

'A Midsummer Nights Dream'

Act 1, Scene 1

Theseus, the Duke of Athens, is getting married in four days. However, during the preparations for the wedding, a man called Egeus appears, bringing with him his daughter Hermia and two men, Lysander and Demetrius. Egeus wishes Hermia to marry Demetrius; however, she is in love with Lysander and refuses. Egeus wants the Duke to sort it all out.

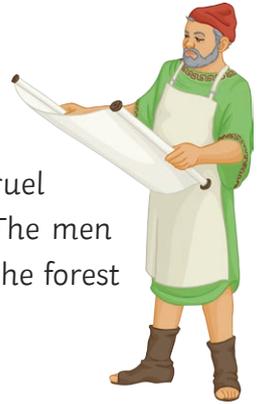


Egeus wants to evoke an ancient law which allows a father to either kill his daughter or put her in a nunnery for life for disobedience. The Duke upholds Egeus' wishes, despite the fact that he thinks Lysander is a fine young man, and tells Hermia that she must marry Demetrius. Once again, she refuses and so the Duke advises her to think carefully about her options. He gives her until the day of his marriage to make a decision.

Lysander and Hermia decide to run away from Athens that night and marry in secret. Hermia confides her plan to her friend Helena. However, Helena is deeply in love with Demetrius, despite the fact that he is not interested in her. They did have a relationship, but Demetrius is now in love with Hermia. To try to curry favour with him, she waits until Lysander and Hermia have run off and then tells Demetrius their plan.

Act 1, Scene 2

A group of tradesmen, Quince, Snug, Bottom, Snout and Starveling, meet at Quince's house to organise the details of the play - 'The most lamentable comedy, and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe' - that they want to perform at the Duke's wedding. The men decide who is going to play each character in the performance and agree to meet in the forest the next night to rehearse.



Act 2, Scene 1

The scene shifts to the woods outside Athens. Fairies live in the woods and are ruled by King Oberon and Queen Titania. Two fairy servants, one of the queen's and Puck (also known as Robin Goodfellow) who serves the king, are discussing the huge argument between Oberon and Titania. Oberon is jealous about the queen's new attendant who is a changeling boy. Oberon wants him for himself, but Titania will not let him go.



In revenge, Oberon tells Puck to pick a flower called love-in-idleness and squeeze its juice onto Titania's eyelids while she is asleep. When Titania wakes, she will fall in love with the first thing she sees – whatever that may be! Puck flies off to do his king's bidding and Oberon then spots Demetrius and Helena in the wood. Helena is trying to persuade Demetrius to take her back and he is being very cruel to her, saying that she makes him sick. Oberon feels sorry for Helena and decides to intervene. He instructs Puck to also put the flower juice on a man wearing 'Athenian garments', but only when he is sure that the next thing he will see is the 'sweet Athenian lady'.

Act 2, Scene 2

Titania is in a different part of the wood and we see her asleep with the fairies around her, singing lullabies to protect her from dangerous animals. Oberon comes in and puts the flower juice drops on her eyelids.



Hermia and Lysander – who have run away through the wood – enter, tired and lost. They decide to rest until morning, although far away from each other to make sure they don't lose their honour before they are married! Puck arrives and assumes this is the couple that Oberon meant. Therefore, he puts the flower juice onto Lysander's eyelids.

Demetrius then runs past – trying to escape Helena, who is close at his heels. Lysander wakes and the first thing he sees is Helena. Naturally, he falls madly in love with her and follows her further into the wood, leaving Hermia alone. Hermia wakes and sets off to find Lysander.

Act 3, Scene 1

The workmen arrive in the woods to begin rehearsing their play. There is a lot of discussion about the script. Puck comes across them and mischievously decides to give Bottom a donkey head. Bottom can't see it, but everyone else can. The other men run off screaming when they see what has happened. Bottom then thinks his friends are trying to make him scared by pretending there is a monster. He sings to comfort himself, but his singing wakes Titania who, of course, falls in love with him. She instructs her servants Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth and Mustardseed to look after Bottom and they lead him off to Titania's home.



Act 3, Scene 2

Oberon is delighted when Puck reports back to him and tells him that Titania is in love with a donkey. Puck also says he was successful with the Athenian couple. However, Demetrius comes in arguing with Hermia and Oberon realises something has gone amiss.

Hermia thinks Demetrius has done something to Lysander, but when she can't get answers from him, she storms off into the wood. A tired Demetrius lies down to go to sleep. Oberon tells Puck to go and find Helena and puts the flower juice on Demetrius' eyes. Sure enough, when he wakes, Demetrius sees Helena and is instantly in love with her. Now both Demetrius and Lysander are begging Helena for her love.



Helena thinks they are both cruelly pretending to love her and is furious. Hermia finally catches up to them and is shocked that Lysander is wooing Helena. A big argument erupts between all four characters. Lysander and Demetrius decide to settle things with a duel and Oberon sends Puck to intervene and sort the situation out. Puck takes on the identity of Lysander when he is with Demetrius and becomes Demetrius when he is with Lysander. He sends both men running through the wood so that they won't meet and fight. Eventually, the four young people all fall asleep near each other. When Lysander finally goes to sleep, Puck reverses the magic that made him fall for Helena. The next morning, Theseus and Hippolyta discover the sleeping couples and agree that they will get married at their wedding.

Act 4, Scene 1



Titania is very attentive to Bottom and wants to stroke his ears and place roses around his head, but Bottom can only think about oats and hay. Eventually the two lie down for a nap. Oberon sees this and tells Puck that Titania has agreed to give him the changeling and so he will now release her from the flower magic. He also tells Puck to turn Bottom back to normal.

Act 4, Scene 2



The remaining players, Quince, Flute, Snout and Starveling meet up again at Quince's house. They are worried about Bottom's disappearance, especially since he is the star of the show. Snug brings news that the duke now has two other couples with him who will also get married. The men are convinced that if they perform their play for all three couples, they will be rich. Just in the nick of time, Bottom arrives to take the lead role.

Act 5, Scene 1

Finally, it is the day of Theseus' wedding and there is much discussion about the celebrations with the master of ceremonies Philostrate.

Philostrate has a list of planned events and asks the duke to cancel the play on the grounds that it will be 'tedious' but Theseus thinks the men have worked hard and deserve the chance to perform.

The play is performed, much to the amusement of the audience. At midnight, all the newly married couples leave and the fairies appear to bless the marriages. The performance ends with Puck advising the audience to treat the play as if it were a dream.

