ACT 1 SCENE 4

*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**

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. 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!

**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, 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.

**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, 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**

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?

**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.

*They exit.*