

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

Devised by Falling Stars Theatre Company

Written by
Lee Phillips

FALLING STARS THEATRE COMPANY:

Beccy Durham, Lucy Adamson, Sally Woodhead, Teona Mae Gott, Mark Edwards, Johnny Rookes,
Colin Lawrence-Sykes, Chloe Lawson, Jacob Phillips, and Lee Phillips

CHARACTER NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	
H (Harriet)	Drama Student/Writer/Director	Chloe Lawson
Martin	Drama School Head of Faculty	Mark Edwards
Sam	Student covering Front of House	Lucy Adamson/Johnny Rookes
Diana	H's mum	Beccy Durham
Nigel	Diana's partner	Colin Lawrence-Sykes
Old Hamlet	Actor	Lee Phillips
Hamlet	Actor	Jacob Phillips
Sandra	Charlotte's mother	Sally Woodhead
Charlotte	Actor playing Ophelia	Teona Mae Gott

PRESET.

SAM (FoH) shows people to their seats, ad lib conversations, dropping in that s/he is an aspiring writer., and that s/he had hoped that it was his/her play that was being performed today.

HARRIET ('H') peers out from the wings scanning the audience.

Sam spots Harriet and is irritated by her, motivated by jealousy that it's not his/her play being performed. H disappears back into the wings and Sam goes about his/her duties.

H enters from the wings and surreptitiously crosses over to the Tech Desk. Once there she tries to stay out of sight. Sam spots her again, tries to get her attention as s/he goes about his/her business but fails.

MARTIN appears from the wings, spots H and makes his way over to her, as Sam struggles to keep his/her frustrations under control.

A discreet conversation takes place between H and Martin.

MARTIN

Alright?

H

Yeah.

MARTIN

Nervous?

H

A bit.

MARTIN

You'll be fine.

H smiles unconvincingly.

MARTIN

Trust me. You've done all the work. It's a great show. You're gonna get a really good grade for this...

H

Really?

MARTIN

Yeah. (beat) Come on, we really should be backstage - make sure the actors are ready.

H

Yeah. Right.

Martin makes his way backstage expecting H to follow but she holds back.

H looks out at the audience expectantly. Sam makes his/her way over to H.

SAM

Erm... is there a problem?

H

No.

SAM

It's just...

H

What?

SAM

Well...

H

What??

SAM

The show'll be starting shortly.

H

So?

SAM

You know no cast or crew should be front of house before a show starts -

H

It's just -

SAM

No. It's not professional.

H

Really?!?

Sam gives H a disparaging look.

H

I'm expecting someone this afternoon. Have they picked up their tickets, d'you know? They're reserved under Lawson.

SAM

Not that I'm aware of. Last time I looked they were still there.

A commotion captures their attention - DIANA and NIGEL create a scene as they make their entrance.

H

Don't worry. They've arrived!

H makes a discreet exit to the wings via the stage.

DIANA

Please! Stop fussing!!

NIGEL

I just don't want to miss any of it.

DIANA

Look! Look!! We've plenty of time! There's still people coming in.

NIGEL

I know that now! But we might've been late...

DIANA

What is this obsession??? When did you get so excited about Shakespeare?!?

NIGEL

I just fancied giving it a go -

Diana lets out a heavy sigh.

NIGEL

What?

DIANA

We could be soaking up the ambience of St Andrew's Square! I could be on my third G&T by now...

NIGEL

Seriously! Is that all you're bothered about? We can do that after.

DIANA

Right. I shall hold you to that.

NIGEL

Fine.

Sam crosses over to Diana and Nigel.

SAM

Afternoon, can I see your tickets?

NIGEL

Here you go.

SAM

That's great. Thank you. It's just those two seats down there by the aisle.

DIANA

What? Them?

SAM

Yes.

DIANA

Down there??

SAM

Yes.

Exasperated, Diana makes her way through Sam and Nigel, and heads to the two seats in the second row by the aisle. She turns back to see Nigel still stood at top of the stairs with Sam.

Well? Come on then!

DIANA

Nigel follows meekly, and Sam heads back to the entrance to resume her duties.

Could we be any closer?

DIANA

I just wanted to get a good view.

NIGEL

Diana rummages through her handbag while H pops her head out from the wings and catches Nigel's eye. He gives her a knowing smile. H disappears back stage as Diana finally produces a vanity mirror and starts titivating her hair, perhaps applies some lipstick.

DIANA

We might as well be sat on the stage. Remind me... *why* do you want to see this?!? I'm sensing this will be an hour of my life I'm never getting back.

NIGEL

Please, for me, will you just try? Give it a chance.

Diana and Nigel ad lib - Diana confrontational, Nigel conciliatory, until all the audience are seated and the play is ready to begin.

SCENE 1.

Smoke fills the stage. Atmospheric music. Lights start to fade up - a cold lighting state.

HAMLET charges in, rapier in hand, startled, afraid, lost.

Unseen, OLD HAMLET enters behind him and observes in disbelief. He approaches Hamlet.

Hamlet?

OLD HAMLET

Hamlet, startled, turns and charges his father, who, in turn is taken by surprise. He sidesteps the charge managing to take hold of Hamlet, holding him in a tight embrace.

Hamlet!

OLD HAMLET

Father?!?

HAMLET

Hamlet subdues.

OLD HAMLET

Son!

HAMLET

But... but... how?

They separate.

OLD HAMLET

I'm so sorry... it shouldn't've come to this.

HAMLET

I don't understand.

OLD HAMLET

That's to be expected. Take your time. It'll come back to you.

Hamlet breaks away in thought.

HAMLET

Horatio - he was holding me. I was in his arms...

OLD HAMLET

Yes...

Hamlet processes the thoughts of what has gone before with more and more agitation as the realisation dawns on him.

HAMLET

Laertes... Claudius... (beat) *mother!!* My mother!

The recollection subdues Old Hamlet.

OLD HAMLET

Yes.

Anger starts to the surface.

HAMLET

No... no, no, no... how?? This... this... you... what?

OLD HAMLET

Remember. Laertes? Claudius?

HAMLET

You!

OLD HAMLET

Yes!

HAMLET

But... that means -

Old Hamlet tenderly holds Hamlet.

OLD HAMLET

Yes.

Hamlet crumbles at the realisation that he is in purgatory, Old Hamlet consoles him, then rage kicks in and Hamlet breaks free.

HAMLET

No! This isn't... this can't -

OLD HAMLET

Son...

HAMLET

I... I... I'm not meant to be here. Revenge. That's what you said. That's all. That's all that was supposed to happen -

OLD HAMLET

Yes. And you did... you did it -

HAMLET

But... but... look! I'm here... with you... that means...

OLD HAMLET

Yes...

Diana 'tut's' very obviously.

NIGEL
Becky! Please!

OLD HAMLET
We're to walk together in this... this prison-house.

DIANA
Alright...!

HAMLET
No... no... this wasn't supposed to happen.

Nigel sighs heavily then resumes watching the play.

OLD HAMLET
No... not what was intended, but -

HAMLET
But? What do you mean 'but'???

OLD HAMLET
Claudius.

A pause. Hamlet waits expectantly for his father to continue.

HAMLET
Well??

OLD HAMLET
He had to be stopped.

A pause again. Old Hamlet continues, to fill the silence.

OLD HAMLET
He made a fool of me.

Hamlet looks on with contempt.

OLD HAMLET
He took my wife - the bed wasn't even cold!!! Then he took my crown.

Again he waits for a response but Hamlet isn't forthcoming.

OLD HAMLET
It wasn't just me, you know. It was never going to be just me. You.

HAMLET

Eh?

OLD HAMLET

Think. The court. How would the court look at you? Hmmm?

HAMLET

As Hamlet. My mothers son.

OLD HAMLET

Maybe. But not some future king, that's for sure.

HAMLET

Poppycok!

OLD HAMLET

You think he'd stop at me? You think his scheming would stop at the crown?

HAMLET

Of course.

OLD HAMLET

What? Once he got his hands on it? Think! There's no way he was ever going to give that up.

HAMLET

No -

OLD HAMLET

Hamlet!

HAMLET

No! He wanted the crown. He got it. That was the end of it.

OLD HAMLET

He plotted to kill you.

Hamlet takes in the gravity of what Old Hamlet is saying.

OLD HAMLET

Not once...

HAMLET

Don't!

OLD HAMLET

Twice!

HAMLET

Stop!

OLD HAMLET

Remember? Rosencrantz and Guildenstern...

A moment as Hamlet digests the actions of his so called friends.

HAMLET

That... that betrayal... that betrayal sickens my soul.

OLD HAMLET

Yes. I'm sorry.

Old Hamlet pauses for a moment to consider the sentiment behind what he is saying.

OLD HAMLET

And I understand you feeling that way... but... they didn't know what they'd signed up to do.

HAMLET

Don't defend them!! It's blatantly clear where their loyalties lie. They chose your brother over me. What does that say about our friendship? Obviously it meant nothing.

OLD HAMLET

They were out of their depth. They were just pawns in my brothers game... the letter, written by Claudius himself... *he* instructed them. He told them to deliver it, *and your life*, to the King of England. They didn't know.

HAMLET

But they chose to follow those instructions. Over loyalty to me, they chose him. Fickle fools... but I got the better of them -

OLD HAMLET

Yes. Yes you did. You triumphed. And yes, they were your friends. But in the end it was you or them. But all because of *him*. Claudius. He sent them with that letter so the King of England would do *his* dirty work for him. But you were smarter. You outwitted him.

HAMLET

Halfwits!!

OLD HAMLET

Yes. Perhaps. Poor, naive, innocent halfwits.

HAMLET

It was rather sweet to see Claudius face when I returned.

OLD HAMLET

You forced his hand. Him and Laertes. That's why you're here. Laertes confessed it! You heard him. The poison. He was going to make damn sure you were dead! The foil... the wine...

Hamlet reels as he recalls the death of his mother.

HAMLET

Mother!

OLD HAMLET

Yes.

HAMLET

But surely -

OLD HAMLET

Tragic happenstance -

HAMLET

No...

OLD HAMLET

It was meant for you. But his ambition got the better of him. Her death is because of his actions... it's on his conscience. And yet, maybe one last act for redemption...

HAMLET

Eh?

OLD HAMLET

Never doubt that she loved you, Hamlet. Even though she took to his bed, and was too easily persuaded by Claudius, a mothers love will never be undone.

HAMLET

What are you saying? I don't understand.

OLD HAMLET

Perhaps, just perhaps, she drank the wine to keep you from drinking it.

Diana and Nigel speak in loud whispers.

DIANA
This is ridiculous.

HAMLET
No... no, no, no, no... this... this is too much to take in!

NIGEL
What?

HAMLET
My mother!

The exchange in the audience distracts Old Hamlet.

NIGEL
What about it?

OLD HAMLET
It's too cruel to consider. (beat) You must see he had to be stopped.

DIANA
This.

OLD HAMLET
Claudius. Yes, Claudius. He had to be stopped, or where would it have ended?

DIANA
No mother would do that!

HAMLET
But why -

H briefly and discreetly pokes her head out from the wings to observe her mother. Sam intervenes from the back of the audience.

SAM
Shhhhhh!

OLD HAMLET
Do you honestly believe he would've let you stand in the way of his grandiose ambition? Hmmm?

DIANA
Do you mind! (to Nigel) How rude!

HAMLET
No... not that... why here? Why am I here?

A commotion from the back of the audience as SANDRA makes her way in. The actors on stage try to hide their irritation by acting through the disruption.

SANDRA
Sorry... I'm so sorry! Ooooh! It's already started! Sorry - I'm running a bit late!

OLD HAMLET
You died!

SAM

Please! Take a seat!

SANDRA

Yes. Sorry... I couldn't find the place!
Charlotte left me directions but they blew
off down Princes Street! I was having a
coffee at Costa -

SAM

Yes... never mind -

SANDRA

- at that Mall at Waverley. It's very nice
there...

SAM

Quite, but -

SANDRA

I sat outside and whoop! The wind
snatched it out of my hand!

SAM

If you wouldn't mind -

SANDRA

- and now I'm late! I couldn't remember
where I was meant to be! Has she been on
yet?

SAM

Sorry?

SANDRA

Charlotte. She's in the play... has she been
on?

HAMLET

But purgatory! Why?

HAMLET

I mean, for you... for you I get it. There
was a purpose. Revenge. You were
murdered, and justice needed to be done.

HAMLET

But me? What reason is there for me to be
here?

OLD HAMLET

Ours is not to reason why -

HAMLET

I avenge your death. I avenged mine - all
those that were bit-parts in his great
scheme have also died, but they're not
here...

HAMLET (CONT)

There's no purpose for them to be here...
they're either in heaven or in hell. But not
here. So what's the reason? Hmmm? Why
am I here? There has to be a reason. And
you.

OLD HAMLET

What?

HAMLET

Why are you still here? You've been
avenged. Why haven't you moved on?
There's no reason for you to still be here.

OLD HAMLET

I'm sorry son... it breaks my heart that it
has come to this -

HAMLET

There's something wrong... something not
right.

SAM
I... I couldn't... er... I don't think so... er...
no.

HAMLET

No.

SANDRA
That's a relief.

OLD HAMLET
No? (beat) What?

SAM
Please... just take a seat.

HAMLET
This is you.

SANDRA
Oooh! Yes! Of course!

OLD HAMLET
What?

Sandra makes her way down the auditorium steps and, if possible, chooses a seat that forces other audience members to move out of the way so that she can get seated.

SANDRA
Excuse me... sorry... don't mind me -

HAMLET
It's you... that's why I'm here.

DIANA (TO SANDRA)
Shhhhhh!

Once again the actors are thrown by the exchanges in the audience.

NIGEL
Diana!

DIANA
What?!?

Nigel looks at her exasperated, then turns his attention back to the stage. Diana 'tut's' yet again. Sandra is seated.

OLD HAMLET
What are you talking about??

DIANA (WHISPER)
Is there an interval?

HAMLET
Think it through... why else? Why else would we both be here if there wasn't something else... some unfinished business?

NIGEL (WHISPER)
 What?
 DIANA (WHISPER)
 Or even better, a bar? Tell me there's a
 bar...

OLD HAMLET
 I'm afraid I have no answer for that.
 HAMLET
 You used me.

NIGEL (WHISPER)
 It's an hour! Why would there be an
 interval??

OLD HAMLET
 Eh?

DIANA (WHISPER)
 Just asking...

HAMLET
 You revealed yourself, and you played me.

H discreetly pops her head out from the wings again to
 observe her mother. Martin pops his out on the opposite
 side of the stage, catches H's eye and intently indicates
 that she needs to get out of sight. They both disappear.

Sandra leans across to a member of the audience.

SANDRA (WHISPERS)
 'ave I missed much?

OLD HAMLET
 Son...

HAMLET
 No! I'm right... you used me. You used me to do your dirty work!

OLD HAMLET
 What? To revenge my death, to secure your rightful line to the throne, to protect *you*!

HAMLET
 No.

OLD HAMLET
 Eh?

HAMLET
 No. This was never about me. It's only ever been about you. That's all this ever was.
 About you getting revenge on your brother - no matter the cost.

OLD HAMLET
 Hamlet! You've been playing 'madness' too long! It's starting to take hold!

HAMLET
 You fired me up. Played my emotions so that I would go out and get revenge for you.

OLD HAMLET

Enough!

HAMLET

No. If it weren't for you, none of this would've happened. You and... and that hatred! That burning hatred to get back at your brother.

OLD HAMLET

Just stop there. Think. Remember? When I appeared that night - the first time? You were just as fired up as me. You raged. The injustice. It filled you with disgust - your uncle... marrying your mother.

HAMLET

Yes! 'cos it was just weeks! You'd only been dead a matter of weeks!

OLD HAMLET

There you go then!

HAMLET

But you couldn't leave it there could you?

OLD HAMLET

Would you? Hmmm? If you'd been murdered?!? Like that?

HAMLET

But, because of you... because you revealed yourself to me... because of that... well, that's why I'm here! Isn't it? Eh? Because of you, I'm here.

OLD HAMLET

That was *never* what I intended -

HAMLET

But, because of you, I'm dead. Stuck here. In purgatory with you.

An awkwardness hangs between them.

HAMLET

If you'd just kept your mouth shut!

OLD HAMLET

Hamlet!

HAMLET

They do say ignorance is bliss! If all I had to do was come to terms with him marrying my mother, I would've dealt with that. I wouldn't've liked it, but I would've gotten on with my life! Still living! But no. Because of you I am dead.

Awkwardness again.

H peeps out from back stage to watch her mothers reactions to the exchange taking place between Hamlet and Old Hamlet.

HAMLET

You used me.

OLD HAMLET

No!

HAMLET

Yes!!

A stand off between Hamlet and Old Hamlet.

DIANA

Genius!

NIGEL

Eh?

DIANA

Using his son like that! Using his son to get back at his brother!!!

NIGEL

But he's dead!

DIANA

Well, if that's the price...

NIGEL

Diana!

H struggles to hide her anger towards her mother, then moves out of sight.

Sandra tries engaging with a person she is sat near to.

The stand-off between Hamlet and Old Hamlet is interrupted as CHARLOTTE enters as Ophelia, wandering aimlessly and singing throughout the following dialogue.

CHARLOTTE
 HOW should I your true love know
 From another one?
 By his cockle hat and staff,
 And his sandal shoon.

SANDRA
 Ooh! Ooh! That's her... that's my
 daughter!!!

Charlotte tries not to let her mothers announcement distract her performance.

CHARLOTTE
 He is dead and gone, lady,
 He is dead and gone;
 At his head a grass-green turf,
 At his heels a stone.

HAMLET
 Ophelia? Ophelia! Is it... how...?

CHARLOTTE
 White his shroud as the mountain snow,
 Larded with sweet flowers,
 Which bewept to the grave did not go
 With true-love showers.

HAMLET
 Ophelia!

Charlotte doesn't acknowledge him.

OLD HAMLET
 Hamlet...

HAMLET
 How is she here? How long -

OLD HAMLET
 She's the same as us... caught between two worlds.

HAMLET
 But... she shouldn't be here! Why would she be here? Ophelia! I don't understand why she would be here. She's so innocent. She shouldn't be here.

Hamlet tentatively approaches Charlotte, reaches out and gently touches her shoulder. There is no response. Hamlet gently turns her to face him.

HAMLET

Ophelia?

CHARLOTTE

Hamlet? Is that you? Is it really you?

HAMLET

Here...

Hamlet embraces Charlotte who collapses into his arms sobbing. Hamlet comforts her.

Sandra addresses the people sat around her.

SANDRA

Oh! My baby!

HAMLET

It's alright.

Charlotte unexpectedly and violently breaks free creating a distance between Hamlet and herself, then charges Hamlet and starts beating him with rage.

Sandra addresses the people sat around her.

SANDRA

Oh! I say!

HAMLET

Ophelia!

Old Hamlet steps in to break Charlotte away from Hamlet.

OLD HAMLET

There, there... come on...

Charlotte once again breaks down, then gradually regains her composure, breaks free, then pathetically.

CHARLOTTE

Hamlet? My love?

She laughs hysterically.

HAMLET

What's wrong? Why is she being like this?

OLD HAMLET

Why?!? Why do you even need to ask?!?

HAMLET

What?

Charlotte's hysteria subsides and she crumples. Hamlet observes her, uncertain how to respond.

OLD HAMLET

You saw her. Her last days. You know what happened... how she died... I've never seen a more tragic and untimely death!

HAMLET

Father!

OLD HAMLET

What?

HAMLET

It wasn't exactly a bed of roses for me!

OLD HAMLET

But you died for a cause. You had intention -

HAMLET

Because of you -

OLD HAMLET

But she quite literally died of a broken heart... her heart broke for you.

HAMLET

What? So this is my fault?

OLD HAMLET

It was her love for you -

HAMLET

And that's down to you. Again!

OLD HAMLET

Is all the death upon the earth to be because of me?!?

HAMLET

You say her heart broke for me?

OLD HAMLET

Aye.

HAMLET

It broke because I feigned madness myself.

OLD HAMLET

See.

HAMLET

I feigned madness to play out your game! To catch out Claudius. It's all part of the big plan! To reap your revenge!

OLD HAMLET

But she shouldn't've been part of it. It was never my intention for her to be involved.

Hamlet crosses over to Ophelia to try and comfort her but she snaps at him forcing him to recoil. He looks on helplessly.

HAMLET

I loved her.

OLD HAMLET

Hamlet... there's something -

HAMLET

What?

OLD HAMLET

No it's alright.

HAMLET

What??

OLD HAMLET

I'm not sure I should say.

HAMLET

What???

Old Hamlet deliberates whether he should continue.

Just say it!!	HAMLET
Ophelia... (beat)	OLD HAMLET
Spit it out!	HAMLET
She wasn't wholly innocent.	OLD HAMLET
What? What does that mean?	HAMLET
She played a part...	OLD HAMLET
You're not making sense. What are you talking about?	HAMLET
Claudius. His plan to... to have you killed. Ophelia was involved.	OLD HAMLET
No.	HAMLET
I'm sorry.	OLD HAMLET
I don't believe you.	HAMLET
Yes.	OLD HAMLET
But... but she loved me. And I loved her.	HAMLET
You saw it yourself.	OLD HAMLET
What? How? When?	HAMLET

OLD HAMLET

In her chambers - she was playing her part. She was just as much a part of it.

HAMLET

What?

OLD HAMLET

She was acting on the instructions of her father. He was scheming with Claudius. They used her to lure you into a confession... to measure your madness -

HAMLET

You're all barbaric. Self serving bastards -

OLD HAMLET

Enough! You will not speak to your father - and your King - in that way.

HAMLET

You have no authority over me. Not in this world - those rules don't matter here.

OLD HAMLET

I'm still -

HAMLET

No! (beat) You! Polonius! Claudius! You're all the same. You just use people. Even your own flesh and blood. Anyone. To... to get on. Get ahead, get revenge.

OLD HAMLET

No...

HAMLET

Look! Look at me! Look at her! *Look... at... her!* Broken because of what I did... what you made me do! Used by my father, pushed on by Claudius, dead because of you.

Ophelia screams out. Hamlet rushes over to try and console her.

HAMLET

Ophelia? Ophelia!

CHARLOTTE

The flowers! The flowers! Where have all the flowers gone?

HAMLET

Ophelia...

CHARLOTTE
Hamlet?

HAMLET
Yes... I'm here...

CHARLOTTE
My father. My father! Where has he gone?

Hamlet is overcome with remorse.

HAMLET
Ophelia! Don't you remember?

CHARLOTTE
Dead... dead! Murdered... the cause! *You* are the cause!

Ophelia breaks free and dashes about the stage aimlessly.

HAMLET
Ophelia!

CHARLOTTE
No. Away... get away! You! You are the murderer! It was you! You killed my father!
Stay away! Or I cannot say what I might do!

OLD HAMLET
There's no more harm you can do! Not here anyway!!

HAMLET
Father!

OLD HAMLET
I'm just stating a truth...

HAMLET
It doesn't help...

CHARLOTTE
Cursed! You are cursed!!

OLD HAMLET
That's a good word for it.

HAMLET

Father!

CHARLOTTE

Stay away. Stay away from me!

Charlotte spirals up into a heightened frenzy then collapses on the floor sobbing. Old Hamlet and Hamlet watch her not knowing quite what to say or do.

Hamlet looks at his father as if to say 'what do I do now?'. Old Hamlet shrugs as if to say 'I haven't got a clue'.

Charlotte stops sobbing and slowly draws herself up.

CHARLOTTE

'tis time to bathe. 'tis time to find the water, lay back, and free myself.

HAMLET

This is too much.

Charlotte sits on the floor, huddled up. Hamlet tentatively approaches her.

HAMLET

Ophelia? Please... listen. There is something I need you to understand.

CHARLOTTE

Rosemary and pansies -

HAMLET

Ophelia -

CHARLOTTE

Fennel and columbines -

HAMLET

Your father -

CHARLOTTE

Dead.

HAMLET

Yes. And yes, I played my part in it -

CHARLOTTE

Long purples and nettles -

HAMLET

But it wasn't me. I mean it wasn't my intention. My father... he was murdered. Murdered by my uncle. And he appeared to me. He fired me up to revenge his death. That's why I behaved as I did. I had to convince everyone I was mad! And for it to be believed, I even had to convince you... I hated it. I hate myself for it.

CHARLOTTE

Hamlet?

HAMLET

Yes... it's me.

CHARLOTTE

My love?

HAMLET

Yes!

CHARLOTTE

My father... he's gone... he's dead...

HAMLET

I know... I'm sorry. I thought it was my uncle. I thought he was hiding. In mothers chambers, but it was your father. I never intended for him to be -

CHARLOTTE

Dead.

HAMLET

Yes. Dead.

CHARLOTTE

Daisies and violets -

OLD HAMLET

Son -

HAMLET

No! Enough! Leave me alone!

Ophelia starts wailing again and thrashing at Hamlet.

CHARLOTTE

You! You killed him! It's you! It's your fault!

OLD HAMLET

Son, she's too far into her madness -

HAMLET

Because of you! It's all your fault!

OLD HAMLET

Not again!

HAMLET

Yes! Again! And again, and again and again, until you accept your part in all this...

Hamlet waits for a response from his father but it is not forthcoming.

HAMLET

How? Hmmm? How can a father abuse their child in such a way? Look at her. *Look... at... her!* You and her father are just the same! Isn't it a fathers responsibility to protect their children? To provide for them, and to enable them to be the best that they can be? But both of you... you used us. You used us to do your dirty work, and look what it's got you. All your children dead!

OLD HAMLET

You overstep the mark. What about honour and respect -

HAMLET

Honour?!? What use is honour when you're dead! You can only honour something that is worth honouring! And respect? That isn't a right. It has to be earned. And you've tried demanding it from me, only to use it against me to do your dirty work. Her father did the same. Now look at her.

OLD HAMLET

If not as your father, then as your king.

HAMLET

Oh! Yes. My king. Yeah. What a great king you were. Such adulation, such honour bestowed upon you, and yes... such respect. Your subjects adored you. And for my part, I did too. But now? Well, now your true character shines through. And I must make sure that you know one thing. As your son... I despise you.

Charlotte bursts into Ophelia's song.

Diana finds the whole thing too much. She stands up to leave.

The actors continue an improvised dialogue on stage trying to stay in character and continue with the play.

CHARLOTTE

How should I your true love know
From another one?

DIANA

Alright! Enough! Come on. We're off.

CHARLOTTE

By his cockle hat and staff,
And his sandal shoon.

NIGEL

Eh?!

CHARLOTTE

He is dead and gone, lady,
He is dead and gone;

DIANA

Come on. We're going.

CHARLOTTE

At his head a grass-green turf,
At his heels a stone.

NIGEL

Hold on...

CHARLOTTE

White his shroud as the mountain snow,
Larded with sweet flowers,

DIANA

No. I've had enough.

CHARLOTTE

Which bewept to the grave did not go
With true-love showers.

SANDRA

Excuse me!

DIANA

(To Nigel)

Come on then!

NIGEL

But -

DIANA

Shift!

SANDRA
Please!

DIANA
(to Sandra)
What?

SANDRA
I'm trying to watch the play!

DIANA
Don't waste your time.

SANDRA
That's my daughter up there.

DIANA
So?

SANDRA
Do you have to be so rude?

NIGEL
(to Sandra)
I'm sorry... she doesn't mean -

DIANA
Er! Excuse me! What are you doing??

NIGEL
I'm just -

DIANA
I can speak for myself thank you very much!

NIGEL
I was just trying to -

DIANA
Well don't.

The actors come out of character and look on in disbelief,
uncertain of what they should do.

SANDRA
Do you mind???

DIANA
Not at all!

SANDRA
So rude!

DIANA
Do you have a problem?

NIGEL
Diana!

H and Martin peak out from the wings to see what all the commotion is about, H horrified.

DIANA
What?

NIGEL
Come on... just sit down and watch the end of the show. You're ruining it for everybody else...

DIANA
No. I'm not going to waste my time. All this... this... self indulgence, naval gazing -

SANDRA
Right! That's enough!

Sandra makes her way through the audience to confront Diana, causing as much disruption as possible.

Sam enters from front of house to see what all the commotion is about.

SAM
Er! Excuse me! What's going on???

SANDRA
I'm giving her a piece of my mind... that's what.

DIANA
I beg your pardon?!?

NIGEL

(to Diane)

Love...

SANDRA

(to Diane)

You just wait there. I've got a bone to pick with you.

DIANA

Really?

SANDRA

Yes. Really!

NIGEL

Please, can we just -

Sam makes her way down to Diana to block Sandra from getting to her.

DIANA

Do you have something to say?

SAM

Please! Just wait a minute!

SANDRA

Oh yes... plenty!

SAM

(desparately)
Enough!

NIGEL

Maybe we *should* just go.

DIANA

No. Not yet.

NIGEL

But I thought you wanted to!

DIANA

That was before. I want to hear what this self absorbed -

SANDRA

You sanctimonious -

No! Enough! Please just -

SAM

Sandra and Diana start 'cat fighting' across Sam. Martin enters from the wings and takes centre stage. The actors look on incredulous.

ENOUGH!

MARTIN

Sandra and Diana stop abruptly.

Excuse me!

DIANA

Who are you??

SANDRA

Er... 'scuse me! You're not meant to be front of house.

SAM

MARTIN

I am Head of Faculty at Glusburn Institutional University, BA Honours in Performing Arts! And I am responsible for this production!

Oh! So you're to blame!

DIANA

SAM

(to Martin)

Can you go back stage please!

MARTIN

Excuse me! I have a doctorate in Performing Arts!

DIANA

You could be the worlds leading brain surgeon for all I care. It doesn't stop this being an assault on my senses!

SANDRA

How dare you!

DIANA

Quite easily actually.

SANDRA

My daughter's in this production.

DIANA

I know... you said!

Diana looks at Nigel with an expression of 'who let this idiot in?!?'.

MARTIN

(to Charlotte)

It's okay! You can stop now!

Charlotte flounces off stage and sits with her mum.

NIGEL

Love, come on, let's just go...

SAM

That might be best all round.

DIANA

Fine.

Diana starts to gather her things as H burst onto the stage.

H

No! You're not going anywhere!

SAM

Not you as well!

DIANA

Harriet?

H

Actually, I go by H now.

DIANA

What the -

NIGEL

Hello love.

Hi.

H

NIGEL

Sorry. I didn't expect it to -

H

No... not quite what I intended. Not what I planned.

DIANA

Er... hold on!

SAM

Er, what's going on here?

DIANA

You knew Harriet -

H

H -

DIANA

- *Harriet* was going to be here???

NIGEL

Well, yeah. It was a surprise.

DIANA

A surprise??? You... you ignorant -

H

Er, mum -

ALL

Mum??

HAMLET

That's your mum?!?

H

Don't 'ave a go at 'im. I asked him to get you here.

DIANA

(to Nigel)

What are you playing at???

NIGEL

Eh?

DIANA

I haven't seen her for years -

H

Three to be precise. Not that you'd be bothered.

DIANA

Now listen here lady. I don't hear from you for years, not a word, and you pull a stunt like this? You want to wash your dirty laundry in front of this lot? Unbelievable! Right. That's it. Yes. We *are* going. Nigel.

Nigel sheepishly starts to gather his coat, etc. He mouths 'sorry' to H.

H

No! No, no, no, no. You're not going anywhere yet. I haven't finished.

DIANA

I beg your pardon?

H

Do you think that's it?

DIANA

What are you talking about?

H

Do you think I'm going to let you just walk out of here? Don't you get it?

DIANA

What???

H

I got Nigel to bring you here so that I can show you what a cow you are!

Diana gasps.

NIGEL

Eh?

DIANA

Don't you talk to me like that young lady!

Realisation dawns on Martin that he has been used.

NIGEL

You used me??

H

All this... all this play is about you. Because of you.

MARTIN

Eh??

Diana and H continue to argue while Charlotte chastises her mother for her glee at the unfolding 'offstage' drama.

SANDRA

Oooh! This is better than the play!!

DIANA

Hold on... what do you mean by that?
Hmmm? All about me?? What? What do you mean?

CHARLOTTE

Mum! Shhhhh!

H

You! You and your... your... vindictive little plots and plans -

SANDRA

Sorry... it's just... well, I'm certainly getting my moneys worth!!!

DIANA

What are you talking about?

CHARLOTTE

Mum!!!

H

Dad!

SANDRA

You couldn't write this could you?!?

DIANA

Oh... that disgusting wea-

SAM

Excuse me... that's not helping.

H

There you go! That's exactly what I'm talking about!

Sam address the audience, Martin addresses H.

SAM

I'm so sorry about this.

MARTIN

H... I think we need to have a little -

H

No! No. I'm not going to let this drop! I've waited years for this. That woman... that woman there... my mother... she's so filled with hate and bitterness... and she used me.

DIANA

That's not fair -

H

Not fair? So you're saying all those times you used me, you blackmailed me -

DIANA

(to the audience)

I never blackmailed her!

H

You did! Emotionally, yes, you did. 'if you loved me...', and 'you can't see him if...' ... all those times... all those times you played me. Cancelling visits. Stopping me from seeing my cousins... and my grandma and grandad... out of spite.

DIANA

You're blowing things out of proportion.

H

Am I?

DIANA

You always did.

H

I know the tricks you played. I've been told. That time... that time dad booked for me to go on holiday with him -

Diana realises that she has been caught out.

DIANA

Ah!

H

A cruise... to celebrate the end of my GCSE's!

DIANA

It was about time he put his hand in his pocket.

H

A *cruise*!! You didn't tell me! I knew nothing about it!

DIANA

He did say it was going to be a surprise...

H

Then you told him I couldn't go! After he'd arranged it all. And paid for it all. You made some pathetic excuse and said I couldn't go. All because you couldn't bare him to spend any time with me. Couldn't bare him to have even a moment of happiness.

DIANA

He didn't deserve it.

H

Why not?!?

DIANA

He's a man!

NIGEL

Eh?!?

DIANA

He left. Like all men do. He left me. Not just me. He left you too.

H

No mum. He left you. He still wanted to be with me.

DIANA

No.

H

Yes! And why do you think he left? Hmmm?

DIANA

Because he was a selfish little prick.

NIGEL

Diana!

DIANA

He was! You never met him!

H

No, mum! He left because of you. You drove him away. And me. I couldn't bare to be in the same room as you. Just like him. Because all you ever did was treat us like something you'd walked in. Ordering us about! 'Do this', 'do that'... I didn't see it at the time, but yeah, I got there in the end. He left you 'cos you made him feel like a piece of shit!

NIGEL

Harriet!

H

H!!!

NIGEL

This is your mother!

H

Yeah, I know.

Martin tries to intervene so that they can get on with the performance.

MARTIN

H... erm, please can I have a word?

H

Not now.

NIGEL

I brought her here so that you two could, you know, start again.

H

No Nigel. You brought her here 'cos I wanted her to see this show.

NIGEL

Thanks for that! Now I feel like a right idiot.

H

She had to see my play. It's the only way I could get her to see how she destroyed my life - I lost my dad because of it.

DIANA

Well... it didn't work. So the jokes on you.

H

You're unbelievable! Do I have to spell it out for you? All this here is about you. This whole piece of theatre is based on you.

DIANA

You saying I should be flattered?

H

Oh no. Definitely not. Unless you think that parents using their children to carry out an act of revenge, no matter what the cost, is something to be proud of!!!

DIANA

Stop being so dramatic.

MARTIN

She's an actor... that's what she does...

H

Martin!

DIANA

So.

H

What?

DIANA

What do you want from me? Hmmm? You used Nigel and you got me here -

SANDRA

Oooh... is this a case of the pot calling the kettle black?

CHARLOTTE

SAM

Mum!

Madam!

SANDRA

I'm just saying.

Diana looks at Sandra as if to say 'drop dead', before turning her attention back to H.

Sandra ushers Nigel to move along a seat so that she can sit down and enjoy the unfolding confrontation.

DIANA

- you used Nigel to get me here for your little theatrical extravaganza. Now what?

H falters - she hadn't thought beyond the performance.

H

I... I don't know.

DIANA

Great!

Diana indignantly crosses over to the performance area and dismissively indicates to Charlotte to get out of her way. Charlotte stands close to her mother.

Martin tries to get his head around all that H has done.

MARTIN

Erm -

NIGEL

(almost desperate)

I feel like an idiot! I thought this was going to be a lovely surprise for your mother. So it was all for nothing??

H

No.

DIANA

Well what then?

H

I just... I just want you to...

DIANA

Spit it out.

H

I just want you to admit it. Admit that you used me.

H indicates Old Hamlet and Hamlet.

H

Just like he's done with him! I want you to see what you've done to me. To dad -

Diana 'tuts'.

H

- you just can't do it can you? I want you to see what you've done. Admit it. Admit that you drove us away... and say sorry.

DIANA

Woah! Now listen here young lady!

CHARLOTTE

Mother!

SANDRA

Ooooh... touched a nerve?

DIANA

I think I've heard enough.

SANDRA

I can't wait to tell your Auntie Deirdre about this!

SAM

Could we just... I mean, I'm just thinking about the people who've -

HAMLET

Can I just check something?

MARTIN

What?

HAMLET

So, if I understand this correctly... if I'm not mistaken... seeing what's going on here... we've all been used. Am I reading this right?

MARTIN

Erm... well...

HAMLET

I mean, it seems to me that this whole trip to Edinburgh is just one big exercise in self help for her.

MARTIN

I, er...

HAMLET

It would've been a lot less fuss if she'd just gone to a therapist.

OLD HAMLET

I don't believe this.

MARTIN

I'm sorry.

OLD HAMLET

I've played Darwen Library Theatre don't you know. I don't expect this kind of behaviour. You won't hear the last of this. I'm going to get onto my agent... and Equity. I'm sure they will have something to say about this.

MARTIN

Oh, give it a rest! You're being paid aren't you?? Stop overreacting.

Incensed at being spoken to like this, Old Hamlet inwardly seethes.

CHARLOTTE

Overreact? Overreact! This is a big deal for me! It's my first paid gig! It's supposed to be a showcase for me - I've got people coming - agents...

This sparks an interest in Hamlet.

HAMLET

Really? Ooooooh!

Sam tries to take control of the situation to get the performance back up and running.

SAM

Erm... do you think -

CHARLOTTE

And my mum... my mum's travelled all the way up from Accrington for this... this... shambles!

DIANA

I should've guessed it would be somewhere like that!

SANDRA

Oooh, don't mind me petal... it's been great... I mean all that Hamlet stuff... well, I never really got it. But this... this has been brilliant.

CHARLOTTE

Mum!!

Charlotte makes her way onto the stage and confronts H, and as she speaks, she starts to become a little unhinged, mirroring her actions as Ophelia.

CHARLOTTE

And you. I can't believe this. I can't believe how selfish you've been. Do you realise? Hmmm? Do you realise how selfish you've been? Did you give any of us a second thought when you were planning all this? Did you for one moment think about us? All the work you made us do for this production? All that 'method acting' you made us do in rehearsals - watching all those... those insane bloody stupid YouTube videos! It's a bloody miracle I haven't gone bloody insane myself! Three years at Drama School for... for this? This is not what I signed up for. (beat) What? You got nothing to say? You don't even care do you? You're unbelievable! Selfish! Selfish, selfish, selfish! Making us come all the way to Edinburgh for... for... this! This has been a shambles! Well, do you know what? I'm done. Yeah. I'm done. Screw the lot of you.

Overcome with emotion, Charlotte dramatically runs off out of the exit causing everyone to stop and watch. All eyes turn to Sandra. Martin buries his head in his hands.

SANDRA

I, er, I suppose I'd better go after her... she, er, she seems a bit upset. I'll just go.

Sandra exits in pursuit of Charlotte. Sam looks on in despair.

SAM

Right. I might as well go as well. This is such a total wasted opportunity. Why couldn't you've given me this opportunity? You always do this. My play was so much better.

H

No it wasn't!

SAM

You did this. You do this all the time. Your threatened aren't you. You're threatened by me - it's something to do with me being a mature student...

MARTIN

That's rubbish.

SAM

I gave up my career in the bank to come here and to learn how to act, and how to put on a play.

MARTIN

And you've done really well -

SAM

No, you've always put her first -

MARTIN

No, that's a load of rubbish.

SAM

First year it happened, now it's happened second year, it'll happen again next year. Well d'you know what? I've had enough. I'm just going to leave, and when I get back to Glusburn, I'm going to put in a complaint to the Dean about you. It's always been favouritism. Always, always, always.

Sam makes her way to the exit as the other cast members look on incredulously. As Sam reaches the exit she turns back in a flourish.

SAM

Ooooh! No! D'you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to write a play and I'm going to write about this! It's going to have all of you in it, it's going to become an amazing worldwide best seller, and I tell you what, not any of you come knocking on my door 'cos I don't want to *ever* see any of you again.

MARTIN

No, no, no...

Sam dramatically strides out of the theatre, leaving Martin looking nonplussed.

A lengthy awkward pause.

OLD HAMLET

(to Hamlet)

Pub?

HAMLET

Can we just wait and - no. Maybe not. Pub sounds good.

OLD HAMLET

Pint?

HAMLET

Yes please. Ooooh! I might treat myself to some Pork Scratchings!

Hamlet and Old Hamlet sidle off into the wings.

Once they have exited, Diana picks up the conversation.

DIANA

See what you've done? Hmm? All this... 'cos of you...

H starts to seethe with rage.

DIANA

All those people... upset... 'cos of you. 'cos of what you've done.

H

Well I had a good teacher didn't I!!!!

DIANA

Don't lay this on me lady!

H

Of course it's on you!! This whole thing only happened because of you!!!

DIANA

Well, you sit and stew in your own misery 'cos I'm going. Come on Nigel.

Diana gathers her belongings.

H

You still don't get it!

DIANA

There's nothing to get -

H

You. You cause misery in anyone who comes into contact with you... how Nigel has lasted so long I'll never understand...

DIANA

I'm sure it's only a matter of time.

Nigel stands astounded, not sure how to respond to Diana's presumption. H looks on incredulous.

Old Hamlet decides he has had enough of the farce that is playing out before him.

H

You're unbelievable!

Really?
 DIANA

He's standing right there!
 H

How can you not get it?
 DIANA

What?!?
 H

They're all the same!
 DIANA

H looks on confused. Nigel slumps in his seat totally crushed by the revelations that unfold.

Your dad. Your Grandad.
 DIANA

You're not making sense!
 H

DIANA
 Oh, Harriet! You're a bright girl, but sometimes I despair. Okay. Let this be a lesson in life for you. If you take one thing away from the fact that I'm your mother, let it be this. Do NOT under any circumstances allow yourself the weakness of being vulnerable to a man.

H
 Where's all this coming from?!?

DIANA
 What? You set up this whole... facade! To have a go at me, and I'm not allowed to plead my cause? Hmmm? Well, let me put you straight on a few things... you've never met my father, your grandad, have you? Well?

H
 No...

DIANA
 That's because he abandoned me. And your grandmother. He abandoned us both. Left us. When I was ten. I came home from school and he was gone. Not a word. Not even a goodbye. Never had a clue. He just packed his bags and left.

H

Oh...

DIANA

Yeah. And then your dad, my husband... he did *exactly* the same. Just packed his bags and went.

H

But that was because you made his life hell!

DIANA

He was no angel. Believe me.

H

But -

DIANA

No. I know you think he's some hard done by hero, but believe me... he was just as much to blame.

H

No!

DIANA

Don't be so naive. It's not 'The Little House on the Prairie'! And do you know what? When he left, he did his damn best to get out of any responsibility. I had to fight every step of the way to get him to pay any maintenance.

H

You never said.

Diana shows a moment of vulnerability.

DIANA

Of course I didn't. He's your father.

H

But you made my life hell.

DIANA

Well... if it makes you feel any happier... if it gives you some 'closure', I never intended that to happen.

H feels her anger start to subside, until Diana speaks again!

DIANA

But I didn't know how to be any different. And then you... you go all high and mighty, you end up just like your father, and you abandon me too. So if I'm bitter, if I'm angry, it's all on you, and him. The pair of you. And I'm better off without.

H

What?

DIANA

You heard.

H

Fine.

A standoff silence hangs between them.

DIANA

Well, I guess there's nothing more to be said then.

H dismisses her mother with the flick of her head. Diana stands her ground for a moment, then turns to leave. As she nears the exit she turns back.

DIANA

Nigel.

Nigel considers what best to do. He catches H's eye who looks at him as if to say 'surely you're not going with her!'.
 H

DIANA

Nigel!!

He leaps out of his seat and meekly follows after her, as H watches them leave. Once they are gone her body slumps despondently.

MARTIN

H.

H bristles.

H

Martin! I'm so sorry... I know what you're going to say. I shouldn't've, and I -

MARTIN

Shhhh.

H looks on confused.

H

I... I...

MARTIN

Shhhhh. Look, what you've done is, well, completely and utterly unethical.

H

I know -

MARTIN

You shouldn't've used us, any of us, in this way.

H

Hmm.

MARTIN

But your mum has just walked out of here. And if you leaves things as they are, I don't expect you'll ever see her ever again.

H

But Martin... I... I... I don't know what to do. I've been so angry - she never said. All that stuff about my dad. She never said, and she was just so angry and... and horrible all the time. It was hell. I couldn't wait to leave. She made my life hell, but she never said. And dad - he was just saying how horrible she'd been, saying how she stopped him from seeing me, but she never said anything about what he was doing. Why didn't she say? And now... I don't know what to do... I mean, she's my mum. And he's my dad. Why did they do that? Why? That's why I did this... I had to do this. I had to show her, but I didn't know what he'd done. He never said, and she never said... and now my mum has walked out, and I don't know what to do... what can I do? She's walked out... what if I never see her again?

The emotion of the situation starts to overwhelm H.

MARTIN

She's your mother. You both need to make this right. *You need to talk to her.*

H tries to make sense of everything that has happened.

MARTIN

Go on. You need to go after her...

But...	H	
Go.	MARTIN	
		H hesitates for a moment, then girds her loins and heads towards the exit. She stops and turns back.
Oh... Martin?	H	
Yes.	MARTIN	
		H ponders for a moment.
No... never mind...	H	
		H heads to the exit.
	H	
Mum?	(calling)	
		H exits leaving Martin on his own. He considers the situation, straightens himself out and purposely moves to the centre of the stage. He takes a moment, then addresses the audience.
	MARTIN	
To be, or not to be. That is the question -		
		BLACKOUT.
THE END		