**ACT I SCENE 1**

***BARNARDO*** *and* ***FRANCISCO****, two watchmen, enter.*

**BARNARDO**

Who’s there?

**FRANCISCO**

No, who are *you?* Stop and identify yourself.

**BARNARDO**

Long live the king!

**FRANCISCO**

Is that Barnardo?

**BARNARDO**

Yes, it’s me.

**FRANCISCO**

You’ve come right on time.

**BARNARDO**

The clock’s just striking twelve. Go home to bed, Francisco.

**FRANCISCO**

Thanks for letting me go. It’s bitterly cold out, and I’m depressed.

**BARNARDO**

Has it been a quiet night?

**FRANCISCO**

I haven’t even heard a mouse squeak.

**BARNARDO**

Well, good night. If you happen to see Horatio and Marcellus, who are supposed to stand guard with me tonight, tell them to hurry.

**FRANCISCO**

I think I hear them. —Stop! Who’s there?

MARCELLUS*and* HORATIO*enter.*

**HORATIO**

Friends of this country.

**MARCELLUS**

And servants of the Danish king.

**FRANCISCO**

Good night to you both.

**MARCELLUS**

Good-bye. Who’s taken over the watch for you?

**FRANCISCO**

Barnardo’s taken my place. Good night.

**FRANCISCO *exits.***

**MARCELLUS**

Hello, Barnardo.

**BARNARDO**

Hello. Is Horatio here too?

**HORATIO**

More or less.

**BARNARDO**

Welcome, Horatio. Welcome, Marcellus.

**MARCELLUS**

So, tell us, did you see that thing again tonight?

**BARNARDO**

I haven’t seen anything.

**MARCELLUS**

Horatio says we’re imagining it, and won’t let himself believe anything about this horrible thing that we’ve seen twice now. That’s why I’ve begged him to come on our shift tonight, so that if the ghost appears he can see what we see and speak to it.

**HORATIO**

Oh, nonsense. It’s not going to appear.

**BARNARDO**

Sit down for a while, and we’ll tell you again the story you don’t want to believe, about what we’ve seen two nights now.

**HORATIO**

Well, let’s sit down and listen to Barnardo tell us.

**BARNARDO**

Last night, when that star to the west of the North Star had traveled across the night sky to that point where it’s shining now, at one o'clock, Marcellus and I—

The GHOST *enters****.***

**MARCELLUS**

Quiet, shut up! It’s come again.

**BARNARDO**

Looking just like the dead king.

**MARCELLUS**

***(to HORATIO)*** You’re well-educated, Horatio. Say something to it.

**BARNARDO**

Doesn’t he look like the king, Horatio?

**HORATIO**

Very much so. It’s terrifying.

**BARNARDO**

It wants us to speak to it.

**MARCELLUS**

Ask it something, Horatio.

**HORATIO**

What are you, that you walk out so late at night, looking like the dead king of Denmark when he dressed for battle? By God, I order you to speak.

**MARCELLUS**

It looks like you’ve offended it.

**BARNARDO**

Look, it’s going away.

**HORATIO**

Stay! Speak! Speak! I order you, speak!

*The GHOST**exits.*

**MARCELLUS**

It’s gone. It won’t answer now.

**BARNARDO**

What’s going on, Horatio? You’re pale and trembling. You agree now that we’re not imagining this, don’t you? What do you think about it?

**HORATIO**

I swear to God, if I hadn’t seen this with my own eyes I’d never believe it.

**MARCELLUS**

Doesn’t it look like the king?

**HORATIO**

Yes, as much as you look like yourself. The king was wearing exactly this armor when he fought the king of Norway. And the ghost frowned just like the king did once when he attacked the Poles, traveling on the ice in sleds. It’s weird.

**MARCELLUS**

It’s happened like this twice before, always at this exact time. He stalks by us at our post like a warrior.

**HORATIO**

I don’t know exactly how to explain this, but I have a general feeling this means bad news for our country.

**MARCELLUS**

All right, let’s sit down and discuss that question. Somebody tell me why this strict schedule of guards has been imposed, and why so many bronze cannons are being manufactured in Denmark, and so many weapons bought from abroad, and why the shipbuilders are so busy they don’t even rest on Sunday. Is something about to happen that warrants working this night and day? Who can explain this to me?

**HORATIO**

I can. Or at least I can describe the rumors. As you know, our late king, whom we just now saw as a ghost, was the great rival of Fortinbras, king of Norway. Fortinbras dared him to battle. In that fight, our courageous Hamlet (or at least that’s how we thought of him) killed old King Fortinbras, who—on the basis of a valid legal document—surrendered all his territories, along with his life, to his conqueror. If our king had lost, he would have had to do the same. But now old Fortinbras’s young son, also called Fortinbras—he is bold, but unproven— has gathered a bunch of thugs from the lawless outskirts of the country. For some food, they’re eager to take on the tough enterprise of securing the lands the elder Fortinbras lost. As far as I understand, that’s why we’re posted here tonight and why there’s such a commotion in Denmark lately.

**BARNARDO**

I think that’s exactly right—that explains why the ghost of the late king would haunt us now, since he caused these wars.

**HORATIO**

The ghost is definitely something to worry about. In the high and mighty Roman Empire, just before the emperor Julius Caesar was assassinated, corpses rose out of their graves and ran through the streets of Rome speaking gibberish. There were shooting stars, and blood mixed in with the morning dew, and threatening signs on the face of the sun. The moon, which controls the tides of the sea, was so eclipsed it almost went completely out. And we’ve had similar omens of terrible things to come, as if heaven and earth have joined together to warn us what’s going to happen.

*The GHOST**enters.*

Wait, look! It has come again. I’ll meet it if it’s the last thing I do. —Stay here, you hallucination!

*The GHOST**spreads his arms.*

If you have a voice or can make sounds, speak to me. If there’s any good deed I can do that will bring you peace and me honor, speak to me. If you have some secret knowledge of your country’s sad fate—which might be avoided if we knew about it—then, please, speak. Or if you’ve got some buried treasure somewhere, which they say often makes ghosts restless, then tell us about it. Stay and speak!

*A rooster crows.*

Keep it from leaving, Marcellus.

**MARCELLUS**

Should I strike it with my spear?

**HORATIO**

Yes, if it doesn’t stand still.

**BARNARDO**

It’s over here.

**HORATIO**

There it is.

*The GHOST**exits.*

**MARCELLUS**

It’s gone. We were wrong to threaten it with violence, since it looks so much like a king. Besides, we can’t hurt it anymore than we can hurt the air. Our attack was stupid, futile, and wicked.

**BARNARDO**

It was about to say something when the rooster crowed.

**HORATIO**

And then it acted startled, like a guilty person caught by the law. I’ve heard that the rooster awakens the god of day with its trumpetlike crowing, and makes all wandering ghosts, wherever they are, hurry back to their hiding places. We’ve just seen proof of that.

**MARCELLUS**

Yes, it faded away when the rooster crowed. Some people say that just before Christmas the rooster crows all night long, so that no ghost dares go wandering, and the night is safe. The planets have no sway over us, fairies' spells don’t work, and witches can’t bewitch us. That’s how holy that night is.

**HORATIO**

Yes, I’ve heard the same thing and sort of believe it. But look, morning is breaking beyond that hill in the east, turning the sky red. Let’s interrupt our watch and go tell young Hamlet what we’ve seen tonight. I’m sure this ghost that’s so silent with us will speak to him. Don’t you agree that we owe it to him to tell him about this, out of duty and love?

**MARCELLUS**

Let’s do it. I know where we’ll find him this morning.

*They exit.*