

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Schools' synopsis by Rebecca Lenkiewicz

A Midsummer Night's Dream is a play about love and obsession, jealousy and magic.

Egeus wants his daughter Hermia to marry Demetrius. But Hermia loves Lysander. Demetrius is decent enough but she's not interested. Lysander is furious and he reminds Demetrius of how just recently he was in love with someone else, Helena. And how Helena is still in love with Demetrius. Egeus wants to impose the ancient law of Athens on Hermia if she refuses to marry Demetrius. He puts his case to the Duke Theseus: 'As she is mine, I may dispose of her. / Which shall be either to this gentleman Or to her death.'

Lysander shouts:

'You have her father's love, Demetrius / Let me have Hermia's: Do you marry him.'

Duke Theseus is about to marry the Amazon Hippolyta and so is feeling generous. He advises Hermia that she should listen to her father. Hermia is left alone with Lysander and they plan to run away together that night. Hermia's best friend Helena approaches them. She is devastated that Demetrius no longer loves her. Hermia tries to comfort Helena but Helena cannot get over her jealousy that Hermia is now Demetrius' dream girl. Hermia tells Helena of their plan to escape into the woods. She'll no longer be around, she will be out of their lives. But Helena decides to tell Demetrius. She thinks this will put her in a good light with him. And if he follows Hermia then she in turn can follow him. She'll do anything to spend time with Demetrius. He runs into the woods to look for Hermia and Lysander. And Helena stalks him. She is desperate although he keeps trying to escape from her. She tells him:

'I am your spaniel.'

In the woods are the fairies. Oberon is the king and Titania is his queen but they have quarrelled. Titania has adopted a little changeling boy*. She loved his mother who died giving birth to him. Oberon cannot bear her loving the child. He is consumed with jealousy and demands the changeling from her. But Titania refuses:

'The fairy land buys not the child of me.'

Oberon is incredibly angry but Titania matches his power and storms away from him with her fairies.

Another group who meet in the woods are the Mechanicals. They are local tradesmen who are preparing an amateur performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* which they hope to be chosen for the Duke's wedding. Bottom the weaver is a keen actor and wants to play every part, male, female and animal.

Oberon watches Demetrius and Helena argue. Oberon describes the drug of a certain flower, 'love-in-idleness' to his fairy servant Puck:

'The juice of it on sleeping eye-lids laid / Will make of man or woman madly dote\ Upon the next live creature that it sees.'

Oberon orders Puck to put the love potion onto the eyes of this quarrelling Athenian man so that he will wake to love Helena. Puck mistakenly puts the potion onto Lysander's eyes. So that he wakes and falls for Helena. Puck also puts a spell onto Bottom so that he will wake up with a donkey's head and his human body. Bottom's friends flee from him, terrified. He thinks they are joking with him.

Oberon squeezes the flower's juice into the eyes of the sleeping Titania. And he whispers to her:

'Wake when some vile thing is near.'

Puck now sees a second Athenian man sleeping and so he puts the juice into Demetrius' eyes who wakes to the sight of Helena. So both men love her and are in competition over Helena. They are willing to fight for her. Hermia wakes up, abandoned. She searches for Lysander and finds him fighting with Demetrius over Helena. Hermia thinks they are all playing a joke on her but they're not. Hermia clings to Lysander but he bats her off him as though she were a fly. He calls her a puppet, a dwarf, an acorn. Hermia is enraged. She blames Helena for his change of heart and thinks Helena has been laughing with them about how short or 'low' Hermia is. She threatens Helena:

'How low am I? I am not yet so low
But that my nails can reach unto thine eyes.'

Helena is terrified but the boys protect her, making Hermia even more furious.

Titania wakes and sees Bottom with his big donkey ears and loves him like she has never loved another. She orders her fairies to wait upon him and hangs upon his every word:

'Thou art as wise as thou art beautiful.'

They have a wonderful time together, all flowers and kisses. But Oberon takes off the spell and Titania is horrified at her donkey-man lover. She runs back to Oberon, and becomes his alone. Puck takes off the spell from Bottom who returns to his worried troupe. They have been selected for the Duke's wedding.

The lovers fall asleep again, exhausted after so much fighting and running and Puck sets the spell aright so that Demetrius still loves Helena but Lysander falls back in love with Hermia. The lovers are found in the woods by Theseus, Hippolyta and Egeus. They all go back to the city, reconciled.

Theseus marries Hippolyta and they all watch the hysterical tragedy that the Mechanicals re-enact.

Puck bids goodnight to the audience as dusk falls and it is fairy-time once more:

'If we shadows have offended
Think but this, and all is mended,
That you have but slumber'd here
While these visions did appear.'

All the lovers are together or reconciled and the mortal and fairy world is, for the moment, at peace.

* A 'changeling' is a child who was believed to have been secretly substituted by fairies for the parents' real child.