A Promptbook for
A Midsummer Night's Dream

Act 1, Scene 2

Enter Quince the carpenter, and Snug the joiner, and Bottom the weaver, and Flute the bellows-mender, and Snout the tinker, and Starveling the tailor.

QUINCE Is all our company here?
BOTTOM You were best to call them generally, man by man, according to the scrip.
QUINCE Here is the scroll of every man's name which is thought fit, through all Athens, to play in our interlude before the Duke and the Duchess on his wedding day at night.
BOTTOM First, good Peter Quince, say what the play treats on, then read the names of the actors, and so grow to a point.
QUINCE Marry, our play is "The most lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe."
BOTTOM A very good piece of work, I assure you, and a merry. Now, good Peter Quince, call forth your actors by the scroll. Masters, spread yourselves.
QUINCE Answer as I call you. Nick Bottom, the weaver.
BOTTOM Ready. Name what part I am for, and proceed.
QUINCE You, Nick Bottom, are set down for Pyramus.
BOTTOM What is Pyramus—a lover or a tyrant?
QUINCE A lover that kills himself most gallant for love.
BOTTOM That will ask some tears in the true performing of it. If I do it, let the audience look to their eyes. I will move storms; I will condole in some measure. To the rest.—Yet my chief humor is for a tyrant. I could play Ercles rarely, or a part to tear a cat in, to make all split:

The raging rocks
And shivering shocks
Shall break the locks
Of prison gates.
And Phibbus' car
Shall shine from far
And make and mar
The foolish Fates.

This was lofty. Now name the rest of the players. This is Ercles' vein, a tyrant's vein. A lover is more condoling.
QUINCE Francis Flute, the bellows-mender.
FLUTE Here, Peter Quince.
QUINCE Flute, you must take Thisbe on you.
FLUTE What is Thisbe—a wand'ring knight?
QUINCE It is the lady that Pyramus must love.
FLUTE Nay, faith, let not me play a woman. I have a beard coming.
QUINCE That's all one. You shall play it in a mask, and you may speak as small as you will.
BOTTOM An I may hide my face, let me play Thisbe too.

I'll speak in a monstrous little voice: "Thisne, Thisne!"—"Ah Pyramus, my lover dear! Thy Thisbe dear and lady dear!"

QUINCE No, no, you must play Pyramus—and, Flute, you Thisbe.

BOTTOM Well, proceed.

QUINCE Robin Starveling, the tailor.

STARVELING Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE Robin Starveling, you must play Thisbe's mother.—Tom Snout, the tinker.

SNOUT Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE You, Pyramus' father.—Myself, Thisbe's father.—Snug the joiner, you the lion's part.—And I hope here is a play fitted.

SNUG Have you the lion's part written? Pray you, if it be, give it me, for I am slow of study.

QUINCE You may do it extempore, for it is nothing but roaring.

BOTTOM Let me play the lion too. I will roar that I will do any man's heart good to hear me. I will roar that I will make the Duke say "Let him roar again. Let him roar again!"

QUINCE An you should do it too terribly, you would fright the Duchess and the ladies that they would shriek, and that were enough to hang us all.

ALL That would hang us, every mother's son.

BOTTOM I grant you, friends, if you should fright the ladies out of their wits, they would have no more discretion but to hang us. But I will aggravate my voice so that I will roar you as gently as any sucking dove. I will roar you an 'twere any nightingale.

QUINCE You can play no part but Pyramus, for Pyramus is a sweet-faced man, a proper man as one shall see in a summer's day, a most lovely gentlemanlike man. Therefore you must needs play Pyramus.

BOTTOM Well, I will undertake it. What beard were I best to play it in?

QUINCE Why, what you will.

BOTTOM I will discharge it in either your straw-color beard, your orange-tawny beard, your purple-in-grain beard, or your French-crown-color beard, your perfit yellow.

QUINCE Some of your French crowns have no hair at all, and then you will play barefaced. But, masters, here are your parts, *giving out the parts,* and I am to entreat you, request you, and desire you to con them by tomorrow night and meet me in the palace wood, a mile without the town, by moonlight. There will we rehearse, for if we meet in the city, we shall be dogged with company and our devices known. In the meantime I will draw a bill of properties such as our play wants. I pray you fail me not.

BOTTOM We will meet, and there we may rehearse most obscenely and courageously. Take pains. Be perfit. Adieu.

QUINCE At the Duke's Oak we meet.

BOTTOM Enough. Hold or cut bowstrings.