

Titania's Votaress

By

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A Midsummer Night's Dream by William Shakespeare

Cast of Characters

<u>Anjali:</u>	20s-30s, Indian, Cis-Woman
<u>Titania:</u>	Late 20s-50s, Any Ethnicity, Trans-Woman, Cis-Woman, or Non-Binary Femme
<u>Puck:</u>	Late Teens-Late 20s, Any Ethnicity, Trans-Man, Non-Binary Masc, or Gender Fluid AMAB (Assigned Male at Birth), (or Cis-Man if you must)
<u>Oberon:</u>	Late 20s-50s, Any Ethnicity, Cis-Man

Scene

Scene 1: Anjali's home in India; Scene 2: The forest, a room in Titania and Oberon's abode; Scene 3: The forest, a bedroom in Titania and Oberon's abode

Time

Please note that this play requires distinct transitions between scenes. In Shakespeare's time, there was no possibility of a black out, so I'm loathe to include them here, but I can't see a way around it. If you can find a good way to transition without blackouts or modern light changes, that would be lovely, but it's more important to me to create the necessary effects than to stick to that Shakespearean detail.

Scene 1

India, nighttime. Anjali, pregnant, sits between the legs of Titania, back leaning against her chest. Titania wraps her arms around Anjali, hands resting on her stomach.

ANJALI

My Queen, you worship me with your embrace.
I am your votaress; would it be not fit
That I should bow to you on tender knee
My swelling stomach brushing 'gainst the ground
My body at your service and my soul
Bent fast to your decree?

TITANIA

My sweet Anjali,
Thy soul could not be bent by Hercules.
Should thou takest Atlas' place and all the world
Was resting firm upon thy narrow frame
Still then thy soul would soar amongst the sea birds
Creep upward like the tendrils of the vines.
You honor me with every breath you take.
As for thy body, templing new life,
Thou couldst not honor me with greater offering
Than that of thy repose upon my breast.
Here let thou pray, I'll answer thee in kind.

They kiss.

Thy honeyed prayer I call upon again.

They kiss again. They are interrupted by the sensation of the baby kicking, turn their attention to the swell of Anjali's belly.

ANJALI

The life within me kicks in jealousy
That it cannot yet view your pulchritude
Nor yet devote itself to veneration
Of your unrivaled, rare, and perfect form.

TITANIA

It won't be long now till thy swelling blooms
And new life rushes forth to bolster thine.

ANJALI

No, not long.

TITANIA

Why didst thou hesitate?
Hast thou some fear or woe as yet unnamed?

Anjali rises, with Titania's assistance.

(CONTINUED)

ANJALI

My Queen, my love, my venerable Titania,
Most glorified of all the fairy folk,
You travel far each evening to be with me-

TITANIA

Thou knowst to me that distances are nought.

ANJALI

Of course, my Queen, your power knows no bounds.
Not mighty oceans, no, nor mountains ranged.
Through ancient forest and o'er fledgling glen
Your influence pertains to all the world.
And in your servant's heart grows love so strong
I fear to divvy it would do you wrong.

TITANIA

Thou fearst that thy love for me will break
So that a part of thy devotion might
Implant itself into thy soon born babe?

ANJALI

Fear not you this?

TITANIA

I never fear thy love.
For be it mine or be it for thy babe
Thy love itself is my ambrosia.
The more thou lovest the stronger is my fare
And thy well being is my nourishment.
Know not thou this?

ANJALI

I know it now my Queen.
How could I doubt for you my truest love?
The stirrings at my core do shake my nerves.
I have a sense of doom I can't explain.

TITANIA

'Tis natural to fear what's yet unborn.
Unborn it can't be known or hewn or shaped.
Yet let thy faith in me assure thy faith
That Fortune will protect her followers.

ANJALI

And will not your love change with coming spring?
This body I've devoted to your worship
Instead shall feed a mewling mortal babe
Whose cries and not my prayers shall resonate;
The honey of my lips, dried to a desert
From singing lullabies like prayers for rest.

(CONTINUED)

TITANIA

Whatever prayers escape thy blessed lips
I cannot help but heed I love thee so.
And be they not for me I heed them still.
In loving thee I'll never have my fill.

ANJALI

And yet--

TITANIA

Enough of this, how dare you doubt!
Have I not given proof over the years
Of my devotion though I owe you none?
And yet I owe thee all, for no one else
Delights me as thou dost.

ANJALI

My gracious Lady,
Please do not chide me for my mortal fears.
We humans are imperfect, yet I fight
The instinct in me for timidity.
You are the moon, the sun, the glittering stars
Magnificent, beloved, and remote.
And yet unlike the moon and sun and stars
You're here before me close enough to touch.
And touch we do, and more; how can I not
Feel insignificant against the heat
Of your celestial kiss; if I do doubt
It is a doubt borne only of devotion.
I do not dare presume your love for me,
This thing of nothing that I am beside you.

TITANIA

A thing of nothing is no thing at all.
No, nor are you a thing at all, nor nothing.
You are the grass that grows on rivers edge,
The willow gracing river's humble shore.
You are the wind that whistles on the tide,
And shakes the steady hollows of the earth.
You are the bees that propagate the flowers,
And too the sweetest flower I have tasted.
Though thou art mortal and I fairy kind,
I wish to live thy life and mine entwined.

ANJALI

And what of your dominion, and your King?

TITANIA

The jealousy of Oberon is famed.
I will admit I risk much in this love.
But what I risk without thee would soon wither.
Without thy love to feed me I would die.

(CONTINUED)

ANJALI

You cannot die.

TITANIA

And yet I would Anjali.
If not with my body, then my soul.
The beating of thy blood is my heart's music.
Thou singst for me with honeyed lips unparted.

ANJALI

Then part my lips once more with thine embrace.
I long to be remembered by thy touch.

*They kiss again. They are interrupted again by
Anjali's first contraction.*

TITANIA

My love what is it? Is the time so nigh?

ANJALI

I do believe the process has begun.
Wilt thou stay with me through this sacred rite?

TITANIA

I will stay with thee unto thy life's end.

ANJALI

And past the end, for here unto thy service
I do to thee my child's life ordain.

TITANIA

I love thee both--

Sudden blackout.

Scene 2

*Lights up. Oberon and Puck, in their fairy
kingdom.*

PUCK

The Queen, my Lord, is stricken in her grief.
She will not stir except to tend the babe.

OBERON

I wish to see her.

PUCK

So I said, my Lord.
She did not answer; silent, simply stared.
And in her eyes--if you'll excuse my saying--
I saw a torment such that I did cower.
The force of it brought tears to my eyes,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

PUCK (cont'd)

Though quicker would the marble statues weep
Than this your merry servant Robin Goodfellow.
And still I must confess that I did cry,
My keening jarred the still and deadened room.
My feet propelled me backward through the door,
Escaping ere I too was petrified.
And if my fairy Lord will pardon me,
I shall not venture thither one time more
For anything i'th'world, save your command.

OBERON

Why then thou hast it, I command thee thither!
Titania is stubborn, hard, and cruel.
I am a king, and she hath made me cuckold.
Yes, for a time I did allowance make,
Unsure of the full nature of their tie.
And I, in sooth, embraced the time apart,
For endless life doth make life long together,
And separation makes together sweet.
But this strange humor that she now does nurse,
And coupled with the nursing of strange babe,
Undoes me so that I cannot endure.
Her sorrow flouts the bonds that we espoused;
She plays upon her grief to paint me fool.

PUCK

My lord, if you'll indulge me--

OBERON

Well, go on!

PUCK

I know you see her sorrow as defiance,
But in my estimation it is not.
Although, my lord, she's no doubt wronged you greatly,
The wrong's in her deception, not her grief.
I cannot bend a bough already broken,
And though your will be mighty, sound, and true,
I fear that time, not you nor I can mend
Her bifurcated heart.

OBERON

Thou knavish sprite!
Thou darest much, for that is thy sly nature.
But now thou darest too much; so begone!
Go once again unto my Queen Titania.
Remind her of her Master and her Lord,
Whose patience ebbs much like the darkening tide.
If she does wish to linger in my favor
Instead of falling out forevermore,
She needs must leave behind her lifeless lover,
Her errant reverie, and bastard boy.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

OBERON (cont'd)
If she returns to me in supposition
I will forgive; else, she will rue her treason!

PUCK
My Lord, I cannot.

OBERON
What is this?

PUCK
My Lord,
Within yourself is bountitudes of grace.
Cannot I soothe your choler with my tongue,
That brings you joy so often with its jests?
Will not you listen to your gentle Puck,
Who only wants what makes you happiest?

OBERON
My gentle Puck, thy words could soothe a beast;
The wildest and most ferocious lion,
Or the most headstrong, dull, and ornery ass,
Would at thy word fall pliant, playful, pure.
And yet the beast within my breast doth rage.

PUCK
Then do not free your rib-jailed beast, my Lord.
Let it remain encased inside your chest,
And guide yourself instead with civil mind.

OBERON
Thy words, dear Puck, I must admit do move me.
And yet I must with my Titania speak.
Go, be my herald, work thy gifted tongue.

PUCK
A gifted tongue will always Lady move.

OBERON
How now, thou makest me laugh despite myself.
If thou canst hearten me, then why not her?

PUCK
My Lord, your love is living, although gone.
Her love is gone, and will not come again.

OBERON
So must her love come back to me again.
And when it does her love will not be gone.

PUCK
Perhaps then you must seek her for yourself.
Remind her of the love she might yet gain.

(CONTINUED)

OBERON

Alright, enough, good Robin, I relent.
Go ply thy merry trickery abroad.
I do relieve thee of this dreadful task,
As thou hast wished since ere thou undertookst.

PUCK

My gracious Lord, I give you all my thanks!
If you do need me, whisper to the wind,
And roving breezes shall relay your call.

Puck exits.

OBERON

Titania, my love, come unto me.
My love, I will not chide thee, nor deride.
I wish but to partake in what thou feelst,
To share with thee in triumph or in grief.
My love, will you not answer?

Lights down.

Scene 3

*Lights up. Titania sits, holding Anjali's baby.
She sings to him.*

TITANIA

Overlooking yellow sand
Would the two play hand in hand
Overlooking emerald sea
Would the maiden come to me
Oh by the sand and the sea
Would my true love come to me
Oh by my hand and my heart
Never again shall we be apart

Day by day and night by night
Did the two themselves delight
Night by night and day by day
Did they laugh the world away
Oh by the moon and the sun
Did the two turn into one
Oh by my hand and my heart
Never again shall we be apart

Just as every leaf must fall
Every mortal heeds the call
And though every joy must end
Nothing's sweeter than a friend
Oh by the winter and spring
Wipe thine eyes, begin to sing
Oh by my hand and my heart
Never again shall we be apart

(CONTINUED)

*Lights fade on Titania humming and rocking the
babe.*

End of play.