

# Horatio Will Be Late

A comedy in two acts

*By*  
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## **STORY OF THE PLAY**

Miss Duncan, the Stratford High School drama teacher, has always wanted to direct "Hamlet," but from the very start her production is doomed. The lead actor is a prima dona who exasperates his peers. The other actors are either jealous that they weren't cast in different roles, or clueless. On opening night the costumes still haven't arrived, so the stage crew tries to improvise with costumes from previous shows, such as "Grease," and "South Pacific." The makeup is lost in a car fire, and the actor who is to play Horatio calls from the hospital: he is about to have an emergency appendectomy.

A member of the cast has a cousin who is a professional actor, and who recently performed in "Hamlet." When he arrives, Miss Duncan learns, much to her horror, that the actor played the role of Hamlet, not Horatio. When cue cards are suggested, they discover their actor is dyslexic and can't read them.

Chaos reigns as actors upstage each other, mis-cue each other, and finally end up in a big fight. Add a nosy principal, a visitor from an arts conservatory, and the pressure of trying to fulfill the terms of a state grant, and we have the worst, and the funniest, production ever of Shakespeare's great tragedy.

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(6 m, 6 w)*

MISS DUNCAN: High school drama teacher.  
MRS. QUINCE: High school principal, not a theater person.  
SARAH: A student, will play Ophelia.  
BEN: A student, will play Polonius.  
WILL: A student, clueless, will play Rosencrantz.  
JOSH: A student, will play the Ghost.  
DREW: A student, a prima dona, will play Hamlet.  
ASHLEY: A student, will play Guildenstern.  
KATHY: A student, will play Gertrude.  
ZACK: A professional actor, tries to play Horatio.  
KELLY: A student, handles makeup and costumes.  
DR. LUCIUS BARRYMORE: A visitor from the Arts Conservatory;  
has no lines.

## **SYNOPSIS**

Act I: Late afternoon, the day of the performance.

Act II: The performance that evening.

## **SETTING**

The setting for Act I is the green room, backstage, of the Stratford High School Theater. Upstage are coat racks with costumes, and tables with makeup, wigs, props, furniture, etc. Beat-up sofas and chairs are downstage. For Act II the setting is the high school stage and SR wing space. A seat in the audience is left empty. It will be used in the second act.

**PROPS and SPECIAL COSTUMES**

Cell phone  
Hawaiian shirts  
Leis  
Elizabethan costume for Zack  
Slip of paper  
Crutches  
Note pad and pen  
Surfboard with cue cards taped on it  
Reading glasses  
Frankenstein mask  
Script  
Cup from fast food restaurant  
Handkerchief  
Muumuus  
Grass skirt  
Poodle skirt  
Baseball jersey  
Victorian dress  
Cold cream  
Clown makeup

## ACT I

(AT RISE: Late afternoon. MISS DUNCAN, the director, is talking on her cell phone. She paces downstage. SARAH, BEN, KELLY and WILL ENTER. Sarah is wearing Hawaiian clothes, a muumuu, leis, etc. They wait for Miss Duncan to finish her conversation.)

DUNCAN: (On phone.) Why are my costumes in New Jersey? There were supposed to be here two weeks ago! I sent you a list of my cast and I sent you a check! My play is about to open and I don't have any costumes! WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT IT? ... I don't want my check back! I want the costumes I rented! ... (With desperation.) I'M NOT ANGRY! I'M DESPERATE! ... Hello? (To STUDENTS.) He hung up. What else can go wrong with this production?

BEN: Somebody might come see it.

DUNCAN: (To BEN.) That's not funny! (To SARAH.) Why are you dressed like that?

SARAH: Kelly did it.

DUNCAN: (To KELLY.) Why is Sarah dressed like that?

KELLY: You told me to look for costumes in case we didn't get the ones you rented.

DUNCAN: We're doing "Hamlet," not "Gilligan's Island."

KELLY: We don't have a very good costume department.

BEN: (Rolls HIS eyes.) All we've done lately are zany comedies set in New York apartments.

WILL: I like those zany comedies! Especially that last one by ... (Thinks.) Neil Diamond.

SARAH: Neil Diamond?

WILL: Yeah. You know. "Barefoot in the Dark."

SARAH: That's "Barefoot in the PARK"!

WILL: That's what I said. So why are we doing this "Hamlet" thing?

DUNCAN: I thought our school needed a challenge. We haven't produced a Shakespeare play in fifteen years. And I always wanted to direct "Hamlet." Shakespeare's greatest tragedy!

WILL: I'm having trouble following the story. Is it supposed to be funny?

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DUNCAN: Funny? It's arguably the greatest drama in the English language!

WILL: So you're saying ... it's not supposed to be funny?

BEN: Have you even read it?

WILL: Kind of. I can't quite tell what it's about.

SARAH: Look, Will. Hamlet's father is murdered by Claudius. His father's ghost appears to Hamlet and tells him to avenge his death. Meantime, Claudius has married Hamlet's mother and he's the king of Denmark.

WILL: That's not very funny.

BEN: Instead of killing Claudius, Hamlet kills Polonius, and then goes to England with his friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

WILL: *(With pride.)* I'm one of those guys!

BEN: Right. You're Rosencrantz. You and your friend are supposed to kill Hamlet.

WILL: Why?

BEN: Because Claudius told you to. But Hamlet kills you two instead.

WILL: I knew I got killed, but I thought it was supposed to be funny.

SARAH: Hamlet returns to Denmark and learns that Ophelia, the daughter of Polonius, has killed herself, and her brother, Laertes, wants to avenge his father's murder by killing Hamlet.

BEN: Claudius arranges a duel. He dips the tip of a sword in poison which strikes both Hamlet and Laertes.

SARAH: Then Gertrude mistakenly drinks from a cup of poison, and right before he dies, Hamlet stabs Claudius with a dagger.

KELLY: And everyone lives happily ever after ... except they're dead.

WILL: Whoa! Is this thing rated R? My mother won't like it if it has bad words and lie-citinus behavior.

DUNCAN: Are you trying to say la-CIV-ious behavior?

WILL: I don't know. Am I?

SARAH: Look, Rosenbush. Just go to England and die. That's all you have to worry about.

*(JOSH ENTERS dressed in black.)*

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