

Act 1, Scene 2 Somewhere in Athens

(QUINCE, SNUG, BOTTOM, FLUTE, SNOOT and STARVELING.)

QUINCE

Is all our company here?

BOTTOM

You were best to call them generally,* man by man, according to the scrip.

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!
To the rest.*
Yet my chief humor* is for a tyrant. I could play Ercles* rarely.

generally - Bottom means the opposite (individually),

To the rest - he means name the rest of the players but he interrupts before Quince has a chance,

humor - temperamental bent, *Ercles* - Hercules

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 Hercules' 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
 And 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

Phibbus' car - chariot of Apollo the sun god, *condoling* - sorrowing

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

And 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 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 and '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.
Masters, here are your parts;* and I am to entreat you to learn them by tomorrow night;
and meet me in the palace wood, a mile without the town, by moonlight.

extempore - improvise (make it up), *parts* - each actor is given only his character's lines and the cue lines

There will we rehearse; for if we meet in the city we will be dogged with company.
In the meantime I will draw a list of props, such as our play needs.
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.

(Exeunt.)

Act 2, Scene 1 A wood near Athens

(PUCK and FAIRY.)

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.
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,
stolen from an Indian 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
called Robin Goodfellow.
Are not you he that frights the maidens of the villagery?
Those that Hobgoblin call you, and sweet Puck, you do their work, and they shall have good luck?
Are not you he?

PUCK

Thou speakest aright; I am that merry wanderer of the night.
I jest to Oberon and make him smile when I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,
neighing in 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 withered 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 neeze* and swear
a merrier hour was never wasted there.
But room, fairy! Here comes Oberon.

FAIRY

And here my mistress. Would that he were gone.

pale - enclosed park, *flood* - water, *dew her orbs* - put dew on her flowers, *lob* - lout, *anon* - soon,
passing fell and wrath - surpassingly fierce and wrathful, *changeling* - a child secretly left in place of another,
square - quarrel, *beguile...foal* - Puck neighs like a female horse to entice a male horse, *quire* - company, *neeze* - sneeze

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

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.

Why art thou here?

But that the bouncing Amazon, your warrior love, to Theseus 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?

TITANIA

These are the forgeries of jealousy;*

and never, since the middle summer's spring, met we on hill, in dale, forest or mead,
or in the beached margent of the sea, to dance our ringlets* to the whistling wind,
but with thy brawls thou hast disturbed our sport.

Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain, as in revenge, have sucked 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 stretched his yoke in vain, the ploughman lost his sweat,
and the green corn hath rotted ere* his youth attained a beard.

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 fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose.

The spring, the summer, the childing* autumn, angry winter, change their wonted liveries,*
and the mazed* world, 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 changeling boy to be my henchman.

tarry, rash wanton - wait, unrestrained woman, *forgeries of jealousy* - lies caused by jealousy,
ringlets - dances in a ring, *ere* - before, *distemperature* - disorder in nature, *childing* - pregnant; fruitful,
wonted liveries - accustomed garments, *mazed* - amazed, *progeny* - children

TITANIA

Set your heart at rest. The fairyland buys not the child of me.
 His mother was a votaress* of my order,
 and in the spiced Indian air, by night, full often hath she gossiped by my side,
 and sat with me on Neptune's yellow sands, marking the embarked traders on the flood.*
 When we have laughed to see the sails conceive and grow big-bellied with the wanton* wind;
 which she, with pretty and with swimming gait* following (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

Perhaps 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 till I torment thee for this injury.
 My gentle Puck, come hither.
 Thou remember once I sat upon a promontory, and heard a mermaid singing on a dolphin's back?

PUCK

I remember.

OBERON

That very time I saw, but thou couldst not, flying between the cold moon and the earth Cupid, all armed.
 A certain aim he took at a fair vestal,* throned by the west,
 and loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow, as it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts.
 But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft quenched in the chaste beams of the watery moon,
 and the imperial votaress passed on, in maiden meditation, fancy-free.
 Yet marked I where the bolt of Cupid fell.

votaress - woman who had taken a vow to serve Titania, *traders on the flood* - trading ships sailing with the tide,
wanton - undisciplined; unchaste, *gait* - walk, *chide downright* - have a really good fight,
fair vestal - virgin priestess (an allusion to Queen Elizabeth I)