Hamlet

William Shakespeare

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Chapter 1 The Dead King

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It was a bitterly cold night in Elsinore, in the kingdom of Denmark. Three men huddled together on the battlements of King Claudius' castle. They were waiting for someone. A young man names Horatio stood with two of the king's guards. "I think you were seeing things last night," he began. "Shh"! hissed one of the guards. "it's here..." Horatio gasped. A shadowy figure had appeared beside them. "It looks exactly like the old king!" cried Horatio, in terror. "The dead king. Why are you here?" he asked the figure. "Please, speak."

But the ghost shook its head and did not reply. As the sun began to rise, he faded away into thin air.

"I must tell Hamlet," said Horatio. Hamlet was his best friend and the dead king's son. Prince Hamlet had been utterly miserable since his father died. He kept to himself and dressed mostly in black.

Just one month after Hamlet lost his father, his mother had married the new king, his uncle. It made Hamlet's blood boil.

How could she forget is father so quickly? He was suspicious about his father's death, too. It had been so sudden. All these thoughts churned over and over in his mind. When Horatio came to see Hamlet the next morning, his friend was sitting alone and looking very gloomy indeed.

"Hamlet," Horatio began, in a quiet voice. I think I saw your father last night." Hamlet leaped up. "What?" Horatio told him about the ghost's visit the night before. "I have to see this for myself," said Hamlet. That night, they went up to the battlements to wait. Drunken yells echoed around the castle courtyard. "What's that noise?" asked Horatio.

"My uncles, Claudius, is having a party to celebrate marrying my mother," said Hamlet, bitterly. "The guests came from my father's funeral and stayed on." As the clock struck midnight the ghostly figure appeared once more. "Father?" cried Hamlet. "Speak to me! What do you want?" The ghost beckoned to him and Hamlet stepped closer, trembling.

"Take revenge for my murder," said the ghost. His voice was like the whistling of the wind. Hamlet's eyes widened. "Who murdered you?" "Your uncle," said the ghost. "My own brother did this dreadful thing."

Chapter 2 Revenge

The ghost told Hamlet the whole story. "I was asleep in the orchard when I felt something dripping into my ear. It burned me! So I opened my eyes... and the last thing I saw was Claudius, clutching a bottle of poison."

"I couldn't even beg forgiveness for my sins," added the ghost. His voice pierced Hamlet's heart. "So now I'm being punished." "I'll avenge you!" said Hamlet. "I swear I will."

The ghost nodded. "Kill him for me," it said and disappeared.

Horatio came up to Hamlet. "Well, what did he want?"

Hamlet shook his head and his eyes darted from side to side. "You'll tell someone," he said. "I swear, I won't tell a soul," promised Horatio. "Very well," said Hamlet and told him what the ghost had said. "If you see me acting as if I'm crazy," Hamlet added, "it's just part of my plan." "What plan?" asked Horatio,

"I'm going to pretend to be mad," said Hamlet, "so my uncle won't guess what I'm really thinking." Horatio saw a strange look in his friend's eye. He wasn't sure if Hamlet would have to pretend.

Chapter 3 A Prince in Love?

"King Claudius! King Claudius!" called a voice. It was Polonius, the kings' adviser. He came rushing into the throne room. "Hamlet has gone mad," he announced. "And I know why." The king started. "Mad?" "Yes!" panted Polonius. "He came into my daughter Ophelia's chamber and ranted and raved." "He's mad with love, you see," explained Polonius. "Ah." Claudius sounded relieved. "I would like to see this for myself."

Polonius smiled smugly. "Let's send Ophelia to Hamlet's room, then hide and watch them. You'll soon see how the poor boy has lost his wits over my beautiful girl."

The king wasn't sure if he entirely believed Polonius, but he agreed to the plan.

They hid behind a curtain to spy on Hamlet. Ophelia went up to him and greeted him. Hamlet certainly started to rant and rave, but not like a man who was mad with love. "Go away!" he screamed at her.

"You women are all the same!" Hamlet spat. "You paint your faces, you lie and you betray us."

When he'd finished yelling, he stalked away, muttering to himself.

Ophelia stare after him in shocked silence. Claudius turned to Polonius. "He doesn't sound like he's in love." Secretly, the king was worried. Was Hamlet angry with his mother for remarrying so quickly? Did he suspect something about his father's death?

He should send Hamlet away, just in case. But that might not be enough. Perhaps he should get Hamlet out of the way for good...

Chapter 4 The Play

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Hamlet was alone in a chilly room in the castle, cursing himself. "I'm useless!" he muttered. "I promised my father I would kill Claudius. What's stopping me?"

A voice of doubt was whispering in his ear. What if the ghost wasn't his father, but a devil in disguise?" I need proof that the ghost was telling the truth," he thought. An idea struck him. A troop of actors was visiting the castle.

"I'll ask them to put on a play about a man who poisons a king," he thought. "If Claudius looks guilty, I'll know he did it." Hamlet went to see the leader of the troop and gave him a script. "Will you put on this play?"

"Of course, my lord," said the actor, with a bow.

That night, the king and queen settled down to watch the play. Hamlet sat beside them, so he could keep an eye on Claudius.

Music struck up and the play began. An actor playing the villain crept up to the man who was playing the king, the fake king snored loudly and the villain poured poison in his ear. Hamlet glanced at his uncle. He has gone pale. "How do you like the play?" asked Hamlet with a bitter smile. The king did not reply. He stood, stumbles over his chair and left the room.

"Th ghost told me the truth," thought Hamlet. "Now I can have my revenge." He got up and followed Claudius.

Chapter 5 A Rat!

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The king hurried along the castle corridors to the chapel. His heart was heavy with guilt.

At the chapel, he knelt before the altar and tried to pray. Hamlet was not far behind. He came into the chapel and watched his uncle. "I could do it now," he thought. "He won't hear me coming."

But Hamlet shook his head. "If I kill him now, while he's praying, he'll go straight to heaven. That isn't a punishment. It's a reward." And he decided to wait. When the king returned to his throne room, Polonius was waiting for him. "I've got another plan," he said, looking pleased with himself. Claudius groaned.

"We should send Hamlet to talk to his mother," Polonius went on. "Perhaps she can get him to stop behaving like a lunatic? I'll hide and listen in." So Hamlet was summoned to his mother's room. He strode in with a face like thunder. "Hamlet, you've offended your stepfather," his mother scolded. "Mother, you've offended my father – by marrying my uncle," replied Hamlet. He grabbed her. His eyes flashed with fury. "Help, help!" cried his mother. There was a noise from behind the curtain. Hamlet whipped out his sword, crying, "What's that? A rat? He plunged his sword through the curtain... and into Polonius.

There was a terrible groan. "Was that the king?" said Hamlet and he pulled the curtain aside.

"Oh," he said, as Polonius' body fell out. "It's him." He shrugged. "I'm sorry I killed him, but it can't be helped." He began to drag the dead man out of the room. "He's mad!" sobbed the queen. When Claudius heard what had happened, he called for Hamlet. "Where is Polonius' body?" he asked. But no one knew where Hamlet had hidden it.

"He's at dinner," said Hamlet. He grinned. "With the worms. Only they're eating him, not the other way around." Claudius saw his chance. "Hamlet," he said. "My dear son... You cannot possibly stay in Denmark now. I'll send you to England to keep you safe."

Hamlet agreed to go. But he was sure that the king was up to no good.

Chapter 6 The Mas Sister

The king and queen were in the throne room some days later, when Polonius' daughter, Ophelia, drifted in. her hair was wild and tangled. She looked as though she'd been dragged through a hedge. She began to sign as she walked.

Clutching bunches of wildflowers in her hands, she handed a bloom to the queen. Everyone watching realized that Ophelia had lost her mind.

A furious pounding on the door broke into her song. "Laertes is here!" called a guard. Laertes was Ophelia's brother. "Where is my father's body?" Laertes demanded. "I heard he was killed. Who did it?" Before the king could answer, Laertes saw Ophelia. She gazed at him, hardly even seeing him. Laertes was horrified. "Oh, my dear sister, what's happened to you?" he gasped.

"Would you like a violet?" she asked. Then she shook her head. "I can't give you a violet. They all withered when my father died."

"She's mad with grief," said the king. "I'm sorry to tell you, Laertes, that Hamlet killed your father. It's all his fault."

"I'll kill Hamlet for this!" Laertes swore. The king waved him close and whispered, "Don't worry. Hamlet will get what he deserves." He smiled. At any moment, his men would be killing Hamlet on board the ship to England. Or so he thought...

"Prince Hamlet is here," came a cry from the courtyard, "returned from England!"

The king's eyes widened with surprise. Laertes began to mutter under his breath about what he planned to do to Hamlet. The queen rushed out to greet her son. Hamlet's friend Horatio smiled. He was standing quietly near the king, holding a letter from Hamlet that explained everything.

The king's men turned on me, as I suspected they would. But at that very moment we were attacked by pirates and I managed to stow away on the pirate ship. I am on my way home. When I return, I will take my revenge!

> Yours ever, Hamlet

Claudius spoke quietly to Laertes. "Hamlet might still be alive, but I have a plan. You must challenge him to a duel." "But what if I don't kill him?" said Laertes.

"I'll dip one of the blades in deadly poison," said Claudius. "Even if you merely graze his skin, he will idea. And if he wins without a scratch, I'll offer him a drink laced with poison instead." Laertes thought about this for a moment. It seemed a dishonest way to get revenge. But his thoughts were interrupted by the queen. She burst into the room, tears streaming down her face.

"Ophelia has drowned herself!" she sobbed. "They found her floating like a mermaid in the lake. Dead! Oh poor Ophelia!"

Laertes gripped his sword hilt. "I'm ready to challenge Hamlet," he told the king. "I will kill him, if it's the last thing I do."

Chapter 7 The Duel

HARREN

Hamlet was out walking with Horatio. They passed through a graveyard where two men were hard at work, digging a grave.

One of the gravediggers threw an old skull up out of the grave. Hamlet caught it, "Hey!" he called. "Whose skull is this?"

"A court jester who died years ago," the man replied. "His name was Yorrick."

Hamlet felt sad. "Poor Yorrick, he was so full of fun when was alive." He pointed at the skull. "look, he's still grinning." The sound of chanting floated across the graveyard. A funeral procession was coming closer. Hamlet recognized the king, the queen... and Laertes.

"Oh, Ophelia," Laertes wept.

Hamlet rushed over to the coffin. "That's Ophelia?" he said.

"You!" Laertes spat. "Go to the devil!" He leaped at Hamlet, pushing him into the empty grave and jumping after him.

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"Hamlet, don't!" said Horatio, as guards pulled the pair out. "You can settle this like gentlemen," the king declared. "I order you to fight a duel."

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Chapter 8 The Poisoned Sword

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That afternoon, the king, the queen and their courtiers came to watch Hamlet and Laertes fight. Two swords were laid out for them. Laertes knew which one to pick. "I'll take this one," he said. The men faced each other; their shining swords held high. "Good luck!" called the king. "And if you win, Hamlet, I have a delicious drink waiting, to toast your victory."

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Hamlet and Laertes began to fight. With a quick thrust, Hamlet cut Laertes' arm with his blade. "A hit!" everyone cried. "First blood!" Well done Hamlet!" Claudius was worried. He raised the poisoned cup. "Here, have a drink before you go on, Hamlet."

"No, I'll drink when the fight is over," said Hamlet.

Before Claudius realizes it was happening, the queen had picked up the poisoned cup. "To my son!" she cried and gulped down a mouthful of the deadly drink. As the queen drank, Laertes swiped with his sword and the blade bit into Hamlet's side. It wasn't a deep wound, but the poison was in Hamlet's blood. Hamlet struck back and their blades clashed together. The force if the blow knocked both swords to the ground. When they picked them up again, Laertes had Hamlet's sword in his hand and Hamlet was clutching the poisoned blade.

With a grunt, Hamlet struck Laertes. As the sword grazed his arm, Laertes recognised the weapon. "I'm dying," he thought. Then the queen began to groan in agony. "That drink... Oh my dear Hamlet, I've been poisoned." "There's a traitor here," cried Hamlet.

"There is a traitor," said Laertes. "And it's me. I plotted with the king to kill you. My sword was poisoned. We're both dying. I... I am so sorry."

Hamlet looked down at the poisoned blade. Suddenly, everything became clear. He had nothing to lose now and he knew what he had to do.

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"This is for my father," he called. He rushed at Claudius, stabbing him with the poisoned sword. The king cried out. The king and queen slumped in their thrones, life ebbing away.

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Hamlet staggered and fell and Horatio rushed to his side. "If you are dying, I'll die with you," cried Horatio. He picked up the cup that the queen had put down. "I'll drink this poison."

Hamlet raised a hand. "Don't, please. I want you to tell the world my story," he said. His voice was growing weak.

"Remember me," he whispered. "The rest is silence."

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