

THE STORY OF A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Find out everything that happens in the play by reading our story. You might like to read it with or to someone else!

Chapter 1 – A Father's Wrath

In the palace court of Athens, everyone is busy. Servants scurry up and down corridors with urgent messages, butlers meticulously shine silverware and kitchen staff try out numerous new recipes. All this hectic preparation can mean only one thing: in just a few short days, Duke Theseus of Athens is set to marry his new bride, Hippolyta. They've been planning the wedding for months and months, and now just one final piece is needed to complete the jigsaw: some entertainment for the post-wedding party. And Hippolyta has an idea. She wants the whole city to be involved in the celebrations, and plans to send an open invitation to all the amateur actors, musicians, and acrobats of the city. Whoever is judged the most fitting performers will entertain the guests and nobility at the royal wedding reception in four days' time.

Just as Theseus and Hippolyta congratulate themselves on this clever scheme, there is a loud knock on the chamber door and in comes flying Egeus - a slightly balding and rather fat courtier of Athens - with his pretty young daughter Hermia and two eligible and handsome young men, Lysander and Demetrius.

"Full of vexation am I, with complaint against my child Hermia!" booms out Egeus, before Duke Theseus even invites him to speak.

"Stand forth Demetrius!" he continues, as Hermia pouts sulkily at his side, shuffling from foot to foot.

"Good morning Egeus... and Demetrius." says a rather bemused Theseus.

"Good morning Duke Theseus," continues Egeus, with a wavering note of impatience in his voice, "and my apologies for the interruption. But you see, my daughter has placed me in a most terrible position. Fine young Demetrius here, has my consent to marry Hermia." Demetrius steps forward to make himself known to Theseus. Meanwhile, Hermia audibly tuts and huffs under her breath, sufficiently loud enough for everyone in the chamber to hear.

"Yet this unsuitable rascal Lysander," continues Egeus, roughly pulling the other young man into view, "has bewitched the bosom of my child by crooning midnight love songs at her bedroom window!"

Immediately Egeus pauses to draw breath, Duke Theseus turns calmly and gravely to Hermia. “And what have you got to say about this, young lady?” he asks, his voice a mixture of kindness and solemnity.

“I love Lysander, and I wish my father could look with my eyes to see what a wonderful man he is.” says Hermia resolutely.

“But my dear girl,” replies Theseus, the solemnity in his voice now outweighing the kinder tones, “Your father should be like a god to you. He composed your beauties, so that you are like a wax sculpture that he himself created. He can mould you or melt you and you must always obey him.” Hermia doesn’t necessarily agree that her father is always right, but she **does** know that the Athenian law is harsh: if she doesn’t marry the man her father chooses, then she might be put to death or forced to enter religious life as a nun.

At this moment, Demetrius takes another step forward and purposefully begins to speak.

“Lysander, why not give up your claim to Hermia? It is clear that her father wants her to marry me, and not you.”

“If her **father** is so keen on you, then perhaps you should marry **him**, and leave me to be with Hermia!” Lysander blurts out (perhaps a little unwisely). Quickly recovering his composure, he addresses Theseus, with a heartfelt look and an imploring tone, “My lord, I am as well derived as Demetrius. And more importantly, I love Hermia with so much more of my heart than he does. Perhaps you should ask Demetrius about his ex-girlfriend **Helena**, who I know loves him truly and would almost die of happiness if he were to agree to marry her!”

At this, Demetrius makes angrily towards Lysander and it seems for a moment that there will be a fight, but Theseus intercedes with a firm, decisive tone.

“Well now,” he says, “the decision is yours alone Hermia. But you have only four days to make it. I must insist that you make your choice before the royal wedding day. You must obey your father and marry Demetrius, or disobey and choose either death or a religious life. I am sorry to be so harsh my dear, but those are the rules of the Athenian court.”

Hermia feels desperate. If only someone could plead with Theseus on behalf of her and Lysander. If only she were free to choose her own path in life and not to be bound by her father’s will! Why must everything be so complicated? She casts a loving last look on Lysander, matches this with an equally disdainful glance at Demetrius, and the three of them are dismissed from the great chamber in silence.

Chapter 2 - Love Triangles and Escape Plans!

“Ay me! The course of true love never did run smooth!” sighs Lysander, his eyes fixed tenderly on Hermia, as he too departs the great chamber.

But just as he leaves, a plan begins to form in his mind. Lysander has an elderly, unmarried aunt, who lives several miles away, on the edge of the Athenian woods. She’s a kind old dear and very fond of Lysander. And the laws of Athens don’t apply there, so if he and Hermia can sneak away from the Athenian court under cover of moonlight and find their way through the woods to his dowager aunt’s house, then they can marry freely, without the unwelcome intrusion of Hermia’s father, Egeus, or anyone else in the Athenian court, for that matter. It’s a fool proof scheme and one that he can’t wait to share with Hermia!

Hermia has already gone on ahead with her father, but Lysander knows he must speak with her urgently. He quickly writes a secret note, which he dispatches with a messenger and soon, in secret, the two young lovebirds meet. Lysander tells her his plan in minute detail and Hermia can barely contain her thrill and excitement. At last, a way to secure her own future, without the interference of meddling grown-ups like her father.

Just as the two finalise their plans, they spot Helena (the ex-girlfriend of Demetrius and Hermia’s best friend) coming their way. Her slow, doleful walk betrays her mood.

“God speed, fair Helena!” calls out Hermia.

“Call you me fair?” wails Helena, “Demetrius loves YOU fair!”

She breaks down in tears as she tells Hermia how heartbroken she is: Demetrius no longer loves her. He has made that perfectly clear. Why is it that Hermia can sway Demetrius’s heart so easily? Can Hermia teach her any tricks to make Demetrius love her again?

“The more I love, the more he hateth me!” she whimpers.

Hermia has the opposite problem. “The more I hate, the more he follows me!” she mutters under her breath.

Hermia must tell her news to someone. She’s bursting with excitement and (apart from Lysander of course) Helena is her best friend in the world. So, it seems perfectly natural to reveal to Helena the great escape plan that she and Lysander have hatched. Her voice quivering with exhilaration, she explains that Helena will soon be entirely free to woo Demetrius, because Demetrius will never again, after tonight, see Hermia’s face. With keen enthusiasm, she blurts out every detail of the scheme and, finally, with her secret divulged, Hermia plants an affectionate kiss on her friend’s cheek.

“Helena, adieu. As you on him, Demetrius dote on you!”

She and Lysander leave, cooing and whispering with restless excitement as they put together the final details of their escape plan. Gloomily, Helena wonders how long it will be before they both entirely forget her. Not long, she supposes. Love, she thinks, can be very selfish and unkind.

And then, left all alone, Helena makes a surprising decision. She knows that Demetrius hates her. She knows that he loves Hermia. And if Hermia disappears for good, he will surely be in a worse mood than ever, and hate poor Helena even more. Perhaps she will even get the blame for Hermia’s sudden desertion. But... if Helena TELLS Demetrius where to find Hermia, then it’s *just* possible he will be so incredibly grateful that he will forget all about Hermia and realise that SHE, Helena, is really the one for him! It’s a long shot, but the more Helena thinks about it the more she becomes certain that it is worth a try!

“I’ll tell Demetrius of Hermia’s flight!” she muses aloud, “and for this intelligence, if I have thanks, it is a dear expense!”

Now, she just needs to find Demetrius, reveal the lovers’ escape plan, and give him a map of the Athenian woods...

Chapter 3 – Meet the Mechanicals

Peter Quince the carpenter, a thin, wiry man with a delicate disposition, dashes and weaves through the streets of Athens with a spring in his step. His mind rushes and races. This very morning, a mysterious letter dropped on his doorstep, bearing the seal of the Athenian Court.

“Peter Quince Esquire - Director of the Rude Mechanicals Acting Troupe”

That’s how the envelope had been addressed. And when he had opened it with trembling fingers, he could hardly believe his eyes: it was from Lady Hippolyta – **THE** Lady Hippolyta – and it was inviting him and his acting gang to audition as entertainers for the evening reception of the forthcoming Royal Wedding!

He turns a corner rather too quickly and nearly bumps straight into one of his troupe - Nick Bottom, the weaver. Bottom is a burly man with a thick brown, bristly beard, a jovial, smiley face, and a very high opinion of himself.

“Good morning Peter Quince. And why, pray, do we have the pleasure of this impromptu rehearsal today?” asks Nick with an amiable grin.

“Well, let’s get inside and I’ll tell the whole company,” says Quince, as the two push past racks of meat on hooks and enter their dilapidated and smelly rehearsal rooms above the butcher’s shop.

“Is all our company here?” asks Quince. He looks around him. There’s young Flute, the bellows mender (only eighteen years old and with a fresh, boyish complexion). There’s Snug the joiner (a rather quiet and simple man who prefers to keep his thoughts to himself). There’s Snout the tinker (whose job is to mend pots and pans). And over in the corner is Starveling, the very best tailor in Athens.

“Here, Peter Quince!” the group chimes in unison.

Quince draws a quick, deep breath. He’s champing at the bit and can’t wait to pass on his thrilling news. He holds the Duchess’s envelope in quivering fingers.

“Here is the scroll of every man’s name,” he begins, with a slight wobble in his voice, “which is thought fit, through all Athens, to play before the Duke and Duchess on his wedding day at night!”

Complete silence. They’re all stunned. There’s a nervous stillness in the room for what seems like an eternity. Then, the quiet is broken (not unusually) by the unmistakable, brawny voice of Nick Bottom. He wants to know what the play they have been chosen to perform will be.

“The most lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe,” says Peter Quince.

“A very good piece of work, I assure you” nods Bottom (although Peter Quince isn’t entirely convinced that Nick Bottom has ever heard of Pyramus and Thisbe before – it’s very possible he’s just showing off, as usual).

And now, it’s time for the casting of the roles. Quince clears his voice and begins.

“Nick Bottom – the weaver?”

“Ready. Name what part I am for and proceed!”

“You, Nick Bottom, are set down for Pyramus.”

Nick jumps up and down with excitement, before realising that he doesn’t know who Pyramus is. Surely it must be one of the main parts though – after all, his name is in the title of the play.

“Is Pyramus a lover or a tyrant?” asks Nick.

“A lover. Who kills himself, most gallant for love.”

Nick has played those sorts of parts before. He’s caused quite a stir amongst the ladies of the town (or so he thinks) with his romantic onstage escapades.

“That will ask for some tears in the true performing of it!” he announces robustly. Nick can cry very convincingly on stage (or so he thinks). He’s done it many times.

Quince moves on to the next role.

“Francis Flute, the bellows mender?”

“Here Peter Quince.”

Quince hesitates before speaking again. He’s a bit worried about giving out this part.

“You shall take Thisbe on you.”

“What is Thisbe?” asks Flute eagerly, “A wandering knight?”

“Not exactly,” answers Quince. “Thisbe is the lady that Pyramus must love.”

“What!?” Poor Flute is astonished. “Let me not play a woman. I have a beard... coming.” He puffs out his chest manfully, furrows his brow and half-heartedly strokes his smooth, peachy chin.

Just then Nick Bottom chimes up again. “Let me play Thisbe too!” he exclaims. “I’ll speak in a monstrous little voice!” He stretches and strains his full-bodied vocals into a painfully squeaky screech, “Ah Pyramus my lover dear! Thy Thisbe dear and lady dear!” He’s very good (or so he thinks) at impersonating a woman’s voice.

Peter Quince is getting irritated now. “No, no, no, NO. You must play Pyramus. And Flute – you Thisbe.”

It’s Snug the joiner’s turn now. Quince tells him that he will play the lion. Snug’s worries that he won’t be able to remember his lines are soon allayed when Quince reassures him that all he needs to do is roar.

“Let me play the lion too!” Nick Bottom is at it again. “I will roar that I will make the duke say, “Let him roar again! Let him roar again!”” Nick’s manly voice is perfectly suited (or so he thinks) to playing the King of the Jungle.

Exasperated now, Peter Quince snaps back, “You. Can. Play. No. Part. But. Pyramus!” He hands out the cue scripts to his troupe, perhaps thrusting the scroll rather more forcefully at Nick than his other actors. “Tomorrow night, meet me in the Palace wood and there we will rehearse! Take pains. Be perfect. Adieu!”

Chapter 4 – Oberon and Titania Meet

The palace woods in Athens are about to get very busy: Hermia and Lysander are packing bags to make their escape there. Meanwhile, Helena is telling Demetrius about the escape plan and the two of them will soon follow suit. And Quince, Bottom and the rest of the Mechanicals are practising their lines for their imminent woodland rehearsal.

But before the Athenian lovers and the comical actors arrive, the woods must surely be a quiet and tranquil place, mustn't they?

You'd be forgiven for thinking so, but in fact, at this very moment, the woods are a place of powerful magic and angry conflict. The glimmering stream's waters swell and wrinkle. The spangled stars blink nervously. The rushing stream roars angrily: The king and queen of the fairies are having a mighty battle.

"Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania!" bellows Oberon, the king of the fairies.

"What, jealous Oberon?" his fairy queen mockingly answers.

The cause of their fierce dispute stands innocently by: a tiny Indian boy, no more than three years old, terrified, and clinging desperately to the floating skirts of one of Titania's waiting ladies.

Oberon wants the little child to be his page boy. But Titania guards him protectively. She had been great friends with the child's mother: a human who had sadly died during childbirth and who had left her baby in Titania's strong protection. Titania will NOT betray her friend. She will NOT give the child to Oberon. Such is the power of the King and Queen of the fairies that their argument frightens nature itself. Crops spoil, fog swathes the barren fields, and the moon looks sick and pale. Even their elfen people are so scared that they climb into acorn cups to hide from the furiously fierce contest.

"I do but beg that little Indian boy to be my henchman," says Oberon, injecting a cunning gentleness into his voice. Perhaps, he thinks, he can use his great charm to softly coerce his fairy queen.

But Titania just laughs. "Not for thy fairy kingdom!" she rails, and with that she turns on her heels and storms from the woods, with her fairy train and the little Indian boy in tow.

Oberon is left reeling: full of anger, scorn, and resentment. He doesn't want to be outwitted. He is, after all, the King of the Fairies! So, he calls for his chief mischief maker, an elfin sprite known all over the world for his wicked tricks, and whose name is Puck.

Oberon sends his crafty servant Puck to find him a magic flower, whose juice has a powerful property: when squeezed onto the eyelids of any sleeping creature, it will make that poor unfortunate fall in love with the very first thing it sees on awakening. This, Oberon thinks, will be his perfect revenge on his fairy queen. He'll make her love some vile and horrible thing, and the distraction this causes will allow him to steal the Indian boy from her and keep him as his page boy.

Puck sniggers devilishly as he hears the malicious plan and faithfully promises Oberon that he will be back within just forty minutes with the powerful love

potion from the other side of the world. He flits away with incredible speed, laughing and shrieking as he sails away on an airy wind to far-off tropical climes.

As Oberon watches him soar away, he suddenly becomes aware of someone or something approaching. With a whoosh of his magical cloak, he makes himself invisible, just as Demetrius and Helena come into view.

“I love thee not. Therefore, pursue me not!” yells Demetrius, “I do not, nor I cannot, love you!”

Helena follows like a lovesick puppy dog. “And even for that do I love you the more!” she gushes romantically.

“I am sick when I do look on thee!” snaps Demetrius cruelly.

“And I am sick when I look not on you!” says Helena, with a rhapsodic sigh.

But Demetrius has just one thing on his mind: the beautiful Hermia! He knows she is in the woods somewhere and he is determined to find her and win her. She might have told him where to find Hermia, but frankly, this dreadful nuisance Helena is just getting in the way. He hurries past the invisible Oberon, with Helena following swift on his heels, and the two of them disappear, deeper into the woods.

Oberon is shocked and unimpressed by Demetrius’s rude attitude towards Helena. Why would this Athenian man be so cruel to this pretty young girl, he thinks? He determines that when Puck returns, he will ask his chief mischief maker to save some of the magical flower juice for Demetrius’s eyes. If he anoints the young Athenian’s sleeping eyelids with the juice, then he can guarantee Helena’s future happiness by making sure that **she** is the first thing Demetrius sees when he awakes. Oberon smiles at his pleasing plan.

“Fear not my lord!” says Puck as he arrives with the flower.

What could possibly go wrong?

Chapter 5 – Puck the Mischief Maker

Oberon watches secretly as Titania’s fairy train sing her softly to sleep. As she drifts off, the fairies disappear one by one, until Titania is left sleeping alone in her flowery bed.

The king of the fairies sneaks up with Puck’s magical flower. He chants a verse as he drops the potion onto Titania’s sleeping lids.

“What thou seest when thou dost wake
Do it for thy true love take

When thou wakest, it is thy dear
Wake when some vile thing is near!"

In still another part of the woods, Puck laughs to himself as he hears approaching human voices. Surely these are the young people from Athens that Oberon told him about. Yes, thinks Puck, these are definitely the young Athenians. The style of their clothing gives them away.

In fact, Puck has it wrong.

The two people he has just seen emerge from a gap in the trees are Hermia and Lysander, not Helena and Demetrius. And we know that Hermia and Lysander are already in love: they certainly don't need a potion to make them gush and moon over each other.

Having said that, they do seem to be in rather a bad mood at the moment. It seems that Lysander isn't quite as sure of the way to his Aunt's house as he had first thought. They've become horribly lost and they're now so exhausted that they must rest, in the hope that daylight will give them a better chance of finding their way out of the woods.

As the two lovebirds drift off to sleep, Puck does what (he thinks) his master has asked him to. He drops some of the remaining love juice onto Lysander's eyes.

"Churl, upon thine eyes I throw,
All the power this charm doth owe!"

chants Puck with smug self-satisfaction. Now, thinks Puck, the next thing this Athenian sees when he wakes will be the thing that he most desperately loves in the whole world. Oberon will be so proud of me, he thinks as he dashes off once again on an airy wind.

But who is this arriving now? It's Demetrius and Helena, passing through the same area of the woods as Lysander and Hermia. They don't see their sleeping friends though. They are too busy arguing with each other. Demetrius rushes through first, desperate to be gone from Helena's side.

"Do not haunt me thus!" he screams, as if poor Helena was a troublesome ghost.

As he scurries decisively away, Helena is (not for the first time) left all alone. Near to tears, she slumps to the ground in a heap. Then, she suddenly spots someone lying on the ground nearby.

"But who is this?" she wonders. "Lysander on the ground?" She panics, momentarily thinking he is dead. But as she gives him a gentle prod with her foot, Lysander twitches, stretches, yawns and opens his eyes. And, of course, the very

first thing that greets his sleepy, potion-bewitched eyes is Helena's worried face, peering down at him with a bewildered look.

Ping! The love juice immediately does its work. Who is this beautiful vision? Why have I never noticed her charms before? Lysander thinks he has never seen anything more lovely and angelic than Helena. All thoughts of his beloved Hermia desert him in an instant as he sighs,

"I'll run through fire for your sweet sake!
Not Hermia, but Helena I love.
Who will not change a raven for a dove?!"

Helena, of course, is mightily confused. Confused and angry! Why is Lysander making fun of her like this? Everyone knows that he loves Hermia and not her. Everyone knows that Demetrius's behaviour is heartless and humiliating, so why add insult to injury with a horrible practical joke like this? Isn't Lysander supposed to be her friend? Hot tears stream down her face and she rushes away, cursing Lysander as she sobs, and heading deeper and deeper into the Athenian Palace woods.

Lysander, meanwhile, is still in the clutches of the magic potion, and is desperate to follow his new love. He casts a scornful look at Hermia, who is still sleeping soundly on the ground. He can hardly believe he ever loved someone as insignificant as her, when the incredible Helena was under his nose the whole time!

"Hermia. Stay thou there. And never may thou come Lysander near!
And all my powers, address your love and might
To honour Helena and to be her knight!"

Just as he sweeps away after Helena, Hermia wakes from a horrible nightmare. In her dream, it seemed as if Lysander was no longer her boyfriend and that he had deserted her in the night! Thank goodness it was just a terrible dream!

"Lysander, help me!" she squeals in terror, expecting her boyfriend to immediately come running to her side. But, wait a moment. Where is Lysander? She can't see him anywhere...

Chapter 6 - Bottom and Titania in Love

"Here," says Peter Quince, "is a marvellous and convenient place for our rehearsal!"

The Mechanicals drop bags full of props and costumes and look around at the lovely clearing in the forest. It really is the perfect spot. There's even a brake of

trees behind them which they can pretend is the backstage area. It's just like having their own little theatre in the woods. How exciting!

After a whole evening and morning of practising their lines and going through their paces, there's a feeling of excitement in the air: The Mechanicals are ready and raring to go.

"Pyramus," says Peter Quince, addressing Nick Bottom, "You begin. When you have spoken your speech, enter into that brake!"

Nick clears his throat and readies himself. Just then, Puck appears from behind a tree. He's finished his work for the day, after (mistakenly) latching Lysander's eyes with the love juice. He's heading to an acorn cup for a well-deserved sleep, when he hears the clamour, flurry and fuss of Peter Quince's *Rude Mechanical Acting Troupe*. What larks! His whole body tingles with excitement as he thinks what marvellous tricks he could play on this bunch of silly buffoons.

"What's this?" he says aloud, in his bell-like voice. "A play? I'll be an audience member. And perhaps an auditor too..." and just as Nick Bottom disappears into his gap in the trees, Puck is struck with a moment of profound inspiration. This silly man Nick Bottom is clearly an ass. So, why not turn him into an **actual** real life ass by giving him a donkey's head? Puck rubs his hands in glee, closes his eyes and concentrates intently on a powerful spell that will make Nick Bottom the weaver very, very different from his usual self!

Meanwhile, in the rehearsal area, Francis Flute is having some problems. First off, he's learnt all his lines in one big block and is insisting on saying them all, rather than leaving gaps between lines and waiting for his cues. Secondly, he can't seem to pronounce some of the play's more complicated words very well.

"Ninus's tomb man, not Ninny's tomb!" yells Peter Quince in frustration.

And now Bottom appears from the brake in the trees, "If I were fair, Thisbe, I were only thine!" emotes Pyramus gallantly. But, hang on a minute! This Pyramus is different to the one the Mechanicals are used to: he has a very hairy face, big floppy ears and massive, yellow bucked teeth. Pyramus is now some sort of strange donkey-man, not a valiant and romantic lover!

At the sight of the transformed Bottom, the others yell and scream fearfully.

"Oh monstrous! Oh strange! We are haunted!" cries out Peter Quince. And before poor Bottom knows it, they dart away in terror and he is completely alone in a clearing in the woods, wondering why his face feels a bit more hairy than usual and why he has a sudden urge to munch on a carrot or two.

But, as it turns out, Bottom the donkey is not completely alone. For a start, the mischievous Puck is watching the mayhem unfold with glee. And, to make matters even worse, the rehearsal area chosen by the Mechanicals is

remarkably close to the fairy bed of Queen Titania. As Bottom sings himself a song to comfort him in his loneliness (and wonders why some of the notes sound a little coarser and more animal-like than his usual dulcet (or so he thinks) tones), Titania shakes off her sleep and opens her enchanted eyes. The first thing she sees is donkey headed Nick.

“What angel wakes me from my flowery bed?” she coos, as she catches sight of Bottom’s floppy ears and hairy face. This mortal is surely the single most beautiful thing she has ever seen!

“On the first view,” she whispers softly, “I say, I swear.... I LOVE thee!”

Bottom gulps loudly. Well, I wasn’t expecting this, he thinks! What a turn-up for the books!

And up in the tree tops, the branches sway and the leaves shake as rascal Puck jumps up and down, delighting in his terrible naughtiness. He just can’t wait to tell Oberon what has happened now!

Chapter 7 – The Lovers Fight!

When Puck meets Oberon, he tells him how he found the amateur actors in the woods and how he played a trick on one called Bottom by giving him a donkey’s head. He explains how Bottom’s singing woke Titania, and how the Queen of the Fairies is now desperately in love with a ridiculous donkey headed fool. He further explains how he dropped the love juice onto the Athenian man’s eyes, so that all of Oberon’s commands have now been fulfilled. He smiles self-importantly. He knows he has done well. Very well.

Just then, Hermia comes rushing by with Demetrius. She’s been looking for Lysander everywhere but he cannot be found. She is certain that Demetrius must have killed him in a jealous rage, and she is yelling and screaming at the top of her lungs. When Demetrius insists that Lysander’s disappearance has nothing to do with him, Hermia storms off angrily into the woods, continuing her search and shrieking, “Lysander, Lysander!” in an alarmed wail.

“The Athenian man!” says Oberon.

“That was the woman.... But **not** this the man...” replies Puck, beginning to think that something has gone very wrong, as he looks confusedly at the unfamiliar shape of young Demetrius of Athens.

Oh dear. It’s obvious to Oberon that Puck has made a **big** mistake. He’s obviously put the potion onto the wrong man’s eyes. This must be put right as soon as possible! Angrily, he sends Puck off to find Helena so that the whole muddle can be resolved. In the meantime, he uses his powers of magic to prevent

Demetrius from leaving this part of the woods, dropping more of the love potion onto Demetrius's sleepy eyelids. Oberon will make sure that when Puck brings back Helena, she will be the very first thing that Demetrius sees when he wakes up.

Just as Demetrius awakes from his deep, magical sleep, Puck leads Helena into view. Demetrius opens his eyes to see the single most beautiful vision of his life.

"Oh, Helena. Goddess, Nymph, Perfect Divine..." he sighs, "My life, my love, my soul, my HELENA!"

And who should turn up at this very moment, but Lysander. Still overcome with the love potion, he too loves Helena more than anything in the world. Neither men have shown any interest in her before. Now BOTH are desperately in love with her! They are down on their knees before her, and begging her to love them each in return.

Now this is all too much for poor Helena. She entered the woods last night with nobody caring whether she lived or died. Now she has two young men pretending to be madly in love with her. Never has she known such cruelty!

"O spite! O hell! I see you are all bent
To set against me for your merriment.
You both are rivals and love Hermia
And now both rivals to mock Helena!"

She sobs and wails helplessly as the two men scurry towards her feet like soppy, besotted schoolboys.

Just then, Hermia arrives. And she is shocked! Shocked to see her so-called boyfriend Lysander, down on his knees before her so-called best friend Helena. The cheek of it! What is Helena playing at?

"You thief of love!" she squawks. "Have you come by night and stolen my love's heart from him?"

Now it's Helena's turn to be furious. So, Hermia is in on the joke too is she? They are ALL making fun of her. Well, she thinks, Enough is Enough!

"You puppet!" she screams at Hermia.

"Puppet!? Puppet!? Why so? Because I am so dwarfish and so low!
How low am I? I am not yet so low
But that my nails can reach into thine eyes!"

And with that, Hermia launches herself at Helena. The two former best friends are fighting tooth and nail! Hermia pulls Helena's hair! Helena gives Hermia a Chinese burn! And Lysander and Demetrius look on in confusion and horror!

Lysander decides to step in. He won't have anyone attacking his beloved Helena. Especially that ridiculous midget Hermia! How could he ever have loved her, he thinks? He fixes Hermia with an angry stare and screams at the top of his lungs, "Get you gone! You minimus, you bead, you acorn!"

Poor Hermia struggles free from Helena's vice like grip and the two girls chase after each other, like a pair of savage animals, deeper into the Palace wood. Lysander and Demetrius, of course, are keen to follow Helena – and bolt off like bullets from a gun to shadow the two disappearing girls.

Oberon looks at Puck with a withering glower. He doesn't need to speak. He's clearly furious! Puck is in **BIG** trouble now....

Chapter 8 - All's Well that Ends Well

Oberon is not pleased with Puck's mischief making, which has inadvertently set the young Athenian men and women at each other's throats. He tells Puck to find the missing lovers as quickly as he can and to tire everyone out so that they all fall asleep. His plan is to give Lysander some different flower magic, to make him fall back in love with Hermia. That way, Demetrius will be in love with Helena, and Lysander will be in love with Hermia, and everything will be as it should be!

After a frantic search over hill and dale, Puck finally finds the manic foursome and gathers them together with a powerful spell, using a special magic charm to confuse the lovers, spin them around and set them down to sleep.

"Up and down, up and down
I will lead you up and down.
I am feared in field and town.
Goblin lead them up and down!"

Entranced, the four romantic lovers whirl and dance their way to a quiet spot in the woods where they instantly fall into a deep, magical sleep. Puck neatly arranges them so that Hermia is in Lysander's arms and Helena in Demetrius's. He then squeezes the new flower juice into Lysander's eyes, so that Lysander will wake to see Hermia and fall back in love with her, just as things were when Lysander and Hermia first entered the forest.

Meanwhile, in another part of the woods, Titania is still smitten with her donkey man, Nick Bottom.

"Oh, how I love thee! Oh, how I dote on thee!" she cries as she instructs her fairies to feed Bottom carrots and hay.

“Eeyore!” says Bottom (and instantly wonders why he is making such ridiculous animal noises. How embarrassing!)

Watching invisibly from a nearby vantage point, Oberon begins to feel guilty about what he has done to Titania. It looks so ridiculous to see his fairy queen swooning and gushing over a foolish mortal, especially one with a coarse, hairy face and such preposterous ears and teeth! It simply isn’t becoming. So he asks Puck to undo this further mischief by releasing Titania from the love spell and by taking the donkey head from Nick Bottom, so that he will look ever so slightly less ludicrous than he does right now.

Puck thinks it’s a shame to undo such a funny trick, but he knows that he is in Oberon’s bad books now and he doesn’t dare resist. He snaps his fingers to undo the spell on Titania, and she instantly jerks awake, as if she had been wrenched out of a horrible and outlandish dream.

“My Oberon,” says Titania sleepily, “Methought I was enamoured of an ass!”

“There lies your love,” says Oberon, with some embarrassment, and he points at Nick Bottom, just as the donkey man lets out a loud “Eeyore!”, munches a mouthful of hay and brushes a buzzing fly away from his long, hairy ears.

“Oh, how my eyes do loathe his visage now!” says Titania, casting a look of disgust at Nick’s ridiculous and horribly mismatched head and body.

As Titania tries to understand what must have become of her senses to have been so enraptured with this man-monster, Puck swoops into action once again. With a further snap of his fingers and a whispered charm, he undoes his previous mischief and Bottom’s donkey head disappears in a puff of smoke, leaving plain Old Nick the weaver sound asleep in the Fairy Queen’s bed.

“Now when thy wake. With thine own fool’s eyes peep!” says Puck with a sly smirk.

Now, the fairy rulers are no longer arguing. Oberon is sorry for what he has done. Titania regrets that she was unwilling to share her Indian child. They are King and Queen once more. Reunited, and laughing together, Oberon and Titania leave the woods. The fairy kingdom is once again subject to a peaceful reign. Long may they reign in harmony!

And now, the only people left in the woods are five mere mortals – four sleeping lovers and one snoozing ex-donkey!

The next morning is Theseus and Hippolyta’s wedding day, which is (of course) also the day that Hermia must decide who she is to marry.

Early in the morning, Theseus and Hippolyta are out hunting with Egeus, Hermia's father. Where should they be, but the palace woods, where so much intrigue, action and excitement has been taking place? And who should they find on the ground but the four young sleeping Athenian lovers, so mysteriously missing since the previous day.

"Good morrow!" says Theseus as the lovers blink awake. "I pray you all stand up!"

At this, Lysander opens his eyes and the first person he sees is (thank goodness) the lovely Hermia. He is instantly back in love with her, and forgets that just hours ago, he was besotted with a completely different girl. Sleepily, the other three open their eyes too. Ping! Demetrius looks Helena directly in the eye and – wonder of wonders – he is madly in love with her! So now, we have Hermia and Lysander in love, and Helena and Demetrius in love, and all is right in the world!

"Fair lovers, you are fortunately met!" says Theseus. And, ignoring the grumbles and moans from Egeus, who so wanted Hermia to marry Demetrius, Theseus and Hippolyta invite the two sets of lovebirds back to the palace, where, instead of one wedding, there will now be three happy couplings!

As the happy Athenian courtiers disappear back to the palace (with Egeus, still peevishly carping, bringing up the rear), Nick Bottom begins to shake off his heavy sleep. As he wakes, he wonders why he is sleeping on the ground, surrounded by petals and flowers. Why is there a bale of hay and some half-eaten carrots at his side? And why does he feel like he has undergone a bizarre transformation? And was there really a beautiful creature in the woods who seemed to love him more than life itself? What a curious and strange dream he seems to have had. There's only one thing for it! He must find Peter Quince and the others, and tell them all about it!

Meanwhile, it's mixed news at poor Peter Quince's house. On the one hand, the Rude Mechanicals have heard that they've been chosen to perform for the Duke and Duchess (and for two more couples who are suddenly joining in the wedding celebrations). On the other hand, where on earth is their friend, sweet bully Bottom? Nobody has seen him since (can they have dreamt it?) he appeared before them like some horrific donkey man-monster.

And just then, as the Mechanicals bemoan their bad fortune, Nick Bottom – the original Nick Bottom - bursts through the door.

"Where are these lads?" he booms in his familiar, hearty voice, with no trace of a donkey's bray now.

"Bottom, Bottom – Oh most happy hour!!" yells Peter Quince, jumping up and down with excitement. The Mechanicals look at each other with wonder and glee. At last, their great tragic play of Pyramus and Thisbe is to be performed to an

audience: to a royal audience at the Palace of Duke Theseus and Duchess Hippolyta. Their play is preferred!

Chapter 9 – Three Weddings and a Terrible Play!

The wedding feast is magnificent. Silver platters spill over with delicious meats and fishes. The sparkling wine is light and fizzy. The laughter of the three married couples fills the ornate celebration chamber.

Court messenger Philostrate enters the room to announce the arrival of the Mechanicals. Now Philostrate is a rather fussy old man: he doesn't like the cut of these Rude Mechanical players, and he doesn't think they should perform before Duke Theseus and their court at all. But Theseus is having none of it.

"I will hear that play!" he laughs merrily and Philostrate scampers from the room to fetch in the actors.

It's Snout who first approaches nervously and takes centre stage. Around his neck is hung a fake wall, with loam and plaster stuck to a wooden board to represent the great divide that separated young Pyramus and Thisbe's forbidden love.

Snout clears his throat and, with a slightly worried wobble in his voice, begins.

"I, one Snout by name, present a wall:
And such a wall as I would have you think
That had in it a crannied hole or chink,
Through which the lovers, Pyramus and Thisbe
Did whisper often, very secretly"

The royal guests snigger a little as Snout holds up his fingers to represent the chink or crack in the wall. It's the first time they've seen an actor pretend to be a wall before. What kind of play is this going to be?

Just then, Bottom appears. With a lofty look and a dashing air (or so he thinks) he strides like a manly hero towards poor Snout.

"Pyramus draws near the wall – silence!" says Theseus as he stifles a chuckle.

"Oh thou. O Wall. O sweet, O lovely wall" begins Nick Bottom as Pyramus

"Show me thy chink to blink through with mine eyes"

Snout holds up his fingers to Bottom's face, and Bottom pretends to look through the chink to see whether Thisbe is on the other side.

"But what see I? No Thisbe do I see.

Cursed be the stones for thus deceiving me!”

Nick begins to hit poor Snout about his costume, striking him blows as if he was the cursed wall that was hiding Thisbe from Pyramus. It’s clear from the “Ouches” and “Ows” that Bottom is hitting Snout just a little too hard. The effect is both worrying and distinctly comical. None of the Athenian courtiers have ever seen the hero of a play beating up a wall before...

Just in the nick of time, before Snout suffers serious injury, here comes Francis Flute as Thisbe. He looks a little embarrassed because he’s wearing red lipstick, a wig and a pretty, floaty dress covered in pink flowers. The embarrassment is made worse when Demetrius giggles audibly at the silly sight.

Flute sulkily stomps his way to the wall, allowing Pyramus to finally spy his love through Snout’s parted fingers.

“My love!” he cries, “Wilt thou at Ninny’s tomb meet me straightaway?”
“I will, my love!” says Flute in a slightly gruffer voice than he had used in rehearsals. (Peter Quince frowns from the side lines and shakes his head vigorously).

The court watch with a mixture of horror and amusement as the tale further unfolds. Snug appears as a lion living near Ninus’s tomb, roars pathetically and grabs at Thisbe’s cloak, just as she escapes. When Pyramus arrives and finds the bloodied garment, he thinks that Thisbe is dead. He decides to kill himself.

This is Bottom’ big moment. He’s been practising his death scene for ages and (so he thinks) it’s absolutely perfect: melodramatic and moving.

“Thus die I, thus, thus, thus!
Now am I dead,
Now am I fled
My soul is in the sky
Tongue lose thy light
Moon take thy flight
Now die, die, die, die!”

Bottom stabs himself repeatedly with the sword and pretends to collapse on the ground. The audience think it’s all over and are just about to clap, when Bottom is suddenly resurrected! He rises up one last time, with a loud groan

“Now dieeeeeeeeeeeeeee!” he wails. And the court collapse in laughter. This must be the funniest tragedy that anyone has ever performed!

As Theseus, Hippolyta and the four Athenian lovers whoop and cheer, crying with laughter, Nick Bottom rises from the dead once again and asks them if they would like an encore.

“No epilogue – I pray you!” screams Theseus in laughter, “Sweet friends, to bed!”

And with that, the wedding celebration is over, the Mechanicals play is done and our story is nearly complete.

Peter Quince and the gang return to their homes. The excitement of the day means that none of them can sleep. None, except Nick Bottom, of course, who is tired from his many adventures, and falls into a deep sleep, filled with dreams of fairies and imps and sprites and carrots and hay and... donkeys.

And all that is left to say is that, deep in the Palace woods, as the Athenian lovebirds sink into their first happily married sleeps, King Oberon and Queen Titania dance a beautiful fairy waltz to celebrate the marriage of the Duke and Duchess, with the little Indian page boy clapping his hands to the beat of the music.