

Hamlet Act I, scene 4

ORIGINAL TEXT

Enter **HAMLET, HORATIO, and MARCELLUS**

**HAMLET**

The air bites shrewdly. It is very cold.

**HORATIO**

It is a nipping and an eager air.

**HAMLET**

What hour now?

**HORATIO**

I think it lacks of twelve.

**MARCELLUS**

No, it is struck.

**HORATIO**

Indeed? I heard it not. It then draws near the season

Wherein the spirit held his wont to walk.

*A flourish of trumpets and two pieces of ordnance goes off*

What does this mean, my lord?

**HAMLET**

The king doth wake tonight and takes his rouse,

Keeps wassail and the swaggering upspring reels,

And, as he drains his draughts of Rhenish down,

The kettle-drum and trumpet thus bray out  
The triumph of his pledge.

**HORATIO**

Is it a custom?

**HAMLET**

MODERN TEXT

**HAMLET, HORATIO, and MARCELLUS** enter.

**HAMLET**

The air is biting cold.

**HORATIO**

Yes, it's definitely nippy.

**HAMLET**

What time is it?

**HORATIO**

A little before twelve, I think.

**MARCELLUS**

No, it's just after twelve; I heard the clock strike.

**HORATIO**

Really? I didn't hear it. So it's nearly the time when the ghost likes to appear.

*Trumpets play offstage and two cannons are fired.*

What does that mean, sir?

**HAMLET**

The king is staying up all night drinking and dancing. As he guzzles down his German wine, the musicians make a ruckus to celebrate his draining another cup.

**HORATIO**

Is that a tradition?

**HAMLET**

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15 Ay, marry, is't.  
 But to my mind, though I am native here  
 And to the manner born, it is a custom  
 More honored in the breach than the  
 observance;  
 This heavy-headed revel east and west  
 20 Makes us traduced and taxed of other  
 nations.

ORIGINAL TEXT

They clepe us drunkards and with swinish  
 phrase  
 Soil our addition. And indeed it takes  
 From our achievements, though performed  
 at height,  
 The pith and marrow of our attribute.  
 25 So oft it chances in particular men  
 That for some vicious mole of nature in  
 them—  
 As in their birth (wherein they are not  
 guilty,  
 Since nature cannot choose his origin),  
 By the o'ergrowth of some complexion,  
 30 Or breaking down the pales and forts of  
 reason)  
 Or by some habit that too much o'erleavens  
 The form of plausible manners—that these  
 men,  
 Carrying I say, the stamp of one defect,  
 Being nature's livery or fortune's star,  
 35 Their virtues else (be they as pure as  
 grace,  
 As infinite as man may undergo)  
 Shall in the general censure take  
 corruption  
 From that particular fault. The dram of evil  
 Doth all the noble substance of a doubt  
 40 To his own scandal.

Enter GHOST

HORATIO  
 Look, my lord, it comes!

Yes, it is. But though I was born here and should consider that tradition part of my own heritage, I think it would be better to ignore it than practice it. Other countries criticize us for our loud partying.

MODERN TEXT

They call us drunks and insult our noble titles. And our drunkenness does detract from our achievements, as great as they are, and lessens our reputations. It's just like what happens to certain people who have some birth defect (which they are not responsible for, since nobody chooses how he's born), or some weird habit or compulsion that changes them completely. It happens sometimes that one little defect in these people, as wonderful and talented as they may be, will make them look completely bad to other people. A tiny spot of evil casts doubt on their good qualities and ruins their reputations.

The GHOST enters.

HORATIO  
 Look, sir—here it comes!

→ pigs

HAMLET

Angels and ministers of grace defend us!  
Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damned,  
Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts  
from hell,

45 Be thy intents wicked or charitable,  
Thou comest in such a questionable shape  
That I will speak to thee. I'll call thee  
"Hamlet,"

"King," "Father," "royal Dane." O, answer  
me!

Let me not burst in ignorance, but tell  
50 Why thy canonized bones, hearsed in  
death,

Have burst their cerements; why the  
sepulcher, — → tomb

ORIGINAL TEXT

Wherein we saw thee quietly interred,  
Hath oped his ponderous and marble jaws  
To cast thee up again. What may this mean,  
55 That thou, dead corse, again in complete  
steel

Revisits thus the glimpses of the moon,  
Making night hideous and we fools of  
nature,  
So horribly to shake our disposition  
With thoughts beyond the reaches of our  
souls?

60 Say why is this? Wherefore? What  
should we do?

GHOST beckons HAMLET

HORATIO

It beckons you to go away with it,  
As if it some impartment did desire  
To you alone.

MARCELLUS

Look, with what courteous action  
It waves you to a more removed ground.

HAMLET

Oh angels, protect us! Whether you're a good spirit or a cursed demon, whether you bring heavenly breezes or blasts of hell fire, whether your intentions are good or evil, you look so strange I want to talk to you. I'll call you "Hamlet Senior," "King," "Father," "royal Dane." Answer me! Don't drive me crazy with curiosity, but tell me why your church-buried bones have burst out of their coffin, and why your tomb,

MODERN TEXT

where we quietly buried you, has opened up its heavy marble jaws to spit you out again. What could it mean that you have put on your armor again, you corpse, and have come back to look at the moon, making the night terrifying and stirring us humans with supernatural fears? Why? What do you want from us? What should we do?

The GHOST motions for HAMLET to come with it.

HORATIO

It wants you to go off with it, as if it wants to tell you something alone.

MARCELLUS

Look how politely it's pointing you to a place that's farther away. But don't go.



(A)

→ part 1

65 But do not go with it.

HORATIO

No, by no means.

HAMLET

It will not speak. Then I will follow it.

HORATIO

Do not, my lord.

HAMLET

Why, what should be the fear?  
I do not set my life in a pin's fee,  
And for my soul—what can it do to that,  
70 Being a thing immortal as itself?  
It waves me forth again. I'll follow it.

HORATIO

What if it tempt you toward the flood, my  
lord,  
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff  
That beetles o'er his base into the sea,

ORIGINAL TEXT

75 And there assume some other horrible  
form,  
Which might deprive your sovereignty of  
reason,  
And draw you into madness? Think of it.  
The very place puts toys of desperation,  
Without more motive, into every brain.  
80 That looks so many fathoms to the sea  
And hears it roar beneath.

HAMLET

It waves me still.  
—Go on, I'll follow thee.

MARCELLUS

You shall not go, my lord.

HORATIO

Definitely not.

HAMLET

It's not going to speak, so I'll follow it.

HORATIO

Don't do it, sir.

HAMLET

Why, what's the danger? I don't value my life  
one bit. And as for my soul, how can the  
ghost endanger that, since it's as immortal as  
the ghost is? Look, it's waving me over again.  
I'll follow it.

HORATIO

What if it tempts you to jump into the sea,  
sir? Or to the terrifying cliff that overhangs  
the water,

MODERN TEXT

where it takes on some other horrible form  
that drives you insane. Think about it. The  
edge of the sea makes people feel despair  
even at the best of times. All they have to do  
is look into its depths and hear it roar far  
below.

HAMLET

It's still waving to me. —Go ahead, I'll follow.

MARCELLUS

You're not going, sir.



MARCELLUS and HORATIO try to hold HAMLET back

HAMLET  
Hold off your hands.

HORATIO  
Be ruled. You shall not go.

HAMLET  
My fate cries out  
And makes each petty artery in this body  
As hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve.  
Still am I called.—Unhand me, gentlemen.  
(draws his sword)  
By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that  
lets me.  
I say, away!—Go on. I'll follow thee.

Exeunt GHOST and HAMLET

HORATIO  
He waxes desperate with imagination.

MARCELLUS  
Let's follow. 'Tis not fit thus to obey him.

HORATIO  
Have after. To what issue will this come?

ORIGINAL TEXT

MARCELLUS  
95 Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

HORATIO  
Heaven will direct it.

MARCELLUS  
Nay, let's follow him.

MARCELLUS and HORATIO try to hold HAMLET back.

HAMLET  
Let go of me.

HORATIO  
Calm down. You're not going anywhere.

HAMLET  
It's my fate calling me. Every nerve in my body is now as tough as steel. The ghost is still waving me over. Let me go, gentlemen. (he draws his sword)  
I swear, if anyone holds me back, I'll make a ghost of him! I say, get away!—Go ahead, I'll follow you.

The GHOST and HAMLET exit.

HORATIO  
His imagination is making him crazy.

MARCELLUS  
Let's follow them. It's not right to obey his orders to let him go alone.

HORATIO  
Go ahead and follow him. But what does all this mean, where will it all end?

MODERN TEXT

MARCELLUS  
It means that something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

HORATIO  
If that's true, we should let God take care of it.

MARCELLUS  
No, let's follow him.