

Ophelia

by Meghan Brown

VOICE: Simple, powerful. Clean.

HAMLET: Self-involved but not unkind.

OPHELIA: All grown up.

MAN'S VOICE: Light, big-hearted.

Hamlet, in a white void.

He wears a dandyish, stereotypical Hamlet costume and holds a bouquet of flowers.

VOICE

Begin. Name.

HAMLET

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.

VOICE

Level.

HAMLET

3.2.

VOICE

Request.

HAMLET

Mid-level 5 pre-review purgatory visitation.

VOICE

Reason for visitation.

HAMLET

Loose ends.

VOICE

Approved.

A thundering stamp of approval.

Hamlet looks directly at us.

HAMLET

I want to say up front that I was going through a rough time.
How many of you remember the story?

*A few audience members raise their hands, or none of them, or all.
Hamlet responds appropriately.*

HAMLET

Basically: I was visited by my father's ghost,
who told me that my Uncle Claudius,
who had just married my mother,
had murdered him, and that it was my job,
as his son and rightful heir, to enact vengeance.
Then I either went crazy, or didn't.
Ophelia, who was either my girlfriend or wasn't
either killed herself or didn't
after I'd killed her father
(which I definitely did).
After a fair amount of navel-gazing,
I ended up dead on the floor in a bloody heap,
along with everyone I'd ever known.

In tragedy, there's a fair amount of ambiguity.
How does one measure intent?
I have no idea, and I was there.

Beep beep.

Taxi's here.
Just a reminder: I was going through a rough time.
But now, to make amends.
Ophelia, Ophelia, Ophelia.

Blackout.

In the darkness, Hamlet travels through time and space.

Whoosh!

Then, a mighty SMACK.

Lights up on:

*Ophelia's apartment in Level 5.
Wall-to-wall aquariums filled with beautiful, glowing fish.
The effect is otherworldly, hypnotic.*

*Other than the aquariums, it could be any messy apartment.
Dishes on the table, laundry in baskets waiting to be sorted, etc.*

Ophelia wears a robe over pajamas, and holds a lamp like it's a baseball bat.

*Hamlet has just been hit.
He's bleeding. Like, a lot.*

HAMLET

Gah!

OPHELIA

Hamlet?

HAMLET

My head!

OPHELIA

What are you doing here?

HAMLET

Don't come any closer!

OPHELIA

What the fuck are you doing here?

HAMLET

I came to—

Do you have a towel, or something?

Some ice?

OPHELIA

Did you bring me flowers?

HAMLET

I know you like—

OPHELIA

Oh my *god*.

Ophelia is having trouble breathing

No no no no no no.

You did not just sneak into my apartment
in the middle of the night after *800 years*.

This is not how I see you again.

HAMLET
Hey! Hey. It's OK.

He reaches for her.

OPHELIA
Don't touch me!

HAMLET
You should sit down.

OPHELIA
Don't tell me what to do in my own fucking apartment.

HAMLET
Such language.

OPHELIA
Welcome to the future.
Things have changed.

HAMLET
Yeah, I noticed.
Really, though, could I get a—?

She tosses him a goofy kitchen towel with cupcakes on it.

Hamlet is amused.

HAMLET
Nice towel.

OPHELIA
Nice shirt.

HAMLET (*looking around the apartment*)
What's with all the fish?

OPHELIA
I work at an aquarium.

HAMLET (*interested*)
Really? That must be fascinating. I've always loved—

OPHELIA
WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING HERE?

HAMLET
Again, with the language. Can we stop that?
It's not befitting of a woman of your station.

OPHELIA
I work. At an aquarium.

HAMLET
The noblewoman at the aquarium. Nice ring to it.
Slumming it in the chlorine?

OPHELIA
Fish don't need chlorine.

HAMLET (*musings*)
What do they need?
What do you give a fish for its birthday?
A little plastic castle with a big red bow?

OPHELIA
Really, though. What's with the clothes?

HAMLET
I wanted to make sure you recognized me.

OPHELIA
Yeah, I recognize you, Hamlet.
Don't know *why*.
Don't know what could have *possibly* caused your face
to get burned into my skull.
Maybe it was the deflowering,
or that time that you literally drove me insane,
or
maybe
just maybe
it's that you
KILLED MY FATHER.

HAMLET

...I was going through a rough time—

OPHELIA

HA.

HAMLET

—but I came here today to—

OPHELIA

Uh-uh.

No fucking way.

I'm not going to sit here and listen to some *apology*.

HAMLET

I wasn't going to apologize.

OPHELIA

What, then?

HAMLET

I'm here to make amends.

OPHELIA

And how is that different?

HAMLET (*direct*)

What are you doing here?

OPHELIA

I live here.

HAMLET

In Level 5?

OPHELIA

Yup. Just me and all the unbaptized babies.

HAMLET

Level 5 is where the unsorted go.

OPHELIA (*wide-eyed, sarcastic*)

Really?

HAMLET

You're not supposed to be unsorted.

OPHELIA

That's really none of your business.

HAMLET

Did you kill yourself?

OPHELIA

Also none of your business.

HAMLET

Because if you didn't you'll be sorted into Level 3.
In Level 3 you choose your job, you choose your house.
Songs and activities and dinners with good friends.
Food, wine, fireflies.
All you have to do is admit it
before the statute of limitations runs out on your file.
Own up, and *poof!* Level 3.
Art projects and long walks on the beach.
You could even get a cat.

OPHELIA

I hate cats.

HAMLET

No, you don't.

OPHELIA

Yeah, I really do.

HAMLET

What about that little grey one that lived by the river?
It probably had rabies, ugly little—

OPHELIA

I don't like cats, OK?

HAMLET

Fine! You don't like cats.
Get a guinea pig.

Get a horse.
Get a labradoodle.
It's not just fish in Level 3.
You can't curl up with a fish.

OPHELIA

Do you know why I like fish so much, Hamlet?

HAMLET

No, frankly.

OPHELIA

Because for three hundred years
my soul was stuck at the bottom of a river
due to "overcrowding" in purgatory,
and the only friends that I had were *fish*.
Those fish? Were awesome.
Those *fish* did a hell of a lot more for me than you ever did.
SO STOP. RAGGING. ON. MY FISH.

HAMLET

I'm sorry.

OPHELIA

You're always *sorry*!

HAMLET (*re: the fish*)

This isn't healthy.

OPHELIA

And you would know!

HAMLET

Look, you don't belong here.
Just tell them you didn't do it on purpose.

OPHELIA

And if I did?

HAMLET

You didn't.

OPHELIA

If I did.

HAMLET

Level 6.

Which is, when you think about it, still better than Level 5.

Level 6, at least you get therapy.

OPHELIA

Right, because I'm clearly the one who needs therapy.

HAMLET

"Welcome to the future."

Everyone needs therapy.

OPHELIA

Yeah, well. Not this girl.

HAMLET

Level 5 is hell.

OPHELIA

No, Level 10 is hell.

Murderers and child molesters. The soulless.

Level 5 is just existence.

Strip malls and day jobs

and kitchen towels with goofy pictures on them.

HAMLET

And just existence is enough for you?

Stuck here forever.

An eternity of waiting

and waiting

and waiting?

OPHELIA

It doesn't seem too different from an eternity of anything else.

HAMLET

Well, it is.

OPHELIA

And you know, I'd guess.

So you're Level 6, then?
Guess you finally worked up the guts after all.

HAMLET
I didn't kill myself.

OPHELIA
Denial is an important part of the process.
Or so I hear.
So, how'd you do it? Don't spare me any of the details.

HAMLET
I didn't kill myself.
I was murdered.

OPHELIA
Well, look at you.

HAMLET
By your brother.

OPHELIA
Are you *serious*?

HAMLET
Yes.

OPHELIA
Why?

He points to her.

OPHELIA (*almost joyous*)
Really?

HAMLET
Look at that smile.

OPHELIA
Forgive me if I get just a little pleasure.

HAMLET
He's dead too.

I shoved a sword through his heart.

OPHELIA

...

HAMLET

You didn't want me sparing any details, right?

Ophelia is steely.

HAMLET (*backtracking*)

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have...

OPHELIA

It's called tact, Hamlet.

It's not a difficult concept.

HAMLET

I know, I'm—

OPHELIA

That's my biggest issue with you, Hamlet.

Being anything other than a *huge asshole*
would have required relatively minimal effort.

But common decency was just too much *trouble*.

HAMLET

I never meant to hurt you.

OPHELIA

You called me a whore.

You pretended to be insane
in order to terrify and humiliate me.

You killed my father.

The same crime you were so *intent* on avenging.

But I guess since it was *my* father, it didn't matter.

Since it was my useless, insignificant life, it didn't matter.

But you know what?

I think I'm starting to get it.

Because now, I look at you and I realize:

You don't matter.

Your thoughts, your feelings.

Whatever amends you want to make.

I dreamed of the day I'd see you again,
planned out hundreds of things to say in my head.
And now? I see you and I want nothing.
I see you and I see nothing.

HAMLET
You see nothing.

OPHELIA
Nope.

HAMLET
You don't have any questions?
You're not curious about anything?

OPHELIA
Uh-uh.

HAMLET
Your brother and I died in the same fight.
So did Claudius and my mother.

OPHELIA
Tragic.

HAMLET
She drank poison that Claudius had set for me.
She's a Level 2.

OPHELIA
You know that?

HAMLET
I've done my research.
I can tell you the whereabouts of half the court.

Ophelia's interested, suddenly.

HAMLET
Still not curious?

OPHELIA
You are such a dick.

HAMLET

Ask me.

OPHELIA

I'm not asking you for anything.

HAMLET

He's a Level 1.

Your father was one of the blameless.

His soul is clean.

OPHELIA

Level 1.

HAMLET

The Great White Light.

OPHELIA

So he's just... gone?

HAMLET

One of the lucky ones.

Nothing heavy left.

OPHELIA (*almost to herself*)

Just gone.

HAMLET

And your brother's a Level 3.

We talk about you after squash sometimes.

He worries.

OPHELIA

...You're a Level 3?

HAMLET

You could join us there.

Or higher, even.

If you didn't jump, your soul is clean.

OPHELIA

Are you fucking *kidding* me?

Level 3. “The Justified.”

HAMLET

I applied. I was approved.
You should try it.

OPHELIA

So you do, what, then?
What fantastically fulfilling life do you have up there?

HAMLET

I’m an actor.

OPHELIA

Of course you are!

HAMLET

What? I always wanted to—

Ophelia laughs.

HAMLET

Stop laughing. It’s not funny.

OPHELIA

That is just too fucking much.
I’m down here toiling away in obscurity,
all the while convinced that you’re in some pit of sin below me
shoveling coal or caring to your oozing sores
or *something* that would imply
that there was some sort of *justice*.
And the whole time you’re up in Level 3 putting on *plays*.

HAMLET

It’s a lot of hard work.

OPHELIA

Is it really?

HAMLET

That’s how I earned enough points to come down here.

Ophelia snorts.

HAMLET

I played Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*.

OPHELIA

Never heard of it.

HAMLET

You guys don't get plays down here, right?

OPHELIA

Nope.

HAMLET

No books either? Or movies?

I've been trying to break into film...

OPHELIA

OH MY GOD.

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING TO ME?

HAMLET

I came to make amends.

OPHELIA

What amends?

HAMLET

You shouldn't be here!

You didn't kill yourself.

I know you, Ophelia.

OPHELIA

I'm trying to look at this logically,

from your completely fucked up point of view,

and it still doesn't make any sense.

Why would I be trying so hard to stay out of the higher levels?

What could be so much worse?

HAMLET

I thought you might be avoiding me.

A moment of stunned silence.

And then Ophelia starts to laugh, and laugh, and laugh.

OPHELIA

You thought
that I was condemning myself
to an eternity of meaninglessness
because I was *avoiding you*?

HAMLET

What? That's a reasonable assumption!
You must've thought that I—

OPHELIA

And trust me. If I was avoiding you?
I wouldn't have been avoiding "The Justified."

HAMLET

It is imperative that you get out of here.

OPHELIA

Why?

HAMLET

Your file expires at midnight.

This gives her pause.

OPHELIA

That's not right.

HAMLET

What are you talking about?
Of course it's right.
Don't you read your mail?
You're out of time.
It took me centuries to save up enough points to get here.
I almost missed you.
I've been... I thought I was gonna be too late.
That you'd be stuck here forever
and I wouldn't ever have a chance to try and make things right.

Ophelia looks at him.

OPHELIA

But I had so much time.

HAMLET

Not that much.

She bristles.

OPHELIA

Doesn't make any difference.

HAMLET

Are you kidding me?

If you don't make your statement in the next hour
you'll be trapped in Level 5 forever.

OPHELIA

THINGS ARE FINE HERE.

What's it to you anyway?

HAMLET (*honest*)

You're keeping me at Level 3.

She looks at him.

OPHELIA

Fuck you.

HAMLET

And Level 2.

Well, that's really something special.

OPHELIA

Fuck you. *Fuck you.* FUCK YOU.

I wish there was a stronger word to use.

HAMLET

It's not just getting to Level 2...

I think about you down here, and I just—

I feel extreme guilt.

OPHELIA

You *should* feel guilty.

You fucked me up.
And I'm not talking about this
in some abstract emotional sense.
You fucked my life up.
I loved my father
and you *killed* him.
That's not... that's not *hurt feelings*, Hamlet.
That's a real thing that actually happened.
It's not something that I somehow *misinterpreted*
because I was too young to know better.
You destroyed my faith in men.
My faith in *humanity*.
I hope you stay guilty forever.

*The phone rings.
Ophelia lets out a wail of almost inhuman rage.
She lunges at him, gives chase.*

HAMLET (*attempting to get away*)
Aren't you gonna get that?

OPHELIA
No!

He manages to get away, leaving a path of destruction in his wake.

Throughout the following, she continues to attempt to rip out his throat.

*The phone continues to ring. And ring. And ring.
Finally, her answering machine picks up.*

OPHELIA'S VOICE (*on answering machine*)
Phelia's Fish! Fanciness. Flippers. Function!
Fun for the whole Purgatory family.
BEEP!
Just kidding, here's the real one!

A beep.

MAN'S VOICE (*on answering machine*)
Hey baby baby baby.

Ophelia and Hamlet immediately freeze.

I'm back! I miss my girl.
Can't wait to see you.
Should I stop by the shop?
I bought you three big angelfish in plastic bags.
One has gold stripes like a tiger.
You're gonna love 'em.
Wanna get 'em into the tank ASAP.
Love you love you love you you're the best.
Bye, Darlin!

Ophelia and Hamlet look at each other.

HAMLET
...Who was that?

OPHELIA
None of your—

HAMLET
Who was that?

OPHELIA
My paramour.

HAMLET
“Lost your faith in men,” I see. Right.

OPHELIA
Oh, so *injured*.

HAMLET
I never betrayed your memory.

OPHELIA
IT'S BEEN 800 YEARS.
I'm allowed to have a boyfriend.

HAMLET
I thought you'd wait for me.
Not turn me over for some unsorted—

OPHELIA
And I'm sure you've been a monk the whole time.

HAMLET
I have been.

OPHELIA
Right, Hamlet. Because I was the great love of your life.

HAMLET
You were.
It wasn't easy being born a prince.

OPHELIA
Too much pressure at the castle?
Run away and join the circus.

HAMLET
That's exactly what I did.

OPHELIA
...I thought you were an actor.

HAMLET
I'm a clown.

OPHELIA
What?

HAMLET
I make people happy, Ophelia.
There's no shame in that.

OPHELIA
...Willy Loman?

HAMLET
My clown name is "Silly Loman."
I didn't want to tell you
because I know most people
don't understand the effort
that goes into art clowning.

OPHELIA
I just cannot take much more of this.

HAMLET

Do you really look at me and feel nothing?
Because that's not how I feel when I look at you.
We shared a bed. I know your body.
That doesn't just go away.

OPHELIA

The idea of having sex with you
of pressing my face against your chubby, blubbery lips
is so appalling that it actually induces nausea.

HAMLET

Fine. You hate me. I can live with that.

OPHELIA

You're dead. You can't live with anything.

HAMLET

And so *witty!*
Just... listen to me. Please—

OPHELIA

No! I don't want to listen to you.
You want me to dredge up this old hurt
because it's going to make you feel better.
I don't want you to feel better.
I just want you out of my life.
WHICH IS SOMETHING I FOOLISHLY
THOUGHT WAS REASONABLE
WHEN I CHUCKED MY BODY INTO A RIVER.

[...]

HAMLET

So you did, then.

OPHELIA

None of your—

HAMLET

You did.

OPHELIA

You don't understand. To die is supposed to—
you're supposed to transcend humanity.
I thought it would be automatic Level 1.
I thought that when I passed I'd just be gone,
just swim right into the Great White Light.
I thought I could escape.
But *you can't escape*.
Because of what I did—

HAMLET

You didn't do anything.

OPHELIA

If you ever cared for me
in any way
please go.

HAMLET

Why? So you can be trapped here, miserable, forever?

OPHELIA

You don't know.

HAMLET

(sincere)

I want to know.
Please.
I want to know.

She makes a decision.

OPHELIA

OK.

HAMLET

OK?

OPHELIA

Let's do it. Let's talk.

HAMLET

All right.

*She sits. He sits.
He looks at her.*

HAMLET

Tell me about your new boyfriend.

OPHELIA

Are you *kidding*—?

HAMLET

We're talking, remember?

OPHELIA

He... works in the flower shop attached to the aquarium.

HAMLET

What's he doing here?

OPHELIA

Drug overdose.

HAMLET

Accidental?

OPHELIA

He has no idea.

That's why it's taking so long to file him.

He should've just said "of course,"

but he's honest.

Honest to a fault.

And... he wants to make sure I have company.

He's a good man.

He brings me fish.

We talk and talk.

HAMLET

You can't touch.

OPHELIA

Nope.

No touch.

Another Level 5 curse.

HAMLET

That's got to get a little boring, doesn't it?

OPHELIA

No. It doesn't.

He pushes me to be a better person.

That's not boring.

You know what's boring?

Pain. Pain is boring.

Your pain, especially.

I was pretty tired of that.

HAMLET

That much was obvious.

OPHELIA

What's that supposed to mean?

HAMLET

You weren't the only one who was having trouble, you know.

I needed help too.

And you've just... turned me over
for some nice, wholesome, *easy* person.

OPHELIA

That's not—

HAMLET

You don't think I envy him?

Honest to a fault?

I can't even *imagine* how that feels, Ophelia.

To know the truth and tell it.

To sit with you and talk and talk and talk.

To know to bring you fish instead of flowers.

To know you, really know you? To be known?

That's all I ever wanted.

OPHELIA

That is just not true.

HAMLET

I'm not the only one who could've done things differently.

OPHELIA

I was a child.

I had no idea what was going on.

HAMLET

My father died.

My mother remarried his killer.

You didn't understand what was going on?

OPHELIA

That, I understood.

But not your insatiable hunger for revenge.

Why? What good would it do?

HAMLET

He killed my father.

OPHELIA

You killed mine.

HAMLET

Don't you see? We were trapped in a vicious cycle of violence!

We couldn't be held responsible for what happened to us.

You were my soulmate and I couldn't see it.

We were meant to be together and instead the world conspired to keep us apart.

OPHELIA

Your soulmate?

You *lured* me into bed with you.

Do you know what that meant to me?

Do you know what *consequences* that had?

It's humiliating. My God.

The one real fleshy thing in my sad, pathetic life...

and *that's* what I got.

HAMLET

I thought you'd turned on me.

OPHELIA

And what if I had? You were cruel.

You were acting crazy.

You were crazy.

Or was that also just an act?

HAMLET

Can't it be both? An act and not an act?

OPHELIA

So now it's time for philosophy.

HAMLET

I'm not trying to be fucking *philosophical*.

OPHELIA

You kiss your mother with that mouth?

HAMLET (*breaking*)

All *right*, Ophelia.

Fine. I put you through some *shit*.

Do you think I was happy?

I was out of my mind.

I don't know if I was crazy,

but I felt crazy.

I saw *ghosts*, Ophelia.

OPHELIA

I guess that was my problem.

I just saw you.

HAMLET

I *wish* I could've just seen you.

I really do.

But my heart was full of terror

and shame

and self-hatred

and *loss*.

There wasn't room for you.

And I know you don't want to hear that,

that it doesn't make anything better,

but the truth is that my feelings for you

meant absolutely nothing in comparison

to my own stupid, broken head.

OPHELIA (*the big fear*)

You never loved me.

HAMLET

Don't you remember?
Those letters. Pages.

OPHELIA

No.

HAMLET

You remember.

"To the celestial and my soul's idol, the most beautified Ophelia"—

OPHELIA

No. No no no.

HAMLET

"Doubt thou the stars are fire,
Doubt that the sun doth move"—

OPHELIA

Stop it.

Stop it stop it *stop* it.

HAMLET

"Doubt truth to be a liar
But never doubt I love."

OPHELIA (*raw*)

Don't—

HAMLET

You were everything to me.
You think that I haven't loved you every day?
You can do whatever you want.
You can turn me into the darkest villain.
God knows, I deserve it.
You can tell yourself that I was selfish and untrue,
that I never cared about you,
that there was never anything between us
other than a stupid girl and an angry boy.
But whatever it is that you think,
you can't change the truth:

I loved you, Ophelia.
I loved you.
It's right there, on every page.

[...]

[...]

[...]

OPHELIA

After I left the court
I couldn't think straight.
I went to the river.
I moved in swerving, curving lines.
I couldn't breathe.
I couldn't see.
I started to run.
I wanted to run and run and run.
But then I was... underwater, somehow.
Without even knowing.

She looks to him.

And I tried. I did try.
Tried to keep running and running and...
Then everything was just calm.
Just me and those fish.
Those beautiful, beautiful fish
living simple, muted lives.
No words.
Just the comfort of silence
silence
silence
and water.

[...]

HAMLET

So you didn't.

OPHELIA

No. I did not.

HAMLET

Then what are you doing here?

OPHELIA

I thought I might see her.

HAMLET

See who?

OPHELIA

“Just me and all the unbaptized babies.”

He looks at her.

HAMLET

You were—?

OPHELIA

You had to have known, Hamlet.

“And rue for me.”

He looks at her.

He had not.

OPHELIA

You left me and I didn't know what to do.

HAMLET

I'm—

OPHELIA

If you say you're sorry one more time

I will cut you into tiny pieces

and feed you to my fish

so help me God.

HAMLET

I would have—

OPHELIA (*not unkindly*)

Done everything exactly the same.

*She forgives him.
A release.*

HAMLET
Did you ever...?

OPHELIA
No. It doesn't work like that.

HAMLET
Then why stay?

OPHELIA
If I left, no one would remember her.

They look at each other.

OPHELIA
I said it out loud.
Made my statement.
It's all over now.
The white light will come for me any minute.
You'll get your Level 2, I suppose.

HAMLET
That's not why I—

OPHELIA
I know.
I know
I know
I know.
It's time for you to go.

HAMLET
I can stay with you until—

OPHELIA
I'd like to be alone when it happens, I think.

HAMLET
All right.

A moment.

Ophelia looks at her fish, then back at Hamlet.

OPHELIA

I don't want to let go of myself.
Each level up you carry less and less.
The weight lightens. And now...

HAMLET

Level 1.

OPHELIA

Just nothingness.

HAMLET

Everything.

OPHELIA (*anguished*)

What am I, if not this?

HAMLET

You'll be a part of everything.
Goodbye, Ophelia.

OPHELIA

Goodbye.

He embraces her. It's all there.

Hamlet leaves.

Ophelia picks up the flowers and sits.

She exhales.

Slowly, almost imperceptibly, a Great White Light begins to crawl over her.

Ophelia looks straight ahead.

OPHELIA

There's a reason I'm drawn to the aquariums.
I feel a kinship to those bright, fast creatures stuck in cages.
I take care of them until the day they can take to the sea.

She looks up.

White, white light.