

## Hamlet: A Televised Tragedy

**scene one** Location: a television studio.

At Rise: On the left side of the stage, studio trappings (Lights, cameras, cables) surround a set, which is basically a desk, with the call letters of the station – MSNBD – displayed prominently along with the name of the show: Countdown, with Neils Kleinfest (based on ‘Countdown’ with Keith Olbermann). On a wall behind the desk is a large banner proclaiming: ELSINOR: DAY 23. The show’s host settles in behind the desk, takes a few notes and some last dabs of make-up. The lights go down, the ON AIR light flashes and we hear the last few bars of Beethoven’s 9<sup>th</sup>. Then Kleinfest speaks:

Kleinfest

That’s right – it’s been 23 days now since the beloved king of this realm was found dead in his orchard. Twenty-three days – almost a month – since a shocked nation awoke to find that it’s wise and robust monarch had been replaced by a little known and lightly regarded brother. *A brother with no previous experience ruling anything.*

A brother, in fact, who’s only prior claim to fame – or infamy to speak it plainly – was as a drunken carouser and womanizer! In short, an embarrassment that our gracious King Hamlet did his best to hide from public view. Now this person is our king.

How did it happen? Well, the story they persist in telling us is that, while he took his ease beneath a tree in said orchard, a snake slithered

(Kleinfest con't)

his way up to the sleeping king and bit him, fatally. There are just a few minor problems with this account.

First, there are no poisonous snakes in the royal orchard! Think about it! One of the most secure areas in the realm. Playground for young princes and princesses. Do you really think a poisonous snake would be allowed anywhere near such a sanctuary?

Second: Even if we accepted such an improbability – tell me, somebody, please – what happened to it? Why has it never been found, even with a hundred soldiers beating the bushes and shrubbery for weeks now?

Third, and most damning of all: There was no evidence of a snake bite on the King's person! No puncture marks. No telltale whitening of the skin. This is not me saying this – this is from the report submitted by the royal physician – 'no visible evidence of a snake bite'!

So how did the story ever gain credence? Simple. No other explanation was ever offered.

Now, I don't know what happened. And I certainly don't want to be speculate in a manner that will get me thrown into a dungeon for treason. I'm just a humble reporter trying to make sense of this tragedy.

But I do know this: Something's rotten in the state of Denmark

- and we still haven't found the snake! This is the 'Countdown'.

## Kleinfest (con't)

Stay with us.

(Blackout. After a beat the lights come up on the right side of the stage. Similar studio paraphernalia surround a similar desk, but the flag of Denmark is displayed prominently, The Wolf News logo and the last name of host, Steve Shanahan. (Based on 'Hannity' with Sean Hannity). Shanahan is conferring with an underling who he dismisses. He then waves off the make-up person and mentally prepares. The ON AIR light flashes and he greets his audience:

Shanahan

Good Evening. As I speak to you tonight, our country is under siege. No

- not by Fortinbras and his blood-thirsty thugs - not yet, anyway –

though you can be sure they take comfort, and their work is made easier

by what is happening in Elsinore tonight. No, I refer to the enemies

within Denmark - the left wing media and socialist sympathizers who

continue to pommel the monarchy with baseless charges and slanderous

accusations that fall just short of treason - because that's their game!

They have no evidence of misdeeds or misconduct - neither do they have

the *conjoneses* to stand up like men and make their accusations –

because then there would be consequences! No, they prefer the coward's

way, sniping from the sidelines - stirring the pot, hoping it will boil over

and create the sort of chaos and confusion they thrive on! So what are

they saying? Or rather implying? Just this: that the late king's death

Shanahan (con't)

was no accident. Rather, it was the result of a conspiracy involving the highest levels of government. Yes, they're actually supposing that King Claudius, Hamlet's loving brother, did, with cold-hearted cunning, and black-hearted malice, dispatch the king – somehow or other.

That's right - they have no idea how he might have done it. All they know is that the details that have emerged 'don't make sense'.

Unfamiliar as they are with reality and its messy inconsistencies they prefer conspiracy. It's so much more comforting to believe that some dark, sinister mastermind is pulling the strings. But I ask you, which version of events is more likely? That a snake was able to conceal itself within a hundred acres of wooded grounds; or that a brother, showing no previous displays of animosity or anger, killed a brother?

And not only that! What about the queen? What are the chances that Gertrude, the universally acknowledged loving wife of King Hamlet, would accept and marry his murderer? That is truly something that 'makes no sense'! And yet, if you believe one you must believe the other. Clearly, King Claudius has stepped into the breach at a most perilous time for the kingdom. Powerful special interests have been inconvenienced by his decisive leadership. While the threats to our

Shanahan (con't)

kingdom are real; the calumnies against the king are not. Now is the time for all real Danes to put aside petty politics and stand by their king

– stand by Denmark! I'm Steve Shanahan. Stay with us.

Blackout. End of scene.

## **scene two**

Location: The set of 'The Now Show'. (a la, 'The Today Show' with Matt Lauer). Again the paraphernalia of a TV studio, this time focused on two chairs, one occupied by the host of the popular morning show - Ken Barbee - the other, the subject of this morning's interview - Prince Hamlet.

At rise: The prince is pacing nervously about the set minutes before the interview is set to take place. He is brushing off attempts to settle him by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Barbee watches from the sidelines.

Hamlet

It just doesn't feel right. I have nothing to say! I don't know what I'm doing here! And where's Horatio?

Guildenstern

I don't know. Where is Horatio whenever you need him? Back at the castle? The point is, we're here. We've agreed to this interview and –

Hamlet

I didn't agree to it.

Rosencrantz

You agreed in principle. You agreed it was better to do one rather than twenty. . . Hamlet, your people love you! They want to know you're OK!

Hamlet

And what if I'm not 'OK'? What if I'm upset? What if I'm angry?

Rosencrantz

Well - You can't be! Not on kingdom-wide television!

Hamlet

I can't be what I am?

Guildenstern

Of course you must be what you are, Sire! None of us has any choice in that! What gentle Rosencrantz means to say is - that is not the side of yourself to feature here. Here, the side to feature is your everyday self, the part that carries on despite petty misgivings, and annoying inconveniences.

Hamlet

Call you my father's death an 'annoying inconvenience'?!

Guildstern

No, Sire! Of course not!

Hamlet

Or my mother's marriage to my uncle - weeks after his death –  
'a petty misgiving'?!

Guildstern (panicked)

I swear my Lord, that was never my intention!

Rosencrantz

Dearest Hamlet! You speak as if to strangers! Surely you cannot doubt  
our love!

Hamlet

I doubt not that some arrangement has been made!

Rosencrantz

Odds Bodkins, Sire! No!

Hamlet

Tell me true! Did money change hands here? Am I bought and paid for?

Guildenstern

Sire! How can you think it?

Hamlet

It is plain that you relied on my not 'thinking' at all! How else should I  
explain such zealotry? Surely your interests are involved! Confess it!  
(Ken Barbee, finally intervenes)

Barbee

Prince Hamlet? I beg your pardon. I don't mean to interfere. But I couldn't help hearing what sounds like reluctance on your part to do the interview.

Hamlet

And . . . ?

Barbee

And if that's the case, by all means, let's cancel it.

Hamlet

Just like that.

Barbee

My dear Prince, I don't know what you've heard about me, or what you may think of the program, but I assure you we are not in the habit of coercing interviews. If you are not perfectly willing and comfortable talking with me on camera then I say to you quite candidly: don't do it.

Hamlet

Did money change hands or no?

Barbee

Just the customary stipend, no more no less. Certainly nothing binding. You can walk away from this with no fear of legal entanglement.

Hamlet



Thank you. I appreciate your understanding. (they shake hands) Perhaps another day. (he begins to leave)

Barbee

Of course I can not speak for the other parties involved.

Hamlet (stopping, turning back)

Other parties? What other parties?

Barbee

Our viewers of course! You understand, we were promised the interview and we promoted it accordingly.

Hamlet

I see.

Barbee

Of course we can always say you're sick -

Guildenstern

No! The press will go into a frenzy!

Rosencrantz

The stock market will drop like a stone!

Barbee

Or should we just cancel - and say nothing?

Rosencrantz

NO! That would be worse! That would fuel all kinds of speculation!

Barbee

Well I'm afraid the gossips and the rumor-mongers will have a field day regardless. You don't cancel an interview minutes before it's scheduled without creating some buzz.

Guildenstern

He's right!

Barbee

But still, if you'd rather cancel -

Hamlet (moving to the chair and sitting)

No, let's do it.

Barbee

You're sure?

(Hamlet nods, Barbee says 'OK' then walks up to the cameraman)

Clear the set.

Cameraman

What about these two? (he indicates R & G)

Barbee

Especially those two. And listen, once you start rolling don't stop. No commercial breaks, no cutaways. Just stay on me. I think we've got

Barbee (con't)

something special.

Cameraman

OK.

Barbee (sitting down, joining Hamlet)

We'll just be a minute or two.

Hamlet

So what are we going to talk about?

Barbee

School? Your studies? The social life of a young, handsome prince abroad?!

Hamlet

I'm afraid, it's not as interesting as you might think.

Barbee

I'll let our viewers judge. . . Of course I'll touch on your father's tragic passing.

Hamlet

Of course . . . The one thing I would ask - let's not go into my mother's relationship with my uncle. It's still so new to me . . .

Barbee

I understand . . .

Cameraman

Thirty seconds!

Hamlet

So just between us Ken, what other compensation was given?

Barbee (reluctant)

. . . Well, there was talk of a show on the Food Network. Nothing definite. I just promised I would talk to some people . . .

Hamlet (amused)

'Cooking with Rosencrantz & Guildenstern'? That's a mouthful right there.

Barbee

But if you're not comfortable with that . . .

Hamlet (waving it off)

It's fine.

Cameraman

Three, two, one -

Barbee

My guest this morning is Prince Hamlet, recently returned from his studies at Wittenberg. I must say Prince, sitting across from you like this - you are a strikingly handsome young man!

Hamlet

Oh. Well, thank-you Ken . . .

Barbee

The paintings and statues around the kingdom don't do you justice.

Hamlet

Well, again, thank-you.

Barbee

Now Prince –

Hamlet

Please, call me Hamlet.

Barbee

OK - Hamlet! You've been away from us for several months, in Germany, studying – What are you studying by the way?

Hamlet

Philosophy.

Barbee

Oh Good! Something useful!

Hamlet

Well, I hope so.

Barbee

I'm joking! It's a wonderful choice. It will give you a lot of options.

Hamlet

I hope so.

Barbee

So you've been away . . . And while you're away, you get the tragic news about your father.

Hamlet

Yes.

Barbee

Tell us about that. Where were you when you found out and what were your first thoughts?

Hamlet

Well, I was in my rooms at the university. I happened to be playing chess with my good friend Horatio, when a currier arrived. I bid him enter and he handed me the royal pouch.

Barbee

What's that?

Hamlet

The mailbag that's used to deliver the king's personal correspondence.

Barbee

I had to ask, never having received any mail from the King!

(Barbee turns for reaction to the audience, 'applause' signs light up)

Barbee (con't)

So at this point, you knew something was up.

Hamlet

Pardon?

Barbee

Well, it's not every day 'The Royal Pouch' shows up on your doorstep.

(laughter)

You knew right away it was a message from the king.

Hamlet

Yes, but of course I thought it was from the king my father, instead it was from my uncle.

Barbee

And what did it say?

Hamlet

It said that my father had been bitten by a snake and subsequently died.

Barbee

Just like that.

Hamlet

Words to that effect.

Barbee

And what did you think? Did you believe that explanation?

Hamlet

I didn't question it. I wasn't thinking very much. I was overwhelmed with grief.

Barbee

Of course . . . Did you weep?

Hamlet

Yes. Of course . . . My father was a man, take him for all in all I shall not look upon his like again.

Barbee

No, I'm sure you won't . . . And what about now?

Hamlet

What do you mean? Do I still miss him?

Barbee

No, I mean, now that you've had a chance to reflect - do you believe the story given out about his death? That he was bitten by a snake-?

Hamlet

I have no reason not to believe it - do you?

Barbee

No! But surely you're aware of the controversy in certain quarters over

Barbee (con't)



this matter?

Hamlet

I'm afraid I don't keep up with all the gossip. For me, the central point is, my father is dead. No amount of arguing on either side is going to change that.

Barbee (slightly off his game)

No. No, of course . . .

Hamlet (Attempting to leave)

Ken, I've enjoyed talking with you –

Barbee

What about Ophelia?

Hamlet

What?

Barbee

Have you talked with her since your return?

Hamlet

Yes. We've spoken.

Barbee

And?

Hamlet

And, that's private.

Barbee

Now, you raise an interesting point! Of course you're entitled to your privacy just like anyone else –

Hamlet

One would think so.

Barbee

And yet, at the same time - you are, in some sense, the face of the kingdom, the embodiment of it's future. Your comings and goings – your relationships - are of enormous interest to the public! Surely you know that.

Hamlet

I can't control what people choose to concern themselves with . . .

Barbee

But surely something is owed in return for such devotion?

Hamlet

I don't see it that way.

Barbee

Well how do you see it?

Hamlet

As you said earlier, I'm entitled to my privacy just like anyone else.

Barbee

But you're not like anyone else, are you? You're Prince Hamlet! You're 'Special'! With special rights and special privileges. You get to go off to Wittenberg and study Philosophy! My question is, don't you also have special responsibilities and obligations?

Hamlet

My responsibilities are to this kingdom and my family!

Barbee

And what about your people? Don't they fit into the equation?

Hamlet

I have nothing more to say.

Barbee

They don't ask for much, Hamlet! Just a bit of acknowledgement – the crumbs off your table so to speak - What do you say to them?

Hamlet (anxious, looking for a way out)

I need to go. I'm not answering any more questions.

Barbee ( smiling)

Why start now, right?

(applause sign lights up)

Barbee (con't)

Listen, I *totally* respect your discretion. I'm sure whatever your relationship with Ophelia is, it is extremely honorable.

(Hamlet responds with a cold stare)

OK, moving on! . . . Your mother, Queen Gertrude, recently married your uncle-

Hamlet (yells, gets out of his chair)

THIS IS INTOLERABLE!

(Hamlet gets up and searches for an exit)

Barbee (motions for the camera to follow)

Prince Hamlet! Are you saying you find the marriage of your mother to your uncle intolerable?

Hamlet(as he bangs on walls)

Oh that this too, too solid flesh would melt!

Barbee

How would you describe your relationship with Claudius? On a scale of one to ten where would you put it? Five? Two?

(at this point Hamlet kicks through a door and escapes)

Barbee (wrapping up)

Well, you saw it! Just an incredible reaction from the Prince at the mere mention of his mother's marriage to the King. The very idea seemed to

Barbee (con't)

unhinge him, drive him into a rage! This can't be good for the royal family - or the kingdom ! More in a minute. This is 'Now'.

Blackout end of scene

### **scene three**

Location: The set of *The O'Malley Factor* (based on The O'Reilly Factor, with Bill O'Reilly) O'Malley sits behind his desk, his two guests, Barnado and Fransico sit in chairs to his right. Barnado has the 'thousand yard stare' that sometimes afflicts combat veterans.

At rise: Bill O'Malley is doing his 'set-up' into the camera while Francisco looks on in awe.

O'Malley

You know, sometimes you just have to shake your head and say, 'What next?'. . . I'm serious! Have you been following this crazy circus we call 'The news'? If you have, you know exactly what I'm talking about. Ever since the tragic death of King Hamlet there's been an incessant drumbeat, an undercurrent of speculation that something's not right. That the Time is somehow out of joint.

I'm told our good comrades over at MSNBD have even added a very dramatic-looking banner to their set, a sort of countdown in reverse, marking the number of days since King Claudius ascended to the throne

O'Malley (con't)

- as if some crime had been committed that needed to be put right! Of course there's been no crime - unless you consider giving aid and comfort to the enemy a crime, which their general appeal to malcontents of every stripe certainly does! Look at the facts! The medical examiners' report! It's all been gone over with a fine tooth comb – how many times? But no, they're still not satisfied. They still insist some kind of foul play was involved. But there are no longer any facts in dispute so how can they possibly maintain their argument? I know! We'll turn to the spirit world! No, I'm not making this up. Apparently the ghost of our late king has been appearing on the castle ramparts, on a regular basis, but to a very select audience - basically, Barnardo here. (finally turning to Barnardo and Francisco)

Good evening gentlemen.

(Barnardo just stares out at the audience, saying nothing)

Francisco

Good evening, Bill.

Bill

Am I right about that? Only Barnardo claims to have actually seen the ghost?

Francisco

That's right, Bill. I have not. But Barnardo has - three times!

Bill

Now how is that possible- Francisco, right?

Francisco

Yes.

Bill

How is it possible, Francisco, that Barnardo here, sees the ghost three times and you, also a guardian of the watch – you've never see it?

Francisco

Because my watch ends at midnight when Barnardo relieves me and so far, the King has only appeared between the hours of two and four.

Bill

So weren't you tempted to hang out after work? See for yourself?

Francisco

In military postings, sentries are not permitted to stay beyond their designated tour.

Bill (consulting clipboard)

And yet you state here, that Horatio, a student, a person in no way connected to the military, did in fact join the watch for exactly the purpose I suggest.

Francisco

Yes, but it was because Horatio was not military it was allowed. Also he has connections to the royal family.

Bill

OK, so can we bring Barnardo into this?

Francisco

He has not been himself lately.

Bill

Oh really? And yet, you recently did that *Ghosthunters* show on the SyFy network.

Francisco

Yes, sir.

Bill

In fact, that's how the producers of this show got wind of your story. I've seen the tapes of that show and Barnardo here is talking his head off – and that was just what - a couple of days ago?

Francisco

Barnardo has been diagnosed with PTSD. Much of the time it leaves him disconnected from his feelings - at other times he becomes very animated.

Bill



Gimme a break! Postraumatic stress? From a ghost?!

Francisco

That's what the VA doctor said.

Bill

You're sure he didn't say psychosomatic post traumatic stress?

(Francisco, at a lost, begins to try to answer, gets cut off)

Never mind. So, *Ghosthunters!* That must have been a nice pay day for you guys.

Francisco

What do you mean?

Bill

I mean they paid you right?

Francisco

Yes, they paid us but -

Bill

Paid you more than the army pays you, I'm told.

Francisco

What they paid us was not the point-

Bill

No? Then what's the point?

Francisco

To let people know what happened!

Bill

Well, you're certainly doing a good job with that! *Ghosthunters!* one night, *The O'Malley Factor* the next - how much are we paying you by the way? I hope you did at least as well as you did with *Ghosthunters!*

Francisco

How much or how little we are paid is not the point -

Bill

I know. You're doing this out of the goodness of your heart. It's like a of public service announcement, right? Ghost alert. The fact that you're being paid two or three times your monthly salary every time you appear on one of these shows, that should in no way detract from your credibility- that or the fact that you probably have a book deal in the works-

Francisco

A book deal?

Bill

Don't have one yet? Don't worry, something tells me the offers are going to start rolling in. What I'm really curious about Francisco, is how you came to believe this story of his  
(makes disparaging nod towards Barnardo)

Bill (con't)

without any proof? I mean, you seem like a halfway intelligent guy.

Francisco

Didn't our Lord say, 'Blessed is he who without seeing believes'?

Bill

Please, let's try to keep religion out of this. I don't want to offend people out there who actually do hold sincere religious beliefs. Let's just stick to the facts, shall we?

Francisco

OK, well, first , because I know Barnardo. I believe what he says. You don't get to be a guardian of the watch unless you are trustworthy and honest and he is. Second, it was soon after the ghost appeared that everything began to change.

Bill

Yeah? And what what you mean by that?

Francisco

I mean the secrecy. The rumors. Divisions within the guard.

Bill

I'm glad you bring this up because isn't it true that Barnardo was recently dismissed from the guard?

(Barnado continues to stare into space giving no response)

Francisco

Yes.

Bill

In consideration of his service, he was given a post in the kitchens - but he is no longer permitted anywhere near the rampart wall - isn't that true?

Francisco

Yes, because they don't want people to know the truth!

Bill

Really? A spokesman for the Palace told me Barnardo was dismissed for 'drunkenness and dereliction of duty'. That's quite a contrast to, how did you put it? 'trustworthy and honest'.

Francisco

He only got drunk and missed his watch after the King's third visit. They twisted the facts to suit their purpose!

Bill

Who twisted the facts?

Francisco

Marcellus!

Bill

And would you please explain to our audience who Marcellus is?

Barnardo

The rival of my watch.

Bill

Well! It speaks! Hello Barnardo! Barnado, could you tell us in your own words what you saw? Or rather what you claim you saw?

Barnardo

. . . It was horrible!

Bill

Try to describe it, please. As best you can. Was it the king?

Barnardo

Aye!

Bill

How was he dressed?

Barnardo

. . . In full armor with arms in hand, but oh! His visage was one of pain and torment! And piteous groans did emanate from him! And God the stench! A sulfurous stench from the bowls of hell did envelop his once majestical form!

Bill (somewhat taken aback)

. . . You were you alone when you saw this . . . Barnardo ?

Francisco

He is only but partly with us . . . Marcellus was the companion of his watch the first two nights it appeared. Then they told Master Horatio.

Bill (consulting clipboard of notes)

Yes, and according to you and Barnardo here, both Horatio and Marcellus saw the ghost as well.

Francisco

That's right! It was the third night when Horatio joined them - the last appearance Barnado could endure. After that he took to the bottle and missed his watch.

Bill

Of course we invited both Horatio and Marcellus to join us tonight but they declined. They did issue a joint statement, however, (to Francisco) would you like to hear what they have to say?

Francisco

I think they don't say much.

Bill

Well, let's hear what they have to say:

Bill (con't)

'Contrary to what Barnardo or anyone else may say, we have seen no ghostlyapparition of King Hamlet. We share in his grief but can give no credence to his story.' What do you say to that, Francisco?

Francisco

They're lying.

Bill

*They're lying!*

Francisco

Aye!

Bill

Why would they lie?

Francisco

Maybe they was told to lie.

Bill

More conspiracy theories! What is it with you guys?!

Francisco

We're just telling what happened.

Bill

Yes, but there's always another side, right? All due disrespect, here's what I think went down: a very prominent public figure dies –

Bill (con't)

tragically, unexpectedly - textbook circumstances for such 'sightings' .

Francisco

I don't understand.

Bill

Well, without delving too deeply into the psycho-babble - we often 'see' what we want to see. A beloved king dies and shortly thereafter his soldiers report 'seeing' him.

Francisco

No sir! It was not a dream! Barnado saw the king!

Bill

And everyone else is lying?

Francisco

They was sworn to secrecy by the Prince.

Bill

The Prince? Hamlet?! Are you really sure you want to drag him into his?

Francisco

It wasn't me who dragged him, it was Horatio.

Bill

What are you talking about?

Francisco



The night after Horatio saw the ghost, he brings the Prince to see. That was the night Barnardo never showed up for - that's why he got the sack. We might have covered for him if the Prince wasn't there.

Bill

So you're saying Prince Hamlet saw this ghost too?

Francisco

Aye, and spoke with it.

Bill

Spoke with it!

Francisco

That's what I'm told, sir. The ghost took the Prince off some way from the rest. Marcellus was against it, fearing for the Prince's safety, but the Prince told Marcellus and Horatio to stand down - and off he goes with the ghost.

Bill

And who's your source for this information? You weren't there and neither was Barnardo. Meanwhile -

(waving the clipboard)

Marcellus and Horatio say you're lying!

Francisco

Begging your pardon sir - and Master Horatio too - but there's lots of eyes and ears on them castle walls. They ain't the kind will talk to strangers, but they talk to me.

Bill

Well, isn't that convenient?! So we should just believe you? Is that what you're saying?

Francisco

Believe what you want. I'm just a humble guardsman trying to do right.

Barnardo

'There's more in heaven and on earth than is dreamt of in your philosophy'

Bill

What? What is he saying?

Francisco

He don't know, sir. Something he overheard maybe.

Bill (the cameraman focuses on O'Malley)

Well, I suppose that's what I get for going down the rabbit's hole. More phony baloney 'facts' and conspiracies. But isn't it strange how these stories persist, despite actual facts, and sworn testimony to the contrary? How can this be? Well, it's simple – some extremely powerful interest

Bill (con't)

groups have decided this King must go down and they're willing to do and say anything to make it happen! Their one miscalculation? You! The Danish people! You see through their lies every time! Stay informed, Denmark! That's it for this edition of 'The Factor'. Good night.

Blackout end of scene

#### **scene four**

At Rise: On the set of 'Vista'.(based on 'The View' with Barbara Walters, Star Jones, Joy Behar, Elizabeth Hasselbeck, and Whoopi Goldberg) Barbara Johns is sitting near the center of the couch with Pearl on one side, Aretha and Cindy on the other. Barbara is leaning forward from the edge of the couch, talking to the audience.

Barbara

We have a very special guest this morning, and one who, I might add, rarely gives interviews -

Pearl (to Aretha)

Yeah, so don't scare her away!

Aretha

Me! What did I do? I love this kid!

Barbara (with an indulgent smile)

As you will soon see for yourselves, she is breathtakingly beautiful. She comes from a noble family and her father, Polonius, is one of the king's

Barbara (cont'd)

most trusted advisors. Her brother, Laertes, is one of Denmark's most accomplished swordsmen -

Aretha

That's what I'm talkin' about! When's he commin' on the show?

Cindy (eyes wide, scandalized)

Stop!

Barbara (shaking her head, continuing)

But it is her on-again, off-again relationship with Prince Hamlet which, while it continues to raise eyebrows in some quarters, captivates the imagination of the public with equal parts fairytale romance and Realpolitik. Whether you approve or disapprove, she never fails to fascinate - ladies and gentleman - the fair Ophelia!

(Ophelia enters to tumultuous applause, gives a short bashful wave to the audience, then briefly greets and shakes hands with each of the women on the couch before taking her place beside Barbara).

Barbara

See? That wasn't so bad.

Ophelia

If you could feel my heart!

Barbara (aside to audience)

When I saw her in the green room she asked if she could start

Barbara (cont'd)

out here on the couch. I said 'no', you have to make an entrance.

(laughter, applause from audience)

Cindy (to audience)

Meanwhile, any of us would love to make an entrance!

Pearl (nodding)

I feel like I was born on this damn couch!

(laughter, applause)

Barbara (resuming)

All right, let's get right to it. How serious is this thing between you and

Hamlet? I mean, are we talking wedding plans? Engagement plans?

Elopement? What's the scoop?

Ophelia

Well, definitely none of the above.

Barbara

Really? None? . . . Ever? So you don't see any future for yourself and the Prince?

Ophelia

Well, you never say 'never' right?

Barbara

But you just did, didn't you? Whay option did I leave out?

Cindy

Maybe, 'I'm not sure' ?

Ophelia

Exactly! Thank-you!

Barbara

I see. You're not willing to share at this point.

Ophelia

Something like that.

Barbara

OK then, let's move on. Your father - Polonius.

Ophelia

Yes . . .

Barbara

Statesman. Advisor to Kings. Articulate. Savvy. My question is: how is he as a father?

Ophelia

Fabulous. We're very close. And my brother too . . .the three of us, after my mother died - we just relied on each other so much. So yes, he's a wonderful father.

Barbara

How old were you when your mother died?

Ophelia

Twelve.

Barbara

Twelve?! I didn't realize you were that young! That must have been so hard on you! Just when a girl needs her mother the most - you lost yours!

Ophelia

Yes, it was hard . . . But my father was great. My brother was great. They both made time for me, did things with me . . .

Barbara

I'm sure they did but (to the camera) - and please forgive me, all you dads and brothers watching out there - I don't think any man can replace a girl's mother, especially at that critical age. So I'm wondering if any woman did step up and fill that role for you . . . ?

(awkward pause as Ophelia looks up to the ceiling racking her brain)

Pearl

If not, Barbara's ready to step up right now!

(laughter, applause)

Barbara (laughs, recovers quickly)

Actually, one daughter is quite sufficient, thank-you very much!

(more laughter, applause)

Barbara (con' t)

What I was trying to get at - not very successfully - with that question, was your relationship with the Queen. She's old enough to be your mother, and of course she is Hamlet's mother - I was just wondering what sort of relationship you two have?

Ophelia

I would say we have a good relationship but . . . not a particularly close relationship? I mean, she is the Queen! I just happen to be a friend of her son's.

Barbara

So we're putting your relationship with Hamlet in the category of 'just friends'?

Ophelia

Why do we have to put it in any category?

Aretha

You go girl!

Ophelia

I mean, we're two young people! Yeah, we've known each other a long time, but attending a banquet when you're ten isn't the same as choosing to spend time together when you're twenty! So I'm not going to characterize our relationship as anything more or less than that.  
(applause, cheering)



Barbara (aside to the audience)

Well, I guess she told me!

(laughter, applause)

Barbara (con't)

Oh, and by the way, you just shattered that image of the fragile little girl who can't speak for herself!

(applause)

Ophelia

Good!

Barabara

I find you a very spirited, articulate young woman, and one, I dare say, your mother would have been extremely proud of!

Ophelia

Thank you.

Barbara

We'll be back in a minute.

(as they go to commercial Ophelia and Barbara spontaneously embrace while the others get up and gather around)

Ophelia

I don't know what got into me!

Barbara

You were great!

Ophelia

But I didn't mean to come on so strong!

Aretha

You had no choice! (indicating Barbara) She's like a dog with a bone when it comes to her damn questions!

Barbara

Well, when we come back from this break you can do all the talking. I'm just going to sit back and listen.

Aretha

Yeah, right! And when I go out to dinner tonight I think I'll just have a light salad.

Cindy (to Aretha)

I have a question for when we get back.

Pearl (also to Aretha)

Me too, if there's time.

Aretha

OK, but first we're gonna talk about that brother of yours! Does he watch the show?

Ophelia

Not really . . . But he'll probably watch this show.

Barbara

Well, I should hope so!

(cameraman comes over to return them to their seats then counts down, three, two one)

Aretha

We're back. Our guest is Ophelia, AKA 'the fair Ophelia' - you ever get tired of that? I mean, it's never the 'smart' Ophelia, or the 'spunky' Ophelia- it's like 'fair' has become part of your name.

Ophelia

Yee, I definitely get tired of it, but once you get a nickname like that, the press never lets it go.

Aretha

Speaking of things you never want to let go of - How's that brother of yours!

(laughter, applause)

Ophelia

He's fine.

Aretha

Yes he is!

(laughter along the couch and in the audience)

Cindy (to Aretha)

Have you no shame!?

Aretha

Not enough to get in my way! Hey! We talked about her childhood - her father - Mr. Hamlet, Barbara's plans for adoption -

(laughter around the couch and in the audience)

Now we're gonna talk about what I want to talk about! . . . So what's Laertes doin' with himself these days - and can I be a part of it?

(screams, laughter)

Ophelia

Well, he came back to the kingdom for a few weeks for the the King's funeral and, the ah, the wedding-

Barbara

One did follow hard upon the other.

Ophelia

And now he's getting ready to go back to school and finish his studies.

Aretha

In Wittenberg?

Ophelia

No. Paris.

Aretha

Paris! Well, that figures. Laertes in Paris, with all those fancy French

girls! I don't suppose a wholesome Danish gal has a chance, now that he's see Paree!

Ophelia

It would be wrong to assume that my brother has given himself over to loose living. He is well advised on these matters and my father keeps a close eye on him.

Aretha

So there's no serious someone in his life right now?

Ophelia

Not to my knowledge.

Cindy

Ophelia, even though your relationships get most of the attention, it's also been reported that you struggle privately with depression and eating disorders. Any truth to that? And if so, how do you deal with it?

Ophelia

Well . . . As with most 'stories', there is an element of truth. After my mother died, I was depressed - understandably, I think - and for a period of time I did refuse food. But not for long - as you can see!

Cindy

So you're saying, these things were issues for you as an adolescent, in

the aftermath of your mom's death - but not since then?

Ophelia

That's right. Although, as Barbara mentioned - I was pretty anxious about coming on the show today and - full disclosure - I had to diet to fit into this dress!

(laughter, applause)

Barbara (looking at Pearl)

We have time for one more question and then Ophelia has to leave for a prior commitment.

Pearl

Great! So, what I want to know is, when you attend one of these fancy nights at the castle -like the wedding, say?

Ophelia (smiling in anticipation)

Yes . . . ?

Pearl

What's the ladies room like?

(laughter)

I mean, I've heard they're stunning! All delft tiles right up to the ceiling!

Pearl (cont'd)

Each with it's own fireplace and liveried attendants helping you to the

whatchamacallit.(laughter)

Ophelia (laughing)

You are absolutely right. The Queen has made upgrading the the ladies' quarters her personal mission. They are extremely well- appointed, each with its own looking glass and powder for the face! And, Pearl, in anticipation of your interest I brought you a souvenir!

(reaches behind the couch and comes back with a hand towel)

A hand towel from the palace, complete with the royal monogram!

(Appearing overcome with emotion, Pearl kneels at Ophelia's feet as if she is being knighted and Ophelia obliges, toughing each shoulder and her head with the towel before handing it to her.Laughter, applause. Ophelia and Pearl both stand, embrace, Ophelia gives a big wave goodbye and exits stage)

Blackout, end of scene

## **scene five**

Setting: The broadcast booth of 'Monday Night Baseball '. Don, the play-by- play man, and Luke, the color/analyst guy are in-between innings when they are joined by a special guest.

Don

So as promised, we have a special guest joining us in the booth tonight: none other than King Claudius! Who, as you might expect, is a huge

Royals fan! (to Claudius) Your majesty, what an honor this is!

Claudius

Nonsense, Don! The pleasure is mine! I've enjoyed your play-by-play work and Luke's expert analysis for years. It's a real thrill for me to be here in the booth with you!

Don

You're too kind.

Luke

Of course, we've known about your majesty's enthusiasm for baseball for years, but what might surprise our viewers is what a *knowledgeable* student of the game you are!

Claudius

Well, thank you, Luke.

Luke

I mean it! Look, he keeps a scorecard! He knows the match-ups, the strategies - who's hot and who's not –

Claudius

I try to keep informed, as much as time and my schedule will allow.

Don

How did your interest in the game started?

Claudius



I think it happened the way it does for a lot of boys - having a catch with my big brother.

Don

Your talking now, of course, about the late King Hamlet.

Claudius

That's right, Don. Hamlet and I were very close. Our father was always off fighting somewhere - much like Hamlet himself in later years - and manys the day we would take our mitts out to the castle grounds and round up a bunch of my father's – uh, other children? - for a pick-up game.

Luke

There were enough of them to field a team?

Claudius

Two teams! You don't think he spent all his time fighting, do you!

Luke

Oh, that's marvelous story!

Don

As the Royals take the field, your highness, and the Yankees come up to

Don (cont'd)

bat, I'm wondering if your mind doesn't go back, as mine does, to the George Brett era, and the famous pine-tar incident.

Claudius

You mean infamous! Don't get me started! An outrageous call!

Thankfully, the commissioner overturned it but it should never have come to that!

Luke

And the Royals ending up winning that game!

Claudius

Yes they did!

Don

Talking about lingering controversies, your highness, we would be remiss if we didn't ask your thoughts regarding the ongoing speculation about King Hamlet's death. Your thoughts, sir?

Claudius

Well, Don, my brother's death was a terrible shock - to me more than anyone – but where I draw the line is with these people – and we're talking about a handful, career communists for the most part – who suggest I had some part in it.

Don

Just outrageous!

Luke

More outrageous than the pine-tar incident, in my mind.

Don

Oh, not even in the same ballpark!

Luke

Nicely put.

Claudius

Thank you guys! It means a lot having you in my corner.

Don

No other corner we'd rather be in.

Claudius

You have the thanks of a grateful king.

Don

Now, we know you can't stay – but any predictions on the game?

Claudius

Royals win 4-2.

Luke

And what about the series?

Claudius

Royals take the Yanks in six!

Luke

Spoken like a true Royals fan!

Claudius

Thanks guys!

(King exits)

Don

Boy! What a class act!

Luke

He really is. To deal with everything he's had to deal with -

Don

Yeah, and I don't care what your politics is, there are some things you just don't stoop to.

Luke

That's right, and accusing someone of fratricide has got to be on that list.

Don

. . . You been reading the dictionary again?

Luke

What? Fratricide? It's a legitimate word!

Don

I know, it's just not one I expect to hear coming out of your mouth!

Luke

Maybe you were expecting some commentary on the game? How about this: ball four. The Yankees get a a lead off walk.

Don

I'm pretty sure that's not the way the Royals wanted to start this game.

Luke

Yeah, despite the king's hopeful prognostications, I think Royals fans could be in for a long night.

Blackout, end of scene

### **scene six**

Scene: The set of *People, Places and Bling!* (Based on Entertainment Tonight! With Mary Hart, Leeza Gibbons, Ron Hendren and Steven Cojocaru) Stage left, the hosts, Joyce Appleton and Bob Salter sit with fashion guru Serge Lemur, ready to discuss and analyze whoever correspondent Marcie Marks can corral on the red carpet. Marcie, the red carpet and her parade of guests are situated stage right. All are dressed to the nines.

Bob

Well, as we've been telling you - *the Players are in town!* And whenever they come to the castle, the audience they attract is a veritable 'Who's Who' of the kingdom!

Joy

You're absolutely right Bob! The Players' gig at the castle is traditionally one of the hottest tickets of the year. Everybody from King on down likes to put in an appearance and check out the 'drama'. But this year's

event is even more frenetic, since a lot of out of town guests, in  
Elsinore for the late king's funeral, decided to hang. Our own  
Marcie Marks is staking out the red carpet so you won't miss a thing.  
Can you hear me Marcie?

Marcie

Hi Joyce! Hi Bob!

Bob

Hi Marcie! You're looking lovely this evening!

Marcie

Why thank you Bob! Yeah, I got to play dress up! It's a Max St. Geroge  
(turns, displaying dress)  
- and you're paying for it!

Bob

Well, it's money well spent as far as I'm concerned!

Joy

So tell us Marcie - any early arrivals of note?

Marcie

Yes, as a matter of fact! Just minutes after we got here - a full two hours  
before the scheduled start of the play - we got this footage of Lord  
Horatio – one of Prince Hamlet's closest friends.

(In the center stage space between where the hosts are and the live red carpet with Marcie is, a spot light finds Horatio in an elegant tux, wearing sunglasses and escorting a stunning young woman)

Joy

Nice tux!

Marcie

Isn't it? Armani, of course.

Serge

This young man is always the epitome of understated elegance. An asset to anyone's kingdom!

Bob

Who's the girl?

Marcie

Not sure. She may be from Wittenberg - we're still working on it.

Meanwhile, about an hour ago, the venerable statesman and royal advisor, Polonius arrived with his illustrious offspring - Ophelia and Laertes - and I had a chance to catch up with them!

(center stage spot lights find Polonius, Laertes and Ophelia. Laertes and his father are dressed in unremarkable evening attire - except that Polonius' chest is festooned with an inordinate number of medals. Meanwhile, Ophelia is wrapped up in a hideous white gown that features a swans' neck and head draped about her shoulders).

Marcie (to Polonius)

Well, good evening! Thank-you so much for stopping to talk with us!

Polonius

Not at all. Happy to oblige.

Marcie

You're such a handsome, accomplished family - you must be very proud!

Polonius

I am proud. It's one thing to have personal accomplishments to look back on

(he brushes down his chest of medals with one hand)

But quite another to have children whose attainments are noteworthy in their own right.

My son, Laertes (patting his back) has distinguished himself both on the playing fields and in the classroom!

(Laertes leans forward to the microphone to make his brief comment)

Laertes

The acorn never falls far from the tree.

Polonius

And my daughter Ophelia

(rubbing the back of his hand against her cheek)



Well, she's beautiful - isn't she?

Marcie

She certainly is! And please tell us Ophelia, what are you wearing tonight?

Ophelia

It's an original creation by Soren the tailor . . .

(looking to Polonius for help)

Polonius

This dress is 100% Danish - designed by Danes, produced by Danes and using nothing but Danish products in it's manufacture. I don't think you'll be seeing anything else like it tonight!

Marcie

I'm sure we won't! Well, I know you want to get inside and be settled before the king arrives -

Polonius

Yes, thank-you. It's been lovely talking with you and your audience.

(he waves at the camera, his children wave, they all exit. Spotlight, return to hosts conversing)

Serge (who is bursting)

I just want to go on record as saying - that was the most hideous dress I have ever seen!

Bob

Careful, Serge, you don't want to get on the bad side of (looking at notes) 'Soren the Tailor'!

Serge

Yes! What was that? A public affairs spot?

Joyce

Well, obviously he's trying to give a shot in the arm to the domestic dress-making industry.

Serge

Fine! Write them a check! Let them design the livery for your servants – Don't sacrifice your only daughter on the red carpet!

Bob

Strong words Serge.

Serge

But it was tragic! She's not a little girl anymore, she's a grown woman – but still her father is picking out her clothes? It's just so sad.

Joyce

It's certainly not the norm.

Serge

It's sick! I mean, she's a beautiful young girl! She should be showing that off, exuding that - not wrapping herself up in the corpse of a swan!

Joy

What about the men, Serge? What did you think about their attire?

Serge

Well, Laertes just has it, what can we say?

Bob

What do you mean, 'he has it'?

Serge

He has it. Devastating good looks. Devil may care attitude. He could be wearing a towel and every eye in the room would go to him.

Marcie

Certainly we know Serge would go to him!

(all the hosts laugh, Serge turns red)

Serge

That wasn't very kind Marcie!

Marcie

I'm sorry, Serge! You know I love you!

Joyce

Marcie, what did you think of Ophelia's dress? Was it as bad as Serge says?

Marcie

It was pretty awful. I mean, besides doing nothing for her figure – she had a dead swan hanging around her neck! When I asked her what she

was wearing I had to make a conscious effort not to say it like, *What are you wearing?!*

Serge

Exactly! Exactly!

Joyce

Now Marcie, what did you make of the fact that Ophelia shows up at such a high profile event on the arm of her *brother*.

Marcie

Yeah. That's become the question of the hour - where's Hamlet? Now the gloom and doom folks take this as a sure sign that their on again off again relationship is off again. But I'm not so sure about that.

Joyce

Why? What do you think?

Marcie

Well the rumor is, Hamlet arrived here even earlier than Horatio.

Joyce

Why?

Marcie

Well, some say it was so he could spend extra time with the players (she makes a face at this idea) My guess? He wanted to prepare an elaborate welcome for Ophelia – remember - these are two very private

people, who have grown up in two very public families. If nothing else, they've learned how to be discreet.

Joyce

Very interesting! And romantic!

(to Bob)

You ever do anything like that for Dorothy?

Bob

I surprise her all the time.

Joyce

I'm not going to touch that one! . . . Oh, we're going back to Marcie now. The King and Queen have just arrived.

Marcie (bowing ostentatiously)

Good Evening your majesties!

(King Claudius nods in acknowledgement, has a word with Gertrude who stays behind while the King and his entourage continue into the theatre)

Marcie

Thank-you so much for granting this interview your majesty!

Gertrude

My pleasure dear. Happy to do it. (looking her over) What a lovely dress.

Marcie

Oh, thank-you your majesty! It's Max St. George.

Gertrude

Lovely.

Marcie

*You* look simply dazzling! May I ask? . . .

Gertrude

Elvis of Elsinor.

Marcie

Gorgeous! And what would you call that color?

Gertrude

Well, the designer calls it 'Spring Magenta' but the King refers to it as my, 'Let's get out of this damn castle and live a little' dress.

Marcie

Does he really?

Gertrude

He really does. He's funny that way. Very . . . unconventional.

Marcie

Your majesty, many viewers are probably not aware of it, but you sponsor the players' annual performance, the proceeds of which go to the Kingdom Orphanage. Can you tell us about their work?

Gertrude

Why certainly, Margie. The Kingdom Orphanage provides food, shelter and training to children whose parents died in service to the crown.

Marcie

Mostly soldiers I'm guessing.

Gertrude

Mostly - but not exclusively – Just last week one of our scullery maids died in an accident involving a ruptured kettle - her son is now in the orphanage and doing quite well!

Marcie

That's wonderful!

Gertrude

Yes, it's very gratifying.

Joyce

Your Majesty? Hi! It's Joyce Appleton from 'Person, Place and Bling!.

Gertrude

Good Evening, Joyce.

Joyce

Good Evening! Thank you for stopping to chat with us.

Gertrude

Certainly. It's my pleasure. I'm a big fan.

Joyce

Oh, that's so sweet of you to say! . . . Your majesty, Marcie was talking earlier with Polonius and his family and we couldn't help noticing that Ophelia came on the arm her brother tonight. We were wondering if you could tell us where Hamlet is and why he didn't escort her?

Gertrude

Well Hamlet's here - somewhere. He came early in fact. He loves theater. In fact, if he hadn't been born a prince, he might have pursued it as his livelihood. Now as to his relationship with Ophelia, I'm afraid I'm as much in the dark as anyone. I'm only the mother you see!

Marcie

Only the mother!

Gertrude

That's right! . . . I'm afraid I must go now.

Joyce

Thank-you for your time, your majesty . . . Well there you have it! Even the Queen doesn't know what's going on with Hamlet and Ophelia!

Bob

But such a gracious presence!

Marcie



Absolutely!

Joyce

And that dress she was wearing looked - spectacular!

Marcie

It was, absolutely spectacular - and you know, she may take some criticism on that account - everyone's so eager to cast stones these days, but I think it was a brave choice, and the right one for her.

Joyce

You're referring, of course, to the fact that her late husband, the king, is dead less than a year and according to royal protocol, she should be wearing black. Isn't that right Serge?

Serge

Yes, technically. I mean, that's what it says in the manual - but look – you can't always run your life according to a manual! Things happen! You meet someone, you fall in love! No disrespect to the late King

Serge (cont'd)

but why should she hide that? Will going around in sackcloth and ashes bring him back? No. I totally agree with Marcie. My advice to the queen is, 'You go girl!'

Bob (over laughter and applause)

Well as a matter of fact, we're gonna go - girls!

(to camera) See you tomorrow!

Joyce (waving)

Bye everyone!

Marcie

Good night!

(Serge throws everyone a big kiss)

blackout, end of scene

### **scene seven**

Scene: On the set of *Ground Zero* (based on CNN's 'The Situation Room' with Wolf Blitzer, Gloria Borger, Jack Keane Peggy Noonan and ---As with the previous scene, the stage is split between a TV studio, where four pundits and the host sit or stand on one side and a remote location is represented on the other, in this case, the Castle Briefing Room. Fox Torrid, the short, grey-haired host of the show, stands before the four pundits, who are sitting on stools, microphones in hand, to offer instant analysis: Liz Sharpe, Lord Bromide, Archy Pressler, Maryanne Montgomery. Fox has a walking stick which he brandishes at times like a carnival barker.

Fox

Welcome to Ground Zero! The best News and Analysis show on television! Tonight we have breaking news from Elsinore! Polonius – statesman, strategist, advisor to kings - is dead! Details of the tragedy are still unfolding. We go now to *Ground Zero* reporter, Rob Davenport in the Castle Briefing Room. Rob what can you tell us? Was this an

accident, or is foul play suspected?

Rob (doing a 'stand-up')

Well, as you say Fox, the details are still sketchy, but they appear to point to a tragic accident.

Fox

But my understanding is, and please correct me if I'm wrong, that Polonius was *stabbed*.

Rob

No, that's correct. He was stabbed.

Fox

So how can it be called an accident?

Rob

That's a good question, Fox, and the answer emerging is a complex one. Apparently Polonius concealed himself behind an arras in the Queen's

Rob (cont'd)

chambers - why we still don't know. When the Prince noticed movement he attacked – without bothering to identify the intruder.

Fox

Let me be sure I've got this straight - You're saying Prince Hamlet killed Polonius?

Rob

Accidentally. Yes. That's what we're being told. Castle spokesman, Kevin Grimmeyer, will be coming out shortly with more details, but so far that's all we have.

Fox

Well that's plenty! Thank-you, Rob! We'll come back to you as soon as that spokesperson appears. Meanwhile, I'm going to turn it over to the best news & analysis team on television: Denmark Times, columnist and *Ground Zero* regular, Liz Sharpe; former General of the Armies, Lord Bromide; Archy Pressler, editor of the *Elsinor Express*; and last, but certainly not least, Maryanne Montgomery, a speech writer for Claudius when he was a prince and now a regular contributor to *Ground Zero*. Liz let's start with you. How shocking is this?

Liz

Extremely shocking. Are you kidding me? Linking the heir to the throne

Liz (cont'd)

to the murder of the King's closest advisor? This is devastating!

Fox

Yes, but devastating to whom? And before you answer, we should clarify that his action could only be considered 'murder' if Hamlet knew it was Polonius behind the arras, otherwise it's 'manslaughter'.

Liz

Yes, and I'm sure that's a distinction Polonius himself would have enjoyed making. But getting back to your question – I think it's hurts the King. He's the one in power.

Fox

What do you think Lord Bromide?

Lord Bromide

I agree that in the short term, it's not good for the king, for exactly the reason Liz points out. BUT if this incident, tragic as it is, brings an end to the gossip and baseless innuendo that has plagued the crown for months - then it could be seen as a positive - though, again, I use that term extremely loosely under the circumstances.

Fox

What do you say Archy? A possible positive for the crown?

Archy

I'm afraid I see things quite differently. With all due respect to Lord Bromide, I wouldn't say the crown is suffering from 'gossip baseless innuendo'. There has been a very deliberate, very calculated campaign – coming directly from the king - to stonewall and squelch any inquiries into his brother's death. I believe foul play was involved and that the

king is involved.

Maryanne

Unbelievable!

Fox

What's unbelievable?

Maryanne

That little Archy Pressler over here, with no government experience, no military experience, no experience at all really - except running a Bolshevik daily - gets to spout his absurd views on kingdom-wide television! And get taken seriously! It's unbelievable!

Archy

And what's your experience, Maryanne? Bad speech-writing and a good bedside manner?

(Archy winks to the others, meanwhile Maryanne grabs Fox's cane and begins beating Archy with it. The other attempt to separate them. Then Fox puts his hand to his earpiece and announces that Castle Spokesperson, Kevin Grimmeyer, has just taken the podium)

Grimmeyer stands at a podium, the silhouette of a castle behind him, is the target of a lot of shouted questions and flash photography, he calmly waits about 15 seconds for things to settle down then begins reading a prepared statement)

Grimmeyer

At approximately 6:35 this evening, Prince Hamlet entered the apartments of the Queen to discuss tentative plans for his

return to Wittenberg. Unbeknownst to him, Lord Polonius had concealed himself behind an arras, *at the request of the Queen*, who was concerned about her son's recent erratic behavior. The queen sought the benefit of Lord Polonius' counsel but felt Hamlet would never speak his mind if Anyone else were present - hence his concealment.

At approximately 6:45 Hamlet perceived movement behind the arras and rashly, tragically, drew his sword - thinking to protect the queen. Instead, he fatally wounded the revered statesman. Overwhelmed with grief and remorse, Hamlet has been taken into protective custody.

The queen is under sedation. Polonius' family has been notified and the King is planning to preside over a funeral service tomorrow at 8am.

That's all I have. Thank-you.

(He exits to more flashes and shouted questions; lights black out on that scene and return to Fox, and the panel of experts, order having been restored, the only noticeable change being Archy's bandaged head and the way he flinches involuntary whenever Maryanne speaks.)

Fox

We just heard an extraordinary prepared statement by Castle spokesperson, Kevin Grimmeyer, saying, essentially, that Prince Hamlet killed Polonius accidentally, the family has been notified and a funeral is scheduled for 8am tomorrow - which, if they keep to that schedule, will certainly preclude attendance by Polonius' only son, Laertes, who is

currently in Paris. Lord Bromide, what do you make of all this?

Lord Bromide

Well, as you say, it's extraordinary. We've simply never experienced anything like this before - which is quite evident by the way it's being handled - prepared statements, no questions from the press, funeral tomorrow morning at 8am?! - It's quite obvious they see this as a potential rallying point for dissidents in the kingdom and they want to put it behind them as quickly as possible.

Fox

Do you agree Liz?

Liz

Well, frankly, I think they're being a little paranoid. I mean, the story as told, has nothing to do with the King. It's about a mother trying to navigate this very complex relationship with her son. But they've taken it in this whole other direction. I mean, typically, a statesman of Polonius'

Liz (cont'd)

stature would lie in state for a week. This rush to bury him borders on shameful. I don't know what they're thinking.

Maryanne

I'll tell you what they're thinking! Exactly what Lord Bromide said!

They don't want this tragedy turned into a circus by left wing fanatics! If



they tried to give the old man his due with a decent period of mourning capped by a state funeral - you'd be giving the radical left just what they want. I mean, can't you just see them? Marching around the rotunda with signs and placards?

Fox

And what do you imagine those signs and placards would say?

Maryanne

I have no idea. Whatever lie fit the moment. Why don't you ask the mastermind over here?

(indicates Archy)

He's probably printing them up as we speak.

Fox

How about it Archy? Do you see the crown in any way responsible for this turn of events? Or are they just being paranoid?

Archy

I think it's interesting that the statement noted Polonius was spying – *at the Queen's request*. Why? So she could get better counsel regarding her son's behavior? I don't buy that story for a minute!

Fox

So what do you think he was doing there?

Archy

He was spying for the King!

Maryanne

Do you hear? This is what they do? Spin the facts to their purpose!

Archy

Look, the King doesn't trust Hamlet. Hamlet doesn't trust the King.

Where was the one place Hamlet might expect privacy and speak his mind freely? His mother's apartments. So who does Claudius send ?

Polonius - the ultimate insider, friendly to all, but loyal only to power.

Even if he was caught, the king probably thought he could talk his way out of it - but as it turned out, he never got the chance.

Liz

I'm curious Archy, in your little scenario, would the queen have known Polonius was there?

Archy

Probably, although it hardly matters. She's already so compromised, that whatever the king decides, she goes along with it.

Fox (to all, summing up)

And what about Hamlet? What's his role in all this? Is he pawn or provocateur?

Maryanne

He's an idiot! The queen herself has said as much! He disgraced the whole family with that interview he did on 'The Now Show'. The best thing for the kingdom would be if somebody accidentally knocked him off!

Fox

Strong words! Do you agree Lord Bromide?

Lord Bromide

No, I have to part company with Maryanne when she talks publicly about 'knocking people off'.

Archy

How about privately?

Lord Bromide

I don't condone assassination publicly or privately . . . But I do think the

Lord Bromide (cont'd)

Prince is overwrought and it might be best both for him and the kingdom if he were to go away for a while - give things a chance to settle down.

Fox

What do you think Archy? Should he stay or should he go?

Archy

Honestly, I don't know what to make of Prince Hamlet. He seems to be in a constant state of vacillation. One minute he's standing up to Claudius, in public, the way only he can; the next he's attending plays with him and doting on his pleasure. He needs to decide who he is for and who against and act accordingly - and he needs to do it soon.

Fox

Liz, I'm giving you the last word. What's your take on the Prince?

Liz

Oh boy. I don't know! . . . OK! You know what I wish? . . . I wish he would marry Ophelia, have a few princes and princesses and live happily ever after! That's what I wish!

(applause, cheers from audience)

Fox

And that's where we're going to have to leave it! You've been watching

Fox (cont'd)

'Ground Zero'. I'm Fox Torrid, good night!

**scene eight** The set of *Ethel!*, (based on Oprah!, with Dr. Phil), which features a couch center stage, which Ethel, a wise and caring woman shares with Dr. Fred, a psychologist and self-help expert, who has

become well known thanks to his many appearances on *Ethel!*. The feeling on the set, and the body language of the principles is markedly somber.

Ethel

Hi everybody. Today is a special show. A show I had to do – had to do for me personally - to get past this unrelenting grief I've been feeling ever since the news of Wednesday's tragedy reached me. Of course, I'm referring to the tragic death of Ophelia, the 'Fair Ophelia' as she was always and will always be known. This young, beautiful girl – who appeared to have it all, somehow decided she had nothing to live for . . . With me today is my very good friend, Dr. Fred, who is wise and wonderful and just the sort of guy you want to have around when you're trying to deal with something horrible that makes no sense . . . Dr. Fred! (applause)

Dr. Fred

Thank-you Ethel. Thank-you for that introduction. But I would like to

Dr. Fred (cont'd)

correct something you just said, namely that what happened made no sense. In fact, it did make sense. *It made sense to Ophelia*. In her way of seeing the world - which had become horribly distorted for reasons we can try to explore - in her view it made perfect sense - it was the way out of all the pain and sadness she was experiencing. And that's the real

tragedy. When the end of life appears to be the only solution to life.

Ethel

OK, well, how does that happen? I mean, in my mind, you would have to lose all perspective, for suicide to be even considered an option.

Dr. Fred

You're exactly right - a person who chooses that course for herself has lost all perspective. Of course, that's not how it looks to them. In their minds they're being direct. 'Perspective' is seen as procrastination.

Ethel

So in their minds they're being brave?

Dr. Fred

Well, of course, you always get yourself in trouble when you try to generalize about human beings. It's like my mama used to say, 'You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him *think*.' Thinking is what

Dr. Fred (cont'd)

makes us human, it's what separates us from the other animals, it's the glory of our species - but it can also be a terrific burden - an unrelenting weight that's always bearing down.

Ethel

You're talking about depression.

Dr. Fred

I am, but I'm also talking about mind dynamics - how you tend to see the world and process information. Getting back to what you asked me, when Ophelia decided to walk into that water and not come out – was she being brave or cowardly? Well, we'd have to be in her mind to answer that authoritatively, but based on what we do know, I would guess that her experience was more one of surrender than defiance.

Ethel

Really. Now why would you say that?

Dr. Fred

Well, let's look at what we know. Her mother died when she was eleven. A devastating blow to any young girl.

Ethel

Yes. Of course.

Dr. Fred

And who replaces that figure? . . . No one. Normally I wouldn't presume to answer such a question, but a few weeks ago I was watching *Vista* and that exact question came up and she answered it. *Nobody ever replaced her mother.*

Ethel

Yeah, I saw that show too. It was sad.

Dr. Fred

So sad! . . . So what was she left with? A domineering father - who she adored - and a rather distant older brother. Due to her family's prominence she grows up under a spotlight but without the benefit of a role-model. So she's constantly being scrutinized and falling short, in a very public, very humiliating way. And this had been going on for years! And was still going on!

Ethel

You're referring to the night of the Players' Benefit Performance, when she wore that hideous dress.

Dr. Fred

Yes. Do we have a clip of that?

(Polonius, Laertes and Ophelia appear again onstage as they were the night of the benefit, posing for the cameras but saying nothing)

Dr. Fred

I mean here she is, 21 years old, wearing some ridiculous creation her father picked out - probably to score political points - meanwhile she gets hammered in the press for days afterward! Not just questioning her taste but her character! I mean, how many of us have had to deal with anything remotely like that?

Ethel



I get the feeling you don't have a very high opinion of Polonius - as a father anyway.

Dr. Fred

Well, I don't like to speak ill of the dead and certainly, being a single parent these days is no picnic - but to answer your question - no, I don't. From what I can see he was a lousy father, and this incident on the red carpet was a fairly typical example of Polonius putting his interests above that of his child - and Ophelia deserved better (applause).

Ethel

OK, but still, having said all that - having a bad night on the red carpet is one thing - killing yourself - I'm still not seeing how she gets there.

Dr. Fred

Well, first of all, what you have to understand is - *it wasn't just one night*. It was hundreds of nights, thousands of nights. Because of who she was, we got to see what one of those nights looked like, but this was no isolated incident.

Ethel

OK, so there was a continual grinding down of her confidence going on

Dr. Fred

Absolutely! And the loss of her mother put her at a deficit to begin with

Ethel

Sure. I can see that.

Dr. Fred

And then we have Hamlet. 'The Prince'. We can't leave him out of this story! . . . Could she have found a more narcissistic, self-involved, jerk if she had spent her whole life searching? I don't think so.

Ethel

You don't think you're being a little harsh? I mean, he's been through a lot too . . .

Dr. Fred

Let me put it this way Ethel, if I'm being too hard on Hamlet? - there's a first time for everything!

Ethel

So definitely not a fan . . . Why? You think he's spoiled? Pampered? Egocentric?

Dr. Fred

All of the above! Absolutely! I mean, let's look at what *his* life has been like

(counting off advantages on his fingertips for emphasis)

- the only child of loving parents, son and heir to a great Kingdom, intelligent, handsome, voted 'Sexiest Man Alive' by Volk Magazine – how many times? And to top it off - beloved by the fairest, most desirable maid in the Kingdom!

Ethel

But he's had his challenges too! I mean, the untimely death of his father under mysterious circumstances, his mother's abrupt marriage to his uncle -

Dr. Fred (shaking his head)

Please . . . Hamlet's father lost a father, and his father lost one too - it's part of life, it's something everyone has to deal with sooner or later – why does Hamlet deserve special consideration? As for his mother's remarriage I say, bravo Gertrude! Too many strong, vibrant women give up on life when their husbands pass and they shouldn't!

(applause)

Dr. Fred (con't)

They should embrace life - passionately, as long as they are able - and if their sons find it embarrassing - let them deal!

(strong applause)

Ethel

OK, but Hamlet did love Ophelia. He declared it quite memorably while

jumping up and down on this very couch! Do we have that clip?

(lights go down, Dr. Fred vacates the couch and Hamlet gets on it and starts jumping up and down yelling “I love her! I love her! I love Ophelia!, then lights go down, he leaves, Dr. Fred returns)

(applause)

Dr.Fred

An iconic moment – No doubt about it. Millions of Danes witnessed it live, or saw replays. But what happened next? Did he quit his day-dreaming at Wittenberg and come back and marry the girl? No, he did not. What he effectively did was tie her hands, made her commit to the relationship, then continued his philandering abroad.

Ethel

Now Fred, I've never seen any evidence linking Hamlet romantically with any another woman.

Dr. Fred

No, and you probably never will. That doesn't mean it hasn't happened.

Ethel

OK, but let's stick to the facts.

Dr. Fred

No problem. Here's a fact, the one that most probably drove Ophelia to madness and suicide: Hamlet killed her father.

Ethel

Except, it should be pointed out, he didn't know he was killing Polonius,-

Dr. Fred

Sure, we can get into legal niceties, the language of the court – Murder in the various degrees versus manslaughter - But Ophelia wasn't a lawyer! To her it was simple - and overwhelming - Hamlet killed her father!

Ethel

So that's what drove her to it? Hamlet killing her father?

Dr. Fred

Oh, without a doubt! I mean, she takes this action, what? The next day? There's no doubt in my mind this was the trigger, BUT it only became a

Dr. Fred (con't)

trigger because of her previous history.. Had she had a healthier childhood, a more normal adolescence - it still would have been a shock, and undoubtedly ended her relationship with Hamlet - but she wouldn't have killed herself . . .

Ethel

And what about Hamlet? How do you see this impacting him?

Dr. Fred

I don't see it impacting him much at all.

Ethel

You've got to be kidding! You don't see it impacting him at all?

Dr. Fred

Oh, in the short term, it's all very dramatic! The reports of him jumping into her grave, rending his garments, pulling out his hair in a show of grief!

Ethel

You don't buy it?

Dr. Fred

I see it as totally premeditated, designed to elicit just the sort of sympathy he seems to be getting.

Ethel

BOY, you *really* don't like him, do you?

Dr. Fred

You know, I never gave him much thought one way or the other - until this incident. I mean, he's always been, to me, a rather shallow, spoiled, playboy. But in his relationship with Ophelia, I see him as a hit and run driver. He'll move on, and never really pay for what he did – but

Ophelia's gone forever.

Ethel

Most of our viewers are unaware that you've had to deal similar tragedy in your own life. When we come back, I'd like to talk with you about daughter, Patty. OK?

Dr. Fred

Sure.

Ethel

Stay with us.

## **scene nine**

Same set as scene one, except our host is Roberta Medoc (based on Rachel Maddow) and banner overhead now reads Elsinor: Day 44.

Medoc (gesturing to the banner; smirking)

That's right - it's now been forty-four days (or 1,056 hours if my math is correct) since King Hamlet's untimely death and not a day or an hour of that time has passed without another question being raised as to the circumstances. Claudius, Gertrude and the whole royal retinue - which

at this point includes all the good folks over at Wolf News – they continue to sing the same old song: 'Everything's fine, nothing to see here! Enjoy your mindless sports! Your mind-numbing 'reality' shows! Nothing to be concerned about!'

Meanwhile, anyone with a *brain* has been transfixed by a series of events rapidly spinning out of control!

(enumerating her points on her fingers)

The circumstances of the King's death, persistent reports of his ghost seeking justice, the stunning 'accidental' murder of Lord Polonius, the suicide of his daughter- and now- the apparent kidnapping of Prince Hamlet!

That's right! Sources close to the Prince report that he was hustled out of

#### Medoc (continued)

the castle in the dead of night, shortly after his alleged slaying of Polonius, and placed on a ship bound for England under armed guard.

What fate awaits him there is anyone's guess.

What's clear is this - Claudius fears Hamlet. He views him as a legitimate threat to his reign and a visible challenge to his authority.

Why else send him off in the dead of night without any acknowledgment or leave-taking?



The whole tangled web of deception is now unraveling so rapidly that not even the royal apologists over at Wolf News can keep pace!

As Alice, one of my all-time favorite heroines, used to say: "Things just keep getting curiouser and curiouser." I'm Roberta Medoc and I'll be back in a moment.

### **scene ten**

The set of 'Fencing with the Stars', (based on 'Dancing with the Stars' with Tom Bergeron and Erin Andrews) by far the most elaborate of the sets so far. A disco ball sets the tone for glitzy, celebrity-ridden activity. Co-hosts Jon Berzerac and Kelly Muffin come out in formal attire to thunderous applause.

Berzerac

Thank-you! Thank-you so much! And welcome to this special edition of 'Fencing with the Stars'!

Muffin

Yes, and when we say 'special' we really mean Special!

Berzerac

How special? Well, for starters, we've given our regular panel of judges the night off. So who do we have to scoring this evening's competition?

Well, why don't we introduce them to you right now!

Muffin

Hailing from one of the kingdom's most noble families, one of Denmark's rising stars and bosom buddy of the heir apparent – Lord Horatio!

(spotlight finds him, seated at the end of a table stage left, facing Berzerac & Muffin center stage. applause)

Berzerac

Pretty impressive, huh? (applause) Well, hold on to your hats ladies and gentlemen because you're about to see history. For the first time ever on live television, a reigning monarch and his queen will participate in a competitive reality show! That's right! Please welcome His Majesty, King Claudius, and his Queen, Gertrude!

(again, thunderous applause as the spotlight finds the King sitting at the center of the judging table and Gertrude to his left, they acknowledge the applause as Berzerac and Muffin approach)

Berzerac (bowing)

Your majesties! Thank-you so much for joining us for this special edition of 'Fencing with the Stars'!

Claudius

Our pleasure, I assure you.

Muffin (to Gertrude)

You're familiar with the scoring system, your majesty?

Gertrude

I think so. Three rounds of three passes each. Each hit counts as a positive point for the fencer who delivers it. The fencer who takes two of the three rounds, or scores a larger number of total points is declared the winner.

Muffin

And what about negative points?

Gertrude Oh yes. A fencer can be assessed a negative point if he steps outside the fencing circle before time is up. A bell will be rung to signify the end of each round.

Muffin

Excellent! You really do know the game!

Gertrude

Well I should! The king never misses a show! If he's not watching baseball, it's fencing - and he spends most of his time yelling at the set!

Berzerac (shocked)

Really?! What does he yell??!

Gertrude

Things I can't repeat on kingdom-wide television!

Claudius

I'm not a passive observer. Never have been. I like to feel like I have skin in the game.

Bergerac (backing up to center stage)

Well, that should make it interesting for our competitors!

(hits himself in the head like he's forgotten something)

. . . The competitors! I knew I was forgetting something! Well, having

Bergerac (con't)

Recruited the king as a judge, you've probably figured out that our competitors tonight are pretty special too. Indeed, you'd be hard pressed to find two more notable fencers in the kingdom.

Osric's Fencing guide for Denmark rates our Fencer Number One – number one! He has competed in tournaments from Paris to Budapest and never finished lower than third. The recent untimely deaths of both his father and his sister have only served to focus his passion. His quote

on the cover of next month's 'Fencing Magazine' says it all: 'What else do I have to live for?'

Ladies and gentlemen, the son of Polonius, the brother of Ophelia - Lord Laertes!

(Applause as Laertes is found upstage right by the spotlight)

Berzerac (continuing, but puzzled)

Now who could we possibly match against one of the top fencers in the Europe? The the noble son of a noble family and 'Volk Magazine's recently selected 'Sexiest Man in the Kingdom'?

(Kelly Muffin joins Berzerac at center stage)

Muffin

Oh, I don't know, Jon. Our Fencer Number Two has also won many awards for his skill with a blade.

Berzerac

Is that right?

Muffin

Yes and he did it while earning a degree in philosophy. He's been called 'the thinking man's fencer'. And the nobility of his line exceeds

that even of Lord Laertes.

Berzerac

Really?

Muffin

That's right. Oh, and the 'Sexiest Man in the Kingdom' award? Been there done that! Not once. Not twice. But four times! That's right! You know who I'm talking about! - Lord Hamlet!

(more applause as the two protagonists now bow to the audience, then go to black, with just Berzerac at center stage left)

Berzerac

There's been an unusually high level of interest in tonight's match, due in part, certainly, to the celebrity of the participants. But there is also an undeniable rivalry at play here, based on the commonly held belief that

Bergerac (con't)

Hamlet and Laertes - well, to put it bluntly - just don't like each other! Kelly caught up with the prince earlier today and asked him about the rumored bad blood between them . . . let's watch.

(Spotlight finds Hamlet and Muffin, sitting on stools, talking informally)

Muffin

So what about you and Laertes? Is this a grudge match? Do you go into this with something to prove . . .?

Hamlet

Not at all. Look, I've known Laertes and his family all my life! He is an honorable and upstanding youth and I love him like a brother. I go into this . . . competition, at the request of the king, in a spirit of sportsmanship and good will.

Muffin

Still, it's only been a week since you *accidentally* killed his father and even less time than that since his sister committed suicide - in part at least - because of you. Have you spoken with Laertes since these twin tragedies occurred? And if so, how did that conversation go?

Hamlet

We have spoken. And I believe it went well. It was constructive. I offered him my sincerest apology for what happened - which of course

Hamlet(con't)

makes it no easier to bare. And as to Ophelia - I think he knows how keenly I feel the loss of her, and that I would do anything to restore her life, even at the cost of my own.

Muffin

There was a curious report just a few days ago on one of the cable news shows that you had been spirited away in the middle of the night, under armed guard, and placed on a ship bound for England. Any comment on that?

Hamlet

I think our news has become very entertaining lately, but I wouldn't rely on it as a guide to events. It's accuracy is quite . . .momentary.

(blackout on Muffin and Hamlet, she now joins Berzerac, center stage)

Berzerac

He really is a philosopher, isn't he?

Muffin

Oh, very much so! At one point we had to stop taping because he went off on this tangent about life and death and what exactly happens when you die - all kinds of weird stuff, which we, unfortunately, didn't have time for.

Berzerac

But he does seem to go into this match with a clear conscience and no ill will.

Muffin

Absolutely! He sincerely regrets the incident with Polonius - he's the first to admit he's got a problem with impulsivity; but he's working on it. As to Ophelia, I don't see how anyone watching that tape could doubt he loved her - I certainly don't.

Berzerac



Well, while you were with Hamlet, I had the opportunity to chat with Laertes and sound him out on the matter. He's clearly not as laid back as the Prince and when I asked him if he was ready to 'move on', here's what he said.

(black out Berzerac and Muffin, find Berzerac and Laertes in 'interview mode' on the opposite side of the stage from where Muffin interviewed Hamlet)

Laertes

My position at this point is, let the board of inquiry do their job - I'm not in any hurry to either condemn or forgive Hamlet - my father is dead. That's the central fact. Mourning him, seeing that he is given his due of honor and respect - that's my concern right now.

Berzerac

And what about your sister's death? Do you hold Hamlet in any way responsible for that?

Laertes

That's another matter and I haven't . . . I haven't completely, taken it in. Part of me still expects her to run out here and wish me luck . . .

Berzerac

It must be very hard

(Laertes just nods)

Well, thank you for spending time with us.

(Laertes nods)

(spotlight returns to Muffin and Berzerac)

Muffin

Wow. That was very moving. Very . . . powerful.

Berzerac

He doesn't say much, but what he says resonates.

Muffin

I think we have the makings of a *great* match.

Berzerac

Well, let's find out shall we?

(They retreat to the sidelines, a large circle is revealed center stage and Laertes and Hamlet are in the center of it. They touch swords and begin fencing. Laertes is clearly the more aggressive and Hamlet skillfully takes advantage, scoring the first hit.)

Claudius(Pushing a goblet forward)

Well done, Hamlet! Come have a drink and vanquish your thirst even as you vanquish your opponent!

Hamlet

Thank-you, Sire, but the contest is far from settled and I need all my wits to keep pace.

(They begin again and a more patient, determined Laertes scores a hit. Soon after this they grapple and drop their swords. The tension is too great for Gertrude and she grabs the goblet intended for Hamlet. Meanwhile the fencers have picked up each other's swords and Hamlet scores a second hit. As they begin to reset, the bell ending the first round sounds).

Berzerac (rushing over to Hamlet)

Well played your highness!

(to the camera)

By the way, if you thought Prince Hamlet won that first round call EL9  
- 0700 or text 'Go Hamlet'

(back to Hamlet)

Your thoughts Prince?

(Before he can respond, Gertrude shrieks and falls forward on the table)

Something appears to be wrong with the queen . . .

(Hamlet falls to one knee)

Prince Hamlet, what is it?

(Laertes also goes down on one knee. He signals to Muffin to bring him the microphone. She rushes over with it).

Laertes

I am laid low by my own treachery! Forgive me Hamlet! It was the king who poisoned my mind and my blade against you . . . You are slain . . .

Claudius (Laertes)

Silence you fool!

(Laertes expires. But Hamlet has risen by sheer effort of will and even as Claudius scrambles to escape, Hamlet staggers across the space and slays him, then collapses, leaving the hosts momentarily speechless).

Berzerac

We're going to take a break and then . . . I'm not sure what we're going to do!

Muffin

I'm still shaking.

Berzerac

Me too!

(reacting to his ear piece)

Berzerac (cont' d)

Oh, OK.

(addressing the camera again)

I'm told the voting is now closed. Please stop voting.

Blackout, end of scene.

**scene eleven** The set of 'Bink' (based on The Glenn Beck Show) consisting of a couple of large white boards and host, Gene Bink. His most distinguishing feature is his passion, which typically animates his

features with humor and warmth, but can suddenly shift to anger and/or tears.

At rise, Bink is standing a few feet in front of the white boards, waiting to engage with his audience. On one of the boards behind him is a list of names: King Claudius Queen Gertrude, Polonius, Laertes, Ophelia, Hamlet, Horatio.

On the other, the word 'Denmark' is written at the center of the board; around it are written the names of other countries: Norway, Sweden, Germany, England, Russia, China.

Bink (near tears)

You know . . . we try to be sensitive to the time of day we broadcast - I know it's getting near supper time and you and your family are probably getting ready to sit down and share a meal together - rehash the day – heck, maybe the kids are sitting with you right now . . . If that's the case,

Bink (cont'd)

I would kindly suggest that you ask them to leave the room.

That's right. I don't want them hearing what I'm about to say. And you know something? If you're not ready to face some pretty painful truths about this country of ours and where we're heading - you should probably turn your set off right now.

Imagine that! A talking head advising you to turn him off! I bet you never thought you'd live to see that!. . . The point is, the significance of what has happened over the last few days goes way, way beyond TV ratings or advertising revenue! It goes to God's

purpose for this kingdom and our very survival as a people!

Are you still with me? Great. Come over here and let me show you something.

(He stands before the first white board, with the names of people)

As of about two weeks ago this was the 'short list' of the most powerful, influential folks in the kingdom. Only a few of them held public office but all of them held power - even if it was only the power to influence one and other. So where are these people today?

(puts an X through 'King Claudius' and writes '2nd King to die this year')

Dead! Killed in an unprecedented and still unexplained bloodbath yesterday at Elsinor! And the second time a Danish King has died this

Bink (cont'd)

*year - something that has never happened before in my lifetime!*

(puts an X through 'Queen Gertrude' and scribbles - 'continuity')

Dead! Another victim of yesterday's violence. Gertrude was of course a beloved queen but even more important - she was the glue that held the line of succession together, wife to two kings and mother to a third - at least potentially.

(Puts an X through 'Polonius' and writes, 'stability, tradition')

Dead! His death, two weeks ago, was the first in a string of bizarre, 'accidental' deaths to strike this select group. More about that later. What

did we lose with Polonius? Stability, Tradition.

(puts an X through Laertes and writes, 'next generation of leaders')

Dead! Polonius' only son, and a prime representative of the next generation of leaders.

(puts an X through Ophelia - writes 'innocence, hope for the future')

Dead! In some ways our greatest loss - the loss of innocence, hope for the future. And how did she die? Well, significantly enough, we're told she *killed herself*.

(puts an X through 'Prince Hamlet,' writes 'death of future')

Dead! The future monarch, repository of so much promise - laid low by a deadly poison . . . Did I just say poison? But poisoning isn't something  
(cont'd)

that happens by accident . . .

That's right. And there's nothing *accidental* about any of this . . .

(stepping closer to the camera, addressing his audience more directly)

Do you remember what I said to you back at the beginning of this nightmare, at the time of King Hamlet's death, when the left wing pundits and right wing pundits started going after each other?

Do you remember what I said?

I said, *No one can bring this kingdom down from the outside.*

Denmark is the greatest kingdom in the history of the world! God

intended us to lead the world, to teach it the liberty and the freedoms we've so long enjoyed! Could Norway take us down if we were united behind our God-given mandate? No way!

The only way Denmark could ever be defeated was from *within* - if we took ourselves down! And that's exactly what's happened! Look at this!

(going back to the chalk board and pointing to Claudius, underlining the name)

To the Left, Claudius was the evil mastermind! Cunning. Devious. A murderous usurper who had to be stopped at all cost! But where is he now? - dead! He's not pulling any strings! Hard as it may be for the left wing fanatics to admit – in the end, he was a victim!

Bink (cont'd)

And what about Prince Hamlet?

(underscores his name on the board)

To the right, he was always the real problem. The spoiled child not willing to accept reality. The self-absorbed youth prone to tantrums!

Violent, deadly tantrums that resulted in

(pointing to Polonius, Ophelia, Claudius & Laertes in turn)

accidental, incidental and on-purpose deaths.

He was the ultimate 'loose cannon' and de facto, destabilizer. So what happens to him? Does *he* triumph in the end? *No!* He's dead too!

He doesn't live to see any change that he can benefit from. He's just



another victim.

So what's going on here? Are all these deaths we've lived through over the last fortnight - *at this level of society* - mere coincidence? The product of random chance? Some would have you think so. Some would encourage you think so. Or better yet - don't think at all! Just sit back, and enjoy your dinner, enjoy your family and don't worry about this kingdom of ours, 'we'll muddle through somehow'. Even if it means foreign occupation and the forfeiting a few rights, things like - oh, I don't know - freedom of the speech, freedom of religion, the right to bare arms. . . just some words, really, but words our forefathers were

Bink (con't)

willing to fight and die for!

Have I got your attention? Good. Then lets go back and look at this list again. You know my daddy used to say, 'If you want to know who stacked the deck, find the winning hand.'

(Circling Horatio's name several times)

You don't have to look far do you? Somehow, despite being at or near the center of this epic bloodletting - Horatio survives without a scratch.

In fact -

(He flips the board around to reveal a new graphic, this one has 'Horatio' at the center with lines radiating out to: Hamlet, Wittenberg, Laertes, Ghost controversy, Rosencrantz & Guildenstern, mourner &

peacemaker).

he does much better than 'survive' - he thrives! He ends up on top! How did he do it?

(underscoring the line that connects to Hamlet)

First, the thing that makes all else possible - his connection to Hamlet. It provides him access to the highest levels of power and shields him from his enemies. What was the precise nature of this 'friendship'? Well, it wasn't conventional, that's for sure! College roomies often become close, but not this close!

### Bink (con't)

And consider this, the only eligible female whose name is ever linked with either Hamlet or Horatio is Ophelia - and she ends up killing herself. Enough said?

Horatio is an atheist. This is an undisputed fact. It's not something he likes to talk about, and not something many people know, but if you look through the papers he's written while at Wittenberg - which by the way, happens to be an atheistic 'think-tank' - there's no denying it. If confronted, Horatio himself won't deny it - he'll sooner deny the existence of God!

So what's the significance of all this? What does it matter?

I'll tell you why it matters: when it comes to the rules and norms that decent, God-fearing people live by and take for granted? You can throw those out where Horatio is concerned! Homosexuality? What's your problem? Who cares what the bible says? That's make-believe man – for people too stupid to know better. If you don't value and respect homosexuals - *your prejudiced!*

And here's the thing: Once there's no God in your world - all things are permitted! The great Russian novelist Dostoyevsky wrote a book with

Bink (con't)

that very premise. It's called 'Crime and Punishment'. Great book. The main character, Raskalnikov, decides he can do whatever he wants because he's the only one who counts! *That's Horatio!*

This whole controversy over King Hamlet's ghost?

(goes back to the chalkboard and underscores 'ghost')

We now know that Horatio was the one who both promoted and sustained it - and nothing contributed more to unhinging Hamlet's reason than that! And what about these two?

(underscores Ros. & Guild.)

Classmates of Horatio's and Hamlet's at Wittenberg. Also

co-conspirators. All they did was steer the Prince into that disastrous interview with Ken Barbee, which was the beginning of a long downward spiral. Leaving Horatio free to play the role of chief mourner and peacemaker.

(moving to the second board with nations)

And what kind of peace has Horatio made? Well, all the lands gained under the heroic leadership of King Hamlet were forfeited to Norway. And we must pay reparations to Norway. And Norwegian troops are to

Bink (con't)

be garrisoned within our borders for at least the next twenty years.

Oh, and all these trading partners we once had?

(he puts X's through all the names but Norway, which he circles)

Our only lawful trading partner now is - you guessed it! Norway!

But look on the bright side. Horatio and his family got to keep their land, and they get to live at Elsinor. Of course he's not King - he just gets to live like one.

So you see? Things aren't that bad. Not if you're a godless sybarite named Horatio.

Blackout, end of scene

## **scene twelve**

The set of 'Marty Duke Live! (based on 'Larry King Live!') A longish desk center stage, at one end sits Marty Duke, a vigorous old man dressed in a brightly colored shirt, bold tie and prominent suspenders. His thinning salt and pepper hair is combed straight-back - suggestive of the straight-ahead, no-nonsense style of his interviews. He wears thick glasses in heavy black frames which he is constantly fidgeting with, as if trying to bring his subject into focus. His subject tonight, Horatio, sits at the other end of the desk, noble in appearance but also somewhat reticent, unaccustomed as he is to being in the public eye.

Marty

Welcome to tonight's very Special Edition of 'Marty Duke Live!' We're only going to have one guest tonight - and he's the man of the hour -

and I mean that literally, because it's only an hour show. Of course, I'm talking about, Lord Horatio.

(applause)

Welcome! Thanks for being with us tonight.

Horatio

My pleasure Marty. Thanks for having me.

Marty

You mind if I dispense with the 'Lord' business and just call you Horatio?

Horatio

Not at all. I prefer it, actually.

Marty

That's what everyone says about you. 'Just a regular guy', no airs, no pretenses . . .

Horatio

Well, I haven't done anything to have pretenses about!

Marty

Well, you hang around with some pretty heavy hitters - And now, the way things stand, you're a power in your own right. Aren't you? I mean, you're our negotiator with Norway, are you not?

Horatio

I am, but only until someone more qualified is found. Look, I just happened to be the last man standing. Literally! As soon as we find a suitable replacement, I'm gone.

Marty

Gone where?

Horatio

Back to Wittenberg. Finish my studies.

Marty

You're really not comfortable in the limelight, are you?

Horatio

Not at all!

Marty

What about right now? Doing this interview?

Horatio

Extremely nervous!

Marty

And yet you're comfortable chit-chatting with kings and dictators, where a wrong word could get you killed! I find that absolutely

*fascinating!*

Horatio

Well, the big difference is the audience.

(gestures to the audience)

Marty

But they have no power! All they do is sit and watch! The pundits tell us we've become a nation of watchers and that's the problem! It's the doers of the world, people like Fortinbras who are taking over. What's he like by the way?

Horatio

Fortinbras? . . . He's very much as advertised - strong, determined, capable . . .

Marty

You like him.

Horatio

I mean, as an individual, I think he's quite admirable; he's what every father would like his son to be - a winner. As a Dane, however, I must see him first and foremost as an occupier and in that role I don't like him at all.

Marty



How does he compare with the late Prince?

Horatio

There's no comparison.

Marty

What do you mean by that?

Horatio

I mean they're completely different types.

Marty

So if they're completely different types, and you just characterized Fortinbras as a winner does that make Hamlet a loser?

Horatio

Not at all! C'mon Marty- don't put words in my mouth!

Marty

Actually, I was putting your words in *my* mouth, but be that as it may - OK. Set me straight then. How are they different?

Horatio

. . . Well, of course, in one circumstance they were alike - each being the only son of a king.

Marty

A pretty unique circumstance.

Horatio

Yes, but the differences also begin there. Hamlet was the son of a successful king while Fortinbras was the son of a failure.

Marty

Making Hamlet's job more difficult.

Horatio

Infinitely more! Fortinbras had nothing to live up to! Whereas Hamlet's father was not only a hero, but a martyred king whose soul was crying out for vengeance!

Marty

Now I'm going to stop you right there because your saying - if I

Marty (cont'd)

understand you correctly - that King Hamlet was murdered.

Horatio

Absolutely! Without a doubt!

Marty

And yet, we would be remiss if we didn't point out that for many People in the kingdom, what happened is still in dispute.

Horatio

Marty, at this point, the facts should be obvious to anyone with a brain in their head.

Marty

Those facts being? . . .

Horatio

Claudius murdered King Hamlet!

Marty

His own brother? . . .

Horatio

Yes!

Marty

And then married his brother's wife? . . .

Horatio

Yes!

Marty

And she knew?!

Horatio

That, I couldn't say. We may never know what the queen knew, or when she knew it.

Marty

You know, I've had them both on the show several times -

Horatio

Yes, I know.

Marty

The king was always, I thought, a very complex individual. You were never sure what he was thinking - you know what I mean?

Horatio

He could smile and smile and still be a villain!

Marty (ignoring him)

But the queen? You never met a more lovely, a more gracious lady . . .

Horatio

That was my experience of her as well.

Marty

So I'm having a very hard time wrapping my head around this whole thing-

Horatio

I understand.

Marty

You know, we have an expression in Yiddish - Mishegas - you familiar with it?

Horatio (shaking his head, smiling)

No, what does it mean?

Marty

Craziness! Utter craziness! Nothing makes any sense.

Horatio

A pretty good a description of the last 24 hours.

Marty

Well, let's see if we can make any sense of it. I want to go back to this whole question of blame - if any one person can be blamed -

Horatio

Marty, the tip of Laertes sword was poisoned! The goblet Gertrude drank from - the one the king offered to Hamlet - was poisoned! These are facts!

Marty

But how do you know it was the king who poisoned them? And even if you did prove Claudius was responsible for that - how do you then tie him to the death of King Hamlet? They're two totally different things, no?

Horatio

Different acts with the same motive: To become and remain king!

(Marty looks skeptical, shrugs)

OK, let me connect the dots for you.

Marty

Please do!

Horatio

The idea for the match between Laertes and Hamlet? It came from Claudius.

Marty

Did it?

Horatio

Yes! Check with the producers of 'Fencing' - ask Jon Berzerac! They were approached by Claudius' people with the idea!

Marty

OK. So the King proposes the match. Then what?

Horatio

He's the King! He has total control of the event! Everything goes through him! Security. Inspection of the weapons . . .

Marty

So his guilt is implicit.

Horatio

Yes! Absolutely!

Marty

But not explicit.

Horatio

Marty! He offered the poisoned goblet to Hamlet twice ! How much

more explicit do you need?

Marty

So why poison the swords then, if he planned to get him with the wine?

Horatio

It was his insurance policy, in case Laertes failed - which he almost did.

Claudius was determined that Hamlet not leave that studio alive.

Marty

But why? I guess that's what it all comes down to. Why is Claudius willing to risk everything to destroy Hamlet? It doesn't make sense.

Especially because, over the last few weeks, Hamlet was doing a pretty

Marty (cont'd)

good job of destroying himself. Or at least his credibility.

(Horatio begins to reply but is cut off)

Wait! Hold that thought. We have to take a commercial break. And when we come back, I want to see those dots! The ones connecting Claudius to King Hamlet's death. OK?

Horatio

OK.

Marty

We'll be back with more in sixty seconds. Stay with us!

(as they break, people rush in from the fringes of the set to touch-up make-up, refresh drinks and adjust microphones. While Horatio seems

absorbed observing this frenzied activity, Marty is still probing, albeit less overtly).

I wasn't kidding about Gertrude . . . she was a knock-out.

Horatio

Yes. A handsome woman.

Marty

The type of woman who always left you feeling you had a chance, if you know what I mean.

Horatio

She was the mother of my best friend - that was my - view of her.

Marty

Sure. She was old for you. Old enough to be your mother!

Horatio

Quite.

Marty

. . . Ophelia would have been more your speed.

Horatio (suddenly alert)

Ophelia only had eyes for Hamlet, and he for her. Their's was a true love.

Marty (skeptically)

Yeah, that's what everybody says.

Horatio



Everyone says it because it's true.

Marty

Well, you'd be the one to know, right? I mean, nobody was closer to the prince than you!

Horatio (with slight uneasiness)

Quite.

(stagehand clear the set, gives Marty a silent countdown with fingers)

Marty

We're back with 'Lord Horatio' the long time companion of the late

Marty (cont'd)

Prince Hamlet –

Horatio

We were friends.

Marty

Excuse me?

Horatio

The Prince and I were friends.

Marty

And what did I say?

Horatio

'Companions'.

Marty

Well, what's the diff, 'friends', 'companions' - 'chums', 'bosom buddies' – you were close, right?

Horatio

Yes, we were. It's just that . . . in some quarters, the prince and I have been portrayed as having a physical relationship –

Marty

Which you deny.

Horatio

Categorically.

Marty

Not that there's anything wrong with such relations - or *relationships*. . .

Horatio

No. . . It's just that we weren't in one.

Marty

So these,

(produces a sheath of papers)

notarized statements from innkeepers in Swabia, Alsace, Nuremberg – alleging that you and the Prince frequently shared rooms - rooms that had only one bed - what are we to make of them?

Horatio

Sworn statements? . . . Where did you get these?

Marty

Honestly? They just came in the mail this morning.

Horatio

But this is outrageous!

Marty

So you never suspected these were out there?

Horatio

That's not the point!

Marty

Then what is the point? I mean, from your perspective? As usual, I'm a little behind . . .

Horatio

Anyone traveling overland any considerable distance shares accommodations!

Marty

Do they?

Horatio

Of course! Some of the regions we pass through, journeying to and from

Wittenberg, you're fortunate if there's one bed in the entire town!

Marty

Is that right? I had no idea.

Horatio

This is an obvious and clumsy attempt at slander!

Marty

So what you're saying is, anyone who travels more than a day's ride in any direction, is going to be sharing a bed with somebody - whether it's the Prince of Denmark or a burgher from Bonn.

Horatio

And this is news to you?

Marty

Hey! You'd be surprised what I don't know! They only let me out of this studio a few hours a day! But I'm glad we could clear up that misconception because, as you say, there's a lot of rumors going around and the more we put to bed! (heh, heh!) - the better!

Horatio

Can we return to Claudius now?

Marty

Yes, by all means! You were gonna connect the dots for us – linking Claudius to the death of his brother.

Horatio

The prince had his suspicions from the beginning. He knew his uncle better than anyone, which was why he proceeded with such caution. He knew Claudius would not hesitate to kill anyone he perceived to be a threat.

Marty

You say he knew Claudius better than anyone, and yet, in the end - if we accept your version of events - he fell victim to Claudius' plotting. Shouldn't Hamlet have known better?

Horatio

He did know better, but sometimes Justice requires sacrifice.

Marty

You're saying he went into that match knowing the sword was poisoned?

Horatio

No. I'm saying he went ahead with the match knowing the deck was stacked against him, but also knowing, it was the only way to expose Claudius.

Marty

So he didn't know the sword was poisoned.

Horatio

No, and he didn't know about the goblet either - but he knew Claudius!

Marty

Well this is all very interesting, but as they use to say in that famous commercial - where's the beef? In other words, where's the evidence showing King Hamlet was murdered, and that it was Claudius who did it?

Horatio

Everyone agrees the king was poisoned and the coroner's report is consistent with that finding. The difference of opinion arises around how

Horatio (con't)

the poison was administered - whether by snake bite, or a human hand. There's never been any evidence to support the snake theory. No snake. No bite marks. But there is very clear evidence of a poisoner – Claudius - with both the motive and the opportunity to act.

Marty

Motive and opportunity are not evidence my friend!

Horatio

He killed Gertrude! He killed Hamlet!

Marty

He killed Laertes too, by your logic, but there's still no smoking gun that links him to any of these deaths.

Horatio

Because he was too clever for that! Just because he was evil doesn't mean he was stupid!

Marty

But the law requires evidence - and you still haven't shown me any.

Horatio

But don't you find the circumstances evidence enough? I mean what do you think Marty? Do you really think Claudius was just an innocent

Horatio (con't)

bystander?

Marty

What I think isn't the question. It's what you can prove in court that which is not always the same thing!

Horatio

OK then, let me ask you - What do you believe?

Marty

. . . I believe in exclusive interviews with important people, and long wet kisses with gorgeous women! I believe in open questions, and closed quotes - six-inch deli sandwiches and corporate expense

accounts - I believe in longevity and being in the right place at the right time -

Horatio

But what about Claudius? What about Denmark?

Marty (to audience)

Don't you love this guy? He never lets up!

(back to Horatio)

I'll tell you what - next time, you sit here and you can ask the questions!

Marty (con't)

How about that!

(back to the camera/audience)

Tomorrow night! My guests will be Osric - *thee* recognized authority on fencing rules and regulations - he's gonna tell us who actually won the now infamous match between Hamlet and Laertes - and our old friend – Bill O'Malley, will be stopping by. I'm sure he will have a very different take on events than my guest tonight - but that's what makes it a ballgame, right? Goodnight everybody!

(blackout)end of play



