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# Hamlet–lette

Shakespeare  
within A Contemporary Play for Teens  
by  
**Patti Veconi**

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## Hamlet-lette by Patti Veconi

### **CHARACTERS**

8-13 F / 5-11 M / 4 Either

Total roles 20 or as few as 14 with doubling

### **ROLES FOR GIRLS**

RITA – *Strong, smart, a leader, wants to play Hamlet, used to date Jack.*

JULIET – *Loves everything Shakespeare and has exuberant energy. Henry's twin.*

THELMA – *Very shy. A Shakespeare aficionado whose name is an anagram of Hamlet. May or may not have a crush on Henry.*

DIDI – *Stage Manager and all business, but with wit.*

LEILA – *Clever girl who wants the play to have period costumes.*

JILL – *Wants the part of Trudy.*

ALYSSA – *Excited to have a small part, any part. Note that this character refers to how young she looks in Act 1, Scene 2.*

SASHA – *Wants to play Ophelia, but doesn't really care.*

JORDAN – *Smaller role. Can double as Alyssa.*

### **ROLES FOR BOYS**

DANNY – *Has no idea about Shakespeare but wants any part that involves fighting.*

KYLE – *Is only auditioning for the play because his friends are. Basketball's his thing.*

JACK – *The obvious choice to play Hamlet. Used to date Rita.*

MARCO – *Likes to wind others up, then stand back for the fireworks.*

HENRY – *Clueless when it comes to girls, knowledgeable about Shakespeare, Juliet's twin.*

CHRIS – *Minor role. Can double as Kyle.*

PETER – *Minor role. Can double as Marco.*

### **ROLES FOR EITHER**

SAM – *Minor role. Can double as Leila.*

BEN – *Minor role. Can double as DANNY in Act 2, Scene 3 and as SASHA in all other scenes.*

TEACHER – *Non-speaking role. May be played by an adult. Teacher represents the director of the play, Ms. (or Mr.) Richworth. This part can also be completely cut from the script.*

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER – *Can double as TEACHER if that role is included. Also makes a fun cameo for a teacher or parent.*

**HAMLET-LETTE ROLES** in Scene 12 are played by the following characters:

Hamlet (JACK)  
Hamlette (RITA)  
Ghost (KYLE)  
Horatio (MARCO or PETER)  
Polonius (THELMA)  
Laertes (JULIET)  
Claudius (HENRY)  
Ophelia (ALYSSA or JORDAN )  
Gertrude (JILL or LEILA)  
Marcellus (SASHA or BEN)  
Bernardo, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (ANY available actors)

**SYNOPSIS**

Just as the cast for this year's play at River Valley High School is announced, a calamity occurs: the lighting rig in the school's theatre collapses, injuring the director and throwing the school's show and entire theatre program into jeopardy. It takes a capable and ambitious cast of high school actors to decide to put the show on themselves. (If only they could manage their offstage drama with as much skill!) With a strong message of empowerment for girls, this play includes coming of age challenges in the spirit of teamwork with both sincerity and levity, while paying homage to Shakespeare's great play.

**RUN-TIME**

Approximately 90 minutes

**STYLE**

Drama that includes a comedy play within a play.

**SETTING**

All scenes take place at a high school. Four scenes take place outside the door to the school theatre, while the rest of the scenes are more flexible as simply implied school spaces. Act 1, Scene 2 as well as Act 2, Scenes 4, 5 and 7 may be played in front of curtain. For greatest effect, Act 2, Scene 6 should be played in the aisles, making use of the full theater.

**COSTUMES & PROPS LIST AT END OF SCRIPT**

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by Patti Veconi

**ACT I**

**SCENE 1: ANNOUNCING THE SCHOOL PLAY**

**SETTING:** *School hallway outside the door to the theatre. Taped to the door is a sign that reads: School play announcement this Friday at 3:00.*

**AT RISE:** *TEACHER enters carrying a piece of paper and stops in front of the door, checks the time on her watch, then tapes the paper up beneath the school play announcement and exits. The paper reads, Hamlet, by William Shakespeare. A moment later, a school bell is heard, followed by the arrival of several students who run to read the announcement, facing upstage.*

*NOTE: For productions that do not include the role of TEACHER, the sign on the door reads: Announcing this year’s winter play: Hamlet by William Shakespeare and the play begins at the sound of the school bell.*

What? **RITA:**

*(Turning together to face the audience.)*  
Hamlet? **ALL:**

Is Richworth serious? **JILL:**

Shakespeare! **HENRY:**

SAM:  
I thought we were doing a musical.

SASHA:  
Doesn't Hamlet kill himself over a girl?

JULIET:  
That's Romeo and Juliet.

DANNY:  
Do we have to speak in an accent?

ALYSSA:  
I just wanted a part in the chorus.

RITA:  
Didi, did you know about this?

DIDI:  
I'm just finding out, too.

JACK:  
There's a sword fight in Hamlet, right?

KYLE:  
Yeah – and jousting!

MARCO:  
How do you do that without horses?

DANNY:  
I'll be the jester! I know how to juggle.

JILL:  
So it's like Monty Python?

HENRY:  
It's a *tragedy*.

LEILA:  
But the costumes will be awesome.

RITA:  
Still, is Richworth for real?

ALL:  
Hamlet?!

*ALL exit while still talking – some discussion of signing up for auditions, See you Monday, etc. After a moment, THELMA enters and pauses to read the sign. She turns toward the audience and smiles before exiting.*

*END OF SCENE.*

## **SCENE 2: GIRLS PARTS AND BOY PARTS**

**SETTING:** *School lounge or bare stage. May be played front of curtain.*

**AT RISE:** *LEILA is pacing, reading over Ophelia's monologue. She mumbles it to herself before starting over from the top as RITA enters and overhears her.*

**LEILA:**

*(Clearing her throat and speaking loudly and with exaggeration)*  
Oh, my lord, my lord, I have been so affrighted! My lord, as I was sewing in my closet, Lord Hamlet, with...with...*(Checking her script for a prompt.)*

**RITA:**

Are you serious?

**LEILA:**

*(Letting out a short scream, startled.)*  
Whaa? Oh, Rita, you startled me.

**RITA:**

Ophelia?

**LEILA:**

Duh. It's the only good girl part in the whole play.

**RITA:**

She's stupid.

LEILA:

You have a power problem. Not every leading girl part has to be a superhero.

RITA:

Do you hear yourself? Look at that monologue again; she calls Hamlet Lord *four times* in the first two sentences alone. Any girl auditioning for Ophelia suffers from subordination syndrome.

LEILA:

What? You made that up. That's not even a thing – and fyi, the first three times she says Lord it's to her father.

RITA:

Oh...well same thing, giving men all the status.

LEILA:

What are you saying? That nobody should even audition for Ophelia because the part doesn't pass some feminist test? The play is 400 years old!

RITA:

No, *some* girl has to be Ophelia, just not one of us.

LEILA:

You want to be Hamlet's mother? Gertrude? How fun is that?

RITA:

Yeah, no, I don't want to be Gertrude either. Guess again.

LEILA:

That's it. Those are the only girl parts. Or actually, maybe one of the traveling actors is a girl – I can't remember.

RITA:

Now you're just being thick.

LEILA:

Hey!

RITA:

There are way more than two girls in the school who want to do this play. Of course some of us will get boy parts.

LEILA:

Ick.

RITA:

Hamlet! I want the part of Hamlet.

LEILA:

Oooh, wow, when you put it that way; if you're Hamlet, I am much less interested in Ophelia.

RITA:

Good. Pretend to be Horatio instead and I'll say Hamlet's monologue to you.

LEILA:

I can't identify with a boy part.

RITA:

Come on.

LEILA:

*Horatio?*

RITA:

The name's very girly: it has she in it.

LEILA:

I just don't know if I can identify with him.

RITA:

OK then, we can do Hamlet's monologue with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and you can be both of them. They're Jewish. Identify with that.

LEILA:

I'm only half Jewish.

RITA:

Come on, Leila. Only one girl is going to get the part of Ophelia and all the rest of us will be cast in boy parts we didn't even bother to look at or think about because we were so busy competing to be the ingénue.

LEILA:

Ahn-ja-what?

RITA:

Ingénue? it's French for leading lady.

LEILA:

Oh really? Well this play's set in *Denmark*.

RITA:

Are you listening to me? If you *are* going to be cast in one of the male parts – which are all superior to both Ophelia and Gertrude, by the way – then at least go in there ready and *asking* for one of those parts.

LEILA:

*(Thinking about this.)*

But I don't want a boy part. I want to wear a beautiful long jacquard dress from the Renaissance with gold cording and a velvet tiara headband with beads.

RITA:

I don't think Hamlet takes place during the Renaissance.

LEILA:

You know the kind of dress I'm talking about. They're really pretty and there are usually two different fabrics that complement each other: like a panel of one kind going down the front and again on the sleeves, which can be really puffy – then another one that –

RITA:

Forget the costumes for now. You won't be wearing anything unless you get cast, and you need to have a back-up part to ask for in case you don't get Ophelia.

LEILA:

So what's your back up part in case you don't get Hamlet?

RITA:

I have several, starting with Claudius.

LEILA:

The king? How would that work?

RITA:

I know, I know, it's unlikely our director is going to go for a Hamlet with two moms – so that takes me to Horatio, a part I really like, but everyone knows Jack will probably get cast as Hamlet and it would be pretty awkward to play his best friend. Come to think of it, if I got cast as Hamlet, he'd probably be Horatio, so it would be awkward either way.

LEILA:

Everything with you and Jack is awkward now.

RITA:

Maybe we should look at the two gravediggers.

LEILA:

Gravediggers? Who are they? Have you actually read the play?

RITA:

Of course. You haven't?

*ALYSSA enters, also carrying  
a copy of the audition packet.*

ALYSSA:

I knew I'd find somebody else here working on their audition. Have you been looking at the Ophelia monologue? It's *hard*.

RITA:

It's Shakespeare.

ALYSSA:

Exactly, and I'm worried about the part where she gets mad.

LEILA:

Who?

ALYSSA:

Ophelia! Sasha told me that Ophelia has to get so mad she goes off the deep end.

LEILA:

The deep end?

ALYSSA:

Yeah, I guess she goes swimming.

RITA:

What? No. Not gets mad, *goes* mad. You know, like cuckoo. Nuts.

*ALYSSA looks at her without understanding.*

RITA:

Wacko? Crazy? (*Spelling it out.*) She loses her mind. And she doesn't go off the deep end swimming; she falls out of a tree into a brook and drowns.

ALYSSA:

You're kidding? That's so depressing. Forget it, Sasha can have the part. But don't tell her Ophelia is a wacko, she's really excited about it.

LEILA:

What do you think of the other girl part? Gertrude?

ALYSSA:

The *mother*? I'm too young.

LEILA:

We're all too young.

ALYSSA:

But look at me: My parents literally still pay the child's price for me everywhere we go.

*SASHA enters with JILL.*

JILL:

Hey you guys.

SASHA:

Are you all auditioning?

JILL:

I'm trying out for the part of Trudy and Sasha wants to be Ophelia. But we're not like, you know, claiming the parts or anything. Just which parts do you want?

RITA:

You can have them both; I'm after something bigger.

JILL:

Bigger?

LEILA:

I *was* interested in Ophelia, but not so much now – and she dies, anyway.

SASHA:

She dies?

ALYSSA:

I know. It does not say that in the character description.

SASHA:

Why does she die? Is it because she gets really mad?

RITA:

She doesn't *get* mad. She *goes* mad.

SASHA:

What's the difference?

JILL:

Don't feel bad. Trudy dies too.

LEILA:

Trudy?

JILL:

Gertrude – but can we all agree to just call her Trudy?

SASHA:

So the only two girls in the whole play both die?

JILL:

Yes, but Trudy dies dramatically and onstage. Ophelia is just found dead.

SASHA:

This part sounds worse all the time.

LEILA:

Right? That's why I'm going for a boy part now...maybe Rosencrantz.

RITA:

He dies, too – offstage.

LEILA:

Seriously? Who else is there?

JILL:

*(Pulling out the character list and reading)*

Um, OK, there's the ghost, King Hamlet, who I guess is already dead...um, Claudius?

RITA:

Dies dramatically, onstage.

JILL:

Polonius?

RITA:

Dies hiding behind a curtain – so kind of onstage.

JILL:

Laertes?

RITA:

Dies in a sword fight, onstage.

JILL:

Um...Guildenstern?

RITA:

Dies with Rosencrantz. Offstage.

JILL:

This play is a bloodbath!

LEILA:

And even fake blood is a costume nightmare.

RITA:

Some of them live.

SASHA:

Still, it's gruesome.

ALYSSA:

Does everybody else auditioning know what a dark play this is?

LEILA:

Doubt it.

RITA:

It's a Shakespearean tragedy. What did you expect?

JILL:

But he wrote comedies, too, right?

RITA:

Yes, but this one's a tragedy.

JILL:

But does it have to be?

LEILA:

I'm with you, Jill. Let's do a comedy version.

SASHA:

Yes! Everyone lives.

ALYSSA:

Happily ever after!

RITA:

You can't change the play.

LEILA:

Funny – coming from the girl who wants a boy's part.

JILL:

Which part, Rita?

LEILA:

Rita wants to be Hamlet.

RITA:

Actually...no. (*Considering*) Instead, I want to be Ham-lette.

SASHA:

That's what Leila said.

JILL:

She said *Ham-let*, but Rita said *Ham-lette*.

RITA:

With an E T T E ending.

JILL:

Like a girl's name?

LEILA:

See? You want to wear a dress! I told you the costumes are everything.

ALYSSA:

How is that a girl's name?

JILL:

It's like – you know – girl names like Colette or Annette or... what's another one?

*They are all quietly thinking  
for a moment.*

RITA:

Bernadette!

JILL:

Yes.

ALYSSA:

Minuet?

JILL:

That's a dance.

SASHA:

Gillette!

RITA:

That's a razor.

LEILA:

So let me understand: all the girls playing boys would be girls playing girls or girls playing boys playing girls?

JILL:

*(Laughing)*

This sounds a lot more like a comedy than a tragedy.

RITA:

I don't know. Yes? Both? Who cares? Shakespeare is done all the time with women in men's roles.

LEILA:

Really?

SASHA:

How do you know?

RITA:

I'm just absolutely sure of it.

ALYSSA:

Well I agree that it would be pretty crummy if only two girls in the whole school got cast in the play.

LEILA:

Yeah, my mom's on the PTA and she would definitely be mad.

SASHA:

I'm OK with girls getting some of the boys' parts. As long as the only girl parts don't go to the boys.

RITA:

The lady doth protest too much, methinks.

SASHA:

What?

JILL:

Is that from Hamlet?

LEILA:

Yeah, Rita here's actually read the play.

RITA:

The play's the thing.

SASHA:

What?

ALYSSA:

Speak clearly.

RITA:

I pray you, trippingly on the tongue?

JILL:

Smack her, Leila.

LEILA:

Nobody understands you.

RITA:

The only thing to understand is that we should all be prepared for any role.

ALYSSA:

OK – but I’m hungry, can we go get some pizza or something?

JILL:

Good idea. We’ll eat something while Rita explains the boy parts to us.

RITA:

Man delights not me – no, nor woman neither, though by your smiling -

JILL:

In English!

RITA:

Um, Shakespeare is like the epitome of English.

ALYSSA:

Pizza!

*ALL exit, laughing.*

*END OF SCENE.*

### **SCENE 3: ON WHOSE SHOULDERS WE STAND**

SETTING:

*Backstage of the theatre. A curtain may hang across the US wall to indicate this. Various set pieces may be strewn about: a trunk, benches, coat rack, etc.*

AT RISE:                    *JACK and HENRY are pretending to sword fight with yardsticks. DANNY, KYLE and CHRIS are crowded around MARCO who has a laptop open, watching a video.*

DANNY:

*(To Henry and Jack)*

Wait a minute, guys; you need to see this one Marco just found.

MARCO:

Right? I told you, the original version with Laurence Olivier is the most authentic. The end – when he jumps from the top of the staircase onto the king – is epic.

JACK:

*(Putting down his yardstick.)*

What do you mean, original? It's not like Hamlet hadn't been done for centuries before Olivier's movie in 1948.

MARCO:

You saw this one already?

JACK:

Of course, it's a classic, but hardly original.

KYLE:

I like the version Kenneth Branagh did more. It's way more – like – *big*. There's more for the rest of us who aren't Hamlet or Laertes to be doing.

MARCO:

No way, Branagh is literally swinging from a chandelier in a huge ballroom. Have you seen the size of our stage?

DANNY:

Yeah, and besides, the rest of us are going to be standing back no matter what.

CHRIS:

Ok then, the one with Ethan Hawke where they're fencing.

HENRY:

That's what I've been saying all along! I actually do fence, you know. I can get us the epees and gear and everything and –

JACK:

No, no, no. No way we're doing it like that awful *emo* version. The whole plot made no sense. Besides, I told you, epees weren't even invented in Shakespeare's time. We're using rapiers and we're sticking with Zeffirelli – by far the best one to go for.

DANNY:  
You're using yardsticks.

CHRIS:  
And the director is Richworth.

DANNY:  
Just, you know, keeping it real.

MARCO:  
Still, very intimidating.

KYLE:  
Right, I'm absolutely trembling.

JACK:  
A little help here? We want to show Richworth we can do this. Otherwise, she'll cut the whole sword-fighting scene completely and have it narrated.

HENRY:  
Ok, so if we're doing it like Mel Gibson –

JACK:  
Zeffirelli.

HENRY:  
Whatever – if we're copying them, then how come we each only get one blade?

KYLE:  
He's right, the best part of the Zeffirelli version is that they get two blades each. It looks really cool.

DANNY:  
One of them's little, though.

HENRY:  
It's a dagger in the left hand and a rapier in the right.

JACK:  
*(Taking his sword back.)*  
We're each only getting one blade because we have no idea what we're doing.

HENRY:  
Yes, I do!

JACK:

My point is that we should stick with just trying to show Richworth that we can swordfight, ok?

*They spar a bit more with the yardsticks as Didi enters, carrying a clipboard and startled by the sparring.*

DIDI:

Did you guys know there's a sign-up sheet on the backstage door if you want to use the theatre for rehearsing? Otherwise, you could get bumped out.

HENRY:

Oh, OK. Would you go put our names up so we can be here now?

DIDI:

I'm the stage manager Henry, not your personal secretary. And anyway, I'm only telling you cuz there's someone else who *did* sign up coming to use the space like –right now.

JACK:

Hey Didi, what are the chances Richworth will include the sword fight in the play?

DIDI:

I have no idea what she's planning for stage combat. I do know she's making a bunch of cuts in the script and moving a few parts around and changing some of the boys to girls.

KYLE:

What?

DANNY:

Changing boys to girls? What does that mean?

CHRIS:

You mean girls dressing like boys or boy parts being rewritten as girl parts?

JACK:

You can't rewrite Shakespeare – that's like rewriting the Bible.

MARCO:

Yeah, it's like sacred.

DIDI:

Maybe Richworth is an atheist.

DANNY:

Seriously, Didi, which parts are going to the girls?

DIDI:

Far as I know, everything is up for grabs and open to interpretation. Just pick your monologue and give your best audition.

HENRY:

We're preparing an entire scene for our audition.

DIDI:

She's just looking for a monologue. Didn't you get the audition packet?

*The boys all look at each other, somewhat abashed.*

DIDI:

Really? You're preparing an audition without even knowing what the director is asking for?

HENRY:

Do you have it? This audition packet?

DIDI:

Again Henry, just to be clear, I'm not your personal secretary.

HENRY:

Oh, right.

*JACK smacks him.*

HENRY, *Continued:*

What?

JACK:

Apologize to Didi for being presumptuous. The stage manager is the most important person in the entire show.

KYLE:

Yeah Henry, where are your manners?

HENRY:

OK, I'm sorry, Didi, whatever. Can you tell us where we can go get this audition packet?  
*(Beat)* Please?

DIDI:

I'm just messing with you. I have them right here. *(Begins handing them out to boys)*

*THELMA enters.*

THELMA:

Oh, um...I thought the theatre was going to be empty.

MARCO:

*(Looking at the packet, incredulous.)*

We have to learn all these?

CHRIS:

I think it's just one.

THELMA:

I reserved...I mean I put my name...I thought it was just going to be...um...

HENRY:

Thelma? *You're* auditioning?

*JACK smacks HENRY.*

HENRY:

Why did you smack me that time?

JACK:

*(Aside)*

You really have no idea when it comes to talking to girls.

DIDI:

*(To Thelma)*

You did. They're just leaving. Clear out you guys – and study up – your monologues have to be memorized.

*The BOYS continue to grumble as they EXIT. JACK and HENRY linger together a moment.*

HENRY:

*(Aside to JACK)*

So you think I sounded rude? Do you think she's mad at me now?

JACK:

Who? Didi? Probably.

HENRY:

Really? But no – I mean Thelma.

JACK:

Oh. Yeah, I suppose it's possible they're both mad at you.

HENRY:

What do I do?

DIDI:

*(Impatiently to the boys)*

Guys?...

JACK:

We're leaving. *(Aside to HENRY)* Just try not putting your foot in your mouth.

*JACK starts to leave, but pauses as he hears HENRY speaking to the girls.*

HENRY:

Thanks so much for all your help, Didi. Really appreciate it. You're doing a great job as stage manager. Incredibly valuable to the team. So pumped to audition – it's going to be great. Um...and good job auditioning, Thelma. I mean, rehearsing – you haven't auditioned yet – so yeah, happy rehearsing there. You're looking...um...really rehearsey-ish today...um...

JACK:

*(Grabbing HENRY by the arm and dragging him off)*

Unbelievable.

DIDI:

Wow, you poor girl.

THELMA:

Me? What? Why?

DIDI:

*(Doesn't answer, just shakes her head.)*

Nobody else is signed up for this afternoon, so you can stay until the last bell.

*DIDI exits. THELMA pulls out her audition packet and begins to speak out loud, reciting Polonius' speech – unsure at first and then getting a little more confident. JULIET enters and listens, unbeknownst to THELMA.*

JULIET:

*(Interrupting.)*

Polonius!

*THELMA startles/screams as she hears JULIET.*

JULIET, *Continued*:

Oh I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to startle you!

*THELMA is stricken speechless.*

JULIET, *Continued*

Are you OK? It's ok. It's just me – I'm Juliet – like in Romeo and Juliet – too bad we're not doing that play, right? But it doesn't matter; I love all Shakespeare. I'm sorry to interrupt your rehearsal. I know you signed up to use the theatre and everything – I saw your name on the sheet – but I'm very nosy and I peeked in and saw you rehearsing and then I could see that you're good so I stayed to listen and appreciate your work. I just love that you're preparing Polonius' speech! Is that the part you want to audition for? You would make an excellent Polonius. I'm sure Richworth is thinking of making that one of the girl parts. That's what the other girls are thinking – or hoping – anyway that's the rumor: that some of the parts written for men will go to girls instead. But I don't know if you would have to play it as intended, or maybe like you're Laertes and Ophelia's mother instead of their father? On the other hand, why can't Polonius just be a *parent* without all that patriarchal baggage? And anyway, Laertes might end up being a girl part, too – which I would love – except that my brother, Henry, also wants to be Laertes. Henry is named for a famous Shakespeare character too, by the way. But honestly, wouldn't it be better if Laertes *were* a female character instead of male? Then Ophelia could have this seriously fierce older sister figure who gets to challenge Hamlet to a duel. It would be like Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs! And what a head-trip that would be for the audience, right? Do they root for Hamlet, the hero, or the girl? Of course – I don't mean to make assumptions. There are lots of parts that the audition packet doesn't give monologues for. The monologues aren't limited in application to those roles – it's just that you would make such a great Polonius, I can't imagine that you *don't* want that part. (*beat*) Hey, are you ok? You're not saying anything.

*THELMA pauses – somewhat stunned by JULIET.*

THELMA:

Henry is your brother?

JULIET:

Yes. Good actor, but not as good as me. So...which is it? Polonius or another part?

THELMA:

What?

JULIET:

Are you trying out for Polonius or another part?

THELMA:

Oh, um, no. None.

JULIET:

None?

THELMA:

I'm not...no. I'm not really *rehearsing* anything.

JULIET:

What are you talking about? Of course you are. You're great. I know you're really shy – it's OK, don't be embarrassed – you haven't said anything in science all year. But acting is different. You get to be somebody *else*.

*JULIET pauses, waiting for this to sink in for THELMA – as though a light bulb should suddenly go off in her brain. JULIET nods, knowingly to THELMA, who nods back – with less surety – then shakes her head 'no'.*

THELMA:

It's very nice of you to say this, but I was just –

JULIET:

Are you seriously going to stand here and tell me you weren't rehearsing a monologue to audition for Hamlet?

THELMA:

*(Stumbling over words, shocked to be confronted like this)*

Ah...um...

JULIET:

Right. Now stop acting all quiet and humble and get back to the confident, advising parent figure you just read and we'll take Polonius from the top again. Then, you can listen to my Hamlet speech and tell me what you think.

THELMA:

Um...

JULIET:

We're going to rehearse these monologues until we're ready to nail that audition.

THELMA:

Um...ok.

*END OF SCENE.*

## SCENE 4: AUDITIONS

SETTING: *Backstage of the theatre. Set pieces have been moved to one side.*

AT RISE: *ACTORS are milling about doing various vocal exercises and warm-ups, consulting their audition packets, pacing, etc. DIDI is in the center of it all, carrying a clipboard, checking names off on her list, all business.*

DIDI:

Okay everyone, listen up! Be sure you've checked in with me to confirm your audition slot. If your name is called and you're not ready, you will be bumped to the end of the line. Do you have your parent agreement form with you? The mandatory rehearsal and performance dates are non-negotiable and you will not, I repeat, will *not* be cast without a signed parent agreement form, so if you don't have it, bring it tomorrow and give it to me then. Any questions?

DANNY:

What if I have to pee?

DIDI:

I suggest you take care of that now.

DANNY:

But, I mean, I get nervous under pressure and what if I have to go just when –

DIDI:

*(Cutting him off)*

Any other questions?

CHRIS:

Can I use the script? I mean, is it better to have the script with me, just in case, or to ask for a line if I forget?

PETER:

Good question. I'm not feeling too solid with the lines either.

CHRIS:

I'm solid! I'm just...nervous.

DIDI:

Well you still have a few minutes to finish memorizing.

PETER:  
Seriously?

DIDI:  
I don't know, hold it if you need to.

DANNY:  
Like my pee?

SASHA:  
What about costumes?

LEILA:  
*(Looking up at this)*  
Costumes?

DIDI:  
What about costumes?

ALYSSA:  
And make up?

DIDI:  
I think you're getting ahead of yourselves.

LEILA:  
*(To SASHA)*  
If you want to help with costumes, just write that on your audition sheet. I'm already signed up.

SASHA:  
Thanks.

SAM:  
Didi, should I do my song or monologue first?

JACK:  
What song?

KYLE:  
We have to sing too?

DIDI:  
There is no singing for this audition.

SAM:  
But I *can* sing, right? Even if it isn't required?

KYLE:

Why would anybody volunteer to sing?

JILL:

Shut up, Kyle.

DIDI:

You don't have to sing. This isn't a musical.

SAM:

How about if I go last and then if there's time I can do my song?

DIDI:

I don't know – I'll check. Anything else?

BEN:

When are callbacks?

SASHA:

And what if we don't get a callback? Does that mean we're automatically cut?

DIDI:

As it says on your audition packet – callbacks are tomorrow – another reason you *have* to get all your paperwork in to me.

JORDAN:

But like Sasha said, what if we don't *get* a callback?

JULIET:

Callbacks are only for when a director isn't sure which part is best for you. It doesn't mean you don't get cast.

JORDAN:

Really? Is that true, Didi?

DIDI:

No idea – I don't read Richworth's mind.

RITA:

When does the cast list go up?

DIDI:

Friday.

JACK:

Friday?

DIDI:

Anything else? Good. Break a leg everybody.

*LIGHTS fade. At the director's discretion, Scene 4 can end here, or continue with LIGHTS up to hear actors recite monologues in unison, overlapping, fractured or in any format desired.*

*END OF SCENE.*

## **SCENE 5: CONSIDERING THE CAST LIST**

SETTING: *School hallway outside the door to the theatre. Taped to the door is a banner reading: HAMLET Cast Announced Friday*

AT RISE: *A TEACHER enters. He/She carries a piece of paper and stops in front of the bulletin board, checks the time on his/her watch, then tapes up the paper which reads, CAST LIST then exits. A moment later, a school bell is heard, followed by the arrival of MARCO, HENRY, DANNY and KYLE.*

*NOTE: For productions that do not include the role of TEACHER, the sign on the door reads: Congratulations Hamlet Cast, with the cast list below that. The scene begins at the sound of the school bell and the arrival of MARCO, HENRY, DANNY and KYLE.*

MARCO:

What's going on? There's like two names for every part.

HENRY:

*(Pulling the cast list down)*

Why did Richworth spell Hamlet with extra letters?

DANNY:

*(Over HENRY's shoulder)*

Where's my name? *(Finding it)* Osric? Who is that even? How did I get cast in a part that wasn't even on the list?

HENRY:

It was on the list, just, you know, not one of the big parts.

KYLE:

Did I get a big part? I don't want a big part. I'll trade you, Danny.

DANNY:

What part did you get?

HENRY:

It looks like I got Claudius, but –

MARCO:

*(Looking over Henry's shoulder)*

We're all double cast. That's what it is.

KYLE:

What? You mean we get *two* parts? How am I going to learn two parts?

MARCO:

No. I mean all the parts have two actors.

HENRY:

And wait 'til Jack sees who the other Hamlet is.

*ALYSSA, JORDAN and SASHA enter.*

SASHA:

Is it up?

JORDAN:

Where is it?

KYLE:

Henry has it.

ALYSSA:

Hand it over, Henry.

SASHA:

Did I get Ophelia?

DANNY:

It's all a little weird.

JORDAN:

What do you mean, weird?

MARCO:

We're double cast.

SASHA:

So there are *two* Ophelias? Am I at least one of them?

HENRY:

*(Handing the list to ALYSSA)*

Here.

ALYSSA:

*(Reading the cast list)*

Ooh – this *is* weird. Sorry, looks like Jordan and I got Ophelia...but you're Marcellus!

SASHA:

It's fine – a small part is actually better. *(Looking over ALYSSA's shoulder)* Who else is there? Kyle! You're Hamlet?

KYLE:

What? Wait, no! You said Jack got Hamlet. I can't learn all those lines! I specifically said I did not want that part!

MARCO:

Kyle's not Hamlet. Look again. He's *King* Hamlet.

*KYLE looks at him blankly.*

DANNY:

The *ghost*? Don't worry, man. You won't have any lines at all.

KYLE:

Oh thank God.

HENRY:

That's not true.

*DANNY shushes HENRY as  
LEILA, SAM, JULIET, JILL  
and BEN enter.*

LEILA:  
Hey you guys.

SAM:  
Is the cast list up?

JULIET:  
Did I get Laertes?

JILL:  
Did I get Trudy?

MARCO:  
Trudy? Who's Trudy?

ALYSSA:  
She means Gertrude.

SASHA:  
*(Still looking at the list ALYSSA is holding)*  
It's you, Jill!

JILL:  
Oh good!

ALYSSA:  
And Leila, too.

JILL/LEILA:  
What?

MARCO:  
You're double cast.

JILL/LEILA:  
What?

LEILA:  
So who got Claudius and –

*DANNY sees JACK entering,  
followed shortly thereafter by  
RITA. Actors around ALYSSA  
continue to quietly consult and  
discuss the cast list.*

DANNY:

*(Interrupting LEILA)*  
Hey there, Hamlet!

KYLE:

Congratulations, Jack.

JACK:

I got Hamlet!

RITA:

Jack is Hamlet? Figures. Richworth has no imagination.

JACK:

Thank you, Rita. By that I take it you mean I'm obvious for the part?

RITA:

Obvious is right. And I suppose Marco got Horatio and Henry got Claudius and –

HENRY:

Actually, things are not that obvious.

KYLE:

Yeah, you and Rita are couple cast!

RITA/JACK:

What?

MARCO:

He means *double* cast.

HENRY:

But that's pretty funny.

JACK:

What do you mean?

HENRY:

*(Embarrassed to have to explain)*  
Well, I mean funny cuz you two – you know – really are.

RITA:

*Were!* Not *are!*

JACK:

I meant what do you mean we're double cast? How's that –

ALYSSA:

You're *Ham*-let...and Rita here is *Ham-lette*. E T T E.

RITA:

*(Taking the list from ALYSSA)*

Really?

JULIET:

How does that work?

RITA:

I guess we each do the whole part for separate performances.

JULIET:

But there are an odd number of shows.

JACK:

*(Taking the list from RITA)*

Whose name is first?

RITA:

What difference does that make?

JACK:

Maybe the first person named *gets* the part and the second person is their understudy.

RITA:

You wish! I am not learning the part if I don't get to actually perform it.

*DIDI enters, carrying her clipboard and overhearing the last part of RITA's line.*

DIDI:

Nobody is performing at all if they haven't turned in their parent agreement form, and that means several of you. *(Looking around)* What happened to the cast list?

ALYSSA:

Jack has it.

BEN:

Didi, how come some of the parts have two names and some only have one?

DIDI:

The smaller parts aren't double cast.

SASHA:

So I get to be in all the shows!

RITA:

Is that how it's working? Double cast actors don't do all the shows?

DIDI:

No idea. What I do know is that I still need those forms from...*(Checking her clipboard notes)* Kyle, Sasha, Henry...

HENRY:

I gave you mine!

DIDI:

Well I don't have it.

HENRY:

You're messing with me, right?

DIDI:

Not this time. And...Leila.

LEILA:

It's in my backpack. I'll get it now.

SASHA:

Mine, too.

CHRIS:

I'll go with you.

BEN:

*(To DIDI)*

So rehearsals start Monday?

DANNY:

Even if we have a small part? I have a dentist appointment on Monday.

DIDI:

Cancel it. In the meantime, I have scripts for all of you to sign for in Ms. Richworth's office, so come with me if you want to start learning your part before rehearsals start. And Jack, put that cast list back on the bulletin board.

*ALL exit except for JACK and RITA.*

JACK:

*(Pinning the list up)*

So...do you think we're going to have to share the same costume?

RITA:

Oh, you like wearing dresses?

JACK:

Very funny.

RITA:

It would be funny, but until I find out how this is going to work, I'm not laughing.

JACK:

Actually, a comedy version of Hamlet could be a lot of fun.

RITA:

*(Considering for a moment)*

Weird...the girls said the same thing a few days ago: that Hamlet is too dark with all the deaths and drama.

JACK:

I'm just saying, let's keep an open mind and not *add* to the drama.

RITA:

You mean, trust your director and all that stuff they teach you in theatre class?

JACK:

Exactly.

RITA:

*(Pause)*

Ok. I agree to wait and see.

JACK:

And for the record, if you were a boy, you'd be an obvious choice for Hamlet, too.

RITA:

What a back handed compliment!

JACK:

Yeah, scratch that. Now I sound like Henry –.

RITA:

Forget it. Let's go get our scripts.

*JACK and RITA exit. The stage is empty for a moment before THELMA enters, goes over to the cast list and reads her name. She turns to the audience, smiles and mouths "Polonius." LIGHTS OUT.*

*END OF SCENE.*

## **SCENE 6: CAUTION TAPE**

**SETTING:** *School hallway outside the door to the theatre. CAUTION tape now covers the door.*

**AT RISE:** *A TEACHER enters carrying a piece of paper and stops in front of the door, takes down all previous paperwork and tapes up another paper which reads: PLAY CANCELLED. TEACHER exits as a bell rings. JILL, ALYSSA, BEN and SASHA enter.*

*NOTE: For productions that do not include the role of TEACHER, the PLAY CANCELLED sign is already on the door with the caution tape at LIGHTS. The scene begins at the sound of the school bell and the arrival of JILL, ALYSSA, BEN and SASHA.*

Caution tape? **JILL:**

What's going on? **SASHA:**

What happened? **ALYSSA:**

It looks like something happened. **JILL:**

BEN:

Let's go in and look.

JILL:

It's *caution* tape. As in stay back? Be careful? Do not enter?

ALYSSA:

But why? What happened?

SASHA:

What are they going to do if we sneak in?

*RITA and JACK enter LEFT.*

JILL:

What good would that even do? The answer to why the play is cancelled has to come from a person, and there's nobody in there.

RITA:

The play is cancelled?

JACK:

What are you talking about?

ALYSSA:

Let's go find Ms. Richworth and ask her.

RITA:

She's not in. We were just at her office.

JACK:

We came in early to talk to her about the part and there was a note on her door that she's going to be out all week.

BEN:

Something is definitely going on.

*HENRY enters RIGHT.*

HENRY:

What's going on?

ALYSSA:

How can they just put up a sign with no explanation?

*RITA starts to exit LEFT.*

JILL:

Well somebody has an explanation.

SASHA:

Rita? Where are you going?

RITA:

To find somebody who has an explanation.

*DIDI enters, RIGHT, followed by SAM and JULIET, who are badgering her for answers.*

JACK:

*(Seeing DIDI)*

Didi!

RITA:

*(Over her shoulder)*

Exactly.

*DIDI's arrival causes a big stir as everyone begins to talk at once, pressing her for answers. RITA turns, sees her, and joins in. DIDI holds a cellphone as she speaks.*

DIDI:

*(Trying to speak over everyone)*

Okay – yes – I know...I can...you have to listen!...Okay, I'll wait...really...If you want to hear me, you'll have to stop talking! Fine...whatever...

*DIDI becomes increasingly irritated until HENRY finally stands up and yells over everyone.*

HENRY:

Everyone, *STOP TALKING!*

*PETER, DANNY & KYLE enter RIGHT.*

DIDI:

Thank you, Henry.

PETER:  
What's going on?

DANNY:  
Is that caution tape?

HENRY:  
Listen!

DIDI:  
*(Collecting herself)*  
Ms. Richworth, our director, sent me an email this morning about what happened. Over the weekend, she was in the theatre working when some of the lighting rig fell, and her leg was broken.

*Pause. Students react.*

JULIET:  
Her leg is broken?

KYLE:  
So, why is she out all week?

RITA:  
*Her leg is broken!*

DANNY:  
It's pretty funny when you think about it.

SAM:  
How is this funny?

DANNY:  
Cuz they always say Break a leg in theatre – you know?

HENRY:  
Yeah, it *would* be funny.

JACK:  
Except it's not.

JILL:  
Cuz now we don't have a director and therefore, we don't have a show!

SASHA:  
And I've already memorized my part. Do you have any idea how hard that was?

ALYSSA:  
You had, like, two lines!

SASHA:  
In *Shakespearean!*

BEN:  
That's not a language.

SASHA:  
Are you sure?

JULIET:  
It's so sad the way you just said, *had* two lines.

KYLE:  
Well I'm relieved.

SAM:  
Relieved?

KYLE:  
I only signed up cuz the guys did. Now we can get back to hoops after school.

JACK:  
Didi, what's going on with the theatre? The caution tape and everything?

DIDI:  
Well, that's the bad news.

RITA:  
I'm sorry? Losing our director wasn't the bad news?

DIDI:  
When the rig fell down on Saturday, the fire department came and everything. They've condemned the theatre.

PETER:  
Damned the theatre?

BEN:  
Like, put a curse on it?

JORDAN:  
How do you even do that?

JACK:

*Con-demned!* It means...it means you can't use it.

SASHA:

Ever again?

RITA:

She told you all this in an email?

DIDI:

Not all of it. Obviously I went straight to Dean Riley's office this morning to get the whole story.

HENRY:

Which is?

DIDI:

So because the lighting rig fell down, they had to *condemn* the whole theatre until the building inspector comes and approves it to reopen.

DANNY:

And when can he get here?

JILL:

Are you listening? It can't be that easy.

DIDI:

It's not. The theatre is really old and it will probably take a complete renovation to bring it back up to code.

JACK:

So...what you're saying...exactly...is?...

DIDI:

According to Dean Riley, the principal's exact words were, There is no more theatre at River Valley High School.

*General reactions all around.*

ALYSSA:

Ok, but. Wait a minute. We just got a whole new sports facility. Can't we just get a new theatre, too?

JULIET:

Not in time to do Hamlet.

ALYSSA:

But we'll need a theatre for next year's shows.

DIDI:

I asked about when it might be fixed and he told me there's no money for more improvement projects in the near future and he would need to remain (*Making air quotes*) "non-committal."

RITA:

*(Under her breath to JILL)*

Sounds like Jack.

KYLE:

So the school is broke?

DIDI:

I guess so.

DANNY:

Did he really say there is no more theatre at River Valley High School?

DIDI:

His exact words.

*ALL react and slowly begin to wander away. RITA and JACK linger, going downstage and facing out, dejected. DIDI is last to leave, but stops to listen to them.*

JACK:

To be...

RITA:

Or not to be?

JACK:

That is the question.

RITA:

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of –

BOTH:

outrageous fortune!

JACK:

Or?... to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing...

RITA:

End them.

JACK:

What if?

RITA:

*(Turning to him)*  
That's not the next line.

JACK:

*(Pausing)*  
No, wait. Listen.

*He looks around and sees that  
DIDI is still there, too.*

JACK, *Continued:*

Didi, what if we put on Hamlet anyway?

DIDI:

What do you mean?

RITA:

Do it ourselves?

JACK:

Yes!

RITA:

How?

JACK:

We just – do it. Show up every day and rehearse like we were planning to.

DIDI:

We could run it like a club.

RITA:

A drama club.

JACK:

Exactly.

And I can direct. RITA:

I think I should direct. JACK:

(*Slowly with determination*)  
Noooo...I should – RITA:

(*Interrupting*)  
Tell you what, I'll continue as stage manager. DIDI:

Yes. JACK:

Great. RITA:

But only if Henry and Juliet direct! DIDI:

*Pause. RITA and JACK both acquiesce to this, slightly chagrinned.*

We'll have to make some cuts. RITA:

Definitely. But I think we can do this. JACK:

Leila's already started working on costumes. RITA:

Jordan and Ben will do publicity and programs. JACK:

Chris and Marco can be in charge of sets and props. RITA:

And most importantly, the cast is set and everyone knows what their part is. JACK:

Except us.

RITA:

JACK:  
What do you mean? We're Hamlet and Ham-lette.

RITA:  
But we never learned how this double casting was supposed to work.

JACK:  
So, we can decide that.

RITA:  
Ok...let's just be Hamlet *together*.

JACK:  
How, exactly?

RITA:  
We split the part evenly.

JACK:  
That would make Hamlet even *more* conflicted and bipolar and suicidal and (*beat*) I like it!

RITA:  
It is a big part and –

DIDI:  
Aren't you forgetting something?

*They look at DIDI,  
expectantly.*

DIDI:  
Something really, really important? (*Beat*) We don't have a theatre.

RITA:  
We can do it anywhere. It doesn't have to be in a theatre.

JACK:  
Yeah, the lunchroom or the gym or...wherever. We can rehearse here, in the lobby.

DIDI:  
This is a hallway.

RITA:

But it's big enough – and you'll figure something out; you're the stage manager.

DIDI:

What if I can't figure something out?

RITA:

You have weeks and weeks of time. Just embrace the spirit of adventure.

JACK:

Yeah, what's a condemned theatre and a director with a broken leg? The show must go on. We trust you to figure it out.

*Pause. They both look at DIDI.*

DIDI:

Fine, I'll do it.

RITA:

To die...

JACK:

To sleep...

DIDI:

*(All business)*

No more! Save it. Rehearsals begin tomorrow. Just cross your fingers I can get permission to run a club.

*DIDI exits purposefully. JACK and RITA follow her, continuing the monologue as they go.*

JACK:

Sleep, no more, and then what?

RITA:

And by a sleep, to say –

JACK:

Right, right, we end the heartache...good thing we're splitting the part.

*END OF SCENE.*

**INTERMISSION**

**ACT II**  
**SCENE 1: REHEARSAL CHALLENGES**

SETTING: *An empty classroom or otherwise unused corner of the school. USL a pile of chairs have been stacked. USC is a costume rack with various pieces hanging and draped over it. DSR a piece of fabric hangs between a coat rack and the wall for use as a curtain.*

AT RISE: *RITA, JACK and JILL, are DSR conferring over their scripts. JULIET and DIDI are conferring behind the costume rack. HENRY and THELMA are DSL looking over lines.*

JACK:  
Ok, so I'm going to enter as soon as Polonius hides, and –

RITA:  
And I'll come in right before the monologue.

JILL:  
This isn't really making sense to me.

RITA:  
It's Shakespeare. You're supposed to just let it wash over you.

JILL:  
Oh, it's washing over me all right.

RITA:  
Where are the directors?

JACK:  
*(Looking around)*  
Juliet is with costumes and Henry is over there.

RITA:  
*(Seeing them)*  
Hey Thelma, can you share your husband there and come join us? We're about to kill Polonius.

THELMA:

*(Embarrassed by the innuendo)*

I...oh...he's not...

*HENRY completely misses that this is an awkward moment for THELMA and walks over to join the others as JULIET hurries over to THELMA.*

HENRY:

We have Act Three, Scene Three down now. Are you ready to take it from there?

JACK:

We are, let me show you what we've figured out.

*JACK, RITA, JILL and HENRY confer over blocking as JULIET sits next to THELMA.*

JULIET:

*(In a stage whisper)*

I can tell you're embarrassed by Rita calling Henry your husband, but you really shouldn't be; nobody suspects that you have a crush on him and I'm sure the way you look at him is only being viewed as good acting. You have nothing at all –

*THELMA, stricken, rushes offstage. JULIET follows her.*

JACK:

*(To HENRY)*

See how that will work? Hamlet enters as soon as Polonius hides.

RITA:

But Hamlet has a line right before that, so aren't we already onstage?

JACK:

We just exited.

RITA:

But we say that line from *within*.

JACK:

We do, but it has to mean offstage. We're calling her –

RITA:

*(Understanding)*

And that's how she knows we're coming!

HENRY:

You guys have to stop saying we. It makes Hamlet sound schizophrenic.

JACK & RITA, *Together*

He is.

RITA & JACK, *Together*

She is.

JILL:

Who cares? Let's just see how it works and take it from my line before Polonius hides. I'll warrant you, fear me not. Withdraw, I hear him coming.

HENRY:

Who are you saying that to?

JILL:

Polonius!

JACK:

Doesn't look like it.

RITA:

She was just there with you! Where did Thelma go?

*JULIET returns.*

JULIET:

Polonius is...in the bathroom. I'll cover for her...I mean him.

JACK:

Jill, give me the cue again?

*Note that RITA mouths all of  
HAMLET's lines, when JACK  
is speaking and he does the  
same when she is speaking.*

JILL:

I'll warrant you, fear me not. Withdraw, I hear him coming.

JACK:

*(With a flourish)*  
Now, mother, what's the matter?

JILL:

Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

JACK:

Mother, you have my father much offended.

JILL:

Come, Come, you answer with an idle tongue.

JACK:

Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue.

JILL:

Why, how now, Hamlet?

JACK:

What's the matter now?

JILL:

Have you forgot me?

JACK:

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.

JILL:

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

JACK:

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.

JILL:

What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me? Help, ho!

JULIET:

*(Standing behind the curtain and affecting a low voice)*  
What ho! Help!

JACK:

*(Drawing his sword)*  
How now? A rat? Dead for a ducat, dead!

JULIET:

Oh, I am slain!

JACK:

I didn't even get to do anything!

JULIET:

*(Poking her head over the curtain)*

Well, what are you waiting for?

JACK:

I don't know. I've never slain anyone before.

RITA:

*(Grabbing the sword from him)*

Don't think so much. How now? A rat? Dead for a ducat,

*She thrusts the sword at the curtain just as THELMA returns RIGHT.*

RITA, *Continued:*

DEAD! Aaaah!!

THELMA:

*(Jumping back as she almost walks into the yardstick)*

Ohhh!

HENRY:

That works.

JULIET:

*(Coming out from behind the curtain)*

Thelma's back!

HENRY:

Thelma, come behind the curtain with me and I'll show you how I want you to hide and then die.

RITA:

That sounds cozy.

*JULIET smacks RITA.*

THELMA:

*(Hesitating)*

Ohhh...

*RITA mouths "What?" to JULIET, who gives her a warning look.*

HENRY:

Jack, you're going to turn your back to the audience and stab your sword directly upstage so nobody sees it.

THELMA:

*(Nervous)*

Ohhh...

JULIET:

Maybe Rita should be Hamlet for this part?

RITA:

No, Jack's got this. I'll watch from here and tell you if it looks good.

*RITA sits, DSC.*

HENRY:

Come on, Thelma.

*HENRY puts his arm around THELMA to pull her behind the curtain, which causes JULIET, JILL, JACK and RITA to exchange knowing looks. JILL shrugs and begins.*

JILL:

What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me? Help, ho!

HENRY:

*(From behind the curtain)*

What ho! Help!

JACK:

*(Drawing his sword and looking curiously at the others)*

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

*JACK thrusts his sword behind the curtain. THELMA comes out, faints and falls onstage.*

RITA:

That looks awesome!

HENRY:

*(Coming out from behind the curtain)*

That was great, Thelma, but don't forget to say your line, too.

JULIET:

*(Kneeling down next to her)*

Thelma? Are you OK?

JILL:

Did you really stab her?

JACK:

No!

RITA:

*(Also kneeling next to her)*

I think she fainted!

*DIDI comes forward.*

DIDI:

What? Ok, that's it! No more rehearsal for today. If we start filling out accident reports, they'll shut us down.

HENRY:

No that is *not* enough rehearsal for today. We have a show to do.

JILL:

Yeah, the show must go on, and all of that.

JULIET:

You don't think maybe we should stop to take care of our injured actor?

JACK:

Just to be clear: I didn't stab her, there was no accident, and she isn't injured.

RITA:

She's also not conscious, so we don't really know if she's injured.

HENRY:

Well, wake her up.

JULIET:

She isn't asleep, Henry, she *fainted*.

JILL:

I wish I could do that. I'm going to ask her how she does that; then maybe after I drink the poison in act 5, I can faint, too.

*THELMA begins waking up during this last line.*

RITA:

Thelma? You ok?

THELMA:

Oooh, wow...um...

RITA:

I know, awkward, right?

JULIET:

*(Smacking RITA again)*

Honestly Rita, you're as tactless as Henry!

RITA:

Well it is!

JILL:

Thelma, that was awesome! How did you do that?

THELMA:

Do what?

JILL:

Die on demand! Well, faint on demand.

THELMA:

I don't...what?...no...um...

JACK:

Can you just tell them that I didn't really stab you? I didn't, right?

JULIET:

Leave her alone, you guys! Come on, Thelma, let's go see if the nurse is still here, and get you some water or something.

*As JULIET and THELMA are getting up to leave, CHRIS and MARCO enter carrying benches and boxes of stage furniture. They have bandanas over their faces.*

CHRIS:  
*(From behind his mask)*  
Look what we got!

JULIET:  
Out of my way! Sick and injured here!

HENRY:  
What is that?

JILL:  
Why are you dressed like cowboys?

MARCO:  
Behold. Scenery!

DIDI:  
You got set pieces from the theatre?

MARCO:  
*(Pulling his mask down)*  
We did.

CHRIS:  
*(Pulling his mask down)*  
These are not cowboy masks, we're robbers!

MARCO:  
Well, bad cowboys were sometimes robbers, too.

CHRIS:  
No! Robbers were robbers and cowboys were cowboys.

MARCO:  
Actually, we're probably closer to pirates.

RITA:  
What are you talking about?

DIDI:  
They broke into the theatre and stole set furniture.

MARCO:  
You're welcome.

JACK:  
How did you do that?

CHRIS:

*(Indicating his mask)*  
Incognito.

MARCO:

It's for the sword fight, so Hamlet and Laertes have stuff to jump on and off of.

CHRIS:

Safe *and* dramatic!

MARCO:

This way, you can do that thing Lawrence Olivier did in the original production when he jumps onto the king.

CHRIS:

Right?

DIDI:

Original? Hamlet is 400 years –

*ALYSSA, SASHA and DANNY enter.*

MARCO:

I know, I know. Again, you're welcome.

*MARCO begins to arrange the benches in different ways, stepping on and off of them as the dialogue around him continues.*

CHRIS:

Just say thank you.

ALYSSA:

What happened to Thelma? We just saw her –

SASHA:

*(To CHRIS)*  
Why are you dressed like a cowboy?

RITA:

Jack stabbed her.

HENRY:

They're *pirates*.

JACK:  
I did not!

JILL:  
Where have you guys been?

ALYSSA:  
Is she bleeding?

DANNY:  
There are pirates in the play?

RITA:  
She's not bleeding. She's just traumatized.

HENRY:  
Be nice!

CHRIS:  
We're robbers. Not cowboys *or* pirates.

SASHA:  
What did you do to her, Jack?

JACK:  
I didn't do anything!

JILL:  
Henry's the one who did it.

DANNY:  
So wait, are there robbers or pirates in the play?

HENRY:  
Me?

JILL:  
*(Teasing)*  
What exactly were you doing behind that curtain?

RITA:  
Yeah, Henry? What exactly were you and Thelma doing?

MARCO:  
*(Standing on a bench)*  
Chris! Let's show them!

(Yelling at MARCO)  
To be!

CHRIS:

MARCO:

Or *not* to be! Aaagh!

*MARCO jumps high off of the bench, fake landing on CHRIS, who makes a SOUND EFFECT slam on the floor and loud moan. ALL react to this.*

ALYSSA:

What was that?

JILL:

Pretty awesome.

SASHA:

Are you hurt?

DANNY:

I definitely want to be one of the robber pirates!

*CHRIS and MARCO both seem to be hurt as they slowly get up, moaning. MARCO is examining his wrist and CHRIS is holding onto one of his shoulders.*

MARCO:

You turned too late.

CHRIS:

I think my shoulder's dislocated.

DIDI:

That's it! No more rehearsal today.

HENRY:

But we –

DIDI:

You're all getting careless.

JILL:

We didn't finish blocking my scene!

DIDI:

*(Firmly)*

We're done for the day. Besides, the custodian wants to get in here. I'm going to let him know.

*DIDI exits.*

CHRIS:

I'm getting an ice pack.

MARCO:

Me too.

*JACK picks up his backpack and starts to leave. MARCO and CHRIS exit.*

HENRY:

*(Grumpy and sarcastic)*

OK, great, fine, yeah, I guess we'll just finish the scene tomorrow. It's not like this is difficult – you know – it's just *Shakespeare*.

DANNY:

*(Following them off)*

So how many robber pirates are there? I have a really small part. I could learn another one.

SASHA:

So we can go?

HENRY:

*(Throwing up his hands)*

Whatever.

ALYSSA:

Sweet! See you tomorrow.

*SASHA and ASLYSSA exit.*

JACK:

*(Turning to HENRY)*

You coming, Henry?

HENRY:

Yeah, I just have to stop by the nurse's office and get my sister.

*HENRY and JACK exit.*

RITA:

*(Under her breath)*  
And check on your distressed damsel.

JILL:

*(Giggling)*  
Poor Thelma.

RITA:

You don't think there was really something going on behind the curtain?

JILL:

No way. Henry is clueless.

RITA:

Maybe we should help them.

JILL:

But it's really fun to tease them.

RITA:

True. Let's see how long it takes them to figure out they like each other.

*RITA and JILL exit.*

*END OF SCENE.*

## **SCENE 2: GOSSIPING AND COSTUMING**

SETTING:

*Same. The benches are now DSC and a bin full of fabric is next to them, as is the costume rack with various pieces hanging and draped over it. The piece of fabric DSR that served as a curtain in the last scene is still tacked up, hanging between a coat rack and the wall.*

AT RISE:

*JILL is standing on one of the benches in a pair of character shoes and her street clothes. LEILA is on the floor beside her, pulling things out of the bin of fabric and costumes. JORDAN sits with them.*

JORDAN:

Wait a minute; they were making out behind the curtain? Henry and Thelma? Did you see this too, Leila?

LEILA:

*(Hands in the bin of clothes and fabric)*

I wasn't there. But it doesn't surprise me.

JORDAN:

So they just went behind the curtain in the middle of rehearsal?

JILL:

Not exactly. We were doing this scene where she's supposed to be hiding back there alone.

LEILA:

Then why was Henry with her?

JILL:

Well, that's the question, right? He was supposedly going to *(making air quotes)* show her something – and that's when she fainted.

JORDAN:

So you think his kissing her is what made her pass out?

*JULIET enters.*

JILL:

That's what Rita thinks.

JULIET:

What does Rita think?

LEILA:

That your brother kissed Thelma behind the curtain.

JULIET:

What? *(To JILL.)* You know you're making that up.

JILL:

*(Innocently)*

I'm just repeating what I saw: Henry took Thelma behind the curtain and in a matter of seconds she was a puddle of confusion on the floor.

JULIET:

Don't be mean. You know she just fainted from – whatever it was that made her faint.

JORDAN:

And what is it that usually makes a girl faint?

LEILA:

Who faints anymore? That's totally – something our great grandmothers did.

JORDAN:

Maybe she's the one who tried to kiss him?

JULIET:

There was no kissing!

JILL:

Ok, maybe there wasn't enough time for them to actually be making out –

JULIET:

Ah...*no!*

JILL:

But you can't deny there's something going on between them.

*JULIET is quiet, considering.*

JORDAN:

Oh my God, there is something going on?

JULIET:

Mmm maybe.

JILL:

Am I just going to stand here or is there actually some fitting to this costume fitting?

JULIET:

And you said you have something for me, too. We only have ten minutes left for break.

LEILA:

Just be patient. I know there was a velvet skirt in here somewhere that I wanted to use as the foundation for Gertrude's gown.

JILL:

Trudy!

LEILA:

Trudy's gown, whatever.

JORDAN:

Come on, Juliet. You're friends with Thelma; what does she say?

JULIET:

She's really sweet, but she doesn't actually say much.

LEILA:

Maybe that's why you've become friends, cuz you do all the talking!

JULIET:

Now *you're* being mean!

LEILA:

I'm teasing!

JILL:

What does Henry say to you?

JULIET:

Brothers do not discuss girls with their sisters.

LEILA:

*(Pulling a skirt out of the bin and speaking to JILL)*

Here it is. Try this on. You can go behind the make-out curtain.

JILL:

*(Stepping off the bench and taking the skirt)*

This? I was thinking more royal blue or red. Trudy is the queen.

LEILA:

Two words: zero budget. *(To JULIET)* Now for Laertes, remind me again – are you a girl playing a boy or a girl playing a boy as a girl?

JULIET:

I've decided Laertes is non-binary.

LEILA:

As in no personal pronouns?

JULIET:

No – just – I'm not thinking about whether he's a she or she's a he. Just show me the costumes you have and I'll see what strikes my creative fancy.

LEILA:

Ok, but manage your expectations. Like I said, there's no budget here.

*DIDI enters.*

DIDI:

How are things in the costume department?

JORDAN:

Hi Didi.

DIDI:

Did you get the other bin from storage?

LEILA:

All it had was stuff from Alice in Wonderland and that outer space adventure play from two years ago.

DIDI:

There's definitely more. I'll look after school.

JILL:

*(Coming out from behind the curtain)*

Do you have a mirror?

LEILA:

No, you'll have to trust how I say it looks. Get back up on the box.

DIDI:

Can I ask you guys something?

JULIET:

Yeah, what?

DIDI:

Are we going to pull this off? I mean, are we going to look stupid or –

JULIET:

You don't think Henry and I are good directors?

JORDAN:

Well *you* won't look stupid – you're not one of the actors.

JULIET:

None of us will look stupid!

DIDI:

No. I mean, sure your directing is fine...I'm just worried about –

*PETER and SASHA enter carrying backpacks.*

PETER:

There you are! You know there's a yearbook meeting that half of you are missing right now?

JILL:

*(Jumping down and running to grab her clothes still behind the curtain)*  
Ah! I have to change! Wait for me, Leila!

LEILA:

Hurry up! Who cares what you're wearing?

*LEILA and JILL run out. There is a pause as the dust from this commotion settles.*

JULIET:

You were saying, Didi?

DIDI:

Nothing. I'm just nervous.

SASHA:

What about?

JORDAN:

She's worried about the show.

PETER:

Rehearsals *are* a little bumpy.

JULIET:

Well if it's the direction, I assure you Henry and I are doing very thorough research to maintain the integrity of Shakespeare's original work, and even though there are some necessary cuts we've had to make – well, there are quite a few cuts, actually – but we've taken care to retain the iambic pentameter as much as possible. I'm sure no credible dramaturg would object and half of them are cuts Ms. Richworth had already planned. But maybe you think it's the performers? Is that it? Are you worried some of our actors aren't well cast? We can't take responsibility for that – the casting was already set before the lighting rig fell on our director and the theatre was condemned. But I think you're wrong there. Don't you agree everyone's doing an amazing job of keeping this production afloat and bringing Shakespeare to River Valley High School even in the face of adversity? It's going amazingly well. And this afternoon, we're going to block the most famous sword fight in the history of theatre and stand on the shoulders of generations of performers. We've already faced this huge, epic challenge and overcome it. Nothing can stand in our way now! *(Beat)* So why is it you're nervous?

PETER:

*(Pause)*

Did you breathe for any of that?

*JULIET is staring at DIDI, which causes PETER and SASHA to turn to her as well.*

JULIET:  
Didi? Is there something you're not telling us?

DIDI:  
*(Shaking her head)*  
Never mind. I'll just...it's...I don't know...

*A bell is heard.*

SASHA:  
Break's over.

DIDI:  
See you at rehearsal later.

*DIDI exits quickly.*

PETER:  
What was that about?

SASHA:  
I think I might know. I'm going to catch up with her.

*SASHA exits. PETER and JULIET follow her.*

PETER:  
But seriously, do you even breathe when you do those monologues?

JULIET:  
I'm passionate, OK?

*END OF SCENE.*

### SCENE 3: SWORD FIGHT FIGHT

SETTING: *Same.*

AT RISE: *BEN stands behind JACK and JULIET, holding some yardsticks. JILL and HENRY sit on chairs to the side wearing paper crowns. LEILA sits with a costume on her lap, sewing. DIDI is taking notes. DANNY, MARCO and OTHERS watch. THELMA sits alone, off to one side writing in a journal and occasionally consulting her script. JULIET and JACK are circling each other as though preparing for a gunfight. They speak with thick melodrama and sarcasm.*

JACK:  
Give us the foils. Come on.

JULIET:  
Come, one for me.

JACK:  
I'll be your foil, Laertes.

JULIET:  
You mock me, sir.

HENRY:  
Give them the foils, young Osric. Cousin Hamlet, you know the wager?

JACK:  
Very well, my lord. Your Grace has laid the odds o'th' weaker side.

HENRY:  
I do not fear it; I have seen you both.

JULIET:  
This is too heavy. Let me see another.

*JULIET makes a show of switching swords with BEN.*

JACK:

This likes me well. These foils have all a length?

BEN:

Ay, my good Lord.

HENRY/KING:

Now the King drinks to Hamlet.

Come, begin.

And you, the judges, bear a wary eye.

JACK:

Come on sir.

*JACK does a very ostentatious and ridiculous move with his yardstick then freezes for effect.*

DIDI:

What was *that*?

JACK:

My signature move.

DIDI:

*(To HENRY and JULIET)*

And how do the directors want that noted in the blocking?

HENRY:

*(At a loss)*

However it will make it make sense to you later?

DIDI:

Fine, it's a swirl on the master script, and I assume Rita's signature Hamlet move is the same?

JACK:

Rita's? She won't have one. She's not doing the sword fight.

JILL:

Really? Does Rita know that?

*JACK shrugs, defensively.  
Some of the girls look at each other as though something might be going on. During this next dialogue, HENRY turns his attention to THELMA and watches her, distractedly.*

JULIET:

Wait a minute, you guys did work this out, right?

JACK:

We're splitting the part.

DIDI:

But this is the big sword fight.

DANNY:

Exactly, and we've been planning it with Jack since before the auditions.

KYLE:

We've researched all the famous versions of this scene ever filmed.

CHRIS:

There's no way Rita gets to do the sword fight.

DANNY:

Yeah, it's bad enough that Juliet got the part of Laertes.

JULIET:

Excuse me?

JACK:

Not my position!

KYLE:

Just saying, Jack, we've got your back on this.

JULIET:

I've been fencing for five years!

DANNY:

Great. Whatever.

CHRIS:

Exactly my point then, wouldn't you rather do the scene with Jack than Rita who's never held a sword in her life?

JULIET:

*(Turning on JACK)*

And exactly how much experience do you have holding a sword, Jack? Not counting the five minutes we've been here.

JACK:

Look, Rita is busy rehearsing the Horatio scene that Marco is having trouble with and we're here working on this one. Can we just continue?

JILL:

Well that's convenient: Marco just happens to have trouble and needs Rita's help on the day we're blocking the sword fight?

JULIET:

You're being awfully quiet, Henry.

HENRY:

*(Bringing his attention back to the conversation)*

What?

JULIET:

Are you in on this conspiracy, too?

HENRY:

Conspiracy?

JULIET:

We're co-directors. You don't get to make secret deals with half the cast behind my back.

DANNY:

Nobody conspired behind your back.

KYLE:

You're being paranoid.

*RITA enters, followed by MARCO.*

MARCO:

But really, I think we should go over it a few more times.

RITA:

Look, Marco, you just have to study. I'm not spending this whole rehearsal going over the same lines with you. Do your homework.

*There is a pause as RITA notices the tension in the room. All eyes have gone to her.*

What's going on?  
Just...rehearsing.  
The *sword* fight.  
It was very generous of you to agree to let Jack have this scene.

RITA:

JACK:

DIDI:

JULIET:

What? That was *not* what we agreed.

RITA:

*This dialogue needs to build quickly  
with both sarcastic humor and  
genuine frustration.*

Jack is doing great as Hamlet.

DANNY:

Meaning what? That Rita isn't?

JILL:

Come on guys.

JACK:

Well she isn't.

KYLE:

You don't know anything.

JILL:

Can we just get back to blocking?

HENRY:

Are you listening to any of this?

JULIET:

Guys, maybe this isn't the best way to –

HENRY:

(*To JACK*)  
You said yourself you wanted the soliloquy.

RITA:

I do. JACK:

Then I get this scene. RITA:

That doesn't even make sense. JACK:

Why don't you flip a coin? DANNY:

Rock, paper, scissors? KYLE:

We could vote. JILL:

Or a staring contest? DANNY:

You could fight! CHRIS:

Yeah! It is a fight scene! BEN:

(*Sarcastically*) JULIET:  
How about a dance off?

(*Jumping up, exploding*) LEILA:  
Seriously? Why haven't you two figured this out? The rest of us are all buried in responsibilities trying to pull this play off and the only thing our stars have to do is decide which scenes they're each in.

Buried in responsibilities? JACK:

The *only* thing we have to do? RITA:

Jill and I managed to split our part without dragging the rest of you into it. LEILA:

JACK:

Well you and Jill never dated.

RITA:

What does that have to do with it?

JACK:

Just saying you might be bringing some bad feelings into this.

RITA:

Bad feelings? I'm the one who broke up with you! Remember?

MARCO:

Anybody else notice this just got awkward?

JACK:

You know what? Take the soliloquy.

RITA:

I don't want the scene where Hamlet *talks* about dying. I want the sword fight – where Hamlet actually gets to die!

DANNY:

I want to die.

KYLE:

I want to die.

MARCO:

Yep. Awkward.

DIDI:

Can we maybe work on a different scene and come back to this one –

JILL:

Later!

LEILA:

Much later.

*ALYSSA and SASHA come running in.*

ALYSSA:

Didi! Why didn't you tell us?

HENRY:

Tell us what?

ALYSSA:

We have a problem, people.

SASHA:

If I knew you were going to go all drama queen, I wouldn't have told you.

JACK:

Told her what? What's the problem?

JULIET:

Is this what you were talking about earlier? (*To HENRY*) Didi thinks there's a problem with the show.

DIDI:

I don't!

SASHA:

Well there is a problem.

RITA:

(*Looking at JACK*)

I'll say.

JACK:

And whose fault is that?

RITA:

Not mine, Mister Sneak!

JACK:

Why don't you just admit that there are scenes I'm better for?

RITA:

Because you're not!

JILL:

Shut up, you two! Nobody wants to hear it.

LEILA:

Yeah, go work it out somewhere. It's not all about you.

JACK:

Really? Cuz I'm pretty sure the play is called Hamlet.

RITA:

See how arrogant he is? Apologize!

To who? KYLE:

For what? DANNY:

(*To DANNY and KYLE*)  
Stay out of it! JILL:

Didi, what's going on? HENRY:

I'll figure it out. DIDI:

That's not what you told Sasha today! ALYSSA:

What is it? JULIET/HENRY:

*Pause; Everyone is upset and now  
staring at DIDI.*

We're getting shut down. DIDI:

What? RITA:

How is that possible? HENRY:

When? JACK:

We're not even supposed to be here now. ALYSSA:

Please explain. JILL:

The administration found out we were running a club without an advisor. DIDI:

RITA:

But, I thought you got us an advisor.

DIDI:

I tried, but every teacher I asked had a reason they couldn't do it.

JILL:

So we've been rehearsing without permission this whole time?

DIDI:

Basically, yes, but now they've caught on to us. Dean Riley made me promise we'd stop today.

LEILA:

This is so unfair!

RITA:

And you weren't even going to tell us?

DIDI:

*(Defensively)*

Cuz I feel really bad!

JULIET:

But why do we have to stop today? Can't we tell him we're perfectly fine doing this club on our own and we don't need any teacher babysitting us?

DIDI:

*(Shaking her head)*

You should've heard him: school safety and security, unsupervised students, insurance risk blah, blah...

LEILA:

There must be someone who can help us.

SASHA:

She told you – she's asked *every* teacher.

LEILA:

I know that – but can't we go to someone else?

JACK:

Well Ms. Wheeler, the principal –

RITA:

She's going to say the same thing as the dean.

LEILA:  
Who's bigger than the principal?

MARCO:  
Nobody.

KYLE:  
The principal is like the president.

LEILA:  
There has to be somebody else!

SASHA:  
Face it, we're done!

*The scene devolves into everyone fighting. Only THELMA quietly picks up her things and exits. Everyone else is caught up in saying unkind things, pushing each other's buttons, overlapping each other until LIGHTS OUT.*

*END OF SCENE.*

#### SCENE 4: HAMLET'S ANAGRAM

SETTING: *A remote school hallway.*

AT RISE: *THELMA enters, carrying a pile of books, which she drops on the floor and sits down next to. HENRY enters.*

HENRY:  
Hey, can I help you with that?

THELMA:  
*(Startled)*  
Oh...um...I – no – I mean, thanks, but I didn't drop my books. I just... *(Looking around.)*  
Did you follow me?

HENRY:  
Well – *(Realizing he's busted)* Yes.

THELMA:  
Why?

HENRY:  
I wanted to talk to you.

*THELMA nods, uncomfortable.*

HENRY:  
You didn't say anything yesterday. *(Beat)* At rehearsal?

THELMA:  
I guess not.

HENRY:  
So I wondered what you think.

THELMA:  
Really?

HENRY:  
Yeah. What do you think?

THELMA:  
About which part? The two Hamlets fighting over who gets to die in a sword fight? Or the stage manager neglecting to tell us that we didn't have an advisor for our drama club? Or the boys insulting the girls? Or the directors not really directing anything?

HENRY:  
Ouch.

THELMA:  
Or how about me never getting through a single scene without falling apart? You know what? I'm relieved it's over. That's what I think.

HENRY:  
Wow, I thought you were shy.

*THELMA just shakes her head, sorry she said anything and embarrassed. She opens a book. HENRY is quiet. He starts to walk away, then turns back and sits next to her.*

HENRY:  
I'm not glad it's over and I don't believe you when you say you are.

THELMA:

*(Sighing and closing her book)*

Look, I don't do extra-curricular. I'm just – I just go to school and mind my own business and do my work –

HENRY:

And study Shakespeare.

*HENRY takes the book she is holding and reads the cover.*

HENRY, *Continued*

The Arden Dictionary of Shakespeare. *(Picks up the pile of other books next to her and sets each down as he reads their titles)* Shakespeare in London, Shakespeare and Music, ...

THELMA:

*(Getting flustered)*

OK...Yes...I like Shakespeare. What's your point?

*HENRY unconsciously sets the remaining notebook he's holding down on his side away from her as he speaks.*

HENRY:

You don't just like Shakespeare; you like Shakespeare more than me or anyone else I know – even more than my sister. And I know you want to do this play. I know you want us doing Shakespeare here at school. Maybe you don't do extra-curricular but you wanted to do this – be in this play with us.

THELMA:

You're wrong.

HENRY:

I'm wrong?

*THELMA clams up. HENRY looks at her a moment.*

HENRY:

Ok, maybe you don't really want to act. Maybe acting isn't your thing? But don't you want to see it happen? Don't you think we should at least be allowed to perform?

THELMA:

I...I don't care.

HENRY:

I don't believe you.

THELMA:

What do you want?

HENRY:

To do this play! I want to do Hamlet and I know you do, too. You can't tell me you don't think we should perform it. *(Beat)* Is that what you really think? That the only opportunity to do Shakespeare at our school is getting shut down and that's just fine?

THELMA:

Of course not.

HENRY:

*(Pause)*  
Good.

THELMA:

*(Pause)*  
So?

HENRY:

*(Pause)*  
So I'm glad we're – you know – on the same page...*(trying to make her laugh)* folio?

THELMA:

Ha ha. *(Beat)* It doesn't change anything.

HENRY:

*(Getting an idea)*  
What were you writing yesterday? During rehearsal? You were working on something.

THELMA:

*(Surprised and taken off guard.)*  
You were watching me?

HENRY:

Well...you know...you were the only one not acting all nuts – so yeah – I noticed you were doing something. It's not the first time. You're always writing – but it's not homework, is it?

*THELMA stares at him. She is very self-conscious, but makes a decision to trust him.*

THELMA:

I like to rewrite Shakespeare. I play around with condensing and cutting up lines to make new strings of iambic pentameter.

HENRY:

*(Pause)*

Cool. That's – really cool.

THELMA:

*(Pause)*

Lots of people do it.

HENRY:

No. But it's cool that you do.

*THELMA shrugs.*

HENRY:

So what were you writing yesterday?

*THELMA takes her time considering before deciding to share this information with him.*

THELMA:

I rewrote Hamlet.

HENRY:

Can I read it?

THELMA:

No! *(Beat)* I mean, no. No. I'm sorry we're not doing the play, but – *(Quickly gathering up her Shakespeare books.)* See you around.

*THELMA exits, flustered.*

HENRY:

Thelma?

*HENRY watches her go, then stands up and notices her notebook still on the floor. He picks it up as he calls her.*

HENRY, *Continued*:

Hey, wait – Thelma!...you forgot – (*Looking at what he’s holding – then speaking to himself*) Oh, wow, look at that; I never realized Thelma is an anagram of Hamlet. (*Opening the notebook and reading*) Hamlet by Thelma – a five-minute play on the bard... (*Looking up*) What? (*Reading a line to himself*) This is brilliant! The!

*He catches himself mid-call and changes his mind, taking the notebook and exiting in the opposite direction of THELMA.*

END OF SCENE

### SCENE 5: SECRET NEW PLAN

SETTING: *Front of curtain or somewhere in the school.*

AT RISE: *DIDI is holding her cell phone and pacing anxiously as JILL enters.*

JILL:  
Ok, secret agent Double-O-Something, what’s up?

DIDI:  
Wait till everyone else gets here.

*RITA enters, also holding her phone.*

RITA:  
Is this it? I thought there were more people on this group chat.

*All three of their phones ping simultaneously. JILL takes hers out to read.*

DIDI:  
They’re coming.

RITA:  
Want to give me the inside scoop? Did you solve the space problem after all?

DIDI:  
Just be patient.

JILL:

*(Reading her phone)*

That's Henry. He has some big news, too.

RITA:

I'm not good with patience.

DIDI:

I hope Henry didn't figure out the same thing I did – cuz my news is really good.

*JACK and MARCO enter.*

JACK:

*(Speaking as he enters)*

I appreciate the whole cloak and dagger mystery, but your choice of venue isn't very covert.

DIDI:

I'm not trying to be covert. I thought it would be better to just act normal if we were having a secret club meeting.

*LEILA and JULIET arrive.*

LEILA:

We're a secret club?

RITA:

Juliet! What's Henry's news?

JULIET:

I have no idea, maybe something happened this morning, but if he's been keeping something from me, then I'm going to want answers.

JILL:

This is exciting!

MARCO:

The only thing that happened this morning was dissecting frogs in biology.

JACK:

That will be hard to top.

JILL:

He said it's really big.

DIDI:

Well so's my news.

Then just spill it!

RITA:

Wait until –

DIDI:

*HENRY arrives carrying THELMA's notebook and a stack of papers. He is looking over his shoulder.*

Henry!

JULIET:

Shh!

HENRY:

JULIET:  
You go first. No, Didi should go first because she sent the first text. Actually, no, save the best for last. OK – yes, Henry, you go first...No wait...no...what if everything happens for a reason and we are *supposed* to hear Didi's news first? We don't want to mess with karma and the laws of natural order.

What are the laws of natural order?

MARCO:

I think she means dharma, not karma.

JACK:

Who cares?

JILL:

Yes. Definitely. Didi, should go first.

JULIET:

MARCO:  
*(Teasing)*  
Should we sit in any particular order or maybe stand in a circle holding hands?

RITA:  
Come on, come on – my patience is completely gone now.

DIDI:  
*(Taking a big breath)*  
Ok, remember how it was my job to find a place to perform the play?

RITA:  
I knew it!

JACK:

And get us permission – which you didn't.

JILL:

Shut up and listen!

DIDI:

And then Leila, you asked if there wasn't someone bigger than Dean Riley or even the principal?

LEILA:

Right.

RITA:

And?

DIDI:

And there is. *(Beat)* The school board! The school board is bigger than anyone in the administration. They're the ones who decide how money gets spent.

HENRY:

Like...if we can get a new theatre?

DIDI:

Exactly. And my mom is a member of the school board and I just found out they're having a budget meeting on Thursday night.

JACK:

Like in two days, Thursday?

JILL:

I don't understand what any of this means for us.

DIDI:

*(To JACK)*

Yes. *(To JILL)* And it means we have to perform Hamlet for them on Thursday night – well, *you* guys have to perform. You have to show them how much we deserve to get a new theatre.

JACK:

Like, crash the board meeting?

MARCO:

In two days?

RITA:

We'll never be ready.

JILL:

We could be.

LEILA:

No, it's too late – we would just look stupid.

*ALL begin to argue until HENRY  
interrupts them.*

HENRY:

Listen, I think I have the answer.

JULIET:

Henry's news! This *is* karma – ok – you have the other half of the solution, right?

HENRY:

I think so.

JACK:

You definitely mean dharma and not karma.

JILL:

Jack! Just listen!

RITA:

We're all listening.

HENRY:

It's called Hamlet-lette and it's a five-minute, scrambled and super condensed comedy version of Hamlet. We can pull it together in two days and keep the cast we already have.

RITA:

Hamlet-lette?

LEILA:

Where did you get this five-minute, super condensed version of Hamlet?

HENRY:

Um...Thelma wrote it.

JULIET:

Really? That's amazing! She's so awesome. I totally believe it. She's always writing stuff and she loves Shakespeare. It makes so much sense. I'm so proud of her! When did she tell you about it and why isn't she here?

JILL:

Do you have it with you? Can we read it?

JACK:

Wait, what does Hamlet-lette mean? Did she write it with two Hamlets?

RITA:

Yeah, do we still split the part?

HENRY:

Yes, it works perfectly – in a weird kind of way. Like I said, it’s a comedy. And anyway, she wrote it for us.

JULIET:

But Henry, wait a minute. Where’s Thelma?

RITA:

*(Impatiently)*

Let me see it.

*HENRY doesn’t answer JULIET as everyone else continues to talk.*

HENRY:

Here, I made copies for everyone. If you can memorize your parts tonight, we’ll rehearse after school tomorrow and again Thursday before the school board meeting.

RITA:

We can’t meet at school, though. Dean Riley will find out.

DIDI:

Well not my house.

MARCO:

No way, we can’t let your mom know we’re planning to crash the meeting.

LEILA:

My parents won’t care.

JILL:

But I’m allergic to your cat.

HENRY:

We can use our house. We’ll meet in the garage right after school.

MARCO:

I’ll let Kyle and Danny know.

HENRY:

And find Ben and Chris, too. Here – give them their scripts. And Jill, will you see Jordan and Sasha today?

*MARCO exits as HENRY finishes handing out scripts.*

JILL:

Yep.

LEILA:

I'll take one for Sam – oh, and I'll see Alyssa, too.

RITA:

*(To JACK)*

Come on, Jack. Let's read this together and be clear about it before tomorrow.

*RITA and JACK exit.*

DIDI:

I'll get more details about the board meeting.

JILL:

This is going to be great.

LEILA:

Yeah, tell Thelma thank you!

*JILL, DIDI and LEILA leave.*

JULIET:

So?

HENRY:

What?

JULIET:

How did you get this?

HENRY:

Well, Thelma told me about it...

JULIET:

But she didn't give it to you, did she?

*HENRY is quiet.*

JULIET:  
Henry –

HENRY:  
Come on, Jules, it's great. (*Handing her a copy of the script*) Wait until you read it.

JULIET:  
I'm sure I'll love it, but –

HENRY:  
I'm going to tell her –

JULIET:  
You mean *ask* her.

HENRY:  
Yes. I am! Just waiting for the right time. She'll be fine. It'll all be cool. Trust me.

JULIET:  
*(Taking the script from him)*  
I hope you know what you're doing. (*Beat*) She likes you, you know. (*Exits*)

HENRY:  
*(Letting this sink in)*  
She likes me?

*END OF SCENE.*

## **SCENE 6 – PRESENTING THE BARD TO THE BOARD**

SETTING:           *Theatre seating and aisles.*

AT RISE:           *LIGHTS UP on the house as BOARD MEMBER addresses the audience.*

BOARD MEMBER:  
Do we have a motion to accept the minutes from the last meeting as read? (*Choosing an audience member to identify*) Mr. Jones so moves, does anyone second? (*Looking at another member of the audience*) Seconded. All those in favor? (*Looks around the audience nodding – purely pro forma*) So moved. Now, on to the budget items. As you know, the theatre at River Valley High School was recently inspected by the Department of Buildings after the collapse of the lighting and found to be unsafe. Although this is very unfortunate, anticipated costs for a renovation of the theatre will likely prove to be prohibitively expensive for any action this fiscal year. Therefore, I move that we table any discussion of –

*ACTORS enter from aisle.  
BOARD MEMBER tries to  
continue speaking, but quickly  
cedes control of the meeting to  
the ACTORS.*

HENRY:

Hello everyone. Thank you for coming.

JACK:

*(Aside to him)*

Thank you for coming? That doesn't even make sense.

JILL:

I thought we agreed Didi and Juliet would do all the talking?

DIDI:

*(Moves to the front)*

Sorry to interrupt your meeting. We know you're very busy and that you have an agenda and we're not on it – but actually, we kind of are on it.

HENRY:

We are?

DIDI:

*(Looking sternly at HENRY)*

We are! Yes – and my friend, Juliet here, will explain.

JULIET:

Of course – well – metaphorically speaking, that is, if you're the school board, and you *are* the school board, then everything on your agenda is about our school and um...and since the school is made up of us, the students of the school, the students make the school, which wouldn't exist without us, the students, so therefore, we're on the agenda!

DIDI:

*(Prompting Juliet to get her back on track)*

Specifically, as...

JULIET:

Yes, specifically we are on the agenda as part of the discussion about the renovation of the theatre in which we would like to present – ourselves – as Exhibit A.

DIDI:

*(Aside to JULIET)*

Exhibit A? It's not a courtroom trial.

JULIET:

*(Trying again, more boldly)*

In consideration of the board's discussion – or in this case, in consideration of the board having completely skipped any discussion as if it doesn't even matter –

DIDI:

Juliet!

JULIET:

*(Clearing her throat and checking herself)*

Right – well – regarding the renovation of the school theatre and the relevance of a thriving theatre program here at River Valley, we the students you serve –

DIDI:

Juliet!

JULIET:

To show you how important theatre is to us, we the students of River Valley High School present to you *Hamlet-lette*; a short adaptation of William Shakespeare's famous tragedy as conceived by Thelma Arden. *(Beat)* And then we hope you will consider funding our theatre's renovation. Thank you!

HENRY:

*(Quickly)*

Act One!

*As an option, DIDI or another ACTOR may read stage directions for Hamlet-lette. During the play, actors may simply stand and sit in the aisle for entrances and exits, or use the space you have in any creative way that works.*

CLAUDIUS:

Enough of my dead brother – let's talk of me!

Felicitations upon our wedding.

We toast queen, Trudy, and new son *Hamlet-lette*.

TRUDY:

*Hamlet-Hamlette*, would'st thou remain in Denmark?

HAMLET:

Really mother?

HAMLETTE:

With him?

HAMS:

I'll think on it.

CLAUDIUS:

Tis a loving and fair reply! Come away.

*CLAUDIUS and TRUDY exit.*

HAMLET:

Fie on't, a fie! That it should come to this

HAMLETTE:

The king dead but one month.

*Enter HORATIO, MARCELLUS & BERNARDO.*

HORATIO:

Hail, lord Hamlet-lette –

HAMS:

What ho, Horatio!

MARCELLUS:

We saw a ghost!

BERNARDO:

Your father's spirit in arms –

HORATIO:

All's not well.

HAMLETTE:

To this apparition –

HAMLET:

you must take me.

*All exit. Enter OPHELIA and LAERTES.*

LAERTES:

I'm telling you, Fifi, forget Hamlet.

OPHELIA:

Why sayeth thou I should'st? In truth, I shan't!

LAERTES:  
Thou shall'st!

OPHELIA:  
I shan't!

LAERTES:  
Thou shall'st!

OPHELIA:  
I shan't!

LAERTES:  
Thou shall'st!

OPHELIA:  
But lo, our father Polonius does come!

*Pause as ALL look expectantly for  
THELMA's entrance.*

RITA:  
*(Aside)*  
Henry! Where's Thelma? She has to go on!

HENRY:  
*(Aside)*  
I texted her but – well – she's not here.

JACK:  
*(Aside)*  
She didn't come to rehearsal either, but you said she'd show up.

OPHELIA:  
*(Nervously)*  
But lo, our father Polonius does come!

DIDI:  
*(Aside)*  
Does Thelma even know about this?

HENRY:  
*(Aside)*  
Of course. I've explained everything...sort of...

RITA:

*(Aside)*  
Sort of?

HENRY:

*(Aside)*  
I left her a message – but it's possible she's mad at me.

OPHELIA:

*(Urgently)*  
But lo, our father, Polonius, does come!

DIDI:

*(Grabbing HENRY's crown off his head and throwing Polonius' cape on him)*  
Well you have to go on and cover for her!

HENRY:

I – um – wait – oh –

OPHELIA:

*(Shouting now)*  
***But lo, our fa-***

HENRY/POLONIUS:

*(Haltingly – remembering the line)*  
Laertes, heed my wise words ere you set sail.

*He begins to ad lib until interrupted.  
THELMA enters from the back of the  
theatre, walks down the aisle and  
takes over from him, speaking her  
lines directly and pointedly at  
HENRY.*

THELMA as POLONIUS:

Look thou character... Think before you act.  
This above all – to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
*Thou canst not then be false to any friend!*  
Farewell! *(Sweetly turning to Laertes)* My blessing season this in thee.

LAERTES:

*(Bowing)* Father. *(Turning to OPHELIA)* Fifi, remember: dump Hamlet!

*They exit. Enter HORATIO, HAMS,  
MARCELLUS and BERNARDO.*

BERNARDO:

Look! The ghost!

*All look at KYLE who suddenly appears at the back of the theater wearing a sheet and gesticulating dramatically.*

HENRY:

*(Aside)*

Thelma, you were great! Thank you so much for coming.

THELMA:

*(Turning away)*

Don't talk to me.

JULIET:

*(Aside to HENRY)*

That went well.

HENRY:

*(Ignoring JULIET, aside to LEILA)*

Leila, why is Kyle wearing a sheet?

LEILA:

You're lucky he got that much. There was no budget for costumes.

MARCELLUS:

Look! The ghost!

*KYLE, under the sheet, gesticulates wildly.*

ALL:

Amazement!

HAMLET:

Father was murdered!

HAMLETTE:

He shall be avenged!

*ALL exit.*

HENRY:

Act Two!

DIDI:

*(Aside)*

Psst, Henry! We're running way over time! Can you cut to Act five?

HENRY:

What? How?

DIDI:

Just do something – we only have two minutes left!

HENRY:

Um – ok – Act Two?

*HENRY looks desperately at  
THELMA.*

THELMA:

*(In a stage whisper to him)*

Um... basically, all the world's a stage.

HENRY:

*(Loudly)*

All the world's a stage!

THELMA:

*(Stricken)*

But that's not from Hamlet!

HENRY:

Who cares? And now, Act Three. *(Aside)* Hamlets, keep it short!

*THE HAMS enter and strike a very  
serious, contemplative pose. They take  
a breath together and speak with great  
emotion.*

HAMLETTE:

To be

HAMLET:

Or not to be

HAMS:

That is the question.

*HAMS exit.*

HENRY:

Act Four.

*ROSENCRANTZ and  
GUILDENSTERN enter.*

GUILDENSTERN:

Rosencrantz!

ROSENCRANTZ:

Guildenstern!

*They do an exaggerated bro  
handshake.*

GUILDENSTERN:

Let us go betray our friend, Hamlet-lette.

ROSENCRANTZ:

Then someday they'll write a play about us!

HENRY:

And Act Five!

*HAMLET and HAMLETTE enter with  
HORATIO, tossing a skull back and  
forth with each line.*

HAMLET:

What a piece of work is a man!

HAMLETTE:

Speak the speech, I pray you!

HAMLET:

Get thee to a nunnery!

HAMLETTE:

Alas, poor Yorick, I knew him!

HAMLET:

The play's the thing!

HAMLETTE:

*(To audience)*  
Though this be madness, yet there is method in't.

*Enter LAERTES, TRUDY and  
CLAUDIUS.*

TRUDY:

Sweets to the sweet. Farewell, Ophelia.

HAMS:

Fifi's dead? (*They react to holding the skull and toss it to HORATIO.*) Ick!

**This is Not the End of the Play**  
**Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes**

**PROPS**

Actors playing students should carry backpacks or school books as seems appropriate. The Audition Packet of assorted monologues from Hamlet as well as a student script of Hamlet can be printed out from the attachments at the end of the script.

Additional props include the following.

Act 1

Scene 1: Hamlet announcement (TEACHER).

Scene 2: Audition Packet (ALL ACTORS in scene).

Scene 3: Yardsticks (HENRY, JACK), laptop (MARCO), clipboard and audition packets (DIDI).

Scene 4: Audition Packets (assorted ACTORS), clipboard and pencil (DIDI).

Scene 5: Cast List (TEACHER, HENRY), basketball (KYLE optional), clipboard and pencil (DIDI).

Scene 6: Play Cancelled sign (TEACHER), basketball (KYLE optional), cell phone (DIDI).

Act 2

Scene 1: Hamlet scripts (ALL ACTORS in scene), yardstick (JACK), clipboard and pencil (DIDI), notebook (THELMA).

Scene 2: Bin full of various costumes with one specific dress or skirt to pull out (LEILA).

Scene 3: Hamlet scripts (ALL ACTORS in scene), yardsticks (BEN, JACK, JULIET), paper crowns (JILL, HENRY), costume and sewing items (LEILA), notebook and pen (THELMA), clipboard and pencil (DIDI).

Scene 4: Collection of Shakespeare books, notebook (THELMA).

Scene 5: Cellphones (ALL ACTORS in scene).

Scene 6: Clipboard (BOARD MEMBER), Feather duster (LAERTES), fake skull and cardboard swords (HAMS), plastic goblet (TRUDY), white sheet (KYLE).

Scene 8: MacBethany sign (TEACHER).

## **COSTUMES**

Contemporary clothing worn by teenagers in a warm or mild climate. As the play takes place over an unspecified number of days, students may change, alter or augment their clothing as practically makes sense for your production. Alternatively, choosing to put the students in school uniforms would alleviate this consideration altogether. Costumes for the Hamlet-lette play in Act 2, Scene 6 should be incomplete but implied to show that an effort was made within a limited budget to come up with some Elizabethan-like costuming. In the original production, Hamlet and Hamlette shared a costume with one wearing the top half and the other the bottom half of a velvet and gold Renaissance confection. Have fun and don't take it too seriously; a few swaths of velvet thrown over a shoulder will do.