

actors, eat no onions!

dramatis personae

Titania:	Angie
Oberon:	Geoff
Titania:	Christa
Oberon:	Maz
Ramesh:	Ramesh
Hermia:	Jerry
Helena:	Becky
Lysander:	El
Demetrius:	Laura
Puck:	Alex
Fairies:	Becky, Christa, El, Jerry, Laura, Maz
Bottom:	Laura
Bottom:	Geoff
Quince:	El
Snug:	Maz
Flute:	Becky
Snout:	Jez
Starveling:	Christa
Storyteller:	Geoff
Lion:	El
Wall:	Jerry
Moon:	Christa
Pyramus:	Maz
Thisbe:	Becky
El:	El

Maz:	Maz
Law:	Laura
Jez:	Jerry
Crab:	Christa
Bec:	Becky

1 beginning

1.1 waiting

*TITANIA (ANGIE), OBERON (GEOFF), FAIRIES,
PUCK.*

**The overture video with sound runs for 10 minutes with
houselights up, and for a further five minutes with
houselights down and stage lights up, before the play starts.**

TITANIA: Oberon.

OBERON: Yes, my love?

TITANIA: Why are we sitting here?

OBERON: We are waiting for a taxi, my love.

TITANIA: Ah. *pause*. What, exactly, is a taxi?

OBERON: Oh, it's a four wheeled vehicle. It's really interesting. The wheels are at each corner. Such a good design.

TITANIA: No doubt. And why are we waiting for one of these things?

OBERON: So that it will take us where we need to go.

TITANIA: Ah. Which is where, exactly?

OBERON: Do you know, I'm not quite sure. It's a new thing I've developed. It's called uncertainty. It's really interesting. It means that you don't know what's going to happen next.

TITANIA: Ah. Does it also have a wheel at each corner?

FAIRY (MAZ): It used to be easy

FAIRY (CHRISTA):	Peaseblossom
FAIRY (EL):	Mustard seed
FAIRY (LAURA):	So nice to be
FAIRY (BECKY):	A vegetable
FAIRY (JERRY):	Uncomplicated
FAIRY (MAZ):	But now
FAIRY (CHRISTA):	But now
FAIRY (EL):	There's a hole
FAIRY (LAURA):	In the centre
FAIRY (BECKY):	It's not the same
FAIRY (JERRY):	It's not
FAIRY (MAZ):	Silver
FAIRY (CHRISTA):	Any more
FAIRY (EL):	Sadness
FAIRY (LAURA):	And 'love'
FAIRY (BECKY):	Something called 'love'
FAIRY (JERRY):	And a hole in the middle
PUCK:	That one, over there, is called OBERON. And that one, there, she's TITANIA. There was a play about them, once. And those people? They are ... supernatural entities, sometimes known as fairies. And, indeed, we all are. Supernatural, that is. But what they are at the moment is: deeply confused. I'm not confused. I am Puck. Also known as Robin Goodfellow. But I prefer: Puck Oh, and the play: the famous play. <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> . About them. I wrote it.
TITANIA:	Oberon.
OBERON:	Yes, my precious.

TITANIA: Why have you done this?

OBERON: Done what, my essence?

TITANIA: Changed everything. Upset everything. Made everything not the same.

OBERON: Have I, my love?

TITANIA: Yes. Why have you done it?

OBERON: I was bored.

TITANIA: Bored? You had everything! You had infinite possibility! You could do exactly what you wanted!

OBERON: Yes. So boring. Weren't you bored?

TITANIA: No! Not at all! I was... I was...

OBERON: What? You were what?

TITANIA: Happy. And sad. And full of...

OBERON: Yes?

TITANIA: Longing?

OBERON: What's that? What is longing? I don't think I've invented that yet, have I?

TITANIA: Yes. You have. You made me fall in love.

PUCK: And there, you see, is the problem. In a nutshell.

FAIRY (MAZ): They can't see us, can they.

FAIRY (CHRISTA): They're not looking.

FAIRY (EL): They're not telling us what to do.

FAIRY (LAURA): We can't amuse them.

FAIRY (BECKY): We're invisible.

FAIRY (JERRY): We don't exist!

FAIRY (MAZ): Yes we do.

FAIRY (CHRISTA): Are you sure?

FAIRY (EL): No.

PUCK: The entire supernatural social order: disintegrated. Very sad. But quite entertaining, too. Otherwise, I wouldn't have made it happen.

TITANIA: So. You invented love.

OBERON: Well, yes. Sort of.

TITANIA: Because you were bored.

OBERON: Well, yes. It was fun, for a while.

TITANIA: It hasn't stopped.

OBERON: Really?

TITANIA: Yes, really. It goes on, you know. It's not just for Christmas.

OBERON: Gosh.

TITANIA: Indeed.

OBERON: You're still in love?

TITANIA: I think so. Yes. But I can't really remember.

OBERON: In love? With the donkey?

TITANIA: He wasn't entirely a donkey. Was he? But yes. Yes. I still am.

OBERON: Gosh. Why?

TITANIA: He was ... sweet. I remember ... sweetness. And: he was ... funny. He was ... real.

OBERON: Really?

TITANIA: Yes. Really.

OBERON: Oh.

FAIRY (MAZ): Ah, love. */All of this is ironic, sending it up/*

FAIRY (CHRISTA): Love, love

FAIRY (EL): Many splendoured

FAIRY (LAURA): Rhymes with dove

FAIRY (BECKY): So versatile

FAIRY (JERRY): Polymorphous

FAIRY (MAZ): I love you

FAIRY (CHRISTA): I love *you*

FAIRY (EL): But I love *you*

FAIRY (LAURA): Oh, no

FAIRY (BECKY): And only you

FAIRY (JERRY): Nobody but you

FAIRY (LAURA): And, maybe, you

FAIRY (BECKY): Oh, no

FAIRY (JERRY): Do you love me?

FAIRY (MAZ): Maybe

FAIRY (CHRISTA): Maybe?

FAIRY (EL): Possibly

FAIRY (LAURA): Love me forever

FAIRY (BECKY): Love only me

FAIRY (JERRY): And me, and me

FAIRY (MAZ): And so on

FAIRY (CHRISTA): And on

FAIRY (EL): And on

PUCK: And so it all got rather chaotic. And dramatic. Just as I intended.

TITANIA: We got old.

OBERON: Did we?

TITANIA: Yes. Look at me. Look at you. We got old. You sold us into impermanence. You made us human. Love. Uncertainty. Things with wheels and corners. And

all of that because of love. Lost to fairyland;
because of love.

OBERON:

I think I hear the taxi coming.

PUCK:

So, I decided to help them out. I decided to
introduce a new character. Look!

1.2 Taxi

*TITANIA (ANGIE), OBERON (GEOFF), FAIRIES,
PUCK, RAMESH*

/Enter RAMESH. He toots the horn/

TITANIA: Hello! Who are you?

RAMESH: My name is Ramesh. Ramesh Krishnamurthy.

TITANIA: Krishnamurthy? What does that mean?

RAMESH: It means me! It's who I am! But you can call me Ramesh! Now, my dears, where would you like to go?

TITANIA: Oberon, tell him where to go.

OBERON To go, my precious?

TITANIA: Yes, what's the matter with you? You summoned this taxi, did you not?

OBERON: Well, no. actually, he just, er, arrived.

TITANIA: *To RAMESH.* Did he summon you?

RAMESH: You both did. And so I came. In my trusty chariot. With great joy, to serve you.

TITANIA: But we don't know where to go.

RAMESH: Yes, you have forgotten. Haven't you. You have forgotten who you were.

OBERON: Possibly.

RAMESH: Definitely. Most assuredly. Goodness me, yes. It happens a lot, in these modern times. Most sad.

TITANIA: What happens a lot?

RAMESH: People forget their narratives. They lose the plot.

TITANIA: It's the corners. I don't like corners. I don't like uncertainty, either. What about you?

OBERON: I do feel, my love, there is something lacking in my life. A gap.

RAMESH: In stories there are no gaps, no corners, no uncertainties. I can help you. You need to get your story back. Let's go.

OBERON: Go where?

RAMESH: You'll see.

TITANIA: But...

RAMESH: First, however, I must go and talk to my friends over there.

TITANIA: But there's no-one over there!

RAMESH: Oh dear, you really have forgotten, haven't you. I must ask, for a moment, for your patience. All will be well. Have no fear.

1.3 follow that cab

*TITANIA (ANGIE), OBERON (GEOFF), FAIRIES,
PUCK, RAMESH*

RAMESH: Hello, my loves, my dears, so nice, beyond nice, to see you all again.

FAIRY (LAURA): Who are you?

FAIRY (BECKY): What do you mean?

FAIRY (JERRY): Are you real?

FAIRY (MAZ): How strange you are.

FAIRY (CHRISTA): Do we know you?

FAIRY (EL): Do we know you?

RAMESH: You too, you too have forgotten. So sad.

FAIRY (LAURA): Sad?

FAIRY (BECKY): We are not sad.

FAIRY (JERRY): We are ... we are ..

FAIRY (MAZ): We were ...

FAIRY (CHRISTA): We ...

FAIRY (EL): Are not

FAIRY (LAURA): Very

FAIRY (BECKY): Happy.

FAIRY (JERRY): No.

RAMESH: No. You have forgotten. I knew you, long ago: when you were able to love.

FAIRY (MAZ): Love!

FAIRY (CHRISTA): Love!

FAIRY (EL): Love is the problem!

FAIRY (LAURA): Love made them old!

FAIRY (BECKY): Love made them forget!

RAMESH: Yes. Love is the problem. Love, also, is the answer. It's a complicated story. You'll like it. Come with me. Follow that cab. No, wait. You all go ahead: get things ready for us. Use your initiatives. You'll like it.

OBERON: Where are we going?

FAIRY (JERRY): Where

FAIRY (MAZ): Are

FAIRY (CHRISTA): We

FAIRY (EL): Going?

RAMESH: We, my loves, are going to the Theatre! */Toots horn/*

1.4 the theatre

FAIRIES, PUCK

FAIRY (LAURA): What do we do?

FAIRY (BECKY): What do we *do*?

FAIRY (JERRY): We're really confused.

FAIRY (MAZ): What's a theatre?

FAIRY (CHRISTA): What is this place?

PUCK: A theatre, my insubstantial friends, is where the
real magic happens.

FAIRY (EL): Really?

FAIRY (LAURA): We understand magic.

FAIRY (BECKY): Magic is reassuring.

FAIRY (JERRY): We like it.

FAIRY (MAZ): But: what do we *do*?

PUCK: Well, the first thing is, you stop behaving as if you
were all one person: you are now ... Actors!

FAIRY (CHRISTA): Actors?

PUCK: Yes! Actors! With actors' egos! And: you are all, at
the moment, unemployed!

/Clicks tap shoes and transforms them/

1.5 Actors

MAZ, EL, LAW, JEZ, BEC, CRAB

/Enter MAZ and EL with feather dusters/

MAZ: I like this job EL.

EL: Do you MAZ?

MAZ: Yeah . . . gives you time to think.

EL: Think? Think about what exactly?

MAZ: Oh - you know - stuff.

EL: Oh. *(pause)* I like it because I don't have to think.
Well not much anyway.

MAZ: And the money comes in handy.

EL: Does it? What for exactly?

MAZ: Oh - you know - stuff.

EL: Oh. *(pause)* I've never quite got the hang of
money. Or stuff, come to think of it.

MAZ: There you go -

EL: What?

MAZ: You're thinking.

EL: Oh dear.

*/LAW with clipboard and pen, and JEZ following her
anxiously with a pile of papers/*

LAW: I know I put them here somewhere. We have to
find them, or the Director will be hopping mad!

JEZ: When did you last see them?

LAW: Oh. I don't know. At that meeting.

JEZ: Which meeting?

LAW: The big meeting. Yesterday . . .

JEZ: The big meeting or the really big meeting?

LAW: Well it must have been the really big meeting because I had them for the big meeting and then I had to wing it through the really big meeting pretending I still had them.

JEZ: You did ever so well, if you don't mind me saying so.

LAW: I don't mind at all actually. In fact.

JEZ: Did I do alright LAW?

LAW: Alright? All right? You were bloody fantastic JEZ.

/BEC and CHRIS with mops/

BEC: So I said to him I said "Darling" I said (he likes that) "Darling, you are a man of the theatre."

CRAB: And what did he say?

BEC: He said "BEC" he said "And you are the leading lady."

CRAB: But you're not.

BEC: I know I'm not, CRAB. He was speaking metaphorically.

CRAB: Yes, he does that.

BEC: Oh he does. So do I of course. That's why we understand each other.

CRAB: And did he get the new buckets?

BEC: Oh yes. I had him eating out of my hand and wrapped round my little finger

CRAB: Oh dear.

BEC: I am speaking metaphorically

CRAB: You're speaking clichés, darling

BEC: Touché my pet. Touché. */they both laugh/*

PUCK: Brilliant! To audience: Ladies and gentlemen, a big hand if you please for the actors! *They take a bow.*

JEZ: I could get used to this...

1.6 two directors

*TITANIA (ANGIE), OBERON (GEOFF), FAIRIES,
PUCK, RAMESH*

/Enter OBERON, TITANIA, and RAMESH/

RAMESH: And... here we are!

TITANIA: This is a theatre?

RAMESH: It is. This is a stage, those are lights, those are entrances, also exits.

OBERON: Good design, that.

RAMESH: And these are actors /they bow, rather elaborately/

TITANIA: And who are they? /Points at audience/

RAMESH: Ah, they are the audience. It is conventional to ignore them, for the most part.

Puck comes forward.

PUCK: Welcome to the theatre. Welcome to the show. Are you audience or actor?

OBERON: I'm not certain

TITANIA: I am. I'm audience.

PUCK: Hmm. No problem. Why don't you both sit here, and then you can join in, or not, as the fancy takes you. I just need your names, please.

TITANIA: Why?

PUCK: For the programme, of course.

TITANIA: But I'm in the audience.

PUCK: Oh yes. Of course you are. But you're still in the programme. /To RAMESH/ And you, sir, are you audience or actor?

RAMESH: I am the director.

PUCK: Hm. I think you will find, sir, that I am the director.

RAMESH: And so am I! Excellent! A most fortuitous circumstance! We can collaborate!

PUCK: Maybe.

This is a three-act play. The first act is called 'The Lovers'. The second act is called 'The Queen and the Donkey'. The third act is called 'Pyramus and Thisbe'. And here, my loves, are your parts.

TITANIA: And why exactly are we here? In this weird place? Watching this strange bunch of people?

PUCK: It's called a play.

RAMESH: It's very educational. Goodness me, yes.

PUCK: It's entertaining. It's destabilising.

RAMESH: It's to help you remember.

TITANIA: Remember what?

PUCK: Remember who you are.

RAMESH: Remember love.

2 the lovers

2.1 the heart of things

FAIRIES, PUCK, RAMESH

RAMESH: So let's go right to the heart of things

FAIRY (EL): The heart of things?

RAMESH: Always. Always the heart of things.

FAIRY (LAURA): Is that what love is?

RAMESH: Wait. Wait and see. Now, what do you remember?

FAIRY (BECKY): The arguments.

FAIRY (JERRY): The mix-up.

FAIRY (MAZ): The girls . . . big and little.

FAIRY (CHRISTA): Not girls! Women!

FAIRY (EL): Whatever. That was fun.

FAIRY (LAURA): Weird.

FAIRY (BECKY): Weird and fun.

RAMESH: Good. You - you play HELENA (BECKY). You play HERMIA (JERRY). You can be LYSANDER (EL). And you can be DEMETRIUS (LAURA). /To PUCK/ and this, my ancient friend, is your work, I think: so you can direct it.

PUCK: Thank you.

2.2 I cannot love you

HELENA (BECKY), DEMETRIUS (LAURA), TITANIA (ANGIE), OBERON (GEOFF), MAZ, PUCK

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 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.?

2.3 this is love?

TITANIA (ANGIE), RAMESH, PUCK.

TITANIA (ANGIE): Stop! Stop all this! It's horrible!

PUCK: Yes, it's not very nice, is it? Quite lively, though, don't you think? Has a certain vivacity?

TITANIA: No! It's horrible! Why are you showing us this?

PUCK: : I thought you wanted to know what love was like.

TITANIA: Like this? This is love?

PUCK: : Yes.

RAMESH: No.

PUCK: : Yes and no.

TITANIA: Thank you. Very informative.

2.4 Dumbshow

*TITANIA (ANGIE), OBERON (GEOFF), PUCK,
HELENA (BECKY), HERMIA (JERRY), LYSANDER
(EL), DEMETRIUS (LAURA), RAMESH*

OBERON: Look. Can you just spell the whole thing out in simple terms? This is much too complicated. It makes my head hurt.

PUCK: Sure. No problem. We'll do a dumb show. Classic device of Elizabethan Theatre. Very traditional. I present to you our four actors: Hermia, the little one, and Helena, the tall one.

OBERON: Right.

PUCK: And here are the males: Demetrius, and Lysander.

OBERON: Right.

PUCK: Now, watch very carefully. Hermia loves Lysander. And Lysander loves Hermia.

FAIRIES: Aaaaaw!

PUCK: On the other hand, Helena loves Demetrius, but Demetrius loves – Hermia!

FAIRIES: Oh nooooooo!

PUCK: Oh yes. Stage 1. Now. Pay attention. Stage 2. Because of a small magical error, to be explained later, Lysander no longer loves Hermia; he loves Helena instead. So now none of the loves are matching!

FAIRIES: Oh nooooooo!

PUCK: Too right. So, to fix it, Demetrius is magicked into loving Helena.

FAIRIES: Aaaaaw!

PUCK: But unfortunately, Helena, who is now loved by Demetrius, whom she loves, and by Lysander, whom she doesn't, decides the whole thing is a bad practical joke, and is very offended. And Hermia, whom nobody now loves, is very very upset. Stage 3.

FAIRIES: Oh nooooooo!

PUCK: Oh yes. Some people are never satisfied. However, we now move hastily on to stage 4, in which Lysander is unmagicked from loving Helena, and magicked into loving Hermia.

FAIRIES: Aaaaaw!

PUCK: So now, Lysander loves Hermia, and she loves him back; and Demetrius (magically) loves Helena, who gratefully loves him back. Happy ending!

FAIRIES: Aaaaaw!

PUCK: /To OBERON/ All clear now?

OBERON: Er, yes. But what was this magical solution? That did nothing but create chaos?

PUCK: That was you. You had a bright idea.

OBERON: Me!?

PUCK: Yes, you. Watch. /To Maz/ you can play Oberon.

MAZ: Me?

2.5 the chemical solution

OBERON (MAZ), TITANIA (ANGIE), PUCK, FAIRIES

OBERON: My gentle Puck, come hither. Thou rememberest
Since once I sat upon a promontory,
And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back
Uttering such dulcet and harmonious 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 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
Quench'd in the chaste beams of the watery moon,
And the imperial votaress passed 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 flower; 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 and re-enter PUCK/

OBERON: Hast thou the flower there? Welcome, wanderer.
PUCK: Ay, there it is.
OBERON: Take thou some of it, and seek through this grove:
A sweet Athenian 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 Athenian 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.

PUCK: Right. So at the moment we're at stage 1. Actors!
Stage 1, if you please! */They leap into the stage 1
position/*. Hermia loves Lysander. Lysander loves
Hermia. Helena loves Demetrius. But Demetrius
loves Hermia. So Oberon wants me to give the
potion to Demetrius and make him fall in love with
Helena. That would solve the problem.

TITANIA: Right, OK. Problem solved?

PUCK: Not exactly. I gave the potion to the wrong guy.

FAIRIES: Oh, nooooooooooooo!

PUCK: Oh yes. Look.

2.6 the wrong Athenian

PUCK, RAMESH, TITANIA (ANGIE), LYSANDER (EL), FAIRIES, HELENA (BECKY), FAIRIES.

PUCK: Through the forest have I gone.
But Athenian found I none,
On whose eyes I might approve
This flower's force in stirring love.
Night and silence.--Who is here?
Weeds 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-courtesy.
Churl, upon thy eyes I throw
All the power this charm doth owe.
When thou wakest, let love forbid
Sleep his seat on thy eyelid:
So awake when I am gone;
For I must now to Oberon.

PUCK: Lysander wakes up, sees Helena, falls in love with her. And falls seriously out of love with Hermia.

TITANIA: Just like that?

PUCK: Just like that.

LYSANDER:

Content with Hermia! No; I do repent
The tedious minutes I with her have spent.
Not Hermia but Helena I love:
Who will not change a raven for a dove?
The will of man is by his reason 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 mockery 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 Demetrius' 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 refused.
Should of another therefore be abused!

PUCK:

And no-one loves Hermia, so she is in despair.

2.7 Hermia unloved

LYSANDER: Hang off, thou cat, thou burr! vile thing, let loose,
Or I will shake thee from me like a serpent!

HERMIA: Why are you grown so rude? what change is this?
Sweet love,--

LYSANDER: Thy love! out, tawny Tartar, out!
Out, loathed medicine! hated potion, hence!

HERMIA: Do you not jest?

HELENA: Yes, sooth; and so do you.
HERMIA *collapses, in tears.*

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

HERMIA: What, can you do me greater harm than hate?
Hate me! Wherefore? O me! What news, my love!
Am not I Hermia? are not you Lysander?
I am as fair now as I was erewhile.
Since night you loved me; yet since night you left
me:

Why, then you left me--O, the gods forbid!--

In earnest, shall I say?

LYSANDER: Ay, by my life;
And never did desire to see thee more.
Therefore be out of hope, of question, of doubt:
Be certain, nothing truer; 'tis no jest
That I do hate thee and love HELENA.

HERMIA: O me! you juggler! you canker-blossom!

You thief of love! what, have you come by night
And stolen my love's heart from him?

HELENA:

Fine, i'faith!

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

HERMIA:

Puppet? why so? Ay, that way goes the game.
Now I perceive that she hath made compare
Between our statures; she hath urged her height:
And with her personage, her tall personage,
Her height, forsooth, she hath prevail'd with him.
And are you grown so high in his esteem;
Because I am so dwarfish and so low?

How low am I, thou painted maypole? Speak;
How low am I? I am not yet so low
But that my nails can reach unto thine eyes.

HELENA:

O, when she's angry, she is keen and shrewd!
She was a vixen when she went to school;
And though she be but little, she is fierce.

HERMIA:

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

LYSANDER:

Get you gone, you dwarf;
You minimus, of hindering knot-grass made;
You bead, you acorn.

TITANIA (ANGIE):

These are not nice people!

2.8 sorting it out

*TITANIA (ANGIE), PUCK, HELENA (BECKY),
RAMESH*

TITANIA:

What happens then?

PUCK:

Well, we're now in stage 2. Actors! Stage 2, please!
/They assume stage 2 position/. In order to sort it
out, Oberon drugs Demetrius, and sends me to get
hold of Helena, so that she's the first person he
sees when he wakes up.

OBERON:

About the wood go swifter than the wind,
And Helena of Athens look thou find:
All fancy-sick she is and pale of cheer,
With sighs of love, that costs the fresh blood dear:
By some illusion see thou bring her here:
I'll charm his eyes against she do appear.
/PUCK exits/
/OBERON goes to sleeping Demetrius/
Flower of this purple dye,
Hit with Cupid's archery,
Sink in apple of his eye.
When his love he doth espy,
Let her shine as gloriously
As the Venus of the sky.
When thou wakest, if she be by,
Beg of her for remedy.
/Re-enter PUCK with Helena/

PUCK: Captain of our fairy band,
Helena is here at hand;
And the youth, mistook by me,
Pleading for a lover's fee.
Shall we their fond pageant see?
Lord, what fools these mortals be!
*/They stand by and watch. Demetrius wakes up.
Sees Helena, falls instantly in love. She freezes in
surprise and disbelief./*

TITANIA: Stage 3, right? Didn't work, did it?

PUCK: It got sorted in the end. I messed them about a bit
- easy enough in the forest and the dark. The girls
had a fight. The men had a fight. And then, thank
goodness, they all fell asleep. Now I give Lysander
the antidote, so that he reverts to being in love
with Hermia, they all wake up and pair off properly,
and there you go. They're a bit bewildered, but no
harm done.
*/The four lovers sleep. Puck gives Lysander the
antidote. They all wake up./*

DEMETRIUS: Are you sure
That we are awake? It seems to me
That yet we sleep, we dream. Let's follow him
And by the way let us recount our dreams.

PUCK: And there you are. Stage 4. All prepared to live
happily ever after. No problem.

TITANIA: And you are telling us that this is love?

PUCK: Yes.

TITANIA: But it's a joke!

PUCK: Yes.

TITANIA: From love to hate and from delusion to delusion.
It's a nightmare!

PUCK: That's right.

TITANIA: So what is love?

PUCK: Love is a child. Love is irrational. Love is blind.
Love tells lies. Listen:

HELENA: 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 beguiled.
As waggish boys in game themselves forswear,
So the boy Love is perjured every where:
For ere Demetrius look'd on Hermia's eyne,
He hail'd down oaths that he was only mine;
And when this hail some heat from Hermia felt,
So he dissolved, and showers of oaths did melt.

TITANIA: And that's the whole story?

RAMESH: No. It's not. It's not the whole story.

3 the queen and the donkey

3.1 ill met

*RAMESH, PUCK, OBERON (MAZ), TITANIA
(CHRISTA), TITANIA (ANGIE), OBERON (GEOFF),
FAIRIES*

RAMESH: Now: the Queen and the Donkey. We begin with a little marital dispute. *To Christa:* You play Titania, please.

PUCK: The king doth keep his revels here to-night:
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.

OBERON (MAZ): Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania.

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

OBERON (MAZ): 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 (CHRISTA):

Set your heart at rest:
The fairy land 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 gossip'd by my side,
And sat with me on Neptune's yellow sands,
Marking the embarked 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
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, did soon after die;
And for her sake do I rear up her boy,
And for her sake I will not part with him.

TITANIA (ANGIE):

Just a minute. Just hang on a minute. That Indian
boy, I remember him now. Yes.

RAMESH:

Yes?

TITANIA (ANGIE):

He was ... you. Was he? Wasn't he?

RAMESH:

Quite possibly. Yes. I am, in fact, Indian. And, at
one time, I was indeed a boy. So it could be, yes.
Maybe.

TITANIA (ANGIE):

So it was you who started the whole thing off,
then? You?

RAMESH: Who knows? Maybe. Things are very interconnected, you know. Wait and see.

OBERON (MAZ): How long within this wood intend you stay?

TITANIA (CHRISTA): 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 (MAZ) Give me that boy, and I will go with thee.

TITANIA (CHRISTA): Not for thy fairy kingdom. Fairies, away!
We shall chide downright, if I longer stay.
/Exit TITANIA with her train/

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

TITANIA (ANGIE): That's not very nice! Did you really say that?

OBERON (GEOFF) Er, I don't remember. No, surely not. An obvious dramatic device. Don't believe a word of it.

TITANIA (ANGIE): Hmm. You used the magic flower, didn't you? The love potion that made people fall in love with the first person they see when they wake up. It's all coming back to me. You did, didn't you?

OBERON (GEOFF): Er, possibly...

OBERON (MAZ): Having once this juice,
I'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 ere I take this charm from off her sight,
As I can take it with another herb,
I'll make her render up her page to me.

/Enter TITANIA, with her train/

TITANIA (CHRISTA): Come, now a roundel and a fairy song;
Sing me now asleep;
Then to your offices and let me rest.

/The Fairies sing/

FAIRIES: You spotted snakes with double tongue,
Thorny hedgehogs, be not seen;
Newts and blind-worms, do no wrong,
Come not near our fairy queen.

Hence, away! now all is well:

One aloof stand sentinel.

FAIRY (LAURA): Hence, away! now all is well:

One aloof stand sentinel.

/Exeunt Fairies. TITANIA sleeps/

*/Enter OBERON and squeezes the flower on
TITANIA's eyelids/*

OBERON (MAZ): What thou seest when thou dost wake,
Do it for thy true-love take,
Love and languish for his sake:
Be it ounce, or cat, or bear,
Pard, or boar with bristled hair,
In thy eye that shall appear
When thou wakest, it is thy dear:
Wake when some vile thing is near.

TITANIA (ANGIE): You bastard!

OBERON (GEOFF): I was upset.

TITANIA (ANGIE): You were upset! What you did was, you upset everything, with your upset!

RAMESH: He did the right thing.

TITANIA (ANGIE): What?

OBERON (GEOFF): What?

RAMESH: Wait. You'll see.

3.2 Amdram

RAMESH, QUINCE (EL), SNUG (MAZ), BOTTOM (LAURA), FLUTE (BECKY), SNOUT (JERRY), and STARVELING (CHRISTA)

RAMESH: Within this play, there is a play; and here are our actors. I present: QUINCE, SNUG, BOTTOM, FLUTE, SNOUT, and STARVELING.

BOTTOM: Are we all met?

QUINCE: Here's a marvellous convenient place for our rehearsal. This green plot shall be our stage, this hawthorn-brake our tiring-house; and we will do it in action as we will do it before the duke.

BOTTOM: Peter Quince,--

QUINCE: What sayest thou, bully Bottom?

BOTTOM: There are things in this comedy of Pyramus and Thisby that will never please. First, Pyramus must draw a sword to kill himself; which the ladies cannot abide. How answer you that?

SNOUT: By'r lakin, a parlous fear.

STARVELING: I believe we must leave the killing out, when all is done.

BOTTOM: Not a whit: I have a device to make all well. Write me a prologue; and let the prologue seem to say, we will do no harm with our swords, and that Pyramus is not killed indeed; and, for the more better assurance, tell them that I, Pyramus, am not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver: this will put them out of fear.

QUINCE: Well, we will have such a prologue; and it shall be written in eight and six.

BOTTOM: No, make it two more; let it be written in eight and eight.

SNOUT: Will not the ladies be afeard of the lion?

STARVELING: I fear it, I promise you.

BOTTOM: Masters, you ought to consider with yourselves: to bring in--God shield us!--a lion among ladies, is a most dreadful thing; for there is not a more fearful wild-fowl than your lion living; and we ought to look to 't.

SNOUT: Therefore another prologue must tell he is not a lion.

BOTTOM: Nay, you must name his name, and half his face must be seen through the lion's neck: and he himself must speak through, saying thus, or to the same defect,--'Ladies,'--or 'Fair-ladies--I would wish You,'--or 'I would request you,'--or 'I would entreat you,--not to fear, not to tremble: my life for yours. If you think I come hither as a lion, it were pity of my life: no I am no such thing; I am a man as other men are;' and there indeed let him name his name, and tell them plainly he is Snug the joiner.

QUINCE: Well it shall be so. But there is two hard things; that is, to bring the moonlight into a chamber; for, you know, Pyramus and Thisby meet by moonlight.

SNOUT: Doth the moon shine that night we play our play?

BOTTOM: A calendar, a calendar! look in the almanac; find out moonshine, find out moonshine.

QUINCE: Yes, it doth shine that night.

BOTTOM: Why, then may you leave a casement of the great chamber window, where we play, open, and the moon may shine in at the casement.

QUINCE: Ay; or else one must come in with a bush of thorns and a lanthorn, and say he comes to disfigure, or

to present, the person of Moonshine. Then, there is another thing: we must have a wall in the great chamber; for Pyramus and Thisby says the story, did talk through the chink of a wall.

SNOUT: You can never bring in a wall. What say you, Bottom?

BOTTOM: Some man or other must present Wall: and let him have some plaster, or some loam, or some rough-cast about him, to signify wall; and let him hold his fingers thus, and through that cranny shall Pyramus and Thisby whisper.

And, most dear actors, eat no onions nor garlic, for we are to utter sweet breath; and I do not doubt but to hear them say, it is a sweet comedy.

QUINCE: If that may be, then all is well. Come, sit down, every mother's son, and rehearse your parts. Pyramus, you begin: when you have spoken your speech, enter into that brake: and so every one according to his cue.

3.3 Bottom translated

PUCK, QUINCE (EL), SNUG (MAZ), BOTTOM (LAURA), FLUTE (BECKY), SNOUT (JERRY), and STARVELING (CHRISTA), BOTTOM (GEOFF)

/Enter PUCK behind/

PUCK: What hempen home-spuns have we swaggering here,

So near the cradle of the fairy queen?

What, a play toward! I'll be an auditor;

An actor too, perhaps, if I see cause.

QUINCE: Speak, Pyramus. Thisby, stand forth.

BOTTOM: Thisby, the flowers of odious savours sweet,--

QUINCE: Odours! odours!

BOTTOM: --odours savours sweet:

So hath thy breath, my dearest Thisby dear.

But hark, a voice! stay thou but here awhile,

And by and by I will to thee appear.

/Exit/

PUCK: A stranger Pyramus than e'er played here.

/Exit/

FLUTE: Must I speak now?

QUINCE: Ay, marry, must you; for you must understand he goes but to see a noise that he heard, and is to come again.

FLUTE: Most radiant Pyramus, most lily-white of hue,
Of colour like the red rose on triumphant brier,
Most brisky juvenal and eke most lovely Jew,

As true as truest horse that yet would never tire,
I'll meet thee, Pyramus, at Ninny's tomb.

QUINCE: 'Ninus' tomb,' man!

/Re-enter PUCK, and BOTTOM with an ass's head/

BOTTOM (GEOFF): If I were fair, Thisby, I were only thine.

QUINCE: O monstrous! O strange! we are haunted. Pray,
masters! fly, masters! Help!

*/Exeunt QUINCE, SNUG, FLUTE, SNOUT, and
STARVELING/*

BOTTOM (GEOFF): Why do they run away? this is a knavery of them to
make me afeard.

/Re-enter SNOUT/

SNOUT: O Bottom, thou art changed! what do I see on
thee?

BOTTOM (GEOFF): What do you see? you see an asshead of your own,
do you?

/Exit SNOUT/

/Re-enter QUINCE/

QUINCE: Bless thee, Bottom! bless thee! thou art translated.

/Exit/

3.4 Titania in love

*BOTTOM (GEOFF), TITANIA (CHRISTA),
PEASEBLOSSOM (JERRY), COBWEB (BECKY), MOTH
(LAURA), MUSTARDSEED (EL), OBERON (MAZ)*

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

/Sings/

The ousel cock so black of hue,

With orange-tawny bill,

The throstle with his note so true,

The wren with little quill,--

TITANIA (CHRISTA): *[Awaking]* What angel wakes me from my flowery
bed?

I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again:

Mine ear is much enamour'd of thy note;

So is mine eye enthralled to thy shape;

And thy fair virtue's force perforce doth move me

On the first view to say, to swear, I love thee.

BOTTOM: Methinks, mistress, you should have little reason
for that: and yet, to say the truth, reason and love
keep little company together now-a-days.

TITANIA: Thou art as wise as thou art beautiful.

BOTTOM: Not so, neither: but if I had wit enough to get out
of this wood, I have enough to serve mine own
turn.

TITANIA: Out of this wood do not desire to go:
 Thou shalt remain here, whether thou wilt or no.
 I am a spirit of no common rate;
 The summer still doth tend upon my state;
 And I do love thee: therefore, go with me;
 I'll give thee fairies to attend on thee,
 And they shall fetch thee jewels from the deep,
 And sing while thou on pressed flowers dost sleep;
 And I will purge thy mortal grossness so
 That thou shalt like an airy spirit go.
 Peaseblossom! Cobweb! Moth! and Mustardseed!
*/Enter PEASEBLOSSOM (JERRY), COBWEB
 (BECKY), MOTH (LAURA), and MUSTARDSEED (EL)/*

PEASEBLOSSOM: Ready.

COBWEB: And I.

MOTH: And I.

MUSTARDSEED: And I.

ALL: Where shall we go?

TITANIA: Be kind and courteous to this gentleman;
 Hop in his walks and gambol in his eyes;
 Feed him with apricocks and dewberries,
 With purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries;
 Nod to him, elves, and do him courtesies.

PEASEBLOSSOM: Hail, mortal!

COBWEB: Hail!

MOTH: Hail!

MUSTARDSEED: Hail!

TITANIA (CHRISTA): Come, wait upon him; lead him to my bower.

OBERON (MAZ): This falls out better than I could devise.

TITANIA:

Come, sit thee down upon this flowery bed,
While I thy amiable cheeks do coy,
And stick musk-roses in thy sleek smooth head,
And kiss thy fair large ears, my gentle joy.
Sleep thou, and I will wind thee in my arms.
Fairies, begone, and be all ways away.

/Exeunt fairies/

So doth the woodbine the sweet honeysuckle
Gently entwist; the female ivy so
Enrings the barky fingers of the elm.

O, how I love thee! how I dote on thee!

/They sleep/

3.5 stop right there

*TITANIA (ANGIE), OBERON (GEOFF), FAIRIES,
PUCK, RAMESH*

TITANIA: OK, stop right there! Is that what actually happened?

PUCK: Yes!

RAMESH: Maybe.

TITANIA: You and your maybes! I don't want any more bloody maybes! I want to know what happened to me!

FAIRY (MAZ): One midsummer night

FAIRY (CHRISTA): In the enchanted wood

FAIRY (EL): You fell asleep.

FAIRY (LAURA): And, in your sleep, you fell

FAIRY (BECKY): Into love

TITANIA: With a monster!

FAIRY (JERRY): But a nice monster

FAIRY (MAZ): A kind monster

FAIRY (CHRISTA): An, actually, rather beautiful monster

TITANIA: Yes, he was, kind of, wasn't he... But he was an idiot!

FAIRY (EL): Yes. A beautiful idiot.

FAIRY (LAURA): You fell into love, inside your dream, with a beautiful idiot.

TITANIA: Yes... And I loved him...

FAIRY (BECKY): Yes: and it was love

FAIRY (JERRY): You discovered love

FAIRY (MAZ): The reality of love

FAIRY (CHRISTA): Where we fall, in a dream

FAIRY (EL): Into love

FAIRY (LAURA): With some beautiful idiot

FAIRY (BECKY): And then become human

FAIRY (JERRY): Find our own humanity

FAIRY (MAZ): Just like you.

TITANIA: Yes, yes, that sounds really nice, but he was still an idiot, an ass, a monster.

OBERON: Yes. I am. All of those things. But: I love you. And, in the forest, on that golden night, you loved me.

TITANIA: What? What are you talking about?

OBERON: The ass's head was a disguise. It was me. I stepped into mortality, to regain your love. And now I can't get back. And neither can you. That's where all the magic went. In its place, there is love. Just ordinary common or garden love. I love you.

TITANIA: */long pause; looks at him/* No. I don't buy it. You're lying, aren't you. Nice try, but no.

FAIRIES: Oh noooooooooooooooooo!

3.6 Bottom's dream

TITANIA (ANGIE), RAMESH, BOTTOM (LAURA)

- TITANIA: So: is that it? Is that the whole story?
- RAMESH: No. It's not. Bottom had a dream, too. A bottomless dream.
- TITANIA: Did he fell in love with a beautiful Fairy Queen, by any chance?
- RAMESH: No, actually. Listen:
- BOTTOM: */Awaking/* When my cue comes, call me, and I will answer: my next is, 'Most fair Pyramus.' Heigh-ho! Peter Quince! Flute, the bellows-mender! Snout, the tinker! Starveling! God's my life, stolen hence, and left me asleep! I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was: man is but an ass, if he go about to expound this dream. Methought I was--there is no man can tell what. Methought I was,--and methought I had,--but man is but a patched fool, if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was. I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream: it shall be called Bottom's Dream, because it hath no bottom; and I will sing it in the latter end of a play: peradventure, to make it the more gracious, I shall sing it at her death.
- RAMESH: He dreamed of Pyramus and Thisbe. And so will we. We will dream his bottomless dream. In which I, too, must play a part.

4 Pyramus and Thisbe: the bottomless dream

4.1 the secret

*TITANIA (ANGIE), OBERON (GEOFF), PUCK,
RAMESH*

- RAMESH: It is my contention, Ladies and Gentlemen, that Shakespeare, the immortal Shakespeare, when he wrote the play that you have just seen, hid in it a secret. A remarkable secret.
- PUCK: Wait a minute. Just wait a minute. I wrote that play. Me.
- RAMESH: Yes, you did. Of course you did. And, dear sir, may I ask? Who wrote you?
- PUCK: Er. Er...
- RAMESH: Shakespeare. Of course. Obviously. Now. While writing you – if I may say so, one of his very greatest creations – he had, I contend, an idea. A brainwave. He decided to hide, in the middle of his complicated play, dreams within dreams, stories interlocked with stories, his secret. Which was, no less, the key to all stories. The fundamental essence of narrative. Which, since all we can live is stories, since stories are all we are, is the essential recipe for life itself.
- OBERON: Really?
- TITANIA: You're kidding, aren't you.
- RAMESH: No. Not at all. Definitely not. He called this creation – possibly his supreme creation – */pause for effect/* Pyramus and Thisbe!
- OBERON: Oh, come on!
- TITANIA: You really are joking!

RAMESH: Not at all! Not in the least! But Shakespeare was.
Of course he was. He was a very humorous
gentleman. This was his greatest joke.

OBERON: All right, come on then, show it to us.

RAMESH: I will. I will. It is called: 'Pyramus and Thisbe': the
play within a play within a play: the bottomless
dream.

4.2 Pyramus and Thisbe

RAMESH, LION (EL), WALL (JERRY), MOON (CHRISTA), PYRAMUS (MAZ), THISBE (BECKY)

RAMESH: First, I present my actors. Some applause, please, for the actors.

Now.

Every play, without exception, must have a lion in it. And here he is: the LION (*EL*).

/LION does LION stuff, roars, menaces/

LION: I am death, the death that awaits you all. I am the fear in the night, the terminal verdict; I am the hammer of god, the unlooked for, that will eat you up. I am, in fact, the eater of worlds, the widow maker, the murderer. But, please note, I mean no harm, not the least harm in the world, there is no need to be frightened, when I roar, it is only a story, and when I eat your children, it is only a dream.

RAMESH: And in every story, without fail, a WALL (*JERRY*) is built.

/WALL does Wall stuff/

WALL: I am the obstacle that comes between desires. I am the bloody nuisance, the thing that gets up your nose. I mess you about, I am implacable, *natura naturans*, I am the way things are. Solid, unscaleable, a total pain in the – architecture. I am what undoes love. I am WALL.

RAMESH: Above them all, overarching every drama, there must be: MOON (*CHRISTA*).

/MOON does MOON stuff/

MOON: Luminous, lunar, enchanting, I am the essence of romance. I turn the darkness golden, I loom over lovers and make their madness sensible. I cast dark shadows, mysteries, illusions of the night. Glamour is what I am, a cold mistress, unobtainable, spellbinding the world of night.

RAMESH: And, it goes without saying, a hero. Obviously. Here he is: PYRAMUS (*MAZ*).

PYRAMUS: And I of course am the lover. Longing, agonising, I am the want that drives me on. The fine delight that fathers thought, that's me, the purity of poetry; I am where all art starts. Desire that trembles with tenderness, always on the edge of ending; wanting, wanting, the play of wonder and delight. What would you do, where would you be, without me, ladies, gentlemen, imagine how empty your lives would be, without my possibilities?

RAMESH: And, finally, the adorable, the one and only, the love object: THISBE (*BECKY*).

/THISBE comes slowly forward/

THISBE: Ah. Yes. The one you've all been waiting for. The one everyone waits for, the wanted, the treacle well, is that it? The cliff over which you wish to fling yourself, again and again? The soft landing, the mattress? Well, gentle lovers, whoever you may be, here are two words from me to you: fuck off. I'll have none of it. I will choose to be me, not yours, not any unbelievable part of you, OK, is that clear? You can stuff your stories. Me, for once. I will be Me.

RAMESH: */Imperturbably: pleased, in fact/* And that, my ladies, lords, and lovers, is my cast.

4.3 story

*RAMESH, STORYTELLER (GEOFF), TITANIA
(ANGIE), OBERON (GEOFF)*

RAMESH: Thank you my dears. Now. What is a story, lovers and strangers? To answer that, I now present the essential introduction, the essence of story: our dumb show. And I present: my storyteller!
(GEOFF).

STORYTELLER: My story begins, as all the stories begin, with death and moonlight.

/LION and MOON set the scene. The rest of the cast join in as appropriate/

Enter the Lover, enter tragedy: the story-weaving begins. Enchanted by Moonlight, unaware of Death, */he gestures at MOON and LION, who react/* Love walks through the evening like an accident waiting to happen. And happen it does, for who should he see but Beauty, the amazing object of desire. Made golden by Moonlight, offset by Death like a jewel on black velvet */interacts with MOON and LION/*, she shines in his eyes, she changes the world for him.

Unaware, impervious as the Moon, she moves on, leaving him—different. He is born again, changed and charged and choc a bloc with mystery. He follows after, hypnotised, never so happy, and runs into: WALL. Who stops him in his tracks. WALL in this story is what? A father, maybe? A husband? A dark wood, an enchanted castle? Poverty, prejudice, total war? Who cares? Without WALL there is no story, he is as necessary as Death and Moonlight.

And so begins a complicated dance, a million different narratives, as Love and Wall and beauty and pain intertwine and interact.

And the lover is sad and happy, he is transfixed and transformed, he is glorious; and he writes plays and poems, poems and plays, full of astonishing meaning. He thinks that love will last forever, that love has made him immortal, that everything will last forever, that the whole of the wonderful world makes nothing but sense.

But then: Death steps in, whenever it takes his fancy to, whatever we do, whatever we hope, whatever we think we might have accomplished; in comes death, and adds his rigorous punctuation. His full stop. Perhaps death is a LION, this time round; perhaps he is a plague bacillus, perhaps a knife in the heart, there is no limit to the parts he plays, but only one denouement.

RAMESH:

And then, my dears, where is immortality? Or meaning? Does anything at all, anything in the world, make any sense at all, in this bottomless dream?

4.4 Thisbe

THISBE: Yes. There is: Freedom.

TITANIA: Freedom?

THISBE: Yes. Listen:

It happened that, in the middle part of my life, in a dark wood, I met a Lion. Who frightened me considerably, chased me, filled me with fear. And so I went deeper, and deeper, into the wood, and there met my enemy, my tormentor, who trapped me there, who would not let me go.

Locked in a dance with my enemy, my nightmare, I fell into hell. Falling, falling, I fell through all the stages of my life, through lovers, pride, ambition, ego, temptation, all the stories that tried to narrate me, until at last I came to a frozen lake. There in that nightmare landscape, where lived my nemesis, my destiny, my final lover, my fine finality. Look where he feeds on hope, on intelligence, on any individuality I might have, he chews it up. He is the very end.

So what happened then? Oh, all sorts of possibilities. Perhaps I was in a car crash, under the streets of Paris. Perhaps I put stones in my pockets, and failed to walk on water. Perhaps I tucked the children up, kissed them goodnight, tiny and warm, and then went into the kitchen, and filled the air with poison.

Or perhaps not. Perhaps one of the poets carried me past, Emily, Sylvia, such euphonious friends, and out on through into a strange day. Good morning midnight. Blues, how do you do?

And in that new morning, that starlit dawn, I am free. I am not defined by stories. I am not defined by desire. Neither by single minded lust, nor by the cuckoo gape of children, feed me, all of them, lovers, children, feed me, they say—no. I say no. I am free. I am free.

TITANIA /to RAMESH/:

Well?

RAMESH:

Well what?

TITANIA:

Is she right? Is that it? Don't leave us hanging there! Does anything make sense?

RAMESH:

Why yes, of course it does, haven't you worked that out?

TITANIA:

No! Have you?

RAMESH:

Yes, of course I have.

TITANIA:

Well, what's the answer?

RAMESH:

Love.

TITANIA:

We're back to square one! That's where we started from!

RAMESH:

No. Listen to me. Love. But with love, freedom.

TITANIA:

Ah.

RAMESH:

Love without narrative.

TITANIA:

Yes.

RAMESH:

Beyond death and moonlight.

TITANIA:

Yes, yes.

RAMESH:

That does not define, desire, entrap, entrance; love that freely gives, is a free exchange of gifts.

TITANIA:

And no more stories?

RAMESH:

Oh, yes. Stories are fine. Stories are good, in their place.

TITANIA:

Which is?

RAMESH:

To hide the truth in an entertaining way.

TITANIA: Riiiiight. /*Thinking about it.*/ Why don't they just come right out with the truth then, why hide it?

RAMESH: Because the truth is so simple that if you didn't dress it in rags and rubies, in narrative niceties, turn and twist, like a changing flame, then no-one would notice it.

TITANIA: This truth thing. This truth that is so simple.

RAMESH: Yes.

TITANIA: What is it?

RAMESH: He knows /*pointing at OBERON*/

TITANIA: Do you?

OBERON: Yes.

TITANIA: Well, for god's sake tell us!

OBERON: I love you. Freely. Completely.

TITANIA: You do?

OBERON: I really do.

TITANIA: And that's what all this has been about?

OBERON: What else?

TITANIA: Just that, nothing else?

RAMESH: My dear, there *is* nothing else.

TITANIA: It's not enough. Show me. Prove it. Do something.

OBERON: Well, as it happens, I do have a little prepared speech. Which might work.

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
 Admit impediments. Love is not love
 Which alters when it alteration finds,
 Or bends with the remover to remove:
 O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
 That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
 It is the star to every wandering bark,

Whose worth's unknown, although his height be
taken.

Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks

Within his bending sickle's compass come:

Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,

But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

If this be error and upon me proved,

I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

TITANIA: Not bad. Not too bad at all.

OBERON: Not bad!

TITANIA: Did you write that?

OBERON: Er, yes. Mostly.

TITANIA: Hmm. I don't believe you. And: I don't mind. It's
beautiful. Thank you. My love.

FAIRIES: Aaaaaaaaaaaaah!

4.5 Waking up

*TITANIA (ANGIE), RAMESH, FAIRIES, TITANIA
(CHRISTA), OBERON (GEOFF)*

TITANIA (ANGIE): And you? What about you?

RAMESH: Time to move on.

TITANIA: Where will you go?

RAMESH: Everywhere!

TITANIA: Really?

RAMESH: Oh, yes, really! In my taxi!

TITANIA: I loved your mother, you know

RAMESH: I do know. And she loved you.

TITANIA: Do you remember her?

RAMESH: Oh yes. Oh, yes.

*/He looks inward - blissful. The others gather,
drawn by the energetic/*

TITANIA: Do you remember India?

RAMESH: Most definitely.

TITANIA: Tell me what you remember

RAMESH: Ah, the cool quiet of the early morning, dawning.
The household sleeping except for my grandmother
and me. The milkman brings the cow to our garden
to milk and I bury my cheek against her soft silk
skin.

I loved the cow. My grandmother used to call me
Gopala, it means, it means cowboy! Roasting the
coffee beans, grinding the strong sweet pungent
smell of them into the spiced Indian air.

A snack . . . idli . . . or dosai . . . or uppama . . . wide white butter churned by granny or me from the fresh and fragrant milk. And so another day opens out into the sounds and smells that linger still in every breath I take . . . crickets, birds, the dry shuffle of the lizard as it scuttles through the dust . . . rancid sweaty comforting smells of the bodies of fellow travellers . . . music scratched and fluted and beaten and stamped . . . the raised voices shouting pleasantries and greetings . . . the busy world of people and purposes.

And in the evening stories. Always stories. The old stories - woven on familiar threads and tracing the patterns of life.

Here is a story. My mother, Devaki, one day was cross with me, because I was playing in mud, which was very nice, and I wondered if it was good to eat. So I put some in my mouth. It was not good to eat. And my mother was scolding me. And I turned to her, and showed her ... everything.

TITANIA: Everything?

RAMESH: Yes. Angels. Rainbows. Infinities. Death after death, birth after birth. Volcanoes, galaxies, the eye of a blackbird. Everything.

TITANIA: Really?

RAMESH: Really. And she was very happy. Happy beyond happy: Ananda, we call it. And my friends, the gopi-girls, who looked after the cows, they made a little song about it. */Turns to fairies/* Do you remember? Do you remember?

/They start to sing the gopala chant very softly, and continue to the end of the play/

TITANIA (CHRISTA):

First, rehearse your song by rote
To each word a warbling note:
Hand in hand, with fairy grace,

Will we sing, and bless this place.

FAIRY (JERRY):

Not a lion; not a mouse
Shall disturb this hallow'd house:

FAIRY (EL):

I am sent with broom before,
To sweep the dust behind the door.

OBERON (MAZ):

Through the house give gathering light,
By the dead and drowsy fire:

FAIRY (LAURA):

Every elf and fairy sprite
Hop as light as bird from brier;

FAIRY (BECKY):

And this ditty, after me,
Sing, and dance it trippingly.

*/song/dance/candlelight - the traditional ending to
midsummer night's dream/*

TITANIA (ANGIE):

If we shadows have offended,
Think 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 yielding but a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend:
if you pardon, we will mend:

PUCK:

And, as I am an honest Puck,
If we have unearned luck
Now to 'scape the serpent's tongue,
We will make amends ere long;

OBERON (GEOFF):

Else the Puck a liar call;
So, good night unto you all.
Give me your hands, if we be friends,
And Robin shall restore amends.