

HAM-LETTE

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HAM-LETTE

SYNOPSIS

A child prodigy wows the director and producer of
HAMLET---and then fails a crucial test.

HAM-LETTE

Cast of Characters

SANDY.....producer; 30's †
PAT.....director; 20's †
MITT.....assistant director; 20's †
TROY.....male; young
ASHLEY.....female; mid-teens
LILY.....female; young

NB: TROY should be played by a boy, the younger and younger looking, the better. Age five would be ideal; nine may do. LILY should be within one or two years of TROY.

Scene

Somewhere in a school building.

Time

The present.

HAM-LETTE

SETTING: We are on a stage which is being used to audition students for an upcoming production. Table; two chairs.

AT RISE: Discover SANDY and PAT. They are clearly dejected.

SANDY

That's it? That's it??? From the entire Northwest Consolidated School system, that's it?

PAT

Well, we might get some guys dropping in late. You know, after football practice.

SANDY

No; no more jocks. If I see one more jerk with a smirk, I'll throw up.

PAT

Me, too. Big, no-talent jocks---show up just because they think it's a way to meet girls.

SANDY

That, I don't mind. What frosts me, though, is that they don't take it seriously. Remember that hunk we had last year? Just barely, barely learned his lines.

PAT

Yeah; and he was the quarter back. They're supposed to be the smart ones.

SANDY

Of course, we did get some boys who weren't jocks.

PAT

Right; we could have cast them right away---as Ophelia.

SANDY

Or maybe Gertrude. Well, perhaps it was a mistake to even think of doing Shakespeare. Maybe we should have stuck to FIDDLER. Or one of those awful sit-com take-offs.

PAT

No; it wasn't a mistake. We've got to show these kids that they have to stretch. Stretch themselves; to do something that isn't easy.

SANDY

OK; it wasn't a mistake. But where's our Hamlet? Hard to do HAMLET without a Hamlet.

MITT

(enters)

Uh, guys---not sure I should interrupt you, but I've got an actor out here you might want to see.

PAT

You had him read, right? Do you think he's any good?

MITT

I'll say this---I've never heard anyone like him. He is sui generis.

SANDY

Really? One of a kind? I'm astonished. Of course---send him in; let's see this superior talent. What's his name?

MITT

That's a bit odd, too. He's already picked a stage name. Calls himself Laurence of Olivier.

PAT

Laurence OF Olivier? What? He doesn't know the difference between one of the greatest actors who ever lived---and Lawrence of Arabia?

MITT

Apparently not.

SANDY

What's his real name?

MITT

Troy Johnson. Should I send him in?

PAT

I don't know why not. Let's see this Laurence of Olivier.

MITT

(Calls off stage)

OK; the director and producer would like to see you. Come on in, Troy. Uh, Laurence.

TROY

(He enters; he is five years old. Or as close to it as the talent pool allows. The part is written for a small, extroverted kid. It's a plus if he has talent.)

He climbs on a chair or table and starts declaiming. Stage direction continued on page 4.

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TROY

(The following is delivered in an over-the-top fashion. Depending on the character he is quoting, TROY modulates his voice, i.e. a raspy old-man for Polonius; a shy girl for Ophelia; growl for grave-digger; etc.)

TO BE OR NOT TO BE, THAT IS THE QUESTION. IT MUST FOLLOW AS NIGHT THE DAY, THOU CANST NOT BE FALSE TO ANY MAN. YOUR WATER IS A SORE DECAYER OF YOUR WHORESON DEAD BODY. THERE ARE MORE THINGS IN HEAVEN AND EARTH, HORATIO, THAN ARE DREMPT OF IN YOUR PHILOSOPHY. THERE'S ROSEMARY, THAT'S FOR REMEMBRANCE. GOOD NIGHT, SWEET PRINCE, AND FLIGHTS OF ANGLES SING THEE TO THEY REST. OUT, OUT, DAMNED SPOT.

(Pauses)

IT WAS THE BEST OF TIMES; IT WAS THE WORST OF TIMES....

(Another pause)

FOUR SCORE AND SEVEN YEARS AGO....

(Gets back on track)

OH, WHAT A ROGUE AND PEASANT SLAVE AM I. GET THEE TO A NUNNERY. AND FLIGHTS OF ANGLES SING THEE TO THY REST.

(A final burst)

TO BE OR NOT TO BE, THAT IS THE QUESTION!

OTHERS

Wow. Amazing. Holy smoke.

TROY

Did you like it? Was I any good? Do I get the part?

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PAT

Whoa, Tiger. That was---that was---well, I've never heard anything like it.

SANDY

That goes double for me---Laurence.

TROY

Oh, do you like my name? My stage name? Can we use that in the program?

PAT

Now hold on! Just hold on. We're a long way from casting the role. You have an amazing amount of poise, I'll say that for you. But, frankly, we were hoping to get someone a wee bit---older.

TROY

I can play older!

MITT

Well, at least he saw TOOTSIE. And that was made in the early eighties.

TROY

Oh, yeah; loved that film.

PAT

Get that---"film." Most kids his age say "picture" or "movie."

SANDY

OK; let's stay on track here. Now, Pat---Mitt---are we completely out of our minds to even be thinking of casting this kid? Would the entire school system laugh itself silly?

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I mean, whoever heard of a Hamlet this young? Isn't that just too bizarre?

PAT

Not as bizarre as another production I saw. This was in Hollywood---black box theater---and one guy, and a Chinese guy at that---played HAMLET. And I don't mean the role; I mean the play.

MITT

The entire play? All the roles?

PAT

All the roles; each and every one. Pretty amazing.

SANDY

People; people. Do you sense we're avoiding the issue here? Dancing around it, so to speak? Do we or do we not consider this kid, talented tho he may be, for our Hamlet?

PAT

The fact is, we don't have anyone else. It might be crazy, but it also might get us some interesting PR. I can see us on the Letterman show....

MITT

Or Leno.

SANDY

Hum-m-m, you really think so? Think out little school system might get some national PR?

MITT

Hey, have you seen some of the things he's had on that show? I remember one guy who had such a flabby belly that he could fold the skin over the handle of a baseball bat and take a swing at a slow pitch. Ugh.

PAT

Ugh, is right. And there's nothing "ugh" about out little guy. He's a phenomenon---in a way.

TROY

Hey, I'm still here, ya know. Don't talk about me like I'm a circus act.

SANDY

Sorry, kid. It's just that you've caught us off guard. Well, guys, let's assume that we MIGHT cast him. What's the next step?

MITT

Let's see how he'd pair up with Ashley---she's probably going to be our Ophelia.

PAT

Great idea; is she still here?

MITT

Oh, yeah.

(Calls off-stage)

Ashley, could you come in here for a sec?

ASHLEY

(Enters. She is mid-teen; maybe late teen. She wears a considerable amount of make up; she is sophisticated---at least for a teen ager)

Hi.

PAT

Ashley; this is, uh, Laurence. We're thinking of him for---
for---Hamlet?

ASHLEY

Hamlet? This is a joke, right?

TROY

(Falls to one knee)

THE LADY DOTTH PROTEST TOO MUCH, METHINKS. FRAILTY, THY NAME
IS WOMAN. I MUST BE CRUEL, ONLY TO BE KIND. ASSUME A VIRTUE
IF YOU HAVE IT NOT. BE SOMEWHAT SCANTER OF YOUR MAIDEN
PRESENCE. SWEETS TO THE SWEET. LEAVE HER TO HEAVEN. THE TIME
IS OUT OF JOINT. THE REST IS SILENCE.

(TROY kisses her hand and rises)

ASHLEY

Well, I've got to admit---the little bugger sure knows the
lines. Or some of the lines.

SANDY

He does, that. And he even throws in a bit of The Scottish
Play....

MITT

And Dickens....

PAT

Don't forget Lincoln! Now, the point is, Ashley, that we
know this is rather odd.

ASHLEY

Odd. Unusual. Peculiar. Crazy?

PAT

OK, OK. We give you all of those. But, we're thinking of the PR value here. With this kid, as Hamlet, we might get national exposure. Maybe David....

ASHLEY

LETTERMAN? Let's do it!

SANDY

I see we've dealt with any artistic objections. Now, you all know that we tour the state, grades K thru six....

LILY

(Enters; runs to SANDY)

Hi, Mommy! We got out early today. I drew a picture of a house for you.

(Gives drawing to SANDY)

TROY

Urrrrrkkk.

(Runs and hides from LILY behind MITT)

PAT

(Goes to TROY)

What is it? What's wrong, son?

TROY

(Mumbles)

PAT

What is it? You want to whisper something to me?

(He leans over; TROY whispers in his ear)

Oh, great; this is just great.

SANDY

What? What is it? What did the kid say?

PAT

He's shy around children his own age.

MITT

And we're going to tour K thru six?

PAT

Doesn't look like it, does it?

ASHLEY

NO! He can't do this to me!

(Moves toward TROY)

You can't do this to me, you little geek! I want to be on Letterman. I want to be on Leno! You...

(TROY flees)

you...you little ham!

BLACKOUT