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.
"The Case Of The Prince
Formerly Known As Hamlet"
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Director's, but never smaller than that of the Director. The
above billing must appear as follows: "The Case Of The Prince
Formerly Known As Hamlet - A Justin Thyme Mystery" by Bruce
Kane.

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.
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.
(step over Claudius)
The king was dead.
(step 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 didn’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.
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.

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.

Yeah, it usually is.

KING HAMLET
In my 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 (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 coulda 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
goes 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 in 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.
Yeah?

Justin Thyme.

Who are you?

Justin Thyme.

Where are you?

Justin Thyme.

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

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.

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

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

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 guarde.

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 Getrude.

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 guarde.

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 Queen is dead.
Hamlet slowly raises his anguished gaze to Claudius who takes a step back.
Hamlet raises his sword to
Claudius who takes another step
back.

Just a minute, son.

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

I suggest you think this over.

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

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.

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.

Owwwwww!!! 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.

\[\text{The bluesy saxophone begins to play.}\]

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.

\[\text{Two Guards lead Ophelia away.}\]

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...

\[\text{The Ghost of King Hamlet enters looking pretty spiffy. Gone are the smoldering clothes.}\]

\[\text{Saxophone out.}\]

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