

# 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 TWO (ACT 1, SCENE 2) WITH NARRATION

Setting: Up to our imagination; could be Quince's house, could be an area near the "stalls" where the craftsmen work in Athens, could even be a neighborhood gathering spot.

The scene shifts suddenly to from the Duke's palace to the working-class section of Athens. We meet a group of craftsmen, after they're getting off work. They are meeting to rehearse their own little play for the Duke's wedding. There's a city-wide competition and the winner of "best entertainment for the Duke's wedding" will win a prize. The craftsmen are: **Peter Quince**, a carpenter, the leader of the group; **Nick Bottom**, a weaver, the group's main actor; **Robin Starveling**, a tailor; **Tom Snout**, a tinker, who works with tin; **Francis Flute**, a teenager, who is a bellows-mender; and **Snug**, the joiner, who builds things out of wood.

### QUINCE:

Is all our company here?

### BOTTOM:

You were best to call them generally, man by man, according to the script.

Quince may be the organizer of the group, but its "heart" is Nick Bottom. Nick loves to act, and thinks of himself as a great actor. He tries to tell Peter Quince how to run the first meeting.

### QUINCE:

Here is the scroll of every man's name which is thought fit, through all Athens, to play in our interlude before the Duke and Duchess on his wedding day at night.

### BOTTOM:

First, good Peter Quince, say what the play treats on, then read the names of the actors – and so grow to a point!

Quince tells everyone the name of the play – "The most lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe."

"Pyramus and Thisbe" is a Romeo and Juliet story about two young lovers separated by their families, who build a wall between their houses. In the story, the lovers find a hole in the wall

and whisper plans to meet at midnight. **Thisbe**, the girl, gets to the meeting place first, but is scared off by a lion, who chews on her scarf. **Pyramus**, the boy, comes late, and finds the bloody scarf, and thinks Thisbe has been killed by the lion, and, feeling overwhelmed with grief, stabs himself in the heart. Thisbe comes back, finds Pyramus dead, and takes his sword and does the same. It's a sad story, but a beautiful play.

Nick is going to be Pyramus. He wants to know more about this role.

**QUINCE:**

You, Nick Bottom, are set down for Pyramus.

**BOTTOM:**

What is Pyramus, a lover, or a tyrant?

**BOTTOM:**

That will ask some tears in the true performing of  
it: if I do it, let the audience look to their  
eyes; I will move storms: I will condole in some measure.  
To the rest – Yet my chief humor is for a tyrant. I could play 'Ercles rarely, or a part to  
tear a cat in, to make all split:

Bottom turns this moment into a true performance, as the others watch and listen:

**BOTTOM:**

The raging rocks  
And shivering shocks  
Shall break the locks  
Of prison gates;  
And Phibbus' car  
Shall shine from far  
And make and mar  
The foolish Fates.

This was lofty! Now name the rest of the players.  
This is Hercules' vein, a tyrant's vein; a lover is  
more condoling.

Peter Quince gives **Flute** his role. Flute wants to be a knight fighting dragons, but he has to play the girl, because women weren't allowed to act in plays back then! Flute says he can't play a girl because he has a beard... coming. Nick jumps in and asks to play BOTH parts!

**BOTTOM:**

An I may hide my face, let me play Thisby too, I'll  
speak in a monstrous little voice. 'Thisne,  
Thisne;' 'Ah, Pyramus, lover dear! thy Thisby dear,  
and lady dear!'

**QUINCE:**

No, no; you must play Pyramus: and, Flute, you Thisby.

Bottom:

Well, proceed.

Quince declines, and moves on to the other characters. Robin Starveling the Tailor will be Thisby's mother; Tom Snout the Tinker will be Pyramus's father; Quince will be Thisby's father; and Snug will play the Lion. Snug the Joiner slowly approaches Quince with a concern.

**SNUG:**

Have you the lion's part written? Pray you, if it  
be, give it me, for I am slow of study.

**QUINCE:**

You may do it extempore, for it is nothing but roaring.

**BOTTOM:**

Let me play the lion too! I will roar, that I will  
do any man's heart good to hear me; I will roar,  
that I will make the duke say 'Let him roar again,  
let him roar again!'

**QUINCE:**

An you should do it too terribly, you would fright  
the duchess and the ladies, that they would shriek;  
and that were enough to hang us all.

**ALL:**

That would hang us, every mother's son.

**BOTTOM:**

I grant you, friends, if that you should fright the ladies out of their wits, they would have no more discretion but to hang us: but I will aggravate my voice so that I will roar you as gently as any sucking dove; I will roar you an 'twere any nightingale.

**QUINCE:**

You can play no part but Pyramus! For Pyramus is a sweet-faced man; a proper man, as one shall see in a summer's day; a most lovely gentleman-like man: therefore you must needs play Pyramus.

**BOTTOM:**

Well, I will undertake it. What beard were I best to play it in?

Quince says, "What you will," meaning Bottom can decide that – and then gives them scripts and final directions. They are meet tomorrow night in the woods to rehearse – they want to do it somewhere where no one else will watch them and steal their ideas.

Quince says they have to learn their lines by tomorrow night!

**QUINCE:**

I pray you, fail me not.

**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