

**“THE CASE OF THE PRINCE FORMERLY KNOWN AS HAMLET”  
A Justin Thyme Mystery  
By Bruce Kane**

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**“THE CASE OF THE PRINCE FORMERLY KNOWN AS HAMLET”  
A Justin Thyme Mystery  
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**CHARACTERS:**

Justin Thyme – Bogart like, hard boiled detective  
Hamlet –Prince of Denmark Self absorbed and just a little dense  
Ophelia – Sexy, femme fatale  
King Hamlet – Dying king  
Gertrude- Hamlet's randy mother  
Claudius – The evil new king  
Polonius – Ophelia's aphorism spouting father  
Laertes – Ophelia's vengeful brother

Rosencrantz & Guildenstern - Hamlet's tweedle dee and tweedle dum college chums  
Gunsel – Claudius's strong arm man  
Herald – Boxing ring announcer.  
Player King - Actor in play within the play.  
Player Queen - Male actor in play within the play.  
Yergen Flergern – Pirate Captain  
Kevin – Scuzzy pirate  
Scuzzy Pirate #2 – Another skuzzy pirate.  
Various citizens of Elsinore, actors, thugs, soldiers, guards and pirates – Can be double and triple cast.

*CASTING NOTE: All, but the lead roles of Thyme, Hamlet, Ophelia and Gertrude, can be double or triple cast with actors playing multiple speaking roles as well as filling in as members of the royal court, the pirate crew and soldiers. Claudius, King Hamlet and the Ghost can, and probably, should be played by the same actor.*

*SETTINGS: The main set, where most of our story takes place, consists of curtains, stone walls and doorways, which will, in turn, become various rooms and settings. Changes of furniture from scene to scene will indicate the rooms or places we are in. The secondary set, stage left, is Thyme's Office, represented by a beat up desk, chair, filing cabinet and wooden coat rack.*

*(Before the CURTAIN rises we hear the sound of a blues SAXOPHONE wailing its song of loneliness)*

*(JUSTIN THYME, a Bogart like private eye dressed in a suit, trench coat and fedora ENTERS. Hardboiled with a side of irony, Thyme has seen it all and done most of it. He's broken as many jaws and he has hearts. He's the kind of man men want to be and women want to be with. And, in some cases, the other way around, but that's another story for another time)*

THYME: *(to audience)* It ended like most of my cases ...with everybody dead.

CURTAIN OPENS to reveal *the bodies of HAMLET, CLAUDIUS and GERTRUDE. Members of the ROYAL COURT stand in stunned silence - all of their mouths wide open in shock. They will stay this way until the end of the scene, Thyme steps over the body of King Claudius. Even in death, Claudius still looks like a man to be reckoned with. Robust, handsome with a full blonde beard and a thick head of blonde hair)*

THYME: The king was dead.

*(Thyme steps over Gertrude's body. Although it's hard to imagine, with rigor setting in, her jaw slumped open and a streak of spittle running down her chin, but in her prime Gertrude was the most beautiful woman in Scandinavia, which is saying something)*

THYME: The queen was dead.

*(Thyme crosses to Hamlet, kneels and cradles him in his arms)*

THYME: The prince was almost dead.

*(Hamlet is anything but imposing. Mid-twenties, slight, ineffectual and somewhat ridiculous looking with his blonde page boy haircut. He's dressed in black, as he will be throughout, a reflection of his state of mind and lack of imagination. There's blood oozing from his shoulder where he's been run through with a sword.)*

MUSIC OUT:

HAMLET: The potent poison quite o'er-crows my spirit and the rest is silence.

THYME: *(to audience)* Unfortunately the rest wasn't silence. For a guy who was checking out, Prince Hamlet had a lot to say.

HAMLET: O good friend, if thou didst ever hold me in thy heart, absent thee from felicity awhile, and in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain... to tell my story.

THYME: *(to audience)* It doesn't take much to see that the problems of one Danish prince don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world. But what the heck. *(to Hamlet)* Yeah. I'll tell your story. I owe you that much.

*(Members of the Royal Court help remove the bodies. The CURTAIN CLOSES. Thyme crosses to his OFFICE.. He tosses his fedora onto the rack, removes his trench coat and hangs it up.)*

THYME: *(to audience)* I'd just gotten in when Effie my overdeveloped secretary with the underdeveloped typing skills pulsated into my office.

*(To the accompaniment of DRUM BEATS, EFFIE, a voluptuous redhead in high heels, a tight skirt and low cut sweater, PULSATES IN. She hoists herself onto Thyme's desk revealing the shapeliest set of pins this side of Radio City. Thyme slides a cigarette between his lips)*

THYME: *(to audience)* She perched herself on my desk and crossed her legs. They were good and she knew it.

*(Effie, takes a wooden match from a holder on Thyme's desk, strikes it on the inside of her thigh and leans forward.)*

THYME: *(to audience)* She leaned over. They were even better. She knew that too.

*(Effie lights the cigarette, then purses her lips and blows out the match)*

THYME: *(to audience)* Then, in a voice that made grown men glad they were... grown men, she told me I had a call.

EFFIE: You had a call.

THYME: *(to Effie)* Who from? *(to audience)* I asked.

EFFIE: The King Of Denmark.

THYME: *(to audience)* She replied. *(to Effie)* What'd he want? *(to audience)* I inquired..

EFFIE: You.

THYME: *(to audience)* She murmured monosyllabically. *(to Effie)* Did he say what it was about?

EFFIE: No. He just said to get your ass over to Elsinore ASAP.

THYME: Thanks apple cheeks.

EFFIE: Sure thing. *(Slides off the desk, undulates to the door, then turns back.)* If you need me for anything else, just buzz. You do know how to buzz, dontcha, boss? You just put your lips together and... *(shakes her head rapidly from side to side while making a loud buzzing sound. Then turns and exits)*

THYME : *(to audience)* I watched Effie pulsate out of my office, rolled my tongue back into the general vicinity of my mouth *(rises and crosses to the hat rack)* grabbed my trench coat and fedora... Cued my saxophone accompaniment... *(nods)*

*MUSIC: BLUESY SAXOPHONE UP AND UNDER*

THYME: ... and headed for Elsinore. Me? I'm Justin Thyme. I work for the F.B.I. The Fictional Bureau of Investigation. I handle the toughest, dirtiest cases in English literature. That's right, I'm a fictional detective. When I got to the castle I was told King Hamlet was waiting for me in the garden.

*(SAXOPHONE OUT)*

*(CURTAINS OPEN to reveal KING HAMLET is revealed lying on bench)*

THYME: *(to audience)* When I found the king, he was in the garden alright. But he wasn't resting.

KING HAMLET: *(in a choking voice)* Murder most foul.

THYME: Yeah. It usually is.

KING HAMLET: In my ear.

THYME: *(leans over the King and speaks louder and slower into his ear)* Yeah, it usually is.

KING HAMLET: You don't have to shout. I'm dying, not deaf.

THYME: You said in your ear.

KING HAMLET: Poison in my ear.

THYME: That'd do it.

KING HAMLET: Hamlet...

THYME: A small village murdered you?

KING HAMLET: No... Hamlet my son...

THYME: Oh... Your son murdered you.

KING HAMLET: No. No... My son didn't murder me. He must avenge me. Help him Thyme... Help Hamlet avenge me. Promise me, Thyme... Promise me.

THYME: Yeah... Sure... I'll get the guy who murdered you. Just one question.

KING HAMLET: Yes?

THYME: Who murdered you?

KING HAMLET: It was... It was... *(King Hamlet snorts loudly and dies)*

THYME: How do you spell that? *(to audience)* He didn't answer me. He was dead and one thing you learn in the detective game is that dead men give lousy answers.

*(Thyme rises. GUARDS ENTER and carry off King Hamlet's body)*

THYME: *(to audience)* I made a promise to help the king's son avenge his death and now I was stuck with it. But before any avenging could take place I had to find out who whacked the old man. At the beginning of every case I like to look around, see what I can see and what I can't see. What you can't see is sometimes more important than what you can see. Only problem is... you can't see it. I went looking for Prince Hamlet to break the news when...

*(MUSIC: BLUESY SAXOPHONE)*

*(OPHELIA glides in. Young, beautiful, sexy... She's dressed in a body hugging gown that's showing off more curves than the Yankees bullpen Her hair is thick and blonde, the waves cascading over her shoulders and down her back. One eye is almost covered by her luxurious mane, giving her the mysterious and enticing look of the prototypical film noir femme fatale.)*

THYME: ... she walked into my life.

*(Her voice is rich and deep with just a hint of velvet.)*

OPHELIA: Well, hello tall, dark and out of place.

*(SAXOPHONE OUT)*

THYME: (*audience*) She was wearing a diaphanous gown that was dropping more hints than the host of a bad game show. She told me her name was Ophelia.

OPHELIA: My name's Ophelia.

THYME: But that her friends called her... Feelya

OPHELIA: But my friends call me ... Feelya.

THYME: She guessed that my name was Thyme. That I was the fictional detective.

OPHELIA: You must be Thyme... The fictional detective.

THYME: She said she knew from...

OPHELIA: Could you please stop doing that.

THYME: Sorry, button nose... Force of habit.

OPHELIA: Just in case you get any ideas, my father warned me about men like you. He said you were (*pronouncing each letter*) T... R...O...U...B...L...E.

THYME: (*to audience*) Looks and brains. Dames like this always spelled trouble. (*wait for the groans then; to Ophelia*) You wouldn't happen to know a prince goes by the name of Hamlet would ya?

OPHELIA: Intimately

THYME: (*to audience*) Something about the way she said "intimately" led me to believe she knew the Prince... "intimately." (*to Ophelia*) Know where I can find him?

OPHELIA: Through that door, down the corridor, past the turret, through the main ballroom, turn right at the armory, left at the keep, right at the chapel, right again at the throne room, down the next corridor and around the second tower. It'll be the third door on your right.

THYME: Thanks, tangerine toes.

OPHELIA: Anytime... And, I do mean... "any" time.

(*SAXOPHONE BEGINS TO PLAY*)

(*Ophelia glides off*)

THYME: (*to audience*) I watched her walk away on legs that started where legs usually start, around floor level and ended where you don't expect them to end... just below her ears.

(*MUSIC OUT*)

THYME: I followed Feelya's directions to Prince Hamlet's quarters.

*(Thyme exits)*

*(SOUNDS of walking and walking and more walking. Doors opening, doors closing, more walking, more doors...A woman screams)*

THYME'S VOICE: Sorry

*(Door closes. More walking, more doors.)*

MAN'S VOICE: It's back that way.

THYME'S VOICE: Son of a bitch.

*(More walking, more doors opening and closing. Stretch this whole sequence out as long as you can and then some. This is where the laughs are. Thyme finally enters completely winded. He bends over to catch his breath.)*

THYME: I gotta join a gym.: *(to audience)* When I found the prince he was talking to the strangest bunch of men I'd ever seen. *(Hamlet enters with a small group of men dressed as Thyme will describe)* Some were dressed as fools....

HAMLET: Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue. But if you mouth it, as many of our players do, I had as lief the town crier spoke my lines.

THYME: All of them were wearing make-up.

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

THYME: And some were even wearing women's clothing. This could only mean one thing... *(disdainfully)* They were actors.

HAMLET: It offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the...

THYME: Prince Hamlet.

HAMLET: *(dramatic and actorish )* Not now, man... Can't you see I'm busy... "directing?"

THYME: Your father sent me.

HAMLET: Oh, that's different. Take five everybody.

*(The Actors exit. Hamlet crosses to Thyme)*

HAMLET: How is dear old popsy?

THYME: Dear old popsy is dear old deadsy?.

HAMLET: Deadsy?

THYME: As a door nail.

HAMLET: Oh poppycock...There must be some mistake.

THYME: No mistake, prince. He's dead. Murdered.

HAMLET: Murdered?

THYME: Murdered. Any idea who would want to kill him?

HAMLET: You mean outside of a few neighboring kings, the husbands of the women he defiled, the entire royal court and the peasants whose land he stole?

THYME: Yeah... Outside of that.

HAMLET: Nobody I can think of.

THYME: He wants you to avenge him. He told me that with his dying breath.

HAMLET: (*frightened*) You mean av...av...avenge as in k...k...k...kill somebody?

THYME: I don't think he wanted you take 'em dancing.

HAMLET: Who am I suppose to...(*choking on the word*)...kill?

THYME: I don't know

HAMLET: (*breathes a deep sigh of relief*) Oh... Well, that's...uh...that's different...

THYME: Yet.

HAMLET: Oh... Well...Fine... Tell you what. You find out who killed popsy and we'll talk about it then.

THYME: Not a word to anyone. Got that? As far as anyone knows your old man croaked of natural causes.

HAMLET: If he did, he'd be the first king in Danish history.

(*Hamlet hurries off, getting away from Thyme as fast as he can.*)

THYME: (*to audience*) Finding out who killed popsy was going to be tougher than I thought. I decided to pay a visit on the Queen. Maybe she could point me in the right direction. After all, she'd been married to the King. That's why they called her the Queen.

*(Gertrude, the Queen, strides in, followed by her SECRETARY, a mousy little man carrying a long list. Now that we see Gertrude upright for the first time, we realize she's a voluptuous blonde in her early forties.)*

GERTRUDE: Yes, yes... Of course. Seat Lord and Lady Godiva wherever you think best.

SECRETARY: Thank you majesty.

GERTRUDE: Just make sure that slut understands the reception is not clothing optional.

SECRETARY: *(exiting)* Yes, highness.

*(Gertrude picks up a bolt of fabric from a table covered in fabrics, wraps herself in it and admires in it a mirror, turning from side to side..)*

THYME: Your majesty?

GERTRUDE: Yes? And who are you?

THYME: The name's Thyme. Justin Thyme. I was with the King when he died.

GERTRUDE: The King?

THYME: Your late husband.

GERTRUDE: Oh, yes. That king. What can I do for you, Mister... uh?

THYME: Thyme.

GERTRUDE: Thyme... Yes, of course.

THYME: I was wondering if I could ask you a few questions?

GERTRUDE: Make it short. I'm very busy.

THYME: I understand. Planning a state funeral under these conditions must be one tough job.

GERTRUDE: State funeral?

THYME: Your husband.

GERTRUDE: My husband?

THYME: The late king.

GERTRUDE ; Oh, that husband. Of course. All of the funeral arrangements have been made. No, I was talking about my wedding.

THYME: Wedding?

GERTRUDE: Yes. Wedding. *(sings)* "I'm getting married in the morning. Ding, dong the bells are gonna chime."

THYME: Congratulations.

GERTRUDE: Thank you.

*(Gertrude holds up two swatches of fabric for Thyme's examination.)*

GERTRUDE: What do you think, Mr. Thyme?

*(Thyme looks them over...considers, then points at one of them.)*

GERTRUDE: Really?

THYME: It brings out the blue in your eyes.

GERTRUDE: I like you Mr. Thyme. You're fulla shit. But, I like you.

THYME: So Queen, who's the lucky guy?

GERTRUDE: Claudius... My late husband's brother.

THYME: You're marrying your brother-in-law?

GERTRUDE: That's correct.

THYME: Won't that make you your own sister-in-law?

GERTRUDE: I know it seems unusual to marry with my husband dead only three days...

THYME: Twelve hours.

GERTRUDE: Really? It seems like he's been gone so much longer.

THYME: Time flies when you're having fun.

GERTRUDE: Yes, doesn't it? You must understand Mr. Thyme, my late husband and I were not what you would call close. Not close at all.

THYME: It happens.

GERTRUDE: Perhaps there are some women who prefer a man who ignores them. Flaunts other women in front of them. Treats them badly.

THYME: I'm counting on it.

GERTRUDE: A man who never... How should I put it?... *(thinks for a moment; her voice drops two octaves)* Slips them the high hard one. Sweeps out the chimney. Threads the old needle. Lays a little pipe now and then.

THYME:*( to audience)* I'd come for a little information, but this was a little more information than I counted on.

GERTRUDE: And then along came Claudius *(does a little dance move)* Slow walkin' Claudius. Slow talkin' Claudius. He is so different from King Hamlet. Warm, loving...

THYME: Alive.

GERTRUDE: An important quality in a man, wouldn't you say, Mr. Thyme? Now what was it you wanted to talk to me about?

THYME: Oh yeah...Any idea who'd want to murder King Hamlet?

GERTRUDE: Murder King Hamlet? What a ridiculous thought. Outside of a few neighboring kings, the husbands of the women he defiled, the lords he humiliated and the peasants whose land he stole, everyone loved King Hamlet.

THYME: Except for you.

GERTRUDE: Of course, but I was married to him.

*(The play continues...)*

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