

HAMLET - SUMMARY

ACT 1

The kingdom wakes under bad omens. Horatio and the guards glimpse a ghost outside the castle, bearing extreme resemblance to the late King Hamlet. Horatio, scholar and best friend to young Prince Hamlet, feels reason crumble, as something rotten stalks around the castle. He runs to tell the prince.

The new King Claudius holds a banquet, and performs with grace, barely disguising his calculating nature, as he sits with his new bride, the wife of his dead brother, Queen Gertrude. But Prince Hamlet, still in mourning, is an open wound. His grief isolates him and his wit becomes venom, and loathes his uncle. Claudius and Gertrude pleads with tenderness to move on. Hamlet receives Horatio's warning of a ghost that bears the likeness of his father after the party.

In the house of Polonius, Ophelia and her brother, Laertes, speak before his departure to study abroad. Laertes cautions Ophelia against his suspicions of Hamlet, but Ophelia reassures him of Hamlet's love, loyalty, and good nature. Polonius enters, bids his adieu to Laertes, before promptly lecturing his daughter on why she shouldn't see Hamlet anymore.

Meanwhile at the castle, it is night, and Hamlet along with Horatio and the Guard Marullus, sneak through the hallways, until they see the apparition of Hamlet's father. Horatio, worried for his friend's safety, begs him not to follow, but Hamlet puts his foot down, and follows. When alone, Hamlet converses with the ghost of his dead father, who reveals to him that his brother and Hamlet's uncle, Claudius, had murdered him for his throne and his wife, pouring poison in his ear. Hamlet swears to avenge his father and the ghost disappears, leaving Hamlet in a fit of madness.

ACT 2

Ophelia urgently informs her father, Polonius, of her meeting with Hamlet the night prior, though clearly deeply in love with the troubled prince. She presents to the audience her rose tinted memory of that night, and Polonius notes perhaps his daughter's rejection of Hamlet's advances that night due to his advice may be the reason for his madness.

At the court of Claudius and Gertrude, they seek to find a means to an end: Hamlet's madness. Is he truly mad, and if so, what is the cause? The old school friends of Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Are summoned, and told to spy on Hamlet, determine the cause of his madness, and return to them with the answers. As they exit, Polonius informs them of his theory: Hamlet is lovesick for his daughter, Ophelia, which must be the true reason for his madness. Gertrude is pleased.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern meet with Hamlet, and though not bright, make their attempt to determine the cause of his madness. Hamlet, who resolved to put on an antic disposition, and pretend to be crazy, had forgotten this entirely on sight of his old friends in his excitement and happiness, which quickly faded when he realized that they were here to spy on him for his parents. So Hamlet turns and tells them he is quite mad, for it serves his agenda: if he pretended to be mad, it would make him less of a threat, making it easier for him to gauge the actions of others in the court and ultimately help him murder Claudius in a calculated manner.

ACT 3

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern report back to the king and queen on Hamlet's indefinite madness, though they know not the cause. Polonius arrives with Ophelia, and she is instructed to give back her letters and other tokens of affection that Hamlet had gifted her. She is comforted by the queen, who exits with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Claudius and Polonius hide themselves in the background when they see Hamlet approaching. Hamlet delivers "To be, or not to be." Ophelia returns the gifts, which spurs on Hamlet to angrily break up with her, and demand she get sent to a nunnery, renouncing all womenkind in a rage. Ophelia laments as she picks up the scraps of torn love letters.

Claudius returns to his room, clearly convinced of Hamlet's violent and temperamental nature. He settles down to pray, admitting his guilt and remorse for murdering his brother, but sees no other way out than by killing Hamlet too. As he prays, Hamlet stalks into the room, sword raised to murder him, but then hesitates, and delays it for later, excusing himself by stating that he should rather kill him when he is exposed for his misdeeds, so people do not remember him a good man, but for the beast that ruined Hamlet's life.

In Gertrude's room, he speaks with Polonius, who quickly hides behind a tapestry when Hamlet angrily storms in to confront his mother on why she had chosen to marry Claudius when his father had barely been dead. Polonius makes noise, and Hamlet thrusts his drawn sword into the tapestry, believing it to be Claudius listening in, but instead has murdered the father of his lover, Polonius. As he lay dead, he and his mother reach an understanding and forgiveness of one another, though Gertrude is now fully convinced of his madness. Hamlet leaves to dispose of Polonius's corpse.

ACT 4

Claudius is frantic upon this news, and sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern after Hamlet to figure out where the body is, as he spirals into paranoia. The two fail to gauge the location, and decide to lead Hamlet to the King himself. Hamlet and Claudius confront one another, Hamlet reveals he buried Polonius at the foot of the stairs, and Claudius sends him abroad to England as a result.

As Hamlet laments on a boat upon his station and his intellectual paralysis which prevented him from killing Claudius multiple times, coming up with too many excuses to do so, Ophelia has lost her mind due to the murder of her father by the love of her life. As she sings, disoriented, her brother, Laertes, storms in full of anger, and almost kills Claudius, who manages to convince him that it was truly Hamlet responsible for the death of his father. Laertes is brought to tears at the death of his and sister, and swears revenge upon Hamlet to avenge HIS dead father.

ACT 5

Horatio and the guards from the opening scene receive a letter from Hamlet who has fought off pirates, hijacked the ship, and sent Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths in England. Meanwhile Claudius and Laertes are brought together, with Claudius not-so-subtly emotionally manipulating him, they too receive a letter from Hamlet. Claudius, who had sent Hamlet to his death in England, is now in a panic, and schemes with Laertes on how to enact revenge. A duel, and Laertes can poison the tip of his sword so, upon barely scratching Hamlet's skin, he will drop dead in seconds. As a backup plan, Claudius will poison a wine goblet meant for Hamlet in case Laertes does not win. What could go wrong?

Hamlet returns on the day of Ophelia's funeral, and leaps into the grave after Laertes. The two begin to fight over her corpse, until they are finally pulled apart by the funeral party. A duel is announced.

Laertes and Hamlet begin their duel in the final act after Horatio exchanged confidences with Hamlet, who in a suicidal manner decides to leave his life to fate and enter the duel anyhow. They scratch each other with the poisoned blade after they accidentally swap swords. Gertrude drops dead after unknowingly drinking the poisoned goblet. There is an outcry, and Hamlet runs to tackle Claudius, before forcing poison down his throat, finally killing him, while Horatio attends to Laertes. Laertes drops dead, and Hamlet is soon to follow, as he collapses in Horatio's arms, and after a long speech leading to nowhere, he too dies, leaving his friend the sole survivor of the massacre.