

The logo for Multiplay Drama, featuring the word "multiplay" in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font, with "drama" in a smaller font below it, and a white right-pointing triangle to the right of the text.

multiplay
drama

A teal-tinted photograph of a hospital room, viewed from above. A gurney with a white sheet is in the center. To the left is a sink and a chair. To the right is a bed with white linens. The floor is tiled.

A Dream

Chris Bush

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Chris Bush

A DREAM



NICK HERN BOOKS

London

www.nickhernbooks.co.uk

Characters

BAND
FESTIVAL-GOERS
VALERIE
LIAM
SARA
JULES
HIPPOLYTA
THESEUS
MIRANDA
FERDINAND
RITA
OLLIE
HARRIET
KITTY
ROB
LYSANDER
HERMIA
DEAN
PATIENT
HELENA
VIOLA
DIRECTOR
ASSISTANT
ORSON
MEDIC 1
MEDIC 2
QUINCE
RAMSBOTTOM
SNUG
FLUTE
SNOUT
STARLING
BERRY
VINE
IVY
ROSE
POPPY
HAZEL
LAUREL
ROWAN
ASTER
LOGAN

PUCK
O'BRIEN
TATIANA
RAJESH
CELIA
ROSALIND
DEMETRIUS
ABIGAIL
ERIC
NURSE
ROMEO
BEN
MOLLIE
DOCTOR
SEAN
CASSIE
GREG
MATT
LIZZIE
ADAM
PHOEBE
BEATRICE
BENEDICK
ORLANDO
CORIN
AUDREY
JACK
CHARLOTTE
HODGSON
RICHARDS
HUGHES
SEBASTIAN
ANTONIA
ANTONY
CLEO
DORIS
DAPHNE
DAVE
JIM
JEN
JON
PROSPERO

ARIEL
EGEUS
MATRON

And various extras

Prelude

An outdoor concert – somewhere like Don Valley Bowl. A festival atmosphere. At the back of the stage, a BAND on a raised platform. The rest of the stage is flooded with as many FESTIVAL-GOERS as will fit. They swoop on with a great rush of energy. These revellers wear general festival gear, with perhaps a few fantastical signifiers – more faeries present than you might normally expect. We're aware that most of the CROWD consist of couples – lovers of all ages and sexes, celebrating together.

The BAND plays. The CROWD roars. It's an uplifting, upbeat number full of heart and life. The CROWD might well sing along with the chorus, as if they know it well. To one side, we see VALERIE, a police officer, with LIAM, a paramedic. They shout over the continuing music.

LIAM. If music be the food of love –

VALERIE. Then this lot need more than earplugs for protection.

LIAM. Where's your romance?

VALERIE. Back home with a hot bath and a nice cup of tea.

They're joined by SARA, another paramedic.

SARA. Liam? Need you out front – got one to take in.

LIAM. On it. *(To VALERIE.)* Hang in there.

SARA and LIAM go.

Song: 'Kiss Me Tonight'

BAND.

OH KISS ME TONIGHT, WON'T YOU KISS ME TONIGHT
AND ANYTHING ELSE CAN WAIT

KISS ME TONIGHT, TONIGHT
BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE

OH KISS ME TONIGHT, WON'T YOU KISS ME TONIGHT
AND ANYTHING ELSE CAN WAIT

Through the throng comes JULES, fifteen, calling out in some distress.

JULES. Romeo! Oi, Romeo! Where are you? Romeo!

He pushes through the crowd and leaves.

BAND.

OH YOU'VE BEEN DANCING THROUGH MY MIND
IN STEEL-CAPPED DOC MARTENS
I DON'T THINK THAT IT'S VERY KIND
YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE STARTIN'

COS YOU KNOW THAT I CAN'T COMPETE
WITH ALL YOUR AIRS AND GRACES
STOOD HERE WITH MY TWO LEFT FEET
AND STARING AT MY LACES

OH KISS ME TONIGHT, WON'T YOU KISS ME TONIGHT
AND ANYTHING ELSE CAN WAIT
KISS ME TONIGHT, TONIGHT
BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE

Focus now shifts to THESEUS and HIPPOLYTA – a couple dressed as a very Bohemian bride and groom – think Glastonbury wedding chic – flowers in hair, floaty skirts and welly boots. They are drunk and in love. Again, they have to shout over the music.

HIPPOLYTA. Dance with me.

THESEUS. Almost our first dance.

HIPPOLYTA. What?

THESEUS. It'll be our first dance – in just a few hours.

HIPPOLYTA. So what's this?

THESEUS (*thinks*). Our last dance. Our last dance in sin.

HIPPOLYTA. I like the sound of that.

They come together and the BAND kicks in.

BAND.

I SWEAR THERE'S MAGIC IN THIS DRINK
BEEN SLIPPED SOME HOCUS-POCUS
THE ROOM IS SLIDING OUT OF SYNC
IT'S ONLY YOU IN FOCUS

I'M TRYING HARD TO DO THIS RIGHT
BUT I'M STILL HAVING TROUBLE
WHO LOVED WHO LOVED NOT AT FIRST SIGHT
DESPITE SEEING DOUBLE

OH KISS ME TONIGHT, WON'T YOU KISS ME TONIGHT
AND ANYTHING ELSE CAN WAIT
KISS ME TONIGHT, TONIGHT
BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE

Another couple – FERDINAND finds MIRANDA.

FERDINAND. Miranda!

MIRANDA. Ferdy! Over here.

FERDINAND. I lost you for a minute.

MIRANDA. All these people – they're like a sea – like an ocean.

FERDINAND. Here – get on my shoulders.

MIRANDA. Yes, Captain.

She starts to clamber on his shoulders.

BAND.

AND WHEN THE MORNING COMES
AND MY HEAD'S SO SORE
AND I'LL STILL BE LOST
AND I'LL STILL BE POOR
AND THE RENT IS DUE
AND THE MILK'S GONE SOUR
AND THE BOILER'S BUST
SO CAN'T EVEN SHOWER
THEN I'LL THINK OF YOU
AND IT'S ALRIGHT
BECAUSE I KNOW THAT WE KISSED LAST NIGHT

OH KISS ME TONIGHT, WON'T YOU KISS ME TONIGHT
AND ANYTHING ELSE CAN WAIT
KISS ME TONIGHT, TONIGHT
BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE
OH KISS ME TONIGHT, WON'T YOU
KISS ME TONIGHT
AND ANYTHING ELSE CAN WAIT

We focus in on HIPPOLYTA and THESEUS again, now right by the BAND.

HIPPOLYTA. Do you trust me?

THESEUS. What?

HIPPOLYTA. Do you trust me?

THESEUS. Of course. Why?

HIPPOLYTA. Then get ready!

THESEUS. For what?

HIPPOLYTA clammers up onto the raised stage, preparing to dive.

No – hold on –

HIPPOLYTA. It's okay – I trust you! Catch!

BAND.

OH KISS ME TONIGHT, WON'T YOU KISS ME TONIGHT
AND ANYTHING ELSE CAN WAIT

KISS ME TONIGHT, TONIGHT
BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE
OH KISS ME TONIGHT, WON'T YOU KISS ME TONIGHT
AND ANYTHING ELSE CAN WAIT
KISS ME TONIGHT
BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE

HIPPOLYTA takes a run-up to dive off the stage. A split-second before she jumps, snap to blackout. We hear sirens and general commotion.

ACT ONE

Scene One

The waiting room of the A&E department at Northern General Hospital. The stage is filled with dozens of people waiting to be seen (as many as seems feasible). THESEUS and HIPPOLYTA are at the reception desk (manned by OLLIE and RITA). With them, a few other members of their wedding party – HARRIET, KITTY and ROB. THESEUS has some blood on him and his arm in a makeshift sling – HIPPOLYTA limps and has a bloody nose. Clearly her stage-dive didn't go as planned. The whole wedding party are a little woozy and worse for wear.

As the lights come up, THESEUS and HIPPOLYTA are trying to register themselves at the desk. In this waiting area there are also two PATIENTS who are recording HIPPOLYTA's drunkenness on their mobile phones and sniggering to each other. [These actors will later become our DIRECTOR and ASSISTANT.]

THESEUS. Theseus –

HIPPOLYTA. And Hippolyta.

RITA. Right.

THESEUS. You might've heard of us.

RITA. Um, I don't think...

OLLIE. Can you give us your full names?

HIPPOLYTA. Sorry. Sorry. Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons.

OLLIE. Okay.

HIPPOLYTA. H-I-P-O... no – H-I-double-P-O-L-I –

THESEUS. Y!

HIPPOLYTA. L-Y-T-A.

OLLIE. Uh-huh.

HIPPOLYTA. Amazons as in warrior women, not websites. That's A-M-A –

THESEUS. That's enough, love.

HIPPOLYTA. Don't listen to him, he's only a duke.

RITA. Okay. Thing is... If we could get your *real* names, that's going to make everything a lot –

THESEUS. Who's to say they're not?

HIPPOLYTA (*very proud*). What's in a name?

THESEUS. Exactly!

RITA. It's just... Because you'll be in the system, yeah? You'll be registered –

OLLIE. Does the Queen of the Amazons know her NHS number?

HIPPOLYTA (*to THESEUS*). Are you going to let them talk to me like that?

KITTY (*to RITA and OLLIE*). I'm sorry about them, it's –

HIPPOLYTA (*before KITTY can say her name*). Ah ah ah – no –

THESEUS. You should never apologise for... for...

HIPPOLYTA. For love!

THESEUS. For expressing yourself. But yes, love too.

HARRIET (*to RITA and OLLIE, by way of explanation*). It was a BuzzFeed quiz.

RITA. Excuse me?

HARRIET. Wasn't some... They weren't rechristened by a guru or discovered some new, some spiritual, some... It was just a –

ROB. 'Which Shakespearian power-couple are you?'

OLLIE. Right.

KITTY. And they took it a bit too seriously.

THESEUS. There's nothing wrong with –

HIPPOLYTA. She's just jealous because she was Lady Macbeth.

RITA. Okay. Alright. Let's all just take a breath, shall we? Let's just try to... Because you are going to be here a little while.

HIPPOLYTA. We can't stay long.

OLLIE. It's a busy day for us. With the festival in town, it's always –

HIPPOLYTA. We can't.

THESEUS. We can't, really – we're getting married tomorrow.

OLLIE. Okay –

RITA. Congratulations, but –

HIPPOLYTA. At the first sight of the sun –

OLLIE. Yeah, see that might be –

THESEUS. Early-ish, anyway. I mean...

HIPPOLYTA. Our love rising with the new dawn.

THESEUS (*yawning*). A lie-in wouldn't be the end of the world, actually, but –

RITA. We'll process you as quickly as we can, but no promises.

KITTY. Great. Thank you. (*To HIPPOLYTA.*) Come on.

OLLIE. Take a seat. Someone will call you.

HIPPOLYTA. It's Midsummer.

RITA. I'm sorry?

HARRIET. She means tomorrow. It's Midsummer.

RITA. Right.

HIPPOLYTA (*slurring slightly*). It's a special day.

OLLIE. Uh-huh. Like I say, we do have a backlog, but –

ROB. Of course – we're sorry.

HIPPOLYTA. It is. It means something. (*To THESEUS.*) They don't believe us.

THESEUS. That's okay.

RITA. Guys, if you could – ?

ROB. Yep, yep, we're going. Just been a long day. A long few days, actually.

HARRIET. In retrospect, a four-day pre-wedding bender doesn't sound like the best laid of plans, but...

HIPPOLYTA. It was a brilliant plan. (*To RITA.*) You don't believe me, but you will.

KITTY. Alright, Hippogriff. This way.

HIPPOLYTA (*still to RITA*). Do you believe in love?

RITA. Uh, sure.

HIPPOLYTA. Do you believe in magic?

RITA. Um...

HARRIET. Just don't engage with her, really.

HIPPOLYTA. You will do. You'll believe in all sorts by the time the sun rises. Love and magic and everything in between.

HIPPOLYTA steps back from the desk, staggering slightly. Lights shift. She straightens up and delivers the following verse as a boozy sort of invocation.

The nights are short. The fulsome moon climbs high.
 And Artemis rides roughshod 'cross the sky
 Her bugle sounds, and mortal men all start;
 Tonight they know the Goddess hunts the hart.
 Through fertile field and moonlit vale,
 O'er babbling brook and dappled dale
 From forest dark and mountains sharp and steep
 And through the minds of lovers as they sleep
 No prey is safe from Cupid's trusty bow
 No God, no man, no creature high or low
 No strength on earth that can resist its charms
 Nor pauper not enriched by loving arms
 Confounds and conquers all, this sickness seems
 To have no cure, but to embrace your dr–

Before HIPPOLYTA can speak her last word she slumps back and is caught by THESEUS. A brief, worried pause, but then she starts to snore loudly. THESEUS and the wedding party manoeuvre her into a seat.

A shift in sound/lighting takes us from the naturalistic world of the waiting room into something that feels a little more abstract/magical/dreamlike. We now get a series of noises and movements from the entire waiting room – HIPPOLYTA's snores, coughs, throats

cleared, magazines being folded and put down, fingers being drummed on a chair, sighs, yawns, retches – any number of things. They start small and seemingly unlinked, but gradually they start to build and layer, becoming rhythmical.

As a pattern/beat becomes established, now various instruments begin to emerge from unexpected places, and the waiting room transforms into a full-scale band/choir. Perhaps we're also joined by an additional bunch of the FESTIVAL-GOERS being led in by POLICE – there for medical attention, but who lead the sing-song.

Song: 'A Dream'

PATIENTS.

IN THE MORNING, IN THE MORNING
ALL THIS WILL BE A BLUR

IN THE MORNING, IN THE MORNING
WE'LL REMEMBER WHO WE WERE BY DAY
BUT TONIGHT WE MIGHT JUST SAY

DON'T WAKE ME YET
TURN OUT THE LIGHT
THIS CRUEL WORLD IS MUCH TOO BRIGHT

JUST LET ME SLEEP
LEAVE ME TO DREAM

AND WHEN TOMORROW COMES I'LL WORK OUT WHAT IT MEANS
AND WHEN TOMORROW COMES I'LL WORK OUT WHAT IT MEANS

BUT WON'T YOU LET ME DREAM FOR NOW...
JUST LEAVE ME TO DREAM

Mood changes slightly. These lines might be divided up amongst soloists.

I COULD DO WITH A SPELL OF GOOD FORTUNE
I COULD DO WITH A SPELL OF PEACE
I COULD DO WITH A SPELL OF REDEMPTION
I COULD DO WITH A LITTLE RELIEF

I COULD DO WITH SOME MAGIC THIS EVENING
I COULD DO WITH SOME MAGIC TONIGHT
I COULD USE JUST A GLIMPSE OF THE FUTURE
TO KNOW EVERYTHING TURNS OUT ALRIGHT

SO GIVE ME A REST
GIVE ME A FRIEND
TELL ME IT ALL WORKS OUT IN THE END

GIVE ME A BREATH
GIVE ME A BREAK
GIVE ME THE HOPE IT'S OVER THE MOMENT I WAKE

AND WON'T YOU LET ME DREAM FOR NOW...
JUST LEAVE ME TO DREAM
LEAVE ME TO DREAM.

Song ends.

Scene Two

Still in the waiting room, the crowd has thinned out slightly, with PATIENTS being led/shuffling off as the song ends. From outside come HERMIA and LYSANDER. He wears motorcycle leathers – they both hold helmets. He limps heavily, leaning on her, some blood visible.

HERMIA. We're here – you're okay – we're here.

LYSANDER. Your dad –

HERMIA. I know.

LYSANDER. Is a psychopath.

HERMIA. Uh-huh.

LYSANDER. I mean it.

HERMIA. Come on –

LYSANDER. I think we just need to take a moment to acknowledge that.

HERMIA. Let's just get you –

DEAN, *an orderly, approaches them.*

DEAN. Easy now. You alright there?

LYSANDER. I've been shot.

DEAN. Christ – okay – okay, just –

HERMIA. He hasn't. *(To LYSANDER.)* You haven't.

LYSANDER. I have! Her dad shot me.

HERMIA. With an air rifle. Shot *at* you. He missed.

DEAN. Okay, so...

HERMIA. He came off his bike. Leg looks pretty bad.

DEAN. Right.

LYSANDER. Guess why I came off the bike. Go on – guess.

DEAN. Did, um, did someone shoot at you with an air rifle?

LYSANDER. Got it in one.

DEAN. Have you called the police already? We'll have to –

HERMIA. No – no police.

DEAN. If –

LYSANDER *(grimacing)*. Really – it isn't necessary.

DEAN. Okay, alright. Can I take your name?

LYSANDER. Lysander. Lysander Powell.

DEAN. And your date of birth?

LYSANDER. September ninth, 1989.

DEAN. Okay – that’s great. That’s lovely. I’m going to send a nurse to take a look at you in just a moment, alright? Can you take a seat for me?

HERMIA. Yep, sure – thank you.

DEAN. Great.

DEAN goes. HERMIA and LYSANDER sit. LYSANDER winces.

HERMIA. How are you doing?

LYSANDER. Been better.

HERMIA. Is there anything I – ?

LYSANDER. Have I mentioned that your dad’s insane?

HERMIA. It has come up, yeah.

LYSANDER. Come here.

They kiss.

HERMIA. I love you.

LYSANDER. I know. It’s inconvenient, actually, but –

She hits him playfully.

HERMIA. Shut up.

LYSANDER.

I love you too. Until the end of time.

HERMIA.

I love you past all reason and all rhyme

LYSANDER.

I love you in defiance of the odds

HERMIA.

A love for which I would forsake the gods

LYSANDER.

So at the temple of your toes I fall

With salutary kisses bless them all

HERMIA.

And I, sustained by naught but thy sweet breath

Shall feast between thy lips and fear no death.

Another PATIENT waiting for treatment cuts across their reverie.

PATIENT. Oh, get a room, will you!

This seems to temporarily snap them out of it.

LYSANDER. Sorry – sorry.

HERMIA. Are we crazy?

LYSANDER. You know who’s crazy –

HERMIA. I mean can we get away with this?

LYSANDER. My aunt will take us in. We can stay with her for as long as we like.

HERMIA. And we'll be safe?

LYSANDER. She's in the middle of nowhere. Nothing but sheep and anoraks, far as the eye can see. He'll not find us.

HERMIA. Maybe if I spoke to him again – maybe if –

LYSANDER. And let him finish me off?

HERMIA. He's not a monster, he just –

LYSANDER. Er...

HERMIA. He's protective. He thinks you're a bad influence.

LYSANDER. And that's why you love me.

HELENA, a nurse, and HERMIA's friend, enters.

HELENA. Hermia!

HERMIA. Helena – I didn't know if you'd be on.

HELENA. Sander – I saw your name – what happened to you?

LYSANDER. Her dad happened.

HELENA. Jesus. Let's have a look.

She examines his leg.

LYSANDER. He tried to shoot me, you know.

HERMIA. He shot into the air. He wasn't –

HELENA. Have you been drinking?

HERMIA and LYSANDER answer in unison.

HERMIA *(together)*. Yes.

LYSANDER *(together)*. No.

HELENA. Okay.

LYSANDER. Only sociably.

HELENA. Alright. Alright, I don't think you've broken anything, but I'm going to have a doctor take a look, and get you something for the pain.

LYSANDER. We need to leave tonight.

HELENA. That might be a problem.

HERMIA. We're running away. Well, we've already run away, I suppose. We haven't got very far yet...

LYSANDER *(to HELENA)*. You're going to help us, right?

HELENA. I'll do what I can. *(Calling over.)* Dean – can you get Mr Powell into bay six?

DEAN. Sure.

HELENA *(to LYSANDER)*. I'll be right through.

DEAN *brings round a wheelchair and wheels off* LYSANDER. HELENA *holds back* HERMIA *before she can follow.*

Aren't you a little old to be running away from home?

HERMIA. I'm a little old to still be living there. It's only for –

HELENA. And leaving someone else to pine after you?

HERMIA. Trust you to worry about Demetrius, even now –

HELENA. I'm just saying –

HERMIA. Thought you'd be glad to have me gone.

HELENA. Yeah? Because who could compete with the great Hermia?

HERMIA. I didn't mean it like that.

HELENA. Won't make a difference. I could be the last woman alive and he'd still have no time for me.

HERMIA. You never know. It's Midsummer – magic in the air.

HELENA. And it'll take something stronger than that.

HERMIA. I have faith. You'll think of something.

HELENA. Maybe. (*Beat.*) Well, to your love – bay six – I'll find you later.

HERMIA. Thank you.

HERMIA *hugs* HELENA *and goes.* HELENA *steps aside, taking out her mobile phone. Before she dials she takes a moment to practise her speaking voice, trying out different styles – friendly, sexy, casual, etc.*

HELENA. Hey, Demetrius... Demetrius, long time no speak ... Demi – how's it hanging?... Hey big boy, how's about we... Okay. Okay. You've got this.

She dials a number.

(*On phone.*) Hey! Hi! Hiya. Um. Guess who! No, don't. It's me, it's Helena, I... Yeah, no, I know I said I wouldn't, but... Hold on... Listen, just... Just... Grow up, it's not stalking, I'm just... Urgh! I'm trying to... Hello? Hello?

She hangs up.

PATIENT. You can't have mobile phones in here. It interferes. You're not allowed.

HELENA. Important, um, important medical business. Just... Actually – can I borrow yours a moment? Life and death. Going to have to insist, actually, so...

A little reluctantly, the PATIENT gives up their mobile phone.

Thanks. Cheers. Much appreciated. (*She dials again.*) Hey – Demetrius – think we got cut off... No – no, don't hang up – it's about Hermia!... Uh-huh. Yes, pretty, perky, perfect Hermia... I might do. What's it to... No, I do! I do! But you'll owe me, right?... Because I *care* about you. I'm not... Yes. Alright, yes!... She's here. Here at the hospital... No, she's fine. Lysander came off his bike, is all. He... Yes, he's going to make it!... Listen! They're trying to skip town... I know! So, I thought maybe we could grab a... Hello? Demetrius? Hello?

She sighs and hangs up again, handing the phone back to the PATIENT.

Here you go. Aeroplane mode from now on. Safety first.

HELENA *looks around a little guiltily and then leaves.*

Scene Three

A transition as we clear the stage. O'BRIEN, head of surgery, crosses, followed by a trail of surgery STUDENTS in scrubs holding notepads. TATIANA, head of medicine, crosses from another direction, followed by a similar gaggle of medical STUDENTS. Amongst these might also move PORTERS with trolleys, PATIENTS being pushed in wheelchairs, etc. General movement.

We now move to a staffroom, but we don't need to see much of it. Nominally in charge is PAULINE QUINCE, senior administrator, with her assistant NICK RAMSBOTTOM. With them are six teenage patients: FRANCES FLUTE, JIM SNUG, TOM SNOUT, ROBIN STARLING, JOSIE BERRY and EDDIE VINE.

RAMSBOTTOM. This our lot?

QUINCE. I believe so.

FLUTE. Greg did say he might try to –

RAMSBOTTOM. Well he's late then.

VINE. Wasn't he booked in for surgery?

RAMSBOTTOM. We can all come up with excuses.

QUINCE. Alright, Mr Ramsbottom.

RAMSBOTTOM. If he doesn't want to commit – because we've all committed, haven't we? You've committed – they've committed – I have *always* been committed – to the finer sentiments of the dramatic arts –

SNOUT (*aside, to FLUTE*). Reckon someone should commit him.

FLUTE *giggles*.

RAMSBOTTOM. What was that?

SNOUT. Nothing.

RAMSBOTTOM. Because I don't find that kind of language very appropriate, do you – in a medical environment? Almost as if no one was reading my daily haikus during mental health week.

STARLING. That was you?

SNUG. I did read a pretty mental limerick in the bogs.

VINE. Was that yours, Mr Ramsbottom? Are you the resident hospital genius, who tragically severed his p– ?

QUINCE (*cutting in quickly*). That's quite enough of that. I think we should make a start, so –

RAMSBOTTOM. Everybody listening, please. All eyes and ears on Mrs Quince. Go ahead, Pauline.

QUINCE. Thank you. Yes. So, as you'll be aware, we've got some special visitors with us this evening –

RAMSBOTTOM. *Very* special – hugely important – life-and-death stuff. (*Beat.*) Not *actually* life-and-death, but –

QUINCE. No. Not at all, but –

RAMSBOTTOM. But *television*, so it's pretty –

QUINCE. Yes. We have a documentary crew in the hospital. And what they want is to get a picture of what life here really looks like – something natural, unglamourised, unguarded –

RAMSBOTTOM. So we are going to practise, practise, practise.

QUINCE. No. Well, all we want –

RAMSBOTTOM. The entire fate of this hospital – of the whole NHS – is in our hands –

QUINCE. That – that isn't accurate, but –

RAMSBOTTOM. Now, we've chosen you as some of our most photogenic and least-infectious patients –

QUINCE. No, we're – Mr Ramsbottom, please –

RAMSBOTTOM. Yes Pauline? You're doing a splendid job.

SNUG. So, um, sorry – what is it you want us to do?

RAMSBOTTOM. Patience, my patients. (*Laughs too much.*) 'Patience, my patients.' I've got to write that down –

BERRY. Is this going to take long? Only I've got to go take me medication in a minute.

RAMSBOTTOM. That can wait.

BERRY. But if I –

RAMSBOTTOM. This is art – you suffer for it.

QUINCE. Okay, let's just... We just wanted to do something a little different – a little fun – something to show our lighter side.

RAMSBOTTOM (*to others*). So take this seriously, alright.

QUINCE. So management have asked us to put on a performance. You remember Mr Ramsbottom's impromptu, um, drama therapy sessions...

General groans from the others.

FLUTE. I told him, miss. It's hard to become the octopus when you're in a full-body cast.

RAMSBOTTOM. Well it is with that attitude.

QUINCE. Please. Now Mr Ramsbottom has furnished us with a script, and volunteered to direct –

RAMSBOTTOM. Merely a good shepherd, Mrs Quince, wishing to steer the muse.

QUINCE. Quite. And we were hoping you'd all –

BERRY. Do we have to?

RAMSBOTTOM. Did man have to climb the moon? Did Michelangelo have to sculpt *The Last Supper*?

SNOUT. I don't think that was –

QUINCE. Of course this is all voluntary, but it's a chance to –

STARLING. But it is for telly?

QUINCE. That's right.

STARLING. Go on then.

FLUTE. Yeah, I'm in. Why not?

QUINCE. And Josie – you're a dancer, aren't you?

BERRY. Yeah. I mean I do some clubs after school, but –

RAMSBOTTOM. I do have quite an extensive jazz and tap background. All the basic choreography is –

QUINCE. Quite. And Tom, don't you sing?

SNOUT. I, uh, well I've got this band, but –

RAMSBOTTOM. Classical, of course, far more my style. All the greats. Pavarotti, Michael Ball, Paul Potts –

QUINCE. Lovely, but I'm sure a more, um, youthful sound –

SNOUT. I'm up for having a try. I mean, if it's –

RAMSBOTTOM *sings a loud blast of 'Nessun dorma'.*

RAMSBOTTOM.

Nessun dorma! Nessun dorma!

QUINCE. Thanks, Nick, but –

Now he really goes for it.

RAMSBOTTOM.

Ma il mio mistero è chiuso in me

Il nome mio nessun saprà!

No! No!

QUINCE. Nick, please.

RAMSBOTTOM. Just an example for the youth, as it were, Mrs Quince, of the expertise I'm willing to impart.

QUINCE. Uh-huh. (*Now to SNUG and VINE.*) And I've heard plenty of you two on the hospital radio doing your voices, your impressions –

SNUG. Yeah, it's just a laugh, but –

VINE. Just us mucking about really.

BERRY. They're brilliant. You totally should.

VINE. Yeah?

BERRY. Dead good. Cracks me up.

RAMSBOTTOM. Comedy – of course – always been my first love –

QUINCE (*ignoring RAMSBOTTOM, to others*). Amazing. So we're all on board. Now I'm sure –

RAMSBOTTOM *launches into a somewhat manic rendition of the 'Dead Parrot Sketch' from Monty Python's Flying Circus.*

RAMSBOTTOM. Resting! He's not resting! He's bleeding demised! He's gone to meet his maker! He's shuffled off his perch and gone to join the choir invisible! (*Beat.*) And so on.

QUINCE. Thank you. (*To others, handing out papers.*) Now, I'd like you to all take a look at the text Mr Ramsbottom has prepared, obviously just a work-in-progress for now, and we're going to meet back in a couple of hours for a read-through.

STARLING (*flicking through*). We can change it?

QUINCE. Absolutely.

RAMSBOTTOM. Absolutely not.

QUINCE. We can talk about it later. Alright, thanks, everyone. Have a good read. Lots to get stuck in to.

All but RAMSBOTTOM begin to leave.

RAMSBOTTOM. Good session, everyone – I'm feeling energised. (*Beat.*) If anyone wants to hang back to discuss costume options, then... No bother. We'll do it later.

RAMSBOTTOM *follows off after the others.*

A Nick Hern Book

A Dream first published in Great Britain as a digital exclusive in 2023 by Nick Hern Books Limited, The Glasshouse, 49a Goldhawk Road, London W12 8QP

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Cover image: Pixelci/iStock

Designed and typeset by Nick Hern Books, London

ISBN 978 1 78850 728 8

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