

## Hamlet Summary

"Hamlet" is a tragedy written by William Shakespeare, believed to have been written between 1599 and 1601. Set in the Kingdom of Denmark, the play follows the tale of the young Prince Hamlet as he grapples with grief, betrayal, madness, and the moral quandaries of revenge.

### Act 1:

The play opens with guards on the battlements of Elsinore Castle, seeing a ghost that resembles the recently deceased King Hamlet. Prince Hamlet, depressed after his father's death and his mother Queen Gertrude's hasty marriage to his uncle Claudius, is informed of the apparition. When he encounters the ghost, it claims to be his father's spirit, murdered by Claudius and demanding vengeance. Hamlet vows to avenge his father.

### Act 2:

Hamlet feigns madness, confusing the court, especially the worried King and Queen. To determine if Claudius is guilty, Hamlet arranges a play within the play, enacting a scene similar to the supposed murder of his father.

### Act 3:

During the play's performance, Claudius reacts guiltily, confirming his guilt in Hamlet's eyes. Hamlet has a chance to kill Claudius but refrains, not wanting to kill him while he's praying and thus send him to heaven. Later, Hamlet confronts his mother about her hasty marriage. During the confrontation, he kills Polonius, who was eavesdropping behind a curtain.

### Act 4:

Ophelia, Polonius' daughter and Hamlet's love interest, goes mad after her father's death and Hamlet's strange behavior. Claudius sends Hamlet to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, former friends of Hamlet, carrying secret orders for Hamlet's execution. Hamlet escapes, but Ophelia drowns under mysterious circumstances, deepening the tragedy.

### Act 5:

Laertes, Ophelia's brother, returns from France, grieving and seeking revenge for his father's and sister's deaths. Claudius hatches a plan with Laertes to poison Hamlet. During a fencing match between Laertes and Hamlet, Queen Gertrude accidentally drinks the poisoned wine meant for Hamlet. Laertes wounds Hamlet with a poisoned blade, but in the ensuing scuffle, the swords are switched and Hamlet wounds Laertes. Both reveal Claudius' plot before dying. Hamlet then kills Claudius and is himself fatally wounded. As Hamlet dies, he names Fortinbras, a Norwegian prince, as his successor. The play ends with the Norwegian royal entering to claim the Danish throne, with the tragic tableau of the fallen Danish court at his feet.

Throughout the play, Shakespeare delves deeply into themes of death, decay, political intrigue, and the moral implications of revenge. The character of Hamlet, with his famous soliloquies

such as "To be or not to be," remains one of the most analyzed and compelling characters in literature.

