

William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

Adapted by Jennifer Kroll and Bryon Cahill



Paramount/The Kobal Collection

CHARACTERS (main parts in **boldface**)

Narrators 1, 2, and 3

Francisco

Bernardo } soldiers

Marcellus

Horatio, a college student and Hamlet's friend

Claudius, king of Denmark

Gertrude, queen of Denmark and Hamlet's mother

Hamlet, son of the late King Hamlet and Claudius's nephew

Laertes, Polonius's son

Polonius, a high-ranking lord at court

Ophelia, Polonius's daughter
Ghost, Hamlet's father

Guildenstern

Rosencrantz } courtiers

Osric

Actor, leader of an acting troupe

Gravedigger

SCENE 1

Narrator 1: It is midnight at Elsinore Castle in Denmark. On a cold, windy platform outside the castle, a guard hears a noise.

Francisco: (*nervously*) Who's there?

Bernardo: Long live the king!

Francisco: Bernardo?

Bernardo: Yes, it's time for my shift. Have you had a quiet guard?

Francisco: Not a mouse stirring.

Narrator 2: Francisco leaves. A few minutes later, Horatio and Marcellus arrive.

Horatio: Hello, Bernardo. Has the thing appeared again tonight?

Bernardo: Not yet. But it has come every night for the past week.

Marcellus: Horatio says it is our fantasy. If it comes again tonight, I will dare to speak to it.

Narrator 3: The men suddenly freeze as a ghostly figure passes before them.

Marcellus: Look! There it is!

Bernardo: It looks just like the king who's dead!

Horatio: (*to the ghost*) What are you and why are you here? Speak!

Narr 1: The ghost looks straight at the men and then silently vanishes.

Photos throughout are from the 1991 film *Hamlet*, starring Mel Gibson as Hamlet.

BIG-TIME PROBLEMS. IT'S SUCH A TRAGEDY!

Bernardo: It will not speak to us.

Horatio: No. But there may be somebody else to whom it will.

SCENE 2

Narr 2: The next morning in the castle, King Claudius speaks with his family members and courtiers.

Claudius: Though the memory of our dear dead brother, the former king, is fresh, and our hearts still grieve, we delight in our marriage to his former wife. Our sometime sister is now our queen. Despite the sadness we all feel, we must keep our chins up and look to the future.

Narr 3: King Claudius turns to his nephew, Hamlet, who stands off to one side, staring at the ground wearing a dark, **brooding** expression on his face.

Claudius: Hamlet, my nephew and now son, how is it that dark clouds still hang on you?

Gertrude: Good Hamlet, do not forever be seeking out your noble father in the dust. You know that all that live must die in order to pass into eternity.

Hamlet: Ay, madam, I know.

Gertrude: Then why do you continue to appear so depressed?

Hamlet: I don't merely *appear*

depressed, madam. How I look on the outside is nothing compared to how my grief consumes me within.

Claudius: You mourn your father, and that is right. But remember that your father lost a father and that father's father lost one too. It's not manly to grieve too much. Stop brooding over your father's death. Start thinking of me as your father. After all, you are the next in line for the throne, and I feel all the love for you that a father feels for his son.

Narr 1: The king and queen leave the room. Hamlet stands alone.

Hamlet: (*to self*) Oh, that this too too solid flesh would melt. O God! O God! How weary, stale, and flat this world seems to me now. It is but an untended garden where weeds grow out of control.

Narr 2: Hamlet paces around the room.

Hamlet: A beast would have mourned longer than my mother. Frailty, thy name is woman! Not even a month after my father's death and she is married to my father's brother. O the wicked speed of it. No good will come from it. But break, my heart; for I must hold my tongue.

Narr 3: Horatio enters the room.

Horatio: Hello, Lord Hamlet!

Hamlet: It is good to see you well, Horatio! When did you get

back from the university?

Horatio: Not long ago. I came for your father's funeral.

Hamlet: I think you came for my mother's wedding.

Horatio: Indeed, my lord, it followed soon after the other event.

Hamlet: Thrift! Thrift, Horatio! My mother didn't want to waste any leftover foods from the funeral and used them for the wedding feast. You know—I would have rather fought my worst foe than attend that wedding. All I could think of was my father.

Horatio: My lord, I think I saw him yesterday night.

Hamlet: Saw whom?

Horatio: The king, your father.

Hamlet: My father?

Narr 1: Horatio tells Hamlet about the ghost that has been appearing before the guards.

Hamlet: I will go to the watch tonight; perchance the spirit will walk again. If it assumes my noble father's person, I will speak to it, and hell itself shall not hold my peace.

SCENE 3

Narr 2: Meanwhile, in another part of the castle, Ophelia bids farewell to her older brother, Laertes, who is about to head off to college in France.

 **vocab** BROODING:
gloomy, depressed

HAMLETOLOGY: HAMLET IS SHAKESPEARE'S LONGEST

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Hamlet grabs Ophelia by the wrist and holds her hard.

Laertes: My dear sister, I know Hamlet speaks to you of love, but don't listen. Protect your heart—and your virtue.

Narr 3: Their father, Polonius, enters the room.

Polonius: What is it, Ophelia, that Hamlet has said to you?

Ophelia: My lord, he has expressed many tenders of his affection to me. He has professed his love in an honorable fashion.

Polonius: Affection! Pooh! Are you really so naive? His sweet words are traps to snare you. Lord Hamlet may play at love if he desires, but you must guard your maiden honor. From now on, you are not to speak to him. Am I clear?

Ophelia: Yes, Father.

SCENE 4

Narr 1: That night, Hamlet waits with Horatio and Marcellus on

the guard platform for the ghost to appear. It is just before 1 a.m.

Hamlet: The air bites shrewdly; it is very cold.

Horatio: Look, my lord, it comes!

Hamlet: Angels and ministers of grace, defend us! King, Father, Royal Dane: O answer me, why have you come?

Narr 2: The ghost begins to move down the platform, beckoning Hamlet to follow.

Marcellus: Do not follow, I beg you!

Narr 3: Horatio and Marcellus try to hold Hamlet back, but he struggles free and runs after the ghost, following it until he is high atop the castle's battlements.

Hamlet: Where will you lead me? Speak to me here, ghost. I'll go no farther.

Ghost: I am thy father's spirit.

If thou ever loved thy dear father, revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

Hamlet: Murder?

Ghost: I was napping in my garden, as I often did. Your uncle came with a vial of deadly poison and poured it into my ear. Instantly, it swept through my body. Thus, my life, my crown, and my queen were stolen.

Hamlet: O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain! That one may smile and smile and be a villain. I will avenge thee.

Ghost: But I command you: Whatever you do, do not lay a hand on your own mother.

Narr 1: The ghost vanishes.

SCENE 5

Narr 2: The next day, Ophelia follows her father's instructions. She returns Hamlet's letters and tries to avoid him. Eventually, though, he comes looking for her. After his visit, Ophelia runs to see her father.

Polonius: How now, Ophelia! What's the matter?

Ophelia: Alas, my lord, I have been so frightened! As I was sewing in my room, Hamlet came in to see me. His jacket was all unlaced and his clothes all dirty. He was so pale, and his knees were shaking so hard that they knocked against each other. He acted like a madman!

Polonius: Mad for your love?

What said he?

Ophelia: He took me by the wrist and held me hard. He stared long at my face, sighing.

Polonius: This is the very ecstasy of love. It's tearing him apart. I'm sorry. Have you said harsh words to him lately?

Ophelia: No, my lord. But I have refused to accept his letters and I've tried to stay away from him, just as you asked me to do.

Polonius: That hath made him mad. This is more serious than I thought. We must tell the king.

SCENE 6

Narr 3: In the castle's assembly hall, King Claudius and Queen Gertrude speak with two young courtiers, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who have recently arrived from England. They are Hamlet's good friends, and the king and queen beseech them to help him.

Guildenstern: We lay our service freely at your feet to be commanded.

Narr 1: Polonius enters.

Polonius: Your Highnesses, I believe I know what's been troubling Hamlet. He is being driven mad by his love for my daughter.

Narr 2: Polonius hands King Claudius and Queen Gertrude love letters written by Hamlet to Ophelia. The king and queen exit with Rosencrantz and

Guildenstern.

Narr 3: Hamlet appears at the far end of the hall; his face is buried in a book.

Polonius: How does my good Lord Hamlet? Do you know me, my lord?

Hamlet: You are a fishmonger.

Polonius: Not I, my lord. What do you read there?

Hamlet: Words, words, words. It says here that old men have gray beards and wrinkled faces and little wit, which I truly believe. And yet, yourself, sir, should be as old as I am, if like a crab you could go backward.

Polonius: (*to self*) Though this be madness, yet there is method in it.

Narr 1: Polonius exits. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter.

Rosencrantz: Lord Hamlet!

Narr 2: Hamlet looks up from his book.

Hamlet: My good friends! You must be a little out of fortune's favor, or else you wouldn't be here in this prison.

Guildenstern: Prison, my lord?

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 of the worst.

Narr 3: Hamlet asks his friends about their travels. As they describe their voyage, they mention that they recently passed a theater **troupe** on the road.

Guildenstern: One of the best troupes in all of Europe. They'll be here soon. Won't it be fun to see them perform?

Narr 1: Not long afterward, a flourish of trumpets can be heard, and the theater troupe arrives at the castle gates. The prince and his friends go to meet the actors.

Hamlet: Welcome!

Rosencrantz: Will you be putting on a show for us in the next few days?

Actor: Yes, my lord, any show you would like.

Hamlet: How about *The Murder of Gonzago*? Do you know that story?

Actor: Yes.

Hamlet: I'd like to see you perform it tomorrow night. You could study a speech of some dozen or sixteen lines which I would set down and insert in it, could you not?

Actor: Ay, my lord.

Hamlet: Very good! Make yourselves welcome here in Elsinore!



vocab

TROUPE:
a group of theatrical performers

Narr 2: The troupe enters the castle. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern follow, leaving Hamlet to himself.

Hamlet: Am I a coward? A villain? Here I am—the son of a dear murdered father. I've been ordered by his ghost to avenge his death. And instead of taking action, I stand unloading the grief in my heart with words!

Narr 3: Hamlet pauses for a moment.

Hamlet: But what if that ghost was really a demon, sent to test me? I shall make double sure my uncle is guilty before I act. I'll watch Claudius's reaction to the troupe's performance tomorrow. Then I'll have better proof of his guilt. The play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.

SCENE 7

Narr 1: By the next day, Hamlet's strange behavior has become the talk of the castle. King Claudius, Queen Gertrude, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Polonius, and Ophelia discuss Hamlet's state of mind.

Claudius: When you talked to Hamlet yesterday, did he tell you what's been bothering him?

Rosencrantz: He does confess he feels himself distracted. But from what cause he will by no means speak.

Gertrude: Have you managed to get him interested in some kind

of lighthearted activity?

Guildenstern: A theater troupe arrived at the castle yesterday. Hamlet seemed very eager to see the players perform. In fact, he wanted to make sure that Your Majesties attended the performance tonight.

Claudius: I'm relieved to hear that Hamlet's taking an interest in such things. Good gentlemen, go and drive his purpose toward these delights.

Narr 2: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern leave.

Claudius: *(to Gertrude)* My dear, will you leave us also? Polonius and I are going to set up a meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia in order to see how he responds to her.

Gertrude: As you wish.

'To die, to sleep—to sleep! Perchance to dream—ay, there's the rub.'

Narr 3: The queen leaves. The king and Polonius get Ophelia to stand in the hallway, pretending to read a book. They duck out of sight when they see Hamlet coming.

Hamlet: *(to self)* To be or not to be—that is the question. Is it nobler to quietly 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 heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to. To die, to sleep—to sleep! Perchance to dream—ay, there's the rub.

Narr 1: Hamlet spots Ophelia.

Ophelia: Good day, my lord. How are you today?

Hamlet: Well, well, well.

Ophelia: I have some things here that I've been wishing to return to you.

Narr 2: She holds out a bundle of love letters, poems, and trinkets. Hamlet looks at her blankly.

Hamlet: I never gave you such things.

Ophelia: You know you did. You said many sweet words when you gave these things to me.

Hamlet: You are so beautiful. I did love you once.

Ophelia: So you have said.

Hamlet: You should never believe sweet words in this sour world. I loved you not.

Ophelia: You deceived me.

Hamlet: Get thee to a nunnery! Why would you wish to marry and bring new sinners into this world? It would have been better if my mother had not given birth

to me! Get thee to a nunnery! Go, farewell. Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool; for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery, go, and quickly too. Farewell.

Narr 3: Hamlet leaves. Ophelia stares after him with tears streaming down her face.

Ophelia: Heavenly powers, restore him. O woe is me.

Claudius: (*to Polonius*) I don't think love is the cause of Hamlet's behavior. And I also don't think he's insane. But I do think he is dangerous. I think I had better get him away from here. I'll send him to England. We owe the English king a visit and some tribute money. Hamlet can deliver that.

Polonius: As you wish, my lord. But before he leaves, why don't you have the queen talk with Hamlet privately one last time? Perhaps she will be able to get some answers out of him.

Claudius: It shall be so. Madness in great ones must not unwatched go.

SCENE 8

Narr 1: That night, the king, the queen, and all the courtiers attend the theater troupe's performance of *The Murder of Gonzago*. The play is the story of a woman who **conspires** to have her husband poisoned. Once he is dead, she marries the

poisoner. At the moment in the play when the poisoner is pouring his deadly potion into a sleeping man's ear, King Claudius suddenly rises.

Claudius: Give me some light! Stop the play! Everybody out! Lights! Lights!

Narr 2: The lights are lit. In the confusion, everyone files out of the room.

Narr 3: A little later, King Claudius stands in his private chambers, talking to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Claudius: I like Hamlet not. Nor stands it safe with us to let his madness rage. Therefore, I ask you to return to England and take him with you.

Narr 1: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern depart, leaving Claudius alone, looking frightened and shaken.

Claudius: (*to self*) O my offense is rank! To kill my own brother! And now, guilt and fear hound me every minute.

Narr 2: King Claudius falls to his knees, attempting to pray.

Claudius: (*to self*) I want to pray, but what words can I use? How can I ask for, or be granted, forgiveness when I continue to wear this ill-gotten crown?



vocab

CONSPIRE:
to join in a
secret agreement

How can I ask for forgiveness when I continue to be married to the queen? I'm trapped in a pit of corruption and sin, and I can't get out of it.

Narr 3: Hamlet enters the room quietly, with his sword drawn.

Hamlet: (*to self*) Now I should do it.

Narr 1: He raises his sword, then pauses.

Hamlet: (*to self*) But ... he is praying. If I kill him now, he might go straight to heaven. No—I ought to kill Claudius when he's in bed with my mother, or in a rage, or drunk, or about some act that has no relish of salvation in it—then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven and that his soul may be as damned as hell.

Narr 2: Hamlet puts his sword down and sneaks away.

Claudius: My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

SCENE 9

Narr 3: Later that night, Queen Gertrude stands in her private chamber, speaking to Polonius.

Polonius: You must tell Hamlet that his behavior has been unacceptable.

Gertrude: I will. But hide now. I hear him coming.

Narr 1: Polonius hides behind a tapestry hanging on the wall.

Hamlet: Now, Mother, what's the matter?

Gertrude: Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

Hamlet: Mother, you have my father much offended!

Gertrude: You have a wicked tongue, my son.

Hamlet: I think the wickedness is all your own.

Gertrude: Hamlet, have you forgotten to whom you are speaking?

Hamlet: No, I certainly have not. You are the queen, your husband's brother's wife. And you're also my mother. I wish it were not the case!

Gertrude: I'll not speak to you if you're going to be like this.

Narr 2: She rises to leave, looking both indignant and scared.

Narr 3: Hamlet grabs her by the arm, holding her back.

Hamlet: Come, come, and sit you down. You shall not budge while I speak.

Gertrude: What wilt thou do? Murder me? Help! Help!

Polonius: (*from behind the tapestry*) What's going on?

Narr 1: Hamlet notices a shape behind the tapestry.

Hamlet: How now! A rat?

Narr 2: Hamlet draws his sword and runs the blade

through the tapestry.

Polonius: O I am slain!

Narr 3: Polonius falls dead.

Gertrude: O what a rash and bloody deed is this!

Hamlet: Yes, a bloody deed—almost as bad, good Mother, as to kill a king and marry his brother.

Gertrude: What? Kill a king?

Hamlet: Ay, lady.

Narr 1: Hamlet pulls the tapestry aside and discovers Polonius's body.

Hamlet: Intruding fool. Farewell, old man. I did not intend to kill you. I mistook you for your better.

SCENE 10

Narr 2: After Polonius's murder, the king and queen rush Hamlet off to England. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern accompany him.

Narr 3: Although no official pronouncement of Polonius's death is made, Ophelia soon finds out the truth. Badly shaken and afraid that she's losing her grip on reality, she writes to her brother, Laertes, begging him to come home from France.

Narr 1: By the time Laertes returns to Denmark, Ophelia has gone mad. Laertes longs to avenge his father's death and his sister's mental collapse by killing Hamlet.

Narr 2: It becomes clear that

Laertes may soon have the opportunity, after two letters arrive from Hamlet. Horatio receives the first one.

Horatio: (*reading*) "We were on our way to England and had been sailing for two days when our ship was attacked by pirates. In the **skirmish**, I was taken prisoner. Fortunately, the pirates were willing to release me with the understanding that I would repay the favor someday. As you read this, I'm on my way back to Denmark. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern continue on their way to England. I have much more to tell you, but it can wait until I see you next. Your friend, Hamlet."

Narr 3: The king receives a different letter. He shares the contents with Laertes.

Claudius: (*reading*) "Your Majesty, I am about to arrive back in your kingdom. I am unarmed and without any money or possessions. I ask you to show mercy toward me. When I see you, I'll explain the circumstances of my sudden, strange return. Hamlet."

Laertes: Now he will have to face me and face what he's done!

Claudius: Laertes, your desire for revenge is natural, and I don't intend to stop you. However, I ask you to go about it my way.

* vocab

SKIRMISH:
a minor battle
COAX: to persuade



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*'Alas, poor Yorick!
I knew him,
Horatio.'*

I have a scheme in mind through which you can get your revenge without taking any blame for your actions.

Laertes: What do you propose?

Claudius: I'll **coax** Hamlet into fencing with you. During the match, you can kill him and pretend it was an accident.

Laertes: I'll put some poison on the tip of my sword so that even a small cut will do him in.

Claudius: And in case that fails, we'll also have a cup of poisoned wine at the sidelines for him.

Narr 1: Just then, King Claudius and Laertes hear an anguished cry. The queen rushes into the room.

Gertrude: One woe doth tread upon another's heel, so fast they follow. Laertes, your sister has drowned.

Laertes: Drowned? Where?

Gertrude: In the brook, down by the weeping willow. She

wandered down there, covered herself in flower chains and garlands, and then lay down in the water, singing. Eventually, the water pulled her under, poor wretch, to a muddy death.

Laertes: Drowned? Alas! Poor Ophelia!

SCENE 11

Narr 2: When Hamlet returns to Denmark, the first person he goes to see is his trusted friend, Horatio. The two talk as they stroll through the local churchyard.

Narr 3: Horatio and Hamlet come upon a gravedigger, singing as he digs.

Hamlet: Has this fellow no feeling of his business, that he sings at grave-making?

Horatio: Custom hath made it in him a property of easiness.

Narr 1: Hamlet leans down and picks up a skull that's been exposed during the digging.

Hamlet: This skull had a tongue

in it once, and could sing too. *(to the gravedigger)* Whose was it? Do you know?

Gravedigger: This same skull, sir, was Yorick's skull, the king's jester. He hath lain in the earth for three and twenty years.

Hamlet: Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio; a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy: He hath borne me on his back a thousand times. Where are your jokes now? your songs? your flashes of merriment?

Narr 2: A funeral procession enters the churchyard. Hamlet and Horatio stand back in hiding. They watch as the king, the queen, Laertes, and a number of lords and ladies approach a newly dug grave. A body is lowered. The queen throws petals into the open grave.

Gertrude: Sweets to the sweet! Farewell, Ophelia! I hoped thou would be my Hamlet's wife. I thought I'd be putting flower petals on your bridal bed, not your grave.

Hamlet: What? The fair Ophelia!

Laertes: A ministering angel may my sister be. Hold off the earth awhile till I have caught her once more in mine arms.

Narr 3: Laertes jumps into her open grave.

Laertes: I hope doom falls heavily on the head of the man responsible for this!

Narr 1: Hamlet steps forward.

Hamlet: What is he whose grief bears such an emphasis? Whose phrase of sorrow conjures the wandering stars and makes like wonder-wounded hearts? This is I, Hamlet the Dane!

Narr 2: Hamlet jumps into Ophelia's grave.

Laertes: The devil take thy soul!

Narr 3: Laertes lunges at Hamlet, grabbing for his throat. They wrestle until they are forcibly parted and come out of the grave.

Claudius: O he is mad, Laertes.

Gertrude: Hamlet, Hamlet! Please, Laertes! He did not mean to cause your sister's death, and he was out of his head when he killed your father.

Hamlet: I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers could not, with all their quantity of love, make up my sum. Laertes, why do you treat me like this? I have been a friend to you, but it is no matter. Do what you will. But hear me, sir: The cat will mew and the dog will have his day.

Narr 1: Hamlet and Horatio exit the churchyard. King Claudius leans over and whispers in Laertes's ear.

Claudius: Remember what we talked about last night. You will have your revenge yet.

SCENE 12

Narr 2: The next day, a message comes for Hamlet as he stands speaking to Horatio.

Osric: His Majesty wanted me to tell you that he has made a wager with the king of France. Laertes, who is newly returned from France, is known there to be a very good fencer. King Claudius has wagered that in a dozen fencing passes between you and Laertes, he shall not exceed you by three hits.

'I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers could not, with all their quantity of love, make up my sum.'

Hamlet: What's riding on this wager?

Osric: Six Barbary horses and six fancy, expensive French rapiers.

Hamlet: Well, it's the time of day when I usually take some exercise. If someone will bring the foils, I will see if I can win this bet for the king.

Narr 3: Osric departs. Servants come in and set up the match.

Horatio: If you feel at all uncomfortable or threatened, just say the word, and I'll do what I can to stop or stall this match.

Hamlet: There's no way to stall one's fate, Horatio. If my time has come, my time has come.

Narr 1: Laertes, King Claudius, Queen Gertrude, and several lords and ladies arrive.

Claudius: Come, Hamlet. Shake hands with Laertes before the match.

Narr 2: Hamlet takes Laertes's hand.

Hamlet: Give me your pardon, sir. I have done you wrong. But I did not intend to. It was my madness, not I.

Laertes: I pardon you.

Hamlet: Come then, let's fence. Your talent should shine here today, when matched against my lesser ability.

Narr 3: Hamlet and Laertes begin to fence. Hamlet scores a hit.

Claudius: You look thirsty, Hamlet. Here, have a drink.

Narr 1: Claudius holds a cup out to Hamlet.

Hamlet: I'll finish this first. Set my drink over there.

Narr 2: They continue. Hamlet scores another hit.

Claudius: *(to Gertrude)* Our son shall win.

Narr 3: Queen Gertrude picks up the cup that King Claudius

VERSIONS OF THE PLAY.

has offered to Hamlet.

Gertrude: Here's to your success, my son!

Claudius: Gertrude! Do not drink!

Narr 1: It is too late. The queen drinks the poisoned wine.

Narr 2: The fencing continues. Laertes wounds Hamlet. In the scuffling, the two switch rapiers. The match heats up. Moments later, Hamlet wounds Laertes. The queen suddenly slumps to the floor.

Hamlet: The queen!

Claudius: She swooned when she saw you both bleeding.

Gertrude: (*gasping*) No! The drink! Oh, my dear Hamlet! I am poisoned!

Narr 3: The queen dies.

Hamlet: O villainy! Ho! Let the door be locked! Treachery! Seek it out!

Narr 1: The room erupts in chaos. Hamlet turns and stares with blazing eyes at the king.

Narr 2: Just then, Laertes collapses, gasping.

Laertes: (*in a faint voice*) The treachery is here, Hamlet. Hamlet, thou art slain. No medicine in the world can do thee good. In thee there is not half an hour of life. The treacherous instrument is in thy hand. The blade is tipped with poison. The foul practice hath turned itself

on me. Lo, here I lie. Never to rise again. Thy mother is poisoned ... I can ... no more ... the king ... the king's to blame.

Hamlet: Poison on the blade, as well as in the cup? Then, venom, do thy work!

Narr 3: Hamlet stabs the king.

Hamlet: Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane! Drink of this potion. Follow my mother.

Narr 1: Hamlet grabs the goblet full of poisoned wine and forces the drink down the king's throat. Horatio leaps up, grabbing at the poisoned wine goblet.

Laertes: He is justly served. It is a poison tempered by himself. Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet. My father's death comes not upon thee. Nor thine on me!

Narr 2: Laertes dies.

Hamlet: Heaven make thee free of it. I follow thee! Horatio, I am dead.

Horatio: Here's yet some liquor left. I follow you, my lord.

Hamlet: Give me the cup, Horatio. If thou did ever hold me in thy heart, live, to tell my story to the harsh world.

Narr 3: Hamlet drinks the rest of the wine himself. He collapses onto the floor. Horatio kneels beside him.

Narr 1: Tears stream from Horatio's eyes as he watches Hamlet's breathing slow and then stop.

Horatio: (*tenderly*) A noble heart has cracked. Good night, sweet prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest. ■

WRITE ABOUT IT

What a Tragedy!

Shakespeare's plays fall into three genres:

- **historical plays** (epics based on actual British monarchs)
- **comedies** (light, romantic plots with happy endings)
- **tragedies** (dark, dramatic plots with unhappy endings)

Hamlet is clearly a tragedy. By the end of the play, Ophelia, Polonius, Laertes, Queen Gertrude, King Claudius—and, of course, Hamlet himself—are all dead. Did things *have* to end that way? Where did Hamlet go wrong?

Give Hamlet Another Chance!

Write a new ending to Shakespeare's tragic masterpiece. What different choices could Hamlet have made? Rework the play so that it ends another way. If you wish, you can even turn it into a comedy! Send your version of *Hamlet* to read@weeklyreader.com. We will post our favorites on our blog, WORD, at readandwriting.com.