**SHAKESPEARE AND THE MUSES**

By

Rebecca Salomonsson

Copyright © 2022 by Rebecca Salomonsson

CAUTION: Professionals and Amateurs are hereby warned that performance of **SHAKESPEARE AND THE MUSES** is subject to payment of a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of The United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth) and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including without limitation professional/amateur stage rights, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all other forms of mechanical, electronic, and digital reproduction, transmission, and distribution, such as CD, DVD, the Internet, private and file-sharing networks, information storage and retrieval systems, photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed upon the matter of readings, permission of which must be obtained from the Author in writing.

The English language stock and amateur stage performance rights in the United States, its territories, possessions, and Canada for **SHAKESPEARE AND THE MUSES** are controlled exclusively by Next Stage Press. No professional or nonprofessional performance of the Play may be given without obtaining in advance written permission and paying the requisite fee. Inquiries concerning production rights should be addressed to genekato@nextstagepress.com

SPECIAL NOTE

Anyone receiving permission to produce **SHAKESPEARE AND THE MUSES** is required to give credit to the Author as sole and exclusive Author of the Play on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. The name of the Author must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and in size of type equal to 50% of the size of the largest, most prominent letter used for the title of the Play. No person, firm, or entity may receive credit larger or more prominent than that accorded the Author.

Characters:

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE – the playwright

CALLIOPE – the Muse of Epic Poetry

CLIO – the Muse of History

ERATO – the Muse of Love Poetry

EUTERPE – the Muse of Music

MELPOMENE – the Muse of Tragedy

POLYHYMNIA – the Muse of Sacred Poetry

TERPSICHORE – the Muse of Dance

THALIA – the Muse of Comedy

URANIA – the Muse of Astronomy

BESS/ PSYCHE/ ARIADNE

PYRAMUS/ BOTTOM/ ROMEO

THISBE/ FLUTE/ JULIET

PYRAMUS’ FATHER/ SNOUT/ LORD MONTAGUE

THISBE’S FATHER/ STARVELING/ LORD CAPULET/ APOLLO

SNOUT/ LADY CAPULET/ PERSEPHONE

QUINCE/ MERCUTIO/ THESEUS

SNUG/ LION/ TYBALT/ KING AEGEUS/ CERBERUS

STARVELING/ BENVOLIO/ ZEUS

FRIAR LAWRENCE/ PSYCHE’S FATHER/ MINOTAUR

PRINCE/ EROS/ MINOS

ENSEMBLE:

SISTERS

ANTS

EAGLE

ADMIRERS

LADY MONTAGUE

RIVER

CHILDREN

SERVANTS

**SHAKESPEARE AND**

**THE MUSES**

*Lights up on a room with a small desk and bed. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE sits at the desk, writing with a quill pen.*

**SHAKESPEARE**. To be… is the only way to be… No. To live or to die. No. To be, or not to be, is the question I am asking… no… to be or not to be is what I want to know… no. To be or not to be, that is the question. Aha! Whether ‘tis better to suffer the terrible things… no… whether ‘tis better… ‘tis nobler! Yes! Whether ‘tis nobler in the noggin… mind… weather ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer the wretched sufferings of life… arrows life throws at us… suffer the aha! Slings and arrows! Slings and arrows of fortune… of outrageous fortune! Yes! Here it is… To be or not to be, that is the question. Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune…. Now what? This is impossible! *(BESS knocks and enters with a tray.)*

**BESS**. Master Shakespeare? Dinner’s ready. Would you like it in here tonight?

**SHAKESPEARE**. No. I hate the very sight of this room.

**BESS**. Will you take it in the kitchen, then?

**SHAKESPEARE**. Oh, Bess! What am I to do?

**BESS**. Eat the corned beef and cabbage I made you, like a good boy. (*She places the tray of food in front of Shakespeare. He stands and crosses to his bed.)*

**SHAKESPEARE**. No, no… I mean, what am I to do about writing?

**BESS**. Keep writing, I guess. (*She sits at his desk and looks at the paper he’s been working on.)*

**SHAKESPEARE**. What’s the point? Have you seen the reviews of *The Comedy of King Hiccumbottom, the Wretched*? My first play and everyone hates it.

**BESS**. So write a better one.

**SHAKESPEARE**. You don’t like it either?

**BESS**. Well, I’m no theatre critic, Master Shakespeare. I’m only your housekeeper.

**SHAKESPEARE**. But…?

**BESS**. But… I think you can do better. It was only your first try. You’ll get better as you go on.

**SHAKESPEARE**. No. I don’t wish to be a writer anymore. I can’t do it. I’m terrible at it.

**BESS.** There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.

**SHAKESPEARE.** Yes, well, the whole of London thinks I’m bad. I’ll never amount to anything!

**BESS**. We know what we are but know not what we may be.

**SHAKESPEARE**.I’m going to be a glove maker like my father.

**BESS**. Good. Maybe then you’ll pay me the wages you owe me. (*She stands and crosses to the exit.)* Eat your supper. Then write what’s in your heart. Write what you know, or write what you want to know, or write what you only know in your dreams. There are plays in you yet, Master Shakespeare. Good ones. (*Exit Bess. Shakespeare crosses back to the desk and continues work on the “To be or not to be” speech.)*

**SHAKESPEARE**. Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune… or die in the gutter, like a poor writer who gets bad reviews. (*He slams his head down on his desk. The room fills with fog, the lights flicker, enter the MUSES, singing or speaking.)*

**MUSES**. William Shakespeare, don’t despair.

The words you seek are everywhere.

Look to the sea, to sky, the earth,

Write of grief and write of mirth.

Write of noble kings high-born,

Who fail, who fall, who fortunes scorn.

Write of women abused, forsaken,

Write of men whom greed has taken.

Write of love that cannot be,

Of death, disgrace, and jealousy.

Or write of love in a comic vein,

Where all ends well, loss turns to gain.

So fill your paper now with ink,

And make sure that your words don’t stink.

Your stories lie there deep within,

Take pen in hand and now begin.

**SHAKESPEARE**. But begin how? Begin what?

**CALLIOPE**. We just gave you at least six ideas.

**CLIO**. Were you even listening?

**SHAKESPEARE**. Sort of. I was a bit distracted by the nine beautiful women entering my room unannounced. Who are you, anyway?

**POLYHYMNIA**. We are the nine Muses. We’re here to help.

**EUTERPE**. We’re here to inspire you in song!

**TERPSICHORE**. And dance!

**URANIA**. To teach you of the stars.

**CLIO**. And the history of man.

**ERATO**. To help you write love poetry.

**CALLIOPE**. And epic poetry.

**THALIA**. To help you feel the joy of comedy.

**MELPOMENE**. Or the sorrow of tragedy.

**SHAKESPEARE**. Ladies, that all sounds very generous, really. But I’m giving up writing.

**CALLIOPE**. Poppycock. You wouldn’t give up so easily.

**THALIA**. Because of one bad review? That’s hilarious!

**MELPOMENE**. Tragic, if you ask me. Very defeatist. Men have been entirely undone by tragic flaws such as that.

**SHAKESPEARE**. You don’t understand.

**POLYHYMNIA**. Of course we understand. You think we’ve never been the object of criticism?

**TERPSICHORE**. Why just the other day, I was called upon to help a young man learn to dance so he could impress the object of his affection. The poor fool needed a lot more help than I could give him, but he blamed me for his clumsiness and failing to win her love.

**URANIA**. An amateur astronomer called on me to help him discover a new planet. But he was looking in the wrong part of the sky. I tried to lead him in the right direction, but he insisted I was wrong and he was right. And when his adversary made the discovery that night, he blamed me for his lack of sight.

**EUTERPE**. What is it that is holding you up, Shakespeare? It can’t be a lack of ideas. You’re a smart, well-read young man. Surely you have dozens of stories inhabiting your brain as we speak.

**SHAKESPEARE**. I have ideas. It’s not that.

**CLIO**. What is it that inspires you? History?

**CALLIOPE**. Poetry?

**ERATO**. Love?

**EUTERPE**. Music?

**MELPOMENE**. Sorrow?

**THALIA**. Joy?

**TERPSICHORE**. Dance?

**URANIA**. The stars?

**POLYHYMNIA**. The sacred?

**SHAKESPEARE**. All those things, and more.

**CALLIOPE**. Then what’s the problem?

**SHAKESPEARE**. I don’t know exactly… a whole mess of things, perhaps. I don’t know how to organize the ideas into something meaningful. Sure, I can tell stories, but I want them to mean something. I want to be the source of inspiration for others.

**MELPOMENE**. You’re thinking too broadly. Start smaller. Think not of the end result yet, but of the way there.

**ERATO**. You’ve written a few sonnets. Why not write a few more? You feel in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes, yes? Why not write about that?

**SHAKESPEARE**. That’s a lovely line… in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes. (*Lights change and music underscores as he finds the words.)* When in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes…

**ERATO**. Yes?

**SHAKESPEARE**. I all alone beweep my outcast state…

**ERATO**. Good!

**SHAKESPEARE**. And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries…

**ERATO**. Beautiful!

**SHAKESPEARE**. And look upon myself and curse my fate.

**ERATO**. Keep going!

**SHAKESPEARE**. Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,

Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,

**ERATO**. And what do you want?

**SHAKESPEARE**. Desiring this man’s art and that man’s scope

With what I most enjoy, contented least;

**ERATO**. And what makes it all better?

**SHAKESPEARE**. Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,

Haply I think on thee, and then my state,

(Like to the lark at break of day arising

From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven’s gate;

For thy sweet love remembered such wealth it

Brings

That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

*(The Muses applaud and ad lib encouraging comments.)*

**TERPSICHORE**. Well done, Shakespeare! That had to feel good.

**SHAKESPEARE**. Yes, I must say it did.

**TERPSICHORE**. Then you’re ready for something bigger.

**SHAKESPEARE**. Like what?

**MELPOMENE**. A tragedy.

**THALIA**. Or a comedy.

**POLYHYMNIA**. Why not both?

**SHAKESPEARE**. At the same time?

**CLIO**. Think about two sides of the same coin. Two ways to tell the same story…

**MELPOMENE**. One ends in sorrow.

**THALIA**. And one in joy.

**SHAKESPEARE**. I don’t follow.

**CLIO**. Take the ancient story of Pyramus and Thisbe. *(Enter PYRAMUS and THISBE, opposite.)*

**POLYHYMNIA**. Two young people in love, separated by a wall.

**CALLIOPE**. By many walls. One wall made of stone, built by an ancient queen.

**EUTERPE**. And one made of hatred, built by their fathers.

**TERPSICHORE**. And one of intolerance, maintained through the years and strengthened by ignorance.

**SHAKESPEARE**. I’m listening. *(A wall appears. Pyramus and Thisbe stand on opposite sides.)*

**CALLIOPE**. Ovid tells us the story in his *Metamorphoses.* It’s rather droll and drear, if you ask me. But let’s take a listen, shall we?

**PYRAMUS**. When Pyramus

**THISBE**. and Thisbe,

**PYRAMUS**. Who were known the one most handsome of all youthful men,   
**THISBE**. The other loveliest of all eastern girls,--   
**PYRAMUS**. Lived in adjoining houses, near the walls that Queen Semiramis had built of brick around her famous city,

**THISBE**. They grew fond, and loved each other--meeting often there-- and as the days went by their love increased. They wished to join in marriage, but that joy *(Enter PYRAMUS’ FATHER and THISBE’S FATHER. They come between the lovers and separate them.)*

**FATHERS**. Their fathers had forbidden them to hope;

**PYRAMUS**. And yet the passion that with equal strength inflamed their minds no parents could forbid.

**PYRAMUS’ FATHER**. No relatives had guessed their secret love, for all their converse was by nods and signs; (*Pyramus and Thisbe make a series of elaborate hand signals, nods, and winks at each other.)*

**THISBE**. And as a smoldering fire may gather heat, the more 'tis smothered, so their love increased.

**SHAKESPEARE**. This is boring.

**THISBE’S FATHER**. Excuse me, we haven’t gotten to the good bits yet.

**SHAKESPEARE**. How about a quick sum up?

**THISBE**. Fine. Our fathers forbid us to marry.

**PYRAMUS**. But we have discovered a hole in the wall that divides our properties and we go there to talk each day.

**PYRAMUS’ FATHER**. Until one day they decide to run away together.

**THISBE**. We decide to meet under a mulberry tree at night when no one will catch us. I arrive first and await my beloved. *(Enter LION.)*

**LION**. But along comes a lion, with blood on her maw from a recent kill.

**THISBE**. She frightens me away, and in my haste to escape, I drop my scarf.

**LION.** Which I pick up in my bloody jaws and tear. *(Lion picks up the scarf, mauls it, drops it and exits.)*

**PYRAMUS**. I enter the scene, ready to take my Thisbe away to marry. But instead, I see the bloody scarf and I assume the worst has happened. I stab myself.

**SHAKESPEARE**. Ridiculous.

**THISBE**. I arrive back at the scene and see my Pyramus lying there dead. I take his dagger and stab myself.

**SHAKESPEARE**. Absurd!

**THISBE’S FATHER**. We two fathers, finding our children thus, combine their funereal ashes into one urn. The End.

**SHAKESPEARE**. The End? That’s it?

**PYRAMUS’ FATHER**. What do you mean “that’s it?” That’s quite a lot for us.

**SHAKESPEARE**. It has no substance, no meaning. Where are the stakes? Where is the conflict? Where is the motivation? It doesn’t even explain why the fathers don’t want their kids to marry. It’s petty, it’s petulant. It’s a farce. *(Exit Thisbe, Pyramus, Thisbe’s Father, and Pyramus’ Father, defeated and offended.)*

**THALIA**. So make it a farce.

**SHAKESPEARE**. What do you mean?

**THALIA**. *(She puts her arm around Shakespeare’s shoulders, and paints him a picture with her words.)* Picture this: a crew of patches, rude mechanicals, that work for bread upon Athenian stalls, are met together to rehearse a play, intended for the Duke’s wedding day.

**TERPSICHORE**. They are putting on a play of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. But they’re all terrible actors. *(Lights change as the Muses become Shakespeare’s thoughts. He writes as the scene progresses. Enter SNOUT, STARVELING, SNUG, FLUTE, BOTTOM, and QUINCE.)*

**QUINCE**. If we offend, it is with our good will.  
That you should think, we come not to offend,  
But with good will. To show our simple skill,  
That is the true beginning of our end.  
The actors are at hand and by their show  
You shall know all that you are like to know.

**SNOUT**.*(As Wall**.)* In this same interlude it doth befall  
That I, one Snout by name, present a wall;  
And such a wall, as I would have you think,  
That had in it a crannied hole or chink,  
Through which the lovers, Pyramus and Thisby,  
Did whisper often very secretly.

**BOTTOM**. *(As Pyramus**.)* O grim-look'd night! O night with hue so black!  
O night, which ever art when day is not!  
O night, O night! alack, alack, alack,  
I fear my Thisby's promise is forgot!  
And thou, O wall, O sweet, O lovely wall,  
That stand'st between her father's ground and mine!

**FLUTE**. *(As Thisbe**.)* O wall, full often hast thou heard my moans,  
For parting my fair Pyramus and me!  
My cherry lips have often kiss'd thy stones,  
Thy stones with lime and hair knit up in thee.

**BOTTOM**. I see a voice: now will I to the chink,  
To spy and I can hear my Thisbe's face. Thisbe!

**FLUTE**. My love thou art, my love I think.

**BOTTOM**. Think what thou wilt, I am thy lover's grace;

O kiss me through the hole of this vile wall!

**FLUTE**. I kiss the wall's hole, not your lips at all.

**BOTTOM**. Wilt thou at Ninny's tomb meet me straightway?

**FLUTE**. 'Tide life, 'tide death, I come without delay.

**SNOUT**. Thus have I, Wall, my part discharged so;  
And, being done, thus Wall away doth go.

**SNUG**. ***(****As Lion**.)* You, ladies, you, whose gentle hearts do fear  
The smallest monstrous mouse that creeps on floor,  
May now perchance both quake and tremble here,  
When lion rough in wildest rage doth roar.

**STARVELING**.*(As Moonshine**.)* All that I have to say, is, to tell you that the lanthorn is the moon; I, the man in the moon; this  
thorn-bush, my thorn-bush; and this dog, my dog.

**FLUTE**. This is old Ninny's tomb. Where is my love?

**SNUG**. ROAR! *(Flute screams and runs away, dropping her handkerchief, which Lion bites and tears. Exit Lion, Enter Bottom.)*

**BOTTOM**. Sweet Moon, I thank thee for thy sunny beams;  
I thank thee, Moon, for shining now so bright;  
For, by thy gracious, golden, glittering gleams,  
I trust to take of truest Thisby sight.  
But stay, O spite!  
But mark, poor knight,  
What dreadful dole is here!  
Eyes, do you see?  
How can it be?  
O dainty duck! O dear!  
Come, tears, confound;  
Out, sword, and wound  
The pap of Pyramus;  
Ay, that left pap,  
Where heart doth hop:

*(Bottom stabs himself.)*

Thus die I, thus, thus, thus.  
Now am I dead,  
Now am I fled;  
My soul is in the sky:  
Tongue, lose thy light;  
Moon take thy flight:

Now die, die, die, die, die.

**FLUTE**. Asleep, my love?  
What, dead, my dove?  
O Pyramus, arise!  
Speak, speak. Quite dumb?  
Dead, dead?  
Come, trusty sword;  
Come, blade, my breast imbrue:

*(Flute stabs herself.)*

And, farewell, friends;  
Thus Thisby ends:  
Adieu, adieu, adieu.

*(Muses applaud. Snout, Starveling, Snug, Quince, Bottom, and Flute take a bow and exit.)*

**THALIA**. Well done, Shakespeare! There is a comedian in you yet. Now find a place to set this little play, as it should not stand alone, but be an ending to a great comedy.

**SHAKESPEARE**. Yes – a comedy about two young lovers who are forced apart.

**URANIA**. Call her Hermia, and him Lysander. They run away together.

**CLIO**. And what adventures do they find?

**SHAKESPEARE**. Mistaken identity, a lovers’ quarrel, two men fighting over one woman… it’s all coming to me now. I’ll fill it with sprites and a fairy king and queen.

**POLYHYMNIA**. And what will you call this great comedy?

**SHAKESPEARE**. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream.*

**CALLIOPE**. Genius!

**ERATO**. Romantic!

**TERPSICHORE**. Beautiful!

**MELPOMENE**. Yes, that’s all well and good. The world needs good comedy. But think about it in a different way. What about the tragic implications – the other side of the coin?

**SHAKESPEARE**. You mean tell the story of Pyramus and Thisbe as a tragedy? But it’s ridiculous.

**CLIO**. You can make it meaningful.

**EUTERPE**. With a lesson to teach the living.

**MELPOMENE**. Raise the stakes, give them motivation, give them substance. *(Clio takes center stage. Lights shift as, again, the Muses become Shakespeare’s thoughts. He watches and writes as he moves about the stage, invested in the characters as they come to life.* *Enter LORD and LADY CAPULET with JULIET on stage right, and LORD and LADY MONTAGUE with ROMEO on stage left.)*

**CLIO.** Two households, both alike in dignity.

**CALLIOPE**. In fair Verona, where we lay our scene.

**CLIO**. From ancient grudge, break to new mutiny.

**POLYHYMNIA**. Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.

**MELPOMENE**. From forth the fatal loins of these two foes

*(Romeo and Juliet cross center and take hands.)*

**URANIA**. A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life.

**EUTERPE**. Whose misadventured piteous overthrows

**ERATO**. Doth with their death, bury their parents’ strife. *(Capulet and Montague parents exit slowly, Romeo and Juliet stay on as Shakespeare takes over.)*

**SHAKESPEARE**. The fearful passage of their death-marked love,

And the continuance of their parents’ rage

Which, but their childrens’ end, naught could remove

Is now the two hours traffic of our stage.

The which if you, with patient ears attend,

What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.

A long-standing feud between two families. Children told from the day they are born that they must hate the other family. Bloody brawls in the streets. No hope of overcoming decades of hatred—

**ERATO**. Until?

**SHAKESPEARE**. Romeo and Juliet

**URANIA.** A pair of star-crossed lovers

**SHAKESPEARE**. Meet at a party at Juliet’s home, where Romeo is not supposed to be.

**TERPSICHORE**. They share one dance and as they dance, they fall in love. *(Romeo and Juliet twirl around each other once and move to opposite sides of the stage.)* But they soon realize that they are of opposite sides of the feud.

**ROMEO**. Is she a Capulet? O dear account! My life is my foe's debt.

**JULIET**. My only love sprung from my only hate!  
Too early seen unknown, and known too late!  
Prodigious birth of love it is to me,  
That I must love a loathed enemy.

**ERATO**. They meet later that night, and declare their love for one another. Give it poetry, Shakespeare. *(Romeo and Juliet move to a balcony, or representation of one.)*

**ROMEO**. With love's light wings did I o'er-perch these walls, for stony limits cannot hold love out.

**JULIET**. If they do see thee, they will murder thee.

**ROMEO**.O blessed, blessed night! I am afeard being in night, all this is but a dream, too flattering-sweet to be substantial.

**CALLIOPE**. They decide to marry in secret, knowing their parents would forbid the match. They meet at the church of Friar Lawrence the next day. *(Enter FRIAR LAWRENCE.)*

**FRIAR LAWRENCE**.Even though your parents are going to kill me for this, I now pronounce you husband and wife. *(Exits. Romeo and Juliet exit together, opposite.)*

**URANIA**. As young people are often want to do, they don’t think through their actions. Perhaps they think they can talk their parents into seeing things their way. Perhaps they don’t think at all except about being together.

**MELPOMENE**. And that’s when things take a turn for the tragic. While on his way home from the church, having just been married to Juliet, Romeo has an encounter that will set his life on a path of destruction.

**SHAKESPEARE**. Yes! He kills someone in a duel. And not just any someone… Juliet’s cousin. Tybalt. But he does it after Tybalt kills his best friend, Mercutio.

**EUTERPE**. Show us how that will play out, Master Shakespeare.

*(Enter ROMEO, TYBALT, MERCUTIO, and BENVOLIO.)*

**TYBALT**. Romeo, the hate I bear thee can afford no better term than this: thou art a villain.

**ROMEO**. Tybalt, villain am I none; Therefore farewell; I see thou know'st me not.

**TYBALT**. Boy, this shall not excuse the injuries that thou hast done me; therefore turn and draw.

**ROMEO**. I do protest, I never injured thee, but love thee better than thou canst devise, till thou shalt know the reason of my love. And so, good Capulet, which name I tender as dearly as my own, be satisfied.

**MERCUTIO**. O calm, dishonourable, vile submission! Tybalt, you rat-catcher, will you walk?

**TYBALT**. What wouldst thou have with me?

**MERCUTIO**. Good king of cats, nothing but one of your nine lives.

**TYBALT**. I am for you.

**ROMEO**. Gentle Mercutio, put thy rapier up. *(Tybalt and Mercutio fight.)*

**ROMEO**. Gentlemen, for shame, forbear this outrage! Hold, Tybalt! good Mercutio! *(Romeo gets in between them, distracting Mercutio. Tybalt stabs Mercutio and runs away.)*

**MERCUTIO**. I am hurt. A plague o' both your houses! Is he gone, and hath nothing? *(To Romeo.)* Why the devil came you between us? I was hurt under your arm.

**ROMEO**. I thought all for the best.

**MERCUTIO**. A plague o' both your houses! They have made worms' meat of me: I have it, and soundly too: your houses! *(Mercutio dies.)*

**BENVOLIO**. O Romeo, Romeo, brave Mercutio's dead! Here comes the furious Tybalt back again.

**ROMEO**. Alive, in triumph and Mercutio slain! *(Tybalt re-enters.**)* Now, Tybalt, Mercutio's soul is but a little way above our heads, staying for thine to keep him company.

**TYBALT**. Thou, wretched boy, shalt with him hence.

**ROMEO**. This shall determine that. *(They fight. Romeo stabs Tybalt. Tybalt dies.)*

**BENVOLIO**. Romeo, away, be gone! The citizens are up, and Tybalt slain. Stand not amazed: the prince will doom thee death, if thou art taken: hence, be gone, away!

**ROMEO**. O, I am fortune's fool! *(Exit Romeo, Benvolio freezes.)*

**MELPOMENE**. Oh, so very sad. Tragic. A young person acts on an impulse and lives are destroyed.

**URANIA**. *(Enthralled in the story. Waving her hand at Melpomene.)* Shh shh shh! Then what happens, Shakespeare?

*(Enter PRINCE, Lord Capulet, Lady Capulet, Lord Montague, Lady Montague. Benvolio unfreezes.)*

**PRINCE**. Where are the vile beginners of this fray?

**BENVOLIO**. There lies the man, slain by young Romeo, that slew thy kinsman, brave Mercutio.

**LADY CAPULET**. Tybalt, my cousin! Prince, as thou art true, for blood of ours, shed blood of Montague.

**PRINCE**. Romeo slew him, he slew Mercutio; Who now the price of his dear blood doth owe?

**LORD MONTAGUE**. Not Romeo, Prince, he was Mercutio's friend. His fault concludes but what the law should end, the life of Tybalt.

**PRINCE**. And for that offence immediately we do exile him hence: I will be deaf to pleading and excuses; Let Romeo hence in haste, else, when he's found, that hour is his last. Bear hence this body and attend our will: Mercy but murders, pardoning those that kill. *(Prince, Lady Capulet, Lord Capulet, Lord Montague, Lady Montague, and Benvolio, all exit, carrying Tybalt and Mercutio off.)*

**CLIO**. Ah, banishment instead of death. That is a good exchange.

**SHAKESPEARE**. Not for Romeo and Juliet. Banishment is as good as death to the young lovers, who fail to see that all might yet be saved. Instead, the characters dive into a headlong tumble downhill towards doom.

**THALIA**. This is missing a certain… LOL quality that I prefer in the playwrights I inspire.

**MELPOMENE**. It is exquisite! *(Enter Juliet.)*

**SHAKESPEARE**. Juliet lies weeping in her room after she has just seen Romeo for what she thinks may be the last time. Her mother comes to her to bring her news. *(Enter Lady Capulet.)*

**LADY CAPULET**.I'll tell thee joyful tidings, girl. Early next Thursday morn, the gallant, young and noble gentleman, the County Paris shall happily make thee a joyful bride.

**JULIET**. *(In sudden anger.)* He shall *not* make me a joyful bride.

**LADY CAPULET**. Here comes your father; tell him so yourself, and see how he will take it at your hands. *(Enter Lord Capulet.)*

**LORD CAPULET**. How now, wife! Have you deliver'd to her our decree?

**LADY CAPULET**. Ay, sir; but she will none, she gives you thanks.

**LORD CAPULET**. How will she *none*? Out, you green-sickness carrion! Out, you baggage! You tallow-face!

**JULIET**. Good father, I beseech you on my knees, hear me with patience but to speak a word.

**LORD CAPULET**. Disobedient wretch! I tell thee what: get thee to church o' Thursday, or never after look me in the face. *(Exit Lord Capulet.)*

**JULIET**. O, sweet my mother, cast me not away! Delay this marriage for a month, a week…

**LADY CAPULET****.** Talk not to me, for I'll not speak a word. Do as thou wilt, for I have done with thee. *(Exit Lady Capulet.)*

**POLYHYMNIA**. So Juliet thinks she is trapped. She is already married and cannot tell her parents. She cannot marry Paris. She sees no way out.

**SHAKESPEARE**. Except one. *(Enter Friar Lawrence.)*

**FRIAR LAWRENCE**. Ah, Juliet, I already know thy grief.

**JULIET**. Tell me how I may prevent it.

**FRIAR LAWRENCE**. I do spy a kind of hope. *(He holds up a small bottle of liquid.)* Take thou this vial, and this distilled liquor drink thou off. No warmth, no breath, shall testify thou livest. *(Juliet and Friar Lawrence freeze as if in conversation.)*

**SHAKESPEARE**. The friar thinks it will all work out well… that Juliet will take the sleeping potion that will make her look dead, her parents will find her in the morning and lay her in the family tomb, meanwhile he will write a letter to Romeo telling him of the plan and Romeo will meet Juliet in the tomb and they will run away together and live happily ever after. *(Juliet takes the bottle and hugs Friar Lawrence. Both exit, opposite.)*

**TERPSICHORE**. *(Sarcastic.)* What could possibly go wrong with that plan?

**CALLIOPE**. It is folly. Why doesn’t the friar simply explain everything to the parents? All could end well for love. He’s creating more problems, causing unnecessary pain for the parents. I don’t like this Friar Lawrence of yours.

**ERATO**. But, Calliope, don’t you see what he is doing? Our Master Shakespeare is creating a world where people are afraid to talk to each other, where each character is set in the ways of hatred, stubbornness, and yes, folly. He is showing mankind what happens under such dire circumstances.

**URANIA**. So how will it end for our star-crossed lovers?

**SHAKESPEARE**. Just as badly as you can imagine.

**CLIO**. *(Excited.)* Death!

**SHAKESPEARE**. Death. Romeo never gets the letter from the friar, but instead is told by his page that Juliet is dead. Feeling hopeless, without friends, without parents in a land he is banished to forever, Romeo buys a bottle of poison. He goes to Juliet’s tomb and drinks the poison by her side.

**THALIA**. Oh, come on! Then I suppose Juliet wakes up, sees him dead, and stabs herself.

**SHAKESPEARE**. Precisely. But out of their deaths comes great understanding, as we spoke of in the prologue. Their parents will never see what destruction they have wrought upon one another with the feud, until something unspeakably horrible happens. When they die, so dies the feud.

**MELPOMENE**. Wonderful, just wonderful Master Shakespeare!

**THALIA**. Well, all I can say is thank goodness text messaging will be invented in the 21st century. It will alleviate the problem of this sort of miscommunication.

**CALLIOPE**. Simply, genius, Shakespeare. So there you have it. You have just written two plays – one comic, one tragic. Both of them quite meaningful. And all from one ancient Roman story. Do you feel better?

**SHAKESPEARE**. I suppose so.

**EUTERPE**. Then our work here is done.

**SHAKESPEARE**. Sure, but two plays aren’t really enough, you know, for someone who plans on a long and illustrious career in the theatre. I need more source material. What else have you got?

**CLIO**. You name it, we have it.

**CALLIOPE**. Stories of jealousy, revenge, deception, overcoming adversity.

**THALIA.** Take your pick.

**CLIO**. I have one I think you’ll like. From ancient Greece this time – the story of “Eros and Psyche.” *(The Muses all exclaim how much they love that story.)*

**CALLIOPE**. Ah, a story of hidden identity, betrayal, love found, love lost, and found again.

**CLIO**. A young girl, subject to arranged marriage, trapped by circumstance, and the object of great jealousy.

**ERATO**. It has all the workings of great drama, and many elements you can use in your own work.

**EUTERPE**. Listen.

**MELPOMENE.** Watch. *(Lights change to set the stage for more storytelling as PSYCHE and PSYCHE’S FATHER enter.)*

**PSYCHE’S FATHER**. Daughter, you know you are a woman of exceptional beauty.

**PSYCHE.** Yeah, I’m, like, super pretty.

**PSYCHE’S FATHER**.All the men of the village come by to admire you so often, I worry that the goddess Aphrodite will despise you.

**PSYCHE**.What do you want me to do, wear a veil?

**PSYCHE’S FATHER**.Hmm… it might not be a bad idea. *(ADMIRERS enter and fall over each other to get to Psyche.)*

**ADMIRER 1**. Psyche, hear my soul speak: The very instant that I saw you, did my heart fly to your service.

**ADMIRER 2**. Doubt thou the stars are fire; doubt that the sun doth move; doubt truth to be a liar; but never doubt I love.

**ADMIRER 1**. You are more beautiful than any mortal woman.

**ADMIRER 2**. More beautiful than any goddess.

**ADMIRER 1**. More beautiful than all the goddesses put together.

**ADMIRER 2**. More beautiful than even Aphrodite herself. *(Everyone on stage gasps.)*

**ADMIRER 2**.What? Oh, come on, I’m just saying what we’re all thinking.

**PSYCHE’S FATHER**.All right, you’ve made eyes at my daughter, now get lost! *(Admirers*, *Psyche, and Psyche’s Father freeze. Enter APHRODITE, unseen by those on stage.)*

**APHRODITE**. More beautiful than me, eh? Hah! No one is more beautiful than me! I am the goddess Aphrodite! Who does that young whippet think she is, anyway? Eros! Eros! *(Enter EROS, carrying his quiver of golden arrows.)*

**EROS**.What is it, Mother? I was just on my way out to shoot some golden arrows into some hearts. Making people fall in love. That’s how I roll.

**APHRODITE**. Yes, yes, my son. But I have something more pressing. Do you see that girl over there?

**EROS**. I see the girl, but I can’t see her face. Who is she?

**APHRODITE**. No matter. I want you to go down there and poison those men’s hearts against her with your blackened arrows so that not a one of them can fall in love with her.

**EROS**. Ugh… again? Mom, you know I hate firing my black arrows into the hearts of people to make them hate each other. I’m the god of love, for crying out loud. Just let me live my truth!

**APHRODITE**.Do it. Now. *(Exit Aphrodite. Eros “flies” down to where Psyche is standing with her admirers. He hides from her and watches, but the moment he sees her face, he falls instantly in love with her.)*

**EROS**. Oh, she doth teach the torches to burn bright! All this time, I’ve been helping others with their love connections, but I have never loved – until now. *(He prepares to fire black arrows into the admirers.)*

**ADMIRER 1**. All days are nights to see till I see thee, And nights bright days when dreams do show thee me. *(Sound effect: arrow zipping through air.)* Well, catch you later. *(Exit Admirer 1.)*

**ADMIRER 2**. Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate. *(Sound effect: arrow.)* Peace out, bruh! *(Exit Admirer 2.)*

**PSYCHE**.Wait! Where are you going? Don’t you want to admire my beauty?

**PSYCHE’S FATHER**.That was weird.Oh well, good riddance. Come daughter, let’s away. *(Exit Psyche and Psyche’s Father.)*

**EROS**.Her admirers are gone, for now. But how will I ever get Psyche to marry me? I need to speak with Apollo. *(Enter APOLLO.)*

**EROS**. Hey, Apollo. I need you to do me a solid.

**APOLLO**. Anything for the son of Aphrodite.

**EROS**.See, there’s this girl I have a crush on – no, a girl I love. Psyche. And I need her to marry me, but my mom must never find out or I’ll be grounded for the rest of my life.

**APOLLO**. Why can’t you just shoot one of those arrows into her heart and make her fall for you?

**EROS.** Too easy.

**APOLLO**.You want it to be a challenge?

**EROS**.Well, I’m a Greek god. Nothing is simple.

**APOLLO**. True enough. Anything else?

**EROS**. Hmm… yes, let’s up the ante. Psyche must never see my face.

**APOLLO**.Really? You’re making this much harder than it has to be. Very well. Leave it to me. *(Exit Apollo and Eros. Enter Psyche and Psyche’s Father.)*

**PSYCHE**. Father, why do you think none of my admirers will actually fall in love with me? They all come here, day after day, to gawk at me as if I were a marble statue, but not one of them will see beyond my beauty and love me as a person.

**PSYCHE’S FATHER**. Yes, my daughter, it is very strange. Your sisters are married lo these many moons, and yet not one man has asked me for your hand in marriage. I will go ask Apollo. *(Exit Psyche, enter Apollo.)*

**PSYCHE’S FATHER**.O, great Apollo! Tell me, please, what fate has in store for my beautiful daughter. Won’t someone marry her?

**APOLLO**. You will not like what I have to say. If you have tears, prepare to shed them now.

**PSYCHE’S FATHER**. It’s that bad? All right… let me just prepare myself mentally. *(He does a quick deep-breathing exercise.)* Okay. Hit me.

**APOLLO**. Hear me, father of Psyche. You must take your daughter to the summit of a high mountain and leave her there. When she is alone, a winged serpent will come and carry her off to be his bride.

**PSYCHE’S FATHER**. A winged serpent? What kind of prophecy is that?

**APOLLO**. Do not argue with the gods, man! I have spoken and this prophecy shall be fulfilled, or else you shall face great punishment.

**PSYCHE’S FATHER**. Seriously? You won’t reconsider? What have we done to deserve such a terrible fate?

**APOLLO**. Hey, it’s Greek mythology. Though this be madness, yet there is method in’t. *(Exit Apollo. Enter Psyche, SISTER 1, and SISTER 2.)*

**PSYCHE**. Well?

**PSYCHE’S FATHER**.It’s not good. We have to take you to the top of a mountain where a winged serpent will swing by and pick you up. You’ll be taken to his palace to become his bride.

**PSYCHE**.What?!? You agreed to this?

**PSYCHE’S FATHER**.As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; they kill us for their sport.

**PSYCHE:** Kill? What do you mean kill? I’m going to be killed?

**PSYCHE’S FATHER:** No, no… I just think they’re playing with us for fun.

**SISTER 1**. Fear not, sister. Perhaps he will be a very kind and gentle winged serpent.

**SISTER 2**. Or if not, maybe he’ll be rich or a good cook or something.

**PSYCHE**. I am doomed to live with a serpent as a husband. There cannot be any good in it. I must have offended the gods in some way.

**SISTER 1**. You’re probably right.

**SISTER 2**. And once you offend the gods, there’s really no telling what terrible things will happen to you.

**SISTER 1**. Right. And they never forgive you, no matter how much you beg.

**SISTER 2**. But don’t worry. It’s only for the rest of your life.

**SISTER 1.** How bad could it be?

**PSYCHE’S FATHER**. Let’s go, daughters. We may as well get it over with. *(They cross the stage to an area representing the mountain.)*

**PSYCHE’S FATHER**.Good-bye daughter. I’m really sorry about this.

**SISTER 1**. See ya, sis. Have a great wedding. Wish we could be there.

**SISTER 2**.I’m sure it will be... interesting. *(Psyche’s Father, Sister 1, and Sister 2 exit. Sound Effect: large swoosh of a monster’s wings flapping. Eros, masked, dressed all in black, and wearing a long cape enters, takes Psyche by the hand and “flies” her to a part of the stage that can represent the palace.)*

**PSYCHE:** Is all the drama really necessary? You’re not really a winged serpent, are you?

**EROS**. Psyche, welcome to my palace. This is your new home. Do you like what you see?

**PSYCHE**.*(Annoyed.)* Sure. Whatever. It’d be nice to see your face, though. You know, so I know who I’m spending the rest of my life with.

**EROS**. I’m afraid that is not possible. This palace will give you anything you ask. You will be waited on by invisible servants who will bring you anything and everything you want.

**PSYCHE**.That’s not creepy or anything.

**EROS**. Psyche, my dearest love, I will love you for all eternity. I will never harm you. You may have everything you desire. I only ask that you never see my face. Understand?

**PSYCHE**. Why? Are you green and scaly, or hideously ugly?

**EROS**. I cannot answer your questions.

**PSYCHE**. Will you at least tell me your name?

**EROS**. I shall come to visit with you each night. We shall have conversations and dine together and you will grow to love me. *(Eros exits. Psyche sits down and rests her chin on her hands to wait. She decides to test out the invisible servants.)*

**PSYCHE**.I could really use some bread and cheese right now. *(A plate of bread and cheese appears, perhaps as pushed on by someone backstage, or by an actor entering as the “invisible servant.”)*

**PSYCHE**. Thank you! *(Psyche eats some bread and cheese. Passage of time: Lights dim, Psyche changes activities to reading a book, lights up. Lights dim, Psyche changes activity to knitting, lights up. Lights dim, Psyche changes activity to playing with dolls, ad-libbing dialogue. Lights dim to night. Enter Eros.)*

**EROS**. Good evening, my love. How was your day?

**PSYCHE**.Boring and lonely. The same way it’s been every day for the last three months. I’m so glad you’re finally here. Talk to me. Tell me things. What’s it like out there in the world? How was your day? What’d you do?

**EROS**.My day was great, as always. So much love in the air!

**PSYCHE**.Yeah. I bet you get to see people and have conversations with someone other than yourself. I bet you aren’t starting to talk to the wall paper like it’s your best friend. And I bet you didn’t try to trap a spider and keep it as your pet and end up accidentally smooshing it instead.

**EROS**.Um… are you not happy here?

**PSYCHE**. Oh, husband – whose name I still don’t know for some reason – I love our evening talks, and I have grown to love you – even though you still won’t let me see your face for some reason. It’s just that I miss human interaction and I miss my family terribly. I beg of you, let me ask my sisters to come visit me.

**EROS**. That is impossible.

**PSYCHE**. But there is nothing for me to do here. I can’t even bake a loaf of bread because the moment I think about doing it, the bread appears ready made. *(Bread appears. Psyche gestures to it as if to say, “See?”)* Don’t get me wrong, I’m very grateful for everything you provide for me, but it would be nice to have some companionship once in a while.

**EROS**. Well, alright. What harm can it do? *(Exit Eros. Enter Sister 1 and Sister 2, impressed by their surroundings.)*

**PSYCHE**.Sisters! Welcome! I’m so glad you’ve come!

**SISTER 1**. I can’t believe you get to live in this huge palace! Are those Persian rugs?

**SISTER 2**. This place is unbelievable! Are those gold chandeliers?

**PSYCHE**. It’s so good to see you both. Tell me, how is father.

**SISTER 1**. Yeah, yeah, yeah, good to see you too.

**SISTER 2**. He’s fine. Are those real jewels you’re wearing?

**SISTER 1**. So you really don’t have to do any work? Ever?

**SISTER 2**.And you get anything you want, anytime you want it?

**PSYCHE**.Yes, but it’s not all--

**SISTER 1**. And how is that husband of yours?

**SISTER 2**. Have you seen his face yet?

**PSYCHE**. No, he won’t allow it. But he is kind and good. He’s smart and funny and we have great conversations in the evenings. I really can’t complain.

**SISTER 1**. Can’t complain? I couldn’t stand to be married to someone – or something – who’s face I could never see.

**SISTER 2**.What if he’s completely hideous? Aren’t you dying to find out?

**PSYCHE**. I don’t think it matters. He’s good to me. And I don’t have a choice in the matter. *(Sister 1 and Sister 2 exchange a look behind Psyche’s back, silently plotting something. They circle around her during the next exchange, as if planting the ideas in her head.)*

**SISTER 1**. But you do have a choice, don’t you?

**SISTER 2**. You could sneak a peek if you really wanted to.

**PSYCHE**.I promised I wouldn’t. I gave him my word.

**SISTER 1**. That’s because he is most likely a monster.

**SISTER 2**. A serpent.

**SISTER 1**. A three-headed dog.

**SISTER 2**. A cannibalistic Cyclops.

**SISTER 1**. He’s waiting until you least expect it.

**SISTER 2**. Until you place all your trust in him.

**SISTER 1**. And then he will kill you.

**SISTER 2**. And possibly eat you.

**SISTER 1**. You must kill him first.

**SISTER 2**. Before he kills you.

**PSYCHE**.I couldn’t! And he wouldn’t!

**SISTER 1**. We’re looking out for our baby sister.

**SISTER 2**. Please, sweet-ums, do it for us.

**SISTER 1**. We couldn’t bear to lose you.

**SISTER 2**. Do it tonight, and come home to us, dear sister. *(Exit Sister 1 and Sister 2. The lights dim to night. Enter Eros.)*

**EROS**. Good evening, Psyche. How was your visit with your sisters?

**PSYCHE**. Um… good… they’re very… um… supportive of me…

**EROS**. That’s wonderful.

**PSYCHE**. Yeah, isn’t it? Well, I’m really not tired. I’m going to read a book for a while. You get some rest, okay? Good night.

**EROS**.Uh, okay. Good night. *(He lies down to sleep. Psyche sits in the dark, waiting. He soon starts snoring. She quietly lights a candle.)*

**PSYCHE**. Boldness be my friend. *(She stands over Eros, removes his mask, and gasps when she sees him.)*

**PSYCHE**.Oh, my sweet love. What have I done? I know who you are. You are Eros, the god of love. I’ve known all along you were someone special and familiar. I betrayed you for my jealous sisters. They were not worried about me. They only wanted me to undo the trust you have put in me. *(Psyche blows out the candle, but as she does a drop of wax lands on Eros. He wakes.)*

**EROS**. Ouch! What the--? Psyche! You have seen my face!

**PSYCHE**.Who could refrain that had a heart to love, and in that heart, courage to make love known?

**EROS**. You have betrayed me. Where there is no trust, there can be no love. *(Exit Psyche, weeping. Enter Aphrodite.)*

**APHRODITE**. Eros! Eros, get over here this minute! *(Eros crosses to her.)*

**EROS**. Yes mother?

**APHRODITE**. So! You have married a human!

**EROS**.What? I would never do such a thing.

**APHRODITE**.Don’t lie to me! And you know what really stings? You didn’t just marry any human. You married that human! The one human I cannot stand!

**EROS**. It doesn’t matter anymore. It’s over. She betrayed me.

**APHRODITE**. Of course it matters! I’m the goddess Aphrodite. You betrayed me, she betrayed you. What goes around, comes around, pumpkin.

**EROS**. You’re going to punish me, aren’t you?

**APHRODITE**. You bettcha. You are to be locked in a tower, grounded for the rest of eternity.

**EROS**.You can’t do that! I’m the god of love. I have a job to do. Millions of people depend on me.

**APHRODITE**. Yes, humans are such needy little creatures. They’ll just have to learn to be self-reliant and catch the object of their affection through their own devices. To the tower. Go! *(Exit Eros. Enter Psyche, opposite.)*

**APHRODITE**.Well, well, well… if it isn’t Psyche, my arch nemesis.

**PSYCHE**. Aphrodite, I don’t know what I did to deserve your hatred. Please tell me where your son is.

**APHRODITE**. Why should I tell you, girl?

**PSYCHE**. Because I love him. I need to tell him how wrong I was.

**APHRODITE**. Sorry, can’t help you. *(Aphrodite starts to leave, then gets an idea.)* I tell you what. If you really love my son, you will perform three tasks for me. When you have completed the third task, you may see my son again.

**PSYCHE**. Anything.

**APHRODITE**. Anything, huh? Okay. *(She claps her hands. A SERVANT brings in a large stuffed bag.)* This bag contains a mixture of poppy seeds, sunflower seeds, millet seeds, and wheat. Separate the seeds into four piles by their type.

**PSYCHE**. I can do that.

**APHRODITE**. Hmm… the lady doth protest too much, methinks. Just a second. *(She claps her hands again and THREE SERVANTS bring in three more giant bags.)* Do it by sun-up. *(Exit Aphrodite.)*

**PSYCHE**. But there are billions of tiny seeds here. How can I do such a task? *(Enter ANTS.)*

**ANT 1**. Allow us to help, fair maiden!

**ANT 2**. We’re used to such work.

**ANT 1**. Ready?

**ANT 2**. Start hauling!

**PSYCHE.** Thank you, thank you little ants! *(Psyche and the Ants move around the four bags, organizing the seeds. When they are finished, Psyche falls asleep. Exit Ants. Enter Aphrodite. She kicks Psyche to wake her.)*

**APHRODITE**. Well, girl, did you do as I bid you?

**PSYCHE**. I did. Look in the bags. Not a seed is out of place. *(Aphrodite looks in the bags and becomes enraged.)*

**APHRODITE**. How did you do it? You must have had help.

**PSYCHE**. My love for Eros gave me the endurance and dexterity for the task.

**APHRODITE**. Fine. Here is your second task. You must go to the mouth of the River Styx and fill this bottle with the black water that rages over the rocks and down the steep cliffs. I hear it’s good for the complexion. *(Aphrodite hands Psyche a small bottle and exits.)*

**PSYCHE**.The River Styx. I can do this. It’s only the mouth of the underworld. No big deal. *(Two FIGURES dressed in black enter with a long piece of black, shiny material to represent the River Styx. They hold it between them and move it up and down to create a ripple effect.)*

**PSYCHE**. *(Struggling to reach the water, afraid she’ll fall in the current.)* How will I ever reach the water and fill this bottle? *(Enter EAGLE.)*

**EAGLE**. Allow me to assist you.

**PSYCHE**. Oh, thank you, Eagle! Thank you! *(Eagle takes the bottle from Psyche and swoops down to the river to fill the bottle. Eagle returns the bottle to Psyche, who returns to Aphrodite.)*

**APHRODITE**. Well, girl… did you get me my black water?

**PSYCHE**. Here it is.

**APHRODITE**. Impossible! You must have had help.

**PSYCHE**. My love for Eros gave me wings to fly over the slippery rocks.

**APHRODITE**. You lie.

**PSYCHE**. There are more things in heaven and earth, Aphrodite, than are dreampt of in your philosophy.

**APHRODITE**. Wretched girl! Fine. Here is your third task: you must travel down to the underworld, the land ruled by Hades and his queen Persephone. Your way will be dark, and cruel creatures will bar your progress. Ask Persephone to fill this box with her beauty. But I warn you, she will never consent.

**PSYCHE**. I must try, for the sake of seeing Eros again.

**APHRODITE**.You’re foolish.

**PSYCHE**.Devoted.

**APHRODITE**. Incorrigible.

**PSYCHE**.In love. *(Aphrodite stamps her foot and exits.)* Okay… I can do this. It’s only the underworld full of lost souls and demons and monstrous creatures. No big deal. *(Enter CERBERUS, the Three-Headed Dog.)*

**CERBERUS**. Who goes there?

**PSYCHE**. I am Psyche. I come on an errand for Aphrodite.

**CERBERUS**. *(Sniffs her.)* You are not dead. Only the dead are allowed in. No one is allowed out.

**PSYCHE**. Please, Cerberus. I must get in. It’s a matter of the utmost importance. Long story, but basically, I have to save my marriage.

**CERBERUS**. Oh, it’s a love thing. Why didn’t you say so in the first place? I’m a sucker for a good love story. You’ll have to tell me all about it sometime. Before you go, could you just rub my belly? *(Cerberus rolls over and Psyche scratches his belly. CHARON enters, rowing a small boat.)*

**CHARON**. Step right in, step right in. Let old Charon row you across the River Styx. Where to, little lady?

**PSYCHE**. I must see Persephone, and convince her to fill this box with her beauty.

**CHARON**. Well, now, that will be tricky. Persephone doesn’t like to be bothered.

**PSYCHE**. If I tell her it is for the goddess Aphrodite, she may consent.

**CHARON**. Suit yourself. *(He rows her across the stage).* Here we are. Good luck. *(Enter PERSEPHONE.)*

**PERSEPHONE**. Who are you and why have you come to see me?

**PSYCHE**. I am here as a messenger and servant from Aphrodite. She asks that you fill this box with your beauty so that she may refresh her good looks.

**PERSEPHONE**. I am happy to serve Aphrodite. *(Persephone takes the box and breathes into it. Sound effect: breath or wind.)* There you are. Take this to Aphrodite, but I warn you, you must not look in the box under any circumstances. What lies inside is for the eyes of the goddess only. *(Exit Persephone.)*

**PSYCHE**. Thank you, goddess. I shall be grateful to you always. *(Psyche steps back into Charon’s boat.)*

**CHARON**. *(Rowing her back across the stage.)* Did you get it?

**PSYCHE**. I did.

**CHARON**. Well, I must say I’m impressed. Here you are, the other side. Come back and see me sometime. They always do! *(Exit Charon, laughing. Enter Cerberus.)*

**CERBERUS**.One more belly scratch before you go? *(Psyche scratches his belly again and exits the “underworld.”)*

**PSYCHE**. I’m almost there. Aphrodite cannot deny me my Eros now. I have done everything she asked. I wonder what the essence of a goddess’ beauty looks like anyway. I know Persephone told me not to look inside the box, but one little peek couldn’t hurt, right? *(She opens the box. Sound effect: wind*.*)* That can’t be good. *(She falls into a deep sleep. Enter ZEUS.)*

**ZEUS**. Aphrodite! *(Enter Aphrodite.)*

**APHRODITE.** My lord Zeus! To what do I owe this honor?

**ZEUS.** What is the meaning of this? Did you really have this poor girl running to the Underworld and back in some sick little game of yours?

**APHRODITE**.Yes, but in my defense, she’s really pretty and I was trying to keep her away from my son.

**ZEUS**. Who you’ve locked in a tower. Release Eros this minute. *(Aphrodite claps her hands and Eros enters.)*

**EROS**. Oh, hey Zeus. What’s up? *(Sees Psyche.)* Is that Psyche? What is she doing here? Mother, what have you done to Psyche?

**APHRODITE**. I haven’t done anything to her. She’s done it to herself. Her curiosity got the better of her. Again.

**EROS**. Is she dead? Zeus, can you wake her?

**ZEUS**. I can do you one better. Eros, Psyche braved the underworld and the black river for you, and she spent all night separating seeds. She is more devoted to you than you deserve, and for her devotion, I shall make her immortal so that you two can be together for eternity.

**EROS**. Eternity? Eternity is a long time to only be with one person.

**ZEUS**. Do you want her or not, Eros?

**EROS**. Yes, yes, of course I want her. *(Zeus wakes Psyche.)*

**PSYCHE**.Zeus? What’s going on?

**EROS**. Psyche! I overreacted. Love is not love, which alters when it alteration finds.

**PSYCHE.** I’m glad you came to your senses.

**EROS.** Good news! While you were sleeping, Zeus turned you into a goddess.

**PSYCHE**.Sweet! *(To Aphrodite.)* Now I never have to do anything you tell me to ever again!

**APHRODITE**.I’m still your mother-in-law. And I need a place to stay for a bit, so I’m going to move in with you and Eros for a while… *(Exit Zeus, Aphrodite, Psyche, and Eros as lights change, taking us back to Shakespeare’s room.)*

**SHAKESPEARE**. There are many themes I can take from the story to use in my work. A lot of good lines, too. I sure like that one about “there are more things in Heaven and Earth than are dreampt of in your philosophy.” Maybe I should write a ghost story.

**TERPSICHORE**. Ooo! Yes! I love a good ghost story.

**SHAKESPEARE**. I’ve got it! Hamlet is a young prince, whose father has just died. His mother has married his father’s brother, and he’s not happy about it.

**THALIA**. And?

**SHAKESPEARE**. A ghost comes to him. The ghost of his father. To tell him to revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

**THALIA**. Murder?

**SHAKESPEARE**.Murder most foul!

**THALIA**.I suppose that can’t end happily, can it?

**SHAKESPEARE**.No, I’m afraid it must be tragedy.

**MELPOMENE**. Ah, another tragedy!

**TERPSICHORE**.This is your take-away from our happy tale of love triumphant?

**SHAKESPEARE**. Yes, lessons learned in death, you know. It is one of my favorite themes.

**URANIA**. Wonderful. And what other ideas can you take from our tale of Eros and Psyche?

**SHAKESPEARE**. Forgiveness, enduring love, awakenings – all these are taking form in my mind’s eye and finding characters and stories to inhabit. Tell me another.

**TERPSICHORE**. That’s our boy!

**URANIA**. Oh, yes let’s do another. This has been so much fun, I don’t want it to end.

**CALLIOPE**. Which one do you think our young prodigy can glean the most from?

**CLIO**. There’s always Hercules.

**ERATO**: Or Apollo and Daphne.

**MELPOMENE**. The more stories you know, Shakespeare, the richer your writing will be.

**SHAKESPEARE**. How about a quick sum-up of all your stories?

**POLYHYMNIA**. Impossible!

**TERPSICHORE**. There are way too many.

**SHAKESPEARE**. Just your favorite then?

**CLIO**. Ah, I’ve got one! Theseus and the Minotaur.

**CALLIOPE**. I’ll start! On the island of Crete, there lived a powerful king, by the name of Minos. *(Enter KING MINOS.)*

**ERATO**. King Minos kept a minotaur – a creature with the body of a human but the head of a bull – imprisoned in a complex maze, and kept him alive by feeding him the brains of his enemies. *(Enter MINOTAUR.)*

**MINOTAUR**. Brains, I need brains.

**MINOS**. Hmmm… I’ve run out of enemies to feed you. How can I get you more brains?

**MINOTAUR**. Feed me, Minos!

**MINOS**. *(Snaps.)* I’ve got it! Athens! I hate that place and their king. I will demand that they send me seven Athenian boys and seven Athenian girls, every year for 20 years, on whom you may feast. I will threaten them with constant sacking if they do not comply.

**EUTERPE**. And so King Minos sent out a decree to King Aegeus. *(Enter KING AEGEUS with a scroll.)*

**AEGEUS**. *(Reading.)* To whom it may concern, it is hereby decreed that the state of Athens must send to the island of Crete, seven boys and seven girls, every year for the next 20 years, as a measure of goodwill. Otherwise you will be subject to raids of various intensity for the rest of your life, and I have a big army. *(To himself.)* Well, 14 children sounds like a small price to pay for peace in the land. I’m sure they’ll be well taken care of. *(Reading.)* The children will be fed to the Minotaur. Best regards, King Minos. *(To himself.)* Blast! Well, a decree is a decree. *(He exits.)*

**MELPOMENE**. And so, seven boys and seven girls were chosen and sent to Crete. *(Enter CHILDREN, scared and clustered together, with THESEUS.)*

**EUTERPE**.But hidden in with the children was Theseus, a man determined to kill the Minotaur before it could devour the children.

**POLYHYMNIA**. King Minos and his daughter Ariadne came out to greet the children when they arrived. *(Enter Minos and ARIADNE.)*

**MINOS**. Welcome children, welcome. *(To Theseus.)* I asked for children, not full-grown men.

**THESEUS**. I’m very mature looking for my age. I’m only, uh, six.

**MINOS**. I see… well children, you will not be eaten until tomorrow, so feel free to make yourselves at home for the night. There’s a pool and sauna in the back and you can help yourself to anything in the fridge. Follow me and I’ll show you around. *(Minos exits, leading the children out. Ariadne stops Theseus.)*

**ARIADNE**. You’re not really six years old, are you?

**THESEUS**. No, I am here to slay the Minotaur and stop him from menacing this country and ours! Show me where he is! Then all the world will know that Theseus has killed the Minotaur!

**ARIADNE**. Whoa! Slow your roll there, pal. There’s no way you can do this without my help.

**THESEUS**. Ha! I need no one’s help! I am Theseus! I am strong and can slay any monster.

**ARIADNE**. Really? And how many minotaurs have you actually slain?

**THESEUS**. Oh—well, you know, like, a few – who’s counting, anyway?

**ARIADNE**. Uh-huh. Listen, I’ve got a deal for you. If you promise to marry me and take me away from Crete, I will help you kill the Minotaur.

**THESEUS**. All right, I agree. You help me and I will marry you.

**ARIADNE**. *(Producing a ball of thread and a sword.)* Take this ball of thread. It is magic thread that will lead you to the Minotaur. Roll it before you as you enter the labyrinth and it will lead the way. And take this special sword. I had it made specially to kill the Minotaur. Your regular sword won’t work.

**THESEUS**. Thank you, my future wife. Who are you, anyway?

**ARIADNE**. Ariadne.

**THESEUS**. Ariadne. I shall return triumphant!

**TERPSICHORE**. And so Theseus entered the labyrinth. After tying the end of the ball of thread to the gate of the labyrinth so he could find his way back out, he rolled the thread before him and it rolled itself through corridors, up stair cases, and down passageways until it reached the minotaur. *(Ensemble enters to move the magic thread. Enter MINOTAUR with a bone.)*

**THALIA**. The Minotaur was busy munching on the bones of his latest victim.

**MINOTAUR**. Who are you?

**THESEUS**. I am Theseus, and this is your dying day, Minotaur.

**MINOTAUR**. Not likely. I cannot be killed by a mere human.

**THESEUS**.Hah! I am not just any human. I have brute power and strength – and this special sword that was given to me.

**MINOTAUR**. I’ll let you try if it will make you feel better. *(They fight. Theseus overpowers the Minotaur and stabs him.)*

**MINOTAUR**. I wasted time, and now doth time waste me! *(Dies.)*

**URANIA**. Theseus followed the magic string back through the labyrinth and to the gate, where Ariadne was waiting for him.

**ARIADNE**. Well?

**THESEUS**. It is done.

**THALIA**. Theseus and Ariadne snuck away in the middle of the night, boarded Theseus’ ship back to Crete, and lived happily ever after.

**MELPOMENE**. Um, no they didn’t. He abandoned her on a beach while she was sleeping. She married Dionysus instead.

**THALIA**. Meh, the course of true love never did run smooth.

**SHAKESPEARE**. Theseus would make a good character in a play.

**EUTERPE**. Consider him as a part of your “Midsummer Night’s Dream.”

**SHAKESPEARE**. Yes! He’ll be the duke who orders Hermia to marry Demetrius, causing her to run away with Lysander. And in the end, he’ll forgive their defiance in running away together because he will know about fly-by-night love, even if his didn’t work out so well.

**TERPSICHORE**. You see, Master Shakespeare, you are taking these stories and embedding their themes into your mind and heart.

**URANIA**. You can take the lessons they teach or the themes they explore and continue to explore them anew.

**CALLIOPE**. And isn’t that the way with story? Each time they are told, they are told in a new way, and continue to inspire new thoughts, new ideas, and new stories, and on and on throughout the history and the future of mankind.

**CLIO**. I dare say, Master Shakespeare, playwrights ages from now will use your plays someday, as a leaping off point for their own.

**SHAKESPEARE**. Do you think so?

**CLIO**. I know it.

**URANIA**. You shall be a poet not for an age, but for all time.

**TERPSICHORE**. That’s lovely. We’ll have someone write that about you someday.

**MELPOMENE**. I’ve been in touch with Ben Johnson a lot lately. I’ll give it to him.

**SHAKESPEARE**. Ben Johnson hates me.

**MELPOMENE**. He may now, but he won’t in a few years.

**ERATO**. Keep learning stories, William. The more you know, the better your writing will be. Your writing has the power to create worlds made of words. Audiences will visit those worlds, spend time with the characters who live there, and leave the theatre all the better for it.

**SHAKESPEARE**. Yes, I see what you mean. Very powerful. (*A beat.)* You have given me so much today. Thank you for everything you have taught me.

**POLYHYMNIA**. We will continue to teach and inspire you for the remainder of your days. We are the muses, after all.

**ERATO**.Just remember: to thine own self be true.

**URANIA**.Love all, trust a few, do wrong to none.

**CLIO**.Take care, Master Shakespeare, and write what’s in your heart. Write what you know, write what you want to know, or write what you only know in your dreams.

**TERPSICHORE**. There are plays in you yet, Master Shakespeare. Good ones.

**SHAKESPEARE**. That’s funny, that’s what Bess said earlier… *(Fog fills the stage and lights shift. The Muses circle around Shakespeare, and lead him back to his desk as they sing or speak.)*

**MUSES**. William, boy, take up your pen

Now that you’re inspired again.

Look to the sea, to sky, the earth,

Write of grief and write of mirth.

Write of noble kings high-born,

Who fail, who fall, who fortunes scorn.

Write of women abused, forsaken,

Write of men whom greed has taken.

Write of love that cannot be,

Of death, disgrace, and jealousy.

Or write love in a comic vein,

Where all ends well, loss turns to gain.

So fill your paper now with ink,

And make sure that your words don’t stink.

Your stories lie there deep within,

Take pen in hand and now begin.

*(Shakespeare begins to write. He continues writing as the lights turn dim for night, and then brighten to signal morning. He stands, stretches, and moves over to the bed and falls asleep. Bess enters quietly, sees Shakespeare is asleep, and starts to leave with the tray. The writing on the desk catches her eye. She sits and begins to read.*

**BESS**. Oh, this is good, Master Shakespeare. This is very, very good.

*(Lights fade to Blackout.)*

**END OF PLAY**