

# Hamlet

A One Act Comedy  
Adapted from Shakespeare  
by Gerald P. Murphy

## HAMLET (YOUTH VERSION)

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HAMLET (YOUTH VERSION)

Characters:

Shakespeare/Ghost

Francisca

Horatio

Macella

Hamlet

King

Queen

Polonius

Rosencrantz

Guildenstern

Player One/Gonzago

Player Two/Queen

Player Three/Prince

Player Four/Poisoner

Player Five/Narrator

Ophelia

Peasants/Onlookers/Servants:

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# HAMLET

*Elsinore Caste, Denmark, but really just a blank stage.*

**SHAKESPEARE.** This is the first draft of Hamlet by me, William Shakespeare. Originally, I had planned it as a one act show. However, the other actors in my company added a line here, a soliloquy there, and pretty soon it became a tragedy and a travesty of my original plan. Also, some of the local unemployed actors demanded parts in the show and inevitably it got out of hand. When you work in theatre you work with what you have, so you have to make lots of compromises. However, the dream of putting on my original show never died with me. So here tonight is my original Hamlet, my original one act version without all the extra baggage. It's still the same show and the same plot that everyone is familiar with. Like the longer version, Hamlet is a young Danish prince. His father, who has died recently, was the king. His mother remarries quickly to the old king's brother, who is now the new king. Hamlet has issues with this situation. We take you now to the castle of Elsinore in Denmark. It is midnight. Francisca, Marcella, and Horatio stand sentry as Hamlet approaches. I get to play the ghost of Hamlet's father! *(Shakespeare exits as Francisca, Marcella, Horatio, and Hamlet enter.)*

**FRANCISCA.** We have something we must tell to Hamlet. It's really strange!

**MARCELLA.** There's a ghost who comes to us each night.

**FRANCISCA.** And the ghost looks just like Hamlet's father. He really does!

**MARCELLA.** Except he looks like he's been rotting away just a bit.

**HORATIO.** He's a quiet ghost. Never says a word.

**FRANCISCA.** We suspect he'll only speak to Hamlet. We really do!

**HAMLET.** By my soul, this seems extremely absurd! *(Ghost appears as all but Hamlet exit in fear.)*

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**GHOST.** Oh, I am the spirit of your father, and I'm doomed to haunt these castle walls till the crimes against me are atoned for and that creep who is your uncle falls!

**HAMLET.** That's neat. It's a ghost who rhymes!

**GHOST.** For it was your uncle dear who killed me just so he could further his career and your mother married him so quickly after he dropped poison in my ear! (*Ghost exits.*)

**HAMLET.** Boy, oh boy! He really put it to me, but what really bothers me the most is that now I'm expected to believe the rhyming ravings of a ghost. If he's telling the truth, it means it I have to bump off my uncle! But what if this is all a figment of my imagination? How can I kill my uncle based on this? This could all be some weird trick! I'm so confused! I'm so confused! (*Hamlet exits as King and Queen enter.*)

**KING.** Go ahead! Go ahead! Call me a miser! Call me a cheapskate!

**QUEEN.** I said nothing of the kind. All I said was that you might have left a bigger tip for the cook.

**KING.** What's this all about? The cook is my personal servant. I give him food, clothing and shelter. In return, he has to cook my meals. Kings don't give tips. They are above that sort of thing. He's lucky I gave him anything!

**QUEEN.** But you only left a penny! What kind of a tip is a penny?

**KING.** Okay, Gertrude, what sort of a tip should I give?

**QUEEN.** The old king gave fifteen percent. I recommended twenty percent, but at least he gave fifteen.

**KING.** Fifteen percent of what?

**QUEEN.** What do you mean?

**KING.** I mean, where do you get the fifteen? Fifteen percent of my treasury? Fifteen percent of my defense budget? Where does this fifteen percent come from?

**QUEEN.** Oh, Claudius!

**KING.** They're lucky I let them have a job cooking my food. There are plenty of serfs out there willing to cook for free for a chance to lick the spoons!

**QUEEN.** Okay, Claudius! I'm sorry I brought it up!

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**KING.** (*Contrite*) Did I hurt your feelings, Gerty? I didn't mean to do that!

**QUEEN.** No, I shouldn't interfere with you. You're the king. It's all my fault!

**KING.** It's not your fault, Gerty. It's my nerves. Our meals have been a little edgy lately, especially around your son.

**QUEEN.** Has Hamlet been a problem again?

**KING.** Your sonny boy is acting like quite the sad sack lately. Do you think he's gone off the deep end?

**QUEEN.** Of course not! He's still mourning his father's death. It's normal in a young man.

**KING.** I don't care how normal this is supposed to be, I'm very uncomfortable around him. Do you think this has anything to do with you marrying me so quickly after the funeral?

**QUEEN.** Maybe yes, maybe no. I think he's just confused. He's at that age, you know? He's very young to lose his father.

**KING.** But the sulking and the feeling sorry for himself! It has got to stop! It's like he's constantly whining like a little baby who needs his diaper changed! Oh, look at me! I'm so sad. My name is Hamlet and my daddy died. Please change my diaper!

**QUEEN.** He isn't that bad, Claudius.

**KING.** He is so! He's driving me nuts!

**QUEEN.** Maybe we could get old Polonius to check him out.

**KING.** I don't know. Polonius doesn't seem very sharp lately. He's so old he has Adam and Eve's autographs. I think he's losing it.

**QUEEN.** I know he's old, but he's known Hamlet since he was a baby. Plus, his daughter Ophelia and Hamlet seem to have a thing going.

**KING.** Really? Hamlet and Ophelia? Well, at least Hamlet has good taste in girls.

**QUEEN.** What are you saying?

**KING.** I'm just saying Ophelia is very cute. I can see why Hamlet might like her.

**QUEEN.** How about you?

**KING.** Gerty, Gerty, Gerty! You know you're the only one for me!

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**QUEEN.** I better be. And don't you be making googoo eyes around Ophelia.

**KING.** Nothing could be further from my mind. Nothing!

**QUEEN.** Maybe we should send for his old school chums, Rosenstern and Guidercrantz.

**KING.** Or was it Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? Either way, they might cheer him up. And maybe they could find out what's bugging him. I'll have a letter dispatched to them right away.

**QUEEN.** And don't forget old Polonius. He might help. Especially if you tip him well. He likes big tips, Claudius, at least twenty per cent!

**KING.** I'm on it. Gerty! I'm on it! *(King exits.)*

**QUEEN.** When did my Hamlet start whining like a spoiled brat? He's young; he's a prince; he's rich; he's handsome! I hear that Ophelia is nuts about him. What does he have to complain about? Why does he go sulking around here like some spoiled brat? He should be gathering up the flowers while he may. He has no reason to be so sad about his father's death. We all have to die some day. Did he think the old guy would live forever? Is he mad because the new king offered me a ring? Did he expect me to walk around wearing a long black dress for the rest of my life? I'm a vibrant woman. I'm not about to live the rest of my life all alone. Get with the program, Hamlet! Wake up and smell the roses! Claudius was the best thing that ever happened to me! He's a hunk! He makes my heart beat faster. Your old man was a rainy day in November. Claudius is a sunny day in May! If you want to be sad about my happiness, go ahead! But don't expect me to dump Claudius. He's my man! He's my man! *(Queen exits as Hamlet enters.)*

**HAMLET.** To be, or not to be; that is the question: Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing them, to die: to sleep like a creep in the deep. T'will make me weep! Wow, what was that all about? Maybe I should lay off the fancy poetry and get down to the bare bones of my problem. I'm supposed to avenge my father. I'm supposed to kill my uncle – on the word of a ghost! Am I going crazy? Suppose I kill my uncle and it turns out that the ghost was just some nonsense in my mind? Like a talking mirage? I'm so confused! You know, I'm so depressed I



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might be better off dead, like my father. At least I'd know some peace. But my father isn't exactly at peace if he's hanging around castle walls every night telling me that my uncle killed him and that I should kill my uncle! Did you hear that? He said I should kill my uncle! Well then, that's what I should do! But what if he's innocent? I'm so confused! I'm so confused! (*Polonius enters as Hamlet takes out a slim book to read.*)

**POLONIUS.** How are you, Lord Hamlet?

**HAMLET.** Fine. And who are you?

**POLONIUS.** Don't you know me, my lord? I have known you since you were a baby.

**HAMLET.** (*Coming close to Polonius and sniffing him.*) You smell like a fishmonger.

**POLONIUS.** Not I, my lord. I had a hot bath not six months ago.

**HAMLET.** Would have fooled me.

**POLONIUS.** What are you reading?

**HAMLET.** Oh, just a book full of lies. It says here that old men have grey beards; that their faces are wrinkled; and that they are generally stupid old fools!

**POLONIUS.** I see that I'm not getting anywhere here. My honourable lord, I will most humbly take my leave of you.

**HAMLET.** You cannot, sir, take from me anything that I will more willingly part with!

**POLONIUS.** Oh, I meant to tell you something before you called me a smelly fishmonger.

**HAMLET.** Yes, Mr. Smelly Fishmonger?

**POLONIUS.** Two of your old friends from university are here. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

**HAMLET.** My old school mates! I'll be glad to see them!

**POLONIUS.** (*Aside*) There's no way I will ever allow Ophelia to get involved with this nut case! (*Polonius exits as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter.*)

**HAMLET.** Rosencrantz! Guildenstern! What brings you here to Elsinore Castle?

**ROSENCRANTZ.** Just to visit you, old friend, old buddy!

**HAMLET.** Really?

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**GUILDENSTERN.** Right! Just to visit you. What other reason would we have, old pal, old chum?

**HAMLET.** Okay, you dimwits. I know the King and Queen have sent for you.

**ROSENCRANTZ.** Then why did you ask?

**HAMLET.** I knew you were sent for, but I don't know why.

**GUILDENSTERN.** I think we were sent to get you out of your bad mood.

**ROSENCRANTZ.** Evidently the King and Queen worry that you are sinking into a hole you won't get out of.

**GUILDENSTERN.** But we know just the thing to bring a smile to your face!

**ROSENCRANTZ.** Yes, we ran into some actors on the way here.

**GUILDENSTERN.** And we invited them here!

**ROSENCRANTZ.** They are ever so entertaining!

**GUILDENSTERN.** Oh, what great fun they will be! Just you wait and see!

**ROSENCRANTZ.** They are so amusing!

**GUILDENSTERN.** What delightful diversions they create!

**ROSENCRANTZ.** They are simply the most wonderful and enthralling thespians in the universe!

**GUILDENSTERN.** Just you wait and see!

**ROSENCRANTZ.** They frolic about the stage with such blissful abandon!

**GUILDENSTERN.** I can hardly stop myself from chortling right now!

**ROSENCRANTZ.** Oh, what laughter will fill the air as these masters of mayhem parade before us!

**GUILDENSTERN.** Oh, what larks we shall have!

**ROSENCRANTZ.** Happiness and joy shall burst from your heart!

**HAMLET.** So, tell me, are they any good at all?

**GUILDENSTERN.** So so.

**ROSENCRANTZ.** They are passable entertainment.

**GUILDENSTERN.** I couldn't take a whole night of them. They're good for about a half an hour or so. Then they begin to get annoying. You know how it is with actors.

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**ROSENCRANTZ.** If you give them any praise, their heads swell and they begin to believe their own publicity. But like Guildenstern said, they might amuse you for twenty minutes.

**HAMLET.** Perhaps that's all I will need.

**GUILDENSTERN.** We must beg your leave. The King and Queen demand our presence. *(Noises offstage, laughter and dramatic voices quoting lines from other Shakespeare plays. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern exit as Polonius enters.)*

**POLONIUS.** My lord, I have news for you.

**HAMLET.** My lord, I have news you. When you mix red paint with white paint, it becomes pink paint! Imagine that!

**POLONIUS.** The actors are come hither, my lord. The best actors in the world, either for proscenium stage, thrust stage, or theater in the round.

**HAMLET.** What about found spaces?

**POLONIUS.** Found spaces?

**HAMLET.** I want them to perform in front of the King and Queen. Can they perform in an open space? I'm not about to build a stage for them!

**POLONIUS.** Here they are now. *(Actors enter.)*

**PLAYER ONE.** My lord!

**HAMLET.** Nice to see you!

**POLONIUS.** I'm out of here, Hamlet!

**HAMLET.** Come again when you can't stay so long! *(Polonius exits.)*

**HAMLET.** Can you play "The Murder of Gonzago"?

**PLAYER TWO.** Certainly.

**HAMLET.** Good, but I want you to insert a few lines to the sketch.

**PLAYER ONE.** Oh, oh!

**HAMLET.** What the problem?

**PLAYER TWO.** We're not so good at adlibbing, my lord. This could really throw us off.

**HAMLET.** It's just a few lines!

**PLAYER ONE.** Do you promise? The last time this happened we were supposed to add a few jokes and we ended up having to memorize Twelfth Night and the balcony scene from Romeo and Juliet in two hours! It was horrible.

**HAMLET.** I promise to keep it short.

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**PLAYER TWO.** We're not all that smart, you know!

**HAMLET.** I know. You're just actors, but you have to come through for me! Can you do it?

**PLAYER ONE.** Yes, my lord. (*Players exit.*)

**HAMLET.** Now I am alone. You can tell that because there are no other people on stage just now! I have heard that guilty people sitting at a play see crimes on stage that make them feel guilty for their own crimes. For instance, an evil mother-in-law while watching *The Wizard of Oz* might suddenly say, "Hey, that witch up there is just like me! She's evil and rotten and deserves to die! Just as I do!" So this Murder of Gonzago is a lot like how my poor old daddy died. And if my uncle, the new king, looks guilty during this play, I'll know that he deserves to die! Yes, yes! The play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king! (*Hamlet exits and Shakespeare enters.*)

**SHAKESPEARE.** "The plays the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king." A brilliant example of alliteration! When I wrote this part, I thought this was a pretty smart plan: Hamlet would get off his duff and avenge his sweet daddy. And it's just about time. The King Claudius isn't sitting around talking to actors. He's sending Hamlet to England to have him murdered secretly. Of course, if Hamlet is killed in England, the new king won't be too upset. In fact, there might be only one person who would really miss him – Ophelia. Ophelia and he were very lovey-dovey before Hamlet started acting so strange. Now her father, Polonius, and her brother, Laertes, want her to stay away from Hamlet because he's acting so weird. But Ophelia likes offbeat characters, since she's pretty weird herself. (*Enter Ophelia.*)

**OPHELIA.** It's not very nice to call me weird, Shakespeare! I'm just a little high strung. Besides, Hamlet is my first true love. A girl never gets over the first guy, no matter how strange he seems to others. After all, true love conquers all, doesn't it? (*Ophelia exits.*)

**SHAKESPEARE.** Meanwhile, it is opening night of the play within a play and Hamlet enters with Horatio and explains what he is up to. We're skipping the part here where Hamlet gives last minute instructions to the actors because Hamlet's a lot like one of those twitchy and nervous directors who can't leave well enough alone. It gets kind of boring to hear

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a director belabor the obvious. (*Shakespeare exits as Hamlet and Horatio enter with players.*)

**PLAYER ONE.** Here, sweet lord, at your service.

**HAMLET.** There is a play tonight before the King. Make sure you remember my new lyrics!

**PLAYER TWO.** Certainly, my lord.

**HAMLET.** (*To Horatio*) One scene of it comes near the circumstance of my father's death, Horatio. Observe my uncle and see how he reacts!

**HORATIO.** As you wish, Hamlet. (*The King, Queen, Polonius, Ophelia and others enter.*)

**HAMLET.** Oh, the king has made his entrance. (*To a Player*) Get you a place, (*to King.*) Your Majesty!

**KING.** How fares our cousin Hamlet?

**HAMLET.** Excellent, your majesty. Polonius, be the players ready?

**POLONIUS.** Aye, my lord. They stay upon your patience.

**QUEEN.** Come hither, my son Hamlet, sit by me.

**HAMLET.** No, good mother. Here's metal more attractive. The fair Ophelia.

**OPHELIA.** You are merry, my lord.

**HAMLET.** What should a man do but be merry? For, look you, how cheerfully my mother looks, and my father died within these two hours.

**OPHELIA.** Nay 'tis twice two months, my lord.

**HAMLET.** So long? O heavens, die two months ago, and not forgotten yet?

**OPHELIA.** Are you being sarcastic, Hamlet? You know I'm a bit naïve

**HAMLET.** Just a little joke, my dear! Just a little joke!

**PLAYER ONE.** We bring you now tonight's entertainment – The Murder of Gonzago! (*Players mime the actions of the following poem which is narrated by one of the players. Players also include Gonzago, his brother, the queen, and a prince.*)

**PLAYER/NARRATOR.** *Gonzago was a noble king  
who had a wonderful queen!*

*They shared a love that was as true as you have ever seen.*

*They had a little darling prince; a handsome boy was he.*

*And sometimes they would all sit down and have a cup of tea!*

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*And have a cup of tea!*

*Gonzago had a brother and this brother was quite mean.*

*He hated his big brother and he had a thing for the queen.*

*Gonzago had no way to know that he had much to fear*

*But when he fell asleep he got some poison in his ear!*

*Some poison in his ear. (The King stands looking horrified.)*

*The Queen she acted quite upset because her king was dead.*

*But after he was in the grave, the queen was soon to wed.*

*She fell in love with you-know-who before the month was done.*

*They danced upon Gonzago's grave and had a ton of fun!*

*And had a ton of fun!*

**OPHELIA.** The King rises.

**HAMLET.** He has such a guilty look about him.

**KING.** End the show immediately!

**POLONIUS.** Players! Players! The show is over!

**PLAYER/NARRATOR.** We're sorry, my liege, if our sketch has offended thee!

**KING.** Away! Away! *(All but Hamlet and Horatio exit.)*

**HAMLET.** I think I have his number now!

**HORATIO.** And I saw the same thing you saw!

**HAMLET.** He really jumped when they did the poison ear bit!

**HORATIO.** He looked as guilty as a puppy beside a pile of poo! *(Sound effect – twelve gongs as Horatio exits as Hamlet strides to down stage centre.)*

**HAMLET.** 'Tis now the very witching time of night, when churchyards yawn and hell itself breaths out contagion to this world. Now could I drink hot blood and do such bitter business as the dawn would quake to look on. I think it's time I paid a visit to my mother! *(Hamlet exits and Shakespeare enters.)*

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