



*A Midsummer Night's Dream*

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# *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

William Shakespeare

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# Dramatis Personae and Scene

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Hermia's father

**Lysander**

Courtier (in love with Hermia)

**Demetrius**

Courtier (in love with Hermia)

**Philostrate**

Theseus' Master of the Revels

**Lords, Attendants****Peter Quince**

Carpenter; "Prologue"

**Snug**

Woodworker; "Lion"

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Weaver; "Pyramus"  
transformed into an ass by Puck

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Oberon's jester, a mischievous fairy who causes much of the confusion in the play.

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Titania's fairy

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Titania's fairy

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V, i: Athens. The palace of Theseus.

# Act I

## Summary

I, i

*Theseus:* Now, fair Hippolyta, **our nuptial hour**<sup>1</sup>  
Draws on apace; four happy days bring in  
Another moon: but, O, methinks, how slow  
This old moon wanes! she lingers my desires,  
Like to a step-dame or a dowager<sup>2</sup> 5  
Long withering out a young man revenue.<sup>3</sup>  
*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 10  
Of our solemnities.  
*Theseus:* Go, Philostrate,  
Stir up the Athenian youth to merriments;  
Awake the pert and nimble<sup>4</sup> spirit of mirth;  
Turn melancholy forth to funerals;  
The pale companion is not for our pomp. 15  
*[Exit Philostrate]*  
Hippolyta, **I wooed thee with my sword**,  
And won thy love doing thee injuries;  
But I will wed thee in another key,  
With pomp, with triumph, and with revelling.

Theseus, the Duke of Athens, is preparing the city for a large festival to mark his imminent marriage to Hippolyta. Egeus, a nobleman, enters the stage accompanied by his daughter Hermia, the man she loves named Lysander, and the man Egeus wants her to marry named Demetrius. He begs Theseus for the ancient Athenian right to either make his daughter marry Demetrius or have the power to kill her:

*Egeus:* Full of vexation<sup>5</sup> come I, with complaint  
Against my child, my daughter Hermia.  
Stand forth, Demetrius. My noble lord,  
This man hath my consent to marry her. 25  
Stand forth, Lysander. And, my gracious duke,  
This man hath bewitch'd the bosom<sup>6</sup> of my child.

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<sup>1</sup> time of our wedding

<sup>2</sup> stepmother or a widow (with inherited property which a son who marries will have in her stead)

<sup>3</sup> income

<sup>4</sup> lively/quick/cheerful and clever/swift/light/agile

<sup>5</sup> trouble, distress, grief

<sup>6</sup> heart

Thou, thou, Lysander, thou hast given her rhymes,<sup>7</sup>  
 And interchanged love-tokens<sup>8</sup> with my child;  
 Thou hast by moonlight at her window sung, 30  
 With feigning<sup>9</sup> voice, verses of feigning love,  
 And stolen the impression of her fantasy  
 With bracelets<sup>10</sup> of thy hair, rings, gawds,<sup>11</sup> conceits,<sup>12</sup>  
 Knacks,<sup>13</sup> trifles, nosegays,<sup>14</sup> sweetmeats,<sup>15</sup> messengers  
 Of strong prevailment<sup>16</sup> in unhardened<sup>17</sup> youth; 35  
 With cunning hast thou filch'd<sup>18</sup> my daughter's heart;  
 Turn'd her obedience, which is due to me,  
 To stubborn harshness. And, my gracious duke,  
 Be it so she will not here before your Grace  
 Consent to marry with Demetrius, 40  
 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. 45

Theseus offers Hermia only two options: she must marry Demetrius or join a nunnery. He then departs with the other men, leaving Hermia and Lysander behind on stage. Lysander quickly convinces Hermia to sneak into the woods the next night so that they may get married at his aunt's house outside of Athens. She agrees to the plan.

*Lysander:* A good persuasion:<sup>19</sup> 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;<sup>20</sup>  
 And she respects me as her only son. 160  
 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, 165  
 Where I did meet thee once with Helena,  
 To do observance<sup>21</sup> to a morn of May,

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<sup>7</sup> poems, verses

<sup>8</sup> gifts

<sup>9</sup> deceitful, artful

<sup>10</sup> ornamental bands

<sup>11</sup> showy ornaments, gewgaws

<sup>12</sup> fancy trifles

<sup>13</sup> trinkets

<sup>14</sup> bouquets

<sup>15</sup> cookies, cakes, and other sweet, candylight delights

<sup>16</sup> influence

<sup>17</sup> still soft and unexperienced

<sup>18</sup> stolen (not from herself but from her father, to whom her heart's destiny was owed)

<sup>19</sup> argument, conviction, opinion

<sup>20</sup> 1 league = approximately 3 miles

<sup>21</sup> customary ritual/worship

There will I stay for thee.

*Hermia:* My good Lysander!  
I swear to thee, by Cupid's strongest bow,  
By his best arrow with the golden head, 170  
By the simplicity<sup>22</sup> of Venus' doves,<sup>23</sup>  
By that which knitteth souls and prospers loves,<sup>24</sup>  
And by that fire which burn'd the Carthage queen,<sup>25</sup>  
When the false Trojan<sup>26</sup> under sail was seen,  
By all the vows that ever men have broke, 175  
In number more than ever women spoke,  
In that same place thou hast appointed<sup>27</sup> me,  
To-morrow truly will I meet with thee.

*Lysander:* Keep promise, love. Look, here comes Helena.

Helena arrives and laments the fact that Demetrius only has eyes for Hermia, even though she loves him far more than Hermia ever could. Lysander tells her to not worry since he and Hermia are sneaking away that night. Helena, in a final soliloquy, indicates that she will tell Demetrius about Hermia's plans because that might make him start to love her again.

### **Monologue**

A term used in a number of senses, with the basic meaning of a single person speaking alone – with or without an audience.

### **Soliloquy**

Latin *soliloquium*, from *solus* 'alone' and *loqui* 'to speak'.

A soliloquy is a speech, often of some length, in which a character, alone on the stage, expresses his thoughts and feelings. [...] Its advantages are inestimable because it enables a dramatist to convey direct to an audience important information about a particular character: his state of mind and heart, his most intimate thoughts and feelings, his motives and intentions.

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<sup>22</sup> innocence

<sup>23</sup> the goddess' carriage was drawn by sacred doves

<sup>24</sup> Cupid

<sup>25</sup> Dido

<sup>26</sup> Aeneas, Dido's lover, who was deserting her

<sup>27</sup> fixed/arranged/prescribed

I, ii

The assembled artisans gather and Peter Quince hands out several parts to a play they want to perform for the Duke's wedding. The play is based on *Pyramus and Thisbe*, and is meant to be **a comedy and a tragedy at the same time**. One of the actors, Nick Bottom, is afraid that if they make the lion in the play too real, it might frighten the ladies and get them all hung:

*Quince*: Robin Starveling, you must play Thisbe's mother.<sup>28</sup>

Tom Snout, the tinker.

*Snout*: Here, Peter Quince.

*Quince*: You, Pyramus' father: myself, Thisbe's father:

Snug, the joiner; you, the lion's part: and, I 60  
hope, here is a play fitted.<sup>29</sup>

*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,<sup>30</sup> for it is nothing but roaring.

*Bottom*: Let me play the lion too: I will roar, that I will do 65

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.<sup>31</sup> 70

They finally all agree to meet in the woods outside of the city the next night to rehearse their parts.

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<sup>28</sup> the mother does not have any part in the play

<sup>29</sup> proper, appropriate

<sup>30</sup> without preparation, offhand

<sup>31</sup> to offend lordly persons could be sufficient cause for execution

## Analysis

Two themes present in many of Shakespeare's plays, **the struggle of men to dominate women** and **the conflict between father and daughter**, form a large part of the dramatic content of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In the first act both forms of tension appear, when Theseus remarks that he has won Hippolyta by defeating her, "Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword" (I.i.16), and via the conflict between Egeus and Hermia. Adding to this war of the sexes are Lysander and Demetrius, both wooing Hermia away from her father.

It is therefore necessary to realise that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is really a play about finding oneself in order to be free of these authoritative and sexual conflicts. The forest therefore quickly emerges as the location where all of these struggles must be resolved. Hermia will try to seek her freedom from Egeus in the woods, in the process fighting a battle against arranged marriages and for passionate love. The buffoons (clowns), in the form of the artisans, add an undercurrent of comedy which at first masks the very real events unfolding on the stage. Yet later they will provide a terrifying (albeit funny) vision of what could have happened in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in the form of their *Pyramus and Thisbe* play.

Recalling *Romeo and Juliet*, Theseus offers Hermia the choice of the nunnery or death. As always in Shakespeare (note Juliet), this is not a viable option for a young woman who is beautiful. Hermia therefore decides to run away rather than face the certainty of death.

A remarkable aspect of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is that it contains **a play within a play**. The story of Pyramus and Thisbe serves to not only show **the tragedy that might have occurred** if the fairies had not intervened, but also to comment on the nature of **reality versus theatre**. Nick Bottom, afraid the lion will frighten the ladies, gets them to write a prologue in which the lion is explicitly revealed as only being an actor. Adding to this, Pyramus must further provide a commentary in which he informs the audience that he is not really committing suicide, but is only acting.

This play within a play is therefore used by Shakespeare to make a subtle point about theatre, namely the fact that it is only acting. Elizabethan times were not so far removed from the medieval past that actors lived with impunity, regardless of their roles. The threat of censorship was very real, a fact that Shakespeare makes laughable in *Pyramus and Thisbe*. A further purpose of pointing out the distinction between theatre and reality could have been to try and convince the public that it does not matter what is put on stage, since the audience clearly knows that it is only a facade. However, Shakespeare throws all of this into doubt with his suggestion in the epilogue that the play has only been a "dream."

# Act II

## Summary

II, i

Robin Goodfellow, also called Puck, meets with a fairy who serves Queen Titania. She tells him that Titania is coming to the woods outside of Athens that night.

*Puck:* How now, spirit! Whither wander you?

*Fairy:* Over hill, over dale,<sup>32</sup>

Thorough bush, thorough brier,<sup>33</sup>

Over park, over pale,<sup>34</sup>

Thorough flood, thorough fire,

5

I do wander everywhere,

Swifter than the moon's sphere;

And I serve the fairy queen,

To dew<sup>35</sup> her orbs<sup>36</sup> upon the green.<sup>37</sup>

The cowslips<sup>38</sup> tall her pensioners<sup>39</sup> be:

10

In their gold coats spots you see;

Those be rubies, fairy favours,<sup>40</sup>

In those freckles live their savours:<sup>41</sup>

I must go seek some dewdrops here

And hang a pearl<sup>42</sup> in every cowslip's ear.

15

Farewell, thou lob of spirits; I'll be gone:

Our queen and all our elves come here anon.

Puck informs the fairy that it would be better if Titania and his master, Oberon, did not meet since they only quarrel when they do so.

Seconds later both Oberon and Titania arrive on stage, both accompanied by their respective fairy followers. Immediately they begin an argument, with both of them accusing each other of **infidelity and jealousy**. Titania has stolen a young boy whom she keeps with her and spends her time caring for. Oberon, jealous of the attention the boy is receiving, demands that Titania give the boy to him, a request she refuses.

After Titania departs, Oberon vows to get revenge on her for causing him embarrassment. He sends his puck to fetch some pansies (= a violet flower), the

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<sup>32</sup> valley

<sup>33</sup> sort of a bush

<sup>34</sup> fence

<sup>35</sup> moisten with dew

<sup>36</sup> circles (fairy rings)

<sup>37</sup> plot of grass, vegetation

<sup>38</sup> yellow flowers

<sup>39</sup> (royal) bodyguards

<sup>40</sup> gifts

<sup>41</sup> perfume, scent

<sup>42</sup> a dewdrop—rounded and glistening like a pearl

juice of which is supposed to make a person love the first thing he or she sees upon waking up. Oberon's plan is to put the juice onto Titania's eyes while she sleeps, so that she will fall in love with the first animal she sees after waking up. Puck leaves him and Oberon hides himself.

*Oberon:* My gentle Puck, come hither. Thou rememb'rest  
 Since once I sat upon a promontory,<sup>43</sup>  
 And heard a mermaid, on a dolphin's back 150  
 Uttering such dulcet<sup>44</sup> and harmonious breath,<sup>45</sup>  
 That the rude sea grew civil at her song,  
 And certain stars shot madly from their spheres  
 To hear the sea-maid's music.

*Puck:* I remember.

*Oberon:* That very time I saw, but thou couldst not, 155  
 Flying between the cold moon and the earth  
 Cupid all arm'd; a certain aim he took  
 At a fair vestal thronèd by the west,  
 And loosed his love-shaft<sup>46</sup> smartly from his bow,  
 As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts; 160  
 But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft  
 Quench'd<sup>47</sup> in the chaste beams of the watery moon;  
 And the imperial votress passèd on,  
 In maiden meditation, fancy-free.  
 Yet mark'd I where the bolt<sup>48</sup> of Cupid fell. 165  
 It fell upon a little western flower,  
 Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound,  
 And maidens call it love-in-idleness.<sup>49</sup>  
 Fetch me that flower, the herb I show'd thee once.  
 The juice of it on sleeping eye-lids laid 170  
 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<sup>50</sup> can swim a league.

Demetrius and Helena arrive in the woods right next to where Oberon is hidden. Demetrius tells Helena to go away, and that he does not love her even though she has told him about Hermia and Lysander trying to run away. She threatens to chase him down if he should try to leave her in the woods.

Oberon, having overheard the entire conversation, decides to make Demetrius fall in love with Helena. He tells Robin Goodfellow to take some of the juice and go anoint the eyes of the Athenian man in the woods, but doing so only when it is certain that the woman by his side will be the first person he sees. The puck agrees, and goes off to carry out his errand.

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<sup>43</sup> mountains

<sup>44</sup> sweet, agreeable, soothing

<sup>45</sup> sounds

<sup>46</sup> released his love-creating arrow

<sup>47</sup> extinguished

<sup>48</sup> arrow

<sup>49</sup> pansies

<sup>50</sup> enormous sea animal of biblical mention, usually identified as the whale

II, ii

Titania calls for a quick dance in the woods with her fairies, after which they sing her to sleep. Oberon takes the opportunity to sneak up and drop the pansy juice onto her closed eyelids. Soon thereafter Lysander and Hermia, tired of walking and having lost their way, decide to go to sleep as well. They lie down, but Hermia demands that Lysander sleep a short distance away in order to keep up her sense of modesty since she is not married to him yet.

*Lysander:* Fair love, you faint<sup>51</sup> with wandering in the wood;  
And, to speak troth,<sup>52</sup> I have forgot our way; 40  
We'll rest us, Hermia, if you think it good,  
And tarry<sup>53</sup> for the comfort of the day.  
*Hermia:* Be it so, Lysander: find you out a bed,  
For I upon this bank will rest my head.  
*Lysander:* One turf<sup>54</sup> shall serve as pillow for us both; 45  
One heart, one bed, two bosoms, and one troth.  
*Hermia:* Nay, good Lysander; for my sake, my dear,  
Lie further off yet; do not lie so near.  
[...] 60  
Lie further off, in human modesty;<sup>55</sup>  
Such separation as may well be said  
Becomes a virtuous bachelor and a maid,

The puck enters, having vainly searched the woods for an Athenian. He spies Lysander lying apart from Hermia and deduces that this must be the hard-hearted Athenian which Oberon spoke about. Robin Goodfellow quickly drops some of the juice onto Lysander's eyes.

Demetrius, followed closely by Helena, runs into the clearing where Lysander is lying asleep. She begs him to stop running away from her, but he refuses and leaves her there alone. Helena finally sees Lysander on the ground and shakes him awake, unwittingly becoming the first woman he sees when he opens his eyes. Lysander immediately falls in love with Helena, and tells her that he deeply loves her. She thinks it is a cruel joke and tells him to stop abusing her.

Helena leaves, and Lysander decides to forget about Hermia and follow Helena instead. Hermia wakes up because she is scared about a dream she has had in which a serpent eats her heart. She calls for Lysander, but he is no longer near her. She then leaves her bed to go search for him.

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<sup>51</sup> grow weak

<sup>52</sup> truth

<sup>53</sup> wait

<sup>54</sup> a bit of grassy ground

<sup>55</sup> proper self-control

## Analysis

The aspect of **the woods as a place for the characters to reach adulthood** is made even more explicit in this scene. In the dialogue between Helena and Demetrius, the woods are a place to be feared, and also are **a place to lose virginity**. As Demetrius warns, “You do impeach your modesty too much, / To leave the city and commit yourself / Into the hands of one that loves you not; / To trust the opportunity of night / And the ill counsel of a desert place, / With the rich worth of your virginity” (II.i.214-219). Thus the forest can be allegorically read as a sort of **trial for the characters**, a phase they must pass through in order to reach maturity.

Hermia’s serpent serves as a sign of the monsters which are in the woods. This plays into the fact that the woods are not only a place which the characters must escape from, but are also **a place of imagination**. Hermia’s fear of her dream, in which the monster and the danger are only imagined, is meant to show the audience that the danger in a play is only imagined by the audience; **neither the play nor Hermia’s dream are real**.

# Act III

## Summary

III, i

The rustics and artisans arrive in the woods and discuss their play, *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Bottom is afraid that if Pyramus commits suicide with his sword, it might seem too real and cause the ladies to be afraid. As a result, they agree to write a prologue which tells the audience that Pyramus is really only Bottom the Weaver and that he does not really kill himself.

*Bottom:* Are we all met?

*Quince:* Pat, pat;<sup>56</sup> and here's a marvellous convenient place  
for our rehearsal. This green plot shall be our stage, this  
hawthorn brake<sup>57</sup> our tiring-house;<sup>58</sup> and we will do it in  
action, as we will do it before the Duke. 5

*Bottom:* Peter Quince?

*Quince:* What sayest thou, bully<sup>59</sup> Bottom?

*Bottom:* There are things in this comedy of Pyramus and Thisbe  
that will never please. First, Pyramus must draw a sword to kill  
himself; which the ladies cannot abide.<sup>60</sup> How answer you that? 10

*Snout:* By'r lakin,<sup>61</sup> a parlous<sup>62</sup> fear.

*Starveling:* I believe we must leave the killing out, when all is  
done.

*Bottom:* Not a whit;<sup>63</sup> I have a device<sup>64</sup> to make all well.  
Write me a prologue; and let the prologue seem to say we  
will do no harm with our swords, and that Pyramus is not  
killed indeed; and for the more better assurance, tell them  
that I, Pyramus am not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver.  
This will put them out of fear. 20

Next, Snout becomes afraid that Snug's role as the lion will cause a similar fear. Thus, they undertake to write another prologue to tell the audience that it is not a lion, but only Snug the joiner. The men further decide that Snug should speak to the audience directly and that half his head should be visible through the costume.

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<sup>56</sup> on time

<sup>57</sup> thicket/clump of small, flowering shrubs

<sup>58</sup> dressing room

<sup>59</sup> worthy, admirable

<sup>60</sup> cannot not endure, bear, stand

<sup>61</sup> by our little Lady (the Virgin Mary)

<sup>62</sup> risky, dangerous, awkward

<sup>63</sup> not a bit

<sup>64</sup> plan, idea, way, invention

Finally they start to rehearse the play, with the puck eavesdropping in the background. Each of the actors makes several word mistakes, giving the phrases completely different meanings. The puck leaves when Bottom goes offstage, and reappears with Bottom, who now wears an ass's head which the puck put on him. Bottom is blissfully unaware that he is transformed into an ass, and humorously asks the others why they run away from him.

*Enter [Bottom] with the Asshead*

*Bottom:* Why do they run away? This is a knavery<sup>65</sup> of them, to make me afeard.

*[Re-]enter Snout*

*Snout:* O Bottom, thou art changed! What do I see on thee? 100

*Bottom:* What do you see? You see an asshead of your own, do you?

*[Exit Snout]*

*[Re-]enter Peter Quince*

*Quince:* Bless thee, Bottom, bless thee! Thou art translated.<sup>66</sup>

*[Exit]*

At this point Titania wakes up and sees Bottom, with his ass's head, and falls in love with him. She begs him to keep singing and making jokes for her, and entreats him to remain in the forest with her. She then calls four fairies in to take care of Bottom and lead him to her garden.

### III, ii

Robin Goodfellow, the puck, returns to Oberon and tells him what has happened to Titania. Oberon is overjoyed that Titania is being humiliated in this way. He then asks about the Athenian he wanted to fall in love with Helena. At this point Demetrius and Hermia enter the stage.

Hermia is convinced that Demetrius has killed Lysander in his sleep, and in her fury she curses Demetrius for his actions. She finally storms away, leaving Demetrius to fall asleep in front of Oberon. Oberon, furious that Robin has ruined his plan to make Demetrius love Helena, sends Robin off to get her. The puck soon returns with both Helena and Lysander.

Helena believes that Lysander is only mocking her with his words of love, and tells him that his phrases have no substance. Inadvertently she wakes up Demetrius, on whose eyes Oberon has applied his pansy juice. Demetrius sees her and also falls in love with Helena, saying, "O Helen, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine!" (III.ii.138).

In the midst of this quarrel over which man loves Helena more, Hermia arrives. She is shocked by Lysander's words and does not believe that he could possibly love Helena. Helena assumes that Hermia is part of the mockery, and chastises her for violating the close friendship which they have enjoyed since childhood.

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<sup>65</sup> trickery

<sup>66</sup> tranformed

Demetrius and Lysander begin to quarrel over Helena even more intensely, at which point Hermia breaks in and tries to stop Lysander. He spurns her, calling her a serpent and a dwarf, and finally leaves with Demetrius to fight over which man should get Helena.

Oberon and Robin step forward, having watched the entire spectacle. Oberon is furious about the mess that Robin has created and orders him to separate Demetrius and Lysander. He then tells the puck to make the men fall asleep, and to rub the juice on Lysander's eyes and make him see Hermia when he awakes. Robin mimics the mens' voices, causing them to follow shadows and sounds and effectively separating them.

Robin leads both men until they fall asleep on the ground. He then finds the two women and brings them close to their "lovers" before letting them fall asleep as well. His last act is to sprinkle the juice into Lysander's eyes so that he will fall in love with Hermia when he awakes and sees her.

### **Analysis**

What is interesting in this scene is the **interchangeability** of the characters. Lysander and Demetrius, Helena and Hermia, **each of them switches roles** and becomes the other person. One of the primary ways that Shakespeare indicates **maturity is to make his characters distinct**. Thus, at this stage of the play the lovers are clearly not yet mature enough in their love to escape from the forest. Puck makes this clear by the way he leads them around in circles until they all collapse in exhaustion. It is this interchangeability that must be resolved before the lovers can fully exit from the forest.

The nature of this interchangeability is further evidenced by the characters themselves. Helena says to Hermia: "We, Hermia, like two artificial gods / Have with our needles created both one flower, / Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion, / Both warbling of one song, both in one key, / As if our hands, our sides, voices, and minds / Had been incorporate. So we grew together, / Like to a double cherry" (III.ii.203-209).

"Like to a double cherry." This line sums up the reason why they are lost in the forest: it is necessary for them to become distinct from one another. After all, Lysander and Demetrius have been able to shift their love to Helena without noticing any difference whatsoever. Therefore, the forest is not only a place of maturation, but also of **finding one's identity**.

Perhaps the most famous line from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is when Puck remarks, "Lord what fools these mortals be!" (III.ii.115). His exclamation, directed at the ridiculous antics of Lysander, is also a direct jibe towards the audience. The nature of human love is challenged in this line, which implies that people will make fools of themselves because of love.

Shakespeare's challenge of what is real versus what is only dreamed emerges in full force in this scene. Oberon decides that he will resolve the conflicts once and for all, saying, "And when they next wake, all this derision / Shall seem a dream and fruitless vision" (III.ii.370-1). Thus the lovers are expected to wake up, each loving the correct person, and each having found his or her own identity.

# Act IV

## Summary

IV, i

Titania and Bottom, still with an ass's head, enter the stage followed by Titania's fairies. Bottom asks the fairies to scratch his head, and is hungry for some hay. Titania, completely in love with him, orders the fairies to find him food. Together they soon fall asleep.

Oberon enters and looks at his sleeping Queen. He tells the puck that Titania gave him her young boy earlier in the woods, and so it is time for him to remove the spell from her eyes. He orders Robin to change Bottom back to normal, but first he wakes up Titania. She at first thinks she dreamed about being in love with an ass, but then sees Bottom still asleep by her side. Oberon helps her off the ground and tells her that tomorrow they will dance at the weddings of Theseus and the other two couples.

Theseus, Hippolyta and Egeus arrive where the lovers are sleeping. They are in the woods to celebrate the May morning with hunting hounds in preparation of the day's ceremonies. Theseus sees the lovers and has them woken by sounding the hunting horns.

The lovers tell Theseus what they remember from the night before, and Lysander declares his love for Hermia while Demetrius speaks of his love for Helena. Theseus decides to override Egeus' will and have all three of them get married in Athens that day. They eventually all depart for Athens.

*Theseus:* I pray you all, stand up.  
I know you two are rival enemies;<sup>67</sup>  
How comes this gentle concord<sup>68</sup> in the world  
That hatred is so far from jealousy  
To sleep by hate, and fear no enmity? 145

*Lysander:* My lord, I shall reply amazedly,<sup>69</sup>  
Half sleep, half waking; but as yet, I swear,  
I cannot truly say how I came here,  
But, as I think,—for truly would I speak,  
And now I do bethink me, so it is,— 150  
I came with Hermia hither. Our intent  
Was to be gone from Athens, where we might,  
Without the peril of the Athenian law—

*Egeus:* Enough, enough, my Lord; you have enough;  
I beg the law, the law upon his head. 155  
(*to Demetrius*) They would have stolen away, they would, Demetrius,  
Thereby to have defeated you and me:  
You of your wife, and me of my consent,

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<sup>67</sup> competing opponents

<sup>68</sup> harmony, agreement

<sup>69</sup> in astonishment, bewilderment

Of my consent that she should be your wife.  
*Demetrius:* My lord, fair Helen told me of their stealth, 160  
 Of this their purpose hither to this wood;  
 And I in fury hither followed them,  
 Fair Helena in fancy<sup>70</sup> following me.  
 But, my good lord, I wot not by what power,—  
 But by some power it is,—my love to Hermia, 165  
 Melted as the snow, seems to me now  
 As the remembrance of an idle gaud<sup>71</sup>  
 Which in my childhood I did dote<sup>72</sup> upon;  
 And all the faith, the virtue<sup>73</sup> of my heart,  
 The object and the pleasure of mine eye, 170  
 Is only Helena. To her, my lord,  
 Was I betrothed<sup>74</sup> ere<sup>75</sup> I saw Hermia.  
 But, like a sickness, did I loathe<sup>76</sup> this food;<sup>77</sup>  
 But, as in health, come to my natural taste,  
 Now I do wish it, love it, long for it, 175  
 And will for evermore be true to it.  
*Theseus:* Fair lovers, you are fortunately met;  
 Of this discourse<sup>78</sup> we more will hear anon.  
 Egeus, I will overbear<sup>79</sup> your will;  
 For in the temple, by and by, with us 180  
 These couples shall eternally be knit.

Bottom wakes up and realises that he has been abandoned in the woods by his friends. He recalls what happened to him only as a dream, a dream about which he says, “I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream. It shall be called ‘Bottom’s Dream’” (IV.i.212-3). Bottom then returns to Athens.

#### IV, ii

The artisans are lamenting the fact that the Duke Theseus is already married, as well as the other noblemen, which means they missed their chance to perform *Pyramus and Thisbe* at the wedding. Bottom finally arrives and tells the men to hurry to the festivities since there is still enough time to perform the play.

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<sup>70</sup> love

<sup>71</sup> toy, plaything

<sup>72</sup> adore

<sup>73</sup> worth

<sup>74</sup> engaged to

<sup>75</sup> before

<sup>76</sup> detest, hate, not like

<sup>77</sup> nourishment (used figuratively)

<sup>78</sup> tale, narration

<sup>79</sup> put down, outweigh

## Analysis

The **transition of reality into only a dream** emerges a second time in Act Four. Oberon tells Titania that Bottom will “think no more of this night’s accidents / But as the fierce vexation of a dream” (IV.i.66-7). Indeed, this is exactly what happens: “The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man’s hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was” (IV.i.209-12).

It is the way that Bottom deals with his nightmare of a dream that is important and interesting. Not only is he not afraid of it, but he wants to turn it into a ballad. **Turning a fearful nightmare into a fun song** is crucial to understanding what Shakespeare has done with *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. This play is the Romeo and Juliet theme woven into a play, taking the sad tragedy and converting it into comedy. Thus Shakespeare is making a further comment about the nature of plays and acting, showing them to be a medium by which our worst fears can be dissipated into hilarity.

The nature of doubling emerges once again in this act, but for the last time. Hermia remarks that, “Methinks I see these things with parted eye, / When everything seems double” (IV.i.188-9). This comment occurs right after Theseus has overridden Egeus’ desires and agreed to let Hermia and Lysander get married. Hermia is correct about the fact that this is **a doubling of marriages**. In spite of escaping from the confusion of the forest, there is still a lingering uncertainty about whether Lysander and Demetrius have been able to distinguish between Helena and Hermia. The effect of having a double wedding merely makes the newfound differences more vague, making Hermia wonder if things still are in fact double.

# Act V

## Summary

V, i

In the palace where Theseus and Hippolyta reside, the guests are waiting for some form of after dinner entertainment. Theseus has Egeus read him a list of possible performances, and Theseus finally settles on 'A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus and his love Thisbe: very tragical mirth' as the play he wants to see performed. Egeus tries to dissuade him, telling him that the actors are workmen will no talent, but Theseus is adamant that he watch them perform.

Quince delivers the prologue, a masterpiece of writing fraught with sentence fragments which serve to reverse the meaning of the actual phrases:

*Enter [Quince as] the Prologue*

*Prologue:* If we offend, it is with our good will.<sup>80</sup> 110  
That<sup>81</sup> you should think: we come not to offend  
But with good will. To show our simple skill,  
That is the true beginning of our end.<sup>82</sup>  
Consider<sup>83</sup> then we come but in despite.<sup>84</sup>  
We do not come as minding<sup>85</sup> to content you, 115  
Our true intent is. All for your delight  
We are not here. That you should here repent you<sup>86</sup>  
The actors are at hand, and by their show  
You shall know all that you are like to<sup>87</sup> know.

The play is then performed, with numerous linguistic errors and incorrect references making it into a complete farce. Hippolyta condemns the play as being "silly" while Theseus defends it as being nothing more than imaginative. During the performance, Theseus, Lysander, Demetrius and Hippolyta add commentary which criticises the action, and makes fun of the antics of the laymen.

At the end of the play both Bottom and Flute get up from where they are lying, supposedly dead, and offer to perform an epilogue or a bergamask (a type of dance). Theseus quickly intervenes and tells them they need no epilogue, but rather should only perform the dance, which they do.

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<sup>80</sup> willingly, we intend well

<sup>81</sup> though

<sup>82</sup> (1) conclusion, (2) purpose, (3) death

<sup>83</sup> remember

<sup>84</sup> anger, annoyance

<sup>85</sup> caring, paying attention

<sup>86</sup> be sorry/regret that you are here

<sup>87</sup> likely to

## V, ii and Epilogue

Puck enters with a broom and sweeps the stage. In a monologue he informs the audience that not even a mouse will disturb the lovers, and it can be inferred that he is protecting their bedchambers. Oberon and Titania arrive in order to bless the union of Theseus and Hippolyta. They perform a fairy dance and depart, leaving Puck alone on stage. Puck's epilogue begs forgiveness of the audience indicating that if someone did not like the play, then he or she should imagine that it was all a dream:

*Puck:* If we shadows have offended,  
Think but this, and all is mended,  
That you have but slumbered here  
While these visions did appear.  
And this weak and idle theme,  
No more yielding but<sup>88</sup> a dream,  
Gentles, do not reprehend:<sup>89</sup>  
If you pardon, we will mend:<sup>90</sup>  
And, as I am an honest Puck,  
If we have unearnèd<sup>91</sup> luck  
Now to 'scape the serpent's tongue,<sup>92</sup>  
We will make amends<sup>93</sup> ere long;  
Else the Puck a liar call;  
So, good night unto you all.  
Give me your hands,<sup>94</sup> if we be friends,  
And Robin shall restore<sup>95</sup> amends.

FINIS<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> productive but

<sup>89</sup> censure, find fault with

<sup>90</sup> (1) correct, (2) improve

<sup>91</sup> undeserved, unmerited

<sup>92</sup> hissing (the sound made by serpents and by disapproving audiences)

<sup>93</sup> reparation

<sup>94</sup> clap your hands for us, if you like what we have done

<sup>95</sup> give back

<sup>96</sup> the end

## Analysis

This final act at first seems completely unnecessary to the overall plot of the play. After all, in Act Four we not only have the lovers getting married, but there has been a happy resolution to the conflict. Thus, the immediate question which arises is why Shakespeare felt it necessary to include this act.

The answer lies in the fact that Shakespeare is trying to drive home a point about theatre; he wants to make it very clear that **the ending to this play could just as easily have been tragedy, not comedy**. The *Pyramus and Thisbe* play makes this very clear because it parallels the actual action of the lovers so closely. Pyramus and Thisbe decide to run away, a lion (one of the monsters in the forest) emerges and seizes Thisbe's cloak, and when Pyramus sees the bloodied cloak he rashly commits suicide. This ending could easily have been the ending to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The final act also serves to challenge the audience's notions about **reality and imagination**. Seeing the pathetic acting of the artisans, Theseus remarks that, "The lunatic, the lover, and the poet / Are of imagination all compact" (V.i.7-8). By this he means that it is imagination which makes people crazy, but it is also the imagination which inspires people. Without imagination it would be much more difficult to enjoy a play, as evidenced by the farce of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, about which Hippolyta comments, "This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard." Theseus helps her overcome this problem by saying, "The best in this kind are but shadows, and the worst are no worse if imagination amend them" (V.i.210,211). Thus, the imagination can solve all the problems.

Perhaps the most telling line of the last act is when Theseus asks, "How shall we find the concord of this discord?" (V.i.61). That is exactly what has happened in the play itself, namely there has been **a resolution to the discord of the lovers** in the initial scenes, which by the end has **turned into concord**.

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