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Hamlet
By William Shakespeare
Act II, Scene II (partly)
Act III, Scene I-III
Revision

William Shakespeare's play, *Hamlet*, presents the reader with a very interesting plot, which unfolds in five acts.

In Scene II of Act II, Hamlet welcomes the players to Elsinore. At Hamlet's request, they will perform for him, so they can prove their talent. Polonius complains about their performance as being too long. Hamlet delegates Polonius to be the host for the players. Only one of the players stays with Hamlet, who asks the player to memorize overnight an edited version of *The Murder of Gonzago*.

When Hamlet is alone, he wonders how much better the players would act if they knew his real story. He blames himself for not standing up to the king and avenging his father's death. Instead, he plans to expose the king's actions with the players' help—that is, to reveal Claudius' crime through a play. He also plans to observe Claudius' reaction to the play. If Claudius has a negative reaction, then Hamlet will have his proof that the king is guilty.

In Scene I of Act III, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern inform the king and the queen of their findings on Hamlet. However, they are not sincere, because they protect their friend, Hamlet.

In the same scene, Polonius, the king, and the queen plan to observe Hamlet's behavior around Ophelia. Therefore, they ask Ophelia to read a book in a location where they know that Hamlet

will soon arrive. For a moment, the king seems to have some remorse about this plot. He even mentions a heavy burden that he carries with him. This is the first clue toward his admission of a crime. When Hamlet arrives and meets Ophelia, the meeting does not go Polonius' way. Hamlet is very unkind to Ophelia, and that upsets her very much. The king realizes that, whatever upsets Hamlet, it's not love. He plans to send him to England, with the hope that the time spent there will help cure Hamlet's hidden sorrow.

In Scene II of Act III, Hamlet tries to advise the players on how to act. The players respond by telling him that overacting can disappoint the versatile spectator.

Next, Polonius informs Hamlet that both the king and the queen will attend the play. Hamlet seems to be very impatient for the play to start. He tells Horatio how much he appreciates him, but also asks him to pay attention to the king's reaction during the play. Horatio agrees.

The play starts with the "dumb show," which is nothing more than a mime show. The show portrays how Hamlet's father, the former king, was poisoned. Ophelia is puzzled by the show's plot, and she asks Hamlet to clarify its meaning.

While watching the play, the king grows very uncomfortable—especially when he witnesses the death of the poisoned character—and wants to leave immediately. As per Hamlet's request, Horatio carefully observes the king's reactions and how upset he is by the plot of the play.

Right after the play, the queen wants to talk to Hamlet. Guildenstern and Rosencrantz are appointed as messengers, to invite Hamlet to the queen. When Hamlet fails to show up on time, Polonius is also sent by the queen to tell Hamlet that she wishes to see him immediately. While

Polonius invites Hamlet to see the queen, they have a very funny encounter—portrayed by Ogden Nash in his poem, “Very Like a Whale.” Hamlet worries that he may lose his temper while talking to the queen.

In Scene III of Act III, King Cornelius asks Guildenstern and Rosencrantz to take Hamlet to England. They agree to protect Hamlet while he is there.

Polonius plans to spy on the meeting between Hamlet and the queen; and he thinks that the queen cannot be impartial because she is his mother.

While alone, the king admits to himself that he killed his brother, the former king. Although he is sorry, there is no going back—because he still has his ambition, the queen, and the crown that he intends to keep. He kneels to pray for God’s forgiveness. Hamlet walks into this scene and starts to observe the king—without the king knowing that he’s being watched. Hamlet has the opportunity to avenge his father’s death; but, if Hamlet kills the king while he is praying, there’s a chance that the king will go to Heaven, according to the superstitions of the time. Therefore, Hamlet decides to wait for a better moment, when the king cannot pray for God’s forgiveness—that is, when the king is drunk, asleep or simply unprepared.

In the end of Scene III of Act III, while praying, the king realizes that his prayers cannot help him, anyway, because he is not sincere.

We will continue our summary with Scene IV of Act III—but not until next week.