

## Shakespeare 4 Kidz HAMLET

*HAMLET is set in Elsinore Castle in Denmark. The main story concerns how young Prince Hamlet struggles to make up his mind to avenge his father's murder. While Hamlet has been studying at Wittenborg University his uncle, Claudius, has murdered Hamlet's father, has succeeded him as King and within a month has married Queen Gertrude his mother. The Ghost of the old king has appeared on the ramparts of Elsinore Castle and urged his son to avenge his death by killing Claudius. But Hamlet is thwarted by his own weaknesses: contemplative and deeply thoughtful one minute and rash and impulsive the next. He delays and falls into a deep melancholy and apparent madness, uncertain and without rational facts and actual evidence of his uncle's guilt. But when a touring theatrical troupe arrive at the castle he has a plan to get the actors to recreate the events of the murder and to witness his uncle's reaction.*

*It is not just a story of revenge, but also explores the themes of indecisiveness, apparent madness, the complexity of action, the mystery of death and the symbolism of a nation as a diseased body.*

*Hamlet is the most famous play ever written and contains many quotes that have fallen into general English usage. Although "To be or not to be" is no doubt the most famous, others such as "Neither a lender or a borrower be"; "To thine own self be true"; "That it should come to this!"; "In my mind's eye"; "The play's the thing ..."; "Brevity is the soul of wit" along with many more invented words have become an integral part of our everyday language.*

*The staging of this version uses introductory and linking narrative sequences from the ensemble who not only play many of the parts but also represent much of the set.*

### Scene 1. A sentry post outside Elsinore Castle.

(Act 1 Scene 1)

*Opening Music. The ensemble take their places around the playing area during the blackout. Lights rise on the ramparts of Elsinore Castle, Denmark. Past Midnight. FRANCISCO a guard is on watch; he is joined by a second, BERNARDO.*

**ENSEMBLE:**            **Something rotten here in Denmark**  
                               **Something bad in Elsinore**  
                               **Something rotten here in Denmark**  
                               **Something bad in Elsinore**

**In Denmark**  
**In Elsinore**  
**In Denmark**  
**Denmark**

**BERNARDO:**            Who's there?

**FRANCISCO:**            No, you answer me: stand, and identify yourself.

BERNARDO: Long live the king!

FRANCISCO: Bernardo?

BERNARDO: It is he.

FRANCISCO: You're right on time for your watch.

BERNARDO: It's gone midnight. You can get to bed, Fransisco.

FRANCISCO: Thanks: it's freezing..

BERNARDO: Is it all quiet?

FRANCISCO: Not a mouse stirring.

BERNARDO: Well, good night. If you meet the other guards Horatio and Marcellus, tell them to hurry up.

FRANCISCO: I think I hear them. Stand, ho! Who's there?

*Enter HORATIO and MARCELLUS*

HORATIO: Friends to this ground.

MARCELLUS: And loyal subjects of the Danish king..

FRANCISCO: Give you good night.

MARCELLUS: O, farewell, honest soldier: Who has relieved you?

FRANCISCO: Bernardo's taken over from me. Good night.

*FRANSISCO exits*

MARCELLUS: Holla! Bernardo!

BERNARDO: Welcome, Horatio: welcome, good Marcellus.

MARCELLUS: Well, has this thing appeared again to-night?

BERNARDO: I've seen nothing.

MARCELLUS: Horatio says we're making it up. He won't believe what we've seen for the last two nights until he sees it for himself. That's why I've got him to join us.

HORATIO: Tush, tush, it will not appear.

BERNARDO: Well, last night about one in the morning ...

*Enter GHOST*

MARCELLUS: Peace, break off; look, here it comes again!

BERNARDO: Just as before, looking just like the dead King Hamlet.

MARCELLUS: Horatio, you're a scholar: speak to it.

BERNARDO: It does look like the king, doesn't it, Horatio?

HORATIO: Yes, most like him: it harrows me with fear and wonder.

BERNARDO: It wants us to speak to it.

MARCELLUS: Question it, Horatio.

HORATIO: What art thou that usurpest 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!

MARCELLUS: It is offended.

BERNARDO: See, it stalks away!

HORATIO: Stay! speak, speak! I charge thee, speak!

*Exit Ghost*

MARCELLUS: It's gone, and will not answer.

BERNARDO: How now, Horatio! You tremble and look pale:  
Now do you believe us? What do you think it is?

HORATIO: My God, if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes ...

MARCELLUS: Looks like the King, doesn't it?

HORATIO: Yes. This is most strange.

NARRATORS: The ghost-like vision of old King Hamlet was dressed in the  
armour he wore when he fought King Fortinbras of Norway  
many years ago.

And the frown he wore was the very same as when he attacked  
the Polish troops on their sledges across the ice.

Years before, Old King Hamlet had received a challenge from Old Fortinbras to a fight. The winner was to receive a sizeable portion of land from the loser. King Hamlet killed Old Fortinbras and as a result Denmark received land from Norway.

But now, Fortinbras' young son and heir -Young Fortinbras - was stirring for a fight to reclaim the land. And those at Elsinore remained on their guard.

To them this vision was a dire warning – of terrible events to come.

HORATIO: Look, here it comes again! But soft, behold! lo, where it comes again!

*Re-enter Ghost*

HORATIO: Stay, illusion!  
If thou hast any sound, or use of voice,  
Speak to me:

*A cock crows as morning breaks.*

HORATIO: If you know anything about the fate of Denmark, O, speak!  
Or have you buried treasure here in the womb of earth,  
Speak of it: stay, and speak! Stop it, Marcellus.

MARCELLUS: Shall I strike at it with my spear?

HORATIO: If it doesn't stop, hit it!

BERNARDO: It's here!

HORATIO: It's here!

*The Ghost exits again*

MARCELLUS: It's gone! We shouldn't have tried to hit it.

BERNARDO: It was about to speak, when the cock crew.

HORATIO: Then it was startled. I've heard it said that as the cock crows ghosts disappear from sea, land, fire and air wherever they are and return to the grave. *(pause)* Well, at least that proves one thing for certain ...

MARCELLUS: What - ?

HORATIO: That cock-crowing story is true! Come on. Let's go and find young Prince Hamlet and tell him what we've seen. I bet you that ghost will talk to the prince.

MARCELLUS: Yes. I know where we can find him.

*Exeunt*

**Scene 2. The Royal Council Chamber. Day**  
**(Act 1 Scene 2)**

NARRATORS: Something was rotten in the state of Denmark.

The old King was dead,  
And so it was said ,  
Poisoned by a snake bite as he took a nap one afternoon in his orchard.

Something was rotten in the state of Denmark.

The old King's brother  
Had just got wed  
To the old King's wife: the Queen who was widowed just four weeks before.

Something was rotten in Elsinore.

The dead King's son  
Remained rather glum  
Consumed with grief  
And shocked at the swiftness of his mother's new marriage

Something was rotten in the state of Denmark.

The state of Denmark prepared for war  
For although the elderly Norwegian King hardly knew of his nephew's plans;  
Young Fortinbras had ordered the surrender of the lands  
Lost to King Hamlet in their duel.

In the Great Hall of Elsinore Castle, the court of the state of Denmark is assembled.

*The King (Claudius) and Queen (Gertrude) sit on thrones side by side. Behind Claudius stands Polonius, the dotting old Lord Chamberlain. Members of the Danish Court are either side. One figure – Prince Hamlet - sits apart, brooding silently, dressed all in black. He stares at his mother, the Queen, then turns away.*

**SONG: THE COURT OF ELSINORE (Claudius, Gertrude, Company)**

**CLAUDIUS:** As I stand before you all  
In the Hall of Elsinore  
I thought I ought to share with you  
My sadness and my joy

We grieve for my dear brother  
The King who is no more  
He ruled the land of Denmark  
From this Court of Elsinore

But now he has departed  
We shouldn't wallow in our woe  
Remember good folk of Denmark  
It was just his time to go

For while I think it wise to mourn him  
I must think of myself too  
So I've taken a new bride  
And a queen for all of you

Raise a toast to Denmark  
Lift a glass to one and all  
To Claudius and to Gertrude  
And to the Court of Elsinore

**ALL:** Raise a toast to Denmark  
Lift a glass to one and all  
To Claudius and to Gertrude  
And to the Court of Elsinore

**CLAUDIUS:** And now let's get down to business  
To the great affairs of state  
I have some news of Norway  
And the news, it isn't great

There's a warlike noise from Norway  
From the Young Prince Fortinbras  
He's banging at our doorway  
To steal lands back from Denmark

I've written to his uncle  
The old Norwegian king  
To suppress this wild young nephew  
But he doesn't know a thing

**ALL:** Raise a toast to Denmark  
Lift a glass to one and all  
To Claudius and to Gertrude  
And to the Court of Elsinore

CLAUDIUS: Cornelius and Voltimand will deliver this letter to Norway on our behalf.

*CORNELIUS and VORTIMAND step forward to receive the letter as the Court applaud enthusiastically. As the two envoys step away LAERTES comes forward.*

CLAUDIUS: And what would you like, Laertes?

LAERTES: My lord, I willingly came to Denmark to attend your coronation. My duty done, I am keen to return my studies in Paris.

CLAUDIUS: Do you have your father's permission? What do you say, Polonius?

POLONIUS: He has worn me down with his pleading and I have grudgingly consented.

CLAUDIUS: In that case, enjoy your time back in France. But now, Hamlet, my nephew and my son –

HAMLET: *(aside)* A little more than kin and less than kind.

CLAUDIUS: Why do the gloomy clouds still hang about you?

HAMLET: Not true, my lord, I am too much in the sun.

*The Queen calls to Hamlet, to gain his attention.*

QUEEN: Good Hamlet, it's time to stop grieving for your dead father. You know that everything that lives must eventually die.

HAMLET: Ay, madam, that's life.

QUEEN: If you think so, why do you seem to be so down?

HAMLET: Seems, madam! No, it is; I know not "seems". I don't wear black for nothing. Within me I am deeply sad.

**CLAUDIUS: It's truly sweet and commendable  
To mourn your father so  
But Hamlet, however dutiful  
There's one thing you should know**

**Your father lost his father  
And that father lost his too  
So throw off all this doom and gloom  
And think of me as your father now.**

**ALL:**                   **Raise a toast to Denmark**  
**Lift a glass to one and all**  
**To Claudius and to Gertrude**  
**And to the Court of Elsinore**  
**To Claudius and to Gertrude**  
**And to the Court of Elsinore**

*Hamlet stares at him. The KING sighs, and, with his QUEEN, leaves the chamber, followed by the court. Hamlet is alone.*

HAMLET:               Oh that my too too solid flesh could melt and turn to dew;  
Oh, if only the Almighty God had not made it a mortal sin to  
take one's own life ...  
*(He sighs deeply)*  
My whole life is weary, stale, flat ...boring!  
Yet, my mother has suddenly ... Why are women so weak?  
Frailty, thy name is woman!

Just one month! Just one month after she followed my poor  
father's body to the grave, she has remarried!  
O God! Even an animal would have mourned longer!  
She has married my uncle, my father's brother, but no more  
like my father than I am like Hercules.  
This is not right! No good can come of this; but even though  
my heart breaks, I must hold my tongue!

*HORATIO, BARNARDO and MARCELLUS enter. Hamlet is surprised to see them.*

HORATIO:             Hail to your lordship!

HAMLET               Horatio, good to see you! You too, Marcellus.  
But what are you doing here in Elsinore?

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

HAMLET:             I think it was to see my mother's wedding.

HORATIO:             Indeed, my lord, they were pretty close together.

HAMLET:             They were economising, Horatio! They served up the leftovers  
from the funeral at the wedding reception.

*HAMLET is momentarily distracted as if seeing something.*

My father! Horatio – methinks I see my father!

HORATIO:             O where, my lord?

HAMLET:             In my mind's eye, Horatio.

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

HAMLET: Saw? Who?

HORATIO: My lord, the King your father.

HAMLET: The King my father! What do you mean ....?

HORATIO: Look, listen. For two nights running these two gentlemen, Marcellus and Barnardo, on their watch in the night, have seen a ghost-like figure: a King Hamlet ghost-like figure, in armour from head to foot.

HAMLET: Where?

MARCELLUS: On the platform near the sentry post.

HAMLET: Did you speak to it?

HORATIO: My lord, I did; but it made no reply.

HAMLET: Dressed in armour?

MARC/BERN: From top to toe.

HAMLET: So you couldn't see its face?

MARC/BERN: Oh yes, my lord. Its visor was up!

HAMLET: And how did it look?

MARC: It frowned.

HAMLET: Frowned?

HORATIO: Well, more sad than angry.

HAMLET: His face: pale or red?

HORATIO: Oh, very pale.

HAMLET: And did he look at you.

HORATIO: Constantly.

HAMLET: I wish I'd been there.

HORATIO: It would have amazed you.

HAMLET: Right, I will watch tonight; perhaps it will walk again.

HORATIO: I'm certain it will.

HAMLET: My father's spirit in arms! All is not well;  
I suspect some foul play. I wish the night was here right now.  
But till then, sit still, my soul: foul deeds will rise,  
Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes.

**Scene 3. A room in Polonius's House. Day.**  
**(Act 1 Scene 3)**

POLONIUS: *(Narrating)* Polonius, the King's old counsellor, had a beautiful daughter called Ophelia.

OPHELIA: *(Narrating)* She loved Hamlet and truly believed that he loved her.

LAERTES: *(Narrating)* But her brother Laertes, who was set to return to Paris to resume his studies, warned her of the dangers of a loving a young Prince.

LAERTES: As for Hamlet, and his interest in you, regard it it as youthful flirting. Nothing more.

OPHELIA: It's no more than that?

LAERTES: Perhaps he loves you now; but you must remember, he is the Crown Prince of Denmark, he cannot choose who he will love. But you can choose to ignore his love songs and protect your honour. Be careful, Ophelia, my dear sister, keep your heart under control and you'll stay out of harm's way.

OPHELIA: Thank you for the lesson, my good brother. I trust you practice what you preach.

LAERTES: Don't worry about me.

*Enter Polonius.*

LAERTES: Ah, here comes my father!

POLONIUS: Still here, Laertes? Get on board that ship!  
The wind is filling the sails and the crew awaits

*He offers Laertes a farewell embrace*

POLONIUS: There; my blessing is with thee! Oh, and one word of advice

**Song: TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE (Polonius)**

**POLONIUS:**            Oh Laertes, the time has come  
                              When you must sail away  
                              Back to France and Paris and all that (Ophelia: Ooh la la!)  
                              Before you leave, I think it's time  
                              I took you to one side  
                              For a sort of father-son type manly chat -

                              As you go through life, you  
                              Need some good advice, you  
                              Need a few rules to see you through  
                              I'm a little wiser  
                              I'll be your advisor  
                              Listen to what I say to you:

                              Never ever borrow  
                              It'll only lead to sorrow, oh and  
                              You'll find lending is a foolish plan  
                              Always show compassion  
                              Never ever follow fashion  
                              Don't forget it's clothes that make the man

                              Yes! You'll discover if you think it through,  
                              That every single word I say is true.  
                              One last gem, just for you  
                              To thine own self be true,  
                              To thine own self be true!