

Remember me

A most unusual *Hamlet*

william shakespeare ~ deirdre burton ~ tom davis

HORATIO: O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!

HAMLET: And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.

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Each of these sets of parts are played by one actor:

Horatio

Angie/Hamlet/Gertrude

Geoff/Hamlet/Claudius/Courtier

Annabel/Hamlet/Ophelia/Laertes

Jen/Hamlet/Ophelia/Gravedigger

Ramesh/Hamlet/Ghost/Osric/Polonius

Polly/Hamlet/Laertes/Guildenstern

Elmina/Hamlet/Ophelia/Rosencrantz

All the actors who play travelling players are on stage all the time. They watch the developing action, interact between themselves, and put themselves forward to play parts. Ramesh, the drummer, carries his drum with him at all times, and marks scene changes and underscores mimed action.

All props are clearly in view, in and around the travelling players' props basket and are picked up and put down in a matter of fact way, as simply tools of the trade.

There is a clearly recognisable scarf belonging to Hamlet, which is introduced in the duel scene, and is then used as different traveling players take on the role of Hamlet.

1 Act one

1.1 before the play

The actors are getting ready for a show. Music, stylised activity. Makeup. Vocal warm-ups--very melodious.

ANNABEL: Ow, that hurt.

JEN: Be quiet, it's making you beautiful.

GEOFF: Red is so not my colour.

JEN: Red is all we've got in your size, darling.

RAMESH: Are you nervous?

ANGIE: Me? Nervous?

ELMINA: Really?

ANGIE: No. Not nervous. More... Terrified.

The actors cluster round Angie to comfort her.

Polly goes to stage front, addresses the audience.

POLLY: I am Shakespeare's sister.

I am fucking sensational.

I have a story to tell.

She calls the actors together.

POLLY: Right. This is a very big deal. You know that, don't you?

ACTORS: Yes, we know that.

POLLY: Good. A *lot* of money. A royal command performance. Fame and fortune.

And: the beautiful popular prince Hamlet -- loves us!

ELMINA: He does?

POLLY: He does. He has graciously written part of the play for us. Just for us! I expect he'll become our patron, and give us lots of money!

ACTORS: Yay! Fantastic!

POLLY: Indeed. Just as soon as he gets over the death of his father. Poor man.

Snakebite. In his own garden. Very nasty.

ANNABEL: Snakebite? In Denmark? Do they have snakes in Denmark?

POLLY: Look, don't ask. Just do the job and take the money, ok?

ANNABEL: It's a bit cold, for snakes... Don't they hibernate?

POLLY: Will you be quiet about snakes! This is a fantastic opportunity! Go out there and knock them dead!

ACTORS: Er...

POLLY: Yes, sorry. Go out there and make them love you!

ACTORS: Yay!

1.2 the play

Dumbshow.

Hautboys play. The play begins.

Enter a king (ANNABEL) and a queen (JEN) very lovingly; the queen embracing him, and he her. She kneels, and makes show of protestation unto him. He takes her up, and declines his head upon her neck: lays him down upon a bank of flowers: she, seeing him asleep, leaves him. Anon comes in a fellow (ELMINA), takes off his crown, kisses it, and pours poison in the king's ears, and exit. The queen returns; finds the king dead, and makes passionate action. The poisoner comes in again, seeming to lament with her. He woos the queen with gifts: she seems loath and unwilling awhile, but in the end accepts his love.

Voices are heard:

CLAUDIUS (GEOFF): Give o'er the play!

OPHELIA (ANGIE): The king rises.

HAMLET (POLLY): What, frightened with false fire!

GERTRUDE (ANGIE): How fares my lord?

POLONIUS (RAMESH): Give o'er the play.

CLAUDIUS: Give me some light: Away!

ALL: Lights, lights, lights!

HAMLET: O good Horatio, I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pound!

Pandemonium.

Silence.

The actors look around, bewildered.

RAMESH: What the bloody hell was that about?

GEOFF: Did someone say something about a *ghost*?

ANGIE: Where's the audience?

JEN: They've vanished, every one of them!

ANNABEL: We weren't that bad!

ELMINA: I think the king was a little upset by something...

JEN: I have a bad feeling about this...

Noise of guards approaching, tramp tramp, chains and swords clashing.

POLLY: Uh oh...

GUARD (NEIL, *offstage*): Arrest them! Treason! Treason!

ANNABEL: We weren't *that* bad!

GEOFF: Shut up, and run for it!

Actors run, frantically.

1.3 after the play

Actors stop running. They are panting heavily, and look furtive and hunted. They collapse in a heap.

GEOFF: Bloody hell, that was close!

JEN: They take theatre really seriously round here, don't they!

ANGIE: What did we do wrong?

ANNABEL: We weren't that bad!

Elmina's mobile phone rings; she answers it.

ELMINA: Hello?

RAMESH: What's she doing? Who's she talking to?

POLLY: It's a magic thing. She does that. Communes with mystic spirits.

ELMINA: You can't be on the train. Trains haven't been invented yet.

RAMESH: Very weird.

ELMINA: Oh, no. ... oh, no! ... oh, that's really awful. ... dead? Really? ... treason?
... oh, what a disaster!

Puts phone away.

GEOFF: Good news?

ELMINA: No. We are in deep shit. Apparently we just accused the king of murdering his brother.

ANGIE: We did?

ELMINA: We did.

GEOFF: Er, how did we do that? It sounds like a very very unsafe thing to do.

ELMINA: Yes. The beautiful prince Hamlet, you see, had a bright idea. He suspects the king of murdering the previous king, i.e. Hamlet's dad. Whose name, confusingly, was Hamlet. So he thought he would test this by getting us to *act the murder*, to see how the king, Claudius, would react.

JEN: Ah. Brilliant idea. Er, did he mention this when he gave us the script?

ELMINA: No, oddly enough, he didn't.

JEN: And the king reacted badly?

ELMINA: Very. Very very badly.

JEN: So the king *did* murder Hamlet's father, then?

ELMINA: Hush! Someone might hear!

ANNABEL: I told you the snake was a red herring! So to speak.

ELMINA: Shut up.

POLLY: Right. So, to summarise, our position doesn't look too good.

ELMINA: No. Plus, there's more. Hamlet, our royal patron, has gone completely mad, murdered the king's favourite counsellor, and been banished from the kingdom; and as for us, they're looking for us everywhere. Wanted dead or alive, that kind of thing.

GEOFF: But surely the king accepts that we are artists, that this is a work of the imagination, that we but hold, as 'twere, a mirror up to nature... No? Ok.

POLLY: Right. Action plan. Time to go on tour. After the, er, *runaway* success of our Royal Command Performance of the Murder of Gonzago, we're going to take it to the provinces. The distant provinces. The Arctic Circle.

ANGIE: What are we going to do for money?

RAMESH: If only we'd asked for payment in advance.

GEOFF: *Holds up large bag of money.* We did.

1.4 back story: Shakespeare's sister

POLLY: Right. While they are trekking off to the frozen North, time for the back story.

I really am Shakespeare's sister. And I really am fucking fantastic.

Brother Bill, yes, he was good. Billy the ghost, we called him. He was like a hole in space, like a cut-out hole, that you could see strange things through, that was him. A walking shadow. The shadow of what's inside him, all those words.

He was a man, however, just a man. He couldn't do our stuff. He didn't know about the secret sisters. He didn't know about yes and no. Just the man things, words, swords, history, that kind of stuff.

Look, I said, brother William, history is shit. Obviously. All those Henrys, for god's sake. Hey, Billy, I said to him, have you ever thought of doing a play about cross-dressing? That would be cool, would it not? Bit of an ironic twist on all that 'I love you' crap, don't you think? Or, you know, have you ever thought of putting *real witches* on the stage? Hey? Or madness, that's a good one, that has legs, believe me. He looked at me, with his silent eyes, his listening eyes, eyes with the whirling words behind them.

Billy the ghost. Silent, he was, mostly, but you could see the words whirling around in his head, all the time, behind his slightly bulging bourgeois brow, full, so full, of stuff. And eyes that were always inwards, looking in, listening. But put a pen in his hand, and out it came: magic. Weird. A strange man, my brother Bill. Men. They are so unnecessarily complicated.

I was different. I went the other way. Well, it was difficult, in the sixteenth century, to get yourself an education. Obviously. The men had all the books. Besides, we weren't supposed to know too much anyway. Words were withheld. Yes and no is about it, about all we were allowed. But you can do a lot with that, you can bend the no until it might mean yes, you can fill the yes with a little threat of no, and men, who are so bloody binary, don't know whether they are coming and going. And if you learn that skill, if you learn the gap between this and that, you can make words, and men, do what you want.

So there I was, wasting my talent in Warwickshire, brother Bill having swanned off to London in order to become world famous, taking some of my good ideas with him, and what was I to do? So I consulted my friend. Oh, yes, my friend. My secret sister. What would I do without you, my dearest?

ELMINA: Irritate people enormously. Well, you do that anyway. In a nice way, mind.

POLLY: Of course.

ELMINA: Of course.

POLLY: I should tell you about my secret sister. She flies in from time to time, probably on broomstick, or some other unlikely method of travel. We talk, late in the night. She teaches me...

ELMINA: I teach her. I teach her to be sensible, also a bit crazy, I teach her to dream. Who am I? The Angel of Impermanence. I ride the viewless winds. I am everywhere. I live within the structures of your self, the lattice work of fantasy that you think is you. In the flickering of your thoughts, in the holes between the moments of your mind, I am. That thought you had yesterday, that joy, that pain, that hunger, that satisfaction, where is it? Gone. I put it away. I made it make sense. I make you make sense. I make you face your self. I am narrative. I am necessity. I am very nice to you, I take away all your certainties, your precious foolishness, your jewels, your niceties, I surround them with silence. Listen. *Pause*. Silence. I am here to tell you, that is what truly is.

POLLY: So, my dear, what am I to do?

ELMINA: Write. Read. Dream. Write some more.

POLLY: Yes, I do that.

ELMINA: Start a theatre company.

POLLY: In Stratford? No way. It would never work.

ELMINA: You'd be surprised. However, maybe not just yet. No, you should, go to Denmark.

POLLY: Er, why?

ELMINA: Denmark is about to be a very interesting place. You'll like it.

POLLY: She's mad, I thought. *To Elmina*: You're mad.

ELMINA: Yes, sort of. Just do it, will you.

ELMINA: So I did. And look where it got us. Running for our lives, off to the Arctic Circle. In the meantime, back in Elsinore...

1.5 duel

Enter the actors, very stately and ceremonious. ELMINA as ATTENDANT. HAMLET is wearing a clearly recognisable scarf.

HAMLET (JEN): Come on, LAERTES.

LAERTES (ANNABEL): Come, my lord HAMLET.

[They begin the duel]

HAMLET: One.

LAERTES: No.

HAMLET: Judgment.

OSRIC (RAMESH): A hit, a very palpable hit.

LAERTES: Well; again.

CLAUDIUS (GEOFF): Stay; give me drink. Hamlet, this pearl is thine; Here's to thy health.

Give him the cup.

HAMLET: I'll play this bout first; set it by awhile. Come.

[They play]

Another hit; what say you?

LAERTES: A touch, a touch, I do confess.

GERTRUDE (ANGIE): The queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet!

HAMLET: Good madam!

CLAUDIUS: Gertrude, do not drink.

GERTRUDE: I will, my lord; I pray you, pardon me.

CLAUDIUS: *[Aside]* It is the poison'd cup: it is too late.

HAMLET: Come, for the third, LAERTES: you but dally;

LAERTES: Say you so? come on.

[They play]

OSRIC: Nothing, neither way.

LAERTES: Have at you now!

[LAERTES wounds HAMLET, then in scuffling, they change rapiers, and HAMLET wounds LAERTES]

CLAUDIUS: Part them; they are incensed.

HAMLET: Nay, come, again.

LAERTES: I am justly kill'd with mine own treachery.

[GERTRUDE falls]

OSRIC: Look to the queen there, ho!

HAMLET: How does the queen?

CLAUDIUS: She swounds to see them bleed.

GERTRUDE: No, no, the drink, the drink--O my dear Hamlet--

The drink, the drink! I am poison'd.

[Dies]

HAMLET: O villainy! Ho! let the door be lock'd:

Treachery! Seek it out.

LAERTES: It is here, Hamlet. Hamlet, thou art slain;

No medicine in the world can do thee good;

In thee there is not half an hour of life;

The treacherous instrument is in thy hand,

Unbated and envenom'd: the foul practise

Hath turn'd itself on me: lo, here I lie,

Never to rise again: thy mother's poison'd:

I can no more: the king, the king's to blame.

HAMLET: The point! -- envenom'd too!

Then, venom, to thy work.

[Stabs CLAUDIUS]

CLAUDIUS: O, yet defend me, friends; I am but hurt.

HAMLET: Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane,

Drink off this potion. Is thy union here?

Follow my mother.

[CLAUDIUS dies]

HAMLET: I am dead, Horatio. Wretched queen, adieu!

Had I but time -- as this fell sergeant, death,
Is strict in his arrest -- O, I could tell you --
But let it be. Horatio, I am dead;
Thou livest; report me and my cause aright
To the unsatisfied.

HORATIO: (HORATIO is played by one actor throughout, who plays no other roles)

Never believe it:

I am more an antique Roman than a Dane:
Here's yet some liquor left.

HAMLET: As thou'rt a man,

Give me the cup: let go; by heaven, I'll have't.

O good Horatio what a wounded name,

Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!

If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart

Absent thee from felicity awhile,

And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,

To tell my story. *Takes off scarf.*

O, I die, Horatio:

The potent poison quite o'er-crows my spirit:

The rest is silence.

[Dies]

HORATIO: Now cracks a noble heart. Good night sweet prince:

And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!

Exeunt all except Horatio. He picks up the scarf.

1.6 Horatio's task

HORATIO: So. Who was he? Who, in all of God's so varied earth, *was he?* That, to coin a phrase, is the question.

My friend, my much loved friend. My sweet prince. My lord, my friend, my angel; the wittiest, the most beautiful man. I would have died for him, you know, I was quite ready, I couldn't live without him: I could not live without him. I was mad, maybe, we were all mad at that time, it was a mad disastrous time. But the poisoned cup was in my hand, he had to knock it away, it was the last thing he did.

Apart from giving me a little job to do. Tell my story, he said.

What am I, a novelist? The ancient mariner? Grab some passing passer by (*grabs a passer by*) have you heard the story of, that kind of thing?

And, moreover, to return to the question, the story of who?

Who was he, my sweet prince? Was he mad? Was he wicked? a lover, was he? A killer? A sharp sarcastic tongue, that he had. A mad strange witty beautiful tormented suicidal devastatingly introspective ... man. He was a man, we shall not look upon his like again, that is for sure.

But why couldn't he just *make up his mind*?

Then, I got an idea. Hamlet loved the theatre. Right: I should write a play.

A tragedy. Yes, good. The Tragedy of... The Lamentable Tragedy... The Most Excellent Historical Comical Tragical Pastoral...

The Tragedy of Who.

And that's as far as I got. So I went looking for the theatre company, the Players, Hamlet's friends, the ones who did the play that told him of Claudius's guilt. They would help.

And, after a long long search, I found them.

1.7 Horatio finds the players

HORATIO: So what are you doing up here in the frozen North? It took me months to find you.

GEOFF: What we are doing, apart, that is, from freezing, is: we are staying as far away from Elsinore as possible, in order not to be put to death in some disgusting and ingenious fashion.

HORATIO: Why? What have you done?

POLLY: Well, you remember Hamlet's brilliant idea, to use a play to catch the conscience of the King?

HORATIO: Yes. Brilliant, that was.

GEOFF: Indeed it was. However, we rather caught the sharp end of it. Wanted posters all over Elsinore. High treason.

HORATIO: Oh. Gosh. Yes. They blamed you for the play! We never thought of that. Oh dear. Sorry. However, that problem has gone away. Everyone is now dead.

ANGIE: Everyone?

HORATIO: Pretty much, yes. Hamlet, Claudius, Ophelia, Gertrude, Polonius, you name it, dead. We had a regime change. It's now very boring.

RAMESH: Sounds good. We can go back, and get warm again?

HORATIO: Sure. And: I have work for you.

POLLY: Is this another brilliant plan?

HORATIO: No, no, nothing like that.

To audience

And then I told them about my play. Or non-play. About the impossibility of writing up Hamlet, of telling his story.

ACTORS: No problem.

HORATIO: No problem? Are you crazy? No, don't answer that. I have no idea even how to begin with it.

GEOFF: My dear boy, this is the theatre, we do this kind of thing all the time. We are professionals. Build a character, rough out some scenes, get the blocking done, talk it through, toss it around, no problem: we'll workshop it.

HORATIO: Workshop it?

POLLY: Absolutely. Look, what have you got to get us started?

HORATIO: Well, I know the story, I was there, I've made some notes, I've done some speeches—

ANNABEL: Hang on a minute.

POLLY: What?

ANNABEL: Who's going to play Hamlet?

ACTORS: Me. Me. Me. Me. I want to play Hamlet. No, me.

A dispute, tending towards a battle, begins.

POLLY: *To Horatio.* Er, they all want to play Hamlet:

HORATIO: OK.

POLLY: What?

HORATIO: OK. They can all play Hamlet. I don't care. Maybe if they all have a go at him, we can figure out who he was.

POLLY: Goodness me. That's very Brechtian. Especially for the Twelfth Century. OK, let's give it a go.

GEOFF: Ladies and Gentlemen, Lords and lovers, I have the enormous pleasure of introducing for you, the improvisational, the extraordinary, the everyone-gets-to-play-Hamlet Hamlet; provisionally entitled (*roll of drums*) The Tragedy of Who. *Players rejoice flamboyantly.*

1.8 How are we going to do this?

HORATIO: OK, how are we going to do this? And, maybe, you should introduce me to the actors?

POLLY: They'll introduce themselves. They like doing that. You tell us which bit of the action you want us to work on next, give us an idea of what we should do, and we'll do it. Take it from the top...

HORATIO: Is that how it's normally done?

POLLY: Always.

HORATIO: Oh. OK then. Well, I have a list of what I think we need to cover, here. *Gives it to her.*

POLLY: Great. My friend here, who is a little bit omniscient, will give parts to actors and get us organized. Won't you, my love?

ELMINA: I certainly will. (*Takes paper and goes into a huddle with the actors. Some business, squabbling for parts, etc.*)

POLLY: OK, OK, calm down. Now, what's first?

1.9 It all began with a ghost

HORATIO: Well, it all began with a ghost.

ACTORS: (*jostling for the part*)

Ooh, a ghost!

I can do ghosts!

No, me me me!

Do we get a costume? Gauze. I want white gauze. I look good in white!

HORATIO: No, really. A real ghost. The ghost of Hamlet's dead father, in the bitter cold, one terrifying night.

RAMESH: Then it's me you want. Ghosts? I know all about ghosts.

As he speaks it's clear that what he says is a surprise to his fellow players. They hadn't known this about him, but there's a sense of "Oh, that's who he is".

RAMESH: I am here. And I am not here. I wander in and out. I am a presence and an absence.

You think you know me do you? You find me understandable, comprehensible. You have pinned me down like a dead butterfly. Ah such stuff as dreams are made on.

Think again my friends. I am dead. Oh yes, Very much so. But I fly and cannot, will not, must not be pinned anywhere, anyhow, any way.

Yes, you could consider me a ghost, I believe that would be one way of putting it. Of seeing it. Of feeling it.

I wander amongst the dear departed and the not so dear departed. But definitely the departed. Oh yes. I blend, I melt, I appear, I disappear, I dive and surface and frolic and froth.

I am the perfect person or non person for this. Believe me. I know things you can't possibly know. I have been places the others have not. I have insider knowledge of the inside out.

You can trust me, you know. I am an intermediary. An interloper. An interpreter of phenomena beyond the phenomenal.

Horatio looks at him. Hands Ramesh the HAMLET scarf. Ramesh nods.

HORATIO: And Hamlet. We'll need a Hamlet.

RAMESH: Leave it with me. (Chooses GEOFF to play HAMLET. Gives him scarf.)

1.10 Alas, poor ghost

HAMLET (GEOFF): Angels and ministers of grace defend us!

Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn'd,
Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell,

Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
Thou comest in such a questionable shape
That I will speak to thee: I'll call thee Hamlet:
King, father, royal Dane: O, answer me!

GHOST (RAMESH): Mark me.

HAMLET: I will.

GHOST: My hour is almost come,
When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames
Must render up myself.

HAMLET (ANGIE): (ANGIE takes scarf, becomes HAMLET) Alas, poor Ghost:

GHOST: Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing
To what I shall unfold.

HAMLET: Speak; I am bound to hear.

GHOST: So art thou to revenge, when thou shalt hear.

HAMLET: What?

GHOST: I am thy father's spirit,
Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,
And for the day confined to fast in fires,
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
Are burnt and purged away.

List, list, O, list!

If thou didst ever thy dear father love –

HAMLET: O God!

GHOST: Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

HAMLET (ELMINA *taking scarf*): Murder!

GHOST: Murder most foul, as in the best it is;

But this most foul, strange and unnatural.

HAMLET: Haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift

As meditation or the thoughts of love,

May sweep to my revenge.

GHOST: Now, Hamlet, hear:

'Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard,

A serpent stung me; so the whole ear of Denmark
Is by a forged process of my death
Rankly abused: but know, thou noble youth,
The serpent that did sting thy father's life
Now wears his crown.

HAMLET: O my prophetic soul! My uncle!

GHOST: Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts, --
O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power
So to seduce! -- won to his shameful lust
The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen:
O Hamlet, what a falling-off was there!

POLLY takes scarf and becomes HAMLET.

But, soft! methinks I scent the morning air;
Brief let me be. Sleeping within my orchard,
My custom always of the afternoon,
Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole,
With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial,
And in the porches of my ears did pour
The leperous distilment; whose effect
Holds such an enmity with blood of man
That swift as quicksilver it courses through
The natural gates and alleys of the body,
And with a sudden vigour doth posset
And curd, like eager droppings into milk,
The thin and wholesome blood: so did it mine;
And a most instant tetter bark'd about,
Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust,
All my smooth body.

Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand
Of life, of crown, of queen, at once dispatch'd:
HAMLET (POLLY): O, horrible! O, horrible! most horrible!

GHOST: If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not;
Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch for luxury and damned incest.
But, howsoever thou pursuest this act,
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught: leave her to heaven
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge,
To prick and sting her. Fare thee well at once!
The glow-worm shows the matin to be near,
And 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire:
Adieu, adieu! Hamlet, remember me.

[Exit]

HAMLET: Remember thee!

Ay, thou poor Ghost, while memory holds a seat
In this distracted globe. Remember thee!

HAMLET (JEN takes scarf): Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
That youth and observation copied there;
And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmix'd with baser matter: yes, by heaven!

HAMLET (ANNABEL takes scarf): O most pernicious woman!
O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!
My tables, -- meet it is I set it down,
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain;

At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark:

So, uncle, there you are. Now to my word;

It is 'Adieu, adieu! remember me.'

I have sworn't.

1.11 Geoff introduction

GEOFF: At this point I would like to explain my part in this remarkable narrative. I have the honour of being the front end of this band of brothers. And sisters. It happened thusly.

ELMINA: What you need is a front end.

POLLY: A front end? *What?*

ELMINA: Yes, you're a woman, if you want to start a theatre company you need a front end. A facade. A frontispiece.

POLLY: Oh, OK.

Discovers Geoff.

GEOFF: Hello, my dear.

POLLY: Don't call me that.

GEOFF: What, pray, should I call you?

POLLY: Don't call me anything. I'm largely anonymous. Like my brother. It works for him.

GEOFF: Oh. Right.

POLLY: Are you an actor?

GEOFF: Among other things, my—anonymous friend. Among many other things.

POLLY: Can you do speeches, pull out the stops?

GEOFF: I can. I certainly can.

'See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!

One drop would save my soul—half a drop! ah, my Christ!'

POLLY: OK, OK, enough, already. Marlowe is so *yesterday*. Do you have any experience?

GEOFF: Enormous. Varied. Extravagant. Outlandish.

POLLY: Excellent. And what are you doing in Denmark?

GEOFF: Looking for work.

POLLY: Right. Well, you've got it. You will be the player king. Also, the front end.

GEOFF: The what?

POLLY: I'll explain later.

1.12 The key to Hamlet's character?

GEOFF: (*To Horatio*). It seems to me, my dear sir, that the key to Hamlet, the focus of his character, is frustrated ambition.

ELMINA: No.

GEOFF: No?

ELMINA: No. It's not.

GEOFF: Oh. OK then. The key to Hamlet, the focus of his character, is—his feelings about his mother?

ELMINA: No.

GEOFF: Total inability to make up his mind?

ELMINA: No.

GEOFF: I give up. What is it?

ELMINA: Is there a key to your personality?

GEOFF: Yes, of course. Er. Er. Hmm. Maybe not.

ELMINA: Definitely not. Nor his.

GEOFF: So how do we get to understand him?

ELMINA: To begin with, think about love.

GEOFF: Love?

ELMINA: Yes. The mainspring, the pinnacle, the defining grace. Love. If you want to know Hamlet, know his love, because love is what we are.

GEOFF: But he was mad!

ELMINA: Yes.

GEOFF: And cruel, a murderer—

ELMINA: Yes.

GEOFF: And suicidal—

ELMINA: Yes. And who loved him?

HORATIO: I did.

ELMINA: Yes. And he loved you.

HORATIO: His mother loved him. She really did.

ELMINA: Yes.

HORATIO: Ophelia. Above all. Ophelia. She loved him.

ELMINA: Yes. And them. *Waves at audience.* Do not forget: them. Everyone loves Hamlet. And what was it that made him mad, and cruel, and suicidal? Love, and love's betrayal. Look: here is Ophelia. She loves him, she is ravaged by her love for him:

OPHELIA (JEN): O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!

The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword;

The expectancy and rose of the fair state,

The glass of fashion and the mould of form,

The observed of all observers, quite, quite down!

And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,

That suck'd the honey of his music vows,

Now see that noble and most sovereign reason,

Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh;

That unmatch'd form and feature of blown youth

Blasted with ecstasy: O, woe is me,

To have seen what I have seen, see what I see!

HORATIO: But he was so cruel to her!

ELMINA: First, he loved her. After the ghost had told him the terrible story, he went to her for help. She was the first one, the only one, he asked for help.

1.13 Ophelia and love

OPHELIA (ELMINA): As I was sewing in my closet,

Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced;

No hat upon his head; his stockings foul'd,

Ungarter'd, and down-gyved to his ancle;
Pale as his shirt; his knees knocking each other;
And with a look so piteous in purport
As if he had been loosed out of hell
To speak of horrors, -- he comes before me.
He took me by the wrist and held me hard;
Then goes he to the length of all his arm;
And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow,
He falls to such perusal of my face
As he would draw it. Long stay'd he so;
At last, a little shaking of mine arm
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
He raised a sigh so piteous and profound
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk
And end his being: that done, he lets me go:
And, with his head over his shoulder turn'd,
He seem'd to find his way without his eyes;
For out o' doors he went without their helps,
And, to the last, bended their light on me.

HORATIO: And she refused to help, because her idiot father and her idiot brother told her to.

JEN: Maybe they weren't idiots. Maybe they loved her.

LAERTES (POLLY): For Hamlet and the trifling of his favour,
Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood,
A violet in the youth of primy nature,
Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,
The perfume and suppliance of a minute; No more.

OPHELIA (*To Polonius*): My lord, he hath importuned me with love
In honourable fashion.

POLONIUS (RAMESH): Ay, fashion you may call it; go to, go to.

OPHELIA: And hath given countenance to his speech, my lord,
With almost all the holy vows of heaven.

POLONIUS: Do not believe his vows; for they are brokers,
Not of that dye which their investments show,
But mere implorators of unholy suits,
Breathing like sanctified and pious bawds,
The better to beguile. This is for all:

I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth,
Have you so slander any moment leisure,
As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet.
Look to't, I charge you: come your ways.

OPHELIA: I shall obey, my lord.

HORATIO: And she betrayed him. Because she obeyed her father.

POLONIUS: Ophelia (now ANNABEL), walk you here. Read on this book,
That show of such an exercise may colour
Your loneliness.

I hear him coming: I'll withdraw.

ELMINA: And he found out:

HAMLET (GEOFF): Where's your father?

OPHELIA: At home, my lord.

ELMINA: Just four words.

OPHELIA: At home, my lord.

At home, my lord.

HORATIO: And this drove him mad.

HAMLET: If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry: be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunnery, go: farewell. Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool; for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery, go, and quickly too. Farewell.

OPHELIA: O heavenly powers, restore him!

HAMLET: I have heard of your paintings too, well enough; God has given you one face, and you make yourselves another: you jig, you amble, and you lisp, and nick-name God's creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on't; it hath made me mad. I say, we will have no more marriages: those that are married already, all but one, shall live; the rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery, go.

HORATIO: And *his* madness drove *her* mad.

GEOFF: Why?

HORATIO: Because Hamlet killed her father.

GEOFF: He killed her father?

HORATIO: Yes. Wait and see.

OPHELIA (*sings*): He is dead and gone, lady,

He is dead and gone;

At his head a grass-green turf,

At his heels a stone.

White his shroud as the winter snow

Larded with sweet flowers

Which bewept to the grave did go

With true-love showers

They say the owl was a baker's daughter. Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be.

We know what we are, but know not what we may be.

Pray you, let's have no words of this; but when they ask you what it means, say you this:

Sings

To-morrow is Saint Valentine's day,

All in the morning betime,

And I a maid at your window,

To be your Valentine.

Then up he rose, and donn'd his clothes,

And dupp'd the chamber-door;
Let in the maid, that out a maid
Never departed more
By Gis and by Saint Charity,
Alack, and fie for shame!
Young men will do't, if they come to't;
By cock, they are to blame.
Quoth she, before you tumbled me,
You promised me to wed.
So would I ha' done, by yonder sun,
An thou hadst not come to my bed.

I hope all will be well. We must be patient: but I cannot choose but weep. And so I thank you for your good counsel. Come, my coach! Good night, ladies; good night, sweet ladies; good night, good night.

GEOFF: And that was the end of love.

ELMINA: No. There is no end of love. He was on the verge of madness—

HORATIO: Playing with it, the way he did—

ELMINA: Yes. She went mad, so that he didn't have to. She did it for him.

Pause; Horatio is moved, and so are we.

POLLY: OK, break time. Five minutes?

Exeunt all except Angie and Ramesh.

1.14 Angie and Ramesh introduction

ANGIE: Are we doing the bedroom scene today?

RAMESH: That's what Polly said. Are you doing Hamlet today?

ANGIE: Not me. No. Not this bit.

RAMESH: Ah.

Shy pause.

RAMESH: Strange place Denmark. You're not from round here are you? Were you . . . were you called?

ANGIE: Oh yes, well it was bloody obvious wasn't it. What I call a really clear dream. Oh yes, I always pay attention to my dreams. That's how I get my instructions, you see. This is my dream journal. Well, it's this year's dream journal. I always carry it with me. Just in case. Just in case of what exactly? Well, just in case. You never know when you might need to refer back to something. For clarification purposes.

So there I am. At the north pole. Well, near enough. Top of Norway somewhere. This year's "convention" you see. Well, I'm, not supposed to say really, but we meet every year. Think magic, think mystics, think miracles and think women. Work out what we might be called, and then think again. Think again Sunshine.

Well, it was the last night of the "convention" and I was sleeping soundly, when a polar bear . . . well not a real polar bear obviously . . . when a polar bear called me to follow him out into the moonlight. Well, not literally, obviously. It was a cold night. It was Norway. Dreams remember? I'm talking dreams here. Sharpen up a little. Keep up.

So, I'm out in the moonlight, and this polar bear gives me a map you see. A map that goes all the way from the top of Norway to the bottom of Denmark. And it has a little mermaid in the corner. Like an old fashioned map. A real old fashioned map.

"Aha" I think to myself. "Copenhagen". Like in the movie. The Danny Kaye movie? (*she sings a little "Hans Christian Anderson . . . Anderson, that's me"*).

So there I am. Sitting by the statue of the Little Mermaid. She was sort of smaller than I expected. And then this oddly assorted bunch of people comes along. And I know. I just know that I have to get up and go with them. Wherever. Whatever.

And then we found you . . . by the river you were. We heard the drums.

They all act out this meeting

RAMESH (*drums*): tah take take

tah take take

tah take take

taketake ta

Ah. You like my drumming? Thank you. Thank you very much.

tah take take

tah take take

tah take take

taketake ta

My drums speak. My drums teach. My drums lead and I follow.

I am here in Copenhagen to learn Danish. I have 17 languages so far. None of them say what I want to say. I am hoping that Danish will be the missing link.

My first language? Sanskrit. Well, you have to start somewhere. I was brought up without language you see. My family were mime artists and musicians. They didn't speak. I'm not sure whether that was because they couldn't or because they chose not to. I forgot to ask. Well, I did ask . . . with the drums . . . but they gave me contradictory answers in their mime. And by the time I could ask them in Sanskrit, or Serbo Croat, or English or French or Russian or the dialects of Tajikhistahn . . . well . . . let's just say we had parted company.

I was a disappointment to them I suppose.

And now the drums have brought me here. Have brought me to you.

I would like to be part of a group again. A community. A family.

Do you need a drummer?

Enter Horatio.

HORATIO: Right? Ready? OK. So this is what happened after your rather sudden exit from Elsinore. Hamlet's mother Queen Gertrude is waiting to talk to him in her bedchamber. Polonius, the King's counsellor - that old guy you met in the palace? Remember? He's going to hide behind a curtain and eavesdrop. Not a wise decision as it happens. Never a good idea to be the King's spy. But he thought he was being helpful. He always thought he was being helpful. (*He is speaking in a matter of fact way, but betrays deep emotion*). Right. Take it from the top please.

1.15 Hamlet and Gertrude

POLONIUS (*RAMESH*): He will come straight. Look you lay home to him:

Tell him his pranks have been too broad to bear with,

And that your grace hath screen'd and stood between

Much heat and him. I'll sconce me even here.

Pray you, be round with him.

HAMLET (*POLLY*): *Within*

Mother, mother, mother!

GERTRUDE (ANGIE): I'll warrant you,
Fear me not: withdraw, I hear him coming.

[POLONIUS hides behind the arras]

[Enter HAMLET:

HAMLET: Now, mother, what's the matter?

GERTRUDE: Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

HAMLET: Mother, you have my father much offended.

GERTRUDE: Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.

HAMLET: Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue.

GERTRUDE: Why, how now, Hamlet:

HAMLET: What's the matter now?

GERTRUDE: Have you forgot me?

HAMLET: No, by the rood, not so:

You are the queen, your husband's brother's wife;

And -- would it were not so! -- you are my mother.

GERTRUDE: Nay, then, I'll set those to you that can speak.

HAMLET: Come, come, and sit you down; you shall not budge;

You go not till I set you up a glass

Where you may see the inmost part of you.

GERTRUDE: What wilt thou do? thou wilt not murder me?

Help, help, ho!

POLONIUS: *[Behind]*

What, ho! help, help, help!

HAMLET: *[Drawing]*

How now! a rat? Dead, for a ducat, dead!

[Makes a pass through the arras]

GERTRUDE: O me, what hast thou done?

HAMLET: Nay, I know not:

Is it the king?

GERTRUDE: O, what a rash and bloody deed is this!

HAMLET: A bloody deed! almost as bad, good mother,
As kill a king, and marry with his brother.

GERTRUDE: As kill a king!

HAMLET: Ay, lady, 'twas my word.

[Lifts up the array and discovers POLONIUS]

Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell!

I took thee for thy better: take thy fortune;

Thou find'st to be too busy is some danger.

Leave wringing of your hands: peace! sit you down,

And let me wring your heart; for so I shall,

If it be made of penetrable stuff,

If damned custom have not brass'd it so

That it is proof and bulwark against sense.

GERTRUDE: What have I done, that thou darest wag thy tongue

In noise so rude against me?

HAMLET: Look here, upon this picture, and on this,

The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.

See, what a grace was seated on this brow;

Hyperion's curls; the front of Jove himself;

An eye like Mars, to threaten and command;

A station like the herald Mercury

New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill;

A combination and a form indeed,

Where every god did seem to set his seal,

To give the world assurance of a man:

This was your husband. Look you now, what follows:

Here is your husband; like a mildew'd ear,

Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?
Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed,
And batten on this moor? Ha! have you eyes?
You cannot call it love; for at your age
The hey-day in the blood is tame, it's humble,
And waits upon the judgment: and what judgment
Would step from this to this? Sense, sure, you have,
Else could you not have motion; but sure, that sense
Is apoplex'd; for madness would not err,
Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thrall'd
But it reserved some quantity of choice,
To serve in such a difference. What devil was't
That thus hath cozen'd you at hoodman-blind?
Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,
Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all,
Or but a sickly part of one true sense
Could not so mope.

O shame! where is thy blush?

GERTRUDE: O Hamlet, speak no more:

Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul;
And there I see such black and grained spots
As will not leave their tinct.

HAMLET: Nay, but to live

In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,
Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty, --

GERTRUDE: O, speak to me no more;

These words, like daggers, enter in mine ears;
No more, sweet Hamlet:

HAMLET: A king of shreds and patches, --

GERTRUDE: What shall I do?

HAMLET: Not this, by no means, that I bid you do:

Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed;

Pinch wanton on your cheek; call you his mouse;

And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses,

Or paddling in your neck with his damn'd fingers,

Make you to ravel all this matter out,

That I essentially am not in madness,

But mad in craft. 'Twere good you let him know;

For who, that's but a queen, fair, sober, wise,

Would from a paddock, from a bat, a gib,

Such dear concernings hide? who would do so?

No, in despite of sense and secrecy,

Unpeg the basket on the house's top.

Let the birds fly, and, like the famous ape,

To try conclusions, in the basket creep,

And break your own neck down.

GERTRUDE: Be thou assured, if words be made of breath,

And breath of life, I have no life to breathe

What thou hast said to me.

1.16 Annabel introduction

HORATIO: How did you get involved in this show?

ANNABEL: Oh, I was drunk.

HORATIO: Really?

ANNABEL: Well, I was more sort of practising being drunk. Part of my skill set.
My repertoire, darling.

HORATIO: I see.

ANNABEL: Do you? Anyway, there I was, standing at a bus stop, in wonderful wonderful Copenhagen, some time in the twelfth century, working on my skill set. You know, a bit of tap dancing, half an aria, a bit of bonkers—

HORATIO: What?

ANNABEL: Mad. Essential for the classical actor, the mad part. [*Madly*] The moon's an arrant thief, and her pale fire she snatches from the sun—

POLLY: Oh, God, that sounds like my bloody brother, I didn't think his fame had got this far yet—

ANNABEL: Madam, [*drunk*] I am not your brother.

POLLY: You're drunk!

ANNABEL: *Delighted*. Do you think so?

POLLY: Yes, I think so.

ANNABEL: Fantastic! How does this sound: my mad act. 'Pillicock sat on Pillicock-hill: Halloo, halloo, loo, loo!'

POLLY: It sounds like my bloody brother, that's what it sounds like. You're an actor, aren't you.

ANNABEL: You guessed!

POLLY: And drunk, too—

ANNABEL: Only a little bit—

POLLY: And slightly mad?

ANNABEL: Not very, just enough to do the job.

POLLY: And, at a rough guess, unemployed?

ANNABEL: Temporarily.

POLLY: Right. You're hired. You're going to fit right in.

1.17 Angie: the death of Ophelia

ELMINA: And now, I think, we need a Gertrude, to finish the story of Ophelia.

POLLY: Angie, if you please...

GERTRUDE (ANGIE): There is a willow grows aslant a brook,

That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream;

There with fantastic garlands did she come

Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them:
There, on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke;
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook.

ANGIE: Look, excuse me, but I don't get this bit.

HORATIO: What is it you don't - er "get"

ANGIE: Well, why didn't she help out?

HORATIO: Pardon?

ANGIE: Gertrude. Why didn't she help? She clearly saw the whole thing. She was obviously standing close by. Did she want her dead or something? Female rivalry perhaps? Competing for Hamlet's affections?

ELMINA: Ah. Love and poetry. My dear.

ANGIE: What?

ELMINA: Love and poetry. She didn't see the drowning. She saw the drowned. And she saw what had to be done.

ANGIE: You mean she lied?

ELMINA: My dear, she cried. She sanctified. In the absence of a priest, she beatified. Quite simply, she did what she could to help.

ANGIE: Is that what poetry does?

ELMINA: Oh yes. And love.

ANGIE: And love?

ELMINA: When it's true. When it knows. When it speaks. Oh yes. Now do the speech please.

GERTRUDE: Her clothes spread wide;
And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up:
Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes;
As one incapable of her own distress,

Or like a creature native and indued
Unto that element: but long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.

COURTIER (GEOFF): Alas, then, she is drown'd?

GERTRUDE: Drown'd, drown'd.

POLLY: Ok, break time.

1.18 Jen introduction

Jen is standing by herself; Horatio approaches her.

HORATIO: I think you're on next?

JEN: Yes.

HORATIO: That's nice.

JEN: Yes.

HORATIO: So, how did you become an actor? How did you join the group?

JEN: Like this.

She assumes a beautiful statuesque pose, moving not a muscle.

Elmina and Polly arrive, and inspect her. She does nothing.

POLLY: What's she doing?

ELMINA: Nothing.

POLLY: Yes, I can see that. But why's she doing it?

ELMINA: I think the idea is that people come and look at her and see if she moves, and if she doesn't, they give her money. She's being a statue, you see.

POLLY: Real money?

ELMINA: Yes.

POLLY: So I guess she's kind of an actor?

ELMINA: Yes.

POLLY: We need actors.

ELMINA: Yes.

POLLY: Her range is a bit limited, isn't it?

ELMINA: So far, yes.

JEN: Excuse me. My range is *not* limited. This is very difficult, you know. Takes a lot of control. Precision. Breath control. Immaculate breath control.

POLLY: But you weren't breathing.

JEN: Exactly. You try it some time. Took years of training.

POLLY: Ah. OK, what else do you do?

JEN: Well, I dance. *Dances.*

POLLY: Nice.

JEN: And I'm a psychoanalyst.

POLLY: Really?

JEN: Yes, really.

POLLY: OK, how did you get into the statue business, then?

JEN: Well, it's very similar, really; not reacting, saying nothing, looking enigmatic. Besides, I couldn't find any neurotics in Denmark. They are all irritatingly well-adjusted here.

ELMINA: Er, have you ever been to Elsinore?

JEN: No, why?

ELMINA: Oh, I think you'd find it very congenial.

POLLY: Wall to wall nutters, is what she means.

JEN: Really?

POLLY: Yes. Join our theatre company. We're going to Elsinore. You can act, you can dance, you can sing, and you can solve their problems in your spare time.

JEN: That sounds very nice.

Turns to Horatio; Polly and Elmina vanish.

And that's how it happened.

HORATIO: I see. And who are you going to play now?

JEN: A gravedigger.

HORATIO: Really?

JEN: Yes. To extend my range, you see.

HORATIO: Right. I'll, er, look forward to that, then.

JEN: Good.

1.19 Gravedigger

POLLY: *Consulting script.* So, in this scene, Hamlet is returning from his very successful if barbaric trip to England, and he happens to come across someone digging a grave, and, surprise surprise, this turns out to be the grave of his girlfriend Ophelia, who happens to be dead. Right?

HORATIO: Right. But he doesn't know that yet.

POLLY: No. OK. Take it from the top.

HAMLET (RAMESH): How long will a man lie i' the earth ere he rot?

GRAVEDIGGER (JEN): I' faith, if he be not rotten before he die -- as we have many pocky corsers now-a-days, that will scarce hold the laying in -- he will last you some eight year or nine year: a tanner will last you nine year.

HAMLET: Why he more than another?

GRAVEDIGGER: Why, sir, his hide is so tanned with his trade, that he will keep out water a great while; and your water is a sore decayer of your whoreson dead body. Here's a skull now; this skull has lain in the earth three and twenty years.

HAMLET: Whose was it?

GRAVEDIGGER: A whoreson mad fellow's it was: whose do you think it was?

HAMLET: Nay, I know not.

GRAVEDIGGER: A pestilence on him for a mad rogue! a' poured a flagon of Rhenish on my head once. This same skull, sir, was Yorick's skull, the king's jester.

HAMLET: This?

GRAVEDIGGER: E'en that.

HAMLET: Let me see.

[Takes the skull]

Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio: a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy: he hath borne me on his back a thousand times; and now, how abhorred in my imagination it is! my gorge rims at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now? your gambols? your songs?

your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now, to mock your own grinning? quite chap-fallen? Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come; make her laugh at that.

1.20 Geoff and Claudius

HORATIO: So, Geoffrey. I'd like you to play Claudius in this scene.

GEOFF: Claudius?

HORATIO: Yes. Any problem with that?

GEOFF: Ah no. No. I specialize in parts beginning with Cl.

HORATIO: Cl?

GEOFF: Yes. Clowns. Cleopatra, Clytemnestra, Cleanthe, Clyde, Clarence, Clare, Clodagh, Chlorophyll

HORATIO: Chlorophyll?

GEOFF: Yes. A leprechaun.

HORATIO: Ah.

GEOFF: And of course, the role that brought me to Copenhagen in the first place.

HORATIO: And that was?

GEOFF: Claus.

HORATIO: Claus von Ebbenhof? Claus Olsen?

GEOFF: Well no. Santa.

HORATIO: Santa?

GEOFF: Santa Claus.

HORATIO: *(pause)* Santa Claus. Hmm.

GEOFF: Yes, I had fallen on interesting times. The inheritance tax you know. So I took a role as Santa Claus. Central London. Not the provinces. Oh no. Not the provinces.

HORATIO: In the West End?

GEOFF: Well not quite the West End. Knightsbridge actually

HORATIO: You don't mean -

GEOFF: Yes I do. Harrods, in fact.

HORATIO: Well, I have to say I'm impressed.

GEOFF: Thank you.

HORATIO: And that brought you to Copenhagen?

GEOFF: Yes. I was spotted. Seen. Brought over specially.

HORATIO: And now you will become Claudius.

GEOFF: Ah.

ELMINA: This, too, is a lesson in Love.

GEOFF: In which I become Claudius?

ELMINA: Yes. Temporarily.

GEOFF: Is that the lesson?

ELMINA: It's part of it.

GEOFF: And the other part is?

ELMINA: You'll find out.

2 Act two

2.1 Claudius at prayer

HAMLET (ELMINA): 'Tis now the very witching time of night,

When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out

Contagion to this world: now could I drink hot blood,

And do such bitter business as the day

Would quake to look on. Soft! now to my mother.

O heart, lose not thy nature; let not ever
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom:
Let me be cruel, not unnatural:
I will speak daggers to her, but use none;
My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites;
How in my words soever she be shent,
To give them seals never, my soul, consent!

CLAUDIUS (GEOFF): O, my offence is rank it smells to heaven;
It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,
A brother's murder. Pray can I not,
Though inclination be as sharp as will:
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent;
And, like a man to double business bound,
I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
And both neglect. What if this cursed hand
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy
But to confront the visage of offence?
And what's in prayer but this two-fold force,
To be forestalled ere we come to fall,
Or pardon'd being down? Then I'll look up;
My fault is past. But, O, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn?
Help, angels! Make assay!
Bow, stubborn knees; and, heart with strings of steel,
Be soft as sinews of the newborn babe!
All may be well.

[Retires and kneels]

[Enter HAMLET]

HAMLET (ANNABEL): Now might I do it pat, now he is praying;

And now I'll do't. And so he goes to heaven;

And so am I revenged. That would be scann'd:

A villain kills my father; and for that,

I, his sole son, do this same villain send

To heaven.

Up, sword; and know thou a more horrid hent:

When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,

Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed;

At gaming, swearing, or about some act

That has no relish of salvation in't;

Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,

And that his soul may be as damn'd and black

As hell, whereto it goes. My mother stays:

This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.

[Exit]

CLAUDIUS: *[Rising]*

My words fly up, my thoughts remain below:

Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

[Exit]

2.2 Talking to himself

JEN: So. How is your quest?

HORATIO: My quest?

JEN: To find out who Hamlet is. Or was.

HORATIO: Nowhere. Anywhere. Circular. And: painful.

JEN: Painful?

HORATIO: Yes, visiting the past. Seeing the dead come alive. And then die all over again.

JEN: Yes. Necessary. Go forward.

HORATIO: How? What should I do? Tell me, what should I do?

JEN: What was he like, your friend Hamlet, when he was by himself?

HORATIO: What? I don't know. How could I know?

JEN: Think about it.

HORATIO: *Thinks.* I think he had ... an inner voice. I think, inside, he was ...

JEN: Yes?

HORATIO: A poet. Yes, a poet. Somewhere inside, from somewhere else, a true voice. A poet.

JEN: Yes. Yes.

HORATIO: So how do I find out what this voice, this secret voice, said to him?

JEN: Ask him. (*Ramesh*). He knows.

2.3 Ramesh: this is what you want

HORATIO: You're not really a ghost, are you?

RAMESH: Maybe, yes.

HORATIO: Really?

RAMESH: Maybe, yes.

HORATIO: Oh. Er, I have a strange question.

RAMESH: Yes, I know.

HORATIO: You do?

RAMESH: Here. This is what you want. (*Gives him a sheet of paper*)

HORATIO: (*He looks at it*) Did you write this?

RAMESH: Maybe. Maybe not. It's what you need. Give it to Polly. She'll know what to do with it.

HORATIO: *To POLLY; bewildered.* I was told to give this to you.

POLLY: *She looks at it.* Oh. My. God. Did you write this?

HORATIO: No, no.

POLLY: Who wrote it?

HORATIO: Well, that appears to be very uncertain. This is a rather odd theatre company you have here.

POLLY: Yes, I know, great, isn't it? Look, this is fantastic. This is the Real Thing. My brother couldn't do anything half as good as this, not to save his life!

ELMINA: Are you sure?

POLLY: Of course I'm sure, I'm the Director. Come on, let's do it. Right now.

2.4 To be or not to be.

GEOFF: To be

ANNABEL: Or not to be

JEN: That is the question:

POLLY: Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune

ELMINA: Or to take arms against a sea of troubles

ANGIE: And by opposing end them?

RAMESH: To die

ANGIE: to sleep;

No more;

JEN: And by a sleep to say we end

The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks

That flesh is heir to

RAMESH: 'Tis a consummation

Devoutly to be wish'd.

ELMINA: To die, to sleep;

RAMESH: To sleep: perchance to dream

ANNABEL: Ay, there's the rub;

For in that sleep of death what dreams may come

When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,

Must give us pause

GEOFF: There's the respect

That makes calamity of so long life;

POLLY: For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,

The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely

ANGIE: The pangs of despised love

GEOFF: The law's delay

POLLY: The insolence of office

JEN: And the spurns

That patient merit of the unworthy takes,

When he himself might his quietus make

With a bare bodkin?

ELMINA: Who would fardels bear,

To grunt and sweat under a weary life,

But that the dread of something after death

RAMESH: The undiscover'd country from whose bourn

No traveller returns

ANGIE: Puzzles the will

POLLY: And makes us rather bear those ills we have

Than fly to others that we know not of?

ANNABEL: Thus conscience does make cowards of us all

GEOFF: And thus the native hue of resolution

Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought

JEN: And enterprises of great pith and moment

With this regard their currents turn awry

RAMESH: And lose the name of action.

2.5 Is that what he was like?

JEN: Is that what he was like? All those people, arguing inside him?

HORATIO: Well, yes. Sometimes, yes. Sometimes he went into himself, and you couldn't talk to him. And sometimes he was quite crazy, or pretending to be crazy, or both. And seeing all sides of the question was what he did, really.

JEN: What it sounds like to me is the most beautiful suicide note ever written. Did you know he was suicidal?

HORATIO: No. I did not know that. No. But he kept it to himself.

JEN: Tell me: what made him happy?

HORATIO: Friendship.

JEN: And what made him depressed?

HORATIO: Betrayal. Lies.

POLLY: Like this?

2.6 Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

GUILDENSTERN (POLLY): My honoured lord!

ROSENCRANTZ (ELMINA): My most dear lord!

HAMLET (GEOFF): My excellent good friends! How dost thou, Guildenstern? Ah, Rosencrantz! Good lads, how do ye both?

ROSENCRANTZ: As the indifferent children of the earth.

GUILDENSTERN: Happy, in that we are not over-happy;

On fortune's cap we are not the very button.

HAMLET: Nor the soles of her shoe?

ROSENCRANTZ: Neither, my lord.

HAMLET: Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favours?

GUILDENSTERN: 'Faith, her privates we.

HAMLET: In the secret parts of fortune? O, most true; she is a strumpet. What's the news?

ROSENCRANTZ: None, my lord, but that the world's grown honest.

HAMLET: Then is doomsday near: but your news is not true. Let me question more in particular: what have you, my good friends, deserved at the hands of fortune, that she sends you to prison hither?

GUILDENSTERN: Prison, my lord!

HAMLET: Denmark's a prison.

ROSENCRANTZ: Then is the world one.

HAMLET: A goodly one; in which there are many confines, wards and dungeons, Denmark being one o' the worst.

ROSENCRANTZ: We think not so, my lord.

HAMLET: Why, then, 'tis none to you; for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so: to me it is a prison.

ROSENCRANTZ: Why then, your ambition makes it one; 'tis too narrow for your mind.

HAMLET: O God, I could be bounded in a nut shell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.

GUILDENSTERN: Which dreams indeed are ambition, for the very substance of the ambitious is merely the shadow of a dream.

HAMLET: A dream itself is but a shadow.

ROSENCRANTZ: Truly, and I hold ambition of so airy and light a quality that it is but a shadow's shadow.

HAMLET: Then are our beggars bodies, and our monarchs and outstretched heroes the beggars' shadows. Shall we to the court? for, by my fay, I cannot reason. But, in the beaten way of friendship, what make you at Elsinore?

ROSENCRANTZ: To visit you, my lord; no other occasion.

HAMLET: Beggar that I am, I am even poor in thanks; but I thank you: and sure, dear friends, my thanks are too dear a halfpenny. Were you not sent for? Is it your own inclining? Is it a free visitation? Come, deal justly with me: come, come; nay, speak.

GUILDENSTERN: What should we say, my lord?

HAMLET: Why, any thing, but to the purpose. You were sent for; and there is a kind of confession in your looks which your modesties have not craft enough to colour: I know the good king and queen have sent for you.

ROSENCRANTZ: To what end, my lord?

HAMLET: That you must teach me.

ROSENCRANTZ: [*Aside to GUILDENSTERN*] What say you?

GUILDENSTERN: My lord, we were sent for.

HORATIO: Betrayal. And that drives him into depression.

HAMLET (ANGIE): I have of late – but wherefore I know not -- lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?

2.7 Jen and Horatio: the death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

HORATIO: Then there's the whole business of Hamlet going to England.

JEN: To England? Why England?

HORATIO: Well. There was a boat.

JEN: To England? In the middle of winter?

HORATIO: Yes. Health and safety wasn't high on the King's list of priorities.

JEN: Was it on yours?

Horatio just looks at her

JEN: Did you go with him?

HORATIO: The King gave orders. He selected Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

JEN: Your friends?

HORATIO: Well, more Hamlet's than mine I have to say - though we all knew each other in Wittenberg of course. But we weren't close.

JEN: Unlike you and Hamlet?

Horatio just looks at her

HORATIO: Friendship. Friendship. (*grief/enigma*). He used to think they were friends. Trustworthy friends. Good friends.

JEN: Used to? What happened to them?

HORATIO: He had them murdered.

JEN: What!?

HORATIO: He had them murdered.

JEN: But I thought they all went to England together.

HORATIO: They did.

JEN: And they all came back?

HORATIO: They did not.

JEN: What happened?

HORATIO: A pirate ship. Hamlet was taken. And then he escaped.

JEN: You're joking.

HORATIO: I'm afraid not.

JEN: Even Polly's brother wouldn't have come up with that one.

POLLY: He might have. Maybe he will. I'll send a letter to England.

HORATIO: Ah. The letter.

JEN: The letter?

HORATIO: He woke up one night on the ship to England. Something made him open the letter that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were carrying to the King of England from Claudius

JEN: And?

HAMLET (RAMESH): O royal knavery! -- an exact command,

Larded with many several sorts of reasons

Importing Denmark's health and England's too,

With, ho! such bugs and goblins in my life,

That, on the supervise, no leisure bated,

No, not to stay the grinding of the axe,

My head should be struck off.

HORATIO: Is't possible?

HAMLET: Here's the commission: read it at more leisure.

But wilt thou hear me how I did proceed?

HORATIO: I beseech you.

HAMLET: Being thus be-netted round with villainies, --

Ere I could make a prologue to my brains,

They had begun the play -- I sat me down,
Devised a new commission. Wilt thou know
The effect of what I wrote?

HORATIO: Ay, good my lord.

HAMLET: An earnest conjuration from the king,
As England was his faithful tributary,
As love between them like the palm might flourish,
As peace should stiff her wheaten garland wear
And stand a comma 'tween their amities,
And many such-like 'As'es of great charge,
That, on the view and knowing of these contents,
Without debatement further, more or less,
He should the bearers put to sudden death,
Not shriving-time allow'd.

JEN: No time for confession? In order to guarantee that they would go to Hell forever. Why?

HORATIO: That's what I keep asking myself. Why? Why that? That wasn't the Hamlet I thought I knew. They didn't deserve that. Not that.

JEN: Then why did he do it? It drove him mad, didn't it?

HORATIO: Everything. The spying. The treachery. The betrayals, everyone betrayed him, everyone, his uncle, his mother, his lover, all his friends—

JEN: Except you.

HORATIO: Yes, except me. And the lies: he couldn't stand lies. Lies drove him mad. They made him hate...

JEN: Himself.

HORATIO: Yes. Yes. He came to hate himself.

2.8 Too too solid flesh

HAMLET (RAMESH): O, that this too too solid flesh would melt
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't! ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely.

JEN: He killed himself, didn't he?

HORATIO: Yes, I think so.

JEN: He knew the duel was a setup; he knew he would die.

HORATIO: Yes.

HORATIO: You will lose this wager, my lord.

HAMLET (ANNABEL): I do not think so: since he went into France, I have been in continual practise: I shall win at the odds. But thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart: but it is no matter.

HORATIO: Nay, good my lord, --

HAMLET: It is but foolery; but it is such a kind of gain-giving, as would perhaps trouble a woman.

HORATIO: If your mind dislike any thing, obey it: I will forestall their repair hither, and say you are not fit.

HAMLET: Not a whit, we defy augury: there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all: since no man has aught of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes?

HORATIO: And you know what? I keep wondering. Asking myself. Could I have stopped him?

JEN: And if you had?

HORATIO: Maybe he would still be here. Maybe he would still be. Maybe there was something in my philosophy that would have . . . that would have . . .

JEN: You think so?

HORATIO: No. Not really. No.

2.9 Hating himself

HORATIO: But why? Why did he hate himself? It's as if he hates his own body, his own flesh. The person he really wanted to kill was -- himself. Why? He was a wonderful man, and he knew it: witty, highly intelligent, much loved, much admired -- why?

JEN: That, you might say, is the question.

HORATIO: To coin a phrase.

JEN: Yes.

HORATIO: OK, you're a psychoanalyst, you know about this stuff; tell me why. What's the answer?

JEN: I don't do answers. I do questions.

HORATIO: Ask, then.

JEN: Who did Hamlet hate?

HORATIO: Er, himself?

JEN: That is a consequence, not a cause. Who did Hamlet hate?

HORATIO: Claudius, of course. Claudius.

JEN: Yes. Why did he hate him?

HORATIO: Because he killed Hamlet's father, maybe?

JEN: Yes, that would do it. But he hated him before he knew that. Why?

HORATIO: Er, er—

JEN: What did he hate about Claudius?

HORATIO: His cunning.

JEN: Yes, his intelligence. What else?

HORATIO: His relationship with Hamlet's mother.

JEN: Yes. What sort of relationship was that?

HORATIO: Incestuous.

JEN: Technically, yes. But not real incest. He hated it as if it were, though, didn't he?

HORATIO: Oh yes.

JEN: What else?

HORATIO: His falsehoods, his tricks, his lies, his murderous treachery—

ANNABEL: His play acting?

HORATIO: Yes, yes, his play acting – Oh my god. His play acting! Are we going where I think we're going with this?

ANNABEL: Where do you think we're going with this?

HORATIO: Hamlet loved play acting. Hamlet was intelligent. Hamlet loved his mother. But not incestuously!

ANGIE: No?

HORATIO: Well...

JEN: What else did Hamlet hate about Claudius?

HORATIO: Oh, his appearance. For some reason. He was a handsome man, Claudius.

POLLY: When Hamlet wanted to frighten his mother, he showed her a picture of Claudius.

HORATIO: Yes, and she went all to pieces. Very strange.

ANGIE: Yes. What was it about the way Claudius looked that Hamlet loathed, that terrified Gertrude?

HORATIO: I don't know. Strange...

JEN: Indeed. Now, the relationship between Claudius and Gertrude was passionate, was it not?

HORATIO: Oh, yes. They were all over each other.

JEN: And this began before the death of Hamlet's father?

HORATIO: Yes. Probably, yes. Hamlet suspected it did, anyway.

RAMESH: Yes. How long before?

HORATIO: Oh, I don't know. Some time before.

JEN: How long? How long before?

Silence. He looks at her. The actors all look at her.

HORATIO: Oh, no. No no no.

GEOFF: It can't be. It can't be.

POLLY: But: it makes sense.

RAMESH: Hamlet loathed his own flesh.

ANNABEL: He wanted to kill himself more than he wanted to kill Claudius!

ELMINA: 'I am too much in the sun', he said!

GEOFF: I don't believe it!

JEN: But it makes sense!

ANGIE: What? What are you all talking about? What?

POLLY: Do you think perhaps, maybe - Claudius might have been Hamlet's father!

HORATIO: That. Explains. Everything. It explains everything. Claudius knew. Gertrude feared it might be true. Hamlet knew, and didn't know. He couldn't face it.

ANGIE: So why did he hate the way Claudius looked?

HORATIO: Because Claudius looked like Hamlet. And Hamlet looked like Claudius.

ANGIE: So Gertrude went to pieces over the two pictures because...

HORATIO: Because she was looking at three pictures. Claudius, Old Hamlet, and

ANGIE: Young Hamlet.

HORATIO: Exactly.

ANGIE: Oh, the poor man. The poor, poor, man.

Silence.

GEOFF: I don't believe it. It's too far fetched.

ANNABEL: I do. It fits. It all fits.

POLLY: Play it!

2.10 Too much in the sun

CLAUDIUS (GEOFF): But now, my cousin Hamlet and my son, --

HAMLET (JEN): [*Aside*] A little more than kin, and less than kind.

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

HAMLET: Not so, my lord; I am too much i' the sun.

GERTRUDE (ANGIE): Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted colour off,
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.

Do not for ever with thy veiled lids

Seek for thy noble father in the dust:

Thou know'st 'tis common; all that lives must die,
Passing through nature to eternity.

HAMLET: Ay, madam, it is common.

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 solemn black,

Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,

No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,

Nor the dejected 'havior of the visage,

Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,

That can denote me truly: these indeed seem,

For they are actions that a man might play:

But I have that within which passeth show;

These but the trappings and the suits of woe.

CLAUDIUS: 'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet,

To give these mourning duties to your father:

But, you must know, your father lost a father;

That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound

In filial obligation for some term

To do obsequious sorrow: but to persevere

In obstinate condolment is a course

Of impious stubbornness; 'tis unmanly grief;

It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,

A heart unfortified, a mind impatient,

An understanding simple and unschool'd:

For what we know must be and is as common

As any the most vulgar thing to sense,
Why should we in our peevish opposition
Take it to heart? Fie! 'tis a fault to heaven,
A fault against the dead, a fault to nature,
To reason most absurd: whose common theme
Is death of fathers, and who still hath cried,
From the first corse till he that died to-day,
'This must be so.' We pray you, throw to earth
This unprevailing woe, and think of us
As of a father: for let the world take note,
You are the most immediate to our throne;
And with no less nobility of love
Than that which dearest father bears his son,
Do I impart toward you. For your intent
In going back to school in Wittenberg,
It is most retrograde to our desire:
And we beseech you, bend you to remain
Here, in the cheer and comfort of our eye,
Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.
GERTRUDE: I pray thee, stay with us; go not to Wittenberg.

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

CLAUDIUS: Why, 'tis a loving and a fair reply:
Be as ourself in Denmark. Madam, come;
This gentle and unforced accord of Hamlet
Sits smiling to my heart: in grace whereof,
No jocund health that Denmark drinks to-day,
But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell,
And the king's rouse the heavens all bruit again,
Re-speaking earthly thunder. Come away.

HORATIO: Oh God, it all makes sense.

2.11 Annabel: you know nothing

ANNABEL: You think you've got him, don't you. You think you've tied him down. You know ... *nothing*.

HORATIO: Who are you?

ANNABEL: An actor. That's all. An actor.

HORATIO: Did you know him, when he was alive?

ANNABEL: No.

JEN: Do you have years of study of the human mind behind you?

ANNABEL: Absolutely not.

JEN: Then what *do* you know?

ANNABEL: Nothing. I'm an actor. There is nothing to be known. You can't hold or confine the human heart. You can't predict it, contain it, patronise it, put it right. No.

HORATIO: What *can* you do, then?

ANNABEL: Wonder. You can wonder at it, because it is wonderful. Always. In anyone. Everyone is Who. The tragedy of Who is everyone's tragedy, that's why we love him, this mad prince, this monster, this wonderful man: he calls us to look inside ourselves, to peel the skins of the onion that is 'me', and find – nothing at all. Nothing. Nothing that is not absolutely wonderful. We are other than we are. In each of us there is the pleasure pain, the dreadful joy, the beautiful silence, life as it is, mysterious, magical, not understandable.

HORATIO: And you can act that?

ANNABEL: Sure. On a good day. When the words are right. When the words can take you to a place where the words fall away, to where you lose the dreadful need for explanations, for containment, for this and that. When you can become someone other than you are. When you can be Hamlet.

GEOFF: Yes. That's beautiful. That's really beautiful. But what about the despair? The doubt? The cacophony of doubt, inside his head?

ELMINA: What about the love?

HORATIO: Love?

ELMINA: Yes, love. You of all people knew his love. He never doubted you.

HORATIO: That is true.

ELMINA: So, he knew. Love beyond doubt.

POLLY: How can we play that?

ELMINA: He knows. *Points at Ramesh.*

POLLY: You're supposed to be some sort of ghost, aren't you?

RAMESH: Maybe.

POLLY: Hmm. And if you were, whose ghost would you be?

RAMESH: I think you know, don't you.

POLLY: Yes, I think I do. This is: strange.

RAMESH: Yes. And therefore, as a stranger, give it welcome. *He gives her a piece of paper. Horatio kneels to him in tearful respect. They embrace.*

2.12 Do not doubt I love

POLLY studies the piece of paper.

POLLY: We've got a song!

Actors gather round and look at the paper.

POLLY: Sing it!

doubt that the stars are fire
doubt that the sun doth move
doubt truth to be a liar
but do not, do not doubt I love.

doubt every fire must burn
doubt peace to be a dove
doubt that the tide will turn
but do not, do not doubt I love.

doubt particle is wave
doubt e is mc squared
doubt chaos can behave
but never, never doubt I cared.

doubt that the stars are fire
doubt that the sun doth move

doubt truth to be a liar
but do not, do not doubt I love.