

FAIREST FOLLIES
By J.J.P. Niemann

Cast of Characters

4 Female; 3 Males

COURTIER

LADY DIASPORA

PAZZIO

HAMMOND

BROOK

MARGUERITE

DULCHINA

Lights up on an elaborate sitting-room in Rococo style, with a single elevated chair—not quite a throne, but close enough—Stage Right, angled. A dramatic curtain hangs behind it, to evoke courtly paintings. In the background, impassive, sits the COURTIER. Enter LADY DIASPORA, followed by PAZZIO. The former is dressed lavishly in faux-medieval style, the latter is understated in a black doublet, and athletic shoes. LADY is in a high humor. She proceeds to her chair and loiters around it as she rhapsodizes. PAZZIO stands respectfully aside, Stage Left.

LADY DIASPORA:

In faith, I know not why I am so *blue*!
 This season breeds in me a little mind
 Of noonday's sullen fervor on the brow
 And little else. Beget me not, Cupid!
 I know not where or how or what or why
 Yet hangs it on me desperate-lye
 As Prometheus upon the cliff,
 His liver pick'd and bowels raw devour'd
 So hang I to ravens of this world,
 The Greatest Lady of Green Bacchalia—
 Diaspora, she has a solemn vow
 Doughty to uphold and nayward bend:
 To fain forbear, and dote upon and love
 Princess of the nation, Brook the little dove,
 My daughter—

and yet not my breast or body's fruit

For little was I ever loved of men...
 Or even boys or women, merry bonds
 None for me! My *sister's* grace withal
 And of her multiplicity an heir
 Yet--an heir so fair, with care and air
 Breathed out for worship of us mean and meek:
 Swim not *I* in Brook's ennobled creek....

She pauses for breath, this being delivered at high volume and with great overflow of feeling. PAZZIO takes the opening to step forward, raises his hand and opens his mouth and is completely cut off again as the tirade continues in a new vein. Stymied, he steps back, ready to wait it out.

LADY

Yet hold awhile—

For little apt a regent would I be
 If this sweet Cherub, my beloved ward,
 The apple of my eyne and finest wine
 Of climbing vine and cherry line and pit,
 My little bit of chortling rosy joy
 upon my knee, her eyes a sea—

PAZZIO [interrupts, but in rhythm]

--Yes, her—

LADY [continues]

...what sort of smithy for this gem am I
 If no fire-tried marriage can I forge
 Betwixt the softness of the running Brook
 And Adamant of Adam's son, a king?
 Yea! Hold, dear Pazzio, here's the rub:
 Importune me not to gratify
 Cravings of the curious mind
 For nobility is a close-ed club
 And options few in our minute estate
 Remain for she whose age is ripe
 Not greened, unbrowned by age or weight
 Of duty, penance, fealty, adult tripe,
 Tripe for fealty, penance of duty,
 The weight of age. But Bacchalia must have

An heir. Alas, but one remains whose name

In troth, I hesitate to even say.

She trails off. PAZZIO steps forward, waits an extra second to see if she's really done, and finally speaks.

PAZZIO: It's Saturday, ma'am. I think we should give Brook a rest on a Saturday, don't you?

LADY

A rest you say? What for.

PAZZIO: It's...[pulls out and checks a smart-phone] eight a.m.? On a Saturday. And she's eighteen. She probably would like to sleep in.

LADY

Composure rests upon those drunk with sleep,

While we awake compose with fevered cheek

The future of Bacchalia.

PAZZIO: I'm just saying—we could *not* worry about that right now--

LADY

Pazzio, you boob, sirrah, fetch her.

PAZZIO: Ma'am, she's going to be mad—

LADY

Sirrah! As wrought in silver is my iron will. Fetch her hence.

Exit PAZZIO.

LADY

Yes, Hammond be the blessed name, his fancy

As a pillory for fondest wish

Of mine—but comes he hence, or else I disincline.

Enter HAMMOND. He's sallow, slouching, and dressed rather loosely for a nobleman.

LADY

Did you sleep well, or peels the eye lewdly

Upon this morning fair?

HAMMOND: My eyes would rather be still asleep, were it all the same to you. Why did we have to have this meeting at *eight a.m. on Saturday*?

LADY

Begging every pardon of your Lordship,
I could not wait, no sleep could sate my need
To know your answer.

HAMMOND: Oh, that. Well, I am the only eligible nobleman left inside the boundaries of the kingdom of Bacchalia. This tiny monarchy that exists solely because of an Italian zoning oversight.

LADY

Yes....?

HAMMOND: Which you are the ruler of after the death of your husband, the Duke...

LADY

Of course!

HAMMOND: *And* of your sister and her husband, the king and queen....

LADY

A tragedy! My heart stills wrings itself.

HAMMOND: ...In A tragic roller-coaster crash at Disneyland, that left you, Lady Diaspora, the lone regent of the kingdom until the coming of age of your sister's then-infant daughter, Princess Brook Emmanuele Selestino-Betancourt III. Who you wish me to marry, in order that there might once again be a proper monarchy of king and queen to rule the kingdom?

LADY

Golden-tongued and pillow-eared, this youth
His age outshines with wisdom and incisive mind.

HAMMOND: So that's what you want. And I get the kingdom.

LADY

Of course!

HAMMOND: And Brook.

LADY

Indeed....

HAMMOND is not that interested in the conversation. He pulls out his phone and starts scrolling idly.

HAMMOND: And the use of the royal Ferrari, correct?

LADY

Along with the palace and the servants.

HAMMOND: Aw screw it. Sure. It's a deal.

LADY [overjoyed]

And thus are both our fortunes made, my king
 Or soon to be, but hark, comes hence my Brook--
 In scarcity you'll do less harm of spirit
 When to her noble ears this news I bring.

She hustles him off Stage Right just as PAZZIO reenters with BROOK at his heels STAGE LEFT. She is wearing an oversize sweatshirt, slightly gothy eye makeup, and leggings. She looks every bit the frustrated teenager she is.

BROOK: Omigod, this *sucks*. Auntie, you're the worst. I was sleeping.

PAZZIO: Your niece, the esteemed Princess Brook, my Lady.

LADY

Alas! I meant no perturbation of
 Your slumber deep and earne'd, darling one
 But angels wait not on the whims of men.
 Yea. Came they to me of this night before,
 And spake they gladness to my wizen'd soul.

BROOK frowns deeply and apprehensively.

BROOK: Please tell me the angels said its time for me to go to college. I want to go to college.

LADY

Your education lacks for nothing here—

BROOK: Except for what I want to do! Psychology and parties, boys and beer!

LADY is agitated by BROOK's obvious discontentment. She turns to PAZZIO.

LADY

Pazzio!

PAZZIO: Here, ma'am?

LADY

Dismiss the courtier.

She puts her arm around BROOK, who is not happy with this, and drags her toward STAGE RIGHT. PAZZIO turns to the COURTIER.

PAZZIO: Ahem...you can go.

The courtier picks up and casually walks out.

LADY

Now, sweetest berry of my bush, my dove,

My little sparrow, darling willow-thrush

Sit here, my little heart o'erflows

To share with you my news.

Focus shifts abruptly back to the other side of the stage. The courtier enters with a stool, which he sets down, and then stands impassively next to it. Enter MARGUERITE and DULCHINA. DULCHINA is dressed in finery befitting her station, MARGUERITE more simply. They are close together, whispering. They approach the stool, and notice the COURTIER. They stare at him and he stares back, and finally she gestures:

MARGUERITE: You can go...

The courtier nods and exits again. MARGUERITE pulls the stool forward as DULCHINA sits on it, then drops to her knees next to her mistress. Dulchina after being calm when they walked in suddenly bursts into hysterics.

DULCHINA [suddenly and with great emotion]: Aaaaaah I love him! I love him, I love him oooooo I adore him I want him forever I love love love love him! Agh! [throws her faces into her hands]

MARGUERITE: Pazzio, the man-at-arms at the court of Lady Diaspora?

DULCHINA: Of course! Wait—don't you love him?

MARG: Um, I don't—

DULCHINA: Aaaaghh how can anyone not love him! He's the greatest, kindest, sweetest, most handsome, most chill, most *awesome person* God ever made in all human history.

MARG: Dulchina!

DULCHINA: I mean....other than Jesus. But I bet Jesus wasn't as handsome!

MARG: It's tough to be so far away.

DULCHINA: Tough? *Tough?! Fords are tough, overcooked chicken is tough, Marguerite...this, this is torture of the soul! We should be engaged, but while he's stuck there I'll never get a ring from him.*

MARG: If only your brother had brought you to court with him....

DULCHINA: I begged! He said he was only going to maybe become king or something, blah blah blah, I would just get in the way, blah blah.

MARG: Lord Hammond is—

DULCHINA: A little *bitch!*

MARG: I was going to say very domineering....[smiles] but he is dreamy though...

DULCHINA: Oh not this again. You still have a crush on him?

MARG: What, it's harmless! It's not like I could ever....I mean, I couldn't....I'm not noble, I would have to be....[she trails off wistfully]

DULCHINA [sniffs]: Marguerite?

MARG: Yeah?

DULCHINA: Look, I'm miserable, I really am, because I can't be with Pazzio, and he is all that matters to me.

MARG: Why doesn't he come to you?

DULCHINA: He's a man-at-arms at court! His family has served the Bacchalian monarchy for centuries. I cannot ever leave, unless he were to become a nobleman himself, then he would be free....But you know what, if I can never have any happiness, if my life is empty, if I will wither away like a grapeless vine in the heat of the summer....at least I can try to make my only lady-in-waiting happy.

MARG: What—you'll set me up with your brother?

DULCHINA: Well, It's not that easy. On principle, he won't court anyone who is not of noble blood. Because he's, like I said, a little bitch.

MARG: Well, I'm not.

DULCHINA: *You're* not. But what if we let you be....someone else?

MARG: You mean....will that work? Won't he recognize me?

DULCHINA: Oh don't worry.

The scene switches back to Lady Diaspora's court.

BROOK: No! No! No! I hate him! I hate hate hate hate hate hate double-down, no-backsies *hate that guy*, and I will under no circumstances, in no universe, not in the last syllable of recorded time, *never* will I marry that piece of turd!

LADY

Alas, Less sweet than overborn
 Runs the blood of my dear sister's soul
 In veins de-pulsing with red humor's bile
 And cheeks so hot to curse and beg denial!

BROOK: Look, Auntie, I love you, but this is too much. I won't do it. I'll...I don't know, I'll throw myself off a cliff, or something, something dramatic, anyway, I'll die dramatically before I marry *Hammond*. Okay? See ya never!

BROOK turns on her heel and stomps out of the room.

LADY [clasps her hands, turns to the audience]

Froward spins the frightening soul of youth,
 But deny this match befits like hand in glove?
 I love love! [pause]
 But boulder'd and unsmooth her love, uncouth.

Exit DIASPORA. Enter PAZZIO.

Transfixe'd as the wav'ring wife of Lot
 Cemented, composed in stasis, over-owned,
 So stands my state. My statue only loaned
 By lineage. No lintel'd blood besot
 From lambs of Jews in distant lands, where stands
 My prophet? Lord, aid me, bring me out
 Of Egypt of my service, though I doubt
 My worthiness to woo and walk the lands
 In freedom. Though with that lib'rality
 No farm, no fence, no blithe finality
 Of leisure—love lingers not, it ever stands.
 For my love, Dulchina do I grieve

For from my Lady I can never leave.

Enter MARGUERITE, dressed in extremely fancy finery, her friend's. She walks with exaggerated pointedness, and as she enters her high heel turns and she nearly falls. PAZZIO starts and turns to see her.

PAZZIO: Where come you from, newly seen—

PAZZIO realizes he's speaking iambic, shakes himself back to reality, and refocuses.

PAZZIO: I mean, uh, who are you?

MARGUERITE: I am Lady Altamonte, of the distant estate of Caucasus. I'm here to—I mean, *who's asking, slave?!*

PAZZIO [skeptical]: I'm Pazzio, I'm the man-at-arms. Lady?

MARGUERITE: Well, rather. You see I'm...well, you know, I'm a bit of a noblewoman.

PAZZIO: Uh huh.

MARGUERITE: Do I detect *sarcasm, servant?*

PAZZIO: Well, there aren't many noblepeople left in Bacchalia is all.

MARGUERITE: Ah, well you know...I'm one of them.

PAZZIO: I—okay. You'll be wanting an audience, right?

MARGUERITE: Ah, yeah, I mean, there's no hurry on that. But wait, Sir Pazzio?

PAZZIO: It's just Pazzio, I'm not noble.

MARGUERITE [realizes this is another person like her]: Oh. Well, um...first, would you mind finding Lord Hammond? I've heard much about him and he sounds just *ravishing*.

PAZZIO: Him? Are you sure?

MARGUERITE nods excitedly.

PAZZIO: The guy with the....[PAZZIO makes a series of gestures meant to imitate the Lord.

MARGUERITE nods excitedly]That guy?

MARGUERITE [anxiously]: Hammond. Do you think you can find him and let me...meet him?

PAZZIO: I...sure, I can make that happen.

MARGUERITE: Oh thank you, thank you, Pazzio you're my hero!

MARGUERITE, overjoyed, forgets herself and throws herself into his arms, but she trips on her heel, and PAZZIO catches her. As this happens, DIASPORA reenters from Stage Left and sees this.

DIASPORA sees the apparently romantic embrace, and her eyes go wide. She turns to the audience and does a little dance of delight. PAZZIO notices her, and with a look of horror hastily pushes DULCHINA back to her feet, brushes her off, and hustles them both off, Stage Left. LADY DIASPORA moves forward into the center of the stage.

There ensues a 45 second frantic Dream Ballet set to Allstar Weekend's "Come Down With Love," during which all the other characters briefly come out and dance around the absolutely love-drunk DIASPORA, at the end of which only PAZZIO and BROOK remain, flanking her but upstage as if they are her backup dancers. DIASPORA finishes dramatically, the music abruptly cuts off, the lights return to normal.

LADY DIASPORA

And so, my little lilac lollipop
 And you, my bound and ever-loyal page
 Fortune's smile entreats your merriment
 And mirth, as forth upon your proper fields
 I spill you loose to romp.

BROOK: You said I should be packing a bag? What for...

PAZZIO: A bag? You're sending her on a journey? Is it—

LADY

Indeed! But scarcely can I hold
 You in suspense as to her destination—
 ...Yet I must.

PAZZIO: Why—

LADY [interrupting]

No, not yet.

Both wait as LADY imagines the moment building.

BROOK: Auntie, I will straight-up leave if you don't get down to business, like, *right now*.

LADY

Wrought in stone my stern decision is.

BROOK: Are you Yoda now? Stop with the—

LADY

Speak not crossly now, burst-ready bud

Of bloom unequalled yet still paling green
 For of this stem of near-dead vine a cross
 I'll have twixt healthy trunk and withered plant.
 Cross not my purpose, till you see the color
 With which I'll bloom that greenly pallor pale.

BROOK [hurt]: I just don't like the sun, okay?

PAZZIO [excited]: My Lady, forbear. You intend a match?

LADY

My man strikes cleanly to the quick, no scratch.

BROOK: NO! Auntie, I won't do it—

LADY

Yet many matches in close friction light
 Call me matchbook, for I will match aright.

PAZZIO: My lady, do you--mean you me?

BROOK [shakes her head]: You lack my curse of princess-ry.

LADY

The both of you.

There is a confused look between PAZZIO and BROOK.

LADY

Oh, not with one another, heavens no.
 Brook—to Hammond's stronghold will you go.
 Servant—stay you here to work and woo
 The eligible, noble Altamont.

BROOK: You're *making me go hang out with Hammond?*

PAZZIO: And cannot I accompany that whim? To Hammond's stronghold *I would gladly* pass.

BROOK: You can stay, I have to go with him—

PAZZIO: But lass-less am I, till I go—alas!

EXIT PAZZIO, grieving.