Hamlet: A Modern Fantasy Adaptation

An Honors Thesis (THEAT 435)

by

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Abstract

William Shakespeare is one of the best and most well-known playwrights in the English language. His timeless works transcend any medium, and, centuries after their creation, his plays are still read and performed over and over, countless times and in countless ways. *Hamlet* is possibly his greatest piece, and its story of love, murder, friendship, betrayal, revenge, and tragedy continues to entertain, delight, and touch the minds of human beings everywhere. This is the first act of *Hamlet* told in a fantasy world, where the swashbuckling and supernatural elements of the play fit very well alongside magic and the fantastical. Of the many stories in *Hamlet* available to be told, this is one artist's interpretation and perspective. Written in modern language, this story will hopefully be accessible to those who know little of Shakespeare, and will hopefully encourage them to go on to explore his original, beautiful works.

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Hamlet: A Modern Fantasy Adaptation

When I was a freshman in high school, we read *Romeo and Juliet* in my Honors English class. It was pretty fun. We read through the play, watched a film version, and wrote analyses for it. I remember being handily amused by the body count - by the time Paris died, I was so jaded by the play's many deaths that I simply thought to myself, "Well, there goes Paris!" and read on. Some of the kids in the class made some cute parody videos and brought them in, and we all had a good laugh. It was my first real exposure to Shakespeare, and it was interesting enough. My next exposure to Shakespeare came the next year, with *Macbeth*.

I hated it.

We spent ages on that play - I think it was a couple of weeks, but it certainly felt long. I didn't find the story very interesting - perhaps the fact that the main characters were the villains bothered me, but I don't really know - we watched a film version of it that I did not enjoy, and I had to write a horrid research paper about Lady Macbeth and somnambulism. By the time we finished, I so hated *Macbeth* that when I was reading a comic book some short while down the road, I was so repulsed upon reading a reference to the play in question that I immediately turned the page, not wanting to think about it. For some reason, we didn't read any Shakespeare in my third year at high school. We read *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby Dick* - no plays. It didn't matter to me.

Then I reached my senior year of high school, and that was when we read *Hamlet*.

*Hamlet* I loved.

It probably helped that we read a lot of the play aloud in class, and our teacher gleefully took the time to explain to us some of the more lewd humor, which we were of a good age to appreciate. *Hamlet* was a fun story, for all that it ended in tragedy - it was interesting and
enjoyable, and the film version we watched of it was fantastic. It was Kenneth Branagh's version of *Hamlet*, and I loved it to pieces. It was a gorgeous film, and I moved on to the class' next literary work with *Hamlet* firmly fixed in my mind as my favorite Shakespeare play. It remains so to this day.

College and a number of Theatre classes made me more able to appreciate Shakespeare's words. In my dramaturgy class my sophomore year, we read Romeo and Juliet again, and analyzed the play within an inch of its life. We read the full version, discussed it, and split into groups and did a project on what concept we would choose for the show and what time period we would play it in if we were producing it - along with, of course, *why*. Then we read the play again, with cuts made in the script - the script of a production we planned to attend in Indianapolis.

We discussed that script, what the creators of that play hoped to achieve, and if we believed they could do it effectively. Then we went to see the performance, then we came back and discussed the performance - was their concept clear to us, and did they succeed in what they set out to do? - and *then* we talked about what cuts *we* would make in the script if we were putting *Romeo and Juliet* on. We spent two or three weeks on *Romeo and Juliet* alone, with so much analysis that even the professor was surprised by the amount of time spent and wished to move on so we could actually get to the rest of his planned course work.

To me, however, those weeks were like a drink of water. I loved those weeks and the time we spent on that play. Right around the same time, Ball State's Theatre Department was also putting on a production of *Macbeth*. I actually wasn't particularly leery about seeing the play - though I still remembered the hatred I'd felt for it in high school, I had seen enough of the department's shows to know that Ball State simply didn't have bad theatre. I also knew that
Shakespeare's play were better if watched performed, as they were intended, than read like a novel, and so I actually looked forward to seeing Macbeth. I wasn't disappointed. The show opened on my birthday, and it was a lovely birthday present. It was a beautiful, minimalist production that I saw three times before its run was over. I remember the fog that floated out onto the stage and into the audience when the play began, and the scrim lit with the colors of dawn, and the three witches, and Banquo's ghost, and Macduff's anguish and revenge over the loss of his wife and children. I like Macbeth much better now than I did in high school.

So when the time came for scheduling spring 2012's classes, and I had room in my schedule for two classes I didn't need to graduate, I signed up for Shakespeare.

I'd already deliberated over my Honors Thesis, and was concerned that I couldn't decide what I wanted to do. I had three ideas - direct a play, write a screenplay, or do something involving French (Write a short story perhaps? I never did quite resolve that idea.) I finally decided I wanted to direct a play, and next wondered which play I should choose. I knew I wanted Karen Kessler for my mentor, and she agreed to oversee me as I went into the endeavor. I didn't know which play to pick, I didn't have a lot of play directing experience (one Directing 1 class), and directing a play required the presence and coordination of other people - it would be a tough job, and I began to worry that I did not possess the capability to do a play justice.

I had a meeting with my mentor and she expressed similar concerns. I told her my second idea, the more solid one - to write a screenplay, and she was very encouraging. We discussed the new path, and since I still wanted the project to be Theatre-oriented, and I was in Karen's Shakespeare class, we determined that I should write a screenplay adaptation of one of Shakespeare's plays. There was a little deliberation over which one, but I almost immediately
gravitated toward Hamlet, my favorite. I wanted to adapt Hamlet, possibly Shakespeare's greatest work.

I left the meeting feeling better, excited about the new prospect. As I thought about how best to adapt Hamlet, where to place the story, and what story of the play I most wanted to tell, I realized I had the opportunity to combine knowledge from three different classes of mine in the semester. I was taking Shakespeare, Screenwriting, and Fantasy Literature. The applications of Shakespeare and Screenwriting are obvious, but I thought, why not place Hamlet in a fantasy setting, like a number of stories I so love? I would be reading plenty of inspiration material throughout the semester, and Hamlet, with its swashbuckling and supernatural elements, would fit very well into a fantastical and magical world.

Everything was decided.

My Shakespeare class helped me as I expected - we went over Hamlet in class, and watched the Kenneth Branagh version of the film, making it my second viewing, and it was like seeing an old friend. That beautiful film definitely influenced me strongly as I wrote. We watched the film Scotland, PA, a modernized adaptation of Macbeth, set in the 1970s, and I adored its dark comedy and hilarious take on the timeless tragedy. We also watched a BBC version of The Taming of the Shrew, and of course, went through others of Shakespeare's plays. In my Screenwriting class, we watched films, discussed character arcs, and listened to our professor explain film's classic three act structure. We wrote two different film treatments for the class, and I began writing a treatment of my version of Hamlet.

I had been rolling ideas around in my head, and thinking about what I wanted to do with the characters, sometimes writing down lines from scenes in my notebooks during the day. In my Fantasy Literature colloquium, we read The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien, Harry Potter and the
Philosopher's Stone (well, my version was Sorcerer's Stone, but the former is the proper title) by J.K. Rowling, and Mort by Terry Prachett. In my Shakespeare class, we were required to write our own concept for either Macbeth or Hamlet, and describe the world we intended to place the play in. I chose Hamlet naturally, and used the assignment to gather my thoughts, detail my concept, and think more about fleshing out the world I wanted to create.

The way I see Hamlet is as a true protagonist - a good, if confused young man who is just trying to deal with his grief and other problems and do the right thing. Hamlet is an intelligent character who doesn't rush into things - when he is first told that Claudius murdered his father, he believes it, but he chooses to wait to act, and to verify the ghost's claim before taking his revenge. He is neither evil nor stupid, but sympathetic, and a character I mourn for when things end in tragedy. He has faults, one of which proves to be fatal when he delays killing Claudius to be sure he goes to Hell, dissatisfied with simply killing him in revenge, but he is a good person, certainly to begin with. I wanted to show that in my writing, and did my best to make Hamlet appear in my work as I see him in Shakespeare's.

Probably my favorite part of the play is Hamlet's great friendship with Horatio. Of all the play's characters, Horatio is the one whom Hamlet most trusts. When his school friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern arrive, he suspects them of reporting about to Claudius almost immediately - yet Horatio he trusts to keep the secret of the ghost's existence and asks him to help him watch Claudius' reactions during The Murder of Gonzago (the play within a play scene). Horatio is the first person Hamlet comes to speak with when he returns in Act IV, and Horatio consistently helps Hamlet, listens to him, and sometimes offers him advice. I love their friendship, and I wanted to portray it strongly in my piece. In fact, one thing puzzled me about their friendship in the original play - of all the other characters, Hamlet trusts Horatio the most.
However, of the characters close to Hamlet, Horatio is the only one whom Claudius and Gertrude completely ignore.

They ask Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to speak with Hamlet and report back, and they send Ophelia out to talk to him while Claudius and Polonius listen, but throughout the entire play, neither of them ever says one word to Horatio. I decided that in my version, Horatio would be very low class, something of a peasant, and very nervous around royalty and Elsinore castle, but still a close friend to Hamlet. This explained to me why neither Claudius nor Gertrude, nor Rosencrantz and Guildenstern ever seemed to consider Horatio's existence - in my world, he is beneath their notice; a shy, reserved young man who could not be further from nobility. This also gave Hamlet further good qualities, as while others ignore Horatio, he is not bothered by his friend's low social status, and encourages him to stand up for himself. As I was trying to show Hamlet in a favorable light, I found this to be an excellent concept. In my version, Horatio goes on his own journey throughout the story, gaining confidence in himself with Hamlet's help and possessing new internal strength by the end of the film.

One of the first and most enduring ideas that popped into my head was the concept of Bernardo and Marcellus as gargoyles. I really wanted the two castle guards to become enchanted gargoyles, immovable, sarcastic, argumentative, and unnoticed by virtually everyone in the castle. Hamlet only finds out about their sighting of the ghost because they mention it in passing to Horatio when he asks them which door he should enter through upon his arrival to Elsinore. They function as a comic relief Greek chorus, present at the scene when Hamlet sees the ghost for the first time, and humorously arguing as they comment upon the action of the human characters. They cannot move from the stone in which they are set, they cannot feel the cold, and they cannot escape from each other - but they can sit back and enjoy the show!
Ophelia went through a couple of different incarnations in my head. I knew roughly how I wanted to portray her character - strong, kind, and in love with Hamlet - and I knew what I wanted her to be. I remembered the lovely line right after Hamlet finishes his "To be or not to be" speech - "Soft you now! The fair Ophelia!-Nymph, in thy orisons, be all my sins rememb'red." In the quotation, Hamlet uses the metaphor of a nymph to describe Ophelia - but I was writing a fantasy piece; I wanted her to be a nymph! I thought it would be a nice reference to the text, it made Ophelia unique, and it gave me a very good reason to cause her break up with Hamlet. It took me a while to determine what sort of nymph she was - at first I thought she was to be a water nymph, but then I considered a fire nymph, a forest nymph, and eventually settled upon frost.

I realized that she was related to the enemy - Fortinbras and his troops were from the kingdom of the frost nymphs, attacking Denmark, and Ophelia was Polonius' adopted daughter, a frost nymph taken in as a child, and not a human. This gave the Denmark royalty cause to distrust Ophelia. She was of the race that was attacking them, and they feared her betrayal, if not through her own will, through the magic that binds her to her people. Polonius insists that Ophelia break up with Hamlet to avoid endangering the throne, and she agrees to do so in order to keep Hamlet above suspicion, rather than simply because her father told her to. Again, Hamlet's unprejudiced mind comes to light here, as Ophelia's status does not concern him and he loves her for herself. Ophelia is a stronger character, and has a reason for leaving Hamlet that is more viable to a modern audience.

For that is one of the goals I wished to accomplish - I wanted to make the story of Hamlet more accessible to the people of today. I enjoy Shakespeare, and I love Hamlet very much, but I find it useful to read and discuss Shakespeare (preferably with someone who understands his
works in general better than I) in order to more fully understand the plays. I can see how many
people could see Shakespeare's works as daunting and incomprehensible, and not wish to read or
view them. With Hamlet displayed in the modern English language, in a fresh and fantastical
world, I believe people will be able to understand the story, enjoy the piece, and appreciate
Shakespeare's timeless tales without the intimidating language and iambic pentameter. Perhaps a
modern version of the story will encourage them to consider experiencing the original, though. I
wanted to see Hamlet come to life in an exciting and magical setting, and show the stories of the
characters that I see and so enjoy.

So sit back and read the first act of Hamlet, as adapted from Shakespeare's play. I hope it
comes to life for you.
Hamlet

By

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Based on:
Shakespeare’s Hamlet

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SCENE 1 EXT. ELSINORE CASTLE COURTYARD NIGHT

It is a dark night with lots of snow. It is difficult to see much of anything, but there is an impression of a large, looming, building. Two unseen characters, BERNARDO and MARCELLUS begin to argue.

BERNARDO
So... How cold d’you think it is out here?

MARCELLUS
Let me think... cold.

BERNARDO
Oh, how accurate. Well, that just answers all my questions.

MARCELLUS
Well, how am I supposed to know? Ask a human if you really want to find out.

BERNARDO
Do you see any humans out here?

MARCELLUS
Only because they’re smart enough to avoid being out here with you!

BERNARDO
And what does that say about you?

MARCELLUS
That I don’t have a choice. Believe me, if I could get away, I would.

BERNARDO
Well, pardon me for trying to start a conversation!

MARCELLUS
It was a stupid question anyway! ‘How cold do you think it is out here?’ Like it matters to us!

There is a sudden, peculiar whooshing sound.
MARCELLUS (CONT’D)
Uh... Berns, did you hear that?

BERNARDO
Hear what?

MARCELLUS
That sound...?

BERNARDO
All I could hear was you yelling in my ear!

MARCELLUS
Well, shut up a minute, I think I heard something.

They wait. Silence.

BERNARDO
I think you’re making it up.

MARCELLUS
No, I heard something!

BERNARDO
(humoring him)
Okay, you heard something.

MARCELLUS
And you didn’t hear anything?

BERNARDO
Well, what did it sound like?

The whooshing sound repeats, louder this time, and more ominous.

MARCELLUS
That.

BERNARDO
Okay, I definitely heard that.

MARCELLUS
Well, what is it?

BERNARDO
Oh, now you expect me to have all the answers!

(CONTINUED)
MARCELLUS

I just -

The whooshing sound repeats, louder and closer. An indistinct, ghostly figure looms up out of the darkness.

MARCELLUS (CONT'D)

Holy crap! It’s the king!

BERNARDO

Really? He looks a little paler than usual...

MARCELLUS

The old king, you moron! Hamlet I!

...Your... your majesty?

Silence. The ghost does not answer.

MARCELLUS (CONT'D)

Your majesty, hey, how’s tricks?

You’re lookin’ good! I mean, well, uh, considering...

The ghost still does not answer.

BERNARDO

Okay, he’s just standing there.

Well, floating, but you know...

MARCELLUS

Don’t talk about him like he’s not in the room!

BERNARDO

‘In the room?’ What room are we in?

MARCELLUS

You know what I mean!

The sound of a rooster crowing is heard off screen. The sky is lightening slightly to the east, a strip of pale yellow sky appearing beneath a thick layer of clouds. The whoosh repeats with an air of finality.

MARCELLUS

...Your majesty?

BERNARDO

Oh hey, check it out - he’s gone.
CONTINUED:

MARCELLUS
Truly you have a talent for the obvious.

BERNARDO
Says Mister We’re-in-a-room!

MARCELLUS
At least I have the sense not to insult the ghosts of royalty!

BERNARDO
Ooh, 'cause a dead human’s gonna bother to hurt us!

MARCELLUS
You have no idea what a dead human would...

Their squabbling fades as the view expands to show a full picture ELSINORE CASTLE in the gray dawn. It is a tall, majestic structure with a vast outer wall and sprawling grounds.

SCENE 2 EXT. ELSINORE CASTLE COURTYARD DAY

It is a bright, sunny day. The snow is still thick on the ground, but melting fast - green grass peaks through and flowers are thawing from under a coat of frost. It should be spring, but winter is still hanging on. HORATIO, a young man in his early twenties, stands nervously in the courtyard, a fair distance from the main doors. The large, iron gates of the outer wall are closed behind him. He glances back at the gates, then walks hesitantly forward. The main doors of the castle are dominated by two stone gargoyles - one on either side. They are still and normal for a moment, then suddenly move and begin to argue with each other. These are the faceless Bernardo and Marcellus.

MARCELLUS
You know, this is probably all your fault.

BERNARDO
How is it my fault?

MARCELLUS
He probably left because you were making fun of him.

(CONTINUED)
BERNARDO
So? I didn’t tell him to come back
now, did I?

As they argue, Horatio is approaching, eying them
uncertainly.

MARCELLUS
I swear it’s your fault and I’m
going to find a way to prove it.

BERNARDO
Well, good luck because you’re
going to need it.

Horatio has reached them.

HORATIO
Um, excuse me?

MARCELLUS
You’re always making my life hell,
why shouldn’t you go to the
trouble?

HORATIO
Ex... Excuse me? Hello?

BERNARDO
Of causing a ghost? Boy, you really
do have an imagination!

HORATIO
Ex... Excuse, um... EXCUSE ME!

Bernardo and Marcellus pause in their argument to stare at
Horatio. He drops his eyes under their combined stare and
shuffles his feet.

HORATIO
Sorry. Um, I was just wondering, if
you could, uh, if you could tell me
if it’s all right for me to use
these doors.

He indicates the grand double doors that open into the great
hall.

MARCELLUS
What?

(CONTINUED)
HORATIO
Well, I mean, I don’t know if I’m allowed. To use the main doors, I mean. It’s just, I’m, I’m here to see Hamlet and -

Bernardo cuts him off.

BERNARDO
Yeah, uh, he’s dead.

HORATIO
Oh no, I meant, I meant the other one.

MARCELLUS
(to Bernardo)
Of course he meant the other one, you moron!

BERNARDO
Well, how was I supposed to know? I mean, around here, take your pick!

HORATIO
Take my pick...?

MARCELLUS
Just ignore him, he’s talking about the ghost we saw last night.

Horatio starts at the mention of a ghost. Marcellus continues, oblivious to the effect his words have had.

MARCELLUS(CONT’D)
And yeah, you can use these doors, I mean, what do we care, eh?

HORATIO
I’m sorry, did you say a ghost?

BERNARDO
Yeah, a ghost. Last night. Hamlet I, no less.

MARCELLUS
The old king.

BERNARDO
Kinda pale, but as lively as ever!

(CONTINUED)
MARCELLUS
Of course, I still think -

HORATIO
You mean a ghost? An actual ghost, not a theatrical illusion? A real ghost?

MARCELLUS
Yeah, a real ghost.

HORATIO
Of King Hamlet.

BERNARDO
Of King Hamlet.

HORATIO
So what do they think?

MARCELLUS
What does who think?

HORATIO
The king and queen. The current ones.

BERNARDO
How should we know?

HORATIO
Well, didn’t you tell them?

MARCELLUS
Hell no, why would we do that?

HORATIO
Well, because, I mean, why wouldn’t you?

BERNARDO
Look, do you know how much respect we get around here? Zip.

MARCELLUS
Zilch.

BERNARDO
Nada.

MARCELLUS
Like we’re gonna tell anybody anything. Nobody ever listens to the gargoyles.

(CONTINUED)
HORATIO
I’m listening to you.

MARCELLUS
Nobody important ever listens to the gargoyles.

HORATIO
(embarrassed and sarcastic)
Thanks for that.

BERNARDO
No problem.

HORATIO
But are you sure you saw the king’s ghost? You really saw it?

MARCELLUS
Of course we did. You think we’re making this up?

HORATIO
But there hasn’t been a real ghost in this castle for over 20 years.

BERNARDO
Shows what you know. There was one here last week.

MARCELLUS
That was a wood sprite, you idiot!

HORATIO
And anyway, why would he come back? Does he think we need guidance?

BERNARDO
Dunno, he didn’t say a thing. Marcellus tried to talk to him, but you can imagine the response he got.

HORATIO
Look, if this is real, if you really saw the king’s ghost... I’m gonna tell Hamlet.

MARCELLUS
Okay, you do that.

(CONTINUED)
HORATIO
But if it isn’t real...

Horatio suddenly gets serious and a bit threatening. It is quite a change from his nervous persona.

HORATIO (CONT.)
If it isn’t real, I’m going to tell the court wizard and have him make the two of you into gravel. Because Hamlet loved his father more than anything, and if you’re just making things up this is gonna kill him. He doesn’t need this right now, and if I hurt him because of you, I’m not gonna be happy. At all. Ever.

Horatio waits. The gargoyles look at him uncertainly.

HORATIO (CONT’D)
So. Are you sure you want me to tell him?

MARCELLUS
Uh... Yeah.

Marcellus suddenly gives Horatio back some of the energy he just received.

MARCELLUS (CONT.‘D)
Yeah, you go ahead. Because we’re not making it up. We may not get any respect around here, but we don’t lie!

HORATIO
All right. I’m going in now.

He walks to the doors and opens them, heading inside.

MARCELLUS
You hear that, Bernie? Our reputations are on the line!

BERNARDO
What reputations? We just told him nobody listens to us anyway.

MARCELLUS
I meant... Argh! If you were three feet closer...!

(CONTINUED)
BERNARDO
Oh, yeah? I’d like to see you try it!

MARCELLUS
Would you?

BERNARDO
I sure would! I’d kick your stony ass!

Their bickering fades again as the camera moves into the castle.

SCENE 3 INT. ELSINORE COUNCIL CHAMBERS

King CLAUDIUS, an aging but still youthful man, and QUEEN GERTRUDE, a handsome woman of similar age, stand before their group of conciliators, who are ranged around a large, ring-shaped table. They are in session, with Claudius going over the latest matters of import. At Claudius’ left side - Gertrude is on his right - sits POLONIUS, the king and queen’s most senior adviser. Next to Polonius sits REYNALDO, the court wizard and Polonius’ confidant.

CLAUDIUS
I know it’s been a bit unorthodox, and rather fast, but I think the benefits outweigh the negatives. We need a strong, united monarchy, particularly in the face of my brother’s death, and I think we can all agree it would be a lot to ask of Queen Gertrude to rule alone in such troubled times.

He pauses to smile at Gertrude. She smiles back. Takes Claudius’ hand.

GERTRUDE
It was really the only option - the throne is much more secure with the two of us. I think the people will come to accept our marriage in time, especially when we all have to pull together to get through the latest trials.

CLAUDIUS
Speaking of which, Fortinbras is becoming a problem we cannot ignore. Winter should have faded

(MORE)
CLAUDIUS (cont’d)
weeks ago and the nights are particularly bad. It’s clearly his doing. Our esteemed court wizard Reynaldo has been doing what he can to help the thaw, but there’s only so much.

COUNCIL MEMBER 1
Why can’t those damn nymphs just mind their own business?

COUNCIL MEMBER 2
Anger’s in their blood if you ask me...

COUNCIL MEMBER 3
Fortinbras has got no right...

CLAUDIUS
Quiet. Whether or not he has the right doesn’t exactly matter, does it? He’s been furious ever since King Hamlet killed his father, we always knew that. Now that his uncle has finally died, Fortinbras can do what he likes.

COUNCIL MEMBER 1
It was a fair duel! I thought those nymphs valued ‘honor’ or whatever.

GERTRUDE
We can expect war from the frost kingdom very soon. Already Fortinbras has gone beyond just attacking us with the weather and is marshaling his troops. Reynaldo?

REYNALDO
I’ve been scrying on what I can of Fortinbras’ movements - it’s not been easy, he’s well-shielded. But I can see enough to know he’s coming, and fast, and with a lot of troops. I’d estimate perhaps 50,000.

There is muffled cursing around the room.

REYNALDO (CONT’D)
He’ll be here in a couple of weeks - possibly longer, depending.
GERTRUDE
We're not waiting for him to get here. We need to avoid a war, if possible, so we'll be starting diplomatic negotiations immediately.

CLAUDIUS
We've tried to contact Fortinbras magically, but either he's kicking up too much dust to hear us or he's not answering - most likely the former. So Laertes is riding out today to meet the army and head up the diplomacy.

There is silence around the room - the council members are tense and unsure.

COUNCIL MEMBER 2
...Laertes?

COUNCIL MEMBER 3
Send Laertes? Are we certain this is the wisest course of action?

GERTRUDE
Polonius has taught him well, and we have every confidence that he will successful if Fortinbras is at all amenable.

COUNCIL MEMBER 1
But Laertes?

CLAUDIUS
And what is wrong with Laertes? He is second only to his father in diplomacy.

COUNCIL MEMBER 2
Oh, come on! His sister -

GERTRUDE
Is precisely the reason Laertes is best equipped to handle Fortinbras.

COUNCIL MEMBER 3
Or to give in to him!

COUNCIL MEMBER 1
Are you thinking this through? What if she affects his judgment? What if she puts a word in his ear?
POLONIUS
Are you insinuating that my daughter is anything less than loyal to Denmark?

COUNCIL MEMBER 2
Actually, yes!

POLONIUS
That is utterly ridiculous.

COUNCIL MEMBER 2
Is it?

GERTRUDE
Gentlemen! We are here to get things done, not squabble like schoolchildren!

There is a pause. Tension in the room.

COUNCIL MEMBER 3
Look, you can’t deny she’s a risk right now. Magic’s finicky, even if she isn’t.

COUNCIL MEMBER 2
‘Course, if it is in their blood...

CLAUDIUS
It doesn’t matter! Ophelia is, as far as we know, a loyal subject and her brother is no different. Fortinbras will look kindly upon Laertes because of her. He won’t see it as a downside, and that’s what matters. Laertes is going.

COUNCIL MEMBER 1
The people won’t like it.

CLAUDIUS
Well, the people don’t rule, do they? (Beat) It’s up to us to make the right decisions for them, whether or not they ‘like’ it.

GERTRUDE
Besides, Laertes is loved by the people. Why, he’s almost as dear to them as is our heir Hamlet -

She waves a hand at a nearby seat. The seat is empty. She startles and recovers.

(CONTINUED)
Anyway, they trust him and so do we. He’s going and that’s final.

CLAUDIUS
Council dismissed.

The group begins to break up, bowing to the monarchs and heading out the door. Polonius pauses briefly to speak to Claudius and Gertrude before leaving with Reynaldo.

POLONIUS
I’ll go make certain Laertes is getting ready.

Claudius and Gertrude acknowledge him, but are looking about the room distractedly. Polonius moves off and Claudius and Gertrude’s eyes fall upon a young man sitting on the floor in the corner, wearing black clothing and a mournful expression. This is HAMLET.

GERTRUDE
Hamlet, sweetheart, why do you keep doing this?

HAMLET
Why do you think, mother?

They step closer to him. Hamlet sighs and stands up.

HAMLET(CONT’D)
I just needed some space. You know how these meetings get to me.

CLAUDIUS
Hamlet, I know you’re upset - we all are. But you need to participate more in the council meetings. How is anyone going to take you seriously as king one day if you don’t get involved in the ruling?

HAMLET
It seems like you two are doing fine without me.

GERTRUDE
Hamlet, please. Try to get over this.
HAMLET
Get over it? You just expect me to get over it, like it's some test I failed at school, or, or a bad day I had? He's gone! How am I supposed to get over that?

CLAUDIUS
Your mother and I are trying our best. I know you loved your father - I loved him, too. But these are troubled times and we cannot afford to let our feelings control us like this. I know what it feels like - I lost my father as well. And he lost his. And he lost his. Death happens, and we must accept it. You can't keep mourning so openly - it makes the monarchy look weak in a time when we have to be strong.

GERTRUDE
We're just trying to do what's best for Denmark and you, Hamlet.

She embraces him.

GERTRUDE
Please try to get better. It breaks my heart to see you so upset and it doesn't need more breaking.

Hamlet sighs.

HAMLET
I'm sorry, mother. I am trying.

GERTRUDE
Why don't you stay here another month, sweetheart? I'd hate for you to go back to school like this, and I want you around where I can see you.

HAMLET
Of course. I'll do anything you like.

GERTRUDE
You're a good son. You'll make a wonderful king one day.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

HAMLET
Thanks. I’ll see you later.

Claudius tries to reach out to Hamlet as he leaves, but Hamlet moves by him too quickly, avoiding his touch. Claudius and Gertrude share a look as Hamlet walks out.

SCENE 4 INT. ELSINORE CORRIDOR

Hamlet walks down a hall, tears beginning to glimmer in his eyes. He reaches a door and steps into the room, shutting the door behind him.

SCENE 5 INT. ELSINORE SITTING CHAMBER

A young woman, who is sitting reading in chair, looks up as Hamlet enters. She is dressed in white, with long black hair, and she seems to radiate cold into the room. This is OPHELIA, frost nymph and adopted daughter to Polonius. Hamlet steps quickly across the room to her and she sets her book down on an end table as he approaches.

HAMLET
Ophelia, I can’t take this. I want to die!

He throws himself into her arms and she hugs him comfortingly.

OPHELIA
I know, I’m sorry, I wish I could make it go away.

HAMLET
It’ll never go away. Never.

OPHELIA
I know. But it will get better.

HAMLET
I’m not so sure of that.

She keeps hugging him and lets him cry.

HAMLET
I just want to die, I want this to end.

OPHELIA
You aren’t thinking about actually killing yourself, are you?

(CONTINUED)
HAMLET
I... I don't know.

OPHELIA
(briskly) Well, you can't. You can't, not while you have me.

Hamlet doesn't answer.

OPHELIA
You have me, and your mother, and the whole kingdom of Denmark in your future. You can't die, you know that.

HAMLET
I know. But I still want to.

OPHELIA
Well, stop it. (more softly) You know he'd want you to live.

HAMLET
Yes.

OPHELIA
Hamlet, you've got so much ahead of you. I know it hurts, but just hold on, okay? I'm here for you, whenever you need me.

HAMLET
Thank you. I don't know what I'd do without you.

OPHELIA
You'll never have to find out.

They kiss. A sound is heard at the door. They break apart immediately and Hamlet leaps to a different chair. Ophelia snatches back up her book and they do their best to look innocent. The door opens and a SERVANT pokes his head in.

SERVANT
Lady Ophelia? Your brother is going to leave soon. You will want to see him off?

OPHELIA
Oh yes, of course.

She leaves her book again and stands up.
OPHELIA (CONT’D)
Bye, Hamlet. See you later.

She blows him a kiss behind the servant’s back as she leaves through the door.

SERVANT
And there’s some funny little chap come to see you, your Highness.

HAMLET
I don’t want to see anybody.

SERVANT
He says you’re the only one he knows around here. Odd.

HAMLET
All right, fine, send him in.

The servant nods and leaves. Hamlet gets up restlessly and paces to the window, where he can see the castle grounds stretched out before him. A few moments later the door opens again and Horatio comes in, looking contrite. Hamlet turns and sees him. A smile lights up his face for the first time.

HAMLET
Horatio!

He hurries across the room to his friend.

HORATIO
Hi. Sorry to bother you, but I didn’t know who else to ask for.

HAMLET
It’s not a bother, believe me. (Hugs him) It’s good to see you.

Hamlet and Horatio move over to the window seat and sit down.

HAMLET (CONT’D)
How have you been?

HORATIO
Okay. How have you - um...

HAMLET
(bitterly) Okay.

(CONTINUED)
HORATIO
Sorry.

HAMLET
So, what brings you here? Term’s still going on, isn’t it?

HORATIO
No, actually. They’ve canceled classes early because of... the king’s death. We’ll start again in a couple of months.

HAMLET
Oh. Well, good I guess. I’ll miss less that way.

HORATIO
I came to pay my respects. The last of the funeral rites are tonight, and I wanted to be here.

HAMLET
The last of the wedding rites are tonight, too. You gonna go to those?

HORATIO
(Quietly) Not if you don’t want me to.

HAMLET
It’s... unbelievable. Two months, two months and she’s already married. To my uncle! Like that isn’t weird! My god, if she had to remarry so badly why couldn’t she at least have chosen someone unrelated to her!

HORATIO
Word is that they wanted to unite the monarchy. Keep everything together.

HAMLET
Well, they’re doing an admirable job. I wish them luck.

HORATIO
Um, how are things with Ophelia?

Hamlet hisses at him to be quiet.
HAMLET
Don't talk about that here! Are you crazy?

HORATIO
But we're alone, I... I thought it was okay.

HAMLET
I'm a prince - I'm never alone.
Hang on.

Hamlet looks around the room. Crosses to the door and opens it. Looks down the hall - empty but for a servant walking away quite a distance down. Closes the door and comes back in.

HAMLET
All right, I guess it's safe.
There's Reynaldo, sometimes he scrys on people, but I've been putting up shields lately and so far he's respected my privacy.

HORATIO
I'll never forget their faces when you enrolled in magic classes.
You'll always have a court wizard.

HAMLET
Yes, but it's more fun to do magic yourself.

Hamlet resumes his seat next to Horatio.

HAMLET
I do worry, though. It wouldn't exactly take a miracle for someone to find out. I mean, as far as anyone knows, we're barely even friends, but... I've been spending a lot of time with her lately. I'm afraid we can't keep it secret much longer. Not sure I want it kept a secret, really.

HORATIO
It wouldn't be good if people found out - not now, certainly. Half the court thinks she's in league with her people and the other half don't like her on principle.
HAMLET
Well, they’re a lot of idiots. She’s been Polonius’ daughter since she was three years old, she’s not going to betray Denmark now. I don’t care what they say.

HORATIO
I believe it, but does the kingdom? They all think the magic connection is going to make her turn.

HAMLET
It won’t. She’s strong. Besides, we still don’t know how that sort of magic works for sure.

Horatio looks uncertain.

HAMLET (CONT’D)
She won’t betray us. She won’t betray me. I love her. That’s that.

Silence between them. Horatio breaks it.

HORATIO
So... how are things?

HAMLET
Great, honestly - considering. She’s been great, better than I deserve. I feel like every time I see her anymore I’m crying. But she’s been... really understanding.

He looks out the window, watching Ophelia as she speaks to LAERTES. Polonius is some distance back, chatting with Reynaldo.

HAMLET
She’s just great.

SCENE 6 EXT. ELSINORE CASTLE GROUNDS

Laertes is packing bags onto his horse, a short distance back from a group of other men readying their horses - his entourage. Ophelia is with him.

OPHELIA
I’m going to miss you.

(CONTINUED)
LAERTES
Yeah. You, too.

OPHELIA
I should be going - Fortinbras would agree to talk to me over anybody.

LAERTES
I know, but...

He shrugs, a helpless gesture.

LAERTES(CONT’D)
People. Everybody thinks you’re going to join them, or have your judgment affected at the very least.

Ophelia starts to say something, but Laertes gets there first.

LAERTES(CONT’D)
I know they’re wrong. But they’re not going to send you off into the arms of the enemy, especially not when you’re so close to royalty.

OPHELIA
Oh lovely, I can tell Fortinbras all about the Queen’s favorite type of tea.

LAERTES
You know what I mean. And there is the magical aspect of things.

The conversation becomes quieter.

LAERTES(CONT’D)
Have you really not felt anything? (beat)

OPHELIA
I... have felt something. Something small. On the edge. Just a flicker in my mind.

She looks out over the landscape, stretching far around them.
OPHELIA (CONT’)
But they’re getting closer, aren’t they?

LAERTES
Have you told Reynaldo?

OPHELIA
Not yet. I’m not sure if I should. It might be just... I don’t want to go and make them think all their fears are confirmed. If it gets stronger, I’ll tell him.

LAERTES
All right. I trust your judgment. For the most part.

This last bit is a private joke - Laertes "does not think much of Hamlet." Ophelia giggles.

LAERTES (CONT’ D)
Speaking of which, how is the poor sod?

Ophelia glances around them, making sure the others are busy and that Polonius is engaged with Reynaldo. She speaks in a whisper. Laertes is quieter too, not wanting to air his sister’s secret.

OPHELIA
He’s doing better. I think. It’s been hard on him, but... he’ll be all right in the end.

LAERTES
You have to be careful, especially now. You ought not to be seen with him very often for the next few weeks.

OPHELIA
He needs me.

LAERTES
I know, but... It’s dangerous now. Maybe... maybe you should break it off with him for a little while.

Ophelia is slightly angered by this.
OPHELIA
I can’t just throw him out, not while he’s grieving!

LAERTES
Ophelia, the kingdom is under duress. If people find out now, more than ever, they’re going to go mad.

OPHELIA
(snappishly) Let them.

LAERTES
Ophelia.

OPHELIA
(relenting) I know. Look, we’ll be careful. We’re always careful. But, I don’t want to leave him. Not even temporarily. Not if I can help it. If we’re lucky, Fortinbras will accept your peace offering and things can go back to normal. And then maybe we’ll get the chance to be open about it.

LAERTES
If we’re lucky.

OPHELIA
Yeah, well you be careful yourself, all right? I don’t want you coming back with your head on a pike.

LAERTES
Such confidence in my diplomatic skills.

OPHELIA
Just watch it.

LAERTES
I will.

He kisses her goodbye, and speaks more loudly as Polonius approaches.

LAERTES(CONT’D)
And remember what I said, all right?
OPHELIA
Yeah.

SCENE 7 INT. ELSINORE SITTING CHAMBER
Hamlet is watching Laertes and Ophelia out the window.

HAMLET
Yeah, we’re doing great.

HORATIO
Well, I’m glad you’ve got her.

HAMLET
Yeah, I know. I’d probably have
gone crazy without her. I just...

Hamlet gets up and moves around the room, seeming
uncomfortable with looking at Horatio while he’s speaking. I
miss him so much, Horatio.

HAMLET (CONT’D)
I miss our walks, and his face at
dinner, and talking in his study. I
miss his advice... everything.
Sometimes I feel like if I just
round one more corner, I’ll see
him. If I just wait, sometime he’ll
walk through the door and be back.
I know it’s stupid -

HORATIO
It’s not stupid.

HAMLET
But... Oh well, it’s not going to
happen. I’d give anything just to
see him again.

HORATIO
Hamlet.

HAMLET
What?

HORATIO
There’s... there’s something I
ought to tell you.

HAMLET
Well, tell me.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

HORATIO
It’s about the gargoyles.

HAMLET
The what?

HORATIO
The gargoyles above the front doors.

HAMLET
We have gargoyles above the front doors? Since when?

HORATIO
They’re enchanted, but apparently they don’t talk to people much. But they talked to me. And they told me... Well, sit down.

HAMLET
What? They told you what?

HORATIO
(Pleadingly) Sit down.

Hamlet sits.

HORATIO (CONT’D)
They told me they’ve seen the ghost of your father walking around.

Horatio winces, waiting for a reaction. Hamlet just stares at him.

HAMLET
What?

HORATIO
They said that he visited in the night, I don’t know for sure if it’s true, but they seemed very sincere.

HAMLET
There hasn’t been a ghost around this castle in 20 years.

HORATIO
I told them that, they said they weren’t making it up. They said it’s him.

Hamlet stands up.

(CONTINUED)
HAMLET
My god. It can’t be, it’s got to be a fairy pretending or something.

HORATIO
Probably, but I thought I should tell you.

Hamlet puts his hand on Horatio’s shoulder.

HAMLET
Yeah, you should. That’s... thanks.

Hamlet wanders off into the room again, preoccupied.

HAMLET
Why would he come back? What would he have unfinished? Well, besides everything, but you know what I mean.

HORATIO
I don’t know. What are you going to do about it? Are you going to look for him?

HAMLET
I don’t see what else I should do. When did they say it happened?

HORATIO
Last night. They swore up and down it was him, even when I told them I thought they were making it up.

HAMLET
All right. I’ll go see them tonight and find out if it’s true.

HORATIO
I’ll go with you.

Hamlet looks at him.

HAMLET
You don’t have to.

HORATIO
Yeah, but I will, if it’s all the same to you.

Hamlet smiles at him.

(CONTINUED)
HAMLET
It's not all the same. It'll be better with you there.

SCENE 8 EXT. ELSINORE CASTLE GROUNDS

POLONIUS
Well son, I wish you all the best. I've taught you everything I know, and I expect a successful negotiation from you.

LAERTES
Thanks, father.

POLONIUS
Be cautious in your dealings with Fortinbras. Keep in mind all of their cultural practices.

LAERTES
Yes, father.

POLONIUS
Be gentle, but firm. Remember peace is the ultimate goal.

LAERTES
Yes, father.

POLONIUS
And above all, remember your country, and who you are. Be diplomatic, but be yourself. And Fortinbras can't help but like you.

LAERTES
Thanks. I'll do my best.

Polonius hugs him. Ophelia hugs him, and he gives her another kiss on the cheek.

LAERTES
Wish me luck.

OPHELIA
Good luck.

POLONIUS
You don't need it. But I'll wish it, anyway. Good luck.
Laertes smiles at them, gets on his horse, and rides to the front of the entourage. The horses ride off while Polonius and Ophelia wave. Eventually, the two of them turn and head back toward the castle.

POLONIUS
So how has your day been? I haven’t had a chance to see you much.

OPHELIA
Fine. Although I’m still suspicious, apparently.

POLONIUS
Mm. Well, humans have their flaws, like everybody. I am sorry you have to deal with this.

OPHELIA
It’s all right. It’s not your fault. I’m glad you picked me up anyway, those years ago.

Polonius smiles.

OPHELIA(CONT’D)
I wouldn’t change it.

She looks on, back toward the castle - she is slightly in front of him. Polonius watches her profile from a little behind.

POLONIUS
So, how’s Hamlet?

Ophelia stiffens almost imperceptibly. She covers.

OPHELIA
I think he’s doing better. I imagine he’s still pretty upset though, no wonder. If I lost you -

POLONIUS
Did you see him earlier today?

OPHELIA
For a few minutes. He needed a friend.

POLONIUS
I think you’re more than a friend.

Ophelia stops walking. Polonius stops, too. She turns to him.

(CONTINUED)
OPHELIA
And where did you get that idea?

POLONIUS
Oh, I don’t know, maybe from the half a dozen love letters hidden in your underwear drawer.

Ophelia looks scandalized. Cold, white vapor begins to float from her body to hang in the air, wreathing her.

OPHELIA
What the hell were you doing - You had no right...!

POLONIUS
Oh, come on - ever parent spies on his children a little. And in this case, I did it because I have a duty defend my country. And you’re endangering it, sweetheart.

OPHELIA
What?

POLONIUS
I’ve seen the two of you together - the looks you give each other. I suspected for a long time, but now, with Fortinbras on the horizon I needed to be sure.

OPHELIA
And of course you couldn’t just ask me!

POLONIUS
I’m sorry I violated your privacy, but no, I couldn’t. I didn’t think I’d get a straight answer.

OPHELIA
Why?

Ophelia seems to be trying to maintain her anger, but it is fading into uncertainty. She seems to understand Polonius’ implications.

POLONIUS
(Quietly) You know why. Ophelia, darling, you know what would happen if your relationship got out. People don’t trust you, that’s a

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
POLONIUS (cont’d)
fact, however ugly of one. If they knew the two of you were intimate -

Ophelia winces.

POLONIUS (CONT’D)
there would be an uproar. They start suspecting Hamlet of treason, and that suspicion would leach over to the King and Queen - unless they punished Hamlet or distanced themselves from him. We need a strong, supported monarchy right now. We can’t risk it.

Ophelia looks miserable, as if he’s already got her convinced, but she’s trying to fight it. Polonius seems to notice.

POLONIUS
If nothing else, it would ruin Hamlet’s chances of becoming a trusted king, if he was shown to have a connection to the enemy in times of crisis.

Ophelia pulls away from him.

OPHELIA
(Shouting) I’m not the enemy!

POLONIUS
I never said you were. But I’m not the rest of the kingdom. (beat) Do you love him?

Ophelia is nearly in tears. Frost is forming on her cheeks.

OPHELIA
Yes.

POLONIUS
Then you’ll leave him.

OPHELIA
I can’t leave him! Not now!

POLONIUS
Right now. You have to. Or I’ll have to tell everything to King Claudius and he’ll probably have you shipped off somewhere where you can’t cause him any more trouble.

(CONTINUED)
Ophelia stares at him, shock in her eyes. Polonius takes her hand.

POLONIUS
I love you. I want you to be happy. But I also want you to be safe, and I want the country to be safe. And if you and Hamlet are found out, neither of those things will be.

OPHELIA
I... I don’t...

POLONIUS
(Gently) Break it off. For now, just while Fortinbras is still at war with us. All right? Please?

Ophelia nods, the motion wrenched out of her. Polonius hugs her.

POLONIUS(CONT’D)
Good. That’s my girl. when this is over, you should be able to go back to him.

OPHELIA
God, I hope so.

Ophelia and Polonius stop hugging and start to walk back to the castle again.

SCENE 9 MONTAGE OF EVENING ARRIVING

The sun is setting. Clouds are gathering swiftly as it sinks. A wind begins to blow across the castle grounds. A servant looks out of a window unhappily. Snow flakes swirl in the air, dancing over the grass and spring flowers. They get thicker and thicker until it is a real blizzard.

SCENE 10 EXT. ELSINORE CASTLE GROUNDS

Hamlet and Horatio step from a small side door and creep up to the main ones, bundled up warmly.

HORATIO
Bloody hell! I’m glad you took magic classes now, or I’d really be freezing!

(CONTINUED)
HAMLET
I told you you should have signed up.

HORATIO
You know I’m not supposed to -

HAMLET
Oh, hang class protocol! You’d be great at magic! Just because you’re not a noble.

He makes air quotes with his fingers at the word "noble." The two reach Bernardo and Marcellus, who appear to be ordinary gargoyles.

HAMLET (CONT’D)
Are these the gargoyles?

HORATIO
Yes.

HAMLET
They’re still.

HORATIO
They were moving earlier.

HAMLET
Well, they’re not moving now.

Hamlet taps Marcellus with a finger. Marcellus immediately reanimates.

MARCELLUS
Son of a dryad, can’t anybody get any sleep around here??

On Marcellus’ other side, Bernardo begins to move, too.

BERNARDO
Whoa, hey Marcellus look, it’s the prince!

MARCELLUS
And Captain Obvious!

BERNARDO
Oh, shut up! It’s not like he comes down here often.

(CONTINUED)
MARCELLUS

Ever.

Marcellus glares at Hamlet.

HAMLET
(Matter-of-fact) To be honest, I didn’t even know you two existed.

MARCELLUS
Well thanks, hello to you, too!

HAMLET
You said my father had been walking as a ghost.

BERNARDO
Yeah.

HORATIO
And you’d better not have been lying!

MARCELLUS
(to Bernardo) Again with the suspicion! Who is this guy? He thinks all gargoyles are liars or something?

HORATIO
(muttering) Just being careful.

HAMLET
How many times have you seen him?

BERNARDO
Just the once. Last night.

HAMLET
Why didn’t you send someone to me immediately?

MARCELLUS
Because you didn’t even know who we were!!

HAMLET
Oh. Well, I’ll have to change that. What are your names?

MARCELLUS
Uh, what?
BERNARDO
What?

HAMLET
I said, what are your names? You want me to know who you are, don’t you? Well, I’m here. I’m listening.

MARCELLUS
Uh, well, uh... My name’s Marcellus, and this is uh,

BERNARDO
Bernardo, your Highness.

Hamlet smiles at the title usage.

HAMLET
Are there any other gargoyles like you about?

MARCELLUS
Uh, as far as we know we’re the only ones, but it’s not like we get to move around a lot, you know.

HAMLET
Hm, I don’t imagine.

Horatio has been looking about nervously.

HORATIO
Um, Hamlet, am I supposed to be out here?

HAMLET
What?

HORATIO
Well, am I supposed to be out on the castle grounds at night? (Quickly) Just me, I’m sure you’re allowed, I mean is there some kind of rule...?

Hamlet puts a hand on Horatio’s shoulder soothingly.

HAMLET
Horatio, relax. Nobody here is going to arrest you for sneezing.
HAMLET
(interrupting) If we happen upon any guards I’ll vouch for you, all right? You’re fine.

HORATIO
Okay.

They turn to look at the frozen landscape, silent but for the wind. Several beats pass.

MARCELLUS
You guys should of brought cards.

SCENE 11 INT. ELSINORE CORRIDOR

Claudius and Gertrude walk down a corridor together, Gertrude in a wedding dress and Claudius in a suit. There are a number of formally dressed people following behind them but not close enough to hear them speak.

GERTRUDE
Are you sure this is what you want?

CLAUDIUS
Of course I’m sure. You deserve all the support I can give you, and I want to give it like this.

GERTRUDE
You’ve been wonderful. Thank you.

Claudius smiles, leans over, and kisses her on the cheek.

CLAUDIUS
Let’s go finish this.

SCENE 12 EXT. ELSINORE CASTLE GROUNDS

HAMLET
They’re in there right now. Sanctifying their marriage on the same day we sanctified his burial.
SCENE 13 EXT. ELSINORE CASTLE CEMETERY

FLASHBACK

Mourners dressed in black stand before a grave, Hamlet, Horatio, Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius, Reynaldo, and Ophelia among them. An elderly PRIEST reads from a book under a cloudy, darkening sky. Hamlet places a white lily on the grave and notices Claudius and Gertrude holding hands. He glares.

HORATIO(V.O)
The alignment was an accident. You can’t dwell on it.

SCENE 14 INT. ELSINORE CORRIDOR

Claudius and Gertrude turn a corner, moving further down the corridor. The people behind them can be heard cheering and laughing.

SCENE 15 EXT. ELSINORE CASTLE GROUNDS

HAMLET
I know. But it tears me up inside.

BERNARDO
This is gonna be trouble...

MARCELLUS
Shut up, Bernie.

SCENE 16 INT. ELSINORE CHURCH

Claudius and Gertrude burst through a great wooden door, into a long, wide hall where the same elderly PRIEST in formal robes waits at the end of the room.

SCENE 17 EXT. ELSINORE CASTLE GROUNDS

HAMLET
And I know why they’re doing it, but I just can’t...

HORATIO
I’m sorry. But we can’t blame them.
SCENE 18 INT. ELSINORE CHURCH

Claudius and Gertrude come to stand before the priest. The long hall stretches away behind them, and scores of people fill the seats. The decorations are opulent and beautiful and stately music plays softly in the background.

PRIEST
You have both faithfully performed the rites each day for the last three days. Today is the final day of ceremony, the last moments before the true bond of marriage. Are you ready?

GERTRUDE
Yes.

CLAUDIUS
Yes.

SCENE 19 EXT. ELSINORE CASTLE GROUNDS

Hamlet takes a deep breath and turns back to look at Horatio.

HAMLET
You’re right. Their (has trouble saying the word) ...marriage is a good thing. For the kingdom. For the people. I have to accept it.

There is a whooshing sound.

HAMLET
What’s that?

MARCELLUS
That’s him!

BERNARDO
He’s coming!

Hamlet turns and Horatio looks up.

SCENE 20 INT. ELSINORE CHURCH

The wizened priest raises his hands high.

(CONTINUED)
PRIEST
I now pronounce you husband and
wife, king and queen of the nation
of Denmark.

Cheering erupts from the audience as Claudius and Gertrude
kiss. They are smiling.

SCENE 21 EXT. ELSINORE CASTLE GROUNDS

The GHOST hovers before the four watchers. The gargoyles
look on with interested but blasé expressions, Horatio looks
frightened and awed, and Hamlet looks both joyful and
grief-stricken. The ghost is silent.

HAMLET
...Father? Oh my god... Father, is
that you? Is that really you?

The ghost says nothing. Hamlet takes a few steps closer.
Horatio tags after him hesitantly.

HAMLET (CONT'D)
Father, if that’s you, answer me.
Answer me, please!

The ghost raises a hand and makes a gesture for Hamlet to
follow. It begins to float away.

HAMLET (CONT'D)
He wants me to follow him.

Hamlet steps forward without hesitation. Horatio grabs him,
forcing him to stop.

HORATIO
What are you doing?

HAMLET
I’m going after him, what are you
doing?

HORATIO
No, stop! You don’t know that it’s
him!

HAMLET
It’s him. I can feel it!

Hamlet starts to pull away. Horatio still clings to him. The
ghost is beginning to float out of sight.

(CONTINUED)
HORATIO
You can’t be sure!

HAMLET
He’s leaving! Let go of me!

HORATIO
He could be a dark fey, you have no idea!

HAMLET
Let go!

HORATIO
If he won’t speak to you here, in the safety of the castle, then he’s not worth listening to!

HAMLET
He’s my father!

They are fighting in earnest now.

HORATIO
No, don’t!

HAMLET
Let go of me or I’ll kill you!

HORATIO
Hamlet - !

Hamlet swings back and punches Horatio on the jaw. Horatio tumbles back into the snow while Hamlet turns and tears off after the specter.

HAMLET
Father! Father, wait!

BERNARDO
Ouch, that’s gotta smart.

MARCELLUS
Eh, at least there’s plenty of ice around. (Beat) Hey kid, you okay?

Horatio sits up with a groan, wiping a few drops of blood from his mouth. He squints into the storm, then stands up abruptly.

HORATIO
(to the gargoyles) You! Which way did he go?

(continues)
MARCELLUS
Uh, that way?

BERNARDO
I think it was that way.

The gargoyles point. Horatio charges off, disappearing into the snow as the gargoyles watch.

HORATIO
Hamlet! Hamlet!

BERNARDO
Hey, he actually believed us.

MARCELLUS
Either he’s finally starting to trust us or he’s just panicking.

HORATIO
Hamlet!!

MARCELLUS
Probably just panicking.

Horatio can no longer be seen, but can still be heard shouting in the distance.

HORATIO
Hamlet! Hamlet! (Beat) Oh, shit.

SCENE 22 EXT. ELSINORE CASTLE GROUNDS

Hamlet is running through the snow, following the ghost, who is setting a fast pace. He hears Horatio calling very faintly in the distance, and after a moment he stops.

HAMLET
All right, we’ve come far enough. Speak to me. If it’s really you, speak to me, please.

GHOST
Hamlet.

HAMLET
Oh, god.

GHOST
Hamlet, it is me. I am no fey in disguise, nor illusion of wizardry. Listen to me. I’ve come back

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
because Denmark is in serious trouble, and I need you to right it.

HAMLET
All right. Do you mean Fortinbras? They've sent Laertes to -

GHOST
I know. That's not the problem.

HAMLET
Then what is?

GHOST
(Beat) I didn't die from a snakebite Hamlet, like everyone supposed. I was actually murdered.

HAMLET
What?

GHOST
Yes.

HAMLET
You... That's... Not... Who did it? Who did it?

GHOST
It was your uncle.

HAMLET
Uncle Claudius?

GHOST
Yes.

HAMLET
You've got to be kidding me.

GHOST
I wish I was.

HAMLET
Uncle Claudius. Why?

GHOST
Power, I suppose. He knew he could convince your mother to marry him if I died. That he could become one of the rulers of the kingdom. But I
GHOST (cont’d)
can’t see inside his mind to know the true purpose. Perhaps it was sibling rivalry taken too far.

He chuckles sardonically.

HAMLET
Mother... Does she know? She can’t... Tell me she doesn’t know!

GHOST
I told you I can’t see inside people’s minds. I’m a ghost - not a prophet. But I don’t believe she knows and I don’t think you should believe that she does, either.

HAMLET
This is too much.

Hamlet puts his head in his hands.

GHOST
I knew it would be hard on you. So much has been lately.

He tries to place a hand on Hamlet’s shoulder, only to have it go through. He sighs. Hamlet feels the failed attempt and looks up.

HAMLET
I love you, father. I still love you, I’ll always love you.

GHOST
I know. I know. I love you, too.

HAMLET
What do you need me to do?

GHOST
Revenge, son. I want justice for my death. At this point, I need it.

HAMLET
You want me to kill him for you.

GHOST
Yes.

(CONTINUED)
HAMLET
I’ve never killed anyone before.

GHOST
I was hoping you would make an exception.

HAMLET
For you... For you I’d do anything.

GHOST
Good.

He glances around for a moment.

GHOST(CONT’D)
I can’t stay much longer. I chose to become a ghost so I could tell you the truth and get my revenge, but I’m afraid it has a lot of limitations. I had trouble figuring out how to manifest at first, and now that I’ve achieved my goal of speaking to you, I won’t be able to come back for a while. But I can’t continue to the afterlife until you kill Claudius. Once he’s dead, my desire is fulfilled and I can move on, but not before then. If he dies of natural causes I’ll be stuck like this for a long time. So I need you to kill him.

HAMLET
All right. I can do it.

GHOST
But leave your mother out of it. Like I said, I don’t believe she knows Claudius killed me. It’s not her fault. So kill him however you want, but leave her alone.

HAMLET
All right. I will.

GHOST
Good. I have to go Hamlet, I can feel the ethereal plane calling me already.

He begins to fade, his fingers disappearing.

(CONTINUED)
GHOST (CONT'D)

Soon I’ll be gone completely.

HAMLET

No. Can’t you stay a little longer?

GHOST

I’m sorry.

He is fading from the extremities and becoming more and more transparent. He moves back further into the snow, away from Hamlet.

HAMLET

Father...!

Footsteps can be heard getting closer. Hamlet takes a step forward, reaching out, but his father’s ghost whisks away. An instant later Horatio rushes out of the night and crashes into Hamlet, knocking both of them to the ground.

HAMLET

Ow!

HORATIO

Sorry.

HAMLET

Slow down next time you run through a snowstorm.

Hamlet sits up.

HORATIO

Sorry.

Horatio sits up, too. Hamlet looks at him.

HAMLET

Um, sorry about hitting you.

HORATIO

It’s fine.

HAMLET

Yeah, well...

HORATIO

Well, what happened? What did it say? Was it really him?

A beat.

(CONTINUED)
HAMLET
Oh yeah, it was him.

HORATIO
Well, what did he tell you?

HAMLET
Lots of stuff. Really important stuff.

He ruffles Horatio’s hair and grins. Horatio looks at him.

HORATIO
Okay... what stuff?

HAMLET
Sorry, I can’t tell you that.

HORATIO
Why not?

HAMLET
Because you might tell somebody else, obviously! I’m getting wet, why are we just sitting here?

Hamlet leaps up and begins to walk back. Horatio follows suit.

HORATIO
Hamlet, you’re acting kind of weird. Did you get enchanted or something? Maybe we should ask Reynaldo -

HAMLET
No! I’m not asking Reynaldo anything! This is just between you and me, okay? You, me, and those sarcastic gargoyles! Nobody else! Got it?

HORATIO
I... um. All right.

They walk in silence for a few moments.

HORATIO(CONT’D)
Um, where are we? I don’t know the grounds.

(CONTINUED)
HAMLET
We’re not far, really.

Hamlet points at a tree through the snow.

HAMLET
See? The willow gardens are close to the main doors. You spent most of your time running around in circles.

He chuckles lightly.

HORATIO
Oh... Are you sure you’re okay?

HAMLET
Fine.

They walk in silence again. Hamlet looks at Horatio. He suddenly stops and catches Horatio’s arm, arresting his movements as well. Horatio gives him a confused look.

HAMLET (CONT’D)
Look, I’m sorry I hit you, I really am. I was upset, I shouldn’t have done it.

HORATIO
I know, it’s fine. I should have known you wouldn’t have listened.

They laugh.

HAMLET
Horatio, I might be acting weird for the next few days. Father told me something I don’t care to repeat, but it’s big. And I have to do something about it.

Hamlet begins walking again. Horatio hurries after him.

HORATIO
Can I -

HAMLET
No, you can’t. Not this time. Not right now, anyway. I need to figure things out for myself first, okay?

(CONTINUED)
HORATIO
Okay.

HAMLET
Just don’t worry about it if I’m sort of weird tomorrow. All right?

HORATIO
All right.

HAMLET
Thanks for being here tonight.

HORATIO
Yeah, you’re welcome.

They have reached the main doors. Marcellus and Bernardo overhear the last bits of their conversation.

MARCELLUS
Aw, they’re adorable!

BERNARDO
Better than when they left, anyway.

HORATIO
Shut up.

HAMLET
Hey, you can’t tell anyone about what happened tonight, all right? Or last night. Nothing. No ghost, no me, no Horatio running around in circles. Got it?

MARCELLUS
We won’t say anything - it’s not like anybody listens.

HAMLET
Promise?

MARCELLUS
Uh, yeah, sure.

HAMLET
That’s not really a promise.

MARCELLUS
Okay, okay we promise not to tell anybody anything about the ghost of Hamlet. Happy?

(CONTINUED)
HAMLET
And you?

BERNARDO
Yeah, I promise, too.

HAMLET
Horatio?

HORATIO
Of course. I promise.

HAMLET
Good. Then let's go inside, because I am freezing!

He slings an arm around Horatio and they move off for the side door they came out of. A warm glow escapes as they slip inside.

MARCELLUS
I wish we could go inside.

BERNARDO
At least we're not freezing.

MARCELLUS
True. Perks of being stone.

BERNARDO
Right, I'm going back to sleep now.

MARCELLUS
I second that motion.

FADE TO BLACK