

## 2 A Midsummer Night's Dream

### Act One · Scene 1 scene description

When the play opens, we meet Theseus, the Duke of Athens and his bride-to-be, Hippolyta. We learn that they are about to be married.

Into this scene comes Egeus, a prominent citizen of Athens, along with his daughter, Hermia, and two young men, Lysander and Demetrius. We discover that Egeus is furious because Hermia wants to marry Lysander. Egeus wants her to marry Demetrius.

Egeus asks Theseus to impose the law of Athens which says that he, as her father, has the right to "dispose of" his daughter as he chooses.

Hermia then asks the duke what the consequences would be if she refuses to follow her father's wishes. Theseus tells her that according to the law, she must either marry Demetrius, be put to death, or become a nun.

Lysander tries to convince the Duke that he is as good a candidate as Demetrius to marry Hermia and (hoping it might help his cause) tells the Duke that Demetrius used to be in love with Helena (a friend of Hermia's) and dumped her, and that Helena is now heartbroken.

The duke advises Hermia to take some time to think about her choice and to tell him what she has decided by his and Hippolyta's wedding day. Then all exit leaving Hermia and Lysander alone onstage.

Hermia (definitely her father's daughter) is furious. Lysander tells her that according to what he has read about love, their problems are pretty typical. Hermia responds sarcastically saying that they might as well just be patient then. This finally spurs Lysander into action and he suggests they escape from Athens and her laws by eloping.

They agree to meet in the woods the following night. At this point Helena enters the scene. She is miserable because she knows that Demetrius, whom she loves, is in love with Hermia.

Hermia and Lysander, trying to cheer her up, tell her that they are planning to leave town and therefore Demetrius will not see Hermia again and that they hope Helena and Demetrius will get together.

Hermia and Lysander leave. Helena, desperate for any excuse to see Demetrius, decides to go and tell him about Hermia and Lysander's plan.

### Act One · Scene 1 vernacular

*[enter Theseus and Hippolyta]*

THESEUS:

Now fair Hippolyta, our wedding day is drawing near.

HIPPOLYTA:

In four days the moon will shine on the night of the ceremony.

THESEUS:

Hippolyta, I wooed you during battle, but I will wed you in a different way, with splendor, with festivities and with merriment.

EGEUS: *[enters with Hermia, Demetrius and Lysander]*

Greetings Theseus, our celebrated duke!

THESEUS:

Thank you, good Egeus. What's the news with you?

EGEUS:

I am very annoyed and come to you with a complaint about my child, my daughter, Hermia. Step forward, Demetrius. My noble lord, this man has my consent to marry her. Step forward, Lysander. And, my gracious duke, this man has bewitched my child; stolen my daughter's heart, and turned her obedience—which she owes to me—into stubborn disobedience. And, my gracious duke, if she will not consent to marry Demetrius, I beg you to impose the old law of Athens which says that since she is mine, I may marry her to whom I choose, which shall be to this gentleman or, if she refuse, to have her put to death, according to our laws.

THESEUS:

What do you say Hermia? Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.

HERMIA:

So is Lysander.

THESEUS:

Yes he is. But lacking your father's blessing, the other must be thought the worthier.

HERMIA:

I wish my father could see with my eyes!

THESEUS:

Better yet, your eyes should see with his judgement.

HERMIA:

I beg your grace to pardon me. I don't know what has made me so bold, but let me ask your grace, what is the worst that can happen to me if I refuse to marry Demetrius?

THESEUS:

Either to be put to death, or to give up forever the company of men. Therefore fair Hermia, ask yourself what you really want. Could you stand the life of a nun?

HERMIA:

I would, my lord, before I'd give up my virginity to him!

THESEUS:

Take some time to think; and by the next new moon—which is the wedding day for my love and me—on that day either be ready to die for disobeying your father; or else to marry Demetrius; or to take the vows of a nun.

DEMETRIUS:

Give in, sweet Hermia, and Lysander, give up!

LYSANDER:

You've got her father's love Demetrius; let me have Hermia's. Marry him!

EGEUS:

Contemptuous Lysander! it's true, he does have my love; and all the rights I have in her, I give to Demetrius.

LYSANDER: *[making his stand]*

I am, my lord, from as good a family as he, as well off; my love is stronger than his; and—what's more—beautiful Hermia loves me. Demetrius wooed Helena and won her; and she—sweet lady—dotes, devoutly dotes, dotes devotedly, on this fickle man.

THESEUS:

I must admit that I have heard that. Demetrius, come; and come Egeus; you shall go with me. As for you, pretty Hermia, adapt your desires to your father's wishes; or else the law of Athens requires your death or your vow to be a nun. Come, Hippolyta.

EGEUS:

We'll follow you. *[all exit except Hermia and Lysander]*

LYSANDER: *[trying to console Hermia]*

How are you my love?

HERMIA:

Oh hell! To be forced to choose love through someone else's eyes.

LYSANDER:

Oh my! According to everything I've ever read, the path of true love is never smooth.

HERMIA: *[sarcastically]*

Then we must learn to accept our suffering with patience.

LYSANDER:

I see what you mean; then listen to me, Hermia. I have a widow aunt who's very rich, and has no children. Her house is far from Athens and she thinks

of me as her only son. There, gentle Hermia, I can marry you, and, being so far away, the laws of Athens cannot apply to us. If you love me, then sneak out of your father's house tomorrow night, and in the woods, three miles out of town, I will be waiting for you.

HERMIA:

My good Lysander! I swear to you, that at the place you told me to, tomorrow I will meet with you.

LYSANDER:

Look, here comes Helena. [*Helena enters*]

HERMIA:

Good day, fair Helena! Where are you off to?

HELENA:

You call me fair? Take back that fair. Demetrius loves your fair; oh, yours is a happy fair! Sickness is catching; oh, if only your looks were too! Then I would catch them, fair Hermia, from you. Oh, teach me how you look and with what charms you have won over Demetrius' heart.

HERMIA:

I frown at him, yet he loves me still.

HELENA:

Oh, I wish your frowns could teach my smiles that skill!

HERMIA:

The more I hate him, the more he follows me.

HELENA:

The more I love him, the more he hates me.

HERMIA:

His stupidity, Helena, is no fault of mine.

HELENA:

It's the fault of your beauty; I wish  
that fault were mine!

HERMIA:

Don't worry, he will never again see  
my face. Lysander and I are going to  
escape from this place.

LYSANDER:

Helen, to you our secret we will reveal.  
Tomorrow night, away from Athens we  
have planned to steal.

HERMIA:

In the woods, where you and I often  
did retreat, there my Lysander and myself  
will meet. Farewell, sweet playmate,  
pray for us, and may good luck bring  
you your Demetrius.

LYSANDER:

Helena, adieu: as much as you adore  
him, may Demetrius adore you!  
*[Hermia and Lysander exit]*

HELENA:

Why are some people so much happier  
than others? Throughout Athens I am  
thought as fair as she. But so what!  
Demetrius doesn't think so; he can't  
see what everyone else already knows.  
And, just as he foolishly dotes on  
Hermia, so I foolishly dote on him.  
Things ordinary, even awful, having  
no value, love can transform to beauty  
and worth. Before Demetrius looked into  
Hermia's eyes, he snowed me and swore  
that he was only mine; but when the  
snow job felt a little of Hermia's heat,  
it all dissolved and he did a retreat.  
I will go tell him of fair Hermia's  
intended flight; then he will follow  
her tomorrow night. If I get any thanks  
for my news, it's still a high price  
to pay. But I'm willing to suffer the  
pain, if only to see his face once again.  
*[she exits]*

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### Act One · Scene 2 scene description

This scene introduces the workmen of Athens. They have gathered together to prepare a little play to celebrate the Duke and Duchess' wedding day.

Quince tries to get things underway and at every step is thwarted by Bottom who is a somewhat pompous, pretentious, but very lovable ass.

They finally get the various parts distributed and decide to meet the next night outside of town to rehearse.

### Act One · Scene 2 vernacular

*[Enter Quince, Snug, Bottom, Flute, Snout and Starveling]*

QUINCE:  
Is the whole company here?

BOTTOM: *[interrupting]*  
It would be best for you to call them generally, one by one, according to your list.

QUINCE:  
Here is the list of everyone's name who is thought to be suitable to act in our play to be given for the Duke and Duchess on his wedding day at night.

BOTTOM: *[interrupting again]*  
First, good Peter Quince, tell us what the play deals with, then read the names of the actors.

QUINCE:  
Indeed, our play is "The most sorrowful comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe."

BOTTOM:  
A very good piece of work, I assure you. Now, good Peter Quince, call your actors according to the list.  
Men, give him room.

QUINCE: *[reading from his list]*  
Answer as I call you. Nick Bottom, the weaver.

BOTTOM:  
Here. Which part am I down for?

QUINCE:  
You, Nick Bottom, are down for Pyramus.

BOTTOM:  
What is Pyramus, a lover or a tyrant?

QUINCE:  
A lover who kills himself for love.

BOTTOM:

My greatest wish is to play a tyrant.

I could play Hercules excellently;

The raging rocks

And shivering shocks

Shall break the locks

of prison gates.

That was lofty. Now name the rest of  
the players.

QUINCE:

Francis Flute, the bellows-mender.

FLUTE:

Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE:

Flute, you must take the part of Thisbe.

FLUTE:

What is Thisbe—a wandering knight?

QUINCE:

It is the lady that Pyramus loves.

FLUTE:

No, really, don't make me play a woman;  
I started shaving—last week.

QUINCE:

That doesn't matter, you will play it  
in a mask, and you may speak in a tiny  
voice .

BOTTOM:

If I could wear a mask, I could play  
Thisbe too. I'll speak in a teeny, tiny,  
little voice; [*he pretends to be Pyramus*]  
"Thisne, Thisne!" [*he pretends to be*  
*Thisbe*] "Ah Pyramus, my lover dear!"

QUINCE:

No no, you must play Pyramus, and Flute,  
you Thisbe.

BOTTOM:

Oh well, go on.

QUINCE:

Robin Starveling, the tailor.

STARVELING:

Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE:

Robin Starveling, you must play  
Thisbe's mother. Tom Snout, the  
tinker.

SNOUT:

Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE:

You, Pyramus' father; myself,  
Thisbe's father; Snug, the  
furniture-maker, you will play the lion.

SNUG:

Do you have the lion's part written  
out? I beg you, if you do give it to  
me, because I'm a slow study.

QUINCE:

You can just ad lib it, it's only  
roaring.

BOTTOM:

Let me play the lion too. It will  
do everyone good to hear me. The  
duke will even say, "Let him roar  
again; let him roar again!"

QUINCE:

If you did too much, you would scare  
the Duchess and the ladies and make  
them shriek, and that would be enough  
to get us all hanged.

BOTTOM:

I will change my voice so that I will  
roar as gently as a dove.

QUINCE:

You can play no part but Pyramus!—  
for Pyramus is a handsome man; a most  
lovely, gentleman-like man; therefore  
you must play Pyramus.



## Act Two • Scene 1 scene description

We now meet the members of the fairy world. It is evening and Puck and one of Titania's fairies meet in the woods and they reveal to each other (and of course to the audience) that their respective bosses are having a feud over a little orphan boy who is in Titania's care and whom Oberon wants in his entourage.

Just as we learn of their anger towards each other, Oberon and Titania show up. Immediately they start in on each other, Oberon demanding the boy and Titania refusing him.

We discover that due to their quarreling, the seasons have all gone awry and the world is in a state of confusion.

Oberon tells Titania that if she will give him the boy, all will be well again. She refuses once more and leaves.

Oberon wants revenge and remembers a flower that he once saw hit by one of Cupid's arrows. The juice of this flower, when squeezed into the eyes of someone asleep, has the power to make them fall in love with the first living thing they see when they awake.

Oberon sends Puck to get the flower and tells the audience that he plans to squeeze it into Titania's eyes and hopes that she will awaken when some awful creature is nearby. While she is distracted with this creature, he intends to make her give up

## Act One • Scene 2 vernacular

BOTTOM:  
Well, I'll do it.

QUINCE:  
Men, here are your parts:  
and I beg you, implore you, and  
desire you, to memorize them  
by tomorrow night, and to meet me in  
the woods near the palace, a mile outside  
of town, when the moon comes up—we  
will rehearse there. I beg you, don't  
fail me.

BOTTOM:  
We'll be there. Adieu. *[they exit]*

## Act Two • Scene 1 vernacular

*[enter fairy and Puck from separate entrances]*

PUCK:  
What's up, spirit? Where you off to?

FAIRY:  
Off to here, off to there, I am off  
to everywhere; and I serve the Fairy  
Queen. Farewell, I must prepare, the  
Queen is soon coming here.

PUCK:  
The King too will be coming here tonight;  
be sure the Queen stays out of his sight.  
Oberon is full of rage, because of the  
boy—stolen from an Indian king—that  
she keeps as her page. Jealous Oberon  
wants the child, but she will not part  
with him. She crowns him with flowers  
and devotes herself to him. And now  
whenever they meet, they quarrel.

FAIRY:  
If I'm not mistaken, you are that shrewd  
and rascally sprite called Robin  
Goodfellow, Are you, "Sweet Puck," are  
you?