

# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

## Character Notes

### The Athenians - inhabitants of Athens, Greece

#### EGEUS

Father to Hermia. He expects his daughter to marry Demetrius and is deaf to her requests to marry Lysander. He is a respected nobleman in Theseus' court and asks Theseus to impose the death penalty on Hermia if she refuses to do as he wishes. Theseus reduces the penalty, threatening Hermia with life in a nunnery if she will not marry Demetrius by his wedding day – in a week's time.

#### HERMIA

Daughter to Egeus and in love with Lysander. Even when threatened by her father and Duke Theseus she does not consent to marry Demetrius. She insists that Demetrius is more interested in her childhood friend, Helena, than in her. Demetrius denies this - perhaps out of fear of Egeus. She is given a week to make up her mind and as soon as she is alone with Lysander agrees to elope with him. Before leaving she tells her friend Helena of their plans.

#### LYSANDER

A young nobleman of Athens in love with Hermia. Lysander is not shy of insisting that he is as good a match for Hermia as Demetrius. When Hermia's father refuses to let them marry, he persuades Hermia to run away with him and stay with relations on the other side of the wood.

#### DEMETRIUS

A young nobleman of Athens. Demetrius has expressed his love for Helena in the past, but Egeus' desire for him to marry Hermia has got in the way. He appears completely unperturbed by Hermia's protestations of love for Lysander and her obvious dislike for him. When Helena tells him that Hermia and Lysander have run away he rushes after them to prevent an elopement.

#### THESEUS

The duke of Athens, whose word is law. Theseus is a hero from Greek mythology. This sets the play in a mythical Greek past. Theseus has only recently returned from conquering the Amazons, a race of warrior women, and is about to marry the conquered Amazon queen, Hippolyta. Unlike Hermia, she seems pleased with

her match. The play, being rehearsed by Peter Quince's company, is to be performed at the wedding feast at the end of the week.

### **HIPPOLYTA**

The queen of the Amazons and happily engaged to Theseus. Although Theseus defeated her Amazon warrior women in combat, both act as a traditional loving couple. She shows some empathy towards Hermia, but does not interfere.

### **HELENA**

A young woman of Athens in love with Demetrius. She is traditionally taller than Hermia (numerous references to Hermia's low height are made). Demetrius had behaved as if he was in love with her, but is now actively in pursuit of Hermia. Helena deliberately tells Demetrius of Hermia and Lysander's flight in the hope that he will go after them and take her to help him. She hopes that somehow she'll persuade him that he loves her and not Hermia. The worse Demetrius treats her, the more she throws herself at him.

### **PHILOSTRATE**

Theseus' Master of the Revels, responsible for organizing the entertainment for the duke's marriage celebration.

## **The Fairies – inhabitants of the wood**

### **OBERON**

The king of the fairies and attended by his own train of fairies and his "jester", Puck. Oberon and his wife, Titania, are not speaking because she refuses to let him have a 'changeling boy' who works for her. Oberon accuses Titania of fancying Duke Theseus and she in turn accuses him of lusting after Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons. Oberon's desire for revenge on Titania leads him to send Puck to find a flower, the juice of which will make her fall in love with the first thing she sees. His intention is for her to fall in love with the ugliest creature imaginable.

### **TITANIA**

The queen of the fairies and wife to Oberon who is attended by her own fairies: Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth and Mustardseed. She has sworn to Oberon's company that she will not return to his bed until he gives up his pursuit of the changeling boy in her service. Her fairies are shocked when she falls in love with the ugly Bottom with his ass's head but she orders them to treat him well.

### **PUCK AKA ROBIN GOODFELLOW**

A mischievous fairy who shares his master Oberon's delight in tricking mortals. At Oberon's bidding, Puck sprinkles "love juice" in Titania's eyes when a mortal wearing an ass's head is near (Bottom see below). Oberon has seen Demetrius treating Helena badly and has ordered Puck to also sprinkle the "love juice" in Demetrius's eyes so that he will love Helena. Puck mistakes and sprinkles the "love juice" in the sleeping Lysander's eyes. Coincidentally, Helena has fallen asleep near Lysander and Hermia and when he wakes he sees Helena before Hermia. Disastrously, he falls instantly in love with Helena and spurns Hermia.

## **The Mechanicals – craftsmen from Athens**

### **PETER QUINCE**

A carpenter and producer of the play for Theseus's marriage celebration. Quince is often bullied by the most confident actor, Bottom. During the play Quince plays the Prologue.

### **NICK BOTTOM**

The overconfident weaver chosen to play Pyramus. Bottom is convinced that he can play all the parts and is reluctant to share the limelight with anyone else. When he takes a short comfort break in a bower Puck delights in weaving a spell that puts an ass's head on him. The rest of the cast are horrified by this sudden transformation, and suspecting black magic, run away. Bottom however, is unaware of the change in his physical appearance and sings to keep his spirits up. His singing wakes Titania (as Puck had hoped) and she falls in love with the ugly mortal with an ass's head to the shock and amusement of her fairies. His ego is so big he scarcely questions why the beautiful Titania should have fallen in love with him.

### **FRANCIS FLUTE**

The bellows-mender chosen to play the female love interest in the play, Thisbe. Flute is young and beardless but insulted, nonetheless, to be chosen to play a girl. He insists that he has "a beard coming on." The role is traditionally played with a falsetto, squeaky voice to get more laughs.

### **ROBIN STARVELING**

The tailor who ends up playing the part of Moonshine.

**TOM SNOUT**

The tinker who ends up playing the part of Wall, dividing the two lovers.

**SNUG**

The joiner chosen to play the lion. Snug is particularly bad at roaring but worries nonetheless that his roaring will frighten the ladies in the audience.