

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>.

SCENE ONE (ACT 1, SCENE 1) WITH NARRATION

Setting: The play takes place in ancient Greece, in the ancient city of Athens and the forest around it.

The first characters to enter are Duke Theseus of Athens and Hippolyta, the Amazon queen. Theseus and Hippolyta are to be married in four days, as soon as the old moon is gone and a new one appears, and the Duke is impatient for the fun of the wedding. Hippolyta reassures him that the time will go by quickly.

THESEUS:

Four happy days bring in another moon.
But O, methinks, how slow this old moon wanes!

HIPPOLYTA:

Four days will quickly steep themselves in night;
Four nights will quickly dream away the time.

Just then a group of Athenian citizens barges in, led by an old man, **Egeus**. Egeus tells the Duke that his daughter, **Hermia**, is being disobedient. She wants to marry a young man named **Lysander**. But Egeus wants Hermia to marry a young man named **Demetrius**. The three young people look on as Egeus lays it all out before the Duke, and invokes an ancient law of Athens: the rule that if any daughter refuses to marry the man of her father's choice, she can be sent to a nunnery to be a nun or be sentenced to death for disobedience.

EGEUS:

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.
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 refuses to give in. She is loyal to Lysander.

The Duke tells Hermia he cannot change the ancient law that gives Egeus control over his daughter's marriage. So Hermia has three choices:

- marry Demetrius
- become a nun, and never marry
- be put to death for violation of the ancient law of Athens!

Duke Theseus gives Hermia four days to decide – until his wedding day to Hippolyta. Everyone goes off and leaves Hermia and Lysander alone. They're sad and upset.

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!

Then: Lysander has an idea! "Let's run away and get married!" Hermia agrees. They plan to meet that night at midnight in a secret spot in the woods, then run for freedom.

Just then, Hermia's friend Helena comes in.

Helena is sad, because Demetrius USED TO love HER, now he loves her best friend Hermia. She feels unattractive and lonely. Hermia promises that she hasn't been flirting with Demetrius.

HERMIA:

The more I hate, the more he follows me.

HELENA:

The more I love, the more he hateth me.

Hermia comforts her, then tells Helena about the secret plan to run away with Lysander.

Lysander and Hermia run off, excited about meeting at midnight.

Helena feels sorry for herself, then.... She gets an idea too! She will go tell DEMETRIUS about Hermia's plan.

HELENA:

I will go tell him of fair Hermia's flight.
Then to the wood will he tomorrow night
Pursue her.

Helena knows that Demetrius will want to go look for Hermia into the woods to try to convince her to marry him... and maybe, for providing this information, Demetrius will like Helena a bit more! Or so she thinks.... She runs off to tell him and to betray her best friend.