

A Midsummer Night's Dream

A text from the University of Texas UTOPIA "Shakespeare Kids" website, created by the UT Shakespeare at Winedale Outreach program; for more information, visit this "knowledge gateway" site at <http://utopia.utexas.edu>.

This text has been edited slightly for students in grades 5-8.

SCENE ONE (ACT 1, SCENE 1)

Setting: The palace of Theseus, Duke of Athens.

Enter Theseus, Hippolyta, Philostrate, and attendants

THESEUS:

Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
Draws on apace; four happy days bring in
Another moon: but, O, methinks, how slow
This old moon wanes! It lingers my desires...

HIPPOLYTA:

Four days will quickly steep themselves in night;
Four nights will quickly dream away the time;
And then the moon, like to a silver bow
New-bent in heaven, shall behold the night
Of our solemnities.

THESEUS:

Go, Philostrate,
Stir up the Athenian youth to merriments!

Exit Philostrate

Enter Egeus, Hermia, Lysander, and Demetrius

EGEUS:

Happy be Theseus, our renowned duke!

THESEUS:

Thanks, good Egeus: what's the news with thee?

EGEUS:

Full of vexation come I, with complaint
Against my child, my daughter Hermia!
Stand forth, Demetrius. My noble lord,
This man hath my consent to marry her.
Stand forth, Lysander...! My gracious duke,
This man hath bewitched the heart of my child;
Thou, thou, Lysander, thou hast given her rhymes,
And interchanged love-tokens with my child:
Thou hast by moonlight at her window sung;
With cunning hast thou filched my daughter's heart --
Turned her obedience, which is due to me,
To stubborn harshness: and, my gracious duke,
I beg the ancient privilege of Athens,
As she is mine, I may dispose of her:
Which shall be either to this gentleman
Or to her death, according to our law
Immediately provided in that case.

THESEUS:

What say you, Hermia? Be advised fair maid:
To you your father should be as a god.
Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.

HERMIA:

So is Lysander.

THESEUS:

In himself he is;
But in this kind, wanting your father's voice,
The other must be held the worthier.

HERMIA: :

I would my father looked but with my eyes.

THESEUS:

Rather your eyes must with his judgment look.

HERMIA:

I do entreat your grace to pardon me.
I know not by what power I am made bold,
But I beseech your grace that I may know
The worst that may befall me in this case,
If I refuse to wed Demetrius

THESEUS

Either to die the death, or to abjure
Forever the society of men.
Therefore, fair Hermia, question your desires.

HERMIA:

I will die, my lord, ere I will yield myself up
Unto his lordship, to whom my soul
Consents not to give sovereignty!

THESEUS:

Take time to pause; and, by the next new moon--
The sealing-day betwixt my love and me,
For everlasting bond of fellowship--
Upon that day either prepare to die
For disobedience to your father's will,
Or else to wed Demetrius, as he would,
Or on Diana's altar to protest
For aye austerity and single life.

DEMETRIUS:

Relent, sweet Hermia: and, Lysander, yield
Thy crazéd title to my certain right.

LYSANDER:

You have her father's love, Demetrius;
Let me have Hermia's: do you marry him.

EGEUS:

Scornful Lysander! True, he hath my love,
And what is mine my love shall render him.

And she is mine, and all my right of her
I do estate unto Demetrius.

LYSANDER:

I am, my lord, as well derived as he,
As well possessed; my love is more than his;
And (which is more than all these boasts can be)
I am beloved of beauteous Hermia:
Why should not I then prosecute my right?
Demetrius, I'll avouch it to his head,
Was in love with Nedar's daughter, Helena,
And won her soul; and she (sweet lady) dotes,
Devoutly dotes, dotes in idolatry,
Upon this spotted and inconstant man.

THESEUS:

I must confess that I have heard so much,
And with Demetrius thought to have spoke thereof;
But, being over-full of self-affairs,
My mind did lose it. But, Demetrius, come;
And come, Egeus; you shall go with me,
I have some private schooling for you both.
For you, fair Hermia, look you arm yourself
To fit your fancies to your father's will;
Or else the law of Athens yields you up--
To death, or to a vow of single life.
Come, my Hippolyta: what cheer, my love?

EGEUS:

With duty and desire we follow you.
Exeunt all but Lysander and Hermia
Lysander:
How now, my love! Why is your cheek so pale?
How chance the roses there do fade so fast?

HERMIA:

Belike for want of rain, which I could well
Beteem them from the tempest of my eyes.

LYSANDER:

Ay me! For aught that I could ever read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,

The course of true love never did run smooth;
But, either it was different in blood,--

HERMIA:

O cross! Too high to be enthralled to low.

LYSANDER:

Or else misgraffed in respect of years,--

HERMIA:

O spite! Too old to be engaged to young.

LYSANDER:

Or else it stood upon the choice of friends,--

HERMIA:

O hell! To choose love by another's eyes.

LYSANDER:

Or, if there were a sympathy in choice,
War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it,
Making it momentary as a sound,
Swift as a shadow, short as any dream;
Brief as the lightning in the collied night,
That, in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and earth,
And ere a man hath power to say 'Behold!'
The jaws of darkness do devour it up:
So quick bright things come to confusion.

HERMIA:

If then true lovers have been ever crossed,
It stands as an edict in destiny:
Then let us teach our trial patience,
Because it is a customary cross,
As due to love as thoughts and dreams and sighs,
Wishes and tears, poor fancy's followers.

LYSANDER:

A good persuasion: therefore, hear me, Hermia.
I have a widow aunt, a dowager
Of great revenue, and she hath no child:
From Athens is her house remote seven leagues;
And she respects me as her only son.
There, gentle Hermia, may I marry thee;
And to that place the sharp Athenian law
Cannot pursue us. If thou lovest me then,
Steal forth thy father's house to-morrow night;
And in the wood, a league without the town,
Where I did meet thee once with Helena,
To do observance to a morn of May,
There will I stay for thee.

HERMIA:

My good Lysander!
By all the vows that ever men have broke,
In number more than ever women spoke,
In that same place thou hast appointed me,
To-morrow truly will I meet with thee.

LYSANDER:

Keep promise, love. Look, here comes Helena.
Enter Helena

HERMIA:

God speed fair Helena! whither away?

HELENA:

Call you me fair? That fair again unsay.
Demetrius loves your fair: O happy fair!
Were the world mine, Demetrius being bated,
The rest I'd give to be to you translated.
O, teach me how you look, and with what art
You sway the motion of Demetrius' heart.

HERMIA:

I frown upon him, yet he loves me still.

HELENA:

O that your frowns would teach my smiles such skill!

HERMIA:

I give him curses, yet he gives me love.

HELENA:

O that my prayers could such affection move!

HERMIA:

The more I hate, the more he follows me.

HELENA:

The more I love, the more he hateth me.

HERMIA:

His folly, Helena, is no fault of mine.

HELENA:

None, but your beauty: would that fault were mine!

HERMIA:

Take comfort: he no more shall see my face;
Lysander and myself will fly this place.

LYSANDER:

Helen, to you our minds we will unfold:
To-morrow night through Athens' gates
Have we devised to steal.

HERMIA:

And in the wood, where often you and I
Upon faint primrose-beds were wont to lie,
Emptying our hearts of their counsel sweet,
There my Lysander and myself shall meet;
And thence from Athens turn away our eyes,
To seek new friends and stranger companies.

Farewell, sweet playfellow: pray thou for us;
And good luck grant thee thy Demetrius!
Keep word, Lysander: we must starve our sight
From lovers' food till morrow deep midnight.

LYSANDER:

I will, my Hermia.
Exit Hermia
Helena, adieu:
As you on him, Demetrius dote on you!
Exit Lysander
Helena:
How happy some o'er other some can be!
Through Athens I am thought as fair as she.
But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so;
Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind;
And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind:
For ere Demetrius looked on Hermia's eyes,
He hailed down oaths that he was only mine;
And when this hail some heat from Hermia felt,
So he dissolved, and showers of oaths did melt.
I will go tell him of fair Hermia's flight:
Then to the wood will he to-morrow night
Pursue her; and for this intelligence
If I have thanks, it is a dear expense:
But herein mean I to enrich my pain,
To have his sight thither and back again.
Exit Helena

BOTTOM:

We will meet; and there we may rehearse most
obscenely and courageously. Take pains; be perfect: adieu!

QUINCE:

At the duke's oak we meet.

BOTTOM:

Enough; hold, or cut bow-strings.

Exeunt