

William Shakespeare's Hamlet summary & analysis

The tragical history of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark" by William Shakespeare is the frontispiece of all the literature in the world and is the fountain of inspiration for all the playwrights who succeeded him. There are many versions of Hamlet written by several playwrights, the most popular being the Hamlet of Thomas Kyd ("Ur-Hamlet"); however, Shakespeare's Hamlet is deservedly the best amongst all the creative interpretations of the Prince of Denmark. The tragedy is written in five acts and focuses entirely on Hamlet. The following Hamlet summary and analysis will give an idea of the philosophical depths Shakespeare could touch with the emotional stirring of the Prince and the intensity of life he could show through the characters.

Hamlet Summary: Act – I, Scene – 1 (A platform before the Elsinore castle):

On the darkest of nights where the cold can make anyone sick at heart, Francisco is guarding the castle and Bernardo another officer enters to own his shift and relieve Francisco for the night. Bernardo inquires about the arrival of Marcellus, another officer and Horatio, friend of Hamlet. As Francisco answers of their absence, the two men enter and Francisco takes leave. Marcellus and Bernardo call Horatio to make him witness the apparition they're seeing for two nights. They speak in whispers about the ghost of their deceased and beloved King Hamlet. Horatio, however, doesn't believe in the statements of the two and waits for the apparition to happen.

As the bell beats one at night, the ghost enters with spectre and armour resembling that of King Hamlet and fades away into the darkness. Horatio watches the ghost with fear, wonder and uncertainty as he recognizes the fierce armour of the King which he wore during the battle against Norway. Horatio interprets that the ghost of King Hamlet is perhaps warning of a military attack as the prince of Norway – Fortinbras, is planning to re-conquer his land and glory.

As the three were discussing about the movement of Danish troops and the Norwegian prince, the ghost enters again and Horatio makes efforts to have a conversation with it. However, the ghost of King Hamlet doesn't utter a word and disappears with the crowing of a cock. Horatio believes it is best to take his friend Hamlet to look at the apparition. He assures that the ghost of King Hamlet will definitely speak to his son – Prince Hamlet; although, the ghost has been silent to them.

(Shakespeare's Hamlet immediately gets into the attention of the audience with the introduction of the supernatural and this shows the astute mind of the playwright in assessing the interest of the people who come to the theatre.)

Hamlet Summary: Act – I, Scene – 2 (Elsinore castle – State room):

Claudius, the brother of deceased King Hamlet announces in the room of state about his marriage to the King's wife, Prince Hamlet's mother and the Queen Gertrude. Claudius backs his decision by stating that the marriage was an act to balance the mourning atmosphere in Denmark and to save the Kingdom as well.

The new King talks of the intentions of young Fortinbras and sends the courtiers Voltimand and Cornelius to deliver a message to the elderly uncle of Fortinbras. After an elaborate speech, Claudius has a conversation with the Lord Chamberlain's (Polonius) son – Laertes. The young boy desires to return to France and Polonius and Claudius agree with the wish of the boy.

Prince Hamlet is still seen in mourning clothes. Claudius and Gertrude question him on the same and Hamlet talks of the mourning duties of a son to his beloved father. Claudius tries to make Hamlet understand that a son has to lose his father and it is the nature of life. He even goes further to console the Prince and asks Hamlet to consider him as his father. Gertrude urges Hamlet to stay in Denmark and not to leave for Wittenberg. Hamlet obeys the wishes of his mother; although, he seems not convinced with the decision of staying back himself. As the new King and the old Queen exit, Hamlet begins to soliloquize (soliloquy = talk to oneself) thus:

“O, that this too solid flesh would melt,

Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!

[...] She (Gertrude) married. O, most wicked speed!

It is not, nor it cannot come to, good:

But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue!”

(Shakespeare's Hamlet has many soliloquies where the characters explain their state of mind. However, the soliloquies of Hamlet are so philosophical and reflect the nature of life itself. In the present soliloquy, Hamlet is in the most distressful state where he is found mourning for his father and his mother is seen with her new husband; above all, the marriage took place before the passing of two months of his father's death.)

Hamlet couldn't console his heart out of the hasty turn of events – the sudden death of his father and his mother's abrupt decision to marry his Uncle Claudius. He laments of his state and thinks if suicide was not a sin, it would have been a fair answer to all his questions. Hamlet couldn't digest the fact that his mother could stop grieving about King Hamlet and marry a man who could never be an equal to King Hamlet.

Horatio, friend of Prince Hamlet along with Marcellus and Bernardo enter the room. After greeting each other and discussing a few things, Horatio unravels the apparition he witnessed and bids Hamlet to keep watch during the night. Hamlet is stunned by the news

brought by his friend and the courtiers. A longing to talk to his father develops in the Prince, so he decides to keep watch and eagerly waits for the day to pass allowing the night to show the ghost of King Hamlet.

Hamlet Summary: Act – I, Scene – 3 (The house of Polonius – A room):

Laertes is about to leave for France and he bids his farewell to his beloved sister Ophelia. He gently advises her not to progress any further with Hamlet, as he is a Prince and would leave her after a few days. Laertes states that although Hamlet seems a sweet perfume, the fragrance will last for a moment and he would disappear once he takes advantage of the beauty of Ophelia. She nods in agreement and says 'not to do something that he doesn't wish his sister to do' in France.

Polonius enters and asks Laertes to hurry if he wishes to catch the ship. He gives him final advice as a father: don't take rash decisions, keep thoughts concealed and together, maintain old friendships, careful embrace of new friends, not to be spirited about quarrels, but be brave in fights, never to lend or borrow from others and most importantly to be true to himself. Laertes obediently listens to the advice of his father and leaves to catch the ship.

As he exits, Polonius asks about the conversation between her and Laertes. Ophelia explains the talk between them and when questioned about her feelings towards Hamlet, she expresses without fear that she is in love with Hamlet. Polonius sternly rejects the thoughts of Ophelia and forbids her to meet the Prince anymore. Ophelia seems to obey the orders given by her father.

Hamlet Summary: Act – I, Scene – 4 (A platform before the Elsinore castle):

Hamlet, Horatio and Marcellus wait for the ghost to appear as keep watch at the platform. Meanwhile, the sounds of jubilation are heard from the castle and Hamlet explains about the custom of carousing when a new King is crowned. He doesn't like the custom as it makes Denmark a laughing stock among other nations and it would stand as a nation of drunkards. As they speak, Horatio notices the appearance of the ghost and asks Hamlet to look. The Prince, unsure about the ghastly presence couldn't decide whether it is really the ghost of his father or a demon from the underworld.

The ghost signals the Prince to follow and Hamlet to know of its intention goes behind without listening to the words of his friends. Marcellus believes that these events will bring great troubles to Denmark and they decide after a while to follow the path of Hamlet and protect him if they could from the apparition.

Hamlet Summary: Act – I, Scene – 5 (Platform – Another part):

The ghost declares itself as the spirit of King Hamlet, which came from the Purgatory to reveal about his unnatural murder. Hamlet couldn't believe the words of the ghost as it was announced that his father died due to the bite of Viper. However, the ghost of King Hamlet reveals about a villain who slipped into the garden quietly and poured into his ear the

deadliest of poisons while he was taking an evening nap. The ghost of King Hamlet discloses the villain to be his brother and the current King – Claudius. The ghost seeks vengeance on Claudius; however, asks his son to leave alone Gertrude who got involved in an incestuous affair because of lust and the influence of Claudius. As the ghost exits, Hamlet falls into a dismal state unable to digest the truth which was revealed by the apparition.

“O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?

And shall I couple hell? O, fie! Hold, hold my heart;

[...] O most pernicious woman!

O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain! [...]”

(The second major soliloquy in Shakespeare’s Hamlet, where the bitter truth shakes up the Prince and there are many elements of Revenge tragedy seen from this point in the act till the end of the play probably influenced by “The Spanish Tragedy” written by Thomas Kyd. Hamlet promises himself to remember nothing else but the words of his father and determines to seek revenge on the villain who dared to kill his father and the woman who sleeps with the murderer.)

Meanwhile Marcellus and Horatio enter the scene and Hamlet asks them not to discuss about the apparition anywhere else. His truthful friends agree and swear on his sword, but the ghost reiterates to swear as Hamlet compels them take an oath repeatedly. Although, confused about the repeated demands of Hamlet they swear the oath of secrecy. Hamlet then provides hints through his words that he might act with insanity but all their oaths must be kept. Hamlet determined to take revenge, leaves the platform with the others.

Hamlet Summary: Act – II, Scene – I (The house of Polonius – A Room):

As the scene opens, Polonius is about to send Reynaldo (servant of Polonius) to France for sending Laertes some money and notes. However, he advises Reynaldo to inquire of the behaviour of Laertes in France and gives instructions as to how to carry on the investigation without creating doubts in the mind of his son. Reynaldo listens to all the directions and obeys the orders of Polonius and starts on his way to France. As the servant leaves, Ophelia with a very sad and frightened face enters.

Polonius inquires about the matter for which Ophelia seems so upset and she reveals her encounter with Hamlet. She explains that when she was sewing in her closet, Hamlet came into the room with a pale and piteous look. Ophelia, worries that Hamlet might have gone mad with her avoiding his letters and meetings as well; in addition, she explains how he grabbed hold of her tightly but as a man of no awareness of speech stood with deep sighs and without a word to speak. After a while, Ophelia says, Hamlet leaves without a word. Polonius speculates that Hamlet might have gone mad due to the avoidance of his daughter and rushes to the castle to speak of this unexpected development to the King Claudius.

(Polonius, through his interpretative words builds up a new plot in the play by declaring to himself that Hamlet has gone mad out of love towards Ophelia. In the previous act, Hamlet hints to Horatio and Marcellus of his strategy of 'feigned madness' to take revenge is seriously helped by the words of Polonius. The behaviour of Hamlet with Ophelia cannot be called entirely as an act to show the world of his madness. Since, Ophelia rejected to send replies to Hamlet and insists not to meet her there is an emotional sadness associated as well which can be seen through the reactions of Hamlet as mentioned by Ophelia. However, the intentions of Hamlet are given a great boost with the power of words as will be used by Polonius in the following scenes.)

Hamlet Summary: Act – II, Scene – 2 (The Castle of Elsinore – A Room):

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, courtiers and friends of Hamlet are summoned by the King and the Queen to know about the changed behaviour of Hamlet. They express their concerns about the erratic behaviour of Hamlet which might have aroused due to the death of King Hamlet and ask the two with the best of their abilities to either cheer him up or discover the cause of his behaviour.

As Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are sent off to perform their duties, Polonius enters with the announcement of the return of Cornelius and Voltimand. They provide good news to the King that there won't be any war between Danes and Norway as the Uncle and King to Fortinbras reproached any such attempt from the youth. However, as a token of friendship they ask to permit the passage of the Norwegian army through Denmark so that they could attack Poles. Claudius shows his consent towards the proposal and sends the two to the Norwegian kingdom to deliver the message of consent.

The two courtiers' exit and Polonius at length explains the reason for Hamlet's madness to be his daughter – Ophelia. In order to test his theory, he asks the three of them to conceal themselves behind an arras and arrange a meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia at the same place. According to Polonius, this act would allow them to understand whether Hamlet is really mad due to love for Ophelia or is there any other reason and Claudius accepts for the plan explained by the Lord Chamberlain. Gertrude observes the approaching Hamlet and Polonius declares his interest to speak with him. Therefore, the King and the Queen exit.

As Polonius tries to have a conversation with Hamlet, he calls him with many titles such as fishmonger, etc. Although, the words of Hamlet are that of a lunatic; Polonius detects a great meaning within the insane words. So, he hurries away to grant the meeting between his daughter and Prince Hamlet.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern come to meet the Prince and Hamlet feels happy to see the two. However, he understands that they are sent by the King and the Queen and forces them to reveal the truth, which they do. Rosencrantz offers to summon a theatrical troupe so that his mind can be diverted of the melancholy. Hamlet declares that he is not mad all the time and sometimes he is sane.

Polonius comes with the announcement of the arrival of the theatrical troupe; Hamlet accepts them and asks one of the players to give a speech on the fall of Troy and about the death of Priam and Hecuba, the King and Queen of Troy. Hamlet is mightily pleased with the performance of the players and he announces that the players will perform “The Murder of Gonzago”, but with some additions made by him. Everyone leaves the room and Hamlet stands alone, who cursed himself for getting involved too much with the stirring speech of the player.

“O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
 Is it not monstrous, that this player here,
 But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
 Could force his soul so to his own conceit,
 [...] the play's the thing
 Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.”

In the soliloquy, Hamlet thinks of himself as meek subduing in thought of grief when the player talks of Hecuba and he couldn't restrain himself although he is fully aware that the characters in the speech are long dead and doesn't have any relationship with him. However, he comes out of it and plans to use the play as a trap to find out of the psychology of the King. He intends to make the King and the Queen to watch the entire play so that he could observe the “conscience of the King”.

Hamlet Summary: Act – III, Scene – 1 (The castle of Elsinore – A Room):

The King and the Queen inquire Rosencrantz and Guildenstern of the melancholic and distracted behaviour of Hamlet. Although, the two courtiers agree that Hamlet is distracted with something, they state that they couldn't find the exact reason for his behaviour. They discuss about the enthusiasm shown by Hamlet towards the theatrical troupe and the King and Queen of Denmark willingly agree to watch the play later that evening. The two courtiers leave and Claudius asks the Queen to exit because he along with Polonius intends to spy on the conversation between Hamlet and Ophelia. As the Queen leaves, Ophelia is ordered by her father to stay in the lobby and they both hide as they hear the voice of Hamlet. Hamlet enters the lobby soliloquizing thus:

“To be, or not to be: that is the question:

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,

Or to take arms against a sea of troubles..."

(Unquestionably, the most famous lines in literature; where the agony of Hamlet is reflected in the form of a philosophical debate. Nowhere in the soliloquy do we find Hamlet speaking with a personal tone and this makes these lines relate to anyone in pain or suffering. It is obvious that Hamlet is contemplating suicide and tries to gather courage, but things of the law that forbids such actions. His mind changes through the speech and his dilemma whether to die or not to die, is clear evidence that Hamlet has many secret intentions that he does not speak of with his friends nor does he reveal them to the audience.)

As Hamlet contemplates on death, he sees Ophelia and starts to talk with her. Ophelia tries to return to Hamlet the tokens of love, but Hamlet denies that he has given any. Hamlet angrily detests that he never loved her and curses women for having the ability to make men monsters. Hamlet's conversation gradually evolves into a rage and he curses all of mankind and expresses his wish to restrict marriages in the world and send everyone to nunneries and leaves hastily. Ophelia is left to mourn of the dismal state of Hamlet.

Claudius, who was hiding and listening, understands that Hamlet is not mad in love, but there is a secret melancholy torturing him. He states that if this broods, it can prove very dangerous; hence, he decides to send Hamlet to England again where the change in scenery could help heal him from the pangs of sadness. He states that madness is great men, should never be taken with indifference and it should be watched constantly.

Hamlet Summary: Act – III, Scene -2 (The Castle of Elsinore – A Hall):

Hamlet is seen busy instructing the players as to how to perform in the play. Meanwhile, Horatio visits Hamlet and the Prince is glad to see his friend. Hamlet shows admiration of the calmness of Horatio and his intellect. He reveals the intention of the play and the revelation given by the ghost of King Hamlet. Hamlet intends to find any guilt or remorse in the face of Claudius when the play will be performed and asks Horatio to observe the same. He speaks very well to Horatio, but as he sees the King and the Queen enter he shifts his predicament and acts as insane.

A "dumb show" is performed by the players, which is a brief version of the play they're about to perform. In it, a king and his queen are seen showing great affection. After a while, the King is allowed to sleep as the Queen leaves the premises. As the king fell asleep, a man enters and pours poison into the ear of the king leading to his death. The murderer not bothered about the death tries to woo the Queen, in which he succeeds after several attempts. Although, the dumb show exactly refers to the incident narrated by the ghost, Claudius doesn't react or show signs of guilt.

Now, the players start to perform the original version of "The Murder of Gonzago" (or famously known as **The Mousetrap** – as entitled by Hamlet when Claudius asks about the play), where the King Gonzago is murdered by his nephew Lucianus and the Queen Baptista seduced by the murderer marries him.

Hamlet throughout the play provides commentary on the behaviour of the characters and the intention behind their actions. He even chaffs Ophelia several times with the use of sexual references. As Lucianus pours poison into the ear of Gonzago, Claudius shows signs of discomfort and asks to light the torches. Claudius leaves the play and the rest of the audience follow him resulting in the play to halt.

As everyone leave, Horatio is seen with Hamlet and they both conclude that the behaviour of Claudius certainly showed some inherent guilt about the death of King Hamlet. Guildenstern and Rosencrantz come to notify Hamlet that he is expected at the chamber of Gertrude. Polonius enters to take Hamlet to his mother; however, Hamlet asks to leave as he longs to have a moment with himself. Hamlet soliloquizes as to how to take action against his mother:

“’Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world: now could I drink hot blood,
And do such bitter business as the day [...]
Let me be cruel, not unnatural:
I will speak daggers to her, but use none:
My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites;
How in my words soever she be shent,
To give them seals never, my soul, consent!

(Hamlet, though appears as if he is mad doesn't act with his actions in such a way. It is clearly evident with the employment of play within the play – “The Murder of Gonzago”. This also shows that Hamlet doesn't want to take actions because a ghost has revealed a different narration about the death of his father. He wants evidence and through the play he gets the psychological proof he needed and develops firm intentions to take revenge. However, it is poor Ophelia who gets into the firing range of Hamlet as he chaffs her continuously to her bitter agony. His “feigned madness” is revealed once again, when he asks for a moment before entering the chamber of his mother. Hamlet thinks of using harsh words as daggers to pierce the heart of his mother, instead of using weapons to make her realize her mistakes. The Scene – 2 of Act – III is very crucial to the play as the whole plot comes together with the help of “The Murder of Gonzago” and all the incidents that evolve around it.)

Hamlet Summary: Act – III, Scene – 3 (The Castle of Elsinore – A Room):

Claudius immediately understands the danger of having Hamlet with him in the castle; therefore, he asks Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to escort the Prince back to London so that his mad behaviour can be sorted out. The two courtiers make haste to prepare for their journey; meanwhile, Polonius enters to remind of his plan to slip into the room of Gertrude so that he can hear the conversation between Hamlet and the Queen. Polonius declares that he will explain everything that happens in the room and leaves. The King, now alone, is overcome by guilt and ruminates on the words of the players who speak of sinuous nature of killing a brother. Although, Claudius feels miserable for his actions; he is not prepared to lose the Kingdom and Queen he acquired through the murder. However, in a slight hope of getting pardoned he kneels down and starts to pray.

“Now might I do it pat, now he is praying;
And now I’ll do’t: and so he goes to heaven;
A villain kills my father; and for that,
I, his sole son, do this same villain send
To heaven. [...]”

As Claudius is praying, Hamlet enters the room without the notice of anyone and decides to kill Claudius. But, Hamlet restrains himself by thinking that if Claudius is killed during his prayers, he will go to Heaven and it will not be a fitting revenge to his father. Therefore, he decides to leave Claudius for the moment and kill him when he is either involved in lustful actions, showing anger or when he is drunk, which would lead his soul to damnation. Hamlet leaves Claudius to his prayer and Claudius rises up confessing that his prayers were not sincere.

(Hamlet’s procrastination leads to a number of events that end up in tragical consequences. However, when Hamlet reasons with himself about his failure to take action at that point of time the reasons seem justifiable as he seeks a complete revenge on the man who killed his father. On the contrary we find that Claudius was not sincere with his prayers, which suggest that Hamlet has missed a great opportunity to seek revenge for his father’s death.)

Hamlet Summary: Act – III, Scene – 4 (The Castle of Elsinore – Another Room):

In the Queen’s chamber, Polonius informs Gertrude that he would hide behind the arras so that he could determine the reason behind the lunatic behaviour of Hamlet. He asks the Queen to be hard in words so that truth might come out from the Prince. Polonius hides behind the arras and Hamlet rushes into the room unannounced.

Gertrude seeks answers for being rude with Claudius, Hamlet speaks of the offense she has done to 'his' father (King Hamlet). Hamlet tries to make her fully aware of the sins she has committed by marrying the brother of her husband only after a few days after his death. Gertrude feels that the intention of Hamlet is to kill her and shouts for help and Polonius hiding behind the arras does the same. The Prince realizes that someone is hiding behind the arras and shouts out "rat" and with the sword stabs the man concealed behind the tapestry. Hamlet thinks that it is Claudius, but finds out that it is the Lord Chamberlain Polonius. Gertrude is aghast with the bloody deed of Hamlet and Hamlet replies that this deed is as bloody as marrying a man who murdered her own husband.

To torment her further, Hamlet takes out pictures of King Hamlet and Claudius. He compares them, claiming that Claudius is a rotten man who is not worthy to take the place of King Hamlet. She begs Hamlet to stop and go no further. Gertrude reveals that now she has looked into her soul and realized that she finds things that are not desirable such as deception and maliciousness. However, the Prince doesn't stop his dagger like words wounding the heart of Gertrude and the ghost of King Hamlet appears in the room.

The ghost is only visible to Hamlet, as the Prince speaks to it Gertrude thinks that her son is mad. King Hamlet reminds his son that his purpose is to kill Claudius. Hamlet witnesses his mother perplexed by his actions, tries to explain about the presence of the apparition and confesses that he is merely acting to be mad. He pleads his mother to abandon Claudius and retain her good senses. Hamlet asks his mother to keep his 'feigned madness' a secret and she out of fear agrees. Hamlet bids his mother good night and drags the corpse of Polonius with him.

Hamlet Summary: Act – IV, Scene – 1 (The Castle of Elsinore – A Room):

Gertrude is distraught with the actions of Hamlet and rushes to meet Claudius, who is seen talking with his courtiers Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The Queen sends them off, so that she can have a conversation with Claudius alone. As they leave, Gertrude explains about the confrontation with Hamlet and explains that he is deranged and kills Polonius because he thought that it was Claudius. The King is worried about dealing with the situation as any news to the outside world can ruin his reputation. So, he feels that the best way to tackle the situation is to send Hamlet away to England and find a reasonable explanation to present in front of the court about the death of Polonius. Claudius, curious about reacting instantly, calls for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. He explains about the death of Polonius and asks them to find Hamlet.

Hamlet Summary: Act – IV, Scene – 2 (The Castle of Elsinore – Another Room):

Hamlet safely stows the body of Polonius and the two courtiers sent by Claudius confront him about the dead body. He doesn't give straight answers to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern when they ask about Polonius. The Prince uses his feigned madness to his advantages and calls Rosencrantz a sponge who soaks up the countenance of the King. He even warns about Claudius, that when he sees that there is no need of the two, he will leave them to utter distress. As the two urge Hamlet to come with them, he finally agrees and they leave.

Hamlet Summary: Act – IV, Scene – 3 (The Castle of Elsinore – Another Room):

Claudius is seen speaking to attendants about the death of the Lord Chamberlain and his intentions to send the Prince back to England. Hamlet is brought to the presence of the King by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Claudius inquires about the whereabouts of Polonius and Hamlet replies that he is at a supper, where he is not supposed to eat, but he is eaten by politic worms. The philosophical expressions of the Prince showcase his understanding of life as he says that a King and the beggar belong to a single table and the maggots seek no such difference. When Claudius forces him to reveal about Polonius, he states that his attendants' musk seek him in Heaven or in Hell. However, he finally reveals that the dead body is concealed in the castle lobby under the stairs.

Claudius asks him to leave to England and the Prince gladly accepts and leaves the room. The King orders Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to make sure Hamlet is abroad and from his words it is known that a sealed cover with dark intentions is also sent along. As everyone leaves, Claudius expresses his hope that England will follow the instructions in the order and kill Prince Hamlet.

Hamlet Summary: Act – IV, Scene – 4 (Elsinore – A plain):

Fortinbras marches his army and is near Denmark, he sends his Captain to seek permission of the King to let them have a safe passage as promised, so that they can have war with Poland. The Captain en route to the castle encounters the Prince escorted by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet asks about the intention of the Norwegian army and the Captain explains that for the sake of a name, young Fortinbras intends to battle with Poland and secure a little patch of land. Hamlet is astonished by the reason behind the march and marvels at the violent nature of human beings. He wishes the Captain good luck and asks the two courtiers to go forward and he will follow them in a moment.

How all occasions do inform against me,
 And spur my dull revenge! What is a man!
 If his chief good and market of his time
 Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more.
 [...] O, from this time forth,
 My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!

Hamlet compares his dull and procrastinated advances with that of Fortinbras, who for a patch of land marches to Poland. So, he gathers the will to act and determines his mind to execute the bloody deeds he intends to do to avenge the death of his father, King Hamlet.

Hamlet Summary: Act – IV, Scene – 5 (The Castle of Elsinore – A Room):

Gertrude is in conversation with a Gentleman and Horatio about the state of Ophelia. She rejects to meet her as she feels that everything that is going around in Elsinore makes her feel sick with guilt. However, with the insisting of Horatio Gertrude accepts to meet Ophelia. Ophelia enters with flowers adorned and singing songs, indicating that she has gone mad due to the death of her father and the behaviour of Hamlet. From the words of Horatio to the Queen it is understood that Ophelia is very disturbed with the passing away of Polonius and Laertes came back from France.

In the castle, a loud noise is heard and Claudius orders his guards to check for it. A Gentleman rushes in to inform Claudius about the presence of Laertes, who gathered a mob of commoners. The mob praises Laertes as their “Lord” and Laertes barges into the hall to seek revenge for the death of Polonius. Both the King and the Queen accept the fact that Polonius is dead, but deny having a hand in his death. However, when Laertes sees the insane Ophelia, his rage increases and he plunges to take action. Claudius asks Laertes to hear him out and decide about taking action against the culprit and Laertes agrees.

Hamlet Summary: Act – IV, Scene – 6 (The Castle of Elsinore – Another Room):

Pair of sailors visit Horatio and deliver him a letter from Prince Hamlet. Hamlet speaks about pirates capturing the ship which was destined to take him to England and the pirates send him back to Denmark. Hamlet asks his good friend Horatio to take the sailors to Claudius and Gertrude, for he has sent messages for them also. Horatio escorts them to the King and moves on to the countryside where he expects to find Hamlet.

Hamlet Summary: Act – IV, Scene – 7 (The Castle of Elsinore – Another Room):

Claudius makes effort to pursue the mind of Laertes and successfully makes him think that the cause of Polonius’ death is Hamlet. When Laertes questions about the King not punishing a murderer, he expresses his inability to punish a man who is loved by Gertrude and admired the people of Denmark. A messenger brings in the letter given by the sailors and written by Hamlet. The letter states about the strange return of Hamlet and he mentions in the post script that he returns to Denmark alone. Laertes is happy to hear of the news, as he seeks revenge for his father’s death.

Laertes agrees to be ruled by Claudius as long as he helps to successfully kill Hamlet. Claudius thinks of a way to kill Hamlet that doesn’t spoil his reputation as a King and he starts to praise the fencing skills of Laertes. Claudius declares that once Hamlet was jealous about the sword handling skills of Laertes and plans to conduct a duel between the two. They plan to use a sharp sword for Laertes instead of a dull fencing blade in the duel and poison the edge of the sword so that a small scratch also can kill the Prince. Claudius goes beyond the result of the duel and decides to offer a poisoned cup of wine to Hamlet, if by chance he emerges victorious.

As they plot against Hamlet, Gertrude enters the room announcing the death of Ophelia. She declares that out of unending grief, Ophelia drowned herself in the river. Laertes, struck with another tragic storm, exits in a hurry to find his sister. Claudius asks Gertrude to come with him to follow Laertes and states that this might further fuel the rage of Laertes.

(The persuasive powers of Claudius are made evident by Shakespeare in this act. He uses mental instability of Laertes to make him think that Hamlet is the one who killed Polonius on purpose. Although, Hamlet did kill Polonius, it was not deliberate and there is fault of Polonius also who hid behind the tapestry when a mother and son were having a conversation. Polonius conceals all the necessary truths and reveals only those that would act against the innocence of Hamlet, which makes Laertes outraged and seek revenge against the Prince.)

Hamlet Summary: Act – V, Scene – 1 (Churchyard in Elsinore):

Two gravediggers are seen excavating the graveyard to make room for a new corpse that is about to enter. They provide a bit of comic relief and at the same time deliver a philosophical message about death. Hamlet and Horatio enter the graveyard and witness the gravediggers do their work. The Prince wonders at the sight of all the skulls and thinks of the profession each skull had when there was still flesh and life to them. Hamlet curiously asks one of the gravediggers to tell about the person who is going to be put in the fresh grave. The gravedigger initially answers that he is digging his own grave, later answers that it is not purposed for a man or woman as after death everyone becomes ‘things’ and finally reveals that the grave is meant for a woman.

The gravedigger goes on about his job as a gravedigger and states that he has been doing it since the defeat of Fortinbras (elder) by King Hamlet; he has been a gravedigger from the day Prince Hamlet came into this world. Hamlet takes out a skull from the pile and the gravedigger identifies the skull to be of King Hamlet’s court jester –Yorick. Hamlet immediately recognizes the name and relates to Horatio about his relationship as a kid, with Yorick. Hamlet is dismayed by the sight of Yorick’s skull and realizes that man is ultimately set to become dust and no more. It happened with Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great and it will happen with everyone born mortal. Hamlet’s intensity of thinking is further shown; where he imagines that the dust of Julius Caesar might be used to fill a hole to stop the wind from entering the house or patching a wall. He seizes to talk as he observes Claudius entering the graveyard and decides to hide along with Horatio.

Hamlet watches the procession, of Claudius, Gertrude, Laertes, mourner, etc., enter the churchyard and recognizes the maimed rites, which indicate the individual committed suicide. The dead body is placed on earth and Hamlet recognizes that it is the corpse of his beloved Ophelia. Laertes squabbles with the Priest, who says that burying Ophelia in the graveyard would profane the others who entered there before. Laertes, unable to hold his emotions, jumps into the grave of Ophelia and takes her into his arms. At that moment of grief, Hamlet also comes out of hiding and declares his agony over the death of Ophelia. He too jumps into the grave and quarrels with Laertes and states thus:



**“I loved Ophelia; forty thousand brothers
Could not, with all their quantity of love,
Make up my sum.”**

Hamlet declares that he would even crocodiles for Ophelia and would accept to get buried along with her. As the quarrel between Hamlet and Laertes intensifies, they are pulled apart. The King and the Queen declare that the Prince is behaving out of his madness. Hamlet, followed by Horatio, rush off from the churchyard. Claudius tries to calm down Laertes and remind him of the plan to kill Hamlet in the duel.

Hamlet Summary: Act – V, Scene – 2 (The Castle of Elsinore – A Hall):

Hamlet reveals to Horatio, how he exchanged the letter carried by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern which caused their execution. In the original letter carried by the two courtiers, the message was to kill Hamlet; however, the Prince changed the letter and wrote a message to kill the bearers of the letter. The orders were executed perfectly and the two courtiers were slain; although, they were friends of Hamlet, he declares that he doesn't have sympathy for them as they betrayed friendship for the favour of the King. But, Hamlet feels sorry for Laertes and his hostile behaviour towards him. Hamlet finds the reflection of himself in Laertes – who is also seeking revenge for his father's death.

Osric, a courtier interrupts their conversation and tells Hamlet about the intention of Claudius to witness a fencing competition between him and Laertes. Osric being a foolish courtier talks of many things and praises the abilities of alerted in front of Horatio and

Hamlet. The pair couldn't understand the intention behind the words of the courtier and a lord enters to announce that the King and the Queen are expecting his presence. Horatio suspects that there is a murderous plot behind the actions of Claudius; but, Hamlet willingly accepts to fight and states that man should always be ready to meet his own end.

Claudius, Gertrude and the entire court are seen in the hall and Hamlet seeks forgiveness from Laertes. He tries to explain that his actions were bound by madness, but not will. Laertes declares that he will forgive Hamlet only when a man of high honour advises him to make peace. Hamlet and Laertes choose the foils and Claudius declares that if the Prince wins the first hit or the second hit, he will offer a cup of wine with a valuable gem inside it to Hamlet. The Prince wins the first hit but resists drinking from the cup, he wins the second hit and resists again. Unfortunately, Gertrude takes the cup and drinks part of the wine. Claudius tries to prevent her, but she takes the win and the King murmurs aside that the cup is poisoned.

Laertes feels that using a poisonous sword to kill Hamlet is not completely acceptable within his moral sense; however, he fights Hamlet and is able to draw blood from the Prince. During the scuffle after the hit, the swords of Hamlet and Laertes are exchanged and Hamlet wounds Laertes with the poisonous sword unaware that the tip is poisoned.

Gertrude falls down and Laertes declares that he was killed due to his own treacherous intentions. The Queen declares that the wine is mixed with poison and shouts out for Hamlet and dies. Laertes reveals that the sword and the cup of wine are poisoned, and it is Claudius who plotted such. Hamlet, furious about the tragic incidents rushes towards Claudius and stabs the King with the help of the poisonous sword. Further, Hamlet makes Claudius to drink the poisoned wine and Claudius dies begging for help. Hamlet asks forgiveness of Laertes and he exonerates Hamlet just before dying.

Fortinbras with his forces enter Denmark after achieving a victory over Poland. Hamlet reveals to Horatio that he is going to die, but asks him not to commit suicide due to the tragic incidents that took place in the Kingdom. He urges Horatio to spread his tragical story and expresses his desire to make the young Fortinbras as the King of Denmark.

Hamlet dies after expressing his desires.

Fortinbras enters the hall with English ambassadors, who declare that the two courtiers (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) are put to death. Meanwhile, amongst the confusion Horatio declares that he will reveal everything that led to the tragical end of Hamlet and the others. Fortinbras asks to carry the dead body of Hamlet and perform rites equal to a royal soldier. A dead march carrying all the dead bodies from the hall are seen.

(Thus ends the "The tragical history of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark" and towards the end of the play everyone seeks their revenge and it leads to the loss of royalty in Denmark. However, Hamlet even at the last moments of life thinks of the Kingdom and sees it fit to make Fortinbras the King, because the young Fortinbras is a man of honour. It is evident when he asks to treat the body of Hamlet like that of a soldier who died for his country.)