

*A  
Midsummer  
Night's Dream*  
William Shakespeare

TIMELESS SHAKESPEARE



## – INTRODUCTION –

Long ago in Greece, Hermia and Lysander decide to elope. Demetrius, who loves Hermia, follows them into the woods, hoping to stop them. Helena, who is in love with Demetrius, also follows.

In the woods are a group of fairies and several craftsmen, rehearsing a play.

Puck, one of the fairies, tricks each character into falling in love with the first person he or she sees upon awakening. All sorts of humorous confusion follows.

## – CAST OF CHARACTERS –

**THESEUS** Duke of Athens

**HIPPOLYTA** Queen of the Amazons, a warrior race of women, defeated in battle by Theseus

**EGEUS** An Athenian citizen

**HERMIA** Egeus's daughter

**LYSANDER** Young man who loves Hermia

**DEMETRIUS** Young man who loves Hermia

**HELENA** Hermia's friend who loves Demetrius

**PETER QUINCE** A carpenter

**NICK BOTTOM** A weaver

**FRANCIS FLUTE** A bellows-mender

**ROBIN STARVELING** A tailor

**TOM SNOUT** A tinker (mender of pots and pans)

**SNUG** A joiner (cabinet maker)

**PUCK** (Robin Goodfellow) A fairy

**OBERON** King of the fairies

**TITANIA** Queen of the fairies

**PEASEBLOSSOM, COBWEB, MOTH, and MUSTARDSEED**

Four fairies who serve Titania

**PHILOSTRATE** Theseus's servant

# ACT 1

## | Scene 1 |

*(Theseus and Hippolyta, along with their servants, enter Theseus's palace in Athens.)*

**THESEUS:** Now, fair Hippolyta, our wedding hour draws near. Four more days! Time seems to go so slowly.

**HIPPOLYTA:** Four days will quickly become night. Four nights will dream away the time. And then the new moon, like a silver bow, shall look on our wedding night.

**THESEUS:** Go, Philostrate. Stir up the youth of Athens to be merry. Awaken the spirit of fun. Tell all sadness to go to funerals. We don't want any sad faces at our wedding. *(Philostrate exits.)* Hippolyta, I wooed you with my sword In the heat of battle, and won your love while defeating you. But I will wed you in a different way— With celebration, joy, and good times.

*(Egeus and his daughter Hermia enter, along with Lysander and Demetrius.)*

**EGEUS:** Joy to Theseus, our respected Duke!

**THESEUS:** Thank you, good Egeus.

What's the news with you?

**EGEUS:** I am having trouble with my child,  
My daughter Hermia.

This man, Demetrius, has my consent to  
marry her.

But you, Lysander, have cast a spell on her!

*(turning to Lysander)* You have given her  
poetry and exchanged tokens of love with  
my child;

You have sung insincere songs of love by  
her window in the moonlight.

You have given her rings, flowers, and candy.

You have used all the tricks young men use  
On young girls like my daughter.

You have stolen my daughter's heart

And made her disobedient to me.

Now she refuses to marry Demetrius.

I claim my ancient right as a father:

As she is mine, I may give her to the man

I choose or send her to her death.

This is the law of our land, as you know.

**THESEUS:** What do you say, Hermia?

Let me remind you, fair maid,

Your father should be as a god to you.

He is the one who formed your beauty.

To him, you are but as a form in wax

That he has shaped. It is within his rights  
To leave the form as it is or destroy it.  
Demetrius is a good man.

**HERMIA:** So is Lysander.

**THESEUS:** In himself he is. But, in this case,  
Because of your father's wishes,  
The other must be seen as the better man.

**HERMIA:** I wish my father saw it with my eyes.

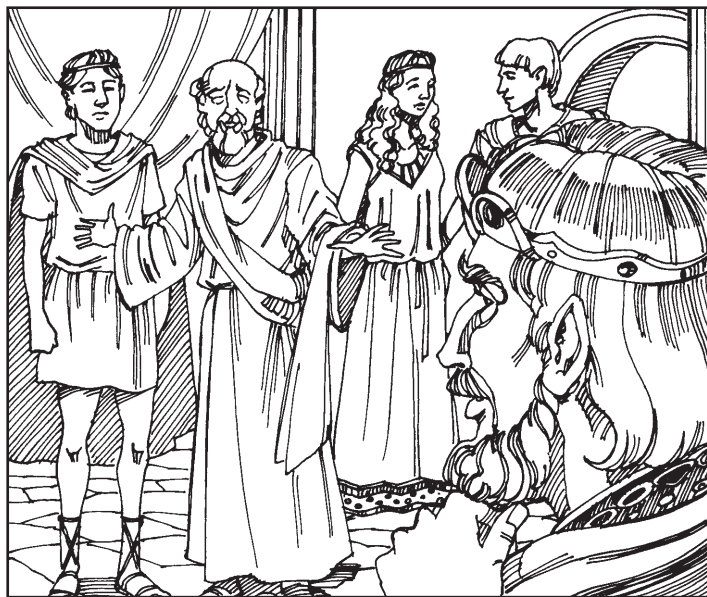
**THESEUS:** Rather, you must see it his way.

**HERMIA:** I beg your grace to pardon me.  
I do not know if it is proper for me  
To explain my thoughts to you.  
But I beg you to answer one question:  
What is the worst that could happen to me  
If I refuse to wed Demetrius?

**THESEUS:** Either to die or never to marry at all.  
Think hard, fair Hermia!  
Consider your youth and your feelings.  
Ask yourself if you could live as a nun.  
Could you be a childless sister all your life,  
Singing weak songs to the cold, lifeless moon?  
Those who can do so are certainly blessed.  
But would you be happy with such a life?

**HERMIA:** So will I live—or die—my lord,  
Before I would marry a man I do not love.

**THESEUS:** Take time to think about this.  
Tell us your answer in four days,



On the wedding day of my love and me.  
By then you must prepare to die  
For going against your father's will—  
Or wed Demetrius, as your father wishes.  
Or live as a nun for the rest of your life.

**DEMETRIUS:** Give in, sweet Hermia.

And you, too, Lysander.

Let me claim what is rightly mine.

**LYSANDER:** You have her father's love, Demetrius.

Let me have Hermia's. *You* marry him.

**EGEUS:** It is true—Demetrius has my love.

And so, I shall give him what is mine.

Hermia belongs to me. All my rights to her  
I give to Demetrius.

**LYSANDER:** My lord, I am as good a man as he!  
 My family is as well-connected as his.  
 I have as much money as he.  
 My love is greater than his.  
 In every way, I am at least as good as he is,  
 And in some ways, I am better.  
 The beautiful Hermia loves me,  
 Which is the most important point.  
 Why shouldn't I return her love?  
 Demetrius courted Nedar's daughter,  
 Helena, and won her soul.  
 She still loves this faithless man.

**THESEUS:** I have meant to talk to Demetrius  
 about it.  
 But I've been so busy that I forgot to  
 do so.  
 Come with me, Demetrius.  
 You, too, Egeus. I must talk to you  
 privately.  
 As for you, fair Hermia, try  
 To fit your wishes to those of your father.  
 Otherwise the law of Athens will go  
 against you.  
 We can do nothing about it—  
 You must die or vow to live a single life.  
 Come, my Hippolyta.  
 Demetrius and Egeus, you come, too.  
 I must talk to you about our wedding  
 And about something else that concerns you.

**EGEUS:** We are happy to go with you, my lord.

*(All but Lysander and Hermia exit.)*

**LYSANDER:** My love! Why is your face so pale?  
How did your rosy cheeks fade so fast?

**HERMIA:** Perhaps it is from lack of rain.  
Only my tears water them.

**LYSANDER:** Oh, my! From everything that I've  
learned,  
The course of true love never did run  
smooth.

**HERMIA:** Oh, awful! To choose love by  
another's eyes.

**LYSANDER:** War or death may stand in the way.  
Love lasts just a moment, like a sound.  
It is swift as a shadow, short as any dream  
And as quick as lightning in a storm  
That, in a rage, splits heaven and earth.  
Before a person can say, "Look at that!"  
The jaws of darkness eat it up.

**HERMIA:** If this is truly what love is,  
It must be law. So we must be patient  
And give to love our thoughts and dreams,  
Our wishes and tears.

**LYSANDER:** Good advice, Hermia. Now, hear me.  
I have a rich old aunt.  
She's a widow with no children.  
Her house is only 20 miles from Athens.



She thinks of me as her only son.  
 There, gentle Hermia, we can get married.  
 Athenian law cannot touch us there.  
 If you love me, leave your father's house  
 Tomorrow night. Meet me in the woods,  
 Three miles outside of town.  
 Remember where I met you with Helena  
 To gather May flowers one morning?  
 That's where I will wait for you.

**HERMIA:** My good Lysander! I swear to you by  
 Cupid's strongest bow, and  
 By his best arrow, with the golden tip—  
 By all that keeps lovers' souls together—  
 And by all the vows that men have broken  
 (Which are more than women ever made)—  
 Tomorrow I truly will meet you there.

**LYSANDER:** Keep your promise, love.  
 Look, here comes Helena.

*(Helena enters.)*

**HERMIA:** Hello, fair Helena!

**HELENA:** You call me "fair"? You don't mean  
 it.  
 Demetrius loves *your* fairness. You are  
 lucky! To him, your eyes are like stars.  
 Oh, were beauty as catching as sickness!  
 I would want to catch yours, fair Hermia.  
 If the world were mine, and Demetrius, too,  
 I'd give you the world and keep Demetrius.

Oh, teach me how to look like you, and how  
To lead the dancing of Demetrius's heart!

**HERMIA:** He loves me though I frown upon  
him!

**HELENA:** I wish your frowns would teach my  
smiles such skill!

**HERMIA:** The more I reject him, the more he  
loves me.

**HELENA:** The more I love him, the more he  
rejects me.

**HERMIA:** He's a fool, Helena! It's not my fault.

**HELENA:** It's the fault of your beauty. I wish  
that fault were mine!

**HERMIA:** Be happy. He won't see me again.  
Lysander and I will soon leave this place.  
Before I saw Lysander,  
Athens seemed a paradise to me.  
But I don't feel that way anymore.

**LYSANDER:** Helena, here's our plan:  
Tomorrow night, when the moon sees  
Her silver face in the water,  
We will steal away from Athens.

**HERMIA:** There we will meet new people and  
seek new friends.  
Goodbye, sweet childhood friend. Pray for us.  
And good luck with your Demetrius!  
Keep your word, Lysander, dear.