

Chapter 1

Hamlet comes to school

On the way to school one day, Fraser said to Tom, 'Do you want to come and see *Hamlet* at the City Theatre on Saturday afternoon? My father is going to take me. He said you can come too.'

Tom Clark and Fraser McDonald were best friends. They loved going to the theatre to see plays. They both wanted to be actors. They went to acting lessons in the city every Monday afternoon. Fraser liked to dance too. He went to tap dancing classes every Saturday afternoon. He loved the sound his tap dancing shoes made. Tom didn't learn tap dancing. He played football for the school every Saturday.

'*Hamlet* is a play by William Shakespeare,' said Fraser.

'I know that,' said Tom. 'I want to play Hamlet one day.' He jumped in front of Fraser and said in a loud voice, 'To be or not to be, that is the question!'

'Very good, Tom. Do you want to come?'

'Yes, I'd love to see it. Thanks! Who's playing Hamlet?'

'Heath Mason!' said Fraser.

'Wow!' said Tom.

Heath Mason was an actor in a television show called *Here and Now*. He played a young doctor, Doctor Carson. The boys watched the show every Monday night.

'I really want to see *Hamlet*,' said Fraser. 'So I won't go to tap dancing class this Saturday. My dancing teacher will understand. She loves Heath Mason too!'

Tom stopped walking. 'Oh, no!'

'What?' asked Fraser.

'I can't come to the play. I have to play football on Saturday,' said Tom. 'We have an afternoon game – against Riverdale High. Mr Rankin won't understand.'

'Ask him, Tom. You have to come!' said Fraser.

'I'll ask him at training after school today,' said Tom. 'But he won't be happy.'

After football training that afternoon, Tom said to his coach, 'Can I speak to you, please, Mr Rankin?'

'What is it, Tom?' Mr Rankin, the football coach, was a short man with a red face. He always yelled at the players.

'It's about the game on Saturday,' said Tom.

'What about it?' said Mr Rankin.

'I don't want to play in it, sir,' said Tom.

'What? Why not?' yelled Mr Rankin. 'You are the best player I have.'

'Um – I want to go to the theatre. Heath Mason is in *Hamlet*.'

'The theatre? We're playing Riverdale on Saturday!' Mr Rankin was angry. 'No, Tom. We need you. Forget about going to the theatre.' Mr Rankin walked away.

Gary Howard walked over to Tom and said, 'Listen, Clark, you're not the best player. I am. But you be at that game on Saturday. Or I'll come and get you.'

Gary Howard was the biggest boy in the football team. He was strong. He had very large hands. He put a hand in front of Tom's face.

'Hello, Tom. Hello, Gary,' a voice said. It was Fraser. He stood next to Tom.

Gary put his hand down and said, 'Be there on Saturday, Clark. Or I'll find you.' He walked away.



‘What was that about?’ asked Fraser.

‘Mr Rankin said I was the best player. Gary heard him.’

‘Oh,’ said Fraser. ‘Gary did look angry! Can you come and see *Hamlet*?’

‘No,’ said Tom. ‘I’m in the team. I have to play football on Saturday, Fraser.’

At lunchtime the next day, Fraser came running to Tom. ‘Tom! He’s here at our school! Hamlet’s here!’

‘Who’s here?’ asked Tom.

‘Heath Mason. I saw him talking to the teachers.’

‘Heath Mason – here? Where is he?’

The boys hurried through the school.

‘There he is!’ yelled Fraser. ‘At the school hall. He’s going into the school hall!’

Tom and Fraser ran into the hall. The boys looked for the actor, but they couldn’t see him.

‘It’s empty,’ said Tom. ‘Did you really see him?’

‘I did,’ said Fraser. ‘It was him.’

They went up onto the stage.

‘Hey, Fraser, you be Hamlet and I’ll be the king,’ said Tom. ‘Come, Hamlet, come, and take this hand from me!’

Just then, Heath Mason walked onto the stage. ‘Hello,’ he said. ‘That’s very good.’

The boys looked at him.

‘I’m Heath,’ he said.

‘I know!’ said Tom. ‘You’re Heath Mason!’

Heath Mason smiled and walked across to the boys. ‘Who are you?’ he asked.

‘Er, I’m Tom and this is Fraser. But what are you doing here?’

‘I’m an old boy of this school,’ said Heath.

'You are?' said Tom.

'Yes. I was a student here. I left twelve years ago. I acted in my first play here on this stage.'

'Fraser and I love acting,' said Tom. 'But the school doesn't put on plays now.'

'That's sad,' said Heath. 'My English teacher, Miss Piper, put on the school plays then. Does she teach here now?' he asked.

'No. Fraser and I go to an acting school in the city,' said Tom. 'We put on plays there.'

'I'm coming to see you in *Hamlet* on Saturday,' said Fraser.

'Good! Are you coming too, Tom?' asked Heath.

'I want to, but I can't. I have to play football.'

'Mr Rankin was my football coach,' said Heath. 'Does he teach here now?'

'Yes,' said Tom. 'He's my coach too.'

'He loves football, doesn't he?' smiled Heath.

Just then, some teachers came into the hall. The school principal, Mr Barton, was with them. He walked up to the stage and said, 'Ah, there you are, Heath. We didn't know where you were.'

'I just wanted to come and look at the hall. I love this place. I did some plays here,' Heath told Mr Barton.

'Ah yes,' said Mr Barton. 'That was before my time here.'

Tom saw Mr Rankin at the back of the hall. Heath saw him too. 'Hello, Mr Rankin,' he called.

'Hello, Heath,' said Mr Rankin. He walked up to the stage.

'Tom can't see my play on Saturday because he has to play football,' said Heath. 'Can't he come to my play?'

'No, he can't,' said Mr Rankin. 'We need him. We're

playing Riverdale. It's the biggest game of the year. You played in the team when you were a student here, Heath. You know Tom has to play on Saturday.'

Heath looked at Tom. 'Mr Rankin's right. You should play football on Saturday, Tom. Come and see my next play.'

Mr Barton said, 'Boys, go to class. Mr Mason will be talking to the school soon.'

'Goodbye, Heath,' said Fraser.

'Thanks for asking about Saturday,' said Tom. 'Nice to meet you.'

'Goodbye, Tom. Goodbye, Fraser,' said Heath.

Outside, Fraser said, 'Wow! We met Heath Mason!'

'But why is he here?' asked Tom.

'I don't know,' said Fraser.

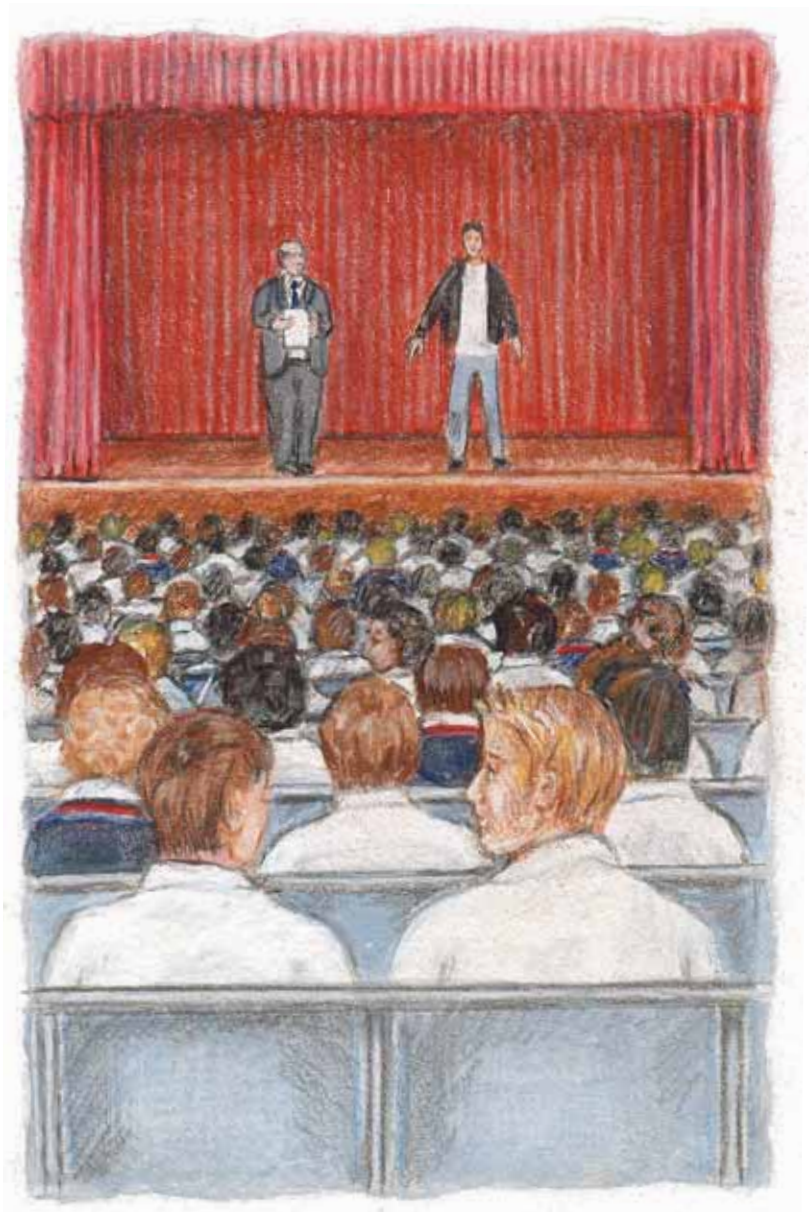
In the afternoon, all the classes had to go to the hall. Tom and Fraser went with their English class. This time, the hall was full of students and teachers. Mr Barton walked onto the stage.

'Today we have a visitor. He is an old boy of the school. He was a student here before any of you came here. But you all know him. Here he is – Mr Heath Mason.'

All the students started talking. Then Heath walked onto the stage and there was a lot of cheering and clapping. Some students stood up. Teachers yelled at the students to sit down and be quiet. Then Heath smiled and raised his hands and all the students sat quietly.

'Thank you, Mr Barton,' said Heath. 'Good afternoon, boys. It's nice to be back at my old school. I'm here to talk about being an actor. It's not an easy job, but I love it. I started acting here on this stage when I was fifteen. And now I want you to act on this stage too.'

Tom looked at Fraser. What was Heath going to say next?



‘I’ve spoken to Mr Barton about this. I want some of you to try acting. So there is going to be a play competition. There will be prizes for the best play and the best actor. I will come back here five weeks from now. I’ll watch the plays that you put on. The group that puts on the best play in the competition will come to the first night of my next play at the City Theatre in November. I’ll be doing Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*. You can come and meet the other actors in the play. And the best actor in the competition will be on my television show, *Here and Now*, for a day. One boy from this school will play my little brother!’

There was a lot of noise from the students.

‘That will be me,’ said Tom quietly.

‘That will be me,’ said Fraser quietly.

Both boys wanted that prize. But only one boy could win the competition.