

PUCK AND THE PLAYERS

By Matt Buchanan

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ISBN: 1-60003-221-4

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CHARACTERS

(In Order of Appearance)

PUCK	a mischievous fairy in the service of Oberon
PETER QUINCE	a carpenter
ROBIN STARVELING	a tailor Francis
FLUTE	an apprentice bellows-mender
TOM SNOT	a tinker
SNUG	a joiner
NICK BOTTOM	a weaver
PEASEBLOSSOM	a fairy in the service of Titania
TITANIA	Queen of the Fairies
COBWEB	a fairy in the service of Titania
MOTH	a fairy in the service of Titania
MUSTARDSEED	a fairy in the service of Titania
OBERON	King of the Fairies
FAIRIES (2-3)	in the service of Oberon

PRODUCTION HISTORY

PUCK AND THE PLAYERS was originally produced in July of 2006 by Woodinville Repertory Theatre, in Woodinville, WA, under direction of Marsha Stueckle and with the following cast:

Puck	Cody Olsen
Peter Quince	John Orrell
Robin Starveling	Evan Eriksen
Francis Flute	Emina Sonnad
Tom Snout	Grace Horiatis
Snug	Samantha Lundberg
Nick Bottom	Nick Jones
Peaseblossom	Alyssa Lundberg
Titania	Hana Holmes
Moth	Katherine Charters
Mustardseed	Carlee Horst
Oberon	Keenan Pischke

PUCK AND THE PLAYERS

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(PUCK enters and addresses the audience.)

PUCK: Well, well, well—what have we here? An audience, would you say? ***(HE peers closely at the audience.)*** Not a very attractive audience. Humph. Well, we can't all be handsome like me. Since you're here, let me tell you a story. The star of the story is—well, me. Puck. Or Robin Goodfellow, if you prefer—it makes no difference to me what you call me. Just don't call me late for supper! ***(To an audience member.)*** That's a joke, son. Look alive! Anyway, don't believe what anybody tells you about those other guys—the hero of this story is me. It all started the week the Duke got married. In case you don't remember, let me tell you, that was a big deal. Everyone in Athens was excited about it. People baked special cakes for the Duke and his new Duchess. They wrote songs about the wedding. And some people decided to put on plays in honor of the day. You know everyone secretly wants to be an actor, right? Well some people should just be happy with what they are, if you know what I mean. ***(PETER QUINCE enters, carrying a bundle of scripts and pacing nervously. QUINCE is a carpenter by trade, but has made an effort to look spruce, and HE has a slightly scholarly—if not intelligent—air about him. PUCK introduces him.)*** That's Mr. Peter Quince. He wrote the play. And let me tell you, as a playwright, he's a pretty good carpenter! That's another joke—***(HE waits for a laugh)***—hopeless! ***(ROBIN STARVELING enters timidly. HE is a tailor and wears a dressmaker's tape around his neck. HE greets QUINCE with a nod and stands waiting.)*** Robin Starveling, the tailor. ***(FRANCIS FLUTE enters. HE is a beardless young apprentice bellows-mender, gawky and eager. HE nods at the others but stands slightly apart from them, waiting for someone in particular.)*** Young Francis Flute, the bellows mender. ***(SNUG and SNOOT enter together. SNUG is a burly joiner—basically a plumber—and SNOOT a tinker. They cross to the others and greet them heartily with back thumps, etc. One of them may get FLUTE in a headlock or mess up his hair—typical masculine affection. STARVELING is clearly a little uncomfortable with these two boisterous types, and FLUTE, while proud to be “one of the group” rather resents the way they treat him like a kid. HE is still waiting for someone.)*** Here's Snug and Snout. Just one person's missing. Trust him to be last. He always did like to make an “entrance.”

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FLUTE: Isn't Mr. Bottom coming?

QUINCE: **(testily)** He said he was.

SNUG: He's a busy man, is Nick Bottom.

FLUTE: Oh, but if he said he was coming, I'm sure he'll keep his word.

SNUG: Oh, no doubt, no doubt. Still, he's a busy man.

FLUTE: He's such a wonderful actor! Remember the Guild Pageant last summer? He was wonderful!

STARVELING: What a voice! And a fine figure of a man, too. I make all his suits.

QUINCE: Well, fine figure of a man or not, he's late.

(NICK BOTTOM enters. HE is a weaver by trade, but dresses like a nobleman—or rather, like his own rather theatrical conception of a nobleman. HE strides onto the stage as if HE owns it. FLUTE is immediately dancing attendance on him.)

BOTTOM: I'm here! We can start now!

FLUTE: Hello, Mr. Bottom! Remember me, Mr. Bottom?

PUCK: Nick Bottom, the weaver. He's—well, see for yourself.

(BOTTOM is rather flamboyantly greeting the company, shaking hands, whispering in ears, patting backs—almost like a campaigning politician meeting the constituents. HE's interrupted by a rather pointed clearing of the throat from QUINCE.)

QUINCE: Okay—er—is everyone here?

(They all gather around QUINCE. FLUTE makes sure HE's right next to BOTTOM.)

BOTTOM: The best thing to do would be to take roll-call everybody one by one, according to their parts.

QUINCE: Well—er—very well. **(takes out list)** Here is a list of every Guild Member in Athens that I think is good enough for our little play in honor of the Duke's wedding day. Nick—

BOTTOM: No, no! Good Peter Quince—that's not the way. First tell us about the play, and then announce the list of the actors. That's the way it's always done.

FLUTE: I'm so excited I can hardly wait!

QUINCE: Very well. The name of our play is "The Most Lamentable Comedy and Most Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisbe." Now—

BOTTOM: Oh! That's a marvelous choice! It really is! A wonderful play! I know it well. Now, give us the list of actors and the parts they'll play. Sit down everyone. Well, go ahead, man!

QUINCE: (*struggling with papers*) Okay, then. Nick Bottom the Weaver. You—

BOTTOM: Present! (*the interruption throws QUINCE off for a moment*) Go ahead. Say what part I'm playing and continue down the list.

QUINCE: I have you down to play Pyramus. Now, Francis Fl—

BOTTOM: Pyramus! Excellent! Pyramus—who is Pyramus? A lover or a tyrant?

QUINCE: A lover—that kills himself for love. (*aside*) Not a bad idea!

BOTTOM: Ah! A doomed lover! That's the part for me! There won't be a dry eye in the house! Remember the Guild Pageant? "A moving performance," they said. Well, go on—who's next?

QUINCE: Francis Flute, the Bell—

BOTTOM: But you know, I'm really even better as a tyrant. I do a great Hercules! Let me show you: (*declaiming*)

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

(*a smattering of applause from the others, especially FLUTE, and not including QUINCE*)

Well, go on.

QUINCE: (*quickly, to avoid being interrupted again*) Francis Flute, the Bellows Mender.

BOTTOM: (*to FLUTE*) Now, that was lofty. That's how you play a hero—or a tyrant!

QUINCE: (*shouting*) Francis Flute, the Bellows Mender!!!

FLUTE: Oh! Present!

QUINCE: Flute, you must play Thisbe.

FLUTE: Who is Thisbe? A wandering knight?

(*STARVELING giggles unexpectedly and is then embarrassed by his own outburst.*)

QUINCE: No. Thisbe is the lady Pyramus loves.

(*Wholesale snorts and guffaws from SNUG and SNOUT.*)

FLUTE: (*desperately*) No! Don't make me play the girl again! Look—I have a beard coming and everything! (*SNUG peers closely at FLUTE's face, then reaches up and plucks a single imaginary hair.*) Hey!

QUINCE: That's as may be. You're the youngest, and you must play Thisbe. You can do her high voice better than anyone else.

BOTTOM: Hey! Maybe if I wore a mask, I could play Pyramus and Thisne! I'd speak in a tiny little voice—listen: (*as Pyramus, in a ridiculously deep voice*) Thisne! Thisne! (*as Thisbe, in a high, squeaky voice*) Ah, Pyramus, my lover dear! 'Tis I, your Thisne dear, and lady dear!

(FLUTE nods enthusiastically at this idea.)

QUINCE: No, no, no! You must play Pyramus, and Flute must play Thisbe!

BOTTOM: Well, go on, then.

QUINCE: Robin Starveling, the Tailor.

STARVELING: Here!

QUINCE: Starveling, you must play Thisbe's mother. Tom Snout, the Tinker.

SNOUT: Here!

QUINCE: You're Pyramus's father. I'll be playing Thisbe's father; and you, Snug, can play the lion. Now, I think that about does it, and I hope we're all well cast. Now, our first rehearsal—

SNUG: Peter Quince!

QUINCE: Yes, Snug?

SNUG: (*moving close and speaking quietly*) Do you have the lion's part written down? Can I have it? I want to start studying it—I'm—I'm not so good at remembering.

QUINCE: You can make it up as you go—it's nothing but roaring.

(SNUG is clearly relieved, but BOTTOM has overheard.)

BOTTOM: Let me play the lion, too! I will roar—oh, will I roar! It will do any man's heart good to hear my roaring! Even a real lion wouldn't be so terrifying!

SNUG: (*protecting his part*) Oh, great—and you'd "terrify" the ladies in the audience, and they'd scream, and that would get us all into trouble.

SNOUT: For sure. If we make the ladies scream, they'll hang us for sure!

STARVELING: Every one of us!

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BOTTOM: No, no, no! I'll do it gently! I'll roar as lightly as a dove! I'll roar as beautifully as a nightingale! Listen! **(He starts to "roar" gently, but Quince interrupts.)**

QUINCE: No, no, and no!! You can't play anybody except Pyramus! **(persuasively)** Pyramus is a gallant, handsome man! A hero! Nobody can play him but you! You've just got to do it!

BOTTOM: **(grudgingly)** Well, okay—I'll do it.

QUINCE: Okay then. Now, here are your parts. **(HE hands out scrolls to the cast)** I want everyone to learn your lines by tomorrow night. That's our next rehearsal.

FLUTE: Where?

QUINCE: Well, I've been thinking about that. We don't want anyone spying on us and stealing our ideas. So, I thought we could meet at the palace gate and go out into the woods and find a nice secret place to rehearse.

STARVELING: Out into the woods? At night?

QUINCE: That's right.

STARVELING: But the fairy folk—

QUINCE: Now, that's all nonsense! Surely a grown man like you doesn't believe in fairies!

(PUCK snorts delightedly.)

STARVELING: Still—

QUINCE: Then that's all settled. Tomorrow night we meet at the palace gate. Meanwhile, I'll make up a list of props and costumes.

BOTTOM: 'Til tomorrow night, then!

(And they all shake hands and scatter, leaving PUCK alone on stage.)

PUCK: **(mocking)** "Surely a grown man like you doesn't believe in fairies!" Well, they'll learn. It's really a remarkably bad idea to go out in the woods after dark, you know. I could tell you stories—well, after all, that's what I'm doing, isn't it? Hey, you! **(PEASEBLOSSOM has entered, and it is to her that PUCK is calling.)** Just exactly where do you think you're going? This is King Oberon's forest.

PEASEBLOSSOM: I've got work to do, if it's any of your business.

PUCK: It is, you know. I'm rather by way of being in charge around here.

PEASEBLOSSOM: Says you. Well, if you must know, I'm on the Queen's business. I've got to plant a dewdrop on every little flower before morning or she'll be ever so upset.

PUCK: Better watch out. The King's on his way. You don't want to be here if they meet.

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PEASEBLOSSOM: Yeah, what is that all about anyway, do you know? They've been fighting like cats and dogs for months now. It's very hard on the furniture.

PUCK: As a matter of fact, I do know. See, a couple of months ago she suddenly shows up with this little baby.

PEASEBLOSSOM: Ohh! I knew it! A scandal!

PUCK: No, no, it was nothing like that. This time. This was a mortal baby, not a fairy—you know, a changeling. She picked him up somewhere. So he decides he wants the baby to bring up as his pageboy, but she won't hear of it. Wants to keep him all to herself.

PEASEBLOSSOM: But they're married. They could both raise the baby.

PUCK: Yeah, well, I tried to tell him that, but he just kept going on about "nobody says 'no' to King Oberon," and before you know it, feud city. I've never seen him so angry.

PEASEBLOSSOM: Hey, how do you know all this, anyway? Wait a minute! I know you—aren't you Robin Goodfellow? I've heard about you!

PUCK: (**modestly**) That is one of my names.

PEASEBLOSSOM: I've heard about you. You're like a leprechaun or something, right? You like to play tricks on humans?

PUCK: (**bowing**) Noble Puck, at your service. Dropper of banana peels, splitter of trouser seats, and swiper of single socks from the laundry. Pleased to meetchoo! (**loud laughter from offstage**) Oops! Here comes the King!

PEASEBLOSSOM: (**looking the other way**) And here she comes!

PUCK: I don't know about you, but I don't want to see this. Come on!

(They exit. Enter TITANIA, accompanied by COBWEB, MOTH and MUSTARDSEED. They set up an elaborate chaise and SHE sits with an exotic-looking drink while the FAIRIES fan her. After a moment, from another direction, enter OBERON, backwards, talking loudly with two or three slightly drunk-looking FAIRIES.)

OBERON: So then I said, "That's no lady—that's my wife!" (**Loud laughter. OBERON notices TITANIA and rolls his eyes.**) Oh. You're here.

(The FAIRIES in TITANIA's train eye those with OBERON suspiciously. Both groups of FAIRIES begin to circle one another, sizing each other up.)

TITANIA: Well, well, well! If it isn't my—husband—King Oberon! Come on, ladies. This place is getting crowded. (**TITANIA and her FAIRIES start to exit.**)

OBERON: Oh, don't be such a prune! Am I your husband or not?

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TITANIA: That's what the preacher said, but you don't act like it.

OBERON: What are you on about now?

TITANIA: Do you think I don't know why you're here?

OBERON: Okay—why, then?

TITANIA: Hippolyta's wedding. (**OBERON wincses. SHE's caught him.**)

Oh, yes, I know all about that little affair. You're here to bless your little mortal sweetheart's wedding to Duke Theseus.

OBERON: It's pretty strange to call an Amazon my "little sweetheart."

Anyway, that was over ages ago. Besides, you're one to talk.

TITANIA: Just what do you mean by that?

OBERON: Well, come on—everybody knows about you and Theseus.

TITANIA: That's a lie! Just because I admire the man as a great warrior and statesman—

OBERON: Oh, save it.

TITANIA: Anyway, that's not what this is about and you know it. It's about my darling little boy.

OBERON: Of course it is! Why do you want to keep him from me? It's not like he's yours—he's just a human changeling. A mortal. And he'd make the perfect pageboy, but noooo, you can't part with him.

TITANIA: I've told you why a dozen times. His mother was my favorite handmaiden. My closest confidante. You've got that rascal, Puck, to keep you company and listen to your stupid jokes—well, I had her. On her deathbed, she begged me to bring up her child, and I'm not giving him to you. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have an appointment.

(TITANIA and her FAIRIES flounce out. OBERON glowers after them. As they disappear, HE calls after them.)

OBERON: Fine! Be that way! But look out—I'm not finished with you yet!

(HE suddenly notices that his FAIRIES are still with him. HE stares pointedly at them until they get the point and depart.) Yo!

Puck!

(PUCK suddenly appears at his side.)

PUCK: At your service, your immenseness!

OBERON: You heard that?

PUCK: Of course. She's in rare form.

OBERON: Well, she's not getting away with it. I will not be refused like that.

PUCK: So, tell me! What's the plan?

OBERON: Come here. **(HE whispers in PUCK's ear for a few seconds)** I'll meet you in an hour.

(OBERON exits. PUCK addresses the audience.)

PUCK: I have to admit it was a great plan—even I was impressed. See, there's this magical flower—only grows in one spot on earth, but I know where it is. This flower was hit by accident by one of Cupid's arrows. Between you and me, poor Cupid's as blind as a bat. Couldn't hit the broad side of a barn. Anyway, this flower. All you have to do is sneak up on somebody when they're asleep and squeeze a little flower juice in their eye, and bingo! When they wake up, they'll fall in love with the first live creature they see! No matter what it is! This is going to be good!

(PUCK exits quickly. Enter OBERON, pacing impatiently and peering frequently offstage. After a pause, reenter PUCK, carrying a flower.)

OBERON: There you are. Did you get it? What took you so long?

PUCK: Here it is—don't get your knickers in a bunch.

OBERON: Hide—here she comes!

(They “hide” in plain sight. OBERON snatches up an ornamental bowl and becomes a “statue,” while PUCK sweeps up some loose greenery and becomes a “shrub.” Enter TITANIA, accompanied by PEASEBLOSSOM, COBWEB, MOTH, and MUSTARDSEED. None of them notices OBERON and PUCK.)

TITANIA: Come on, now, ladies. I'm sleepy. Somebody get my bed ready.

PEASEBLOSSOM: Right away, Your Highness.

COBWEB: We're on it!

(They start making up a bed out of leafy boughs and other forest detritus.)

TITANIA: Now, you two (*indicating MOTH and MUSTARDSEED*) listen carefully. I want you to keep a careful watch. His Majesty is somewhere in this forest, and I fear he means mischief. Keep him away from me.

MOTH: Trust us, Your Highness!

MUSTARDSEED: Nobody's getting past me!

TITANIA: I hope not. Is my bed ready?

PEASEBLOSSOM: Fluffed up, turned down, and a mint on the pillow!

TITANIA: Good. Then you two can help Moth and Mustardseed keep watch.

COBWEB: Check.

(TITANIA lies down to sleep. The four FAIRIES position themselves in a perimeter and stand guard. MUSTARDSEED is standing very near OBERON's "statue," and PEASEBLOSSOM very near PUCK's "shrub.")

(After a moment, OBERON begins blowing in MUSTARDSEED's ear. SHE swats at her ear as if SHE thinks there's a fly there. HE keeps it up and SHE becomes more and more frantic, until SHE spins around so many times SHE makes herself dizzy and—after several alarming wobbles, during one of which we're sure SHE's going to fall on TITANIA and wake her—crumples to the ground.)

(PUCK pulls a large dead rat from somewhere on his person. HE sneaks up behind PEASEBLOSSOM and suddenly dangles the rat in front of her face. A tiny scream escapes her and SHE faints. TITANIA mutters in her sleep—both PUCK and OBERON freeze and stare at her—but SHE doesn't wake.)

(OBERON sneaks behind COBWEB and gets down on all fours right behind her knees. PUCK approaches her from one side, then suddenly leaps in front of her, making a horrible face. SHE takes an involuntary step backwards, falling over OBERON. PUCK instantly grabs her feet and drags her offstage.)

(OBERON produces a bottle from somewhere in his costume and, approaching carefully, places it gently on the ground beside MOTH—the only sentry still upright. Then HE creeps away and makes a slight noise. SHE turns her head and notices the bottle. SHE picks it up curiously. Sniffs it. Finally takes a tentative drink. Evidently it's tasty. SHE drinks some more, and hiccoughs daintily. Drinks some more. SHE is getting drunk. When SHE begins weaving on her feet, PUCK steps up and tips her neatly over his shoulder in a fireman's carry, and bears her offstage.)

(OBERON approaches the sleeping TITANIA. HE pulls the flower from his belt and squeezes it into her eyes.)

OBERON: Flower hit with Cupid's dart,
Open up her fickle heart
What she sees upon awaking,
That she loves, the rest forsaking.

There. When you wake up, you'll fall in love with the first living creature you see. I hope it's something really disgusting. That'll teach you to say no to Oberon!

(HE exits. After a moment, QUINCE, BOTTOM, SNOUT, SNUG, FLUTE and STARVELING enter. They are dragging a large trunk of props, carrying a lantern, and looking about them fearfully. None of them notices TITANIA lying asleep. When BOTTOM speaks, his voice is unnaturally loud.)

BOTTOM: Good. Everybody here?

QUINCE: This looks like a good spot for our rehearsal. We can use this little clearing for a stage, and this bush can be the "green room." Everybody ready? Okay—places for Scene One!

(They start to move, but stop when BOTTOM speaks.)

BOTTOM: Excuse me—

QUINCE: ***(sighing)*** What is it, Bottom?

BOTTOM: No offense, but I've been reading over your script.

QUINCE: ***(impatently)*** Yes?

BOTTOM: Well, I mean—we can't do some of this stuff. We'd never get away with it.

QUINCE: Well, I don't know—

BOTTOM: Like, look at this here! It says I have to draw my sword and kill myself! I can't do that—think of the ladies!

STARVELING: He's got a point, you know. You can't do that in front of ladies.

SNOUT: I think we'll have to leave that part out.

QUINCE: Well, if you think—

BOTTOM: No, no! I've got a better idea. Write me a prologue. Say something like this: ***(declaiming)*** "Ladies"—no, er, how about: "Fair ladies, do not fear. Our swords are not real." No! "It's all in good fun—no harm will be done!" Hey, that's not bad! And then I can go ahead and tell them not to worry about Pyramus killing himself, because it won't be Pyramus at all—it'll be me—Bottom.

SNOUT: ***(dryly)*** That'd make me feel better.

(SNOUT elbows STARVELING to point his joke. Meanwhile, SNUG has been quietly and intently practicing roaring very quietly in the background. QUINCE tries to call the meeting back to order.)

QUINCE: Fine. We'll have a prologue. Now, can we start? Places for Scene—

BOTTOM: Er—

QUINCE: Something more?

BOTTOM: It's nothing.

QUINCE: Anyone else?

SNOUT: Well—won't the ladies be afraid of the lion?

(Just then SNUG roars particularly loudly—right in STARVELING's ear.)

STARVELING: I know I am!

BOTTOM: Gentlemen, think about it. If we bring a lion into a house with ladies, they'll all have hysterics! We'll be lucky to get out with our skins!

SNOUT: So, we need another prologue.

STARVELING: He's no lion—we're not lyin'?

(SNOUT chortles.)

BOTTOM: No, no! He's got to say it himself.

SNUG: ***(horried)*** Me?

BOTTOM: And you can tell them your name, and say, "Fair ladies, I entreat you not to tremble or fear. If you thought I was a real lion, I would never forgive myself. No, I am a man, just like you."

(SNOUT snorts. SNUG has been frantically writing on the back of his hand.)

SNUG: But I can't remember all that!

QUINCE: (over him) Fine, fine. But we've got two more problems. First of all, the two lovers are supposed to meet by moonlight. How are we going to get moonlight into the Duke's house?

FLUTE: Ooh—that's a tough one.

SNOUT: Is there a moon the night of the play?

QUINCE: How do I know? Bottom? You seem to think you know everything.

BOTTOM: Check an almanac. Who's got an almanac?

STARVELING: ***(sarcastic)*** Oh, sure, I just happen to be carrying an almanac, right here in my pocket next to the dictionary and the globe of the world.

SNUG: I've got one.

(HE holds it up. After a pause during which everyone has time to wonder why SNUG would be carrying an almanac, they all crowd around to look up the moon.)

FLUTE: **(excited)** It does! It says right here—it's a full moon that night.

BOTTOM: Well, then, nothing easier! You just leave a window in the great chamber open, and the moon can shine in.

QUINCE: **(doubtfully)** Well, yes. Or, somebody could come on dressed up as the Man in the Moon. But there's another problem. Pyramus and Thisbe are supposed to talk through a chink in a wall.

FLUTE: A wall?

SNOUT: You can never bring in a wall. **(smugly)** Solve that one if you can, Bottom.

BOTTOM: **(equally smug)** Simple. Someone **(HE clasps SNOUT by the shoulder)** will have to dress up as a wall—

SNOUT: I'm not dressing up as a—

BOTTOM: With some plaster or some bricks or stones on him. And he can give a little speech and tell everyone he's a wall.

QUINCE: But the chink! They talk through a chink in the wall!

BOTTOM: So he can hold his fingers like this. **(BOTTOM makes a circle of his thumb and forefinger, then forms SNOUT's fingers into the same figure.)** There's your chink.

QUINCE: Fine. Now, let's rehearse. We don't want to be here all night. Places for Scene One! Pyramus, you enter from the right, and Thisbe, you get ready to enter from the left. **(exasperated)** Your other left, Flute! Snout, you may as well get in there and be a wall.

(As they get set up, PUCK enters. They can't see or hear him.)

PUCK: What have we here? A play? I love plays. Hold it a minute! **(PUCK snaps his fingers and everyone mortal freezes. HE runs offstage, returning almost immediately with a bucket of popcorn.)** Okay! **(HE snaps his fingers and the action resumes as if nothing had happened. PUCK comes down off the stage and sits in the audience to watch.)** This ought to be fun!

QUINCE: Speak, Pyramus!

(BOTTOM approaches the "Wall." HE is walking sideways and can't really see where HE's going, because HE has been too well coached and is afraid to turn his face even slightly away from the audience.)

BOTTOM: Thisne!—

SNOUT: **(correcting, out of the side of his mouth)** Thisbe.

BOTTOM: Thisbe! Oh, my dearest Thisbe dear! Oh, come to me, my dearest Thisbe dear! **(FLUTE approaches the "Wall" from the other side. HE has put a mop head on his head as a wig. BOTTOM continues.)** But hark! I hear a voice! I'll go and see! But soon, oh, soon I will return to thee!

(BOTTOM exits, still not turning his back to the audience. PUCK leaps from his seat.)

PUCK: This is too good. ***(to audience)*** Wait here!

(PUCK hops back onto the stage and follows BOTTOM out. Just before HE disappears, HE turns to the audience and silently mouths, “What a jackass!” There is a long pause onstage. QUINCE clears his throat loudly.)

FLUTE: Oh! Is it my turn?

QUINCE: Duh! Yes! He’s coming back in a minute—he just went to look for a noise.

FLUTE: Oh—okay. Um— ***(FLUTE delivers the following lines in a high voice, running them together with no regard for sense or sentence.)*** Oh, Pyramus, return to me at once, and do not leave me standing like a dunce! For you, my love, are everything to me, and your sweet face is all I hope to see. Enter Pyramus. Of course I’ll meet you, dear, at Ninny’s tomb—

QUINCE: ***(exploding)*** That’s Ninus’s tomb! Ninus’s! And you don’t say that yet.

FLUTE: I don’t?

QUINCE: No! Pyramus has another line first. He hasn’t asked you to meet him yet! You speak your whole part all at once—cues and all! ***(a shout)*** Pyramus! You’ve missed your cue! It was, “All I hope to see!” Flute!

FLUTE: Oh! Um—and your sweet face is all I hope to see.

(Enter BOTTOM, with PUCK at his heels. BOTTOM’s head has been transformed into that of a donkey, which PUCK proudly points out to the audience.)

BOTTOM: It may be fair, but not as fair as yourrrs! ***(He sort of brays the last word.)***

FLUTE: Whoah! Keep away from me!

BOTTOM: What? Why?

QUINCE: Holy—Bottom! We’re haunted!

(Everyone begins backing carefully away from BOTTOM, afraid to stay but also afraid to make a sudden movement.)

STARVELING: It’s the fairy folk!

SNOUT: It’s devils!

SNUG: Ruuuuuunnnn!

BOTTOM: What? What is it?

(Exeunt in a panic all but PUCK, with BOTTOM trailing behind the others.)

PUCK: *(to audience)* This is great! Watch this!

(FLUTE creeps timidly on. PUCK sneaks up behind him and whinnies loudly. FLUTE flies headlong.)

(SNUG enters from the other side. PUCK sneaks up and bays like a hound. SNUG exits, falling over himself.)

(SNOUT and STARVELING enter, backing from opposite sides. PUCK waits until they almost bump in the middle, then roars like a lion. They each whirl and try to flee in the opposite direction, instead crashing into each other and becoming entangled. Finally they separate and flee together.)

(BOTTOM enters alone. PUCK retires upstage to watch.)

BOTTOM: Why did they run away? *(Maybe some in the audience offer suggestions. If so, Puck shushes them.)* I know! This is a joke! A joke on good old Nick Bottom. It's jealousy, that's what it is. They're all jealous of my talent. They're trying to trick me into being afraid. Well, it won't work!

(QUINCE enters very tentatively.)

QUINCE: Oh, Bottom! God bless you, Bottom!

(HE exits quickly.)

BOTTOM: *(calling after him)* Bless yourself! Ha! I'll show them. They won't make a jackass out of me! I'll sing. That will show them I'm not afraid! *(BOTTOM sings. On the long high notes HE tends to bray like a donkey.)*

The blackbird is so black of hue,
except his orange bill!
The thrush, she sings a note so true
(honk)
The wren, her note is shrill!

(TITANIA awakens and sits up.)

TITANIA: What angel sings so beautifully?

BOTTOM: The rowdy bluejay boldly begs,
the cuckoo cries, “cuckoo!” **(honk)**
He steals your nest, he steals your eggs,
there’s nothing you can do! **(honk)**

TITANIA: Mortal!

(BOTTOM starts. HE gazes at her with a mixture of awe and fear.)

BOTTOM: Eh?

TITANIA: Sing again, mortal, sing again! You have the most beautiful voice!

BOTTOM: I do?

TITANIA: And the most beautiful face, too.

BOTTOM: **(dismissively)** Nahhhh!

(SHE comes to him and puts a finger to his lips.)

TITANIA: Shhh! You do. You know you do. It’s strange, but I can’t help myself. I—I think I love you!

(Upstage, PUCK is quietly ecstatic. BOTTOM backs slowly away from TITANIA.)

BOTTOM: Yeah, well—er—there’s no reason for that. No reason at all. And yet, when you think about it, what does reason have to do with love, eh? **(HE laughs at his own joke.)** Ha ha! That’s a good one!

TITANIA: And clever, too! Gorgeous and smart!

BOTTOM: I don’t know about that, but if I could figure out how to get out of here, that’d be smart enough for me.

TITANIA: No! You can’t leave! **(With an elegant gesture, SHE casts a spell. BOTTOM is frozen in place.)** You’re not going anywhere! I’m no ordinary spirit, you know—I pretty much make the rules around here. I think you’re going to like it here, too. **(With another gesture SHE unfreezes him.)** Peaseblossom! Cobweb! **(There is no response.)** Where did they go? **(calling)** Moth! Mustardseed! **(embarrassed)** My sentries seem to have wandered off. **(louder)** Peaseblossom! Cobweb! Moth! Mustardseed! **(The four FAIRIES straggle in, yawning and rubbing sore spots. MOTH still hiccoughs occasionally and tends to giggle. TITANIA shoots them a questioning look and seems about to upbraid them for disappearing, but SHE dismisses the impulse.)** Ladies, this is my new special friend. Isn’t he gorgeous? **(Incredulous looks from the FAIRIES. MOTH sniggers.)** Now I know you’re all going to make

him comfortable. **(to BOTTOM)** Just call on them for whatever you need. **(to FAIRIES)** Well—aren't you going to greet your new lord?

PEASEBLOSSOM: **(bowing uncertainly)** Hail, Mortal!

COBWEB: Hail, Mortal!

MOTH: **(giggling)** Hail, Mortal!

MUSTARDSEED: Hail, Mortal!

BOTTOM: **(slowly finding his footing)** Er—pleased to meetchoo, I'm sure. **(HE offers a hand to COBWEB, who looks at it without understanding)** Nick Bottom—Actor. **(pause, prompting)** And you are—

COBWEB: Oh! Cobweb.

BOTTOM: Cobweb! Good to know you. If I ever have a problem with flies, I'll be sure to call you! **(HE laughs heartily at his own wit. COBWEB is offended but doesn't dare say so. BOTTOM offers his hand to PEASEBLOSSOM.)** Nick Bottom.

(PEASEBLOSSOM has caught on and takes his hand briefly.)

PEASEBLOSSOM: Peaseblossom.

BOTTOM: Pleased to meet you, Peaseblossom. Say hello to Mr. Butterbean and Mrs. Summersquash for me! Ha ha! **(to MOTH)** Nick Bottom. **(But MOTH is giggling so hard HE gives up on her and moves on to MUSTARDSEED.)** Nick Bottom—Actor Extraordinaire.

MUSTARDSEED: Mustardseed.

(BOTTOM looks her up and down with an exaggerated leer.)

BOTTOM: Mustardseed! Would that be—hot mustard? Eh? Eh?

(SHE flounces away as HE slaps his thigh at his humor.)

TITANIA: Come on, ladies. Bring him to my chambers. **(aside to PEASEBLOSSOM)** See if you can bring him quietly.

(The FAIRIES, TITANIA and BOTTOM exit. PUCK comes down and addresses the audience.)

PUCK: This is even better than I expected! The King will be pleased!

(PUCK exits. QUINCE, FLUTE, SNUG, STOUT and STARVELING enter, apparently lost.)

STARVELING: **(sarcastic)** 'Surely a grown man like you doesn't believe in fairies!' What do you say now, smart guy?

QUINCE: Nonsense. Er—probably just a trick of the light.

SNUG: He's bewitched.

QUINCE: Anyway, water under the bridge. Let's concentrate on finding our way out of here.

STARVELING: Before someone else is cursed.

FLUTE: But what about Bottom! We can't just leave him!

SNOUT: I can.

FLUTE: But—

QUINCE: Look, we're lost. We don't know where poor Nick is anyway.

SNUG: I want to go home.

FLUTE: But we can't—

QUINCE: (*kindly*) Bottom is a strong man. He'll be all right. Why, I wouldn't be surprised if he's home right now, wondering where we are.

FLUTE: (*brightening*) You think so?

STARVELING: I think we came in over this way.

(Exeunt. After a moment, enter TITANIA, BOTTOM, PEASEBLOSSOM, COBWEB, MOTH and MUSTARDSEED.)

TITANIA: Come on, darling. Let's sit over here. (*TITANIA and BOTTOM sit, HE with his head in her lap. The FAIRIES hover nearby. SHE strokes his head.*) Let me brush your sweet hair and kiss your (*momentarily discomfited*) er—large ears. Comfortable, darling?

BOTTOM: Mmmm. Peaseblossom!

PEASEBLOSSOM: My Lord?

BOTTOM: Scratch my head, would you? You have no idea how it itches. (*PEASEBLOSSOM begins scratching BOTTOM's head, with a disgusted look on her face.*) Cobweb!

COBWEB: Here and ready!

BOTTOM: Oh, Cobweb, listen carefully. Do you think you could go out and kill me a big fat honeybee? And bring me his honey bag?

COBWEB: I think so.

BOTTOM: Well, don't put yourself out too much—and be careful not to break the honey bag. I'd hate to think of you all covered in honey! (*COBWEB exits*) Moth! (*furiously giggling*) Never mind. Mustardseed!

MUSTARDSEED: My Lord?

BOTTOM: Help Peaseblossom scratch, if you would. (*MUSTARDSEED joins PEASEBLOSSOM. BOTTOM also furiously scratches himself. PEASEBLOSSOM and MUSTARDSEED exit in disgust.*) (*to TITANIA*) I've got to get to a barber. I'm feeling remarkably hairy about the face. It itches something fierce.

(PUCK, grinning widely, leads OBERON onto the stage. The others are not aware of their presence as they watch.)

TITANIA: Are you hungry, my love? I could send Moth. Anything you want?

BOTTOM: **(considering)** I could eat.

TITANIA: Just name it.

BOTTOM: Well, let me see—I think I'm in the mood for—that's odd.

TITANIA: Dear?

BOTTOM: Er—nothing. I think what I'd like is—um—oats!

TITANIA: **(startled)** Oats?!

BOTTOM: **(firmly)** Good dry oats! **(wavering)** Or hay. There's nothing like good sweet hay when you're feeling peckish.

TITANIA: Are you sure you wouldn't like some nice roast goose? Moth does a wonderful sauce.

BOTTOM: **(surprising himself)** I'd rather have a handful of dried peas, actually.

TITANIA: If you say so. Moth! **(MOTH exits, still giggling. BOTTOM snuggles down in TITANIA's lap.)** I though she'd never go. **(suggestively)** Now we're alone, my love.

BOTTOM: Mmmm. Good. Don't let any of your people disturb me. I'm feeling like a nice long nap. Mmmm.

TITANIA: **(exasperated but bearing up)** Sleep, my sweet. I'll wrap you in my arms and keep you safe.

(They both sleep.)

PUCK: Isn't this great?

OBERON: My best revenge ever. But you know, I'm starting to feel sorry for her. I mean, look at him!

PUCK: You should have seen him before. This is an improvement.

OBERON: I'm going to put her out of her misery.

PUCK: **(aside, to the audience)** She doesn't look miserable to me.

OBERON: **(sternly)** Where's the antidote?

PUCK: Here it is.

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