

— Cast of Characters —

HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK

Son of the dead king; nephew of the present king

CLAUDIUS, KING OF DENMARK

Hamlet's uncle

GERTRUDE, QUEEN OF DENMARK

Hamlet's mother; now married to Claudius

GHOST Hamlet's murdered father

POLONIUS Chief adviser to Claudius

HORATIO Hamlet's loyal friend

LAERTES Polonius's son; Ophelia's brother

— Cast of Characters —

OPHELIA Polonius's daughter;
Laertes's sister

ROSENCRANTZ and
GUILDENSTERN Hamlet's former
classmates

VOLTIMAND, CORNELIUS, and
OSRIC Danish courtiers

MARCELLUS, BERNARDO, and
FRANCISCO Castle guards

REYNALDO Polonius's servant

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

Introduction

About 500 years ago, Hamlet's father, the king of Denmark, was murdered by his own brother, Claudius. Then Claudius quickly married Hamlet's mother, Gertrude. As the play opens, the ghost of Hamlet's father appears. He tells his son who murdered him. And he tells Hamlet to get revenge. As the play unfolds, Hamlet tries to talk himself into murdering Claudius.

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

ACT 1

— Scene 1 —

(Francisco is at his post. He's guarding Elsinore castle. Bernardo enters.)

BERNARDO: The clock has struck 12. I'll take over the watch now, Francisco.

FRANCISCO: Thank you. It's so cold. I'm upset.

BERNARDO: Has it been quiet tonight?

FRANCISCO: Yes.

BERNARDO: Goodnight. Tell my partners to hurry. They are guarding too.

FRANCISCO: I think I hear them now.

(Horatio and Marcellus enter. Francisco exits.)

MARCELLUS: Hello, Bernardo!

BERNARDO: Welcome, Horatio and Marcellus.

MARCELLUS: Has the *thing* come again?

BERNARDO: I haven't seen it.

MARCELLUS: Horatio says it's all in our minds. He doesn't believe we saw it twice! Maybe he'll see it for himself tonight.

HORATIO: It won't appear.

MARCELLUS: Quiet! It's coming!

(The Ghost enters, dressed in armor.)

BERNARDO: It looks like the dead king!

HORATIO *(to the Ghost):* Who are you?
Are you our dead king? Speak!