

**by the way, there's no escape (a Hungarian musical theatre ficlet collection)**

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# by the way, there's no escape (a Hungarian musical theatre ficlet collection)

by [Carmarthen](#)

## Summary

Assorted ficlets based on Hungarian musical theatre that isn't *Rómeó és Júlia*. See notes for an index.

## Notes

1. Métella, Gardefeu, and Bobinet battle carnivorous plants (*Párizsi élet/La vie parisienne*)
2. Józsiás attempts to introduce Bakszén to a new kink (*Ördögölő Józsiás*)
3. Tiger Brown has an ill-advised attraction to gangsters, including Spats Colombo and Bernardo (*Threepenny Opera / Some Like It Hot / West Side Story*, in the Hungarian versions all characters played by the same actor)
4. Austrian Der Tod and Hungarian A Halál, kissing in a tree (*Elisabeth*)
5. A little bit of Luigi Lucheni's thoughts in the afterlife (*Elisabeth*)
6. Métella and Gardefeu talk about Bobinet...in bed (*Párizsi élet/La vie parisienne*)
7. Bakszén, Prince of Hell, develops an interest in Sergeant Jonel (Bakszén/Jonel, *Ördögölő Józsiás/Menyasszonytánc*)
8. Dilló and Rosa discover things in common (Dilló/Rosa, *Ördögölő Józsiás/Rómeó és Júlia*)
9. Death stalks Maxim de Winter (Death/Maxim, *Rebecca/Elisabeth*)
10. Gardefeu and Bobinet's first kiss (Gardefeu/Bobinet, *Párizsi élet/La vie parisienne*)
11. Puck improves on Christmas (Puck, *Szentivánéji álom*, G)
12. Puck visits ancient Rome (Puck, *Szentivánéji álom*, G)

# (Métella, Gardefeu, and Bobinet fight carnivorous plants, G)

## Chapter Summary

For drcalvin, who asked for "Párizsi élet - Inspired by Atov's art, how would you write Bobinet, Gardefeu and Metella fighting their way through a forest of giant man-eating plants? The cancan bar is on the other side, you see."

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"I think we took a wrong turn," said Bobinet, "somewhere back by the river."

"Don't complain," Gardefeu replied cheerfully, taking Métella's hand and helping her over a fallen log. She looked utterly charming and serene in cool leafy green despite the humid heat of the jungle, while he and Bobinet were merely sweaty and bug-bitten. He was beginning to suspect her of practicing dark arts. "After all, we brought you on our honeymoon—a true sacrifice for friendship—else you'd be back in Paris, already leg-shackled to dear cousin Juliette—"

Bobinet shuddered, then slapped the back of his neck. "Cursed mosquitos!"

"Poor lambs," said Métella, with a sympathetic pat for each of them, "they're not biting me at all."

Sometimes Gardefeu rather thought he hated his lovely new bride.

"*Anyway*," continued Bobinet, peevishly, "I only meant that this does not look like a first-rate hotel. It looks like a jungle full of horrible things lurking in the dark to devour us."

"Don't be ridiculous." Gardefeu tried not to look too closely at the huge, nodding plants clustered around the base of the trees. It was dark, but that was only because the canopy high above was dense with leaves. Jungles were supposed to be dark, and they were still on a path—albeit a rather small one—ergo, they would eventually reach the hotel. Where else would a path lead?

"Do you smell that?" Métella's hand on his arm was uncomfortably tight, and that, more than Bobinet's rather usual nerves, unsettled Gardefeu.

There was indeed a smell, like roast meat and cake. As they stood there it grew stronger.

"Why...we must be near the hotel at last," said Gardefeu, less firmly than he would have liked, "nothing to worry about."

But there was something faintly wrong about it all, an undertone of sickly sweet rot, and none of them moved from where they stood.

"I think," said Bobinet, staring fixedly off into the shadows, "that we should retreat to the dock. Very, very slowly."

To be sure, the giant plants did have an ominous air—the large, toothed oval flowers reminded Gardefeu a bit of some tiny flytraps from the New World that he had seen once in the greenhouse at the Jardin des Plantes. But they were only plants, and plants could not possibly hurt them....

Something moved, with a flash of scarlet, and the smell grew stronger.

"Raoul, my love," said Métella, very quietly, "if those giant things are flytraps, what do you suppose they eat? Surely not giant flies."

"What likes roast pork and chocolate cake?" Bobinet's voice was sharp, bordering on hysteria.

"They're just plants. Plants can't move that fast—"

With an audible snap and the sound of panicked squeaks, one of the smaller traps slammed shut on a monkey. After a moment there was a horrible silence.

"What was that you were saying about a retreat, Bobinet?"

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Later, in the hotel salon, Bobinet nursed a scotch morosely, not even glancing at the stage, where a trio of third-rate cancan girls performed a lackluster routine. Métella had kept up a cheerfully biting critique, but Bobinet had neither cracked a smile nor reminded them that he had been completely correct about the path. It was most unlike him.

Well, this was the kind of thing Métella was good at, for some particular value of "good" that rarely ended up with someone in jail. Gardefeu nudged her to look at Bobinet and made a helpless face.

"What's wrong, darling?" She scooted over to sit next to Bobinet, more closely than was proper—but really, what was proper about bringing your best friend on your honeymoon, especially when you knew full well he used to regularly fuck your wife, and probably still wanted to? Gardefeu signaled the waiter for another scotch. No, make that three. "You can unburden yourself to me. Tell Métella what's bothering you."

"I was just thinking about Juliette," Bobinet said, giving her a sheep-eyed look, if said sheep was rather depressed and already three sheets to the wind on very expensive scotch. "You know, at least the plants would have been quick. That monkey didn't seem to suffer much. All this—" He waved a hand, encompassing the salon, the cancan dancers, and Gardefeu and Métella. "—well, it's just delaying the inevitable, isn't it? You know how my aunt is."

Gardefeu did, intimately. A very...determined...woman, Madame de Quimper-Karadec. He grimaced and downed his scotch, trying not to think about it.

"Is that all?" Métella patted Bobinet's arm and gave Gardefeu a look that he was pretty sure should worry him. "Well, we'll just have to create such a scandal that not even the marquise can overlook it."

She smiled, sweet and innocent as a newborn lamb.

After a moment of hesitation, Gardefeu knocked back the scotch he'd ordered for Métella, and pushed the third glass over to Bobinet. He was pretty sure they'd need it.

## Chapter End Notes

Much later Métella has a flytrap-inspired dress made for her. Both Gardefeu and Bobinet are deeply uncomfortable with how turned on they are.

# (Józsiás introduces Bakszén to ice cubes, Bakszén/Józsiás, T)

## Chapter Summary

*If there was one thing Józsiás had learned in the last year, it was that it was better to spring new things on Bakszén quickly, so his hedonism kicked in before his contrarian competitive instincts. Everything went so much more smoothly that way, and he didn't have to replace his wardrobe due to scorch marks as often.*

## Chapter Notes

As usual, privatesnarker's fault. Somehow. 100% an excuse for dumb jokes.

Takes place in the handwavy polyamorous fixit AU of [Diplomatic Relations](#).

If there was one thing Józsiás had learned in the last year, it was that it was better to spring new things on Bakszén quickly, so his hedonism kicked in before his contrarian competitive instincts. Everything went so much more smoothly that way, and he didn't have to replace his wardrobe due to scorch marks as often.

This had worked well so many times that Józsiás had made the mistake of getting complacent.

Which was why Bakszén was currently plastered into a corner on the opposite side of the room, doing a fine impression of a wet cat. "That's...sick," he said, eyeing the glass of ice water in Józsiás' hand with extreme distrust. "Why would you."

Bakszén's utter affront was actually kind of hilarious, but like cats, Bakszén hated being laughed at, and Józsiás *did* want to get laid, so he suppressed his laughter.

"Let me get this straight," said Józsiás, and began ticking off points on his fingers, "you walk around in leather and spikes. You're fine with bondage, blindfolds, nipple clamps, using your henchmen as furniture, spanking, biting, and scratching. You wear a bullwhip as a belt and definitely know how to use it. You and Durmonyás have some sort of weird thing going on with his tail, don't think I haven't noticed just because leather pants don't show stains, he makes faces during court sometimes—no, I *don't* want to know the details—"

Bakszén shrugged.

"—and you're objecting to a few ice cubes?" Józsiás took a sip of nice, cold water, just to watch Bakszén repress a shudder of horror.

"Ice is *kinky*," said Bakszén, almost primly.

"I see," said Józsiás, refraining from hysterical laughter only by heroic effort (it was a good thing he was a hero). "So what you're saying is...that I'm kinkier than you."

There was a long silence, during which Bakszén's eyes narrowed to slits. "Not at all," he purred, launching himself from the wall into a predatory slink that neatly slid him into Józsiás' personal space. He hesitated scarcely a moment at the sudden proximity to the dreaded ice. "Do your worst, mortal."

Józsiás smiled. Sometimes Bakszén's competitive instincts were very, very useful.

# (Tiger Brown/Spats Colombo/Bernardo, Threepenny Opera/Some Like It Hot/West Side Story, T)

## Chapter Summary

Tiger Brown has a terrible weakness for dangerous men.

## Chapter Notes

For privatesnarker, my fellow in 'there's no such thing as a crack pairing, just one that hasn't been convincingly written yet.'

In the Hungarian musical productions of *Koldusopera* (Threepenny Opera), *Van, aki forrón szereti* (Some Like It Hot), and *West Side Story*, all three characters were played by the same actor. From actorcest are many crack pairings born...

Tiger had sworn it would be different this time. He'd lost everything once: his job, his reputation, his wife, his daughter, what he had believed to be his greatest friendship. The former to the latter, of course. Wasn't it always so?

Mackie'd land on his feet of course, like the alley tomcat he was. He always landed on his feet, Mackie, when other men were lying in the rubble of their lives wondering where theirs had been blown to. It had been that way during the war and that way after, and Tiger had been a fool to believe it would be otherwise, a fool to believe he was different, that Mackie *cared* about him.

No more trusting men like Mackie, not here in New York, no matter how sharp they looked in a suit or how pretty they talked, no matter how lonely it got surrounded by strangers. No matter how dark the nights got, or how strong the moonshine.

He wasn't a copper anymore, but that didn't make it any safer to go home with smooth-talking gangsters, no matter how much they might remind him of Mackie. No matter that Mackie had been fair as an angel, boyish in his beauty and sharp as a knife only under it, and this Puerto Rican lad was dark and sleek, that other one in the gray bespoke jacket angular and Italian. The both of them together were pure sin and twice as dangerous, two twin blades unsheathed and deadly. No one would ever mistake them for angels.

Tiger had sworn he wouldn't listen to the devil on his shoulder anymore, that skip in his heartbeat around dangerous men, that warm curl in his belly when someone wrapped hard



fingers around his wrist and offered to buy him a drink in the kind of bar where no one remembered your name.

But the moonshine is burning in his gut, the darkness warm and encompassing. Nothing in here feels quite real; it's a dream that will fade away when the dawn breaks, safely insubstantial. If they can forget that out there they'd be enemies, at each other's throats over territory like stray dogs, if they can forget that and kiss each other like the promise of a fight, all flashing teeth and punishing hands—

If they can touch him with sure fingers that burn like brands, hold him down and make him near weep from *feeling*, already more alive than he's been since he and Mackie were young together, young and unafraid—

—who is he to say no to two such devils, he who is only a man, and weak?

# **(Der Tod/A Halál, Elisabeth, first kiss)**

## Chapter Summary

For sadademort, who asked for "A Halál/der Tod because what happens when death kisses death oooo (I'm so sorry)."

## Chapter Notes

Moved from my general ficlet collection because I think it goes better here.

### **I.**

There are many spirits who take the living through the final veil; in this one, Death sees an echo of self, of shadowed wings and starlight and the silence of beyond, and yet—

—this spirit is almost human in his passion, although his touch, when it comes, is as cold as Death's own, almost familiar.

It is indefinably different, kissing someone who kisses back, laughing darkly against Death's lips, cool fingers weaving into starlit hair; but when they part Death feels no more understanding of the act, no lingering ghost of warmth to lend a brief semblance of life.

"I don't understand what she sees in you," the other spirit says, fingertips pressing lightly against his lips, and laughs again.

### **II.**

Elisabeth's assassin, the poor weak fool, sinks to the floor, forgotten as their eyes meet, falsely guileless blue to unfathomed dark. They know each other at once: how can they not, when for the first time they both feel the pull of sleep, of eternal rest and the peace of darkness? The longing pulls at Death's soul, an ache deep under his breastbone, and he wonders for a moment if this is what they all feel, all their short little lives: how strong his Elisabeth must have been to resist it!

He reaches out first, fingertips tracing over sharp cheekbones, a crow's-beak prow of a nose, the curve of a mouth as cruel as his own. The other shudders faintly under his touch, face remaining as impassive and cold as marble.

Death cannot say who leans in first, only that they lean closer, close enough to share the breath that only mimics life, closer yet. The moment holds, and holds—and breaks. They do not touch.

The ache remains.

# Opening Night (Luigi Lucheni, Elisabeth das Musical)

## Chapter Summary

Tonight will be different, Lucheni has decided.

*Elisabeth das Musical.*

## Chapter Notes

For Atov, who requested my favorite *Elisabeth* character and got the one I find most interesting. I had Serkan Kaya's Lucheni more or less in mind, but I have similar feelings about KMM's Lucheni and I was definitely imagining a Hungarian Death, so it goes in this collection anyway.

The play proceeds as it has every night.

At first, Lucheni had simply told the story, a dry progression of the facts as he knew them, without emotion or argument. He had made his argument already, with a needle file at the dock and later in the memoirs they took from him in prison, in smuggled paper and sooty ink and moonlit nights.

Night after night, the same story, the details of the childhood of a woman he had never known, the almost prurient peering into her heart, her brittle marriage and her distant motherhood, the lost dreams of someone trapped in a beautiful cage. He had felt no sympathy: at least her cage was well-provisioned, appointed in every luxury. What was the life of one woman when her death could speak of the plight of so many?

He had counted the performances, then, or tried to, but there was no way to record a tally, and after the first few hundred nights, they blurred together, a mad whirlwind of entrances and exits, the glare of lights and out in the darkness a faceless audience—the same or different, he did not know. Watching. Judging, just as the Voice did.

When he could no longer count, he rebelled. He refused to say his lines. He spoke to the other actors, who went through the motions of their parts with the mechanical perfection of clockwork, as unresponsive to his pleas and shouts as waxen dolls, save for *him*, aloof and cold. *He* only regarded Lucheni with puzzled amusement, as if he were a pet who had done something unexpected.

It changed nothing. Every night the curtain rose, the actors played their parts, the curtain fell.  
He could not change the story.

But tonight—tonight—will be different.

## (Métella/Gardefeu, talking about Bobinet, T)

### Chapter Summary

For privatesnarker, Métella and Gardefeu talking about Bobinet...in bed.

Based on the Hungarian production of Offenbach's *La vie parisienne*, *Párizsi élet*.

"But you love me best," Gardefeu said, with enough smugness that Métella felt he ought to be taken down a peg, even if he had just shown her a very good time *and* taken her to the opera first.

She bit her lip, because she knew it drove him wild, and pretended to be thinking. "I don't know," she said, "Bob *is* such a dear awkward creature, and uncommonly good with his hands."

"Good wi—" Gardefeu broke off, faintly flushing as his imagination took over, and Métella smiled to herself. By October she'd have both of them in the bed at once, she was sure of it.

# Dancing on the Edge of Disaster (Bakszén/Jonel, Ördögölő Józsiás/Menyasszonytánc, G)

## Chapter Summary

On some handwavy fix-it post-canon tour of the mortal world Bakszén, Prince of Hell, takes an interest in one very unpleasant Sergeant Dumitrescu Jonel, and Durmonyás prepares to duck for cover. Nothing actually horrible takes place in the course of this ficlet.

Crossover between *Ördögölő Józsiás* and *Menyasszonytánc*.

## Chapter Notes

Context for this bit of crossover crack: drcalvin and I were talking about Jonel, and how no one in *Menyasszonytánc* could stand up to his horribleness, and then she said Bakszén probably wouldn't even notice. So yeah. (We also concluded that when Bakszén gets bored, Mamuk will probably give Jonel a job torturing damned souls and he probably fits in better as a devil than he ever did as a human. So I guess that's a... happyish...ending for someone who really doesn't deserve it but hey, it gets him out of the human world?)

"Good dancer," Bakszén commented, although he seemed a lot more interested in Sergeant Jonel's ass than his footwork. "Nice...boots." Bakszén licked his lips, and despite the fact that he should have grown used to Bakszén's ability to make the tiniest action unutterably filthy years ago, Durmonyás blushed.

The human's dance had grown more frenzied, but it was a kind of frenzy that Durmonyás had a very bad feeling about. He was not unfamiliar with people who tended to explode at a moment's notice, but there had been something nasty about how Jonel had spoken to the innkeeper, a kind of venom that reminded Durmonyás of Lord Mamuk in the sort of mood that led to someone being flayed alive for vellum. When the music stopped and Jonel exploded, he was pretty sure the result was going to be much, much worse than one of Bakszén's tantrums.

"What about Italy?" he said desperately, while Bakszén continued to eye Jonel with entirely the wrong kind of consideration for someone who wasn't even a minor foreign dignitary. "I hear it's warm this time of year."

Bakszén didn't seem to hear, tapping his claws idly against one leather-clad thigh in thought. "What was that they called him earlier? *Sergeant*? Do you think that's something like a prince?"

"I very much doubt it." He wasn't worried about Bakszén's safety—oh no, he had nothing to worry about, not from a human—but it would be sad to see such a nice little village with such lovely kosher plum brandy razed to the ground in the aftermath of one of Bakszén's terrible ideas. And Jonel, his mad, ominous dancing rising to a frenzied crescendo, was a walking terrible idea, shiny boots and attractive profile or no. "He's probably nobody important. You know, they say Verona has very nice gardens and—"

Bakszén waved an imperious hand at him. "Shh, Durmi, I'm thinking."

Well, that was it. They were fucked. Might as well go see if the innkeeper had any of that plum brandy left before the music stopped and Durmonyás, as usual, had to pick up the pieces.



# (Dilló/Rosa, first kiss, Ördögölő Józsiás/Rómeó és Júlia, T)

## Chapter Summary

A banished Dilló goes drinking in Verona and meets a—she must grudgingly admit—slightly intriguing human woman.

Crossover between *Ördögölő Józsiás* and *Rómeó és Júlia*.

## Chapter Notes

For privatesnarker, who prompted Dilló/Rosa, first kiss.

"Men are pigs," Rosa said, tossing her blond braids back over her shoulder. She knocked back another shot of fairy brandy without a flicker of a grimace, and poured herself another with a steady hand. "Especially the ones who pretend they're so nice, the ones who treat you like a goddess until they wake up one morning and forget you ever existed."

Dilló curled her lip; it wouldn't do to let the mortal know she was a little impressed by her fortitude. The first time Jázmina's little mortal peasant boy had tried fairy brandy he'd ended up under the table after two shots. Bakszén had called him a pathetic weakling, taken a third shot, and joined him.

"Even the ones who don't pretend to be nice still find ways to fuck you up," Rosa went on. "This is good stuff. You want another?"

There weren't any pure-hearted knights. Dilló had known that since she was a girl, sitting in the library alone with the lawbooks while the other fairies had their hearts broken every week over this man or that. So she'd thought, well, why not try a man who couldn't hide what he really was, not to anyone with half a brain (which ruled out half of her people, but that wasn't *her* problem, until it was). That he'd been beautiful, too, all arrogance and sex in leather, that hadn't hurt.

And look how well *that* had turned out for everyone involved. "Just give me the bottle."

Rosa had her head tilted to one side and was eyeing Dilló with a funny kind of speculation, eyes sharp and bright. She was nothing at all like Jázmina, sweet Jázmina with her core of steel—all Rosa's steel was on the outside, honed to shining spikes. And then, instead of handing her the bottle, Rosa reached over and brought Dilló's hand to her lips, brushing a kiss over her wrist. Her lips were soft.

That was...unexpected, and surely it was only the brandy that flushed Dilló's cheeks, and not some silly chit of a mortal unsettling her with children's games.

Rosa's smile had edges to it, and there was a challenge in the words she breathed next, leaning across the table so she could whisper into Dilló's ear, "What do you say we finish the bottle somewhere more private, fairy girl?"

Two could play that game, Dilló thought, and pulled Rosa into a kiss that was as much answering challenge as she could make it.

She didn't need another Jázmina, and God knew, not another Bakszén. But she was far from home—she had no more home—and where was the harm in sharing a little warmth in the night?

# **The Face in the Mirror (Maxim de Winter/Death, Rebecca/Elisabeth crossover, T)**

## Chapter Summary

*The face in the mirror every morning looked less and less like his own. Maxim could feel the bones of his face when he shaved—with slow, careful strokes so he could pretend his hands did not tremble—more prominent every day.*

(Warnings for suicidal ideation, cancer, and character death.)

A crossover between the musicals *Rebecca* and *Elisabeth*.

## Chapter Notes

Scion\_of\_Capulet asked for Death/Maxim de Winter, first and only kiss - I didn't quite get to the actual kiss and it came out pretty morbid. Oops?

As usual, I'm imagining both characters played by the same actor, because apparently that's my kryptonite, plus it wouldn't really make sense otherwise.

The face in the mirror every morning looked less and less like his own. Maxim could feel the bones of his face when he shaved—with slow, careful strokes so he could pretend his hands did not tremble—more prominent every day. He could feel the cough still lingering in his chest from the previous winter, dry and faint and nothing to worry about, as he told his wife, because he could not bear for her to worry about anything.

But the face in the mirror remained the same, the hands that brought the razor up to his chin long and thin, but not the skeletal things he saw if he looked down, knuckles protruding against thin papery skin. He had not expected to live so long, once, and if he had not had his wife, her youth and unwavering devotion, her unbending strength, well—would there have been any point in putting off the flames a little longer?

When the cough grew worse, he was sure of it: whoever he saw in the mirror, it was not his own reflection. The eyes were all wrong, hard and dark and glittering like a field of stars, as terrifying as the immensity of space, a reminder of how brief and inconsequential mortal life truly was.

Still the reflection that was not a reflection mirrored his motions perfectly, whisking the soap to a foamy lather, rubbing it over a chin that surely had never seen a stray hair, as smooth and

pale as it was, scraping the razor for show over the planes and hollows of a cheek less cadaverous than his own. If he grimaced, it grimaced; if he laughed, a silent humorless laugh, it laughed.

Maxim found it comforting, in a way. With the reflection, he did not have to pretend that he was all right, that he did not wake sweating from dreams of dark hair and red lips and a woman's laugh, biting back a scream so he would not wake the other woman beside him, the woman who deserved so much more than a broken old man (*a murderer*, said a woman's voice, an iron-hard voice with a crackle of fire in it, *call yourself what you are, Mr. De Winter*). With the reflection, he did not have to pretend that there was no hard, aching knot in his chest, a blackness that every day seemed to suck away more of his breath, more of his strength. He did not have to pretend that he did not believe deep in his heart that it was *her* revenge, somehow, from beyond the grave—but for him there would be no merciful bullet (Frank would do it, if he asked, and it would destroy him; he would not ask).

The reflection knew all of that, and it would not worry for him. It cared nothing for him, regarding him every day with cool, inhuman indifference, pretending to shave, patiently imitating every slip, every tremor, as he grew clumsier. It was difficult to shave by touch, now, but he managed.

The morning the reflection smiled at him, he knew it wouldn't be long.

# Breaking the Rules (Bobinet/Gardefeu, first kiss, *La vie parisienne*, T)

## Chapter Summary

*There were rules about this kind of thing. It was all right to flirt outrageously when your best mate decided to put on a dress at a certain kind of masquerade party.*

For sophia-sol, who prompted Gardefeu and Bobinet's first kiss.

Based on the Hungarian production of Offenbach's *La vie parisienne*, *Párizsi élet*.

## Chapter Notes

Yeah, I'm slightly fixated on Bobinet in a dress, idk.

Gardefeu's general uselessness was as carefully cultivated as his dress, calculated to ensure that no one ever asked him to do anything resembling work. That did not, in fact, mean he was stupid. Most cancan dancers were well under two meters tall, and for some reason Gardefeu had never understood, remarkably few had profiles sharp enough to slice bread.

There were rules about this kind of thing. It was all right to flirt outrageously when your best mate decided to put on a dress at a certain kind of masquerade party. It was all right to dance with him, laughing every time you both tried to lead and ended up colliding in a tangle of warm limbs and frothy layers of silk flounces. It was all right to tease him until he blushed and scowled and looked entirely like himself again under the artfully applied makeup that softened the harsh lines of his face into something approximating feminine beauty, if the light was kind.

It was, perhaps, not quite the done thing to catch him by the wrist and draw him into a corner, to lean in and kiss him as his eyes widened, his hands fluttering wildly before settling awkwardly onto Gardefeu's shoulders.

Gardefeu had never paid very much attention to the done thing.

When they came up for air, Bobinet was blinking at him in startlement fast veering into panic. He caught Bobinet's hands before he could bolt. "Did Métella help with your makeup? I can't imagine she loaned you the dress, or you'd have been thrown out in the streets for indecency the moment you walked in the door."

"You," Bobinet said, after a moment in which a remarkable series of emotions chased each other across his mobile face, "are a right prick."

But he didn't let go, so Gardefeu grinned and kissed him again.

## **...and a raven in a pear tree... (Puck, Christmas decorations, Szentivánéji álom, G)**

### Chapter Summary

*A Midsummer Night's Dream/Szentivánéji Álom*: Puck...improves a little upon Christmas.

Day 4 of the Shakespeare Advent Challenge on Tumblr: decoration.

### Chapter Notes

More Shakespeare than *Szentiván*, but compatible with both if you assume a certain level of fix-it for the latter, and I felt it fit thematically better in this collection.

As the days grew shorter, Puck's lord and lady grew equally short with each other: Oberon gloomy and jealous, Titania snappish as a dog with a thorn in her paw. If only it were something so simple as a thorn! Puck, who had set a thousand thorns a-pricking, could have plucked one out as easily.

The third time Oberon cuffed him about the head with no humor in it and gave him that glowering storm-cloud look, he took himself away. There were a hundred lands to explore where no one would tell him to begone—or if they did, their trifling mortal curses would carry no weight.

The cities had changed since last he ventured into the mortal realm. They were larger now, the stink of iron about them even stronger. Terrible things shrieked to and fro on iron set into the ground, and Puck hastily leapt away, half a league in a single step, to a safer remove.

But as the snow blanketed everything in a soothing layer of wet chill, the burn of the iron dulled, and he returned, cautious, giving the iron monsters a wide berth. Although the sun had long set, the city glowed like a jewel, the warmth of light reflecting off the waters of a river he remembered as dull and muddy, refracting in myriad glitters from the snow. Every window gave off yellow warmth.

He drew closer, wrapping invisibility around himself as he flew upwards, and peered in a window. Inside mortals sat around a table laden with food, roasted meat and fruit and rich cakes, draped about with fresh green pine boughs. A tree stood in the corner, draped with garlands of berries and nuts.

Perhaps, in their wondrous inventive foolishness, the mortals had thought of something wise to light up the dark of winter: this piney spiced warmth, candlelight and color, the joyous music rising from somewhere in the streets below. Surely this would bring a smile to Oberon's melancholy and sooth Titania's ruffled feathers.

He had a few ideas for improvements, though.

The tree was the oldest in the forest, a giant stretching taller than the rest, and Puck had to admit that the birds drawn to the berries he'd strung through its branches made finer decorations than any spun glass bauble wrought by mortal hands. His lord and lady did not like him to steal children anymore, but the birdsong was sweeter than those grubby red-cheeked brats going from door to door and singing of things Puck did not understand. Trees of orange and clove, confused by their journey from warmer lands and a touch of fairy magic, blossomed and fruited with vigor about the roots of their king, filling the air with their scent.

The wine, ah, that he left as it was; weak stuff, next to fairy liquor, but sweet and rich with cinnamon and cloves, a little tart: a mortal novelty to compliment the array of delicacies that had gone missing from this larder and that.

He stood back and surveyed his work: a feast-hall in the forest, its vault the canopy of the trees above, their branches lit with will o' the wisps (promised their pick of the leftovers if they would only stay in place the night long), garlanded with birds fluttering here and there and fragrant with spices.

Puck plucked a pear from a tree and gave the raven sitting in it a critical look. A raven in a pear tree just didn't sound quite right...but it was no matter; neither Oberon nor Titania had ever been much for ornithology.

Yes, this would cheer them quite well; they were fortunate indeed to have a Puck looking out for them. Well-satisfied, he flitted away again to summon the court.



# (Puck visits Rome, Szentivánéji álom, G)

## Chapter Summary

For drcalvin, who asked for Puck to visit ancient Rome. Shakespeare-compatible.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He comes to Rome with some British slaves, in the breaking of sandal straps and the souring of goat's milk; they whisper in their native tongues, northern and southern and western, and they do not dare curse him. You never know who listens in the shadows.

He comes to Rome with a cohort of German auxiliaries, tall blond Marcomanni who find their braids tangled and their weapons dulled while they slept, and who curse the mischievous spirits, but not too loudly and never by moonlight.

He comes to Rome by every road, with every conquered people, a thorn in every foot and a burr under every saddle. He skims the milk and molds the bread, rots the garum (can any tell the difference? the slaves ask, but not where their masters can hear), rusts hobnails and shield bosses, cracks tile, slips rings from the fingers of bathers, yanks hounds' tails, wakes sleeping babes to crying. Never-sleeping Rome is rich sport for a spirit like him.

He is a pest, a curse, their pucca, their puk, but he is *theirs*. Sometimes when a British girl weeps, heart-thin and exhausted and afraid she will be beaten if her sewing is not done by morning, she will fall asleep and wake to find it done, stitched by a needle finer and sharper than iron could make. Sometimes when a young soldier is afraid, wet and cold and far from his mother's hearth, he will find in his bowl a barley cake, still hot from the ashes and dripping with honey.

They leave him cups of milk and smooth stones, crusts of bread and little hard apples. Perhaps it is only animals that take the food, crows the stones. But it is better to leave them, better to be the lonely spirit's friend than his enemy.

## Chapter End Notes

Apologies for extremely dodgy linguistics - Puck probably only dates from the 14th century, etymologically.



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