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manager? (*big smile*) Yes. Yes! I'd be glad to stop in and talk to you about it. You won't be sorry. I'll work real hard and do a good job. On my honor! Bye!"

(*Looks at a distant horizon*) For (*your name*) is an honorable man. (*then, as himself*) But I wonder ... Should I be the honorable stage manager? (*ponders in grand style*) To be or not to be. That is the question ... (*face lights up! then, to audience*) and Emily Sue Fitzhaven is the answer!

END

"To Be or Not" is an excerpt from the play Vaudeville Daze by Ken Bradbury and Robert L. Crowe. Copyright granted by the Library of Congress, 1997. ISBN: 0-9644681-8-2

The Author

Robert L. Crowe

Dr. Robert L. Crowe (B.S. in Ed. Western Illinois University; AM(T) St. Louis University; Ed. D., Indiana University) is the published author of three books and winner of the United States Library of Congress Award for Children's Literature. He has co-authored seven plays, four of them are musicals. He has authored 30 magazine articles and is currently President of Creative Ideas, Inc. Dr. Crowe is a former public school administrator and teacher at the public school, college and university levels.



#109 - TO BE OR NOT

by
Robert L. Crowe

Next week! I can't put it off any longer. Play try-outs are next week and I have to prepare a scene that will show off my best stuff. But what? Ahhh, this is going to be tough. If I had talent, I could pick any dramatic or comedy scene and be OK. The trick is to pick just the right work to get me a part in the school play and at the same time hide the fact that I have no talent.

This year I just have to get a part. I know Emily Sue Fitzhaven will get the lead, and if I get a part that means that I will get to spend every evening for a month with her. Well, not exactly with her. I'd get to spend every evening *near* her. That's good enough. So. I need to pick a scene ... a scene so ... so ... spectacular that the director will stop the try-outs, stand and applaud ... and yell "Bravo!" Hmmmm. It better be a real humdinger of a scene.

(*looks at imaginary book*) The Complete Works of William Shakespeare. Ought to be something in here. Ahh. What luck. The first play I see is just perfect for me. Shakespeare's Hamlet! It has everything I need. A strong leading man. High drama! A better than average writer. OK. OK. Here we go! (*clears throat*) Ahumm. A hummm. "To be or not to be. What is the question?" (*pause*) That doesn't make any sense. Oh, "That is the question." I'll try it again. "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 ..." Huh. I wish I had an outrageous fortune.

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But maybe I'm not reading this right. What if the director is looking for a mature, sophisticated leading man. (*assumes a dignified, English-upper-crust stance and accent*) "To be or not to be, thawt is the question. Whether tis nobler in the mind to suffer ... (*sniffs, but still in character*) ... it is seldom noble to suffer" (*drops character*) Unless you're a director and have to suffer through all these try-outs.

Wait! Maybe the director is looking for a tough guy, instead. (*puts a snarl on his face and pretends to be the nastiest he can*) "To be ... or not ... to be. That's the question! You do understand when I ask you a question don't you? The question is ... whether it is more nobler to suffer the slings and arrows ... or from a knife wound ..." (*drops character*) Naw. I don't even believe that. Anyhow, what if the play calls for someone LB and C ... Laid, Back and Cool. (*becomes mellow, low key*) "Hey, mon. To be ... or not. Dat's the question. I just wanna know if you think it's noble to suffer the slings ..." (*drops character*) Sufferin' succotash, that's heavy. Maybe something that has a laugh in it would be better. (*flips pages*)

Ah, here's a scene ... at the beginning of the play. Hamlet is talking to Horatio and holding the skull of his friend Yorick ... Yuk! (*in grand fashion*) "Alas! Poor Yorick. I knew him, Horatio; a fellow of infinite jest." (*looks at skull*) Yeh, he's pretty funny all right. (*tosses imaginary skull over shoulder*) Well, it's obvious that this Hamlet is greatly over rated. Maybe I'd better look for some other play. (*flips pages*)

Yes! Julius Caesar! Great! High name recognition. Has a salad named after him. Treachery of the grandest sort with murder in the marketplace. This is the one! Anthony's funeral speech. "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears. (*very brief pause while he mimes taking off ear*

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and handing it to someone, then continues) I come to bury Caesar, not to raise him." Whoa! (*mumbles and reads along with finger pointing at book*) Oh. "I come to bury Caesar, not to *praise* him." Oh, sure ... "for Brutus is an honorable man. So are they all, all honorable men ..." (*voice trails off*) Yeh, well, with a group of buddies like that, who needs assassins.

(*flips pages*) Maybe I'd better not do that one. I might be so good that I would really move the audience and there's too much violence in the world as it is. Hey! Why didn't I think of this? Romeo and Juliet. The perfect love story. (*flips pages*) Let's see. (*points to the imaginary balcony of Juliet*) "But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?"... (*cocks his head and looks at book*) Why couldn't he write this in English? All he had to say was, "Hey, Julie. We can see your light 'cause somebody broke your window!" Let's see. Next line. "It is the East (*turns and points another direction, not sure where East is*) ... the East ... and Juliet is the sun." Hey. Here's a line I can use. "It is the East and Emily Sue Fitzhaven is ... is the ... daughter."

I don't know. Maybe I'm being dishonest trying to be something I'm not ... an actor. I really don't want to act in a play ... Ay, there's the rub! I just want to be around Emily Sue Fitzhaven! And, hey! What if I get a part and have to get up in front of all those people? I never thought of that! (*pause*) Harken a moment! I've got a better idea. (*puts book down and walks to imaginary phone, punches in some numbers*). "Hello, Mrs. Zeller. This is (*your name*). I know you're directing the school play and try-outs are next week. I was just wondering ... I'm a hard worker and very well organized. Being a student of Shakespeare, I have a special love for Em ... (*almost says Emily Sue Fitzhaven*) ... the theatre. I was just wondering. Do you already have a stage