

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

ACT 1
SCENE 1

THESEUS and **HIPPOLYTA** enter
with **PHILOSTRATE** and others.

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THESEUS

Our wedding day is almost here, my beautiful Hippolyta. We'll be getting married in four days, on the day of the new moon. But it seems to me that the days are passing too slowly—the old moon is taking too long to fade away! That old, slow moon is keeping me from getting what I want, just like an old widow makes her stepson wait to get his inheritance.

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HIPPOLYTA

No, you'll see, four days will quickly turn into four nights. And since we dream at night, time passes quickly then. Finally the new moon, curved like a silver bow in the sky, will look down on our wedding celebration.

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THESEUS

Go, Philostrate, get the young people of Athens ready to celebrate and have a good time. Sadness is only appropriate for funerals. We don't want it at our festivities.

PHILOSTRATE exits.

Hippolyta, I wooed you with violence, using my sword, and got you to fall in love with me by injuring you. But I'll marry you under different circumstances—with extravagant festivals, public festivities, and celebration.

EGEUS enters with his daughter **HERMIA**,
and **LYSANDER** and **DEMETRIUS**.

EGEUS

Long live Theseus, our famous and respected duke!

THESEUS

Thanks, good Egeus. What's new with you?

EGEUS

I'm here, full of anger, to complain about my daughter Hermia.—Step forward, Demetrius.—My lord, this man, Demetrius, has my permission to marry her.—Step forward, Lysander.—But this other man, Lysander, has cast a magic spell over my child's heart.—You, you, Lysander, you've given her poems, and exchanged tokens of love with my daughter. You've pretended to be in love with her, singing fake love songs softly at her window by moonlight, and you've captured her imagination by giving her

locks of your hair, rings, toys, trinkets, knickknacks, little presents, flowers, and candies—things that can really influence an impressionable young person. You've connived to steal my daughter's heart, making her stubborn and harsh instead of obedient (like she should be).—And, my gracious duke, if she won't agree to marry Demetrius right now, I ask you to let me exercise the right that all fathers have in Athens. Since she belongs to me, I can do what I want with her—as the law says: I can either make her marry Demetrius—or have her killed.

HERMIA

So is Lysander.

THESEUS

You're right, Lysander's admirable too. But since your father doesn't want him to marry you, you have to consider Demetrius to be the better.

HERMIA

I wish my father could see them with my eyes

HERMIA

Your grace, please forgive me. I don't know what makes me think I can say this, and I don't know if speaking my mind to such a powerful and noble person as yourself will damage my reputation for modesty. But please, tell me the worst thing that could happen to me if I refuse to marry Demetrius.

THESEUS

You'll either be executed or you'll never see another man again. So think carefully about what you want, beautiful Hermia. Consider how young you are, and question your feelings.

THESEUS

Take some time to think about this. By the time of the next new moon—the day when Hippolyta and I will be married—be ready either to be executed for disobeying your father, to marry Demetrius as your father wishes,

DEMETRIUS

Please give in, sweet Hermia.—And Lysander, stop acting like she's yours. I've got more of a right to her than you do

.LYSANDER

Her father loves you, Demetrius. So why don't you marry him and let me have Hermia?

EGEUS

She's mine, and I'm giving her to Demetrius.

LYSANDER

(to THESEUS) My lord, I'm just as noble and rich as he is. I love Hermia more than he does. My prospects are as good as his, if not better. And beautiful Hermia loves me—which is more important than all those other things I'm bragging about. Why shouldn't I be able to marry her? Demetrius—and I'll say this to his face—courted Nedar's daughter, Helena, and made her fall in love with him. That sweet lady, Helena, loves devoutly. She adores this horrible and unfaithful man.

They all exit except LYSANDER and HERMIA

LYSANDER

What's going on, my love? Why are you so pale? Why have your rosy cheeks faded so quickly?

HERMIA

Probably because my cheeks' roses needed rain, which I could easily give them with all the tears in my eyes.

LYSANDER

Oh, honey! Listen, in books they say that true love always faces obstacles.

HERMIA

If true lovers are always thwarted, then it must be a rule of fate. So let's try to be patient as we deal with our problem. It's as normal a part of love as dreams, sighs, wishes, and tears

LYSANDER

That's the right attitude. So, listen, Hermia. I have an aunt who is a widow, who's very rich and doesn't have any children. She lives about twenty miles from Athens, and she thinks of me as a son. I could marry you there, gentle Hermia, where the strict laws of Athens can't touch us. So here's the plan. If you love me, sneak out of your father's house tomorrow night and meet me in the forest a few miles outside of town.

HERMIA

Oh, Lysander, I swear I'll be there tomorrow

LYSANDER

Keep your promise, my love. Look, here comes Helena. Hello beautiful Helena.

HELENA enter HELENA

Did you just call me "beautiful"? Take it back. You're the beautiful one as far as Demetrius is concerned. Oh, you're so lucky! Your eyes are like stars, and your voice is more musical than a lark's song is to a shepherd in the springtime. If the world were mine, I'd give it all up—everything except Demetrius—to be you.

HERMIA

I curse him, but he loves me.

HERMIA

Don't worry. He won't see my face ever again. Lysander and I are running away from here.

LYSANDER

Helena, we'll tell you about our secret plan. Tomorrow night, when the moon shines on the water and decorates the grass with tiny beads of pearly light (the time of night that always hides runaway lovers), we plan to sneak out of Athens. Lysander and Hermia exit.

HELENA

It's amazing how much happier some people are than others! People throughout Athens think I'm as beautiful as Hermia. But so what? Demetrius doesn't think so, and that's all that matters. He refuses to admit what everyone else knows. But even though he's making a mistake by obsessing over Hermia so much, I'm also making a mistake, since I obsess over him I'll go tell Demetrius that Hermia is running away tomorrow night. He'll run after her. If he's grateful to me for this information, it'll be worth my pain in helping him pursue my rival Hermia. At least I'll get to see him when he goes, and then again when he comes back.

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ACT 1
SCENE 2

Modern Text

QUINCE, the carpenter, enters with **SNUG**, the cabinetmaker; **BOTTOM**, the weaver; **FLUTE**, the bellows-repairman; **SNOUT**, the handyman; and **STARVELING**, the tailor.

QUINCE

Is everyone here?

BOTTOM

You should call their names

generally.

Bottom means "individually," not "generally. Bottom frequently makes mistakes with words.

generally, one person at a time, in the order in which their names appear on this piece of paper.

QUINCE

This is a list of the names of all the men in Athens who are good enough to act in the play we're going to perform for the duke and duchess on their wedding night.

BOTTOM

First, Peter Quince, tell us what the play is about, then read the names of the actors, and then shut up.

QUINCE

All right. Our play is called *A Very Tragic Comedy About the Horrible Deaths of Pyramus and Thisbe*.

BOTTOM

Let me tell you, it's a great piece of work, and very—funny.—Now, Peter Quince, call the names of the actors on the list. Men, gather around him.

QUINCE

Answer when I call your name.—Nick Bottom, the weaver?

BOTTOM

Here. Tell me which part I'm going to play, then go on.

QUINCE

You, Nick Bottom, have been cast as Pyramus.

BOTTOM

What's Pyramus? A lover or a tyrant?

QUINCE

A lover who kills himself very nobly for love.

BOTTOM

I'll have to cry to make my performance believable. And as soon as I start crying, oh boy, the audience had better watch out, because they'll start crying too. I'll make tears pour out of their eyes like rainstorms. I'll moan very believably. Name the other actors.—But I'm really in the mood to play a tyrant. I could do a great job with Hercules, or any other part that requires ranting and raving. I would rant and rave really well. Like this, listen.

Oh, that was truly inspired!—Now tell us who the other actors are.—By the way, my performance just now was in the style of Hercules, the tyrant style. A lover would have to be weepier, of course.

FLUTE

Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE

Flute, you'll be playing the role of Thisbe.

FLUTE

Who's Thisbe? A knight on a quest?

QUINCE

Thisbe is the lady Pyramus is in love with.

FLUTE

No, come on, don't make me play a woman

QUINCE

That doesn't matter. You'll wear a mask, and you can make your voice as high as you want to.

QUINCE

Robin Starveling, you're going to play Thisbe's mother.—Tom Snout, the handyman

QUINCE

You'll be Pyramus's father—I'll play Thisbe's father myself—Snug, the cabinetmaker, you'll play the part of the lion.—So that's everyone. I hope this play is well cast now.

SNUG

Do you have the lion's part written down? If you do, please give it to me, because I need to start learning the lines. It takes me a long time to learn things.

QUINCE

You can improvise the whole thing. It's just roaring.

QUINCE

We'll meet at the giant oak tree in the duke's forest.

They all exit.

ACT 2 A FAIRY and ROBIN GOODFELLOW (a "puck" or mischievous spirit)
meet onstage.

ROBIN

Hello, spirit! Where are you going?

FAIRY

I go over hills and valleys, through bushes and thorns, over parks and fenced-in spaces, through water and fire. I wander everywhere faster than the moon revolves around the Earth. I work for Titania, the Fairy Queen, and organize fairy dances for her in the grass. Goodbye, you dumb old spirit. I've got to go. The queen and her elves will be here soon.

ROBIN

The king's having a party here tonight. Just make sure the queen doesn't come anywhere near him, because King Oberon is extremely angry. He's furious because she stole an adorable boy from an Indian king. She's never kidnapped such a darling human child before, and Oberon's jealous. He wants the child for himself, to accompany him on his wanderings through the wild forests. But the queen refuses to hand the boy over to Oberon. Instead, she puts flowers in the boy's hair and makes a fuss over him.

And now Oberon and Titania refuse to speak to each other, or meet each other anywhere—neither in the forest nor on the plain, nor by the river nor under the stars. They always argue, and the little fairies get so frightened that they hide in acorn cups and won't come out.

FAIRY

Unless I'm mistaken, you're that mischievous and naughty spirit named Robin Goodfellow. Aren't you the one who goes around scaring the maidens in the village, stealing the cream from the top of the milk, screwing up the flour mills, and frustrating housewives by keeping their milk from turning into butter? Aren't you the one who keeps beer from foaming up as it should, and causes people to get lost at night, while you laugh at them? Some people call you "Hobgoblin" and "sweet Puck," and you're nice to them. You do their work for them and give them good luck. That's you, right?

ROBIN

What you say is true. That's me you're talking about, the playful wanderer of the night. I tell jokes to Oberon and make him smile. I'll trick a fat, well-fed horse into thinking that I'm a young female horse. Sometimes I hide at the bottom of an old woman's drink disguised as an apple. When she takes a sip, I bob up against her lips and make her spill the drink all over her withered old neck. Sometimes a wise old woman with a sad story to tell tries to sit down on me, thinking I'm a three-legged stool. But I slip from underneath her and she falls down, crying, "Ow, my butt!" and starts coughing, and then everyone laughs and has fun. But step aside, fairy! Here comes Oberon.

FAIRY

And here's my mistress, Titania. I wish he'd go away!

OBERON

How *not* nice to see you, Titania

.TITANIA

What, are you jealous, Oberon?—Fairies, let's get out of here. I've sworn I'll never sleep with him or talk to him again.

OBERON

Aren't you supposed to obey me, your lord and husband?

TITANIA

But I know for a fact that you snuck away from Fairyland disguised as a shepherd, and spent all day playing straw pipes and singing love poems to your new girlfriend.

OBERON

How can you stand there shamelessly talking about me and Hippolyta, when you know that I know about your love for Theseus?

TITANIA

These are nothing but jealous lies. Since the beginning of midsummer, my fairies and I haven't been able to meet anywhere to do our dances in the wind without being disturbed by you and your arguments. We haven't been able to meet on a hill or in a valley, in the forest or a meadow, by a pebbly fountain or a rushing stream, or on the beach by the ocean without you disturbing us.

OBERON

Do something about it, then. You have the power to fix it. Why would Titania want to argue with her Oberon? All I'm asking for is to have that little human boy as part of my crew.

TITANIA

Get over it. I won't give up this child for all of Fairyland. His mother was one of my worshippers. But since she was a mortal, she died giving birth to that boy, and for her sake I'm raising him and will not give him up.

OBERON

Give me that boy and I'll come with you

TITANIA

Not for your entire fairy kingdom.—Come, fairies, let's go. We're going to have an out-and-out brawl if I stay any longer.

TITANIA and her FAIRIES exit.

OBERON

Well, go on your way, then. You won't leave this grove until I've paid you back for this insult. (*to ROBIN GOODFELLOW*) My dear Puck, come here. You remember the time when I was sitting on a cliff, and I heard a mermaid sitting on a dolphin's back sing such a sweet and harmonious song that it calmed the stormy sea and made stars shoot out of the sky so they could hear her better?

ROBIN

Yes, I remember.

OBERON

Bring me that flower. I showed it to you once. If its juice is put on someone's eyelids while they're asleep, that person will fall in love with the next living creature he or she sees. Bring me this plant, and get back here before the sea monster has time to swim three miles.

ROBIN

I could go around the world in forty minutes.

OBERON

When I have the juice of that flower, I'll trickle some drops of it on Titania's eyes while she's sleeping. She'll fall madly in love with the first thing she sees when she wakes up—even if it's a lion, a bear, a wolf, a bull, a monkey, or an ape. And before I make her normal again—I can cure her by treating her with another plant—I'll make her give me that little boy as my page. But who's that coming this way? I'll make myself invisible and listen to their conversation.

ACT 4
SCENE 1

DEMETRIUS, HELENA, HERMIA, and LYSANDER are still sleeping on the stage. **TITANIA** enters with **BOTTOM**, who still has a donkey's head, and the fairies **PEASEBLOSSOM, COBWEB, MOTH,** and **MUSTARDSEED. OBERON** enters behind them, unseen by those onstage.

TITANIA

(to BOTTOM) Come over here and sit down on this flowery bed while I caress those lovable cheeks. I'll put roses on your silky, smooth head and kiss your big, beautiful ears, my gentle darling.

BOTTOM

Where's Peaseblossom?

PEASEBLOSSOM

Here.

BOTTOM

Scratch my head, Peaseblossom. Where's Monsieur Cobweb?

COBWEB

Here.

BOTTOM

Monsieur Cobweb, sir, get out your weapons and kill me a striped bumblebee on a thistle, and bring me its honey. Don't tire yourself out, monsieur. Oh, and monsieur, be careful not to break the honey-sac. I'd hate to see you drowned in honey, sir.

COBWEB exits.

MUSTARDSEED

Ready.