

Silly Shakespeare for Students

A stylized illustration of a forest at night. The trees are dark blue with circular canopies. In the center, a white unicorn and a white fairy with wings are standing. The background is dark blue with white stars and a large yellow moon at the top.

# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

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*with help from*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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# S ummary

Written in 1596/96 *A Midsummer Nights' Dream* is one of Shakespeare's most performed plays. Our version is very close to the original in terms of plot, characters and narrative. We have added a short introduction by a narrator and Puck and have combined some of the minor fairy characters into the part of Fairy.

Theseus, the duke of Athens, is preparing for his marriage to Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, with a four-day festival of entertainment. He commissions his Master of the Revels, Philostrate (who in our version is Puck in disguise) to find suitable amusements for the occasion. Egeus, an Athenian nobleman, marches into Theseus's court with his daughter, Hermia, and two young men, Demetrius and Lysander. Egeus wishes Hermia to marry Demetrius (who loves Hermia), but Hermia is in love with Lysander and refuses to agree. Egeus asks for the full force of the law to fall on Hermia's head if she disobeys her father. Theseus gives Hermia until his wedding to consider her options, warning if she disobeys her father's wishes she could be sent to a convent or even executed.

Nonetheless, Hermia and Lysander plan to escape Athens the following night and marry in the house of Lysander's aunt, some distance away. They make their intentions known to Hermia's friend Helena, who was once engaged to Demetrius and still loves him (even though he dumped her after meeting Hermia). Hoping to regain his love, Helena tells Demetrius of Hermia and Lysander's plan. At the appointed time, Demetrius stalks into the woods after his intended bride and her lover. Helena follows him.

In these same woods are two very different groups of characters. The first is a band of fairies, including Oberon,

the fairy king, and Titania, his queen. They have recently returned from India to bless the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta. The second is a band of Athenian craftsmen (the Mechanicals) rehearsing a play that they hope to perform for the duke and his bride.

Oberon and Titania are arguing over a young Indian servant boy given to Titania by the prince's mother; the boy is so beautiful that Oberon wishes to make him a servant, but Titania refuses. Seeking revenge, Oberon sends his servant, Puck, to acquire a magical flower, the juice of which can be spread over a sleeping person's eyelids to make that person fall in love with the first thing he or she sees upon waking. Puck obtains the flower, and Oberon tells him of his plan to spread its juice on the sleeping Titania's eyelids.

Having seen Demetrius act cruelly toward Helena, he orders Puck to spread some of the juice on the eyelids of the young Athenian man. Puck sees Lysander and Hermia; thinking that Lysander is the Athenian of whom Oberon spoke, Puck puts the love potion in his eyes. Lysander happens to see Helena upon awaking and falls deeply in love with her, abandoning Hermia.

As the night progresses and Puck attempts to undo his mistake, both Lysander and Demetrius end up in love with Helena, who believes that they are making fun of her. Hermia becomes so jealous that she tries to challenge Helena to a fight. Demetrius and Lysander nearly do fight over Helena's love, but Puck confuses them by mimicking their voices, leading them apart until they are lost separately in the forest.

When Titania wakes, the first creature she sees is Bottom, the most ridiculous of the Mechanicals, whose head Puck has transformed into that of a donkey. After Titania has passed some time doting on the donkey-headed weaver, Oberon (unseen) obtains the Indian boy. Puck spreads the love potion on Lysander's eyelids, and by morning all is well. Theseus and Hippolyta discover the sleeping lovers in the forest and take them back to Athens

to be married. Demetrius now loves Helena because of the potion, and Lysander loves Hermia again.

Following the wedding ceremony (unseen), the lovers watch Bottom and his fellow craftsmen perform their play, a fumbling, hilarious version of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. When the play is completed, the lovers go to bed; the fairies briefly emerge to bless the sleeping couples with a protective charm and then disappear. Only Puck remains, to ask the audience for its forgiveness and approval and to urge it to remember the play as though it had all been a dream<sup>1</sup>.

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1—The keen-eyed amongst you may notice some direct use of a few original lines/ words, including the final word in each line of Puck's final monologue being the same as the original version.

# Playing Style

This version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, although reduced to around a one-hour playing time, remains true to the original's plot, characters (with some small exceptions), and structure. When performed, this production should maintain a lively pace and exaggerated style. Although Puck is directed to speak directly to the audience, other characters can follow his lead in order to maintain an intimate feeling between characters and audience. Technically, the production, as with the original, has a very low level of technical requirements. The sets can be very minimal and the costumes simple. A musical score may be used between scenes to cover changes where necessary.

Of course, one of the major differences between this version and the original is the simplification of the text. On some occasions, in performance, you will find the rhyming scheme helpful to the playing, in which case the actors should just 'stand back', enjoy the words and help the audience do the same. On other occasions, the rhyming scheme will seem stifling and restrictive, in which case do not be afraid to improvise a little, add your own occasional lines or do not emphasise the rhymes so much. Overall, this version should be fun to play and watch. It can be produced with a small budget and should be done 'over the top' which can give you a chance to play with your own ideas of theatricality.

# Cast of Characters

## FAIRIES

PUCK:	<i>The servant of Oberon. Very mischievous fairy</i>
TITANIA:	<i>The wife of Oberon and queen of the fairies</i>
OBERON:	<i>The husband of Titania and king of the fairies</i>
FAIRY:	<i>The servant of Titania</i>

## ATHENIANS/THESEUS' COURT

THESEUS:	<i>The Duke of Athens, impatient to be married.</i>
HIPPOLYTA:	<i>The Queen of an Amazon tribe. Brought back to Athens as a prize of war and is now Theseus's fiancée.</i>
PHILOSTRATE:	<i>Theseus' servant (played by Puck in disguise)</i>
EGEUS:	<i>Hermia's father and Greek Lord, impatient for his daughter to marry Lysander</i>
HERMIA:	<i>The daughter of Egeus. Both Demetrius and Lysander are in love with her. But she loves only Lysander.</i>
LYSANDER:	<i>Young Athenian aristocrat in love with Hermia</i>
HELENA:	<i>Aristocratic Athenian friend of Hermia's. In love with Demetrius</i>
DEMETRIUS:	<i>Young Athenian aristocrat, former boyfriend of Helena. Now in love with Hermia</i>

## MECHANICALS

*(A group of lower-class craftsmen attempting to put on a play for Theseus' upcoming wedding)*

QUINCE:	<i>the play director</i>
BOTTOM:	<i>a joiner, plays Pyramus</i>
FLUTE:	<i>plays Thisbe</i>
SNUG:	<i>plays the lion</i>
SNOUT:	<i>plays the wall</i>
STARVELING:	<i>plays the moon</i>

# Act 1

## Prologue

### CHORUS

*(Each actor to take at least one line and addresses the audience directly).*

Good evening. Welcome to the show  
Midsummer Night's Dream, I'm sure you all know . . .  
It's a famous work by Will the Bard  
But his language can be kind of hard

So this evening we will do our best  
To simplify old William's text.  
As you can hear, we'll speak in rhyme  
And cut two hours off the running time.

So for those of you who have an aversion  
To seeing Shakespeare in a modern version,  
Best go now before we start  
To pull this classic play apart.



But for those of you with short attention,  
Our show's a really great invention:  
Only the highlights and none of the dross<sup>2</sup>.

**PUCK**

And me, I'm Puck, I'm a fairy, of course

Now you may not believe that I really exist  
Or think fairies and ghouls are just shapes in the mist  
But in actual fact, that's not really the case:  
I stand here as real as the nose on your face.

With the help of one of Shakespeare's shows  
We'll show how you humans we keep on your toes.  
Talking of which here's the King and the Queen  
But don't worry about me, cos<sup>3</sup> I cannot be seen!

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2—Bad parts

3—Short for because.

## S CENE 1.

*Athens. The palace of THESEUS.*

*(Enter THESEUS, HIPPOLYTA, and Attendants)*

**THESEUS**

Hippolyta, dear, well, here's your new home.  
It may not be so fancy but at least it's not Rome.  
In Athens we have far more manners and taste  
So your beauty and charm will not go to waste.

**HIPPOLYTA**

Manners and taste? Have you muddled<sup>4</sup> your brains?  
You stole me from home, and you keep me in chains

**THESEUS**

Oh, don't be like that my dear Amazon queen  
It's old-fashioned romance . . .

**HIPPOLYTA**

. . . it's not, it's obscene!  
I have not got a choice but to marry you here

**THESEUS**

Then you may as well face it. Crack open a beer

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4—Mixed up, scrambled

(THESEUS *passes* HIPPOLYTA *a beer*)

Philostrate, Philostrate! Where the heck is he now?

(PUCK *enters disguised as* PHILOSTRATE)

**PHILOSTRATE**

I'm right here, your Highness

**THESEUS**

... There is no need to bow

**PUCK**

(*Aside*) Yes, it's Puck here-you knew that-disguised as a  
man

I do this sometimes just to make good my plan

**THESEUS**

I'm worried my queen is getting cold feet.

And a little bit drunk. (*To* HIPPOLYTA) Here, love, take a  
seat.

(*To* PHILOSTRATE) This wedding you promise will win  
me her heart?

**PHILOSTRATE**

Don't you worry 'bout that Lord, I'll just make a start

(*He exits*)

**HIPPOLYTA**

How long do I have to sit here like this?

**THESEUS**

Not long now, dear. Perhaps one little kiss?

**HIPPOLYTA**

Not likely, you heathen<sup>5</sup>, not 'til I am freed.  
And even after we're married, it's not guaranteed

*(Enter EGEUS and HERMIA)*

**EGEUS**

Happy be Theseus . . .

**THESEUS**

. . . Oh, not you again?

**EGEUS**

It's my eldest girl Hermia. She's being a pain.  
I told her to marry this upstanding lad:  
Demetrius, step forward

*(Enter DEMETRIUS)*

**HERMIA**

. . . He's an absolute cad!

**EGEUS**

Stop lying my child. He's as sweet as a panda.

**HERMIA**

But I want to marry this man Lysander.

*(Enter LYSANDER)*

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5—Someone who is uncivilized

**LYSANDER**

We had a few dates and we saw some good bands.

**EGEUS**

And now she won't do what her father commands  
Please tell her, my Lord. I am wasting my breath  
She either gets married or we put her to death

**HIPPOLYTA**

I'm with you, dear Hermia. It seems that we women  
Around here in Athens don't get an opinion

**THESEUS**

(*To EGEUS*) Well, thanks a lot, Egeus, your timing is great.  
I know it's a problem, but couldn't it wait?  
(*turns to HERMIA*) Now listen Hermia, it's Demetrius or  
bust  
And I'll even let you get married with us

**HERMIA**

Well I don't want to die, but this man ain't no fun

**THESEUS**

Either marry him, dear, or you'll live as a nun!

**EGEUS**

Oh, thank you, my Lord. I'm sure she'll agree

**THESEUS**

She'd better do, mate . . . Now let's go have tea.

*(Exit all but LYSANDER and HERMIA)*

**LYSANDER**

Well, the course of true love in our case is dead,  
So I'd better be going, you heard what he said.

**HERMIA**

Is that it? Not so fast. Are you a man or a mouse?  
Let's run off to your Auntie's house

**LYSANDER**

That cute little shack on the edge of the wood?

**HERMIA**

And there we'll get married. You got it?

**LYSANDER**

Yes . . .

**HERMIA**

. . . Good!

*(Enter HELENA)*

**HERMIA**

Oh, Hi there, Helena. How are you?  
Your hair looks great. Did you do something new?

**HELENA**

I'm trying to look more serious  
To win that man Demetrius,  
But whatever I say and whatsoever I do  
He has only got eyes for you,  
Your eyes, your ears, your mouth, your nose . . .

**HERMIA**

My head and shoulders, knees and toes?

**HELENA**

Don't tease me so, it's not a joke.  
I'm obsessed with that Demetrius bloke.  
I wish I had your gorgeous looks  
To get in that man's good books.

**HERMIA**

All other men, they say you're hot  
But Demetrius has lost the plot.<sup>6</sup>  
It doesn't matter what I say.  
He's waiting for our wedding day!

**HELENA**

But you love him (*indicates* LYSANDER). Did I get that  
right?

**HERMIA**

(*nodding*) Which is why we're skipping town tonight

**LYSANDER**

Well, actually we leave tomorrow,  
But we'll put an end to all your sorrow.

**HERMIA**

We'll never come back . . .

**LYSANDER**

. . . I swear it's true

---

6—Lost touch with reality

**HERMIA**

And then he'll only have eyes for you.

*(Exit HERMIA and LYSANDER)*

**HELENA**

Oh, Cupid, such a cruel sprite  
To land me in this awful plight.  
He loved me once: Demetrius.  
But Hermia she did ruin us.  
And even when he knows their plan  
I'm sure he'll never be my man.  
He'll follow them into the trees  
To catch a peek, but if you please  
I'll follow him to enrich my pain  
Just to see him go . . . (hopefully) and come back again

*(Exit all)*



**OBERON**

Oh, let it go I do beseech  
This here is my final speech!  
Let their lives be clean, not grubby.  
Let their kids be fun and chubby.  
Let the women wear the pants.  
And let men learn how to dance.  
And let the fairies all agree  
To let them live accordingly!

*(Exit OBERON, TITANIA, and train)*

**PUCK**

If you're feeling all offended  
Cos this play we have amended  
Just forget that you were here  
And none of us we did appear.  
cos that's the point, the gist, the theme,  
We're all just fairies in a dream.  
So go home and don't reprehend:  
And soon you'll feel you're on the mend.  
Just keep a little thought of Puck,  
And if you do, I'll bring you luck.  
From the tips of my toes to the tip of my tongue,  
I'll cast you my shadow and my shadow is long;  
If you're feeling all playful, just give me a call;  
And some fun like tonight I will share with all.  
And if all of these couplets didn't make us good friends,  
I will visit you later and make my  
. . . amends.