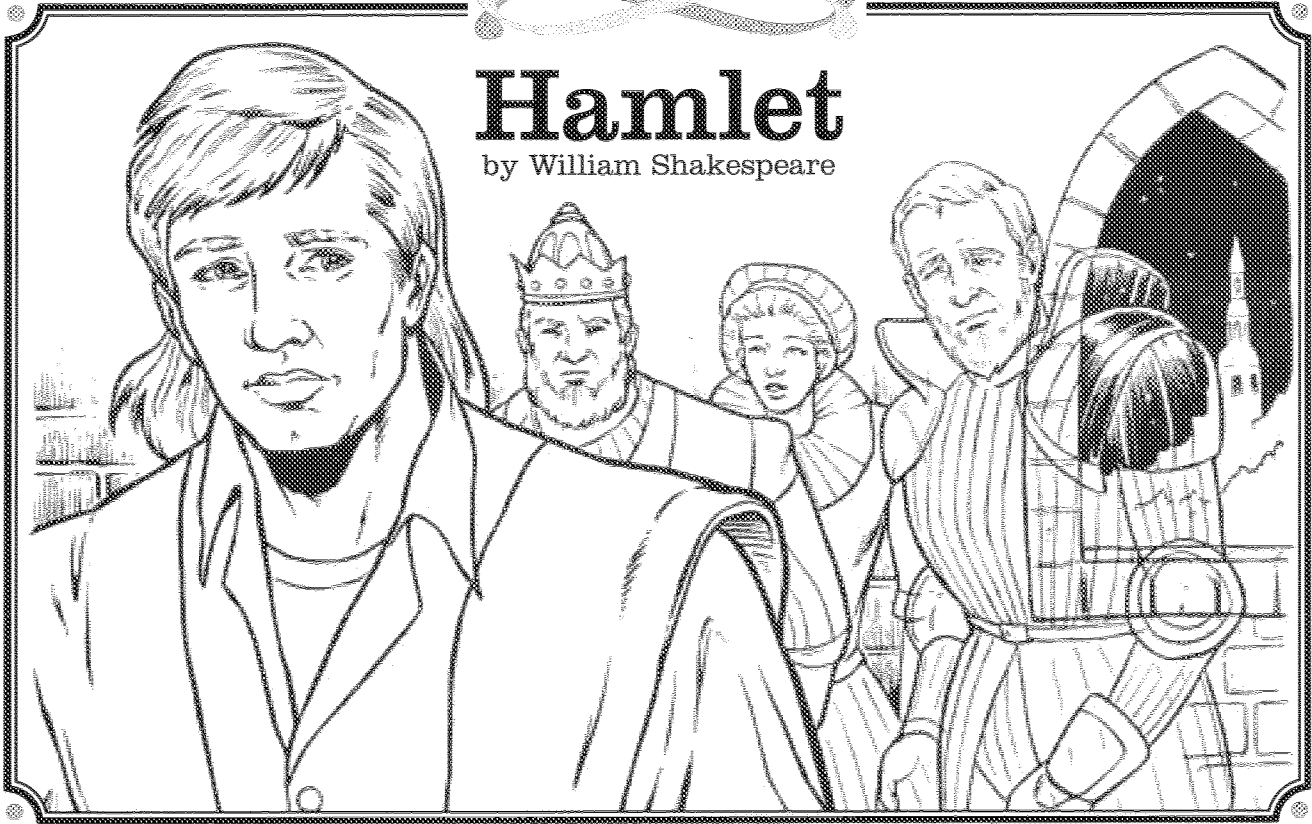


Hamlet

by William Shakespeare



Hamlet

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Hamlet might not have minded staying, for Ophelia—the woman he loved—was at Elsinore. But Ophelia’s father, Polonius, told her not to return Hamlet’s affection. Soon the prince heard some alarming news from his friend Horatio: He and two officers had seen the dead king’s ghost stalking the battlements of the castle at midnight.



Hamlet

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After his father's sudden death, Hamlet, prince of Denmark, returned from the University of Wittenberg to Elsinore Castle. Hamlet's grief was compounded by his mother's hasty marriage to Claudius, the dead king's brother. Hamlet longed to return to Wittenberg to escape the sight of Claudius in his father's place. The king and queen wanted him to stay.



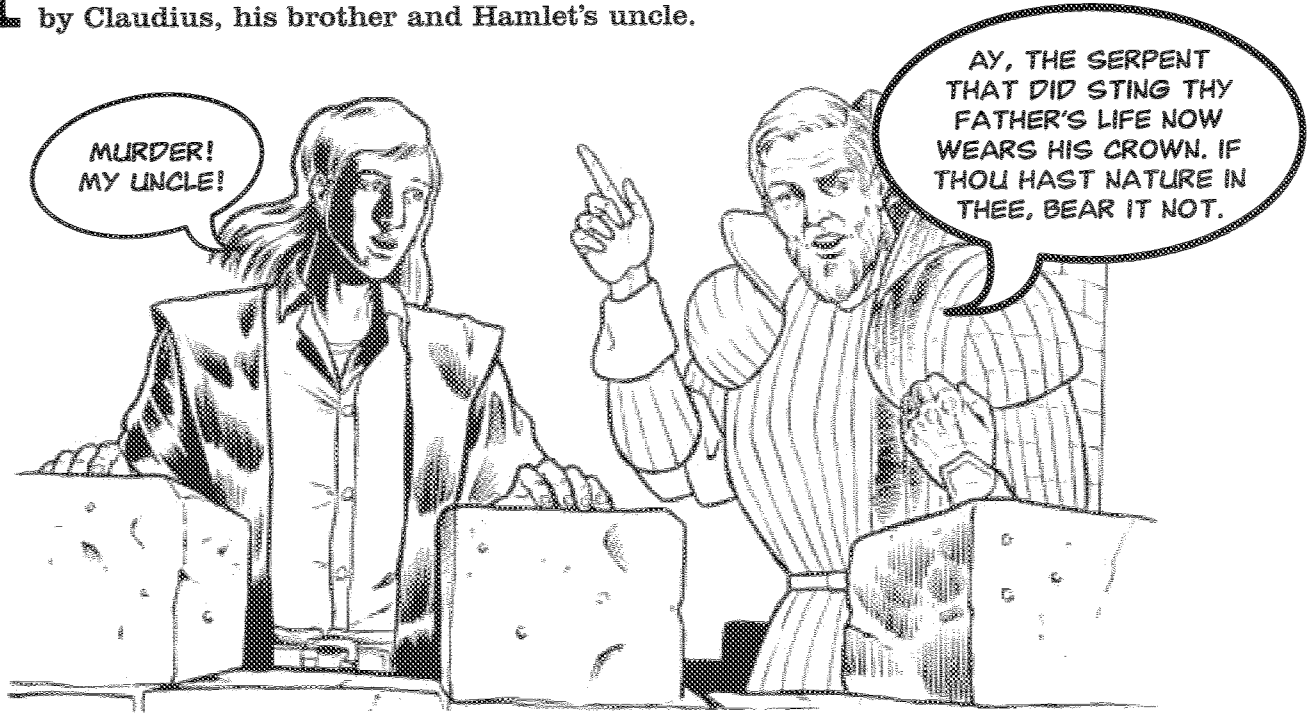
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That night, Hamlet met Horatio and the officers on the guard platform. Shortly after midnight, the armed ghost of Hamlet's father appeared and beckoned to Hamlet to follow it. Horatio and the officers begged him not to go, but Hamlet followed the ghost.



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The ghost led Hamlet to the battlements. There, the ghost told Hamlet that he had not died from the sting of a serpent, as people believed, but had been poisoned by Claudius, his brother and Hamlet's uncle.



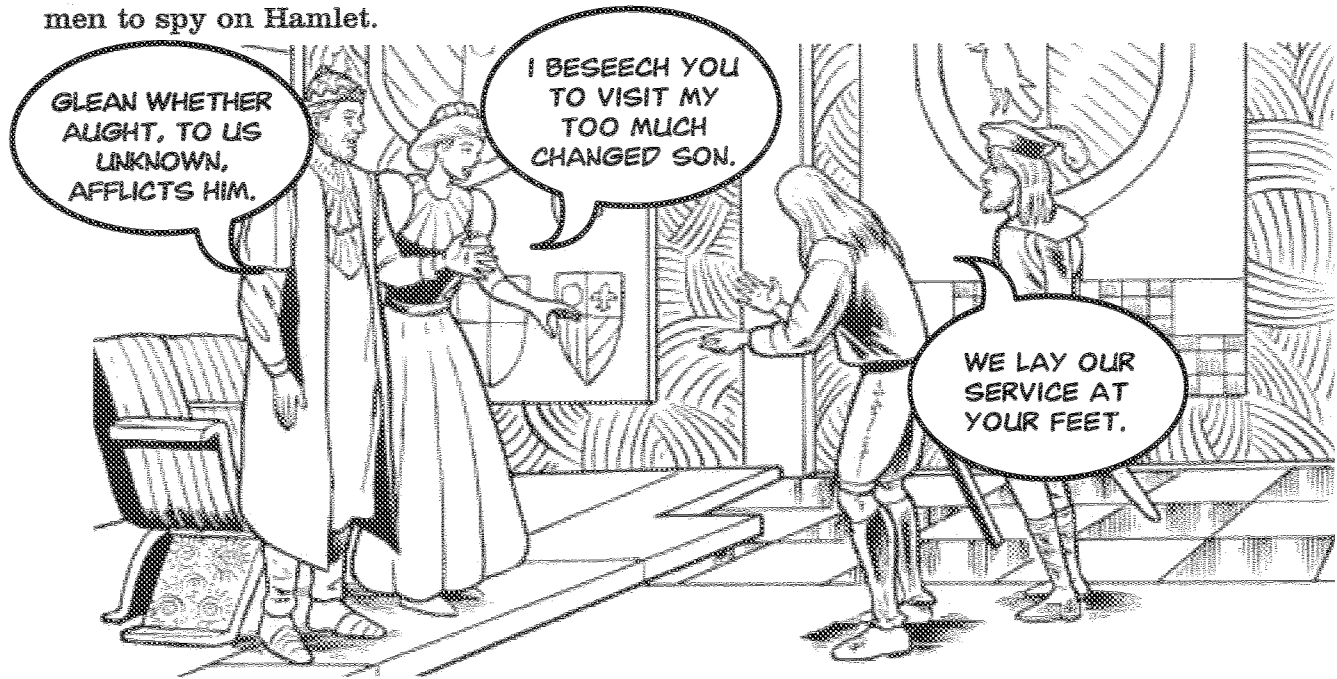
Hamlet

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern spoke to Hamlet. But the prince, guessing they were spies, told them nothing. When a group of actors arrived at the castle, Hamlet got an idea. He pulled aside one of the actors and quietly asked him to play *The Murder of Gonzago* the following night, with some minor changes.



Hamlet

After this meeting with the ghost, Hamlet began to act crazy. Polonius thought it was because Ophelia rejected him; but the king was unsure. Was Hamlet really mad? Or was his craziness an act to gain the throne? The king sent for two young men to spy on Hamlet.



Hamlet planned for the actors to replay his father's murder so he could watch the king's reaction. But Hamlet still had his doubts. With his father's possible murder, his mother's disloyalty, and Ophelia's rejection, was life worth living?



At the play, Claudius stormed out during the scene where a man pours poison in his sleeping brother's ear. Convinced now that the ghost was telling the truth, Hamlet followed, ready to kill him. But he came upon the king praying. If Hamlet murdered Claudius then, the king would go straight to heaven.



Hamlet

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Hearing of Polonius's death made the king even more fearful for his own life. He sent Hamlet to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The spies carried a letter from the king, the contents of which were known only to Claudius himself.



Hamlet

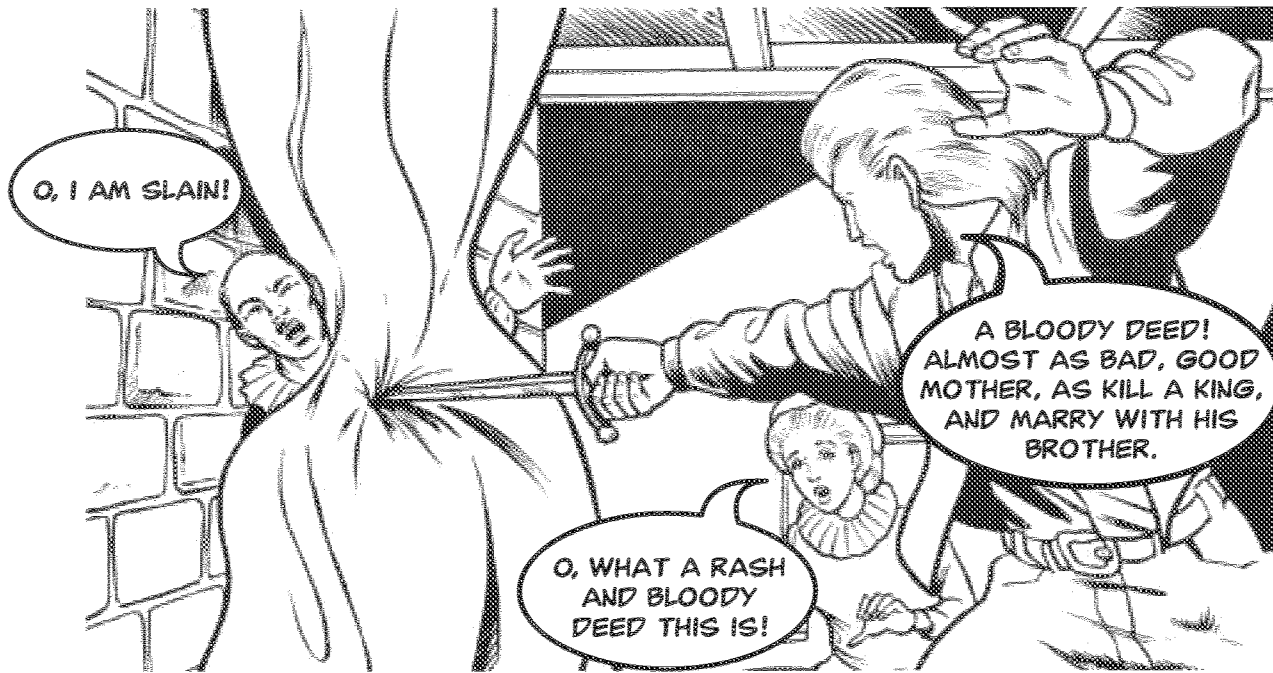
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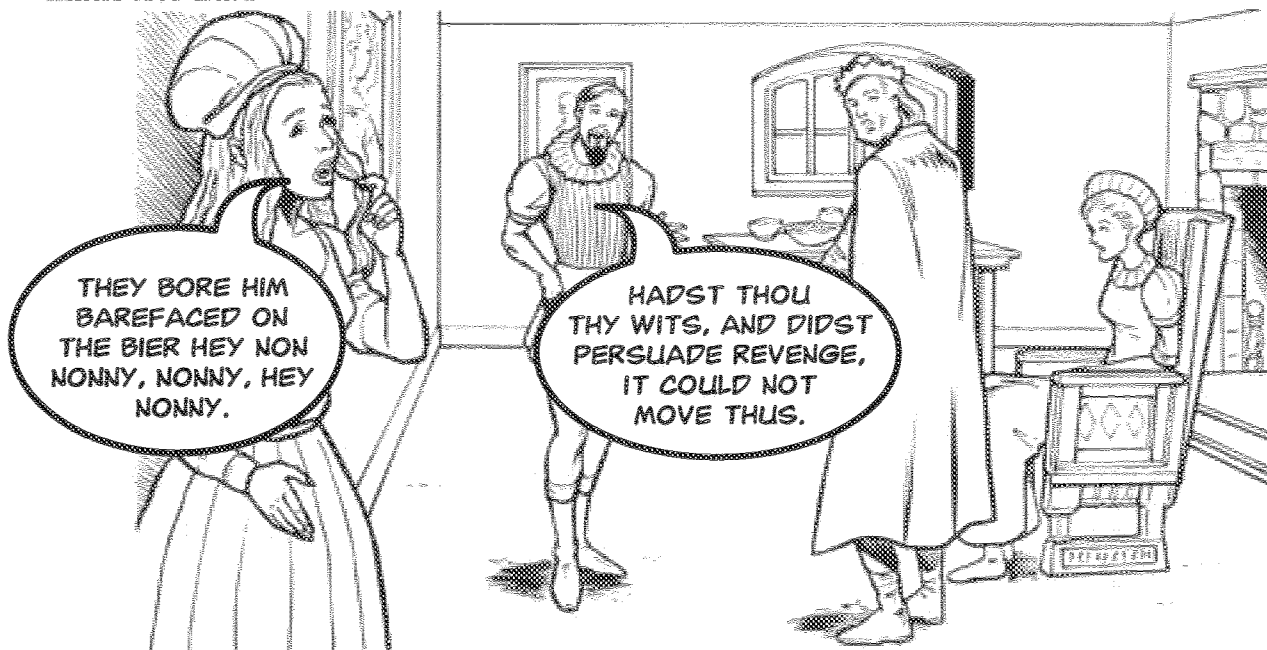
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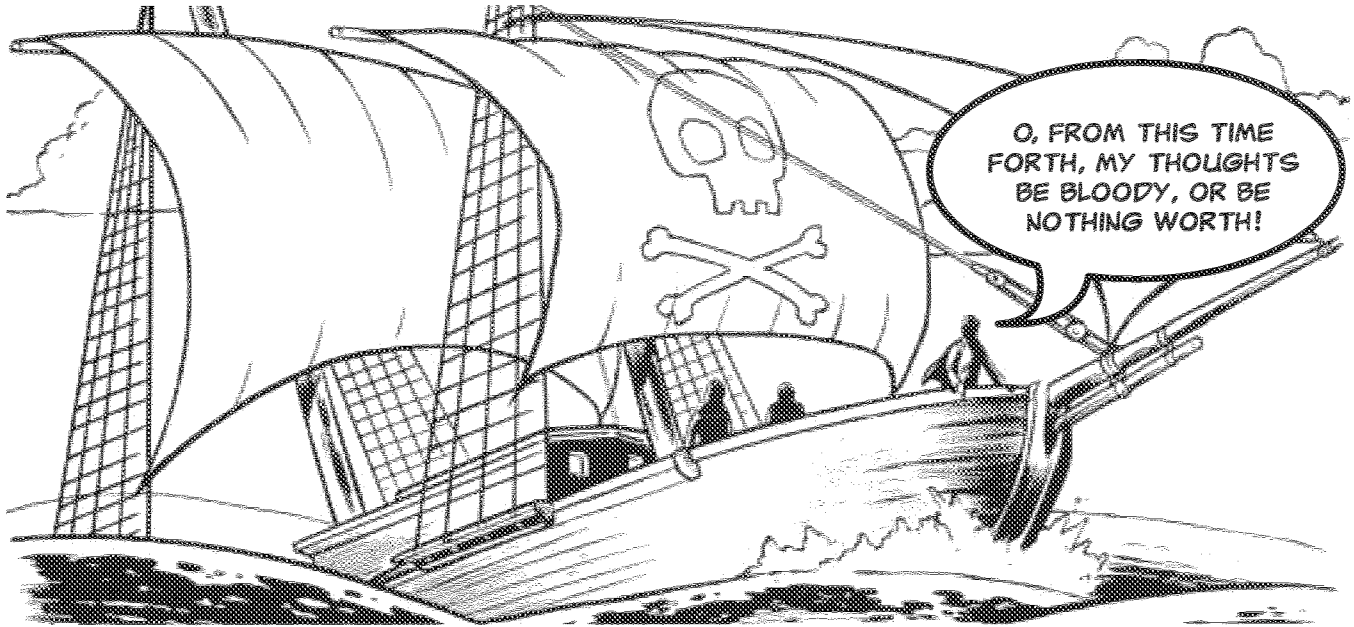
Later, Hamlet went to see his mother and began arguing with her. Upset, the queen cried out for help. Seeing the tapestry move, Hamlet drove his sword right through the fabric, thinking the king was behind it. But it wasn't the king; it was Polonius.



Laertes, son of Polonius, was in Paris when he heard of his father's death. He rushed home to Denmark, determined to avenge his father's murder. He became even more determined when he met his sister, Ophelia, and saw that their father's death had made her mad.



Meanwhile, Hamlet, unable to sleep on the ship, got up and stole the packet his companions were carrying. He discovered the orders for his death. Hamlet wrote new orders for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's deaths, and resealed the packet. Then he escaped on a pirate ship headed for Denmark.



In case Laertes's poisoned sword tip did not work, the king also promised to poison Hamlet's drink at the match. As they were talking, the queen rushed in, crying that Ophelia was dead.



When Hamlet arrived in Denmark, he lied, saying he had been captured by pirates. The king trusted the prince even less now, and quickly planned to have Hamlet killed in a duel with Laertes. Laertes, eager to avenge his father's death, willingly went along with the plan.



Hamlet, unaware of Ophelia's death, met Horatio in the churchyard. He told his friend how he discovered the king's secret orders to have him beheaded in England.



Hamlet and Horatio watched a funeral procession approach. When Hamlet saw the king, queen, and Laertes, and heard Laertes grieving, he realized it was Ophelia who was being buried.



Hamlet and Laertes started dueling. While they fought, the king set out the poisoned cup for Hamlet. But instead the queen, his wife, drank from it. She fell at the same time that Hamlet and Laertes were both wounded by the same poisoned sword tip.



After the funeral, Hamlet accepted the king's invitation to a duel with Laertes. He told Horatio he believed he would win, yet he felt ill about his heart. This worried Horatio.



Hamlet stabbed the king with the poisoned sword. Claudius cried out and died. Then Laertes fell to the ground. Before he died, he and Hamlet forgave each other. Then Hamlet spoke his last words.

