

HOPELESS HAMLET

TEN MINUTE PLAY

By Wade Bradford

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**HEUER PUBLISHING LLC
P.O. BOX 248 • CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA 52406
TOLL FREE (800) 950-7529 • FAX (319) 368-8011**

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SYNOPSIS: A young actor playing the "Ghost" in a high school production of *Hamlet* catches a bad case of stage fright. When he refuses to go on stage, hilarity ensues. A spoof on the Bard's classic tragedy.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 MEN, 7 WOMEN, FLEXIBLE)

COACH (F)	<i>(20 lines)</i>
HAMLET (M)	<i>(76 lines)</i>
HORATIO (F)	<i>(18 lines)</i>
BRITTNEY #1 (F)	<i>(29 lines)</i>
BRITTNEY #2 (F)	<i>(25 lines)</i>
MOM (F)	<i>(8 lines)</i>
STEVE, THE GHOST (M)	<i>(13 lines)</i>
OTHER GHOST (M/F)	<i>(5 lines)</i>
OPHELIA (F)	<i>(7 lines)</i>

SETTING:

Behind the curtain of a high school production of *Hamlet*. Several actors, including the young star of the show, as well as others stretch and practice their lines. They are gearing up for their opening night performance.

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AT RISE:

A tough looking woman in sweatpants, a football jersey, and a baseball cap marches onstage. She is obviously some sort of coach. However, tonight, she is the director of a tragedy of Shakespearean proportions. She blows her whistle.

COACH: Five minutes! Places for act one!

HAMLET: Coach! You can't use your whistle backstage! The audience is just behind the curtain. They can hear you.

COACH: Sorry, Hamlet. I'm still getting used to this drama stuff. I'd rather be coaching, but basketball season is over and my water polo team quit on me.

HAMLET: Why?

COACH: We don't have a pool. And they got tired of pantomiming in the parking lot.

A young actress, Ophelia, dances onto the stage. She looks wild-eyed, as if she has just recently lost her mind.

COACH: What's with her?

HAMLET: Oh, she's just getting into character. It's called Method Acting.

COACH: What's that mean?

HAMLET: She embraces the personality in everyway possible.

COACH: Yeah, but I thought she didn't turn into a looney bird until act three.

HAMLET: *(Tries to get her attention.)* Soft you know, the fair Ophelia . . . *(She keeps on dancing like a loon.)* Hmm . . . I'm sure she'll be fine when the curtain comes up.

Ophelia exits.

HAMLET: Hey, did Thomas and Eric finally arrive?

COACH: No.

HAMLET: What? We start in two minutes! They open the show!

COACH: Don't worry. I found replacements. They're good girls.

HAMLET: Girls? They're the palace guards! They're supposed to

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be men! It's bad enough you cast a girl for the role of Horatio.

Horatio, a bored looking girl, enters. She is writing on her hand.

HAMLET: And look- - she doesn't even have her lines down.

HORATIO: That is so not true. How do you spell "Fortinbras"?

HAMLET: *(Sighs, turns back to coach.)* So, where are the replacements?

COACH: Girls! *(Blows whistle.)*

Two cheerleader-types enter. They are both incredibly bubbly. They are both named Brittney. They hop around with their pom poms.

BRITTNEY #1: We are so excited!

BRITTNEY #2: Go Hamlet!

HAMLET: *(Snatches pom-poms.)* There are no pom-poms in Shakespeare.

BRITTNEY #1: You must be playing the title role.

BRITTNEY #2: You look like a melancholy Dane.

BRITTNEY #1: I'm Brittney. And this is my best friend . . .

BRITTNEY #2: Also Brittney. It's a pleasure to be acting with you.

COACH: Places everyone!

HAMLET: I hope you two know what you're doing.

A very proud, very embarrassing "stage mom" enters. She runs up to Hamlet.

MOM: Oh, there's my handsome young Hamlet! There's my baby boy!

HAMLET: Mom! You aren't supposed to be backstage! You should be sitting in the audience.

MOM: Oh, your step-father is so boring to sit with. He's already fallen asleep. Let me take a picture of you. I am so proud of my little super star. You know, I still wish upon wish that your grandmother would have let me audition for my high school plays. Who knows, I could have gotten an agent, made it on Broadway, become the Queen of the stage. But, at least I can live my

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dreams through you.

HAMLET: You want me to be queen of the stage?

MOM: Oh, you know what I mean. I wish I could be in the show with you. Do you think they could let me be an extra tonight? I'll just stand in the background and look interested.

HAMLET: Sorry, Mom. Time to get to your seat. Tell Hank not to snore.

He quickly urges her off the stage. The young actor who plays the Ghost steps onto the stage. He motions for Hamlet. He looks nervous, shy, and unsure.

GHOST: Psst! Hey!

HAMLET: You look great, Steve.

GHOST: I don't think I can do this.

HAMLET: What do you mean?

GHOST: I'm too sacred.

COACH: What? The ghost has stage fright?

HAMLET: Steve, you know your lines, right?

GHOST: Sure sure. "I am thy father's spirit; Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night."

HAMLET: Brilliant. What's the problem?

GHOST: I've never performed in front of so many people. I've got this queasy feeling in my gut.

HAMLET: I know exactly what that is.

COACH: The side effects of steroids.

HAMLET: No! It's just butterflies in your stomach. Opening night jitters. But you don't need to worry, you know why?

GHOST: Why?

HAMLET: Because we'll be on stage together. That means the audience will be paying attention to me, not you.

GHOST: Really?

HAMLET: Of course. I'm Hamlet. The play's all about me. That's why Coach cut so many scenes . . . so the audience could focus on the most important part of the show - me.

COACH: *(To Ghost.)* You'll do fine, kid. Good luck everybody!

HAMLET: Coach! It's bad luck to say good luck!

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COACH: Really? Is that one of those superstitious things like saying “Macbeth”?

HAMLET: Aggh! Just get off the stage and open the curtain!

COACH: Here we go everyone! We’re about to begin!

She leaves the stage. The lights go out . . .

In the darkness, the coach whistles. Lights up on the two Brittneys. They each carry a spear and march on different sides of the stage. Brittney #1 takes out a cell phone and calls the other Brittney.

BRITTNEY #2: *(In a sing-songy voice.)* Who’s there?

BRITTNEY #1: Nay, silly, answer me. Stand, and unfold yourself.

BRITTNEY #2: Hail to the king!

She sneaks up and taps her on her shoulder. In mock surprise, the other Brittney turns and laughs.

BRITTNEY #1: Hi Brittney! I mean, Bernardo!

BRITTNEY #2: Welcome Horatio!

Horatio enters, she’s staring at the palm of her hand.

HORATIO: What, has this ghost appeared again tonight?

BRITTNEY #2: I have seen nothing.

HORATIO: *(Still reading off her hand.)* Tush, tush, It will not - -
(Switches to her other hand to read.) appear.

BRITTNEY #1: Peace! Break thee off: look, the ghost approaches!

The Ghost steps out onto the stage, pushed along by the Coach.

BRITTNEY #2: Looks it not like the king? Speak to it, Horatio.

The Ghost becomes very shy and runs off in a panic.

BRITTNEY #1: Tis gone and will not answer.

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HORATIO: (*Reading the bottom of her shoe.*) Let us impart what we have seen tonight unto young Hamlet.

BRITTNEY #1: Let's do it.

They move down stage. Hamlet enters, very dramatic.

HAMLET: O! that this too, too solid flesh would melt, thaw, and resolve itself into a dew- -

Horatio has approached.

HORATIO: Hail to your - -

HAMLET: (*Annoyed at the interruption.*) Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd His canon against self-slaughter - -

HORATIO: Hail to you lordship - -

HAMLET: Not yet! How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable Seem to me all the uses of this - -

HORATIO: Hail to you - -

Hamlet covers Horatio's mouth.

HAMLET: O fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden, that grows to seed; things rank, and gross in nature - - gross!

Lets go of Horatio.

HAMLET: You licked my hand!

HORATIO: Hail to you lordship!

HAMLET: (*Very annoyed.*) I am glad to see you, Horatio. Or do I forget myself.

HORATIO: (*Looking around for the next line.*) Uh . . . Uh . . . Uh . . .
My lord . . .

BRITTNEY #1: What Horatio means is that we saw your father's ghost.

HAMLET: Saw whom?

BRITTNEY #2: My lord, the king, your father.

HAMLET: The king my father!

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BRITTNEY #1: Duh, that's what we said. Follow us!

HAMLET: My father's spirit in arms! All is not well. Foul deed will rise, Though all the earth overwhelm them, to men's eyes.

BRITTNEY #2: Okay, enough with your soliloquy; let's go!

They wander downstage. Sound cue: Creepy music, a haunting wind.

HAMLET: The air bites shrewdly; it is very cold. What hour now?

HORATIO: I think, it lacks the twelve.

BRITTNEY #2: No, it is struck.

BRITTNEY #1: Spooky, spooky, spooky!

BRITTNEY #2: Look, my lord! It comes!

HAMLET: Angels and ministers of grace defend us!

They stand staring for a moment.

BRITTNEY #2: Yep . . . your father's spirit is approaching . . .

BRITTNEY #1: Behold the ghost!

Nothing.

BRITTNEY #2: Any moment now.

HAMLET: *(Trying his best to improvise but stay in character.)* Art thou certain that a ghost came to this spot? I would think he would cometh before us by now.

HORATIO: *(Reading the wrong line.)* It beckons you to go away with it --

HAMLET: No, not yet, good Horatio, you have spoken too soon. I am sureth that the Ghost of my father will appear before us right . . . Now!

BRITTNEY #1: Huh. Well, I guess we were wrong. There's no ghost. Good night, Lord Hamlet. See you tomorrow.

They try to walk off stage.

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HAMLET: Wait! Uh . . . Thou wouldst not leave your noble prince in these dark woods. *(Grabs each Brittney and brings them back.)* We shall all stay here until that errant spectre gets his haunted butt out onto the stage. Isn't that right, Horatio.

HORATIO: Uh, yes, my lord . . .

BRITTNEY #2: I know. Maybe if we do a cheer it will encourage the ghost to come out and party with us!

BRITTNEY #1: That's right! Let's show that old spirit some team spirit.

HAMLET: Oh please don't.

BOTH BRITTNEYS: *(In full cheerleader mode.)* Hamlet's Daddy please appear. Get your Ghostly Rear in Gear! Go - ghosty! *(Clap - - clap.)* G - O - S - T! Ghost!

They hop up and down like the excited cheerleaders they are.

HAMLET: Ghost is spelled with an "H."

BRITTNEY #1: No, that would spell "gosh."

HAMLET: You two are the most pathetic guards in all of Denmark!

BRITTNEY #2: Look! I think I see the ghost approaching!

HAMLET: Finally! *(Clears throat.)* Angels and ministers of grace defend us!

BRITTNEY #1: Oh wait. It's not the ghost.

The Coach, hiding behind a bush, waddles onto the stage.

HAMLET: Sadly, no. It appears to be an enchanted bush . . . *(Coach's arm sticks out from the bush. She hands him a piece of paper.)* Delivering a telegram.

BRITTNEY #1: What's it say?

HORATIO: *(Grabs it from Hamlet, anxious to read something.)* The ghost has locked himself in the bathroom.

The Bush waddles away, exiting off stage.

HORATIO: *(Starting to follow the bush.)* Take me with you, magic bush!

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HAMLET: (*Grabs Horatio.*) Oh no you don't! You shall stay by my side, good Horatio. I am certain the ghost will be out soon, though I did not realize that ghosts have toilets.

BRITTNEY #2: Do you still have to use the restroom in the afterlife?

HAMLET: I knoweth not.

BRITTNEY #1: To pee, or not to pee; that is the question.

HAMLET: Please stop that - wait! I glimpse a strange figure fast approaching! Could it be the very ghost we have long waited for?

Ophelia flitters onto the stage, strewing about flowers.

HAMLET: Sweet Ophelia, I did not expect to see you for several more scenes . . .

BRITTNEY #2: She seems cute. I like the hair. Who is she?

BRITTNEY #1: That's Hamlet's ex-girlfriend. She's gone crazy.

BRITTNEY #2: How?

HORATIO: Oh! I know! (*She lifts her pant, there are words written on her leg.*) "She may strew dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds."

BRITTNEY #2: What does that mean?

BRITTNEY #1: She's lovesick over Hamlet!

The two Brittneys giggle and stand side by side.

BOTH BRITTNEYS: Oh Hamlet, you're so fine, you're so fine you blew her mind. Hey Hamlet! Hey Hamlet!

HAMLET: Ugh! I wish we could just skip to my death scene in Act Five. But lo! Someone else comes! Surely it must be the ghost!

The Coach, hidden in a large cardboard box, makes her way onto the stage.

HAMLET: (*Disappointed.*) A large . . . cardboard . . . box-shaped ghost.

Slowly, a sock puppet rises from the center of the box.

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HORATIO: This is freaking me out right now.

COACH: *(In sock puppet voice.)* Hamlet! I am thy father's spirit . . .
Doomed for a certain term to walk the night . . .

HAMLET: Father . . . you look different.

BRITTNEY #1: *(Scared.)* What is that?!

COACH: *(Still hidden, using sock puppet.)* List, list, O list!

BRITTNEY #1: Aaaagh!

She smashes the sock puppet with a foam sword.

HAMLET: What art thou doing?

BRITTNEY #2: She's afraid of sock puppets.

HAMLET: Don't worry! It's nothing. It's just a sock!

He pulls off the sock puppet, revealing the Coach's hand.

COACH: *(Still moving her hand in puppet mode.)* Eek! I'm naked!

BRITTNEY #1: Who are you?

COACH: Oh, just a stage hand. *(Exits.)*

HAMLET: Wait! Methinks this demon like sweat sock is an imposter,
for I believe the true ghost is now approaching.

Stage Mom, covered in a white sheet with two cut outs (or blackened circles) for eyes, walks onto the stage. She holds a copy of the script in front of her. She hams it up, making corny ghostly sounds.

MOM: Ooooooo! Oooooo! I am thy father's spirit.

HAMLET: Mom?!

MOM: Hi sweetie! Don't be scared. I'm not really a ghost. I'm just acting with you.

HAMLET: *(Lifts sheet.)* Mom, I don't need your help. I'm doing fine.

MOM: Of course you are, honey. *(Covertly.)* It's all the other actors that are ruining things. Now, let's do this scene, you and me together. Just like when we tapped dance at the Foxsome County Talent Show.

Suddenly, there is a loud series of snores from the audience.

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HAMLET: Who's that?

MOM: Must be your stepfather.

HAMLET: How embarrassing. Why can't you still be married to Dad, instead of Mr. Rip Van Winkle snoring it up in the center row? (*Pulls at hair.*) Ugh!!! Mom! Sometimes the choices you make drive me insane. I don't know whether I should just mope around consumed with depression, or seek some sort of revenge, or if I should just let my mind snap and go mad!

BRITTNEY #1: Psst. (*She draws Hamlet aside.*) This is not the time for you to be hateful towards your stepfather and frustrated with your mother. You're supposed to be playing the role of Hamlet.

HAMLET: You're right.

BRITTNEY #2: (*Pointing off stage.*) Look, who's that creepy person looming in the distance?

BRITTNEY #1: It must be the ghost!

HAMLET: At long last!

BRITTNEY #2: Say something Horatio!

HORATIO: (*Reading off her hand.*) Look, my lord, it . . . cornflakes? Oh great. I'm sweating.

A Ghost (but different from the Hamlet Ghost) enters, back to audience.

OTHER GHOST: Ohhhhhh . . . Ohhhhhh!

HAMLET: Speak tardy father. Let us know thy will . . . And what took you so long in appearing before us!

OTHER GHOST: Ohhhhhh . . . Ebenezer Scrooge! (*Turns to reveal the Jacob Marley Ghost from A Christmas Carol.*)

HAMLET: What?

OTHER GHOST: Ebenezer Scrooge! Why do you hate Christmas so much?

HAMLET: Thou art in the wrong play. You want the auditorium at the junior high down the street.

OTHER GHOST: Oh dear.

MOM: (*Back in her ghostly sheet.*) Hey, who's this?! I turn my back for one minute and now you're seeing another ghost?! Well no one's haunting him but me!

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She starts to push the Christmas Carol ghost.

OTHER GHOST: Hey! Where's your holiday spirit, lady?!

They begin a shoving match, but the two Brittneys quickly hold back each ghost.

HAMLET: Oh, something truly is rotten in Denmark.

HORATIO: Sorry. I had egg salad.

OPHELIA: *(From offstage, or the back of the audience.)*

Haaaaamlet . . . Why did you leave me?

HAMLET: Ophelia? Where are you?

Ophelia walks down the aisle, covered in seaweed. Now and then, she might drape an audience member with some of her flowers, or some of the seaweed.

OPHELIA: I am floating down the river. Here, sir, have some seaweed.

HAMLET: Fair Ophelia. We are waiting for a ghost.

OPHELIA: *(Stepping onto the stage.)* I am a ghost! I drowned in the river, remember?

HAMLET: Get thee to a nuthouse!

OPHELIA: And I shall haunt you forever unless you obey my command.

HAMLET: And what, pray tell, do you command of me?

OPHELIA: *(Dancing around Hamlet in a ghostly fashion.)* Take me.

HAMLET: Take you . . . where?

OPHELIA: Take me to the prom.

HAMLET: I already told you, I'm going to the prom with Kimberly.

OPHELIA: That scrawny little girl who runs the mics? I can't stand that snotty little -

Ophelia's mic "cuts out" so that Ophelia silently and angrily mouths words.

HAMLET: Okay, that's enough - -

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Ophelia suddenly stabs Hamlet with Brittney's sword.

BRITTNEY #1: On no, Hamlet is slain!

BRITTNEY #2: Go on, Hamlet, die. You just got stabbed.

HAMLET: But I . . . it . . . Oh fine! Anything to get out of this scene.

He falls down and feigns death.

BRITTNEY #1: Horatio, say something in poor Hamlet's honor.

Horatio kneels. She checks words written on her arm.

HORATIO: It's kind of smeared, but . . . "Good night, sweet pineapple. May flights of angel cake swing thee to thy nest."

HAMLET: *(Suddenly gets up, angry.)* That's it! Father, get your ghostly carcass out onto this stage! *(Starts to exit.)*

BRITTNEY #1: Where are you going?

HAMLET: To the underworld! *(Stomps off stage.)*

Offstage, Hamlet and the Ghost are heard arguing. Then, silence . . . followed by the flushing of a toilet. Hamlet re-enters and shoves the stage-frightened Ghost onto the stage. Coach steps out onto the stage too, to make sure the Ghost doesn't dash off again.

GHOST: But I can't - -

COACH: Come on kid, you can do it. *(She lifts up her sock puppet and says:)* We believe in you.

GHOST: But I don't - -

HAMLET: Just speak the speech, I pray you!

GHOST: *(Nervous at first.)* Uh, I am thy father's spirit . . . Doomed for a certain term to walk the night. *(Builds in confidence. Starts to get really into the part.)* And for the day confined to fast in fires. Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature, Are burnt and purg'd away . . .

Now everyone gazes at his incredible performance with a mixture of awe and fear.

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GHOST: *(Continuing.)* But that I am forbid to tell, The secrets of my prison house, I could a tale unfold whose lightest word, Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood, Make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres, Thy knotted and combined locks to part, And each particular hair to stand an end, Like quills upon the fretful Porcupine.

BRITTNEY #1: Wow! He's really good!

BRITTNEY #2: *(Clutching onto the other.)* And scary!

GHOST: But this eternal blazon must not be To ears of flesh and blood, list, list, o list: If thou did'st ever thy dear father love . . .

HAMLET: *(So caught up, he's frightened.)* Oh God! (Or "Oh my Goodness" for those who may be offended by the original Shakespearean text.)

GHOST: Revenge his foul and MOST UNNATURAL MURDER!!!!

At this, everyone is truly terrified. They all run away off stage, leaving the young actor who plays the ghost all by himself.

GHOST: Amateurs!

THE END