Act 1 Scene 2: The Mechanicals

(Enter Quince the carpenter, Snug the joiner, Bottom the weaver, Flute the bellows-mender, Snout the tinker, and Starveling the tailor.)

QUINCE Is all our company here? 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 on to a point.

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

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 gallantly 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.

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 You must take Thisbe on you.

FLUTE What is Thisbe? A wand’ring knight?

QUINCE It is the lady that Pyramus must love.

FLUTE Nay, faith, let not me 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 Thisbe too. I’ll speak in a monstrous little voice. ‘Thisne, Thisne!’ ‘Ah, Pyramus, my lover dear! Thy Thisbe dear and lady dear!’

QUINCE No, no, you must play Pyramus.— And, Flute, you Thisbe.

BOTTOM Well, proceed.

QUINCE Robin Starveling, the tailor.
Here, Peter Quince.

Robin Starveling, you must play Thisbe’s mother. Tom Snout, the tinker.

Here, Peter Quince.

You, Pyramus’ father; myself, Thisbe’s father; Snug the joiner, you, the lion’s part: and I hope there is a play fitted.

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

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

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.’

If 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.

That would hang us, every mother’s son.

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 an ‘twere any nightingale.

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 gentlemanlike man: therefore you must needs play Pyramus.

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

Why, what you will.

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

Some of your French crowns have no hair at all, and then you will play bare-faced. (Passes out the parts)

But, masters, here are your parts: and I am to entreat you, request you and desire you, to con them by tomorrow 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.

We will meet, and there we may rehearse more obscenely and courageously. Take pains, be perfect. Adieu.

At the duke’s oak we meet.

Enough. Hold or cut bow-strings. (Exeunt)
Act 2 Scene 1: The Fairies

(Enter the King of Fairies [Oberon] at one door with his train, and the Queen [Titania] at another 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 stol’n away from fairy land,
And in the shape of Corin sat all day,
Playing on pipes of corn and versing love
To amorous Phillida. Why art thou here,
Come from the farthest step of India?
But that, forsooth, the bouncing Amazon,
Your buskined mistress and 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?
Didst not thou lead him through the glimmering night
From Perigenia whom he ravished?
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 pavèd fountain or by rushy brook,
Or in the beachèd 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
Hath every petty 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 fold stands empty in the drownèd field,
And crows are fatted with the murrion flock,
The nine men’s morris is filled up with mud,
And the quaint mazes in the wanton green
For lack of tread are undistinguishable.
The human mortals want their winter here:
No night is now with hymn or carol blessed.
Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,
Pale in her anger, washes all the air,
That rheumatic diseases do abound.
And through this distemperature we see
The seasons alter; hoary-headed frosts
Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose,
And on old Hiems’ thin and icy crown
An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds
Is, as in mockery, set. The spring, the summer,
The childing autumn, angry winter, change
Their wonted liveries, and the mazed 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 changeling boy
To be my henchman.

TITANIA
Set your heart at rest:
The fairy land buys not the child of me.
His mother was a votress 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 th’embarkèd 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
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.

OBERON
Well, go thy way: thou shalt not from this grove
Till I torment thee for this injury.

(Exeunt Titania and her train)
(Enter Demetrius, Helena following him)

DEMETRIUS  I love thee not, therefore pursue me not.  
            Where is Lysander and fair Hermia?  
            The one I'll stay, the other stayeth me.  
            Thou told'st me they were stolen into this wood;  
            And here am I, and wood 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 power to draw,  
            And I shall have no power 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 thee 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.  

DEMETRIUS  What worser place can I beg in your love —  
            And yet a place of high respect with me —  
            Than to be used as you do use your dog?  
            Tempt not too much the hatred of my spirit,  
            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 changed:  
            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 valour 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 wooed and were not made to woo.  
            I'll follow thee and make a heaven of hell,  
            To die upon the hand I love so well.  

(Exit Demetrius)

HELENA    Your wrongs do set a scandal on my sex:  
            We cannot fight for love, as men may do;  
            We should be wooed and were not made to woo.  

(Exit)