

The Case Of The Prince Formerly Known As Hamlet
A Justin Thyme Mystery

By Bruce Kane

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

JUSTIN THYME, a Bogart like detective. Always dressed in a trenchcoat and fedora.

HAMLET, young Prince of Denmark

(NOTE: roles of King Hamlet, Claudius and the Ghost should be played by the same actor.)

KING HAMLET, old king of Denmark.

CLAUDIUS, brother of the old king

GHOST OF KING HAMLET, the old king's ghost

OPHELIA, young and sexy

GERTRUDE, voluptuous Queen Of Denmark

(Polonius and Laertes could be played by same actor)

POLONIUS, Ophelia's doddering father

LAERTES, Ophelia's hot headed brother.

PLAYER KING, actor in play within the play

PLAYER QUEEN, actor in play within the play

HERALD, wrestling type ring announcer

PRIEST

NOVICE ACTOR

Roles of Herald, Priest, Player King, Player Queen and Novice Actor can be double and triple cast. Depending on the casting choices available they can also double as GUARDS and MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL COURT, which can be filled by as many extras as you can muster.

SETTING

The play is set in the sixteenth century royal court of Denmark. The single set will represent all the rooms in Elsinore Castle.

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Formerly Known As Hamlet"
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WARNING No one shall make any changes to this play for the purpose of production. Publication of these plays does not imply its availability for production.

"The Case Of The Prince
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Before the lights come up we hear
the sound of a lone saxophone
playing a bluesy film noir like
theme in the vein of the song
"Harlem Nocturne."

LIGHTS UP on the bodies of
CLAUDIUS, GERTRUDE and HAMLET
spread across the stage. JUSTIN
THYME enters.

THYME

(to audience)

It ended like most of my cases with everybody dead.

(steps over Claudius)

The king was dead.

(steps over Gertrude)

The queen was dead.

(crosses to Hamlet, kneels
and cradles the prince in
his arms.)

The prince was almost dead.

Saxophone out

HAMLET

The potent poison quite o'er-crows my spirit and the rest is
silence.

THYME

Unfortunately, the rest wasn't silence. For a guy who was
checking out, Prince Hamlet had a lot to say.

HAMLET

O good friend, if thou didst't ever hold me in thy heart,
absent thee from felicity awhile, and in this harsh world
draw thy breath in pain... to tell my story.

THYME

It doesn't take much to see that the problems of one Danish prince don't mount to a hill of beans in this crazy world. But, what the heck.

(to Hamlet)

Yeah, I'll tell your story. I owe you that much.

Guards enter to remove the bodies.

THYME

It all began when the King of Denmark dropped a dime to tell me he needed my help. He sounded worried. Very worried. So I grabbed my fedora, buttoned up my trench coat, cued my saxophone accompaniment...

(Saxophone begins to play)

...and headed for Elsinore. Me? I'm Justin Thyme. I work for the F.B.I. That's the Fictional Bureau of Investigation. I handle the toughest, dirtiest cases in English literature. That's right. I'm a fictional detective. When I got to Elsinore, I was told the King was resting in the garden. He was in the garden, alright, but he wasn't resting.

King Hamlet stumbles in.

KING HAMLET

(gasping for air)

Murder, most foul.

He collapses onto to a bench.

THYME

Yeah, it usually is.

KING HAMLET

In my ear.

THYME

(shouting into the King's ear)

Yeah, it usually is.

KING HAMLET

You don't have to shout. I'm dying not deaf.

THYME

You said in your ear.

KING HAMLET

Poison in my ear.

THYME

That'd do it.

KING HAMLET

Hamlet.

THYME

A small village poisoned you?

KING HAMLET

No... Hamlet, my son.

THYME

Oh, your son poisoned you.

KING HAMLET

No. No. My son didn't poison me. He must avenge me. Help him Thyme. Help Hamlet avenge me. Promise me Thyme. Promise me.

THYME

Yeah, sure. I'll get the guy who murdered you. Just one question.

KING HAMLET

Yes?

THYME

Who murdered you?

KING HAMLET

It was... It was...

King Hamlet coughs and dies.

THYME

How do you spell that?

(to audience)

He didn't answer. He was dead. And one thing you learn in the detective game is that dead men give lousy answers.

Guards enter and carry out King Hamlet's body.

THYME

I made a promise to help the king's son avenge his death and now I was stuck with it. But first I had to find out who'd whacked the old man. At the beginning of every case I like to look around. See what I can see and what I can't see. Sometimes what you can't see is more important than what you can see. The only problem is you can't see it. I was looking around to find Prince Hamlet when...

(Bluesy saxophone announces
the arrival of OPHELIA)

... she walked into my life.

OPHELIA

Well, hello there tall, dark and out of place.

THYME

She was wearing a diaphanous gown that was dropping more hints than the host of a bad game show. She told me her name was Ophelia.

OPHELIA

My name's Ophelia.

THYME

But, that her friends called her Feelya.

OPHELIA

But, my friends call me... Feelya.

THYME

She said I must be Thyme.

OPHELIA

You must be Thyme.

THYME

She said she knew from...

OPHELIA

Could you please stop doing that.

Saxophone out.

THYME

Sorry button nose. Force of habit.

OPHELIA

My father warned me about men like you.

THYME

Oh yeah?

OPHELIA

He said you were...

THYME

Were what?

OPHELIA

(spelling)

T... R... O... U... B... L... E...

THYME

Looks and brains. Dames like this always spelled trouble.

(to Ophelia)

You wouldn't happen to know a prince goes by the name
"Hamlet," would ya?

OPHELIA

Intimately.

THYME

Something about the way she said "intimately" led me to
believe she knew the prince "intimately."

(to Ophelia)

Know where I can find him?

OPHELIA

Through that door, down the corridor, past the turret,
through the main ballroom, turn right at the armory, left at
the keep, right at the chapel, right again at the throne
room, down the next corridor and around the second tower.
It'll be the third door on your right.

THYME

Thanks, tangerine toes.

OPHELIA

Anytime. And I do mean "anytime."

THYME

I watched her walk away on legs that started where legs
usually start, around floor level, and ended where you don't
expect them to end... just below her neck. I followed her
directions to Prince Hamlet's quarters.

*Thyme exits. Now all we hear are
the sounds of footsteps and more
footsteps. Doors opening. Doors
closing. More footsteps. Door
opening. Woman screaming.*

THYME (OFFSTAGE)

Sorry.

*Door closing. More footsteps and
even more footsteps. Door opens.*

MAN'S VOICE

It's back that way.

THYME (OFFSTAGE)

Damn.

*More footsteps. Finally Thyme
enters out of breath.*

THYME

I gotta join a gym.

*Hamlet enters with a coterie of
some very strange looking men.*

THYME

When I finally found the Prince he was talking to the strangest bunch of men I'd ever seen. Some were dressed as fools.

HAMLET

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue.

THYME

All of them were wearing make-up.

HAMLET

But if you mouth it, as many of our players do, I had a leif the town crier spoke my lines.

THYME

And some were even wearing women's clothing. This could only mean one thing.

(disdainfully)

They were actors.

HAMLET

Nor do not saw the air...

THYME

Prince Hamlet.

HAMLET

Not now man. Can't you see I'm "directing?"

THYME

Your old man sent me.

HAMLET

Oh... Take five everybody.

*The Players exit. Hamlet crosses
to Thyme.*

HAMLET

How is dear old popsy?

THYME

Dear old popsy is dear old deadsy.

HAMLET

Deadsy?

THYME

As a door nail.

HAMLET

Oh poppycock. There must be some mistake.

THYME

No mistake, prince. He's dead. Murdered.

HAMLET

Murdered?

THYME

Murdered. Any idea who want to kill him?

HAMLET

You mean outside of a few neighboring kings, the husbands of the women he defiled, the entire royal court and the peasants whose land he stole?

THYME

Yeah. Outside of that.

HAMLET

Nobody I can think of.

THYME

He wants you to avenge him. He told me that with his dying breath.

HAMLET

(nervously)

You mean avenge as in... kill somebody?

THYME

I don't think he wanted you to take 'em dancing.

HAMLET

Who am I suppose to kill?

THYME

I don't know... yet.

HAMLET

Oh... Well... In that case when you find out who killed popsy you'll be sure to let me know.

Starts to exit

THYME

As far as anyone knows your old man died of natural causes. Got that?

HAMLET

If he had, he'd be the first king in Danish history.

Hamlet hurries out as fast as he can.

THYME

Finding out who killed popsy was going to be tougher than I thought. I decided to start with a visit on the Queen.

Gertrude enters wearing a full length black cloak. She is accompanied by her SECRETARY who carries a very long list.

GERTRUDE

Yes, yes of course. Seat Lord and Lady Godiva where ever you think best. Just make sure that slut understands the reception is not clothing optional.

The Secretary hurries off

THYME

Your majesty.

GERTRUDE

Yes? And who are you?

THYME

The name's Thyme. I was with the King when he died.

GERTRUDE

The King?

THYME

Your late husband.

GERTRUDE

Oh, that king.

THYME

I was wondering if I could ask you a few questions.

GERTRUDE

Make it short. I'm very busy.

THYME

I understand. Planning a state funeral must be one tough job.

GERTRUDE

State funeral?

THYME

Your husband.

GERTRUDE

My husband?

THYME

The late king.

GERTRUDE

Oh, that husband. Of course. All of the funeral arrangements have been made. No, I was talking about my wedding.

THYME

Wedding?

GERTRUDE

Yes. Wedding.

(sings)

I'm getting married in the morning. Ding, dong the bells are gonna chime.

THYME

Congratulations. Who's the lucky guy?

GERTRUDE

Claudius. My late husband's brother.

THYME

You're marrying the king's brother.

GERTRUDE

That's correct.

THYME

Won't that make you your own sister-in-law?

GERTRUDE

I know it seems unusual with my husband dead only three days.

THYME

Twelve hours.

GERTRUDE

Really? It seems like he's been gone so much longer.

THYME

Time flies when you're having fun.

GERTRUDE

Yes, doesn't it? You must understand Mr. Thyme, my late husband and I were not what you would call close. Not close at all.

THYME

It happens.

GERTRUDE

Perhaps there are some women who prefer a man who ignores them. Flaunts other women in front of them. Treats them badly.

THYME

I'm counting on it.

GERTRUDE

A man who never... how should I put it?

(her voice drops two octaves)

Slips them the high hard one. Sweeps out the chimney. Threads the needle. Lays a little pipe now and then.

(voice gets all gooey)

And then along came Claudius.

(does a little dance)

Slow walkin' Claudius. Slow talkin' Claudius. He is so different from King Hamlet. Warm, loving...

THYME

Alive.

GERTRUDE

An important quality in a man, wouldn't you say, Mr. Thyme? Now what was it you wanted to know?

THYME

Any idea who'd want to murder, King Hamlet?

GERTRUDE

Murder King Hamlet? What a ridiculous thought. Outside of a few neighboring kings, the husbands of the women he defiled, the entire royal court and the peasants whose land he stole, everyone loved King Hamlet.

THYME

Except for you.

GERTRUDE

Of course... But, I was married to him. Now if you have no further questions.

Gertrude starts to leave.

THYME

There is one more thing, queen. With your husband dead, who gets to be king?

GERTRUDE

Claudius will ascend to the throne.

THYME

I'm sure he will. But, who gets to be king?

GERTRUDE

Claudius.

THYME

But isn't your son Hamlet next in line?

GERTRUDE

Have you met my son, Mr. Thyme?

THYME

Yes, I have.

GERTRUDE

Then you understand. A king must be commanding. Decisive. My son couldn't figure out which was to go on a one way street.

She exits

THYME

It was obvious the Queen wasn't a woman who wasted time, especially when it came to planting the old man.

Gertrude returns still wearing the full length black cloak. This times she is accompanied by Claudius, Hamlet, Ophelia and a PRIEST. They all stare down into a open grave.

PRIEST

Granderant tyrannes cuius narratat sed parabilit destros illuc invicos flagitat ipsum et ratum.

*He gestures over the open grave
and begins to chant*

PRIEST

I can beat you at dominoe.. ohs..

EVERYONE

(chanting)

Oh, no you ca... ant.

PRIEST

(chanting)

Onorave et motatus iter exhortar luxurerrimus.

EVERYONE

(chanting)

What you just sa...aid.

PRIEST

Ashes to ashes... Dust to dust... Old King Hamlet will soon
be rust.

CLAUDIUS

Amen to that, brother.

PRIEST

(to Gertrude)

Your majesty. Are you ready?

GERTRUDE

I am ready.

PRIEST

If her majesty will prepare herself.

*Gertrude nods to Ophelia who
removes Gertrude's black cape in
one swift motion to reveal a full
length, form fitting, low cut,
very white wedding gown.*

PRIEST

Please repeat after me. I Gertrude

GERTRUDE

I Gertrude.

PRIEST

Queen of Denmark.

GERTRUDE

Queen of Denmark.

PRIEST

Take thee Claudius.

GERTRUDE

Take thee Claudius.

PRIEST

To be my lawful wedded husband.

GERTRUDE

To be my lawful wedded husband.

PRIEST

(to Claudius)

And now sir. If you will repeat after me. I Claudius.

THYME

(to audience)

I loved that show.

CLAUDIUS

I Claudius.

PRIEST

Take thee.

CLAUDIUS

I'll take it from here, padre. I Claudius take thee Gertrude
to be my lawfully bedded wife.

PRIEST

I believe that's lawfully "wedded"...

CLAUDIUS

You do it your way, padre. I'll do it mine.

PRIEST

In that case... I now pronounce you man and wife. You may kiss the bride.

*Claudius plants a great big kiss
on Gertrude. The two of them
start making out like teen-agers.*

HAMLET

(exiting)

I can't believe she's doing this.

OPHELIA

(exiting)

I can't believe she wore white.

*They exit along with the Priest.
Thyme breaks in on the newlyweds.*

THYME

Congratulations, Gert. That was one helluva ceremony.

GERTRUDE

Well, we thought with everyone here for the funeral, we'd just kill two birds with one stone.

THYME

Or with a little poison in the ear.

CLAUDIUS

What did you say???

THYME

Sorry. Nothing.

GERTRUDE

Oh, dear, where are my manners? Claudius, this is Mr. Thyme. He was with my dear departed husband when the dear... departed.

CLAUDIUS

Really??

THYME

Really.

CLAUDIUS

So, tell me Thyme, did my dear brother say anything before he died?

THYME

(to audience)

I coulda told him the king told me he was poisoned. I coulda told him the poison was poured in his ear. I could told him...

CLAUDIUS

(impatiently)

Well, Thyme, did my brother say anything before he shuffled off this mortal coil?

THYME

I can tell ya one thing, Claude. He didn't do no shuffling. Just coughed and died.

CLAUDIUS

(relieved)

Just coughed...

THYME

And died.

CLAUDIUS

Well, then. If you'll excuse me, it's time I made my ascension to the throne. Shall we dear?

*Claudius puts his arm around
Gertrude's waist and guides her
off*

CLAUDIUS

Once more into the breach, dear friends. Once more into the
breach.

*He plants his hand firmly on
Gertrude's behind.*

GERTRUDE

(girlishly)

Oh Claudius, you are such a bad boy.

They exit.

THYME

It looked like I was up against some very heavy hitters.
There was no way I was gonna get to the killer. This time I
had to make the killer come to me. I needed to shake things
up. Stir the pot. Throw a few bombs.

*Thyme crosses to an entering
Hamlet.*

THYME

Just the man I'm looking for.

HAMLET

What do you want now?

THYME

To shake things up. Stir the pot. Throw a few bombs.

HAMLET

What are you talking about?

*Hands Hamlet some sheets of
paper.*

THYME

Read this.

HAMLET

What is it?

THYME

A scene I wrote. I want you to put in your play.

HAMLET

You want me to put your scene in my play.

THYME

That's right, prince. My scene in your play.

HAMLET

I suppose you'll want a writing credit.

THYME

Relax, Shakespeare. I only care about catching the guy who offed your old man. The way I figure it, the killer had to be someone who had easy access to your father. Someone he trusted. Someone who had the three M's.

HAMLET

The three M's?

THYME

Yeah... Motive... Method and...

HAMLET

And what?

THYME

Mopportunity.

HAMLET

What's this scene got to do with any of that?

THYME

It's a ploy.

HAMLET
What's a ploy?

THYME
The play.

HAMLET
What about the play?

THYME
It's the ploy.

HAMLET
The play's the ploy.

THYME
And the ploy's the play.

HAMLET
The play's the ploy and the ploy's the play.

THYME
Actually, that's the play within the play.

HAMLET
What's the play within the play.

THYME
The ploy.

HAMLET
The ploy?

THYME
I call it "The Mousetrap"

HAMLET
Call what "The Mousetrap?"

THYME
The play within the play.

HAMLET

I thought that was the ploy.

THYME

It is.

HAMLET

The play within the play.

THYME

That's what makes it a ploy.

HAMLET

The play.

THYME

The play within the play.

HAMLET

The Mousetrap.

THYME

Which is the play within the play.

HAMLET

Let me get this straight. The play is a ploy and the ploy is the play and "The Mousetrap" is the play within the play that makes the play a ploy.

THYME

We don't want to tip our hand. So, whatever you do, don't repeat that to anyone.

HAMLET

I don't think I could if I wanted to.

Exits. A moment later the royal court including Claudius and Gertrude begin arriving. During this...

THYME

(to audience)

It was showtime. The curtain was about to go up on Hamlet's play. My plan was in motion.

*Ophelia enters with POLONIUS, a
doddering old man*

THYME

And so was the Lady Ophelia. There was something about her that drew me in like iron filings to a magnet. Like a moth to a flame. Like something that draws something to something else. I don't know if it was the chantilly lace or the pretty face. Maybe it was the wiggle in her walk... or the giggle in her talk.

OPHELIA

Mr. Thyme.

THYME

(to audience)

Oh, baby, that's what I like.

OPHELIA

This is my father, Polonius.

THYME

Nice to meet ya, Pole. Any father of Ophelia is a father of mine.

POLONIUS

Neither a borrower nor a lender be.

THYME

With what I make, I couldn't...

POLONIUS

To thine own self be true and it follows as...

OPHELIA

Later, father. Let's go in. The play is about to begin.

POLONIUS

(wandering off)

Another opening. Another show.

OPHELIA

(to Thyme)

I'm having a little party in my quarters after the play.
You're invited.

THYME

Who else will be there?

OPHELIA

We'll I'll be there. And if you come, that'll make two of us.

*She slinks off to join her father
and the others.*

*Hamlet enters spouting advice to
a couple of the Players.*

HAMLET

The purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now,
was and is, to hold, as it t'were, the mirror up to nature.

*One of the Players stands behind
Hamlet the whole time, mockingly
mouthing the words and imitating
his exaggerated gestures.*

HAMLET

Places everyone.

*Hamlet joins the others. The
PLAYER KING and PLAYER QUEEN take
their places.*

PLAYER KING

Full thirty times hath Phoebus' cart gone round
Neptune's salt wash and Tellus' orbed ground,
Since love our hearts and Hymen did our hands
Unite commutual in most sacred bands.

Yawns all around.

THYME

(to audience)

I was sure glad I didn't have any money in this turkey.

PLAYER QUEEN:

Nor earth to me give food, nor heaven light,
Sport and repose lock from me day and night,
Both here and hence pursue me lasting strife,
If, once a widow, ever I be wife!

PLAYER KING:

'Tis deeply sworn. Sweet, leave me here awhile. My spirits
grow dull, and fain I would beguile.

(The Player Queen exits.)

THYME

(to audience)

Here we go.

The Player King lies down and falls asleep. A VILLAIN SLINKS IN carrying a vial. He isn't exactly twirling his mustache but he might as well be. The audience perks up. Claudius begins to squirm. The Villain slowly pours a liquid from the vial into the ear of the Player King. The Onlookers gasp. Claudius practically has a heart attack. The Villain slinks out. A curtain is dropped over the scene. The audience doesn't know whether to clap or not. A few do. Most don't. Slowly people begin to leave, murmuring to one another.

GERTRUDE

(to Claudius)

Do you have any idea what that was all about?

CLAUDIUS

(nervously defensive)

Me? What are you saying? Know what that was all about? Why would I have any idea what that was all about?

(He hurries off still
murmuring. Gertrude follows
him out)

Do I have any idea what that was all about?

*Polonius wanders off left, then
right, the left again.*

POLONIUS

(to no one in particular)

There's no business like show business.

*He exits. Ophelia nods in Thyme's
direction.*

THYME

Ophelia.

OPHELIA

Please... Feelya.

THYME

I'm looking forward to it.

Ophelia undulates out.

Hamlet crosses to Thyme.

HAMLET

Well, what do you think?

THYME

It's too soon to tell.

HAMLET

I thought you, of all people, would be more encouraging.

THYME

I was talking about my scene.

HAMLET

So you do want a writing credit.

THYME

I want to catch a killer

HAMLET

Is that all you ever think about? The killer. The killer.
What about art? What about the theatre?

THYME

What about nailing the creep who rang down the curtain on
your old man? Wrote him out of the script? Dropped his
option?

HAMLET

Well, yes... There's that. Do you know... who... uh... that
person might be?

THYME

I have my suspicions.

HAMLET

Good... Suspicions are good.

(suspiciously)

And... uh... what may I ask do you intend to do about these
suspicions?

THYME

You mean now that the killer knows you know how your old man
was zotzed?

HAMLET

I... uh... suppose.

THYME

We wait.

HAMLET

(relieved)

Good... Good. Waiting is good.

(suspiciously)

Waiting for what?

THYME

For someone to try to kill you.

HAMLET

Kill me??? Kill me??? You never said anything about someone trying kill me!!!

THYME

Would you have gone along if I had?

HAMLET

Of course not!

THYME

That's why I didn't tell you.

Thyme and Hamlet exit. Moments later a bed is pushed in. On it are Thyme and Ophelia, who is now wearing Thyme's fedora.

OPHELIA

Well, Thyme, aren't you going to ask how it was for me?

THYME

Why should I?

OPHELIA

Because men like you always girls like me how it was.

THYME

Let's get one thing straight, tangerine hips, I ain't a guy like me. Besides, I know how it was for you.

OPHELIA

You do?

THYME

That somersault you did off the canopy with a full twist said it all.

OPHELIA

(proudly)

I did nail the landing.

THYME

Why do you think I gave you a ten?

OPHELIA

I must admit you're different from all the other men I've dated.

THYME

How so?

OPHELIA

For one thing, you're not a cousin.

THYME

There's a big world out there. A dame like you could have it all.

OPHELIA

I'm not a dame.

THYME

No offense meant.

OPHELIA

Non taken. My mother was a dame. Dame Eleanor. I'm a lady. But, someday I'll be the queen.

THYME

You? The queen?

OPHELIA

And once, I'm Queen, I could do you a lot of good.

THYME

You're doin' me a lotta good right now.

*The bed is pushed out. Hamlet
rushes in.*

HAMLET
(agitated)
Thyme... Thyme... Where are you?

*Thyme enters tucking in his
shirt.*

THYME
What is it?

HAMLET
(practically wailing)
Polonius! Polonius!

THYME
What about Polonius?

HAMLET
Oh what a rogue and peasant slave am I.

THYME
Knock off the Bartlett's Quotations and tell me what
happened.

HAMLET
I killed Polonius.

THYME
You what?

HAMLET
I killed Polonius.

THYME
What are you talking about? Start from the beginning.

HAMLET
(hands Thyme a note)
I found this under my door.

THYME

You're gonna have to help me here. My sixteenth century Danish is a little rusty.

HAMLET

It's from my mother telling me to meet her here.

THYME

Okay, so you're mother wanted to see you.

HAMLET

She never showed up.

THYME

Okay. She never showed. Can we get to the killing Polonius part?

HAMLET

While I was waiting, I heard a noise.

THYME

A noise... You heard a noise... So?

HAMLET

I... uh...

THYME

You... uh... what?

HAMLET

I panicked.

THYME

Of course, you did.

HAMLET

I thought Claudius was sending someone to kill me. So I drew my sword and I...

THYME

Yes?

Hamlet makes a series of stabbing gestures.

THYME

You became a mime.

HAMLET

I stabbed that curtain.

Thyme crosses to one of the three hanging curtains.

THYME

(to audience)

Hamlet had chosen curtain number three.

(peers behind curtain)

When I saw what was behind it, it made me wish he had gone for curtain number one or curtain number two.

(pushes back curtain to reveal the body of Polonius.

Kneels down to examine the body)

You can relax, kid. You didn't kill him.

HAMLET

You mean he's not dead?

THYME

He's deader than... Deader than... Well, deader than someone who's really dead. But you didn't do the dirty deed.

HAMLET

How... How can that be? I stabbed him

THYME

You can't kill a dead man.

HAMLET

What are you saying?

THYME

He was already dead when you shish kabobed him.

HAMLET

I don't understand any of this.

THYME

It's a set up. My guess is Claudius... or someone working for Claudius... sent you that note. Probably a forgery.

HAMLET

Why?

THYME

Easy. You come here. Your guards follow. They wait. Break in. Find the old man stabbed to death. Arrest you for the murder. And, the next thing you know, Claudius has you dancin' from the end of a rope.

HAMLET

I don't want to dance from the end of a rope!!!

THYME

By the way, where are your guards?

HAMLET

Still outside my door. I come through the secret tunnel my father built.

THYME

To hide out from invading hordes?

HAMLET

To visit women in the middle of the night.

THYME

The old boy really covered ground, didn't he?

HAMLET

Let's just say my mother wasn't his first wife. Or his second for that matter.

THYME

Now, listen to me and listen good. You never got that note. You never left your room. You were never here. Got that?

HAMLET

Got it.

THYME

Now get outta here.

Hamlet exits.

THYME

(to audience)

They buried Polonius the next day. The local sawbones said he'd been stabbed twenty seven times. His death was officially chalked up to "natural causes." I learned later that in Elsinore, getting stabbed twenty seven times was considered "natural causes."

An agitated Ophelia rushes in.

OPHELIA

Thyme... Thyme.

THYME

What is it cumquat knees?

OPHELIA

I've got bad news.

THYME

You're pregnant.

OPHELIA

Worse.

THYME

Thank God.

OPHELIA

Laertes is going to kill Hamlet.

THYME

Who the hell is Laertes?

OPHELIA

My brother.

THYME

Doesn't anybody around here have a real name like Bob or Tom or Dennis? Why does your brother want to zotz Hamlet?

OPHELIA

To avenge our father's death.

THYME

(to audience)

Revenge, of course. The leading cause of death in Denmark. If you ask me, this whole country could use a strong dose of anger management.

(to Ophelia)

We have to find Hamlet before your brother does.

OPHELIA

I'll go this way.

THYME

I'll go that way.

OPHELIA

Good plan.

THYME

If you find the prince before I do send him right to me. And don't say anything about your brother. We don't want to panic him.

OPHELIA

Right.

*Ophelia exits. No sooner does she
step off stage than Hamlet
enters.*

HAMLET

Ophelia said you wanted to seem me.

THYME

(to audience)

I knew I had to ease into this gently. Hamlet was a sensitive soul.

(to Hamlet)

Laertes wants to kill you.

HAMLET

(panicking)

Kill me??? Kill me??? I don't want Laertes to kill me!!!

THYME

(to audience)

He took it better than I thought.

HAMLET

Wait a minute. I thought my uncle wanted to kill me.

THYME

The line just got a little longer.

HAMLET

Why does Laertes want to kill me?

THYME

He thinks you iced his old man.

HAMLET

Why would he think that? Nobody knows I was there.

THYME

Somebody does.

Claudius and LAERTES enter.

CLAUDIUS

(graciously)

Prince Hamlet... Mr. Thyme.

THYME

Claude.

CLAUDIUS

I don't believe you know our dear cousin Laertes.

THYME

Nice to meet ya, Lay.

Laertes ignores Thyme.

CLAUDIUS

Hamlet, come say hello to Laertes.

*Hamlet approaches Laertes and
hesitantly reaches out to him.
Laertes slaps him across the face
with his glove.*

HAMLET

What was that for?

LAERTES

I challenge you to a duel.

HAMLET

A duel?!!

LAERTES

To the death.

HAMLET

I don't want to fight a duel to the death!!!

CLAUDIUS

You know the rule Prince Hamlet.

HAMLET

What rule?

CLAUDIUS

Meet Laertes in a duel to the death or leave Denmark, never
to return again.

HAMLET

I never heard of that rule.

CLAUDIUS

Of course not. I just made it up. You have until sun up tomorrow to decide. That's another rule I just made up. Come Laertes.

Claudius and Laertes exit.

HAMLET

Well, it was nice knowing you Thyme.

THYME

Where are you going?

HAMLET

I don't know about you, but I'm booking passage on the first herring boat out of town.

THYME

What about avenging your father?

HAMLET

My father? Why would I want to avenge my father?

THYME

Because he was your father.

HAMLET

We only have my mother's word for that.

THYME

You run now kid and you'll spend the rest of your life running. You got a choice here. Suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune or take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them.

HAMLET

Easy for you to say.

THYME

Actually, no it wasn't. Running away isn't the answer. It never is.

HAMLET

That depends on the question.

THYME

To be or not to be, that is the question.

HAMLET

Multiple choice. Mmmmmmm... In that case I'll take "not to be" as in not to be killed.

THYME

Remember something kid. A coward dies a thousand deaths, a soldier dies but once.

HAMLET

I'll take those odds any day.

Hamlet exits.

THYME

(to audience)

Well... With the prince splitting for parts unknown, it looked like my job here was done. There wasn't anything left for me to do.

GHOST (OFFSTAGE)

Justin Thyme... Justin Thyme.

Or so I thought.

Thyme looks around to see where the voice is coming from.

GHOST (OFFSTAGE)

Justin Thyme.

THYME

Yeah?

GHOST (OFFSTAGE)

Justin Thyme.

THYME

Who are you?

GHOST (OFFSTAGE)

Justin Thyme.

THYME

Where are you?

GHOST (OFFSTAGE)

Justin Thyme.

THYME

Listen pal. Enough with the spooky voice. If you're gonna show... show.

GHOST (OFFSTAGE)

Keep your pants on. I'm still trying to figure out this ghostly apparition crap.

The GHOST OF KING HAMLET ENTERS. He's covered in smoldering rags as though he'd just escaped from a burning building or the fires of hell.

THYME

King Hamlet. I thought you were dead. You are dead, aren't you?

GHOST

Do I look like I'm in the pink of health?

THYME

What do you want?

GHOST

Unless I'm avenged I am doomed to walk the night. And for the day confined to fast in fires, till the foul crimes done in my days of nature are burnt and purged away.

THYME

You wanna translate.

GHOST

I'm going to burn in hell until my son avenges me.

THYME

Well, that's not gonna happen. Your son hates you. Your wife hates you. I couldn't find anyone who didn't hate you. They'd all be dancing on your grave if they weren't getting married on it.

GHOST

Being king isn't a popularity contest. You made me a promise Thyme. You promised me that Hamlet would avenge my death.

THYME

You never told me your son was a pussy.

GHOST

If I had, would you have agreed?

THYME

No.

GHOST

That's why I didn't tell you. Can't you talk to him Thyme? Talk to Hamlet.

THYME

He's your son. You talk to him.

GHOST

You said so yourself, he hates me.

THYME

Then tell him you love him.

GHOST

But, I don't love him. I've never loved anyone. I couldn't afford to.

THYME

Tell him anyway.

GHOST

Does that really work?

THYME

I don't about kids, but it sure as hell works with dames.

GHOST

(exiting)

Now he tells me.

Ghost exits

THYME

Like I said, my time in Elsinore had come to an end.

(Hamlet wanders in)

Or, so I thought.

(to Hamlet)

Prince Hamlet... What happened? You look like you've seen a ghost.

HAMLET

He said he loved me.

THYME

Who said he loved you?

HAMLET

My father. Or, at least, his ghost. That was right after he called me a pussy. That's how I knew it was really him.

THYME

Did he say anything else?

HAMLET

Unless he is avenged, he is doomed to walk the night. And for the day confined to fast in fires, till the foul crimes...

THYME

Done in his days of nature are burnt and purged away.

HAMLET

How did you know?

THYME

Lucky guess.

HAMLET

You were right about one thing, Thyme. I can't go through life suffering the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. I've made up my mind.

THYME

(to audience)

That oughta screw up a few thousand Ph.D. theses.

(to Hamlet)

What did you decide to do?

HAMLET

I decided to accept Laertes challenge.

THYME

Your old man would be proud of you.

HAMLET

You think I'm doing this because some apparition shows up in the middle of the night spreading a load of pig manure about how it loves me?

THYME

Then why are you doing it?

HAMLET

Like you said. "To be or not to be."

THYME

Yeah? So?

HAMLET

I have decided not to be...

(very dramatically)

... a pussy.

*He strides off. Members of the
Court file in.*

THYME

That night Hamlet and Laertes faced off. The cream of
Elsinore society all showed up for an entertaining night of
blood and death.

The HERALD ENTERS.

HERALD

Lords and Ladies... The King and Queen.

*Claudius and Gertrude enter,
smiling, nodding, waving.*

THYME

I hadn't seen an entrance like that since the opening of
"King Lear, The Musical"

*Claudius and Gertrude take their
places on two high backed chairs.*

HERALD

(turning into a wrestling
announcer)

And now... let's get ready to rumble...eth. Presenting a duel
to the death. In the red corner... the prince formerly known
as Hamlet.

Hamlet enters to mild applause.

HERALD

In the blue corner... The greatest swordsman in all of
Denmark. Give it up for Lay... Air... Tees.

The Herald encourages members of our audience to join in chanting Lay...Air...Tees. Lay... Air...Tees. Laertes bounces in thrusting an invisible sword.

HERALD

Before we begin tonight's duel to the death, will everyone please rise for the singing of the Danish national anthem.

The Herald indicates for our audience to rise. A COURT ATTENDANT ENTERS carrying cue cards with the lyrics.

EVERYONE

Hail to mighty Denmark
 Land of sky and sea.
 Crushing all our neighbors
 From the Finns to the Zuider Zee.
 We smash them with our axes.
 We bleed them with our taxes.
 We crush them with our legions.
 The Swedes, the Dutch and Norwegians.
 Hail to mighty Denmark
 Land of sea and sky.
 Leading Scandinavia
 In war and nymphomania.
 We're the Danish Danes of Denmark.
 Of our pastries we are fond.
 We're big and tall and zaftig.
 But mostly we are... blonde.

CLAUDIUS

Prince Hamlet... Good cousin Laertes. If you will please come forward.

Hamlet and Laertes approach Claudius and bow.

CLAUDIUS

The swords please.

*The Attendant steps forward
holding a red velvet pillow on
which rest two identical swords.*

CLAUDIUS

Prince Hamlet... If you will choose your sword.

*In typical Hamlet fashion he
keeps going back and forth unable
to make a decision about which
sword to take.*

CLAUDIUS

(annoyed)

Just pick one, already.

Hamlet chooses a sword

CLAUDIUS

(to Hamlet sarcastically)

Excellent choice.

(turns to Laertes)

Dear cousin, Laertes.

*Laertes picks up the remaining
sword, hefts it for weight and
balance and then makes a few
jabbing motions toward Hamlet,
who recoils. Laertes laughs.*

CLAUDIUS

And now... the goblets, please.

*Ophelia enters in a low cut gown
carrying two silver goblets chest
high.*

VOICE IN THE CROWD

Whoa... Nice goblets.

Ophelia approaches Claudius and Gertrude.

CLAUDIUS

If the combatants will please step forward to baptize their swords.

Ophelia holds a goblet out to Hamlet.

CLAUDIUS

Prince Hamlet... If you would please dip your tip.
 (Hamlet is totally confused)
 Your sword... In the goblet.

HAMLET

What for?

CLAUDIUS

Because it's part of a long tradition... I just invented.

Hamlet dips his tip in the Goblet.

CLAUDIUS

And now dear cousin.

Ophelia holds out the second goblet. Laertes dips his tip. Hamlet and Laertes take up places facing each other.

LAERTES

Float like a butterfly. Sting like a bee. Prince Hamlet goes down in three.

CLAUDIUS

Gentlemen... En garde.

Hamlet and Laertes cross swords. The Attendant bangs a gong.

The dueling begins and carries on through what follows.

THYME

(to audience)

The fix was in. It had to be. There was no way Claudius was going to let Hamlet get out of this alive. The only question was how. And then Claudius gave it all away.

Thyme crosses to Ophelia, Claudius and Gertrude.

OPHELIA

Wine, my lord?

CLAUDIUS

Thank you.

THYME

(to audience)

Pay attention to the goblets.

(points at the goblets)

These goblets!

Ophelia hands Claudius the goblet in which Hamlet dipped his sword.

THYME

Now, that's the goblet Hamlet dipped his tip in.

Ophelia offers the second goblet to Gertrude.

THYME

And that's the goblet Laertes dipped his sword in.

Claudius sees Gertrude take the goblet. He quickly snatches it away from her.

GERTRUDE

Claudius!

CLAUDIUS

This is not for you.

He tucks the goblet safely under his chair.

THYME

That's when I knew I had to get the Prince outta there before it was too late.

Thyme grabs the hammer from the Attendant and bangs the gong. Hamlet and Laertes return to their respective corners. Thyme puts out a low stool for Hamlet to sit on then hits him in the face with a wet sponge like a corner man in a prize fight.

THYME

We gotta switch swords.

HAMLET

What are you talking about?

THYME

The cup Laertes dipped his tip in.

HAMLET

The bowl with the scroll.

THYME

No, the cup with the pup.

HAMLET

The cup with the pup?

THYME

The cup with the pup.

HAMLET

What about the cup with the pup.

HAMLET

It has the rickey with the mickey.

HAMLET

The what?

THYME

The drink with the zinc.

HAMLET

I don't follow.

THYME

The quench with the wrench.

HAMLET

You lost me.

THYME

The glass with the gas.

(Hamlet has no idea)

The poison.

HAMLET

The poison???

THYME

Keep it down.

HAMLET

(softly)

The poison?

THYME

All that tip dipping. Laertes goblet has the poison in it.
If he so much as scratches you... you're dead.

HAMLET

I don't want to be dead!!!

THYME

I said keep it down.

HAMLET

(softly)

I don't want to be dead.

THYME

I got it covered. Just go out there and work him around to me.

HAMLET

What are you going to do?

THYME

Don't worry about it.

HAMLET

Don't worry about it???

*The Attendant hits the gong.
Hamlet stands.*

THYME

One more thing, kid. Don't let him scratch you.

*The dueling begins. Hamlet keeps
backtracking, keeping his
distance from Laertes.*

THYME

Around to me, kid... Around to me... That's it. A little more.

*Thyme steps forward to trip
Laertes who tumbles into Hamlet.
They fall and drop their swords.*

LAERTES

(to Thyme)

You clumsy oaf.

THYME

My apologies. Allow me.

(picks up Hamlet's sword and
hands it to Laertes)

You sword, my lord.

*Thyme hands Laertes sword to
Hamlet.*

LAERTES

Now, get out of my way while I split this cowardly cur from
crotch to cranium.

*The duel continues until Laertes
scratches Hamlet with his sword.
Laertes raises his arms in
triumph.*

LAERTES

A ha! My father is avenged. My sister is avenged. And I am
avenged.

HAMLET

No, you're not.

LAERTES

Yes, I am.

HAMLET

No, you're not.

LAERTES

Am.

HAMLET

Not.

LAERTES

Am too.

HAMLET

Uh... uh.

LAERTES

Uh huh.

HAMLET

Do I look dead to you?

LAERTES

That's not possible. I scratched you. You're supposed to be dead.

HAMLET

Tell him, Thyme.

THYME

(explaining)

Your sword, my lord.

LAERTES

(to Thyme)

You switched the...

(Thyme nods. Laertes turns to Hamlet)

Then you have the sword with...

HAMLET

(smiles and nods)

En garde.

Laertes stands dead still for several moments, then drops his sword and takes off running right past Claudius.

CLAUDIUS

Come back here you lily livered little...

Claudius realizes everyone is staring at him. He tries to recoup the moment.

CLAUDIUS

A toast to my brave nephew slash stepson... Prince Hamlet.

*Claudius raises his goblet.
Gertrude reaches down and picks
up the poisoned goblet.*

GERTRUDE

To Hamlet.

*Claudius starts to drink, turns
to Gertrude, sees her drink.*

CLAUDIUS

(panicked)

No! No!

Gertrude coughs.

GERTRUDE

(choking)

Murder... most... foul.

THYME

(to audience)

Seems to be a recurring theme around here.

*Gertrude collapses onto her
chair.*

CLAUDIUS

No. No... I told you it wasn't for you.

Hamlet rushes to Gertrude.

HAMLET

Mommy! Mommy!

*Too late. The the Queen is dead.
Hamlet slowly raises his
anguished gaze to Claudius who
takes a step back.*

HAMLET
(menacingly)

You! You!

*Hamlet raises his sword to
Claudius who takes another step
back.*

CLAUDIUS
Just a minute, son.

HAMLET
I am not your son. I am Prince Hamlet. You killed my father.
Prepare to die.

CLAUDIUS
I suggest you think this over.

HAMLET
I am Prince Hamlet. You killed my father. Prepare to die.

THYME
Hey, kid, this ain't "The Princess Bride."

*Hamlet presses the attack.
Claudius, the better swordsman,
holds him off until he finally
stabs Hamlet in the shoulder.
Hamlet drops his sword and falls
to his knees.*

CLAUDIUS
I'm sorry, Hamlet. You leave me no choice.

*As Claudius steps in for the
kill, Thyme tosses Hamlet his
sword. In one motion, Hamlet
catches it and cuts Claudius.*

CLAUDIUS
Owwwww!!! That hurt.

HAMLET

My mother is avenged. My father is avenged. And, I am avenged.

CLAUDIUS

No, you're not.

HAMLET

Yes, I am.

CLAUDIUS

No, you're not.

HAMLET

Am

CLAUDIUS

Not.

HAMLET

Am

CLAUDIUS

It's only a scratch.

HAMLET

My sword.

CLAUDIUS

What about your sword?

HAMLET

Tell him, Thyme.

THYME

The tip.

CLAUDIUS
(getting weaker)

The tip?

THYME

It was dipped in the cup with the pup.

CLAUDIUS

The cup with the pup?

THYME

The cup with the pup.

CLAUDIUS

What about the cup with the pup?

THYME

It had the rickey with mickey.

Claudius drops to one knee.

CLAUDIUS

The what?

HAMLET

The gulp with the pulp.

THYME

The swig with the rig.

HAMLET

The shot with the rot.

CLAUDIUS

What the hell are you talking about?

THYME/HAMLET

The poison!!!

CLAUDIUS

Why didn't you just say so?

HAMLET

The same poison you poured in my father's ear.

CLAUDIUS

That wasn't me.

HAMLET

Yes, it was.

CLAUDIUS
No, it wasn't.

HAMLET
Yes, it was.

CLAUDIUS
No, it wasn't.

HAMLET
Uh... hun.

CLAUDIUS
Uh... uh.

THYME
If it wasn't you, then who was it?

CLAUDIUS
It was... It was...

Claudius coughs.

THYME
How do you spell that?
(Claudius dies)
He was dead. And one thing you learn in the detective game is
that dead men still give lousy answers.

HAMLET
I did it Thyme.

Thyme cradles Hamlet in his arms.

THYME
You did it, kid.

HAMLET
I was a soldier.

THYME
You were a soldier.

HAMLET

I rose up against a sea of tribbles...

THYME

Troubles.

HAMLET

Whatever.

THYME

(to audience)

And with that Prince Hamlet collapsed into my arms...

(removes his hat)

... and made a twenty minute speech in iambic pentameter.

HAMLET

You that look pale and tremble at this chance, that are but
mutes or audience to this act...

(Guards enter to carry off
Claudius, Gertrude and
Hamlet still talking)

Had I but time, O, I could tell you. But let it be.

*After all the bodies are removed,
Ophelia rushes to Thyme.*

OPHELIA

Take me with you Thyme. There's no one left for me in
Elsinore. Literally, there's no one left for me in Elsinore.

THYME

You're good paprika toes. Real good. It was you. All the time
it was you.

OPHELIA

I don't know what you're talking about.

THYME

Old King Hamlet was afraid. Afraid someone was going to kill
him. But he didn't know who and he didn't how and he didn't
know when. He'd've been on his guard with everyone but you.

OPHELIA

You're just making this up.

THYME

Sure, he'd've gone into the garden with you. He was just old enough and lecherous enough to do that.

OPHELIA

If you're trying to frighten me, you're doing a very good job.

THYME

He'd have looked you up and down, licked his lips and followed you, grinning from ear to ear.

OPHELIA

Stop talking like that.

THYME

And then, while he was looking you up and down and grinning from ear to ear, you could have gotten as close to him as you liked, lulled him to sleep and poured the poison in one of those ears he was grinning from... or to.

OPHELIA

That's not true. You know it's not true.

THYME

Claudius was ambitious, but not as ambitious as you. You knew that Hamlet would never be king. So you set your sights on Claudius. You knew that he and the queen had been steaming up the Wamsuttas. All you had to was knock off the old king. Watch Claudius ascend to the throne. Then bump off Gert and become Cladius's very young, very willing, very well built queen.

OPHELIA

You're just making this up.

THYME

And tonight, you were going for the hat trick. First Hamlet, then the Queen and then me.

OPHELIA

I did it for us Thyme. You and me.

THYME

I'm gonna send you over cinnamon knees.

OPHELIA

You don't mean it Thyme. I know you don't. You're just playing with me.

The bluesy saxophone begins to play.

THYME

This ain't a game, tangelo ears. You're going to the tower. And if they ever let you out, I'll be waitin' for you.

OPHELIA

And, if they don't?

THYME

Well... We'll always have Elsinore.

Two Guards lead Ophelia away.

THYME

She walked out of my life the way she walked into it. On legs like an elevator that started in the basement and went all the way up to the penthouse. Then down again. Then back up again. Then down again. Then...

The Ghost of King Hamlet enters looking pretty spiffy. Gone are the smoldering clothes.

Saxophone out.

GHOST

So it was the girl all the time.

THYME

Why didn't you tell me she was in the garden with you?

GHOST

What difference does it make? I'm avenged. Freed from purgatory. No longer am I doomed to walk the night. And for the day confined to fast in fires....

THYME

Save me the free verse. A lot of people had to die for you to be avenged.

GHOST

Like they say in purgatory. You can't make an omelette without killing a few people. Thanks Thyme, I owe you one. See you soon.

He exits

THYME

The Case Of The Prince Formerly Known As Hamlet was finally over. Looking back on it I suppose Claudius got what he deserved. As for the Queen, her only crime was loving not wisely, but too well. Of course, I can't speak from personal experience. I never had the pleasure. Ophelia? Ophelia. The stuff that dreams are made of. And the prince..?

An ACTOR enters reading from some script pages.

ACTOR

Captain of our fairy band, Helena is here at hand. And the youth, mistook by me pleading for a lover's fee. Shall we their fond pageant see? Lord, what fools these mortals be.

From off stage we hear a familiar voice.

HAMLET (OFFSTAGE)

Speak the speech, I pray you as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue.

Entering

HAMLET

But if you mouth it, as many of your players do...

THYME

All he wanted to do... was direct.

*The saxophone plays our bluesy
theme as the lights fade.*

THE END