

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 THREE WITH NARRATION (*aka Act 2, scene 1*)

Setting: The forest outside Athens, at night.

Finally, it is the next evening. We know that Hermia and Lysander are making their way into the woods for their secret meeting... and that Demetrius is heading off into the woods to find Hermia... and Helena is chasing him! Peter Quince and Nick Bottom and the gang are all at home, working on their lines and preparing to meet at “the Duke’s Oak” at midnight. And in the woods outside of Athens... the fairy spirits are stirring!

We see a group of Titania’s fairies zooming around, sprinkling dewdrops on the grasses and flowers – “orbs” they call these little drops of water, or “fairy favors.”

Suddenly, another spirit jumps out from behind some plants and surprises them. It is Puck, Oberon’s “jester” and helper.

PUCK:

How now, spirit! Whither wander you?

FAIRY:

Over hill, over dale,
Thorough bush, thorough brier,
Over park, over pale,
Thorough flood, thorough fire,
I do wander everywhere,
Swifter than the moon’s sphere;
And I serve the fairy queen,
To dew her orbs upon the green.
Farewell, thou lob of spirits; I’ll be gone:
Our queen and all our elves come here anon.

Puck warns the fairies that his boss, Oberon, is coming this way to “keep his revels,” or celebrations – each night, the fairies celebrate their world with dancing and singing and games. Oberon and Titania each have their own “lair,” or hangout spot.

Puck tells Titania’s fairies to clear out, because Oberon is angry – “passing fell and wrath” – because Titania has a “lovely boy,” a beautiful young Indian child she adopted when the boy’s mother died, and Oberon is full of jealousy and wants the boy to be part of his team of fairies.

Titania refuses to hand over the boy. She knew the mother, and promised to raise the child as hers after the mother – a human “mortal” died. Oberon is not happy about this! So now, whenever the King and Queen meet, they “square off” and have a huge fight, and the fairies scramble for cover!

PUCK:

But she perforce withholds the loved boy,
Crowns him with flowers and makes him all her joy:
And now they never meet in grove or green,
By fountain clear, or spangled starlight sheen,
But, they do square, that all their elves for fear
Creep into acorn-cups and hide them there.

Titania’s fairies think they recognize this Oberon spirit – could it be the famous Puck, know for his tricks?

FAIRY:

Either I mistake your shape and making quite,
Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite
Call’d Robin Goodfellow: are not you he
That frights the maidens of the villagery...
Mislead night-wanderers, laughing at their harm?
Those that Hobgoblin call you and sweet Puck,
You do their work, and they shall have good luck:
Are not you he?

PUCK:

Thou speak’st aright;
I am that merry wanderer of the night.
I jest to Oberon and make him smile...
But, room, fairy! here comes Oberon!

Oberon and Titania come storming in from opposite sides, and confront each other, while their fairies scurry for cover behind them.

OBERON:

Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania!

TITANIA:

What, jealous Oberon! Fairies, skip hence:
I have forsworn his company.

OBERON:

Tarry, rash wanton: am not I thy lord?
Why should Titania cross her Oberon?
I do but beg a little changeling boy,
To be my henchman.

TITANIA:

Set your heart at rest:
The fairy land buys not the child of me.
His mother was a votaress of my order...
But she, being mortal, of that boy did die;
And for her sake do I rear up her boy,
And for her sake I will not part with him.

OBERON:

How long within this wood intend you stay?

TITANIA:

Perchance till after Theseus' wedding-day.
If you will patiently dance in our round
And see our moonlight revels, go with us;
If not, shun me, and I will spare your haunts.

OBERON:

Give me that boy, and I will go with thee.

TITANIA:

Not for thy fairy kingdom. Fairies, away!
We shall chide downright, if I longer stay.

Titania storms off with her fairies. Oberon is furious, and vows to get back at her somehow!

OBERON:

Well, go thy way: thou shalt not from this grove
Till I torment thee for this injury.
My gentle Puck, come hither.
Fetch me that flower; the herb I show'd thee once:
The juice of it on sleeping eye-lids laid
Will make or man or woman madly dote
Upon the next live creature that it sees.

Fetch me this herb; and be thou here again
Ere the leviathan can swim a league.

Oberon plans to put the “love juice” from the flower shot by Cupid’s arrow onto Titania’s eyes while she’s sleeping. While she’s distracted, he’ll grab the boy. Puck zooms off to get the flower.

OBERON:

Having once this juice,
I’ll watch Titania when she is asleep,
And drop the liquor of it in her eyes.
The next thing then she waking looks upon,
Be it on lion, bear, or wolf, or bull,
On meddling monkey, or on busy ape,
She shall pursue it with the soul of love:
But who comes here? I am invisible;
And I will overhear their conference.

Oberon has heard someone crashing through the woods. He decides to watch, knowing they cannot see him. He sees a young Athenian woman chasing a young Athenian man. The man seems to be looking for someone else, and trying to ignore the young woman who is begging for his attention. It’s... Demetrius and Helena!

DEMETRIUS:

I love thee not, therefore pursue me not.
Where is Lysander and fair Hermia?
Thou told’st me they were stolen unto this wood;
Hence, get thee gone, and follow me no more.
Do I entice you? Do I speak you fair?
Or, rather, do I not in plainest truth
Tell you, I do not, nor I cannot love you?

HELENA:

And even for that do I love you the more.
Neglect me, lose me; only give me leave,
Unworthy as I am, to follow you.

Demetrius runs off to keep looking for Hermia. Helena chases after. Oberon, observing all of this, feels sorry for the young woman. She is trying so hard to give her love, and the young man is being so rude! He gets an idea. He’ll help her out! When Puck comes back with the flower, Oberon will ask Puck to take part of it and find the young man and put some on his eyes, so that he’ll wake up and fall in love with the woman.

OBERON:

Hast thou the flower there? Welcome, wanderer.

PUCK:

Ay, there it is.

OBERON:

I pray thee, give it me.
Take thou some of it, and seek through this grove:
A sweet Athenian lady is in love
With a disdainful youth: anoint his eyes;
But do it when the next thing he espies
May be the lady: thou shalt know the man
By the Athenian garments he hath on.
Effect it with some care, that he may prove
More fond on her than she upon her love:
And look thou meet me ere the first cock crow.

PUCK:

Fear not, my lord, your servant shall do so.

Oberon slips away to find the sleeping Titania and begin his plan to get the boy; Puck zooms off to find the young man in "Athenian garments" and fulfill Oberon's request!

Somewhere in the woods, Hermia and Lysander must be trying to find their way...