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At the Trial of Hamlet, Chicago, 1994

Did Hamlet mean to kill Polonius? Diane and I sit at a table with the rich, who have the luxury to discuss such things over a veal dinner. The vegetables are beautiful! I am here because I wrote a book which nobody here has read, a book that Diane reads because she loves me. My book has nothing to do with Hamlet. My book is filled with reservation Indians. Maybe my book has everything to do with Hamlet. The millionaire next to me sets down one of his many forks to shake my hand. He tells me the poor need the rich more than the rich need the poor. Abigail Van Buren eats corn at the next table. I read this morning she has always believed homosexuality is genetic. Finally. Dear Abby can have all the corn she wants! I'll pay. She wears a polka dot dress and is laughing loudly at something I know is not funny. Did Hamlet really see his father's ghost? Was there a ghost? Was Hamlet insane or merely angry when he thrust his sword through that curtain and killed Polonius? The millionaire tells me taxi cab drivers, shoeshine men, waiters, and waitresses exist only because the rich, wearing shiny shoes, often need to be driven to nice restaurants. A character actor walks by with a glass of wine. I recognize him because I'm the type of guy who always recognizes character actors. He knows that I recognize him but I cannot tell if he wants me to recognize him. Perhaps he is afraid that I am confusing him with another character actor who is more or less famous. He might be worried that I will shout his name incorrectly and loudly, transposing first and last names, randomly inserting wild syllables that have nothing to do with his name. Did Hamlet want to have sex with his mother Gertrude? Was Hamlet mad with jealousy because Claudius got to have sex with Gertrude? When is a king more than a king? When is a king less than a king? Diane is gorgeous. She wears red lipstick which contrasts nicely with her brown skin. We are the only Indians in Chicago! No, we are the only Indians at the Trial of Hamlet. I hold her hand under the table, holding it tightly until, of course, we have to separate so we can eat our food. We need two hands to cut our veal. Yet, Diane will not eat veal. She only eats the beautiful vegetables. I eat the veal and feel guilty. The millionaire tells me the rich would love a flat tax rate. He talks about interest rates and capital gains, loss on investments and trickle-down economics. He thinks he is smarter than me. He is probably smarter than me, so I insecurely tell him I wrote a book which I know he will never read, a book that has nothing to do with Polonius. My book is filled with reservation Indians. Maybe

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it has everything to do with Polonius. A Supreme Court justice sits at the head table. He decides my life! He eats rapidly. I want to know how he feels about treaty rights. I want to know if he feels guilty about eating the veal. There is no doubt in my mind the Supreme Court justice recognizes the beauty of our vegetables. Was Hamlet a man without logical alternatives? Did he resort to a mindless, senseless violence? Were his actions those of a tired and hateful man? Or those of a righteous son? The millionaire introduces his wife, but she barely acknowledges our presence. Diane is more gorgeous, even though she grew up on reservations and once sat in a tree for hours, wishing she had lighter skin. Diane wears a scarf she bought for three dollars. I would ask her to marry me right now, again, in this city where I asked her to marry me for the first time. But she already agreed to marry me then and has, in fact, married me. Marriage causes us to do crazy things. She reads my books. I eat veal. Was Hamlet guilty or not by reason of insanity for the murder of Polonius? The millionaire tells me how happy he is to meet me. He wishes me luck. He wants to know what I think of Hamlet's case. He tells me Hamlet is responsible for what he did, insane or not. There is always something beautiful in the world at any given moment. When I was poor I loved the five dollar bills I would unexpectedly find in coat pockets. When I feel tired now, it can be the moon hanging over the old hotels of Chicago. Diane and I walk out into the cold November air. We hail a taxi. The driver is friendly, asks for our names, and Diane says, I'm Hamlet and this is Hamlet, my husband. The driver wants to know where we're from and which way we want to go. Home, we say, home.