



HAMLET
by
William Shakespeare

Hamlet

by
William Shakespeare

A Short Story for ESOL & Functional
Skills Learners



Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, has come back from university.

He finds that his father, the old king, is dead. His mother has married his father's brother, Claudius.



Claudius is now king of Denmark.
Hamlet is shocked that his mother has
married so soon after his father's death.
He is also angry that she has married
Claudius.



Soon, a ghost is seen walking on the castle walls. The ghost looks like Hamlet's father, the dead king. When Hamlet sees the ghost, he is told that it is the ghost of his father.



'I am your father's spirit,' the ghost tells Hamlet. It tells him that Hamlet's father did not die naturally. He was murdered by his brother Claudius.



As the king slept, Claudius put poison into his ear. This caused the king a painful death. The ghost tells Hamlet to take revenge on Claudius for murdering his father.



Hamlet can't believe that his mother would marry the man who murdered her husband. He becomes depressed. He thinks about killing himself: 'To be or not to be – that is the question.'



Hamlet decides to pretend he is mad. He wants to find out if King Claudius really did kill his father. Claudius soon notices that Hamlet is behaving strangely.



So Claudius asks Polonius, his adviser, to spy on him. Polonius thinks that the best person to find out what is causing Hamlet's strange moods is his own daughter Ophelia. This is because Ophelia is Hamlet's girlfriend.



She is close to him. But when Ophelia tries talking to him, Hamlet gets very angry. He tells her that he never loved her and breaks up with her.



Ophelia is very upset by this. A group of travelling actors arrives in town. Hamlet gets them to perform a play at the castle.



Hamlet's play contains a scene in which someone murders a king by putting poison in his ear. This is exactly what the ghost said had happened to him. Hamlet's plan is to watch King Claudius during the play.



He wants to see how Claudius reacts when he sees his own crime performed on stage. Then Hamlet will know if Claudius is guilty or not. Hamlet's plan works.



King Claudius becomes so angry that he interrupts the play. He goes off in a rage. Claudius starts thinking of ways to get rid of Hamlet.



Soon afterwards, Hamlet sees Claudius praying. He wants to kill him. But he worries that if he does, Claudius will go to heaven instead of going to hell.



As a murderer, Claudius deserves to go to hell. So Hamlet does nothing. He goes to speak to his mother.



While they are talking in his mother's room, he sees someone moving behind the curtain. Hamlet thinks that it is Claudius. So he takes his sword and stabs through the curtain.



But he is shocked to find he has in fact killed Polonius, the adviser, not Claudius. This means that Hamlet has killed the father of his girlfriend Ophelia. Ophelia goes mad and drowns herself in a river.



Ophelia's brother, Laertes, comes to her funeral. He is furious about what has happened. He and Hamlet argue about who loved Ophelia most.



King Claudius now sees an opportunity to finally get rid of Hamlet. He organises a sword fight between Hamlet and Laertes. To make sure that Hamlet is killed, Claudius gives Laertes a sword covered in poison.



He also prepares a cup of poisoned wine. But Claudius's plans go horribly wrong when the poisoned sword wounds both Hamlet and Laertes, and Hamlet's mother drinks from the poisoned cup. Knowing that he is about to die himself, Hamlet kills Claudius, finally getting revenge for the murder of his father. At the end of the play, all of the royal household of Denmark are dead.