force the lands his father lost. This, I take is the main reason behind our preparations for war, the reason for our guard duty, and the cause of this rush of activity and the stockpiling throughout our land.

HORATIO

Now, sir, young Fortinbras,  
Of unimproved metal hot and full,  
Hath, in the skirts of Norway here and there,  
Sharked up a list of lawless resolute,  
For food and diet, to some enterprise  
That hath a stomach in't, which is no other -  
As it doth well appear unto our state -  
But to recover of us, by strong hand  
And terms compulsatory, those foresaid lands  
So by his father lost; and this, I take it,  
Is the main motive of our preparations,  
The source of this our watch, and the chief head  
Of this posthaste and rummage\* in the land.

*\*Note: 'Rummage' meant to stow in a ship's hold. Spelled 'romage' in some texts.*

BARNARDO

I think there can be no other reason. It may well explain why this ominous armoured figure appears during our watch, and why it looks so like the king who was, and still is, the reason behind these disputes.

BARNARDO

I think it be no other but e'en so.  
Well may it sort that this portentous figure  
Comes armed through our watch, so like the king  
That was and is the question of these wars.

Act I Scene I - Elsinore. A Platform Before The Castle. Midnight.

HORATIO

A speck of dust to trouble the mind's eye. When almighty Rome was at its height, just before the fall of the mighty Caesar, graves stood empty and their shrouded dead contents squawked and gibbered in the Roman streets, and comets with tails of fire and dripping blood were expelled from the sun as ominous signs, and the moon, which influences Neptune's ocean tides was eclipsed like a doomsday precursor of terrible things to come. And many similar signs, messengers preceding our fate, omens of the destruction to follow have been demonstrated by Heaven and earth to our country and countrymen.

HORATIO

A mote it is to trouble the mind's eye.\* In the most high and palmy state\* of Rome, A little ere the mightiest Julius fell, The graves stood tenantless and the sheeted dead Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets; \*As stars with trains of fire and dews of blood, Disasters in the sun; and the moist star,\* Upon whose influence Neptune's empire stands, Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse; And even the like precursor of feared events, As harbingers preceding still the fates And prologue to the omen coming on, Have heaven and earth together demonstrated Unto our climates\* and countrymen.

*\*Note: The 'Mind's Eye' is the imagination, forming or recalling a mental image.*

*'Palmy state' – the palm leaf was an ancient symbol of victory in war.*

*'As stars with trains...' most scholars agree that there are one or two lines omitted here, probably unintentionally.*

*'Moist star' – the moon (with its watery beams), and 'climates' were regions with different climates. For example, Denmark's cold northern climate.*

*This speech is based on Jesus foretelling the end of the world in the Holy Bible, Mathew, 24:29: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken."*

RE-ENTER GHOST.

HORATIO (CONT'D)

Wait, look! Here it comes again! I'll confront it, though it may destroy me. (to Ghost) Wait, spirit. If you are able to make a sound or have a voice, speak to me...

HORATIO

But soft, behold! Lo where it comes again! I'll cross it\* though it blast me. Stay, illusion. If thou hast any sound or use of voice, Speak to me.

*\*Note: 'I'll cross it' – it was believed that if you walked across the path of a ghost you became under its power and influence, and if you upset it by doing so it could destroy you, 'blast me' – meaning to obliterate me completely.*

THE GHOST DOES NOT SPEAK BUT SPREADS ITS ARMS WIDE AS IF IN REPLY.

HORATIO (CONT'D)

If there is any good thing I can do that may ease your passage and not harm my standing in heaven, speak to me...  
*(the ghost does not speak)*

HORATIO

If there be any good thing to be done That may to thee do ease, and grace to me, Speak to me.

*Note: It was believed that ghosts returned because of some unfinished business during their life on earth. If someone could complete the task on their behalf they could rest in peace. Another reason for them to appear was to warn loved ones of some impending future event, or because someone had caused their death and they wanted the truth to be known. Horatio broaches all reasons.*

HORATIO (CONT'D)

If you have any knowledge of your country's fate – which with forewarning could be avoided – speak out...  
*(the ghost does not speak)*  
Or if, in your life you hoarded ill-gotten treasures buried in the bowels of the earth, the reason for which your spirit is doomed to walk the earth, tell me. Stay and tell me!

HORATIO

If thou art privy to thy country's fate - Which happily\* foreknowing may avoid - O, speak.  
Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life Extorted treasure in the womb of earth, For which, they say, your spirits oft walk in death, Speak of it, stay and speak!

*\*Note: 'Happily' – perhaps. Derived from the word 'haply'.*

---

A COCK CROWS, INTERRUPTING HIM AND SIGNIFYING THE BREAK OF DAY.

AT THE SOUND, THE GHOST QUICKLY TURNS TO LEAVE.

---

HORATIO (CONT'D)

Stop it, Marcellus!

MARCELLUS

Shall I strike it with my spear?

HORATIO

Do it, if it will not stay.

HORATIO

Stop it, Marcellus.

MARCELLUS

Shall I strike it with my partisan?

HORATIO

Do, if it will not stand.

---

AS HE LUNGES AT THE GHOST IT VANISHES AND APPEARS INSTANTLY IN A NEW PLACE REPEATEDLY AS THEY TRY TO STRIKE IT.

---

BARNARDO

It's here!

HORATIO

Now it's here!

BARNARDO

'Tis here!

HORATIO

'Tis here!



Act I Scene I - Elsinore. A Platform Before The Castle. Midnight.

THE GHOST FINALLY DISAPPEARS COMPLETELY.

THEY LOOK AROUND FRANTICALLY FOR WHERE IT MAY REAPPEAR. IT DOESN'T.

MARCELLUS

It's gone!

We did wrong to show violence to a royal entity. It's like the air, untouchable, and our vain blows are malicious and disrespectful.

BARNARDO

It was about to speak just as the cock crowed.

HORATIO

And then it fled like a guilty person upon hearing a fateful summons. I've heard that the cock is the trumpet of the morning, awakening the God of day with his shrill penetrating throat, and at his warning the wandering spirit, whether in sea, fire, earth or air, rushes back to its confines; as we saw proof of just now.

MARCELLUS

It disappeared as the cock crowed. Some say that whenever the season comes when we celebrate our Saviour's birth, the bird of the dawn crows all night long, and then, they say, no spirit dares walk abroad. The nights are free of evil, no planets exert influence, no fairies bewitch anyone, no witch has the power to cast spells, so hallowed and blessed is the time.

MARCELLUS

'Tis gone!

We do it wrong, being so majestic, To offer it the show of violence; For it is as the air, invulnerable, And our vain blows malicious mockery.

BARNARDO

It was about to speak when the cock crew.

HORATIO

And then it started like a guilty thing Upon a fearful summons. I have heard The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn, Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat Awake the god of day, and at his warning, Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air, Th' extravagant and erring spirit hies To his confine; and of the truth herein This present object made probation.

MARCELLUS

It faded on the crowing of the cock. Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes Wherein our Saviour's\* birth is celebrated, The bird of dawning singeth all night long, And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad, The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike, No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm, So hallowed and so gracious is that time.

*\*Note: 'Our Saviour' refers to Jesus Christ, whose birth is celebrated every year at Christmas time (December 25<sup>th</sup>)*

HORATIO

So I have heard, and I do in part believe it.  
But look, the morning, clad in its russet  
gown, walks over the dew of the high  
eastern hill. Our watch is ended, and my  
advice is that we share what we have seen  
tonight with young Hamlet, for, upon my  
life, I'll wager this spirit that refuses to  
talk to us will talk to him. Do you agree we  
should tell him about it, out of loyalty  
befitting of our duty?

HORATIO

So have I heard, and do in part believe it.  
But look, the morn in russet\* mantle clad  
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward\* 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.  
Do you consent we shall acquaint him with it,  
As needful in our loves, fitting our duty?

*\*Note: 'Russet' is a reddy brown colour, often associated with Autumn.*

*Some editions prefer 'eastern' to 'eastward'.*

MARCELLUS

Let's do it, I say, and this morning I know  
where he can be most conveniently found.

MARCELLUS

Let's do't, I pray; and I this morning know  
Where we shall find him most conveniently.



## ACT I SCENE II

### A STATE ROOM IN THE ROYAL CASTLE.

THE ROYAL COURT OF DENMARK, AFTER A ROYAL WEDDING. TRUMPETS FLOURISH, HERALDING THE ARRIVAL OF CLAUDIUS, THE NEW KING OF DENMARK, AFTER HIS BROTHER, THE LATE KING HAMLET, HAD DIED TWO MONTHS PREVIOUSLY. HE IS ACCOMPANIED BY HIS NEW WIFE, QUEEN GERTRUDE, RECENT WIDOW OF KING HAMLET.



THEY ARE FOLLOWED BY THE COUNCILLORS, VOLTEMAND AND CORNELIUS, WITH POLONIUS, THE KING'S CHIEF ADVISOR AND HIS SON, LAERTES, AND OTHER OFFICIALS (CUM ALLIS - WITH OTHERS - THE WHOLE CAST ON STAGE).

LASTLY HAMLET, THE THIRTY YEAR OLD SON OF THE LATE KING HAMLET AND QUEEN GERTRUDE, SULKILY ENTERS THE ROOM. STILL MOURNING HIS FATHER'S DEATH, HE IS DRESSED IN BLACK, DESPITE EVERYONE ELSE BEING DRESSED IN THEIR FINERY FOR THIS WEDDING BEING CELEBRATED.

*\*Note: The King uses the plural terms 'we' and 'our', when he means 'I' or 'mine'. It is known as 'the royal we'. The English monarch still uses the plural in speech to denote they speak on behalf of the country. It is not used in the translation.*

*Gertrude was previously his sister-in-law, not an actual blood relative of Claudius*

#### KING CLAUDIUS

Though the memory of my dear brother, King Hamlet's death is still fresh in our minds, and while it is natural to grieve openly, as a kingdom mourning together in sorrow, it is time now to restrain our grief and think not only of his memory but of our own affairs. Therefore my one time sister, and now my and your queen, the joint imperial ruler of this warring country, has, as it were, with saddened joy, having one eye open in celebration of a funeral, and one closed in sadness at matrimony, bringing joy to sadness and sadness to joy in equal measure, taken to become my wife. We have listened to public opinion, which we have allowed to be freely given on this matter, and for all your support and approval we give our thanks.

#### KING CLAUDIUS

Though yet of Hamlet our\* dear brother's death  
The memory be green, and that it us befitted  
To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole  
kingdom  
To be contracted in one brow of woe;  
Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature  
That we with wisest sorrow think on him  
Together with remembrance of ourselves.  
Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen,  
Th' imperial jointress to this warlike state,  
Have we, as 'twere with a defeated joy,  
With one auspicious and one dropping eye,  
With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage,  
In equal scale weighing delight and dole,  
Taken to wife; nor have we herein barred  
Your better wisdoms, which have freely gone  
With this affair along. For all, our thanks.

---

THE KING PICKS UP A LETTER SEALED WITH A WAX ROYAL SEAL.

---

KING CLAUDIUS (CONT'D)

In further news, you all know Fortinbras junior, who, holding a poor opinion of our resolve, or thinking that with my late, dear brother's death our country would be disjointed and in disorder, combined with his ambitious dreams, has not failed to pester us with messages demanding the surrender of the lands lost, quite lawfully, by his late father to my most valiant brother. Well, he can think again.

KING CLAUDIUS

Now follows that you know young Fortinbras, Holding a weak supposal of our worth, Or thinking by our late dear brother's death Our state to be disjoint and out of frame, Colleague'd with the dream of his advantage, He hath not failed to pester us with message Importing the surrender of those lands Lost by his father, with all bands of law, To our most valiant brother. So much for him.

---

MURMURS OF APPROVAL FROM THOSE GATHERED.

---

KING CLAUDIUS (CONT'D)

Now, as for myself, and the purpose of this meeting, in response to his actions I have here a letter I've written to the King of Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras - now so sick and bedridden he barely knows what his nephew is up to - demanding that he suppress his nephew's stance, reminding him that Norway's military personnel and supplies are all subject to his control. I hereby dispatch you, good Cornelius, and you, Voltemand, as bearers of this letter to the aged King, with no power of negotiation outside the range of the detailed articles within this letter.

KING CLAUDIUS

Now for ourself, and for this time of meeting, Thus much the business is: we have here writ To Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras, Who, impotent and bed-rid, scarcely hears Of this his nephew's purpose, to suppress His further gait herein, in that the levies, The lists, and full proportions, are all made Out of his subject; and we here dispatch You, good Cornelius, and you, Voltemand, For bearers of this greeting to old Norway, Giving to you no further personal power To business with the king more than the scope Of these dilated articles allow.

---

THE KING HANDS VOLTEMAND AND CORNELIUS THE LETTER.

---

KING CLAUDIUS (CONT'D)

Farewell, you may commence your duty with your immediate departure.

VOLTEMAND & CORNELIUS

In this and all things we will do our duty.

KING CLAUDIUS

I do not doubt it. A fond farewell.

KING

Farewell, and let your haste commend your duty.

VOLTEMAND & CORNELIUS

In that and all things will we show our duty.

KING

We doubt it nothing; heartily farewell.

Act I Scene II –A State Room In The Castle

---

VOLTEMAND AND CORNELIUS EXIT BOWING.

THE KING TURNS TO POLONIUS' S SON, LAERTES.

---

KING CLAUDIUS (CONT'D)

And now you, Laertes, what news do you have for me? You mentioned a request you had.

KING

And now, Laertes, what's the news with you? You told us of some suit.

---

LAERTES DOESN'T IMMEDIATELY REPLY.

---

KING CLAUDIUS (CONT'D)

What is it, Laertes? Your voice is not lost with any reasonable request to the ruler of Denmark.

KING

What is't, Laertes?  
You cannot speak of reason\* to the Dane  
And lose your voice.

*\*Note: 'Speak of reason...' has the double meaning of asking a reasonable question and the King being a reasonable man. 'Lose your voice' meaning both, 'your voice would not be wasted' and also not being able to speak up when requested because he had lost his voice or was timid. A public demonstration that he is a benevolent ruler who listens and you need not be afraid to ask his favour.*

KING CLAUDIUS (CONT'D)

What could you possibly ask for, Laertes, that I would not freely give but for the asking? A head is not joined closer to the heart, nor a hand to the mouth, than I, the King of Denmark am to your father. What is it you wish to ask, Laertes?

KING

What wouldst thou beg, Laertes,  
That shall not be my offer, not thy asking?  
The head is not more native to the heart,  
The hand more instrumental to the mouth,  
Than is the throne of Denmark to thy father.  
What wouldst thou have, Laertes?

LAERTES

My revered lord, your gracious permission to return to France, from where I willingly came to Denmark to show my respects at your coronation. But now that my duty is done, I must confess, my thoughts and wishes once again direct themselves towards France, subject to your gracious permission and pardon.

LAERTES

My dread lord,  
Your leave and favour to return to France,  
From whence though willingly I came to  
Denmark  
To show my duty in your coronation,  
Yet now, I must confess, that duty done,  
My thoughts and wishes bend again toward  
France,  
And bow them to your gracious leave and  
pardon.

KING CLAUDIUS

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

KING

Have you your father's leave? What says Polonius?

## Hamlet Translated

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### THE KING TURNS TOWARDS POLONIUS.

---

POLONIUS

My lord, he so wore me down with his persistent pleading, that in the end I succumbed and gave my reluctant consent. I do beg you, give him permission to go.

POLONIUS

He hath, my lord, wrung from me my slow leave  
By laboursome petition, and at last  
Upon his will I sealed my hard consent.  
I do beseech you, give him leave to go.

---

### THE KING TURNS BACK TO LAERTES.

---

KING CLAUDIUS

Leave when best suits you, Laertes, the time is yours, put your talents to best use as you wish!  
But now, my nephew Hamlet, also my son...

KING

Take thy fair hour, Laertes; time be thine,  
And thy best graces spend it at thy will!  
But now, my cousin\* Hamlet, and my son -

---

### FINALLY THE KING TURNS TO PRINCE HAMLET.

---

*\*Note: The King chooses to address Hamlet last, which displeases an already unhappy Hamlet. Hamlet's first line below tells this, it has a double meaning, 'kind' meaning either 'by nature' or 'considerate', and he is not the kind of man Claudius is, and Claudius is not nice.*

*'Cousin' then meant relative of any kind.*

HAMLET

(aside) Related by nature, but not in nature.

HAMLET

[Aside.] A little more than kin, and less than kind\*.

KING CLAUDIUS

Why is it that dark clouds still hang over you?

KING

How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

HAMLET

Not so, my lord. I've had too much of the sun.

HAMLET

Not so, my lord. I am too much i'th' sun.\*

*\*Note: He uses 'sun' as a deliberate pun; son and sun.*

Act I Scene II –A State Room In The Castle

QUEEN GERTRUDE

Dearest Hamlet, take that dark look off your face, and let your eye look on the King of Denmark as a friend. Do not seek your noble father in the dust forever with those downcast eyes. You know this is commonplace, everything that lives must die, passing through nature to the eternal ever after.

HAMLET

(*sarcasm*) Yes, madam, it is 'common'.

QUEEN

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\*.

*Note: He is being sarcastic. What his mother has done is far from normal, and 'common' is a pun on usual occurrence and lowly thing to do.*

QUEEN GERTRUDE

If it is, then why does it seem to affect you so much?

HAMLET

Seem, madam? No, it *does*. I don't know why you think '*seem*'. It's not just my dark mood, good mother, or my black mourning suits, or my windy expulsion of deep sighs. No, nor is it the constant stream in my eye, or the dejected look of my face, along with all other expressions, moods and displays of grief that can truly show my feelings. These may '*seem*' to, as they are the actions a man can put on, *I feel inside exactly as I show. There's no pretence in my feelings of woe.*

QUEEN

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 haviour of the visage,  
Together with all forms, moods, shows 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.*

*Note: Hamlet is suggesting that his grief is real, unlike his mother who rushed to remarry.*

KING CLAUDIUS

It is commendable to your sweet nature, Hamlet, to show such duty to mourning your father. But you know, your father lost a father, and that father lost his, and each surviving son felt duty bound for a period to mourn his loss. But to persist in this obstinate sorrow is irreligious stubbornness. Such grief is not manly, and most disrespectful to the heavens. It suggests a weak heart, a slow witted mind, an ignorant and uneducated understanding. We know it is inevitable, it is normal, unlike some unexpected terrible occurrence.

KING

'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet,  
To give these mourning duties to your father;  
But you must know, your father lost a father,  
That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound  
In filial obligation for some term  
To do obsequious sorrow. But to persevere  
In obstinate condolence is a course  
Of impious stubbornness, 'tis unmanly grief,  
It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,  
A heart unfortified, a mind impatient,  
An understanding simple and unschooled;  
For what we know must be and is as common  
As any the most vulgar thing to sense -

---

HAMLET SAYS NOTHING, CONTINUING TO STARE AT THE GROUND.

---

KING CLAUDIUS (CONT'D)

Why take it so obstinately to heart? Goodness me, it offends heaven, disrespects the dead, and goes against nature, which despite your absurd reasoning, in its natural course takes the life of all fathers, from the first to die to the one who died today, with its cry of 'that is the way it is'. I pray you bury this unproductive grief, and think of me as a father now. Let it be known to all, you are the immediate heir to the throne, and that I look on you with the same fondness of any father to a dearest son. For this reason your desire to return back to Wittenberg University is contrary to my wish, and I beseech you, reconsider and remain here in the warm comfort of our court, as my chief courtier, kinsman and my son.

KING

Why should we in our peevish opposition  
Take it to heart? Fie, 'tis a fault to heaven,  
A fault against the dead, a fault to nature,  
To reason most absurd, whose common theme  
Is death of fathers, and who still hath cried  
From the first corpse till he that died today,  
'This must be so.' We pray you, throw to earth  
This unprevailing woe, and think of us  
As of a father; for let the world take note  
You are the most immediate to our throne,  
And with no less nobility of love  
Than that which dearest father bears his son  
Do I impart toward you. For your intent  
In going back to school in Wittenberg,  
It is most retrograde to our desire,  
And we beseech you, bend you to remain  
Here in the cheer and comfort of our eye,  
Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.

QUEEN GERTRUDE

Do not let your mother's wishes be in vain, Hamlet. I beg you, stay with us, don't go to Wittenberg.

QUEEN

Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet.  
I pray thee, stay with us; go not to Wittenberg.

HAMLET

I shall do my best to obey you, madam.

HAMLET

I shall in all my best obey you, madam.



Act I Scene II –A State Room In The Castle

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KING CLAUDIUS

Why, that is a good, respectful answer. Stay here in Denmark in stately honour. *(to wife)* Come madam, Hamlet's offer of kind accord warms my heart. In celebration of this, a great cannon shall inform the clouds of every toast I drink today, rousing the heavens into re-echoing the king's message with a roar of thunder. Come, let us go.

KING

Why, 'tis a loving and a fair reply: Be as ourself in Denmark. - Madam, come; This gentle and unforced accord of Hamlet Sits smiling to my heart, in grace whereof, No jocund health that Denmark drinks today But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell, And the king's rouse the heavens shall bruit again, Re-speaking earthly thunder. Come away.

---

TRUMPETS HERALD (FLOURISH).

EXIT ALL EXCEPT HAMLET WHO NOW RECITES HIS 1<sup>ST</sup> SOLILOQUY.

---



*Note: Soliloquy means talking thoughts out loud.*

HAMLET

Oh, how I wish my sullied, hardened flesh would melt away, like water, and form itself as dew on the ground, or that the Almighty had not made taking one's own life a sin. Oh God, Oh God! *(he sighs)* How weary, dull, drab and useless this world seems to me! A curse on it, damn it! It's an untended garden that's gone to seed, overrun with rank and ugly weeds. That it should come to this! Only dead two months - no, less even that that - such an excellent king, compared to this one...

HAMLET

O that this too too solid flesh would melt, Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew, Or that the Everlasting had not fixed His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God, O God! How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable Seem to me all the uses of this world! Fie on't, ah fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature Possess it merely. That it should come to this! But two months dead - nay, not so much, not two - So excellent a king, that was to this...

---

HE INDICATES THE DIRECTION KING CLAUDIUS LEFT THE ROOM.

---

HAMLET (CONT'D)

Like a Titan to a beast. So loving of my mother he'd not even allow the winds from heaven to blow too roughly on her face. Heavens above! I can't get it out of my mind. She would cling to him as if the more she had of him the more her appetite grew. And yet within a month...

HAMLET

Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother That he might not betwixt the winds of heaven Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth! Must I remember? Why, she should hang on him As if increase of appetite had grown By what it fed on, and yet within a month -

## Hamlet Translated

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*Hamlet compares his late father to a Greek god and his new step-father to a beast.*

---



---

HAMLET PAUSES, THEN PULLS HIMSELF TOGETHER.

---

HAMLET (CONT'D)

Let me think of it no more. Women, so weak in character! A little more than a month since she wore those same shoes following my poor father's body, weeping like Niobe. Why? Her of all people...

HAMLET

Let me not think on't. Frailty, thy name is woman!  
A little month, or ere those shoes were old  
With which she followed my poor father's body,  
Like Niobe\*, all tears; why she, even she -

*\*Note: Niobe was a mother in Greek mythology, married to the king of Thebes. She boasted to Leto, a mother of only two children, namely Apollo and Artemis, of her fourteen children to show she was superior. Apollo and Artemis in rage at the insult killed all fourteen of her children. Niobe's husband committed suicide in grief at his loss. Niobe ran to Mount Sipylus to plead with the gods to end her misery. Zeus took pity on her and turned her to stone so she would have no feeling. The rock exists today, still weeping tears, and is regarded as a moving reminder of a mother's eternal mourning.*

HAMLET (CONT'D)

Oh, God. A senseless beast would have mourned longer! Married to my uncle, my father's brother, but no more like my father than I am like Hercules. Within a month, even before the salt of deceitful tears had ceased flushing her swollen eyes, she remarried. Oh, such wicked haste, to jump with such ease between incestuous sheets! It is not good, nor can any good come of it. It breaks my heart, but I have to suffer in silence.

HAMLET

O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason  
Would have mourned longer! - married with my  
uncle,  
My father's brother, but no more like my father  
Than I to Hercules. Within a month,  
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears  
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,  
She married. O most wicked speed, to post  
With such dexterity to incestuous\* sheets!  
It is not, nor it cannot come to good.  
But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

*\*Note: Incest in Shakespeare's time included distant relatives and in-laws. The church forbade a man marrying his brother's widow, yet this is exactly what Henry VIII had done some years before Hamlet was written. Later, Henry, desperate for a son and heir, proclaimed the marriage incestuous and had it annulled. This led to England breaking away from the Roman Catholic Pope and forming The Church of England with the ruling monarch as its head. In another coincidence, within a month of having Anne Boleyn beheaded, Henry married Anne's lady in waiting.*

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ENTER HORATIO, MARCELLUS, AND BARNARDO.

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Act I Scene II –A State Room In The Castle

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HORATIO  
Greetings to your lordship!

HAMLET  
I'm glad to see you are well, Horatio, it is  
Horatio isn't it?

HORATIO  
It is, my lord, your humble servant as  
ever.

HAMLET  
My good sir, and good friend, I too am  
yours. And what brings you from  
Wittenberg, Horatio?

HORATIO  
Hail to your lordship!

HAMLET  
I am glad to see you well.  
Horatio, or I do forget myself.

HORATIO  
The same, my lord, and your poor servant ever.

HAMLET  
Sir, my good friend; I'll change that name with  
you.  
And what make you from Wittenberg,\* Horatio?

*\*Note: Hamlet means the famous Wittenberg university in Germany, further emphasising that Horatio is a learned gentleman. It was founded in 1502 with Martin Luther attending who in 1517 would pin his ninety-five thesis to the All Saints Castle Church door protesting against the selling of indulgences in Wittenberg. This marked the beginning of the protestant reformation, a movement against the Catholic Church. This was relevant in Shakespeare's England with the recently formed Church of England banning Catholicism.*

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HAMLET NOTICES THE COMPANIONS WITH HORATIO.

---

HAMLET (CONT'D)  
Marcellus?

MARCELLUS  
(*bowing*) Indeed, my good lord.

HAMLET  
I'm very glad to see you.  
(*to Barnardo*) And good evening, sir.

HAMLET  
Marcellus?

MARCELLUS  
My good lord.

HAMLET  
I am very glad to see you. [*To Barnardo.*] Good  
even, sir.

---

BARNARDO BOWS IN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

---

HAMLET TURNS HIS ATTENTIONS BACK TO HORATIO.

---

HAMLET (CONT'D)  
(*to Horatio*) But please, Horatio, tell me  
what brings you from Wittenberg?

HORATIO  
I am playing truant, my good lord.

HAMLET  
But what, in faith, make you from Wittenberg?

HORATIO  
A truant disposition, good my lord.

HAMLET

I would not believe that from your enemies, nor shall I allow you to offend my ears by talking yourself down. I know you are no truant. So, what is your business in Elsinore? We'll teach you to take a good drink before you depart.

HORATIO

My lord, I came for your father's funeral.

HAMLET

I beg you, do not mock me, fellow student. I believe it was for my mother's wedding.

HORATIO

Indeed, my lord, it followed close behind.

HAMLET

Saving money, Horatio. The funeral feast was served cold on the marriage tables. I'd rather have died and met my worst enemy in Heaven than seen that day, Horatio. My father... I still see my father.

HAMLET

I would not hear your enemy say so, Nor shall you do mine ear that violence To make it truster of your own report Against yourself. I know you are no truant. But what is your affair in Elsinore? We'll teach you to drink deep ere you depart.

HORATIO

My lord, I came to see your father's funeral.

HAMLET

I prithee do not mock me, fellow-student; I think it was to see my mother's wedding.

HORATIO

Indeed, my lord, it followed hard upon.

HAMLET

Thrift, thrift, Horatio. The funeral baked meats Did coldly furnish\* forth the marriage tables. Would I had met my dearest foe\* in heaven Ere I had seen\* that day, Horatio. My father, methinks I see my father.

*\*Note: 'Coldly furnish' – served cold, unfeeling, a play on words.*

*'Dearest foe' - Dearest was used for strong feelings of both love and hate.*

*'Ere I had seen' – some editions say 'Or ever I had seen'. 'Ere' is a better syllable count to match the next line.*

HORATIO

Where my lord?

HORATIO

Where, my lord?

---

HORATIO LOOKS AROUND SHOCKED. HAMLET POINTS TO HIS HEAD.

---

HAMLET

In my memories, Horatio.

HORATIO

I met him once, he was a good king.

HAMLET

He was a good man. The best of anyone in everything. I shall not see the like of him again.

HORATIO

My lord... I think I saw him last night.

HAMLET

In my mind's eye, Horatio.

HORATIO

I saw him once. He was a goodly king.

HAMLET

He was a man. Take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again.

HORATIO

My lord, I think I saw him yesternight.

Act I Scene II –A State Room In The Castle

HAMLET  
Saw? Who?

HAMLET  
Saw? Who?\*

*\*Note: Some editions change this line to "Saw who?", but it was probably meant as two separate questions.*

HORATIO  
The king, your father, my lord.

HAMLET  
(*shocked*) The king my father!

HORATIO  
Calm your shock for a moment, and listen carefully to what I have to say, with these two gentlemen as witnesses to the astonishing event.

HAMLET  
For the love of God, tell me.

HORATIO  
Two nights in a row, these gentlemen, Marcellus and Barnardo, on their guard duty in the dead quiet of the midnight hour had an encounter. A figure looking like your father appeared before them wearing exactly the armour he wore and marched slowly and regally past them. Three times he walked past their disbelieving, fearful eyes, as close as the length of his staff, whilst they, quivering like jelly out of fear, stood dumbstruck, unable to speak a word to him. In dire secrecy they revealed this to me. On the third night I kept watch with them, where, every word they had told me both in time and description was proven good and true. The apparition came. I knew your father, it was as alike as these two hands. (*holds up his hands*)

HORATIO  
My lord, the king your father.

HAMLET  
The king my father!

HORATIO  
Season your admiration for a while With an attent ear, till I may deliver, Upon the witness of these gentlemen, This marvel to you.

HAMLET  
For God's love, let me hear.

HORATIO  
Two nights together had these gentlemen, Marcellus and Barnardo, on their watch, In the dead waste and middle of the night Been thus encountered. A figure like your father, Armed at point\* exactly, cap-a-pe,\* Appears before them, and with solemn march Goes slow and stately by them. Thrice he walked By their oppressed and fear-surprised eyes, Within his truncheon's length;\* whilst they, distilled Almost to jelly with the act of fear, Stand dumb and speak not to him. This to me In dreadful secrecy impart they did, And I with them the third night kept the watch; Where, as they had delivered, both in time, Form of the thing, each word made true and good, The apparition comes. I knew your father; These hands are not more like.

*\*Note: 'Armed at point' - dressed ready for battle.*

*'Cap-a-pe' - head to toe, 'pe' probably stemming from the French 'pied' for foot.*

*'Truncheon' - a staff up to 6 feet (2m) long, used by someone in high position, not the later police baton.*

HAMLET

But where was this?

MARCELLUS

On the platform of the watch tower, my lord.

HAMLET

Did you speak to it?

HORATIO

I did, my lord, but it made no reply. Yet on one occasion I thought it lifted its head as if to speak, but just then the cock crowed loudly, and at the sound it turned and hastened away, vanishing from our sight.

HAMLET

That's very strange.

HORATIO

Upon my life I swear it's true, my noble Lord, and we believed it our duty to tell you.

HAMLET

Indeed, indeed, sirs, but this troubles me. Are you on watch duty tonight?

BARNADO & MARCELLUS

We are, my lord.

HAMLET

It was armoured you say?

BARNADO & MARCELLUS

Armoured, my lord.

HAMLET

From top to toe?

BARNADO & MARCELLUS

From head to foot, my lord.

HAMLET

Then you saw his face?

HORATIO

O yes, my lord, his visor was up.

HAMLET

But where was this?

MARCELLUS

My lord, upon the platform where we watched.

HAMLET

Did you not speak to it?

HORATIO

My lord, I did,  
But answer made it none; yet once methought  
It lifted up its head and did address  
Itself to motion, like as it would speak;  
But even then the morning cock crew loud,  
And at the sound it shrunk in haste away  
And vanished from our sight.

HAMLET

'Tis very strange.

HORATIO

As I do live, my honoured lord, 'tis true,  
And we did think it writ down in our duty  
To let you know of it.

HAMLET

Indeed, indeed, sirs; but this troubles me.  
Hold you the watch tonight?

BARNADO & MARCELLUS

We do, my lord.

HAMLET

Armed, say you?

BARNADO & MARCELLUS

Armed, my lord.

HAMLET

From top to toe?

BARNADO & MARCELLUS

My lord, from head to foot.

HAMLET

Then saw you not his face.

HORATIO

O yes, my lord; he wore his beaver up.

Act I Scene II –A State Room In The Castle

HAMLET  
How did he look? Fierce?

HORATIO  
He looked more in sorrow than in anger.

HAMLET  
Pale or red in the face?

HORATIO  
Pale, very pale.

HAMLET  
And his eyes were fixed upon you?

HORATIO  
All the time.

HAMLET  
I wish I had been there.

HORATIO  
It would have been a shock to you.

HAMLET  
Very likely, very likely. Did it stay long?

HORATIO  
As long as one can count slowly to a hundred.

BARNARDO & MARCELLUS  
Longer, it was longer.

HORATIO  
Not when I saw it.

HAMLET  
His beard was gray, yes?

HORATIO  
As I remember it in real life, dark with silver streaks.

HAMLET  
What looked he? Frowningly?

HORATIO  
A countenance more in sorrow than in anger.

HAMLET  
Pale or red?

HORATIO  
Nay, very pale.

HAMLET  
And fixed his eyes upon you?

HORATIO  
Most constantly.

HAMLET  
I would I had been there.

HORATIO  
It would have much amazed you.

HAMLET  
Very like, very like. Stayed it long?

HORATIO  
While one with moderate haste might tell a hundred.

BARNARDO & MARCELLUS  
Longer, longer.

HORATIO  
Not when I saw't.

HAMLET  
His beard was grizzled, no?

HORATIO  
It was as I have seen it in his life,  
A sable\* silvered.

*\*Note: In heraldry sable is black. Shakespeare also uses sable for black later - "he whose sable arms black as his purpose".*

HAMLET  
I will watch with you tonight. Perhaps it will walk again.

HAMLET  
I will watch tonight;  
Perchance 'twill walk again.

HORATIO

I'm sure it will.

HAMLET

If it has assumed my noble father's likeness, I'll speak to it even if hell itself howls a warning from its gaping mouth for me to hold my peace. I ask you all, if you have not spoken of this sight, to remain silent about it, and whatever happens tonight observe but say nothing. I will repay your loyalty. So, go about your duties. I'll visit you between eleven and twelve on the guard platform.

ALL

Our duty is to your honour.

HAMLET

May your affections be as great as mine are for you. Farewell.

HORATIO

I warrant you it will.

HAMLET

If it assume my noble father's person, I'll speak to it though hell itself should gape And bid me hold my peace. I pray you all, If you have hitherto concealed this sight, Let it be tenable in your silence still, And whatsoever else shall hap tonight, Give it an understanding but no tongue. I will requite your loves. So, fare you well. Upon the platform 'twixt eleven and twelve I'll visit you.

ALL

Our duty to your honour.

HAMLET

Your loves, as mine to you. Farewell.

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EXEUNT ALL EXCEPT HAMLET.

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HAMLET (CONT'D)

*(aside)* My father's armoured spirit! All is not well. I suspect foul play. I wish it were night already.

*Till then, stay calm, my soul. Foul deeds will rise,*

*Though all the world would keep them from men's eyes.*

HAMLET

My father's spirit in arms! All is not well. I doubt some foul play. Would the night were come.

*Till then sit still, my soul. Foul deeds will rise, Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes.\**

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EXEUNT

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*\*Note: The rhyming couplet at the end of Hamlet's speech signified to the audience the end of the scene at a time when there was little if any scenery on stage, no curtains and no lights to dim. Rhymes are in italics to identify them.*

