

The Final Performance of Hamlet

A play in two acts
by
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CHARACTERS

HERMES – one of the King’s servants. Has a strong opinion of himself. Bosses Potiphar around.

POTIPHAR – another of the King’s servants. Hermes’ right hand man. A bit dim witted, though capable of brilliant insights.

HILDRED – an older maid-servant. Not a very pleasant woman.

T’SILLAH – a young, vivacious, maid-servant. Hildred’s assistant, and also secret/not-so-secret admirer.

LAGER – huge, ogre-like fellow who runs the castle library/dungeon. Originally appointed to his position for his dungeon/prisoner abilities, but has an endearing literary side to him as well.

BERTRAND – a long time prisoner in the dungeon. Also serves as Lager’s library assistant.

KING VIDEO (pronounced vi-day-oh, like Montevideo the capitol of Uruguay) - the self-serving, egotistical and slightly out of it King.

PRINCE – the King’s son and castle drug-dealer. Feels very estranged from his father.

TIME

The future – 2163.

SETTING

A medieval-style castle ruled by a tyrannical King. The castle is its own little world, with its inhabitants fulfilling every societal need by themselves. No one has ventured outside the castle for over thirty years.

HISTORY

Around the year 2015, a group of people dissatisfied with the cultural milieu of the early 21st century decided to leave it and establish a new way of life elsewhere. This brought them to an abandoned castle where they set up a new society, cutting off contact with the outside world. Around 2130, Charley Video, the father of the current King, led a coup, seizing power and establishing the United Kingdom of the Areas of the Castle with himself as monarch.

NOTES

Within the play, on purpose, Hamlet is almost never italicized.

ACT I

SCENE 1

(The castle multi-purpose room. Servants of the King, Hermes and Potiphar, are sitting around, playing gin-rummy.)

HERMES

Gin!

POTIPHAR

Man, you always beat me at everything.

HERMES

That's why you're so much fun to play with.

(The Prince enters.)

PRINCE

I've got my dad's, you know, the King's, New Years Resolutions, to be enacted January 1st, 2164. Hey, where is everyone?

HERMES

(noticing the Prince)

You talking to us?

PRINCE

No, I've gone insane and have no perception of reality. It's just that *my* insanity turns out to be going around doing my stupid job my stupid dad forces me to, just as always. Yes, I'm talking to you. Where are all the other servants - it's time for the weekly servant announcements. I don't have all day here - I have drug deals to make.

HERMES

I presume like usual, they're cutting. I know that if we had remembered you'd be coming here and interrupting our game of gin, we'd be elsewhere.

PRINCE

Thanks, that's heartwarming. Really makes you feel good to be alive.

POTIPHAR

That's what were here for.

PRINCE

Yeah. Well I might as well get on with this.

(reading)

The King's New Years Resolutions, to be enacted January 1st, 2164.

One - Increase the amount of brie cheese at all royal events.

Two - Change most exulted one to most most exulted one.

Three - Destroy every existing copy of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

(A slight pause)

Four - Appoint Prince master of the universe, kill the King.

(Prince exists.)

POTIPHAR

Oh man, I hate brie. Could we suggest Monterey Jack, or even Swiss cheese instead? And that King, he's so full of himself, most most exulted one and favoring the Prince like that? Uhhh.

HERMES

Did! You! Hear! What he said! Destroy Hamlet. Oh God. The greatest tragedy of all time will be no more.

POTIPHAR

That's nice.

HERMES

Are you crazy? This is a catastrophe.

POTIPHAR

What's the big deal Hermes? You know the old say saying, all that lives must die. Or the new saying, it's 10 AM, the party's over, I don't know who you are, get out of my apartment.

HERMES

(confused)

Right.

(pause)

Perhaps. Well, at the very least it's a tragic ending for it. It'd be so anticlimactic if it just fell out of print because people stopped caring about it. Wait a moment Potiphar, we can't go along with this abominable act. We must fight and stop the King!

POTIPHAR

But he'll kill us for sure the first second we say a word against him.

HERMES

Good point, scratch that. Fine, Hamlet's going bye-bye, we'll have to accept that. But you know what that means?

POTIPHAR

Not really, give me a hint, I'm rather fond of guessing games. Here, I spy with my little eye...

HERMES

Be quiet! The point is, you and I, Potiphar, must stage, on December 31st, at 8 PM, well 8:10 to seat latecomers, the final performance of the Bard's greatest work.

POTIPHAR

Will that take long?

HERMES

I don't know, about three, four hours.

POTIPHAR

(shocked)

That long? I was going to go to the ball. I'll miss the smoochie fest at midnight.

HERMES

Well, you'll just have to wait 'till next year. This is going to be the ideological statement of the millennium.

POTIPHAR

Well couldn't we do it the night before or something? There's this one maidservant I've just got the bewillies over, and I'm betting she'll be mighty toasty come New Year's Eve.

HERMES

No. Your Will and your Willie will have to wait. Because this Will waits for no one. We must take Hamlet with us till the last possible second. No expense will be spared for this.

POTIPHAR

We don't have *any* money.

HERMES

Right. No theft of castle property will be left undone to secure what we need to make the last, the greatest, the ultimate performance of Hamlet.

POTIPHAR

Wait, Hildred the maid is coming, hush up.

HERMES

She's not the one have the hots for, is she?

(Hildred enters slowly, dusting.)

POTIPHAR

Hildred, oh no.

(Shivers)

Mine's real feudal-trash. A regular serving-wench sexpot.

HERMES

Well hush up too, let's see what she wants.

(to Hildred)

Hi Hildred, how goes it?

HILDRED

What are you two milling about for, don't ye' got jobs to do?

POTIPHAR

For your information, *no*, we're talking about...

HERMES

About what jobs to do next. You know us, we're always what would make the king happiest, let's do that.

HILDRED

(suspicious)

Is that right? Well I could use some help with this here dusting.

HERMES

Oh you know Potiphar is tragically allergic to dust, we couldn't possibly.

POTIPHAR

That's right, and pollen, and old unattractive women, and fish.

HILDRED

I'm watching you two, know that.

HERMES

Good day to you too as well, very good.

(Hildred exits.)

POTIPHAR

That was a close one, you almost gave the whole plot away.

HERMES

Me? But did you see her dramatic intensity? If she wasn't so untrustworthy and reprehensible, my personal anti-christ, she would definitely be on our list for Gertrude.

POTIPHAR

Who's Gertrude?

HERMES

Who's Gertrude! Hamlet's mother.

POTIPHAR

Is Hamlet the guy who works at the bar?

HERMES

Hamlet, Prince Hamlet, Shakespeare's Hamlet.

POTIPHAR

Oh, Shakespeare. You mean one of the King's, eh, consorts. The one with the lazy eye, right?

HERMES

Potiphar. Please do tell me you have heard of Hamlet, you know what who he is?

POTIPHAR

Well, if you mean he's not the King's illegitimate child by a rather stocky woman with a lazy eye, then actually, no, not a clue.

HERMES

And Shakespeare?

POTIPHAR

The King's barber?

HERMES

Oh Potiphar.

(with great care)

Shakespeare is the greatest writer we have ever known.

POTIPHAR

Don't you mean John Grisham?

HERMES

No, before Grisham, there was Shakespeare. (Pause, then with nostalgia) Picture it, a young man born in Stratford-upon-Avon to esteemed, but not aristocratic parents, becomes the toast of London as he churns out one after another unforgettable work.

POTIPHAR

So he made butter?

HERMES

No Potiphar. He made plays, magical, soft, velvety, intense plays that filled the mind with emotion, brought you into the consciousness of the character, and made you feel, laugh, cry, transcend the inhuman life survival compels. And from king and queen, to every teen, for hundreds of years since, they have learned his words. First with bewilderment, next with burden, and then finally, as an adult, or for the rare precocious youngster, with love and comfort. That, my good man, is Shakespeare.

POTIPHAR

So how come I never heard of him?

HERMES

You went to servant school. They only teach *Everything I Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten* and *The Ms. Manner's Guide to Self-Effacement and Drink Mixing*.

POTIPHAR

But you went there too, we were in the same class.

HERMES

Yes, we graduated together. But until I was twelve, my father was no servant, but a court baker. And so I went to baking school, where we would learn of love and romance and excitement - the true ingredients of noble bread. Well Shakespeare was on that menu, and so I learned of him then, and never forgot him - not even when my father's transgression made both he and I servants for life.

POTIPHAR

Well, who's Hamlet then?

HERMES

Good, you're catching on. Okay, now Hamlet is both a name of a play, and the main character of that play. Confusing, admittedly, but Shakespeare was no simpleton - he'd throw the audience a few curve balls to make sure they weren't crowding the plate. Now Hamlet is the Prince of some small, unimportant Scandinavian nation, and his father, the Emperor of that same small, unimportant Scandinavian nation, is murdered by the Emperor's brother, the Shah, who then becomes Emperor, and also marries Hamlet's father's wife, Hamlet's mother, the Kaiserina. Now Hamlet is really pissed off by this, and that should be enough for the poor guy. But no. He gets in his head that his girly girl, named Ophelia, has been sneaking around behind his back. You know going up to people and saying, mine name's Ophelia, and oh, I'll feel you, if you, oh, feel me. You get the idea. Anyway, Hamlet then tries to...umm...oh...hmmm? Well...

POTIPHAR

Come on, what happens next Hermes, this is getting good.

HERMES

Well Potiphar, you know how in school sometimes you start out really eager to read the book, but then, well, you realize you don't actually have to do any of the reading to participate in class. Well, I think that 's what happened with me and Hamlet somewhere around Act Three. So the rest of it's a little fuzzy in my mind. But in the end, I'm pretty sure the King tries to kill Hamlet, and then Hamlet actually kills a whole bunch of people. Which should definitely be a crowd pleaser.

POTIPHAR

Reminds me of our King. But I like this Hamlet. He's his own man.

(Sings)

I'm my own man.
 I serve people, but according to my plan.
 If you want dinner at four,
 and I'm in the bedroom having my way with a (pause) chore,
 you're going to wait to I finish up,
 because I'm my own man.
 I don't care about skin cancer, I get a tan,
 cause I'm my own man.
 If I became king I'd also kill people that bother me,
 but in the meantime I'll watch re-runs of The Facts Of Life on T.V.,
 there's nothing wrong with loving Tootie, Blair or Natalie.
 Because I'm my own man.
 I'm my own man.

HERMES

Well I guess we better read the play if we're going to do it.

POTIPHAR

No one said anything to me about reading. I'm a singer, dancer, sometime actor, but no reader.

HERMES

How do you learn your songs and your parts then?

POTIPHAR

I make 'em up as I go along.

HERMES

That would explain your enormous success so far, but eh, you're just going to have to dust off that left-hemisphere of your brain and suck it up. Come on, let's go to the library.

POTIPHAR

(jiggling and singing)

I'm my own man.

(pause)

Okay, if I have to.

HERMES

Good, now come on.

(End of scene.)

Scene 2 - The library/dungeon

(This place takes place in the castle basement which is both the library and the dungeon. Stacks of books cover the space, interspersed with torture devices and chains for people to be shackled to the wall with. In one corner there is a desk. The desk belongs to Lager (like the type of beer) an ogre-like fellow, who is both head librarian and dungeon master. He's stamping books at his desk. Bertrand, one of the inmates, has a chain around his leg that allows him a decent amount of movement. He is standing cataloging books. After a little while, Lager, not even taking his eyes off of his stamping, picks up a whip and hits Bertrand.)

BERTRAND

Hey why'd you do that Lager - I'm cataloging these books as fast as I can.

LAGER

Look Bertrand, you know you weren't sentenced to the dungeon for your health. I can't shirk off my responsibilities. I admit, you're a damn good assistant librarian and I'd be at a loss if I ever absent mindedly killed you, but I got to get in a good lick every so often if the King is going to keep on letting me double as dungeon master and librarian. If you remember, he was ready to scrap the entire library to expand the dungeon. I had to plead with him to let me combine them. Plus, hearing your skin crackle is quite a rush. Now, where was I?

(Potiphar and Hermes enter the library, descending the steps. They come to the front and speak to each other, out of Lager's hearing distance.)

HERMES

Now remember, we got to play it cool. No mentioning what we're doing. If anyone asks, we're just looking for a little pleasure reading.

POTIPHAR

Got it, we're here for the porn.

HERMES

I didn't mean that. We're just here to look around for books. Got it? Now come on, let's try and find Hamlet. You look under H, and I'll look under S for Shakespeare.

(Potiphar and Hermes begin searching through the books. Lager looks up from his work and sees them.)

LAGER

Can I help you with something boys?

POTIPHAR

No, no. We're just looking for the porn.

(catching himself)

I mean, pleasurable reading that's not porn. Like

(trying to think of an example)

wait, there's no pleasurable reading that's not porn,

(pondering)

is there?

HERMES

Just browsing for something to read before bed.

(Potiphar continues searching, Hermes listens to Lager.)

LAGER

Well if you need any recommendations, I'm here. But

(holding up a book in his hand)

I really like *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff - And It's All Small Stuff* by Richard Carlson. I find the constant pressure to torture somewhat overwhelming. It makes me lose perspective. So I read a little of the book before I go to bed each night, and it makes me feel all okay. It reassures me that I have so much to live for, and so torturing's no big deal. It's just another thing in my inbox to take care of. Maybe something to learn from even.

HERMES

(skeptical)

Right - did you ever think of getting a window installed in here. Maybe even just leaving the room say, once a decade?

LAGER

Afraid I'm not following you. Well, let me know if you need any help.

(Lager returns to his work.)

HERMES

Potiphar - find anything?

POTIPHAR

Well I got to the H A Ms. There's Ham cooking, hamster cooking, hammering nails for fun and profit, hamstringing injuries and you, and a book on yams misfiled. But no Hamlet. Any luck with you?

HERMES

Well here's the Shakespeare section, let me have a look.

(searching)

They've got *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, a copy of Ronald Reagan's favorite sonnets, but no, no Hamlet. Great. What exactly are we going to do now?

BERTRAND

Lager, what do you want me to do with this box of Hamlet's I collected. Dump 'em?

LAGER

No, no, we can't do that until New Year's and the decree passes. As you know, with our most arbitrary and ego-centric of kings, he may change his mind if it suits him. And who knows, maybe King Video will grow a heart? Just set them down anywhere.

(Bertrand, still chained, puts them as far away as the chain will reach and allow him to.)

HERMES

Well there they are Potiphar. Why don't we mosey on over, and stuff a few into our pockets.

POTIPHAR

Okay, but won't they see us?

HERMES

You're right, you go and distract Lager and Bertrand, I'll get the books.

(While Potiphar goes over to Lager's desk, Hermes goes and stuffs the books into his clothes. All the following lines are sung.)

POTIPHAR

(to Lager)

It's got to be tough to torture.

LAGER

Oh it is, oh it is.

POTIPHAR

(to Bertrand)

It's got to be tough on the skin.

BERTRAND

Oh it is, oh it is.

POTIPHAR

But it gives you purpose, it gives you a role. It keeps discipline up, no one strays too far from the pole

(points to the pole where Bertrand is chained from.)

BERTRAND

(walking with his chain in hand to center stage)

(spoken)

That ain't the half of it-

(sung)

I'm a swash buckling, condemned soul,
every night is a toll, toll, toll.

Don't need no cotton candy, don't even needs meals, all I want is for my wounds to
heal,
everyday's a new adventure sailin' the old ocean red,
on my six foot chain it's an all right deal,
it's kind of fun watching your blood congeal.

LAGER

I'm a swash buckling, cold tortured soul,
but you want to explain to the King why we need more coal?

Well I give some licks with a big old stick,
and I cry a bit and lose my wits,
and I don't remember the last time I saw the sun, but don't let anyone persuade ya' this
ain't fun,
cause they've never tried being
(slowly)
a swash buckling, treasure seeking, plank walking, parrot having, book loving,
tortured soul.

LAGER

(confused, not sure how to segue back from the song, looks to his
stick and picks it up and hits Bertrand with it)
get back to work Bertrand.

(Bertrand goes back to cataloging, Potiphar and Hermes
come back to the front, Hermes now stuffed with copies of
Hamlet.)

HERMES

Good work Potiphar, I've got the goods.

POTIPHAR

Cool. It's too bad Bertrand's trapped down here - he's got a great voice. We could use him for show, don't you think?

HERMES

(smugly)

Well there's hardly any singing in Hamlet, actually.

POTIPHAR

Hardly any singing! What kind of a musical is that!

HERMES

It's not a musical.

POTIPHAR

Come on Hermes, be reasonable. When was the last time a lot of people wanted to go see a play with no songs? It's hard enough trying to revive anything but St. Lloyd-Webber's CATS, let alone do a new musical or a straight play. Man, you and your high faululent artsy ideas. I need to get me another agent.

HERMES

I'm not your agent. I'm your fellow humble servant of the ruthless king.

POTIPHAR

Whatever.

HERMES

Well, let's get out of here already before they get suspicious.

(Hermes and Potiphar go to the stairs. As they cross the doorway, an alarm goes off. They've set off the unchecked-out book alarm. They quickly step back into the library and the alarm stops. Lager and Bertrand look up now.)

LAGER

(absent-mindedly)

Did you hear something Bertrand, was that the book alarm?

BERTRAND

I guess so, can't reckon what else it would be.

LAGER

Haven't heard that in years, not since the Prince swiped all those Sweet Valley High and Babysitter's Club books. Sicko.

BERTRAND

You think maybe those two were trying to steal something?

LAGER

I don't know, let's ask them. Say Potiphar and Hermes, you weren't trying to steal any books and set off the alarm, were you? Because we'd be happy to check anything out for you.

HERMES

Us? Oh no. It must have been one of those emergency tests, like they have on TV. You know, this is a test, this is just a test, if this had been a real emergency we would have told you: run for your lives, the world's over, death is imminent.

LAGER

Are you *sure* you don't want to take a look at the self-help section? We could look at it together?

(Hermes motions no.)

LAGER

All right then, have a good one.

(Bertrand and Lager go back to cataloging.)

HERMES

Well how are we going to get the books out of here now? I'll have to come up with something ingenious.

POTIPHAR

Well, there's a xerox machine we could use. But wait, wouldn't that be a copyright infringement?

HERMES

Potiphar, in three weeks there aren't going to be *any* copies of this. I think Shakespeare will waive the royalty just this one time. Come on.

(They go over to the xerox machine.)

HERMES

Twenty-five cents a copy! Hamlet's got to be a hundred pages. I make 57 cents a week. How much change do you have on you Potiphar?

(Potiphar shuffles through his pockets.)

POTIPHAR

(counting)

Twelve cents and one of those arcade tokens. Maybe we could copy half a page and perform that. Or if we shrunk it really small, we might be able to get the whole thing. I've got pretty good eyesight.

HERMES

Damn it. There's that idea. How are we supposed to smuggle these out of here without setting off the alarm?

POTIPHAR

Well I don't know, this might work.

(Potiphar takes a small electronic machine out of his clothing. A demagnetizer.)

HERMES

What in God's name is that?

POTIPHAR

It's a demagnetizer. You know stores use it to decharge the things you buy so you don't set off the alarm.

HERMES

Why, that's just what we need - that's perfect. I love you Potiphar - we're saved.

(Hermes gives Potiphar a kiss on the cheek.)

POTIPHAR

Hey man, be careful with my emotions.

HERMES

Sorry.

(pause)

But how in God's name did you get that?

POTIPHAR

I traded it with Manny, you know the manager at Castle Republic. I just can't get enough of their trendy posh, castle-wear, and on my pittance of a salary, I can't even buy a muted gray eye-patch, let alone a whole smock. So I talked Manny into stealing stuff for me in exchange for tap lessons. But then he got caught once, so he called the deal off. But then he realized how tap had become a part of him, so he gave me one of the demagnetizers so I could steal the stuff myself. Made me throw in some salsa lessons too, but I think it's a pretty fair deal.

HERMES

You think it'd work here too?

POTIPHAR

I reckon, let's give it a try.

(They carefully hide the machine and the books from Lager's and Bertrand's view and demagnetize the books. They then slip then under their clothing and walk to exit. After a moment of hesitation, they walk out the exit. No alarm goes out. Lager looks deeply at Bertrand. End of scene.)

Scene 3 - Potiphar and Hermes' Room

(Potiphar and Hermes are in their room in the castle. There is a bunk-bed, which they share. Potiphar has the top bed, Hermes the bottom. Potiphar sits on his top bunk, his legs hanging over the edge. He is reading a copy of Hamlet. He has reading glasses on. Hermes occupies the bottom bunk and is also reading a copy of Hamlet. A stack of other copies of Hamlet lies on the ground.)

POTIPHAR

This is good stuff - how come you never mentioned Shakespeare before? I didn't know what I was missing sticking to abridged mystery audio-tapes.

HERMES

Really? You like it? Because re-reading it now I find it kind of drab. Sure it's pretty and all - but does it speak to me, to those of my generation - (unsure) whatever my generation is exactly. The cultural critics call us the ampersand generation - now that they've run out of letters to name us with, but I don't buy it. For like all generations, we're amorphous, a majority of exceptions, un-unified. And yet, and yet, somehow we are united in *taste*, in response, in our proclivities, and so for me, and for most of the ampersands, all Shakespeare really does is slowly entertain us - slowly because it takes so damn long to read. Wouldn't it be better to read five plays by current authors, like that clever guy in the shoe polishing division, who writes those witty comedies about what it's like to serve a king in our post-post-modern age, than to read Hamlet?

POTIPHAR

Well it doesn't take too long if you don't try and understand it. It really flies by then.

HERMES

Forgive me if I'm wrong, but isn't the whole point to understand it?

POTIPHAR

I forgive you.

HERMES

For what?

POTIPHAR

For being wrong.

HERMES

(sarcastically)

Oh, please explain.

POTIPHAR

Gladly. It's not meant to be understood on paper, but on stage - with great actors like me, and Olivier, and Garrick. Travolta. It's so silly they had all those books on Shakespeare in the library - I'm sure they'd be interesting if one was into reading, but what non-member of the royalty is nowadays? We don't have time to finish all of Castle-

Cosmo, let alone books about other books we also haven't read. So that's why I think Shakespeare is cool and I'm going along with this whole project - I can take a seemingly incomprehensible work, written in Latin for God's sake...

HERMES

It's written in English.

POTIPHAR

Whatever. And I can transform it into a work of beauty that affects an entire audience - even if they don't realize it, even if the words stumble their consciousness but fill their subconscious.

HERMES

Where are you getting this from? You'd never heard of Shakespeare before today, let alone performed him.

POTIPHAR

Oh, the introduction.

(holding up his copy of Hamlet)

It's really good. Did you know Hamlet invented the subconscious? How about that Hamlet is the central character in all of world literature? Well it's true. And I'm going to be the final person to play him. So from now on, it'll kind of be like I invented the subconscious and I'm the central character in world literature. People will be like, remember that play Potiphar was in, and the other person will be like, oh, you mean the one where he invented the subconscious and became the central character in world literature? And the first guy will say, yeah, that one.

HERMES

What do you mean you'll be playing him?

POTIPHAR

Well I naturally assumed I'd play the lead. I am a world renowned actor.

HERMES

(obviously lying)

Well yes, of course, but I just assumed I'd play Hamlet.

POTIPHAR

Oh no, you should play Polonius. He's sort of funny and plotting. You're a perfect fit.

HERMES

You think?

POTIPHAR

Believe me, I've been in this biz a long time, too long on some days, and if there's one thing I know, it's casting. And you have to go with your instincts. Because without instincts, man is like a blind monkey in a joust - no matter what you do, you're getting a javelin in the eye. Plus, what do you want playing a pastry chef anyway?

HERMES

What? What pastry chef? We're not doing Hamlet Can Cook, we're doing Hamlet.

POTIPHAR

What pastry chef!? How about Hamlet? The prince of the Danish. The finest pastry chef the *West* has ever seen – rivaled by no one save Ko Kaiden, the cheesecake shogun of the *East*.

HERMES

Oh Potiphar, I was so excited for a moment. You were acting so eloquently, I thought maybe I was finally rubbing off on you a little.

POTIPHAR

See, I am a great actor. You didn't realize for a second I'm still the same lovable, naive old Potiphar.

(Potiphar sings.)

Look into my brain, what do you see?
 You see a donut.
 Look into my drain, what do you see?
 Clogged yogurt.
 Some call me dumb, some call me squishy,
 some call me fun, some slap my tushee,
 Most forget my name, most abuse my feelings,
 But inside this wronged young frame,
 is a nice interesting, talented guy you'd like to get to know more.
 Like to get to know more.
 Go for walk,
 you'll discover I can talk,
 come on over and you'll see,

Potiphar's a friend to me.

HERMES

I guess you are a good actor, you should play Hamlet. I just can't get mad at you.

(Hermes goes and gives Potiphar a little hug, like on Potiphar's legs which are hanging over the side of the bunk-bed.)

POTIPHAR

Okay, that's enough. We wouldn't want someone to get the wrong idea - especially one of us.

HERMES

Yes, you're right for once. Anyway, getting back to your error, Hamlet is not the Prince of the Danish, but the Prince of Denmark.

POTIPHAR

But isn't he the Prince of the Danish people, which one might naturally abbreviate - Prince of the Danish?

HERMES

I guess you're right, but you're missing the point entirely.

POTIPHAR

I'm right again! Two for two - I'm on fire. Touch me, I'm sizzling.

HERMES

All right, enough of that Potiphar. Time is of the essence, so we need to get moving on this show pronto. First, we'll need the rest of the cast. I'll leave that up to you. Tomorrow you'll search out the castle, discovering stars, or at least moderately cogent and non-drooling individuals for the cast. I will do all the necessary preparations for our first rehearsal, which will be tomorrow night at eight, with all the actors you find. We will thus reconvene in exactly 24 hours, from

(signaling from exactly this moment)

now, in our room, fully prepared to begin our holy undertaking. Till then, tata.

POTIPHAR

We aren't going to go to sleep tonight?

HERMES

Oh right, we will reconvene in exactly 24-8, 16 hours from tomorrow morning when we wake up.

POTIPHAR

Huh?

HERMES

Get me a cast by tomorrow night.

POTIPHAR

Well wouldn't it be best to have an open casting call? We'd see the best talent.

HERMES

No, no, no, we must maintain absolute secrecy. We can't let anyone know our true intentions, not even the cast if possible. For no matter what, the one thing to remember above all: under no circumstances is the King or Hildred to get wind of this. Because if they do, it's all over, they'll put us out to dry faster than a sumo wrestler's match-used sweat-band.

POTIPHAR

Okay, if you put it that way.

HERMES

Well, we have to do it this way, even though I'm sure you're right.

POTIPHAR

Three for three! Michael Jordan in the house!

(Potiphar mimes shooting a basket and admires his form.)

So pretty.

HERMES

Goodnight Potiphar.

(Hermes puts out his light.)

POTIPHAR

Goodnight.

(Potiphar shuts off his light and continues speaking.)

Three seconds left, Potiphar with the ball, Lakers down by two. Three, two, one, oh my, he launches it from *way* beyond the three point line. It's good, it's good, Lakers win, Lakers win!

(End of scene.)

Scene 4 - Hildred and T'sillah's room

(This scene takes place in Hildred and T'sillah's room, which is furnished identically to Potiphar and Hermes. T'sillah lies on the top bunk, reading from a large tome. Hildred sits knitting. T'sillah is Hildred's assistant and would-be lover - she secretly pines for Hildred.)

T'SILLAH

(reading from Hildred's record-book)

November 4th: Cleaned the Queen's bathtub, the Queen remarked 'never saw a tub sparkle so.' November 23rd: Served the royal family Thanksgiving dinner - got special compliment for giving up the holiday without pay - given turkey carcass as thank-you. December 1st, spent all day cleaning the King's fireplace, Potiphar and Hermes entered just before the King did. I, covered in soot against a black wall, was functionally invisible. The King assumed Potiphar and Hermes had cleaned the fireplace - hah - oh excuse me, but like they ever do anything? King complimented them and treated them to a round at the Castle Tavern as reward. December 12th...

HILDRED

Wait, what's written in the vengeance column for that one?

T'SILLAH

There's not anything written.

HILDRED

What? Nothing? How can that be?

(T'sillah comes down from her bunk to try and comfort the quickly maddening Hildred.)

T'SILLAH

Oh come on Hilly, it's no big deal. So those two got a little free attention.

HILDRED

(pulling away from T'sillah)

It is not okay. I work very hard for the meager praise I receive - the meager grounds for meaning in this forsaken life I lead. They stole what was mine, they made no protestations, and now, now they must pay. How it slipped my mind until now, I know not.

T'SILLAH

But Hildred, you're such a wonderful woman. Sure you were wronged, but you can forget about it, make the best of it.

HILDRED

T'sillah, be quiet. You're an *assistant* servant. You have no right to make moral judgements. When you earn tenure like I have, then, if you like, you can go around on a pogo-stick, cry out against injustice, and gain lots of weight. Now, what are *we* going to do about this?

T'SILLAH

We?

HILDRED

You do want to please me, don't you?

T'SILLAH

Well of course, you're everything to me, you're...

HILDRED

Hush up T'sillah. All I'm doing is showing you the castle ropes, you know, teaching you the few tricks they *still* don't teach you at Harvard Servant School™.

T'SILLAH

Oh no, you're wrong. You're like a mother to me, no, more than a mother ever could be.

HILDRED

Now that's enough. Before long you'll be telling me you've fallen madly in love with me.

(As Hildred says this, there is a pause. A look of unmasking falls upon T'sillah's face. T'sillah breaks into a song, though Hildred appears to be unaware she is singing.)

T'SILLAH

(sings)

Madly In Love

I've fallen madly in love with you,
so hard it hurts to tie my shoe.

if you're around and I am too,
I feel forlorn and show it too.

I've fallen madly in love with you,
and I've hardly got a clue what to do.

Should I tell you,
should I just leave a clue,
that I've fallen madly in love with you?

Should I just go home and leave my job,
Because you make my lesbian heart throb?

She won't see me, she doesn't care,
that I've fallen madly, deeply in love and am so bare.

She has her world and I have mine,
my question is will they ever align?

When will my pain end?
When will the fence fall down?

HILDRED

(continuing her speech from before)

And that's patently insane.

(T'sillah's face is filled with distraught.)

A beautiful young woman like yourself, falling for an old hag like me, when there are so many fine-looking menial workers to choose from? And like I could love you? Even when I was head of the Castle Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Straight, Transgendered, and Asexuals Union, and *all* the young hotties, well besides the asexuals, made passes at me, it didn't move me. Now when I'm old - ha to even think it. Now, how are we going to give it to those motherfuckers where it hurts, and we all know exactly where that is.

T'SILLAH

Oh Hildred, please.

HILDRED

Oh come on, it's just you and me here. It's not like I'm speaking to the whole world - cause if I was, well, I'd be talking about a whole lot of other things. About things that matter and can change the world - not how we've got to figure out what those two little, (pausing and looking around) parental sexcisers are up to, and how to put an embarrassing end to it.

T'SILLAH

(getting excited)

So they're up to something you think?

HILDRED

Oh I know it. I can smell their rank smelling plans ten cold underlit mildewy corridors away.

T'SILLAH

So what do you think they're up to?

HILDRED

I'm not sure exactly - that's where you come in.

T'SILLAH

Me?

HILDRED

(sarcastically)

No. When I said you, I meant the invisible goose dancing in the corner. Yes you. You work your stuff on that dim-witted Potiphar, and find out what their plan is. Then you get us in on it somehow, and then we joyfully ruin it.

T'SILLAH

That's brilliant. I won't let you down. I'll suck in my inner drives and be the best hoochie-momma this castle's ever seen.

HILDRED

That's the spirit. Good, it's finally sinking in how our lives are just one long sublimation till death. Better get a practicing while you're young. For when you're old and senile, people will be more likely to give you their life savings to buy a hearing aid, then think of you sexually.

T'SILLAH

Oh, well I don't know if I can agree with that.

HILDRED

Go to bed, it's late. I'll just finish up this knitting.

T'SILLAH

Can I sleep in your bed tonight? It's warmer.

HILDRED

Hush up and get used to the cold, that's life.

T'SILLAH

It doesn't have to be.

HILDRED

For us it does. And I'll teach you that if I have to spank you.

T'SILLAH

Would you?

(Hildred continues to knit, end of scene.)

Scene 5 - The Castle multi-purpose room

(Potiphar is looking at head-shots of people, tearing them up one by one. T'sillah comes on stage.)

T'SILLAH

Oh hi Potiphar, you're just who I was looking for, I really want to talk to you.

(Potiphar jumps up to meet her.)

POTIPHAR

Really, that's weird.

T'SILLAH

Oh no, it's not. You are really handsome.

POTIPHAR

Hand you some of what? I don't follow.

T'SILLAH

Oh Potiphar, umm, it's just that you are a really great guy, with such a good body, and I'd really like to get to know you more, and especially if you were doing any project that I could become involved with, and were we could get to know each other more. Right yeah, because I have this really insightful friend my age, and I know people young like us aren't supposed to talk eloquently about the things in life that really matter. But *she* does, and anyway, she says that the best way for people to fall for each other, is to be involved in a project together, were the two of you can be together a lot, in an area of devotion, but without having to focus completely on each other and get bogged down in all the societal mumbo jumbo that starts to affect you in those situations. And so, I was thinking that maybe you and I could...(failing) oh I can't do this. I can't lie for love, I can't, it runs so counter to it.

POTIPHAR

I know what you mean. Love and truth hand holds so much, we all know exactly what they're doing sitting in that tree. K-i-s-s-i-n-g.

T'SILLAH

Well, give me a second to process that,

(pauses)

oh yeah, that makes sense.

POTIPHAR

Really, you think? Mostly my comments get blown off. Which is really painful.

T'SILLAH

I know. For me, like, well, there's one person who I really want this deep connection with, and it seems like before I begin to speak, she's already turned me off.

POTIPHAR

Yeah, I'm sure that's really painful too. Because like with me, there's person who means a lot to me, but who doesn't listen to me. Well, he listens to me, he understands all the words, but he doesn't try and think of them in a profound sense. He only looks at the superficial meaning.

(sees T'sillah is listening)

I'm not so silver-tongued and all, and sometimes I say stupid things which I don't mean, but I wish he would have more faith in me to presume I was saying something important, and then, only when it's clear I've made another comment of the bungling idiot sort, write it off. I don't know why I'm telling you all this, I must seem so silly, just making a fool of myself again.

T'SILLAH

Oh no, you're not. Thank you for sharing with me, for being comfortable to share with me. Because I know I don't have anyone to share my true feelings with. I have my friend who gives really good advice, but I don't feel comfortable talking about the most intimate things with them.

POTIPHAR

You mean underwear?

T'SILLAH

No. Like deepest feelings and emotions.

POTIPHAR

Damn it. I thought that's what you probably meant, but I just said underwear. I don't know what's wrong with me.

T'SILLAH

I don't mind. It was funny. Clever.

POTIPHAR

You think? You think I was trying to be clever?

T'SILLAH

(pondering)

Maybe. I don't see why not. You seem like you could be very funny.

POTIPHAR

But tragic too, no?

T'SILLAH

I don't see why not- you had a lot of pathos in you when you were talking about your friend. It suggested how the two of you may never reconcile, though you will forever be linked. Heavy stuff.

POTIPHAR

Well thanks. You do pathos now.

T'SILLAH

I don't see what you mean.

POTIPHAR

I don't know, it just came out I guess. No. I know what I meant, talk some more if you can, if you want to, I don't mean to force you to do anything, but I want us to share.

T'SILLAH

Oh, I'd love to. I feel a very strong connection to you at this moment. One I've never felt with the woman I love. But that doesn't stop me from feeling that nothing but her will make me happy, will free me from whatever enclosure I feel myself in. Do you ever get that - when you look around and feel like, my life is so contained. But if only you had someone truly special, it wouldn't matter that there were limits to your existence, because you could live in the area where you and that person's lives interconnected, and transcend the limits - even if they'd still really be there. And you'd feel a sort of confidence, because you'd be free to move, but not so much it would scare you. Maybe I should have been a dancer? Maybe thinking it was too hard, too much of a struggle, with no guarantees like lifelong servitude, was a mistake.

POTIPHAR

I don't know. Look at all the potential happiness you see in this life. And well, I know this isn't exactly like dancing, but how would you like a leading role in a major play I'm producing. You're wonderful and you'd be wonderful in it.

T'SILLAH

Oh, that's so flattering. Thank-you, thank-you, I'd love it. It'd be a dream. Oh, I won't let you down. No, I won't. I just only hope that this doesn't come in-between my true-

love and me. You know, if I get so passionate about this, she might think I'm not passionate about her.

POTIPHAR

Well, maybe this is crazy, but, you know how you said doing a project with another person can be a great opportunity to really be with each other? Well, there's another female part in the play that's not cast yet. It's for an older woman, but how can I come in-between true lesbian-love? Remember, lesbians didn't make God, God made lesbians.

T'SILLAH

Oh, no, it's perfect - she's older than me, quite a bit older. Oh this is wonderful Potiphar, I'm so glad we spoke, you've changed my life.

POTIPHAR

Well thank-you. But you've also helped me - all the female roles are cast, and well, you've given me a little more faith that I can make it. That we can make it.

(They sing an impromptu duet.)

Oh, we can do anything,
climb a tree,
even with an artificial knee,
oh yes. Our tree.
Oh no, we won't be stopped,
not till it's chopped
our tree of dreams,
we pick it's bark,

T'SILLAH

till it creates lovers sparks,

POTIPHAR

or friendships quarks,

TOGETHER

our tree.
Our tree can do anything,
we'll hang a swing,
say ding a ling,
ring, ring, ring,

hello good friend.
 We'll come to it once again,
 when life's a gem,
 and thank the tree,

T'SILLAH

and you thank me,

POTIPHAR

and me thank thee,

TOGETHER

we're friends.

T'SILLAH

(speaking again)

Oh Potiphar, Hildred is going to be so happy when I tell her about the play.

POTIPHAR

You're telling Hildred about the play?! You can't do that. Hermes will go crazy, he'll kill me.

T'SILLAH

Well of course I'm telling her. She's in the play. That might involve knowing about it, don't you think?

POTIPHAR

Wait a second. Let me put two and two together - four! You're in love with Hildred! She's your dream? Our tree wants you and Hildred to make out in it?

T'SILLAH

Oh I know it's crazy, she's so much more of a woman than I am. But love is blind.

POTIPHAR

Yes, that expression never made sense until now. You're quite right. Well, I guess if that's what our tree demands, so it shall be. I'm going to have a lot of explaining to do on this one though. See you tonight at eight in my room for the first rehearsal. Wear comfortable shoes.

T'SILLAH

Great, but uh, well, now that we're friends, can I ask you a personal question? I feel sort of obligated to ask it.

POTIPHAR

Sure, go ahead, shoot. Just don't aim for the head.

T'SILLAH

Are you and Hermes planning any secret plot?

POTIPHAR

Besides the play? Nothing that I can think of.

T'SILLAH

Oh my God, the play, of course. And me and Hildred are in it! Don't you just love it when there's something you don't think you should do, but you're scared of the consequences of not doing it, but you act on higher faith, and you don't do it, and things still work out.

POTIPHAR

Oh absolutely. Like sometimes they tell me to clean the King's bathroom, and I don't want to do it, so I just spray it with popouri spray, and he's all like, 'thanks for cleaning the bathroom Potiphar, I know it's worse than hell in there,' and I just smile.

T'SILLAH

Oh. Thanks for everything again. See you later.

(T'sillah exits.)

POTIPHAR

(smelling his underarms)

God I love that fresh Popouri smell.

(Bertrand enters attached to a very long chain. He is carrying some books.)

BERTRAND

Hi Potiphar.

POTIPHAR

Oh hi Bertrand. Hey, what are you doing out of the dungeon, err, library? Collecting overdue fines?

BERTRAND

Sort of. I think what Hermes said today about not ever getting out really got to Lager. He rustled up a really long chain and told me to 'go and live', well, 'go and live and track down the Prince and get back those girly Young Adult books he stole in his early adolescence.' You know, it's funny, I think the Prince is really starting to mature too. Like when he was young, he would come into the dungeon and give me Indian red-burns, but like now, when I went to get the books, he gave me some, but then he told me I have to come back later and sample his product and hangout if I want any more. But he did tell me a few of the books he has to keep for sentimental reasons. Then I thought I might argue with him on that one, but then I remembered that I'm a condemned prisoner and he's the Prince. But he's definitely grown as a person. Maybe it's because of all the science he's into now.

POTIPHAR

Science, really?

BERTRAND

Yeah, he's got like a whole laboratory in his room, with all these scales and bags full of green herbs, and other bags with white powder, and all sorts of pills. Well, I better go, tata.

POTIPHAR

Hey, wait a second. You think Lager might be letting you out some more?

BERTRAND

Well, he said it's about time he lets go of his little baby. I thought about reminding him that then perhaps he might also stop *torturing* me, but I didn't want to press my luck.

POTIPHAR

Is that one of your favorite game shows too? No whammy's for me. But anyway, I have a proposition for.

BERTRAND

Look, I've been chained to a wall for a long time, but not that long - I'm not that type of guy.

POTIPHAR

So you wouldn't want a part in a play?

BERTRAND

Is it a straight play, or a musical, or...

POTIPHAR

Oh, it's fully heterosexual.

BERTRAND

Well cool. That'd be a dream come true.

POTIPHAR

Awesome. Ever since I saw you, I thought you were perfect. I even said so to Hermes.

BERTRAND

We're still talking about the play, right?

(Potiphar nods yes.)

BERTRAND

Good. The only thing is, we have to keep this a secret from Lager. I don't know if he would give me so much freedom right away. I don't want to chance it.

POTIPHAR

Makes sense - do you need an alibi then?

BERTRAND

Oh yeah, good idea.

POTIPHAR

Thanks, just another thing my childhood of nearly uninterrupted television viewing taught me. Do you have anything in mind - maybe you're went over to have dinner at a friends house, and then watched a movie? That one works nearly every time on T.V.

BERTRAND

Well,

(suggesting)

how about more along the lines of, I have to go to the Prince's room every night to get back another stolen book, and then I have to stay there awhile and comfort him over the loss.

POTIPHAR

Cool, sounds good. So see you tonight at eight in my room. Wear comfortable clothes.

BERTRAND

This is for the play, right?

POTIPHAR

Uh-huh.

BERTRAND

Just checking. The last time I rushed into a lot of off-beat stuff I was condemned to eternal torture, so I think it's understandable I sort of hedge my bets nowadays.

POTIPHAR

(brushing him off)

Okay, I get it.

BERTRAND

That was too much, wasn't it?

POTIPHAR

(getting irritated)

It's a little annoying that you feel compelled to explain everything you say. Have a little faith.

BERTRAND

Yeah, sorry.

POTIPHAR

(had enough)

Fine.

BERTRAND

I didn't mean to say anything inappropriate.

POTIPHAR

(definitely had enough)

You've made that abundantly clear.

(Bertrand waves goodbye and exits.)

POTIPHAR

(mocking Bertrand)

'For the play right?' I'm sorry, ego or not, I'm an attractive man. I don't care if I'm not gay and he's not gay - he should still be attracted to me. Men.

(Potiphar exits. End of scene.)

Scene 6 - The dungeon/library

(Lager sits at his desk, fuddling with books.
Hermes enters. Lager looks up.)

LAGER

(a bit surprised)

Oh Hermes my good man, it's so good to see you again so soon. Oh, you must have come for those books I suggested.

HERMES

You're in a good mood.

LAGER

Non-sense.

HERMES

Okay.

LAGER

All I meant was, well, oh forget it.

HERMES

What are you talking about?

LAGER

Well, all right. Come on over here.

(Hermes comes over to Lager.)

LAGER

Your comment about how I never leave here got to me. Really got under my skin. So anyway, I did what I always do when I get upset, I went and read “Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff - And It’s All Small Stuff” by Richard Carlson.

(getting emotional)

And I came to Chapter 76. “Get Comfortable Not Knowing”. It teaches, through a moving parable about a wise old man and a village, how to attain peace in the unknown. And that made me realize something. I’ve been misreading the entire book. It’s not just about convincing and tricking yourself that your life doesn’t suck. It’s about, by trying new ideas, new things, and learning to exist in the unfamiliar, actually *being* satisfied with your life. At first - I think because the idea that I’ve been wasting my life for so long is so overwhelmingly painful - I thought: this doesn’t apply to me. I love my ventureless life. It’s rewarding. But whom does it apply to? Whom’s the one really chained up? Whom can’t experience deep satisfaction and needs to be cut loose? Bertrand. Well, alright, he still has to be physically chained up, but I can cut his mental chain. So I found a really long chain-extension and set him *out* into the castle. Which left me alone with my thoughts. Oh heavy, heavy thoughts. They tore me open. Look at yourself Lager. It’s you who are trapped! That’s who Richard Carlson is writing for. You! And that’s about where I was when you came in.

HERMES

Well, I feel honored, if a bit weird, being told all this. You think you’re ready to try something new, something outside the dungeon, err, library?

LAGER

I am. And it took me a lot of courage to just come out and say that. But I think it’s the truth.

HERMES

Well then. Gosh. What’d you have in mind then?

LAGER

How am I supposed to know? I haven’t been outside in twenty years. I don’t know what the kids do for fun nowadays - what dangerous method of inefficient manual transportation they use. What sort of things they put into their noses. What they do to rebel. I want to rebel Hermes.

HERMES

Against whom?

LAGER

Myself.

HERMES

Oh. Well, are there any activities you're interested in.

LAGER

Sure, but gin-rummy isn't exactly rebellious. Do you know of any rebellions?

HERMES

Well, I know of something, but I wouldn't exactly call it a rebellion. More an ideological literary statement with metaphysical underpinnings. But I shouldn't tell you about it. It's not a good idea.

LAGER

Oh come on, this is a desperate man here. Please Hermes, this is my future.

HERMES

(considering)

Well,

(pausing)

do you act?

LAGER

Do I act? Do I act?

(pausing)

No. But I could learn. I bet I'm a natural, I've read lots of plays. I could be also be a dramaturg. Think of the headlines.

HERMES

(thinking)

Hmmm. Well I was going to do the dramaturgy myself, but you doing it would save me a lot of work, so okay. You're in.

LAGER

What play are you doing?

HERMES

Hamlet.

LAGER

What? The play the King is destroying? The play about an evil king, who, like our King Video, and those before him, heartlessly maintains his power? That's no ideological statement, that's a French-revolution, get your freakin' head chopped-off, kind of rebellion.

HERMES

I never thought of it that way. You know, as the play being an attack on the King. But you're right. This is a chance for us to stand up and criticize, make our voices heard, even if we're trying to do it so that no one important hears them, and we don't die. Well, are you in? Can you pledge yourself to the play?

LAGER

I don't know Hermes.

HERMES

Come on, do it. Live Lager. Because you wouldn't look good with a nose-ring.

LAGER

All right. I pledge allegiance to the play, which undermines the United Kingdom of the Areas of the Castle, and especially the King who rules over it, tightfistedly, without reverence to any higher being, harshly, with few civil liberties, and little sensitivity, for any.

HERMES

Okay, good. Maybe we can make that our warmup cheer. But this is just perfect. I was coming here to ask you some questions about Hamlet, and now you're an accomplice, and doing lots of my work for me.

LAGER

Well if you put it that way. So let's get started. What did you want to know?

HERMES

Just some questions about the text. Like I'm under the impression there are different versions of it, and so I was unsure which one we should use.

LAGER

You're quite right. Now there's the First Quarto, often caddly called, the Bad Quarto. You bad bad corrupted Quarto. But it's interesting because it moves fast. It's not nearly as pretty as the other versions, but much less ambiguous and wordy. And so, while we

would never perform it alone, its heightened tempo shouldn't be forgotten. Then there's the more standard Second Quarto and First Folio versions. Those are what we consider the more real Hamlets. And there's also Quarto Three, Four and Five. But this is silly, I should just show you what I mean. I have a box with all the different versions right around here somewhere (seeing the now empty box) That's funny, it was full this morning when you and Potiphar came by.

HERMES

Oh yes, right. Funny how things slip your memory. Uhh, Potiphar and I, eh, temporarily borrowed the books.

LAGER

I didn't remember you checking anything out. Plus those weren't supposed to go out.

HERMES

Perhaps, we stole the freakin' books would more accurately describe it.

LAGER

(containing himself)

Go get the books. All the books. Now. Now. Now. Before I change my mind about all of this.

HERMES

Okay.

(Hermes runs out of the dungeon. Lager regains a happy countenance.)

LAGER

(smiling and smirking to himself)

Well I still have to keep up appearances and maintain a little order. It can't get out that the dungeon master's really just a cuddly, Pillsbury-Doughboy softy.

(Lager pokes himself and tickles himself and laughs like the Pillsbury-Doughboy)

(End of scene.)

Scene 7 - Potiphar and Hermes' room

(It's a little before eight that night. Hermes is organizing copies of the script. Potiphar comes in.)

POTIPHAR

Hi Hermes, how did your preparations go? Is that the script?

HERMES

Yep. Made eighteen copies. Figured we'd double cast a few people. How many actors did you get? Eighteen I hope. Seventeen?

POTIPHAR

Three.

HERMES

Three-teen? I mean thirteen?

POTIPHAR

No. Three. Bertrand, T'sillah, and, uh, Hildred.

HERMES

(shouting)

Who?

POTIPHAR

I have a feeling you heard me the first time.

HERMES

Yeah, that's right. I heard you say, the one person besides the King who could ruin our project, is now

(counting)

one of the six actors we have for a play made for a cast of twenty.

POTIPHAR

Six?

HERMES

Oh yeah, I gave Lager a part.

POTIPHAR

Great - though didn't you say you wanted people who didn't drool? Anyway, that's probably enough people for the show. See if you can work it out.

HERMES

All right, but I still can't believe you did this. Hildred.

POTIPHAR

There were extenuating circumstances.

HERMES

I'm sure there were. Like your stupidity.

POTIPHAR

Hey, watch it buddy. You do your calculations, and I'll take care of embarrassing myself.

HERMES

All right.

(Hermes takes a copy of the script and furiously works through it, trying to figure out how to assign parts.)

HERMES

Well, it'd work if we did fifteen scenes where characters played by the same person talk to each other. Man, this is all ruined. We had a strict production schedule and now who knows when we can get started, if ever. I say just call the whole thing off.

(A chime goes off.)

Great. It's eight o'clock, everybody's going to be coming and we, no you, are going to have to tell them they have to go home. Thanks everyone for coming tonight, but the final performance of Hamlet is cancelled.

POTIPHAR

What? I can go home now?

HERMES

Yep, the show's over.

(The lights go up to house lights. The actors - except for those playing Bertrand and the Prince - file off from the off-stage waiting areas towards the auditorium exit, leaving with whatever

personal items they've brought - the show's over so they're going home. All the actors except Bertrand, the Prince, Hermes and Potiphar exit the theater. The actor playing Hermes walks slowly to the theater's exit, thoroughly defeated. The actor playing Potiphar takes his ego sign back from off-stage and has almost exited the theater when Bertrand and the Prince come on stage.)

PRINCE

What's going on here? Why's everyone leaving?

HERMES

(to the Prince)

What are you doing in our room?

BERTRAND

Oh, Potiphar offered me a part in the play, and I kind of mentioned it to the Prince here when we were hanging out tonight, and he sort of, demanded a part. He's a good actor and all - he almost had me that those copies of Playboy I found in his room are for a report on highly glossy paper.

HERMES

The show's over I'm afraid. Everyone's left.

POTIPHAR

No Hermes - no. Don't you see - take a look at those part calculations again. Quickly, before any of the actors get into a taxi. What would one more actor do for us?

HERMES

Well I don't know, let me see.

(Hermes runs over to the script and furiously calculates)

Oh my. Yes. Yes. We just about make it. We can do it. The show's back on. The show's back on! Oh I love you Potiphar

(kisses Potiphar on the cheek)

I'm so happy. I'm sorry I abuse you sometimes.

(Potiphar goes and puts away his ego sign offstage.)

PRINCE

I am just so excited, this is going to be so much fun. You guys are great. Know that I'll supply the supply 24/7. Cast party, whenever. Here's my beeper number

(gives Hermes a business card)

24/7, I'm always at your beck and call.

HERMES

What is this guy talking about? Anyway, before you get on board, let me clear something else up, just so we're crystal on this.

PRINCE

I can do crystal, no problem. Give me twenty minutes.

HERMES

Is this guy on smack or something, what is he talking about?

PRINCE

Smack, just give me...

HERMES

I understand that you're the Prince, you could have me put to death, etc., etc. But I am the director of this project. I need you on my side, listening to what I say. Can you do that?

PRINCE

Uh-huh.

HERMES

Okay. Now, I just want to make sure that you know what the situation is. You've heard your father's New Year's resolutions for this year?

PRINCE

I announced them to you.

HERMES

Right, sorry, slipped my mind. So you're totally in this?

PRINCE

Hey, my dad is a mean loser and I hate 'em. Anything I can do to screw with him, even if it's an ideological statement of no actual consequences, is awesome.

POTIPHAR

Well then we should probably get the other actors back then. They're probably chilling in Starbucks by now.

HERMES

Yes, you're right. But our true intentions against the King must remain a secret between us. Hildred, who's hatred for Potiphar and myself is about as intense as a New York City cop on quota day, and T'sillah, her ravishing yet devious sidekick, cannot know anything. I'm pretty sure they don't know about the King's resolutions, so as long as we don't say anything to them, we should be safe.

(Potiphar runs out the theater door and gets the other actors back. They all assemble around Hermes back on stage.)

HERMES

Thank you everyone for coming today. What we are about to embark on is I'm sure going to be an amazing experience for everyone.

(T'sillah smiles at Hildred and then Potiphar)

We, the seven of us, are going to perform, during the New Year's Ball, at 8 PM, just for fun, one of the world's greatest works, Hamlet, by William Shakespeare. Hamlet will be our daily bread for the next three weeks. Every night we will immerse ourselves in the Bard. That's Shakespeare by the way. Lager, our trusty librarian and fearsome dungeon master, will explain the literary aspects of the play. I, as the director, will explain Hamlet as life, will make life into Hamlet. So clear all your appointments, cancel your date for the New Year's Ball, and get ready to ride the wildest Danish roller coaster the world has ever seen. Now, before we begin, any questions?

HILDRED

Who the hell do you think you are?

HERMES

Great, if there aren't any questions, Potiphar will pass out the scripts and I will announce the parts. Then we'll do a read through and then you can get to work on your lines, and then tomorrow night, we'll start rehearsing scene one. If you're in it, be off-book by tomorrow or you and Lager will spend some special time going over the material downstairs, if you get my drift. All right everyone, gather round. Listen carefully. Casting is as follows, no comments please:

Tier One Parts
Hamlet - Potiphar

Polonius – Hermes
 Doctor - Hermes
 Tier Two, Lesser Parts
 Claudius - Lager
 Horatio - Prince
 Laertes - Bertrand
 Rosencrantz - Bertrand
 Guildenstern - T'sillah
 Francisco - Prince
 Marcellus - Bertrand
 Barnardo - T'sillah
 Fortinbras - Prince
 Players - first player and player King - Bertrand, Player Queen - T'sillah
 Lucianus - Prince
 Captain - Bertrand
 First and Second Clown, or Grave diggers - Bertrand and T'sillah
 Gertrude - Hildred
 Ophelia - T'sillah
 Ghost - Lager
 Reynaldo - Hildred - I know, it's going to be a tad jarring to have the actress playing Hamlet's mother play a man, not that it's much of a stretch for Hildred, but I just couldn't pass up the opportunity to cast Hildred as my servant. Okay, moving on.

(Hildred shoots looks of daggers at Hermes.)

HERMES

(mockingly scared)

Oooo, I'm scared.

(Hildred takes out a real dagger.)

HERMES

Hey, put that away, don't make us start patting people down before rehearsal.

(Hildred puts the dagger away.)

Okay, where was I? Yes.

Voltemand - Prince
 Gentleman - T'sillah
 Messenger - Prince
 First Sailor - Bertrand

Osrice - T'sillah

Lord - T'sillah

All - Bertrand

LAGER

I think 'All' means everyone in the scene speaks at once, not a character named All.

HERMES

Yes, of course, just put that in to see if you were paying attention. All right, enough interruptions.

First Ambassador – Prince

Yes, the final scene is performed by the Prince playing all three parts. Fortinbras, Horatio and First Ambassador. It's post-modern, and we're post-post-modern, so don't worry. Well, that's about it. Shall we sit down for a read through?

(The cast joins hands, and sing together.)

ALL

We are Hamlet.

Hamlet is us.

From God to Shakespeare,
in us now's the trust.

We won't let the bard down,
the paying patrons too.
Cause we all know, the Bard is true!

We are Hamlet.
And we're Shakespeare.
We are actors, and we'll see it through.

He was the greatest,
The finest entertainest,
And so now we'll try to knock the socks off Hamlet, and expose his feet to you!

Cause we all are Hamlet, yes every single one of us, yes we are!
Use the bathroom if you like now, it's not far!
But please don't leave and go and get your car!

We are Hamlet.
Hamlet is us.
From God to Shakespeare,
in us now's the trust.

(End of Act One)

Act II

Scene 1 - the King's dressing room

(Potiphar and Hermes are in the King's dressing room. There is a lot of clothing hung up. Potiphar and Hermes are sweating and trying to move a wooden table. It's giving them trouble, and so they're stopping for a minute to catch their breath.)

POTIPHAR

This table is going to be great for the set, I'm sure the King won't even notice it's gone.

(The King enters, sees them, and goes over to them.)

KING

What's going on men, what are you doing with my table?

HERMES

Oh hi King. Umm, we're just taking it, to get, uhhh, dry-cleaned.

KING

Dry-cleaned? It looks fine to me - you can't just polish it?

POTIPHAR

No, Hermes says the set has to sparkle for the play on New Year's. He says amateur productions often needlessly settle for cheap looking sets.

KING

What play?

HERMES

Oh right, well, there's this, well, we wanted to do a little play sometime on New Year's.

KING

What's the play about?

POTIPHAR

A king! A powerful king who's actions have consequences.

KING

Really, oh, I see.

(aside)

Come on, a powerful king who's actions have consequences - that's me!

(the King sings)

I'm gonna be immortalized in drama, I'm going to be a star.
 Controlling the canon has such wonderful perks,
 Maybe I should chuck out *several* of Shakespeare's works.
 Hamlet tomorrow, Macbeth after that,
 I don't care for 'em so they can all go splat.

And if trashing Shakespeare doesn't float my boat,
 I'll through Byron into the moat.
 And there's always Shelley who so smelly,
 and I never really liked Keats,
 or took a great fondness for Yesats,

And so they'll go, and in the collective unconscious be replaced by a show,
 that immortalizes me in drama!

(spoken)

Sounds like a great idea, when were you planning to do it?

HERMES

Uhh, sometime while the ball was going on, off in some room in the castle, very minimalist, small production, hardly worth seeing.

KING

Nonsense. I'd love to see it. Shame on you, you're too modest Hermes...

HERMES

(interrupting)

It's Hermes your majesty.

KING

Whatever. Anyway, you do it as part of the ball, so I can see it, and so everyone can see it. Now, please feel free to use any of my wardrobe for costumes, or my horse, or...

HERMES

Oh, I don't think we'll need live animals for this production.

KING

If you say so, but don't limit your artistic vision on account of me, take whatever you need, furniture, essential structural beams of the castle, my crown, here,
(giving it to Hermes)
you can have it, don't be shy.

HERMES

That's really nice of you, but we don't really need it I think, here you go.
(placing it back on the King's head)
But thank you so much for everything, we won't disappoint.

KING

Of course not, now you two carry on with whatever you were doing to that poor table. I'll check up on you later. Ta-ta.
(King exits)

POTIPHAR

Why no live animals Hermes?

HERMES

You imbecile, you invalid, you idiot, you. You've ruined everything. First you put Hildred in the cast. Now, the King knows. How exactly are we supposed to perform Hamlet in front of the King? He's destroying it, remember?

POTIPHAR

Well,
(thinking)
can't we just change Hamlet to Gamlet?

HERMES

(sarcastically)
Yeah sure, and then we can go and get our own TV show.

POTIPHAR

I suspect sarcasm, but I'm not sure - you know how much I yearn for my own prime-time series.

HERMES

Sarcasm. Extreme sarcasm.

POTIPHAR

Well, I was just being friendly with the King, making chit-chat. I didn't mean to mess up. I think I'm going to cry now.

HERMES

Oh don't do that. You'll make me feel guilty.

(thinking)

Well, maybe that's not such an awful idea. Gamlet. Just change it to Gamlet and change King Claudius to King Video. It might work. I mean the King is a colossal idiot. He might be so caught up in the idea of having a play about himself, he won't even notice it's a scathing portrait of monarchy and actually Hamlet. Well, I don't really see what else we can do if we're not going to cancel the final performance of Hamlet.

POTIPHAR

Not that again. The show must go on! We owe it to humanity.

HERMES

You're absolutely right Potiphar - for the fourth time this month. Don't think I'm not keeping track. Now pick up the table and let's go make those script changes.

POTIPHAR

(singing and jiggling)

I'm my own man.

(spoken)

Okay.

(aside)

Partially recognized greatness is the deepest of all pains.

(The two of them take the table off-stage. End of scene.)

Scene 2 - Potiphar and Hermes' bedroom

(The cast is assembled, save Hermes. The table from the previous scene and other props are now crammed into the room. They are all milling around, busying themselves, getting ready to start rehearsal.)

HILDRED

I can't get into character with all this stuff here, it's claustrophobic.

BERTRAND

Can we swap gravedigger parts T'sillah? I really want to be gravedigger two.

T'SILLAH

I don't know. You willing to trade me Rosencrantz for Guildenstern as part of the deal?

BERTRAND

Never mind.

PRINCE

T'sillah, you want to come to my room after rehearsal and see my stash?

T'SILLAH

Go hit on Hildred will you.

LAGER

I'm sorry Potiphar, but it's pronounced Yorick (yaw-rick) not Yo Rick. You see it's not Yo! Rick! I knew 'em. It's alas, poor Yorick. I knew him, Horatio.

POTIPHAR

So then what does Rick do in the play?

HILDRED

Where is that bastard Hermes anyway?

(Hermes enters, bedecked in a scarf wrapped around his neck, sun-glasses, that sort of thing. Like he's developed a little case of director's ego.)

HERMES

(positively wacky)

Hello my lovers, how art though today? Oh, I am just fabulous, you are just fabulous. Oh, life is great. The show is coming along splendidly, you are just, uhh, such fantastic actors. So full of life. I am just so confident - we're all set for the dress rehearsal tomorrow, and then, the day after. The ball, showtime! The show is in place - it is as we say, finit, ready to go. We will change nothing, we have no time, actual or abstract, to change, to tweak - it needs it not. Oh, thank goodness nothing could throw a monkey wrench, or as the English say, a spanner, into the show now. Oh, except for what Potiphar did. Yeah, it seems that Potiphar told the King about the play. And the King told us that he wants us to perform it not in our quaint little theater/little-used ping pong room, but at the New Year's Ball. Now that should in itself enough to give us a royal wedgie, but it's not all. For now, now, the truth. I wanted to keep this from some of you for your own good. All right, because some of you couldn't be trusted. But necessity, and your dedication to this play has swayed me otherwise. Hildred, T'sillah, as painful as it is for me to say this, I've grown to trust you. So, the truth is that we are not simply doing Hamlet to have a good ole' time. But it was to be a statement. A statement against the King's cruel New Year's resolution that Hamlet is to be destroyed. Alas, with our new situation, things have changed. We cannot spite the King so directly in front of his face. So, the final performance of Hamlet is indeed cancelled.

(The actors start to exit - to go home.)

HERMES

But wait. While Hamlet is cancelled, Gamlet is not. Yes, in the long tradition of the Hamlet story, so Lager tells me, of the transmutation of characters, storylines, and names, as the Danish historian's Amleth became the French novel's Hamblet, which then became Shakespeare's Hamlet. Shakespeare's Hamlet becomes our Gamlet. Also, if anyone asks you who the play is by, it's Gilliam Gakespeare. Man, that's hard to say. All right boys and girl,

(pause)

and Hildred. Let's do this.

LAGER

(to the Prince)

Give me a year's supply of whatever he's on.

HERMES

Now gather round, only a few changes will have to be made. First - whatever you do, don't say Hamlet. Say Gamlet. If you have to, say Amulet. Better say that Danish guy - than Hamlet. Get the idea? Good. Next. The King thinks the play is about him, which, in a sense, it is. However, to placate his truly sickefyingly large ego, King Claudius

becomes our King, King Video. Now I know the King's name isn't ever actually mentioned in the play, but it will be King Video in the program, and so be aware of it. Besides that, we're going to use the same sets and costumes we already have, just move them to the castle multi-purpose room where the ball is. The King did offer us the use of his wardrobe for the show. Would one of you be willing to go over there and look for some exciting pieces to flash up our wardrobe?

HILDRED

T'sillah and I will go.

HERMES

Oh that's wonderful, thank you ladies. My trust in you was not misplaced, now what it? Okay. Well, I guess that's all the preamble necessary. Let's take it from Act Five, grave diggers to your places.

BERTRAND

This is just a hypothetical question, and maybe less relevant to me because I'm already sentenced to life-long torture, but couldn't there be dire consequences for all of us if the King isn't fooled?

HERMES

Yes. Anyone have a problem with that? And before you answer, remember, this play isn't just about a moment in the spotlight and adoring, eager to please fans anymore. It's still that, thankfully, but it's also about making a statement to all the world, to all this castle, that we don't like this King, but we do like Hamlet and *it* matters to us. And though we aren't going to go out of our way to make the King know this, if he finds out, mission accomplished. Any problems?

(The cast looks around at each other.)

BERTRAND

Nope. Remember, I prefaced my question with the word hypothetical, so no need to be mad at me or lay blame.

PRINCE

You're such a doofus.

HERMES

Okay, places, places.

(They get up and scurry about, end of scene.)

Scene 3 - the King's dressing room

(T'sillah and Hildred are in the King's dressing room, looking at various pieces of clothing. There is a chest on the floor.)

HILDRED

(holding up an outrageous piece of clothing)

Wow, some of the King's clothes are really wild. I just love it. They're going to be great for the guys in the show. But it'd be nice if there was a little jewelry for us gals though. I feel a bit plain in just my old dress.

T'SILLAH

Well they say that plain vanilla yogurt is really the best, you know. But yes, it would be nice to accessorize a bit. Hey, I wonder if there's jewelry in this box?

HILDRED

Maybe, open it up.

(T'sillah opens up the chest. It is full of dresses and women's clothing. She pulls out a piece of clothing.)

T'SILLAH

This is *nice*.

HILDRED

Yeah, I'm sure it looks great on the King.

(They laugh)

T'SILLAH

Yeah, I think we're going to have to add a "w-o" to the m-a-n in monarch.

HILDRED

You're cruel.

T'SILLAH

I'm cruel - we're doing this whole revenge thing for your sake, aren't we?

HILDRED

Oh, well...

(The King enters)

KING

Excuse me, what are you doing with those?

T'SILLAH

Oh, Hermes said that you gave us permission to look through your things for costumes.

KING

Uhh, yes, but my things, not the Queen's. These
(grabbing what T'sillah is holding)
are the Queen's, not really sure how they got here actually.

HILDRED

Oh, we'll take them over to her quarters then, I'm sure she's a missing them.

KING

Oh no, that's quite all right. I'll take care of that myself, they can stay right here for now. Here, why don't you take this Hildred,
(giving her some male clothing)
you're butch.

HILDRED

Excuse me your highness?

KING

Don't you two have the whole butch-femme aesthetic going on here? Am I just misreading the situation? Well, I better be off. Remember - the stuff in box stays, couldn't have the Queen be perturbed. The rest is yours. Tata.

(The King exits.)

T'SILLAH

No, especially when the King's the queen.

HILDRED

You're terrible. I don't know what the King was talking about though, butch-femme. He sure is an idiot.

T'SILLAH

I think I know what he's talking about.

HILDRED

Yeah, what?

T'SILLAH

How the two of us really belong together.

HILDRED

You're making about as much sense as the King. We're about as attached to each other as a motor-challenged three-year's old's pin to the donkey's tail at a birthday party.

(The King comes back on.)

KING

You know what, better take the box with me.

(The King takes the box and begins to exit.)

T'SILLAH

(desperately)

Wait, King, uhh, you know what's really going with the play don't you?

KING

I'm not sure that I do.

T'SILLAH

Well let me just say, for your own heath, I think you should shut it down before it ever goes up, and you should kill Potiphar and Hermes.

KING

What are you talking about, why T'sillah?

T'SILLAH

Because...

HILDRED

(cutting T'sillah off)

Because you are going to be so pleased with it, it might overload your 'like'-capacity and it will kill you. It's going to great. All we have left is the dress rehearsal, and everything is set and fab.

KING

Oh, well thanks for the warning. Uhh, see you then, good luck with the dress rehearsal, see you tomorrow night.

(King exits.)

HILDRED

I can't believe he said 'good luck'. He might as well have killed us now. That's the worst thing you can tell an actor.

T'SILLAH

See, that's why I...think you're such a wonderful person. See, everyone thought you were a nasty old, self-serving, self-aggrandizing bitch, and you go and do the most selfless act - you had the greatest revenge in your hands and you gave it up. And so that's why I have to tell you what I've been trying to hint at for a long time...

HILDRED

Enough already, it was nothing. I just didn't want to give up the spotlight of the play. They can kill them after the show, that will satisfy me enough.

T'SILLAH

But you know that you could get into just as much trouble as them by doing this.

HILDRED

So? I'm an old woman. I don't have children, I don't have anything to look forward to. Revenge, I've realized, has gotten old with me. The Golden Years? If I retire at ninety-five, then I get a pension. This play is all I have. At least I'll have one pleasant thing to take with me when I go. It may be all I need.

T'SILLAH

I love you.

HILDRED

I thought as much.

T'SILLAH

You did?

HILDRED

I'm not stupid. The whole madly in love song was a big tip off and old-age has it's benefits - I've seen it all before.

T'SILLAH

Why didn't you say something - you knew then I was in pain not telling you.

HILDRED

Because we're not going to go anywhere – and so the more time you had to deal with the pain by yourself, the easier it would be to let you down.

T'SILLAH

Why can't we go anywhere? Why can't you just accept that someone wants to make you happy?

HILDRED

Because that's not the way the world works. People like me aren't supposed to be happy, and it would be unfair to become happy now, when I don't have that long to enjoy it. Better to give it to someone like me forty years younger.

T'SILLAH

But my love isn't my annual donation to the most neediest fund. It found you, and it wants to stick on you. It is stuck on you.

HILDRED

Then get some scissors.

T'SILLAH

What can I say to you, what can I promise, what can I give you that will give us a chance?

HILDRED

Listen, okay. If you promise to be the best ever Ophelia, and Guildenstern, and Gentleman, and Barnardo, and so on, in tomorrow's show; if you give a wonderful

performance, and show me you can be completely invested and living in this play, and not be thinking and worrying about us; if you do that, and if we don't get killed, then I will try, for a little while, to live completely in the time I spend with you. If you can do it, maybe I can do it. And if that works, and we are both happy together, I'll accept that you are part of my life. But if you can't live in another world for those few hours tomorrow, you certainly can't live with me in my difficult world for any time at all. Now don't hug me, and just go and work on your lines. I'll pick out what we need.

(T'sillah runs out, Hildred pauses for a moment and starts collecting clothing. End of scene.)

Scene 4 - Potiphar and Hermes' room

(Potiphar and Hermes sit.)

POTIPHAR

(very cheerful)

Man, our dress rehearsal went so badly, that is so awesome. Because that means the show has to be great, right?

HERMES

(sullen)

Well, you are correct, they say a bad dress rehearsal portends a smashing performance. But I'm not so sure *they* would have said that after seeing *our* dress rehearsal.

POTIPHAR

So there were a few missed lines, one or two people fell asleep and missed cues, there was a bit, all right, a large quantity of blood accidentally shed during the fight scene. But overall, the cast as a whole is sensational, don't you say.

HERMES

I don't argue with you on that point Potiphar. It's actually a more individual problem the play has, actually, how should I put this, you're the problem Potiphar.

POTIPHAR

Me?

(pause)

Oh no. But, alas, I can, I will, accept that, and I hereby resign.

HERMES

Yeah, and we get another Hamlet from Rent-a-Hamlet, from U-Hamlet, from the Do-It-Yourself Hamlet kit? There's no time. You see, your resignation is just the problem. Without your ego, your performance doesn't have the edge it needs. And in a castle this big, without a little spice in your soul, a little overriding force pushing you to go farther, to be bigger, you don't get noticed, you don't even notice yourself. You're like a crumbled coffee-cake, you've got all the ingredients that make ya' tasty, but everyone else just sees a bunch of mush. You need something to compel you to comb your hair in the morning, even though you're just a servant right now,

(with emphasis)

because there's always a chance you'll run into someone that wants to make you a *star*. And you do it for yourself too. Forget doctors - if you look good, you feel good. So Potiphar, for the play, for yourself, go get your ego back.

POTIPHAR

Are you sure, I wouldn't want to...

HERMES

Yes, yes, you have no ego, that's great, now go and get it.

POTIPHAR

Okay. I don't really know how long I could have made it without it anyway. Being selfless is tiring.

(Potiphar goes and gets his ego back from off-stage. He comes back on stage with it and Hermes is getting into bed.)

HERMES

Great, now time for some restorative, subconscious-digesting, sleep.

(Hermes lies down. Potiphar begins to put his ego back into his shirt when Hermes pops up.)

Oh wait.

(Hermes takes a small container of pepper and sprinkles some onto Potiphar's ego.)

POTIPHAR

What are you doing?

HERMES

Just thought you could use a little extra spice for your soul tomorrow.

POTIPHAR

I have several catty rejoinders I could make now, but I'll keep quiet and just enjoy the moment as it is.

(Potiphar puts his ego under his shirt.)

Goodnight Spices. I mean Hermes.

HERMES

Goodnight sweet, and occasionally sour, Prince.

(They both get into bed and lie down. Blackout. End of scene.)

Scene 5 - The Castle Multi-purpose Room

(The room is decorated for the New Year's ball. There's a table with punch bowls and champagne glasses. The stage is set up for the show, there is a curtain or some other apparatus for hiding the actual set. It is important to hide the set. The various members of the cast are milling about - speaking to each other, flirting, that sort of thing. Hermes is pacing. Potiphar is talking to some woman he's picked out in the audience. The King has not yet entered.)

POTIPHAR

Yeah, so I'm the main character, Gamlet. It's pretty cool, I have a lot of lines.

(pause as if the woman is responding to Potiphar)

I know, it is pretty great. I bet you can't wait to see me in action.

(another pause)

Well thanks, but what are you doing *after* the show? Maybe we could get together for a little encore?

(pause)

You are sexy.

(pause)

Well catch you later doll. Come to the cast party.

(Potiphar leaves them and walks by Hermes, who is still wrapped up worrying.)

POTIPHAR

Eh Hermes - it looks like I may get jiggy with that maidservant after all. Good news, eh?

(Potiphar sees the worry on Hermes face)

Is something wrong - did you forget your lines?

HERMES

Potiphar, I'm not so sure that this will work. What if we die? What if I get us all killed? There's still time to cancel this.

POTIPHAR

Come on boss, you have more faith in this than anyone. You're just getting a little stage fright. You're no lepidopterist, which I think is a person who studies butterflies, either that or it's a polygamist with leprosy, but in either case, you've got a few butterflies. That's all.

HERMES

How can I live with myself, die with myself, if I am to blame for the deaths of my entire cast? How can I put you, my best friend in all the world, in this entire castle, in danger? Drama isn't worth this. It's supposed to help the world, not kill people. The whole point is to get people to stop killing each other. This doesn't make sense.

POTIPHAR

And yet Hamlet is all about death. Death comes. Sometimes fittingly, sometimes not. You can't choose. You just live to the full when you're alive.

HERMES

Maybe then this show's got it wrong. Maybe when death was such an ever-present fear, Hamlet was relevant, but now - no. We should hide from death, do happy, happy plays, that please people, that please Kings. That don't hurt people, even if they don't show the truth. Maybe if we try hard enough, we can stop pain. So to do a tragedy that shows people the pain they find themselves in is a mistake.

POTIPHAR

But we're born through pain, we'll likely die by pain. Does it not then make sense to live in pain, or at least accept it if it comes?

HERMES

I don't know Potiphar.

(pause)

Maybe you're right. Is it even possible to live life by dodging pain and certain death? Because you can't really know if something's going to be painful or kill you, until you yourself have gone ahead and done it. So,

(pause)

okay. Okay. Let's call the actors back-stage, get on our costumes and go ahead and do this. Are you with me?

POTIPHAR

You know I am.

HERMES

Great. Unless, maybe we're wrong. We could be wrong - let's postpone the show. Now that we've changed it to Gamlet, it doesn't matter that Hamlet is being destroyed, we can do this show tomorrow or next week, maybe next New Year's - it'll give us time to think this one out.

POTIPHAR

No, I can't let you do this. Gamlet *is* Hamlet. The final performance of Hamlet is tonight. And you know it.

HERMES

Yes, but, Potiphar, what if...

(The King enters in a royal flourish.)

KING

(clapping his hands to draw attention)

The play. Now.

POTIPHAR

(to Hermes)

Too late, now come on.

(Potiphar pulls Hermes behind the curtain. The other cast members follow. The King and the other people on stage find seats - perhaps in the audience. They pick up the programs and leaf through them.)

KING

There it is - King Video, immortalized in drama.

(sings)

That's the way, uh-huh, uh-huh, I like it. Say that's the way. Uh-huh, uh-huh, I like it.

(There us a bit of silence. The lights go down.)

(Note: The only parts of the Gamlet performance that are shown are these little following snippets. Each snippet starts when the lights go up, and finishes when the lights soon go off.)

(The lights come up. The curtains open, revealing the set of Gamlet for Act One, Scene One, which takes place (as in Hamlet) on a guard platform of the castle. T'sillah, playing Barnardo, spots the Prince, playing Francisco. Refer to the real play Hamlet (which hopefully hasn't been destroyed by the time you read *this* play) for more details. T'sillah speaks the first line of the play to the Prince.)

T'SILLAH

“Who's there?”

PRINCE

“Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself.”

T'SILLAH

“Long live the King!”

(At this line the King claps, and then the lights go out. Next lights come up revealing the end of Act 3, Scene Four, the famous scene with Gertrude and Hamlet, where Hamlet kills Polonius. Potiphar, playing Hamlet, speaks to Hildred, playing Gertrude. Hermes, playing Polonius, is lying on the floor dead, covered in fake-blood.)

POTIPHAR

“Come, sir, to draw toward an end with you. Good night mother.”

(Potiphar pulls Hermes body along the stage and the curtain goes down, people clap. Hermes, still covered in fake blood, jumps out from behind the stage and speaks to the audience.)

HERMES

There will be now be a fifteen minute intermission to use the bathroom, do your thing, take blood-pressure medicine - whatever you need to do to get you through the rest of the show. Thanks.

(Hermes darts back behind stage. The King gets up and starts clapping sarcastically - he's really, really, mad. Potiphar, peeking his head out from behind stage, sees the King clapping and assumes the King is really pleased. Potiphar can't contain himself, and goes out to speak to the King.)

POTIPHAR

Isn't it great King Video? I heard you clapping in the beginning - and you're still clapping. You must be really pleased. Well, the man you have to thank is Hermes. Of course, playing the lead I bear some responsibility for the play, but it's really Hermes.

KING

Well, the way I see it, you're equally responsible.

POTIPHAR

You're very diplomatic.

KING

(in a very calculated way of speaking)

Thank-you, but responsible in the sense of you've done a heinous, truly inexplicable, wrong against me and United Kingdom of the Areas of the Castle. You see, your play implies that I am an evil murderer, and I don't actually, for some reason which presently escapes me, find that flattering. So why don't you fetch Hermes for me, and that way I can execute the two of you before the intermission's over.

POTIPHAR

Right, sure thing, let me go and find him.

(Potiphar runs behind the stage. The Prince sticks his head out from behind stage and the King sees him and motions for him to come over.)

PRINCE

Hey dad, what'd you think of the show - was I good?

KING

Oh, yes. Quite. I mean you're obviously not trained at all, and your lack of natural talent doesn't make up for it, but besides that, you're really good. Well no, I guess, you're not actually. You're quite bad. Ha. But I don't see the point of you doing this acting stuff anyway. I really don't understand your interests.

PRINCE

Man, you never have. You never try and take an interest in what I do. Like when I was six and really into Lego, you only let me have the castle-Lego's, no space Lego's, cause you didn't want me going off the monarchy path. Do you even know that I'm a drug-dealer? And why do you think I sell and do drugs - because I think it's a really good cause? Because I need the money even though I'm the Prince? No. Because you never could divert any of your love away from yourself, and so I spend my life trying to get as far away from you as I can. And when all you have is this castle, what choices do I really have?

(Potiphar comes back on stage and taps the Prince on the shoulder.)

POTIPHAR

I'm sorry if I'm interrupting, but I need you Prince.

(leading him away)

I think he can lead me to where Hermes is, so you can kill us.

(The Prince goes behind stage with Potiphar, the King sits down. The Page, who has been in the audience, sees Lager peering out.)

PAGE

Hey Lager, great job.

(Lager comes out to speak to the page.)

LAGER

Oh thank-you. It's a bit new to me this acting thing, but I've just sort of been trying to expand my horizons recently.

PAGE

Well, whatever you're doing, it's working.

LAGER

That's so nice of you. I also did the dramaturgy for the production.

PAGE

I know, I read it in the program.

LAGER

I designed the program.

PAGE

Well, then what are you doing stuck down in the dungeon all the time?
You should be using all your talents - going places with your life.

LAGER

That's a good point.

PAGE

Hey, remember who said it.

(The lights flash - the intermission is almost over and the show is about to begin again. Lager begins to exit.)

PAGE

(shouting to the exiting Lager)

Don't forget me when you're famous.

(Potiphar runs back on stage to the King, carrying a drink.)

POTIPHAR

I'm really sorry, but I still haven't found Hermes and the show is about to begin, and I must go backstage. So I'm truly sorry, but you'll have to wait until after the show to put us to death. However, as a consolation, please accept this free drink from the show bar, on the house.

KING

I don't know.

(smelling the drink)

Cranberry?
 (Potiphar nods)
 My favorite.
 (finally agreeing)
 All right.
 (the King drinks down the beverage)
 Refreshing.
 (The lights flash again.)

POTIPHAR

Ahh, we're going to start, got to run, enjoy the show.

(Potiphar runs back behind the stage. The curtain rises on Act Four, Scene One, which takes place somewhere in the castle. Lager, playing the King, is poised to speak to Hildred (Queen) and Bertrand (Rosencrantz) and T'sillah (Guildenstern.) The lights go out before they start speaking though. The lights come up on Act Four, Scene Five, towards the end of the scene, starting with line 185, spoken by Laertes. On stage is Bertrand, playing Laertes, T'sillah playing Ophelia, Hildred playing the Queen, and Lager playing the King.)

BERTRAND

"Thought and afflictions, passion, hell itself, She turns to favor and to prettiness."

T'SILLAH

(singing)
 " 'And will 'a not come again?
 And will 'a not come again?
 No, no, he is dead,
 Go to thy death-bed,
 He never will come again.
 His beard was as white as snow,
 All flaxen was his pole,
 He is gone, he is gone,
 And we cast away moan,
 God 'a' mercy on his soul!"

(spoken)

And of all Christians' souls, I pray God. God buy you."

(When T'sillah stops speaking, King Video leaps up. He has gone completely insane - totally overdosed on drugs.)

KING

(screaming, raving) Take my soul, my beard is white, God is gone, moan, moan. The Ecstasy!

(Everyone is totally shocked as he runs around the stage completely hallucinating and out of control. He then runs off-stage. Bertrand, still playing Laertes speaks.)

BERTRAND

"Did you see this, O God?"

(The lights go out. Then lights go on and reveal the end of the final scene of Hamlet, Act Five, Scene Two. Potiphar, playing Gamlet, lies dead. As does Lager playing the King, Hildred playing the Queen, and Bertrand, playing Laertes. The Prince, playing Horatio, First Ambassador and Fortinbras is the only living person on stage. He speaks Fortinbras's last set of lines, starting with line 378)

PRINCE

"Let four captains bear Gamlet like a soldier to the stage, For he was likely, had he been put on, To have prov'd most royal; and for his passage, The soldiers' music and the rite of war Speak loudly for him. Take up the bodies. Such a sight as this becomes the field, but here shows much amiss. Go bid the soldiers shoot."

(A shot is heard from off-stage. The Prince stays where he is and the curtain comes down. Everyone starts to clap. The cast comes out for a bow. Over the loudspeakers comes a voice.)

Dick Clark: Hey everyone, this is Dick Clark for the 2164 New Year's Rockin' Eve. The ball is about to drop and we're all a'waiting. Here it comes, 10...9...8...7...6...5...4...3...2...1...Happy New Year!

(Everyone cheers and hugs their neighbor - Hildred and T'sillah hug deeply, Potiphar and Hermes, Bertrand and the Prince, Lager looks out and upwards, full of confidence and dreams. The cast takes another bow, everyone claps. Then the King comes running on. He's shot himself, he stumbles in and dies at the feet of his son the Prince. The Prince starts to clap and the audience joins in, louder than ever. The lights go out.)

Scene 6 - The Castle multi-purpose room

(It's the morning later, no signs of the show or ball can be seen. Hermes and Potiphar sit playing cards, exactly like the play began. They are playing the game War.)

POTIPHAR

(putting down a card)

War!

(Potiphar and Hermes each put down several cards and Potiphar wins the hand and takes the cards.)

POTIPHAR

I really like playing War with you Hermes, it's a lot more fun than those other games we used to play - I win as much as you do. I think that's because it's a more balanced test of our skills.

HERMES

Sure Potiphar.

(The Prince enters carrying several newspapers.)

PRINCE

Read all about it, the new King's, that's me, review of Gamlet.

HERMES

We'll take one.

PRINCE

Two cents.

HERMES

Two cents! Are you crazy - the paper used to be free.

PRINCE

Yeah, that was when my dad was King and the paper was nothing but a self-serving, self-aggrandizing ego trip. Now that I'm King, I want to make the paper into a self-running, *self-supporting* cultural entity. Read the editorial on page two. Right next to my legalization of drugs opinion piece slash royal degree.

HERMES

All right, pay the man two cents Potiphar.

POTIPHAR

What - me? How about we split it?

HERMES

All right.

(They each rustle out a penny and hand it to the Prince. The Prince hands Potiphar a paper and exits.)

POTIPHAR

Want to read the drugs piece first?

HERMES

Come on Potiphar, the review.

POTIPHAR

Oh yeah, here we go.

(begins to read)

A Gamazing Gamlet, by the New King.

I was truly astonished by the captivating performance of Gilliam Gakespeare's Gamlet I acted in last night.

HERMES

(interrupting) I can't believe he didn't change it back and tell everyone it was really

Hamlet, and really Shakespeare. Gilliam Gakespeare's Gamlet is going to be immortalized? I feel so defeated.

POTIPHAR

Remember, it wasn't titles you were trying to save, but substance, substance. And you did. The only thing to feel bad about is that the difficulty in pronouncing Gakespeare is going to turn a few people off from the work. But those are probably the people who, honestly, aren't going to gain much from Hamlet anyway. So don't feel bad.

HERMES

I guess your right, but it's not like H is even so far from G on the keyboard, it would have just taken like three seconds to correct. All right, go on.

POTIPHAR

(reading)

Despite the fact that I was the star of the show, I can objectively say, it was the greatest night of theater in the history of the United Kingdom of the Areas of the Castle. The acting was superb. Potiphar gave a highly layered rendition to Gamlet, and at times I truly believed he was insane. I thought this during rehearsals as well, but the insanity reached a new level last night. Hermes, also the show's director, gave a fine Polonius, dying very well in Act Three. The direction, by the way, was pretty good. I mean Hermes and I didn't always see eye to eye on things - I sometimes felt like he expected too much of us. I don't know if that was his directing style or if he was just enjoying the power trip, but I'll give him the benefit of the doubt.

HERMES

(interrupting)

How dare he, airing our dirty laundry in public like that. I'm never working with him again - from now on it's only with people I really like.

POTIPHAR

Hermes, you can't just do shows with me. Silly. But he said some really good things about you. And he called me layered. I'm so layered I should be a cake.

HERMES

So I boss people around occasionally - who doesn't? Okay, I've bitched my full, or shall I say gitched gy gull, go on.

POTIPHAR

(reading)

Lager was a solid King and Ghost - obviously, having the same actor play both roles is an interesting juxtaposition. He changed costumes quickly and never banged into the other actors behind stage. Hildred, despite the fact that there is no one in the castle that attracts me less, was a drawing Queen, resigned yet always present. T'sillah and Bertrand were wonderful in their numerous roles - T'sillah bending gender like she's no pretender. But no need to take a look down her dress - she's all woman - I accidentally squeezed her breasts several times during the rehearsal period. Bertrand deserves a special nod for his tremendous dedication to the work, giving his all despite being attached to a thousand foot chain. And, of course, I was awesome. The final section, where I played all three roles on stage was a brilliant move by the director, but required acting genius to pull it off. Well Genius was on that stage last night, let me tell you folks. Oh boy it was. And it was called me. 'Sides that, the costumes, set, and lighting were cool enough. But perhaps the coolest thing of all was the King flipping out and killing himself during the show. That was really, really cool. Because now I'm King and he's dead and buried. Life is interesting - it sucks for some and rocks for others.

HERMES

Yeah, that was so weird Potiphar. I wonder if we'll ever know what really happened to the King.

POTIPHAR

I kind of do, I think. I think I sort of caused it.

HERMES

What are you talking about?

POTIPHAR

Well, I didn't want to tell you about this, because I know it'll upset you, but at the intermission, I went to speak to the King.

HERMES

I told you all it's unprofessional to speak to the audience during the intermission.

POTIPHAR

I know, but I thought he was going to praise me. But instead he told me to go and get you so he could kill us. Because he didn't like the whole murderous, incestuous King connotation of the play. So I ran to find you and think of something to do. But you were no where to be found.

HERMES

Nature called.

POTIPHAR

Anyway, I didn't know what to do, when all of a sudden, the lines we had just said during the previous scene came to mind. You know when Hildred says, "This is the very coinage of your brain, this bodiless creation ecstasy is very cunning in." And I say, "Ecstasy?" And then that's when I realized, Ecstasy. I'm sorry Shakespeare, but it just doesn't mean madness anymore. That led me to think, what if I put the King in such a state, that he'd be so out of his mind, he wouldn't remember a thing that happened at the play. So I went and grabbed the Prince, took him backstage, and asked him, 'do you have any Ecstasy on you?' And he was like, 'how much are you looking for?' And I said 'I don't know, how much do people normally take?' and he said 'depends on body size, desired effect, but if you're looking for a nice sedate edge, say three, maybe four hits', so I said, 'make it six.' So he's like, 'they're not all for you are they? Because I know six doesn't sound like so much more than four, but at those doses, they're kind of dangerous, and become like amphetamines, and zoom, zoom you up.' Well after a little haranguing about his drug-dealer Hippocratic oath apprehensions, he gave them to me, and I mashed them up and put them into some Cranberry juice - which I knew was the King's favorite. So I brought it out to the King, got him to drink it, and well, a little while later, it kicked in, and he flips out. Kills himself. And well, the show is saved.

HERMES

Wow, Potiphar, you're my hero. You are. You saved all our lives, and you saved Gamlet. You are the wind beneath my wings.

(They hug.)

HERMES

Now come on, finish the review.

POTIPHAR

Okay, in a minute. I also think I feel a deep sense of loss over the whole thing. It may only be a shock at the finality of my actions, but I feel it. I think drugs Hermes, may be playing with God. You alter the brain, you seek to control it, okay. But the problem, maybe the problem that I feel I should have considered before I acted, and didn't, was that we don't know what the effect of drugs will be. You can't really control it. Making the decision to use for oneself, surely should be a right, just like suicide, or hating, or even the right to hate me, have to be rights. They're human expressions which we have to protect. We just also have an obligation, as a society, to discourage them to the best

of our capacity, because we know they aren't as simple and harmless as the mind often conjures, and the world offers alternatives. And especially with drugs, you don't actually know what you're really doing, the effects aren't entirely predictable. And even if for *some* they can be experimented with, and won't addict you to the point where you seem to lose the basic dignity of man we will hopefully all achieve under our new King, then they *can* alter your decision making - so that you don't know what you might do, so that you might act beyond whatever you, or anyone else expected, or really, wanted. Maybe man shouldn't mess with playing God, especially with playing someone else's, and I did.

HERMES

Maybe in times of great need, man must play God. Maybe inside each of everyone one of us, we're really an understudy for God. Today Potiphar, God called in sick. You were just doing your job.

POTIPHAR

That's very gratifying for my once again, normal functioning ego, so thanks. But a little part of me knows that what if things hadn't gone the way they did. What if the King didn't die, and had put us all to death – would my act have been justified then? It was the same act. Can positive results ever fully justify a questionable action?

HERMES

Maybe not, but in your situation, there were no questions. You, as you saw it, had one out. You took it, knowing it might not work, but also knowing that if you didn't take it, you would be lying down for the firing squad. So perk up, turn that frown upside down, for as we say in showbiz, use your smile as an umbrella on a rainy, rainy day.

POTIPHAR

All right, you've convinced me of the ideological soundness of my actions, even if guilt, that ever present malady suitable for a play onto itself, still resounds. Okay, now where was I in this review.

(reading)

Well what's next for this fine crew of Gamlet? Good question. I of course, will stay King until my most likely, untimely death. Bertrand will serve as my special counselor and has been officially pardoned for the treason, pillaging, vandilization of castle property, and public blaspheme he committed. What's a little mischief in one's youth, anyway? Hildred has been given early retirement and a hefty pension, and T'sillah has been promoted to tenured servant at half hours, and given unlimited dance lessons at the new Castle Arts Center. They will continue to share quarters. Lager has been asked to undertake an unprecedented and risky mission, to step foot outside the castle and see if there's anything there. I am sure you are as excited as I am to find out the results. And

Potiphar and Hermes, the originators of this fine, fine, production - what is their fate to be? Hermes will become the artistic director of the new Arts Center. And Potiphar? Potiphar will be the star of his very own prime-time TV show. They will continue to share quarters, so their new found success won't go to their heads too much. Thank you wonderful cast.

(Potiphar jumps up)

Oh my God! My dream come true, and you sound like you're getting a great job, I'm so happy for you too. My own show. What should I call it - Potiphar, P, The Potiphar Show, the P-show, the possibilities are endless! I am so happy. We really made it!

(Hermes smiles. They hug. They come forward and sing.)

We'll Always Have Each Other

HERMES

I couldn't have done it without you,
I couldn't have made it this far,
But with you we'll reach forever,
we'll touch that distant star.
They'll be time away a'coming, when we'll stay apart,
but from each other's lives, I promise we won't depart,

I'll miss you, I'll miss you,
If I must I'll kiss you goodbye,

But never forget, you are in my eye.

POTIPHAR

Oh Hermes, dear Hermes, my teacher and my pal,
our memories and our times will be our chorale,
we'll sing together,

TOGETHER

We'll always have each other,
we'll always have a friend,

POTIPHAR

In Hermes I'll depend.

HERMES

Oh Potiphar, sweet Potiphar, my buddy and my muse,
I never minded when you were confused.
I won't forget you, even if I sometimes try,
what can I say, you're too amazing to deny.

TOGETHER

So let's sing together, together, sing a finale tune,
and then we'll journey on, see the newest moon,

We'll always have each other,
another,

we'll always have a friend,
and in that special friend, we'll always know, always feel,

we do depend.

(They grasp hands and raise them up above their heads. Lights
out.)

The End