

THE TEN MINUTE HAMLET

by Sharon Talbot

A Comedy in Two Acts

In Loving Memory of James Scott Robinson

July 9, 1943 - April 24, 2011

Creator and Artistic Director of Out of the Box Theatre Company

Renaissance Man, Actor, Director, Friend

*“Now cracks a noble heart. Good-night, sweet prince; And flights of angels
sing thee to thy rest.”*

Horatio to Hamlet, The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

Act V, Scene ii

William Shakespeare

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January 19, 2016

Dear Reader,

Why in God's name, you might be asking yourself at this moment, would anyone write a fourteen-character play in this economy?

Ten years ago at a Theatre Guild luncheon, I sat beside a gentleman of 70, handsome and exquisitely dressed. As we spoke, I remarked that he must work a great deal given his looks and age. He lowered his head and whispered, "No. There's nothing out there for me. Nothing." And he began to weep. And so did I.

I vowed then and there to write a play with a large number of 60+ actors, for whom very little is written. And here it is.

"Hamlet" could be mounted at large regionals where budgets are large and non-Equity roles are permitted. It could be performed off-Broadway where salaries are smaller. It could be done in community theatres wherever standards of production, acting and direction measure up.

It could even go to Broadway with fourteen stars — like Charles III (17) and Noises Off (9 plus standbys) — with enough motivation and backing. And a few millionaires.

This play will tap into a population of hundreds, maybe thousands, of complex and brilliant male and female actors who languish throughout our country because of rampant ageism in every part and particle of our business. And many other businesses.

So, come on! Take a chance! Let's change things together!

And here's the "Hamlet" website with the cast of a very successful reading produced by Donna Trinkoff of AMAS.

<http://www.thetenminutehamlet.com>

Sharon Talbot

The Ten Minute Hamlet
by Sharon Talbot
A Comedy in Two Acts

A teenage parolee from Attica directs the residents of a retirement home in “Hamlet”, and changes the lives of everyone around him.

Place: Upstate New York, the Day Room of a fictional progressive retirement home, The Aurora Arms in the Village of East Aurora, New York. It is modeled after a college dorm.

Time: The present.

Style of the play: screwball comedy with substance; louder, faster, funnier, as in the 40’s Broadway comedies; lots of “ping pong”; full of charming, good-hearted, quirky characters. Most scenes have the pace of a Noel Coward play.

All characters are American. The Aurora Arms residents are non-actors able to rise to the demands of Shakespeare in order play the play within the play.

~~ CAST ~~

MIGUEL HERNANDEZ 17-20, Hispanic, perhaps short of stature, perhaps homely, street-smart, bright, angry, volatile, a former drug addict, soft under his smart-ass exterior; moves very well, fluent in Spanish and English, a distinct Hispanic street accent. Think young Lin-Manuel Miranda from “In the Heights”. Plays all the smaller characters in HAMLET.

CHARLA WOODS 40’s-50’s, director of the facility, a transgender woman, tall, beautiful, peaceful and comfortable in her own skin, perhaps the most centered person in the play, loves her charges, but takes guff from no one. She is a woman of presence, warmth and dignity. Can be played by a straight woman or a trans woman. Must NOT be “readable” as a Tranny. That fact is one of the surprises of the play. Think Brooke Shields. Plays PLAYER QUEEN.

ANNABELLE HUBBARD Early 20’s, Caucasian, midwestern, the assistant director, educated, sweet, a do-gooder, fresh out of social work grad school and new at her job. Polite to a fault but very much her own person. Designs costumes for HAMLET.

KING 50’s, the enormous dayroom attendant, a one-person security force, scary, child-like, not the brightest bulb in the chandelier. Or is he? Think Vince Pruitt Taylor. Plays THE GHOST and FORTINBRAS.

LEWIS RESIDENTS

All are 60 or older, fit, intelligent, dignified, witty, blessed with a sense of humor. They are retired from numerous careers. None are ex-actors. They've been together a few years and are very comfortable with one another. Conversation flows easily.

IDA PAULINE DEAN Feisty, straightforward, plays ROSENCRANTZ/
GUILDENSTERN

MARY CHRISTINA JOHNSON Tall, leaderly, fearless, plays POLONIUS

AFTON MANLEY Ethereal, spiritual, plays OPHELIA

RACHEL OBERHOLTZER Direct, gentle, intellectual, plays
ROSENCRANTZ/GUILDENSTERN

MARCELLA WRIGHT Flirty, vivacious, plays GERTRUDE

HERBERT COBERN Elegant, dignified, plays CLAUDIUS

TRAVIS DECKER Intellectual, thoughtful, indecisive, plays
HAMLET

RALPH HOBERMAN Open minded, a progressive thinker, plays
HORATIO/POISONER

WILLIAM MCGARRITY Black, down-to-earth, warm, emotional, sings
beautifully, plays THE GRAVEDIGGER
PLAYER KING

MANNY TRAVANO Gregarious, outgoing, a talker, plays LAERTES

Running time: 1 1/2 hours with one intermission.

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ACT ONE

Act One. Scene One.

The Present. A morning in May.

Place: Upstate New York, the Day Room of The Aurora Arms.

Lights up. TV is on with no one watching, folks are in a frieze, as in a painting, playing cards, knitting, doing embroidery, reading, keeping busy. They're unkempt, in bathrobes and pajamas. They are still until CHARLA speaks.

CHARLA enters.

CHARLA

(al la Robin Williams in "Good Morning, Vietnam") Good morniiiiiiiiing, citizens!

The scene explodes with energy and speed. They do a familiar roll-calling routine, as in grade school.

IDA PAULINE

Ida Pauline!

MARY CHRISTINA

Mary Christina!

AFTON

Afton!

RACHEL

Rachel!

MARCELLA

Marcella!

HERBERT

Herbert!

RALPH

Ralph!

TRAVIS

Travis!

WILLIAM

William!

MANNY

Manny!

CHARLA

Good! And what is today? (pauses for effect) Our one-year-anniversary!!

(the group is stunned; a beat)

WILLIAM

I feel like I've been here for years!

AFTON

Light years!

MARY CHRISTINA

Forever!

CHARLA

No, just a year ago today, you moved in! So tonight, a party, and today, a visitor!

MARY CHRISTINA

Who?

CHARLA

You'll see! Got the you-know-what from the storage room!

MARY CHRISTINA

Thank you!

RACHEL

What's the you-know-what from the storage room?

MARY CHRISTINA

Later.

CHARLA

(To HERBERT) Got the patches.

HERBERT

Thanks.

TRAVIS

(to CHARLA) Chess today?

CHARLA

Maybe.

WILLIAM

I'll play you, Travis.

TRAVIS

It's got to be her. Today's my birthday! I'm going to beat her pants off!

ALL

(surprised, ad lib, delighted) Oh! Happy Birthday! Congratulations! (etc.)

MANNY

(to TRAVIS nastily) Another year gone! Brain giving out?

TRAVIS

Up yours, asshole.

MANNY

I hope time passes quickly, so your short-term memories become long-term memories, and you can finally remember something.

CHARLA

(intervenes like a cheerleader) Okay! Whaddya say we actually get dressed today for our visitor? Then we'll start the activities!

HERBERT

I don't need activities. I need purpose.

MARCELLA

Yes!! When do we get Playstation 4?

WILLIAM

I want "NBA2K16" and "Batman"!

HERBERT

No, I mean a reason to get up in the morning. For what I'm paying to live here, I should get what the brochure promised.

CHARLA

Look, I talk to management every day. I tell them the schedule is ludicrous, but they're aging hippies --

MANNY

— with Alzheimer’s —

CHARLA

— trying to correct the mistakes of their youth —

AFTON

— like permanent body odor —

CHARLA

— by demanding regimentation.

RALPH

So, were stuck with their day-camp mentality?

CHARLA

For now.

HERBERT

A year. My God. I thought I’d be doing real work by now.

MANNY

I did, too! We was framed!!

HERBERT

That was my reason for coming here.

RALPH

(pulls out the brochure) Look, Charla, I saved the brochure. (reads) “Be one of ten vibrant seniors in a college setting, working as mentors and volunteers in a growing township. Live in the new, experimental, forward-looking Aurora Arms in the sylvan town of East Aurora, New York.

MARCELLA

Oh, yes, and look! Here’s a photo of a baby deer in the forest!

ALL, “Awwwww”.

RACHEL

I remember that! What happened?

CHARLA

(beat) I am working towards that. It takes time to set up volunteer positions.

MARY CHRISTINA

A year??

CHARLA

I have to work with the town as well as our board — red tape, bureaucracy —

MANNY

(to all) Awwright, awright, it'll get done, it's not Charla's fault, so leave her alone. So, who's the visitor?

CHARLA

You'll see. Let's roll, everybody. Put on real clothes today.

RACHEL

Real clothes for what?

CHARLA

You'll feel better.

MARCELLA

No, darling. You'll feel better.

RALPH

(to CHARLA) "Any fool can make a rule, and any fool will mind it." That is my stand, Sir Madam.

CHARLA

But who's the fool, Sir Boring? (CHARLA leaves.)

IDA PAULINE

(watches CHARLA go) Fudge head.

RACHEL

(to IDA) She's only trying to help us.

IDA PAULINE

Don't see you getting dolled up.

RACHEL

You're acting out!

IDA PAULINE and RACHEL stick out their tongues at each other with an "ehhhh" sound. Note: these two are Yale buddies, constantly razz each other in this way.

RALPH

Dear ladies, an infantile gesture unbecoming your dignified selves.

IDA PAULINE

That's not what you said last night, pookie. (everyone: "ooooo")

RALPH
(unflustered) Anyone for Gin?

HERBERT
And tonic?

RALPH
Oh, please.

WILLIAM
Me.

WILLIAM joins RALPH for Gin Rummy.

IDA PAULINE
(to WILLIAM) Don't play him. He cheats.

RALPH
Do not!

IDA PAULINE
Do, too.

WILLIAM and RALPH play throughout the scene.

HERBERT
(to the group) Listen. First, I find it positively embarrassing to wave my arms around in green water up to my nipples. Second, something is amiss here. How long can it take to connect to the very town we live in? Charla said volunteer opportunities were everywhere.

MARCELLA
Well, Charla will come through for us, you'll see, and swimming is good for you. After all, you never go outside any more. You never walk.

RALPH
"An early-morning walk is a blessing for the whole day."

HERBERT
I'll walk to the Oak Bar in the Plaza. That's it.

RACHEL
You talk about drinking a lot, Herbert, not good.

IDA PAULINE

Oh, shut up.

RACHEL

(to IDA; tosses it off) Lux et Veritas.

IDA PAULINE

(to RACHEL; tosses it off) Boola Boola.

Tongues out, “Ehhhhh”.

MARCELLA

Well, I love swimming, but I hate that thing in the gym where you ride a bicycle with your arms. (demonstrates) I’m perfectly capable of riding a normal bike. In fact, when I was fifteen, my mother grounded me, so I pulled off my bra and rode all over Denver with my boobs flying! The Denver Post got a shot of my strawberry beauty mark!

RALPH

Women do develop certain marks of beauty with age.

IDA PAULINE

Yeah, whiskers and yellow teeth.

RACHEL

Herbert’s right. Something is wrong. I thought I’d be working with Partners in Rehab.

HERBERT

I was a chemist at Pfizer. I thought I’d be at Mercy Diagnostic.

RALPH

“The gods were bored; therefore they created human beings.”

IDA PAULINE

Shut up, dear.

MANNY

Oh, cut it out, guys. Guess what? Travis folded his Depends into a sailor hat.

TRAVIS

(with an evil smile) I made it for you.

MANNY

Oh, goody, you found a dry one!

RACHEL

(breaks in) Manny! Need to talk?

AFTON

You're getting snarky earlier than usual.

MARY CHRISTINA

We've all lost somebody --

MANNY

-- yeah, yeah, yeah --

MARY CHRISTINA

— you said she was very pretty and bright —

MANNY

-- Jesus, lay off!!!

AFTON

(yelling) We can't!!

All stop talking; AFTON has never raised her voice.

AFTON

We can't, dear! You wear us out with your sniping! She's gone three years, now. You gotta get over Helen!

MANNY

-- oh, I didn't realize -- sorry --

IDA PAULINE

-- your stewardship was impeccable --

MARY CHRISTINA

-- Ida's right. You did a lot better than I did with my mom —

WILLIAM, still playing Gin, breaks in loudly to stop the grousing.

WILLIAM

The Dow is up! Thank God!!

All stop talking.

RALPH

Less talking, more playing.

WILLIAM

Gin!

RALPH

(astonished) How'd you do that?

WILLIAM

Genius.

They start a new game.

HERBERT

Is anyone listening to me?

MARCELLA

Darling, let it go. There's nothing to be done until Charla figures it out — in the near future, I'm sure.

TRAVIS

The future! This IS my future! I'd be flush by now if I hadn't bought land up here!

MANNY

No one put a gun to your head!

TRAVIS

Mr. Real Estate didn't tell me about the highway!

MANNY

Yes I did!

TRAVIS

No you didn't!!

MANNY/TRAVIS

(escalating) Yes you did! No I didn't! you certainly did! nuh uh!

WILLIAM

Stop! (they stop; to MANNY) I'm sure you told him but perhaps it wasn't clear.
(to TRAVIS) Real estate's a bitch, it crashes, bounces way up, and tanks.

IDA PAULINE

Your velcome!

RALPH

(to TRAVIS and MANNY, still playing Gin) I retired from a Byzantine public school system, and I'm living happily after. Shut up.

AFTON

(jumping in gaily) Who wants to hear an organ concert with a reception afterwards?

HERBERT

(light bulb) They'll have booze!

MARCELLA

(to HERBERT) If you go, I'll go. I love organ music. My mother was the organist at University Park Methodist church in Denver. So down to earth, so simple —

WILLIAM

(still playing Gin) -- simple? I thought I'd go nuts. They went door to door in Brooklyn spreading the good news and asking for money for soup kitchens. My mom didn't have money for our kitchen, much less soup kitchens. She was trying to keep us out of soup kitchens.

TRAVIS

How much is the concert? I'm not sure if --

AFTON

-- 20 bucks or suggested donation --

TRAVIS

-- oh. I'll go, maybe -- but then again, I have things to do -- but I should get out --

AFTON

-- yes, you should. We could sit together. (TRAVIS lights up)

MANNY

I'll sit with you!

TRAVIS

I was about to say the same thing!

MANNY

Horning in like always!

RALPH

(roaring at MANNY and TRAVIS) Shut up or I'll kill you myself!

MARY CHRISTINA

News flash! I'm restarting my sewing business right over there in my room. I'm gonna make some dough!

WILLIAM

Get them to buy you a sewing machine.

MARY CHRISTINA

Ah! That's the you-know-what Charla found me in the storage room. Don't tell management! A Singer. Has a manual treadle, I love it! My daughter'll work with me.

RACHEL

Lucky you -- Barbara wants nothing to do with me since she married that tree surgeon.

AFTON

You know, there is something wrong here.

MARY CHRISTINA

Yeah. These aren't the golden years, they're the rust years.

HERBERT

We're at each other's throats because we have nothing to do.

RALPH

"Do not go where the path may lead, go instead --

IDA PAULINE

Darling, please!

RALPH

"-- go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." Gin.

WILLIAM

Damn! You do cheat!

RALPH

No. I'm good.

WILLIAM

(shuffling cards) Rematch! (they start again)

MARY CHRISTINA

You know, we did move in here with all our books and stuff, thinking it would be stimulating, like college. Thinking we'd have work up here related to our careers. I lost sight of that.

AFTON

Yeah. And what do we do? Underwater basket weaving. Boring! And how many times can I read "Pale Fire"? I've read it ten times. Nabokov always cracks me up. Not to mention I just_wrote my eighth book on beekeeping!

CHARLA re-enters. Sees they're still in pajamas.

CHARLA

Guys!! Please put on clothes today for our visitor.

RACHEL

Is there something you aren't telling us? I've felt that for a long time.

RALPH

Me, too. When you say you speak to the town, what does that mean? Who do you talk to?

CHARLA

The town board. Second Tuesday of every month at 7 p.m. I'm always there.

WILLIAM

And you bring up work for us?

CHARLA

Yes.

RALPH

So what's the problem?

CHARLA

No openings. This is a town of families and small businesses. They have good schools and health facilities. They take care of their own. So far I haven't found a good fit.

MARY CHRISTINA

What do you mean "good fit"? We're regular educated people with a lot to give for free. What's to fit into? And God knows we have a sense of humor!

AFTON

Yes! Where else could they find eight books on beekeeping!

WILLIAM

Wait a minute. Is it something about us? Is it because I'm Black?

CHARLA

Oh, no, no, no. It's just that they're — they're very proud people who don't ask for help —

WILLIAM

Baloney! They're not the Cherokee Nation!

HERBERT

It IS something about us, isn't it?

MARCELLA

They've seen us around town. We're not scary.

CHARLA

They know you're very fine people . . .

RACHEL

And . . .

CHARLA

— it's just that they feel you're too . . .

TRAVIS

Too what?

CHARLA

. . . too . . .

WILLIAM

What?

CHARLA

Old.

(beat)

MANNY

What?

CHARLA

Old. They feel you're too old. They think you'd fall down or pass out or get sick or have a heart attack. I even invited them here and they wouldn't come. (a long pause; they are in shock) I'm so sorry.

WILLIAM

When were you planning on telling us this?

CHARLA

Well . . . I guess . . . now. I'm so sorry. I wanted to tell you before, but they said they'd fire me if I did.

MARCELLA

But the brochure said —

CHARLA

The brochure made promises written by our kumbaya hippie board before they had bothered to check it out with the Aurora town board. When they found they'd been shot down, our kumbaya hippie board hoped they could divert and entertain you with stupid activities and rules and schedules and you'd forget about it. But you didn't. They didn't bargain on that. Neither did I. I blew it. I'm so sorry. I have to go. Please get dressed.

CHARLA leaves sadly. A long beat. All are devastated. Several weep.

MANNY

So here we sit. Useless. I coulda done that in my daughter's garage with the motor running.

WILLIAM

I brought Handel's *Messiah* to share with some church up here.

MARY CHRISTINA

They never gave us a chance.

TRAVIS

It's a Police State.

RALPH

I brought my book on teaching teachers. It won The Global Teacher Prize.

IDA PAULINE

I'm stronger and better now than ever I was when I was younger —

AFTON

They never even met us!

RACHEL

East Aurora to Seniors, "Drop dead."

MARCELLA

I feel like I've been hit by a truck.

HERBERT

(seething) I'll bet they're Millennials!

MANNY

(hollering to the skies) I'll bet they're Republicans!

(a silence, then)

MALE OFFSTAGE VOICE.

AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAagh!

All jump up, scream as one.

EVERYBODY IN TANDEM

AAAaaaaaaggh!

A metal bucket flies across the room and crashes on the other side.

MALE OFFSTAGE VOICE.

AAAaaaaaaggh!

EVERYBODY IN TANDEM

(again in tandem) AAAaaaaaaggh!

A wet mop flies across the stage. MIGUEL HERNANDEZ flies onstage, screaming at someone behind him in the wings.

MIGUEL

I ain't washin' floors, shithead!!!

MIGUEL screeches to a halt, stares at the assembled group, stunned like a deer in the headlights. The group stares back, frozen. Then IDA PAULINE and RACHEL look at each other.

IDA PAULINE and RACHEL

Cowabonga! (High Fives)

TRAVIS

(delighted, to AFTON) You got me a stripper for my birthday!

AFTON

What???

MIGUEL

(to the group) Whatchoo starin' at??

IDA PAULINE

You, fudge head.

MIGUEL takes them in for the first time, freezes, shocked.

MIGUEL

(horrified, hollering) Jeez! Old farts! Gray hair!

IDA PAULINE

So?

MIGUEL

They said old folks home I was thinking 35, 40 tops! Jeez!

HERBERT

(outraged) We are not old farts, we are seniors. We do not have gray hair, we have clear hair --

MIGUEL

-- fuck off, asshole --

THUMP! KING lands onstage. The residents jump back.

KING

Gotcha!

MIGUEL

(screaming at KING) I ain't moppin' no floors, I ain't scrubbin' no toilets!!

KING

You ain't livin' til dinner!

KING grabs MIGUEL by the back of his collar. MIGUEL spews epithets, threats, insults to the residents and KING. ANNABELLE runs in from the other side.

ANNABELLE

(hollering over MIGUEL's screaming) King! It's all right. Mr. Hernandez just got here!

TRAVIS

(terribly dismayed) He's not a stripper?

KING

(hollering over MIGUEL's screaming) His work order says "cleaning" and he ran away.

ANNABELLE

(hollering over MIGUEL's screaming) Yes, but we must first acquaint Mr. Hernandez with our facility. We must give him a chance to feel welcome. (explaining to everyone, proudly) I learned that at Indiana University. He'll be with us for two months and he needs to feel embraced. Remember how everyone embraced me when I started here last week? Well, Mr. Hernandez needs to feel embraced.

KING

((hollering over MIGUEL's screaming) His work order says cleaning!

ANNABELLE

(hollering over MIGUEL's screaming) Yes, but first, we must get to know him! (like a cop) PUT HIM DOWN! (KING does. MIGUEL shuts up.) STEP AWAY FROM THE VEHICLE! (KING does.)

ANNABELLE

(proudly to the group) They say that on "Blue Bloods".

MIGUEL jumps up on a table against the back wall. ANNABELLE, the eternal do-gooder, extends her hand.

ANNABELLE

(sweetly) Mr. Hernandez, welcome.

MIGUEL stands trapped on the table between ANNABELLE and KING -- wild-eyed, buffaloed, panicked -- surrounded by individuals dressed like insane persons.

ANNABELLE

(sweetly, re-extends her hand with insistence) Welcome.

KING

(sweetly, holding out work order) Cleaning.

A silence; stalemate; no one moves. RALPH takes over.

RALPH

What we have here is a failure to communicate. Mr. Hernandez, it is apparent you have entered our premises perhaps against your will. Would that be true?

MIGUEL

(terrified, cautious) Yeah --

RALPH

You are saying, then, you're a man of disambiguation?

MIGUEL

(outraged) Hell no! I like girls!

WILLIAM

He means are you on parole from some jail?

MIGUEL

Not parole, goddam community service --

RALPH

You mean you come to work here in the daytime, and at night you go home to . . .

MIGUEL

Attica.

A beat, then ALL (except RALPH) scream as one.

MIGUEL

(hollering above them) I didn't do it!

MARCELLA

That's what they all say!!

RALPH

(hollering) Quiet! (ALL get quiet.) He's just a kid! (to MIGUEL) Of course you didn't do it. Are you doing community service as part of your jail sentence?

MIGUEL

Yeah.

RALPH

So your objection to scrubbing floors is --

MIGUEL

-- when they said community service I thought I was gonna be doing, you know, like, wearin' a fluorescent yellow vest like a hi-lighter, and planting trees, stuff like that, not sloppin' around ugly old --

MARY CHRISTINA

What???? (one grand, blistering sweep of language) Mr. Hernandez, I am Mary Christina Johnson and though I may no longer be 24, I do not feel "ugly old", but quite young and pretty, thank you so much, regardless of how you see me. None of us here sees ourselves as "ugly" or "old". So why don't you button it up since it appears we are stuck with your rude, crass, foul-mouthed, asshole presence. We do not care who you are. We do not care what you have done or not done. Do not take advantage of our good will. Be a dear and get a grip! Now (extends her hand), welcome to our residence, and GET OFF THE FUCKING TABLE!

MIGUEL gets off the table fast, takes her hand.

MIGUEL

Yeah.

MARY CHRISTINA

Yes, ma'am.

MIGUEL

Yes, ma'am.

MARY CHRISTINA shepherds MIGUEL around the room, and he passes among them with as much politeness as he can muster in his present state of panic. The residents greet him with graciousness or reluctance as befits their present state of discomfort.

MARY CHRISTINA

Now, if you can all get over yourselves, this is Mr. Hernandez, come to join us. And this is Ida Pauline Dean --

IDA PAULINE

Delighted --

MARCELLA

Marcella Wright. Hello --

HERBERT

Mr. Coburn to you --

TRAVIS

Travis Decker, teacher -- sorry about the stripper thing --

WILLIAM

William McGarrity, I worked the docks --

AFTON

Afton Manley, sorry I screamed at you --

RALPH

Ralph Hoberman --

RACHEL

Ms. Rachel Oberholtzer --

MANNY

Manny Travano, watch your step, kid.

MARY CHRISTINA hands him off to ANNABELLE.

ANNABELLE

And we've already met, Annabelle Hubbard -- and this is King.

KING

(sweetly) Charmed. (MIGUEL cringes, does not take his hand)

ANNABELLE

And now that you've met all of us, I wondered if you'd join us for lunch?

MIGUEL

Lunch???

ANNABELLE

Great! And would you mind, terribly, cleaning up that water? (like a mommy) And make it nice and dry. King did this whole floor himself this morning.

MIGUEL

Uh, yeah, okay -- ma'm --

ANNABELLE

Why, thank you.

CHARLA enters. MIGUEL stares if she were from Mars.

CHARLA

Ah! I see everyone has met Mr. Hernandez. Great! Okay everybody. Swimtime! I don't want to lose my job!

They shuffle out; HERBERT and MARCELLA hang back with CHARLA.

HERBERT

(loud whisper) Charla, I object to the presence of a killer.

MARCELLA

(loud whisper) He'll murder us in our beds!

CHARLA

Oh, stop! He's a kid.

HERBERT

(MARCELLA and HERBERT leave, grumbling) Torture, humiliation, abuse, degradation, (etc., etc. until offstage)

ANNABELLE

I told you.

CHARLA

I thought they'd be okay about this.

ANNABELLE

You sprung it on them. They've never been around jail — persons.

KING

Yeah! What did you expect?

CHARLA

(to MIGUEL) Miguel, these folks aren't used to --

MIGUEL

-- cons --

CHARLA

-- yeah. Give them time.

They start out. As he leaves, KING indicates with two fingers "I'm watching you" and leaves. MIGUEL stands alone, trying to make sense of what has just happened to him, and makes a decision. He retrieves the bucket and mop and starts, with great care, to mop up the water left on the floor, cursing.

MIGUEL

De todos los lugares a los que podría haberme objeto de dumping que tenía que ser esta mierda con espeluznante tipos viejos? Limpieza de baños y vaciar el recipiente en el suelo? (*Translation: Of all the places you could have dumped me it had to be this shithole with creepy old dudes? Cleaning toilets and slopping up the floor?*) (to the sky, threateningly) Dios mio! I won't forget this, man!!

BLACKOUT.

Act One, Scene Two.

A few days later. Afternoon. KING slouches on the sofa reading *Penthouse*. CHARLA enters.

CHARLA

Christmas shopping? (KING looks up.) How's Miguel working out?

KING

(looking at magazine) Got nothing for him to do. Cleaning staff does everything. Gonna be a problem.

MIGUEL enters, surly, angry, sweeping non-existent dust.

KING

Oh look! Godzilla! (KING hurls a dust rag at MIGUEL, who catches it in his left hand. KING leaves.)

CHARLA

So, Miguel, how's it going?

MIGUEL

(without looking up, sweeping) Great.

CHARLA

We keeping you busy?

MIGUEL

Yeah.

CHARLA

Any complaints?

MIGUEL

Food sucks.

CHARLA

True. Carry on! Stay busy. Time will fly. (starts to leave)

MIGUEL

(stops her) Ma'am? Since I been here, I mean, I don't mean no disrespect or nothing, um, okay! Why're you in drag?

CHARLA

(startled) Why do you think I'm in drag?

MIGUEL

I don't know ---

CHARLA

-- would it bother you if I were in drag?

MIGUEL

-- uuumm --

CHARLA

-- I'm a transgender woman.

MIGUEL

(a long beat) -- a what?

CHARLA

A man who chooses to become a woman physically. I had sex reassignment surgery.

MIGUEL

(stunned) What's that?

CHARLA

An operation to change male sex organs into female sex organs.

MIGUEL

You mean you cut off your —

CHARLA

— yes! In a way. I never felt I was a guy, even when I was younger. I always felt like a girl here (points to head) and here (points to heart) regardless of what was here (points to crotch). So after a lot of counseling and hormones, I had the surgery.

MIGUEL

(beat; it hits MIGUEL; he has a visceral reaction, then) You did it because you like guys?

CHARLA

No, I wanted to match my body up with my thoughts and my feelings and my heart. In my soul I knew I was a woman.

MIGUEL

You have a boyfriend?

CHARLA

Yeah.

MIGUEL

Ugh! (beat) Sorry. They know about you here?

CHARLA

Of course. They don't care. They hired me because I'm really good, and I have an MSW from Columbia.

MIGUEL

(astonished) Wow. How'd you get it through customs?

CHARLA

(beat) My degree from Columbia University.

MIGUEL

Oh. I thought you had a hot car from South America.

CHARLA

(pause. Note; "read" is past tense) You read me. That's amazing. No one's ever read me. You're very intuitive. (a beat) Well, word has it you don't have much to keep you busy. You got two months of service here. What do you want to do?

MIGUEL

Leave.

CHARLA

Heh, heh. How about hanging with the folks?

MIGUEL

They smell like plastic.

CHARLA

They're very nice.

MIGUEL

They rich?

CHARLA

I don't know.

MIGUEL

I ain't changing' no bed pans.

CHARLA

Play cards with them, sit and talk to them --

MIGUEL

Fuck! No way -- I'd rather clean toilets!

CHARLA

You don't leave here 'til I say so!!

MIGUEL

Oh. Guess that makes you "da man", don't it?

CHARLA

No, it makes me "da woman". So, what's it going to be?

MIGUEL

Like I have a choice. (uneasy) Lissen. How could you cut your own body?

CHARLA

(beat) You're a lefty, aren't you? And someone forced you to use your right hand.

MIGUEL

How'd you know that?

CHARLA

A hunch. In school, right?

MIGUEL

(surprised to be understood) Yeah, the nuns slapped my left hand with a ruler. It really hurt.

CHARLA

Did you have the choice of being left- or right-handed?

MIGUEL

No.

CHARLA

Exactly. You were born that way. Same here. It's good to be able to be yourself.

MIGUEL

Yeah, you're right. (a beat, sadly) I ain't MY self, that's for sure. (beat) What you said before, doing something with the old — the . . . residents? What if . . . what if we did . . . (mouths his words silently) a play.

CHARLA

A what?

MIGUEL

(just barely audible) A play.

(loudly) A play?

CHARLA

Yeah.

MIGUEL

With them in it?

CHARLA

Yeah.

MIGUEL

How do you know about plays?

CHARLA

My mom. She loved shows.

MIGUEL

How would you know what to do?

CHARLA

(beat) When I was a kid in the projects, I was gonna be maybe a director like that guy Robert Redford and like that famous old guy, the British dude . . . um . . . Larry Oliver. My mom and I watched all these old movies and they were dressed up all the time and they called each other *darling*. *Darling* this and *darling* that. Beautiful. She signed me up for classes at the Center. I was in a play. I know what to do!

MIGUEL

You want to stage a play with these folks in it?

CHARLA

Yeah, direct it.

MIGUEL

They're not actors, you know. The actors home is in New Jersey. You should have gone there.

CHARLA

There's a home for old actor dudes? Jeez! Well, they stuck me here.

MIGUEL

Kismet.

CHARLA

MIGUEL

No. I don't know you that well.

CHARLA

(lost in thought). Why not. (thinking it through, piece by piece, then gaining as ideas come and becoming more excited) This could be the very thing to bring positive attention to ourselves. We could do it right here (indicates Day Room). We'll invite the families and friends, the staff and yeah, the board members and the Aurora Town Counsel. It would give us credibility. Maybe something really easy, something with a lot of people in it -- something funny and light, say like, those plays they do in that dinner theater up here, (MIGUEL starts bouncing around, raises his hand like an excited third grader) Move Over Mrs. Markham", "Come Live With Me" -- breezy, full of laughs -- easy to understand --

MIGUEL

-- yeah, yeah, I know one -- I know one -- I know one with all that stuff --

CHARLA

What?

MIGUEL

-- really, it's got laughs and sex and dudes fighting and sex!

CHARLA

What?

MIGUEL

"Hamlet"!

BLACKOUT

Act One, Scene Three. An afternoon three weeks later.

Lights up.

Everyone is rehearsing or helping with the production. They are all lively and dressed well. All involved enjoy and respect what they're doing and take it very seriously. CHARLA and ANNABELLE work on the set. The residents and KING hold HAMLET scripts, rehearsing lines and doing voice, body and acting warm-ups which MIGUEL has taught them. IDA PAULINE stands frozen in the middle of the room, arms reaching up to the heavens.

RACHEL

What are you doing?

IDA PAULINE

I'm a tree.

MIGUEL has overnight become the great loving-and-supportive-diva director.

AFTON

(to Miguel) But would Ophelia walk on that speech?

MIGUEL

Yes, *darling* and it will be beautiful if you float along here, see? (demonstrates) as you say to Polonius -- he's your father -- remember?

AFTON

Of course --

KING

(very upset, like a little boy) Excuse me, Miguel, I can't remember all the Ghost lines. I tried and tried but the words are screwy.

MIGUEL

(to AFTON) Excuse me, *darling*. (to KING) It's poetry.

KING

(begins to weep) I know. I've tried to work on my own. I'm bad at poetry unless I have a lot of time. (sobs like a child)

MIGUEL

(startled) Okay, okay. (kindly, thinking fast) Look, you're the ghost so -- instead of saying words, when Hamlet stops talking -- moan!

KING

Moan?

MIGUEL

Moan.

KING

But on the Internet I read I might be a demon come from Hell to hurt Hamlet.

MIGUEL

No, in this version you are the ghost of Hamlet's father. You can moan. You know? Like ooaahh, like you're in pain or really sad.

KING

(like a proud first-grader) Could I say "The quality of mercy is not strained, it droppeth like a gentle --"

MIGUEL

-- no! no! no! you can't say lines from another — wait -- if you can remember that speech, why not these?

KING

(sadly) I'm slow.

MIGUEL

Okay. (kindly, as if talking to a two-year old) Let's go with the moaning. Moan with the feeling of the line you would be saying. Let's hear it.

KING

Oooooooooaaaaaaahhhhhh.

MIGUEL

There! That's it! That's it! Fantastic! Brilliant! Keep that in. (KING brightens up, walks off, practicing moaning; MIGUEL turns back to AFTON) Um, so okay, darling, you float along here and say, "He hath, my lord --" and so on and so on.

AFTON

(floating, reading from script) "He hath, my lord, of late made many tenders --" What does that mean?

MIGUEL

It means he really digs you.

AFTON

Ooooh, that rascal. (conspiratorially) You know what? I don't think Ophelia's a virgin. She did it with Hamlet and they're keeping it quiet til they're married out, of respect for her father. (floats away, rehearsing her line).

CHARLA and ANNABELLE take MIGUEL aside.

CHARLA

Miguel! We've been rehearsing three weeks. We got four weeks left. Are we gonna make it?

ANNABELLE

Everyone's coming. It has to go well! It'll get us the arts program!

MIGUEL

You'll see, they'll pull together.

CHARLA

(urgently) How do you know? And why "Hamlet" in the first place? The play is five hours long! I didn't know the play was five hours long! And where is it funny? I don't see that it's funny!

ANNABELLE

(to CHARLA) But look how different they are after three weeks of rehearsal!

CHARLA

You know "Natalie Needs a Nightie"?

MIGUEL

No!!! (beat) My mama read to me from this huge red book that had every one of Shakespeare's plays. Then in 7th grade she gimme this other book that tells you what the plays mean. Hamlet is this really sensitive teenage dude with a high IQ who's having a nervous breakdown. And I knew exactly how he felt! People dissing you and beating you up. So I read the play and it's really thick, man, you know? And Hamlet's uncle kills Hamlet's old man, his own brother, and his mother shacks up with the uncle, except they're kings and queens so people have to deal with it. He's trapped, man. And I said, he's me! HE'S ME! I musta read that play ten times. I memorized all his speeches. When my mom died, I promised myself I would do it for her.

The residents, overhearing, have now gathered around MIGUEL with questions. They are interested, motivated, insistent, overwhelming.

HERBERT

Do you know the library has The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, the Cambridge Edition, with illustrations by Rockwell Kent?

MIGUEL

The big red book like my mom's! Hers got lost. Let's get it --

HERBERT

-- already checked it out and it's in my room. It's really heavy. We've also gone on the Internet. There are discussions about every character!

MIGUEL

Good, sure, you should start exploring --

TRAVIS

-- Miguel, King just told me he's going to moan his lines instead of speaking them. How will I know when he's through? I don't want to step on his moans.

MIGUEL

He's going to moan with the feelings that his line would have had if he could remember it.

TRAVIS

Okay. Now, listen, what if I just do the first half -- no the first quarter -- um well maybe, I don't know, anyway, just a few lines of the too, too solid flesh speech. I have many other monologues to memorize.

MIGUEL

You can't cut Shakespeare's lines! It's against God.

RALPH

Against God? Are you crazy! God doesn't give a damn about Shakespeare! But I do! I want to do a good job! And now we're in a mess here. I was so excited about doing Horatio -- you know I wanted to be an actor when I was a kid but, no, my parents made me go into teaching like them. Now I'm done with that and I want my heart's desire. And we're going to look like amateurs!

MIGUEL

No, no, no, you won't. Horatio, you are Hamlet's best friend, his homey. You are a noble character, the only one he trusts.

RALPH

Really? (touched) The only one he trusts. Do you know that in Latin, "Horatio" recalls the Latin term "orator"?

MIGUEL

Yes! That's you! And (to TRAVIS) Hamlet, this is the only guy you trust in the whole world, and as you die, you ask him to tell the the world your tragic story, and he does!

TRAVIS

Ooooh. Okay. So why can't I kill my vicious uncle?

MIGUEL

(spells it out) Get this, while you're sitting on your ass not killing Claudius, you're thinking, which tells us you're introspective, philosophical, and humane . . . you can't kill your uncle because (pauses for dramatic effect) you respect human life and don't really want to kill anyone!

TRAVIS

Yes!! (overjoyed) Of course! Of course! So then when I do it in the heat of battle — it's okay!

MIGUEL

(overjoyed) Yes!

TRAVIS and RALPH happily go off to rehearse.

MARCELLA

Honey, see, here in the script where Gertrude says "Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted colour off and let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark . . .", and so on, and so on. Could I just say, "Son, cheer up and be nice to your stepfather. Your dad's gone, so get over it." It's clearer.

MIGUEL

Darling, you can't change the words!

MARCELLA

-- no, no see, I would put in Shakespeare's words here and there, to give it a flavor --

RACHEL

-- yes, that's what I want to do, too. See here, where I say, "Good, my lord, vouchsafe me a word with you," Guildenstern is saying, "Hamlet, let's talk" --

WILLIAM

-- could I be Rosencrantz? Why do I have to be a gravedigger --

RACHEL

— I was talking! (To MIGUEL) Guildenstern is saying, "Hamlet let's talk." Can I say that?

WILLIAM

-- no, wait! Wait!! A blue-collar dirty job worker? Did you choose me because I'm black???

MIGUEL

No! No of course not --

IDA PAULINE

(loudly) -- wait. Im Rosencrantz. I already wrote his backstory and a list of character traits!

MIGUEL

Yeah, she's Rosencrantz --

HERBERT

(interrupting) -- so, anyway, is Claudius a monster? Did his brother molest him?

MIGUEL

Wow! No! The deal with Claudius is he's a bad man, but a good king. He avoids war with Norway through diplomacy and keeps Fortinbras out of Denmark --

HERBERT

-- and keeps the land Hamlet's father won from Norway in a duel!

MIGUEL

Yeah! His thing is power and manipulation.

HERBERT

Ah! He does have good qualities! (walks away to practice)

MARCELLA

-- do you think Gertrude was sleeping with Claudius before he killed her husband? I do.

MIGUEL

-- yeah, makes it easier to see how she could fuck, sorry, jump in the sack so fast --

WILLIAM

-- can we run it? We haven't even timed this thing. What if it's too long? The audience will leave.

MANNY

I agree. We need to do run-through after run-through. That's what they do on Broadway.

MARIE CHRISTINA

Listen, I read that Lynn Fontanne — you know her? Every evening before the show, she went down in the basement of the theater and ran the whole play by herself! Just to warm up!

AFTON

I'm not ready for a run-thru! I haven't found my overall objective, and I certainly haven't found the spine of the play --

MANNY

-- the spine is: "to cleanse the court of Denmark." I read that in Wilson and Goldfarb, *Theater: The Lively Art*, 7th edition: Chapter 6.

MIGUEL

(with authority) NO. The spine of the play is "grab hold of life at every moment."

The room goes quiet for a beat.

AFTON

How do you know that?

MIGUEL

It said so in the book my mother gave me.

AFTON

"Grab hold of life at every moment." In the book your mother gave you. That's good enough for me. Right? (all agree) Let's run with it!

RACHEL

Great! Now -- would it be wrong to say that Shakespeare meant Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to represent the yin and yang of the human soul?

IDA PAULINE

Yes! They pretend to be Hamlet's friends, then plot with Claudius against him, for money.

RACHEL

I read on the Internet they are reminders of Hamlet's indecision. He hesitates to kill Claudius but easily sends his own friends to their death.

MANNY

Maybe they're just college dudes hard up for cash.

MIGUEL

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are sleaze-balls who rat on Hamlet for pay until Hamlet gets wise. But they're basically one character. (light bulb) In fact, why don't you two say all the lines together as a kind of symbolic thing!

RACHEL AND IDA PAULINE

Wow! Works for me!

They go off to rehearse together.

MARY CHRISTINA

You've done a wonderful job bringing us this play. I feel like a new woman.

Except I'm playing a man. Why do I have to play a man? I'm so embarrassed.

MIGUEL

We don't have enough men. Listen, in Shakespeare's day, all the characters were played by men. And if there were not enough men around (making this up on the spot), women played the men's roles! (pauses for effect). Do you have any idea how many women are dying to play Polonius?

MARY CHRISTINA

(knows he's bluffing) Oh, all right! Now, maybe I should lower my voice. Listen to this. "Neither a borrower nor a lender be."

MIGUEL

Bravo! Bravo! (to the skies) How does she do it?

MARY CHRISTINA

Raw talent! (walks away practicing the deep voice)

MANNY

So, what's the deal with Laertes and his little sister? He's concerned with her virginity then fights with her ex-boyfriend about who loved her the most while they're standing in a grave, for God's sake.

MIGUEL

Right.

MANNY

Sounds like incest! No way! Laertes would never touch his sister!

MIGUEL

Well, God, no --

MANNY

And this is pre-Freud. (laying it out for MIGUEL) Freud changed everything when he came along. The characters in plays AFTER Freud tried to discover the roots of their feelings. They knew they were feeling stuff. But back then, the character of Laertes wouldn't have been aware of what he was feeling.

MIGUEL

You got it. Play that.

KING

(declaims grandly to MIGUEL) Fortinbras and Hamlet both have a dead father to avenge. But Fortinbras acts, while Hamlet mopes around. Hamlet is jealous!! (walks away; all stare for a moment)

MIGUEL

(beat) Good. Now, William, Gravedigger, (laying it out for WILLIAM) your scene is the definitive final scene in Hamlet's terrible emotional journey. First, it gives the King and Laertes time to change their costumes from act 4 to act 5. Second, it allows the audience to see Hamlet is only pretending to be crazy. Third, it makes Hamlet face his own mortality and find peace. And last, it shows Hamlet that his dead friend, Yorick, is being dug up to make room for his dead love, Ophelia. This blows him away. The circle of life! In that moment, he sees everything clearly and goes off to kill the evil king Claudius!! (beat, WILLIAM is speechless) All because of you!

WILLIAM

(very happy) Wow!!

MIGUEL

And The Gravedigger has a song!

WILLIAM

(overjoyed) A song?

MIGUEL

See? I didn't cast you because you're Black, I cast you because you can sing.

WILLIAM

Oh! Well then, all right.

MIGUEL

Okay, let's do a run-through with the scripts. Walk around, own the space, people, own the space.

The group assembles ad lib, owning the space, scripts in hand.

MIGUEL

Now since we don't have enough actors for the small roles, I'll read all the other characters. And . . . go! (races through his lines at breakneck speed) "Scene I- Elsinore-platform-before-the castle-Francisco-at-this-post-enter-to-him-Bernardo-"Who's there?"-and so on, and so on. (slowly, with great feeling) "I think I hear them. Stand, ho! Who's there?" (no response) "Who's there?" (no response) Ralph!!

RALPH

What?

IDA PAULINE

Say your line!

RALPH

Oh, yeah. "Friends to this ground."

MIGUEL

"And liegemen to the Dane."

RALPH

Wait, wait. I didn't feel that. Let me try again.

MIGUEL

"Stand, ho! Who's there?"

RALPH

"Friends to this ground."

MIGUEL

"And liegemen to the Dane." and so on, and so on, (slowly, with great feeling) "Say, What, is Horatio there?"

RALPH

"A piece of him." Damn! No, that wasn't --

MIGUEL

(rushing on) "Welcome-Horatio-welcome-good-Marcellus", et cetera, et cetera, um "He may approve our eyes and speak to it."

RALPH

Tush, tush, 'twill not appear.

MIGUEL

"Sit down awhile," and so on, and so on, "What we have two nights seen."

RALPH

Let's see, let's see, here (tries to get in touch with feelings) "Well, sit we down, and let us hear Bernardo speak of this." Damn! I'm just not ready --

KING enters too early as THE GHOST, moaning.

KING

Oooooaaaaaaggghhh --

MIGUEL

(to KING) No, no, this is a silent entrance, see? (points to his script) You just appear and you stand here and then you leave.

KING

Oh.

KING walks to the center of the room, stands, mutters to himself under his breath simultaneously with MIGUEL.

MIGUEL

(racing through) Peace break he off;
look where it comes again! In the
same figure, like the thing that's dead
—

Thy are a scholar; speak to it, Horatio.
Looks it not like the king? mark it,
Horatio --

KING

(muttering slowly) "The quality of
mercy is not strained —"
-- it droppeth like a gentle rain from
heaven --"

MIGUEL

(suddenly hears KING; roars) What are you doing??

KING

You said have an inner life even if you don't have lines.

MIGUEL

Not out loud!!

AFTON

(bursting into tears) Ophelia drowns herself! I just realized that! It's all because that bastard pretends to love her then tells her to join a convent! Why didn't someone help her?

(This section starts slowly, then escalates until they're screaming at the top of their lungs and CHARLA stops them.)

RACHEL

(a realization) She's right! Hamlet defines Ophelia by her sexuality. Laertes turns her into an erotic object while insisting, at the same time, on Ophelia's chastity. What is she supposed to do?

RALPH

You're right! And where is her mother?

MARY CHRISTINA

And why doesn't Polonius have the brains to take care of his own daughter? I may be playing a man, but am I playing a stupid man?

HERBERT

Could we just get on with this. We're only on page two in the script. We'll be here all night! Besides I'm starving. It's dinnertime.

WILLIAM

Gripe gripe, gripe. If it isn't swimming it's your stomach --

HERBERT

My stomach? What about your bowels? You walk around pfft! pfft! pfft! all day long and we have to inhale --

WILLIAM

You think I don't see those cigarettes you hide then sneak out at night and light up under my window? Payback!!

IDA PAULINE

(to HERBERT) You said you quit!

HERBERT

(roars) I tried!

MARCELLA

(to IDA PAULINE) Don't pick on him! He's upset!

AFTON

(to MARCELLA) What about second-hand smoke coming through the vents?

HERBERT

(to WILLIAM) I'm sorry!

WILLIAM

Don't give me sorry when I have lung cancer!

RACHEL

Stop! You're all acting out!

MARY CHRISTINA

Were you this bossy in your practice?

RACHEL

Being in charge was my job!

MARY CHRISTINA

My daughter said you were a Nazi. That's why she went to the Karen Horney Institute!

RACHEL

If you were a better mother she wouldn't have needed therapy! You know what she called you? Mommy Dearest!!!

CHARLA, WHO HAS BEEN WORKING ON THE SET AND WATCHING WITH ANNABELLE, BREAKS IN HOLLERING.

CHARLA

Stop!! (**room goes dead**) Are you crazy? We have four weeks to pull this project together! Don't any of you realize our survival is at stake here? All sorts of things the town board is withholding because they think you're useless! You want purpose? This is it! Grow up! (storms out)

A silence.

MANNY

I wish I'd never gotten involved!

TRAVIS

You're a terrible actor!

MANNY

I'm a terrible actor? You sound like William Shatner!

KING

(roars) Stop!! (everybody freezes) Somebody needs a time out. Go to your chairs!!

They do. KING has never given them orders before.

KING

Sit down!!

They do.

KING

Quiet time!!

The chaos stops. MIGUEL moves downstage to a pool of light designating the front steps of the building, sits, head in hands. It's a lovely cool night. ANNABELLE appears, sits beside him.

ANNABELLE

(absolutely gleeful) Wow! I've never seen them this alive.

MIGUEL

When I read "Hamlet" I was so caught up in him I never saw how huge it is. What am I going to do?

ANNABELLE

You still have four weeks.

MIGUEL

They'll never get it.

ANNABELLE

That's not true, they're very bright. (ticks them off on her fingers) Afton's a published author, Ida Pauline taught English Lit at Yale, Herbert's a chemist, Travis taught math, Rachel's a psychologist, also from Yale, William ran the shipyards in Brooklyn --

MIGUEL

-- I don't care --

ANNABELLE

-- Mary Christina had her own business, Manny sold real estate very successfully, Ralph ran the New York City Public schools, Marcella was a copywriter and raised three kids by herself!

MIGUEL

They -- can't -- act!

ANNABELLE

Who cares? These people are captivated by Shakespeare! Isn't that amazing? Shakespeare scares people and they jumped right in! Without a second thought!! (long beat) What *are* you doing here, really? Attica's maximum security. What'd you do?

MIGUEL

Fuck off.

ANNABELLE

Ok, I'll go in and tell them you said fuck off --

MIGUEL

-- shit! I let everybody down. I always screw up --

ANNABELLE

-- (really doing a number) oh, poor me, poor me, I'm so bad, my life is terrible, boo hoo hoo --

MIGUEL

(explodes) Whaddyoo know about someone like me? You little white girl with a college degree from, where? Indiana? I don't even know where Indiana is. I grew up in the projects in the Bronx! Whaddyoo know about seeing your friends cut like it was fuckin' Afghanistan over a bag of heroin? Whaddyoo you know about needin' a

fix so bad you whack your own mother to get her purse? Because I did! I hit her, I grab her purse, I run out, I come back, there she is, brains on the carpet, dead! She cracked her head open on the radiator. And you diss me? You just lucky I ain't smackin you, bitch!

ANNABELLE

(long beat) Well. (beat) I'm going to make an iced tea. (starts to go in, turns around, vehemently) You started something here you damn well better finish!

MIGUEL

I don't know how!

ANNABELLE

(blows up) Make something up! Don't you hurt my people!

MIGUEL

(beat) Awright, awright, (etc.)

ANNABELLE

Okay, maybe they can't act but (light bulb) what can they do? Let's go with what they can do.

MIGUEL

Right, right. What can they do? (thinks, paces, etc.) What can they do, what can they do —

Then quickly, ticking off a list --

MIGUEL

-- they move around good --

ANNABELLE

-- they're educated --

MIGUEL

-- they're smart --

ANNABELLE

-- they remember short groups of lines --

MIGUEL

-- they speak clearly --

ANNABELLE

-- they make sense of what they're saying --