

PRIME

A full-length comedy in verse by
Ellen Margolis

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

ERDOS, a serious young man.

DAR, female.

DION, male.

These two are royals from adjoining kingdoms who have only met recently. They are dressed simply, prepared for travel. They are excited and nervous about what lies ahead, and coping in their different ways.

CONSTANCE, female.

CORNELIUS, male.

TREY, male.

Constance and Cornelius are sister and brother, close in age. Constance is a little older and more reserved; Cornelius is more emotional and impulsive. He dresses with a sense of style. Trey is not manipulative or a player; he simply falls for both of them.

The Qs:

QUINN, sharp, clever. Smile can be menacing.

QUEENIE, female, large, sexy, charismatic.

QUENTIN

QUEASY

These two are followers, somewhat scary, like henchmen.

QUERY, female, sneaky, expressive, good mover, doesn't speak.

The Qs are hearty, high energy, loud. Cheerful, but with hair-trigger tempers. Costumed like school crossing guards, with sashes of a family tartan if possible, as there is something Scottish about them.

The Seven, from a different land entirely:

ALFA, head of this tribe.

BERNIE, female.

CHARLEY, male.

DELTA, female.

ERNIE

FARLEY

GREG, male.

Characters are all in their teens. Except where specified, actors of any gender, ethnicity, or physical ability may be cast. Family resemblances within groups would be ideal, but costuming can also help establish those connections.

SETTING

A beautiful valley, and the kingdom nearby. All should be created primarily through the imagination. Ladders for trees, etc. Something that suggests a cave for Erdos.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Prime was originally produced at Woodrow Wilson High School, Portland, Oregon, in February of 2015.

Production Team:

Director and Choreographer: Matthew B. Zrebski; Scenic and PR Design: Jamie M. Miller; Costume and Styling Design: Morgan McFadden; Lighting Design: Jeff Woods; Original Music Composition and Sound Design: Matthew B. Zrebski; Properties Design: Shayla Norris-York and Sofia Vilches; Stage Management: Zoe O'Loughlin.

Cast:

ERDOS	Henry Hakanson
DAR	Elena Braxton
DION	Michel Castillo
CONSTANCE	Sydney Yeagers
CORNELIUS	Luke Burton
TREY	Aidan Sivers-Boyce
QUINN	Guthrie Stafford
QUENTIN	Gwyneth Bushman
QUEASY	Elijah Moon
QUERY	Gracie Dills
QUEENIE	Jenna Hillenbrand
ALFA	Abbey Hanson
BERNIE	Fiona Murphy
CHARLEY	Zachary Johnsen
DELTA	Mattie Richardson
ERNIE	Kyle Turner
FARLEY	Andrew Foran
GREG	Lukas Aberle

Crew:

ASM/Sound Operator: Molly Girsch. ASM/Backstage Lead: Zoe Stuckless. Costume Leads: Kai Clayton, Sarah Hall-Dolezal. Styling Lead: Elizabeth Sikora. Scenic Lead: Emily Coker. Rigging Lead: Mary Michels. Photography: Jenna Hillenbrand, Steve Patterson. Stage and Costume Construction: The WHS Stagecraft/Styling classes.

Dedicated with love to Matt, Jamie, and the original cast and crew.

(Lights up; ERDOS alone at the exact center of the stage.)

ERDOS: A chopstick. A sock.
A pant leg. A glove.
A single kidney, just one lung.
Below without above.

An eyebrow. An antler.
A shoelace. A hand.
A bicycle with just one wheel.
One footprint in the sand.

(Erdos lifts one foot and stands like a stork for a moment, then starts to hop away.)

(A moment later, enter DAR and DION at a run, perhaps from over a hill or rise.)

(Erdos quickly hops away to where he can observe them from a discreet distance.)

DION: You're out of breath. We have to stop someplace.
Let's rest right here.

DAR: But we don't know it's safe!

DION: We've come so far, I'm sure our track's gone stale.
It's getting dark, they must have lost our trail.
Besides, we're not so valuable, your Maj—

DAR: We're royalty! They won't give up so fast.
We have to move. My dad will never quit;
Get up, you know I'm right, no talk, that's it!

(Dar tries to take a few more steps, but nearly faints from exhaustion.)

DION: You're overwhelmed. The journey was too draining.
And look—I'm feeling drops, it's started raining.
Please trust me. Get some sleep now if you can.

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DAR: And in the morning?

DION: We'll stick to the plan.
You'll go your own way, find some honest work,

DAR: And you'll go yours and find out what you're worth.

DION: Exactly. If I got the chance, I could
Learn something practical with steel or wood,
Or maybe leather? Come, it's not too damp here.
You can stay dry and warm, we'll make our camp here.

DAR: You've been a good friend to me, true and strong.
In other circumstances —

DION: Don't go on.
We neither of us wanted what they planned.

DAR: No one should have their whole life pre-ordained.
Arranging marriage for two adolescents?
No. That's a path to sorrow and resentment.
To have a partner forced on you for life:
"You lucky kid, we've chosen you a wife"
—Or husband, spouse, or consort, or whatever—
Without a chance to look around?

DION: Ugh. Never!

DAR: It's like they're saying everything you do
From now on happens in a world of two.

DION: "We choose Prince Dion for you. Wed him promptly!"

DAR: "Here's Princess Dar. That's that. Your fate's accompli."
Forget exploring any other mate
Or anything at all. Just go stagnate.
Your story winds up here. End of the line.
One stupid face to look at for all time.

DION: There's no need to be hurtful —

DAR: Erp, I mean
Forget investigating other scenes.
Or for that matter, having your own story –
'Cause, truth to tell, I'm equally as boring.
I've never done a thing outside of school
But riding horses, playing music –

DION: Cool!

DAR: Or learning languages or playing polo,
Or blowing glass, composing for the oboe,
Or how to shoot a partridge at ten meters
And hand it over to the chef to feed us.

DION: You talk like that's all nothing. It's a lot!

DAR: But when it comes to real life, I've done squat.
Sure, I can hunt, fish, dance, and paint with oils,
And all the other tedious stuff that royals
May do to fill their time, but it's so dreary.
I want some friction in my life, you hear me?
A chance to make it on my own!

DION: I get it.

DAR: Or someday I'll be thirty and regret it.
I'm sure you're nice. You're fine. And if we had to,
Like if the world were ending, I'd be glad to –
Or if the human race was near to dying –

DION: We've pretty well established you're not buying.
Here, use my jacket if the ground's too hard.
A nice long sleep will help us be prepared
For where our quest may lead us –

DAR: No! I'm scared.
Let's just go back and tell them yes, we'll do it.
The truth is, we'd be wiser to go through it.
We could get eaten by a bear or panther.

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Those birds sound nasty! Here's my final answer:
 I'll marry you like everyone's expecting.
 Why did we even think about objecting?
 And hey, you're right, there's gonna be a storm.
 Let's hurry home where we'll be dry and warm.
 And later in the week – what were we dreading?
 We'll join our kingdoms, and ourselves, by wedding!

DION: Your Majesty, we're both too good for settling.
 You're tired and you're anxious. It's upsetting
 To think there might be danger come to pass,
 But for my money, you can kick the ass
 Of any scary beast or weather system.
 If nothing else, you'll *talk* 'em to submission.

DAR: Yes. Thanks for that. Right.

DION: No more second guessing.
 No peddling backward, swerving, or regressing.
 Tomorrow finds us swinging for the bleachers.
 So no more talk of made-up scary creatures.
 Just lie down. Go on. Close your eyes. Good night.

DAR: (*Yawning:*) That does sound good. You know, I think I might.

Hey, buddy? How's about a back-up scheme?
 Let's meet here in a year if we're – (*Sleeps.*)

DION: Sweet dreams.

(*Sound of rain.*)

(*Dion glances around, watchfully, then sleeps.*)

(*Erdos emerges.*)

ERDOS: Two, yes, it's double,
 But not much to say.
 The options are polar,

It's towards or away.

It's northbound or southward,

Come here or get out.

Not complex or subtle:

A *whisper*, a SHOUT.

With two you know either

It's hell or it's heaven.

No real complications

Like five, say, or seven.

With two there's no issue,

No narrative drive.

There's not much to work with

Like seven or five.

Or three! Even three!

(Lights change; rain fades out.)

Three is win, place, or show.

With three, you get drama;

It's ready, set —

CORNELIUS: *(Entering a bakery:)* YO!

CONSTANCE: *(Entering. This scene takes place in the same location, but at a different time than Cornelius's scene:)* Hellooooo?

CORNELIUS: You there? I need —

CONSTANCE: Excuse me? I'd like to buy something?

CORNELIUS: Yeah, hello! For my sister, please. Before she wakes up. I'm going to need one of the blueberry tarts. It's perfect for her. The color. That glossy purple blue black. If she were a color, she'd be —

CONSTANCE: I was thinking a lemon bar? Or—? Sorry? Hello? It's our anniversary, the thing is. A sad day, but still —

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CORNELIUS: I want to surprise her! Before she wakes up! She'll never believe I got up before her. I'll put it on her nightstand. "What's this?"

CONSTANCE: Worth celebrating. Not because it's sad. Because it's –

CORNELIUS: Us. Anniversary of us.

CONSTANCE: Or – when the bird died?

CORNELIUS: When our parents left – they were always leaving, but the *last* time they left, which we could tell was the last time. Mother packed all her nicest scarves, and the very last thing that happened was –

CONSTANCE: On their way out the door –

CORNELIUS: She said,

CONSTANCE: She said to him, to Father: "Bertram, your coat. Your good winter coat."

CORNELIUS: And it was *April*. And she looked at him significantly.

CONSTANCE: Like this?

(Constance and Cornelius both give a look.)

CORNELIUS: So we knew.

CONSTANCE: We knew.

CORNELIUS: And two days went by. We stared at each other, primarily. For two days. And then the canary –

CONSTANCE: Madame Vermicelli –

CORNELIUS: She was called something – it's slipped my – funny –

CONSTANCE: fell –

CORNELIUS: Madame Vermicelli, that was it—

CONSTANCE: she fell off her perch.

CORNELIUS: Dead.

CONSTANCE: We hadn't thought to feed her. We hadn't thought to feed *ourselves*.

CORNELIUS: And Constance said—

CONSTANCE: (*Calmly:*) "I see." And Cornelius burst into tears. Tears spurting out of his little face. "Cornelius," I said, "collect yourself."

CORNELIUS: She never scolded me! Never! She was the oldest, yes.

CONSTANCE: I'm older by ten months, but I try not to—

CORNELIUS: *I* was the one who—if anything—

CONSTANCE: Corey has always been the bold one.

CORNELIUS: Except this particular day. "Cornelius," she said, "collect yourself." She saved us.

CONSTANCE: "We're our own bird now, and our own parents, too. Bertram and Lydia are gone, and we're a family."

CORNELIUS: "No one can know. We can't have anyone splitting us up. So no telling anybody, ever." Oops.

CONSTANCE: Hello?

CORNELIUS: Well, I guess it doesn't matter anymore. We're old enough to—hey! I need a tart, you see. Blueberry. *That* one. The biggest.

CONSTANCE: Hello!

(*Enter TREY.*)

TREY: Yes?

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CONSTANCE AND CORNELIUS: *(Each pointing:)* How much for that?

TREY: Uh, I don't really work here. I mean, I just clean up.

CORNELIUS: Well, where is somebody who can sell me a tart? And quickly, please. I want to surprise her.

TREY: They're all busy with the —

CONSTANCE: The wedding! Of course! I understand.

CORNELIUS: I don't understand. Is the shop open or not? Are these baked goods for sale, or not?

TREY: I guess you can have it.

CORNELIUS: Thank you so much!

TREY: That's a good story. Your brother. Your sister. The bird.

CONSTANCE: Cornelius.

CORNELIUS: Constance. Home.

(Trey hands something to Cornelius, who rewards him with a dazzling smile and exits. Trey stares after him, smitten.)

CONSTANCE: How much?

TREY: Uh...five?

CONSTANCE: That seems very fair. Here you go.

(Constance pays and exits; Trey remains for a moment, taken with her. Exits.)

(Rain. Dawn. Dion and Dar on the ground, Erdos nearby. Dion stirs.)

DION: *(Quiet alarm:)* I slept too long. The sun is sneaking through.

By now I should have been long gone from you.

The world is round, or so they say, my dear.

If it is meant to be, I'll meet you here
In twenty days and nights, or twenty thousand,
When we our futures and our depths have sounded.

(Dion picks up his pack and backs away from Dar, crouching. He smacks into Erdos.)

I beg your pardon! How much did you hear?

ERDOS: Not much. Some gooey stuff. Oh, and "my dear."

DION: Can you be cool?

ERDOS: My lips are sealed, I swear.
But you don't seem to want to leave her there.

DION: It's complicated, that's all I can say.

ERDOS: It always is. That's why I stay away
From all that stuff and focus on mathematics.
No complications, romance, or dramatics.

DION: You mean to tell me you're some kind of hermit?

ERDOS: Not some kind, but *exactly*. I confirm it.

I like it here. It's quiet. I can focus.

And no one bothers me! No noise or ruckus.

My days I spend in happy contemplation
Of numbers – add, subtract, multiplication.

And after that I often observe others

Like vagabonds or pickpockets or lovers

Who've found it best to sneak away by night.

DION: You do this voluntarily?

ERDOS: That's right.

DION: But isn't there a family to miss you?

A mom to hug you? Sibling slug or kiss you?

A family of three or five or seven?

You must have someone –

ERDOS: Youngest of eleven.

(Dar stirs in her sleep, mutters.)

DAR: Purn durfer?

DION: I should be off. Quick! Your story!

ERDOS: Then may I speak in prose?

DION: Of course, go for it.

ERDOS: I was left on the roof of a coach as a baby. Nobody saw me fall off except my next closest sister. I bounced down the road in my baby seat, and all she did was blow raspberries at me through the back window. Plllllph! Fortunately, I wasn't hurt, and soon I was taken in by a poor but honest flock of mathematicians and number theorists who were happy to have an extra set of fingers and toes around. They fed me on donuts and bagels from the break room. When I turned sixteen, they handed me a bundt cake and told me it was time to go make my own way in the world. And would I mind if they just grabbed a slice and ate at their desks, because they did need to be getting back to it, so good luck then, and off you go!

And here I am.

DION: A hermit. And why not if that's your thing?

ERDOS: But what of you, sir?

DION: Sir?

ERDOS: Your dad's the King?

DION: I guess I'm not the greatest at disguise.

ERDOS: A little dirt might help to fool the eyes.

(Dion begins to smear dirt on himself.)

DION: Say, you won't tell?

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ERDOS: Tell who? This valley's empty!

DION: There's surely a reward.

ERDOS: That doesn't tempt me.

DION: I'll need some work.

ERDOS: The village may have openings.

DION: The village! Right. I'll do my best.

ERDOS: Here's hoping.
Good day then, sir! I mean, good day, uh, *you*.

(Exits.)

DION: Good day. And to you, Princess Dar, adieu.

(Lights up on Cornelius up a tree, writing in a journal; Constance on a bench, working with papers. As before, they are in separate times and spaces.)

(Trey enters between them, raking leaves. He starts to read over Constance's shoulder.)

TREY: *Volunt*.

CONSTANCE: What?

TREY: *Volunt*. Isn't it? "We want." Not *volent*. "We will want." Oh hey, it's you. Lemon bar.

CONSTANCE: My brother is. I bought it. I mean yes. I mean Hi.

CORNELIUS: Hi.

TREY: *(To Cornelius:)* I like your shoes. *(To Constance:)* *Volo*. "Wishing, wanting."

CORNELIUS: Thank you.

TREY: *(To Cornelius:)* You're up my tree, actually.

CORNELIUS: What?

TREY: That's my tree. For sitting. No problem now, but when I take a break...

CORNELIUS: (*Starting to flirt:*) I don't think it's your tree.

TREY: Of course. Trees belong to everyone. To mother earth. But that is my branch.

CONSTANCE: You know a lot of Latin for a—baker? Leaf raker?

TREY: You know surprisingly little Latin for a—?

CONSTANCE: Tutor. For the royal nieces and nephews.

TREY: Really? (*To Cornelius:*) Move over.

CORNELIUS: There's not room for two of us.

TREY: Move over so you can see. On the branch. Behind your left knee, it says "Octavia plus Sisto."

CORNELIUS: (*Looks.*) Nope.

TREY: (*To Constance:*) Must be nutsy at the palace. What with the couple run off and all.

CONSTANCE: Nutsy is exactly what it is.

TREY: How are those little nephews and nieces? Bit of a handful? (*To Cornelius:*) Double or nothing?

CORNELIUS: Double what?

TREY: (*Covering his eyes:*) Under your right hand it says "Norman sucks dill pickles."

CORNELIUS: (*Looking:*) Nope. Though that might be a *drawing* of a dill pickle.

TREY: Why are you in a tree?

CORNELIUS: Why not?

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TREY: Call it a hunch, but I don't think when you got dressed this morning, your plan was to sit in a tree.

CORNELIUS: I'm hiding. I work at the palace. It's a nutsy day. What with the royal couple run off.

TREY: What do you do?

CORNELIUS: Assistant Stylist. If the wedding ever happens, and if you ever get to see the bridesmaids' dresses –

TREY: –unlikely –

CORNELIUS: –the petticoats were my idea.

TREY: You must be so proud.

CORNELIUS: Shut up.

CONSTANCE: Oh, they're darling!

TREY: What's that?

CONSTANCE: My students?

TREY: I shouldn't have interrupted your work.

CONSTANCE: I'm glad you did. Whoo! I'm trying to be bolder. Like my brother.

TREY: The lemon bar. Did he like it?

CONSTANCE: Four bites.

TREY: Chomp. Chomp. Chomp. Chomp. That is bold.

CONSTANCE: He left me one.

TREY: Chomp.

CONSTANCE: We share everything.

TREY: No, really. Petticoats! Fantastic.

CORNELIUS: I suppose you save little orphaned puppies in your spare—hey! What *do* you do? I thought you worked at the bakery.

TREY: I do.

CORNELIUS: Are you lost?

TREY: I do a little bit of everything. I'm a factotum.

CORNELIUS: Is that a fact?

TREY: (*Climbing up to get closer:*) Totally.

CONSTANCE: You have to be. Bold. These days.

TREY: These days? How old are you?

CONSTANCE: I'm old-fashioned, I guess. Not on purpose.

TREY: No, it's nice.

CORNELIUS: For whom?

TREY: Hmm?

CORNELIUS: For whom do you factotum?

TREY: Factote. The verb is factote.

CONSTANCE: I mean, if I were my brother right now, I'd have done something bold.

(Cornelius and Trey are almost kissing.)

TREY: Like what?

CONSTANCE: Like—

CORNELIUS: Here! (*Writing on Trey's hand:*) Here's my name and the color of my house. If you can find me, we'll have a picnic.

CONSTANCE: Like invite you on a picnic. Tell you where we live.

(Trey pulls his sleeve down over his hand.)

TREY: *(To Constance:)* I'd love to see you again.

CONSTANCE: Me too!

TREY: Early mornings, I'm at the bakery. I'll take a break if you come by.

CONSTANCE: What time?

TREY: Anytime.

CORNELIUS: I should get down. Out of this tree.

CONSTANCE: I should get back to work.

TREY: Good luck with the royal people.

CONSTANCE AND CORNELIUS: Thanks.

CONSTANCE: Will you tell me your name?

CORNELIUS: Aren't you going to tell me your name?

TREY: Trey.

CONSTANCE AND CORNELIUS: Trey.

(They all see each other and register what's happening. Disbelieving, they move into a triangle. Trey, in a mild panic, extends his arms to keep them all at a safe distance.)

(Lights.)

DAR: *(Rising:)* This isn't good. That ground was awfully wet.

My trousers feel like diapers. You can bet

He woke up early, headed someplace dry.

"Oh, look! Let's camp here!" Sure, why not, let's try.

"And by the way, I'll slip out in the a.m.,

And leave you to the bugs and beasts and mayhem."

(Unrolling Dion's jacket and putting it on:) I miss him though.

No, no, I don't miss *him*.

Just – what? His voice, his eyes, his hands, his grin.

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Oh, hell. I'm sure it's just because I'm lonely.
No. Step it up. Today my job is only
To look for food, and work, and some good lodging,
And then there's always bloodhounds to be dodging.
Forget him! Up and at it, that's the plan.
And not another thought about that man.

(Dar exits.)

(Light change. Constance, Cornelius, and Trey are still in place.)

(From another direction, QUERY enters, an odd little sneaky person carrying a parchment flyer with the word "REWARD" large and visible. Query circles Constance, Cornelius, and Trey at a distance, comparing them to the flyer in her hand. They are too busy to notice. When Query has examined them thoroughly, she exits.)

TREY: It's no one's fault.

CORNELIUS: Obviously. I mean, if it *were* anyone's fault...

CONSTANCE: It's not. I won't do anything that would hurt my brother.

CORNELIUS: Really? I'm the one who's going to get hurt?

CONSTANCE: Corey?

CORNELIUS: Constance? *(To Trey:)* Are you planning to juggle us?

TREY: No. No! I was involved with *one* person once, and I couldn't even keep *that* in the air.

CORNELIUS: Fine. But now what?

TREY: I have a proposal. If we don't see each other, nothing bad will happen. I'm not saying I like this —

CONSTANCE: It does seem like the best way.

TREY: So. I stay away from the palace and the upper grounds. And you avoid the bakery and the park. Anywhere else we might run into each other?

CONSTANCE: I hate to claim the library, but...the library. I spend most of my weekends there. Corey?

CORNELIUS: The dance club. The art galleries. The zoo.

CONSTANCE: I'm afraid we're taking over everything.

TREY: That's all right. I'll spend more time practicing guitar.

CONSTANCE AND CORNELIUS: You play guitar?

CORNELIUS: No, no. Sober up.

(Puts out a hand to shake Trey's, solemnly.)

Goodbye.

TREY: Goodbye.

CONSTANCE: *(Shaking hands:)* Goodbye.

TREY: Goodbye. *(Starts to exit.)* Write me! Just kidding.

(Exits.)

CORNELIUS: Well done. Proud of us.

CONSTANCE: Yes.

CORNELIUS: Are you disappointed though?

CONSTANCE: Are you?

CORNELIUS: No. I mean, a little. I liked him. But you're the one who's...

CONSTANCE: What? Oh. Say it.

CORNELIUS: You're the one who's never had a boyfriend.

CONSTANCE: I haven't needed one. I don't need one.

CORNELIUS: I couldn't bear to lose you.

CONSTANCE: You never will.

CORNELIUS: All right. *(Beat.)* Any word on the royal runaways?

CONSTANCE: I guess we'll all hear if anything happens. And the little lords and ladies still need their lessons. Walk with me?

CORNELIUS: At least you have something to do. Only so many times you can iron a bridesmaid dress. Boring.

CONSTANCE: Make yourself a fancy hat from scraps.

CORNELIUS: I'll make *you* a fancy hat.

CONSTANCE: *(Kissing Cornelius on the forehead:)* You're a fancy hat.

(They exit.)

(Erdos enters, counting his steps under his breath. Dar enters, sees him, tries to catch up.)

DAR: Excuse me. Sorry! Hi? Hello? YOU HEAR ME?

ERDOS: Eleven, thirteen...maybe not so near me?
I'm trying to work out a complex pattern
Not to be rude, but there's no time for chatter.

DAR: I'll leave you if you'll help me find some food,
Or point me toward some work, however crude.
It's been a while since I ate or drank,
I cannot pay you, but you'd have my thanks.
If you'll give me a hand, I swear I'll vanish.
The thing is, I'm persistent when I'm famished.

ERDOS: That jacket's nice. I'll take it for some porridge.

DAR: Oh no, it's not for sale.

ERDOS: You'd rather forage?

DAR: It's just that...

ERDOS: Someone special left it with you?

DAR: What? No! I'm catching cold! I need it! (*Sneezing:*)
CHOO!

Now, what about a job? Will you not help me?
I'm smart, I'm—uh, I'm game, I'm fairly healthy.
I'm smashing at a dance, a real go-getter!
There must be someone hiring minuetters?
Or how about glass-blowing? 'Cause I'm aces
At turning fire and sand to jugs and vases.
Or then again, if what you need's translation,
I know them all, from Farsi to Dalmatian.

ERDOS: Your Highness, if you really don't mind labor—

DAR: My *Highness*? No! I'm just a woodsy neighbor,
Just out to gather kindling before night,
And looking for some poor provisions.

ERDOS: Right.
Don't worry, I don't care, won't tell, won't ask.
Though I would think you'd maybe wear a mask?
But anyway, if work is what you seek,
You might look at the inn across the creek.
I've also heard the pub will pay in scraps
For someone to clean out the oil traps.

DAR: My hero! It's experience I crave.

ERDOS: And off you go.

DAR: I'll leave you to your...cave?

(Dar exits; Erdos retires.)

(Trey enters with a pair of garden clippers. He starts tending to a tree or bush.)

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(Constance re-enters with a book.)

CONSTANCE: Oh! No, no. Wrong way.

TREY: Turned around?

CONSTANCE: I have a terrible sense of direction.

TREY: Me too!

(They share a brief swoon.)

NO! Exactly what we're not doing. Right?

CONSTANCE: Right!

TREY: *(Crossing past her:)* Goodbye! *(As he nears the exit:)* Oh.

CONSTANCE: What's that?

TREY: Nothing.

CONSTANCE: I thought you said "oh."

TREY: Couple of turtles, that's all.

CONSTANCE: Turtles?

TREY: Kind of old. Couple of eighty-year-old turtles. Looks like he's waiting for her to get ready. You know, like an old married couple.

CONSTANCE: Really? *(Runs over to see.)* Awww.

TREY: "Come on, Myrtle, the opera starts at eight."

CONSTANCE: "Keep your pants on, Blurtle, just trying to make myself pretty for you."

TREY: "You're *always* pr—" No. Right. Gotta go.

CONSTANCE: I'll see you. I won't.

TREY: Check check. Bye.

CONSTANCE: Bye.

(Trey exits. Cornelius enters, carrying snowshoes, which he then tries awkwardly to put on.)

(Trey re-enters with a snow shovel, sees Cornelius from the back.)

TREY: How great is this snow! *(As Cornelius turns:)* It's you. I'll go.

CORNELIUS: Do you mind? It's just – winter! I love winter.

TREY: Me too! *(A moment.)* Who cares? So do lots of people. *(Exiting:)* Hey!

CORNELIUS: Something?

TREY: Nope. Not at all.

CORNELIUS: Great.

TREY: Just a couple of puppies.

CORNELIUS: Good for them.

TREY: Trying to get up on their feet. Looks like the first time.

CORNELIUS: Stupid.

TREY: I know. *(Beat.)* You have to come see this right now!

(Cornelius runs over. They watch puppies.)

CORNELIUS: Do you think they're warm enough?

TREY: Not at all!

CORNELIUS: Send warm thoughts.

TREY: Hot cocoa.

CORNELIUS: Thick sweaters, you guys. Brrrr. MMMM.

TREY: Cuddling under big warm blankets. Nope.

CORNELIUS: Damn. Well, I guess –

TREY: No, totally.

CORNELIUS: I mean, watching puppies together.

(Gestures as if to say "how goofy is that?")

TREY: Yeah. Why do animals insist on doing cute things around us?

CORNELIUS: No *us*.

TREY: Exactly. Bye.

CORNELIUS: Bye.

(Cornelius exits.)

(Sound of wind, loud.)

(Trey runs into Constance, head down, heading into the wind, carrying some cloth bags.)

TREY: Whoops!

CONSTANCE: Whoops!

TREY: Shopping?

CONSTANCE: I don't like seeing you.

TREY: I'm sorry.

(Heads the other way, runs into Cornelius.)

CORNELIUS: *(Walking, clutched against the wind, head down:)* Ugh, the snow is so dirty now. *(Sees Trey.)* Quit it!

TREY: I'm not trying to—

CORNELIUS: Well you're doing a bad job of it.

(Trey changes direction, now face-to-face with Constance.)

CONSTANCE: If you run into Cornelius?

TREY: I won't.

CONSTANCE: If you accidentally do—he would like that turtle thing I think.

(Trey turns in place.)

CORNELIUS: If anything, you should be with my sister. Show her those puppies.

(Constance and Cornelius see each other.)

CONSTANCE: Oh no!

CORNELIUS: I'll go.

TREY: This

CONSTANCE: Has

CORNELIUS: Got

TREY: To

CONSTANCE: Stop.

CORNELIUS: Agreed.

TREY: I say we take a leaf from the royals. I'll head out of town. Start fresh. I don't mind. Nobody will miss me here. Except, obviously, you two.

CONSTANCE: Be well!

CORNELIUS: Take care!

(They head off, Trey separate from the others, but Constance and Cornelius soon drift apart and each of them drifts closer to Trey, till they are traveling in a big triangle around the stage, trying to stay safely away from each other.)

(Query sneaks in and begins to stalk them. She follows each one for a moment, comparing them to the flyer she holds.)

(Trey turns suddenly; Query speeds away.)

TREY: Weird. Anyway, (*Stopping:*) this ought to do it. (*Sees Constance and Cornelius.*) Damn.

CORNELIUS: Hey!

CONSTANCE: Oh, come on!

TREY: You! North! You! West! Me! This way!

(Erdos peeps out of his cave, glaring.)

(The trio exits, meets again.)

You! To the sea! You! To the icecaps! Me! To the high volcanoes!

(They exit. Erdos waits. They meet again.)

(Erdos lurches out and growls.)

ERDOS: To Mars! To Venus! To Saturn!

CORNELIUS: Do you mind?

TREY: We're trying not to do something.

CONSTANCE: But it isn't working.

CORNELIUS: You know what? We're all terrible at directions. Maybe we should *try* to meet here.

(A beat while they take this in.)

TREY: That should do it.

CONSTANCE: Sure. So this is it then. Really goodbye.

ERDOS: Oh, yes, by all means. Just not on my doorstep. Is that a remote possibility?

CONSTANCE: Sorry.

TREY: Our bad.

CORNELIUS: Off we go.

(Constance and Cornelius exit together; Trey separately.)

ERDOS: Three. How exhausting.
No thank you. Please stop.
So flipping unstable.
Slip, wobble, kerplop.

Now *four*, that's more like it.
No drama, no clatter.
With four you learn quickly
There's nothing the matter.

(He begins arranging four of something on the ground – maybe rocks and pinecones, or his shoes and socks.)

Four moves two by two,
Like Noah's collection.
It's easy to simplify,
Just a bisection.

(Moving the objects into pairs in different combinations:) It's easy
to break up,
Cinchy to split;
A couple of twos
Are the pieces of it.

(Growing bored:) As a matter of fact,
It's a big waste of time
Considering numbers
Other than prime.

What I like are those numbers
That stand by themselves
That can't be divided
By anything else.

Four's not worth the wind-up,
So let me be frank
And say like a Frenchman:

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Un deux trois quatre cinq.

Or even in German,
That "funf" looks like fun,
The countdown's beginning:
Five four three two —

QUINN: (*Off:*) RUN!

(Erdos is nearly run over as QUINN, QUEENIE, QUENTIN, QUEESY, and QUERY enter and begin to dance, a raucous hybrid of Scottish fling and punk.)

(They end with a flourish.)

(Erdos backs to the edge of the stage.)

Tonight will be epic, I feel!

QUENTIN: The ground here's just right for a reel!

QUEASY: My legs are on fire,
And I'm mad with desire:
Hold me down or I'll start to cartwheel!

QUENTIN: Wait! Something does not feel okay here.

QUEASY: But you reconnoitered all day here!

QUENTIN: I smell something odd.

I think — oh my god!

(Turns on Erdos.) A little rat's joined us to play here.

(They advance on Erdos, quickly surrounding him so he has no way to exit.)

QUINN: You're way out of line. You were silly
To spy on us for our dad. Really.
You need to get lost,
If you don't, there's a cost.
Our Quentin will tear off your willy.

ERDOS: You've got it all wrong; you're mistaken.
I swear I'm not trying to break in.
Your shindig looks lively,
But I'm not a spy, see,
I'm just here for some calculations.

QUENTIN: This gathering's private, you creeper.

QUEASY: We love teaching lessons to peepers.

QUENTIN: We don't like your nerve;

QUEASY: We're not soft on pervs.

QUEENIE: (*Sneaking up behind Erdos, startling him:*) Say hi
when you meet the Grim Reaper!

ERDOS: Gah! Listen, I'm no Peeping Tom.
I won't tell your dad. Or your mom!
Though I look like I'm caught,
My intentions are naught
But observing. Let's all just stay calm.

QUINN: At least you've got one thing to boast —
You've made it much farther than most.
Too bad it's for nada,
You trespassed. We gotta
Enforce our restrictions. You're toast.

ERDOS: I mean you no harm! Really, none!
I'm making a study. From One
To Infinity...ish
It's long been my wish —
Right now, though, I wish I could *run!*

(*A moment of tense silence, then Quinn breaks into a big smile.*)

QUINN: Ah, screw it, you don't seem half bad.
We've nothing against you, my lad.
You seem pretty mellow,

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A nice little fellow.

QUEASY: And what's more, you'd look good in plaid.

(Roars of approval from the Qs, who begin wrapping Erdos in scarves, etc., as he speaks.)

ERDOS: You mean it? You're not gonna pound me?

You'll just dance and caper around me?

I'm so glad you get

That I'm no kind of threat!

In fact, now I'm happy you found me!

QUEASY: We're not gonna beat you, that's true,

But now here's what we're gonna do:

We won't dance without you;

This party's *about* you!

You're part of the gang now.

ALL Qs:

WOO HOO!

QUENTIN: Get up now, get jiggy, get on it.

And dance like there's bees in your bonnet.

We don't have all night,

Get dancing, that's right.

It's easy, you'll see when you've done it.

(Dancing, in which Erdos is passed from partner to partner. Finally he steps out, winded, bent over double and holding his side.)

ERDOS: My god! They're relentless. No pity.

I'm worn out and nauseous and giddy.

QUINN: Hey!

QUENTIN: Where's—?

QUEASY: You get hopping!

We're nowhere near stopping!

ERDOS: I think I would rather they hit me
(As the Qs approach, to distract them:) Hey, guys, can I ask you
 to say

How you manage these late-night soirées?
 Your parents don't catch you?
 Does nobody watch you?
 How do you have such time to play?

QUINN: We've worked out a scheme that's real shrewd:
 There's no tracking such a big brood.
 With five, you can always
 Sneak one down a hallway,
 And they size things up unpursued.

(As Query pantomimes this:) Our Query's the sneakiest sneak;
 She flies down the hall for a peek,
 And when things are hushed,
 She comes back all flushed,
 And gives us the thumbs-up we seek.

QUEENIE: Once she signals, we slip and we creep,
 While the parents are counting their sheep.
 Then we're back in by dawn
 When we "wake" with a yawn
 And pretend that we've been sound asleep.

Though lately they've been awfully curious
 About one thing they find quite mysterious:
 Our shoes wear out so
 Which costs lots of dough.
 If they really knew why, they'd be furious!

ERDOS: Wow! You've sure got it wired —

QUENTIN: You brat!
 Distracting us with all this chat!
 You got us to talking,
 And sitting and gawking.

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Let's dance now, and no more of that!

ERDOS: I don't think I can, I'm too –

QUEASY: Rubbish!

You're in your prime, don't be so sluggish.

It's time you get skipping,

And stomping and ripping,

And helping us raise tonight's rumpus!

QUINN: Once you start, you will find nothing's finer.

It's better than sex! It's diviner!

And with one extra – YOU –

We may see something new!

ERDOS: And that just may be my stomach liner.

Besides, I have much more to ask.

How can you be up to the task?

Sure, dancing's faboo,

But the way that you do –

So boisterous, so long, and so fast!

QUEASY: By daytime, we all toe the line.

Between school and our jobs, it's a grind.

Our spirits get sapped,

Our energy zapped,

Time to party or else lose your mind!

QUINN: The pressure all day is immense,

It's exhausting, the whole future tense.

"What's your plan?" "Which career?"

"Whatcha doing next year?"

Dancing hard is our only defense!

QUENTIN: No more interruptions, let's move!

Nothing else feels as good as a groove.

Your mama did bless you

With a backside, and yes, you

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Better shake like you've something to prove.

(Enter Dion, unseen by the others. He wears an apron and carries a toolkit.)

(Erdos gets thrown out of the dance on a wide spin and checks in with the audience, while the movement behind him winds down.)

ERDOS: No kidding, I'm this close to herking.
It's too much for me, this berserking.
What's that? They've abated!
And before I'm belated!
Hoo-ee, I can breathe now. It's working.

QUINN: All right, that's an hour, let's check.
Our boots can't be worn out or wrecked.
They have to look good still,
As if we've just stood still.
How are they? Oh, crap.

QUENTIN: Ick.

QUEASY: Yuck.

QUEENIE: Bleck.

QUINN: Oh hell no! My shoes are in tatters.

QUENTIN: And mine are all shredded and shattered.

QUEASY: The stitching's in pieces,
There's sweat in the creases.

QUEENIE: They're nothing like new. That's what matters.
Our parents will lose it – no joke.
We'll all be locked up till we croak.
We'll spend our life grounded,
Barbed-wire-surrounded.
And every privilege revoked.

QUEASY: We can never again misbehave.

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Which means that tonight's our last rave.
Will we turn it down?

ALL: Never!

QUEENIE: We'll dance harder than ever.

ERDOS: Then I'm cooked! There's no chance I'll be saved.

(The Qs turn on Erdos and dance him faster than before.)

DION: Hey! What is this hullabaloo?
I'm here with a newsflash for you!
If it's meant to be joyous,
I'm afraid that this boy is
In line for the hospital.

ALL: BOO!

DION: I suppose it's not really my business,
But you're pushing this guy to the limit.
If it's shoes that need tending,
I'm all set for mending.
Just sit down and give me a minute.

(The Qs look angry and suspicious.)

What's to lose? I can see that you're hobbling.
I'd be happy to offer my cobbling
To your whole entourage,
And throw in a massage.
Your poor worn-out feet must be throbbing.

(The Qs put their heads together, then break on a loud grunt.)

QUINN: Let's see what you got, little fixer.
For our rips and our tears and our blisters,
Our flopping-off soles,
And our straggly holes.
After that, we'll get back to our mixer.

(Dion gestures to them to line up. Erdos, limping and panting, crosses to behind Dion, where he can watch but be protected from the Qs.)

ERDOS: Thank god! You just saved me, my friend.
They were dancing my life to an end.
I'm aching and thirsty,
And my lungs are, well, bursty.
Their shoes and my legs need a mend!

(Erdos watches as Quentin, then Queasy, gets a mend and polish from Dion. The shoe repair process is quick and stylized: a tug, a twist, a shine.)

(Meanwhile, Queenie turns away and retouches her hair and makeup with the help of Query.)

DION: Never mind, it's my pleasure, good man.
I need practice, and this sweaty clan,
With their feet so disgusting,
Will need lots of adjusting.

ERDOS: Thanks a heap! Stall them long as you can.

(After Dion has spruced them up, Quentin and Queasy go into a little soft shoe to celebrate. Dion can't help himself and joins in, then increases the level of difficulty. He's got moves.)

(Then he hurries back to work on Queenie, who turns to face him just as he sits back down. They draw everyone's focus.)

QUEENIE: I swear, if you mess up my shoes –

DION: You can thrash me however you choose.
But first give me a try,
And you might find that I –

QUEENIE: Oh, that's nice. That's the stuff! Oh aah ooh.

(When they are finished, Queenie struts away.)

(Dion works on Query's shoes, while Queenie moves to Erdos, who is simultaneously terrified and wowed by her.)

Your friend's awful cute. What's his deal?

His hands did a job on my heels!

Do you think he's attracted?

ERDOS: He certainly acted —

QUEENIE: Introduce me, you fool! Now! For real!

ERDOS: I'd like you to meet —

QUEENIE: My name's Queenie!

ERDOS: May I introduce —

QUEENIE: You're so dreamy!

And is that by chance

An awl in your pants,

Or are you just happy to see me?

DION: Oh my gosh! You're a knock-out for sure,

And no doubt lots of guys would endure

Any hardship or trial.

The difference is I'll

Have to leave now, despite your allure.

QUEENIE: Do you not understand what I mean?

Look around. See these thugs? I'm their queen.

So you'll do what I say,

And you'll like it that way,

'Cause I don't kid around when I'm keen.

DION: But I'm already spoke for and promised.

QUEENIE: I don't give a sh —

ERDOS: Shh! I got this.

His secret? He's clutzy.

Tremendously!

QUEENIE: But—

ERDOS: See?

(Dion falls down to illustrate.)

He's got two left feet.

QUEENIE: Really?

DION: Honest!

QUEENIE: Then this all might as well be forgotten.

That's the one thing I simply can't cotton.

Let's throw in the towel,

And say no harm, no foul,

I just *can't*, if your dancing is rotten!

QUENTIN: *(Grabbing Dion:)* Hey, what was that step you just showed us?

You start to the left, *that* I noticed.

Then after the slide,

Is it step, ball, change, glide?

Or—step-step, hop-hop?

QUEENIE: Oh, you're bogus!

(Queenie moves into a stand-off with Dion. He's busted. He starts to pack up. Meanwhile, the other Qs surround Queenie sympathetically.)

Hell, I don't know what I was thinking.

The guys that I like—always stinking.

Whether chewing tobaccky,

Or smoking the wacky.

The one before this? Too much drinking.

And this pattern's so bloody recurrent.

Is it me? Are my looks the deterrent?

I get all of the losers,

The louses, the boozers.

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How I hate it and wish that they weren't!

(Erdos girds himself up and approaches Queenie.)

ERDOS: If I may? It just can't be that bleak.
There are so many fish in the creek.
And by "fish," I mean *guys* who
Would give their right eyes to
Be near you for even a week.

QUEENIE: No, don't patronize me, you crumb.
You can save your clichés. I'm not dumb.
Yeah, your friend is a hunk,
But I'm done with that junk.
I just want to dance till I'm numb.

(Erdos retreats, mortified. Queenie dances.)

(Dar enters, in janitor's coveralls, hair in a kerchief, wearing Dion's jacket. Dion spots Dar and switches gears abruptly.)

DION: Yes, dance. But with me. Let's get festive!
Please teach me your moves. They're impressive.

QUEENIE: What? That's quite a change.

DION: I know it seems strange,
But my legs are quite suddenly restive.

(Dar watches them dance for a second, then stomps up and gets in Dion's face. Dion keeps dancing.)

Why, what is this! I didn't see you there.

DAR: You didn't see me, or just didn't care?

DION: I know this can't be jealousy I see.
You never had the slightest use for me.

DAR: Of course not! I was in the neighborhood
And thought I'd let you know that all is good.

DION: Me, too! It turns out I've a gift for shoes.
I'll start a business, once I've paid my dues.
It was so smart to take that daring plunge
And find ourselves. So glad we played that hunch.

DAR: And me, my new life's better than I hoped.
I work three jobs and *love* the smell of soap.
And finding somewhere warm to sleep is easy
When I get off my last shift cleaning feces
And washing floors where urine has grown crusty.
It takes a lot more than that to disgust me.
You were so scared before! So doom-and-gloomy.
My god, it's lucky that you listened to me.

DION: I'm glad you're happy, though in truth I'd claim
Your memories and mine are not the same.
As I remember,

QUEENIE: (*Interrupting:*) What is this, you cur!
You're up to something – what's the deal with her?

DION: I'm sorry if I gave the wrong impression.

QUEENIE: Don't give me that. I just asked you a question.
You told me your heart was bespoken,
And mine was about to be broken,
Till this person arrived,
Then you hopped up and jived,
Was it all just an act? Were you joking?

DAR: Is that right? Was it all just a trick?

QUEENIE: To make this one jealous?

DAR: That's sick.

QUEENIE: You embarrass and shame me,
And no one could blame me
If I beat your face with a stick.

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DAR: Don't touch him!

QUEENIE: Try and stop me.

DION: (*To Dar:*) Do you care?

DAR: Of course not. Couldn't matter less, I swear.

DION: That's good because our lives are separate.

DAR: Exactly. Is there something you don't get?

DION: Nope. See you. Glad to hear it's going fine.

DAR: (*Turning back:*) I guess one question does come to my mind.

You told that dishy redhead you're engaged,

Around the time she went and got enraged.

(*Raising her voice:*) That's right! You said "your heart was not your own."

Congratulations! Anyone I know?

DION: You're flattering yourself if you think that.

Nice jacket, by the way.

DAR: Here, take it back!

ERDOS: Oh no. Not three!

Another triangle? Can't be.

CORNELIUS: (*Entering:*) Then again, you might get used to it.

(*Seeing Constance:*) Ah! There you are.

CONSTANCE: (*Entering:*) One hundred eighty degrees equals misery. Or does it?

TREY: (*Entering:*) It seemed a given: that way madness lies.

CONSTANCE: But there's a nice familiar ache to triangles.

CORNELIUS: A stable instability.

TREY: Equilaterally distributed.

DION: No triangles! Don't pay them any mind.
I'm sorry, Queenie. I was out of line.
Believe me, I never —

QUEENIE: Don't even. Whatever.
You can dig your own grave. I'll be fine.

(Quentin and Query have been circling Dion and Dar. When Queenie turns toward them, they signal wildly, which she misunderstands.)

What now? Oh it's dawn? Great, we're stuck now.
Can't go forward or back, that's our luck now.

QUENTIN: Look, Queenie — these two!

QUEENIE: Give it up, guys, please do.

QUEASY: It's the couple!

QUEENIE: I don't give a — *what* now?

QUINN: Although you've been somewhat debased.
This time wasn't truly a waste,
If my eyes aren't liars,
They're the two on the flyer.
The very same pair that we've chased!

QUENTIN: It's our gambit for getting home late!
We'll be heroes, not hoodlums. It's great.
We just turn these two over,
Collect all the silver,
And buy ourselves all the —

DAR: No, wait!
You cannot think it fair to turn us in.
To make us marry without love's a sin.
(To Dion:) And you don't love me, right? Not even any?

DION: Do *you* love *me*?

DAR: Of course not. Don't be funny.
(To the Qs:) You see, it would be quite despicable
 To force us to live lives so miserable.

QUEENIE: We couldn't give a damn. Rules of the hunt.

DAR: Don't anger your new King and Queen up front.
 If you don't give a fig for common virtue,
 Come back with us and pay for breaking curfew.

DION: Although we'll face some shame on our return,
 We'll see you get the punishment you've earned.

(The Qs are confounded. Everyone is at an impasse.)

ERDOS: My head. My brain.
 Such friction. Such pain.
 Such fractiousness among so few.
 And that's just five and three and two.

DAR: So now hear this. The valley we'll divide
 And tolerate each other, side by side.

(Dion directs them around; they start to move into separate quadrants, The Qs, the trio, and Dion separate from Dar.)

(Enter ALFA, BERNIE, CHARLEY, DELTA, ERNIE, FARLEY, and GREG. They look scruffy and neglected, with tattered clothes, makeshift backpacks, a couple of walking sticks they've picked up along the way.)

ALFA: What's up? We come in peace.

BERNIE: In pieces, too.

CHARLEY: We mean you no harm.

DELTA: We're unarmed.

ERNIE: Just need a place to land is all.

FARLEY: Just need a hand.

QUINN: You need to go back where you're from.
This valley is all out of room.
So go! Head on back,
Just retrace your tracks.
We've nothing to offer. Go home.

(The seven new people stand paralyzed.)

QUENTIN: Hey! Did you not hear what we said?
Back home with you, that's where you head.

ALFA: That's one thing we can't do.
Be merciful, can't you?
The country we're from wants us dead.

(A sudden shift in mood. Everyone senses that the stakes are real.)

DION: The way you speak, it has a certain weight.
We will at least hear why you've drawn this fate.

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