

The full moon threw its gleaming light across the hardwood stage; its luminescence overpowered the spots held aloft by the boom stands sitting in each of the four aisles. The lighting technician slumped in his seat, his thick-rimmed glasses sliding down on his pointed nose. He, like the wide-spectacled, gray-haired director, had run the show so many times that habit worked its way through boredom. The actors and actresses shuffled across the stage, some overacting, others underacting. In the end, the troupe was resigned to accept their miniscule talent.

The audience was sparse. They dotted the staggered seats, like saplings along a country road. Some were patrons to this theatre, aged and cultured in their own minds. Others were students who were only there to fulfill some school requirement or another.

The breeze picked up, carrying the monotone lines of the actors away, and deep into the trees that stood around the “Theatre in the Grove.” In its early days, this outdoor attraction had been the highlight of the town. Now, the high Shakespearean language was lost on an audience who found more entertainment in taking bets on the fate of Romeo. Would he kill himself with the poison or fall through the rotting planks of the stage floor?

Still, one member of the audience sat, watching intently, waiting. His eyes were shadowed by the bill of his woolen cap. His jacket, a dashing thing at one time with its elbow patches, gave the appearance that he had attempted to dress for some fine occasion only to have missed it by at least fifty years. A crumpled program with the title, “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” printed in smeared ink, rolled back and forth between his fingers. As the play droned on, he waited.

The stage trembled. Bare feet trotted out into the light of the moon. A tunic made of cloth leaves rustled in the wind. Eyes flashed behind a rosy-cheeked comedy mask. The

crumpled program stopped moving, and hidden eyes gleamed back. This was what brought the audience here this night, or at least one of the audience members.

Lips below hidden eyes moved along with each line, and almost shouted in unison, “Lord what fools these mortals be.”

The rest of the audience seemed a dull, colorless haze in comparison to this enthusiastic patron. His seat creaked as he drew ever nearer to its edge until, along with his theatrical counterpart, he quoted, “Give me your hands if we be friends and Robin shall restore amends.”

A mischievous smirk spread across the patron’s face as he drew the rest of the audience to its feet. As his hands thundered together, his passion spread like a contagion through the rest of the crowd. The applause that flooded the stage caused the troupe to freeze in sheer surprise. There had not been such a standing ovation in this theatre for several years. For the first time in longer than they could remember, rising from their bow, they looked forward to tomorrow night.

This strange mirth-giver’s smirk rode on his face as he exited the theatre and made his way into the grove of surrounding trees. The land around him shifted. Night mixed with day. Colors became more vibrant. Trees grew bigger and flowers that had not been there moments ago exploded in full bloom. The world became a surrealist painting around this wayward voyager. He parted his lips in a pointy-toothed smile and removed his hat, revealing red eyes that gleamed in the light of life itself.

“A finer Puck I have not seen,” he laughed, “save one.”

Like the landscape, he also began to change. Pale skin that had once mocked mortality shifted to an emerald gleam. Hair greened and parted to make way for two stubby goat horns. Imitation clothing faded to reveal a spindly, long-limbed body. Thick hair as green as that on his head cascaded over his shoulders and sprouted from his knees, elbows, tops of his feet, and

backs of his hands. Lips curled and pointed in a beaky grin beneath his bulbous nose. The trickster of legends looked around satisfied, and breathed deeply the sweet air of home. Then with a powerful leap, he was lost in the painted canopy as though he had never been.