

HELPING HAMLET

Ten-Minute Dramatic Duet

by
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(Two characters are seated and angled away from one another. HAMLET looks despondent. MARTHA looks slightly nervous. HAMLET pantomimes dialing the phone; MARTHA pantomimes picking up the phone. Although HAMLET speaks Shakespearean English and MARTHA speaks contemporary English, they converse as if the language difference is not an obstacle to their communication.)

MARTHA: Hello? *(pantomimes reading from an instruction sheet posted above the phone)* I mean, hello, Headrest Hotline. I'm Martha. How can I help?

HAMLET: Oh, that this too too solid flesh would melt, thaw and resolve itself into a dew!

MARTHA: Uh oh. I mean, you're... you're... you're talking about suici... wait just a second, okay? I'm pretty new at this. Actually, it's my first night, so let me see if I can find someone... uh, someone with more, somebody better for you to talk to. Just hang on!

HAMLET: Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd his canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!

MARTHA: Oh my God! Don't do it! Look, self-slaughter is a very bad thing! Listen, I don't know where everybody went. I don't suppose you might want to call back when...

HAMLET: How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable seem to me all the uses of this world! Fie on't! Ah fie!

MARTHA: All right, I'm not going anywhere, just kidding. I won't hang up. Stay on the line. *(referring to the pamphlet SHE has found)* It says right here you should keep talking to me. Not that I'm reading from anything. The main thing is I am here. I am here for you. You can tell me anything you need to. Hello? Hello, are you still there?

HAMLET: 'Tis an unweeded garden that grows to seed.

MARTHA: Oh, good. You stayed.

HAMLET: Things rank and gross in nature possess it merely.

MARTHA: I understand what you're saying. I do. Life can feel overwhelming sometimes. Like weeds, yeah! I mean, you're just surrounded by them like you're the... the one tomato that's supposed to be there and you're just going to get choked with all the weeds. Why am I saying tomato? The main point is I'm just here. I'm not very good at this, so if I make stupid comments or something, don't let them drive you to... you know, just... I'm here.

HAMLET: That it should come to this!

MARTHA: To what? You can tell me? What's made you feel this way?

HAMLET: But two months dead, nay, not so much, not two! So excellent a king; that was, to this, Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother, that he might not beteem the winds of heaven visit her face too roughly.

MARTHA: Okay, you're losing me a little. Who died? Your mother died?

HAMLET: Must I remember?

MARTHA: No, no, I don't want to force anything. Just let it come as it wants to. I'm just here. I'll wait.

HAMLET: Why, she would hang on him, as if increase of appetite had grown by what it fed on.

MARTHA: So, the she is your mother and the him is your father, right?

HAMLET: And yet, within a month - let me not think on on 't - Frailty, thy name is woman!

MARTHA: Well, you know, you happen to be talking to a woman, you realize. You don't have to insult all of us just because you're mad at your mother, but that's okay. It is your mother you're mad at, right?

HAMLET: A little month, or ere those shoes were old with which she follow'd my poor father's body...

MARTHA: So it was your father who died! Good! I mean, that's terrible. It's just good that I understand. But, oh, that is terrible. No wonder you're feeling so down. I don't know what I'd do if my dad died. I'm so sorry.

HAMLET: Like Niobe, all tears: why she - even she - O God!

MARTHA: It's all right! I'm here! Keep talking to me!

HAMLET: A beast that wants discourse of reason would have mourned longer - married with my uncle, my father's brother.

MARTHA: Your mother married your uncle? Ew!

HAMLET: But no more like my father than I to Hercules.

MARTHA: I am really sorry. Isn't that, like, illegal or something?

HAMLET: Within a month; ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears had left the flushing of her galled eyes, she married.

MARTHA: Wow. In less than a month, your father died and your mother married his brother? I'd want to kill myself, too. Oh, I shouldn't have said that. Forget that last thing. I didn't mean that.

HAMLET: O, most wicked speed, to post with such dexterity to incestuous sheets!

MARTHA: Yes, I agree! That is definitely wicked speed and definitely wicked disgusting but even if it happened to me, I would not try to... you know, so don't think I was suggesting that it was a good idea, please! Please don't think that!

HAMLET: It is not, nor it cannot come to good.

MARTHA: What do you mean? What can't? Our talking together or your mother's marriage? I told you before, I sometimes put my foot in my mouth, but I want to keep talking. Don't hang up. I can listen.

HAMLET: But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue!

MARTHA: No, you don't have to hold your tongue! You don't have to stop talking! Really! Listen... **(HAMLET pantomimes hanging up. HE gets up and paces for a while.)** Don't hang... oh, no. Oh, no, no, no! My first night and I have killed someone! Stupid, stupid, stupid! **(rapping herself on the forehead)** Think before you speak! Think, think, think! Maybe he'll call back. I've got to read up on this a little bit. I can't blow it again. **(reading from a pamphlet on advising potential suicides)** "Encourage the person to discuss..." Okay, I did that. I can do that. "Elicit the person's feelings..." I would do that if I knew what elicit meant, but I get the point. Okay. "Use the terms suicide, kill yourself and suicidal plan when talking about the threat." What? Use them? I thought you weren't supposed to. "Potential victims may see suicide as a romanticized escape... a solution without notable consequences. Using these terms can bring the person into a sharper reality focus while enabling the helper to determine if a plan is in place." Oh. That makes sense. What's the use? He's not going to call back. **(HAMLET crosses back to the chair and looks at the phone. HE picks it up and dials again.)** Face it, Martha, your first night as a volunteer helper and you kill a guy. How am I going to live with this? I'm going to need to call somebody myself. **(hears the phone ring and frantically runs to pick it up)** Hello? Hello? I mean, Headrest Hotline. Is this you? This is Martha.

HAMLET: To be or not to be. That is the question.

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