

THEATRE GHOSTS:

TABLE READ

a play

by

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With so much theatre being created for 90 minutes or less presentations, theatre houses often close their doors by ten at night; leaving venues dark, yet presumably available to create additional revenue and/or bring in a new audience; one that doesn't even consider night life starting till after 9:00 pm.

THEATRE GHOSTS is a series of 'after-hours' theatre. Made up of one act plays roughly forty-five to seventy-five minutes in length that are intended to be performed on a stage already in place for another production, regardless whether that production be *Noises off*, *Music Man*, *As You Like It* or *Raisin in the Sun*. The *Theatre Ghosts* plays utilize each venue as a theatre space—generally the same theatre space itself that the audience is attending...any dialogue pertaining to location or venue may and should be adjusted to match the venue.

CHARACTERS

CARA - a Stage Manager

TOPHER - an Actor / playing the role of Hamlet

RILEY - an Actor / playing the role of Ophelia

DOBORAH "DOBIE" AMES - a Director

THE SETTING

The theatre space itself as is.

THE TIME

Present.

SYNOPSIS

A ten minute scene—a spin on Hamlet—is table read and dissected along with each artist's lives in the ongoing drama behind the curtain.

For the purposes of our READING:

Any stage directions or dialogue highlighted in grey will NOT be read aloud.

These people talk over each other consistently...do not be afraid to overlap.

A NOTE ON THE DIALOGUE:

1. A slash “ / “ indicates the character with the next line of dialogue begins his or her speech (overlapping dialogue).
2. Dialogue in brackets “ [] ” is unspoken, although the character is thinking it.
(please note these passages will also be highlighted in grey in this script)
3. Dialogue in parenthesis “ () ” is spoken aloud but is an aside.
(also note that these passages are NOT highlighted and SHOULD BE read aloud)
4. Grammatical errors; sentences beginning in lower case; or UPPER CASE; used in place of common punctuation (even a few misspellings), were, indeed, intended.

(At rise:

Five chairs, arranged around a long table, the style you might find at any party rental shop, apron the existing set of whatever show is currently on the theatre's season. Seated at the table are four artists: A young man (TOPHER), a young woman (RILEY)—both actors; a woman of no determinate age (CARA), the stage manager; and DOBORAH AMES, a woman edging into her forties—or beyond (The Director). Each artist has a script and writing utensils in front of them, as well as notebooks, phones, water, coffee or whatever suits their comfort within reach. As the lights come up, RILEY is setting her cell phone in front of herself—centralized on the table as CARA is just hanging up on a call from her own phone:)

CARA

Yeah. Yeah, he's not coming.

DOBORAH

[Really?]

CARA

It's a work thing.
He said—he'd said it might be a problem.

DOBORAH

Ongoing or just tonight?

CARA

I [don't really remember]...

DOBORAH

Ok, then.
OK, let's get started uh..[Cara] you go ahead and read Leartes along with the stage directions.

CARA

You sure you don't want to...

DOBORAH

I want to listen. I can't listen if I'm [focused on reading, right?]...

CARA

Anything you want.

DOBORAH

That's what I want.

(A slight beat.)

DOBORAH

Turn off your phones.

RILEY

(No need to move, as she already has:)

[of course]

TOPHER

Ohh..right. Sorry.

(He silences his cell phone.)

Yes. There ya go.

(DOBORAH takes up a pencil, notes the time in her script. Throughout the following reading she makes copious notes. But first we encounter a brief awkward moment.)

DOBORAH

(To CARA:)

[Well?]

CARA (Stage Directions)

Uhhh..Scene. At rise. Elsinore. A hallway in the castle. Large windows draped with fabric to the floor line the wall. Laertes waits quietly, leaning half in/half out of one the curtains, cleaning the underside of his fingernails with the tip of his dagger, as Hamlet crosses through. Laertes takes a single step forward. Hamlet stops. A beat. Their eyes avoid each other. Laertes continues to focus on his self-manicure.

TOPHER (Hamlet)

Laertes.

CARA (Laertes)

Hamlet.
Prince.

(RILEY tries to subtly reach out to her phone.)

DOBORAH

What? You need to take that?

RILEY

No. I just...you said I could...[record this]?

DOBORAH

Sure; fine; whatever.
Whenever you're ready.

(RILEY turns on her recording app.)

RILEY

Sorry.

DOBORAH

Again.

(Doborah corrects the start time in her notes as CARA begins over:)

CARA (Stage Directions)

Right. Scene one. At rise. Elsinore. A hallway in the castle. Large windows draped with fabric to the floor line the wall. Laertes waits quietly, leaning half in/half out of one the curtains, cleaning the underside of his fingernails with the tip of his dagger, as Hamlet crosses through. Laertes takes a single step forward. Hamlet stops. A beat. Their eyes avoid each other. Laertes continues to focus on his self-manicure.

TOPHER (Hamlet)

Laertes.

CARA (Laertes)

Hamlet.
Prince.

TOPHER (Hamlet)

I thought you were sailing to France already.

CARA (Laertes)

Yeah. About that.

(Stage Directions:)

Eyes meet.

(Laertes:)

She's my sister.

TOPHER (Hamlet)

Word of advice: you should be more careful stepping out of shadows like that..you could be mistaken for a rat. The castle seems overrun.

CARA (Laertes)

You can have any whore, any maiden, of your choice. She's my sister.

Am I uh..sensing a threat?
TOPHER (Hamlet)

I need to know.
CARA (Laertes)

Know what?
TOPHER (Hamlet)

..You touch her again...
CARA (Laertes)

Sinon quoi?¹
TOPHER (Hamlet)

Do you love her?
CARA (Laertes)

What is love?
TOPHER (Hamlet)

I have more pressing issues than your... You dishonor your sister, sir.

So ... “No”.
CARA (Laertes)

Words.
TOPHER (Hamlet)

Laertes sheaths his knife.
CARA (Stage Directions)

(Laertes:)
I could gut you like a fish and call it self-defense; tell me what I’ve heard is untrue.

Words.
TOPHER (Hamlet)

Words like *Midwife? Clergy? Carelessness?*
CARA (Laertes)

Consent.
TOPHER (Hamlet)

¹ Sinon quoi? - French for “Or what?” (pronunciation: “*se-Nown kwa*”)

CARA (Laertes)
Conceit.

TOPHER (Hamlet)
Caution.

CARA (Laertes)
Cunt.

TOPHER (Hamlet)
—try [*tree*] matters. Only country matters. You need not concern yourself with affairs of state; they're above your / station.

CARA (Laertes)
Are you planning to marry her?

TOPHER (Hamlet)
And put you in line to the throne? I'd sooner cut my own neck. What does she say happened?

CARA (Laertes)
She's a woman.

TOPHER (Hamlet)
Well, there you go. We can't trust that, now can we?

CARA (Laertes)
We can trust our own eyes. It's only a matter / of—

TOPHER (Hamlet)
When does your boat leave again? Are you rowing there yourself?

CARA (Laertes)
I can be back within two days' time.

TOPHER (Hamlet)
Well..I guess I'm im—(am I *supposed* to be impressed?)—had you said *one day's* time, I would have thought, 'now that's something worth wagering on'.

CARA (Laertes)
Stay away from her.

TOPHER (Hamlet)
Why? We both know the damage is done. Does your father—

CARA (Laertes)

Leave him out of this.

TOPHER (Hamlet)

Still thinks she's as pure as the driven—

CARA (Laertes)

Curb your tongue

(Stage Directions:)

Knives are drawn on each other.

TOPHER (Hamlet)

(You would only be doing us all a service.)

CARA (Laertes)

(Don't think it past me.) "The lunatic son attacked. I could do no less than protect myself. I am heart broken. And on the eve of their betrothal. If only he had not passed away so young..." Her integrity would be only minimally marred but not sullen.

TOPHER (Hamlet)

Fancy words for a lawyer's son but I think you meant *sullied*.

CARA (Stage Directions)

Something or someone is heard moving nearer. The knives immediately return to their concealment. Only Hamlet allows his blade to linger in the shadows, aimed at Laertes' back organs, as Ophelia enters.

RILEY (Ophelia)

My two favorite—

TOPHER (Hamlet)

We were just parting ways.

RILEY (Ophelia)

..Shouldn't you?

CARA (Laertes)

Be on a boat. I had to confirm: it was his, was it not—Is this still ongoing?

RILEY (Ophelia)

I—don't know / what you're...

CARA (Laertes)

Must I spell it out?

(Again, to Hamlet—for Ophelia’s benefit:)

Do you love her?

TOPHER (Hamlet)

When have I not?

CARA (Laertes)

(To Ophelia:)

You’re a fool. He will not honor you. He has said as much. And your time is apparently short.

RILEY (Ophelia)

[Have you said anything to] Father?

CARA (Laertes)

Don’t be absurd. But he’s not blind, he’ll see it soon enough. Are you going to tell him you’re just getting fat? He’ll counsel your diet.

(Referring to Hamlet:)

And he says nothing. You know what he wants you to do. And that will be on your soul.

RILEY (Ophelia)

Are you done?

CARA (Laertes)

Are you daft?

RILEY (Ophelia)

Your boat—

CARA (Laertes)

To hell with my boat. There’ll always be another.

RILEY (Ophelia)

I can not talk to you [when you’re] like this.

CARA (Laertes)

Talking wasn’t the problem.

TOPHER (Hamlet)

(Knife still in hand, though out of sight:)

She may be your blood but I will not have you talk to her like that. I may be a number of things but I’m not an arse.

CARA (Laertes)

Would you stab me in the back; is that how you slew King Fortinbras? Like a coward?

(Stage Directions:)

The slightest of beats: Hamlet sheaths his dagger.

RILEY (Ophelia)

please.

TOPHER (Hamlet)

At least I've tasted battle, unlike you and your books and poetry...

RILEY (Ophelia)

please. stop.

I love you both. And I don't want to have to choose. Not today.

CARA (Laertes)

But soon.

RILEY (Ophelia)

You told Father you are leaving. So, leave.

CARA (Laertes)

You don't want to choose...[but clearly you have]...

RILEY (Ophelia)

(To Hamlet:)

I know..I know your mother and uncle frighten you.

(To Laertes—in reference to Hamlet:)

He had just lost his father. And yes, we comforted each other through that storm. I know what it is to be orphaned of a parent. / And I know—

CARA (Laertes)

You were three.

RILEY (Ophelia)

And you were nine; shouldn't that mean it hurts you three times more? I barely knew her. He lost the man he'd known all his life, and then and then—then they usurped his throne...

CARA (Laertes)

I don't have to listen to / [this]

RILEY (Ophelia)

No, you don't. Leave. We'll be fine. We have each other.

CARA (Laertes)
(Referring to Polonius [their father]:)
When do you—*How* do you plan to tell him?

RILEY (Ophelia)
I've... tried. But I will..in my time.

CARA (Laertes)
Tell him [Father] that he [Hamlet] forced himself upon you—*something*—but tell him something soon. If you need me to be there—

RILEY (Ophelia)
Oh my, no, oh my god, no.

CARA (Laertes)
(Referring to Hamlet:)
He teach you to speak like that?

TOPHER (Hamlet)
I'm right here.

CARA (Laertes)
Half the country thinks you're mad. The remainder simply don't know you. But rest assured, I think your sanity is not an issue. I think you know exactly what you're doing.

TOPHER (Hamlet)
They teach you that in France, do they? Hurry, they're waiting...

CARA (Laertes)
Since it's too late to counsel 'stop', do make an honest woman of her. Or I'll see a cutlet made of you. And I promise it'll be face to face.

TOPHER (Hamlet)
(ooooooooooooo.)

RILEY (Ophelia)
Leartes, please, you have to go.
Please. I...[can't]...

CARA (Stage Directions)

A slight beat.

(Laertes:)

Two days.

(Stage Directions:)

Hamlet shrugs.

CARA (Continued / Laertes)
(Bidding her adieu:)

Ophelia.

TOPHER (Hamlet)

I feel ya.

CARA (Laertes)

..shuddup.

(Stage Directions:)

Laertes exits. There is an awkward moment between Hamlet and Ophelia.

RILEY (Ophelia)

Love you.

TOPHER (Hamlet)

Do you? Because I can be saved or crowned or cured—[which one—after all] I *am* a madman?

RILEY (Ophelia)

You're hardly mad; just / misunder—

TOPHER (Hamlet)

ohhhhhh but if I was...

Wouldn't that be something? To wrap ourselves inside and out of. And rest. Hidden away. Peut-être un peu de mort²?

RILEY (Ophelia)

From such a dance of death comes life.

TOPHER (Hamlet)

Unless it comes to naught.

RILEY (Ophelia)

What're you—you're confusing me.

TOPHER (Hamlet)

You're beautiful; you're young; but you're stupid.

RILEY (Ophelia)

..I love you. You said...

TOPHER (Hamlet)

I have a country to win; I have a debt to pay. I will come to you from time to time?

² Peut-être un peu de mort? – French for “Perhaps a little death?” (*pronunciation: “pe-TE-tr un P-d-more”*)

What? RILEY (Ophelia)

Or not. TOPHER (Hamlet)

What are you saying? RILEY (Ophelia)

What are you asking? TOPHER (Hamlet)

You're going to be / a... RILEY (Ophelia)

TOPHER (Hamlet)
First, I must be a son. And you play the daughter. Before there can be any talk of children or love or respect.

You said you loved me. RILEY (Ophelia)

TOPHER (Hamlet)
I say a lot of things. And I truly mean them. Honestly. From my whole heart. *When* I say them. At that moment. Moments...[come and go]...

In this moment. RILEY (Ophelia)

..I have to see about a ghost. TOPHER (Hamlet)

CARA (Stage Directions)
Hamlet exits, leaving Ophelia in her own thoughts as the lights fade. End scene.

(A slight beat.)

Ok. DOBORAH

Well, I think it's stupid. TOPHER
(A moment...)
(D—did I just say that out loud?)

RILEY

You want me to play it back for you?

DOBORAH

You can turn that off now.

RILEY

Oh. (right.)

(She does so. CARA checks her phone. DOBORAH waits for Cara to return her attention to the rehearsal...)

DOBORAH

Thoughts? Other than *'stupid'*.

TOPHER

Can we stretch?

DOBORAH

You're not glued to the chair.

RILEY

Notes?

DOBORAH

Uhhhh not really yet. Let's explore this a little more.

(Before Topher does:)

Don't touch the set.

TOPHER

[I'm not.]

CARA

They know where everything is.

TOPHER

Whatever. Why are we reading in here anyway—what's wrong with the—?

DOBORAH

We just shampooed the carpeting in the / greenroom.

CARA

It's still drying.

(A beat.)

DOBORAH

More thoughts; let's focus on the script. / What I want us to explore is—

TOPHER

Fine, It's ..uh..it's unconventional?

DOBORAH

Good; that's a start. Why?

TOPHER

controversial?

RILEY

No, not really; I don't think so—not so much. There is growing opinion that uh she was uh. She / is.

DOBORAH

Yes. More.

RILEY

I mean, yeah, she takes the rue.

TOPHER

..Right...(?)

RILEY

It's all supported in the original script.

(RILEY pulls out a copy of *Shakespeare's Hamlet*.)

I also read online that / Shakespeare's wife—

TOPHER

Oh: well, if you read it online...

RILEY

Ophelia dies in a botched abortion attempt.

TOPHER

If you say so.

RILEY

She hands out flowers to everybody but she keeps the rue for herself. Because rue, it was a well-known—in Shakespeare's time—is poisonous and was used to often to induce abortions. But if you took too much...

TOPHER

They never even *did it*.

RILEY

No. They definitely did.

(RILEY thumbs through the script of *Hamlet* to find the lines of evidence.)

TOPHER

Well, I still don't care.

(Referring to the character of:)

For me, Hamlet is all over the place here.

RILEY

Maybe because he's actually crazy?

(CARA's phone [on silent] rings [unheard]. CARA answers it.)

CARA

(On phone:)

Yep?

TOPHER

(Is that Brian?)

(CARA nods.)

TOPHER

(Tell him he was recast.)

(What?; it's a joke.)

CARA

(On phone:)

Are you sure? – Do you want to talk t—she's right here. – No; yeah; I'll tell her.

(CARA hangs up the phone. They all wait...)

RILEY

Was / that?

CARA

That was Brian. Good news: he got the job.

DOBORAH

“The job?”

CARA

They promoted him. To manager. Oh, and he can't do the play. But he's going to make a donation.

(A beat.)

ALTERNATIVE DIALOGUE:

Part of the concept of THEATRE GHOSTS is to adapt the script to the actual venue of the given production.

Pg 1 – the TABLE may be placed anywhere that is most convenient.

Therefore, building descriptions (pg 12), should be adjusted to fit the actual building:

Pg 12 - reference to carpeting being shampooed and drying in the greenroom may be adjusted to paint drying in the kitchen (etc.); or any other reason that a (unseen) common room may be unoccupiable.

THE CURRENT SET:

There are times when the venue may have no set or a set under construction (between productions). In these cases the following adjustments can be made:

Pg 12

DOBORAH
Uhhhh not really yet. Let's
explore this a little more.
(Before Topher does:)
Don't touch the set.

TOPHER
[I'm not.]

CARA
They know where everything
is.



DOBORAH
Uhhhh not really yet. Let's
explore this a little more.
(Before Topher does:)
Don't touch the set.

TOPHER
(What set?)

DOBORAH
Don't touch anything.

TOPHER
[I'm not.]

CARA
They'll know. They always
know.