

Dusk, midsummer, beside a worn path at the edge of a forest. A man, dressed in shabby nobleman's elizabethan garb. He sits at a small, tidy fire cooking a supper. The day's colors are transcending the scene with fantastic, almost distracting brilliance. They fade slowly through the play into a cobalt blue by the end, punctuated by a full moon. It has not yet risen.

SYLVIO starts to sing, softly to himself.

SYLVIO

Then hate me when thou wilt, if ever, now,
Now while the world is bent my deeds to cross,
Join with the spite of fortune, make me bow,
And do not drop in for and after-loss.
Ah do not, when my heart hath shaped this
sorrow,
Come in the rearward of a conquered woe;
Give not a windy night a rainy morrow
To linger out a purposed overthrow.
If thou wilt leave me, do not leave me last,
When other petty griefs have done their spite,
But in the onset come: so shall I taste
At first the very worst of fortune's might,

And other strains of woe, which now seem woe,
Compared with loss of thee will not seem so.

Hums, then sits, contemplating the audience. Looking them up and down. Ad lib judgements. Gets bored. Hunger peeks. He considers his empty pot, then crosses to a patch of mushrooms and bends to harvest them. Enter TIMON. We hear him before we see him.

TIMON

Nothing I'll bear from thee
But nakedness, thou detestable town!
Take thou that too, with multiplying bans!
Timon will to the woods, where he shall find
The unkindest beast more kinder than mankind.
The gods confound (hear me, you good gods
all)Th' citizens both within and out that wall!
O blessed breeding sun, draw from the earth
Rotten humidity; Not nature,
To whom all sores lay siege, can bear great
fortune
But by contempt of nature.

SYLVIO

(aside) Here is a ruined man. Though, by the look of his hands, marked himself noble once. May be noble still.

TIMON

O between night and day! Day and night doth wrack my heart where war makes mark. I am bitter but only want revenge on myself. But since I will not end my life, I must abhor it in thee.

SYLVIO rises, making self known

SYLVIO

Art thou flung in rage from this ungrateful seat
Of monstrous friends? What hath thou with him that
Supply thy life, or of that which can command it?

TIMON

(sees SYLVIO, recoils)
More man? Plague, plague!

SYLVIO

Plague? (looks around) Not I.
In clear absence of malice seek I just solace,
(sings)
For without this wood I can make no supper...nor craft a bolus. (giggles)

TIMON

A knave, stacking wood with tiny hands perforce
Shall light no fire but his own discourse.

SYLVIO

What?

TIMON

What?

SYLVIO

Art thou wise? (beat) Art thou fair?

TIMON

I am no more wise than thee,
That nature, being sick of man's unkindness
Should yet be hungry! Common mother, thou...

SYLVIO

I am not thy kinsmen, except in life. Except in life. Except in life.

*Turns back to cooking dinner.
Ignores TIMON.*

TIMON

(unused to being ignored) Your errant hands
should dig for your repast.
Who seeks for better of thee? Sauce his palate
With thy most operant poison.

SYLVIO

Poison, you say? Thou hast most need of drink,
friend. Though the poison I prescribe is more
kind. Here. (hands flask)

TIMON

I'll not of any draught crafted by man.

SYLVIO

You'll never taste sweeter water...unless...
Hang on, I'll piss in your mouth. That might
be what you're after.

TIMON

Heathen! Goth! Make mockery of my woe!

SYLVIO

Not I, my lord. I merely suggest you garner a
second opinion before you follow your own
doctor's orders to the grave.

TIMON

(teary) I'll have you know, that in my youth I
lived. (beat) In this all my orisons be
remembered.

SYLVIO

Well, then, make yourself useful if you are to
haunt me thus, and fetch us some water.

TIMON

I am not thy slave.

SYLVIO

Nay, not mine. Only thine. Suit yourself.

***SYLVIO stares. TIMON,
begrudgingly, obliges. Takes pail
off. SYLVIO grumbles and stirs. **

SYLVIO

What a rogue and peasant slave he is.
Conscience makes a coward of him. He's lost
the name of action. (to pot)
Bubble, bubble, toil and trouble,

(MORE)

SYLVIO (CONT'D)

Fire burn and cauldron...wait. How does it go?
 (stirs, enjoys the moment, the
 silence, the sounds of the
 departing day, the approaching
 evening. hears movement)
 How now? What life breaks yonder window?

*Enter ROSALIND, TOUCHSTONE, and
 CELIA, crashing through the
 underbrush.*

ROSALIND

Jupiter, how weary are my spirits!

TOUCHSTONE

I care not for my spirits, if my legs were not
 weary.

ROSALIND

I could find in my heart to disgrace my man's
 apparel, and to cry like a woman; but I must
 comfort the weaker vessel; courage, good
 Aliena.

CELIA

I pray you bear with me; I cannot go no
 further.

TOUCHSTONE

For my part, I had rather bear with you than
 bear you; yet I should bear no cross if I did
 bear you; for I think you have no money in
 your purse.

ROSALIND

Well, this is the Forest of Birnam.

TOUCHSTONE

Ay, now am I in Birnam; the more fool I; when
 I was at home I was in a better place; but
 travelers must be content.

SYLVIO

Content with what, my lord, with what?

general shrieks

ROSALIND

Ah! You startled us.

SYLVIO

I could see I had.

TOUCHSTONE

For sooth, sir, I am content that I am neither here nor there. I prefer to be betwixt.

CELIA

Betwixt what, you rascal?

ROSALIND

The Scylla and Charybdis, I being the older of the two.

SYLVIO

Do you terrorize men so?

CELIA

I do.

ROSALIND

That's fair. She does. Not I, my lord. I am fair, and fair again doth say.

TOUCHSTONE

In the secret parts of fortune, I. Yet I would I were so honest a man.

SYLVIO

Ay, yet the world's not grown honest. You would be betwixt a liar and a devil. Present company exclud'd, of course.

**Quick take to the audience. They all curtsey and clap in the air like Mick Jagger. *

ROSALIND

What, art thou all alone? What hath you to remote disjuncture thus enslaved?

SYLVIO

Not I! Look you, the air. Are not the birds marvelous companions? The trees?

CELIA

I think those are bats.

TOUCHSTONE

Don't eat that.

Enter TIMON.

TIMON

What! More pestilence! What wretched a state is this?

SYLVIO

To watch the entire world, one must only stay
in one place long enough. Now, where's that
water?

TIMON

I leave for a moment and the bugs come
crawling back! It is a vile and pestilent
congregation of vapors.

CELIA

This is too long.

ROSALIND

I prithee, shepherd, if in that wretched state
thou findest thyself can prove entertainment,
here is where we may rest ourselves and feed
our eyes as much as our mouths. For this is a
young maid with travel much oppress'd and
faints for succour. And I a slightly less
young maid who enjoys nothing so much as to
watch men suffer.

TIMON

You succor, you brought her.

long beat. incredulous.

SYLVIO

Come, friends, what make you at Birnam wood?
Beggard that I am, I am poor in wit enough to
prompt your tale.

ROSALIND

To you our minds we will unfold: Tonight, when
Phoebe doth behold
Her silver visage in the watery glass,
Decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass,
A time that lovers' flights doth still
conceal,
Through Birnam Wood have we devised to steal.

TOUCHSTONE

Cry you mercy, I took you for a joint-stool.
I'm not stealing anything

SYLVIO

Wherefore art thou, a maiden, a mistress, and
a...

TOUCHSTONE

...a very fine gentleman...

TIMON

The very words...

SYLVIO

I was to say, 'a clown' but methinks thou art not so wise a man as that.

TOUCHSTONE

By mine honor, I have been fool to the king for twenty and four.

TIMON

And now fool to us for (mines looking at watch) too long.

SYLVIO

Wherefore make thee to Birnam? What drives you on with such haste?

ROSALIND

Mine uncle means to kill me.

dead stop. all stare, eyebrows raised.

SYLVIO

Oh, is that all? An avuncular death threat? What is it with uncles in this mad world?

ROSALIND

We seek the safety of the wood, for without the town are men less contrived with petty grievance. Here, in the cool evening airs, passions are reduced into simmer and we may think more clearly.

SYLVIO

The only thing simmering is in my pot.

CELIA

That smells so good.

TIMON

That may be true here, but when thou into the bosom of the forest go, thine eye will be blinded by untutored sight.

TOUCHSTONE

If I take your meaning, Sir, it will be dark?

TIMON

In mind, in sight, behold not beauty's flight,
For thou takes't what thou art inside the grove,
A trove of mystery to your mind reveals,
Now deaf to your ragg'd appeals.

TOUCHSTONE

I think he means it will be dark.

SYLVIO

He means that enjoy this moment while you can, for as you seek solace from the darkness, the darkness will find you, be thou in forest hid or sunlit glade, on hilltop far, or in mournful grave.

TOUCHSTONE

Truly this fellow doth not stand upon points.

TIMON

Aye, if he did, you would not be smiling so.

CELIA

I must eat something or I will be in mournful grave.

SYLVIO

You may take some of this simple fare with you, ere you go.

ROSALIND

You are too kind, and we owe you a debt. (to TIMON) You, I'd rather not see again.

TIMON

I like it that way.

TOUCHSTONE

Stay awhile, madam, I will be faithful.

Exit CELIA, ROSALIND, & TOUCHSTONE

SYLVIO

Now I am...

TIMON

May I have some?

SYLVIO

Don't you have somewhere else to be?

TIMON

I too, am human. I too have a mouth, a mind, and I too feed on the air, the wind of fate. Why can I not have the wind and the air? Why must needs I breathe the vapors of my foul brethren, when it curdles the air in my lungs? When it sticks in my throat and chokes the very life of me? Wherefore am I not free of this torment? But in a dream of fiction I stand here, alone...

SYLVIO

Not alone.

TIMON

...and unwilling to relent. Unwilling to
sacrifice my own mind .
I spoke in rhyme once. In iamb.
I knew who I was, and others knew me well. No
fishmonger, I. I was kept alive; alight from
within by my gifts to...to all who sought
them. They mistook my love: I gave it freely
ever; and there's none
Can say he truly gives, if he receives:
If our betters play at that game, we must not
dare to imitate them; faults that are rich are
fair.

SYLVIO

This is a different tune. Come. I take no heed
of thee; thou'rt human, therefore welcome: I
myself would have no power; prithee, let my
meal make thy silent.

TIMON

I scorn thy feast; 'twould choke me.

Enter MACBETH

MACBETH

So foul and fair a day I have not seen.

TIMON

Ho, ho! Confess'd it! All hail thee, a ninny
by any other name would still as loudly bleat.
It seems I will never be free of the ticks and
leeches of this hanged world.

SYLVIO

Hold your tongue, devil. Good evening, sir.
Wherefore speakest thou so ill of such a fair
night?

MACBETH

I have seen things you people wouldn't
believe. Three hags, appeared from the earth
itself, methought, then addressed me as thane.

SYLVIO

They prefer to be called gay.

MACBETH

HAGS.

SYLVIO

Ah. My mistake.

TIMON

Art thouthane?

MACBETH

Aye! But of Glamis. How of Cawdor? And then addressed me as king!

SYLVIO

Thou art a king here, in this netherworld between heaven and hell, the earth and sky. Free to roam and pluck, act as you will, free to crush the grass, to lift a glass, to tap 'dat... (trails off)

MACBETH

Thou art mad.

TIMON

He's on to something.

MACBETH

But I am sorely confused with my plight. Just this night, in my chamber, my lady, incarnidine, I dreamt her hands in my chest, then holding my heart, still beating in her fingers' grasp. My own bloody deeds still haunt my eyes. (beat) Is this a dagger before me?

TIMON

You appear to be in shock.

MACBETH

Hoy-day, what a sweep of vanity comes this way!
They dance! Like madness is the glory of this life.
As this pomp shows to a little oil and root.
We make ourselves fools, to disport ourselves.

SYLVIO

You have done our pleasures much grace.
Set a fair fashion on our entertainment,
Which was not half so beautiful and kind;
For madness is kind, and just,
Just as the anger and sorrow of death and dying is a kind of madness.
In fact, just now, departed hence, three travelers; a noblewoman, a maiden, and a clown. Running from their fate, into , god knows what. The forest?

(MORE)

SYLVIO (CONT'D)

Within the safety of fortified walls they fled
from fear. Within the tall trees they'll feel
it still. Yet here, by this fire, under this
sky, between this and betwixt that, they were
at peace. How come they by that?

MACBETH

I'll not stay here. Have you eaten on the
insane root that takes the reason prisoner?

TIMON

Have a look in his pot. There's madness for
you.

SYLVIO

My madness is in my method, though there be
reason enough for it.

MACBETH

What kind of answer is this? Art thou in
league with the weird women? Are there no
stones in heaven but what serves for the
thunder? -Precious villain!

SYLVIO

I have of late, but wherefore I know not,
gained all my mirth. This hale promontory,
look you, the air - Why it seems nothing more
to me than heaven on earth.

TIMON

He is mad.

MACBETH

Soft you; a word or two before you go.
I have done the state some service, and they
know't.
No more of that. I pray you...There is nothing
in this. I seek power; this is a step
On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap.
Stars, hide your fires;
Let not light see my black and deep desires:
The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be,
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.

*Exit MACBETH. TIMON and SYLVIO sit
in silence. Then,*

TIMON

Excellent madman! thou canst not paint a man
so bad as that guy. I kiss'd thee ere I kill'd
thee: no way but this;
Killing myself, to die upon a kiss.

SYLVIO

Shame not these woods by putting on the
cunning of a carper.
Be thou a flatterer now, and seek to thrive
By that which has undone thee: hinge thy knee.

*TIMON starts at this. Looks around
for answers.*

TIMON

I know not which way to go.

SYLVIO

Hither and yon?

TIMON

Up or down.

SYLVIO

Where liest o' nights?

TIMON

Under that's above me. (considers)
Where feed'st thou o' days, scoundrel?

SYLVIO

Where my stomach finds meat; or, rather, where
I eat it.

TIMON

Would poison were obedient and knew my mind.

SYLVIO

I see a cherub that knows thee.

TIMON

O, from this time forth my thoughts be clarity
or be nothing worth.

SYLVIO

Then take thy leave into thy nascent birth.

*exit TIMON. SYLVIO sits with his
neat, crackling fire, sending
sparks into the cobalt night, the
full moon rising behind. A wolf
howls distantly. Then a far off
cackle. Then a scream. Then
silence.*

SYLVIO

Now I am alone.

Curtain.