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ENC 1102
Hamlet
By William Shakespeare
Act III, Scene IV
Act IV, Scene I-VII
Summary
Revision

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

In Scene IV of Act II, Hamlet meets the queen. The queen dismisses Polonius, who hides behind the curtains—in order to spy on the queen's meeting with Hamlet. During their meeting, Hamlet—believing that it is the king hiding behind the curtains—stabs through them with his sword and kills Polonius. Hamlet then tells the queen that he thought he was killing a rat.

The queen asks Hamlet why he is so angry with her. Hamlet answers rudely. He blames her for forgetting so easily her former husband and for marrying the unworthy Claudius. The queen implores Hamlet to stop talking to her in that way. At this moment, the ghost enters the scene. When Hamlet talks to the ghost, the queen thinks that Hamlet is crazy. Hamlet realizes that the queen cannot see or hear the ghost. Before he leaves, Hamlet asks the queen not to go back to her husband's room and especially not to tell Claudius about their discussion during their meeting. The queen agrees. He also reminds her that he has to leave for England; and, as he leaves the room, he drags Polonius' body behind him.

In Scene I of Act IV, the king asks the queen about Hamlet's whereabouts. Distraught, she tells the king how Hamlet killed Polonius. The king realizes that Hamlet meant to kill him and fears that he will be blamed for Hamlet's crime. He decides to cover up the crime and make sure that Hamlet leaves for England.

In Scene II, the king appoints Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to find Polonius' body. They ask Hamlet where they can find the body, but he is not willing to help them.

In Scene III, the king decides that Hamlet must be punished; however, he must proceed carefully, aware of how much the crowd loves Hamlet. Rosencrantz informs the king that he still doesn't know where Hamlet has hidden Polonius' body. When the king asks Hamlet about the body, Hamlet avoids the question with an evasive answer. The king then tells Hamlet that he must prepare to leave for England. Surprisingly, Hamlet agrees. The king orders Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to ensure that Hamlet leaves for England. Claudius then prepares to plot Hamlet's murder. In order for his plot to succeed, he writes a letter to the King of

England, requesting him to arrange for Hamlet's murder. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are appointed to deliver this letter.

In Scene IV, Fortinbras sends one of his captains with a request for the King of Denmark. Hamlet intercepts the captain and finds out about Fortinbras' request to cross through Denmark, in order to attack Poland. Hamlet wonders why people are ready to die for a

piece of land. In addition, he thinks that it is unfortunate that he can't stop this massacre, because he is not the king.

In Scene V, the queen, a gentlemen, Horatio and the king witness Ophelia's madness. The king appoints Horatio to watch her closely.

Meanwhile, Laertes returns to Elsinore. He leads a mad crowd into the palace and demands to know what has happened to his father. The king tells him that he is not responsible for Polonius' death. Next, Ophelia enters the room. Her erratic behavior is heartbreaking.

The crowd wants Laertes to be king. Therefore, Claudius tells Laertes that, if this is what the people want, he will step down from the throne and allow Laertes to be king—but not before the crowd hears the truth about what really happened to Polonius.

In Scene VI, Horatio receives a letter from Hamlet. From the letter, he finds out that Hamlet boarded a pirate ship and that, in a letter addressed to the King of England, Claudius ordered his murder. Hamlet instructs Horatio to meet him; but not before he allows the sailors, who brought over Hamlet's letters, to also see the king.

In Scene VII, the king finds out that Hamlet plans to return home. Laertes and the king plot to kill Hamlet when he returns. Laertes suggests poisoning the tip of his sword and then injuring Hamlet in a duel. In addition, the king suggests poisoning Hamlet's drink,

just to be on the “safe” side. Next, the queen enters the scene, informing them that Ophelia accidentally drowned in the river. Laertes is heartbroken.

Next week, we will continue our summary with Act V.