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- INTRODUCTION -

About 500 years ago, Hamlet's father, the king of Denmark, was murdered by his own brother, Claudius. Then Claudius quickly married Hamlet's mother, Gertrude. As the play opens, Hamlet's father's ghost appears and tells his son who murdered him. He urges Hamlet to seek revenge. As the play unfolds, Hamlet tries to convince himself that he should murder Claudius.

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

- CAST OF CHARACTERS -

HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK Son of the dead King Hamlet, and nephew of the present King of Denmark

CLAUDIUS, PRINCE OF DENMARK Hamlet's uncle

GERTRUDE Queen of Denmark and Hamlet's mother

GHOST The ghost of Hamlet's murdered father

POLONIUS Chief adviser to Claudius

HORATIO A commoner and loyal friend of Hamlet

LAERTES Son of Polonius and the brother of Ophelia

OPHELIA Daughter of Polonius and the sister of Laertes

ROSENCRANTZ and **GUILDENSTERN** Former classmates of Hamlet

VOLTIMAND and **CORNELIUS** Danish courtiers

MARCELLUS, BERNARDO, and **FRANCISCO** Guards at the castle

REYNALDO Polonius's servant

OSRIC A Danish courtier

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

ACT 1

| Scene 1 |

(Francisco is at his post before the castle in Elsinore. Bernardo enters.)

BERNARDO: The clock has struck 12.

I'll take over the watch now, Francisco.

FRANCISCO: Thank you for relieving me.

It is bitter cold, and I am sick at heart.

BERNARDO: Has it been quiet tonight?

FRANCISCO: Not a mouse stirring.

BERNARDO: Well, good night. Tell my
Partners on watch to hurry.

FRANCISCO: I think I hear them now.

(Horatio and Marcellus enter as Francisco exits.)

MARCELLUS: Hello, Bernardo!

BERNARDO: Welcome, Horatio and Marcellus.

MARCELLUS: Has it appeared again—the *thing*?

BERNARDO: I have seen nothing.

MARCELLUS: Horatio says it is only our fantasy.
He will not believe that we saw it twice!
By standing watch with us tonight, he can
See it for himself.

HORATIO: It will not appear.

BERNARDO: Sit down awhile,
And let us once again tell you about
What we have seen two nights in a row.
Last night, about this same time,
The clock was striking one—

MARCELLUS: Quiet! It's coming again!

(The Ghost enters, dressed in armor.)

BERNARDO: It looks just like the dead King!

MARCELLUS: Speak to it, Horatio!

HORATIO *(to the Ghost):* Who are you?
Why do you wear the armor in which
Our buried King did sometimes march?
By heaven, I order you to speak!

MARCELLUS: It seems to be offended.

BERNARDO: See, it stalks away!

HORATIO: Stay! Speak! I order you, speak!

(The Ghost exits.)

MARCELLUS: It will not answer. It is gone.

BERNARDO: What do you think now, Horatio?
You tremble and look pale.
Isn't this something more than fantasy?

HORATIO: Before my God,
I would never have believed it
Unless I saw it with my own eyes.

MARCELLUS: Isn't it like the King?

HORATIO: As like as you are to yourself!
That was the very armor he had on when
He fought the ambitious King of Norway.
And he frowned just like that once,
When angry. It is strange.
I have no idea what to think.
But it seems like a bad sign.

MARCELLUS: Tell me, if you know,
Why this quiet and watchful ghost
Has come here these past nights.
And why does our country seem
To be preparing for war?

HORATIO: I'll tell what I've heard.
Our last King, whose image just appeared,
Killed King Fortinbras of Norway.
Along with his life,
Fortinbras lost all the lands
He had risked in the battle.
If Fortinbras had won, our good King
Would have had to give up his lands.
That was their agreement, so it was only fair.
Now, sir, young Fortinbras, his son,
Rash, hot, and foolish,
Has raised an army of lawless men
To recover the land lost by his father.
This must be why we are preparing for war,
And the reason we must keep watch at night.

BERNARDO: I think you must be right.