

1.2 In an audience chamber in Elsinore, Claudius, the new king of Denmark, holds court. After thanking his subjects for their recent support, he dispatches ambassadors to Norway to halt a threatened attack from Fortinbras. He gives Laertes permission to return to France but denies Hamlet's request to return to the university in Wittenberg. Hamlet, mourning for his father's death, is left alone to vent his despair at what he regards as his mother's all too hasty marriage to his uncle, Claudius. The audience learns that the marriage took place "within a month" of the former king's death.

Horatio, Barnardo, and Marcellus arrive and tell Hamlet about the Ghost. Hamlet, aroused by the news, agrees to join them that night.

8. **our sometime sister:** my former sister-in-law (Claudius uses the royal "we" throughout, when he is speaking as king.)

9. **jointress:** a woman who owns property jointly with her husband

11. **With . . . eye:** as if smiling with one eye and crying with the other

18. **a weak . . . worth:** i.e., a low opinion of my ability

21. **Colleaguèd:** i.e., in league with; **advantage:** i.e., superior position

29. **impotent:** helpless

(Scene 2)

*Flourish. Enter Claudius, King of Denmark, Gertrude the Queen, [the] Council, as Polonius, and his son Laertes, Hamlet, with others, [among them Voltemand and Cornelius.]*

KING

Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death  
 The memory be green, and that it us befitted  
 To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom  
 To be contracted in one brow of woe,  
 Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature 5  
 That we with wisest sorrow think on him  
 Together with remembrance of ourselves.  
 Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen,  
 Th' imperial jointress to this warlike state,  
 Have we (as 'twere with a defeated joy, 10  
 With an auspicious and a dropping eye,  
 With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage,  
 In equal scale weighing delight and dole)  
 Taken to wife. Nor have we herein barred 15  
 Your better wisdoms, which have freely gone  
 With this affair along. For all, our thanks.  
 Now follows that you know. Young Fortinbras,  
 Holding a weak supposal of our worth  
 Or thinking by our late dear brother's death 20  
 Our state to be disjoint and out of frame,  
 Colleaguèd with this dream of his advantage,  
 He hath not failed to pester us with message  
 Importing the surrender of those lands  
 Lost by his father, with all bonds of law, 25  
 To our most valiant brother—so much for him.  
 Now for ourself and for this time of meeting.  
 Thus much the business is: we have here writ  
 To Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras,  
 Who, impotent and bedrid, scarcely hears

Of this his nephew's purpose, to suppress 30  
 His further gait herein, in that the levies,  
 The lists, and full proportions are all made  
 Out of his subject; and we here dispatch  
 You, good Cornelius, and you, Voltemand, 35  
 For bearers of this greeting to old Norway,  
 Giving to you no further personal power  
 To business with the King more than the scope  
 Of these dilated articles allow.

[Giving them a paper.]

Farewell, and let your haste commend your duty.

CORNELIUS/VOLTEMAND

In that and all things will we show our duty. 40

KING

We doubt it nothing. Heartily farewell.

(Voltemand and Cornelius exit.)

And now, Laertes, what's the news with you?  
 You told us of some suit. What is 't, Laertes?  
 You cannot speak of reason to the Dane  
 And lose your voice. What wouldst thou beg, 45  
 Laertes,  
 That shall not be my offer, not thy asking?  
 The head is not more native to the heart,  
 The hand more instrumental to the mouth,  
 Than is the throne of Denmark to thy father. 50  
 What wouldst thou have, Laertes?

LAERTES

My dread lord,

Your leave and favor to return to France,  
 From whence though willingly I came to Denmark  
 To show my duty in your coronation, 55  
 Yet now I must confess, that duty done,  
 My thoughts and wishes bend again toward France  
 And bow them to your gracious leave and pardon.

KING

Have you your father's leave? What says Polonius?

31. **gait:** course

31-33. **in that . . . subject:** i.e., since the troops  
 and supplies are drawn from Norway's own subjects

37. **To business:** to negotiate

38. **these . . . articles:** this detailed written ac-  
 count

39. **let . . . duty:** i.e., let your speedy departure  
 take the place of ceremonious leave-taking

45. **lose your voice:** i.e., waste your words

48. **native:** naturally connected

POLONIUS

Hath, my lord, [wrung from me my slow leave  
By laborsome petition, and at last  
Upon his will I sealed my hard consent.]  
I do beseech you give him leave to go.

60

KING

Take thy fair hour, Laertes. Time be thine,  
And thy best graces spend it at thy will.—  
But now, my cousin Hamlet and my son—

65

HAMLET, <sup>1</sup>aside

A little more than kin and less than kind.

KING

How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

HAMLET

Not so, my lord; I am too much in the sun.

QUEEN

Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted color off,  
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.  
Do not forever with thy vailèd lids  
Seek for thy noble father in the dust.  
Thou know'st 'tis common; all that lives must die,  
Passing through nature to eternity.

70

75

HAMLET

Ay, madam, it is common.

QUEEN

If it be,  
Why seems it so particular with thee?

HAMLET

"Seems," madam? Nay, it is. I know not "seems."  
'Tis not alone my inky cloak, (good) mother,  
Nor customary suits of solemn black,  
Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,  
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,  
Nor the dejected havior of the visage,  
Together with all forms, moods, <sup>1</sup>shapes of grief,  
That can (denote) me truly. These indeed "seem,"  
For they are actions that a man might play;

80

85

60-61. **wrung . . . petition:** i.e., finally persuaded me to allow him  
62. **Upon . . . consent:** i.e., I reluctantly agreed to his wishes  
64-65. **Take . . . will:** a courteous formula giving Laertes permission to return to France  
66. **cousin:** kinsman  
67. **more than kin:** i.e., twice related: uncle/nephew and "father"/"son"; **less than kind:** i.e., in a less-than-natural relationship  
69. **in the sun:** a pun on sun/son  
70. **nighted color:** i.e., black (mourning) clothing  
72. **vailèd lids:** i.e., lowered eyes  
74. **common:** belonging to all human beings  
78. **particular:** special, personal  
80-86. **'Tis . . . truly:** i.e., it is not only my black clothes, my sighs and tears, my downcast face, and other outward signs of grief that indicate my real feelings

But I have that within which passes show,  
These but the trappings and the suits of woe.

KING

'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature,  
Hamlet, 90

To give these mourning duties to your father.  
But you must know your father lost a father,  
That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound  
In filial obligation for some term 95

To do obsequious sorrow. But to persevere  
In obstinate condolment is a course  
Of impious stubbornness. 'Tis unmanly grief.  
It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,  
A heart unfortified, (a) mind impatient, 100  
An understanding simple and unschooled.

For what we know must be and is as common  
As any the most vulgar thing to sense,  
Why should we in our peevish opposition  
Take it to heart? Fie, 'tis a fault to heaven, 105  
A fault against the dead, a fault to nature,

To reason most absurd, whose common theme  
Is death of fathers, and who still hath cried,  
From the first corse till he that died today,  
"This must be so." We pray you, throw to earth 110  
This unprevailing woe and think of us

As of a father; for let the world take note,  
You are the most immediate to our throne,  
And with no less nobility of love  
Than that which dearest father bears his son 115

Do I impart toward you. For your intent  
In going back to school in Wittenberg,  
It is most retrograde to our desire,  
And we beseech you, bend you to remain 120  
Here in the cheer and comfort of our eye,  
Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.

96. **obsequious**: dutiful (Claudius seems to be playing on the related word "obsequy," funeral service.)

97. **obstinate condolment**: sorrow that refuses comfort

99. **incorrect to heaven**: uncorrected by the divine will

103. **most . . . sense**: most familiar object of perception

108. **still**: always, habitually

109. **corse**: corpse

111. **unprevailing**: futile, useless

113. **most immediate**: next in line of succession

116. **impart toward**: give to

118. **retrograde**: opposite, contrary

129. **jocund health**: merry toast  
 130. **tell**: count out  
 131. **rouse**: deep drink; **bruit**: report  
 133. **sullied**: stained, defiled (The Second Quarto [Q2] reads "sallied," an alternate spelling for "sullied"; the Folio [F] reads "solid.")  
 136. **canon**: law  
 143. **that was to this**: i.e., that was, in comparison to *this* king (Claudius)  
 144. **Hyperion to a satyr**: i.e., like the sun god as compared to a goatlike satyr  
 145. **might not beteem**: would not allow  
 151. **or ere**: before



Niobe. (1.2.153)  
 From Giovanni Battista Cavalleriis,  
*Antiquarum statuarum* (1585-94).

QUEEN

Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet.  
 I pray thee, stay with us. Go not to Wittenberg.

HAMLET

I shall in all my best obey you, madam.

KING

Why, 'tis a loving and a fair reply. 125  
 Be as ourself in Denmark.—Madam, come.  
 This gentle and unforced accord of Hamlet  
 Sits smiling to my heart, in grace whereof  
 No jocund health that Denmark drinks today  
 But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell, 130  
 And the King's rouse the heaven shall bruit again,  
 Respeaking earthly thunder. Come away.

*Flourish. All but Hamlet exit.*

HAMLET

O, that this too, too sullied flesh would melt,  
 Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew,  
 Or that the Everlasting had not fixed 135  
 His canon 'gainst (self-slaughter!) O God, God,  
 How (weary,) stale, flat, and unprofitable  
 Seem to me all the uses of this world!  
 Fie on 't, ah fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden  
 That grows to seed. Things rank and gross in nature 140  
 Possess it merely. That it should come (to this:)  
 But two months dead—nay, not so much, not two.  
 So excellent a king, that was to this  
 Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother  
 That he might not beteem the winds of heaven 145  
 Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth,  
 Must I remember? Why, she (would) hang on him  
 As if increase of appetite had grown  
 By what it fed on. And yet, within a month  
 (Let me not think on 't; frailty, thy name is woman!), 150  
 A little month, or ere those shoes were old  
 With which she followed my poor father's body,

153. **Niobe:** In Greek mythology, Niobe, so grief-stricken at the loss of her children that she could not cease crying, was transformed into a stone from which water continually flowed.

154. **wants . . . reason:** lacks the ability to reason

158. **Hercules:** in Greek mythology, a hero of extraordinary strength and courage

160. **Had . . . eyes:** i.e., had stopped turning her eyes red

161. **post:** rush (as in riding a post-horse)

162. **incestuous:** Hamlet calls the marriage of his mother and his uncle "incestuous"—i.e., a violation of the laws against intercourse between close kin. The Ghost will also make this charge (1.5.49). Other members of the Danish court seem to see the marriage of Gertrude and Claudius as legal and legitimate. Debates about the incestuousness of a marriage between a widow and her dead husband's brother were heated in the 16th century (especially during the divorce trial of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon). The Bible gives conflicting commands about such marriages. How one is to view the marriage of Gertrude and Claudius is an ongoing focus of interest for students of *Hamlet*.

169. **I'll . . . you:** i.e., instead of your calling yourself my "servant," we'll call each other "friend"

170. **what . . . from:** what are you doing away from

Like Niobe, all tears—why she, (even she)  
(O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason  
Would have mourned longer!), married with my  
uncle, 155

My father's brother, but no more like my father  
Than I to Hercules. Within a month,  
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears  
Had left the flushing in her gallèd eyes, 160  
She married. O, most wicked speed, to post  
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!  
It is not, nor it cannot come to good.  
But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

*Enter Horatio, Marcellus, and Barnardo.*

HORATIO Hail to your lordship. 165  
HAMLET I am glad to see you well.  
Horatio—or I do forget myself!

HORATIO  
The same, my lord, and your poor servant ever.  
HAMLET  
Sir, my good friend. I'll change that name with you.  
And what make you from Wittenberg, Horatio?— 170  
Marcellus?

MARCELLUS My good lord.  
HAMLET  
I am very glad to see you. [To Barnardo.] Good  
even, sir.—  
But what, in faith, make you from Wittenberg? 175

HORATIO  
A truant disposition, good my lord.  
HAMLET  
I would not hear your enemy say so,  
Nor shall you do my ear that violence  
To make it truster of your own report 180  
Against yourself. I know you are no truant.  
But what is your affair in Elsinore?  
We'll teach you to drink (deep) ere you depart.

186. **hard upon:** soon after  
 188. **coldly:** served cold (as leftovers)  
 189. **dearest:** most grievous; bitterest  
 194. **goodly:** admirable, excellent  
 201. **Season your admiration:** i.e., control your  
 astonishment  
 202. **attent:** attentive

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

HAMLET  
 I prithee, do not mock me, fellow student.  
 I think it was to (see) my mother's wedding. 185

HORATIO  
 Indeed, my lord, it followed hard upon.

HAMLET  
 Thrift, thrift, Horatio. The funeral baked meats  
 Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.  
 Would I had met my dearest foe in heaven  
 Or ever I had seen that day, Horatio!  
 My father—methinks I see my father. 190

HORATIO  
 Where, my lord?

HAMLET  
 In my mind's eye, Horatio.

HORATIO  
 I saw him once. He was a goodly king.

HAMLET  
 He was a man. Take him for all in all,  
 I shall not look upon his like again. 195

HORATIO  
 My lord, I think I saw him yesternight.

HAMLET  
 Saw who?

HORATIO  
 My lord, the King your father.

HAMLET  
 The King my father? 200

HORATIO  
 Season your admiration for a while  
 With an attent ear, till I may deliver  
 Upon the witness of these gentlemen  
 This marvel to you.

HAMLET  
 For God's love, let me hear! 205

HORATIO  
 Two nights together had these gentlemen,  
 Marcellus and Barnardo, on their watch,

210. **at point exactly; cap-à-pie:** at every point, from head to foot  
 213. **oppressed and fear-surprisèd:** terrified  
 214. **truncheon:** short staff (here carried as a symbol of authority)  
 215. **the act of fear:** the action of fear upon them



"Armèd at point exactly, cap-à-pie." (1.2.210)  
 From Henry Peacham, *Minerua Britannia* (1612).

In the dead waste and middle of the night,  
 Been thus encountered: a figure like your father,  
 Armèd at point exactly, cap-à-pie, 210  
 Appears before them and with solemn march  
 Goes slow and stately by them. Thrice he walked  
 By their oppressed and fear-surprisèd eyes  
 Within his truncheon's length, whilst they, distilled 215  
 Almost to jelly with the act of fear,  
 Stand dumb and speak not to him. This to me  
 In dreadful secrecy impart they did,  
 And I with them the third night kept the watch,  
 Where, as they had delivered, both in time,  
 Form of the thing (each word made true and good), 220  
 The apparition comes. I knew your father;  
 These hands are not more like.

HAMLET But where was this?

MARCELLUS My lord, upon the platform where we watch.

HAMLET Did you not speak to it? 225

HORATIO My lord, I did,  
 But answer made it none. Yet once methought  
 It lifted up its head and did address  
 Itself to motion, like as it would speak;  
 But even then the morning cock crew loud, 230  
 And at the sound it shrunk in haste away  
 And vanished from our sight.

HAMLET 'Tis very strange.

HORATIO As I do live, my honored lord, 'tis true.  
 And we did think it writ down in our duty 235  
 To let you know of it.

HAMLET Indeed, sirs, but this troubles me.  
 Hold you the watch tonight?

ALL We do, my lord.

HAMLET Armed, say you? 24



245. **beaver:** front piece of a helmet  
 259. **grizzled:** gray



Helmet with beaver down. (1.2.245)  
 From Henry Peacham, *Minerua Britannia* (1612).

ALL Armed, my lord.  
 HAMLET From top to toe?  
 ALL My lord, from head to foot.  
 HAMLET Then saw you not his face?  
 HORATIO  
 O, yes, my lord, he wore his beaver up. 245  
 HAMLET What, looked he frowningly?  
 HORATIO  
 A countenance more in sorrow than in anger.  
 HAMLET Pale or red?  
 HORATIO  
 Nay, very pale.  
 HAMLET And fixed his eyes upon you? 250  
 HORATIO  
 Most constantly.  
 HAMLET I would I had been there.  
 HORATIO It would have much amazed you.  
 HAMLET Very like. Stayed it long?  
 HORATIO  
 While one with moderate haste might tell a 255  
 hundred.  
 BARNARDO/MARCELLUS Longer, longer.  
 HORATIO  
 Not when I saw 't.  
 HAMLET His beard was grizzled, no?  
 HORATIO  
 It was as I have seen it in his life, 260  
 A sable silvered.  
 HAMLET I will watch 't tonight.<sup>1</sup>  
 Perchance 'twill walk again.  
 HORATIO I warrant it will.  
 HAMLET  
 If it assume my noble father's person, 265  
 I'll speak to it, though hell itself should gape  
 And bid me hold my peace. I pray you all,  
 If you have hitherto concealed this sight,

269. **tenable**: withheld, kept secret  
278. **doubt . . . play**: suspect some treacherous action

1.3 In Polonius's chambers, Laertes says good-bye to his sister, Ophelia, and tells her not to trust Hamlet's promises of love. Polonius joins them, sends Laertes off, then echoes Laertes's warnings to Ophelia, finally ordering her not to see Hamlet again.

3. **convey is assistant**: ships are available  
7. **fashion**: a temporary enthusiasm; **toy in blood**: amorous flirtation  
8. **in . . . nature**: in the early days of its prime  
9. **Forward**: ardent, eager  
10. **perfume . . . minute**: that which makes the moment sweet and fills it with pleasure

Let it be tenable in your silence still;  
And whatsoever else shall hap tonight, 270  
Give it an understanding but no tongue.  
I will requite your loves. So fare you well.  
Upon the platform, 'twixt eleven and twelve,  
I'll visit you.

ALL Our duty to your Honor. 275

HAMLET Your loves, as mine to you. Farewell.  
[All but Hamlet] exit.

My father's spirit—in arms! All is not well.  
I doubt some foul play. Would the night were come!  
Till then, sit still, my soul. (Foul) deeds will rise,  
Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's 280  
eyes.

He exits.

(Scene 3)

Enter Laertes and Ophelia, his sister.

LAERTES

My necessaries are embarked. Farewell.  
And, sister, as the winds give benefit  
And convey (is) assistant, do not sleep,  
But let me hear from you. → write to me

OPHELIA

Do you doubt that? 5

LAERTES

For Hamlet, and the trifling of his favor,  
Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood,  
A violet in the youth of primy nature,  
Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,  
The perfume and suppliance of a minute,  
No more.

OPHELIA

No more but so?

LAERTES

Think it no more. 10

} metaphor  
What is Hamlet's love?