

# THE PEOPLE IN THE PLAY

*OBERON, King of the Fairies*

*TITANIA, Queen of the Fairies*

*PUCK,*

*A mischievous sprite who does Oberon's bidding*

*PEASEBLOSSOM, MOTH, COBWEB,*

*MUSTARDSEED AND OTHER FAIRIES,*

*Followers of the quarrelling King and Queen*

*HERMIA,*

*Who loves Lysander but is betrothed to Demetrius*

*HELENA,*

*Who loves Demetrius but is not loved in return*

*LYSANDER AND DEMETRIUS, rivals for the hand of Hermia*

*EGEUS, Hermia's father*

*NICKBOTTOM, QUINCE, SNUG, FLUTE, SNOUT,*

*STARVELING,*

*A band of Athenian workmen indulging in amateur  
dramatics*

*THESEUS, Duke of Athens*

*HIPPOLYTA, his wife-to-be*

*The action takes place on the eve of the Duke's wedding, in a  
fairy-filled wood near Athens.*

# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

SOMETHING was wrong in the world Of fairies. Rain filled the ditches, swamped the fields, rotted the crops and ran like tears down the abandoned village maypole. All this in July. In Greece! There was discord among the spirits, a falling out between the King and Queen Of the Fairies over which Of them should have a little Indian changeling boy for a page. While they sulked and fumed and stamped their fairy feet the rain kept pouring. There was every chance it would still be raining on Duke Theseus's wedding day. The Duke was due to be married on Midsummer's Day, and the citizens of Athens could think of little else unless it was the weather, or their own dreams Of marriage. Big, buxom Helena dreamed Of marrying Demetrius, but there was no hope Of that for Demetrius was besotted With her friend, little dark-haired Hermia, and Hermia's father approved. It was all settled. Her father had told Hermia to marry Demetrius. The fact that Hermia was in love with Lysander was Of no Importance.

*The course Of true love never did run smooth*

Lysander, Act I, Scene I

Hermia stood up to her father and refused Demetrius point blank, but was told, 'Marry him or I'll put you in a nunnery and you can go without a husband altogether. 'As a result, little Hermia and Lysander took things into their own hands. On Midsummer's Eve, they eloped. They walked off into the forest, determined to be together come what may.

The only person who knew they had gone was Hermia's life long friend, Helena.

Hoping that such behavior might change Demetrius's mind about whom he wished to marry Helena went to Demetrius and told tales . "*Lysander and Hermia have run off together! Didn't always tell you I loved you more than she did ?*" She did not get the reaction she had hoped for. Demetrius promptly drew his sword and strode after the lovers, swearing vengeance on Lysander.

Helena was left to stride along behind , reminding him ten times hourly how she loved and adored him. It was not what Demetrius wanted to hear.

*“ Leave me alone , can ’t you? I’ve told you till I’m hoarse, I can ’t stand the sight of you!”*

*“And I can ’t bear to be away from you !”* Wailed Helena .

They crashed into the forest like a stampede of cattle, disturbing the faires, whose nerves were already jangled. Oberon , king of the faires, and Titania , his Queen, had met by accident in a moonlit glade.

*I’ ll met by moonlight, proud Titania*

Oberon, act II scene I

Their quarrel had flared up again. After the skirmishing was over , a thousand gossamer wings still trembled with shock in the pallid starlight. Oberon , who had lost the skirmish, decided to punish Titania for again refusing him the Indian boy. He dispatched Puck, his master of mishchief, to fetch a certain potent herb for the sake of its magic

*I’ ll put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes*

Puck, act II scene I

Meanwhile, a group of working men came crashing, like a caravan of donkeys, in the forest glade

They were looking for somewhere quiet to rehearse a play in honour of the Duke's wedding. They had chosen something suitably romantic the story Of Pyramus and Thisbe. In the play, the thwarted lovers arrange to meet by moonlight... the fair maiden is frightened off by a lion, and the handsome hero thinking the lion has eaten her, kills himself. They thought it was just the thing for a wedding.

There was peter Quince the Carpenter, Flute the Bellows-Mender, Snug the Joiner, Starveling the Tailor, And Snout the Tinker. And, of course, there was Nick Bottom the Weaver, whose enthusiasm almost made up for the joint lack of acting skills. What with Bottom who would have liked to play all the parts himself, Snug, who had no memory for lines, and Flute, who spoke his all-Of-a-lump, Peter Quince found directing drama was not as easy as he had first supposed.

While Oberon waited a few minutes for Puck to circle the earth and bring him the magic herb, his peace was shattered by Demetrius, hotly

pursued by Helena. Still Helena was protesting her love, and still Demetrius was spurning The Fairy King, as he eaves dropped, was moved by Helena's distress. "I'll soon put this to rights" he thought.

Then, like a shooting star, Puck returned from his errand a dart of movement glimpsed in the corner of an eye. Armed with the magical purple-petalled flower, Oberon squeezed some Of its juice on the eyes Of his sleeping Queen.

Whatever you see when you open your eyes, 'he whispered with malicious pleasure, ever grotesque, however foul, love it with all your heart and soul. Let be something horrible.' Then, like the spotted snake, he glided silently away: and told Puck to do the same for Demetrius - to make him love that big, neglected girl who followed him about.

Unfortunately Puck, not knowing there were two Athenian boys in the grip Of midsummer madness, found the wrong twosome, and squeezed the flower in to lysander's eyes.

Helena tripped over her friend's lover in the dark mistook him for dead ,and pummeled at him anxiously until he woke up. So as he opened his eyes, he saw through purple mists a picture of perfection! He leapt up and embraced Helena's knees, pressed his face to her thigh, and begged leave to worship her.

'Oh, how could you!' she cried, stamping on his foot.'I

Know it's Hermia you love, but to make fun of me at a time like this. And having as hot a temper as she had a passion, she talked off, while Lysander tottered after her, lovestruck.

Hermia, woken by a nightmare and finding herself alone, cast about for her Lysander, calling his name. No answer. What could have happened to him? She rushed into the dark embrace of the wood, as afraid for her lover as for herself.

'Wait behind that bush, Bottom, said Peter Quince, and when you hear you cue, come out and say your lines.

Bottom picked his way through the brambles, muttering his lines to himself to get them off by heart, and squattered down behind the bush. Spiders and beetles, slow-worms and hedgehogs came trekking by, casting their shadows like outgrown chrysalides.

*What hempen home-spuns have we swaggering here,  
So near the cradle of the fairy queen*

Puck, ACT III, SCENE I

mischief, Puck, seeing this great gangling lummock littering up the fairy woodland had been too much of a temptation. He had given Bottom the head of a donkey.

And when Bottom answered his cue and stepped out from behind the bush, his fellow actors took one look at him, screamed, and fled, with an invisible Puck hard on their heels to chase them through bogs and briars.

'Oh ha ha, very funny, Bottom called after them loudly. 'Think you'll make an ass out of me, do you, with your fooling about? Well, I'm not bothered!' Still, to be alone in the middle of a wood in the middle of the night was a little unnerving, even for a man of Bottom's calibre, and he began singing to raise his spirits.

The particular spirit he raised was Titania, Queen of the Fairies. She opened her eyes, saw the see-sawing, hee-hawing head of a donkey right overhead, and cried, 'O, exquisite creature! Where did you come from? Let me touch you! Tell me your heart's not given to another! Grant me the right to love you, adore you, dote on you!'

*Mine ear is much enamour'd of note;  
So is mine eye enthralled to thy shape.*

Titania, Act III, SCENE I

The donkey blink at her, dilating its big, wet nostrils and grinding its yellow teeth. 'Well, I don't rightly know why you'd want to go and do a thing like that,' Bottom drawled. But he did not stop her stroking his ears; it was a very agreeable sensation. Bottom was puzzled to be loved by a fairy but, as with his acting, he had a good enough opinion of himself not to question his luck. When Titania summoned her fairy helpers – Peaseblossom and Moth, Cobweb and Mustardseed – to weave him flower garlands, bring him nectar, and scratch his head, he did not complain about that either.

Puck saw it all and reported back to his master the effects of the purple juice. Oberon was delighted – until two Athenian lovers trailed by again beneath the tree where Oberon sat. Demetrius had briefly shaken off Helena and even managed to find Hermia, his runaway fiancée, wandering alone in the woods. But he was no better off for having found her. 'You've killed him, haven't you!' she greeted him. 'You've killed my darling Lysander while he slept! How low can a man stoop? Where have you hidden his dear body? Tell me!' Then she ran away from him and instantly and completely lost her way.

'This is the girl I saw,' whispered Puck, 'but not the man.'

'Fool!' said Oberon. 'You've squeezed juice in the wrong pair of eyes, you silly sprite! Go and make amends immediately.' So Puck went and dropped

love juice in Demetrius's eyes, as Oberon had originally intended. He even managed to do it just as Helena (with Lysander close behind) caught up with her idol again.

Always unloved before, Helena soon found herself with not one but two men mooning after her! Both Demetrius and Lysander, to her total bewilderment, were hurling compliments at her, and dogging her through the woods in hope of a kind word. They did not get one. She naturally assumed they were both making fun of her.

*O sprite! O hell! I see you all are bent  
To set against me for your merriment*

Helena, Act III, SCENE II

'Everyone knows you love Hermia!' she retorted to Lysander's protestations of love.

'Oh her. Demetrius can have her.'

'No, no,' said Demetrius. 'I'm quite content. You eloped with her; you have her.'

'No, you! I've found someone far better!' declared Lysander.

Their raised voices guided little lost Hermia into their moonlight clearing.

'*She's yours!*' Demetrius was shouting.

'*No she's not she's yours!*' Lysander shouted back. '*Helena loves me, She's always said so!*'

'*That was before you contracted to marry Hermia*'.

'*I told you before: leave that minimus out of this*'

Hermia's jaw dropped as she realized that the men were talking about her.

'*Oh, you sneak thief! You temptress!*' she shrieked running at Helena and jumping up as if to scratch out her eyes. 'What have you done to them? You've bewitched them! You're trying to steal my Lysander!'

Towering over her, equally angry, Helena retaliated,

'*What, you too? Are you going to join in this cruel, wicked joke? After all our childhood years together?*' Meanwhile the rivals in love, Demetrius and Lysander, had their hands on their sword hilts and were starting to talk of 'fighting to the death for the right to marry Helena.'

On a branch overhead, swinging his feet “Puck the mischief-maker looked on in amazement. *'What fools these mortals are!'* he whispered to the Fairy King. Oberon kicked him off his perch so that Puck rattled down through the trees like a falling pine cone.

*'This is all your doing. Use the love-flower to put things to rights, or by morning we shall have dead Athenians strewn round the wood like dirty washing. Go after them.*

*Roll up the moonlight and paint the night blacker that they miss each other in the dark. Lead them to opposite ends of the wood where they can't hurt each other. In the mean time, I shall undo the charm on my proud Titania.'*

An hour earlier, walking in the wood, the Fairy King had found his Queen busy festooning the donkey-headed Bottom with flowers and jewels.

*Come, sit thee down upon this flow'ry bed  
While I thy amiable cheeks do coy  
And stick musk-roses in thy sleek, smooth head,  
And kiss thy large ears, my gentle joy.*

TITANIA ,ACT V,SCENE I

So obsessed was she with her new love that she had lost all interest in the little Indian Boy. “*Take him, take him*” She said dreamily, and Oberon had simply carried the boy away. He found his joy in winning marred, however, by the sight of Bottom still being caressed and garlanded. He did not like to admit it, but he was a little jealous of Bottom the Ass.

*Be as you were  
See as you saw  
Fairy away, and see your mistake*

With a second, neutralizing flower, Oberon anointed the eyes of his Queen. Flies circled Bottom’s long ears and crawled on to the cheek of the Fairy Queen.

It had stopped raining. The fairies no longer wished to be at war. When Titania awoke, the face she saw above her was Oberon's, and she liked expression in his eye. “I

*had the oddest dream*”, she murmured. *“I dreamed I was in love with an ass”*.

*“There’s your donkey, beside you,”* said Oberon, and Titania gave a shriek of horror at the sight of Bottom, ears a-flop, nose a-flicker, dreaming of oats and carrots. *“Come away,”* said her fairy true-love. *“The day’s dawning. Away fairies! Away elves and goblins! Let the wood stir and the dew glisten. Let the birds sing and the creatures listen!”*

So the day dawned fair after all for Duke Theseus's wedding. The sun shone hot, the wet ground steamed, the weather vanes turned to the west, and the clenched flowers unfolded like fists. Nature and the fairies were at peace once more.

*“Helena, I love you,”* said Demetrius.

*‘Who am I to argue?’* said Helena.

*‘Hermia, I love you,’* said Lysander.

*‘I should think so too,’* said Hermia.

*‘At last that’s settled,’* said Puck, discarding crushed flowers.

He was just wiping his purple-stained fingers through his hair when the ground shook and a clamour of huntsmen galloped into the wood. Demetrius drew Helena close; Lysander shielded Hermia in his arms. But the leading huntsmen reined in his horse just in time to avoid them. It was the Duke Theseus, celebrating his wedding day with a dawn hunt.

Behind him rode a dozen Athenian noblemen as well as his African bride-to-be, Hippolyta. Hermia's father was there.

*‘Hermia? What’s the meaning of this!’* he demanded. *‘I warned you: submit to marriage with Demetrius or be shut*

*Up in holy orders! And you, Demetrius...is this any way for a betrothed man to behave? Let go of that woman!’* The

Duke interrupted him. *‘There’s a superstition that if unmarried maids or men go walking in the woods on*



Midsummer's Eve, they'll meet their true-loves. These lovers seem to have done that-and they must have what midsummer gave them. Today in the temple, when Hippolyta and I make our vows, let these couples be married too, and may the fairies bless us all! ...Thank the gods it's stopped raining.

*'Most fair Pyramus!'* A dishevelled workman with straws in his beard stumbled out from behind a bush. The company stared at him and he stared back, clearly expecting someone else.

*'What did you say, fellow?'*

*'That's my line. That's what I have to say when I come on. Must've fell asleep back there. Now I come to remember, I did have the oddest dream...!'* Bottom's speech petered out. *'My line, sir, for the play, sir.'*

At the wedding. But where did Peter Quince get to?" Bottom scratched his head and found, to his great surprise, a daisy Chain over one ear.

*The Merry and Regrettable Tragedy of Pyramus and Thisbe* was the highlight of the wedding feast. Everyone forgot their lines. The Lion apologized for roaring. The heroine had a three-day growth of beard. The moon was so burdened down with props that he clattered across the stage like a thinker's handcart dragging a stuffed dog behind him on a piece of string. The Wall held up two rude fingers to represent a hole, and the hero - *'Now I'll kill myself'* - took forty-three lines - *'Now I die!'* - to expire - *'Now I am dead!'* - after stabbing himself - *'Dead...Dead!'* - in the armpit - *'Now my soul has fled!'* - with a wooden sword. The audience fell off their benches laughing - Which came as a surprise to the actors. But it seemed to suit the Duke very well, for he awarded a purse of gold to everyman-jack.

After the brides and bridegrooms, the guests and the actors, the servants and the towns people had gone to their beds, windows open on a perfect balmy night "Titania and Oberon led their fairy band in and out of the houses. They laid their blessing on every eyelid and on every heart, leaving the silent rhymes of their magic verse written on the moon-white air, like footprints on a fall of summer snow.

*I know A bank where the wild thyme blows,  
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,*

*Quite overcanopied With luscious woodbine,  
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine.  
There sleeps Titania sometime of the night  
Lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight*

Oberon ,Act II,Scene I