

HAM-LETTE, TOO
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HAM-LETTE, TOO

SYNOPSIS

Students in a high-school's drama department audition for roles in HAMLET. Jocks, drama-queens, cheerleaders---all fail. Then, a young boy amazes the director until he, too, flunks a crucial test.

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DIRECTOR'S NOTE

In almost every class, there is a small, extroverted boy. He wants attention; he demands attention. With this play, you can channel his energy for the enjoyment of many.

However, this is first and foremost a "director's play." By that, I mean it is a play which gives the director much more than the usual latitude for expression. There are six relatively minor characters who come to an audition for HAMLET. Each of them reads for a part. While the play clearly delineates each character, it left to the director to choose the lines from HAMLET which each actor will read. And, within the limitations imposed by the playwright on each character, the director is encouraged to draw that character in bold strokes.

That being said, the playwright submits that the following excerpts will work nicely. For the two boys, use Hamlet and Horatio in Act I, Sc. 2. The director can read the few lines which Marcellus has. The two girls can read the clown scene at the beginning of Act V, Sc.1. And the boy-girl combination can read Hamlet and Ophelia Act III, Sc.1.

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Cast of Characters

SANDY.....producer; mature girl or boy
PAT.....director; mature girl or boy
MIKE.....student; athletic boy
ROON.....student; athletic boy
SHANA.....student; girl cheerleader
BENTLY.....student; rich girl
ASHLEY.....mature girl
MITT.....assistant director; mature girl or boy
ALLIE.....student; introverted boy
TESS.....student; girl drama queen
TROY.....young looking boy
LILY.....Ashley's sister; young looking girl

NB: The part of TROY is written for a small, extroverted boy.
LILY should be within one or two years of TROY.

Scene

Somewhere in a school building. The senior class is holding auditions for its upcoming production of Hamlet with an all student cast.

Time

The present.

HAM-LETTE, TOO

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

AT RISE: Discover SANDY and PAT. They are nervous but full of optimism.

SANDY

All right; where do we stand?

PAT

Well, yesterday, we cast all the minor roles. But

(He looks at his notes)

we still need Hamlet, Gertrude, Ophelia and Horatio. Let's hope we get some talent this time.

SANDY

OK; you ready? Ready to kick some Elizabethan butt?

PAT

Ready as I'll ever be.

(Calls off stage)

OK, Mitt. Send in the first couple of guys.

(ROON and MIKE enter)

Hi, guys. Glad you could come read for us.

MIKE

I didn't come to do any readin'. I'm here to try out for this play.

ROON

Yeah, me, too.

SANDY

Hey, we're just glad you're here. And "reading" is what we call this process. We ask you to read from the script.

MIKE

Oh. Well, you shoulda said so. I'm not very good at readin'.

ROON

Yeah, me, too.

PAT
Right. Now, here are some sides...

MIKE
Sides? Sides of what? Don't look like sides of anything I ever saw. Hey, Roon, do these look like sidin' to you?

ROON
No, they sure don't.

SANDY
No, no; not "siding." Just "sides."

PAT
Come on guys; "sides" is what we call parts of the whole script.

MIKE and ROON
Oh-h-h-h.

PAT
Right. Now, Mike...you're Mike, aren't you...will you read the part of Hamlet. And Roon, you can be Horatio.

(They read. It is left entirely to director as to what and how long they read. And in what fashion. Needless to say, they botch the effort. PAT and SANDY sit in stunned silence.)

SANDY
Gee...that was...great. Thanks, guys; we'll be in touch.

MIKE
OK; I'm pretty sure I'll get the part. I just want you to know that I can't practice afternoons 'count of football practice. And evenings I work.

ROON
Yeah, me, too.

PAT
Thanks, guys; thanks for sharing that with us. That'll make it easier for us to decide just whom to cast. So, thanks again.

(MIKE and ROON leave)

SANDY
Oh, God. Please don't let that be a sample of what's left in the barrel. Let's try a couple of girls.

(Calls off stage)

OK, Mitt. We can use an Ophelia and a Gertrude.

(SHANA and BENTLY enter)

Hi, girls. So glad you could come to our read--- uh, audition today. Now, have either of you had any experience acting?

SHANA

Oh, I have; I have.

PAT

That's wonderful. Tell us about it. What roles have you played?

SHANA

I've been a cheer-leader for three whole years.

SANDY and PAT

Oh?

SHANA

Yeah. I know that some people sort of kid us but, let me tell you, it's hard to get out there and pretend to be up and cheerful all the time. I call that acting.

PAT

You know, I never thought of it that way, but, yes, I can see that. Can you see that, Sandy?

SANDY

What? Oh, yes, yes, certainly. Great talent required; vastly under-rated, cheerleading.

PAT

And how about you...Bently, is it? That's a pretty name.

BENTLY

Yeah, well, my daddy had a Rolls Royce and wanted to call me Rolly but Mom put her foot down. So they settled on Bently. Same car, you know. Just a different hood ornament. And then, to top it off, they spelled the name wrong.

SANDY

Fascinating. Now, have you ever acted, Bently?

BENTLY

Sugar, I'm acting every hour of every day. Think I like going to a crappy school like this? Rubbing elbows with the hoi polloi? Not on your life.

PAT

Well, we're certainly glad that you can take time from what is probably a very busy schedule to be with us. But, just out of curiosity, why are you in this school?

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BENTLY
Daddy promised me that, if I could stick it out for one semester with these people that he'd let me go to modeling school in New York. So, I just grit my teeth and do it. Thought this little theatrical venture might help pass the time.

SANDY
Fair enough. Now, here are some sides. I'd like you to read the two clowns.

BENTLY
Clowns! I'm not going to be a damn clown!

SHANA
Me neither!

SANDY
Ladies, please! We're looking for an Ophelia and a Gertrude. But, they have very few lines together, so this will give us some idea of your...range of emotion. So, please, just read the lines.

(This they do. With the results that one could expect from no-talent kids)

SANDY
Thank you; thank you. That was very nice. One of us will be in touch. Thank you.

BENTLY
I bet you don't. I bet you're just saying that. Well, friend, you can kiss my you-know-what.

(BENTLY and SHANA leave)

PAT
Whoa; a lot of hostility in that one.

SANDY
Yeah; too bad we aren't doing Richard III. She'd be great
AS THE LEAD.

ASHLEY

(Enters)

Hey---you going to be much longer?

SANDY
No; just a bit. I'll be right with you.

(ASHLEY leaves)

PAT
Was that Ashley? Haven't seen her since she graduated.

SANDY
I probably shouldn't mention this just yet---but Ashley said she'd help out. As a favor. If we need one.

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PAT

She did? That's good news. She'd be a great Ophelia. And it sure looks like we will need her.

SANDY

We're really not supposed to use college kids. But she only graduated last year. And we really need her.

PAT

Comes in handy---having a college just six blocks away.

(Calls to MITT)

Anybody else out there, Mitt?

MITT

(From off stage)

One boy and one girl.

PAT

OK; send them in.

(TESS and ALLIE enter)

Hi, people. I guess you know that we're casting Hamlet. And all the major roles are open so we're glad to see you. Now, what did you want to read for us?

ALLIE

(Mumbles)

What's that? Speak up. SANDY

I mumble be mumble mumble play. ALLIE

Now, Allie. Allie, is it? Allie, we're going to have to hear you. I mean, the audience will have to hear you. PAT

I KNOW THAT. DO YOU THINK I'M mumble mumble mumble idiot? ALLIE

No, no, of course not. Whatever you said...of course not. OK, we'll just ask you to read for Hamlet. And, Tess, what role did you want to audition for? SANDY

Oh, Ophelia. Ophelia, of course. TESS

(TESS waxes more and more dramatic as she roars on)

It's such a wonderful part! Wonderful! I've always wanted to play it! She's so beautiful.

(TESS then switches gears)

But sad. So sad. To die; and to die so young. So beautiful and so young and then---she dies. Oh, it could break your heart. It breaks my heart.

(She bursts into sobs)

There, there---Tess. She doesn't really die. I mean, she's just a character. In a play. PAT

Don't tell me she doesn't die! She dies! All the world mourns her. I mourn her. TESS

(TESS sobs some more)

Of course *you* mourn her. We all mourn her. And we honor your grief. PAT

TESS

(Brightly)

You do? Well, that's all right, then.

SANDY

It is? I mean, sure---it is. Now, can we hear what you want to read for us?

(ALLIE reads the part of Hamlet. About every fourth or fifth word is intelligible. TESS reads Ophelia, with gigantic mood swings, ending up throwing herself into the "grave." PAT and SANDY sit in stunned silence for a few secondss. They look at each other and then clap loudly)

PAT

Well done; well done!

(Anxious to get these two nut cases out of his life)

I can assure you, I've never heard a reading quite like that in my entire life. Thank you so much. We'll be in touch.

ALLIE

Mumble; mumble.

TESS

Thank you; thank you; thank you. It's been such a joy reading for you. I mean that from the bottom of my heart. You both have been so kind, so gracious, so...

SANDY

Yes, yes; we're really glad you came by.

TESS

Oh, one last thing. Just a tiny, teeny tiny thing.

PAT

Yes?

TESS

If you don't mind---I hope you won't mind---I'd really like the play to be called OPHELIA AND HAMLET. That wouldn't be too much trouble would it? Just a tiny little change.

SANDY

We'll certainly keep it in mind. Thank you again.

(ALLIE and TESS leave)

PAT

Wow.

SANDY

Wow indeed.

(Calls off stage)

Hey, Mitt. Anyone else show up?

MITT

(From off stage)

No; sorry No one else.

SANDY

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

PAT

Well, we might get some more 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. Mike and Roon all over again? No thanks.

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 the seniors cast last year? He barely, just barely learned his lines.

PAT
Yeah; and he was the quarterback. They're supposed to be the smart ones.

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

PAT
Right. And they were just as bad.

SANDY
Well, maybe 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 talked to him, 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

(Enters)

(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 THY 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?

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?

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

PAT

Not as bizarre as a production I heard about. 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 our little school system might get some national PR?

MITT

Hey, have you seen some of the things on those shows? I remember one guy; he'd lost a lot of weight. And he had a flabby belly. There was so much loose skin that it could fold over the handle of a baseball bat. So, he'd hold the bat with the flab. And take a swing. Ugh.

PAT

Ugh, is right. And there's nothing "ugh" about our 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---it sure looks like she's going to be our Ophelia.

SANDY

Good idea.

(Calls off stage)

Ashley. Could you come in here for a sec?

ASHLEY

(Enters)

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 ASHLEY)

Ashley! When are we going home? I'm tired of waiting in there. When are we going home?

ASHLEY

Lily, honey. Not now. I can't deal with a baby sister right this second.

TROY

Arrrrrkgg.

(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---come back here, you little ham!

BLACKOUT