

A Midsummer Night's Dream

by William Shakespeare



Act 1, Scene 1

THESEUS and HIPPOLYTA enter along with PHILOSTRATE and others.

THESEUS

ow, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour draws on apace. Four happy days bring in another moon. But oh, methinks how slow this old moon wanes! She lingers my desires, like an old widow forestalls an inheritance.

HIPPOLYTA

Four days will quickly turn into night. And each night, we will dream away the time. Soon the moon—like a silver bow newly bent in the sky—shall behold our celebrations.

THESEUS

Go, Philostrate, stir up the Athenian youth to merriments! Wake up their lively and swift spirits. Send melancholy out to funerals—that pale emotion has no place at our table.

PHILOSTRATE exits

Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword, and won thy love by injuring you. But I will wed thee in another key— with pomp, with triumph, and with reveling.

EGEUS enters with his daughter HERMIA, along with LYSANDER and DEMETRIUS

EGEUS

Joy to you, Theseus—our renowned duke!

THESEUS

Thanks good Egeus. What news with thee?

EGEUS

Full of vexation come I with complaint against my child, my daughter Hermia. Step forward, Demetrius. My noble lord Theseus, this man, Demetrius, has my blessing to marry her. Step forward, Lysander. Yet, my gracious duke, this man, Lysander, has put a spell on her heart.

You, you, Lysander, have given poems, and exchanged love tokens with my daughter. You've stood beneath her window in the moonlight with your forged love songs. You've stolen her fancy by giving locks of your hair, rings, toys, trinkets, flowers, and candies—all to seduce an innocent child. With cunning hast thou schemed to steal her heart and turned her obedience, which is due to me, into a harsh stubbornness.

My gracious duke, if Hermia, standing here before you, won't agree to marry Demetrius, then I demand my rights as father. She belongs to me, I can do with her what I wish. As the law states: either she marries Demetrius or she dies

THESEUS

What say you, Hermia? Be advised, fair maid: To you your father should be as a god, for he's created thy beauty. You are but a figure sculpted out of wax that he hath the power to leave or to destroy. Demetrius is but a worthy man.

HERMIA

So is Lysander.

THESEUS

He is. But he lacks your father's approval, so then you must consider Demetrius to the better.

HERMIA

I wish my father would look at them through my eyes

THESEUS

It is through his judgement must you look

HERMIA

I beg your Grace to pardon me. I know not by what power I am made so bold, or whether speaking my thoughts shall harm my reputation but I beseech you, what befalls me if I refuse to wed Demetrius?

THESEUS

You'll either be sentenced to death or shall never again speak with another man. Therefore, fair Hermia, question your desires. Know of your youth, and explore your feelings—if you do not yield to your father's wishes, can you endure the life of a nun, shut up in a dark convent, living without husband or children, chanting quietly to the moon? Those who control their passions and remain virgins are thrice as blessed. But a married woman lives happier in this world than a virgin, who achieves the blessing of chastity but grows and withers as a flower on the stem

HERMIA

So will I grow, so live, so die, my lord. I will not give up the ownership of my virginity to my lord father. My soul refuses to let him command me into the yoke of a marriage I do not want.

THESEUS

Take time to consider your desires. By the next new moon—the day when my beloved and I will be joined in marriage—be ready to either die for disobeying your father's wishes, or else, go to the temple of Diana and vow to spend the rest of your life as a virgin priestess

DEMETRIUS

Relent, sweet Hermia and, Lysander, yield thy crazed title to my certain right.

LYSANDER

You have her father's love, Demetrius.

Let me have Hermia's. May you marry him instead

EGEUS

Scornful Lysander, it's true, I do love him. And as so, I will yield to him what is mine. Hermia yet belongs to me, and I bequeath my rights to Demetrius

LYSANDER

[To THESEUS] I am, my lord, as well derived as he, As well possessed. My love is more than his. My fortunes every way as fairly ranked, if not with vantage, as Demetrius'. And—which is more than all these boasts can be— I am beloved of beauteous Hermia. Why should not I then prosecute my right? Demetrius, I'll avouch it to his head, made love to Nedar's daughter, Helena, and won her soul. And she, sweet lady, dotes, devoutly dotes, dotes in idolatry upon this spotted and inconstant man.

THESEUS

I must confess that I have heard as much and meant to speak of it to Demetrius. But I became distracted with my own concerns and had forgotten. Demetrius and Egeus, come with me. I have council for you both that I wish to give

As for you, fair Hermia, prepare to match your desires to your father's will, or else the law of Athens—which I cannot bend—demands that you either die or take a vow of chastity and never marry. Come along, Hippolyta. How are you, my love? Demetrius and Egeus, come. I have work I need of you

EGEUS

With duty and desire we follow you

They all exit, except LYSANDER and HERMIA

LYSANDER

How are you, my love? Why are your cheeks so pale? How is it that their roses have faded so quickly?

HERMIA

They have but lacked rain, which I could give unto them from the tears in my eyes

LYSANDER

Ay me! For aught that I could ever read, could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth... Perhaps the lovers are of different castes

HERMIA

Oh, what a curse! Too high of class to be loved

LYSANDER

Or else of different ages—

HERMIA

Oh, vicious fate! Too old to be engaged to young.

LYSANDER

Or else their choice depended on the wishes of another

HERMIA

Oh, what hell, to choose love by another's eyes

LYSANDER

Or—even if two could marry—war, death, and sickness may intervene, so that their love lasts no longer than a sound, fleeting as a shadow, as short as a dream. Or brief as lightning that—like a flash of passion—lights up heaven and Earth but disappears into darkness before you can say "Behold!" So quick bright things come to confusion

HERMIA

If true lovers are always thwarted, then it proves our love must be righteous. Let us approach our concern with patience. Since an honest love is unjustly oppressed, such persecution must be as much a part of love as our dreams, wishes, and tears

LYSANDER

A good persuasion. Therefore, hear me, Hermia. I have a widowed aunt, who has property and great wealth with no children. Her house is twenty miles from Athens, and she thinks of me as her son. There, gentle Hermia, may I marry thee, where the harsh laws of Athens can't pursue us. If you love me, steal forth from thy father's house tomorrow night. I will wait for you in the woods, three miles outside of town, at the place where I once met you with Helena to celebrate the first of May. There will I stay for thee.

HERMIA

My good Lysander! I swear to thee—by Cupid's strongest bow, by his best gold-tipped arrow; by the innocent doves that drive the chariot of Venus; by everything that binds souls together and makes love grow; by the bonfire upon which the Queen of Carthage burned herself to death when she saw her lover Aeneas had sailed from her; and by all the vows that men have ever broken (which outnumber all the promises women have ever made) that I will meet thee

LYSANDER

Keep your promise, my love. Look, here comes Helena

HERMIA

Beautiful Helena! Where are thou going?

HELENA enters.

HELENA

Call me "fair?" Your beauty is what Demetrius desires. Oh, lucky beauty! Your eyes are like stars, and your sweet voice is more melodic than a lark's song to a shepherd in springtime. Oh, how I wish beauty was as contagious as sickness... I would catch yours, beautiful Hermia, before I left. My ear would be infected by your voice, my eye by your eye, and my tongue would catch your tongue's sweet melody. If I owned the world, I'd give it all up—with the exception of Demetrius—to be transformed into you. Oh, teach me how you look at Demetrius, and with what art you sway the motion of his heart.

HERMIA

I frown upon him, yet he loves me still

HELENA

Oh, that your frowns would teach my smiles such skill!

HERMIA

I give him curses, yet he gives me love.

HELENA

Oh, if only my prayers could arouse such affection

HERMIA

The more I hate, the more he follows

HELENA

The more I love, the more he hates.

HERMIA

His folly, Helena, is no fault of mine.

HELENA

It's only your beauty's fault. I wish that fault were mine!

HERMIA

Take comfort. Demetrius no more shall see my face. Lysander and I will fly this place. Before I laid eyes on Lysander, Athens seemed a paradise. But his beauty and grace are so that he hath turned this heaven unto a hell

LYSANDER

Helena, we shall tell you of our plan. Tomorrow night—when the moon is reflected on the waters and decorates the lawn with beads of pearly light, the time of night that always conceals a lovers escape,—we steal away through the gates of Athens.

HERMIA

[To HELENA] In the woods where we used to lay on the pale primroses, sharing all the sweet secrets of our hearts— there my Lysander and I shall meet. We'll turn away from Athens and look for new friends and the company of strangers. Goodbye, sweet friend of youth. Pray for us, and may fate give you Demetrius! Keep your promise, Lysander. We must refrain from seeing another until tomorrow night

LYSANDER

I will, my Hermia.

HERMIA exits.

Goodbye, Helena. May Demetrius love you as you love him!

LYSANDER exits

HELENA

O how much happier can some be! Through Athens I am thought as fair as she. But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so. He will not know what all but he do know. And as he wanders, doting on Hermia's eyes, so I too of his own qualities. Love can transform such crude and horrible things into such beauty. Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind. And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind. Love is said to be a child, because in choice it is so oft beguiled. Just as mischievous children abrogate their vows, so too does Love perjure itself. Before Demetrius saw Helena's eyes, he swore that he belonged to me. Yet when he came upon Hermia's beauty, he abandoned his oath. His promises melted like hail in the sun. I shall tell him of fair Hermia's flight. Then to the wood will he go tomorrow night. And for this intelligence if I have thanks, it is a dear expense. But herein mean I to enrich my pain, To have his sight thither and back again.

HELENA exits

Act 1, Scene 2

QUINCE the carpenter, SNUG the cabinetmaker; BOTTOM the weaver, FLUTE the bellows-repairman, SNOOT the repairman; and STARVELING the tailor all enter.

QUINCE

Are all of us here?

BOTTOM

You'd be best off calling their names generally, one person at a time, following the order of the names on the list.

QUINCE

Here is the list of every man in Athens who we consider worthy to act in the play we are to perform for the duke and duchess on the night of their wedding.

BOTTOM

First, good Peter Quince, tell us what this play is about. Then read the names of the actors, and in that way arrive at the conclusion.

QUINCE

Indeed. Our play is called "The most heartbreaking comedy of Pyramus and Thisbe."

BOTTOM

A very good piece of work, I assure you, and very funny, too. Now, good Peter Quince, call forth the actors on your list. Men, gather around.

QUINCE

Answer as I call you. Nick Bottom, the weaver?

BOTTOM

Here. Say which part I'm to play, and proceed

QUINCE

You, Nick Bottom, will play the role of Pyramus.

BOTTOM

Who is Pyramus? A lover or a tyrant?

QUINCE

A lover who, most gallantly, kills himself for love

BOTTOM

That will ask of me some tears in the true performing of it. If I do it, I'll make tears fall from thy audience eyes like rainstorms. I'll make them weep. I'll grieve—and just the right amount of grief, of course. Okay, now list the other actors. Actually, my first choice would be to play a tyrant. I'd make a wonderful Hercules, or any other part that requires ranting and raving that will bring the house down.

The raging rocks
And shivering shocks
Shall break the locks
Of prison gates.
And Phoebus' car
Shall shine from far
And make and mar
The foolish Fates.

That was high art! Now, name the rest of the actors. That speech was in the style of Hercules, in the vein of a tyrant. Of course, a lover would be more condoling

QUINCE

Francis Flute, the bellows-repairman?

FLUTE

Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE

Flute, you'll play Thisbe.

FLUTE

Who's Thisbe? A wandering knight?

QUINCE

Thisbe is the lady whom Pyramus loves.

FLUTE

Nay, faith, let me not play a woman. I have a beard coming.

QUINCE

No difference it makes. You'll be wearing a mask and you can make your voice as high as you want.

BOTTOM

If I can wear a mask, let me play Thisbe too! I'll speak in an amazing high-pitched voice. Pyramus will say: "Thisne, Thisne!" Then I'll say: "Ah, Pyramus, my dear love! I'm your dear Thisbe—your dear lady!"

QUINCE

No, no. You must play Pyramus. And Flute, you Thisbe

BOTTOM

Well, all right. Continue

QUINCE

Robin Starveling, the tailor?

STARVELING

Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE

Robin Starveling, you're going to play Thisbe's mother. Tom Snout, the repairman?

SNOUT

Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE

You, Pyramus' father. As for myself, I'll play Thisbe's father. Snug, the cabinetmaker, you'll play the lion. God, I hope we've been well cast...

SNUG

Do you have the lion's part written down? Pray you, if it be, please give it to me, as I'm a slow learner

QUINCE

You can improvise the whole thing, because it's just roaring

BOTTOM

Let me play the lion, too! I'll roar so well that it'll delight anyone who hears. I'll roar so well that the duke will say, "Let him roar again. Let him roar again!"

QUINCE

If you roar too well, you'll scare the duchess and the other ladies, and make them scream. And

that would be enough to hang us all.

ALL

They'd hang every single one of us

BOTTOM

I agree, if we fright the ladies out of their wits they'd have no choice but to hang us. But I'll aggravate my voice so that I'll roar as gently as a baby dove. I'll roar like a melodic nightingale.

QUINCE

You can play no part but Pyramus! Because Pyramus is a good-looking man, the most handsome man you could find on a summer's day, the most lovely gentlemanly man. Therefore you must play Pyramus.

BOTTOM

Very well, I'll do it. What would be the best beard for me to wear for such a part

QUINCE

Whichever one you want to wear

BOTTOM

I'll play the role wearing either a straw-colored beard, or a brownish-yellow beard, or a deep red beard, or maybe a bright yellow beard the color of a French crown

QUINCE

Some French heads have no hair at all, so you could play the role clean-shaven. But, gentlemen, here are your scripts. I beg you to please learn your lines by tomorrow night. Then meet me by moonlight in the duke's forest a mile outside of town. There we will rehearse, for if we do it in the city, we'll be bothered by the crowds and everyone will know what we shall perform. In the meantime, I'll make a list of props that we'll need for the play. Now, I beg you, don't miss our rehearsal

BOTTOM

We'll be there, and there we'll rehearse most courageously. Work hard, memorize your lines perfectly. Farewell.

QUINCE

We'll meet at the giant oak tree in the duke's forest

They all exit.

A FAIRY and ROBIN GOODFELLOW enter from opposite sides of the stage.

ROBIN

How now, spirit? Whither wander you?

FAIRY

Over hill, over valley, through bush, through thorn, over park, over fenced-in pastures, through

water, through fire. I wander everywhere swifter than the moon revolves around the Earth. I serve the fairy queen, decorating the grass with dew. The tall cowslip flowers are her bodyguards: the spots you see on their gold coats, those be rubies, gifts from the fairies. Their sweet smells come from those spots. Now I must go seek some dewdrops, and hang a pearl of dew in every cowslip flower. Farewell, you silly spirit. I must go. The queen and her elves will soon be here

ROBIN

The king revels here tonight. Be careful that the queen doesn't come within his sight, because King Oberon is possessed with anger. She stole a charming boy from an Indian king to be her servant. She's never kidnapped such an adorable child, and Oberon is jealous. He wants the child to be a knight within his own court, to wander with him through the wild forests. But the queen refuses to give up the beloved boy. Crowns him with flowers, and makes him all her joy. And now they never meet in grove or green, by fountain clear or spangled starlight sheen. They argue, so that all their elves fright and sneak off to hide in acorns

FAIRY

Either I'm completely mistaken, or else you are that mischievous and shrewd spirit named Robin Goodfellow. Aren't you the one who plays pranks on the maidens in the village; clogging up the flour mill so they can't grind grain; and making housewives breathless by keeping their milk from turning into butter no matter how much they churn? Don't you stop beer from foaming, and lead people out at night the wrong way while you laugh? Those that call you "Hobgoblin," or "sweet Puck"— you do their work and make sure they have good luck. Are not you he?

ROBIN

Thou speak'st aright. I am that merry wanderer of the night. I jest to Oberon and make him smile. When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile, neighing in the likeness of a filly foal. And sometime lurk I in a gossip's bowl. The wisest aunt telling the saddest tale sometime for three-foot stool mistaketh me. Then slip I from her bum, down topples she. None of them has ever wasted an hour in greater fun. But make room, fairy! Here comes Oberon

FAIRY

And here my mistress. Would that he were gone!

The Fairy King OBERON and his followers enter. On the other side of the stage, the Fairy Queen TITANIA and her followers enter.

OBERON

I'll met by moonlight, proud Titania.

TITANIA

What, are you jealous, Oberon? Fairies, let's leave this place. I have forsworn his bed and company

OBERON

You impulsive and willful creature. Am I not your lord and husband?

TITANIA

If you were, then I must be thy lady to whom you are faithful. But I know you snuck away from Fairyland disguised as a shepherd, and spent all day playing music and reciting love poems to a shepherdess. Why have you come here, all the way from the furthest mountains of India? Because, of course, that bouncing Amazon Hippolyta—your half-boot-wearing mistress and warrior lover—is marrying Theseus, and you've come to bless their wedding bed with joy and prosperity

OBERON

How can you shamelessly make insinuations about my relationship with Hippolyta, when you know I know about thy love for Theseus? Did not you entice him through the glimmering night away from Perigouna, whom he had just abducted and ravished? And didn't you make him be unfaithful to Aegles, Ariadne, and Antiopa?

TITANIA

These are the forgeries of your jealousy. Not once, since the beginning of midsummer—whether on a hill, in a valley, a forest, or a meadow, by a spring or rushing brook, or on a beach—have my fairies and I been able to meet and perform our dances to honor the whistling wind without your shouting. Because of you, the winds have grown angry. In revenge, they have made nasty fogs rise up from the sea, and made rain fall upon the land so that the rivers flood. All the work of farmers' and their oxen has been for not, and the corn has rotted before it could grow ripe. Animal pens stand empty in the drown fields, and the crows have grown fat from eating the bodies of sheep and cattle killed by disease. The village greens where men play are filled with mud, and the maze-like paths through the high-grown grass have faded because no one walks among them. The mortals have not gotten their winter. The nights have not received the blessings of the hymns or carols.

Therefore the moon, the governess of floods, pale in her anger, moistens all the air so that sickness abounds. Because of disturbance in the natural order, the seasons have altered: bitter frosts descend upon red roses. And Old Man Winter wears an icy crown decorated with sweet summer flower buds, like some kind of cruel prank. The spring, summer, fruitful autumn, and angry winter have all changed from their normal clothes, and now the confused world can't tell one from the other. This progeny of evils comes from our debate, from our dissension. We are its cause

OBERON

Fix it then. You have such power. Why would Titania want to argue with her Oberon? All I ask is to have that human boy as my attendant.

TITANIA

Set your heart at rest. I wouldn't trade the child for all of Fairyland. His mother was one of my priestesses, she used to gossip by my side in the spiced Indian night while on Neptune's yellow sands as we watched merchant ships sail by. We'd laugh when we saw the wind fill up their sails, as if the wanton wind had made them pregnant and big-bellied. She would imitate the ships—she was pregnant at the time with the little boy—and she would pretend to sail upon the land to get me little presents and then come back carrying gifts like she was a trading ship returning from voyage, rich with cargo. But she was a mortal, and she died giving birth. And for

her sake do I rear up her boy, for her sake I will not part with him.

OBERON

How long do you plan to stay in this forest?

TITANIA

Perhaps until after Theseus' wedding day. If you will join in our circle dance and see our moonlight revels without causing trouble, then go with us. If not, stay away, and I'll avoid your lands.

OBERON

Give me that boy and I'll come with thee

TITANIA

Not for thy fairy kingdom. Fairies, away! We'll have a true fight if I stay.

TITANIA and her followers exit.

OBERON

Then go on your way. You shall not leave this grove until I've made you pay

[To ROBIN GOODFELLOW] My gentle Puck, come hither. Do you remember that time, sitting on a cliffside, we heard a mermaid sing with such a sweet and harmonious voice that the rude sea grew tame at her song, that the stars shot madly from their spheres?

ROBIN

Aye

OBERON

On that night, I saw Cupid flying between the cold moon and the Earth, with all his arrows. He aimed at a beautiful virgin who sat upon a throne at the western end of the world, and he shot his love arrow hard enough to pierce a hundred thousand hearts. But I saw young Cupid's fiery arrow weakened by the chaste beams of the watery moon, and so the royal virgin was unaffected by the arrow, and continued on with her virginal thoughts without care. But I noticed where Cupid's arrow fell. It fell on a little western flower, which used to be as white as milk but turned purple when it was wounded by his arrow. Maidens call it "love-in-idleness." Fetch me that flower. I showed it to you once. If the juice of that flower is dropped on the eyelids of those asleep, that man or woman will fall madly in love with the next living creature they see. Bring me this plant and return here before Leviathan can swim three miles

ROBIN

I'll put a girdle round about the Earth in forty minutes.

OBERON

Once I get this juice, I'll spy on Titania until she falls asleep and then drop the liquor of it in her eyes. The first thing she sees when she wakes—whether it's a lion, bear, wolf, bull, monkey, or an ape—she'll fall deeply and madly in love with. And before I take this charm from her sight —

which I can do by using another herb—I'll make her give that boy to me. But who comes here? I am invisible. And I will overhear their conference.

ROBIN exits.

DEMETRIUS enters, followed by HELENA.

DEMETRIUS

I love thee not, therefore pursue me not. Where are Lysander and beautiful Hermia? The one I'll slay, the other slayeth me. You told me they stole into this wood. And here I am, losing my mind because I cannot find my Hermia. Get thee gone, and follow me no more

HELENA

You attract me to you, you heartless magnet! But you must not attract iron, because my heart is as true as steel. If you relent your power over me, then I won't have any to follow you.

DEMETRIUS

Do I invite you to follow? Do I speak to you kindly? Or rather, do I not in plainest truth tell you I do not, nor I cannot, love you?

HELENA

And for that I love you all the more! I'm your little dog. And, Demetrius, the more you beat me, the more I'll love you. Treat me like a dog—kick me, hit me, ignore me, try to lose me. Just allow me to follow you, even though I'm not good enough. What worse place can I beg to be held in your heart than to be treated as you would treat a dog? And yet, I would consider it a place of honor.

DEMETRIUS

Don't tempt me to hate you any more than I do. For I am sick when I do look on thee

HELENA

And I am sick when I look not on you

DEMETRIUS

You shouldn't risk your reputation or virginity to commit yourself into the hands of one that loves you not, in the middle of the night in such a deserted place

HELENA

Your virtue is my privilege. the beauty of your face shines like the sun, so it is not night to me. , The forest is not empty, because for me you are the entire world. How can it be said I am alone when all the world is here to look on me?

DEMETRIUS

I'll run from thee and hide me in the bushes, and leave thee to the mercy of wild beasts

HELENA

Not even beasts are as vicious. Run. The story of lustful Apollo chasing the nymph Daphne shall be changed: Now Apollo will run, and Daphne will pursue. The dove will chase the griffin. The

gentle deer will race to catch the tiger. Speed is useless when cowardice pursues bravery.

DEMETRIUS

I'll not linger listening to your tales. Let me go. Or if thou follow me, understand that I'll do thee mischief in the wood.

HELENA

You've already wronged me in the church, in the town, and in the fields. Curse you, Demetrius! Your behavior is an insult to all women. We can't fight for love as men do. We should be wooed and were not made to woo

DEMETRIUS exits. ROBIN enters.

I'll follow thee and make a heaven of hell, to die upon the hand I love so well.

HELENA exits.

OBERON

Fare thee well, nymph. Before he leaves this grove, he shall seek thy love

ROBIN

Ay, there it is. Do you have the flower? Welcome, traveler.

OBERON

I pray thee, give it me. *[He takes the flower from ROBIN.]*

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows, where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,
quite overcanopied with luscious woodbine, with sweet musk roses and with eglantine.
There sleeps Titania sometime of the night, lulled in these flowers with dances and delight.
And there the snake throws her enameled skin, weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in.
And with the juice of this I'll streak her eyes and make her full of hateful fantasies.

[He gives ROBIN part of the flower] Take this and search the forest: there's a sweet Athenian lady who is in love with a young man who loves her not. Anoint his eyes, but do it in a way that ensures that the lady will be the next thing he sees. You'll recognize the man by the Athenian clothes he's wearing. Be careful when you do, so that when it's done he loves her more than she loves him. Then meet me before the rooster's first crow at dawn

ROBIN

Fear not, my lord. Your servant shall do so

They exit, in opposite directions

Act 2, Scene 2

TITANIA enters

TITANIA

Come, dance and sing a fairy song. Then go for a while to do your work. Some can kill the worms plaguing the rosebuds. Others can fight with bats for their leathery wings, from which to make

coats for my elves. And still others can keep away that clamorous owl that hoots in surprise when it sees us pretty fairies. Now sing me to sleep, then go off to your work and let me rest.

The FAIRIES sing

FIRST FAIRY

[Singing] Snakes with spots and forked tongues;
And prickly porcupines, don't be seen.
Poisonous lizards, do no harm. Don't come near our fairy queen

FAIRIES

[Singing] Nightingale, melodiously Sing our sweet lullaby.
Lulla, lulla, lullaby, lulla, lulla, lullaby.
Let no harm or spell or charm
Come near our lovely lady. Say good night with a lullaby.

FIRST FAIRY

[Singing] Weaving spiders, come not here. Hence,
you long-legged spinners, hence! Beetles black,
approach not near. Worm nor snail, do no offense

FAIRIES

[Singing] Nightingale, melodiously Sing our sweet lullaby.
Lulla, lulla, lullaby, lulla, lulla, lullaby. Let no harm
Or spell or charm
Come our lovely lady nigh. Say good night with a lullaby
[TITANIA falls asleep]

SECOND FAIRY

Come on, let's go! All is well.

The FAIRIES exit. OBERON enters.

OBERON

[Squeezing flower juice on TITANIA's eyelids]
What thou seest when thou dost wake, do it for thy true love take. Love and languish for his sake. Be it ounce or cat or bear, pard or boar with bristled hair, in thy eye that shall appear, when thou wakest, it is thy dear. Wake when some vile thing is near.

OBERON exits. LYSANDER and HERMIA enter.

LYSANDER

Fair love, you faint with wandering in the wood. And to speak truth, I have forgot our way. We'll rest us, Hermia, if you think it good. And tarry for the comfort of the day.

HERMIA

Be it so, Lysander. Find you out a bed, for I upon this bank will rest my head

LYSANDER

One turf shall serve as pillow for us both. One heart, one bed, two bosoms, and one troth.

HERMIA

No, good Lysander. For my sake, my dear, lie further off yet. Do not lie so near

LYSANDER

Oh, my sweet, I am innocent. I mean that my heart unto yours is knit so that but one heart we can make of it. Two bosoms interchained with an oath— so then two bosoms and a single troth. Then by your side no bed-room me deny. For, lying so, Hermia, I do not lie.

HERMIA

Lysander riddles very prettily. A curse upon my manners and my pride if Hermia meant to say Lysander lied. But, gentle friend, for love and courtesy lie further off in human modesty. Such separation as may well be said becomes a virtuous bachelor and a maid. So far be distant. And, good night, sweet friend. Thy love ne'er alter till thy sweet life end!

LYSANDER

Amen, amen to that fair prayer, say I. And may my life end if my loyalty to you ever does. Over here is my bed. May the god of sleep give you all his rest!

HERMIA

May half that rest be yours.

HERMIA and LYSANDER fall asleep

ROBIN enters

ROBIN

Through the forest have I gone, but I've found no Athenian on whose eyes to use the love juice of this flower. [*Sees LYSANDER and HERMIA*] Whoa! Who is this?

Weeds of Athens he doth wear. This must be the man who shunned the Athenian girl. And here's the girl, sleeping soundly on the dank and dirty ground. Pretty soul! She shouldn't lie near this hard-hearted, crude man.

[*Squeezes flower juice on LYSANDER's eyelids*] Villain, upon thy eyes I throw. All the power this charm doth owe. When thou wakest, may love stop you from falling back to sleep. So awake when I am gone, For I must now go to Oberon

ROBIN exits DEMETRIUS and HELENA enter, running

HELENA

Stop, Demetrius! If just to kill me

DEMETRIUS

Do not haunt me thus

HELENA

Oh, will you leave me in the dark? Do not so!

DEMETRIUS

Stay, on thy own peril. I alone will go

DEMETRIUS exits

HELENA

Oh, I'm out of breath from this foolish chase. The more my prayer, the lesser is my grace. Happy is Hermia, wheresoe'er she lies, for she hath blessed and attractive eyes.

How came her eyes so bright? Not with salt tears. If so, my eyes are oftener washed than hers.

No, no, I am as ugly as a bear, for beasts that meet me run away for fear. Therefore no marvel though Demetrius do, as a monster, fly my presence thus. What wicked and dissembling glass of mine made me compare with Hermia's sphery eyne? *[Sees LYSANDER]* But who is this here?

Lysander, on the ground? Is he dead or asleep? I see no blood or injuries. Lysander, if you live, good sir, awake

LYSANDER

[Waking up] And run through fire I will for thy sweet sake. Radiant Helena! Nature shows her art by letting me see through your body into your heart. Where is Demetrius? Oh, Oh, how fit a word is that vile name to perish on my sword!

HELENA

Do not say so, Lysander. Say not so. Do you not love your Hermia? Hermia still loves you. Then be content

LYSANDER

Content with Hermia? No. I do repent

The tedious minutes I with her have spent.

Not Hermia but Helena I love.

Who will not change a raven for a dove?

The will of man is by his reason swayed,

And reason says you are the worthier maid.

Things growing are not ripe until their season.

So I, being young, till now ripe not to reason.

And touching now the point of human skill,

Reason becomes the marshal to my will

And leads me to your eyes, where I o'erlook

Love's stories written in love's richest book.

HELENA

Why is it my destiny to be so mocked? What have I done to deserve such scorn? Is it not enough, is it not enough, young man, that I never have and never will get a sweet look from Demetrius' eye? Must you also flout my insufficiency? Honestly, you are being cruel to woo me so disdainfully, without meaning. But fare you well, though I must confess I thought you were a kinder and nobler soul. Oh, that a lady of one man refused should of another therefore be abused!

HELENA exits

LYSANDER

She sees not Hermia. Hermia, sleep thou there. And never mayst thou come Lysander near!
For as a surfeit of the sweetest things the deepest loathing to the stomach brings,
Or as the heresies that men do leave are hated most of those they did deceive,
So thou, my surfeit and my heresy, Of all be hated, but the most of me.
And, all my powers, address your love and might to honor Helen and to be her knight.

LYSANDER exits

HERMIA

[*Waking up*] Help, Lysander, help me! Do your best: try to get this slithering snake off of my chest.
Oh goodness! What an awful dream I just had. Lysander, look how I do quake with fear!
Methought a serpent eat my heart away, and you sat smiling at his cruel pray. What, are you gone? Lysander, my lord! What, out of hearing, gone? No sound, no word?— Alas, where are you? Say something if you can hear. Anything! I'm so afraid that I almost faint. No? Nothing? Then you are not nearby. I'll either find you right away, or else I'll die.

HERMIA exits

Act 3, Scene 1

While TITANIA sleeps onstage, BOTTOM, QUINCE, FLUTE, SNUG, SNOUT, and STARVELING enter

BOTTOM

Are we all here?

QUINCE

Right on time. And this is a marvelous place for us to rehearse. This clearing will be the stage, and this hawthorn bush will be our dressing room. We'll rehearse the play the same as we'll perform it for the duke.

BOTTOM

Peter Quince

QUINCE

What is it, my fine friend Bottom?

BOTTOM

There are things in this comedy of Pyramus and Thisbe that will never please the audience. First of all, Pyramus has to draw a sword and use it to kill himself, which the women in the audience won't be able to stand. What do you think about that?

SNOUT

By the Virgin Mary, that's a serious problem!

STARVELING

I think, in the end, we'll have to leave out all the killing

BOTTOM

Not at all! I've an idea. Write, just as I describe, a prologue that explains that we won't actually injure anyone with our swords, and that Pyramus isn't really killed. And to make even more assurance, explain that that while I look as Pyramus I'm not actually he, I'm really Bottom the weaver. This will put them out of their fear.

QUINCE

Good. We'll perform a prologue, and we'll write it in traditional ballad form, with alternating lines of eight- and six-syllables

BOTTOM

No, add two more. Write it with alternating lines of eight and eight syllables

SNOUT

Won't the women be frightened by the lion?

STARVELING

I'm very worried about that

BOTTOM

Sirs, you should all think about this: bringing in—God protect us!— a lion among ladies is a most dreadful thing. Because there's not a more frightening thing living than the lion.

SNOUT

So we'll have another prologue that explains he's not actually a lion

BOTTOM

No, you should announce to the audience his actual name, and make it so that half of his face is visible through the lion costume. And he himself should say something like the following, "Ladies," or "Beautiful ladies," "I would ask you" or "I would request you" or "I would beg you" "not to fear, not to tremble, because I would defend your lives by giving up my own. If you thought I came here as a real lion, it would endanger my life. No, I am no lion. I am a man, just like other men." And he should say his name, and tell them plainly that he's Snug the carpenter

QUINCE

Good, that's what we'll do. But there are two more problems we must solve. How are we going to bring moonlight into the room where we perform? Because, you know, Pyramus and Thisbe meet in the moonlight.

SNOUT

Will the moon be shining on the night we're to perform?

BOTTOM

A calendar; a calendar! Look in the almanac. Look up when the moon shines, look up when the moon shines!

QUINCE

[He takes out and consults a book] Yes, it doth shine that night

BOTTOM

Well then, we could leave a window ajar in the great room, and the moon will shine through

QUINCE

Yes, or else someone will have to play the character of Moonshine. There's another thing: we need to have a wall in the great room. Because Pyramus and Thisbe talked to each other through a chink in a wall, as the story goes

SNOUT

You'll never be able to bring in a wall! What say you, Bottom?

BOTTOM

Someone has to play the part of Wall. For a costume, he can be covered in some plaster or clay to show that he's a wall. Then he can hold his fingers like this *[He holds up his hand with two fingers split slightly apart]*, and Pyramus and Thisbe can whisper to each other through that cranny

QUINCE

If we do this, then all will be well. Now sit down everyone and rehearse your parts. Pyramus, you start. When you've said your lines, go behind that bush as if it were a curtain offstage. Everyone else, do the same according to whether you should be on or off

ROBIN enters, unseen by the other characters onstage

ROBIN

[To himself] Who are these country bumpkins making so much noise so close to the fairy queen's bed? What? Are they about to perform a play? I'll be the audience. An actor too, perhaps, if I see cause

QUINCE

Speak, Pyramus. Thisbe, come forward

BOTTOM

[As PYRAMUS] Thisbe, flowers with odious smelling sweet—

QUINCE

“Odors!” “odors!”

BOTTOM

[As PYRAMUS] odors smelling sweet, are like your breath, my dearest Thisbe dear. But hark, a voice! Wait here for a moment, and I'll be back soon!

BOTTOM exits

ROBIN

[To himself] A stranger Pyramus has never been performed

FLUTE

Should I talk now?

ROBIN exits

QUINCE

Yes, you should. You're supposed to show that you think Pyramus just went to check on a noise he heard and is to come again.

FLUTE

[As THISBE] Most radiant Pyramus, you are as white as a lily, the color of a red rose on a splendid rosebush, a lively young man, as trustworthy as a horse that never gets tired. I'll meet you, Pyramus, at Ninny's grave.

QUINCE

That's "Ninus' grave" man. And also, don't say that part yet, because you're supposed to say it to Pyramus. You just said all your lines at once, cues and all.
Enter, Pyramus. You missed your cue. It's "never gets tired."

FLUTE

Oh! *[As THISBE]* As trustworthy as a horse that never gets tired.

BOTTOM enters, with a donkey's head instead of his own.

ROBIN also enters

BOTTOM

[As PYRAMUS] If I were handsome, my lovely Thisbe, I would still be entirely yours

QUINCE

Oh! A monster! How strange! We're being haunted. Pray, gentlemen! Fly, gentlemen! Help!

QUINCE, FLUTE, SNUG, SNOUT, and STARVELING exit

ROBIN

I'll follow you. I'll lead you all in circles, through bogs through bush, through hedge, and through thorn. Sometimes I'll take the shape of a horse, sometimes a hound, a hog, or a headless bear. Sometimes a fire! And neigh, and bark, and grunt, and roar, and burn, Like horse, hound, hog, bear, fire, at every turn

ROBIN exits

BOTTOM

Why do they run away? This is some joke to scare me

SNOUT enters

SNOUT

O Bottom, thou art changed! What have you on your head?

BOTTOM

What do you see?

SNOUT exits. QUINCE enters

QUINCE

Bless thee, Bottom, bless thee. Thou art transformed!

QUINCE exits

BOTTOM

I see their knavery: this is to make an ass of me, to fright me if they could. But I will not stir from this place, do what they can. I will walk up and down here and I will sing, that they shall hear I am not afraid.

[Singing] The blackbird, so dark of hue
With orange-tawny bill,
The throstle with his note so true,
The wren with little quill—

TITANIA

[Waking up] What angel wakes me from my flow'ry bed?

BOTTOM

[Singing] The finch, the sparrow, and the lark, the plainsong cuckoo gray,
Whose note full many a man doth mark and dares not answer "Nay"—
For indeed, who would set his wit to so foolish a bird? Who would give a bird the lie, though he cry "cuckoo" never so?

TITANIA

I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again. Mine ear is much enamored of thy note. So is mine eye enthralled to thy shape. And thy fair virtue's force perforce doth move me on the first view to say, to swear, I love thee.

BOTTOM

Methinks, mistress, you should have little reason for that. And yet, to say the truth, reason and love keep little company nowadays. It's a shame that some mutual friend doesn't introduce them

TITANIA

Thou art as wise as thou art beautiful

BOTTOM

That's not true, either. But if I were wise enough to get out of this wood, I'd have all the wisdom

I need

TITANIA

Out of this wood do not desire to go. Thou shalt remain here whether thou want to or not. I'm not some ordinary fairy. The summer itself serves me. And I do love thee. Therefore go with me. I'll give you fairies to serve, and they'll bring jewels from the ocean depths, and sing to you as you sleep on a bed of pressed flowers. Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed, come!

Four fairies—PEASEBLOSSOM, COBWEB, MOTH, and MUSTARDSEED—enter

PEASEBLOSSOM

Ready

COBWEB

And I.

MOTH

And I.

MUSTARDSEED

And I

ALL

Where should we go?

TITANIA

Be kind and courteous to this gentleman. Follow where he walks. Run and jump joyfully where he can watch you. Feed him apricots and blackberries, with purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries. Steal honey from the bumblebees, and make candles from beeswax. Then light the candles with the fire from glowworms' eyes so that my love will have light when he goes to bed and wakes. Pluck the wings from painted butterflies, to fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes. Fairies, bow and do him courtesies

PEASEBLOSSOM

Hail, mortal

COBWEB

Hail!

MOTH

Hail!

MUSTARDSEED

Hail!

BOTTOM

I beg your pardon, sirs, very much. Will you tell me your names, sirs?

COBWEB

Cobweb.

BOTTOM

I would like to get to know you better, good Mister Cobweb. If I cut my finger, I'll use you as a bandage. And your name, good sir?

PEASEBLOSSOM

Peaseblossom

BOTTOM

Please, give my regards to Mrs. Peapod, your mother, and to Mr. Peapod, your father. Good Mr. Peaseblossom, I'd like to get to know you better too. And now, may I ask what your name is, sir?

MUSTARDSEED

Mustardseed.

BOTTOM

Good Mr. Mustardseed, I know you have patiently suffered, and how those cowardly, gigantic sides of beef have caused so many of your family members to be devoured. I promise that many of your relatives have made my eyes water. I'd like to get to know you better, good master Mustardseed

TITANIA

Serve him well, and lead him to the place I sleep. I think the moon looks sad, and when she cries, every little flower cries, lamenting the fact that they are forced to remain chaste. Make my lover stay quiet. Bring him to me in silence.

They all exit

Act 3, Scene 2

The Fairy King OBERON enters

OBERON

I wonder if Titania be awaked. Then, what it was that next came in her eye, which she must dote on in extremity.

ROBIN enters

Here comes my messenger. How now, mad spirit? What fun have you had around this haunted grove?

ROBIN

My mistress is in love with a monster. While she slept in her secret bed beneath a canopy of flowers, there came a bunch of fools—ignorant workers who earn their money working the shops in Athens. They met to rehearse a play intended for great Theseus' nuptial day. The silliest of the group, who played Pyramus in their play, finished his scene and went offstage to sit in the

bushes. While he rested there I placed an asses head on him. Soon it was time for him to respond to his Thisbe, and he emerged. His friends ran, like wild geese that spot an approaching hunter, or like a flock of red-headed jackdaws rising, cawing, and madly flying across the sky at the sound of a gunshot. When one heard footsteps, he fell head over heels, shouted “Murder!” and called for help from Athens. Their fear shook them of their common sense. I led them away in their confusion, and left sweet, transformed Pyramus there. When in that moment so it came to pass, Titania waked and straightway loved an ass

OBERON

This has transpired even better than I planned. But have you put the love juice on the eyes of that Athenian, as I bid you?

ROBIN

I did it while he was sleeping, that is finished too. And the Athenian woman was sleeping near him. So, when he woke, he certainly must have seen her

DEMETRIUS and HERMIA enter

OBERON

[To ROBIN so only he can hear] Stand close. This is the same Athenian

ROBIN

[To OBERON so only he can hear] That’s the woman, but not the man.

DEMETRIUS

Oh, why be so mean to someone who loves you so? You should aim such cruel language only at your worst enemy.

HERMIA

Now I but chide, but I should use thee worse. For thou, I fear, hast given me cause to curse. If thou hast slain Lysander in his sleep, then you’re already knee-deep in blood, and you should just plunge in deeper and kill me too. He is more faithful to me than the sun is to day. Would he have snuck away from me while I was asleep? As if a hole appeared through the center of Earth, and the moon snuck through to surprise her brother, the sun, on the other side of the world. It must be that you murdered him. A murderer should look like you do—so pale and grim.

DEMETRIUS

That’s how such a victim should look. And that’s how I look, too, because you’ve pierced me through the heart with your cruelty. And yet you, the murderer, look as bright and shining as the planet Venus, glimmering in its orbit in the sky.

HERMIA

What does any of that have to do with my Lysander? Where is he? Oh, good Demetrius, will you bring him to me?

DEMETRIUS

I would rather feed his corpse to my dogs

HERMIA

Out, dog! away, you mutt! You've driven me past what any woman could endure. Hast thou slain him then? You should not be thought of as man. Oh, tell the truth. Tell the truth, for my sake. You wouldn't have even dared to look at him when he was awake, but you murdered him asleep? Oh, how brave of you! A snake, a poisonous snake, would do just the same. And in fact a snake did do it, because no snake has ever had a more forked, lying tongue than you have, you serpent

DEMETRIUS

You're working yourself into a rage. I'm not guilty of killing Lysander. Nor is he dead, for aught that I can tell

HERMIA

I pray thee, tell me then that he is well

DEMETRIUS

If I could tell you that, what would I get?

HERMIA

A privilege of never seeing me again. And from thy hated presence part I so. See me no more, whether he be dead or not

HERMIA exits

DEMETRIUS

There is no following her in this fierce vein. Here therefore for a while I will remain. Sadness becomes harder to bear when it's joined with a lack of sleep. I'll try to lighten my sadness through slumber. *[He lies down and falls asleep]*

OBERON

[To ROBIN] What hast thou done? Thou hast mistaken quite, and laid the love juice on some true love's sight. Because of your error someone's true love has turned false, instead of a false love turning true.

ROBIN

That's the fate of love. For every man who's faithful, a million others betray the oath of love they make with a new, over and over again

OBERON

About the wood go swifter than the wind, and Helena of Athens look thou find—
All fancy-sick she is and pale of cheer, With sighs of love, that costs the fresh blood dear.
By some illusion see thou bring her here. I'll charm his eyes against she do appear.

ROBIN

I go, I go. Look how I go,
Swifter than arrow from the Tartar's bow

ROBIN exits

OBERON

[Squeezing flower juice on DEMETRIUS's eyelids] Purple flower, hit by Cupid's arrow, sink into the pupils of his eyes. When he sees the girl he should love, make her seem to him as bright as Venus shining in the sky. When you wake, if she's nearby, beg her to answer your love with hers.

ROBIN enters

ROBIN

Captain of our fairy band, Helena is here at hand,
And the youth, mistook by me, pleading for a lover's fee.
Shall we their fond pageant see? Lord, what fools these mortals be!

OBERON

Stand aside. The noise they make will cause Demetrius to awake

ROBIN

Then will two at once woo one. What sport!
And those things do best please me that befall preposterously

LYSANDER and HELENA enter

LYSANDER

Why should you think that I should woo in scorn? Scorn and derision are never accompanied by such tears. Look, I cry when I vow my love for you. And vows so born, in their nativity all truth appears. How can these things in me seem scorn to you, bearing the badge of faith to prove them true?

HELENA

You do advance your cunning more and more. When truth kills truth, O devilish holy fray!
These vows are Hermia's. Will you give her o'er? Weigh oath with oath, and you will nothing weigh. Your vows to her and me, put in two scales, will even weigh, and both as light as tales.

LYSANDER

I had no judgment when to her I swore

HELENA

And still you have none

LYSANDER

Demetrius loves her, and he loves not you

DEMETRIUS

[Waking up] O Helena, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine! To what, my love, shall I compare thine eye? Crystal is muddy. Oh, how ripe in show thy lips, those kissing cherries, tempting grow! That pure congealèd white, high Taurus' snow, fanned with the eastern wind, turns to a crow when thou hold'st up thy hand. Oh, let me kiss this princess of pure white, this seal of bliss!

HELENA

Oh spite! Oh hell! I see you've joined together to humiliate me for your own merriment. If you were civil and knew courtesy, you would not do me thus much injury. Can't you just hate me, as I know you do? Must you join in souls to mock me too? If you were men, as men you are in show, you would not use a gentle lady so — To vow, and swear, and superpraise my parts, when I am sure you hate me with your hearts. You're both competing for Hermia's love, and now you're competing to see who can mock me more. What an impressive feat, what a manly thing to do, to conjure up tears in a poor maid's eyes with your derision! None of noble sort would so offend a virgin, and extort a poor soul's patience, all to make you sport

LYSANDER

You are unkind, Demetrius. Be not so. For you love Hermia. This you know I know. And here, with all good will, with all my heart, In Hermia's love I yield you up my part. And yours of Helena to me bequeath, whom I do love and will do till my death

HELENA

Never did mockers waste more idle breath

DEMETRIUS

Lysander, keep thy Hermia. I will none. If e'er I loved her, all that love is gone. My heart to her but as guest-wise sojourned, and now to Helen is it home returned, there to remain.

LYSANDER

Helena, it's not so

DEMETRIUS

Do not mock a love you know nothing about, or else risk peril. Look, your love is coming. Yonder is thy dear.

HERMIA enters

HERMIA

Dark night, that from the eye his function takes, the ear more quick of apprehension makes. Wherein it doth impair the seeing sense, it pays the hearing double recompense. Thou art not by mine eye, Lysander, found. Mine ear, I thank it, brought me to thy sound But why unkindly didst thou leave me so?

LYSANDER

Why should I stay, when love pressed me to go?

HERMIA

What love could press Lysander from my side

LYSANDER

Lysander's love, that would not let him bide, fair Helena, who more engilds the night than all yon fiery oes and eyes of light. Why seek'st thou me? Could not this make thee know the hate I bear thee made me leave thee so?

HERMIA

You speak not as you think. It cannot be

HELENA

So, she is one of this confederacy! Now I see all three have joined together to create this game of lies to spite me. Injurious Hermia! Ungrateful maid! Have you conspired and schemed to torment me with this foul derision? Have you forgotten about all the times we've shared, the vows of sisterhood we made, the hours we spent together while scolding time itself for parting us? Our friendship, our childhood innocence? Hermia, we sat together sewing one flower with our two needles, working on the same single piece of cloth. We would sit on the same cushion, singing the same song in perfect key, as if our hands, our sides, our voices and our minds were joined as one. So we grew together, like two cherries—which seem separate but also joined. Two loving cherries sharing one stem. We seemed to have two bodies but one heart, like doubled coats of arms that belong separately to a husband and wife but who also share a single crest. Are you going to rip apart our friendship by joining these men to humiliate me? It's not friendly, nor maidenly. Women will scold you for it though I alone do feel the injury

HERMIA

I am amazed at your passionate words. I scorn you not. It seems that you scorn me

HELENA

Have you not set Lysander, as in scorn, to follow me and praise my eyes and face? And made your other love, Demetrius to call me goddess, nymph, divine, and rare, precious angel? Why would he say that to one he hates? And why would Lysander deny his love, so rich within his soul, and offer me his affection, unless you told him and he agreed? Why do you care that I'm not as blessed as you are—so surrounded by love, so fortunate—and am instead miserable, my love unreturned? This you should pity rather than despise

HERMIA

I understand not what you mean by this

HELENA

Do that. Pretend to be serious, but then make faces at me behind my back, wink at each other, and keep the jest alive. You're doing such marvelous work with this farce, it will go down in history. If you had any pity, grace, or manners, you wouldn't pretend to fight over me. But fare ye well. 'Tis partly my own fault, which death or absence soon shall remedy

LYSANDER

Stay, gentle Helena. Hear my excuse. My love, my life, my soul, fair Helena!

HELENA

Oh excellent!

HERMIA

[To LYSANDER] Sweet do not scorn her so

DEMETRIUS

[To LYSANDER] If Hermia's pleas don't get you to relent, I can compel you to

LYSANDER

Thou canst compel no more than she entreat. Thy threats have no more strength than her weak prayers.

Helen, I love thee. By my life, I do. I swear by that which I will lose for thee to prove him false that says I love thee not.

DEMETRIUS

I say I love thee more than he can do.

LYSANDER

If thou say so, draw your sword and prove it.

DEMETRIUS

Quick, come

HERMIA

Lysander, what does all this mean?

HERMIA holds LYSANDER back

LYSANDER

[To HERMIA] Away, you!

DEMETRIUS

No, no. He pretends like he tries to break loose.

[To LYSANDER] you act like you follow me, but then won't. You coward. Run away

LYSANDER

[To HERMIA] Hang off, thou cat, thou burr! Vile thing, let loose or I will shake thee from me like a serpent

HERMIA

Why are you grown so rude? What change is this, sweet love?

LYSANDER

Thy love? Out, tawny Tartar, out! Out, loathed medicine! O hated potion, hence!

HERMIA

Do you not jest?

HELENA

Yes, of course he does, and so do you.

LYSANDER

Demetrius, I will keep my word with thee.

DEMETRIUS

I would I had your bond, for I perceive a weak bond holds you. I'll not trust your word.

LYSANDER

What, should I hurt her, strike her, kill her dead? Although I hate her I'll not harm her so

HERMIA

What, can you do me greater harm than hate? Hate me? Wherefore? O me! What news, my love? Am not I Hermia? Are not you Lysander? I am as fair now as I was erewhile you loved me last night. But last night you left. So—the God forbid—did you actually slip away?

LYSANDER

Ay, by my life, and never did desire to see thee more. Therefore be out of hope, of question, of doubt. Be certain, nothing truer. 'Tis no jest that I do hate thee and love Helena.

HERMIA

Oh me!

[*To HELENA*] You juggler! You canker-blossom! You thief of love! What, have you come by night and stol'n my love's heart from him?

HELENA

Honestly! Have you no modesty, no maiden shame, No touch of bashfulness? What, will you tear impatient answers from my gentle tongue? Fie, fie! You counterfeit, you puppet, you!

HERMIA

"Puppet"? Why so? Ay, that way goes the game. Now I perceive that she hath made compare between our statures. She hath urged her height, and with her personage, her tall personage, her height, forsooth, she hath prevailed with him. And are you grown so high in his esteem because I am so dwarfish and so low? How low am I, thou painted maypole? Speak. How low am I? I am not yet so low but that my nails can reach unto thine eyes.

HELENA

[*To LYSANDER and DEMETRIUS*] I pray you, though you mock me, gentlemen, let her not hurt me. I was never cursed. I have no gift at all in shrewishness. I am a right maid for my cowardice. let her not strike me. You perhaps may think, because she is something lower than myself, that I can match her.

HERMIA

"Lower?" See, there it is again!

HELENA

Good Hermia, do not be so bitter with me. Hermia, I always loved you, and kept your secrets. I never did anything to hurt you—other than, out of love for Demetrius, told him of your stealth unto this wood. He gave chase. For love, I followed. But he shouted to go away and threatened to strike me, spurn me—nay, to kill me too. And now, so that you'll let me go, I'll carry my foolishness back to Athens and follow you no further. Let me go. You see how naïve and foolish I

am

HERMIA

Why, get you gone! Who is 't that hinders you?

HELENA

My foolish heart, which I leave behind

HERMIA

What, with Lysander?

HELENA

With Demetrius

LYSANDER

Be not afraid. She shall not harm thee, Helena

DEMETRIUS

No, sir, she shall not, though you take her part.

HELENA

Oh, when she's angry, she is keen and shrewd! She was a vixen when we were in school. And though she be but little, she is fierce

HERMIA

"Little" again? Nothing but "low" and "little"! Why will you suffer her to flout me thus? Let me come to her.

LYSANDER

[To HERMIA] Get you gone, you dwarf, you tiny little creature of knotgrass weed, you bead, you acorn!

DEMETRIUS

You spend too much to help those who want none. Let her alone. Speak not of Helena. Take not her part. If you plan on showing so little love to Hermia, you'll pay dearly

LYSANDER

Now she holds me not. Now follow, if thou darest, to try whose right, of thine or mine, is most in Helena

DEMETRIUS

"Follow"? Nay, I'll go with thee, cheek by jowl

DEMETRIUS and LYSANDER exit

HERMIA

You, mistress, are the cause of all this fighting. Nay, go not back

HELENA

I will not trust you, I, nor longer stay in your curst company.
Your hands than mine are quicker for a fray. My legs are longer though, to run away

HELENA exits

HERMIA

I am amazed and know not what to say

HERMIA exits

OBERON

[*To ROBIN*] This is thy negligence. You relentlessly ere, or else committ'st thy knaveries willfully

ROBIN

Believe me, King of Shadows, I mistook. Did not you tell me I should know the man by the Athenian garment he had on? I can't be blamed that I anointed the Athenian's eyes. And so far am I glad it so did sort, as this their jangling I esteem a sport

OBERON

Thou seest these lovers seek a place to fight. Therefore, rush, Robin, and overcast the night. Cover the starry sky with a low fog as dark as hell, and lead these testy rivals so astray as one come not within another's way. Use Lysander's voice to get Demetrius riled up with insults. Then rage a bit in Demetrius' voice. And in that way you'll lead them away until tiredness creeps over them with its heavy legs and bat-like wings so that they fall dead asleep. [*He gives a different flower to ROBIN*] Then crush this herb into Lysander's eye, whose liquor hath this virtuous property to take from thence all error with his might and make his eyeballs roll with wonted sight. When they next wake, all this derision shall seem a dream and fruitless vision. And back to Athens shall the lovers wend, with league whose date till death shall never end. Whiles I in this affair do thee employ, I'll to my queen and beg her Indian boy. And then I'll reverse the spell on her eyes and all will be at peace.

ROBIN

My fairy lord, this must be done with haste. For the dragons that pull the night's chariot are speeding through the sky. And yonder shines Aurora's harbinger, at whose approach, ghosts, wandering here and there, troop home to churchyards. Damnèd spirits all, that in crossways and floods have burial, Already to their wormy beds are gone. For fear lest day should look their shames upon, they willfully themselves exile from light And must for aye consort with black-browed night.

OBERON

But we are spirits of another sort. I with the morning's love have oft made sport, and like a forester the groves may tread even till the eastern gate, all fiery red, opening on Neptune with fair blessed beams, turns into yellow gold his salt green streams. But notwithstanding, haste. Make no delay. We may effect this business yet ere day.

OBERON exits

ROBIN

Up and down, up and down,
I will lead them up and down. I am feared in field and town.
Goblin, lead them up and down. Here comes one

LYSANDER enters

LYSANDER

Where art thou, proud Demetrius? Speak thou now

ROBIN

[In DEMETRIUS' voice] I'm over here, you villain. Drawn and ready. Where art thou?

LYSANDER

I'll find you

ROBIN

[In DEMETRIUS' voice] Follow me then to plainer ground.

DEMETRIUS

Lysander, speak again! Thou runaway, thou coward, art thou fled?
Speak! In some bush? Where dost thou hide thy head?

LYSANDER exits. DEMETRIUS enters

ROBIN

[In LYSANDER's voice] Thou coward, art thou bragging to the stars, telling the bushes that thou look'st for wars, and wilt not come? Come, recreant. Come, thou child! I'll whip thee with a rod. He is defiled that draws a sword on thee.

DEMETRIUS

Art thou there?

ROBIN

[In LYSANDER's voice] Follow my voice. We'll try no manhood here.

DEMETRIUS and ROBIN exit LYSANDER enters

LYSANDER

He goes before me and still dares me on. When I come where he calls, then he is gone. The villain is much lighter-heeled than I. I followed fast, but faster he did fly, that fallen am I in dark uneven way, and here will rest me *[He lies down]* Come, thou gentle day! For if but once thou show me thy grey light, I'll find Demetrius and revenge this spite. *[He falls asleep]*

ROBIN and DEMETRIUS enter

ROBIN

[In LYSANDER's voice] Ha, ha, ha! Coward, why comest thou not?

DEMETRIUS

Wait for me, if you darest! Thou runn'st before me, shifting every place, and darest not stand nor look me in the face. Where art thou now?

ROBIN

[In LYSANDER's voice] Come hither. I am here

DEMETRIUS

Nay, then, thou mock'st me you'll pay dearly for this if ever I thy face by daylight see. Now go thy way. Faintness constraineth me to measure out my length on this cold bed. By day's approach look to be visited. *[He lies down and falls asleep]*

HELENA enters

HELENA

O weary night, O long and tedious night! You reassuring dawn, shine comforts from the east, so I can go back to Athens in the daylight and leave behind this poor company. Now sleep, which can make us forget our sorrows, steal me awhile from mine own company. *[She lies down and falls asleep]*

ROBIN

Yet but three? Come one more. Two of both kinds make up four. Here she comes, cursed and sad. Cupid is a knavish lad thus to make poor females mad.

HERMIA enters

HERMIA

Never so weary, never so in woe, bedabbled with the dew and torn with briers, I can no further crawl, no further go. My legs can keep no pace with my desires. Here will I rest me till the break of day. Heavens shield Lysander if they mean a fray! *[She lies down and falls asleep]*

ROBIN

On the ground sleep sound.

I'll apply to your eye.

Gentle lover, remedy.

[Squeezes flower juice into LYSANDER's eyes]

When thou wakest, thou takest

True delight in the sight of thy former lady's eye.

And the country proverb known— That every man should take his own—

In your waking shall be shown.

Jack shall have Jill. Nought shall go ill.

The man shall have his mare again, and all shall be well

ROBIN exits

Act 4, Scene 1

LYSANDER, DEMETRIUS, HELENA, and HERMIA continue to sleep onstage. TITANIA enters with BOTTOM (who still has a donkey's head) and the fairies PEASEBLOSSOM, COBWEB, MOTH, and MUSTARDSEED. OBERON enters behind them, unseen by the others

TITANIA

[To BOTTOM] Come, sit thee down upon this flowery bed while I thy amiable cheeks do coy, and stick musk roses in thy sleek, smooth head, and kiss thy fair large ears, my gentle joy.

BOTTOM

Where's Peaseblossom?

PEASEBLOSSOM

At your service

BOTTOM

Scratch my head, Peaseblossom. Where's Sir Cobweb?

COBWEB

At your service

BOTTOM

Monsieur Cobweb, my good sir, get you your weapons in your hand and kill me a red-hipped humble-bee on the top of a thistle. And, good sir, bring me its honey. Now don't overwork yourself too much in doing it. Oh, be careful not to break the honey-sac. I'd be sad if you drowned in honey.

COBWEB exits.

Where's Sir Mustardseed?

MUSTARDSEED

Ready.

BOTTOM

Give me your first, Sir Mustardseed. Please, no need to take off your hat and bow, good sir.

MUSTARDSEED

What's your will?

BOTTOM

Nothing, good sir, except for you to help Sir Cobweb scratch my head. I should go to the barber's, for methinks I'm getting amazingly hairy on my face. And I am such a sensitive ass that if my hair even tickles me even slightly, I must scratch.

TITANIA

Wilt thou hear some music, my sweet love?

BOTTOM

I have a fairly good ear for music. Let's have someone play the triangle and smack some sticks together

TITANIA

Or tell me, sweet love, what thou desirest to eat

BOTTOM

I wouldn't mind munching on some good dry oats. Methinks I have a great desire to a bottle of hay. Good hay, sweet hay hath no equal.

TITANIA

I have an adventurous fairy that shall seek the squirrel's hoard and fetch thee new nuts

BOTTOM

I'd rather have a handful or two of dried peas. But, please, don't let any of your attendants stir me. A yearning for sleep has come over me

TITANIA

Sleep thou, and I will wind thee in my arms. Fairies, be gone, and be all ways away.

THE FAIRIES exit

I'll wrap my arms around you just as the tendrils of the woodbine plant twist around the sweet honeysuckle, and just as the female ivy curls around the branches of the elm tree. Oh, how I love thee! How I dote on thee!

BOTTOM and TITANIA fall asleep

OBERON

Welcome, good Robin. Seest thou this sweet sight? Her dotage now I do begin to pity. I met her a while ago near the edge of the forest as she was plucking for pretty flowers for this intolerable idiot, and I scolded and fought with her. She had put a little crown of fresh, sweet-smelling flowers around his hairy temples. And the dew, which used to decorate the flowers like the most beautiful pearls, now lay in the center of the flowers like tears of shame for being forced to sit on that ass' head. When I had at my pleasure taunted her and she in mild terms begged my patience I asked her for the Indian boy. Right away she agreed to give him to me, and sent a fairy to bring him to my chamber. Now that I have the boy, I'll undo the awful flaw affecting Titania's eyes. And, gentle Puck, remove the ass' head from the head of this yokel, so that when he wakes along with the others, they can return to Athens and remember the craziness of this night as nothing more than the fierce vexations of a dream. But first I will release the fairy queen. *[Squeezing juice from the second flower into TITANIA's eyes]* Be as thou wast wont to be. See as thou wast wont to see. Dian's bud o'er Cupid's flower Hath such force and blessed power. Now, my Titania, wake you, my sweet queen

ROBIN enters

TITANIA

[Waking up] My Oberon, what visions have I seen! Methought I was enamored of an ass...

OBERON

There lies your love

TITANIA

How came these things to pass? Oh, how mine eyes do loathe his visage now!

OBERON

Be still for a while. Robin, remove his ass' head. Titania, call to your fairies for some music, so that these five mortals will sleep more deeply

TITANIA

Music, ho! Music such as charmeth sleep!

Music plays

ROBIN

[Taking the ass' head off of BOTTOM]

Now when thou wakest, with thine own fool's eyes peep.

OBERON

Sound, music! Come, my queen, take hands with me,
And rock the ground whereon these sleepers be.

[Dances with TITANIA]

Now thou and I are new in amity, and will tomorrow midnight solemnly dance in Duke Theseus' house triumphantly, and bless it to all fair prosperity. There shall the pairs of faithful lovers be wedded, with Theseus, all in jollity.

ROBIN

Fairy King, attend, and mark. I do hear the morning lark

OBERON

Then, my queen, let's quietly follow after the night, crossing the globe swifter than the wandering moon

TITANIA

Come, my lord, and in our flight tell me how it came this night that I sleeping here was found with these mortals on the ground.

OBERON, TITANIA, and ROBIN exit.

A hunting horn blows. THESEUS enters with, EGEUS, HIPPOLYTA, and his servants

THESEUS

Go, one of you, and find the forester. Since we are still in the morning, my love shall hear the

music of my hounds. Unleash the dogs in the western valley. Let them go. Now go, I say, and find the forester

One of the servants exits

My beautiful queen, we'll go to mountaintop and listen to the musical chorus of our hounds

HIPPOLYTA

I was with Hercules and Cadmus once, when their Spartan hunting dogs surrounded a bear. I'd never before heard barking that courageous. Not just the forests, but also the skies, the waterfalls, everything nearby seemed to be part of the same mutual cry. I never heard so musical a discord, such sweet thunder

THESEUS

My dogs are bred from the Spartan line. They have the same fleshy folds around their jaws, the same sandy color, and on their heads they have the same ears that hang low enough to brush the morning dew from the grass. Though they're not fast when chasing prey, their barks sound like a set of bells—different notes, but all perfectly in tune. No one has ever blown a hunting horn in answer to a more melodic pack of dogs—not in Crete, or Sparta, or Thessaly. Judge for yourself when you hear them. But wait! What nymphs are these?

EGEUS

My lord, this is my daughter here asleep. And this, Lysander. This Demetrius is. This Helena, old Nedar's Helena. I wonder of their being here together.

THESEUS

No doubt they rose up early to observe the rite of May, and hearing our intent, came to attend and honor our ceremony. But speak, Egeus. Is not this the day that Hermia should give answer of her choice?

EGEUS

It is, my lord

THESEUS

Tell the hunters to wake them by sounding the horns.

One of the servants exits

Someone shouts offstage. Horns are blown. LYSANDER, DEMETRIUS, HELENA, and HERMIA wake up

THESEUS

Good morning, friends. Saint Valentines is past. Have you lovebirds only begun to couple now?

LYSANDER

Forgive us, my lord.

LYSANDER, DEMETRIUS, HELENA, and HERMIA all kneel

THESEUS

Please, all of you, stand up

LYSANDER, DEMETRIUS, HELENA, and HERMIA all stand up

[*To LYSANDER and DEMETRIUS*] I know you two are rival enemies how comes this gentle concord in the world, that hatred is so far from jealousy to sleep by hate and fear no enmity?

LYSANDER

My lord, I shall reply amazedly, Half sleep, half waking. But as yet, I swear, I cannot truly say how I came here. But as I think—for truly would I speak, and now do I bethink me, so it is—I came with Hermia hither. Our intent was to be gone from Athens, where we might, without the peril of the Athenian law—

EGEUS

[*To THESEUS*] Enough, enough, my lord. You've heard enough: I ask that the law, the law, be brought down upon him. Demetrius, these two were going to fly away, stealing your wife and stealing my consent that she should be your wife

DEMETRIUS

[*To THESEUS*] My lord, fair Helen told me of their stealth, of this their purpose hither to this wood. And I in fury hither followed them, fair Helena in fancy following me. But, my good lord, I wot not by what power— But by some power it is—my love to Hermia, melted as the snow. That love seems to me now like a memory of some worthless trinket I used to love when I was a child. Now the object and the pleasure of mine eye, is only Helena. I was engaged to her before I ever met Hermia. But like in sickness did I loathe this food. But as in health, come to my natural taste, now I do wish it, love it, long for it, and will for evermore be true to it.

THESEUS

Fair lovers, you are fortunately met.
Of this discourse we more will hear anon. Egeus, I will overbear your will.
For in the temple by and by with us these couples shall eternally be knit.
And, for the morning now is something worn, our purposed hunting shall be set aside.
Away with us to Athens. Three and three, we'll hold a feast in great solemnity.
Come, Hippolyta.

THESEUS, HIPPOLYTA, EGEUS, and their servants and followers exit.

DEMETRIUS

These things seem small and undistinguishable, like far-off mountains turned into clouds.

HERMIA

It seems to me that my eyes are out of focus, and everything looks double

HELENA

Me too. And I have found Demetrius like a jewel, mine own, and not mine own

DEMETRIUS

Are you sure that we're awake? It seems to me like we are sleeping, and dreaming. Do not you think the duke was really here, and bid us to follow him?

HERMIA

Yes, and my father

HELENA

And Hippolyta.

LYSANDER

And he did bid us follow to the temple

DEMETRIUS

Why then, we are awake. Let's follow him and by the way let us recount our dreams

LYSANDER, DEMETRIUS, HELENA, and HERMIA exit

BOTTOM

[Waking up] When my cue comes, call me, and I will answer. My next cue is "Most handsome Pyramus." Hey there! Peter Quince? Flute the bellows-repairman? Snout the repairman? Starveling? My God, they went away from here, and left me asleep? I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream—past the wit of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass if he go about to expound this dream. Methought I was—there is no man can tell what. Methought I was, and methought I had—but man is but a patched fool if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was. I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream. It shall be called "Bottom's Dream" because it hath no bottom. And I will sing it in the latter end of a play before the duke. Peradventure, to make it more gracious, I shall sing it at her death

BOTTOM exits

Act 4, Scene 2

QUINCE, FLUTE, SNOUT, and STARVELING enter

QUINCE

Have you checked Bottom's house? Has he come home yet?

STARVELING

No one's heard from him. There's no question he's been kidnapped by fairies.

FLUTE

If he doesn't come, then the play will be ruined. We won't be able to perform it. Will we?

QUINCE

It wouldn't be possible. There's not another man in all of Athens who can play Pyramus but he.

FLUTE

It's true. He hath simply the best wit of any handicraft man in Athens.

QUINCE

Yes, and the best looking too. And his voice is the very paramour of sweetness

FLUTE

You mean "paragon." A "paramour is, God bless us, something naughty

SNUG

Gentlemen, the duke is leaving the temple, along with two or three additional lords and ladies who were also married. If we could only have performed our play, we would all have gotten rewards and been set for life

SNUG enters

FLUTE

Oh that sweet, guy, Bottom! he's missed out on six pence a day for the rest of his life. He wouldn't have been able to escape a fortune, even if he'd wanted to. If the duke wouldn't have given him six pence a day for playing Pyramus, I'd go jump off a bridge. And he would have deserved it. Pyramus is worth six pence a day, or nothing at all.

BOTTOM enters

BOTTOM

Where are my lads? Where are my good fellows?

QUINCE

Bottom! Oh, what a great day! O most happy hour!

BOTTOM

Gentlemen, I have incredible stories to tell you—but don't ask me what, for if I tell you I am no true Athenian. I'll tell you everything, exactly how it happened.

QUINCE

Tell us, good Bottom

BOTTOM

You won't get a word out of me! All that I'll tell you is that the duke has had his dinner. Gather your costumes, some new strings for your false beards, and some new ribbons to decorate your shoes. Then meet me at the palace as soon as you can. We should each look over our lines again. In sum, our play is going to be performed! So make sure that Thisbe has clean underpants. And make sure whoever is playing the lion doesn't cut down his nails, because they are going to need to stand in for the lion's claws. And, my most dear fellow actors, eat no onions or garlic. We must have sweet-smelling breath so the audience will say, "it's a sweet play." Enough talk. Come on, let's go!

They all exit

Act 5, Scene 1

THESEUS, HIPPOLYTA, and PHILOSTRATE enter, along with other lords and servants

HIPPOLYTA

My dear Theseus, what these lovers are describing is so strange

THESEUS

More strange than true. I don't believe any of these stories or fairy tales. Lovers and madmen have, such active imaginations, that they see and hear things that cool, calm people can't understand. Madmen, lovers, and poets all are all ruled by their imaginations: One sees more devils than vast hell can hold—

That is the madman. Lovers, just as wild, see a gypsy's face and think it is as beautiful as Helen of Troy's. The poet's eye, doth glance from heaven to Earth, from Earth to heaven. And they take the unreal things that tumble out of their imagination and write about them as if they were actual places. When people who have such strong imaginations feel some kind of joy, they imagine that it must be some entity or power that brings or creates that joy. Or if, in the night, they feel some fear, they see a bush and imagine it a bear!

HIPPOLYTA

But the story that the lovers are telling—all described the same way—suggests that it's something that they really experienced rather than some imagined fantasy. It has a consistency to it that suggests truth, even if it is strange and unbelievable

THESEUS

Here come the lovers, full of joy and mirth. Joy to you, kind friends! May joy and sweet days of love be with you always.

The lovers —LYSANDER, DEMETRIUS, HELENA, and HERMIA—enter

LYSANDER

May even more joy than you wish for us await you—on your royal journeys, at your table, and in your bed!

THESEUS

Come now, what masquerades, what dances shall we have to wear away this long age of three hours between our dinner and bedtime? Where is our Master of the Revels? What entertainments do we have ready? Is there no play for us to watch to ease the torture of free time? Call Philostrate

PHILOSTRATE

Here, mighty Theseus

THESEUS

Tell us, what entertainment do you have that will shorten the evening? What plays, what music? How will we enjoy this lazy time without some delight?

PHILOSTRATE

[Giving *THESEUS* a piece of paper] That is a list of all of the performances that are ready. Choose which one your highness would like to see first

THESEUS

[Reading] “*The battle between Hercules and the Centaurs at the wedding feast of Pirothous, sung by an Athenian eunuch accompanied by a harp.*” We’ll have none of that. I’ve already told that story to Hippolyta, of the glory of my cousin Hercules. What else? “*The riot of the drunk Bacchanals who in the grip of their drunken frenzy rip the singer Orpheus to shreds.*” That’s a story often told in plays, and I saw it when I returned from conquering Thebes. “*The nine Muses mourning the death of learning and the arts, which lately have become so stale.*” That’s a satire—a sharp and critical satire—and wouldn’t be right to perform at a nuptial ceremony. “*A boring short drama about young Pyramus and his love Thisbe. Very sad and funny.*” Funny and sad? Short but still boring? That’s like hot ice, a wonderously strange snow. How shall we find the concord of this discord?

PHILOSTRATE

My lord, it is a play that's about ten words long, which is the shortest play I've ever encountered. But, my lord, it's ten words too long, which is what makes it tedious. In the entire play, there is not one well-placed word, not one actor a good fit for his part. It is tragic, my noble lord, for Pyramus therein doth kill himself. Which, when I saw rehearsed, I must admit brought tears to my eyes—but I've never cried tears of such loud and merry laughter.

THESEUS

Who performs it?

PHILOSTRATE

Manual workers from here in Athens who have never until now spent much doing anything that required thinking. Now they’ve overburdened their tired minds to create this play for your ceremony

THESEUS

And we will watch it!

PHILOSTRATE

No, my noble lord. It is not for you. I’ve seen it, and it’s worthless, as worthless as anything ever created—unless you find their sad attempt funny, with their bad acting and misplaced lines

THESEUS

I will hear that play. For never anything can be amiss when simpleness and duty tend to it. Go, bring them in. And take your places, ladies

HIPPOLYTA

I don’t enjoy seeing fools overwhelmed when they only try to serve

PHILOSTRATE exits.

THESEUS

Why, my noble love, you shall see no such thing

HIPPOLYTA

Philostrate says they're not good actors

THESEUS

Then we're even more kind, to give them thanks for something they're not good at. Our entertainment will be to watch their mistakes, and what their own poor talent can't accomplish. Our noble generosity will see the effort they are giving rather than their quality. When I have visited foreign cities, great scholars have tried to greet me with speeches they've rehearsed. And I have seen them shiver and turn pale from nervousness, and pause in the middle of their sentences, and mess the tones of voice they've practiced, and then finish by breaking off without even welcoming me. Trust me, my love, even in their silence I could sense the welcome they meant to give. I can understand the same meaning from those who are modest and frightened but also want to do their duty as I can from those who can rattle off a speech with wit, talent, and eloquence. As I see it, my love, tongue-tied simplicity says the most, precisely by saying the least

PHILOSTRATE enters

PHILOSTRATE

If it please your Grace, the actor who will deliver the prologue is ready

THESEUS

Let him come forward

QUINCE enters, performing as the PROLOGUE

PROLOGUE

If we offend, it is with our good will. That you should think we come not to offend, But with good will. To show our simple skill, That is the true beginning of our end. Consider then we come but in despite. We do not come as minding to contest you, Our true intent is. All for your delight We are not here. That you should here repent you, The actors are at hand, and by their show. You shall know all that you are like to know.

THESEUS

That man doesn't pay attention to punctuation

LYSANDER

He rode his prologue like a wild colt. He didn't know how to make it stop. The moral here, my lord, is that it's not enough to speak. You have to speak correctly.

HIPPOLYTA

Yes, he's performed the prologue like a child plays a recorder—he can make sounds, but not

with any purposeful control

THESEUS

His speech was like a tangled chain. Unbroken, but all jumbled up. Who's next?

*BOTTOM enters as PYRAMUS; FLUTE as THISBE; SNOUT as WALL; STARVELING as MOONSHINE;
and SNUG as LION*

PROLOGUE

Ladies and gentlemen, perhaps you're wondering about the subject of this play. Keep wondering, until the truth makes clear. This man is Pyramus, if you'd like to know. It's certain that this beautiful lady is Thisbe. This man, dusted in lime and plaster, is playing the Wall, that awful wall that separated these lovers. Through a little hole in the Wall, the poor souls are content to whisper. And no one should be amazed by that. This man, who has the lantern, dog, and thorn bush, is playing the role of Moonshine. Because, if you'd like to know, the lovers didn't think it was shameful to meet each other in the moonlight by Ninus's tomb—there, they would woo each other. This dreadful beast, which is called "Lion," scared away, or rather frightened, the faithful Thisbe when she arrived first at the meeting place one night. And, as she ran away, she dropped her cloak, which the awful Lion stained with his bloody mouth. Soon Pyramus arrives, a sweet and tall young man, and finds his faithful Thisbe's cloak covered in blood. Because of that, he raised his sword—his bloodthirsty blade—and bravely stabbed his raging, ferocious chest. Then Thisbe, waiting in the shade of the mulberry bushes, took out his dagger and killed herself. To hear the rest of the story, let Lion, Moonshine, Wall, and the two separated lovers explain it more fully while they stand on the stage.

THESEUS

I wonder if the lion will speak

DEMETRIUS

It wouldn't be shocking, my lord. When a bunch of asses are up on stage talking, a lion might talk too.

WALL

In this same interlude it doth befall That I, one Snout by name, present a wall. And such a wall, as I would have you think, That had in it a crannied hole, or chink,
Through which the lovers, Pyramus and Thisbe, did whisper often very secretly.
This clay, this plaster, and this stone doth show that I am that same wall. The truth is so.
And this the cranny is, right and sinister, through which the fearful lovers are to whisper

PROLOGUE, THISBE, LION, and MOONSHINE exit

THESEUS

Would you ever hope to hear plaster speak more eloquently?

DEMETRIUS

It is the wittiest partition that ever I heard discourse, my lord

THESEUS

Pyramus draws near the wall. Silence!

PYRAMUS enters

PYRAMUS

O grim-looking night! O night with hue so black! O night, which ever art when day is not!
 O night, O night! Alack, alack, alack, I fear my Thisbe's promise is forgot!
 And thou, O Wall, O sweet, O lovely Wall, That stand'st between her father's ground and mine.
 Thou Wall, O Wall, O sweet and lovely Wall,
 Show me thy chink to blink through with mine eyne!
[WALL holds up two fingers, spread a bit apart]
 Thanks, courteous Wall. Zeus shield thee well for this! But what see I? No Thisbe do I see.
 O wicked Wall through whom I see no bliss! Cursed be thy stones for thus deceiving me

THESEUS

The wall, methinks, having thought and feelings, should curse back

BOTTOM

[As himself] No, in fact, sir, he shouldn't. "deceiving me" is Thisbe's cue to speak. She is to enter now and I am to spy her through the wall. You shall see! it'll happen just as I am telling you.
 There she comes

THISBE enters

THISBE

Oh Wall, you've so often heard my moans because you part me from my handsome Pyramus! My cherry lips have often kissed your stones which are held together by plaster

PYRAMUS

I see a voice! Now I'll go to the chink to find out if I can hear my Thisbe. Thisbe?

THISBE

My love thou art, my love, I think.

PYRAMUS

Whatever you think, I am your gracious lover. And, like Limander, I'm still faithful to you

THISBE

And I'll be as faithful as Helen of Troy, until the day I'm destined to die

PYRAMUS

Not Shafalus to Procrus was so true

THISBE

As Shafalus to Procrus, I to you

PYRAMUS

Oh, kiss me through the hole in this vile wall

THISBE

I'm kissing the wall's hole, not your lips at all

PYRAMUS

Will you meet me at Ninny's grave straightaway?

THISBE

No matter what transpires in life or death, I come without delay

PYRAMUS and THISBE exit

WALL

Thus have I, Wall, my part played so. And, being done, thus Wall away doth go

WALL exits

THESEUS

With the wall gone, now the two lovers will see each other by the light of the moon.

DEMETRIUS

There's nothing you can do about it, my lord, when walls have ears.

HIPPOLYTA

This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard

THESEUS

The best plays are a kind of illusion, and the worst are no worse if you use your imagination to fix up

HIPPOLYTA

Then it's your imagination that's good, not theirs

THESEUS

If we imagine these actors as being no worse than they imagine themselves to be, then they'd seem like excellent men. Here come two noble beasts, a man and a lion.

LION

You gentle-hearted ladies—who fear even the smallest monstrous mouse that sneaks along the floor—may shake and tremble when the wild lion roars in its most violent rage. Therefore, know that I, Snug the carpenter, am neither a cruel lion nor a lioness, because if I were a lion that had come to this place in order to fight, then it would cost me my life

LION and MOONSHINE enter

THESEUS

A very gentle beast, of a good conscience

DEMETRIUS

A very best at a beast, my lord, that e'er I saw.

LYSANDER

This lion seems like a fox, by being more sly than courageous.

THESEUS

True. And he's just about as wise as a goose—that is, not wise at all!

DEMETRIUS

Not true, my lord. He's not courageous enough to be discreet, just as the fox pulls along the goose by carrying it in its mouth.

THESEUS

He's not discreet enough to be brave, actually, just as the goose can't carry the fox. It doesn't matter. Let's leave this to his discretion, and let us listen to the moon

MOONSHINE

This lantern symbolizes the horned moon

DEMETRIUS

He should have worn the horns on his head

THESEUS

He is no crescent, and his horns are invisible within the circumference.

MOONSHINE

This lantern represents the crescent moon. I am pretending to be the man in the moon

THESEUS

This is the greatest error of all. The man should be put inside the lantern. How else can he be the "man in the moon?"

DEMETRIUS

He doesn't dare to go in there on account of the candle. Because, you see, the candle must first be put out

HIPPOLYTA

I'm tired of this moon. If only he would wane away

THESEUS

It seems by the meager amount of light he's giving off that he is waning. But, to be polite, we'll have to wait to find out

LYSANDER

Proceed, Moon.

MOONSHINE

All that I have to say is to tell you that the lantern is the moon. I, the man in the moon; this thornbush, my thornbush; and this dog, my dog

DEMETRIUS

Well, all of these should be in the lantern, because all of them are in the moon. But be quiet! Here comes Thisbe

THISBE enters

THISBE

This is old Ninny's tomb. Where is my love?

LION

[Roaring] Grrrrrrrr!

THISBE runs off, leaving her cloak behind

DEMETRIUS

Well roared, Lion!

THESEUS

Well run, Thisbe!

HIPPOLYTA

Well shone, Moon! Truly, the moon shines with good grace

LION bites and shakes THISBE's cloak, staining it with blood.

THESEUS

Well moused, Lion!

PYRAMUS enters.

DEMETRIUS

And then came Pyramus.

LION exits

LYSANDER

And so the lion vanished

PYRAMUS

Sweet Moon, I thank thee for thy sunny beams. I thank thee, Moon, for shining now so bright. For by thy gracious, golden, glittering gleams, I trust to take of truest Thisbe sight. But stay, O spite! But mark, poor knight, What dreadful dole is here! Eyes, do you see?

How can it be? O dainty duck! O dear! Thy mantle good,
What, stained with blood? Approach, ye Furies fell! O Fates, come, come,
Cut thread and thrum. Quail, crush, conclude, and quell!

THESEUS

Watching this performance would be almost enough to make a man sad—so long as a good

friend of yours died while you were watching it

HIPPOLYTA

Curse my heart, but I feel sorry for this man

PYRAMUS

Oh why, Mother Nature, did you create lions? A dreadful lion has deflowered my darling, who is—no, no—who was the most beautiful woman that ever lived, loved, liked, or smiled. Come, tears, overwhelm me! Come out, sword, and wound me in the chest—yes, on the left side where the heart beats. *[He stabs himself]* Thus die I, thus, thus, thus. Now am I dead. Now am I fled. My soul is in the sky. Tongue, lose thy light. Moon, take thy flight

MOONSHINE exits

DEMETRIUS

This guy is just a single face of a die—the one, because he's a true original
Now die, die, die, die, die. *[He dies]*

LYSANDER

He's a die with even fewer than one dot. He's dead, so he's nothing.

THESEUS

With the help of a doctor he might recover and become an ass

HIPPOLYTA

What's happens now since Moonshine has left before Thisbe comes back. How will she be able to find her lover?

THESEUS

She will find him by starlight. Here she comes, and her passion ends the play

THISBE enters

HIPPOLYTA

I don't think this Pyramus deserves a whole lot of crying. I hope she will be brief

DEMETRIUS

The difference in who's better between Pyramus and Thisbe is razor thin. God save us from him, as a man. But God save us from her, as a woman.

LYSANDER

She's seen him already with those sweet eyes of hers

DEMETRIUS

And so she'll start moaning, as we expected

THISBE

Asleep, my love? What, dead, my dove? O Pyramus, arise!

Speak, speak. Quite dumb? Dead, dead? A tomb must cover thy sweet eyes. These lily lips, this cherry nose, these yellow cowslip cheeks are gone, are gone.

Lovers, make moan. His eyes were green as leeks. O Sisters three, come, come to me with hands as pale as milk lay them in gore, since you have shore with shears his thread of silk tongue, not a word.

Come trusty sword. Come blade my breast imbue and farewell friends, thus thisbe ends.

Adieu, adieu, adieu.

[she dies]

THESEUS

Moonshine and Lion are left to bury the dead

DEMETRIUS

Ay, and Wall too.

BOTTOM

[As himself] No, I assure you. The wall that separated their fathers' land has been taken down. Would you like to see the epilogue or see two of our actors perform a country dance?

THESEUS

No epilogue, please. Your play does not need to offer any apology for itself through an epilogue. Never apologize—when the actors are all dead, no one must be blamed. In fact, if the man who wrote the play had performed as Pyramus and hanged himself with Thisbe's stockings, it would have been a very good tragedy. And that's exactly what it is, honestly, and remarkably performed. Now please, perform your country dance. But don't worry about performing your epilogue

Everyone dances. BOTTOM and FLUTE exit

The hands of the clock have struck midnight. Lovers, to bed. 'Tis almost fairy time. I fear we shall outsleep the coming morn as much as we this night have overwatched. Sweet friends, to bed. In the coming weeks we will continue our celebrations, in nightly revels and new jollity

OBERON and TITANIA enter with all their servants and followers.

ROBIN

Now the hungry lion roars and the wolf howls the moon, while the tired ploughman snores, exhausted from his work. The embers of the fire glow, while the owl's screeching hoot makes the man lying in his sickbed think about the shroud that will cover him in death. Now is the time of night where the graves all open wide, and release their spirits to glide over the paths of graveyards. And we fairies—who run from the sun just like Hecate, following darkness like a dream—now frolic. Not a mouse shall disturb this hollowed house. I am sent with broom before to sweep the dust behind the door

OBERON

The dying fire gives off a glimmering light throughout the house. Now every elf and fairy, hop as lightly as a bird on a twig, and this ditty, sing after me, sing and dance it trippingly

TITANIA

First, rehearse your song by rote, to each word a warbling note. Hand in hand with fairy grace
will we sing and bless this place

OBERON

[Singing] Now, until the dawn, each fairy wander through this house.

Titania and I will go to the bless the royal marriage bed, so that the children conceived will have good luck. All three of the couples will always be faithful in love, and the blots of Nature's hand shall not in their issue stand they won't have moles, or cleft lips, or scars, nor mark prodigious, such as are despised in nativity, fairies, take this holy dew from the fields, and as you walk through the rooms of the palace, bless them with sweet peace. And the owner of the palace will always be blessed and safe. Trip away. Make no stay. Meet me all by break of day.

*OBERON and TITANIA and the FAIRIES sing and dance
They all exit except for ROBIN*

ROBIN

If we shadows have offended, think but this, and all is mended—
That you have but slumbered here while these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme, no more yielding but a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend. If you pardon, we will mend.
And, as I am an honest Puck, if we have unearned luck
Now to 'scape the serpent's tongue, we will make amends ere long.
Else the Puck a liar call. So good night unto you all.
Give me your hands if we be friends, and Robin shall restore amends