

PUCK AND THE PLAYERS

A play for Young Audiences
Adapted from Shakespeare by Matt Buchanan

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 Snout—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

Two or three Fairies—in the service of Oberon

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. He is a carpenter by trade, but he 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 Snout enter together. Snug is a burly joiner—basically a plumber—and Snout 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.”

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 he 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 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. Name 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

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!

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.)* Bottom is a gallant, handsome man! A hero! Nobody can play him but you! You've just got to do it!