

A Midsummer Night's Dream

William Shakespeare



Wedding Bells



Theseus, the Duke of Athens, was very excited. The Queen of the Amazons, Hippolyta, had agreed to marry him. Squeezing her hand, he grinned and ordered his servants to prepare for the wedding.



Soon, they were racing around the palace, polishing furniture and floors until they shone. In the kitchen, the cook began creating a cake fit for a queen.



“We shall hold the best party Athens has ever seen,”
Theseus promised Hippolyta.



Just then, an angry man burst into the Great Hall with three other people. “I must see Duke Theseus now!” he shouted. “Is that you, Egeus?” asked Theseus. “Whatever’s wrong?”

Egeus gestured at a girl in a yellow dress. “It’s my daughter, Hermia,” he explained. “I want her to marry this man, Demetrius.” A man in a pale blue tunic nodded to the duke. “But Hermia wants to marry Lysander,” Egeus went on. “You’re in charge around here. Please tell her to marry Demetrius.”



Theseus frowned at Hermia. “Demetrius is a good man,” he pointed out, “and the law says daughter must obey their fathers.” Demetrius gave a slight smile. “But that’s not fair!” said Lysander, shaking his messy curls. “Hermia loves me. Demetrius has her father’s love. Let me have Hermia’s!”

Theseus glared at the young man. “Lysander!” he snapped. “Don’t be rude. I’m sorry, but Hermia must marry Demetrius. It’s what her father wants. And if she won’t do as Egeus tells her, she’ll have to become a nun.”



Lysander watched in fury as Theseus left, taking Egeus and Demetrius with him. Hermia was dismayed. "I can't marry Demetrius," she cried. "And I don't want to be a nun."

"I'll meet you in the forest tonight and we'll run away," said Lysander, trying to comfort her.



“Run away?” said a voice, interrupting them. “Who’s running away?” It was Hermia’s best friend, Helena.

Quickly, Lysander told her what had just happened. Helena sighed.

“At least Lysander loves you Hermia. I wish Demetrius loved me.”

“Poor Helena,” said Lysander. “We do too. But we can’t hang around,” he went on. “Come on, Hermia, we must pack.”

“We’re leaving Athens tonight,” Hermia whispered on her way out.



Left alone, Helena felt tears pricking her eyes. “It’s so unfair!” she thought. “I love Demetrius so much and he wants Hermia.”

Around her, the palace was full of noisy wedding preparations. The bustle made Helena feel worse. “I’ll tell Demetrius that Hermia is running away with Lysander,” she decided. “Perhaps then he’ll choose me.”



Putting on a Play



Over at the house of Peter Quince, a craftsman, things were almost as noisy. He had decided to put on a play for the Duke's wedding and had asked five of his friends to help.



“Are we all here?” Quince called. “Nick Bottom, the weaver?”

“Ready!”

“Francis Flute, the bellows-mender?” “Here, Peter Quince.”

“Robin Starveling, the tailor?” “Here, Peter Quince.”

“Tom Snout, the tinker?” “Here, Peter Quince.”

“And Snug, the joiner?” “Here!”



“The play I’ve chosen,” Quince announced, “is the sad, sad story of Pyramus and Thisbe.” Bottom wasn’t listening. “Oh good,” he said. “I like a comedy. Who am I?”

“You’ll be Pyramus,” Quince told him. “A young man in love with the beautiful Thisbe.” Bottom looked pleased. “I’ll make a brilliant Pyramus!”



“And Flute is to be Thisbe,” Quince said. Flute looked horrified.
“A girl?” he screeched. “I can’t be a girl!” I’m... I’m growing a beard.”

“Oh! I could be Thisbe too,” Bottom offered. “I’ll speak low for the man,” he growled, “and high for the girl,” he finished with a squeak.

“Flute is Thisbe,” said Quince firmly. “He can wear a mask. Starveling is the moon, Snout is a wall and Snug is a lion.”



Bottom hopped up and down with excitement. “Oh! Let me be the lion,” he begged, giving a fierce roar.

Quince jumped in surprise. “You’d scare the audience away,” he said.

“Here are your words,” Quince added, handing out pieces of paper. “Learn them quickly. We’ll meet tonight in the forest to rehearse.”



A Fairy Fight



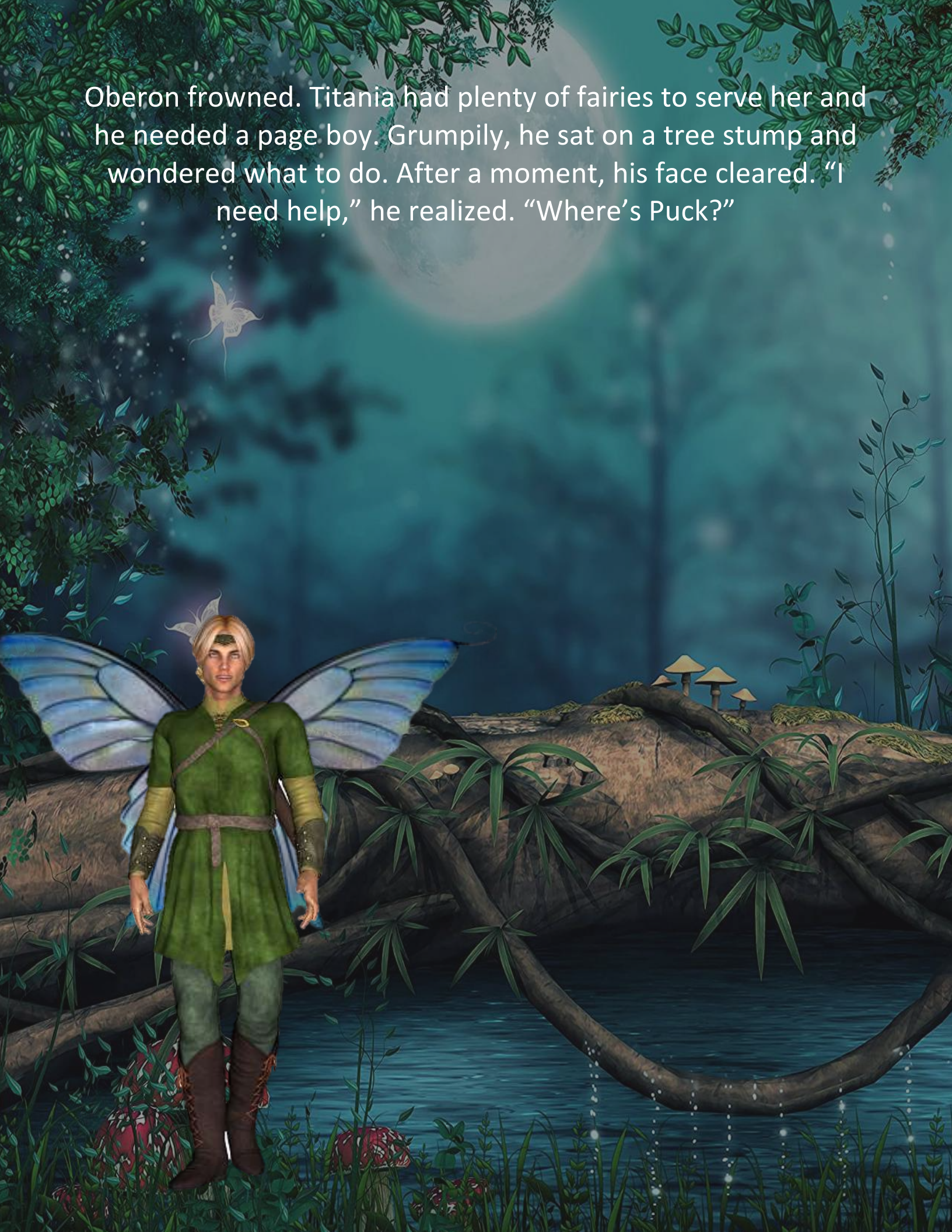
Later that evening, deep in the forest, Oberon – king of the fairies – was in the middle of a fight with his dazzling queen, Titania. They were arguing over one of Titania’s servants. “You should give him to me,” Oberon declared. He followed Titania as she walked through the forest, nagging her until the queen’s head ached. “I want a page to carry my cloak.”



Titania turned away, her hair glowing gold in the moonlight.
“Oberon, stop it,” she said. “He’s my page and I’m keeping him.” She waved a pale hand and four fairies appeared.
“Come!” she ordered. “We’re leaving.”

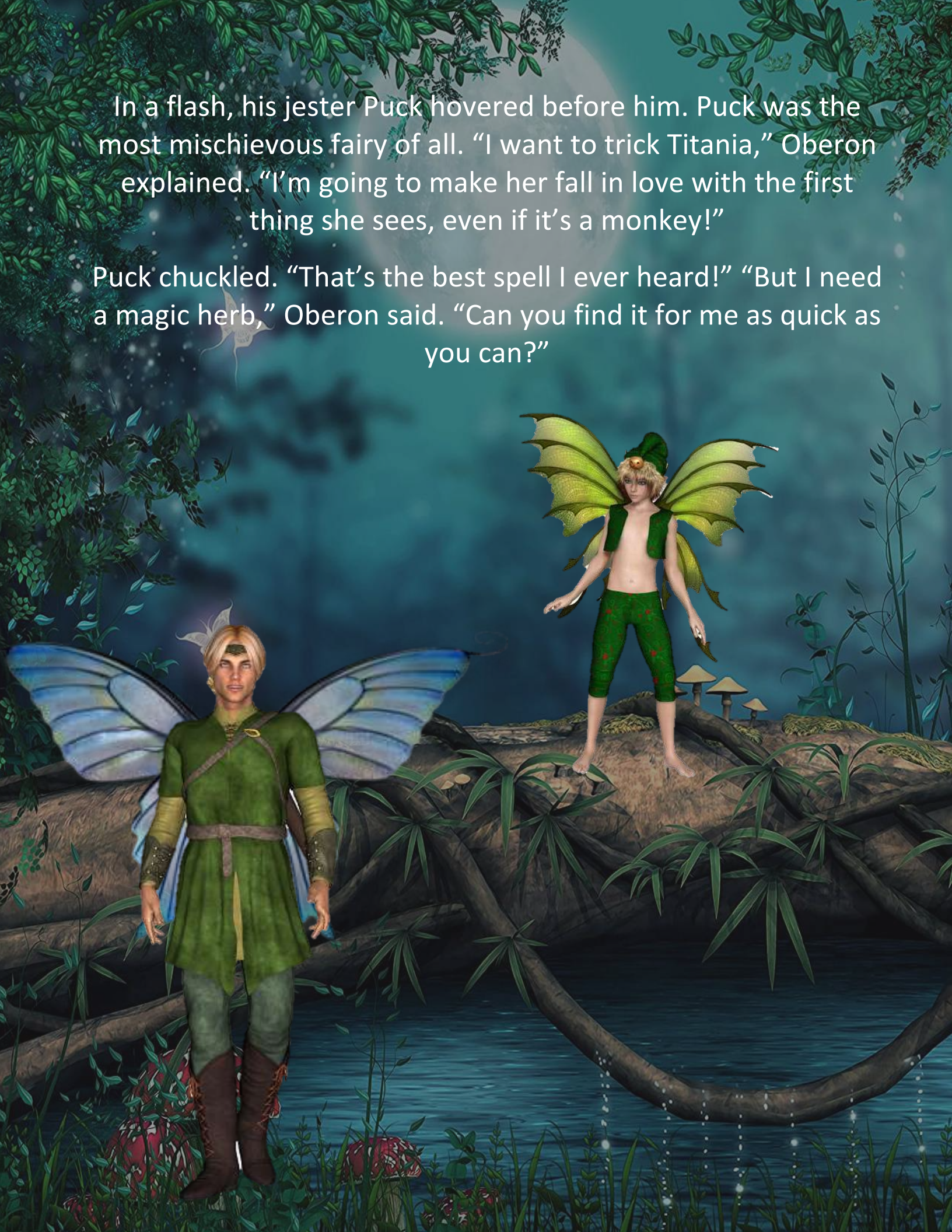


Oberon frowned. Titania had plenty of fairies to serve her and he needed a page boy. Grumpily, he sat on a tree stump and wondered what to do. After a moment, his face cleared. "I need help," he realized. "Where's Puck?"



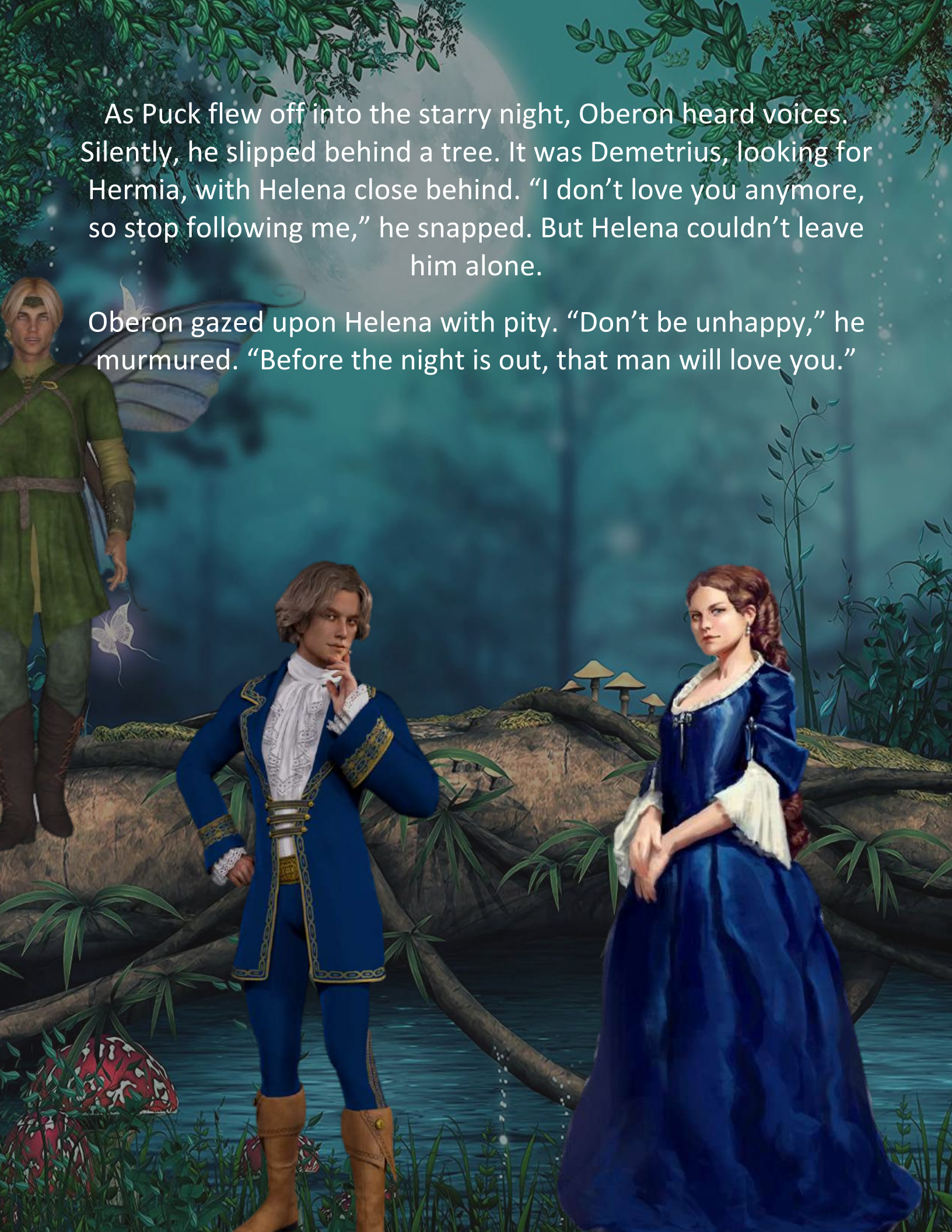
In a flash, his jester Puck hovered before him. Puck was the most mischievous fairy of all. "I want to trick Titania," Oberon explained. "I'm going to make her fall in love with the first thing she sees, even if it's a monkey!"

Puck chuckled. "That's the best spell I ever heard!" "But I need a magic herb," Oberon said. "Can you find it for me as quick as you can?"



As Puck flew off into the starry night, Oberon heard voices. Silently, he slipped behind a tree. It was Demetrius, looking for Hermia, with Helena close behind. "I don't love you anymore, so stop following me," he snapped. But Helena couldn't leave him alone.

Oberon gazed upon Helena with pity. "Don't be unhappy," he murmured. "Before the night is out, that man will love you."



He looked up as Puck returned, clutching the herb. "You found it!" cried Oberon with glee. "Now, I've just seen a sweet girl who's in love with a boy from Athens. I want you to put some juice from the herb in his eyes, so he falls in love with her."



Leaving Puck to search for Helens and Demetrius, Oberon sped off to his queen. He found her lying on a bed of violets, with her fairies singing a lullaby. The scent of herbs filled the air, sweetening their magical song.



Oberon waited for the fairies to leave before gently rubbing
the magic her on Titania's eyes.



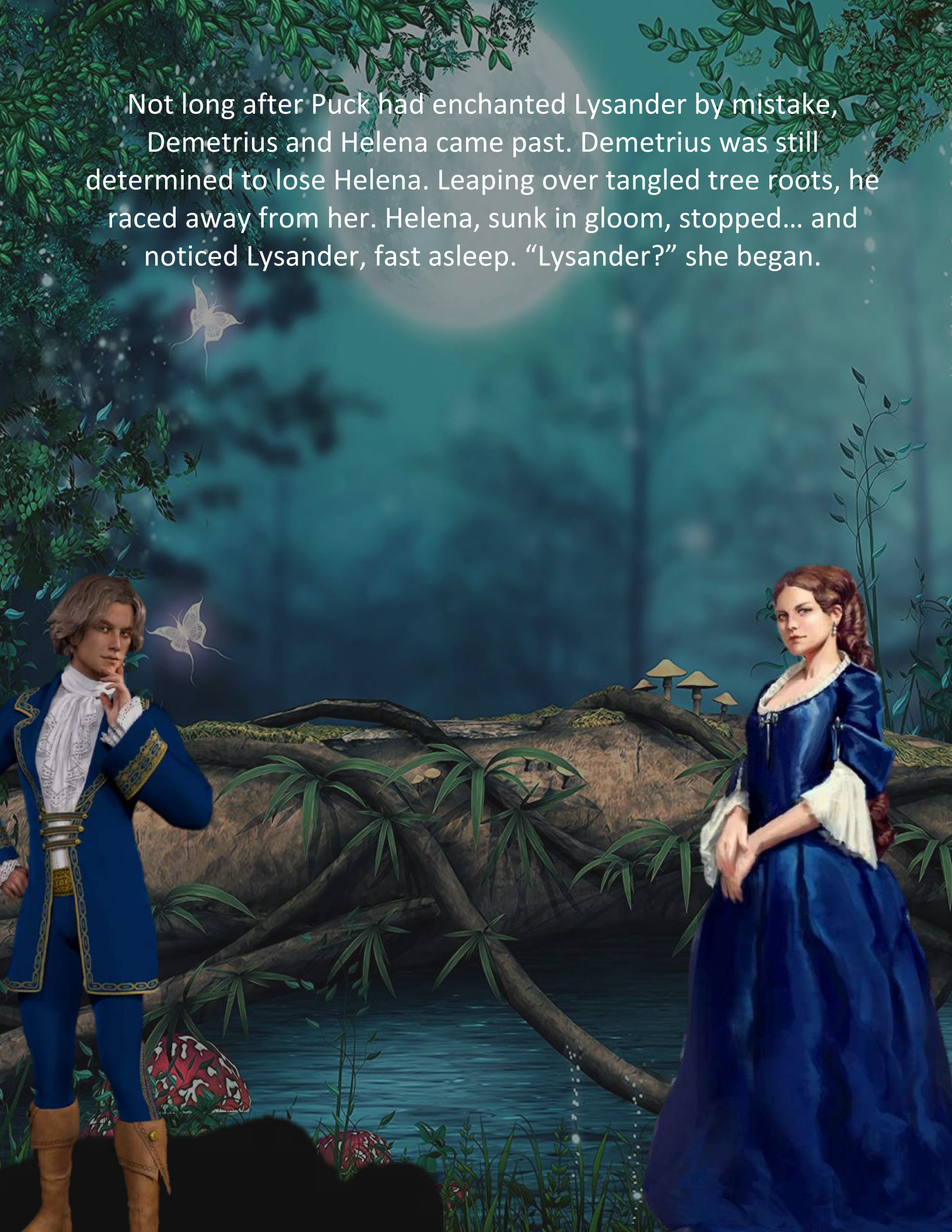
Meanwhile, Puck had found a boy and girl wearing Athenian clothes and fast asleep. “This must be the couple Oberon saw,” Puck thought, squeezing juice into the boy’s eyes. But it wasn’t Demetrius – it was Lysander.



Puck's Tricks

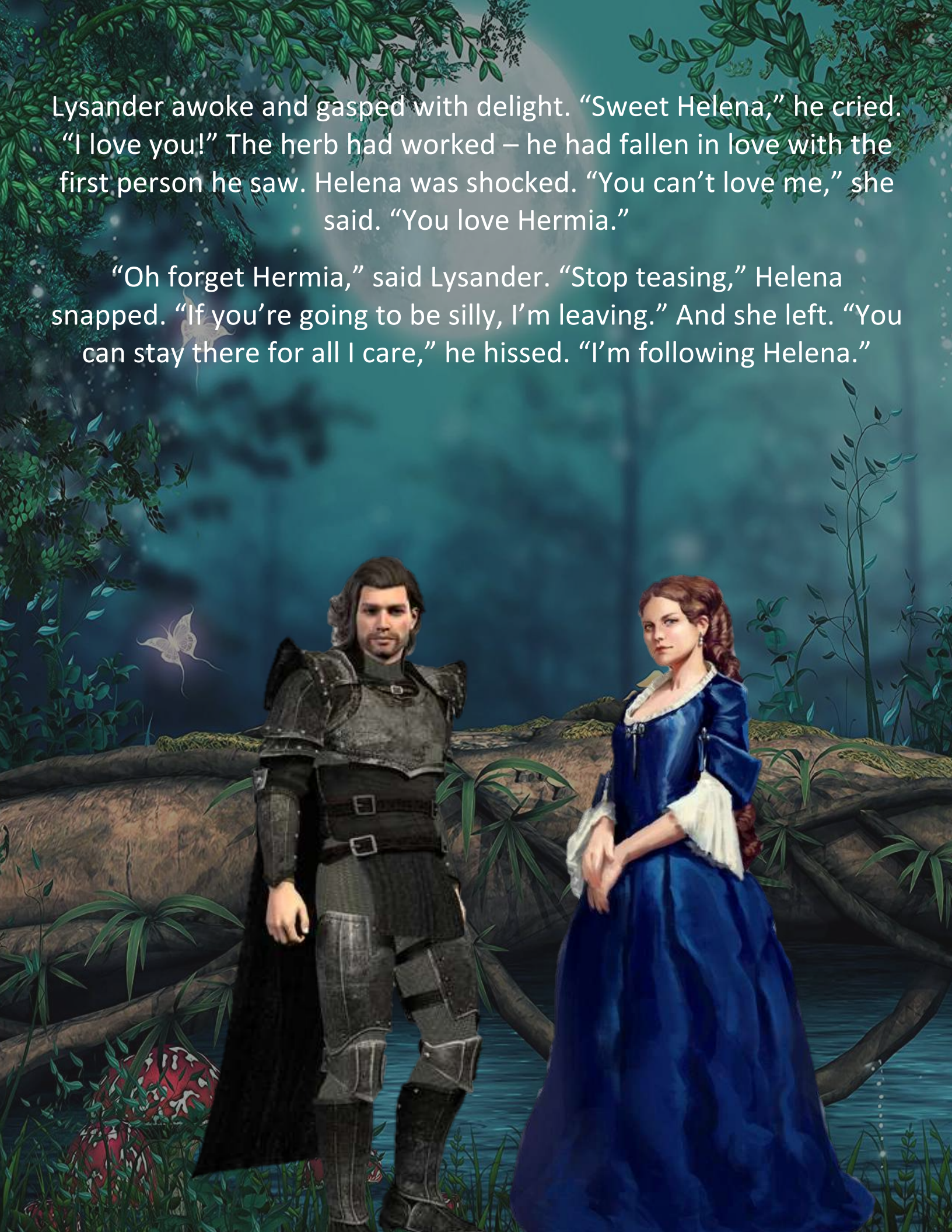


Not long after Puck had enchanted Lysander by mistake, Demetrius and Helena came past. Demetrius was still determined to lose Helena. Leaping over tangled tree roots, he raced away from her. Helena, sunk in gloom, stopped... and noticed Lysander, fast asleep. "Lysander?" she began.



Lysander awoke and gasped with delight. "Sweet Helena," he cried. "I love you!" The herb had worked – he had fallen in love with the first person he saw. Helena was shocked. "You can't love me," she said. "You love Hermia."

"Oh forget Hermia," said Lysander. "Stop teasing," Helena snapped. "If you're going to be silly, I'm leaving." And she left. "You can stay there for all I care," he hissed. "I'm following Helena."



When Hermia woke, a moment later, she was alone. "Lysander?" she called. "Where are you? What's happened?" Scrambling to her feet, she went to look for him.

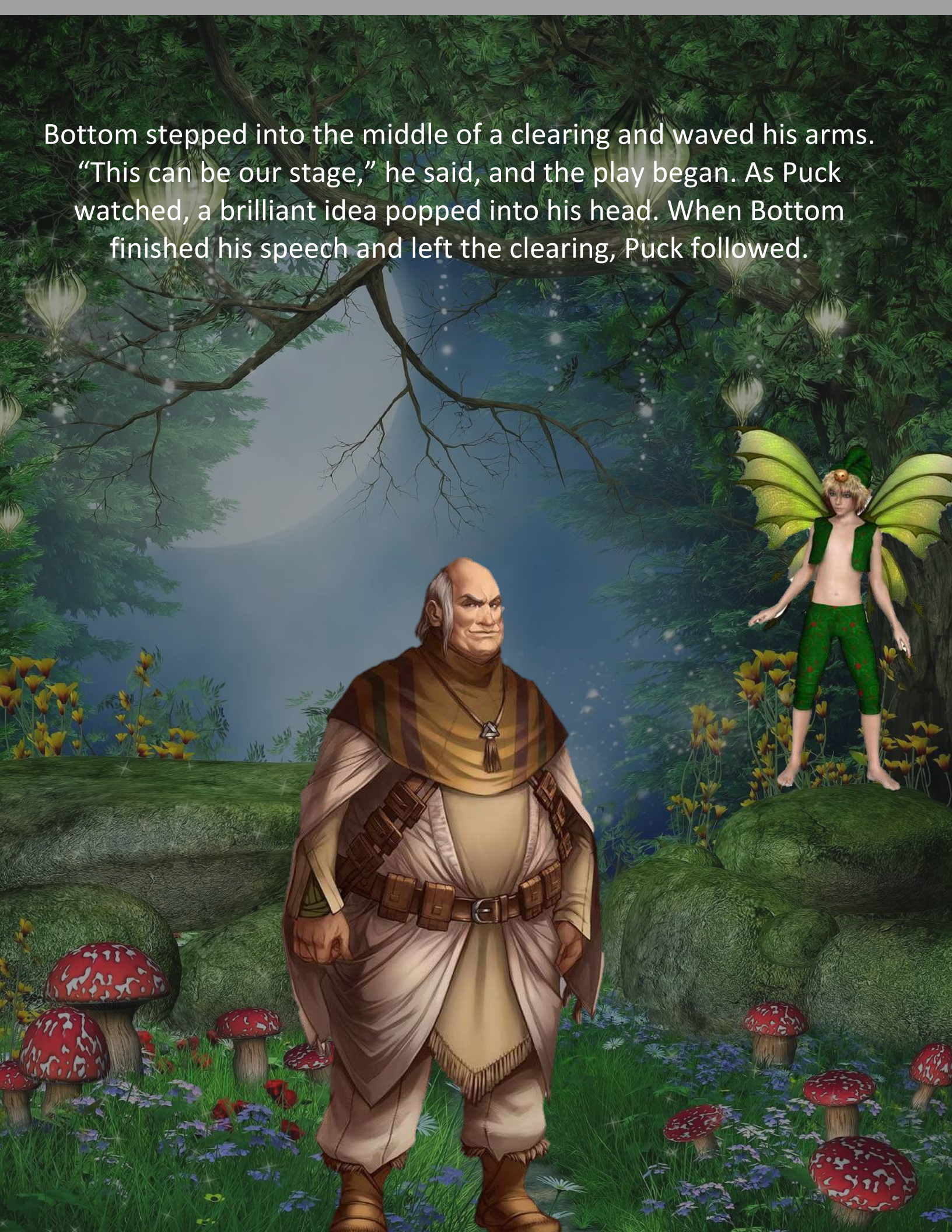


Puck had no idea of the trouble he'd caused. He was flying deeper into the woods, looking for fun. And who should he run into but Peter Quince, rehearsing with his friends? "A play?" Puck thought. "I think I'll watch... and maybe I'll join!"

Bottom was worried. "This play's too scary," he said.
"Especially the lion," Snout agreed.

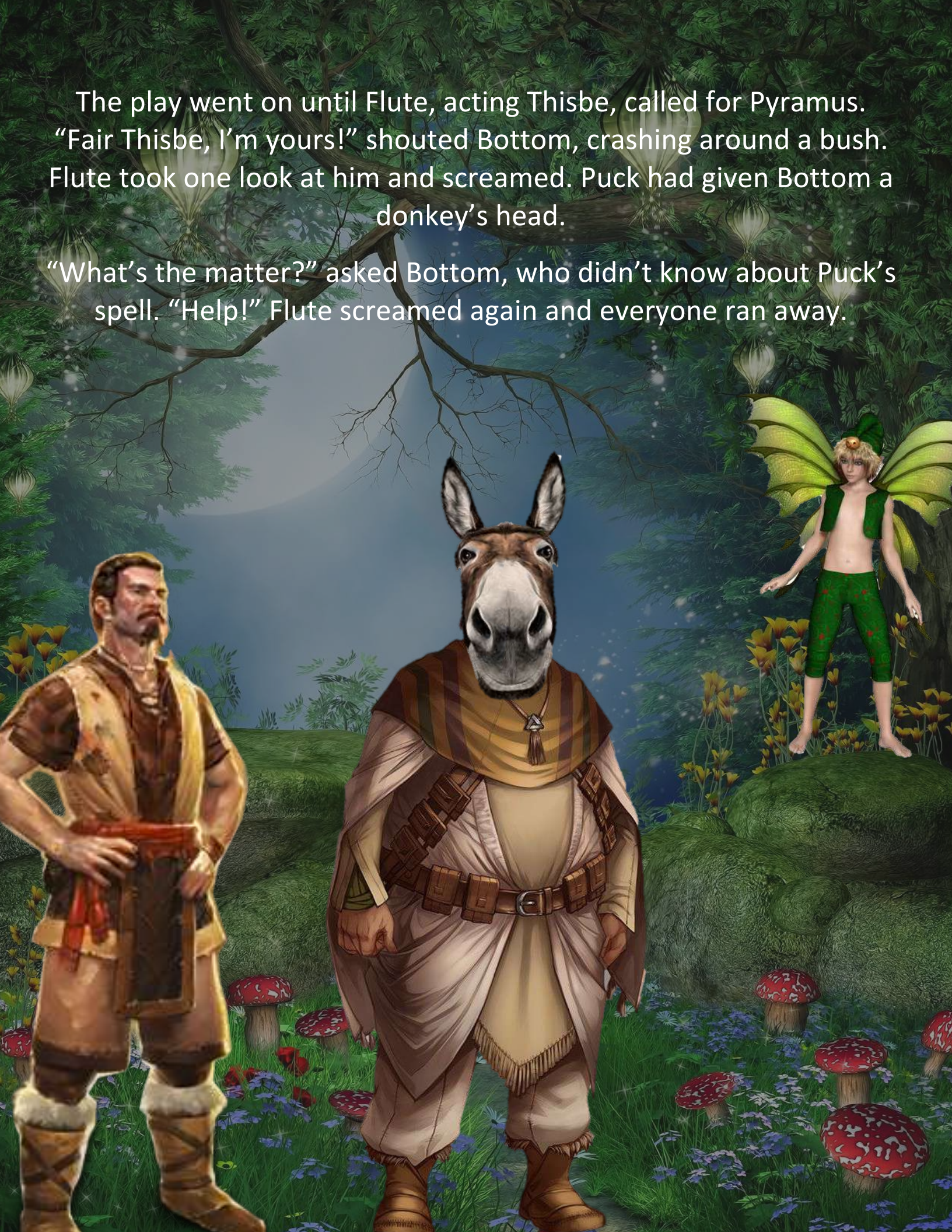


Bottom stepped into the middle of a clearing and waved his arms. "This can be our stage," he said, and the play began. As Puck watched, a brilliant idea popped into his head. When Bottom finished his speech and left the clearing, Puck followed.

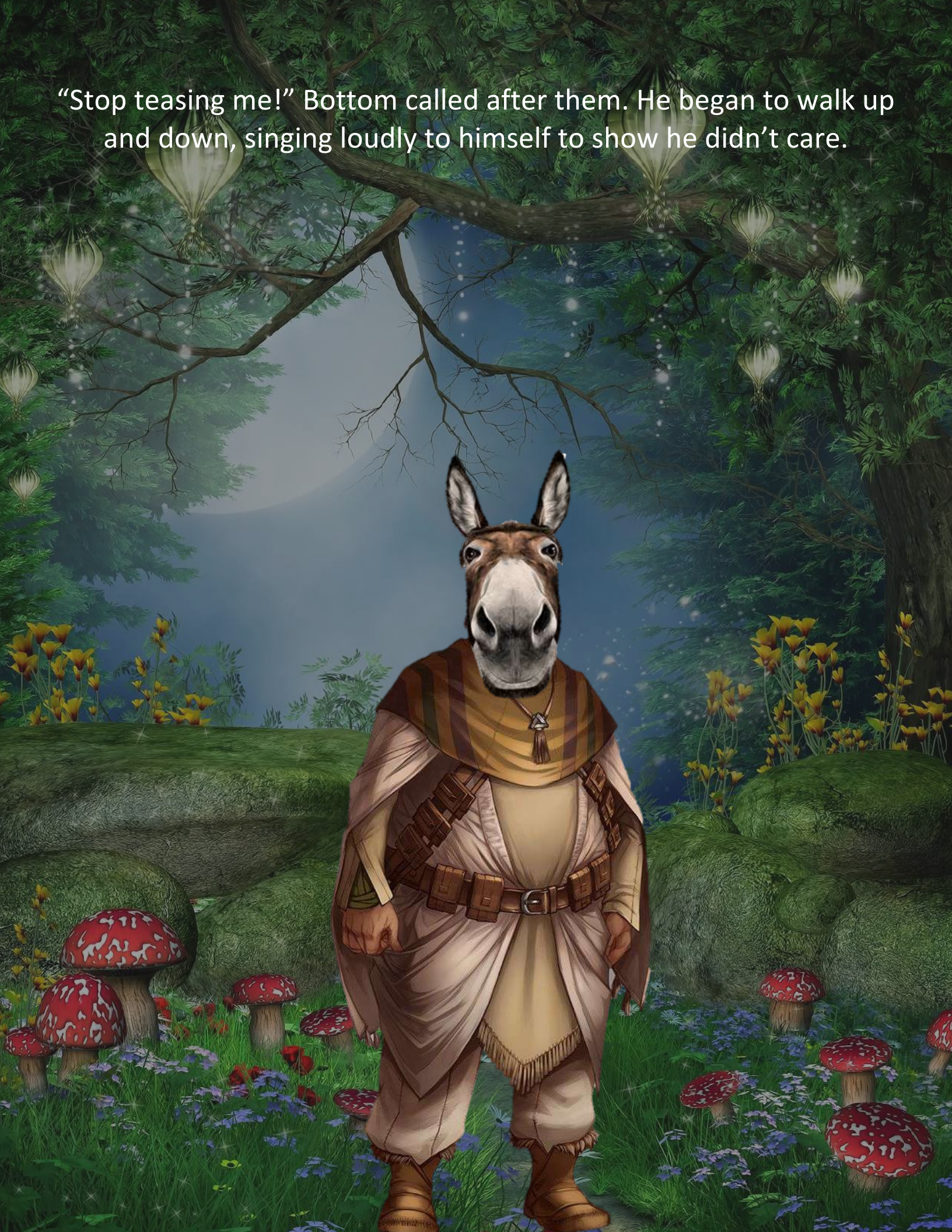


The play went on until Flute, acting Thisbe, called for Pyramus.
“Fair Thisbe, I’m yours!” shouted Bottom, crashing around a bush.
Flute took one look at him and screamed. Puck had given Bottom a
donkey’s head.

“What’s the matter?” asked Bottom, who didn’t know about Puck’s
spell. “Help!” Flute screamed again and everyone ran away.



“Stop teasing me!” Bottom called after them. He began to walk up and down, singing loudly to himself to show he didn’t care.



Bottom's awful singing woke Titania, who took one look at his floppy, furry ears and fell in love. "Whose angel voice is that?" she asked. "Sing again, O wise, beautiful creature."



Summoning her fairies, she told them to feed him dewberries and sweet, ripe apricots. "And shield his eyes from the moon with your butterfly wings," she said.

Titania stroked Bottom's velvety nose. "I'll take good care of you," she promised, kissing his fuzzy cheek.



Puck peeked through some leaves at them and giggled.
“She’s in love with a donkey!” Springing up, he flew off to tell
Oberon of his trick.



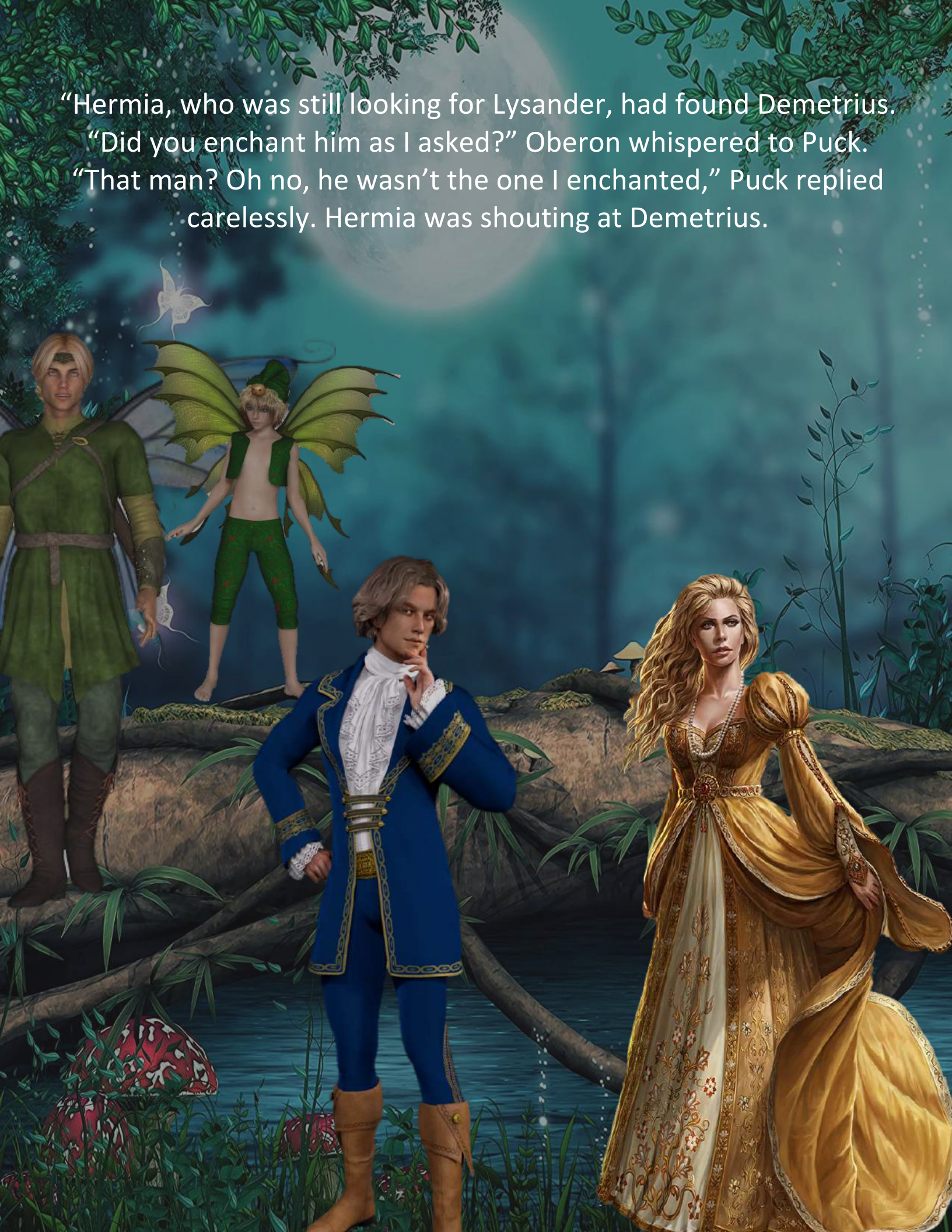
**Who
Loves Who?**



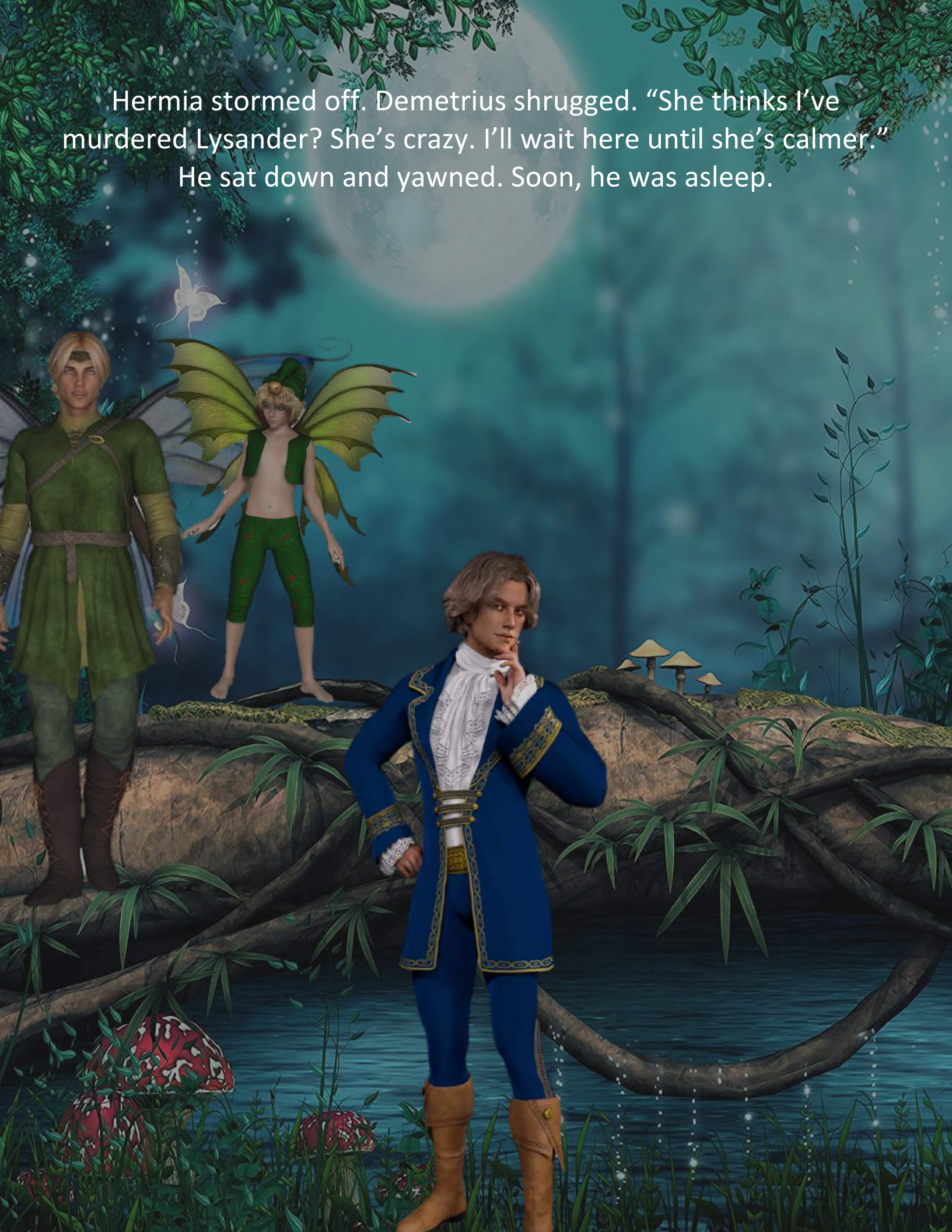
“A donkey? That’s better than I’d hoped,” said Oberon in
delight. Just then, they heard a shout.



"Hermia, who was still looking for Lysander, had found Demetrius.
"Did you enchant him as I asked?" Oberon whispered to Puck.
"That man? Oh no, he wasn't the one I enchanted," Puck replied
carelessly. Hermia was shouting at Demetrius.



Hermia stormed off. Demetrius shrugged. "She thinks I've murdered Lysander? She's crazy. I'll wait here until she's calmer."
He sat down and yawned. Soon, he was asleep.



Oberon groaned. "Oh, Puck, what have you done? We must this right." Floating to Demetrius, he squeezed herb juice in his eyes. "Now we must find the pale, sad girl who loves him."



"Is this her?" asked Puck.

Sure enough, there was Helena, closely followed by a desperate Lysander. "I'm not teasing you," he insisted. "I love you!" "Ha!" snorted Helena. "You should be saying that to Hermia." Lysander shook his head. "I made a mistake. I love you now. Besides, Demetrius loves Hermia. He'll never love you." "Helena, I love you!"

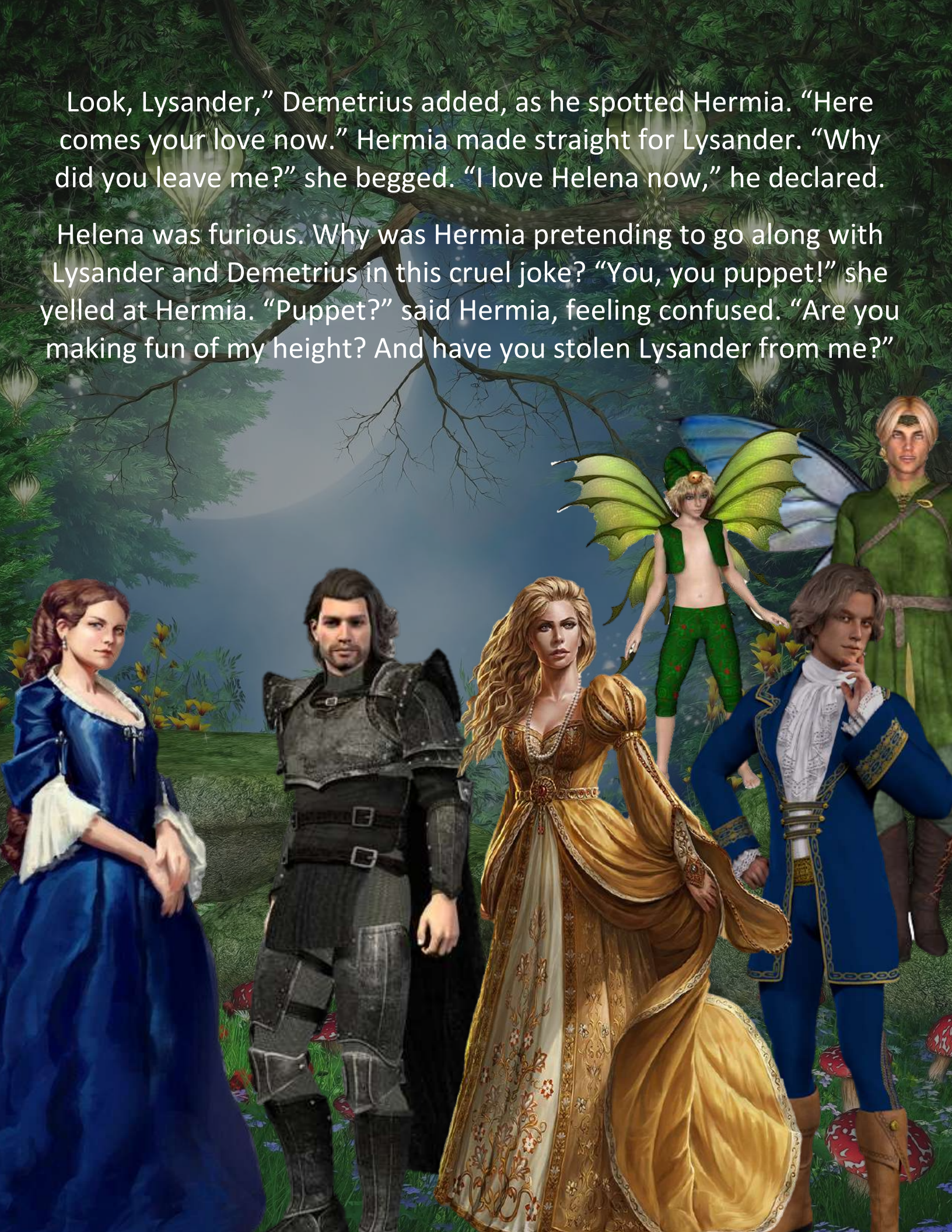


Demetrius cried, waking up and seeing her. Helena groaned. "Stop it! Stop it! Now you're both teasing me."



Look, Lysander," Demetrius added, as he spotted Hermia. "Here comes your love now." Hermia made straight for Lysander. "Why did you leave me?" she begged. "I love Helena now," he declared.

Helena was furious. Why was Hermia pretending to go along with Lysander and Demetrius in this cruel joke? "You, you puppet!" she yelled at Hermia. "Puppet?" said Hermia, feeling confused. "Are you making fun of my height? And have you stolen Lysander from me?"



Oberon sighed. Things were getting worse. Then Demetrius and Lysander decided to fight each other for Helena. Both swore they loved her most. "You'd better follow them," Oberon told Puck.

"Keep them apart until you've sorted this. Meanwhile, I'll find Titania." "Be quick," said Puck as he flew away. "It's almost dawn."



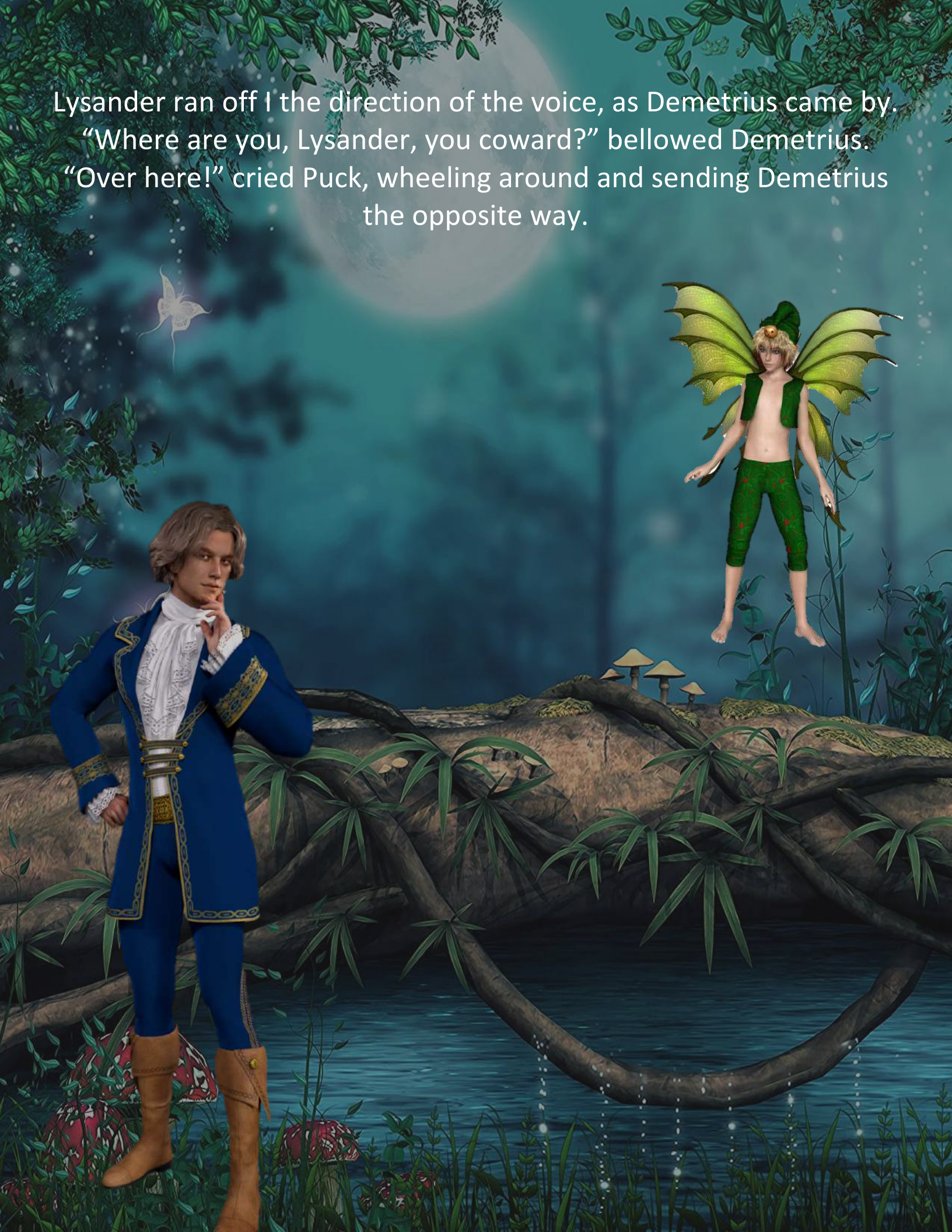
Breaking the Spells



Puck sang as he darted through the woods, until Lysander's angry voice interrupted him. "Where are you, Demetrius?" "Here I am!" called Puck, copying Demetrius' voice.



Lysander ran off in the direction of the voice, as Demetrius came by.
“Where are you, Lysander, you coward?” bellowed Demetrius.
“Over here!” cried Puck, wheeling around and sending Demetrius
the opposite way.



Soon, the pair were chasing all over the forest, trying to find each other. Finally, exhausted, they lay down either side of a bush and slept. No sooner had they fallen asleep than Helena came along. Feeling miserable and tired, she sat down without even noticing them.



A moment later, Hermia lay down as well.



While the four of them slept, Puck squeezed herb juice into
Lysander's eyes.



Quietly, barely ruffling the flowers, Titania passed by. Her fairies flew after her, making a fuss of Bottom.

“Be gone!” Titania told the fairies suddenly. “My love and I must sleep.” Puck saw Titania cuddling Bottom’s big donkey head and burst out laughing.



"I'm beginning to feel sorry for her," said Oberon, appearing from behind a tree. "I'm going to take off the spell. And you, Puck, must do the same for that poor donkey."



Demetrius cried, waking up and seeing her. Helena groaned. "Stop it! Stop it! Now you're both teasing me."



**Happily
Married**



The four quickly jumped up. “My lord,” said Lysander, bowing to the duke. Theseus looked at Lysander and then at Demetrius. “I thought you both wanted to marry the same girl. What happened?” Lysander shrugged. “I’ve no idea. Hermia and I were running away...”



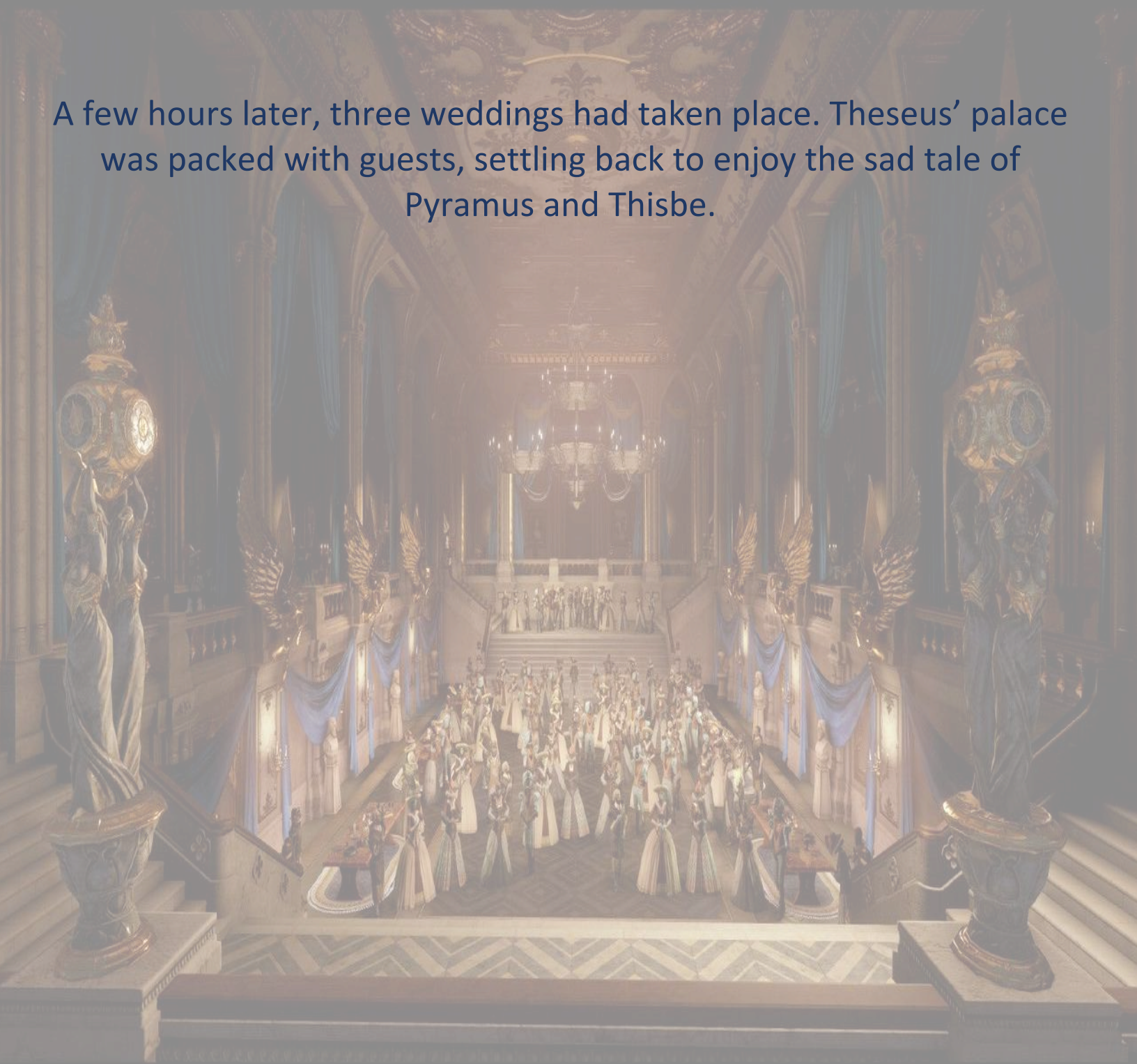
“What?” burst out Egeus, with a scowl on his face.
“Outrageous!” Clap him in irons. Demetrius, you nearly lost your
wife.” “Ah,” said Demetrius. “About that... It’s a funny thing, but
my love for Hermia has melted like snow. It’s Helena I afore.”
Egeus turned purple with rage, but Theseus smiled. “Excellent!”
he said. “We can all be married together.” Taking Hippolyta’s
hand, he led the happy couples back to his place.



No one noticed Bottom waking up. “What an amazing dream,” he mumbled, as he too left the woods. “I thought I was a donkey!”



A few hours later, three weddings had taken place. Theseus' palace was packed with guests, settling back to enjoy the sad tale of Pyramus and Thisbe.



To a trumpet fanfare, Bottom, Flute and Snout walked around the stage. Snout stood in the middle as the wall and the play began.

“This is no good,” said Bottom, as Pyramus. “Let’s meet in the graveyard.” Flute nodded and all three trooped off.



As they left, Snug crawled in with Starveling, who was carrying a hoop of lights. Snug gave a roar, then added, “Do not be frightened ladies! I’m not a real lion.”



As Flute came on again, tripping over his dress. “Where are you, Pyramus, my love?” he called. Snug roared and Flute ran away, screaming. As he fled, his scarf fell off. Snug chewed it greedily.

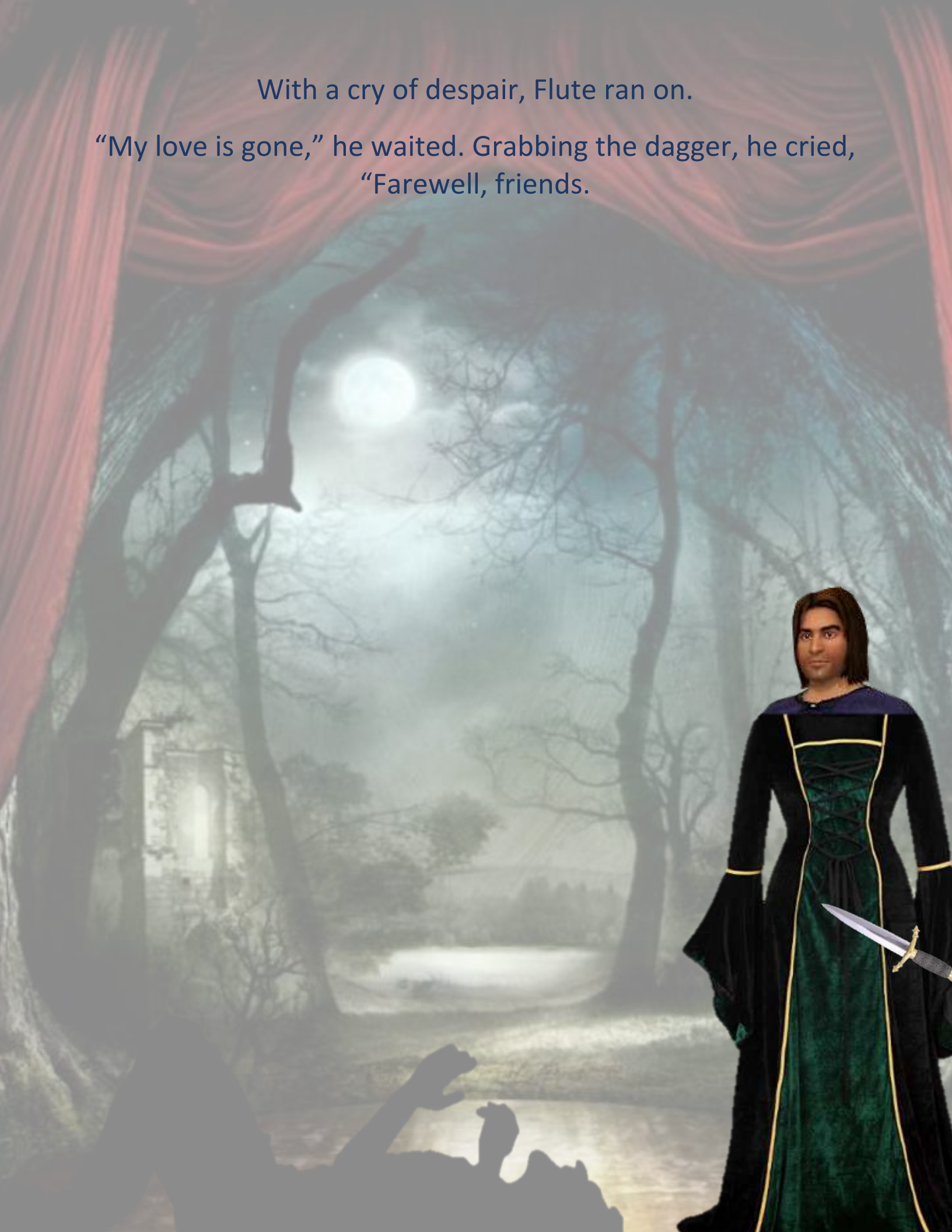


Bottom came back and snatched up the chewed scarf. “Thisbe? Eaten by a lion?” he sobbed. “My dainty duck is no more.” Turning to face the audience, he pulled out a fake dagger and stabbed himself.



With a cry of despair, Flute ran on.

“My love is gone,” he wailed. Grabbing the dagger, he cried,
“Farewell, friends.



Thus Thisbe ends.” As his body fell on Bottom, the audience clapped and cheered.



Unseen above, the fairy king and queen were watching the play with Puck. “Let’s bless this place,” murmured Titania. Oberon smiled. “Now they’ll all live happily ever after,” he said. And they did.





THINK

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