ACT 1 SCENE 5

*The GHOST and HAMLET**enter.*

**HAMLET**

Where are you taking me? Speak. I’m not going any farther.

**GHOST**

Listen to me.

**HAMLET**

I will.

**GHOST**

The hour has almost come when I have to return to the horrible flames of purgatory.

**HAMLET**

Ah, poor ghost!

**GHOST**

Don’t pity me. Just listen carefully to what I have to tell you.

**HAMLET**

Speak. I’m ready to hear you.

**GHOST**

You must be ready for revenge, too, when you hear me out.

**HAMLET**

What?

**GHOST**

I’m the ghost of your father, doomed for a certain period of time to walk the earth at night, while during the day I’m trapped in the fires of purgatory until I’ve done penance for my past sins. If I weren’t forbidden to tell you the secrets of purgatory, I could tell you stories that would slice through your soul, freeze your blood, make your eyes jump out of their sockets, and your hair stand on end like porcupine quills. But mortals like you aren’t allowed to hear this description of the afterlife. Listen, listen! If you ever loved your poor dear father—

**HAMLET**

Oh God

**GHOST**

Take revenge for his horrible murder, that crime against nature.

**HAMLET**

Murder?

**GHOST**

His most horrible murder. Murder’s always horrible, but this one was especially horrible, weird, and unnatural.

**HAMLET**

Hurry and tell me about it, so I can take revenge right away, faster than a person falls in love.

**GHOST**

I’m glad you’re eager. You’d have to be as lazy as a weed on the shores of Lethe not to get riled up here. Now listen, Hamlet. Everyone was told that a poisonous snake bit me when I was sleeping in the orchard. But in fact, that’s a lie that’s fooled everyone in Denmark. You should know, my noble son, the real snake that stung your father is now wearing his crown.

**HAMLET**

I knew it! My uncle?

**GHOST**

Yes, that incestuous, adulterous animal. With his clever words and fancy gifts, he seduced my seemingly virtuous queen, persuading her to give in to his lust. They were evil words and gifts to seduce her like that! Oh, Hamlet, how far she fell! She went from me, who loved her with the dignity and devotion that suits a legitimate marriage, to a wretch whose natural gifts were poor compared to mine. But just as you can’t corrupt a truly virtuous person no matter how you try, the opposite is also true: a lustful person like her can satisfy herself in a heavenly union and then move on to garbage. But hang on, I think I smell the morning air. So let me be brief here. Your uncle snuck up to me while I was sleeping in the orchard, as I always used to do in the afternoon, and poured a vial of henbane poison into my ear— that poison that moves like quicksilver through the veins and curdles the blood, which is just what it did to me. I broke out in a scaly rash that covered my smooth body with a revolting crust. And that’s how my brother robbed me of my life, my crown, and my queen all at once. He cut me off in the middle of a sinful life. I had no chance to repent my sins or receive last rites. Oh, it’s horrible, horrible, so horrible! If you are human, don’t stand for it. Don’t let the Danish king’s bed be a nest of incest. But however you go about your revenge, don’t corrupt your mind or do any harm to your mother. Leave her to God and her own guilt. Now, good-bye. The glowworm’s light is beginning to fade, so morning is near. Good-bye, good-bye, good-bye. Remember me.

*The GHOST**exits.*

**HAMLET**

Ah, all you up in heaven! And earth! What else? Shall I include hell as well? Damn it! Keep beating, my heart, and muscles, don’t grow old yet—keep me standing. Remember you! Yes, you poor ghost, as long as I have any power of memory in this distracted head. Remember you! Yes, I’ll wipe my mind clean of all trivial facts and memories and preserve only your commandment there. Yes, by God! Oh, you evil woman! Oh, you villain, villain, you damned, smiling villain! Where’s my notebook?—It’s a good idea for me to write down that one can smile and smile, and be a villain. At least it’s possible in Denmark. *(he writes)* So, uncle, there you are. Now it’s time to deal with the vow I made to my father. He said, “Remember me.” I swore I would.

*MARCELLUS and HORATIO**enter.*

**HORATIO**

Sir, sir!

**MARCELLUS**

Lord Hamlet.—

**HORATIO**

Please let him be all right!

**HAMLET**

I’m all right.

**HORATIO**

Oh-ho-ho, sir!

**HAMLET**

Oh-ho-ho, kid! Come here.

**MARCELLUS**

So how did it go, sir?

**HORATIO**

What happened, sir?

**HAMLET**

It was incredible!

**HORATIO**

Oh, please, tell us, sir.

**HAMLET**

No, you’ll talk.

**HORATIO**

I swear I won’t, sir.   
  
**MARCELLUS**

I won’t either, sir.

**HAMLET**

Okay. But you promise you can keep a secret?

**HORATIO, MARCELLUS**

Yes, I swear.

**HAMLET**

Any villain in Denmark is going to be, well, a villain.

**HORATIO**

You don’t need a ghost returning from the grave to tell you that, sir.

**HAMLET**

Yes, you’re absolutely right. So, without further ado, the best thing to do now is probably just to shake hands and go our separate ways. You go and take care of your business (since everybody has some business to take care of, whatever it is worth), and I’ll go and pray.

**HORATIO**

You’re talking in such a crazy way, sir.

**HAMLET**

I’m sorry if I offended you; yes, very sorry.

**HORATIO**

Oh, don’t worry about it, sir. No offense taken.

**HAMLET**

Ah, but there is, Horatio, there’s a lot of offense. As for this ghost we just saw, he’s a real one, I can tell you that much. But regarding what happened between us, don’t ask—I can’t tell you. And now, my friends, my courageous and educated friends, do me one small favor.

**HORATIO**

What is it, sir? Of course we will.

**HAMLET**

Don’t ever tell anyone what you’ve seen tonight.

**HORATIO, MARCELLUS**

We won’t, sir.

**HAMLET**

No, you have to swear it.   
  
**HORATIO**

I swear to God I won’t.

**MARCELLUS**

Me too, I won’t, I swear to God.

**HAMLET**

Swear by my sword.

**MARCELLUS**

But we already swore, sir.

**HAMLET**

Yes, but swear by my sword this time.

**GHOST**

*(calls out from under the stage)* Swear!

**HAMLET**

Ha ha, is that what you say, kid? Are you down there, my man?—Come on, you hear this guy down in the basement. Agree to swear.

**HORATIO**

Tell us what to swear, sir.

**HAMLET**

You swear never to mention what you’ve seen. Swear by my sword.

**GHOST**

*(from under the stage)* Swear.

**HAMLET**

You’re everywhere, aren’t you? Maybe we should move. Come over here, gentlemen, and put your hands on my sword again. Swear by my sword you’ll never mention what you’ve heard.

**GHOST**

*(from under the stage)* Swear by his sword.

**HAMLET**

You said it right, old mole.You’re pretty busy down there in the dirt, aren’t you? What a tunneler! Let’s move again, my friends.

**HORATIO**

My God, this is unbelievably strange.   
  
**HAMLET**

Then give it a nice welcome, as you would give to any stranger. There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than you’ve even dreamed of. But now listen to me. No matter how strangely I act (since I may find it appropriate to act a little crazy in the near future), you must never, ever let on—with a gesture of your hands or a certain expression on your face—that you know anything about what happened to me here tonight. You must never say anything like, “Ah, yes, just as we suspected,” or “We could tell you a thing or two about him,” or anything like that. Swear you won’t.

**GHOST**

*(from under the stage)* Swear.

**HAMLET**

Okay, then, unhappy ghost, you can rest now. So, gentlemen, I thank you heartily and with all my love, and I’ll repay you however I can some day. Let’s go back to court together, but shhh, please. No talking about this. There is so much out of whack in these times. And damn the fact that I’m supposed to fix it! Come on, let’s go.

*They exit.*