

# HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

*By*

*William L. Walker Montgomerie*

# HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

© 2025 by William L. Walker

**CAUTION:** Professionals and Amateurs are hereby warned that performance of **HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY** is subject to payment of a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of The United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth) and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including without limitation professional/amateur stage rights, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all other forms of mechanical, electronic and digital reproduction, transmission and distribution, such as CD, DVD, the Internet, private and file-sharing networks, information storage and retrieval systems, photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed upon the matter of readings, permission of which must be obtained from the Author in writing.

The English language stock and amateur stage performance rights in the United States, its territories, possessions and Canada for **HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY** are controlled exclusively by Next Stage Press. No professional or nonprofessional performance of the Play may be given without obtaining in advance written permission and paying the requisite fee.

## SPECIAL NOTE

Anyone receiving permission to produce **HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY** is required to give credit to the Author as sole and exclusive Author of the Play on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. The name of the Author must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and in size of type equal to 50% of the size of the largest, most prominent letter used for the title of the Play. No person, firm, or entity may receive credit larger or more prominent than that accorded the Author.

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

### **"The Quill and Heart That Speak Thy Name"**

O Michael, thou art love's most steadfast light,  
A flame that warms me through both storm and sun.  
Thy voice, both gentle whisper and bold might,  
Doth shape my dreams ere yet they are begun.

Mine inspiration, ever dost thou be,  
A muse who stirs the depths of heart and mind.  
Through thee, my soul knows art and liberty,  
And in thy gaze, sweet truth and strength I find.

No kinder critic e'er could guide mine way,  
With wisdom laced in love's unyielding grace.  
Thou lift'st mine eyes when doubt would bid them stray,  
And in thy presence, all my fears erase.

So shall my pen and heart both sing of thee,  
For thou art all—my love, my melody.

# HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

## **Synopsis**

Set in the eerie Elsinore Center for Restorative Care, a 1950s asylum, *Hamlet: A Horatio Story* reimagines Shakespeare's tragedy through HORATIO's fractured mind. As Hamlet descends into vengeance, HORATIO struggles to bear witness, torn between loyalty and a truth distorted by grief. The asylum's sterile halls mirror Denmark's decay, where love, betrayal, and madness blur reality. Through HORATIO's eyes, memory and trauma intertwine—are events as they were, or as his mind has reshaped them? This adaptation invites audiences into a world where ghosts linger not just in shadows, but in the depths of the human soul.

## **Casting Statement for *Hamlet: A Horatio Story***

In this adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, we fully embrace an inclusive approach to casting, where roles are not confined by traditional gender assignments or cultural expectations. Every character—whether HORATIO, Hamlet, Gertrude, or Polonius—can be played by actors of any gender identity, race, or cultural background. This flexibility allows for a deeper exploration of the text and its themes, highlighting the universal nature of the story's struggles, relationships, and humanity. By inviting performers to interpret these iconic characters in ways that transcend traditional boundaries, we ensure that each role is imbued with unique voices and authenticity. Our goal is to celebrate the diversity of the human experience, creating a production that is vibrant, dynamic, and reflective of the world we live in today.

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

On November 13, 2024, *Hamlet: A Horatio Story*, an original adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, was first produced on the Duane Allen Stage in the Ray E. Karrer Theater at Paris Junior College. This unique adaptation brought to life the classic tragedy through HORATIO's perspective, immersing audiences in a reimagined narrative set within an evocative 1950s insane asylum.

The original cast featured:

- **HORATIO** – Kai Fornof
- **HAMLET** – Daniel Martinez
- **CLAUDIUS/GHOST** – Jeff Stewart
- **GERTRUDE** – Lisa Martin
- **LAERTES** – T.K. McGee
- **OPHELIA** – Rylie Johnston
- **POLONIUS** – Tim Wood (Nov. 13)/Will Walker (Nov. 14)/Javier Mata (Nov. 15-17)
- **ROSENCRANTZ** – Jeri Howe
- **GUILDENSTERN** – Derek Dacus
- **CORNELIUS/FIRST GRAVEDIGGER/ATTENDANT** – Addison Brown
- **PLAYER KING/SECOND GRAVEDIGGER/ATTENDANT** – Ryan Smith
- **PLAYER QUEEN/DOCTOR/ATTENDANT** – Sally Boswell
- **VOLTEMAND/JASPER/LORD** – Amanda Blouin
- **FRANCISCO/PROLOGUE/ATTENDANT** – Elizabeth Holliefield
- **BARNARDO/OSRIC/ATTENDANT** – Libby Stowell
- **LADY IN WAITING/MESSENGER/MARGORY** – Alyssa Ottmo
- **MARCELLUS/LUCIANUS/SAILOR/ATTENDANT** – Emma Davis
- **MORTIMER** – Collin Henson

Directed by William L. Walker, with stage management by Brenna Mills and assistant stage management by Maegan Martinez, the production also featured light and scenic design by Will Walker and Andy Johnson, Costume Design/Coordination by Brenda Stellpflug Ottmo, Celia Stogner, Dee Jackson, and Alyssa Ottmo, Properties collected and built by Will Walker, Jeff Stewart, Rylie Johnston, Emma Davis, Libby Stowell, and special ghost effects by Jeff Stewart. This inventive retelling captivated audiences, blending Shakespearean tragedy with a thought-provoking modern twist.

### Staging Suggestions

#### Blending Reality and Memory: Horatio's Soliloquies

*As HORATIO begins his soliloquy, the stage transitions into a fragmented blend of memory and reality. A single spotlight isolates HORATIO, casting a long shadow behind him that stretches toward the audience. Around the edges of the stage, faint, distorted projections of Hamlet and other key characters flicker like ghosts of the past, their movements slow and dreamlike.*

*The lighting shifts subtly with his emotions: warm hues for moments of nostalgia, cold, sharp tones for grief or doubt. As HORATIO questions his memories, the flickering projections begin to blur, their features indistinct, emphasizing his uncertainty.*

#### Ghost Scenes: Interaction with the Asylum Setting

*The ghost's entrance is marked by an abrupt change in the atmosphere. The asylum lights flicker and dim, casting jagged shadows of bars and windows onto the walls, creating the impression of a crumbling prison. A cold mist seeps across the floor, swirling around Hamlet's feet as if the ghost's presence is pulling him into another realm.*

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

*The ghost appears faint at first, its form merging with the mist, but as it speaks, its outline sharpens. Each word echoes unnaturally, as if reverberating through the walls of the asylum. When the ghost mentions betrayal, the shadows on the walls ripple violently, mimicking the shattering of glass. As it fades, the mist retreats, leaving Hamlet alone in stark, sterile light, the air heavy with unease.*

### **Cast**

#### ***20 M / 10 W / Various***

HORATIO, The Teller of our Tale, Hamlet's friend, and confidant

HAMLET, Prince of Denmark, son of the late King Hamlet and GERTRUDE

GERTRUDE, widow of King Hamlet, now married to Claudius

CLAUDIUS, brother to the late King Hamlet

OPHELIA

LAERTES, her brother

POLONIUS, father of Ophelia and Laertes, councilor to CLAUDIUS

THE GHOST, former king and father to Hamlet (played by the actor playing CLAUDIUS)

MORTIMER, A hooded messenger of sorts

VOLTEMAND

CORNELIUS

ROSENCRANTZ

GUILDENSTERN

OSRIC

FRANCISCO

BARNARDO

MARCELLUS

A Gentleman

JASPER

A LADY IN WAITING to the Queen

MESSENGER

MARGORY, lady to Ophelia

The Players:

PROLOGUE

PLAYER KING

PLAYER QUEEN

LUCIANUS

SAILOR

FIRST GRAVEDIGGER

SECOND GRAVEDIGGER

DOCTOR of Divinity (Priest)

Various ATTENDANTS, Lords, Guards, Musicians, Soldiers, SAILORS,  
Officers

# HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

## PROLOGUE

*In the care ward of the Elsinore Center for Restorative Care. Dark figures wander like lost souls in shadow. At center stage sits a LONE FIGURE in a straitjacket, unnoticed by the others. He gestures toward the shadows that dance upon the walls, his eyes filled with intensity. Rocking back and forth, he repeats the same words, softly at first, then louder.*

**HORATIO.** *(in repetition)* To be or not to be...

To be or not to be...

To be or not to be... *(Abruptly, he stops and looks up.)*

To bear this tale—this weight upon my soul—

Is a burden I did not choose, but must fulfill.

For what I speak tonight is not mere history,

But the story of my friend, my brother in spirit,

Hamlet, noble prince of Denmark. *(He pauses, his gaze distant, as if reliving painful memories.)* A light that burned so brightly,

Now lost to shadows and betrayal.

To stand by him and witness his descent—

This wound within me has yet to heal. *(Horatio's voice grows firmer as he steels himself.)* But I must speak, though each word is pain,

For in his madness, there was a truth

We were all too blind to see.

If my voice can pierce the veil of death,

Let it reach Hamlet's restless spirit—

For though he is gone, his story must be told. *(Looks upward, as if seeking Hamlet's spirit among the shadows. Pause, softer and*

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

*introspective. Members of the ensemble approach in shadow and remove his straitjacket.) Yet even as I speak, I wonder:*

Were these events as I remember them,

Or has the shadow of grief reshaped the truth?

The mind bends under such weight—

What remains is not always as it was.

Do I recount the tale as it happened,

Or as it haunts me in the still of night? *(Horatio retreats into the shadows, watching, as the story begins.)*

### **ACT 1 SCENE 1**

*(The stage is dimly lit. BARNARDO and FRANCISCO, two guards, stand watch at the edge of the asylum grounds. Horatio lingers in the shadows, observing.)*

**BARNARDO.** Who's there?

**FRANCISCO.** No, you answer me! Stand and identify yourself!

*(Horatio steps forward, calm but cautious.)*

**HORATIO.** Peace, friends. It is Horatio—a loyal servant to Denmark.

**FRANCISCO.** Good night, then.

**HORATIO.** Farewell, honest soldier. Who comes to relieve you?

**FRANCISCO.** Barnardo takes over now. Good night. *(He glances around uneasily, shifting his weight.)* By my troth, I do abhor this place. *(Francisco exits. Barnardo approaches Horatio, visibly tense.)*

**BARNARDO.** Welcome, Horatio.

**HORATIO.** Tell me—has it shown itself again tonight?

**BARNARDO.** Yes, just as the star to the west reached its height.

The air turned cold, and there it stood,

A shape that mirrors the late king. *(A ghostly figure flickers in the distance, shrouded in mist. Barnardo points, alarmed.)*

**BARNARDO.** Look there! It's back again!

Does it not look just like Claudius who's dead?



## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**HORATIO.** *(Staring in awe, a chill creeping into his voice)* By heaven, it is... almost identical.

This sight sends shivers through my very bones.

But what foul purpose drives it to haunt the night?

**BARNARDO.** Speak to it, Horatio! You are a scholar—surely, it will heed your voice.

**HORATIO.** *(Stepping forward, gathering his resolve)* What are you, spirit, that walks in death's dark veil?

If there's a reason for your restlessness, speak!

What injustice binds you here? Speak, I charge you! *(The ghost begins to move away, fading into the shadows.)*

**BARNARDO.** It's leaving!

**HORATIO.** Wait! Stay, spirit! I command you—speak! *(The ghost vanishes into the mist, leaving only silence.)*

**BARNARDO.** Gone again, just as before. It never lingers, Never utters a word.

**HORATIO.** *(Pausing, visibly shaken.)* I would not have believed this—Not if my own eyes had not beheld it.

Yet what it portends, I know not... *(He hesitates, looking out into the darkness.)* But did I see it as it truly was?

Or has my mind, bent by grief,

Drawn a shape to match my fears?

What it portends, I know not...

Yet it chills me, as much for its presence

As for the doubt it leaves in its wake.

**BARNARDO.** What can this mean? Why does it appear Each night, with that same ghostly stride?

**HORATIO.** I know not, but I sense a warning—

A shadow of doom that hangs heavy over us all.

Something is rotten at the heart of this kingdom,

And I fear it is but the beginning.

We must tell Hamlet what we've seen.

I am certain this spirit will speak to him.

**BARNARDO.** Aye, he may find words where we found none.

*(Barnardo nods and exits.)*

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**HORATIO.** *(To himself)* A spirit of vengeance, bound by death,  
Seeks an ear that will hear its tale.  
If this specter bears a warning,  
Hamlet must be told, for I fear  
He alone holds the key to whatever dark fate  
Lies ahead for Denmark.  
Heaven help us if it is too late. *(Horatio slips into the shadows, resolute, as the scene ends.)*

### SCENE 2

*Horatio stands alone on the dimly lit stage, still shaken from his encounter with the Ghost. A mist rolls in, and MORTIMER, hooded and shadowed, steps forward quietly. He seems almost to materialize from Horatio's surroundings, his presence both unnerving and familiar.*

**HORATIO.** Who's there? A friend or a phantom in the night?

**MORTIMER.** *(emerging from the mist, his voice calm and knowing)* A friend, if that's what you wish.

But you know me already, Horatio.

I am the voice that whispers when silence falls,  
The shadow that lingers when all else fades.

**HORATIO.** *(visibly unsettled)* You speak in riddles. Show yourself plainly, or leave me to my thoughts.

**MORTIMER.** *(stepping forward, a knowing smile on his lips)*

Your thoughts? Ah, Horatio, they are mine as much as yours.

I am the mirror of your fears,

The weight you carry but cannot name.

**HORATIO.** *(stepping back, unnerved)* What trickery is this? You speak as though you know my mind.

**MORTIMER.** *(moving closer, his tone becoming more insistent)* And why shouldn't I? I've walked these halls with you—

Not in flesh, perhaps, but in the spaces

Between your doubt and your grief.

You saw a ghost tonight, did you not?

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

A king, risen from the grave?

Or was it simply your guilt, given form?

**HORATIO.** (*defensive, trying to shake off the doubt*) I saw what I saw.  
My eyes did not deceive me.

**MORTIMER.** (*with a faint, sad smile*) Your eyes, perhaps.  
But what of your heart, Horatio? What of your mind?  
Memory is a fickle thing—

It bends to the weight of sorrow, reshapes the past to fit the pain.

Tell me, friend, do you trust even yourself? (*Horatio hesitates, visibly shaken by the weight of the question. Mortimer's voice softens, but it is no less insistent, pressing on his fragile psyche.*)

**MORTIMER.** (*softly, almost a whisper*) Think on it, Horatio.  
The truth is rarely as simple as it seems.

And the greatest lies are the ones we tell ourselves. (*Mortimer steps back into the shadows, his form dissolving like smoke. His voice lingers in the air, echoing in Horatio's mind.*)

**MORTIMER.** (*echoing, as if inside Horatio's thoughts*) Think on it,  
Horatio. The truth is rarely as simple as it seems.

And the greatest lies are the ones we tell ourselves. (*Mortimer vanishes into the mist, leaving Horatio standing alone, visibly disturbed and uncertain.*)

**HORATIO.** (*to himself, in a voice tinged with doubt and introspection*)

What specter was that, born of shadow and doubt?

Did he speak truth, or was it my grief given voice?

The ghost... I saw it. I swear I did.

And yet, his words echo in my mind.

Could it be that even memory is not to be trusted?

### SCENE 3

*Horatio steps forward, observing the scene before him.*

**HORATIO.** Friends, take note—this is the heart of Denmark's court,  
Or so I recall. The years cloud memory,  
And the faces of these halls shift like shadows.

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

Was Claudius always so poised, so cunning?  
Or have I, looking back, sharpened his deceit,  
As I sought to make sense of this tragedy?  
Memory twists with time,  
And even I cannot swear to the truth of it. (*Horatio quietly blends into the gathering crowd. A flourish of trumpets. Enter CLAUDIUS, GERTRUDE, members of the Council, POLONIUS, LAERTES, HAMLET, and others, including VOLTEMAND and CORNELIUS.*)

**CLAUDIUS.** Though our dear brother's death still casts a shadow,  
We've chosen to think wisely on his passing  
While also focusing on our own duties.  
That's why, though it brings mixed feelings,  
We've taken our sister-in-law as our wife.

**VOLTEMAND.** Your Majesty, we support your decision completely.  
Though sorrow lingers in Denmark's halls,  
We honor this new union with our full loyalty  
And will uphold your rule for the strength of our land.  
We trust in your wisdom, especially in these trying times.

**CORNELIUS.** Here in court, where grief and duty collide,  
We commit our hearts and minds to your leadership.

Your judgment guides our path,  
And we serve you faithfully, as Denmark's needs require.

**HORATIO.** Your words, noble lords, truly reflect  
The thoughts of every loyal citizen.

Your wisdom unites his kingdom, and we stand firm,  
Ready to follow the course you've set. (*Voltemand and Cornelius bow and exit.*)

**CLAUDIUS.** Now, Laertes, what is it you want?  
Your father's loyalty to the throne is unwavering,  
Just as the head and heart are naturally bound.  
What is your request, Laertes?

**LAERTES.** My lord,  
I came to Denmark willingly to show my duty  
During your coronation. But now that my duty is done,  
I ask your permission to return to France.

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**CLAUDIUS.** Do you have your father's approval? What does Polonius say?

**POLONIUS.** Yes, my lord.

I beg you, grant him leave to go.

**CLAUDIUS.** Go then, Laertes, with my blessing. Take your time  
And enjoy yourself as you wish. (*Turning to Hamlet*)

But now, my dear nephew—and my son—

**HAMLET.** (*aside*) A bit too much family and not enough kindness.

**CLAUDIUS.** Why do you still seem so gloomy?

**HAMLET.** Not gloomy, my lord—I'm just in the spotlight too much.

**GERTRUDE.** Dear Hamlet, stop wearing this dark clothing

And let your eyes look kindly upon Denmark.

Don't keep your eyes lowered

As if searching for your father in the dust.

You know that death is a natural part of life.

Everything that lives must eventually die.

**HAMLET.** Yes, madam, it's common knowledge.

**GERTRUDE.** If it's common,

Why does it seem so personal to you?

**HAMLET.** "Seem," madam? No, it *is*. I don't know "seem."

It's not just my dark clothes,

Or the tears in my eyes,

Or my downcast expression—

Those are just outward signs that can be faked.

What I feel inside goes deeper than appearances;

These are just the outer signs of my grief.

**CLAUDIUS.** It's sweet and commendable, Hamlet,

That you're still mourning your father.

But you must understand, he lost a father too,

And that's the way of the world.

So, drop this pointless sorrow and think of me

As your father now. The world knows

You're next in line for the throne,

And I love you as much as any father would his son.

As for your plans to return to school in Wittenberg,

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

We're against it. We want you to stay here  
With us, where you belong.

**HORATIO.** Your Majesty, if I may say something:

Hamlet's sadness is understandable to those who know him well.

His grief is not a sign of neglect, but of deep love.

*(Aside)* But as I stand here now, I wonder—

Was his madness always so clear?

Did I mistake his grief for something darker,

Or have I, in telling this story,

Stretched his torment to match my own?

**CLAUDIUS.** You speak wisely, Horatio.

Still, we must do our best to lift his spirits and keep him close.

What do you say, Hamlet? Will you stay here and ease our hearts?

**HORATIO.** Yes, my dear friend, your presence here is invaluable.

In this court, we are bound not just by duty,

But by friendship and mutual understanding.

Please, don't turn your back on those who care for you.

**GERTRUDE.** Please, Hamlet, don't ignore your mother's wishes.

Stay with us and don't go back to Wittenberg.

**HAMLET.** I'll do my best to obey you, madam.

**CLAUDIUS.** That's a loving and fair answer.

It warms my heart to hear you agree.

Come, everyone, let's go. *(A flourish of music. Everyone exits except Hamlet and Horatio.)*

**HAMLET.** *(to himself)* Oh, if only this too, too solid flesh would melt,  
Thaw, and dissolve into a mist...

Or that the Everlasting hadn't forbidden suicide!

Oh God, God—

How tired, stale, flat, and pointless

Everything in this world seems to me!

How did it come to this?

Just two months dead—no, not even that long.

Let me not think on it! Frailty, thy name is woman!

A month after his death—before her shoes

Were even worn out from following his funeral procession,

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

She remarried.

Like Niobe, crying oceans of tears—then married my uncle,  
My father's brother.

Oh, such wicked speed, to jump so quickly  
Into an incestuous bed!

This cannot end well.

But I must hold my tongue.

**HORATIO.** Hamlet, as your friend,  
If you ever need someone to listen,  
Remember, I'm here for you.

**HAMLET.** I'm glad to hear that, my friend—or I forget myself!

**HORATIO.** I am always your friend, and at your service.

**HAMLET.** You are more than a servant; you're a true friend.  
But what brings you back from Wittenberg, Horatio?

**HORATIO.** My lord, I came to see your father's funeral.

**HAMLET.** Don't mock me.

I think you came for my mother's wedding.

**HORATIO.** Yes, my lord—it happened so soon after.

**HAMLET.** "Thrift, thrift," Horatio!

The leftover food from the funeral

Was used to serve at the wedding.

Oh, I wish I had never seen that day!

I can't stop thinking of my father.

**HORATIO.** I saw him once—he was a noble king.

**HAMLET.** He was a man, take him for all in all.

I shall never see his like again.

**HORATIO.** My lord, I think I saw him just last night.

**HAMLET.** Saw who?

**HORATIO.** The King—your father.

**HAMLET.** The King, my father?

**HORATIO.** Calm yourself and listen closely,  
And I will tell you something extraordinary.

**HAMLET.** For God's sake, let me hear it!

**HORATIO.** In the dead of night,

We saw a figure that looked like your father

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

Appear and walk by us.

I swear, my lord, it was the very image of him.

**HAMLET.** Did you speak to it?

**HORATIO.** I did, but it didn't answer.

At one point, it raised its head as if to speak,

But just then, the rooster crowed,

And it vanished into thin air.

**HAMLET.** This is very strange.

**HORATIO.** I swear it's true, my lord.

**HAMLET.** This troubles me deeply.

Are you keeping watch again tonight?

**HORATIO.** Yes, my lord, we are.

**HAMLET.** I'll join you tonight.

Maybe it will appear again.

**HORATIO.** I'm sure it will.

**HAMLET.** If it looks like my father,

I'll speak to it, even if it comes from hell itself.

If you've kept this secret until now,

Keep it still. I'll reward your loyalty.

I'll meet you on the platform between eleven and twelve tonight.

Farewell. (*Horatio retreats into the shadows as Hamlet exits.*)

**HAMLET.** My father's spirit—something is terribly wrong.

I wish the night would hurry!

Evil deeds will be revealed,

No matter how much we try to hide them. (*He exits.*)

### **SCENE 4**

*Horatio stands off to the side of the stage, partially hidden, observing everything. LAERTES enters with his sister, OPHELIA.*

**LAERTES.** Everything's packed and ready. Goodbye, Ophelia.

And don't forget to write to me.

**OPHELIA.** Do you really think I would forget?



## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**LAERTES.** About Hamlet—don't take his affection too seriously.  
It's likely just a fleeting crush, nothing lasting.  
Maybe he loves you now, but you need to be cautious.  
Remember, because of his position, he can't make his own choices  
freely. He's bound by duty to the kingdom,  
And his decisions affect the entire state.  
So, protect yourself, Ophelia.

Don't get caught up in his desires. Keep your heart guarded.

**OPHELIA.** I'll take your advice to heart,  
But, dear brother, don't preach to me about morals  
While you yourself are out there living recklessly,  
Taking the easy road while warning me to stay virtuous.

**LAERTES.** Don't worry about me. (*POLONIUS enters.*)  
But I've stayed too long. Here comes our father.

**POLONIUS.** Still here, Laertes? Hurry up—get on board!  
The wind's in your favor, and your ship is waiting.  
Now, take my blessing, and a few words of advice:  
Keep your thoughts to yourself and don't act on impulsive ideas.  
Listen to everyone, but speak to only a few.

Dress well, but not extravagantly—  
Your clothes say a lot about who you are.  
And don't borrow money or lend it,  
Because it often leads to trouble.  
But most importantly, above all else:  
Be true to yourself,  
And then you can't be false to anyone else.  
Now, go with my blessing.

**LAERTES.** I humbly thank you, Father.  
Goodbye, Ophelia. Remember what I told you.

**OPHELIA.** Don't worry—I've locked it in my memory,  
And you hold the key.

**LAERTES.** Goodbye. (*Laertes exits.*)

**POLONIUS.** Now, Ophelia, what were you two talking about?

**OPHELIA.** If it pleases you, Father, we were talking about Lord  
Hamlet.

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**POLONIUS.** Ah, good that you brought it up.

What's going on between you two? Tell me the truth.

**OPHELIA.** He's been showing me a lot of affection lately.

**POLONIUS.** Affection? Nonsense! You're just a naive girl,

Not realizing the danger you're in.

These are traps set to catch foolish birds.

From now on, be less available to him.

Don't be so easily won over.

As for Lord Hamlet, remember that he's young,

And has more freedom than you.

So, don't take his promises seriously.

This is my final word:

I don't want you wasting your time

Talking to him or encouraging his advances.

Do you understand? Be careful.

**OPHELIA.** I'll do as you say, Father. (*Ophelia exits. Horatio, still hidden in the shadows, paces thoughtfully, contemplating all he's seen so far. Polonius enters, spotting him.*)

**POLONIUS.** Horatio! There you are. You've been lurking around the castle more than usual lately. Tell me—what have you seen during your watch?

**HORATIO.** Yes, my lord, I've witnessed some strange sights,

And I can't help but wonder what they mean.

**POLONIUS.** I've heard rumors of a ghostly figure haunting these halls.

And they say it looks just like our late king.

Tell me, Horatio, is this true? Have you seen it with your own eyes?

**HORATIO.** Indeed, I have, my lord. The ghost is the spitting image of the late King Hamlet. I've seen it several times now, and each time, it leaves me more unsettled. There's something ominous about its presence, as if it's trying to warn us of something terrible.

**POLONIUS.** Hmm... These are not stories to be shared lightly.

In a place like this, filled with troubled souls,

We can't afford to have wild rumors spreading.

You must keep everything you've seen and heard to yourself.

Do I have your word on that?

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**HORATIO.** Yes, my lord, you can trust me.

What I've seen will stay between us. I understand the weight of this secret.

**POLONIUS.** Good, good. We must keep Elsinore's peace intact, Even if it means guarding the truth.

Now, Horatio, keep a close eye on Prince Hamlet.

He's been acting strangely, and the Queen is worried.

I want you to report anything unusual directly to me.

**HORATIO.** Of course, my lord. I'll watch over him as best I can.

You have my word—I'll keep an eye on him.

**POLONIUS.** Excellent. I'm counting on you. In this court, discretion is our greatest asset. Now, go and tend to your duties. And remember—silence is golden. (*Polonius exits, leaving Horatio deep in thought.*)

**HORATIO.** (*to himself*) There's more to all this than meets the eye.

What game is Polonius playing?

I'll do as he asks, but I can't ignore

The secrets I've uncovered.

Prince Hamlet needs someone he can trust,

And I fear the court is full of shadows.

Whatever happens, I'll be there for him. (*Horatio exits, determined to uncover the truth behind the ghost's appearance and Polonius's scheming.*)

## SCENE 5

*Horatio stands in the shadows as Hamlet and MARCELLUS enter.*

**HAMLET.** The air bites sharply; it's so cold tonight.

**HORATIO.** Yes, it's a harsh, bitter cold.

What time is it now?

**HAMLET.** Must be close to midnight.

**MARCELLUS.** No, the clock just struck twelve.

That's when the ghost usually appears. (*Suddenly, the ghost emerges from the shadows, its form dimly visible.*)

**HORATIO.** Look, my lord, it's here!

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**HAMLET** (*stepping forward, trying to stay composed*) Angels and ministers of grace defend us!

Are you a spirit of peace or something dark and evil?

You come to me in the shape of my father—

I'll speak to you, whatever you may be.

Why are you walking the earth at this hour, dressed in armor?

Tell me, what is it you want? (*The ghost beckons to Hamlet, motioning for him to follow.*)

**HORATIO.** It's signaling for you to go with it, my lord,

As if it has something to share with you alone. (*Pauses, as though doubting his words.*)

(*Aside*) But how can I trust what I see?

Each night, the specter emerges, its form unmistakable.

Yet, even as I speak, I wonder:

Was it a ghost, or some conjured nightmare?

My grief bends my vision, warps the lines

Between shadow and flesh.

(*To Hamlet*) My friend, I fear what lies ahead—

For what if you follow this phantom into ruin?

**MARCELLUS.** Don't follow it, my lord! Who knows what it might do?

**HORATIO.** What if it leads you to the cliffs by the sea,  
And changes into something terrifying to drive you mad?

Please, Hamlet, don't go!

**HAMLET.** Why should I fear it? My life isn't worth more than a pin's fee. It keeps calling me—I have to follow it. (*The ghost beckons more urgently, moving further away.*)

**MARCELLUS.** No, you mustn't go, my lord! (*Marcellus and Horatio try to hold Hamlet back, but he pushes past them.*)

**HAMLET.** Let go of me! I swear, if you don't let me go,  
I'll turn you both into ghosts!

I'm following it, whatever the cost. (*Hamlet chases after the ghost into the darkness. Horatio and Marcellus are left behind, worried.*)

**HORATIO.** This is madness! What's going to happen now?

**MARCELLUS.** Something is seriously wrong in Denmark.

We need to follow them—we can't leave Hamlet alone with that spirit.

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**HORATIO.** Yes, let's go after them. Heaven only knows what might come of this. We have to protect him, whatever happens. (*They rush after Hamlet and the ghost, disappearing into the darkness, Horatio suddenly remains.*)

### SCENE 6

*Horatio turns to the unseen audience and addresses them.*

**HORATIO.** The world is grey here,  
Where shadows dwell and whispers softly creep,  
Hamlet, meets his father's ghost.  
With trembling hearts, we witness  
Where darkened truth bestows. (*Horatio moves to the shadows. Enter Ghost and Hamlet.*)

**HAMLET.** Where are you leading me? Speak now—  
I'll go no further until you explain yourself.

**GHOST.** Listen closely, Hamlet. My time grows short;  
I must return to the fires of torment.

**HAMLET.** Torment? What is this torment you speak of?  
Who are you to be bound to such a fate?

**GHOST.** Do not pity me, but listen well,  
For what I reveal will sear your soul.  
I am the spirit of your father,  
Condemned to wander the night and burn by day  
For sins unconfessed and cut off too soon.

**HAMLET.** My father's spirit? O God, can this be true?  
Speak, that I might know what dark secrets you hold.

**GHOST.** Yes, murdered was I, foully and most unnatural.  
As I lay asleep within my orchard,  
A serpent crept upon me—  
And that serpent now wears my crown!

**HAMLET.** (*stunned, reeling*) My uncle, Claudius!  
O my prophetic soul, my worst fears confirmed!

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**GHOST.** Yes, Claudius—my own brother,  
Who with wicked cunning won your mother's heart  
And stole my life's breath with poison.  
As I slept, unaware, he poured a cursed potion  
Into my ear, corrupting my blood and stopping my heart.  
Thus was I dispatched in my prime,  
Unshriven, unprepared, with all my sins upon me.  
A brother's treachery, most vile!

**HAMLET.** O horrible, O most wicked deed!  
What can I do to right this wrong?

Speak, father's spirit, guide me in this vengeance!

**GHOST.** Remember me, Hamlet, but do not let thy soul  
Be tainted by hatred or consumed by revenge.  
Leave your mother to heaven's judgment—  
Her heart is troubled enough.

But as for Claudius, let justice be your sword.

Now, farewell. The dawn approaches,  
And I must vanish with the coming light. (*The ghost begins to fade  
away as the first hints of dawn break through the darkness.*)

**HAMLET.** (*desperately, reaching out*) Wait! Don't leave me with only  
this! How can I prove these words? What should I do?

**GHOST.** Seek the truth, but tread carefully.

The court is filled with spies and traitors.

Trust no one but those closest to your heart.

Remember me, my son, and know—

Denmark's throne is rightfully yours.

Farewell... remember... (*The ghost disappears into the mist as the light  
of dawn brightens. Hamlet falls to his knees, trembling.*)

**HAMLET.** O all you host of heaven! O earth! (*Exits in a panic*)  
(*The dimly lit hallway of the Elsinore Center. Mortimer appears  
unexpectedly as Horatio paces, struggling to reconcile the ghost's  
warnings with the mounting tension in the court.*)

**HORATIO.** (*Startled, gripping his sword*) Who's there? Speak, or  
I'll—

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**MORTIMER.** (*Emerging slowly, calm and deliberate*) Steel cannot cut what I am, Horatio. Save your strength.

**HORATIO.** Mortimer. Again, you come unbidden, a shadow dogging my every step.

Speak plainly—what specter’s errand brings you here?

**MORTIMER.** (*Chuckles darkly*) Ah, Horatio, ever the loyal sentinel. But your eyes are clouded by trust, and trust is the most dangerous illusion in these halls.

**HORATIO.** Enough riddles. If you have truth, let it be known, or leave me in peace!

**MORTIMER.** (*Stepping closer, lowering his voice*) You seek peace in a place built to shatter it. Did you think the Elsinore Center was merely for healing? Oh, no. This asylum was Claudius’s design.

**HORATIO.** (*Taken aback*) What do you mean? Claudius—?

**MORTIMER.** The Elsinore Center was his idea—a refuge for “troubled souls,” he called it. But look around. The “restorative care” is a lie, Horatio.

These walls are stained with the secrets of those deemed inconvenient. Not all who enter are mad, but many leave that way—if they leave at all.

**HORATIO.** You accuse Claudius of—of what? Torture? Murder?

**MORTIMER.** Not directly, no. That would be far too bold. But whispering in the right ears, burying truths beneath diagnoses... it’s easy to silence dissent here.

Even Hamlet’s father had his dealings with this place.

**HORATIO.** (*Shocked*). King Hamlet? Impossible. He would never—

**MORTIMER.** Oh, he kept his hands clean, as kings do. But the late king knew the power of this place. It was his tool as much as it is Claudius’s. And now, Hamlet inherits the sins of his bloodline.

**HORATIO.** You speak of shadows and poison, but what proof have you?

**MORTIMER.** (*Leaning in, with chilling certainty*) Proof? Proof lies in the whispers of these walls. Listen closely, Horatio. You’ll hear the cries of those who knew too much, loved too deeply, or dared too greatly. And Hamlet—poor Hamlet—do you not see? He’s become a victim of his father’s legacy.

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

His madness may be his own, but it was seeded by the rot in this very place.

**HORATIO.** (*Visibly shaken*) And you? What is your role in this? Why do you tell me this now?

**MORTIMER.** (*Fading back into the shadows*) Because, loyal Horatio, you carry the burden of truth. And truth, like madness, is a sickness that spreads. Beware whom you trust, even among the living. (*Mortimer disappears into the darkness. Horatio stands alone, his breathing unsteady, as the shadows of the asylum seem to close in around him.*)

**HORATIO.** (*To himself*) The sins of the fathers, passed to the sons... What curse is this, that binds us all to such ruin? Hamlet, my friend... what darkness have we both inherited? (*He exits, determined to confront Hamlet, the weight of Mortimer's revelation heavy on his shoulders.*)

### SCENE 7

*Ghost moves to Horatio. Horatio fearing what may happen next.*

**HORATIO.** Great specter—what would you have of me?

You appear again to haunt this weary soul.

Is it not enough that Hamlet bears your burden?

What duty now falls upon my shoulders?

**GHOST.** Horatio, steadfast companion, heed my words—

A grave task lies before you. My son treads a path dark and perilous, Burdened by truths that sear the soul and shadows that twist the heart.

**HORATIO.** These words chill me, yet speak plainly.

What would you have me do? For Hamlet's mind is already frayed— Each step he takes leads him further into darkness.

**GHOST.** Stand firm beside him, for the storm gathers fast.

The serpent who stole my life coils ever tighter around Denmark's throne, Spreading its venom through these cursed halls.

But beware—the cost of loyalty is great, and those who walk this path may find Their souls bound to sorrow's endless night. (*The ghost moves closer, his voice lowering to an urgent whisper.*)



## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**GHOST.** A secret festers deep within this court,  
One that could undo us all. Trust none but the prince, and tread  
carefully—

For the eyes of spies and traitors lie hidden in every shadow.  
Yet the moment to act has not yet come. Patience, Horatio. When the  
time is ripe, you shall know it, and only then must you strike with  
purpose clear.

**HORATIO.** But what if he falls, spirit? What if Hamlet's grief  
consumes him before justice can be served? I fear his rage will turn him  
blind to the truth you seek to reveal.

**GHOST.** A heart consumed by vengeance may falter, yet it is the fire  
that fuels his soul. You, Horatio, must be his anchor, his light when all  
else fades to black.

But know this: even you may not be spared the darkness that lies ahead.

**HORATIO.** (Visibly shaken, yet resolute) If it is my fate to stand by  
him as the world crumbles to ruin, then so be it. I shall not falter,  
Though the shadows threaten to consume us both.

Yet tell me, great spirit—can Hamlet bear such burdens?

Or shall I watch him break beneath the weight?

**GHOST.** The heart is resilient, but it is not unbreakable. Be his guide,  
his guard against despair, but let the truth unfold by his hand alone. For  
justice must come not from you, but from him—

Only then shall Denmark be purged of its poison. Remember me,  
Horatio, and let not your loyalty waver. (*The ghost's form begins to  
waver, its voice softening yet growing distant.*)

**GHOST.** The venom that flows through this court can taint even the  
purest soul. Shield him from despair, but speak no more of what you've  
seen. Farewell... until the dawn breaks once again. (*The ghost fades  
into the mist as the first hints of dawn pierce the darkness. Horatio  
stands alone, trembling, wrestling with the heavy charge laid upon him.*)

**HORATIO.** (Alone, to himself) A duty sworn, a burden borne—  
To watch, to wait, to guard against the night. But if this loyalty leads me  
into darkness, what then becomes of my soul?

O Hamlet, dear friend, I will not abandon you to madness.

Yet how can I guide you when even I am lost in this maze of shadows?

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

*(HAMLET enters hurriedly as if seeking something.)*

**HAMLET.** What else?

And shall I couple hell? O fie! Hold, my heart,

And you, my sinews, bear me up!

Remember thee? Yes, I will remember—

And from this moment on, I'll wipe away

All trivial memories from my mind,

Keeping only this commandment, set within my soul:

"Remember me."

O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!

Now to my word. It is "Adieu, adieu, remember me."

I have sworn it! *(Enter Horatio and Marcellus, breathless and concerned.)*

**HORATIO.** My lord, my lord! What news?

**MARCELLUS.** Prince Hamlet, are you unharmed? What did the ghost reveal?

**HAMLET.** O, wonderful, most wonderful!

But swear to me, friends, upon my sword,

That you shall never speak of what you've witnessed tonight.

**HORATIO.** We will, my lord. We'll keep your secrets safe.

**MARCELLUS.** Yes, my prince, we swear it.

**HAMLET.** Swear it on my sword! For this secret must remain buried.

The ghost calls us to a grim duty,

But we must move with caution,

For Denmark's soil is tainted, and danger lurks in every shadow.

**HORATIO** *(concerned but resolute)* Your will is ours, my lord. We are bound by our oath.

**HAMLET.** Good. Now come—there is much to plan,

And a play I must put on,

To catch the conscience of the king.

But let us part here, for eyes are everywhere. *(All exit except Horatio.)*

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

### SCENE 8

*Horatio lingers alone, pacing, troubled by the night's revelations—about the ghost, Hamlet's madness, and the mounting tension in the court. He pauses, lost in thought. Enter Mortimer, cloaked in shadow, his presence both unsettling and familiar.*

**HORATIO.** *(startled, looking up)* You again. Always where I least expect you.

**MORTIMER.** *(slowly emerging from the shadows)* And yet, I am always where I need to be.

I've walked these halls long enough to know their secrets.

And yours, Horatio, are not so different.

**HORATIO.** *(studying him, confused and uneasy)* You seem to know more than you should. Who are you, Mortimer? What ties you to this place?

**MORTIMER.** *(smiling faintly)* This place? It ties us all, does it not?

We are all here, trapped in these halls of guilt, of duty, of fear.

But if you must know, I've been here before—

A patient, once, though not by choice.

They called me mad for seeing things—

Things too vivid for their liking.

And perhaps I was, for I've learned, Horatio:

This place doesn't heal you. It hides you. *(He steps closer, his voice soft but probing.)* It hides the truth, buried beneath layers of denial.

**HORATIO.** *(frowning)* And now? What are you to me? A guide? A tormentor?

**MORTIMER.** *(pausing)* That depends.

Do you want answers, Horatio?

Or do you just want someone to share the weight of your questions?

Because if you seek answers, I cannot give them.

The truth isn't written in those pages you carry,

Nor in the stories they tell here.

Truth is lived, and sometimes, it is buried so deep

That even you will not dare to dig it up. *(Mortimer steps closer to*

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

*Horatio, placing a hand on his shoulder—a touch that is both comforting and suffocating.)*

**MORTIMER.** (quietly) You think you can save him, don't you? Hamlet. You follow him, loyal to the end. But tell me, Horatio—Can you save someone who's already lost? Can you save yourself from drowning in the same madness?  
*(Horatio winces, caught off-guard by the question, but Mortimer continues.)*

**MORTIMER.** In this house of lies, loyalty becomes a trap. And you, Horatio, have stepped willingly into it. *(His voice lowers.)* You think you can trust him—But what of the court? What of the others? Who among them do you trust? Who among them can you trust?  
*(Horatio stands frozen, his breath quickening. Mortimer's words settle into the silence, heavy and unsettling.)*

**MORTIMER.** (voice fading as he steps into the shadows) You'll find no answers, Horatio. Only more questions.

And as you walk this path, remember:  
The truth you seek may not be the one you wish to find. *(Before Horatio can reply, Mortimer exits silently, leaving him in a state of confusion and reflection.)*

**HORATIO.** (introspective) Hamlet, my friend... your fate draws near. And though shadows gather, I will not abandon you. But in this house of deceit, Who can I truly trust? *(Horatio remains still, chilled by the weight of Mortimer's words, staring into the darkness as the curtain falls, knowing that his path ahead grows narrower with each choice.)*

## SCENE 9

*The stage is dim, and Ophelia sits quietly, looking troubled. Hamlet enters suddenly, his appearance wild but his eyes sharp. Ophelia rises, both relieved and nervous at his arrival.*

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**OPHELIA.** (*rising, nervous*) My lord, you come at last, but why so wild? Your clothes are torn, your eyes aflame.

What troubles you so deeply?

**HAMLET.** (*pacing, half-mad*) Trouble? Trouble is the air we breathe in Denmark. The rot clings to every stone, every word, every smile. (*He stops suddenly, his gaze piercing her.*) Do you feel it, Ophelia? The lies coiled tight around us?

**OPHELIA.** (*calm but alarmed*) My lord, I feel only your unrest. What weighs upon your heart?

**HAMLET.** (*gripping her wrist, intense*) Everything! They think me mad, Ophelia—do you? (*A bitter laugh*) Or is it madness to see clearly, To sense the poison in this place?

**OPHELIA.** (*trying to calm him*) I see only a man torn by grief and rage. I wish to understand, my lord, but your words run circles.

**HAMLET.** (*suddenly softer, almost pleading*) If you wish to help, play your part.

When your father questions you—and he will—  
Say you've seen me as I am now: unhinged, unpredictable.  
Let them believe it.

**OPHELIA.** But if I do, my lord, they'll act against you.  
You'd risk being seen as truly lost.

**HAMLET.** (*pulling away, voice trembling*) Let them think what they will! It shields the truth. (*He glances toward the shadows, catching HORATIO's figure.*) But some must know better.

**HORATIO.** (*stepping forward*) I see you, my friend, as I always have. If there is reason in your madness,  
Trust that I'll stand by you.

**HAMLET.** (*nodding, resolute*) Then watch, Horatio, and be ready. Ophelia, do as I ask. This court is a serpent's nest,  
And we must tread carefully lest we be swallowed whole.

**OPHELIA.** (*with quiet resolve*) If you will it, my lord, I will obey. But know this tears my heart in two.

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**HAMLET.** *(smiling faintly, haunted)* A broken heart is a small price to pay in a world already shattered. *(With a strange smile, half-mad, half-calculated)* Perhaps I am lost. Perhaps I never was. *(He steps back, his gaze still on her, then exits abruptly, leaving Ophelia alone as she watches him leave, trembling. After a long pause, she glances toward the door, knowing she must tell her father, even though she doubts what she has seen.)*

### SCENE 10

*Ophelia with Horatio, her gaze unfocused. Polonius enters, carrying an air of urgency.*

**POLONIUS.** *(briskly)* Ophelia, have you seen Hamlet today?

**OPHELIA.** Not since this morning, Father. He seemed... unsettled.

**POLONIUS.** *(nodding, as if confirming his suspicions)* Unsettled, indeed. His erratic behavior troubles the court. You must keep your distance from him—do not encourage his affections.

**OPHELIA.** *(hesitant)* Father, he professes his love so earnestly. Could it truly be the cause of his unrest?

**POLONIUS.** Love, Ophelia, is often a fleeting madness, especially in young men with heavy burdens. Do as I say—deny him further. For your sake and his.

**OPHELIA.** Yes, Father. I will obey. *(Polonius hides in the shadows as Hamlet enters abruptly, his appearance disheveled, his gaze wild. Ophelia stands, startled.)*

**HAMLET.** Ophelia. Alone, are you? Or is your father lurking behind some curtain?

**OPHELIA.** *(calming herself)* My lord, I've something to return to you. These letters... and tokens of your love.

**HAMLET.** *(glaring at the items she offers)* Love? Tokens? Lies, all of it. Lies we tell ourselves to keep from facing the rot.

**OPHELIA.** *(gently)* But you wrote to me, my lord. You spoke of love—

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**HAMLET.** (*bitterly interrupting*) I loved you once. Or thought I did.  
But love is a poison in Denmark's air.

**OPHELIA.** (*tears welling*) If you no longer care, my lord, then I release you.

**HAMLET.** (*his tone turning cruel, almost frantic*) Release me? Get thee to a nunnery! What need have we for breeders of sinners?

Do you think I am mad? You should know better.

You all should know better. (*Hamlet turns sharply and exits, leaving Ophelia stunned. Polonius emerges from the shadows, shaking his head grimly.*)

**POLONIUS.** He raves, Ophelia. His mind is as unmoored as a ship in a storm.

**OPHELIA.** (*softly, her voice trembling*) Perhaps the storm is not his alone, Father. (*Polonius exits. Ophelia remains behind.*)

**OPHELIA.** Horatio, wait—I must speak with you!

**HORATIO.** Speak freely, Ophelia. If I can ease your heart, I will.

**OPHELIA.** I told my father of Hamlet's state, as he commanded me, yet my fear remains.

I cannot tell if Hamlet's mind is truly unmoored,

Or if he feigns madness so cunningly that even he forgets the act.

**HORATIO.** What think you, then? Is it grief's guise, or has reason fled him altogether?

**OPHELIA.** At first, I thought it a mask—a clever ruse. But now... I fear that in pretending, he's lost himself.

**HORATIO.** Perhaps his aim is to draw Claudius's gaze,  
To stir the court in ways we cannot yet see.

**OPHELIA.** And yet, what if I've deepened his peril?  
He said they'd see no truth in madness.

But what if it's no act? What if he truly raves?

**HORATIO.** Fear not, Ophelia. I'll uncover the truth.  
If this madness hides purpose,  
We'll play this game to its end.

**OPHELIA.** (*relieved*) Your words bring me hope, Horatio.

**HORATIO.** Take comfort, sweet Ophelia.  
Though shadows close around him,

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

We shall find a way to guide him to the light. (*MARGORY enters with a letter in hand.*)

**MARGORY.** A letter from your brother, madam.

He bid it reach you with great urgency.

**OPHELIA.** Thank you, Margory. Leave me now. (*Margory exits. Ophelia breaks the seal and reads aloud.*)

**OPHELIA.** (*reading*) “Dear sister, though seas divide us,  
My thoughts remain ever with you.

*I hear troubling news from Denmark—*

*Of Hamlet’s state, darker than winter’s depths.*

*Be cautious, Ophelia, and trust not all that seems fair.*

*The noble Prince now wanders paths perilous.*

*Guard your heart, seek our father’s counsel,*

*And let his wisdom guide you.*

*I long to see you safe and well. Until then,*

*Be wise and steadfast. Your brother, Laertes.”* (*She lowers the letter, her expression conflicted.*) Laertes, your words may comfort,

But they do not calm this storm within me.

You speak as though I cannot see for myself.

Yes, Hamlet has changed—

Do you think I don’t see it?

You fear for me, but I am not helpless.

I see the madness in him, but I see more—

A man torn between grief and joy,

Burdened by something none of us can name.

You think me fragile, but I know the truth

Better than you imagine. (*She folds the letter and presses it close to her chest, then softly*) You worry for me, dear brother.

But who will worry for you?

## SCENE 11

*Horatio is alone, pacing in a dimly lit corner of the asylum. His mind is troubled by Hamlet's behavior and the increasingly dangerous atmosphere around them. Mortimer enters silently, appearing almost*



## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

*like a shadow. His movements are slow, deliberate—his presence haunting.*

**HORATIO.** (*pausing, startled*) Who walks there?

Friend or phantom? Show yourself!

**MORTIMER.** (*emerging from the shadows*) It is I, Horatio.

Not a friend, nor phantom, but something you know well—

A voice that speaks within, a shadow of your own mind.

**HORATIO.** (*taking a step back, unnerved*) Mortimer...

How silently you tread,

As if from realms where silence reigns alone.

What whispers bring you from the dark?

What murmurs do you bring from those who plot?

**MORTIMER.** (*his voice steady but charged with tension*) They speak of Hamlet, my lord—

The halls of Elsinore tremble with fear.

Some say he is mad, some call him a threat,

Others simply wait for his doom to unfold. (*He smiles faintly*)

'Tis almost as if death watches him,

A silent companion at his side,

Waiting for the right moment to strike.

**HORATIO.** (*struggling to suppress his unease*) Your words weigh heavily, Mortimer.

Do you intend to frighten me with fate,

Or are you simply recounting the truth?

**MORTIMER.** (*approaching Horatio, gentle*) Would that fear and fate were not the same, Horatio.

But they are, aren't they? The dead need no flattery,

And those who walk the edge of ruin

Know that their end waits patiently at the door.

**HORATIO.** (*voice breaking slightly*) Speak not of ends, but what Hamlet must do—

How can he steer through this storm?

What must he do to find his way?

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**MORTIMER.** (pausing, his gaze unwavering) Aye, caution is but paper to the flame, when the winds of fate blow this strong.

But still, I linger here, a reminder of all that cannot be escaped.

When the time comes, I will return,

And bring news that shakes the very earth beneath us.

**HORATIO.** (*his voice quivering*) If you have a warning, speak it now! Tell me what I must do, how I can save him!

**MORTIMER.** (*leaning closer, whispers in Horatio's ear*) There is no saving Hamlet, Horatio—

At least not from what has already begun.

And you... you will walk this path with him,

Bound by your duty, your guilt, your loyalty.

But beware—when you turn away from doom,

It's not so easily escaped.

For in these walls, the grave is never far. (*He steps back, fading into the shadows*)

**MORTIMER.** (*his voice echoing as he exits*) In the end, you'll ask yourself—

Was it his fate, or yours, that sealed the doom? (*Horatio stands frozen in the dark, his heart heavy with Mortimer's words. His mind races, filled with doubt and the fear of what lies ahead.*)

## SCENE 12

*Enter Hamlet and Horatio.*

**HORATIO.** My lord, you seem more troubled with each passing day. Share with me what haunts you, so I might help ease your burden.

**HAMLET.** Ah, Horatio, it's not just the ghost that haunts me.

There's a darkness—deep and festering—

Clinging to the very bones of Denmark.

Claudius wears my father's face,

And the sight of it drives me to madness.

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**HORATIO.** You speak of shadows, my friend,  
But your heart bears the heaviest weight.  
What can I do to help?

**HAMLET.** How can you help when I am lost myself?  
To avenge my father's murder is my duty,  
Yet to strike down Claudius would tear my soul in two.

**HORATIO.** I see your torment, but remember this:  
Justice is a path fraught with peril.  
If you seek vengeance, tread carefully,  
Lest you lose yourself in the darkness.

**HAMLET.** Madness, darkness—perhaps it is clarity, Horatio.  
They call me mad, but I see through their masks.  
Tell me, do you think me truly lost?

**HORATIO.** No, Hamlet, you are not lost.  
But you walk a dangerous path.  
Let not rage consume you.  
I will stand by your side, whatever comes—  
But promise me, do not lose yourself.

**HAMLET.** You are my anchor, Horatio,  
The one soul I trust in this accursed court.  
If there is hope, it lies with you.

**HORATIO.** Then hold fast, my friend.  
And when all is done, I shall tell your story,  
So the world may know you as I do. (*Exeunt Hamlet*)

### SCENE 13

*Horatio steps forward.*

**HORATIO.** In Elsinore, whispers spread fear,  
And Hamlet, consumed by his thoughts,  
Deception wraps itself in lies, truths rise like ghosts from the land.  
(*Flourish. Enter Claudius, Gertrude, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Attendants.*)

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**CLAUDIUS.** Welcome, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

We needed you, hence your swift summons.

What have you learned of Hamlet's change?

Please stay here for a while, and see what you can find.

**GERTRUDE.** He speaks of you often.

If you can spare time, your visit will be appreciated.

**ROSENCRANTZ.** We'll obey your command, my lord.

**GUILDENSTERN.** We are at your service, freely.

**GERTRUDE.** Thank you. Go to Hamlet now.

Find him and bring him here. *(Rosencrantz and Guildenstern exit as Polonius enters.)*

**POLONIUS.** The ambassadors from Norway have returned, my lord.

**CLAUDIUS.** You always bring good news, Polonius.

**POLONIUS.** And I have found the cause of Hamlet's madness.

**CLAUDIUS.** Do tell!

**POLONIUS.** He's mad, my lord, truly mad.

To be mad is simply to be mad.

**GERTRUDE.** Less poetry, more matter.

**POLONIUS.** He is mad, but we must find why.

My daughter has given me this letter, and it suggests... *(He reads aloud.)*

*"Doubt the stars, doubt the sun,  
Doubt truth, but never doubt I love you,  
Ophelia, I am ill with love."*

**GERTRUDE.** Did this come from Hamlet?

**POLONIUS.** Yes, madam. He sent this to her.

**CLAUDIUS.** How does she feel about his love?

**POLONIUS.** I told her to avoid him, to refuse his messages.

**CLAUDIUS.** Could this be the cause?

**GERTRUDE.** It's possible.

**POLONIUS.** I will investigate further. I'll find the truth.

**CLAUDIUS.** How can we test it?

**POLONIUS.** He often walks alone in the lobby.

I'll have my daughter meet him there, and we'll hide to observe.

**CLAUDIUS.** Let's try it. *(Enter Hamlet reading.)*

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**GERTRUDE.** Here he comes, lost in thought.

**POLONIUS.** Please, leave me to it. I'll approach him. (*Claudius and Gertrude exit.*)

**HAMLET.** Hello, Polonius.

**POLONIUS.** Do you know me, my lord?

**HAMLET.** I know you. You're a fishmonger.

**POLONIUS.** Not I, my lord.

**HAMLET.** I wish you were an honest man.

**POLONIUS.** Honest?

**HAMLET.** Yes, in this world, honesty is rare.

**POLONIUS.** True enough, my lord.

**HAMLET.** If the sun breeds maggots in a dead dog,  
why does a good woman walk in the sun?

**POLONIUS.** What do you read, my lord?

**HAMLET.** Words, words, words.

**POLONIUS.** What's the matter, my lord?

**HAMLET.** What matter?

**POLONIUS.** The matter in your reading.

**HAMLET.** Slanders, for the writer claims old men  
are foolish and weak, but I won't say more.

**POLONIUS.** This madness has a method to it.

Would you walk outside, my lord?

**HAMLET.** Into my grave?

**POLONIUS.** Well, that's out of the air.

I'll leave you, my lord.

**HAMLET.** You can't take anything from me but my life.

**POLONIUS.** Farewell, my lord. (*Polonius exits.*)

**HORATIO.** My lord, you're surrounded by scheming minds.  
What do you make of Polonius's words?

**HAMLET.** Old fools, all of them.

Horatio, look at him—a meddling fool, thinking he's wise.

**HORATIO.** Yes, my lord, but his advice is weighty to him,  
though light to those who see through him.

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**HAMLET.** I use him for my amusement, my friend,  
though he thinks he's the one tricking me.  
But let's speak no more of him.

**HORATIO.** As you wish, my lord, but remember,  
guard your words and actions carefully.

**HAMLET.** Thank you, Horatio. Your wisdom guides me. (*As Hamlet exits, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter.*)

**GUILDENSTERN.** My lord.

**ROSENCRANTZ.** Most honored lord.

**HAMLET.** Ah, my good friends! How are you both?

**ROSENCRANTZ.** As indifferent as the earth.

**GUILDENSTERN.** Happy in that we're not overjoyed,  
just content with our place.

**HAMLET.** What news?

**ROSENCRANTZ.** None, my lord, except that the world's grown  
honest.

**HAMLET.** Then doomsday must be near! But your news is false.  
What has brought you here?

**GUILDENSTERN.** To visit you, my lord.

**HAMLET.** Am I mistaken, or were you sent for?

**ROSENCRANTZ.** We were sent for, my lord.

**HAMLET.** Ah, I knew it. You're spies for the king and queen,  
but tell me, what brings you here to Elsinore?

**ROSENCRANTZ.** We've come to see you, my lord.

**HAMLET.** And is this a free visit or a command?

**GUILDENSTERN.** We were sent for, my lord.

**HAMLET.** Then let's speak no more.

Man is a poor thing, his reason great,  
yet women don't delight me.

**ROSENCRANTZ.** My lord, we meant no offense.

**HAMLET.** Why did you laugh, then, when I said I was not delighted by  
man?

**ROSENCRANTZ.** We laugh because if you don't like man,  
how will you treat the actors coming soon?

**HAMLET.** What actors?

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**ROSENCRANTZ.** The players, my lord.

**HAMLET.** Ah, the players! Welcome to Elsinore!

But my uncle and aunt are deceived.

**GUILDENSTERN.** In what, my lord?

**HAMLET.** I am mad, but only when the wind blows north-northwest.

When it blows south, I'm as clear-headed as a hawk from a handsaw.

**HORATIO.** Your wisdom shows, Hamlet, even in jest.

Shall we hear the players perform?

**HAMLET.** Yes, Horatio, let's see them act.

Stay close, and offer your advice,

for in their play, I'll find truth in disguise.

**HORATIO.** (Aside) Madness may hide a purpose unknown,

But even as I stood by Hamlet's side, I questioned what I saw.

The court, the players, their faces in the dim light—

Were they as I remember?

Or has my telling reshaped them?

Claudius's reaction—

Was it guilt, or the discomfort of being watched?

Each detail feels true in the moment, yet slips like sand through the fingers of time. (*Enter Polonius.*)

**HORATIO.** (Aside) Now comes the meddling fool again.

I'll stand by Hamlet, come what may.

**POLONIUS.** My lord, the players have arrived.

**HAMLET.** Good! Let's see them.

**POLONIUS.** They're the best actors, for any kind of play, from tragedy to comedy. (*Flourish. The players enter.*)

**HAMLET.** Welcome, masters! Let's hear a passionate speech!

**PROLOGUE.** What speech, my lord?

**HAMLET.** I've heard you perform a speech before.

The one about Pyrrhus!

**PROLOGUE.** Ah, the rugged Pyrrhus, who struck terror into the Greeks.

**HAMLET.** Say on.

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**PROLOGUE.** The moblèd queen,  
who saw her husband's limbs minced by Pyrrhus,  
would have made the gods themselves weep.

**HAMLET.** Excellent! I'll have you finish this later. *(To Polonius)*  
My lord, will you see the players settled?

**POLONIUS.** Of course, my lord. *(Polonius exits with the players.)*

**HAMLET.** I'll leave you for now, my friends.

Tomorrow, we shall hear a play. *(Rosencrantz and Guildenstern exit.)*

Oh, what a fool I am!

This actor, in mere fiction, can summon such emotion,  
while I, in truth, do nothing to avenge my father.

What's wrong with me?

I shall act! *(He exits.)*

### SCENE 14

*Enter Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern.*

**CLAUDIUS.** Can you find out from him why he's acting like this,  
with all this madness and confusion?

**ROSENCRANTZ.** He admits he's distracted,  
but refuses to say why.

**GUILDENSTERN.** We can't get him to open up. He keeps us at a  
distance, avoiding any talk about what's really going on.

**GERTRUDE.** Did he greet you well?

**ROSENCRANTZ.** Like a gentleman.

**GUILDENSTERN.** Though he was clearly forcing himself.

**ROSENCRANTZ.** He was blunt in his answers, but free with his  
words.

**GERTRUDE.** Did you try to entertain him?

**ROSENCRANTZ.** Actually, we met some players on the way,  
and he seemed pleased to hear about them. They're here now,  
and I believe they're preparing to perform tonight.



## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**POLONIUS.** It's true, and he asked me to urge your Majesties to attend.

**CLAUDIUS.** I'm glad to hear that. Let's encourage him further and guide him toward these distractions.

**ROSENCRANTZ.** We'll do so, my lord. (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern exit.*)

**CLAUDIUS.** Sweet Gertrude, leave us now.

We've secretly called for Hamlet, so that, by chance, he may confront Ophelia. We will stay nearby and judge their interaction.

**GERTRUDE.** I'll leave when I feel it's right.

And Ophelia, I hope your beauty will be the cause of Hamlet's madness, so that your virtues will lead him back to his true self, for both your sakes.

**OPHELIA.** I hope so too, my lady. (*Gertrude exits.*)

**POLONIUS.** Ophelia, walk here. Please read this book.

I hear him coming. Let's step back, my lord. (*They step away. Horatio appears from his hiding place.*)

**HORATIO.** (Whispering) I'll watch him here, alone, deep in thought. (*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, end them.

To die, to sleep— No more— To die, to sleep—

To sleep, perchance to dream.

Ay, there's the rub, for in that sleep of death what dreams may come,

When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,

Must give us pause.

For who would endure the pain of life

if not for fear of what comes after death?

Conscience makes cowards of us all.

**HORATIO.** My lord, your spirit seems troubled.

**HAMLET.** Horatio, you are more to me than just a friend; you show me my truest self.

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**HORATIO.** And I, dear Hamlet, find strength in our bond.  
We shall face whatever comes together. (*Ophelia enters.*)

**HAMLET.** Ah, Ophelia.

In your prayers, remember all my sins.

**OPHELIA.** Good my lord, how have you been these days?

**HAMLET.** I thank you, I've been well.

**HORATIO.** (*aside to Hamlet*) My lord, Ophelia's kindness asks for your heart, respond kindly as she does to you.

**OPHELIA.** My lord, I have some gifts of yours,  
I've longed to return them.

**HAMLET.** No, I never gave you anything.

**OPHELIA.** My lord, you know you did, and with them, words so sweet that made the gifts even more precious.

Take them back. A noble mind doesn't let gifts go unappreciated.

**HORATIO.** (*aside to Hamlet*) She speaks true, my prince.  
Do not reject her.

**HAMLET.** Are you honest?

**OPHELIA.** My lord?

**HAMLET.** Are you fair?

**OPHELIA.** What do you mean, my lord?

**HAMLET.** If you are honest and fair,  
your honesty should keep your beauty in check.

**OPHELIA.** Could beauty be anything without honesty?

**HAMLET.** Yes, beauty would sooner corrupt honesty  
than honesty could ever make beauty pure.

I did love you once.

**OPHELIA.** Indeed, you made me believe that.

**HAMLET.** You shouldn't have believed me. I never loved you.

**OPHELIA.** Then I was more deceived.

**HORATIO.** (*to Ophelia*) Don't take his words to heart; his mind is struggling.

**HAMLET.** Go to a nunnery!

Why be a mother to sinners?

I'm honest enough, but I could accuse myself of things better left unsaid.

Go to a nunnery. Where's your father?

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**OPHELIA.** At home, my lord.

**HAMLET.** Then let him stay there, playing the fool. Farewell.

**OPHELIA.** Oh, help him, sweet heavens!

**HAMLET.** Go to a nunnery, farewell.

If you must marry, marry a fool.

Wise men know what monsters you make of them.

To a nunnery, go, and quickly. Farewell.

**OPHELIA.** Heavenly powers, restore him!

**HORATIO.** *(to Hamlet)* Enough, my lord; your words wound more than heal. *(Hamlet attacks Horatio putting him to the ground without missing a beat to Ophelia.)*

**HAMLET.** God gave you one face, and you make yourselves another. I won't speak further. It drives me mad.

To a nunnery, go.

**HORATIO.** *(Aggressively pushing Hamlet out.)* Come, my lord; let you depart and leave this bitter air... *(Hamlet exits.)*

**OPHELIA.** Oh, what a noble mind is here undone!

His sharp mind dulled by grief.

What a sight to see, to witness what's become of him.

**HORATIO.** He is torn within, his wits undone by sorrow.

But hope remains. His spirit, though bent, may still rise and heal.

**OPHELIA.** This place, these walls—they suffocate me. They call it the Elsinore Center, a house of care, but I see it for what it is: a gilded cage. Its doors may close to the mad, but the sane are prisoners, too. Even the air feels heavy here, thick with whispers, secrets, and the weight of lives left unspoken.

Hamlet's words—they once felt like a key, promising to unlock the world beyond these walls. But now? His love has turned to riddles, his touch to torment.

Even when he looks at me, he does not see me— only shadows, reflections of something lost. *(She takes a deep breath, struggling to compose herself.)* I am told what to think, how to act, whom to obey. Father says I must deny Hamlet, deny my own heart. He says it's for my own good. But what good comes from silence? What good comes from being shaped and reshaped like clay beneath the hands of

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

men who only see me as daughter, lover, pawn? *(She glances around the room, her voice growing bitter.)*

Even this asylum is a mirror of my life— sterile, controlled, with no room for freedom. The women here walk the same halls as the men, but our steps are measured, our paths predetermined. The patients who cry too loudly are silenced.

The ones who dream too boldly are smothered. And the ones who break? They are locked away, hidden where no one can see their despair. *(She clutches her chest, as if trying to steady her heart.)* Perhaps I am already one of them, trapped in a world where my voice is as faint as the echo of my own thoughts. Perhaps I was mad to believe I could be anything more than what they allow. A woman, they say, must be quiet, obedient, pure. But what purity remains in a world so stained? *(Her voice softens, turning sorrowful.)* I see now: this place is not just Hamlet's prison. It is mine. It is all of ours.

And as the walls close in around us, I wonder—who will break first? Hamlet, with his restless spirit? Or me, with my silent tears? *(She looks upward, her expression one of desperate longing.)* O heavens, give me strength. Give me a voice, a choice, something— anything but this silence. *(She leaves the stage Slowly, her head bowed as Claudius and Polonius enter with Hamlet entering hidden.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** His love? It's not directed that way.

Though his actions may seem mad, I feel there's something else at work. He will be sent to England, where perhaps new surroundings will clear his mind. What do you think?

**POLONIUS.** It's a good idea.

And after the play, let his mother try to reason with him. If it doesn't work, send him to England.

**CLAUDIUS.** Madness in great ones must not go unchecked. *(They exit as Hamlet emerges from hiding, grabbing Horatio.)*

**HAMLET.** Horatio, are you spying on me, or are you truly my friend, untouched by lies?

**HORATIO.** No spy, my lord, but loyal and true, I love you with all my heart.

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**HAMLET.** Together, we will face this night, our bond strong enough to banish all shadows.

**HORATIO.** The time is ripe for action, words alone won't be enough.  
(*HAMLET Exits*)

### SCENE 15

*Claudius's study. Claudius stands at the window, his expression dark. Polonius enters, followed by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.*

**CLAUDIUS.** (*without turning*) What news of Hamlet?

**ROSENCRANTZ.** My lord, he remains distant, avoiding our questions at every turn.

**GUILDENSTERN.** His words are sharp, yet devoid of reason.

**CLAUDIUS.** (*turning sharply*) Devoid of reason? No. There is purpose to his madness, though what it conceals, I cannot yet see.

**POLONIUS.** Your Majesty, if I may—Hamlet is a danger to himself and to the throne.

We cannot allow his unrest to fester unchecked.

**CLAUDIUS.** You echo my thoughts, Polonius. The time has come for action. (*Turning to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*)

You will escort Hamlet to England. Letters are prepared, and his departure must be swift.

**ROSENCRANTZ.** As you command, my lord.

**GUILDENSTERN.** We shall see to it at once. (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern bow and exit. Gertrude enters, her expression heavy with worry.*)

**GERTRUDE.** To England? Must it come to this?

**CLAUDIUS.** It must. The boy is a threat, Gertrude.

His every word sows discord, his every action undermines the peace. For Denmark's sake, he must go.

**GERTRUDE.** (*pleading*) But he is still your nephew. And my son.

**CLAUDIUS.** (*firmly*) And that is why I send him away, not to his death. He may return, once his mind is clear.

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**POLONIUS.** Gertrude speaks with a mother's heart, my lord.  
But Denmark's crown requires a king's resolve.

**CLAUDIUS.** *(With new determination.)* Then resolve it shall have.  
Ensure Hamlet departs before the sun sets. *(Claudius exits, leaving Gertrude and Polonius behind. Gertrude looks after him, conflicted.)*

**GERTRUDE.** *(softly, to herself)* Would that love could heal what power cannot. *(Polonius watches her for a moment, then exits as the scene fades.)*

### SCENE 16

*Horatio steps forward as Hamlet enters with three of the Players.*

**HAMLET.** Speak the speech I taught you, smoothly, but not too theatrically. Avoid overdoing it.

**PROLOGUE.** I'll do my best, your Highness.

**HAMLET.** Don't be too tame. Let your instincts guide you. Match action to word, but keep it natural. Overacting makes a mockery of the play. The wise will see it for what it is—foolish ambition. Now, go get ready.

**HORATIO.** Your wisdom guides us all, my lord. We trust in your direction. *(Hamlet and Players exit as the lights shift and Mortimer steps from the darkness as Horatio paces, visibly troubled by recent events.)*

**HORATIO.** Who walks there? Friend or phantom? Show yourself!  
*(Horatio grabs at the hilt of his sword, but Mortimer raises a hand, calm and deliberate.)*

**MORTIMER.** Friend, if you'll have one in a place where loyalty fades like smoke. But tonight, I come not for friendship. My purpose is to serve the truth—though its weight may break us both.

**HORATIO.** Speak plainly, Mortimer. What truth do you bear? Are you specter or man? And what cause have you to wander these halls like death's own shadow?

**MORTIMER.** I am but a vessel, Horatio, a whisper carried by the winds of treachery. The ghost calls to Hamlet, but the living bear heavier burdens. *(Mortimer steps closer.)*

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**HORATIO.** If you have knowledge, speak! Hamlet's life balances on the edge of ruin.

**MORTIMER.** Hamlet's ruin is not his own—it is crafted by hands both visible and hidden. Claudius's throne is built on lies, but his spies see more than you think. And you, Horatio, are their next quarry.

**HORATIO.** *(steadfast)* Let them come. I've pledged my life to protect Hamlet, whatever the cost.

**MORTIMER.** You watch him like a man tethered to a sinking ship.

**HORATIO.** He needs me. Now, more than ever.

**MORTIMER.** Does he? Or do you need him?

You cling to him as if saving him will redeem you.

But tell me, Horatio, if he falls, will you fall with him?

**HORATIO.** I won't abandon him. I've come this far—

**MORTIMER.** *(interrupting)* And what has it cost you? Your peace? Your reason? You see the shadows gathering, Horatio.

You know where this ends. *(Mortimer circles him, speaking low and steady.)* But here's the truth:

You cannot save a man who won't save himself.

And Hamlet— *(Pausing, almost with pity.)*

He chose his path the moment he spoke to the ghost.

**HORATIO.** *(angrily)* You speak as if you know him, as if you know me.

**MORTIMER.** I know enough.

And I know this: if you keep walking his path, you may lose yourself before you can lose him. *(Mortimer exits, leaving Horatio visibly shaken.)*

**HORATIO.** *(to himself)* A whisper in the dark, yet it bears a storm's weight. If Mortimer speaks true, then Hamlet's fate is more dire than even I feared. I will watch. And I will act, though it costs me all. *(Horatio remains to contemplate what has and will transpire. Hamlet enters excited.)*

**HAMLET.** Ho, Horatio!

**HORATIO.** At your service.

**HAMLET.** You're the truest man I know, Horatio.

**HORATIO.** Oh, my lord—

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**HAMLET.** I don't flatter. Since I've chosen you as my closest friend, that's that. Enough of this. There's a play tonight for the King, a scene that mirrors my father's death. Watch my uncle's reaction closely. We'll judge it together later.

**HORATIO.** Of course, my lord. If he steals anything during the play and gets away with it, I'll pay for it.

(Aside) But what am I to judge?

What if my sight deceives me as surely as my memory?

If I misread Claudius, or Hamlet, will I bear the guilt of a false story?

To witness is no simple task—

For to see is not always to know. (*Sound of trumpets.*)

**HAMLET.** They're coming. Let's be idle. Get a seat. (*Enter Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and other Lords.*)

**CLAUDIUS.** How's our cousin Hamlet?

**HAMLET.** Excellent, really. I'm full of promises I can't keep. You can't feed birds like that.

**CLAUDIUS.** I don't understand, Hamlet.

**HAMLET.** Neither do I. (*To Polonius*) You acted once, didn't you, my lord?

**POLONIUS.** I did, my lord, and was considered good.

**HAMLET.** What did you play?

**POLONIUS.** I played Julius Caesar. I was killed in the Capitol—Brutus killed me.

**HAMLET.** Are the players ready?

**ROSENCRANTZ.** Yes, my lord. They're waiting on you.

**GERTRUDE.** Come, sit by me, Hamlet.

**HAMLET.** No, mother. There's a more appealing spot over here. (*Hamlet sits near Ophelia.*)

**POLONIUS.** (*to Claudius*) Do you see that? (*Claudius acknowledges what passes between Hamlet and Ophelia.*)

**HAMLET.** Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

**OPHELIA.** No, my lord.

**HAMLET.** I meant, my head upon your lap.

**OPHELIA.** Yes, my lord.



## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**HAMLET.** Do you think I meant something else?

**OPHELIA.** I think nothing, my lord.

**HAMLET.** That's a good thought for a young woman.

**OPHELIA.** What is, my lord?

**HAMLET.** Nothing.

**OPHELIA.** You're in a merry mood, my lord.

**HAMLET.** Am I?

**OPHELIA.** Yes, my lord.

**HAMLET.** What else should a man be but merry? Just look at my mother, so cheerful, and my father died only two hours ago.

**OPHELIA.** It's been two months, my lord.

**HAMLET.** So long? Then let the devil wear black, and I'll wear sable. To die two months ago and not be forgotten yet? There's hope for a great man's memory to outlive him. *(Trumpets sound.)*

**OPHELIA.** What does this mean, my lord? *(Enter PROLOGUE.)*

**HAMLET.** We'll find out soon enough.

**PROLOGUE.** For us and for our tragedy, here stooping to your clemency, we beg your hearing patiently. *(Exits.)*

**HAMLET.** Is this a prologue or a line from a ring's inscription?

**OPHELIA.** It's brief, my lord.

**HAMLET.** Like a woman's love. *(Enter PLAYER KING and PLAYER QUEEN.)*

**PLAYER KING.** It's been thirty years since Phoebus' cart circled Neptune's seas, and thirty moons since love joined us in marriage.

**PLAYER QUEEN.** So many years, and still love isn't finished with us! But alas, you're so sick, far from cheer.

**PLAYER KING.** I must leave you soon, my love. My strength is fading. But you will be loved and honored, and perhaps find another husband.

**PLAYER QUEEN.** I will never remarry. I could never love again after my first husband.

**HAMLET.** That's bitter!

**PLAYER QUEEN.** Second marriage is treason to my heart. I'll never marry again.

**PLAYER KING.** You say that now, but often we break our resolutions.

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**PLAYER QUEEN.** I swear it's true—I'll never marry again.

**PLAYER KING.** It's deeply sworn. Sweet, leave me here for a while. I need rest. (*PLAYER KING falls asleep.*)

**PLAYER QUEEN.** Sleep well, my love, and may nothing come between us. (*Exits.*)

**HAMLET.** (*To Gertrude*) What do you think of the play, my mother?

**GERTRUDE.** The lady doth protest too much, me thinks.

**HAMLET.** Oh, but she'll keep her word.

**CLAUDIUS.** Have you heard the argument? Is there no offense in it?

**HAMLET.** No, no offense. It's just a joke, poison in jest.

**CLAUDIUS.** What's the name of the play?

**HAMLET.** The Mousetrap." It's a reenactment of a murder in Vienna. A clever piece of work. (*Enter LUCIANUS.*)

**HAMLET.** Here's Lucianus, nephew of the King.

**OPHELIA.** You're like a chorus, my lord.

**HAMLET.** Begin, murderer.

**LUCIANUS.** Thoughts dark, hands ready, poison in hand, this night will undo life's natural course. (*He poisons the Player King.*)

**HAMLET.** He poisons him in the garden for his estate. (*Claudius rises.*)

**OPHELIA.** The King rises.

**HAMLET.** What, frightened by false fire?

**GERTRUDE.** How is my lord?

**POLONIUS.** Stop the play!

**CLAUDIUS.** Get me light! Away!

**POLONIUS.** Lights, lights, lights! (*All but Hamlet and Horatio exit.*)

**HAMLET.** Good Horatio, I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pounds. Did you notice?

**HORATIO.** I did, my lord.

**HAMLET.** What about the poisoning?

**HORATIO.** I noted it well.

**HAMLET.** Ah ha! Let's have some music! Bring in the recorders! (*Enter Guildenstern, Rosencrantz.*)

**GUILDENSTERN.** My lord, may I speak with you?

**HAMLET.** A whole story, sir.

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**ROSENCRANTZ.** Your mother wants to speak with you in her chamber before you go to bed.

**HAMLET.** We'll go. *(Enter the Players with recorders.)*

**HAMLET.** Ah, the recorders! Let me see one. *(He takes one and turns to Guildenstern.)* Will you play this pipe?

**GUILDENSTERN.** I can't, my lord.

**HAMLET.** Please.

**GUILDENSTERN.** I really can't.

**HAMLET.** It's as easy as lying. Just control it with your fingers and blow, and it will play beautiful music.

**GUILDENSTERN.** But I can't make it sound right. I don't have the skill.

**HAMLET.** Do you think I'm easier to play than a pipe? Call me any instrument you like, but you can't play me. *(Enter Polonius.)*

**HAMLET.** God bless you, sir.

**POLONIUS.** Your mother wants to speak with you right away.

**HAMLET.** I'll come to her soon.

*(Aside)* They fool me to the top of my patience. I'll go no more. *(He exits.)*

### SCENE 17

*Horatio stands alone, deep in thought in one of the asylum's quiet, dimly lit hallways. He is troubled by the weight of Hamlet's actions and the strange occurrences around him. He turns suddenly, startled by a presence that seems to materialize from the shadows.*

**HORATIO.** *(turning, startled)* Mortimer! You tread so softly, as though summoned from the grave itself. What dark tidings do you bring to these cursed halls?

**MORTIMER.** *(calm with dread)* Tidings darker than the shadows you fear, Horatio. The King's heart beats with unease, his mind restless and afraid. He gathers his council, but the weight of Hamlet's words has unnerved him. The dead do not stay buried when a prince like Hamlet stirs the earth.

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**HORATIO.** (*studying Mortimer closely*) You speak as though you know the pulse of this place, but I cannot say whether you are my conscience or a specter. Your words feel heavy—too heavy to be borne by the living.

**MORTIMER.** (*a smile*) Perhaps I am both. Your conscience is not a simple thing, Horatio. It wears many masks, and in Elsinore, it is never quiet. The shadows creep in every corner, and death walks among us with many faces. You cannot turn from it, for it is woven into your soul. You know this, don't you?

**HORATIO.** (*stepping closer*) If death walks among us, then speak plainly—what path do we tread? Is Hamlet's course a righteous one, or does it lead us all toward ruin? Can you tell me, as the voice inside my mind, what to do?

**MORTIMER.** (*a whisper*) The path ahead is a twisting road, and you know that no man can see the end of it clearly. Hamlet walks with a purpose, but fate is a wild thing, untamed by reason. His soul calls to the past and the dead, but the future is not written in his words alone. It is written in what is hidden and what is revealed when the shadows fall.

**HORATIO.** (*gripping Mortimer's arm*) Speak not in riddles! Hamlet is no pawn of fate—his mind is sharp, his will unyielding. Do not tell me his cause is lost!

**MORTIMER.** (*Into Horatio's eyes, his voice steady*) It is not the wit of man that seals fate, but the truth that lies beneath it. You and Hamlet are bound by more than loyalty—by the ghosts of what came before and the weight of the choices that follow. The question is not whether his cause is just. The question is, Horatio—will you follow him into the dark, where what is unseen will be laid bare?

**HORATIO.** (*voice trembling*) Then let the darkness come! If truth walks hand in hand with death, then I will walk with it. But do not count us lost. Hamlet's light has not yet burned out!

**MORTIMER.** (*stepping back into the shadows*) Then pray that it burns brightly, Horatio. For the dark is always hungry, and the light it consumes is the one we hold most dear. (*Mortimer's figure fades into the shadows, his steps eerily silent. Horatio remains, his mind churning*)

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

*with unease, the weight of Mortimer's words settling into his heart. He grips the hilt of his sword as if bracing for the battle that is to come.)*

### SCENE 18

*Horatio there, as if he has never moved.*

**HORATIO.** In this crucial moment, where Hamlet's pain meets his hidden enemy, we see truths lost in shadows, amid the tangled webs of courtly politics. The prince faces his fate, and betrayal lurks just outside the gate. *(Horatio steps into the shadows as Claudius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern enter.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** I don't trust him, and it's not safe to let him roam freely. Prepare yourselves—

I'll send him to England with you.

**GUILDENSTERN.** We'll make arrangements.

It's our duty to protect your people, my lord.

**ROSENCRANTZ.** The life of one man is tied to the strength of his mind, but the life of a king, whose wellbeing affects so many, Requires even greater protection.

**HORATIO.** *(aside)* Here they wear duty like a cloak,  
But whose true interests do they serve?

**CLAUDIUS.** Horatio, don't stand there silent.

Remember your place and loyalty—

You serve the crown, and that's a noble task,  
To protect this realm and everyone in it.

**HORATIO.** My liege, I serve both the crown and Denmark,  
For both are bound together.

But loyalty stretches beyond the throne,  
To the people's hearts, where true allegiance lies.

I hope my service proves worthy,  
To keep this nation safe from harm.

**CLAUDIUS.** *(to Rosencrantz)* Get ready for this quick journey.

**ROSENCRANTZ.** We'll hurry. *(Rosencrantz and Guildenstern exit. Enter Polonius.)*

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**POLONIUS.** My lord, he's heading to his mother's room.  
I'll hide behind the curtain and listen in. (*Turning back to Claudius*)  
But before I go, one thought weighs on me—  
Though secrets are often hidden in shadows,  
I'm no fool. I've heard many whispers in your service,  
And there are things I know,  
Things that, if I die, will see the light of day.  
No schemer, no order to stay quiet,  
Can bury the truth.

**CLAUDIUS.** What do you mean by all this? Speak plainly!

**POLONIUS.** I serve you loyally, and I'll continue to do so.  
But if something were to happen to me, there are papers, hidden away,  
that speak of things you don't know.

This court has ears and eyes, and secrets don't stay hidden forever.

**CLAUDIUS.** You speak in riddles. Do you think I'm your enemy?  
Is this your way of questioning my loyalty?

**POLONIUS.** I live to serve you, my lord, but wisdom comes with  
caution. No one is safe from fate—  
Not even kings.

And should I be silenced, the world will know what I knew.

**CLAUDIUS.** Then live, good Polonius.

Loyal servants need not fear death.

But if you're plotting something,

Beware—there's a spider waiting in the dark.

**POLONIUS.** Farewell, my lord. I'll see you before you sleep,  
And tell you what I know.

**CLAUDIUS.** Thank you, Polonius. (*Polonius exits.*)

**HORATIO.** (*aside*) I see the king's troubled—his face is pale,  
Guilt and fear weighing on him.

**CLAUDIUS.** Oh, my sin is foul, it stinks to high heaven.  
It's the oldest crime—my brother's murder.  
I can't pray, even though I want to.  
My guilt keeps me from acting on my will.  
I want to fix this, but I don't know where to start.

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

**HORATIO.** *(aside)* He speaks of murder and evil deeds,  
But won't seek forgiveness.

**CLAUDIUS.** What if my hand is stained with so much blood—  
Isn't there enough mercy in heaven to wash it clean?  
What's prayer for, if not to face our sins,  
To prevent our fall, or seek forgiveness when we're down?

**HORATIO.** *(aside)* I wonder at his soul's pain,  
Pitying him, if not for—

**CLAUDIUS.** Oh, what a wretched state!  
My soul is bound in guilt, struggling to break free.  
Help me, angels!

Let me bow, let my hardened heart soften—  
Everything could be made right. *(Claudius kneels.)*

**HORATIO.** *(aside)* The lies he tells himself poison his soul,  
And poison my own heart too. *(Horatio retreats into the shadows. Enter Hamlet.)*

**HAMLET.** Now's my chance. He's praying—  
If I kill him now, he'll go to heaven.  
But wait... that's not enough.  
He killed my father with a life full of sins—  
I can't send him to heaven.

When he's drunk, or in bed with my mother,  
That's when I'll strike—  
So his soul goes to hell, where it belongs. *(Hamlet puts his sword away.)*

**HAMLET.** I'll wait. My delay only extends his life. *(Hamlet exits.)*

**CLAUDIUS.** *(rising)* My words fly up, my thoughts stay down—  
Words without thoughts don't reach heaven. *(He exits.)*

**HORATIO.** *(To the unseen audience.)* In this asylum of shattered  
dreams and fears, I stand, a solitary figure, a witness to the anguish  
etched upon each face. *(He gestures to the unseen turmoil that surrounds him, the echoes of suffering palpable in the air.)*

Here, within these walls where reason is confined,  
I find myself amidst a labyrinth of despair,

## HAMLET: A HORATIO STORY

Where reality and illusion intertwine. *(He walks slowly, his footsteps echoing in the empty corridor, his voice carrying a weight of somber contemplation.)* But even in the depths of this desolate night, A flicker of hope, amidst the chaos and strife, There lies the promise of a respite. *(He raises his gaze, a glimmer of determination shining through the darkness.)* And so, as the shadows lengthen and the hour grows late, let us pause, let us reflect, let us contemplate. For in this interlude, this momentary pause, We find solace in the silence, in life's eternal cause. *(With a solemn bow, Horatio bids farewell, his presence fading into the obscurity of the asylum's depths, leaving the audience to ponder the enigma of the human condition.)*

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—  
ORDER A COPY AT [WWW.NEXTSTAGEPRESS.COM](http://WWW.NEXTSTAGEPRESS.COM)***