

An ass-head¹

The setting of the following passage is the wood near Titania's bower. The Athenian workmen enter to rehearse the play they have planned to stage. The elf Puck also enters but he is not seen by anyone. He plays a trick on Bottom, one of the workmen, by giving him an ass's head. Remember that Oberon has put some juice on Titania's eyelids.

[Enter PUCK, and BOTTOM with an ass-head on.]

BOTTOM If I were fair, Thisbe, I were only thine.

QUINCE O monstrous! O strange! We are haunted²! Pray, masters³!
Fly, masters! Help!

[Exeunt QUINCE, SNUG, FLUTE, SNOUT, and STARVELING⁴.]

PUCK I'll follow you; I'll lead you about a round⁵,

5 Through bog, through bush, through brake, through briar⁶;

Sometime a horse I'll be, sometime a hound⁷;

A hog, a headless bear⁸, sometime a fire;

And neigh, and bark, and grunt, and roar, and burn⁹,

Like horse, hound, hog, bear, fire, at every turn¹⁰. [Exit.]

10 BOTTOM Why do they run away? This is a knavery¹¹ of them
to make me afeard¹².

[Enter SNOUT.]

SNOUT O Bottom, thou art changed! What do I see on thee?

BOTTOM What do you see? You see an ass-head of your own,
do you? [Exit SNOUT.]

[Enter QUINCE.]

15 QUINCE Bless thee, Bottom, bless thee! Thou art translated. [Exit.]

BOTTOM I see their knavery: this is to make an ass of me¹³;
to fright me, if they could. But I will not stir¹⁴ from this place, do
what they can; I will walk up and down here, and will sing, that
they shall hear I am not afraid.

20 [Sings.] The ousel cock, so black of hue,
With orange-tawny bill,
The throstle with his note so true,
The wren with little quill¹⁵ –

[The singing awakens TITANIA.]

TITANIA What angel wakes me from my flowery bed?

25 BOTTOM [sings] The finch, the sparrow, and the lark,
The plain-song cuckoo grey,
Whose note full many a man doth mark,
And dares not answer nay¹⁶ –

for, indeed, who would set his wit to so foolish a bird?

30 Who would give a bird the lie, though he cry 'cuckoo'¹⁷ never so?

TITANIA I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again:

Mine ear is much enamour'd¹⁸ of thy note;

So is mine eye enthralled¹⁹ to thy shape;

And thy fair virtue's force perforce²⁰ doth move me,

35 On the first view, to say, to swear, I love thee.

BOTTOM Methinks, mistress, you should have little reason for that.

And yet, to say the truth, reason and love keep little company

together nowadays. The more the pity that some honest

neighbours will not make them friends. Nay, I can gleek upon occasion²¹.

40 TITANIA Thou art as wise as thou art beautiful.

William Shakespeare
A Midsummer Night's Dream
(1595)






Act 3, Scene 1

- 1 ass-head. Testa d'asino.
- 2 haunted. Stregati.
- 3 masters. Ragazzi.
- 4 QUINCE ... STARVELING. Zeppa (carpentiere), Incastro (falegname addetto all'incastro), Zufolo (aggiusta-manici), Beccuccio (Calderaio) e Agonia (Sarto), il gruppo di operai ateniesi.
- 5 I'll ... round. Vi farò danzare.
- 6 Through bog ... briar. Attraverso la palude, il bosco, la macchia e il rovetto.
- 7 hound. Segugio.
- 8 A hog ... bear. Un maiale, un orso senza testa (riferimento alle tradizioni popolari dove spesso appaiono animali senza testa).
- 9 neigh ... burn. Latrerò, abbaierò, grugnirò, muggierò e brucerò.
- 10 at every turn. A ogni piè sospinto.
- 11 knavery. Canagliata.
- 12 to make me afeard. Farmi paura.
- 13 to make an ass of me. Farmi passare per asino.
- 14 will not stir. Non mi voglio muovere.
- 15 The ousel ... little quill. Il merlo, così nero, con il becco giallastro, il tordo con il suo canto così intonato, lo scricciolo con il fischio stridulo.
- 16 The finch ... answer nay. Il fringuello, il passero, e l'allodola, il cuculo grigio dal canto monotono, il cui canto molti uomini intendono, e non osano rispondere no.
- 17 cuckoo. Cuculo; il suo verso richiama la parola 'cuckold', cornuto; all'epoca di Shakespeare questo riferimento era frequente.
- 18 enamour'd. Invaghito.
- 19 enthralled. Stregato.
- 20 perforce. Per forza.
- 21 gleek upon occasion. Parlare fino al momento opportuno.

**VISUAL ANALYSIS**

1 READ the text and identify its two parts. Then write a heading to each section.

2 LOOK at the visual analysis of the text and write down what each highlight represents.

3 COMPLETE the summary with the words from the box.

head	replaced	wakes up	juice	reason
frightened	ass	weaver	sing	wise



Puck turns Bottom's **(1)** into that of an ass. When the other men see the transformed Bottom, they are **(2)** and escape. Bottom, having no idea that his head has been **(3)** with that of an ass, comments that his friends are joking and want to make an **(4)** of him. Meanwhile Titania **(5)** When she sees the ass-headed **(6)** , she immediately falls in love with him as a result of the magic flower's **(7)** that Puck had put on her eyelids. She insists that he continues to **(8)** and declares her love for him. Bottom cannot believe it and says that love and **(9)** seldom go together. Titania thinks that he is not only handsome but also **(10)**