

A Midsummer Night's Dream

A Midsummer Night's Dream Plot Summary



The play begins when Theseus (Duke of Athens) and Hippolyta (Queen of the Amazons) are discussing their wedding. They are interrupted when Egeus comes storming in with his daughter Hermia. Egeus asks Theseus to make his daughter Hermia marry Demetrius, the man he has chosen for her. Hermia explains that she cannot marry Demetrius because she is in love with Lysander. Unmoved Theseus gives Hermia an ultimatum – marry Demetrius, face death, or become a nun.

Faced with these harsh options Hermia and Lysander feel they have no choice but to run away together. Before she goes Hermia tells her best friend Helena where she is planning to go. Helena is jealous of Hermia because Helena is in love with Demetrius, the man Hermia is supposed to marry. So Helena tells Demetrius that his intended bride is about to run away with Lysander. Demetrius decides to follow them, and Helena decides to follow Demetrius, hoping to win his love. So the four young lovers find themselves alone in the forest.

Also wandering in the forest that night is a group of Athenian tradesmen, led by Peter Quince. They are planning to perform a play 'The Tragedy of Pyramus and Thisbe' at Theseus' wedding. They decide to rehearse in the forest where they hope to find a bit of privacy.

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In another part of the forest are Oberon and Titania, the king and queen of the fairies. They have been arguing over Titania's refusal to give her boy page to Oberon. Oberon decides to cast a spell on Titania to get his revenge. Oberon sends Puck, his assistant, to find a magic plant, the juice of which, when poured on the eyes of someone asleep, will cause them to fall in love with the first creature they see when they wake up. Whilst collecting the magic plant Puck finds the tradesmen rehearsing and decides it would be funny to make the arrogant actor Bottom look like a donkey. When Oberon gets the potion from Puck he uses the juice on Titania and she falls in love with Bottom, who is the first thing she sees on waking. However the only problem is that Bottom looks like a donkey!

Oberon tells Puck to use the love potion on Demetrius, so that he will fall in love with Helena and they can be happy together, but Puck, mistaking the two Athenian youths, uses it on Lysander instead, who promptly falls in love with Helena. Puck tries to rectify his mistake by using the potion on Demetrius too but this just creates more and more confusion. Now Lysander and Demetrius (who both used to love Hermia) fall in love with Helena instead! Hermia cannot understand why no one loves her anymore and Lysander and Demetrius challenge each other to a duel over Helena. They set off chasing each other through the forest whilst Helena and Hermia run after them to try and prevent harm. Puck, who enjoys mischief, leads them further astray with glee.

Finally Oberon tells Puck to stop messing with the mortals, so Puck lulls them all to sleep and uses his magic to put everything right. This means that Demetrius now loves Helena and Lysander loves Hermia. Bottom goes back to looking human, Titania realises her mistake, the lovers are happily paired and Titania and Oberon are reconciled. The two young couples marry alongside Theseus and Hippolyta, and Bottom's troupe performs the play at the wedding celebrations.

Vocabulary

ultimatum (n) – a promise that there will be a punishment if what is wanted is not done, a deadline

harsh (adj) – severe or cruel

tradesman (n) – a person who works in a job that requires special skill or training

arrogant (adj) – exaggerating one's own importance or being prideful

to rectify (v) – to make things right

duel (n) – a fight to settle an argument or disagreement

to mess with (v) – to tease or joke with in an unkind way

to lull (v) – to cause someone to become sleepy