

Murder in Elsinore by Timothy C. Treanor

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SCRIPT PREVIEW

ACT I

(The stage is dressed with at least six chairs, distributed in apparent random order. Two chairs must be upstage center, roughly parallel to each other; they will have the accouterments of royalty – his & hers crowns, robes, etc . There is a human skull at the center of the stage on the floor and two swords lie near it. Prominently displayed on an easel at some point where it is visible to the audience but not obstructing the stage, is a large sign. "The Vaguely Familiar Players present Hamlet, starring J.K. Chittering," it says.

*Stage music up as **J.K. Chittering** stalks to center stage, scowling fiercely, and hunches over the laptop he carries with him. He is carrying a lunch bag and he withdraws a sandwich and a Coke® from it. While he munches, he types into the laptop. Periodically he looks up at the audience, nods with satisfaction, and returns to his laptop. At the extreme s.l., **The Sound Artist**, sitting at a table full of equipment, checks and rechecks his notes. The equipment must include a metal garbage can lid and perhaps horns and whistles or other devices for live sound.*

*(We chose to replicate most sounds through a Yamaha keyboard.) Periodically, **the Sound Artist** hits a sound cue – symbols clashing, say, or a low boat whistle – and whenever he does **Chittering** looks up at him and glares. **The Sound Artist** gestures apologetically, but he seems to be unable to stop his clownish fumbling with her equipment. SR of the table is a podium.*

*Eventually, **Dame Edith Pugh**, a stately actress of a mighty age, emerges through the audience and walks onto the stage. She goes up to **Chittering** tentatively, and he waves her off with an angry gesture. Hurt, she goes s.r., muttering to herself.*

*Next, **Charles Shramp Scamp** and **Oberon Dome** emerge together through the audience, talking to each other. As they mount the stage, **Scamp** gives **Chittering** a disdainful look and walks over to **Dame Edith**, where he begins a low, consoling conversation. **Dome** approaches **Chittering**, who gives him the same treatment he gave **Dame Edith**, and **Dome** skitters over s.r. to the other two. **The Sound Artist** silently calls **Scamp** over to the soundboard, where he points out something. **Scamp***

reaches down to the soundboard and gets an electric shock. Shaken, he returns to **Dame Edith** and **Dome** and resumes his conversation with them. As the three talk, **Scamp** seems to notice the audience and points them out to **Dome**, who immediately rushes backstage. **Scamp** gestures to the balcony, and we hear the following prerecorded announcement:)

**PRERECORDED
ANNOUNCEMENT:**

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the Port Tobacco Players' production of the original mystery-farce *Murder in Elsinore*, starring J.K. Chittering as Hamlet. Port Tobacco is now in its fifty-sixth year of bringing the great classics of the theater to life. And, in addition, we do some shows like this. We remind you that smoking and cell phones are prohibited, and don't even think of smoking your cell phone. Please observe the emergency exits.

This is a murder mystery, which means that someone's going to die tonight. When that happens, do *not* rush for those emergency exits. Instead, carefully observe the many clues scattered around you and rely on the adages found in your program books. The remaining characters – that is, those who are not dead – will circulate among you between acts. You may ask them questions if you think it will do any good. Now, sit back, relax, and enjoy tonight's production of *Murder In* – hey! What are you doing here! (*Onstage, Chittering breaks out into a huge grin.*) You're not supposed to – ow! (*Sound of scuffling.*) Somebody call the police! (*Crashing sound. A second pre-recorded voice, slightly breathless, takes over. It is obviously Chittering holding his nose.*)

SECOND VOICE:

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is our distinction to bring you the A Number One play in the English Languages, *Hamlet, Prince of the Danishes*, by Bill Shakespeare, starring the incomparable J.K. Chittering as Hamlet, Prince of the Danishes. Sit back and enjoy this mind-blowing production. Remember, tipping is permitted. (**Oberon Dome** emerges from backstage with

Colleen Cibber in tow. **Colleen Cibber** strides rapidly towards the podium; **Dome** floats over where **Scamp** and **Dame Edith** are standing.

Colleen Cibber: Good evening, I'm Colleen Cibber. Five years ago, I had the pleasure and the privilege of inheriting the Vaguely Familiar Players from my late Aunt, the legendary Sady McDonald. In our heyday, all the great thespians trod our boards.

J.K. Chittering: Not that there's anything wrong with that. Hah!

Colley Cibber: Marlon Brando, Sir John Guilgud, Dame Judi Dench, Sir Alec Guinness. And (*touch of despair*) now look at us. (**Dame Edith** strikes a ridiculous theatrical pose. **Scamp** begins some obnoxious vocal exercise, shaking his fingers loose at the same time. **Dome** smiles moronically. **Chittering** belches.) Yes, now look at us. We have fallen on hard times. I'll admit that. Yesterday, because of budget, I had to let my dog go. Oh, it was hard. You've never lived through hell until you've had to give your faithful companion of nine years a pink slip. Staring into those big brown eyes, trying to explain our outplacement services and his continuing right to medical coverage while he thumps his tail...(Recovers herself). Anyway, all this is by way of explaining that we will be unable to present our scheduled production of *Hamlet* tonight.

J.K. Chittering: The dog was gonna play Ophelia. We got Dame Edith, here, instead. (*Points to **Dame Edith**.*)

Colleen Cibber: (*Explosively*) Will you shut up, Mr. Chittering. In any event, the Vaguely Familiars will be pleased to present (*looks again at Vaguely Familiar Players*) I believe will be pleased to present *Scenes from Hamlet*, underscoring the plays most dramatic, and memorable, moments, as they are presented (*a deflated sigh*) in the rehearsal stage (*muttering*) by a pack of morons.

We are very pleased to have with us today the internationally acclaimed director, Uta Thwicket.

*(Looks around; notices that **Thwicket** is not on stage. Repeats more loudly, enunciating each word distinctly.)* We are very pleased to have the internationally acclaimed director, Uta Thwicket, with us today. On this stage. (**Thwicket** emerges, looking annoyed.)

Uta Thwicket: Yeah, I'm here. *(Walks around the stage, as though looking for something.)*

Colleen Cibber: Ms. Thwicket is well known for having turned down an opportunity to direct *Thelma and Louise*, *Braveheart*, and *Silence of the Lambs*. She was the original director of *Titanic* but resigned over artistic differences with Leonardo DeCaprio. She originally came to Washington to serve as artistic director for the National Shakespeare Theater...

Uta Thwicket: *(Suddenly and loudly.)* Where's my damn chair?

Colleen Cibber: ...the National Shakespeare Theater...

Uta Thwicket: *(Even more loudly)* I get a director's chair. It's in my contract.

Colleen Cibber: *(Stage-whispering to **Sound Artist**.)* Get her chair out there.

Sound Artist *obliges, reaching over his table and accidentally pressing sound cues: foghorn; swords clashing; etc. He brings the chair over to **Thwicket**, and **Thwicket** and **Sound Artist** can work out comic business setting up chair. When they are done **Colleen Cibber** resumes.*

Colleen Cibber: Ms. Thwicket came to Washington to serve as the artistic director for the National Shakespeare Theater but *(pause)* resigned before her plane landed. Ms. Thwicket is a beacon of integrity against the hypocrisy of the film and theater industry.

Uta Thwicket: Right.

Colleen Cibber: This...this is actually the first play she's directed, start to finish...

Uta Thwicket: Get on with it.

Colleen Cibber: We are deeply honored to have the theatrical legend Dame Edith Pugh with us in the roles of Gertrude and Ophelia. Dame Edith made her debut in *Birth of a Nation*, playing the nation. Subsequently, she has appeared in literally thousands of productions here and in England, often as significant geographical features.

Dame Edith: (*giving little wave*) Hello, there.

J.K. Chittering: (*Looking up from his laptop*) Hey, wait a minute. I have to make out with her? She's, like, ninety years old.

Colleen Cibber: Mr. Chittering, please. Joining us today as Polonius and King Claudius is Charles Shramp Scamp, who entertained generations of Americans as the voice of Huckleberry Hound for years.

Charles S. Scamp: Ladies and Gentlemen, I just wish to tell you what a privilege it is to appear...

J.K. Chittering: Hey, can you still do that *doink doink doink* thing where your legs move real fast?

Colleen Cibber: Please, Mr. Chittering. (***Cibber and Chittering glare at each other. Turning to audience, Cibber continues.***) In the roles of Horatio, Rosencranz, Guildenstern and Laertes, we have the ever-popular Oberon Dome, best known as "Evil Curley" in the classic David Croninburg film, *The Three Stooges Go Bad*.

Oberon Dome: Nyuk! Nyuk! Nyuk! (*makes fingers into gun, points it at Chittering*) Boom!

J.K. Chittering: Hey, Obe-wan, get over it. They never released the movie.

Colleen Cibber: And finally, as Hamlet, we have Mr. J.K. Chittering. Mr. Chittering has...no credentials whatsoever.

J.K. Chittering: I got something better than a background in lousy movies. I got *information*. That's currency in this city, I'll tell you, boy howdy!

Dame Edith: Boy howdy?

Colleen Cibber: Proceeds from tonight's production will go to restore our seriously depleted treasury. ...

J.K. Chittering: After I get my honorarium.

Colleen Cibber: (*Sighs in exasperation.*) Every dollar raised by this production *after* Mr. Chittering gets his honorarium will be used to restore this company to its former glory. (*Suddenly, decisively.*) Ms. Thwicket, why don't you explain to the audience what they'll be seeing today? (*During the rest of the scene **Colleen Cibber** occasionally roams the set as if searching for something.*)

Uta Thwicket: (*resignedly. Throughout this speech **Chittering** is pacing s.r., waiting for his chance to go on. Every time **Thwicket** says "Hamlet" **Chittering** nods vigorously, and with great satisfaction.*) All right. In this scene, King Claudius and Queen Gertrude have arranged for Ophelia to be alone in the room Hamlet is about to enter. They will hide while Hamlet is alone with Ophelia, so that they can evaluate Hamlet's feelings about the girl. (***Dame Edith**, as Ophelia, sits down front stage right and begins primping and batting her eyes.*) Polonius stays to give one last bit of advice to his daughter before leaving her to Hamlet. But when Hamlet arrives, his reaction is not what Ophelia had expected. Take it away, Scamp.

Sound Artist: *sets up music cue*

Charles S. Scamp: Ophelia, walk you here – Gracious, so please you We will bestow ourselves (*Hands book to Ophelia*) – Read on this book;

That show of such an exercise may color
Your loneliness – We are oft to blame in this –
'Tis too much prov'd – that with devotion's visage
And pious action, we do sugar o'er
The devil himself.

I hear him coming; let's withdraw, my love.
(Exits to front s.l. **Chittering** enters, continues
his pacing, throwing his arms about wildly.
Dome follows, at a safe distance.)

J.K. Chittering: To be or not to be, that is the...(in the middle of his grandiose gesture, he suddenly realizes that he does not know the next word. He grimaces and wiggles in the hopes that the audience will mistake his panic for Hamlet's emotional upset. Music cue continues for a few seconds until it is obvious that **Chittering** has forgotten his line. Finally **Chittering** gives up.) Line.

Uta Thwicket: (Shoots out of her director's chair.) Question! Question, you moron. What else could it be?

J.K. Chittering: (undaunted). Question. (Mispronunciations which follow come about as a result of **Chittering's** uncertainty about what the lines are.) Whether it is nobler in the heart to suffer the slings and errors of outrageous fortune, or to sleep, perhaps to...perhaps to...(resigned) Line.

Uta Thwicket: Dream! Dream! To sleep perchance to dream! Is your brain completely pickled by that rotgut you drink? What else could it be? You sleep, you dream. What else could it be?

J.K. Chittering: Ah, I dunno, Utes. Maybe it's -- dance. (Suddenly, grabs **Dome**.)

Sound Artist Hits music and **Chittering** and **Dome** – **Dome** not entirely willingly – dance a dramatic waltz or tango. **Sound Artist** seems delighted by this development and sways in rhythm, smiling.

Uta Thwicket: Stop! Stop! (Runs over to **Chittering** and **Dome** and physically pulls them apart. **Dome** staggers s.r.)

Oberon Dome:

*(Weakly pronouncing the Stooge Loyalty Oath).
Woo! Woo! Woo! (**Chittering** wanders away,
looking for something on the floor as the next bit
of dialogue takes place. Eventually, he finds the
skull and picks it up just before delivering his
line.)*

Uta Thwicket:

*(Whirling on **Sound Artist**.)* And you – don't
encourage him! You take your sound cues from
me – get it?