

***SAMPLE PAGES. PLEASE DO NOT COPY***

**The Haunted Hamlet**

By Christine Harvey

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**Cast:**

Hamlet

Ophelia

Gertrude

Claudius

Fortinbras

Horatio

Laertes

Polonius

Actor # 1, 2, 3, and 4

Director

Ghost # 1, 2, and 3

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(There are props and costumes strewn about the stage. Hamlet, Ophelia, Gertrude, Claudius, Fortinbras, Horatio, Laertes, Polonius, and other actors enter.)

Fortinbras: This place is a disaster. How can we work with props and costumes strewn about? Somebody has got to clean them up.

Laertes: Knock yourself out.

Claudius: (slapping Laertes) Be polite and make yourself useful.

Laertes: (reluctantly picking up props and costumes from the floor) Fine.

Polonius: I would help you out there, sonny. But I have a hard time bending these days. I remember what it was like to be young and chipper

like you. Seems like ages ago. Oh, if only I could go back to the days before false teeth and hip replacements.

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Fortinbras: I can't stand clutter. (He begins to pick up the props and costumes.) Things have to be in their place. (Laertes throws the items he collected carelessly offstage. Fortinbras folds the costumes he collects and places them neatly offstage.)

Actor # 1: Wow, I can't believe I get to work here at the famous Hamlet theatre. And I'm even performing in the production of Hamlet. Wow!

Actor # 2: Yeah, I don't even care that I have a small part.

(There is an oooo sound from offstage.)

Actor # 3: Did you hear that?

Actor # 2: It sounded like a ghost.

Actor # 3: Oh, listen to you. The wind howls through the windows, and you think it's a ghost.

Actor # 4: Well, this place is supposed to be haunted, you know.

Actor # 3: So they say, but I don't believe that.

Gertrude: I believe it. I see them. I hear them. I sense them. Ghosts!

Actor # 4: Really? You see ghosts? Where?

Gertrude: There! (She points to the audience.) And there! (She points somewhere else.) And here! (She points to Actor # 4.) But not here. (She points to herself.) Look at me! I'm not a ghost. I'm Elizabeth Taylor - the real Elizabeth Taylor. (She spreads her cape out like wings and swoops around the stage.) Even the ghosts need to know the truth.

(The actors move away from Gertrude as she continues swooping around the stage.)

Horatio: This looks like a really fun group to work with. I'm excited.

Laertes: (sarcastically) Oh, yeah. They look really interesting.

Claudius: Watch your tone, young man.

Laertes: I can't believe you made me do this, Dad. These people are so lame.

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Claudius: It's better than you being cooped up in the house all day on that, what's it called, on that MSG thing.

Laertes: It's called MSN, Dad.

Claudius: Yeah, and those stupid computer games.

Laertes: They're not stupid.

Claudius: Well, they are certainly not helping improve your mind or your talents. You need some culture, young man.

Laertes: (sarcastically) Okay, Dad, that's what I need to succeed in this world, to be good at cultured things. Because we all know that everything revolves around drama and art and music. If I want a good paying job, I had better be cultured. Computers on the other hand - well, who uses them anymore?

Actor # 1: I just love Shakespeare, and this is my first time in a Shakespearian production.

Actor # 2: I know. Me too. And I just want to do well. I want to work really hard at this and impress the director.

Laertes: Good luck with that.

Claudius: You'd be well advised to do the same, young man.

Laertes: Yeah, whatever.

Gertrude: I'm the real Elizabeth Taylor. I'm the real Elizabeth Taylor. (As she swoops around the stage she hits Laertes with her cape.)

Laertes: Hey, watch it, lady.

Gertrude: The name is Elizabeth – Elizabeth Taylor.

Laertes: Ah, yeah. I caught that.

Gertrude: Yes, but I don't think that you understand. That is my name - the name that my parents gave to me. I was born with it. My first name is Elizabeth and my family name is Taylor. The other white diamonds lady – she's a fake. Elizabeth Taylor was what she chose as her stage name. But I'm real. That's really my name. I'm all real.

Laertes: Okay, Elizabeth Taylor, whatever you say.

Claudius: Straighten up, son. Here's the director.

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(The director enters.)

Director: Sit down and listen up, everyone. (Everyone sits down including the director who lounges in a director's chair.) We are doing a children's production of Hamlet this year. Now I'm sure you're asking yourselves, why Hamlet - that's not a children's play. Well, it's just easier this way. The adult theatre put it on and took the time to modernize the language so it's easier for me to use their script. I don't have time to find a new play that would be more appropriate for children. The adaptation that the last director wrote simplifies the Shakespearian language and simple works for me.

Fortinbras: I could write a children's play for you.

Hamlet: Yeah, I could help. We could write a musical. Children love musicals.

Director: No, that will take time. This is easier. Okay, let me start by introducing myself. My name is George. I'm the director.

Everyone: Hi, George.

Director: Hi. Now we have some information to get through and I want to do it quickly, so no interruptions please. Rule one: The director is the boss! Listen to the director! I make the rules however so random or contradicting they may be, you must still follow them because I'm in charge. Rule two: Lines must be memorized by the fifth rehearsal! No exceptions! Otherwise you make my life very difficult and it becomes easier to just kick you out rather than to keep you in the cast. Is that understood?

Everyone: Yes.

Director: No interruptions please. Rule three: The director is the boss! And in case you were wondering, I'm the director. Rule four: You must attend every rehearsal. For those of you who are going to complain that in other theatre companies, you are allowed to miss a couple of rehearsals, you need to understand that this is not one of those companies! This company is my company. It is difficult to run a production with cast members missing, and difficult doesn't work for me. If you miss a rehearsal, don't bother coming to the next one because I've already replaced you. Rule five: Easier is better.

Make my life easier and everyone's life will be easier. Oh, and rule six: The director is the boss! So basically, I'm the boss.

Horatio: And don't forget the most important rule. (The director looks confused.) Have fun!

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Director: (ignoring Horatio's comment) Any questions?

Fortinbras: Yes, I have a question. I was wondering why there is no Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in this play, but there is in the original Hamlet. As his old schoolmates, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are called in to spy on Hamlet and report to Hamlet's evil uncle, Claudius. They are later executed because Hamlet sets them up for spying on him. Hamlet's distrust of their sincerity and his feigned affection for them really...

Director: Hold it, hold it. You see, this is already too confusing. Those characters are confusing. I mean, feigned affection – that's deep. No, I want to keep it simple. I didn't have anyone audition for those parts, and I didn't understand those characters anyway so I took them out of the script. Simple!

Fortinbras: But...

Director: Okay, moving right along. Now we are going to split into groups. I need the leads to work with me starting with Laertes, Horatio, Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, and Fortinbras. All the other leads can sit backstage and watch.

Actor # 1: What about the people who are not playing leads?

Director: Right! All of you who are playing chairs or tables or dust or blood and all of those things, you can go down to work in the South-Anti Room.

Actor # 2: You mean the room with the cockroaches?

Director: Yes, they hang out there because the South-Anti Room doubles as our garbage disposal room. I need you there so that I can call you up when I need you. See, here is the garbage chute. (The director points to the garbage chute.) I'll just call down there, and you'll hear me. Then I can get you to come up for a scene whenever I need you. It just makes things so much easier rather than having to send someone to get you or find you myself. Here! (The director hands Actor # 1 a big stick.) This should help fend off the cockroaches.

Actor # 1: Or you could call an exterminator.

Director: That would just hold up the production. This is easier.

Actor # 1: Easier for whom?

Director: For me. And when my life is easy, your life is easy.

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Actor # 3: What about me? I'm the understudy for chair # 2, among other things.

Director: You can go in the group with the chairs.

Actor # 4: I'm the understudy for the understudy of the dust on chair # 4. Where should I go?

Director: Well, I guess you should go in the group with the chairs also. Remember that you are also playing the blood and the river and anything else that comes up as a prop that we don't have readily available in the props room. It's just easier to have you act as props rather than buying new props. Now off you go. (Actors # 1, 2, 3, and 4 exit.)

Fortinbras: I'm really worried about the dust on the chair. They only have seven weeks to learn their part. I just hope it will be enough time for them to really embrace the role.

Laertes: I'm sure they'll be fine.

Claudius: (to the director) Yes, because under your leadership anything is possible. That's what my boy was saying just last night at dinner. He was saying, "Wow, that director is amazing. He can do anything. I can't wait to work with him."

Laertes: Oh, okay, Dad.

Director: Well, let's get started. Let's run Act 5, Scene 2.

Fortinbras: But isn't that the last scene of the play?

Director: Yes. My blocking papers were somehow stapled in reverse order this morning. I'm too tired to put them back into order, so I thought it would be easier to just run the play backwards. You know, starting with the last scene and working our way to the first scene.

Fortinbras: Won't that get confusing?

Director: It's just easier this way.

Ophelia: As the lead of the play, shouldn't we be going on to one of my scenes? I'm playing Ophelia, and Ophelia is dead before the last scene.

Polonius: Actually, young lady, if my tired old memory serves me correctly, Ophelia is not a lead. She is a supporting character.

Ophelia: I still get my own dressing room, right?

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Director: We only have two dressing rooms, one for the females and one for the males. I didn't ever get around to having the others set up. Besides, this way is just easier for me. I don't want to go looking for you in dressing rooms. This way I know exactly where you are whenever I need to find you. If you're a girl, you'll be in the girl's dressing room, and if you're a boy, you'll be in the boy's dressing room. Simple!

Ophelia: What a disgrace - forced to share a dressing room with lowly extras! Just wait until my manager hears about this!

Hamlet: I was looking over my lines last night and I was thinking that instead of saying, "Good match, Laertes," this would be a good place to incorporate a song. It would be Hamlet's final solo.

Fortinbras: What do you mean his final solo? He doesn't have any solos.

Hamlet: Well, not yet but I'm working on some numbers for everyone. I've got this wonderful tap dance number for you, oh, and for you (pointing to Claudius) I have a duet that you sing with Queen Gertrude and...

Director: Why don't we just stick to the script? Musicals are a lot of work, and that just doesn't work for me.

Hamlet: But I've got it all planned out, and if you'll just listen to what I've done so far I'm sure you'll love it.

Director: No, let's just do it without the music. It's easier without. And as I always say, easier is always better. All right, everyone, we're going to start our rehearsal now. Could I get everyone in his or her places backstage, please? (Hamlet, Ophelia, Gertrude, Claudius, Fortinbras, Horatio, Laertes, and Polonius go backstage. Gertrude starts peeking out from behind the curtains.) Liz, stop peeking out from behind the curtains. The audience shouldn't see you yet.

Gertrude: I know no Liz. I am Elizabeth Taylor.

(Horatio enters the stage.)

Horatio: But nicknames are so much fun. I love nicknames. My friends call me Annie, because whenever I'm feeling blue, I sing orphan Annie's song. You know the one about the day getting better tomorrow.

(Hamlet enters the stage.)

Hamlet: Ah, yes. I love that musical. (Horatio and Hamlet start singing "The Sun Will Come Out Tomorrow.")

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Gertrude: I will not answer to Liz. I am not Liz. I am Elizabeth Taylor - the real Elizabeth Taylor.

Director: I'm sorry, Liz, but I just can't refer to you as Elizabeth Taylor all of the time. The name is too long. It takes too much effort. Shorter is better.

Gertrude: (thinking about it for a moment) The fake Elizabeth Taylor would not stand for such a thing. So I shall, just to prove that I am not her. I am real! (Gertrude, Hamlet, and Horatio go backstage.)

Director: Okay, so we are ready to begin. Let's have everyone in their places then for the last scene as is described on page twenty-three.

Fortinbras: (calling from offstage) But isn't everyone already dead by that point?

Director: Yes, let's start where you are all dead. We'll start on page twenty-three and then work our way backwards. (The actors move to their positions. Hamlet, Laertes, Claudius, and Gertrude are dead. They collapse over each other to form a mound of bodies in the middle of the stage. Horatio and Fortinbras are alive. The director calls down the garbage chute.) Blood! I need you on stage. (Actor # 1, 2, 3, and 4 run out onstage, dressed in red. The rest of the cast indicates that they smell bad by holding their noses.)

Ophelia: (walking onstage) That blood smells disgusting!

Actor # 4: We were in the garbage room.

Ophelia: What were you doing, rolling in it?

Actor # 4: Well, the garbage is leaking everywhere. It's hard to avoid. It's all over the floor and walls. It's not very pleasant.

Ophelia: Well, go take a bath or something. We should not be subjected to this fragrance assault.



Director: No time for baths. Now get offstage. Ophelia is not in this scene.

Ophelia: And I'm not very happy about that either. (The director waves Ophelia to leave. She stomps off.)

Director: Blood, please, play your part.

Actor # 1: We are blood.

Actor # 2: (making seeping motions) Seeping.

**SAMPLE PAGES. PLEASE DO NOT COPY**

Actor # 3: (making pouring motions) Pouring.

Actor # 4: (making spurting motions) Spurting...

Actors: (making spilling motions)...and spilling about.

Director: Good, very good. (Actors # 1, 2, 3, and 4 exit.)

Fortinbras: Isn't Horatio supposed to be sad because his best friend Hamlet is dead? He looks too happy.

Horatio: (smiling) I am sad. See this is my happy. (Horatio makes a very happy face.) And this is my sad face. (Horatio smiles.)

Director: Yes, that works.

Fortinbras: But he's smiling.

Director: It's just easier for him.

Fortinbras: Fine.

Director: Now begin the scene.

Fortinbras: Alright! (When acting all of the actors should be extremely melodramatic and over the top.) Where is Claudius? (Horatio points to the dead bodies.) This is horrible. I had come to tell Claudius that I had Rosencrantz and Guildenstern executed, just as he requested, but I guess he doesn't care now because he is dead.

Horatio: Hamlet wanted you to know how this tragedy came to pass. He wanted you to know that Claudius was a villain. Claudius convinced Laertes to duel with Hamlet with a poisoned sword which managed to scratch Laertes and Hamlet both. They died, but not before Queen Gertrude drank the poisoned wine intended for Hamlet. In Hamlet's rage, he killed Claudius.

Fortinbras: (clears throat) I will assume the throne of Denmark, and I will make sure that Hamlet's story will be told. Let his gravestone read, "Rest in Peace." For he would have been a noble prince, had he lived. Carry him off.

Director: And cut. That went well. Good scene. But now I'm exhausted. I think that it is time for a break.

Fortinbras: A break? But we just started.

Director: No we just finished. That was the end of the play, remember?

Fortinbras: But...

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Director: Everyone meet back here in ten minutes. Then we can start on page twenty-two.

Laertes: Hey, this director guy is cool. We get a break already. (Laertes takes out his game boy.)

Claudius: (disgusted) I can't believe you brought that here.

(Hamlet, Ophelia, Gertrude, Claudius, Fortinbras, Horatio, Laertes, Polonius, and Director exit for a break, but leave their scripts behind. The three ghosts enter. Ghost # 2 is wearing a traditional ghost costume, with a white sheet and chains.)

Ghost # 1: (to Ghost # 2) Did you see that? I can't believe they intend to show children that gruesome scene. It's too much death and destruction.

Ghost # 2: Oooo. Oooo. Death and destruction. Oooo. Oooo. Very scary!

Ghost # 1: What are you doing? Why are wearing that ridiculous outfit?

Ghost # 2: Do you like it? I found it in the costume room.

Ghost # 3: Don't you think that you are propagating a stereotype by wearing that outfit?

Ghost # 2: It's just a costume.

Ghost # 3: It's degrading. That outfit depicts ghosts as scary, bleach-white creatures, existing in condemnation and torment, and as we all know, that is just not our reality. No wonder we get no respect when even our own go running around acting like Jacob Marley.

Ghost # 2: Okay, fine. I'll take it off. (Ghost # 2 removes the costume and throws it down on the stage.) There! Happy?

Ghost # 3: Better.

Ghost # 1: Guys, this is just terrible. Look at what they are doing to our theatre. This is supposed to be a children's production. And children should be able to come and see happy plays. Now they are putting on Hamlet. It's just not appropriate. I rearranged the director's script thinking it would help. I thought that if I put the script pages backward, it would sort of be as if everyone is coming back to life, but it's just not turning out that way. The violence is still there, and I don't want the kids seeing that.

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Ghost # 2: Why don't you come and play in the costume room with me. That always makes me feel better. I saw three French maid outfits. We could each wear one!

Ghost # 3: You have to stand up for what you believe in. The days of ghosts being treated like second-rate citizens has got to end. Our voices need to be heard. We have rights too.

Ghost # 1: I don't believe children should be watching the violence in Hamlet. I feel strongly about this. So I should do something. (Ghost # 1 thinks for a moment.) I know! I'll rewrite the director's script.

Ghost # 3: Great idea! (Ghost # 1 starts rewriting the director's script.)

**CONTINUED...**