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SF PERUSALS

Shakespeare in Hollywood

by Ken Ludwig

A Samuel French Acting Edition



New York Hollywood London Toronto
SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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Originally produced by Arena Stage,
Washington, DC
Molly Smith, Artistic Director
Stephen Richard, Executive Director

SHAKESPEARE IN HOLLYWOOD premiered on September 5 , 2004 at Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., Molly Smith, Artistic Director, Stephen Richard, Executive Director, Guy Bergquist, Producer. It was directed by Kyle Donnelly. The set was designed by Thomas Lynch, the costumes were by Jess Goldstein, the lighting by Nancy Schertler, and the sound by Susan R. White. The Company Manager was Jill A. Mauritz, the Casting Director was Eli Dawson, and the Choreographer was Karma Camp. The Stage Manager was Brady Ellen Poole, the Assistant Stage Manager was Amy K. Bennett, the Fight Choreographer was Brad Waller, the Dramaturg was Michael Kinghorn, the Speech and Vocal Consultant was Lynn Watson, and the Technical Director was Jim Glendinning. The production was graciously sponsored by Esthy and Jim Adler.

The cast, in order of appearance was as follows:

LOUELLA PARSONS.....*Ellen Karas*
MAX REINHART.....*Robert Prosky*
DICK POWELL.....*David Fendig*
JACK WARNER.....*Rick Foucheux*
DARYL.....*Michael Skinner*
LYDIA LANSING.....*Alice Ripley*
OBERON.....*Casey Biggs*
PUCK.....*Emily Donahoe*
OLIVIA DARNELL.....*Maggie Lacey*
WILL HAYES.....*Everett Quinton*
JOE E. BROWN.....*Hugh Nees*
JIMMY CAGNEY.....*Adam Richman*
ENSEMBLE.....*Bethany Caputo*
Scott Graham
Eric Jorgensen
Robert McClure

CAST OF CHARACTERS

OBERON
PUCK
JACK WARNER
MAX REINHARDT
WILL HAYS
DARYL
OLIVIA DARNELL
LYDIA LANSING
LOUELLA PARSONS
DICK POWELL
JIMMY CAGNEY
JOE E. BROWN

The play is written for 12 actors, 4 women and 8 men. The actors playing Hays, Brown, Cagney, Powell and Daryl double as Albert, Harry, Sam, Groucho, Tarzan and the Cowboy. If extra actors are available, they can play movie stars at the opening of the play, cameramen, seamstresses, etc.

SHAKESPEARE IN HOLLYWOOD

by Simon Reade

for The Arena Stage Production Journal

The name rang a bell. "He's called Ken Ludwig, Simon," said Adrian Noble, then Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company. "He's in Stratford. Big supporter of the RSC in the States. He's got some ideas he wants to run past us." Ken Ludwig? Surely not Lend-Me-A-Tenor-Crazy-For-You Ken Ludwig? What on earth would that master of American screwball comedy want with a classical, Shakespeare ensemble? As Literary Manager at the RSC at the time I was a champion of poetic theatre, pursuing commissions that tended towards political epics. The imp in me surmised that the RSC could well do with upsetting its own apple-cart; but it is a state subsidised theatre. This Ken Ludwig is the darling of commercial theatre.

Curious, I met the guy.

Well, never judge a writer entirely by his output. Just as Dostoevsky probably wasn't all doom and gloom, wisecracking Ken Ludwig's got his serious points too. Sure, he's fun, full-of-beans. But he's also exceptionally well-read, bright as a button, with an enthusiasm for comedy and music theatre across the centuries. He's an expert who kept – who keeps putting me to shame in my lack of appreciation of the popular stage, of the movies. And I don't just mean the cheesy matinees we'd snigger and sneer at today. He can extemporise on the clown in European Renaissance drama, on the wit of the 18th century playwrights, on the inter-War stars of the Silver Screen… On our first meeting, in the sunshine of Stratford-upon-Avon, he charmed me, he delighted me. And,

canny fellow he is, he'd pitch several ideas at me before I'd even realised he's started.

Some had been long in gestation: a rewrite of a Regency Tony Lumpkin sequel to She Stoops to Conquer. We read the original and realised why it necessitated a rewrite. It was trash. We decided not to go there. Some ideas had been dreamt up on the hoof: inspired by walking backstage, along the narrow passage where the huge 1930s Royal Shakespeare Theatre collides with the Elizbethan-style Swan Theatre, Ken had seen the actors from contrasting shows co-mingle, mid-performance. What if, in this collision, the modern dress performers get confused with the doublet-and-hosed, take a wrong turning and end up on the wrong stage in the wrong play, mused Ken. We laughed and laughed as he improvised and then had the good grace to admit Michael Frayn had written *Noises Off,* Alan Ayckbourn *House and Garden.* Ken's is still an even wilder idea, but we didn't pursue this either.

We also talked about the whole Shakespeare industry and how the recent movies — from Ken Branagh, via Baz Luhrman, to *Shakespeare in Love* — had introduced the plays and the man to a whole new generation who'd rejected the works in the classroom or in the lyric theatre. *Shakespeare in Love* in particular inspired us. Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard's marvellous screenplay had illustrated how the Elizabethan Theatre of ruthless producers and jobbing script writers, wasn't a million miles away from the Hollywood studio system.

It was then that Ken mentioned something in passing and we both had that 'ping', light-bulb moment. A film I should have known about, but didn't — Max Reinhardt's 1936 movie of *A Midsummer*

Night's Dream — was even more amazing in its making than the finished product itself. It was a story which got right to the heart of the commercialisation of art, the opportunism of Hollywood, the use and abuse of the most venerated writer of all time, Shakespeare. It charted the creative quirks of a meister of mittel Europische Kinema, Max Reinhadt. And it had a cast of starlets: Mickey Rooney, Jimmy Cagney. And the more he talked, the more animated he became. Ken explained to me about Will Hays, the daffy self-appointed censor, whose application of the Hays Code to the sexiness and magical realism of Shakespeare's dream play was an outrage – very funny, but an outrage nonetheless. And there it was, the embryo of a play which embraced the Shakespeare industry, Hollywood exploitation, US cultural imperialism, the clash of ideologies (liberal and philistine, European and American), of dreams versus nightmares with fascism in Germany a distant but significant rumble. I saw a serious play in the making. I guess Ken had the genius to see that its seriousness could be conveyed through an accumulation of farcical mayhem.

Key to that, and what I learnt from Ken as we developed it first with the RSC (who didn't produce it, internal political changes getting in the way) and most recently in a try-out reading at Bristol Old Vic where I am now Artistic Director, is this brilliant genre which I believe is peculiar to the American psyche: high-jinx, screwball comedy. British people would never be that zany. We're too knowingly cynical. Funny, yes. But don't we just know it. It is a genre specific to the American stage and screen of the mid 20th century. And Ken is the modern master of it, his passion for its vaudevillian high-octane antics fuelling his messianic zeal to recapture its essence for contemporary audiences.

Ken's passion for Shakespeare (his family, even his personal email address all seem to be named after one Shakespeare character or another) is also evident in his new play. *Shakespeare in Hollywood* is thus a deeply personal play as much as a popular play. And in the spirit with which I used to commission plays at the RSC it's also poetic and political and, let's not be afraid to say it, something of a mini-epic. Yet it's also got a screw loose, the playwright's having a ball. Screwball. Good comedy. Good drama. Good fun.

SIMON READE is Artistic Director of Bristol Old Vic where he has adapted Jill Tomlinson's The Owl Who Was Afraid of the Dark. He has worked extensively in film and television, for the BBC and Tiger Aspect in particular. He was Literary Manager and Dramaturg at the RSC 1997-2001 where his adaptations included Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children and Ted Hughes' Tales from Ovid. He was Literary Manager at London's Gate Theatre in the early 1990s.

FOREWORD

In the 1930s, the talkies discovered Shakespeare in a big way. Four significant movies based on Shakespeare plays were made within a span of four years: "The Taming of the Shrew" starring Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford; "As You Like It" starring Laurence Olivier and Elizabeth Bergner; "Romeo and Juliet" starring Leslie Howard and Norma Shearer; and, the subject of this play, "A Midsummer Night's Dream" directed by Max Reinhardt.

The film studios in the 1930s recognized quickly that movies based on Shakespeare plays were "box office poison." However, in doing research for this play, it soon became clear to me that the Shakespeare films of that time were often made because the mistresses or wives of the studio heads wanted to be in such "prestigious" movies to enhance their reputations. Elizabeth Bergner, who starred in "As You Like It" was married to Robert Czinner, the director of the film. Irving Thalberg, production chief of MGM put his wife Norma Shearer into "Romeo and Juliet" despite her age. And for Fairbanks and Pickford, who were married, "The Taming of the Shrew" was a family affair as well. (This is the movie that caused great hilarity in its opening minute by announcing that the play was "by William Shakespeare with additional dialogue by Sam Taylor.")

In writing *Shakespeare in Hollywood*, I've tried to stick to the historical record as much as possible. Thus, Max Reinhardt, the most famous stage director of his generation, did come to Hollywood from Austria as a refugee from the Nazis, and he directed his first (and only) motion picture, "A Midsummer Night's Dream" for Warner Brothers Pictures in 1934. Jack Warner did have three

brothers, Harry, Albert and Sam, who ran the studio with him. Their father did start out as a shoemaker. And Louella Parsons, the most famous gossip columnist of her day, was born Louella Oettinger in Dixon, Illinois.

Dick Powell, who played Lysander in the movie, was indeed a heartthrob of the 1930s, and he starred in a string of successful musicals, including "42nd Street." James Cagney, the biggest star of the movie, did play Bottom, though he was best known at the time for gangster pictures. The emerging child star, Mickey Rooney, ultimately played Puck in the movie; however, his filming was indeed delayed by the accident he had while skiing with his mother. Also, as Olivia mentions in the course of the play, for the 250 years prior to 1900, Puck was often played by a woman.

The terms of the Production Code that Hays outlines in the play are virtually verbatim from the actual Production Code that caused untold misery for every studio in Hollywood. Moreover, the objections that Hays raises in the play are the ones that the Hays Office actually raised at the time of filming. (Jack Warner himself wanted Reinhardt to cut the "love scene" in "Pyramus and Thisbe" because both characters were played by men and he was afraid that the Hays Office was going to object.) The biggest objection of the Hays Office was to the black fairy overcoming the white fairy towards the end of the movie. Reinhardt said that he created the black fairy to represent the evils of Nazism. Ultimately, this and the other objections were withdrawn. No one knows exactly why.

It is also true that Joe E. Brown, who played Flute, had just finished filming the third of three baseball movies based on the short stories of Ring Lardner. Jimmy Cagney's movie previous to the

"Dream" was a Western, "The Frisco Kid."

To me, one of the most surprising aspects of Shakespeare in the movies is that dozens of silent pictures were made from Shakespeare's plays before the advent of sound. Obviously, the producers in those days thought that Shakespeare's stories alone were strong enough to carry the films. Many of these silent movies can be seen on a DVD entitled Silent Shakespeare, released by Milestone Film & Video (2000)

I wrote *Shakespeare in Hollywood* on commission from The Royal Shakespeare Company in England, and I may have enjoyed writing this play more than any other I've ever written. An academic at heart, I loved the research; to me, Hollywood in the 1930s is the bee's knees; and as a Shakespeare addict to end all addicts, I loved living for a few months with Oberon and Puck. So my thanks to Simon Reade, Literary Manager of the RSC (now Artistic Director of the Bristol Old Vic), whose faith in the play has been unwavering, and to Adrian Noble, Artistic Director at the RSC at the time of the commission. Equal thanks to Molly Smith and Arena Stage for mounting the premiere and helping me select such a clever director, Kyle Donnelly, and such an inspired cast.

Ken Ludwig
Washington, D.C.
March 29, 2005

For Olivia and Jack,
my two Shakespeareans

What is love? 'Tis not hereafter,

Present mirth hath present laughter;

What's to come is still unsure:

In delay there lies no plenty;

Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty;

Youth's a stuff will not endure.

TWELFTH NIGHT
Act Two, Scene Three

Act I

(HOLLYWOOD, 1934. An orchestra is playing "Hooray for Hollywood," and lights are criss-crossing the sky like enormous, reckless fireflies. We feel the excitement and glamour of movie-land at its height.

We're at the world premiere of a new movie in front of Grauman's Chinese Theater. LOUELLA PARSONS, the iconic gossip columnist for the Hearst newspapers and well-known radio personality, is at a microphone, broadcasting live, and a rope barrier separates her from hundreds of screaming fans who have shown up to see their favorite movie stars. Some of these stars, glamorous and trendy, wave to the crowd as they parade into the theatre past LOUELLA.)

LOUELLA. Good evening, good evening to all of you out there in radio-land, this is Louella Parsons, your eyes and ears in Hollywood, at the sensational premiere of the new motion picture "A Midsummer Night's Dream," by the Warner Brothers. That's right, we have a night of culture ahead of us, a movie by the Swan of Avon himself, Mr. William Shakespeare, and if he could only see the excitement here tonight, he would be swimming down that river just as proud as a peacock. And don't let that word "culture" frighten you, my darlings, because the word on this movie is sock-o entertainment from start to finish. And what else would you expect from

a talking picture starring Mr. Dick Powell! *(Screams from the crowd.)* Miss Anita Louise! *(More screams.)* And Mr. James Cagney!! *(Even bigger screams – as CAGNEY goes by and waves to the crowd.)* Wait a moment. A limousine is pulling up. Someone is getting out...Oh my darlings, how exciting, it's the director of the movie himself, Mr. Max Reinhardt!

(A disappointed "Ohhhh..." from the crowd as MAX REINHARDT enters. He's a pixie-ish man in his 60s and he has a pronounced German accent.)

LOUELLA. Max! Over here!...He's coming this way...Ah, Professor Reinhardt, it's Louella Parsons. Welcome to the opening of your new cinematic sensation.

REINHARDT. Thank you, Louella, I'm —

LOUELLA. *(To the radio audience.)* I'm sure you all know that Professor Reinhardt is considered the most distinguished director working today in the live theatre. Now tell us, Max, did it scare you a little, directing your first motion picture ever?

REINHARDT. No, not really. But I —

LOUELLA. "No, not really." *(Laughing)* Oh, Max, you're priceless. Now do I hear an accent in your speech? Are you from abroad?

REINHARDT. Ja, I am from Austria. And I have —

LOUELLA. "From Austria." How adorable. And what brings you to the United States?

REINHARDT. Heh heh, this is going to make you laugh, is funny story. There is man in my country named Hitler who is killing people.

LOUELLA. Oh yes of course. And we're just thrilled that you got away. Wait! A limousine has just pulled up...Oh, it is! It's Dick Powell!

(Screams — and DICK POWELL enters. He's a good-looking, boyish actor in his late 20s. He waves to the crowd and sings:)

POWELL. "I'm young and healthy, and you've got chaaaaarm!"

(Bigger screams.)

LOUELLA. Dick! Dick! It's Louella!

(LOUELLA chases after POWELL, leaving REINHARDT stranded. He turns and speaks to the audience.)

REINHARDT. And for this I have left my homeland. True, alternative is the Nazis, but is very close race. So: vhy am I here, you ask? It all began one year ago vhen I found myself for very first time in this legendary place called Hollyvood: land of glamour and gluttony, palm trees and poodles, sequvins and sin. At this time, I have just put on big stage production of Shakespeare's masterpiece "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and I get raves and kudos you vould not believe. So, I ask myself, vhy not make a film of this production using big hot-shot Hollyvood stars. It vould be a great contribution to world culture, a real treat for lovers of Shakespeare, and, between you and me, I could make a few bucks in the process. With this in mind, exactly one year ago today, I go to see Jack Warner of Warner Brothers Pictures.

(The scene shifts to an office at the Warner Brothers Studio. JACK WARNER is behind his desk. He's a natty dresser and tough as nails. Sitting nearby is DARYL, who's known in the trade as a "yes-man." He's 25 to 30 and wears glasses. As the set is changing, REINHARDT continues:)

REINHARDT. Mr. Warner, I say to him, you are great producer and famous man. But you have not yet achieved the respect you deserve as man of innovation and artistic vision. So what do you say about making movie of Shakespeare's play "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

WARNER. You're an idiot!

REINHARDT. Okay, but what do you say?

WARNER. Listen, Mel — can I call you Mel?

REINHARDT. Sure, but my name is Max.

WARNER. Right, Max, now I've been asking around about you, and people tell me that you're really smart.

REINHARDT. Is true, I am genius.

WARNER. Good. Then you'll understand this perfectly. It's a dumb idea. Am I right, Daryl?

DARYL. Yes sir!

WARNER. Now why do you think we make movies, Max? Take a wild guess.

REINHARDT. To make artistic contribution to world culture?

WARNER. Wrong. We make movies to make money. They even have the same first letter. Movies. Money.

REINHARDT. Ah, but what if you use that money to make "Midsummer Night's Dream." Is another M.

WARNER. And so is moron! It ain't gonna happen!

REINHARDT. But you could make it happen!

WARNER. You're an idiot!

REINHARDT. Okay, fine! I take project back to Adolph Zukor at Paramount, he is begging me for this picture!

WARNER. You're a liar!

REINHARDT. *(To the audience.)* And he's right, of course, I am lying through my head. But at this moment, a miracle occurs. A fairy princess, like in Shakespeare play, comes through that door and changes everything.

LYDIA. *(Striding into the room.)* I'm a slut!

(LYDIA LANSING is a beautiful blond starlet with a whiny, showgirl voice. She sleeps with JACK WARNER, not just to get ahead, but also because she likes him. She's just come off the set of an historical action picture and she's wearing a cheap, bright red costume, torn and shredded along the skirt to show she's been in a battle, and across the chest to show that she has a lot of cleavage. Somewhere deep inside that cleavage is a nice kid. She carries a fan magazine and she's fuming.)

WARNER. Lydia!

LYDIA. That's what they call me, Jack! A slut! Look at this! "Photoplay Magazine." "The Ten Biggest Sluts in Hollywood." And who do ya think is number one? The Queen of the Sluts? Take a guess.

WARNER. You?

LYDIA. Bingo! You got it, Jack. And do you know why it's me? Huh? Do ya?! 'Cause I do all the stinkin' pictures you give me!

WARNER. But darling —

LYDIA. "Gun Moll Mama." Remember that one? And "Hold My Pistol".

WARNER. But they made you a star!

LYDIA. A star? You call this a star?! *(Her costume.)* Look at me! I'm in a fucking French Foreign Legion picture! "Oh Major Waverly, I feel so frightened by those nasty heathens surrounding Fort Chutney." *(She wiggles – her trademark wiggle.)* "How will I ever get back to my ancestral home in Dundee, Scotland?"

WARNER. But sweetie-pie —

LYDIA. Don't touch me! Now I want somethin' decent for a change. Somethin' with prestige. You're makin' biography pic-

tures, give me one of those. I'd be great in a biopic. I could play Madame Curie. Listen to this, I wrote it myself: "Oh, Dr. Mendel, just look at them squiggly things under the microscope. I think they could cure somethin'! Somethin' bad, like disease! Wait! We'll call it...penicillin!"

WARNER. But we just did a doctor picture about Louis Pasteur.

LYDIA. Well they ain't the same person are they?!

REINHARDT. She has a point.

LYDIA. Who's he?

REINHARDT. *(Kissing her hand.)* How do you do, I am Max Reinhardt, and I am famous director.

LYDIA. Gee.

REINHARDT. Good-bye.

LYDIA. Hey, where ya goin'?

REINHARDT. Alas, there is nothing here for me to do. I have just offered to make classic prestige picture for your boyfriend here. Shakespeare picture. Only he tells me he does not have leading lady who could perform in such a picture.

WARNER. That's a lie!

LYDIA. Shut up! *(To REINHARDT.)* What's it about?

REINHARDT. It is about a fairy-land forest that is ruled by a handsome king named Oberon.

LYDIA. Wow.

REINHARDT. He and his helper, named Puck, devise a plan to use a magic flower that makes you fall in love with the very first person you see.

LYDIA. This is really good!

REINHARDT. So Oberon uses the flower on a group of lovers who have fled to the forest — one of whom could be you, Lydia Lansing, in the part of Helena, a ravishing maiden who speaks only in poetry.

LYDIA. Holy cow.

WARNER. Don't listen to him!

LYDIA. Why not? Cause you want me to appear in nothin' but dreck?

WARNER. But honey pie —

LYDIA. I want this picture.

WARNER. Well you can't have it! Because I ain't makin' it! Right, Daryl?!

DARYL. Yes sir!

LYDIA. Shut up, Daryl!

DARYL. Yes ma'am!

LYDIA. Jack, listen to me, I'm gonna tell ya somethin', and I'll say it slow and calm so it's really clear. You get me this picture and you make it fast, or ya never touch these hips again! Comprendo?! *(All sweetness to REINHARDT.)* So very nice to have made your acquaint-tinyance.

WARNER. *(To REINHARDT.)* You son of a bitch.

REINHARDT. *(To the audience.)* And so it happened in a flash of magic that I was soon making film of "Midsummer Night's Dream," and I assure you that all four Warner Brothers could not have been happier.

(The lights change, and we see the WARNER BROTHERS on a telephone conference call with each other, each in his own pool of light. They include HARRY, the elder statesman; ALBERT, the smart one; SAM, the dumb one; and JACK, who we just met. Their dialogue crackles along quickly.)

HARRY. Jack, you're a schmuck!

JACK. Harry, that ain't fair!

SAM. I agree with Harry.

JACK. Sam, stay out of this.

ALBERT. You did it for some toostie, right?

JACK. Al, that's a lie!

SAM. He wanted to get in her pants.

ALBERT. I'll bet it was that girl that wiggles.

SAM. He's got a Hawaiian girl?

ALBERT. Not that kinda wiggle.

JACK. Would you guys just shut up and listen!

HARRY. The big shot is telling me to shut up.

JACK. Harry, please I'm telling you straight. This picture'll be good for the studio.

ALBERT. Like the plagues were good for Egypt.

SAM. Papa always said to us, "Stick to your last." That's what he said, you know, "Stick to your last."

JACK. He was a shoemaker!

HARRY. And what's so wrong with a shoemaker? Are you saying Papa didn't work hard?

ALBERT. He's criticizing Papa now.

JACK. Boys would you just listen to me! This Shakespeare stuff ain't all bad. I read some this morning and there are parts in English.

SAM. It's poison, Jackie.

HARRY. We'll lose a fortune.

SAM. Ya know the title ain't so bad. "Shakespeare." Sounds like a biopic.

JACK. It ain't called "Shakespeare!"

ALBERT. Sam, it's called "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

SAM. Well that'll put us right in the crapper.

ALBERT. Maybe we should get a rewrite man.

HARRY. Mankiewitz is good.

ALBERT. Or Morrison.

SAM. Or pay this Shakespeare guy to do it.

ALBERT. He's dead, you idiot.

SAM. Then he'll cost us peanuts.

HARRY. I say we axe the project and we do it fast before he makes any more commitments to this dame of his —

ALBERT. He's got a girl that wiggles, let her wiggle in somebody else's picture. I need this whole thing like I need a goiter—

SAM. So how come I'm the one who needs my head examined when he's the one who gets us in trouble? Tell me that—?

JACK. Boys…Boys, would you listen to me!! I happen to be head of production for this company, and we are making this film whether you like it or not. End of discussion!

(They all hang up.

The lights come up and it's mid-morning on the back lot of the Warner Brothers Studios. We're on the Sound Stage where "A Midsummer Night's Dream" is being shot. We see a tree and some foliage as well as lights and cameras.

After a beat, there's a crack of thunder and a flash of lightning, the stage goes dim in a magical way – and OBERON, King of the Fairies from "A Midsummer Night's Dream" appears from nowhere. The stage effect by which he appears should be as magical as possible, so that we realize instantly that this is not a human, but a being from another world.

As for the creature himself, he has all the characteristics of the OBERON we know from Shakespeare. He's imperious, impatient and commanding. He has a child-like temper and there's a sense of whimsy about him. He's also extremely attractive.)

OBERON.

Home,

Home at last to the Magic Wood near Athens,
Aweary from a night of escapades
And frolic, where lovers meet, embrace and dream of
Immortality.
(Calling)
Puck! Robin Goodfellow! Come hither!

(Another crash of thunder, and PUCK magically appears. This is the real PUCK from the same play, that "shrewd and knavish sprite" called Robin Goodfellow, the mischief-maker of the fairy world. Though PUCK is a boy/man, he's played in this case by an actress.)

PUCK.
I am here, my Oberon, swift as a shadow.
And brief as the lightning in the collied night!
OBERON.
Wither wander you, spirit?
PUCK.
Over hill, over dale,
Through bush, through briar,
Over park, over pale,
Through flood, through fire —
I do wander everywhere,
Swifter than the moon's sphere,
And I serve —

(At this moment, GROUCHO MARX crosses the lot with his characteristic stride and walks right up to OBERON and PUCK.)

GROUCHO. *(To OBERON.)* Why hello. Do you always wear your pajamas on the set, or is it just because I'm good-lookin'?

(JOHNNY WEISMULLER enters dressed as TARZAN and gives his famous yell.)

TARZAN. Aiiiieeeieiiiieieiieeeeieieee!!

(A COWBOY enters.)

COWBOY. Hey, Johnny, wait up! *(He playfully pulls his six guns and pretends to shoot OBERON and PUCK.)* Blam, blam, blam, blam, blam! Ha ha!

(GROUCHO, TARZAN and the COWBOY all exit. Beat. OBERON looks at PUCK.)

OBERON. ...Where in the Depths of Hell are we?!
PUCK. I have no idea.

(Hollywood, we come to realize, is our modern equivalent of a Wood near Athens. It's a land of enchantment, like the Forest of Arden, where anything can happen. It's a place of liberation and reassessment, where the illusory is part of the total experience of reality.)

OBERON.
(Angry)
I gave thee but one instruction,
Lead us home from Athens to the magic wood,
But no, he has to flub it up!

PUCK. "Flub it up?" That doesn't sound like you. Could we be dreaming?

OBERON. We are such stuff as dreams are made on.

PUCK. Now that sounds more like your old self.
OBERON.
Oh shut up!
I have just had one of the longest nights of my life!
First I have an argument with my Queen.
Then I try to sort out four Athenians
Who are so excited by the sex
Of one another they can barely keep their
Pants on. Then I drop the liquor of the
Magic flower on Titania's eyes
And she awakes and makes an ass of herself,
Or rather he does, Bottom, so she couples with him,
Good joke, ha, ha, then it's
Back to the lovers, we watch the play, we get them to
Bed, we give them our blessing, and by this time
I'm so tired I could drop,
And all I ask is a good day's sleep
And you can't even find the way home!
PUCK.
But I know I used all the usual spells.
I bayed at the moon like a wolf and rolled my eyes,
Then spun around three times to the left and...uh oh.
OBERON. To the left?
PUCK. Well —
OBERON. You normally spin to the right.
PUCK. Ay, there's the rub.
OBERON.
I have a blockhead for a henchman.
A coddle-pated, lack-brained, thick-eyed, three-suited, rabbit-sucking
Ignoramus-is-too-good-for-him having
No more brain than a Christian!
Do you have anything to say?!

PUCK. I think we came to the wrong Wood Near Athens.

WARNER. *(Off)* Now listen to me and listen good.

OBERON. But who comes here? We are invisible and we will overhear their conference.

(Zzzzing! And just as in the "Dream," OBERON makes a gesture with his hand and renders himself and PUCK invisible. That is, they remain on stage and we can see them, but no one on the stage can see them. Note: whenever they magically disappear or reappear throughout the play, we hear the distinctive sound you get when you run your fingernail across the strings of a harp. This sound will be indicated in the script by the word "Zzzzing!"

WARNER and DARYL enter.)

WARNER. Daryl, my boy, I need your help. I want you out of my office.

DARYL. *(Getting teary-eyed.)* Well may I say, sir, what a pleasure it's been working for you all these years —

WARNER. No, you idiot, I'm not firing you. I'm assigning you to this Shakespeare project. I want you to be Reinhardt's assistant.

DARYL. Me?

WARNER. The son of a bitch will try to spend me into the grave, I know it. I want you to watch him every minute. If the bastard goes over budget by one penny I want to know about it.

DARYL. Yes sir.

WARNER. And most of all, keep an eye on Lydia.

DARYL. Lydia.

WARNER. She's one in a million.

DARYL. A million.

WARNER. I'm insane about her.

DARYL. You're insane.

WARNER. The poor little thing. She doesn't know Shakespeare from sheep dip. And if she so much as looks at another actor without her legs crossed, I want her...*(LYDIA walks in wearing her costume.)* walking onto the set like a vision from classical drama! What a costume!

(She's happy as a clam and bursting with excitement about her new role. She's carrying her script.)

LYDIA. Thanks, Jack. Pretty classy, huh? It kinda itches around the crotch but that's okay because you gotta make sacrifices for art.

WARNER. Maybe it's just the underwear that's itchy.

LYDIA. It can't be. I ain't wearin' any. Now listen — I got the script and it's fabulous! Real class. I don't understand a single word of it.

WARNER. I'll send it to rewrite.

LYDIA. Good. Cause there's a word in here with like fifteen syllables. Oh, and guess what! I hired a vocal coach. This guy's really cute. He's Irish, I think. His name is Larry O'Liver.

WARNER. Laurence Olivier?

LYDIA. Yeah, that's it.

WARNER. He's big stuff. He just starred in a movie. How much are you paying him?

LYDIA. Don't worry. I know how to pay him.

(She pats his cheek and walks off. WARNER reacts.)

WARNER. *(Running after her.)* Lydia! Lydia, I'll pay him! Daryl, stop her!

DARYL. Yes sir!
WARNER. Lydia, come back here! Listen to me ..!

(And they're gone.
OBERON gestures with his hand so that he and PUCK reappear. Zzzzing!)

OBERON. Well at least it won't be boring.

(The telephone on the director's table rings. Ring!)

OBERON & PUCK. Ahh!
OBERON. What was that?!
PUCK. It's that black thing. There. *(Ring!)* Is it alive?
OBERON. I have no idea. But if that's its mating call, where's the other one? *(Ring!)* No, wait.

(OBERON has figured it out. He picks up the receiver.)

VOICE THROUGH THE PHONE. *(WARNER)* Hi, is Reinhardt there? We've got a problem.
OBERON & PUCK. Yahh!

(OBERON and PUCK jump backwards in fear, dropping the receiver.)

VOICE THROUGH THE PHONE. *(WARNER)* What was that?!...Hello? Are you there, because if you are, you're fired!!... Hello?!"

(OBERON hangs it up with a bang.)

OBERON. ...O brave new world that hath such creatures in it.
A WOMAN'S VOICE. *(Off)* Oh, now what do I do!
DARYL. *(Off)* Miss Darnell!
OBERON. Someone's coming. Go quickly. Find us a way out of here.
PUCK. I go, I go, look how I go, Swifter than arrow from the T —
OBERON. Just go!

(As PUCK runs off, a young woman hurries in from the other direction. Her name is OLIVIA DARNELL. She has the sass, beauty and natural charm of a heroine from the screwball comedies of the 1930s. She's wearing an attractive day dress.)

OLIVIA. Hide me!
OBERON. What?
OLIVIA. Hide me! Please! Quick!
OBERON. Where?
OLIVIA. Anyplace!
OBERON. Here!
DARYL. *(Off)* Miss Darnell!
OLIVIA. *(Popping up.)* And tell him you haven't seen me!
OBERON. Get down!

(He hides her behind his cloak — and DARYL runs on.)

DARYL. Have you seen a young woman run past here?
OBERON. Black hair, red dress, this high?
DARYL. Right!
OBERON. I haven't seen her.
DARYL. Hey, come on! Mr. Reinhardt's looking for her!
OBERON. Sorry. She went in that direction.

DARYL. Thanks!

(He runs off.)

OBERON. The coast is clear.

(OLIVIA emerges.)

OLIVIA. Thank you for hiding me. I guess I panicked.

OBERON. Are you in trouble?

OLIVIA. No. I mean yes. A little. See, I'm in this movie. I play Hermia. And I fought so hard to get the role, you have no idea! I did screen test after screen test, and I memorized the entire part. Only a different part. I wanted to play Puck.

OBERON. Puck?

OLIVIA. I know, you think a boy should play him, but until this century, Puck was always a girl.

OBERON. *(Horrified)* He was? I had no idea.

OLIVIA. Anyway, I got the part of Hermia, which is tremendous, it's the biggest break I ever had, and of course to play opposite Dick Powell, the biggest heartthrob in Hollywood, he's such a sweetheart, God in heaven, but I was going to really memorize the lines last night, at least get a start and learn the ones for today, but then my brother got a cable from his base that he was being sent to flight school in the morning! So anyway, we stayed up the entire night so we could spend a few more hours together, and we tried to make a party of it, and I guess I got a little drunk and then I woke up this morning and I hadn't learned the lines, at least the way I want to, and I just can't bear to face the great Max Reinhardt without being well prepared, so I'm hiding out to get some time alone so I can memorize it better since I'd look like such a fool if I didn't know it really well, do you see?

OBERON. It's perfectly clear.

OLIVIA. I'm Olivia.

OBERON. Oberon. King of the Fairies.

OLIVIA. Oberon? Oh, dear. I hope your heart's not set on it.

OBERON. Set on what?

OLIVIA. Oberon. The part's been cast. Haven't you heard? It's Victor Jory.

OBERON. What's a Victor Jory?

OLIVIA. Are you serious? He's a movie star. Where are you from, outer space?

OBERON. No, but it's another world.

OLIVIA. I knew you were foreign. I could tell from the way you speak. It reminds me of a bell, tolling in the countryside.

OBERON. When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees and they did make no noise.

OLIVIA. That's from "The Merchant of Venice."

OBERON. Is it? I thought I made it up.

(She laughs.)

REINHARDT. *(Off)* Miss Darnell!

OLIVIA. Oh no, that's Mr. Reinhardt. I've got to run.

OBERON. No, stay. You'll be all right.

OLIVIA. But I told you, I don't know all the lines yet!

OBERON. You will. Just speak the speech, I pray you.

OLIVIA. Hamlet.

OBERON. I thought you said it was Reinhardt!

OLIVIA. It is!

OBERON. Then just do as I tell you! Look over there. He comes.

OLIVIA. Where?

(OBERON has deliberately made her look away. When she does, he gestures with his hand and makes himself invisible again. Zzzzing! REINHARDT enters.)

REINHARDT. Ah, there you are. I have been looking for you everywhere.

OLIVIA. I was taking a walk, that's all, and I've just been talking to...*(She looks around; he's gone.)* Where did he go? He was right here...

REINHARDT. Okay, fine, now listen to me. I want to take a few minutes right now to rehearse your big speech in Act One.

OLIVIA. Now? I mean, does it have to be now? Could we do it later?

REINHARDT. No. Is first shot of filming, so I want it to be extra good. Let's hear what you've got. Start with scream.

OLIVIA. Scream?

REINHARDT. Big scream. Of frustration. You are angry because your father says you cannot marry boy you love. Go. Big scream.

(OLIVIA takes a breath. She prepares herself. Then:)

OLIVIA. Ahhh!

REINHARDT. Dat vas terrible. It shtunk. Big. I want big scream. Go.

OLIVIA. … Ahh!

REINHARDT. Oy vey iss mir. Big! You know what is big scream? Is opposite of little pathetic scream!

(OLIVIA closes her eyes to get her courage up. OBERON has by this time picked up a pair of scissors from the director's table – and he sticks them into her rear end.)

OLIVIA. AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!

(OBERON happily tosses the scissors in his hand and puts them back.)

REINHARDT. Okay. Not bad. We continue. Now remember, you are speaking to the Duke of Athens, and he says that you must do exactly as your father tells you and marry a man you do not love. So what do you say?

(Pause. OLIVIA takes a breath. And now OBERON starts to prompt her. He whispers in her ear, and the effect of their two voices echoing and mingling with each other is very sexy.)

OBERON.
"I do entreat your grace."
OLIVIA.
"I do entreat your grace to pardon me."
OBERON.
"I know not by."
OLIVIA.
"I know not by what power I am made bold."
OBERON.
"Nor how it may."
OLIVIA.
"Nor how it may concern my modesty
In such a presence here to plead my thoughts.
But I beseech your grace that I may know
The worst that may befall me in this case
If I refuse to wed Demetrius."
OBERON.
"Either to die the death."

OLIVIA.
"Either to die the death? or to abjure
For ever the society of men?
Oh, so will I grow, so live, so die, my lord,
Ere I will yield my virgin patent up."

REINHARDT. *(Framing the shot.)* And you turn slowly and look into the face of man you love...

(She turns and faces OBERON – but of course she doesn't know it.)

OBERON.
"My good Lysander."
OLIVIA.
"My good Lysander."
OBERON.
"I swear to thee."
OLIVIA.
"I swear to thee by Cupid's strongest bow,
By his best arrow with the golden head,
By the simplicity of Venus' doves,
By that which knitteth souls and prospers loves."
OBERON.
"And by that fire."
OLIVIA.
"And by that fire which burned the Carthage queen
When the false Trojan under sail was seen,
By all the vows that ever men have broke —
In number more than ever women spoke —
In that same place thou hast appointed me.
Tomorrow truly will I meet with thee."

(Pause. It's finished. The magic of it sinks in.)

REINHARDT. Magnificent. I am genius for choosing you. Come now, we shoot the scene.

OLIVIA. I'll be right there. Please. Just a moment.

REINHARDT. I give you one minute, and I'm counting!

(He exits. Zzing! OBERON reappears, and OLIVIA turns and sees him.)

OLIVIA. There you are! Where have you been? Oh, how can I ever thank you enough? You were right, I remembered every word. Every syllable. And I was really good!

OBERON. Bravo.

OLIVIA. It was astonishing. It just took hold of me.

OBERON.

Upon your words
Sit laurel victory, and smooth success
Be strewed before your feet.

OLIVIA. Anthony and Cleopatra.

OBERON. *(Looking around.)* Where?

OLIVIA. *(Laughing)* Oh you're so silly. You make me laugh.

OBERON. Do I? I don't think I've ever made anyone laugh before. I've made them frightened.

OLIVIA. I don't believe that.

REINHARDT. *(Off – perhaps over a speaker.)* Miss Darnell! Now!

OLIVIA. I've got to run. Oh God, I hope I don't forget the lines.

OBERON. You won't, I promise.

OLIVIA. Thanks again. *(She kisses him on the cheek.)* I hope you get a part in the movie!

(Puzzled, OBERON touches his cheek. Something has happened and he's not sure what it is. He exits, and OLIVIA is now alone. She turns front and is lit as though in another place.)

OLIVIA. Mrs. Joan Darnell, 46 Mountain Lane, Sioux City, Iowa. Dear Mother, Well, the filming has started and I am playing opposite Dick Powell, and he's being so nice to me. Anyway, this morning I met the most interesting man. He's an actor who wants to be in the film and he's somehow...strangely inspiring. I like him very much. No, don't call Aunt Ethel and start planning the wedding. We're just friends. I may never even see him again. Write soon. Love, Olivia.

(As she goes, the lights change and WILL HAYS enters. He's in his 50s, full of bluster and vanity. He wears a suit. He wields immense power in Hollywood and he knows it.)

HAYS. Hello?!...Anybody here?!...Typical. *(He looks impatiently at his watch. OBERON enters.)* Ah, good. Will Hays. Hays Office. I'm looking for a Max Reinhardt.

OBERON. I know not where he is.

HAYS. You "know not?"

OBERON. No, but I do wager he'll return without delay.

HAYS. Oh, really?

OBERON. Yea. Have patience and endure, I urge thee.

HAYS. Oh, I see. Well, let me suggest to "thee" that you "cutteth" the crap and go find Reinhardt for me! Right now. And don't be such a smart-ass!

OBERON. Do you insult me? Call me villain? Break my pate across?

HAYS. Oh, brother. Look, I'm asking for some cooperation around here! Is that so hard to follow?!

OBERON. Sir, if you but ask you'll get a fair reply. If you demand, I'll have to take revenge.

HAYS. Revenge?! I'm Will Hays! Do you know what I'm capable of?!!

OBERON. A lot of wind, apparently.

HAYS. All right, what's your name?! Now! I want your name right now. Let's go. Name!

OBERON. Oberon. King of the Fairies.

HAYS. Don't you try to be funny with me. I could have you out on the street by tomorrow morning selling apples!!

OBERON. Oh, I don't think so.

HAYS. Do you want to bet?!

OBERON. Done! It's a bet! A fair wager! Before I leave this place, you will beg me for forgiveness!

HAYS. *(Astounded)*...Beg you?

OBERON.

Plead with me, on your knees, with tears
In your eyes, like Niobe, turned to stone
And weeping for eternity!
Puck! Ho! Robin Goodfellow!

(OBERON exits in a rage.)

HAYS. The man's a crackpot. He's insane.

(REINHARDT enters in a foul mood. He's followed by DARYL.)

REINHARDT. Hello? Do I hear yelling on my set?!

HAYS. Are you Max Reinhardt?

REINHARDT. Ja!

HAYS. Well thank God. At last. Will Hays. Hays Office.

(Hearing the name HAYS, DARYL runs off.) Now listen, I'm afraid I've got some problems with your script.

REINHARDT. Oh really? How vonderful. He's got problem vith my script. I just found, out my Oberon — Victor Jory? — he just quit, my Puck, Mickey Rooney, broke his leg while skiing with his mother, so I am now missing my two big stars, *AND YOU GOT PROBLEMS VITH MY SCRIPT?!* And you are who again?

HAYS. Will Hays. Production Code Administration.

REINHARDT. Never heard of it.

HAYS. Oh of course not. You're a foreigner, from Eastern Europe? Let me fill you in. The Production Code is a set of rules to protect the American public so that movies do not contain anything vulgar, salacious, profane or obscene. We look askance at scenes of sex, adultery, lust, passion, seduction, nudity, venereal disease, sexual hygiene, and childbirth.

REINHARDT. You have good memory.

HAYS. I wrote the Code. At the request of the Legion of Decency — which is composed of millions of Americans who have pledged to boycott any movie that does not receive my seal of approval. No seal, no movie. Are we clear now?

REINHARDT. Ja, very clear. Is censorship.

HAYS. No, it's the will of the people. Now let's discuss your film, shall we? Here is a list of things I'd like to see cut from your script as soon as possible. It includes, of course, the scene on page, let's see, here we are, page 58, where someone named Titania sleeps with a man who has been changed into a donkey.

REINHARDT. So?

HAYS. It is disgusting! It smacks of bestiality. If this Bottom fellow has to be transformed, turn him into something human. It could still be funny. Perhaps he could have a club foot or something. Next item, it's in the stage directions, aha, right here, page 108, it says "the black fairy overpowers the white fairy and carries

her off." A black man carries off a white woman, and you expect to have no problems? And who is this black fairy anyway? It doesn't even say!

REINHARDT. He is spirit of Evil.

HAYS. "Evil?" What "evil?" What are you talking about? That's irrelevant.

REINHARDT. It is? With what is happening in my country, it is irrelevant? People being dragged screaming from their homes. Families separated. Children murdered. This is irrelevant?

HAYS. I meant irrelevant to the picture. It isn't set in Germany.

REINHARDT. And because it's not set in Germany, it cannot be about Germany? It cannot remind us who we are. Are you blind?

HAYS. I beg your pardon?

REINHARDT. You must be blind or stupid.

HAYS. *(Enraged)* How dare you?! Are you insane?! Mr. Reinhardt, here is a list of all of the offending passages in your script. I suggest you clean it up!

REINHARDT. *(Equally enraged.)* Mr. Hays. Here is confetti! I suggest you clean it up!

(He tears up the list and tosses the bits of paper in the air.)

HAYS. *(Nose-to-nose.)* I'll be back! You foreigner!

REINHARDT. And I'll be waiting! You native!

(They exit in opposite directions. As they go, OBERON enters.)

OBERON. Puck! Puck! Robin Goodfellow!

(PUCK runs in. Appears magically, but it must be quickly.)

PUCK. I'm here, your grace! Right here! I was looking for you!

OBERON. (*With the urgency and excitement of a great discovery.)* Listen to me. I think I've figured out what's going on around here. We're in the future, and this place is a kind of theatre. They put on plays here.

PUCK. That's what I heard! Only they're called "movies."

OBERON. Right. And they record them on something called flim, using a coma.

PUCK. Film and camera.

OBERON. That's it. And when you sit and watch this "movie," you're not seeing the actors themselves, just flickering shadows. Which is very profound, because it implies that nothing lasts forever. That we are all just flickering shadows. Mere images on the spleen.

PUCK. Screen.

OBERON. Right. Moreover, everybody wants to be a movie actor. It's the great thing to be! They get paid enormous sums of money, they're treated like gods, they do nothing to deserve it, and everyone calls them moons!

PUCK. Stars.

OBERON. That's it. And here's the big surprise — guess who their current movie is about? Hmm? Us!

PUCK. It is?

OBERON. Yes! Apparently at some point in the past we became famous. People love us. They read about us. Our exploits have been chronicled by some cowardly Indian named Shaking Spear. People adore us!

PUCK. Everybody?

OBERON. Yes! No. That reminds me. There is a human here who pollutes this place — his name is Hays, he insulted me! — and I intend to make him suffer for his crimes.

PUCK. *(A guttural whisper.)* Hays...

OBERON. Now listen, I have a plan. My gentle Puck, come hither.

(During the following, as OBERON gives PUCK instructions, REINHARDT enters and listens. OBERON and PUCK don't see him. OBERON speaks with urgency.)

OBERON.
Thou rememb'rest.
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 though couldst not,
Flying between the cold moon and the earth,
Cupid, all armed. A certain aim he took
At a fair vestal thronèd by the West,
And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow
As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts.
Yet marked 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 showed thee once.
The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid.
Will make or man or woman madly dote

Upon the next live creature that it sees.
Fetch me that 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!

REINHARDT. *(Applauding)* Excellent! That vas vonderful. You boys are good! How did Mr. Varner get you here so fast?

PUCK. Mr. "Varner?"

REINHARDT. That was terrific audition.

OBERON. Thank you, but what exactly is an "audition?"

REINHARDT. Ah! That is exactly how I feel. Bravo. There is no such thing as audition, we must be truthful every second. You just scored big point with me. So, let's continue. Your names please.

PUCK. Puck.

OBERON. Oberon. King of the Fairies.

REINHARDT. Ja, but that remains to be seen. I want your real names.

OBERON. Oh, our real names.

PUCK. Ralph.

OBERON. Hector.

(They look at each other and shrug as if to say "why not".)

REINHARDT. Now tell me about yourselves. Where did you last appear?

OBERON. Just outside Athens. We were playing at the palace.

REINHARDT. You played the Palace? Ooh, that is very good venue. Now have you ever played Oberon and Puck before?

OBERON. Well, yes.

PUCK. Quite a lot, actually.

REINHARDT. Good. Now what about your film experience. What have you shot?

OBERON. Well, once I shot a unicorn. But I was very young.

REINHARDT. "A Unicorn." That was the title?

OBERON. He didn't have a title. He was just a common unicorn. I also did some shooting for the Amazons. I had to, it was the birth of their nation.

REINHARDT. "The Birth of a Nation." Hoo. That was very big hit. Gentlemen, I have good news. You are hired. Congratulations.

OBERON. "Hired?"

REINHARDT. I want you to play Oberon and Puck in my new movie.

PUCK. In this movie?

REINHARDT. Ja.

OBERON. You mean as...actors?

REINHARDT. Ja.

OBERON & PUCK. Ha haaa! Yahoo! We're movie actors!

OBERON. *(Very show biz:)* I'm gonna be a moon!

PUCK. Star.

OBERON. Right!

(OLIVIA enters.)

OLIVIA. Excuse me, Mr. Reinhardt, but there's a rumor that Mr. Jory has left!

REINHARDT. Ja, is true, he quit, who needs the bum. I have found someone ten times better. Miss Darnell, meet your new Oberon.

OLIVIA. ...You? Is it really you?

OBERON. Apparently.

(She almost jumps for joy.)

OLIVIA. Oh, my God. I'm so happy for you! You did it! You actually did it! *(She runs to him and hugs him with affection.)* Wait! I think we should celebrate. Have you been to the commissary yet? It's like a fairyland. You see one big star after another and they sit right next to you! And don't worry, we'll go dutch.

OBERON. All right, but I don't think I can do the accent.

OLIVIA. Oh, Mr. Reinhardt, could we have our lunch break, please, I mean the cameramen are still setting up the shot and we'll be back before they're done, I promise!

REINHARDT. Ja, go, but don't be long.

OLIVIA. Thanks! Come on! It's my treat!

(And as she drags OBERON away, PUCK throws his hat in the air and lets out a cry of happiness.)

PUCK. We're going to be in the movies! Yipeeeee!

[If the play was in three acts (as it is structurally), this would be the end of Act One.]

(As PUCK dances out happily, LYDIA enters, dressed to the nines in her costume, with LOUELLA following her, getting an interview.)

LOUELLA. Lydia! My dear! You must be so excited arriving for your very first day on such a prestigious picture! May I ask you some questions for my column?

LYDIA. Why of course, Louella, I would be utterly enchanted.

(LYDIA is really putting on the dog now that she's such a classy actress; alas, she is betrayed by her chorus-girl accent.)

LOUELLA. First of all, tell me: who do you play in the picture?

LYDIA. I play a beautiful and delightful young woman named Helena. She is the star. But alas, her boyfriend loves another, and so she flees into a forest.

LOUELLA. How thrilling.

LYDIA. Only this ain't no ordinary forest. It's full of magic, including a magic flower! Of which the juice of it is so powerful that if you get it in your eye, you fall deeply in love with the very next person you look at, whammo! Which, as you can well imagine, makes for some very funny complications. Ho ho.

LOUELLA. How exciting. Now tell me, what does all this mean for Lydia Lansing? Can we expect to see you in other prestigious movies in the future?

LYDIA. Yes, Louella, I think you can. And I would like to add that I personally find it thrilling to be doin' a movie written by the immortal Shakespeare, because he is truly one of our great Americans. And I do hope this is just the beginning, because there are so many other classic roles I hope to play in the future. Like Madame Curie and Moby Dick. Thank you.

(At this moment, POWELL, REINHARDT and DARYL enter.)

DARYL. Okay, let's go! Shot 128. The Wood Near Athens. Lights, check. Set, check, We've got a moon, we've got a tree. Lysander over here, Helena enter here. Quiet, please ladies and gentlemen! Quiet!

REINHARDT. Roll them. And action!

(LYSANDER, as portrayed by DICK POWELL, is asleep on the ground. After a beat, LYDIA, playing HELENA, enters. She is a truly terrible actress. She makes Snout and Tinker look like Laurence Olivier. But she tries her best and gives it all she's got.)

LYDIA as HELENA.
(Her Brooklyn accent as strong as ever.)
"O, I am out of breath in this fond chase.
The more my prayer, the lesser is my grace.
Happy is Hermia, wheresoe'er she lies,
For she hath blessèd and attractive eyes."

(She smiles broadly and sighs. That part's out of the way!)

LYDIA as HELENA.
"But who is here? Lysander on the ground?
Dead — or asleep? I see no blood, no wound. *(She pronounces wound to rhyme with "ground.")*
Lysander, if you live, good sir, awake!"
POWELL as LYSANDER.
"And run through fire I will for thy sweet sake!
Not Hermia, but Helena I love.
Who will not change a raven for a dove?"
LYDIA as HELENA.
"Good sooth, you do me wrong — good sooth, you do!
In such disdainful manner me to woo! To woo! To woo!"
REINHARDT. Cut! Cut! Cut! What is this to woo to woo?! You sound like bird! There is only one "to woo!" "In such disdainful manner me to woo!"

LYDIA. I thought it kinda helped my character. It makes her seem really sad. Ya know? "To woo, to woo."

REINHARDT. Ja, is sad all right.

LYDIA. Gee, thanks! If ya want, I could do some cryin'.

REINHARDT. I will do that for both of us. Now do it again! And do it right this time!

(The scene shifts to the Warner Brothers Commissary. OBERON and OLIVIA sit together at a table. The effect is very romantic.)

OBERON. Thank you for..."lunch."

OLIVIA. Isn't the commissary a dream?! It reminds me of a fairy tale come — ...Omigosh. Don't look behind you. Don't! Don't! It's Bing Crosby!

OBERON. And he does what again?

OLIVIA. He's a singer. And he smokes a pipe. He's very famous.

OBERON. Well no wonder. It must be hard to sing and smoke at the same time. Can I have some more of that brown liquid with the bubbles?

OLIVIA. Coca Cola.

OBERON. And I love those little square things with the layers.

OLIVIA. Sandwiches. I would have thought that every place in the world had sandwiches.

OBERON. Not where I come from.

OLIVIA. Outside Athens.

OBERON. Right. I mean, in a way.

OLIVIA. What way? And don't change the subject this time.

OBERON. *(Hissing)* Look! I mean don't look! The man behind you! He must be important, he's all in white and he has a weapon!

(She peeks over her shoulder.)

OLIVIA. He's a waiter. That's a ladle.

OBERON. Oh. He's not a star?

OLIVIA. No. Well he might be someday, if he's in lots of movies.

OBERON. And then, if he becomes a star, he gets treated like royalty.

OLIVIA. That's right.

OBERON. Doesn't your king get upset at this?

OLIVIA. We don't have a king. Or a queen.

OBERON. Then who runs the place?

OLIVIA. The people do. It's a democracy.

OBERON. Well that'll never work, believe me. They tried it once in Athens, it was chaos.

(She laughs.)

OLIVIA. Come on, tell me the truth. Where are you from?

OBERON. And if I said: a land of magic?

OLIVIA. I'd say how interesting and tell me more.

OBERON.

(Gently)

Think of a world that's full of groves and green,
With fountains clear and spangled starlight sheen.
Where argument between the jealous queen and king.
Makes riot of the middle summer's spring.
A land of pavèd fountain and of rushy brook.
Where in the beachèd margent of the sea
We dance our ringlets to the whistling wind.
Would you come to such a place with me?

(Their faces are an inch apart. They could kiss at any moment.)

OLIVIA. Oh my gosh, look at the time. We have to go. Reinhardt'll be furious. *(She leaves money on the table and drags him off.)* Quick! Come on! We can't be late!

(As they run off, the action shifts to the Warner Brothers costume shop where JOE E. BROWN is being fitted by a seamstress with pins in her mouth. BROWN is a good-natured fellow with a wide grin who always looks bemused and slightly baffled by life. He's holding a copy of the movie script and calling to someone offstage.)

BROWN. I can't get over it. Why would they put me in a Shakespeare movie? I can hardly speak regular English.

CAGNEY. *(Off)* Aw it ain't so bad.

BROWN. That's easy for you to say. You're the great Jimmy Cagney. I'm in baseball movies. *(JIMMY CAGNEY walks in wearing a large ass head.)* Yaaah!...What's that?!

CAGNEY. *(With the head still on.)* It's my costume. For the movie.

BROWN. You're kidding me.

CAGNEY. Nope.

(BROWN walks around CAGNEY in amazement.)

BROWN. But I don't get it. I thought you were playing a guy named Bottom.

CAGNEY. I am. But during the movie, I turn into a donkey. Then everybody gets scared and runs away. Except a fairy princess who falls in love with me.

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