

HEADSETS

(A VIEW FROM THE LIGHT BOOTH)

A FULL LENGTH COMEDY

By William Missouri Downs

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SYNOPSIS: On the final night of the Chicago-Ensemble-Repertory-Group-Theatre-Project's doomed production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, everything that can go wrong does. The cast of *Hamlet* gets hit with food poisoning, Yorick's skull goes missing and the police arrive to shut down the production because the producer hasn't paid the rent. When the critic from the Chicago Tribune shows up to review their production, the techies decide there is only one way to save their reputations - the critic must die. The techies set out to "accidentally" drop a Fresnel on him from the grid. As the production comes to its hilarious end, it's no wonder that *Headsets* has been called the *Noises Off* of technical theatre.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(FIVE MEN, ONE WOMAN)

HAMMET (m)..... The stage manager. (428 lines)
CLAUDE (m).....Hammet's stepfather. The light board operator. (278 lines)
AMELIA (f)..... The assistant stage manager. (27 lines)
GARRY COOPER (m).....A Shakespearean actor. (152 lines)
PATROLMAN SHUBERT (m).....A police officer.* (64 lines)
DICK (m, VOICE ONLY) The sound board operator. (55 lines)

**The role of Patrolman Shubert can be double cast with Dick, or with slight changes to the script, can be played by a woman.*

TIME:

Saturday evening.

PLACE:

The Wayfarer Theatre, Chicago - the final performance of *Hamlet*.

SETTING:

A light booth located in the balcony of this small off-loop theatre. Unused light gels and Fresnels lie about. On the back wall is a large poster announcing the Chicago-Ensemble-Repertory-Group-Theatre-Project's production of *Hamlet*; the requisite picture of Shakespeare has been augmented with a blurb reading, "I rolleth in my grave!" Beside the poster are the exit and a ladder leading to the grid. On the wall is a fire axe. In front of the light booth runs the railing of the balcony.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

"A delightfully funny play." — *The Los Angeles Times*

"*Headset* is that rare sort of play that gives audiences a look at the chaos that often happens behind the scenes of theatrical productions...very, very funny." — *Kevin Fox, Company of Lost Souls, Ontario, Canada*

Productions:

University of Wyoming (Laramie, WY)
Theatre in the Park (Birmingham, AL)
Pensacola Little Theatre (Pensacola, FL)
Fishbowl Theatre (Toronto, Ontario)
The Cookeville Drama Center (Cookeville TN)
Garmisch Theatre (Germany)
Curtain Up! (Durham, NC)
Hexis Theatre (Singapore)
Gilbert Theatre (Fayetteville, NC)
The Richard Basehart Theatre (Los Angeles, CA)
Sheboygan Players (Sheboygan, WI)

MUSICAL WORK

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CONCEIVED BY

TOM WHITE AND WILLIAM MISSOURI DOWNS

ACT ONE

Elizabethan pre-show music. As the lights rise, HAMMET, an intense, haunted, stage manager, rushes in cramming down a sandwich and beer. He picks up the headsets and hollers into them.

HAMMET: Headset check...Amelia, have you seen my St. John's Wort? *(No answer.)* Amelia? Are you back stage? *(No answer.)* Hellooooo? Great, just great. *(He takes out a pair of binoculars and begins looking down into the audience. To himself.)* Look at 'em. Bunch of Shakespeare sheep. Oh, yeah, honey. That's not your father, is it. And you...that's right, argue with the usher, he's putting you in the wrong seat. You all hate *Hamlet* as much as I do, only you won't admit it! You know, Marlowe really wrote this play! Shakespeare was nothing but an actor! A front man! He could barely spell his own name. *(He smells something awful.)* Something is rotten... *(He follows the smell; it's himself. He takes off his T-shirt and smells it. It's dreadful. He takes another T-shirt off a hook on the wall, smells it. It's worse, so he decides to put the original T-shirt back on. He hollers in the headsets.)* Amelia, headset check... *(No answer.)* Okay, let's try Dick?...Dick, are you back stage? Is sound ready?...Dick? Dick? *(No answer. Pissed.)* This is just great! Hello anyone! *(He jiggles the wires.)* Hello! *(Beat.)* Okay, I'm in control here. Right. *(He sees a hammer, picks it up and pounds the headsets into dust. After the fit, he sits back and takes a gulp of beer.)* God, but that felt good! *(AMELIA, the assistant stage manager, enters. She's all business - a real pro.)*

AMELIA: Yes! I hear you!

HAMMET: Where are you?

AMELIA: Behind you! *(She takes his beer and dumps it.)* What did you do to your headsets?

HAMMET: I killed them.

AMELIA: What is wrong with you? You look like you've seen a ghost.

HAMMET: It's nothing. The date with Ophelia didn't work out, that's all.

AMELIA: I don't know what you see in her. *(Flirting.)* You know, there are lots of other women who would love to go out with you.

HAMMET: Look, I'm just a little hung over, okay?

AMELIA: You were hung over for the matinee. This is far more serious.

HAMMET: Okay. I'll tell you but...you're not going to believe this. I was just walking back from dinner when I saw this...man standing on the other side of the street looking at the theatre.

AMELIA: *(Beat.)* Wow, unbelievable.

HAMMET: He kinda looked like my...father.

AMELIA: I thought your father was dead - murdered or something, right?

HAMMET: No. I mean, my stepfather.

AMELIA: The one you haven't seen in five years.

HAMMET: Yeah.

AMELIA: Don't worry. He's big-time, he'd never show up in a crappy little theatre like this. Besides, he hates your guts.

HAMMET: You're right. Of course. What was I thinking? Maybe it's tension. Closing night, you know.

AMELIA: Relax. What could go wrong?

HAMMET: Did the union send over the extra hand?

AMELIA: I called; they said he'd be here any moment. I've mopped the stage, opened the house, did preset and checked the headsets, but of course that doesn't matter anymore.

HAMMET: What about the damn actors, are they back from dinner?

AMELIA: The damn actors are straggling in. They had their last meal over at Dead Bob's.

HAMMET: Dead what?

AMELIA: Remember Bob's Bar? Well Bob died. So now they call it Dead Bob's.

HAMMET: Did you call five minutes?

AMELIA: Five minutes ago.

HAMMET: Call places. Let's get this over with so I can start living.

AMELIA: Just put your mind on automatic.

HAMMET: I did that at the matinee.

AMELIA: And you did an extremely adequate job. Oh, by the way, Hamlet's understudy is sick. He did a Pampers commercial this morning and was overwhelmed by fumes. I told him to stay home, if that's okay.

HAMMET: Whatever.

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AMELIA: Look, it's the last show of the season, we don't know if there's going to be a next season, so try to be pleasant for once. Please?

HAMMET: Sure.

AMELIA: Give me two minutes to get backstage and let's start.

AMELIA exits. HAMMET picks up a grease pencil and places the final mark on a wall that is covered with tally marks.

HAMMET: *(To himself.)* All the world is a stage, and I have to light the damn thing. *(The door opens; CLAUDE, older techie enters. At first, HAMMET does not notice him.)*

CLAUDE: Ah...excuse me.

HAMMET: You're late. Sit down, show's starting. This is how it works, I call the cue, you do it. Have you worked a— *(HAMMET turns and comes to a dead stop when he sees CLAUDE. Pause.)*

HAMMET: You won't do.

CLAUDE: I can push a dimmer with the best of them.

HAMMET: No, don't sit down, I said, dammit you sat down! How did you find me?

CLAUDE: I wasn't looking this time. *(The thick, tired voice of DICK, the backstage sound tech comes out of the speaker box.)*

DICK'S VOICE: This is sound checking in.

HAMMET: Dick, where are you?

DICK'S VOICE: I'm on the speaker box. Since you punched-out your headsets—

HAMMET: It was the old set!

DICK'S VOICE: Were they sitting on the light board?

HAMMET: So what?

DICK'S VOICE: Those were the brand new ones. They arrived C.O.D. between shows. I was goin' to surprise you...surprise.

HAMMET: Fine! We'll go with the speaker box.

DICK'S VOICE: I met the guy the union sent over backstage. He claimed to be your stepfather. You know, it's only a first impression but he didn't seem to be a lying-egotistical-sack-of-shit to me.

CLAUDE: It's good to see you again...son.

DICK'S VOICE: But you're a far better judge of character than I am.

AMELIA'S VOICE: Hammet, The actors are ready. Let's do it.

HAMMET: *(To Claude.)* Look, this isn't going to work, so why don't you put your coat on and shuffle back to whatever rock you crawled out from under!

AMELIA'S VOICE: Did you hear me? Headset check—

HAMMET: 'Cause, I'm not interested in working with you, not now, not ever!

AMELIA'S VOICE: Is there a problem up there?

CLAUDE: No. Listen, you are?

AMELIA'S VOICE: Me? I'm Amelia.

CLAUDE: Ophelia?

AMELIA'S VOICE: No Amelia.

CLAUDE: Amelia, look, if you should hear any loud crashes, or glass breaking, or maybe someone shrieking, "Help, he's killing me," would you be so kind as to call the police?

AMELIA'S VOICE: I take it you two have worked together before?

CLAUDE: No, this will be our first time.

AMELIA'S VOICE: Try to keep on opposite sides of the room for the next two hours, okay? The damn actors are ready.

HAMMET: If we have to work together, just sit there and do what I say. I call it, you do it. It's just a simple game of Simon Says. Got it? Good.

CLAUDE: Is it all right if I were to—?

HAMMET: Did Simon say talk?

DICK'S VOICE: *(Distorted.)* Yhech Heyit Fuchii.

HAMMET: Oh boy, Dick, you're really garbled. This is just great. Just what I needed! *(HAMMET starts wiggling wires.)*

DICK'S VOICE: *(Swallowing.)* ...Sorry. My mouth was full.

HAMMET: Please, try to articulate!

DICK'S VOICE: It's not easy with a meatball hoagie in your mouth.

HAMMET: Is sound ready to go?

DICK'S VOICE: Soon as I finish dessert.

HAMMET: Let's do it. House lights to half...go. Fade out pre-show music...go. Warning, smoke machine. Warning light cues beginning through ten. House lights out...go. Sound A and smoke machine...go. *(As HAMMET dictates each command, CLAUDE follows. The house lights dim.)* Amelia, let's go with the smoke machine...Amelia, the smoke machine!

AMELIA'S VOICE: *(Coughing.)* ...It's on... *(Cough.)*

HAMMET: Lights 1 and flies 1...go.

CLAUDE performs the cue. The Elizabethan pre-show music fades out and the rich glow of the stage below lights their faces as the production of Hamlet begins. During the rest of the play, we can hear the muffled dialogue coming from the unseen stage below.

CLAUDE: My God. Who the hell designed the lights? Look at that dark spot stage right.

HAMMET: *(Beat.)* I did. I designed the lights.

CLAUDE: Oh. Nice job. Except for that dark spot stage right.

HAMMET: For your information that's a shadow! An attempt to manifest the darker qualities of Hamlet's soul. The gleaming shine of the stage, juxtaposed to the discovery of the inward wonder and the reality of Hamlet's empty inner space.

CLAUDE: *(Beat.)* It looks like a dark spot. Got another one stage left. You got some instruments out. Did you do a pre-show check?

HAMMET: Yes, I did a pre-show check! Is there anything else?

CLAUDE: How about this cue coming up?

HAMMET grabs the cue sheet from CLAUDE.

HAMMET: I know! Lights 2 and sound B...go.

AMELIA'S VOICE: Got a problem. Rosencrantz says for some inexplicable reason, Guildenstern just threw up on his velveteen cockscorn.

HAMMET: Get him a handy-wipe and tell him we can dry clean it later.

CLAUDE: Tell 'em to stand in the dark spot.

AMELIA'S VOICE: It's happening again—oh my god! Hamlet, you're standing in it.

CLAUDE: Who directed this piece of crap?

HAMMET: My former girlfriend - we broke up opening night.

CLAUDE: Why?

HAMMET: She wanted to be paid. Lights 3...go. Warning scene shift.

AMELIA'S VOICE: Guildenstern is not going to make it!

HAMMET: What the hell is the problem?

AMELIA'S VOICE: He always gets nervous before a show.

HAMMET: It's the twenty-third show!

AMELIA'S VOICE: He's really sick, Hammet, he's white as a sheet.

HAMMET: Ah, to hell with it! Tell Hamlet to make his entrance! And jump to light cue 10 and sound E. Did you hear that, Dick?...Dick, are you on headsets?!

DICK'S VOICE: You talking to me?

HAMMET: Yes. What are you doing?

DICK'S VOICE: Watching "Love Boat."

HAMMET: You're watching television?!

DICK'S VOICE: It's a real funny episode where Jo-Anne Worley is lost at sea.

HAMMET: Dick, do you know the definition of the word 'professional'?

DICK'S VOICE: Wait a minute; I'll look it up in my union manual.

HAMMET: Would you mind paying a little attention to the show?! We're jumping.

DICK'S VOICE: I'm on top of it.

HAMMET: Lights 10, sound E...go!

CLAUDE, an old expert at close calls, quickly performs the cue. Far off we hear trumpeting horns.

HAMMET: Warning lights 11 through 20. Warning sound F, G, H, I—

AMELIA'S VOICE: Going off. Anybody know where a towel is?

CLAUDE: *(Looking at the script.)* My god.

HAMMET: What?

CLAUDE: Who the hell edited this script?

HAMMET: The director.

CLAUDE: There's nothing left.

HAMMET: For your information, people aren't willing to sit through a four-hour *Hamlet*.

CLAUDE: What are you doing after the intermission, *King Lear*?

HAMMET: Keep your hands off my script, Claude.

CLAUDE: You should call me dad.

HAMMET: You're not my father!

CLAUDE: How about poppa? Da?

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HAMMET: How did you find me? Did the union tell you? I left instructions never to give out my personal information!

CLAUDE: It was just a matter of time till we had to work together. It's just bad luck, and it looks like you're about to miss another cue.

HAMMET: I know exactly where I am! Lights 11 and sound F...go!

The door flies open and GARRY COOPER, an actor in full Elizabethan garb and codpiece, enters. Every time Garry enters he should be wearing a different Elizabethan outfit.

GARRY COOPER: Do you mind? I'm trying to get into character!

HAMMET: What the hell are you doing up here? You should be back stage.

GARRY COOPER: I don't like it there. I find it to be a negative energy spot - too many actors.

GARRY goes into his breathing exercises. It's like a perverted Lamaze.

HAMMET: Amelia, I've got a damn actor up here in the booth... breathing.

AMELIA'S VOICE: Oh, that's Garry Cooper.

HAMMET: Garry who?

GARRY COOPER: Please, may I center myself?

CLAUDE: By all means. *(Again with the perverted Lamaze breathing.)*

HAMMET: Get out of here!

GARRY COOPER: I shall depart, but I will need some quiet if I am going to practice my Tai-Chi. It reminds me who I am so that I can cast myself off and take on the character of Achilles. We have very little in common you know.

CLAUDE: Achilles? Who the hell is Achilles? I've never seen that role in *Hamlet*.

GARRY COOPER: I am a very important part of this play. I am denouement. I am milieu. I am—

HAMMET: Not in the program.

GARRY COOPER: All right, if you must know, I made the name up. Since the playwright has overlooked naming my character, I've taken it upon myself to correct his glaring oversight. "Achilles!" Sounds important, doesn't it?

CLAUDE: You're an extra.

GARRY COOPER: Nay, dear sir, more, I carry a spear. Notice, I didn't say, "merely a spear carrier." No. Where would Shakespeare be without me? Where would he be without the thousands, nay, tens-of-thousands of actors who have carried his spears for him? You might remember my performance in *Troilus and Cressida*. I've played many roles, seven messengers, eleven attendants, three servants, five officers and one herald!

HAMMET: Get out!

GARRY COOPER: They say the theatre is dying but I don't care. The critics never mention me but it's unimportant. They are the eunuchs of the theatre. They're here every night, they see it done, but they can't do it themselves!

HAMMET: Get back stage or I'll report you to Equity!

GARRY COOPER: What good would that do? I'm not a member!

HAMMET: Out!

HAMMET starts to throw the actor out.

GARRY COOPER: Wait! Look! This is my favorite part. Marcellus says, "Something is r-r-r-r-rotten in the state of Denmark."

CLAUDE: That's your favorite part of *Hamlet*?

GARRY COOPER: No, right after. Here it comes. My entrance.
(*Beat.*) Oh shit!

GARRY COOPER runs out.

HAMMET: Garry just missed his entrance.

AMELIA'S VOICE: It's not the first time.

CLAUDE: What type of operation is this?

HAMMET: Underfunded.

CLAUDE: I've worked over twenty productions of *Hamlet* and this is the worst. Worse even than Zero Mostel's. What plays have you done this season?

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HAMMET: All tragedies: *Hamlet*, *Othello* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

CLAUDE: Midsummer is not a tragedy.

HAMMET: This one was.

CLAUDE: You're stuck in repertory hell. If I'd known things were this bad, I might've helped. I was at the Guthrie for a while, I could have put in a word for you.

HAMMET: A favor so late in life, thanks.

DICK'S VOICE: Oh GOD NO! I DON'T BELIEVE IT!

HAMMET: Dick! What is it?! What happened?!

DICK'S VOICE: Don Knotts just fell overboard.

CLAUDE: My mentor, the great Edmond Klein always said, "We can't all light Broadway." You must enjoy even the little theatres. Even the theatres where the whole house must be comped. The theatres where if you *buy* a ticket, they look at you strangely. But, Hammet, this is ridiculous! The Chicago-Ensemble-Repertory-Group-Theatre-Project? How did 'ya come up with that?

HAMMET: By committee.

AMELIA'S VOICE: I'm running out of Tums, do we have any more?

HAMMET: What happened to the six-pack I bought this morning?

AMELIA'S VOICE: I've been handing them out to the actors. It seems Dead Bob's sweet and sour pork melt isn't sitting well with them.

CLAUDE: My God what happened to you? Last time we saw each other you were all lit up about how theatre was dying. How you were going to save it before it was consumed by musical comedy. Whatever happened to the theatre you were going to start? As usual, all talk.

HAMMET: This is it.

CLAUDE: What?

HAMMET: The theatre I started. This is it.

CLAUDE: I know theatre is dying, but this is ridiculous.

GARRY COOPER enters. PLEASE NOTE: Each time Garry enters his codpiece should get bigger.

GARRY COOPER: I blew it! I'm sorry. I hate unprofessionalism as much as you do and I was un-pro-fess-ion-al!

HAMMET: I'm glad you admit it. You're fired!

GARRY COOPER: I wouldn't do that if I were you.

HAMMET: Why not?

GARRY COOPER: I saw Mrs. Batchelor in the lobby.

HAMMET: No way!

CLAUDE: Who's Mrs. Batchelor?

GARRY COOPER: The landlady.

CLAUDE: Is this a problem?

GARRY COOPER: Our lease was up two days ago.

HAMMET: I was trying to stick in a few extra performances to make ends meet.

CLAUDE: I'm sure she'll understand.

HAMMET: Understand?! Do you realize what she charges for this dump? Half the wiring is bad; the fly system is a joke. The actors think the stage is raked. It's just sagging! Look, whatever we do, she must not find out there's a performance tonight.

CLAUDE: It's a little obvious isn't it? There are a hundred people out there!

HAMMET: It can be done. She's old, blind, Lights 12...go, and senile.

GARRY COOPER: Sorry to interject, but if I linger any longer I shall miss another entrance. I am proud to say that I have never missed two entrances in one night.

HAMMET: How the hell were you ever cast in my theatre?

GARRY COOPER: How else, I know Mrs. Batchelor personally.

HAMMET: How well do you know her?

GARRY COOPER: Well enough.

HAMMET: You're rehired.

GARRY COOPER: I'll just go down and see if I can pull the muslin over her eyes.

GARRY COOPER exits. HAMMET buries his head in his arms.

AMELIA'S VOICE: (*Out of breath.*) I'm back!

HAMMET: How's Guildenstern?

AMELIA'S VOICE: Surviving. But now Polonius isn't doing well.

HAMMET: How long till he dies?

AMELIA'S VOICE: If he doesn't stop puking, not long.

HAMMET: I mean in the play!

AMELIA'S VOICE: I got two more actors who are complaining about being sick to their stomachs. And the Ghost tells me Barnardo just up-chucked in the green room.

HAMMET: What the hell is going on?

CLAUDE: Sounds like food poisoning.

AMELIA'S VOICE: Hold on. Problem. Going off.

HAMMET: I don't get paid enough.

CLAUDE: If you were looking for good pay, why did you go into the theater?

HAMMET: I went into it because it was the only area of study in which I didn't have to try. I'm lazy. Lights 13-A...go.

CLAUDE: Perhaps we have more in common than you're willing to admit.

HAMMET: Sound G, flies 7, lights 13-B...and go!

CLAUDE: Hell, this life must be some fun for you. Personally, I like the scoop neck dresses women love to wear to the theatre. The view from up here is all that makes my life worth living. What's your excuse?

HAMMET: I don't approve of talking during a show.

DICK'S VOICE: Yes you do.

HAMMET: Shut up, Dick!

CLAUDE: Look at yourself. Is this the son I raised?

HAMMET: No one raised me, least of all you.

CLAUDE: I've never met anyone so haunted by nonexistent ghosts. You want me to plead guilty? I give it. I wasn't a good father—

HAMMET: Stepfather.

CLAUDE: I was never home. I was cold, alcoholic and absent. Feel better?

HAMMET: No.

CLAUDE: Your mother loved the idea of you being in the theatre. It's true. Your mother loved the stage.

HAMMET: Right, that's why she counted tip-money out of mason jars, lived in cold-water flats, and cursed the theatre till the day she died.

CLAUDE: She was a very talented actress.

HAMMET: She was no more talented than I am. She was a failure. No help from you.

CLAUDE: Hammet, I was thirty years old. Suddenly I found myself married to an aging ingénue and her sassy little son. I did all I could do without sacrificing my own life. Then one day, I decided to look at my problems a new way. I imagined myself standing on the moon looking down at the earth. Suddenly my problems seemed so small, so insignificant. That's what you should do. Stand up here on the moon and look down on the stage that is life.

HAMMET: Great. How do I breathe?

CLAUDE: That's not important.

HAMMET: I'm standing in a total vacuum, thinking about how small my problems are while I gasp for breath, dying of asphyxiation. Problems solved! I'm dead!

AMELIA'S VOICE: Problem!

HAMMET: What?

AMELIA'S VOICE: I don't know how to say this, but there's a policeman backstage.

HAMMET: Damn! I knew that actor wouldn't help.

AMELIA'S VOICE: Excuse me, Officer. You can't go out there! Right back!

HAMMET drops his head. CLAUDE gets up.

CLAUDE: You hold down the fort, I'll go backstage and see what I can do.

HAMMET: No, you won't.

CLAUDE: Look, I'll occupy him.

HAMMET: I said no! I'm in charge here. I'm the stage manager, you do what I say!

CLAUDE: As you wish.

HAMMET: Why is it every time my life is falling apart, you show up?

CLAUDE: Maybe it's just falling apart all the time. You got a policeman backstage, you goin' to do something or not?

HAMMET: I'm a professional! I'm going to solve this problem my own way! Dick? (*No answer.*) Dick? Wherefore art thou Dick?

DICK'S VOICE: Ah yeah.

HAMMET: Did a policeman come by your way?

DICK'S VOICE: You mean that short guy, uniform, snub-nosed 38 on his hip.

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HAMMET: That's him!

DICK'S VOICE: Yeah, we had a nice chat.

HAMMET: You talked to him?

DICK'S VOICE: Although I don't make it a habit of talking to actors now and then I do.

HAMMET: There is no role of a 'policeman' in *Hamlet*.

DICK'S VOICE: Oh that's right, you cut that part.

HAMMET: If you see him again, stall him. Okay? (*No answer.*)
...Dick?...Dick, can you hear me?...Dick? Dick...?...Dick this is the mother ship, pick up your headsets!

CLAUDE: What if the cop is back there to take away an actor? Maybe Garry is late with child support? Why second-guess life?

HAMMET: Let's use our frontal lobes shall we? Old lady Batchelor is spotted in the lobby. Five minutes later a policeman is caught back stage. I think we can deduce that he's not here to ask Ophelia for a date.

CLAUDE: Fine. Limit yourself. Your lighting designs show that same limitation.

HAMMET: Great! You're right! That policeman isn't after me! He's a lover of Shakespeare. Once again my stepfather has solved all my problems. No more worries. If he comes up here, we'll just cross that bridge when we get there, right?

CLAUDE: Right. You got a cue.

HAMMET: I don't care, I'm free!

CLAUDE: Then I'll do it.

HAMMET: I'm in charge, I'll tell you when to take a cue!

CLAUDE: But it's written down right here.

HAMMET: Don't touch the board!

CLAUDE performs the cue.

CLAUDE: Sorry boy.

HAMMET: Damn you!

CLAUDE: It was clearly marked in the book. 17-B.

HAMMET: I'm reporting you to the union!

CLAUDE: I haven't missed a cue in twenty-seven years!

HAMMET: That just makes you better than me doesn't it?

CLAUDE: Yes, it does—

DICK'S VOICE: (*Humming then singing.*) ...Hum, hum, hum, hum...wouldn't you like to be a pepper too? Be a Pepper drink Doctor Pepper. Be a Pepper drink Doctor Pepper...

HAMMET: Dick?

DICK'S VOICE: Ah yeah.

HAMMET: You're singing out loud again.

CLAUDE: If you hate the theatre so damn much, leave! No one is stopping you. I can handle this by myself.

HAMMET: I've missed my share of cues, but I've never intentionally ruined a production.

CLAUDE: Well, that just makes you better than me, doesn't it.

HAMMET: At the very least, I know not to have a marital spat in the middle of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. You two put on a better show than the actors! I should have lit row H, seats 9 and 10!

CLAUDE: I apologized for that.

HAMMET: And that just makes it so much better. The apology was so powerful; it just wiped the memory right out of my mind. Lights 14...go. Flies 7...go. Sound H, lights 15...go.

CLAUDE: Your mother and I didn't want you to know about the divorce. We thought we were doing you a favor.

HAMMET: A favor! You call throwing stacks of playbills at each other doing me a favor—?

AMELIA'S VOICE: Problem!

HAMMET: I don't care.

AMELIA'S VOICE: Hamlet just went up.

HAMMET: What? Who went up?

AMELIA'S VOICE: Hamlet - just went up on his lines.

Hammet grabs the binoculars.

HAMMET: My God! What's he doing?

AMELIA'S VOICE: Just standing there.

HAMMET: Feed him the line!

AMELIA'S VOICE: (*Pissed.*) I'm sorry; I've been wiping up vomit. I don't know where we are!

Hammet frantically flips through the script.

HAMMET: Was anyone paying attention? Dick? Dick!

CLAUDE: (*Pointing at the script.*) Right here.

HAMMET: (*Reading.*) "Or not to be."

AMELIA'S VOICE: (*Whispering.*) Or not to be!

HAMLET: (*Far off.*) Or not to be! That is the question...

GARRY COOPER enters.

GARRY COOPER: Do you realize what this does to my inner visual concentration? *My* concept of *my* character does not include a twentieth century policeman. But that's not the half of it. We're in real trouble.

HAMMET: What now?

GARRY COOPER: I've lost my spear!

HAMMET: Get out!

GARRY COOPER: What good is a spear-carrier without a spear? I'll make a fool out of myself out there!

AMELIA'S VOICE: Got another problem. Two more actors are suffering from cramps.

HAMMET: To hell with the actors, what happened to the policeman?!

AMELIA'S VOICE: Hey, don't yell at me, I've got hell breaking loose back here. Oh no!

HAMMET: What?!

AMELIA'S VOICE: King Claudius is down.

HAMMET: Can he make his entrance?

AMELIA'S VOICE: Yes - if he regains consciousness!

CLAUDE: When's his entrance?

AMELIA'S VOICE: Soon.

CLAUDE: How soon!?

AMELIA'S VOICE: Well, normally at this point he stands beside me and bitches about how his costume doesn't fit him in the crotch. So I'd guess five minutes.

GARRY COOPER: Now that's really strange! My costume doesn't fit my crotch either. I think that costumer hates men.

HAMMET: (*To Amelia.*) What should we do?

GARRY COOPER: Fire the bitch.

HAMMET: Get out!

CLAUDE: Wait a minute, Hammet, we need him.

HAMMET: What for?

CLAUDE: To play King Claudius.

HAMMET: I wouldn't cast this blinking idiot in a speaking part even if he could speak.

CLAUDE: Do you know the part?

GARRY COOPER: Me? Perfectly! It's the scene where King Claudius questions his stepson's sanity.

CLAUDE: Let's hear the first line.

GARRY COOPER: I know the third line.

CLAUDE: Give it your best.

GARRY COOPER: May I center myself—?

CLAUDE: Just say it!

GARRY COOPER: (*He is a terrible actor.*) "Love? His affection do not that way tend. Nor what spake though it lacked for a little not unlike madness!"

CLAUDE: Where did you study?

GARRY COOPER: The Professional Waiter's School.

CLAUDE: Do you know what the text means?

GARRY COOPER: It's all Greek to me.

CLAUDE: Good, in your case it's better that way.

GARRY COOPER: You mean I have the job?

CLAUDE: Have at it.

DICK'S VOICE: Hammet?

HAMMET: What is it Dick?

DICK'S VOICE: I found where we're at..."Or not to be."

HAMMET: Thanks, Dick.

DICK'S VOICE: I'm there for ya, buddy.

Claude hands Garry the script. He begins studying his lines.

GARRY COOPER: Bullshit, bullshit, Oooo! *My line.* Bullshit, bullshit, Oooo! *My line.*

HAMMET: You're not going on.

GARRY COOPER: I'm a fast learner. Let me show you. Give me the next line and I will instantly commit it to memory.

CLAUDE: Okay. "There's something in his soul o'er which his melancholy sits on brood; and I do doubt the hatch and the disclose will be some danger..." Got it?

GARRY COOPER: Got it. I have a photographic memory.

CLAUDE: Good. Then "speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue."

GARRY COOPER: Huh?

CLAUDE: Just say it.

GARRY COOPER: Oh. Okay. Here goes. *(He centers himself. Dramatically.)* "There's his soul and he sits on something which hatcheth some danger."

HAMMET: Hatcheth?

CLAUDE: It'll have to do.

HAMMET: I'm not putting him in.

GARRY COOPER: I'll have you know, I studied under the great Constantine! Famous for that immortal phrase, "Acting is making faces." Perhaps you've read his book, *Acting from the Neck Up?*

CLAUDE: Let's try it again.

GARRY COOPER: *(Gesturing.)* Sure. *(He centers himself.)* "There's his soul and he sits on something which hatcheth some danger."

CLAUDE: No, no, no. Try "to suit the action to the word and the word to the action."

GARRY COOPER: I don't follow.

CLAUDE: Don't "saw the air too much" with your hands.

GARRY COOPER: You're leaving me way behind.

CLAUDE: In other words, don't gesture so much.

GARRY COOPER: Oh! Not a problem! *(With microscopic gestures.)* "There's his soul and he sits on something which hatcheth some danger." Don't I take direction well?

HAMMET: He's not going out there!

GARRY COOPER: Why not!

HAMMET: Because, lights 16, sound I...go, I'm running this show and it's bad enough already.

GARRY COOPER: Please, please, please. You've got to give me this chance. You got a chance once. Who was it? Who said, go for it. Make it your own?

HAMMET: (*Pointing at Claude.*) Him. Then he kicked me out of the house.

CLAUDE: (*To Garry Cooper.*) Go for it. Make it your own.

Thrilled, GARRY begins memorizing lines.

HAMMET: Hatcheth?

AMELIA'S VOICE: Okay, moment of calm. I got a message from Ophelia. She wanted me to give you her phone number.

HAMMET: Why? I've already got it.

AMELIA'S VOICE: Not you, your stepfather.

HAMMET: What!

CLAUDE: We met before the show. I guess she liked what she saw.

HAMMET: (*Pounding his fist.*) No, no, no.

CLAUDE: She kind of reminds me of your mother playing Ophelia, but then again all actresses do.

HAMMET: Why don't you date the Queen, at least she's your age!

CLAUDE: What's the matter, son, are you trying to whack Ophelia with the prize?

HAMMET: (*Sarcastically.*) She's too young for me.

CLAUDE: What does age have to do with it? Your mother's age didn't matter.

HAMMET: She was six months older than you.

CLAUDE: Don't worry, I have a test I use to tell if they're old enough. I refuse to date any woman who can't remember Kennedy's assassination.

HAMMET: You expect me to believe that? I saw you in New York with some teenager. Do you realize how silly you look with your arm around someone a third your age? It ruined Yonkers for me.

CLAUDE: You were in New York? Why didn't you look me up?

HAMMET: Because my stepfather was walking along with his hand on the butt of some fifteen year-old.

CLAUDE: She wasn't fifteen.

HAMMET: Don't tell me she could remember Kennedy's assassination.

CLAUDE: I had to move it up to Bobby's, but she had read about it.

HAMMET: Where? From the womb?

HEADSETS (A VIEW FROM THE LIGHT BOOTH)

CLAUDE: Amelia? Ask Ophelia if she remembers Kennedy's assassination?

AMELIA'S VOICE: Going off to ask.

DICK'S VOICE: Going off too.

HAMMET: What? Where?...Dick? *(No answer.)* Damn.

AMELIA'S VOICE: Ophelia tells me that she thought Kennedy was still alive.

CLAUDE: How about Nixon's resignation?

AMELIA'S VOICE: That's a big negative.

CLAUDE: The Gulf War?

HAMMET: Damn it cut it out! You just never lay off do you? Always farting around with other women. You know, Mom and I were both wise to it.

CLAUDE: Your mother was no angel.

HAMMET: I ought to slam this light board down your throat!

GARRY COOPER: Tut, tut! For goodness' sake! You two should really try to get along. My father passed away some time ago. You know, you never miss your father until he's gone.

HAMMET: What a pleasant thought.

GARRY COOPER: Alas, my father was always filled with grand delusions about me. Then one day I decided to come straight with him. I told him the truth about myself. Suddenly, all the games were stripped away. We really looked at each other for the first time. Only our true emotions on the table. He immediately grabbed his chest, fell back in his Craftmatic adjustable bed and died. How's that for a guilt trip?

CLAUDE: You told him you were gay?

GARRY COOPER: No, I told him I was an actor.

HAMMET: And he believed you?

GARRY COOPER: That was over two years ago. I've almost forgotten what he looked like. If he hadn't left me his Craftmatic, I'd hardly think of him at all.

AMELIA'S VOICE: My father passed away three years ago. He always wanted me to have children, so when the doctor told me he was about to die, I ran down to the maternity ward and stole a baby. You should've seen the joy on his face. It was worth the time in jail.

HAMMET: Well, let me tell you about my step-dad. Wonderful guy. Married my mother two weeks after my dad died. Really let me have time to get over it before he made his move.

CLAUDE: It wasn't two weeks.

HAMMET: Three, four weeks, what's the difference? Then he disappeared. Always on the road, never home. He'd always bring my mother a little gift each time he came home. Apples from New York, fortune cookies from San Francisco, herpes from Houston. When I was fifteen he brought me a baseball glove. It was for the wrong hand!

GARRY COOPER: That is tragic. Most tragic. Maybe I'll use this emotion when I play King Claudius. (*Garry strikes a dramatic pose of a baseball pitcher. He pantomimes a pitch.*) "Forgive me, my foul murder." (*On 'foul', he swings and follows the bum fly ball.*)

HAMMET: Amelia, Dick, we're just going to skip over the entire scene.

AMELIA'S VOICE: But the play won't make any sense.

HAMMET: It'll make even less sense if we let this nut go on.

AMELIA'S VOICE: But—

HAMMET: Trust me. It's Shakespeare. Most of the audience is lost anyway.

CLAUDE: Oh come on, let the nut have a chance.

GARRY COOPER: Yeah!

HAMMET: I've made up my mind.

GARRY COOPER: Well, then I shall take my leave. Another lost moment. But you'll not get off. I'm going to write the worst things about you on Facebook, you...you big *Coriolanus*!

HAMMET: You're fired!

GARRY COOPER: No, I quit!

HAMMET: Get out!

GARRY COOPER: I'm going to run you through with my spear - as soon as I find it!

GARRY COOPER exits.

HAMMET: Amelia, Dick, we're skipping Lights 17 through 25, sound L-M-N-O, and flies 9 and going right to 36, sound P. How are the actors? Amelia? Amelia!

AMELIA'S VOICE: YES!

HAMMET: We're skipping cues...

AMELIA'S VOICE: I know!

HAMMET: Let's run for the end of the act.

DICK'S VOICE: I'm back.

HAMMET: Where the hell have you been!

DICK'S VOICE: Sneekin' a peek at Ophelia's costume change. It's usually really erotic but not tonight.

CLAUDE: Why not?

DICK'S VOICE: She threw up on herself.

HAMMET: We got a big cut coming! We're skipping from—

DICK'S VOICE: I'm aware of it.

AMELIA'S VOICE: I can't get the stage left tower out. It's back behind the throne.

HAMMET: Fly out the stage header and then bring in the throne!

AMELIA'S VOICE: Got it.

HAMMET: Warning lights 25 thru 30, sound P through S and flies 9. Let's do the cut. Are the actors ready?

AMELIA'S VOICE: Now they are!

HAMMET: And lights 36, sound P...go! Good. Flies 9...go! Lights 25, sound R — you still with us Dick?

DICK'S VOICE: *(Mouth full.)* Huehi yusi isri.

HAMMET: And . . . go. *(Beat.)* I did it! Damn I'm good.

HAMMET sits back, it was a brilliant cover.

CLAUDE: Well done, son.

PATROLMAN SHUBERT enters.

SHUBERT: *(Professional and cold.)* Excuse me, but I need you guys to step out here please.

HAMMET: Officer, we are running a show, we can't step away from the board.

SHUBERT: We got a problem here and I intend to get to the bottom of it.

HAMMET: Look, officer, I know what Mrs. Batchelor told you, but let us finish and we'll hand over the box office to that greedy old witch. Do you realize what an explosion theatre in this country would have if the landlords were supporters of the arts?! Do you know why Shakespeare is so popular—?

SHUBERT: (*To Claude.*) Is he nuts—?

HAMMET: Because we don't have to pay royalties to the playwright. Too much of our operating budget goes to rent! Soon we'll be hiring dead actors so we don't have to pay them. Now do as you please, but I'm staying right here whether there's an audience or not!

SHUBERT: I don't know what your problem is but I got this car blocking the exit out here and a traffic jam forming in the parking lot.

HAMMET: A what?

SHUBERT: A traffic jam. This play must be a real stinker to cause a jam up like that.

HAMMET: Look, officer, I have a show to run. Perhaps you could call a tow truck.

SHUBERT: It's one of those fancy foreign automatics. You tow 'em and they cost a ton to repair.

HAMMET: What the hell do you want me to do?

SHUBERT: Could you make an announcement?

HAMMET: An announcement? No!

SHUBERT: Look, that crowd outside is growing by the minute. It's starting to get unruly.

HAMMET: I can't stop *Hamlet* in the middle to ask someone to move their car.

CLAUDE: Why not? You cut out the middle.

SHUBERT: That's all right, I'll do it.

HAMMET: No you won't.

SHUBERT: It's okay; I gave the door-prize speech at the last policeman's ball. I'm good in front of people.

CLAUDE: Can you play King Claudius?

HAMMET: Claude!

CLAUDE: It was worth a try.

HEADSETS (A VIEW FROM THE LIGHT BOOTH)

SHUBERT: Hey guys, I got no time to fool around. I'm on a mission. I need the owner of that car before a riot breaks out. Those theatre patrons can really get violent and I don't blame them considering what you charge for this artsy-fartsy stuff.

HAMMET: I'll make an announcement at intermission. Not before.

SHUBERT: When's that?

HAMMET: Twenty minutes.

SHUBERT: No go. In twenty minutes we're going to have a replay of Kent State, only with tuxedos.

HAMMET: Officer, this theatre doesn't stand much of a chance, but if you start arresting our patrons, it's over - understand?

SHUBERT: Oh I get it.

HAMMET: You do? Wonderful.

SHUBERT: You're one of those "artistes." Sitting in here pretending what you're doing is important. Well let me tell you something, there's a real world out there with people and relationships and asshole supporters of the arts who park their cars so no one else can get out. Now if I don't get some action on this matter, I'm gonna start kickin' a whole bunch of "artiste" butt!

HAMMET: Officer, you don't understand, this is important.

SHUBERT: No it's not. The theatre is dying. Everyone knows that.

CLAUDE: Have you ever seen *Hamlet* before? We could get you a free ticket if you'd like -

SHUBERT: Why would I watch this junk? There's better street-theatre outside-. Wait a sec - is that an attempt to bribe me?

HAMMET: You're getting us in deeper

SHUBERT: Look, I don't want to be a bad guy. I'm just doing my job. I gotta get that car moved or the Chief says he'll sling me back into traffic detail for a month.

HAMMET: The Chief of Police is out there?

SHUBERT: Yeah. By the way he hates the play.

CLAUDE: Perhaps we can make an announcement between scenes.

SHUBERT: Do I ask for much?

HAMMET: We are not doing it!

CLAUDE: We just need the right moment. It can be a delicate decision as to exactly when to shatter the illusion you're trying to create. You understand, don't you?

SHUBERT: Of course, I'm a married man.

CLAUDE: Why don't you run back outside and we'll take care of everything.

HAMMET: We are not going to do it!

SHUBERT: *(To Hammet.)* You got a big mouth. I don't like big mouths.

HAMMET: And I don't like cops!

AMELIA'S VOICE: I'm back. Hey listen, guys, when that cop gets back there, talk to him real slow. He's like brain dead or something.

SHUBERT looks around trying to find where the voice is coming from.

CLAUDE: Thanks for letting us know, Amelia.

AMELIA'S VOICE: No problem.

SHUBERT: *(Pissed.)* You got three minutes to make that announcement or I'm taking things into my own hands. Do I make myself more than clear? Three minutes! No more.

CLAUDE: Of course, officer.

PATROLMAN SHUBERT exits. Beat. CLAUDE sighs.

HAMMET: I hate it when you do that.

CLAUDE: I'm just sitting here.

HAMMET: You sighed.

CLAUDE: And what's wrong with that?

HAMMET: If you're disappointed with me just say it, don't make funny little noises.

CLAUDE: I'm not disappointed. To be disappointed with you, I'd have to have some expectation.

HAMMET: Is that supposed to hurt me?

CLAUDE: I don't know if you're capable of being hurt.

HAMMET: Lights 26, sound S, flies 11...go!

CLAUDE: And you wonder why no one will hire you. Why must you confront everyone? Use your head. Can you think and talk at the same time? I discussed the possibility of getting you a job with my last director. He laughed in my face. Told me you got so fed up with the computer board at the Food-and-Footlights-Dinner-Theatre, you pissed into the light board. Two thousand dollars damage. Your reputation is getting around.

DICK'S VOICE: Where are you going to put this announcement?

HAMMET: My Stepfather will answer that.

CLAUDE: At intermission. Not before.

DICK'S VOICE: But the cop said three minutes.

CLAUDE: He won't do it. Trust me. I'm a great judge of character. Besides, he wasn't wearing a watch.

AMELIA'S VOICE: Look, I've had to make a few changes due to sick actors. The First Messenger will be playing Reynaldo, The Second Messenger will be playing Horatio, and The Third Messenger will be playing both Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Apparently the extras were the only ones who didn't eat at Dead Bob's.

HAMMET bangs his head against the wall.

CLAUDE: Look, there'll be another show. There's got to be some place in the world where they don't know about you.

HAMMET: I invested in this one.

CLAUDE: What? How many times have I told you never invest in the theatre. It's like the lottery, only no one wins!

HAMMET: I couldn't find a job. I was going to prove them all wrong about me.

CLAUDE: You're stage manager, technical director, lighting designer and producer. Don't you see what you're saying? You don't hate the theatre. You don't hate light. You're beginning to see it as a paintbrush or a sculptor's chisel or music. Admit it, you love the theatre.

AMELIA'S VOICE: The actors are upset again.

HAMMET: Ask me if I care.

AMELIA'S VOICE: One of them just saw the critic from the Chicago Trib walk in.

HAMMET: Jerome Reardon is in the house?

HAMMET grabs the binoculars and looks down into the audience.

AMELIA'S VOICE: Isn't that the guy you've been trying to get here for the last three months?

HAMMET: Oh God in heaven don't do this to me. Not tonight.

GARRY runs in.

GARRY COOPER: Jerome Reardon is in the house! I saw him! I must get out on stage so he can discover me.

HAMMET: You're going nowhere!

GARRY COOPER: But I've waited three years to have him in the house! Let me take a real role, please!

CLAUDE: I take it he's someone important.

AMELIA'S VOICE: He can make or break you. My god, don't you read reviews?

CLAUDE: I never read reviews.

HAMMET: He's lying.

CLAUDE: What're you worried about? Maybe he'll like it.

HAMMET: This man called *Cats* a smelly litter box. The only Shakespearean actor he has ever liked was Olivier. He actually said in print that when Olivier played Coriolanus he could hear his balls clanking!

CLAUDE: And what did he feel about Gielgud?

HAMMET: He called his performance the sound of one ball clanking!

CLAUDE: What's the problem? This is *Hamlet*. Maybe he's never seen it.

HAMMET: He remembers names - memorizes programs. Four years ago Moss Sanders directed that modern version of *I Never Sang For My Father*.

CLAUDE: I remember - nude on stilts.

HAMMET: Right, with the big clown noses.

CLAUDE: How could I forget?

HAMMET: He still remembers it! He's panned every Sanders play since then. This critic is incapable of forgiving. There was nothing left for Moss to do but end it all.

CLAUDE: He committed suicide over a review?

HAMMET: No. He went into television.

GARRY COOPER: I can't believe you're all afraid of a little critic.

He's only a lost human being who loves to take his personal problems out on others. Let me talk to him.

HAMMET: Oh, no. We tried that with the landlord. You're staying right here!

GARRY COOPER: Well fine, all night you're yelling for me to leave and now you want me to stay. Make up your mind.

HAMMET: I want you to drop dead but that's not an option right now.

CLAUDE: We got a cue.

HAMMET: I see it. Lights 64, sound U...go. Flies 13 and go.

GARRY COOPER: Look, I know his son, Biff.

HAMMET: You know the critic's son?

GARRY COOPER: He owes me a favor.

HAMMET: How could his son possibly owe you a favor? Wait, I don't want to know.

GARRY COOPER: I'll just go down and have a heart-to-heart talk with him woman-to-woman.

HAMMET: What could you possibly say? "Please forgive us the cast has food poisoning"?

GARRY COOPER: Please, I'd be far less obvious. I start by complimenting his tie. Asking where he bought it. Then, if it was one of the "in" places we'd talk about that. Then, I bring it around to the cool restaurants. Then, I'd invite him to the reception after the show.

HAMMET: There is no reception after the show!

GARRY COOPER: Well, let's quickly arrange one!

CLAUDE: The man has the right to his opinion.

HAMMET: What do you mean, he's a critic!

AMELIA'S VOICE: He just arrived. He doesn't know it's an off night.

If everyone does a brilliant job from here on out, we'll be fine!

GARRY COOPER: She's right. It'll be okay if we're perfect from here on out! I'm off to make my entrance! I shall be perfect!

GARRY COOPER runs out.

CLAUDE: We can at least give it a try. What do you say, son?

HAMMET: For once you're right. All is not lost yet. And don't call me "son." Amelia? Amelia!

AMELIA'S VOICE: What?!

HAMMET: Tell the actors to start acting!

CLAUDE: That's my boy, there's always hope.

PATROLMAN SHUBERT enters the balcony. He checks his pocket watch and takes out a huge BULLHORN.

SHUBERT: *(Into bullhorn.)* Ladies and gentlemen, would the owner of the car license plate WS-1616 please move it on account that someone else wants to get out!

SHUBERT gives HAMMET the finger and exits.

HAMMET: I'll kill him!

HAMMET starts for the door. CLAUDE grabs him.

CLAUDE: Stop!

CLAUDE forces HAMMET back to his chair.

AMELIA'S VOICE: What the hell was *that*?!

CLAUDE: Oh nothing, Amelia, just a policeman with a bullhorn making a public service announcement.

AMELIA'S VOICE: That's what I thought it was.

GARRY COOPER enters.

GARRY COOPER: All right! Fine! I can understand taking away my moment in the gels, but giving lines to a policeman!?

HAMMET: You're dead!

HAMMET starts after GARRY COOPER.

GARRY COOPER: He's mad!

GARRY COOPER runs out. HAMMET stops.

HAMMET: Amelia, I need something.

AMELIA'S VOICE: In the cabinet.

Hammet takes out a large bottle of gin and drinks straight.

DICK'S VOICE: I'm making a note here. How about changing the notice in the program to read, "The use of recorders, cameras and bull-horns is strictly prohibited"?

CLAUDE: Hammet—

HAMMET: I'm not ready for you to talk yet.

CLAUDE: We got a cue.

HAMMET: What's the sense?

CLAUDE: There's still a few dozen patrons in the audience.

HAMMET: Not worth it.

CLAUDE: Sure it is.

HAMMET: Oh right. This is the man who studied under the great Edmond Klein! He and Dionysus shall strike us down if we stop! The show must go on! I wonder how Mom felt about your record. More than anything she wanted to talk to you before she died. But you wouldn't miss a cue.

CLAUDE: I had no way of knowing she was that bad off.

HAMMET: I said she was dying! What else could that possibly mean! Too bad the doctors didn't buy her a ticket to the theatre, maybe she could have got the respect she deserved. Maybe then you could have taken a second between cues to listen to the last wishes of your wife.

CLAUDE: She was no longer my wife.

AMELIA'S VOICE: Hell, we're losing more audience.

CLAUDE: Look, Hammet, I know this isn't the best time to ask, but I need a little favor.

HAMMET: Whatever it is, the answer is no.

CLAUDE: It'll only take a second...

HAMMET: What!

CLAUDE: Could you run things without me for a moment? I need to run a quick errand.

HAMMET: You know I can't leave the booth during a show.

CLAUDE: I know...but, sorry, Hammet, I need to go to the parking lot.

HAMMET: Why...?

CLAUDE: I don't know how to say this but, WS-1616. My car. Sorry, son.

HAMMET: (*Infuriated.*) Your twenty-seven year record of never missing cues is about to come to an end.

CLAUDE: Stay away from the board!

CLAUDE turns to perform the cue. HAMMET pulls the fire-axe off the wall. He comes up behind Claude. Suddenly, he slams the axe into the light board. The theater goes dark. Seconds later, the emergency lights click on.

HAMMET: I believe you'll have to start counting over again.

HAMMET walks out.

AMELIA'S VOICE: What the hell is going on?

DICK'S VOICE: We got a major problem here! My television just went out!

CLAUDE: Just get the actors off the stage. I'll take care of it.

CLAUDE runs out after HAMMET but he is already gone. CLAUDE slowly walks to the edge of the balcony and looks down at the audience.

CLAUDE: Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention please?! I'm up here. Looks like we've had a slight problem with the lights. The intermission was only a few short lines away so if you will forgive my humble attempt to act, I will fill you in on the rest of the scene...when the lights went out, King Claudius, Hamlet's stepfather, was praying. He was to say, (*Attempting to act – he's not too bad.*) "O, my offense is rank, it smells to heaven. Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens to wash it white as snow? May one be pardoned and retain the offense? 'Tis not so above; there the action lies in its true nature, and we, ourselves are compelled, even to the teeth and forehead of our faults. Heart with strings of steel, be soft as sinews of the newborn babe. All may

yet be well.” And Hamlet sneaks up behind King Claudius with a fire axe...I mean with a sword and says something like, “Now might I do it pat, now he is a praying.” But then he stops and thinks. “Up, sword and know thou a more horrid way. When he’s drunk or in his rage. Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven and his soul may be damned and black as hell.” And the stepfather prays, “My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. Words without thoughts never to heaven go.” And we fade to black. Gently. Slowly. The fading light plays with the iris and for a moment you see the soft shadow of the stage clearly once more before it disappears, never to return, at least never ‘til tomorrow’s matinee. (*Beat.*) Ladies and gentlemen, an announcement will be made during the intermission as to whether we’ll be having a second act.

The lights fade.

END OF ACT ONE

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