

William Shakespeare

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Summary

A Midsummer Night's Dream takes place in Athens. Theseus, the Duke of Athens, is planning his marriage with Hippolyta, and as a result he is planning a large festival. Egeus enters, followed by his daughter Hermia, her beloved Lysander, and her suitor Demetrius. Egeus tells Theseus that Hermia refuses to marry Demetrius, wanting instead to marry Lysander. He asks for the right to punish Hermia with death if she refuses to obey.

Theseus agrees that Hermia's duty is to obey her father, and threatens her with either entering a nunnery or marrying the man her father chooses. Lysander protests, but is overruled by the law. He and Hermia then decide to flee by night into the woods surrounding Athens, where they can escape the law and get married. They tell their plan to Helena, a girl who is madly in love with Demetrius. Hoping to gain favor with Demetrius, Helena decides to tell him about the plan.

Some local artisans and workmen have decided to perform a play for Theseus as a way to celebrate his wedding. They choose Pyramus and Thisbe for their play, and meet to assign the roles. Nick Bottom gets the role of Pyramus, and Flute takes the part of Thisbe. They agree to meet the next night in the woods to rehearse the play.

Robin Goodfellow, a puck, meets a fairy who serves Queen Titania. He tells the fairy that his King Oberon is in the woods, and that Titania should avoid Oberon because they will quarrel again. However, Titania and Oberon soon arrive and begin arguing about a young boy Titania has stolen and is caring for. Oberon demands that she give him the boy, but she refuses.

Oberon decides to play a trick on Titania and put some pansy juice on her eyes. The magical juice will make her fall in love with first person she sees upon waking up. Soon after Puck is sent away to fetch the juice, Oberon overhears Demetrius and Helena in the woods.

Demetrius deserts Helena in the forest, leaving her alone. Oberon decides that he will change this situation, and commands Robin to put the juice onto Demetrius's eyes when he is sleeping. He then finds Titania and drops the juice onto her eyelids. Robin goes to find Demetrius, but instead comes across Lysander and accidentally uses the juice on him.

By accident Helena comes across Lysander and wakes him up. He immediately falls in love with her and starts to chase her through the woods. Together they arrive where Oberon is watching, and he realizes the mistake. Oberon then puts the pansy juice onto Demetrius's eyelids, who upon waking up also falls in love with Helena. She thinks that the two men are trying to torment her for being in love with Demetrius, and becomes furious at their protestations of love.

The workmen arrive in the woods and start to practice their play. They constantly ruin the lines of the play and mispronounce the words. Out of fear of censorship, they decide to make the play less realistic. Therefore the lion is supposed to announce that he is not a lion, but only a common man. Bottom also feels obliged to tell the audience that he is not really going to die, but will only pretend to do so. Puck, watching this silly scene, catches Bottom alone and puts an asses head on him. When Bottom returns to his troupe, they run away out of fear. Bottom then comes across Titania, and succeeds in waking her up. She falls in love with him due to the juice on her eyes, and takes him with her.

Lysander and Demetrius prepare to fight one another for Helena. Puck intervenes and leads them through the woods in circles until they collapse onto the ground in exhaustion. He then brings the two women to same area and puts them to sleep as well.

Oberon finds Titania and releases her from the spell. He then tells the audience that Bottom will think is all a dream when he wakes up. He further releases Lysander from the spell. Theseus arrives with a hunting party and finds the lovers stretched out on the ground. He orders the hunting horns blown in order to wake them up.

The lovers explain why they are in the woods, at which point Egeus demands that he be allowed to exercise the law on Hermia. However, Demetrius intervenes and tells them that he no longer loves Hermia, but rather only loves Helena. Theseus decides to overbear Egeus and let the lovers get married that day with him. Together they return to Athens.

Bottom wakes up and thinks that he has dreamed the entire episode. He swiftly returns to Athens where he meets his friends. Together they head over to Theseus's palace. Theseus looks over the list of possible entertainment for that evening and settles on the play of Pyramus and Thisbe. Bottom and the rest of his company perform the play, after which everyone retires to bed.

Puck arrives and starts to sweep the house clean. Oberon and Titania briefly bless the couples and their future children. After they leave Puck asks the audience to forgive the actors if they were offended. He then tells the audience that if anyone disliked the play, they should imagine that it was only a dream.¹

¹ "A Midsummer Night's Dream: Summary", **GradeSaver**,
www.gradesaver.com/midsummer-nights-dream/study-guide/summary