

ENTER MACBETH

By Ruth Buchanan

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ISBN: 978-1-60003-737-5

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ENTER MACBETH

A Full Length Comedy

By Ruth Buchanan

SYNOPSIS: For hundreds of years, the cast members of *Hamlet* have toiled through each nightly performance – delivering their lines, sneaking about behind tapestries, clutching at skulls, betraying one another, falling in love, losing their minds, drowning, stabbing, being stabbed, and dying – over and over and over again. Night after night, the cycle has never changed. Until now. With a principal character missing and half the cast on the verge of revolt, they must take drastic measures to keep the script from being shelved and the set from going dark. With the cast grasping at straws to keep their numbers even, they soon resort to recruiting from other scripts in Shakespeare's First Folio, hoping that doing so will bring an end to all their problems. Little do they suspect what further doom awaits.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(7 female, 7 male, 3-6 either, 2-5 extras, doubling possible, gender flexible)

FRANCISCO (m/f)	Castle Guard. Not the brightest. <i>(46 lines)</i>
BERNARDO (m/f)	Castle Guard. Dim. Very concerned about timing. <i>(56 lines)</i>
KING CLAUDIUS (m)	Unofficial director of <i>Hamlet</i> cast. <i>(71 lines)</i>
HAMLET (m)	Emo kid. <i>(52 lines)</i>
HORATIO (m)	The best friend. Trying to keep everything together. <i>(111 lines)</i>
GHOST KING (m/f)	Possibly delusional. Stone deaf. <i>(13 lines)</i>
MARCELLUS (m)	Absolutely sick of everything. In love with Ophelia. <i>(127 lines)</i>
LAERTES (m)	Expert swordsman. Poor singer. <i>(17 lines)</i>
POLONIUS (m)	A kiss-up. <i>(11 lines)</i>

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QUEEN GERTRUDE (f).....	Mother to Hamlet and mother figure to all. (42 lines)
OPHELIA (f)	Meltdown waiting to happen. (25 lines)
MACBETH (m)	Evil mastermind masquerading as drooling idiot. (79 lines)
FIRST WITCH (f)	Evil. (20 lines)
SECOND WITCH (f)	Evil. (21 lines)
THIRD WITCH (f)	Evil. (20 lines)
ROSENCRANTZ (m/f)	Clueless schoolmate of Hamlet. (6 lines)
GUILDENSTERN (m/f)	Clueless schoolmate of Hamlet. (6 lines)
GENTLEWOMAN/NURSE JUDY (f)	Attendant on Lady Macbeth. Disillusioned. (11 lines)
DOCTOR (m/f)	Attendant on Lady Macbeth. Disillusioned. (7 lines)
LADY MACBETH (f)	Evil genius puppet master. Compulsive hand-washer. (30 lines)

DOUBLING SUGGESTIONS:

DOCTOR / GHOST KING
GUILDENSTERN / BERNARDO
ROSENCRANTZ / FRANCISCO

EXTRAS:

2-5 (m/f)..... Attendants/Guards/Entourage of Lady Macbeth.

DURATION: 75 minutes.

PRODUCTION NOTES

SET DESIGN: All of the scenes take place in and around the set/backstage theatre world of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. You have a free hand to make these sets as authentic or as campy as you like in order to suit both your budget and your mood. You will need a set to depict the castle walls, the throne room of Elsinore, the backstage wings, and a green room.

COSTUMES: See costume list for basic suggestions, but a few characters have special wardrobe notes.

- **The Three Witches** are also ninjas. While casting, attempt to determine how much “ninja” movement your actors are capable of. In the script, directions such as “WITCHES ninja off stage” should be interpreted with them doing cartwheels, forward rolls, handsprings, jumps, etc. Depending on how much acrobatic movement you're able to have them pull off, you'll want to wardrobe them accordingly in either pants or robes/smocks. Although certainly females, they should, however, definitely have the suggested facial hair as a nod to the line Macbeth utters in the original *Macbeth* script when he first sees the witches: “you should be women, / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so.” Try, however, to resist giving their costuming other Asian influences, since they are still, after all, from a Scottish play and are therefore inherently Highland witches.
- **Hamlet** is dressed in black due to his status as the Emo Prince, but in order to pay homage to the famous skull monologue from the original *Hamlet* (which I'm sad to say didn't make it into this script due to time restrictions) he should be dressed in a black tee with *The Punisher* skull on it. If this isn't feasible, any black tee with a skull printed on will do.
- **All males from *Macbeth* cast** must be wearing kilts and all **females** must be wrapped in tartan or have tartan accents in order to help the audience differentiate between them and the *Hamlet* cast. The playing of bagpipes any time a character crosses over from *Macbeth* to *Hamlet* will offer further clarification on this matter. I recommend the opening bars of “Scotland the Brave.”

SOUND EFFECTS:

- Rooster Crow
- Crash/Tinkling Glass
- Skirl of Bagpipes
- Thunder
- Karaoke Soundtrack
- Cat yowl
- Walkie-talkie beep

PERSONAL PROPERTIES:

- iPad or tablet computer
- Collapsible cauldron frame
- Ear trumpet
- Rope
- Gag/blindfold
- Swords (5-7)
- Wheelchair
- Hamlet* script
- Walkie-talkies (2)
- Microphones (2)
- Cauldron
- Dry ice
- Karaoke machine
- Bundle of kindling
- Neck brace
- Leg casts (2)
- Arm slings (2)
- Bandages

WARDROBE

Francisco – Guard uniform, sword.

Bernardo – Guard uniform, sword.

King Claudius – Royal robes, crown.

Hamlet – Black skinny jeans, *The Punisher* tee-shirt, guy-liner, open black robe.

Horatio – Action clothes, cloak, sword.

Ghost King – Musty royal robes, dented crown, fuzzy beard, ear trumpet.

Later, long johns.

Marcellus – Action clothes, cloak, sword.

Laertes – Fine court apparel, sword.

Polonius – Fine court apparel.

Queen Gertrude – Fancy royal dress, wimple.

Ophelia – Fine dress.

Macbeth – Sword, cloak, kilt, ornate crown.

First Witch – Ninja garments, hooked nose, light goatee.

Second Witch – Ninja garments, small fu manchu.

Third Witch – Ninja garments, long straggly hair and bushy eyebrows.

Rosencrantz – Royal apparel.

Guildenstern – Royal apparel.

Gentlewoman – Simple smock dress with tartan accents, wimple. Later, modern-day nurse's uniform.

Doctor – If male: kilt, plain shirt. If female: plain robe with tartan accents.

Later, scrubs.

Lady Macbeth – Sweeping scarlet dress, black boots, short black gloves, fishnet hose, evil crown.

Extras (2-5) – Guards' uniforms.

DIRECTOR NOTES

If there is such a thing as Shakespearian fan fiction, then you're holding it in your hands.

After having taught these two plays for more than a decade, I began to imagine what it would be like for these characters to cycle through the plays as many times as I had. The resulting daydream produced a cast of characters with full self-awareness apart from their roles in the play (some of whom were content with their lot in the script, some of whom were not) who had come to see Shakespeare as a sort of deity, he who had created them and left them trapped in ever-cycling plot loop. All they would need would be one dramatic turn of events to upset the balance of centuries. In this case, it's Hamlet's accidental fall from the battlements that brings both disaster and hilarity.

Depending on the demographics of your audience, you may want to include a brief sketch of both original Shakespeare plays in your playbill or have a junior member of the cast (or the stage manager) read brief summaries. The script is such that there's an overarching plot that can be understood and appreciated even by those who have no knowledge of Shakespeare's First Folio, but naturally the enjoyment is further enhanced the more prior knowledge one has of the two plays being mashed together.

A word on dialogue: The best way for the audience to be able to differentiate between regular dialogue and Shakespearian dialogue, other than recognizing the famous quotes and the obvious syntax, is for the characters to overact the Shakespearian lines as broadly as possible. Macbeth-as-Hamlet is an exception to this, of course, as those lines are intended to be read woodenly.

Concerning pop culture references: All jokes about celebrities, tech, social media, and/or pop culture may be updated at your discretion to prevent outdated. While characters are in the "green room" or off duty as their Shakespearian counterparts, they should feel free to be seen checking their phones, listening to iPods, etc.

About gender-flexible characters:

- Should Francisco and Bernardo be played by females, they should be named Francisca and Bernadra. If females double as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, please do not alter their names.
- If the Doctor is cast as female, there's no need to conceal her gender.
- If the Ghost King is cast as a female, however, be sure that the long white wig/beard and thick robes conceal her gender as best as possible. This should not be difficult, since the Ghost King has very few actual lines, but the idea that the Ghost King is Hamlet's father must be preserved as best as possible.

In regard to accents: It's preferable that all characters from the *Macbeth* cast at least attempt Scottish accents – particularly the Gentlewoman, since she goes incognito for a time as a modern nurse, and her accent slipping in and out is one clue to the *Hamlet* cast that she is not what she's presenting herself to be. I recommend having the *Macbeth* cast marathon watch Pixar's *Brave* and listen to Arkangel's 1998 cast recording of *Macbeth* during the lead-up to the production, since both feature authentic Scottish pronunciation. The latter will be especially helpful in helping the *Macbeth* cast learn their *Macbeth* lines.

A note regarding walkie-talkies: If Macbeth wears a mic, then holding his walkie-talkie up near his mic will be sufficient for ensuring that the audience can hear the conversations that go on over walkie-talkies. If he's not wearing a mic, have a mic backstage for Lady Macbeth to speak to him through.

ACT I

SCENE 1 - ELSINORE IN DENMARK: A PLATFORM BEFORE
THE CASTLE WALLS

AT RISE: BERNARDO and FRANCISCO stand staring straight ahead, as if in readiness for a signal. Some moments pass.

FRANCISCO: Pssst! *(A beat.)* Psssst!

BERNARDO: Eh?

FRANCISCO: It's your line!

BERNARDO: Wait. It's starting? Now?

FRANCISCO: Of course we're starting! We're always the first ones, *(Pedantically.)* then Horatio, then Marcellus, then the Ghost, and that's Scene 1. Then—

BERNARDO: Yes, yes, yes, but—

FRANCISCO:—Scene 2 has King Claudius and Queen Gertrude, and Voldemort—

BERNARDO: Who??

FRANCISCO: I mean Voltemand, and Cornelius, and Polonius, and his son Laertes, and—

BERNARDO: Yes, I know—but—

FRANCISCO: and—HAMLET! *(Smiles.)*

A beat.

BERNADRO: Okay.... Let's back up.

FRANCISCO: And then in Scene 3—

BERNARDO: No! No, absolutely not. No Scene 3.

FRANCISCO: No Scene 3?! But we have to do Scene 3! That's the scene where—

BERNARDO: I mean, no Scene 3 right now.

FRANCISCO: Of course not right now. Because first we always do Scene 1. Then we do Scene 2. After that, we do Scene—

BERNARDO: Yes, yes, I think we've got it. *(Indicates audience.)*

FRANCISCO: Whodja mean, we?

BERNARDO: I mean we as in us. Me and, well.... them. *(Gestures to audience.)*

ENTER MACBETH

FRANCISCO: Who's them? Is them the good people of Denmark?
The king's faithful subjects?

BERNARDO: Certainly not. They're the audience—

BERNARDO and FRANCISCO snap to attention and stand ramrod straight and poker faced throughout the following exchange.

KING CLAUDIUS: *(Offstage.)* First positions everyone, first positions for Act 1, Scene 1. Hamlet, you're late!

HAMLET: *(Offstage.)* Sorry, sorry!

KING CLAUDIUS: *(Offstage.)* Ridiculous. Get yourself to first position and put down the iPad.

HAMLET: *(Offstage.)* One sec. I'm trying to beat Julius Caesar's high score, which isn't going to happen if I don't keep playing. These birds won't launch themselves, you know.

KING CLAUDIUS: *(Offstage.)* As you must. Places, everyone. All right, remember to keep the energy up. Looks like we've got a full house out there, but of few look just this side of deaf, so remember to project. Horatio?

HORATIO: *(Offstage.)* Yo!

KING CLAUDIUS: *(Offstage.)* A bit lighter on your feet this time. We don't want a repeat of last night's fumble-footed foolishness.

HORATIO: *(Offstage.)* Will do.

HAMLET: *(Offstage.)* It's all right, 'Tio. If you trip again, we'll just ad lib something sprightly. As per usual.

ALL: *(Offstage.)* Ad lib laughing, taunts, jeers, etc.

KING CLAUDIUS: *(Offstage.)* Yes, yes, but it's important to remember that when Shakespeare created us, he did so in order to—

HAMLET: *(Offstage.)* No offense, boss, but... we've been at this for, like, 400 years. If we don't have the general idea by this point—

KING CLAUDIUS: *(Offstage.)* Fine. Well, then, off you go. And watch your cues, Your Ghostliness. You were early on your entrance last night.

GHOST KING: *(Offstage.)* WHAT?!?

BERNARDO and FRANCISCO exchange longsuffering looks.

KING CLAUDIUS: (*Offstage, sighing.*) Deaf as a fence post.

GHOST KING: (*Offstage.*) WHHAAAAT?!

KING CLAUDIUS: (*Offstage.*) ALL RIGHT, YOU LOT. READY...

AND.... ACTION! (*Hisses to BERNARDO.*) Bernardo! You start out HERE FIRST.

BERNARDO leaps offstage, only to reappear almost instantly, making his entrance.

BERNARDO: *Who's there?*

FRANCISCO: Nay, answer me; stand, and unfold yourself.

BERNARDO: Long live the king!

GHOST KING: (*Offstage.*) AND SAME TO YOU, YOUNG VARLET!

KING CLAUDIUS: (*Offstage.*) Oh for the love of Old Will, NOT YOU!

You can't live long. YOU'RE ALREADY DEAD.

FRANCISCO: Bernardo?

BERNARDO: He.

FRANCISCO: You come most carefully upon your hour.

BERNARDO: 'Tis now struck twelve; get thee to bed, Francisco.

Have you had quiet guard?

FRANCISCO: Not a mouse stirring.

BERNARDO: Well, good night. If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus, the rivals of my watch, bid them make haste.

FRANCISCO: I think I hear them. Stand, ho! Who's there?

Enter HORATIO and MARCELLUS.

HORATIO: Friends to this ground.

FRANCISCO: Give you good night. (*FRANCISCO exits.*)

MARCELLUS: Holla! Bernardo!

BERNARDO: Say, what, is Horatio there?

HORATIO: A piece of him.

BERNARDO: Welcome.

HORATIO: Welcome, good Marcellus.

MARCELLUS: What, has this thing appear'd again to-night?

BERNARDO: I have seen nothing.

MARCELLUS: Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy...Therefore I have entreated him along with us to watch the minutes of this night; that if again this apparition come, he may approve our eyes and speak to it.

HORATIO: Tush, tush, 'twill not appear.

BERNARDO: Sit down awhile; and let us once again assail your ears, that are so fortified against our story what we have two nights seen.

ALL sit.

BERNARDO: Last night of all, Marcellus and myself, the bell then beating one.—

Enter GHOST KING.

MARCELLUS: Peace, break thee off; look, where it comes again!

GHOST KING: (*Cupping ear.*) Eh? Can't hear ya!

MARCELLUS: Oh, for Will's sake.

GHOST KING: (*Producing ear trumpet.*) WHAAAT?

BERNARDO: (*Sighing.*) In the same figure, like the king that's dead.

MARCELLUS: Thou art a scholar; speak to it, Horatio.

GHOST KING: WHAZZIT?

MARCELLUS: (*Overly pedantic.*) IN THE SAME FIGURE, LIKE THE KING THAT'S DEAD. Honestly. Someone needs to put in a word about retirement.

BERNARDO: Looks it not like the king? Mark it, Horatio.

HORATIO: Most like... it harrows me with fear and wonder.

BERNARDO: It would be spoke to.

MARCELLUS: Question it, Horatio. Loudly.

HORATIO: WHAT.... ART THOU... THAT USURP'ST, TOGETHER WITH THAT FAIR AND WARLIKE FORM IN WHICH THE MAJESTY OF BURIED DENMARK DID SOMETIMES MARCH?

Long pause.

BY HEAVEN, I CHARGE THEE, SPEAK!

Longer pause.

MARCELLUS: Do you think he's dead?

HORATIO: Can ghosts die?

MARCELLUS: Let's hope so.

GHOST KING: WHAAAT? SPEAK UP, THOU PUNY, IDLE-
HEADED COXCOMB!

MARCELLUS: It is offended.

BERNARDO: See, it stalks away!

BERNARDO Shoos away GHOST KING, who shambles aimlessly, pointing ear trumpet toward the sky.

HORATIO: Stay! Speak, speak! I charge thee, speak!

MARCELLUS: Please, no. Don't make him. I can't bear it.

HORATIO: You know I have to. It's been written.

Exit GHOST KING, seemingly by accident.

MARCELLUS: By the First Folio, I beg you. Let him go.

HORATIO: 'Tis gone, and will not answer, thank Will's good name.

BERNARDO: How now, Horatio! You tremble and look pale.

MARCELLUS: It's likely the strain of being forced to go through this
sham of an act every night. I swear, if we have one more disaster,
I'm walking off.

HORATIO: And going where? To join the cast of *A Midsummer
Night's Dream*? You know there's something wrong with those
guys.

*MARCELLUS opens mouth and raises a finger as if to make
pronouncement.*

ENTER MACBETH

And *don't* say *The Scottish Play*. You wouldn't last a scene. Lady Macbeth would eat you. If she could stop washing imaginary blood off her hands long enough to kill you, that is. Besides, you don't have a choice. *Hamlet* is ours. So it's been written. Now get back to it. (*With increased drama.*) Before my God, I might not this believe without the sensible and true avouch of mine own eyes.

MARCELLUS: (*Sighing, wooden.*) Is it not like the king?

BERNARDO: I think it be no other but e'en so.

HORATIO: A mote it is to trouble the mind's eye. But soft, behold!
Lo, where it comes again!

Re-enter GHOST KING, shoved onstage by hands from offstage.

MARCELLUS: Here we go again.

HORATIO: (*Shushing MARCELLUS.*) I'll cross it, though it blast me.
Stay, illusion!

GHOST KING begins wandering, pointing about with ear trumpet.

If thou hast any sound, or use of voice, speak to me...if there be any good thing to be done, that may to thee do ease and grace to me, speak to me!

Rooster crows.

GHOST KING: SAME TO YOU, THOU SAUCY KNAVE!

HORATIO: If thou art privy to thy country's fate, which happily foreknowing, may avoid, O speak! Speak of it: stay and speak!
Stop him, Marcellus!

MARCELLUS: (*Folds arms, lets GHOST KING pass in front of him.*)
Not for all the bones in Old Will's tomb.

GHOST KING walks toward hand motioning and snapping from backstage and is pulled off.

HORATIO: What's the matter with you tonight? Get back on script.

MARCELLUS: We do it wrong, being so majestic—I'm sorry, I—
just—I can't do it anymore.

HORATIO: Do... what, exactly?

MARCELLUS: This... this. This part. This play. I just can't do it.

HORATIO: I don't follow.

BERNARDO: (*Loudly.*) It was about to speak when the cock crew.

MARCELLUS: Oh, give it up, Bernardo.

BERNARDO: Eh?

HORATIO: What are you doing??

MARCELLUS: Oh, come on, 'Tio, give it a rest.

HORATIO: What?

MARCELLUS: This act.

HORATIO: What act?

BERNARDO: Act I?

FRANCISCO: (*Leaning in from backstage.*) Yes, Act I. First we do
Act I, then Act II, then—

Hands pull FRANCISCO offstage while being shushed by ALL.

MARCELLUS: (*Preens.*) Oh, look at me! I'm Horatio! I play second
fiddle to the Emo Prince, and even though I've been written in as
nothing more than a foil to the world's most pathetic anti-hero, I'll
get down on my skinny knees and thank the mighty pen in the sky.

FRANCISCO: (*Leaning in from backstage.*) Actually... he's Horatio.
You're Marcellus—(*He is pulled backstage.*)

HORATIO: Better a foil to a prince than two-pence doubler like you,
Marcellus. You wouldn't know a dramatic monologue if it fell out of
the sky and landed on your face.

VOICES: (*Offstage.*) OOOOOooooooooooooo!

KING CLAUDIUS: (*Offstage.*) Quiet, you lot! Horatio, Marcellus!
Pull yourselves together and get on with it.

GHOST KING: (*Offstage.*) WHAZZIT????

MARCELLUS: Why should we?!

BERNARDO: Why should we... what?

MARCELLUS: Why should we get on with it!

HORATIO: How do you mean?

ENTER MACBETH

MARCELLUS: We come here every night. We run around this moldy castle screaming and going crazy and stabbing each other behind tapestries, and for what? I ask you! What do we actually get out of it?

HORATIO: Literary immortality?

MARCELLUS: What good is immortality if you have to spend it stalking around castle walls in the dead of night freezing your doublet off in company with a platoon of idiots and a stone-deaf buffoon?

GHOST KING: (*Offstage.*) EEHH?

HORATIO: Listen, I know it's not always easy. And sometimes you may not like how you've been written, but the fact remains that you have been written! And not just by anyone, either. By Old Will himself!

MARCELLUS: Here we go.

HORATIO: I hate when you get like this.

MARCELLUS: Like what?

HORATIO: All mopey and disillusioned and ungrateful and—

MARCELLUS: Remind you of anybody we know?

BERNARDO: Hey. You leave Hamlet out of this.

MARCELLUS: I'd love to. If it weren't for him, we wouldn't be stuck in this mess.

HORATIO: Hey. It's not his fault that his uncle kills his dad and steals the throne and marries his mom—

MARCELLUS:—leaving us trapped in an endless loop of revenge and murder for all of time. No, you know what? You're right. It's not his fault. It's Shakespeare's—

HORATIO: You bite your tongue!

KING CLAUDIUS: (*Offstage.*) Excuse me, but if you nincompoops would just GET ON WITH IT—

BERNARDO: I'm sorry, my liege, but I don't know—I'm—we're—I don't know where we *are* in the script!

MARCELLUS: Oh, just forget it. (*Exit MARCELLUS.*)

BERNARDO: Marcellus—wait! We're not—uuuugh.

HORATIO: Uh, okay, um, let's—We'll just keep going.

BERNARDO: But Marcellus just—

HORATIO: Don't worry about it. Let's—here....But look, the morn in russet mantle clad walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill! Break we our watch up, and by my advice, let us impart what we have seen tonight to young Hamlet. Do you consent we shall acquaint him with it as needful in our loves, fitting our duty?

BERNARDO: I'm sorry, sir, but I don't—I'm not—it's Marcellus's line next, and he's not here to say it!

HORATIO: And you're telling me that after 400 years of nightly performances, you don't know his closing lines?

BERNARDO: Beggin' your pardon, no, sir. Francisco's the one who—

HORATIO: *(Pulling at hair.)* Arrugh! Fine. I'll do it. *(Trying to imitate MARCELLUS.)* Let's do't, I pray, and I this morning know where we shall find him most conveniently. *(Exiting.)* How was that?

Exit HORATIO and BERNARDO.

KING CLAUDIUS: *(Offstage.)* Oh, for Will's sake.

SCENE 2 - THE KING OF DENMARK'S COURT: FLOURISH

AT RISE: *Enter CLAUDIUS, GERTRUDE, POLONIUS, LAERTES, and HAMLET.*

KING CLAUDIUS: Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death the memory be green, yet so far hath discretion fought with nature that we with wisest sorrow think on him, together with remembrances of ourselves.

Silence.

LAERTES: My liege, I believe now is when you generally charge Cornelius and Voldem— I mean, Voltemand with their duties?

KING CLAUDIUS: Yes, well, I would... *(Darkly.)* if they were here.

LAERTES: Ah.

KING CLAUDIUS: Anyone have any idea where those two lickpennies scuttled off to? *(Last part shouted toward backstage.)*

QUEEN GERTRUDE: I believe they got buttonholed by Marcellus.

Last I heard, he was holding forth on the “theoretical catharsis of breaking character.” Whatever that means.

ALL: Ad lib sighs, groans, etc.

HAMLET: Not this again.

QUEEN GERTRUDE: Not to worry, my love. He goes through this every few centuries. Just let him work it out of his system and we’ll be back to normal.

HAMLET: If you call stabbing people behind tapestries normal.

POLONIUS: Spoilers!

HAMLET: Like any of it even matters.

QUEEN GERTRUDE: Hamlet!

HAMLET: What...?

QUEEN GERTRUDE: (*Mother look.*) You know.

KING CLAUDIUS: Moving on, then—

LAERTES: After Voldemor—Voldemard and Cornelius leave, you address me.

KING CLAUDIUS: Ah, yes. And now, Laertes, what’s the news with you?

LAERTES: My dread lord, my thoughts and wishes bend again toward France and bow them to your gracious leave and pardon.

KING CLAUDIUS: Have you your father’s leave?

POLONIUS: He hath, my lord, wrung from me my slow leave—

KING CLAUDIUS: Take thy fair hour, Laertes, time be thine, and thy best graces spend it at thy will.

POLONIUS and LAERTES exit.

But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son—

HAMLET: A little more than kin, and less than kind.

KING CLAUDIUS: How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

HAMLET: Not so, my lord, I am too much i’th sun.

QUEEN GERTRUDE: Good Hamlet, cast thy knighted colour off, and let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark. Do not forever with thy veiled lids seek for thy noble father in the dust. Thou know’st ‘tis common: all that lives must die.

HAMLET: Ay, madam, it is common.

QUEEN GERTRUDE: If it be, why seems it so particular with thee?

HAMLET: Seems, madam? Nay, it is. I know not seems. 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother, nor customary suits of common black. These indeed seem, for they are actions that a man might play; but I have that within which passes show. These are but the trappings and the suits of woe.

KING CLAUDIUS: 'Tis unmanly grief. It shows a will most incorrect to heaven. We pray you throw to earth this unprevailing woe, and think of us as a father; we beseech you bend you to remain here in the cheer and comfort of our eye, our chiefest courtier, cousin, and son.

QUEEN GERTRUDE: Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet.

HAMLET: I shall in all my best obey you, madam.

KING CLAUDIUS: Why, 'tis a loving and a fair reply. Madam, come.

Exit KING CLAUDIUS and QUEEN GERTRUDE.

HAMLET: O that this too too solid flesh would melt, thaw and resolve itself into dew. How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable seem to me all the uses of this world! Fie on't, ah fie! 'Tis an un-weeded garden that grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature possess it merely. That it should come to this! But two months dead – nay, not so much, not two – so excellent a king, so loving to my mother that he might not betem the winds of heaven visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth! Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him as if increase of appetite had grown by what it fed on; and yet within a month – let me not think on't –

MARCELLUS: *(Entering.)* This monologue lasts a month.

HORATIO: *(Entering, panting.)* Hail to your lordship! Thanks for the heads up. I nearly missed our cue! *(Slips iPad behind back.)*

HAMLET: I am glad to see you well... if a bit early. I wasn't quite finished, you know.

MARCELLUS: Oh, please. It's not like you don't have like twenty more monologues coming up later.

FRANCISCO: *(Leaning in from backstage.)* Twelve more, actually. Thirteen total. Four in prose and nine in verse— *(Is yanked backstage by hand at his collar.)*

HAMLET: It's a lot. Too much, if you ask me.

MARCELLUS: Which we didn't. So can it, emo kid. We're not here to talk soliloquies.

HAMLET: No. Unless I'm mistaken, you're here to hear about how I saw the ghost of my dead father, the murdered king—

MARCELLUS: “—*in my mind's eye, Horatio*” Not this again. Anything but this.

Throughout the following dialogue, MARCELLUS stands between HORATIO and HAMLET, but slightly back, and melodramatically mouths all the words of their conversation.

HORATIO: I saw him once; he was a goodly king.

HAMLET: He was a man, take him for all in all.... I shall not look upon his like again.

HORATIO: My lord, I think I saw him yesternight.

HAMLET: Saw? Who?

HORATIO: My lord, the King your father.

MARCELLUS: All right, let's just get this over with. Horatio, you tell Hamlet all about seeing the ghost of his dead dad wandering around up on the battlements. Hamlet, you swear to meet us up there tonight to—

HORATIO: Stop! Stop! What are you doing? For the love of Will, stop, Marcellus!

MARCELLUS: Can't stop now! We're going straight for the good stuff. I say we skip the next scene and just cut to Hamlet meeting his dead dad on the battlements. *(Roars.)* SCENE FOUR, EVERYONE! READY SCENE FOUR!

KING CLAUDIUS: *(Offstage.)* What now—?

FRANCISCO: *(Entering with BERNARDO, panicky.)* Wait—wait—it's not time! First we do Scene 1, then Scene 2, then 3, then Scene 4.

MARCELLUS: Not tonight, we don't!

FRANCISCO: But—but—

BERNARDO: But... it's written!

MARCELLUS: Oh, it's written. It's WRITTEN. Let me ask you something. Don't you ever get tired of being the simple night watchman? Don't you ever long for a role with a little excitement? A little passion, and ...I don't know, some adventure?

BERNARDO: Well.... I guess I wouldn't mind sitting on that fancy throne and saying what's what every now and again.

FRANCISCO: But that's not how I'm written, is it?

MARCELLUS: Is it?

FRANCISCO: What are you saying?

MARCELLUS: What I'm saying, is that the fault, dear Francisco, is not in our stars, but in ourselves that we are underlings.

HORATIO: Wait, wait... wait. WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

KING CLAUDIUS: (*Entering stage right.*) I'll not have those words spoken on this stage, thank you very much!

GHOST KING, apparently oblivious, enters stage left, and begins "haunting" HAMLET.

GHOST KING: OooooooooOOoooooooo—

HORATIO: Ugh, he's early with the cue. Look my Lord, it comes!

HAMLET: Oh, I guess we're still...? Angels and ministers of grace defend us!—

MARCELLUS: Oh, you guys, would you just give it UP?

To CLAUDIUS, as ALL trickle from backstage to observe his meltdown.

When are you going to admit that this sham, this mockery, this travesty of existence CANNOT ENDURE? Look at us! Always the same, night after night. The same lines, the same gags, the same duels, the same poisoned blades—

ALL: Ad lib, Oi! Spoilers!

MARCELLUS: —the same "accidental" stabbings, the same drownings, the same hauntings, the same depressing monologues, the same unappealing love scenes, the same tragic deaths.

OPHELIA: (*Entering last.*) Wait, wait, wait....unappealing?

MARCELLUS: No, no, no, Ophelia. I don't mean you. You're lovely.

HAMLET: Oi!

MARCELLUS: All I'm asking is for you to ask yourselves where.

FRANCISCO: Where...?

HAMLET: Where is it written that Hamlet must love Ophelia, and that his love must destroy her? Where is it written that King Claudius must be the murderer? That Rosencrantz and Guildenstern must die? That Hamlet must stab Polonius, and Laertes must avenge his father's death and Ophelia must lose her mind? Not that you don't make insanity look absolutely stunning.

ALL: Ad lib muted agreement.

MARCELLUS: I'm just asking you where. Where is it written, my friends?

HORATIO: Um, it's called the First Folio. Ever heard of it?

MARCELLUS: Well, maybe we don't want to follow the First Folio any more.

ALL: Ad lib. No! gasps, etc.

MARCELLUS: Maybe we're tired of being told who lives, who dies, and who gets the happy ending!

ALL: Ad lib muted assent.

HAMLET: Actually, in point of fact, nobody gets a happy ending.

MARCELLUS: Yes!!! That's just what I'm saying! Maybe it's time, after 400 years, to say no to the First Folio and say yes to letting something different happen for a change.

ALL: Cheers, jumping, ecstatic celebration.

GHOST KING, yanking ear trumpet violently from ear, bumps into HAMLET, who falls backward directly off the stage, making a loud CRASH with TINKLING GLASS.

FRANCISCO: Um.... guys? I think Hamlet's broken.

MARCELLUS: Ohhhh no.

SCENE 3 – SAME

AT RISE: *Cast is presented in dramatic tableau, HORATIO and MARCELLUS at center.*

KING CLAUDIUS: Well, Marcellus. I hope you're happy.

HORATIO: Yeah, is this "different" enough for you?

FRANCISCO: Three months without our principal character. THREE MONTHS.

OPHELIA: I can't spend three months on the shelf. I just can't. I'll go batty for real. Oh, I can feel them now... those cold waters closing over my head as I go down... down into the darkness of eternal—

MARCELLUS: I won't let that happen, Ophelia!

OPHELIA: Oh, you won't. How nice.

MARCELLUS: I mean it! I have a plan. I—

QUEEN GERTRUDE: Wonderful. Listen up, everyone. The three-inch fool responsible for putting my son Hamlet in a coma would now like to tell us his wonderful plan to keep us from getting shelved.

MARCELLUS: Well...

KING CLAUDIUS: Yes?

HORATIO: Say on.

MARCELLUS: Well. There's this guy. You've probably seen him hanging around the green room. He's tall, he's royal, bad taste in women, but... still. He's looking for a change of scene... You know, sort of broody... wears a kilt...?

KING CLAUDIUS: Oh, for Will's sake, would you just get to the point?

MARCELLUS: Maybe it would be easier just to—wait here. *(Exits.)*

OPHELIA: This ought to be good.

HORATIO: If by "good" you mean horrible.

OPHELIA: Of course.

Enter MACBETH to a SKIRL OF BAGPIPES and swirl of black cape.

MACBETH: So foul and fair a day I have not seen.

ALL: Ad lib shock, gasps, small screams, etc.

Enter MARCELLUS. MACBETH adopts "super hero" stance, hands on hips. After a moment, his shoulders slump and he stands with hands and jaw hanging, eyes glassy, looking as if he might begin to drool. Throughout scene, this is his default pose.

HORATIO: Oh, you have got to be kidding me.

MARCELLUS: What?!

HORATIO: This guy?

ENTER MACBETH

MARCELLUS: What's wrong with him?

BERNARDO: Are you seriously asking what's wrong with Macbeth?

ALL: Interrupting with ad lib screams, horror, etc.

FRANCISCO: Dude! Don't say the name! Remember the curse of *The Scottish Play!* If you say the name inside a theatre—

BERNARDO: I wasn't saying the name of the play. I was saying his name. Which happens to be Macbeth.

ALL: Gasps, etc.

FRANCISCO: Which is the same as the name of the play. Don't you see?

MARCELLUS: I really think we're going to be all right, guys. I don't believe there's actually a curse.

FRANCISCO: But still, guys. I think someone had better—ugh.

Exit FRANCISCO at a run.

QUEEN GERTRUDE: Where's he off to?

BERNARDO: To go outside, run around three times, and spit.

Where do you think? He says it's the only way to break the curse.

MARCELLUS: You guys. There's no curse. I'm telling you.

Besides, when I explained our predicament, he seemed happy to help. Well, I mean... he didn't actively try to resist when I brought him here. So really, it couldn't be worse than getting shelved, right? I mean, what's the worst that could happen?

MACBETH: (*Snapping into character.*) You should be women, and yet your beards forbid me to interpret that you are so. (*Returns to drooling idiocy.*)

OPHELIA: Do you really want us to answer that question?

MARCELLUS: Come on, give him a chance!

QUEEN GERTRUDE: Give him a chance. Give him a chance?! You want us to give the most psychotic, pathological, murderous king in the entire First Folio a chance?

MARCELLUS: Don't listen to her, your majesty. We know you're basically a good person who's just made a few... mistakes.

HORATIO: Like getting married to a sociopath, then letting your wife convince you to stab your king, hiring thugs to carve up your best friend, conspiring to murder children, hanging out in caves with witches... am I forgetting anything?

KING CLAUDIUS: This is an outrage! I want him off this stage immediately.

Enter FRANCISCO, panting.

MARCELLUS: Come on, guys, have a heart. I think he deserves a chance.

OPHELIA: A chance to murder us? No thank you—

MARCELLUS: A chance to get out from under the thumb... of Her.

BERNARDO: ...Her?

FRANCISCO: You know. Her. *(Feigns washing hands, then taps head in "crazy" gesture.)*

BERNARDO: Ohhhhhhhh. Her. *(Shudders.)*

QUEEN GERTRUDE: Preposterous! There's no way that any audience would believe that this abomination is my son.

FRANCISCO: He's mental, he is.

BERNARDO: He's ... *(Waves hand in front of MACBETH'S face.)*
He's something.

OPHELIA: I heard from The Porter that he's been like this ever since the *The Scottish Play's* 350th birthday.

QUEEN GERTRUDE: *(Tutting.)* You don't spend 350 years on a killing spree without some softening of the brain.

MARCELLUS: The Porter? What Porter?

HORATIO: You know. That lushy gatekeeper from *The Scottish Play's* cast.

MARCELLUS: You're still talking to him? I thought you guys—

OPHELIA: And this is your business because...?

HORATIO: Never mind. It's completely out of the question. This schizophrenic, blood-mongering canker wit could never play Hamlet. He doesn't even know the lines!

MARCELLUS: I thought of that.

MARCELLUS pulls out copy of the script and sticks it in MACBETH'S hand.

HORATIO: You can't be serious.

MARCELLUS: Show them, your majesty.

ENTER MACBETH

MACBETH: (*MACBETH unfreezes sufficiently to open the script, drooling at it. Painstakingly.*) It then... draws near the season... wherein the spirit held his wont to walk...

MARCELLUS: You see?

OPHELIA: Oh, yes. So good.

MARCELLUS: Well at least we won't be shelved, Ophelia.

QUEEN GERTRUDE: He does have a point.

KING CLAUDIUS: But my dear!

HORATIO: Not you too!

QUEEN GERTRUDE: I'm just saying!

OPHELIA: But if you think that having this—this thing playing my lover is going to do anything positive for my state of mind—

KING CLAUDIUS: ENOUGH! (*Beat of silence.*) I say we take this to Lady Fortune. We will use her to seek... the Will of Will.

All: Ad lib groans, sighs, etc.

FRANCISCO: I hate when we do this.

KING CLAUDIUS: (*Chanting, as if doing eenie-meenie, miney-mo.*)

O Bountiful Fortune, O Lady Mine,
The Will of Will we seek to divine,
I ask thee only that we, a pair,
display the same on forehead fair.

ALL save MACBETH, who is drooling hold a certain number of fingers up to their foreheads. CLAUDIUS holds up two fingers.

Two! Who has two!

MARCELLUS: !!

All: Ad lib. Groans, sighs, etc.

HORATIO: That tears it.

KING CLAUDIUS: Thus have we divined will of Will! All right, then, you lot! Places for Scene 4.

They begin to exit, all but MACBETH, who is staring.

HORATIO: (*Pulling MARCELLUS aside.*) I don't like this.

MARCELLUS: Relax, 'Tio. It's just for a few months. And it's just to keep us off the shelf! You know Ophelia would never be able to take that length of time in the dark. She'd—

HORATIO: Never mind her. Do you know what he's done? How far gone he actually is? If you're really concerned for the well-being of all your cast-mates, I don't think we should—

MARCELLUS: Honestly, look at him. How dangerous could he possibly be? He's a shell of a man! All we need him to do is read Hamlet's lines directly from the script. It'll be fine. It won't be great, but it'll be fine.

HORATIO: But what if—

MARCELLUS: Relax.

MARCELLUS and HORATIO exit, leaving MACBETH alone, center stage. MACBETH unfreezes, slowly looks around, walks several paces forward, un-swirls his cape, pulls walkie-talkie from his pocket, and speaks into it while donning a pair of dark sunglasses.

MACBETH: I'm in.

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