

Midsummer Night

A Play In Two Acts

By Buck Greenwald

CAST

Theseus, King of Athens
Hippolyta, Queen of Athens
Egeus, Nobleman of Athens
Demetrius, Lord of Athens
Lysander, Lord of Athens
Hermia, Lady of Athens
Helena, Lady of Athens
Peter Quince, the Carpenter
Snug, the Joiner
Bottom, the Weaver
Flute, the Bellows-Mender
Snout, the Tinker
Starveling, the Tailor
Robin, a Puck
Oberon, King of the Summer Court
Titania, Queen of the Summer Court
Raj, the Changeling
Abigail, the Green Fairy
Malvina, the Blue Fairy
First Fairy
Second Fairy

*ACT I**PROLOGUE.*

TITANIA

"May all to Athens back again repair,
 And think no more of this night's accidents
 But as the fierce vexation of a dream."
 'Tis well for him to say whose fancies join
 With consequence, whose dreams are second-rate
 To waking. I from slumber raise'd my lids
 Into a land of force'd subservience;
 False love, compell'd upon an ass's face
 By he who swore his all-abiding love,
 Then disavow'd it for a servant-boy,
 And mock'd my manufacture'd tenderness.
 What of Demetrius, who woke enthrall'd
 By she who lack'd innately his affection?
 Is't right that man should nevermore awake
 From what to conscious mind would nightmare be?
 Had we capacity to alter fate:
 Reverse the sands, let fall the eastern sun,
 Erase what came before and write anew
 With course fresh-charted to the story's close,
 Could any mother's son of you deny
 The mercy in that act? Dismiss as dreams
 Your hardships: they will haunt you all the same.
 Four lovers to the woods are bound tonight.
 With them, a would-be actor's company.
 And, woven in among their plotted threads,
 The new-forge'd story of a fairy queen
 Who, passive as she was 'neath flower's sway,
 In vengeance, birth'd a forest's disarray.

*SCENE I. Athens. The palace of Theseus.**(Enter THESEUS, HIPPOLYTA, PHILOSTRATE, and Attendants)*

THESEUS

Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
 Draws on apace; four happy days bring in
 Another moon: but, O, methinks, how slow
 This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires,

Like to a step-dame or a dowager
Long with'ring out a young man revenue.

HIPPOLYTA

Four days will quickly steep themselves in night;
Four nights will quickly dream away the time;
And then the moon, like to a silver bow
New-bent in heaven, shall behold the night
Of our solemnities.

THESEUS

Go, Philostrate,
Stir up the Athenian youth to merriments;
Awake the pert and nimble spir't of mirth;
Turn melancholy forth to funerals;
The pale companion is not for our pomp.

(Exit PHILOSTRATE)

Hippolyta, I woo'd thee with my sword,
And won thy love, doing thee injuries;
But I will wed thee in another key,
With pomp, with triumph and with reveling.

(Enter EGEUS, HERMIA, LYSANDER, and DEMETRIUS)

EGEUS

Happy be Thes'eus, our renownéd duke!

THESEUS

Thanks, good Egeus: what's the news with thee?

EGEUS

Full of vexation come I, with complaint
Against my child, my daughter Hermia.
Stand forth, Demetrius. My noble lord,
This man hath my consent to marry her.
Stand forth, Lysander: and my gracious duke,
This man's bewitch'd the bosom of my child;
Thou, thou, Lysander, thou hast giv'n her rhymes,
And interchanged love-tokens with my child:
Thou hast by moonlight at her window sung,
With feigning voice verses of feigning love,
And stolen the impression of her fantasy

With bracelets of thy hair, rings, gawds, conceits,
 Knacks, trifles, nosegays, sweetmeats, messengers
 Of strong prevailment in unhardened youth:
 With cunning hast thou filch'd my daughter's heart,
 Turn'd her obedience, which is due to me,
 To stubborn harshness: and, my gracious duke,
 Be it so she; will not here before your grace
 Consent to marry with Demetrius,
 I beg the ancient privilege of Athens,
 As she is mine, I may dispose of her:
 Which shall be either to this gentleman
 Or to her death, according to our law
 Immediately provided in that case.

THESEUS

What say you, Hermia? Be advise'd, fair maid:
 To you, your father should be as a god;
 One that compose'd your beauties, yea, and one
 To whom you are but as a form in wax
 By him imprinted and within his power
 To leave the figure or disfigure it.
 Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.

HERMIA

So is Lysander.

THESEUS

In himself he is;
 But in this kind, wanting your father's voice,
 The other must be held the worthier.

HERMIA

I would my father look'd but with my eyes.

THESEUS

Rather your eyes must with his judgment look.

HERMIA

I do entreat your grace to pardon me.
 I know not by what power I'm made bold,
 Nor how it may concern my modesty,
 In such a presence here to plead my thoughts;
 But I beseech your grace that I may know
 The worst that may befall me in this case,

If I refuse to wed Demetrius.

THESEUS

Either to die the death or to abjure
 Forever the society of men.
 Therefore, fair Herm'ia, question your desires;
 Know of your youth, examine well your blood,
 Whether, if yield you not to father's choice,
 You can endure the liv'ry of a nun,
 For aye to be in shady cloister mew'd,
 To live a barren sister all your life,
 Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon.
 Thrice-blesséd they that master so their blood,
 To undergo such maiden pilgrimage;
 But earthlie'r happy is the rose distill'd,
 Than that which with'ring on the virgin thorn
 Grows, lives and dies in single blessédness.

HERMIA

So will I grow, so live, so die, my lord,
 Before I will my virgin patent up
 Unto his lordship, whose unwishéd yoke
 My soul consents not to give sovereignty.

THESEUS

Take time to pause; and, by the next new moon—
 The sealing-day betwixt my love and me,
 For everlasting bond of fellowship—
 Upon that day either prepare to die
 For disobedience to your father's will,
 Or else to wed Demetrius, as he would;
 Or on Diana's altar to protest
 For aye austerity and single life.

DEMETRIUS

Relent, sweet Hermia: and, Lysander, yield
 Thy crazéd title to my certain right.

LYSANDER

You have her father's love, Demetrius;
 Let me have Hermia's: do you marry him.

EGEUS

Scornful Lysander! True, he hath my love,

And what is mine my love shall render him.
 And she is mine, and all my right of her
 I do estate unto Demetrius.

LYSANDER

I am, my lord, as well derive'd as he,
 As well possess'd; my love is more than his;
 My fortunes every way as fairly rank'd,
 If not with vantage, as Demetrius';
 And, which is more than all these boasts can be,
 I am belove'd of beaut'eous Hermia:
 Why should not I then prosecute my right?
 Demetrius, I'll vouch 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 so much,
 And with Demetrius thought to have spoke thereof;
 But, being over-full of self-affairs,
 My mind did lose it. But, Demetrius, come;
 And come, Egeus; you shall go with me,
 I have some private schooling for you both.
 For you, fair Hermia, look you arm yourself
 To fit your fancies to your father's will;
 Or else the law of Athens yields you up—
 Which by no means we may extenuate—
 To death, or to a vow of single life.
 Come, my Hippolyta: what cheer, my love?
 Demetrius and Egeus, go along:
 I must employ you in some business
 Against our nuptial and confer with you
 Of something nearly that concerns yourselves.

EGEUS

With duty and desire we follow you.

(Exeunt all but LYSANDER and HERMIA)

LYSANDER

How now, my love! Why is your cheek so pale?
 How chance the roses there do fade so fast?

HERMIA

Belike for want of rain, which I could well
Beteem them from the tempest of 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;
But, either it was différent in blood,—

HERMIA

O cross! Too high to be enthrall'd to low.

LYSANDER

Or else misgrafféd in respect of years,—

HERMIA

O spite! Too old to be engage'd to young.

LYSANDER

Or else it stood upon the choice of friends,—

HERMIA

O hell! To choose love by another's eyes.

LYSANDER

Or, if there were a sympathy in choice,
War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it,
Making it momentary as a sound,
Swift as a shadow, short as any dream;
Brief as the lightning in the collied night,
That, in a spleen, unfolds both heav'n and earth,
And ere a man hath strength to say 'Behold!'
The jaws of darkness do devour it up:
So quick bright things come to confusion.

HERMIA

If then true lovers have been ever cross'd,
It stands as an edict in destiny:
Then let us teach our trial patience,
Because it is a customary cross,
As due to love as thoughts and dreams and sighs,
Wishes and tears, poor fancy's followers.

LYSANDER

A good persuasion: Therefore, hear me, Hermia.
 I have a widow aunt, a dowager
 Of great revenue, and she hath no child:
 From Athens is her house remote sev'n leagues;
 And she respects me as her only son.
 There, gentle Hermia, may I marry thee;
 And to that place the sharp Athen'ian law
 Cannot pursue us. If thou love'st me then,
 Steal forth thy father's house tomorrow night;
 And in the wood, a league without the town,
 Where I did meet thee once with Helena,
 To do observance to a morn of May,
 There will I stay for thee.

HERMIA

My good Lysander!

I swear to thee, by Cupid's strongest bow,
 By his best arrow with the golden head,
 By the simplicity of Venus' doves,
 By that which knitteth souls and prospers loves,
 And by that fire which burn'd the Carthage queen,
 When the false Trojan under sail was seen,
 By all the vows that ever men have broke,
 In number more than ever women spoke,
 In that same place thou hast appointed me,
 Tomorrow truly will I meet with thee.

LYSANDER

Keep promise, love. Look, here comes Helena.

(Enter HELENA)

HERMIA

Godspeed, fair Helena! Whither away?

HELENA

Call you me fair? That fair again unsay.
 Demetrius loves your fair: O happy fair!
 Your eyes are lodestars; and your tongue's sweet air
 More tunable than lark to shepherd's ear,
 When wheat is green, when hawthorn buds appear.
 Sickness is catching: O, were favor so,

Yours would I catch, fair Herm'ia, ere I go;
 My ear should catch your voice, my eye your eye,
 My tongue should catch your tongue's sweet melody.
 Were the world mine, Demetrius being bated,
 The rest I'd give to be to you translated.
 O, teach me how you look, and with what art
 You sway the motion of Demetrius' heart.

HERMIA
 I frown upon him, yet he loves me still.

HELENA
 O, that your frowns would teach my smiles such skill!

HERMIA
 I give him curses, yet he gives me love.

HELENA
 O, that my prayers could such affection move!

HERMIA
 The more I hate, the more he follows me.

HELENA
 The more I love, the more he hateth me.

HERMIA
 His folly, Helena, 's no fault of mine.

HELENA
 None but your beauty: would that fault were mine!

HERMIA
 Take comfort: he no more shall see my face;
 Lysander and myself will fly this place.
 Before the time I did Lysander see,
 Seem'd Athens as a paradise to me:
 O, then, what graces in my love do dwell,
 That he hath turn'd a heav'n unto a hell!

LYSANDER
 Helen, to you our minds we will unfold:
 Tomorrow night, when Phoebe doth behold
 Her silver visage in the wat'ry glass,

Decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass,
 A time that lovers' flights doth still conceal,
 Through Athens' gates have we devise'd to steal.

HERMIA

And in the wood, where often you and I
 Upon faint primrose-beds were wont to lie,
 Emptying our bosoms of their counsel sweet,
 There my Lysander and myself shall meet;
 And thence from Athens turn away our eyes,
 To seek new friends and stranger companies.
 Farewell, sweet playfellow: pray thou for us;
 And good luck grant thee thy Demetrius!
 Keep word, Lysander: we must starve our sight
 From lovers' food till morrow deep midnight.

LYSANDER

I will, my Herm'ia.

(Exit HERMIA)

Helena, adieu:

As you on him, Demetrius dote on you!

(Exit LYSANDER)

HELENA

How happy some o'er other some can 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 errs, doting on Hermia's eyes,
 So I, admiring of his qualities:
 Things base and vile, folding no quantity,
 Love can transpose to form and dignity:
 Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind;
 And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind:
 Nor hath Love's mind of any judgement taste;
 Wings and no eyes figure unheedy haste:
 And therefore is Love said to be a child,
 Because in choice he is so oft beguile'd.
 As waggish boys in game themselves forswear,
 So the boy Love is perjured every where:
 For ere Demetrius look'd on Herm'ia's eyne,

He hail'd down oaths that he was only mine;
 And when this hail some heat from Herm'ia felt,
 So he dissolved, and showers of oaths did melt.
 I will go tell him of fair Herm'ia's flight:
 Then to the wood will he tomorrow night
 Pursue her; 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.

(Exit HELENA)

SCENE II. Athens. Quince's house.

(Enter QUINCE, SNUG, BOTTOM, FLUTE, SNOUT, and STARVELING)

QUINCE
 Is all our company here?

BOTTOM
 You were best to call them generally, man by man, according to the script.

QUINCE
 Here is the scroll of every man's name, which is thought fit, through all Athens, to play in our interlude before the duke and the duchess, on his wedding-day at night.

BOTTOM
 First, good Peter Quince, say what the play treats on, then read the names of the actors, and so grow to a point.

QUINCE
 Marry, our play is, The most lamentable comedy, and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisby.

BOTTOM
 A very good piece of work, I assure you, and a merry. Now, good Peter Quince, call forth your actors by the scroll. Masters, spread yourselves.

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

BOTTOM
 Ready. Name what part I am for, and proceed.

QUINCE

You, Nick Bottom, are set down for Pyramus.

BOTTOM

What is Pyramus? A lover, or a tyrant?

QUINCE

A lover, that kills himself most gallant for love.

BOTTOM

That will ask some tears in the true performing of it: if I do it, let the audience look to their eyes; I will move storms, I will condole in some measure. To the rest: yet my chief humour is for a tyrant: I could play Ercles rarely, or a part to tear a cat in, to make all split.

The raging rocks

And shivering shocks

Shall break the locks

Of prison gates;

And Phibbus' car

Shall shine from far

And make and mar

The foolish Fates.

This was lofty! Now name the rest of the players. This is Ercles' vein, a tyrant's vein; a lover is more condoling.

QUINCE

Francis Flute, the bellows-mender.

FLUTE

Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE

Flute, you must take Thisby on you.

FLUTE

What is Thisby? A wandering knight?

QUINCE

It is the lady that Pyramus must love.

FLUTE

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

QUINCE

That's all one: you shall play it in a mask, and you may speak as small as you will.

BOTTOM

An I may hide my face, let me play Thisby too, I'll speak in a monstrous little voice.

'Thisne,

Thisne;' 'Ah, Pyramus, lover dear! Thy Thisby dear, and lady dear!'

QUINCE

No, no; you must play Pyramus: and, Flute, you Thisby.

BOTTOM

Well, proceed.

QUINCE

Robin Starveling, the tailor.

STARVELING

Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE

Robin Starveling, you must play Thisby's mother. Tom Snout, the tinker.

SNOUT

Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE

You, Pyramus' father: myself, Thisby's father: Snug, the joiner; you, the lion's part: and, I hope, here is a play fitted.

SNUG

Have you the lion's part written? Pray you, if it be, give it me, for I am slow of study.

QUINCE

You may do it extempore, for it is nothing but roaring.

BOTTOM

Let me play the lion too: I will roar, that I will do any man's heart good to hear me; I will roar, that I will make the duke say 'Let him roar again, let him roar again.'

QUINCE

An you should do it too terribly, you would fright the duchess and the ladies, that they would shriek; and that were enough to hang us all.

ALL

That would hang us, every mother's son.

BOTTOM

I grant you, friends, if that you should fright the ladies out of their wits, they would have no more discretion but to hang us: but I will aggravate my voice so that I will roar you as gently as any sucking dove; I will roar you an 'twere any nightingale.

QUINCE

You can play no part but Pyramus; for Pyramus is a sweet-faced man; a proper man, as one shall see in a summer's day; a most lovely gentleman-like man: therefore you must needs play Pyramus.

BOTTOM

Well, I will undertake it. What beard were I best to play it in?

QUINCE

Why, what you will.

BOTTOM

I will discharge it in either your straw-colour beard, your orange-tawny beard, your purple-in-grain beard, or your French-crown-colour beard, your perfect yellow.

QUINCE

Some of your French crowns have no hair at all, and then you will play bare-faced. But, masters, here are your parts: and I am to entreat you, request you and desire you, to con them by to-morrow night; and meet me in the palace wood, a mile without the town, by moonlight; there will we rehearse, for if we meet in the city, we shall be dogged with company, and our devices known. In the meantime I will draw a bill of properties, such as our play wants. I pray you, fail me not.

BOTTOM

We will meet; and there we may rehearse most obscenely and courageously. Take pains; be perfect: adieu.

QUINCE

At the duke's oak we meet.

BOTTOM

Enough; hold or cut bow-strings.

(Exeunt)

SCENE III. A wood near Athens.

(Enter, from opposite sides, a fairy, and ROBIN, a Puck)

PUCK

How now, spirit! Whither wander you?

FAIRY

Over hill, over dale,
Thorough bush, thorough brier,
Over park, over pale,
Thorough flood, thorough fire,
I do wander everywhere,
Swifter than the moon's sphere;
And I serve the fairy queen,
To dew her orbs upon the green.
The cowslips tall her pensioners be:
In their gold coats spots you see;
Those be rubies, fairy favors,
In those freckles live their savors:
I must go seek some dewdrops here
And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.
Farewell, thou lob of spirits; I'll be gone:
Our queen and all our elves come here anon.

PUCK

The king doth keep his revels here tonight:
Take heed the queen come not within his sight;
For Oberon is passing fell and wrath,
Because that she as her attendant hath
A lovely boy, stole from an Ind'ian king;
She never had so sweet a changeling;
And jealous Oberon would have the child
Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild;
But she perforce withholds the loved 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,
But, they do square, that all their elves for fear
Creep into acorn-cups and hide them there.

FAIRY

Either I mistake your shape and making quite,
Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite
Call'd Robin Goodfellow: are not you he

That frights the maidens of the villag'ry;
 Skim milk, and sometimes labor in the quern
 And bootless make the breathless housewife churn;
 And sometime make the drink to bear no barm;
 Mislead night-wand'rers, laughing at their harm?
 Those that Hobgoblin call you, and sweet Puck,
 You do their work, and they shall have good luck:
 Are not you he?

PUCK

Thou speak'st aright;
 I am that merry wand'rer of the night.
 I jest to Oberon and make him smile
 When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,
 Neighing in likeness of a filly foal:
 And sometime lurk I in a gossip's bowl,
 In very likeness of a roasted crab,
 And when she drinks, against her lips I bob
 And on her wither'd dewlap pour the ale.
 The wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale,
 Sometime for three-foot stool mistaketh me;
 Then slip I from her bum, down topples she,
 And 'tailor' cries, and falls into a cough;
 And then the whole quire hold their hips and laugh,
 And waxen in their mirth and neeze and swear
 A merr'ier hour was never wasted there.
 But, room, fairy! Here comes Oberon.

FAIRY

And here my mistress. Would that he were gone!

(Enter, from one side, OBERON, with his train; from the other, TITANIA, with hers)

OBERON

Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania.

TITANIA

What, jealous Oberon! Fairies, skip hence:
 I have forsworn his bed and company.

OBERON

Tarry, rash wanton: am not I thy lord?

TITANIA

Then I must be thy lady: but I know
 When thou hast stole'n away from fairy land,
 And in the shape of Corin sat all day,
 Playing on pipes of corn and versing love
 To am'rous Phillida. Why art thou here,
 Come from the farthest Steppe of India?
 But that, forsooth, the bouncing Amazon,
 Your buskin'd mistress and your warr'ior love,
 To Thes'eus must be wedded, and you come
 To give their bed joy and prosperity.

OBERON

How canst thou thus for shame, Titania,
 Glance at my credit with Hippolyta,
 Knowing I know thy love to Theseus?
 Didst thou not lead him through the glimmering night
 From Perigenia, whom he ravishéd?
 And make him with fair Aegles break his faith,
 With Ariadne and Antiopa?

TITANIA

These are the forgeries of jealousy:
 And never, since the middle summer's spring,
 Met we on hill, in dale, forest or mead,
 By paved fountain or by rushy brook,
 Or in the beached margent of the sea,
 To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,
 But with thy brawls thou hast disturb'd our sport.
 Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,
 As in revenge, have suck'd up from the sea
 Contagious fogs; which falling in the land
 Have every pelting river made so proud
 That they have overborne their continents:
 The ox hath therefore stretch'd his yoke in vain,
 The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn
 Hath rotted ere his youth attain'd a beard;
 The fold stands empty in the drownéd field,
 And crows are fatted with the murrion flock;
 The nine men's morris is fill'd up with mud,
 And the quaint mazes in the wanton green
 For lack of tread are undistinguish'ble:
 The human mortals want their winter here;
 No night is now with hymn or carol bless'd:

Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,
 Pale in her anger, washes all the air,
 That rheumatic diseases do abound:
 And thorough this distemperature we see
 The seasons alter: hoary-headed frosts
 Far in the fresh lap of the crimson rose,
 And on old Hiems' thin and icy crown
 An od'rous chaplet of sweet summer buds
 Is, as in mockery, set: the spring, the summer,
 The chiding autumn, angry winter, change
 Their wonted liv'ries, and the mazéd world,
 By their increase, now knows not which is which:
 And this same progeny of evils comes
 From our debate, from our dissension;
 We are their parents and original.

OBERON

Do you amend it then; it lies in you:
 Why should Titania cross her Oberon?
 I do but beg a little change'ling boy,
 To be my henchman.

TITANIA

Set your heart at rest:

The fairy land buys not the child of me.
 His mother was a vot'ress of my order:
 And, in the spiced Ind'ian air, by night,
 Full often hath she gossip'd by my side,
 And sat with me on Neptune's yellow sands,
 Marking the embark'd traders on the flood,
 When we have laugh'd to see the sails conceive
 And grow big-bellied with the wanton wind;
 Which she, with pretty and with swimming gait
 Foll'wing,—her womb then rich with my young squire,—
 Would imitate, and sail upon the land,
 To fetch me trifles, and return again,
 As from a voyage, rich with merchandise.
 But she, being mortal, of that boy did die;
 And for her sake do I rear up her boy,
 And for her sake I will not part with him.

OBERON

How long within this wood intend you stay?

TITANIA

Perchance till after Theseus' wedding-day.
If you will patiently dance in our round
And see our moonlight revels, go with us;
If not, shun me, and I will spare your haunts.

OBERON

Give me that boy, and I will go with thee.

TITANIA

Not for thy fairy kingdom. Fairies, away!
We shall chide downright, if I longer stay.

(Exeunt TITANIA with her train)

OBERON

Well, go thy way: thou shalt not from this grove
'Til I torment thee for this injury.
My gentle Puck, come hither. Thou rememberest
Since once I sat upon a promontory,
And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back
Utt'ring such dulcet and harmon'ious breath
That the rude sea grew civil at her song
And certain stars shot madly from their spheres,
To hear the sea-maid's music.

PUCK

I remember.

OBERON

That very time I saw, but thou couldst not,
Flying between the cold moon and the earth,
Cupid all arm'd: a certain aim he took
At a fair vestal thronéd by the west,
And loose'd his love-shaft smartly from his bow,
As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts;
But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
Quench'd in the chaste beams of the wat'ry moon,
And the imperial vot'ress passéd on,
In maiden meditation, fancy-free.
Yet mark'd I where the bolt of Cupid fell:
It fell upon a little western flower,
Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound,
And maidens call it love-in-idleness.

Fetch me that flow'r; the herb I shew'd thee once:
 The juice of it on sleeping eye-lids laid
 Will make or man or woman madly dote
 Upon the next live creature that it sees.
 Fetch me this herb; and be thou here again
 Ere the leviathan can swim a league.

PUCK

I'll put a girdle round about the earth
 In forty minutes.

(Exit PUCK)

OBERON

Having once this juice,
 He'll watch Titania when she is asleep,
 And drop the liquor of it in her eyes.
 The next thing then she waking looks upon,
 Be it on lion, bear, or wolf, or bull,
 On meddling monkey, or on busy ape,
 She shall pursue it with the soul of love:
 And when I 'witch the lady once again
 And re-entice her will to loving me
 As a re-application will discharge
 I'll make her render up her page to me.
 But who comes here? I am invisible;
 And I will overhear their conference.

(Enter DEMETRIUS and HELENA, following him)

DEMETRIUS

I love thee not, therefore pursue me not.
 Where is Lysander and fair Hermia?
 The one I'll slay, the other slayeth me.
 Thou told'st me they were stolen unto this wood;
 And here am I, and wode within this wood,
 Because I cannot meet my Hermia.
 Hence, get thee gone, and follow me no more.

HELENA

You draw me, you hard-hearted adamant;
 But yet you draw not iron, for my heart
 Is true as steel: leave you your pow'r to draw,
 And I shall have no pow'r to follow you.

DEMETRIUS

Do I entice you? Do I speak you fair?
Or, rather, do I not in plainest truth
Tell you, I do not, nor I cannot love you?

HELENA

And even for that do I love you the more.
I am your spaniel; and, Demetrius,
The more you beat me, I will fawn on you:
Use me but as your spaniel, spurn me, strike me,
Neglect me, lose me; only give me leave,
Unworthy as I am, to follow you.
What worser place can I beg in your love,—
And yet a place of high respect with me,—
Than to be used as you use your dog?

DEMETRIUS

Tempt not too much the hatred of my spir't;
For I am sick when I do look on thee.

HELENA

And I am sick when I look not on you.

DEMETRIUS

You do impeach your modesty too much,
To leave the city and commit yourself
Into the hands of one that loves you not;
To trust the opportunity of night
And the ill counsel of a desert place
With the rich worth of your virginity.

HELENA

Your virtue is my privilege: for that
It is not night when I do see your face,
Therefore I think I am not in the night;
Nor doth this wood lack worlds of company,
For you in my respect are all the world:
Then 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 brakes,
And leave thee to the mercy of wild beasts.

HELENA

The wildest hath not such a heart as you.
Run when you will, the story shall be change'd:
Apollo flies, and Daphne holds the chase;
The dove pursues the griffin; the mild hind
Makes speed to catch the tiger; bootless speed,
When cowardice pursues and valor flies.

DEMETRIUS

I will not stay thy questions; let me go:
Or, if thou follow me, do not believe
But I shall do thee mischief in the wood.

HELENA

Ay, in the temple, in the town, the field,
You do me mischief. Fie, Demetrius!
Your wrongs do set a scandal on my sex:
We cannot fight for love, as men may do;
We should be wood and were not made to woo.

(Exit DEMETRIUS)

I'll follow thee and make a heav'n of hell,
To die upon the hand I love so well.

(Exit HELENA)

OBERON

Fare thee well, nymph: ere he do leave this grove,
Thou shalt fly him and he shall seek thy love.

(Enter PUCK)

Welcome, wand'rer. Hast thou the flower there?

PUCK

Ay, there it is.

OBERON

So 'tis. Now, guard it well.
I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,

With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine:
 There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,
 Lull'd in these flow'rs with dances and delight;
 And there the snake throws her enamell'd skin,
 Weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in:
 And with the juice of this, Puck, streak her eyes,
 And make her full of hateful fantasies.

PUCK

My king, thy word is firm as nature's laws
 But thy scheme, as 'tis outline'd, bids me pause.
 Once full-induce'd, the love this brings will stay
 Unless replace'd by love-spell's overlay.
 Ensuring that the lover will be thrall
 To one soul.

OBERON

Aye, 'tis true: love conquers all.
 We stand at chasm's edge; once leap is made
 The cost of undershooting may be paid.
 But fear thee not, for fear will wound our fun.
 I'll spell her like to me, when all is done.
 When I am peerless in Titania's eye
 Mine edict for the boy she'll not defy.

PUCK

Thine object, as solution, is the best—
 To say, it stands above the meager rest.
 E'en so, I'll do thy bidding—

OBERON

Heed my will
 For there's another task to test thy skill.
 Take thou this flower, and seek through this grove:
 A sweet Athen'ian lady is in love
 With a disdainful youth: anoint his eyes;
 But do it when the next thing he espies
 May be the lady: thou shalt know the man
 By the Athen'ian garments he hath on.
 Effect it with some care, that he may prove
 More fond on her than she upon her love:
 And look thou meet me ere the first cock crow.

PUCK

Fear not, my lord, your servant shall do so.

(Exeunt PUCK and OBERON, separately)

SCENE IV. Another part of the wood.

(Enter LYSANDER and HERMIA)

LYSANDER

Fair love, you faint with wand'ring in the wood;
And to speak troth, I have forgot our way:
We'll rest us, Herm'ia, if you think it good,
And tarry for the comfort of the day.

HERMIA

Be't 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

Nay, good Lysander; for my sake, my dear,
Lie further off yet, do not lie so near.

LYSANDER

O, take the sense, sweet, of my innocence!
Love takes the meaning in love's conférence.
I mean, that my heart unto yours is knit
So that but one heart we can make of it;
Two bosoms interchainéd with an oath;
So then two bosoms and a single troth.
Then by your side no bed-room me deny;
For lying so, Herm'ia, I do not lie.

HERMIA

Lysander riddles very prettily:
Now much beshrew my manners and my pride,
If Herm'ia 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 vir'tuous 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 then end life when I end loyalty!
 Here is my bed: sleep give thee all his rest!

HERMIA

With half that wish the wisher's eyes be press'd!

(They sleep. Enter PUCK)

PUCK

Through the forest have I gone.
 But Athen'ian found I none,
 On whose eyes I might approve
 This flower's force in stirring love.
 Night and silence — Who is here?
 Garb of Athens he doth wear:
 This is he, my master said,
 Despised the Athenian maid;
 And here the maiden, sleeping sound,
 On the dank and dirty ground.
 Pretty soul! She durst not lie
 Near this lack-love, this kill-court'sy.

*Churl, upon thy eyes I throw
 All the pow'r this charm doth owe.
 When thou wake'st, let love forbid
 Sleep his seat on thy eyelid.*

Now shall I withdraw unseen;
 My aim to 'chant the fairy queen.

(Exit PUCK. Enter DEMETRIUS and HELENA, running)

HELENA

Stay, though you kill me, sweet Demetrius.

DEMETRIUS

I charge thee, hence, and do not haunt me thus.

HELENA

O, wilt thou darkling leave me? Do not so.

DEMETRIUS

Stay, on thy peril: I alone will go.

(Exit DEMETRIUS)

HELENA

O, I am out of breath in this fond chase!
 The more my pray'r, the lesser is my grace.
 Happy is Herm'ia, wheresoe'er she lies;
 For she hath blesséd and attractive eyes.
 How came her eyes so bright? Not with salt tears:
 If so, my eyes are oft'ner wash'd 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 Herm'ia's sphery eyne?

(Exit HELENA)

SCENE V. Another part of the wood.

(Enter TITANIA, with her train)

TITANIA

Come, now a roundel and a fairy song;
 Then, for the third part of a minute, hence;
 Some to kill cankers in the musk-rose buds,
 Some war with rere-mice for their leathern wings,
 To make my small elves coats, and some keep back
 The clam'rous owl that nightly hoots and wonders
 At our quaint spirits. Sing me now asleep;
 Then to your offices and let me rest.

(She lies down. FAIRIES sing)

FIRST FAIRY

*You spotted snakes with double tongue,
 Thorny hedgehogs, be not seen;
 Newts and blind-worms, do no wrong,*

Come not near our fairy queen.

CHORUS

*Philomel, with melody
Sing in our sweet lullaby;
Lulla, lulla, lullaby, lulla, lulla, lullaby:
Never harm,
Nor spell nor charm,
Come our lovely lady nigh;
So, good night, with lullaby.*

FIRST FAIRY

*Weaving spiders, come not here;
Hence, you long-legg'd spinners, hence!
Beetles black, approach not near;
Worm nor snail, do no offense.*

CHORUS

*Philomel, with melody
Sing in our sweet lullaby;
Lulla, lulla, lullaby, lulla, lulla, lullaby:
Never harm,
Nor spell nor charm,
Come our lovely lady nigh;
So, good night, with lullaby.*

(TITANIA sleeps)

SECOND FAIRY

*Hence, away! Now all is well:
One aloof stand sentinel.*

(Exeunt Fairies. Enter PUCK)

PUCK

*She sleepeth well untrouble'd in her grove,
And powerless — Oberon wouldst approve.
Thus, with this flower, I anoint her eyes
That she may love what being she next spies.
A man, or maid, or forest-creature may
Yet be her paramour this 'mergent day.
Resistance to my king will be for naught—*

TITANIA

(Eyes opening) What medd'ling forest spirit have I caught?
 Whilst I, asleep and lost in dreamtide's field
 Did slumber, didst thou think me like to yield
 To Oberon, my husband? O, sweet Puck —
 For yes, I recognize you.

PUCK

—O, my luck!

Titania, as I dance'd among the trees
 With sighs of gossamer upon the breeze,
 I happen'd here, upon thy starlit bower
 Bedeck'd in dew-soak'd moss and honey-flower.
 And from the gloom, a figure didst appear —
 A wolf — and as I watch'd, the beast drew near.
 I saw it meant thee harm, milady, so
 I stood above; thy sleeping form below.
 Then woke thou now with such a startle'd fright,
 As that same wolf didst vanish from my sight.

TITANIA

Thou liest! Wretchéd spirit of the night,
 How easily thy words the truth invite.
 Mine ears may list where blossoms intrigue heed —
 I think thou art a foolish Puck indeed.

PUCK

Forgive my trespass, lady queen. I come—

TITANIA

To play me, at behest of Oberon!
 A dastard's game. My husband is a knave.
 Yet knavery may knavery defeat.
 I'll play his game, and beat him too, besides.
 Hence, spirit! Go and tell my husband thus:
 That I have caught thee at this spiteful game,
 And knowést well that something is afoot.
 That he may pass the hand, if he desires —
 But if he doth proceed, I'll raise the stakes
 And play my cards more expertly than he.
 But in return for granting thee egress—
 For there's no geas impels me set thee free —
 Thou must in turn divulge to me his plan.

PUCK

Thou art the very apex of fair play.
 I'll heed thine order. Hark to what I say.
 This flower's juice is soaked in love's embrace,
 And if anointed on thy lovely face,
 When next thou didst awake, would prompt thee find
 What first thou saw most comely to thy mind.
 And in ensorcell'd love wouldst thou remain
 Until its magic were applied again.

TITANIA

Sought he this consequence upon my head,
 Who claims to love me? O two prongéd tongue!
 He'll yíeld an I die to see it done.
 Love's traitors merit not its instruments;
 I'll find a use for such a flower yet.

(TITANIA grabs the flower)

Away with thee! I have no more to say.

PUCK

Thy missive I'll relate, without delay!

(Exit PUCK)

TITANIA

If Oberon believeth I'd be dupe'd
 By such inexpert trick, then he's a fool.
 But fools may bite as hard as any beast,
 Without the aid of wisdom. To relent
 Would, having lost surprise's benefit,
 Be prudent. Yet he will not, he cannot;
 To lose, he can't consider. He'll perceive
 A threat to dignity in Puck's report.
 His pride's the brittle breastplate of his mail,
 And there I'll strike. But by what stratagem?
 Through some device I'll humble him.

(Enter HELENA)

But soft!

A maid approacheth. I'll observe unseen,
 For deeds that darkness hides are deeds of note

More oft than not. A solitary maid
 Within a night-cloaked wood doth captivate
 Mine int'rest. Wherefore she cometh hence?

HELENA

(Coming across LYSANDER) But who is here? Lysander! On the ground!
 Dead? Or asleep? I see no blood, no wound.
 Lysander, if you live, good sir, awake.

LYSANDER

(Awaking) And run through fire I will for thy sweet sake.
 Transparent Helena! Nature shows art,
 That through thy bosom makes me see thy heart.
 Where is Demetrius? O, how fit a word
 Is that vile name to perish on my sword!

HELENA

Do not say so, Lysander; say not so
 What though he love your Herm'ia? Lord, what though?
 Yet Herm'ia still loves you: then be content.

LYSANDER

Content with Herm'ia! 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 sway'd;
 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

Wherefore was I to this keen mock'ry born?
 When at your hands did I deserve this scorn?
 Is't not enough, is't not enough, young man,
 That I did never, no, nor never can,
 Deserve a sweet look from Demetr'us' eye,
 But you must flout my insufficiency?
 Good troth, you do me wrong, good sooth, you do,
 In such disdainful manner me to woo.

But fare you well: perforce I must confess
 I thought you lord of more true gentleness.
 O, that a lady, of one man refuse'd.
 Should of another therefore be abuse'd!

(Exit HELENA)

LYSANDER

She sees not Herm'ia. Herm'ia, 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 tie 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 pow'rs, address your love and might
 To honor Helen and to be her knight!

(Exit LYSANDER)

TITANIA

The man by maiden slept. Yet he awoke,
 And straightaway upon the maid he spied
 Bestow'd sweet words! This is the flower's will.
 This would my husband wish, my gaze to fall
 On wretched creature and to be entice'd.
 How came the spell upon a mortal's sight?
 Who but the meddler-king would thither place't?
 I know not what designs upon these youths
 My husband hath; what plots in them unfold,
 But an I interfere, he'll take affront
 For pride's sake; match his wits against mine own:
 A contest which, like gold and false alloy,
 Hath one conspicuous superior.
 I will provoke him, tangle up his threads,
 And humble him ere long. But first, the pith:
 To help this maid retrieve her lord forthwith.

HERMIA

(Awaking) Help me, Lysander, help me! Do thy best
 To pluck this crawling serpent from my breast!
 Ay me, for pity! What a dream was here!
 Lysander, look how I do quake with fear:

Methought a serpent ate my heart away,
 And you sat smiling at his cruel pray.
 Lysander! What, removed? Lysander! Lord!
 What, out of hearing? Gone? No sound, no word?
 Alack, where are you speak, and if you hear;
 Speak, of all loves! I swoon almost with fear.
 No? Then I well perceive you all not nigh
 Either death or you I'll find immediately.

TITANIA

The man thou seek'st lives, but more's the shame
 That his Penelope, like morning-mist
 Is vanish'd from his mind and thought, as if
 The nymph Calypso will'd that it be so.

HERMIA

I prithee, hold! Whence came thee, and wherefore?
 Is't sport to see mine eyes so red, so sore,
 Confessing salt-stain'd weakness to the night?
 Who art thou, to give maidens such a fright?

TITANIA

Take fright not in my face, but in my words:
 I mean no ill but seek to bring thee news
 That appertains to finding thy beloved.
 The man who lay beside thee hath withdrawn
 To seek another maiden, ardor-mad.

HERMIA

Lysander loves me; this I know is true.

TITANIA

Lysander loved you. Now he loves anew.
 As I observe'd, he sought another's care
 And move'd himself into the forest deep.
 But blame him not for his newfound desire.
 His mind is not his own; he is bewitch'd.
 A crafty fairy's spell doth guide his gaze.
 But wipe the dew of sadness from thine eye:
 Mine aid I pledge, to win thy lover back.
 Be comforted — I'm equal to the task,
 For I hold sway above the Summer court
 As fairy queen of all within this wood,
 And have the means to grant thy heartfelt wish.

HERMIA

I know not how to answer, for, in sooth,
Thy words are too fantastic to be truth.
Yet in my childhood stories, I heard tell
Of punishments and consequences fell
For maidens who, elf seeing, disbelieve'd—
So tell me, fairy, if my love didst leave,
What aid canst thou in charity provide?

TITANIA

A multitude, with thou and I allied.
I'll find this man of Athens; 'round him weave
A shroud of slumber he may not resist;
The same that close'd the hundred watchful eyes
Of Argus. Where he, powerless, doth lie,
I'll drop this potent blossom in his eyne.
Pursue him: there thy lover yonder fled
And when thou findest him, thou wilt contrive
To, when he waketh, meet his love-turn'd gaze
Ere any other creature: be thou first.
If this is done, his senses shall return,
And he shall love thee as he did before.
Conform thyself to my commands; I say
Where spell doth end, begins thy wedding-day.

HERMIA

I thank thee, fairy, for thy humble aid.
I'll go at once to find him, unafraid.

(Exit HERMIA)

TITANIA

Thou fleeting breath, thou mayfly, mayst thou win
Thy mortal lover's unbecoming heart.
May Oberon's plots fail ere they begin —
But now I must away, to do my part.

(Exit TITANIA)

SCENE VI. Yet another part of the wood.

(Enter OBERON)

OBERON

I wonder if Titania be awake'd;
Then, what it was that next came in her eye,
Which she must dote on in extremity.

(Enter PUCK)

Here comes my messenger. How now, mad spir't!
What night-rule now about this haunted grove?

PUCK

The opposite of that mine efforts strove.
'Tis hardship manifested in locution.
If I durst play thee false, a retribution
Wouldst surely follow when my brazen lie
Had been discover'd; but the same is nigh
If I do speak the truth: thus my design:
To keep indignity and truth both mine.

OBERON

Puck, as thou art my servant, I demand
Thee tell of what's transpire'd.

PUCK

There's a strand

Of wisdom offered humb'ly by the best
Of minds: "Slay not the envoy". I request
Thou keep this dear sagacity in mind.

OBERON

This I shall do.

PUCK

Your majesty is kind.

All glamor'd crept I to Titania's grove
Unseen by all: the agent of that love
That grew where Cupid's dart did 'leash its spell.
Titania lay dream-prisoned in the dell.
But one alone of hers kept vigilance,
And past his vision I was like to dance.
Thence came I by Titania. I approach'd,
But doom'd our ploy the moment I encroach'd.
Sense sharp enough to wake her she'd attain'd,
Or else her slumber'd from the start been feign'd.

She straight didst overthrow my plann'd intent,
 And took the flow'r that for her eyes was meant.
 Then, with dire promises of torture's hate,
 Was I thy stratagem force'd to relate.
 And when she freed me, sent me with report
 That she doth know of thine intended sport
 And hath a mind to foil thy best-laid plans
 If thou dost not concede to her demands
 Which are to yíeld. So it came to pass
 Titania wake'd, and made me look the ass.

OBERON

I will not lie; I now am mickle vex'd.
 I did think more of thee. Prithee, what next?
 The flower's loss doth hurt our cause the most,
 And stymies us.

PUCK

If I may briefly boast—
 My wit and tongue possess unrival'd speed,
 But faster still my fingers with misdeed.
 And when Titania, standing tall, did bid
 Me give the flower, give it her I did.
 Though most of it was to her hand enshrine'd,
 Swift action by me kept one bit behind

(PUCK reveals a single flower petal)

Palm'd I this flower's flesh so cleverly,
 Titania noticed not, and set me free.

OBERON

With this, thou art redeem'd — at least, in part.

PUCK

Of better news, that petal's but the start.
 Ere I to fairy bower did advance,
 I 'pon Athen'ian lid did spark romance.
 Thine edict here was carried out complete.
 That man by now hath surely found his sweet.

(Enter HERMIA, pursued by DEMETRIUS)

OBERON

Stand close. This is the same Athenian.

PUCK

This is the woman, but not this the man.

DEMETRIUS

O, why rebuke you him that loves you so?
Lay breath so bitter on your bitter foe.

HERMIA

Now I but chide; but I should use thee worse,
For thou, I fear, doth give me cause to curse.
Thy claim on me amusing was, until
Egeus' mandate emptied my goodwill.
Thou art the impetus of our mad flight.
A man of decency and breeding might
Be satisfied with that! But nay, pursuit
Is thy one answer to a spurnéd suit.
Now thou dost but accost me, and this maid
Is greatly vex'd at being thus waylaid.
So get thee hence ere thou dost vex me more.
I charge by what thou claim'st thou dost adore.

DEMETRIUS

I do adore thee yet, despite that I
Pierce'd through the heart am with your stern cruel'ty:
Yet you, the murd'rer, look as bright, as clear,
As yonder Venus in her glimm'ring sphere.

HERMIA

Thy fawning cease. As spendthrift's hand on gold,
The words thou speak'st can find no lasting hold.
Lysander is the man for whom I live,
While for thine oaths my mind is but a sieve.
The sand doth fall too rapidly for me
To numerate how scant my sighs for thee.
Now begone! For I work a fairy's will:
To save Lysander, for his heart doth chill
Towards me, enrapture'd to another's gaze—
'Tis Helena, I trust, sets him ablaze,
For she is here if thou art — and 'tis ill
To have thee close at hand; my brain doth fill
With ire and brimstone when thou draw'st too near.

Thus, thoughts do muddy when I need them clear.
Go!

DEMETRIUS

Fairy's will? You take me for a dunce.
Yet I obey; you need but tell me once.
Thought I Lysander's love would pass away
As fog beneath the garish light of day
Without his presence here, yet it remains.
A man must know when ardor turns to chains.

HERMIA

This meeting's levy I can ill afford.

DEMETRIUS

Then I'll remain no longer, on my word.

(Exeunt DEMETRIUS and HERMIA, in opposite directions)

OBERON

What hast thou done? Thou hast mistaken quite
And laid the love-juice on some true-love's sight:
Of thy misprision must perforce ensue
Some true love turn'd and not a false turn'd true.
And now this mortal claims a fairy's hand
Doth send her forth — This has Titania plann'd.
A purposeful humiliation's spite
That sends a message with intended slight.
Upon both fronts, thine efforts reap me ill.
I wonder that I let thee serve me still.

PUCK

O Penitence! I'll serve to make this right
Ere bright Selene finishes her flight.
I know not how, I grant. The world is sick,
And ill-restrain'd by literary trick.
If this were but an act, the answer'd lie
Within another magic bloom to 'pply.
No reason to't; conven'ience ready-made:
Such tactics are a playwright's stock in trade.
But no such thing exists in life; if it
Be solvable, it will be solved through wit.
And, as my wit be cannier than most—

OBERON

In light of what hath 'fallen us, thy boast
 Doth overawe me not. I'll play thy part,
 And form the plan that sets her sweetness tart.
 The maid we saw Titania's aid enjoys,
 And through her undermines our love-born ploys.
 That maid and your Athenian must part.
 The other pair must joined be one heart.
 Titania, then, will strive for the reverse—
 So be it. We'll hope well our schemes disburse.
 Our course remains. I'll not force humbleness,
 No matter how much flower she possess.
 We've but a petal; thus, we cannot waste
 Further attempts upon Titania's face.
 That plan's abandon'd. Mortals are the toy
 By which we'll win the battle and the boy.

PUCK

Thy plan is iron-cast; I find no fault.
 And next to mine, the winner — by default.

OBERON

To find the other Athenian, fly.
 Take thee our petal, to anoint his eye.
 To Helena, then guide him. That will do
 For that. To meet this other maid I'll go.
 She claims restriction in Chronos' domain
 To orchestrate Titania's task and gain?
 Then I'll delay her. O, she'll feel the sting:
 The queen who thought to quarrel with her king!

PUCK

I spring at once, to all degrees fulfill.
 I, like a hat, am worn by sitting still.

(Exit PUCK)

OBERON

*Stalwart tree and twisted root,
 Bramble-hedge and new-grown shoot,
 I charge thee shift, about me bend,
 And to the maiden's path append.*

'Tis well. She'll soon arrive. I'll now conceal

My form 'neath age; 'tis wisdom's pure ideal.

(After several seconds, enter HERMIA)

OBERON

I bid thee pause. I've grave report to share.
'Tis sent thee by Titania, queen most fair.

HERMIA

The fairy's herald? Come, I bid thee tell:
How go her efforts to negate the spell?

OBERON

The charm is planted like a stubborn weed,
Whose roots doth grasp the earth about the seed
That birth'd them. Now, my lady-queen doth pull
This charm-weed by the stem, but vain her cull,
For roots take hold like iron in the ground.
Thus, judgment of the stem must be unsound.
But as a shovel breaketh root's domain,
So nature's remedies o'er magic reign.
Within this wood, an ancient tree doth grow.
A juniper, with gift to overthrow
Unwanted spells. Fetch from this tree the fruit
And offer it — deliver thus thy suit.
And thou wilt know this tree by berries red—
Not violet; magic, crimson doth embed
Within its harvest. Seek thou such a sign.
The blushing berries — then, the cure be thine.

HERMIA

A card'nal juniper? That is the tree
Perplex'd Lysander with fulvosity.
I told him 'twas a symbol of the life
Our love would bear when we were man and wife.
What luck we chance'd to pass! What fortune mine
I pluck'd these crimson berries from the vine!
Now lead me onward, that this natural cure
My married happiness for me secure.

OBERON

Of course, I — well, that is to say, well found.
I'll off to — nay — forgive my fickle sound.
Surprise disarms my wit. What easy prey

Man's wisdom when he knows not what to say!
 This first ingredient was found right well,
 But won't alone suffice to break the spell.
 The second is the autumn-flower's frond,
 Which grows abundantly upon the pond
 But two skips hence.

HERMIA

No reference to a set
 At the initial was — do I forget?

OBERON

'Twas meant, but nay. Thou dost recall the right.
 Thou mayst chastise me for mine oversight.

HERMIA

Belief is cheap, when trust the bargain backs,
 But trust's expensive; here, it credit lacks.
 Deceit as usurer depletes its means,
 And further shrift trust's legacy demeans.

OBERON

I bid thee wait!

HERMIA

Thy counsel lacks for want.
 I'll heed it not: Thine arguments are gaunt.
 I do recall Lysander's plight did lie
 At fairy feet — and fairy here I spy.
 Thy lot the blame, or servant to the cause.
 Thou dost mislead my steps and bid me pause.
 Beshrew thee, for thy part in this deceit!
 Sharp words — not triumph — is thy earn'd receipt.

OBERON

Thy mind doth pierce the matter to its heart.
 Thou art astute; defeated, I depart.
 'Twould be a simple matter to invoke
 Such magic 'gainst thy will that at a stroke,
 I'd break it. But that magic's not to wield,
 Or stronger spells Titania'd leap to field.
 'Gainst mortals, rules must govern expertise,
 And by those rules, I'm bested — and with ease.
 The next time, I'll a diff'rent end impel...

'Til then, Athenian, and fare thee well.

(Exit HERMIA)

OBERON

And truly, my objective here today
Was never vict'ry; merely to delay.
Despite the outcome, that was well attain'd.
Mere face I've lost; but time enough I've gain'd.

(Exit OBERON)

Scene VII. A clearing in the wood.

(Enter TITANIA, over a sleeping LYSANDER)

TITANIA

The deed thus far is safe accomplishéd.
The lad doth sleep Endymion's slumber,
And fast upon, Selene doth advance.

*Let this nectar's sun devour
All who pass to thine eyes' power.
Fire burns throughout the night,
But love burns hotter and more bright.
Lie sleeping 'til the time draws right
To bring that burning love to light.
Cast off the gloom of loveless plight,
And dance upon thy heart's delight.*

(TITANIA drops the juice into his eyes. A lengthy pause)

No mortal sign of mortal company
Itself makes known. I fancy mischief's hand
Doth guide her absence; devilry may reign
O'er mortal when she enters fay domain.

(Exit TITANIA. Enter DEMETRIUS, with HELENA following after)

HELENA

O sweet Demetrius! I beg of thee:
Give up the flight and grant thy company.

DEMETRIUS

I bid thee end thy weary tracks apace,
Or else thy heartbreak will resolve this chase,
And I no longer have the stomach for't.
For my heart, being broken in its tort
Hath nothing of itself to further seek
The griming of thy ardor's babb'ling creek.

HELENA

Your harsh objections of my suit dismiss'd?
Do mine ears hear aright?

DEMETRIUS

The point is miss'd.

Thou guileful schemer! Thou didst think to gain
My favor, with Lysander's flight well-lain,
Then move me, when I movéd Herm'ia not.
Arachne could not weave a better plot.
But my heartbreak is thy foundation's fault.
All love is poison'd now to passion's vault.
All due to thee, I've visited great ill
On Hermia — exhausted her good will
Towards me; so what's thy reckless quest attain'd?
All hope I've lost; a lodestone-heart I've gain'd.

HELENA

If I can offer comfort, but a word
From you is needed—

DEMETRIUS

Be my tirade slurr'd?

My comfort is to move thee from my sight
Ere cock-crow!

HELENA

Feel you nothing for me?

DEMETRIUS

Spite!

This forest is the death of ev'ry prayer
I spake — let it be thine, for all I care!

HELENA

If perish I, 'tis from the words you speak:

Sharp daggers, that my heart unerring seek!

LYSANDER

(Awakening) A man am I, yet in Nyx's domain,
 A man may be a king, and kings may reign
 O'er wondrous dreamscapes peopled by the thoughts
 Of he who ties his slumber up in knots.
 Wrapp'd in my fantasy did I preside
 As Paris o'er Troy, Helen at my side.
 The armies of the north and south lay siege,
 But though I had no men to call me liege,
 I fought them off. My ardor beaten mail
 And sword at once; my mastery couldst quail
 Such armies ten times over long as I
 Kept Helen 'side me: lover and ally.
(Seeing DEMETRIUS) But who this shining figure bids me view,
 The closest to perfection this world through?
 O angel! Perfect form and features thine,
 I'll e'er reflect your glory in mine eyne!

HELENA

Stirs there Lysander! Rise, Demetrius,
 To my defense! That madman didst discuss
 False love with me — fictitious and disloyal
 To Hermia, whose troth he doth despoil
 With wicked words. His mischief knows no bound!
 I prithee, separate me from this hound!
 This knave, this scullion—

LYSANDER

My passion was
 Ne'er meant for thee. My heart beats not for dross.
 Be thou so desp'rate for a lover's touch
 To invent lovers? You presume too much.
 I look'd on thee with fancy once, I grant,
 But, gazing on perfection, change my cant.
 Demetrius! My love!

HELENA

Lysander?

LYSANDER

Hush.
 Who will not change a raven for a thrush?

The path to happiness beneath my feet
 Ne'er look'd so wide, nor breathe'd me air so sweet.
 Take me, Demetrius, into your heart.
 Or else your arms — 'twill satisfy to start.

HELENA

Thought I thou stoop'd to depths no man had reach'd
 Before, when words of wooing sway'd thy speech
 Towards me — but now I see I did mistake —
 To woo me's not the vilest act to take.
 To make me bear thy wooing's hateful sin,
 But taking it away once it begin?
 To take the worth I found myself bestow'd,
 And to another free give what I'm owe'd,
 That I resent its absence? And to him?
 Base cruel'ty fills thy spirit to the brim!

DEMETRIUS

I do dismiss thy words on judgment's grounds,
 For in thy madness, push thee reason's bounds
 Beyond the endpoint, be this jest or no.

LYSANDER

Who jests? Each second spent, my love doth grow
 From seed to full-bloom flower in a flare
 Of hasten'd plumage. Lips, form pilgrim's pray'r.
 Man first was made by God in Heav'n above
 Wherefore should man not then come first in love?

HELENA

How paltry was the lunacy percieve'd
 In him before, to what he's now achieve'd.

DEMETRIUS

Give ground, Lysander. Settle and perpend.
 The moment thou approachest is thy end.
 As pointed words kill that which love endows,
 So is my sword-point fit to thwart thy vows.

LYSANDER

If I must die, then let the hand be thine
 That wields the blade which cleaves me to the chine!
 Best I expire than thine embrace forego—
 Ne'er hath a naked weapon please'd me so.

(Enter PUCK, who attempts to appraise the situation.)

HELENA

Enough! Enough! Thou mock'st me even now!
Hast thou no shame? The gods may marvel how
I glimpse'd a trace of kindness in thy mien.

LYSANDER

Stop up thy tongue, thou cockatrice. Between
My senses occupied with chatt'ring maid,
And with this god, my pref'rence goes unsaid.
Shall I allow thy mud to be the thing
That fouts Demetrius's spark'ling spring?

DEMETRIUS

You'll see a sparkle yet an if I draw.

LYSANDER

A worthy sight, to be the last I saw.

PUCK

(unheard, to DEMETRIUS) Alackaday, a step away,
I'll slice this knot without delay.
Thou art the man, and this the maid,
So love shall reign within this glade.
Jack shall have Jill.
Naught shall go ill.
The king will favor me again, and all will be well.

DEMETRIUS

Pray, give me peace! An if thou wilt not heed,
I'll two steps off, and this fierce humor bleed.

(DEMETRIUS backs off, trying to calm himself down. PUCK follows)

PUCK

*Within this flower's purple dye
Lies my misfortune's remedy.
Anon thy lady shalt thou spy,
Then bow thy head to destiny.
It needs a moment, naught but one*

(PUCK drops the juice on DEMETRIUS' eyelids)

And effortless, the deed is done.
 Now, with Athen'ian love instilled,
 My king's command have I fulfilled.

(Enter HERMIA)

HERMIA

To think I nearly set the search aside
 To chase invention! Well I found he lied,
 For if I'd fallen for his craven trick,
 The time I spent would make most dismal tick.
 As is, his prattle kept me all too late.
 O, how fey wiles govern mortal fate,
 And mold them selfishly! What's this I spy?
 Lysander! And awake. Still, I must try,
 For in not trying, doom all I hold dear.
 Lysander! O, Lysander! Look you here!

LYSANDER

Who calls? The shadow of a maid I knew,
 Whose creamy skin, when placed by hard sinew,
 Now seems the lesser. O, by what foul art
 Did Hermia contrive to win my heart?

HERMIA

What.

DEMETRIUS

Now, Lysander, let us talk with sense.
 This madness shall be cured with eloquence.
(Seeing HERMIA as he turns) Alas, I am afflicted as the next.
 Was comeliness e'er place'd in finer 'text?
 I've been transfixed always by her spell,
 But now my love's an ocean to a well.
 Ere this fair moment pass'd, my heart lay dead
 Within my chest, but now it beats! I'll wed
 Thee or I perish. Such is my desire —
 A spring eternal, never to expire.
 Love, never have I known thee! More's the shame.
 Fair Venus, I affirm thy golden claim.
 Grant me my prize, and 'til the end of days;
 'Til world's sundering, I'll sing thy praise.

HELENA

A man's stern vow to never love again
 But lasts until a maid who isn't plain
 Doth cross his path. His protestations ring
 As false to me as any untune'd string.
 Yet this be new. Demetrius's tongue
 Ne'er heap'd such praise to call for every rung
 If one didst wish to climb it. Ne'er before
 It move'd so well, nor struck me to the core.
 From whence the change? (*To HERMIA*) I think 'tis thy deceit
 To blame. Demetrius and thou didst meet:
 Then prove'd him no such equal to thy charms —
 So woo'd thy way into my lover's arms.
 All fits! Lysander's madness then was born
 Of sadness when he witness'd thy scorn!
 Demetrius is move'd to greater heights,
 Whilst fawns on thee the man my heart ignites!
 And once again, I'm left to hold thy slough
 Of friendship. Was Lysander not enough?

HERMIA

What falsehoods do disservice in thy name?
 'Tis true Demetrius loves me. The blame
 Is thine; ne'er have I prompted such response,
 While all thy wiles achieveth nonchalance.
 I ask thee leave thy bitter words unsaid.
 Cast off the jealous harpy; be the maid.

(*Enter TITANIA*)

TITANIA

No human sign, nor testimony's mark
 Of medd'ling found I. Thus, I must conclude
 The maiden's path and mine, like arrows launch'd
 By brother bows at brother archers, pass'd
 Each other in mid-flight. Now I am here,
 I see my thoughts confirm'd. All chaos reigns,
 (*To PUCK*) And I believe the cause doth thither stand,
 For chaos follows Robin like the smell
 Of tanning-vats the tanners of the town.

PUCK

O queen, whose mercy's only match'd by grace,
 How unforeseen this meeting, at this place!

Dispatch'd was I to gather fairy dew,
 And now return — I'm merely passing through,
 And fear my lateness will be noticéd
 If I don't leave our pleasantries unsaid.

TITANIA

Is that thy grandest effort? Was I born
 A dewdrop's fall ago, to be so fool'd?
 Dear Puck, thou art a wordsmith, but thy knack
 Is wasted on me. Now, I prithee tell,
 What purpose did my husband have in mind
 When he dispatch'd thee hither?

PUCK

I may not.

My king was wroth enough that I was caught
 But once. If yet again I wag my lips,
 King Oberon will have my hide in strips.

TITANIA

My sympathy's, at present, short-supplied.

PUCK

Have mercy, lady queen. My hands are tied.

TITANIA

I give thee moments four to find thy voice.

PUCK

Let Hecate witness: I had not a choice.

The mortals present are Athenian.

(Indicating HELENA) That woman is enamor'd with (Indicating DEMETRIUS) that man.

The man, in turn, admires *(Indicating HERMIA) this maiden. She*

Did have (indicating LYSANDER) a love, but now he loveth (Indicating DEMETRIUS) he.

'Tis wish'd by Oberon *(Indicating DEMETRIUS and HELENA) they form one heart*

But honest mishap's kept them well apart.

(Indicating DEMETRIUS) He enthralls (Indicating HELENA and LYSANDER) two, but seeks (indicating HERMIA) another's charm.

I've told thee all. Now, please. Release mine arm.

TITANIA

The crown appreciates all thou hast done
 And all of thy volition! Thou mayst go;

I have no further use of thee. 'Tis thus:
 If one be water, then the other's earth.
 But if the other's water, he is oil.
 'Tis well, but as insurance, not enough
 To leave a love, no matter how ill-use'd
 Within her breast. 'Tis caution I indulge.

(Subtly drawing towards HELENA)

*Do what thou doth do most well:
 Affix her eyes in magic spell,
 Her spirit now content to dwell
 Upon a fancie'd wedding-bell.
 Let plaintive sighs now 'scape her lips,
 And form the nectar lover sips.
 Now eyesight falls upon the one
 Displeasing most to Oberon.*

HELENA

...And thou, Lysander — one thing more I say:
 True caddishness ne'er live'd until today,
 But marshals now to take a human shape
 Ill-fitting, now resem'bling more an ape.
 Beelzebub's shrill chorus 'scapes thy tongue,
 And through thee gains an entrance. In thy lung
 Do live the insects make this buzzing choir
 That stoke the words of hell. What dismal fire
 Expectorated thee? Avert mine eyes!
 Who looks upon thee o'dium's substance spies.
(As HELENA turns away, TITANIA anoints her eyes with the flower)
 I've no more time for thee, nor 'straint withal,
 So know, Lysander, that I do appall
 Myself to think of thee! Thou filth. Thou taint.
 Thou base, degen'rate, *(Turning to face LYSANDER)*, beacon of a saint!
 Thou purple emperor; O blazing sun!
 I ne'er did love 'til this love had begun.
 Ten years I've wander'd 'midst the desert sands,
 And now find water's reservoir. My hands
 Do ache to touch your Myron-sculpted frame
 'Til end of time! I yearn to be untame
 With you. My pulse is fast, my cheeks are red.
 My voice a growl. 'Tis wish that we be wed,
 Not signs of hatred, no! Nothing more far
 But that which cause'd Mycenae's launch to war.

But have me for a moment, I implore.
 I'll grant you all your fiercest dreams, and more.

HERMIA

How fluidly do thine affections turn!
 As easily as one thy suit doth spurn,
 Thy bitter claws unfurled like a sail,
 And full ahead another's heart assail.
 Were we not friends, us both, from childhood?
 Does that mean naught, to forestall hateful feud
 Betwixt us? There can be but little more
 So long'st thou love Lysander; naught but war.

HELENA

War for Lysander? Thou art well my friend,
 But amity by love oft meets its end,
 For one's the greater. My desire doth run
 Hot through me; give a choice and friendship's done,
 For good companions like twin trees will grow
 Together, climbing high what once was low.
 But passion sweeps upon me like a fire,
 And 'gainst that heat do trunks thus turn to pyre,
 And leave but smoke and ash; that's what remains
 Of all goodwill we share'd, despite thy pains.

DEMETRIUS

'Tis well! Let Helena escape the bond
 Of her affection; Lysander, respond
 In favor. This will Hermia leave free,
 And as a frightened dove, take wing to me.

LYSANDER

I love her not!

HERMIA

(*To DEMETRIUS*) I love thee not!

DEMETRIUS

Wherefore

Such din, fair one? Is't so hard to adore
 Such man as I? Helena onetime did.

HELENA

But recognize my folly.

DEMETRIUS

There, I bid:
Is't fair Lysander gains the love of two
Without a care, and hath no art to woo?

LYSANDER

No care, but for thee, and no art as well
To turn thy loving heaven from a hell
Of spurn'd dismissal. For these maidens care
I not a whit.

HELENA

Mine inner heart I bear
To thee! My love grows greater still
Than 'twas a minute thence.

HERMIA

Much-vaunted skill

To grow thy love so fast from hermit's greed;
From spendthrift's gold; from winter-blighted seed!
Mine nurture'd wast in tenderness's loam,
And bore full fruit ere thine from earth did roam.
As great thy love doth claim, mine's grown the rate
Thou claim'st, and longer — thus, judge mine more great.
Renounce thy honey'd words ere I be move'd
Thy features with a blow to be improve'd.

HELENA

Hear how she threatens! She doth lack restraint,
Lysander, I'm demure without complaint.

HERMIA

No threat but offer; if well-re-arrange'd,
Thy face Demetrius's mind may change,
And he may love thee; for, to be forthright,
He gazeth not upon thy current sight.
For friendship's sake, I offer up this cure.
He wants for someone lovely and demure.

LYSANDER

Their voices dominate the air! I lack
The skill to block them out and turn my back
As if on womenkind to gaze on he

That teacheth well the truth that love is free.

HELENA

I'm silent evermore at thy demand.

HERMIA

I'll voice relief, at risk of reprimand.

DEMETRIUS

(*To LYSANDER*) Speak not of love, or I'll forget my place.

LYSANDER

Speak not of places; all thy doubts erase.

DEMETRIUS

Be satisfied with both the maids beguile'd
To love thee—

LYSANDER

Nay, I am by them revile'd.
'Twas writ — or should have been — within the Book:
What women can't look over, they o'erlook.

HELENA

She must upon her toes to look thee o'er!

HERMIA

Another word from thee, and—

HELENA

Heretofore,
We've seen her even-headed: now reveals
Her temper, closer-cropp'd than head to heels!

LYSANDER

A low blow 'deed! 'Tis by necessity
Thou need'st must aim thus.

DEMETRIUS

Shame! Thy levity
Is purchase'd at my dearest love's expense,
So halt you both, or brave my recompense.
Beshrew those jackel-hounds who pick and bay
At goddesses, but find themselves fair prey.

Lysander, for but one of four you burn,
 Yet asses will lead armies ere return
 That love to thee. Affection sparks in two —
 Or, all in four, save he thou wan'st — and you.
 Would not the gods themselves let forth great shouts
 Of merriment to watch these layabouts?
 But sad as poor Lysander's case may be,
 'Tis Helena's brings mirth more skillfully.
 For Helena had lot to light her torch,
 And set it 'pon my door, my hair to scorch
 With trepidation. Soon she lost this sport
 To more engrossing men. Her friend's consort
 A pleasing target was, and sure to yield
 To such an one as she, so she appeal'd
 As best she could, but in vain! O, alas,
 For neither man she courted were spun-glass:
 Transparent to her wiles. Fail'd twice o'er!
 E'en Paris earn'd his point in fortune's score.

HELENA

As like as I! Lysander love'd me well
 Before.

DEMETRIUS

Thy tale attracts a certain smell
 Of fish. But if 'tis true, then thou didst lose
 His love impressively — To disabuse
 Himself of womankind in their entire
 Is talent true, to which few maids aspire.

HERMIA

Ay, me! This fairy illness spreads like smoke
 Amidst us. Now my heart must bear the yoke
 Of loséd friend and lover both. I trow
 If e'er I'm near that fairy as thee now,
 I shall abuse him mightily, with all
 The spite a woman holds, and wherewithal.

HELENA

Hermía's defect charm doth bring such shame,
 Within Hermía's heart, she signs the blame
 Immortal-wards, upon the fairy race,
 Than on distinction's lack, denied her face.
 This nymph, this Cleopatra, cannot bear

This single man, who may her love forswear.
 All other loves, proffer'd by ev'ry man
 in Athens, are without the here'tic, bran
 To her discerning tongue. How came this by
 Than supernatural fay's conspiracy?
 Bear witness! I — and mortals all-world o'er —
 Are oft wash'd up upon rejection's shore,
 And we must bear it! Cómeth as a shock
 That love brings pain, now thine's upon the block?
 Expect thou sympathy? Nay, understand
 The agony we mortals must withstand
 When love hears tolling knell! Fraternity
 With scornéd sister folds to jealousy
 Long-held! O, pain, thou hast a confidante!

.
 Lysander, dearest love, thy pale words haunt
 My memory, love's death-rattle draws near.
 I'll marshal for one last foray. Sincere
 My sorrow losing Hermia's regard,
 But doing so brings freedom to discard
 Most everything: convention's next to go.
 No edge to forfeit hence, disgrace or no,
 Nor sacrifice to give in thy esteem —
 Unchain'd to grant what men are like to dream.

.
 I blush before you, naked, in the foam
 Of Venus's ascent. My fertile loam
 Wants but a seed to root itself and sprout
 In florid love, a thunderclappéd shout
 Of primordial primacy. Without
 Which are my raven rivulets untoss'd.
 While with, my body's silk is gold-emboss'd
 Your name — Lysander — rising to a cry
 Behind uncover'd pearls, a sob, a sigh,
 A plea, and quickéning; my back voussoir
 Against unpaintéd parchment: leave a scar
 To claim your passing. By Terpsichore
 Stirs forth the grace that shuns a galléry.
 No more for me the moon, with you the sun
 Ablazéd in your glory; be undone
 And do concurrently. Observe my plight.
 Send tongues of flame to quench my soul tonight.

LYSANDER

'Tis for thy sake I bid thee pause, not mine.
And for these two: their horror grants a sign
Of my reaction. No more sway'd am I
Than was I prior. Pitiful thy ply.

HERMIA

Such brazenness ill-fits the straight-lace'd sort
Whose ranks you claim to swell. What ill comport
Have I born witness to?

HELENA

All that you heard
Of love was birth'd; Regret me not a word.

(Enter OBERON)

OBERON

So sizable a ley-line knot I've seen
Not once before. This mortal discord flares
And pulses like a wound upon the wood.
The bleeding's drawn me hither; now the rot
Must be excised. How came affairs to boil?
Robin! Discharge to me thy role in this,
And how such enmity hath been release'd.

TITANIA

Benign felicitations, husband mine.
I urge thee chide poor Robin not too harsh,
For if his role's a sun, my moon eclipse'd
His fool endeavor. Never send a sprite
To do a monarch's work, lest thy intrigue
Collapse in wood-rot. But 'tis now too late.
The threads of mortal love are tangle'd past
The brink of bodkin-mending. All aligns
To thine embarrassment. How now, my king?

OBERON

Thou wilt be duly punish'd for thy tongue
But second, first to chide thy actions here.
I did but aim to bring these lovers close,
And aid what promise'd but acerbic words
And callous hearts. 'Twas done generously,
And had no part within our feud. Yet now,

They are but tools in thy immortal hands
 To strike me as thou wilt. No happiness
 Commands their heart, save where it be compell'd
 Through binding geas. Titania, love is life
 Itself, no weapon in another's clash.

TITANIA

Their fate is but what thou didst wish as mine,
 Or dost the memory of thy fell plan
 Escape thee? Are these mortal lives so rich
 That they are sacrosanct above thy wife's?
 No worth indignity by that same hand
 That clasp'd mine those centúries ago?
 Nay, Oberon. Thy wrongs compound themselves
 'Gainst thy hypocrisy.

OBERON

All that was done

To this result was but the terminus
 Of thy defiance. Pharaoh's stubbornness
 Brought forth the plagues: thy stiff-back'd obstinance
 Deserv'd recompense: the consequence
 Of yielding not the change'ling boy; my right
 As both the forest's lord and thine.

TITANIA

"And thine?"

Hear I the whispers of the flippant wind
 Among the ivy, burbles of the brook
 That yearns to burst its banks. The merest echoes
 Of oaken immortality that stood
 Eight hundred years before its roots gave way
 And pass'd to dust in wake of season's turn.
 Hear I the moon-beams strike the forest floor;
 The pattering of tiny squirrel-feet
 Upon the twigs. Yet, never have I heard
 A sound which gave me pause so great as that.
 "And thine"? I'll give thee cause to disavow
 Those words. I'll show thee well who wears the crown
 In sooth.

OBERON

In equal countermeasure, force
 Responds to force; that is a natural law.

Bring magic arts to bear and I'll respond,
 And doing so, this forest rend. I know
 Thy boldness and thy fever'd passion both,
 But forgéd zeál, quench'd in reason's pools,
 Will harden to dependability.
 Believe I not thy bitter pridefulness
 Would push thee to loose ruination's hounds
 To slaver 'pon our peaceful fairy-groves.

TITANIA

Where words are insufficient to convince
 A man, that man's own senses hold the key.
 Let thy perceptions fill my diction's gaps.

*Diana, by the love we share
 Uproot the trees and form a snare
 Of leafy branches, for to hold
 Mine Oberon, less wise than bold
 Then smother him, and form a sheath
 About his arms and legs; a wreath
 Of wood and earth, of bark and leaf!*

(The trees wrap their branches around OBERON)

OBERON

*Hephaestus, by thy lordly name
 Create for me a ring of flame
 To burn the bonds that circle 'round
 And root themselves within the ground
 That my Titania, with a flash
 Will find her actions over-rash
 Her dreams and vines both fruitless ash!*

(Fire burns away OBERON's binds)

TITANIA

*O Zeus, who reigns from 'Lympus high
 I call on thee with desp'rate cry*

HERMIA

Pinch me, Lysander! Madness sets upon me.
 Methinks the trees did stir their branches up.

LYSANDER

'Twas but a shadow-trick. Banish thy fears.

DEMETRIUS

Lysander balks at guarding you from harm,
 But I'll betwixt you interpose myself
 If but a breath of sanction pass your lips.

HERMIA

As loathe upon thee as I look, thy bid
 Is welcome. Sin'ster workings are afoot
 Within this grove.

HELENA

Deliver me, my love!
 The fire, like a glutton, doth devour

*So hark ye to my dread command
And send thy rains upon the land!
Let lightning strike and thunder roar
Sleet downpour chill us to the core
Until the fires blaze no more!*

The forest floor.

DEMETRIUS

Whence came this flame? 'Tis sure
The ground were dampen'd with the nightly air.

LYSANDER

I'd immolate myself a thousand times
And think naught of't; the heat's negligible
Against the heat that burns within my breast
For you alone.

DEMETRIUS

Away, and cool thyself.

(Rainfall puts out OBERON's flames)

OBERON

*Poseidon, shaker of the earth
If now our pact hath any worth
I call on thee and ask thee make
A rolling temblor of a quake
Now listen well to my demands
Thou master of the sea and lands
Split forth the earth with thy great hands!*

LYSANDER

'Tis cold! 'Tis cold!

HERMIA

Then step to mine embrace.

HELENA

Nay, step to mine. My body be thy brace.

LYSANDER

I'll not to thee or thee, my love prevents.

DEMETRIUS

Am I the only one with any sense?
And is a frozen death my just reward?
That this affliction's physic were the sword!

(Cracks appear in the ground. One separates HERMIA and LYSANDER from HELENA and DEMETRIUS)

TITANIA

*Kind Hermes, who loves trav'lers best
I call on thee to grant egress
By way of cold and binding mist
That I may lose myself amidst.
And thus from battle slip away
Beneath the shield of magic fey:*

LYSANDER

A rift! For you, my sweet Demetrius,
I'll leap. No quake or storm shall part us thus.

HERMIA

You will be dashed to pieces! Do not leave

A blanket of the thickest gray!

My side, my love, nor give me cause to grieve!

HELENA

Nay, leap, Lysander! On the other side
Awaits you I, to be your blushing bride.

DEMETRIUS

Fair Hermia! Though sunder'd by this fault
Are we, my seated love withstands assault,
And will until our paths again converge.

(Exit TITANIA, under cover of fog)

DEMETRIUS

From what foul vessel doth this fog emerge?
The rising sun I look'd to's pass'd behind
These portent clouds; without her, strike me blind!

LYSANDER

Forgive me, for I've lost the cavern's lip.
To leap's to die, to advance is to slip.

HELENA

Lysander! Your harmonics place you near.
I fly to meet you where the air be clear!

LYSANDER

Not so, by heav'n I say, be it not so.
Ere she doth feel her way, I'll further go.

HERMIA

And with you I, for love doth not abate
When love in lovéd's heart hath turn'd to hate

DEMETRIUS

(To HELENA) Make lead thy pace until I've reach'd thy breast.
Their couple's figure'd of what we love best.
Thou seek'st Lysander; him I'll help thee find,
For Hermia will be not far behind.
This wood's possess'd; new dangers haunt this vale.
We'll jointly triumph where alone we'd fail.

(Exeunt lovers, disoriented. HERMIA follows LYSANDER; DEMETRIUS and HELENA exit together)

OBERON

Then run, Titania! To the ends of earth
Shall I hound thee; thou shalt have no respite
Until thou beg'st of me forgiveness.
The victory today is mine to claim,
But like the flower of spring that blossoms first
And dashes pigment on long-hoary ground,
This contest is the first of many more.
The root will form the branch and branch take root
As fay meet fay beneath the canopy
And wage upon each other bloody war.
I'll force for force, whate'er Titania choose,
And prove to her the truth that girds her place.
And for the lovers? What care I for they
Now open conflict be the forest's law?
They're to the wood, and lost themselves therein.
Let fate's wind carry them where'er it may.
I'll now prepare mine armies. Come what might,
Our hunting-horns will sound again this night!

(Exeunt. End Act I)

ACT II

SCENE I. A part of the forest.

(Enter BOTTOM, and TITANIA, observing)

BOTTOM

'Tis perplexing, for a forest to behave as this one does, and it doth make for an impractical place to rehearse in. Met us 'neath an open copse and in short-order ascertain'd the need for a wall and moon-shine, which Snout and Starveling now take on, whereupon Peter Quince abolished all notion of mothers and fathers from th'script. He then bade me pen my suggested prologue, but no sooner had I than a rain did set upon us and washed it all away. As we, shiv'ring, stood against the storm, the earth itself leapt beneath our feet! I stumbled about 'neath the grief-stricken sky, but thick fog then formed about the wood, and mine eyes did most foully betray me. "Peter Quince!" I called, then. "Snug! Sweet Starveling!" But the forest made cruel mockery with echo and shrill laughter, and I heard no returning call. Now, the very trees which once stood still as the columns of the Parthenon shift 'neath my gaze, and shadows flit betwixt them. Aye, shadows — shadows, in the deep of night! Is't right for shadows to so behave? Mine's a good and obedient shade: it fixes itself to my heels and durst not stray; I may behind me look, expect it there — and there 'tis. This constancy does my shadow credit. Would all men were so constant as their shadow. Mine, I think, is of a particularly steadfast sort. It hath, in any event, alone stuck to me; by my friends am I forsook. O friends, why have you left me thus? This forest is a twisting, seething thing, and if it doth wish me harm, let it come upon me all at once and spare me this mocking dance!

TITANIA

Thy bravery commends thee, friend. Wherefore
Thy pilgrimage? For though I welcome thee
Within the woodland, thou art stranger in't.
(Aside) Yet stranger still the charge his presence stirs.

BOTTOM

I prithee, quit these darkling woods, for they are no place for ladies like yourself. Whence came you?

TITANIA

Fear not for me, for danger fears to tread
Those spots I deem beyond its fragile grip.
Thou think'st this forest dark? 'Tis paradise;
The wellspring of my power, throbbing bright
With unrestrained anger at my foes.
This forest is my realm, and I its queen.

BOTTOM

Your Majesty! Queen of dead-wood and cabbage-patch! Queen whose subjects are the crows and voles, whose edicts bid the cock not crow too mightily! Mightiest queen, who sleepeth on damp moss and dines on bitter leaves and river-water! A pretty queen indeed, and luckier than the salaried player, who hath the forest as her realm.

TITANIA

Thou mock'st me at thy peril. Trifle not,
For I have no mood for't. My pardon beg,
Or I shall wreak upon thee all the harms
Within mine armory of wonders. Hold!

(TITANIA creates a display of magic, which frightens a shrinking BOTTOM into staying)

BOTTOM

Pardon, pardon, a thousand pardons!

TITANIA

Thy penitence, as is, will satisfy
For now. Henceforth, with forethought guard thy speech,
For thou dost address no unfinish'd maid,
Nor e'en a fairy of the common sort,
But she who ruleth woods and shadow-moors,
And bids the stars not shine unduly bright,
And 'fore the Summer Court her dictums makes
'Neath pregnant moon: Titania, Fairy Queen.

BOTTOM

I'll gird my tongue with armor thicker than the world is wide, and seal my mouth with wooden pegs harder than a mill-stone ere I further scoff.

TITANIA

I see thou wilt. Thou findest me most vex'd,
And add thine irritations to the sum
Of my frustrations, wittingly or no.
But as it may, I have for thee a charge —
A task that only thou mayst undertake.

BOTTOM

Speak it, I pray. I serve to live.

TITANIA

In days so far pass'd as to be forgot
Was there a war 'twixt man and fairy-folk.

The fay were cunning, swift, and full of guile,
 And work'd great magic in their stake's pursuit.
 But man was cunning in a different wise,
 And was, on battle's field, well-unmatch'd;
 Their bravery and mass beyond the scope
 Of fay philosophy. At last it came:
 The day of reckoning for man and fay:
 The Clash At Tailte, which determinéd
 The conflict's resolution, and our fates.
 The fairies quickly found themselves outflank'd
 By human vigor and ferocity.
 The mortal general on the field that day
 Outwitted easily our keenest mind
 For strategy: Queen Lurline the Serene,
 And drove the fairies to abject defeat.
 So came to pass our life within this wood,
 Our numbers much reduce'd, for fairy-kind
 Hath brought forth no new life within that span
 Of time. 'Tis fortunate our span be long,
 Else fairies would have perish'd from the Earth.
 I live'd to see that day of dark defeat,
 As did we all. Recall we well the skill
 Of human generals in the art of war.
 Now war doth come to me and mine again,
 But not a one hath mettle for the fight.
 Their memories of Tailte do them ill;
 They lack the gall-shore'd stomach for command.
 A human in a place of generalship
 Wouldst grant their doleful spirits means to climb
 The walls of Troy. Thou art a man, and brave.
 Wouldst thou, o mortal, wield authority
 As if a weapon at a queen's behest?

BOTTOM

You do me honor, fair queen, but war is not among my strong points. Give me a company, and I will move them to provoke sighs, sobs, laughs, groans, exultations, and gasps — but under affect of wonder and delight. Under my tutelage, they will slay their audience, mark you — but mercifully, that they may be slain anew each performance. I am a weaver by trade, your Majesty — not a warrior. You would better make a mess-captain of Starveling.

TITANIA

I'll cease thy bleak objections; worry not
 That birth endow'd thee not with qualities

Well-suited to this task. Mine art can fill
 Like mortar gaps that birth left incomplete.
 I'll give thee all the qualities whereby
 A man doth lead an army: stubbornness,
 Harsh temper, and dependability,
 A rugged sturdiness that falters not,
 Great loyalty, and brawn that will not tire,
 And can be move'd to do great injury
 To any man who overlooks thy kick.
 With what I grant thee, thou shalt be new-made.
 Thou wast an actor; now thy lines shall be
 The ranks that soldiers form ere war's alarm.
 Thy props the drums and flags that signal troops.
 Thy theater wherever battle joins.
 Thou wast a weaver, now weave stratagems
 Instead of cloth, and may the warp and weft
 take shape within thy mind. Thou wast a man:
 Henceforth, thou shalt be...

BOTTOM

What?

TITANIA

Greater, I say.

No fiercer general known to man or beast.

BOTTOM

Then no fiercer a general shall I be in thy service. If you will but assign the role, I shall play it skillfully.

TITANIA

What is thy name?

BOTTOM

'Tis Bottom, Queen.

TITANIA

'Tis meet.

For thou art now mine army's foundation;
 The bedrock at the bottom of the stand,
 That anchors it when enemies conspire
 To make it fall. See that thou crumble'st not,
 For doing so shall well disservice me.
 Anon shall I to Bacchus make my plea,

Distorts the features of the one disposed
 To view the truth. In darkness, such a face
 When warped, may be unrecognizable.
 I am in darkness now, Demetrius,
 And I can ill abide distorted glass.

DEMETRIUS

How now, didst thou not now express desi're
 To change me for Lysander?

HELENA

Frustration

May sire indignant words, but thine art back'd
 By years of envy, and of envi'ous thoughts.
 That envy is my burden, and it weighs
 More heav'ly still when I be set upon.
 Thou canst ignore mine anger when it peaks;
 Dismiss it as a zephyr, nothing more.
 But I have no such luxury.

DEMETRIUS

How now,

I say again? Be we so intimate
 To make thy judgments suréty? Know this:
 Thou speak'st of darkness, so do I too live
 Within a shadow longer than the reach
 Of all my fortunes, triumphs, or my deeds.
 The man who casts this shadow knows it not;
 Durst not but spare a caring glance to they
 Who are denied the sun because he stands
 Within its light. We once were bosom friends:
 I and this handsome, charming, clever man.
 The acrid taste of love unjustly weigh'd,
 Of recognition measure'd to his deeds
 And thus ungiven, was a wallet's make
 When, bulging, given o'er to grateful hands.
 'Til came a one with highly prize'd esteem,
 Who woke in me all that the riverbed,
 When summer-season desiccates its banks,
 Desireth in a rush of Adam's ale.
 Thou canst not help but guess the man she love'd.
 The choice was made in moments: 'twas the man
 Who stood not in another's shadow'd gloom.
 I find no fault with her for choosing thus:

But stomach I no longer friendship's shade.
 'Twas priced too great, and still's not paid in full.
 Therefore, invoke thou not his company
 As preferable. It smacks of what hath been
 My lot since he and I first chance'd to meet,
 And aye, it pains me; 'tis a burden share'd.

HELENA

Between our tongues, we've armory enough
 To tear us both to shreds. Of what thou say'st,
 I'd not an inkling. I'll amend my speech,
 If thou wilt grant the same for me.

DEMETRIUS

I will.

We've but each other in this hated wood,
 And must present it a united front.
 Our scars may cleave us, but the say is ours
 If we be cleft together or apart.

HELENA

With sympathy our bond, we'll be as bards
 And music, indivisible in heart.
 'Gainst such as that, this forest is outmatch'd.

DEMETRIUS

What ho! The earth hath voice'd its discontent
 And lo, its lips are parted still.

HELENA

'Tis wide.

And yet we must proceed.

DEMETRIUS

I see no end

To left or right: thus to be turn'd aside
 Along its edge would leave us little hope
 Of keeping our direction uniform.

HELENA

(Peering in) I spy no end to'th drop. I feel the glow
 Of torment's flames upon my cheek; besides,
 A more miasmic air I can't recall
 As bubbles forth in wafts from in the pit.

DEMETRIUS

A most prestigious wound within the world.
Well, 'tis a shame we cannot step around,
Nor plumb the depths and climb the other side.
Of other avenues I see but one.

HELENA

Not o'er, I pray? 'Tis sixteen feet at least
From lip to lip. My legs are flower-stems
And shan't alight me.

DEMETRIUS

Aye, the spear is set.
The target place'd, the sand-line neatly drawn.
There's naught but to draw back and let it fly.
'Twas said: Do or do not, there is no try.

HELENA

This wood's no jav'lin yard.

DEMETRIUS

O that it were!
Alas, misfortune's not so kind a mistress.
If man had power o'er the stars' decree,
He'd put an end to sickness, poverty,
Ill luck in love, all bod'ly injury
Injustice, hunger, ill-usage, e'en death.
So might we banish this incision hence,
Had we the art. But we are as the sick,
And fortune hath decree'd us leapers both.

HELENA

But for this leap'rous fortune, there's the cure
Of choice, which is to move along, not through
Until by chance, we come across a third,
Avail ourselves, and thread the labyrinth.

DEMETRIUS

Survival and celerity are one
Within this madden'd world.

HELENA

'Twill be my death!

DEMETRIUS

Now founder thou upon the furthest reef
 Ere thou espiest land? Surrender thou
 Thy laurel crown to they from whence it came?
 Doth bitter love not stir within thy blood,
 "Lysander!" call, and move thee to a height
 That dwarfs the efforts of Olympia?
 Or when I thought our loves proportionate,
 Did I misjudge thee?

HELENA

Sully not my love
 With false comparison to lesser sport.

DEMETRIUS

What means this "lesser"? Thine's a pretty thing,
 As are all baubles, place'd in prominence
 One winter's time, then all forgot next spring.
 Or like a candle, bright to look upon,
 And warm to hold, but fated from the start
 To perish gently, merry to the end.

HELENA

Thine expertise is thus made evident —
 In candles, if not matters of the heart.
 For love is candle, aye, and bauble too,
 And sole, and tankard, and the swineherd's switch.
 Love's gilded vestments: radiant when don'd,
 And warm, familiar comfort to the skin.
 Love is a feast that's infinite in scope:
 Laid out upon a table with a seat
 For every human born. And they who dine
 Will find each course more varied than the last,
 And no two lovers will be served the same.
 Yet all receive the warmth of nourishment:
 A fullness of the soul and body both.
 And they who sit are brethren of the mind,
 Who recognize, in passing, those who sat
 And broke their bread at passion's heady feast.
 That's love, thou prophet. Feel it, if you can.

DEMETRIUS

If love uplifts thee, come. I choose to leap.

(DEMETRIUS leaps across the chasm)

Where are thy wings? Thy vestments fair and bright?
I'll venture onward. Follow if you can.

HELENA

Hold! Mock me if thou must, but tell me true:
Did never once my passion'd words ring clear
Within thy heart, and whisper verity?
Provoke they aught but scorn? If so they do,
Thy heart must feel a kinship with mine own,
For they are fellow pilgrims in our breasts.
I beg thee, by the love you know I hold
And feel, the same as thou, to lend thyself,
And leave me not behind, on bended knee.

DEMETRIUS

Thy well-aim'd words strike conscience 'gainst my sense,
For thwarted love's as bitter as is sweet
The blush of victory. I'll not deny
That nectar, or you'll cleanse thy tongue with bile.
Here is my hand. Now leap ye and I'll clasp't
About thine own, and pull thee an you lurch.

HELENA

Now, Helen, sure's the arrow strikes the mark.
Or so I trust Demetrius might speak.

(HELENA leaps and DEMETRIUS grabs her wrist and pulls her to safety)

DEMETRIUS

The weight of fallen sand doth on me press
And spur me onward — come, we must regain
What we have lost in dalliance: Make haste.
I'll not allow our efforts go to waste.

(Exeunt)

Scene III. Another part of the forest.

(Enter LYSANDER and HERMIA, following)

HERMIA

Lysander, Lysander, leave me not thus!

LYSANDER

Wherefore, Herm'ia? Demetrius awaits
For me somewhere within this curséd wood.
Perhaps in danger, hurt, or else unwell,
In need, perchance, of my fair-featured aid.

HERMIA

The fog hath grown so thick about, fear not:
For danger, an Demetrius she sought,
Wouldst have, to find him, just as fair a throw
As thine own love-lorn efforts; this I trow.
Nay, fairer! Danger's senses are close-kept,
And can be thereby fooled, but love's inept.
For love is blind, and blunders, ill-aware
Of his surroundings, be they fog or fair!

LYSANDER

Demetrius! (*To HERMIA*) I prithee, follow not.
They features liken to a ghastly dream
Whence, bolden'd by my love, I now awake.

HERMIA

You know me not!

LYSANDER

—O, that I knew but less!
The little I recall speaks ill enough.
Demetrius and I have, in the past,
Made quarrel — and the impetus was thee!

HERMIA

That quarrel birthéd wast of love for me!
Demetrius pursued me at the start—

LYSANDER

Am I thy rival, then?

HERMIA

Nay, just my heart!

LYSANDER

Placate me not with falsehoods! He loves thee.
That face which makes me sicken with regret
Enflames the passion of his callous heart.

What qualities therein affect him so?
 What artistry that I may not possess?
 Thy rosy cheeks? 'Tis but a rush of blood
 That of our pair, I'd put to better use.
 Thy milk-white arms? What triumphs have they seen
 That they are grown so weak? Is not my strength
 Enough to wreath mine arms in victory,
 And make of them thy plain superior?
 Thy ruby lips? But they do more than kiss —
 They open, and a sound emerges forth,
 Which would, in time, drive any list'ner mad.
 Methinks such peril be not worth the prize.

HERMIA

Enough! I perish ere I hear the rest!
 Your love, which flowed as water in your breast,
 Is lost the heat that burned in your regard,
 And, frozen, is a block both cold and hard.
 Now some cruel hammer of another heart
 Hath crack'd this love and sunder'd it apart.
 The shards of which do pierce my flesh and bone,
 And sever hope to call your name mine own.
 Yet, though this sudden falseness cause distress,
 Above it, I do wish you happiness,
 So if you with another seek to be,
 I'll want for naught but your proximity.
 And as a pilgrim to the holy word,
 I'll cleave to thee; my love be e'er interr'd.
 And that you may pursue him unafraid,
 To win Demetrius, I'll give mine aid.

LYSANDER

Thou wouldst do such a thing for me?

HERMIA

For you

I shall your quest with all mine art imbue.

LYSANDER

Thou dost make for thyself a pretty case.
 'Tis well — I shall allow thy company
 Provided — halt, for I must qualify —
 Provided that the closeness of thy self
 Doth not exceed thy current distance now.

HERMIA
I'll swear't.

LYSANDER
Then forward, to my love's embrace!

(Exit LYANDER)

HERMIA *(Aside)*
I follow but to gaze upon your face.

(Exit HERMIA)

Scene IV. Titania's encampment.

(BOTTOM, with an ass's head, stands with TITANIA among a troop of fairy soldiers.)

BOTTOM
'Tention!

FAIRY
Here, General Bottom.

BOTTOM
Retort, I bid thee.

FAIRY
Our flight holdeth fast at the fern-gully, but midnight will mark the dissolution of their charms. In sooth, I can ill divine if good or ill waits upon our efforts.

BOTTOM
Give word to prepare the charge. We'll win the day ere our horses turn to mice.

(Exit fairy. Enter a second fairy, running)

FAIRY
Hail and hark! Oberon's forces make to capture the great fairy fountain to the east! Our station'd clique can find no purchase 'gainst their halek-blades, and they do count among their number the dread pale man, for whom fairies are light sustenance.

BOTTOM
'Tis well. Reinforce thyself and with a bitter blossom return. We'll allow our enemies entrance, and trap them therein.

FAIRY

Are bitter blossoms not proscribéd by Atlantean decree?

TITANIA

The decree hath been retracted by the veteran handiwork of a fay chancellor, and bitter blossoms are again modern-legal.

FAIRY

Then I'll delay not longer.

(Exit fairy)

BOTTOM

'Tention!

BLUE FAIRY and GREEN FAIRY

Here, General Bottom.

BOTTOM

Who art thou, and what is thy pleasure?

BLUE FAIRY

Many names and guises have I, but I am known for my cobalt tresses, and some call me Malvina. I am mother to lost souls, wand'ring boys, and stray hearts.

BOTTOM

And thou?

GREEN FAIRY

I wear the same guise to no two men, but am stranger to none. Abigail Sinth is what I am called, and so mayst thou know me. Joyous revelry is my stock in trade, yet my presence leadeth men to stray and my touch doth drive them to madness, for I am a capricious spirit.

BOTTOM

If I send thee both, each will find the other unwelcome company. Thou (*indicating the BLUE FAIRY*) wilt accompany an alseid to forest's edge. There seek fresh hay, for our reserve runneth short. Thou (*indicating the GREEN FAIRY*) art a welcome guest, to aid my hardship's passing.

BLUE FAIRY

Thy will be done.

(Exit BLUE FAIRY)

GREEN FAIRY

A guest to thee, honored general? Such distinction is not for me to dream of. Idleness is a beguiling spirit, but he who indulges it reaps no grain, and, when starving for want of bread, will regret his imprudence dearly. Truly, thou wouldst find me a welcome guest at thy table until cock's crow, but thou wouldst then beseech the heavens for the good sense to have sent me on my way.

TITANIA

She speaketh goodly sense.

BOTTOM

That I cannot deny. O, that my every vice were inclined to argue thus! Thou mayst retire, Mistress Abby, I shall partake of thy company when the trumpet cries victorious in triplets.

GREEN FAIRY

At once I go on heel and toe,
The blithest spirit, to and fro!

(Exit GREEN FAIRY)

BOTTOM

I await but a word from the fairy-fountain; if all goes well, we have removed our enemy's vanguard, and may muster for one final foray into their midst while the front remaineth undermine'd. Three flights we'll send to their center, and take prisoner the king himself.

TITANIA

Nay, the danger be not worth the prize. Three fights will founder 'gainst Oberon's formations.

BOTTOM

They shall not go forth alone, but with the twin blessings of speed and cunning. E'en the finest thread may pass through a needle if 'tis aimed squarely at the eye. 'Twill advantage itself upon what mayhem its passage creates; ere Oberon can conceive the stratagem, the three flights will upon him. And wise is he who first said: Faint heart ne'er yet claim'd the bullion.

TITANIA

'Tis well-devised. Thy keen mind may spite my worries yet. In sooth, I feared a force'd retreat from my court, swept on like the autumn winds before which fallen leaves may only scatter. In the event, 'neath the forest's walnut-shells would we have scattered, folded until the tallest of us were no more than a thumb-length high. Oberon's ire is

highly stoked, but would slowly cool for want of kindling were we thus secluded. In that state, he would be moved to grant me parley.

BOTTOM

And will you so treat him?

TITANIA

Nay, his humiliation will satisfy. My temper runneth in a cool vein, well-suited to match Oberon's fire. 'Tis hard and unyielding as iron, or so it hath been quoted. Mere breaths dare lift these barbéd words to the absence of my person, but the wind is a willing courier. Truly, a ruler's greatest boon is not the imposing fist, but the well-tune'd ear.

BOTTOM

Aye, fortunate the ear that need not tarry for a chanty, but may produce one at its leisure.

TITANIA

Cold iron, general, will triumph o'er piping froth. Oberon's chastisement will be on my terms, and for that, I expect 'twill sting all the more keenly.

(Enter a third fairy, running)

FAIRY

Fair news from the front, general Bottom! Oberon, expecting reinforcement from the fairy fountain, hath advanced beyond his means. Our flights hold firm and drive the wedge betwixt them further. The rival band, like overripe cherries, did come into full-bloom prematurely, and now await our plucking, for they are well-stymied and poised at the tottering edge of defeat.

BOTTOM

Thy testimony is as the summer sun upon my breast, good fairy. Gloried victory now catches its effigy within my very eyes. Give word at once to prepare a sortie. We will lead with a strike from the ash grove, with the Dunraven clique at its head. Weave a web about their body with the rest, that the luxury of escape will be denied them.

TITANIA

My place is with Dunraven, at the head of the charge. My husband's sorcery will not suffer a test of might to any but mine. His attentions I'll turn towards myself 'til his army lies scattered about him. Get thee to the front, general. I will join thee presently.

BOTTOM

I will await your command. At your bidding, we will sally once more into the breach. Fairies, array you behind me and draw! In this hour, darkest before dawn's light, let the blade that tippeth the scale be thine. March!

(Exeunt BOTTOM, with all remaining FAIRIES behind him)

TITANIA

How all occasions do inform agreement,
 And spur my just revenge. The time draws close.
 It circles like an eagle, talons wide
 And spread for battle, wings outstretch'd and proud,
 Awaiting but the movement of the mouse
 To fold its pinions in a fleet-wing'd dive,
 And issue from its beak a valiant cry
 That mice the world o'er will hide their heads
 And count themselves that day among the lucky.
 What speaks today will lend a tongue tomorrow,
 And shape what comes, by virtue of its past.
 Within this skirmish, paradigms may fall —
 Though innocent, more casualties of war.
 Who knows what kingdom I might shape anew
 Within the rubble of our fallen notions.
 A garden, newly-harrowed, for to grow
 The seeds of potent thoughts to mighty oaks.
 The flowers of progress will be ours to pluck,
 And p'raps, in time, the flowers of love will bloom.
 But what will be their legacy? For love
 E'en in a flower's garb may spark a war.

(TITANIA regards the flower)

'Tis but the meanest thing, to work such charms
 That overturn'd a forest here tonight.
 And such a lovely thing, to work the hate
 In measure equal to the love it made.
 In sooth, 'tis bitter on the tongue my role
 In what fell tide hath swept this wood apart:
 The trees afire, the clouds asunder rent,
 And peace two centuries grown hath now been change'd
 For open war betwixt the fairy kin.
 Yet heavier upon my conscience weighs
 That but to gain advantage on my foe,
 I gave a guiltless man a vile shape
 Which he did not deserve, nor comprehend.
 A voice — but passing small — did ply me stop,
 But in my folly and my vengeant rage,
 My deafen'd ears derided conscient sense.
 For dragons of the heart are shrewder still
 Than dragons of the flesh. We fay may match
 A dragon well in combat predeclared;

In measure do we prove the worthier
 Nine times in ten. But foes within ourselves
 Who are ourselves, and know us for the knaves
 The world may see but never, stymie us.
 Immortal bodies house our mortal souls,
 As equal in their fallibility
 To those we'd hold ourselves so high above.
 And I, as fay to mortals are to kings,
 Am but this flower'd bud: a corruptor,
 Who, if her victims knew what she had wrought,
 Would likely end her, an they had the means.
 What am I, that I do not do the same?
 The charms it's laid remain the lovers' fate
 But evils hence I'll not perpetuate.

(TITANIA destroys the flower)

Scene V. Another part of the forest.

(Enter HELENA and DEMETRIUS, cautiously)

HELENA

We're through the worst, unless the worst's in wait.
 The copse has thinn'd, no more will errant arms
 With leafy fingers and hard barkéd palms
 Attempt to throttle or dismember us.

DEMETRIUS

'Twas not the meanest of the forest's woes,
 But neither its most potent obstacle.
 The light which called and bid us from the path
 To sit beneath its warmth was more subdued,
 And wast upon us ere we could prepare.
 The empty circle-stones upon the ground
 Which cause'd all things beyond its edge to fade,
 That left deep pits where sod once stake'd its claim
 Pose'd greater threat.

HELENA

The sin'uous, glassy air
 That sought our lungs and harden'd 'bout our lips
 Gave greater fright. What import rooted trunks?

DEMETRIUS

Through unity and by our mu'tual aid,
We've lasted through more tasks than Heracles,
And do not hesitate to face the next.
'Tis love that drives us; love permits us on.

HELENA

The forest's cache of horrors runneth dry.
We must be near the endpoint: falter not
And we will have our prize: Lysander me,
And thou with Hermia. Thy shoulder bleeds.

DEMETRIUS

A scratch, no more. A pine is passing swift
When it is move'd to be. 'Twas carelessness
That cause'd the wound: I'll not be hinder'd by't;

HELENA

I bid thee, let me bind't. Thine injury
Was won in my defense: I'll suff'r it not
Upon thy person. Bravery is well,
But valor's surfeit heralds tragic ends.

DEMETRIUS

Or sweet rewards, more pleasant for the pains
Afflicted in the gaining. Suffering
Is but the bitter parcel wrapp'd in hide
And soak'd in offal, which few dare approach.
'Tis those with wisdom, those with bravery,
Or those with naught but their impetuous hearts,
Who find in the unwrapping paradise
Once hidden 'neath the rags, now brought to light.

HELENA

Then speak of Heaven to Prometheus.

DEMETRIUS

I am not he.

HELENA

Nor is his burden thine.
Thy sacrifice is not ordain'd: be free,
And shore thy hardships where thou mayst. Mark me
When I do say thy fettle's my concern,

For I do care for thee, Demetrius.
 We kindred spirits, comrades in one aim
 Together walk'd through fire, over coals,
 And still remain unburn'd. 'Tis kinship's way
 To bind like souls who ferry o'er the Styx
 Within one vessel. Thus, for my concern,
 Oblige a friend, and let her tend to thee.

DEMETRIUS

My heart entreats me onward, wound or no,
 And gladly I'd obey, but as a friend
 Thou hast entreated; by my friend, I'm move'd.
 In that capacity, I've much regard
 For thee, for this hath been our crucible,
 And stood thou ev'ry moment at my breast.
 Before, I tolerated thee, but now
 I would not think to idly brush aside
 Thy smallest of concerns; for thee, I'll stay.

(DEMETRIUS sits. HELENA begins to dress the injury)

HELENA

Compeerly words oft speak unfetter'd sense.

DEMETRIUS

With weight behind: 'tis not the same in love,
 For friends with import speak, while lovers ape
 And think of nothing: so they fill their words.
 When we converse, it forms a branching path
 Of forks and splits, which I must navigate
 And pain myself in trav'ling but one course.
 I long to backtrack, but the road ahead
 Doth draw me further onward, endlessly.
 Wheree'er we end, I end there happily.

HELENA

Thy words give shape to thoughts already mine.
 What precious conversation filled the gaps
 Betwixt mad, gibbering shadows and strong winds
 Which blew us panting to the roiling moss
 Hath been its own adventure, more my like
 Than this lot.

DEMETRIUS

 If this wound must cause delay,
No company I'd rather have than thee
To while away the misdirected time.
Let us converse, ere ardor bids us on.

(HELENA finishes)

HELENA

And gladly would I, an my work remain'd.
But thou art well, or well's I may achieve.
How farést thou?

DEMETRIUS

 I judge't acceptable.
The bleeding's stopped; the pain is but an ache
Which I can treat as elders the unwise.

HELENA

Then up! The fog awaits our challenge hence,
And we'll renew it.

DEMETRIUS

 We've too long delay'd
And speech is cheap; we'll have a glut anon.
When we adventurers have won our loves
And stand encircle'd in their ferv'rous arms—
'Tis then, and not before, that we'll converse,
For any length or subject we desire.

(HELENA and DEMETRIUS begin to walk again)

DEMETRIUS

The tree-tops rattle.

HELENA

 Call to mind thine oath!
The storm's again upon us!

DEMETRIUS

 I recall't.
And gladly I fulfill't, to serve a friend.

(DEMETRIUS shields HELENA from the storm with his body until it passes)

The winter-storm has pass'd, and with't my strength.

HELENA

The storm again birth'd rain, then hail, then rock.
All that for me, thy back didst intercept?

DEMETRIUS

Mine oaths have never been the sort that break.
But e'en an if I'd never sworn, 'twas meet
I interpose'd myself thus.

HELENA

Good my friend,

How shall I pay what I am now oblige'd?

DEMETRIUS

To chase thy love and win thy happiness.
Waste not the opportunity I bought,
For I have paid, and will not be refunded.
Go, win Lysander for the both of us.

HELENA

Nay, how shall I with you not at my side?
Demetrius, bestir yourself at once!
Recall you Hermia? Did you not leap
With lighter feet than ocean foam in wind
Across a yawning chasm fathoms deep,
With naught but transcendental love your spur?
Think now on she you love, and stand anew!

DEMETRIUS

Aye, so I have, and so I will, and do.

(DEMETRIUS and HELENA kiss)

On my behalf, you have unjustly wept.
That hair-shirt's mine to wear, maintain'd and kept.
I would fain cast it off, with your esteem,
For one of cambric, made without a seam.

HELENA

Since we were youths, that cambric shirt's been spun
And daily wash'd in water scorch'd with sun.

I do forgive you your imagine'd fault,
 But none offend me — thus, I prithee halt.
 We've been bewitch'd, 'tis plain enough to see.
 'Tis you I love, not him — with clarity.

DEMETRIUS

Proves clarity my old love counterfeit
 Against the new, to which I'll fain submit.
 Then Hermia farewell! Thy love is tart
 To Helena's, who reigns within my heart.

HELENA

Our hearts have pierce'd their veils. That our eyes
 Could see as well as they, and thus surmise
 The path behind this fog. Let us be on.
 'Twill not be safe to rest until the dawn.

(Exeunt)

Scene VI. Another part of the forest, by the edge.

(LYSANDER sits by a smoking fire; HERMIA sits farther off)

LYSANDER

Despite my fingers' gentélest caress,
 The fire is but embers. How alike
 This fire is Demetrius's love,
 For both do wither ere they gather force
 Despite my tend'rest ministrations. O
 Wet wood, O shaméd, unresponsive heart!
 Thine absence both doth leave me bitter cold.

HERMIA

Milord, how burns the fire?

LYSANDER

— Poorly yet.

HERMIA

Forgive me if that news bring no upset.
 For such a fire, if built, would hardly reach
 Its heat to me as surely as thy speech.
 But if the camp I werén't forced to shun,
 Then would we both have heat, instead of none.

LYSANDER

I'd sooner brave the frigid winter's scorn
And perish gripp'd within its hoary grasp
Than strike my body's flint against thy steel.
Seek out another for to test thy charms.

HERMIA

'Tis true in metaphor, we oft do speak,
But in this case, my words are not oblique.
Thou speak'st of a body's flint and steel,
Yet more can I achieve an they be real.
Recall thou not my skill with wood and spark?
But call me close; I'll vanquish back the dark.

LYSANDER

I did misunderstand. I prithee, try.
Thou mayst approach. I do suspend thy oath.

HERMIA

I give thee thanks.
(*HERMIA starts a fire*) Now, sit thou by the flame.

LYSANDER

What marvel this?

HERMIA

No marvel but the same
As when upon the river-bank in chill
Of winter, thou didst sit in grievous ill,
Thy cloth soak'd through, thy spirit soon to fly,
No wood or fuel to form a remedy.
But labor'd I 'till my crude tools found spark
To drive away the bone-chill and the dark,
And pressed thee 'twixt my body and the fire.
Warmth on two fronts — thus did the cold expire.
So history herself commends my deeds
As do relate to fire's min'ral seeds.
Didst thou remember aught of this? No?

LYSANDER

Nay.

The memories are marsh-mist in my mind,
Substantial as a spray upon my cheek.

As thou didst tell the tale, they took shape
 Again, but ere they did they were restraint
 When wild abandon gives us o'er; withdrawn.

HERMIA

The autumn ere that winter swept the land,
 The trees did cast their leaves about like sand.
 All red and yellow, but not half as bright
 As we were, with the force of our delight.
 The chamberlain dispatch'd to seek us found
 Us in the trees as oft as on the ground.
 I do recall a tree whose branches made
 A perfect love-seat underneath the shade
 Of a great limb. How vigorous we'd move
 The branches 'til bright leaves fell from above
 Upon the heads of noble passers-by.
 Then, when the pile grew larger, from the sky
 We'd plummet, and we'd land where we did start.
 Both tangled: limb with limb, and heart with heart.

LYSANDER

Thy words, like puzzle-boxes, interlock
 With all my mind's phantasms, and restore
 Them to their fullness. Please, if there be more
 Of these sweet memories, I prithee tell.

HERMIA

Sweet Demeter outstretched her gentle hand,
 And brought the air of spring upon the land.
 And fresh-content from supper rested we
 Outside the walls of Athens, in the lea.
 We lay supine on nature's verdant bed,
 Thy shoulder welcome purchase for my head,
 And thought of nothing but that nothingness
 That occupies young heads. Thou must needs guess:
 What creature came upon us in that pose
 And started as we, seeing it, arose?

LYSANDER

My tongue's a brand; mine answer's at the tip.
 The scene remakes itself in my mind's eye.

HERMIA

'Twas—

LYSANDER

Spoil me not! My pride will not permit
Thine aid. I see the olive tree, and us
Beneath it. Some yards off, the creature stirs.
Its nose doth twitch — its ears be long — a hare!

HERMIA

A hare it was. Doest thou recall the rest?

LYSANDER

My mind is blank.

HERMIA

Then we'll forego the test.
To see the hare did bring me joy so grand,
I wished at once to have it in my hand.
Thou saw'st this wish writ plain upon my face,
And slowly stood, then darted thence. The race
Was fierce contested, rabbit against man,
Which one might prove the better? I began
To think thee well defeated, and I wept
But thou didst then return, thy promise kept,
And squirming in thy arms the hare I yearn'd
To keep. And with that rabbit we return'd
To Athens. She became a lovéd pet.
Her name be Clover, and she livést yet.

LYSANDER

How eagerly these memories return!
Diverted once the rivers of my thought,
But now the arid banks begin to swell.
Ah, Clover! She is brown, with flecks of white.
And so agreeable to human touch.
How could I forget her? Do continue.
My riverbanks now long to overflow.

HERMIA

Lysander, I could fill eternity
With all the tales I have of thou and me.
Yet some of them shine brighter than the rest,
And of them all, this next one is the best.
Oh, but thou must recall — wouldst not forget —
The story of the day our lips first met.

LYSANDER

I might have known. Harlot, hast thou no shame?
 Abusing for thy gain my breach'd mind?
 Tell not this tale; I do not wish to hear
 Whatever falsehood thou wouldst surely spin.
 I never love'd thee, so I kiss'd thee not.
 Demetrius is where my heart lies scorn'd,
 But not with thee, O no, Never with thee.
 This partnership is ended. Get thee hence.
 I need no slattern's aid to win my love.

HERMIA

What cruelty this? Thy memories cut clean,
 That knew the tender sweetness pass'd between
 Our lips? The moments shared in privacy?
 It is too great to fade to amity.
 Your kisses, more than sugar, more than cream
 A covenant most sacred were, a dream
 That promise'd more! Better that promise crack
 And shatter than its bonds fade slow to slack!
 I care not what you do, or where you go,
 Or who you choose, but this plain fact I know:
 What pass'd between us happen'd! I maintain
 Such moments leave a mark, at least — a stain,
 To prove it once was real. E'en a pox
 Doth mark the skin, though frank delight it mocks.
 So think our time a blessing or a blight,
 I do demand that proof! It is not right
 That love should be forgot! It meant too much
 To 'vaporate like mist! Our lips did touch.
 If memory betrays how they were warm'd
 I'll vivify your thoughts with one, new-form'd,
 That some like memory of us be born.
 I care not if it prompts your joy or scorn.
 It is enough that it is yours to hold
 And keep — I must press on whilst I am bold —

(She kisses him)

Now cast me from your company, my heart.
 'Twas worth it all; If't please you, I'll depart.

(LYSANDER sits in a stupor)

Yet, as I have transgress'd already, I
Can see no harm in sinning twice, thereby—

(She kisses him again, and is surprised when he responds)

Lysander—

LYSANDER
Hush.

HERMIA
I cannot—

(HERMIA and LYSANDER kiss)

LYSANDER
I recall
Some multitude of things.

HERMIA
How many?

LYSANDER
All.
My love, there is a coldness in my bones
That fire cannot touch, nor I alone
Rid myself of; therefore, on bended knee
I ask — nay, beg — your presence close to me.

Scene VII. A small clearing in the wood.

(SNOUT is bent over a pile of twigs, trying to start a fire. STARVELING, FLUTE, QUINCE, and SNUG watch hopefully. Angrily, SNUG throws his implements aside)

SNOUT
Devil take't!

FLUTE
Again, Snout, success ne'er were won through lack of trying.

SNOUT
An I make a thousand attempts, th'wood shan't dry for the thousand-and-first.

SNUG

But one hour past, saw I a flock of fire-bats among the copse. Now by Jove, say I, what lunacy is't when bats will merrily combust whilst wood stayeth obdurate?

STARVELING

This lanthorn doth the horned moon present;
Myself the man i' the moon do seem to be.
With undergrowth is this, my thorn-bush meant,
And faithful hound —

FLUTE

Tush in thy teeth! To rehearse now's unseasonable.

QUINCE

Rehearsal's ne'er unseasonable. Study on! 'Twill be well-rewarded come performance-day.

FLUTE

Doth our present circumstance suggest rehearsal to you, Quince? Why, what part? Th' piercing, unnatural cold? Our growing appetite? Th' hazard-ful wood that swalloweth all assay at direction? I'faith, with what vision lookest thou that —

SNOUT

Hold! We are beheld. I feel the eye of maleficence upon me — it unsettleth my stomach. 'Tis beyond the tree-line.

STARVELING

Aye, moving past the clearing. Here, Snug, feel — my brow's awash in sweat.

SNOUT

I'm nigh out o' my wits, stricken through with fright.

QUINCE

Thou'rt not.

SNOUT

Nay, I am.

QUINCE

Then seal thy fright behind close'd lips and keep the key about you. Do but pretend courage, I prithee. If one among us catcheth fright, 'twill spread like sickness.

SNUG

Peter Quince, I too am greatly fear'd. Mark my quaking.

QUINCE

Fie, hang't all.

SNUG

'Tis our postponed action does't. There's naught for our hands 'til morn: lacking vocation, our minds cast about for distraction and find fear. The shadow moveth not, but in boredom we cannot help but conjure't thus. Therefore, let us occupy ourselves and through a game abridge the night-hours.

FLUTE

I know no games.

SNOUT

I've one — 'tis the game of "I espy". I'll first.

I espy

With mine eye

Something black.

QUINCE

'Tis the night.

SNOUT

Aye, well guess'd. I'll again.

I espy

With mine eye

Another thing 'tis black.

QUINCE

Hast thou other games?

STARVELING

Mayhap we ought sing.

ALL

Nay, nay, sing not.

STARVELING

I've a winsome voice, and couple'd with't a most melodious and note-tune'd ear.

FLUTE

Ope thy sack-hole and I'll fly. Then you'll have but four to search for two.

SNUG

We ought begin the search again. Bottom may be peril'd, and hath no companions to keep him company.

FLUTE

We've search'd until foot-cramps plague'd us: we'll make no progress 'til morning. He's like as not found his way home and is e'en now putting a teapot-full to roil, and thinking on what's come of us.

QUINCE

Let us rehearse our play to while the time: 'twill drive out the fright.

SNOUT

'Tis no game, but good as any, say I.

SNUG

And I.

FLUTE

I'll not, I think.

STARVELING

O, be a sport, Flute.

FLUTE

Well...

STARVELING

Thou'lt look the fool being odd-man-out among us.

FLUTE

O very well, but I warn I shan't enjoy it.

QUINCE

By moonlight mark your lines and stand thus.

SNOUT

Where shall we begin?

QUINCE

Why, at the beginning, and continue 'til we've found the end, whereupon we'll stop.

STARVELING

Marry, begin.

QUINCE

Gentles, perchance you wonder at this show;
But wonder on, till truth make all things plain.
This man is Pyramus —

FLUTE

Omit that, for we've no Pyramus.

QUINCE

We do but rehearse; we will by performance have our Pyramus return'd.

SNUG

Why, whose death will prompt Flute end his life?

FLUTE

I'll whisper to no man, but Snout's fingers only.

STARVELING

I say without Bottom, this play hath no Pyramus, and without Pyramus, this play hath no bottom.

FLUTE

Nay, no top neither.

QUINCE

Let pass Pyramus's lines for the moment: we'll refresh him at next meeting. Now peace;
I'll continue in my vein.
This man is Pyramus, if you would know;
This beauteous lady Thisby is certain.
This man, with lime and rough-cast, doth present
Wall, that vile Wall which did these lovers sunder;
And through Wall's chink, poor souls, they are content
To whisper. At the which let —

SNOUT

How long must I stand thus? My arms are up-and-down with cramps.

QUINCE

Then thou mayst hold thyself in another stance.

SNOUT

Nay, to hold myself else-wise would not suggest a wall. I must suggest a wall.

QUINCE

Thy prologue will suggest the wall; thou need'st but stand.

SNOUT

I'll sit, for my legs begin to ache, and suggest the wall in comfort.
In this same interlude it doth befall
That I, one Snout by name —

QUINCE

Hold, hold, there's more of mine to say. Await thy cue.

FLUTE

Nay, 'tis long enough already. Move past, move past.

SNUG

Aye, move past, I wish to roar. I have a roar within me now that bellows to be let loose.

QUINCE

I must be sure my lines are fix'd within my brain —

FLUTE

Thy dedication is thy proof; we'll require none of it. 'Tis mine entrance.
O wall, full often hast thou heard my moans,
For parting my fair Pyramus and me!
My churl lips have often kiss'd thy stones,
Thy stones with lime and hair knit up in thee.
Pyramus I perceive not, I'll peer again — Peter Quince, Pyramus doth not keep
appointment.

QUINCE

Proceed, picture thy love thence speaking forth his lines, and deliver thee thine unto the
picture.

FLUTE

They are jumbled, what be my cues? Ah, I do kiss the wall, that much do I recall. And
sith Pyramus doth lack presence, Wall will I address: I will meet thee at Ninny's tomb.

SNOUT

Thus have I, Wall, my part dissemble'd so;
And, being done, thus Wall away doth go.

QUINCE

Snug, now comes thine entrance.

SNUG

You, ladies, you, whose gentle hearts do fear
 The smallest monstrous mouse that creeps on floor,
 May now perchance both quake and tumble here,
 When lion rough in wildest rage doth roar.
 Then know that I, one Snug the joiner, am
 A lion-fell, nor else no lion's dam;
 For, if I should as lion come in strife
 Into this place, 'twere pity on my life.

SNOUT

Odds, 'twas well-deliver'd.

SNUG

'Tis not but the half-part, for there's a great roar building up within me that shan't long
 be deny'd. I tremble holding it.

STARVELING

Peter Quince, I've a great worry about me. 'Tis decided I play moon-shine, that I'll own.
 'Tis a good part, and one I embrace without complaint. Yet if natural moon shineth
 above, it leaveth little room for me. I'll withdraw this rehearsal.

QUINCE

Nay, the part of the moon's of great import. Close thine eyes to the moonlight and begin,
 imagine it is absent.

STARVELING

This lanthorn doth the hornéd moon —

(STARVELING trips and falls with a crash)

FLUTE

There is the moon knock'd from the sky.

SNUG

(Roaring the mightiest of roars) Ro-ar!

QUINCE

Shame, thou hast preceded thy cue.

SNUG

Pardon, I could no longer hold't.

QUINCE

Collect thyself, we will begin again from Thisby's entrance.

STARVELING

'Twas the most fearsome roar that e'er mine eyes beheld.

SNUG

All the roar's descendants will be diminish'd in stature, I fear — the best is past.

(Enter RAJ, observing)

FLUTE

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

SNUG

(Roaring) Ro-ar!

(FLUTE runs off)

STARVELING

Aye, now Pyramus must enter.

(FLUTE returns)

FLUTE

I see no Pyramus, thus I say he found his doom in lion's jaws. I was sorely frightened by the beast's approach, but do return, that you mayst observe mine eyelid's dew.

This cherry nose,

These yellow cowlike cheeks,

Are gone, are gone:

Lovers, make moan:

His ears were green as leeks.

O Sisters Three,

Come, come to me,

With hands as pale as milk;

Lay them in gore,

Since you've gone ashore

With shears as thin as silk.

Tongue, not a word:

Come, trusty sword;

Come, blade, my breast imbrue:

(Stabs herself)

And, farewell, friends;

Thus Thisby ends:

Adieu, adieu, adieu.
(Dies)

STARVELING
 There, lovers both are dead, we've reach'd the ending.

SNOUT
 Th' epilogue, man! Th' epilogue!

ALL
 Aye, th' epilogue!

QUINCE
 Lo, now in bloodéd gore dost Thisby lie,
 With luckless breast her honéd bodkin's sheath.
 Beside her, Pyramus "adieu" didst cry,

FLUTE
 He did not.

QUINCE
 To pains an unfair lot doth oft bequeath.
 Yet with the lovers' death, so dies the wall,
 Whose stony substance cleft two tribes between.
 That wicked edifice, flag-stones and all,
 Is raze'd by lovers' fathers, now serene.
 For ne'er was story of more misery
 Than that of Pyramus and his Thisby.

SNOUT
 A mote of dust hath crawl'd itself into the recesses of mine eye.

STARVELING
 A most magnificent rehearsal, I trow, fit to play before royalty. Peter Quince, if thou art not made knight for this, never call me tailor.

RAJ
 What wonders these? I was each moment transfix'd, but by what force I know not. Who are you? You bear the shapes of mortals men, but mortal men you cannot be, for you have the craft of fairies about you.

SNUG
 Jove save us, an apparition!

FLUTE

Nay, a child. Off my supports, or I swear I'll show thee th'familiar slant.

QUINCE

Art thou mislaid?

RAJ

(To SNUG) I prithee, roar again, it gave me such tremor in my soul that I can scarce believe't.

SNUG

'Twill perhaps come upon me again. Stay close and thou mightst again hear it. Aye, right off I took him for a sensible fellow.

QUINCE

Thou'rt welcome in our campment, though we've no fire built. We'll do thee no ill service; we are but honest tradesmen, with an honest craft — we are merchants of laughter and woe, shapers of most tragedic comedy, virtuosos of the cosmic stage. Journeyman actors are we, in a band, who strive but to entertain if we cannot do else.

RAJ

Have you more craft to ply? Forsooth, I can think of ill else. Thine art of pretense is meat and drink to one who ne'er before hunger'd for such delicacies.

QUINCE

You heard the lad, Flute. Give show — from th'first, for I say thou art as lithe a gentlewoman as e'er I saw.

FLUTE

Nay, I'll not, well, p'raps a jot of't.
O wall, full often hast thou heard my moans,
For parting my fair Pyramus and me!
My cherry lips have often kiss'd thy stones,
Thy stones with lime and hair knit up in thee.

(Enter BOTTOM, flanked by fairies)

BOTTOM

I see a voice: now will I to the chink,
To spy an I can hear my Thisby's face.

STARVELING

Bewitch'd.

BOTTOM

Thisby!

FLUTE

Who calls there?

BOTTOM

Nay, thy line's another, I think. Where is the wall?

SNOUT

Not on my life.

STARVELING

It's here for our teeth, say I. A spir't made off with one o' mine when I was but a lad, and left me but tuppence in recompense.

SNOUT

He'll none of thy teeth: they're not worth tuppence.

QUINCE

How do you, spir't? Wherefore dost haunt us?

BOTTOM

(Aside) Can they know me not? Madly have I sought your company, from point of splitting.

QUINCE

Is't e'en so?

BOTTOM

Wonders have transform'd me, wonders I can scarce begin to give voice to. O, uproot thine arms, embrace me as a fellow!

(RAJ attempts to exit)

BOTTOM

But thou, master Raj, stay put or I'll see thee contrite. Thy mistress is sore displeas'd with thee. Lay hands on him, but not roughly.

(Fairies restrain RAJ)

Now, I say this tires me, no greeting from among th'company. One among you, do me the courtesy of crying "Bottom!" and giving me as much as th'tightclasp 'round the chest. What's overcome you?

QUINCE

“Bottom,” sayest thou?

RAJ

I wish’d but to see the woods at night, and to gambol among tree-trunks freely, without escort. And lo, saw I —

BOTTOM

’Twas soft ‘bout th’middle; there’s war on.

QUINCE

Said thou “Bottom?”

BOTTOM

Aye, “Bottom,” I said. An I must give repeat, I’ll instruct my warders clean thine ears.

FLUTE

Bottom ne’er wast so much an ass as thee.

BOTTOM

An ass, you see? I’ll show you an ass, i’faith.

SNOUT

Aye, thou dost yet.

BOTTOM

O vexation! I’ve not time to box hinge’d wood-dummies with thee. ’Tis war on; th’compound needs but I to make a final assault. Only my love for you stay’d my plans so long, but you stifle’t, you do, sirrah. Aye, and you, Flute, thou pinch-neck. Raj, Titania bid me fetch thee, and through me speaks words of chastisement that are not for present ears. Wore I thy cloth, I’d clasp my hands and keep close eye on the worms o’the isle. Reflect on thy wrongs and do not again flee.

RAJ

Aye, General.

BOTTOM

And for you — I’ll have words with you anon, an I survive the coming battle. My heart’s made heavy by your ill-use now I am above your station. But I’ll prove in time that I am the same frolicsome, fair-face’d Bottom still as e’er I was. Fare you well. Lance-corporal Mustard-seed!

FAIRY

Here, General.

BOTTOM

Give word along the line: none of ours may truck with this band, for they are under my protection.

FAIRY

I'll see it done.

BOTTOM

Then make with haste for the queen's bower, for dawn will soon alight. And grant their twig-box a lighted cinder, for by their tambourine-bones I see 'tis sore-needed.

(A fairy starts a fire in the kindling. Exeunt BOTTOM, RAJ, and fairies)

FLUTE

I feel that I have seen madness.

SNOUT

'Tis late enow to reel any man's senses and make the mundane appear madness. A midsummer night's vision, say I, 'tis all — we'll have it forgot by morning.

STARVELING

Then whence came this fire?

SNOUT

That point's but a feather against the weight of my lids. Let's lay our cloaks by it and make sense of 'tall anon.

QUINCE

We must set a guard, or risk more apparitions.

SNUG

All who wish Peter Quince as our guard, raise hands.

(All raise their hands but QUINCE)

QUINCE

Well then, a pox on the lot of ye.

STARVELING

I'm like to sleep an hundred year.

(All sleep but QUINCE)

QUINCE

(Singing) In Amsterdam, I met a maid,
Mark well what I do say.

In Amsterdam, I met a maid,

And she was mistress of her trade.

I'll go no more a-roving with you, fair maid.

A-roving, a-roving —

Now Hypnos is upon me, but I must keep watch. I'll for a few winks shut my eyes, then
watch anew, refresh'd.

(QUINCE sleeps. Enter HELENA and DEMETRIUS, weary with tiredness. Seeing the fire, they curl up by it and sleep. Enter HERMIA and DEMETRIUS opposite, also weary. They too see the fire and sleep by it, on the other side, not seeing their counterparts.)

Scene VIII. The edge of the forest.

(The Mechanicals lie sleeping on the ground. On one side of them sleep DEMETRIUS and HELENA, and on the other, LYSANDER and HERMIA. Fanfare. Enter THESEUS and HIPPOLYTA, dressed for battle, flanked by guards)

THESEUS

Go, one of you, find out the forester,

For there is mischief in this neighb'ring wood.

The watchman hath reported heavy storms

That wrack more locally than storms are wont.

The trees have risen, and with ghostly stride,

Array'd themselves defensively about.

Dank fog, an ill presage, doth newly blow

About an ever-roiling forest floor.

This supernatural hand hath force'd mine own,

And so I answer, army at my back.

My queen and I, foremost in battle's arts

Within all Athens, now do foremost stand,

Equip'd with blades from cold iron freshly forge'd,

And brace'd for battle 'gainst all types of foe,

To pacify what charms have swept the wood.

Behind us, men of Athens in their prime:

The peak of sporting prowess and hot blood,

Who stand as order'd, thick as men are tall.

Thus do we face this eldritch incident:

With steel back'd by all we may arrange

'Gainst mortal happenstance.

(The soldier returns)

One moment hence,
And you'd have miss'd the mark. Call forth the hounds.

HIPPOLYTA

I was with Heracles and Cadmus once,
When in a wood of Crete they bay'd the bear
With hounds of Sparta: never did I hear
Such gallant chiding: for, besides the groves,
The skies, the fountains, every region near
Seem'd all one mutual cry: I never heard
So musical a discord, such sweet thunder.

THESEUS

My hounds are bred of Cephalus' kind;
The pups of Laelaps, sire'd before the bust
Of that most peerless hunter grace'd the stars
In marble'd stiffness. These are noble pups,
Who each possess their mother's divine mote,
And are, in turn, attune'd to hidden walks
And revels which may dance upon the edge
Of mortal comprehension. Bright their eyes,
High-prick'd their ears, their noses ever twitch.
These selfsame mongrels shall our vanguard be,
And 'gainst immortal harm we'll be forewarn'd —
Forearm'd if luck be with us. Now advance!

(THESEUS sees the gathering of sleepers)

But who are these? Not natives, I'll presume.

HIPPOLYTA

Their mein bespeaks familiarity
As if in echo, from a recent past.

THESEUS

These are the lovers 'broil'd in dispute —
Those good Egeus bid me separate
Together lie; the other two are close,
But distant: 'twixt them, five in apron-garb
Whose faces are unknown to me.

HIPPOLYTA

This pair

Hath fled Egeus' mandate for the grace
Of sylvan equity. I cannot say
What bid these others join their company.

THESEUS

Sound them awake. I'll hear them testify.

(Another fanfare, louder. HERMIA stirs)

HERMIA

My dreams blush green at my reality,
And plunge themselves at once one fathom more.

HIPPOLYTA

No dream; Midsummer night has come and gone.
The day hath drawn: you stand within't

HERMIA

Alive!

Lysander, love, we are deliver'd! Wake!

(LYSANDER stirs, as do SNUG and FLUTE)

SNUG

O, my back.

FLUTE

Thou hast seen fit to curse thy back long's I've known thee. 'Twill not have been made worse by damp earth and ferns.

SNUG

I' faith, 'tis tender.

(SNUG and FLUTE shake the other Mechanicals awake. LYSANDER notices THESEUS and HIPPOLYTA and kneels)

LYSANDER

Milord. You find me insubordinate.
For that, I plead your mercy and your ear.

THESEUS

Arise, Lysander. I come not for thee,

But for my peoples' sake, those lodge'd nearby,
 Whose livelihoods depend on placid trees
 And limpid welkin. I'll deliberate,
 And in due time decide thy punishment.
 More urgent matters now upon us press.
 You pass'd the night within the wood's embrace?

HERMIA

No madder night since Cithaeron's revels
 Hath dreamtide's satellite presided o'er.

THESEUS

Then tell me all.

HERMIA

 It almost seems a dream.
 Methinks I see these things with parted eye,
 When everything seems double — yet 'twas truth
 If thou art here with army to assault
 The woodland glades that did so trouble us.

LYSANDER

Selene's rays birth'd lunacy in us.
 Hate thaw'd to love and friendships long-held waned.
 Demetrius was to the rest of us
 In madness as an tiger 'mongst the does.

HERMIA

'Twas not much more than yours, I guarantee.
 Or lest you do forget — you forsook me.

LYSANDER

A fault I swear to never make again.

HERMIA

Fay wiles held thy reason 'gainst its will,
 And only now release it.

THESEUS

 In thy words,
 Confusion rests: the more you clarify,
 The muddier the picture in my mind.
 From the beginning.

LYSANDER

All's a dreamlike state.

HIPPOLYTA

Permit them time to reap their memories,
Dust them, arrange them chronologic'ly,
And melt away the fog that shrouds clear minds.

THESEUS

Well-council'd: Youths, corral your wayward thoughts.
Thy rival thither may with clearer speech
Dispel uncertainty's hallucinations.

(THESEUS shakes DEMETRIUS awake, which wakes HELENA)

DEMETRIUS

Milord, you find me disadvantage'd.

THESEUS

Rise,
And claim advantage, for thy rival's caught.
He Athens sought to flee with Hermia,
But she'll not now escape her husband's vow.
Go thence and claim her.

HELENA

By the love you swore,
You'll not, upon thy life.

DEMETRIUS

I must decline.
My heart and Egeus now disagree
On who I am to marry — I was blind
To love's true face; my love to Hermia,
As melted as the snow, seems to me now
As the remembrance of an idle gaud,
Which in my childhood I did dote upon;
And all the faith, the virtue of my heart,
The object and the pleasure of mine eye,
Is only Helena. To her, my lord,
Was I betroth'd ere I saw 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

And I shall honor it. The compact's seal'd.
For love as I see here should not be slave
To fatherhood's design. Lysander, too,
Will have my sanction at the altar's base.
Is't not just, fair Hippolyta?

HIPPOLYTA

Your rule

Is mark'd by wisdom's tenderhearted touch,
And for't will you be praise'd. How came you hence
In company with these unfortunates?

DEMETRIUS

I know them not.

HELENA

Nor I.

THESEUS

Then soon you shall.

Ho, craftsmen! Prithiee introduce yourselves!

QUINCE

'Tis an honor to meet you, m'lord. I am but a humble craftsman, a carpenter, and these are my actors.

THESEUS

What carpenter hath actors in employ?

(A mighty flash and roar of thunder. Mechanicals and lovers cower. THESEUS and HIPPOLYTA draw. Enter OBERON and PUCK, fleeing, followed by TITANIA, BOTTOM, and a host of fairies. OBERON finds his escape blocked by THESEUS' army, and is now boxed in. Mortals watch in amazement)

OBERON

If Robin hath a fetch to grant escape,
I'll grant thee pardon for thy clumsiness.

PUCK

E'en bags of tricks have bottoms.

TITANIA

Stand ye still,

And I'll reward you: keep him in his place.
 Thou hast, O king, the Wilis met tonight:
 Thy dance is at an end, thy war and reign
 Aren't overlong behind. On bended knee
 Prostrate thyself, with oath to pacify,
 And we'll discuss surrender and its terms.
 Thou art outfought, outwitted, and outplay'd.

OBERON

I'll not to my own wife cede dominance.

TITANIA

'Twas never thine to cede.

PUCK

I beg of you,

Kind master, bear with reticence this slight,
 Or we may be ill-use'd.

OBERON

Thine offering

Of peace is but mine own subservience.
 I cast it from me as a lump of coal:
 From fire-pit fresh, still smoldering within.

TITANIA

Fie, truly art thou starve'd for lack of barbs,
 If thou wouldst hone dishonor long-decay'd:
 Scavenge'd from corpses long since lost to time
 That should stay so; Tam Lin was my mistake,
 And I have paid in contemplative nights
 That broke to dawn above my reddened eyne.
 Dost raise that shame as weapon 'gainst me now?
 'Tis meager, and will save thee not.

OBERON

Reflect

Upon that circumstance which bids thee doubt.
 Reflect! Doth not it match thy present state?
 The mortal changeling boy, o'er whom you rule,
 Who is by rights another's? Thy mistake,
 Which lingers like a poison in thy mind,

Will be compounded in thy folly's mark.
 Give up the boy as thou didst not Tam Lin
 Lest conscience sicken thee to even death.

TITANIA

A worthy gambit! Shadow-king indeed,
 To work such subtlety upon my qualms
 That I didst turn mine ear — though fleetingly —
 To thy concerns. Unseen in thy design,
 Unseelie in thy methods. And I say
 Unseemly too, in thy chicanery.
 The boy's my charge, entrusted to my care
 By mother's dying wish: 'tis not for thee
 To "taken babe!" cry, beat outrage's drums,
 And laud thyself as virtue's guardian.
 A more self-serving cause I can't conceive.

OBERON

Self-serving is this war. Thy stubbornness
 Hath sever'd countless fairy lives in twain,
 Left scar'd our home, our very livelihood,
 Upended social order, fracture'd trust,
 And now reveal'd ourselves to humankind,
 Those butchers who at Tailte curst our race
 To desperate obscurity. In stride
 With thee doth march one of their breed,
 Whose stratagems have sap'd my peoples' will
 With their brutality. What price was bought
 Thy changeling's ownership? 'Tis but one boy
 I wish'd to have as servant, nothing more.

TITANIA

'Tis not the boy I'd lose if to thy claim
 I ceded, but mine own sovereignty,
 Respect from those who grant it, liberty,
 And standing as thy equal in all things.
 These things seem not like much to who from birth
 Possess them; those who find them later on
 Well know them for the treasure that they are;
 Will fight and bleed and strive and die for them.
 A line I drew before me, through the moss,
 And thou hast overstep'd it, Oberon.
 Thou wilt but kneel — and I should use thee worse
 For all the wrongs I've suffer'd by thy will,

But mercy holds its sway within my heart.

.
The winter staff is none but thine to raise:
Shun mercy's touch and feel displeasure's chill,
Or come into the light; reclaim thy crown,
And rule as king of fairies, at my side.

OBERON

The changeling boy?

TITANIA

The boy remains with me.

OBERON

Attempt once more: that outcome may not be.
He's destin'd to my court; my heart is set.

TITANIA

I hold the upper hand, lest you forget.

OBERON

Ere thou and thine do bring your prize to ground,
I'll show you well how bites a corner'd hound.

PUCK

Milord, she's wroth. I prithee tempt her not,
Nor beard her in her lair. 'Twas shrewdly fought,
But I would rather life than —

OBERON

—Hold thy peace!

Thy mind is wasted on that idle tongue.
Titania, come! But this pronouncement know:
I'll not to my defeat gracefully go.

(TITANIA motions and her fairies step forward. At a motion from THESEUS, his soldiers step forward as well to meet them)

THESEUS

No further bloodshed will I tolerate
Until I ascertain who holds the right
Of this dispute. Speak forth who keeps your laws,
And I will add my soldiers to their cause.

OBERON

I did but ask that —

TITANIA

I was beset by —

THESEUS

Hold! You, sir, proceed.

OBERON

My wife doth have an Ind'ian servant boy,
 A changeling human, orphan'd as a babe.
 No sweeter boy did walk, nor comelier.
 A treasure of the forest, he: a prize
 Too great to hold for any but a king.
 She did resist when I but ask'd of her
 To grant this boy into my company,
 And made grave sport of my benevolence
 To mortal lovers. She then raise'd her arm
 And magic both against my rulership,
 Which ended as unfolds before thy sight.
 I charge thee by the bond we share as kings
 To end this upstart reign, by —

THESEUS

I have heard

All that I wish'd to hear: incite me not.
 I'll facts and only facts. Now, lady, speak.

TITANIA

'Twas charge'd to me, that boy. In mother's death
 Was voice'd that fervent wish. 'Tis for her sake
 I serve as fairy godmother to he
 Who, though a changeling boy, is of true blood,
 And upright. 'Twas my husband's wish I quit
 Mine oath and be forsworn. To press his case,
 His servant — who stands quiv'ring at his side —
 He dispatch'd to lay magic 'pon mine eyes;
 Ensorcel me to love what magic bid.
 No meaning hold the vows he softly spoke
 'Neath wooded lid, Aurora our love's witness.
 A slight with centuries' weight rejoinder begs.
 I did but echo Themis in mine acts.
 O Queen, if ever wert thou friend to wives
 Whose husbands overbear them, bend the ear
 Of thine to aid —

THESEUS

My judgment is mine own.
 I've heard thy testimony — comes the fork,
 Where one path taken closes off the rest
 Forevermore to be a mystery.
 Yet one must walk one path: to stop's to die,
 And hesitation's rarely practical,
 Though always all too easy; face'd with choice,
 Self-incapacity's a safer bet.

Fay monarchs, I hold power over you,
 Because my weight, if push'd to either side,
 Will shift the balance thusly. Thus, 'tis force
 That weights my words, compels you grasp at them
 Like drowning men to flotsam. Yet if I spake
 Without the instrument an army grants,
 With naught but wisdom forge'd by tribulation,
 I start to wonder: would those words take root?
 If 'twixt thy camps some neutral earth were found,
 Would it be seize'd and won, or cast aside
 In favor of your war's continuance?

OBERON

What sayest thou?

THESEUS

'Tis peace I offer you.
 A promise I'll extract: your binding oaths
 To hold my counsel just and sacrosanct,
 And sway not from its edicts or demands.
 The oath of royalty will hold, I trust.
 I'll for thy faith give solemn guarantee
 Of compromise, fair-weighted and detach'd.
 So think on it, but hold this in your minds:
 Today, my love and I conjoin our souls.
 The promise of this day did brush our lids,
 And fill our slumber with tranquility.
 Woke we expecting gay festivities
 And holy union, not calamity.
 'Tis not with joy we wear this panoply,
 But in employment of our sacred charge:
 To be the first 'twixt Athens and despair.
 Thy spat hath steel'd and sharp'd our wedding-day,
 And every minute spent here doth delay

Our matrimony that same minute more.
 If't please'd me, I'd discard this settlement,
 And choose my victor with a show of blades
 And demonstration swift. As I am just
 And good of heart, I've not of yet. Be warn'd:
 What tests good humor may extend that sway
 To understanding and integrity.

OBERON
 How will thee, wife?

TITANIA
 To Theseus's court
 Come discords nation o'er for settlement.
 His even hand hath grown beyond the walls
 Of Athens. An he fairness guarantees,
 I'll bloodshed end; his edict I'd accept,
 For writ of trust is not such worthy proof
 As Theseus of Athens with his word.

THESEUS
 My thanks. But two like pledges must there be.

OBERON
 Allow me my delib'rance.

HIPPOLYTA
 If a prompt
 Thou needest, I'll deliver it point-first.
 Naught but thy vow will then deliver thee.

OBERON
 Titania's words as to thy character
 Will I o'erswear. They cannot be gainsaid.
 I'll swear, conditional on equity.

TITANIA
 We both have done't

THESEUS
 Four lovers fled my walls
 But one night heretofore. 'Twas out of need
 They did thus, to escape the law's expanse.
 Four lovers they: for love they brave'd the night

And forest both. Their rings were bondage-forge'd;
 More suited for an ankle than a hand,
 But triumph crowns them masters of their fates,
 And for their boldness yields before their choice.
 'Tis choice informs the theme this summer morn,
 And choice I'll bow to for a second time.
 Call forth the boy disputed. Ask of him
 The master he may choose — it must be one.
 And to that choice, his parents must abide
 And ne'er again seek quarrel for his love,
 For it is his to freely vouchésafe,
 As ours is but our own, no more or less.

OBERON

I do reject thy wisdom.

TITANIA

As do I.

OBERON

'Tis poorly weighted, canst thou that deny?
 A boy who eateth gruel and gruel alone
 Compares it well to insect, bark, and stone.
 Then, to protect against the lesser feed,
 Will turn from meats, from cheeses, and from mead
 In ignorance. And so this boy may choose
 In error, knowing not what to refuse.
 Titania's care good judgment did delay.
 He cannot help but choose her: sense, give way.

THESEUS

Be this a noble fairy's honesty?

HIPPOLYTA

Your hope were unimpeachéd charity
 Towáreds these rogues. But hope exacts a fee.

THESEUS

'Twas asking overmuch: 'tis clear to me
 My folly. Lord, what fools these fairies be!

TITANIA

I'd sooner learn of kindness from a shrew
 Then choice in love from Thes'eus: All, review:

The Amazonian queen in kingly bed
 Enshrine'd was claim'd by force; will grudging wed.
 What will had she to nuptials? 'Twas her blade
 Didst arbitrate her fate in Athens' raid,
 Not love! Not choice! I shun what you devise.
 Hypocrisy condemns this compromise.

THESEUS

The lance-tip's found the armpit. Why contest
 This amaranthine shame of glory-days
 Gone mad with possibility? My hands
 Were on that journey stain'd a ruddy hue,
 And shall hereafter be.

HIPPOLYTA

But 'tis not true.

Though combat won my hand, 'twas mine to lose
 As I did please. I am an Amazon:
 A scion of that proud and noble race
 Of bladed, bowstring'd women who in strength
 Alone find merit. "To no man, submit"
 Hath been our rally-cry, "Lest ye be cow'd
 In force of steel to his am'rous aim,
 And then — and not 'til then — to mast'ry bow.
 Be thou the snar'ling, wild-hearted wolf
 That must be brought to heel lest it bite."
 When Theseus o'er foaming strand did sail
 In golden ship and serv'd by retinue,
 In sooth, he conquered me with glance alone,
 Though, in his triumph, lost his heart to me
 And was in turn prevail'd o'er. But the will
 Of custom's not so eas'ly overrid,
 And custom call'd for steel — so he drew.
 He was the storied fighter-legend king:
 As fierce his strikes were, graceful his defence
 Was too, and just as cunning his approach.
 But not so cunning yet that I would not,
 With skill applied at full capacity,
 Have visited upon him such a blow
 That Spain would up the channel send its fleet
 Before it suffer'd such indignity.
 Ah, husband, you do cast your eyne about,
 And skeptic smile curves your oft-kiss'd lips,
 But mark me: the betrayal of my blade

That left my neck without a sentinel
 Was on my part delib'rate: mine own choice
 To be thus master'd, and in my tribe's eyes
 Thy lawful and deserv'd subordinate.
 So, 'twas my choosing to become his wife,
 And I am happy in't. You swore an oath,
 And though that oath be insignificance
 Itself to you, though it be paper-thin,
 And gauzy as a fracture'd spiderweb,
 Recall: My husband's prowess on the field
 Of battle is a vibrant tapestry
 Well-woven by the songs of troubadours,
 And every word they sing hath roots in fact.
 But I am stronger, faster, by a hair
 More skill'd — and yet that hair is all I need
 To with this cold iron blade amend your fraud
 And folly both. I say, call forth the boy.

TITANIA

Such ultimatums ill become a queen
 Beneath such mutual accord as ours.
 I give thee leave to pit thy human skill
 Against the weight of fey experience,
 Which holds the balance of two thousand years
 Or more — we'll see whose folly is unmade.
 But in thy wisdom, I am mollified,
 And shall as you desire — of my will.
 The boy on Rainspell Island keeps his court;
 I move'd him thither, fearing an attempt
 To spirit him away. Attend me, Puck,
 And fetch him: thou art fleeter in thy feet
 Than any in my ranks.

PUCK

Shall I comply?

OBERON

All that she bids, obey to the letter.

(Exit PUCK)

THESEUS

Methought our sworded contest had the air
 Of rapid resolution. Now I see't.

I'll not complain, for by that subterfuge
 Came you. And did you, for mine honor's sake,
 Withhold that secret 'til necessity
 Bade its release? You are the noblést,
 Most priceless creature e'er this world walk'd.

TITANIA

My servant, I have done thee parlous wrong.

BOTTOM

What wrong, O Queen?

TITANIA

A cruel translation, placéd on the head
 Of he who gave his service willingly
 In my defense. 'Tis past mine absolution,
 But not my power to this wrong make right.

(BOTTOM becomes a man again)

For all thy service render'd, and the slights
 I heap'd on thee, I offer my regrets
 And deepest sorrows. If thou canst forgive
 I'd ask it. Thou shalt lead a blesséd life
 This moment hence — it is thine earned pay.

QUINCE

Why, bully Bottom!

BOTTOM

Ho! Peter Quince? And Snug, and Flute — O, sweet Flute! How the hours apart from you
 have racked me!

SNOUT

Am I mad? Methought... well, let it pass.

QUINCE

O Bottom, what a monstrous shape you had been force'd to wear.

BOTTOM

What shape is that?

QUINCE

An ass, man! A doughty ass.

BOTTOM

An ass? Do you think me an ass, sirrah? No ass I, nay, but a fairy general! Make of that what you will, Peter Quince. Aye, laugh if you will, Starveling, 'tis true, though I can e'en scarce believe't. But more of that anon: I shall write it up as a poem and deliver it to you all, extempore, at the king's wedding.

(Enter PUCK, and RAJ, following)

PUCK

I order'd was to whisk this boy away
And bring him hither — which I thus obey.

THESEUS

Is this the boy who sets upon the wood
Such storms that defy madness? No Helen
Is he, and small. Thy name, my boy?

RAJ

Raj, sir.

Though but one name have I, it suits me well,
And I like prizéd vestments wear it proud.

THESEUS

Well spoken. Raj, thou art at journey's fork.
Immortal fairies two have made their claim
Upon thee, and will neither one give ground
Before the other. Now's thy sickle change'd
For tongs and swage-block. But the choice is thine.
Few men are ever masters of their fate:
Thou art among them. Do the honor well.

RAJ

Doth my choice bind?

THESEUS

Both king and queen concur.

Perpend and speak; none will thy choice deny.

TITANIA

'Twas Padmini that gave thee to my care.
If not my son, thou art still no less dear,
For all my love for her is thine to share,
And in thy tender, boyish breast cohere.

These joyous years I've tended thee in hurt:
 Sooth'd sicken'd brow; wipe'd clear your every frown.
 And matters beyond boyhood I'd divert
 To keep thy face unwrinkle'd, spirit lown.
 A boy becomes a man and leaves his nest,
 And does great deeds, and wins himself prestige.
 That is the world-way, but, at my behest,
 Seek't not for now: my heart is sore besieged.
 I plead: thou art my child, leave me not.
 A queen may rule all but a heart distraught.

OBERON

The forest's heart holds spectacles unseen
 By mortals if they live'd a hundred lives.
 But you are to these wonders all, I ween,
 The majesty to which all wonder strives.
 A sweet-face'd boy, unmar'd by pass of time.
 A clever boy, who learns at rapid pace.
 A kindly boy, who smiles all sublime,
 And to all creatures living grants his grace.
 Is't any shock I'd be enthrall'd by thee?
 The boy whose gifts my kingdom doth outshine?
 If in thy heart lies mercy, hear my plea,
 And mark thee well these desperate, pleading eyne.
 This weakness comes not oft; I tell thee true:
 No other power could mine own undo.

RAJ

It is too much, to choose.

THESEUS

But still thou must.

RAJ

Titania, you have been mother to me almost as long's memory stretches. And 'tis a kind picture those memories paint, I'll swear by't. You did treat me right well, and for't, I give my thanks.

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Oberon, thy words do me honor beyond my credit. I cannot endorse the lavish praise you heap upon me, but it meeteth with mine utmost appreciation.

.

And yet, despite the kindnesses shown me, my heart doth shrink from a life eternal among the trees. If 'tis in my power to choose, then would I walk freely among men and meet life's hardships as they came, and learn all I do not know. This past night, I

witness'd marvels unknown to me. Men wore the lives of others upon their bodies, filled their mouths with foreign words, move'd freely with another's gait. No magic this, but magic all the same. And I would fain learn this art from these wise and gallant men, who stand yonder. If I may.

THESEUS

What sayest thou, Sir Quince? Wouldst he be taught?

QUINCE

As well as any who would seek to join our company.

RAJ

It is my wish.

TITANIA

Like hammerfalls on nails do you drive
A mother's dotage backward to her heart,
Where, met, the corp'ral organ must give way
Before the stronger force, and beat its last
Ere it expires. Wish again, I plead;
To lose you from my life is pain indeed.

RAJ

I'll visit oft, and perform you comedy until your eyes cannot find the tears for laughter, and your heart doth swell to bursting with pride for your mortal son, the journeyman actor. Upon the road, my thoughts will with you be. You shan't help but feel my thoughts upon you, and those sad lips will again know smiles. Farewell — I shall return.

THESEUS

Raj, company, and fated paramours:
Our band's to holy altar bound. Come all,
And our procession join. We'll couples three
Be join'd Hymeneally with due pomp
And revelry. And you will play for us.
To you, I'll speak anon, for we might build
Between our race's gifts a paradise
Beyond one's single capability.

OBERON

Thou needs but cross our border: we will come.

TITANIA

But best be done with haste, if done at all,
For summer's sun to autumn doth defer,

And winter's royalty on fairy thrones
 Will rule our breth'ren 'til the springtime thaw.
 But they are spirits of another sort,
 And may not treat with thee.

HIPPOLYTA

I'll see it done.
 The groundwork will ere summer's death be won.

LYSANDER

If claimed I these happ'nings did transpire,
 They'd call me mad, or else call me a liar.
 'Twould be meet. Yet, despite dubious reaction,
 My thoughts do savor not much of distraction.
 Lest... is't I who lets sanity roam free?

HERMIA

Nay, love. Thou'rt sane as I.

LYSANDER

Then I must be.
 Yet these mad visions are lucidity
 Itself to yesternight's dim memory.
 Methought — well, never mind what blur'd events
 My dreaming mind stitch'd crosswise into sense.

HELENA

Make inquiry into our dreams: thou'lt find,
 I do suspect, thine own exact-align'd.
 Did all of us meander through the glade,
 And fall in love like wantons newly made?
 It was no dream; do not conceive it so.
 Though incredulity bids reason go,
 Adhere to Tarski's blessed litany —
 That mantra which is proven dittany
 To upturn'd faculties. The truth is blest
 Of all beliefs. I urge you, think it best
 To not discard what we have learn'd tonight
 About our inner selves. Those truths may bite,
 But, love, your hallow'd flaws have shown to me.
 Dismiss them not as stupor's fantasy,
 For I accept them with an open heart
 Along your ev'lest virtues. I bemoan:
 The ugliest heart reveal'd is mine own.

I ope'd my spirit's gates to public view
 Far wider than I meant, or than did you.
 O, I must know, forego all gentleness.
 Now having seen me, do you love me less?

DEMETRIUS

I do but understand you, and by Jove,
 The more I understand, the more I love.

LYSANDER

You, Hermia, have seen my quintessence.
 Would you still have me?

HERMIA

All my heart assents.

'Twould be a shame to waste the altar set
 To wed the king and queen of Athens. Yet,
 Sweet prudence weighs my footfalls 'gainst delight —
 Nay, I'll press on. There's danger, for we might
 Soon change our minds: we'll wed without delay.

LYSANDER

And change them after?

HERMIA

'Tis the usual way.

(Exeunt all but OBERON, TITANIA and PUCK)

TITANIA

Art thou placated?

OBERON

If thou art, I'll be.

My pride ran wild: this will I concede
 If thou dost.

TITANIA

That expression smacks of truth,

I'll own. Open hostilities will cease
 On mine own part, though but reluctantly
 I grant it. For 'tis through thy yellow deeds
 I've lost the boy I cherish'd as a son,
 Perhaps forever. 'Tis not eas'ly born.

OBERON

Take heart. All mothers ever brought forth sons
 Keep company with thee. A son's majority
 Oft keenly bites, but 'tis a compliment
 Of healthy rearing when impatient feet
 Tap lively meter in the entrance-hall.
 I was denied e'en that, a father's pride,
 But I begrudge thee not. I was amiss
 To with coercive tack entreat a child
 Into my keeping. Now unveils the course
 Of wisdom, long dissemble'd from mine eyes
 And only at eleventh hour perceive'd:
 Of our two beings, we'll give equally,
 And to a child of our own give form:
 No changeling, but a fullblood fairy babe,
 Who is as much yours mine, and yet his own.
 He'll burgeon under our combinéd care —
 Or she, perhaps: she'll no less handsome be.

TITANIA

As handsome as he would be beautiful.
 O, how would Mab exult to have a charge!
 Once more give compact thusly, lest I wake.
 But whisper it anew each eventide,
 And I am yours, O king of unlit realms,
 Until eternity gives up its last
 And fades in turn to cinders.

OBERON

I confess,

I know not how. The youngest of my band,
 Sly Timbletack, predate written word.
 I fear the fairy birthing-rites are lost,
 But I'll pledge mine endeavors in their full
 To reinvention.

TITANIA

By moonlight we'll meet,

And 'til we find the answer, we'll consort.
 My bower will this night open to you,
 That we may every obstacle explore.
 Thy wit, or so 'tis said, is most immense —
 Renowned in all corners. Set it loose

And put it to the task: I say success
By springtime will its crownéd head make known.

OBERON

O, merry will I. Youthful fervency
Doth sweep upon me like a summer storm,
And scorns the weight of years. Shall we take wing
And soar betwixt rose-leaves caress'd with dew?
Shall we cavort through cowslip, merry-make
Amongst the moss, dally in daffodils,
And revel gaily upon rampion?
Midsummer morn becomes midsummer noon,
And I'd waste not a whit.

TITANIA

To silver bells

We'll trip our measures, and 'cross Heaven's cloak
We'll frisk, for we must dance and we must sing:
It is our nature; that we can't deny
For long. I feel the effervescent call
That moves me to discard my somber thoughts.
Let us be off: mayhap we'll lovers bless
With lengthy life, and with prosperity.

OBERON

Our flights will sore be winnow'd.

TITANIA

Aye, the bole

Of fairy fellowship's untimely stripp'd,
And bodies, like autumnal fallen leaves,
Lie scatter'd beneath sylvan canopies.

OBERON

The price of all my folly, by these hands.
O ichor's wellspring! Stainéd harbingers
Of our extinction! I'm of half a mind
To lop thee from my person, and fain would
If 'twould save one of Lurline's noble race;
If vitr'ous spheres and waxen lips wouldst ope,
If pallid gentle cheeks would crimson flush,
And leaden, thrice-crook'd limbs again take flight.
What wouldst I shun, to change our fortunes thus?
Nothing, say I! I daresay I'd suffer

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
 To wipe this tragedy from time's accounts
 And start anew.

PUCK

I've physic of a sort.
 But 'tis untested, and may come up short.
 With thine assent, I'll speak it.

OBERON

Do, I bid.

PUCK

About the globe, from keep to pyramid,
 I've travel'd, touring wonders of the age:
 Great structures, beauties, writings for the stage,
 Crusades and conquests, battles great and small,
 Exotic beasts — but stories most of all.
 Heard I this legend in a far-off land:
 Of fairy poison'd by a craven's hand.
 Into the arms of mortal friend she flew,
 And there her light extinguishéd for true.
 But ere her friend did mourn, these words he spake,
 And all the world heard: "She may awake
 If mortals all efface their disbelief
 In fairies." Which they did, to his relief.
 And aye, with halting breath, her flick'ring glow
 Did feed on that belief and brighter grow.

TITANIA

If there were mortals — but they're long-away.

PUCK

Perhaps another band doth, as a play,
 Observe our plight, and, if ask'd gracefully,
 Would lend their hands with utmost sympathy
 In show of their belief in fairy-kind —
 If, having seen us, they feel thus incline'd.

OBERON

In them we'll place our faith. Stay, presently
 Solicit their indulgence — pleasantly.
 As in all things, beginnings fade to ends —
 'Tis left to Robin to restore amends.

(Exeunt OBERON and TITANIA)

Epilogue

PUCK

If we shadows have offended,
 Speak but this, and all is mended:
 That you have but slumber'd here
 While these visions did appear,
 And this weak and idle theme
 No more yiel'ding than a dream.
 That thought hath a certain charm,
 Yet that same thought doth bring you harm.
 For though the mind may cast its hue,
 Reality must have its due.
 The time you spent within your seats
 Doth listen not to your conceits.
 And in pretending otherwise,
 You grant the truth a different guise.
 If those you saw did think it right
 To blame a vision of the night;
 Dismiss'd that which they overcame
 To overcome instead their shame,
 Then are those creatures, fay and man,
 No better than they first began.
 No greater lesson have they learn'd.
 No happy ending have they earn'd.
 And it is much the same with ye.
 Indulge accountability.
 So —
 If we shadows have offended
 Prithee learn, now it be ended.
 Keep in mind what caused distaste,
 That time now spent not go to waste,
 And you may someday come to find
 What sort of play will please your mind.
 No ending here, save what you make:
 Do not think long on dreams; awake.

(Curtain)