

ACT 5

THESEUS, HIPPOLYTA, and PHILOSTRATE enter, with a number of lords and servants.

HIPPOLYTA

These lovers are saying some strange things, Theseus.

THESEUS

Yes, strange—and totally made up too. I'll never believe any of these old legends or fairy tales. Lovers and madmen hallucinate about things that sane people just can't understand. Lunatics, lovers, and poets all are ruled by their overactive imaginations. some people think they see devils and monsters everywhere—and they're lunatics.

Hippolita Lovers are just as crazy, and think a dark-skinned gypsy is the most gorgeous woman in the world. Poets are always looking around like they're having a fit, confusing the mundane with the otherworldly, and describing things in their writing that simply don't exist. All these people have such strong imaginations that, when they feel happy, they assume a god or some other supernatural being is bringing that happiness to them. Or if they're afraid of something at night, they look at the shrubbery and imagine it's a wild

bear!

HIPPOLYTA

But the story that these lovers are telling, and the fact that they all saw and heard exactly the same things, make me think there's more going on here than imaginary fantasies.

Their story is bizarre and astounding, but it's solid and consistent.
The lovers—LYSANDER, DEMETRIUS, HELENA, and HERMIA—enter.

THESEUS

Here come the lovers, laughing happily.—I wish you joy, my friends! I hope the days ahead are full of joy for you.

LYSANDER

We wish you even more joy, and hope joy comes to you in your royal walks, at your table, and in your royal bed!

THESEUS

Now, what kind of entertainment do we have to fill up the long three hours between dinner and bedtime? Where is our entertainment director? What performances have been prepared? Aren't there any plays for us to enjoy while we wait in torture for bedtime to come? Let me see Philostrate.

PHILOSTRATE

Here I am, Theseus.

THESEUS

Tell us what entertainment you've prepared for the evening. Which plays, what music?

How will we pass the time without some entertainment?

PHILOSTRATE

(giving THESEUS a piece of paper) Here's a list of all of the acts that have been prepared. Choose which one you want to see first.

THESEUS

(reading) "The battle between Hercules and the Centaurs, to be sung by an Athenian eunuch, accompanied by a harp." No, we won't see that. I've already told that story to Hippolyta, while praising my cousin Hercules. What else? "The riot of the drunk Bacchanals who rip the singer Orpheus to shreds." That's an old show, and I saw it the last time I came back from conquering Thebes. "The nine Muses mourning the death of learning and scholarship." That's some sharp, critical satire.

PHILOSTRATE

It's a play about ten words long, which is the shortest play I've ever heard of. But in my opinion, it's about ten words too long. That's why it's tedious. In the entire play, not one word is well-written, and not one of the actors is right for his part. It's tragic because Pyramus kills himself. I have to admit that when I saw his suicide during rehearsal, I had tears in my eyes—but they were tears of laughter.

THESEUS

Who are the actors?

PHILOSTRATE

Rough workmen from Athens who never spent much time thinking. Now they've worn out their out-of-shape brains to put on this play for your wedding.

THESEUS

So let's see it.

PHILOSTRATE

No, my noble lord. This play isn't right for you. I've seen the whole thing, and it's completely worthless—unless you think their bad acting and their misremembered lines—which they memorized so painfully—are funny.

THESEUS

I'll watch this play. Nothing can really be bad when it's created by simple people who try hard. Come on, bring them in. And sit down, ladies.

PHILOSTRATE *exits.*

HIPPOLYTA

I don't like seeing poor people overburdened or looking bad when they're trying to do something good.

THESEUS

You won't see anything like that, sweetheart.

HIPPOLYTA

He just said that they're no good at acting.

THESEUS

Then we're even kinder people for thanking them for something that they're not good at. We'll entertain ourselves by accepting their mistakes. When poor dutiful people can't do

certain things well, generous people can consider the effort they put into it rather than the effect that they produce.

Hippolita In my travels, great scholars have come up to me, meaning to greet me with well-rehearsed welcoming speeches, and I have seen them tremble and turn pale, and pause inappropriately in the middle of their sentences, and botch their well-rehearsed tones of voice because they're so nervous, and then break off abruptly at the end, without actually welcoming me. Trust me, my sweet, I figured out that they were trying to welcome me even though they were silent, and that message was as clear from someone who was modest and nervously dutiful as it is from someone who is loud and audacious and eloquent. Therefore, love and tongue-tied simplicity can say the most even when they're saying the least, in my opinion.

PHILOSTRATE

Your grace, the person who is going to deliver the prologue is ready.
enters.

THESEUS

Let him come forward.

The PROLOGUE (QUINCE) enters

PROLOGUE

If we happen to offend you, it's because we want to. We don't want you to think we came here to offend you, except that we want to offend you with our good intentions. Our plan to show off our little bit of talent will wind up getting us executed. Please keep in mind we're only here out of spite. We don't come here with the intention of making you happy. We're absolutely not here to delight you. The actors are ready to come out and make you sorry. By watching their show, you'll find out everything you're likely to know.

LYSANDER

He rode that prologue like a wild horse. He didn't know how to stop it. The moral of this story is that it's not enough to speak; you have to speak grammatically.

HIPPOLYTA

Yes, he performed his prologue like a child plays a recorder—he can make sounds, but they're out of control.

PROLOGUE

(delivered by QUINCE) Ladies and gentlemen, perhaps you are wondering what is going on. Well, keep wondering, until the truth makes everything clear. This man is Pyramus, if you want to know. This beautiful lady is definitely Thisbe. This man with the limestone and cement is portraying Wall, that horrible wall that kept these lovers apart. They are content to whisper through Wall's little hole, the poor souls, and no one should be surprised. This man, with his lantern, dog, and thornbush, portrays Moonshine, because,

if you want to know, the lovers were not ashamed to meet each other by moonshine at Ninus's tomb in order to carry on their courtship. This grisly beast, which is called "Lion," scared away, or rather frightened, the faithful Thisbe when she arrived at the meeting place at night. As she ran away from him, she dropped her cloak, which the horrible Lion stained with his bloody mouth. Soon Pyramus comes along, a tall and handsome young man, and finds his faithful Thisbe's cloak to be dead. At this point, he takes his sword, his bloody blameful blade, and bravely breaks open his boiling bloody breast. And Thisbe, hiding in the shade of the mulberry bushes, took his dagger and killed herself. For the rest of the story, let Lion, Moonshine, Wall, and the two lovers talk more about it, since they're standing here.

THESEUS

I wonder if the lion's going
to talk.

DEMETRIUS

No wonder, my lord. One
lion may when many asses
do.

DEMETRIUS

It wouldn't surprise me, my
lord. If these asses can
speak, a lion should be able
to.

PROLOGUE, THISBE, LION, and MOONSHINE exit.

WALL

(played by SNOOT) At this point I, Snout, play a wall. But not just any wall. I want you to understand that I'm pretending to be a kind of wall that has a little hole in it. The lovers Pyramus and Thisbe often whispered very secretly through that hole. This clay, this cement, and this stone that I'm carrying around show that I'm that wall. It's the truth. And this is the crack, right side and left side *(points with two fingers)*, through which the frightened lovers will be whispering.

DEMETRIUS

It's the smartest partition I've ever heard speak, my lord.

PYRAMUS

(played by BOTTOM) Oh, grim-looking night! Oh, night that is so black in color! Oh night, which is always there when it is not day! Oh night! Oh night! So sad, sad, sad, I'm afraid my Thisbe has forgotten her promise!—And you, oh Wall, oh sweet, oh lovely Wall, you stand between her father's property and mine, you Wall, oh Wall, oh sweet and lovely Wall. Show me your hole to stick my eye up against!

WALL holds up two fingers

Thanks, courteous Wall.
Jove shield thee well for
this!

Thank you, you're such a
polite wall. God bless you
for doing this. But what's

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But what see I? No Thisbe
do I see.

O wicked Wall through
whom I see no bliss!

Cursed be thy stones for
thus deceiving me!

happiness! **BOTTOM**

this I see? I don't see any
Thisbe. Oh wicked wall,
through which I don't see
an

(out of character) No, actually, sir, he shouldn't say anything. It's not his turn, it's
Thisbe's. "Disappointing me like this" is Thisbe's cue.

THISBE

(played by FLUTE) Oh wall, you've often heard me moaning because you keep me
separated from my handsome Pyramus! My cherry lips have often kissed your bricks,
which are stuck together with cement.

PYRAMUS

I see a voice! I'll go to the
hole to see if I can hear my
Thisbe's face. Thisbe?

THISBE

My love thou art, my love,
I think.

THISBE

You are my love, my love, I
think.

THISBE I am going to be as faithful to you as the Helen of Troy until the day I die.

APYRAMUS

Oh, kiss me through the hole in this nasty wall.

THISBE

But I'm only kissing the wall's hole, not your lips at all.

Wall Thisbe and Pyramus exit.

WALL

I, Wall, have done my part. Now that I'm done, Wall can go away.

DEMETRIUS

What can you do? That's
what happens with talking
walls.

HIPPOLYTA

This is the silliest stuff

HIPPOLYTA

This is the silliest thing I've

that ever I heard.

ever seen.

LION

(played by SNUG) You, ladies, whose gentle hearts make you afraid of the smallest monstrous mouse that crawls around on the floor, might quake and tremble now when the wild lion roars in his most violent rage. You should know that I, Snug the carpenter, am not a fierce lion or a lioness, because if I were a lion and I showed up here to cause trouble, I'd be taking my life in my hands.

DEMETRIUS

He's the best actor I've ever seen play a lion.

MOONSHINE

This lantern represents the moon. I myself am playing the man in the moon—

DEMETRIUS

He can't go in there because of the candle. It's too hot.

LYSANDER

Go ahead, Moon. **MOONSHINE**

All I wanted to tell you is that the lantern is the moon, I'm the man in the moon, this thornbush is my thornbush, and this dog is my dog.

THISBE

This is old Ninny's tomb. But where is my love? **LION**

(roaring) Hey!

Thisbe runs off dropping her veil. **DEMETRIUS**

Good roaring, Lion!

THESEUS

Good running, Thisbe!

HIPPOLYTA

Good shining, Moon!—Really, the Moon shines very well.

Demetrius And then Pyramus showed up.

LYSANDER

So the lion disappeared.

PYRAMUS

Sweet Moon, I thank you for your sunny beams. I thank you, Moon, for shining now so bright, because by the light of your gracious, golden, glittering gleams,

HIPPOLYTA

Damned if I don't feel sorry for him.

Pyramus

And so I'm dying. Here I go, here I go. Okay, now I'm dead. My soul has fled to the sky.

My tongue shall see no more, It's time for the moon to go away. **MOONSHINE** exits.

Now die, die, die, die, die. (PYRAMUS *dies*)

HIPPOLYTA

I don't think a ridiculous Pyramus like that one deserves much moaning. I hope she keeps it short**DEMETRIUS**

I can't decide whether Pyramus or Thisbe is better. God help us if he's a better man. But God help us if she's a better woman.

LYSANDER

Look, she's spotted
him with those sweet
eyes of hers.

DEMETRIUS

And thus she means,
videlicet—

DEMETRIUS

And now she'll start moaning, of
course—

Thysbe Are you asleep, my love?
What, are you dead, my dove? Oh,
Pyramus, get up! Speak, speak. Can't
you talk? Dead, dead? The dirt of a
grave must cover your sweet eyes!

*The actors dance,
and **BOTTOM** and **FLUTE** exit's
almost fairy time. I'm afraid we're
going to oversleep in the morning as
late as we've stayed up tonight.*

ROBIN

Now the hungry lion roars and the wolf
howls at the moon. The farmer snores,
exhausted from his work. HIPPOLITA

Laughs. OBERON and **TITANIA** enter with their servants and followers. **OBERON**

Let the dying fire shine a glimmering light throughout the house. I want every elf and fairy to hop lightly, like a bird on a twig, and to sing and dance this song along with me.

TITANIA

First rehearse your song from memory, and make sure each note is pretty. We'll all join hands and sing, and bless this place with our fairy grace.

Now fairies let's all dance.

Robin

If we actors have offended you, just think of it this way and everything will be all right—you were asleep when you saw these visions, and this silly and pathetic story was no more real than a dream. Ladies and gentlemen, don't get upset with me. If you forgive us, we'll make everything all right. I'm an honest Puck, and I swear that if we're lucky enough not to get hissed at, we'll make it up to you soon. If not, then I'm a liar. So good night to everyone. Give me some applause, if we're friends, and Robin will make everything up to you.