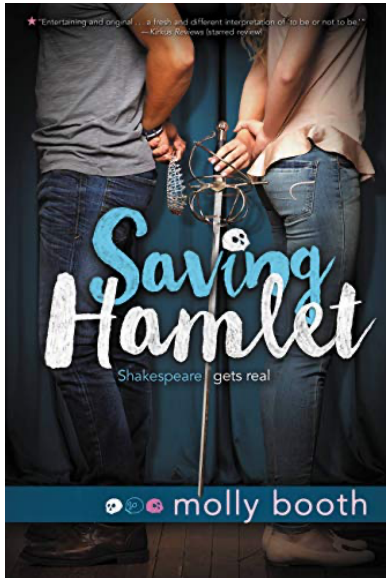# Saving Hamlet by Molly Booth

"I looked down at my black hoodie, skinny jeans, and black high-tops. My carefully chosen outfit had been deemed uncool by a sixty-year-old man wearing blue velvet shorts."

"'Want to know what a book-keeper's job is, boy?' [Wick] muttered. 'We keep the actors from ruinin' the play.'"

Can a haircut change a life? Is it weird to have feelings for someone who died 400 years before you were born? What do these questions have to do with Shakespeare? In *Saving Hamlet* by Molly Booth, Emma's life has the usual dramas that come with being a sophomore in high school, like a major falling out with her former soccer teammates and a huge crush on the student theatre director who passed over her talented best friend Lulu for the lead role in *Hamlet*. On top of that, Emma is unexpectedly promoted to stage manager (instead of assistant as she expected) and the director's costume, cast, and script choices seem doomed to disaster. As if the production falling apart before it can begin isn't enough drama to handle for one person, Emma also falls through the stage's trap door and lands in the basement of the original Globe Theater (like, back in the year 1601). Emma finds herself helping an amazingly talented stage manager and gets to see William Shakespeare himself putting the finishing touches on the very first production of *Hamlet*. As Emma goes back and forth between these two dramatically different time zones, she finds herself embroiled in trying to save two different productions of

Hamlet simultaneously, while juggling her interest in three different guys and helping bisexual Lulu to deal with a traumatic fallout with her homophobic parents.

Despite the painful parts (both the cringe ones and the realistic problems for queer teens), this book was a fun, quick read that includes various queer identities as well as some time travel just for kicks. For normal teens, the level of drama in this book might seem a bit extra, but for theatre geeks, it's actually pretty true to life, at least in the experience of this reviewer. The characters are definitely a little cliché; the gay best friend is about as stereotypical as possible and Emma's back story is honestly kind of suspect (what exactly was the point of including a mysterious prior fallout with her soccer team? Does her family actually contribute anything to the story? Not really). That all said, if you can look past the fact that the 16th century teenaged love interest doesn't literally scream in terror for 3 months at finding himself surrounded by modern technology, you'll have a fun time reading this story of a time-traveling stage manager. Not only is this book entertaining, but it does have some valuable messages about friendship, love, and self-acceptance. Lulu's trouble with her parents is portrayed with the gravity it deserves (there's rarely an easy solution to being kicked out for being queer, and Booth doesn't gloss over this issue) despite her experience being secondary to the main story.

Best suited to readers aged 15-17, this book will be especially enjoyable for theatre geeks, lovers of Shakespeare, or even just anyone who likes elements of time travel and/or teen romantic dramas. If you don't know much about theatre, this is an amazingly entertaining crash course, as a basic introduction to stage managing and the associated terminology ("blocking," etc.) is built into the story. Be advised that reading this book may lead to Wikipedia rabbit holes starting on topics such as William Shakespeare, stage blocking, or general relativity and the chronology protection conjecture.

References

Booth, M. (2016). *Saving Hamlet*. Hyperion.