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The Pocket Dream

A comedy

Elly Brewer and Sandi Toksvig

Samuel French — London
New York - Toronto - Hollywood



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THE POCKET DREAM

First performed at the Nottingham Playhouse on 25th April 1991 with the following cast of characters:

Simon Beaumont

Theseus

Mustardseed

Phelim McDermott

Quince

Prologue

Phyllida Brewster

Hippolyta

Helena

Louisa Rix

Titania

Starveling

Moonshine

Jo Payne

Hermia

Puck

Sandi Toksvig

Snout

Wall

Dave Hershaw

Philostrate

Lysander

Neil Mullarkey

Bottom

Pyramus

Felix Barker

Egeus

Oberon

Mac McDonald

Snug

Lion

Tom Brindle

Demetrius

Peaseblossom

Lee Simpson

Flute

Thisbe

Fairies: Blue Team, Red Team, Yellow Team

Directed by Pip Broughton

Designed by Jacqueline Gunn

It returned to the Nottingham Playhouse on 1st February 1992 and was subsequently presented by the Theatre of Comedy Company in association with the Nottingham Playhouse at the Albery Theatre, London, on 27th February 1992 with the following cast of characters:

Simon Beaumont

Theseus

Mustardseed

Phelim McDermott

Quince

Prologue

Phyllida Brewster

Hippolyta

Helena

Louisa Rix

Titania

Starveling

Moonshine

Jo Payne

Hermia

Puck

Sandi Toksvig

Snout

Wall

Dave Hershaw

Philostrate

Lysander

Clive Mantle

Bottom

Pyramus

Felix Barker

Egeus

Oberon

Mike McShane

Snug

Lion

Tom Brindle

Demetrius

Peaseblossom

Lee Simpson

Flute

Thisbe

Fairies: Blue Team, Red Team, Yellow Team

Directed by Pip Broughton

Designed by Jacqueline Gunn

THE CHARACTERS

FELIX BARKER : Front of House Manager — a dapper man, with a gambling habit, who started at the theatre as a temporary barman and has climbed through the ranks by virtue of never having left. Ten years ago he was only passing through town after a spot of bother with an unpaid debt. He is not particularly interested in theatre and although used to dealing with the public, he is shy when it comes to anything related to being on stage.

JOPAYNE : Stage Manager — a fairly efficient worker with a no-nonsense attitude which manifests itself in flippancy. A small woman, she pays no attention to her personal appearance and wears unflattering glasses and theatre “blacks”. Slightly contemptuous of Phyllida and her television work, Jo loves theatre, but has no desire to be an actress and has learnt her understudy parts with casual indifference, never expecting to go on.

PHYLLIDA BREWSTER : Actress — hired to play Hippolyta and Titania, Phyllida is not the most popular member of the cast, misguidedly believing she has the best interests of the show at heart as she constantly “advises” her fellow artistes on how to improve their performances. Trained at RADA, she is still bitter over not winning the gold acting medal. Phyllida’s many close calls with stardom never led to the fame she so desperately seeks. Just turned 40, Phyllida’s anxiety about her future has manifested itself in her choice of a young, virile, live-in-lover, which both pleases and worries her.

DAVE HERSHAW : Handyman/stage hand — an ex-fireman who was asked to leave as his constant mishaps were endangering his fellow crew. First introduced to the theatre as overnight fireman, Dave joined the staff full time shortly after his fire station burned down. This is Dave’s first production and he’s so thrilled with his new job that he’s even learned the lines. His constant desire to help can be irritating, but it is difficult to get annoyed with him as he means so well and is unfailingly cheerful and optimistic.

The Pocket Dream

TOM BRINDLE : Phyllida's boyfriend — a PE teacher at an all girls school in London who met Phyllida when she presented the drama prizes at speech day. They have been together for eighteen months — Tom is proud of her, truly loves her and insists that his other "excursions" mean nothing to him. Although not overly bright, Tom knows how to use his good looks to the best effect and has limitless confidence. He has come to get Phyllida back, after she walked out over a "misunderstanding" concerning a fellow member of staff (female). Tom knows the lines from *The Dream* as he spent many hours helping Phyllida learn hers.

SIMON BEAUMONT : Actor — extremely professional, with a long history in TIE, Simon has never made a name for himself in anything, although he is known as a "solid company member". His career includes several seasons in Regent's Park, one line in *Howard's Way* and several years in the touring version of *Privates on Parade*. Although he appears weedy, Simon's body is a temple for his work — he spends many hours honing his skills and is always first into the theatre to prepare for the show.

AUTHORS' NOTES

The Pocket Dream is set in a small theatre where the Henry Irving Strolling Players (HISP) Memorial Theatre are due to appear as part of a countrywide tour, to present *A Midsommer Night's Dreame*.

To reinforce the set-up, **Felix Barker** stood in the foyer before the play began, overseeing the smooth running of his Front of House area and **Tom Brindle** arrived as a member of the audience, had a proper ticket for the play and took his seat along with everyone else. Only **Jo, Dave** and **Tom** were ever seen effecting scene changes.

The original production employed Kirby's Flying Ballets who enabled Puck to fly, but where there is no access to a flying rig, then a similar effect might be achieved with Puck on roller skates or a skateboard, adapting the lines accordingly.

For the original staging of the play, a programme was produced in two halves— one for the “supposed” HISP play, complete with fake cast list and biographies for **Phyllida Brewster** and her leading man, the other with the genuine cast list and biographies.

The fake cast list and some background information on HISP are included in the following pages for use, if required, in promotional literature.

The Henry Irving Strolling Players Memorial Theatre

A bit of background...

One afternoon in 1975, a group of eager young theatricals chanced upon and much enjoyed a production which recreated the staging of Samuel Phelps's Sadler's Wells version of *A Midsummer Night's Dreame* from 1853. So much so, that we raced back to our digs in Balham and sat around the one electric bar to read the play aloud, each taking the role we coveted most.

Such was our enjoyment of this first spontaneous encounter with The Bard, that we were moved to consider how enriched our lives would be, were we to devote ourselves to The Great Man's work. Thus was The Henry Irving Strolling Players Memorial Theatre founded and from that moment on, we came to look upon *The Dreame* as our talisman.

HISP's founding philosophy is to present the pure and unadulterated works of The Bard, as close to their original form as the distance of years allows, and to illuminate them for the masses.

With all our productions, before a single iambic pentameter is vocalised, there are painstaking months of research into original pronunciations and stage directions. The company work by piecing together our performances, like theatrical detectives seeking every hidden subtlety and cunning nuance in the original text. And though some may think it radical, we sculpt our plays collaboratively, each actor helping out his fellow. What function a director, when The Bard is master and perfection is the single common goal?

Early appearances ranged from such diverse locations as the social club of United Biscuits (*As You Like It*), to the stage of the Open Air Theatre, Basildon (*Hamlet*). Then, having found our thespic feet, we progressed to school tours (*Romeo and Juliet*) and various incarceration units for the socially disadvantaged (*King Lear*). This phase of our development culminated in our most prestigious accolade to date: the Golden Chalks Award for "Best Shakespearean Tragedy in a Schools Touring Production, Northumbrian Region".

It was this award which lent credence to our quest to seek approval from a wider theatre-going public. Months of intense rehearsal gave birth to the Corps' most ambitious project to date: *A Midsummer Night's Dreame*.

THE HENRY IRVING STROLLING PLAYERS PRESENT

A MIDSOMMER NIGHT'S DREAME

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Theseus, Duke of Athens	GRAHAM STUART
Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons	PHYLLIDA BREWSTER
Hermia, Egeus's Daughter, in love with Lysander	THEADORA BENNET
Lysander, loved by Hermia	ANTHONY HARPUR
Demetrius, suitor of Hermia	PATRICK WARD
Helena, in love with Demetrius	DEIRDRE DAVIES
Egeus, Hermia's Father	PETER STEWART
Philostrate, Theseus' Master of the Revels	MICHAEL PERRIN
Oberon, King of the Fairies	CHRISTOPHER PACK
Titania, Queen of the Fairies	PHYLLIDA BREWSTER
Puck, or Robin Goodfellow	PAUL CHEDLOW

Fairies

Peaseblossom	MARY BELL
Cobweb	SIMON BEAUMONT
Moth	ROBERT MACGREGOR
Mustardseed	MAX MACKENZIE

Peter Quince, a carpenter; Prologue	MARY BELL
Nick Bottom, a weaver; Pyramus	ADRIAN MICHAELS
Francis Flute, a bellows-mender; Thisbe	RICHARD THISTLE
Tom Snout, a tinker; Wall	JOHN HENDERSON
Snug, a joiner; Lion	MARK LEVY
Robin Starveling, a tailor; Moonshine	WASYL NIMENKO

Fairies attending on Oberon and Titania

Katie Bradford	Jared Baker	Noella Bello
Vanessa Campbell	Billy Clark	Steven Brandy
Rickie Downey	Elaine Francisco	Elizabeth Faulds
Jack Falconer	Lorraine Francisco	Anna Hilton
Dominic Gilmore	Zoë John	Jess Hilton
Aaron Gourlay	Damian Irish	Rachel Mamauag
Jodi Neill	Amiir Saleem	Jay aul Murphy
Salah Eddine Salik	Nicholas Tapp	Piers Robinson
Emily Thomas	Chloe Ward	Mario Roberto Salvato
Mary Thomas	Cassandra Zenthner	Tyrone Ward

Understudies: Carly Cheeseman, Logan Coutts, Laura McGrath, Sebastian Zito

Lords and Attendants to Theseus and Hippolyta
(with thanks to those members of the cast who volunteered their spouses!)

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ACT I

SCENE 1

House Lights to half

JO (*voice over*) Ladies and Gentlemen...

Pause while the audience settle

...at this performance by the Henry Irving Strolling Players of *A Midsommer Night's Dreame*, the part of Theseus will be played by Simon Beaumont. May I remind you, Ladies and Gentlemen, that the taking of photographs and the use of tape recorders is prohibited. Thank you.

House Lights out

As the CURTAIN rises, Mendelssohn's "Dream" music is heard. Smoke drifts across the stage. A small band of Fairies dance up through the audience and on to the stage. As they dance we notice some are slightly oddball — one has heavy boots on, one a broken leg, one trainers etc. In the distance a clock strikes and the Fairies disappear

A flat showing an entrance to the Duke's palace flies in as Theseus (Simon) and Hippolyta (Phyllida) enter UL and pose regally in front of the flat

THESEUS (SIMON)

Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
Draws on apace. Four happy days bring in
Another moon — but O, methinks how slow
This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires,
Like to a stepdame or a dowager
Long withering out a young man's revenue.

HIPPOLYTA (PHYLLIDA)

Four days will quickly steep themselves in night;
 Four nights will quickly dream away the time:
 And then the moon — like to a silver bow
 New-bent in heaven — shall behold the night
 Of our solemnities.

THESEUS (SIMON) (*gesturing L with confidence*)

Go, Philostrate,
 Stir up the Athenian youth to merriments,
 Awake the pert and nimble spirit of...

(*It dawns on him that no-one has followed him on stage*)

Phyllida smiles gamely at Simon and the audience, confident that she has no more speeches and it can't be her who has gone wrong. After a pause, Simon soldiers on, turning to the other side in case Philostrate has entered R by mistake

Go, Philostrate...

Pause. We hear Jo and Dave running backstage calling to each other, as doors slam

PHYLLIDA (*stage whisper*) Where the hell is he?

SIMON (*out of the side of his mouth*) I don't know. (*He takes Phyllida firmly by the arm and moves her DR*)

PHYLLIDA What are you doing?

SIMON Just act royal. (*Brightly*) Come, my lady. Uh ... let us hither ... (*moving Phyllida L to the prompt corner*) ... and go ... thither.

HIPPOLYTA (PHYLLIDA) (*rallying round*)

And I shall play me on my ... zither.

SIMON (*looking desperately for help*) Jo? Jo?

JO (*off*) What?

SIMON Where is everybody?

JO (*off*) I don't know. I can't find anyone. Go round one more time.

SIMON OK.

Dragging Phyllida, the two return to their original positions

THESEUS (SIMON) (*a little faster*)

Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour

Draws on apace. Four happy days bring in
Another moon — but O, methinks how...
(looking to the L wings)... slow
This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires,
Like to a stepdame or a dowager
Long withering out a young man's revenue.

HIPPOLYTA (PHYLLIDA)

Four days will quickly steep themselves in night;
Four nights will quickly dream away the time——

THESEUS (SIMON) *(interrupting)*

Go, Philostrate...

The flat behind them drops, making a terrible noise. Phyllida and Simon react

PHYLLIDA Oh for God's sake. That's it. *(Looking to the prompt corner)* Where the hell's the Company Manager? I'm waiting. Where is he?

JO *(off)* Er...Wandsworth Prison. *(Or local reference)*

PHYLLIDA Yes, well get him. I... what?

Jo, the Stage Manager, wearing cans and carrying the prompt book, beckons to Phyllida from the prompt corner

No. You come here.

JO *(slowly creeping on stage, avoiding looking at the audience)*
Apparently...er...some misunderstanding with one of the fairies last night. I must say I thought she looked older... anyway, they've refused bail. *(Turning to exit, she sees the audience for the first time and pales)*
Oh my God!

Jo exits

PHYLLIDA How distasteful. Wardrobe, this neckline still isn't laying right...Of course "now", Betty.

Phyllida exits R

(Muttering as she goes) I'm sure you'll recollect I mentioned it twice in the fitting.

Simon is appalled to find himself alone, c. Still attempting to maintain his poise as Theseus, he scurries to the prompt corner and drags Jo on. Jo is on the phone and the cord to the receiver stretches with her to c

JO (*on the phone*) I must speak to Mr Barker. ... Well where is he?

SIMON (*to Jo*) If the Company Manager's not here you'd better say something.

Jo turns to speak to the audience, realizes she is still on the phone and lets it go — it flies off into the prompt corner

Phyllida appears R

Simon goes to stand next to Phyllida

JO (*clearing her throat, speaking very quietly, nervous*) Ladies and gentlemen ... so sorry ... one or two tiny problems with the ...

VOICE (TOM) FROM AUDIENCE Speak up!

Simon, Phyllida and Jo all try to see who has shouted

JO (*too loud*) Ladies and gentlemen, we do seem to have one or two gremlins in the works this evening. (*Loud, nervous laugh. To the flies*) Alex, could you take the flat out, please.

The flat flies out

Everything's now under control and er...

As the flat is half way up, it reveals Dave on his knees with a tool box, fiddling with something. His trousers have slipped down to reveal the crack in his bottom. Horrified to discover that he is in full view of the audience, he tries to sneak off stage

(*Going upstage*) What are you doing, Dave?

DAVE It was a bit wonky, I had an idea how to fix it. I'll just check it. (*He indicates above to have the flat dropped*) Here, Jo...

The flat flies in smartly, obscures him from view

JO So, everything's now under control, ladies and gentlemen — Mr Beaumont... Miss Brewster, if you're ready to continue... Act One, Scene One.

The flat falls with a crash right over Jo, who is unharmed as she stands in the open doorway. Simon and Phyllida still stand well out of the way

PHYLLIDA (*shrieking*) I could have been killed!

JO (*to herself*) We couldn't get that lucky.

SIMON Could I just say ... if there's too much tension, I do tend to lose my voice.

DAVE (*still busy with his tools*) I think I can see what the problem is now.

JO Touch it and die, Dave.

Jo exits to the prompt corner

DAVE Have I done something to annoy you?

SIMON (*moving towards the prompt corner and staying there*) Jo, I don't want to be difficult, but this is a very important evening for me.

The others carry on

(Waving discreetly to someone in the stalls; mouthing) Sorry!

PHYLLIDA (*slightly louder, moving downstage to ensure attention*) I could have been killed you know.

Jo enters with a pencil

JO Dave, get a chair for Miss Brewster.

Dave exits L

(Playing nervously with the pencil; to the audience) I'm so sorry we've had another slight hold up, but I'm confident...*(she snaps the pencil in half)*...that our celebrated cast of fine Shakespearean performers, are now ready to...

Dave walks behind her with a chair

DAVE They're not coming.

JO What?

DAVE I've been trying to tell you — they're not here.

JO How many of them are not here?

DAVE Apart from Phyllida and Simon?

Jo nods

All of them.

JO Where are they?

DAVE In *The Dog and Trumpet*. (Or local reference)

JO How long have they been there?

DAVE Since yesterday.

JO Let me get this straight. Sixteen members of our cast are in the pub?

DAVE Fifteen actually. Old Mr Mackenzie — you know, Mustardseed — he's here, but he passed out in his dressing-room.

JO (*swinging the chair around towards Phyllida*) Miss Brewster!

PHYLLIDA (*with less confidence; sinking into her chair*) I could have been killed you know.

JO You've been telling the cast how to act again, haven't you?

PHYLLIDA One or two tiny...

SIMON ...hours...

PHYLLIDA ...pointers.

JO (*under Simon and Phyllida's dialogue*) Dave, go and get Mr Barker.

DAVE Who?

JO The Front of House Manager.

DAVE Where from?

JO The Front of House, you fool.

Dave jumps down off the stage

No, Dave ... Dave ... Dave — the other side.

DAVE Sorry.

Instead of going round, Dave goes through the audience to the other side of the house and exits

JO (*to the audience*) I'm terribly sorry.

SIMON (*sweetly, moving towards Phyllida*) Not that I blame you. You of all people know there is always room for improvement.

PHYLLIDA I was merely thinking of the production and trying to make some simple improvements. *(She begins to collapse in tears)*

JO Off, please Simon. Get her off.

PHYLLIDA As usual, I see I have been completely misunderstood. Everyone's been beastly.

Simon moves to her side

JO *(to the audience)* I'm terrible sorry. Obviously we won't be able to continue this evening. *(To Simon)* Off, please.

PHYLLIDA *(to Simon)* This has never happened to me before.

JO *(to the audience)* This has never actually happened to me before.

SIMON Big breaths.

Simon leads Phyllida R

PHYLLIDA I could have been killed you know.

SIMON I've got some Rescue Remedy in my bag. *(He reaches into the wings for a bag from which he produces a variety of medicaments and a towel to drape around his neck)*

JO Strictly speaking, I think it's called a "technical... er...indisposition of the entire company". But it's not a problem — you will be getting your money back. I think the trick here, is to hold your ticket stubs up in the air... *(holding her arms up in the air)*... and then from the various exits in the building...*(demonstrating with arm movements, like an air stewardess)*... they will be gathered up and then you will get all your money back.

Felix enters from the back of the stalls, arguing with Dave

Ooh, Mr Barker — I'd like a word with you, please.

Felix climbs on the stage wearing a full dinner suit with a garish bow tie and matching cummerbund. A portable phone sticks out of one jacket pocket and a copy of the "Racing Post" sticks out of the other. He holds an open packet of crisps. He is followed by Dave, who stands and waits in case anybody needs him

FELIX What the hell is going on?

JO This is Mr Felix Barker, ladies and gentlemen. He's the Front of House Manager and he will be giving you all your money back. *(She starts a round of applause)*

Felix turns and registers the audience

FELIX *(shoving the crisps into his pocket)* Just a second, folks. *(He puts his hand up to protect his eyes)* Do we need all these lights? *(To the audience)* Two seconds... Jo, Jo, come here.

JO *(to the audience, walking across to Felix)* All your money back. Every penny.

FELIX *(grabbing Jo)* Money back? Have you lost your mind?

JO No. I've lost my cast.

Felix indicates R, where Simon and Phyllida are busy in the wings with the rescue remedy

FELIX And Phyllida and Simon, what are they — chopped liver?

JO Close. Actors. Two of them. That's "T" "W" "O", Felix. Two. That's two here, and sixteen in the snug of *The Dog and Trumpet*. *(Or local reference)*

DAVE Mr Mackenzie's in his dressing-room, but I can't get him to come round.

FELIX *(together)* Thank you, Dave.

JO

DAVE Apparently his last words were "I'm ready to go on — what's the play?"

JO Thanks, Dave. So, two actors to play eighteen parts. You sort it out.

Jo exits to the prompt corner

FELIX *(moving to prompt corner)* You're the Stage Manager, you ought to be able to do something. What is it we always say in the theatre?

Jo pops out

JO Where's my money?

Jo exits

FELIX No! The show must go on! (*He moves R*) Miss Brewster, I appeal to you.

PHYLLIDA (*sitting on her chair*) Not even on a dark night.

FELIX Mr Beaumont...!

SIMON Well, I would never knowingly let my public down.

FELIX (*grabbing Simon round the neck, dragging him L*) Good, good. Now we're cooking. (*Still holding Simon, he turns to the prompt corner*) Jo — who are the understudies?

Jo enters

JO (*consulting her prompt copy*) Well ... er, there's me. And then there's, er... me. I guess it's me mostly.

FELIX (*dropping Simon*) That's it?

JO This isn't the RSC you know. It's subsidized rep. (*Or local reference*) For two hundred pounds a week I stage manage, I understudy all the parts and I'm available in case Juliet Stevenson falls sick in *Death and the Maiden*. (*Or local reference*)

Jo exits to the prompt corner

PHYLLIDA I refuse to share the stage with an untrained midget.

Felix and Simon sense trouble

Jo enters slowly

JO (*smiling, advancing on Phyllida*) Oh fussy, are we, now? This from a woman who played a corpse in *Casualty*.

Phyllida leaps up and towers over Jo, who stands her ground

Dave appears in the upper portal

DAVE (*declaiming as Ophelia*)

“Then up he rose, and donn'd his clothes,
And dupp'd the chamber door;
Let in the maid, that out a maid
Never departed more.” (*A small bow*)

FELIX Fabulous, Dave! (*He moves upstage to Dave*) You could use Dave.

DAVE (*jumping down to the stage*) I've been studying backstage.

SIMON (*clapping slowly, moving R*) Bravo! A magnificent performance.

Jo sits on the step. Felix stands beside her and, unheard by the audience, badgers her to continue with the play

Phyllida and I will do the Dream, while Dave weaves in and out pretending to be Hamlet's girlfriend.

DAVE (*over enthusiastic*) I can do the Dream. It's my favourite. I know it backwards.

PHYLLIDA That's pretty much how the rest of the cast knew it.

JO (*looking at Phyllida furiously, getting up and moving to Dave*) All right ... all right. Dave — you'll do.

DAVE What really? Can I really? You're not just kidding?

JO You're in, Dave.

Dave moves to stand between Simon and Phyllida, squeezing them enthusiastically round the shoulders. Phyllida is appalled

FELIX (*moving to exit through the house*) You're practically there. Simon, Phyllida, Dave, Jo...

JO And you.

FELIX (*stopping in his tracks*) Oh no...

JO Oh yes. If you think this is such a good idea, you take a part — or two. (*She moves to the prompt corner*)

FELIX (*following Jo*) I couldn't possibly — I've never appeared on a stage before...

JO (*turning on Felix*) And I suppose Dave's Laurence Olivier.

Jo exits

DAVE (*sitting on Phyllida's chair*) Well — given time.

PHYLLIDA This is absurd.

FELIX I am strictly administration.

Jo enters with the prompt book and walks to R

Felix follows her

DAVE But Miss Brewster, we wouldn't be doing this if you hadn't upset the rest of the cast and made them walk out.

JO Dave comes to us straight from the diplomatic corps. Stand by stage right, please.

Jo exits R

FELIX And I'm shy.

PHYLLIDA I have never been so insulted.

Jo enters

JO (*crossing to the prompt corner*) You want to get out more.

Jo exits

SIMON Phyllida — maybe it's up to us, the real professionals, to rally the amateur troops.

Jo enters with a script and stands c

FELIX (*moving to Jo*) When I said "the show must go on", it was not my intention to put it there personally.

DAVE Shall I collect the ticket stubs so you can give them their money back, Mr Barker?

FELIX (*eyeing the audience for a long moment*) Shit...! Where do I get my costume?

JO So, let's see — five of us to play eighteen parts. Piece of cake ... (*she sits*) ... just need to find another thirteen people.

DAVE There's always Alex, backstage.

JO Oh no, he's been ... (*she mimes smoking a joint*) ... he's gone ... (*she mimes "out of it"*)

SIMON (*moving to Jo*) Some of us will have to double up.

FELIX Not me. Just a small part.

JO (*looking at Felix's crotch*) So I've heard. Two seconds, ladies and gentlemen. Cast — prompt corner, now!

Jo gets up and exits to the prompt corner, followed by Simon

FELIX (*dialling on his portable phone*) Yeah... hallo, Clive? Did you get it? Good. That's ten to one on Cissy Fairfax.

Felix exits

DAVE (*picking up Phyllida's chair*) Come on, Miss Brewster, it's going to be fun.

Dave exits

Phyllida starts to follow and then realizing she is alone on stage, turns to the audience

PHYLLIDA My dear friends, thank you for your patience in what are clearly trying times. I feel moved to speak to you at this emotional impasse, for you... we... are about to embark on a great theatrical experience and — thank you but no, I am not just referring to my own performance. For though your collective eye will naturally wish to feast upon the shining light that is my talent, I beg your indulgence of my fellow, would-be thespians — particularly the dwarf. Whatever adverse circumstances have created this predicament — and I feel wounded by the aspersions which have been cast upon the still waters of my good intentions — make no mistake, we shall give you a show. (*She moves to exit, UL*)

From the back of the house, the sound of solo clapping is heard as Tom Brindle comes through the audience to the stage

TOM Bullseye. Bloody brilliant. (*Clapping and calling her name like a chant*) Phyllida! Phyllida!

She pauses and turns

Phyllie, it's me. (*He moves down the aisle towards her*) I bet you're surprised to see me.

PHYLLIDA Tom! What are you doing here?

TOM (*leaping on stage*) Don't be cross.

PHYLLIDA I am not "cross".

Jo enters UL, with a pile of scripts, followed by Simon

TOM (*putting his arms around Phyllida*) Phyllie! We're meant for each other. You can't deny it.

JO Great, you found someone else.

Dave and Felix enter partly dressed in costume for Act I, Scene 1

TOM Hi! Tom Brindle — Deputy Head, PE — St Joe's for Girls. I'm her other half.

PHYLLIDA He was.

TOM Yeah, well... I expect Phyllie's mentioned me.

JO Do you know this play? (*She shows Tom a script*)

PHYLLIDA He's only a ...

TOM Natch.

PHYLLIDA You do?

TOM Sure. All those hours in bed going over your lines — remember you said I'd make a great Bottom 'cos I'm hung like a don——

PHYLLIDA — he'll be fine.

JO Right, listen up, everyone. (*She opens the script and looks at her watch*) Oh God, look at the time. Right, let's just worry about the first scene first. Phyllida, over here ... turn round ... (*She measures herself against Phyllida*) Oh yes, you are taller — you be Helena and I'll take Hermia. Simon ...

SIMON ... the Duke, of course — but I could play anything. (*To Tom*) Do you know, in a recent TIE production I played every part of the body and——

JO (*indicating Dave and Tom*) You two boys, Demetrius and Lysander — doesn't matter which.

DAVE Bottom! Please let me play Bottom.

JO We'll worry about the other parts later.

FELIX (*moving to exit*) I'm out of here.

JO And you, Felix — Egeus ... (*She throws him a script*)

FELIX (*catching the script*) Who?

JO Let's get on with this if we're going to do it, but I want to make it quite clear from the beginning that whatever's happened, this is still a professional show and therefore under no circumstances am I doing any snogging.

Tom goes to lead Phyllida off, but she shakes him away and strides to

the wings. He follows

Simon starts to exit, then pauses to listen

FELIX I'm shaking. The lines are a complete blur.

JO (*indicating the audience*) It's not too late to give them their money back.

FELIX Suddenly everything is crystal clear.

Jo and Dave move to raise the fallen flat back into position

SIMON (*taking Felix off*) Centre yourself. Reach down for that inner calm. Big breaths.

They exit together L, Felix trying to get rid of Simon

Dave heads off stage and returns R to do a blast with the smoke machine

JO (*to the audience*) I am so sorry. (*Loudly*) Tabs in. Music. Act one, scene one. God help us.

**JO TO HERMIA; DAVE TO PHILOSTRATE; FELIX TO EGEUS;
TOM TO DEMETRIUS**

SCENE 2

The tabs come in and music starts again. As the CURTAIN rises, Mendelssohn's "Dream" music is heard and smoke drifts across the stage

As before, a small band of Fairies dance up through the audience and on to the stage. The dance is not as successful as the first time and a couple of the Fairies fight

Unaware of the audience, Tom enters UL, climbs up the steps wearing his underpants and trying to get into his costume. At the top, he realizes that he is in full view and swiftly exits UR

In the distance a clock strikes. The Fairies disappear and a flat showing the Duke's palace flies in as Theseus (Simon) and Hippolyta (Phyllida) enter as before. The flat comes to rest with a large crash, making Phyllida and Simon jump

THESEUS (SIMON)

Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour

Draws on apace.

Four happy days bring in another moon ——

HIPPOLYTA (PHYLLIDA) (interrupting)

Four days will quickly steep themselves in night;

Four nights will quickly dream away the time ——

THESEUS (SIMON)(interrupting)

Go, Philostrate ...

Pause, nothing happens. Simon looks panic stricken to prompt corner. Voices come from DR

DAVE (off) Who's Philostrate?

JO (off) You'll have to do it.

DAVE (off) I can't — I'm Lysander. I can't do both.

JO (off) He doesn't speak.

Dave is pushed on, DL, wearing a false beard and carrying a small Union Jack. He stands for a moment facing Simon, then turns uncertainly

DAVE Philostrate. *(To the audience, lifting up the beard)* Not really, it's me, Dave. *(He waves the Union Jack)*

Simon takes a deep breath. Phyllida imperceptibly shakes her head

THESEUS (SIMON)

Go, Philostrate,

Stir up the Athenian youth to merriments.

DAVE (at a loss) Righto.

Dave waves the flag, then notices Simon discreetly indicating that he should move L, which he does awkwardly, waving his flag as he goes

SIMON Why, here comes Hermia, Demetrius *and* Lysander. That's you, Dave.

Dave panics and exits L

DAVE TO LYSANDER

Hermia (Jo), Demetrius (Tom), and Egeus (Felix) enter R. Felix and Jo are carrying scripts, Jo is wearing a diaphanous gown which she finds a bit embarrassing

Phyllida goes to take up her posing position in the open portal

THESEUS (SIMON)

Good Egeus. What's the news with thee?

FELIX (*scanning the script*) Damned if I know.

Jo points out the right place

EGEUS (FELIX)

Full of vexation ——

SIMON Speak up.

FELIX Is it too quiet?

SIMON I can't hear you.

EGEUS (FELIX)

Full of vexation come I, with complaint

Against my child, my daughter Hermia.

Stand forth, Demetrius!

Tom smiles winningly at the audience

Pause. My noble Lord,

This man hath my consent to marry her.

Stand forth, Lysander!

Lysander (Dave) rushes on with his script

And, my gracious Duke,

This hath bewitched the bosom of my child.

She will not consent to marry with Demetrius,

I beg the ancient privilege of Athens two hundred:

JO That's the line number, we don't read that bit.

EGEUS (FELIX)

I beg the ancient privilege of Athens

As she is mine, I may dispose of her

Which shall be either to this gentleman or to her death.

FELIX I'm out of here. *(He goes to exit R)*

Theseus speaks, Jo pulls Felix back on stage

THESEUS (SIMON)

What say you, Hermia? Be advised, fair maid:

To you your father should be as a god;

Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.

HERMIA (JO)

(reading) So is Lysander. *(She kneels)*

But I beseech your grace that I may know

The worst that may befall me in this case

If I refuse to wed Demetrius.

THESEUS (SIMON)

Either to die the death, or to abjure

For ever the society of men.

Take time to pause, and by the next new moon

The sealing day betwixt my love and me

Upon that day either prepare to die

For disobedience to your father's will,

Or else to wed Demetrius, as he would,

Or on Diana's altar to protest

For aye austerity and single life.

DEMETRIUS (TOM) *(gearing up for his big moment)*

Relent, sweet Hermia; and, Lysander, yield

Thy crazed title to my certain right.

Thrilled that he has remembered his lines, Tom looks to the audience for approval — he does athletic knee bends. Dave moves L to speak to him, notices the knee bends and copies uncertainly

LYSANDER (DAVE)

You have her father's love, Demetrius —

Let me have Hermia's. Do you marry *him*.

TOM What?

Egeus (Felix) moves to speak to Lysander. Dave encourages him to join in the knee bends

EGEUS (FELIX)

Scornful Lysander.

Felix scurries back to his original position. Tom and Dave stop the knee bends

DAVE No. Come back.

Dave follows Felix and stands in front of him, delivering his lines with his back to the audience. As he speaks, Jo and Simon subtly try and get him to turn around

LYSANDER (DAVE) (*reading in what he thinks is a Shakespearean rhythm*)

I am, my Lord, as well derived as he,
As well possessed. My love is more than his,
My fortunes every way as fairly ranked —
If not with vantage — as Demetrius'.
And — which is more than all these boasts can be —
I am beloved of beauteous Hermia. (*He finally turns*)
Demetrius made love to Helena,
And won her soul.

THESEUS (SIMON)

Demetrius, come; And come, Egeus.

Phyllida storms off UL. Tom exits DL

You shall go with me.
I have some private schooling for you both.

Felix exits L

Theseus turns to Hermia (Jo), who is paying no attention as she has realized the hot lights are making her sweat. She indicates this to Dave

For you, fair Hermia, look you arm yourself
To fit your fancies to your father's will;
Come, my Hippolyta.

The portal shuts. Simon realizes she has gone

What cheer, my love?

Demetrius and Egeus...

FELIX (*off*) What?

Felix and Tom rush back on

THESEUS (SIMON)

(*pushing them off stage*) ... I must confer with you
Of something nearly that concerns yourselves.

FELIX On, off, on, off — make up your mind, you little twerp.

They exit

SIMON TO QUINCE; PHYLLIDA TO HELENA; FELIX TO SNUG

DAVE Shall we carry on? You look lovely.

LYSANDER (DAVE)

How now, my love?...

JO Not yet, I have to cry first.

She has a go at crying, then beckons to Dave who kneels next to her

LYSANDER (DAVE)

How now, my love? Why is your cheek so pale?

How chance the roses there do fade so fast?

Hermia (Jo) gets up awkwardly, followed by Dave

HERMIA (JO)

Belike for want of rain, which I could well

Beteem them from the tempest of my eyes.

She turns to face Dave, but his script blocks her view as he holds it right in front of her face

LYSANDER (DAVE)

Hear me, Hermia:

I have a widow aunt...

JO I can't see you.

DAVE Sorry.

LYSANDER (DAVE)

From Athens is her house remote seven leagues;

There, gentle Hermia, may I marry thee;

And to that place the sharp Athenian law

Cannot pursue us.

If thou lovest me, then

Steal forth thy father's house tomorrow night,

And in the wood, a league without the town —

There will I stay for thee.

HERMIA (JO)

Tomorrow truly will I meet with thee.

LYSANDER (DAVE)

Keep promise, love. *(He moves to kiss her)*

Jo is appalled. Phyllida clears her throat loudly, off stage

Look — here comes Helena.

Helena (Phyllida) enters L with a script

HERMIA (JO)

God speed, fair Helena! *(Confidently)* Whither away.

(She wonders whether what she's just said was really written as an insult. She moves to sit with Helena on the step c)

Phyllida has decided to play Helena with a girly lisp

HELENA (PHYLLIDA) (half-referring to the script)

Call you me fair? That "fair" again unsay.

Demetrius loves your fair. O happy fair!

Your eyes are lodestars ...

Jo mouths "lodestars" to Dave, mimicking Phyllida's delivery

... and your tongue's sweet air

More tunable than lark to shepherd's ear

When wheat is green ...

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