

DIRECTING HAMLET

a play in two acts

by

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CHARACTERS

CAITLYN (THE ACTOR) Nineteen, above average in appearance but not so much so that it becomes distracting, to others or herself. Could blend into a crowd if she had to.

THE DIRECTOR (LEE) A man anywhere from forty-five to sixty years. A seasoned veteran of the theatre.

SETTING

A rehearsal space. Preferably an actual stage. There is at least one chair involved. Otherwise the space can be barren or as cluttered as rehearsing on a stage set for another show, with all the props and furniture pushed to the walls to allow the Actor (CAITLYN) room in which to work. THE DIRECTOR (LEE) may be set up in the audience or on a corner of the stage. THE DIRECTOR may (or may not) have a table set up for his personal items and scripts. All is left up to the actual production's discretion.

TIME

The play takes place in the immediate present.

ACT I

A rehearsal space (Same Theatre as the actual production is taking place in.)

ACT II

Same location. Fifteen to twenty minutes (*intermission's length*) later.

NOTE:

The lines from Shakespeare's play Hamlet are presented in **BOLD** type when being performed by the ACTOR (CAITLYN).

"The rest is silence."

—*Hamlet to Horatio (Act 5, sc2)*

Hamlet

William Shakespeare

A NOTE ON THE NOTATIONS:

1. A slash (/) indicates the character with the next line of dialogue begins his or her speech (overlapping dialogue).
2. Dialogue in brackets ([]) is expressed nonverbally.

ACT I

(At rise:
CAITLYN, a young ACTOR of nineteen, sits
perched on the front of a folding chair, addressing a
group of actors who clearly aren't there. She takes
in a deep breath before she begins.)

CAITLYN

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you—

THE DIRECTOR

Talk.

CAITLYN

—trippingly on the tongue:—

THE DIRECTOR

Just say the words.

CAITLYN

—for if you mouth it,—

THE DIRECTOR

Just talk.

CAITLYN

Excuse me?

THE DIRECTOR

Keep going. [Just say the words]

CAITLYN

Trippingly on the tongue—

THE DIRECTOR

"Trippingly on the tongue."

CAITLYN

Trippingly-on-the-tongue—

THE DIRECTOR

"TRIPPINGLY ON THE TONGUE!"

CAITLYN

. . . Excuse me?

THE DIRECTOR

And drop the accent.

CAITLYN

[What accent]?

THE DIRECTOR

[Just say the words. Start again.]

CAITLYN

(Takes another deep breath.)

Speak the speech, I pray you—

THE DIRECTOR

"Speak the speech": just [say] the words

CAITLYN

Speak the speech, I pray you.

THE DIRECTOR

{Start] again.

(CAITLYN takes another deep breath.)

THE DIRECTOR

What are you doing?

CAITLYN

What?

THE DIRECTOR

With your . . . shoulders.

CAITLYN

I'm breathing.

THE DIRECTOR

Don't breathe. [Just do the damned] words.

(CAITLYN hesitates.)

THE DIRECTOR

Do you even know what you're saying [here]?

CAITLYN

It's in English, isn't it?

THE DIRECTOR

[No. No, I'm sorry: you're right. Too early. We've just started, haven't we?] So, what are you saying—why are you saying it?

CAITLYN

She's talking to a group of actors—

THE DIRECTOR

I.

CAITLYN

What?

THE DIRECTOR

I: first person. You're him/her—whoever: "*I'm* talking to a group of actors."

CAITLYN

I'm talking to a group of actors . . . telling them not to overact?

THE DIRECTOR

Yeah; I don't see it.

CAITLYN

They're not here.

THE DIRECTOR

Then who's here?

CAITLYN

Nobody.

THE DIRECTOR

Then talk to me.

CAITLYN

And I'm telling you what? Not to overact?

THE DIRECTOR

[Well, that's a little paradoxical, don't you think?]

CAITLYN

What?

THE DIRECTOR

Nothing; I'm playing. Lighten up.

CAITLYN

Hamlet's not a light character.

THE DIRECTOR

Every character has a light s—. . . No, you're right: Hamlet can be a brooder . . . [but] is this one of his brooding moments?

CAITLYN

No?

THE DIRECTOR

No?

CAITLYN

No.

THE DIRECTOR

No. Then what are you trying to do?

CAITLYN

I haven't even done the first line.

THE DIRECTOR

Honey, it's over in the first line. It's all in the first line. The rest of the speech is clarification.

CAITLYN

Why would he clarify?

THE DIRECTOR

You tell me.

CAITLYN

He likes to hear himself talk?

THE DIRECTOR

Maybe. Why else?

CAITLYN

They don't get it.

THE DIRECTOR

Maybe that too. Try it.

CAITLYN

Now?

THE DIRECTOR

Good as time as any.

(CAITLYN starts again with a deep breath.)

THE DIRECTOR

Don't breathe!

(CAITLYN stops. She takes this in not knowing what to do. She tries not to breathe through the following:)

CAITLYN

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue: but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the t—

THE DIRECTOR

"For if you mouth it as many of your players do."

CAITLYN

For if you mouth it—

THE DIRECTOR

(Mouthing:)

"For-if-you-mouth it."

CAITLYN

For-if-you-mouth-it-as-many—

THE DIRECTOR

"For-if-you-mouth it,—

(Drops the mouthing:)

"—as many of your players do."

CAITLYN

(Following along:)

—as many of your players do, I'd as lief the town-crier spoke my lines.

(A beat:)

What?

THE DIRECTOR

Nothing. Go on.

CAITLYN

Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it offends—

THE DIRECTOR

What the hell was that?

CAITLYN

“Offends”?

THE DIRECTOR

Your hand: what did you do with [your hand]?

CAITLYN

Nothing.

THE DIRECTOR

What's the line? Go back.

CAITLYN

"Nor do not saw the air too much"

THE DIRECTOR

"With your hand, [thus.]" Move your hand on thus.

CAITLYN

Thus. But use all gently for in the very torrent, tempest, and as I may say—
(Continues as The Director continues along with her:
CAITLYN grows frustrated as they BOTH CONTINUE:)

THE DIRECTOR & CAITLYN

(THE DIRECTOR quotes simultaneously with CAITLYN
but with more constraint:)

**—as I may say whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a
(temperance?) that may give it smoothness—**

CAITLYN

Do you want to do this?

THE DIRECTOR

Do you?

CAITLYN

Yes.

THE DIRECTOR

[Then] what's the problem? You need to take five?

CAITLYN

Thank you, / yes.

THE DIRECTOR

Tough. You don't have five. You, Hamlet, don't have five.

CAITLYN

The name is Caitlyn.

THE DIRECTOR

You want to be Caitlyn?

CAITLYN

Cat's fine.

(CAITLYN does his best not to roll his eyes as The Director continues; she's heard it before.)

THE DIRECTOR (*Continued:*)

—because I don't recall there being a 'Caitlyn' in the script. Did Caitlyn's father die? Is Caitlyn a prince—or a princess? Did Cat's uncle marry Cat's mother? So I think Hamlet is clearly the more interesting character here—Of course if you want we could name one of the spear carriers Cat. Or we could change around all the names. "My liege—I fear that Rosencrantz and Caitlyn are dead."

[You with me now?]

You have no time. You have one shot. You have a group of no talent actors come into town and you have paid them to act out your play. But if they overact it like they always do the whole damned thing will just be lost, right?

CAITLYN

[Yes.]

THE DIRECTOR

Then do it that way. Tell them to stop chewing up the scenery and do it right. We're here / to rehearse—

CAITLYN

Speak the speech I pray you as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue: for if you—

THE DIRECTOR

Better but not so much anger.

CAITLYN

Speak the speech—

THE DIRECTOR

Too saccharin.

CAITLYN

Speak the speech—

THE DIRECTOR

You can't piss 'em off, here. You have to win them over.

CAITLYN

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue: but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags—

THE DIRECTOR

(Goading Caitlyn along as she continues:)

Chide with them.

Earn their respect.

Get them to agree. Get them to laugh: Get them to want to do it your way.

You have to earn their respect before you—

Stop. Stop. Go back. What was that?

CAITLYN

Can I just do the speech thru once?

THE DIRECTOR

Is that what [this is]? A speech? [Kitty Cat, you're a genius. Thank you. Thank you. OK.] Sit down.

(She does.)

THE DIRECTOR

Thank you. Now, tell me a story.

CAITLYN

What?

THE DIRECTOR

Tell me a story.

CAITLYN

About?

THE DIRECTOR

About you. About Caitlyn. Or Cat.

CAITLYN

Now I'm Caitlyn?

THE DIRECTOR

For the moment. Talk to me. Tell me anything. Tell me about the time you first kissed a boy. You have kissed a boy?

CAITLYN

Yes.

THE DIRECTOR

Did you let him get to first base? Was there tongue?

(CAITLYN is stopped a moment.)

THE DIRECTOR

What was his name?

CAITLYN

Kevin . . . Watterman.

THE DIRECTOR

Go on.

CAITLYN

I was in the fourth grade. It was on a dare. He and . . . some of his friends . . . dared each other during recess and after school . . . Kevin walked me home and . . . when I wasn't looking he . . . kissed me . . . on the lips. So I hit him. No tongue.

(Pause.)

THE DIRECTOR

Now, was that a speech?

CAITLYN

What?

THE DIRECTOR

Was that your whole "speech"? You see, Cat, there are no "speeches" in the theatre. There are only dialogues. Sometimes one of the parties doesn't say anything but the opportunity to interrupt is always there. Or the information is so short—like your beating on poor Kevin that—

CAITLYN

OK, I get it.

THE DIRECTOR

Exactly.

OK?

CAITLYN

OK?

THE DIRECTOR

OK?

CAITLYN

OK?

THE DIRECTOR

OK. Good for you by the way.

Go.

CAITLYN

Speak the speech,—

(She stops on the word: "speech".)

THE DIRECTOR

What?

CAITLYN

There are no "speeches"?

THE DIRECTOR

[Not like *you* use the word. "Speech" the way Shakespeare uses the word, yes. It's a matter of definition.]

CAITLYN

[What's the difference?]

THE DIRECTOR

[It has to do with] focus.

CAITLYN

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue: but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings—

THE DIRECTOR

Who are you talking about?

CAITLYN

The groundlings?

THE DIRECTOR

All of them.

CAITLYN

Really?

THE DIRECTOR

OK. [I just wanted to make sure.]

CAITLYN

groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumbshows and noise—who is Termagant?

THE DIRECTOR

Think of Jim Carey in Ace Ventura

CAITLYN

I kinda liked that movie—

THE DIRECTOR

. . . I'm not going to even comment . . .

CAITLYN

I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant; it out-herods Herod: pray you, avoid it. / Who's Her—

THE DIRECTOR

"Pray you avoid it".

CAITLYN

Pray you, avoid it.

THE DIRECTOR

"Pray you avoid it."

CAITLYN

Pray you . . . avoid it. There's a comma.

THE DIRECTOR

Lose the comma.

CAITLYN

But there is one.

THE DIRECTOR

Who are you? The grammar police? I'll bet you Shakespeare never wrote a comma in his life. It was probably put there by some librarian in a powdered wig and orthopedic shoes.

CAITLYN

Pray you avoid it.

THE DIRECTOR

"Pray, you avoid it"; better: move the comma to after "pray". It's a typesetter's error.

Go with it.

CAITLYN

It out-herods Herod: pray, you avoid it.

(A beat.)

Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion

THE DIRECTOR

Why did you pause?

CAITLYN

She has a change of—I have a change of thought?

THE DIRECTOR

No, she doesn't. Well, yes, he does—but why?:

(Up now and before she can answer!)

Because somebody said something to him, didn't they?

CAITLYN

(Moving slightly—putting distance back between them:)

Something; it doesn't matter.

THE DIRECTOR

Dialogue. [See?] Wha'd he say?

CAITLYN

Who?

THE DIRECTOR

The player.

CAITLYN

I don't know. She interrupts me.

THE DIRECTOR

You don't know your cue?

CAITLYN

It's an interjection.

THE DIRECTOR

Is it? What does she say? How does she change the course of what you're saying—What's the line?

(Returns to his table to refer to the script; either quoting or reading from the pages:)

First Player to Hamlet: "I warrant your honour."

(Puts down the script again.)

What do you think he means by that?

CAITLYN

(Annoyed:)

I get it.

THE DIRECTOR

Exactly.

CAITLYN

Can I go on now?

THE DIRECTOR

Perfect.

CAITLYN

Are you done mansplaining to me?

THE DIRECTOR

Now you lost me. No. Yes. The first player just said "I get it." "Can I go on now?" "Will you let me do my damned job?" In other words she just shut you down—so how do you respond?

CAITLYN

(Keeping her comment to herself:)

Be not too tame neither—

THE DIRECTOR

What if he were smiling? Not you: player. Better yet: what if he gave you exactly what you asked for? As lifeless a reading as only he could give?

CAITLYN

(Adjusting to the thought:)

Be not too tame neither. / But let your own discretion be your tutor—

THE DIRECTOR

But smiling always smiling. She's a smiler, she is. Not you: the Player. Always selling. / What do you think you see behind her smile?

CAITLYN

let your own discretion be your tutor: suit the—

(Continuing under The Director's next line:)

—action to the word, the word to the action; with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature:—

THE DIRECTOR

(As CAITLYN continues:)

You see, this is the problem with doing Shakespeare. Idiots think he thought he was writing for a nineteen year old boy. This is why Hamlet is never played by a nineteen year old anything.

CAITLYN

I'm nineteen.

THE DIRECTOR

Case in point.

CAITLYN

Or maybe it's because I'm not a boy.

THE DIRECTOR

It's an all female cast; none of you are boys; you'd stand out like a sore thumb.

CAITLYN

Then maybe because it's poetry.

THE DIRECTOR

Says [who?] This isn't poetry. This is a conversation—nobody's going to set music to it. This is real people talking now; having a genuine conversation. So, if you're upset: be upset—but not so upset that you make a fool out of yourself—and at the same time don't underplay it to the point you have nothing invested: because if you don't care why should they?

(CAITLYN chooses not to reply.)

THE DIRECTOR

That's the whole point you're trying to make here. Shakespeare is reaching through the ages through you to tell dumbshit kids just like Caitlyn to stop acting and just be human for godsakes. And honey, if you can pull this off without going over the top or just floating on the surface you just might make something of yourself. Pick it up: the word to the action . . .

CAITLYN

(Holding back what she can:)

The action to the word, the word to the action; with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature: for any thing so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. That's poetry.

THE DIRECTOR

It's poetic, it's not poetry.

CAITLYN

Now this / overdone—

THE DIRECTOR

(Overlapping right behind her:)

This overdone—

CAITLYN & DIRECTOR (*Continued*)

(THE DIRECTOR right behind CAITLYN:)

(—Now this overdone,) or come tardy off, though it make the unskilful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve; the censure of the which one must in your allowance o'erweigh a whole theatre of others.

THE DIRECTOR

From the top.

CAITLYN

Speak the speech I pray you, trippingly on the tongue, for if you mouth it, as many of your players do—

THE DIRECTOR

As many of your players do. — O, there be players that I have seen play, and heard others praise, and that highly, not to speak it profanely,—

CAITLYN

You jumped.

THE DIRECTOR

—that, neither having the accent of Christians nor the gait of Christian, pagan, nor man, have so strutted and bellowed that I have thought some of nature's journeymen had made men and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably. See? She is speaking about them.

CAITLYN

And the player says I hope we have reformed something differently or something.

THE DIRECTOR

Why?

CAITLYN

What?

THE DIRECTOR

Why?

CAITLYN

Why what?

THE DIRECTOR

Why does he respond? Why does she say anything?

(CAITLYN is at a loss for words.)

THE DIRECTOR

Exactly. You have anything to add?

CAITLYN

. . . No.

THE DIRECTOR

Until you can't hold it back any longer. And that's why she speaks.

CAITLYN

She says reform it.

THE DIRECTOR

It's not what she says: it's how she says it. You're her meal ticket. She's laughing; she's smiling. And behind her: the other players they're smiling too, until they're all laughing—How do you know the Player says "reform it"?

CAITLYN

Because I say "reform it" back / to her.

THE DIRECTOR

So, "reform it" means?

CAITLYN

(Choosing her words carefully not to let the dual meaning slip:)

. . . up yours.

THE DIRECTOR

(Smiling back at her . . . returning the volley:)

Up yours : reform it altogether.

CAITLYN

Reform it altogether.

THE DIRECTOR

"Reform it altogether."

CAITLYN

O, reform it altogether. And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them;

THE DIRECTOR

You see? It's a scene!

(Paraphrasing for her:)

Don't ad-lib.

CAITLYN

I know. —**for there be of them that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too;**

THE DIRECTOR

Up yours and up yours too.

CAITLYN

What?

THE DIRECTOR

And the play is doomed to fail.

CAITLYN

Why?

THE DIRECTOR

Because you just pissed them off.

CAITLYN

What do you want from me?

THE DIRECTOR

What do you want from me?

CAITLYN

The truth.

THE DIRECTOR

The truth? It's a play. It's a story. It's a weak attempt for Hamlet to stand up for herself without taking a risk. It's her puberty, dammit.

(CAITLYN just stares at him.)

THE DIRECTOR

It's your [puberty.] The only real thing here is you kissed Kevin on a dare in the fourth grade.

"And in the meantime . . .

CAITLYN

(Thinks a moment to find the line:)

though, in the mean time, some necessary question of the play be then to be considered: that's villainous,—

THE DIRECTOR

Villainous.

CAITLYN

—and shows a most pitiful ambition—

THE DIRECTOR

Pitiful ambition.

—**in the fool that uses it.**—
CAITLYN

Fool that uses it.
THE DIRECTOR

Go, make you ready.
CAITLYN

Get angry.
THE DIRECTOR

What?
CAITLYN

Get disgusted. From the top.
THE DIRECTOR

(CAITLYN stares at the director wide eyes a moment or two. She then shakes it off and sets herself, perched on the chair again.)

Lose the chair.
THE DIRECTOR

The what?
CAITLYN

Lose the chair.
THE DIRECTOR

(CAITLYN moves the chair to the side.)

Throw it.
THE DIRECTOR

What?
CAITLYN

Throw it. Toss it away.
THE DIRECTOR

(CAITLYN pushes the chair firmly away, sending it sliding across the stage to wherever it may land.)

THE DIRECTOR

Whenever you're ready.

(A beat: CAITLYN attempts to prepare again—but not breathe deep—not take position—not overact—not . . . There is a long pause.)

THE DIRECTOR

Well?

(CAITLYN screams from the bottom of her gut; a long agonizing sound that has been buried far too long and once concluded continues to echo in the otherwise silent theatre. A beat.)

THE DIRECTOR

Perfect.
Alright. Let's take a break.

CAITLYN

Thank you.

(CAITLYN moves to sit on the chair she slid across stage as THE DIRECTOR also takes a seat on another part of the set. They each pull out cell phones. THE DIRECTOR looks briefly then puts the phone away again. CAITLYN, in contrast, begins going through received messages. Pause.)

THE DIRECTOR

Coffee?

CAITLYN

You asking if I want some or will I make some?

THE DIRECTOR

Actually I was hoping you'd go out and buy it.

CAITLYN

I have water.

THE DIRECTOR

(A beat.)

[Suit yourself.] You do have that on silent, right?

CAITLYN

You didn't hear it ring, [did you]?

(No reply: holds the phone up for The Director to see:)

Fifteen messages.

THE DIRECTOR

[Alright then.]

(Opens up a plastic wrapped sandwich; the type one might purchase at a gas station or out of a vending machine.)

You hungry? I'm buying —

(Corrects himself:)

— Offering. Ham 'N' Cheese.

CAITLYN

I'm a vegetarian.

THE DIRECTOR

Of course you are.

(Moves all the ham to one half—

CAITLYN

Is that another problem [for you]?

THE DIRECTOR

(—offers the other sandwich half:)

Cheese.

CAITLYN

I'm still not making you coffee.

THE DIRECTOR

Eat the sandwich.

(Pause: They eat in silence.)

THE DIRECTOR

So, what made you want to do Hamlet in the first place?

CAITLYN

What made you?

THE DIRECTOR

I asked first.

CAITLYN

My resume.

THE DIRECTOR

Excuse me?

CAITLYN

It'll look good on my resume.

THE DIRECTOR

(Takes this in a beat:)

That's what I thought you said.

CAITLYN

How often does someone get the chance to say, "I did Hamlet"; being a girl.

THE DIRECTOR

Depends on what you mean by "I did Hamlet".

CAITLYN

You don't think it'll look good on my resume?

THE DIRECTOR

You know, you remind me of my own kid: always trying to spend your allowance before it's been earned.

CAITLYN

You have kids?

THE DIRECTOR

A daughter. 'Bout your age. You?

CAITLYN

"Me" what?

THE DIRECTOR

Have a kid?

CAITLYN

I'm nineteen.

THE DIRECTOR

It's been known to happen.

CAITLYN

.. Uh . . . no.

(There is a slightly awkward pause.)

THE DIRECTOR

Well, I think we've bonded now, how 'bout you?

(CAITLYN chooses not to respond—she instead smiles if only to be polite. The pause continues.)

CAITLYN

So, what're your feelings on an all female cast?

THE DIRECTOR

It may sell a few more tickets and maybe get some press.

CAITLYN

Which is the whole point, isn't it?

THE DIRECTOR

Rather cynical for someone your age, isn't it?

CAITLYN

I'm agreeing with you.

THE DIRECTOR

I've earned my cynicism: you're supposed to be hopeful and deery eyed.

CAITLYN

Is Hamlet supposed to be hopeful and deery eyed.

THE DIRECTOR

One for you.

CAITLYN

Thank you . . . I think . . .

So why'd you get involved in this production if you're not wild about the concept?

THE DIRECTOR

Who said I'm not wild about the concept?

CAITLYN

You strike me as more of a purest.

(THE DIRECTOR chooses not to respond.)

CAITLYN

So Why Hamlet—why here?

THE DIRECTOR

Why not? Sorry, you deserve an answer. It goes back to the basic fundamentals of real estate: "location, location, location".

CAITLYN

I thought that was basic fundamentals of sales.

THE DIRECTOR

(Continuing on:)

We are here in the heart of the metropolis: near the best schools, restaurants, a mall and a thriving medical industry. Everything is just minutes away. And there's a Starbucks right around the corner.

CAITLYN

(Back reviewing text messages.)

That's why you're doing Hamlet?

THE DIRECTOR

(Watching CAITLYN for her reaction:)

[It passes the time.]

(Pause. THE DIRECTOR eats as CAITLYN returns text messages.)

THE DIRECTOR

So, nothing about the character herself intrigues you?
"Ah youth. Youth."
Chekhov.

CAITLYN

I'm sorry, what—What does my age have to do with anything?

THE DIRECTOR

(A beat.)

You done with your break? Ready to get back to work?

CAITLYN

I haven't finished my sandwich.

THE DIRECTOR

Fine.

(Takes a prepackaged pack of cookies out of his coat pocket.)

Cookie?

CAITLYN

No. Thank you.

THE DIRECTOR

I got a Snickers for later. You want that?

CAITLYN

No. I'm good. Thank you.

THE DIRECTOR

Let's talk about the character. Tell me about [yourself].

CAITLYN

Is this some kind of method acting exercise or something like that?

THE DIRECTOR

No; it's a conversation. Tell me the story of Caitlyn. Is that your real name or did you find it in the phonebook somewhere?

CAITLYN

I'd rather talk about Hamlet.

THE DIRECTOR

You've already told me you don't know crap about Hamlet.

CAITLYN

When did I say that?

THE DIRECTOR

"Because it'll look good on your resume."

CAITLYN

You asked me an honest question I gave you an honest answer.

THE DIRECTOR

Who told you it was an honest question? [Anyway,] all the actors I ever met are professional liars: by trade. I expect you to try to impress me not to tell me the truth.

CAITLYN

Should I be worried at this point?

THE DIRECTOR

Oh for godsakes—If we're gonna need a chaperone—

CAITLYN

No, no, by all means—I carry mace: whaddo you want to hear?

THE DIRECTOR

[Oh no, please, don't stop on my account: you opened this door—you changed the rules here: It'd be against all twelve steps to go back now—so, tell me about Caitlyn.] Whatever you want me to know.

CAITLYN

(Considers her options before she begins:)

I was born in the lower section in the south of Denmark to a King and Queen of a very inconsequential castle. I have never worked a hard day in my life (because I never had to). Just waiting for the old man to die and then do what I have to to make the rest of my own life bearable.

THE DIRECTOR

(Playing along:)

And tell me, why are you so depressed?

CAITLYN

The way I see it I'm not so much depressed as I am bored.

THE DIRECTOR

Interesting choice; [but] how do you play it and keep audience awake at the same time?

CAITLYN

Well, that's just where the play begins: spoiled rich kid, spoon fed and ignored by her family—and then the king is killed and instead of stepping in she's stepped over. So she has to do something in order to regain her right to the throne—but the problem is, having never done anything before in her whole life: she doesn't know how.

THE DIRECTOR

So, why are you acting so animated?

CAITLYN

It's Shakespeare.

THE DIRECTOR

And her father's ghost?

CAITLYN

In her head.

THE DIRECTOR

But the Soldiers see the ghost in ACT I.

CAITLYN

They'll say anything to keep their jobs.

THE DIRECTOR

So Hamlet's crazy.

CAITLYN

I didn't say that.

THE DIRECTOR

He is considered by some to be the classic textbook case [of melancholy]. He's depressed.

CAITLYN

She's not depressed.

THE DIRECTOR

Of course, you're nineteen, tell me what you know about depression.

CAITLYN

My mother was depressed. And she drank. And then drinking depressed her more; it was a vicious cycle until she died of alcohol poisoning.

THE DIRECTOR

(Takes this in a beat before responding:)

I'm sorry to hear that.

(CAITLYN shrugs.)

THE DIRECTOR

Wha'd your father do?

CAITLYN

He was already gone by then.

[He] wasn't really in the picture much. But we do still do Christmas and the odd Fourth of July.

THE DIRECTOR

[Hmm]—so, how did you cope with her . . . passing?

CAITLYN

Theatre.

THE DIRECTOR

Now you're preachin' to the choir.
Brothers? Sisters?

CAITLYN

We were all in and out of the house: fighting for the attention of the television set.

THE DIRECTOR

And then actors became your heroes . . .

CAITLYN

And my brothers took up track.

THE DIRECTOR

So they tried to run away.

CAITLYN

Never really thought about it [that way].

THE DIRECTOR

Money? Was that an issue for you? Unless that's / too—

CAITLYN

No. We had money. It was nothing flaunted—it just wasn't an issue.

THE DIRECTOR

Until you left home and now it is.

CAITLYN

Am I getting paid for this psychotherapy or do I pay you?

THE DIRECTOR

{Alright then;} we hit on something . . .

CAITLYN

I'm here, aren't I?

THE DIRECTOR

To build your resume, yes, I know.

CAITLYN

[I'm] done with my sandwich.

THE DIRECTOR

[And so you are.]

CAITLYN

You want to pick it up where we left off?

THE DIRECTOR

Sorry, if I got too personal . . .

CAITLYN

All part of the process, [right? Is this] how you always work?

THE DIRECTOR

Sometimes. As a director you fit the method to the performer. Why'd you get interested in acting in the first place? Other than you only see your father at Christmas and your mother was a drunk?

CAITLYN

And Directing is a control obsession for you?

THE DIRECTOR

To the bone, girl. Good parry.

CAITLYN

Is this just a game to you?

THE DIRECTOR

Isn't it?

CAITLYN

[Then what is the point? Forgive me, if *I'm* being too blunt.]

THE DIRECTOR

[Oh no, we're long past that now. That's what I like about the Theatre: bluntness. Feel free to be blunt: cut right to the chase.]

CAITLYN

Are you hitting on me?

THE DIRECTOR

What? No. God. Please.

CAITLYN

Cuz you're old old enough to / be . . .

THE DIRECTOR

Who's mansplaining now?

CAITLYN

This is: this is a game. This is just a dance for you, isn't it? What happened to holding the mirror up to nature and watching her flinch?

THE DIRECTOR

Now, *that's* a Hamlet..

CAITLYN

That's a Hamlet?

THE DIRECTOR

Confrontation. Introspection. What else is there? When you get down to it? You act or you don't. Be or don't be. The play's the thing—how many speeches you have anyway?

CAITLYN

Four—five but one of 'em's actually short.

THE DIRECTOR

You know 'em all?

CAITLYN

That's my job.

THE DIRECTOR

No, that's your homework. What do you want to tackle first?

CAITLYN

We were working on ACT 3.

THE DIRECTOR

You're not ready for ACT 3. Let's go the short one—no, let's start with the first one. ACT 1 scene 2.

CAITLYN

Very good.

THE DIRECTOR

I read the play.

CAITLYN

(Takes a moment to compose herself and launches in:)

O that this too too solid / fle—

THE DIRECTOR

What the hell are you doing?—

CAITLYN

What?

THE DIRECTOR

You were just talking to me like a human being—can you *keep* talking to me like a human being?

CAITLYN

I'm talking to myself.

THE DIRECTOR

Do you always talk to yourself in iambic pentameter?

CAITLYN

It's written in iambic . . . pen-a-whatever.

THE DIRECTOR

You're not reciting a children's poem.

CAITLYN

If you didn't like the way I act—why did you cast me? If I don't have enough balls for the role?

THE DIRECTOR

Would it help to know that no one else was considered for the part?

CAITLYN

And that upsets you because I'm a woman and I'm nineteen / and let's not forget I'm a vegetarian—

THE DIRECTOR

The role *was* written for a thirty year old man.

CAITLYN

Who says he's thirty—?

THE DIRECTOR

Shakespeare wrote the role for an actor in his troupe who was thirty years old at the time he wrote it. Ben Johnson. Yorick, the Jester, died some twenty plus years ago before Hamlet digs him up.

CAITLYN

“Alas Yorick, I knew him” . . .

(Thinking aloud:)

[But] she's in college.

THE DIRECTOR

And now you're thinking like a producer. I need an actor.

CAITLYN

And you got me?

THE DIRECTOR

And we got you.

CAITLYN

So? There are four other actors the same age as me in this play.

THE DIRECTOR

Your people know people, we'll leave it at that.

CAITLYN

What are you saying?

THE DIRECTOR

I'm not saying anything.

CAITLYN

I didn't sleep with anybody to get this role.

THE DIRECTOR

When did I . . . ?

CAITLYN

And I'm not about to—

THE DIRECTOR

(Very calmly:)

Hold it right there. If I said anything . . . just . . . that's not why we're here.

CAITLYN

Then what—you're saying my getting this role was what: political?

THE DIRECTOR

Go on with the speech.

CAITLYN

But you didn't cast me.

THE DIRECTOR

You were cast.

CAITLYN
Did you cast anybody?

THE DIRECTOR
Yes.

CAITLYN
But not me.

THE DIRECTOR
How does it matter why you got the role: you got the role—

CAITLYN
It matters to me.

THE DIRECTOR
—so do the role. Be the role.

CAITLYN
Oh my god, you want me to start sleeping with a crown on too?

THE DIRECTOR
{I don't care—} . . . Can we get past this? What just happened in the scene?

CAITLYN
Can we take—

THE DIRECTOR
No.

(There is a pause.)

THE DIRECTOR
What: you gonna cry?

CAITLYN
(A beat:)
The King and Queen are holding court telling me to get over my mourning and get on with my life.

THE DIRECTOR
It's been two months.

CAITLYN
It's been two months.

THE DIRECTOR
It's been two weeks.

CAITLYN
It's been two weeks.

THE DIRECTOR
Which is it?

CAITLYN
It doesn't matter.

THE DIRECTOR
Of course it does.

CAITLYN
It's my father.

THE DIRECTOR
Have you read the play?

CAITLYN
Of course I've / read the play—

THE DIRECTOR
Other than the scenes you're in.

CAITLYN
Holy shit. You want me to walk out? Is that what you're after? So you can hire a Hamlet you want? One who maybe has a set?

THE DIRECTOR
No.

CAITLYN
Then what do you want?

THE DIRECTOR
I want Caitlyn. I want Caitlyn as Hamlet. Bring me Caitlyn as Hamlet.

CAITLYN
Sorry, we're not the same person.

THE DIRECTOR
Yes, you are. For all I know what you just described as Hamlet was you. I want to see that Hamlet.

CAITLYN

Why?

THE DIRECTOR

Because I've never seen it before. No one has. That's what they're buying tickets for. Both the the feminine and the the the masculine. But we have to start with what Shakespeare wrote. And the Hamlet Shakespeare wrote wasn't ignored. She was loved by the whole country (ACT 4, scene 7); she fought side by side beside her father in a war that just ended (ACT 1, scene 1); she, young Hamlet, killed King Fortinbras (also ACT 1, scene 1—same speech). And because the entire first Act is devoted to introducing the ghost as real. But whether Caitlyn thinks the ghost is real or not—or whether the ghost *is* real or not—doesn't matter because Hamlet thinks the ghost is real. And if you'd read the play for other than the purpose of learning your own lines you might have found that out. But you're still here which tells me you may also want to find out who Hamlet is. And why playing him right might improve your resume. So, I'd like to start with who you think he or she or it is.—

CAITLYN

(as he continues:)

It?

THE DIRECTOR (Continued:)

—Because besides being wrong on so many levels there will be a nugget of truth there that no one else has ever seen—beyond the fact that you're a girl—and that is Caitlyn's Hamlet.

The King and Queen are acting like lovebirds—you've all but told them to go and get a room—your father just died and it doesn't matter whether it was two weeks or two months, two days or two years: we agree. But you've got nowhere else to go. And I actually like that part about being stepped over: gives you something to wrestle with: your own ambition verses your grief.

(A beat. He pulls out his cellphone and checks it. Sets it down on the table in front of himself.)

Whenever you're ready.

CAITLYN

Can I have a minute . . . ?

THE DIRECTOR

No.

CAITLYN

You have to take a call?

THE DIRECTOR

[No; checking the] time.

(Showing CAITLYN his arm:)

I don't wear a watch. You're stalling.

CAITLYN

(Debates her options for only a moment—almost says something—thinks better of it—composes herself . . . and then starts:)

**O, that this too too solid flesh would melt, thaw and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd his canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God!
God! How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable, seem to me all the uses of this
world! Fie on't! ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden, that grows to seed; things
rank and gross in nature possess it merely. That it should come to this! But
two months dead: nay,**

(Stops to remark—)

THE DIRECTOR

Go on.

CAITLYN (*Continuing*:)

**not so much, not two: so excellent a king; that was, to this, Hyperion to a
satyr; so loving to my mother that he might not betem the winds of heaven
visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth! Must I remember? why, she
would hang on him, as if increase of appetite had grown by what it fed on:
and yet, within a month—Let me not think on't—**

THE DIRECTOR

Tell me about your mother.

CAITLYN

Who are we talking about now?

THE DIRECTOR

Did she love your father?

CAITLYN

I really don't feel comfortable discussing this with you.

THE DIRECTOR

Why did she drink? What depressed her in the first place? If you could go back
and change that . . . would she?

(No reply. Softly now, nudging her to go deeper:)

You don't have to answer me; you have to answer you.

She needed something and you weren't it. And He wasn't there. So she turned to
someone—something that was.

THE DIRECTOR (Continued:)

"Frailty thy name is woman."

CAITLYN

What? Oh . . . yeah . . .

(Takes a moment to regroup and then; picking up both the line and meaning:)

A little month, or ere those shoes were old with which she follow'd my poor father's body, like Niobe, all tears:—why she, even she—O, God! a beast, that wants discourse of reason—

('Niobe' reference: not great delivery but THE DIRECTOR chooses to let it go as CAITLYN continues:)

CAITLYN (Continued:)

—would have mourn'd longer—married with my uncle, my father's brother, but no more like my father than I to Hercules: within a month: ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears had left the flushing in her galled eyes, she married. O, most wicked speed, to post with such dexterity to incestuous sheets! It is not nor it cannot come to good: but break, my heart; for I must hold my tongue.

(There is a long pause. CAITLYN stands alone, understanding the words possibly for the first time. THE DIRECTOR checks the time on his phone and makes a note.)

THE DIRECTOR

Well?

CAITLYN

I don't want to do that again.

THE DIRECTOR

Eight shows a week. Twice on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

(CAITLYN says nothing as she continues to take in *[and reflect on]* the moment.)

THE DIRECTOR

That's why I'm doing Hamlet.

CAITLYN

Can we do something a little light hearted now?

THE DIRECTOR

Love to; wha'd you have in mind?

CAITLYN

Something from Neil Simon.

THE DIRECTOR

"We're all out of cornflakes. F. U."

"Took me three hours to figure out that 'F.U.' was Felix Unger." Unquestionably the epitome of classic comic writing (written in 1965 when the initials alone were enough to make a spinster blush). OK, let's jump ahead.

CAITLYN

To where?

THE DIRECTOR

Do you have another speech with Ophelia? Other than?

CAITLYN

I don't think so.

THE DIRECTOR

Too bad. I was hoping we might be able to build on that.
What's your next . . .

CAITLYN

Speech?

THE DIRECTOR

Private thought.

CAITLYN

After the ghost leaves.

THE DIRECTOR

Right.

The ghost is real by the way.

CAITLYN

So I gathered.

THE DIRECTOR

Let's try something different.

CAITLYN

. . . Why?.

THE DIRECTOR

Perfect: that: there. Stay with me: Your next speech: You just saw your father—Hamlet's father—Hamlet just saw Hamlet's father. Father just left. The Ghost is gone.

(But CAITLYN stops top focus on the next speech)

THE DIRECTOR

Dammit. No. Stop. Don't prepare.

(Seeing her confusion:)

Perfect: What's going on in your mind? You're dumbfounded? You angry? Terrified? You just talked to your father—don't worry: not going there: we've had enough Psychodrama for one day. You just found out that your Uncle wasn't just an opportunist: that he actually murdered your Dad? And he wants you to what?

(Lets the thought sink in.)

Who're you going to tell? Who's going to believe you? Why should they? They all think you're crazy. Forget the script. I don't care how wrong you go. Go off book. Play with it.

CAITLYN

From where?

THE DIRECTOR

From the moment the Ghost leaves: "Remember me"

CAITLYN

O all you host of heaven! O earth! what else? And shall I couple hell?

THE DIRECTOR

No. Play with it: put it in your own words.

CAITLYN

I have to do the lines.

THE DIRECTOR

Who said? Free yourself. Say whatever comes into your mind.

(CAITLYN stumbles for words.)

THE DIRECTOR

Go with it. Say something.

CAITLYN

.. I think ... You're ... this is making me a little uncomfortable.

THE DIRECTOR

Perfect. Go with it.

CAITLYN

This is not . . . this is . . . this is a load of crap.

THE DIRECTOR

OK, fine: go with "this is a load of crap."

CAITLYN

I could say more but I don't want to offend you.

THE DIRECTOR

Offend me.

CAITLYN

What is your problem?

THE DIRECTOR

Perfect.

(Sensing she may not be paraphrasing the script;)

Are you—?

CAITLYN

. . . Fuck.

THE DIRECTOR

Keep going . . .

CAITLYN

No.

THE DIRECTOR

Personalize it—that's the whole point, right? Why'd you become an artist? Why did you get into acting?

CAITLYN

I'm not doing this.

THE DIRECTOR

Why do any of us get into [acting]? We want to create. You know why we want to create?

CAITLYN

And you're going to tell me?

THE DIRECTOR
God.

CAITLYN
God?

THE DIRECTOR
God, my dear. God.

CAITLYN
God.

THE DIRECTOR
God created the heavens and the earth. He created the fish in the seas. He created the seas. He created fruits and vegetables, trees, shrubs and insects. He created light and darkness, the moon, the stars, the sun and birds and animals. And then He created man.

CAITLYN
I really don't need a Sunday school lesson right now.

THE DIRECTOR
He created man in His image. And what IS His image? A creator. He created us to create. That's what we do. For you it's acting. For me directing. For some other poor schmuck it might be plumbing but that's what we do and that's why we do it. We create.

CAITLYN
When you say create? What does that even have to do with Hamlet?

THE DIRECTOR
Everything—no, God: not that. We have to get past that. “Get thee to a nunnery”: . . . what is Hamlet asking? What are we here for? Why are we here? Why is Caitlyn here?

CAITLYN
Why are you?

THE DIRECTOR
Excellent question. I'm here to help you find the answers.

CAITLYN
You have the answers?

THE DIRECTOR

I have no idea what the answers are. I come up with the questions. I help *you* find the answers.

And then he's gone . . .

"Remember me."

OK, that's not going to work: I have a feeling you're not trusting me right now. Too pissed at me, right? But pissed is better than crying. Pissed is relational, its lashing out—connecting to somebody else. Crying is just wallowing. Stay active. And don't think of me—think about—You've got to care about your father—you ever lose anybody? Anybody close . . . Oh, sorry.

CAITLYN

This is all just a mind game for you?

THE DIRECTOR

No, that was an honest mistake. Really. After all we're just here to help you build your resume.

CAITLYN

Wow, passive aggressive enough? Is it just my age or my being a girl? 'Cuz I'm really getting mixed signals here—what's wrong with a little ambition? What's wrong with wanting to be noticed?

THE DIRECTOR

Is that why you're doing this? For your review? So someone'll like you? Reviews come and go, kid. They only live on in your family's scrapbook and on the internet—next to the porn sites and million dollar schemes from some businessman in Nigeria.

CAITLYN

And I'm done with your psychoanalysis bullshit, OK?

THE DIRECTOR

Really?

CAITLYN

So, if you want to direct me, fine. But don't do that. Give me blocking, give me a line reading: hell, I don't care—but stop playing shrink on my ass.

THE DIRECTOR

How many text messages you have now?

CAITLYN

What?

(Looks.)

Whaddo you care?

THE DIRECTOR

Who keeps trying to get hold of you?

CAITLYN

[Nobody.] I'm here to rehearse. If we're done—then I'm ready to go.

THE DIRECTOR

No, we've got the space all day.

(Slight pause.)

CAITLYN

. . Yeah . . .

THE DIRECTOR

That's not where I was going—how sad is it that you have to turn everything I say into a sexual innuendo?

CAITLYN

Because I'm young and a girl, and everything a man says usually is a sexual innuendo.

THE DIRECTOR

Well, it's not. I learned a long time ago not shit where you eat. But if you're bound and determined to learn that lesson the hard way, like the rest of us, you'll have to do it without me. And that was a sexual innuendo only because I thought it was a funny line. But / lets—

CAITLYN

Can we set some ground rules here?

Treat me like any other actor. Got it? Don't see me as male or female: I am not a gender, I'm an actor. Got it? Stop watching what you say 'cuz I get it. I'm not who you want. Or I am. But I'm who you've got. So, let's do this.

THE DIRECTOR

Let's do this.

CAITLYN

Fine. What do you want me to paraphrase?

THE DIRECTOR

Why don't you quit?

CAITLYN

You want me to quit?

THE DIRECTOR

I did: before; but I saw something in that last speech about your mother that said, "No. I wanna see what this girl can do."

CAITLYN

The name is Caitlin. Not Honey, not dear. And don't ever call me baby.

THE DIRECTOR

Lee.

CAITLYN

Lee.

LEE (*aka: THE DIRECTOR*)

Like the jeans. So, Kitty Cat, why haven't you stormed out yet?

CAITLYN

You're a crazy son-of-a-bitch, you know that?

LEE

So, I've been told and by better than you.

CAITLYN

So why are *you* doing Hamlet? What makes this show so important to *you*?

LEE

(Off the cuff—as it just comes to him:)

Still want to know why you got the role, don't you?

CAITLYN

(Caught off guard but answers the question just to see where the conversation will lead:)

Yes.

LEE

Well, I'll tell ya. This *is* a superficial business, after all: because someone thought you *looked* like a Hamlet.

CAITLYN

I look like Hamlet?

(LEE shrugs.)

CAITLYN

You think I look like Hamlet?

LEE

No telling. You're going to look like our Hamlet though and that's what we're going with.

"Remember me."

Like you said: we're here to rehearse. In your own words.

"Remember me."

CAITLYN

(After a beat: choosing to go along:)

Jesus Christ. Heaven on earth—what the hell was that? If there is a God . . .

What is it you want me to say?

What the hell do you want from me?

This isn't Hamlet talking—this is me, Cat. Lee?

Now you shut up?

Pay back?

(There is a pause as LEE lets Caitlyn dangle alone with her thoughts; watching her, waiting for her to do something.

CAITLYN, in turn, does the same with Lee. The pause continues.)

CAITLYN

You waiting for me to make the [first move]—what? Fine. And I'm supposed to believe this has nothing to do with . . . You know what: fine. I can do this, too. I can play this game just as long as—I can outplay you: The way I see it I've got what twenty, thirty years on you? I've got the odds in my favor.

This is such a load of crap.

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?

(Moves into character—what else does she have?)

What else!? Fu—

(Chooses instead to say:)

Fffie!! Hold! Hold my heart. You want me to do this?? I can do this!

LEE

(Softly prodding her on:)

"Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat in this distracted globe . . ."

CAITLYN

Remember thee!! Nothing else will I do. I'll forget everything else you've done to piss me off and this—this I will do. Nothing else that you've done—wiping the slate clean.

LEE

Love keeps no record of wrongs.

CAITLYN

I will remember one thing. One "fie"-ing thing: to bring him down.

LEE

Who?

CAITLYN

Claudius.

LEE

But they won't listen to you.

CAITLYN

Who won't?

LEE

None of them. They think you're crazy.

CAITLYN

I'm crazy?

LEE

They all see it. Maybe they're right.

CAITLYN

Now I'm crazy.

LEE

Maybe you are crazy.

CAITLYN

You want crazy? I'll give you crazy.

LEE

Give me crazy.

CAITLYN

I'll give them crazy.

LEE

Give me crazy.

CAITLYN

(Jumping ahead:)

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy. But come; here, as before, never, so help you mercy, how strange or odd soe'er I bear myself, as I perchance hereafter shall think meet to put an antic disposition on, that you, at such times seeing me, never shall, with arms encumber'd thus, or this headshake, or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase, as 'Well, well, we know,' or 'We could, an if we would,' or 'If we list to speak,' or 'There be, an if they might,' or such ambiguous giving out, to note that you know aught of me: this not to do, so grace and mercy at your most need help you, Swear.

LEE

Swear!

CAITLYN

Swear.

LEE

Swear!

CAITLYN

Swear!

LEE

Swear!

CAITLYN

SWEAR!

LEE

SWEAR!

CAITLYN

SWEAR!

LEE

SWEAR!

CAITLYN

Fuck you.

LEE

You may make a Hamlet yet. Again.

CAITLYN

What?

LEE

Don't think about it. Just do it.

CAITLYN

From where?

LEE

"Heaven and earth Horatio."

CAITLYN

But that's not—

LEE

You here to rehearse?

CAITLYN

(Through the following she does her best to mimic Lee in physicality and delivery:)

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy. But come; here, as before, never, so help you mercy, how strange or odd soe'er I bear myself, as I perchance hereafter shall think meet to put an antic disposition on, that you, at such times seeing me, never shall, with arms encumber'd thus, or this headshake, or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase, as 'Well, well, we know,' or 'We could, an if we would,' or 'If we list to speak,' or 'There be, an if they might,' or such ambiguous giving out, to note that you know aught of me: this not to do, so grace and mercy at your most need help you, Swear.

(LEE lets CAITLYN soak in the moment. LEE checks his phone again; he makes a note.)

CAITLYN

How long should it be?

LEE

What?

CAITLYN

Is your phone ringing or are you timing me?

LEE

Time.

CAITLYN

And?

LEE

We'll see.

CAITLYN

What should it be?

LEE

(Smiling at the naiveté:)

[How should I know? I would] need a baseline to judge from. I'm establishing the baseline here.

CAITLYN

Shouldn't you just feel it?

LEE

So, how does it feel to you; long or short?

(CAITLYN is at a loss for a response.)

LEE

And that's why I can't talk to you like any other actor: Because you ARE a woman. A man wouldn't think twice about what I just said but you—being the gender / you are—

CAITLYN

I'm a whole gender now, am I? Half the population of the planet?

LEE

More than half.

CAITLYN

What *is* it with you?

LEE

So: here's a question: . . . Is Hamlet crazy or is she faking it?

CAITLYN

Who're you . . . Well, if the ghost is real . . .

LEE

(Still holding his phone; using it for emphasis:)

No. Wrong. That's the question. That's always the question. If we answer it one way or the other—if we tip the scale: we've lost the play. We have to always question. That's why you do Hamlet. To be (crazy) or not to be (crazy). To be (an avenging child) or not to be [an avenging child]. To be (your mother's daughter) or not. To be your Daddy's—(or not). To be alive [or not.]—

(LEE's phone, still in his hand, starts to ring, startling him in the process; LEE looks at the phone briefly and quickly resets it for silent.)

LEE

Sorry. Now it's on silent.

CAITLYN

To answer or not to answer.

LEE

(Putting the phone away into his pocket.)

[Something like that, yeah.]

CAITLYN

To be or not to be. That is the question—

LEE

That is THE question.

CAITLYN

That is THE question.

LEE

[That is] the ONLY question.

CAITLYN

But that doesn't scan.

LEE

You think Hamlet is listening to the melody of his own thoughts? OK, there is a melody to it: it's there. There is a sing songiness there but: fight it. Fight it for all your worth. Fight to be real. Fight to make a difference. Fight to make your point. You ever go to church, Cat?

CAITLYN

I used to.

LEE

They sing worship songs?

CAITLYN

Every week.

LEE

And have you ever notice the difference between worshipping and singing? One's connected, one's just hittin' the notes. When you rely on the melody of Shakespeare you're just hittin' the notes. Don't just sing melody. You play an instrument?

CAITLYN

No.

LEE

Damn.

CAITLYN

Why?

LEE

Find the harmony—find the--don't go off key but don't limit yourself to C-F-G. I'm not making any sense here am I?

CAITLYN

At least now we're on neutral ground.

LEE

There is no such thing.

(Suddenly bursts out:)

GOD DAMN IT!!

CAITLYN

What?

LEE

It's not you. It's not you.

(Struggling to put together the words:)

I'm just trying to put the thought to . . .

CAITLYN

What time is it?

LEE

We need to take a break.

CAITLYN

Alright . . . I need to . . . Too much water.

LEE

You do that. I've got to make a phone call. Be back in ten.

CAITLYN

Sure.

(LEE pulls his cellphone out of his pocket as he heads off stage, leaving CAITLYN alone to wonder just what she's gotten herself into.)

END ACT 1

ACT II

(At rise:

LEE is onstage alone, rifling through his script, reading and/or making notes, as he nurses a cup of coffee from Starbucks or some other chainstore. There is now (*if not there before*) a small table beside or in front of him where rests scripts, note pads, cellphone, pens and another cup of coffee. CAITLYN enters.)

Sorry—
CAITLYN

Save it.
LEE

Where'd you want to start?
CAITLYN

You want a coffee?
LEE

No, I'm good.
CAITLYN

I'll just drink both then.
LEE

From?
CAITLYN

Starbucks.
LEE

No, where do you want to start in the script 'from'?
CAITLYN

I thought we could talk.
LEE

... About?
CAITLYN

That's what women like to do, right: Talk?
LEE

CAITLYN

If you're just gonna . . .
Wha'd you want to talk about?

LEE

I was gonna let you lead the conversation.

CAITLYN

. . . Why?

LEE

Why not? Hamlet's a leader. I want to see how you lead.

CAITLYN

This is . . . not how I usually work.

LEE

You're nineteen. How do you 'usually' work? How many plays have you—No.
You ask the questions.

CAITLYN

(A beat: decides how to begin.)

How many plays have *you* done?

LEE

Directing? Or in all?

CAITLYN

Both.

LEE

Fifty-two directing; Probably a hundred thirty something I guess.

CAITLYN

You teach?

LEE

Only when I have to.

CAITLYN

We done?

LEE

That's all you want to know?

CAITLYN

I already [know]: I Googled you before we started rehearsals.

LEE

You Googled me?

CAITLYN

[Yeah]. You didn't Google me?

LEE

No. You're nineteen, I wouldn't expect to find much.

CAITLYN

My age; Is that all you got?

LEE

You don't want the coffee? Double shot?

CAITLYN

This is where I'm supposed to delve, right? Into what makes you tick? Prying questions? Elusive answers? That what you looking for?

LEE

You're probably more of a mocha soy latte girl anyways. Or an energy drink. I shoulda got you an energy drink.

CAITLYN

This is. This is a test. Stop. Why can't we just do the scene?
(Directly into his eyes:)

To be or not to be that is THE question. Whether tis Nobler—

LEE

Are you on something?

CAITLYN

Excuse me?

LEE

You're on something, aren't you?

CAITLYN

No. You may hyped up on caffeine: I'm fine.

LEE

You are. You took something.

CAITLYN

No, I didn't.

LEE

I can see it. I'm not rehearsing unless you're sober.

CAITLYN

What's your problem? I AM sober. I've been [sober], I don't know if I can say the same about you.

LEE

Right: your mother.

CAITLYN

Leave her the fuck out of this. I don't use; didn't use, not gonna use.

LEE

Where were you?

CAITLYN

On the phone. We took a break: remember?

LEE

I thought you went to go pee.

CAITLYN

I multi-tasked; women can do that . . . Holy . . . God; what is going on here? You don't want to rehearse fine. I have other places I can be.

LEE

Siddown.

CAITLYN

No. No more.

LEE

Where were you?

CAITLYN

On the phone. Like you. How'd *your* phone call go?

LEE

They didn't answer.

CAITLYN

You leave a message?

LEE

Didn't have to.

CAITLYN

OK . . . I don't know if that's supposed to be eerily mysterious or [what] but guess what: not playing.

LEE

You Googled me.

CAITLYN

So?

LEE

Wha'd you find?

CAITLYN

Look it up yourself.

LEE

You already did. Wha'd you get from it? Give me the Reader's Digest version. . . The twitter version: in a hundred and forty four characters or less.

(There is a slight pause. LEE again offers the second coffee. CAITLYN ignores the offer and the pause continues until CAITLYN acquiesces to answer the question:)

CAITLYN

Two hundred and eighty now, old timer, but thanks for trying to keep up. You were married, twice, divorced as many times. You have one child, a daughter from a woman you didn't marry.

LEE

So you lied to me?

CAITLYN

When?

LEE

When you asked me if I had a kid. You already knew.

CAITLYN

I asked if you had *kids*.
Guilty as charged.

LEE

So what else—what else you find out about me?

CAITLYN

. . . That twenty years ago you were considered an up and coming voice of the theatre but you never quite caught the brass ring and then . . . you . . . kinda disappeared . . . You've done regional theatre lately . . . wrote a couple plays . . . am I missing anything?

LEE

Awards?

CAITLYN

Several. Congratulations.

LEE

Thank you. [So] wha'd you get out of that?

(CAITLYN is at a loss for words; unsure how to respond.)

LEE

You read my bio. You gotta have a question. Spit it out.

CAITLYN

(Why are you asking me this:)

Why?

LEE

Good start—[Is] there more?

CAITLYN

. . Why . .

(Forms a question to satisfy him:)

'dyou stop?: Why'd you sit it out?

(Rephrases:)

Why'd you slow down?

LEE

I had a child. It changes your priorities.

CAITLYN

She take after you?

LEE

In ways you wouldn't understand. Quid pro quo?

CAITLYN

What?

LEE

Later. OK, I've got one on topic: Tell me: What happens in the graveyard?

CAITLYN

[I don't follow.]

LEE

We're back to the play: this is the "Tragedy" of Hamlet. Something happens in the graveyard. Or was it on the ship?

CAITLYN

I don't know what you're talking about.

LEE

Hamlet wants to die. If Hamlet wants to die at the opening of the play and then at the end of the play she dies: there is no tragedy. She has to want to live. Something has to happen to make her want to live really live: and right when she wants to live: she winds up in a sword fight—a sword *play*—and then she dies. You with me on that? [Now] that's a tragedy. Where do you think it happens?

(Pause: CAITLYN, again, is at a loss for words. She waits for Lee to move on, but as nothing happens, CAITLYN instead joins in as they each ponder the scene in question silently for an answer.)

CAITLYN

In the cemetery?

When Hamlet jumps into the grave—in Ophelia's grave and . . . when Laertes' hands 're around her throat . . . ?

LEE

OK . . . we can work with that. Whaddo you say: you have a speech there?

CAITLYN

But there are no speeches.

LEE

[Really? Now? We went through this already.] What do you say in the graveyard?

CAITLYN

[Nothing of any length.] "The cat will mew and dog will have his day."

LEE

Really? Damn. [Too] obscure. But the [moment works.] And then you forgive Laertes in the next scene, right? Let's do that one.

CAITLYN

What?

LEE

Act Five.

(Starts looking through the script.)

Forgiving Laertes.

CAITLYN

I really don't think you know what you're talking about.

LEE

You sure you're not on something?

CAITLYN

As God is my witness. Are you?

LEE

Yeah, I'll be your witness too.

(Looking through the script;; aside:)

And you have seven speeches by the way, not five. Six if you don't count the ne where Claudius is praying upstage: but I count that: so it's seven

(Back on track:)

Act 5, scene 2: Hamlet to Laertes. "Give me your pardon sir".

CAITLYN

So, is everyone a she or is Laertes' still a he?

LEE

[Right now let's] just go with it as written.

CAITLYN

He.

(No reply.)

And *I'm* forgiving *him*?

LEE

Yes.

CAITLYN

But I'm asking him for his pardon . . .

LEE

That's Shakespeare [for you.]

CAITLYN

And you think *I'm* on something?

LEE

(Checks the time on his cellphone and . . .)

Whenever you're ready.

CAITLYN

(Takes a moment as needed . . .)

Give me your pardon . . . sir: I've done you wrong—

This the same one?

Give me your pardon, sir: I've done you wrong; but pardon't, I— I don't know these lines as well as I do the front of the play.

LEE

Use the script..

CAITLYN

[Not on your life.] I may have to start several times.

Give me your pardon, sir: I've done you wrong; but pardon't, as you are a la—gentleman. You sure you don't want to—

LEE

Happier. I want you happier.

CAITLYN

This presence knows, and you must needs have heard, how I am punish'd with sore distraction.

LEE

OK: You're telling him—you're telling her you've been crazy: because now you've seen the light!

CAITLYN

(Tries to continue but . . .)

I have to start again.

LEE

Ok: however you learned it's fine.

CAITLYN

Give me your pardon, sir: I've done you wrong; but pardon't, as you are a . . gentleman.

LEE

But more joy.

Fine: He's a gentleman. He's a he.

CAITLYN

(Trying to not listen to Lee's asides but get thru the piece at least once first:)

This presence knows, and you must needs have heard, how I am punish'd with sore distraction.—I'm crazy, I know— What I have / done, that might your nature—

LEE

No, "they" called you crazy but this is your sanest hour yet. You [have] found clarity!!

CAITLYN

This presence knows, and you must needs have heard, how I am punish'd with sore distraction.

LEE

You're not distracted now.

CAITLYN

Oh yes I am. **This presence knows, and you must needs have heard, how I am punish'd with sore distraction. What I have done, that might your nature—**shit, I know it, I know it, I just said it a moment ago— **honour and exception roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.**

**Was't Hamlet wrong'd Laertes?
Never Hamlet: if Hamlet from herself
be ta'en away, and when she's not
herself does wrong Laertes, then
Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.
Who does it, then?
Her madness: if't be so, Hamlet is of
the faction that is wrong'd; her
madness is poor Hamlet's enemy.**

LEE

"Was" madness; was: past tense.

Who needs to blame anybody; always enough blame to go around?

Deny it then!

Her madness does it!

But only *You* can call it madness—just you—but that's OK because it was your madness and you can own it and because you're not mad now. But nobody else can call it madness—just you; It's like when Richard Pryor can—or some rapper uses the 'n' word endlessly but that's fine: but you or me: suddenly we're labeled an anti-semitic or a racist or whatever and we're outta a job facing charges: look that up in your Google.

CAITLYN

. . . M'lady, in this audience, let my disclaiming from a purposed evil free me so far in your most generous thoughts, that I have shot mine arrow o'er the house, and hurt my sister.

LEE

See? "forgive me. I overstepped my bounds."

CAITLYN

That's what I said: Hamlet is asking Laertes for *her* forgiveness.

LEE

Ok. Whatever. But the point is: you've got something to live for now and your joy to have something to live for HAS to be bigger than your guilt or remorse. Do it again.

CAITLYN

I don't know if I can remember the lines [if you insist on talking over me the whole time.]

LEE

You did fine. But more joy.

(As CAITLYN starts:)

I want you to have so much joy that anybody listening would still think you're crazy. Ebenezer Scrooge on Christmas morning.

CAITLYN

Ebenezer Scrooge.

LEE

You know, A Christmas Carol?

CAITLYN

Yes, I know A Christmas Carol.

LEE

Ebenezer Scrooge.

CAITLYN

Ebenezer Scrooge.

LEE

Or would you rather a female / reference—

CAITLYN

Ebenezer's fine.

LEE

On Christmas morning.

CAITLYN

I—I got it. [Genderless right?] You have a baseline?

(No reply. She starting again . . . with more joy:)

Give me your pardon, miss: I've done you wrong; but pardon't, as you are a lady. I feel like a cartoon character.

(Searches for the line:)

This presence knows, And you must have heard, how I am punish'd with distraction. Don't give it to me. Are you on book?

LEE

No one's on book.

CAITLYN

Great. **What I have done, that might your nature, honour and exception roughly awake, I hereby tell you twas madness. Was't Hamlet wrong'd Laertes? Never: if Hamlet from herself be ta'en away, and when she's not herself does wrong Laertes, then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.**

(Possibly giggling:)

Who then does it, then? Her madness: if't be so, Hamlet is of the fraction that is wrong'd; hers madness is Hamlet's enemy. M'lady, in this audience, let my disclaiming from a purposed evil free me so far in your thoughts, that I have shot mine arrow over your house, and hurt my sister.

LEE

A crazy thought: you think you should be talking to someone in the audience when you say, "in this audience?"

(Pause. CAITLYN doesn't answer—hopefully the thought will pass—better yet why not change the subject:)

CAITLYN

Time?

LEE

(Checking his cellphone—then ignoring it.)

How'd that feel?

CAITLYN

How'd it feel for you?

LEE

Missing something but we'll work on it.

CAITLYN

Having a Laertes should make a difference.

LEE

She wants your throne, you know.

CAITLYN

. . . Okay . . .

LEE

The people would back her in an uprising against your uncle.

CAITLYN

So?

LEE

So . . . : you don't care. Because you finally have something to live for.

CAITLYN

And what is that?

LEE

I ask the questions, remember?

CAITLYN

You wanted me to lead this conversation, remember?

LEE

[Yeah, that was then.] Moving on. What next?

CAITLYN

You're call.

LEE

What do you want to do?

CAITLYN

. . . Well . . . There's the obvious one . . .

LEE

No. No, we're not ready for that.

(A pause.)

LEE

The short one. We could do the short one. What is the short one?

CAITLYN

(Thinks quickly on it:)

Leave me, friends.

(A beat — other players exuant. Quickly to prove her point that the pierce is short:)

Tis now the very witching time of night, when churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out contagion to this world: now could I drink hot blood, and do such bitter business as the day would quake to look on. Soft! now to my mother. O heart, lose not thy nature; let not ever the soul of Nero enter this firm bosom: let me be cruel, not unnatural: I will speak daggers to her, but use none; my tongue and soul in this be hypocrites; how in my words soever she be shent, to give them seals never, my soul, consent!

LEE

Where the hell was that from?

CAITLYN

Act Three—after the play . . .

LEE

After the fiasco, gotcha. We already did "the play's the thing"?

CAITLYN

(Thinks on it—'*Does Lee mean the character (Hamlet) has already done the speech or have they (Lee and Caitlyn) already worked on it?*'—she chooses the easier way out:)

. . . Yes.

LEE

(Thinking out loud:)

So, this is the opposite of that. Bookends [as it were]. Shakespeare telling us "all the writing, all the play's are crap: get out and do something. The pen isn't mightier than the sword: the pen is just a pen." You already passed up Claudius praying?

CAITLYN

That's the next speech.

LEE

Right. So, it's not a bookend. So maybe she does catch the conscience of the king; which means I have to rethink this. I don't remember this speech.—Why don't I remember this speech—What do you think of this speech?

CAITLYN

It's short.

LEE

That's not short; "No": that's a short speech. Or "Damn" that's a whole speech: one word but it's short.

CAITLYN

Or silence.

LEE

No, kid—Silence?: Silence can be the longest speech in the world. It may look small on the page but it commands volumes.

CAITLYN

[. . . OK].

LEE

It's more than an absence of anything; it's—God, himself, shut up for four hundred years: twice. It's waiting. It's sitting in a hospital room for months on end. It's not having nothing to say; it's when the words won't be said because the truth is too . . . much. Too potent. Too ugly. Because once you've said it—you can't unring that bell. So we ignore it or we laugh, we act, we direct, we create another truth. One we can deal with—one we can shout out loud—one we can have some kinda control over—[one] outside ourselves. And if that doesn't work we add another. And another truth, And another. Until we have so much truth that we don't know what to say. It's not having nothing to say: it's having too much to say and no way to say it. It is the longest speech of life. Silence, Cat, is the only real monologue we have.

CAITLYN

(Not knowing how else to respond:)

Thank you I think.

LEE

But by Shakespeare's [standards] this [piece] could probably be considered short. But packed.

CAITLYN

Quality over quantity.

LEE

So break it down for me.

CAITLYN

What?

LEE

The speech. The play just ended everybody's saying, "blah-blah-bla-bla-bla-blah-blah." They all go—you made a pass at Ophelia. She ignored it. Very important moment by the way. I don't know how we're gonna work it but Ophelia's purity is part of what drives you over the top in the first place: She wants you—she wants you as bad as you want her—and you— . . . you being . . . and her—Are you? No. That would be a different play. Maybe we cut that. But you can't because : Hamlet and Ophelia they—you may have fooled around a little but never ... He and Ophelia never went all the way: because Ophelia's a good girl: no [cunt'-try matters for her.] Daddy's girl. Because you need that for killing Polonius. Where was I?

CAITLYN

You wanted me to break it down.

LEE

Sorry. Yes. So . . . break it [down]: Everybody's gone.

CAITLYN

"Leave me, friends."

LEE

You send them away. My apologies, you are right. Score one. Then you move into action.

CAITLYN

Thinking out loud.

(LEE motions: gesturing as if to say, "of course, standard Shakespearean fair".)

CAITLYN

I'm deciding it's time.
Time to take action. Moving onto phase two.

LEE

To kill Claudius?

CAITLYN

. . . No . . .

LEE

No?

CAITLYN

No? To talk my mother—to Hamlet's mother, Gertrude.

LEE

That's a funny name. Gertrude. Probably was much more popular before Shakespeare made into a bimbo name like Bambi. Now it's just stupid. You don't know any Gertrudes, do you?

CAITLYN

I prepare to talk to my mother. To tell her what happened.

LEE

To save her.

CAITLYN

Because she's next. Claudius wants the throne. And Claudius's going to kill her next.

LEE

Who?

CAITLYN

H-Hamlet's mother. Claudius is going to—Is it Claudius or is it going to be Claudia?

LEE

Forget Claudius. Why are you going to your mother? Why do you have a problem approaching her? You're saving her.

CAITLYN

Because she still loves him. Because what I'm going to tell her will hurt her. The truth will hurt her.

LEE

Didn't she hurt you first? Maybe you have a problem with that—a problem with saving her because a piece of you wants her to suffer.

CAITLYN

Not to die.

LEE

A little bit?

CAITLYN

What kind of person are you?

LEE

What kind are you, that's the question. That's maybe why you talk out loud. You know who talks to themselves out loud? Not just crazy people: crazy people and geniuses. It's not a done deal that you're announcing out loud so the audience can get inside your head. It's you who want to hear it. Hear what it sounds like. You are an audience of you. This is a great speech.

(Checks the cellphone:)

Do it again.

CAITLYN

Right . . .

Leave me, friends.

(A beat—other players exuant.)

Tis now the very witching time of night, when churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out contagion to this world: now could I drink hot blood, and do such bitter business as the day would quake to look on. Soft! now to my mother. O heart, lose not thy nature; let not ever the soul of Nero enter this firm bosom: let me be cruel, not unnatural: I will speak daggers to her, but use none; my tongue and soul in this be hypocrites; how in my words soever she be shent, to give them seals never, my soul, consent!

LEE

I hate that it rhymes.

CAITLYN

You want to change it too?

LEE

It's Shakespeare: it's golden. Want to: yes; going to: no. So what happens next? Now you come across Claudius the King. Kneeling. Praying. Opportunity. You are David and he is Saul. Go. It's a Biblical reference it has nothing to do with—

(As CAITLYN prepares—almost whispering:)

You see him.

CAITLYN

He's a he?

LEE

You're on your way to talk to your mother but there he is. There he is. There he is.

CAITLYN

Now might I do it pat, now he is praying; and now I'll do't. And so he goes to heaven; and so am I revenged. That would be scann'd: a villain kills my father; and for that, I,—

(LEE holds up his hand for CAITLYN to respond to; but CAITLYN continues on.)

CAITLYN

—his sole heir, do this same villain send to heaven. O, this is hire and salary, not revenge.—

(LEE starts waving his *[still in the air]* hand.)

CAITLYN

—He took my father grossly, full of bread; with all his crimes—

LEE

Hey, hey—hey. Hey. Slow down. What are you doing here? Running a race?

CAITLYN

I'm thinking on my feet.

LEE

Think slower.

Take it in, hon— . . Watch him. Calculate. Consider all your options.

CAITLYN

I'm getting to them.

LEE

No. You're running way past them, kiddo. Start over.

CAITLYN

Now might I do it pat, now he is praying; and now I'll do't.

LEE

STOP!! . . . : First pause.

CAITLYN

And so he goes to heaven;

LEE

Take a beat.

CAITLYN

and so am I revenged.

LEE

STOP. Think it over. Don't say anything just think about it.

(After about two beats he gives his hand a nod—
orchestrating Caitlyn to pick it up again.)

CAITLYN

**That would be scann'd: a villain kills my father; and for that, I, his sole heir,
do this same villain send to heaven.**

(LEE lifts his hand: stop. A beat. Go.)

CAITLYN

this is hire and salary, not revenge.

LEE

Can you feel the music?

CAITLYN

He took my father grossly . . . full of bread;

(CAITLYN and LEE start finding the same pulsing tempo
now. LEE follows with his hand as if it were a baton to
Caitlyn's song.)

CAITLYN

with all his crimes . . . broad blown . . . as flush as May;

LEE

It's a hymn.

CAITLYN

and how his audit stands . . . who knows save heaven?

LEE

And here comes the bridge.

CAITLYN

**But in our circumstance and course of thought, 'tis heavy with him: and am I
then revenged,**

(A beat. Taken solely on her own.)

(LEE nods: *Yes.*)

CAITLYN

**to take him in the purging of his soul, when he is fit and season'd for his
passage?**

(A pause.)

LEE

Wait for it. Wait for it.

(A beat. Whispering again:)

It would be so easy to end it all here and now . . .

(He softly pushes his hand giving Caitlyn the cue:)

CAITLYN

No!

(CAITLYN and LEE lock eyes for a moment; throwing them each off guard. Both quickly recovering back to their respective roles.)

CAITLYN

Up, sword; and know thou a more horrid hent:

(Same melody but less hypnotic, growing in intensity but fighting off the speed that wants to accompany it:)

when he is drunk asleep, or in his rage, or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed; at gaming, swearing, or about some act that has no relish of salvation in't;

(LEE holds his hand a moment: CAITLYN stays her words. Under LEE's guidance CAITLYN picks up again but softer now:)

CAITLYN

then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven, and that his soul may be as damn'd and black as hell, whereto it goes.

(LEE drops his hand—the music is over—leaving CAITLYN to turn her last line into a commentary on the song that preceded it:)

CAITLYN

My mother stays: this physic but prolongs thy sickly days.

(A pause.)

LEE

That: was music.

(A beat. LEE looks to his cellphone but makes no note. LEE mulls his thoughts over a moment as CAITLYN waits uncomfortably.)

CAITLYN

(Catching LEE in thought:)

What?

LEE

You believe in God, Cat?

CAITLYN

Excuse me?

LEE

What? Was that taboo?

CAITLYN

No, I heard your question. Did you ask if I believe in "God, . . . Cat" or "In (a) God-Cat"?

LEE

Is there such a thing as a "God / Cat"?

CAITLYN

What are you asking?

LEE

You believe in prayer? The power of prayer?

CAITLYN

I don't know.

LEE

You think Claudius can just wipe away all his guilt with one prayer? Nobody watching? If a man prays in the woods and nobody sees it . . . You go to church, right?

CAITLYN

Are we holding church now?

LEE

Could be. Sometimes. For most the actors I know this is church. This is where we sacrifice. Where we worship. Where we pray. The theatre is a church and the stage is its altar. You believe that?

CAITLYN

Do you?

LEE

I'm the one asking the questions.

CAITLYN

Then where do you find your atonement? And where do you receive your forgiveness?

LEE

Good call. Altar girl?
Preacher's kid?
Closed subject?

CAITLYN

It's your rehearsal.

LEE

Who do you pray too?

(CAITLYN waits for clarification.)

LEE

Caitlyn. Cat. Who does Caitlyn pray to?
Whatever happened to poor Kevin?

(CAITLYN laughs.)

LEE

Hey, you gave me free reign.

CAITLYN

I said you could "ask", I didn't say I would answer.

LEE

You are a curious character Miss Caitlyn Saunders. Curious indeed. So, what happened to Kevin? Do you know?

CAITLYN

Not really.

LEE

You were in fourth grade together; I'm sure you went to fifth and sixth together too.

CAITLYN

We moved.

LEE

Ohhh, *you* moved. Right. When your parents . . . split up or when your mother died?

CAITLYN

If we're done?

LEE

No. No, sorry, I'll back off. You have to tell me when I get too personal, OK? I've been told I have boundary issues. Other people's, not my own.

CAITLYN

[It's OK. You're] just doing your job, right?

LEE

Tell me about when you left home. If that's not too sensitive a subject.

CAITLYN

(Considers the question a moment before asking:)

. . . Why?

LEE

So you been on your own now for how long now? Six months? A year?

CAITLYN

Two and a half. What're you / get—

LEE

Months?

CAITLYN

Years.

LEE

Seventeen.

Emancipated?

When your mother died. Right. You said you have brothers.

CAITLYN

In Colorado.

LEE

Younger? Older?

CAITLYN

Older.

LEE

And they didn't take you with them?

CAITLYN

I was a Senior in High School.

LEE

Got it.

You have a boyfriend, Caitlyn?

CAITLYN

(Caught off guard again:)

. . . I don't know / if I—

LEE

Girlfriend?

CAITLYN

No.

LEE

Don't be insulted; I only asked. I'm not passing judgment. I just find the term 'significant other' too sterile. 'Girlfriend' 'Boyfriend' : that implies a personal relationship.

CAITLYN

I'm not gay.

LEE

Neither am I. And yet, here we are. Now, can you just follow my question instead of assuming the worst?

CAITLYN

How the hell is that—Do you just say anything that pops into your head?

LEE

No. No, the myriad of things that pop into my head that I don't say could fill this room. And what about you? Why doesn't Caitlyn say anything that pops into her head? Or does it have to be scripted? Why did you get into acting in the first place?

Quid pro quo time; you owe me / this one.

CAITLYN

I'm not playing this game with you anymore.

LEE

Too much TV as a kid? You ever get involved in sports? Why aren't you in school?

CAITLYN

Which question do you actually want me to answer?

LEE

You choose.

CAITLYN

I play softball.

LEE

What field?

CAITLYN

Shortstop.

LEE

Coed or—

CAITLYN

I'm not in school—

LEE

Because you can't afford it.

CAITLYN

Did you want me to answer these questions? 'Cuz you're doing fine on your own.

LEE

Why acting?

CAITLYN

Why are you asking? Why did *you* get into theatre?

LEE

Easy: girls.

CAITLYN

Girls?

LEE

Girls.

CAITLYN

Girls.

LEE

No.

CAITLYN

Can we get back to working the script.

LEE

Why are you here, Caitlyn?

Why are you here? Why are you putting up with all my shit?

CAITLYN

You're making me nervous.

LEE

Good. You should be. We should all be nervous. Hamlet is nervous.

What'd you want to be when you were a little kid?

CAITLYN

You tell me.

LEE

I got into the theatre in the first place because that's where all the girls were. Sue me, I'm just being honest. Met both my wives in the theatre. Met the mother of my child too. So, I learned.

(He stops—thinks over what he is about to say—and what he has just said—loses his thoughts for a moment . . .)

I'm sorry, we are so off track right now it's ridiculous.

(Focusing back in Caitlyn:)

What did you say you wanted to be when you grew up?

CAITLYN

I am—no . . . I am done—This is . . . not what I signed up for.

LEE

Really? / When did—

CAITLYN

Why all the personal questions about me? I don't know whether you're gathering information for future assaults on me or what.

LEE

Now I'm "assaulting" you.

CAITLYN

Pretty much.

LEE

I'm just trying to get to know you. I don't Google.

CAITLYN

Why don't I believe that?

Your daughter? You talk to her like this? You know, I'd really love to be a fly on that wall. You ever even see her? / Is this some kinda—

LEE

Every day.

Why'd you leave home?

CAITLYN

Whaddo you care?

LEE

Was it a boy? A girl? They didn't / want you?

CAITLYN

I had my own reasons.

LEE

Where are they now? Your brothers in Colorado—are they still in Colorado?

CAITLYN

What does it matter?

LEE

They're family. You could have stayed with them [but] you didn't. You chose to leave by staying behind.

Was it a teacher?

CAITLYN

Oh my god No.

LEE

Sorry / Then . . .{what?}

CAITLYN

It was *their* choice, alright? My brothers chose not to take me with them—if you have to know—they arranged for me to stay behind to finish school because they thought I'd be happier.

LEE

And were you? Happier?

CAITLYN

I got by.

LEE

Well . . . that sucks. I'm sorry.

CAITLYN

Are you satisfied now? You really are . . .

LEE

(Piecing it in . . .)

my god: your review: this *is* about your rev—You need your review to shove it in their faces. / Cat, that'll eat you alive like a

CAITLYN

Can you stop: Enough already. Enough.

LEE

. . . Of course. I'm sorry. I really am.

CAITLYN

Hamlet's the more interesting character, of course.

LEE

Of course.

CAITLYN

So, tell me, how can you use that to make me a better Hamlet?

(Slight pause. LEE looks down at the time on his cell phone. He sets it down again. He takes another drink of coffee.)

LEE

You want to be a better Hamlet? We can do this . . .

(A beat: CAITLYN holds her ground.)

Alright then, there's a speech [it's actually the hardest] in Act four . . .

CAITLYN

Scene four: getting on the ship for England. Separated from her family. Leaving home. Unwanted. Unfinished business. Got it. I see where you're going with this.

LEE

You know it?

Because you don't have to prove anything.

CAITLYN

Ready when you are.

LEE

Then go for it; give me what you got.

(He notes his phone and pushes it to the side; giving Caitlyn his full attention:)

Just take your time.

(CAITLYN takes a moment to reflect and prepare for the scene. Her countenance for this speech is more controlled and confident than we have seen before. In fact she performs the following piece as near perfect as any Hamlet can; every nuance, every beat, every moment is filled with just the right amount of respect for the author as for the character—she is spot on: brilliant.)

CAITLYN

(Beginning with an address to both Rosencrantz and Guildenstern:)

I'll be with you straight go a little before.

(A beat. CAITLYN watches her schoolmates leave with a clear distaste in his mouth for both men. She looks back at where she's been and takes in the last sights of her homeland as she lets the rest of the characters from the previous scene continue to exit farther away.)

How all occasions do inform against me, and spur my dull revenge! What is a woman, if her chief good and market of hers time be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more. Sure, he that made us with such large discourse, looking before and after, gave us not that capability and god-like reason to fust in us unused. Now, whether it be bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple of thinking too precisely on the event, a thought which, quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom and ever three parts coward, I do not know why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do;' sith I have cause and will and strength and means to do't.

(She now includes what waits before her as well as what she is leaving behind:)

Examples gross as earth exhort me: witness this this army of such mass and charge led by a delicate and tender prince, whose spirit with divine ambition puff'd makes mouths at the invisible event, exposing what is mortal and unsure to all that fortune, death and danger dare, even for an egg-shell. Rightly to be great is not to stir without great argument, but greatly to find quarrel in a straw when honour's at the stake.

CAITLYN (Continued:)

(And now she includes herself into the mix:)

How stand I then, that have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd, excitements of my reason and my blood, and let all sleep? while, to my shame, I see the imminent death of twenty thousand, that, for a fantasy and trick of fame, go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot whereon the numbers cannot try the cause, which is not tomb enough and continent to hide the slain? O, from this time forth, my thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!

(She steps away, following after the characters who had previously exited before her.)

(Long pause:

LEE is the one now speechless before CAITLYN. He glances at his phone but makes no note again . . . No comment needed: he couldn't add anything to this if he wanted to. Lee watches in all but awe as CAITLYN continues her cross—circling around and back to almost where she'd started her speech.)

LEE

(Quietly appreciative:)

Where have you been hiding her?

(No reply. He now notes the time down.)

What the hell was that? Where the hell did that come from?

CAITLYN

That was my audition / piece. But . . .

LEE

Where was I? And that is how you got the job, Cat—"But?"

CAITLYN

I think this went / better. Yeah I included the—

LEE

Better? I don't know what else / to say. I have no purpose here—This was better, yeah, this was— . . .

CAITLYN

—I realized the *puffed up* captain was probably gay and even so or maybe *because* she was gay she was willing to march into to hell just to prove she was worthy and so : if she can do *that* then What am I? / *What* is Hamlet?

LEE

What are you? What are you indeed: that was perfect. Don't let it get to your head. Next.

How is it that you understand this speech and you don't have a clue on the rest of the role?—Don't get me wrong: when you understand the rest of the role like this piece . . .

CAITLYN

I'm here to learn.

LEE

Honey, if we all learned as fast as you there'd be world peace by now. Or complete slaughter—one or the other—be careful what you learn. (I'm sorry.) You have now earned my respect.

(There is a pause.)

CAITLYN

Shall we do the last one then?

LEE

(Thinks on it:)

No.

CAITLYN

Why not?

LEE

Well, in the first place: it's not the last one. It's in the middle of the play. And we skipped one but I'm not going to [break your]—I'm not going to bother about that. "The play's the thing in which we'll catch the conscience of the king."

CAITLYN

Oh, right.

LEE

"Alas, poor Yorick; I knew him, Horatio." That's a whole scene.

CAITLYN

I thought we were just working on the monologues.

LEE

There are no monologues, Cat.

CAITLYN

We've gone over that.

LEE

Then go: do it. "Oh, what a rogue and peasant slave am I".

CAITLYN

Excuse me?

LEE

"Peasant slave"—from the top.

CAITLYN

(A beat.)

God be wi' ye. I am alone. Oh what a rogue and peasant slave—

LEE

What?

CAITLYN

What, "what"?

LEE

Start again.

CAITLYN

(Starting again:)

God be wi' ye. I am alone. Oh what a—

LEE

Don't adlib.

CAITLYN

I'm not—

(Starting again:)

God be wi' ye. I am alone.

LEE

Where does it say that?

CAITLYN

Say what?

(As Lee flips thru the script for the speech.)

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are leaving: I say, "God be wi' ye," then "I am alone," then "Oh—

LEE

(Staring at the page in front of him;)

Are you?

CAITLYN

Am I—Am I what?—

LEE
(Continued:)

Alone?

CAITLYN
(Continued:)

—A rogue and peasant slave?

LEE
Alone! Alone. Is Hamlet alone? Is Hamlet ever really alone? Does he even know what is to be alone? Surrounded by courtesans and servants and anyone with a mouth begging for a handout. It's like the rich thinking they know what it's like to be poor because they can imagine it. Skip it. Next speech.

CAITLYN
I think the point is that she's a slave to the people whether with them or not—

LEE
Skip it. He's not alone.

CAITLYN
Whatever you say.

LEE
He is never alone. Claudius and Polonius are watching.

CAITLYN
When— . . . Are we talking about the same speech?

LEE
In the first place Claudius and Polonius are behind the curtain watching and how do you know you're not aware that they're there and maybe you're just trying to put on the crazy.

CAITLYN
Okay . . . in that scene . . . "to be or not to be": It wouldn't be such a famous speech if she was just a 'putting on a show'.

LEE
There's always someone listening, Cat. Always. And in the third place I don't want to play around with this shit anymore.

CAITLYN
And was there a second somewhere? You skipped from the first to the third.

LEE

I did two firsts, you weren't following. Is that what you got from all this: semantics? Why didn't you quit?

CAITLYN

What?

LEE

Why didn't you just tell me to—well, you did indirectly—but why did you stay?

CAITLYN

You just praised—I'm not following you.

LEE

I gave you every reason to storm out. What the hell is wrong with you?

CAITLYN

(Back at him:)

Not every reason.

LEE

I'm not here to play out your Daddy issues.

CAITLYN

[Neither am I.] I'm here to work.

LEE

This isn't work. This is worship. This is— . . . I would have walked out 40 pages ago. I wouldn't have come back from your piss break.

CAITLYN

Why are you getting so upset about this?

LEE

Because you had to quit. You had to march off and realize: that quitting wasn't an option. You had to come back with your tail between your legs and say, "dammit, I'm here."

CAITLYN

"Dammit, I'm here."

LEE

No. Because until you quit; until you really quit; until you march off; storm out; piss off; you can't come back and know what it is to realize that you can't kill yourself. It's not a matter of a moral dilemma, it just is.

CAITLYN

So, this was all a game?

LEE

No.

CAITLYN

What else do you want to call it?

LEE

You're nineteen.

Why did you stay? Why didn't you . . .

Oh my god, it *is* your father.

Your father left. Didn't he? I can't— . . .

He left you and your brothers and your mother. In the fourth grade.

And you're still looking for him. And that's why you didn't go to Colorado: you didn't go with your brothers because you stuck around for him but he didn't take you in. Even after she died.

(No reply. Softly; still putting it all together:)

This isn't Daddy issues, this is . . . You not being him. You don't walk away . . . because you're not her. You're not him.

(A beat. He now no longer waits for a reply. He knows there won't be one:)

No, you stick around. You stick around—you stick it out, regardless of what happens because you're not him. I could have set you on fire and you woulda stuck around to toast marshmallows. I could have— . . . I'm sorry honey , but that's just sad. That's . . . you're better than that. I woulda left.

CAITLYN

On page forty, I heard.

LEE

Forty pages ago; if you're going to hear it hear it right.

(Pause.)

LEE

Why? Why? Why . . . put yourself through all this crap?

CAITLYN

It beats ballet.

I thought I might learn something.

LEE

From who? Me? I got nothin', Caitlyn. I've got nothing to teach you. Who am I? I'm nobody. You're nobody. Hamlet isn't real. We will all die; we will fade from everyone's memory like some Jean-Paul Sartre play and Hamlet? Hamlet will live on. Hamlet will never die; Hamlet will continue to raise the consciences of humanity and the irony of it all is all Hamlet wants to do is to move on to the next dance. You wanna hear the speech? Fine—you wanna do the speech, I don't care.

(Without pause or shift of focus LEE begins in straight from where he is:)

To be, or not to be: that is the question: Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them? To die: to sleep; no more; and by a sleep to say we end the heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to,

(He pauses . . . not so deliberately but is notably silent a moment.)

'tis a consummation devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep; to sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;

(A slight knowing smile of irony:)

for in that sleep of death what dreams may come when we have shuffled off this mortal coil, must give us pause:

(This pause being deliberate.)

there's the respect that makes calamity of so long life; for who would bear the whips and scorns of time, the oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely, the pangs of despised love, the law's delay, the insolence of office and the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes, when he himself might his quietus make with a bare bodkin?

(To Caitlyn:)

Who would fardels bear, to grunt and sweat under a weary life, but that the dread of something after death, the undiscover'd country from whose bourn no traveller returns . . .

(Pause. LEE has stopped altogether. The pause continues. CAITLYN waits for more but in receiving nothing she continues where Lee has left off.)

CAITLYN

puzzles the will

(A beat: after Lee does not comment she continues:)

and makes us rather bear those ills we have than fly to others that we know not of? Thus conscience does make cowards of us all; and thus the native hue of resolution is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, and enterprises of great pith and moment with this regard their currents turn awry, and lose the name of action.

(Pause.)

CAITLYN

(Nothing more said she finishes the line quietly:)

**Soft you now! The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons be all my sins
remember'd.**

(Pause. CAITLYN waits for some instruction or critique
but LEE appears lost in his own thoughts. CAITLYN
moves to him.)

LEE

(Softly:)

Go home, Cat.

CAITLYN

(Matching his quiet:)

Are you OK?

LEE

Yeah . . . I'm fine.
(Pause.)

CAITLYN

You wanna take ten?

LEE

Why?

CAITLYN

. . . Well . . .

(Noticing the phone lit up on Lee's side table.)

You might answer your phone for one.

Look, you got a message. Crap: you got more messages than me. I don't know
what you were all over my case for. Look at that: You've missed three calls in the
last half hour.

LEE

(Takes his phone from Caitlyn and places it in his pocket:)

It's on silent.

CAITLYN

They look like they're from the hospital—They could be important.

LEE

Alright, [that's it for now. If] you want we can break for lunch?

CAITLYN

You're not going to return the call?

LEE

I don't have to. It's from my daughter.

CAITLYN

(Taken aback a moment before he puts it together:)

And she works at the hospital, right?

God, you're a sonofabitch. Well, you had me going on that for a moment, I hope you're

Your daughter *is in* the hospital . . isn't she?

Holy shit. So what the fuck are we doing here?

LEE

Fine: [maybe you're right.] Why don't we just call it a day? You've got places to [be.] I've got [places to go.] We [can] just leave it at that. We all [have] arrangements to make.

CAITLYN

Your daughter is *in* the hospital, right?

LEE

[So,] if we're done then I have to lock up; do you have everything with you?

CAITLYN

(A beat.)

[If] your daughter's in the hospital, what are you doing here?

LEE

She's downstairs.

(Silence. CAITLYN dares not ask. They both know the answer.)

CAITLYN

(Softly:)

By 'downstairs' you mean . . ?

LEE

. . . In the hospital.

CAITLYN

(Softly:)

damn

LEE

Right? So you tell me; that was the message. I received a text—prob'ly an hour ago . . .

CAITLYN

(Repeating it delicately:)

"downstairs . . . in the hospital" . . .

(Long pause—the Silence continues.)

CAITLYN

(Carefully so as not to take a position:)

They sent you a text message?

(There is a long pause. CAITLYN is unable to move, not knowing how to respond.)

LEE

So she's . . . uh . . .she's not coming out . . .

(Pause.)

CAITLYN

Oh my g— . . .You should go then . . .

LEE

. . . Right . . .

CAITLYN

Yeah . . .

(Sincerely offering:)

You need a ride?

LEE

No, thank you, [dear]. Actually I'm better if I drive.

(Silence. LEE starts redress the stage : moving furniture and props back into their proper places. CAITLYN joins in the work. Without words LEE stops—if only to refute her help but CAITLYN insists on holding her own. The two finish redressing the stage. Not knowing what else to say CAITLYN gathers her things. LEE waits patiently although the silence itself becomes unbearable.)

LEE

(Unable to let the silence continue:)

She was in a coma for three months. They had her hooked to . . .

(A beat. Uneasy as it is for him to admit:)

But she couldn't wake up . . . The E.E.G.s . . . They took her off the machines today. I couldn't bring myself to be there for . . .

(LEE is unable to say more or even complete his sentence. Awkward silence.)

LEE

So I left my phone on silent and they broke through with a four word text. Not a "sorry". Not a "we tried to get hold of you but" . . . just "Your daughter is downstairs." So . . . But it's a beautiful day somewhere, right?

(CAITLYN remains at a loss to respond.)

LEE

For a little boy in Mission Hills¹. And a young mother in San Luis Obispo². And some . . . other people I don't know—never met, never will. It's all about perspective, right? So you tell me . . .

(They share a look. CAITLYN looks to Lee, seeing into him for the first time . . . Pause.)

LEE

What? Were you expecting some long ass speech? Some tie it all up in a bow for you, revelation? . . . Sorry. . . . Life doesn't always work out the way you want to, does it?

(The pause continues. CAITLYN finishes setting the last piece of stage dressing back into place. She stops. A beat.)

LEE

What?

CAITLYN

I was just . . .

LEE

You use this. You remember this. You store it away and . . .

CAITLYN

That's a fucked way to live.

¹ - City named to be changed to a local municipality no closer than fifty miles away (non de script at best)

² - ibid

LEE

Tell me about it . . .

(No reply. CAITLYN takes out his own car keys and feels them in her hand a moment.)

CAITLYN

(Quietly but firmly:)

I'm driving.

(LEE wants to refuse but he has no voice. They both head offstage together.)

CAITLYN

(As they exit:)

Tell me about your daughter . . .

(But we don't hear Lee's reply as they are now gone from our view. Silence. The lights "click" out as the appropriate switches are turned off unseen off stage; leaving only the mist of light coming in from an open backstage door. The light diminishes to a sliver and then darkness as Caitlyn and Lee both exit the building.)

END