



Hamlet was the only son of the King of Denmark. He loved his father and mother dearly—and was happy in the love of a sweet lady named Ophelia. Her father, Polonius, was the King’s Chamberlain.

While Hamlet was away studying at Wittenberg, his father died. Young Hamlet hastened home in great grief to hear that a serpent¹ had stung the King, and that he was dead. The young Prince had loved his father so tenderly that you may judge what he felt when he found that the Queen, before yet the King had been laid in the ground a month, had determined to marry again—and to marry the dead King’s brother.

Hamlet refused to put off mourning² for the wedding.

“It is not only the black I wear on my body,” he said, “that proves my loss. I wear mourning in my heart for my dead father. His son at least remembers him, and grieves³ still.”

Then said Claudius the King’s brother, “This grief is unreasonable. Of course you must sorrow at the loss of your father, but . . .”

“Ah,” said Hamlet, bitterly, “I cannot in one little month forget those I love.”

With that the Queen and Claudius left him, to make merry over their wedding, forgetting the poor good King who had

1 serpent [ˈsɜːr.pənt] (n.) a snake, especially a large one 大蛇

2 mourning [ˈmɔːr.nɪŋ] (n.) the period during which somebody’s death is mourned 服喪

3 grieve [ɡriːv] (v.) to feel or express great sadness 悲傷

002 been so kind to them both.

And Hamlet, left alone, began to wonder and to question as to what he ought to do. For he could not believe the story about the snake-bite. It seemed to him all too plain that the wicked Claudius had killed the King, so as to get the crown and marry the Queen. Yet he had no proof, and could not accuse Claudius. And while he was thus thinking came Horatio, a fellow student of his, from Wittenberg.

“What brought you here?” asked Hamlet, when he had greeted his friend kindly.



Hamlet, Prince of Denmark



“I came, my lord, to see your father’s funeral⁴.”

“I think it was to see my mother’s wedding,” said Hamlet, bitterly. “My father! We shall not look upon his like again.”

“My lord,” answered Horatio, “I think I saw him yesternight⁵.”

Then, while Hamlet listened in surprise, Horatio told how he, with two gentlemen of the guard, had seen the King’s ghost on the battlements⁶.

Hamlet went that night, and true enough, at midnight, the ghost of the King, in the armor he had been wont⁷ to wear, appeared on the battlements in the chill⁸ moonlight.

Hamlet was a brave youth. Instead of running away from the ghost he spoke to it—and when it beckoned⁹ him he followed it to a quiet place, and there the ghost told him that what he had suspected was true.

4 funeral ['fju:nərəl] (n.) a ceremony for burying or burning the body of a dead person 喪禮

5 yesternight ['jestənaɪt] (ad.) on the last night 〔古〕昨天夜裡

6 battlements ['bætlmənts] (n.) (pl.) a low wall around the top of a castle, that has spaces to shoot guns or arrows through
設有槍砲眼的城垛

7 wont [wɑ:nt] (a.) be accustomed 習慣於

8 chill [tʃɪl] (a.) unpleasantly cold 寒冷的

9 beckon ['bekən] (v.) to move your hand or head in a way that tells someone to come nearer 招手示意



Hamlet and his father's ghost

004 The wicked Claudius had indeed killed his good brother the King, by dropping poison into his ear as he slept in his orchard¹⁰ in the afternoon.

“And you,” said the ghost, “must avenge¹¹ this cruel murder—on my wicked brother. But do nothing against the Queen—for I have loved her, and she is your mother. Remember me.”

Then seeing the morning approach¹², the ghost vanished¹³.

“Now,” said Hamlet, “there is nothing left but revenge¹⁴.”

10 orchard [ˈɔːrtʃərd] (n.) area of fruit or nut trees 果樹園

11 avenge [əˈvendʒ] (v.) to inflict injury in return for 報仇

12 approach [əˈprəʊtʃ] (v.) come near 接近

13 vanish [ˈvænɪʃ] (v.) to disappear suddenly 突然不見

005 Remember thee¹⁵—I will remember nothing else—books, pleasure, youth—let all go—and your commands¹⁶ alone live on my brain.”

So when his friends came back he made them swear to keep the secret of the ghost, and then went in from the battlements, now gray with mingled¹⁷ dawn and moonlight, to think how he might best avenge his murdered father.

The shock of seeing and hearing his father’s ghost made him feel almost mad, and for fear that his uncle might notice that he was not himself, he determined to hide his mad longing for revenge under a pretended madness in other matters.

And when he met Ophelia, who loved him—and to whom he had given gifts, and letters, and many loving words—he behaved so wildly to her, that she could not but think him mad.



Hamlet, Ophelia,
Queen and Claudius



For she loved him so that she could not believe he would be as cruel as this, unless he were quite mad. So she told her father, and showed him a pretty letter from Hamlet. And in the letter was much folly¹⁸, and this pretty verse¹⁹ —



Hamlet and Ophelia

*Doubt that the stars are fire;
Doubt that the sun doth move;
Doubt truth to be a liar;
But never doubt I love.*

And from that time everyone believed that the cause of Hamlet's supposed madness was love.

- 14 revenge [rɪ'vɛndʒ] (n.) harm done to someone as a punishment for harm that they have done to someone else 報仇
- 15 thee [ði:] (n.) objective case of thou 〔古〕(thou 的受格) 你
- 16 command [kə'mænd] (n.) an order given by somebody in authority 命令
- 17 mingle ['mɪŋɡəl] (v.) to mix or combine 混合
- 18 folly ['fɒ:li] (n.) stupidity, or a stupid action, idea 愚蠢
- 19 verse [vɜ:rs] (n.) writing which is arranged in short lines with a regular rhythm; poetry 韻文



Poor Hamlet was very unhappy. He longed to obey his father's ghost—and yet he was too gentle and kindly to wish to kill another man, even his father's murderer. And sometimes he wondered whether, after all, the ghost spoke truly.

Just at this time some actors came to the Court, and Hamlet ordered them to perform a certain play before the King and Queen. Now, this play was the story of a man who had been murdered in his garden by a near relation, who afterwards married the dead man's wife.

You may imagine the feelings of the wicked King, as he sat on his throne, with the Queen beside him and all his Court around, and saw, acted on the stage, the very wickedness that he had himself done.

And when, in the play, the wicked relation poured poison into the ear of the sleeping man, the wicked Claudius suddenly rose, and staggered²⁰ from the room—the Queen and others following.



Just at this time some actors came to the Court.



Then said Hamlet to his friends—“Now I am sure the ghost spoke true. For if Claudius had not done this murder, he could not have been so distressed²¹ to see it in a play.”

Now the Queen sent for Hamlet, by the King’s desire, to scold him for his conduct²² during the play, and for other matters; and Claudius, wishing to know exactly what happened, told old Polonius to hide himself behind the hangings²³ in the Queen’s room.

And as they talked, the Queen got frightened at Hamlet’s rough, strange words, and cried for help, and Polonius behind the curtain cried out too.



In the play, the wicked relation poured poison into the ear of the sleeping man.

20 stagger [ˈstæɡər] (v.) to walk or move with a lack of balance as if you are going to fall 搖搖晃晃

21 distressed [dɪˈstrest] (a.) very upset 痛苦的

22 conduct [kənˈdʌkt] (n.) the way someone behaves 行為

23 hangings [ˈhæŋɪŋz] (n.) (pl.) a large piece of cloth, often with a picture on it, that is hung on a wall for decoration 簾子



Hamlet, thinking it was the King who was hidden there, thrust with his sword at the hangings, and killed, not the King, but poor old Polonius.

So now Hamlet had offended his uncle and his mother, and by bad hap²⁴ killed his true love's father.

“Oh! what a rash²⁵ and bloody deed is this,” cried the Queen.

And Hamlet answered bitterly, “Almost as bad as to kill a king, and marry his brother.”

Then Hamlet told the Queen plainly all his thoughts and how he knew of the murder, and

begged her, at least, to have no more friendship or kindness of the base²⁶ Claudius, who had killed the good King.

And as they spoke the King's ghost again appeared before Hamlet, but the Queen could not see it. So when the ghost had gone, they parted.



Hamlet thought it was the King who was hidden there.

24 hap [hæp] (n.) chance 機會

25 rash [ræʃ] (a.) careless or unwise, without thought for what might happen or result 行為魯莽的

26 base [beɪs] (a.) not honorable and lacking in morals 卑鄙的



When the Queen told Claudius what had passed, and how Polonius was dead, he said, “This shows plainly that Hamlet is mad, and since he has killed the Chancellor, it is for his own safety that we must carry out our plan, and send him away to England.”

So Hamlet was sent, under charge²⁷ of two courtiers²⁸ who served the King, and these bore letters to the English Court, requiring that Hamlet should be put to death.

But Hamlet had the good sense to get at these letters, and put in others instead, with the names of the two courtiers who were so ready to betray him.

Then, as the vessel went to England, Hamlet escaped on board a pirate ship, and the two wicked courtiers left him to his fate, and went on to meet theirs.



Hamlet escaped on board a pirate ship.

27 charge [tʃɑ:rdʒ] (n.) the responsibility or duty of looking after somebody or something 看管

28 courtier [ˈkɔ:rtɪr] (n.) one who is attached to a royal court 朝臣



Hamlet hurried home, but in the meantime a dreadful thing had happened. Poor pretty Ophelia, having lost her lover and her father, lost her wits²⁹ too, and went in sad madness about the Court, with straws, and weeds, and flowers in her hair, singing strange scraps³⁰ of songs, and talking poor, foolish, pretty talk with no heart of meaning to it.



Ophelia has lost her wits.

And one day, coming to a stream where willows³¹ grew, she tried to bang a flowery garland³² on a willow, and fell into the water with all her flowers, and so died.

29 wits [wɪts] (n.) (pl.) the basic human power of intelligent thought and perception 理智

30 scrap [skræp] (n.) a small irregular piece of something or a small amount of information 片段

31 willow ['wɪləʊ] (n.) a tree that grows near water and has long, thin branches that hang down 柳樹

32 garland ['gɑ:rlənd] (n.) a circle made of flowers and leaves worn around the neck or head as a decoration 花環

