

THE QUARTET

- **Lysander.** Stay, gentle Helena; hear my excuse:
My love, my life my soul, fair Helena!
- **Helena.** O excellent!
- **Hermia.** Sweet, do not scorn her so.
- **Demetrius.** If she cannot entreat, I can compel.
- **Lysander.** Thou canst compel no more than she entreat:
Thy threats have no more strength than her weak prayers.
Helen, I love thee; by my life, I do:
I swear by that which I will lose for thee,
To prove him false that says I love thee not.
- **Demetrius.** I say I love thee more than he can do.
- **Lysander.** If thou say so, withdraw, and prove it too.
- **Demetrius.** Quick, come!
- **Hermia.** Lysander, whereto tends all this?
- **Lysander.** Away, you Ethiopie!
- **Demetrius.** No, no; he'll
Seem to break loose; take on as you would follow,
But yet come not: you are a tame man, go!
- **Lysander.** Hang off, thou cat, thou burr! vile thing, let loose,
Or I will shake thee from me like a serpent!
- **Hermia.** Why are you grown so rude? what change is this?
Sweet love,—
- **Lysander.** Thy love! out, tawny Tartar, out!
Out, loathed medicine! hated potion, hence!
- **Hermia.** Do you not jest?
- **Helena.** Yes, sooth; and so do you.
- **Lysander.** Demetrius, I will keep my word with thee.

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- **Demetrius.** I would I had your bond, for I perceive
A weak bond holds you: I'll not trust your word.
- **Lysander.** What, should I hurt her, strike her, kill her dead?
Although I hate her, I'll not harm her so.
- **Hermia.** What, can you do me greater harm than hate?
Hate me! wherefore? O me! what news, my love!
Am not I Hermia? are not you Lysander?
I am as fair now as I was erewhile.
Since night you loved me; yet since night you left
me:
Why, then you left me—O, the gods forbid!—
In earnest, shall I say?
- **Lysander.** Ay, by my life;
And never did desire to see thee more.
Therefore be out of hope, of question, of doubt;
Be certain, nothing truer; 'tis no jest
That I do hate thee and love Helena.
- **Hermia.** O me! you juggler! you canker-blossom!
You thief of love! what, have you come by night
And stolen my love's heart from him?
- **Helena.** Fine, i'faith!
Have you no modesty, no maiden shame,
No touch of bashfulness? What, will you tear
Impatient answers from my gentle tongue?
Fie, fie! you counterfeit, you puppet, you!
- **Hermia.** Puppet? why so? ay, that way goes the game.
Now I perceive that she hath made compare
Between our statures; she hath urged her height;
And with her personage, her tall personage,
Her height, forsooth, she hath prevail'd with him.
And are you grown so high in his esteem;
Because I am so dwarfish and so low?
How low am I, thou painted maypole? speak;
How low am I? I am not yet so low
But that my nails can reach unto thine eyes.
- **Helena.** I pray you, though you mock me, gentlemen,
Let her not hurt me: I was never curst;
I have no gift at all in shrewishness;

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I am a right maid for my cowardice:
Let her not strike me. You perhaps may think,
Because she is something lower than myself,
That I can match her.

- **Hermia.** Lower! hark, again.
- **Helena.** Good Hermia, do not be so bitter with me.
I evermore did love you, Hermia,
Did ever keep your counsels, never wrong'd you;
Save that, in love unto Demetrius,
I told him of your stealth unto this wood.
He follow'd you; for love I follow'd him;
But he hath chid me hence and threaten'd me
To strike me, spurn me, nay, to kill me too:
And now, so you will let me quiet go,
To Athens will I bear my folly back
And follow you no further: let me go:
You see how simple and how fond I am.
- **Hermia.** Why, get you gone: who is't that hinders you?
- **Helena.** A foolish heart, that I leave here behind.
- **Hermia.** What, with Lysander?
- **Helena.** With Demetrius.
- **Lysander.** Be not afraid; she shall not harm thee, Helena.
- **Demetrius.** No, sir, she shall not, though you take her part.
- **Helena.** O, when she's angry, she is keen and shrewd!
She was a vixen when she went to school;
And though she be but little, she is fierce.
- **Hermia.** 'Little' again! nothing but 'low' and 'little'!
Why will you suffer her to flout me thus?
Let me come to her.