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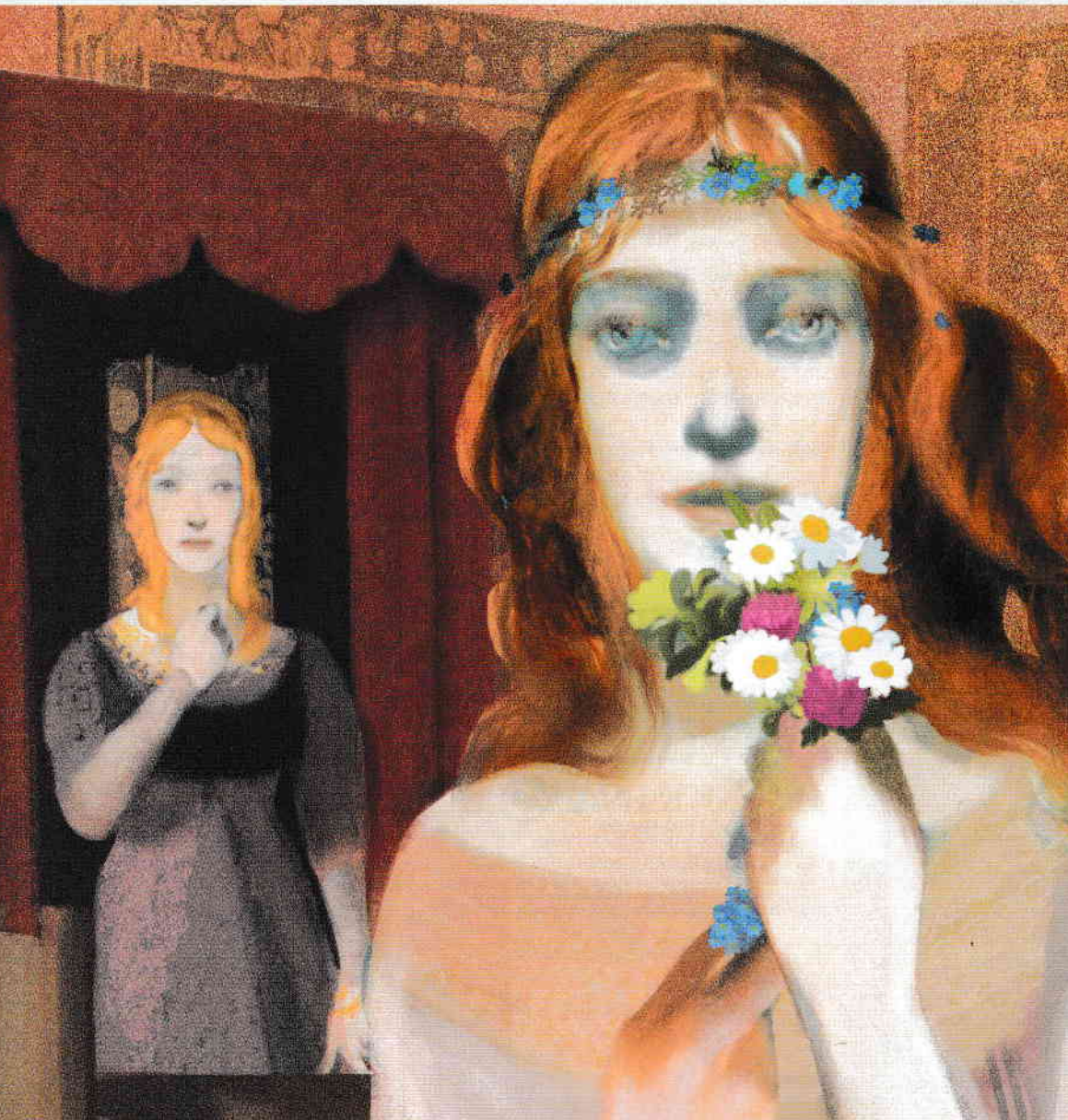
We know  
books

William Shakespeare

# Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

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# Contents

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE		4
CHAPTER ONE	<b>A ghost at Elsinore</b>	11
CHAPTER TWO	<b>Forbidden love</b>	21
CHAPTER THREE	<b>Friends or spies?</b>	36
CHAPTER FOUR	<b>A play to catch a king</b>	47
CHAPTER FIVE	<b>Mistaken identity</b>	59
CHAPTER SIX	<b>Hamlet's punishment</b>	69
CHAPTER SEVEN	<b>The return of Laertes</b>	83
CHAPTER EIGHT	<b>Bitter revenge!</b>	96
DOSSIERS	Revenge in Elizabethan Drama	30
	London in Shakespeare's times	78
CINEMA	<i>Hamlet</i> on the screen	106
ACTIVITIES		10, 16, 20, 26, 35, 42, 46, 54, 58, 65, 68, 74, 82, 90, 95, 103
AFTER READING		110
<b>FIRST</b>	FIRST-style activities	19, 26, 29, 45, 54, 56, 57, 58, 67, 76, 77, 90, 92, 93, 105
T: GRADE 7	Trinity-style activities (Grade 7)	29, 77

n. track

end



These symbols indicate the beginning and end of the passages linked to the listening activities.

## CHAPTER ONE

*A ghost at Elsinore*

**O**ld King Hamlet of Denmark was dead. His death had been sudden and unexpected, so his son, Prince Hamlet, had not been with him. He was at university in Wittenberg when it happened. As soon as he received the news, he hurried back to be with his mother, Queen Gertrude. Hamlet had loved and respected his father very much and he was deeply upset. However, he was only allowed a little time to mourn<sup>1</sup> his father. Less than two months after King Hamlet's death, Gertrude remarried. The new king was called Claudius and he was the old king's brother and Hamlet's uncle.

Hamlet was shocked by his mother's decision. How could she marry again so soon? It wasn't right. It was an insult to the memory of his father. Even worse, she had married his uncle Claudius! Hamlet didn't approve of that at all! He refused to join in the wedding celebrations and continued to dress in black to show that he, at least, was still in mourning. As the days passed he became more and more silent and withdrawn.<sup>2</sup> On the day of the king's first official meeting with the members of his court in the Great Hall, he stood in a corner by himself. He had no interest at all in listening to Claudius.



track 02

1. **mourn** : feel very sad because someone has died.
2. **withdrawn** : very quiet and preferring not to talk to other people.



When the huge doors were finally closed, Claudius stood up and began his speech.

'My brother was a good king,' he said. 'We all miss him. But life goes on and we can't mourn him forever.' He turned to the queen with a smile and continued.

'I decided to marry Gertrude because I know it's what you all wanted.'

There was a short pause before everyone clapped politely.

'Thank you,' the king said. 'Now, let's get down to business. The Norwegians are still causing trouble. Young Prince Fortinbras keeps threatening to attack Denmark if we don't give him back the land that my dead brother took from his father. Well, the threats of that young man don't frighten me! I've written a letter to his uncle, the king of Norway, demanding that he puts a stop to his nephew's plans for once and for all. Cornelius and Voltemand! I'm giving you two the job of delivering it. Here it is. You can leave immediately!'

The two courtiers went up to the king, took the letter and hurried away.

'Now, Laertes,' Claudius went on. 'I believe you have a favour to ask. Is that right?'

Laertes was the son of Polonius, the Lord Chamberlain.<sup>3</sup>

'Yes, my lord,' replied the young man. 'I'd like to return to France to continue my education. My father ordered me to come back to Denmark for your coronation. I have done my duty, so now I'm asking for your permission to leave.'

'What does your father say?' said Claudius turning to his Lord Chamberlain. 'Polonius! Will you let him go?'

'He's asked me so many times, my lord, that in the end I have agreed.'

'In that case, you may go, Laertes. Now, where's Hamlet? I have something to say to him.'

'I'm here, sir.'

'Hamlet! Still looking miserable!' Claudius said, rather impatiently. 'You can't spend your whole life mourning, you know. Everyone has to die sooner or later.'

'Claudius is right, Hamlet,' said Gertrude. 'It's time to take off those black clothes.'

'And as for going back to Wittenberg, I don't think it's a good idea,' said Claudius. 'Both I and your mother want you to stay here, don't we, Gertrude?'

3. **Lord Chamberlain** : official in charge of the royal household.



‘Yes, Hamlet. Please say you’ll stay.’

‘If you ask me to, mother, then I must obey you,’ replied Hamlet.

‘Good! That’s decided, then,’ said Claudius. ‘Business is finished for today. Come on, Gertrude.’

The king and queen, followed by all the courtiers, left the Great Hall and Hamlet was left alone with his thoughts.

‘I’d prefer to be dead!’ he cried. ‘Life has no meaning any more. I can’t believe it! My father’s only been dead for two months and my mother’s already married again! Oh, women are so weak! Even an animal would have mourned for longer. And she’s married Claudius! A man who is the exact opposite of my father! How could she? It’s sure to end badly.’

Just at that moment, the door opened and Horatio, his old friend from university, came in. There were two castle guards with him.

‘Horatio!’ Hamlet exclaimed, a smile brightening his face for once. ‘How good to see you! But why aren’t you in Wittenberg?’

‘I wanted to come to your father’s funeral, Hamlet.’

‘My mother’s wedding, you mean,’ replied Hamlet bitterly.

‘It’s true. There wasn’t much time between them.’

‘They were so close together that we ate the leftovers<sup>4</sup> from the funeral at the wedding banquet!’

‘Your father was a great king,’ said Horatio.

‘He was a perfect human being,’ said Hamlet, sinking back into melancholy.<sup>5</sup> ‘I’ll never know a man like him again.’

‘Hamlet, I have to tell you something,’ said Horatio very seriously. ‘I think I saw him last night.’

‘Who? My father?’

Hamlet’s ‘melancholic expression quickly turned to one of shock, then suspicion.

‘Is this a joke, Horatio? My father’s dead.’

‘Calm down and I’ll explain everything.’

Horatio took hold of his friend’s arm and, as they walked around the Great Hall, he told him what had happened.

‘Those two guards over there told me they had seen a ghost while they were

4. **leftovers** : food remaining at the end of a meal.

5. **melancholy** : sadness.

**1 Comprehension check**

Match the beginnings of the sentences (1-6) to the endings (A-F).

- 1  Two months after old King Hamlet died
- 2  Claudius gave his permission for
- 3  Hamlet couldn't understand why
- 4  Horatio saw the old king's ghost but
- 5  Hamlet was afraid when
- 6  His father's ghost told Hamlet that

- A his mother had married again so soon.
- B he had been poisoned by his brother.
- C his wife married his brother Claudius.
- D it didn't say anything to him.
- E Laertes to return to France.
- F the ghost told him to avenge his murder.

**2 Reference**

Who, what or when do the underlined words refer to? Write the answers in the spaces (1-6) below the sentences.

- 1 Claudius: 'We all miss him.'
- 2 Claudius: 'Will you let him go?'
- 3 Horatio: 'There wasn't much time between them.'
- 4 Hamlet: 'He was a perfect human being.'
- 5 Horatio: 'This is when it usually appears.'
- 6 Ghost: 'While I was sleeping in the garden, he poured poison in my ear and killed me.'

- |         |         |         |
|---------|---------|---------|
| 1 ..... | 3 ..... | 5 ..... |
| 2 ..... | 4 ..... | 6 ..... |

**3 Characters**

Work with a partner. Decide together which adjective in the list best describes the character. Choose one word only.

- 1 Hamlet: arrogant • brave • cheerful • rude • sensitive
- 2 Claudius: ambitious • jealous • patient • realistic • selfish
- 3 Laertes: creative • determined • easy-going • independent • shy